ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

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Volume 5, Issue 1
Pp: 151-165
2011
Published on: 1st Jan 2011

1495
ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

America Imagined in James Kelman's *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free*

Paul Shanks

James Kelman's reputation as a writer rests on his nuanced rendering of Glasgow speech and his politically committed representations of working-class experience. Thus far, few critical studies have considered the predominance of migration as an ongoing motif and plot device in his fiction.[1] The down-trodden and rootless characters that feature in the novels and short stories frequently long to escape from Britain, and the notion of emigration – especially to America, Australia and New Zealand – often becomes a key aspiration. In his fourth novel, *How late it was, how late* (1994) the central protagonist has a love of country music and entertains fantasies of fleeing to the States. Given his circumstances over much of the narrative, these reflections are brutally ironic. After a beating by plainclothes policemen he goes blind before being released from custody to feel his way home without a penny to his name. Towards the end of the novel, after being kept in custody again for interrogation, he realises that it is only a matter of time before he is locked up for good and he makes plans for an escape from Glasgow. As he ruminates over his options, he is still able to formulate visions of an idyllic lifestyle, even to the extent of the comic and the ludicrous (as when he imagines having his own DSS office in the South of England). However, he draws the line when his thoughts return to Texas:

> Ah fuck London. Maybe he would go somewhere else all the gether. Luckenbach Texas.
>
> Shut yer fucking mouth.[2]

The synaptic pattern denoted here, daydream followed by rejoinder, forms something of a motif in Kelman's work. It is noteworthy that in this instance the fantasy is cut short before it has even the chance of causing any trouble:

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[1] Simon Kővesi is the exception here; his discussion of Kelman's second novel, *A Chancer* is complemented by useful contextual material on migration from Glasgow in the 1970s and 80s: *James Kelman* (Manchester, 2007), 77 – 86

[2] James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London, 1995), 255.

for Sammy Samuels, the idea of travelling to Texas is both desirable and impossible.

Instances like the above, where migration is contemplated as 'daydream' rather than 'reality' function as refrains in many of Kelman's novels and short stories. The earlier work, rather than detailing the experience of travelling to the New World and settling there, focuses on the impact that such journeys have on those who are not in the economic position to go anywhere but who are hugely sensitised towards the discourse of emigration as one of several myths of self-betterment. The early short story, 'A notebook to do with America', centres upon an old man's visit to the wife of a deceased friend in the dilapidated 'single-end' of a partially demolished tenement. The woman, who has prepared a solitary wake for her husband, asks him if he will be 'going to America' and subsequent dialogue reveals that the man and the deceased often talked about travelling there.[3] After going through to the kitchen to view the body of his friend, the man leaves with a notebook which has been set aside for him by the woman. Nothing is revealed about the book other than that which is indicated in the title of the story but the reader may speculate that it contains sketches and plans for the journey that the two intended to make. The belated ineffectuality of such fantasies is made all the more poignant when set against the backdrop of an older Glasgow that is gradually disappearing.

Kelman's fifth novel, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (2003), forms something of a departure from earlier work in that it is set exclusively in America. It becomes evident, however, that the Glasgow-born protagonist that narrates this novel has failed to assimilate within his new domicile. It is also the case that the version of America featured in the text is extremely idiosyncratic, filtered as it is via the worldview of the protagonist.

I A Failed Emigrant

Jeremiah Brown has been living in the States for twelve years. He now intends to go back to Scotland but is far from certain that this is a journey he will ever make. For much of the novel he lingers in a state of indecision over his options. He considers his time in the US to have been a failure on a number of counts – economic, personal, and political – and describes himself as a 'failed

[3] James Kelman, 'A notebook to do with America', *Not not while the giro* (1983 repr. Edinburgh, 2007), 171.

fucking immigrant'.[4] Glasgow, on the other hand, offers only a few family ties (he has some affection for his mother but not his siblings) and the idea of returning there fills him with trepidation. Throughout the narrative, he constantly changes his mind as to whether he will leave the States or not and, at one point, he contemplates tearing up his flight ticket. It is ironic that in the one novel where the central character has actually made the journey to America and lived there for a period of time, the reader encounters the same sense of impotence, recurrent daydreams and thwarted ambitions that tend to distinguish Kelman's other protagonists.

The novel begins on the evening before Jeremiah is due to fly home. Because of itchy feet, boredom with his own company, and the desire for beer and entertainment, he leaves his motel and ends up in a nearby town. Where this town is situated on the map remains uncertain, though the reader may surmise that it is somewhere in Colorado and fairly near Denver. Jeremiah firstly lands up in an establishment called 'The Shooters and Horses Sports Bar' where he manages, albeit inadvertently, to offend the bartender and one of the clientele. After several lite beers (his beverage of choice throughout the novel), he beats his retreat and resolves to go back to the motel but his resolution is broken when he catches sight of a Jazz bar offering live music. He remains in this location for much of the rest of the novel, and commentary on his immediate situation is intercut with lengthy reminiscences regarding the last twelve years.

The cover of the first edition of the novel, showing a sword-bearing Statue of Liberty, like the one described in Kafka's unfinished novel, *The Lost One*,[5] cues the reader into realising that the America presented here will not be quite the same as the 'real' one. In both the 'Shooters and Horses' bar and in the Jazz bar, Jeremiah is asked to produce ID confirming his legal settlement as an alien in the US. We find out that he has a Red Card III, which marks him out as an atheist-socialist and thereby anathema to the political mainstream. The Red Card, of course, is fictional, but there are subsequently other details that present a deliberately skewed and warped version of the 'Land of the Free'.

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[4] James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (London, 2004), 20.

[5] 'A sudden burst of sunshine seemed to illumine the Statue of Liberty, so that he saw it in a new light, although he had sighted it long before. The arm with the sword rose up as if it newly stretched aloft, and round the figure blew the free winds of heaven': Franz Kafka, *America*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *Franz Kafka* (London, 1976), 133. See the front cover of *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (London, 2004).

Jeremiah speaks in a recognisably Glaswegian idiom but his allegiances to the city and land of his birth are thin. Most of the statements he makes about Scotland are negative, from an account of being knifed outside a chip shop in Glasgow to a general hatred of role models like Andrew Carnegie in the States.[6] He frequently mentions his attempts to gather information regarding a long-lost ancestor and namesake but nothing is ever discovered beyond hearsay and his own extravagant suppositions. There are, moreover, no encounters with other Scots over the course of the narrative and little sense of a diasporic community. In this respect, Jeremiah distances himself from the stereotype of the homesick emigrant eager to maintain connections with his or her countrymen: 'other exiles think about hame much of the time, they get together and talk about the guid auld days and stuff. I could chat about the dear auld motherland as well but it was aye with an uncommon sense of relief at no being there'.[7] For all that, he appears to enjoy parodying the pseudo-historical lingo of clan mythologies and the Gaelic inheritance of Ireland and Scotland and takes a recognisably revisionist stance in suggesting that narratives of national and cultural origin are fabrications. At one point, he expresses a desire to learn Spanish as a means of distancing himself from any shared sense of a Celtic identity:

> Spanish was one of the languages I often tried to learn, like Gaelic – if only because every time I had the bad luck to find myself in a stage-oirisch bar I bumped into these stage-oirisch pricks who got very blood and soil and linguistically pure and I wantit to confound them to the very marrow of their traditionalist beings. St Patrick was a fucking Skatchman anywey from the town of Dumbarton. Of course us Browns originated from oillin, the MacDiumhns, and we had wur ayn business with St Patrick, no to mention the auld Fenians and yer man Connal Gulban. That is the trouble with heritage, ye can do anything ye like with it.[8]

Jeremiah's diatribe is aimed at those selective genealogies of nationhood which claim key historical personages (such as St Patrick) as their own. A further debunking of nation and inheritance is intimated in the phonetic rendering of names like Scotland, England, Ireland and America; 'oillin' suggests a rather

[6] Ibid., 8, 396–7.
[7] Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 16.
[8] Ibid., 105.

'stage-oirisch' Irish accent while 'Skatchman' caricatures US pronunciation. In such instances, the 'finality' of the national as part of a 'symbolic order' is decentred by the oral. There is, however, another form of cultural allegiance to which Jeremiah gives more credence. When an acquaintance from an Indian family tackles him on the subject of his history, his response is that 'working-class people … dont have a history'.[9] Yet he speaks in respectful terms when referring to American radicals like the Socialist and Union activist, Eugene Debs and the former slave and civil rights advocate, Frederick Douglas ('with the auld Skarrisch connection').[10] In instances like these, Jeremiah identifies with a radical history that appears to exceed the national parameters that he claims to despise. It is not so much history itself that he rejects; it is the history of nations (with all the cultural baggage that they sometimes carry).

In seeking Jeremiah Brown the Elder, the reader discovers that the protagonist has spent a lot of time travelling between the West and the East coast, sometimes with a fellow gambler buddy called Hayden. He settles in New York after taking flight from the West coast (over some unspecified yet dangerous trouble he has become embroiled in). While in New York, he lives in a cramped apartment (or 'cupboard') with little furniture, has insufficient clothes, has a poorly paid evening bar job from which he longs to escape, and occasionally goes on gambling sprees. He also reveals that he is trying to write a novel; an unlikely detective fiction which he hopes to turn into a film. His fortunes turn when he meets Yasmin; a black jazz-blues singer with whom he becomes besotted. The two settle into a relationship, although even after they have a child together they live apart due to Jeremiah's precarious financial circumstances. It is suggested that part of the reason for the distance in the relationship may be racial and cultural (i.e. Jeremiah's status as an unassimilated immigrant and a 'pink Skarrisch fucker').[11] Due to his marginalised status and his lack of economic security, attempts to form lasting ties or to set up a family prove elusive. An unlikely change in occupation from bartender to Airport Security Operative seems, at first, to offer a solution to these difficulties. Jeremiah manages to get the job because of a widespread increase in the security industries due to a phenomenon called the 'Persian bet'.

The 'Persian bet', a coinage that develops from the term 'perishing bet', emerges from a down turn in airline insurance due to increases in airplane crashes. It begins as an advertising joke but soon takes on a life of its own

[9] Ibid., 46.
[10] Ibid., 60.
[11] Ibid., 47.

via the machinations of Hollywood and television propaganda. According to the scheme, the bookie becomes insurer and the passengers make bets as to whether they will survive the flight or 'perish'; if they survive, all is as it should be, if they perish, their nearest and dearest win a large quantity of cash. The satire here is timely, the novel referring obliquely to the paranoid aftermath of the 9/11 bombings. The Persian bet also illustrates the real meaning of life insurance when pared down to its essentials; the monetary gain from such schemes is dependent on one's demise or the unlikelihood of one's survival following a plane crash.

Persian bet insurance is soon taken out of the hands of the bookie by those with 'corporate interests'.[12] What also becomes apparent, however, is that the people involved in the bets are from the lower echelons of US society: 'those who speculated on the "Persian bet" were poverty stricken bodies on an income so far below what official government experts reckoned it took to stay alive that the term "income" was dropped'.[13] Bets are also taken up by bankrupts and 'would-be-suicides'.[14] Interests in cheap flights and the Persian bet subsequently leads to a mass influx of the poor who begin to gather at airport terminals 'bearing blankets or pushing grocery carts'.[15] Because of the incremental rise in bodies there is an expansion in airport security: even those identified as 'aliens' are able to get a job. Ironically, the socially marginalised employees become responsible for fencing in a mob of predominantly indigenous American citizens.

The drifters that congregate at airports in order to partake in 'Persian bets' are difficult to control. Their mute yet intractable presence is conveyed in phantasmic terms: 'they didnay seem to fucking grasp that orders were orders. These bodies were clogging up corridors, reception and gate waiting areas and were even finding their way onto the goddam airfields themselves. It was like they were phantom apparitions or something'.[16] The description of these unwitting insurgents indirectly recalls the unruly bodies that crowd the districts and corridors of the Law in Kafka's *The Trial*. A key to their significance can be found in Kelman's idiosyncratic reading of the latter novel where he argues that the forces of the Law pitted against Joseph K find their basis in class conflict: '[Joseph K] was not having lies told about him: he was living a lie.

[12] Ibid., 123.
[13] Ibid., 127.
[14] Ibid., 125.
[15] Ibid., 128.
[16] Ibid., 135.

He assumed that the values of "his" society … were the supreme authority of humankind and then discovered they were subservient to a greater power, that of the Law which allowed his social inferiors to assume authority over him'.[17] While such an interpretation may appear tendentious, these comments cast light on the function of the airport vagrants in *You Have to be Careful*. Collectively, they form an uncanny reminder of the hidden lives that persist at the bottom of the social ladder while also illustrating, in estranged ghost-like form, the latent power of the 'folk' to resist and impede the workings of commodity capitalism. The simultaneously phantasmal and subversive presence of these visitants is intensified when various Security Operatives in the airport begin to witness a phantom grocery cart pusher (later named the 'being') who seems to haunt the whole airport. The 'being' eventually appears in a VIP suite where his/her (the gender remains ambiguous) grocery cart explodes causing mayhem.[18]

II Speaking in Tongues

In contrast to those instances where the reader is offered a 'paranoiac' or distorted version of US culture, North America is also 'translated' in the novel via the Glasgow idiom of the narrator. An early intimation of the style adopted in *You Have to be Careful* can be found in one of Kelman's earlier pieces, entitled 'More complaints from the American Correspondent'. This text forms part of a sequence of fragmentary and playful shorts in the collection, *Greyhound for Breakfast* (1987). It is possible to surmise that the story, with its exaggeratedly formal title, is one of a series of letters from a Glasgow émigré to someone who may share (or be familiar with) his cultural background:

> Jesus christ man this tramping from city to city – terrible. No pavements man just these back gardens like you got to walk right down by the edge of the road man and them big fucking Doberman pinchers they're coming charging straight at you. Then the ghettos for christ sake you got all them mothers lining the streets man they're tugging at your sleeves, hey you, gies a bite of your cheeseburger. Murder polis.[19]

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[17] James Kelman, *'And The Judges Said… '* (London, 2002), 304.

[18] James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 248.

[19] James Kelman, 'More complaints from the American Correspondent', *Greyhound for Breakfast* (London, 1999), 133. Kelman is paraphrasing Edwin and Willa Muir's

The reader familiar with Kelman's work will recognise the itinerant drifter type that narrates here. The overall impression is one of culture shock. The speaker-narrator[20] describes himself as 'tramping from city to city' in a way that appears primarily at odds with the automobile culture of urban centres like Boston etc, where middle-class suburbs tend not to have pavements and where loitering pedestrians are looked upon with suspicion. What is notable is the way in which these experiences have been 'translated' into a recognisably Glaswegian idiom; the final phrase, 'Murder polis', a common enough imprecation taken from a popular Glasgow Street-Song, is both comfortingly familiar and weirdly out of place. In contrast, the confrontation in the 'ghettoes' suggests a form of cultural symbiosis in that the encounter is rendered in a mixture of Glaswegian and American vernacular. The reciprocity in the narrator's choice of language not only suggests an attempt to recreate his experiences in the language of his home city but also that the 'mothers' (an American vernacular phrase) are in a condition of penury that the narrator recognises partially as his own ('hey you, gies a bit of your cheeseburger').

The meeting of registers that pertain to Glaswegian and American culture is developed more fully in *You Have to be Careful*. Like the narrator of 'More complaints', Jeremiah claims to have considerable experience of tramping on foot. In the following passage, he recalls (or restages) a conversation with his girlfriend Yasmin, who wonders how he has such an extensive knowledge of New York:

> All yous indigenous folks wonder how come furnirs know their way around the highways and byways of this city. It is because we walk, we walk, everywhere we go we walk … I spent the night in wigwams, under trees and under bridges, under roads and in trenches and caves and ditches, beneath aqueducts, chuckalucks and pipe ducts; tree huts, riverbanks and various shady groves and leafy hollows. One night I slept near a small loch
>
> Pardon me?
>
> Like a wee lake, a wide stretch of water.[21]

translation of the opening sentence of Kafka's novel: 'Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning' (*The Trial*, in *Franz Kafka* (London, 1976), 13).

[20] The term 'speaker-narrator' is used by H. Gustav Klaus to describe Kelman's first-person narrators: c.f. *James Kelman* (Tavistock, 2004), 3.

[21] Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 86.

Most of what Jeremiah says is to be taken with a pinch of salt as he has a penchant for drawing out a yarn and his verbal effusions tend to develop their own momentum, often completely departing from the realms of the plausible. As with 'More complaints', his speech contains North American and Scots phrases: the Scots collective second-person pronoun ('yous') is contrasted with a phonetic approximation of North American pronunciation ('furnir'). Likewise, the Scottish 'loch', which is glossed by Jeremiah, contrasts with the North American 'chuckaluck'. There is more to the latter term than meets the unsuspecting reader; to spend the night beneath a chuck-a-luck, essentially a game of chance where three dice are tumbled in a structure resembling an hour-glass shaped bird cage, is clearly a thinly veiled euphemism for an evening spent gambling.

In addition to Jeremiah's often-parodic imitations of North American speech idioms and lexis there are numerous instances in which the phonology and sometimes the orthography of other languages encroach upon the page. As Liam McIlvanney observes in his review of the novel, this may indicate the type of person that can barely speak a sentence without putting on a funny voice.[22] Earlier in the review, McIlvanney envisages the kind of academic criticism that might emerge from this aspect of the novel: 'one can already imagine the Bakhtinian analyses of *You Have to be Careful*, which will celebrate its boisterous voices, its "dialogic" use of language. In fact, the foreign tags and phrases do little to disguise the crushingly monologic nature of the work'.[23] Admittedly, when reading the novel, it is sometimes possible to feel entirely trapped by the speaker's unmitigated and often hysterical loquacity. At a purely visual level, however, the use of the 'foreign tags' has an alienating effect, suggesting someone whose speech is subject to the depersonalising relativism of a so-called global culture. In the following passage, Jeremiah provides his own marching orders:

> Nay wonder people got sick of me. Who wants to listen to some girning-faced furnir prick constantly moaning. Why dont ya fuck off hame to yer ayn country and moan. Yeh, precisely, le billet is booked monsieur. So gie us a smoke to celebrate. And le bier, oú est le bier. Donde está la la señorita! Eh hombre, gie us el brekko.[24]

[22] Liam McIlvanney, 'Give or take a dead Scotsman', *London Review of Books*, 26.14 (22 July 2004), 16.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 52.

This diatribe of self-loathing disintegrates into a barrage of vernacular Scots, American, French and Spanish phrases. The hotchpotch of idioms may remind the reader of those myths of America as melting pot where cultures are able to coalesce and combine. There is a further sense that the speaker's discourse is permeated by a banal and impersonal globalism in which the stock phrases of one culture may be used in lieu of another. In order to understand fully the disquieting externality of these renderings, however, it is necessary to address Kelman's ongoing concern with the scission that exists between speech and writing and the formal experimentation in his preceding work, *Translated Accounts* (2001).

The latter text is one of Kelman's most uncompromising and opaque: set in an imaginary province under martial rule, it contains fragments of confessions, first-hand accounts of paramilitary violence, streams of consciousness, and public speeches. These have been rendered into a stilted and un-idiomatic translatorese that simultaneously fails to grasp nuances of meaning yet is somehow capable of conveying the incommunicable horror of political atrocity. For many readers, *Translated Accounts* seemed to indicate a departure from Kelman's long-term commitment to representing the local and the concrete in his Glasgow fictions. Yet it also served to highlight the ways in which the earlier texts, far from suggesting an unproblematic mimesis of Glasgow speech, illustrated the tension involved in transposing the 'oral' into the 'written'.

Given these factors, it becomes easier to identify what Kelman is attempting to achieve formally in *You Have to be Careful*. The reader is presented with the seemingly guileless effusions of the first-person narrator. However, as was the case with *Translated Accounts*, the sense of an external agency is also conveyed in the way that the text is represented on the page, suggesting that parts of the narrative have been mediated in their transposition from speech to writing. It is in this respect that the impeccably rendered foreign tags gain a more sinister resonance and an anxiety in relation to that which is 'outside' is intimated.

III The Problem with Boundaries

McIlvanney has argued that *You Have to be Careful* is essentially static in structure.[25] Until the last thirty pages, little of note takes place within the

[25] McIlvanney, 'Give or Take a Dead Scotsman', 16.

framing narrative other than Jeremiah's progressive drunkenness, his paranoia regarding a 'pentagon fucker' observing him from the bar, and his attraction to a barmaid called Sally. In a text where there are no chapter divisions and no clear breaks in the narrative, the reader is subjected to an unrelenting interior dialogue where memories of the past mingle with polemical diatribes against global capitalism. For these reasons, the novel can be accused of lacking any cohesive structure. Yet perhaps this is the point. Jeremiah has difficulties in maintaining boundaries: the disjointed and seemingly random flow of his reminiscences indicates someone who lacks control over their own thoughts. There are also numerous points where he is unsure whether he is speaking aloud or not (an effect made possible in the text due to the lack of quotation marks for reported speech). He is given to compulsive behaviour ('mine was a compulsive, obsessive, addictive personality'),[26] has a predilection for gambling (although he always loses), and sometimes loses control over his body (there are numerous instances where he is prone to uncontrollable erections). There is a sense Jeremiah's status as an 'unassimilated alien' in the States with ID that marks him out as an unwelcome subversive may be the cause of such phenomena. The situations in which he is asked to produce ID constantly remind him of his status within the domicile country; the fact that his beliefs are at odds with the 'official' line; and that he may be called into account and 'exposed' at any given moment. Given these details, it may be argued that the form reflects the content. In another sense, the narrative possesses – and to a greater degree than any other Kelman novel – an existential 'openness' that avoids the 'closure' of more conventionally narrated novels and manages to convey 'a feeling of the dragging of time'.[27] For all that, if the narrative style of *You Have to be Careful* appears to be 'free' with its loose and digressive structure, the subject matter of the narrative, which includes Jeremiah's failure to build a successful family, to gain a career and find permanent domicile in the States, veers towards the fatalistic.

Due, in part, to the amount of booze consumed and the unrelenting nature of this Glasgow-voiced narrator's reflections, it is tempting to align the novel with other drunken-Scots monologues such as Hugh MacDiarmid's epic poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), a hallucinogenic mosaic

[26] Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 2.

[27] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'François Mauriac and Freedom', trans. Annette Michelson, *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (London, 1969), 15. C.f. also Laurence Nicoll, 'Kelman and the Existentialists' in Scott Hames (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman* (Edinburgh, 2010), 127–130 and Scott Hames, 'The Literary Politics of James Kelman' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2006).

of Scotland realised via the conceit of inebriation (*in vino veritas*), and Alasdair Gray's novel, *1982 Janine* (1984), where 'an alcoholic, insomniac supervisor of security installations' mingles sexual fantasies with regret at the promise of his early years during a single night in a hotel room. What is significant about these texts is that the speakers appear simultaneously immobile in space while being vulnerably exposed to the torsions of their own thoughts as they relate to the external world. Certainly, Jeremiah frequently has a sense that his personal borders are being encroached upon in the text and is often verbaholic in situations where he feels his autonomy threatened. In some instances, his anxieties take the form of paranoia; in others, his suspicions find their counterpart in reality.

The only moments of respite from the non-stop barrage of the narrator's musings and recollections occur when the reader is presented with dialogues between Jeremiah and other characters. Nevertheless, as soon becomes apparent, even the words of others are altered, expanded, and embellished via the central narrator's consciousness. At the same time, there are instances in which Jeremiah's control over his own narrative becomes destabilised in the text, as becomes apparent in 'The Shooters and Horses Bar' when he offends the clientele without realising it or when it becomes evident through the words of the barman that he has been speaking his thoughts aloud. Other characters in the narrative, alongside the reader, are party to phenomena in the narrative that escape Jeremiah. This estranging effect is also achieved within the framework of the character's own reminiscences. About halfway through the novel, Jeremiah recreates (or relives) his job interview for the post as Security Operative. The interview, conducted by a panel of three, is also a 'personal interrogation' and the discussion veers towards the kind of discursive non-realism that characterises Kafka's *The Trial*:

> The elder male said, Hey Jeremiah, we know all about you so why dont you relax. You are the problem that we address. Once we have you figured we decide the areas suited to your particular weaknesses. In the Security industry people's weaknesses should be highlighted, they can be more crucial than strengths. In this agency we go further; the way we see it these weaknesses are the true strengths.[28]

In the records, Jeremiah is also described as 'a libertarian socialist atheist'.

[28] James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 150.

In response to the interviewers' questions, he begins an implausibly long confession regarding his beliefs, aspirations and his keenness to get the job. These are interspersed with more comments from the panel that suggest the interviewers have information on file that relates to things Jeremiah has said in the past i.e. 'do you consider that fate deals a hand in life and that we are left to pick up the pieces?'.[29] There are several interpretive possibilities here: 1. as in other encounters Jeremiah is embellishing the whole scene by putting words in his own mouth as well as that of others; 2. Jeremiah is indeed party to such an interview within the fictional world of a novel which teeters between mimesis and the uncanny (according to Tzvetan Todorov's definition of these terms);[30] 3. questions of verisimilitude are irrelevant as the scene is merely a prop for political satire; 4. the interview never happens, Jeremiah has made the whole thing up; 5. the reader is to infer that parts of the narrative have been doctored or 'written up' by an unspecified interlocuter. Such crises in interpretation are provoked by the formal tension in the text between speech/ subjectivity, written language/ spoken language, concretion/ externality; the cumulative effect is similar to that which Cairns Craig noted in his discussion of Kelman's first published novel, *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), where 'voices can erupt into the self because it is already the space of the Other'.[31]

One of the interviewers in the episode just discussed, speaks of those, like Jeremiah, who are 'not afraid of the world that lies outside these shores', unlike other US citizens who 'wont have a map in the house; even the sight of our country in outline causes tension because it posits the existence of the *beyond*'.[32] In the final section of the novel, Jeremiah gets lost while looking for a public toilet and somehow ends up outside the Jazz bar where he ends up traipsing the streets through freezing snow: we leave him, in what constitutes a rather slapstick ending, face to face with a policeman after he has slipped in the snow and fallen on his backside. The indirect suggestion conveyed by the potentially hostile silence of the policeman is that during his time in the 'Land of the Free' Jeremiah has, in fact, been loitering on enemy territory. In this

[29] Ibid., 152.

[30] '[In the uncanny], events are related which may readily be accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar': Tsvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic* (Ithaca: 1975), 46

[31] Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* (Edinburgh, 1999), 102

[32] James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 154.

instance, the 'Land of the Free' championed by those stranded within the UK in Kelman's other novels, is represented as a kind of police state.

It is noteworthy that despite the setting and the frequent references to American culture, *You Have to be Careful* has a pattern entirely fitting with Kelman's later novels (especially *How late it was* and *A Disaffection*). In these texts, a paranoiacally heightened version of the 'real world' is represented where individual autonomy is threatened by the impersonal forces of state power. The implication is that the non-real (or surreal) elements in these narratives merely accentuate the kinds of experience that people from Kelman's own background have to confront. However, the protagonists of these novels are often outsiders who are effectively isolated from any sense of community (although a radical sense of working-class solidarity is occasionally invoked as an ideal). Within the main narrative frame of *You Have to be Careful* (Jeremiah's evening of binge drinking), there are no phone calls, no encounters with acquaintances and only passing conversations with other people. Events from the past are relived and re-dramatised but the fact that they are tempered by Jeremiah's selective memory heightens the overall impression of dislocation from other people.

It would appear then that the social, political and personal displacement of Kelman's protagonists is consolidated rather than resolved by the experience of emigration as dramatised in this novel. The lack of connections with other Scottish expats and Jeremiah's feeling that a return to Scotland is the ultimate sign of his failure (no jubilant homecomings are intimated) diminishes any impression of a collective diasporic identity while his inability to entirely assimilate within his adopted country or be recognised as a permanent resident leads to a condition of rootlessness and homelessness. Such a negative reading of the novel is tempered by the exuberant manner in which the narrative incorporates American vernacular and aspects of the history and culture of the US into its maw. In this respect, the narrative could be seen as offering a Scottish-American symbiosis, at least at the level of language (although such interpretations are complicated by the instability and mediation of the text, as I have illustrated).

The longing that Jeremiah has for lasting connections with the other becomes apparent in his almost infantile longing for the feminine, as when he reminisces about his relationship with Yasmin or when he suddenly becomes besotted with the bartender in the Jazz club. These desires conjoin with the character's simultaneous sense of displacement and longing to be accepted within his adopted country. A useful cadence can be brought to bear on

Jeremiah's condition if we turn again to a passage from *Translated Accounts*. Throughout the latter text the unidentified speakers often refer to a female figure who is absent from their lives; in some instances, this is due to the breakdown of a relationship, while in others the woman has unaccountably gone missing. In what is a fairly common trope (though not stated explicitly), this absence leaches into the characters' sense of belonging: 'This place also, now it was strange to me, that it might cease to exist by virtue of my becoming part of it. But I could never truly be part of it. No matter what transpired it would lie always outside of myself'.[33]

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[33] James Kelman, *Translated Accounts* (London, 2004), 298.