

Tomáš Balvín, *Anarchy and Anarchism in the Works of James Kelman*

BA thesis

Opponent's Review

The submitted BA thesis attempts to view the work of James Kelman (1946), one of the prominent voices of contemporary Scottish literature, in the light of political anarchism as represented both by traditional ideological concepts (from Bakunin onward but also back to Rousseau and Proudhon) and present-day political attitudes, mostly anti-England ones. The central critical text, used as a guideline of a sort, is Jesse Cohn's essay "What Is Anarchist Literary Theory?", but at the same time the student includes a plethora of other secondary materials to support his arguments. In this sense, the topic seems to be very well researched and accurately presented.

The thesis is divided into two parts, "In Activism" and "In Prose", the first one being devoted to Kelman's ideas as expressed in his essays and other non-fiction texts, the second to the ways his anarchism is projected into his fiction, i.e. his short stories and novels. The relation between the two parts seems rather arbitrary; this is mostly due to the fact that Kelman's fiction is not primarily political, i.e. it does not address political issues directly but rather through various forms in which independence from prescriptive norms of whatever kind is struggled for. Concerning this, it is questionable in what way e.g. Kelman's position to voting and political representation, discussed in great detail in sub-chapter 2.2, manages to elucidate the character of Kelman's fiction. This fact, I believe, closely bears upon the question whether we should study Kelman prevailingly as a political figure or whether we should approach him as a man of letters. Though it may be argued that these two facets are inseparable, it is more in accord with the character of our study programmes to examine the literary works of the author, and toward this goal the thesis indeed seems to incline. The first part thus should prepare us, in a sense, for the analysis provided in the second part. Yet the problem is that the thesis does not culminate in any real analyses of Kelman's novels and stories; on the contrary, these are given a very limited place in the thesis. They complete a rich mosaic of many aspects of Kelman's anarchism, but we learn much more about other critics' views than about Kelman's works of fiction themselves. It is not even certain which of Kelman's novels and short story collections the student has actually read. The topics of working class characters and of language strategies and narrative innovations are fascinating, no doubt, and as such they deserve a more thorough treatment than that provided in the thesis. To make things clear: we learn a lot about Kelman's anarchism, and this must be appreciated, but we should know more about its application in his fiction and about the student's reading of his fiction.

With respect to this, I feel that the second part should appropriately be called "In Fiction", rather than "In Prose", as the first part also examines Kelman's prose writings. What also partly devalues this thesis is a number of language errors and typos which even make some sentences almost incomprehensible. A final revision of the text is definitely needed. Most of these errors are indicated in one of the copies.

To conclude: I **recommend** the thesis for defence with a preliminary mark "very good" (**velmi dobře**).

PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D.

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