

# James Kelman's The Burn Essay

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James Kelman's story, *The Burn* has been interpreted as a universal representation of the condition of the working class in an oppressive society. Also, critics have brought to light the stylistic accomplishment of Kelman's writing; his ability to use language to bring to bear a psychological and emotional state of being within a fraction of an individual's life; but, there is another perspective that may have been an unintentional result of his genius as a writer. His unnamed character gives us an additional lens to view his journey. And, by following the anonymous character through his journey to an interview we can see the part he plays in the social construct, as oppressive as it is, that brings him to a hopelessly inevitable dead end.

Social constructs can be a debilitating influence upon an individual's life. The propaganda the construct spews through positioning the individual in a hierarchal system is sometimes met with opposition and other times taken as fact. When met with opposition, the construct can motivate one to aspire to become more than the construct would permit. And, on the occasions that the construct is believed it is used as confirmation of a self-denigrating idea. The negative affect is that it creates permanence where a potentially temporary condition exists. James Kelman's story, posits that although social constructs are created to keep a group in place, it is the belief in the construct that perpetuates the cycle of

oppression, propagates the lie and brings it to [reality](#).

Kelman's character is a slave to the outside forces. It pushes him in a direction he does not want to go. There are choices. He sees them. But, he chooses the least desirable, as noted: "He glanced back across the wide expanse of w...

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...ermanent state of delusion" (43).

Kelman's character lives there and rationalizes why he is there, pointing to the outside forces that surround him, that imprisons, that he would have to break free from but, "he just had no choice" but to stay in the place in which the social construct has placed him and "be alone."

In conclusion, James Kelman's unnamed character is lead down a trail that is an allegory to his life and the end of his life. The forest, the stream, the obstacles, and the shadows of the characters he meets along the way displays the social construct that lead him to inner turmoil and later, his prophetic conclusion. And, through the narrator's announcement of the characters inevitable demise, Kelman shows that although throughout the story he highlights the universality of the condition of "everyman" he superimposes the individuality of the end.

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