

Subversive and Disturbing Concepts in *What Becomes* by A. L. Kennedy

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ABSTRACT

Scottish author A.L. Kennedy is one of the key representatives of the modern short-story in English. Several of her collections – including *Night Geometry* and the *Garscadden Trains* (1990), *Now That You're Back* (1994), *Original Bliss* (1997) and *Indelible Acts* (2002) – have won prestigious British literary prizes. This paper closely examines her fifth collection *What Becomes* (2009), in which the twelve stories deal with isolation, loneliness, depression, and a complete lack of love. Kennedy's unique poetics reflects her interest in formal innovations; she shows passion toward and sympathy with the weird, awkward, ugly and shocking. Her short-stories disturb the reader through the particular formal devices (the special use of typography) and thematic concepts (showing the disturbances of everyday life).

KEYWORDS

Short story, A.L. Kennedy, *What Becomes*, formal innovations, typography

Alison Louise Kennedy,¹ better known as A.L. Kennedy, is one of the most critically praised Scottish fiction writers and journalists of today. The author whose works have been called "dark and little difficult"² may well be characterised by these words herself, as Kennedy likes to pose as a disturbing personality. She does not hesitate to use harsh language and manifests her writing as a life vocation reflecting upon things which bother her personally as a woman and as a writer. Laura Tennant notes "accessible isn't a word you'd attach to a writer who favours an androgynous pair of initials."³ It is fiction and the process of writing as such which Kennedy reflects upon in her journalism⁴. She writes a lot about why and how she writes, detailing the process of creation and through these meta-narratives Kennedy tries to marginalize her (fictional) self, and attempts to show the otherness and uniqueness of her condition. In her article "If my ideal writing day existed, this would be it" Kennedy mocks a stereotyped image of a writer and strongly resents to be put into any universal category. She is not one of those saying I "'always complete the final draft in my suite at the Carlyle' or 'my writing room faces the smaller of our lakes and has a delightfully inspiring view across the Chilterns/Dartmoor/the Swiss Alps/Dollis Hill' or 'I always get up at 4am, sip my organic mint tea – dew-kissed

1 A.L. Kennedy was born in 1965. While attending Dundee High School from 1979 to 1983, she was a frequent visitor to the theatres in Stratford and London, a passion which later took her to Warwick University to study drama and has eventually turned her into a popular stand-up comic. Completing a BA in Theatre Studies and Drama in 1986, she returned to Scotland and started her writing career. Since 1989, after her return to Scotland, A.L. Kennedy worked for Project Ability, a Glasgow-based Centre for Developmental Arts, initially as Writer in Residence (1989-1995) and subsequently as editor of *Outside Lines* magazine. Kennedy is a member of the Management Committee of Project Ability, and her dedication to community arts programmes remains strong. She used to teach creative writing to with special needs students and now teaches creative writing to the socially disadvantaged students of St. Andrew's University.

2 Laura Tennant, "The Dark Side of Love," *New Statesman* 10 (2009): 43.

3 Tennant, "The Dark Side," 43.

4 See for instance <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2010/may/10/al-kennedy-writing-back-pain/print> or <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2010/apr/13/rooms-not-ones-own-al-kennedy>.

leaves fresh from the sunken garden – and then five or six thousand words tumble forth before Freddie and Timmy and the dogs wake up and I have to oversee Marta while she makes them breakfast.”⁵ A. L. Kennedy often comments on the difference between “writing” and “being a writer”. In an interview with Kaye Mitchell she explains:

I’m very interested in writing, the process is continually fascinating, it provides something very valuable in our culture – ideally – it’s something which takes place, in part, somewhere other than the real world – that gives it an almost Platonic quality, an absolute flavour. Being a writer – apart from being about everything but writing – is about being a human being, rather than an absolute – which is always a mixed experience, it’s about publicity, it’s about the things which waste writing time or the time in which someone could be living their life.⁶

A.L. Kennedy repeatedly stresses writer-reader contact⁷ which she strengthens as a regular attendee at book festivals, readings and other cultural events. Kennedy states:

You can’t predict what your reader will be like, of course, but you can predict that they will be a human being who is going to experience the world as something other than two-dimensional. You’re actually saying something to somebody. It’s very easy, particularly if you’ve been writing for a long time, just to have a conversation with yourself. But you always have to remember that people have gone to the effort of buying, or stealing, and then reading your book.⁸

The list of A.L. Kennedy’s works is long and very diverse. She has written several short story collections, novels, non-fiction works, a few screenplays and columns, arts features as well as reviews for the *Scotsman*, the *Irish Times* and the *Guardian*. Kennedy started her writing career with the short story collection *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990) which won the *Scotsman* Saltire Award, John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and the Scottish Arts Council Book Award. Her earliest work contains stories of loneliness and isolation, and – in addition Kennedy also tries to describe the life of single women entrapped in a variety of relationships. Her following short story collections were *Now That You’re Back* (1994) which won the Scottish Arts Council Book Award, *Tea and Biscuits* (1996), *Original Bliss* (1997), *Indelible Acts* (2002) and *What Becomes* (2009). Her most significant novels are *So I Am Glad* (1995), *Paradise* (2004) and *Day* (2007) – a winner of the Costa Prize in 2007. In both her short stories and longer fiction, Kennedy’s characters are often marginalized, searching for their identity, constantly suffering emotional crises, miscommunication and sensual turmoil.

The short story collection *What Becomes*⁹ was published in 2009 to great praise from critics. The collection has been described as “stunning, impressive and genuinely enjoyable” (C. Sawers in *The Scotsman*), “committed to capturing the precariousness and unsteadiness of individual mental landscapes” (A. Clark in *The Guardian*) and “brilliant” (K. Ashenburgh in *The Spectator*). Kennedy’s fiction is multilayered, complex and offers numerous perspectives for analysis and interpretation. *What Becomes* consists of stories typical for her in use of certain stylistic and expressive means, sharply pointed

dialogues and the silences in the text which are characteristic features of Kennedy’s poetics. Though in her interviews the author has denied any planning or arrangement of the collection as a whole, it is quite interesting how coherent the book is in terms of its structure.

As for content, the twelve short stories in *What Becomes* generally depict lives without purpose as results from the lack of love, hope or communication. Kennedy’s inspiration does not come from the fantasy world; these are everyday, common urban people, often broken by crises in relationships. Most of them are middle-aged men and women isolated, lonely, disappointed, marginalized and (unjustifiably or justifiably) guilty. Kennedy is a close observer of ordinary problems, of everymen not having time enough for building and strengthening their relationships which ends in deep and often tragic falls into the emptiness of existence. As Laura Tennant mentions: “Kennedy likes to keep her readers on their toes, or perhaps, more accurately, she likes to induce in them the same nauseous sensation of alienation from which so many of her characters suffer.”¹⁰

It is typical of Kennedy to juxtapose physical proximity and emotional distance. Often there are cases that the closer and more intimate the characters are, the bigger the communication gap between them is. Interestingly, Kaye Mitchell in her characterization of Kennedy’s fiction suggests that though she can be hardly considered an author of romance fiction “in its obvious literariness, avoidance of formula and eschewing of traditionally ‘happy’ endings, not to mention its packaging and reception.” Yet “in its preoccupation with romantic relationships, love, sex and desire, Kennedy’s work invites comparison with this variety of genre fiction.”¹¹ In *What Becomes*, each short story examines human relationships, often presenting the supposedly un-presentable; silences and communication gaps are ever-present and create vacuums impossible or extremely difficult to fill. On one hand, characters do not communicate; or, if they do, they are often misinterpreted.

Emotionally quite unstable and frequently depressed, Kennedy’s characters often seek refuge in places where they may indulge in loneliness, and which they expect would bring the peace they desire. Though Kennedy does not give much space to direct descriptions, her settings often echo the situation and are closely intertwined with the state of mind the characters find themselves in, what are they going through and why they behave the way they do. They often seek out specific places in which they seek to find significance. For instance in *What Becomes* Frank hides in the cinema, as he wants to escape problems that haunt him at home, only to learn that it is impossible as even the anonymity of the dark cinema does not divert him from his marital and personal crisis. Even the movie which is being screened – there is a problem with the sound – mirrors his life. The scenes in the short story *Wasps* take place in a family which – contrary to being filled with love, understanding and comfort – is falling apart. There are threats worse than a nest of wasps and the couple is too estranged to fix the problems. The woman from *Saturday Teatime* is relaxing in a flotation tank and calms down in the warm, wet and safe space, the protected significance of which only becomes apparent when the reader learns what she went through in childhood.

Kennedy’s fiction is full of losers, people who have failed in their social roles. Surprisingly, in *As God Made Us* a teacher – a role normally associated with tolerance and compassion – shows her disgust openly at the sight of handicapped men. Frank in *What Becomes* used to work as a forensics expert and visited the places of crimes, murders

5 A.L. Kennedy, “If my ideal writing day existed, this would be it,” *Guardian* June 9, 2010.

6 Kaye Mitchell, *A.L. Kennedy* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 121-122.

7 See also Kennedy’s article available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2010/apr/28/perils-meeting-favourite-authors-al-kennedy> which discusses this issue.

8 Jonathan Derbyshire, “The Books Interview. AL Kennedy,” *New Statesman* August 3, 2009, 46.

9 A. L. Kennedy often experiments with typography in her texts.

10 Tennant, “The Dark Side,” 43.

11 Mitchell, *A.L. Kennedy*, 69.

and bloodshed. Being retired, the haunting scenes gradually come back. He cannot bear them which results in a kitchen scene when Frank cuts himself and permeates the room with blood to his wife's horror. In Kennedy's world, marriage is without love, the father in *Wasps* leaves the family, and so on. It is very often through family ties and marital relationships that Kennedy examines why people fail. The couples pictured are never ideal, partners just floundering, not knowing how to fix things, and cheating on each other.

Kennedy is a merciless judge and easily sentences to death those whom she despises. Significantly, many short stories in the collection have just a one-word title which evokes not only the obvious wide referential – denotative and connotative – quality of the term, but also creates an effect of a drastic and sudden cut. In the case of two short stories, *Marriage* and *Another*, the titles obviously have no precise reference; however, it is interesting to observe how cyclic structure – indefinite / definite / general – works in here. The title of the story *Marriage* is indefinite; there is nothing about the marriage revealed, any suggestion or explanation. It is just any marriage. Furthermore, the couple in the short story is nameless and becomes concrete only after a wider context and circumstances of their marital life appear. They struggle with everyday conflicts, changes of mood and some serious problems; it is a broken relationship in which true love is missing. The abused and beaten woman seems to have no chance to escape her violent husband, and merely passively submits to his needs. They are two strangers, living the routine of a failed partnership: "This isn't working, he can tell. Anybody would be able to tell. [...] Reconciliation...[...] So they won't have a giggle. They won't be companions. They won't chat. They will just walk, trudge on. She will trash their afternoon."¹² Again, physical proximity counterpoints an emotional distance. We gradually get to know the nature of their relationship and at the end the woman even grows sentimental, her powerlessness becoming even more obvious: "Together they watch the two men work under the rain.[...] She repeats herself more quietly, 'I don't know how they stand it.'"¹³ The sentence she repeats may refer to their own personal situation, as well as to her quiet desperation which is likely never going to be defeated.

Another dysfunctional marriage is depicted in *Another*, in which Lynne fills the gap after the death of her husband Barry too easily as their marriage happened to be simply just a formal bound suiting both of them: "Barry had offered her a child as a consolation for his inability to love *her*. (Liking was also beyond him.) In order to shore up something that couldn't stand, they had made a person: a complete, living human being."¹⁴ The above mentioned effect of a cyclic reference is even stronger here, with *Another*, a determiner which refers to something additional (of a same type), or something different. With such a title, we do not know what is going to be determined and how; it can be basically anything or anyone. *Whole Family with Young Children Devastated* again depicts a marriage which is about to end, and at the same time it portrays the growing relationship between two discontented people. A man, who probably cannot stand his situation at home, forges a bond with a woman and shares several phone calls with her. The woman spends time watching TV or walking on the beach, and hopes that maybe one day she will be sharing not only phone conversations but something real, closer and more personal. Kennedy once again introduces a couple as well as individuals who do not seem to fulfil their dreams and desires. In another story, *Sympathy*, a man and a woman search for what is missing in their lives – the feeling of being noticed even by

any stranger. The man uses the phrase "I love you" which loses its significance in this context, and love in his perception is just a momentary feeling: "...I love you. 'No you don't.' 'But I want to say I do. And let's see if I can.'"¹⁵

A.L. Kennedy studies relationships between men and women very closely, though in some of her stories she also deals with relationships between parents and children, an issue which also frequently tackles with the past. In *Saturday Teatime* the woman tries to relax but her memories haunt her and she returns to her childhood, when she witnessed her parents' fights. Here, Kennedy discusses the very delicate problem of domestic violence and digs into the depths of a human psyche. The child – now a grown woman – still hopes deeply in her heart that things may turn out better, that something might change or she could change her life, but it is probably just childish naivety combined with the yearning for a warm hug from someone close, especially from her parents.

As has been already suggested, one of the disturbing concepts in Kennedy's fiction is how the lack of communication, attention and sincerity represent disruptive elements corrupting relationships and causing trauma. To strengthen her agenda, Kennedy presents extremities and images which are close to evoking shock or provoking subliminal reactions. That is the case of the first story *What Becomes*, in which Frank, tired of work, life and marital love, feels as if he were invisible and needs someone to save him. Having dealt with blood, murder and people on the run for his whole life – he is a former forensics expert – it is now he who "murders" and "has to run": "And the man he'd been before was gone from him absolutely...[...] thoughtless. [...] Maybe mad. Maybe that's what he was. Broken or mad. Broken and mad. [...] It felt like a type of mild headache. No one ever helps."¹⁶ Cutting himself (was it an accident?) while preparing dinner, there is blood all over the kitchen. After Frank's wife comes back, a literal slaughterhouse turns into an emotional one. Obviously, Frank needs to be consoled by someone. Even if he still loves this woman, he feels the gap between them, her coldness and inability to share feelings and understand him. They are two desperate souls, broken-hearted, who cannot reconcile their relationship and start over:

I understand why people look at fountains, or at the sea. Because these don't stop... [...] I want everything back. No stopping. I want nothing to stop...[...] Afterwards they had rested, his head on her stomach, both of them still weeping, too loudly, too deeply... [...] But even that had gone eventually, and there had been silence and he had tried to kiss her and she had not allowed it. That was when he had taken his bag, left the room, the house, the town, the life.¹⁷

The movie Frank is to see in the cinema plays no sound and he immediately seeks someone to fix it. However, the question "who is to blame for *his* mutiny" remains open. There are several possible reasons: his previous work conditions and tragedies he had been observing for years, wife's (mis)understanding and (mis)interpretation of the kitchen scene or simply Frank himself and his failure to adapt and express what he feels.

Kennedy also uses the human body in order to disrupt stereotypes and prejudices. In *As God Made Us* six young men who first met in an army hospital are connected by common experiences. They are all former soldiers (fighting for an Idea), now turned to amputee veterans who visit the swimming pool and spend time together, trying to forget about their everyday troubles. The men realize the bitterness of their existence and yet

12 A.L. Kennedy, *What Becomes* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), 127.

13 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 135.

14 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 187.

15 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 158.

16 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 14.

17 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 20-21.

they hope to be accepted as they are. As one of them reflects, "His body is not an aid to mental rehabilitation. So he swims, makes everything glide and jolly. This means he'll improve faster. But never as fast as he would without his injuries. That's a medical fact - if he still had his foot and the rest of his arm, he'd be finding life much better than he is."¹⁸ The past cannot be changed; the men are still haunted by it and there is still something or someone who shows them, either directly or indirectly, that they do not belong among "the normal". In a place where human bodies are uncovered and physical defects are more obvious, mental defects become visible as well. *As God Made Us* is the story of intolerance and social exclusion. In the story, a teacher with her pupils visits the pool where they meet a few disabled men. A. L. Kennedy shows the teacher's hypocrisy and her failure as a moral authority. Though seemingly speaking in a very mild tone, her expressions are full of prejudices and bias. The teacher thus represents a subversive element; her ethical standards are weak and based on a superficial judgement of men's looks. In her eyes, the men are a nuisance and create an inappropriate scene for children to look at:

"Excuse me." She focuses on Gobbler. "I realise you've been here, that you come here quite often...[...] And I've explained you to them, but now - ..." What you'd be explaining. "[...] Is that like I need translating? Like I'm a foreign language, because that's not it - British me, British to the core [...] I told them you were as God made you [...] You are disturbing. [...] There must be places you can go to where you'd be more comfortable." [...] And the lads don't speak. She stays standing there and hasn't got a fucking clue. And the lads don't speak.¹⁹

The conception of time in A.L. Kennedy's stories is very specific and should play a key role in any interpretation of her fiction. Mitchell mentions that A.L. Kennedy often works with analepsis ("flashing back" to an earlier point in the story) and prolepsis ("flashing forward" to a moment later in the chronological sequence of events), and that she is often preoccupied with memory and the relationship of past and present.²⁰ Glenda Norquay also agrees that A.L. Kennedy frequently uses shifts in temporal perspectives.²¹ A.L. Kennedy's narratives often resemble scattered pieces of puzzle that we have to put together to create a whole picture. She moves between different periods of time in characters' lives, and even though Kennedy uses various devices to help the reader, we need to be well focused on the sequence of events. She often begins her story *in medias res* and retrospectively explains how, why or when characters have come to their present situation or state.

For example, the story *What Becomes* begins as Frank is sitting in the cinema and only later do we gradually learn about everything that has preceded. Constant shifts in place (cinema and kitchen) and time (now and then) emphasize Frank's emotional state of distress. The present and past are intertwined and his situation at the cinema somehow echoes his disturbed thoughts (problems with the sound – he cannot understand the story = things left unexplained with his wife = she could not understand *his* story).

Retrospection can also be found in other stories in the book. For example, in *Confectioner's Gold* we first meet the young couple as they are strolling in the city and

only then do we gradually discover who they are, what they did, what has brought them into the current situation. Detailed references also suggest the special significance of time:

Two days now without sleeping, not even a nap since they got here. Which was *on Friday* - when they got here. It was definitely *on Friday* and they have kept very firm about this, because in retrospect their movements are unlikely, unclear. For example, *after the Friday* they ran clean on through a *Saturday* that seemed to exist *for only an hour or two* - the length of a rain shower and a squabble, a slammed door - and then it became *the unfamiliar Sunday* which currently surrounds them, insistent and over-bright.²²

It seems that just the past remains in the relationship and merely memories unite the alienated couple.

Kennedy uses the same technique in *Marriage* and *Sympathy*. In *Marriage*, we learn about the present couple from the past and accounts of the things they paradoxically had not done:

They were walking – had been for hours, further and further into the Saturday mess of downtown. They hadn't gone according to his hopes, hadn't stopped for lunch, hadn't taken the tiny ferry [...] They hadn't bought lunch on the island [...] He'd wanted to give her a splendid day, but she wouldn't listen, wouldn't agree, wouldn't let him take her hand [...] These last few months, he couldn't tell what she intended. Back at home their rooms were almost emptied.²³

In the short story *Sympathy* the same analogy may be drawn. We are immediately dragged into a hotel room where two strangers are about to have sex:

"Is this wise?" "Sorry?" "I said - is this wise?" Which is ... I just didn't want a silence - not right now. I think. Nervous. [...] "God, you smell nice. And feel nice. And the lady doesn't want the curtains open, but a strange man...in her hotel room...that's fine." [...] "And you look all right." "Thanks a lot." "I mean safe." "Thanks a hell of a lot." "Okay, you look like I'm going to fuck you. And you're going to fuck me. How's that."²⁴

Thanks to the time shifts, we get to know the whole history of how they ended up in that room, what happened in their lives before they came to the hotel: "I make it twenty-four...minutes ago you were in the bar downstairs and by yourself and ready to pick up anyone at all, ready to fuck anyone, because that's what you like."²⁵

Kennedy is an experienced experimental stylist. Mitchell points out that she works with a moderate level of typographical experimentation and her use of bold, italics and different fonts indicate the thought processes of different characters.²⁶ Glenda Norquay adds that the author uses specific tools including this experimentation with typography in her narratives to confront the largest questions of existence.²⁷ Stories in *What Becomes* often contain words, phrases and even longer parts written either in italics or different fonts which stand out from the text immediately, as it is obvious that the highlighted part must be significant. Through these direct insights, a certain balance of

18 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 120.

19 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 121-122.

20 Mitchell, *A.L. Kennedy*, 148.

21 Glenda Norquay, "'Partial to Intensity': the Novels of A.L. Kennedy," in *The Contemporary British Novel*, ed. J. Acheson and S. C. E. Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 145.

22 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 75, italics mine.

23 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 130-131.

24 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 154.

25 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 159.

26 Mitchell, *A.L. Kennedy*, 148.

27 Norquay, "Partial to Intensity," 145.

the fictional objectivity is achieved. On one hand this helps the reader to distinguish the thoughts from the narrator's commentary; on the other hand, it also puts specific emphasis on the stressed part in the whole context of the story. In the short story *What Becomes* Frank is trying to complain to the boy that the movie is running without sound: "I said there is no sound." Frank is not enraged, not about to do anything, simply thinking - *no one helps and you ask and it doesn't matter because no one helps and I don't know why.*"²⁸ The use of italics here obviously refers to the thought of the character and at the same time emphasizes the general existential angst Frank is experiencing.

Italics are also used in *Confectioner's Gold* when Tom and Elaine are walking the street and the part italicized refers to the Elaine's thoughts: "It also occurs to her that they ought to be hand in hand, herself and her man. *Two lovers strolling together. Two relatively young people who have sex with each other strolling together. Two very close to middle-aged people who are scared of having sex with each other strolling together. Two people strolling. If you over-think things, then they get away from you.*"²⁹ Though walking in the closest proximity possible, they are universes apart – both in material (cannot afford the restaurant they enter, using someone else's apartment) and spiritual need (the reference to the physical consummation of their love with no implication of inner understanding).

When only individual words are italicised, the main effect is to raise the emphasis and significance of the specific word for the short story. Thus in *Saturday Teatime* the woman meditates about happiness: "And who doesn't like being happy? Happy's why I'm here. I am trying something new that should increase my happiness. This time it's *flotation and relaxation*. I've walked in and bought an hour of both."³⁰ The narration is – in a way – a philosophical treatise on happiness. For her, happiness is represented by flotation and relaxation, and that is why she decides to try it. The flotation tank is what the grave is for Samuel Beckett's after-life narratives. As she lies there, various memories from her near or distant past come to her. She remembers one kid from a party the week before trying to get her to play with a hamster; she recalls the kid's parents and how strange they were. She finds herself in a very sensitive mood and comes to times when she was just nine years old. It is at this moment when we realize how hurt this woman is inside as she confesses that there is nothing that frightens her more than her own parents. The short story *Marriage* is another revelation of a couple in crises. In the part where they are walking the street – two anonymous indifferent persons, the woman walking a few steps ahead – the word "running" may be considered to carry a special meaning: "A few streets ago, she raised her pace and she's still rushing. She's not *running*, though..."³¹ We may assume that the author wants here to suggest or even foreshadow that though the marriage is broken and dysfunctional, the wife will not run away from her husband. There is also one particular place in the book where the author directly refers to the use of italics. In *Story of My Life*, the woman is sitting at the dentist and undergoes oral surgery: "And this is my speaking voice, my out-loud voice, the one for everyone but you. So *it's in italics* – the way you'll know."³² *Story of My Life* thus acquires several layers of references and offers various interpretations. The first idea is to draw parallels between her life and the visit to the doctor in which the pain and fear related to the visit somehow represent the overall impression of life as suffering. The second option is – and the narrator actually

does this – to look at life as a string of beads each of which stands for an experience related to her teeth.

To sum up, the short stories by A.L. Kennedy might seem to be bleak and hopeless visions of modern life. Though pessimistic and without providing direct answers, the stories are effective psychological probes on disturbing existential questions of contemporary society. As stated in the beginning A.L. Kennedy likes to provoke and question. Her stories are secular: there is no place for god and miracles do not happen. However, there also are other ways Kennedy makes her readers feel disturbed. The problems she chooses to discuss might seem banal – for instance her depiction of marital, family relationships, or an encounter with the disabled – but Kennedy gives them qualities and describes them in such a way that banality alters into shocking reality. There are common situations which are often turned into the emotionally tense and even psychologically disturbing scenes such as a couple in a kitchen full of blood, or a teacher with the pupils encountering the handicapped men at the pool. Traditional societal structures such as a marriage or a family do not work. People resemble Beckett's characters meditating upon their bleak and hopeless existence they are unable to face. A. L. Kennedy frequently uses typography, especially italics, to communicate with a reader and gives him some hints to her texts. There are a few effects of the graphic emphases; besides Kennedy's attempt to defamiliarize and diversify the text as such, there is also the intention to stress and highlight a specific word often meant ironically in the text.

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28 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 12.

29 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 76.

30 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 57.

31 Kennedy, *What Becomes*, 128.

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