

TRANSFORMATIONS IN JACKIE KAY'S *TRUMPET* - A PSYCHOANALYTICAL INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT

A psycho analytical insight into the strange functioning of the mind and its pangs camouflaged, provides for interesting exploration. Cross gender people who take the steps to alter their sex (change physically from male to female or from female to male) become transgenders. As if they were just born into the wrong body. In Jackie Kay's award-winning debut novel, 'Trumpet' unfolds vicissitudes of mental vibes that lead us to the unconscious workings of the mind. In 'Trumpet', Kay very carefully registers the technical as well as emotional difficulties of 'transgendered' life. The novel begins in the wake of his death. Born a female by the name of Josephine Moore, Joss discovers he is a transgender, and lives his life as a man. He becomes a famous trumpet player and devotes his life to his passion for music. Joss is portrayed as a passionate lover, strict father, energetic friend, and dedicated artist. The title Trumpet refers literally to the main character, Joss Moody's instrument. Moody was an amazing trumpet player and became famous in the jazz world. Figuratively, it could be argued, the trumpet embodies more than Moody's fame. Moody's trumpet serves as an equalizer of identity. The character Joss Moody is not a man or a woman, or a husband or a father. He is a trumpet player. The title of the novel gives his identity the opportunity to be that simple. Additionally, Joss's trumpet functions as a phallic symbol that allows him to navigate being black and Scottish by inhabiting certain forms of black masculinity. Joss is married to Millie Moody, a white woman. Thus the objective of the paper would be to explore the strange functioning of her mind, the repressed desire, which would contribute in opening up new realms for interesting research

Key Words: Cross Gender, subjugation and marginalization, transvestite, transsexualism, gender dysphasia, Mental disorder, In the Closet, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, (LGBT).

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- DR. MEENAKSHIKULKARNI

Kay's debut novel 'Trumpet' unfolds vicissitudes of mental vibes that lead us to the unconscious workings of the mind. The story is about gender identity and platonic love. The novel begins in the wake of Joss Moody's death. Joss Moody the protagonist is born as the daughter of a black father and white mother (the same as the author herself). Born a female by the name of Josephine Moore, Joss discovers he is a transgender, and lives his life as a man. 'Trumpet' is a moving story of a shared life based on an intricate lie of loving, deception and lasting devotion. Joss becomes a famous trumpet player and devotes his life to his passion for music. The character of Joss Moody was based on a real person: Billy Tipton. He was a successful American Jazz musician and bandleader popular during the 1940s. He was also born a woman. Like Tipton, Joss is genetically female but lives his life like a man, with his natural gender only being discovered after his death. Trumpet opens after his death and explores the reaction to this revelation from the media and the people in his life.

He is portrayed as a passionate lover, strict father, energetic friend, and dedicated artist. There is complete void in the life of his wife, Millie after his death, she expresses herself '*Joss's soul has gone and mine has been stolen*'. (Pg2). She could not come to terms with the death of her loving partner and to add to her misery, the media went over to her with a fine toothed comb. She felt miserable, hounded and hunted. She took respite in the off beaten resort of *Torr*, the place where the couple would celebrate their priceless moments, she tries to capture respiteful moments through her traumatic period and away from the unending questions of the media, who were blowing things out of proportion and adding to her misery. After his demise, Millie has a disorderly, annulled feeling "*The emptiness is palpable*". (Pg 12)

I focus on how he constructs his identity, outlining the fact that he has always been at the same time a man and a woman. Kay represents identity as not fixed, something fluid, and something which is in a dynamic state, since it is defined by many different aspects, such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, class and ethnicity.

As 'lesbian' and 'gay' becomes included in the 'homosexual' category, in recent years

'queer' becomes an umbrella term which is used to include all these categories and many others. This use of the word, which is now well established and spread among gay people, has the aim to deprive the other label of the negative connotations they had over the years. Cross Dressing: Cross Dressing, simply, is the act of wearing clothes that are typically kept for the opposite gender. It is commonly used to refer to males dressing in female clothing, but it could also refer to females dressing in male clothing. Just as the protagonist of 'Trumpet,' Josephine Moore reinvented herself as Joss Moody. However, Joss has lived both as a man and as a girl and this is something that moves beyond gender binaries.

Alice Walker's paper "As You Wear: Cross-dressing and Identity Politics in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*" begins with the sentences: "You are what you wear. You are what you were", discusses the problem with gender binaries. Many Binary opposites are present in *Trumpet*; there is life and death, male and female, being prominent. Alice Walker argues that "cross-dressing – or 'crossing', as it is otherwise known – is synonymous with choosing" per chance, personal preference. A cross-dresser, Walker argues, operates between these opposites and by resisting assimilation within a system of binary oppositions, he or she reveals the inadequacy of this system, and, furthermore, questions the extent to which appearance and identity are juxtaposed. In the case of Joss, it is her choice to dress like a man, the cross-dresser functions as a disorderly and rebellious presence: by resisting adaptation within a system of binary oppositions.

Judith Butler begins her book *Gender Trouble* with a quotation from Simone De Beauvoir: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one". Keeping in mind this quote, I would like to make a distinction between sex and gender. Sex can be briefly defined as one's biological feature coming from birth. But gender is "an achieved status rather than an ascribed biological characteristic, and is based on tasks performed and the significance of clothing as well as anatomical and other factors" (Bullough 5).

Transgender is a term which includes different categories of people, "transsexuals (pre, post and no-op); transvestites; cross-dressers; [...] persons who have chosen to perform no gender at all". The term addresses to those people whose identity, expression, behavior, or general sense of self does not reflect the sex they were born. They are not either female or male, they are in an 'in-between state'.

A gender role is a set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived sex. These are usually centered round opposing conceptions of femininity and masculinity, although there are myriad exceptions and variations.

The specifics regarding these gendered expectations may vary substantially among cultures, while other characteristics may be common throughout a range of cultures. There is ongoing debate as to what extent gender roles and their variations are biologically determined, and to what extent they are socially constructed.

Queer theory is heavily influenced by the work of Lauren Berlant, Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, Queer theory focuses on "mismatches" between sex, gender and desire. Queer has been associated most prominently with bisexual, lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersex, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. In this case Joss's gender does not entirely match the gender he was assigned at birth. He silently voices his rejection of his biological gender and lets his psyche work. Being transgendered and crossdressing are often related, but are by no means the same thing. People who are transgendered either feel that they should be the opposite gender, or through surgery or nature have anatomical parts belonging to the opposite gender.

In this paradoxical world, where there is sabotage of freedom in the name of gender, if the line between male and female doesn't exist, it will be a calm situation, where not only is it just as common to be homosexual or bisexual as heterosexual, but every person has the choice—with society's full, unflinching support—to act, dress or even biologically exist as either a male or a female, or anything in between.

Secret: *"The world runs on a secret . What kind of place would the world be without them? Our secret was harmless. It did not hurt anybody".* (Pg 10) but when Joss dies and the truth is exposed, it ends up affecting more people than she ever imagined. It gives nothing away to reveal right off that Millicent's late husband was, in fact, a woman--something Millie has known all along but that the Moody's adopted son, Colman, only discovers after his father's death. Titillating as the subject matter initially seems, in Jackie Kay's capable hands Joss's gender-bending becomes almost a side issue in a novel that is, at its heart, concerned with the essential nature of love.

Claiming Joss's gender status as hybrid suggests a mix between two things and that the subject in the matter is part of both. This idea of hybridity is still concerning the product more than the choice of the individual, the consumer, if you will. Instead of putting focus on what we have a hybrid between, I think the real subject of interest is the choice; how we can consider gender as something of choice rather than an accepted intricate part of being an individual. According to Butler "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a

set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler 1999, 43). Thus, gender is an act we have to repeatedly choose.

First revelation : Milliee was troubled that even after three months of courtship, Joss only held her hand or while walking had arms around each other and had short soft kisses. Joss was very diffident and timid when it came to making advances as normal lovers would. Millie was unable to fathom the reason behind this vague behavior, unable to figure out why he was so withdrawn.

After a long courtship, with great difficulty when he manages to go to her bedroom, Joss doesn't make any physical advances as he was troubled with the burden of the truth he wanted to disclose to Millie. The first revelation “ He takes off his blue jacket and throws it on my floor”(Pg 20) She wonders if he wants to make love, he should undress her first, “I'm excited watching this man undress for me. Underneath his vest are lots of bandages wrapped round and round his chest. He starts to undo them..... I'm not finished, he says. He keeps unwrapping endless rolls of bandage. I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small firm.” (Pg 21) Millie accepted him as he was as she had found a soulmate in him. Their love was on a platonic nonsexual level. Sex takes a backseat in this novel except for the crossdressing as Josephine had assumed a personality in which she was comfortable.

Frustration “All his working life he has assumed that what made a man a man and a woman a woman was the differing sexual organs. Yet today, he had a woman who persuaded him, even dead, that he was a man, once he had his clothes on” (115). Joss goes against the mainstream, and to the reader it seems almost clear that this has always been his aim throughout his life. He has switched his gender as a woman into a man, alienated from his predetermined identity as a woman; feeling and defining himself as a man, and living according to the standards of a man. “Whenever the name Josephine Moore came up, he'd say, 'Leave her alone,' as if she was somebody else. He always spoke about her in the third person” narrates Millie, Joss Moody's devoted widow (93). Here Joss is seen estranged to his biological sex, and also contradicts with the assumption that sex and gender must go parallel to each other: with his vagina and breasts, he leads a life similar to any ordinary man. The disconnect he felt between his body and soul, Joss felt he was in the wrong body. Regardless of his body parts such as breasts and vagina, regardless of the societal impositions they bring together, and without thinking his female sex as a lifelong essentiality and imprisonment for himself, Joss reinvents his gender identity according to his own *realities*, which is a kind of resurrection on his part. This reinvention, of course, has

a driving force as well as a reason Vague feeling of general discomfort with their identity crystallize into that realization Switching gender they feel have found psychological peace. In order for him to survive both physically and psychically, what is necessary is to recreate a new past, present and future for himself – along with a new gender identity. Gender dysphasia can be life- threatening, the distress caused by the mismatch between body and spirit can lead to depression and even suicide. Some people regard certain sex as normal and default, proclaiming the others out this order marginal and out outcast.

To celebrate 'trans' people: *"He loses his sex, his race, his memory. He strips himself bare, takes everything off, till he is barely human...He could be the ferryman. The migrant. The dispossessed. He can't stop himself changing. Running changes. Changes running. He is changing all the time. It is liberating. To be a girl. To be a man...He unwraps himself with his trumpet. Down at the bottom, face to face with the fact that he is nobody. The more he can be nobody the more he can play that horn. Playing the horn is not about being somebody coming from something. It is about being nobody coming from nothing. The horn ruthlessly strips him bare till he ends up with no body, no past, nothing...So when he takes off he is the whole century galloping toits close...Scotland. Africa. Slavery. Freedom. He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing".* (Kay, 131,135,136)

Psychological effects can be noted from the characters. He behaves as he feels. He lives as he wishes. As a man, as a husband, as a father. Kay paints a clear picture of how Joss Moody had come to terms with her identity. Her decision to live as a man was never a problem for her or her wife to understand, as being a man was her identity. For others in the novel this is quite the opposite. Colman, her adopted son, struggles with the finding upon Moody's death. Through this struggle, the reader begins to see that Kay uses Moody as a vessel for showing it's not who or what you are in the world; it's your influence upon the people in it.

Cross dressing can be seen to link to ideas of sexual transgression in parts of Trumpet. When Joss Moody is found to be a male, the deception is quite clearly a huge issue - especially to Colman, Moody's son, who has already struggled with his identity because of his adoption. The fact that Moody was so successful in 'passing' as a man makes the deception feel all the more shocking. I don't feel as though we will ever know if nature or nurture is the predominant deciding factor when it comes to what sex we feel we are. Still, masculinity and femininity are shown in this novel by both sexes. It is difficult to label Moody as homosexual because the act of cross-dressing indicates that they are in fact

males, which renders their relationships as heterosexual. Psychologically, they have a heterosexual relationship but the difference is that psychologically, the genders are switched. Masculinity and femininity is consequently a complex issue to define in this novel.

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Conclusion:

During the 1950s and 1960s, society was still based on a patriarchal system and sex changes were not still understood or accepted. They were taboo. Joss Moody would not have been able to become a famous trumpeter if he had kept his image as a woman, since musicians were predominantly men. He desperately wanted to succeed as a jazz musician and so he cross-dresses to achieve his objective.

Even if Joss is biologically female and has a sexual relationship with another woman, this does not mean that we are talking of a lesbian relation because Joss considers himself as a man, and so do the people around him. Their relationship cannot be considered 'lesbianism'; they are husband and wife. By using normal labels such as 'wife' and 'widow' Millie hopes to change the mind of both the media and the other people who marginalized her and Joss. On the other hand, they cannot be considered to be in a heterosexual relationship because biologically they are both born woman.

Jackie Kay examines the complexities of gender, race, and relationships in a bold and inventive voice. *Trumpet* explores issues of gender, race and identity in the modern world. The story is told through a series of short vignettes written from the perspective of people who knew or encountered Joss Moody, a world famous jazz musician who, it was found after his death, had been assigned female gender at birth. "Yeah , she liked playing the trumpet all right, but there was more to it than that . She liked being a man .Pure and simple." (Pg 264) It indulged her inner psyche of power play.

Music is a precious gift for Joss in that it functions as a medium in his life for emancipation, resurrection, alienation, familiarization, rebellion, affection and so on. Citing Virginia Woolf's version of a metaphysical and escapist androgyny as one kind of aesthetic against the material politics of the tradition of literature and film which satirizes, parodies

and painfully exposes the discontinuities of dominant sex-gender systems. The essay ends by arguing that Kay also develops these systems by imbricating sex and gender within a series of dislocated familial, sexual and racial identities beginning with the arrival of Joss's African father in Scotland at the start of the 20th century. Their whole life was in the closet, but after Joss's death it was shattered and became an open book to be hovered and hounded by media and took their little harmless secret in the wrong perspective.

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