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Deconstruction of gender binarism and “compulsory
heterosexuality” through Joss Moody in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*.

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1. Introduction

Trumpet (1998) is a novel by the Scottish writer Jackie Kay. Her works are a reflection of her own life. It is essential to know her biological origins, as a white couple adopted her. Her birth mother was white, and her father was a black man. Kay is mainly a poet; in her works, she explores the difficulties of identity; moreover, these problems are those she suffered in her own life, which is not different in her novel *Trumpet* (Nijmeijer). The theme of identity is also central in this novel. The novel is set immediately after the death of the jazz trumpeter Joss Moody. Upon his death, it was found that the musician was transgender. His identity and life are the critical arguments in the novel, as people who knew him (and others who did not know him) explore his lifetime. Kay's style, mainly a poet, has an informal spontaneity, giving the text a natural and resonant oral presence (Eckstein 7). Throughout the narrative, Kay explores the problems of gender identity through the character of Joss.

I will explore how gender can be construed differently depending on who tells the story. The analysis will also be done on "compulsory heterosexuality", coined in this way by Butler, this theory explains how our culture is dominated by heterosexuality, and we are made to believe that there is an innate preference for this type of relationship (Olsen). Other themes for analysis are the importance of naming and how gender might be viewed as a performance. *Trumpet* will also be compared to a real-life transgender person who experienced similar discrimination depicted in the novel. All these points will be explored through the basic notions of queer theory that will be explored in the subsequent section: the theoretical framework. So, by using these notions, it can be understood the link between gender binarism and "compulsory heterosexuality" and how both affect transgender people. To show how transgender people are affected, it is going to be used two cases of transgender people: a fictional and a real one: Joss, the fictional case, and the real one will be the tragic death of Brandon Teena. These cases aim to explore the relationship between transgender discrimination in reality and fiction and how readers can create empathy. Empathy is defined by the capacity for thought and feeling, including the capacity to feel and

respond to other people's emotions. (Davis 3). As Bal and Veltkamp state, when reading a novel, identification with the characters and emotional investment in the plot sometimes lead the reader to feel sympathy for the characters and even to experience the story's events as if they were happening to them personally. By exploring how Jackie, through Joss, compares the different ways, transgender people are subject to intolerance, the intermingling of reality and fiction to create empathy will be examined. Both individuals were males but assigned females in their certificates after their death. Thereby relating the importance of naming to the identity of a transgender person — whether they are still alive or respecting their memory once they have passed away. Thus, the significance of naming is evident, particularly in rejecting externally imposed categories that can harm one's sense of self (Sullivan 114). To explore this, notions from Queer theory will be used. However, before this introduction to the theoretical framework of Queer theory, it is essential to provide background for the novel narrative and techniques of how transgender identities are perceived by society and institutions, in addition to how laws affect them concerning official documentation. All of this is to understand how transgender identities have been discriminated against.

Now, regarding the historical background of how transgender people are perceived and laws concerning transgender people and transgender rights. These basic notions are needed to understand that transgender individuals have been traditionally discriminated against. Minor changes occurred during the 1980s, and the 1990s paved the way for further developments in the 21st century. In the early 2000s, successive Labour governments initiated the gradual inclusion of trans rights in legislation (Nevrkla). However, nowadays, in the UK, official documents such as certificates and passports only provide two options, 'male' or 'female' (Nevrkla). In this way, it will be analysed how binarism is imposed by society and legal institutions endorses this binarism, affecting transgender identities.

Consequently, I chose Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* because I was drawn by how the transgender identity of Joss is seen throughout the novel and how this also happens in reality. The novel's multiple voices and points of view allow us to analyse how gender and sexuality can be perceived depending on whom tells the story. In this way, the novel can analyse gender as a performance and re-evaluate "compulsory heterosexuality". Furthermore, the character of Joss can be used for an in-depth analysis of all these points — how different types of people perceive transgender identities and to analyse what is gender and sexuality. Hence, this analysis approach will be character-based, focused on Joss. First, the theoretical framework will provide a brief explanation of the novel narrative's techniques and the framework used to analyse gender binarism and heterosexuality; this will be made using the pivotal framework of Queer theory. Secondly, in subsequent sections, there will be an in-detail analysis of Joss's story and character; this will be done through an in-depth analysis of works that analyse the novel. Finally, the work will conclude with the main points discussed from this *Trumpet* analysis about the previously indicated contents.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section will provide the main theoretical framework used to analyse this dissertation, first, by explaining the narrative techniques used in the novel, along with pivotal publications of Queer theory to explain what gender is. Secondly, it will explore the basis for later analysis of heterosexuality using the characters of Joss and Millie (Joss' wife).

First, concerning the narrative techniques in *Trumpet*, the novel has a mixture of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration with an internal focus. Through this mixture of different narrative perspectives, the novel explores the questions of identity Joss. Most of the novel is told by homodiegetic narrators, mainly Millie, Joss' wife; Sophie, "his ghostwriter"; and Colman, his adopted son. On the other, there are chapters with heterodiegetic narration; for example, when the doctor or the funeral director, both

characters discovers that Joss is transgender. Overall, each character provides their perspectives and insights after Joss's death. These narratives create different outcomes.

On the one hand, readers are not given a direct depiction of the characters; we mainly learn about them indirectly through their viewpoints and focalisation. More importantly, the novel's subject, Joss, is only known through others; he is not given a voice in his own storytelling. This is key to understanding that his identity and lifetime are told through other characters' perspectives like Millie remembering anecdotes of their marriage or Colman remembering experiences with his father. On the other hand, readers have access to Joss's experiences relying on intermediary characters, so these third parties' perspectives and biases could influence readers' opinions about Joss. This choice of narration creates a dilemma: readers never have direct access to Joss's perspective and must form opinions about him relying on intermediaries.

Now, it is time to move on to consider Queer theory. Queer theory has many authors and sub-theories; one of the core theorists of queer studies is Judith Butler with her *Gender Trouble* (1990). Thus, this dissertation will mainly use the theoretical framework from *Gender Trouble* and *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003) by Niki Sullivan. I chose these books due to their relevance to Queer theory, as these texts significantly influence gender and sexuality discourse. *Gender Trouble* became a foundational text within Queer theory, and *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* provides a basic framework for understanding Queer theory. They offer a unique and complex perspective of gender and sexuality and provide the necessary framework for this dissertation. Using these books, I can explore the complexity of gender and sexuality. This framework about gender and sexuality will be pivotal for the analysis of this book.

As Sullivan (2003) states, coinciding with Butler in this statement, gender and identity are somewhat performative. The chapter *Performance, Performativity, Parody, and Politics* explores how gender and sex do not necessarily go together, and it exposes how the commonly held belief that gender is a natural attribute, an internal essence that manifests itself, is false.

As Butler states, it could be said that gender is a performance through repeated acts that try to mimic the ideal (Butler 179). Gender is a performance that could create adverse effects; society punishes those who do not achieve their gender right. (Butler, 178). This is the case of Teena and Joss; gender must be maintained within its binarism stability (Butler 177). Hence, due to these strict gender norms, society creates the social fiction of "natural sex." (Butler 178). However, this "natural sex" does not exist; as Butler states, bodies use expressions which also perform that belong to a particular cultural signification. In such a manner, there is no pre-existing identity meaning — no true or false gender acts.

If society acknowledged that it does not exist such a thing as "true gender" appears, transgender individuals would have been respected. This is especially true for the cases of analysis of this dissertation: Joss and Teena, who were discriminated against for being transgender after their deaths. By being respected, they would have to flourish outside the constricting frames of masculinist domination and required heterosexuality, accepting and recognising how genders are not true or untrue or derived from another gender. (Butler, 176)

First, it is essential to explain how heteronormativity is explained in terms of the male/female binarism system. A heterosexual person is attracted to a person whose sex is opposed to one's own (Sullivan 119). Having defined what is meant by heterosexuality, although these sexualities are not going to be the object of analysis, it is also important to know that they exist. Moreover, this knowledge is crucial to recognise and respect the diversity of sexual orientations, such as gay relationships, lesbianism and bisexuality (American Psychological Association). So, as stated before, the novel also could be used to analyse the

imposition of "compulsory heterosexuality" through Joss and Millie, but how there are people who questioned their marriage. From the very beginning, Joss and Millie saw themselves as a heterosexual marriage. From both sides, Millie's focalisation: "I can't see him as anything other than him, my Joss, my husband" (Kay 35) and from Joss' focalisation: "He cannot believe his luck. He has a wife, and he has an album" (Kay 36). However, their heterosexuality is not apparent to others, especially from Sophie Stones, the tabloid writer who wants to expose Joss's life as a gossip; she sees them as "lesbians": "The best yet. Lesbians who adopted a son; one playing mummy, one playing daddy. The big butch frauds. Couldn't be better" (Kay 44). Hence, Joss and Millie are a couple outside the traditional heterosexual paradigm. Joss and Millie's relationship can be seen as a resistance against heteronormativity that tries to marginalise individuals who do not fit into binarism and typical heteronormativity.

In such wise, cis-heterosexual individuals, just like transgender people, can also be victims of the "compulsory heterosexuality" system (Butler 180). "Compulsory sexuality", aforementioned, could be defined as being assumed by the default sexuality as "a normal or natural thing", subjecting that those who do not align with these expectations of sexuality are more likely to be marginalised. Thus, it can impact cisgender and transgender individuals, making them victims of societal expectations and gender norms. In such wise, cis-heterosexual individuals who do not conform to traditional gender and sexuality expectations may also face discrimination (i.e. Sophie referring to Joss and Millie repeatedly as lesbians).

Heterosexuality is purely made through historical and cultural forces (Sullivan 14). Thereby, through its deconstruction, heterosexuality can also be chosen, especially by women who have been the victims of this system (Sullivan 126). This decision gives women political power, allowing them to be more than sufferers. In addition to women, others who do not fall into binarism, such as transgender people who do not fit the "real gender", will live and experience heterosexuality in their way, abandoning current categories of male/female and "compulsory heterosexuality" (Sullivan 127).

Therefore, Joss and Millie are consciously queering heterosexuality in two ways. First, Joss challenges male/female binarism, and Millie differs heterosexuality as a force taking advantage of women. They are living heterosexuality on their terms.

In conclusion, it had been explored the basis of the theoretical framework based on Queer theory for the rest of the analysis will be used to tackle the issue of gender as a performance as well as the adverse effects on those who do not fit into the binary system or the traditional expectations of gender. Finally, it has been discussed how "compulsory heterosexuality" can oppress and marginalise individuals; and how Joss and Millie are queering heterosexuality consciously in two ways, by challenging male/female binarism and as a force which has traditionally taken advantage of women.

3. Honouring transgender identities: The importance of naming.

It could be argued that many texts have a relationship between fiction and reality. Fiction can offer a new understanding of different realities; defining these realities in fiction could help others understand them in reality. Readers could create empathy through characters and make it easier to understand specific issues better (Bal and Veltkamp 2). Kay's *Trumpet* is of interest for this issue because, through the story of Joss, a fictional case, she shows how transgender identities can be affected negatively through incorrect labelling by institutions. Besides, Kay also shows how judgmental individuals negatively impact transgender people, whether out of ignorance or purposefully. In this way, as aforementioned, Brandon Teena is of interest because it could be seen as a parallel to Joss. His case is fundamental to understanding that fiction and reality are intermingled. Teena, just like Joss, is transgender identities who are discriminated against after their death.

Gender norms tend to separate sex in binaries, as if they were the contrast one another, creating the social fiction of a "natural sex". (Butler 178). Binary construction is rather a social fiction (Butler 178) nor a stable identity (Butler 179). Consequently, Kay portrays this gap in binarism through Joss: it is clear that

this dichotomy is not enough. This system fails to define what gender is entirely, and this failure has caused Joss to be labelled with a gender he does not identify with.

As seen, Joss suffers from gender binarism after he dies. This system is backed by legal institutions because, as it had been mentioned in the introduction, the UK only accepts the alternatives "male" or "female" available on official papers like certificates (Nevrkla). Furthermore, Kay uses Joss's story to illustrate how oppressive gender and sex binaries can be. As well as it is vital to recognise and respect self-asserted individuals; this is a crucial indicator of understanding that gender is a "performance". Joss is labelled after his death as female by a doctor.

Nevertheless, the traditional classification of male/female based on physical sex is insufficient, as Joss did not identify as a female. It stresses the limitations of binary gender categorisation, and official certifications do not consider the complexity of gender and identity, being much more complex than a dichotomy. However, through his life and performance, Joss tries to subvert his "sex", referring to his self-expression as male in public and escaping the gender norms imposing him as "female" he subverts traditional gender expectations and asserts as male. Something the doctor deliberately chose to ignore: "She crossed 'male' out and wrote 'female' in her rather bad doctor's handwriting. She looked at the word 'female' and thought it was not quite clear enough. So she crossed that out, rutting to herself, and printed 'female' in large childish letters" (Kay 40). She does not think that the first female is enough, and she writes it again, but bigger; this shows how childish she is. The doctor is an official institution, and she refuses to understand the limitations of gender.

Joss, after his death, is assigned female. Later, Millie fights to put the male in his certificate but only succeeds in changing Joss's death name to his real name. The mortician thought it was unfair and was surprised that Joss was labelled as female, but in the end, he had to choose to follow the hierarchical binary and put 'female'. Accordingly, naming has an evident power. Although Joss is assigned the female

gender on the death certificate, Millie succeeds in putting his real name on the certificate, acknowledging how important naming is to Millie and Joss; in this way, they escape what was imposed by the doctor.

Furthermore, even though the female is put, having Joss's name on the certificate empowers Millie as a widow and honouring Joss' lifetime, as he was a man, not a woman like the doctor had stated. In such a manner, naming and honouring are crucial. The registrar, in a thoughtful act, chose to put Joss's correct name (instead of his death name Josephine): "[...] wrote the name Joss Moody on the death certificate. He wrote the date. He paused before he ticked 'female' on the death certificate,[...] She said, 'Thank you,' to him." (Kay 81). As a result, although feminine is marked, Joss's memory is respected, and the registrar reassures Millie as a "widow". Using Joss' correct name highlights how Joss and Millie were husband and wife and, by extension, how Millie is now a widow.

Now, bringing the focus to the actual case, the subject of analysis, the one from Brandon Teena, is essential. Teena dressed in clothing typically associated with men wore a chest binder and a prosthetic penis, had sexual relationships with women, and adopted male names. Despite not identifying as a lesbian or a woman, Teena's medical records were initially altered to list him as male. However, once it was revealed that Teena had female anatomy, the hospital chart was revised to read 'Teena Brandon/F.', which was Teena's death name and wrong gender (Sullivan 113). Just like Joss, he suffered discrimination after his death, being labelled as female. In Joss' case, Kay shows the parallel between reality and fiction towards gender: this system is minimal, and it shows that it can be highly harmful to transgender identities; it demonstrates the different ways transgender people can be discriminated against. Hence, in fiction or reality, naming shapes how people understand themselves and show themselves to the world. Correct naming allows one to shape the real individual identity.

Similarly, as observed, naming can be a tool of oppression imposed by people who want to marginalise those who do not fall into the hierarchical binary of male/female. This is especially true for Teena and

Joss, who identify outside of the thigh binary sexes, being transgender individuals. Despite that, some people try to escape from this dichotomy; sometimes, like Joss and Teena, they will be wrongly labelled with the sex they do not belong with. The fictional case of Joss being discriminated against exemplifies real-life discrimination, which is Teena's situation; their situations are essential to acknowledge that fiction and reality can be merged to show a specific reality.

Consequently, labelling is essential in shaping the self and resisting the imposition of constraining categories (male/female). By challenging this rigid hierarchical binary, society can create a safe space for identities to flourish in their true selves. In such a manner, it could have prevented the wrong categorisation of 'female' in Joss and Teena's cases.

Society reinforces gender binarism by categorising individuals as male or female, not respecting their self-asserted gender identity. Thus, some people follow this line of thought that there is only male/female. However, some people choose to honour the diversity of gender identity, promoting acceptance and safe spaces for those, unfortunately, often marginalised individuals.

In *Trumpet*, Sophie is the character who represents this continuum of not accepting the self-asserted gender and consciously choosing incorrect pronouns. She is constantly misgendering Joss. First, Sophie addresses Joss with the wrong gender and pronouns: "A woman who wrapped bandages round her breasts and wore at least two T-shirts beneath her shirts" (Kay 127). Secondly, she describes Joss's binding chest as a farce: "She liked wearing those bandages, didn't she? She liked the big cover-up" (Kay 263). Hence, Sophie is a good illustration of individuals who constantly discriminate against transgender individuals, Joss. This is even more evident when she wants Colman (Joss' son) to recollect information about Joss's childhood. She is obsessed with getting information about his past in order to highlight he was a "she": "But it is important that we remember that "he" was a "she" first.'" (Kay 142).

On the other hand, some people also choose to honour correct naming and try to defend transgender individuals. For example, Millie, Joss' wife, tries to resist the imposition of categories and wants Joss to feel respected and safe: "I wrapped two cream bandages around his breasts every morning, early. I had to help him to get dressed so that he could enjoy his day and be comfortable" (Kay 238). This quotation accounts for how she wanted Joss to feel valued and secure.

In conclusion, gender is more than a binary; frequently expressed as a performance that changes depending on a person's environment. Nevertheless, the male/female binary is a firmly embedded idea in society that can be seen in many aspects of daily life, whether in official institutions or individuals who discriminate against transgender people. The story of Joss, paralleling Teena's case, demonstrates how fiction and reality can go by hand to remind people of outdated gender binaries. Storytelling can be used to broader known patterns, and emphatic skills can be improved. Furthermore, their stories also illustrate the importance of honouring and respecting transgender identities; by doing so, these identities can flourish in their true selves.

4. The power of stories: how individuals can build their own identity through cross-dressing and using the correct labels.

The impact of gender on performance will be examined in this section; as LaGuardia exposes, binary oppositions are imposed on individuals. However, this binary chooses to overlook the complexity of gender acts, resulting in an inadequacy regarding identifying individuals' true gender. Therefore, cross-dressing is always tied to this binarism and will only exist in a society that uses male or female labels. So, the result of the performance –the story an individual wants to tell about themselves – can be perceived very differently depending on who receives and interprets the story/performance.

In the same manner, as stated before, there is no such thing as "true" gender acts and social norms are somewhat imaginary. So, cross-dressing would be another way to perform the actual gender of a person.

Moreover, as LaGuardia shows, without a person, clothes are only accessories and only show their true self once they are worn (LaGuardia 36). Therefore, it can be said that performing is binding or using pronouns that align with the gender a person wants to achieve. Hence, cross-dressing is also an individual choice that challenges traditional gender and sexuality. Without these frames of male/female, of "natural sex", or heteronormativity, cross-dressing could not exist, as it is hugely tied to these frames. Therefore, they were cross-dressing challenges to binary gender expectations.

In this way, in the novel, Sophie represents the not accepting part of society, those who only think in binaries and will not accept people outside the binary construct. However, on the other hand, Joss' wife, Millie, is the one who ensures him. She is the only one who knew Joss cross-dressing always; not even Colman, their son, knew it. Hence, the version of Joss' story will change depending on who narrates the story.

Not only is it affected by Joss' gender, but Joss and Millie's story is also questioned. While Joss and Millie see themselves as a typical heterosexual couple, the press exposes them as a facade, reading Joss's cross-dressing as a lie and the couple being labelled as "lesbians". Therefore, they are judged through binarism, not accepting other forms of gender or heterosexuality.

As Englund (2010: 4) claims, identity is something expressed, highlighting once more that stories vary depending on who is telling them. This is how the narratives told by others shape identity; that is why Joss's identity is told to be by others, not those who know the truth, in this case, Millie. Even though readers have never accessed Joss's voice, we have one who knew him and cared for him; she helped Joss in his performance in order to make Joss comfortable in his binding: "The tighter I wrapped, the flatter his breasts. That was all he was concerned about. [...] I had to help him to get dressed so that he could **enjoy** his day and be **comfortable**." (Kay 238). Nevertheless, he is discriminated against due to his gender, especially by Sophie Stones: "What was the real reason for pretending she was a man?" (Kay 128).

Moreover, Englund suggests how to go beyond the binaries of sexes, and as she coincides with Butler, gender is a sect of acts in repetition; Joss always performed (traditionally) masculine gender acts. Identity and gender are shaped subjected depending on whom it tells it. Hence, if a general understanding existed of gender going beyond the conventional parameters, people could realise that gender is more than a binary. If this had occurred in Joss's case, he did not have suffered unjustified transphobia, and Millie would not have needed to struggle to define herself as a heterosexual woman.

The concept of cross-dressing never comes up *per se* in the novel; however, Joss, by cross-dressing in a manner traditionally associated with men, chooses to perform his true gender, his affirmation of self that goes beyond the traditional binary of male/female (Englund 9). In this way, Joss creates a narrative for himself beyond the binary of gender, giving him the freedom to live his entire life as a man. Joss is a clear example of the importance of moving beyond binary thinking. Moreover, it is crucial to explore the limitations of traditional gender roles to understand why, after his death, he had been labelled as a "woman".

As stated before, both naming and language are powerful tools that individuals can use to create their narratives and go beyond the strict rules of gender binarism. However, the power of performing can also be used to challenge these norms. Joss and Millie do so with two instances of this: first, when they get married, they transcend the idea of the typical couple. Secondly, when Joss discards his surname and deadname, he rejects his previous identity. Together, these actions by Joss and Millie show the power of language and performance to subvert the established norms of gender and identity. After that, both Joss and Millie change their surname to one they both create "Joss Moody had once been Josephine Moore." (Kay 93) and Millie "I have become Millicent Moody. Mrs Moody. Mrs Joss Moody." (Kay 28). As Englund holds, once they change their names, they follow a tradition of becoming a family (Englund 12), a heterosexual couple in its own right: they tell the world their own story. In addition, when Joss discards

his dead name, he refuses to conform to the gender roles imposed on him, and, as a consequence, he claims his own identity and desires to present his actual gender. Overall, both of them acquire the ability to forge their own identities and develop the story that defines them as a couple and a family.

Unfortunately, there will always be people who will not respect these identities and stories. That is why Joss is put as a female on his death certificate. Joss does not seem able to escape gender binarism. Moreover, in the novel's section, *Letters* provides an overview of different people's opinions about Joss's identity, highlighting how Joss does not control his gender or history and how this could be addressed as another way of violence towards Joss. The section gives an account of many opinions. These opinions go from respecting Joss; this is made by a reader who does not care about gender, enhancing how gender can be performed: "[...] who lives their life as a man and is discovered to be female at the time of death was a woman all along. What is 'really' in this context?" (Kay 159). In addition, this section depicts as well people who want to make a profit from Joss' death: "We are planning to bring out four CDs to mark Moody's phenomenal impact on jazz music [...]. These will be available later this year." (Kay 160). Finally, in this section, restating her idea about Joss's gender, Sophie Stones also refers to him as a woman: "details of every aspect of **her** life" (Kay 159). Moreover, it is important not to forget how she refers to Millie as a lesbian in other sections of the novel, disrespecting her too. Sophie wants to make her own story about Joss, not considering him or Millie. She even creates titles for the books she wants to write about Joss, the following: "The Trumpet Man/Woman. The Life and Times of the Transvestite Trumpet Player. Now You See Her, Now You Do not" (Kay 125). Additionally, it is crucial to keep in mind how she refers to the marriage of Joss and Millie as lesbians and as a fraud: "Lesbians who adopted a son". [...] The big butch frauds. (Kay 170)

However, as Butler states, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler 1999:33).

Therefore, cross-dressing is deeply rooted in binary constructions of gender, serves as a tool to challenge gender and binary thinking. Cross-dressing is a transgression of the rigid expectations from society of how men and women should look and behave. By challenging these norms and expectations, cross-dressing could offer a new perspective on gender binaries and how they limit individual expression and freedom. Joss and Millie's story is a strong example of how individuals can create their own stories and name themselves accordingly. They can discard whatever they want to achieve their desired performance, including erasing deadnames and surnames or challenging heterosexuality. Despite this, it is essential to remember that there are always people who will not respect these individuals' identities, as seen in Sophie Stones' case, always calling Joss a woman and Millie a lesbian; or the doctor labelling Joss as a "female". People may not respect transgender individuals for several reasons, such as ignorance or deeply "traditional" beliefs about gender norms and sexuality. One of the main reasons why some people struggle to accept transgender identities is because it clashes with their beliefs about what it means to be a man or a woman. For many people, gender is a fixated entity, and someone choosing a different one could be threatening.

Moreover, they could also have prejudices about these non-traditional gender identities and fall into discrimination. People could argue that gender is a biological construct. However, it is important to fight to create safe zones and a greater understanding towards all gender identities. It is necessary to challenge traditional gender stereotypes to promote inclusivity and a more accepting identity for queer people. As Butler (180) states, there is "neither true nor false" gender. Consequently, by understanding the limitations of gender roles and binary construction, it could be possible to create a more inclusive society that respects different gender identities and narratives, which could have prevented everything that happened with Joss and Millie.

5. Queering heteronormativity: Joss and Millie analysis as a couple outside of the heterosexual paradigm

Queer relationships do not only include same-sex relationships; sex relationships are defined in terms of binarism (woman with woman or man with man). Moreover, it may be possible to move away from stabilised notions of gender and sexuality assumed by society, including heterosexual couples who are not heteronormative. So, those supposed boundaries of sexuality and anatomy would disappear, and it would reaffirm that this society's norms are imaginaries. What is more, heterosexuality, being a system that has traditionally oppressed women, has been subverted by Millie, as heterosexuality is a system in which women have been the primary victims.

As stated before, it is necessary to embrace more fluid definitions of heterosexuality; if not, heterosexual couples, such as Joss and Millie, can also be victims of the "compulsory heterosexuality" system. This is because they are queering heterosexuality on their terms, moving from traditional notions of gender and sexuality. In this way, the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality is now in crisis as gender and sexuality start to move from the binary spectrum (Marinucci 29).

Heterosexuality is tied to strict gender norms that oppress alternative modes, such as Joss and Millie (Sullivan 120). Even though they are a heterosexual couple, Joss is transgender, so they are not seen as heterosexual. After Joss dies, Millie must go through society's judgments, which will label her and Joss as lesbians: "I am trapped inside the pages of it. Anything is possible. My life is up for grabs. No doubt they will call me a lesbian" (Kay 154).

Heterosexuality is failing in providing correct categorisation, as Marinucci claims (29); it has stopped providing consistent labelling and is inconsistent with transgender individuals. Hence, heterosexuality as the norm in society has entered a crisis. However, this crisis does not prevent violence to those people who fall from the binary paradigm and, by extension, people who surround and respect them, just like

Millie predict: What do they know about his life? [...] No doubt they will call me a lesbian. [...] Words that do not fit Joss. They will call him names. Terrible vertigo names.” (Kay 154)

In *Trumpet*, Joss and Millie must deal with society's rejection of Joss as a transgender individual and them as a couple who do not fit in the typical heterosexual mould. The quote from above shows the derogatory remarks against Joss and how he is subjected to violence and discrimination. This demonstrates the failure of society to acknowledge and recognise the gender identity and marriage of people who do not fit the binary gender paradigm. Hence, the simplistic distinction between male/female and homosexual/heterosexual must be expanded to include those who do not fit the paradigm (Marinucci 31). Meaning that heterosexuality is compatible with the existence of transgender people and, by extension, heterosexual marriage in which one of the members is transgender.

Nevertheless, queer theory seeks to challenge the binary system of male and female that is often used to define heterosexuality. Queer theory shows that sexuality is complex and multidimensional. While ignoring labels is another option to challenge these binaries, so by simply doing so, individuals can express their identities in their ways. By ignoring this system, Millie chooses heterosexuality deliberately; this gives her political power. Hence, she is not a victim of "compulsory heterosexuality" anymore. This enables women to regain their political power in a historically oppressed system.

Trumpet engages with issues related to sexuality and identity through Joss and Millie's experiences. Their narratives demonstrate that heterosexuality is not an all-inclusive concept, but one experienced differently depending on the individual. Furthermore, the novel highlights that it is not necessary to categorise someone with a strict label in order to create interpersonal connections with others. This is shown in *Trumpet* through Joss' friend Big Red McCall. When Sophie Stones interviews him, and she pressures him to refer to Joss as a woman, McCall maintains that Joss is a man and it does not matter what gender he is: "Nope. And you should concern yourself with the music. The guy's a genius.' 'Don't you

mean the girl's a genius?' Sophie says. "Whatever. Christ, do you think I'm bothered? Do you think anybody's bothered? It's the fucking music that matters." (Kay 148)

This means that labels are not essential to create connections, and gender and sexuality are subject to change. Not every man has to be cisgender, nor do queer relationships necessarily mean only same-sex relationships, just like victims can free themselves from strict heterosexuality. Queer can also include heterosexual couples who are not heteronormative, gender can include transgender individuals, and women can empower themselves through heterosexuality.

By questioning heterosexuality and challenging the male-female binary that often defines it, Joss and Millie offer a new perspective on the complexities of this sexual orientation. Through their exploration of queer heterosexuality, they firmly reject the oppressive nature of enforced heterosexuality, which has long marginalised trans individuals. Overall, *Trumpet* encourages us to embrace new ways of understanding sexuality.

6. Conclusions

Through an in-depth analysis of Jackie Kay's novel *Trumpet*, this essay has analysed the relationship between fiction and reality, the complexities of gender binarism, and the impact of compulsory heterosexuality. By paralleling Joss and Teena's histories, it can be stated the importance of honouring transgender identities through the correct use of names and pronouns. It is also interesting to highlight that heterosexuality and gender can be subverted to achieve a desired effect: Joss can be a male, and Millie can be empowered through heterosexuality. Joss and Millie demonstrate that heterosexual relationships can escape traditional heterosexuality by queering it. These subversions show the weakness of heterosexuality and gender binarism. By understanding the limitations of gender and sexuality, it is possible to create more inclusive labels, emphasising how gender is indeed a performance. However, it

also shows how stories change depending on who tells the story, as there will always be individuals who will try to discriminate and criticise those stories that do not fit traditional societal constraints.

Furthermore, fiction can be seen as a learning tool and a reflection of society. *Trumpet* provides a framework for better comprehension of the struggles faced by transgender individuals and those who defy societal gender norms. The novel's narrative exposes the oppressive systems that confine non-conforming individuals while also offering a narrative of resilience and hope.

This dissertation has argued that fiction and reality are linked; fiction works as a fundamental learning tool and can function as a mirror for society. With Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*, readers can better understand the problems of transgender people and those who try to escape tight gender norms. This can inspire and motivate people to feel empathy towards those who are "queer". Kay's narrative shows how systems can oppress those who do not fit traditional labels. However, equally importantly, she also offers a narrative of resilience, offering hope for all types of identities who want to build their own identity and life story.

This dissertation demonstrates that gender and heterosexuality are socially and historically constructed forces that can be deconstructed. Through the exploration of transgender identities and the subversion made by these identities, it becomes evident these institutions' limitations. In addition, by examining the characters and their narratives, this work aims to show how fiction can have the capacity to generate empathy that can be applied to the real world. This empathy can be used to recognise how gender and sexuality are constructs; society can embark towards greater inclusivity and understanding for those who are not traditionally "normative". Overall, this dissertation highlights the importance of understanding gender and sexuality as social constructs and how storytelling can promote empathy and inclusivity in society.

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