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Volume 13: 2020-21 ISSN: 2041-6776

2. Consider the ways in which two texts from the module represent ONE of the following topics: mental health and madness; masculinity; travel; sex and sexuality; war and/or violence; time.

Masculinity: *Trumpet* and *Buddha of Suburbia*

Angus Forshaw

In Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998), masculinity exists at the intersections of class, race and sexuality. Kureishi's novel takes place in a post-60s hippie movement, which celebrated androgyny and effeminate masculinity, and thus depicts the cultural backlash in the form of the punk movement. Anxieties around the confines of masculinity also concern characters in *Trumpet,* to whom sex and gender are inseparable. The transgender male Joss Moody deconstructs characters' gender essentialist views that what makes a man is the possession of a penis. Neoliberalism exists in the background of both novels, guiding points of view, as institutions of government maintain gender as a biological trait, and queer masculinity is othered. In this essay, I will draw on frameworks of masculinity set out by R. W. Connell in *Masculinities* (2005), Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1999), and Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) to examine how the novels compare in their representations of masculinity as performance; as commodity; and their diverse depictions of a queer masculinity.

In *Trumpet* and *The Buddha of Suburbia,* anxiety around masculinity as a cultural construct and challenges to gender binaries lead characters to put masculinity into force as a performance. Central to this issue is Joss himself, whose very existence is a challenge to the idea that gender is biologically constructed, and who uses the phallic trumpet as a vessel to perform his masculinity. Justine Gonneaud points out that one of the most striking things is that 'what is left out of this novel is precisely what is usually expected from stories of gender-bending characters. [Other transgender works] consistently put the transgender or transsexual

voice that they feature to the forefront, with a view to reclaiming narrative power.'[1] By inverting this conventional form, Jackie Kay draws attention away from Joss' own experiences, and towards exterior perceptions of him. For most of the novel, Joss is delineated externally by a dozen different voices and narrative forms, conveying the way he is not only indefinable as a person with plural interior identities and social relationships, but also by the way he confounds and challenges professional and institutionalised ideas about gender. This signals a postmodern erosion of the truth focused as a political critique against the government's legitimated ideas about how to delineate gender. Moreover, it shows the way gender is not biologically constructed, but a performance, dependent on the experiences of others, like Joss' jazz playing or Karim's theatre acting, which Joss has kept up for his entire life.

Judith Butler makes a separation between sex and gender by writing that the 'body is not a "being", but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practise within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory sexuality.'[2] She encourages us to 'consider gender… as a *corporeal style,* an "act", as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning.'[3] Constructed masculinity is separate from the biological sex of the body, which is only revealed in sex or death, and is thus a performance, coded as such with Joss' identity as a jazz musician. Whereas Millie affirms this constructed masculinity as his true identity, Colman implicates Joss as a fraud: 'My father looked fake. Everything about him. His skin looked like it was made of silicone. His eyes were closed, but I got the feeling that if someone opened them, the bright orange eyes of some huge doll would blare out at me. His hands looked like plastic gloves, as if they had never ever held a trumpet, as if the trumpet was just a dream the dead body had.'[4] Colman sees Joss' performance as a fakery and denial

[1] Justine Gonneaud, 'Exceptionality and Commonality in Jackie Kay's Trumpet', (2020).
[2] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999), (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2011), p. 189
[3] Butler, p. 190
[4] *Trumpet,* p. 70

of his true self: his skin is made of 'silicone' – the same material used for breast plates on drag queens, notably a contrasting art form which usually performs gender in the other direction. Colman suggests the vessel through which Joss projects his identifying gender, the phallic trumpet, is also a fake, that because of his biology, his masculinity can only ever be 'a dream the dead body had', a hopeless fantasy of material biology. And yet, Joss is still 'my father', with male pronouns – showing that even a distraught Colman is for the most part unable to overcome notions of performed and socially constructed masculinity.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* the political and cultural environment of the 1960s creates an anxiety around constructions of traditional masculinity. Rather than an individual performing his gender, Kureishi's novel pinpoints the rise of a whole countercultural movement which seeks to restore traditional masculinity through its performance, or overperformance. The hippy culture of the 60s receives a cultural backlash in the form of punk, which Karim first experiences at a bar: 'Not a squeeze of anything "progressive" or "experimental" came from these pallid, vicious little council estate kids with hedgehog hair, howling about anarchy and hatred.'[5] This countermovement is politically reactionary, characterised by hypermasculine aggression, abuse and authenticity: '[the singer's] purpose was not to be charismatic; he would be himself in whatever mundane way it took. The little kid wanted to be an anti-star.'[6] R. W. Connell identifies this performance as a protest masculinity, which 'picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in a context of poverty.'[7] Punk arises from the disenfranchisement of the working class, economic recession and the gender fluidity and androgyny of the hippie movement, and aims to reassert rigid gender roles through a 'working-class masculine ethic of solidarity.'[8] Even as it is rooted in an authentic working-class rage, punk overperforms masculinity as a style of music, to a humorous extent: '"Fuck off, all you smelly old hippies! You fucking slags! You ugly fart-breaths! Fuck off to hell!"'[9] This

[5] Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2017), p. 130
[6] *Buddha,* p. 130
[7] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), p. 114
[8] *Masculinities,* p. 117
[9] *Buddha,* p. 131

is mirrored in *Trumpet* in the narrative voice of Colman, whose adolescent enactments of masculine rage as a 30-something man often threaten to strain credibility. Performances of intersectional identity occur in other ways throughout the novel, from Karim being asked to put on an Indian accent to appear more 'authentic', to Haroon using his ethnicity to lend credence to his Buddhist teachings which he learnt in the London suburbs.[10] Charlie performs his rage, perhaps genuine but certainly not working-class, in appropriating the punk persona. In these conscious performances and overperformances of masculinity, Kureishi and Kay emphasize that gender is politically and culturally constructed.

In both novels, expressions of masculinity are subject to the forces of neoliberalism, in the form of the press. Both traditional forms of masculinity and alternative forms are capitalized on by a media which likes to shock and disgust. Connell writes that exceptions to traditional, cisnormative masculinity are 'perversely celebrated by being made into a running freak show for mass entertainment.'[11] In *Trumpet,* Kay uses the character of Sophie Stones to satirize this environment, the 'chronicler and upholder' of the 'prurient sexual zeitgeist of the 1990s'.[12] Stones is fascinated by Joss only to the extent that she can make money from him: 'They should have no problems selling this book. People are interested in weirdos, sex changes, all that stuff.'[13] She is gleeful about the sensationalism of Joss' story: 'This one is the pick of the bunch. The best yet. Lesbians who adopted a son; one playing mummy, one playing daddy. The big butch frauds. Couldn't be better.'[14] Through the eyes of the unsympathetic journalist, to whom Joss is a female transvestite and a pervert, Kay depicts a press which relies on sensationalism and titillation for profit, with no regard for human dignity or a non-normative view of gender.

[10] *Buddha,* p. 147
[11] *Masculinities,* p. 252
[12] T. Hargreaves, 'The power of the ordinary subversive in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*,' *Feminist Review* 74 (2003), p. 6
[13] *Trumpet,* p. 125
[14] *Trumpet,* p. 170

In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* protest masculinity is also commodified. Punk is subject to mediatization and eventually globalisation, which ultimately leads to its downfall. Connell writes that the tabloid press depends 'heavily on a double agenda of titillation and reassurance': titillation by alternate masculinities on the one hand, and reassurance of traditional masculinity on the other, with heteronormative, masculine roles being the 'dominant media story-lines and entertainment genres, providing reassurance both for the alienated wage-earner and the bored housewife with children.'[15] Kureishi seemingly subverts this, as Charlie understands the way to gain media attention is to flaunt a hypermasculine, punk attitude – both reassuring and titillating at once: 'he learned that his success, like that of the other bands, was guaranteed by his ability to insult the media… These insults were published widely, as were his other assaults on hippies, love, the Queen, Mick Jagger, political activism and punk itself.'[16] The press revels in his senselessly nihilistic attacks on every subject, even on punk itself and the underlying political philosophy it represents. Controversy is key: 'With luck the record would be vilified and banned, guaranteeing credibility and financial success.'[17] Masculinity itself is the titillating news item, which Charlie capitalizes on when he goes to America. Both Kay and Kureishi's depictions of a media environment which profits off of sensationalism alone convey how cultural representations of masculinity are subject to the economic-rationalist forces of neoliberalism: rather than a traditional or progressive politics around gender, neoliberalism is 'inconsistent with traditional patriarchy… Neoliberal politics has no interest in justice at all.'[18]

Finally, both novels depict competing facets of queer masculinity. In both, queerness is exemplified by a preoccupation with the penis. Whereas Karim is unapologetically queer, *Trumpet* places Joss as a heteronormative transgender male. When Millie and Joss have sex, it is coded as heterosexual, penetrative: 'I feel myself being turned around. He straddles me.

[15] *Masculinities,* p. 252
[16] *Buddha,* p. 153
[17] *Buddha,* p. 153
[18] *Masculinities,* p. 255

Pushes himself into me… I curl myself into him and he holds me, rocking me back and forth… I am weak. I am totally and utterly loved.'[19] Millie assumes the normative female sex role - passive, 'weak', giving control over to her partner – while the narrative voice suggests an imaginary penis on Joss, as he 'pushes himself into [her]'. Judith Halberstam writes that 'Queer time' is a term for a model of temporality 'that emerges within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance.' [20] Joss, however, has a wife, a son and middle-class job: he is even elevated by his celebrity status. He is, however, queerer than at first glance: the trumpet, as Monterrey points out, is simultaneously phallic and yonic: 'While extending out from the body like a phallus, a trumpet also has "a concave end, combining thus the masculine and the feminine in its form."'[21] Rather than the traditionally accepted gender dysphoria, Joss reveals himself to sit at a more liminal boundary: 'He is himself again, years ago, skipping along the railway line with a long cord his mother had made into a rope. In a red dress. It is liberating. To be a girl. To be a man.'[22] Joss is not uncomfortable to think of himself as a girl; does not remember himself to be unhappy, or need wear masculine signifiers. He thinks of himself, to some degree, as both, and it is 'liberating'. Thus, Kay deconstructs the rigid boundaries of binary gender by suggesting that freedom lies in the space between.

If in *Trumpet* the penis is a source of anxiety and ambivalence, in *Buddha* it is a source of joy. Kureishi's use of a close narrative voice creates depictions of sex acts between men and women that are numerous and explicit, with no regard for prudishness: Zadie Smith writes that 'Books were not considered hot property. *The Buddha of Suburbia* changed all that… To see [the expletive "cunt"] inside a book – instead of on a wall – was, in and of itself, very good

[19] *Trumpet,* p. 197
[20] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York UP, 2005), p. 2
[21] Monterrey, T. "A Scottish Metamorphosis: Jackie Kay's Trumpet," *Revista Canaria de Estuios Ingleses* 41 (2000), p. 172; quoted in Mandy Koolen, 'Masculine Trans-formations in Jackie Kay's Trumpet', Atlantis 35:1 (2010), p. 41.
[22] *Trumpet,* p. 135

value.'[23] Bisexual Karim acts on impulse alone: 'I went to [Terry] and put my hand between his legs. I didn't think he'd allow himself to like it too much; I didn't think he'd let me take his cock out, but I reckoned you should try it on with everyone you fancied, just in case.'[24] He is adolescent and sexually voracious, far from the heteronormative Joss: to Karim, sexuality is just another social construct, like gender, made to be transgressed. There is a boundless celebration of all types of sexual activity: 'I wanted to tell everyone that such regular live-fire through the veins was possible; for surely, if they knew of it, they'd be doing it all the time.'[25] Halberstam writes that queer time is about the 'potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing.'[26] Queer people have a 'stretched out adolescence', unbound by heteronormative ideas of family.[27] *Buddha* demonstrates this by queering the picaresque genre, conventionally a rambling episodic first-person novel about class, now offset by a middle-class suburban identity, marginalised instead by the liminality of Karim's race and sexuality. No one relationship sustains the novel; instead, there is a personal movement, from *(In) The Suburbs* to *(In) The City*, from school and family life to a career in the theatre. Coming after but conspicuously overshadowing the novel's events is the AIDS crisis, further emphasizing the transience of queer time. Through Karim, Kureishi depicts and celebrates the life of a queer male, in all its 'happ[iness] and miser[y]'.[28] Thus, Kureishi and Kay explode the possibilities for representation of masculinity outward, disposing of heteronormative, cisnormative, and gender essentialist ways of reading the masculine identity.

In conclusion, both novels show a polyphony of representations of masculinity, in the way it is performed, commodified, and queered. *Trumpet* shows that gender is constructed as a performance of social gestures, which punk music in *Buddha* performs exaggeratedly. Nevertheless, masculinity can be co-opted by the media to both mock its marginalised forms,

[23] *Buddha,* p. *v*
[24] *Buddha,* p. 241
[25] *Buddha,* p. 187
[26] Halberstam, p. 2
[27] Halberstam, p. 153
[28] *Buddha,* p. 284

and celebrate its traditional excesses, under an economic-rationalist order whose only concern is profit. Finally, masculinity is represented in a diversity of queer ways, with both authors centring their novels around different intersections of race, sexuality and gender. Both depict a crisis of masculinity, which they answer by exploding its definitions.

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