The self is to be told
Gender, identity and the telling of stories in Jackie Kay’s
Trumpet
Abstract

Notable in Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*, a story about a jazz musician that all his adult life pretended to be a man, is the many voices that bring their stories to the novel. The voices give life to Joss Moody, who recently passed away, by telling stories of and about him. This essay concerns gender and identity in the light of narration: how stories can be considered the basis of existence. Drawing from five statements regarding narratology and the theories on identity of Judith Butler I will present my claim that all that is needed to create one’s identity are stories that are told. Joss Moody’s life moves beyond binary thinking and in consequence his story and the discussion of it will do so as well. This essay deals with Joss’s family, Millie and Colman, and their stories in the aftermath of Joss’s death as well as journalist Sophie Stones who wants to create her own story of Joss’s life to sell. Together they all bring their perspective on ideas of narration and identity.
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Introduction

In Jackie Kay’s novel *Trumpet* we are introduced to the recently widowed Millie as she deals with the loss of her husband Joss Moody, a famous jazz musician and trumpet player. We come to know Joss through Millie’s and Colman the son’s, memories and through the accounts of different people whose lines of work intersect with the journey of Joss’s dead body. The memories held by new and old friends of Joss clash with the desires of journalist Sophie Stones who wants to ghost-write Joss’s biography in order to shockingly portray his secret now made public: Joss’s body is discovered to be female. “Transvestite has a nice pervy ring to it” (Kay 126) Sophie thinks while Millie’s reaction the media frenzy brings her to say “no doubt will they call me a lesbian. They will find words to put on to me” (154).

The same events of Joss Moody’s life and death yield very different stories depending on who tells it. Accordingly, this creates many perceptions of the same event. In Simone De Beauvoir’s *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* she states that the self is not to be known, it is to be told. If identity is something to be told, these stories will also differ depending on who tells them. Therefore I want to relate stories and narration to the perception and creation of identity. I want to present how a discussion of identity can be related to theories on narrative by the use of Bennett and Royle’s statements as regards to their discussion on narrative. They begin with the basic assumption that “Stories are everywhere” (41). Much like the quote from De Beauvoir, their second statement reads “Not only do we tell stories but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere we are also in stories” (41). By the use of these points I will explore the way in which identity is created and perceived in the light of narration. The theories on identity that I will use are primarily based on Judith Butler’s works. Concerning the connection between gender and identity Judith Butler states that

It would be wrong to think that the discussion of “identity” ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only
become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility (Butler 1999, 22)

Based on this a discussion of gender identity could be said to equate a discussion of simply identity since, according to Butler, the two are embedded within each other. For the young Joss Moody, Josephine Moore, to reinvent herself as man has then no other essential components would differ from Josephine, for example, having reinvented herself as a new woman. However, Joss has lived both as a man and as a girl and this is something that moves beyond gender binaries. Therefore it is important for the discussion to move beyond binaries as well, both in the sense of identity and gender that Joss’s life displays and in the sense that, regarding stories, “there is always more than one story” (Bennett and Royle 41). All the identity form known as Joss Moody needs to exist is stories and the “power, property and domination” (41) that comes with the telling of them. However, since stories are multiple is Joss the only one who creates Joss Moody? The power that is inherent in the telling of stories that creates the self are not all vested in only just the self, we create other people with our stories as well. This essay begins with deconstructing gender binaries and exposing the side of identity creation I want to connect to narratives. I will then introduce the theories on identity and the last section introduces a more theoretical view on narratology.

**Binary and beyond**

Binary opposites are ever present in *Trumpet*; there is life and death, male and female, to name but two. Binary thinking can both harm and contribute to the discussion, description and understanding of matters. When there are two alternatives that are separated and different from each other to the point of becoming each other’s opposites, does choosing one automatically mean rejecting the other? If the two alternatives are separated and seen as polar opposites then choosing one can be said to mean being attracted to this option. Therefore, the
not chosen option, according to binary thinking, becomes something that is rejected and essentially repelled. Having a mixture between the two alternatives at hand becomes impossible.

Concerning gender, Alice Walker discusses the problem with gender binaries in her article about cross-dressing and identity within Kay’s text. Walker’s paper begins with the sentences: “You are what you wear. You are what you were” (Walker 35). This description of an individual ties to the quote right before the opening of Trumpet, namely the George Gershwin song “They can’t take that away from me” The quote goes: “The way you wear your hat, the way you sip your tea. The memory of all that- No, no! They can’t take that away from me”(qtd. in Kay). Just like Walker’s “what you wear” and “what you were” (35) Gershwin’s lost love is also described by what she wore and the way she was. Walker’s statement presents the idea that we are two things at the same time, which becomes problematic only if these two things are different from each other according to the binary opposition of genders. 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 coextensive (35)

Thus the first statement allows for new thinking beyond the popularized notion of only being able to be one thing as, in fact, the word “wear” is different from the word “were” and we are, according to Walker, both. To “resist assimilation” (35) and therefore not acknowledge the polarity of the options allows for a mixture between the alternatives, if so desired. Such a mixture that comes from ignoring the polarity of the options also ignores the binary pair of attracted/repelled, two words that would describe the alternatives after the decision has been made. Not every choice made is the result of a desire that has now been satisfied and accordingly, not every option that is not chosen is one that is repelled.
Gender is one concept where binary oppositions are deeply anchored in our way of thinking and to experience a switch between the two, or in fact reveal “the inadequacy of this system” (35), as Walker puts it, is something that does not happen often. What most of us will experience on the other hand is the loss of a loved one. This is also, in a way, part of another rigid binary opposition, that of being alive and being dead. If the binary pair of male/female is seen as polarised opposites that can not be transcended, just like being alive or dead, then you can not possibly be both. However, as Millie states “Loss isn’t an absence after all. It is a presence” (Kay 12). Millie as a grieving widow presents us with the difficulty of dealing with death, because Joss very much lives on to her through her narrative and memories, despite not being there anymore. Kay is using another binary state, being dead or alive, which to Millie is contradictory as she states that “The emptiness is palpable” (12). The contradiction inherent in the fact that Joss has passed away but is not gone is an attempt to make us question the binary state of gender by relating it to another state of contradiction that is, perhaps, more commonly occurring. With this we may more easily realise that gender, too, can be two options at the same time even though it seems contradictory.

Lamia A. Gulcur points to seeing Joss Moody as a hybrid when it comes to gender, that Joss exists in a “third space, nor woman nor man anymore” (Gulcur). However I would like to approach the same basic idea from another perspective. 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 choosing; how we can consider gender as something as free as any other self made aspect constituting our identity. 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). Basically, gender is an act we have to repeatedly choose
to perform. Regarding other aspects of identity, like nationality and having an accent for example, Colman remembers when his family had moved from Glasgow to London. Colman says “When I came home with my cockney accent, my father got all cut up” (Kay 51) “My father clung to his. Determined that everyone would know he was Scottish” (50-51). For everyone to know he was Scottish Joss kept speaking with a Glasgow accent while Colman chose not to. Both of them made a choice in how they wanted to act and accordingly, how they wanted to be perceived. Here is where I first want to introduce narration and stories in to the discussion of identity and shift the focus from a discussion about the result to a discussion about the creation.

The choice Joss has made in regards to his gender results, in the end, to something identical to what Gulcur describes, but I want to see Joss differently because of this little distinction to focus on the creation instead of the product. I want to make two points clear; one being that gender identity is a set of acts that needs repetition. These repeated aforementioned acts can be related to the stories we tell. In relation to this I also want to bring attention to my second point that the way a story is told may not be the way it is perceived by someone else. This is because reading/interpreting and writing/creating a narrative is not the same thing because it is different people performing the two acts. The interpretation Sophie Stones has made of Joss and Millie through her interviews with Colman leads to a different story, one that would not be called Trumpet, but rather perhaps “The Life and Times of the Transvestite Trumpet Player” (Kay 125). Accordingly, we can then have a situation that is two things at the same time as there is no distinction in importance between an event being written and an event being read. These two points and their relationship to each other will be further discussed below.

Alice Walker argues that “cross-dressing – or ‘crossing’, as it is otherwise known – is synonymous with choosing” (Walker 35). However, Walker fails to state what
cross-dressing should be otherwise. She points out that at its most basic level it “is an act of personal choice, of dynamic self-determination” (42). Because, as far as what one wears, the choice to put on clothes is always made. Although, is it simply the clothes that matter? A bank executive may be uncomfortable with having to wear a suit to work everyday, but does so in order to be a bank executive. For Joss Moody jazz meant everything, perhaps a man’s suit came with the world of jazz? “Without the individual, there is only a pile of clothes” (36) Walker claims, but perhaps, without the pile of clothes, it is the individual who is faltered. Maybe the choice, the act of “self-determination” (42) only allows for the clothes as they make it easier to be accepted for who you want to be and what you want to do. Joss Moody playing the trumpet has nothing to do with clothes, in fact “It all falls off – bandages, braces, cufflinks, watches, hair grease, suits” (Kay 135). *Trumpet* never reveals Joss’s reason for cross-dressing. It could have less to do with the clothes themselves than rather finding a way in to the jazz world.

Walker continues to describe cross-dressing as something “fluid and multifaceted” (37) but this fluidity that is supposed to negate the binary logic becomes in itself also part of a binary order, because would there be fluidity if we had nothing solid? This fluidity of cross-dressing becomes dependant on the rigid structures that the division between being male and being female has become.

Once again we can get caught in this binary logic of definitions where the existence of one thing seems to become dependant on its opposite. What can we then put our focus on so as to escape this oscillation between two things? Looking closer at the text *Trumpet*, and only allowing for a discussion within the parameters of what the text tells us is there, what do we have? Cross-dressing as a concept is never brought up. Cross-dressing is not part of anyone’s identity picture, of themselves or of someone else. This is because no one uses that word except for Sophie Stones who briefly muses that a cross-dresser is “someone
who dresses in a fit of fury” (Kay 126). It is not part of the narration the many different voices brings to the novel and therefore it does not exist in the novel. The fact that cross-dressing is when someone generally accepted as being part of one gender decides to dress according to the standards provided for the other gender, and that this is something that does happen in Trumpet, cross-dressing still is not part of the novel. Relate this to how two young siblings wrestling on the floor may always look the same whether the idea of anger, disagreement or playfulness exists in the situation. The same sequence of events of someone who is born into the category of female and starts to dress according to the conventions of the other group may not always be known as cross-dressing if in fact cross-dressing is not referred to. If the idea of the word does not exist in the situation then to use the word would be misrepresentative to those who created the situation. There is a difference in perception between the creator and the interpreter, so when the children’s parents tell them to stop fighting they may simply answer that they are not.

This is why it is important to move beyond binary thinking. It stands in the way of realising events, concepts and results as being able to be multiple things at once. The way they are told, and thus created, can differ from the way they are perceived and interpreted by someone else. When then this someone tells the story further it creates another version of the same event. Both these versions, as well as any subsequent one, are of importance and to incorporate binary thinking would reduce the nuances. Joss would become a dead woman and there would be nothing more to it. Telling, perceiving and re-telling is how our reality is created and in accordance, our identity.

As Tracy Hargreaves puts it, Trumpet “is about the construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of a life” (3). In regards to taking something apart and reassembling it is necessary to know what all the parts do. If a situation can appear in the same way but hold very different meanings, like the children wrestling on the floor, it is important to know what
this situation means to the people who created it if we are to use it as a part making up something bigger. Otherwise the deconstruction can lead to distorting the image of the part and the subsequent reconstruction leads to a product nothing like the original. These three words that Hargreaves uses are all a big part of *Trumpet* and can be said to each be represented by a character. Joss constructed an identity for himself, Colman feels like he has to reconstruct his entire past once his father’s secret is revealed to him and Sophie wants to deconstruct Joss in order to find all the juicy details that she can reassemble into a story that will sell in the sleaze-obsessed 90s. Together the three of them all bring their respective aspects of interpreting and creating identity. The only way to investigate this is to study different narratives, as indeed they are characters in a book. This may seem obvious; however, this is applicable to interpreting the characters in our own lives as well, as I with the help of Judith Butler will point out below.

**Narratives and Identities**

With regards to display how the self is very much connected to other people, Judith Butler discusses the autonomy of the self seems to falter when the self is in mourning. She uses this state of being as an example to show that we are more than just ourselves in the sense that “if we’ve lost, then it seems to follow that we have had” (Butler 2004, 18) and she wants to outline what is it that we have had. Butler describes grief as accepting to undergo a change and constitutes that grief’s effect becomes puzzling when “One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why” (18). She describes it as if “Something is larger than one’s own deliberate plan or project, larger than one’s own knowing” (18). This then leads Butler to ask: “What is it that claims us at such moments, such that we are not masters of our own selves?” (18). Millie in the process of mourning shows these moments when something other than our normal self is in control. “My hand was shaking when I lit the fire. That’s how
absurd I’ve become. I can’t even light a tiny cottage fire without shaking.” (Kay 4). This, according to Butler, is how

grief displays the way in which we are in the thrall of our relations with others that we cannot always recount or explain, that often interrupts the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control (Butler 2004, 19).

This is an example of how our identity can suffer by the death of another person. Joss and Millie were part of each other; they shared something that in relation to the self became something that was beyond it. In this it becomes evident that we are some of all of our family and friends. To answers Butler’s initial question of what it is that “we have had” (18), Millie had Joss and the loss of him affected Millie’s sense of self control.

Just like Joss is a part of Millie, the people around Joss are part of him. He is the reason Millie can say “I have become Millicent Moody” (Kay 28) when they have married. Colman notes the similarities between him and his father, “We even look alike. Pure fluke. Or maybe I copied his smile so much I look like his carbon copy” (50). We mimic our parents and our peers and we take the last names of the people we love. Joss has made up his last name, but Millie and Colman, who share it, have however not made it up. For them, acquiring the name Moody is based on a long and well known tradition involving husbands and wives and their children. If Joss Moody is not his real name, is it real for Millie and Colman? The only difference between Joss and the rest of his family is the process by which they acquired it. Why it is Joss who is subject of disbelief is because he created the name by himself, while Colman and Millie simply underwent the canonised, familiar, process of name change. The registrar wonders if “one day Josephine Moore just plucked the name Joss Moody out of the sky and called himself this name and encouraged others to do likewise? “(80). It appears as something strange what Joss has done. However, look back at the registrar’s view on “the
significance of names, what they told you, the occupation they gave you” and how “Sharif
would not be a registrar today were it not for his name” (76-77). Names, according to Sharif
correlate to who you will become. Josephine became Joss, so the creation of your own name
in accordance to the creation of your own self makes perfect sense. Joss’s creation of a new
name spread to include his wife and child as well. In this way we become more than just
ourselves, something that is visible in both our narrative and our identity.

However, it is not only their last names that Joss and Millie share; they share
each other’s stories as well. Millie has chosen parts of Joss’s narrative in order to embellish
her own. It is Millie who is the first person narrator in *Trumpet* and Joss is only allowed to
speak through memories from the other characters. This connects narrative to identity in the
sense that we are more than ourselves, evident when faced with the loss of someone, and in
how we can share the same story with someone else. In a sense, a life is a narrative that goes
beyond the individual. After someone is dead as well as before someone is born their life may
continue or be created by the voice of the people around. The memories of those who
remember you and the plans of those who expect you give you life when you are unable to do
so for yourself.

Another way to create an existence through narrative is through making plans
for the future and expecting things to happen. This is a way to continue the narrative beyond
the point of the present. This future part of the entire narrative that makes up our existence is
of as much importance as the past. If identity is based on the collection of decisions made,
experiences had and things done, then it is important to realize the future contains these same
parts. In our story that takes the self beyond the point of the present we have made decisions,
made up experiences and imagined things done. Whether it is something simple as what to
make for dinner tomorrow or something more complex and longer lasting such as imagining
the life of an unborn child, there is a multitude of signs of who we are. Joss says “there is
more future in the past than there is in the future” (Kay 190). To fill the void then, there must be more of the past in the future than in the past as well. This makes the past and the future blend together with each other to the point of becoming the same. If we are what we were then this also means that we are what we will become. The narrative is unbroken and our identity is created within it, on both sides of the present equally. However, the story is always read within the present. If your identity is your story then the way you see yourself is in turn also the way you tell your story. The same sequence of events can take many shapes and forms depending on who is describing and perceiving them, therefore this must also hold true in how the self reads its own story. Within this the power to make ourselves what we want to be can be found, because we can make a choice in how we want to read our own story.

Storytelling creates something that is real, because why else would Colman feel so confused by Joss’s advice to “make up your own bloodline” (58)? If you do that you create more than one past, more than one story of your bloodline, for example. Several stories that are all supposed to be about the one same thing. If stories just were without reality value this problematisation would not occur. Joss tells Colman a series of different stories of who his father may have been; Colman however asks “Which one? I said. Which one is true?” (59). The search for the truth may not have to do with the actual truth so much as the desire to end the problematisation of the multiple stories because we believe that the truth will bring an end to them.

On the other side of storytelling creating something that is real; Judith Butler argues that without names, words and discourse, something that is unarguably real, like the life of an individual can become dehumanised, unreal. She begins with stating that

On the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level. (Butler 2004, 25)
When Butler discusses violence towards minorities within sexual preference and gender identification, homosexuality, transgender and so on, she considers violence as something that occurs after a dehumanisation of an individual has happened. The way this dehumanisation has first taken place is through the lack of space in the discourse for these individuals. More specifically she states that “there is no frame and no story and no name for such a life” (25). This reason for causing violence towards another human being ties together with what Butler said earlier in this essay about the autonomy of the self in relation to others. The previous example showed an instance of realising that the self is connected to another person, here, however, is an example of when this connection to other human beings is no longer there. Both instances display an obvious link to narratives. Without going in to narrative theory, Butler hits the nail on its head when she says there is “no story” (25). There is no narrative that includes the victim in to the life of the victimiser and this is of paramount importance because without that missing narrative there would be no victim and victimiser to begin with. If the lack of words, stories and names to describe another human being or group of individuals can lead to discrimination, hatred and personal violence, the importance of these three things becomes extremely evident. Therefore I will introduce a more theoretic view on narrative and stories.

Frames, Stories and Names

Bennett and Royle offer a list of five propositions regarding narrative:

1. Stories are everywhere
2. Not only do we tell stories but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere, we are also in stories.
3. The telling of a story is always bound up with power, property and domination.
4. Stories are multiple: there is always more than one story.
5. Stories always have something to tell us about stories themselves: they always involve self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions. (Bennett and Royle 41)
The first statement holds very true within the realm of a novel, as it is, unarguably, a story in a common format. Novels are easily recognisable as stories and books are indeed found everywhere. However, this statement makes the point that stories are more than just books. It allows for assuming everything is a story, something which the following statements depend upon. The second statement I feel connects narrative to identity. That “stories tell us” (41) connects to Simone De Beauvoir’s statement that the self is something that we tell and to Butler’s claim that dehumanisation first occurs when there is “no story” (Butler 2004, 25). Being human means to be in a story because if stories are everywhere, where would someone who is not in stories be? It would be impossible and therefore it would be the being that would cease to hold true. The third statement on the list I want to again relate to Judith Butler. Power, property and domination in relation to autonomy of the self make the connection to stories and narrative clearer. To be autonomous can be said to have power over oneself and to consider your own life to be your property and not somebody else’s. This is in turn, then, connects to stories as means to achieve power. The fourth statement regarding the multicity of stories can be linked to what I want to make clear regarding the perspective of who reads an event or a story. If we are to single down the area of inquiry to one single event, there is still more than one story there. Every story has the potential to become more, different stories, if they are re-told or read by someone new. Basically, the same story can never be told twice. The fifth statement in a way justifies the reason why I am writing this essay, or in fact why literature is considered to be of any importance at all, besides entertainment. Author David Foster Wallace said in an interview with Larry McCaffery for The University of Illinois that “Fiction’s about what it is to be a fucking human being” (McCaffery). If anything, this quote lays bare the link between fiction, stories, and the being of a human and it also emphasises the simplicity and obvious relationship fiction has to humanity. This, in turn, also displays the connection between narratives and identity, to name giving and ownership and to shared
stories and understanding between human beings. Wallace continues to say that “I just think that fiction that isn’t exploring what it means to be human today isn’t art” (McCaffery) and in that sense Jackie Kay has definitely managed to produce a piece of art.

I would like to return to the third point on the list. If the first two points are considered to be the basic claims upon which the following depend, then the third statement is where a second element is introduced. To say that “The telling of a story is always bound up with power, property and domination” (Bennett and Royle 41) transports the basic description of simple stories to a social level; to something that is tied to human relations. It becomes a tool to which humans acquire needs that very much has influenced the way our society has taken over time. Without going further in to the big picture of society I would like to go directly to how this affects our sense of identity.

When Colman discovers his father’s secret he feels like his story has dramatically changed without his doing so. A new story is presented and since his father’s life is very much a part of his life and identity as well, Colman is now part of a new story. However, this is not a story he is telling. It is being told to him by people who have no real relation to his life at all. The mortician who first presents Colman with the information is a man he has never met before and is not likely to ever meet again. The only person he discusses his feelings towards this change is Sophie Stones, someone he also has had no prior connection with. Since of course his father is dead, it is only people who Colman has no close relationship with who are there to tell the story of how his father was born a woman. Colman is found in a situation of change and adjustment without being able to be the one who is the cause of this. He is not the one who is telling this story that is having such a profound effect on his own life. He is, according to the third point Bennett and Royle make, at a loss for power. This may be why Colman needs to reconstruct his identity: to regain the power of his own life.
Millie finds herself in a similar situation. Before she says, as I have mentioned earlier, that “they will find words to put on to me” (Kay 154) Millie describes her newfound state of being with the words “My life is fiction now, an open book” (154). The tabloids, the newspaper and the public are all contributing to her and Joss’s life’s story. They have become narrators, they have the power and they make Millie feel like a character in a book, disconnected from the author of it. This is a strange feeling for Millie to be the protagonist in a story she has no control over.

In John Berger’s article “Stories” Berger calls a story not “merely a meeting-place for the protagonist, the listener and the teller” but rather “a unique process which fuses these three categories into one” (McQuillan 172). Millie is the listener and protagonist in the journalists’ stories and Colman is a character in the new version of the stories of his father’s past he is now listening to. Colman and Millie have found themselves in a state of distress towards this fusion of the three categories since it is evident the stories they hear cause them confusion. “I don’t know my father, my mother or myself. I don’t know any of us anymore” (Kay 60) Colman says. The kinds of stories they hear are unlike how stories have been presented to them previously. This is because for them, the protagonist and the listener are supposed to be the same person but this time they can not even recognise each other.

Colman’s sense of a loss of power becomes evident in the anger he portrays. “I’ll write his fucking biography. I’ll tell his whole story. I’ll be his Judas” (62). To be Joss’s Judas could mean to be the one who denies his existence, to do so could mean not to tell his story but to tell hers. The power to deny Joss as a man comes if Colman would tell his whole story the way Sophie, for example, wants it to read. Colman understands that he would regain the domination of his reality by writing Joss’s biography.

However, the notion of power coming from stories is something that Joss has understood as well. Colman remembers Joss talking about where his father came from and
Joss saying that it “Doesn’t matter a damn, he said. You pick. You pick the one you like the best and that one is true” (59) With this he is granting everyone the authority to themselves create their reality the way they want it to be. Nevertheless, in the light of recent events Colman’s response to Joss’s statement that “It doesn’t change me who my father was or where he came from and it certainly doesn’t change you, he said” is “He was wrong about that. He was wrong. That stupid bastard was wrong” (59). Considering the opposing views Colman and Joss have it seems like what Joss ignored, and what Colman feels affected by, is how his life ties together with the lives of the people close to him. Joss operates under the pretence of the third statement, that if you are the one telling your story you are in power of your own life and thus, as an autonomous person, you are at liberty to create your life as you like.

Just as Colman, Sophie’s reason to deconstruct the story of Joss Moody can also be said to be in relation to power. She wants to make this story her own; to be the reason it is told to the public. The way Sophie ponders upon possible titles for her upcoming best-seller suggests her trying to make this story her property. The options for titles she has hints to the kind of book she will be producing. “The trumpet Man/Woman. The Life and Times of the Transvestite Trumpet Player. Now You See Her, Now You Don’t” (125). All of these titles suggest something whose tone would fully go against the tone of the story Trumpet presents. It is evident that Sophie, with the simple hint of a possible title of her future work, will re-arrange the life of Joss Moody into something that would appear unrecognisable as the same story. Applying Bennett and Royle’s fourth point on the list becomes evident. “There are always more than one story” (Bennett and Royle 41) and Sophie has the prerogative to tell this story as well. However, this is where the fifth point comes into play. The story Sophie wants to tell probably says more about her and the audience it is for than it does about the life of Joss Moody because “Stories always have something to say about stories themselves” (41).
When it comes to Joss Moody and his construction of identity I want to first quote Judith Butler when she says that “gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” and that accordingly “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). To have a deed that are supposed to be done by a doer whose existence only emerges by the deed itself can be related to stories. If assuming that the deed is in itself a story of some kind, something that can be told, and if everything is stories then what is not a story should then not be something. If a doer, someone that is assumed to pre-exist the deed, is not a story then the doer is not anything, it does not exist.

Now, assuming music is stories then to play music makes the player a narrator, a doer with a deed according to Butler, and this in turn, according to Bennett and Royle, yields power. However, Joss playing music “is about being nobody coming from nothing” (Kay 135). If the doer is ignored and diminished to the point of it becoming negligible, although naturally still there in order for the deed to actually exist, then the deed is what is prominently in focus. Judith Butler describes our gender and identity as a performance, a word that seems to be taken from the realm of theatre and music. To make the connection between performing a musical instrument and performing a gender may be obvious, however, if expanded, able to yield much deeper connections. Music can certainly tell stories; they are stories if everything is stories. So for Joss to play his trumpet makes him tell a story, in turn, this gives him power and property. Being no one coming from nowhere can be linked to Butler’s claim of there not being a doer that pre-exists the deed. The music is the deed, the story and it bestows the power to be. Therefore, all Joss needs in order to be Joss Moody is the deed of performing music. This is how he can construct himself, and just as Millie says “If it wasn’t for the horn he would be dead and gone. Years ago.” (135)
Conclusion

Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* takes the reader on a journey that explores what it means to be a human being. The first bump in the road comes with Joss Moody actually being a woman, though having lived his entire adult life as a man. Furthermore, Joss is a man in the spotlight of the public eye, as he has become a famous jazz musician. From this point on the novel could take one of many roads onwards. The opinion of the media is that Joss’s life’s secret makes for excellent headlines, evident in the motives of Sophie Stones. Millie on the other hand stands crestfallen with the unfamiliar twist to her and her husband’s lives the papers have taken to. The state of grieving Millie is in at the loss of her husband is something that can be used to further map out the person Joss Moody was. The gap in Millie’s life is the quiet that comes from Joss no longer being alive and having a voice. Millie, as well as Colman, their family and friends all contribute with their stories of Joss Moody and it is through their narratives that the character of Joss becomes known to the reader. From this a link towards the identity of a person and the narratives of others, along with the narrative of the self, becomes evident. Bennett and Royle formulate the statement that stories are everywhere and that they are a means to power. What Judith Butler claims is that the absence of stories is what leads to a dehumanisation that becomes the cause to violence towards individuals whose identity are not present in these stories. The power of stories is then something that is needed for a dehumanisation not to occur: stories are how we make ourselves and others humans.

In order to be perceived as the kind of individual you want to be you are dependent on other people’s opinion of the world. Joss Moody is someone whose life transcends the binary logic of gender. His life, the way Joss wants to be perceived is a way that is not part of the common view of the world. The choice to be a girl and become a man is not something that exists in the over all perception of the world where binary thinking
towards genders prevails. However, despite all this Joss exists and he does so through his and his friends and family’s story of Joss Moody. He is a trumpet player and all he needs to be one is to play the trumpet. This is another form of telling a story, of being a doer because of a deed and it grants him power of existence.

I want to leave this food for thought and use the famous quote of Mahatma Ghandi’s saying to “be the chance you want to see in the world” in relation to what I have referenced earlier that everything are stories and that there are power vested with them. Joss Moody and Trumpet presents a story void of assumptions of ruling gender binaries and perhaps that is a change needed in the world.
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