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‘The Truth is a Thorny Issue’¹: Lesbian Denial in Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*

By Ceri Davies²

Abstract

The focus of this paper is Jackie Kay’s novel, *Trumpet*, the fictionalised account of a woman (Josephine Moore) who lives her life as a man (Joss Moody). This paper looks at how Joss’s identity is constructed, as well as the impact this has on the identities of other people. In particular, the paper examines the difficulties faced by Joss’s wife, Millie, as she tries to help him keep his secret, and protect her own identity as a heterosexual wife. Her attempts to defend herself and her husband from accusations of lesbianism lead to an examination of the power of labels and the essay questions both Millie’s commitment to the truth as she sees it and the usefulness of gender labels in determining identity.

Keywords: truth, identity, gender

The Scottish writer Jackie Kay is best known for her poetry collections, in particular *The Adoption Papers* and *Other Lovers*, in which she explores issues of ethnicity and gender. Her first novel, *Trumpet* (1998), is about the life of Joss Moody, jazz trumpeter, as recalled by his family and friends following his death. Kay loosely modelled the character of Joss on the real-life American jazz musician Billy Tipton³ (1914-89), who was discovered to have been a woman after his death. In *Trumpet*, Joss’s life is held up for scrutiny because it is only following his death that people discover that he was in fact a woman. In the shock that follows, several narrators question the past they thought they knew and at the same time try to comprehend the effect of this deceit upon their own ideas of identity. The most important narrative belongs to Joss’s wife, Millie Moody, who is the only person who shared his secret. When Joss’s secret becomes known, Millie is faced with the task of defending and legitimising their relationship in the face of society’s need to find labels for them. The label that society uses is ‘lesbian’; something that Millie struggles with: she does not accept it, but subconsciously knows that she cannot completely deny it either. With my close examination of the text, I hope to show exactly how Millie endeavours to manipulate the truth to deny her possible lesbianism while seeking to affirm Joss’s masculinity, and by extension, their heterosexuality.

Although the novel has several narrators and points of view, the most prominent is the first-person narration from Joss’s wife, Millie, not least because she is in the isolated position of having known about Joss’s secret for a long time. The keeping of this secret means that Millie is apart from everybody else, and her role in the text is as

¹ Quote taken from Patricia Nicol’s (1998) interview with Jackie Kay in *The Sunday Times*.

² ‘Lesbian Denial in Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*’ was originally written as part of the coursework for Ceri Davies’ MA in the Diversity of Contemporary Writing at Swansea University. She enjoyed researching this so much that she expanded her studies to look at gender deconstruction in other modern writing. She has just completed the first year of her Ph.D. at Swansea University, writing on ‘Gender De/Construction in the modern novel’.

³ The biography of Billy Tipton, *Suits Me*, was written by Diane Wood Middlebrook and published soon after *Trumpet* in 1998.

complex as her role in Joss's life. She tries to stop the 'terrible lies' (Kay 1998: 267) that are reported by the media, and combat them with the truth that only she has control over, but this task is made more difficult by her internal struggle. Millie's attempts to portray her life with Joss as normal are tainted by the undercurrent of uncertainty and denial that Jackie Kay punctuates her every utterance with. When Millie reflects on her life, she cannot help but be aware of the fact that Joss's secret was a constant presence in the marriage. Even as she attempts to validate the relationship and their roles in it, Millie is battling with her own conscience and the new view of her past that Joss's death creates. Jackie Kay creates a situation where even as Millie is telling Joss's story, she is also telling her own, and it is here that the problems lie. If Millie accepts that Joss was not a man – that his masculinity was no more than a costume – then she changes her definition of herself, from wife to lesbian. Millie denies the latter categorisation, and seeks to defend her right to be called first a wife, and then a widow, by demanding that people accept her chosen role, and she is forced to deny some essential truths about the relationship. While people are trying to understand Joss's motivations, it is Millie that is on trial. Incidents such as marriage and having children create discord: just as Millie sees marriage and motherhood as forces to stabilise the relationship, so they are simultaneously exposing the truth of the situation. As *Sunday Times* journalist Patricia Nicol (1998) notes, '[t]he truth is a thorny issue in Jackie Kay's writing'.

Kay makes sure that Millie's search for truth is undermined by the fact that her life is built upon Joss's lie, but Millie tries not to confront this. When she has to explain how she found out that Joss was a woman, her narrative becomes very controlled, with the result that a potential moment of realisation and revelation is transformed into a moment of avoidance. Joss reveals his secret during their courtship: significantly he does not – or cannot – vocalise his situation, choosing instead to disclose his identity through undressing and revealing his (female) body. Millie initially misreads this scene as the prelude to a seduction, feeling 'excited watching this man undress for me' [Kay 1998: 21]). However, she soon realises that something is wrong because of the 'bandages wrapped round and round his chest' (Kay 1998: 21). When Millie finally sees Joss's body, the scene ends abruptly with the statement, 'He keeps unwrapping endless rolls of bandages. I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small. Firm' (Kay 1998: 21). At a point when the reader expects Kay to include reaction, explanation or justification, there is nothing. Instead, Millie changes the subject by focusing her attention on the world outside her window: 'It is light outside now, a frail beginning light' (Kay 1998: 21). Stopping the narrative at such a crucial moment, Kay denies Millie the opportunity to explore and express her feelings. The denial of a reaction – positive or negative – is the denial of a right to a reaction, and this refusal to confront her basic feelings characterises the way Millie expresses herself throughout the text.

Millie's detached description of Joss's body serves a positive purpose in her quest to prove Joss's masculinity: as Joss reveals his truth via undressing, his femininity is reduced to a pair of breasts; an unfortunate physical deformity rather than a state of being. Joss's decision to hide his body with bandages suggests that his femininity should be viewed as a symptom of an illness, giving justification to him assuming a male role. Later in the text, Millie revisits the moment of revelation and is able to acknowledge some feelings: 'I remember feeling stupid, then angry. I remember the terrible shock of it all; how even after he told me I still couldn't quite believe it' (Kay 1998: 35). This

expression of shock is interrupted by a sudden shift of focus on to what Joss was feeling, again denying Millie the right to any emotions: 'I remember the expression on his face; the fear, that I would suddenly stop loving him' (Kay 1998: 35). When Millie returns to her own feelings, she is able to say, 'I don't think I ever thought he was wrong. I don't think so' (Kay 1998: 35). It is important that she represents herself as never having felt that their relationship was wrong. If she admits to doubts then she is admitting that the relationship was 'abnormal' and this categorisation extends to both her and Joss. The uncertainty in her words only emphasises the uncertainty she feels.

At no point in the text does Millie reveal exactly what Joss tells her when he explains his secret. She glosses over whatever Joss tells her, noting only that 'he told me' (Kay 1998: 35). This seems to be a very deliberate oversight. Whatever Joss said to her, however he explained his secret or defended what he did, he would have to have admitted that he was a woman. I think that Millie chooses to omit this from her story because she cannot face reliving it. If Joss told her that he was a woman, then Millie could not deny that she thought about it, or that it was a part of their lives. Also, Millie does not explain what she said to Joss to make him continue the relationship. By being strangely reticent on this point, Millie is preventing the reader from understanding exactly how Joss's act was justified. Ignoring the fact that at some point, she did confront and accept Joss's 'true' identity, Millie decides that the best defence is to try to diminish the importance of the secret.

Describing her first meeting with Joss, Millie asks, 'How could I have known then?' (Kay 1998: 11). Kay is implying that Millie fell in love with Joss before she had any idea that he was female, and this helps to explain how Millie may have justified the relationship to herself. By suggesting that it was impossible for her to have guessed the truth beforehand, Millie is blaming Joss: although she casts herself as his protector, there is a definite sense that she uses Joss to take focus off herself. During a difficult patch in the relationship, Millie is angry enough to consider the possibility that she is a victim of Joss's actions, because 'he tricked me, he made me fall in love with him...I couldn't do anything but marry him' (Kay 1998: 38). Perhaps realising that this is unfair to Joss, Millie later presents the secret as something that strengthened and protected the relationship because it meant that Joss would never commit adultery. When Millie and Joss's son, Colman, asks Millie how she would feel if Joss had an affair, '[s]he said he never would be unfaithful and gave me an odd smile' (Kay 1998: 48). Colman regards this response as proof that his parents enjoyed keeping the secret from him, but I believe that the 'odd smile' shows how worthless Millie's certainty is: Joss is not being faithful because he wants to be, but because he has no choice. The very thing that is supposed to strengthen the relationship is actually meaningless. Even so, on her wedding day, Millie revels in her certainty that Joss will be faithful:

Friends of mine who Joss has not yet met come up and say, 'Where did you find him? Quite a catch.' Another one says, 'I'd watch him. The handsome ones have roving eyes.' I laugh, 'You are just jealous, Agatha.' I laugh heartily to myself. Quite a catch (Kay 1998: 31).

Millie's pride at being in a relationship with someone that other women perceive as 'a catch' (Kay 1998: 31) is compounded with a deep sense of security that comes from

knowing that Joss can never leave her: 'For a split second, I feel jealous, imagining what it would be like if Joss were ever unfaithful to me. Then I remember and feel safe. We have our love and we have our secret' (Kay 1998: 29).

Joss's reaction to the question of fidelity is equally illuminating. Again, Colman is the questioner, and after asking if Joss has ever cheated on Millie, Joss says, 'No, with complete sincerity, no effort involved at all' (Kay 1998: 168). His reasoning is that he is 'not interested in anybody besides [Millie]. Only she can turn [him] on' (Kay 1998: 168). By talking in these terms, Joss suggests that he could cheat – if he so desired – but that strong sexual attraction stops him. The effect of such a phrase as 'turns me on' (Kay 1998: 168) is that it makes Joss seem to be a very sexualised (masculine) being. This reaction is something Kay tries to create in the text. As soon as Joss's secret is revealed, she is careful to make Joss appear to be the dominant sexual partner, in a move that highlights what could be described as stereotypically masculine behaviour. In a discussion of transgender relationships, Pat Califia⁴ suggests that assigning male and female roles often depends on sexual behaviour: 'the correlation of maleness with masculinity and running the fuck; the correlation of femaleness with femininity and getting run over in bed' (Califia 1997: 5). Joss's domination is not just a reassertion of his masculinity, but a confirmation of Millie's womanhood.

Before they establish their roles in the relationship, there is discord stemming from both Joss and Millie taking on sexual roles that are inappropriate for their gender roles. Joss 'never tries to touch' (Kay 1998: 15) Millie, and she is concerned that there might be a problem even as she searches for a rational explanation: '[e]ither Joss is terribly proper and old-fashioned or there is something wrong' (Kay 1998: 15). On the other hand, Millie is 'terribly frustrated at the lack of sexual contact' (Kay 1998: 15). Their first proper kiss, just before Joss reveals his secret, is remembered by Millie as 'he is kissing me' (Kay 1998: 19). Kay's phrasing of this statement could be compared to the famous statement, 'Reader, I married him,' from *Jane Eyre*. Jane refuses to observe traditional female behaviour, culminating in this phrase that emphasises her controlling role in the decision to marry. The statement in *Trumpet* turns this idea on its head by emphasising that the relationship is following a traditional model, with the male taking charge of sexual matters. It is essential that traditional behaviour is portrayed in order to stabilise the relationship, and this is followed through in Millie's attempts to 'heterosexualise' the relationship, just before the truth is revealed, to make sure that Joss is portrayed as suitably male. After Millie finds out Joss's secret, the sexual contact increases in intensity: Millie describes how Joss 'pushed himself into me...I am possessed' (Kay 1998: 36). As Califia notes, '[o]ne of the achievements that someone must demonstrate to be recognized as a man is sexual potency, the ability to take or *possess* a sexual object' (Califia 1997: 48, my emphasis). Similarly, Vern Bullough, an American sex researcher, remarks that '[a] man, fearful of being labeled as exhibiting feminine weaknesses, could demonstrate his masculinity by asserting power over his wife' (Bullough 1993: 114).

Millie remembers that 'Joss used to comb my hair every night. It was one of the few feminine things he did' (Kay 1998: 8). Although it seems as though Millie is finally able to face up to the female part of Joss, Kay uses this situation to display Millie's desperateness to prove that even when Joss does 'female' things, there is an innate

⁴ Pat Califia is a writer on sexual minority issues. More information can be found at www.patcalifia.com

maleness to him. A description of an innocuous activity such as brushing hair becomes sexually charged: 'I loved it. Him sitting behind me, pressing against me, combing my thick dark hair in firm downward strokes' (Kay 1998: 8). Millie's need to 'heterosexualise' the relationship is particularly obvious during her marriage to Joss, which is a very public way to prove the relationship. Millie's 'pale green slinky dress' (Kay 1998: 26) is extremely significant: the colour is a deliberate deviation from the traditional white in order to signify that she is not a virgin. This means that Joss is cast into the role of lover, which both legitimises the lesbian sexual experience and elevates it to the status of the heterosexual relationship it would like to be. When Millie refuses to wear white because she is not a virgin, Joss is 'proud of himself' (Kay 1998: 26), because he has proven his masculinity. Similarly, the suggestive cut of Millie's dress helps to accentuate her femininity: 'it shows my cleavage. I look sexy' (Kay 1998: 26). The wedding ceremony is about more than just marriage, as it stands as proof that Joss is capable of being a husband, and Millie is capable of being a wife. Millie would never identify herself as a lesbian, probably because of what such a label infers – Pat Califia points out that '[lesbians] have been identified as "not-women"' (Califia 1997: 3) – so her wedding is about more than a public identification as heterosexual: it is about Millie being recognised as a woman.

During the wedding ceremony, Millie is aware that such a public celebration of the relationship is an opportunity for the secret to be exposed, and her thoughts are dominated by fears that they will be found out:

At the Registrar's Office, I kept thinking of that bit in *Jane Eyre* where the minister asks if anyone knows of any reason why Mr Rochester and Jane should not marry and the man from the Caribbean suddenly stands up and says, Yes (Kay 1998: 26).

Jane's wedding, famously disrupted by the news that Mr Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason, provides an intriguing parallel to Millie and Joss's situation. Bertha is the 'daughter of Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta his wife, a Creole' (Brontë 1996: 325). The use of the word Creole is a deliberate one, emphasising a confused genetic heritage: '[Creole] could be applied to a native West Indian of any race...it is probable that [Charlotte Brontë] means something specific by the expression: that Bertha's mother is of racially mixed origins' (Mason 1996: 522). Bertha's English (and by implication, white) father and racially mixed or West Indian mother are reconfigured in Joss's parents: a (white) Scottish mother and a father who was 'a black man [from] the West Indies' (Kay 1998: 250). Thus, Joss is relegated from the position of husband to that of Bertha: a 'mad-woman.' (Brontë 1996: 339) In light of the parallel with Bertha, Joss's behaviour – what could be crudely termed his 'madness'—is a result not of gender, but colour. If Joss is occupying the same space as Bertha, then it is the discovery of his condition that could jeopardise his wedding. Alternatively, Joss could be connected to 'the man from the Caribbean' (Kay 1998: 26), who stops the wedding, or Mr Rochester, whose dark secret is the reason that the wedding is called off. Millie's fear is that Joss may confess his secret and humiliate her. It is the very fact that Joss is a racial 'other' and a gendered 'other' that makes the wedding dangerous.

The nature of everyday life with Joss means that Millie is constantly confronted with evidence of Joss's deception, and it takes a lot of denial and work on Joss and Millie's parts to keep the relationship strong. The knowledge that Joss is a woman is inescapable for Millie because she 'wrapped two cream bandages around his breasts every morning' (Kay 1998: 238). Millie makes it clear that this task was not one that she let herself dwell on: 'I didn't think about anything except doing it well' (Kay 1998: 238). Millie's comment on the bandages – 'He didn't care if it was uncomfortable. It probably was a little' (Kay 1998: 238) – reflects upon the uncomfortable situation as much as the bandages, a situation where they did not, or perhaps could not, talk: 'I don't remember us saying anything whilst I did this' (Kay 1998: 238). As Millie repeats that 'I don't remember thinking much' (Kay 1998: 238), the implication is that she blocked it out, and refused to let herself consider what she was actually doing, other than to consider the necessity of the act: 'I had to help him get dressed so that he could enjoy his day and be comfortable' (Kay 1998: 248). When Millie says this she is ignoring the possibility that she helped Joss in order to enjoy her own day and make herself feel more comfortable: she can only be a wife if Joss inhabits the role of husband. If he is not dressed as a man then it calls their roles into question.

This element of denial is also evidenced in the way Joss dresses: after Joss puts on his boxer shorts, Millie 'turned away while he stuffed them with a pair of socks' (Kay 1998: 238). It is important for both of them that Millie does not witness the most important part of the transformation, the construction of genitals, as she can only cope with seeing a small part of her husband's reality. She notes that '[Joss] was always more comfortable once he was dressed. More secure somehow' (Kay 1998: 238). It is perhaps easier for Joss to believe that he is a man when he is dressed as one. This is probably true of both of them, because it is easier for Millie to believe Joss is a man when she is not confronted with his implements of disguise. The importance of the disguise makes it difficult for Millie to know what to do with Joss's possessions when he dies: 'I have some of his bandages here at Torr. I don't know what to do with them. I can't throw them away. I can't give away these bandages. I can't burn them or bury them or throw them into the dustbin' (Kay 1998: 239). Although they are a reminder of Joss ('They smell of him still' [Kay 1998: 239]), they are also a reminder of a part of his life she is trying to forget.

Kay shapes Millie's narration so that it becomes an attempt to destroy Joss's alter ego, Josephine Moore, by denying that Josephine ever existed within the confines of their relationship. Josephine does exist, but as a shadow rather than an actual person. To try to explain how she lived with (or without) Josephine, Millie explains that as far as she was concerned, Josephine did not really exist because Joss never talked about her. In fact, Joss is only able to discuss his female past when he knows that it cannot have an affect his relationship: 'Joss told me a few days before he died more about being a girl than he had ever done in a lifetime of marriage' (Kay 1998: 203). Although the implication is that Joss was the one who would not discuss Josephine, his decision is partly prompted by Millie's reaction. When he finally tells her that his name used to be Josephine, Millie remembers how she felt unable to respond: 'I was so surprised that time, I couldn't say much. I remember finding it slightly distasteful, the idea of Joss having another name. If I am honest, perhaps I found it frightening too' (Kay 1998: 93).

Millie's fear stems from the realisation that 'Joss has not always been Joss, that Joss Moody had once been Josephine Moore' (Kay 1998: 93). For once, Joss has confronted the issue of his past: he admits that he has not always been male and the relationship is destabilised. For a few awkward moments, the issue of Joss's femininity is thrust into the spotlight. By reclaiming his feminine identity – 'My mother called me Josephine after her sister' (Kay 1998: 93) – he reminds Millie that Joss is a construction rather than a reality. Millie's response to this is to insist that Joss is real while simultaneously denying the validity of Josephine: 'no matter how hard I try, I can't see him as anything other than him, my Joss, my husband' (Kay 1998: 35). Perhaps the truth is that it is only too easy to dwell on it.

With Millie's reaction in mind, it is hardly surprising that when she finally felt able to ask questions about Josephine, Joss could not provide answers: 'whenever the name Josephine Moore came up, he'd say, "Leave her alone," as if she was somebody else. He always spoke about her in the third person. She was his third person' (Kay 1998: 93). It is significant that following the direct confrontation of his past ('my name' [Kay 1998: 93]), Joss later resorts to discussing himself in an abstract way, as if attempting to create a distance between his two identities to prevent them ever coming too close together again. Millie claims that the two identities are so different that 'I can't properly imagine even what [Josephine] looked like. I can't imagine her hair, how she would have worn her hair. I don't want to' (Kay 1998: 93). However, Millie's denials unravel themselves when she admits '[h]e looked unlike himself when he was dying. Unlike the man I married. I don't know who he looked like. Maybe he looked more like her in the end. More like Josephine Moore' (Kay 1998: 94).

Millie cannot bear to think about Josephine – 'I don't want to think about her. Why am I thinking about her?' (Kay 1998: 94) – because thinking about her makes her more real. As a means of self-preservation, Millie decides that if Colman tries to discuss the relationship, 'I will say one thing and that will be all. I didn't think about it at all' (Kay 1998: 94). Millie is forced to take this position because if she admits that she thought about Joss's past, then it is close to admitting that she is a lesbian; that she thought of Joss as a woman. This is why her denials become evermore forceful: 'I can't stare at these pictures and force myself to see *'this person who is obviously a woman, once you know'* – according to some reports. I can't see her. I don't know if I'll ever see her' (Kay 1998: 100, emphasis in original). If the reports are correct, and Joss was obviously female despite his clothing and behaviour, then Millie is assigned the role of lesbian. This is a role that does not sit comfortably on Millie's shoulders: from getting married to having children, Millie has sought to live an ordinary life to convince other people – and by extension herself – that her relationship is normal.

Despite Millie's obvious difficulty in accepting the truth of Joss's body, she claims that she never told Colman the secret because it was irrelevant: 'What could I tell him – that his father and I were in love, that it didn't matter to us, that we didn't even think about it so how could I have kept it from him if it wasn't in my mind to keep?' (Kay 1998: 22) This statement is an obvious lie; from her worries that the wedding would be stopped, right through until Joss's death, Millie has the truth foremost in her mind: when Colman thinks back, he recalls that 'I always had to knock on [my parents'] bedroom door. They taught me that from when I was small' (Kay 1998: 66). Millie is presented as being aware of the possible impact of other people finding out the truth.

Being with Joss means that Millie has to create a distance between herself and other people, for fear of the truth escaping: 'when I married Joss I became less close to my mother. I didn't want her to get too near' (Kay 1998: 84). When her mother visits, Millie truthfully appraises her situation: 'I hadn't realized I felt at all nervous of Joss till now' (Kay 1998: 85). It is as if, once confronted with the possibility of outside interference, Millie gains greater awareness of possible hazards, understanding that something as simple as a 'doctor's visit could ruin our lives' (Kay 1998: 87).

Fear of being discovered notwithstanding, the marriage is portrayed as a strong one until the question of children arises. Kay suggests that Joss so skilfully plays the role of man that it is only when his secret demands to be acknowledged that Millie is forced to accept bodily facts. When Millie realises how badly she wants a child, she recognises the consequences of having Joss as a partner: 'Why can't he give me a child? He can do everything else. Walk like a man, talk like a man, dress like a man, blow his horn like a man. Why can't he get me pregnant?' (Kay 1998: 37) Her repetition of the phrase 'like a man' emphasises Millie's realisation that Joss can only ever be 'like a man'; the transformation will never be complete because unlike other things that can be learned – 'He has a slow deliberate walk, like he's practised it' (Kay 1998: 15) – Joss can never become fully male and get Millie pregnant.

Even worse than Joss's failure as a man is Millie's personal failure as a childless woman. Describing 'the girl I was' (Kay 1998: 8), Millie says that 'she always wanted marriage, I remember. Marriage, children' (Kay 1998: 8). This sense of failure is compounded because Millie is also unable to live up to the expectations of society: 'My old autograph book from school haunts me. Margaret Baxter writing the daft ditty: "First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Millie pushing a baby carriage"' (Kay 1998: 37). Unable to have a child, Millie's efforts to create a normal life are undermined. Eventually Joss and Millie are able to overcome their difficulties by adopting Colman. When they try to decide what reason to give for wanting to adopt, Joss suggests that they say Millie 'had a hysterectomy' (Kay 1998: 40). This idea, suggesting that Millie has lost an essential part of her womanhood, is quickly disregarded in favour of blaming Joss: 'we'll say your sperm count is too low!' (Kay 1998: 40) Although this appears to be an attack on Joss's masculinity ('The look on his face is a picture. I laugh so much my stomach hurts' [Kay 1998: 40]), using Joss's sperm count as the reason to adopt means that Joss validates the request for a child, thus regaining the position of provider within the relationship.

Although they have undergone a marriage ceremony and raised a child, Millie finds that the deception leaves her unable to fully accept the life she has led. A large part of the problem rests in the way that the media labels her as 'a lesbian. They will find words to put on me. Words that don't fit me. Words that don't fit Joss' (Kay 1998: 154). Millie has to reject 'lesbian' because it suggests otherness rather than the normality she wants her life to project, and a 'marginalized status' (Califia 1997: 37) at odds with her public marriage. This can be placed in the context of real-life questions of identity. As Pat Califia notes, 'female partners of [female-to-males] have begun a dialogue about the differences they perceive between their own sexual identities and the categories of 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' (Califia 1997: 210). Even Jackie Kay herself admits to not being sure how to categorise Millie and Joss's relationship because 'Joss is a woman having sex with another woman, which most people would define as lesbian behaviour,

but Joss thinks of himself as a man and so do the people around him. So, you tell me what that makes Millie? I don't know the answer' (Nicol, 1998).

Millie rejects 'lesbian' but embraces 'heterosexual', presumably because a lesbian label 'might have a negative impact on the credibility of [the] partner's male identity' (Califia 1997: 210). It is the normal labels that she seeks refuge in: 'I loved being the wife of Joss Moody' (Kay 1998: 206). By using such labels, she hopes to change the minds of both the media and the people who reject her:

My husband died. I am now a widow. That is what I will tell them if they come and ask me. My husband died. I am now a widow. My husband died. I am now a widow. Why can they not understand how ordinary that is? Many women have become widows. Many women have gone through what I've gone through. Many women know the shape, the smell, the colour of loss. Many women have aged with loss. Grief has changed the face of many women. I am not alone. I have to tell myself this. I am not alone (Kay 1998: 205).

The hardest part for Millie (and Joss) is that 'you end up being defined by what makes you extraordinary' (Nicol, 1998). The problem is that she is a woman in a relationship with a genetic woman. In real-life, similar situations result in 'outsiders...invariably see[ing] their relationship as something other than a heterosexual bond' (Califia 1997: 43). Millie is attempting to fight against her inner knowledge that 'a woman who looked like, acted like a man...was disgusting to society'(Raymond 1996: 220). Jackie Kay notes that 'gender and race are categories that we try to fix, in order perhaps to cherish our own prejudices' (Weissman, accessed 2004), and it could be said that Millie's attempts to stop the feminising of Joss constitute a reaffirmation of her prejudice towards lesbianism.

When Joss dies, Millie makes it her mission to keep his secret. She tries to convince herself that she is acting in a way Joss would have approved of: '[h]e told me to remember the bandages, to remember and put the bandages back on. So I unbuttoned the pyjama jacket, managed to pull it off. It was hard work. I wrapped the bandages around his chest for the last time' (Kay 1998: 203). I would argue that Millie is not performing an entirely altruistic act in so far as she has to keep Joss's secret in order to protect her own truth. However, when Joss dies, the secret can no longer be kept. The reaction of the doctor who signs Joss's death certificate foreshadows the media's later attempts to categorise Millie and make clear distinctions:

She got her red pen from her doctor's bag. What she thought of as her emergency red pen. She crossed 'male' out and wrote 'female' in her rather bad doctor's handwriting. She looked at the word 'female' and thought it wasn't quite clear enough. She crossed that out, tutting to herself and printed 'female' in large childish letters (Kay 1998: 44).

Even when the truth threatens to make itself known, Millie makes a final attempt to save herself, this time using honesty: at the registrar's office, she makes no attempt to hide the evidence of Joss's double life: 'She had a birth certificate for the deceased bearing the name Josephine Moore. A medical card for the deceased that is fifty-two years out of date under the name of Josephine Moore...A marriage certificate for the deceased bearing the

name Joss Moody' (Kay 1998: 78). In what is perhaps an echo of the doctor's shock, the registrar cannot immediately comprehend what he is seeing because '[i]t was as if she had brought to him the certificates and papers of two completely different people, not one' (Kay 1998: 79).

Millie makes an appeal to the registrar, suggesting the Joss's secret be preserved for Joss's sake: 'She asked Mr Sharif if he could be registered as a man. She said, rather enigmatically, it appeared to Mohammad, that this would have been important for her husband, to be registered in death as he was in life' (Kay 1998: 79). Millie is trying to argue that Joss should be registered as a man because that is what he was: by saying this, Millie is ignoring the evidence of the birth certificate, the medical card, and Joss's body. The registrar refuses to grant Millie's request because '*he could not lie* on a death certificate' (Kay 1998: 80, my emphasis). The fact is that Joss Moody only exists because '[o]ne day Josephine Moore just plucked the name Joss Moody out of the sky and called himself this name and encouraged others to do likewise' (Kay 1998: 80), and this truth renders Millie's life false.

In spite of her best efforts to recreate herself, Millie struggles to combat her own doubts about her life. Although she says that her past is 'the only thing that feels authentic' (Kay 1998: 36), she is able to acknowledge at least partly the unreality of her life: 'Have I been a good mother, a good wife, or have I not been anything at all? Did I dream up my own life?' (Kay 1998: 98). Her own sense of self is so tainted by past actions that even revealing the truth feels like a lie, with her admitting that 'I don't know how to be myself anymore. I don't even know if I am being genuine. I question my own actions as I might question the actions of an actress' (Kay 1998: 36). Her doubts even permeate the photographic records of her life: her only chance to believe in a happier past. The posed nature of the photographs causes her to remark, '[I]t makes us look unreal, as if we were acting' (Kay 1998: 99). She realises that the only chance of believing in her past is to make herself believe in it: 'I tell myself I had a life, a family, family holidays. I tell myself to hold on to it. Not to let anybody make me let go' (Kay 1998: 99).

The biggest challenge to Millie's sense of identity comes from the media as it offers a perspective on the relationship that she claims not to recognise:

One of the newspaper articles had the headline *Living a lie*. They found people who claimed to be Joss's friends who said things like, "He fooled us completely." But it didn't feel like that. I didn't feel like I was living a lie. I felt like I was living a life. Hindsight is a lie (Kay 1998: 95).

She is able to dismiss the comments of Joss's friends because she does not feel fooled or lied to, but Millie is speaking from a different point of view: she knew Joss was a woman. She was living a lie – the lie that Joss was male – but it was a lie she knew about and her constant denials only force the truth forward. When the media interferes, Millie claims that '[her] life is a fiction now, an open book' (Kay 1998: 154). She doubts the truth of her new life because she is no longer in control of which facts the public is allowed to know: 'There is no line I can draw which says: "Stop here". It will be all over the top, crossing the boundary' (Kay 1998: 158). At this stage, Millie has one final

defence. She cannot deny that Joss is a woman, just as she cannot deny that she loved him, so she turns her love into something to be admired and respected:

I managed to love my husband from the moment I clapped eyes on him till the moment he died. I managed to desire him all of our married life. I managed to respect and love his music. I managed to always like the way he ate his food. I managed to be faithful, to never be interested in another man. I managed to be loyal, to keep our private life private where it belonged. To not tell a single soul including my own son about our private life. I managed all that (Kay 1998: 206).

In a few words, Millie transforms her deceit into something respectful: she was not lying for the sake of being deceitful, but as an act of love.

Regardless of what she claims, her sense of guilt seeps out slowly, and sometimes unintentionally. The guilt is obvious from the first page of the novel; trying to emphasise her innocence, Millie finds somebody that she can align herself with: 'There's a film I watched once, *Double Indemnity*, where the guy is telling his story into a tape, dying and breathless. I feel like him. I haven't killed anyone. I haven't done anything wrong' (Kay 1998: 1). This is an interesting comparison because the man she is referring to – the protagonist, Walter Neff – is a murderer and a cheat, fully aware of what he is doing. In spite of her best efforts to deny guilt, Millie cannot help but incriminate herself. Some time elapses before Millie is finally able to say, 'I am lying to myself. I am always lying to myself and I really must stop it' (Kay 1998: 205). Millie is only able to reach this moment of self-revelation when she cannot convince herself that 'I am not alone' (Kay 1998: 205). Millie *is* alone; she is separate from other people because of the life she led and the manner in which she led it. By admitting to her dishonesty, 'it becomes apparent that Moody wasn't alone in exploring and creating alternative selves' (Smith accessed 2004). Millie's alternative self is the heterosexual wife she wants so desperately to be.

To aid understanding of Millie's situation, it is helpful to turn to the author of *Trumpet*, Jackie Kay, for her views on the issue of 'truth'. Discussing who Joss is, Kay says, 'if people love him enough then they will believe him. My idea is that through love an identity can be created and sustained, and that love can allow someone to do the impossible' (Nicol 1998). I agree that it is Millie's love for Joss that inspires her to believe in him as a man, but I find it difficult to agree with Kay's assertion that the identity can be sustained, because throughout the text, Millie is dealing with the realisation that Joss's female alter-ego was ever-present in the marriage. Josephine was there all along; Millie just chose to ignore her because knowing Joss to be a woman undermines her own construction as a heterosexual woman. Perhaps the truth of the situation is captured in remarks Kay makes about writing: 'Writing is just a sophisticated way of telling lies, you know. *You are creating something false and asking people to believe that it is true, which is all that a lie does*' (Nicol 1998, my emphasis). Kay's description of a lie seems to me to be uncannily close to describing what Joss does. Although Kay argues that '[t]he point is that for those who love him, Moody is not living a lie, but being true to himself' (Nicol 1998), Millie *is* living a lie and refusing to face up to it: she is not being true to herself.

In her review of *Trumpet*, Helena Smith believes that the fundamental question that *Trumpet* poses is '[w]hether Moody has lived a fiction or created an alternative

reality' (Smith, accessed 2004). My argument is that there is no difference. A fiction is a lie; an alternative reality is a lie lived as the truth. The real riddle is Millie Moody: a woman who does not understand her own mind, her every action, her every word, seeming to contribute to the construction of a life lived as a lie. Simultaneously denying the lie and admitting it, she faces the personal dilemma that she does not know who she is. Until she is able to confront the possibility of her own lesbianism, her attempts to ignore it can only be viewed as hollow.

Describing the village where she hides from the media attention, Millie observes that the '[w]eather here in this part of the world is just as moody, just as subjective and disloyal, as people' (Kay 1998: 23). In this sentence, Millie shows what is wrong with her narrative: the story she tells is subjective – she cannot help that – as it depends on her memories and thoughts. However, her story is also disloyal. As she tries to rewrite the past, she is disloyal to the life she led, and the person she loved, because in trying to change her past, she is suggesting that it is not good enough; that the relationship cannot stand up to the intense scrutiny of the press. If Millie refuses to be ashamed of her relationship, then nothing anybody says can have any affect. Her efforts to convince the world of Joss's masculinity only serve to reinforce the idea that Joss is not a man. By denying her past, Millie displays the shame that she claims not to feel.

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