

The Multiple Spatial Narratives in Jackie Kay's Trumpet

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Abstract

Henri Lefebvre is the founder of the theory of space production who initiated the “spatial turn” of the social sciences in the 1990s. Spatial criticism theory also provides a new analytical perspective for literature, triggering the quick rise of spatial literary studies. In current feminism and gender research, there are more and more explorations on the issues of body, gender, and subjectivity in spatial geography. This article focuses on the first novel *Trumpet* by the “Scottish Makar” Jackie Kay. Taking the space of the characters’ activities in the novel as the main entry point, this article adopts Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space and close reading as the main research method to analyze the different identity constructions of the main characters under the concepts of body space politics, race space politics and gender space politics. Studying this novel from the perspective of spatial politics not only enriches the research perspective, but also reveals the important aspects of race, class, gender, etc. involved in the novel through the tool of “space”.

Keywords

Jackie Kay; Trumpet; Henri Lefebvre; Spatial narrative.

1. Introduction

Jackie Kay (b. 1961), the current Scottish Makar (National Poet for Scotland), wrote: ‘I think I will always be interested in identity, how fluid it is, how people can invent themselves, how it can never be fixed or frozen.’ (Kay, 1999: 73) Not only in Jackie Kay’s famous collections of poetry like *The Adoption Papers* (1991), but also in her first novel *Trumpet* (1998), different understandings of identity can be observed. All her works gravitate around key themes of identity, which has strong connections with her personal experiences.

In 1961, Jackie Kay was born to a Nigerian father and a Scottish mother, and brought up in Glasgow by her white adoptive parents. As a mixed-race girl who grew up in a white community, Kay has long realized the deep-rooted racial discrimination as well as the disadvantages of women. Meanwhile, as a lesbian, she has many personal experiences and thoughts when it comes to sexual identity. All these personal experiences become special catalysts to her writing, and she always puts the questions of identity, belonging, and place at the core of her writing.

Trumpet (1998), which was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize, is Kay’s first and so far only novel. After its first publication for more than 20 years, *Trumpet* is still in print, which is a sign of its popularity. *Trumpet* can be seen as the culmination of themes which have preoccupied Kay since the outset of her writing career. It involves a series of identity categories, like race, gender and ethnicity, etc. Inspired by the life experiences of the American jazz musician Billy Tipton (1914-1989) whose death revealed that “he” had been a woman, Kay in *Trumpet* tells the extraordinary story of a black Scottish Jazz trumpeter Joss Moody who lived his life as a man but was revealed to be anatomically female after his death. The responses of different people towards his death constitute the main contents of this novel, including those of his wife Millie Moody, his adopted son Colman Moody, the journalist Sophie Stones, the drummer Big Red, etc. Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), a pioneer of space theory, proposes that space is a social and cultural product that not only affects people’s spatial practices and perceptions but also is

closely connected with power. He proposed the “spatial triad” in his book “The Production of Space” (1974), first translated into English in 1991, which contends that any space produced by society is a mixture of “spatial practices”, “representations of space” and “spaces of representation”. (Lefebvre, 1991: 33-46) The interaction and dialectical relationship between the three is also emphasized to explain the social construction of social space. Firstly, “space practices” usually pays attention to space in the sense of function and form. It involves a space of objects and things, and a space in which people move and act. Secondly, the “representations of space” refers to the discourse of spatial order, which is conceived and planned by the makers of social spatial order, and is used to discipline the “spatial practices” of social members. Lastly, “spaces of representation” is a space in the specific sense. It is a living space established by individuals or groups under the discipline and restriction of “representations of space” to meet or challenge the spatial order stipulated by it. (Zhao, 2011: 139) Lefebvre’s work offers a powerful mechanism for thinking through the spatial dimensions of modern society and culture, as well as literature.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, under the background of global spatial reorganization and the promotion of Lefebvre and Foucault’s space theory, the western literary scholars have begun to rethink the relationship between literature and space. In China, there also has been more and more attention given to the spatial literary studies in recent years. Domestic academic circle has yet little research about the novel *Trumpet* written by the contemporary Scottish poet and novelist Jackie Kay, such as interpreting the identity construction of characters in the novel. This article, taking the perspective of spatial politics and taking the space of the characters’ activities in *Trumpet* as the main entry point, will analyze the issues of body, gender and race space involved in the novel, which not only enriches the research perspective, but also reveals the race, class, gender and other aspects that Jackie Kay constantly concerns through the tool of “space”.

2. Body Space: Joss's Expansion of Living Space

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the attention to “body” has widely entered the vision of literary scholars. In Lefebvre’s theorizing of the body, he has a focus on space, on “the body’s implication in and constitution of a ‘sensory-sensual space’”. (Simonsen, 2005: 1) Asserting that “the production of space begins with the production of body” (Lefebvre, 1991:405), he understands the body not only as the subject of historical abstraction and visualization but also as an intrinsic part of social practice. He advocates using the body to experience and imagine space and opposes to the idea of restraining the body. This chapter will use Lefebvre’s body space theory to analyze Joss’s reconstruction of his gender and the expansion of his living space.

The “representations of spaces” of masculinity has markedly hindered women from transcending and challenging spatial practices. Women have to be in the bottom and marginal space where they “rightly” belong, so that they can become recognized by the patriarchal society. However, although born with a female body, being a woman and being trapped in the marginal space of society is against the will of the protagonist Joss in the novel. Therefore, Joss cleverly used the body to experience and imagine space. Starting from changes in his looks, he took the initiative to pretend to be a man and he made it wonderfully since gender is performative as what Judith Butler beholds.

Judith Butler (b. 1956), an American philosopher and gender theorist, put forward the theory of “gender performativity”, the core point of which is that “gender is not born; gender and even all identities are performative.” (Salih, 2002: 43) Joss’s experience is a perfect example for this performative view of gender. To win some partial victories from the dominant cultural system, the disadvantaged groups in a society, like the female, need to adopt certain strategies, like voice, tone or dressing, etc. For Joss, he imitated men in attire, supplemented by words, gestures,

behaviors, etc., to hide his biological gender and successfully created a black male image. Joss successfully constructed a new social gender by means of performing and imitating the cultural conventions of gender.

It is clear that Joss, a woman, has almost willed herself into being a man and expanded his living space greatly. However, this is inseparable with Millie's assistance. Millie is the only one who knows the utmost secret of Joss and she "wrapped two cream bandages around his breasts every morning, early." (Kay, 1998:238) To protect Joss's male image, they cannot relax in the slightest even in their home. Colman recalled that "the door to their bedroom was always shut. Tight." (Kay, 1998: 55) Their bedroom is the harbor for Joss, the only safe space. Millie recalled, after Joss released his first album, "He tells me it is all down to me, that I have created him, that I am responsible for his success". (Kay, 1998: 36) The united front established by Joss and Millie poses as a resistance, confrontation and challenge to the orthodox gender. The alliance formed by the two tore through the disguise of the gender norms prescribed by the patriarchal law, and subverted the hegemony of patriarchal social space politics, thus overturning the existing space distribution relationship and expanding Joss's own living space.

Joss's own living space was further expanded through his move from Scotland to London. "In some cultures, restricting women's mobility in identity and space is the key to maintaining their subordinate status", (Massey, 1994: 179) while Joss actively broke up the restriction on his mobility in identity and space. He was born and brought up in a small Scottish town called Greenock, but as what the journalist Sophie described, "she moved away from Greenock then she became a man. Had to find a city, Glasgow, and then a bigger city, London." (Kay, 1998:264) Compared to Glasgow, large UK cities like London is more diverse and inclusive, and therefore poses as a perfect place for Joss to escape from his old relationships and to build an entirely new gender identity. In the choice of space settings in the novel, Kay's personal experiences provided herself with a unique perspective. Kay, being a lesbian herself, seemed in 1990 to be not optimistic about the ability of Scotland to embrace such multiplicity either in racial or sexual terms: "I don't know if I could actually read lesbian poems there." (Kay, 1990: 127) Today, she with her family still lives in Manchester, a large UK city.

3. Race Space: Spatial Oppression on Racial Minorities

The "spatial practices" in the "spatial triad" includes all physical social practices, but it is a "conventional spatial behavior", which is controlled by the will of socially powerful group. (Zhao, 2011: 21) In Lefebvre's view, definers of the right of discourse are the ones who discipline various marginalized groups in society through a series of discourse mechanisms and dominance. In a hierarchical society, the "definer" or the planner of "representations of space" is the ruling class; while in the British racial society, the planner is the mainstream ethnic group-- the whites. In this novel, Kay has a few direct descriptions of how white society discriminates against the black, but readers can always feel the pervasive hostility and surveillance targeted on the black by simply observing the spatial conditions of whites and blacks, as Lefebvre claims that the ideology of race needs to use space as a medium and be constructed in space.

In Trumpet, the space is divided into two according to ethnic attributes, and there is a clear distinction between blacks and whites. From the living space of the black people in Britain, the influence of white surveillance and the mainstream culture is prominent. Racial minorities are conceived as inferior in Britain where the British people are predominantly white. Since the whites form the powerful group that controls the division and allocation of macro-space, most of the underprivileged black people can only live in small houses, except for few ones who managed to squeeze into the middle class. In the case of Joss's father, he lived in a white person's house as a servant, occupying little space in society.

The father of Joss, John Moore, was brought to Scotland when he was just six years old. This was done because John's father persuaded a Scottish captain of a ship to take him back to Scotland and give him some kind of education. However, on arriving Greenock, Scotland, the captain dropped him to a distinguished family where he has been working as a servant, polishing their shoes and doing loads of chores daily. No one cares about his education or his father's expectations on him in the least. When he turned 18, he willingly became a house painter apprentice and ended his life as a servant for the whites. From such an underprivileged background, being simultaneously poor and black, he had to earn a living and later raise a family by working really hard. Undoubtedly, because of his race, his marriage with a white woman, Edith Moore, was very unusual and must have gone through much resistance and prejudices. Even after years, Joss's classmate May recalled, "Well, that was a bit of a scandal. Her mother was from Glasgow, but her father was a black man". (Kay, 1998:250) This word "scandal" is demonstrative of how pervasive this racism on black people is in Scotland, even at the present times. The living space of whites does not allow the "intrusion" of the black people, let alone a white marrying a black.

Similarly, the marriage of Joss Moody is frowned upon just like that of his parents'. In 1955, Joss married Millie, a white girl, but unsurprisingly Millie's family is not satisfied with Joss because of his race. Millie's mother said plainly to Millie, "I don't want you marrying a Darky", and even claimed that "it wasn't prejudice, it was common sense." (Kay, 1998:27) They got married despite so much resistance, but they "didn't have the money to get a house together" (Kay, 1998: 31) and continued to live in a rented flat, which indicates that the couple departing from the normal accepted standard set by the whites, the planner of "representations of space", was subjected into an underprivileged status whose spatial demand can hardly be met. However, with Joss's career taking off, they moved to a big house in London, thus greatly expanded their living spaces. Jackie Kay challenged the order of racial space by describing Joss's experience of mobility. This in itself is not only a breakthrough of literary tradition, but also a pursuit of the "spatial justice" that Soja calls for. (Soja, 2010: 1)

In Trumpet, Joss's adopted son Colman's experiences as a black person whether in Scotland or in London reiterate a sense of alienation. When he was just about six years old, in Glasgow, Colman witnessed and experienced an overt act of discrimination of the black. Colman remembered that a white guy insulted a black man on a bus, while "the black man who had been called an ape... was just sitting with his eyes low, looking at the bus floor." (Kay, 1998: 54) Millie scolded the nasty white guy, but this guy later held up Colman as an object for ridicule. At that time, Colman was so scared of people staring at him that he noticed his "own color of skin" for the first time. In a rage, Millie "got off that bus and walked home". (Kay, 1998: 54) This retreat of Millie suggests her weakness as a woman in a patriarchal society, while this bus together with other public space in a racial society represents a socially symbolic place where the racial minorities are not accepted, needless to say being treated equally.

The police bureau is another socially symbolic institution, which symbolizes authority and national ideology. In Colman's life, his personal experiences taught him that "It is not easy to travel in this country. Black guys like him." (Kay, 1998: 189) He said, "I've been picked up by the police countless times, man, for doing fuck all. Just for bring black and being in the wrong place at the wrong time."(Kay, 1998: 162) Such things keep happening, as Colman said, for "countless times". It seems that the black are always in the wrong place as long as they stand on the land dominated by the white. As an illustration, Colman encountered some poor black people on his way to train station. He went "down into the filthy hole of tube. Down into the underworld of rubbish and stink and piss and poor people with their kids begging and guys holding up bits of brown cardboard that read 'homeless'. (Kay, 1998: 184) In the shadow of racism, most of the black people live on the margins of society, having difficulty in finding a decent job and even a house to live in. Such a terrible scene of living Colman witnessed in the

tube is a clear manifestation of what situations the black people are forced into and what they are deprived of in this racial society.

4. Gender Space: Spatial Confinement and Transcendence of Female Characters

In Lefebvre's "spatial triad", "representations of space" refers to "the dominant spatial order conceived by powerful social groups that is related to production relations." (Zhao, 2011: 20) When the spatial relationship is placed in a patriarchal context, space can reflect gender politics. In the patriarchal social space, the representation of gender space is masculine supremacy or binary opposition between men and women. Under the narrative discourse of male hegemony, the planner of gender "representations of space" is male, and urban space is divided into two based on gender characteristics. In order to consolidate their dominant status in space, men deliberately place women in the lower and more marginal space. For instance, the majority of women are trapped in the private space of "home", especially the kitchen area of the family space. The chapters titled "House and Home" all feature Millie as the narrator. The house and home are also her space for daily activities, while her appearance in public space is mostly because of her husband. But even in their homes, women often have little control of space.

18 years after the novel's first publication, in writing an introduction to *Trumpet*, the Scottish writer Ali Smith has pointed that 'House and Home' stands for a clash between the private and public worlds. 'House and Home' usually appears as a typical media heading, like a style section in a newspaper, and that intense media observation, like a small crowd of paparazzi outside the house of Millie, has left her feeling invaded and hunted. She saw herself as "a woman who was captured by the light for ages and ages to try to find myself in her." (Kay, 1998: 3) "The light" here not simply refers to the annoying camera flash from the media, but also the constant heterosexual male gaze in the patriarchal society. "Home" that is supposedly private becomes public, and also there are hardly any happy families in the traditional sense in this novel, suggesting that the "home" space has been alienated.

One noteworthy point about Mrs. Moody is that, "The thing she was fussy about was all her ornaments. Ornaments from all around the world in that house." (Kay, 1998: 173) Millie's love for decorations from all over the world, on the one hand, reflects her lack of freedom in real life space, on the other hand, also implies her imagination and possibility of striving for greater potential space. The mobility of space makes it possible to transform the gender space. After the death of Joss, the secret about his body was revealed and became a great sensation of the day, prompting Millie to take action to seek greater space.

In order to hide from the media reporters squatting outside her home, Millie sneaked into their secret hut in the small fishing village of Torr, Scotland at midnight. "I had to get away, so I drove here." (Kay, 1998: 3) Millie's move represents as a resistance to the male gaze, thus reconstructing a body space belonging to the female herself and resisting the traditional gender spatial order. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Torr is a very small Scottish village where people here "never heard of Joss Moody, Britain's legendary trumpet player". (Kay, 1998: 6) This approach of placing the expression of female body desires in marginalized social life fields, such as "barren hills" and "small towns", vaguely conveys the failure of Millie's resistance to traditional gender spatial order, and also shows that it is difficult for women to escape from the marginalized and subordinate space when the "representations of space" are defined by men.

Another important female character in this novel, Sophie Stone, the journalist, also cannot spare the heterosexual male gaze in this patriarchal society. Working in journalism where men enjoy preponderance in numbers, she transcended the traditional gender spatial order in this aspect. However, her behaviors illustrate that she is constantly under the gaze of men and heavily affected by it. In her intercourse with Colman, Sophie developed affection towards him and

started dressing up for him. "If I buy the right outfit, Colman might like the look of me." (Kay, 1998: 234) During her shopping, Sophie saw a women "squeezing herself into a size 16 when she is probably a size 22", and deemed her a "poor fat cow". (Kay, 1998: 232) Sadly, there are lots of women like them who try to meet men's aesthetic expectations regardless of their own body comfort.

The range of space that women can rightly occupy was initially defined by men who are in control of authority, but gradually this spatial representation penetrated into the will of everyone in society, and finally women internalized this spatial representation and deem them as the standards to restrict their behaviors. They willingly, or more like, unconsciously, accept the restraint of their own spatial practices imposed by men. More plainly, a sentence from Sophie illustrates that women are situated on the margins of society, while men control the entire social space with their own authority as the center: "It will not be the first time. Why should I have scruples when men have been using me for years?" (Kay, 1998: 170) As this sentence suggests, although being aware of the spatial oppression imposed on her, Sophie still chooses to abide by the gender norms of the patriarchal society, which is a easier way for her to fit in this society.

For most women, including Millie and Sophie, whether they are aware of the spatial oppression they are subjected to or not, they accept and abide by the gender norms of the patriarchal society. Still, there are some women who are committed to finding possible ways of breaking through the spatial oppression. An obvious example is that, after Doctor Krishnamurty issued the medical death certificate of Joss, "she drove off in her white car at quite a considerable speed." (Kay, 1998: 44) The car is driving on a highway, a place full with dialogue, publicity and openness, which makes women who are on the edge of mobility see the hope of transcending the division of gender space. Although women's car mobility "not necessarily eradicating gender stereotypes, but at least it has played an important role in breaking gender stereotypes for American women and dissolving the public/private gender antagonism." (Scharff, 1999: 170) By creating characters different from the traditional gender expectations, Kay shows her subversion to women's spatial confinement and the possibilities for women to challenge and transcend the traditional gender roles.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, this article focuses on the living space of the main characters in the award-winning novel *Trumpet* by Jackie Kay, and interprets the different identity constructions of the main characters under the concepts of race space politics, body space politics and gender space politics respectively. From this particular tool of "space", it can be observed that racial minorities suffer from spatial oppression in a racial society just like what women suffer in a patriarchal society, but they simultaneously make resistant attempts to spatial oppression, and that the fluidity of gender as well as gender space provides more freedom to the gender identity construction. In this novel, Kay actively explores the reality and possibility of living space, and expresses her hope to make the world more inclusive and more accepting of different races, genders, sexual orientations, etc.

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