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The Gap between Two Generations in Selected Poems by Jackie Kay

ABSTRACT

This research explores how Jackie key presents family relationships and the gap that exists between two generations; that of parents and of children. Despite the fact that there is compassion and love in these relations but still the gap cannot be denied. It is too deep to a degree that it causes a lack of communication. Using humor, native language, and racism, Kay has intensified the struggle between what represents the past and the present. The poems discussed are: "My Grand-mother's Houses"; "Keeping Orchids"; "Lucozade"; "Bed"; "Divorce"; and "Gap Year".

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الفجوة بين جيلين في قصائد مختارة لجاكي كاي

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الخلاصة:

يستكشف هذا البحث كيف تعرض جاكي كاي العلاقات الأسرية والفجوة الموجودة بين جيلين ؛ الأباء والأبناء. على الرغم من حقيقة أن هناك تعاطفًا وحبًا في هذه العلاقات ، إلا أنه لا يمكن انكار الفجوة التي لا تزال قائمة. كما انها عميقة جدًا لدرجة أنها قد تسبب عجزا في التواصل. باستخدام الفكاهة واللغة الأم والعنصرية ، ركزت كاي على الصراع بين ما يمثل الماضي والحاضر. القصائد التي تمت اختيارها في هذا البحث هي: "بيت جدتي" ، و "تربية الأوركيد" ، و "لوكوزاد" ، و "السرير" ، و "الطلاق" ، و "سنة الفجوة".

الكلمات المفتاحية: جاكي كاي ، علاقة عائلية ، فجوة ، أجيال ، أم.

The Scottish novelist, dramatist, and poet Jacqueline Margaret Kay was born in Edinburgh to a white Highlands mother and a Nigerian father before being adopted as an infant by white Marxist parents in Glasgow, where she grew up. After studying English at Stirling University, she traveled to London for a while, becoming one of many Scottish poets who have moved south for work and recognition. Kay now lives in Manchester and teaches creative writing at Newcastle University.

She frequently performs her work live and creates poems for auditory platforms, in addition to releasing written works. Kay's writing employs a variety of media: her fiction is lyrical in its concern to sensibility and detail, yet her poetry appear to have more theatrical sense in its use of the dramatic monologue and the occasional verbal or narrative aspect. Kay's status as a "experiment with form," according to Helen Brown (2012), frees her from the complete responsibilities of following any literary customs," providing her with freedom to and modify them. "key's multiple media , Brown contains "enables Kay undermine to express her ideas more effectively and reach a wider audience" (n.p).

Her writing also delves deep into the complexities of family ties, cultural and national inheritance, as well as the ways in which humans utilize imagination to build their personal histories and bridge the gap between the generations. Kay's writing is frequently influenced by her biography and her memories as a an adopted child. She uses several individual voices and personas to convey personal memories and experiences that are often more realistic. It is important to note that the basis of her autobiographical poems are not intended to portray her as an attractive seeker or to be overly reflexive. For her, According to Rebecca E. Wilson and Gillean Somervill-Arjat (1990), "using her own experience was intended to make the readers feel it as their own, allowing them to recognize the work from multiple angles" (p.123).

Family relationships represent a primary topic that connects the seven selected poems. These poems however, address intergenerational issues with reference to the differences in thinking, beliefs, values, and tastes between two generations separated by a large age gap. In " My Grandmother's House" the characters are linked by their shared history , language ,and their female gender, but the gap between them still existing. They do not share anything in common, the new generations cannot even understand the old stories "stories of things I can't understand" (l.10). The difference between generations in this poem is determined by upbringing, lifestyle of the old people rooted in their behavior which creates a tremendous controversy. Both generations

are in an everlasting criticism and condemn for each other's actions. The grandmother obviously reflects an essentialist idea of Scottishness as a generational one, shrugging off required aspects that are no longer useful for her. A description of her residence is given, where everything is outdated and the only way newspapers are used is to cover the presents.

Here is home.

The sideboard solid as a coffin.

The newsagents next door which sells

hazelnut toffees and her Daily Record.

Chewing for ages over the front page

her toffees sticking to her false teeth.(ll.15-20)

The poem recalls her experiences in adolescence, where her grandmother used to "dragging" her along to "the strange place" which is the church describing the experience as a strange one and everyone including the air is stuck there.

where the air

is trapped and ghosts sit at the altar.

My parents do not believe. It is down to her(ll.37-39)

The subject of race conflict is accordingly brought in the form of racial comments which causes the gap to widen even further; an experience that awakens the kid to her own seeming otherness. It demonstrates the unpleasant reality even family cannot defend her against racism. In this poem, however, the racial comment from the lady who was trying to impose a sense of otherness toward the colored child. For Kay, "Other people's assumptions about who you are" [...] "do interfere with your own self-image" (Kay,1994,p.532).

Lovely, she says,

beautiful child, skin the colour of café au lait.(ll.59-60)

Although the lady's words are charming, they exhibit severe racism and a lack of acceptance for her skin color. The fact that her grandmother remain mute and does not deflect these statements has widened the gap between her and her grandchild. According to Kay, the "sense of being outside and being inside Scotland in terms of receiving a lot of racism from other Scottish people [...] is what fuels my sense of how and what I write" (Gish,2001, pp.179–80).The reason why she writes about this incident, is that she is slapped by her grandmother every time she makes a comic comment on that lady describing her. She was grounded for being funny while the Racist women was blamed for her speech; "I see her / like the hunchback of Notre Dame" (ll.62-63).

In "Keeping Orchids", the presence of "orchids" in the title is a symbol of Kay's prospective bond with her birth mother and her need of care as a newborn baby. It is a present from her mother, and Kay has clearly spent a lot of efforts into caring and that is the distinction between her and her mother.

The orchids my mother gave me when we first met
are still alive, twelve days later. Although
some of the buds remain closed as secrets.
Twice since I carried them back, like a baby in a shawl (ll.1-4)

Kay provides another instance of stain communication that widens the gap between her and her biological mother who has decided to leave her for adoption. The poem is about her first contact with her mother in many years, and the frigid setting and lack of warmth was palpable to the extent that she portrays it (winter room). The meeting is brief, and there are no plans for another. Though the meeting is intended to bridge the gap between the two, the outcome has broadened it even farther, since the mother herself cut their ties and nothing can be done to repair the situation.

A door opens and closes. Time is outside waiting.
I catch the draught in my winter room.
Airlocks keep the cold air out.
Boiling water makes flowers live longer. So does
cutting the stems with a sharp knife(ll.33-37).

As an eagerly adoptive daughter, she recognizes that while discovering her biological roots is important to her, it will not bridge the gap between the two. The meeting will not explain her life because cultural and familial influences have been the only important elements in molding her character as biological influences. Kay (2010) emphasizes this aspect of adoption in her memoir:

The jigsaw can never, ever be completed. There will always be missing pieces, or the pieces will be too large and clumsy to fit into the delicate puzzle. The search is often disappointing because it is a false search. You cannot find yourself in two strangers who happen to share your genes. You are made already. (p. 47)

Rather than speaking directly about herself, the poet uses the orchids as different image on which to project her emotions after that meeting. She and Orchids are both broken into pieces, "the whole glass carafe has crashed" (l.6).

"Lucozade " however, is about a daughter paying a visit to her sick adoptive mother in the hospital believing that she is about to die. Even though she is sick, she keeps criticizing the presents she has received, including the "Lucozad" itself as an undesired traditional gift, that brings back memories of her youth as well as her being offered the same drink every time she feels ill .

‘Don’t bring flowers, they only wilt and die.’

[...]

Don’t bring Lucozade either,’ then fades(l.2,l.8).

Kay's description of the mother's sense of humor is lighthearted. She conveys the idea of a strong, confident lady facing difficulties by blending words from her speech. After waking up dazed from the drugs, all what she wants to talk about is grownups stuff crating a huge gap between the two. There is an emphasis on the speaker's youth and lack of life experience contrasts with the mother's experience "I am sixteen; I've never tasted a Bloody Mary" (l.15).

An impression is given that the mother's situation confuses Kay. The mother's question is extravagant, reckless, naughty, and of life-affirming nature.

My mum wakes up, groggy and low.

'What I want to know,' she says, 'is this:

where's the big brandy, the generous gin, the Bloody Mary,

the biscuit tin, the chocolate gingers, the dirty big meringue?' (ll.13-16)

The poem concludes with an emotional scenario of a young girl singing and carrying in her hand that undesired gift of the hospital. The load of disease held throughout the poem is relieved by removing the gifts, as is the melancholy that pervades the early stanzas.

Another distinguished generational gap is the use of different languages. The generation gap in "Bed" has created a similar linguistic barrier that can be difficult to bridge. This is an issue that is visible throughout society, complicating day-to-day communication at home, at work, and in schools. As a representative of the older generation, the lady in the poem spoke her native Scot language, which creates a sense of separation from the younger set. Her sole method to identify herself as an ancient Scottish lady was through this noticeable gap. "Man's most essential symbol is his language," writes Ramaa Prasad (1992), "and via this language, he determines his reality" (p.4).

Through the usage of dramatic monologue, the mother expresses her feelings as an elderly generation that has no place in this modern world. The poem is set in a bed, much like the title suggests. She uses contentious language to describe the profound and lasting differences between her and her daughter. The suggested lack of worth and understanding between her and her daughter serves as a metaphor for the intergenerational gap. Everything the old see is imprisoned in this reality; "Stuck here in this big blastit bed / year in, year oot, ony saint wuid complain" (ll.3-4).

The old mother expresses her thoughts of being a burden to this young woman and appears to feel sorry about it. This is supported by the fact that communication has broken down between the two, and there are strong notions about communication conveyed. The poem

demonstrates that the persona can clearly explain her feelings. With the daughter, however, there is simply no appearance of dialogue or efforts to fix this relationship. The final lines tell a mixture of feeling by the old lady toward her daughter.

I'll be gone and how will she feel?

Not that I'm saying I want her guilty.

Not that I'm saying I am not grateful(11.37.39)

Nevertheless, in "Divorce," the roles are reversed in this relationship, with the daughter now taking her role in speaking in the style of a dramatic monologue with a misleading title. At first, it appears that the poem is about divorcing parents, but it quickly becomes evident that it is about a young person who wishes to divorce her parents.

The histrionics daughter reveals her deep sorrow at her parents' treatment of her over the years. They never speak a nice word to her to console her; she, on the other hand, is not entirely on the right track; she treats them badly and has no regard for them describing the smell of her " father's breath" like that of the camel. It appears like a lack of understanding and respect has turned the relationship into toxic one . The poem is dramatic, hilarious, and disturbing, with the girl makes direct, assertive, and uncompromising statements:

I want a divorce

[...]

I never chose you

You are rough and wild

I don't want to be your child. All you do is shout

and that's not right.

I will file for divorce in the morning at first light(11.15, 24-28)

The daughter believes she is unnoticed. She suffers from emotional distance and is tired of her parents speaking to her in a way that suggests that they do not understand her. She pursues the ideal and is dissatisfied when her parents do not conform to her expectations. Lack of communication appears to be at the root of this situation that leads to an interior conflict. Beyond minor issues, the speaker is unable to properly convey her challenges. As a result, she employs deception and exaggerated language such as: "I don't want to be your child" (l.26).

The last poem to be addressed is " Gap year," that describes the symbolic and emotional distance Kay feels as a result of her son growing up. There is however, a physical and an emotional gap between them. It is written in the poet's voice and dedicated to her son, Matthew. She discusses his international adventures, which prompts her to dwell on her sentiments regarding his childhood and newfound independence. Though the poem is about a private schism between a mother and her son, it also addresses global themes. She is implying that she will ponder on how our generation can be perceived as having a large generation gap.

She begins the poem with a flash back by reminiscing certain memories of the ultimate mother-son relationship from the weeks leading up to his birth and how delighted she was. Words like "Yesterday" indicates her nostalgia for the past . She recalls their tight relationship even before he was born, referring to him as "my dear stranger".

The second part of the poem is larger in length , suggesting that the experience of tracking Matthew's jounies and awaiting his return is a painfully long and drawn-out one. She describes the progress of his travels and her mixed feelings about his departure where she hardly can recall how he looks like since they have been separated for a long time.

Now, I peek in your room and stare at your bed
hardly able to imagine you back in there sleeping,
Your handsome face – soft, open. Now you are eighteen,
six foot two, away, away in Costa Rica, Peru, Bolivia(II.17-20)

Kay's emotions are conflicting; she wants him to be by her side, to be united with her son, and to feel safe with him. As a mother, she despises being left alone and facing the world with no one alongside her; she even compares her existence alone to the popular movie Home Alone.

I feel like a home-alone mother; all the lights
have gone out in the hall, and now I am
wearing your large black slippers, flip-flopping(II.49-51)

Seeing him "on top of the world", following his ambition and attempting to create a meaningful life for himself, even if it means being separated from his mother, changes her mood to one of happiness and pride. She accepts this eventual separation and is looking forward to see her son in a better place.

My heart soars like the birds in your bright blue skies.
My love glows like the sunrise over the lost city.
I sing along to Ella Fitzgerald, A tisket A tasket.
I have a son out in the big wide world.(II. 52-55)

A mixed sensation to see her son grow up and gradually start to leave her, but she realizes that this is the reality of life, and this is beneficial since it contributes to the construction of healthy individuals who have enough experience to confront life. Recalling the past is made to make it live forever . She compares what she is doing like what her parents did, “It’s not so much that people drown in memories, or that the past is another country; for my parents the past is their future” (Kay, 2012, p. 122).

Conclusion

Based on the earlier discussion, it is obvious that the gap between generations is an important concern in Jackie Kay's poetry. In her poems, she explores five different generations. Each group observes various beliefs, thoughts, values, and tastes that circulate in their environment across a specific historical period. The grandmother and granddaughter symbolize the first group. They have a strong falling gap because they have little in common. The second group is represented by the daughter and her biological mother, who refuses to look for her

daughter and end all possibilities of further communication. The third group is represented by the daughter and her adoptive mother, whose lack of shared understanding and mixing of traditional and modern values cause misunderstanding and widen the gap.

The fourth and fifth groups present the reversed roles as for the mother and her neglected daughter who never makes an effort to bridge the gap between the two a matter that enhances the conflict and makes the mission of finding a solution impossible. The other reversed group, on the other hand, is confusing because what the daughter demands is a better and understanding parents who feel accustomed to the modern world. The last group ,however, has a kind of understanding to the gap or separation if it helps to develop the experiences of them making them even stronger and well improved .

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