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## “One Person, Two Names”: Confluence in Jackie Kay’s Writing

*Une personne, deux noms : la notion de confluence dans les écrits de Jackie Kay*

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- 1 When Jackie Kay was twelve, she wrote an eighty-page story entitled *One Person, Two Names*, about an African-American girl who pretends to be white, a story which already focused on the complex issue of identity which would come to dominate her writing. And indeed, Kay’s writing is about confluence in many ways: as a Scottish writer with a Nigerian father, who often gets asked where she is from by people who “look at her face rather than listening to her voice”, as a lesbian poet challenging heteronormative standards on sexuality, as an adopted child who, like the girl in her story, bears two names,<sup>1</sup> she is situated at the crossroads of our cultural, societal and racial landmarks. In her literary output, Kay, who was made Scottish Makar earlier this year taking over from Liz Lochhead, also works across boundaries by being a writer of poetry, short stories, a novel (to date, with a second novel in preparation), several plays and a memoir. This paper examines how her later writing reflects this position as a racial, cultural and social hybrid. Looking more precisely at her latest collection of short stories *Reality, Reality* (2012), in connection with her memoir *Red Dust Road* (2010) and the poetry book *Fiere* (2011), this article will look at the way Kay reflects on how we define ourselves, but also at the way she transforms the tools that we use to define ourselves. Caryl Phillips, the English writer of Caribbean descent, emphasises the primacy of storytelling when it comes to understanding who we are as individuals, but also as a society:

There is a directness about storytelling, involving as it does human beings as the central players, which means that we often look first to our writers for news of who and what we are. Words cohering into language form the bedrock of our identity, and to explain our human condition, our first port of call is generally words. (2011, p. 57)

- 2 Like Phillips, Kay enrolls the power of words, of storytelling to go over her own dual, confluent identity, but also to render the complexity, the fluidity of our notion of

ourselves. She also makes use of the reverse to confluence, dislocation, and uses literary genres in order to create her own territory and language of hybridity.

## One name, two people: the fluidity of identity

- 3 "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." (Astley, 1999, p. 73) This certainty expressed by Kay that one person can indeed bear even more than two names, is illustrated in her story "The First Lady of Song" from *Reality, Reality*, which covers the life story of a woman who lives through two hundred years, assuming many different identities over this period of time, with different names, different families and different lives. This story shows how Kay reaches beyond the obvious duality in her own identity, as is expressed in the early poem "So You Think I'm a Mule?" (1988). In the poem, which focuses on this narrow definition of identity that Kay keeps coming up against, the narrator is a black Scottish woman whose Scottishness is questioned on account of her blackness:

'Where do you come from?'  
 'I'm from Glasgow.'  
 'Glasgow?'  
 'Uh huh, Glasgow.'  
 The white face hesitates  
 the eyebrows raise  
 the mouth opens  
 then snaps shut  
 incredulous

- 4 When the white woman insists "But you're not pure", the poem concludes, in a bracketed sentence that graphically indicates the placing under erasure that this line of questioning entails, "(So You Think I'm a Mule?)" (Kay, 1991, p. 121). This much-quoted poem sets the foundation of Kay's ethics of identity. As Susanne Hagemann indicates, "[t]o the questioner's either/or logic, the woman opposes her both/and" (1997, p. 325).<sup>2</sup>
- 5 The story entitled "These are not my clothes" revives the idea of a duality of selves in a different context by focusing on the elderly, and turning duality into a weapon to fight the oppression of a system which, in a manner very similar to the patronizing attitude of the white woman in "So You Think I'm a Mule?", tries to suppress the narrator's sense of who she is on account of her age:

She [the nurse] comes again and she says, having a peaceful rest are we? She seems to think there's two of me. It's the only thing I'd agree with her about because there are two of me. There's the one that's sat on this chair and there's the one that's planning the Cardigan. (Kay, 2012, p. 26)

- 6 The "planning"—trying to get a helper to buy a cardigan for her, so that she can at last wear her own clothes—is comically likened to an act of heroic resistance which as and of itself seems to contain the possible overthrow of the oppressive system which so often renders older people invisible and deprives them of any vestigial sense of self. In the poem "Between the Dee and the Don", Kay goes back to the either/or logic in a different context and reflects on this question of personal identity in terms that, as is indicated by the title which is repeated throughout the poem, foreground the notion of confluence:

I was conceived between the Dee and the Don.  
 I was born in the city of crag and stone.

I am not a daughter to one father.  
 I am not a sister to one brother.  
 I am light and dark.  
 I am father and mother. (Kay, 2011, p. 23)

- 7 The anaphoric repetition of the first person pronoun, which insists on the poem as a means to reflect on personal identity, the insistence on defining herself first by negating the standard model of identity, the adoption of the cumulative rather than either/or logic that Hagemann notices about her early poetry, all lead Kay to resolve the dual presentation into a more complex portrayal of identity in the last line,<sup>3</sup> which, in a manner reminiscent of her novel *Trumpet*, slips from identity in terms of race to identity in terms of gender.<sup>4</sup> The poem delineates its own territory for the realisation of this complex image of the self, which Kay borrows from the African tradition, in the shape of an Igbo saying placed before the poem like an epigraph—"The middle ground is the best place to be". This privileged vantage point for a safe overview of who we are is confirmed in the poem's first stanza:

I will stand not in the past or the future  
 not in the foreground or the background;  
 not as the first child or the last child.  
 I will stand alone in the middle ground. (Kay, 2011, p. 23)

- 8 The middle ground is this place which, alone, can grant her individuality, the ability to "stand alone", and to construct this individuality by relying on time, place and ancestry, all those facts which, in Kay's case are ambiguous. The middle ground is a capacity to make opposites meet, or, on the contrary, to shun them. Matthew Brown argues that Kay appeals to what Homi Bhabha has called "the ethics of coexistence", emerging from a "social space which has to be communally shared with others, and from which solidarity is not simply based on similarity but on the recognition of difference" (Bhabha in Brown, 2007, p. 226). Carole Jones also writes about this particular place that Kay finds herself in, the place of being both, and as Kay emphatically reminds us in the poem by starting with a series of negative characterisations, the place of refusal to conform to pigeonholing. Jones sees this as a middle space:

The cross-dresser, like the biracial individual, confounds dominant binary thinking by occupying two categories simultaneously, a middle space which undermines the exclusivity of the categories. (2009, p. 99)

- 9 So this is the challenge for Kay: what kind of voice can articulate the double bind of the middle ground? And indeed, as the adopted daughter of (white) Scottish parents, Kay has to struggle with a voice that knows no precedent, no language that she can build on; she has, to paraphrase Chinua Achebe who inspired her memoir's title, no "red earth with which to build walls"<sup>5</sup> to help her along, as she recounts in an interview:

When I started writing—unless I was writing about black people—I couldn't find a way of expressing my colour on the page because my voice is very Scottish, so I used a lot of blues forms and mixed them up with Scottish forms to create a blues-black voice or a Scottish-blues voice. I still haven't done that to the extent I'd really like to. I'm struggling to find a voice that is unifying. There has to be a way linguistically of finding a voice that captures your own complexities. I envy writers that are half-Jamaican and half-English and who grew up with parents who already have that syntax and language to use, [but] I didn't have any black people growing up around me—no Nigerian blethers, no Jamaican patois. (SRB Interview, 2016)

- 10 This dilemma appears on the epigraph page to *Fiere* which features quotes from both Robert Burns and Chinua Achebe, and again, with *Red Dust Road* which summons Cixous,

Falkner and Achebe, the epigraphs being used as a way to pre-empt the writing by suggesting the duality of the voice of the text or the poems. It is also present in poems that reflect on the necessity for the voice to keep several languages alive, such as "time" for instance, quoted here in its entirety:

The day they forced her to speak  
 their tongue, she lost  
 the black-eyed susan.  
 She went back in  
 time  
 They say her voice is very strange.  
 They tie her hands behind her back.  
 They say repeat after me until  
 she has *no language at all*.<sup>6</sup> (Kay, 2008, p. 80)

- 11 The concluding line to the poem is a warning against depriving people of their own language, coming as it does after three lines which rely on the anaphoric repetition of the oppressive other represented by the pronoun "they", an oppression that is reinforced visually by the capitalisation of the alienating pronoun. The line is also a reflection on the dilemma of having to rely on a dual voice that does not exist. There seems to be a suggestion that the voice is not available to the woman not just for reasons of personal circumstances, but also because the either/or logic—or, to take up Kay's own words, the one person one name logic—leads to the suppression of one voice by another, more powerful one which aims to take over and in the process forecloses the possibility for true expression. In *Reality, Reality*, Kay offers a fictional solution to this dilemma in a way consistent with her love of music in her attempt to create what she calls a Scottish blues form. In the magic realist story "The first Lady of Song" she enrolls both music and time to synthesise the hypothetical voice she is striving for. What characterises the protagonist therefore, is not the usual markers of identity, such as name or age, but music, in a way that literalises Kay's comment that she has "always been interested in the way music tells the story of identity" (Astley, 1999, p. 73). Emilia Marty who, at some point in her life, was also Ella, as well as Elina, Eugenia, or Ekatarina exists, explains and understands life through music; over the years she sings Moravian Folk song, classical arias in the 19th century through to jazz in the 20th, and back to classical music,<sup>7</sup> until the moment when, as her last self Emilia says, "my voice is deeper now" (Kay, 2012, p. 42). It is a voice that has absorbed and synthesised the music of the past, a voice that can confidently account for the fluidity of the various identities she has had over the years. Crucially it is an artistic voice, most suited to capturing complexities, which Kay calls for in her poem "Imagine":

seeing languages in shapes  
 before your eyes – dynamic  
 and metrical – forcing  
 you to focus;  
 your conversation a spatial relationship  
 between mouth, eyes and hands.  
 The space between the planets.  
 And somebody telling you, *that's miming*  
*that's pantomime*. Somebody who  
 cannot separate a word  
 from a thought.  
 All this (Kay, 2008, p. 80)

- 12 This "imagined" voice is performative, it can fulfil the metaphorical task of covering the space between planets, a task that requires effort, as is indicated by the breaking up of the lines into asyntactic or asemantic units. The effort thus required of the reader to recompose, reconstitute the meaning of the verse evokes the effort required to break open the singular, restrictive connection between one word and one thought, one name and one girl. This alone can convey the fluidity of identity which the magic realist postulate in the short story makes possible,<sup>8</sup> along with a very physical mark of this fluidity, the gradual darkening of Emilia's skin, which she reflects upon at the end of her fifth life:

Now, my skin is dark black. Emilia Marty has dark black skin. I'm rather in awe of it. It is not transparent, it is not translucent, but it is shimmering. I wear a great dark skin now, like a dark blue lake, like a lake at night with a full moon in the sky. (Kay, 2012, p. 43)

- 13 The incantatory rhythm which successfully turns language into "shapes" foregrounds the injunction made in the poem to "imagine". The story therefore goes against the grain of the racist attitude Kay meets with in such early poems as "So You Think I'm a Mule?" and "In my country", with the counter-suggestion that blackness can only be achieved after years of evolution, an ironical reinterpretation of Oscar Wilde's portrait which obviously serves as a backdrop to the story. It is a quiet statement of resistance to the forces of colonisation,<sup>9</sup> even though Kay is only mildly optimistic about this issue, as is indicated by the use of the verb "to wear" to refer to the character's black skin, as if it were put on rather than an intrinsic characteristic of the subject. But in spite of this restriction, the point is made that the "deeper" voice allows her to finally *be* black.
- 14 And indeed, the voice of synthesis that Kay calls for in the above-quoted interview is a voice that can incorporate Scottish vernacular, the Scottish tradition, and African culture and language, but it is a voice that is also the voice of fiction which, as such, can enrol some formal and narrative characteristics that will also foreground the principle of confluence. In the story "Mind Away", the protagonist Claire is with her mother Nora who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, and who complains that words have "run off with somebody else" (Kay, 2012, p. 134). Claire, a writer who simultaneously with having a conversation with her mother, is working on a story, or rather, letting a story flow to her as she admits that "Sometimes, I'd find myself typing a sentence that would surprise me" (*ibid.*, p. 136), finds herself transferring her mother's illness, and even her very words, onto a character who, in real life, is Nora's doctor. The middle ground in this case is a sort of metaleptic in-between zone in which theoretically real-life characters are transferred onto ambiguously fictional ones, and the voice is the voice of fiction. This middle ground becomes a confluent space in the sense that it brings together ontological spheres that can't interact. As a trace of the profound disturbance stirred by the mingling of the two ontologies, the characters who trample the middle ground sometimes do it at the expense of the coherence of their own world:

Dr Mahmud was sitting in his surgery with a patient, Peter Henderson, when Doctor Mahmud suddenly said, 'I'm finding I don't like wearing tights anymore. It's a hassle pulling them up and over my ankles, my knees. I'm that exhausted when I've hoisted them over my knickers that I've lost the will to live. Time *Sheer* and I parted company.' (Kay, 2012, p. 136)

- 15 What is underlined in this extract is precisely the discrete characteristic of the worlds thus brought into contact, both fiction and reality rather than either fiction or reality. If we add to that the fact that yet another ontological level comes into contact with this

dualist world, the real world of Jackie Kay's biography, in which her birth mother suffered from the illness depicted in the story,<sup>10</sup> the middle ground becomes a point of confluence, not just in the sense of two stories and two worlds brought together, but of a territory that all ontologies can occupy.

- 16 Jackie Kay writes in *Red Dust Road* that the imagination is the faculty that enables us to make sense of our lives (2010, p. 49), which is very much what Vadnie in "Mrs Vadnie Marlene Sevlon" does by making up an entire family for herself. In "Mind Away" imagination becomes the virtual but very valid place of encounter, where worlds as disparate as the author's life, her story's primary and secondary diegetic levels can, between them, recreate the truth of who one is, and what one is made of. In the same way that the reader is made to realise in "Mind Away" that the good doctor is indeed a creature of the writer's imagination, we equally come to realise that our "reality, reality" needs to be displaced to a place where we can actually understand it, even if it does not make any immediate sense. And the words slipping away from the mother convey the urgency of the task undertaken in the story: if one is to make sense of the "gobbled gook" (Kay, 2012, p. 142) our lives are made of, we need to cross borders, be they ontological, and use the power of our imagination to inject meaning into them. So when Kay quotes Flaubert's famous statement that "We writers may think that we invent too much – / but reality is worse / every time"<sup>11</sup> it is in fact to reassess it, to adapt it to her purpose, which is to challenge the limits of our notion of "reality", which was a fairly unambiguous—or at least unquestioned—concept when Flaubert was writing, and to show that this challenging is vital, not to measure fiction up against reality as in the quote, but to underline the depth, the hidden dimension that comes into our sense of what is, as Ali Smith writes, "really real life".<sup>12</sup> The epizeuxis of the title to the collection therefore works as a way to suggest a second, vertical dimension which adds depth to our sense of "the real", one that may be added, paradoxically, with the input of imagination, which alone can connect and supply the missing links. In that case, the title "one person, two names" sheds any potentially negative connotation and, rather than suggesting a hankering after unity, becomes an indication that this very duality can be a factor of a heightened, better delineated sense of one's own self. When at the end of "Mind Away", Claire contemplates the snowy landscape and claims that "[i]t was like a fresh sheet of paper, no footprints yet, nothing" (Kay, 2012, p. 158), she lays down the foundations for the artistic, imaginative representation of the middle ground she, and many others, have carved for themselves.

## Writing from chaos

- 17 The middle ground is a flexible, multi-dimensional space, one that can accommodate ontologies, voices and words from different spheres because they all share some formal or thematic characteristic. In his famous essay in the short story as a literary genre, the Irish writer Frank O'Connor stresses what he considers to be its main characteristic: "There is in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not often find in the novel—an intense awareness of human loneliness." (O'Connor, 1976, p. 87)
- 18 Kay, maybe because she is a writer of short stories, but also of poetry and novels, stresses the formal reason for such thematic specificity,<sup>13</sup> and portrays characters whose isolation in their social environment is emphasised. "Mind Away" and "Mrs Vadnie" are cases in point, like "The White Cot", which is a narrative of loneliness and incommunicability, of



the rift that can separate two individuals, as Dionne cannot find a bridge to her partner anymore, owing to her obsession with the child they never had who comes to visit her in hallucinations that take over the whole reality of her life and sever all connections with other humans. Yet the story that best captures this feeling because it contains no pathos is the title story, in which a young woman takes a staycation in order to be a contestant in her own imaginary cooking TV show. The supposedly televised event acts as a reminder to the reader that in this age of communication through social media, reality TV and electronic devices, people end up paradoxically marooned in their own separate understandings of a reality that it is increasingly difficult to tell apart from a shared, common experience. A sort of heightened reality, a "Reality, Reality". The story projects a world where human beings are dehumanised, deprived of names, and where the character is happy to talk to a pretend TV camera. At the end of the story, after being evicted from the pretend show, her words sever any meaningful connection with any sense of her individuality. They are empty words, a parody, or maybe just a repetition of the bad lines that the would-be TV stars we are now familiar with repeat like a mantra in front of the (unfortunately) all too real cameras that capture their speech:

There's no way I'm stopping cooking, I say to the little light in my kitchen that is really the eye of the burglar alarm but could just as easily be the eye of the watching world. No way. I've got my dreams. I could still turn up trumps and deliver the goods. (Kay, 2012, p. 13)

19 Loneliness therefore breeds chaos for characters whose sense of themselves is lost in a distorted sense of what sphere, what world they occupy. They are no longer able to "Imagine - time - distance" to take up the titles of the three poems on language and identity gathered on the same page of the *Darling* collection.

20 *Red Dust Road* also tackles the issue of loneliness, albeit in a more personal way. In the context of discussing her reasons for looking for her birth parents, she explains that in spite of all the love bestowed on her by her adoptive parents:

[...] there is still a windy place right at the core of my heart. The windy place is like Wuthering Heights, out on open moors, rugged and wild and free and lonely. The wind rages and batters at the trees. I struggle against the windy place. I sometimes even forget it. But there it is. I am partly defeated by it. (Kay, 2010, pp. 45-6)

21 In an interview, Kay again expresses this idea of the windy place at the core of her heart, and crucially links it with the impulse to write:

What is interesting is creating a form, and working with it, and through that you make sense of chaos. That's the challenge for me as a writer, confronting emotional and difficult things that have happened to you, and turning them into a sonnet, a memoir or a monologue. (Beyer, 2010)

22 What is conveyed in *Red Dust Road* is this idea of writing as, to quote Janice Galloway, an act of "weaving a route through chaos" (Galloway, 1994, p. 5). By going over the constantly changing story of her life, Kay writes to turn her messy, chaotic life into a stable story, a personal myth, if only temporarily so, because as she explains, "[y]ou think adoption is a story that has an end. But the point about it is that it has no end. It keeps changing its ending" (Kay, 2010, p. 46). But because of the windy place that fills her heart, the movement works both ways for Kay, and she also has to turn to myth, the static image she has of her birth father, and breathe life into it. On a visit to Aberdeen where he met her birth mother, she starts from myth in order to reconfigure chaos:

Slowly, it seems the statuelike figure I had in my head emerges from the stone, and he is part flesh. He's not a person that has been turned into mythical stone, but a

mythical stone statue that is turning into a person before my eyes. (Kay, 2010, p. 138)

- 23 The stakes are high on a personal level, as writing this particular tale into being, as she explains in *Red Dust Road*, is a case of obtaining her birth father's recognition which, alone, can finally solve the "One person, two names" puzzle:

I close my eyes and make a wish. I wish that everything will go well in Nigeria.  
I wish that my father will like me. I wish that I'll return whole. (Kay, 2010, p. 166)

- 24 So weaving a route through chaos for Kay is a question of tracing a way from dislocation to recognition and wholeness, with her writing a back and forth movement between the two poles, in effect configuring the middle ground, creatively imagining it into existence.

## The space of writing

- 25 In order to create the middle ground, Kay uses form, and as a poet and short story writer, she uses the particular confluence that she sees in the short story as a genre:

The short-story is the hybrid form: it's a cross between the novel and the poem. It shares poetry's love of metaphor and the image, with the novel's love of the camera wide-angle-lens. (O'Malley, 2004)

- 26 And indeed, one major characteristic of the genre results from the double nature of the short story, its lyricism combined with its narrativity, which makes Pierre Tibi describe it as a hybrid genre. Tibi concludes, "the short story therefore seems to be the place where the rivalry between the poetic and the narrative, the spatial and the processive aspects, plays itself out".<sup>14</sup> The rivalry or, if one reverses the perspective, the confluence manifests itself in Kay's short stories as well as poems, to reveal human loneliness and underline Kay's particular territory, but also to fulfil a function often noted about the short story, which O'Connor describes as that of depicting the life not of a hero, but of what he calls "a submerged population group" (1976, p. 86). Kay herself makes a very similar point in the *Scottish Review of Books* interview:

I think what writers often do is give voice to the voiceless. The voice might be a piece of land, or it could be an island or a kind of person who has been ignored, or whose story has not been properly told. I do feel like I'm drawn to creating characters whose stories are not familiar. Toni Morrison said she wrote the books she wanted to read. I feel like that. (SRB Interview, 2016)

- 27 The story "Hassadah" is the most emblematic of this enterprise. It is a story of immigration and exploitation filtered through Hassadah's consciousness, the story of "eight of us [...] hidden first as cargo on the boat, and then in a lorry, inside boxes, where we can't breathe, where we think we are going to die, no air, no water, just the dark" (Kay, 2012, p. 105). Hassadah, who ends up a prostitute, locked up in the Western version of a harem by someone she calls "the King", reacts by cooking a great meal for all the other girls. The meal serves as an act of rebellion for the whole group, in which Hassadah, because of the biblical connotations of her action, as well as her appropriation of language, comes across as the prophet of freedom:

Nell say because she like words like me, not the kind of words the King teach, but other words, a whole world of other words. Yes, I say, smiling to Nell with some *elegance* (another word I learn and like, *elegance*) my head held high. Today I break my fast. I am Hassadah. My name mean morning star. (Kay, 2012, p. 112)

- 28 Armed with the renewed language of poetry and narrativity, the various narrators of *Reality, Reality*, together with Hassadah, can delineate the middle ground, not only by

following horizontal and vertical dimensions but also by exploiting fiction's (and poetry's) potential to the full. Our lives, our "reality" consists in a series of choices and trajectories. Kay's work raises the question of other potential lines and trajectories; it is concerned not only with what is, but with what Kay, borrowing a line from the famous poem by Robert Frost, calls the road not taken:

When I look in the mirror  
I don't see a foreign face,  
no *Heart of Darkness*  
but you, who were with me all along,  
walking the road not taken, [...] (Kay, 2011, p. 2)

- 29 *Red Dust Road*, with its title that focuses on this parallel path, explores the third dimension, the road not taken, trying to map the missing parts of Kay's life. With its particular structure, which breaks the narrative into snippets of time, it reconstructs the road, by making the gaps, the forks obvious, in a literary genre that is more often characterised by its linearity and chronology. *Reality, Reality* also asks the questions of the roads not taken: Vadni does not get the "lucky" story, the road to New York, which was taken by her cousin. Most poignantly, in "the White Cot", Dionne tries to the road not taken, but she loses her sanity in the process, showing that this road, once missed, is irretrievable. But as Kay's poem indicates, the other, the "you", "were with me all along", showing that the road not taken can, somewhere in the background of the road taken, like a shadow road also guide the traveller. Kay, like the figure of the poet in Frost's own poem, who famously concludes that "I took the one less travelled by, / And that has made all the difference", can claim to successfully represent, or at least sketch the shadow road of our lives,<sup>15</sup> for such is the poet's power. It is a crucial task, for, as Carol Ann Duffy says, "poetry is who we are in verse" (Clark, 2016). It is however even more than our lives, as it formulates a territory of encounter, the place that enables us to express our own irreducible humanity. As Caryl Phillips explains:

I believe passionately in the moral capacity of fiction to wrench us out of our ideological burrows and force us to engage with a world that is clumsily transforming itself, a world that is peopled with individuals we might otherwise never meet in our daily lives. As long as we have literature as a bulwark against intolerance, and as a force for change, then we have a chance. Europe needs writers to explicate this transition, for literature is plurality in action; it embraces and celebrates a place of no truths, it relishes ambiguity, and it deeply respects the place where everybody has the right to be understood. (Phillips, 2011, p. 16)

- 30 Like all of Kay's poems, both *Reality, Reality* and *The Red Dust Road* chart the place of no truth that we can all meet in.

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## NOTES

1. The name Jackie was given to her by her adoptive parents; Joy was the name chosen by her birth mother.
2. Hageman concludes that "The woman thus claims the right to a multiplicity of identities, but only in so far as she can live them out to the full." (1997, p. 325)
3. Alison Lumsden suggests that "repeatedly Kay resolves the questions of identity raised in her work via such imagined possibilities, hypothetical constructions which are both open-ended and provisional, suggesting that subjectivity is not fixed into any one position, but is, rather, multiplistic, *elusive* and flexible" (Lumsden, 2000, p. 81), even though, as she reminds us, the main ontological negotiation in Kay's poetry is the interrogation of her own blackness.
4. There have also been studies of how Kay articulates an inclusive sense of citizenship in a devolutionary context. See Matthew Brown (2007, p. 220) on how Kay's work dramatizes the challenges surrounding issue of citizenship in Scotland today by inserting question of race into the contemporary debate.
5. She uses this quote from Achebe as an epigraph to *Red Dust Road*.
6. Significantly, in the book *Darling* which was published in 2008 and gathers poems from previous collections, the three poems about language printed on that same page are entitled "Imagine", "Distance" and "time", making up a sort of summary of Kay's ingredients to identity.
7. The story is of course connected to the way Joss Moody in *Trumpet* successfully creates an identity for himself with his music.
8. It is quite similar to the postulate on which Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is based—the protagonist who lives through several generations. Unlike what happens in Marquez's novel however, there is in Kay's story an attempt to rationalise the events depicted by having the character explain that she is her father's experiment—ironically an equally improbable justification.
9. Kay often refers to Franz Fanon and to Fanon's theories on the adoption of white culture in interviews as well as, more obliquely, in her writing. In *Red Dust Road*, when she encounters her birth father to discover that he is a born again Christian who greets her as his sin being visited upon him, and prays over her for two hours by way of catching up on all the years they have

spent apart, she comments on the scene by saying that she has lost him to white culture: "Christianity has taken away his African culture and given him this. I'm thinking about colonialism and missionaries and not properly listening." (Kay, 2010, p. 6)

10. The similarities go of course much further than just giving a character in a book her mother's illness. Many anecdotes about her birth mother, which Kay shares in *Red Dust Road* find their way into the story, such as when the mother and daughter set off to have a bowl of soup at the mother's church café, which they first have to find because the mother cannot remember where it is, or feeling hungry while her mother talks about the chocolates she was given especially for her visit.

11. Epigraph to *Reality, Reality*.

12. Epigraph to *Reality, Reality*.

13. For Kay too, loneliness suits the short story as a form.

14. "Ainsi la nouvelle semble être le lieu et l'enjeu d'une rivalité entre le poétique et le narratif, l'ordre spatial et l'ordre processif." (Tibi, 1988, p. 15)

15. In the SRB Interview, Kay expresses her fascination for what she calls "the shadow life, the shadow road", adding that "There is something disquieting and at the same time exhilarating about that, the breath-taking road you might have missed." (SRB interview, 2016)

## ABSTRACTS

This article examines the many ways in which Jackie Kay's writing is about confluence: as a Scottish writer with a Nigerian father, as a lesbian poet, as an adopted child, she is situated at the crossroads of our cultural, societal, racial landmarks. Looking more precisely at her latest collection of short stories *Reality, Reality*, as well as to her memoir *Red Dust Road* and some of her poetry, this article looks at the way Kay, by starting from duality, delineates a territory for the definition of the self which she calls the "middle ground" and which, as she explains in her memoir, has to be constructed with a voice that knows no precedent; it is also a voice that fuses together reality and fiction. Kay's fiction and her poetry probe the depth of our notion of reality, and of "the windy place" our identity sometimes stems from. Finally, the space of confluence for Kay is also a space of writing, which helps her explore what she calls "the road not taken".

Cet article examine les différentes formes de confluence qui constituent l'écriture de Jackie Kay. Auteur écossais dont le père est nigérian, poète lesbienne, enfant adoptée, Kay se situe aux confins de nos repères culturels, sociétaux et raciaux. En partant de son dernier recueil de nouvelles *Reality, Reality*, de ses mémoires *Red Dust Road* et de certains poèmes, cet article se penche sur la façon dont Kay, en partant de la notion de dualité, trace un territoire identitaire qu'elle nomme « *the middle ground* ». Ce territoire, ainsi qu'elle le déclare dans ses mémoires, postule une voix qui ne connaît aucun précédent ; c'est également une voix qui mêle réel et fiction. Les œuvres de Kay sondent les profondeurs de la notion identitaire, de ce qu'elle nomme « *the windy place* » dont elle procède. L'espace d'écriture qu'elle bâtit l'aide ultimement à explorer ce qu'elle décrit comme « *the road not taken* ».

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Jackie Kay, identité, confluence, dislocation, poésie, nouvelle, mémoires

**Keywords:** Jackie Kay, identity, middle ground, confluence, dislocation, poetry, short stories, memoir

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