

Sexuality as a Diasporic Element in Bernardine Evaristo's *Mr. Loverman*

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Abstract:

African literature explores the diverse issues of everyday human life. In particular, African post-colonial diasporic fiction uses sexuality to find a true life. In the fiction written by African Diasporic women writers, it is a fundamental diasporic element. The famous Booker Prize winner African Diasporic women fiction writer Bernardine Evaristo's *Mr. Loverman* is written in a similar ideology. LGBT, Racialism, Displacement and Black European History are a crucial part of sexuality. Bernardine Evaristo's *Mr. Loverman*, as the intersection between old age, queerness, and race is one that isn't traditionally explored in literature. The fiction engages with themes of Anti-Gay Bias, Violence, and the Fear of Coming Out; Deceit, Desire, and the Repression of Emotional Truths; and the Importance of Community to Marginalized People.

Keywords: LGBT, Racialism, Displacement and Black European History

Introduction:

Bernardine Evaristo is the African Diasporic writer of eight works of fiction and verse fiction concerning the African Diaspora, as well as two nonfiction publications. Her work *Girl, Woman, Other* won the Booker Prize in 2019. In her writing, she frequently juxtaposes the past with the present, fiction with poetry, the real with the fantastic and reality with alternate realities.

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Queer perspectives on space and time develop in this fiction, in contrast to traditional ideas about sexuality, close relatives, and procreation. Hetero-normality was coined by Michael Warner in 1991 and it affects these kinds of establishments. Although scholars have given the term many different meanings, they all agree that it refers to an ideological social structure. It is more specifically an ordered structure within society. This social structure establishes and maintains standards for what constitutes appropriate behaviour in daily life and assigns rewards and punishments based on people's presumed gender and sexuality. Consequently, hetero-normality not only assumes that hetero-sexuality is superior to other forms of sexuality but also specifies the exact gender specific behaviours. Here, it is expected that individuals must participate in this sexual course. This implies that men and women are taught to act in mutually beneficial manners that are specified based on their gender. Difficulties create when a person's demands start to conflict with cultural norms. Expectations derived from one identity marker (such as race) cannot be reconciled with requirements resulting from another (such as sex). Therefore, individuals, who exhibit conduct that diverges from conventional gender norms, are susceptible to bias, slander, aggression and in the most life-threatening situations, assassination. 69 UN member states still criminalize and stigmatize same gender sexual behaviours, according to an International Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-gender, and Inter-sex Association study (ILGA). Juan Ignacio Cortés, a writer for Amnesty International Spain, makes reference to this report in his piece that was released on 28 January, 2021. The study reveals that five other states are considering implementing the death penalty, and that six of these governments recognize it as a valid form of punishment for the aforementioned crimes. Moreover, he claims that LGBT people are often the focus of hate crimes due to their gender identification and sexual preference.

It is simple to observe how the text utilizes queer time and space. Barrington, the protagonist of a story, does this without recognizing it since he is not someone, who simply follows social standards. It is accurate that as he attempts to maintain those values in some situations, he does not in many others. These values lead to a kind of on-going internal dispute that is related to both his quest for self-identity and his sense of belonging. Sexual orientation actually results from unique and peculiar temporalities, innovative life plans and non-traditional economic activities, in opposition to the homo-sexual mechanism. The most recognizable way that Barry expresses his queerness is not through adherence to a single dialect; rather, as a self-taught person, he regularly shows off his ability to speak in queer languages like Standard English, French and even Latin.

His adoption of dialect, according to writer, was mainly intended to help readers understand him better as a black Caribbean man; his language, diction, and syntax are instruments that he employs to develop a far more realistic character that may live outside of his narrative. She also suggests that writing a work of fiction in dialect transforms it into a literary dis-obedience with political implications.

Barry expresses his LGBT identity through his actions as well. He is a 74 years old married man with a family, begins to engage in events like a young person at the opening of a book 'The Art of Marriage'. This is surprising because he is not following the typical roles. Furthermore, his traveling companion, Morris is disrupting hetero-sexual schedules. In fact, he disapproves of the notion that he should be happy to be a grand-father and enjoy an old man's life. An author insists that despite the fact that his community sees him as a husband, father, and grand-father, his identity is a homo-sexual recreation of his great grand-fathers, dads, and grand-fathers. In the music hall, he and Morris find an innovative method to escape reality and a sense of independence. In addition to being a married party creature, Barry is a gay man, who hasn't come out to the public recently. He is not lying on Carmel, as one might expect from a hetero-sexual man, despite what she believes. His concealed lover must be a woman because, as a male Black Caribbean, he defies gender standards. He is not accepted as gay, unlike Morris; in fact, he is disconnected from this group of individuals. This is exactly separates him unique. He maintains this perspective for most part of a novel; only toward the conclusion, does he actually stray from it? Even though he does occasionally show some empathy for gay people.

He refuses because it causes him internal turmoil since he would have to put himself in a similar position if he confessed that he is a gay. Put another way, he acknowledges his attraction to men, but he doesn't think of the anti-man as a metaphor for himself. Because he transcends categorization, he is just further proof of queerness. Barry says he is not a less of a man since he has sex with males, according to Lucinda Newns. He challenges the mainstream gay discourse even though he is a highly masculine protagonist, who constantly discusses the few ways that he can identify as a queer Black man. It encourages coming out and welcomes gay brotherhood. A novelist contends, however, that the condition Fred D'Aguiar describes in his essay, 'Home is Unbelongingness', which is mental tremulousness or a feeling of inadequacy in relation to time and place combined with a neurotic demeanour. She claims that his feelings of inadequacy are not racial in nature; rather, they are a result of his self-denial and inability to fully accept his homo-sexuality. As such, he would prefer to consider himself a Barry- sexual, who created a new brand category. Barry's subsequent change of heart toward Morris, despite his initial lack of interest in him, is a different factor that keeps him from conforming to the standards of homo-sexuality. But before this happened to him, he was afraid to leave his comfortable surroundings because he believed that leaving his home and neighbourhood would be a terrible experience.

There is a sense of community conveyed by these two remarks. According to some psychiatrists, humankind cannot exist without a sense of belonging, as without it, individuals would lead solitary lives, only coming together to have children and propagate. The primary issue is that social ties serve as a safety net that helps people manage their stress, making it impossible for people to separate the value of feeling like a part of a community from their mental and physical health. When people feel that others are pulling for them, they can manage difficult situations better. Barry is hesitant to come out as gay since he feels unsupported by his family and fears rejection from his community. Each of these incidents stresses him out because that's just what people do. He adds that he genuinely loves living in his home and that he is deeply anchored in it.

It would be like disassembling him and reassembling him in a different, frigid environment if we moved. Houses don't necessarily become homes, according to Barry. They have to live for a long time before they can relax. He's emphasizing his inability to leave his home because it would be like bidding adieu to a part of him. One of the most important points, Caroline Koegler highlights in her scenario analysis is: The home and home-making serve as metaphors for the inclusion of persons of color in the novel form. In addition, Barry suggests that one of the reasons he isn't moving out that he used to Carmel cleaning and cooking. This makes it clear that leaving the hetero-normative home environment is fraught with fear and uncertainty. He seems disinterested about his wife's sadness or the tension that has caused in their marriage. I push the door open, stuff the key into the lock, then wait extravagantly. Carmel used to bolt it sometimes, which meant I had to drag my ass over the side gate and wait for day-light to rise and her fury to fall on the lawn-mower in the shed. I had to kick down the garden side door, once before I could tell her that she could no longer keep a king from entering his realm.

In an attempt to assert his dominance over his wife, Barry rebels against her and attempts to act like a real man. Being the chief of the home, he will not consent to his wife leaving him to sleep outside. Both actions fit the mould of gender stereotypes. He is showing, on the one hand, how a man may use force and his might to achieve his goals, in this case, breaking into the house. However, Carmel loses control over the situation because her punishment is ineffective; after all, Barry is a true owner of the house.

Eventually, he comes to the realization that leaving the house would be worthwhile in order to end a terrible marriage between him and Carmel. He initially dreams of a gay house and a civilization free from hetero-sexual and dogmatic societal mechanisms as he begins to seriously explore getting a divorce in Carmel. Everywhere we wish to be called home is OK. Miami, what say you? There looks like a poofah to everyone. It might be time for us to relocate to a luxurious Florida bungalow with a lawn sprinkler system and a butler, who serves us aperitifs while clad just in his boxers. Though Barry still harbours prejudices against homosexuals, he feels that Miami is an ideal location for him and Morris to relocate because of its gay community. This is essential because, as he puts it derogatorily, he is quietly inserting himself into the group of poofahs, a term that has to do with embracing himself because his gender

identity is an essential part of who he is. In addition, Barry encounters religious convictions that support the development of heterogeneous attitudes. When Carmel's religious colleagues come over, for example, he gets embarrassed because they are criticizing gays and invading his personal space. After all, a book of Romans says that a man will be executed if he lies to another man just as he does to a woman. Business dealings with women are not any different here. He tries not to get involved in their homophobic conversation, but eventually his oldest daughter Donna decides to voice her views, which Carmel's friends find objectionable. In response, Donna finds herself asked if she wants her son, Daniel to grow up to be an anti-man, to which she is unable to respond succinctly. Barry then answers their inquiries out of instinct.

A protagonist finds it hard to believe he had the guts to conclude such a contentious discussion. He feels assaulted by their harsh comments, thus he is unknowingly responding to homophobia. He replies to this attack, in addition, in his home, where he lives and where he expresses his homo-sexuality. He's been suppressed for a long time, and he won't let anyone into his home, who talks negatively about LGBT people. This makes sense as his home represents his homo-sexual identity, as was previously mentioned. After Carmel's comeback from her trip, she decides to move to Antigua, thus Barry gradually overcomes being afraid to leave her. This suggests that he doesn't have to depart a residence in order to act in a hetero-sexual fashion despite his homo-sexuality. Remember that he may have been trying to find a middle ground between different cultures when he previously refused to give up his home and way of life in favour of living an exclusively LGBT existence.

This is due to the fact that both the white gay society and the black community discriminate each other, hence an individual may move somewhere in between these two groups. But Carmel's choice gives Barrington a chance to live in and be an integral part belonging to a queer black diasporic society. In a book, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, published in 1996, Stuart Hall makes the case that identities are never solitary but rather a collection of constructs derived from several, usually hostile, discourses, practices, and stances. Later contemporary periods have seen an even greater fragmentation and fracturing of identities: By providing my protagonist these multiple identities that overlap which I think is their own, I sought to write against preconceptions. There's a turning point, where Barrington's actual nature aligns with what most people think of him. Morris doesn't know that his spouse used to be a gay cottager. I always thought he would always defy convention. He's not, for example, the hip young gay man, one would imagine a black gay writer from British literature to be, going out on the weekends to bars in Soho. Additionally, he is not a competent male that would be more inclined to be falsely identified as gay by the broader public, a lawyer or a university lecturer, for instance. Instead, he is a long time working-class factory worker. Despite his childhood, education and profession not fitting the middle-class, he perhaps had middle-class ambitions. Barrington is also a respected husband, father, and grand-father, who live in Hackney, a Caribbean community. In Hackney, Lewisham, Brixton, and Harlesden neighbourhood, one can see men, who resemble him. These are the older black men, who are sophisticated, beret, and bling-eyed, and, who dress up for church, weddings, dances, and funerals. Barrington reconstructs these dads, grand-fathers, and great grand-fathers in a homo-sexual way. Additionally, I didn't want to portray an elderly person, who feels resentful about his time in Britain and, who cries for a long time about early prejudice he experienced. Sara Ahmed describes this persona as representing melancholic migrant's fixation with injury, along with neglect, poverty, and remorse. His daughter Maxine reminds her father, "I inherited my happiness and I'm preserving it." He is an independent man with assets, who is humorous, full of life and optimistic. There aren't many rich black man images in British literature or the media.

He is a wealthy landlord, which is another surprising aspect of who he is. His age does not deter him either. He has kept his youthful attitude of hedonism and is in good physical shape. Barrington sometimes even adopts the demeanour of a raver. Evidently, he includes being gay as one of his identities. His sleeping around is the only thing that worries me. Though he exclusively engages with men, he is a participant in the cottaging civilization that resulted from the prohibition of homo-sexuality, much like Selvon's men. His player persona makes him more strongly depicted as homo-sexual. As per Hall's definition, stereotyping is restricted to a limited set of principles that are dictated by a limited set of simplified characteristics. Through the use of Morris and my protagonist, I hope to demonstrate that I have moved above these simplistic portrayals of black men in literature. Barrington might seem like an ordinary old Caribbean man, but I hope he defies preconceptions.

Conclusion:

In this paper, the researcher tried to portray sexuality as a diasporic element throughout LGBT and cultural experience of black African protagonist, Mr. Barry in European countries. Here, *Mr. Loverman* is a poignant, witty, and deeply humanizing novel focusing on Barrington Jedidiah Walker, a 74-year-old Caribbean-Londoner, who leads a double life as a flamboyant gay man while married to a religious woman, Carmel.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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