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Kelly 4 Shannon 4eva

Abstract

This work is a creative writing exploration of one person's intersectional trans* experience – a perspective currently underrepresented in Young Adult (YA) fiction – and told through first-person point-of-view. The work uses humour as an inclusive tool for both trans* and broader readership, as well as being a place for trans* identification – particularly female-to-male (f2m). It does not discount the struggles of multiple subject positions, but disrupts and troubles negative associations by inserting an alternate conversation. One that emphasises resilience, and the importance of support in the acquisition of agency.

Biographical note

Gyps Curmi is a PhD student in creative writing with the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southern Cross University. Gyps won the University Medal in 2013, and has had a number of short stories published. Gyps has an interest in intersectional subjectivity through speculative fiction writing and is currently writing their PhD thesis using gender-neutral language.

Keywords

Creative writing – Trans* – f2m – intersectionality – Young Adult

It's funny how you don't realise how bad the things you live with everyday are 'til you leave.

I think I was lucky though – living on the edge of town instead of being locked up in the middle. Dad raised me the best he could. We had a flaky, weatherboard up the far end of Bent Street, past the no limit signs. I liked the name, 'cause it talked about me, without me having to say anything. Like a private joke.

If it hadn't been for the school bus, I probably wouldn't have gone into town at all. It was too far to ride my pushy, especially in the summer heat, but I promised Dad I'd go to school to keep welfare away.

Don't even know if the old house is still there, it was falling down even with us both in it. Dad never drank, but he wasn't there much either. He followed the shearing a lot. I loved his lanolin soft hands. They made me smile when he let me run my fingers over them. I felt close to him then, for a little bit. They were so different to the rest of his hard strong body. He never hit me with them much either, except if I didn't keep the house looking alright or he found me wearing his clothes.

I couldn't help that. I especially loved wearing his suit. I liked how it looked, and how good it made me feel. He never wore it. Not since Mum left. But I don't like thinking about that too much. Neither of us did. So it sat there heavy in the place where our love should be.

I hated school. I hated having to wear a uniform and being picked on for looking different, or not wearing a uniform and getting shit for wearing the wrong clothes. But I could take what they dished out to me. It's what they said about Mum I hated most. I was always getting into trouble for smashing someone when they tried to slag her off. It wouldn't have been easy for her to leave. To leave him. To leave me. She was really brave, I reckon, coming all this way from some tiny little island in the Mediterranean. I looked up where Malta was in an atlas at school once. It's miniscule. Some maps don't even have it on them. But Mum used to tell me that Malta was actually five islands. Imagine that. One day I'm going go there and see for myself.

Mum was so proud of herself marrying an Aussie she chose instead of the Maltese boy her aunt tried matchmaking her with. She never knew then though, that Dad would take her all the way across the Great Divide to this barren hole of a place. Where catheads prickles lance through your thongs as easily as if they were made of Wonderwhite bread. She hated them, and all the scary things that bit, like redbacks and snakes, and the born-and-bred locals who wouldn't accept her because she wasn't the same as them.

Dad took Mum away from the only family she had in Australia, and away from the concrete safety of Sydney with its dance halls she loved so much. I didn't know for a long time where she went after she left us. I'd get postcards now and then, but they were always stamped from different places so Dad couldn't track her down. He tried once or twice, but then gave it up.

I'm not in Barraba though anymore – not since Dad died while away shearing – got himself killed by a bloody randy ram, down Rangari way. It was hard, losing them both, but it also meant I could finally leave. I'm not like Mum, though, can't stand cities. But Sydney was sweet for a while, to learn that I'm not the only one like this. That it's ok to be me.

But I do have to talk about those times in Barraba. Let folk know what it's like growing up and being in a place that's so far away from city technologies and influences that most people still don't even have computers, or see much outside their own beliefs and experiences. And where being a square peg sux big time. So I'll tell you the story of my leaving, which was hard. It's hard to leave when you're leaving the only person who understands you behind.

'You can't go.'

'I know, but I'm going anyway.'

Kelly starts crying and I hold her close to my bound chest. I can feel a cathead prickle under my bum and try to brush it out without disturbing her too much. Her tears are starting to sog through my shirt.

'Come with me. Please.' My eyes are getting all hot and burny. Geez, I think I'm going to start bawlin' like a girl myself in a minute. You know I'll die if I have to stay here.'

I'm glad we're lying under our big old peppermint gum, carved with our love, at the back of the showgrounds. Its weeping branches sweep right down almost to ground level. Cocooning us. Hiding us.

Maybe I'm not so different from Mum after all. She knew that staying here would kill her, and it will kill me too. Inside, if not outside, and probably both. And I'm still under age as far as welfare goes.

Kelly hangs her head, avoiding my eye, 'You know I can't come. I can't leave Mum alone.' She looks up. 'Not with him.'

'I know.' My hands ball into useless fists.

A huge roar goes up, and we both know someone's taken a bad fall or been gored if they're riding bulls. But there are no more shouts so I guess not too much damage was done.

I feel Kelly relax against me again. Her little brother's riding tonight and we'll have to go watch soon. He's hoping that riding the circuit will be his ticket out of here. But I don't want to move. I don't want to get up and face the world. I just want to lie here with Kelly in my arms and catheads sticking in my bum forever. When I shut my eyes, still squeezing back the tears, I see rainbows of lights from the Spider ride spin across my eyelids, and hear everyone squealing as it makes that big whoosh sound.

I've got this big empty place inside me and I know it's only going to get bigger. *Please don't let this moment end...ever.* But of course it does.

At least Kelly does it gently. She raises up on her elbow and looks me straight in the face. It's hard to keep looking at her, but I do. I feel shamed that I'm leaving her.

Abandoning her. So I keep looking back at her, looking into her eyes. Both of us seeing into the depths of each other's souls. Connecting real deep. Deeper than sex even. She's the only person I've ever done this with, been this intimate, and it's breaking my heart all over again. This time I really do cry. Blubbering away like a little baby. And it's Kelly holding me. Stroking me.

'I love you, Shannon,' her breath's a whisper in my ear.

I can't say nothing. Just sob like the Split Rock Dam's been ruptured. As if I'm some stupid little kid who doesn't know any better. When I finally snivel myself dry, Kelly rolls on top of me and I really do have to get that cathead prickle out. She laughs at me wincing and flailing, but she doesn't get off me, just lies there chuckling low and deep in her throat. It's finally out and even though I thought I was too heartbroke to want sex, Kelly starts slowly, rhythmically, ever so gently grinding against my body. Her fingers entwine mine and pin them to the ground above my head and another cathead prickle digs in, but I'm past being able to even feel it now. I'm just looking at her. Feeling her. Loving her. Watching that slow sexy smile that always melts me, turn into something more.

Then another roar goes up and I feel Kelly tense, worried for her brother. The spell just broke and we both know it.

Kelly gives me a gentle kiss on the mouth and I pull her back as she goes to get up. I want the magic to come back but it's gone so I don't struggle when she pulls me to my feet.

I try to keep us to the shadows as we head back towards the show. Out of the lights, and noise and dust. But Kelly takes my hand and walks into the glare of the lights, proud and smiling, and just daring anyone to say something. It makes me feel like I'm worth something, just to be with her. I stand up tall and walk next to her. For a while I can even ignore all the looks and the snide whispered remarks.

'Bull-dyke!'

'Lezbo'

'Wog-slut!'

I can feel my fingers balling into fists again and my lip curling and I'm tempted to turn and punch out whoever makes the next sound. But Kelly's just walking like she can't hear nothing and she looks at me smiling with that wicked grin she gets. She pulls me close so our arms are round each other and suddenly that empty place inside me is filled with her warmth. I don't give a shit about what anyone says. It's our last night together and nothing's going to spoil it. I'm at the annual show with my girl and I'm going to win her that big stuffed unicorn she wants so bad from the shooting gallery, so she's got something to hold onto when I'm gone. Something to remember me by. To keep our hope and our love alive 'til I come back for her like I promised. A proper man.

Endnote

1. The asterisk in *trans** comes from computing language. It represents a “wildcard”. That is, the asterisk indicates that any number of other characters may be attached to the original prefix. Thus, the asterisk is used to indicate all the gender positions, from drag queen to genderqueer, that fall outside traditional gender norms.

Research statement

Research background

This work entwines multiple intersectional subjectivities (McCall 2005), through the trans* (Elliot 2010) protagonist's migrant, class and regional identities; weaving autobiography with contemporary accounts of trans* youth subjugation (Clare 2010). The story disrupts tragic 'Othering' tropes of victimhood by offering hope through support, with a resilient trajectory towards agency. Here, I use the term trans* as an umbrella term following Elliot to 'refer to anyone whose expression of gender disrupts conventional assumptions of the gender order and who identifies as such (2010: 1).

Research contribution

The story foregrounds trans* experience through use of the first person. Trans* protagonists, particularly f2m, are underrepresented in Australian YA fiction (Lo 2013). Written with humour, this story creates an accessible place for trans* youth identification, without trivialising the problems, or the importance of support in acquiring agency (Clare 2010: 464-65) in repressive socio-cultural environments.

Research significance

'Coming out' is often fraught for trans* youth. Geographical barriers to gender confirmation treatments, internalised trans*phobia and religious 'conversion therapies' compound barriers to acceptance by the individual, community and state. Because trans* lives often end tragically, more trans* characters as main protagonists in YA will encourage self-acceptance and inclusive conversations within the Australian YA landscape.

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