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**Imagining Transgender: Reinscriptions of Normativity in
Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet***

Abstract

Over the past years the portrayal of transgender images and issues has become part of Anglo-American mainstream literature and film. Though this development, at first sight, seems to be a sign for a growing acceptance of transsexuality and -identity among audiences and readerships, portrayals of transsexual characters still often seem to employ various strategies of 'normalization', i.e. they attempt to relocate those characters and their bodies within traditional binary gender paradigms in order to render the characters' 'queerness' acceptable for a mainstream audience. My paper will analyse the portrayal of gender and identity in Duncan Tucker's road movie *Transamerica* (2005) and Jackie Kays award winning novel *Trumpet* (1998). Following Miriam Frotscher I will suggest that mainstream films and texts still seem to be doubtful about their audiences' readiness "to question their binary frameworks of knowledge regarding to sex and gender". In particular, I will argue that a common strategy for realigning trans characters into a hetero-normative gender framework draws on the narrative employment of romantic notions of love and family.

Keywords: Transgender, Gender Passing, Narrative Structure, Staging Identity, Strategies of Normalization, Mainstream Cinema.

Transgender in Mainstream Culture

In 1997 famous sitcom star Ellen DeGeneres announced her homosexuality both on the *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and in a subsequent episode of her sitcom, *Ellen*, in which her character finally realizes, accepts, and publicly declares that she is gay. As one of the first major TV celebrities to literally enact her coming-out, DeGeneres is seen by many as a pioneer in the struggle against gay and lesbian discrimination in the United States. The coming-out episode won DeGeneres an Emmy. Yet, the immense and controversial media attention subsequently targeted at her homosexuality eventually caused ABC to cancel the show. A year later the actress found herself without a job.

DeGeneres' career is interesting as it seems to mirror a more general development in popular media culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Seventeen years after her coming-out, DeGeneres is back in the limelight and one of the most successful and popular TV hosts in the United States. [1] Other gay celebrities have openly discussed their sexuality in the meantime; same-sex marriage has been institutionalized in Great Britain and several U.S. states; and successful movies such as Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids are Alright* (2010) have introduced non-heterosexual life and love to the cinematic mainstream. Moreover, other forms of non-heterosexual desire have profited from this development. In the wake of the increasing acceptance of gay and lesbian actors and characters, different forms of trans identity have started to feature in an increasing number of media products. [2] From British pop icon Robbie Williams' ironic toying with transsexual images in music videos such as "She's Madonna" (2007) to the transgender characters Adam Torres in the current Canadian teen drama television series *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001-), and Sophia Buset in *Orange is the New Black* (2013-), [3] transgender images and issues have become part of Anglo-American popular culture. [4] This development, at first sight, seems to be a sign for a growing acceptance of transsexuality and -identity among audiences and readerships. However, following Mirjam Frotscher, I would like to suggest that portrayals of sexuality, identity and desire "not easily located in the hetero/homo divide" still tend to be "met with strategies of [...] re-inscribing" non-normative bodies "into exactly the kind of logic that the gender presentation defied" (n.p.). Mainstream portrayals of transsexual characters, in other words, often employ various strategies of 'normalization' (Frotscher), i.e. attempts to relocate those characters and their bodies within more traditional gender paradigms. Their transgressive potential is tamed, their 'queerness' rendered acceptable for a mainstream audience. Drawing on the example of Duncan Tucker's road movie *Transamerica* (2005) and Jackie Kays award winning novel *Trumpet* (1998) I will argue that one of those strategies for

realigning trans characters into a hetero-normative gender framework draws on the narrative employment of romantic notions of love and family. [5]

The two works chosen for this analysis deliberately differ from each other in several respects. Kay's novel is set in England and traces the lifespan of its protagonist from 1927 to 1997, while the movie *Transamerica* shows a road trip through the contemporary United States. The latter portrays a male-to-female transsexual who wants to undergo surgery, while the former is about a biologically female trans person, who spends her adult life passing as a male artist. Despite those important differences, however, there are affinities with regard to the underlying narrative strategies of staging transgender in both works, which are particularly interesting as they seem to cut across different media and different types of trans experience.

2. Queer Gender for A Mainstream Audience: Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica*.

Roland Barthes prophesized that once traditional gender paradigms are blurred “meaning and sex become the object of a free play, at the heart of which the (polysemant) forms and the (sensual) practices, liberated from the binary prison, will achieve a state of infinite expansion” (133). In her monograph *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) Eve Sedgwick, however, takes issue with this belief and draws attention to the remarkable resilience of the gender binary, which in her opinion constitutes one of the structural foundations of Western Culture. In her view, social developments and epistemological insights that foreground the discursive inconsistencies underlying the traditional dichotomy of gender do not necessarily lead to a destabilization of this dichotomy:

[R]ather than embrace an idealist faith in the necessarily, immanently self-corrosive efficacy of the contradictions inherent to these definitional binarisms [e.g. hetero/homo; masculine/feminine etc.], I will suggest instead that contests for discursive power can be specified as competitions for the material or rhetorical leverage required to set the terms of, and to profit in some way from, the operations of such an incoherence of definition. (Sedgwick 11)

The ideological power and pervasiveness of traditional binarisms, in other words, do not depend on conceptual consistency; traditional notions of gender rather display a remarkable ability to re-imagine alternative and transgressive identities along the lines of its binary matrix. A case in point is Ellen DeGeneres and the growing acceptance of homosexuality in popular culture. One of the most popular TV personalities and married to the actress Portia de Rossi, she hardly remains a transgressive element in American society. As Frotscher points out, “mainstream gay and lesbian concerns, like marriage equality or open service in the armed forces, have driven homosexuality away from being a queering or questioning force” (n.p.). The situation is still different for trans persons. No trans male or female has reached a degree of popularity and media presence

comparable to that of DeGeneres. Yet, while trans desire and sexuality still could be a potentially destabilizing force to normative gender images, most media products do not pursue such an agenda. Even though mainstream audiences may have become more open minded (or at least exposed to) non-heterosexual and trans desire, popular films and books seldom ask their audiences to fundamentally question the binary frameworks underlying gender and sex. Drawing on the work of Sedgwick, Mirjam Frotscher argues that in mainstream cinema non-heterosexual desire is only considered acceptable and even readable as long as it can be “located within the dichotomous and complimentary frameworks of sex, gender, and sexuality” (n.p.). Once it threatens to fall outside this framework, narratives engage in a variety of normalization strategies. Her study deals with what she terms ‘strategies of uncovering’ in various films and TV series such as movie *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), directed by Kimberly Peirce and the TV series *The L Word* (2004-2009). Its focus is on the analysis of scenes in which “trans* bodies are brought back to alleged legibility by either relocating the bodies through their desire or by pushing the bodies back into a supposedly natural state” (n.p.).

Taking Sedgwick and Frotscher as a starting point my essay engages with a different set of strategies employed in order to normalize trans identity. In particular, I argue that apart from reimagining trans desire along the lines of homosexual desire, an additional strategy lies in the performative silencing of transsexuality in favour of traditional notions of filial and parental love and obligation. By employing plotlines that divert the recipients’ attention from sexuality to non-romantic and non-sexual types of love, narratives such as Duncan Tucker’s *Transamerica* normalize trans identity by appealing to a supposedly universal, shared humanity.

My first example, Duncan Tucker’s directing debut *Transamerica*, presents the story of Bree Osborne (formerly Stanley Chupak), a male-to-female transsexual living in Los Angeles, whose life revolves around the wish to become ‘fully’ female. The opening scenes show the trans protagonist rehearsing ‘typically’ female ways of speaking and dressing. They introduce the viewers to a character who desperately wants to undergo gender-reassignment surgery. Just as the operation that will change Bree’s anatomical sex has finally been approved, she unexpectedly learns that she has a teenage son called Toby, who has been arrested by the police. Forced by her therapist to take responsibility for the boy who has run away from home after his mother’s death, Bree takes a plane to New York where Toby has been living as a rent boy. Here, she bails him out of prison and convinces him to accompany her on a road trip back to California, all the while concealing her identity and pretending to be a charitable Christian missionary. The ensuing trip across the U.S. takes up a variety of typical elements of the American road movie: Instead of taking busy

interstates, they drive along “winding two-lane highways, and eat in homey little roadside cafes” (Scott), they encounter colourful figures, including “a wise warm black woman, a drunken and depraved hillbilly and a courtly Indian [...], who takes a liking to Bree” (ibid.). They manage to get their car stolen, and eventually those events lead to a foreseeable, slow and reluctant bonding between the two characters. After a series of adventures and their equally predictable falling out after Bree is forced to disclose her ‘true’ identity, they finally reach California. Though the movie refrains from a sugar-coated happy ending in typical Hollywood fashion, it still closes on a decidedly hopeful note: Bree undergoes surgery and contently settles into her new life with an anatomically female body. Furthermore, the final scene stages a tentative reconciliation with Toby in which both characters ‘accept’ their respective roles as parent and son. [6]

With her bodily transformation, made possible by modern surgery, the film clearly relocates the protagonist’s trans identity into the normative category of women. In what Frotscher would call a typical scene of ‘uncovering’, Bree is shown fully nude in the bathtub just before her re-union with Toby, as if to visually remove all doubt about her acquired femininity. The fact that the character is played by an actress (Felicity Huffman) gives this scene additional, extra-textual weight and helps to firmly endorse Bree’s identity as a mother. This scene of uncovering, however, is only one of the strategies employed to stage Bree’s transformation from man to woman. The entire narrative structure of the film, i.e. the road movie scenario, is used to a similar effect.

“Like all good road movies,” as Philip French points out, “*Transamerica* is both a journey in space and time and a journey of the mind and spirit.” Like its title *Transamerica* tellingly suggests, it uses the structure of the road movie to pair “geographic migration/dislocation and gender transition in a process of thematic mirroring” (Keegan 8).

Transgender narratives, autobiographical and fictional alike, have traditionally used this motif to signify the trans person’s movement toward self-acceptance and into an integrated, newly gendered personhood [...]. The trans person is recurrently imagined as both a geographical and gender migrant – moving through uncharted territory and between the poles of intelligible gender. (ibid.)

By the end of the movie, however, Bree’s journey is over. She has not only completed her trip across the US but she has also completed her journey towards female anatomy. More importantly, she has also come to acknowledge her deep emotional attachment to Toby. Felicity Huffman points out in an interview that Bree “thinks the biggest thing she can do is become a woman, and she realizes that the biggest thing she can do is become a parent” (DVD Interview ‘Conversation with Duncan Tucker and Felicity Huffman’, in *Transamerica*). Paternal love—most dramatically staged in Bree’s despair when she thinks that she has ‘lost’ her son after their quarrel—becomes the main cinematic means with which Tucker’s *Transamerica* ensures the audiences sympathy

towards its trans protagonist. The film refrains from staging potentially more controversial issues such as trans sex or romantic love, not to mention social marginalization, discrimination, and inequality. Instead, it relies on the value of family and the transformative power of becoming a parent to ensure a broad audience's acceptance of Bree and her journey. This narrative strategy appeals to a variety of viewers. A. O. Scott, for example, writes in a review for *The New York Times* that the film succeeds in "affirm[ing] Bree's dignity ... [and] liberat[ing] her and others like her from any association with camp or freakishness." Critics such as Cael M. Keegan, however, view the movie's gender politics in a much more critical light. *Transamerica* certainly promotes a liberal acceptance of trans sexuality, but in order to achieve this aim it creates a simplified, one-dimensional representation of trans identity. As Keegan points out, *Transamerica* eschews social and political issues of trans existence and stages a narrative relying heavily on rather traditional social values:

The enduring message of *Transamerica* is that transgender identity can only be authenticated through kinship [...]. It is biological connection, not the political connection of a transgender community or culture [...] that the film stresses as the key to personal liberation and the end to bad feeling. Through this process, the film makes transgender difference consumable for a mainstream audience that is assumed to share a sentimental, romantic ideal of the biological family as the affective centre of national life. (Keegan 12)

Bree's love for Toby, in other words, has to become more important than her wish to become a woman for both her and the movie to gain a large audience's sympathetic approval (ibid.). In this context, the fact that Bree has also completed her journey from male to female anatomy by the end of the story only seems to be a necessary precondition for her to 'fully' become Toby's mother. She is re-integrated into the normative gender matrix with the help of a two-pronged narrative move: biological transition by means of surgery plus the full embrace of parental responsibility become the two complimentary sides of the same narrative coin. They underlie a story that seems to suggest love and the surgeon's scalpel as the ultimate solution for 'curing' gender dysphoria (17).

3. Polyphony, Jazz, and Gender Performance in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*

Another text in which domestic relationships and love constitute central narrative strategies is Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*. [7] Aiming at the British literary market the novel proceeds in a quite different manner and with quite different effect compared to *Transamerica*. The text refrains from presenting a teleological narrative that unambiguously resolves the mystery connected to its trans protagonist. Despite those differences, however, it evokes similar notions of parental and filial love in order to render the protagonist 'acceptable' to the novel's readership. As a result, *Trumpet* is an

interesting hybrid. Its experimental form underlines the performative and multiple nature of gender. Simultaneously, its celebration of family allegiance as a redeeming and supposedly universal value reintroduces traditional notions of gender and family, metaphorically speaking, through the backdoor. In the following, I will first sketch the novel's polyphonic narrative structure and its transgressive dimension before addressing the conservative implications of the very same narrative strategy.

The story of *Trumpet* was inspired by the life of the American jazz musician Billy Tipton. It tells the story of the successful black, male Scottish jazz trumpeter, Joss Moody, who is discovered to have been born biologically female after his death. In analogy to this unusual topic, the novel displays an unusual narrative structure. Similar to Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996), the story sets in only after the death of its protagonist and is rendered alternately from the points of view of different characters. Friends, family as well as a journalist from the yellow press, who is after a sensationalist biography, are among this group of fictional agents. They are placed in the same situation as the reader and are retrospectively trying to make sense of Joss Moody's life.

With the exception of the protagonist's wife Millicent, the discovery of his biological sex comes as a complete surprise to all of the characters in the novel. This includes, most importantly, his adopted, adult son Colman, whose shock and disbelief about the discovery soon turn into rage and anger. In the novel's major scene of uncovering, Colman is unexpectedly confronted with the naked body of his father in the morgue just before the burial. This scene unambiguously presents Joss' body as anatomically female – a revelation that leaves Coleman with the bitter feeling of having been deceived. Unlike the parallel scene in *Transamerica*, the presentation of the protagonist's nude body, thus, does not precede and prepare an act of reconciliation but rather marks the beginning of Coleman's conflict with his dead father.

Another significant difference to *Transamerica* is that Kay's novel does not employ the motif of a journey to stage the crossing of gender boundaries. Instead, it is by showing different characters' attempts to come to terms with the memory of Joss that the narrative reconstructs the protagonist's life and deeply engages with the topic of gender passing, i.e. the ability of an individual to pass for a member of the opposite sex (Kilian 285). For this purpose the novel employs a variety of voices that enable the text to engage in a truly multifaceted literary exploration of the notions of gender, identity and race (Mergenthal 132). The complex and fragmentary novel is composed of thirty-five a-chronologically arranged chapters of various lengths; it features a collage of memories, dialogues, reflections, obituaries, letters, and newspaper clips. Thus, the very form of the text reflects the protagonist's unconventional gender status; it underlines the multifaceted and plural

nature of Moody's identity. In sharp contrast to *Transamerica*, its formal structure explicitly opposes a teleological notion of narrative (Walz 138). Instead, the narrative presents a "plurality of voices who try to make sense of the contradictions of a female body living under a masculine identity" (ibid). This structural device has profound repercussions on the semantic level. Due to the plurality of voices, the personality of Joss "can only be partially reconstructed" by the reader (ibid). "[T]he multiple narratives", according to Lumsden (87), "allow the reader no fixed position by which Joss's constructed identity may be contained." They further signal that "his/her life and death can never be safely delimited through standard teleological narrative modes (ibid.).

Gender questions in *Trumpet*, in other words, are not only explicitly discussed but also implicitly performed by an orchestra of different voices. [8] The polyphonic quality of the novel is further underscored by the musical form of jazz, which Kay consciously chooses both as a thematic and a structural leitmotif.

I wanted to tell a story, the same story from different points of view. I was interested in how a story can work like music and [...] I wanted to write a novel whose structure was very close to jazz itself. So the registrar, the drummer, the cleaner all interested me because they gave the same story a different note. (Kay, "Interview.")

"Jazz", as Lars Eckstein points out, "is, above all things, paradigmatically 'hybrid' in nature" (Eckstein 53). It has therefore often served as a metaphor for "unconventional constructions of identity" (González 89). Kay's choice to draw on Jazz both thematically and structurally, thus, signals a fundamentally performative understanding of gender and identity. [9] In this context, it is not surprising that the text refuses to unveil a number of aspects at the very heart of Moody's gender passing: When and why did he decide to become a passing man? Did the decision have something to do with his career as a musician? Why did he feel it necessary to hide his trans identity from his son? The fact that those questions are not resolved and remain subject to speculation is central to the novel's rendering of gender and love and has interesting repercussions for our reading of the story. On the one hand, the musician's gender and identity remain incomplete and 'in process.' On the other hand, the deliberately frustrated attempt to fully reconstruct Moody's personality and sexuality foregrounds the other characters' and their emotions while they endeavour to grapple with the same questions. As a result, the narrative focus of the novel changes. It turns from a story primarily about Joss Moody into a story also essentially concerned with some of the other characters. Particularly his wife and son, who serve as the text's main focalizers, become protagonists in their own right as they have to "de and re-construct themselves, finding ways to exist after his death" (Lumsden 89).

It is through the thoughts and emotions of these characters that the novel manages to manipulate the audience's sympathy towards the protagonist. While readers trace the interplay of voices in *Trumpet*, they begin to realize that there are essentially two sets of characters: fictional agents who had an intimate personal relationship with the deceased musician, and characters that were not personally acquainted with him. While individuals in the latter group (e.g. the physician, the undertaker, the journalist Sophie Stones) either remain emotionally indifferent or show a merely voyeuristic interest, all members of the first group (e.g. his wife, the housekeeper, fellow musicians etc.) reveal a deep emotional attachment to their late relative and friend. Their points of view unambiguously endorse Joss Moody's musical genius and his kind, compassionate, and likeable personality. It gradually becomes apparent that all of these characters loved the protagonist in their individual way – as band leader, caring husband, friendly employer, or great friend. In the face of this shared positive assessment, the emotional relevance of gender categories appears to step into the background. While the many narrative fragments do not provide exhaustive information about Moody's life and sexuality, they nevertheless enable a decisive emotional assessment of his qualities as a human being. This has ambiguous consequences for our reading of the story.

On the one hand, the narrative seems to negate the relevance of Joss gender and trans identity in favour of his personal qualities. In a sense, this has a liberating effect as it clearly signals that neither the value nor the personality of Joss as a human being are defined by gender and sexuality. The novel seems to suggest that his sex and gender do not matter because he was a great guy. In this context, the story moreover displays tremendous and admirable respect for the practice of gender passing by refusing to pry into the most intimate spheres of its protagonist's life and identity. Questions about Joss and Millicent's sex life, his reasons for becoming a man, or the everyday details of successful gender passing remain disclosed and private. At the same time, the overall emphasis on love and compassion emerging from the array of character perspectives identifies love, affection and empathy as the fundamental qualities defining human nature. [10]

On the other hand, the narrative focus on supposedly shared, universal human values of love is at least in part problematic. First, it relies on rather romantic and normative notions of romantic and paternal love. Second, the redirection of the readers' attention away from the protagonist's trans identity can be read as a strategy for effectively silencing this very identity. Support for this reading can be found in the way the narrative handles the story of Coleman, who is deeply upset by the revelation of his father's biological sex. Although the reader realizes quite early that his resentment is in part an expression of deep insecurities about himself, Coleman's anger seems to be particularly fuelled by a feeling of having been deceived by his father. Apart from being necessary

as a plot device, the fact that Joss and Millicent refrain from informing their son during his youth seems consistent with parenting during this period and reflects the personal risk and the legal problems associated with discovery. Nevertheless, the young man's reaction is also quite understandable. It is less due to his father's trans identity as such, but rather to his father's seeming lack of trust that Coleman feel deceived and betrayed. What is important in this context, however, is the way the narrative deals with the notion of deception that enters the narrative through Coleman's feeling of betrayal: Interestingly, the problem is neither resolved nor explained. Coleman does not have a conversation with his mother who explains their motives, nor is he shown to rationalize their behaviour himself. Instead the text simply continues to re-assert Joss' qualities as a loving parent as it proceeds. Coleman gradually overcomes his anger, starts to trace his father's past, gets to know his father's mother and begins to remember his own childhood. During this process the notion of deception silently recedes into the background; it vanishes behind the deep love and loyalty that ultimately turns out to underlie the relationship between father and son (Walz 148).

The story thus ends on an ambivalent note. By filtering the question of gender passing through the perspective of various characters and their emotions (e.g. Coleman's anger and Millicent's grief), Kay manages to give the story of Joss a high degree of diversity and authenticity. As Halberstam remarks: "The beauty of Kay's narrative is that she does not undo the life narrative of a passing man; rather, she sets out to honor it by weaving together a patchwork of memories from Joss's survivors [...] and making that patchwork into the authentic narrative" (59). In combination with the aforementioned jazz-metaphor, the novel's programmatic refusal to provide unambiguous accounts of the character's, gender or biography undermine the notion of rigid gender categories and suggest the possibility of successfully transcending the binary 'male/female' in a performative way. At the same time, there is an overall emphasis on love and compassion that emerges from the array of character perspectives which identifies love, affection and empathy as the fundamental qualities defining human nature. This emphasis runs the risk of silencing the issue of gender passing – a risk that in the novel is embodied by the character Millicent, who, stricken by her personal loss, refuses to discuss Joss' trans identity. All she wants to do is to mourn her late husband. While this reaction is understandable on a personal and psychological level, its implications for the novel's discussion of gender passing is less clear. Although, Joss and Millicent's decision to leave young Coleman uninformed is somewhat understandable, it nevertheless evokes the uncomfortable and stereotypical notion of the trans person as somebody who 'deceives' others.

4. Conclusion

My analysis has shown that both Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* strategically employ love as a narrative means for staging transgender identity and the passing of gender boundaries. While the former presents a straightforward road movie evoking the stereotypical image of the transformative power of maternal love in order to reach a mainstream cinematic audience, the latter displays a more experimental narrative structure that manages to emulate the performative nature of identity and gender. Though both texts, thus, rely on love as a central narrative element, they use it to quite different effect. *Transamerica's* ending closes the tension between Bree's chosen gender and her biological sex. The film, in a sense, resolves the problem of gender dysphoria by normalising Bree, by transforming her transsexuality into a conventional version of femininity and motherhood. *Trumpet*, in contrast, does not fully resolve this tension. Joss Moody, after all, is dead. His body and his identity can no longer be changed or normalized by means of surgery. Instead the text's fragmentary and polyphonous narrative structure suggests a notion of gender that is transitory and in flux and offers a depiction of the passing man that is rendered with a deep sense of respect and compassion. Still, the novel is not entirely free from evoking potentially problematic stereotypes. In her discussion of trans representations in film, Mirjam Frotscher concludes that

[...] strategies of uncovering [...] are employed to 'make sense' out of supposedly confusing trans* bodies [...]. Thereby these depictions play on what one would have hoped were outdated stereotypes: a) that there is always a truth that can be revealed, b) that biology trumps all else, c) that in order to be loved and to love you need to be clearly identifiable along the binary and d) that trans* people are at least a little deceitful. (n.p.)

There is no question that *Transamerica* and *Trumpet* are both deeply sympathetic to the issue of trans identity and have contributed to the important task of making mainstream audiences familiar with questions of sex change and gender passing. Nevertheless, as the preceding analysis has tried to illustrate, problematic stereotypes and an indirect re-inscription of traditional and normative values can still be traced in both narratives – albeit to a different degree and in different form. The texts thus unintentionally bear witness to the resilience of traditional normative notions of gender, love, and family. Although a more extensive study incorporating many further works would be necessary to arrive at a more comprehensive assessment of the portrayal of transgender in popular culture, the two works analysed in this paper suggest that mainstream films and texts still seem to be doubtful about their audiences' readiness "to question their binary frameworks of knowledge regarding to sex and gender" (ibid.).

Endnotes

[1] Among the many awards won by DeGeneres are thirteen Emmys, fourteen People's Choice Awards and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (2012).

[2] In the following, the term 'trans' is used short for 'transgender' in compounds such as 'trans identity'. The terms 'transgender' and 'transsexuality' are retained in full where they appear alone. Furthermore, they are used more or less interchangeably in the sense of a general umbrella term covering a variety of trans experiences by "anybody who does not feel comfortable in the gender role they were attributed with at birth, or who has a gender identity at odds with the labels 'man' or 'woman' credited to them by formal authorities." (Whittle 2006: xi). For a more detailed account of different types and facets of transgender identity, see David Valentine's study *Imagining Transgender* (2007).

[3] Adam Torres is played by Jordan Todosey and Sophia Burset by Laverne Cox, who became the "first openly transgender woman nominated for an Emmy award" for her portrayal of Burset in 2014 (Whipp).

[4] Another example for this trend is the appearance of transgender characters in young adult fiction. Though the number of texts is still small, novels such as Kristine Clark's *Freakboy* (2013), Ellen Wittlinger's *Parrotfish* (2007) and Julie Peter's *Luna* (2006) portray transgender teenagers and their the struggle for trans identity, acceptance and love for a young audience.

[5] Parts of the ensuing analyses of *Transamerica* and *Trumpet* draw on an earlier discussion of these texts in Hartner (forthcoming).

[6] Both their falling out and their tentative reconciliation are predictable in terms of the film's plot structure as a road movie that predominantly focusses on the relationship of its protagonists: A number of elements including score, character construction and situational comedy signal throughout the film that the story will not end in tragic disaster. At the same time, *Transamerica* only marginally engages with Toby's acceptance of Bree's transition, and the challenge this process might pose to the teenager.

[7] For an analysis of *Trumpet* from the perspective of cognitive narratology, see Hartner (2013).

[8] For gender as a performative category, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990).

[9] In this light, it is no coincidence that the character Joss Moody is a Jazz musician.

[10] Cf. the following statement by Jackie Kay: "I think that we are all not that different really," she writes in an interview. "So I always write from the knowledge that we share a very common humanity with other people." Quoted in: Susheila Nasta, *Writing Across the World: Contemporary Writers Talk* (London: Routledge, 2004), 241.

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