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ARTICLE

Mr Loverman: A Novel based on Exploring the Caribbean Community and a Journey from Self-denial to Acceptance

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Abstract:

Black British literature came to the force in the 1970s and was described as the writing of authors based in Britain but from different origins in former British colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. It talked about alienation, migration, and discrimination against people of various origins. In her novel *Mr. Loverman* (2013), Bernardine Evaristo talks about Black British Literature and Black British characters, Evaristo explores the experiences of Britain's older Caribbean community through their cultural myths, and fallacies, it is about the fear that people have about the consequences they will have to face if they try to be outspoken, or they try to be themselves. Evaristo talks about modern Britain in her works. Barrington Jeddiah Walker is a self-educated, less confident man of 74, who is truly in love but not with his wife, but with his gay lover, Morris. It is a story of their journey from self-denial to acceptance.

Keywords: Black British Literature, Caribbean community, Homosexuality, Self-denial.

Introduction

This research paper discusses Black British Literature, which emerged in the 1970s and was described as the writing of authors based in Britain but of different origins in former British colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Bernardine Evaristo discusses homosexuality in her novel *Mr. Loverman* and also focuses on the Caribbean community and the experiences of the old Caribbean people who have moved to England from their native lands. In the Caribbean Island of Antigua, talking about sexuality and homosexuality had been taboo, something about which one needs to be silent. Talking about homosexuality means making people go against you. *Mr. Loverman* is Bernardine Evaristo's seventh book-length publication

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and her second prose novel. In 2015, it was awarded the Publishing Triangle's Ferro-

Grumley Award for LGBT Fiction. The novel is exceptionally insightful, offering a unique perspective through the character of Barrington, an elderly queer Antiguan Windrush migrant, fondly called "Barry." This perspective brings an intersectional view of Caribbean-British migration, race, and queer aging. With these features, the novel has revolutionized the canon of Black British fiction. *Mr. Loverman* is a story about a 74-year-old man Barry Barrington Jedidiah Walker, who is from Antigua, but he moves to London with his wife when he was in his twenties. Barry is a married man, but since his teens, he has been in love with his best friend Morris and has been in a secret relationship with him. He is Barry to his friends but trouble to his wife, he is a flamboyant Hackney personality, and he is famous for his dapper taste and fondness for retro suits. His wife Carmel is aware of the fact that Barry his husband is cheating on her but with whom and how she doesn't have any idea about that. *Mr. Loverman* is a groundbreaking exploration of Britain's older community that explodes cultural myths and fallacies and tells us how deep and far-reaching the consequences of prejudice and fear can be. A person belonging to a sexual minority is often seen as different and they are not accepted by society homosexuality is still not accepted as heterosexuality is accepted. Homosexual people try to figure out themselves, they try very hard to accept themselves as the way they are, but societal pressure is not letting them accept it, they are in self-denial mode. These things are changing in today's world but very slowly and it will take a long time for people to accept it. In Antigua, the life of homosexual people is not easy, there, people of different sexes are not accepted and it is illegal. The novel talks about its

main character Barry Barrington Jedidiah Walker identity formation and his struggle with himself. It talks about Caribbean masculinity, sexuality, and cultural myths. These cultural myths and beliefs are affecting the people who are homosexual, and because of this many people find it hard to accept themselves as what they are. In *Mr. Loverman*, Barry is also not able to accept himself as what he is and that he belongs to the LGBTQIA+ community because of the society and its pressure. The novel explores the extent to which homosexuality determines and talks about the public life and private life of the protagonist Barry Barrington Jedidiah Walker. Bernardine Evaristo discusses women and their rights, as well as men, their situation, plight, and position in society. In her novel, Evaristo talks about sexuality and marginalized communities, at the start of the novel we come to know that the protagonist, Barry shuns the term 'homosexual', 'I, for one, do not wear make-up, dye my hair, or do the mince-walk... I ain't no homosexual, I am a... Barrysexual!'. In the novel, Barry comes out from the process of identity crisis by coming out of the comfort zone of his marriage, in which he was unhappy. Sexuality and masculinity are very important and of high status in Caribbean society. Caribbean society focuses more on masculinity and strong men.

Being a homosexual or even talking about homosexuality is not considered masculine. In today's world, we see changes in the laws related to LGBTQIA, but some countries still target homosexual people and they are not in their favour. The cultural beliefs, the societal pressure affect the coming out and identity formation of Barrington Walker, and his struggle to accept that he belongs to the LGBTQIA+ community because of the Caribbean

society. For sixty years Barry has been in a relationship with his childhood friend and soul mate Morris. Everyone in the area is used to seeing them around together – partners in crime, like an old married couple – well exactly. Morris came to England first, and Barry followed with his new wife. He created a life, had two daughters, worked, and began buying old derelict properties and doing them up. Through all the years there was always Morris. Life with Carmel his wife was often hard it was never really a happy union and Barry has given Carmel plenty of reasons to be angry. She has always assumed he was off with other women on the nights he came home late. Carmel is a committed Christian, for her marriage is a lifelong commitment no matter what but this marriage has suffocated Carmel stopping her from being happy. Even for Carmel, there is the memory of a happier time in her past, a secret she carries. Now, with his long marriage in full breakdown and his eldest daughter siding with her mother as usual. Barry has some tough decisions to make, according to Barry things were getting out of hand, and he had to make things better. Barry decides to show his real self in front of others, his family, and society, though he has the idea that this won't be accepted, according to him it is high time.

Barry is forced to hide his true self and live a double life, presenting an impression of heterosexuality to conform to societal expectations and avoid ostracism. This internal conflict between his genuine self and the persona he presents to the world creates a sense of alienation and self-denial, as Barry grapples with feelings of shame and inadequacy. Moreover, Barry's rejection is further compounded by the intersectionality of his identity as a Black man and an immigrant from Antigua. He faces discrimination and prejudice not only based on his sexual orientation but also his race and nationality, adding layers of complexity to his experiences of

marginalization and exclusion and holds on to societal expectations of masculinity and the pressure to conform to traditional norms of male behavior, which often involve suppressing emotions and desires that are considered feminine or non-normative. His internal homophobia and fear of being regarded as weak or unmanly contribute to his feelings of shame and self-rejection, showing the sense of rejection, and denial that pass into his lived experience. In the novel, the concern of the writer is these controversial issues, trying to disrupt traditional stereotypes established by a heteronormative and patriarchal society. This is an out-of-the-ordinary novel as it is a tale of two gay black Caribbean characters, who break social and historical standards, as it is well known that in Antigua and Jamaica, sex between two men is still illegal. There is great social opposition to sexual diversity. Apart from this, the novel leads us to question issues such as gender, class, race, and so on, depicting identity as an intersectional queer social construct. Sexuality and Masculinity in Caribbean society focus more on men who are strong, promising, and dominant and focus less on families, Caribbean society talks mostly about patriarchy and others belonging to

LGBTQIA as a crime. Caribbean society is a religious and stereotypical society. Mr. Loverman is a novel that shows the consequences of not being honest with oneself through the main protagonist Barry. The expectations of his community and family reinforce the idea that marriage and procreation are essential markers of adult success and fulfillment, influencing Barry's decision to marry Carmel and start a family despite his underlying attraction to men. Behind the facade of a dutiful husband and father, Barry makes a profound and long-standing love for Morris, his childhood friend and lover. Evaristo delicately explores Barry's suppressed desires and conflicted emotions, revealing the

psychological toll of living a double life. Barry's internal struggle between societal expectations and his authentic self is a poignant illustration of sexual repression. His inability to openly express his love for Morris reflects the fear of social ostracization, familial rejection, and internalized shame ingrained through years of cultural conditioning.

Barry has been hiding his real identity from his people and his wife just because he doesn't want people to question him, he is not afraid of them but his family, wife, and her friends are coming in his way and it is difficult for him to make a decision and show what he is in front of the world. He wants to hide his true self to avoid any judgment from the society he is living in. Barry is living a double life and wants to get rid of it, he tries to focus on his relationship with Morris. There are many hardships faced by the main character of the novel Barry, going through various dimensions, including physical, emotional, and societal aspects, a male individual coming from the Caribbean society, experiences the worst effects of social stigma due to his sexual orientation. The main issue of the novel is centered on exploring Barry's sexual orientation; his struggle for love, self-discovery, and self-denial are important points in this novel. Barry's firm decision to not disclose his true sexual orientation is rooted in his fear of rejection and condemnation from his Caribbean community. Though he has loved Morris since childhood, he has kept this a secret throughout his existence in the novel.

Throughout his life, he has always lived with a fear of being judged by society; he has known his sexuality since childhood. However, he has decided to hide his identity from his family and friends for a long period, due to prevailing societal and cultural norms and expectations. The main conflict of Barry hiding his sexuality in the novel can serve as a powerful and relatable theme, as it talks about the issues related to

identity, societal expectations, and self-acceptance. Morris is Barrington's best friend and his secret lover. Morris is more liberated and open-minded about his sexuality. He accepts his sexual identity, and his willingness to engage in a loving relationship with Barrington reflects a sense of self-acceptance that aligns with the values of the Gay Liberation Movement. Morris's character stands in contrast to Barrington, who is more conflicted and constrained by societal norms. Morris's comfortable existence as a gay man in London and his acceptance of his identity reflect the gradual shift in societal attitudes. Morris divorces his wife to live with Barry. Morris often empathizes with Barry's internal turmoil to accept his sexuality in front of society. Morris is depicted as a caring, understanding, and non-judgmental person, and his open acceptance of his sexuality contrasts with Barry's struggles. In Mr. Loverman Morris's wife, Odette sees Morris and Barry in an awkward position, to hide their relationship Morris bribes his wife with money. This is the situation of the gay people, which is painful that is how they have to hide their real identity just to be safe from the the society they are living in. Barry's daughter is in a lesbian relationship, Barry is happy to know about it, but on the other hand, he is afraid about his sexuality, he is happy to know about how young people take this and come in front of people without having the fear of being judged unlike the older people. Barry has repressed emotions in the novel, he is in the mode of self-denial. There are a few incidents in the story that make Barry hide his true self. The novel examines the complexities of love, including forbidden love, societal expectations in relationships, and the impact of choices made for the sake of family and community. Barry is regarded as a supportive husband who cared for Carmel during her battle with postpartum depression, even though he is not treating her as a wife. Furthermore, he fulfills his

role as a responsible father, prioritizing his family's wellbeing. On one hand, Barry's affection for Morris is genuine, so he desires to break free from his marriage and initiate a divorce from Carmel. As time passes, his internal struggles intensify. Barry's inner aspiration is to spend his remaining years alongside Morris, yet he remains passive, concealing his true sexuality and assuming the facade of an ordinary man. One day, Barry and Morris visited a gay pub in London to meet some friends of Maxine who were part of the LGBTQ+ community. Following an extensive conversation with them, Barry experienced a sense of relief witnessing their unabashed enjoyment of their sexuality. Their lack of shame in expressing their identities openly in public profoundly impacted Barry and accepts his homosexuality as a result of the experiences he has gained from others. He is prepared to confront society as a gay man. Evaristo creates, the main character of her novel Barry with a great deal of psychological tension, at last, he understands himself and is ready to stand against the social prejudice of gay men. These two gay men in the novel face the challenges of navigating societal expectations, familial pressures, and cultural norms. Barry, the protagonist of the novel exemplifies the intricate dynamics of sexual repression through his life experiences, desires, and societal pressures. Born into a Caribbean immigrant community in London during the mid-20th century, Barry navigates a complex web of cultural expectations, familial obligations, and personal identity struggles that shape his understanding and expression of his sexuality. Barry's upbringing within a conservative.

Caribbean cultural milieu plays a pivotal role in shaping his early perceptions of sexuality. Rooted in traditional values that prioritize heteronormativity and familial duty, Barry internalizes these norms from a young age. Barry and the other characters

in the novel experience emotional repression. Evaristo explores the conflicts that emerge when individuals strive to liberate themselves from societal limitations and pursue their unique paths. Writing and queering these significant texts, Evaristo offers an alternative vision of the very foundations of Black British identity and masculinity, embedding queer attachments within the long-standing Black British literary canon. Evaristo's portrayal of the intersection of home-making, ageing, and queerness is particularly compelling, as queer ageing remains a marginalized experience in literature. Bernardine Evaristo's novels offer a profound exploration of repression and psychological conflict, giving deep insights into the complex inner lives of her characters. By examining the complicated nature of repression and its impact on individual and collective experiences, Evaristo highlights the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring quest for self-acceptance and authenticity. Her distinct portrayal of psychological turmoil and identity formation offers a powerful commentary on the societal forces that shape our lives and the ongoing struggle to navigate the complexities of the self in a constantly changing world. Through her empathetic and richly detailed narratives, Evaristo invites readers to engage with the intricate psychological landscapes of her characters, fostering a deeper understanding of the human condition and the resilience required to overcome repression and embrace one's true self.

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