



Funny Boy:

Themes



Theme: Gender and Sexuality



Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender



Themes:

- **Gender and sexuality:**
- Arjie's deviation from traditional masculinity leads his family to continuously shame him, and he quickly internalizes this shame and begins to think of himself as inherently flawed. Largely because they do not know what to make of him and fear that his failure to be conventionally masculine reflects their failure as a family, the Chelvaratnams repeatedly call Arjie “funny”—a word that both betrays the family’s anxiety about admitting the possibility of having a gay son and shows that their homophobia is based on an unjustified, instinctual revulsion, tied to the cultural norm of heterosexual marriage and families.
- In the first chapter, when Amma forces Arjie to play with the boys rather than the girls, she reveals that she does not completely believe in the restrictive notion of masculinity she is enforcing: she says that Arjie must go with the boys "because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly," as though gender separation is just an inherent and necessary feature of the world.



Pigs cannot fly:

- “From my sling-bag I would bring out my most prized possession, an old white sari, slightly yellow with age, its border torn and missing most of its sequins. The dressing of the bride would now begin, and then, by the transfiguration I saw taking place in Janaki’s cracked full-length mirror—by the sari being wrapped around my body, the veil being pinned to my head, the rouge put on my cheeks, lipstick on my lips, kohl around my eyes—I was able to leave the constraints of my self and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palu, seemed to revolve. It was a self magnified, like the goddesses of the Sinhalese and Tamil cinema, larger than life; and like them, like the Malini Fonsekas and the Geetha Kumarasinghes, I was an icon, a graceful, benevolent, perfect being upon whom the adoring eyes of the world rested.”



Questions of Sexuality:

Anil

- “Funny” is contrasted by Radha with her “serious” love toward Anil, who does not fit into Arjie’s childish idea of a lover because he was “not serious enough” (66). But even so, Anil is not regarded as “funny.” Radha’s response to her mother’s question plays upon the binary opposition of serious/funny. Radha deliberately exploits the double meaning of the word “funny” in Ammachi’s rhetorical question, managing to announce her anti-traditional attitude towards the cross-ethnic relationship. Radha’s ability to exploit language’s ambiguity allows her to temporarily resist that dominating power.
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Marriage as a theme:

1. The game named as “**bride-bride.**”
2. **Her Fatness who is a sister** insists that “A boy cannot be the bride ... a girl must be the bride” imposes gender roles onto the idealized world of “bride-bride”
3. In that passage, he considers the activity not dressing up as a woman, but rather as inhabiting the highly symbolic role of bride as “icon.” Arjie as bride is free to acknowledge himself as transcending the “constraints of [him]self, and transcend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self” (4)
4. Here is no language of gender or sexuality, only of idealized, neutral forms. Arjie's awareness that he perhaps does not belong with either the girl cousins or the boy cousins can be seen in this genderless language. His unwillingness to associate himself with a gender in his “more beautiful self” shows his recognition that he is “caught between the boys' and the girls' worlds, not belonging or wanted in either” (39).
5. This concept is a precursor of his later recognition of his homosexuality, but in the innocent, simplified terms of a child



Isolation and love:

Like Radha and Anil's forbidden love, the secret love of Arjie and Shehan also reveals the theme of isolation.

They have kept their love a secret in order to avoid conflicts within their society. Arjie explains that his admission in Victorian Academy is a boon in disguise, the best thing that could happen to him.

He feels like this because he has finally found someone who can see world from his perspective. Arjie's boyfriend convinces him that it is okay to be different.

Both of them like each other because there are powerful and hidden possibilities in their relationship.

When they declare that they are boyfriends, Arjie becomes confused, but now he realises that why his father think that he is "funny".

He tries to end his relationship with Shehan, but he cannot. He realises that this is the culmination of his feelings



Shehan plays very significant role in his life.

He has become medium for Arjie's self realisation. Arjie truly discovers himself.

This is the most dangerous situation, when the person is passing from such troublesome phase in his life, where he cannot ignore the reality, that who he is, even if that means disgrace for one's family and community.

Arjie says, "I was no longer a part of my family in the same way I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me"(284).

Their relationship has brought a lot of confusion into their life, particularly in the life of Arjie, their relationship has caused Arjie to detach himself from his family and society.



To be continued..

