

The Billie Jean Story: The Man in the Mirror

Linda Jean Jordan

Xlibris

978-1-4415-6731-4

The Billie Jean Story: The Man in the Mirror recounts the hardships of African-American protagonist Billy Jean: thwarted from college by her parents, two failed marriages, and struggles to succeed in the music business. Through all she endures, Billy Jean survives due her faith in God and her lust for successful musician Geo Marcus—a thinly veiled stand-in for Michael Jackson. Billy Jean believes Marcus returns her affections and that he speaks to her through his songs.

Billie Jean represents Linda Jean Jordan's first book. Although categorized as fiction, the lines between fiction and reality blur as Jordan and Billy Jean grow up in Georgia towns of the same, graduate from the same Alma maters, work at IBM as keypunch operators, and complete musical projects titled *Believe*, among other similarities. In fact, Billy Jean even says that the only thing Jordan has fictionalized is Michael Jackson's name. One can tell Geo is Michael Jackson because the protagonist refers to him doing the moonwalk and writing the song "Billie Jean." She also mentions the birth of Jackson's daughter, Paris. In her youth, Billy Jean has a vision of Michael Jackson / Geo Marcus. Besides straddling autobiography and fiction, the work spells the main character's name inconsistently; while spelled "Billie Jean" in the title, it is spelled "Billy Jean" in the narrative.

The only character who comes to life in the book is Billy Jean. Her Christian faith and her determination to overcome the obstacles faced by a professional African-American woman in the 1970's and 1980's will inspire female readers of any race to reach for the stars with dogged determination. Her devotion to God will gratify devout readers as they will see His divine intercession in her life. Even her all-consuming obsession with Geo shows how far some people go in idolizing rock stars.

Unfortunately, other characters who clearly have important relationships with Billy Jean—her parents, her husbands, her siblings, and even Geo—all remain comparatively flat in the glare of Billy Jean's strength. All life is sucked from the narration. Sandwiched between a needlessly redundant preface and repetitive conclusion, the narrative itself lacks tension. In addition, verb tenses switch from present to past within the same sentences, and, unconventionally, new paragraphs are denoted by a bracket. Chapter titles are written in first person, while the story is told in the third person. Frequently, one stumbles upon incoherent passages such as the following: "Being, baptism could people like her have things happen to them this way." This novel could have used much editing and proofreading before going to print.

The narrative would be more powerful if the author had forgone the fictionalization and simply written a memoir. Buried beneath all the confusion and errors is the compelling tale of a woman's journey toward the American Dream.

JILL ALLEN (February 17, 2012)

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