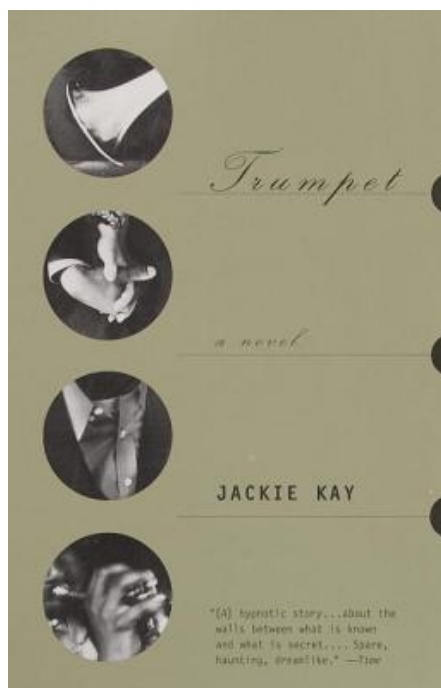




Trumpet

Jackie Kay

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Jackie Kay

Trumpet Jackie Kay

In her starkly beautiful and wholly unexpected tale, Jackie Kay delves into the most intimate workings of the human heart and mind and offers a triumphant tale of loving deception and lasting devotion.

The death of legendary jazz trumpeter Joss Moody exposes an extraordinary secret, one that enrages his adopted son, Colman, leading him to collude with a tabloid journalist. Besieged by the press, his widow Millie flees to a remote Scottish village, where she seeks solace in memories of their marriage. The reminiscences of those who knew Joss Moody render a moving portrait of a shared life founded on an intricate lie, one that preserved a rare, unconditional love.

Trumpet Details

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Author : Jackie Kay

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From Reader Review Trumpet for online ebook

Laura says

Beautifully written and extremely poignant, *Trumpet* explores issues of gender, race and identity in the modern world. The story is told through a series of short vignettes written from the perspective of people who knew or encountered Joss Moody, a world famous jazz musician who, it was found after his death, had been assigned female gender at birth.

Particularly moving are the pictures of the grief felt by Joss' wife after his death, the sense of betrayal experienced by his adoptive son and the general bafflement or indifference of other people who encountered him and later found out his secret. The vulture-like tabloid hack is particularly well portrayed - she is the only character to refer to Joss as 'she' and sets her sights on writing a bigoted expose on Joss Moody the 'pervert'. She was one of the best baddies I've read in a long time.

The book was written and set in the late 1990s in the UK and while reading it, it struck me just how much our society has moved on in terms of LGBT issues in less than 20 years. So in a sense it felt oddly dated, but this in itself was quite uplifting.

Despite the stunning prose, the story did feel a bit slow at times, particularly in the first half. The ending was brilliant though. I would recommend to anyone who is interested in race or gender issues.

Ben Babcock says

Trumpet is the August pick for the Banging Book Club, an online, tweet-fuelled read of books about sex and sexuality hosted by Hannah Witton, Leena Norms, and Lucy Moon. This is a nice change of pace after a few months of non-fiction books. All of the fiction books so far have been excellent but in such different ways. The two previous novels (*Asking For It* and *All the Rage*) had similar topics but very different narrative and thematic approaches; each broke my heart, though. *Trumpet* is quite different in both topic and tone. It is Jackie Kay's only novel, and her reputation for her poetry is understandable given the lyrical lilt of *Trumpet*. This is a complex and moving book, not so much outraging or heartwrenching as the other two Banging Book Club novels, but certainly just as emotional. Trigger warning, for the book and this review, with regards to transphobia and transphobic language. I can't speak for how trans people will react to reading this; I think this book is a very interesting and eye-opening read for cisgender people who might not otherwise have questioned how they talk about and think about trans people, especially trans people who get "outed".

I love the different perspectives in this. It's so easy to write one-dimensional characters, especially when dealing with hatred like transphobia. Kay's depiction is much more nuanced, balancing the influence of society with each character's personality. Many characters who don't interact with Joss directly or know him personally treat the revelation that he is transgender as an anomaly in their otherwise orderly life: the doctor has to correct a death certificate; the undertaker ponders how he could have mistaken the body for male; the registrar laments the ugliness of the corrected certificate but ultimately takes pity on Millie and enters "Joss Moody" in the register rather than his birth name.

Trumpet is not a book of grandstanding, of intense dialogues and Picard speeches for or against trans rights. Yes, there are moments of confrontation, of accusation, of recrimination. By and large, though, this is a book of reflection and rumination. The moments in here are small and unguarded and therefore they seem much

more honest. Take, for example, the undertaker's reaction:

It had never happened to him before. He had never had a man turn into a woman before his very eyes. He felt it to be one of those defining moments in his life that he would be compelled to return to again and again.

I can understand his reaction. I imagine undertakers have a very interesting relationship with the nature of our embodiment. Kay captures some of this in her portrayal of him and his meditation on who people were before they come to him and how their personalities may or may not change after death. Confronted with the shell of Joss Moody, the undertaker has no understanding of who he was as a living person. He has only the physical archaeology to go on here. This is a deft way of commenting on the delicate balances that inform our identities. Biology may not *determine* our identities, gender or otherwise, but it certainly informs our behaviours and those of the people around us. Stripped of any other context, Joss' biology is the only frame of reference the undertaker has.

The above quotation, and the undertaker's chapter in general, also made me stop and think about the out-sized significance we place on gender performance and sex determination in our society. When you get right down to it, how often is your sex really an important factor in any given situation? So many forms, governmental or otherwise, want you to tick "M" or "F" so that they can crunch statistics and make assumptions about you. But humans are so diverse and so good at breaking out of boxes. Even in situations where it seems like biology should matter, there are better ways to take biology into account: when giving X-rays, perhaps "are you capable of getting pregnant?" rather than "are you a woman?" or "do you have testes?" when discussing testicular cancer awareness. Beyond mostly medical situations, though, a person's sex *should* be largely irrelevant to how they move through the world. The fact that it isn't, that we put so much emphasis on determining someone's sex and remarking on when their sex doesn't correspond with how they perform gender, is a shame.

The main characters reinforce and echo this, and their own relationships with their sex and gender colours their interpretations of Joss. Millie as a young woman struck me as being so confident in her own sexuality:

I have on a pale green slinky dress.... My dress shows my cleavage. I look sexy and my four brothers and Joss are all staring at me with similar expressions in their eyes.

It's 1955 and she is forward and forthright and knows what she wants and that she looks good. I love it. And she so clearly loves Joss; it's her level of self-possession that allows her to discard immediately the shock of Joss' revelation and declare that it is a non-issue.

In contrast, Sophie's obsession with Joss is far more voyeuristic; she serves as an avatar for the prurient curiosity we are now all familiar with thanks to social media (but this is 1997 so the web is a very different place):

What I want Colman Moody to find out is this: what made Joss Moody into a transvestite? What was the real reason for pretending she was a man? She is different, I'm quite sure, from other transvestites. Joss Moody only returned to being a woman in death. The rest of the time she dressed like a man, lived her life as a man, her own son believed her to be a man. No, this

isn't a straightforward tranny.... Was she just a perv or what? Which came first? What's the story? How did she manage to pull it off?

Kay really captures the ignorance here: the idea that an event or series of events "turns" someone trans, similar to the idea that people get "turned" gay; the use of words like *pretending* to show that Sophie views Joss' gender identity as a sham; the use of such loaded words like *tranny* and *perv*; and the idea that Joss has to "pull it off" as if being trans is some kind of magic trick.

I find Sophie so interesting because she *seems* like she should be a one-dimensional character: she is shallow, amoral, caring only about the potential for profit and reputation from her collaboration with Colman. Yet she isn't one-dimensional. Kay is careful to explore the motives that have made Sophie this way, from her inferiority complex in relation to her slimmer, more competent sister to her obsession with how people see her. The paragraph I quoted above ends with this:

I look at Sophie in the mirror. I pull my hair up and put some pins in. I look clever with my hair up. I knew I had it in me. Clever Sophie.

Yes, Sophie is narrating and talking about herself in the third person here. That's the type of person she is. She is self-absorbed and offensive, but she is as much a product of our society as anyone else. When she thinks about how she is just using Colman to make a name for herself, she says:

Why should I have scruples when men have been using me for years? As long as it takes to make good copy. He's playing the same game, isn't he?

So in Sophie Kay gives us an example of a woman who "leans in" and thinks the best way to get ahead is to internalize the oppressiveness of the patriarchy. This is so sad yet entirely understandable, and it makes Sophie a sympathetic if, at times, annoying antagonist. Colman is absolutely right when he belatedly declares, "You wouldn't know a moral if it slapped you in the face". While Sophie's stance towards Joss is transphobic, it's a casual kind of transphobia born more of apathy than hatred. This is important, because this transphobia is more pernicious and probably more common than people who are openly out and about slurring trans people and committing hate crimes. It's haters who launch the bathroom bills, but it's the apathy that gets them passed.

And then we come to Colman. I want to call him my favourite character, but I feel like I've said that, maybe not in so many words, for Millie and Sophie. **The character game in this book is just so strong, people!** Anyway, in the beginning it seems like Colman is going to be a huge jackass. And it turns out ... he really is a huge jackass. But he's a huge jackass who loves his father. In particular, he continues to use masculine pronouns when referring to Joss, even going so far as to correct Sophie when she uses feminine pronouns. His attitude towards Joss is very proprietary and becomes even more so as the book progresses.

The rift between Colman and his father, it should be noted, existed prior to Joss' death and is far more complicated than the fact that Joss was performing gender as a man. Colman, like most of us, is a complex bundle of issues: he is adopted, he is Black, he is nominally Scottish but doesn't feel Scottish, etc. He has memories of his father that are variously happy, sad, and awkward, and if any of the latter were influenced

by Joss being trans, none of the experiences are so strange that they wouldn't happen with a cis father. Kay reminds us that there is seldom any one reason for the way we feel about or remember someone.

It's not just what *Trumpet* includes that makes it so interesting as what Kay omits. We don't get as complete an ending as one might like—in particular, I'm sure I'm not alone in yearning for that reconciliation scene between Colman and Millie, and I respect the hell out of Kay for denying us that easy resolution in favour of making us imagine it. We don't learn exactly what transpires between Colman and Edith. And while Joss Moody is unquestionably the central character of this book, he remains in many ways a cipher. Although we do hear a little from him, thanks to flashbacks and letters posthumously read, for the most part he does not have a voice except through the reminiscences of the other characters. *Trumpet*, in this sense, is not so much about Joss' experience as a biracial, trans musician as it is about other people's grief and attempt to process the news that he was trans. This last part is obviously important; however, let's not ignore the book's wider themes on the difficulty of truly knowing someone and the fact that even after they are gone, your relationship with them goes on.

Deyonne Bryant says

I've read this book twice, shortly after its publication and recently for a book-club discussion. The prose is lovely and the story compelling. However, I did not understand what motivated any of the major characters to do the things they did, excluding the son Colman. Millicent's love of Joss and grief upon losing him was written about in a convincing manner. However, I did not understand her character fully. She didn't seem to have any substance aside from loving Joss and holding his secret. I wondered if she was a good mother and strong partner and was glad to see her ask this question of herself in the novel. The narrative leads you to believe that it is somehow perverse to want to know why Joss lived as a man; however, this is the question held by most readers in our book club. If Jackie Kay wanted readers to question *their* motives, then she might have chosen a less flat character than the journalist to show readers the mistake in thinking this way about Joss. A section of the narrative suggests that Joss was happy as girl yet chose to live as a man upon becoming an adult. I was not sure if the gender bending was done in order to access entry into the male-dominated jazz world or because Josephine really felt as if she had been assigned a sex that she did not identify with, or both. Knowing this would have made Joss more sympathetic and less mythical, a figment of Jackie Kay's imagination. Still, I think the novel is important and should be read by many people.

Stef Rozitis says

This book was a sensitive, complex memoir style fiction about the life and loves of a trans-man. When Joss moody the famous trumpet player dies, his family and friends need to come to terms with stuff they never knew about his past. Theoretically this book owes a lot to Judith Butler showing very clearly that gender is a performance, and also the odd way that what you see depends partly on your vantage point, players create gender together as a social effect not purely as an individual choice (but not completely disjointed from individual choices either). Love is love...but is it? Who gets to decide a persons identity? What makes a family "real"?

This book is also in many ways a sensitive illustration to go with the theoretical work of Jack Halberstam especially *Female Masculinity*. The way that a trans-masculinity may be transformative of what we know about masculinity, may be critical is gently shown, the way the trans-man "becomes" a man with the limits

of masculinity to me was also there. I was frustrated by Joss Moody for being such a man, so selfish and entitled in relationships and leaving such a mess, particularly for taking poor Millie for granted so much! But Moody was critical of harsh masculinities.

All the usual (and irritating) clichés and simple answers are side-stepped. There is a "normal" sort of a character, a member of the gutter press who tries to force the answers that are easily understandable in the common sense. She lacks insight and her agenda is to exploit not to understand...how often is this the case when these things are sensationalised or made universal. Real knowing in the book happens in more piecemeal ways, through love, desire and kinship (in complex ways), through networks of love, misunderstanding and redemption.

I have said too much. It is not a book that can be explained. It is an eye-opening journey to read it, and yet one that doesn't give "answers". Try it!

Steffanie says

I don't know how I had never heard of this book before my dear friend recommended it to me a few months back. How could I have missed such a literary masterpiece? I feel like this novel should be counted among the great and groundbreaking novels to date.

Jackie Kay really analyzed how prurient the world can be. Joss Moody is the main character, but does not narrate at all, and is actually dead from the first page to the last. Joss Moody, the famous Jazz Artist has a secret. How this secret affects family, friends and others is so interesting to read about.

Jackie Kay's language is very visual and stimulating: "I go out into the wind. It slaps me on the face, stinging my cheeks. The weather is changing again. It is suppose to be summer. The trees sway about like drunks in the wind, cursing." (25)

Jackie Kay must have gone through something traumatic in her life to be able to write so flawlessly about mourning. Also, I find it important that Kay, brings to her writing a pretty unique background. From Wikipedia:

Jackie Kay was born in Glasgow in 1961 to a Scottish mother and a Nigerian father. She was adopted by a Scottish white couple Helen and John Kay and brought up in Bishopbriggs, a suburb of Glasgow.

(Check out the article for more interesting things about her!) You can totally find palpable remnants of these beginnings in "Trumpet".

Really, really impressed. I kind of want to read it again, before starting a new book. But we shall see. :)

Elizabeth says

Thank fuck that's done. Not because it was bad - the opposite - because it was unrelenting, heart-breaking and brutal. Reading it's like being in a car crash, with you going through the windscreen in the first few chapters and the rest just the grind of the miles of asphalt against your face as you're carried forward by your own momentum.

This book is about the revelation after his death that Joss Moody was a trans man, given the name at birth of Josephine Moore. The book focuses largely on the massive transphobic reaction that this revelation meets with in the press and from his son, while Joss's widow Millie struggles to survive overwhelming feelings of grief and loss in isolation in a small Scottish village.

I found this book almost unbearable. The unrelenting transphobia this book portrays made my blood fucking boil. Maybe in a world where such a thing is a sad relic of a distant past reading this book might be bearable. Might be enjoyable. But not in this world where Lucy Meadows was hounded to her death by shit-eating tabloid hacks (may they burn in Hell). Not here, not now. This book is almost 15 years old. And the horror of how little has changed in how trans people are treated is sickening. Every time Joss was referred to as "she", as "pretending", it just set my teeth on edge and made me feel sick. How fucking hard is it? His name was Joss, if he wanted you to call him Josephine, he would have told you to call him Josephine, he would have given that as his name. If he wanted you to refer to him as "her" or "she", he would have mentioned it in his nearly-70-odd years of life. He didn't so don't. It's not hard. There's no giant book of political correctness you have to consult. It's basic fucking manners. The same courtesy you'd extend to anyone. If someone doesn't like what you're calling them, and you don't actually want to be a dick, you stop. Basic playground ethics, people. How fucking hard is that?

I'm not trans, I'm cis, but as a woman it was so depressingly and identifiably awful in watching it play out - we have found a fanny therefore all else is invalid. It doesn't matter who you were, or what you did, or what your achievements are, or what you were like - we have found your fanny, now that is what you are, all you are. Jesus, how often have you seen that in the press? From the way Olympic athletes are criticised or ridiculed for not being sexy or feminine enough, or that the ones that have passed the sex-object-test have their entire achievements boiled down to how to "yeay for you, you're doable". Jesus, even negative shit - look at Amanda Knox - the actual serious, life-and-death horrors you can do, and it all boils down to "what a pretty cunt". We found your fanny, all else is irrelevant. Reading this story was like watching someone wash away Joss Moody's entire life. They found his cunt, all else was irrelevant. His jazz career, his friends, his marriage, his role as a strong, black father to his son. Gone. Blotted out. Awful.

The other, almost as bad, strand to this story, apart from the transphobia, is what it is like to raise a child who is a shit. Not in the big dramatic We Need To Talk About Kevin way, but in the small, quiet, everyday way of raising a kid who is just a shit. We all know people like that. Know people who are good parents, raise their kids right, and at the end of the day are left with giant selfish shits who give not a fuck about them. People who you look at and think, "God, what did they ever do to deserve a wean like that?", knowing it's nothing at all. Colman Moody is giant, selfish wean, a child of man, someone who has never wanted for anything - money, love, support - and he is no good to anyone. His father dies and his mother is grieving, and rather than, in her time of need, support her, or talk to her about his shock at finding out his father was trans, or even listening to her when she tries to talk to him about it, he rallies the gutter press to hound her from her home, to destroy his father's memory, to cash-in on his long-held but now vindicated sense of sullen self-entitlement and self-pity. His mother is an elderly woman. She has just lost her husband of 30-odd years. She wants to die and go into her husband's grave with him, but has chosen to stay strong for her child. And what does he do? He does everything he can to drive her to it. To tear up her whole life so she will not even have her memories. All will be tainted with salacious gossip and implied perversion. Imagine, pouring your whole life, all your love into a child like that, and then in your old age, when you really need them, all you get back is betrayal and bitterness and their self-centred indifference to you. That's the thing about having kids, they are not like spouses that can be divorced if things don't work out. Children are as large in their absence as their presence, and once had are there for life. For good or ill. Strangers you bring into your family never knowing who they will turn out to be. Regardless of how they are brought.

Millie Moody broke my heart, a small, dignified, warm and caring woman, about the same age as my gran, trying desperately to cope with grief that she cannot share with anyone else. She's tragic. I could have wept for her.

Seriously, this is a great book but it's not a light read. If you have any humanity at all this book will be a hard read.

Elizabeth Ducie says

A fascinating exploration of the background to a secret revealed after the death of a famous trumpet player, Joss Moody. It is written from different points of view: in particular his wife, Millie, who is grieving, hiding and gradually working her way through her pain; his son Colman, who is distraught and hurting badly; and the odious reporter Sophie, who is just facile and mean. There are also snapshots from other people, on how Joss impacted on their lives. My only disappointment was that we don't hear much from Joss himself and no explanation of his motivation. Nevertheless, a great read. Some interesting insights into growing up as a person of colour in 1950s Scotland.

Modupe Field says

How in God's name I have missed this book is amazing. I devoured it in 2 days. I am not usually a fan of people who write like poets but I have to say Jackie Kay's trumpet is a very well written book. When I first heard of this book, I thought that I would be reading about how Joss Moody decided to become a man, how he managed to pull it off, the challenges he might have met along the way. But NO, this book is a whole lot bigger than that.

This book is all about love. How you can love someone so much that whether they change sex, you still love them for who they are. It is about how it feels to lose the love of your life. Don't be mistaken into believing it is just about a transvestite, it is about 2 people who love each other, the loss that is felt when you lose the love of your life.

Jackie Kay did a brilliant job capturing the emotion of young Colman. I enjoyed reading his part and discovering at the end that despite his father and mother deceiving him, he still loved his father very much. That was extremely touching.

Overall I would highly recommend this book, it is beautiful pageturner with a steady moving plot.

Sara Salem says

What a beautiful book!

Jess says

I read this one pretty fast--it's a quick read in general, but you just don't want to stop. The writing style perfectly winds all these characters and their reactions together in a way that is so sympathetic and believable that it is hard to understand how this is fiction.

The most important characters of this novel is, sadly, fictional--Joss Moody is a mixed-race Scottish jazz trumpet player who chose to live his life identifying as male, despite that fact that he was born female and lived much of his childhood as such. Joss is dead at the beginning of the novel and we see his life unfold through the eyes of his loving wife Millicent (who of course knew of his secret), his son Coleman (who did *not*), a nosy and insensitive journalist, and several old friends, family members, band-mates, and caretakers. The way Joss' identity affects people in different ways is the greatest part of the story--the fact that he is transgender (a term not used in the novel but may be applicable to Joss) brings about rage, sadness, shock, and even a few *I'm not surprised* reactions. It's often heartbreaking and enraging to read.

This is a really great story. The ending is satisfying. I actually think it could've been a bit longer, but it's still an amazing, original, and topical piece of fiction.

Suzanne Egerton says

Trumpet is a delight. Very loosely based on an actual event which took place in America, Jackie Kay moves the action to Scotland in the second half on the twentieth century.

After the death of jazz trumpeter Joss Moody a lifelong deception is revealed which impacts in different ways on friends and family members. The shockwaves cause a press furore which drives his grief-stricken wife to seek shelter in the highland village which was the family's second home. Colman, the couple's adopted son, is so traumatised by the revelation that he is alienated from his father's memory and falls prey to a female journalist determined to exploit the scandal to the hilt; she persuades him to collaborate in the writing of a racy book about his father's life.

The story is told in both first and third person, and from various characters' point of view. Some of the most charming and well-observed of these witnesses are those involved with the post mortem nuts and bolts: the registrar, the undertaker. And in the process of Colman's search into his father's background other fascinating characters shed light on the enigmatic musician.

But it is Millie, the widow, who lingers with us. Her memories and reflections on the couple's life together are more powerful than any extravagant expressions of love and grief would be. She is strong; as a white Scot marrying a black musician in times when a black face was an extraordinary sight, she has had to be. She reveals a marriage in which passion and deep, abiding love were at the heart of everything. Through her we glimpse the engaging and irresistible personality of the husband she will always adore.

Jackie Kay's style is intelligent, humorous, humane and full of insight. I thoroughly recommend Trumpet.

jo says

this is the story of joss moody, a fictional trumpet player with a west indian father and a white scottish mother; the story is inspired by billy tipton, a real-life sax and piano player. in fact, there are no similarities between these two men except for the fact that they both were prominent jazz musicians and both were biological women who lived as men.

the element of race is so important in *Trumpet* -- as important, really, as the element of gender -- that billy tipton, who was white, seems barely more than an inspiration. jackie kay fashions a new story entirely and her story plays deftly and lyrically with the issue of joss's identity -- an identity that is simultaneously very strong and very tortured -- and other people's perception of it after his death. there is no doubt that joss perceives himself as a man, just as there is no doubt that everyone perceives him as a man too, even when his biological femaleness is revealed upon his death. for some reason (this is something it would be interesting to discuss) his wife is less than protective of dead joss's masculinity and lets the doctor and the undertaker

examine him alone. inevitably, the story gets out.

there is a lovely passage in which millie describes helping joss dress in the morning. as she carefully wraps and pins his bindings around his chest, she observes that she never touched his breasts. when joss inserts a pair of socks in his boxers, she delicately averts her gaze. on his part, joss dresses heavily, with two t-shirts over his bindings and a shirt and jacket on top. he's always dressed to the nines, very elegantly and formally, even in the hottest weather and the most casual circumstances. this is no problem for joss and millie, not something they discuss. another couple might choose to have endless conversations about this; this couple chooses not to. this is interesting too.

so in a way joss's masculinity is entirely unproblematic: he is simply a guy and there is nothing to talk about. in other ways, though -- in the ways in which this masculinity is relentlessly, physically *constructed* each morning and each night, by himself and his wife, and then carefully tended to by both through a lifelong system of deception, it's a huge problem.

unlike billy tipton, joss dies of heart attack (or so it's implied). bound under tight bandages of all kinds, his heart gives out.

the book is narrated by a number of voices, each given one or more chapters. the lion's share is given to colman, joss's and millie's adopted-at-birth son. colman's profound love for his father is seriously shaken by the discovery of his betrayal, but, as i said, this goes farther than gender. race permeates the novel in ways more subtle than gender but still very profound. both joss and colman have white mothers (colman's is of course adoptive); both, as it turns out, have little knowledge of their fathers. the racial lineage of these two men is confused, hidden, and broken: joss's father died when he was young and joss refuses to discuss him; colman's adoptive father, joss, is a famous man whom his son cannot but see as an idol. idols are hard to live with and colman is faced by his own inability to live up to his idea of his father every step of the way.

in the fact that joss's father is not present -- even in stories -- and colman's father is not a biological father in more senses than one lies the burden of these two black men. their black masculinity is literally orphaned. each one of them has to fashion it on his own, any way he can.

colman's rage and hurt are depicted beautifully, as are millie's simple and profound love for joss and her deep mourning. but the secondary characters are beautiful too. in particular i loved the undertaker and, in the last part of the novel, one of joss's childhood friend. her chapter is a real treat.

Jessica says

This is the first Jackie Kay novel I've read and it was enjoyable, but there was a deeply upsetting aspect to it. The story follows the loved ones of late Jazz musician Joss Moody, who upon his death, it is revealed he is actually a woman. Now the narrative does skip between a few different people, some of whom aren't particularly sensitive considering pronouns, though I do see this is very realistic it is still upsetting. Still it was an enjoyable and interesting narrative, the story was addictive! I'd recommend it to anyone if you aren't too upset by pronouns being misused by a few particularly horrible (and unfortunately realistic) characters.

Michelle says

(Original review posted on my livejournal account: <http://intoyourlungs.livejournal.com/...>)

Why I Read It: Assigned for my Religious Themes in Literature class.

Like Mootoo Shati's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* explores the complexity of sexuality and gender. The novel follows the aftermath of the great jazz trumpeter Joss Moody, and follows his wife as she deals with the grief that comes with losing him. We also follow his son Colman, as he struggles with the revelation that his father was in fact born with a female body.

What Kay addresses beautifully in this novel is how people have the tendency to conflate sexuality and gender identity. Joss' wife Millicent knew from before they were married that Joss had a female body but she didn't care. She loved JOSS, who identified as a man and thus they both still identified as straight. But in the aftermath of Joss's death and the revelation of the gender he was born with, people assume that Millie is a lesbian. This lack of understanding, or willingness to understand drives Millie crazy and she's forced to retreat to her summer home to get away.

Colman was an interesting character because despite his disgust at his father's choices he was still a sympathetic character, even when HE himself wasn't making the best choices. It's understandable that he would question his own gender identity when he identifies as male and modeled his masculinity after someone who turns out to NOT be biologically male. That's got to be mind-boggling, especially when you're not expecting and you're already reeling from grief. His reactions to his father's death also displayed an incredible level of complexity with the exploration of his grief and anger.

Reading Sophie's bits were easily the hardest parts to read as she was easily the most frustrating and unlikable character (though she's obviously meant to be). Her desperate search for the REASON for Joss's choice of identifying as male was angering: she pegged it on Joss's wanting to be a famous trumpeter and not being able to do it as a female, on the death of Joss's father at a young age, and on the fact that Joss was obviously just a pervert who got a kick out of tricking people. We as readers KNOW this is all bullshit of course, but unfortunately it's the attitude a lot of people adopt when it comes to transgendered people which is really sad.

Kay's writing is also worth noting; along with addressing very complex issues, she's an incredibly talented and crafty writer. Throughout the novel, she utilizes several points-of-view from several different characters and uses them all to great effect: We have a first-person POV of Colman when he's being interviewed by Sophie, one where he's NOT being interviewed by her, a third-person POV from him, a first-person POV from Millie, first-person from Sophie, as well as at least three more first-person POVs from other adjacent characters. In under 300 pages that's A LOT of POVs and when written down like that, it sounds like way too much. But Kay pulls it off. Each different POV draws out something different from the story and it never comes off as messy.

Oh, and I don't want to reveal too much, but I also loved the ending. Essentially, you're lead to believe that it's going to be one thing, but it ends being something completely different, and for that I was really happy -- it could have taken the obvious route, but then it would have undermined everything it had set out to do. Again, Kay is a great writer who obviously knows what's she doing.

Final Verdict: I loved this book and think it's a wonderful example of GLBTQ lit with a focus on transgendered people. Kay explores the complexities of gender identity and sexuality with a deft hand and this is a book I think I could read over and over again and get more out of it every time. The psychology of the characters is spot-on and they are just as complex as the subject matter of the book. The writing was also excellent and Kay displays an incredible handle on POV as she uses A LOT throughout the course of this relatively short novel and pulls it off magnificently.

BrokenTune says

"When the love of your life dies, the problem is not that some part of you dies too, which it does, but that some part of you is still alive."

What makes up identity?

Is it your family?

You accent?

Where you're born?

Where you're raised?

Is it what you do?

Is it how you do it?

Is it the clothes you wear?

Is it your age?

Is your gender?

Is it who you fall in love with?

Is it who you respect?

Trumpet is a beautiful investigation into the question of how people derive a sense of identity under circumstances which seem to strip the members of the Moody family of all of the certainties they may have once held to be indestructible.

Jackie Kay wrote this poetic novel around Joss Moody, a fictional jazz musician, whose death leaves his family at a loss after a lifetime of constructing their own image of themselves in relation to Joss, their respective husband and father.

More than that, Kay beautifully describes how their grieving process helps them to figure out who they are.

"I was a traditional boy in an untraditional house. I was always going about the place freaked out and embarrassed. My parents were not like other people's parents. Whenever they came to my school they stuck out like a sore thumb. I don't know what it was. A different life makes people look different. Even their skin. Their clothes were more glamorous. They didn't look like they worked a nine to five. I wanted parents that looked like they worked a nine to five. It was bad enough with all that jazz never mind this. My life was unconventional. A lot of my childhood was spent on the road. Touring. Place to fucking place. I'd have been happier at home watching Star Trek with a bowl of cornflakes. Too much, it was. All that razzamatazz. Other kids envied me and I envied other kids. That's it."

Naori says

I was going through some old notebooks and I came across some passages from this book that I just wanted to share. Billy Tipton, who is the subject of this novel, was an incredible jazz musician who was not only trans but also not out to two of his three wives, nor to any of his long time band members, until after his death. There is a great biography of him called Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton by Diane Middlebrook, that really chronicles both his life and his music in a very nuanced way (although the author does struggle with gender pronouns throughout).

As both a jazz musician and someone who identifies as queer, this book intersected with multiple identities for me in a powerful way. I think the author's words about the body are very provocative and for anyone considering it, Trumpet is not a long read but a very emotional and relevant story. It is something that's hard

not to find some part of yourself in...

"When he gets down, and he doesn't always get down deep enough, he loses his sex, his race, his memory. He strips himself bare, takes everything off, 'til he's barely human. Then he brings himself back, out of this world. Back, from way." - Jackie Kay

"His eyes shut tight to keep out the light. He is the music. The blood dreaming. The slow ache." -JK

"It doesn't matter a damn he is somebody he is not. None of it matters. The suit is just the suit the body holds. The body needs the suit to wear the horn. Only the music knows everything. Only the dark sweet heart of the music." - Jackie Kay

So I wonder....what suit is your body wearing for you today?

Naori

Nicole says

It's not often that a book can completely surprise you. I mean ta-da, pull the wool over your eyes, gasp out loud surprise you.

It's clear from the start that Joss and Millie Moody share a secret and now that their secret is out life will never be the same. You get that on page one. Now see, I thought the secret was something to do with racial tensions or how this black man and white woman met and married or maybe how they managed to adopt their son. Some sort of sinister family secret or crime committed in the name of love.

Not so.

To say more would be to spoil the story, so I'm going to delve into some abstract discussion of the book. The multiple narrators had very distinct voices, though sometimes they wore on my nerves. Millie was eloquent but redundant while Colman was just a jackass. To be fair, I'm guessing that was intentional. I mean, when you're drowning in grief, you do circle in emotional spirals and when you feel betrayed by your parents, you might ramble like a jackass.

I loved the peripheral character interjections. They read like characters from Our Town, giving a hint of their lives by describing their interactions with the various Moody family members. Some of Millie's descriptions of her grief were lovely. At first, the ending seemed to come out of nowhere, but thinking back, I can clearly trace Colman's steps to his breaking point/acceptance so it makes more sense than I originally thought.

Go read this book and then call me so we can talk about it.

Most apt line: "I didn't feel like I was living a lie. I was living a life." Seriously, let's talk.

Fiona says

Jackie Kay is the current Scots Makar, Scotland's national poet. She dedicated this book to Carol Ann Duffy, her ex partner and currently Britain's Poet Laureate. With credentials such as these, I had high expectations.

'Trumpet' is a book of its time. It was written in the 1990s.

The nineties love the private life. The private life that turns suddenly and horrifically public. The sly life that hides pure filth and sin. The life of respectability that shakes with hypocrisy. ... The upper-class English movie star who has been caught [being] sucked by a Hollywood prostitute. Love it. The respectable 'family values' MP who sucked on the toe of a bimbo. Love it. All of it. The dirtier the better. The more famous, the better. [The ghost writer's voice]

In this climate Joss Moore, internationally famous jazz trumpeter, dies and is discovered to be a woman. His wife and he have lived with this secret for over 40 years. The son they adopted didn't know that his father was a woman. He found out from the undertaker when he went to pay his respects. The book listens to each voice in turn. His widow, Millicent, who fell in love with Joss before finding out he was a woman. It didn't matter to her. She loved him. His son, Colman, bitter and upset with his father and ready to sell his story to a hack journalist seeking her fame and fortune by ghost writing a sensationalist book about Joss. Fellow musicians, their old cleaner, an old school friend, his mother. Headlines screamed that Joss had been 'living a lie'.

They found people who claimed to be Joss's friends who said things like, 'He fooled us completely'. But it didn't feel like that. I didn't feel like I was living a lie. I felt like I was living a life. Hindsight is a lie.' [Millicent's voice]

Jackie Kay writes lyrically, almost poetically at times, about love. Joss was loved by his parents, his wife, his son, his friends and admirers. He had hidden his gender because he wanted to be a jazz trumpeter and that just wasn't going to happen living as a woman in the 1950s. He became famous in the jazz world and achieved the life he'd dreamt about, except that he had to studiously avoid being 'found out' by anyone other than his wife for the rest of his life.

'Trumpet' is a love story, moving and full of compassion, with a fair dose of bitterness as we follow the painful journey of the bereaved towards acceptance. It will stay with me for a long while yet.

PS Joss was from Greenock and so there's a fine smattering of the West of Scotland expressions that Jackie Kay so loves. I have to thank her for reminding me of some I'd forgotten, especially 'Away and raffle yourself'!

Kat B. says

After his death, it's revealed to the world that the famous male trumpet player Joss Moody turns out to have been assigned female at birth. Mostly a novel about the way his son grapples with this truth, the story is told through everyone's voice except for the deceased (save a few slightly-redeeming pages). The son's journey toward understanding his father is painful to read, but also somewhat powerful. Overall the book fell short of moving me, even felt frustrating at times, but was an interesting read.

Madleen says

This book is all about love.

It is an absorbing type of book, but not a page turner.

Reading it, is as if reading about real true feelings. One is overcome with tenderness towards the story, not some of the characters.

This book is truthful to the last extent; but it tells the truth gently.

The expressions, the descriptions, the short recollections.

This story touches your heart. It doesn't grip it, possess you; but grow on you, become part of you from the very beginning.

It will remain with you, make part of your innermost.

I didn't believe such intimacy in language possible before.

We get to know each character rather well and thoroughly, but as the story develops, must comprehend that there is a world to this character beyond expression.

This book is like magic.

What bewitches the reader so much is that most of the story takes place in his own mind.

Kay has just spelled out the frame for us, but done it so well and in such a way, that between the lines and words there lies the whole story, which cannot be written down: it is beyond expression.

This story soothes and stimulates, develops naturally and surprises, is told in a completely calm tone, but moves you deeply.

Jackie Kay has the talent to reach the reader, to make him create his own world out of her book. This story cannot be compared to any other novel whatsoever. It has become true, as it tells us about true historical events of society.
