

‘An Imaginary Black Family’: Jazz and the Construction of Scottish Blackness in Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*

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The subject of this paper is the influence of African-American culture in Jackie Kay’s novel *Trumpet* (1998), about a Scottish jazz musician. Kay’s impulse for this narrative comes from the true story of Billy Tipton, an American jazz pianist who, on his death in 1989, was discovered to have the body of a woman. Because Tipton had lived as a man, including marrying twice and adopting children, his story became a sensation in the States. Kay transposes the basics of this narrative, making her central character, Joss Moody, a Scottish, biracial trumpet player. This paper investigates Kay’s motivation and strategies in writing *Trumpet*. In making Joss Moody black when Tipton himself was white, Kay reveals an agenda that aims to instate a black presence into a predominantly white Scottish culture. Growing up as a biracial, adopted child in 1960s Glasgow, Kay writes that ‘I concocted an imaginary black family for myself through images that I had available to me’, the vast majority of which were African Americans. She ‘invented a self’, just as in *Trumpet* she invents a black, queer, Scottish cultural presence. The novel itself constructs a performative subject, relating to themes in African-American literature, including ‘passing’, transvestism and what Toni Morrison calls ‘re-memory’. Jazz is reflected in themes, content and structure, and a major concern with reinvention. Referring to the country of her birth, Kay has remarked in an interview that ‘I love the country but I don’t know if the country loves me’, a reference to her experience of racism in Scotland that prompted her relocation to England. *Trumpet* is a nostalgic revisioning of Scotland through the re-constructive influence of African-American culture, giving voice to Kay’s own complex feelings of loss and relations with that country.