Walking into the world of Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* (1998) is much like walking into the fog-filled setting of this essay’s epigraph. The plot seems simple enough: Joss Moody, a black Scottish trumpet player, is discovered to be biologically female (a fact previously only known to his white wife, Millie) after he dies. However, focusing on the effects that this revelation has on those who survive him, Kay creates a complex web of narrative voices that juxtaposes the past and the present through poignant, often painful reenactments of memory. Construing a story that condenses and suspends like a vapor in the cool Scottish air, Kay forms a dense narrative mist in *Trumpet* that makes the character of Joss simultaneously palpable and intangible, substantive and effervescent, expansive and intimate. And, though she chooses to feature certain characters’ perspectives more prominently than others—namely those of Millie, their adopted son Colman, and a tabloid journalist, Sophie Stones—the novel’s multi-voiced structure also forces the reader to work through a number of testimonies from a diverse group of people, ranging from one of Moody’s band-mates to his doctor, his housekeeper, a childhood friend, and even the funeral director and a county registrar. Doing so, *Trumpet* generates a compelling sense of empathy for Joss and the people who inhabit the novel, cataloging their subjective experiences and emphasizing the intensely affective components of each.

On a more literal level, however, the “pea souper” in epigraph of course portrays the physical mist that Joss’ father steps into when he arrives in Scotland from Africa.
Described in a letter that Joss gives to Colman to open posthumously, the fog serves as a key detail in Joss’ beautiful and haunting account of his father’s life. Chilling and disarming, the fog not only presents the Scottish landscape in a way that makes it emphatically felt, but also creates a sense of the terror and disorientation of being thrust into a place that is not-yet-home. Significantly, Colman’s account of his father’s biography in the penultimate chapter of the novel, entitled “Last Word,” is the only place in the novel where readers have the chance to hear Joss’ own ‘voice.’ Preparing the expectation that it will finally reveal Joss’ decision to conceal his biological sex from his son, the letter instead recounts a story of diasporic movement that describes processes of change, of losing one’s past, and of making a new life. In writing a history that implicitly mirrors his own transformational journey from the young girl Josephine Moore into the dying man writing the letter, Joss subtly reveals the ways in which national, racial, and gendered identities have condensed into the “real pea souper” of his life. Functioning as more than mere meteorological detail, then, the fog literalizes the complex imbrication of his postcolonial and queer experiences and the ways in which they come to bear upon him and his family history.

Of the few critics who have evaluated *Trumpet*, most have tended to read the novel as either a story that speaks to its treatment of queer sexuality and gender performance or as a novel about the racial complexities of post-imperial Britain. While these pieces offer productive explorations of the novel in their own right, this separation fails to show how those two facets of identity become enmeshed and how they fundamentally constitute one another in the lived experience of its characters. Demonstrating how the analytically distinct categories of race, nation, and gender come to be powerfully synthesized within an individual’s life, *Trumpet* challenges the notion that these differences can be thought of in absolute or separate terms. Furthermore, by foregrounding the affective experiences of its many characters, the novel not only offers the chance to understand how the postcolonial and the queer need to be thought of together, but also provides an aesthetic and narrative locale where this condensing can be explored and, perhaps more importantly, felt.

To this end, I want to focus in this essay on Kay’s use of imagery and metaphor in *Trumpet* and investigate how she uses them to index the structural and affective dimensions of the queer and postcolonial experience, specifically through her elaboration of a diasporic and transgendered figure. Indeed, as her complex use of the fog shows, Kay develops an imagistic vocabulary that not only points to the intersections between these experiences, but also demands that they be seen as complicatedly lived processes: as sources of pain and pleasure, expression and limitation, displacement and survival. I will specifically focus on the novel’s use of spectrality and musicality, two tropes that are explicitly linked to the book’s treatment both of race and nationality, and of gender and sexuality. Before turning to a close reading of the novel, however, I will first outline *Trumpet*’s relationship to Kay’s larger body of