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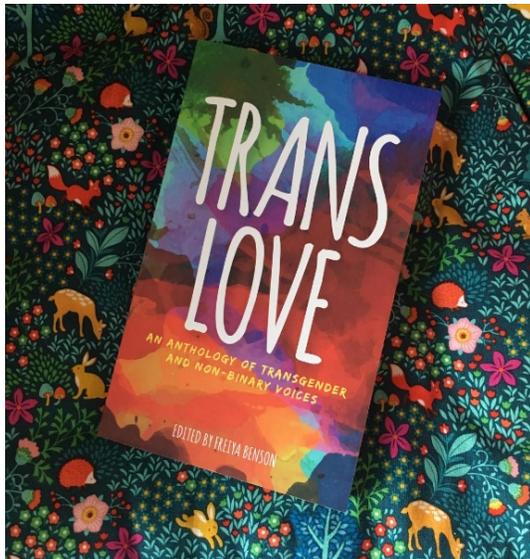
Celebrating Trans Authors: Reviews Issue

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Interview with Freiya Benson, editor of *Trans Love: An Anthology of Transgender and Non-Binary Voices*

Interview by Lyndsay Macadam

Freiya Benson. *Trans Love: An Anthology of Transgender and Non-Binary Voices*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019.



Freiya Benson is a journalist and author from the United Kingdom. She writes about sex, relationships, love, and how to navigate the world as a trans woman. Her latest project is the anthology *Trans Love: An Anthology of Transgender and Non-Binary Voices*, a collection of writing by herself and others about being trans and in love, in all its many forms.

Why did you decide to approach the book as an anthology?

Love—the subject of the anthology—is a big thing. It felt to me that, although I have my own personal experience of love, that it's just one experience, and there's an opportunity here to broaden the picture a bit. After deciding this, an anthology felt like the only way to go, and I was lucky enough to be approached by a publisher, which really helped get the ball rolling! Once I started getting submissions in from other people and hearing their stories, it just confirmed to me this was the right way to go. The work I started getting was really amazing and it really affirmed how important it was to get a variety of voices in the book, both from an intersectional point of view and also because it's just really interesting to read about.

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How do you find people to get involved?

It was mainly the internet if I'm honest. I did do some flyers, but they were less successful! I also approached a few people I already knew, and my publisher, Jessica Kingsley, also helped with getting in touch with some of their own writers, which was super helpful as well. It was quite hard work trying to work out how to reach people. I don't really use social



media that much so I had to dive in a bit with that and reach out, but it did work, and once I overcame the anxiety that comes with doing this sort of thing, it was actually okay.

What form does the writing take?

The writing is a real mix of stuff. There's poetry and prose from both known and new writers. It felt really important to me to try and get some fresh new voices in the anthology, so for some of the people featured, this is their first published piece of work. I'd like to think that because there are over thirty different writers featured in the book that everyone will find something that will resonate with them.

Why love, and why trans love especially?

For a while I've felt that when it comes to trans people and love, that the focus has been a bit off. It nearly always revolves around sex and relationships for a start, and it's regularly portrayed in a really negative way. It felt so one-dimensional, and I wanted to address that. In the anthology there is a section about sex and relationships, but there's also parts where we talk about family, friendship, self-love, and faith, as well. The word "love" covers a vast spectrum and within that there are negative and positive things. It's just sometimes we get stuck on the dark stuff. This isn't to say that there isn't any darker stuff in the anthology, that is obviously an intrinsic part of love. It's just that there's also more positive and joyous representation as well.

When we think about love we normally think about romantic love, but you've chosen a wider definition. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Yeah, like I was saying before, we get very focused on the sex and relationships bit of love. I think this is partly because it is really interesting, and it's also the aspect of love that's most likely to affect us all in some shape or form, I guess. However, I wanted to broaden that out a bit and try and cover some of the other aspects of love that can affect us as well. That's why there's writing in the anthology about friendships and family, self-love, and faith. Right at the start when I was first thinking about the anthology, I was writing a lot about how I interacted with the world as a trans woman. It occurred to me that whatever I was writing about, be that sex, my own body image, or coming out for instance, it all basically boiled down to love and its many facets.

Which aspect of love was the most challenging to write about?

I think it is always hard writing about your own personal experience in relation to other people, especially when it's people you know. I think as well that when it comes to love it's sometimes hard not to feel a bit side-lined or hurt as a trans person. It often feels like love is stacked against us, and that there are extra hurdles we have to navigate that others don't. I think that being able to write about that and to also come across well is really hard,



especially in today's world where everything is so visible and immediate. I've always tried to approach anything I write from a place of kindness and understanding, even if I'm hurting, which isn't always easy to do. I think I succeed most of time, but it's definitely challenging sometimes!

Where there any chapters you'd have liked to explore in more depth?

I would have really liked to expand on the faith and belief chapter more and get more representation from a variety of faiths. It was definitely the toughest section to get people to write for and it felt like I only touched the tip of the iceberg with that section and that there was easily a whole book in there somewhere. If I had more time and energy then I would have definitely expanded that part, but sadly I'm only human!

Who is the book for?

That's a tough question! In an ideal world I'd like to say it's for everyone, but I'm not sure if that's the case. I think there's a lot in it, so there may well be parts that some people love that others just don't get, which is fine. I primarily wrote it for trans people, and by trans I mean the whole spectrum of trans identities. The writing in the book comes from a trans perspective, and I hope that the pieces in the book help make people feel less alone or heard. It would be amazing if someone read something in the anthology and felt that, you know like in a "Oh my goodness, me too" type way. I'd hope, as well, that it's accessible to people outside of the trans community and that maybe it gives them a better understanding of how love can be for trans people. Ideally, I'd love it if the writing in the book made people feel included and gave them some degree of reassurance or joy!

What do you hope people will take away from reading *Trans Love*?

That we're not so different, really. We all experience love in some shape or form, and that shared experience is powerful and uniting. Yes, it can be tough, but it can also be joyous and celebratory. I hope everyone finds a bit of writing that they can relate to, or that makes them think, or smile, or feel something. I really like for people to read the book and take away some love and understanding. That would be the dream.

When can we read the book?

The book came out on the twenty-first of August, 2019, both in ebook form and real-life paperback, which is ridiculously exciting for me. You can order it worldwide at all good booksellers, both on the internet and in the real world right now!



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An Anthology of Transgender and Non-Binary Voices*

Lyndsay Macadam

LYNDSAY MACADAM is a 40-something queer from Scotland who has migrated south to live in Brighton, England. They lead an LGBTQ Charity and are passionate about queer culture, politics and equality. When they are not at their desk fighting the good fight against the patriarchy, they are usually reading books, growing plants or wandering through the woods. @MxMacadam