



Juggling

Barbara Trapido

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Christina and Pam are sisters less than a year apart in age. Pam is tall and black-haired, while Christina is small and fair. Brought up in New York, they are sent to an English boarding school where they meet two boys, Peter and Jago. As the years pass, the four meet and part.

Juggling Details

Date : Published June 30th 1995 by Penguin Books Ltd (first published 1994)

ISBN : 9780140236040

Author : Barbara Trapido

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary

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Anne says

I've never read anything by Barbara Trapido before. Well, that's not quite true – I tried to read Frankie and Stankie and just couldn't get to grips with it at all. But I found Juggling in a charity shop and thought Barbara Trapido's reputation had at least earned her another try. And how I loved this book! The cast of characters demands advanced juggling skills – the edgy Christina, her adopted sister Pam, the ethereal Peter, the slightly dangerous Jago and a vast cast of other characters like the exotic Dulcie, Christina's pushy dad Joe, the fragrant Alice, the bohemian Judith, the unfrocked priest, the long-lost twin. The plot is labyrinthine, but handled with a deft lightness of touch – and some of the most wonderfully quirky language. The parallels with Shakespearean comedy – and tragedy – are explicitly drawn. The story ranges through religion, the academic world, childhood, sexuality, religion and more. Parts are shocking, parts are laugh-out-loud funny, others are unutterably sad. And the drawing together of the story threads at the end is satisfying, shocking and wonderfully appropriate. I was expecting dry erudition, but instead I enjoyed a highly entertaining read. Why did I leave it so long?

Kate says

'Juggling' is a book that I quite enjoyed reading, but that I'll ultimately forget. It'll sit on my book case gathering dust, and I'll eventually donate it to charity. For all the praise I've read for Trapido's writing, I didn't see it too well. I felt it was quite naive, and almost childish at times. Perhaps I'm being too critical, but I kept expecting something amazing and profound to jump out at me, something about relationships and family (the novel heavily focuses on both, the an extreme, you could argue) that would stick with me for days, but unfortunately nothing.

I do think that Trapido is very clever though. To the point where upon finishing, I found myself calling her a 'very clever author'. One of the repeated points in the novel is Shakespearean plays, comedies and tragedies; so it's of no surprise that the novel plays out like one. Towards the end I actually found myself getting annoyed by it though. Things became altogether too silly and nonsensical for my liking (did the genre suddenly shift to fantasy?) and I felt it was rushed and clumped together. As if the author inspired to create a shattering Shakespearean ending, but could only piece together a dull, everything-in-its-place epilogue. I wonder, upon finishing, if the author named the book so because of this?

On the other hand, she does create very likable, very well-rounded characters. I found the shift in protagonist fresh and interesting, and it kept surprising me. I found myself guessing at what would happen, and constantly being proved wrong. That was very refreshing. It's a shame that Peter, my favourite character, wasn't explored more, but that could be my bias showing.

Evan James says

loved the writing. perhaps a little too "tricky" in the 3rd quarter but a strong finish!

Laura says

Barbara Trapido is a recent discovery for me and this is only the second novel of hers I have read. The "Shakespearean" tag appealed to me immensely and I have enjoyed it in this context as a literary artefact. I am always after this kind of thing, and it not always easy to find!

So, what have we here? Twins, fathers and daughters, fathers and sons, couplings and uncouplings, a midwinter's dream, with ghouls instead of fairies... I feel that there are so many elements from Shakespeare in this story of Christina and her conflicted feelings about her father, that it is not possible for me to say whether this is or not a pastiche of a specific play. I can't possibly say and I am keen to read your reviews for some scholarly illuminating gems.

Kathe says

I read *Juggling* for the first time soon after it came out in 1994. Loved it then and loved it even more this time, which is lucky as my book club will be talking about it tomorrow night. (It was my turn to choose the book.) We'll also be discussing the prequel, *Temples of Delight*, which I reviewed here recently as well.

I love novels with stratified plots and characters who surprise me. *Juggling* delivers on these and many other counts. I'm a Shakespeare nut, so that helps with a lot of the references in *Juggling*. There's a Horrendous Event right in the middle that I'd forgotten about, but it's central to the plot so I forgive the author.

If you've never read any Trapido, read *Temples of Delight* first, then *Juggling*, as *T of D* provides a lot of the background for understanding the characters and why they are the way they are. The ending is extremely Shakespearean, complete with reunited twins and characters changing partners. In the hands of a less skillful writer, it would probably seem hokey, but no - it's wonderful.

Hilary Tesh says

The sequel to *Temples of Delight* ~ I would say it is an advantage to have read that first and fairly recently. That way, you will recognise the background of some of the main characters, Alice and Joe, last seen about to get married, baby Pam and Alice's own daughter, Christina, both now teenagers, and Roland Dent, Alice's one time suitor. The story is witty and intriguing, like the Shakespeare comedy it tries to emulate, with just as many twists, turns and lost twins. After a slow start, I really enjoyed this book, with its characters which then reappear in *The Travelling Hornplayer*. I have to add how much I enjoy how Barbara Trapido revisits her characters, rather than leaving them frozen in time, even if it does mean they don't always get the happy ending you would hope for them!

Tony says

I'm fairly sure that I have read this before! Trapido seems to fill her books with literary references and strong Shakespearean-style coincidences and this books plays this quite heavily. Twins figure strongly, particularly pairs of twins that are significantly different (in one case of different parents!) Physical similarities do not always make people alike (or indeed to like each other) and differences do not always attract. The plot is

implausible and the outrageous coincidences are knowingly hammed up. Great fun to read, however!

(recovered notes from 2005) story full of coincidences as lives interweave. The story revolves around twins and sisters who have no genetic link (like my girls). Full of eccentric characters and often making strange decisions. The failing for me was that BT insists on tying up every loose end by the end of the book, which involves some dramatic conversions and far-fetched combinations.

Buchdokter says

In "Jonglieren" treffen zahlreiche Personen aus komplizierten Familienverhältnissen aufeinander - neudeutsch: Kinder aus Patchwork-Familien. Christina ist die leibliche Tochter von Alice. Ihre ältere Schwester Pam wurde als Neugeborenes von Alice und Joe adoptiert, nachdem das Drama um den Tod von Pams Mutter das Paar an deren Sterbebett überhaupt erst zusammengeführt hatte. Joe ist der Verleger der Verstorbenen. Die Geschichte der ungewöhnlichen Familiengründung erzählt Mutter Alice ihren Töchtern wie ein Märchen. Die Mädchen sind im Alter weniger als ein Jahr auseinander und Christinas Eifersucht auf die Erstgeborene ist nur zu verständlich. Schon früh wird Christinas Drang deutlich, Gleichaltrige zu dominieren und aus der Enge ihrer Familie auszubrechen. Pietro, der Jongleur, dem sie so gern nacheifern würde und den sie zum Beinahe-Vater ehrenhalber ernannt, wartet mit einer ähnlich komplizierten Herkunft auf. Als Kind kennt Christina die Verbindung zwischen Alice und einem Mann namens Roland Dent noch nicht, die durch Pietros Herkunft bis nach Frankreich reicht. Durch eine Begegnung mit Internatsschülern entschliesst sich Joe spontan, seine Töchter auf das englische Internat dieser Jungen schicken. Die Schule nimmt noch nicht lange Mädchen auf, ihre Strukturen sind stark durch männliche Rituale geprägt. Christina findet im Internat ihr aus "Der Herr der Fliegen" bekannte Gruppen-Beziehungen vor. Herrscher und Meinungsführer der Schüler ist Jago Rutherford, dessen Kontakt zum eigenen Zwilling Bruder durch die Trennung seiner Eltern abrisst und der unbewusst auf der Suche nach seiner verlorenen schwächeren Hälfte zu sein scheint. Der Neuanfang im Internat ermöglicht Joe und Alice ein Leben ohne Kinder; die Mädchen können sich endlich mit Gleichaltrigen messen, nicht wie bisher nur mit der eigenen Schwester. Die Beziehung zwischen der allgemein bewunderten Christina und Jago könnte die Verletzungen des wilden, unglücklichen Jungen heilen, würde bei Jagos Ersatzzwilling Peter jedoch neue Wunden reißen. In einer Halloween-Nacht kommt es zu einer Gewalttat unter den Internatsschülern. Mehrere Personen wollen - mit besten Absichten - dem Opfer helfen, in eigener Hilflosigkeit verschlimmern sie die Sache jedoch. Was gut gemeint war, sprengt die ohnehin komplizierten Beziehungen.

In Rückblenden in die Kindheit werden die Familienbeziehungen gleich zu Beginn der Handlung aufgefährt, so dass man ähnlich wie in einer Krimihandlung Details sammeln kann, die zu einer Lösung führen könnten. Das Thema Herkunft läuft wie eine zweite Spur neben der Handlung. Wie die eigene Entwicklung von der Nationalität der Eltern beeinflusst wird, das Wissen über die leiblichen Eltern, wie auch die Situation von Stief- und Halbgeschwistern laufen wie ein roter Faden durch die Handlung.

Die bis dahin so spannende Handlung hebt leider im letzten Drittel des Buches ab, sie zerfasert an dem Punkt, an dem ich lieber wissen wollte, wie es dem Opfer der Gewalttat inzwischen geht. Chrissie, vom Kinderbuch "Madeline" und von "Herr der Fliegen" geprägt, arbeitet inzwischen als Studentin über Shakespeare - Barbara Trapido schwelgt deutlich in literarischen Bezügen. Durch die Beziehungen zwischen sehr vielen Personen, sowie die intertextuellen Bezüge war "Jonglieren" für mich ein mit feinem bis drastischem Humor beobachteter, sehr fordernder Familien-Roman, der sicher bei der zweiten Lektüre weitere Seiten von sich preisgeben wird.

Die im Berlin Verlag (ISBN 978-3833303104) und vorher bei Goldmann erschienene Übersetzung Jonglieren. wurde für diese Ausgabe überarbeitet.

Liz Lou says

A beautiful conclusion to Temples of Delight and the interwoven nature of relationships. Or, a story on the preponderance of soul mates.

Melinda Worfolk says

One of the best ways I can describe reading this book is that you get on the horse at the beginning and it takes off at a gallop. You are flung off the horse at the end, so you stand up, look around, and try to make sense of the journey you've just been on!

This is what happens when you put a bunch of holds on Overdrive and forget about them. When Juggling came in, I could not remember why I had put a hold on it, but there it was, so I read it. Happily, I was not disappointed. Trapido is a talented writer and her prose is funny, prickly, and energetic. There are deliberate allusions to Shakespeare's mistaken identity comedies, and the plot of Juggling is accordingly convoluted. It's not a five-star read for me simply because I wasn't crazy about some of the weird coincidences (and in all honesty I am already starting to forget some of the story--all that galloping), but I really enjoyed it overall.

Carla says

Fast-paced, witty, but ultimately less satisfying than its (truly wonderful) predecessor Temples of Delight. The faith and magical qualities of the former are now replaced by a somewhat cynical comic spirit-- and what was touching before becomes somewhat ordinary. Some of the plotting seems forced, too. There's a masterful whirlwind wrap-up of juggled partnerships, but because we haven't seen any of them develop, they seem unpersuasive.

Uncle Bob says

Barabara Trapido keeps turning out these wonderfully intelligent, characterful novels.

Two sisters, Pam and Christina, one dark, one fair, with contrasting temperaments make their way in the world. At boarding school the girls meet two boys, Peter and Jago, one tall and handsome, the other small and serious.

It is impossible to convey in a few words the subtlety with which these relationships are drawn. Like Barbara

Trapido's other novels the story is told with an exquisite sense of humour.

I would also recommend Frankie and Stankie, her semi-fictionalised story of growing up in apartheid South Africa in the 50s.

Kristin Strong says

I'm afraid I just don't get it.

There's an undercurrent of Shakespeare running through this, and his plot contrivances are mentioned on at least one occasion, and if this whole thing is meant to be an homage of sorts to that, then I get it.

I don't like it much, but I get it.

We have a saintly "angel" who occasionally floats above the ground (or above the covers -- I picture it like Sigourney Weaver in "Ghostbusters") and can stop people doing violent or bad things. He appears mainly in the background so he isn't around to stop a rape but fetches up in a friend's bed to tell her that he's in love with the twin brother of the man she's loved for years. (Yes, the whole plot is like this.)

Coincidences abound and everybody is related somehow and if you can keep it straight, congratulations. I couldn't. Probably because I wasn't invested enough to put in the mental work. I didn't hate this, I just didn't CARE.

Esme says

i enjoyed sections of this? and wildly hated other sections? and generally didn't understand the rest? uh yeah

Paul says

I wasn't sure about this one as I haven't read any Barbara Trapido before; but it was actually rather good. It is a sequel apparently, but works as a standalone very well. This is all about Shakespearean comedy; which is to say it's all rather tragic; in a light and comedic sort of way.

Trapido serves up twins separated at birth, a defrocked priest, misplaced siblings, coincidences that are Shakespearean in concept, switched and transposed parents, blurred genders, rape, incest, religion, English public schools, fathers and daughters/sons, finding your mum snogging your English tutor's wife and Trapido juggles all these balls and more in a very adept way.

Juggling in this context has the Elizabethan meaning of to play tricks or deceive; a sort of sleight of hand. In the middle of a book one of the characters writes an essay on Shakespearean comedies which is reproduced in full and is brilliant: the point being;

"The Tragedies are Tragedies and the Comedies are Tragedies. The Comedies are a better sort of tragedy because they make us laugh and because the characters stay alive."

And;

"In the conflict of gender, the women win the war of words, but the men will win the battle. The women win on points, but the men are the people who have the points. They have the last weapon against the last word. They have kisses and penetration.

Peace, I will stop your mouth

Women are made to bear and so are you.

The tragedy of the Comedies is that while sex draws men and women together, gender draws them apart.

This is the terrible contradiction.”

Trapido's plots plays brilliantly with all of this in what is essentially a coming of age tale. The plot is really too complex to try to explain, but is simply told and easily followed. It does help to have something of a grasp of Shakespeare's Comedies because there are so many references and parallels.

I don't really understand why Trapido is not better known; this is good stuff.

4.5 stars
