

## Ring of Fire

LISA JARNOT was born in Buffalo, New York in 1967. She is the author of several chapbooks as well as a full-length collection of poems, *Some Other Kind of Mission*, (Burning Deck Press, 1996). She currently lives in New York City and is completing a biography of the American poet Robert Duncan which will be published by the University of California Press in 2005.



# Ring of Fire

LISA JARNOT



PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING  
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham PDO, Cambridge CB1 5JX United Kingdom  
PO Box 202, Applecross, Western Australia 6153

All rights reserved

© Lisa Jarnot, 2003

The right of Lisa Jarnot to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

First published by Zoland Books, Boston USA 2001  
Second enlarged edition 2003

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

*This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.*

ISBN 1 84471 007 6 paperback

SP

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

*for Elizabeth Willis*



## Contents

I. The Book of Providence	3
The Bridge	5
Dictionary	7
Tell Me Poem	8
Ode	9
Brooklyn Anchorage	10
What In Fire Did I, Firelover, Starter of Fires, Love?	11
Found Text	13
Autobiography	14
Still Life	15
Valley of the Shadow of the Dogs	16
The New Life	17
The Age of the Velocipede	20
II. Sea Lyrics	23
III. Dumb Duke Death	55
IV. Heliopolis	67
Suddenly, Last Summer	69
O Life Force of Supernalness of World	70
Ye White Antarctic Birds	71
Poem Beginning with a Line by Frank Lima	72
O Razorback Clams	73
Moo Is Om Backwards	74
Song of the Chinchilla	75
You, Armadillo	76
On the Lemur	77
Aardvark	78

Song from the Greek	81
Lake of Fire	83
The Song Between	84
Old	85
The Eightfold Path	86
Right View	86
Right Aspiration	88
Right Speech	89
Right Action	90
Right Energy	91
Right Mind	92
Right Labor	93
Right Meditation	94
The Specific Incendiaries of Springtime	95

## Acknowledgments

Some of the poems included in this volume were originally published in the following magazines, chapbooks, and books:

*Bombay Gin*, *The Colorado Review*, *Compound Eye*, *Downtown Brooklyn*, *Facture*, *Gare Du Nord*, *Gas: High Octane Poetry*, *Grand Street*, *The Hat*, *The Impercipient*, *Jacket*, *Kenning*, *Lingo*, *Mass Ave*, *Mike and Dale's Younger Poets*, *Object*, *The Portable Boog Reader*, *Shiny*, *Stand*, *Talisman*, *The Transcendental Friend*, *Verse*, *Washington Review*, *The World*, and *Zazil*.

*The Eightfold Path* (a+bend press, San Francisco), *Heliopolis* (rem press, Cambridge), *new mannerist tricycle* (Beautiful Swimmer Press, Brooklyn), *Sea Lyrics* (Situations Press, New York), and *Two of Everything* (Meow Press, San Diego).

*Ring of Fire* (Zoland Books, Boston).



Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.  
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

—CATULLUS



# I. The Book of Providence



## The Bridge

That there are things that can never be the same about  
my face, the houses, or the sand, that I was born under the  
sign of the sheep, that like Abraham Lincoln I am serious  
but also lacking in courage,

That from this yard I have been composing a great speech,  
that I write about myself, that it's good to be a poet, that I look  
like the drawing of a house that was pencilled by a child,  
that curiously, I miss him and my mind is not upon the Pleiades,  
that I love the ocean and its foam against the sky,

That I am sneezing like a lion in this garden that he knows  
the lilies of his Nile, distant image, breakfast, a flock of birds  
and sparrows from the sky,

That I am not the husband of Cassiopeia, that I am not  
the southern fish, that I am not the last poet of civilization,  
that if I want to go out for a walk and then to find myself  
beneath a bank of trees, weary, that this is the life that I had,

That curiously I miss the sound of the rain pounding  
on the roof and also all of Oakland, that I miss the sounds of  
sparrows dropping from the sky, that there are sparks behind  
my eyes, on the radio, and the distant sound of sand blasters,  
and breakfast, and every second of it, geometric, smoke  
from the chimney of the trees where I was small,

That in January, I met him in a bar, we went  
home together, there was a lemon tree in the back yard,  
and a coffee house where we stood outside and kissed,

That I have never been there, curiously, and that it never was  
the same, the whole of the island, or the paintings of the stars,  
fatherly, tied to sparrows as they drop down from the sky,

O rattling frame where I am, I am where there are still  
these assignments in the night, to remember the texture  
of the leaves on the locust trees in August, under the  
moonlight, rounded, through a window in the hills,

That if I stay beneath the pole star in this harmony of  
crickets that will sing, the bird sound on the screen,  
the wide eyes of the owl form of him still in the dark,  
blue, green, with shards of the Pacific,

That I do not know the dreams from which I have come,  
sent into the world without the blessing of a kiss, behind the  
willow trees, beside the darkened pansies on the deck beside  
the ships, rocking, I have written this, across the back of the  
sky, wearing a small and yellow shirt, near the reptile house,  
mammalian, no bigger than the herd,

That I wrote the history of the war waged between the  
Peloponnesians and the south, that I like to run through  
shopping malls, that I've also learned to draw, having been  
driven here, like the rain is driven into things, into the  
ground, beside the broken barns, by the railroad tracks,  
beside the sea, I, Thucydides, having written this, having  
grown up near the ocean.

## Dictionary

As a small south american squirrel  
inhabiting mostly mountainous regions  
would feed on lizards half-way between  
poles of the tropics, I too would fall  
heartbroken in the settlement of feuds  
or the fields of kentucky.

When the moss grows high between the  
perennials and disordered mimmocks weep,  
these dainty fastidious gestating mammals  
break for leavened bread and sup between  
the rows of trees, lifting like friars  
some heavy books in sunlight's morning  
windows where the mollusks row in scion's  
quadregesimal phyla.

## Tell Me Poem

Tell me why you don't  
want to know about the  
snake cults in ancient  
greece and then tell me  
why someone started all  
the tin foil on fire on  
avenue b and then tell  
me the story about osgood  
and ferocious the giant  
squirrels.

## Ode

For let me consider him who pretends to be the pizza delivery man and is instead the perfect part of day, for the fact he is a medium, for the eight to twelve inches of snow he tends to be, for he who covers the waterfront, for he that was hand-made in a tiny village in japan, for that he is more than just an envelope or inside-out balloon, for that he can always find the scotch tape, for that he resembles a river in mid-December muddied over, for that he has seen the taxi cabs on fire in the rain, for that he is like the heat beneath the desk lamp, for that he is not a tiny teal iguana, for that it is he who waits for me inside cafes, for that he has hands and legs, for that he exceeds the vegetable, for that he is the rest of the balance continuing huge.

## Brooklyn Anchorage

and at noon I will fall in love  
and nothing will have meaning  
except for the brownness of  
the sky, and tradition, and water  
and in the water off the railway  
in New Haven all the lights  
go on across the sun, and for  
millennia those who kiss fall into  
hospitals, riding trains, wearing  
black shoes, pursued by those  
they love, the Chinese in the armies  
with the shiny sound of Johnny Cash,  
and in my plan to be myself  
I became someone else with  
soft lips and a secret life,  
and I left, from an airport,  
in tradition of the water  
on the plains, until the train  
started moving and yesterday  
it seemed true that suddenly  
inside of the newspaper  
there was a powerline and  
my heart stopped, and everything  
leaned down from the sky to kill me  
and now the cattails sing.