

Screens Jets Heaven

JILL JONES is a Sydney poet and writer. Her work has been published extensively in Australia and in journals in New Zealand, Canada, the USA and the UK as well as on-line. Some of her poems have been translated into Mandarin, Cantonese and Polish. Her first book, *The Mask and the Jagged Star*, won the Mary Gilmore Award in 1993 and her second book, *Flagging Down Time*, was published in late 1993 by Five Islands Press. *The Book of Possibilities*, published in 1997, was shortlisted for the 1997 National Book Council 'Banjo' Awards, the 1997 Age Book of the Year Poetry Prize and the 1998 Adelaide Festival Awards. A chapbook of prose poems, *The Real Me*, will be published by Wild Honey Press (Ireland) in 2002. She has worked as a journalist, film reviewer, book editor, arts administrator and public servant. In 1995 she co-edited *A Parachute of Blue*, an anthology of recent Australian poetry (Round Table Publications).

Other books by the same author

The Mask and the Jagged Star (1992)

Flagging Down Time (1993)

A Parachute of Blue: First Choice of Australian Poetry No. 1,
co-edited with Judith Beveridge and Louise Wakeling (1995)

The Book of Possibilities (1997)

Screens Jets Heaven

NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

JILL JONES



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for Annette

Vivamus . . . atque amemus
CATULLUS

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from The Mask and the Jagged Star 1992

Saturday morning in Ashfield

Fifteen minutes at the autobank, waiting for money,
and the nations stroll by with their children
and the new languages.
So many words for Saturday and shopping,
but only one word for money,
inscribed on plastic and the machine intones.
Your name's numeric, pretending it's the universal language,
but the footpaths show out the differences,
such as clothes and their colour, the number of children,
(oh, and eyes, hair and skin).
It's a weekly celebration despite government green papers,
talkback radio and letters to the editor.
It's inevitable like the violence,
and the bearing and raising of all these children
who are not getting back on any boats
because they were born just round the corner.
And it's nobody else's business
on a free winter's day cut with sun,
crowned with the beautiful hard antipodean blue.
But it doesn't seem so hard today
to love all that ordinary, forgotten suburban ritual
that could make this Saturday exciting.

Conversations in cars with the engine running

the footpath is crumbling at the top of the driveway
and there are stars tonight as we pull up
and word games like “scrabble my meaning”
at the tips of your fingers the volume controls
must be cold as you switch off
the meter this is now hyperspace
and one of the speakers is you
saying “you’re just like me” and that
is my ignition point i don’t want
your loser’s deck and your graphic equaliser
the vinyl is humid and i open the door and run
decide to be like myself as if that’s cheating
the neighbourhood is cheering as i race
down the driveway as i stop at the gate
to talk to the dog the stars above grow brighter
stabbing the dark and i’m wishing like blazes
for a bushfire friendship razing the neighbourhood
laughing in cars with the engine running.

If you're in the neighbourhood

They're shattering the telephone
booth again,
this time for New Year.
But get in touch.
The bowels of the old house
they're breaking
decorate the footpath, don't
go barefoot on these sharp entrails,
you'll never get here, don't
take off when the planes rev up
their last rush, high
scream, feet down
landing; the airport's miles away but
round the corner
there's the last black rush,
espresso, for strength, if you need.
But in this street there's a broken cup
from some forgotten basement,
viscera of bricks and tiles,
textures under feet.
You could find it all
here, you can feel it, or,
now they have air-conditioned the phone booth,
but left the receiver for the New Year,
get in touch.

Hyperventilating in the supermarket

Hyperventilating in the supermarket,
lost somewhere in a labyrinth
 of pet food, popcorn and poison,
running aisles of obstacles and temptation,
realising your health depends on memorising
 the food additive code,
as towers of toilet paper engulf young children
playing at bored makebelieve,
so much is bright and pretty, crazed and disjointed,
there's the viciousness of shopping trolleys,
their twisted wheels pointing every way but forward,
so you crash into small grottoes of sweet biscuits
made in the shapes of animals, on special,
six hours shopping confusion,
 lost at the end of the century,
while others are dying in queues,
six hours subtracted from the things
 you really should be doing,
hyperventilating in the supermarket,
high on guilt and spending,
clutching at shiny items.

Nosferatu in the suburbs

Not the guns again,
not the rain continuing,
not the knives,
not in front of the children.
No wonder they're all escaping,
the youngest ones left for the border
yesterday with all they have:
plastic back packs, bare feet and blank prescriptions,
drained by "adults only" pale night shadows.
And you, seeking beer and oblivion
and the family's deepest veins for red life.

Not the fists again,
not the blind thunder,
not the axe,
blunted on the daytime coffins,
but sharp in your private midnight.
Although your mouth moves
I can no longer speak,
every cavity, every room now empty,
sucked dry but you still starve;
all dry now except the walls,
still moist, the papers will say,
when the bystanders arrive.

Third floor outrider

There is sometimes hope beyond the midnight roar of traffic
leaving in squadrons of steel and drunks,
the suburb flips over one more time and grasping at silence
nuzzles its faceless sleep into thousands of pillows,
and there is someone on the third floor balcony scraping against
rust being wide awake, staring at some sun light years
distant with an old Greek name.

There is hope beyond for even the most careless traveller casting
through the smallest lens an eye after midnight.

The third floor rises even higher with this sweeping
concentration making you believe that god has the only
eternal focus wide out into universes even yet uncreated,
because the body trembles and you forgot the tripod but of course
even the balcony trembles and this is just one small wobbly
pinpoint planet anyway.

But it's necessary to stand chilling as tonight seeps in, to let
rumours of a dozen domestic misdemeanours go
unnoticed by every eye you have brought with you.

Because the lights below the horizon go on and off all the time
and you could notice some other midnight,

out there, to be out there, is the hope and there is no room for a
fear of sailing beyond, this is not what you're afraid of, but
of that zone below, alongside the traffic and the
battlefields,

before the third floor outrider is called and can't ignore the crater
there, on one side of the bed, and an animal, a human,
nuzzling around, watching the watcher and sounding a
little dangerous.