

# Launch of Jo Langdon's *Snowline*, Whitmore Press

By Maria Takolander, Café Go, Geelong, 18 May 2012

We are here to celebrate the launch of another stunning Whitmore Press poetry book. And to celebrate, with Whitmore Press, a stunning new voice in the Australian poetry scene: Jo Langdon.

*Snowline* is a book that, not surprisingly given the title, features various poems about that quietly beautiful but devastating phenomenon called snow. However, other things that feature just as prominently in this collection include the moon (mentioned 8 times), human wrists (referred to 6 times), and dreams (which are mentioned on 7 occasions). These things speak to the concerns of Jo's book, which exposes the quiet, secret and intimate aspects of the world; those things that so often go overlooked.

Jo Langdon is a poet who is extraordinarily attuned to the hidden and intimate details of the world, which she reveals in a way that is vulnerable and sensuous, 'tactile and true' (to borrow a phrase from a poem in Jo's collection.) She captures moments of mystery and beauty, calling our attention to things anew. This is part of the reason we read poetry, of course: to be reminded of the details; to be restored our vision.

Jo's poems remind us of all sorts of worldly mysteries. There is

- 'the wind singing weirdly / through the pines / infecting sleep.'
- 'bone shapes / in the bodies of eucalypts.'

- the blue of the sky that resembles ‘ceiling shadows / or skyscrapers or gas-stove flames.’
- the sound of gumtree branches that ‘rake their noise across the roof.’
- a cat ‘seashelled in sleep and hiding / bird dreams.’
- a river that ‘shines like eyes.’
- a ‘paper-bright moon.’
- blackbirds ‘beaded to fence wire’; how ‘Their bodies seem to cut bird-shaped / holes into the sky.’

There is that same power of vision and detail when it comes to life’s seedier and darker things:

- hearing a ‘housemate’s skull collide / with toilet porcelain. / The wet barking of her sickness, / then nothing.’
- seeing a dead sparrow and ‘columns of ants ribboning from its / un-ticking chest.’

Jo’s poetry, though, is never cruel, nor is it narcissistic. Despite the coldness implied by snow, the poems in this collection are marked by warmth and life; a sense of generosity and inclusiveness. These are poems that share secrets and secret experiences of places with others—with friends, family, and children.

Children figure prominently and beautifully in Jo’s poems, with a child’s view of the world providing readymade poetry, a fresh and vulnerable vision of things. One memorable poem in the collection sees a child commenting, in halting English, on a homeless man with a hare-lipped dog. This man, the child thinks, ‘*wants to go also to the zoo*’.

Another poem sees a child utter the line:

- ‘We’ve got to tell Mama the moon is half-broken.’

Childhood, too, is an important part of the collection. It is revealed as a precious and ghostly world, glimpsed in mysterious fragments and sometimes with fresh insights:

- There is, for instance, the fear a child feels in being alone and watching aeroplanes in the sky. ‘Earthbound by the swing set / steel wings 30,000 feet or so above my head’ are akin to ‘God / knowing my atheism.’
- There is a memory of smoking, as a teenager, ‘loose-footed / in small stones and beer bottle glass.’
- In another poem we read how the poet’s mother spoon-fed the poet garlic to combat a childhood fever. The mature poet reflects: ‘As a child I complained she never wore / her wedding dress or rings. It took uncounted / years to see how she wears her love.’

Speaking of counting years, I’ve been watching Jo’s extraordinary talent in writing emerge over a number of years now. I taught Jo in first year literary studies at Deakin University, where I remember her attending classes in very short summer dresses—as well as handing in some terrific creative writing for assessment. Jo, even at undergraduate level, already had such exciting potential. There were hallway conversations with other lecturers and tutors as Jo progressed through to second and third years. Jo’s talent was obvious to all.

Then I was lucky enough to supervise Jo’s honours thesis, a piece of fiction which she wrote with the confidence and flair of a professional. I’m now in the fortunate position of supervising Jo’s PhD thesis, which is also in fiction.

Jo, so young, already has such an impressive range of publications to her name—in both poetry and fiction. We're here today to celebrate what is perhaps her crowning achievement thus far: this beautiful book of poems, *Snowline*, published by Whitmore Press. Look out for more from Jo, though. She is a writer who will go places; she has been from the very beginning.

Congratulations, Jo, on this beautiful book, *Snowline*.