

Alison Croggon launching *Breaking the Days* by Jill Jones

Melbourne, December 2016

I've known and admired Jill's work for longer than I care to remember. I read her first book, *The Mask and the Jagged Star*, twenty years ago, back in the early nineties. I feel kind of weird when I say things like that: how did that happen? There's still part of me that feels awed by how time slips past. As Jill says in her poem 'Nowhere in another green world': 'The days are now fewer / than the days that were many'.

Looking back, the world seemed less dark then. Maybe it was this dark all the time; it's always been bleak for those people who lacked the insulation of privileges that some of us still take for granted. And maybe it's easier to feel hopeful when you're younger, maybe you think that truth is something that you can just find, like happiness, or that either of these things will solve everything that is wrong.

When you lose that fine blitheness, as you do, some few of us are still able to sing. Jill is one of the singers. In this world of breaking days, the poet still sings, and the world still sings to her. There is song in every line in this book, even in the things that destroy us. '[H]arm in all its nuances', she says, 'sings'.

That song is the voice of something that persists, a 'sweet wreckage' that 'escapes the doubt of the world', a 'small stone at the heart of the matter'. It's not redemption, nor transcendence; it's something more humble and more complex, a lucid, intelligent consciousness stripped of illusions that remains nevertheless attendant to the music of being, located as it is in the very middle of dailiness.

For Jill this presence is notated, as it is in all poetry, all language, as an absence. It's our consciousness that makes us separate, from ourselves and from others. We all die alone. And language both anneals and destroys: it is the lies we tell ourselves, how we express our friable faith in each other, how we shore ourselves against the oncoming certainty of death and all those other smaller disasters that mount into the textures of our lives.

It takes an unusual poet to generate a lyrical beauty from anxiety, doubt, fear, despair, all the splintering rubble of the present age. It takes an astringent truthfulness to notate the dishonesties, the minute brutalities, the seemingly minor desperations and joys of our human comedy, with such attentive accuracy and unsentimental feeling, with such generous vision. Here our lives are written small against the large disasters of our times, and we find that differences of scale are banished: they are the same. As Jill says in the poem 'Shouting in the rain':

Your decisions go with you, thinking about food
or socks, or eternity – they all go together.

Using uncertain materials – the nuances of the everyday, the language that betrays so easily – Jill's poetry grounds itself, like Rilke's ladders, on nothing. And it has the courage to remain there. She says: 'You are never where you are. / There is no here'. And later: 'We are where we are, wherever / we are, as we are'. Between these two poles, she summons the heartbreaking fragility and humour, the complexity and contradiction, of what it means to be conscious and transient and alive. As she says in 'The growling horizon':

You even wish to be alive
in the dying dark
walk into the song dust of early morning
with its machines on the edge
of a low growling horizon
alive with tin, power
and forecast rain

This is a stunning collection of poems, and I recommend it to you all. Herein are treasures, artefacts of a humble and necessary magic, honed with the accuracy and care of true attention. And it's my pleasure to launch *Breaking the Days*.