

Robert Adamson on *Breaking the Days* by Jill Jones

Breaking the Days is a powerful book where Jill Jones blends her experiences with great skill, ranging across time, light and language. In this collection of poems, 'The past isn't even the past' and 'Shade is a kind of writing, as well as a kind of light'. In a world falling apart, her poetry looks into the darkness and realises that even 'harm ... sings'.

Mondrian said that to create order, an artist must first practice the art of destruction, then after this act – as in *Breaking the Days* – the poet must start again from chaos, from emptiness. In her poem 'Negative theology', Jones playfully stares into the abyss until the poem realises the abyss is staring back, and we hear the book's voice.

Slightly sardonic, but under the absorbed tones of O'Hara and Ashbery, there is something else, as in the line, 'You see things but there's nothing you will say', that brings to mind Seamus Heaney's 'Whatever you say, say nothing' – another poem in another time of terror. Jones, however, has a tone darker than the wisecracking New York School. Her wit is tempered by a sort of lyrical melancholy and a longing for a 'lack of desperation' where 'each minute is something you create'.

Throughout *Breaking the Days* there is a driving intelligence, constantly searching for answers, almost knowing there is no answer, only a turning back; writing, not glancing, as witnessed in a knowing line like 'Love isn't all you need' and the Eurydice-like 'Better than waiting / for what doesn't come'. If there is an older spirit behind the long poem 'The plover in the poem and what meaning does not mean', it might be Wallace Stevens, but this is a poem fully inhabited by the fiery wit and restrained passion of Jill Jones. Who else has heard the plover's cry as specifically: 'The traffic consists in its oiled / and unoiled length and screech'.

This is a book of poetry containing the destruction of forms and the creation of new dark music. It was riveting to read these wonderful poems, and they echo in the mind.