

1998

Poems

Jo Shapcott

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Shapcott, Jo, Poems, *Kunapipi*, 20(3), 1998.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol20/iss3/34>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Poems

Abstract

SCOTOMA, A VISIT FROM JANEY, DELECTABLE CREATURES for Wendy Wheeler, TO
ROTTERDAM FOR THE ROSIE B. BABES

Jo Shapcott

SCOTOMA

She dashed towards him, faster than all
 the colours leap towards the light or rush
 away at dusk, crying, 'Angel! Beloved!'
 For he was perfect, so she said,
 with his twelve tattoos, dairy-free diet,
 weekly manicure and mirror-bright shoes.
 One tattoo was a road of words
 round his body, a spiral from toe
 to crown where it set fire to her mouth
 when she touched his pate with her tongue.
 He even pissed in a golden arc
 which lit the night sky. She watched
 the fine trail lift on the mild wind
 wobbling across her vision fit to blind.

A VISIT FROM JANEY

Janey wants to wreck my bathroom she's
 so out of it. She's staggering towards
 the unexpected wall of glass, waving
 her bottle of booze, she's raiding the cabinet
 for pills and screaming at the lime-scale stains
 in the bath. The echo suits her voice so she smiles
 and sits with a bump on the wooden toilet seat,
 then grins up at the overhead cistern,
 as she slips her beaded dress over her head.
 So here's her stocky body, her small girl shape
 slumped and naked on my toilet.
 And now she's resonating my white tiles,
 vibrating my roomy old bath: 'O Lord,'
 she croons to the lime-scale, 'O Lord,' to the tap
 which drips, 'O Lord,' to the overhead cistern,
 cold porcelain, on which is gathering
 the magic condensation of her breath.

DELECTABLE CREATURES

for Wendy Wheeler

'But he would have us remember most of all
To be enthusiastic over the night
Not only for the sense of wonder
It alone has to offer, but also

Because it needs our love: for with sad eyes
Its delectable creatures look up and beg
Us dumbly to ask them to follow;
W.H. Auden, 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud'

You won't remember, but it was
October and the street trees
still coloured like rude bouquets.
I had some rare walks by the river,
the weak sun loose on the water
and the light so washed out and lovely
it would make you cry if you weren't
completely alert. Every step I took
they were uncovering something: people
sleeping under cardboard, a lost riverboat
marooned on a freak low tide, the buried flotsam
which made metal detectors buzz, theatres
with resonant names: the Rose, the Globe.

And I was carrying a torch for someone
to the point of hallucination:
we rolled in flames through seven fields, the burning
so thorough I longed to be shocked by water,
a faceful of anything, even the smelly Thames.

And I remember the press full of doctors,
of inventions; a herringbone fragment
of DNA to fool a virus, a wisp
of vitamin to lock on to inner decay
and knock it dead for good. We were
saving vouchers, too, for air miles.

There was, O yes, the morning I woke up
to see an open book, drying on the drainer.
Dimly reconstructing the night before
I remembered dropping off, head on the desk,
getting up moments later, to select the book
with extra-exquisite care from any old shelf.

I slowly chose a page, spread it with jam
and butter, and tried to stuff it down my mouth.
It was, of course, Freud's *Jokes and the Unconscious*.
I must have tried to wash it like a tea plate,
stacked it, then put myself into my bed.

I think the explanation could be this:
that in the light, the river was sometimes pink,
and St Paul's was pink, and even Lloyds
in the distance was pink, as I crossed Waterloo Bridge
with a purchase under my arm, some piece
of frou frou or a novel to bring me back
from the seven fields, back to the river-mist
which must once have been river water, back
to breathing mist so deeply I could feel
each droplet hit my diaphragm like shot.

TO ROTTERDAM FOR THE ROSIE B. BABES

Even the children are dancing and in the foyer
of the nightclub the ornamental fish are restless.
I've been ten hours getting to Rotterdam
but Rose on tenor sax gives it some throat
as specialist dancers turn out in black and white
for some low-slung, loose-kneed jiving. We drink Grolsch
for free because my sweetie knows the barman.
Rose says, 'I've been singing that song for twenty years
and still don't know what it means.' Well I can tell her.
It means lights on in Rotterdam and shine
on the grubby buildings, the ferocious port.
It means Rose, two saxes, trumpet, and trombone,
piano, traps and bass, all peeling back
layers of occupation, layers of blitz;
Rose folding sea walls and reclaimed land,
rolling up canals. It means the North Sea
swallowing the whole damned lot as Rosie
sings again My Funny Valentine.