

**REVIEW / soi 3 books / Wren Lines, Universal Andalusia, Lemon Shark**

Reviewed by Tom Shapcott, for The Australian, 25 November 2006

[www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20796539-5003900,00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20796539-5003900,00.html)

**Tiger Earns its Stripes****Wren Lines**

By Billy Jones

Papertiger Media Inc, 247pp, \$29.65

**Universal Andalusia**

By B.R. Dionysius

Papertiger Media Inc, 179pp, \$24.15

**Lemon Shark**

By Luke Beesley

Papertiger Media Inc, 80pp, \$20.85

PAPERTIGER Media is a new publishing house with a mailing address in Brisbane's West End and an office in Thailand, where these three volumes were printed. And immensely impressive productions they are. Billy Jones's *Wren Lines* incorporates many line drawings by the poet-artist and they come out clearly, even though some are considerably reduced from the originals. The paper, binding and cover designs are also first rate. In other words, this is no semi-amateur effort; as a statement of ambition, these titles command attention.

So what of the contents? *Wren Lines* is subtitled *Selected Poems and Drawings, Volume I* and at 247 pages is no slim volume. Jones, an American, was born in 1935 and arrived in Australia just in time for the Generation of '68 poetic outburst. His first collection, *Each Seed a Sunflower*, appeared in 1975 and by its title established his essential stance: the tininess and universality of the seed, the image of van Gogh (and the nourishing multitude of seeds) in the sunflower. Jones has maintained this world view in his life as in his art. He is an outsider for whom transcendence is inherent in the smallest object. His poems are celebrations: life, lust, luminosity. Recurring motifs illuminate and act as triggers for the movement of the personal into the universal, a dangerous tightrope.

In all his books, Jones has accompanied his poems (often more invocations than what is traditionally accepted as poetry) with detailed, often exquisite drawings; the two complement each other resonantly. Where the poems call on sound and image to reinforce the poet's search for the universal in the minuscule, the drawings effortlessly begin with the most commonplace and are transformed into icons often radiant with turbulent auras and immediate stillness. Stillness is at the heart of the Jones search.

Sex is a recurring theme and there is a sort of carnal holiness in this celebration of lust. Lucky man. But the small birds and riverbank life of his chosen habitat in southeast Queensland are also marvellously captured. This may well be the quality in Jones's output that gives him the fame he may quietly believe he has properly earned, through all his many decades of Spartan poverty and rich perceptiveness. *Wren Lines* reads as a sort of journal, but it is also a testament.

Brett Dionysius has been a colourful and ebullient character on the Brisbane literary scene for nearly two decades. *Universal Andalusia* (also a sort of poetic diary but using the perhaps thinly fictional narrators Baldwin and Roxanne) covers the ocker ramblings in Turkey, Greece, Spain and India of all-too-familiar globetrotters. I laughed aloud several times, but

also winced at the exactitude with which he has captured the quick and only sometimes muttered inflections of his Aussie tourists.

It's a useful device: it allows the poet to be himself but also to cast a sly glance at ourselves as others see us and, in the ongoing dialogue of Baldwin and his wife Roxanne, at different perceptions of the one thing. There are several poems where one feels the poet is speaking directly to or at us, but then he almost immediately reverts to his rude and irreverent alter egos.

This is a meaty, robust meal of a book and if the conclusion is the obvious one ("glad to be home"), the trip along the way has been rocky but full of enough insights to make you snort and splutter. I think Spain (and a tribute to Federico Garcia Lorca) made the most impact on the lumbering Baldwin (who conveniently dies once back here), but the travellers' exploits in Turkey took us along the less travelled route, whereas India proved, then and always, to be not for the squeamish.

Of the three poets, Luke Beesley is the youngest, and Lemon Shark is his first collection. It shows a young man's concern for language, for words. Words not necessarily in sentences. The sentence, for Beesley, is only spasmodically useful: his poems glide into sudden and unexpected links and associations, triggered by the words themselves, not their context. In this, he shows himself responsive to recent (and not so recent) trends in poetic politics.

What is certain is that Beesley is finding his voice. Although this is the thinnest of the three volumes at 80 pages, it reveals a poet with an essentially lyric touch, a great sense of surprise and timing, and a voice that seems increasingly sure of where it is going. More than a poet to watch: this is a poet already out there and revelling in it.

*Tom Shapcott has written more than 36 books, most recently Adelaide Lunch Sonnets.*

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Illustration: Jock Alexander

## Tiger earns its stripes

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