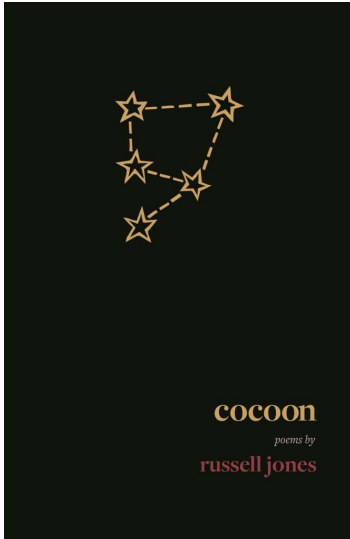


'cocoon', by Russell Jones

Review by Matthew Macdonald



For those not already familiar with the work of Russell Jones, his poetry rarely resists the call of outside-the-box creativity, and *cocoon* is another notable example of his passion for pushing poetic boundaries. The multimedia nature of the collection - which features five comic poems illustrated by Sara Julia Campbell, Caroline Grebbell, Aimee Lockwood, Edward Ross & Mark Toner - immediately marks *cocoon* out as a distinctive work and showcases what successful creative collaboration can look like. Yet the comic poems are only one aspect of *cocoon*, with Jones also building on the wide range of themes present in his earlier collections.

Jones is a master of the opening line, and *cocoon* showcases this skill by drawing in the attention of the reader from the get-go - 'I hope we age as beaches do' ('let us be mauled by the ocean'); 'The Japanese know how to wrap an apology' ('kabuto'); 'A nightmare, slashed' ('cat out the bag'). Admirably, Jones manages to maintain this momentum throughout the collection, enabled by his range of form and content as he moves from philosophical musings in the guise of a quiz ('quiz night at the palm gardens hotel') to the human impact on animals via agriculture in the modern day ('biography of a cow') to Morgan-esque science-fiction concrete poetry, which reads as if written by a computer ('pioneer'). Jones's characteristic flair for inventive imagery is evident throughout, as are his lyrical touches as highlighted in 'balloons over bagan' which expresses the vitality of love through

its simplicity:

*but she is all
I see
another life
I want
to be the wind
that tastes
her tongue
her words
when she speaks*

The philosophical flourishes that often appear in Jones's work are present across much of *cocoon*, but they are specifically brought to the fore in poems 'anatman' (the concept that there is no "self"), 'kintsugi' (the physical and metaphysical concept of highlighting or accepting imperfections and breakages as part of the necessary history of the object), and 'anitya' (the concept that everything is impermanent):

*the butterfly beats
the bustle
unfolds
the pages of its wings*

('anitya')

Across Jones' work there is also a willingness to examine the darker sides of life - as seen in 'the good thief', which explores the spread and impact of cancer - and occasionally brush shoulders with horror, as seen in the poem-comic 'an official guide to surviving the invasion' as well as 'cat out the bag', where horror exists amorphously in the background before rising to a crimson crescendo in the final few lines:

*to the sack
where she'd tried
to save her children*

*but not
understanding
coils
of razor wire,
shattered bottles
she
dragged
them
through
those glistening fields*

These splashes of horror and darkness are not the totality of Jones's work, however. In poem-comic 'beorn' - illustrated by Aimee Lockwood, with whom Jones collaborated on the poetry graphic novel *The Wilds* (Tapsalteerie, 2021) - Jones's work sinks willingly into gentleness, with the two people of the poem enveloped in Lockwood's palette of blues, soft greens and pinks as they visit the titular bear who

*will sit and think
(she is very wise)
brew tea
hold us in her pillow soft arms
her heart thudding
like heavy rain
until our hearts
adopt her rhythm*

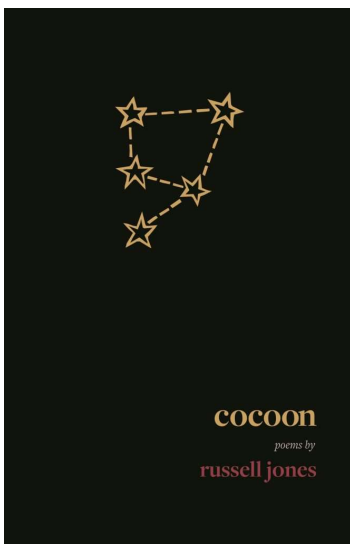
*just as we've
always wanted*

cocoon is a collection that contains multitudes and reading its pages is a continuous joy, with the layers of each poem allowing for something new to be discovered with each re-read.



'beorn', illustrated by Aimee Lockwood

cocoon is published by Tapsalteerie



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