

School Essay by RB.

Monday, 8 October 2018

# Janine Browne: An analysis of Clunk & Jam

## Extended Poetry Response

Janine Browne is a Perth based Poet/artist who self publishes her works. She interestingly, flunked English, didn't like reading in her younger years and ultimately dropped out of school. When writing Browne speaks how her process with the poems and artwork/characters is one she has little control over, *'The poems and characters quite literally spill onto the page'*. Browne is the type of artist who will rarely, if ever, purposely sit down to write a poem. She tell of how it's a subconscious response or reaction to something and that often she finds that it just lands on the page, *'I might be driving the car or wake in the middle of the night and it pours out, but I'll also have weeks and months where nothing arrives'*. She restrains from editing too much what is originally wrote down to keep authenticity to her poems, for them to be an honest reaction, full of raw emotion. Browne opts to use a typewriter when publishing because the mistakes are visible. As a poet Browne likes to encourage, particularly young people, to write for the sake of writing and not get stuck on neatness, spelling, punctuation etc because those restrictions (and fears) can often spoil the process of the story telling – and evolving. *'There's always time for that after – but the story, the words, are what matters most'*.

Janine speaks of the reasons for writing her work lays behind a strong feeling of morality in which she cares deeply for the people she shares this world with (personally known to her or not) and what is going on around the world. She personally believes that “stories, poetry and art have the power to give others and empower them to create a positive change- or at the very least feel less alone”. She also acknowledges that not everyone can write or draw to express themselves creatively so she feels that if you can, and you're comfortable to share it (or even terrified) it's something that can potentially be something of value and joy to others, so if you enjoy writing and it makes you feel something, then you should keep doing it, free from any expectation of fear of sharing it with the world, writing helps us grown into the person we are and the person we want to be and thats a good thing, and if you can help someone else understand their feelings through your own work at the same time, then it's worth that small moment of terror. It's important to talk about things and share ideas, because thats how we as humans evolve both personally and as a society. Writing supplies a means of doing that. Browne says that *“Personally, writing helps to empty my head and make sense of things. It helps me work things out and transform experiences into something of value — an insight, I create books (self-publish) because I believe in the ability of the book, as an object, to be 'friend-like'. To be a continual power source”*

*This also refers back to a Poem from Browne's first book, In My Room:*

*It is the simple act of storytelling that illuminates the darkness.  
An image, a string of words, that access places beyond consciousness.  
It is truth spoken from a damaged soul that warms the heart.  
The expression of another's pain that has the power to heal.*

Further solidifying her reasoning behind writing and the importance of sharing your work.

*Clunk and Jam is a 200 page collection of Janine's art, poetry and stories exploring themes of difference and disconnection; the notion of the Super Hero and overcoming impossible things; following dreams; and finding a sense of place. An important part of the presentation of Clunk & Jam is that when it began getting a spot in bookshops, it's minimalistic portrait actually stands out because it's so 'quiet'. A book about 'difference' that stands out because it's different. Space is such a commodity and everyone is trying to 'shout' or 'tell' us something and so often we see book covers, over-crowded with blurb and often really spotlighting the author too. Browne says 'I wanted to resist all of that {the over-crowding on a cover} and think I may have pulled that off.'*

As a society, we constantly experience hardships, times where we are forced to react to a situation that sometimes, we're not sure how to handle and sometimes can't handle. Browne uses her writing to react in her own personal way to events happening all around the world and also uses series', such as the Boy (which was a reaction to the fires in Victoria), to write of how the world suffers at the hands of these disasters and how people are also expecting too much of people and how they should react instead of how they do in those situations. Like the BOy series was a reaction to the fires in Victoria. Amelia Bloom (not in Clunk & Jam) was a reaction to the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris – she's about understanding how broken everything is but she remains invested in dreaming – and hope. *'The Army of Ink (in Clunk and Jam) are little powerhouses of strength and a healthy rebellious reaction to personal and social injustice. To toxic cultural trends and the negative impact of advertising and social media on our sense of worth and identity.'*

The Boy stemmed from Browne learning of the fires from two men who'd experienced the fire and she wrote 'The Bush Telegraph' in response— which was then asked to use as the forward for the book. Browne also wrote The BOy is reaction to watching a young boy, who she believes was about 15, on the news. He described how he came upon a line of cars that were trying to escape the fire, how he saw people dead in the cars and he was distraught by not being able to do anything to save them. "I was just bowled over that a boy of that age would feel such responsibility- and deeply felt empathy' Her first response to this was the poem "he saw it coming but what's a BOy to do..." writing about how sometimes the answers you're looking for aren't always there when you need them, and some problems are just too big for you to deal with alone.

The other pieces she wrote are said to have followed on later, fuelled by listening to the angst in young boys that she would hear throughout her years doing community work. Browne also has a son who, in his environment and hobbies, grew up in a "toughen up princess' man's world that didn't allow boys to freely express how they felt or be openly sensitive. Thus, she uses the new way of spelling BOy as a suggestion to a new notion of being a BOy — separate from this man's world. The other BOy's in clunk and jammed stemmed specifically from her sons experience in his go-karting community, the 'He couldn't quite make it' ones, due to constantly being put down for not being good enough and needing to be stronger.

‘Over the years I’ve listened to a lot of young people tell their stories of feeling different, not fitting in, feeling small and not good enough and I’ve personally experienced these things. So the writing and characters create a space where difference is valued. Small has a place. Where the sharing of stories help us feel less alone and more validated. My hope is that the experience of reading the book [clunk and jam] is like looking into a mirror that reflects back something that helps us see the good in our own reflection. Something that shows us possibility and helps us think and challenge the things that can impact negatively on our sense of self. Something that reflects a message that opposes what we are constantly receiving through our phones, TVs and media.’

Clunk and Jam’s section The BOy can be described as ‘womansplaining’, considering that she is explaining why the BOy feels this way, why males feel the way they do when in turn she would have no idea being a woman herself and never having experienced these so called stigmas. While Browne may have witnessed situations where a boy is treated unfairly and the world may indeed seem unfair and tough on BOys, she herself will never be able to write an accurate poem about how a man feels considering that she is treated completely different. But when delving deeper into the poetry itself we find that she is not specifically commenting on the BOy’s feelings in their own, but instead on the unjust expectations expected of them.

It can also be interpreted that Browne may be using this part of Clunk & Jam to comment on the contrasting differences in the treatment between males and females, and that while females find it unfair that they are deemed weak and incapable, they should not be so “whiny” about it as they do not quite realise the responsibility that is put on BOy. She uses this section of the book to give her opinion on how she feels that watching from an adult woman’s point of view, it is not fair for BOy culture to be so tough and expectant on them, especially not from such a young age. Many of her poems in this section comment on the language of BOy culture and the way they treat each other not knowing any different from the way they were raised by their fathers and other figures of male authority. She speaks of wishing for the ideals and expectations held of BOy to be reset because she watches BOy as he grows, she watches as he sits in this gruelling vigil, unable to change anything as he is all but one BOy among many. She writes about how she wonders when the time will come when BOy no longer has to be “just one of the boys” anymore and can live out his life the way he wants to.

*“Boy wondered how long he’d have to wait- or should he just pack up and go.....”*

This small excerpt that is added in before the larger poem talking about how boy did leave, comments on Browne’s previously mentioned attitude towards society’s expectation of BOy, She uses this to make the reader wonder how much longer it is going to take before boy society changes, for it to stop being so tough on BOy. When delving into the second part of the sentence alludes to the feeling of giving up, that the world is too much for BOy and that maybe it is time up for him, is he done? Will it ever change? Have we as a society destroyed BOy and his will to keep on fighting for what he wants?

The Superhero series stems from Browne always having had a strong social conscience and being very sensitive – particularly to the suffering of others, or bad things happening, there

was a part of her that wanted to save the world (the child/teenager) – knowing full well she couldn't (the adult self). *'I was also one of those kids who felt really responsible for people around me and what was happening. And then I had experiences where no-one showed up for me, so I lost faith in the notion of real life Super Heroes.'* When Janine watched 'The Dark Knight', because just like the bulk of society, she loved watching Super Hero movies and imagining they exist, that there was a pure being always there to save us from evil, unable to be corrupted by temptation. But she was devastated that Batman gave up in that particular movie. He reached a point of such despair that he could no longer focus on the good. I believe that a lot of young boys/men in particular (but also girls/women) feel that angst about not being able to save the world, to fix everything that's broken but finding they are unable to, thus beginning the battle that comes from within themselves and that can end terribly. I believe that Browne's ability to relate to this concept is what created the inspiration for excerpts from both *The BOy* and *The Superhero* series. And while Browne herself writing about these issues does not offer a solution, I think we should be talking and thinking about this more than we do and so her pieces are extremely valuable to this process.

The superhero series emphasises less on impossible acts of heroism and more on people brave enough to make small changes that can contribute to society, even in small doses. Browne speaks of times when we all felt we could take on the world, the times that we looked up to our parents and other authority figures, how in our child-like eyes, they were the heroes of this world, protecting us from evil, unable to be corrupted. But when we grow up and reach our teenage years, we start to lose faith in ourselves, and feel that we are too ordinary to be extra-ordinary even if our parents were just 'plain' people with no magical powers and when we reach that point, it when we become stuck, ready to give up on ourselves, to hang up our heroes cape. But at the same time we hear of these stories of ordinary people facing impossible challenges and instead of being scared, these small acts of bravery can be 'heroic' and that the ability to be brave in humane and impossible situations is more heroic than anything "super-fied" because it ignites a sense of hope in our lives.

The poem 'Heroic friendship' focuses on changing the current view of bravery and heroism, commenting on how hard it is to do anything that involves opening up, as it makes you vulnerable to "be alone" because being alone, with no one to stop you from those thoughts can be a dangerous but brave thing to do. That to be heroic in your own life, or in assisting others when they need it, knowing perfectly well when you are needed and how to be there for someone is a more reasonable to attempt than to be attempting impossible feats of 'heroism'

*'I feel I'm very fortunate that the Army of Ink and other characters show up on my page – come to my rescue. Hence the drive (and responsibility) to share them'*. Browne doesn't refer to them as Super Heroes – just heroic little people, and I think that's enough. To just be heroic in your own life and be brave enough to be vulnerable, to connect with and be kind to others. I think that's more doable than being anything 'super'-fied. But no less a valuable contribution to the world. I also believe that this is the main message behind her Superhero series.

Janine speaks of the reasons for writing her work lays behind a strong feeling of morality in which she cares deeply for the people she shares this world with (personally known to her or not) and what is going on around the world. Browne likes to encourage, particularly young people, to write for the sake of writing and not get stuck on neatness, spelling, punctuation etc because those restrictions (and fears) can often spoil the process of the story telling – and

evolving. Poets like Janine Browne are the true super heroes of our time, as she too instils hope in the hearts of all who read her work.