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## Beard & Belle



### Jayne Amara Ross

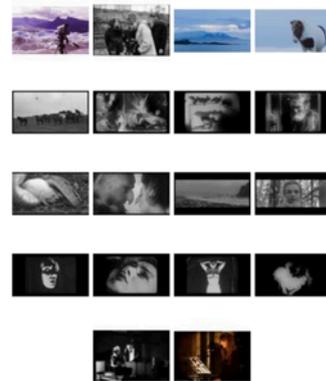
Jayne Amara Ross was born in Australia, grew up in Paris and schooled a while in Manchester. She's a prolific poet, spoken word artist and filmmaker with a passion for rap music and the Lurianic Kabbalah.

*It started with an inspirational mum...*

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"My first serious attempt at writing something personal was a play I wrote when I was about 15. I think, like for most artists, the prime motivator when I was starting out was simply a desire to be loved and accepted by my peers. All the lofty thoughts about artistry and purpose came later. I put on that play at school and suddenly I went from being a weirdo-loner to someone who had a lot of friends - and the only thing that had changed was that I was being openly creative.

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“I read for the same reason that I drink, to get temporary relief from the constant reminder of how meaningless everything is and the despair that comes with that. When I drink, I can romance myself, escape the chokehold of my brain and feel flushed with a universal blood. When I read, I go looking for that same self-annihilating feeling of an unmediated connection with something bigger; I want to read validation and companionship into a mythology that is similar to my own.

“I remember reading James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in my mid-teens, probably because I’d heard it was a difficult read. I didn’t understand much of the story but I remember being intoxicated by the rhythms of Joyce’s prose. It was my first introduction to the carnal power of the English language, and the first time I felt butterflies in my stomach whilst reading a book.

“My mum was a crucial source of inspiration and encouragement and is still my biggest champion. She was really good at making me think I was entirely normal when, in truth, I was a pretty weird kid. Anytime me and my sisters wanted a toy, my mum would say, ‘make it yourself’, and she was always available to help. So, when I was a teenager and was sick of just acting in other people’s plays, I just thought, ‘I’ll write my own play and direct it’. And I did, and that’s clearly my mum’s influence.

“Another person who was a really big influence on me was Nick Alldridge. Nick was a history teacher who was really involved in the drama department at my school and he mentored me all through my high school theatre days. Nick taught me that as the initiator of a project you must be prepared to work ten times harder than anyone else involved - and shut up about it - that elegance in hard work is one of the essential indicators of a person’s worth.

“I have been scribbled all over, but the first tattoo I got was the word TRUE on my left wrist. My left hand is my strong hand, the hand with which I write. Like all my tattoos, it is just as much a reminder as it is a manifesto. I tend to think that if I can use my true hand to consult the oracle without my brain filtering it to shit, I can glean enough of my own truth to stay out of trouble. I think a life lived authentically is one in which you consistently seek to cut through the bullshit constructs of personality and intellect to bare the unpalatable monster that lies beneath. I can't pretend that I am in any way successful in doing this - but I do try, and when I fall off the horse, I rightfully feel disgusted with myself.

“I love rap music. My 30th year has been a particularly difficult one, and listening to rap music has brought a lot of light back into my life. Rap is what poetry is still struggling to be, a larger imbibing of the common heart. There is no philosophical hierarchy in rap, which allows it to be a much purer expression of human experience than other literary forms, I think. One of the albums that saved me was Danny Brown's *XXX*. There is a really deep yearning in his music that feels almost devotional to me. In the opening lines of *XXX*, he says 'I'm in your bitch mouth but she fantasizing / staring at these skinnies, said its so tantalizing'. That's so perfect, that's so beautiful! Its like the most incredible expression of acosmism ever; an admission that our desire for the infinite will never find satisfaction in the finite. That's the reason Sophia leaves the pleroma in the Gnostic cosmogony; she knows there is something out there that is so much more powerful than what she is already experiencing. It's that longing for the infinite that defines humanity. Emil Cioran says 'to adore a whore or to adore God describes the same movement. Only the object of the adoration changes, but what is that object really worth when it is nothing more than a pretext for the simple desire to adore?'. And that doesn't even come close to expressing the complexity that Danny Brown manages to encapsulate in those two lines, with a metaphor that opens it up to everyone.

“I also think that rap does a lot to exalt excess, which is something I find relief in. I really hate this all-pervading fixation with balance and temperance. Only heightened experience and knocking against your limits can give you an idea of who you really are, or really can be. We should be fighting boredom instead of excess; boredom is what creates violence and stifles creativity. I feel like women are particularly vulnerable to dulling norms, perhaps because we are less naturally aware of the perimeters of our desire than men. We often resort to external barometers, spending a lot of time and energy on worrying about being 'too much' of this and

'too little' of another thing, leaving our personal potential for greatness wither, and our true calling unanswered.

"Until recently, I shot all my films on super 8 and 16mm film and hand-processed everything at home in my darkroom. I had a real thing for souped-up Beaulieu super 8 cameras with Angénieux or Schneider lenses until I became unhappy with the image stability. I also loved the Canon 814 Autozoom (I had three, used them all until they broke). I adore tilt-shift lenses and was lucky to get funding on *The Golden House: For Him I Sought the Woods* to hire a full Century set for the Super 16 Arriflex we were using. I have binge-shot Kodak's Tri-X super 8 and 16mm film, which I process in D-19 developer that I mix from scratch with trial-by-error adjustments to get the most out of my greys.

"Recently I've sort of lost interest in high contrast images and am more attracted to nuance and larger dynamic range. My first foray into digital was with the 2.5K Blackmagic Cinema Camera. I used it when I was shooting in Iceland. When you shoot RAW, it is really so beautiful. I have a 17.5mm Voigtlander lens that opens really wide, and the MFT mount on the BMCC allows me to mount PL cine lenses with an adaptor. I feel really lucky to finally go digital now, with this kind of gear and not with some nasty little format like mini-DV.

"I spent 10 years really geeking out in the darkroom, mixing raw chemicals, using weird cameras, doing a lot of optical printing and hand-painting and stuff like that... I suppose I was a bit of an analog purist for a while. I'm not sure that that kind of filmmaking really rocks my boat anymore. At the moment I just want to write, and work with actors.

"Over the past few years, I have travelled to Iceland quite a bit and last year I was lucky enough to spend 3 months in residency in a small fishing town in the north to make a film. I have a really visceral relationship with the Icelandic landscape, probably because I am obsessed with cosmogonies and everything there reminds me of the dismemberment of the primordial giant Ymir in the Edda. I like cosmogonies that describe the finite world coming into being in cosmic debris. Every cosmogony results in duality, and to me that failure seems to be the main cause of a lot of the metaphysical agony that we all experience. So, when I was over there, I made a film about that failure – in love, in community, in our attempts at moving beyond duality.

“At the moment I’m writing a short fiction film set in Pigalle, loosely based on the *Book of Jonah* and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. This film is also about failure, which seems to be my favourite subject at the moment, now that I am a big old adult! I have also been writing a lot of poetry. I have always worked with more than one medium at the same time but now I really just want to write, see how far I can go with it. I am on a mission to become myself, at the ripe old age of 30, with my writing as the sole guiding force. Cioran says ‘each pang of desire humiliates the sum of our truths and forces us to reconsider our negations’. That’s me, that’s my 30<sup>th</sup> year, and that’s my battle-cry: DESIRE, desire first-and-foremost, desire before and over everything else. The rest is waffle.