

University of Wollongong

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'Waitin' for the Viet Cong' and 'Mixed business'

Biographical note:

Having been part of the Australian Poetry scene for nearly five decades I have courted mainly the tragic, comic and narrative muses to produce a number of verse novels and other collections, concentrating on (though not exclusively) lives in Post War inner, middle and outer suburbia. I am also, more recently the publisher of Grand Parade Poets with nine volumes in the past four years.

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Creative writing – poetry - Post war urban Australia

Waitin' for the Viet Cong

The speaker is a recently retired femocrat

...in this way my mother, my late mother told it:
how their elder daughter, scholarship holder/doctoral candidate,
had disappeared and how that winter in Paris,
as chill turned flu turned pleurisy turned pneumonia
no-one, not even her parents let alone those friends
The Collective, knew her whereabouts:
that had all stopped where and when a sad girl left
without forwarding address.

But as if my father decreed
She's our rebel and nobody else's
I was to be saved in a way most never could be saved,
by an establishment finding its own
and bringing her home.

'Just a few days short of death,
that's right of death...' my mother told it,
'but we set to work we did, how everybody did
to find and save her.'

She mightn't have composed
this saga of a family's miracle, she sure was its conductor;
and if I still defer to certain of its merits
here's the exception: this tale she told
(eyes wide alight in their bewildered pride)
was hers, and hardly mine: the girl,
so well past crying now, who having some breakdown
was back home with her parents

If only she'd never *meant* it!
Did that woman really announce (and yes she did)
'I'd like you all to meet our elder daughter, the brilliant Marxist-Leninist...'?
What kind of La Mama farce *was* this?
For there would be my mama, this fifty year old high school librarian
trundling out to friends her Great Story: when what I wanted
was to regale her with mine: be-dumped or dump.

There is that moment when,
no matter her age a child needs to announce
Yes, yours was my upbringing, nobody else did it,
but you will never understand now, will you?

And *Understand? We do we do* came their stammering chorus
of concern: parents, educators, clerics, whoever was the vogue
But but what of your future?

When I still lived with my folks I might bring
The Collective home: my people, people ablaze
with all that kind of courage History supplies:
every argument good as won. 'Good afternoon Professor,
we are the people who'll be taking over.'

Isn't there a perverse fun
meeting those you'd love to see purged?
For on occasions Dad might take my sister and myself
to the Staff Club, as if to teach
*This is no 'other half', this is 'our half',
see how we live?*

Then, as they glanced my way
how I enjoyed proposing the Staff Club's condescensions:
*What are we going to do with them:
our angry children and their amazing brains?*

No all of us. Someone from a milder faction
kept courting my sister; when she turned twenty
he told his mother they would live together.
She shrieked then ordered them married.
Now there was a pair so willing to facilitate 'dialogue',
any 'dialogue' with any one,
a couple whose future was that much in the present
it seemed near enough the past; whilst mine
just hoped the greater stories might commence:
all those things we'd live to see happen, happening:
getting rid of Imperialism for starters,
after which anything bourgeois.

I was so adept at *bourgeois* wasn't I,
using the whole Collective-at-its-grandest-heights'
greatest label of abuse (even if that's what we were, bourgeois).
Sometimes I fear these were the last occasions it was ever
employed; the saddest fact, for what other word remotely evoked
our world, that world we needed to replace?

But for all his loving pragmatism *Lies?*
I wish I could have known to tell my father the professor
I can accept living lies, but we've been living games!
With *we* being our family or The Collective or just
me and the girl I'd been loving near a decade now.
And she was Antoinette.

When my sister and I were still in high school
our Dad took his family on sabbatical.
And in the girl's school adjacent to the Red Brick
(its chaffing pettinesses, those scandalous inevitables)
you might say I wanted to leave, immediately leave

except for where? What puritan like me would need
the vapid joys of Swinging London? Besides,
the Sister School, the French girls had arrived
and if I was distracted I was ah so anchored!

This was Antoinette and I:
some enchanted evening you may see this someone
you'll wish to see again, again, again, then
fly to my side and guessing I'll understand ask
*Where exactly are you from and what exactly
do they do there?*

From then who needed any bourgeoisie
when each was such an aristocrat for the other?
Ours always would remain an aristocrat's revolt,
the skewed truth matched by the necessary swagger.

Thin like me without my bumps and angles
Antoinette was lithe, that gamin type made for barricades,
with her well-aimed assassin of a mind designed
so that Imperialism would be hacked and hacked
to what it always was: a big-noting fraud for
men with connections.

She'd come to stay,
I'd go to stay, at sixteen I'd the best indeed the only
kind of friend I needed; and on some nights
(it felt like I could never stop)
just speaking French! French!

'Yes, yes the French girl...'

Mother never asked so much as alluded:
something you knew she knew just wasn't jelling.
What though? Antoinette may not have been polite
she sure was diplomatic though.
This she seemed to deliver, is how we'll deal
with *them*. Well at least my father
who'd see me to or at the boat train.

And I recall (could I ever not?)
how Antoinette took me some place where women,
women were looking at each other and it all seemed
a matter of love. Till then I'd hardly thought like that
(she knew I hadn't) but something was making sense
and making even more sense whenever we kissed.

Whilst in a room stuffy from a low fire
and his perspiration, I met her sad-eyed, chain-smoking
Stalinist father who, ploughing his How To guides
told me what we already knew:
that all the world that mattered were disposing
with empires.

Three, four, five times in six months

she and I met, loved, separated and cried
(and I was not that kind of girl to cry).
Now sabbatical over, our family was returning
and with that other world awaited *their* turn at disposing,
the Viet Cong's!

When mother uncovered I was 'on the pill'
(a term dating both cause and its reaction)
our grand implosion arrived.

'Couldn't you,
couldn't you...' she sure had gagged on something,
'just...just...protect yourself?'

With what?

Whilst these I still assume are what had hurt:
she never knew I'd been to see a doctor
and that shuddering idea some stupid boy
might find her potential University Medallist attractive,
or failing that easy. Meanwhile she,
the once so ever-worldly and aware,
turned into the silliest woman I would ever know
(except of course myself).

It helped she was a fool:
I needn't worry about that need I,
since weren't there mightier concerns? When Paris
seemed like it had been shot out of France into
and beyond the heavens, I knew the time was mine,
was ours.

Air-mailing Antoinette,
near frying myself with jealousy at their struggles,
how they were leading the world where the world
just had to be led, whilst here I was
attempting a collective life in back street suburbia:
girls like me, lean, spectacled correct-liners
or the jolly dumpies spread out in their jeans;
those impossibly deep-voiced boys
or the frizzle-haired ones forever quoting Dylan
in Dylan voices as if they'd truly written the stuff;
and runaways who'd finish running on or running back;
all of it banal, ludicrous, remarkable, so that you
would wake to another day of your revolt thinking
This is beautiful for this is History
and if there's to be a vanguard, guess what it's us,
for we are going to truly matter
and I am going to return to Antoinette.

Nothing I would ever do had been so planned,
so mis-planned.

Candidacy and scholarship were certainties
whilst French would never be a problem:
wasn't it all mine, not as a kind of loan
but the zealous gift which steeled and committed
I thought had chosen me, such being that on-cue bravado
History and love both offer.

Shy, arrogant girls,
hadn't we kept each other's photographs
'Moi sur Les Barricades', 'Me and my Collective'?
Maybe. But what hers had hardly shown
was all the ground she'd filled, she'd travelled,
which wasn't I knew mere breasts and a boyfriend.
Much worse she couldn't, wouldn't announce
Don't you understand, it's hardly that now.

Like any liberation I needed a future.
Well here came my future folding into the present
then onto the past, with Antoinette asking
'Hadn't you boys?'

I'd my answer
to a different question: 'Aren't I on the pill?'
(That something to make one comfortable and annoy mums.)

Then catching this right-through-me look of hers
I knew what she was viewing *Oops! Here's that Australiene
again (some place like that) a pest from my past,*
and how right now in the compost of our caprice
and paranoia, my Antoinette was truly blooming.
Who did she think we had been?
Just two young women sending aerograms
and she was probably correct. Best be bland best say
She cut me and I caught a chill
as I'd say now except all I could taste
(all I wanted to taste) were vinegar tears;
whilst all I believed was heading pleurisy and beyond.

So in some grubby bed I lay, devastated yet proud:
At least I'm this bad! Could there be a better way to die?
With little else to appreciate, why not revel in that?

Since they were after me, those who thought they understood;
though nowadays I'd simply say her fellow bourgeoisie
were tracking down a very sick Australian girl,
of whom they'd later say was somehow saved
by telegrams, cablegrams (they meant a lot in those days
telegrams, cablegrams) and an embassy's footwork.

Week after shaky week I'd little else but sweated,
though now someone was saying my name and I caught that
monotonal national voice diplomacy never could dispel.
Whilst all those manner of people I wished exterminated:
governments, Foreign Affairs, specialists, flight crew, anyone
wanting the world purged of every Antoinette-and-I
were helping to lift, mend, fly and propel me
through Customs and out, still school girl ruthless.
As if that mattered for, whatever my posture
I was only posture now: graceful, graceless, remorseful,
remorseless. O you dumb and greedy little monster!

'You realise,' my sister and her spouse confided,
'it was their networks found you...' itemising
some of my most abhorred Staff Club names.
But as with Antoinette the only 'catch' was irony;
when Dad thanked them on my behalf all turned History,
unalterable History.

The Collective was dissolving as what replaced it
made their own mistakes re-making ours.
I tutored then I stopped to start a new life:
policy/consultancy/policy/consultancy.
I loved somebody, I loved somebody else.
I put aside telling Mum of 'Antoinette the Sequel'
but then she died. Dad remarried so I told them,
humanism all the way.

'That was love.'

In the movie he'd have intoned these words
deep in a mellow book-lined den.
But being on the patio of their townhouse
he had to laugh. 'Love. It can't have been much else.
And you always were whatever you always were.'

'Taa Dad.' Then I laughed too.

*We knew Struggle, we knew Truth,
Knew Hué and Hai Phong,
Served such causes in our youth,
Waitin' for the Viet Cong.
Whilst Johnson, Nixon straffed the North,
Bellowed each July the Fourth:
"Longin' for the Viet Cong to win girls,
Screamin' for the Viet Cong!"*

*[They grew, the thick red arrows grew,
Each downward swelling prong
(Courtesy of Fu Manchu)
Waitin' for the Viet Cong:
With ev'ry Indo-Chinese peasant
Craving his slice of Karinya Crescent,
Slaughter us the Viet Cong sure will, boys...
Better kill the Viet Cong!]*

*One Sunday circa ten to five
Hearing our door bell's gong:
From parents on some arvo drive
(Waitin' for the Viet Cong).
Did they clang forth 'The East Is Red'
Those chimes which shot us out of bed?
At home with the Viet Cong, 'Hi Oldies!'
'It's a pleasure, Viet Cong.'*

*Some played Dylan, some played Ochs,
And others Cheech and Chong.
Whilst some just played at (said their folks)
Waitin' for the Viet Cong.
With visions packed within each spliff
Like scenes from 'Blow Up', 'MASH' and 'If...'
Somethin' for the Viet Cong? Oh save us,
Nothin' like the Viet Cong!*

*My sister married blissed on grass,
She wore a sarong.
(I near-to-almost missed that farce
Waitin' for the Viet Cong.)
Later, back at their bourgeois ranch
Where her spouse ran a Labor Party branch,
'Why wait for the Viet Cong?' I'd taunt. 'I'm
Wedded to the Viet Cong!'*

*Innocent women innocent men
Little we did seems wrong.
A stroll to the shops then home again
(Waitin' for the Viet Cong).
Went abroad copped much the same.
'Now what,' she asked me 'is your name?'
Sobbin' for the Viet Cong (boo hoo hoo)
Howlin' for the Viet Cong!*

Mixed business

The speaker is...

Reliable as anyone I've known,
Bob Arnold is the kind of man for whom life works
because (please excuse my sentimental aphorisms)
he loves life's work; he's lucky too, since he makes
his luck: wife, two girls, an extended back/
extended up weatherboard, the briskest walk
from Dennis station, a mum and dad further up
the Hurstbridge line.

He's never said so
but unlike me he's never let his parents down.
Can't you hear mine? *Why turn out yet another teacher
for the state and why then did you quit?
Why'd you marry whom you did then let
your marriage rot? Or why in my own phrase
That lack of any focus?*

Not that I would mention it,
but when you respect their aptitude, their nous
and clearly their results, when a man does plenty
and it's all success, a friend like Bob will focus
for you: which dictum Bob need never know
also applied to Beetle.

Let's say someone walks by/
walks into any spot that's yours along the strip
at three or four or five pm and *Yes* you get it
today I'll score! Let's further say that this is how
that world of Beetle starts, as one windy, warm
late August afternoon I was at his place and
this girl was there: just past attractive,
just starting to age (as his or anybody's taster-lady
should be). Sure, with a few days left of
hanging back I still felt detached, with though
that growing 'edge', my 'edge' which told me
*Want what's offered, take what's offered.
Your deal mightn't enter many listings but
your dealer will. If this girl dies (and she
may die) your man won't even care:
for this is Beetle and isn't he your man?*

I had, I have my still and centred love
of self-respect (rules as still may save me)
where though lay any self-respect in *that?*
Where it was to be regained of course, that swiftest,
simplest way, the Beetle way.

Those days it seemed

like every second staff room (that's where I'd been
a year before) let alone every spot along the strip
had one of us at least: happy-go-usey, slightly sad,
making and remaking us ever so slightly sadder,
My wife had never cared for me and sadder,
and so she quit. I'll always hate her.
She and the boy friend though, I bought them out,
aiming to live alone, which dispensing with the lot
our lot (furnishings, white goods) I did,
enjoying all that propped my pride in minimal living.
Next-to-last off the carpets came, paring me to floorboards
(with a front room facing Lygon Street opposite the cemetery)
and my invalid pension. So I shrugged,
put my place on the market and finished each few days
with silent wails to some distant god
hating it, hating her for that little twerp I was,
so that I would catch, I *had* to catch the bus
to Clifton Hill and then wait for the Beetle tram.
Until that summer's day I saw the man who sent me there:
Big Mike on the strip announcing 'Beetle's? Don't exist.'
And I'd be best advised it never had.

Except it had.

And I thought of us: retailers, clientele, those stickybeaks-for-now,
as kids jostling in line with Skunk, Keno, Des 'n' St-st-stu
at Mother Beetle's tuckshop, big-noting sure,
though most days more big-noter wacky than big-noter paranoid:
like Skunk announcing 'Wanna join the army so I can give
the officers head!'

'Well,' Big Mike sneers, 'somewhat possible
isn't it? If he can get away from Beetle. How can he but?'

Not with the quiz-master himself
(our one with all questions, answers, prizes) reminding both how
hadn't he been Cap'n Midnight's two-i-c? and how
'...for a year whilst we were flogging his little bags o' joy,
the ol' Midnight, wasn't he the Pope!'
Well, Beetle taunted, weren't our wishes always jelling, jelling,
to be part of such pedigree? Some Reservoir back street?
Never for our Cap'n! Which made me wonder
why indeed for our Beetle? Not that I need ask,
since this is what Beetle ultimately does:
forces you to imagine. I know I must.

*This sure is useless bastard weather...and near midnight,
stone-bored with these past two days of northerlies
Des 'n' Stu watch wogs on Elwood Beach wrap up their soccer.
And even if tomorrow's Sunday, Sunday can be work for some
like Des 'n' Stu: sitting it out, staring at videos, listening yet again*

to Beetle and agreeing with him how Dæmon's been a very stupid boy. Tonight but, they've credit enough with which to hit the Crystal Palace, to choose and pay (which gets as innocent as they shall ever be).

In some place which though boarded-up may have passed for a milk bar, through all the rich, twenty minute glug of video trailer voice-overs, he's been phoning this useless bastard summer Sunday. Welcome to Beetle's, for when he's finished his calls and orders 'Kill it!' his boys understand their choice. Beetle or the feature? What choice? Not when he's chosen how this afternoon they're getting Dæmon round just so these very stupid, very stoned and very minor dealers (Beetle, Big Mike, Skunk, Keno, Des 'n' Stu) propped by Beetle-rules can kill him, correct kill him, Dæmon a thirteen year old user-dobber-thief. Well that's the Beetle option and if his boys are out, right out of it enough, this will be done.

The kid's brought in and all is prime for Beetle versus Dæmon time, how: 'It was you wasn't it sent those fuckers round to bust us?'

'Shit Beetle-mate, that wasn't me!'

Which might be answered

Who then but? except everyone's got so distracted by some boy, some boy who's hardly entered high school calling their mate Beetle...Beetle-mate? Go on try believing it!

'Hey Beetle-mate,' Stu asks in nervy spite, 'c-c-can't we start the feature now?'

Dumb beyond useless-bastard-useless, you never had the energy to fast-forward anything.

You've been superseded by this grand stoned silence, Beetle as thinker, who pauses, once, twice and then orates.

'He gets tied up,' Beetle stands.

'And gets put there...'

And where is there? There, there, there! Underneath underneath! Underneath where Beetle's jumping!

'Feed him dog meat, feed him dog shit, anyone of you know any better?' Of course they don't. 'And let it be wayout right Des? Right Stu? And by right I mean

so real-real wayout, beyond mere real wayout, this'll be

Return to Wayout City and St-st-stu that's not some video.

Correct Keno?' Who always keeps on nodding 'Correct, Skunk?

The day has now commenced and we are made for it!'

Not quite Big Mike. Earlier that arvo, once he saw this Dæmon thing unfolding (as if he'd stay around for *that?*) he left. They were mental. And either on it or not today's product sure was. *Yep, on yer bike Big Mike* he told himself, shuffling like he was in some folk dance

sideways to the door *On yer bike, we're relocating.*

And he had to since with all of his dealer's skills and effort,
the product and the risks, obedience was the only other option.

'I've taken such risks,' Beetle would announce, 'none will understand.'

Who then murders some prepubescent user so that him and
his Beetle gang of pro dealers, amateur killers get caught,
and for a few days' worth of summer news they hog it.
(*'Off the record,'* a spokesman said, *'the underworld is shamed.'*)

And I knew them. But also knew myself:
that if it had been necessary I might have been there
that summer afternoon in Reservoir, it might've been me
shuffling an exit with Big Mike, or else with Des 'n' Stu
giggling whilst we tried to dump the corpse
(sure hadn't done that sort of thing before had they,
the things ol' Beetz got you to do!).

For even through
that slow mania of the Beetle toll, people got to know each other,
cooperate. (*'J-j-jeez Beetz,'* Stu who thought he was funny
once gagged, *'don't give them ambos t-t-too much work.'*
Wherever he's been sent there's plenty imitations starting.)

And truly he unites folk does our Beetle, so that when guilt,
actual proven guilt strides in presenting itself to sighs of joy,
with the bench contributing each decent, hard-working Aussie's
two bob's worth, oh Beetle just listen, even the very bludging,
the outright indecent are falling one-over-the-other, just to ensure
how banal you truly were. Or when it's time for nostalgia to intervene
watch them queue to ask *'The Beetle merchandise?'* Then answer
*'If you had ways to look at anything and we mean anything
(that philosophy, those manners, anything) all would end in hock
to Beetle. (Or if you had any luck some better class
of wholesaler.) I mean we had to survive. There was little like it.'*

Me, I was fortunate. I could still promenade North Carlton
beaming to and marvelling at the Morton Bay Figs.
Beetle couldn't own me *that* much, though he still required it known
*Your thoughts are my thoughts and my thoughts are your thoughts which are
'You'll be forever Beetz the best there is.'*

And it fits doesn't it,
how when I heard that him and his losers were set for judgement
I knew that I'd be seeing him this final time.
And though I liked and trusted that idea, a witness seemed required:
this friend to whom I could announce: *'Now you get it, don't you?'*
I'm who he's been dealing with.'

The trial occurred into school vacation time so I asked Bob,
who as he had been painting rooms Ange permitted one day off,
gatekeeper Ange, the wife who took me for *my husband's pin-eyed
user friend, him on his invalid pension.* Let her,

she wasn't to know that for all the headaches, all the heartaches (why bother mentioning withdrawals?) R v. Beetle was the primest vengeance show in town, my year's grandest attraction.

We caught the train to Flagstaff which got me questioning
Just how many users train it to their dealers?
Unfair asking Bob of course, his problem if he wasn't in our Beetle club, though come, come Mr Arnold haven't you gone teaching spaced on your very own drug of choice? Most probably not. Who on any 'drug' could be each student's matey-favourite yard duty martinet as you are?

One lunch hour then,
Bob is motioning to me: 'See him grinning there in his long black coat and big thick boots? Today's E.T I'll stand any bet is stoned...'
After which we commenced those Friday evenings when my wife and I, Bob and Ange fronted bistros, though even then the Arnolds must've guessed the bit, that little bit I'd be using Saturday to get me through a day a night, another day and night of married life. (I've seen her with the boyfriend once: at the Vic Market where we gave each other a tiny nod *Go on darling guess who that was... my useless user ex!*) And at the next bistro or the next, just to annoy the spouse Big Mike got referenced in passing. And *that* Big Mike? Bob knew him from La Trobe. On Bob 'n' Mike terms? 'Near enough. A Maoist once... a teacher once...' hoping to be a junkie once; any fad taking him to an edge, though hardly so 'edge' you couldn't *Oops, easy-does-it* and adjust.

Anyone's capable, just be nice if a touch desperate and ask about in any suburb, any town (in any staffroom!)
'Know where I can find myself a Beetle?'
Well now's our final chance to find you a Beetle, Bob, my chance to get my final taste of Beetle, him to cop his final shot of me.

And as if I'd conjured, here came his look that slightest pause part way between *Well wadda ya know...* and *Who is that prick, I think I know that prick, who is that prick?* Though when the judge, who doubtless knew less than one per cent of it mentioned him by the name Ma and Pa Beetle gave their baby *Who?* I briefly found myself asking *Who? Oh yes yes yes I used to buy from that deadshit once except that now since anyone can deal he's not being done for dealing and Beetz I kept staring back, a prick enough to taunt him Beetz not anyone can kill and weren't you at very base camp case all death?*

'So that was him?'

'Was him once.'

'Nice word *once*,'

said Bob.

Look Beetle, look Bob at what I was back then:
twenty nine, bound for divorce, a head-and-heartache prone
high school teacher who, one Thursday after work
approached a man I knew, that same Big Mike, who sent me out
to him, this charismatic squirt (squirtier than even me,
who'd hardly make Bob's shoulders).

'Yeah we're Beetle.

What are we doing you for?'

I told him what. Who sent me then?

And as I answered, don't say we 'bonded' though we did,
over Big Mike's snigger producing, ever-ripening moustache,
there on a Reservoir back street where Beetle worked out of his shop front.

'...so,' I asked my dealer, 'this was a milk bar once?'

'Mixed business,' he replied, 'just like any day.'

And who was there that any day? Taster girl, another woman too,
one I later took for Dæmon's mother, found within a year
wailing in some park.

Though by now I had a little bag inside
my jacket pocket and having survived that afternoon
I knew that I'd survive this little bag, this anything.
And I have.

For look at what's evolved:

an even more prone, divorced, ex high school teacher of thirty two
trying his embarrassed 'Thanks for coming.'

'My pleasure,' Bob replies.

Except for headaches I think I'd like to think I'm clean.

Lying down though which is often, my mind remains on her: my wife,
whose secrets forced me into mine. And I could blame that woman plenty,
who though would listen to the blame?

Even Bob, a friend who's always heard me out would walk away.
I've seen him, down the other end of a park, playing with his kids,
and as we waved I knew his feeling in return:

There he goes, someone from then I'd rather wasn't now.

And never say you've never felt that way...

driving through this heritage town who's that limping relocated man?
Big Mike, one Interferon day to the next. That girl must be dead;
but for each Des, Stu, Keno, Skunk who wants to make some
living-or-dead effort? Hardly me. And Dæmon?
He was a kid on the news whose parents one, two, two and a half
decades back gave idiot name upon idiot name to their disposable offspring,
as if their Dæmon would grow into his generation's Beetle.

Who just degenerated. For I've heard this,
someone's required to wheelchair him, King Beetle-mate with Aussie flag
round and around the Z Division yard, this someone being recompensed
with product.

So it continues, my tick-off list of

Them them and them, those those and those till it will have happened
much too many years ago, and even these memories, our sour
and blighted memories, surely must need to cease.

Research background

There is always room to explore the lives of Australians, from before the start of white settlement to the present day. With narratives from a retired femocrat examining her Maoist past and first big love affair, and a self-pitying junkie examining his relations with both his psychotic dealer and a 'straight' friend from his teaching days, I aim to explore areas of urban Australian life still relatively untouched in poetry.

Research contribution

First person poems in which the speaker is decidedly not the author are one of the staples of my verse as well as being one of the major strands in poetry since at least the Victorian era. Do dramatic monologues and verse narratives attempt to colonise areas usually held by playwrights and fiction writers? Most certainly. Do we succeed in this enterprise? The jury is definitely out. Check at the end of this century for a progress report.

Research significance

Since I know I will be evaluated by my willingness to tackle areas in poetry and modes of poetry that have been my territory since at least the mid 1970s, 'evidence of excellence' will have to wait. The big paradox, of course, is that although it will be posterity that delivers the final judgement, no poet (no writer) should ever write with posterity in mind. The only thing I can say with certainty, though, is that I have improved. The next big task is to write something that no one would expect me to write, and write it well. Now that would show significance!