Bread Winner

A poetry collection

Exegesis: The poet's work

How does the work of poetry relate to the wider work environment?

Gillian Roach

2016

School of Language and Culture

Primary Supervisor: Michael Johnson

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

Table of Contents

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Gillian Kaye Roach

Intellectual Property Rights

All intellectual property, including copyright, is retained by the candidate in the content of the candidate's thesis. For the removal of doubt, publication by the candidate of this or any derivative work does not change the intellectual rights of the candidate in relation to the thesis.

Confidential Material

The content of the candidate's thesis is confidential for commercial reasons, that is, the possible publication of the thesis, or a derivative of it, as a work of creative fiction for sale.

This confidentiality remains after any commercial publication. For the removal of doubt, publication does not change the intellectual property rights of this or any derivative work.

Abstract

The thesis *Bread Winner* is a collection of 50 poems that explores the question *What do you do?* Often the starting point in conversation when two people meet, this tricky question reflects the widely-held view that what we do defines us and indicates our value. The question comes pre-loaded with assumptions about the nature and definition of work as well as hierarchy, gender and status. Bread Winner explores the concept and language of work in New Zealand society, from a personal vantage point, unpicking definitions and what is valued. A major theme of the collection is the relationship between work and identity.

Bread Winner has three sections: **Black Ice, Napier – Taupo Rd; Breadwinners** and **Flax Way**. The structure of the collection follows a movement from personal experience, through reflection on gender roles and societal norms, to more overtly political work. This movement reflects, and in some cases maps, both my personal journey and the development of my writing. The collection includes traditional lyric poems, alongside more open, mechanistic techniques, in a sense 'showing its working' as older poems rub up against more experimental forms.

In the exegesis, The poet's work, I look at how my personal journey relates to the subject matter of Bread Winner. I describe my desire to assert the value and contribution of my unpaid 'work' and how this contributed to my growing political awareness.

I document how I experimented with the lyric form to open up my poetic practise and explore more democratic and inclusive forms. Several poems in the collection work with found texts, using deconstruction techniques that foreground the process of writing poetry and show the working. This reflects the subject matter; digging into and deconstructing the language of work, as used in the media and by bureaucracy, to look at its underpinnings. (The sources of found material for individual poems are referenced in the notes on p.70)

In this context, the exegesis looks at the work of a poet and how it relates to the wider work environment. My creative work has played an important part in my personal

development, helping me forge a sense of myself as an individual. However, writers and other creative workers face a precarious and changing work environment. As with my experience in traditional caring roles, the ongoing work of writers (and other creative workers) is largely invisible unless it attracts an income or other external measures of success. Artists must adapt to the demands of the market to earn an income, limiting their ability to challenge the status quo, innovate or experiment with new forms, and advantaging those with independent financial support/privilege.

The collection Bread Winner explores the precarity and instability of the modern work environment; the tidal shifts between tradition and new ways of doing things, threats and opportunities, and the tension between the need to present a public, commodified self and the depth and darkness required for creative work. It aims to expand and open out the idea of work — leaving space for the reader to "come towards" meaning, bringing their own understanding of the question 'what do you do?'

Exegesis : The poet's work

How does the work of poetry relate to the wider work environment?

Exegesis: The poet's work

How does the work of poetry relate to the wider work environment? `

Introduction

Bread Winner is a collection of 50 poems that explores the question *What do you do?* This tricky question is often the starting point in conversation when two people meet, reflecting society's view that what we do defines us. The question comes pre-loaded with assumptions about the value and definition of work as well as hierarchy, gender and status.

For this creative work, I proposed exploring the concept and language of work in New Zealand society, focusing on several major themes, including:

- the role of meaningful work in the development of personal identity
- the changing nature of work
- what counts as work, success at work and how it is rewarded
- a poet's work and how it relates to the wider work environment

Part of the attraction of making this my focus was to take a less personal approach to writing poems, to remove the 'I' from my work and tackle broader themes, expanding my range and scope. However, the word work encompasses many things — as a concept it is huge, a mountain which would take a lifetime to draw from all sides. I have taken a glimpse from my vantage point, drawing on my personal experience as well as observation of others at home and in my community, and from my wider reading.

How do you build a sense of yourself in a world where so much of a person's identity is entangled with *what you do* in the sense of a job or career, when you are not in paid employment? How do you define success if the prevailing paradigm is that work only has status if it is rewarded financially?

> "…there continues to be the assumption that the only way in which work can be visible or valuable is if you treat it as if it were a market commodity or a market service and you attribute a value to it." (Marilyn Waring, as cited in Cavanaugh, 1998)

Attitudes to raising children and women's engagement in paid work have changed considerably in my lifetime. When I had children 20 years ago it was rare for women to return to paid work before their children were school age: this was different from the expectation of my mother's generation that married women would not work outside the home until their children were much older. It is now commonplace for the primary carer (usually mother) to return to paid work while children are still babies and child-care has become commodified, its value visible as the cost parents assume when they outsource the role to a day-care centre or child-minder. While this societal shift has not happened in a uniform fashion, it is now widely accepted as the norm — the experience of each individual woman, each family, differs according to their circumstances, values and beliefs, and the catch-all label 'working mother' is as inadequate to capture the totality of one person's experience as 'stay-at-home mum'.

As a woman who came of age in the 1980s, the era of 'girls can do anything', I struggled with my immersion in what I had previously regarded as an old-fashioned and restrictive traditional female role when I became a mother. I felt huge tension between my wish to be valued and earn success within a culture that did not seem to recognise my role, and my conviction (also culturally instilled) that what I was doing was important for my own family, and my wider community, and should be valued on its own terms. I did not want to be like my mother's generation, with so few choices, facing huge inequalities, yet wanted to raise my children with the same time and care with which I was mothered.

I relied heavily on my work as a poet and fiction writer during this time to forge an authentic private identity as an individual, greater than the narrowly defined boundaries of stay-at-home mum or housewife that I felt did not adequately reflect me or my experiences. My poems recorded my personal experiences of my environment, day-to-day activity and emotions. In retrospect, I was attempting to write a poetry of mothering – to capture it and show its nuances and to transform it by this creative process into something visible and 'real'.

> "The poet never says this to himself, but in effect this is what he means when he begins a poem: he is asking "what is the poetry of…" whatever he happens to be dealing with. By poetry, he means the reality of, the totality of. What is the poetry of love at first sight? What is the poetry of desperate ambition? What is the poetry of myself, my consciousness?" (Shapiro, 1960/1989, p. 101)

Influenced by feminist writers like economist Marilyn Waring, I grew in confidence that the work I was doing was important and valuable, despite being unpaid. I also became more aware of my own privilege in having the economic resources to choose whether or not to take up paid work. With a background of paid work in both special education and development aid, I developed an interest in children's rights and the impact of poverty and inequality on children. Voluntary and paid employment advocating for better policy to address child poverty contributed to my growing political awareness of how societal structures and discourse shape the experiences of individuals. This challenging work contributed greatly to my personal development, building skills and giving me a broader perspective on my own family life, as well as my community and wider New Zealand society.

These themes form the organic matter which has composted down into the poems of this collection. I do not address these themes directly, but have tried to "Tell all the truth but tell it slant — " (Dickinson, n/d)

The collection is built around three sections: **Black Ice, Napier – Taupo Rd; Breadwinners** and **Flax Way**. Over these three sections it is possible to see a movement from personal experience through reflection on society's expectations towards a more political stance, although I don't want to overstate this. The journey has not been particularly linear or straightforward and, particularly this year, has taken me to some unexpected places:

> our lives had changed
> like when you swim in the sea
> and when you get out
> there are togs, sandcastles, jandals,
> but not yours

Easter 1983 (Roach, 2016, p. 20)

Lyric / Anti Lyric

I have tended to write in a lyric tradition, influenced by poets such as James K Baxter,

Elizabeth Smither and American Billy Collins. The Poetry Foundation defines a lyric as:

> "Originally a composition mean for musical accompaniment. The term refers to a
> short poem in which the poet, the poet's persona, or another speaker expresses
> personal feelings." (*Glossary Terms*)

The aspects of this tradition that appealed to me were accessibility and simplicity, a deep

human connection and an engaging narrative element. I would have defined the lyric poem

in a similar way to Mary Oliver:

> "This lyric poem is brief, concentrated, has usually no more than a single subject
> and focus and no more than a single voice, and is more likely to employ a simple
> and natural rather than an intricate or composed musicality." (Oliver, 1994, p. 84)

Through wider critical reading I became aware of theories that draw attention to the artifice

of all poetry and call into question this definition of lyric poetry as 'natural'. As I stretched

in my practice to encompass a wider social and political context, I could see my own work

was heavily dependent upon my personal experiences and narrative ego, and tended

towards a single controlling idea.

> "The coercive, epiphanic mode in some contemporary lyric poetry can serve as a
> negative model, with its smug pretension to universality and it tendency to cast the
> poet as guardian to Truth." (Hejinian, 2000, p.43)

Over the past year, I have worked to open my poetic practice to new insight and ideas. This

involved developing a greater awareness of traditional elements of form (including line

length, stress, metre and rhyme) in the development of a poem as well as disruptive or

'anti-lyric' techniques, such as play on the materiality of the poem, extra-textual elements

and subverting the reader's sense of a 'speaker', working to create "an open, sliding voice

we can all slip into if we so wish." (Barbour, 2001, p. 31)

Stephen Burt, writing about the influence of Emily Dickinson and William Carlos Williams on Rae Armantrout, said they:

> "taught her how "to dismantle and reassemble the forms of stanzaic lyric—how to turn it inside out and backwards, how to embody large questions and apprehensions in the conjunctions of individual words, how to generate productive clashes from arrangements of small groups of phrases." (as cited in "Biography: Rae Armantrout," 2016)

AUT tutor Michael Johnson recommended several writers and critics as reading for the Master of Creative Writing, who were helpful in exploring this, including Emily Dickinson, Anna Akhmatova, Pablo Neruda, James K Baxter, Bob Orr and Language poets Lyn Hejinian, and Charles Bernstein.

I looked to these poets to signal ways to analyse and deconstruct my poems, to look closely at the techniques I use, and why, and to develop new techniques rather than writing from a purely intuitive place. As Canadian academic and poet Douglas Barbour describes:

> "searching for a way to play with lyric sound and rhythm and intensity while somehow 'breaking' with a lot of 'lyric' baggage, the lyric ego, the insistence on a kind of autobiographical emotional narrative, etc." (as cited in McLennan, 2002)

I felt freed by this play, enjoying the opportunity to stand back from the personal and simply experiment with different forms and techniques.

> the oppressed to of them side against their
> feeling dictated the experience
> he living on the tramps and beggars
> menial work in of fancy Parisian
>
> Down and Out (Roach, 2016, p. 53)

Open and closed texts

In my work advocating for better policy to address child poverty, I repeatedly encountered the view that work is the best way out of poverty for families, even for those with very young children. I became increasingly aware of the power of words and definitions to shape debate in support of the existing patriarchal power structure,

> "Moving to paid work is the best way to lift more families out of poverty." (English & Tolley, 2015)

Current welfare policies focus on encouraging people into paid work, with penalties for those who do not seek paid work, even when full-time employment does not guarantee enough income to live on. This discourse, now seen as the neutral position or status quo, is packed with ideological assumptions about the deserving or hard-working and undeserving (idle and feckless) poor, and the value of traditional caring roles. The narrative is based on a narrow definition of work, "as a means of earning income; employment ("Work," n.d.)", which fails to recognise or include the work of caregivers and parents (particularly women), or indeed any other creative and productive endeavour which does not attract income. This exclusion has a power dynamic, as Marilyn Waring describes:

> "The old system [….] worked by holding power—the power of definition (who works and who doesn't, what's in and what's out)." (as cited in Cavanaugh, 1998)

I wanted to encompass this wider social and political context in my poems, to explore the active power of words and definitions to include and exclude, according to the underlying ideological assumptions of those using them:

> "The question is always: what is the meaning of this language practice; what values does it propagate; to what degree does it encourage an understanding, a visibility, of its own values or to what degree does it repress that awareness?" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 225)

Lyn Hejinian defines a "closed text" as one "…in which all the elements of the work are directed toward a single reading of it." (Hejinian, 2000, p. 42) The open text, by contrast,

> "invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies…The writer relinquishes total control and challenges authority as a principle and control as a motive." (Hejinian, 2000, p. 43)

In writing Bread Winner I experimented with techniques to 'open' up my poems, to 'break the glass' (Bernstein, 1992, p. 33) between writer and reader, drawing attention to the "social & ideological nature & function of language habits in which we are ordinarily so absorbed as to ignore or repress." (Bernstein, 1992, p. 35)

term crisis applies to the housing
house price appreciation
Auckland has all of financial bubble
at some point many of   us
the apparent wealth
ever increasing house
are two main concern

No real political tackle the housing (Roach, 2016, p. 60)

Form

work: bring (a material or mixture) to a desired shape or consistency by

hammering, kneading…work the mixture into a paste with your hands.

("Work," n.d.)

A major challenge this year has been to balance a more deliberate and thoughtful use of form with the desire to write open, vigorous and inclusive work. Hejinian writes of the:

"conflict between a desire to satisfy a demand for boundedness, for containment and coherence, and a simultaneous desire for free, unhampered access to the world prompting a correspondingly open response to it." (Hejinian, 2000, p. 41)

She asks:

"Can form make the primary chaos (the raw material, the unorganized impulse and information, the uncertainty, incompleteness, vastness) articulate without depriving it of its capacious vitality, its generative power?" (Hejinian, 2000, p. 47)

I have taken part in the 100 Days project over several years, which involves repeating a simple creative task every day for 100 days. This project, which founder Emma Rogan describes as "wonderfully simple, and deceptively challenging" (Rogan, 2016) has taught me a great deal about the value of constraint on creative work. The very limitations of the task challenge you "to dig deep into your creative reserves, to rely on your readiness to work in order to achieve creative breakthrough." (Rogan, 2016) What I learned from undertaking this sustained creative practice, working to a defined set of parameters in

different media (photography and drawing), gave me greater confidence to experiment with form in poetry.

I found working with defined forms particularly helpful in writing more experimental, disrupted poems. Following a strict metre, or counting syllables, served to hold the fragmented elements together and provide cohesion.

> "Form is not a fixture but an activity." (Hejinian, 2000, p. 47)

I was drawn to deconstruction techniques as part of my work this year — foregrounding the process of writing poetry and showing the working. This reflected the subject matter; deconstructing the language of the media and bureaucracy to look at its underpinnings. I worked with a range of texts, including newspaper and magazine articles (print and digital), government media releases, social media comments (online) and website content, choosing texts with relevance to the themes of the collection; particularly work, housing and education.

Several poems in the collection were created using aleatory (random) processes. I experimented with mechanistic techniques, using cut-ups and patterns of words within texts — digging into found texts to see how closely their meaning held once they were disrupted.

> "roots pull from the earth's hughold — some clings,
> there will be clods and necessary dust,
> the smell of dust"

> Saccadic Differentiations (Roach, 2016, p. 68)

I was particularly interested in working with the materiality of text in a hands-on, tactile way – applying techniques inspired by traditional crafts practiced by women, representing creativity and hours of (often invisible) labour. For these poems, I chose to work with content that did not draw directly from my personal experience, to remove my own ego from the poems and allow room for the play of words to create interesting meaning and juxtapositions. They are contrasted with more conventional work, written within a lyric tradition, and newer work which applies these new techniques to more personal material, such as **Lotto Dog** (p.57) and **What do you do** (p.46).

Pleating

I called one of the techniques I used 'pleating', as it involved folding pages of text from a newspaper or magazine into random pleats, reshaping the text that remained visible into a poem.

> Sole bread and winner
> responsibility, that's for the family.
> The home is to be life
>
> supporting their expensive
> possible neighbourhoods,
>
> Breadwinners (Roach, 2016, p. 37)

Word Patterns

I experimented with disrupting texts (both print and digital) using a simple pattern, (three words of text, miss two, repeat) and its reverse (two words of text, miss three, repeat). It strikes me that this was like following a knitting pattern, missing and creating stitches in a regular pattern, to create a lace effect.

I used this technique to explore how meaning might hold once a text was disrupted in this way and literally filled with holes, and whether the result might reveal its own airy beauty.

> It is not get hold of outside the circle
> own experience but limitation
> I have a great deal that immense interest
> to hope I shall chance to write about what
>
> Down and Out (Roach, 2016, p. 53)
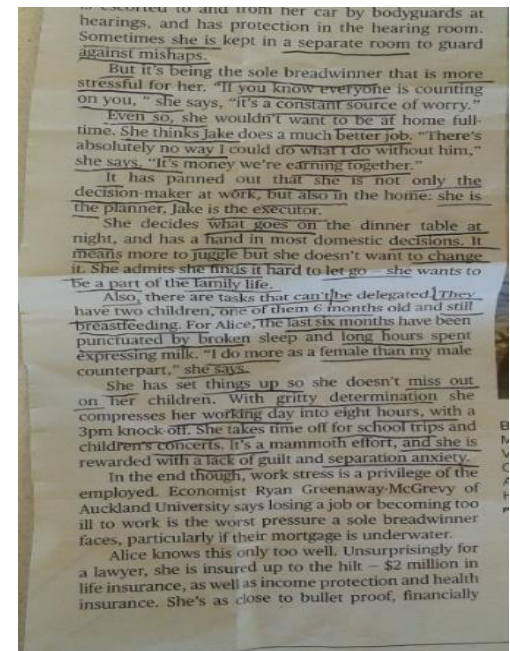
Cut Ups

I also created poems using the cut-up method, which has been well-established over the last 100 years. William Burroughs said, "All writing is in fact cut ups. A collage of words read heard overheard." (Burroughs, 1963) Burroughs believed the use of scissors simply made the process explicit and that the technique lead to great experimentation and variation.

> "The cut up method brings to writers the collage which has been used by painters for fifty years. And used by the moving and still camera. In fact all street shots from movie or still cameras are by the unpredictable factors of passers by and juxtaposition cut ups. (Burroughs, 1963)"

> how his hair looked
>   under fire
>   stood over her

> His future with the body (Roach, 2016, p. 20)
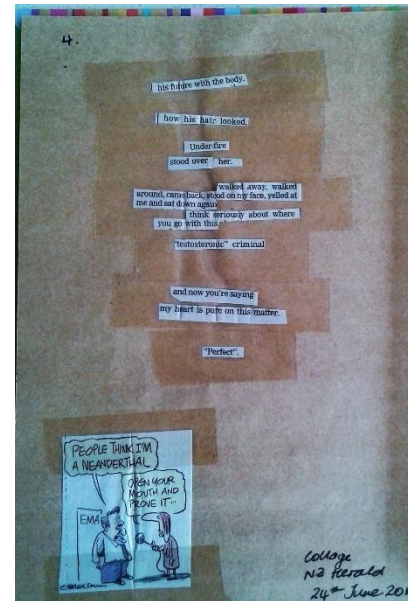
Sampling

In several poems, I used samples of both text and overheard conversation.

> "Consider the narrative drift and disruption that every day produces by chance: you participate in the reconstruction of the story not by filling in the gaps and elisions, but by [as a detective] appropriating whatever fragment is "useful" to you." (Carr, 2016)

The poem **What do you do?** explores this small, odd question; the grammar of which becomes weirder the longer you look at it. Apart from one three-line stanza, it is appropriated from Google searches, which suggest popular searches along similar themes, and the small side journeys which a search of this kind might lead you on. The algorithm which determines the results of a Google search are adapted from the individual's previous searches and is thus highly specific, which seemed a fascinating start to the process. Because of this filtering, it operates in the grey area between mechanical and personal creation. One 3-line stanza, written by me and not appropriated, had been looking for a

home in a poem and seemed to fit due to the congruity of theme. It felt crucial to include something that wasn't computer generated in this poem, to disrupt the pattern. I was interested to explore how the two modes worked with and against each other, and will continue to explore this fusion in future poems.

Another poem, **Lotto Dog**, aims to reflect my community using snippets of conversations I've had with people while walking my dog. These are slippery in terms of being an accurate record – they are what I recall was said, or what my brain serves up when I try to remember – as reflected by the structure and syntax of the poem.

> noble dog brings good fortune
> kids stop to pat her
> smiles big   bigger as Auckland
> she's lucky bro   you'll win Big Wednesday now
>
> Lotto Dog (Roach, 2016, p. 57)

Themes

Journeys

> *"work: a thing or things done or made; the result of an action."* ("Work," n.d.)

Several poems in Bread Winner involve journeys of some kind and the overall structure of the collection loosely follows a movement from poems which explore mainly personal experience, through reflection on gender roles and societal norms, to more overtly political work. The work, in this way, reflects, and in some cases maps, my personal journey and the development of my writing.

Section one **Black Ice, Napier-Taupo Rd,** relates closely to my personal experiences as a parent over the past 20 years. The title poem explores a trip from Napier to Taupo after a major winter storm, aligning this journey with the charged and often fraught experience of parenting. The narrator, driving the car, is so preoccupied with her passenger's safety in icy conditions she loses sight of them as people, they have become reduced to cargo, fragile 'bags of blood' which she must transport from a to b. While alert to the conditions of the

road, she realises she is missing deep, possibly dangerous signs within her relationship with her children. The black ice of the title, becomes a metaphor for what she cannot see, threatening 'the delusion of safety'.

These are imaginative journeys as much as physical — sometimes to an unexpected destination. They speak of the movement and momentum provided by day to day life — "Middle class gypsy kids / tote their bundles / from car to music / to car to drama" (Roach, 2016, p. 22) — and also the imagination, which incites action and movement, yet also journeys on regardless.

> The creek of imagination
> diverts to the conscious brain
> by smell: no need to change
> shoes or clothes, check weather
>
> to walk the street through
> the alley to the bridge
> where the brown water
> surges below regardless
>
> Regardless (Roach, 2016, p. 52)

Work stories

> *Work: "a task or tasks to be undertaken —*
> *tasks, jobs, duties, assignments, commissions, projects; chores"("Work,"*
> *n.d.)*

Different families, and societies, have their own definitions of work, their own 'work stories'. As a child, I often found myself in trouble for avoiding 'jobs' so I could read a book. Baking an edible banana cake trumped writing a poem any day of the week. The devil found work for 'idle hands'. Stories like these provide a starting point to explore different concepts of work and how it shapes, and is shaped by, individuals and communities. When I began this project, I initially proposed visiting several work-places

but instead found myself focused on the invisible work driving my very ordinary day-to-day interactions — at the supermarket, on social media, at the bakery, on the bus. The poem **Down and Out**, which deconstructs a text about George Orwell, became my manifesto for the year, calling on me to widen my own experience, while also acknowledging my own limitations and prejudices:

> It is not get hold of outside the circle
> own experience but limitation
> I have a great deal that immense interest
> to hope I shall chance to write about what
>
> Down and Out (Roach, 2016, p. 53)

The unstable syntax echoes my feelings about writing directly about different professions – which seemed a job for prose rather than a poetry collection. If I was to capture work, it had to be done from the corner of my eye. **The baker rises early,** one of the few poems in the collection which is ostensibly about a job, began as a reflection on the process of writing; my increased attention to different types of work has increased my vocabulary and range of imagery. In a similar manner, **Professional Organiser** unpicks a found text about a 'job', to reveal the underlying societal values around consumption and child-rearing.

> Constant challenge to decency,
> your child's birthday. Drowning
> in a handful of 56.
> No-one needs 56.
>
> Professional Organiser (Roach, 2016, p. 45)

Making meaning

> *"We have a funny relationship with poetry, don't we? It's both absent and*
> *present. It's such a marginal thing in the culture and yet come weddings*
> *and funerals, come the time when you want to find, say, a seductive way*
> *to write to your Valentine, we turn to poetry."*
>
> *Billy Letford, (as cited in Jamieson, 2016)*

My creative work has played an important part in my personal development, helping me to forge a sense of myself as an integrated and whole person, greater than any single role as a daughter, wife, mother or worker. I have resisted the narrow definition of work as paid employment to "provide an income', and been comforted that it also encompasses "activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a result" as well as "a literary or musical composition or other piece of art." ("Work," n.d.)

Janna Malamud Smith writes,

> "life is better when you possess a sustaining practice that holds your desire, demands your attention, and requires effort; a plot of ground that gratifies the wish to labor and create — and, by so doing, to rule over an imagined world of your own." (as cited in Popova, n.d.-a)

The sustained practice of writing (both poetry and prose) over many years has grounded me in my own community and physical environment, as reflected in many of the poems in this collection.

> down the end of our road
> where it bends back on itself
> past the Kura
>
> they're building million dollar homes
> in the footprint of the State
>
> Haver Stock (Roach, 2016, p. 58)

Undertaking the Master of Creative Writing in 2016 has helped me to identify as a poet in a more public way; to 'own it' as Letford describes (as cited in Jamieson, 2016). My knowledge of and engagement with the 'work' of poetry has expanded through sustained writing and critical reading during the year, as well as opportunities to have my work published and take part in readings.

Work and the Poet

Individuals face an increasingly casualised work environment, at a time when major changes in technology have removed many traditional sources of employment, many entry-level and low-skill jobs have disappeared and there is entrenched unemployment and high levels of underemployment. [1]The work environment is increasingly precarious – Slashie (Wright, n/d) or patch-work careers are likely to be the new norm, where a potential for highly creative and fulfilling working lives is counter-balanced by the lack of security and income growth. There is a high potential for failure in these circumstances, which benefits those with skills and privilege. With fewer opportunities for those with lower skills and ability, there is also potential for exploitation: the freedom and choice of individuals is restricted as they adapt to the needs of an exploitative system.

Author Miya Tomikatsu writes about the growth of the Do What You Love ethic, best summed up by Steve Jobs, who said, "The only way to do great work is to love what you do." Under this ethos, labour which is not 'loveable' ("creative, intellectual, socially prestigious") — i.e. most labour — is essentially invisible.

> "Work becomes divided into two opposing classes: that which is lovable… and that which is not (repetitive, unintellectual, undistinguished). Those in the lovable work camp are vastly more privileged in terms of wealth, social status, education, society's racial biases, and political clout, while comprising a small minority of the workforce." (Tokumitsu, 2015, p. 11)

Tokumitsu illustrates how a public profile has become "necessary for acknowledgement of one's very being," through the character of Alicia Florrick from television programme The Good Wife. Alicia travels from invisibility, and powerlessness, as a stay at home mother (albeit the wife of a politician) to self-actualisation through visible, high-status work.

---

[1] The Council of Trade Unions estimates 30% of New Zealanders, 65,000 people, are in insecure work. (NZCTU, 2016)

> "Alicia's blossoming depends on the diametric opposition the show sets up between domestic and professional life…[show and audience] take it as a given that the office is a place of liberation and the home is one of obscurity." (Tokumitsu, 2015, p. 33)

The writing 'industry' reflects many trends in the wider work environment. The ongoing work of a writer, or other creative worker, is largely invisible unless it attracts an income or other external measures of success. A key message delivered to us as students this year has been about the decline in the traditional publishing 'industry' and the need for proactivity to ensure publication (and thus an income). We are urged to seek every opportunity to survive and sustain; to develop a public profile, seek publication in journals and online publications, network and showcase our ability through readings and other public events. There is tension between this construction of a marketable persona (and commodifiable, marketable creative work) to earn an income, and the conditions required for creative work.

> "…a life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense." (Hannah Arendt as cited in Tokumitsu, 2015, p. 48)

These issues are not new — James K Baxter wrote of 'the ladder-climbing game', contrasted with the 'brambles' that 'grew best':

> "…I don't chop it back
> Till the fruit have ripened. Yesterday I picked one
> And it was bitter in my mouth…" (Baxter, 1982, p. 157)

Baxter was writing of his attempts to reach God through works rather than faith, but the image also pertained to his writing. In Jerusalem Sonnets he writes of Hatana (Satan) bashing at his window, luring him to become "The country's leading poet" (Baxter, 1982, p. 128) — and Autumn Testament contains extensive meditation on the conflict he feels between his work in Jerusalem and societal expectations.

Changes in technology, including e-publishing and the growth of social media, coupled with the diminishment of the traditional publishing industry, have pushed many functions

into the author's domain. "Crafting an attractive persona in order to present one's creative work — artistic or otherwise — is also work, work that comes naturally and enjoyably to some, and less so to others." (Tokumitsu, 2015, p. 30)

While there many new opportunities bubbling up in this new environment, very few writers make a sustainable income from their work; most also need to work in other roles. Those with independent financial support/privilege are most advantaged by this system; those who must adapt to the demands of the market are less likely to challenge the status quo, innovate or experiment with new forms.

> ""Disruption" is only for those with soft landings and few consequences."
> (Tokumitsu, 2014, December 1)

I felt the creative work should reflect this precarity and instability; the tidal shifts between tradition and new ways of doing things, threats and opportunities, and the tension between the need to present a public, commodified self and the depth and darkness required for creative work. Bread Winner includes quite traditional lyric poems, alongside more experimental open forms. In a sense the collection 'shows its working', as older work rubs up against new ideas and forms, with each informing the other in an ongoing conversation.

Conclusion

The structures and language of New Zealand's consumer capitalist, neo-liberal society act as powerful forces shaping our experiences and our activity. I became aware of this through personal experience, as I attempted to assert the value and meaning of my 'work' as a mother, in tension with society's (and my own) narrow expectations. This led me to greater political awareness, and activism, which influenced the scope and subject matter of the poems in this collection. Writers are also subject to these forces, leading them to commodify and market their activity to meet the demands of the market and earn an income. These forces can act to limit and control individual choice and activity: shaping oneself to fit the demands of the prevailing hierarchy does not foster innovation, experimentation or inclusion.

> "We live in a meritocratic society, where accomplishments are constantly being measured externally, where forms are always read from the outside, where comfort and lifestyle are often mistaken for success, or even happiness. Don't be fooled. Our ideas regarding success should be our own… As artists, it will be especially difficult to measure these ideas of what success may be because you have chosen a practice that is entirely dependent on being willing to possibly fail, over and over again regardless of any successes that do come your way." (Teresita Fernández, as cited in Popova, n.d.-b)

Traditional lyric poetry was often written from a position of privilege and 'smug pretension' — raising the voice of the poet above the reader. I have been challenged in preparing this collection by the desire to address these tendencies within my own work, and to explore more democratic and inclusive forms, especially when digging into social, economic and cultural hierarchies.

The poet Craig Raine argues poets have:

> '...an implicit contract with the reader, that poems mean something," that the reader is mostly "entitled to expect resolution and meaning. Poetry isn't a perverse crossword puzzle, without answers, designed to divert setter and solver until eternity." (Raine, 2016, p. 6)

While I have learned a great deal from experimentation with form while writing this collection, I cannot disagree with Raine; I think we are hard-wired to search for meaning in poetry. Perhaps then, the important work of a poet is to open up and expand meaning, resisting 'authority as a principle and control as a motive.' (Hejinian, 2000) I aimed to achieve this with the poems in this collection, to expand and open out the idea of work — leaving space for the reader to "come towards" meaning as Letford describes (as cited in Jamieson, 2016) and create their own understanding of the question 'what do you do?'

References

Arnold, N. (2016, May 29). Minimalism: How having less stuff makes us happier. *Sunday Star Times*. Retrieved from http://www.stuff.co.nz

Barbour, D. (2001). *Lyric/ Anti-lyric*. Alberta, Canada: NeWest Press.

Baxter, J. K. (1982). *Selected Poems*. Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

Bernstein, C. (1986). Writing and Method. In *Content's Dream* (pp. 217-236). Los Angeles, CA, USA: Sun & Moon Press.

Bernstein, C. (1992). Artifice of absorption. In *A Poetics* (pp. 9-53). Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.

Biography: Rae Armantrout. (2016). Poetry Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/rae-armantrout

Building a time machine. (2012).   [Poetry Anthology]. Wellington, NZ: The New Zealand Poetry Society.

Burroughs, W. (1963). *The Cut Up Method*. Retrieved from http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/burroughs-cutup.html

Carr, E. (2016). Finding Poems in My Own Labyrinth. *Literary Hub*. Retrieved from http://lithub.com/finding-poems-in-my-own-labyrinth/

Cavanaugh, C. (1998). Aurora online with Marilyn Waring. *Aurora*. Retrieved from http://aurora.icaap.org/talks/waring.htm

Dickinson, E. (n/d). *Tell all the truth but tell it slant — (1263)*. Retrieved from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/56824#poem

English, B., & Tolley, A. (2015, May 21). *$790m package for children in poorest families* [Press Release]. Retrieved from https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/790m-package-children-poorest-families

Glass, P. (2016, April 28). Paul Glass: No real political will to tackle the housing crisis. *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz

Glossary Terms. Retrieved 17/10/16, 2016, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/glossary-terms/detail/lyric

Grimshaw, C. (2016, May 8). Charlotte Grimshaw: A difficult daughter, a happy mother. *Sunday Star Times*. Retrieved from http://www.stuff.co.nz

Hejinian, L. (2000). The rejection of closure. In *The language of inquiry*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Jamieson, T. (2016, August 21). "You've got to own it. You've got to say with pride 'I'm a poet." Is Billy Letford the next big thing in Scottish literature? *Herald Scotland*. Retrieved from http://www.heraldscotland.com

Jones, N., & Johnston, K. (2016, March 15). Schools shake-up: No more deciles? *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz

McLennan, R. (2002). Interview with Douglas Barbour [Email Interview]. *Jacket 2*. Retrieved from http://jacketmagazine.com/18/c-barbour-iv.html

NZCTU. (2016). *Under Pressure: Insecure work in New Zealand*: NZ Council of Trade Unions. Retrieved from http://www.union.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Under-Pressure-Summary-Web-Final.pdf

Olds, J. (2016, May 15). Do New Zealand men have bad style? These fashionable Kiwis share their top tips. *Sunday Star Times*. Retrieved from http://www.stuff.co.nz

Oliver, M. (1994). *A poetry handbook: a prose guide to understanding and writing poetry*. New York, NY: Mariner.

Penguin days. (2016).   [Poetry Anthology]. Wellington, NZ: The New Zealand Poetry
        Society.

Phillips, A. (2015). Against Self-Criticism. *London Review of Books, 37, No 5*, 13-16.
        Retrieved from https://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n05/adam-phillips/against-self-
        criticism

Popova, M. (n.d.-a). An Absorbing Errand: The Psychology of Mastery in Creative Work
        [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/03/14/an-
        absorbing-errand-janna-malamud-smith/

Popova, M. (n.d.-b). What It Really Takes to Be an Artist [Web log post]. *Brain Pickings*.
        Retrieved from https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/12/29/teresita-fernandez-
        commencement-address/

Raine, C. (2016). *My Grandmother's Glass Eye: A Look at Poetry*. London, UK: Atlantic.

Roach, G. (2016). *Bread Winner* [Unpublished MS].

Rogan, E. (2016). *100 Days Project* [Website]. Retrieved from
        http://100daysproject.co.nz/100-days#13-about-the-project

Sabin, M. (2007). The truths of experience: Orwell's nonfiction of the 1930s. In J. Rodden
        (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell* (pp. 43). Retrieved from
        https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=x8-
        fnamQuUkC&pg=PA43&lpg=PA43&dq=George+orwell+Every+self-
        advancement+seemed+spiritually+ugly&source=bl&ots=WP340yCtSn&sig=8UZNsKE
        S6JHVxyUR2q0dkRvCFwE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBjsKA6bDQAhXCEpQKHeJa
        AdIQ6AEIGTAA#v=onepage&q&f=falseS

Shapiro, K. (1989). What Is Not Poetry? In R. Gibbons (Ed.), *The Poet's Work: 29 Poets on the
        Origins and Practice of Their Art* (University of Chicago Press Edition 1989 ed.).
        Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1960)

Slater, C. (2016, March 15). Blunt decile system to get some tuning. Retrieved from
        http://www.whaleoil.co.nz/2016/03/blunt-decile-system-to-get-some-tuning/

Stitchbury, H. (2016, June 5). Richest suburbs: Behind the picket fences. *NZ Herald*.
        Retrieved from http://m.nzherald.co.nz

Tokumitsu, M. (2014, December 1). In the Name of Love. *Jacobin*. Retrieved from
        https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love/

Tokumitsu, M. (2015). *Do what you love and other lies about success and happiness*. New
        York: Regan Arts.

What being busy does for your brain. (2016, May 19). *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from
        http://m.nzherald.co.nz

Work. (n.d.). In *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*. Retrieved from
        https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/work

Wright, M. (n/d). The Era Of The Slashies – The Multi-Skilled, Multi-Faceted, Career
        Juggling Generation. *The Vocal*. Retrieved from
        http://www.thevocal.com.au/welcome-to-the-era-of-the-slashies-the-multi-skilled-
        multi-faceted-professional-life-juggling-generation/

Zander, B. (2008, March 28). Writers and breeders. *Sunday Star Times*. Retrieved from
        http://www.stuff.co.nz