

Poltergeist clown

Winner 2002 W B Yeats Poetry Award for Australia & New Zealand

Like when he ripped his skintight daks playing Chubby Checker
at the hardware convention. There wasn't a dry eye in the stand
as he nail-gunned the rips with his at-the-ready Black and Decker.
Didn't miss a twist. Had them then, in the palm of his hand.

Or, his impers of Bert at the 66 Logies, calling Muhammed 'boy; host
in trouble, blinking down - old Moonface to a T - at Ali's knotted fists.
Laugh! How can she chew through the mourning toast
if she keeps gagging on crusts of his famous skits?

She was his back-up for so long: seamstress, driver,
keeper of clippings, first to clap. It only takes a spark
and a generator's roaring by the sink and he's beside her,
rubbery-faced, spruiking fit to drop, lighting up their Luna Park.

'Piss off!' she wants to yell. 'All you left was a fast curtain call
and me bare headed under the indoor drizzle of these bills.
Yeah you! Dork on that yellow poster, bowing from the wall.'
But she hard swallows the words, like he did the pills.

'Babe,' she remembers him begging. 'Get me any gig.
RSL or bowling club. Any stand up, voice over, buck's do or stag.
But no kids. No blowin up balloons in a stinky pink clown's wig.
Don't let this business stub me, like a late night smoko fag.'

Silly thing was - he was beaut with kids. They love a dag.
And he missed the birthdays when they stopped. 'Indiscreet,'
said the agent. 'Mints can't hide the booze.' He left a gag
by the bottle. *These Rohypnols are useless. I'm not even feeling sleep-*

She knows she has to close him down.
Pointing his funny bone won't stop her.
She has to kill off her poltergeist clown.
He's become the phantom in her opera.

Squinting into strange sections of the Sun,
she finds the unwanted pages, and hand on chin,
begins spelling out the jobs, one by bloody one,
as his crusts, like stale jokes, bomb the bin.

Notes on Poltergeist Clown

"So you can say - 'Piss Off' in a poem?"

Paul Vickery, 83

Re-written, like most of my work, at least fifty times over 20 years or more it began as free verse centred around the comic's widow at breakfast trying to chew through her 'mourning toast'. The rhythm in the free verse version was so strong it took over and demanded the companionship of rhymed endings. They came together fairly easily once the larrikin ghost began cavorting in front of me like Ally McBeal's dancing baby.

The first rhymed version appeared in the 2001 anthology 'Gallop On' which is a collection of rhymed poems. I still wasn't happy with the piece until I inserted a more dramatic opening, trimmed and re-rhymed some long lines and fine-tuned the ending. The new 'Poltergeist Ghost' lay in my files until I learnt that the W B Yeats competition considered previously published poems provided they had been significantly re-worked.

I never expected to win a large open competition with a rhymed poem.

Poltergeist Ghost was selected to represent Australia at UNESCO's 'Poetica Babble' - a celebration of International Poetry Day (not too well publicised in Australia). I added some footnotes to explain Bert Newton, RSL's, smoko etc. Paul Vickery, my father, wasn't mollified.