

Last words

Winner of the 2000 AGGF Poetry Award.

It was a shock to see you climb into your coffin
and snap your first-ever manicured fingers
for a dour hit man to take you to
the big cemetery
in the sky.

Your friends and family have been sensitive.
They have honed the edge of feeling,
those old rivals of mine, scraped rich odes
from your soup cans,
your second best teeth; everything
you were personal with.

For me the whole affair was a fraud.
No death rattles. Neither conversion
or tweaking of the parson's nose
and, naturally, no
Kiss me Hardy.

You just croaked in your own selfish way.

I'll keep my promise about the séance.

Wouldn't do, would it, after
all those years of bombast
if the last words
were mine.

Notes - Last Words

Strong relationships and unequal power balances don't necessarily end with death. I imagined these lines as a quiet under-the-breath address to a newly covered grave. The narrator's voice came through very strongly in the first drafts as he tried to score some long overdue points and then reluctantly surrendered to the power of his demi-god friend whom I came to think of as Mick Jagger type.

The opening and closing stanzas came fairly quickly. The middle part took about 20 years; finally falling into place with 'You just croaked in your own selfish way' which seemed to catch the bitter/jocular/'bloody typical' emotions of the narrator.