

Poems that challenge the mind

Four poems that reach out to encompass diverse dimensions. We start with ***Whittling our Niche*** (perhaps my own favourite, which headlines this website). The poem explores the notion that during his or her short life any person sees a miniscule portion of the universe which surrounds. Our friends and experiences come from that tiny splinter taken from a massive tree. But what if we could connect to the greater trunk and all its branches?

Whittling our niche

*Imagine what one doesn't see,
Or hear, or feel, or experience,
Through any one life
On this blue-green globe.
The choice we have is limitless;
The path we choose to take,
Governed by a potent mix
Of genes and circumstantial fate.*

*Reality comes individually:
A short, sweet glimpse, a minute amount,
From oceans of people
And deserts of place.
Within some overall time-set frame
We carve and whittle our niche,
Discarding the remaining sequoia tree
For the other six billion to reach.*

March 2003

It always seemed an intriguing thought that we associate and assimilate within a small circle of people. At birth, our brand-new world is a clean slate on which we can draw whatever life we wish to lead, and people we prefer to meet. Though not really, because even at the point of entering the world we are born the child of a mother and father, who inhabit a specific culture. Already we are confined and codefied; pushed back into our corner. Interplays with people in our vicinity often form the basis on which we select relationships for life. We choose from a tiny inner circle of people we meet and places we inhabit. If we had chosen another route, then the result could have been quite different.

Mind Waves

*Bliss is turning and burning,
Like waves in turmoil in my head.
What once seemed so clearly
Defined, as tracks on firm wet sand,
Have been swept away; submerged,
Or left as unclear imprints in fading light.
Direction? Weight? Intensity? Authenticity?
- Questions in the froth and bubble.
Who am I? Where am I going now?
Back to the beachhead,
Where once I started forth,
Full of surety and assured.
Or, on past the depths of control!
For nightmares still abound
Waves-eye-view of a beach too far,
Rescued then by some anonymous soul.
- Dress rehearsal for a one act finale?
Who knows? God knows!
(If you're a believer).
But, what if not?*

Adelaide 1995

Troubled times bring troubled thoughts: a philosophy which underlies ***Mind Waves***. It is perhaps the most introspective poem in the whole collection.

I had been diagnosed with cancer and had just undergone surgery to stop what was there and prevent more coming. Fortunately, and with time, everything was judged successful, but when the poem was penned, I was still not sure. Nothing like a spot of ill health to disturb the mind and throw it off kilter. Before, I had a plan; after and that plan more-or-less disintegrated. I had to re-think my life over: to re-work my soul. Where once I had been confident, I was now unsure whether to retrace my steps and begin again or to launch out further into the unknown.

The analogy with my rescue from drowning many years before and referral to the next possible (and perhaps final) crisis in life, clearly shows a troubled mind, conceivably further unsettled by the fact that, as a non-believer, I had no God to fall back on. The future a total unknown!

House of Cards

*Loneliness bares its tentacles
To reach out and drag you down
Into the abyss!
For an abyss it is quite clearly,
Created by the state of mind
That pervades the lonely soul.
Searching for cracks and crevices
To soak through and soak up
Those positive thoughts,
Haphazardly placed,
As obstacles in the track
Of that ever-pervading,
Ever present abyss.
This abyss is a bottomless sea,
The dark black hole of night,
Until the daily dawn.
Yet, just as surely it can be
Lurking along some busy street
Of jollity and frivolity,
Overflowing the happiness bowl
Booming out from a public house,
To lap around and envelope
This lonely, single soul;
Caught this time by a new abyss:
Caught like a bird in oil!*

Cheltenham, 2006

House of Cards points out that old relationships die hard and that the grass is not necessarily greener, but in fact could be a whole lot browner, when we decide to stride out for fresh fields and new horizons.

The year before had brought the end of a long term union, which had encompassed residence in two countries and travels to many more, as well as two beautiful daughters. The strengths of such associations, developed over time, are difficult to leave behind and the new loneliness that ensues can be hard to overcome.

Millions of people must experience similar feelings, so I decided to commit mine to print.

Pebbles on the Beach

*Moving the pebbles on the beach,
Changing the chairs on the deck.
Pursuits built round ability
To find true direction in life.*

*Is direction itself a thing called love?
Married to a theme for years.
Clambering down from the treadmill:
Suddenly without a wife.*

*How does one move on from this spot?
This space in everyone's being.
Finding fresh opportunities
To forge new bearings in life.*

*Relying on skills built up over time.
That seem sort of useless now.
Forging new capabilities:
Stabbing the dark with a knife!*

Mombasa, 2018

In 2017, I was shell-shocked, having gone through a series of end-of-the-road terminations and brutal losses – at work, at home, with friends and related to finances. ***Pebbles on the Beach*** grew out of all that, when I found myself cast adrift and having to search for new work, new relationships, new ideas and new aspirations. Often it seemed a fruitless search, as suggested by the last line '*Stabbing the dark with a knife!*'
