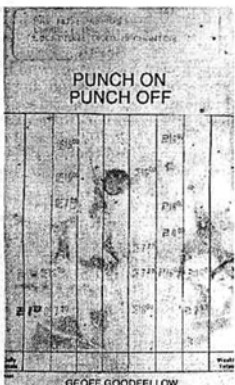


Working-class verse with a punch-line



Punch On Punch Off
by Geoff Goodfellow, Vulgar Press,
\$14.95

GEOFF Goodfellow could almost be called an honorary Tasmanian. This South Australian-based poet is now doing his annual tour of Tasmania. Goodfellow is a regular booking for schools, colleges, universities and prisons in Tasmania.

It is easy to see why. His poetry is grittily observant of the downside of life. Goodfellow's new collection, *Punch On Punch Off*, includes the kind of poems which speak of a working-class Australia.

Goodfellow knows what he is talking about in terms of hard physical work. In 1983, after a back injury caused through persistent heavy lifting, he was forced to stop work. It was then that he discovered

he could write. Where these poems connect with an audience is that they speak of authentic experience.

Many are critical of the kinds of work that men and women are asked to do for unsympathetic employers. In his poem, *What Mum Told Me in 1964* we read how hard work was supposed to never kill anybody.

The poem is about the eventuality of physical work taking its toll on young men. Goodfellow notes at the end of the poem:



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*no hard work never killed them
it was only part of them —
that died.*

It would be wrong to suggest that Goodfellow is a poet who has not moved beyond the abrupt end of his own on-site working life.

These poems, although often bitter in their reflections, are poems that also celebrate a life that embraces mateship with a sinewy kind of love.

On the sheer monotony of repetitive labour, he notes in *The Violence of Work*,

*I work in a factory
Monday to Friday
punch on punch off.*

With the refrain, "punch on punch off" there is a sense established of the mindless cycle of dehumanising work. The individual becomes a part of the process and loses any personal sense of identity.

Then in the poem, *The Luxury of Work*, Goodfellow offers a biting, and yet moving, analysis of the monotony and cruelty visited on shop girls. These check-out chicks are his patient ones who "hold back a pee for three or four hours... let alone your tongue at times". To read this poem is to see shop girls as never before.

But for all of Goodfellow's capacity to show the hardness of work on people, this fine collection is tempered with some disarmingly tender insights.

In *Family Secrets* he watches his mother in the kitchen where he, *waited to hide my face in your mixing bowl and clean up the spoon.*

● On May 11, at 5.30pm, Goodfellow will read at Hobart Bookshop.

CHRISTOPHER BANTICK