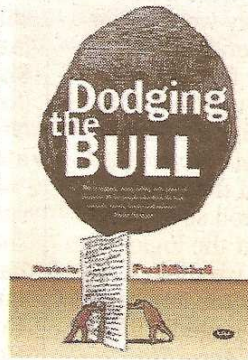


STORIES



Dodging the Bull

Paul Mitchell

Wakefield Press, \$22.95

Reviewer *Lorien Kaye*

DIFFERENCE IS THE DEFINING characteristic of these short stories. The characters experience their difference from others; the reader experiences their difference from the characters; and Paul Mitchell seems to revel in making his stories different from one another, taking in a broad sweep of Australian society. Some stories are realistic, others embrace more fantastic scenarios. Characters range from a war veteran talking from beyond the grave to a young woman whose potential holiday romance is cut short by the Bali bombing. Their voices range from colloquial to more formal.

What the stories have in common is that their undercurrents swirl strongly and they deliberately resist closure.

I find Mitchell at his best in rural Australia. There is authenticity and feeling in stories such as *In the Shell*, *Talisman* and *Driven from Darackmore to Toonenbuck*, which capture tension and love between friends, family and community. Mitchell is less convincing in the city and in more surreal stories.

Mitchell has previously had two volumes of poetry published and has already had success with these stories — most have been published in literary magazines and anthologies. The stories come with the ringing endorsement of Martin Flanagan. My endorsement doesn't peal quite so loudly, but it's good to see a collection of Australian short stories from a lesser-known writer.