

thousand skulls are a pyramid near Phnom Penh'. Yet for Brook Emery the ocean, an image which resonates throughout this collection, has the last word: 'we might press ourselves/against the edge of that one big wave, cling and let go'.

In places, the poet's compacting of thoughts and touches of the surreal might make meaning obscure for some readers: 'I'll listen, you think,/to the aversion of eyes,/the passing that hides/in attachment to time./That's a stone in your hands' ('Story'). But on the whole this poet's fourth collection displays sensitive and masterly control, and concentrates thought, language and form into mature poetic statement. It rewards close reading and rereading.

PAUL MITCHELL – AWAKE DESPITE THE HOUR

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This book could almost be subtitled 'Mitchell's war on everything'. For the poet/persona the world is falling apart ('Stagefright'). Expressing his general disillusionment, his satire ranges from the playful ('My Wheelie Bin's Big Day') to the potent: 'An American flag, lining the insides of all coffins' ('ID'). Deploring the spiritual/moral state of things, he reverses and twists familiar texts and concepts, as in 'At the Gates': 'The valley of the shadow of life...'. This key poem tackles big questions provoked by Kafka's vision: 'Kafka saw gate after gate... world without beginning.' The persona wants to escape or to arrive, but is foiled by thoughts perhaps derived from quantum physics about 'how far': 'How much further?... Far from anything that's far, behind a galaxy or planet, far inside an atom.' Other key poems are 'The Bells Flying' (loss of what was) and three pieces headed 'Scenes from a Marriage'.

Underlying all this is a desperate search for spiritual satisfaction. Like Brook Emery, Mitchell is looking for 'something more' but in a specific religious context. The powerful 'Bedroom Psalm' brings the reality of 'a torn-clothed man, bleeding in the desert', crying 'O you without ears – /Hear me'. Mitchell's flair for black humour lightens the tone late in this poem: 'I can't remember when my soul/dropped through the shopping bag'. A slab of comic dialogue called 'Contact' is about no contact, and 'Interest', a hurricane of words about things in which the poet says he is not interested, is both entertaining and sobering. A contrast, 'Better Late Than, etc.' is in elegant cadences about memory. Juxtaposed images in a few poems challenge interpretation. But close reading can uncover layers of meaning, clues to equip us to think through the book as a whole. There is compelling poetry in this collection.