

My Report from the Uwharries
By Irene Mitchell
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Review by Dennis Daly

Ranging over and through the world of the imagination, gathering details, and illuminating the poetic high ground found between the unfathomable and the understood is no mean feat. In her newest collection of poetry, *My Report from the Uwharries*, Irene Mitchell leads us along the ancient paths of mood and metaphor finding, of all things, a wry, contemplative vision of harmony.

Underlying truths depend on the seeker maintaining the goals that originally propelled the quest. Mitchell's poem *Illusion* lays out the power of perception and the need to follow, with some shrewdness, the trail of building wonder, sometimes in the face of adversity. The poet puts it this way,

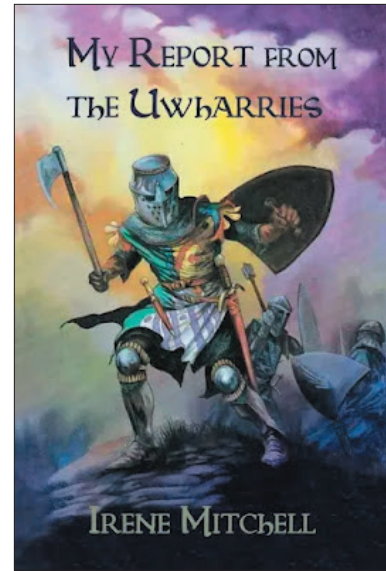
*What a curious thing it is,
this exploration under the roof of stars
of that un-rejectable map
yielding what one never quite wanted
to know.*

*Each frayed opportunity thus weighed
is found insufficient in its own world,
but in this illusory world
every chance shines
with a smooth coat and smart figuration*

Fallout, Mitchell's poem denying causality, at least in the artistic imagination, in the mad, mad world at hand, asks a question of degree: How much can one tolerate?. The peacefulness of the poet's craft enables her to utilize logic to justify the encroaching opposition and, seemingly, to plea for redundancy and purposeful deceleration. Mitchell opens the poem with candor,

*In a hurry to disclose the particulars,
I will tell you right now
that the resulting fallout
had nothing to do with my actions.*

*I was not responsible
for the wind that brought down
the power lines but spared the roof
while I was under it*



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*in my room so peacefully versifying
about how the opposition
only wanted to plant the wheat of thought
in the arid field.
They were busy rototilling
Just when the power went out
So the tillers had to go to sleep out there.*

The title poem, My Report from the Uwharries, makes clear the nature of Mitchell's explorations. She searches for inspiration and a sense of mystery or awe. Speed and first impressions are everything. Her poetry demands immediacy, and its unfolding universe permits no corrections. Mitchell opens her piece this way,

*I go now with magnificent velocity
to the imagined place, driven
to explore its diversity,
I go there seeking any surprises
and wonders of the universe
that may present themselves to me.
The stratosphere and I
will then become acquainted
in a subtle, convenient fashion.
There will be no need
for correction, either of content
or pronunciation...*

Under a disapproving and prescient moon, the poet in her piece entitled Making Good the Way reports the phenomena of melting glaciers and the current lack of honeyed inspiration in the natural world. However, the imagined universe picks up the slack and carries the day. Time connects the photons of goodness together into a powerful and joyous introspection. The poem concludes this way,

*Hallelujah that the report
uncovers evidence
that there are draughts of clear air to spare
in one's private room
on silver earth
where moments of icy moonlight
conjoin to make good the way.*

Awaiting Sentence, Mitchell's poem contemplating the art of poetry, finds that solitary space that nurtures creation. The mystery of its strange logic and texture feels palpable. Time's fluidity flows both ways as tenses mesh in a self-sustaining dynamic. The ponderous waiting as art develops gnaws at the poet's essence with no mitigation, even in this cocoon of innocence. Consider these lines in the interior of the poem,

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*Like rain disappearing into the atmosphere,
even those breaths brimming
with goodness
in traditional fashion
can be lost at any time.*

*Hardly had the words been written,
night's harness freighting each syllable,
then the versifier sped toward the one sanctified
response, a sleep during which the distant
future seemed inconsequential.*

Most complex actions in life collapse in transit. Mitchell's geographical survey takes note of each stunted adventure and highlights it as she passes. Her poem *Presence* observes the jittery crowd in her wake and their general disinterest. The poet also points out a potential for engagement. She says,

*Although such reconnaissance
May prove a tiring exercise,
It brings to the fore
The many incompletes harboring
Along the way, waiting to be reawakened
Through some artful conveyance.*

*Take more tests.
Find Tripoli on the map,
Define tidal pool.
Explain sorry.*

*Emphasize
pain, neglect, achievements, glory.*

"What a piece of work is she," says Mitchell in her dazzling poem entitled *The Harmony of Good Genes*, praising the eloquence, inspiration, and infinity of poetic choices. Even under intense assault the poet formalizes her wry commentaries as she is defended by the ever-benevolent foot knight. She eschews complaints and tedium and pleasures others with the harmony of her unhesitant visions. Here is the heart of the piece,

*Harken back to the first pleasure,
deep breaths in the gold bathing suit
with sea-green stripes front to back
and she emerged from the sea a swimmer
slapped down by waves no more, now able to slough off
the brine even though the wrought iron spokes
of an incoming storm.*

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*Meanwhile, light and air tooled at their workbench
her agreeable complexion.
She did not pry into why that was,
Only took pleasure from it*

Mitchell's delightful collection, created wholly out of light and air, deserves serious attention for her craft, her mischief, and her pantheon of visionary and wonder-filled moments.