

Rock'n'Roll Mamma—Jacqueline Saphra

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First things first. There are things about this poetry pamphlet I really enjoyed, and there are things that made me curl up at the edges. My reaction was markedly polarised. It may be that I am not the audience for whom Jacqueline Saphra wrote these poems. I'm not a Rock 'n' Roll Mamma, but there will be plenty of readers who are, and who will identify with her defiance in the title poem: You think I'll give in to crimplene, retire to bridge and camomile? No fucking chance.

My acid days are done, but watch me dance. My discomfort wasn't all due to lack of common ground, however. There's a huge variation in quality of the writing and I was left wishing the collection had been edited with a more critical eye.

Because some of these poems are cracking. The imagery is precise, often visual, and haunting. In 'A Penny for the Peepshow' a divorced Dad stands in Madame Tussaud's looking on in disbelief as his young daughter becomes mesmerized by the clockwork figures repeatedly enacting the beheading of Anne Boleyn. What he doesn't understand is that it is not the blood and gore that enthral her, but: the epilogue - the deus ex machina whose invisible hand tossed, with perfect aim,

the old wife's battered head back into position

time after time, good as new. In 'Lift' Jacqueline Saphra best demonstrates her ability (found in many of the poems here) to find a poem in a mundane situation and make it precious. Thinking about her husband's ability to: ... judge the shape and load

of any cumbersome object,

calculate its fitness to be manouvered she stands at the bottom of the stairs one morning when he is away from home and admires the "lifting with your mind/ the games you play so easily/ with weight and faith." In this, as with the stronger poems in Roc'n'Roll Mamma, there's a serious and metaphysical quality to the writing. Hidden inside the garish pink covers of this pamphlet there are some wonderful poems. Go seek them out. Liz Bassett