

Beyond the Blue Mountains: Wisdom and compassion on living and dying

by Elizabeth Basset (Medio Media 1999) 256pp, £12.00 pbk.

On examining a poetry book with its few words scattered over a page, a friend's mother exclaimed, 'you don't get many words for your money!' The response was both naïve and perceptive. Sometimes words fail to grasp and comprehend the reality of things and, at other times, there can be too many words which can control and mask the truth.

Perhaps this is true, in part, about our comprehension of death? How do the many words written connect with our own worlds of experience? So, despite this reviewer's ambivalence about anthologies, this collection of prose, poetry and prayer is a useful way into the subject. I think it is written more for those of us curious about the meaning of our own deaths and for those who attempt to accompany those facing death.

Basset has gathered together a diverse collection of pieces eager to stimulate thought and encourage good care practice through sensitive attitudes to the emotional geography of death. The collection is useful and stimulating thought difficult to evaluate because of its wide ranging diversity. It would be a useful addition to a parish library or resource for those who might like to consider the meaning of death in their lives.

What kind of words best help and how these words connect with our experiences remain a critical (and often unexplored) area for all our further reflection and practice.

James Woodward