



READY MADE BOUQUETS

by Robin Lindsay Wilson

reviewed by Nigel Humphreys (The Hawk's Mewl 2007)

In common with much of the best of contemporary poetry Robin Lindsay Wilson seeks to seduce with accessibility so that once involved the reader is often surprised by his beguiling perspective which gifts everyday concepts to a fresh make-over. The Collection *Ready Made Bouquets* begins quietly with a clutch of self-addressed poems (a little preachy for my taste) concerning the creative process and it's not until *Behind the Border* that one realises that here is a poet with something to say. The poem, using unambiguous language and typically economic in expression, deals with the passing of cultures and ideologies as in plus ça change . . . from Ashtoreth to

the English
and the Americans
are dead . . .
who remembers them ?

In the succeeding poem *Jocasta* one is taken aback by an oblique take on the Oedipus story turning it on its head and concluding

from the moment he was born
she controlled everything

The 'Art' poems which occupy the torso of the collection are inspired by paintings not especially well known I would have thought and occasionally too subjective to engage the reader emotively. Wilson seems not to trust the poetry at times as in *Time-lapse Bouquets*

Your hand is shaking
Your eyes close

I find beauty
in the wilting rose

On the other hand *Donatello* dealing with closet sexuality, the raw objectivity of *Beckmann , Last Turning* 'as still as a stroke of genius' and the brilliantly evocative *Monet Bird Song* proclaim Wilson's talent for understated piquant phraseology

the lily pond knows
what beginning is
without my song

Less convincing are his love poems (with the exception of the intrinsically fine *Love Letter* . . . 'Dublin and Glasgow/both made of leaves'). Loch Fyne begins weakly
Our country is made of shingle and cloud
its hope distributed by divisions of water

However where Wilson's poetry works particularly well is when it involves social comment and the pressures of modern life. In *Where Ideas come from* a soldier is destroyed by domesticity. *Open* invites the reader to share that subjective experience of a place when it simply feels right to be there:

the river Dee spreads your legs . . .

some villages are opened
by a tea towels on a line
a flowering rhododendron
a fresh pub food sign

and the insights of *Alternative Potential* are typical of the way he uses homespun detail to ironic effect

a smell like the fast release
of Wellingtons or an early
discovery of damp groin
makes you sorry for people
you do not want to know

There are some finely worked images in *Anger Management* and *Loneliness* and his inventive turn of language works well in poems such as *Alchemy of Trust*

he can pour his right hand
into clouds of hysterical wine

Only on occasions is one aware of Wilson's Scottish heritage. His poetry has a universal quality which reaches out far beyond a nation's borders. His poems are visually compelling, light of foot but ambush with depth. Where much of contemporary poetry sees the need to be as clever and opaque as is humanly possible, the reader does not have to work hard to be enriched by the talent manifest in this Collection and therein lies much of its appeal.