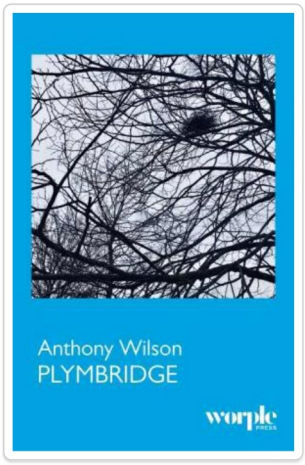
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London Grip Poetry Review – Anthony Wilson

***Poetry review – PLYMBRIDGE*: D A Prince** reviews a collection by **Anthony Wilson** which draws together memories from different times, making some sometimes surprising connections

Plymbridge
Anthony Wilson
Worple Press, 2026
ISBN 978-1-905208-56-2
£10.00

Plymbridge (the pamphlet) defies expectations. Plymbridge (the place) is a wooded valley of the the River Plym, north-east of Plymouth, with National Trust woodland to the east; and Wilson's title suggests that this might be a pamphlet concentrating on geography, the natural world, local history, and his relationship to it. The opening poem, "Two River Poems", appears to bear this out. In two parts, one to the Exe and the other to Plymbridge (the river Plym), Wilson contrasts the 'Bergs of beige foam' in the polluted Exe with the 'spinning curls/ of crystal rapid' in the clean and kingfisher-ed Plym. This is the place where 'Toppled beeches grow weirs / of clotted leaves'. There's a lot of white space around these poems, as though letting in the air; "Plymbridge" even has a couple of lines that are simply single words. It all points to ecological concerns and tightly clipped lines.

This is Wilson's seventh collection, stretching across thirty years. He's also a familiar name as the blogger whose *Lifesaving Poems* became the source for the Bloodaxe anthology of the same title, where each poem is supported by Wilson's mini-essay on what brings the poem alive for him. His own reading is wide-ranging and open-minded so perhaps it is this quality that, in the subsequent poems, rapidly takes this pamphlet away from the specifically natural location to somewhere entirely different. Even so, the two poems facing each other, across these following pages, are a

shock, both in style and subject. Here is the relaxed, expansive opening of “In the Laundrette with Adam Zagajewski”

Usually I take Raymond Carver with me,
but today, Adam, it was you.
A kind Spanish man showed me
how to work the machines —
we both had sheets after Christmas.

Literary references, a European world brought close to home, and handled with ease: this is an anecdotal poem, and accessible on first reading, as is “Adam Zagajewski Visits Lvov”. This is described in the notes as a ‘found’ poem, although any textual adjustments would require access to Clare Cavanagh’s 2005 translation of Zagajewski’s original. Is Wilson making a statement about the differences between open and closed in these two poems? There is, to me, something secretive about ‘found poems’; it’s as though the poet hugs the original text tightly, and only shares selectively. There are two more ‘found’ poems in Plymbridge. One, “Biographical Details: *Poetry Introduction 7* (Faber, 1990)” is exactly what the title says: facts culled from those mini-bios familiar from the back pages of poetry anthologies. It’s a game of Spot-the-Poet, but if you want to play you will need to track down the names of poets featured in the Faber anthology (there are eight, and not all are household names) and then match the details. One for winter evenings, perhaps.

When Wilson shifts focus to remembering his schooldays and friends from that time, the overlapping names and shared interests strengthen the poems. There’s a dialogue between them as they build up a picture of community activity. “Fresh Air” brings names of school friends into the present

The drum solo in Los Endos,
so loud we miss the bell
at the start of prep,
Charlie Phil Collins,
me Chester Thompson,
our pencils blurring as
we face other each in
hysterics from opposite
ends of the stud when
Yaffle bursts in screaming
Turn that noise down now!

Short lines, monosyllables maintaining the jazz speed, the unlikely line breaks on ‘as’, ‘in’, when’: these all give immediacy. Names, used again in “Time in a School House”, don’t exclude the reader but give the impression of a settled society defined by close friends. “Bogs” recalls what you’d expect in this context, the school lavatories, a 12-line poem ending with a single line, by Tonnus Oosterhoff ‘Nobody escaped from that time.’ This is just one of the references to other writers that puzzle me: Oosterhoff is a contemporary Dutch poet but I’d guess that most readers don’t recognise his name and the line doesn’t strike me as significant in itself. Perhaps Wilson has a personal connection here, as with the names of school friends, that is a part of his fabric but this time I feel excluded.

There’s a second poem with a borrowed ending, “Red Stationery: *poem ending with a line by Sufjan Stevens”,* where I have to check the reference online. An American singer/songwriter — again, still alive, so there may be an unspecified personal connection that I’m missing. This time the line is not an exact quotation but again the significance of that eludes me. Is this an allusion to inaccuracies in memory, how the past plays us false, however hard we try to keep hold of it? At

times there is a cryptic element in Wilson's poems that I found difficult to untangle.

Being invisible, going unnoticed is a theme that haunts these poems, and feels surer ground. "Against Listening" has the repeated line 'I will never be heard', while "Boiled" opens with 'I can name the churches where I wasn't seen.' In "The Green" Wilson takes on the role of outsider, in the disguise of an anonymous dog-walker as he re-visits childhood scenes

Surprised to have never walked round it,
I snoop at the big houses pretending I'm not

A familiar action this time, which prefigures the endings of the final poems. This is a pairing that shows Wilson at his best, using free verse in a conventional format (i.e. no experiments with spacing or punctuation) and celebrating two friends. "Class: *Careful What You Wish For* (Carcanet, 2015)" explores his own reading of Peter Sansom's collection. You have to hunt in the Acknowledgements to find Sansom's name, though; it's as though Wilson expects readers to be immediately familiar with the title. The description of Sansom's plain style is linked to Wilson's opening poems about the Plym

like one of those rivers glimpsed
on one of those walks, meandering
apparently without purpose,
glistening suddenly through trees,
always trees, meeting its own night.

The final poem, "Aria on Hope: *i.m. John Ash"*, commemorates the poet who died in 2019, one whose work Wilson has written about in his blog. *Plymbridge* opens with a poem in memory of Sue Dymoke, a poet who died in 2023 – indeed, this whole pamphlet is dedicated to her memory – and this rounds it off beautifully, returning the poems to their beginning. The ending of the poem draws back from personal feelings, placing the poet's death in a long line of deaths, giving it a dignity that transcends time

it becomes important
to record the emotion, rinsed of feeling,
and hail the lonely piper standing vigil
at the ruined palisades and catafalques
seeing them for what they were, emblems
of a way of life long since departed.

In celebrating the multiple threads of memory built up across his life, and the lives of others, Wilson reminds his readers of underlying values – familiar places, familiar friends, and the importance of recognising these while there is time.

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