



enough by Louise Wallace. Wellington: VUP (2013). Pb, 63pp. RRP: \$25. ISBN: 9780864739131. Reviewed by Sue Wootton.

The front cover of this book is paper-bag plain: author's name and book title in black on a white background. It's *enough*, the second collection of poetry by previous Biggs

Prize for Poetry winner **Louise Wallace**. The back cover has no words. Instead, it shows a black and white photograph of (presumably) the author on a bush track, looking back at the photographer, an uncertain or apprehensive expression on her face. Striking out single-file through unfamiliar territory can be unnerving. It can be difficult to resist the urge to keep checking in with former authority figures, constantly asking - Am I on the right track, am I doing okay, is it enough?

So, cover and title successfully signal the mood of anxiety and fear of inadequacy which permeates the collection. The blurb on the inside flap tells us that "This is a book about moving to the South Island". There is evident nervousness about this journey. Crikey, I wanted to say, it's the South Island, not the Moon. Yes, there is Real Culture in the South Island. Yes, the Simple Life can produce complex art. The blurb also explains that this collection is 'apparently artless'. I don't think the collection is completely artless. The work speaks strongly of the struggle to find an authentic, independent voice. There is a deliberate honing-down of style, an approach eschewing lyricism in favour of an attempt to capture the vernacular. Yet the effect is flattening; no lilt, no cadence, gives lift to the lines. Ordinary Anglo-Saxon verbs pull sturdy nouns through house and field:

...she takes things out of boxes, puts them in their proper place.
She does washing,
she cooks,
she mows the lawns...

("Getting things done").

The blurb renders this quality as "disarmingly direct". I wasn't disarmed at all; it would be difficult to be disarmed by the simplicity of "does", "takes"

and "puts". So, not disarmed, but not often magnetised either – not affected or drawn in, not lingering in lines or phrases trying to catch subtleties of echo, nuance, musicality or vibration.

Is it enough? The question hovers over every poem. Wallace worries herself "into a grisly stew" about this work which "doesn't pay", downgrading it to child's play: "stringing words together / like a popcorn necklace" ("The feathered hat"). That image, unfortunately, stayed with me as I read the poems, especially the poems which deal with "how to write".

Wallace can be insightful, but shies away from uncomfortable conclusions. She can identify a poseur at three hundred paces (see the poem "There are people better than you or I"), yet is preoccupied with how to recognise, without external authoritative guidance, what is or isn't a 'mask'. "I don't need my fancy clothes / anymore (and that's fine, honest)" ("The happy poem"). The dilemma – and the central concern of this collection – is made explicit in "At the airport":

The things I write
that are the most true are the things people say
don't yet feel like poetry. How to write those things
closest to yourself? Better I wrap some kind of snake
round my middle and try to write like that. The
challenge –
a mask.

The challenge for this reader, however, is discerning whether the poet *intends* the clunky effect of lines like 'that are the most true are the things people say / don't yet feel like poetry...' It certainly makes the point: it sure don't yet feel like poetry. Artful irony? On reflection, and thankful to the 'apparently artless' directive in the blurb, I decided this is probably so.

Several poems in the collection do lift from anxious self-regard enough to let in space and light, enough to cast shadows, enough to haunt, enough to reverberate and hum. The titular poem, *enough*, is one of these poems. The poem bears repeated reading, opening further and deeper each time, leading us from the surface observed moment to a deeper, wider place – that auditorium of the mind where we can hear strange, sometimes unidentifiable music. All poetry addicts crave access to that mysterious place. No addict can ever have enough, and *enough* was not enough for me in this sense. But *enough* is, of course, a risky title. Some readers may find that it points more to courage than timidity, and hear wider resonance than was audible to me.