

BONES OF ETHER

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JAMES WALLER

A sample of five poems from the collection

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The Wounded Dog

The wounded dog sings
Out of chorus with Time

Moon-breast, dream beast
Hallowed horn of hubris

Sing another song
Fabled shadow

I know no other,
Whispers the beast

You are my point
My stutterance

My black-beamed strangeness
And now I shall hunt

The word-hour
With soles of honey

The fur of another kind
Draped upon my shoulders

Like a shawl of blood,
A soft plate stolen

From a darker Age

A whispered chain
Of crimson

Forgetting the links
Of its own sundered horizon

Upon The Anvil

The dream-light that is my hammer-speech
Tears like a rag from the dress of sound

The tree-bride, leaves that are heaven-scent,
Births in rings the cooling blades

An old harmony of gilt-edged gowns
Sews in secret through the undergrowth

Is there a point to the song, which utters its bark
Like a giant shedding its shaggy skin?

The leaves do not answer, the undergrowth is silent
The hidden sky bites the hour, and a dark dog

Breaks a long-loved bone upon the anvil of a dream

The Golden Wood

Black dogs walk the gilt interior,
Dream-beasts of the shadow-verge

Sentences of silence
Are drawn from the golden wood,

The passageway of trunks
Swaying gently in the wind,

Each limb a map of the Milky Way
Stained with mauve and umber

A bird alights upon a green-mossed branch
Framed by lungs of silver

Slowly it sinks into the umber-shade
Into a blessed gown of darks

And there I sit, amidst moss and bark
One foot buzzing, another cold

Remembering, somehow
To straighten my spine

Like a young, grey sapling
Hearing the vertical call

A Fiction

My castle of dust, my secret language, born of fire;
Words learnt from a brazier of twilight signs

Images stolen from the braids of an inner light
Yes, it is the dance of a stranger's shadow

Upon the wall of Plato's fictitious cave
And the writer, too, is a fiction of blood and bone

The Child, Revisited

The figure of stone, born in a casement
Of soft blue fire, held like a shadow

Close to the light. I have worn the edges
Of my jacket, the leather old and cracked

But it fits me still. I can't complain
And my boots, though half my age

Are sound as the earth they greet
It is a slow dune of wilderness

That reaches through, to the child
Of soft-shoed bronze, his wing of lead

A fable, soldered to his oceanic shoulder
He has grown since last we met

But his gaze has not forgotten
The soundless ships of human memory

Nor the tree from which he hung
Nor the blood which whispered

Through older veins. He holds me now
In the cradle of his sunken eyes

Two wells of heavenly dark,
Two seas swelling in their starless grip.

How much can he forgive?
How often has he been murdered?

The count is beyond reckoning
And the fathomless pupils

Of his inner-most oceans
Glint with a hidden rage

