

## Bone Dreams

### I

White bone found  
on the grazing:  
the rough, porous  
language of touch

and its yellowing, ribbed  
impression in the grass —  
a small ship-burial.  
As dead as stone,  
flint-find, nugget  
of chalk,  
I touch it again,  
I wind it in

the sling of mind  
to pitch it at England  
and follow its drop  
to strange fields.

### II

Bone-house:  
a skeleton  
in the tongue's  
old dungeons.

I push back  
through dictions,  
Elizabethan canopies,  
Norman devices,

the erotic mayflowers  
of Provence  
and the ivied Latins  
of churchmen

to the scop's  
twang, the iron  
flash of consonants  
cleaving the line.

In the coffered

riches of grammar  
and declensions  
I found *bān-hūs*,<sup>1</sup>

its fire, benches,  
wattle and rafters,  
where the soul  
fluttered a while

in the roofspace.  
There was a small crock  
for the brain,  
and a cauldron

of generation  
swung at the centre:  
love-den, blood-holt,  
dream-bower.

#### IV

Come back past  
philology and kennings,  
re-enter memory  
where the bone's lair

is a love-nest  
in the grass.  
I hold my lady's head  
like a crystal

and ossify myself  
by gazing: I am screens  
on her escarpments,  
a chalk giant

carved upon her downs.  
Soon my hands, on the sunken  
fosse of her spine,  
move towards the passes.

#### V

And we end up  
cradling each other

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<sup>1</sup> Old English: *bone-house*, i.e. body.

between the lips  
of an earthwork.

As I estimate  
for pleasure  
her knuckles' paving,  
the turning stiles

of the elbows,  
the vallum of her brow  
and the long wicket  
of collar-bone,

I have begun to pace  
the Hadrian's Wall  
of her shoulder,  
dreaming of Maiden Castle.

## VI

One morning in Devon  
I found a dead mole  
with the dew still beading it.  
I had thought the mole

a big-boned coultter  
but there it was,  
small and cold  
as the thick of a chisel.

I was told, 'Blow,  
blow back the fur on his head.  
Those little points  
were the eyes.

And feel the shoulders.<sup>1</sup>  
touched small distant: Pennines,  
a pelt of grass and grain  
running south.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *North* (1975), in *Opened Ground*, in *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*, Faber and Faber, London, 1998.

