

Gwyn, Richard
WALKING ON BONES
Original Drawings by Tessa Waite
Parthian/Dufour (78 pp.)
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Gwyn, who was born in South Wales and now lives in Cardiff, has written three previous books of poetry. He has given readings of his work at various venues in the U.S. and U.K., and has collaborated with several European artists on other projects. Ms. Waite's accompanying artwork consists of highly textured drawings that remind one of the aleatoric *frottages* (rubblings) of Max Ernst. They are evocative and wholly appropriate to the subject at hand. It is tempting to assume that any poet who resorts to prose poems is either lazy, inept, or terribly trendy — or all three. But there is no evidence that Gwyn has taken any shortcuts. The form these poems have taken seems instead to have arisen intrinsically out of the ideas and materials that presented themselves. Gwyn studied anthropology and later spent a decade traveling through the countries surrounding the Mediterranean, particularly Crete and Catalonia. While these influences can be discerned, each prose poem inhabits its own world, one which Gwyn imbues with his own quirky observations. "The soul travels at the speed of a trotting camel." He lends each situation an air of mystery and offers layer upon layer of speculation, in a kind of reverse archaeology, as to what has, and what will, occur. People become interchangeable because they are archetypes. He describes ordinary, equally archetypal tasks: cleaning fish, shaving, mowing the lawn, ironing, chopping wood. Where Gwyn truly shines is in the sensuous details he imparts to each simple act. The vividness of his depiction in "Peeling an Orange" actually induces a sensation of tingling on the tongue.

While the poet laments "the pernicious attributes of a godless world," his work goes a long way toward sanctifying the rituals of daily life.