

# Meditation on a Bone

A.D. Hope

A piece of bone, found at Trondhjem in 1901, with the following runic inscription (about AD 1050) cut on it:

*I loved her as a maiden; I will not trouble Erlend's detestable wife; better she should be a widow.*

Words scored upon a bone,

Scratched in despair or rage –

Nine hundred years have gone;

Now, in another age,

They burn with passion on

A scholar's tranquil page.



The scholar takes his pen

And turns the bone about,

And writes those words again.

Once more they seethe and shout,

And through a human brain

Undying hate rings out.

'I loved her when a maid;

I loathe and love the wife



That warms another's bed:

Let him beware his life!’

The scholar's hand is stayed;

His pen becomes a knife

To grave in living bone

The fierce archaic cry.

He sits and reads his own

Dull sum of misery.



A thousand years have flown

Before that ink is dry.

And, in a foreign tongue,

A man, who is not he,

Reads and his heart is wrung

This ancient grief to see,

And thinks: When I am dung,

What bone shall speak for me?