

Hoar Fox
Gareth Alun Roberts

Across the fields the trees are stiff with their knowledge of winter.
They splinter shadows from the shattering moon as Fox comes,
vivid on the frost-laid land in its winding-sheet: a needlework
too fine to be easily unpicked by this blade of fox,

 this wound of fox;
 this rape and jaw and ear
 sharp for the loosening stitch.

But nothing is loose tonight: all is iron and argent
and hard beneath paw and snout.

Not even battlefields full of warriors will be turfed out
of their fossilled beards; their finger-bones
that twitched with summer to reach the plough's shears
now hold their knuckles close. And Fox is a weapon, unsheathed,

 that has no mark:

 not in the cleaned out gasp of the forest; not in the grimace
 of the thickening stream. No twitch here. No sniff. No blood

 for the quick nose
 frantic at the hem of the moon where the feathers are.

But the down that falls on dust-downs is bone-dust
and dry in the throat. A flake of snow
sinks to his pelt
and melts there, where the last bead
of the blood of the world is; the last meat.

Throughout the fleeting night is the sound
of fox, happily munching.

