

Alfred in Guthrum's Tent

After Daniel Maclise's 19th Century masterpiece

Luminescent oils
drag me through the frame
into a ripe imagined past
where
a minstrel's fingers
pluck bittersweet notes from strings
to charm enemy ears
When the revellers
pass out will he draw a knife
to make their throats grin
 gargle red ribbons
over grass underneath the gaze
of the winged god of the woods;
a key in each hand
I wonder what locks
they fit; which door, box or chest
each one keeps secure -
what lies within
This minstrel is the Marsh King
glancing over his shoulder
at unknown Englands
a divided *land*
 skirmishes
to fertilise the earth
drench the sky
But it's the thunder in his face,
vengeance smouldering in his brain
 that spooks me
standing in this gallery
knowing
we are crucified
all of us, on the crossroads
of eternity