

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Spending Time With Walter

John Hartley Williams

CONTENTS

Cover

About the Book

Also by John Hartley Williams

Title Page

Epigraph

Part I

Spending Time with Walter

London Incident

Domestic

Instead of a Letter

The Mechanic

Frogmen Seeking the Child Recover the Unexpected

You Deal With the Noises

Instinct

The Rower

A Storm in the Country

The Blaze

The Ceremony

Dog

Under the Dolmens

Wheel

Part II

The Barge

Part III

Love and Poetry

In Which He Imagines His Beloved Is a Floating Restaurant

August

The View From Bird Rock

The Stink of the Troubadour

Creative Writing

One World Books

The Competition Poem

How the First Kite Was Flown

Hoş Geldiniz

The Sanibel Stoop

Epiphany

Olygoptl

The Machine

Package Deal

Hot Five

Acknowledgements

Copyright

About the Book

The long poem at the centre of John Hartley Williams' new collection is a dramatic monologue narrated by a laconic, possibly lamed, forest dweller, a lowly crewmember on a barge travelling an unnamed waterway. Some of his remarks are addressed to his talisman, the shrunken head of an African tribesman. The barge carries a sinister cargo and its captain has a preference for sadistic sex. Other poems in the book undertake journeys - to Northern Cyprus, China, medieval France, Florida - but like 'The Barge' they're not exactly travel poems, more poems which travel. Welcome to the unsettling world of John Hartley Williams, whose restless, inexhaustible imagination, originality and maverick humour have enlivened contemporary poetry for years. Paranoid, erotic, disturbed and disturbing, these are bulletins from a dislocated, parallel world that excites, entertains and terrifies - and often feels more real to us than our own.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

Hidden Identities
Bright River Yonder
Cornerless People
Double
Ignoble Sentiments
Canada

TRANSLATION

Censored Poems by Marin Sorescu
(with Hilde Ottschofski)

AS EDITOR

Teach Yourself Writing Poetry
(with Matthew Sweeney)

SPENDING TIME
WITH WALTER

John Hartley Williams

CAPE POETRY

*The examination of reality
Demands a certain unreality*

Nicholas Moore

I

SPENDING TIME WITH WALTER

At the front door, he stands apart,
his sad face in shadow. They look at me
as if to say: 'Ah. And he's with you?'
As the entertainment gathers speed, and girls
run with high-pitched laughs from one room
to the next, Walter stands in the hall.

His head is tilted back. He's looking at
pictures that ought to be upon the wall, but aren't.
From room to room, I pursue the giggling cries.
Later, I find him before an open wardrobe,
staring into mothballed darkness like a scientist.
He nods to me and we depart.

Down the drive, I remember.
My scarlet slippers have been left behind.
Returning to the house, I'm told
I may not pick them up till I've located both.
One is under the table with a girl's sandal.
I find the other. But someone's moved the first.

Standing at a pile of left-foot shoes,
I feel the glow of an obscure humiliation.
My smiling host explains: *these are for the
handicapped.*
My stockinged feet are silent on the carpet,
my outdoor brogues together by the door.
On the lawn, Walter stands by a dark-leaved bush.

When I come close, he ceases to murmur.
He wears a look of Saturn. Orion blinks in his pupil.
Behind us, the house rears brokenly up

towards the moon, its lighted windows smashed.
Walter grips my arm. What could be the tie
that binds us, along the shadowed pavements, home?

If something isn't right, I don't know what it is.
Can't he speak his thoughts? At what other place
is he staring off? The distant sound reaches me
of hard, blazing music. Suddenly, he stops.
The pressure of his fingers arrests my blood.
On our faces, the lamplight makes its moves.