

Ted Hughes

Mount Zion

I

Blackness
Was a building blocking the moon.
Its wall—my first world-direction—
Mt Zion's gravestone slab.

Above the kitchen window, that uplifted mass
Was a deadfall—
Darkening the sun of every day
Right to the eleventh hour.

Marched in under, gripped by elders
Like a jibbing calf
I knew what was coming.
The convicting holy eyes, the convulsed Moses mouthings.
They were terrified too.
A mesmerised commissariat,
They terrified me, but they terrified each other.
And Christ was only a naked bleeding worm
Who had given up the ghost.

Women bleak as Sunday rose-gardens
Or crumpling to puff-pastry, and cobwebbed with deaths.
Men in their prison-yard, at attention,
Exercising their cowed, shaven souls,
Lips stretching saliva, eyes fixed like the eyes
Of cockerels hung by the legs,
As the bottomless cry
Beat itself numb again against Wesley's foundation stone.

Alarm shouts at dusk!
A cricket had rigged up its music
In a crack of Mt Zion wall.
A cricket! The news awful, the shouts awful, at dusk—
Like the bear-alarm, at dusk, among smoky tents—
What was a cricket? How big is a cricket?

Long after I'd been smothered in bed
I heard them
Riving at the religious stonework
With screwdrivers and chisels.

II

The Ancient Briton lay under his rock,
Under the oaks, the glittering leaves of Sunday.

He was happy no longer existing
Happy being nursery school history

A few vague words
A stump of local folk-lore.

A whorl in our ignorance.

That valley needed him, dead in his cave-mouth,
Bedded on bones of cave-bear, sabre-tooth.
We needed him. The Mighty Hunter.

We dug for him. We dug to be sure.

Hot brows, Sunday after Sunday.
Iron levers.

We needed that waft from the cave
The dawn dew-chilling of emergence,
The hunting grounds untouched all around us.

Meanwhile his pig-headed rock existed.
A slab of time, it surely did exist.
Loyal to the day, it did not cease to exist.

As we dug it waddled and squirmed deeper.
As we dug, slowly, a good half ton,
It escaped us, taking its treasure down.

And lay beyond us, looking up at us

Labouring in the prison
Of our eyes, our sun, our Sunday bells.

Neil Powell

Somewhere

Logs are being sawn somewhere:
Easing through the softened air,

Heavy with rain and sodden leaves,
The sound of blade on timber gives

An edge to cloud's infinities.
Mist buttresses the nervous trees,

Smoke jostles where the cloud resists,
But there below the saw persists.

The blade gives edge to what it takes.
The world is split. The timber breaks.