

1.6 Mas de Provence (1980)

Quarry the womb
where my closest grain was written my members
roughly hewn: countrymen fashioned me
blindly in the heat of day
with cart and forearm,
memory and desire,
celebrated my accomplishment
then put me out of mind.
Great pine soldiers
I carry in me
who themselves took seed
before the sawyers,
and whose locked heart
has still not seen the day.
Tiled I am in crystal clay
which lay in rivers here
before the Romans gave them name.

I never failed my function:
bore the first of them who came,
was party to matrimony
accommodated
rough coupling, the shriek
of childbirth and the long
approach of dark, played host
to industry and indolence
echoed song and scandal
was privy to tenderness
and the bitterest games that
heart can play.
Harbour I was they went from
shelter always shared,
and as I watched them
when the sun was high
already braced my back against
the meaner wind to come.
In short, a constant home
in which they thrived,
or failed, and placed
their petty stamp
and left.

Did they mistake my
dumbness for assent?
Was none of them aware –
in that still hour
illuminated by the
westered sun –
that another lived among them implying earlier lives
than theirs? Had none of them an ear
for such reverberations? –

the silent agitation
the will unheeded
as it watched the
inglorious prosper
and the good man sit
hemmed in by circumstance

and stare his life
mould and forge my parts
to such a high estate, and then withhold the hand of
love.

to embers in the grate?
And even when
as happened once or twice
they fought for me,
never after dark did one of them
with rough litigious hand
caress my flank or
cast a heart felt word and
listen keenly for
my echo in reply:
my antecedents, my great bulk and all my benefacts
conveniently distilled to esoteric script
in some official book!

But I have older friends:
I watch that cavalcade
of battering sun
traverse the bowl of valley
arc of sky –
complaisantly dispel the chill
disordered symptoms of the dark
and then disrobe to stand
as glaring helion, to
pierce the forehead pierce the eye
and not let man forget
the oldest god of all.
The mountains are my allies too
observed me from the start,
and held me
in their loose embrace.
I have tried to see the place
before the mountains came, and then
have glimpsed the chthonic power that
heaved them up
and set them where they are –
rock head reared against the sky
which sleeps at noon
but looks the thunder in the eye.
I have watched the mantle on that
massive shoulder change
from open fabric of ebullient green
to the evening's
dark impenetrable cloak, and then
the huge and sombre wall of night
pricked by cold Sirius
and the dog's bark.

Allies they are, but
care not for my form,
will cradle me when all
my parts are decomposed,
my identity is gone – that
form and function fused
in me by men which only
men sustain: and of them
all that now remains,
the faintest echo in my vacant frame and all their rotten
artefacts
so carelessly bequeathed. Cruel to cleave and carry,
mould and forge my parts
to such a high estate, and then
withhold the hand of love.

There was only one who came, alone
and as he stood I felt he
saw the mountains through my eyes
perceived my deeper pulse,
indulgently evoked my consciousness - but left:
and now I wish that he had let me sleep,
because my hearths are cold,
and I am ready to dissolve
and join my ancient friends.

Le Blavet – September 1980