

Word and Stone

SAMPLER

ALSO BY JEREMY HOOKER

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* published by Shearsman Books

Jeremy Hooker

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Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2019 by
Shearsman Books
50 Westons Hill Drive
Emersons Green
BRISTOL
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-672-1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*To Mieke
with me always*

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Word and Stone

‘Ye also, as lively stones, are built up
a spiritual house...’

1 Peter 2:5

‘... the sculptor shapes only the stone,
the dead stone, and the poet only the word,
which in itself is dead. But the statesman
shapes the masses ...’

Joseph Goebbels, May 1933

1
A carved hand
holding a cross
is cut in the castle floor.

Under the floor
crushed skulls
mix with bloodstained soil

Outside
the sea shifts
breaking and making
for ever.

2
The cross cut in stone
states what it is:

foundation,
word written in rock.

It has fronted the sea
for centuries
slowly wearing away.

3

Before word
there was a cry,
a breath against the stone.

It takes a hand of flint
to write in rock.

A strong hand
scattering sparks
striking down.

The word settles in

making itself a home –
a house of spirit

a field of skulls.

4

Before words
there was stone.

Before stone,
water and fire.

Creatures
looked up from the sea.

Their wordless cry
lives in us until we die.

5

Men took up stones
to build a castle.

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Other men came to bless it,
perhaps this man –
who may have been gentle –
with the carved hand.

Who asked the women
what they wanted?

They bow down
as they are bid
and kiss the stone.

6
Words in the mouths
of men with power
round the world,

crushing it

like an apple in the fist.

7
Masterful words,
with the might
of clenched hands –

which strike at the roots
scattering pith and sap,
sundering limb from limb.

But always a sense
beyond the sense
survives:

an apple on the branch
beyond the grasp of words.

8

The image wearing away
wants to break free.

It longs to become
a word with spirit.

It beats against
castle walls.

It cracks
the shell of the skull.

It desires to fly
as gulls fly

out to sea
to settle on the deep.

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9

The great stones
move in their own world
which men and women
approach fearfully

daubing with blood

listening
 waiting
for the stone

the stranger

the blank-faced one

to speak.

10

This is the way of words

The cursus leads to the ring,
Dawn with a spear of light
strikes through cloud.

All paths lead down
over cobble skulls
through tangled roots

into the earth.

11

Beyond the smashed teeth,
the bloody pulp,
the gouged mouths

among the corpses
a live word

gasps

thirsting

to speak again.

12

The antique castle will fall,
the carved hand drown
in shingle and wrack.

Words like gulls
will scream on the deep

crying

with endless discontent
of what may be.

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Skylarks, cromlechs

for Christopher Meredith

You open the car door, and I step out
onto rough moorland grass,

at my feet

the tiny yellow faces of tormentil,
and young bracken,
tender curling fronds renewing
earth wasted by last year's harvest,
and stretching far, from hill
to wraiths of higher, blue-domed hills.
Most wonderful, after weeks indoors
watching the sky through windows,
the wind in my face,

a touch

that wakes the sleeper to the world.
Far off, the Beacons climb into cloud,
massive rounded blue-grey forms.
All is shadow, and substance,

and song –

skylarks quivering as they fly up,
rising, rising, pouring
their voices over the earth,
into the wind that carries the sounds away.
As we move on, passing
broken ground, with groups of fallen stones,
I think: How could anyone not wish to be here.
Ancient ones,
voiceless generations,

it is all becoming

moment-to-moment:
lark song pouring down,
Beacons climbing into cloud,
young bracken unfurling
under the touch of the wind.

Welsh chapel in winter

Windows of the chapel house
look out on a cold country
half buried in snow.

Zion is blind; no one
worships here now.

Sheep huddle
against a stone wall.
The one human presence,
pylons, in steely light,
draw power-lines
over valley and hill.

Preacher, visionary,
people from hill farm
and pit village
have passed this way
and gone, deepening
the isolation.

No one comes here
unless, on some day in summer,
a solitary visitor
or a family, seeking
grandparents among the graves.

The very silence
is like a cry, or echo
of a fragment
of sermon or song,
voices that rise and vanish
into the strange land.

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Pictures at an Exhibition

(Engaging with the Past,
Oriel y Bont, Tŷ Crawshay)

1

This woman
who has a landscape behind her,
this monumental figure
in shawl and chimney hat,
what shall we call her?

Lady of Wales in the rain,
of lead sky and coal-black hills,
or a revival of a revival,
a painted maiden
from a time that never was?

How demure she seems
her face pretty as a primrose.

But look at her mouth
and shadowed eyes,
her smile that no man can read.

2

What shall we do? they ask.
We are men beggared and blind.
We are thieves with stolen lives.

We are men in a place that does not own us,
clowns looking for a part in an empty theatre.

This land is not our fathers' or our mothers',
but our children's,
who totter in our broken steps.

Land of the black heart
under the green hills,
once the wealth of empire,
now the land called Bugger All.

3

Look at me, she says.
Do you think me an illusion
that you painted in your mind?

Do you suppose me
a silly story of flowers
and a witless owl?

Though you stand at your easel
for ever, I do not submit to be known.

This imagined flesh
pure as sea-washed shell
is stuff that's come out of the sea,

moon-driven,
fierce as the tides.

I will make of myself what I will.
You, I will leave to your dream.