

Stunted yew and *Taxus baccata* considerata
Poetry by John Burman

Stunted yew

I did not know that I could mourn a tree!
Not felled, but lopped so comprehensively
I was appalled. A yew, some century old;
tall, lowering, its branches broad and dark,
it brooded at the bottom of our drive,
a bulk of mystery and gravitas
that I would glance at every day-lit morn
when I drew back the curtains. Something that
I took for granted!
Every one involved
discerns a huge improvement. Better shape;
those heavy branches shed, the top-knot lopped;
a spur to draw new vigour and new growth;
in brief, regeneration.
But to me,
that mis-proportioned, gaunt and mushroom shape,
skeletal branched, peak-stunted to the height
of an extended ladder, looks grotesque -
which was a thing of mystery. I suppose
I shall get used to it. But to regain
that once majestic wildness will take years;
the which the Yew has in longevity
but I have not! It is a selfish thought!
Resentment joins bereavement and they two
mingle with angst; chief being the harrowing truth
that I connived in well intentioned rape
of something that I had not recognised
I cherished!

Taxus baccata considerata.

-i-

The churchyard yew seethes in the breeze of spring,
sere guardian in a cemetery of time,
that has scant relevance to those we bring
to plots eternal. Sense, I sense, nor rime
nor reason, why the yew is chosen here
to serve as sentinel arboreal sign
for England's dead. Sad cypress strews the bier
of they from Venice, whom by water borne
find rest upon *'The Island of the Tear'*.

-ii-

Reason, I grant, when yew was hewn and sawn
to craft a longbow, once an army's might;
King Harry's power! Then, sturdy yeoman's brawn
the pliant withy bent and taking sight,
loosed carnage on a sally-port, whence troops
stormed his defences and opposed his right.

-iii-

The trunk stands blackened, girt with iron hoops,
where lightening strike a hollow funnel fused.
Gnarled branches creak, half split, their massive droops
propped by church purlings, nail scarred baulks, now used
to strut the quick but frail; flanked by the dead,
whose headstones lean, by frost and time abused.

-iv-

The yew, in spring's dawn breezes, seethed, I said!
As from a dusty carpet newly beat,
a pulse of pollen grains, about my head,
disperse, wind-borne - their function to complete,
(though myriads fail) a reproductive seed;
whose genesis, an embryonic feat,
masks huge potential. Thus, ideas should breed!
Yet dust of concept, puffed away in haste
finds barren ground, discarded like a weed,
beginnings, fruitless, wafted free to waste!

-v-

Well! - Newton's apple dropped! No sapling grew,
but '*gravity*', in common parlance placed,
suffused coherent thought. Thus, genius drew
a veil from ignorance; that he who peers
into '*Principia*', learns what Newton knew:

which shall outlast the yew, millennium years!

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enquiries to John at 0121 445 1679