

Questions on Poetic Arson

Neil Newton

Like flinging a throwing knife, Ted Hughes pierced Sylvia Plath's
marooned journal of beautiful, yet, taught, acerbic
verse into a backyard stone-surrounded, pitted makeshift pyre.

Did he even read the line, the phosphorescent "Sear of light,"
were the pages filled with waxy, red scribbled words, "constipated thought,"
or was the entire journal dismissed, discarded, ignored, unread?

Did he dance hocus pocus with the chanting of funeral,
were the papers torn out as kindling to stoke the fire,
or did he toss the lot on a pile of slimed, rotting leaves?

Did he burn at the break of day, to greet the morning,
at night while flames licked a blackberry spring sky,
or in the afternoon with stinging sparkler-like spray?

Was the journal a last will and testament, leaving
him a pratfall—bequeathing to him her second best poem,
or was it a farewell letter of a tongue-jammed poet?

Certainly, metaphor, image, and confession fluttered like ashen confetti,
words incinerated like the homes of the Blitzkrieg or Dresden,
letter by letter until every sentiment burned to a glowing, pulsating ember.

Now, it is autumn, midnight. I drive down this quiet suburban lamppost street.
Along the gutters, piles of paper and leaves fizzle and smolder, and I pause
at the smoke-ghosted sky, peppered with once-were poems, forever lost.