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Michael C.R. Sweeting

Abstract of Ph.D. thesis  
"Patterns of Initiation in the Poetry of Ted Hughes  
From 1970 to 1980"

This study seeks to give a close reading of the poems in the major sequences by Ted Hughes published since 1970. The consideration of the poems centres upon the influence of initiatory religious patterns and their mythologies upon the poet's work. A key to such initiatory patterns is the primitive religious phenomenon known as shamanism. The first chapter of the thesis charts evidence of Hughes's fascination with shamanic practice and shows its pervasive and central influence from early poems such as 'Jaguar' right up to the pivotal work of Gaudete.

In chapters on each of the three volumes preceding Gaudete Hughes is shown as being preoccupied with shamanic questions rather than with the answers that a fully initiated shaman is able to give. Crow takes its protagonist to the very threshold of initiation, as does Prometheus on his Crag, but the need for the contextualization of the abstract experiences in the poems becomes very clear. Cave Birds is an attempt to introduce a coda of the realities of common human experience, but it is not until Gaudete that the strong mythological element in Hughes's work is disciplined into a greater, though flawed, whole.

More and more Hughes seeks to transform the profane experience of our present life into a perception of the sacred. In Gaudete Lumb fails to do this with the rituals of his personal fertility cult and those around him are killed or emotionally damaged. But he himself is radically changed. The Epilogue Poems of Gaudete reflect this change and point the way away from a poetic reliance on the mechanisms of mythology to a living out of ritual in the poetry itself. Both 'Moortown' and Remains of Elmet exemplify this development in their perception of the sacredness of Nature. By Adam and the Sacred Nine the mythological element can now be presented yoked in a balanced way to the sensitivity of the poetry.

PATTERNS OF INITIATION IN THE POETRY OF TED HUGHES  
FROM 1970 TO 1980

by

Michael C.R. Sweeting

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Durham.  
Research was conducted in the Department of English Literature  
at that University.

Hatfield College, Durham

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from it should be acknowledged.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to study the poetical works of Ted Hughes, concentrating on those major works published between 1970 and 1980. These are Crow, subtitled 'From the Life and Songs of the Crow', Prometheus on his Crag, Cave Birds, Gaudete, 'Moortown', Remains of Elmet and Adam and the Sacred Nine. The volumes have been considered in the order of first publication, whether in limited or trade editions, rather than the order of publication by Faber and Faber which bears no relation to the chronology of composition.

Within this framework certain key motifs in the poems will be considered and used to illuminate the meaning and value of the texts. The motifs involved all illustrate or extol some kind of initiatory experience, particularly that most clearly found in the primitive religious phenomenon called shamanism - a phenomenon which must provide our context for the appreciation of other complementary religious forms.

Because Hughes has a particular affinity for spiritual systems that incorporate elements of shamanism, he therefore moves away from the major monotheistic religions towards those patterns that flourished prior to them. Later beliefs such as Gnosticism and Tibetan Buddhism are considered because of their deep roots in earlier beliefs.

To list the belief systems that Hughes uses is to be confronted with the hotch-potch of religions that flourished during the days of the decline of the Roman empire. During this period most beliefs were polytheistic, syncretistic and initiatory in content, depending upon a mystery that only initiates were entitled to know or participate in. Thus the Eleusinian Mysteries existed alongside other Earth-Mother cults



such as that of the Phrygian Great Mother, the Orphic mysteries, Mithraism, Gnostic sects, Manicheism and sundry Persian and Egyptian cults. There was no bar to devotion to a number of these cults as long as one was rich enough to pay the initiation fees. The reviled exception to this was the minor cult of Christianity, derived from the barely tolerated religion of the Jews.

The attitude of Ted Hughes closely parallels that of the cultivated Roman, utilizing elements of each mystery religion at will, but with a latent fear and hostility where Christianity is concerned. Like the Roman Hughes sees it as a threat to a central corpus of belief - "Christianity deposes Mother Nature and begets, on her prostrate body, Science, which proceeds to destroy Nature."<sup>1</sup> Science destroys mystery and without mystery there is no means of initiation or living contact with the deity. Hughes links science to Puritan Protestantism and the rise of industrialization. But he is prepared to admit that "if you are a real Christian you are not far away from nature and when you go back to the Bible and Christ and the early Christians, God is nature."<sup>2</sup>

A religion's attitude to nature is of paramount importance to Hughes. That is why he values religions that have strong shamanic elements, since these religions derive from a time when man was in a clearer relationship with his environment. The shaman was, and is, the holy man of hunters, of nomads and of herders, all groups vitally dependant upon animals and nature's continued tolerance of their activities.

From the very beginning of his poetic career Hughes has shown a deep interest in animal vitality and in the need for relationship with the world we live in. Shamanism corresponds to this in a highly attractive fashion, but it has another major interest. Hughes's second written reference to shamanism, in 1966, three years after his

review of Mircea Eliade's Shamanism, was in an essay on his wife's poetry: (This passage was later deleted from the essay.)

Her poetry escapes ordinary analysis in the way that clairvoyance and mediumship do: her psychic gifts, at almost any time, were strong enough to make her frequently wish to be rid of them. In her poetry, in other words, she had free and controlled access to depths formerly reserved to the primitive ecstatic priests, shamans and holy men, and more frequently flung open<sub>3</sub> to tourists with the passport of such hallucinogens as L.S.D.

It has been claimed by Anthony Libby that Hughes sees himself in the same way - "the role he plays as poet must be understood literally in terms of the activity of the shaman."<sup>4</sup> There are great problems about a literal shamanic activity such as the lack of a tribal context, the need for apprenticeship and the need for an audience, but it is certainly clear that a metaphorical shamanic act is taking place in Ted Hughes's poetry (as we shall see in the first chapter).

It must therefore be understood that rather than a literal, anthropological, survey of the poetry the goal of this work is an informed reading of the poems. Our task is literary rather than spiritual illumination. In this context it is hoped to do greater justice to the import of the poetry and to gain a greater understanding of its structure, through an appreciation of a key model. This model must itself be open to criticism, since it greatly affects the tone and style of the poems. The desire to avoid criticizing religious beliefs has tended to make a number of writers on Hughes over-tolerant of certain effects, effects such as abstraction, or the privacy of many poems. Another problem has been that inadequate understanding of the religious models in Hughes's work has resulted in an unawareness of the poet's own extensive capacity for subversion of his sources; there is also a tendency to overlook the inherent weaknesses of the models Hughes uses.



To explore these factors most clearly the poet's most productive period of publication has been chosen. Whereas in the first twelve years of public activity Hughes published three major volumes of verse, in the ten years between 1970 and 1980 he has published seven major sequences, their cohesion a notable development, as Wodwo had already hinted.<sup>5</sup>

During this period Hughes has begun to diversify his artistic collaborations. He has worked with Peter Brook, with Gordon Crosse and Fay Godwin as well as his older influence the artist Leonard Baskin, allowing drama, opera and photography to interact with his central poetic impulses.

Not only has there been an increase in the poet's productivity in this decade, but more importantly, an increase in quality, direction and confidence, a confidence based upon the stripping away of false values and the embracing of every manifestation of the sacred. These are also the activities of the shaman and the initiate in a mystery religion, so it is not surprising that these elements are made explicit in a way that has not happened before in Hughes's work. Certainly the use of animal totems and familiars has been present even in the poet's earliest work, like 'Jaguar' and 'Hawk Roosting'.<sup>6</sup> The backdrop to the whole of Wodwo is a descent to the underworld, a feature of many initiatory beliefs. But these ideas do not represent a conscious embracing of the shamanic model, a model for the poet's own activity that is not even mentioned in either poetry or prose until 1963. The earlier poems seem rather to be a natural outcome of the Anthropology degree that Hughes took at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

There are two additional advantages in dealing with the poet's more recent work. Firstly, the period has received far less attention, partly due to the difficulties of being objective about recently

published material. Secondly, the choice of a later period allows for an extensive use of Hughes's prose to illustrate the points being made. During this period Hughes gave a number of interviews, committed his views to a commercial tape, and wrote a number of essays developing ideas already apparent in his book reviews of the sixties for the New Statesman and The Listener. His prose clearly shows the poet's involvement with the use of initiatory models and enables us to consider more clearly what he is attempting to achieve in the poems.

This thesis is not the first work which has touched upon such issues. So far there have been four full-length studies on Hughes himself and two others which relate his work to that of his contemporaries. Both of the latter books, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes by Alan Bold and Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes by Margaret Dickie Uroff, are unsatisfactory because they share a mystification as to Hughes's goals and approach, consequently turning their attention more closely to his companions. This is perhaps excusable in Bold's work which is aimed at wide use in schools, but seriously overbalances Uroff's book, which confines its consideration of Sylvia Plath and her husband to poetic similarities, similarities which are shown as deriving from Plath, in utter contradiction of many passages from Letters Home.

In contrast Gifford and Roberts's Ted Hughes: A Critical Study is exactly what it claims to be; a critical appraisal of a number of important poems executed with sensitivity and grace whilst avoiding some of the more enigmatic issues which might detract from the admirable coherence of the book. A different approach is taken by Ekbert Faas, whose Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe is organized around certain issues rather than certain poems. Different yet again is the recently published Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes by Stuart Hirschberg which sees a pattern of development from protagonist as shaman to

protagonist as trickster, and finally as scapegoat.

The fourth full-length work is the seminal The Art of Ted Hughes by Keith Sagar which seeks to show Hughes as the major poet he is and to raise as many relevant points about his work as possible. Because of this an indebtedness to Dr. Sagar is unavoidable, since he mentions if not actually explores most of the influences upon Ted Hughes's work. It was this book which paved the way for an exploration of those issues which had been dealt with in passing or without a wider context. My own longstanding interest in primitive cultures and mythology then supplied the direction needed to correlate the emerging patterns.

Other than the inspirational influence of The Art of Ted Hughes the only one of the above books that has proved directly relevant has been that of Ekbert Faas, due to the pioneering interviews he has reprinted together with previously unpublished information and essays. Books whose titles would seem to reveal a closeness of interest have proven to deal with other topics. Leonard Scigaj's thesis 'Myth and Psychology in the Poetry of Ted Hughes' deals almost exclusively with Buddhism and Jung in the early works. David Porter's article 'Beasts/Shamans/Baskin: The Contemporary Aesthetics of Ted Hughes' also deals with early work and lacks concrete conclusions. Both Porter and Stuart Hirschberg tend to describe rather than explore the phenomena they deal with, whereas Faas and Sagar raise questions and suggest connections. This thesis deals with the consequences of such questions and the importance of what we see when certain connections are followed through Hughes's poetry.

Above all what follows seeks to both acknowledge and appreciate the effect of Ted Hughes's writing. The intention is not to hasten a process of demystification but to complement the emotional impact of

the poems, an impact which is not detracted from by knowledge of religious thought or mythology but rather enhanced by it. For this purpose we must now turn to the questions of how and why the poems affect us so much. A major clue to this must be the pattern of initiation known as shamanism, and it is to this that we must first turn.

A brief note on the texts - I have used the most recent version of the most easily available text. Therefore all references are to British publications, usually by Faber and Faber. Where a limited small press edition gives a fuller version the extra poems are included. This most obviously applies to Adam and the Sacred Nine, published in two versions in 1979. Following my principle, it is the longer Rainbow Press edition that is dealt with, rather than that collected in the Faber Moortown.

Thus, for Crow the second edition of the British text is used, published in 1972. Cave Birds, though produced as a ten poem sequence in 1975, is considered from the Faber/Scholar press edition of 1978. There are no problems with Gaudete, the Faber 1977 text being used. With Remains of Elmet there is only a one poem difference between small press and Faber text ('Wycoller Hall'). The most confusing case is that of 'Moortown'. The poems were published as Moortown Elegies by Rainbow Press in 1978. They form the title sequence at the beginning of the 1979 Faber collection called Moortown. Since the latter contains the most recent and readily available version, I have worked from that. In that version the sequence is called 'Moortown', and that is how I refer to it in my text.

NOTES

1. Ekbert Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, (Santa Barbara, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 109.
2. Essay 'Myth and Education', published in 'Children's Literature in Education', I (March, 1970), 70. This is the first of two essays with the same title.
3. 'Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems', Triquarterly, 7 (Fall 1966), 82. This passage was edited out of the essay's reprint in The Art of Sylvia Plath, ed. Charles Newman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970). See Eric Homberger, Art of the Real, (London: Dent, 1977), pp. 164-5.
4. Anthony Libby, 'God's Lioness and the Priest of Sycorax: Plath and Hughes', Contemporary Literature, 15, part 3 (Summer 1974), 391.
5. Even in terms of minor material the later period has been more productive. In 1966 Hughes released the collection Recklings, signifying the weak animals of the litter. Otherwise he devoted himself to writing for children, following the birth of Frieda in 1960 and Nicholas in 1962. In terms of sheer volume Hughes wrote more for children than for adults during this period.  
  
In contrast after 1970 minor works include Orts, the leavings at the side of the plate, 'Earth-Numb', Crow Wakes and A few Crows.
6. Noted by Stuart Hirschberg, whose book Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1981), makes much of shamanic elements in the early poetry, whilst tending to neglect more explicit references in later poetry. This is because he sees a development from shaman model to trickster and hence to scapegoat. These are not, of course, mutually exclusive characteristics. This work is also notable for its almost total neglect of Hughes's prose.

## CHAPTER 1

### TED HUGHES AND SHAMANISM

Ted Hughes is a poet who is deeply concerned about his culture, a culture where it seems that, in the words of Carl Jung, "nothing is holy any longer",<sup>1</sup> whose pursuit of material benefit has led to neglect and abuse of both the natural world and the human spirit. Hughes's own response is similar to that of Jung. In his review of Max Nicholson's The Environmental Revolution he writes, "The story of the mind exiled from nature is the story of western man."<sup>2</sup> Hughes's poetry is poetry written for a world that has lost its balance, poetry that can vividly portray the crisis, yet which also has a healing force through its emphasis on the holiness of the natural world and the mystery of the human psyche.

In many ways Hughes's poems record the epic journey of western man returning from exile, and it is in this context that Hughes begins to explore the spiritual technique known as shamanism, which also emphasizes restoration of cosmic balance and healing, and which often expresses itself in terms of a journey or flight.

So what is shamanism? There are numerous perspectives on what is essentially a highly individualistic phenomenon, but the basics are clear. Hughes outlines the shamanic experience like this:

Basically, it's the whole procedure and practice of becoming and performing as a witch-doctor, a medicine man, among primitive peoples. The individual is summoned by certain dreams. The same dreams all over the world. A spirit summons him ... usually an animal or a woman. If he refuses, he dies ... or somebody near him dies. If he accepts, he then prepares himself for the job ... it may take years. Usually he apprentices himself to some other Shaman, but the spirit may well teach him direct. Once fully-fledged he can enter trance at will and go to the spirit world ... he goes to get something badly needed,

a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs. Now this flight to the spirit world he experiences<sub>3</sub> as a dream ... and that dream is the basis of the hero story.

A fuller description of the shaman's call and practice is given in

Hughes's review of Mircea Eliade's major work on the subject:

The shaman is chosen in a number of ways. In some regions, commonly among the North American Indians, the aspirant inflicts on himself extraordinary solitary ordeals of fasting and self mutilation, until a spirit, usually some animal, arrives and becomes henceforth his liaison with the spirit world. In other regions the tribe chooses the man - who may or may not, under the initiation ordeals, become a shaman. But the most common form of election comes from the spirits themselves; they approach the man in a dream. At the simplest these dreams are no more than a vision of an eagle, as among the Buryats, or a beautiful woman (who marries them), as among the Goldi.<sup>4</sup>

More complex forms of this initiatory dream-call contain a "central episode" which consists of:

a magical death, then dismemberment, by a demon or equivalent powers, with all possible variants of boiling, devouring, burning, stripping to the bones. From this nadir, the shaman is resurrected with new insides, a new body created for him by the spirits.

The death experience is a prelude to a number of years of study leading up to the time when the prospective shaman is capable of safely negotiating the spirit realms, realms dominated by "familiar figures" - "the freezing river, the clashing rocks, the dog in the cave entrance, the queen of animals, the holy mountain, and so on."

The shamanic dance is a performance, and thus always requires some kind of audience, usually having a public purpose:

The results, when the shaman returns to the living, are some display of healing power, or a clairvoyant piece of information. The cathartic effect on the audience, and the refreshing of their religious feeling, must be profound. These shamanizings are also entertainments, full of buffoonery, mimicry, dialogue, and magical contortions. The effect on the shaman himself is something to wonder about. One main circumstance in becoming a shaman, in the first place, is that once you've been chosen by the spirits, and dreamed the dreams, there is no other life for you, you must shamanise or die: this belief seems almost universal.

At the end of the article Hughes suggests that the experience being described is not a shamanic monopoly, being, "in fact, the basic experience of the temperament we call 'romantic'." He continues:

In a shamanizing society 'Venus and Adonis', some of Keats's longer poems, 'The Wanderings of Oisin', 'Ash Wednesday', would all qualify their authors for the magic drum; while the actual flight lies perceptibly behind many of the best fairy tales, and behind myths such as those of Orpheus and Herakles, and behind the epics of Gilgamesh and Odysseus. It is the outline, in fact, of the Heroic Quest.

Both passages link the shamanic and the poetic experiences, a correspondence which the shamanic practitioners also appreciate. The Papago Indians of North America say that "Only to one who is humble does the dream come, and contained within the dream there is always the song."<sup>5</sup> The Indian shaman could almost be talking of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.<sup>6</sup> It is thus little wonder that Hughes links shamanic dreams to the 'romantic' temperament. He does not only see this temperament in terms of the song, but also of its content, the harnessing of mythic material to control emotional energy. That is why he can include T.S. Eliot among the 'romantic' candidates for the shaman's drum.<sup>7</sup>

Ted Hughes regards shamanism as a force for equilibrium because it deals with the control and harnessing of energy expressed through ecstasy, energy which can vitalize and empower or bring to chaos and destruction. This dialectic can be seen being worked out even in the earliest of Hughes's poems; for instance, 'The Jaguar', written in 1955 as the result of a few weeks dishwashing at Regent's Park Zoo in London. The great cat symbolizes the danger of the energy and its need for containment, yet without resolving the paradox - that the jaguar is a prisoner at the same time as 'His stride is wildernesses of freedom', and the obverse of that paradox, where the cat is delivered from chaos by being denied his natural existence.



The poet explains the basis of the dilemma in his interview with Faas:

If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control - rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one.

Thus it is not surprising that in 'Second Glance at a Jaguar' the jaguar is "Muttering some mantrah, some drum-song of murder", and is "Going like a prayer-wheel." He is even, like certain South American shamans, "making his skin/intolerable" - "he has to wear his skin out", enabling its replacement by a magical skin to effect a change in sensibility.

But such poems are more than enquiries into the dialectic of elemental energy. They are also "invocations of the Goddess", and "invocations of a jaguar-like body of elemental force, demonic force."<sup>9</sup> Hughes regards such poems as having "real summoning force", like 'Gog', which was meant to be a journalistic poem about the Ardennes offensive in the Second World War, until the energy released summoned up the dragon of the Apocalypse, which was only stopped in its rampage through the poet's psyche by the writing of the Red Cross Knight section of the poem.

In keeping with this, Hughes goes on in the same interview to speak of the way in which vehement activity connects one with the elemental power circuit of the universe. It is this power circuit which both poet and shaman seek to plug into. For the shaman the energy is released in ecstasy, manifested in song and in dance. For the poet the same rites take place in his verse.

Thus, as early as 1957, when The Hawk in the Rain was made Poetry Book Society Autumn Choice, Hughes wrote in their bulletin likening his method to that of a musical composer - "I might say that I turn every combatant into a bit of music, then resolve the whole uproar into as formal and balanced a figure of melody and rhythm as I can."<sup>10</sup> This

establishing of order and restoring of balance is exactly what the shaman is also accomplishing through his music.

In 'The Poet Speaks', a 1963 interview, Hughes spoke of a correlation between his interests in music and his writing of poetry - "my interest in poetry is really a musical interest, I think." He saw some of his poems as "musical rhythm - a sort of dance", often initially with no words at all. "Then I just threw words into them."<sup>11</sup> The shaman has a similar attitude towards composition. He "does not fix his or her mind on particular words nor sing a known tune. In dreams or other dreamlike states, the song comes through the barrier that separates the human being from the spirit world."<sup>12</sup> Although there are numerous examples of this technique in earlier poems, its boldest application is found in the Crow poems. "Most of them appeared as I wrote them. They were usually something of a shock to write. Mostly they wrote themselves quite rapidly ..."<sup>13</sup> The experience is very close to that of the Gitksan Indian shaman, Isaac Tens, who declares, "The songs force themselves out complete without any attempt to compose them."<sup>14</sup>

The dance of the gnats in 'Gnat-Psalm' is equally compulsive:

Dancing  
Dancing  
Writing on the air, rubbing out everything they write  
Jerking their letters into knots, into tangles  
Everybody everybody else's yoyo (Wodwo, p. 179)

The figure is carried out upon the dance-floor of the page, as is the rat's dance in 'Song of a Rat'. These dances are also songs, songs of experience like William Blake's 'The Fly', dances which are eventually set to the "super-ugly" songs of Crow, accommodating his flap and strut and indomitable incomprehension.

In these earlier poems only instinctive insect and animal life can generate the true elemental energy. Man is too much held back by his

rationality and his arbitrary taboos. This is why Hughes wants to shift cultural foundations to completely new "Holy Ground", a new mythus replacing Christianity, which he believes is the worn out religious machinery of a worn out culture. Hughes is like the protagonist of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus who claims that the great need of his age is to replace the "Mythus of the Christian Religion" in order "to embody the divine spirit of that Religion in a new Mythus."<sup>15</sup>

This mythus, this "new divinity", has ancient roots. "The old method is the only one." Hughes feels that we must tap the primitive impulses at the root of our own minds. He echoes the sentiment of Paul Ganguin who felt that "To achieve something new, you have to go back in time". For Hughes the best way to do this is to make shamanic flights into the depths of one's own mind, with the implication that there the past consciousness of our race can be found.

For the poet a major way of making the secret flight is through dreams. Hughes calls Shakespeare's corpus "a perfect example of the ancient Universal shamanistic dream of the call to the poetic or holy life."<sup>16</sup> According to Jung dreams are:

pure nature; they show us the unvarnished natural truth, and are therefore fitted, as nothing else is, to give us back an attitude that accords with our basic human nature when our consciousness has<sub>7</sub> strayed too far from its foundations and run into an impasse.

Dreams are the unconsciousness's equivalent of narrative tales, and like such tales have collective meaning when they have mythical content. It is not surprising that the dreamlike poem 'Pike' is about fishing in a "stilled legendary depth", which "was as deep as England," (Lupercal, p.57)

For Hughes, as for Jung, there is a positive effect in just having the dream, particularly in a culture that has exchanged dreaming for aspiration. He sees a story as having the same qualities.

When we tell a child a story, the child quickly finds his role; as the story proceeds the child enters a completely imaginative world ... to some extent he goes into a condition of trance ... And so whatever happens to him in the story happens under conditions of hypnosis. In other words, it really happens. If in a story he is put through a humiliating defeat, the effects on him are of real defeat. If he is put through some sort of victory, the effects on him are of real victory. This is how these early storytellers could claim good fortune and so on for the listeners to their hero tales.

In a later essay on the same subject, that of myth and education, Hughes speaks of stories as a force of reintegration. "So it comes about that once we recognize their terms, these works seem to heal us."<sup>19</sup> The narrative poet is like the shaman whose relating of a myth results in "some display of healing power or a clairvoyant piece of information." (It is worth remembering that this does not preclude the rituals also being "entertainments, full of buffoonery, mimicry, dialogue and magical contortions",<sup>20</sup> like Crow.)

The mythic narrative, the entering of the Dream Time, is central both to the shamanic healer and the 'romantic' poet. Ted Hughes also places great emphasis on this, the poetic experience which is healing because, like the children's story, it "really happens". This sense of immediacy is what is being sought in the early poem, 'Childbirth', from The Hawk in the Rain, a poem which looks at birth through mythic spectacles.

The poem closely resembles an actual incantation - of the Cuna Indians of Panama, as recorded by Claude Levi-Strauss<sup>21</sup> - an incantation specifically intended to facilitate childbirth by giving a mythic explanation for the mother's pain. The song is a quest by the shaman for the woman's lost soul, or 'purba', which has been captured by Muu Puklip, the power who forms the foetus. Muu is "indispensable to creation", and the fight is only against "her abuses of power". It is thus a restored balance which is sought. The shaman's task is to help

the mother relive her condition by means of an empathic act whereby he too lives through the experience as he chants. To describe the effect upon the patient Levi-Strauss uses the term "abreaction" - "when the patient intensively relives the initial situation from which his disturbance stems."<sup>22</sup> He also points out that the term also applies to the shaman, who is therefore a "professional abreactor." (In fact, because the shaman abreacts the patient abreacts.)

In both the poem and the incantation the treatment of the theme hinges upon an equation of the womb with a hell or underworld:

When, on the bearing mother, death's  
Door opened its furious inch,  
Instant of struggling and blood,  
The commonplace became so strange. (The Hawk in the Rain, p.45)

In the Cuna chant the uterus is described as "the dark inner place", and the vagina is inhabited by various creatures of the underworld. In the Hughes poem a similar underworld also lies very close during birth:

Through that miracle-breached bed  
All the dead could have got back;

Both poem and chant deal with the problem of how a new-born child can come from a place associated with death. This is particularly pressing for the Cuna, who closely link the mother and the earth. The child is therefore an autochthonous being, one truly back from the dead. Hughes's poem reassures us that the cosmos has come back into adjustment after this unnerving miracle. The child has "Put the skull back about the head/Righted the stagger of the earth." The shaman calms the frightened mother in a similar way, likewise stressing that the womb-door has been closed and that the dead cannot now escape.

The main difference, besides the fact that the poet treats a condition he himself provoked, is in the degree of identification. The Cuna healing is characteristically shamanic, where the sorcerer too experiences the events, "in all their vividness, originality and

violence."<sup>22</sup> But the Hughes poem lacks this identification. At this stage of his development he has not yet dealt with a tendency towards curious metaphysical enquiry and a corresponding distancing of the subject from the healing power of myth.

One begins to be aware that the best poems are where the experience is somehow lived out by the poet himself, while 'Childbirth' and many other early poems seem to have the quality of observations - often striking, but little more. What the poet shaman does not fully live out cannot be fully appreciated by the reader. Thus, despite Hughes's conscious linking of his craft with that of the shaman, the final test must always lie in the poems themselves.

The shaman's song is based upon three factors; the energy, or ecstasy; the myth, expressed in some form of ritual; and a resulting catharsis or abreaction. These three components combine to produce healing, reintegration and answers to spiritual questions. In his poetic development Hughes deals with each of these elements in turn. In the early work the accent is upon the power, what Mircea Eliade calls the "Kratophany", the manifestation of force.<sup>23</sup> We are shown the strength of hawk, pike, jaguar, bull, wind, sea. This is why the emphasis is on animal life, since "Each one is living the redeemed life of joy. They are continually in a state of energy which men only have when they've gone mad."<sup>24</sup> In Wodwo this power is turning inwards and there is danger of destruction, so too in Crow the emphasis is put upon the process, the actual machinery of the experience. Thus the volume commences with a kind of catechism, ('Examination at the Womb Door') preceded by a genealogy and a creed ('Lineage' and 'Two Legends'). Crow is full of songs, macabre dances and highly compressed rituals, (for example 'A Kill' and 'Crow's Battle Fury') and like Cave Birds and Prometheus on his Crag, great emphasis is put upon the

search for initiatory experience. In each of these three volumes the cathartic factor is strongly developed, but it is catharsis and process which are emphasised, not catharsis and reintegration.

It is not until Gaudete that Hughes begins to try for answers. The mythic element is made a great deal more accessible by the reintroduction of a human perspective. In the three preceding works the main link with mankind has been the suffering of the protagonists. The events of these volumes are not lived out in a social context. There is no human society present at all in Prometheus on his Crag, while in Cave Birds and Crow human relationships are used more as a counterpoint to the activity of the protagonists, than any kind of background.

In Gaudete there has to be a social milieu, since Hughes is now intent upon a poetic living-out of the ritual, believing that if the shaman/poet/reader can even get so far as to ask the vital question of the divine being, that might constitute an answer in itself, as Parzival healed the Fisher-King by asking about his health.

Thus it is possible to see a shamanic formula being worked out in Ted Hughes's poetic development:



It should be noted that the goal is always interaction with the reader patient even if the poet is not aware of that when writing. Only the best poems in Lupercal and The Hawk in the Rain see this formula worked through to a successful conclusion, where both author and reader seem to join together in a sharing of the experience the page provides.

It is with Wodwo that Hughes seems to grasp a proper understanding of his goals and begins to take up the call fully. This delay is not surprising, as he points out - "Poets usually refuse the call. How are they to accept it? How can a poet become a medicine man and fly to the

source and come back and heal or pronounce oracles? Everything among us is against it."<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps one can understand this by making a parallel with the shaman's initial call. Hughes has mentioned the call through dreams, "the same dreams all over the world."<sup>27</sup> The potential shaman is usually summoned by an animal or a woman - the summoning by an animal closely parallels Hughes's experience as described by Keith Sagar:

In his second year at Cambridge Hughes went through a sort of crisis which caused a complete block in his ability to write essays. One night very late, very tired, he went to bed, leaving the essay he had been struggling with on his desk. Then he dreamed that he was still sitting at the desk when the door opened and a creature came in with the head and body of a fox, but erect, man-sized, and with human hands. He had escaped from a fire; there was a strong smell of burning hair and the skin was charred, cracked and bleeding, especially the hands. He came across the room, put his hand on the essay, and said "Stop this. You are destroying us." His hand left a blood-print on the page. Hughes connected the fox's command with his own doubts about the effect of the Cambridge brand of critical analysis on the creative spirit, (he had written no more poems since leaving school), and decided<sup>28</sup> to change from English to Archaeology and Anthropology.

This account points strongly to a shamanic threshold experience. The poem 'The Hawk in the Rain' reminds us of the comment in the Eliade review that in some tribes just to dream of an eagle is to be identified as a shaman, while another common threshold dream, that of the transfigured woman, seems to lie behind Hughes's fascination with The White Goddess by Robert Graves.

These instances all point towards a shamanic call closely bound in with Hughes's poetic vocation, but at this stage it seems that Hughes had not fully understood the shamanic side of this double call, and is unconsciously seeking to exercise certain attributes of the shaman without having experienced the necessary deep crisis. This crisis "has the value of a superior threshold initiation", and gives shamanism, according to Joseph Campbell, "a quality of general human validity."<sup>29</sup>



The shaman has four main accomplishments, according to Mircea Eliade in Myths, Dreams and Mysteries:

1. The capacity for hierophany. The sacred manifests itself through the sharpened senses of the shaman. He often feels a vivid warmth since the experience is also a 'kratophany', a manifestation of force. The shaman is distinguished by his ability to experience the world in a new way. The world is renewed as he sees it anew. The result is:
2. The ability to see spiritually and receive illumination.
3. The ability to journey into the spirit realm, both to obtain answers and to converse with the divine. The climbing of trees or beating of drums are symbolic of the 'mystical flight' into the spirit world.
4. Because the barrier between heaven and earth has been overcome, besides the pre-fall ability to talk to the Godhead, the shaman can also talk the "language of the animals" and achieve renewed friendship with them (this usually includes receiving an animal familiar).

By these attributes the shaman, on behalf of his clan or group, locates them in a spiritual universe where spiritual questions can be answered and healing effected.

Shamanism thus caters for Hughes's doctrine of energy, his love for the world of nature, his metaphysical concerns, and his fascination with animals. It also provides an answer to the twentieth-century poet's problem of whether his work is relevant.

In his early poetry Hughes has a clear understanding of the shamanic call, although much of this is instinctive and not fully developed. He has had the courage to accept the call, but has not yet come to terms with the consequences. The long apprenticeship is just beginning. As has already been pointed out, Hughes has begun to use myth as a means of controlling energy, a technique which becomes a major concern in his later poetry. But this is rarely as developed as in 'Childbirth'. Usually we see the mythic perspective in terms of holding two opposites in balance, as for instance in 'Six Young Men':

That man's not more alive whom you confront  
 And shake by the hand, see hale, hear speak loud,  
 Than any of these six celluloid smiles are,  
 Nor prehistoric or fabulous beast more dead;  
 No thought so vivid as their smoking blood:  
 To regard this photograph might well dement,  
 Such contradictory permanent horrors here  
 Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out  
 One's own body from its instant and heat. (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 54)

These young men have become a legend, as dead as any prehistoric beast, yet alive, not only because of their preservation in celluloid, but also because of their power to affect the minds of the living. What brings this theme even closer to the mythic perspective is the fact that it is based upon a dialectic between life and death, the "binary opposition" that Jakobson saw as fundamental to language, and thus also to myth.

Hughes invests his poems with a dreamlike quality, a kind of 'reverie'. It is not surprising that such a reverie on a cold winter's night produced 'The Thought-Fox'.<sup>30</sup> In Lupercal we see the reverie become dreams, although there is already a strong dream element represented in poems like 'A Woman Unconscious', 'A Dream of Horses' and 'Relic', the last of which is very reminiscent of the eskimo initiate's contemplation of a whale or seal bone, or the Tantric Buddhist meditating upon a skeleton. But the tools of the shaman seem not to be fully developed. Myth and dream are used. There is the changed sensibility which makes a flower "Brutal as the stars of this month." The vision is both immediate and convincing. But it is not related to common human experience. Where there is an example of altered vision, of a manifestation of the sacred, the dialectic is missing, blurring the vision; and correspondingly, the dialectic is often cut off from true vision, leaving many of the poems in Hughes's two first collections in a kind of forced metaphysicality.<sup>31</sup>

The integration of vision and dialectic can only come through the

initiatory ordeal, which hinges upon the provoking of a profound crisis in the life of the candidate. This is achieved by dislocating the universe of the prospective shaman, usually through isolation and various other forms of privation. In some cultures this might go with an educating process over a number of years. In others, particularly among the Eskimo and North American Indian the ordeal is "nasty, brutish and short."

Whatever the case, the crisis is experienced as a symbolic death, by being swallowed, eaten, dismembered or scourged. This mystical return to chaos<sup>32</sup> and destruction of "normal profane experience"<sup>33</sup> enables a recreation and resurrection. The resurrection brings about a change of sensibility and as a result all experience becomes sacred for the initiate.

In this context it is therefore little wonder that Hughes has called Wodwo "a descent into destruction of some sort."<sup>34</sup> The initiatory ordeal emphasizes Freud's 'Thanatos', the death-principle within man, death which makes regeneration possible. This emphasis abandons what Freud would see as sanity, the maintaining of the balance between Thanatos and Eros (the life-principle) in favour of a kind of divine madness.

The Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal are part of the balance, since it becomes clear that although the world portrayed is violent in the extreme, it is also a world of life. The "unselfconscious will to live" is dominant. Death is present but there is no will to die, and without death there is no rebirth. There is indeed a tension between life and death, as a poem like 'Mayday on Holderness' shows. "The decomposition of leaves" and "The furnace door whirling with larvae", (Lupercal, p. 11), are both present, but here they are not in competition. What is not present is the tension between the will to life and the will

to death, the excruciating competition which begins to fuel Hughes's poetic genius in the mid sixties.<sup>35</sup>

After Lupercal the Thanatos principle is released in a different and far more disturbing way. The fertility rite of 'Lupercalia' becomes bawdry, as in 'Bawdry Embraced' in Recklings. Along with 'The Burning of the Brothel' this poem records a frenetic, disgusted violence that has no shred of affirmation, save that of bawdry itself:

Bawdry! Bawdry! Steadfastly  
Thy great protagonists  
Died face to face, with bellies full,  
In the solar waste

Where there is neither skirt nor coat,  
And every ogling eye  
Is a cold star to measure  
Their solitude by.

('Bawdry Embraced', Recklings p. 43)

In 'Scapegoats and Rabies' and 'Root, Stem, Leaf', Hughes is just beginning to get this force under control. The poet's instinct has begun to use the energy, rather than being helplessly driven by it. Thus the standard of the poetry also begins to rise during this period. But now the easy, unconscious balance of the earlier poetry has gone, releasing both a potential blessing and a curse. The poet is now deposited in such a position as to be exposed to the full force of his universe with neither shelter nor bearings. This certainly forces him from the limited themes he could have remained chained to, but also commits him to a great responsibility in the use of his gift, and makes him prone to over-reaction when faced with the extremes of numbness and the heights of destructive force.

In Wodwo Hughes descends into depths where true initiation no longer seems possible. The poem 'The Bear', enigmatically says of the bear,

He is the ferryman  
To dead land.

His price is everything. (Wodwo, p. 41)

The poem has a dreamlike quality. The dream is a purposeful one, the shaman's dream of his initiation. Eskimo shamans often dreamed of bears during their search for knowledge. One such dreamer, the apprentice shaman Autdaruta, describes thus how he acquired power over spirits:

Sometime afterwards he (Autdaruta's master) took me on a journey again, and this time it was so that I myself might be eaten by the bear; this was necessary if I wished to attain to any good. We rowed off and came to the cave; the old man told me to take my clothes off, and I do not deny that I was somewhat uncomfortable at the thought of being devoured alive.

I had not been lying there long before I heard the bear coming. It attacked me and crunched me up, limb by limb, joint by joint, but strangely enough it did not hurt at all; it was only when it bit me in the heart that it did hurt frightfully.

From that day forth I felt that I ruled my helping-spirits.<sup>36</sup>

Autdaruta experiences the mythical death which leads to renewal and wisdom, but the bear of Wodwo only ferries to "dead land". He can take one to the Wasteland, but not back again. In 'Out', Hughes's father has in a sense returned from this place, having been dragged from "The mortised four-year strata of dead Englishmen/He belonged with." The first section of the poem is even called 'The Dream Time', the mythic time the potential shaman seeks to re-enter. But in the second section "The dead man in his cave" is reborn:

As after being blasted to bits  
The reassembled infantryman  
Tentatively totters out, gazing around with the eyes  
Of an exhausted clerk. (Wodwo, p. 156)

The poet's despairing conclusion is:

Goodbye to all the remaindered charms of my father's survival,  
Let England close. Let the green sea-anemone close. (Wodwo, p. 157)

This is more than a reminiscence of the poet's juvenile disappointment that his father has not become some kind of super-man as a result of

the First World War. Hughes is filled with the suspicion that the initiating experience now only ferries to a dead land.

Eventually Hughes will take up the shamanic tools in a more confident way and seek for a healing of that Wasteland. But at this stage he must explore the possibility that initiation and regeneration are no longer possible for man in a culture where spiritual values have been undermined. In Crow, Hughes considers the possibility that if the old body cannot be replaced, maybe Man himself will be.

The final link between the rather disjointed work of the poet's crisis period and Crow is a piece called 'Eat Crow', a radio play, written in 1964, some of which was published a year later under the title 'X - A Dialogue'.<sup>37</sup> This piece links the quest for a completed initiation with the crow-figure, the mocking antithesis of that aspiration.

The work can hardly be called a dialogue in the usual understanding of the term. There are two speakers, Morgan and She, but there is no communication between the two. She continues what seems to be a fragmented litany. "The crow watches the man" is the refrain, with two catechistical statements in between, starting "A Crow is a sign of life. Even though it sits motionless."

'She' seems to be a kind of midwife to Morgan's initiatory ordeal. First Morgan experiences a tearing apart similar to the Eskimo shaman who is mystically eaten by a polar bear. Afterwards he sleeps - "When I woke I could hear voices, many voices,/It was my bones all chattering together." This resembles the second stage of Eskimo initiation as outlined by Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade, where the prospective shaman contemplates his bones which have now been picked clean. But the great difference is that instead of leading to integration, the ordeal speaks only of dislocation. Unlike Ezekiel's vision of the dry

bones coming together in harmony and receiving the breath of God's life - "The pelvis was shouting. And the bones of the foot/And the bones of the hand, fought." Instead of a manifestation of the Logos "the vertebrae were screeching/Something incomprehensible", presaging the many incoherent cries in later Hughes poems.

The first part of 'X' finishes with Morgan running from the nightmare. He is unable to accept the incomprehensible, and that particular task now devolves upon Crow, who is trying to become a man. Hughes says in his broadcast 'Poetry Now', that for this purpose, "He's put through various adventures and disasters and trials and ordeals" which initially do not alter him at all. Then suddenly Crow's sufferings "completely transform him, tear him to bits, put him together again, and produce him a little bit changed."<sup>38</sup> This should bring about Crow's initiation into humanity, but it is not forthcoming.

Whereas in Wodwo the initiating patterns are incomplete, and there is even a hint of the possibility of complete annihilation with no rebirth, in Crow the spectre is of continual rebirth without initiation.<sup>39</sup>

Thus in 'A Kill' Crow is:

Flogged lame with legs  
 Shot through the head with balled brains  
 Shot blind with eyes  
 Nailed down by his own ribs  
 Strangled just short of his last gasp  
 By his own windpipe  
 Clubbed unconscious by his own heart (Crow, p. 16)

This is not just part of "God's Nightmare". Crow is going through elements of Irish, Scandinavian and Christian initiation of deities through suffering. But here the experience is neither expiatory nor illuminating.

A similar nightmare situation occurs in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Bardo Thodol, a work which underpins the whole schema of Crow. In the section entitled the 'Bardo of Karmic Illusions', the dead person

comes face to face with the various wrathful deities. "Have faith in the Blood - drinking Deities too",<sup>40</sup> he is exhorted. In Buddhist terms, if this advice is followed rebirth can be avoided and the true initiation which is Nirvana attained. But Hughes, while greatly utilizing this strain of teaching, is far more akin to the Tantric and shamanic influences on the Bardo. He says to Ekbert Faas - "the special weirdness and power of all things Tibetan in occult and magical circles springs direct from the shamanism, not the Buddhism."<sup>41</sup>

Where the Buddhist and shamanic strains are united is in Crow's refusal to abandon his self-hood, his one indestructible desire to live. For the Buddhist this is a tragedy since "He who hath desire continueth subject to rebirth" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad). Only by giving up the desire to live, which is the essence of self-hood, can Crow escape from the wheel of existence. This same refusal to let go of self-hood also prevents Crow experiencing shamanic initiation since he cannot receive the new self until he has let go of the old.

Also there is the problem of faith. Morgan, in 'Eat Crow' is far too afraid to "have faith in the Blood-Drinking Deities." Crow is far too egocentric to have faith in anything else save himself. By this time Hughes has isolated the two greatest barriers to initiation, fear and lack of faith, both of which are manifested in the desire to remain inside oneself, rather than reaching out. Occasionally Crow does manage to look outside himself. One such instance is the poem appropriately called 'Glimpse':

'O leaves', Crow sang, trembling, 'O leaves -'

The touch of a leaf's edge at his throat  
Guillotined further comment.

Nevertheless  
Speechless he continued to stare at the leaves

Through the god's head instantly substituted. (Crow, p. 90)



But this is a glimpse and no more. Crow is more truly the 'King of Carrion':

His palace is of skulls.

His crown is the last splinters  
Of the vessel of life. (Crow, p. 91)

He presides over what closely resembles a shaman's altar, which is also made of "skulls" and a "scaffold of bones". But his kingdom is empty, and he reigns over silence.

Despite Crow's earlier refusal to allow his suffering redemptive value, eventually he is prepared to attach himself to an Eskimo shaman. 'Two Eskimo Songs' are the primitive man's answer to the question of mortality and clarify for Crow the nature of his quest. Crow's own perspective is too closely linked to that of twentieth century 'civilized' man, mitigated to some extent by his animal vitality. But the animal is denied initiation because it is not human, and the modern man is denied initiation because he has betrayed his roots. The only hopeful response to the problem of man confronted with his temporality is that of the eskimo, in 'Fleeing from Eternity':

He got a sharp rock he gashed holes in his face  
Through the blood and pain he looked at the earth

He gashed again deeper and through the blood and pain  
He screeched at the lightning, at the frost, and at time.

Then, lying among the bones on the cemetery earth,  
He saw a woman singing out of her belly.

He gave her eyes and a mouth, in exchange for the song.  
She wept blood, she cried pain.

The pain and the blood were life. But the man laughed -

The song was worth it.

The woman felt cheated. (Crow, pp. 92-3)

'How Water began to Play' repeats the lesson of 'Fleeing from Eternity'. Water, like man, searches the physical universe, meets pain, blood

"maggot and rottenness", and begins to weep uncontrollably. As a result "It lay at the bottom of all things/Utterly worn out utterly clear," (p. 93). If there is any message in Crow, this is it, that suffering makes the universe transparent. Poetry is the response to this startling clarity,<sup>42</sup> and is often an expression of the struggle which makes the hierophany possible.

The struggle is particularly evident in Crow, where it seems both Crow and his creator are intent upon one thing; to survive the ordeal, knowing that "The pain and the blood were life" ('Fleeing from Eternity') - "To emerge is the aim of the Crow poems" Geoffrey Thurley has said in The Ironic Harvest.<sup>43</sup> Hughes does not only seek to emerge, but also to emerge at a particular place, where he can begin to fully use the "master - fulcrum" of shamanic energy.

After Crow we see a new strand introduced into Ted Hughes's poetry. Suffering is valuable, not only in terms of initiation, but also for expiation. Prometheus on his Crag and Cave Birds weave these two strands together.

In Prometheus on his Crag the initiatory and expiatory elements are linked together in terms of shamanic mediation. Prometheus, like the shaman, is a link between heaven and earth, conversing with both the gods of Olympus and the men of Athens. At this stage he is a mediator, but not a true one. He is seeking to deal with divinity on behalf of man, when the problem of guilt has not yet been dealt with. To put things in Judeo-Christian terms, the barrier between man and God requires more than just someone to mediate, but also someone to pay the price for man's sin, which is what put the barrier up in the first place.

As a result Hughes's poetry of the seventies more and more explores the tension between shamanism, which does not deal with guilt, and Judeo-Christianity, which claims to deal with both guilt and death, yet

which seems to atrophy the life of energy which he holds so close. It is this exploration which perhaps most of all establishes Hughes's affinities with the poetry of William Blake.

The major difference between Prometheus' understanding (probably also Hughes's) and Christianity, is that one believes in atoning suffering, while Christianity is about an atoning sacrifice-death. So when Prometheus lays himself down in his chains:

On the mountain,  
under Heaven  
as THE PAYMENT -

He is - Too far from his people to tell them

Now they owe nothing. (Poem 16, Moortown, p. 86)

Here we have the expiating payment without expiatory results. Prometheus is "too far" from mankind to communicate the good news, which therefore remains useless. This is not surprising considering the fact that Prometheus is suffering for his own transgression, while Christ died for mankind's. The resulting problem of guilt is most clearly stated in Poem 20, where Prometheus asks, "Was Life his transgression?/Was he the punished criminal aberration?" The guilt is worsened by the knowledge of his own immortality. Prometheus cannot experience full initiation or freedom from sin, since both involve death.

Hughes seems to deal with this problem by focusing upon the initiatory aspect. This is logical, since part of the shaman's repertoire is the ability to return to the pre-Fall state, the Paradise where man, beast and God are in harmony, before the advent of sin. But this raises numerous problems for Prometheus. He has lost any shamanic accomplishments he might have had. He "Has bitten his prophetic tongue off" (Poem 6). He is "Arrested half-way from heaven/And slung between heaven and earth." (Poem 7)

Prometheus is a prisoner as well as a candidate for full initiation.

This situation is repeated in the psychodrama Orghast at Persopolis, where the cruel father-figure Krogon victimizes Pramanath, who stands for Prometheus. The prisoner/potential initiate correspondence is also strong in Cave Birds, where the protagonist is led like a condemned prisoner by the summoner via the interrogator and the judge to the executioner.

In all three works Hughes endeavours to work a poetic solution to a problem which must be solved before his shamanic apprenticeship can end. In Orghast at Persopolis this is stated simply in the rising dawn at the end of the performance. (It was performed in the open air at the Shiraz festival in 1971.)

In Prometheus it is in the sudden outburst of Poem 21, where the mountain he is chained to "splits its sweetness", setting him free to tread "On the dusty peacock film where the world floats."<sup>44</sup> This is a beautiful but unconvincingly precipitate release. The same effect is far better achieved in Cave Birds where the accent is not so much on the visionary dreams of the candidate, but upon the journey through the spirit-world. These poems bring across a sense of well-deserved nightmare assailing the protagonist, Kafkaesque in its intensity.

The protagonist cockerel, representative of Socratic rationality, tries to argue his way out of the summons to the spirit-world but:

When I said: 'Civilization',  
 He began to chop off his fingers and mourn.  
 When I said: 'Sanity and again Sanity and above all Sanity',  
 He disembowelled himself with a cross-shaped cut.  
 I stopped trying to say anything.  
 But then he began to snore in his death-struggle  
 The guilt came.  
 And when they covered his face I went cold. ('After the first fright',  
Cave Birds, p. 10)

The protagonist deserves the death sentence for his murder of nature through his rationalism and lack of thanksgiving. Nevertheless this

sentence is also the hope of regeneration. In 'The Executioner' the prisoner says:

You have no idea what has happened  
To what is no longer yours

It feels like the world  
Before your eyes ever opened (Cave Birds, p. 22)

This is prophetic, but first he must go through the gates of Hell after being equipped with the weapons for the task. He had become the 'warrior', the one seeking to become a 'man of knowledge'.<sup>45</sup> The protagonist enters the Hall of Judgement and his soul is skinned ('A flayed crow in the hall of judgement'). This symbolizes his mystical death, as does the image of baptism, taken from Christianity, sleep taken from Gnosticism, burial from Earth-Mother cults and eventually the scapegoat image from Judaism. After this, the initiate is given a 'Scarecrow swift' as his true guide and spirit familiar. He is now 'Walking bare' and like aboriginal shamans whose intestines turn to opal, he has "the gem of myself". He can now enter into sacred marriage. "The violent death is creative",<sup>46</sup> and so the Earth-Mother (Blodeuedd, in the poem 'The owl flower') is reconciled, and now can be wooed. Immolation and marriage both harness Earth's creativity, whereas in Wodwo and Crow she has been at enmity with all.

The final vision is of a falcon, 'The risen', "his shape/Is a cross." (Cave Birds, p. 60) At last there is a vision of divinity, even if it is not the Creator himself.

In Gaudete Hughes takes this vision of the divine and puts it in terms of his early fascination with the White Goddess. Now divinity has been discovered the myth does not have to be told, it can be lived. Guilt is at least captured if not actually removed, and has been harnessed to the initiatory experience. In Gaudete Hughes can have faith in something, even if as yet it is the "Blood-drinking Deities"

of the Book of the Dead.

In both Cave Birds and Gaudete there is also a greater consciousness of the relationship with the reader, who is encouraged to participate in each poem. Both volumes are cinematic and episodic. The language is far more visual, a long way from the long strings of adjectives in Crow's "super-ugly" songs. Hughes has found the optimum way of controlling his extravagance of energy. Instead of bald descriptions of what takes place like:

When Crow cried his mother's ear  
Scorched to a stump. ('Crow and Mama', Crow, p. 17)

or the stuttering description of the mother figure as:

Death and death and death- (Gog' II, Wodwo, p. 151)

We now see this figure face to face:

A face as if sewn together from several faces.  
A baboon beauty face  
A crudely stitched patchwork of faces. (Gaudete, p. 104)

The greater visual emphasis more clearly presents the goal of the Gaudete narrative, which is to heal this awful figure, the mutilated Gea Genetrix. Like the hero of Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival and Peredur in The Mabinogion, Lumb is unable to respond from his humanity when confronted with the suffering ruler. He too is dominated by a system based upon denial. He lacks both the compassion which Wolfram extols and the curiosity which the author of Peredur emphasizes.<sup>47</sup>

He is "The veteran of negatives/And the survivor of cease." (What will you make of half a man', Gaudete, p. 176) He is a stranger to choice and personal responsibility:

He declares he can do nothing  
He protests there is nothing he can do  
For this beautiful woman who seems to be alive and dead.  
He is not a doctor. He can only pray. (Gaudete, p. 15)

The inability to act or enquire is marked by numbness (p. 13), a

numbness which is penetrated only by pain,<sup>48</sup> a pain which "rends him apart, from the top of his skull downwards" (p. 15). Lumb must come to the point where to pray is not the antithesis of to heal, the fulcrum point of shamanic initiation. Lumb experiences the initiatory effect of pain and crisis, while his double experiences the expiation. One is the hierophant, the other the scapegoat. But as Keith Sagar has pointed out in The Art of Ted Hughes:

... the whole story is a psychological analogue, as all the many stories in myth and folklore of doubles, changelings, tanists, twins, weirds and shadows are. There is only one Lumb. He is undergoing a spiritual/psychological crisis.<sup>49</sup>

The single experience is examined from a doubled perspective. The prologue gives a fairly straightforward initiatory pattern with elements of both the rites of Herakles and of Mithras. The plunge into the wasted otherworld and the return through "a doorway to daylight" (p. 19) is in itself a mystical death and rebirth. This element of the initiatory experience takes place in the Great Time, while the second element is put in the context of semi-rural England. Perhaps we are being shown two different aspects or levels of the same period of time in Lumb's life. Whatever the case, it is the second strand which is the more complex.

The two are united by the Orphic myth, as modified by its contact with Dionysan religion. The underworld experience in which a female figure is found but not brought back to life parallels Orpheus's quest for Euridice, while the pursuit and death parody the orthodox Orphic account of their patron's death - hounded by the Maenads for too great a devotion to Apollo. Lumb's devotion to his own deity, enshrined in the sheel-na-gig, is also overweened, but in this case it is murderous husbands who pursue, rather than Bacchic women.

Nonetheless the major influence on the main narrative is that of

the Dionysan rite. Dionysus was brought forth by his father Zeus, after his mother Semele was consumed when she tried to see her lover of the night. As a result he is a deity of inner tension, between Father and Mother, between exultant joy and pitiful suffering. This tension results in madness. Walter Otto says of this god:

... he appears among men like a storm, he staggers them, and he tames their opposition with the whip of madness ... Life becomes suddenly an ecstasy - an ecstasy of blessedness, but an ecstasy, no less, of terror.<sup>50</sup>

He is a god of confrontation, bringing "A wild uproar and a numbed silence."<sup>51</sup> Music often announces his madness, as in 'The scherzo' (Gaudete, p. 41). Estridge feels his daughters "are tearing him to pieces" like the Maenads (p. 42). It is a "materialized demon" (p. 44), both an invocation and an announcement of the madness descending.

The madness is health-giving, like the shaman's threshold initiation, a procreative madness, "inherent in the womb of the mother",<sup>52</sup> and propagated by Dionysus's own sensuality. The problem is that the madness has not been allowed free expression and erupts in an unbalanced form, in a society where very few of the women have children, and in which the youngest, Garten and Felicity, are over eighteen.

The spirit-Lumb is a healer who does not understand the true situation and thus precipitates a corporate crisis. Perhaps there is a degree of release, but Felicity's death is murder, not sacrifice. Lumb must both make atonement and discover the full, true initiation needed to heal the land. The first stage is of alienation leading to longing:

Me too,  
Let me be one of your warriors.

Let your home  
Be my home. Your people  
My people.

(p. 190)



The initiand is before the Goddess as Ruth before Naomi, begging inclusion in the chosen people, along with the "grass-blade", the black-bird and the badger. This mirrors the supplication of p. 53:

He tries to make this ash-tree his prayer.  
He searches upward and downward with his prayer,  
    reaching upwards and downwards through the capillaries,  
Groping to feel the sure return grasp  
The sure embrace and return gaze of a listener -

The double's prayer is answered by "the drowning creature of mud" which "embraces him as he embraces it" (p. 104). The Lumb of the notebooks knows what he is praying for, and to whom he is praying, but the double has not yet reached this stage. The passage which contains this experience strongly emphasizes birth. Lumb is buried in primal mud, in a foetal position. He sees himself "being delivered of the woman from the pit" (p. 105), and himself gives birth. Now, "He sees her face undeformed and perfect" (p. 106).

It is important to realize that this is Lumb's individual initiation. "The initiand is born again from the womb of Mother Earth",<sup>53</sup> while the descent into the underworld is the heroic and shamanic initiation. The Dionysan element centres upon individual purgation, the use of a victim. Dionysus is both hunter and pursued, and, when pursued, is cast down into a sea, lake or underworld. One of the forms in which he returns is that of a child, the reborn. The Dionysan mystery is also the "lesser mystery" of the Eleusinian rite, performed in the spring, the "greater mystery" being the celebration of the Great Mother. The Orphic element gives the heroic perspective, descent into the Mother's womb.

Gaudete reminds us that shamanic/heroic initiation must be on a basis of personal rebirth, a personal plugging of our "energy appeal into the inexhaustible earth" (p. 163). Throughout the development of this theme, Hughes has been working towards an equilibrium which can be achieved in no other way than through actual experience. The 'Moortown'

sequence and Remains of Elmet, particularly the latter, are heirs to this experience where the initiation of the shaman-poet does not affect poetry alone, but leads to a place in which "every responsible action is charged with a magico-religious value and meaning."<sup>54</sup>

NOTES

1. Carl Jung, Collected Works, trans. by R.F.C. Hull. Ed. Read, Fordham and Adler, 20 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 18, para. 582.
2. 'An Idea Whose Time Has Come', Review of The Environmental Revolution by Max Nicholson, Spectator, 24 (21st March 1970), 278-9.
3. 'Ted Hughes and Crow', London Magazine, 10, no 10 (January 1971), 17. Interview with Ekbert Faas.
4. 'Secret Ecstasies', Review of Shamanism by Mircea Eliade and The Sufis, by Idries Shah, Listener, 29th October, 1964, p. 677. The 3 subsequent quotations are from the same source.
5. R.M. Underhill, Singing for Power, (Berkeley: University of California 1976), p. 7.
6. The shaman's ability to "see" closely resembles Wordsworth's experience in The Prelude 348 II (1850 edition) when:

Oft in these moments such a holy calm  
 Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes  
 Were utterly forgotten.

The result of this experience is the same for the shaman as for the Romantic poet. "Through the strangely sharpened senses of the shaman, the sacred manifests itself." Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, (London: Fontana, 1968), p. 80.

Wordsworth also instinctively sought solitude, the isolation in which the barrier between the sacred and the profane is dissolved. This 'natural supernaturalism' can be seen in the philosophy of the Eskimo shaman, Igjuquarjuk:

True wisdom is only to be found far away from people, out  
 in the great solitude, and it is not to be found in play,  
 (cf. Wordsworth's rebuke by Nature when boating on Ullswater)  
 but only through suffering. Solitude and suffering open  
 the human mind, and therefore a shaman must seek his wisdom  
 there.

Joan Halifax, Shamanic Voices (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1980), p. 69.

Hughes's own Romantic affiliations are closest to Blake; who saw God sitting in a tree; who emphasized energy and animal vitality; who wrote songs of both Innocence and Experience.

7. Review of Eliade's Shamanism.
8. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 10.
9. *ibid.*, p. 8.
10. 'Ted Hughes Writes', Poetry Book Society Bulletin, 15 (Sept. 1957), 1-2.
11. The Poet Speaks XVI (London: Longmans for the British Council, 1963), p. 87.

12. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 32.
13. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 18.
14. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 33.
15. Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, ed. H.D.Trail.(New York:AMS Press, 1965).
16. From 'Shakespeare's Poem', which appears as a long note to A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, edited by Hughes, (London: Faber, 1971). The quotations are on p. 199 of this volume.
17. C.G. Jung, 'The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man', Collected Works, Vol. 10 (2nd edition 1970), para. 317.
18. 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 61.
19. 'Myth and Education', Writers, Critics and Children, ed. Geoffrey Fox et al. (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 92. This essay is substantially different from the 1970. essay of the same title.
20. Shamanism review.
21. Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology I, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 186-205. An essay entitled 'The Effectiveness of Symbols'.
22. *ibid.*, p. 181. Essay, 'The Sorcerer and his magic'.
23. Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, translated by P. Mairet, (London: Fontana, 1968), p. 126.
24. 'Desk Poet', Guardian, 23rd March, 1965, p. 9. Interview with Joan Halifax. (Hughes has been talking about Lupercal).
25. A similar progress can be seen in Hughes's development from the use of a dialectic of myth (the reconciling of opposites such as life and death, wild and tame, nature and culture), through an emphasis on legend, the myth recounted, to the ritual which is the myth enacted.
26. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 17.
27. *ibid.*
28. Keith Sagar, 'The Last Inheritance : Ted Hughes and his Landscape', Poetry Wales, 15 (Winter 1979/80), 69-70.
29. Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), I, 253.
30. Poetry in the Making, (London: Faber and Faber 1967), p. 19.
31. For instance the poems 'The Perfect Forms', 'Two Wise Generals', 'Phaetons', 'Egg-Head', 'Urn Burial', 'Fire-eater'.

32. "For the archaic and traditional cultures, the symbolic return to chaos is indispensable to any new Creation." Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, pp. 3Q-1.
33. *ibid.*, p. 80.
34. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 15.
35. Recent examples of this are 'Life is trying to be Life' and 'A Citrine Glimpse' 1 and 2, both in 'Earth-Numb', published in the recent Moortown collection.
36. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, pp. 108-9.
37. 'X - A Dialogue', Encounter, 25 (July 1965), 20-21.
38. 'Ted Hughes's Crow', Listener, 30th July, 1970, p. 449. This brief article describes and quotes from the broadcast.
39. Note also 'Crow's Battle Fury'. This poem recreates the heroic initiation described by Eliade in Rites and Symbols of Initiation, (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), pp. 81-87.
40. Tibetan Book of the Dead - Bardo Thodol, J. Evans-Wentz edition, (London: O.U.P. 1957), p. 149.
41. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 17.
42. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 31. "At the moment of ecstasy when he or she is transported to a place that is beyond mortality, the poetry breaks forth to overwhelm, a potent and aesthetic resolution."
43. Geoffrey Thurley, The Ironic Harvest, (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), p. 186. It is interesting that Thurley puts Hughes in the "English Existentialist tradition", because of this emphasis on the experience of suffering. Hughes is in fact in an immeasurably older tradition.
44. Vide also 'And the Phoenix has come' in Adam and the Sacred Nine.
45. This is the basis of The Teachings of Don Juan, by Carlos Castaneda, which is a modern enquiry into the shamanic experience.
46. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 186.
47. The Mabinogion, translated by Jeffrey Gantz, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 248-49, part of the story 'Peredur, Son of Evrang'.
48. Cf. the poem 'Having first given away pleasure', Gaudete, p. 192.
49. Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, 2nd edition, (Manchester: MUP, 1978), p. 189.
50. Walter F. Otto, Dionysus, Myth and Cult, trans. R.B. Palmer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 78.

51. *ibid.*, p. 93.
52. *ibid.*, p. 143.
53. Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. 61.
54. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 73.

CHAPTER 2CROW

To respect words more than the truths which are perpetually trying to find and correct words is the death of poetry. The reverse, of course, is also the death of poetry - but not before it has produced poetry.

Hughes on Laura Riding, 1970<sup>1</sup>

In 1962 Hughes was asked by the American artist Leonard Baskin to complement a number of his drawings of dead crows and human corpses with poems based upon these images. Hughes pounced upon the crow drawings, seeing them as transcending the more human looking figures such as 'The Hanged Man' from the Tarot pack. He articulated his fascination in an essay in a Baskin exhibition catalogue:

'The Hanged Man' is not dead: it is the Angel, shattered by death, dispersed to the Universe, re-assembled by joy, that here takes up a position in which it is equal to the whole of its past and the whole of its future. So the dead crow, just the size of a crow, as he is just the size of a man, is the Hanged Man's equal. Every feather of the crow is there and perfect, and the crow is dead, yet this bird again is the immortal Angel of Life. In the aspect of the Angel of Death.<sup>2</sup>

We meet this Angel of Death in various guises in Wodwo, most especially in 'Ballad from a Fairy Tale', but it was not until 1964 that this figure was identified as a crow. Eat Crow, as we have already seen, was both the debut of the crow figure and the clearest indication of the initiatory motifs that have become more and more prominent in Hughes's poetry. But in fact it was not until Hughes went to Ireland in 1966 that the Crow poems began to take on their present shape, seemingly activated by the Irish setting which is mirrored in the veiled quotations from their national epic, the Tain Bo Cuailgne, the cattle raid of Coole. Crow shows the same indestructibility as Cuchulain who singlehandedly

harassed the army of the Four Provinces of Ireland while the men of Ulster gathered to repel the invaders. He similarly encounters both hags and a beautiful mysterious woman.<sup>3</sup> Crow is a spiritual warrior like both Cuchulain and the primitive shaman.

But these are not the only models for the initiatory progress of Crow. Alan Bold has called Crow "a British book of the dead"<sup>4</sup> and the sequence is remarkable for its layering of Eastern thought together with mythology derived from the British Isles. The 'book of the dead' being referred to is the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead', the Bardo Thodol, one of the main sacred texts of Llamaism, which is a form of Tantric Buddhism. In 1960 Hughes did some work for a grand oratorio of the Bardo for Chou Wen Chung, the Chinese composer. The radio-play 'The Wound' in Wodwo has a deep root in the Bardo Thodol (as well as John Arden's Sergeant Musgrave's Dance). Tantric Buddhism has two great attractions for Hughes: firstly Tantricism is a development of shamanism<sup>5</sup> and secondly this kind of Buddhism has a close link with the work of Arthur Schopenhauer who is the only philosopher Hughes "ever really read".

#### A. Tantricism

Tantricism is a technique of mastering the world around one. It does not renounce the world like the yogi or the Buddha does, instead seeking to overcome it through the awakening of "the serpent power", personified as the goddess Kundalini. In the Tantric schools (N.B. Tantra just means treatise) it is believed that the human body is a microcosm of the universe and thus Kundalini is located at the base of the spinal column. The nerve at this place is symbolized by a messenger's wand, while the two entwining nerves are portrayed as snakes. This is the same as Hermes' Caduceus. In a similar way Mount Meru on Tibet is identified as the spinal nerve and the centre of the



world.

Already we see hints of shamanism in the concept of Mount Meru. (In the Bardo the dead person climbs this mountain, thus embarking upon a shamanistic journey which will initiate him into new life - in this context either a better reincarnation or nirvana if his Karmic debt has been paid.) Also Tantric meditation includes spiritual exercises in the presence of corpses and skeletons, believing the life essence to be concentrated in the skeleton. But while the shaman seeks the root of being to participate in it the Tibetan monk will be seeking nirvana, escape from being.

The mythology of Tantricism is based on the premise "That the world is created and ruled by two polar principles, Shiva and Shakti."<sup>6</sup> Shiva, the god, is absolutely passive, while Shakti, the goddess, manifests every level of creation and life. Shakti appears in various forms of the Great Goddess and is also "active in woman". Deliverance from cosmic evil can only be reached by the union of these two principles in the body of the devotee. This is experienced as a "very lively warmth" which Eliade calls the "magical heat", experienced by shamans the world over.

This philosophy is very attractive to one who prefers any male deity to be absent, who is obsessed with the white Goddess figure, who deals continually with polarities and the hope of an initiatory integration. Tantricism also puts a high value on sex, which is another departure from Gautama's Buddhism.

#### B. Buddhism

One must remember that the Bardo Thodol is a Buddhist text, no matter how influenced by Tantric ideas. Even though its form is shamanistic - full of beasts, gods, mountains and journeys, like a magical spell, its underlying philosophy is Buddhist. It is closest to

the Ashvaghosha's re-evaluation of the Buddha's Four Truths; the Four Truths are these:

1. Existence is suffering; all being is impermanent.
2. All suffering originates in desires.
3. Salvation is attained by destruction of desires.
4. Extinction of suffering can be found by practice of the eight-fold path, which in attenuated form is wisdom, knowing that one's material existence is 'maya' - illusory; uprightness, based on passive compassion; and <sup>7</sup> self concentration which is meditation on a yogic basis.

If this path is rightly followed the disciple will eventually attain 'nirvana', release from being.

Though Hughes is chiefly interested in the magical symbolism of the actual text, some of these ideas attract him, especially Gautama's starting point in a belief that the world is full of evil and suffering and that the phenomena of life might be likened to a dream. We must remember that Crow is "God's nightmare" and that Hughes is already developing the use of the dream state from hierophany. There are already examples of this in 'The Hawk in the Rain' or 'The Thought-Fox'. There will be a poetic re-statement of an actual dream in 'The Wound'. The poet's own dreams feature strongly in the Epilogue to Gaudete.

For Hughes life is a dream, but that dream is the chief reality because it gives the hope of revelation and that is in essence what the Bardo Thodol is; a death dream leading to life, far closer to shamanism than to Gautama.

It should also be noted that things usually just happen to Crow. He seems to have no desires of his own, all that he has is the will to live. This is the one desire which brings him back to life time and time again. "He who hath desire continueth subject to rebirth."<sup>8</sup> Once again Hughes only uses the framework of another philosophy to illuminate his own dilemma. The Buddhist offer of redemption through the renunciation of desire, is impossible for one who sees naked will as

the greatest thing that we can learn from the animals. Hughes is also attracted to a religion which teaches "dependance on self alone", as Schopenhauer has phrased it.

### C. Schopenhauer

Hughes's ideas are closest to Schopenhauer's version of Buddhism. Schopenhauer also exploits the ambiguity of the nature of desire. For him it is not just the source of evil, but of salvation too. The last desire a Buddhist denies is his desire for salvation, which neither Hughes nor Schopenhauer is prepared to consider. Although Schopenhauer believed "striving after happiness ends in disillusionment"<sup>9</sup> he seems to have felt that this was an integral part of the human predicament. He also seems to have believed that to be human is to be in a predicament where "each of us is being punished for his existence."<sup>10</sup> This is exactly what Hughes's protagonist feels in Prometheus on his Crag.

In this context Schopenhauer emphasized "the negativity of well-being and happiness, in antithesis to the positivity of pain." Evil is "palpable", while happiness is "the mere abolition of a desire and the extinction of a pain."<sup>11</sup> Hughes instinctively agrees with the main hypothesis. Pain and destruction are more concrete than anything else in Crow and Wodwo, in Gaudete too for that matter. But in Gaudete the poet is trying to come to grips with what true joy is. He fails completely, but in the process of doing so gives us some insight into why happiness is so elusive.

Schopenhauer also gives a reason why animals are to be envied, since their sufferings are not accumulative, because they are delivered from "memory and anticipation". For an animal suffering "cannot sum itself up. Hence the enviable composure and unconcern, which characterizes the animal."<sup>12</sup> Another element of Schopenhauer's philosophy which appeals to Hughes is taken over from Brahminism where the world is created in error.

Brahma is supposed to have created the world by a kind of fall into sin, or by an error, and has to atone for this sin or error by remaining in it himself until he has redeemed himself out of it. Very good!<sup>13</sup>

In the same essay, 'On the Suffering of the World', Schopenhauer also attacks the Judeo-Christian deity with these words:

But that a god like Jehovah should create this world of want and misery anima causa and de gaiete de coeur and then go so far as to applaud himself for it, saying it is all very good: that is quite unacceptable.

Instead Schopenhauer prefers, as Hughes seems to in Orghast and Prometheus on his Crag, the gods of Zoroastrianism, Ohrmazd, the good god, continually at war with Ahriman, the evil god. For both writers this seems more realistic than postulating an all-good Creator and then trying to explain why evil is in the world. The Crow poems are based on this fundamental attitude to metaphysics and have the same flaw. They take no account of human moral responsibility and choice. If things just happen to Crow then evil must be a force arising from God, or whoever puts him through his trials. If there is such a thing as free will, evil can arise in Crow or you or me without God being at all responsible. Crow experiences personal emotions and has his own personality without any hint of personal accountability.

In many ways Schopenhauer exemplifies the pessimistic polarity in Hughes's thought, while shamanism and mystical experience represent the hopeful side. For instance when Hughes is at his most pessimistic about sex and women he is very close to comments like "sexuality becomes for man a source of brief pleasure and protracted suffering."<sup>14</sup> This is exactly what he seems to feel in poems like 'A Childish Prank', 'Fragment of an Ancient Tablet' or 'Lovesong'. Crow is himself sexless. (Although Baskin's drawings show genitalia, they signify vitality rather than sexuality.) But although sexuality in the Crow poems is destructive or debased it is still a powerful motivating force and

provides at least a temporary escape from isolation and eventual destruction (as in 'Notes For a Little Play').

#### D. Gnosticism

Elements of all the philosophies considered so far can be found in Gnosticism, the term used to cover an extensive syncretization of Platonism, Judeo-Christianity and Zoroastrianism that found its most developed forms during the second century after Christ. Gnosticism was not so much a religion as an approach to religion, the pursuit of 'gnosis', knowledge that was not available to the common run of humanity. Sometimes Gnostics operated within the framework of Christianity, claiming to hold the secret teachings of Jesus, but as the sects developed they became more clearly anti-Christian. One sect, the Ophites, would solemnly curse Jesus as part of their liturgy.<sup>15</sup>

Gnostic doctrine concentrated on two key areas, the Nature of the Divine Being and the means of redemption, whatever the multiplicity of beliefs that might have been held by conflicting groups. The foundation of the first belief was a form of dualism, "an opposition between an ineffable transcendent God and an ignorant, obtuse demiurge (often a caricature of the Old Testament Jehovah), who is the creator of the cosmos."<sup>16</sup> For the Gnostic there are two Gods, one of spirit and one of matter. The pattern of redemption is in deliverance from the evils of matter:

The general pattern of the gnostic myth ... portrays a heavenly essence which falls from the upper spiritual world of light into the lower material world of darkness and is imprisoned in a number of earthly bodies. To liberate this pure essence from its imprisonment a saviour descends from the world of light to impart the true knowledge (gnosis); he is at once redeemer and revealer. (F.F. Bruce)

It is the first of the two key gnostic doctrines that Hughes deals with in Crow, the second being developed via Manicheism in Prometheus on his Crag. In Crow God is always shown as the 'ignorant demiurge', a development from such earlier poems as 'Theology' and 'Logos' in

Wodwo. In the former poem God is like a "querulous" old man. In the latter poem he is "a good fellow, but His mother's against Him". These poems not only prefigure the style of Crow, but also the theology!

The "blinding pentagram" of God's power in 'Logos' is a Gnostic symbol for the combination of the five senses, each represented by a different planet. These are the source of power of the deity of matter, who is creator of man and the worlds but not of all things. His act of creation produces a "nightmare" which he brings forth with "a swinish cry". This same failed creator figure is found in Crow, where Hughes says, "God, having created the world, has created it slightly wrong, and Crow's efforts over-correct it."<sup>18</sup> Thus the existence of evil can be attributed to the errors of one deity, and all good things shown as the work of another superior God. In Hughes's cosmology this latter being is absent, the Deus Otiosus or Withdrawn God of many primitives; so the only legitimate force of true divinity remaining is Mother Earth.

The concept of two levels of deity can be found in 'Crow's Theology'. Only a materially minded demiurge would love the stones and the "shot-pellets" reasons Crow. Therefore he decides that there are two Gods, one absent and loving him and the other dominant and only loving Crow's enemies. This is the same reasoning as that of the Marcionite heresy which used an opposition between the Old and New Testaments to postulate two conflicting deities, Jehovah and Jesus.

For other sects the two claimants to the royal throne were God and Satan. Satan, the non-material deity, and the serpent in the Book of Genesis, were brought together as one. This throws light on the poem 'Reveille' in Wodwo and upon 'Apple Tragedy' and 'Snake Hymn' in Crow:

The Ophites or Serpent Worshippers ... taught that the inferior creator-spirit ... had given himself out to be the greatest of all the spirits and was so incensed when the first created man

gave thanks to the Father instead of to himself that he planned to beguile him through Eve and so bring about his undoing. From such a fate the Serpent rescued the primal man by introducing Eve to the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>19</sup>

Hughes would have already been acquainted with the beliefs of this sect through Robert Graves and The White Goddess.<sup>20</sup> 'Apple Tragedy' in fact expresses the even more extreme views of the Naessenes who regarded the Serpent as "the divine seducer and impregnator of Eve."<sup>21</sup> In Crow God's invention of cider is the occasion for this:

Adam drank and said: 'Be my god'.  
Eve drank and opened her legs

And called to the cockeyed serpent  
And gave him a wild time. (Crow, 2nd edition, 1972, p. 78)

The role of Eve in the 'theological' poems raises a problem about the author's attitude. In the various Gnostic systems women were invariably inferior and often assumed to be the source of all evil. Birth was regarded as an obscene sign of materialism and the ill-considered manufacture of souls destined for hell, since only a chosen few would have 'gnosis'. Certain Crow poems, such as 'Fragments of an Ancient Tablet' and 'Crow's First Lesson' mirror the horror of birth and the bondage of "woman's vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened." (p. 20) But in stark contrast the poet hymns the Great Mother in 'Crow's Undersong'.

We would be seriously misunderstanding Hughes if we assume that he has embraced Gnostic chauvinism, since in fact it is Gnostic dualism that fascinates him. He sees woman as mystery and ambiguity, as deity to be adored and as potentially faithless lover.

Both its dualism and its mystery element link Gnosticism to other types of initiatory religion. It is similar to both shamanism and Tantric Buddhism in that secret knowledge is attained by a spiritual journey, since to be united with the true creator the Gnostic initiand

must first traverse "the planetary spheres of hostile demons"<sup>22</sup>:

Much time was ... devoted to learning the correct magic passwords and the most potent amulets, which would enable the delivered soul to force the monstrous powers barring the ascent to open their doors and allow him to pass onwards and upwards to the realm of light.<sup>23</sup>

(Henry Chadwick)

Thus Gnosticism, like shamanism, depends upon an initiatory ordeal as the way to enlightenment. It is a similar ordeal that dictates the events of Crow.

#### E. God's Nightmare: Cartoon and hero tale

The Crow poems are actually based on a large unfinished narrative corpus, a mythical basis that is implicit in the poems, which are selections from the earlier part of the story, compressed core samples from a large field.

The myth of Crow begins like this:

God, having created the world, has a recurring nightmare. A huge hand comes from deep space, takes him by the throat, half-throttles him, drags him through space, ploughs the earth with him then throws him back into heaven in a cold sweat. Meanwhile man sits at the gates of heaven waiting for God to grant him audience. He has come to ask God to take life back. God is furious and sends him packing. The nightmare appears to be independent of the creation, and God cannot understand it. The nightmare is full of mockery of the creation, especially of man. God challenges the nightmare to do better. This is just what the nightmare has been waiting for. It plunges down into matter and creates Crow.<sup>24</sup>

(Keith Sagar)

Crow is thus the result of a divine nightmare, and the poems maintain this sense of his origins. They are full of the characteristics of nightmare - agony without release in death, corrupt sexual fantasy, little progress with a great amount of effort. David Lodge has pointed out the similarity between Crow and the cartoons, and what is a nightmare but a private and horrific cartoon? All one can do is survive long enough to wake up.

It must also be remembered that this nightmare can be converted to a useful purpose. With every retelling of the myth we experience a new



sense of horror, yet it also opens up the way for an integration of the emotions raised to the surface. (Greek tragedy functions in the same way.) Hughes seems to be suggesting that if the nightmare is infused with the sacred, a ritual healing, and not a shaken awakening, will result. The effects of the dream also depend on one's perspective. What to a twentieth century Westerner might be a nightmare could mean otherwise to someone from a different culture. Thus in 'A Kill' Crow is:

Flogged lame with legs  
 Shot through the head with balled brains  
 Shot blind with eyes  
 Nailed down by his own ribs  
 Strangled just short of his last gasp  
 By his own windpipe  
 Clubbed unconscious by his own heart (p. 16)

For us this vision of birth would be an ultimate nightmare, but for the prospective witch doctor it would be a promise of revelation, that he was about to be torn apart in order to be reborn, with the superior knowledge of the twice-born. Also Hughes has characteristically left obscure the fact that most of the agonies inflicted on Crow have something to do with expiatory sacrifices or the advent of some religion.<sup>25</sup>

The world of the cartoons combined with that of initiatory ordeals is the same world we find in the primitive epics. Even later transcriptions such as the Nibelunglied and the Icelandic Sagas have this dual quality where death and suffering have a curious ambiguity, the ambiguity of the nightmare. In these works death is a casual commonplace. It might even be the result of a trick or joke as in the story Hreidar the Fool. But death is also a portentous matter because of its invocation of the gods, and in many cases the laws of revenge, as in Njal's Saga.

These elements are particularly noteworthy in the Tain where Cuchulain's opponents are comic in their ineffectuality except when he

is forced to fight his foster-brother Ferdia, who has been duped by the offer of the woman Finnebair, or when the opposition becomes truly serious and the berserk fury or warp-spasm comes upon the hero. Like Cuchulain killing Ferdia, Crow in 'Crow Tyrannosaurus' weeps and stabs at the same time. In 'Crow's Battle Fury' his madness is directly based on that of Cuchulain. Like Cuchulain Crow is surrounded by casual slaughter and is miraculously healed of his own wounds. The nightmare is not only that of the cartoon but that of the epic tale, where humour always has a violent tinge, where the hero is either indestructible or all too vulnerable, Odysseus or Achilles. Crow is all heroes and combines their strengths and failings.

#### F. Crow and his Context

There are complex reasons for the poet's choice of the Crow figure.

Firstly there is its resistance and apparent indestructibility:

The crow is the most intelligent of the birds. He lives in just about every piece of land on earth, and there's a great body of folklore about crows, of course. No carrion will kill a crow. The crow is the indestructible bird, who suffers everything, suffers nothing - like Horatio.<sup>26</sup>

In a letter to Alan Bold Hughes adds:

One of the starting points was that the Crow, as the bird of Bran, is the oldest and the highest totem creature of Britain ... The crow was also Odin's bird - therefore the totemic bird in chief of the Angles, Saxons, etc., and of the Norsemen. England pretends to the lion - but that is a late fake import. England's autochthonous Totem is the Crow. Whatever colour of Englishman you scratch you come to some sort of Crow.<sup>27</sup>

Thus on the one level the crow is a kind of daemon of the English spirit, having the right to speak on all English matters, as in 'Crow's Song About England'. In this aspect he is both guide and exemplar, but he also suffers from the same kind of anxieties - "the dual horror of existence", the first horror being the "monstrous horror of life" (a very different attitude from Hughes's first two collections) and the second "being small, left out emptily excluded" which is both a general

human anxiety and also a post-Imperial neurosis.

The story of Crow is his attempt to become a man. "He's put through various adventures and disasters and trials and ordeals"<sup>28</sup> which have two effects on him. Initially they do not alter him at all, like the father in 'Out' whose suffering cannot rescue him from clerkhood. Then Crow's sufferings "completely transform him, tear him to bits, put him together again, and produce him a little bit changed." But no matter how close Crow gets, he does not become a man.

Crow resembles the man described in Freud's 'Civilization and its Discontents' who has become "a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent, but those organs have not grown on him and they still give him much trouble at times."<sup>29</sup> Like Freud's twentieth century man Crow attains a "God-like character" without contentment, because the true fruit of godhead is denied him. He cannot be content because, as Calvin Bedient has so aptly put it, "Anxiety begins to radiate from finiteness of being",<sup>30</sup> Crow is at his most impotent when faced with infinity. Thus in 'Crow on the Beach' as he looks out to sea, the symbol of infinity, he wonders "What could be hurting so much?" Even in his more successful second phase (which comes about as the result of a nuclear holocaust) Crow cannot really cope with the sea:

Finally

He turned his back and he marched away from the sea

As a crucified man cannot move.

(*'Crow and the Sea'*, p. 82)

This statement is highly ambiguous, it could just be taken as Crow turning his back on spiritual realities, or it could be an ironic comment on the incarnation where the finite and the infinite are supposed to meet. These lines not only suggest that the Incarnation was a

failure but also raise the question of how a loving God could thus condemn his son and those human beings who did not respond. This points to a third, metaphysical, strand in the Crow poems.

At this stage it is worth reminding the reader that Freud's view of man precludes a spiritual dimension. His mythic portrayal of Eros and Thanatos is only a special form of symbolic language and this can only go so far in a description of spiritual issues. Jung on the other hand saw myth as a "supernatural element within man's psyche."<sup>31</sup> In 'Modern Man in Search of a Soul' he spoke of "the necessity of rediscovering the life of the spirit",<sup>32</sup> a statement with which Hughes would heartily concur. (At a later stage we will examine Hughes's own understanding of myth. Suffice it to say at this stage that he believes modern man to be in a hell of his own making, having rejected the "religious negotiations" which "formerly embraced and humanized the archaic energies of instinct and feeling."<sup>33</sup> This is close to Jung's view and points to a psychological understanding of religion, based upon its capacity to deal with human needs, not on its absolute veracity.)

Like Jung Hughes wants a restoration of ritual and myth to their rightful place as healing and therapeutic functions; "... these works seem to heal us. More important, it is in these works that humanity is truly formed."<sup>34</sup> But before the poet can begin on this task (Jung would agree that there are few besides poets capable of this, since they have discovered "the spirits, demons and gods") he must establish his own basis for so doing. Thus in Wodwo Hughes works through his burden of destruction and life-denial to a stage where his protagonist can say "very queer but I'll go on looking." Neither is Hughes blind to the cathartic nature of myth, being so affected by the first part of his vision in 'Gog' that he had to introduce the Knight to protect himself.

Our main question is whether Crow has sufficient ritual power to deal with a desacralized society. Hughes said to Ekbert Faas of ritual that "the old method is the only one", but can this method work in a world where myth and ritual have been divorced from each other? The myths Hughes utilizes no longer have a basis in a common social milieu. To a degree Hughes probably realized this by his use of a Crow, "England's autochthonous Totem", hoping that some deep Englishness would respond to his poetry - as perhaps it has done considering the success of the volume.

But it could be said that Hughes is no less bewildered in his own way than most Englishmen. Crow seems to be a typically English anti-hero in many ways; slightly comic, slightly pathetic, slightly malicious, committed to the action because it seems to fill a void not because of any deep trust in his own motives or aspirations. We are reminded of Hamlet, who might be called the archetypal English hero - "Mother-wet, weak-legged, horrified at the task, boggling" as Hughes put it in his essay 'Shakespeare's poem'.<sup>35</sup>

What Hughes has not really considered are the limitations of myth, hoping that a concentration on its value would somehow overrule. Myth can only be foundational, can only succeed in confronting and controlling our deepest fears, can only reconcile opposites or integrate man back into a holistic world to the degree that it expresses truth and a correct perception of the world around. Myths can in fact express what is false as well as what is true. One does not have to go into a long defence of absolutes against relativism to claim that, if self-deception is possible, a myth can be false. Since myths express our deepest urges and hopes they always have this ambiguity. Many myths are an attempt to avoid the human condition, not just to come to some understanding of it. Hughes's saving grace is that he does not

try to avoid such issues.

Ted Hughes's answer to both the problem of social context and of self-deception seems to be in a belief that myth deals with archetypal human behaviour and issues. This is put quite vaguely - "every people has its true myths .. They are as alike as the lines on the palm of the human hand",<sup>36</sup> but he understands that not every myth is a true myth (by his use of the phrase "true myth") - an account of what really happens in the inner region when it collides with "the stubborn conditions of the outer world." Such myths are attested because "the imaginative men of every subsequent age have had recourse to their basic patterns and images."<sup>37</sup>

So Hughes's task in Crow is to select those patterns and images which relate to the twentieth century situation, and which also relate to a mythically based initiatory experience that is not purely a self-deception for the sake of integrating emotions. I am convinced that though Hughes has a psychological view of both myth and religion he is not fully satisfied with his own understanding. If he were he would have stopped looking and probably stopped writing.

Hughes's greatest strength is that he is "all for opening up negotiations with whatever happened to be out there", 'out there' being "anything outside the cosiest arrangement of society."<sup>38</sup> In 'Myth and Education' he speaks of the attempt to re-enter the "lost inheritance", refusing both cults and drugs as a means. This lost inheritance is what Crow is himself searching for, his wife across the river. Hughes has not made clear the nature of Crow's quest in the poems. At first it is the result of his attempt to correct God's mismanagement of the world which leads him to seek out the author of all the confusion. Later it becomes the search for a bride and embracing of the female which has previously disgusted Crow. In order to get across the river

to this woman Crow must carry across an Ogress who asks him seven questions:

His answers move from one pole of total disaster in the relationship between him and the female to the opposite pole of totally successful, blissful union. And meanwhile, this Ogress on his back turns into a beauty, before she escapes into the oak forest on the other side of the river. And there are many more episodes in this happy land until the Ogress eventually becomes his bride.

We do not need all this, though, in order to appreciate the importance of the Crow poems as poems of search, a search where what happens on the journey is as important as the goal.

This kind of journey is to Hughes essentially shamanic. He sees it as being based upon the shaman's "flight to the spirit world" which he experiences as a dream (Crow, although he is "God's nightmare" is himself a dreamer), "... and that dream is the basis of the hero story." Hughes believes that:

It is the same basic outline pretty well all over the world...It is the skeleton of thousands of folktales and myths. And of many narrative poems. The Odyssey, the Divine Comedy, Faust ...<sup>40</sup>

Hughes himself follows the shamanic outline in Crow as we shall see in our consideration of the individual poems, remembering that the hero story format means that these poems must be considered as part of a whole.

#### G. The Poems

The adventure begins with three different accounts of Crow's genesis, echoing the habitual confusion of the epics and the numerous conflicting Greek creation myths. 'Two Legends' locates Crow's origins in blackness. He is the absolute opposite to the Gnostic Light, "black the lungs/Unable to suck in light." He is totally material, but also totally whole and consistent:

Black also the soul, the huge stammer  
Of the cry that, swelling, could not  
Pronounce its sun.

(p. 13)

The second part of the poem also emphasizes Crow's uniqueness and isolation. His blackness is that of the otter which Hughes in 'An Otter' called "neither fish nor beast." It is that of the rock "plunging in foam" which is not the sea but not really the land either. It is the black of the gall, neither flesh nor blood. Crow's ambiguity is that of each of these other elements of the natural world. In being neither thing he is in some strange way both. That is why he is a "black rainbow". The rainbow is reckoned to be a bridge between heaven and earth by primitive peoples. It does not belong fully to the ground it seems to touch or the sky it fitfully inhabits, yet at the same time it brings the two together.

The rainbow is a cosmic symbol, as it was to Noah, proof of his covenant with God. In other cultures it symbolizes a similar covenant of communication, communication through a mediator, the shaman, who also links heaven and earth. Crow is a subverter of the shaman's role, since he does nothing with his bird ability, the dual gift of walking and flight. He is not an agent of affirmation. In 'Lineage' he is the son of "Never/Never Never Never" son of Nothing. The poems that follow include a large element of the initiatory ordeal. The question is whether Crow will be initiated out of his genesis in negation or by his obstinacy be initiated more deeply into it.

The third myth of Crow's birth owes much to the Bardo Thodol as he undergoes the Llamistic examination at the womb's door that gives the poem its title. But once again there is a subversion. The goal of the Bardo is to obstruct birth giving the initiand a further hope of paradise without having to re-enter the world of Karma. Crow on the other hand imagines that life is worth having. A rite to aid the appreciation of death is reversed by Crow's stubborn desire for life:



But who is stronger than death?

Me, evidently.

Pass, Crow.

(p. 15)

With these words Crow is condemned to meaningless immortality, having rejected the sovereignty of the kingdom of death. He is now like the Brahman deity who must stay in the world until he has redeemed himself out of it, a Prometheus figure.

In 'The Door' Crow bravely flies out to face life. "Flying from sun to sun" he eventually finds his home in a human body, a "growth of the solid world":

It is part of the world's earthen wall.  
The earth's plants - such as the genitals  
And the flowerless navel  
Live in its crevices.

(p. 18)

Crow's discovery of a place to dwell is similar to that of Satan in Book IV of Milton's Paradise Lost. Both journeys end with an infiltration and lead to dire results. It is in this poem that we see that Crow is both avian and human. He is part of the human consciousness, yet a separate individual who has his own hope, fears and problems.

Hughes further sets the stage for later poems by showing first Crow's relationship with the maternal, and then the paternal. His birth is his immediate estrangement from his mother. Instead of being part of her he is part of something else. In 'Crow and Mama' Crow keeps trying to start his journey which is in itself a rejection of the maternal, the search for his father. As we have already seen this search will change in character since he begins to search for the feminine again. But until that time he is shown as murderer of women and friend of the outside world and the paternal, rejecting not only the mother but her world and by extension spiritual realities for materialism. Thus when "He tried a step, then a step, and again a step -/

Every one scarred her face for ever." (p. 17) His very birth is 'A Kill', an act of terrorism against his mother. But there is also a positive hope. The killing is also that of Crow, a clue to future chances. If he is willing to experience these same death pangs on a spiritual level he can be initiated into spiritual as well as material life, the inner as well as the outer world.

The problem is that Crow takes up with the wrong company, that of God, who has imprisoned the true Supreme Being. Hughes describes him thus:

This particular God, of course, is the man-created, broken-down, corrupt despot of a ramshackle religion, who bears about the same relationship to the Creator as, say, ordinary English does to reality. He accompanies Crow through the world, in many guises, mis-teaching, deluding, tempting, opposing and at every point trying to discourage or destroy him.

This God closely resembles the Gnostic demiurge whom we considered earlier. But whereas the Gnostic deity was mediator between man and the unknowable Godhead, Hughes's God is an usurper, like Zeus who supplanted Kronos, his father the Titan.

This deity is also responsible for the sufferings of the female figure in Crow and of Crow himself. He is like the Lord of Death in the Bardo. Echoes of both 'Crow and Mama' and 'A Kill' can be found in the section called the 'Bardo of Seeking Rebirth':

The Lord of Death will place round thy neck a rope and drag thee along; he will cut off thy head, extract thy heart, pull out thy intestines, lick up thy brain, drink thy blood, eat thy flesh, and gnaw thy bones; but thou wilt be incapable of dying. Although the body be hacked to pieces, it will revive again.

Thus in 'Crow and Mama' "He jumped into the car the towrope/was around her neck he jumped out" and in 'A Kill' Crow, though "Flogged ... Shot ... Nailed ... Strangled ... Clubbed ..." is also incapable of death. These poems may not be good verse but they are not gratuitously violent

comic strips. The violence is religious, the nightmare a spiritual one, showing a world under the domination of the Lord of Death.

As a result all true religion has been turned upside down. In 'Two Legends' Crow broke out of the cosmic egg, the symbol that the Buddha used for the breaking of the shell of ignorance and wrong seeing. In contrast, the breaking of Crow's egg lets loose the son of Nothing. In 'Lineage', a Biblical parody, it is not Christ who is produced but Crow. Instead of the Word of God, the Logos, there is a bird "Screaming for Blood."

Numerous Crow poems show the futility of religion under the domination of God the Paternal. Crow's mayhem is only in imitation of his companion, a showing up of his incapacity:

... in the beginning Crow is simply a pupil of God's in the early world, a little childish hanger-on to the events of the creation. Crow interferes at every point, of course, because God, having created the world, has created it slightly wrong, and Crow's efforts over-correct it.<sup>43</sup>

Thus in 'Crow Alights' the result is "the horror of Creation." This is not the poet's perception but that of his protagonist, the poems being "his songs, the songs that a Crow would sing."<sup>44</sup> The point is that the eye of the carrion-eater which thrives on entropy and decomposition is horrified by the exuberance of any life save his own.

The world-view evoked is that of the creature in Samuel Beckett's novel The Unnameable and of his plays. This minimalist vision in 'Crow Alights' of a world epitomized by "... this shoe, with no sole, rain-sodden,/Lying on a moor" seems at first to be the same as that of Endgame, where man is "a little piece of grit in the middle of the steppe"<sup>45</sup> but in fact there is a major divergence of authorial intent.

Beckett's world is one where every person has a God-shaped hole, but with no deity to fill the hole. "The bastard! He doesn't exist!"<sup>46</sup> shouts Hamm in Endgame. Beckett's view of the absurd derives from this

utter hopelessness, while Hughes finds his sympathies to be with Eastern Europeans like Vasko Popa who he feels has the "simple animal courage of accepting the odds."<sup>47</sup>

Hughes appreciates Popa because he and others have "cut their losses and cut the whole hopelessness of that civilization off, have somehow managed to invest their hopes in something deeper."<sup>48</sup> He feels that there is a "shifting of your foundation to completely new Holy Ground, a new divinity, one that won't be under the rubble when the churches collapse."<sup>49</sup> Thus for Hughes the hopelessness is that of a particular civilization, not of the whole of humanity. He would probably also say that while man still has the idea of divinity, he has that godhead within him and within reach. This is the imprisoned being he is seeking to release through Crow.

The demiurge of Crow is the God brought into being by the impoverished Enlightenment mentality; man is made in his image and he is made in man's. Thus for Hughes the world is not breaking down because it lacks God but because it lacks a proper perception of the sacred. For Beckett nothing has meaning without God, relationships are impossible because proper communication is impossible. In contrast Hughes believes that there is hope and the possibility of relationship if one goes far enough back to human roots in a perception of the whole world around as sacred.<sup>50</sup> In The Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal Hughes concentrated on the positive side by presenting numerous poems which give revelation of the natural world. It could be argued that he is using Crow as a prophetic warning, and also as an attempt to find a basis for the affirmations he has previously so blithely made. Hughes's vision of Thanatos has modified his revelation of Eros, and in Crow Thanatos seems to be stronger.

Thus, not only is it suggested that the chief features of human

relationships are sexuality and aggression, but also that aggression is the dominant force. This would be bearable, Hughes feels, in a world where man and his environment were reconciled, but since this is not the case there is a dangerous release of uncontrolled energy. (This is exactly what Gaudete also shows.)

'A Childish Prank' and 'Crow's First Lesson' are Crow's first encounters with sexuality, while 'Crow Alights' and 'That Moment' are his first encounters with destruction. 'A Childish Prank' opens with God wondering what to do with his unactivated, soulless man and woman. The problem makes him doze off and Crow begins to interfere:

Crow laughed.  
He bit the Worm, God's only son,  
Into two writhing halves.

He stuffed into man the tail half  
With the wounded end hanging out.

He stuffed the head half headfirst into woman  
And it crept in deeper and up  
To peer out through her eyes  
Calling its tail-half to join up quickly, quickly  
Because O it was painful.

Man awoke being dragged across the grass.  
Woman awoke to see him coming.  
Neither knew what had happened.

God went on sleeping.

Crow went on laughing. (p. 19)

This is a variation on Aristophanes' recounting of the origin of sexual instincts in Plato's Symposium, a myth dealt with in depth by Freud in 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' and in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. The kind of God shown here has already been pointed out. Calling the Worm "God's only son" is just one step beyond the Gnostic belief that the serpent was an agent of the inept God who created matter.

Crow is at the play stage in 'A Childish Prank' and is soon ready to go to school. 'Crow's First Lesson' shows that he does not understand

sexuality and only understands love in the context of violence. Here Crow is a kind of Pandora, his voice being the box from which the evils that beset man are released:

Crow gaped, and a bluefly, a tsetse, a mosquito  
Zoomed out and down  
To their sundry flesh-pots. (p. 20)

But worse than any disease is the way that "woman's vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened." This is the beginning of a series of images of hags pursuing Crow:<sup>51</sup>

Mummies stormed his torn insides  
With their bandages and embalming honey.  
He contorted clear, he vomited empty -  
He flew. ('Oedipus Crow', p. 43)

Crow's interference has degraded sexuality and Mother-Earth is seeking to get her own back.

'Crow Alights' presents us with a disjointed and tawdry world. The poem's descriptive technique reminds one of a Sartre novel. It is written as if the poet's eye is a camera catching a hand here, a cup there, without realising that they are meant to go together. One must understand that for Hughes the camera is the symbol of descriptive sterility. The "imprisonment of the camera lens" puts our inner world into neutral,<sup>52</sup> "Like broiler killers, we are reduced to a state of pure observation. Everything that passes in front of our eyes is equally important, equally unimportant."<sup>53</sup> Crow has camera eyes. His blinks are like the shutter closing:

Crow blinked. He blinked. Nothing faded.  
He stared at the evidence.

Nothing escaped him. (Nothing could escape.) (p. 21)

Because nothing can escape him everything he sees is put in the category of "equally unimportant". He is a stranger to the world of men, completely objective, and this is a judgement on man as 'Crow hears Fate Knock on the Door' points out:

Yet the prophecy inside him, like a grimace,  
 Was I WILL MEASURE IT ALL AND OWN IT ALL  
 AND I WILL BE INSIDE IT

(p. 23)

Crow's egotism is what gives him the power to survive after "the only face left in the world/Lay broken." ('That Moment', p. 22)

Ekbart Faas suggested while interviewing Hughes in 1970 that 'Crow Alights' and 'That Moment' with 'Notes for a Little Play' hint at a nuclear blast. Hughes accepted the point and said it was "a complete abolition of everything that's been up to this point and Crow is what manages to drag himself out of it in fairly good morale."<sup>54</sup>

This forces us to look at the way the poems unfold since the nuclear blast in 'Notes for a Little Play' is unrelated to that of 'That Moment'. One might be tempted to throw away one's idea of any linear development or conventional narrative but in fact it is just a different kind of linear development. Within the framework of Crow's progress through life, having a clear beginning in the myths of genesis and a clear concluding point with him sitting as 'King of Carrion', there are numerous episodes which could be taking place at any time of his journey. This approach to chronology is very similar to that of the Tain where stories of Cuchulain's youth or death interrupt the narrative of the cattle raid at seemingly random points. In both Crow and the Tain the aim is not to show character and activity so much as the nature of the hero. For this purpose certain themes from the earlier part of the volume are reiterated later on (e.g. 'Crow on the Beach' and 'Crow and the Sea'). The effect is of layers of meaning and development of the myth around certain fixed points.

Time is used mythically in the Crow poems and is therefore subordinate to the actual events. Myths as Levi-Strauss has claimed, suppress time. They take place in the Great Time, called by the Australian

aborigines the 'Dream Time'. In the Dream Time life is not an infinite series of events as it is for Western historicism. Instead events are concentrated around certain primal occurrences and put the emphasis upon spiritual rather than physical verities.

One such central occurrence in Crow is the nuclear blast which links the work to flood narratives like the Epic of Gilgamesh,<sup>55</sup> both being disasters which lead to a starting again, apocalypse before world-renewal, the end intrinsically connected to a new beginning. But in Crow we see numerous violent ends without a new cosmology coming from the ashes, no new heaven and new earth, because to inhabit such a world Crow must himself be made new. The lack of a paradisaical new beginning reflects the pessimism of Schopenhauer and his view of time as the ultimate human bondage. For Schopenhauer Time is one of the consequences of the Fall. "It ceases to persecute only him it has delivered over to boredom."<sup>56</sup> Thus Crow is subjected to the incredibly rapid changes of 'Truth Kills Everybody' or must sit listlessly, "Lonelier than ever", in 'Crow's Playmates'.

In Crow Ted Hughes postulates a world where there are the consequences of a Fall, but without a Paradise which was lost, and which, therefore, cannot be regained. He experiences what Eliade calls "nostalgia for paradise" without a Paradise to believe in.<sup>57</sup> The God of Crow is unable to manage anything more than the same tawdry experiment - an uncreative Creator.

But this is not Beckett's hopeless world. A single hope remains for Hughes, that of new life for old, the creation of paradise by a renovation of the sensibility, the death into life transformation of alchemy and initiatory religion. Crow's bride across the river is his Philosopher's Stone, capable of transmuting base metal into the gold of eternity.



Geoffrey Thurley is absolutely correct when he states in The Ironic Harvest that "The aim of the Crow poems is to emerge."<sup>58</sup> We must wait until Hughes's later poetry to see what kind of world he emerges into and what he emerges as. For Hughes to emerge is to be able to integrate conflicting experiences. Thus Crow is finite but indestructible. He is full of both a raw unselfconscious energy and a massive egotism. He is a mixture of blind defiance and anxious misgivings. He does not know whether to renounce his animal or his human elements. According to Schopenhauer an animal can best cope with the world of pain, but Hughes realizes that this negates the value of pain as initiation. The strongly mythical flavour of the poems is the poet's means of dealing with these aspects of the dilemma of Crow's being. Myth and ritual allow one to become one with Nature without renouncing humanity. Myth reconciles opposites and ritual makes that reconciliation manifest. The cult of Dionysus parallels Crow in the way it dealt with the same potentially murderous forces:

all earthly powers are united in the god; the generating, nourishing, intoxicating rapture; the life-giving inexhaustibility; and the tearing pain, the deathly pallor, the speechless night of having been. (Walter Otto)

The difference is that the ritual of Dionysus was tried and tested, while Crow is a dangerous experiment.

Hughes seems to regard Crow as the precursor of a new beginning, a kind of John the Baptist. He exhibits the same extreme behaviour and also bears a prophecy. But while John said "Prepare the way of the Lord", Crow's only prophecy is of himself and his hope is that:

... I WILL MEASURE IT ALL AND OWN IT ALL  
AND I WILL BE INSIDE IT  
AS INSIDE MY OWN LAUGHTER  
AND NOT STARING OUT AT IT THROUGH WALLS  
OF MY EYE'S COLD QUARANTINE  
FROM A BURIED CELL OF BLOODY BLACKNESS -

(p. 23)

This prophecy is the key to Crow's search and explains why the independent existence of grins and smiles is seen with such horror. Crow is searching for a personal, internal integration with the external and impersonal world that surrounds him. Creation leaves him helpless in 'Crow Hears Fate Knock on the Door' because he cannot sustain a relationship with it. All he can do is examine it like a contemporary scientist:

He studied a stone from the stream.  
He found a dead mole and slowly he took it apart  
Then stared at the gobbets, feeling helpless.

(p. 23)

Crow shows a fundamental lack of confidence in his own prophecy that he "WILL BE INSIDE IT." Instead of being inside his own laughter all he can see is a "grimace ..... Slowly rending the vital fibres."<sup>60</sup>

To emerge to the place in which 'Littleblood' may be prayed to efficaciously both Crow and the reader must journey through poems which are the equivalent of the Bardo Thodol's Dangerous Narrow Pathway, narrow because it is the path of fate. In the Bardo this pathway is the natal passage, and in that sense Crow is not really about Crow's life but solely his birth:

And still he who never has been killed  
Croaks helplessly  
And is only just born. (p. 84)

While John the Baptist prophesied the birth of Jesus, Crow's prophecy is of his own birth. Until he experiences this spiritual birth Crow is only the "half illumined" hierophant of 'Crow Communes'.

In this condition Crow desperately needs some form of ritual to both further the process of illumination and to contain the energies generated by Crow's activity:

Any form of violence - any form of vehement activity - invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe. Once the contact has been made - it becomes difficult to control. Something from beyond ordinary human activity enters.

When the wise men know how to create rituals and dogma, the energy can be contained.<sup>61</sup>

The great weakness and the greatest strength of the Crow poems is that the energy is not controlled by the ritual. The lack of containment may result in gratuitous repetition, unnecessary ugliness and a regular loss of poetic control but it also enables a unique freedom of expression. It drives the poems with unstoppable force, sweeping the reader along with them towards the point of emergence. This is not necessarily the point of hope, not yet anyway, since there is no hope for Crow until he manages to "locate and release his own creator, God's nameless hidden prisoner, whom he encounters repeatedly but always in some unrecognizable form."<sup>62</sup>

In 'Crow Tyrannosaurus' and 'Crow's Account of the Battle' we see his curiosity being whetted for this task. Crow is brought face to face with a world in which each living thing exists by preying upon others. As in 'A Kill' the point is pushed to ugly extremes:

And the dog was a bulging filterbag  
Of all the deaths it had gulped for the flesh and the bones.  
It could not digest their screeching finales.  
Its shapeless cry was a blort of all those voices. (p. 24)

This is not what is commonly accepted as poetic language; but it is not a poet speaking here, instead it is a crow. The crow's songs are "songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language .." Hughes continued to say that such poems "would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say without any other consideration."<sup>63</sup>

'Crow Tyrannosaurus' is one of the poorer attempts at following the above dictum. Viewed solely on Hughes's own terms it is still repetitious and lacking in tightness. The poem makes a similar point to 'Thrushes' in Lupercal. The line "But his eye saw a grub. And his head, trapsprung, stabbed" repeats the opening of the earlier poem with none of its compulsive fascination. The poem instead depends

upon the repetition of the word "weeping" - as if that would make us cry. The same kind of floridity can be found in 'Crow's Account of the Battle', although certain sections show how a "super-ugly" language can have a lyricism of its own. The main problem with both poems, though, is not so much the language as the imbalance in the perspective. For a crow's songs they are too close to a human view and human loyalties. On the other hand they are not close enough to humanity for compassion to come forth from the chaos.

Within the structure of Crow these poems nonetheless serve their purpose. They explain why Crow has now begun to think and to consequently suffer remorse:

Crow thought 'Alas  
Alas ought I  
To stop eating  
And try to become the light?' (p. 24)

But he does not really want to be either saved or the saviour, light being the proof of salvation to the Buddhist and the mark of the cosmic deliverer to the Gnostic. Instead Crow prefers the evidence of Nature contained in his instincts, but is not honest enough to fully admit it. He thus invents the Black Beast (p. 28) to externalize his guilt and avoid developing the malady of conscience. "Crow killed his brother and turned him inside out to stare at his colour./Where is the Black Beast?"

Here Hughes has applied a contemporary myth to the pot-pourri of legends that make up the Crow volume. Whether unconsciously or not he has given Crow's alter-ego the name of the creature that Durham and Yorkshire miners jokingly refer to. Feelings of irrational fear and of the presence of a malevolent force in the pit are jokingly attributed to a Black Dog, as chronicled in the short stories of Sid Chaplin.

This correspondence is not surprising since the miner lives in two worlds, above and below ground. In his 1970 interview with Faas, Hughes

spoke of two worlds which he regarded as equally real, an outer one and an inner one of imagination. In the 1976 'Myth and Education' essay he expresses his feeling that the latter world has been denied by a sick, materialistic society and "has become elemental, chaotic, continually more primitive and beyond our control. It has become a place of demons." Thus both the miner's underworld and the inner psyche have their demon - the Black Beast. "If we do manage to catch a glimpse of our inner selves by some contraption of mirrors, we recognize it with horror - it is an animal crawling and decomposing in a hell."<sup>64</sup> Our act of self-protection is to externalize the horror.

But to regain our lost inheritance, two worlds shared equally, we and Crow must confront the Black Beast and recognize it as part of ourselves. The uncollected Crow poem 'Song of Woe' is about a person's discovery of the problem, the only way to achieving an answer. He sees the world as one of "grief", created things forming a "great wheel of woe." He seeks release from this Karmic wheel by abandoning his world, which fails; and so he is forced to sit on the earth naked, like the shaman, and allow the grief to overwhelm him - "And his mouth filled his eye filled/With the same muddy woe."

Finally, rather than abandoning the world he abandons "his body, his blood" and the earth fades away "Into non-being":

And there at last he had it  
 As his woe struggled out of him  
 With a terrific cry  
 Staring after the earth  
 And stood out there in front of him,  
 His howling transfigured double.

(*Song of Woe*)<sup>65</sup>

The protagonist weeps with relief until - "And at last, tear by tear,/ Something came clear." In its dual themes of clarity through suffering and dealing with the double the poem presages 'Two Eskimo Songs' and Gaudete. (It is also a potential summary of Dostoyevsky's novels.)

'Crow's Account of St. George' shows a man fighting his "howling transfigured double." This man is a scientist who has decided that "everything in the Universe/Is a track of numbers racing towards an answer." This conclusion, which ignores problem for answer, awakes an ordure-covered demon. A total emphasis on the outer world awakes the avenging forces of the inner world, represented by "A bird-head,/Bald, lizard-eyed, the size of a football, on two staggering bird-legs." (p. 31) In panic the man lashes out at the apparitions around him, an "egg-shell object", a "shark-face" and a "belly-ball of hair", only to recover and find that he has killed his wife and children.<sup>66</sup>

The story, which is based upon a Japanese folk tale and which is reminiscent of Hercules' killing of his best friend, his tanist or double, is used as a warning. It tells us that in trying to destroy the demon we become like it. It is a reversal of what Hughes considers to be the "suspect"<sup>67</sup> myth of St. George. Here the dragon/demon is triumphant over the masculine and scientific forces which seek to reduce the world to manageable proportions. This reductive attitude is seen as anti-feminine, and Crow, like the scientist, can thus only encounter the feminine as menacing and ugly. As Keith Sagar has put it:

His adventures bring him into contact with various women and female monsters. Because they are ugly, often horrific, he fights them, or evades them, or in some way mismanages the situation, not realizing that each time he is meeting his own mother, his intended bride.<sup>68</sup>

Both 'Crow's Account of St. George' and 'Crow's Account of the Battle' express a nightmare vision, but while the latter is directly polemic the other uses a more subtle approach via the reworking of both an eastern and a western folktale. 'Crow's Account of St. George' exposes us to the spiritual consequences of the myths and points forward to a greater development of the same method in later work. Here Hughes is starting to deal with mythic patterns in such a way that the

actual pattern is becoming more important than the didactic element it can express.

The poem 'A Grin' develops this tendency, showing forth a disturbing occult quality rather than a lesson. When asked what Laughter, Smile and Grin stood for Hughes replied, "I'm not quite sure what they signify." Ekbert Faas pressed the point and Hughes gave some confirmation as to the nature of 'A Grin':

Most of them appeared as I wrote them. They were usually something of a shock to write. Mostly they wrote themselves quite rapidly, the story was a sort of machine that assembled them, and several of them that seem ordinary enough now<sup>69</sup> arrived with a sense of having done something ... tabu.

These comments explain the supernatural sense of horror in 'A Grin', and give a point of reference which links Crow to Yeats' A Vision, which was based upon automatic writing during a series of his wife's seances.<sup>70</sup>

The namelessness of the grin awakes primitive fears of the unknown and of spirit possession:

There was this hidden grin.  
It wanted a permanent home. It tried faces  
In their forgetful moments, ... (p. 29)

Like 'The Smile' this poem draws attention to the presence of things inside us that we are to a degree aware of, yet unable to define. The lack of definition is the cause of both fear and fascination. Hughes does not want definitions like those of Beckett who outlines three kinds of laugh in his theory of the absurd, and instead concentrates upon negotiations with these forces, forces which are also present, for the same reasons of mystery, in initiatory religion. For Hughes it is the mystery, not so much its content, that opens the human mind to the inner world and spiritual reality. His words on this are both a warning and an encouragement to the critic. "It's easy enough to give interpretations I think and draw possibilities out of them but whether

they'd be the real explanations I don't know."<sup>71</sup>

Hughes contrasts the spiritual response with the scientific:

The objective, scientific, fact watching attitude, and this detached, passively recording attitude, is of no use whatsoever when it comes to dealing with our own minds and hearts. It is useless in the most vital activity of all. The activity of understanding ourselves.<sup>72</sup>

This attitude mediates the static rather than the eternal, giving no true permanence such as the grin looks for:

It tried the face  
In the electric chair to get a tenure  
In eternal death, but that too relaxed. (p. 29)

It looks for the permanence of death rather than of life because it feels it has got a better chance, death lasting so much longer than life. Hughes is beginning to face the central question of initiatory religion - how to deal with death and exploit it to advantage. But at this stage the enquiry is abstract and impersonal and the discovery that death can release a smile as well as a rictus is not fully developed in Crow.

'The Smile' expresses a metaphysic where the perceptions are formed in the sense rather than the mind, allowing one to meet:

... this smile  
That rose through his torn roots  
Touching his lips, altering his eyes  
And for a moment  
Mending everything

Before it swept out and away across the earth. (p. 63)

The poet's approach is the same as that which he applauds in the work of Janos Pilinszky, whose work he translated in 1976 after eight or nine years acquaintance:

Though the Christian culture has been stripped off so brutally, and the true condition of the animal exposed in its ugliness, and words have lost their meaning - yet out of that rise the poems, whose words are manifestly crammed with meaning. Something has been said which belies neither the reality nor the silence. More than that the reality has been redeemed. The very symbols of the horror are the very things he has redeemed.



They are not redeemed in any religious sense. They are redeemed, precariously in some all-too-human sense, somewhere in the pulsing mammalian nervous-system, by a feat of human consecration: a provisional, <sup>93</sup>last-ditch 'miracle' which we recognize, here, as poetic.

Pilinszky's poems are some of the very few which can be compared with Crow, for instance 'Sin':

You are still a child but already your limbs  
almost deliberately dazzle  
in the dawning  
system of curves.  
And, like a secret smile,  
if not your hip, your shoulder  
forgets you, and betrays you.  
I see you from head to heel.

I look at you, till I can no longer bear it.  
One move  
and my life starts to slip softly  
like a crumbling sand-pit.  
You are still fragile - escape  
before it reaches you!  
Your head topples with a nod  
It was hit by the first blow.

The collapsing years  
mine towards you, greedily.  
Like starved sticks  
the immense forest comes to life.  
My nights! The shivering  
mob of my nights!  
They pounce on you bodily -  
a morsel of bread.

They snap your young wrist  
they crush your back  
they are seeking the happiness they never  
found with me.  
The lost child,  
blinding youth!  
And they throw you away empty  
like a gutted sack.

Is this what you are saving for me?  
I watch you, detached, numb.  
Where is the shoulder that flared  
the hint of its splendour?  
My hands hang, confused,  
in empty air.  
Would it be you that was killed?

Would I be the one who killed her? (1947)

This poem deals with the same kind of issues as Crow. There is the sense of human fragility that we find in 'Crow's Vanity'. There are touches of the same cartoon-like horror found in 'Revenge Fable' - "Your head topples with a nod." "My nights" are like the grin: "they are seeking the happiness they never/found with me." They have a life of their own; they can snap a wrist and crush a back.

The persona's response is the same as that of Prometheus, also confronted with the panorama of suffering concentrated into a single occasion - "I watch you, detached, numb." The bewilderment at the end leads to the same dawning of realization as in 'Crow's Account of St. George' - "Would I be the one that killed her?"

But a completely different perspective is given when one looks at the poem's title - 'Sin'. An aspect of the same force as the grin and the smile has been named. We can now see how great its power is. Sin, in many ways, is what Hughes is also talking about, separation from the divine, the source of truth. He also exposes a world in its ugliness, where words have lost their meaning, where Crow is asked to say 'LOVE' and can only retch. The world of both poets is equally bleak, the difference is that Pilinszky still thinks it worth praying this:

Only let me trust you, God.  
I want your nearness so much,  
shivering  
makes the love of loves even fierier.

Bury me in your embrace.  
Do not give me up to the frost.  
Even if my air is used up  
my calling will not tire. ('Complaint')

Hughes wants to meet the divine, but cannot cope with the deity. He can only speak of the Great Mother of Nature, the closest he has got to the source of things, in the third person. This is the feminine figure of 'Crow's Undersong' who "cannot come all the way." Any further contact with the Ultimate Being is hampered by his vision of

the sleeping demiurge in 'Crow Communes', "a great carcass" who has been exhausted by his efforts at creation.

While Pilinszky is prepared to seek a religious redemption in 'The Prayer of Van Gogh', Hughes contents himself with ridicule of the "corrupt despot" of 'Crow Communes'. It is this attitude which undermines the claim that Crow is searching for his imprisoned creator and perhaps explains why he does not find him/her in the Crow volume.

In the earlier quoted passage from his introduction to Pilinszky's Selected Poetry Hughes contrasted redemption "in a religious sense" with a "poetic" redemption, where "The very symbols of the horror are the very things he (the poet) has redeemed." This is a salvation of things not living beings and therefore inadequate. This facile conclusion is in fact not followed through in the poems where a materialistic view of salvation is ridiculed. Crow's literalism about Christian communion is the "first jest", a "cipher". Crow may tear a piece off the sleeping God and swallow it but that does not mean that revelation comes through digestion!

There can be no true redemption effected by such a ramshackle figure as the God of 'Crow Communes' and it is because of this that Hughes turns to a "poetic" redemption of such symbols as the anti-Logos. In Hughes's cosmology even the incarnate word of God needs redemption, an idea held by the Gnostics, but he has also added a modern perspective, since in 'A Disaster' this new Logos manifests the destructive force of Freud's Thanatos:

There came news of a word.  
Crow saw it killing men. He ate well.  
He saw it bulldozing  
Whole cities to rubble. Again he ate well. (p. 33)

Rather than breathing life in to the inanimate, this word sucks life out of the living, "sucking the cities/Like the nipples of a sow/ Drinking out all the people." Crow contains numerous reversals of



'Crow's Fall' is the first time we truly encounter Crow as hero, and from this point onwards his actions echo those of classical heroes. The poem anticipates 'Crow's Battle Fury' which contains lines taken almost direct from the Tain Bo Cuailgne, describing Cuchulain's battle fury. Both poems centre around an expression of Crow's 'ferg' as laughter, the same laugh found in 'In Laughter'.

'Crow and the Sea' is a variation on another Cuchulain story, that of his death. In the grip of a magically induced delusion the hero fought the sea, as in Yeats' 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea'. In contrast Crow just walks away. The true hero cannot resist the challenge of the symbol of eternity. Crow can. (It is also worth considering another myth of Cuchulain's death, embodied in the memorial to the Irishmen killed at the General Post Office in Dublin during the 1916 Easter Rising. A statue shows the dying hero defying his enemies with a scald crow perched upon his shoulder, perhaps an agent of the deity Lug, his father.)

Crow is also shown as a failed hero in 'Oedipus Crow', where he is tripped up by death in a spectacular prat-fall, reminiscent of a Buster Keaton film. He is a failed Hercules in 'Truth Kills Everybody', since although he does not let go his grip on Proteus he is "blown to nothing" when the god turns himself into a bomb. These episodes are both initiatory ordeals and reruns of third-rate Westerns (probably starring Carson MacReared, a juvenile creation of the poet). They depend on the same criterion - survival of the hero. Crow has a kind of superiority over the classical hero since he always survives, but in doing so he misses their glory and continued life in the memory of admirers. Thus in 'Crowego' he is shown as the only author, protagonist and reader of his epic tale, a hollow victory:

The gold melted out of Hercules' ashes  
Is an electrode in Crow's brain.

Drinking Beowulf's blood, and wrapped in his hide,  
Crow communes with poltergeists out of old ponds.

His wings are the stiff back of his only book,  
Himself the only page - of solid ink. (p. 61)

After the holocaust the only remaining epic is that of Crow.

It is interesting to see which heroes Crow is explicitly linked with. Like Ulysses he is a wanderer, searching for a home. Like Hercules he relies on brute strength and must go through a number of labours before he can rest. Like Beowulf he seeks a horror which lies at the periphery of human consciousness. The Black Beast is Crow's Grendel and the hags in the poems echo Grendel's mother, the Sea Hag.

These three heroes are linked by their resourcefulness and active, violent response to their troubles. In contrast are several of a different kind of hero, one who is more a trickster than a warrior. Prometheus is the foremost of these and with Christ and Oedipus is a passive sufferer rather than a robust freebooter. The second trio are also men who die an expiatory death or seek a meaning in their suffering.

Oedipus is the type of the man in 'Criminal Ballad'. Whatever he does it results in suffering, dislocation and death:

There was a man and when he was born  
A woman fell between the ship and the jetty  
At a heave from the moon and the sun  
Her pleading cries were humbled out (p. 38)

'Criminal Ballad' also deals with exactly the same sequence of events found in Hughes's adaptation of Seneca's Oedipus for Peter Brook's theatre company:

... the face of Oedipus contorted like a  
rabid dog he had begun to scream a bellowing  
animal anger agony tearing his throat

his fingers had stabbed deep into his eyesockets ...  
(Seneca's Oedipus, p. 51)

In 'Criminal Ballad' events are compressed and the agony of guilt de-emphasized, but the result is the same:

And when he began to shout to defend his hearing  
 And shake his vision to splinters  
 His hands covered with blood suddenly (P. 39)

Like Oedipus the protagonist of this poem instinctively runs away from his children, "Holding his bloody hands clear of everything" in case he precipitates even more pain and guilt. Finally his weeping becomes laughter. He has fully embraced the world of 'In Laughter'.

'Oedipus Crow' concentrates on the second part of the Oedipus myth in which he is pursued throughout the earth by the vengeful harpies. This has close parallels with the pursuit of the soul by demons of the Bardo-realm in the Bardo Thodol. In fact one is a psychological analogue of the other. In this poem Crow is lame, "One legged, gutless and brainless", like Oedipus whose name means lame-footed in Greek.

The poem is an ironic comment on both the Bardo and the Oedipus story. In the Book of the Dead to run away from the demon leads to an unwanted rebirth, which in Buddhist terms is worse than death. The journeying soul is meant to be chastened and taught by his failure and achieve Nirvana in the next Bardo state. In 'Oedipus Crow' Crow is both warned and corrected but remains unchanged. He is unrepentant because he knows neither sin nor guilt. He cannot say with Oedipus:

... and you cannot pay you cannot possible pay  
 not in this lifetime  
 you need to be born again suffer for everything  
 again. (Oedipus, p. 50)

Crow rejects both the Bardo's offer of nirvana and Oedipus's obsession with rebirth, and so his suffering remains meaningless. His condition is expressed in Pilinszky's 'Sin':

- And so we atone, but our atonement  
cannot appease  
no suffering  
can redeem our hells.

This is why in 'The Contender' the protagonist's suffering is called a "senseless trial of strength." He has nailed himself with nails of nothing, hoping that his suffering will be redemptive, but he lacks any true spiritual context to make it so. He is like Prometheus chained to Mt. Elbruz, self-chained by his refusal to divulge his secret to Zeus his captor. Neither the Contender nor Prometheus are Christ figures since they are both seeking redemption for themselves, rather than for others. They are both trying Crow's way, change through suffering alone, not the way of Christ (and in one sense the shaman) whose death is far more important than his suffering. It is death that Crow, the Contender and Prometheus are each unable to confront.

(As in Christianity suffering for the shaman is only a means to an end, that of receiving a new body and becoming a 'man of knowledge'. The shaman knows that there is no salvation by suffering alone, as does the Christian, but one looks for the answer inside himself and the other outside.)

'The Contender' should be read together with 'Crow on the Beach' and 'Crow and the Sea', the last poem drawing together the themes of the first two. Crow is shown as a creature of only two out of the four classical elements, earth and air. The fire only chars him. The water makes him fearful and inadequate. He is thus symbolically denied certain initiatory possibilities. Both Christian water-baptism and Heraclitan fire-baptism are denied him and he must find his answers in the heavens or in the earth.

Heraclitan doctrine clarifies this symbolism, for Heraclitus taught that through 'strife' fire changes into water, water into earth



and back again. Crow is earth but does not want to be made one with water again. Instead of transmuting him like some alchemical metal 'strife' only tears him apart:

His utmost gaping of brain in his tiny skull  
Was just enough to wonder, about the sea,

What could be hurting so much? (P. 40)

In contrast, in a Manichean<sup>76</sup> universe, fire and earth are polarities, not part of a Heraclitan circle. Heraclitus lived in a unified world where Hades and Dionysus are one (see Gaudete - epigraphs) while Manicheism is dualistic, prefiguring the Freudian separation of Hades and Dionysus and Thanatos and Eros. Crow is a victim of this dualism. Thus water is not a unifying agent, part of a circle, but a dividing agent. Crow is shown in the water poems as on the wrong side of the Red Sea and unable or unwilling to take a step of faith.

In the Crow poems water is always linked with eternity and eternal life. In 'Crow and the Sea' the sea is even equated with a crucified saviour figure - "He turned his back and he marched away from the sea/ As a crucified man cannot move." (p. 82) But this crucified figure is not the son of the Father in Heaven, but the Contender, the stubbornly stupid son of the demiurge. The Contender's passion is played out among cliffs and gorges like that of Prometheus, not upon a hill like that of Jesus. The Contender in fact closely resembles Aeschylus's Prometheus, obstinate and defiant, dominated by a kind of martyr complex.

The final main Oedipal poem is 'Song for a Phellus' which portrays a "Daddy", reminiscent of Sylvia Plath's murderous father/husband/God in her poem 'Daddy', who has walled up his son in the prison of his mother's womb. He is in league with a god who is just a bigger version

of himself. This poem develops two areas of the poet's personal mythology. One is the image of the father-divinity imprisoning his son which is found again in Orghast and Prometheus on his Crag. The other repeats the splitting in two of the mother which we have already encountered in 'Crow's Account of St. George'. Oedipus' splitting of the Sphinx and his "Mammy like a melon" will also be found again as Krogon's murder of his family in the play Orghast. The poem portrays the opposite to the Heraclitan circle of life. It is a circle of murder in which Oedipus finds himself inside his eviscerated mother, doomed to repeat his unnatural act. She will not stay dead and he will only destroy himself once again by his matricide, as in 'Revenge Fable'.

The mother figures are representatives of Mother Nature, completely elemental and multi-faceted. In 'Crow's Undersong' she is mother, bride, daughter and hag. She is naked and singing or made dumb by needless trappings of feathers and fur. "She stays/Even after life even among the bones" because she will bring new life out of the compost. But paradoxically she "cannot last" since her dominating principle is that of mutability (Spencer met her in the Mutabilitie Cantos of The Fairie Queene). She has been badly treated and so appears to be a hag and Crow, like Oedipus, does not therefore appreciate her as mother and wife; she is only the target for his violence.

Paternal abuse has not only affected the Great Mother who is shown as wrinkled with cities, but corrupts the very idea of woman. This explains the vaginal obsession found in 'Fragment of an Ancient Tablet' and its "gouts of blood and babies." The opposition of 'above' and 'below' shows a split in creation analogous to the splitting of Crow's mama and the scientist's children in 'Crow's Account of St. George'. But this image of failure has its obverse. The 'Ancient Tablet' is the Emerald Tablet or Smaragdine Tablet which summarized the doctrines

of Hermes Trismegistus. It was studied for purposes of illumination by numerous mystery cults and by the more recent Sufic masters. It is in fact quoted in full by Idries Shah whose book The Sufis was reviewed by Hughes in 1964. The hidden message is that the symbols of horror are the means of redemption.

Thus the duplicity of the lovers in 'Lovesong'<sup>77</sup> which results in a mutual possession has the nuclear blast of 'Notes for a Little Play' as its antidote. The explosion leaves only two survivors, a new Adam and Eve. They are "Horrors - hairy and slobbery, glossy and raw", but they are also humanity's hope. These mutations are the new primitives, naked like their Mother. Their danse macabre becomes a sexual union:

And this is the marriage of these simple creatures -  
Celebrated here, in the darkness of the sun,

Without guest or God. (p. 86)

They have been freed from the "virus of God", the God of William Blake's 'Earth's Answer':

"Selfish father of men!  
"Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!  
"Can delight,  
"Chain'd in night,  
"The virgins of youth and morning bear?"<sup>78</sup>

This God restricted sexual activity to the night. After the "nuclear glare" the primal parents can celebrate in the "darkness of the sun." The jealous restrictions of Jehovah have been overthrown. Jealousy is also a central characteristic of Hughes's demiurge, as in 'Genesis of Evil', an uncollected Crow poem:

When Adam relaxed  
And Heaven closed for the day  
Eve began again  
With what her little snake, her familiar,  
Had whispered while she slept.

Every day Adam could hardly wait  
For Heaven to close  
And the next installment  
Of the snake's bloody love-thriller  
From Eve's lovely lips.

When God heard about this from Michael  
 He came creeping close, in the form of a mouse,  
 And listened -  
 It was there hidden in the bush      79  
 That He became blind with Jealousy.

Hughes, like Blake, sees the earth as being in bondage to this  
 jealous Jehovah. As a result neither the Great Mother nor one's  
 earthly love can be properly addressed:

He wanted to sing about her

He didn't want comparisons with the earth or anything to do with it

Oversold like detergents  
 He did not even want words  
 Waving their long tails in public  
 With their prostitute's exclamations ('Crow Tries the Media', p. 46)

The moment a sound comes from Crow's beak "her shape dimmed." Crow  
 rightly distrusts words because they are on God's side. They have  
 nothing to do with the singing Earth-Mother who "cannot manage words"  
 ('Crow's Undersong'), who must herself be sung to, wooed and adored.  
 That is why Crow sings for her not just his undersong but 'Robin Song',  
 'Owl's Song' and 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song'.

These are songs of Experience, not of Innocence, but like Blake's  
Songs of Experience these too have a prophetic hope of freedom. For  
 Blake the chained Earth has herself become an agent of oppression due to  
 her own bondage:<sup>80</sup>

Thou, Mother of my Mortal part,  
 With cruelty didst mould my Heart,  
 And with false self-deceiving tears  
 Didst bind my Nostrils, Eyes & Ears:

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay,  
 And me to Mortal Life betray.  
 The Death of Jesus set me free:  
 Then what have I to do with thee? ('To Tirzah')

Hughes is too suspicious to turn to Blake's Jesus or Pilinszky's  
 "comfortless" God. His hope derives its energy from more pagan sources.

In 'Fleeing from Eternity' the man obtains earth's song after

looking at the earth "through blood and pain." His initiatory suffering is like that of the couple in 'Notes for a Little Play'. The two poems show different aspects of shamanic initiation. "The song was worth it" is the eskimo's opinion. The mutant couple, beyond opinions, just act, and a marriage is celebrated. One poem centres on the actual suffering which goes with revelation. The other hints at its effect. The nuclear glare becomes a twentieth century "magical heat" where "the excess of power" (as a result of initiation) "is experienced as a very vivid warmth."<sup>81</sup> Also the couple are "raw" like the South American Indians whose skin is scraped until the 'spiritual' skin is reached.

So what is this song which brings revelation and gives us hope in the ruins of a blasted civilization? Hughes would probably say that it is completely individual, a revelation that is hinted at in the poem 'Glimpse', which is the nearest that Crow gets to a full hierophany. In eating God he was only "half-illuminated". But now he has seen what Blake articulated as God sitting in a tree. Crow's song to the leaves turns his gaze outside himself, and the leaves become for him a manifestation of the sacred. At last he can worship - speak in the second person rather than the third.

This is the culmination of a progressive growth in Crow's consciousness. Though it is dangerous to make the poems too linear in development, one can see this growth being activated as a result of Crow's confrontation with the sea in 'Crow on the Beach'. Before this poem there seems to be no hint of consciousness of self in Crow. His egotism is so monumental that he does not need to think in terms of self-hood. He has the total self-confidence of the animal, completely unaffected by his errors.

But after 'Crow on the Beach' we begin to encounter poems like 'Crow's Vanity', 'Crow's Nerve Fails' and 'Crow Sickened'. 'Crow's

'Vanity' is his first attempt in the volume to look at himself. His vanity, the desire "for a glimpse of the usual grinning face" has opened him up to self-consciousness. This is the thin end of the wedge, since vanity is a symptom of insecurity, and, as 'Crow's Nerve Fails' points out, insecurity is founded upon a sense of guilt.

The insecurity comes from a "vision of impermanence, of the hanging gardens of Babylon, the "mistings of civilization" which are dispersed by one brush of the arm. The transience of culture reminds Crow of his own finitude. His birth has committed him to exist in temporality. Now "His prison is the earth" ('Crow's Nerve Fails'). Since he is imprisoned by the earth (cf. 'To Tirzah'), he reasons that he must be guilty of some unknown crime. Not knowing his crime he cannot ask for mercy, thus "He cannot be forgiven", so "Trying to remember his crimes/Heavily he flies." (p. 47)

Thus a desire to know is born at the same time as Crow discovers guilt:

Is he his own strength?  
 What is its signature?  
 Or is he a key, cold-feeling  
 To the fingers of prayer? ('Crow Frowns', p. 50)

Crow begins to ask questions, particularly about where he derives his being from and why, the basic questions of sentience. Crow feels like a spare part in creation "waiting for something/To use him for some everything." Why was he brought forth from nothing? Was God just doing a few tricks to entertain the angels as Crow suspects in 'Conjuring in Heaven'?

The story of Crow's growth is interspersed by violent physical encounters with a rapidly changing universe, which accelerate the journey into anxiety. Thoughts crush Crow, choke him or bewilder him as in 'Magical Dangers'. In 'Crow Goes Hunting' Crow tries words

instead, but they cannot even cope with a "bounding hare". In 'Crow Improvises' self-annihilation replaces the destruction of other creatures:

And so the smile not even Leonardo  
 Could have fathomed  
 Flew off into the air, the rubbish heap of laughter  
 Screams, discretions, indiscretions etcetera (p. 65)

The frantic attempt to strike the spark that will "scour him to ashes" like a Phoenix is one response to Crow's growing realization of his condition. But the next poem, 'Crowcolour', reminds us that, unlike the many-coloured Phoenix, Crow is "Blacker/Than any blindness." In fact rather than being consumed he ends up as 'Crow Blacker than Ever', a blackness linked to his egotism, "Crying: 'This is my Creation',/ Flying the black flag of himself." (p. 69) 'Crow's Song of Himself' is a similar statement of self-sufficiency, but this is deceptive. In 'Crow Sickened' "His illness was something could not vomit him up", Crow experiences not only existential anxiety, but also existential nausea. Another aspect of the illness is shown in 'Crow's Playmates':

Lonely Crow created the gods for playmates -  
 But the mountain god tore free

And Crow fell back from the wall-face of mountains  
 By which he was so much lessened. (p. 60)

Crow is seeking, if not to be free of his condition, to at least make it palatable. But he is left "lonelier than ever", faced with the unchanged fact that "He was what his brain could make nothing of."

The act of creating seems pointless, not knowing who created him, nor why he was created. All Crow's aspirations founder upon the rock of the material universe, the realm of mutability, death and decay. In 'Crow Sickened' Crow:

Decided to get death, but whatever  
 Walked into his ambush  
 Was always his own body. (p. 74)

Crow's own material being is always in the way. He strikes his enemy,

fear, and "He felt the blow./Horrid, he fell." Divided against himself Crow is always doomed to seek and never find, to suffer without discovering meaning.

In 'Truth Kills Everybody' Crow finds Proteus, the god who always tells the truth, to put his question to him. In this poem Proteus is in fact Nereus, called by Homer "The Old One of the Sea". Hercules sought Nereus in order to discover the way to the Hesperides during his labours. Nereus challenged him to a wrestling match, during which he took various shapes to shake Hercules' grip, but finally submitted and told the hero the way. Crow's experience is slightly different:

And he held it he held it and held it and

BANG!

He was blasted to nothing. (p. 83)

Though the god always tells the truth, truth kills everybody. But instead of death leading to rebirth, in Crow's case death only leads to a re-creation.

But in all this Crow does not give way to the human feeling of despair, despite his other anthropomorphic attitudes. Crow's energy "invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe"<sup>82</sup> which gives him the power to continue. Crow's problem is that he will not accept the energy in other things. He doesn't know how to deal with energy outside himself, with a constantly changing creation. His dilemma is that of modern man, stripped of the structures of religion to channel the elemental energy. "If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you"<sup>83</sup> To be truly reborn Crow must accept the energy, and through "the machinery of religion" keep it under control.

The alternative is put forward in 'A Bedtime Story':



Once upon a time there was a person  
Almost a person

Somehow he could not quite see  
Somehow he could not quite hear  
He could not quite think  
Somehow his body, for instance,  
Was intermittent

(p. 71)

This echoes God's word through the prophet Isaiah to Israel "Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive." Isaiah asks how long this will continue. The reply is:

Until cities lie waste  
without inhabitants  
and houses without men,  
and the land is utterly desolate. (Isaiah 6 v 11)

It is no wonder that in 'A Bedtime Story' "As if to welcome his glance/An earthquake shook a city onto its people" (p. 71) Hughes sees Western man as passively "frozen" in front of the television set, oblivious to the holocaust, "in attitudes of total disengagement, a sort of anaesthetized unconcern."<sup>84</sup> As a result the television set dreams for us and "We are dreaming a perpetual massacre":

And when the seamonster surfaced and stared at the rowboat  
Somehow his eyes failed to click  
And when he saw the man's head cleft with a hatchet  
Somehow staring blank swallowed his entire face  
Just at the crucial moment  
Then disgorged it again whole  
As if nothing had happened (p. 72)

We now realize that Crow's objectivity is that of the camera; Crow is showing us our dreams in action replay. "That smell of psychosis which is very easy to detect"<sup>85</sup> is now expressed in poems rather than on the television. Hughes's hope is to achieve a cure for the psychosis by bringing it into the open. The images raised cannot be explained and then disposed of, but they must not be surrendered to either. "'I give up', he said. He gave up./Creation had failed again." (p. 72)

In contrast to the person in 'A Bedtime Story', Crow is the one who never gives up. In 'Crow and Stone', his enemy stone "battered

itself featureless/While Crow grew performance nimbler." (p. 84) He is perfectly adapted to survival, a Darwinian dream. He will inherit the earth "his mere eyeblink/Holding the very globe in terror", but in doing so he has become a monster, and though he has never been killed, Crow "is only just born", croaking "helplessly." It is not enough not to give up. Blind survival is as blind as despair.

While Crow is blind to spiritual things his every act will be a joke; dangerous, macabre and effective, but still a joke. After the impressive litany of 'Crow's Song of Himself', "Crow stopped his beak and started in on the two thieves." (p. 73) In 'A Horrible Religious Error' when Crow saw the serpent he "Grabbed this creature by the slackskin nape,/Beat the hell out of it, and ate it." (p. 45) He is bound to the world of cartoon and the television. 'A Horrible Religious Error' is a kind of script for a new morality play. Enter the serpent, staring defiantly at the audience. God grimaces with panic. Adam and Eve collapse in tears whispering "'Your will is our peace'." The effect is of a camera panning across the stage. Then of course the hero leaps to the rescue, except it is Crow, who peers shortsightedly and, motivated purely by instinct, pecks at the worm. The scenario is now more like the kind of morality play favoured by Ionesco and Arrabal.

'Apple Tragedy' and 'Crow Blacker than Ever' have the same atmosphere of farce. God is trying out his party tricks again, trying to make himself popular, and invents cider. This is effective with Adam who says "Be my god'." But the serpent curls up into a questionmark until Eve, having drunk, calls him over for a "wild time." The tale rapidly becomes a sleazy domestic drama, part of the "bloody love-thriller" in 'Genesis of Evil' which keeps Paradise entertained after "Heaven closed for the day."

Adam tries to hang himself. Eve cries rape and stamps on the serpent's head, a new perspective on the Biblical 'bruising of the serpent's head':

Now whenever the snake appears she screeches  
'Here it comes again! Help! Help!'  
Then Adam smashes a chair on its head,  
And God says: 'I am well pleased'

And everything goes to hell. ('Apple Tragedy' p. 78)

'Crow Blacker than Ever' shows the consequences of turning upon the serpent, the monster who is really our mother:

When God, disgusted with man,  
Turned towards Heaven.  
And man, disgusted with God,  
Turned towards Eve,  
Things looked like falling apart.

But Crow Crow  
Crow nailed them together,  
Nailing Heaven and earth together -

So man cried, but with God's voice.  
And God bled, but with man's blood.

Then heaven and earth creaked at the joint  
Which became gangrenous and stank -  
A horror beyond redemption.

The agony did not diminish.

Man could not be man nor God God. (p. 69)

In this poem God and man turn from each other, resulting in the 'absentee God' or Deus Otiosus of primitive societies. In Shamanism Mircea Eliade describes the phenomenon:

... Supreme Beings gradually lose their active place in the cult, giving way to religious forms that are more 'dynamic' and 'familiar' ... The magico-religious complex that has come to be called 'matriarchy' accentuates the transformation of a celestial god into a deus otiosus. The reduction or even the total loss in religious currency of uranian Supreme Beings is sometimes indicated in myths concerning a primordial and paradisaical time when communications between heaven and earth were easy and accessible to everyone; as the result of some happening (especially a ritual fault), these communications were broken off and the Supreme Beings withdrew to the highest sky.

The world of Crow closely corresponds with this formulation. 'Crow's

'Undersong' shows the new interest in the more dynamic mother-figure. A ritual fault is present in 'Crow's Fall' and is re-told in a different form in 'Crow Blacker than ever'. The poet's addition to the pattern derives from Gnosticism; this is the presence of two levels of Supreme Being, only one of whom is actually present in the poems.

The true Creator is the demiurge's prisoner, as we have seen. Thus the real Supreme Being is for Hughes not one but two steps removed from His creation. He is both absentee and prisoner, and is only knowable through his wife, the Great Mother, the woman of 'Crow's Undersong' and 'Fleeing from Eternity'.

The role of the shaman in such a dislocated universe is to bridge the gap between heaven and earth. As the result of his mystical death the shaman is able to move freely between the two spheres, "to relive a state inaccessible to the rest of mankind."<sup>87</sup> The fact that Crow is seeking contact with the divine therefore makes him a prospective shaman. The problem is, as always, his indestructibility which precludes any true mystical death.

Because Crow seeks falsely to practice as a true shaman he only causes unnecessary pain. In 'Crow Blacker than ever' one of his plans for reconciliation is the Incarnation of Jesus, regarded as an arbitrary attempt at "Nailing Heaven and earth together." Hughes rejects the Incarnation because it postulates a God who is near to mankind, but embraces the Cross, to which he seems to believe that all humanity is born. 'Snake Hymn' is Crow's statement of this belief:

The blood in Eve's body  
That slid from her womb -  
Knotted on the cross  
It had no name. (p. 87)

In Crow it is the snake who is "God's only son", as in 'The Contender', not Jesus Christ. The "empty husk" of the snake's shed

skin is the equivalent of the empty tomb and is the proof that the snake has a new skin, a symbol of initiation. Among the Yamana of Tierra del Fuego the purpose of ritual rubbing of the face is to remove the old skin for a new one, visible only to initiates.<sup>88</sup> To Aborigine shamans in Australia the touch of the snake's skin against one's own imparts knowledge.

In Crow the only way out of the crucifixion of the created condition seems to be through an altered state, an initiation out of nothing and into a concrete yet spiritual reality. In a characteristically subversive fashion Hughes has made the serpent the epitome of that spiritual reality. It is not a new idea, in fact, for the Christian-Gnostic sect the Naassenes revered the serpent of Genesis, who to them was the alleged divine seducer and impregnator of Eve, a belief that is directly reproduced in 'Apple Tragedy'. For Hughes the serpent represents all that Puritan Christianity has suppressed.<sup>89</sup> For St. George to kill the dragon is to him "a suppression or denying of what in these stories therefore becomes evil, becomes demonic or satanic" and results in the establishment of an "artificial, slightly unreal" moral ideal.<sup>90</sup>

Crow has been misunderstood as a blast of nihilism, but it is in reality a corrective extreme. Hughes, after complaining about the fable of St. George to questioners at a symposium on children's literature, went on to say what he felt was the role of poetry - "to realign our extreme, exclusive attitude with our natural environment and our natural biological supply of life."<sup>91</sup> Whereas sequences like 'Moortown' and Remains of Elmet deal with the environment, Crow, like Gaudete, deals with the "supply of life."

Shamans invoke the life-energy by the means of ecstatic experiences, expressed by dancing, and more importantly, song. Through the

sequence Crow sings a number of such songs. But his songs only show one of the two characteristics of shaman song. Hughes's "supply of life" is hindered in the poems by the fact that his hero cannot 'sing into life' and can only experience shaman songs in their other role as "comrades in loneliness."<sup>92</sup>

Sometimes, though, Crow sings about what he himself cannot experience. This is the case in 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song'. The title refers to the primitive idea of mythical animal ancestors. Crow in this song has taken the elephant as his totem, and thus it is both him and his primordial ancestor.

Totem songs and shaman songs are usually separate,<sup>93</sup> but this is a totem song about Crow's ancestor's shamanic powers. The hyenas do the elephant a favour by their disassembling of his body since "At the Resurrection/The Elephant got himself together with correction." (p. 58) He becomes "a walking sixth sense" and goes upon his way, while the hyenas are condemned to frustrated running - "opposite and parallel." The elephant's song is deep in the forest's verdure, the hyenas' "putrefying laughter" is confined to the desert. The elephant sings about Paradise, the hyenas about corruption.

Through his song Crow seeks to identify with his claimed ancestor. He pathetically claims that:

Then it was delicate and small  
It was not freakish at all  
Or melancholy (p. 57)

This would seem to be an oblique reference to his own freakishness and growing anxiety. In fact he is really trapped in the same desert as the hyenas. He is the King of Carrion, ruling an empty kingdom, or in 'Dawn's Rose', "talking to stony skylines":

Desolate is the crow's puckered cry  
As an old woman's mouth  
When the eyelids have finished  
And the hills continue. (p. 59)

The beauty of 'Dawn's Rose' and 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song' only serves to highlight his isolation and his inability to sing properly. Crow's songs truly become comrades in loneliness and they are also about his other comrades, the Robin and the Owl. The robin seems to be a familiar of the imprisoned Deus Otiosus. Both are hunted kings. Both have been lost. Both can say:

I am the maker  
 Of the world  
That rolls to crush  
And silence my knowledge. ('Robin Song' p. 52)

The robin's mastery through gnosis cannot be maintained because his father the wind "can't recognize me though I cry." Neither can Crow recognize the true nature of his companion.

In 'Owl's Song' Crow encounters a false companion, like the Green Mother in Cave Birds. His song embraces the materialistic philosophy of the supplanting demiurge and the Western scientist, his acolyte:<sup>94</sup>

He sang  
 How the swan blanched forever  
 How the wolf threw away its telltale heart  
 And the stars dropped their pretence (p. 55)

His assertion that "everything had nothing more to lose" is brought to stunned silence when faced with the majesty of the Heavens, the tiger which is the created Universe.

'Robin Song' and 'Owl's Song' are distinctive in the uncharacteristic thinking into the lives of a creature other than Crow himself. 'Crow's Undersong' and 'Littleblood' are distinctive in that Crow's hard-won preparedness to look outside himself results in acts of invocation. Crow has discovered both a deity worth worshipping and a familiar spirit which he can relate to. Littleblood is a true shaman's helper. He is both drummer and dancer, the one who can show Crow the way to the initiatory experience that has so far eluded him, although tantalized by the threshold experience of the poem 'A Glimpse':

O littleblood, drumming in a cow's skull  
 Dancing with a gnat's feet  
 With an elephant's nose with a crocodile's tail.

Grown so wise grown so terrible  
 Sucking death's mouldy tits.

Sits on my finger, sing in my ear, O littleblood. ('Littleblood', p. 94)

Having subverted rather than rejected more sophisticated initiatory systems such as Buddhism and Gnosticism, Hughes has chosen shamanism as his major model for the initiatory experience in the Crow poems. The poems we must finally consider are the clearest statement of this decision. 'Fleeing from Eternity', one of 'Two Eskimo Songs' shows the basis for such a decision. Under the pressure of geological time and of the realization of the dominance of death, the eskimo seeks to harness the powers which seem to be his enemies. Rather than St. George's destruction of what he fears there is the desire for an accomodation with these forces.

What the eskimo does next is the beginning of shamanism - "He got a sharp rock he gashed holes in his face/Through the blood and pain he looked at the earth." Blood and pain become twin lenses of the spectacles through which he now regards the earth. Now he can see "a woman singing out of her belly", a woman that he has never seen before. The song she gives him is also composed of blood and pain, but it is the song of life, the second kind of song that a shaman sings, the kind that has been denied to Crow.

This song and its companion are like repeated lessons from Crow's new-found spirit helper. He has ceased from play and the false teaching of the demiurge found in 'Crow's First Lesson'. 'How Water Began to Play' is a different perspective on the same truth. From wanting to live water goes to the stage of wanting to die. These are the paths of materialism and of existential despair. Water also searches, like the



Buddhist, for "nothingness", not knowing that the very act of searching denies the goal. Only when water has ceased to strive does true clarity become possible. This is not the stillness of Zen meditation, but the rest of one who has suffered, the result of involvement rather than detachment. 'How Water Began to Play' parallels 'King of Carrion' where Crow discovers that he has reached a dead end, ruler of an empty kingdom. It is into this enforced inactivity that the eskimo's answer comes.

If the shamanic element is as strong as suggested then the most important doorway for Crow's chances of initiation is to be found in the "skulls" and "the scaffold of bones" that surround him. The experience of Crow closely parallels that of the shaman:

Even before setting out to acquire one or more helping spirits, which are like new 'mystical organs' for any shaman, the Eskimo neophyte must undergo a great initiatory ordeal ... gaining the ability to see himself as a skeleton. <sup>95</sup>

The Eskimo shaman had bones to aid his contemplation, so too does Crow, a contemplation that is not strange to the poet whose own meditation on a bone has resulted in the Lupercal poem 'Relic'.

The presence of the overtly shamanic poems at the end of the Crow sequence remind us that the suffering that has gone before was not truly initiatory, not even an initiation into humanity. In the last poem of the book Crow gains his helping spirit; now the way is open for the true "great initiatory ordeal." Crow is still contemplating bones, not yet his own skeleton. Crow ends with its hero being made a shaman's apprentice, but with no guarantee that he will complete his training. The threshold call has come to him and he has responded. We must await until Cave Birds to see a protagonist gain the ability to see his own skeleton. In 'First, the doubtful charts of skin' the hero comes to "loose bones/On a heathery moor", the equivalent of 'King of

Carrion', but in the next poem, 'The knight', he himself decomposes into a pile of bones - "While hour by hour the sun/Strengthens its revelation."

No such revelation is present in Crow, only unsatisfactory glimpses. The situation at the end of the sequence is still closer to the desert than the forest.<sup>96</sup> Crow does not yet sing with the voice of his elephant ancestor "About a star of deathless and painless peace." (p. 58) Littleblood must sing such songs to him by means of instruction. The long apprenticeship has just begun.



NOTES

1. Unpublished essay, quoted at length in Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, pp. 188-89.
2. *ibid.*, p. 166.
3. cf. The Tain, trans. Thomas Kinsella, (London: OUP, 1970). In one of the preparatory stories to the Tain Cuchulain defeats the sons of the "bird-headed" (p. 33) Eib Erichenn, who is also a "one-eyed hag". He kills her also when she seeks revenge. She stands for the Morrigan, one of the three aspects of the Irish war-goddess who appears as a bird (p. 98). On pp. 132-37 the Morrigan first appears as "a young woman of noble figure" then as "a squint-eyed old woman."
4. Alan Bold, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1976), p. 127.
5. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 17. "From one point of view the Bardo Thodol is basically a shamanistic flight and return. Tibetan Buddhism was enormously influenced by Tibetan primitive shamanism."
6. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 144.
7. Bardo Thodol, pp. 225-32.
8. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, from Bardo Thodol, p. xii.
9. Dorothy Dauer, Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Ideas, (Berne: Herbert Lang & Co., 1969), p. 12.
10. Schopenhauer, Essays and Aphorisms, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 49.
11. *ibid.*, pp. 41-2.
12. *ibid.*, p. 44.
13. *ibid.*, p. 48.
14. *ibid.*, p. 45.
15. Rudolph Bultmann's contention that Gnosticism was a pre-Christian religion which greatly affected the development of Christian theology is now reckoned to be incorrect. See Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidence, (London: Tyndale, 1973).
16. New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, entry on Gnosticism.
17. F.F. Bruce, New Testament History, (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971), p. 399.
18. 'Ted Hughes's Crow'.

19. J. Wand, A History of the Early Church, (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 45-46.
20. Robert Graves, The White Goddess, (London: Faber, 1952), p. 466. "This Serpent had originally been Ophion, with whom, according to the Orphic creation myth, the White Goddess had coupled with in the form of a female serpent."
21. New International Dictionary of the Christian Church.
22. *ibid.*
23. Henry Chadwick, The Early Church, (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1967), p. 36.
24. Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 106.
25. *ibid.*, pp. 107-8. Sagar points out the sources in the death of Conchubar of Ulster, Norse sacrificial executions, folk tales and "a Manichean text." To this list we should add the Bardo Thodol, which is parodied in the poem's structure and language.
26. 'Ted Hughes's Crow'.
27. Dated 27th February. Bold, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, p. 117.
28. 'Ted Hughes's Crow'.
29. The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. J. Strachey and A. Freud; 24 vols, (London: 1953-74), 21, 91-2.
30. Calvin Bedient, Eight Contemporary Poets, (London: OUP, 1974), p. 103.
31. cf. Lillian Feder, Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry, (Guildford, G.B.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 57.
32. Carl Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, trans. Dell and Baynes, (New York, 1934), pp. 136-42.
33. 'Myth and Education', 1976, p. 90.
34. *ibid.*, p. 92.
35. A Choice of Shakespeare's verse, p. 188.
36. 'Myth and Education', 1976, p. 93.
37. *ibid.*
38. London Magazine, January 1971, pp. 10-11.
39. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 213.
40. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 17.
41. Cover of Claddagh recording of Crow (Claddagh CCT9-10, 1973).

42. Bardo Thodol, p. 166.
43. 'Ted Hughes's Crow'.
44. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 20.
45. Samuel Beckett, Endgame, (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p. 28.
46. *ibid.*, p. 38.
47. 'The Poetry of Vasco Popa', Critical Survey, 2 (Summer 1964), 211-4.
48. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 19.
49. *ibid.*
50. A view close to that of Eliade in The Sacred and the Profane, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959).
51. These are the hags of both the Tain and the Mabinogion. The Mabinogion story 'Branwen' romanticizes the cult of the goddess Branwen whose sign was a white crow. Her husband was Bran, whose totem was a black crow. 'Branwen' shows the Goddess as beautiful, but still a prisoner.
52. 'Myth and Education', 1976, p. 90.
53. *ibid.*, p. 89. cf. 'Public Bar T.V.' in Wodwo.
54. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 19.
55. Another one of these is 'Crow's Fall'.
56. Schopenhauer, Essays and Aphorisms, p. 42.
57. Eliade, Myth and Reality, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), ch.2.
58. Thurley, The Ironic Harvest, p. 186.
59. W. Otto, Dionysus: Myth and Cult, p. 140.
60. At times Crow's predicament overwhelms him. His lack of confidence at one stage leads to a lapse into pessimistic determinism which is most clearly illustrated in the uncollected Crow poem 'Existential Song'. London Magazine, 10, no. 4 (July/Aug, 1970), 18-9.

Once upon a time  
 There was a person  
 Running for his life.  
 This was his fate.  
 It was a hard fate.  
 But fate is Fate.  
 He had to keep running.

He began to wonder about Fate  
 And running for dear life.  
 Who? Why?  
 And was he nothing  
 But some dummy hare on a racetrack?

At last he made up his mind.  
 He was nobody's fool.  
 It would take guts  
 But yes he could do it.  
 Yes yes he could stop.  
 Agony! Agony  
 Was the wrenching  
 Of himself from his running.  
 Vast! And sudden  
 The stillness  
 In the empty middle of the desert.

There he stood - stopped.  
 And since he couldn't see anybody  
 To North or to West or to East or to South  
 He raised his fists  
 Laughing in awful joy  
 And shook them at the Universe

And his fists fell off  
 And his arms fell off  
 He staggered and his legs fell off

It was too late for him to realize  
 That this was the dogs tearing him to pieces  
 That he was, in fact, nothing  
 But a dummy hare on a racetrack

And life was being lived only by the dogs.

61. London Magazine, January 1971, pp. 9-10.
62. Claddagh recording sleeve note.
63. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 20.
64. 'Myth and Education', 1976, p. 90.
65. Critical Quarterly, 12, no. 2 (Summer, 1970), 108-9.
66. The scientist's bifurcation of a cell's heart is the equivalent of the same act performed on his wife. Vengeance is awakened in the form of a Morrigan.
67. 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 65.
68. Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 235.
69. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 18.
70. "The ideal aspect of Yeats' development is that he managed to develop his poetry both outwardly into history and the common imagery of everyday life at the same time as he developed it inwardly in a sort of close parallel ... so that he could speak of both simultaneously. His mythology is history, pretty well, and his history is as he said 'the story of a soul'." (London Magazine, January 1971, p. 15). Hughes's mythology also points

to the 'story of a soul' as in the "psychodrama" Cave Birds and eventually merges it with history in Remains of Elmet.

71. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 18.
72. 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 57.
73. Introduction to Pilinszky: Selected Poems, trans. by Hughes and Janos Czokits (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1976), p. 12.
74. Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. 84.
75. The berserker fury includes an experience of "magical heat", but Crow is made of spiritual asbestos. In 'Crow's Last Stand' the sun renders everything down into a "final obstacle". This is "Crow's eye-pupil, in the tower of its scorched fort." (Crow, p. 81).
76. See Chapter 3.
77. cf. George MacBeth's poem 'The Transformation', a close parallel to 'Lovesong'.
78. From Songs of Experience, Blake Complete Writings, (London: DUP, 1966).
79. Critical Quarterley, 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1971), 201.
80. A theme continued in the play Orghast, see Chapter 3.
81. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 147.
82. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 9.
83. *ibid.* p. 10.
84. *ibid.* p. 7.
85. *ibid.*
86. Eliade, Shamanism, p. 505.
87. *ibid.*
88. *ibid.* p. 53.
89. The poet experienced this during his youth in the form of the Calvinist Methodist Sunday School.
90. 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 69.
91. *ibid.*
92. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 31.
93. C.M. Bowra, Primitive Song, (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 1962), p. 228.

94. cf. third part of 'Wings' in Wodwo, (p. 175), which attributes a similar attitude to the owl.
95. Eliade, Shamanism, p. 62.
96. The poem 'Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural' (Crow, pp. 79-80), an addition to the 1972 edition of Crow, contains a number of parallels with the poetry of T.S. Eliot. This might seem strange when Hughes claimed he was looking for a language that raised no ghosts, but is best understood in terms of later Eliot echoes in Cave Birds. Stuart Hirschberg in his Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes has suggested a number of cross-references with the Four Quartets, especially 'Little Gidding'. Cave Birds would seem to indicate a wasteland → Little Gidding movement parallel to the desert → forest movement of 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song' (cf. references to 'The Waste Land' in 'The knight' in Cave Birds).



CHAPTER 3PROMETHEUS ON HIS CRAG

By 1969 the Crow project had lost its momentum. Hughes abandoned it, salvaging the best poems for the volume entitled Crow. But the poet had not lost the concerns that had engendered Crow and his myth-making capacity was still in full flood. This capacity was turned towards a project called Orghast which Peter Brook had invited Hughes to join, not only to write the play but to write the language, Orghast, after which the play was named. Orghast was performed only at the Shiraz festival in Iran, for which it had been commissioned, and its text is not readily available. What did eventually arise from the adventure in language was a poem sequence called Prometheus on his Crag, first published by Rainbow Press in a limited edition during November 1973. Written in 1971, published in 1973, Prometheus on his Crag did not become readily available until 1979, when the sequence was included in a revised version in the Faber Moortown collection. The poems rely on the same source material as the play - Manicheism, Zoroastrianism, the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus and Calderon de la Barca's Life is a Dream. Hughes had hoped that his experiments with Orghast would feed his use of English, Prometheus on his Crag was the first test of whether it had done so.

It would be easy to consider this sequence to be a mere mental residue from the Shiraz festival production, but we must rather recognize that the poems continue the single myth that pervades Hughes's poetry. They do not repeat the discoveries and perceptions, nor even the style of Crow, but seek to approach the same human dilemmas from a

different angle. To understand the new development of old themes we should first turn to the play which was the progenitor, though not the ultimate ancestor of Prometheus on his Crag.

Orghast must be approached as a dual entity. On the one hand there is the narrative encapsulated in the actual performance at Shiraz. On the other is the myth which served as the foundation for the expressed events. Together these two aspects form what Peter Brook hailed as "the most labyrinthine work since Ulysses."<sup>1</sup>

First it would be wise to consider the actual play since it is this that formed the immediate quarry of ideas for Prometheus on his Crag in the same way that the long Crow myth was the quarry for the Crow volume. The content of Orghast is not fully available, remaining in Hughes's hands as an unpublished manuscript, but Orghast at Persepolis by A.C.H. Smith has collected and collated Hughes's notes for the play. The plot of the play is summarized thus:

#### Part I

is the story of the crime against material nature, the Creatress, source of life and light, by the Violator, the mental tyrant Holdfast, and her revenge. The first plan of her revenge is on the animal level, and it fails, because on the animal level the situation is unalterable, or rather inevitably reproduces itself; the second plan is on the truly human level, and it succeeds, transcending the conflict by creating a being which, like Prometheus (this is the story of how he survives), includes the elemental opposites, and in whom the collision and pain become illumination, because it is the true account.

#### Part II

is the story of the tyrant, Holdfast, in the Underworld, the decomposition of the fallen ego among the voices of its crimes, oversights and victims. Hercules, his son, descends to raise him up, back into the world, but death gives instead the vulture (the mystery of Prometheus's physical/spiritual dilemma), transformed into a woman.<sup>2</sup>

This summary clearly shows the play's roots in Iranian gnostic religions, most closely paralleling the main myth of Manicheism. According to Mani there was a Supreme Being, corresponding to the deity

Zervan, worshipped by both Zervanites and Zoroastrians, eventually revered by Mithraism. Beneath him were two other divine beings, Ohrmazd and Ahriman, the former who embraced good, the latter evil. A fourth ingredient was Light which was considered to be "absolute and coexistent" with God.<sup>3</sup> Ahriman inhabited the underworld, and looking up one day he saw Light, and coveting it he rose up against God/Zervan. God, being a pure spirit, was unsuited to such strife and called the 'Mother of Life' to his aid. She subsequently called the Primal Man, who turns out to be Ohrmazd.<sup>4</sup> Orghast is thus part of the unrecorded struggle between God's agents and Ahriman who is called Holdfast in the play.

In the myth behind Orghast Hughes both develops and drastically reinterprets a Manichean version of the cosmos. The reinterpretation hinges upon the poet's treatment of the key doctrine of matter. The Manicheans considered matter to be evil and the opposite of the Supreme Being who was completely spirit. The body was irrelevant to this brand of Gnosticism which concentrated on the salvation of the soul. This is anathema to Hughes who suggests through the Orghast myth that the problem is not with matter and the material world, but with the tyrant figure of Ahriman/Holdfast who is called Krogon in the myth and is Prometheus' enemy, Zeus.

Krogon is the corrupter of the natural order which he accomplishes by supplanting the true God and raping the Mother figure, who is called Moa in Hughes's myth. He also imprisons the son of God who corresponds to the Iranian Ohrmazd, but who is simply called 'Sun' in Hughes's version of the myth. Thus spiritual emptiness and the degeneration of the natural world are seen not as the fault of matter but of male oppression of the female.

Like Manicheism Hughes's myth has a hierarchy of deities. There

is an absent Supreme Being. Beneath him is Sun and his wife Moa, one being 'spirit fire', the other material fire. Krogon is their son in time. Krogon is the epitome of the key figure of classical myth. Edmund Leach has summarized all these myths in one sentence. "If society is to go on, daughters must be disloyal to their parents and sons must destroy (replace) their fathers."<sup>5</sup> Krogon not only follows this pattern, but also echoes part of it. He directly corresponds to Zeus who supplanted Kronos his own father, thus ending the rule of the Titans. (Prometheus, being a Titan, is thus a hereditary enemy of Zeus.)

Supplanting can be patricide, the natural order undermined for gain. Krogon dislocates the natural order in this way. Hughes's point is that it is not the natural world that is at fault. Rather, evil is the result of a dislocation deriving from wrong personal attitudes. Like Blake's God Krogon is grasping and jealous. Hughes is never comforted by patriarchs, but puts his whole hope for the future in Mother Earth:

Krogon does not reproduce in himself the harmony of Moa and Sun. He cannot inherit the bliss of Light, or grow up into the order and natural authority of the Sun, or accept the teeming energies of Moa. Why not? - he wants to hang on to them as if time did not exist.

So he imprisons his father Sun. Now all that the world can see of the natural order and authority of the Sun is the shadow of Krogon - the false order and authority which Krogon has invented to perpetuate his own power.<sup>6</sup>

It is his influence that has made Nature the hag of Crow. Hughes has said that "the interior mythology of the play is of a piece with parts of my earlier writing."<sup>7</sup> The importance of Orghast is that its schema articulates Hughes's spiritual concerns in a highly specific, though complex, manner. As we shall see the myths of Crow and Orghast can not just be found in early writings but in a more developed and

direction-filled form in the later works. In this context it is noteworthy that Hughes has suggested that any poet's work is part of a single whole, of "one system and the same."<sup>8</sup> His essay on Shakespeare shows a similar conviction.

The mother figure that Hughes feels Puritanism suppressed in her guise as the Virgin Mary is shown as a victim of isolation and degeneration in Orghast:

Moa, separated from the spiritualizing love of the Sun, sinks more and more deeply into the chaotic and randomly productive fires of matter. Less and less of a divinity under Krogon's persecution, and more and more of a revengeful demon, suffering his rapes only in order to bear somehow a son who will destroy him.<sup>9</sup>

Moa's degeneration is hastened by Krogon's ruthless murder of her children, which is both a mirror of the classical myth of Zeus' conflict with the Titans and of a similar Japanese myth, the myth that 'Crow's Account of St. George' recounts anew. Moa's response in her rearing of a new supplanter reproduces the substance of the Norse Volsunga Saga in which the ravished Signy rears her son Sinfjotli to kill his father Siggeir. In the saga patricide is Sinfjotli's initiation into manhood, but in Hughes's myth the son of Krogon just replaces his father as a second despot. These events repeat themselves time and again. "And each succeeding Krogon is even more mechanically and sophisticatedly suppressive than his father, as if the single ghost went strengthening from generation to generation."<sup>10</sup>

It is not our purpose here to consider the whole Orghast myth nor to seek to understand it thoroughly, since the emphasis must remain on the poetry. What in fact both the plot of Orghast and that of the Orghast myth show us, is an impossible situation which is resolved by the ministrations of a Redeemer figure. In the play the redeemer role is split between Hercules, the rescuer, and Prometheus, the sufferer.

In the myth there are three figures. Pramanath corresponds to Prometheus and does his work on the eternal level. Sogis works on a wholly spiritual level. Agoluz corresponds to Hercules, a man so totally dominated by matter that he does not see the redemptive light in him. His task is to bring material redemption.

In the Orghast myth Sogis alone is successful in his task, his success symbolized by his marriage to Ussa, Moa's representative, a marriage that is echoed in the resolution to Cave Birds. As we shall see in our appreciation of the initiatory patterns in that work, the distinctive feature is that it only affects a purely spiritual realm. Sogis is able to resolve in spirit what Agoluz can never resolve in flesh, and what Pramanath can never resolve in eternity. While Cave Birds celebrates the purely spiritual victory and marriage Prometheus on his Crag examines the dilemma of its hero that fails to bring an initiatory resolution in matter or in eternity. The Prometheus poems concentrate more on the eternal perspective, since in the figure of Crow we have already met the Hercules figure and his inextricable involvement with matter.

The single figure of Prometheus unites the myth, the play and the poems. Only he is eternal in lifespan, spiritual in nature and material in his ability to feel pain. It is this threefold, contradictory, character whom we meet in the Prometheus on his Crag poems. Hughes treats Prometheus as an archetypal figure, much along the lines of Jung and Kerényi,<sup>11</sup> rather than as "Indo-European folk-hero" in a false myth ("an anti-feminist fable" probably invented by Hesiod as Robert Graves has suggested in his The Greek Myths.<sup>12</sup>)

Prometheus appeals to Hughes as an archetypal hero for three main reasons. Firstly he spans East and West. His alternative name, 'Pramanath', in the Orghast myth, reminds us of this. The Bhagavata

Purana speaks of two brothers, Pramanthu and Manthu, and the Sanskrit word "pramantha" refers to the fire-drill which Prometheus is supposed to have invented. Thus he is not a purely Mediterranean figure.

Secondly he has many of the characteristics of the Manichean Primal Man. This redeemed Redeemer, like Prometheus, suffered a defeat at the hands of a seemingly superior evil god. He is stripped of his five weapons of light and lies stunned in the abyss of matter, fettered and surrounded by beasts ready to devour him. Prometheus is fettered to Mount Elbruz in the Caucasus and a vulture comes to dine upon his liver, which is renewed daily for this purpose. Both Prometheus and the Primal Man are ideal figures, as Shelley understood in his Prometheus Unbound. Shelley took Prometheus to be "the type of the highest perfection, of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends."<sup>13</sup> For Hughes the ideal is not that of human moral perfection, but of human suffering with initiatory potential. Prometheus for the poet is the type of the hierophant, the initiand, the prospective man of knowledge.

The third attraction of the Prometheus story derives from the second. Prometheus' pain is that of the prisoner, a perception of the human condition common to both the Manichean and the Existentialist. Peter Brook had already treated the plight of the prisoner. In between the two collaborations with Hughes, Oedipus and Orghast at Persepolis, the company had explored and performed three works which dealt with the tale of "a young man suddenly confronted with the ambiguity of freedom and imprisonment."<sup>14</sup> The three plays were Shakespeare's The Tempest, Peter Handke's Kaspar and Calderon de la Barca's Life is a Dream, the last of which is particularly relevant to Prometheus on his Crag.

Life is a Dream is the story of a young man called Segismundo who

is imprisoned by his father the King because of prophetic warnings of his future deprecations:

Many times his mother  
 In a recurrent nightmare  
 Saw a human monster  
 That rent her body open  
 And came bloodstained into the world  
 Like a viper - his mother's murderer.<sup>15</sup> (Life is a Dream, p. 20)

As a result Segismundo spends all of his early life in a specially-built tower, remote from society, seen only by one keeper, Clotaldo. Segismundo is suddenly raised to kingship to see if he will resist fate and act morally, but is too preoccupied by his sense of injustice to rule justly. He is sent back into prison, and convinced that he dreamed. Released by rebelling soldiers he vanquishes his father, but is so chastened by his experience that he acts honourably. For Segismundo all life is an illusion which shows all ambitions and posturings as nothing.

The key factor in Life is a Dream is the similarity to the themes of Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound together with which it provides a kind of gloss to Hughes's poems. In each work there is an imprisoned Son in protest against a Father/God. Both challenge the ruler's authority, Segismundo by insurrection, Prometheus by his prophecy that Zeus will be deposed. Both rail at the vagaries of fate and are counselled to humility, Prometheus by Oceanus, Segismundo by Clotaldo; "be gentle, be humble, for it may be that you are dreaming." (Life is a Dream, p. 47) Prometheus' response to this is bluster and a kind of martyr complex which Oceanus points out, "You will not be made humble, will not yield to pain;/You mean to add new sufferings to those you have." (Prometheus Bound, p. 30)<sup>16</sup>. Segismundo says, "But now I know myself! I am nature's monster,/Part man, part beast," (Life is a Dream, p. 48) In other words he is a Wodwo. It is also significant that Segismundo succeeds in deposing the father-figure, while this is only potential in



the Prometheus myth. Certainly neither Prometheus, nor Hercules his ally, achieve such a revolution.

In both plays the central question being asked is whether the controlling force, Fate in Calderon, Zeus in Aeschylus, can be overthrown. This is closely linked to the problem of freewill. Segismundo does achieve moral choice, while all that Aeschylus is prepared to say is that no-one is free but Zeus. Prometheus can disobey Zeus and bring fire to man, but he must suffer greatly for it, chained to Mount Elbruz with an iron wedge in his side awaiting the vulture. Meanwhile Zeus extends the punishment to man by giving Pandora to Prometheus's brother, Epimetheus, knowing she will open the box of plagues (although Prometheus has also put hope inside). Pandora is the first woman, bringer of both beauty and evil.

Calderon's version of the situation is in the tradition of Western humanism and is in stark contrast to the culture which is meant to have spawned that humanism. The Greek myths show a bitter human condition. Prometheus and his three brothers are all aspects of this condition:

Prometheus, "he who knows in advance."  
 Epimetheus, "he who learns afterwards."  
 Menoitios, "he who mortal doom awaits."  
 Atlas, who carries the world as both punishment and responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

These four brothers are ambiguous offsprings. One version of the myth has them as children of Iapetos, the Titan linked with temporality, and Klymene, daughter of Okeanos, while the other variant has Klymene married to Ouranos, master of the heavens. In other words the brothers are children both of temporality and mother earth, and heaven and earth. This is a powerful mythic treatment of the nature of man.

The difference between Prometheus and Segismundo is that the latter is nearer the beast. So too is Caliban, the son of the blue-eyed Sycorax, who Hughes identifies as Shakespeare's version of the White

Goddess, the Great Mother. Kaspar in Handke's play is also separated from humanity by his imprisonment in a dark room from birth, never seeing or meeting a human being. He is taught language by the invisible Prompters in the same way that Prospero instructs Caliban. Prometheus, on the other hand, has no contact with the animal world before the advent of the culture. Although Prometheus is an offspring of "Earth-, mother of all life", whom he invokes at the start of Aeschylus' play, he does not affirm her values. As the daughters of Oceanus complain, "You respect too highly the race of mortals." (Prometheus Bound, p. 36)

It is also notable that the plays all deal with a rescue from darkness and imprisonment. The element of waking from a dream is also a Gnostic allegory of the event of gnosis. Life is a Dream implies the unreality of material things.

Hughes has described Prometheus on his Crag as "A limbo ... a numb poem about numbness." This numbness seems to be the interstice between the world of dream and the world of physical suffering. Prometheus hangs between these as he hangs between divinity and humanity. It is noteworthy that these are the two main characteristics of shamanistic initiation. The prospective shamanistic practitioner begins to dream and make contact with the spirit world and as a result of his personal experience is submitted to a series of physical ordeals by the community. There are numerous permutations of the shamanic initiation but all include certain uniting factors. The variety can be very clearly seen among the Siberian peoples where a prospective shaman can be properly initiated "in the candidate's dreams or ecstatic experience" without having to go through any ritual. In other parts of Siberia the initiatory ritual includes climbing a tree or pole, symbolic of the ascent to Heaven and undergoes a certain amount of physical suffering. In some cultures this includes torture, in others pure stamina, as in

the Eskimo insistence on shamans swimming from hole to hole under the ice.

But the point is the same. The candidate must experience a symbolic death and regeneration, often being torn apart and being put back together again as in the Siberian Yakuts. With the Iglulik Eskimo after many days spent in meditation the candidate falls down "dead" in the snow for three days and nights. When he comes to he tells of being devoured by a polar bear and reduced to a skeleton, "But you will find your flesh again, you will awaken and your garments will fly towards you."<sup>18</sup>

This regeneration results in an illumination, which lays the ground for a new sensibility. This is the second requirement of this type of initiation and can happen in various ways. The important factor of shamanic initiation as opposed to adolescent initiation, or joining a secret society, is that it is not just to do with the tribe but with the whole Universe, which gives shamanism "a quality of general human validity."<sup>19</sup> Shamanism is a vocation, which is part chosen, part precipitated by external events. Whatever happens there is a crisis which "has the value of a superior threshold initiation." The whole philosophy behind this is encapsulated in the words of the Caribou Eskimo Igjugarjuk:

The only true wisdom lives far from mankind out in the great loneliness, and it can be reached only through suffering. Privation and suffering alone can open the mind of a man to all that is hidden to others.<sup>20</sup>

It is in this loneliness of suffering that the poems of Prometheus on his Crag are located.

Prometheus shares the dual trial of the Eskimo shaman, loneliness and suffering. It is a place of hope because "true wisdom lies far from mankind", but it is also a prison. Prometheus is in a limbo because he is in between heaven and earth and in between light and

dark, He is neither one of the Olympian Gods nor one of the men of Athens he has aided. He is not totally matter because he is immortal. He is not totally spirit since he suffers. His physical situation is also a limbo, his mountain being also in between earth and sky. His position in relation to the light is equally ambiguous:

... And he paused  
Just within darkness, just within numbness.  
He let his mouth-mask far off

Loll in the light. (Poem 1, Faber Moortown, p. 71)

The imagery of light and darkness directly relates to the Manichean element. Prometheus is like the Primal Man awaking from slumber to discover that he is a prisoner, "Something is altered." Both Prometheus and the various Gnostic Redeemers have fire, wind and light as weapons. Each lies stripped of those weapons. In bringing fire to man Prometheus has lost it for himself. This is expressed in physical terms by the cold of Mount Elbruz, resulting in "ice-burned lungs." Prometheus is in a place of choice shared by the protagonists of 'The Contender' in Crow and 'The knight' in Cave Birds. The contender's response to being nailed to a cliff "with nails of nothing" (Crow, pp. 41-2) is obstinacy:

He lay crucified with all his strength  
On the earth  
Grinning towards the sun  
Through the tiny holes of his eyes  
And towards the moon  
And towards the whole paraphernalia of the heavens ('The Contender')

In contrast the Knight "Has conquered. He has surrendered everything" (Cave Birds, p. 28). Like the Manichean warrior or the shamanic initiate he is prepared to surrender his weapons in order to take them up again in a consecrated manner. Prometheus cannot make this response because he cannot die, the total "flawless" submission. But neither is he stubbornly wakeful like the Contender who sleeplessly gazes at both

sun and moon. Again he is in an intermediate state, that of dreaming, a kind of death and a kind of wakefulness.

The issue of sleep and waking is central to the sequence. If Prometheus wants to continue his resistance to Zeus, much like Shelley's hero, he must stay alert and alive. To die is to fail in that self-set task. In that sense he has crucified himself like the Contender. The other choice is to follow the leading of his dreams and abandon obstinate defiance for a more total victory, that of gnosis, true wisdom that will integrate his being, bring heaven and earth together once again. The source and solution to this dilemma is in himself as is the case in

Orghast:

Pramanath is himself Light, creative fire, the original single substance ...

But he is fractured. He is the crossroads of eternal light and ecstasy, and temporal doom, pain, change and death. Conscious in eternity, he has to live in time. And he cannot solve his dilemma. He hangs between heaven and earth, almost torn apart, an open wound, immortal.<sup>21</sup>

Prometheus is almost torn apart, unlike the shaman who must be totally disassembled and reconstituted by the forces of the natural world. Prometheus is almost anything, but unsure of what he wishes to be or do. There may even be an issue of choice. Can he choose what to do or not?

In this impossible situation Prometheus grabs at an initial false hope. As he regains a degree of consciousness he asks hopefully, "Am I an eagle?" Vain hope was his gift to man to mitigate the plagues of Pandora's vessel. Vain hope is his own response, made all the more poignant by the fact that he is the one whose nature is also to always know the real situation in advance.

Why does Prometheus hope that he is an eagle? Hughes has written in his review of Mircea Eliade's Shamanism that among the Buryat tribe

just to dream of an eagle is to become a shaman. The shaman expresses this totemistically by claiming that he and the eagle are one and the same. (The poem 'The Eagle' in Under the North Star is based on a reversal of this primitive mind set, making the eagle a shaman!) Prometheus hopes that his punishment by Zeus was the death penalty and that he has been reborn to the shaman's task, the reconciliation of heaven and earth, man and God, a task which he previously attempted without the right qualifications. Prometheus's hope is particularly vain since only a voluntary death would be acceptable. The same vain hope can also be seen on a Manichean model. The Redeemer experiences two awakenings. One is after his defeat, the other is his rescue by the Messenger of Light. Prometheus imagines that his awakening is the second one and that he is flying beside the Messenger.

Importantly both paradigms can be subsumed into universally understandable images. In world literature a traditional yearning of the prisoner for freedom is symbolized by the glimpse of a bird through prison bars. It is very noticeable in Tolstoy and in Bernard Malamud's The Fixer. In the latter sightings of birds and strange dreams follow each other. As the prisoner in some Tzarist cell identifies with the bird's freedom, so too does Prometheus. Common symbols of the human condition - confinement, and of freedom - birds, are brought naturally together.

Kerenyi has called Prometheus's plight the "epitome of the self-chosen human existence." He faces his suffering like a Camusian hero, "Relaxes/In the fact that it has happened." (Poem 2) Prometheus is the archetypal stranger, forbidden intercourse with both man and deity, his only companion the vulture, the equivalent of the plague for Doctor Rieux in Camus' La Peste.

In Camus' work the dilemma of the human condition is not solved,



shout", the shout that heralds the Apocalypse will be one of divine irritation! There is also an obvious echo of Christ's Passion, but which shout is echoed? Is it 'It is finished'? Or is it 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'. It must be the latter, since the veil between heaven and earth is not rent in two. The shout also echoes the Summons of The Living Spirit by the hero in the abyss. Hughes's treatment is no less ironic when dealing with Manicheism than with Christianity. The shout that should have brought a helping spirit only wakes the vulture, who is actually likened to the Spirit in Poem 20 where he is called the "Helper", the Paraclete.

We have already met a personified scream in Crow, mirroring the Manichean Summons which was treated as a living entity. In Cave Birds the very title of the poem 'The Summoner' speaks of this correspondence. It is significant, too, that in the same way that a shout arouses the vulture a scream produces the summoner. In contrast to Crow and pre-saging Cave Birds Prometheus's shout opens the door to his initiation - through suffering. The shout increases his pain, "splayed him open from breastbone to crotch" (Poem 4) but its feathers tell him in "headline letters" that:

"Today is a fresh start  
Torn up by its roots  
As I tear the liver from your body." (p. 74)

Rather than a code to be deciphered, as in the Wodwo poem 'Gnat-Psalm' where all the observer can discern is a "crazy lexicon" and a "dumb kabala", there are "Black, bold and plain" words. The key to the code has proved to be the involvement of true suffering.

Before we continue we must consider the birds more fully. Having seen the connection with freedom in the mention of the eagle, we must also appreciate the vulture's role and that of the other birds found in



the third poem of the sequence. One is reminded of 'Crow and the Birds' and the other Parliament of Fowls in Adam and the Sacred Nine. The birds are a continual reminder of Prometheus's dilemma since in their own freedom they remind him of his loss. They pester but they are also a mockery. They are "The clusterers to heaven" while he is fettered to a rock. They are "sun-darkeners" because they are closer to the sun, source of all life, than he. As we shall see the vulture is similarly linked to the sun.

Prometheus's relationship with the vulture is the key to understanding. Of this bird's role in Orghast Hughes has written. "The cure, for Man, will be to understand this bird and come to some final reconciliation, as Sogis" (Prometheus's spiritual alter ego) "does, not to heroify the sickness as Agoluz does."<sup>22</sup> Agoluz stands for the purely heroic response to the question of initiation. His fellows in Hughes's poetry are Hercules and Cuchulain, both of whom appear in Crow. Cuchulain is himself a Prometheus type as the poet's 1972 addition to 'Skylarks' from Wodwo suggests:

Manacled with blood,  
Cuchulain listened bowed,  
Strapped to his pillar (not to die prone)  
Hearing the far crow  
Guiding the near lark nearer  
With its blind song

'That some sorry little wight more feeble and misguided than myself  
Take thy head  
Thine ear  
And thy life's career from thee' (Selected Poems 1957-1967, p. 100)

Cuchulain will not embrace the egoless death of the skylarks, so cannot experience full initiation and victory over death, despite his other shamanic attributes such as the 'hero halo' and 'the warp-spasm' battle fury.<sup>23</sup>

Hughes's account of Cuchulain's death from the Ulster cycle and his reworking of the Prometheus myth show each hero in contrast to certain

birds and challenged by a particular one, a crow in the former work and a vulture in the latter. Prometheus eventually comes to terms with his mentor in a way that Cuchulain does not. The vulture's role is the same as that of the eagle in a story related by Claude Levi-Strauss which he composed himself around the plot of Corneille's Cinna. It is close to Hughes's themes in its tale of two childhood friends who become enemies. Cinna has become a cynic and Augustus is on the verge of divinity. Augustus is visited by Jupiter's eagle, scruffy and "foul-smelling":

The eagle explained to the incredulous Augustus that the divine nature he was about to acquire would consist precisely in no longer experiencing the feeling of revulsion by which he was now overwhelmed while still a man. Augustus would realize that he had become a god, not by some radiant sensation or the power to work miracles, but by his ability to tolerate the proximity of a wild beast without a sensation of disgust, to put up with its stench and the excrement with which it would cover him.<sup>24</sup>

This is exactly what transforms Prometheus's attitude. The involvement required is not just that of suffering but of communion with the natural world.

In Poem 5 Prometheus has his first dream, but rather than thinking in terms of an accommodation with animal stench and talons he contemplates "The hook-faced majesties of revelation." This is no way to initiation as 'Second Birth' in Moortown points out. Revelation is not to be found in the "exploded heavens" but in "an ugly grave/Fallen in on bleached sticks."(p. 112). As a result his solution to the problem of God is too easy, although it does have the advantage of instinct. "He had resolved God/As a cow swallows its afterbirth." This solution does not deal with "The infant's bottomless cry, the mother's lament,/The father's curse."(p. 75) We are reminded that what is at stake is no mere question of metaphysics but an issue affecting every human relationship, since every other human being is also part of the natural world.

Prometheus is still behaving too like the hero figure. His dream of bursting "the sun's mass" is rooted in Mithraism, the ultimate hero religion. Mithras was born naked from a rock on the Cosmic Mountain, Hara Bazaiti. Perhaps this is also Prometheus's hope and so he pathetically tries to behave like Mithras whose first feat after birth was to measure his strength against the Sun, a fight which he won. Prometheus is "Like a new-born calf" in the same way that Mithraism taught that the first creation of the good god Ohrmazd was a bull.

Although Prometheus has a vision of released light it is in fact still within "the heart's jar/That clapped again shut." (p. 75) The cry of frustration that is expressed is no longer his own, but that of all humanity. We are again pointed to Prometheus as an example of humanity's situation.

In Poem 6 Prometheus "Has bitten his prophetic tongue off" like Crow who was "Half-illuminated. Speechless." ('Crow Communes') This has a direct effect on the human world which cannot now rely on the unsullied voice of prophecy, but must make do with horoscopes, Tarot and the Bible. Religion is devalued because it is now mediated by things, not the true shaman. Thus the only real contact between man and the divine is severed. Shamanism is for the world of the withdrawn God, but without even this tenuous link, which only a few can follow, man is cut off entirely. In the twentieth century poetry is the only means of communication remaining. No wonder both Hughes and Shelley, both holding to a view of poet as priest, have turned to the Prometheus myth.<sup>25</sup>

The demythologized world makes time meaningless. The clock talks backward. Primitive society, no matter how cyclic in its thinking, can think back to the Great Time, the Dream Time, what Mircea Eliade calls 'Nostalgia for Paradise'; and thinks forward to a future world renewal.

If time is made meaningless (a favourite Beckett theme), no such renewal is possible. Without an end, there can be no new beginning. The world as well as Prometheus are trapped by immortality even more than by death.

In this kind of world Prometheus is "slung between heaven and earth." (Poem 7) The solution of his personal dilemma will heal the world, which is the macrocosm of his mind. But the condition of the world makes it nigh on impossible for him to find personal release through death into initiatory experience. Thus the dilemma widens. He is left to a "numb bliss, a forlorn freedom." Meanwhile we are given a further mythological insight into the vulture. Here the bird is the result of Prometheus swallowing the fire he stole, which now works at his vitals. The representative of Light eats the representative of Dark, the son of Klymene. Thus we again glimpse something of the Orghast cosmology where the vulture is "Light, his consciousness of his position."<sup>26</sup>

The seventh poem centres round Prometheus's theft of fire. In this poem Prometheus "Swallowed what he had stolen." He is thus shown as tormented from inside by fire and outside by the vulture, both of which are one in substance with the Sun:

And the sun, plundered and furious,  
Planted its vulture.

So the sun bloomed, as it drank him,  
Earth purpled its crocus. (p. 77)

At this point Hughes is not only following the cosmology of Manicheism but also that of a more recent dualist, D.H. Lawrence, for whom fire is "the sudden sun-assertion" and "an absolute unity in itself."<sup>27</sup> For Lawrence as for Hughes in Prometheus on his Crag "The sun is not, in any sense, a material body."<sup>28</sup> It is not even a symbol, but a spiritual reality. Lawrence saw the sun and moon as the two main poles of

consciousness, forming a holy trinity with individual life as the Holy Spirit.

Lawrence's myth is only a refinement of the Babylonian myth of Tiamat and Marduk. Marduk was the vanquisher of the sea-beast Tiamat. He was a sun-god, eventually joined to Mithras, another Mesopotamian deity, while Tiamat was a Moon goddess, an aspect of the Great Mother. Marduk's defeat of Tiamat mirrors Krogon's suppression of Moa in Orghast. Light vanquishes darkness. Male supplants female. To Hughes this is a disaster and to understand Prometheus on his Crag we must realize that darkness is valued and the sun indicates oppression. Once again the poet has used mythic patterns to his own ends. In the same way that he subverted Buddhism in Crow he now reverses Manicheism retaining its dualism but repudiating its anti-materialism and hence its denial of earth and the Mother.

By eating Prometheus's liver the vulture is eating the darkness, preying upon a polar opposite that should be balanced against, not opposed, and eventually this will be expressed in the image of the weighing scales in Poem 10. Prometheus is himself being weighed by these scales "slung between heaven and earth."

This immobility is his punishment as a trickster. Prometheus tricked Zeus at the Mekone sacrifice where he offered the god a choice of offerings, one a pile of bones hidden beneath fat, the other the flesh wrapped in the animal's stomach. Zeus chose the tempting rubbish and man was given the meat. To get his own back Zeus withheld fire from man and this was the cause of Prometheus's theft, discovery and punishment.

The trickster role not only links Prometheus to Crow but points to their joint debt to shamanism which is the domain of the institutional trickster.<sup>29</sup> The punishment of Prometheus in these poems is

in keeping with this background, since the greatest possible frustration for a shaman, mediator between heaven and earth, is to be stuck between the two. Prometheus's punishment is Zeus's own trick.

As a result all of Prometheus's responses in Poem 8 can be seen in a tragi-comical light, a kind of mime:

Prometheus On His Crag

Lay astonished all his preparations  
For his humanity  
Were disablements he lay disabled (p. 78)

The lack of punctuation and repetition both cultivate a sense of personal clumsiness, showing a figure more at home with activity than spiritual enlightenment. The simplicity of the language of this poem is also a strong contrast with the two that have gone before.

Prometheus in Poem 8 begins to change his religious response. In the first part of the poem he is thinking in almost Buddhist terms. With characteristic irony Hughes has him equate being human with nirvana, since to become human is to die and thus escape the wheel of being, which in Prometheus's case is that of immortality. But as in Buddhism the concentration upon "preparations" are in themselves "disablements." Like his previous trickster feats Prometheus's religious interests are insufficient credentials for humanity. But in the second half of the poem he is beginning to consider the terms of the cradle/grave of 'Second birth' and of Cave Birds, "Was this stone his grave this cradle/ Nothingness nothingness over him over him" He wonders whether the vulture is mother, fellow-prisoner or jailor. The answer, that the bird is all three, is irrelevant since its activities preclude further theological debate. The important thing is that at last he is beginning to ask relevant questions. Since the shaman is a specialist in spiritual questions this could be an indication that there is hope of an escape from limbo. The scenario at this stage is very similar to

that of Cave Birds where the psychodrama will be extended so that Prisoner, Jailor and Mother are all separate, though still birds. The protagonists of both Prometheus on his Crag and Cave Birds are vitally concerned with escape from avian oppressors.

In Poem 9, though, Prometheus loses all hope of such an escape. His mental props have been systematically removed. His shouts have become a scream in the previous poem and now everything has become incomprehensible. Only the vulture has any knowledge and Prometheus can only vainly consider "The hieroglyph he makes of my entrails." Prometheus's final prop was his hope of revenge by refusing to divulge the secret that is referred to in the poem. In Aeschylus this secret is the prophecy that if Zeus couples with the nymph Thetis then the child of the union will supplant him. This same child will rescue Prometheus. Prometheus bit "his prophetic tongue" off to withhold this information and thus hasten Zeus's downfall, but it has resulted in him being stripped bare and left speechless, in involuntary silence. Now he cannot save himself by divulging the secret to Zeus. He now cannot fall into the trap of King Basilio in Life is a Dream, who in defeat exclaims, "And I, by seeking to save myself, am lost -/I, I myself have destroyed my kingdom."<sup>30</sup>

Instead Prometheus is becoming like Augustus in Levi-Strauss's little play. He "Began to admire the vulture/It knew what it was doing" What he finds particularly impressive is its ability to "digest its guilt." (poem 10, p. 80). It feels no personal responsibility for the suffering in the world, the "cost of the gift" of life. (In the Greek myth man received the plagues of Pandora's box as the price of the gift of fire).

Prometheus envies the bird because its existence is in a state of dynamic balance rather than static suspension like himself. Life and

suffering are perfectly balanced on its "heavenly weighing scales" - its wings. Prometheus has both life and suffering, (in fact they are all that he has) but he cannot relate them together because of guilt. The balance must be reached through expiation. This is now Prometheus's only hope, as it is for Segismundo in Calderon's play, and Prometheus may have the chance of a second elevation, as does Segismundo.

In Poem 11 Prometheus dreams. "He who lives dreams his life/Until he wakes."<sup>31</sup> Both Segismundo and Prometheus have what they think is only a dream of elevation and begin to think their whole existence is a dream. But in the same way that Segismundo's release actually takes place and is a prophecy of his second accession to the throne, so too this poem can be seen as a prophecy of an as yet unrealized initiatory victory. Prometheus is experiencing a shamanic threshold experience where everything is transformed by an altered state of perception.<sup>32</sup> Thus the spike in his chest becomes "a swallowtail butterfly, just trembling." It is a fascinating coincidence that Levi-Strauss's Augustus is told that subsequent to his assumption of divinity "Butterflies will come and copulate on your neck."<sup>33</sup> As in the eagle's prophecy to Augustus the road to initiation is in an accommodation with nature, an accommodation that began with admiration for the vulture and continues in the vision of instrument of suffering as butterfly.

Once again Hughes has reversed Manichean doctrines by making Prometheus awake to the horrible material fact of the vulture rather than a purely spiritual gnosis. In the next poem he unashamedly borrows from the myth of Orpheus.<sup>34</sup> Orpheus is credited as giving the hero short relief by his song which could charm any living creature, including the vulture. In the Hughes poem Prometheus sings to himself, "A song to his wounds", a song which is:



A pure  
Unfaltering morphine

Drugging the whole earth with bliss. (Poem 12, p. 82)

The song may be a palliative but it is still a song, the common accompaniment to a prospective shaman's initiatory suffering. The Netsilik Eskimo Aua puts it like this:

I would sometimes fall to weeping, and feel unhappy without knowing why. Then, for no reason, all would suddenly be changed, and I felt a great, inexplicable joy, a joy so powerful that I could not restrain it, but had to break into song ... And then in the midst of such a fit of mysterious and overwhelming delight I became a shaman ...

Aua said he did not know how it happened but he could "see and hear in a totally different way."<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless Prometheus is still racked by guilt. He feels that "he had already invented too much." The symbol of his imprisonment is expressed in human society by the woman's womb.<sup>36</sup> Another Manichean idea is used here - the belief that procreation was wrong since it only created candidates for hell as only a chosen few would reach gnosis. Poem 13 also reiterates themes found in Crow which deal with Mother Nature in her hag aspect. Guilt is made specific here because the effects of Prometheus's transgressions are catalogued.<sup>37</sup>

A similarly bleak view of human existence is found in the next poem. We seem to have been thrown into Beckett's universe, one that Hughes had denounced as cheaply helpless in his work on the Eastern European poets. Prometheus is a new Nagg from Endgame, an "accursed progenitor", while in Poem 14 all relationships are based upon whipping, a favourite Beckett image, especially in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky in Waiting for Godot. These poems show Prometheus giving up hope, and instead clinging to guilt. It is this which must be whipped away and the whips have a positive as well as a negative role.

The three weapons of the Primal warrior were considered to be

light, fire and wind. The whips are the wind, "invisible tongues", a pagan Pentecost, the environment of the swifts, the motor of the world which is envisioned as "leaping/Like a great ungainly top." (Poem 14, p. 84) Prometheus has already had his own weapons of light and fire turned upon him and must suffer the final ordeal. Manicheism has again been adapted, as usual to a shamanistic model, in order to show a personal initiation through a crisis of suffering. Among Eskimo shamans the wind is the force which whips the flesh of the initiate until he is a bare skeleton. This symbolizes his nakedness before Nature, and precedes his re-clothing in flesh and hence a new, spiritual, body.<sup>38</sup> The forces which batter both Prometheus and the shaman are demonic enemies until initiation when they are forced to become servants. Prometheus's encounter with fire in the form of the culture will give him the shaman's mastery of fire. The revelation of light will give him what Eliade calls in The Two and the One "the mystic light." He will only be able to ride the wind like the shaman after he has been flayed by that same wind.

There follows a second dream of freedom and of "prophesying Freedom." (Poem 15, p. 85) As was the case previously he again awakes to a harsh reality, "to the old chains/and the old agony." Nonetheless Prometheus has made progress. It is in his dreams that he will find the key to his fetters. Instead of seeking to burst out to the periphery he instead turns to the "centre of every aeon ... Himself sealed on his rock":

This is the way out of the vicious circle. Not to rush round on the periphery, like a rabbit in a ring, trying to break through. But to retreat to the very centre of centres, and there to be filled with a new strange stability, polarized in unfathomable richness with the centre of things.<sup>39</sup>

(D.H. Lawrence)

Prometheus's dream precedes the realization in the next poem of some point to his suffering:

He yields his own entrails  
 A daily premium  
 To the winged Death In Life, to keep it from men. (Poem 16, p. 86)

The issue of expiation has now become clearer, but no good can yet come from the protagonist's suffering since he is "Too far from his people to tell them/Now they owe nothing."

Prometheus sees his death as substitutionary, a common primitive concept, as is evinced by the early Lupercalia and the practice of Hindu kingdoms in India where the king dies to avert some great misfortune of his people. He was their substitute and in later years even he had a substitute in the form of a slave. The problem comes in communicating the fact of his substitution to a human race who are still suffering as if nothing had been done by him. His suffering brings no communication and fails in the terms of the two belief systems that emphasize relationship with the heavenly - Christianity and shamanism. Christ brought reconciliation for man with God by his death of the cross. The shaman is also a mediator, albeit highly man-centred. The uniting factor in the claims of establishing links with the divine is in the death and resurrection motif. Prometheus cannot die so there can be no communication.

This throws some light on the first line of Poem 17. The flat statement "No God -" is probably not a statement of atheism but one of alienation. If one continues the shamanic paradigm one can equate this with the concept of the Deus Otiosus, the absentee Supreme God who set the world in motion and left it to lesser divinities who are the ones the shaman negotiates with.<sup>40</sup> It is not surprising that despairing of any contact with this God Prometheus finally turns to "His mother", Themis, another figurehead of the cult of the Magna Mater or Great Mother. Thus the statement could also be seen as a rejection; of the male deity who is not interested, in eventual favour of one who

is closer. Commenting on the introduction of familiar words to his Orghast language characterized DADA as "that person over there, who doesn't give me food, is strange, and comes to represent the outside world", while he feels that the word MAMA comes from the sucking shape of the lips and closeness.<sup>41</sup> Prometheus embraces "A word" which is not the male Logos but is "Buried behind the navel, unutterable./The vital, immortal wound." (Poem 17, p. 87)

The word is shown as a wound and wound as womb. The previous sense of revulsion has gone. Hughes is reconsidering the import of the Smaragdine Tablet and its statement that "as it is above, so it is below":

Above - a word and a sigh.  
Below - gouts of blood and babies.

Above - The face, shaped like a perfect heart.  
Below - The heart's torn face. ('Fragment of an Ancient Tablet'  
Crow, p. 85)

In the above lines womb, wound and word are also brought together, but are incomprehensible to Crow. In Prometheus on his Crag there is the beginning of the appreciation of the tablet's true meaning. Idries Shah's translation of the Tablet reminds its reader that "The miracle is to be obtained",<sup>42</sup> rather than judged. Whether Prometheus does obtain the miracle remains to be seen.

In Poem 18 Prometheus meets a new representative of animal life - after the avian and the insect, now the reptile. Hughes's version of the "icon" pictures the hero surrounded solely by natural life, not even by humans in animal form like Io, who comforted Prometheus despite her own suffering in a cow's form. Although Io might seem a fitting comforter, as she was in Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound, for Hughes she is a distraction since he wants his hero to appreciate his humanity totally in the context of the world around him.

From the lizard's whisper we must assume that somewhere in the

midst of these shamanic dreams and ordeals Prometheus has been initiated into humanity. Maybe his death insurance, his "daily premium" to the vulture's "Death in Life" company (Poem 16) has finally matured. Ironically he has a perception of things that he never had as a deity of foreknowledge, and equally ironically it does not relieve his suffering. The lizard's envy of his new-found humanity does not interrupt the vulture.

Prometheus's humanity arouses a great shout from within. His words now hold the possibility of valid communication. "So speech starts hopefully to hold/Pieces of the wordy earth together" (Poem 19, p. 89).<sup>43</sup> But faced with the immensity of creation one is still forced to the 'savage' silence of "space-fright." Full humanity prompts a full questioning, the search for a way round the "space-fright" and the human condition.

The questions that Prometheus asks in Poem 20 are very similar to those that Hughes has asked throughout his poetic career. In the idea of bird as "unborn half-self" we meet the protagonist of Cave Birds. As "prophetic familiar" the vulture could be the bird in 'Hawk Roosting' or any other living creature in the early poetry. As "The nothing door" the vulture is Crow at the womb-door. There then follows a central question which is the pivot of the poem - "Was Life his transgression?/Was he the punished criminal aberration?" This is a direct echo of Segismundo's words in Life is a Dream when he states - "For man's greatest sin/Is that he was born."

It is this Original Sin that Prometheus is seeking to expiate. Since it can only be expunged by death he remains both unshriven and uninitiated. His second question about himself rather than the vulture shows this realization. "Was he an uninitiated infant/Mutilated towards alignment?" Hughes's poetry seeks to answer this question, applying it

to Western man. With each volume he takes a different perspective, desperately thinking as the vulture circles.

Not only is the earlier work echoed in the riddle of the vulture but also we are given hints of later developments, particularly Gaudete. Lumb is also an "anti-self" and a "Helper", a "supernatural spirit" sent by the Earth Mother, "the earth's enlightenment."

The final poem should be read in the context of these far-reaching questions and identifications. It is not a conclusion to Prometheus's experience but only the end of a chapter whose plot will continue, played out by different characters. The hero's recognition that he is an "uninitiated infant" has opened the way to a far greater degree of "earth's enlightenment" than we ever found in the destruction of Wodwo or the nihilism of Crow, despite such tantalizing hints such as the poems 'Glimpse' or 'fleeing from Eternity'.

Prometheus's final admission of guilt, unavoidable because shared with all humanity, and his admission of lack of knowledge, contradicting the meaning of his name, have the required effect:

His mother covers her eyes.  
The mountain splits its sweetness.  
The blue fig splits its magma.

And the cry bulges.  
And the veiny mire  
Bubbles scalded. (Poem 21, p. 92)

His mountain becomes a volcano and its blast annihilates. In the same way that crocuses announce Spring "The mountain is flowering/A gleaming man." Poem 7 has proven to be prophetic:

So the sun bloomed, as it drank him,  
Earth purpled its crocus.

So he flowered  
flowers of a numb bliss, a forlorn freedom- (p. 77)

It is now understood that Prometheus can only flower himself when the Earth does too. He is a microcosm of the world around him. His

own renewal and the world's renewal are brought together in the images of the crocus, which speaks of the annual renewal of the seasons, and the volcano which speaks of that total renewal, a new Heaven and a new Earth.

There is a third image of renewal though, which must also be considered. It is that of the peacock and phoenix. The volcano is Prometheus's "crib of flames" since like the phoenix he will rise from the ashes of his own conflagration. The world floats on a "dusty peacock film" because the peacock stands for:

beauty and the power of transmutation, because in popular belief it is credited with the power of eating poisons<sup>44</sup> and transforming them into the beauty of its feathers.  
(W.Y. Evans-Wentz)

Thus the sequence ends with a number of images of initiatory release. Prometheus is "A gleaming man" like the Manichean Redeemer rising from his prison abyss to sit on his throne of glory. The mention of the peacock provides a link with the Tibetan Buddhist peacock throne, which is the seat of one of the Five Buddhas.

These images are usually mystifying to the general reader. They are perhaps overwhelming and certainly beautiful without explanation, but what is finally unsatisfying, though, is the suddenness of this hierophanic vision. Guilt has been accepted but that is not sufficient. If a "PAYMENT" has been made for man, then how did it happen? The very cosmology that has been used to universalize Prometheus on his Crag has also made it abstract. This was perhaps the poet's intention as we can guess from the use of the words "icon" and "fable" in Poem 18 to describe the nature of the text. Although one form is static and visual, the other mobile and auditory, these artistic models are united in a common abstraction and idealization.

We must wait until Cave Birds for the problem of guilt to be articulated in a more personal way. Many of the ideas that we have

discovered in Prometheus on his Crag are there developed in such a way as to cause a clearer identification with the contemporary reader and the journey towards a more public art. This sequence should be seen as the logical conclusion to one of the strands of Crow, opening the way to the poet's concentration on the concerns that begin to germinate in Cave Birds and which come to fruition in Gaudete - they will then be plowed back into the ground in 'Moortown' and Remains of Elmet.



NOTES

1. A.C.H. Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), p. 98.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 132-3.
3. Geo Widengren, Mani and Manicheism, trans. Charles Kessler, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1961), p. 46.
4. In the Zervanite version of the myth Ahriman and Ohrmazd are twin brothers, sons of Zervan. Ahriman is the oldest so he rules the earth for the first half of creation, to be replaced by his brother in the second half. Ohrmazd represents the victorious force of good supplanting his evil brother. We thus have the two fighting brothers of Parzival and Hughes's Gaudete.
5. Edmund Leach, Levi-Strauss, (London: Fontana Collins, 1970), p. 81.
6. Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, p. 93.
7. *ibid.*, p. 97.
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*, p. 93.
10. *ibid.*, p. 94.
11. Carl Kerényi, Prometheus, trans. Ralph Mannheim, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1963).
12. Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, I (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 148, para. 8.
13. Preface to 'Prometheus Unbound'. Shelley, Poetical Works, ed. T. Hutchinson, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).
14. Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, p. 20.
15. Calderon de la Barca, Life is a Dream, trans. Kathleen Raine, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968), p. 20.
16. Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, trans. by P. Vellacot. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 30.
17. See Kerényi, Prometheus, pp. 35-38.
18. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 82.
19. Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, p. 253.
20. *ibid.*, p. 54.
21. Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, p. 94.

22. *ibid.*, p. 97.
23. Cuchulain's warp spasm gave him the nickname "the warped one from Ein Macha" in the Tain.
24. Levi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 497.
25. Note that Hughes repudiates the idea of institutional priesthood, as with the Reverend Lumb in Gaudete who must undergo a true personal initiation. This is partly because shamanism is a hunter's religion. It is an agricultural society which develops ritual most fully and subordinates the individual most completely to the common good of the group.
26. Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, p. 97.
27. D.H. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 157.
28. *ibid.*, p. 156.
29. See Paul Radin, The Trickster, (London: Routledge, 1956). In The Masks of God Campbell refers to Prometheus as the type of one pole of religious thought - "The Greek Titan, a sublimation of the image of the self-reliant, shamanistic trickster." (p. 279) His other pole is Biblical Christianity. He sees one as taking the side of man, the other of God.
30. Calderon, Life is a Dream, p. 89.
31. *ibid.*, p. 74.
32. The two cosmic pythons, the Sea and the Sky form with the Earth the Mithraic triad. In Mithraism all statues of the deity and his superior Kronos show both with a serpent around them - a caduceus. Here the fight within the triad shows a dislocated universe.
33. Levi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, p. 497.
34. Orpheus was similar to Prometheus in a number of ways, for according to Strato "in his mysteries he taught men things unknown to them before." Orpheus was also imprisoned and his mystery dealt with the release of the soul. Plato in Cratylus (400 c) spoke of "the followers of Orpheus ... holding that the soul is undergoing punishment, for some reason or another, and has this husk around it, like a prison, to keep it from running away."
35. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 33.
36. One myth credits Prometheus with the creation of man and woman. In another woman is the penalty for this transgression, Pandora and her box being equally dangerous. This is the myth Robert Graves regards as an anti-feminist fable.
37. cf. the death-camp imagery in Plath's 'Daddy'.

38. The structure behind this aspect of Prometheus on his Crag can be seen in the following schema:

fire	→	the vulture	→	the mastery of fire
wind	→	whips	→	ability to ride the wind
light	→	the sun	→	the divine halo

3 weapons      3 enemies                      3 shamanic attributes

39. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 149.
40. Eliade describes a number of North American Indian versions of this belief in Myth and Reality.
41. Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, p. 43.
42. Idries Shah, The Sufis, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), p. 13.
43. The idea of words as birds in this poem is a familiar one among shamans. Sioux songs sound like the crying of a flock of birds.
44. Bardo Thodol, p. 55.

CHAPTER 4

CAVE BIRDS

Cave Birds was first published as a ten poem limited edition in 1975, with nine drawings by Leonard Baskin. These poems were composed during the same period as both Season Songs and Gaudete but were the first to appear in any completed form. The generally available edition of the poems took form as the result of Baskin's enthusiasm in producing ten further drawings and thirty-one poems were read at the Ilkley Festival in Yorkshire in 1975. The poems deal with the now-familiar themes of death and resurrection and more clearly than any of Hughes's other work show his vital concern with initiatory patterns. In fact, rather than using initiatory myths, Hughes is now creating his own initiatory text. Cave Birds describes a ritual which takes an individual from profane experience into the sacred.

The sequence commences by showing the protagonist at ease in a cosy nursery world. It is a nursery because there is no personal responsibility and no capacity for understanding the true nature of the world. Not only is the persona completely untouched by suffering, but he also has no concern about its effects on other creatures. His only response to what he sees is self-congratulation at his own immunity. "When I saw little rabbits with their heads crushed on roads/I knew I rode the wheel of the galaxy." (1978 Faber edition, p. 7) The persona's attitude trivializes the "miracle" of the hawk's flight, takes the mysteries of Nature and makes them a game rather than a rite. Hughes's introduction to the poem when Cave Birds was broadcast puts the persona's situation like this - "The hero's cockerel innocence, it turns out,

becomes his guilt. His own self, finally, the innate nature of his flesh and blood, brings him to court." This introduction served as a reminder of the judiciary nature of the protagonist's experience, that his attitude is not harmless, but a serious offence against Nature, an offence that can not be overlooked, and in the midst of his complacent crowing the hero is struck dumb so that the honesty of the scream can surface. Like the Word of God which is sharper than any sword, which divides between spirit and soul, the scream is "Like an obsidian dagger, dry, jag-edged." One is also reminded of the stone sacrificial dagger of many cultic religions, for instance the Aztec.

The hero is confronted by spiritual realities which make a mockery of his complacent philosophy, his dangerous innocence. The philosophy is that of Socrates, as the initial title of 'The accused' as 'Socrates' Cock' hints. Hughes has said that the basic idea of the sequence is "the psychological crime, punishment and compensation of Socrates",<sup>1</sup> who was the defender of the trend from religion to philosophy as the key to living. This idea is explained by the poet in his original subtitle, describing Cave Birds as:

The Death of Socrates and his Resurrection in Egypt - with some idea of suggesting that aspect of it which is a critique of sorts of the Socratic abstraction and its consequences through Christianity to us. His resurrection in Egypt, in that case, would imply his correction, his re-absorption into the magical-religious archaic sources of the intellectual life in the East Mediterranean and his re-emergence as a Horus-beloved child and spouse of the Goddess.<sup>2</sup>

So once again we see Hughes's pivotal preoccupation with spiritual sources which predate our own culture and which use the "old method" to put our civilization on to a "new holy ground." The protagonist in being judged stands for each one of us, including the poet himself, and also for our culture which has also made mock of the mysteries,

thus forfeiting any meaning to our sufferings.

The scream of the protagonist begins the judicial process by bringing down the bird whose task is to act as summoner. Even the physical form of this bird is a foretaste of judgement:

Spectral, gigantified,  
Protozoic, blood-eating.

The carapace  
Of foreclosure.

The cuticle  
Of final arrest.

('The summoner', p. 8)

As Gifford and Roberts have pointed out "foreclosure" implies dis-possession and in the hero-cockerel's case he is deprived of his spirit's home, his body.

At first the summoner seems to be a protector, but, "Sooner or later -/The grip."

The description of the summoner as protector is part of a double thread; the first the judicial image, the second based on analogies stemming from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The first thread leads to such words as "foreclosure" and "Evidence" and the titles of a number of poems, while the second is more hidden yet appears in most poems. This latter strand emphasizes the work of the Word and the Spirit, forces which Hughes presumably regards as more acceptable than other Christian concepts owing to their relation to mystery religions. The Spirit aspect comes in references to the wind, which Jesus likened to the Spirit (cf. 'The guide'), in references to water ('The baptist') and in the images of comfort. In 'The baptist' the water is a "swathing of balm" while in 'The summoner' the creature is called a protector, like the Comforter who is the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

It is important that the protector also be the summoner, since by calling the hero to account and making foreclosure on his life, it

releases him to a new existence, the "Resurrection in Egypt." Like the Christian Holy Spirit, by bringing the forces of conviction, the summoner opens the door to rebirth, but first the legal requirements must be satisfied. The hero must stand trial and if found guilty must suffer the penalty. Thus we are presented with the Kafkaesque trial of 'After the first fright'. As an "honourable platonist"<sup>3</sup> the protagonist feels bound to protest, but is confronted by his own daemon, his alter-ego, his non-rational self, who dramatizes in front of his eyes the true nature of his crimes:

The disputation went beyond me too quickly.  
 When I said: 'Civilization',  
 He began to chop off his fingers and mourn.  
 When I said: 'Sanity and again Sanity and above all Sanity',  
 He disembowelled himself with a cross-shaped cut. (p. 10)

"He cannot understand the sequence of cause and effect"<sup>4</sup> said Hughes, that his own attitude is causing the dismemberment of his own true self. Once again the hero is silenced, but now instead of a scream comes guilt:

I stopped trying to say anything.  
 But when he began to snore in his death-struggle  
 The guilt came.  
 And when they covered his face I went cold. (p. 10)

Hughes has written to Gifford and Roberts clarifying 'After the first fright', speaking of his early misgivings about its crudity and why he followed Keith Sagar's urging to retain it in the sequence. Its crudity is part of the point. "The point of the poem is that the real language of pain is clear - its declaration to the 'I' in the poem is immediate and complete, totally understood."<sup>5</sup> He also tells us that:

The subject here - that no doubt has some influence on the tone and style of the piece - is the crude and degenerated state of the mutual understandings between what is desirable and required, and what is inescapably and blindly undergone. 'Civilization' and 'Sanity' are variable terms, according to what is desirable and required. What is 'desirable' and 'required' to what is truly suffered?<sup>6</sup>

Chopping of fingers in mourning and Hara-kiri are examples of what is desirable and required in certain cultures, yet insanity in others. It is significant that in Westernized societies they are the marks of extreme existentialist alienation. One is reminded of the masochistic suicide of the Japanese novelist Mishima and of the Dutch existentialist film where the man who was both director and victim set up a camera to record his self-mutilation by cutting off his fingers, joint by joint using pliers. What in 'integrated' societies is "part of the coherent, balanced successfully adapted system by which those societies manage life and their world"<sup>7</sup> in our world is a manifestation of decay, masochism rather than "absolute honesty ... the acceptance of the reality of what hurts."<sup>8</sup>

It is this reality that the protagonist is now subjected to by 'The interrogator', the representative of the sun as in Prometheus on his Crag and likewise a vulture agent of the male principle.<sup>9</sup> Like a real vulture the interrogator is ready to pounce upon whatever the Sun exposes, in this case, "the stare-boned mule of man/lumped on the badlands." (p. 12) The Sun which the vulture serves is manifested in Cave Birds as 'The judge' a disgusting expression of the male principle divorced from the female. The judge is more concerned with judging than justice, as is the Zeus in Prometheus on his Crag, Krogon in Orghast, the Jehovah that Hughes finds in the Old Testament, the Gnostic creator of Crow. He is:

The garbage-sack of everything that is not  
The Absolute onto whose throne he lowers his buttocks.

Clowning, half-imbecile,  
A Nero of the unalterable. (p. 16)

We note that his main interest is gluttony, that the guilt and punishment that mankind is imprisoned by are just "leavings." The judge is too self-obsessed to enjoy oppressing humanity. His oppression is even



more intolerable for being a side effect of his gluttony.

With a glutton as judge it is not surprising that a scavenger bird should be the prosecutor, and in his extremity the persona finds the offer of the vulture's hungry embrace hard to refuse:

Then the bird came.  
 She said: your world has died.  
 It sounded dramatic.  
 But my pet fern, the one fellow creature I still cherished,  
 It actually had died.  
 I felt life had decided to cancel me  
 As if it saw better help for itself elsewhere.

Then this bird-being embraced me, saying:  
 'Look up at the sun. I am the one creature  
 Who never harmed any living thing.'

I was glad to shut my eyes, and be held.  
 Whether dead or unborn, I did not care. ('She seemed so considerate',  
 p. 14)

The protagonist's situation is very similar to that of Prometheus who also must endure the vulture's interest,<sup>10</sup> but unlike Prometheus the hero of Cave Birds has the hope of an end. He has abused his humanity but he is human, mortal like the lizard that Prometheus envies in Poem 18. Prometheus can never make atonement because he can never die, he can only wildly hope that the vulture is "after all, the Helper/ Coming again to pick at the crucial knot/Of all his bonds?" (Poem 20) In contrast the protagonist of Cave Birds has already recognized the vulture as his "protector".

Whereas the image of feeding was previously one of despair, a communion, but one without celebration, in Cave Birds it is one of life. "Whether dead or unborn", it does not matter - if rebirth is possible. It is at this point that the third strand of imagery becomes apparent. This is the shamanistic journey towards initiation, which in many cultures is described as being eaten by a monster,<sup>11</sup> and in every culture includes dismemberment and complete disintegration. With the persona's acceptance of the vulture's claim that "your world has died", he is

ready to make the journey to the underworld, the process of psychic dismantlement and reconstruction that the numerous shamanic traditions illustrate.

Mircea Eliade calls the experience of being eaten "a frequent symbol for the 'breakthrough in planes'",<sup>12</sup> the means by which an individual is transferred from one mode of existence to another. But before this transfer can be fully effected there must first be a confrontation with the realities that the persona has so long ignored. 'The plaintiff' shows him seeing for the first time the representative of the Earth goddess:

This is the bird of light!

This is your moon of pain - and the wise night-bird  
Your smile's shadow.

This bird  
Is the life-divining bush of your desert

The heavy-fruited, burning tree  
Of your darkness.

How you have nursed her!

Her feathers are leaves, the leaves tongues,  
The mouths wounds, the tongues flames

The feet  
Roots

Buried in your chest, a humbling weight  
That will not let you breathe.

Your heart's winged flower  
Come to supplant you. (p. 18)

The "bird of light" is linked to its mother, the Gea Genetrix, by a number of herbal images. The bird is a bush in the desert, its feathers its leaves, its feet the roots. At the same time it is still a manifestation of the persona's victim, his own daemon. In repressing a part of his nature he has also suppressed Nature herself.<sup>13</sup> The vulture is the representation of the male force, symbolized by Zeus.

The plaintiff is "the wise night-bird", creature of Artemis and Athene,<sup>14</sup> the same female figure who will be encountered in 'A riddle' and 'The owl flower', who the protagonist will eventually marry in a sequence of later poems.

The tone and haunting beauty of 'The plaintiff' is reminiscent of 'Crow's Undersong', but here the tone is firmer, the subject brought into focus, a concrete manifestation of the 'She' who cannot "come all the way" and who can only make her complaint through her messenger.

The marriage to this hermaphroditic figure who is both himself and a representative of the female, is the second major phase of the protagonist's shamanic initiation. The marriage with an androgynous spirit is a specifically shamanistic experience,<sup>15</sup> part of a phenomenon that has already shown the force of its attraction in Crow and Prometheus on his Crag.

Baskin's drawing is of a 'Hermaphroditic Ephesian Owl', pointing to the plaintiff's androgyny, reflecting a psychological reality - the mythic reconciliation of male and female, at peace within a single individual.<sup>16</sup> But the marriage is still yet to come. The first phase of devouring must run its full course. 'In these fading moments I wanted to say' describes the hero's final moment of struggle, making idiotic excuses in the face of death. In response the daemon reminds her other self that he cannot have cared about "some perfect stranger's maiming" because he had no concept of the true nature of the world and of life, "a cold business of mountains and their snow," (p. 20)

Though already swallowed by the vulture the protagonist receives his final sentence in the executioner's cup of hemlock. The poem 'The executioner' portrays death as a kind of possession, a replacement of the hero's old self by the raven. The use of hemlock reminds us that it is the death of Socratic man that is taking place as the

protagonist discovers that his body is no longer his own. He becomes a foetus awaiting new birth. "It feels like the world/Before your eyes ever opened." (p. 22)

It should be noted that here Hughes has not made the mistake of relieving the sense of doom as the poison darkens first the heavens and then the earth. The poem is a little apocalypse in itself, as one by one the stars blink out of existence and concurrently the hero's consciousness fragments, black emptiness replacing the eyes of his friends. This sense of total horror is admirably balanced by the persona's own detachment and the monumental uniqueness of the experience. A new cosmos replaces the indifferent or exhausted one that turned its back on the protagonist in the previous poem. The hero's rebirth is for him a renewal of the whole world. Here the aspect that is being dealt with is the return to the womb just prior to rebirth, what Mircea Eliade calls the 'regressus ad uterum'.<sup>17</sup>

With the poem 'The accused' there now begins to be a voluntary response rather than just a reaction. The protagonist makes an unsolicited confession that is both legal and spiritual. The spiritual side is more Gnostic than Christian, an antinomian confession, repenting of his body. He is also confessing fraud in that he has sported the finery of a "bedaubed, begauded/Eagle-dancer" without being one. This confession brings positive results. The shedding of skin is like that of the snake, a symbol of renewal. It also has shamanic significance, involving a rubbing away of skin until a magical second skin is visible to the leading shamans.<sup>18</sup> By now the protagonist has realized that without going to judgement he will never go free. He has also realized that he must renounce the old for the new, the profane for the sacred. In the terms of Saint Paul he must put off the old man and put on the new. 'The accused' deals with the first action. 'First, the

doubtful charts of skin' deals with the beginning of the latter, port-  
 raying it in terms of a journey as in The Pilgrim's Progress or the  
 quest for the holy grail. There is also a strong element from the  
Odyssey:

After some harmless, irrelevant marvels  
 And much boredom at sea

Came the wrecked landfall, sharp rocks, hands and knees  
 Then the small and large intestine, in their wet cave.  
 These gave me pause.

('First, the doubtful charts of skin', p. 26)

This journey is also a swallowing; the hero negotiates intestines  
 as if they were tunnels in the Cyclops' cave, part of the continual  
 layering and cross-reference that characterizes Cave Birds. One of  
 the trials is a battle with a spider which reminds us of the Judge who  
 "teeters across/A web-glistening geometry",<sup>19</sup> another manifestation of  
 the male oppressor figure. Having survived these encounters the hero  
 is finally confronted by his own grave, an encounter which is made  
 more explicit in the poem 'Second Birth', collected in the Faber  
 edition of Moortown:

When he crept back, searching for  
 The womb-doorway, remorseful,  
 It was an ugly grave  
 Fallen in on bleached sticks. (Moortown, p. 112)

The womb door is also a grave, a familiar correspondence to the primitive  
 psyche. In Africa it is customary for the women of some tribes to give  
 birth into a shallow trench (or deliberately on to the bare earth) to  
 act out the origins of the infant in both death and the earth. The  
 epitaph at the end of 'First, the doubtful charts of skin' should be  
 read in this context. Because the protagonist has come to the grave he  
 will find weapons. It is a prophecy that he will become a warrior, "the  
 ideal, spiritual persona designed to manage and enjoy those other worlds  
 safely, and sanely, and this one too."<sup>20</sup>

There is also a link here with Remains of Elmet - in the image of

"loose bones/On a heathery moor, and a roofless church", with wild horses standing among the graves.<sup>21</sup> It is in such a landscape that the "cradle-grave" is located:

Where the Mothers

Gallop their souls

Where the howlings of heaven  
Pour down onto earth  
Looking for bodies  
Of birds, animals, people

A happiness starts up, secret and wild,  
Like a lark-song just out of hearing  
Hidden in the wind

A silent evil joy  
Like a star-broken stone  
Who knows nothing more can happen to it  
In its cradle-grave. (Remains of Elmet, p. 10)

Once again the emphasis is on the grave as central to birth. In this poem the Mothers are the force behind the vitality of the moors. They, like the wild horses, are attendants of the Great Mother. In 'The knight' the hero kneels before this same lady in "flawless" submission.

'The knight' is the culmination of the first phase of the ritual. This was not the case in the first version of Cave Birds where the sequence of poems went straight from 'The accused' to 'The risen'. This gave central emphasis to the trial image, whereas with the stimulation of ten more Baskin drawings, the emphasis turns to the shamanistic and initiatory aspects, developed in poems like 'A flayed crow in the hall of judgement', 'The baptist', 'The guide', and 'Walking bare'.

The next group of poems introduces the marriage element, throwing into sharper focus the importance of the choice between the false mother of 'A green mother' and the goddess of 'A riddle'. In The Art of Ted Hughes, Keith Sagar has treated this third group of poems as "not intended to go with any drawings, most of them, in fact, quite outside the bird-drama."<sup>22</sup> The first part of the statement is certainly

correct, but the assumption that most of these poems are "for relief and contrast"<sup>23</sup> is not borne out by the poems themselves. Although a number of them, like 'She seemed so considerate' and 'In these fading moments', are no more than expansions of established themes and do bear the marks of forcing that Sagar refers to in his Cave Birds chapter, nonetheless the third group of poems is vital to the final product. They both give us a link with common twentieth century life as in the new opening poem, 'The scream', and also add a whole second stage to the hero's initiation, making it shamanic as well as personal. The second section transforms the sequence, changing it from an exercise in the rebirth motif, albeit a highly accomplished one, into a poetic demonstration of the reintegration proffered to the protagonist, and also arguably giving a reader grounds for a similar negotiation with the female principle.

But before the marriage there must be a revelation. In the shamanic schema it is insufficient to die and to be reborn. There must be a discovery of knowledge that will make the protagonist a true warrior, a "man of power."<sup>24</sup> Such a warrior conquers by surrendering everything. His reward is himself, offered upon the altar of "the common wild stones of the earth", his sacrifice a deep response of reverence to the earth. It is in her name that he has conquered:

A man of knowledge in his role of warrior was obligated to have an attitude of deferential regard for the items with which he dealt; he had to imbue everything related to his knowledge with profound respect in order to place everything in a meaningful perspective. Having respect was equivalent to having assessed one's insignificant resources when facing the Unknown.<sup>25</sup>

(Carlos Castaneda)

The protagonist's submission of his vision to the grave and the reverent committal of his "trophy" to Nature results in a response from the natural order that surprises our technological sensibilities:

An unearthly cry goes up.  
The Universes squabble over him -

Here a bone, there a rag.  
His sacrifice is perfect. He reserves nothing. ('The knight', p. 28)

The cosmos acts like another, gigantic, vulture. It is like the Siberian "Bird-of-Prey-Mother", which watches over the shaman's soul until it reaches maturity, when it is torn apart.<sup>26</sup> There is also an echo of the Dionysan myth. Dionysus is also hermaphroditic, called 'hardenothelus', "man-womanish". Another of his names is "man-render", a right given him as a result of his own dismemberment by the Titans. His mother is Semele who was seduced by the god Zeus, representing marriage between mortal and immortal, earth and sky. As we will see again in Remains of Elmet the decaying bones of the above poem are what, for Hughes, nail the two elements together.

The Baskin drawing beside the text of 'The knight' is of 'A Death-stone Crow of Carrion'. The protagonist has shed the false finery of the cockerel and been transformed into a crow. He manifests the indestructibility of Crow, but unlike Crow he is making progress in his quest because he is prepared to be dismantled:

And already  
Nothing remains of the warrior but his weapons

And his gaze.  
Blades, shafts, unstrung bows - and the skull's beauty

Wrapped in the rags of his banner.  
He is himself his banner and its rags.

While hour by hour the sun  
Strengthens its revelation.

Not only is there a devouring and a dismemberment but as in many primitive cultures, there is also a stripping down to the skeleton which then becomes an object of contemplation:

By thus seeing himself naked, altogether freed from the perishable and transient flesh and blood, he consecrates himself, in the sacred tongue of the shamans, to his great task, through



that part of his body which will longest withstand the action of the sun, wind and weather, after he is dead.<sup>27</sup>

(Mircea Eliade)

That is why "His spine survives its religion." The weapons he receives as a result of his consecration are his own bones, wrapped in a tattered battle flag that is his own soul, like Crow's "black flag of himself."

What makes the protagonist a hero and a warrior is the fact that he has survived all that has happened to him:

In our time the heroic struggle is not to become a hero but to remain a living creature simply ... The victims of radio-activity and of the death-camps, the corpse of a bird, an agony too private to name, become the only unequivocal portraits of life, of the Angel a hundred faces behind the human face.<sup>28</sup>

In this comment on the work of Leonard Baskin, Hughes gives us an insight into his perception of the centrality of the themes in 'The knight', themes likewise suggested by the corpse of a bird. It is from the contemplation of such realities where Hades and Dionysus are one, that Hughes's own epiphanies derive. What is happening in the poem is a meditation upon one of "the unequivocal portraits of life." This form of meditation is further elucidated in another of Hughes's critical writings, his essay on the Hungarian poet Janos Pilinszky, written a year after Cave Birds:

The intensity is not forceful or strenuous, in any way. It is rather a stillness of affliction, a passivity of transfiguration. At this point, when all the powers of the soul are focused on what is final, and cannot be altered, even though it is horrible, the anguish is indistinguishable from joy. The moment closest to extinction turns out to be the creative moment.<sup>29</sup>

It is extinction and survival that makes the protagonist a warrior.<sup>30</sup> Without the former he is just like Crow or the "blood-crossed Knight" of the third part of 'Gog' in Wodwo who survives by trampling Nature underfoot. In Cave Birds the correspondance is no longer with the "suspect" myth of St. George and the dragon but is with that of Gawaine and the Green Knight.<sup>31</sup> Gawaine, too, must submit

to the forces of Nature, represented by the Green Knight. Gawaine's own encounter with this force also takes place beside a prehistoric burial place. But whereas in the medieval poem the two knights retain their separate identities, since an accommodation with the natural forces is culturally possible, in Cave Birds the context is of a society alienated from nature and only a complete assimilation and transformation will suffice. The protagonist must stop being a tool of the Socratic anti-material heresy and become the champion of the wronged lady.

'The knight' makes a definite break in the sequence, the climax to the first section. As a result, when we read 'Something was happening' there is a strong sense that everything is starting again. Once more we are shown the protagonist's response to a death; this time not that of a rabbit but of a woman that he has been close to. Again the complacency is shattered, this time by fear of a cycle of life that he cannot control:

And when I saw new emerald tufting the quince, in April .  
 And cried in dismay: 'Here it comes again!'  
 The leather of my shoes  
 Continued to gleam  
 The silence of the furniture  
 Registered nothing

The earth, right to its far rims, ignored me. (p. 30)

Nonetheless the hero is not left completely alone:

Only the eagle-hunter  
 Beating himself to keep warm  
 And bowing towards his trap  
 Started singing

(Two, three, four thousand years off key.)

These lines give us the main clue as to the nature of the division of the main elements of Cave Birds. Attention has already been drawn to the two phases of initiation and marriage, yet these do not explain

the repetition of themes and images that we are now encountering. The reason is because so far the protagonist has only experienced a personal initiation. His knighthood is only a beginning, not an end. The hero must now make the quest that he has been knighted for. The marriage is a new, specifically shamanic one, preceded by ordeals designed to confront fear rather than guilt. The persona of 'Something was happening' has not yet realized this and strolls without purpose, not knowing that he has now been apprenticed as a shaman.

The song of the "eagle-hunter" reaches across the millenia to help the persona, who must find a new song of his own, the eagle-hunter's being millenia "off-key". The journey must continue. The knight must win his lady's hand in marriage. The apprentice must master his trade. His dream in 'The knight' has proved his calling but not his ability to continue, and he must go through an ordeal which is both part of his education and a test. The protagonist's greatest enemy is now fear, guilt having already been confessed:

You choose - but it is a formality.  
Already yourself has confessed yourself.

All those sweatings and grinnings are futile.  
The candidate is stripped.

Such fear - your weight oozes from you. ('The gatekeeper', p. 32)

In The Teachings of Don Juan it is fear which is called "the first enemy of the man of knowledge." But also fear is treated as necessary. "The ideal was that, in spite of fear, one had to proceed with the course of one's acts."<sup>32</sup> In 'The gatekeeper' it is the gatekeeper's question which brings out the hero's fear of unforgiveness. "The simple fork in the road" is a highly important one. An eagle is flying "To drop you into a bog or carry you to eagles." Either the protagonist will emerge from this a shaman or he will be lost in the quagmire of his remorse. (The eagle is a symbol of the shamanic call. Among the

Buryat of Siberia just to dream of an eagle makes one a shaman.)

The answer is in fact already present in the hero's response to the sphinx/osprey's question. The sphinx asked Oedipus what went on four legs, three legs, two legs and one leg. He made the correct answer, 'Man'. This is also the answer of the protagonist of Cave Birds, who confesses his humanity, which is both the source of his guilt and of the courage that can make him conquer. His position is that of Carlos Castenada as shown him by Don Juan:

You think there are two worlds for you - two paths.  
But there is only one. The protector showed you this with  
unbelievable clarity. The only world available to you is  
the world of men, and that world you cannot choose to  
leave. You are a man!<sup>33</sup>

Hughes, too, links acceptance of one's self and one's humanity with acceptance of one's world. He applauds just such an attitude in his review of Max Nicholson's The Environmental Revolution, and it is the journey to this attitude that he dramatizes in the 'Alchemical Cave Drama' of Cave Birds.

This drama is now affected by a major change of tone, commencing with the poem 'The gatekeeper'. A different perspective is used for the second phase of initiation achieved by changes of voice. Whereas the earlier poems are usually in the first person, only occasionally in the third, the later ones are often from the point of view of an observer. In only two of the later poems does the hero speak, these being 'When I came I saw a wood' and 'Walking bare'. Most poems are addresses by various birds to the protagonist or observations on his behaviour by someone outside the drama. Once again it is worth making a comparison with The Teachings of Don Juan. The first person poems resemble Castenada's diary entries describing his experiences. The observer's advice and aids to understanding are like Don Juan's instruction. The teaching role of the birds in Cave Birds is like

that of the various potential helpers who appear to Castenada. Likewise some of these helpers are true, others false. The major difference lies in the third person poems, which have no equivalent in Castenada's writings, his apprenticeship initially discontinued, and though resumed, still unfinished.

The format common to both works is very similar to that of a mystery play or of Chaucer's The Parlement of Foules, particularly the latter, with various birds speaking to a central character, all open to the scrutiny of the poet. This dramatic structure enlivens the sequence in a way that Hughes's other Parlement, Adam and the Sacred Nine, fails to.

'Walking bare' and 'A flayed crow in the hall of judgement' are counterpoints to the drama, soliloquies, as in seventeenth century revenge tragedy, where the flood of bloody events is interrupted for the hero to give the audience an insight into his own state of mind. This dramatic structure continually reminds us that we are not dealing with a philosophical abstract, or a tract about initiatory experience, but with the hero's actual experience. Thus Hughes avoids the pontificating that mars Crow and is able to maintain the reader's interest through the rather repetitive violence. There is also a skilful use of questions in order to arouse our curiosity and maintain our contact with a distinctly odd experience.

These factors are particularly important since Hughes obviously intends the sequence to have an effect on an audience that has no knowledge of primitive initiatory rites. Thus the poet must use dual-purpose images, such as that of flaying in 'A flayed crow in the hall of judgement'. Here the admirably articulated sense of nakedness speaks for itself, dependant on no gory description of a flayed crow but on the persona's spoken expression of his isolation:

I rise beyond height - I fall past falling.  
 I float on an air  
 As mist-balls float, and as stars.

A condensation, a gleam simplification  
 Of all that pertained.  
 This cry alone struggled in its tissues.

Where am I going? What will come to me here?  
 Is this everlasting? Is it  
 Stoppage and the start of nothing? (p. 34)

Nonetheless there is also the shamanistic aspect, derived from the emphasis on removal of skin as symbolic of an altered state of consciousness. The effect of the flaying is to reveal the hero in his new guise of a crow, although the transformation has already taken place - the skeleton in 'The knight' is of a crow. This makes it clear that the different birds are symbols; the cockerel of Socratic man, the crow of the resurrected man who is still as yet unfulfilled. There is no "parallel human story" beside a "bird-drama", as Keith Sagar has suggested. The birds are externalizations of human psychic and psychological experience. Within the context of the symbol each bird is a bird and behaves as such, yet what the protagonist bird experiences is a human experience.

This can be seen in the next poem, 'The baptist', which takes us beyond the 'dark night of the soul', the "Darkness in which there is now nothing" of 'A flayed crow'. The use of the second person pronoun in 'The baptist' makes it seem as if the observer is talking to us, rather than the hero and is answering the question asked in the previous poem - "Is this everlasting? ... Or am I under attention?":

The baptist

Enfolds you  
 In winding waters, a swathing of balm

A mummy bandaging  
 Of all your body's puckering hurts (p. 36)

The baptist, a maze pelican, both represents the Buddhist dissolution of the self in the greater reality, the drop of water in the ocean, and also the Christian death to self, leading to new life with God, symbolized by burial in and resurrection from the waters.

The Biblical echoes continue in the title of the next poem, 'Only a little sleep a little slumber', which is the first line of a proverb that goes on "a little laying of the hands to rest - And your poverty will come in like a vagabond, and your need like an armed man." A shamanic recasting of the proverb goes like this - "Not to sleep is not only to conquer physical fatigue, but is above all to show proof of will and spiritual strength."<sup>34</sup> In Gnosticism sleep is a form of death and to awake is to be reborn. To stay awake is part of the protagonist's ordeal and it seems that the "shyest bird among birds" is one of those who has failed the test. He is now the last of his kind and so is by implication either impotent or too shy to court a mate. To fail the test is to fail to reproduce oneself. Whatever the interpretation of the bird's nature the point of the poem seems to be in the confrontation with the possibility of failure, like Childe Roland's meeting with the cripple in Browning's poem. "I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring/My heart made, finding failure in its scope."

The fear of defeat and death is exploited by the persona of the next poem:

Why are you afraid?  
In the house of the dead are many cradles.  
The earth is a busy hive of heavens.  
This is one lottery that cannot be lost.

Here is the heaven of the tree:  
Angels will come to collect you.  
And here are the heavens of the flowers:  
These are an everliving bliss, a pulsing, a bliss in sleep.

( 'A green mother', p. 40)

The green mother tries to make sleep seem attractive, contradicting the

warning given in the previous poem. Instead of knowledge, 'gnosis', the offer is of cheap forgiveness, a compromise solution: "Little of you will be rejected-" Instead of a choice as in 'The gatekeeper', all that is offered is "one lottery that cannot be lost", that of oblivion.

The green mother is in a very old tradition of deadly seductionists - the Sirens, Circe, and the Irish queen of the Fairies, whose lovers, once they have eaten or slept in the fairy hill, remain in everlasting bondage. This tradition is given a characteristic twist by Hughes. The false voice is of a mother, not a lover, who offers not mansions but cradles in a smothering parody of Jesus' words to his disciples. What is being offered is not spiritual maturity but eternal childishness.

The green mother's other aspect is that of a plausible religious humanist, a public relations officer for God, peddling a variety of holiday heavens:

The city of religions  
Is like a city of hotels, a holiday city.  
I am your guide.  
In none of these is the aftertaste of death  
Pronounced poor. This earth is heaven's sweetness. (p. 40)

The first title of this poem was 'Father of lying constructions', echoing the work of William Blake in its Biblical parody and untrustworthy father deity. But here there is a change in the sex of the deceiver, since a male false guide would be too easy to spot. There is also a psychological verity in the offer of a return to the womb. This is religion without suffering or self-denial, catharsis without involvement. Those who become the green mother's children have their faces wiped clean "Of the bitumen of blood and the smoke of tears." In other words they are separated from the act of sacrifice.

This false religion is offered even more subtly in the poem 'As I came, I saw a wood' where the protagonist is tempted to join a seemingly



valid rite which is the "festival of all the religions":

But a voice, a bell of cracked iron  
Jarred in my skull

Summoning me to prayer

To eat flesh and to drink blood. (p. 42)

The sacred grove is portrayed as a ritual in itself; bride, animals and insects joining in the dance with the trees. But again its benefit is illusory, being something in which humans cannot participate. Also, the ecstasy seems lasting but is not actually so. The creatures are trapped in a cycle where "they never stopped/Or left anything old or reached any new thing."

The hero is affected by a mixture of loathing and attraction, which Hughes evokes through the situation and little word hints ("seemed permanent", for instance). He can wander among the celebrants, but cannot join them, emptily excluded like Crow, as they enjoy an "absolution in sanctity" (p. 42) that is valid for them but a dead end for him. In the human world the dance is not complete in itself. It must be followed by a sacrifice.

In withstanding these three tests the hero has proved himself worthy to continue and enter fully the second stage of his initiation, which commences with 'A riddle', earlier entitled 'Incomparable marriage'. The persona of this poem is the true manifestation of the female deity. The green mother is not a true mother because she hides her children in her womb, while the true mother tells the hero:

Now as you face your death  
I offer you your life

Just as surely as you are my father  
I shall deliver you

My firstborn  
Into a changed, unchangeable world  
Of wind and of sun, of rock and water  
To cry. (p. 44)

The true mother makes no claims to protection from death or the harshness of the elements, but she does offer life, the proof of which is pain and tears. This is the kind of world Hughes feels modern poetry should deal with - hence his interest in contemporary Eastern European poets:

In a way, their world reminds one of Beckett's world. Only theirs seems braver, more human and so more real. It is as horrible as his, but they do not despair of it ... They have got back to the simple animal courage of accepting the odds. They do not accept lightly: we know what they have paid.<sup>35</sup>

The protagonist of Cave Birds is in the process of coming to the same position.

In her offer of reality the true Mother reminds the hero that his previous attempts to save his own skin were at her expense:

As you defended yourself  
I collected your blows, I was knocked backward

As you dodged  
I received in full

Once again we are reminded of the cost of involvement - no protection without sacrifice, no sacrifice without pain. The persona is daughter, wife and mother, having suffered the pain of each. She is the protagonist's alter-ego, suppressed by his previous Socratic infatuation - in the terms of Hughes's essay on Shakespeare she is Venus spurned by Adonis, the Queen of Heaven supplanted by Jehovah. She is the deity of 'Crow's Undersong', who Crow is searching for in order to marry, a part of the story that is not made clear in the poems. Cave Birds continues this story, 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days' being directly part of it. Hughes tells us:

That's right at the end of the story, when Crow is crossing the river, and has the seven questions put to him by the Ogress he carries across. His answers move from one pole of total disaster in the relationship between him and the female to the opposite pole of totally successful, blissful union. And meanwhile, this Ogress on his back turns into a beauty, ... And there are many more episodes in this happy land until the Ogress eventually becomes his bride.<sup>36</sup>

'A riddle' covers the earlier part of the same ground, its very title linking it to the seven questions.<sup>37</sup> Cave Birds is a positive continuation of the story which is basically negative in Crow, despite the possibilities hinted at in the last poems of the Faber edition. Cave Birds takes up the matter of poems like the 'Two Eskimo Songs', dreaming the myth onwards, as Jung would put it. The man who initially robs the woman of her song must be reconciled to her, and the conflict resolved in marriage.

With this marriage about to take place it is surprising to find the poem 'The scapegoat' interjected. This is Hughes's explanation - "His marriage, the opposite of a physical marriage, is celebrated by driving out of him a cockerel, as a scapegoat, a sacrifice to the eagles."<sup>38</sup> The driving out of the scapegoat is paralleled with the driving out of evil spirits, and thus:

The comedian  
Of the leap out of the body and back in again  
  
Let out a mandrake shriek  
In a jabber of unborn spirits, a huddle of oracles. (p. 46)

The "comedian" is of course the shaman whose talents include those of the exorcist, and whose spirit can leave his body at will. He is also "joker" because he is a trickster, as Paul Radin has pointed out in his work on the Trickster motif in the beliefs of the North American Winnebago Sioux.

In 'The scapegoat' it is marriage that fills the void after the casting out of the cockerel/scapegoat/spirit, and thus in one sense the spiritual marriage is itself a kind of possession. The willing sacrifice of the scapegoat precedes the willing sacrifice of the protagonist to his partner in coition.

The scapegoat was part of the Jewish temple worship. Once a year the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to make a special offer-

ing for the sin of the people. The blood from the sacrifice would then be sprinkled on a goat which would be then expelled into the desert. Christ was reckoned by the early Jewish Christians to be the once and for all sacrificial scapegoat, and we see an echo of the crucifixion in the last lines of the poem:

The champion of the swoon  
 Loll'd his bauble head, a puppet, a zombie  
 And the lord of immortality is a carcass of opals,  
 A wine-skin of riddance, a goat of oaths  
 A slaking of thistles. (p. 46)

The scapegoat lolls like Christ upon the cross, crying out with thirst. As Christ "the lord of immortality" was "a goat of oaths" so the cockerel repeats his suffering. The references to the "wine-skin" and "slaking" may point to another parallel where Jesus cried out with thirst and was offered coarse Roman wine which he refused.

This poem reveals an attitude towards the possibility of atonement that has developed very little beyond that found in Prometheus on his Crag. Prometheus was a scapegoat in that he was punished instead of man (although Zeus vindictively fooled man with the false gift of Pandora's box). The difference here is that the cockerel is atoning for who he is rather than for what he has done. His suffering is closest to that of the shaman who seeks a new sensibility, having rejected his old one. It is not Christ-like in that it is a personal atonement, not an offering for the sins of others.

The importance of 'The scapegoat' in the schema of Cave Birds is that it prepares the way for marriage. Atonement must be made for past abuses of and hostility to the feminine. Evil must be exorcised before the good can be embraced.

After 'The scapegoat' there follows three marriage poems interspersed by poems of shamanic illumination. In 'After there was nothing

there was a woman' we are shown the bride whose voice we have already heard. Her beauty is the result of entropy:

Whose breasts had come about  
 By long toil of earthworms  
 After many failures, but they were here now  
 And she protected them with silk (p. 48)

The bride is the earth, sifted by earthworms and dressed by silkworms. Like various creatures in Lupercal she has come from the humus (cf. 'Mayday on Holderness') but here she is also composed of such. Her beauty has come "Via the vulture's gullet/And the droppings of the wild dog ..." The earth and the animal kingdom are shown in a symbiosis that is abhorrent to humanity, yet leaves mankind empty excluded. The message of 'The knight' was that we must each voluntarily make our contribution to the composition of the soil.

Marriage to the earth-bride means a total giving of self. 'His legs ran about' and 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days' illustrate this by the act of sexual consummation. In the former of these two poems the protagonist's single-minded entanglement with his bride leads to a hierophanic revelation. The totality of his impulse "Like a bull pushing towards its cows, not be stayed/Like a calf seeking its mama" opens the doorway to the heavens. This spiritual marriage is consummated in a manifestation of the sacred as well as by coitus:

Then such greatness and truth descended  
 As over a new grave, when the mourners have gone  
 And the stars come out  
 And the earth, bristling and raw, tiny and lost,  
 Resumes its search  
 Rushing through the vast astonishment. (p. 52)

In the other poem the protagonist gives because he has been given to. This becomes an act of mutual creation:

And now she smooths over him the plates of his skull  
 So that the joints are invisible

And now he connects her throat,  
                                 her breasts and the pit of her stomach  
 With a single wire               (p. 56)

Each touch is creative because it is also ecstatic. Eliade has called shamanism the "technique of ecstasy." Its parallel in common human experience is found in sexual union. Thus that union is both the poet's metaphor for the shamanic experience and an external manifestation of that inner truth.

Besides having the value of grounding a reader in a more accessible human experience than shamanism, the marriage metaphor also has an important root in the thought of primitive societies. Among the Goldi of Siberia to dream of such a union as articulated in Cave Birds would be proof of being a shaman. (Just to dream of a woman would be sufficient.) Referring to such experiences the anthropologist Rahmann concludes:

shamanism essentially consists in a specific relation to a tutelary spirit, which is manifested by the spirit's taking hold of the shaman as its medium, or by entering into the shaman to invest him with higher knowledge and powers, ...<sup>39</sup>

The relation to the tutelary spirit is usually described as a marriage.

This spirit-woman is revealed in the sequence as 'The owl flower':

Big terror descends.

A drumming glare, a flickering face of flames.

Something separates into a signal,  
 Plaintive, a filament of incandescence,

As it were a hair.               (p. 58)

The bird is very similar to the angel of 'Ballad from a Fairy Tale', the same angel that appears at the end of Remains of Elmet, the angel at the centre of Baskin's work. Each of these apparitions evokes fear and awe. Each is surrounded by an ominous yet beautiful apocalyptic light, "fired with rainbows, raw with cringing heat" (p. 58) This same owl was once the plaintiff, messenger from the goddess and the goddess

herself, as when Athene used to become an owl to deliver her own messages, or the Celtic deity Blodeuedd who also took the form of an owl and is described in one myth as being made from flowers. Robert Graves considers her to be a manifestation of the White Goddess.

The whole marriage theme can be traced back to 1964, when Hughes began work on a play entitled Difficulties of a Bridegroom, parts of which became poems in Wodwo (like 'Ghost Crabs' and 'Gog' Part III) or part of the shorter drama Eat Crow. Ekbert Faas describes the roots of Cave Birds in Difficulties of a Bridegroom like this:

The new volume carries its subtitle for a good reason. For its central piece, 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days', is the fulfilment of a quest which started with Hughes' attempt, shortly after Sylvia Plath's death, to write a verse drama adaptation of The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz, Andreae's seventeenth century Hermetic narrative about how 'sponsus' and 'sponsa' become each other's saviour through their union.<sup>40</sup>

In his 1977 interview with Faas Hughes called Andreae's play "a crucial seminal work - like Parzival or The Tempest - a tribal dream."<sup>41</sup> The roots in hermetic philosophy and alchemy, its offshoot, explain why Cave Birds is called an 'Alchemical Cave Drama', also drawing attention to the primitive beginnings of alchemy in initiatory religion - which also deals with transmutation of base elements.<sup>42</sup> What is gained from Hermeticism and alchemy is the concept of mutual salvation, unlike the shamanic marriage which deals more with mutual favours. The act of union is the experience that makes the hero a true healer, and is also his means of healing the abused Mother/Wife.

True to his anthropological training (and poetic instinct) Hughes broadens the perspective to give a fuller insight into this experience. In 'The guide' the female spirit imparts knowledge to the protagonist as to her role, while 'Walking bare' looks into the hero's own mind as he articulates his discovery of a new body and sensibility. These

poems make a useful contrast to the marriage poems without supplanting them as the centre of attention. They also provide a reminder that the union is a spiritual one, an insight into rather than a commentary upon the central act of intercourse. In this act the hero discovers not only the gem of his true self but also his true guide and mate.

'The guide' was earlier entitled 'The true guide' to contrast with the false guide of 'A green mother'. The guide herself points to this contrast - "Where the snow mama cuddled you warm/I fly up. I lift you." To fall asleep in the snow is to die, as in the Wodwo short story 'Snow'. Instead the guide, who is a 'Scarecrow Swift', brings a cleansing whirlwind, reminding the hero that a proper foundation can only be laid if the ground has been cleared:

...one had better have one's spirit invested in something that will not vanish. And this is a shifting of your foundation to completely new Holy Ground, a new divinity, one that won't be under the rubble when the churches collapse.<sup>43</sup>

The "flame-wind" that will clear the rubble and scour him is both red and black, the colours used in Gnosticism to signify the Holy Spirit. The "non-wind, a least breath" is like the still, small voice that spoke to the prophet Elijah out of the whirlwind.

'Walking bare' shows us the hero after the wind has done its work. His old flesh has been removed, as in the companion drawing. "What is left is just what my life bought me/The gem of myself." (p. 54) He is released by "Lightness beyond lightness", and the torment is past as "new sky-lines lift wider wings/Of simpler light", and he perceives his true place in the cosmos:

A one gravity keeps touching me.

For I am the appointed planet  
Extinct in an emptiness

But a spark in the breath  
Of the corolla that sweeps me. (p. 54)



This is the same cosmic perspective as at the end of 'His legs ran about', a complementary account of the protagonist's hierophany. The marriage and the scouring are one in their effect.

"The gem of myself" is a core of being that has been tested mercilessly yet survived, the proof of the hero's calling. The description of the core as a gem points to the 'diamond' body that Indian yogis receive and the intestines "composed of quartz crystals" of Australian shamans.<sup>44</sup> As in so many other instances Hughes uses words with anthropological validity which at the same time can stand poetically for themselves, using myth and anthropology as part of his quarry of poetic images. Thus the giving of new flesh to each other in 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days' both gives a whole new perspective on the mutuality of sexual union and makes accessible the hermetic concept of 'sponsus' and 'sponsa', alchemical giver and receiver made one by the initiatory experience:

She gives him his eyes, she found them  
Among some rubble, among some beetles

He gives her her skin  
He just seemed to pull it down out of the air  
and lay it over her  
She weeps with fearfulness and astonishment (p. 56)

The mutually changing touch enables the female divinity to be manifested as the owl flower, and catches the hero up in the essence of the true male force, the force revealed as the falcon of 'The risen'. The protagonist has not been dropped in a bog but has been truly carried "to eagles" (p. 27):

He stands, filling the doorway  
In the shell of earth.

He lifts wings, he leaves the remains of something,  
A mess of offal, muddled as an afterbirth.

His each wingbeat - a convict's release.  
What he carries will be plenty.

He slips behind the world's brow  
As music escapes its skull, its clock and its skyline.

Under his sudden shadow, flames cry out among thickets.  
When he soars, his shape

Is a cross, eaten by light,  
On the Creator's face. (p. 60)

The protagonist has become a saviour, his shape a cross. But he is not like Christ - rather a Gnostic deity who makes atonement for the depredations of an indifferent creator. He is now "a Horus-beloved child and spouse of the Goddess",<sup>45</sup> a Laurentian Jesus, sneaking off to Egypt (As in D.H. Lawrence's The Man who Died).

'The risen' should be regarded as the companion poem to 'The owl flower'. One shows the essence of the divine expressed in the masculine, the latter shows the divine spirit of the feminine. The falcon is the protagonist's Moses and his Ezekiel. He sets free like Moses; "His each wingbeat - a convict's release." Like Moses he encounters a burning bush; "Under his sudden shadow, flames cry out among thickets." The story of the burning bush is further referred to when the falcon is called "A burning unconsumed." He is thus both Moses and bush, deliverer and revelation.

Ezekiel also spoke to the Children of Israel as they lay in bondage in Babylon, many hundreds of years after the captivity in Egypt that Moses led them out of. He was not so much a prophet of needed action as the expresser of almost indescribable glimpses of heaven. His central vision was of mighty creatures whirling like wheels. The falcon is like these cherubim and seraphim "A whirling tree".

The Biblical echoes provide a link with a parallel work, William Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'. In the poet's "memorable fancy" where he dines with Isaiah and Ezekiel (plates 12-13) he asked Ezekiel:

why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side? he answer'd, 'the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite: this the North American tribes practice, & is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification?'<sup>46</sup>

Blake also saw the nature of the shaman's aspiration to the infinite. Hughes is following his example in both the symbol of the king bird and the angel of later sequences. Blake stated in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' that "When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius; lift up thy head!"<sup>47</sup> The poem ends with a final vision of an Angel, "embracing the flame of fire, & he was consumed." In contrast Hughes's falcon is "A burning unconsumed." Both poets end their sequence with a motto following the manifestation of the creature that is their symbol of the "Genius" of life-energy. For Blake it is "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression." For Hughes the final reminder is that "At the end of the ritual/up comes a goblin."

These words, which go under the title of 'Finale' are the reminder of the provisional nature of the "tribal dream" found in Cave Birds. Blake created his own absolute standard, while Hughes is prepared to qualify his statements. 'Finale' can be found embedded in the text of the poet's 1970 interview with Faas:

You choose a subject because it serves, because you need it. We go on writing poems because one poem never gets the whole account right. There is always something missed. At the end of the ritual up comes a goblin. Anyway within a week the whole thing has changed, one needs a fresh bulletin ... In the end, one's poems are ragged dirty undated letters from remote battles and weddings and one thing and another.<sup>48</sup>

Cave Birds is the record of a wedding, a wedding that effects the final transformation of the protagonist from a cockerel into a falcon. But it is a wedding that takes place in the Dream Time, outside time and society. The results of hierophany and transformation must be worked out in the material world if they are to be anything more than provisional. The truths that Hughes is groping towards cannot be

expressed in the symbol alone, which is by definition unchanging and unconsumed. They must be tested in the outer world of entropy, change and development. Gaudete is the poet's response to this need. No longer do the protagonists operate in a mythological or dream world, instead they are inhabitants of a contemporary English village. It is in the success or failure of Gaudete that the 'provisional dreams' of Crow and Cave Birds must be judged.

NOTES

1. Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, Ted Hughes: A Critical Study, (London : Faber, 1981), p. 260.
2. *ibid.*
3. From Hughes's introduction to the poem during the BBC broadcast of Cave Birds.
4. *ibid.*
5. Gifford/Roberts, Ted Hughes: A Critical Study, p. 260.
6. *ibid.*, p. 259.
7. *ibid.*, p. 260.
8. *ibid.*
9. In Orghast this male figure is the god Krogon. In the myth that connects Orghast to Prometheus on his Crag, he manifests himself as the vulture that feeds daily upon Prometheus's ever-renewed liver.
10. Keith Sagar has pointed out that the line "Who never harmed any living thing" was originally part of Poem 21 in Prometheus on his Crag. See The Art of Ted Hughes, 2nd edition, p. 174.
11. Mircea Eliade says that the experiences of being eaten, torn apart or descending to the underworld are in fact initiatory ordeals. Rites and Symbols of Initiation, pp. 61-4.
12. Eliade, Shamanism, p. 251.
13. "His crime implicates him in wider and wider responsibilities. His victim takes on a form which is progressively more multiple and serious, progressively more personal and inescapable." (from commentary to the broadcast).
14. Baskin entitled the drawing 'Hermaphroditic Ephesian Owl'.
15. Marriage to a spirit is discussed on p. 72 ff. of Eliade's Shamanism. Here he only discusses transvesticism, rather than androgyny. A more recent work, The Two and the One, has rectified this.
16. This will be developed into the Doppelganger motif in Gaudete. Joan Halifax says that by definition the shaman is "a double being", since he is the reconciler of opposites in himself. (Shamanic Voices, p. 28)
17. Eliade calls the experience of being swallowed a "regressus in the flesh", and links both with World Renewal (see chapter on this in his Myth and Reality).
18. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 84.

19. Besides hints of the voyages of Odysseus, there is also an echo of Browning's 'Childe Roland', where the hero makes a journey through a bleak landscape to face death at the Dark Tower, an analogue of the "leaning menhir."
20. 'Sorcerer's Apprentice', Review of A Separate Reality by Carlos Castenada, Observer, 5th March, 1972, p. 32.
21. See 'The Sheep Went On Being Dead', 'Heptonstall Old Church' and 'Heptonstall Cemetery', all in Remains of Elmet.
22. Sagar, Art of Ted Hughes, 2nd ed., p. 244. See this work for the listing of the three phases of writing which became the Faber Cave Birds. The trial emphasis was further weakened by the removal of 'The advocate'. It seems that the earlier poems were revised in the light of the later ones. (pp. 243-4)
23. *ibid.*, p. 244.
24. See note 20. In the Castenada review Hughes shows his familiarity with and approval of Don Juan's goals.
25. Carlos Castenada, The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 196.
26. Eliade, Shamanism, p. 36.
27. *ibid.*, p. 62.
28. From Hughes's introduction to the Leonard Baskin Catalogue (1962), part of which is reproduced in Ekbert Faas's Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, pp. 166-67.
29. Pilinszky, Selected Poems, p. 12. Hughes bases the denouement of Gaudete on a similar perspective.
30. Gifford/Roberts, Ted Hughes: A Critical Study, pp. 15-17. Includes information on the knight of 'Gog' as a Manichean hero.
31. In the 1970 Faas interview when asked about the influence of dialect and medieval literature upon his work, Hughes replied, "And in the case of the West Yorkshire dialect, of course, it connects you directly and in your most intimate self to middle English poetry." (London Magazine, January 1971, pp. 11-12.)
32. Castenada, The Teachings of Don Juan, p. 196.
33. *ibid.*, p. 150.
34. Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. 15.
35. 'The Poetry of Vasco Popa', p. 211. For Hughes the price of knowledge is always suffering; thus pain obliquely benefits mankind.
36. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 213.
37. *ibid.*, p. 144. N.B. 'Bride and Groom ...' answers the question 'Who gives most? Him or Her?'

38. Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, 2nd edition, p. 180.
39. Eliade, Shamanism, p. 427.
40. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 143.
41. *ibid.*, p. 212. It is therefore unsurprising that Parzival is at the roots of Gaudete, as the epigraph implies.
42. Gifford/Roberts, Ted Hughes: A Critical Study, p. 200.
43. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 19.
44. Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, p. 255.
45. Gifford/Roberts, Ted Hughes: A Critical Study, p. 260.
46. Blake, Collected Works, p. 154.
47. *ibid.*, plate 9, line 15, p. 152.
48. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 15. Cf. also Poetry in the Making, p. 18. "It is this little goblin in a word which is its life and its poetry, and it is this goblin which the poet has to have under control."

CHAPTER 5GAUDETE

God is day and night, winter summer, war peace, satiety  
hunger - all the opposites, this is the meaning. (Heraclitus)

Gaudete is the dreaming onwards of the myth that we first encountered in Crow<sup>1</sup> and which we have seen developed boldly but inconclusively in Cave Birds, the attempt to find a basis for relationship between modern man and the Magna Mater, the Great Mother. But the roots of the poems go back far beyond Crow to 'Song' in Hawk in the Rain and to the subject matter of Ted Hughes's dramatic works.

In the early nineteen sixties Hughes seems to have put most of his energies into the exploration of poetic drama, beginning with his unpublished verse adaptation of the Bardo Thodol, written as a libretto for the Chinese composer Chou Wen Chung, whom Hughes met in America at the end of 1959. It is from a vivid dream during this project that Hughes obtained The Wound, the radio play that became an element of Wodwo. A few years later, in 1964, he worked on another verse drama, this time based upon Andreae's The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz. This was broadcast as Difficulties of a Bridegroom in the January of 1963. A later version, written in 1964, became Eat Crow, the first intimation of the Crow story.

It was during this same period that the story of Gaudete took on its initial form as a film scenario. Hughes's work on this between 1962 and 1964 follows the pattern of his two previous dramatic attempts and echoes the theme of the unpublished play The House of Taurus, which is a re-working of The Bacchae of Euripedes. But unlike these



plays Gaudete gained a vital independence from its sources, developing rather than re-working the myths. Not content with re-iteration Hughes sought to create a new "tribal dream",<sup>2</sup> nonetheless firmly based on "crucial seminal" works, like Christian Rosencreutz, The Tempest and Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival.

It is thus hardly surprising that one of the two epigraphs to the poem come from Parzival, a late form of the Grail legend as found in the Mabinogion story 'Peredur, Son of Evrawg'. In the same way that Eschenbach developed the work of Cretien de Troyes and the anonymous author of 'Peredur' to touch the imagination of a new generation in a different society, Hughes uses Parzival as the starting point for his own cultural application of the myth. The Dionysian ritual behind The Bacchae is used in the same way, the primary source, Euripedes and syncretized Orphic strains, being the gateway to a modern version of the myth and its ritual enactment.

Also present in Gaudete are echoes of Hughes's own myth. Cave Birds was written concurrently with Gaudete (both overlapping with 'Moortown') and seems to be an exploration of a different aspect of the same story. Cave Birds is also a direct link between Gaudete and Crow. The poem 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days' is a direct episode from the Crow story. The events take place:

right at the end of the story, when Crow is crossing the river and has the seven questions put to him by the Ogress he carries across. His answers move from one pole of total disaster in the relationship between him and the female to the opposite pole of totally successful, blissful union.<sup>3</sup>

Gaudete continues the journey towards this union, a journey that is fraught with pitfalls as Crow has already discovered. Lumb initially shows a complete inability to deal with or relate to the woman he is expected to heal. This is reflected in his relationship with

Maud and Felicity, who stand for different aspects of the Goddess. This is the pole of total disaster, while the Epilogue and subsequent poems show a man who has mastery of animals and has communion with the deity, as evinced by the prayers and invocations in the poems. Marriage has not yet taken place, but a relationship has been established.

The connection with Cave Birds is also a reminder that Gaudete is as much about initiation and the nature of the initiatory process as its companion work. But while Cave Birds more closely resembles the drama used in Greek Mystery religions, being both a ritual and a lesson, Gaudete is more like the popular tragedies that developed from such initiatory dramas. It deals with the responses of people caught up in abnormal circumstances and, like Greek tragedy, shows deep insights into human character without a similarly deep characterization. Hughes's literary equivalent of the wearing of masks is to make his characters "slightly puppet-like."<sup>4</sup>

Gaudete has a freedom that the ritual drama of Cave Birds does not, the ability to portray mistakes. The spirit-lumb's attempt as a twentieth century fertility cult, his mis-interpretation of the duty of a pastor to love his flock, remind us that not every emissary from the underworld knows what it is doing, that not every avenue of initiation is a legitimate one. But these are only reminders since Hughes says - "My own opinion I withhold. It's like a play - it contains no author's comments. As far as interpretation goes - I leave all options open."<sup>5</sup> During the same 1977 interview with Faas Hughes even went so far as to say:

... it is not the story that I am interested in but the poems. In other words, the whole narrative is just a way of getting a big body of ideas and energy moving on a track. For when this energy connects with a possibility for a poem, there is a lot more material and pressure in it than you could ever get into a poem

just written out of the air or out of a special occasion. Poems come to you much more naturally and accumulate more life when they are part of a connected flow of real narrative that you've got yourself involved in.<sup>6</sup>

Such statements must be put into context, since although Hughes's opinions may be withheld on one level a definite world view is implied - in such things as the choice of subject matter, treatment of characters and the way in which certain episodes receive a fuller treatment than others. We must also remember that what is implied here may have been clearly stated in some other part of the poet's work.

So we must remember that Hughes has stressed that certain narratives have a therapeutic capability,<sup>7</sup> "that without full operation of the various worlds and heavens and hells of imagination, men become sick, mechanical monsters."<sup>8</sup> What Hughes is trying to make us understand is that it is not the long, involved, unpublished Crow myth that counts, but the energy-filled actuality that is a poem quarried from that source. For Hughes a source is as important as its ability to still produce a creative response, no more.

The continual emphasis in Hughes's poetry is the need to live out the narrative, to experience the myth, whether it be a heaven or a hell. These two worlds are truly one, as the first epigraph of Gaudete states, since both Hades and Dionysus activate the imagination and both inspire songs and festivals. It is in the same spirit that the Bardo Thodol exhorts its readers to "Have faith in the Blood-Drinking deities too."<sup>9</sup>

### Prologue

On the very first page of the Prologue to Gaudete the reader is thrown, together with Nicholas Lumb, into the domain of the blood-drinking deities, an otherworld where a silent and empty Northern town has become a "maze of mass-graves" (p. 12). Lumb loses his head and

begins to run shouting through the streets. There is an answering shout and a creature bounds forward - "The blackest clot of the whole nightmare has found a shape and is leaping towards him." This apparition closely resembles one of the miseries of the Sidpa Bardo where the soul on its way to rebirth is told "Thick awesome darkness will appear in front of thee continually, from the midst of which there will come such terror-producing utterances as 'Strike! Slay!' and other similar threats."<sup>10</sup> Lumb is suffering from a Bardo-like illusion. It is in fact only "an old man, in scarecrow rags", delighted that he has scared the priest.

We are reminded of the vitality of the tramps in earlier Hughes poems, but more importantly the old man is an emissary, a fairy guide like one of the Children of Danu in Irish folklore - it is not surprising, therefore, that his voice is "hard and Irish."

From the very beginning of the poem Hughes is building a cultural context for Lumb's experience. In the same way that he saw The Wound as a Celtic-Gothic version of the Bardo-Thodol, Gaudete is a Britain version of certain Greek myths and a German courtly romance, as well as of the Bardo. Hughes is seeking to tap the poetic energy in polarity and balance - "The balance also between German/Scandinavian and ancient British/Celtic, between Puritanical suppressive and Catholic woman worshipping."<sup>11</sup> This syncretism is not one of fusion but of balance and inner stress.

To identify the old man as one of the Children of Danu fits in well with the pole of woman worship, since the goddess Danu was one of the manifestations of the Magna Mater, or the White Goddess, as Robert Graves calls her.<sup>12</sup> Thus it is also not surprising that the old man leads Lumb to a woman who seems to be his mistress. She lies on the floor of a cave "tangles in the skins of wolves", tended by an "aged aboriginal",

surrounded by watchers. It becomes obvious to Lumb that he is expected to help her in some way, but after looking for signs of life:

He declares he can do nothing  
 He protests there is nothing he can do  
 For this beautiful woman who seems to be alive and dead.  
 He is not a doctor. He can only pray. (p. 15)

Lumb is being expected to perform a shamanic healing, but he can only think in terms of the assistance of a physician. What follows could be interpreted as the aboriginals' attempts to remedy his obvious lack by putting him through the relevant initiatory ordeals. Keith Sagar has already pointed out that the flogging of Lumb while he is bound to a young oak tree is related to the rite of Herakles, the husband of the Goddess. The subsequent sacrifice of a bull does not only echo the initiation ceremony of Mithraism, as Sagar points out, but also the rite of the goddess Attis, a fertility deity.<sup>13</sup>

Both ordeals are in fact travesties since Lumb has not been truly prepared, either by training or a threshold experience indicative of his calling. Rather than integration Lumb feels a "sudden jagged darkness that rends him apart, from the top of his skull downwards." This psychic split precedes the creation of a Doppelganger from the log he has been tied to. Instead of producing wholeness the ordeals have resulted in a dangerous splitting apart.

This is not the only irony. Lumb has obviously been brought because he is a priest, a representation of a faith that is based upon the resurrection of its deity, and is shown totally wanting. He has nothing to offer, not even compassion, a failure in the terms of both religions. His ordeals are therefore also a judgement, like the Bardo's purging exercises or Dante's Inferno.

Lumb is a warped Orpheus. His descent to the underworld is involuntary and he returns without his Euridice. He is baptized in

blood without wishing access to any mystery. His failure and impotence have only one parallel that is not the inverse of a myth, that of the story of the Fisher King and the healing of the Wasteland, the mythic centre of Parzival. Because Parzival does not ask the king what is wrong with him the monarch cannot be healed. Because his failure leaves the land as infirm as the king Parzival is doubly at fault:

You should have pitied the host and king  
 To whom God did this wondrous thing.  
 You asked not of his grief and dread,<sup>14</sup>  
 So though you live, your bliss is dead.

Eschenbach's version of the legend lays great stress on the personal responsibility and lack of compassion that prevents his hero asking the healing question, "What aileth thee, my uncle?" This is in contrast to earlier versions that berate the protagonist for his lack of curiosity when he sees the Grail objects that the king guards. It is the later emphasis that Hughes uses, showing a man who will neither act nor choose. Lumb even refuses to choose which tree he is tied to! A denial of responsibility comes easily to his lips. His double reproduces the same behaviour in his relationship with Felicity, delaying the elopement and thus bringing about his death.

The initial failures of both Parzival and Lumb prolong the suffering of the one they are meant to heal. The double is also a failure since the joy of having flesh makes him forget his task as messenger of the Goddess. Lumb is an emissary from the underworld; Hughes goes so far as to say that "All the forms of natural life are emissaries. The actual bodies of the people are emissaries."<sup>15</sup> But there is an obscurity as to the exact nature of the task, an obscurity compounded by the double's errors. A statement of Hughes hints that Lumb is meant to be a kind of beneficial catalyst, dissolving the spiritual

predicament of Western man. In his 1977 interview with Ekbert Faas Hughes said that this predicament was "impossibly crystalized in the immovable dead end forms of society and physical life",<sup>16</sup> and refers to Lumb as a flawed attempt to break down these forms. The irony is that the original Lumb whose super-ego is intact fails because he will not act, while his double minus that super-ego is too instinctually orientated to remember what he is supposed to be doing.

### The Main Narrative

The main story opens in a completely different environment to that of the Prologue. Rather than a grim Northern industrial town we follow Major Hagen's gaze across the May parklands of Southern England as his binoculars sweep the landscape with "the worm's stealth, the milled focal adjustment." In a single vignette we are introduced to a recurring symbol and a central character. The symbol is of the spying device, binoculars, telescope, camera and telescopic lens, the means by which the forces that have corrupted the mill town dominate the landscape by refusing to look at it properly. Hagen is the focal point of these forces in the poem, others like Estridge being mere extensions of his character, or like Garten a different pole of the same power. Hughes originally intended that the whole story be the story of what was going on inside Hagen's head, Garten being his objective other self, but he sacrificed this for narrative clarity, though their use of spying devices remained as a link.

Hagen represents the Germanic/Scandinavian pole referred to earlier, his face "A frontal Viking weatherproof" (p. 24), his underlip unaffected "Forty generations from the freezing salt and the longships." As in other Hughes poems Viking blood is Puritan blood (see 'The Warriors of the North', Wodwo, p. 159, and a number of poems in

Remains of Elmet). It is against this blood that Pauline Hagen offends in her liaison with Lumb, and like a Viking Hagen's response involves a weapon.

Hagen's instinct is to dominate, as his stuffed animal trophies signify. He is like the bulls that he breeds. Lumb's interest is not a challenge to his love but to his power. Thus, having seen them together on the ornamental bridge in the park, he ostentatiously takes his morning walk with "His double-barrelled Purdey, cradled light in his left elbow." The ring-dove he shoots is pointedly presented to his wife, who refuses it, and then to Lumb. The bird becomes an unspoken challenge and a prophecy of further violence.

This incident is important in two ways. Firstly it sets the tone of menace and barely suppressed savagery. Secondly it presages the manner of the double's death, shot by Hagen just like the dove. The poem 'A bang - a burning -' emphasises the importance of this correspondence. This episode is not only a dramatic irony but truly a prophecy, preparing the reader for a sense of déjà vu at the climax of the story. In the poem Lumb does not know if he is man, angel or bird:

Am I killed?

Or am I searching?

Is this the rainbow silking my body?

Which wings are these? (p. 198)

Besides the hints of Bardo-style reincarnation and the transmigration of souls, we can detect echoes of Crow, who is also often unsure as to whether he has survived his previous ordeal. Lumb, like Crow, must go through certain trials and mistakes before he can reach his bride. It is significant that he is killed as he plunges into Hagen's ornamental lake, water being the traditional entry to the underworld - and in the Crow myth it is water that must be crossed to



find the bride.

Lumb's journey is also like Crow's in that it is unthinking. At a number of points the Goddess seeks to remind him of his duties but cannot fully influence him. The incident with the dove is the first of these, the dove being the one of her symbols and also sacred to Herakles, who, like Lumb, is bound to a log, beaten, mutilated, and eventually killed. The dove in his hand is meant to remind Lumb of his nature and role, and of the Goddess he serves.

Hughes then tears us away from this drama of what we do not fully understand and introduces us to the poacher Joe Garten, who is spying on Mrs. Westlake, the doctor's wife. He has heard Hagen's shot a mile away. The following sections deal with the period of time that it takes Lumb to cover that mile to his rendezvous with Mrs. Westlake. Hughes uses this gap to heighten the sexual tension, using Pauline Hagen's retrospective of her time with Lumb in the "leaf-mould" and "spermy bluebells" to heighten the interest in the coming meeting with another woman. (p. 32)

Right from the very beginning of the poem sexual and aggressive tension feed upon each other. So for instance Pauline's fantasy leads to guilty introspection and the passive invitation of her husband's "Depth charges/Of incredulity and righteousness." Hagen's yells make his dog attack him and he turns his rage on the pet. As he has always done in the past he takes out his frustration on the animal kingdom. Like the man in 'Crow's Account of St. George' he destroys what he most loves because of a warping within. He is an example of Hughes's mechanical monster, man without the heavens and hells of imagination. Hagen is expressing the "devil of suppressed life" -<sup>17</sup> he is a kind of poltergeist, "An insane voltage, a blue crackling entity." (p. 33)

Having been shown the violence that is the obverse of Puritan sexuality we are returned to the wood where Garten's watching is rewarded by the sight of Lumb "fighting inside the car" with Mrs. Westlake. The sexual act is a conflict from which Lumb emerges with a bloodied mouth. But Mrs. Westlake is the loser - her damage is internal, a memory of Lumb, revulsion for the sterility of her home, the fantasy of suicide all part of her injuries. She moves through her house "as if it were a last search for something hopelessly lost." The mirrors seem to conspire against her along with "A hateful orange vase, a souvenir ashtray" (p. 38) to obscure reality. She is numbed and defeated by the "Chill, comfortless, alien furniture", and eventually "Her mind closes ... She waits/Like a beaten dog/At her trembling cigarette." (p. 40)

What Lumb has given the two women is both all that they have and also that which is destroying them. Hughes, quoting Goethe, has spoken of keeping faith with "the world of things and the world of spirits equally."<sup>18</sup> The people in Gaudete, with few exceptions, have only kept faith with the world of things. For the women their only contact with the world of spirits is through Lumb. It is a contact that leads to a psychic short-circuit since they have no means of coping with the elemental energy that the double releases. They are especially open and dangerously vulnerable because they do not have the kind of mechanical security that Hagen and Estridge have cultivated.

These points are poetically expressed in 'The scherzo' where Commander Estridge listens, appalled, to his daughter Jennifer playing Beethoven. She is invoking a "primaeval" and "horrifying" energy. To Estridge the music is like "a materialized demon." It seems to challenge everything about his Victorian Gothic house and his stuffed animals. Like Hagen, Estridge is surrounded by animal trophies to

emphasise his domination of nature, but the demons are undaunted. They find their way in through Hagen's anger and now through Jennifer's music. Estridge flees to his telescope in the Belvedere.

The music releases what has been negated, but without control, a Bacchic rite of the mind. Estridge feels that his daughters "are tearing him to pieces", like the Bacchae whose madness in their worship of Dionysus led to the rending apart of those they pursued. Walter Otto has said of the Bacchic madness in his Dionysus: Myth and Cult - "The deep emotion with which this madness announces itself finds its expression in music and dance."<sup>19</sup> Otto sees music as an invocation of the god and his train. Truly this:

Music, that eats people  
That transfixes them  
On its thorns, like a shrike  
To cut up at leisure

Or licks them all over carefully gently  
Like a tiger  
Before leaving nothing but the hair of the head  
And the soles of the feet

Is the maneater  
On your leash. (p. 182)

The person that is being referred to in the above lines is of course the Goddess, perhaps in the guise of Semele the mother of Dionysus. Her music is "like a tiger" because she herself is "The Tiger", as Hughes called her in his 1977 interview with Faas.<sup>20</sup> We must remember, though, that her music is only destructive when she is in her hag aspect, a destroyer like the Hindu goddess Kali:

The tiger does not kill but opens a path  
Neither of Life nor of Death:  
The tiger within the tiger:  
The Tiger of the Earth. ('Tiger-psalm', Moortown, p. 151)

The problem in Gaudete is that the power of the manifestation of the deity cannot be harnessed. There are no rituals save the ones that Lumb introduces, rituals performed on a false basis with the Goddess unhealed:

In the old world God and divine power were invoked at any cost - life seemed worthless without them. In the present world we dare not invoke them - we wouldn't know how to use them or stop them destroying us. We have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination - anything bigger introduces problems, the demons get hold of it ... To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control - rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one.<sup>21</sup>

Without such a restraint the music rushes up the stairs of Estridge's house and we find Janet, Jennifer's older sister, about to hang herself. After contemplating her pregnant body she releases the birds in her father's attic aviary and then kills herself. Like the birds, she is "a strange predator." Her state of mind is a clear echo of the attitude of the hawk in 'Hawk Roosting'. The hawk has "No falsifying dream" (Lupercal, p. 26), while in Janet's case "No thought for the future falsifies these moments." Like her sister, who sees herself as a wolf in a later dream, Janet is a predator, one of the Bacchic band; but things are warped and the predators have become the victims.

Only being able to guess at the reasons for Janet's suicide, we are once again tantalized by a change of setting. We watch Estridge as he watches Holroyd's farm and Holroyd's wife through his telescope. Like Hagen's binoculars the telescope symbolizes Estridge's lack of direct involvement in life and the desire to imprison in the lens. He "treasures" Mrs. Holroyd "among his collection of ideals." He collects images of people like birds in his aviary. The ideal is shattered as Mrs. Holroyd emerges from the barn with Lumb. She dusts herself, then suggestively takes him into the farmhouse. Estridge's

inner scream is duplicated by Jennifer's own audible scream as she discovers Janet's body.

With this scream metaphorically echoing in our heads we are then given our first direct encounter with the spirit Lumb. As Lumb looks at the land a hierophanic experience is precipitated by the insight that vitality and danger go together. He also sees that the trees are not "trees only." He becomes aware of "the power that beats up against him" from the ground and feels a sense of his own smallness and helplessness. What he experiences closely resembles the shamanic threshold experience that has been discussed in earlier chapters, the experience that shows one that the path to shamanic healing power and knowledge is open.

It is not surprising that Lumb should feel a great power since "Every hierophany is a Kratophany, a manifestation of force", as Mircea Eliade has indicated.<sup>22</sup> Another statement of Eliade's partly explains why Lumb's 'difference' is such a threat to the men of the village:

Modern Western Man feels ill at ease before many forms of manifestation of the sacred: he finds it difficult, for instance, to accept the fact that, for certain human beings, the sacred may manifest itself in stones or trees ... Sacred stones or trees are not adored in their natural capacity, but only because they are hierophanies, because they "show forth" something which is no longer mineral or vegetable but sacred - "wholly other".<sup>23</sup>

This is why the trees are not "only" trees, and why the ash tree stands as Lumb's prayer. It becomes a homologized version of the Cosmic Tree.

But Lumb is only at a threshold. The necessary ritual power to control what is happening is not yet available to him. He feels as if the world is "a giant aircraft out of control, shaking itself to pieces." (p. 52) Lumb has found no greater balance between the two worlds than any of the other characters. Lumb's visions are always of the dangerous vitality of Nature, valid but incomplete. His sense of the hill

"hunching and swelling" beneath him in poetry reminiscent of 'Pennines in April' leads him on "Till the one presence of world crushes him from himself, and sits on him like an iron crown on a stone pillar." (p. 51) This may be the antidote to his forlorn dreams of normality, "Each with a bed at the centre", but Lumb still feels trapped and unable to experience any real relation to anything save a tree, the substance from which he was formed. He has not had the shaman's setting free from himself.

In contrast the epilogue poems show a man whose identity is "filled up with the whole world" :

I watched a wise beetle  
Walking about inside my body

I saw a tree  
Grow inward from my navel

Hawks clashed their courtship  
Between my ears.

Slowly I filled up with the whole world.  
Only one thing stayed outside me, in the glare.

You beckoned. (p. 179)

In the epilogue poems we see a man whose trapped identity has been set free. He is now able to build on what were experiences with content, but not saving content. In the Epilogue:

Trying to be a leaf  
In your kingdom  
For a moment I am a leaf  
And your fulfilness comes. (p. 180)

But even then the success of this attempt leads to a form of destruction, as in the Crow poem 'Glimpse'. There Crow is beheaded by his glimpse, while in the above poem Lumb is "Like the electrocuted man."

Implied in both the main text of Gaudete and the Epilogue poems is the idea that psychic integration can only come through a death crisis. We are being continually subtly prepared for Lumb's death,

whether through dramatic means such as the linking of Lumb's activity with violent consequences, or poetically through the use of themes and images that point towards death.

The most obvious death image in the hierophanic section is that of the out-of-control aircraft. Faas tells us of a dream that Hughes used to have:

... a recurrent nightmare of disaster, death and transformation which the poet, until a few years ago, dreamt at regular intervals since childhood: a plane, which he flies in or watches, crashes in flame and often, before it hits the ground, changes into a monster animal falling out of the sky.<sup>24</sup>

Faas points to the epilogue poem 'The viper fell from the sun' as related to this dream. In it:

A hand out of a hot cloud  
Held me its thumb to suck.

Lifted me to the dug that grew  
Out of the brow of a lioness. (p. 188)

Here the Goddess comforts the persona after his horrific vision. But in another poem, 'Collision with the earth has finally come' (p. 180), it is Lumb, not a monster that is cast to earth like Satan from Heaven. There is this ironic comment:

Once I said lightly  
Even if the worst happens  
We can't fall off the earth.

And again I said  
No matter what fire cooks us  
We shall be still in the pan together.

And words twice as stupid.  
Truly hell heard me. (p. 181)

In Gaudete it is the symbolism of descent that is always dominant, not that of ascent. In that it differs from its sources. The disciple of Mithras was first baptized in blood, symbolizing descent then climbed a seven rung ladder to show his right to enter the heavenly places. For the shaman, mastery of the means of ascent, such as riding his drum or

climbing a tree to Heaven, are proofs of his power and protection when making the descent to the underworld to deal with the spirits on behalf of his clients. In Christian terms Jesus, though descending to Hell after the crucifixion, eventually returned to his rightful place at the right hand of His Father. But Lumb, like Satan, is cast down. "Truly hell heard me." Certainly the epilogue poems point to a resurrection, but there is no sign of an Ascension.

Because Lumb does not have the full range of spiritual abilities his ritual is unbalanced and always tends to face people with the hells that they have made for themselves. Thus in the next section although Mrs. Walsall of the Bridge Inn is in love "The child inside her is a growing/Fungus of jealousy." (p. 55) Like the other women so far, she falls into a numbness that is a kind of hell in itself in Hughes's poetry (cf. a number of poems in 'Earth-Numb' and Prometheus on his Crag).

It is now obvious that Lumb is impregnating every available woman. Doctor Westlake has discovered that Janet Estridge was pregnant and Jennifer, her eyes full of "the steel-cutting acetylene/Of religious mania" tells him that Lumb and Janet had intended to elope to Australia. But then Lumb had transferred his affection to herself and she had clarified things to her sister "for her own good." (p. 57)

While we are still assimilating this news Hughes again transfers our attention; this time to Mrs. Holroyd, who is a symbol of fertility, at one with the calf in the yard and the growing corn, "like a plant." The bull in the paddock is her bull. As it scratches on a tree it brings the blossoms down "like a confetti." The blossoms, like the "spermy bluebells" earlier, are a symbol of fertility in most versions of the Earth-Mother cult. In the Dionysan rite they symbolized the 'divine moisture', water being the sign of procreative activity. (Both semen and bulls were sacred in the Dionysus Mystery.)



After a brief episode where Garten observes Lumb with Betty, the Bridge Inn barmaid, we are shown Lumb's housekeeper, Maud, as she brings blossoms of "wet lilac and apple" into the bedroom. These are symbols of both fertility and the presence of the Goddess, of whom an epilogue poem says "she is an apple." Mrs. Holroyd and Maud are split aspects of the Earth-Mother, the wife and the aging spinster, ideal woman and hag. Hughes has explained Maud in this way - "The idea is that she is the representative in this world of the woman that he is supposed to cure in the other world."<sup>25</sup> If Lumb has a Doppelganger so does the Goddess. Maud is the deity's attempt to control Lumb in our world, "in a way has control over Lumb to bring about this renovation of women and therefore of life in general in this world."<sup>26</sup>

The problem is that because she is human Maud is in the same kind of bondage as the other women. She is as inadequate a representative of the deity as the double is of the real Lumb. She and the other women eventually create a black Mass that is an expression of their imprisonment rather than any hope of release.

After setting the blossoms at the head of the bed, an expression of her feelings of frustration as well as of her care, Maud reads Lumb's diary, presumably discovering his plans for elopement, a decision reached during his hierophany. Her reaction is to use his crystal ball, ignoring the stricture that death comes from using another person's ball. What she sees is prophetic of Lumb's death. What she does is prophetic of her own. Finally she sees what she wants to see, as "a lumpish form" plunges a knife into the neck of Lumb's bride. Maud steals his sacrificial dagger and prepares for murder.

Hughes skilfully aligns the motives of the embittered spinster with those of the Goddess's Doppelganger. Maud's intended violence is on one level an act of bitter jealousy but on another it is an attempt to pre-

vent Lumb from marrying someone who is not the true representative of the unhealed deity. (The mention of the dovecote on page 64 is a reminder of this woman.)

In the next section more information is given as Old Smayle, Lumb's nearest neighbour, muses on the nature of religion. He is amazed that it seems to boil down to "Something about mothers - maternal instincts./ Something about the womb - foredoomed, protective instinct." (p. 66) Smayle stresses the feminine aspect of religion in a way that is reminiscent of Cadmus and Tiresias in the Bacchae. Also, in Peredur the prefiguring of Parzival, we are told that when the hero arrives at the hall of the King of Suffering - "when he arrived he saw only women." The king and his women, Dionysus and the Bacchae or maenads, Lumb and his Women's Institute coven, are all explicitly or implicitly the servants of a female deity in the shadows, as we shall see. Or as Smayle puts it, "It's like a herd of deer ... why is it always led by a hind?" (p. 65)

Garten finds the whole topic very discomfoting because he is pursuing Smayle's granddaughter Felicity and "Felicity mentions the Reverend Lumb too often." He also has a deep fear and distrust of feminine religious activity. Noticing a "deadly glance" from Mrs. Evans, the secretary of the Women's Institute, he asks her husband if he has seen the minutes of their meetings. "He bets that's a book of revelations/Real religious stuff." Evans turns the question by telling Garten that Lumb's van has broken down outside his cottage gate. Lumb is having intercourse with Garten's mother in the garden hut, but the son arrives too late to find anything amiss, except that all his caged animals have been loosed. The energetic nature of the couple's sexual activity has resulted in the disintegration of the rabbit and ferret hutches. This event has the same symbolic meaning as Janet's death

which also resulted in the release of imprisoned animal life. A similar kind of release eludes the human beings.

The animals that have been freed return to the order of nature. A ferret grips a crying baby rabbit, prefiguring the next episode where Jennifer Estridge has a vision of herself as a wolf circling the dead body of her sister on a snow lake. Her behaviour has been as feral as that of the ferret, but the animal is acting out of natural hunger, free from the schizophrenia that makes Jennifer see herself as both the wolf and her sister. She is another predator/victim like Janet. Her warped concept of survival has led her to destroy part of herself, another form of suicide. Lumb may have released the ferret but he has also released the wolf, both acts unknowing.

In his article 'The Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype' Carl Jung tells us of the ambivalent nature of the mother figure. Her negative aspect links her with deep water, nightmares and the grave. In this aspect she manifests herself as a witch, hag or a devouring animal. In her positive aspect she is linked with the search for Paradise, with symbols of fruitfulness and with hollow objects, especially ovens and cooking vessels.<sup>27</sup> The latter aspects are clearly brought together in the Grail legends, where a cup, or in the Welsh version, a cauldron, is sought.

The quest for the Grail and the healing of the Fisher King come together in the story of Parzival. Each development of the Percival story is an episode in the battle between male and female. In Parzival this is expressed in terms of the insanity of one flesh fighting itself, Parzival and his brother or Janet and her sister. For male and female to fight is an equal insanity, as numerous other developers of the courtly love tradition pointed out. (A good early example is 'Que be-m vols mal', called 'Na Audiart' in Ezra Pound's rendering of the poem.)

In Peredur, the earliest version of the legend we have complete, such a sentiment would be alien. The hero has a completely dualistic outlook, the champion of male against female. His uncle, the king, tells him "forget your mother's words" and then gives him the stricture that will delay his own healing. "From now on follow this advice: though you see what is strange, do not ask about it unless someone is courteous enough to tell you."<sup>28</sup> So that when Peredur has watched a macabre procession without comment, not only is he chastized by his sister for not asking the healing question but she also tells him, "You are the cause of your mother's death. When you set out against her will a pang of pain leapt up within her and she died."<sup>29</sup> In Peredur, unlike Parzival, the hero does not return a second time and heal the king, although a mysterious black woman tells him of his error. Instead he hunts for the black woman, vanquishes her champion, then destroys the hags of Gloucester. Thus the story ends with the feminine suppressed and the king still suffering, while Parzival and other later versions influenced by the Madonna cult and courtly love all end with a vision of the grail and sometimes also a woman. This ending is much closer to a number of other Mabinogion stories, where "a journey to the otherworld or a foreign land is undertaken in quest of a bowl or cauldron, or else a woman, but in any case a symbol of woman's regenerative power."<sup>30</sup>

In Gaudete the Percival story is at its most explicit. It is not a bowl or the grail that is sought, but a woman. A number of other elements of the tale are brought into line with this. Thus it is not a lame or impotent Fisher King who is in need of healing but a beautiful woman who is both alive and dead, appearing in this world as a hag. This woman is both Nature and everywoman, perhaps even the anima, the feminine aspect of the male mind. In any of these senses the beautiful woman stands for a part of our existence that has been

denied.

The results of such a denial can be seen in Dr. Westlake's unbalanced perception of the natural beauty around him. Shaken by his time with Jennifer, he perceives Spring as "Funereal", the hedgerows seem to be a "Sargasso", the starlings like "blow-flies". He sees a totally fallen Nature, sees decay where there is in fact budding new life. He sees death in life, the opposite to the superficially similar 'Mayday on Holderness' in Lupercal, which sees life in death.

Consistent with his rejection of Nature Westlake rejects his wife as well. She is prejudged when he finds Lumb's van in his driveway and like Hagen Westlake finds his security in a shotgun. As he enters the house he hears his wife's cries, which turn out to be hysterical, rather than sexual as he has supposed. Ignoring Lumb's reasonable tone, Westlake's violence leads to a struggle and Lumb's escape.

This is the doorway to Lumb's own experience of a dualistic conflict against part of himself. As he washes his wounds in the river, out of the "babel" of the water he hears voices. As one, his own, becomes insistent the spirit-Lumb is taken back to a previous experience - or perhaps a previous dream. In this experience a quiet day's fishing with Felicity is interrupted by another Lumb who springs from the water of the lake and tries to pull Felicity back down with him. To prevent this Lumb fights himself, the clothed personality against the naked personality.

There is much doubt as to the true place of this episode in the narrative thread of Gaudete, but it would seem that the spirit has access to the memory of his imprisoned double, since he "recognizes voices out of his past." It seems that either he is experiencing a flashback, seeing his own initial incursions into this world through other eyes, or he has briefly entered the Dream Time where all events

are contemporaneous.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever the case, the significant fact must be the conflict between two who are really one man. "One grinning and the other appalled." The conflict ends with the naked spirit plunging headless back into the lake like Grendel in Beowulf. The primitive concept of the double, which is based upon the idea of wholeness, has been turned upsidedown. Normally, according to Joan Halifax, "The androgynization of the shaman represents the biunity of earth and sky ... The shaman thus becomes a double being."<sup>32</sup> Lumb is not a double being in this sense, being neither androgynous nor a representative of wholeness. Thus he is not a true shaman either, his bondage being his overdeveloped masculine drive, Eros out of control.

A different perspective on the double is given by Mauss in his A General Theory of Magic where he writes:

A soul is a person's double, that is, it is not an anonymous part of his person, but the person himself ... On other occasions the double may be quite separate from the magician, a person to some degree independent of his control, who from time to time appears to carry out his will.<sup>33</sup>

It is in the last sense of the above description that Maud is the Goddess's double, but the spirit-Lumb is something quite different, a double in conflict with its other half, a soul in rebellion. The idea of such a conflict and lack of wholeness is alien to the primitive mind. It is only in our own culture that the concept of the divided double is found. This was pointed out by Sylvia Plath in her doctoral thesis on the double in the work of Dostoyevsky where:

... man's instinct to avoid or ignore the unpleasant aspects of his character turns into an active terror when he is faced by his Double, which resurrects those very parts of his personality which he sought to escape.<sup>34</sup>

It is thus little wonder that Lumb is "appalled" by the advent of a creature so unlike, yet like, himself, a creature which felicity

believes at first to be a seal, a creature compared to a monkey and a fish. One Lumb is severely repressed, the other a Don Juan, making the grab for Felicity that his rival dare not make himself. According to Jung Don Juanism is the result of a Mother complex. The sufferer "unconsciously seeks his mother in every woman he meets." It accentuates the forces of Eros and - "The man's Eros does not lead upward only but downward into that uncanny dark world of Hecate and Kali, which is a horror to any intellectual man."<sup>35</sup>

Thus Lumb finds himself in a world of nightmare. In fact the outline of the episode was suggested by a dream of the poet himself. This dream is recorded thus by Ekbert Faas as "a very brilliantly lit dream about fishing at a lake where he met himself and had a fight, tore his own hand off and threw it away." Apparently Hughes interpreted this dream as "a perfect image of the divided self."<sup>36</sup>

As in the spirit-Lumb's later fight with the mud-woman, the resistance is a statement of refusal. It is the equivalent of Peredur and Parzival keeping silent, refusing to get involved. Because Lumb refuses his own self he must also refuse the Earth-Mother since his psychosis forces him to see her always in her negative aspect, hence the imagery of deep water and nightmare that have been referred to earlier.<sup>37</sup>

In Gaudete Hughes is pointing out by implication that where the self is divided nightmare reigns, whether the surrealistic experiences that increasingly grip Lumb or the living suburban nightmare of the Westlakes, and now Dunworth the architect. The latter, finding Lumb in his wife's bed, attempts to kill himself. His response is the same as Janet's, the ensuing numbness that of Mrs. Walsall. This numbness is the numbness of the victim, the person unable to act as in the Wodwo poem 'The Green Wolf' and Prometheus on his Crag. Those who act are

the ones who can still dream, even if their dreams are only of revenge, of pride and of supplanting. Maud and Jennifer dream of the last of these, Betty the barmaid of her incubus and producing a Messiah, while the voyeurs will be the ones who hound Lumb to his death.

There is a strong emphasis on vision in the poem. Hughes suggests that the way we see is the way we are. Garten's use of a camera not only finally puts him in the camp of the voyeurs, it also shows him as one who must put a machine between himself and reality. He is like the man Hughes has written of who stood by photographing while a tiger killed its tamer. In the same essay Hughes, lamenting the division between our subjective and objective worlds, writes of the camera as "A perfect mechanism of objective perception."<sup>38</sup> Garten has succumbed to the morality of the camera, while for Hughes, as for Jung, it is dreams that "show us the unvarnished natural truth."<sup>39</sup>

Those who dream see a truth that they cannot always face, but which they must endure. In one sense the whole poem is a collective dream, Hughes's own attempt at a "tribal dream", stating a painful yet natural truth. We must rejoice (for that is what 'gaudete' means in Latin) since even the greatest pain is a sign of change and thus of hope. An incomplete dream is better than the camera, the telescopic sight and the divided self.

Some of the characters in Gaudete, all women, embrace Lumb's dream of a Messiah. The most overbred and surburban in mentality are, with their spouses, moral victims of this dream. The most and least informed women, Maud, Janet Estridge, and Felicity, die because of it. The sickness of the Goddess is manifested in this world in terms of woman as victim.

Those who suffer least from Lumb's advent are whose married women who have links with the earth and with fertility. We have already met



Mrs. Holroyd and Mrs. Garten; now we meet the third of these characters, Mrs. Davies, who is "A questionable flowerpot troll-woman, her hands half-earth." She is "the real thing ... An old sunburned vixen, with a soft belly" (p. 92).

Felicity is properly described in the same section as Mrs. Davies and is also an animal, once a "mongrel and spindly", now "as a leopard." These two women represent the two poles of the Goddess's positive aspect, Mother and Maiden, Demeter and Persephone. Mrs. Davies mothers the earth with her hands of earth in the same way that Mrs. Holroyd mothers 'her' bull. Mrs. Garten is literally a mother, one of the few before the advent of Lumb. In the village there have been no births since the Estridge sisters, Felicity and Joe Garten. It is significant that one parent of each is dead or gone. There are no full families in the village and it seems to be under a curse of sterility, like the domain of the Fisher King.

The two living male progenitors, Smayle and Estridge, are opposites of each other, the one rejecting the feminine, the other its advocate. They are expressions of an unreconciled duality, like Maud and Felicity. In the next few sections a look at Maud's activity is set in between the description of Felicity and a second look at Mrs. Davies, a clear contrasting on the part of the poet. Maud is shown walking through the church graveyard. To reach the grave at the end she must follow behind another woman who mysteriously disappears at the end of the path. Engraved on the lonely last grave is the single word 'Gaudete'. She puts some blossoms on the grave and rearranges the pattern of sea-shells that adorn it. The apple blossoms signify the presence of the White Goddess.<sup>40</sup> Hughes has identified the strange woman as the Goddess herself.<sup>41</sup>

Although she is the deity's double Maud has none of the intimate

relationship that Mrs. Davies shows as she feeds a pet adder with milk in the potting shed where she and Lumb have just had intercourse. Her behaviour is reminiscent of the Minoan priestesses who kept snakes as oracles of the Magna Mater. Maud's tragedy is that of the Goddess - she is the only woman that Lumb is not interested in, so there is no chance of a healing ritual marriage as in Cave Birds.

Following the above studies the plot suddenly moves into top gear again. Mr. Walsall has noticed his wife's absence at the bar. Maud spies on Felicity's preparations for her secret elopement with the vicar. The seeds of death are coming to fruition. Maud is the voyeur who will destroy Felicity as Hagen is the corresponding destroyer of Lumb. Hagen and Lumb are opposites. Maud and Hagen are spiritual allies.

The sense of growing menace is counterpointed by an increasing number of sudden shocks, the next one being a car crash that plunges Lumb into a river. But he then finds himself in a different kind of wetness, the mud of a cattle-yard. The mud is both grave and maw, the nightmare showing the deity once again in her negative aspect. As in the fight by the lake there is a background of rain and storm, and now darkness too. Lumb is hunted round the yard by men in oilskins. His shouts for mercy are answered by a Kafkaesque slip of paper, sodden and indecipherable. A stampede of cattle leaves him lying in a foetal position in the primal mud.

Lumb is revived with the dawn like the Icelandic shamans reassembled from a spiritual state of dismemberment by the new day. Raising himself, the vicar finds first the body of Mr. Evans, then Walsall and the other men of the parish. He hears a cry - it is Pauline Hagen buried up to her neck in mud. In fact all the women are in the same condition:

Faces lift out of the earth  
 Moistly-lidded, and gazing unfocussed  
 Like babies new born. (p. 195)

For the women the earth is a womb, for the men a grave. The women's cries are an echo of the Goddess's own cries, "like the half-cry/Of a near-fatally wounded person" (p. 195). But there is something else in the mud. As Lumb reaches out, "Thinking this one creature that he can free" (p. 104), the mud-covered creature seizes him in an unbreakable grasp. The rain washes the mud away to reveal a woman's face:

A face as if sewn together from several faces.  
 A baboon beauty face,  
 A crudely stitched patchwork of faces. (p. 104)

The men in oilskins lift the two from the mud and Lumb experiences a kind of astral projection whereby he sees himself in labour bringing forth the baboon woman. In a parodic reversal of the Incarnation a man gives birth to a woman, the natural order as disrupted as her face. No wonder Lumb "imagines he has been torn in two at the waist" (p. 106). This is another nightmare of the divided self. Once again reaching out leads to conflict, although this time the motivating force is compassion, which is rewarded by a revelation. "He sees light./He sees her face undeformed and perfect." The experience is more than a dream, being an underworld encounter, the parallel in the double's experience to the flogging and abattoir incidents in the Prologue.

The revelation of the woman directs the double's attention to his sheel-na-gig, a Celtic fertility idol, when he returns to our world. But, instead of being redirected to his task, Lumb falls into a mindless contemplation of the statue's prominent vaginal opening, "An entrance, an exit./An arched target centre." Meanwhile his enemies prepare - Hagen in the city gun shop, Garten getting his incriminating film developed. The city's cathedral is passingly contrasted with the sheel-na-gig, the impotence of the former epitomized by the bishop, a

"Mummified senile ... casualty" (p. 111). (The poem 'Churches topple' on p. 190 expresses the same opinion.)

Garten's use of his photographs brings out the full story; Lumb is using the Women's Institute meetings as the focus of a new religion for women. The aim is for one of the women to give birth to a saviour, implicitly a saviour of women only. The cattleyard episode can be seen as an allegorical version of their beliefs, the men being shown as dead and the women imprisoned, awaiting some deliverer. In Lumb's religion men are assumed to be spiritually dead and their wives spiritually in bondage. Lumb is an arcane John the Baptist, preparing the way of the Messiah.

In this role Lumb is also a failure, since he dreams of taking the glory for himself. Having fallen asleep looking at the sheel-nagig he dreams of himself enthroned in the cathedral next to Maud amid "the cries and the drum-pulse." In fact he is unknowingly being affected by Maud's magic. In the candle-lit church "Maud has become beautiful" (p. 121). Maud will also fail, though; the vision coming true in a very different way to the one she has imagined, where the final flame-filled scenes in the cathedral will be replaced by the burning crypt of the parish church, their throne the pyre of wood their dead bodies are burnt on.

Maud's jealous love is the cause of the internal collapse of the religion, Garten's photographs the cause of the external collapse through exposure. The only person who does not believe the evidence of his camera is Felicity. She runs from what she thinks is the false evidence of one to the false love and reassurance of the other. Both Lumb and Maud, for different reasons, persuade her to delay the elopement until after the Institute meeting. Lumb packs his suitcase and discovers that his dagger is missing. After he has loaded the car Maud

secretly removes the ignition keys.

But Maud is not the only one who will hound Lumb to his fate. The men of the parish, incensed by Garten's revelations, make plans in the pub and drink to increase their courage. Each is in his own way like Westlake - on the verge of "something barbarous, disproportionate, insane" (p. 130). Meanwhile Maud escorts Felicity to the W.I. meeting in the church basement. Under her black shawl she is wearing a bridal dress. (Is the lone grave that of a lover who died before the wedding, leaving Maud to spinsterhood and bitterness?) Felicity has already been drugged by an innocent looking drink and does not protest when, on arrival at the meeting, she is dressed in the skin of a hind. While the wives of the parish dance around drugged and naked to a cassette tape of tribal music Lumb mounts Felicity from behind, wearing the horns of a stag on his head. Felicity has already dimly realised that "she herself is to be the sacramental thing" (p. 141), but she is turned from sacramental object into sacrificial victim as Maud suddenly plunges Lumb's dagger into the nape of her neck, and screams to the other women of how Lumb intended to elope - "Like an ordinary man/With his ordinary wife." (p. 147)

The women surround Lumb like flies round a corpse, an echo of the women in the cathedral vision who crowded as "black as flies" (p. 119). The spirit's attempt to become human and take over his double's full identity has failed. What happened in the cattelyard again becomes important. As well as a religious allegory it is a prophetic pre-figuring of what now takes place. Unable to escape by car without the keys, Lumb is forced to run the gauntlet of the local men who have been galvanized into action by Estridge's rage and stirred up further by Maud's false account of Felicity's death.

Although he is injured by Walsall's thrown garden fork Lumb

manages to escape across the fields. Pursuers and pursued are linked in a strange way. The men "are hardy animals of the same landscape" like their victim. Pursuit turns Lumb into a kind of animal and he tries to tune himself into the animal's energy source - the earth. First he covets "the furious micro-energy" of the fly, but "The miles of otherworld rootedness weigh in against him" (p. 155). His true source of strength is not so much the animal kingdom as Mother Earth herself. He discovers this as he leans exhaustedly against a tree, unconsciously reproducing what was his "prayer" earlier in the poem. The tree gives Lumb strength as he "sinks nerves into the current of the powerline", trying to plug himself into the "elemental power circuit of the Universe" that Hughes believes can be invoked.<sup>42</sup>

Initially Lumb only receives a jolt of "separatedness, his healed-over smallness" (p. 156), followed by a sense of sadness and futility. But even as these feelings grab at him, "he has already started/running away." His highly developed survival instinct has thwarted this third, indirect, attempt to "grab" him. As he continues to run, despite a chance encounter where he is wounded by Evans, Lumb imagines "He has plugged his energy appeal into the inexhaustible earth" (p. 163). He is caught up in a mystical experience, an ordeal vision, where he imagines "mountains of golden spirit":

He rides in the air behind his shoulders with a whip of hard will  
Like a charioteer.  
He imagines he is effortless Adam, before weariness entered,  
leaping for God. (p. 163)

Lumb believes that his powers have returned, but really he is "Like a hurt stag", an echo of his role in the recent ritual. But in this case he is experiencing the stag's knowledge of what it is to be a victim, the experience which is Lumb's truest link with the feminine forces. But he himself does not see this link. He sees himself as

Phaeton who drove the chariot of the sun across the roof of the world. He sees himself in a pre-fall state, "effortless Adam", like the shaman who can journey back to Paradise. But in fact neither role and neither journey is realistic. He is not a deity and he has failed as the messenger of a deity. He does not have Phaeton's mastery of an aspect of Nature and he has failed to release the inhabitants of the village into a kind of eternal May.

Deep down Lumb "knows/He has lost every last help/Of the grass and the trees, ... he is now ordinary, and susceptible/To extinction." (p. 164) Only in this ironic fashion has his attempt to be ordinary succeeded. He has at last realized that there was nothing great in himself, his gimcrack religion a manifestation of hubris. He "Is nothing more than some radio-transmitter", beaming information and direction from one world to another. The problem has been that the information from the inner or under world has proved to be too much for the characters of Gaudete to cope with.

The final revelation of insignificance is Lumb's truest vision, the beginnings of a true appreciation of his place in the order of things. It is this appreciation that is expressed in the Epilogue poems. It is only in flight and in pain that Lumb experiences any real identification with humanity and its condition. This is the new-found knowledge he tries to escape with.

Hagen's lake is Lumb's hope of escape. Physically it would be a means of slowing down his pursuers. Magically lakes are entrances to the underworld and hence a doorway to safety. It is not clear as to which means of escape Lumb is attempting when "He balances,/Narrowing himself to pierce a disappearance, to become infinitesimal." (p. 167) Most likely he is attempting the second form of escape, a return to the underworld, to the Mother's womb through "the crack of this place."

In the terms of the Percival legend Lumb is seeking to enter the abode of the Lady of the Lake. But he has not reckoned upon the presence of another "goddess", Hagen's rifle, which is "the unfailing bride/Df his ecstasies", (p. 167). This false goddess may be able to destroy Lumb's "bag of skin", but it cannot wipe out his dawning knowledge:

He knows now that this land  
 This embroidery of stems and machinery of cells  
 Is an ignorance, waiting in a darkness -  
 He knows at last why it has become so. (p. 165)

This revelation gives Lumb a second chance in the service of the Goddess and thus his body is disposed of in the way that gives such a chance. He is cremated in the church basement along with Felicity and Maud, who has committed suicide with the dagger on seeing his dead body. "All evidence goes up" and the slate is wiped clean, but since Lumb has been consumed like the phoenix he will also rise like the phoenix. He cannot return to the otherworld but he can be reborn. The phoenix's pyre is "the altar of its death and its birth" ('The Phoenix', Adam and the Sacred Nine, Moortown, p. 169.) so too for Lumb.

Another aspect of the symbolic cremation is that the two polar aspects of the Great Mother, Felicity and Maud, have been burnt together, their ashes mingling. They are at last reconciled in death and both have been united with Lumb - but while he continues his task they are both reabsorbed into the Woman whom they have represented. The numerous images of division have given way to one of unity in death as is so often the case in Hughes's poetry. In fact the very same cremation image is central to the elegiac poems in 'Moortown' where Jack Orchard is seen as a log being burnt on the fire of time. ('Now you have to push'<sup>43</sup>) So despite the fact that Lumb fails to heal the suffering deity there is still a way forward, the search for wholeness still meaningful. The closing image of the narrative is only a hint of



this, preparing the way for the further explorations of the Epilogue.

### Epilogue

Both the Lumb of the Prologue and of the main narrative have now gone through a process of pain leading to a new consciousness. We have already examined Hughes's fascination with patterns of shamanic integration so it is not surprising to see such a pattern here. Lumb's trials are initiatory not just because of their painful character, but, more importantly because of what they produce - a new man. The Lumb of the Epilogue may be a product of both his predecessors but he is himself neither. His initiation has made him both a different man and a maker of songs like the shaman, the author of a "tattered notebook" of verse. He also has the shaman's mastery of the animals, able to charm an otter from the lake.

At the beginning of the epilogue a Catholic priest sits in his bothy on the west coast of Ireland, reading the disciplines of St. Ignatius. He is interrupted by some young girls who show him a water-proof wallet containing a number of poems and tell him of the strange man who left the wallet after offering to show them a miracle. The 'miracle' was to whistle an otter from the Loch but the priest is not impressed and gets carried away instead with his own description of the miracle of creation.<sup>44</sup> So affected is the priest by his own words that "He thought something supernatural had happened" and this experience makes him reconsider the other supernatural happening he has been told of. Finding that the children have left in boredom he opens the wallet and begins to meticulously copy out the "heavily corrected" verse. (The fact that the poems are so heavily corrected is a reminder that what follows is not so much the result of some kind of prophetic inspiration as a man's attempt to write about what is essentially a

mystery.)

In the figure of the Catholic priest Hughes is again at work on his pattern of stresses. His faith is a contrast to the dead Anglicanism portrayed earlier. Hughes regards Catholicism as more open to the female principle in its veneration of Mary as "Queen of Heaven."<sup>45</sup> The priest is closer to the natural world in location as well as belief, living in one of the remotest places in the British Isles, not in some grey area between town and true country. Against the remoteness the priest has the armour of St. Ignatius, what Keith Sagar has called "arid spirituality", yet this does not prevent him as it did not prevent Gerard Manley Hopkins, from experiencing a Heraclitan perception of the fiery grandeur of the created order. The priest's disciplines are no more arbitrary than those of Don Juan, whom Hughes so admires in his review of Castenada's A Separate Reality.<sup>46</sup> As is the case throughout Gaudete we are reminded implicitly that "all the opposites, this is the meaning."

#### The Epilogue Poems

The Lumb who is supposed to have written these poems is, in the words of the Argument, "The original man ... but changed." Hughes also tells us elsewhere that he is "half crazy, composing hymns and psalms to a nameless female deity."<sup>47</sup> As in Jennifer's scherzo, madness and creative acts are brought together with a woman the focus. Walter Otto writes, "We should never forget that the Dionysac world is, above all, a world of women. Women awaken Dionysus and bring him up. Women accompany him wherever he is."<sup>48</sup> Otto then goes on to tell of the way that Dionysus is confronted by the masculine world of Apollo and an accomodation is reached because they have a vital need for each other's emphases.

In Gaudete this unity is not present - the women follow Dionysus

and the men Apollo - and it is the enmity of these two forces that is the final cause of disaster. The poems of the epilogue seek to reconcile these elements in the Orphic nature of the changed Lumb. Ancient Orphism was highly syncretistic and was responsible for the eventual enjoining of the Dionysan and Apolline cults.<sup>49</sup> In terms of the poem, the Orphic strand centring on the descent into the underworld is used as a doorway to a portrayal of Orphic psychic experience.

The Orphic myth is echoed not only in the underworld journey in the prologue but also in the manner of the spirit-Lumb's death. Writing about the Orphic archetype, Daniel Liberthson says that he can approach death in two ways, via a burial/journey to Hades or through dismemberment by the maenads, a link with the Dionysan myth. Lumb experiences both modes of death through his two personae. He also suffers for the same reason as the Orpheus figure. "The Orphic poet endures a psychic and poetic experience in order to redeem the form of the lost one."<sup>50</sup> Orpheus's lost one was his wife, Euridice. For Lumb the lost one that he must redeem is the beautiful woman in the cave. He is a failed Orpheus because he does not redeem this woman or bring her into this world, as Orpheus did with Euridice. Only right at the end of the main narrative does Lumb realize that, in the words of Liberthson, "Part of the Orphic task is of course to woo nature."<sup>51</sup>

The epilogue poems begin just such a wooing of nature, personified in the unnamed deity who is adored. This makes them more than mere elucidations of the main text and explains why they do not always follow the linear development of the narrative. Nonetheless these poems use the mixed blessing of memory as a kind of spiritual skeleton, a peep behind the flesh of the main events, a vision of the essence of what has taken place.

The poems show Lumb's insight into what has happened to both himself and his double. The early poems of the epilogue seem to be organised so as to deal with the persona's initiatory threshold experiences, a perception of his true state as "half a man." Ironically, though Lumb is "half-crazy" he is more perceptive as to his real condition than either of his predecessors. He sees himself as "The veteran of negatives" and in 'I hear your congregations at their rapture' he envies the birds who were "long ago perfect", unlike man who seems to always have a part of himself missing, a Fallen creature.

This sense of lack is the mainspring of the desire for initiation, man's attempt to reconcile the opposites of his existence:

Man feels himself torn and separate. He often finds it difficult properly to explain to himself the nature of this separation, for sometimes he feels himself to be cut off from "something" powerful, "something" utterly other than himself ...

(Mircea Eliade<sup>52</sup>)

The sense of separation is like Voltaire's 'God-shaped hole' which he believed that all men have, yet which can never be filled. The person who Lumb feels can fill this hole is the undescribed female he questions in 'Who are you?', the same figure who beckons in 'I watched a wise beetle', the woman groaning in pain in 'At the top of my soul'. The path to peace and the path to initiatory knowledge combine in the poet's search for the woman he glimpses.

There are a number of poems that catalogue Lumb's failed attempts at relationship. There is the failure of violence - "The trousseau of the apple/Came by violence into my possession" (p. 179) - a result of lack of patience. "I forestalled God -/I assailed his daughter." Perhaps Lumb is referring to his many seductions, his log-like attempt at relationship with Nature. Whatever the case, in 'Collision with the earth has finally come' he admits that he has made:

Error on error  
 Perfumed  
 With a ribbon of fury (p. 180)

'Trying to be a leaf' recalls Lumb's attempts to become one with the trees, to return to the log he was made from. But there is only "a moment" where "your fulness comes." In 'I heard the screech, sudden', although Lumb's legs "were already galloping to help/The woman who wore a split lopsided mask -", before he gets to her it is too late, "And the curtain came down." But Lumb's attempt to help precipitates a new situation, just as it did with the baboon-woman:

But now, suddenly,  
 Again the curtain goes up.

This is no longer the play.

The mask is off. (p. 181)

Lumb's own attempts to reach the Goddess are a failure. She must come to him. This is what was meant by the difficult image of the reversed roles in the birth in the cattleyard. Roles must be reversed because otherwise Lumb will never be able to see "An unearthly woman wading shorewards/With me in your arms" ('The rain comes again'). In 'This is the maneater's skull' Lumb realizes that while "I was looking for you./You were looking for me." (p. 183)

The White Goddess is linked a number of times in Gaudete to the 'maneater', usually a tiger.<sup>53</sup> Music is the maneater on the Lady's leash in 'Music, that eats people'. In the main text the "maneater's skull" is contemptuously used as a paperweight by Hagen, a symbol of his oppression of the natural world. In 'She rides the earth' one of the Goddess's mounts is a lion, linking her to Hera, the wife of Zeus, who did likewise. (The bull and the ass she also rides are mounts of Europa, the daughter of Zeus, and of Christ on his entry to Jerusalem respectively.) The lion was also the beast that Dionysus used to turn

himself into. The poet will eventually be lifted to the dug that grows "Out of the brow of a lioness." (p. 188)

The Goddess is both mother and killer beast, mistress of Nature, which is also tender and cruel at the same time. Like the tiger in 'Tiger-Psalm', (pp. 150-1 of the Faber Moortown), she "blesses with a fang./ The tiger does not kill but opens a path." The dangerous aspect of the deity and her realm is powerfully expressed in the poem 'The lark sizzles in my ear', or here where:

A primrose petal's edge  
Cuts the vision like laser.

And the eye of a hare  
Strips the interrogator naked  
Of all but some skin of terror -  
A starry frost. (p. 185)

Lumb's honest encounter with nature strips him naked, makes him both victim and servant of the Goddess. In a sense he is even doing the deity's work for her:

The one I hunt  
The one  
I shall rend to pieces

Whose blood I shall dab on your cheek

Is under my coat. (p. 185)

An English fox-hunt is incorporated into the Bacchic symbol of hunt as sacrifice, a universalization of a common country occurrence as in 'Calves harshly parted from their mamas', putting each experience in the light of the Goddess:

So much for calves.  
As for the tiger  
He lies still  
Like left luggage

He is roaming the earth light, unseen. (p. 197)

Likewise in 'I know well' the death of a pony with its "hardly-used beauty" becomes implicitly the death of a beautiful woman in the

prologue, whose gaze is "brilliant", mirrored in the pony's "deep glimpse." (p. 191).

In such poems Hughes combines the clarity of his 'Moortown' poetry with the gnomic style of some of his early metaphysical work, not always successfully. What has re-activated a style reminiscent of 'Snowdrop' and 'To Paint a Water-lily' when at its best is the South Indian devotional lyric called the 'vacana'. After reading A.K. Ramanujan's translations of such lyrics, Hughes began to write poems in their style, prayers stimulated by the suspicion that a year-long sore throat he was suffering from was the beginnings of cancer:

I began to write these 'vacanas' as little prayers - about a hundred of them, some of which will be published in Orts. And then, when I was shaping up Gaudete, I realised there should be something at the end and that this sort of poem would be ideal if I could write it in the right context.<sup>54</sup>

The vacana style links the poet's fear of death with that of Lumb. It is important for both of them since "The Orphic poet must fly in the face of death as such - he cannot avoid it; he must insist that there are possibilities of life in death, of gain in loss - he must bring death to life."<sup>55</sup> The result of the exploration of these possibilities is the poet's discovery, Lumb's or Hughes's, it does not matter, of his "keeper/Sitting in the sun - " (p. 187). He tells us "for all rumours of me read obituary." Death means many things to such a poet. It is an adventure in 'I said goodbye to earth', a journey through the "tunnel of fire" to the place where the snowflake is crucified and the atoms pray too. It is a gamble for initiation in 'The dead man lies, marching here and there':

He never stops trying to dance, trying to sing  
And maybe he dances and sings

Because you kissed him.

If you miss him, he stays dead  
Among the inescapable facts. (p. 198)

In another meditation on death, 'Waving goodbye, from your banked hospital bed', rather than being kissed the persona kisses. He stands in a morgue before a woman who, like Sylvia Plath, "knocked the world off, like a flower vase/It was the third time. And it smashed." (p. 186) His response to this dead woman is strikingly different from his behaviour in the prologue. But without the woman alive even the sun is only "like a cold kiss in the street -/A mere disc token of you." (p. 191)

The inaccessibility of this woman is symbolized by her veil in 'A primrose petal's edge' (p. 185), similarly, as the poet searches:

Looking for her form  
I find only a fern.

Where she should be waiting in the flesh  
Stands a sycamore with weeping letters. (p. 192)

Nonetheless his faith remains, challenging death, which is usually symbolized as a tree in these poems. He anticipates:

The saviour  
From these veils of wrinkle and shawls of ache

Like the sun  
Which is itself cloudless and leafless

Was always here, is always as she was. (p. 192)

The enemy of Lumb's faith is the doctor in 'A doctor extracted', the companion to the scientist in 'Crow's Account of St. George'. He tells false tales:

About a God  
Who ripped his mother's womb  
And entered it, with a sword and a torch

To find a father. (p. 189)

For Hughes to demythologize is to commit matricide.

But despite the obstacles the evidence that a real relationship with the Goddess is possible is built up through the poems. Instead of "she" the poet is able to speak of "you". In the process he comes to terms with his smallness, making his understanding part of his act of worship:



Each of us is nothing  
But the fleeting warm pressure

Of your footfall

As you pace  
Your cage of freedom. (p. 195)

Where the deity is present the Orphic task of bringing life from death is possible. There are two particular poems where the trees, symbols of death like the "memorial" sycamore (p. 193) and the "tree darkening a house" (p. 192), are changed by the Goddess, her alchemy transmuting death into life.

The Goddess is called the "oak's bride", the oak being a tree that "seems to die and to be dead/In its love-act" ('I see the oak's bride in the oak's grasp'). Here Hughes uses the common Renaissance pun where 'to die' also means 'to experience orgasm'. The tree is transformed by the deity from a memorial into a communicant in the marriage act. Pain and sexual union come together and are transcended in this poem. The tree's bliss is the rictus of Christ on the cross, which leads to resurrection life. In 'Your tree - your oak' we are reminded that "Agony in the garden" is the result of the "Annunciation" of a saviour. The tree, like the cross, is the place where death is swallowed up in the victory of life.

As in Cave Birds initiatory questioning and suffering lead to a release from bondage and potential for relationship. The symbol of such a release in the epilogue poems is that of an oak flying "Astride the earth." The tree rides the earth as the shaman rides his drum, which is the mount for his magical rides to Paradise. The oak is also the dual symbol of the Lady - it is "your tree" - and of Lumb, the man united to a tree-bole by a Christ-like scourging.

In these poems death becomes an absolute form of initiatory pain, the tree replacing the Christian cross. The pain is the kind which

"can only be paid down/Equal, exactly,/To what can be no part of falsehood" (p. 192). To other dreams of quest and sacrifice Ted Hughes has added his own, not an explanation but a poetic experience that we are invited to share in by the skilful combination of drama and narrative. Gaudete is no more conclusive than any other of Hughes's works, but this is because the poet has a clear idea of the idea expressed by Jung, that:

Even the best attempts at explanation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language ... The most we can do is to dream the myth onwards and give it a modern dress.<sup>50</sup>

NOTES

1. Carl Jung's 'Psychology of the Child Archetype', 1940. In Collected Works, Volume 9, Part 1: The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, para. 271.
2. Ekbert Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 212. From a 1977 interview with Hughes.
3. *ibid.*, p. 213.
4. *ibid.*, p. 215.
5. *ibid.*, p. 214.
6. *ibid.*, p. 213.
7. 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 58. "... those early peoples had a strong intuition of the therapeutic effect of simple narratives."
8. *ibid.*, p. 60.
9. Bardo Thodol, p. 149.
10. *ibid.*, p. 162.
11. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 215.
12. See Graves, The White Goddess, pp. 61-64.
13. Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, 2nd edition, pp. 192-3.
14. Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1935), V, ll. 947-50.
15. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 215.
16. *ibid.*
17. 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 58.
18. 'Myth and Education', 1976, p. 92.
19. Otto, Dionysus: Myth and Cult, p. 143.
20. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 214.
21. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 10.
22. Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 126.
23. *ibid.*, p. 125.
24. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 121. The same image can be found in The Iron Man, and could even be the root of 'Ballad from a Fairy Tale' and 'The angel'.

25. *ibid.*, p. 215.
26. *ibid.*
27. Carl Jung, 'Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype', Collected Works, 9, part 1, paras. 156-7.
28. The Mabinogion, trans. by J.Gentz (Harmondsworth:Penguin, 1976), p. 225.
29. *ibid.*, p. 227.
30. *ibid.*, Introduction, p. 17. The story 'Branwen' is a parallel version of the myth we find in 'Peredur'. Bron is lame, as is the king in the latter tale and in some workings of the Grail legend the Fisher King is actually called Bran or Bron. The object of Bron's journey is to rescue the woman Branwen. Both Bron and Branwen were names of deities. (For links with Crow see p. 104, note 51)
31. For the differing approaches to this passage see The Art of Ted Hughes, 2nd ed., p. 201 and Gifford/Roberts, pp. 169-70.
32. Joan Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 28. Cf. Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 176. "Androgyny is an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness."
33. Marcel Mauss, A General Theory of Magic, trans. by R. Brain, (London: Routledge, 1972), pp. 34-57.
34. Sylvia Plath, 'The Magic Mirror: a study of the Double in two of Dostoyevsky's novels', Smith College, 1955, Introduction, p. 3.
35. Jung, 'Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype', para. 186.
36. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 124.
37. See earlier in the chapter, p. 199.
38. 'Myth and Education', 1976, p. 88.
39. Carl Jung's 'The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man', 1933-34, Collected Works, 10, para. 317. Jung was one of the first psychiatrists to note that psychotics dream little or not at all.
40. Graves, The White Goddess, p. 40.
41. Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 215. The strange woman "is the buried real woman that has disappeared from this world."
42. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 9.

43. The pyre is also a hint of the Beltane 'need-fire'. Beltane was celebrated on 1st May, initially in honour of the goddess Beltis, or Belili, who Robert Graves identifies with the White Goddess. This throws light on Hughes's statement that he regards the narrative of Gaudete as "just being the story of English Maytime." Faas 1977 interview, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 215.
44. Lumb has already been compared to an otter on p. 106 of the text. As in the case of the shaman he shares the characteristics of his familiar.
45. Cf. the argument of the essay 'Shakespeare's Poem' which contrasts the Jehoval worshipping Calvinism of the Puritans that Hughes regards as repressive. The 39 Articles of the Church of England are based on Calvinist principles.
46. Review of A Separate Reality.
47. From a programme leaflet to the acting version of Gaudete, performed in London during August 1977.
48. Otto, Dionysus: Myth and Cult, p. 142.
49. W.K.C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion, (Methuen: London, 1952), pp. 41-7.
50. Daniel Liberthson, 'The Quest for Being: Theodore Roethke, W.S. Merwin and Ted Hughes', Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1976, p. 31.
51. *ibid.*, p. 64, note 22.
52. Mircea Eliade, The Two and the One, (Harvill Press: London, 1965), p. 122.
53. Cf. Graves, The White Goddess, p. 277, note 1, and p. 404. Hughes has called the Lady of the epilogue poems "The Tiger ... She is the whole works." Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 214.
54. *ibid.*, p. 138.
55. Liberthson, p. 37. Despite his penetrating study of Orphism Liberthson seriously misapplies it to Hughes's work which he regards as "anti-Orphic" and "about disintegration" (p. 10), on the basis of his reading of Crow, ignoring poems like 'Two Eskimo Songs' and other prefigurings of the poet's more developed initiatory motifs.
56. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, para. 271.

## CHAPTER 6

### MOORTOWN

The 'Moortown' poems were first published in 1978 by Rainbow Press as Moortown Elegies, the result of several years working with Jack Orchard, the father of the poet's second wife, Carol, at Moortown farm in Devon. Following his return from Persia Hughes seems to have spent more time farming than writing poetry; farming renewed his vision and contributed to the explosion of creative energy in the middle of the decade.

In 1974 Hughes produced a short sequence for children called Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter which eventually became the volume published as Season Songs by Faber. While writing these poems for children the poet did not exclude adults. Season Songs shows the more positive aspects of the farmer's life, with little emphasis on the pain of birth and death we find in 'Moortown'. What links the volumes is their interest in the cycle of the seasons, an interest which resulted in a number of 'Moortown' poems being used to evoke each month in Michael Morpurgo's All Around the Year. A number of the 'Moortown' poems had also seen first light in the children's volume Moon-Bells. Two, 'Sheep' and 'March morning unlike others', come directly from Season Songs.

While Hughes was developing this strand of fresh nature poetry he was also becoming more and more involved in ideas that led to Cave Birds and Gaudete. This other strand could have become totally separated from the less demanding work without the advent of 'Moortown', which, as we shall see, is a powerful renewing and unifying force in Ted Hughes's poetry.

The 'Moortown' poems began as rough diary entries in a journal that

Hughes kept while he was farming in Devon. At the time he was trying to write a whole book of what he calls "upbeat" poems about the cycle of the seasons, motivated by the superstition "that the writer, even more than the reader, is affected by the mood and final resolution of his poem- in a final way." It is no coincidence that the subject of these upbeat poems was the animal life on his farm since for Hughes:

... one of the striking things about animals is that their dominant mood is happy. Their whole attitude to life is naturally upbeat. I suppose they're not burdened much in the way of memory and a long history of mortality and its disasters.<sup>1</sup>

He feels that this is particularly true of sheep and cattle, "and through their eyes one feels it in the plant kingdom as well."

Thus for Hughes the poet is bonded both to his poetic creation and to the subjects of that creation. A poem becomes almost a spell, words interwoven with an indefinable something else that gives them a power greater than the sum of syllables. The effect is similar in the case of both the poem and the spell. They change those who encounter them and they open up an alternative universe or an alternative way of perceiving.

In his discussion of poems from 'Moortown' in the Norwich tape Hughes clearly associates poetry with primitive magic, starting by reminding us that "Poetry is traditionally supposed to be magical", and going on to narrate a personal experience of the overlap between the two areas:

- I have had curious encounters with the old kind of hunting magic, one in connection with the following poem ('Earth-Numb'). After a whole season of very poor success catching salmon I composed this poem. It describes earlier experiences and I was writing and rewriting it, on and off, for over two or three years. Naturally I never thought of it as a hunting incantation, it was just another poem. But then, at the start of this particular season when the angling fever began to make itself felt, I worked at this piece over two or three days and finished it. At last it seemed to me I'd got it just right. The following day I caught a large salmon and two days after

two more salmon, one of them even larger. The impression was that somehow I'd broken down the resistance. Everything had to happen as in the poem. (Norwich Tape)

It is this same 'hunting magic' that Hughes felt brought about his best early poems, as he explains in 'Capturing Animals', one of the programmes from Poetry in the Making:

If I had not caught the real fox there in the words I would never have saved the poem ('The Thought-Fox'). I would have thrown it into the waste-paper basket as I have thrown so many other hunts that did not get what I was after. As it is, every time I read the poem the fox comes up again out of the darkness and steps into my head. And I suppose that long after I am gone, as long as a copy of the poem exists, every time anyone reads it the fox will get up somewhere out in the darkness and come walking towards them.<sup>2</sup>

But now, in 'Moortown', the animals being dealt with have already been captured - by domesticity generations ago. So it is a different magic that the poet weaves in Season Songs and 'Moortown', not so much the sudden bloody sacrifice of the hunt as the calculated defeat of, season by season, the world of John Barleycorn and Jack Orchard. Individual poems depend far less on a direct mythology than on a sense of the rightness of things - as Jung has said, "Nature commits no errors." It is this sense which maintains the essentially upbeat tone, a tone which is not negated by the pain and the violence in some of the poems. Hughes realises that "It's extremely difficult to write about the natural world without finding your subject matter turning ugly." But he goes on to remind us:

In that direction, of course, lie the true poems, the great complete statements of the world in its poetic aspect. I mean that catalogue of disasters and mysteries the Book of Job; or that unending cycle of killings and grief The Iliad, or the great tragedies. What all those works have in common of course is not exactly a final upbeat note; but it is a peculiar kind of joy, an exultation. But that's the paradox of the poetry. As if poetry were a biological healing process, it seizes on what is depressing and destructive and lifts it to a realm where it becomes healing and energising, or it tries to do, that is what it is always setting out to do; and to reach that final mood of release and elation is the whole driving force of writing at all. (Norwich Tape)



It is this determination which enables Hughes to break out of the bleakness of Crow and Prometheus on his Crag yet which also stopped him from taking the easy way out by writing purely 'happy' poetry. In fact sections of both Season Songs and 'Moortown' were being written during the same period that Cave Birds and Gaudete were taking shape. There may be major differences of tone and style between all of these works, but there is no difference of spirit. All these works are there to remind us that we need to consider the inner world of our spirits and the outer one of Nature:

So what we need, evidently, is a faculty that embraces both worlds simultaneously. A large, flexible grasp, an inner vision which holds wide open, like a great theatre, the arena of contention, and which pays equal respect to both sides. Which keeps faith, as Goethe says, with the world of things and the world of spirits equally.<sup>3</sup>

It is only for the purpose of elucidation that Hughes speaks of these worlds as if they were separate, since his poetry constantly reminds us of what he has already expressed in prose with his review of The Environmental Revolution by Max Nicholson - "We hold this globe in our hands ... This miniature earth has our stomach, our blood, our precarious vital chemistry, and our future."<sup>4</sup>

Hughes's gospel is the interdependence of man and his environment and the need for reconciliation between the two who are, in effect, destroying each other.<sup>5</sup> This theme is hinted at in the shamanic integration that takes place through the ordeal of Cave Birds. It is expressed in social terms in the narrative of Gaudete, mystically in the epilogue poems of that work; but in 'Moortown' for the first time the reconciliation is set in personal terms, as the poet chronicles his encounters with the forces of Nature on his farm. As a farmer he experiences a sense of unity both with the animal life and with a man, Jack Orchard, participating in the two worlds, once again following the

model of the shaman.

The pivotal role of the poet is admirably expressed by Peter Scupham in his perceptive review of the Faber edition of Moortown:

The weight and power of the book come in the title sequence  
 ... Here a landscape, threshed and bounced about by its  
 winter weathers and farming demon-king, struggles to give  
 birth to its own continuation.<sup>6</sup>

To call the poet a "demon-king" may be hyperbole, but there is no denying his presiding function in the 'Moortown' sequence. The diary format continually reminds us that it is through his perception that we see the animal world. Thus Hughes writes in 'Foxhunt':

... Will he run  
 Till his muscles suddenly turn to iron,  
 Till blood froths his mouth as his lungs tatter,  
 Till his feet are raw blood-sticks and his tail  
 Trails thin as a rat's? Or will he  
 Make a mistake, jump the wrong way, jump right  
 Into the hound's mouth? As I write this down  
 He runs still fresh, with all his chances before him.  
 (Moortown, pp. 23-4)

Once again we are reminded of the power of the poet, weaver of spells that can kill or sustain a weary fox. And it is not only as a poet that Hughes has 'miraculous' abilities. As farmer he is both animal friend and animal master. In 'Roe-deer' he is able to see the deer who "had happened into my dimension/The moment I was arriving just there." In 'Birth of Rainbow' he is one of the agents who bring about the cow's safe delivery, a role which is beyond Lumb in Gaudete.

But the greatest magic is in the farmer's ability not to be crushed between earth and sky, a capacity celebrated from 'Crow Hill' in Lupercal right up to poems like 'Top Withens' in Remains of Elmet. Two lines in the Lupercal poem 'Crow Hill' laconically celebrate the farmer's strength: "Between the weather and the rock/farmers make a little heat." In primitive cultures, to make heat is to make magic. Among shamans this is manifested in what is called "mastery of fire" the ability to withstand or emit flames, but in the wider practice of

primitive magic being warm is part of mastery of one's environment. To make a fire by natural means and to become supernaturally hot are one and the same thing. Following this paradigm, references to heat in 'Moortown' are references to mastery. Thus when the poet manages to start the frozen tractor it:

... stands  
 Shuddering itself full of heat, seeming to enlarge slowly  
 Like a demon demonstrating  
 A more-than-usually-complete materialisation - ('Tractor', p. 30)

Jack Orchard is portrayed as habitually nursing his cigarette as in 'A Memory' and 'Hands', while the most moving of the five elegiac poems about him present his cremation as being an extension of his love of bonfires:

Now you have to push it all -  
 Just as you loved to push the piled live hedge-boughs -  
 Into a gathering blaze ('Now you have to push', p. 65)

Here we see a far more subtle use of mythical or anthropological information than in Crow and Prometheus on his Crag. There the poet is not concerned with the pedigree of the images he uses, but with their durability. Fire is still linked with vitality and mankind still fascinated by the seemingly miraculous way that it appears, physically evident yet without mass. What Hughes is doing is to remind us of certain foundational responses to the physical world, responses that enabled primitive peoples, and enables them still, to live at peace with Nature. The image of the farmer between the millstones of earth and sky puts man in his place, challenges his bravado and imparts another basic message - 'co-operate or die'. 'Moortown' is about co-operation while the ruined farms of Remains of Elmet show us the alternative (see 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves' and 'Top Withens').

Throughout 'Moortown', then we encounter mythical echoes and patterns, but these are implicit rather than explicit. The personal

spiritual adventure is the focus of attention, not the adventure of a culture. This adventure is the one Hughes described in his review of Philip O'Connor's book on tramps, and which he sought to articulate in such earlier poems as 'Crag Jack's Apostasy' and 'Wodwo'. It is "the two way journey towards Reality" towards both the "objectless radiance of the Self" and the "reality of the world."<sup>7</sup> Much has been made of this journey by writers on Hughes, particularly by Leonard Scigaj, who has put a strongly Buddhist slant on Hughes's statement. He feels that by the time of Wodwo Hughes's meditations:

cause him to abandon history and faith in significant experience in the phenomenal world for the deeper sense of self-determination afforded through Oriental modes of self-transcendence.<sup>8</sup>

This may be true of parts of Wodwo, but it does not do justice to the extent and determination of the poet's quest for a new holy ground. 'Moortown' asserts quite the opposite and marks the beginning of a stable relationship between Hughes and Nature (the relationship has always existed but has tended to be stormy). In the terms of Maud Bodkin Hughes is beginning to "contextualize" his "lived experience", which she defines as experience that cannot be contemplated, only enjoyed.<sup>9</sup> The diary format of 'Moortown' stresses the experiential aspect of the entries, it points to the poet's growing trust in his own perceptions. But we must remember that Hughes has not lost interest in the "objectless radiance of the Self" because he has found a stable platform for his consideration of the physical world.

Both Hughes and Bodkin bring private experience and its contextualization together under the chaperonage of Imagination, which for Bodkin leads to "awareness" and for Hughes the same kind of heightened perception he admires in the shaman., Where Bodkin uses a word, Hughes sees a man. His theory follows practice and gives him the audacity to

make a farming diary part of a spiritual adventure. It is Hughes's attitude to imagination that makes diary and quest part of the same poetic fabric. In his 1976 essay on 'Myth and Education' he suggests that most people either have a really weak or an inaccurate imagination, which he defines as "sharpness, clarity and scope of the mental eye" and that we have rare flashes of such clarity, flashes which can be disciplined by mental education. He then asks "why isn't the sharp, clear, objective eye of the mind as adequate for this world (the inner world) as it is for the other more obviously outer world?"<sup>10</sup> Hughes portrays the imagination as having a beam which can be pointed outwards or inwards to illuminate, but he feels that we have retreated from the inner world because of its complexity and danger:

In the end, since all our attention from birth has been narrowed into that outward beam, we come to regard our body as no more than a somewhat stupid vehicle. All the urgent information coming towards us from that inner world sounds to us like a blank, or at best the occasional grunt, or a twinge. Because we have no equipment to receive it and decode it. The body, with its spirits, is the antennae of all perceptions, the receiving aerial for all wavelengths. But we are disconnected. The exclusiveness of our objective eye, the very strength and brilliance of our objective intelligence, suddenly turns into stupidity - of the most rigid and suicidal kind.<sup>11</sup>

As a proponent of the dual use of the imaginative faculty, the "mental eye", Hughes has sought to write poetry which exercises and educates both aspects of the imagination, particularly stressing their interdependence. Now we can understand why Hughes talks about poems as if they were spells, since if a normal descriptive poem can change the way we look at things, making us more aware and making us look more sharply, then a poem which adds the extra dimension of the inner world will sharpen our perception of that world as well. It could be said, therefore, that almost all of Hughes's poems are 'spiritual' in the widest sense. Speaking of 'Orf' and 'February 17th' Hughes says this:

The magical operation of these last poems, I imagine, can be guessed from the effect each one would have on us if, say, we opened a book at random, asking to be shown our fortune. If we came on the poem about the sick lamb, or the disastrous birth, we would be downcast, maybe, or maybe really depressed, according to our resilience. Imagine having a dream about either of these things. (Norwich Tape)

To Hughes these poems are magical because they stir up the inner world either in pain or in joy. The effect on the reader or listener is all-important, the violence that surfaces so easily in Hughes's poetry an attempt to breach the wall of numbness we have around our inner selves, a wall reinforced by the anaesthetic of the television set.<sup>12</sup>

The first poem in the 'Moortown' sequence, 'Rain', shows us the world of cattle who lack all our access to the inner world and must inhabit the comfortless outer world of rain and mud:

... Nowhere they can go  
Is less uncomfortable. The brimming world  
And the pouring sky are the only places  
For them to be ... (p. 16)

Surprisingly, though, the poet seems to envy them since like the hawk in 'Hawk Roosting' they have no "falsifying dreams" to trouble them. They have no conflict except with their environment, fenced in yet free from the tensions of human awareness. They inhabit a single, holistic universe, unavailable to memory and conscience. This point is deeply embedded in all the 'Moortown' poems as it is in all the animal references in Gaudete, but it is there for us to uncover. Hughes wants us to exercise our faculties together with him. Thus he sweeps us headlong into the environment that is his "lived experience" and which he offers to share with us.

The sense of being 'outside' is overwhelming in 'Rain', the initial appeal being made to our sense of sight:

... Every mutilated leaf there

Looks like a frog or a rained-out mouse. Cattle  
 Wait under blackened backs. We drive post-holes. (p. 15)

The tone is laconic, the rhythm derived from the only sounds available, the "Dull roof-drumming" and the hammering of rain on the roads. The only movement in the poem before the last ten lines is that of the human beings. It is as if the men are mesmerized by the rain and the monotony of their work so that it takes an appreciable amount of time before the various birds are noticed.

'Rain' is an outstanding poem in that it captures a sense of space without a dependence on images of movement. The poem derives its strengths from internal opposites, the vista of the "Hills wallowing" contrasted with the withdrawal of the calves who "Wait deep beneath their spines"; the sense of a visitation from "off-world" and the prosaic activity of both man and beast; the men and animals trapped by the rain, the birds in flight, claustrophobia and space, mud and rain. Between all of these polarities there is inter-action in the same way that the rain makes the mud yet does not become it. The whole poem is a dialectic between worlds.

In the 'real' world both man and beast are portrayed as victims, while the birds, since they are not tied to the earth, do not have to endure its burden. In 'Rain' both the persona and the cattle are at the mercy of the mud. In 'Dehorning' the cows are symbolically mastered by the men, while in 'Poor Birds', the birds despite their discomfort are exposed to the transcendent, "Electrodes of stars" and the "Machinery of heaven". They are making the two-fold journey, experiencing at the same time the reality of the "sodden twigs" and of their dreams of heaven.

This is the only poem in 'Moortown' where this rule is explicit, unlike numerous examples that we will encounter in Remains of Elmet

where the snipe are compared to shamans, their wings the drums by which they fly from earth to heaven. (Note the resolution of 'Rain' where the snipe fly over "invisible in the dusk", yet still audible.) Hughes, who will attempt a cosmology based on Nature in Remains of Elmet, is in 'Moortown' laying out the natural order that inhabits such a world. It is based on being a victim. Man and animal are both completely at the mercy of the elements. The birds have a degree of accommodation with the weather, particularly the wind, yet are the most likely to die in the snow. The domestic animals have their accommodation with Man who gives them food, cover and assistance at birth, yet they are at his mercy. Man can create a "new order" as in 'Dehorning', a dangerous ability that brought about the other New Order, Nazism.

There is no guilt in what Nature does, but it is implicit in the works of man. This guilt surfaces in poems which deal with the mastery of animals, 'Dehorning', 'Ravens', 'Sheep 2', 'A Memory' and the two poems about auctions examine the different aspects of such mastery and its consequences. It is isolated as an essentially male impulse. The woman in 'She has come to pass' spends a whole day at the auction and departs after bidding for a bull "relieved she had lost it, so,/As from a job well done." If this woman is taken to be Hughes's wife, Carol; we have a very strong correspondance with the Holroyds in Gaudete. The husband is the dehorner, his wife the admirer of the bull, who is called "Her bull".<sup>13</sup>

In 'Sheep' and 'A Memory' it is the sheep-shearing that symbolizes human dominance. Here the beneficial side is apparent, so it is no surprise to see Jack Orchard the central figure in the latter poem. But there is also another side to human responsibility, that set forth in 'Ravens'. Here the man must explain to the child:



... I explain  
 That it died being born. We should have been here, to  
 help it.  
 So it died being born. "And did it cry?" you cry.  
 I pick up the dangling greasy weight by the hooves soft as  
     dog's pads  
 That had trodden only womb-water  
 And its raven-drawn strings dangle and trail,  
 Its loose head joggles, and "Did it cry?" you cry again.  
 Its two-fingered feet splay in their skin between the  
     pressures  
 Of my finger and thumb. And there is another,  
 Just born, all black, splaying its tripod, inching its new  
     points  
 Towards its mother, and testing the note  
 It finds in its mouth. But you have eyes now  
 Only for the tattered bundle of throwaway lamb.  
 "Did it cry?" you keep asking, in a three-year-old  
     field-wide  
 Piercing persistence. "Oh yes" I say "it cried." (p. 38)

The farmer is always faced with this harsh kind of cause and effect.  
 Lambs die in direct proportion to the time spent by the shepherd away  
 from the flock. An ewe will give birth into a puddle or a sudden  
 squall will overwhelm a lamb's defences.

'February 17th' shows another side of the farmer's responsibility,  
 the accountability of being in charge. The "hacked-off head" of the  
 dead lamb is a black reminder of this. There is irony too, since the  
 severed head is a symbol of mastery - for instance among the plains  
 Indians of North America who used to impale a buffalo's head on a stake  
 as a proof of this. The events of 'February 17th' are a reminder that  
 the human being is not the ultimate master and cannot always decide  
 which animals live or die, in contrast to the Animal Master myth.  
 'Birth of Rainbow' is a clear statement of this. After the birth of a  
 lamb in a March hailstorm, the final comment must be "... We got to  
 cover./Left to God the calf and his mother." (p. 45)

In 'Moortown' birth and death, like rain, wind and snow are beyond  
 the limits of human authority. On the one hand is the experience of  
 'Struggle', on the other that of 'Surprise'. In the former the calf is

unable to survive the "gruelling journey" he has made from the womb, despite human assistance; while in 'Surprise' the diarist just happens to notice "A glistening/Hanging sheet of blue-black" under the tail of a grazing cow:

... Suddenly  
 The apron slithered, and a whole calf's  
 Buttocks and hind-legs - whose head and forefeet  
 Had been hidden from me by another cow -  
 Toppled out of its mother, and collapsed on the ground. (p. 34)

The same event is shown as both heroic tragedy and comic prat-fall. One calf takes on personality and death together and "died called Struggle./Son of Patience" - the other lives, having turned from "an anomolous/Blue plastic apron" into a newborn "jelly", characterless but alive.

Hughes sees in Struggle the same willingness to battle against the odds that he admires in the Eastern European poets. Something is incarnate in Struggle that is not present in the other calf. He is described as lying "like a pieta Christ"; a pieta being a picture of the Virgin Mary holding in her arms the dead Christ. But the calf is the suffering "Son of Patience" - not the suffering Son of God.

Struggle's birth is a spiritual event, the pain its validity, a point reflected in the Moortown poem 'A god':

Pain was pulled down over his eyes like a fool's hat.  
 They pressed electrodes of pain through the parietals.

He was helpless as a lamb  
 Which cannot be born  
 Whose head hangs under its mother's anus. (p. 156)

This image is used to commence a description of a crucifixion, that of man as Christ, showing the same brave response and "gruelling journey" as in 'February 17th', the difficult birth central to both poems.

In all three of the above poems the protagonists are transformed by pain and death. Struggle receives a name, like a successful initiate

in some Australian or Red Indian rite. The man in 'A god' has been changed into something different although he does not know what he has "become". The lamb in 'February 17th' becomes a spirit who haunts the consciousness of the author and who has gained the whole world for a body. "The meek shall inherit the earth" - in animistic rather than Christian terms.

This last poem is a good example of the way Hughes has altered his use of mythic themes. If archetypes do exist in the human mind, the image of the severed head would well qualify as one. It occurs in contexts as diverse as the myth of Orpheus or a novel by Iris Murdoch, outside a New Guinea tribal camp or Traitor's Gate at the Tower of London, in Science Fiction (cf. Bob Shaw's Dagger of the Mind) or in a horror story like Hughes's own 'The Head'.

Hughes has himself already used the image in 'Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural', where the whole world is portrayed as:

The mauled, blood-plastered, bodiless head of a planet  
 Trying to speak,  
 Lopped before birth  
 Rolled off into space, with mouth smashed  
 And tongue still moving  
 To find mother, among the stars and the blood-spittle,  
 Trying to cry - (Crow, p. 79)

The first similarity between this and 'February 17th' is the link with the earth, the lamb "With all earth for a body." The second is that both the lamb and the planet have had their heads "Lopped before birth." The difference is that in Crow the severed head is an image of despair depicting a mutilated earth, while in 'Moortown', although severed, the lamb's head receives a new body. The result in the latter poem is one of regeneration, notwithstanding the ironic comment on the Animal Master myth that has already been mentioned. The head in 'February 17th' is like that of Orpheus which floats down one of the rivers of Hades to join a new body at the other end. The whole Orphic myth is one of pain

and separation leading to restoration (as we see in Gaudete), while the perspective that dominates 'Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural' is that of Rosicrucian pessimism - the poem being a rescued fragment of Hughes's play The Difficulties of a Bridegroom, his adaptation of the seventeenth century The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz (see Chapter 4, p. 170). This work tries to show "the processes of regeneration and change within the soul",<sup>14</sup> but there is always the underlying frustration that although in theory "sponsus" and "sponsa" become one, base metal still does not become gold! This feeling was also transferred into Eat Crow, which was the herald of the whole Crow project.

The ambiguity of the severed head is most clearly seen in the 1978 story 'The Head'.<sup>15</sup> It tells the story of two hunters, brothers, who set out to hunt in a valley where a huge congregation of animals forms every thirty years. They are warned by the Slott tribe that this gathering is taboo and "the Lord of the animals would strike his body dead, rip his head off and skin it and leave it, or he would do the same to his spirit." Despite this warning the slaughter commences, and continues unabated until the narrator is confronted by a wolf. "It occurred to me that I was being looked at by a sage, one who knew how to live. Clearly this world belonged to him." He kills the wolf but is so sickened by his action that he will not hunt again.

That night the narrator sees "the shawled figure of a woman bowed low over our skinned victims as before an altar." It now becomes apparent that his brother has been maddened by his uncontrollable blood-lust, and has killed and decapitated their guide. The next night the murderous brother is torn apart by some unknown creature though his skinned head lives on. The surviving brother takes the head back to the Slott village where he is forced to fight the head which has grown

wings and talons. He succeeds, but at the coup de grace the thing becomes a living silent woman. "In the end I married her and never hunted again."

Here, as in the poems, the head is a dual symbol - of judgement upon man for his murder of Nature, and of the possibility of peace with Nature in marriage to the silent woman. Hughes believes that Nature will never give up on man. There is always room for hope since she always seeks to woo us and re-educate us:

Nature's obsession, after all, is to survive. As far as she is concerned, every new baby is a completely fresh start. If westernized, civilized man is still open to correction, presumably she will correct him. If he is not open enough, she will still make the attempt.<sup>16</sup>

On this basis 'February 17th' is an offer of hope as well as a warning. Deep in the poem is the implicit point that what Nature will do for lambs she can do for men.

Hughes seems to have three major aims in 'Moortown'; to put man in context, to show animal vitality and how it can affect human beings, to show the essential hope that pervades the natural world. In essence these poems are as much about humanity as about animals. 'Feeding out - wintering cattle at twilight' exemplifies this, putting man in his place. The dominant force is not man but the wind, which has a kind of supernatural power. It can even get "inside the hill", like the Irish little folk are supposed to be able to do. Again we are shown a microcosm of a world in conflict, but this time it is a wood, not a calf, as the focus of the struggle. The wood and the cows are both victims, the difference being in their response. The wood is near to panic but the cattle stand like nails holding down the roof of the hill. The wood is terrorized by the wind but the cows are inspired:

... The wind  
Has got inside their wintry buffalo skins,  
Their wild wooly bulk-heads, their fierce, joyful breathings

And the reckless strength of their necks.  
 What do they care, their hooves  
 Are knee-deep in porage of earth - (p. 22)

Because the cows are part of the earth they can be inspired by the wind, accepting an invitation that is also extended to the humans in 'New Year exhilaration'. "The world's being/Swept clean ... Exhilaration/Lashes everything." Here the response is no longer the cry of Crow, but rather laughter. "It nearly/Blew me up the chymbley." These humans and the cattle they tend have learnt to fit in with the elements and not to be ground down between sky and hills. Thus the cows "grunt happily" and the humans laugh while:

... The powers of hills  
 Hold their bright faces in the wind-shine.  
 The hills are being honed.... (p. 25)

In both poems the landscape is made a focus of wonder, summoned up by the spell of the poet's words. The hills are inhabited by spirits; the new moon rides the sky as if it were a sea. The cattle stand on the edge of a flat earth, "the near edge/Where the world becomes water." Like the farmer in 'Crow Hill', the house in 'Wind', the trees in Remains of Elmet, they are the join between two worlds.

Snow is shown in the same dominant role:

Snow smoking as the fields boil

The bull weeps.  
 The trough solidifies.  
 The cock pheasant has forgotten his daughters.  
 The fox crosses mid-field, careless of aquittal.  
 Twigs cannot pay the interest.  
 The farm-roofs sink in the welter again, like a whale's fluke.  
 Sheep fade humbly.  
 The owl cries early, breaking parole,  
 With icicles darkening witness.

Each animal, trough and farm too, is changed by the snow, highlighted against its whiteness and then lost in the mist. The title line is a poem in itself, setting the scene for both the rest of the poems and also 'Bringing in new couples'.

In 'Snow smoking as the fields boil' the snow is a tyrant. In the following poem we are told about his campaign of conquest, humans and sheep retreating before him. The snow is a "mean snow/fiery cold," rolling across the countryside like the Norse Fimbulwinter - the winter that is released at the end of the world. In 'Couples under cover' winter scorches the oaks with "white fire-snow" as they attempt "a hilltop/Helpless self-defence" until they are erased. Likewise the snow erases all trace of the deer in 'Roe-deer':

The snow took them and soon their nearby hoofprints as well

Revising its dawn inspiration  
Back to the ordinary. (p. 31)

The deer are portrayed as winter's secret agents. They require a "password" or a "sign". Even their nature is a "secret deerhood". They are also like spirits, inviting the watcher to go with them into the hidden world behind the "curtain" - a curtain like that separating the people from the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple. The vision of this poem is to break down the barrier between the sacred and the profane. Like the wind and the rain the snow sends its spirit-helpers abroad, as if Nature was putting up signposts to direct us toward her. These guides perform the same task as the Scarecrow Swift in Cave Birds who leads the protagonist onwards to marriage and communion with the female.

But although the snow illuminates the inner life it remains an enemy of the outer one. Winter's hostility to man can be seen in 'Tractor', and it does far worse to the animals - as in 'Last night' where "The North wind brought the worst cold/Of this winter" and killed two lambs. But there is a way in which winter strengthens as well as kills, as we see in 'Couples under cover'. Here the combination of the force of natural selection and human attention prepares the lambs, who:

Will toss out into the snow, imperishable  
 Like trawlers, bobbing in gangs, while the world  
 Walters unconscious into whiteness. (p. 33)

On the Norwich tape, before reading this poem Hughes tells us that "In bad snowy weather lambs often die of exposure, but if they're kept under cover for a day or two, not longer, they get over their first weakness and become very tough."

This toughness eludes the human being who must wear "armour gloves", whose feet, buttocks and fingers are tortured by the cold. Even the tractor is superior in this respect. "At white heat of numbness it stands/In the aimed hosing of ground-level fieriness." As has already been stated, this is a poem about human mastery, but it, like 'February 17th', is also about human weakness. The poet's relationship to the tractor which is "like a demon", is the same as that of a shaman to a spirit - it being both his potential helper and the antagonist that he must bind to his will. Without the tractor/spirit he lacks power, stands alone.

This poem points us to the ambiguity of the farmer's position as both master and servant, responsible for the animals yet working in a world where Nature has the final responsibility and authority. He can master the tractor in a way that he cannot master the animals. In this context, the tragedy of 'Drf' seems to be the conflict between the farmer's authority and that of Nature. Hughes shoots the lamb to spare it further pain, but in doing so enslaves its spirit. It must ask his permission to depart, giving him a too-heavy responsibility that it is not his task to bear.

In contrast we see in 'Little red twin' that the preparedness to leave the calf "To her ancestors" results in her recovery from scour. The picture here is one of co-operation. The humans provide glucose water and sacking, rescue her from the disc-harrow, yet in the end:



... The smell of the mown hay  
 Mixed by moonlight with driftings of honeysuckle  
 And dog-roses and foxgloves, and all  
 The warmed spices of earth  
 In the safe casket of stars and velvet

Did bring her to morning. And now she will live. (p. 52)

'Birth of Rainbow' is another poem that reminds us that man can only do so much. The new-born animals must always be finally "Left to God".

Another difference between 'Orf' and the other poems mentioned is the manner of its composition - in that it was not written as a diary entry, since "it wasn't for a week or two that I sat down to try and record it. Already the incident had mingled with memory and conscience and it tried to become a poem."<sup>17</sup> Memory corrupts the certainty of the moment of the shot to bring the same tone of impotent regret found in the nursery rhyme that 'Orf' echoes:

"Who killed Cock Robin?"  
 "I", said the sparrow,  
 "With my bow and arrow,  
 I killed Cock Robin."

Throughout 'Moortown' there is a strong tension between personal responsibility and what might be seen as Fate, or God, or Nature - depending upon our own personal perspective. The poet himself is no longer making the attack on the Calvinism<sup>18</sup> of his childhood that can be seen in Wodwo or his essay on Shakespeare. In 'Moortown' Hughes has stopped reacting against "the iron arteries of Calvin" ('Warriors of the North'), and is prepared to look at the other side of the coin of human responsibility. He sees a world similar to that of the Viking cultures, where accountability was a two-fold thing, where a man felt a responsibility to act and yet still believed that he was going to his 'wyrd'. In poems like 'Orf' and 'Ravens', as in 'Cock Robin', although each death is an accident, some account must still be given.

There is a constant dialectic throughout 'Moortown', forming a

pattern of polarities that is the source of the sequence's coherence and life. The exploration of such patterns is the core of Hughes's writing:<sup>19</sup>

To me - no matter what metaphysical persuasion or definable philosophy a poem may seem to subscribe to - what is unique and precious in it is its heart, that inner figure of stresses.<sup>20</sup>

These are the same stresses that energize mythology - the reconciliation of opposites, the coming to terms with the realities of human existence, the same stresses that we see worked out in 'Moortown'. The act of farming takes the place of the ritual expression of myth and the farmer represents the cultic initiate:

Ritual is an expression through prescribed acts of the wish or need to exert power either forbidden or unattainable in ordinary life ... ritual results in both failure and success. The initiate somehow knows that he will never quite control the seasons, the gods, or death, for these are after all terms naming the conditions of life, but in a deeper sense he is victorious, for he has not only exhibited his hidden and perhaps forbidden wishes regarding such mysteries, he has also revealed and learned something about himself, and in so doing has defined and controlled a chaos within.<sup>21</sup>

The above extract from Lillian Feder's Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry has equal relevance to the farming world of 'Moortown'. The farmer has power, a power of life and death over his animals such as only the hunter also possesses. As we have already seen the farmer is success and failure, master and servant. The farmer is also in a position of self-discovery.

In 'Moortown' there is a personal attempt being made at an equilibrium between the outer and inner world. Hughes has said that his poems are "attempts to prove the realness of the world, and of myself in this world, by establishing the realness of my relation to it."<sup>22</sup> This helps us to understand the importance of the stress of detail in the poems and the use of the eye-witness diary entry for immediacy. The poet is trying to establish a common reality with the reader.

The question then arises as to whether these diary entries are

actually poems or not, something that Hughes has assiduously avoided calling them in his readings from the sequence. It would seem, though, that this insistence is to provoke a non-intellectual response from a listener or reader, since for all practical purposes these diary entries are also poems. Hughes himself speaks of them as having the same magic that he has ascribed to poetry in his linkage between poetic magic and emotional power:

If we came on the poem about the sick lamb, or the disastrous birth, we would be downcast, maybe, or maybe really depressed, according to our resilience. Imagine having a dream about either of these things. (Norwich Tape)

In this taped discussion of his recent poetry Hughes calls both 'February 17th' and 'Orf' poems, although he distinguishes between their methods of construction.<sup>23</sup>

This distinction seems to be solely based on whether the writing has an immediacy of relation to the actual events described. Thus Hughes describes 'Orf' as having been written a fortnight too late, while 'Little red twin' is written in the present tense as if it were happening before the poet's very eyes - and ours too. The emphasis on immediacy is an obvious invitation for the reader to share with the poet, an invitation that is obscured or lacking in much of Hughes's more strongly mythological material. In the terms of Susanne Langer 'Moortown' has the characteristics of both myth and fairy tale, the latter being made more accessible by the former.

Langer sees myth as "for understanding actual experience" and the fairy tale as "primarily for supplying vicarious experience."<sup>24</sup> The content of the poem deals with one, and the diary form mediates the other. The best poems are the ones that find a true balance between the two, since "the inner figure of stresses" find their correct tension. A poem like 'Tractor' lacks this inner stress. The poet's experience



intended to be legendary, the other an engagement of our pleasure in observation of living things. In 'Moortown' the legendary and mythical are recurring motifs in the poetic pattern, in Crow they are the centre-piece.

An example of how the mythical skein is woven in with the 'upbeat' fairy tale and descriptive poetry can be seen in the references to the wind. The wind that blows through the supernatural world of 'Feeding out-wintering cattle at twilight' blows a hint of the same feeling into 'Surprise' where it is "North-East and sickening, the hay/Shrinking, the year growing." In 'Happy calf' the wind that makes "the high silvery floor of clouds" march, also "Trembles the grass-stalks" near the calf. A poem that shows the wind as an impersonal force leads on to one where the wind is personal but inexorable, and then on to another that shows it caressing the grass and a calf. The wind is always the wind of fate, blowing life in and blowing it away, but it is also a vital force rather than a stereotype.<sup>25</sup>

In 'Last night' the North wind brings "the worst cold/Of this winter" and kills twin lambs - the messenger or angel of death, but straight after the forces of vitality resurface in the two rutting rams. Here we are again reminded of the 'Moortown' myth, that Nature is never stopped for long and that death is another initiative from the forces of life.

In this way Hughes relates the mythic material to the purely descriptive elements, giving meaning to the suffering and the joy. Thus 'Ravens' is not quite as sad a poem as it first appears, while the first section of 'Sheep' is far more tragic. Because Nature is never stopped the evisceration of the lamb becomes part of life, not death; but the lack of will of the lamb in 'Sheep' is the essence of death -

giving in:

... It was not  
That he could not thrive, he was born  
With everything but the will -  
That can be deformed, just like a limb.  
Death was more interesting to him.  
Life could not get his attention. (p. 60)

The sin here is not a deliberate one, but a kind of Original sin, Schopenhauer's kind, the failure of the will, the 'ding an sich'. Because of this the lamb fails to make it through "a warm summer night", yet the calf in 'Little red twin' survives scour, intense heat and the disc-harrow with the aid of her "ancestors". The lamb is like a human being, crying with "a despairing human smooth Oh!/Like no lamb I ever heard." Despair is a human disease, a deformity in animals, an unwanted luxury in those intent upon survival. In his review of Nicholson's The Environmental Revolution Hughes has said that Nature's "obsession" is to survive. Man out of touch with Nature does not have that overriding urge, and is thus barred from the "inner spiritual unity" that the animals enjoy.<sup>26</sup>

The dead lamb in 'Ravens' is not cut off from this unity as the peacefulness of the last lines reminds us:

... its first day of death was blue and warm  
The magpies gone quiet with domestic happiness  
And skylarks not worrying about anything  
And the blackthorn budding confidently  
And the skyline of hills, after millions of hard years,  
Sitting soft. (p. 38)

The lamb is being returned right back to the womb of Mother Earth. Nature's confidence is unshaken. The blackthorns still bud. The skylarks do not worry. The lamb is a casualty in a war that they know instinctively life will win in the end.<sup>27</sup>

The principle at work in such a poem has been referred to as the poetical equivalent of the psychological phenomenon called 'enantiodromia'. This term was first used by Heraclitus and was taken

up again by Jung. It has been applied to the play of opposites in Hughes's poetry by Leonard Scigaj, the word literally meaning "running counter to". Scigaj says this about it - "In the philosophy of Heraclitus it is used to designate the play of opposites in the course of events, the view that everything that exists turns into its opposite."<sup>28</sup>

In 'Ravens' the principle is only hinted at in the closing lines. In 'February 17th' it is made clearer in the living body of earth being given to the dead lamb's head. But again there is a difference between its use in 'Moortown' and in more mythological works. This can be illustrated in a comparison with the 'Earth-Numb' poem 'Second birth', which is based upon a very clear enantiodromia, the shamanic equation between death and new birth:

When he crept back, searching for  
The womb-doorway, remorseful,  
It was an ugly grave  
Fallen in on bleached sticks.      (Moortown, p. 112)

It is a poem about the principle rather than its results in human experience. We are told:

There is nothing to be done  
About what a head becomes  
After years in wild earth.

But in 'February 17th' not only are such absolutes made particular, but there is also a mystical vision of death actually become new life.

In 'Moortown' enantiodromia is subtle and psychological, not absolute and mythical. For instance in 'Little red twin' the poet's first glance leads him to say "And now after a day in the upper eighties/  
There she lies dead ...". We then discover, as does the poet on coming closer, that the calf still lives. She has gone from death to life in the mind of the reader and of the poet. Again we share rather than ponder the effect, whereby death has turned into its opposite in our mental process.

In 'Ravens' Hughes reverses the process to show us death coming out of life. This is achieved by organizing the material according to its importance to the three-year-old child who accompanies the author to the field where the ravens have been active. First the child focuses on "a new lamb/Just getting up" and continues to do so when the adult has already seen the dead lamb. The inner stress of the poem comes from the adult's greater awareness of what is going on. The line "Over here is something else" and "Now over here, where the raven was." We can guess what has happened, but the child must run over and find "The fine anatomy of silvery ribs on display and the cavity,/ The head also emptied through the eye-sockets." A scene abounding with life as shown as harbouring death and our eyes, like the child's are "Only for the tattered bundle of throwaway lamb." Our vision of Spring has become a vision of death, made more tragic by the alternation of child and adult perspectives.

In 'Moortown' mythic polarities are now being expressed without the need for mythological crutches, and the root psychological responses become more important than the myths that are used to express them. This new approach is begun in Cave Birds, harnessed in Gaudete, and transcended in Remains of Elmet, where, as in 'Moortown', the mythological is a substratum that supports the whole, yet rarely is exposed on the surface of the poetry. In 'Ravens' one can see the birds as trickster-ravens cheating the lamb of its existence, or one can consider the literary connection with the 'storm-crows' of The Battle of Maldon and see the birds as scavengers on the edge of the battle between vitality and death. But one does not need such mythological and literary detail to appreciate the poetic transference from life to death that is truly mythical.



Other poems are purely reminders of the substratum, especially those specifically dealing with the cycle of the seasons. This cycle is so powerful that it is one of the few things that can affect the Earth, who in 'March morning unlike others' has to convalesce "After the frightful operation" of winter. The poems closely follow the cycle of the seasons, going from 'Rain' which is dated for November in Michael Morpurgo's All Around the Year<sup>29</sup> to 'Sheep' which was one of the last Summer poems in Season Songs. (The final six poems vary in the month of their setting - timeless memories, not part of a cycle that Orchard has escaped.)

The fact of the progress of the seasons is a symbol of hope. Mythically it is the basis of the idea of a World Renewal following some great apocalyptic crisis - in this case the onslaught of Winter. Among the Norsemen the apocalypse actually was regarded as prefaced by a supernatural winter, the Fimbulwinter. Psychologically, to survive winter is to have another year of life before you, so no wonder Spring is an 'upbeat' event.

In the same way that 'March morning unlike others' reminds us of the benefits of Spring, 'Last load' opens up to us the benefits of Summer, a fertility poem like 'While she chews sideways'. 'Last load' is a harvest festival in miniature. It brings together a number of emotions that blend into the paean of joy in the last lines. Frantic effort is set alongside the sense of satisfaction that not just is the whole harvest in, but that it is also done before an impending rainstorm. The build-up of tension from the "desperate" loading and from the change in atmosphere due to the storm is released in the downpour:

The trees shake out their masses, joyful,  
 Drinking the downpour.  
 The hills pearly, the whole distance drinking  
 And the earth-smell warm and thick as smoke

And you go, and over the whole land  
 Like singing heard across evening water  
 The tall loads are swaying towards their barns  
 Down the deep lanes. (p. 56)

Moisture is seen as a crowning gift, both mundane antidote to the dust of the fields and munificent quickener of the fields. It shows the involvement of the eternal in human affairs, as rain also did in the Old Testament:

I will pour out water on the thirsty land  
 And streams on the dry ground  
 I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,  
 And my blessing on your descendants.  
 And they will spring up among the grass  
 Like poplars by streams of water. (Isaiah, Ch. 44, v. 3,4)

In 'Moortown', as in the Bible, man is included in the promises of life if he wants to be. But domesticated and wild animals share the task of showing the way. The cattle are the cattle of the Earth Mother, but the wild animals are her messengers. 'Fox-hunt', 'Roe-deer' and 'Coming down through Somerset' are a commentary on the specifically farming poems. These three poems are reprinted from the book of children's poems called Moon-Bells, which is an addendum to Hughes's longstanding interest in the energy of animal life. ('Coming down through Somerset' is also printed in the Faber Season Songs.)

These poems show possible responses to the promises and demands of Nature. We can turn animals into machines, like the fox-hounds whose only two products are "Dog-shit and dead foxes" - or we can share their secrets. In 'Roe-deer' the deer have come to take the watcher beyond his "snow-screen vision of the abnormal", while the dead badger of the third poem seems to have the secret of eternity. "Beautiful,/Beautiful, warm, secret beast ... I want him/To stop time." In the same way that the deer make tracks in the snow, the badger impresses itself "on my moment of life." But the tracks are obscured and Hughes is told "Get rid of that badger", because it is already decomposing. The poems

remind the farmer that he may have mastery over some animals but he is still on the very edge of understanding their communion with the eternal.

In the same way that the wild animals provide a perspective on the farm life Jack Orchard is the contrast to, and mentor of, the farmer. The six final poems are a celebration of his life and an elegy on his death. Hughes has always tended to bring these two aspects together, a very clear example being the Wodwo poem 'Pibroch', a pibroch being an elegy played upon the bagpipes, "part elegiac, part martial", as Hughes has put it. These characteristics are present in the poems about Jack Orchard. The elegiac element is clearest while the martial is expressed in several different ways.

First is the First World War imagery that has been present from the poet's earliest work; from 'Six Young Men', 'Mayday on Holderness' and 'Out', right up to 'Long screams' in Remains of Elmet. Secondly these poems reiterate Hughes's admiration of those men whom the weather seems to wage a personal war against - the tramps of Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal, men of the outdoors like Crag Jack and Billy Holt. Thirdly there is the imagery of the Masai warrior, who is not just hunter and fighter, but cattle herder too. Hughes has in the past tended to emphasise the role of the hunter rather than the herder, since it is among the former that shamanism most flourishes, where the shaman is hunter of souls and spiritual warrior. Through the African images the poet is now able to relate these phenomena to a more pastoral society and setting. Unlike the other expressions of the martial this aspect has not been exploited before and heralds the developments of Remains of Elmet.

'A monument' precipitates us immediately into this world of multiple conflicts without hesitation:

Your burrowing, gasping struggle  
 In the knee-deep mud of the copse ditch  
 Where you cleared, with bill-hook and slasher,  
 A path for the wire, the boundary deterrent,  
 That memorable downpour last-ditch hand to hand battle  
 With the grip of the swamped blue clay, to and fro,  
 The wallowing weight of the wire-roll,  
 Your raincoat in tatters, face fixed at full effort,  
 And the to-fro lurching under posts and tools and pile-driver,

(p. 62)

The conflict is Orchard's expression of vitality, his active service in the war between life and death that so fascinates Hughes. It is also an investment of his own life-force in the land. He works "Under December downpour", the twilight caused by the rain and the lateness of the day reminds that he is using up his store of life. The wire fence that Orchard is constructing is his monument, because, says the poet, "that is where I remember you."

Hughes sees similar memorials in the drystone walls of his native West Yorkshire, a mute testimony to the human energy expended trying to live:

Their lives went into the enclosures  
 Like manure. Embraced these slopes  
 Like summer cloud-shadows. Left

This harvest of long cemeteries. ('Walls', Remains of Elmet, p. 33)

The walls, like the wire fence, are "Endless memorials to the labour/  
 Buried in them." Both are made redundant by Nature. The farmers are repulsed from the moorland, leaving the walls broken down and unusable since there are no animals to enclose. The wire fence is "tensed through impassable thicket" and is therefore redundant, and is "hidden/Under tightening undergrowth .../To be discovered by some future owner."

The underlying theme is the 'Ubi sunt' of Latin poetry, filtered through the Anglo-Saxon consciousness of The Wanderer, which describes a sacked city with its walls covered in frost, the buildings crumbling

and the halls fallen in. The Saxon poet reminds his hearers that at least these things remain, now that their inhabitants are dust. There is a strong Anglo-Saxon flavour throughout 'Moortown', particularly in 'A monument' and other strongly alliterative poems like 'Struggle' and 'Rain'. Hughes even uses a version of the half-line of the Saxon bards. Thus Orchard is:

Skullrakad with thorns, sodden, tireless,  
Hauling bedded feet free, floundering away  
To check alignments, returning, hammering the staple  
Into the soaked stake-oak, a careful tattoo (p. 62)

This kind of alliteration gives Orchard's mundane activity an epic quality, as he works "face fixed at full effort." There is the same persistent response to hardship that is found in The Seafarer, but without the complaint. In 'Hands' snapping barbed wire rips Orchard's hands but he only laughs "then just ignored them/As the half-inch deep, cross-hand rips dried."

The Anglo-Saxon element gives another connection with the warrior/agriculturalist idea, where warrior is farmer too. In 'A memory' Orchard masters sheep as if they were adversaries in combat. His "suddenly savage, suddenly gentle/Masterings of the animal" are the actions of a man with the outlook of a warrior as he swears "drum-guttural African curses."

A more direct comparison in 'A memory' is with "a collier, a face-worker/In a dark hole of obstacle." This might seem strange until we realise that the miner, like the soldier, must come to terms with the life of the earth. One gains his protection from it, the other his livelihood. They become part of the earth as do the animals, who are as much of the land as the barley. In 'The day he died' both fields and cattle grieve for Orchard and the poet says "From now on the land/Will have to manage without him." Together the cattle and the fields are

the "land". For Hughes all births are autochthonous. Only that which comes from the earth can return to the earth. In 'Moortown' the message of 'Second birth' is exemplified in Jack Orchard, whose life was in "the knee-deep mud of the copse ditch" ('A monument'), whose hands were "Lumpish roots of earth cunning." ('Now you have to push')

Like Dick Straightup in Lupercal Orchard is "full of legend and life" ('Dick Straightup', Lupercal, pp. 17-18). He is shown as prodigiously strong, impervious to both pain and the weather. His only "comfort", the cigarettes that kill him, is portrayed as an agent of some spirit lurking in his lungs. A hero's death must be as legendary as his life. This is particularly the case in 'The day he died', which:

Was the silkiest day of the young year,  
The first reconnaissance of the real spring,  
The first confidence of the sun. (p. 64)

Spring and grief for Orchard are closely bound together, almost as if his death has brought in the new season. Both events are also a reminder that Nature still has the initiative - to raise up and to bring low.

The picture of Nature mourning is a feature of the elegiac convention, as for instance in Milton's Lycidas, but it is also an element of primitive vegetation myths, which some see the elegy as growing from. 'The day he died' is not a direct reworking of such myths, since Adonis and Thammuz die in the autumn to be reborn in the spring, while Orchard dies on February 14th, but the idea of someone's death bringing the spring is still common to both poem and myths.

This muted mythical emphasis allows the poet to imply something portentous in Orchard's death, without depersonalizing it. It is the death of a friend, not a symbol, that has moved Hughes to write. There is a direct involvement in actual experience. Hughes has spoken of the dangers of "a more detached ritualizing" in his review of Bowra's

Primitive Song, where "the poems seem to gain in beauty and complexity as they lose in purpose." Further on Hughes says "Most effective of all, perhaps, are the laments, where the poem's work is simply the human relief of strong feeling."<sup>30</sup> The poet's task is to relieve his own pain as well as that of others. For Hughes poems "are the only way I can unburden myself of that excess which, for their part, bulls in June bellow away."<sup>31</sup> 'The day he died' is a remarkably controlled example of this, which also maintains the inner stress. At the same time that the poem is a lament it is also a celebration of the vitality of the mourners.

In 'Now you have to push' and 'The formal auctioneer' Orchard is celebrated as a man who is one with the earth. We know he is one with it in death, but we are reminded here that he was one with it in life. This is why the poems are both lament and celebration, since although Orchard is lost to men he is not lost to Nature. In life his face is described as a "patch of ancient, familiar locale." He is "A tree with two knot-eyes, immovable, / A root among roots, without leaf" in 'The formal auctioneer' (p. 66). Orchard is of the earth as well as on it. His very name is to do with trees, whose strength is in the earth and whose presence is above. The psychological pattern of world above and world below, pinned together by trees, is very important to Hughes as we will see in our examination of Remains of Elmet. There, in both 'Tree' and 'A tree', the wind brings about a crisis of initiation that makes the tree a shaman of the landscape.<sup>32</sup>

The emphasis in 'Moortown' is not quite the same. The central factor is not the special relationship with nature that the shaman is supposed to enjoy, but the sense of unity with the landscape that is common to all those who live close to it, particularly those who gain their livelihood from it like farmers and primitive tribesmen. These two kinds

of people are brought together in the description of Orchard as a "gangly long broad Masai figure" ('Now you have to push'), and his hands are "like an African's footsoles" ('Hands').

Orchard's hands are the key to his character, his strength and his mastery. They are the essence of his humanity and the point of contact with vegetation and with animal life. These hands are "tomes/Of what has been collecting centuries/At the bottom of so many lanes." (p. 65) The mud supplies the wisdom, but it is through the hands that it is expressed.

'Now you have to push' and 'Hands' show in Jack Orchard the values that make both a good man and good poem. Hughes says that he has always been concerned to give his poems "-as well as good faces, clear brains and strong hands - sound hearts."<sup>33</sup> In 'Now you have to push' Orchard's hands, face and heart each dominate a section of the poem. They become its own hands, face and heart. Hands are for practicality, face for character, heart to express that "inner figure of stresses." Hughes sees in Jack Orchard the virtues he most admires in both poetry and in primitive cultures. Each must be practical to survive, and gains character from the struggle (in the same way that Struggle the calf gets his name). What results is the ability to make an honest response to life and death, which is the subject of the last seven lines of the poem.

In the same way that Orchard used to push "the piled live hedge-boughs" into the bonfire and watched until the last embers were extinguished, now it is himself he must push into the fire and wait for his own last spark. In this image Hughes balances the 'have to' of death against the willingness to go when necessary:

Now you have to push it all -  
Just as you loved to push the piled live hedge-boughs -  
Into a gathering blaze



And as you loved to linger late into the twilight,  
 Coaxing the last knuckle embers,  
 Now you have to stay  
 Right on, into total darkness (p. 65)

Death becomes a meditation, a lingering in the twilight, not a dehumanizing violence. The poem is effecting a mythic reconciliation between pushing and lingering, between death as a necessary choice and as predestined fate. The focus on fire as the way of death, consuming by cancer and by cremation, is also a hint of the story of the Phoenix, which deals with the possibility of new life coming from the ashes. In the poem 'And the Phoenix has come' in Adam and the Sacred Nine the fire is called "The altar of its death and its birth." (Moortown, p. 169). Deep down in 'Now you have to push' is the tentative hope in a resurrection.

'Hands' has the same general pattern as the previous poem. Again Orchard's hands are a shorthand expression of his character, "A farmer's joke: 'still got your bloody great hands!'" They are practical too, like "old iron tools", (p. 67). They also make him one with the bullocks whose nostrils he grasps, the ewes he delivers and the tractor he drives. The poem also ends with a polarity. The delicacy of touch in assisting the birth of lambs is applied to the habit that eventually kills him. It is the third of three stresses in the poem, polarizing and then reconciling strength and delicacy, as well as active hands and inactive. As in 'Now you have to push' the third stress is between life and death and is dealt with in a final visual resolution:

Your hands lie folded, estranged from all they have done  
 And as they have never been, and startling -  
 So slender, so taper, so white,  
 Your mother's hands suddenly in your hands -  
 In a final strangeness of elegance. (p. 68)

The pattern of polarity followed by poetic resolution is at its most effective in 'Moortown', so it is not surprising that the whole sequence, as well as the individual poems, depends on this pattern. The farming poems are about the cycle of the seasons while the Jack

Orchard poems are about death, the break in the cycle. The latter poems are a direct contrast to what has gone before in four ways. They focus on man, not beast. They do not follow the cycle of seasonal development. They make no attempt at being deliberately 'upbeat'. They deal specifically with issues of memory - immediacy is not as important as 'stopping time' along the lines of 'Coming down through Somerset'.

The first part of the sequence is more like a series of excerpts from a fairy story. The last six poems are more legendary. But this is not so much an area of polarity as overlap, since all the 'Moortown' poems bring together the "legend and life". The differences arise from the subject matter. The animals have little to do with legend since they are always living in the present, while man, who is preoccupied with eternity, sees it as a connection with immortality. The animal poems follow the pattern of the seasons. The Orchard poems follow the patterns of human thought. The former poems have "the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness and colour, and on the other hand its no less striking uniformity, its repetition" (Propp: Morphology of the Folktale<sup>34</sup>) while the last poems have the uniqueness of the man Jack Orchard at their core.

The area of overlap between the immediacy and repetition of fairy tales and the temporal awareness and uniqueness of legend is where the truly mythical can flourish. The myth of 'Moortown' embraces all these qualities, since Hughes has progressed to a point where he can generate a true dialectic between human and animal life, where before he had sought to remove man from the picture, as in Crow (or even Season Songs), or approached human issues indirectly as in Cave Birds. In 'Moortown' legendary and mythological material begins to find its place as an aid

to a poetic exploration of our humanity and our relationship with the world around us.



14. Frances A Yates, The Rosicrucian Enlightenment, (St. Albans, Herts.: Granada Publishing, 1975), p. 97. (Quoted in Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, p. 81)
15. The Saturday Night Reader, ed. Emma Tenant, (London: W.H. Allen, 1978), pp. 38-42.
16. Review of The Environmental Revolution. In this review Hughes adds that he is convinced that "the moment has come" for Nature's initiative.
17. Critical Forum tape.
18. See Remains of Elmet pp. 277-8.
19. See Introduction, p. 21.
20. 'Ted Hughes Writes', Reprinted in Worlds, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 126-7. The basis for Hughes's interest in poets as diverse as Amichai and Douglas is thus clarified.
21. Lillian Feder, Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 15.
22. 'Ted Hughes Writes'.
23. Critical Forum Tape.
24. Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, (Cambridge: Massachussetts, 1967), 3rd ed., p. 177.
25. Among the Sea-Dyak of Borneo the Wind Spirit is the Messenger to and from the dead because only he has the courage to cross the frontier between the worlds of life and death. See Eliade, Shamanism, p. 359.
26. Review of The Environmental Revolution.
27. "What excites my imagination is the war between vitality and death, and my poems may be said to celebrate the exploits of the warriors of either side." 'Ted Hughes Writes'.
28. Leonard Scigaj, 'Myth and Psychology in the Poetry of Ted Hughes,' p. 135.
29. Michael Morpurgo's All Around the Year, (London: John Murray, 1979), gives the following datings for the setting of poems which are reproduced in Moortown -  
 October - 'The formal auctioneer'; November - 'Rain'; January - 'New Year exhilaration'; February - 'Couples under cover'; March - 'Birth of Rainbow'; April - 'Happy calf'; June - 'Last load'; August - 'Coming down through Somerset'.
30. Review of C.M. Bowra, Primitive Song.
31. 'Ted Hughes Writes'.

32. A. Mollema suggests that this is one of Hughes's two main mythical oppositions, the other being between the legendary and modern worlds. See 'Mythical Elements in the Poetry of Ted Hughes', Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters, 2 (1972), 2-14.
33. 'Ted Hughes Writes'.
34. Vladimir Propp, The Morphology of the Folktale, Trans. by Lawrence Scott, revised and ed. by L.A. Wagner, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas, 1958), pp. 20-1.

CHAPTER 7REMAINS OF ELMET

After spending a large proportion of his poetic career on explicitly mythological symbols and concerns Ted Hughes has begun to renew poetic contact with his past, with animal life and with the landscape. It has become more and more clear that it is an initiation into relationship that he seeks rather than into a cult of his own devising. In 'Moortown' this orientation was seen and felt in the immediacy of diary entries. Now, with Remains of Elmet, first published by Faber and Faber in May 1979, we are shown a major retrospective, a whole culture that can now only survive as a legend.

In this sequence Hughes explores the landscape of the valley of his birth. The Calder Valley has laid claim to being the cradle of the industrial revolution, its hinterland wrested from robbers and displaced labourers by the new water-powered factories. Now, further developments have made the canal-side industries obsolete. Hughes has set out to capture something of this changing world, a world that is an integral part of himself. An ironical counterpoint to the valley's entropy are the superb photographs of Fay Godwin which contrast their frozen moments against both permanence and decay.

Remains of Elmet opens with Hughes sitting, drinking tea with his uncle who is reminiscing about Hughes's mother six years after her death. This man is the poet's single, fragile link with the past. His memories are "Archaeology of the mouth/Treasures that crumble at the touch of day", treasure which, like a "huge fish" exhausted after much fighting against the line, hangs "on such a frayed, fraying hair-

fineness." His uncle's memories are "Keeping their last eighty years alive and attached to me,/keeping their strange depths alive and attached to me."

Similar human links with the past are the 'Crown Point Pensioners' and the old man "in the lonely parlour/On the heights road" of 'Heptonstall'. But the "old man/Of the hills" (p. 92) is completely alone, "Lets his memories leak" for lack of a new receptacle, "Letting time moan its amnesia/Through the telegraph wires." The Pensioners at Crown Point at least have each other to talk to, "Attuned to each other, like the strings of a harp." They are described as "Singers of a lost kingdom", the old Kingdom of Elmet, and as such are duty-bound to pass on "The reverberations their fathers/Drew from these hill-liftings and hill-hollows."

Hughes stands in relation to these men as heir of their "Indigenous memories" (p. 89), his "last inheritance" (p. 7), an inheritance that has decayed, that could slip away at any moment, yet which is truly a treasure, a repository of strength, an inheritance which is:

Blood in the veins  
For amusement.

A graveyard  
For homeland. ('For Billy Holt', p. 90)

Billy Holt is a symbol of the best that the Calder valley has produced, representative of a society where the Norse longships "Anchored in nose and chin"<sup>1</sup>, meshing in with the British spirit. The Calder "Badlands" with their "far, veiled gaze of quietly/Homicidal appraisal" admirably suit "the Ancient Norse virtues of hardness and bloody-minded violence."<sup>2</sup>

Billy Holt worked as a weaver in Todmorden until the outbreak of the First World War when he joined up at the age of sixteen in the Lancashire Fusiliers, where he rapidly became a sergeant and was training to be an officer in Oxford when the war ended. His first post-war



enterprise was a holiday camp in Hardcastle Crag,<sup>3</sup> a place which Hughes portrays as experiencing parallel activities to those of a whole generation:

"Think often of the silent valley, for the god lives there."  
 But here the leaf-loam silence  
 Is old siftings of sewing machines and shuttles,  
 And the silence of ant-warfare on pine-needles  
 Is like the silence of clogs over cobbles,  
 And the beech-tree solemnities  
 Muffle much cordite. ('Hardcastle Crag', p. 13)

In Remains of Elmet there is a constant correspondence between the moors, woods and towns of the Calder Valley and the First World War trenches. To survive both is a feat, and also an initiation. The poem 'Long Screams' next to a photograph of barbed wire, empty scrub landscape and a pool of water - like a shell-crater - reminds us most forcefully of the correspondence:

Dark voices.  
 Swift weapons.

What rummaging of light  
 At the end of the world.

Unended bleeding  
 Deaths left over.  
 The dead piled in cairns  
 Over the dead.  
 Everywhere dead things for monuments  
 Of the dead.

And now this whole scene, like a mother,  
 Lifts a cry  
 Right to the source of it all.

A solitary cry.

She has made a curlew. (p. 26)

In 'The Sheep Went On Being Dead', "The throb of the mills and the crying of lambs" is "Like shouting in Flanders." Once again Fay Godwin's photograph seems to have stimulated Hughes in a correspondence between his own experience of the violence, decay, and beauty even, of the moors and the trenches of the Great War. The dead sheep in the

last stages of decay has all these qualities. Its "crumble of doll's curls and calcium" leads him on to think of the farms as "melting corpses", similarly skeletal remains, protruding from the earth. In the 1963 radio broadcast, 'The Rock', Hughes reminds us:

... everything in West Yorkshire is slightly unpleasant. Nothing ever quite escapes into happiness. The people are not detached enough from the stone, as if they were only half-born from the earth, and the graves are too near the surface. A disaster seems to hang around in the air there for a long time. I can never escape the impression that the whole region is in mourning for the first world war.<sup>4</sup>

The disaster still hangs in the air as he writes Remains of Elmet. All save seventeen of the young men who fought with the Lancashire Fusiliers in the Dardanelles were killed. Hughes's father was one of the survivors, his pocket-book deflecting a piece of shrapnel. Hughes says in 'Out', "The shrapnel that shattered my father's paybook/Gripped me." (Wodwo, p. 156)

As a result, everywhere the poet looks he sees monuments to the dead. In 'Long Screams' it is the dead themselves. In 'Hardcastle Craggs' he claims, "Name-lists off cenotaphs tangle here to mystify/The voice of the dilapidated river" (p. 13). The miles of dry-stone walls are called "This harvest of long cemeteries" ('Walls'). The closing of the mills because all the men have enlisted has spawned cenotaphs:

First, football pitches, crown greens  
Then the bottomless wound of the railway station  
That bled this valley to death. ('First, Mills', p. 34)

Hughes regards the war as "A single, fatal wound", one from which the area never recovered, the closing of the mills for war prophesying the final closure in recent times through lack of work.

Hughes seems to have felt this in terms of his own sense of enclosure within the valley, his earliest years dominated by "a dark cliff" which was "both the curtain and backdrop to existence":

If a man's death is held in place by a stone, my birth was fastened into place by that rock, and for my first seven years it pressed its shape and various moods into my brain. There was no easy way to escape it. I lived under it as under the presence of a war, or an occupying army: it constricted life in some way, demanded and demied, and was not happy. ('The Rock')

'First, Mills' expresses exactly the same idea, the hills commandeered, the towns and villages sacked. The narrow valley is a trench surmounted by "A sky like an empty helmet/With a hole in it."

Levi-Strauss has said that men think in myths without them being aware of it. Perhaps a poet is one who is consciously able to do the same, to pattern experience in such a way as to articulate it for those who would otherwise miss the pattern's significance. Hughes's first intent, however, seems to be to impress the pattern powerfully upon our awareness, using Godwin's visual images as a springboard. He educates our eye and imagination to see skeleton and corpse when we see wall and farm, educates us to share the sense of disaster in the air - in other words inviting us to share his childhood and the poet's own particular pair of mythical spectacles.

This invitation has always been implicit in Hughes's poetry, the proffering of a way of seeing. Hidden warfare, as in 'Mayday on Holderness' and 'Relic' in Lupercal, has always been a theme, but now we are presented with the full sweep of the drama, specifically located, drawing its emotional strength from its myths. Thus in 'Mill Ruins' the gutted building is explained in terms of the loss of the shuttle's spirit, trapped by the magicians of Japan, exploiting the "smiling fools in Todmorden":

And the children  
Of rock and water and a draughty absence  
Of everything else  
Roaming for leftovers

Smashed all that would smash  
What would not smash they burned

What would not burn

They levered loose and toppled down hillsides. (p. 38)

The children are a kind of supernatural Luddite band, "Like the earliest/Homeless Norsemen" and heirs of their "bloody-minded violence." Perhaps it is a skirmish of these same supernatural beings which is recorded in 'Long Screams'. These are the signs of Nature in labour, producing "A solitary cry./She has made a curlew." (p. 26)

Where the Mothers' speaks of similar beings, riding the wind, "Looking for bodies/Of birds, animals, people." One is not sure whether the mothers seek dead bodies for some dark, secret purpose or whether they want to give themselves physical form. The mothers seem to be the spirits of the moors, releasing a "secret and wild" happiness, the exultant mood of the moors that Hughes felt preserved his childhood from the oppression of the rock-face:

... the mood of moorland is exultant, and this is what I remember of it.

From there the return home was a descent into the pit, and after each visit I must have returned less and less of myself to the valley. This is where the division of body and soul, for me, began. ('The Rock')

At this stage we can now see that Remains of Elmet is expressing both a mythology and a cosmology. The mythology of the First World War, one that is very close to our culture, is used as an ante-chamber to a second, deeper mythology based on more distant cultural premises, where spirit activity is one of the causes of decay. At the root of the warfare is the oppression of man:

Hill-Stone Was Content

To be out, to be carted  
And fixed in its new place.

It let itself be conscripted  
Into mills. And it stayed in position  
Defending this slavery against all.

It forgot its wild roots  
 Its earth-song  
 In cement and the drum-song of looms. ('Hill-Stone Was Content',  
 p. 37)

Meanwhile the "soft hill-water" carries out its guerilla warfare. Although men "Got To The Summit", the desecration of the television aerial has resulted in the spirit's enmity - "The hills went on gently/ Shaking their sieve." The water may be soft, the hills may sieve gently but they are still eroding man's brief dominance (p. 56).

The valley belongs briefly to man who plants "its flooring of cricket pitch, meadows, bowling greens, streets, railways and mills."<sup>5</sup> It is a kind of underworld, "a happy hell" (p. 7) containing "the arguing immortal dead." The river Calder is its Lethe, the "dark river" of forgetfulness. The valley is also a womb, but one that is past fertility.

In contrast the moors "Are a stage for the performance of heaven." ('Moors', p. 19) They are also the meeting point with the sky. To descend from them is to descend into the pit ('The Rock'). To stand upon them is to be 'Open to Huge Light', a light of revelation. The shepherds are shamans, calling up the wind with their reeds, the wind who "was God, they knew" (p. 17). One is reminded of Blake's piper who pipes "a song about a lamb."<sup>6</sup> In this case:

Now hills bear them through visions  
 From emptiness to brighter emptiness  
 With music and with silence. ('Open to Huge Light', p. 17)

The moor is the meeting place between heaven and earth. In 'Heather' we are told:

The upper millstone heaven  
 Grinds the heather's face hard and small.  
 Heather only toughens. (p. 48)

A similar image of endurance comes in 'Where the Millstone of Sky' reminding us of the potential initiatory value of endurance, the sky

"Grinding the skin of earth/Earth bleeds her raw true darkness."

Earth is flayed and naked and can now put on the new magical skin of the initiate. Sky is continually bringing forth regeneration within the earth by this milling process. The blood is life. The heather toughens.

The poems and the photographs always emphasise the contrast between moor and sky and their dominance over the valley:

Ultimately, the valley was surrounded by moor skylines, further off and higher than the rock, folded one behind another. The rock asserted itself, tried to pin you down, policed and gloomed. But you could escape it, climb past it and above it, with some effort. You could not escape the moors. They did not impose themselves; they simply surrounded and waited. ('The Rock')

Hughes goes on to say:

... my outlook was ruled by simple light and dark, heaven above and earth below, divided by the undulating line of the moor. If any word could be found engraved around my skull, just above the ears and eyebrows, it would probably be the word 'horizon'.

Thus the poet's eye is constantly drawn to "the walled, horizon-woven choir/Of old cares" and "The huge music/Of sightlines" in 'The Word that Space Breathes'. The landscape forms a choir and orchestra for a performance of "The Messiah/Of opened rock." The split between heaven and earth is what occasions the manifestation of the Logos in the "chapel of cloud." On the other hand the landscape that cries out for a hierophany as a result of its very form, begging a reconciliation, stark in its conflict of light and dark is continually held apart by the onrush of day, night having brought the two worlds together in impenetrability, the "Tidal dawn splitting heaven from earth" ('Cock-crows', p. 121). Meanwhile creation groans until the sons of God come into their own.

The split between heaven and earth is an externalization of the split in the human being. Hughes says that his childhood environment

is where the division of body and soul began for him.<sup>7</sup> His mythology is an attempt to establish a place of reconciliation, like that of E.M. Forster, whose call was to "Live in fragments no longer. Only connect and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die."<sup>8</sup>

It is isolation and the refusal to share a world, instead creating a separate half-world, that Hughes sees as the cause of the death of the Calder valley. Even worse is the establishing of one's own world at the expense of nature, displacing the wolf from his lookout, enslaving the stones of the hillside, exploiting the streams and emasculating them into canals. The result of this activity is portrayed in the poem 'Remains of Elmet' where the farms eat each other and the milltowns "were cemeteries/Digesting utterly/All with whom they swelled." When the natural equilibrium is disturbed too greatly spiritual cannibalism results. Instead of a symbiotic means of livelihood, there is the parasitic, the tourists who "pick among crumbling, loose molars/And empty sockets", scavengers worrying the decomposing carcass.

The effect of this is shown upon both rock and water, the two constituents of the landscape that are most open to exploitation. The moor is pure and the sky is free, but earth and water lie in bondage. 'Wild Rock' is now "Tamed rock." Heaven is now a quarry, a quarry for the valley inhabitants' "stony ideas" which they use to produce moral clothing against the onslaught of the "four trembling quarters." The weaving trade is made symbolic of the human impulse to wrap oneself up against the "Roof-of-the-world-ridge wind", the wind which "bloweth where it listeth" as the Gospels put it, the wind of the life-breathing spirit.

In contrast to the tamed, quarried rock is 'The Big Animal of Rock' whose kin "visit each other in heaven and earth", who kneels at

the festival of the "Mourning Mother/Who eats her children." This is the rock's winter aspect, very different from its summer one, "openly sunning" in the April thaw, enjoying a "quiet cat-ecstasy." ('In April') The difference is one of consciousness. The true rock animals are unselfconscious and therefore at peace with their energy. Like the actual animals in Hughes's early poems the strength of the rocks comes from "their complete unity with whatever divinity they have."<sup>9</sup> That is why 'Rock Has Not Learned' speaks with approval of the unaware valleys and the "blind skylines", who are "Ignorant in ignorant air." All these are part of the divinity they worship which is mother Earth, the Gea Genetrix, the Mourning Mother.

Water receives a similar treatment. Throughout the sequence rain and water symbolize life, and the ability of water to flow freely is very important. In 'It Is All' water is trapped in a puddle and has thus become a trap for the sun. In 'Willow-Herb' the stagnant canal is a mirror of the industrial despair. The chimney beside the water is "lopped stump-low for safety", emasculated out of relationship with nature, which is its only just fate, having been "Something that was fingers and /Slavery and religious." (The chimney's only chance is that presented in 'Lumb Chimneys' where the chimney is like another tree in the wood and "Before these chimneys can flower again/They must fall into the only future, into earth." p. 14)

'Willow-Herb' shows us a canal of "slack ripples" which "rusts" and is useless. But in both 'The Canal's Drowning Black' and 'The Long Tunnel Ceiling' there is still some life left in the canal, that of the fish, the loach and trout. Likewise 'Under the World's Wild Rims' allows for a uniting and lifegiving force, which in this case is the sun, which on Hughes's way to school "Gave my school-going purpose", as its rays hit the factory skylights beside the canal towpath.



But there are still two separate worlds, that which man has shaped and the oligocene world of the loach in 'The Canal's Drowning Black', (p. 74), to whom man is a "Monkey God, A Martian." In Poetry in the Making Hughes writes of his time spent tickling loach out of the canal stonework with his net<sup>10</sup> - "their Paradise and mine." Nature has managed to breed "wild leopards - among bleached depth fungus." The trout in 'The Long Tunnel Ceiling' is a "tigerish, dark, breathing lily." The world of animal energy has managed to infiltrate the town.<sup>11</sup> A "free lord" still reigns "among mean sandstone,/High under ferns, high up near sour heather." When the world of man impinges upon the moors the effect is different. In 'Widdop' instead of the reservoir dominating the landscape there is an accomodation between the "frightened lake" and the equally frightened heath-grass. The lake has no confidence in its position. The wind sniffs at it as it trembles like a mongrel being examined by a wolf, part of the same creation, the same species, but a domesticated newcomer nonetheless.

While the rock and the water enter a degree of bondage, the moor is never cowed. In the same way that the Lumb Valley surrounds and undermines the stonework of the chimneys until they fall into the earth, so too the moors erode the farms which attempted to domesticate them. Both 'Top Withens' and 'Hill Walls' express the sense of "Pioneer hope" that sought to tame the hills but that hope was directed "at the dead end of a wrong direction" (Top Withens'). While America was slowly tamed, in West Yorkshire an enemy more potent than the Indians besieged the "dream's fort." Finally the farm at Top Withens was over-run:

And the skylines, howling, closed in -

Now it is all over.

The wind swings withered scalps of souls  
In the trees that stood for men

And the swift glooms of purple  
Are swabbing the human shape from the freed stones. (p. 103)

'Hill Walls' also takes the form of an adventure, the hills an exploring ship with stone rigging. "Exhilarated men" at first "grew stronger riding the first winters." Like the crew of a ship searching for the North-West passage, the farmers supplement their determination with hardiness and growing experience. Grass, crops and cattle are at first carried along in the adventure. But in the end there are:

No survivors.  
Here is the hulk, every rib shattered.

A few crazed sheep  
Pulling its weeds  
On a shore of cloud. (p. 30)

In these two poems Hughes is using another variety of myth-making, that of childhood adventure dreams, like his own adolescent epics of Carson MacReared the Indian killer, a "plunge into imagination" now made desperate by the need to correct the balance away from a solely materialistic outlook.<sup>12</sup> This is one of the tasks of Remains of Elmet, making us look at a world we have not previously noticed, using constant personification of inanimate objects and flights of descriptive imagination. Dead farms like dead leaves "Cling to the long/Branch of world" ('Dead Farms, Dead Leaves', p. 55). 'Walls' sees the field-walls as a "harvest of long cemeteries." Hughes will use any tool to hand to focus our gaze, to force us to use our imagination too, to expose that inner world:

... without full operation of the various worlds and heavens and hells of imagination, men become sick, mechanical monsters. And as the life inside them shrinks to a little artificial space of permitted activity, the other world seems to die too. Life becomes no longer worth living and the life instinct begins to fail.<sup>13</sup>

It is this failure of the life instinct that the poet sees in the Calder valley. The moors themselves remain vital, still holding their exhilarating power "Of Armadas about to set out - " ('There Come Days To The Hills'). Here the hill-ships have "Dragons on mainsails", reminding us of the serpent, which for Hughes and many cultures is the symbol of life, and once again of the Norsemen.<sup>14</sup>

The poet is concerned that the full world be portrayed, including its hells. The mill-towns have brought their fate down upon themselves because of their "stony ideas" ('Wild Rock'), which are closely linked with the chapel Christianity of the valleys. Hughes called the story of St. George a "suspect story"<sup>15</sup> and sought to compensate for it with his children's book The Iron Man:

... my little boy with his Iron Man, instead of destroying the dragon, makes friends with the dragon; he includes the dragon in the world, he doesn't shut off and close the world back into a narrow prison. He keeps space open.<sup>16</sup>

Men have sought to enslave rock, water and moor, but have not truly succeeded, only dominating the components, not the moor itself, where the Mothers continue to gallop their souls. The reason they seek to enslave is, for Hughes, because they themselves are enslaved (cf. 'It Is All'). "Christianity in suppressing the devil, in fact suppresses imagination and suppresses vital natural life."<sup>17</sup> In the question-time following the paper which contained these observations, Hughes admitted a marked bias, but conceded that, "if you are a real Christian you are not far away from nature and when you go back to the Bible and Christ and the early Christians, God is nature."

What Hughes seems to be complaining about is the restrictive and soul-destroying legalism of valley Calvinism, symbolized in Remains of Elmet by Mount Zion chapel. In 'The Canal's Drowning Black' Mount Zion's "Cowled, Satanic Majesty" looks with disfavour as the boy throws

the loach back into the canal, their true and mutual Paradise. In 'The Ancient Briton Lay Under His Rock':

We needed that waft from the cave  
The dawn dew-chilling of emergence,  
The hunting grounds untouched all around us. (p. 84)

Although the children desperately want to discover the mythical "stump of local folk-lore", they are working against themselves because they are under the influence of Sunday and the Hunter they seek is protected by his rock, which as they dug "waddled and squirmed deeper." Although the children have the imaginative power they are "Labouring in the prison/Of our eyes, our sun, our Sunday bells."

In 'Rhododendrons' the shrubs stand for similar forces of repression, joining with the council, police and chapel, "Rubberized prison-wear of suppression!" They are an alien strain, presiding over "dead acid gardens/where blue widows, shrined in Sunday, shrank ...". The rhododendrons are an expression of the spirit of Sunday, reminiscent of the short story in Wodwo:

To the farthest skyline it was Sunday. The valley walls, throughout the week wet, hanging, uncomfortable woods and mud-hole farms, were today neat, remote, and irreproachably pretty, postcard pretty. The blue sky, the sparkingly smokeless Sunday air, disinfected them. ('Sunday', p. 57)

Michael, the protagonist of the story (not the hero, for that is Billy Red), sits in chapel "and began to imagine a wolf galloping through snow-filled, moonlit forest. Without fail this image was the first thing in his mind whenever he shut his eyes on these situations of constraint ..." (p. 56).<sup>18</sup> It is this same wolf which the mill-town culture has rejected in favour of the television:

Lights  
Over conversation and telly and dishes  
In graves full of eternal silence.

Lights  
Of the wolf's wraith  
That cannot any longer on all these hills  
Find her pelt. ('You Claw The Door', p. 95)

The television is the choice of a desensitized culture, the result of a failure of religion.<sup>19</sup> 'Heptonstall Old Church' describes the rise and fall of Christianity in the valley, once again based on personification, a huge bird whose skeleton is the old church:

A great bird landed here.

Its song drew men out of rock,  
Living men out of bog and heather.

Its song put a light in the valleys  
And harness on the long moors.

Its song brought a crystal from space  
And set it in men's heads.

Then the bird died.

Its giant bones  
Blackened and became a mystery.

The crystal in men's heads  
Blackened and fell to pieces.

The valleys went out.  
The moorland broke loose. (p. 118)

What once brought humanity light and beauty has now blackened.

"Blackness/Was a building blocking the moon " (p. 82). This building is Mount Zion, "Darkening the sun of every day." Its opposite is 'Bridestones':

Holy of holies - a hill-top chapel.  
Actually a crown of outcrop rock -  
Earth's heart-stuff laid bare. (p. 64)

To attend this chapel is to share where heaven and earth meet,  
a marriage "nailed down" by the "wedding stones", a pun on the rock's name:

And from now on,  
The sun  
Touches you  
With the shadow of this finger.

From now on  
The moon stares into your skull  
From this perch. (p. 64)

Mount Zion blocks out the moon, at Bridestones its rays are unavoidable, deep-piercing. The moon dies and is resurrected, but the Christ of Mount Zion Chapel was "only a ..... worm/Who had given up the ghost." But even here Nature has managed to infiltrate her agents of subversion. A cricket's music contradicts the "bottomless cry" of the "prison-yard." The "crumpled" women and the men with "cowed, shaven souls" do not even know what a cricket is. In their threatened state they whisper to each other, "How big is a cricket?" fearful lest it overwhelm them.

The cricket seems to have a similar symbolic value to the locusts of the Old Testament, which are a common judgement against oppression, as in the case of the plagues sent upon Pharaoh, and particularly against oppression as the result of false religion.<sup>20</sup> The presence of the locusts was a call to repentance. The cricket does an equivalent task in West Yorkshire!:

Long after I'd been smothered in bed  
I heard them  
Riving at the religious stonework  
With **screwdrivers** and chisels. (p. 82)

Mount Zion blocks the moon, Bridestones lets it stare into our skulls. But in 'Spring-Dusk' the snipe is able to bring the moon's lifelight down into its eggs. The moon of 'Bridestones' exposes and illuminates but does not benefit. In 'Spring-Dusk' there is a mediator, a shaman, the snipe, who is:

Drumming in the high dark - witchdoctor  
  
Climbing and diving  
  
Drawing the new  
Needle of moon  
Down  
  
Gently  
  
Into its eggs. (p. 66)

There are a number of creatures which stand between earth and sky in Remains of Elmet. They are either of the moors, almost touching the sky, like the sheep and certain rocks (cf. 'The Big Animal of Rock'), or more fully shamanic like the birds who are at home in either environment - the grouse, snipe and curlew. Any other animals shown in the sequence are servants of one or the other of the mediums, the gulls who fly "Out of nothingness into nothingness" ('Widdop'), or the weasels who are demon labourers of the Earth-Mother ('The Weasels We Smoked Out Of The Bank'). There are very few human claimants to the shamanic role, saving those who "Play the reeds of desolation", sitting on the roof of the world. 'Open to Huge Light's photograph shows such a man sitting between two trees as if at a threshold or gate, his animal familiar beside him, looking out on desolation. As the eskimo shaman Igjuquarjuk said:

True wisdom is only to be found far away from people, out in the great solitude, and it is not found in play, but only through suffering. Solitude and suffering open the human mind, and therefore a shaman must seek his wisdom there.<sup>21</sup>

Joan Halifax tells us in Shamanic Voices that "The threshold place of the initiatory experience is the two-light world", where the many dualities of human experience are brought together through a "personal rite of transformation."<sup>22</sup> This fits closely together with Hughes's landscape of contrasts expressing psychological verities. The reconciliation between moor and sky is that between earth and heaven, but it is also the uniting of body and soul, man and his environment.<sup>23</sup> The concept of the "two-light world" also fits in with Hughes's perceptions in 'The Rock' of the shadowed valley as a prison and the open moors as a place of revelation. That is why the "wind shepherds" are 'Open to Huge Light' and why a number of the hierophanic poems are about light:

They are  
The armour of bric-a-brac

To which your soul's caddis  
Clings with all its courage. ('These Grasses Of Light', p. 16)

Here the human soul is like a may-fly, incredibly shortlived and at the mercy of the forces of Nature, represented by light. But light has become a fellow-victim:

Light Falls Through Itself

Loses most of itself  
And all its possessions.

Falls naked  
Into poverty grass, poverty stone,  
Poverty thin water. (p. 113)

Light derived its strength from its alliance with the hills, both of which were put into a bewitched sleep under "migraine of headscarves and clatter ... clog-irons and biblical texts" ('The Trance of Light'). But now, at last, the hill beast is awakening, like something "out of Revelations." Man's grip has loosened. He has defeated himself. "The mad singing in the hills" is beginning again:

And the hills walk out on the hills  
The rain talks to its gods  
The light, opening younger, fresher wings  
Holds this land up again like an offering

Heavy with the dream of a people. (p. 20)

The light itself is shamanic, its trance resulting in its ability to make the offering, laden with the incense of a whole culture's dreams, like the incense of the prayers of the saints (also out of Revelations). This and the other overtly mythical poems closely resemble primitive songs:

In such songs and in the myths from which they are derived the main purpose is to give reality to the belief that divine beings are at work in the familiar world ... They catch the nature of gods and spirits and the temper behind their activities with a special understanding of what it means for the emotions, and in this lies their poetic appeal. It reinforces an imagination that is already at work by giving it a wider field for its exertions and moves easily from the bare facts of myth to their realization in practice ... The primitive



convictions that divine beings are at work everywhere is displayed in a concrete form, and we see what advantages it brings.

(C.M. Bowra: Primitive Song<sup>24</sup>)

The poem 'High Sea-Light' is one poem which manifests "a special understanding" of what the presence of divinity means for the emotions. This poem is the description of a visionary experience, a hierophany:

High Sea-Light

Pearl-robe  
Of earth's grit

Heaven glows through  
Into the streams  
Into gulping mouths

Into a world  
Of busy dark atoms  
Inside the live wreathed stone

Of light worn warm by a wonder. (p. 62)

Hughes has gone beyond the dark quest of Crow whose only hope is death and rebirth, but is indestructible. He has taken up the divinity released in Gaudete, destructively at first, and expressed it in terms that revitalize the civilized man who has been previously cut off from his 'primitive' roots. Heaven now "glows through". On the moors death is part of life, inseparable, in a way that cannot be experienced in Crow. On the moors man and nature must reach an accomodation, a balance missing in the main narrative of Gaudete. What the epilogue poems of Gaudete commenced Remains of Elmet continues.

In Remains of Elmet man is represented as inadequate to the shamanic task of reintegration. He cannot cope with the wilderness of moor:

The call to shamanhood often sends the neophyte into the wildest of terrains, into a world inhabited only by beasts and spirits. It is in these lonely places that the sacred mysteries ... can find their way to the human mind.<sup>25</sup>  
(Joan Halifax)

The farmers could not resist the beseiging unresponsiveness of the moors, finally overwhelming rather than initiating, as in 'Top Withens'. This

poem draws attention to an image which has already surfaced twice, that of the tree as a symbol of man on the moor, "the trees that stood for men." Most trees on the moor were planted, imported like the rhododendrons in the valley:

A priest from another land  
 Fulminated  
 Against heather, stones and wild water. ('Tree', p. 47)

In 'Tree' the tree is portrayed as a priest, a representative of organised religion, a failed religion. After man's departure the tree remains on the moor and through suffering becomes "the new prophet", transformed by the "maiming glimpse" afforded by the lightning. (This priest to prophet transformation is what Gaudete is all about.) The poem 'A Tree' shows the tree in the middle of its initiatory suffering, coming to the place where it ceases to strive, "Let's what happens to it happen", as it is battered by the "unending interrogation by wind/Tortured by huge scaldings of light." Each tree has had to suffer to earn its right to stand against the sky, bridging heaven and earth. That is why the oaks in 'The Sheep Went On Being Dead' are "crucified", and the tree of the present poem is "cruciform".

The presence of trees is a statement of man's failure, that of abandoning the pain and the solitude for the valleys, rejecting the treasures of heaven, the "last inheritance" (p. 7), for earthly treasures that have been consumed by moth and rust. But the trees are also a symbol of hope. Joseph Campbell reports this statement of the Tungus shaman, Semyonov Semyon:

Up above there is a certain tree where the souls of the shamans are reared, before they attain their powers. And on the boughs of the tree are nests in which the souls lie and are attended ...

According to our belief, the soul of the shaman climbs up this tree to God when he shamanizes.<sup>26</sup>



"a state of energy which men only have when they've gone mad"<sup>29</sup> - like the snipe in 'Spring-Dusk'. These lines about the spirit flight in Joan Halifax's Shamanic Voices might be describing that poem where we also see:

a messenger in flight across the perilous threshold of the two-light world, where the illumination of the dream world of night and the light of the day's sun transect and fuse into the field of twilight, where transcendent vision is awakened.<sup>30</sup>

But the bird that is most closely linked with the transcendent vision is the curlew. When writing of Emily Bronte Hughes tells us "The curlew trod in her womb" ('Emily Bronte'). Her whole physiology is mythically transformed by her empathy with the moors. The stream ran through her; the "stone swelled under her heart." Her lover is the wind, representing the male aspect of the moor a "shaggy sodden king." This king is like Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights, a spirit of the moors, the demon lover.

The curlew, like Heathcliff, is a psychic offspring of the poetic vision that Emily Bronte articulated, and is also a ruler, "a wet-footed god of the horizons" ('Curlews In April'). The curlews are also bards. They "Hang their harps over the misty valleys", their song fathering "full golden moons" from the womb of the heather. In 'Curlews Lift' we discover the curlews have another shamanistic accomplishment, the ability to penetrate the world of light, to attain the revelation:

They trail a long, dangling, falling aim  
Across water

Lancing their voices  
Through the skin of this light

Drinking the nameless and naked  
Through trembling bills (p. 29)

Throughout the sequence Hughes is affirming his kinship with the curlew-spirit, an animal familiar through whom he can tap the same source that Emily Bronte, that other poet of the moors, discovered. This is the "peculiar sad desolate spirit that cries in telegraph wires on moor roads, in the dry and so similar voices of grouse and sheep, and the moist voices of curlews."<sup>31</sup> The bird is separate from the shaman or the poet, but its spirit "can best be imagined as the fiery force of the shaman that flies over the earth."<sup>32</sup> The curlews bring hierophany, but to perceive them truly is in itself a hierophany, the mark of the shaman. Hughes seems to see himself as continuing the verbal tradition of the 'Crown Point Pensioners', turning the insights from the "archaeology of the mouth" into a living manifestation of the sacred.

The ideas of the familiar or spirit guide is developed in 'Two', to remind us that nothing can be accomplished without it. The initiand and his guide descend the stairway from heaven and "from the morning star ... /Then the stream spoke oracles of abundance/And the sun poured out at their feet." But the two begin to quarrel:

The guide flew up from the pathway.

The other stood still.

The feather fell from his head.

The drum stopped in his hand.

The song died in his mouth.<sup>33</sup> (p. 80)

Thus we see that the curlew-god of the moors is prepared to manifest himself as the familiar of whoever is prepared to continue the task of singer to the Kingdom of Elmet. He is the one who gives the poet his songs and he is also the one who, in his wrath at man's desecration of his domain, has brought judgement down on the valley.

The group games of 'Football at Slack' and 'Sunstruck' are portrayed as rites of propitiation, as men's mysteries with a limited

membership. They continue their rites despite the rain, dancing and mimicking flight:

But the wingers leapt, they bicycled in air  
And the goalie flew horizontal

And once again a golden holocaust  
Lifted the cloud's edge, to watch them. (p. 68)

The footballers perform "on a bareback of hill." The cricketers are enclosed by the "valley parapets." The footballers are baptised by the rain, the cricketers "returned, with changed faces,/Like men returned from a far journey."<sup>34</sup> One can imagine the young Hughes watching either game, cut off from both by size and age, and barred from their aftermath in the pub by law - an early prefiguring of the longing for initiation that is a central feature of his poetry.

In the last poem, 'The Angel', we discover that the propitiatory rites have been insufficient. The poem is a dream of the consequences of man's rebellion against nature, whose servant the curlew is. The full moon which is so often linked with life and knowledge "had crashed on to Halifax." But out of this scene of apocalyptic destruction, resembling a nuclear blast, arises "a swan the size of a city!" The moon is a kind of phoenix (cf. Adam and the Sacred Nine) rising again from the ashes, but in this case, changed. The moon has hatched into a bird-angel, its full identity becoming known as it comes closer.

This poem is a reworking of the earlier poem published in Wodwo as 'Ballad from a Fairy Tale'. The initial vision is much the same until halfway through. In both versions the persona asks his mother for some explanation and is terrified by the answer, the lines Blakean in their simplicity. Then come the differences, which are twofold. The first is the direction the angel takes. In the later version it just hovers and then sinks out of sight "behind Stoodley", while in the

Wodwo version it:

Passed under the rough hilltop  
 Opposite the house  
 Where my father was born  
 Where my grandmother died. (p. 167)

The other main difference is that when the persona sees the apparition again the later poem has him reaching out and touching "that strange square of satin" on its head, while in the earlier:

When I next saw  
 That fringed square of satin  
 I could have reached and touched it  
 But I was standing in a valley  
 Deeper than any dream. (p. 167)

Thus it seems that at the time of the Wodwo version the poet was still in bondage to the past, constricted by the valley. But in Remains of Elmet there is a release. The first poem was written after Sylvia Plath's death, the second following his mother's. It would appear that the square of satin represents a premonition of their deaths, one which he knew about, having touched the cloth, the other hidden, and so even more terrifying:

And through my mother's answer  
 I saw all I had dreaded  
 But with its meaning doubled.  
 And the valley was dark. (Wodwo, p. 167)

Perhaps release also comes from the understanding expressed in 'Heptonstall Cemetery', that Hughes's dead relations are themselves "A family of dark swans", making the spirit-flight, their bodies claimants to earth, their spirits inhabiting the heavens.

So we see in Remains of Elmet an application of the mythic perspective to include everything from the most personal consideration of past bereavements to a spiritual appraisal of the economic collapse of the Calder area. It has been said by Professor Jensen that "A myth is not a sequence of independent images, but a meaningful whole, in which

a particular aspect of the actual world is reflected."<sup>35</sup> I have sought to emphasise the linkages throughout what is, after all, called a "Pennine Sequence", in order to show that Remains of Elmet fulfills the role of a true myth. By themselves Fay Godwin's photographs are "a sequence of independent images", but their function is to provide the hooks for the many elements of the poet's myth-making capacity, which has always been formidable.

It could have been that Ted Hughes had run out of ideas and was being helped along by artificial visual stimulæ. But instead we discover that, rather than pandering to decaying talent, Fay Godwin has in fact chosen images that have always been very close to Hughes, obviously utilizing her long-standing acquaintance with the poet as a starting point. The photographs complement the poems (it could have been the other way round) to truly make a "meaningful whole", uniting many levels of perception in a single image; of rock, of horizon, of tree, moon and bird. By linking human struggles with the world of Nature Hughes has also projected human conflicts on to a landscape, a landscape which has found harmony, thus giving us hope.



NOTES

1. In 'A Hero's History', review of Heimskringla and The Prose Edda by Snorri Sturlson, Gods, Demons and Others, by R.K. Narayan, New York Review of Books, 31st Dec., 1964, pp. 6-7, Hughes called the Norsemen "one of the key peoples of history". Hughes also wrote of his preference for Norse myths, regarding them as "truer to us", because pre-Christian - 'Asgard for Addicts', review of Myth and Religion of the North by E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Listener, 19th March, 1964, pp. 484-5.
2. 'A Hero's History' review.
3. Holt went to follow his parents out to Canada and put his weaving talents to good use but "a terrible fit of nostalgia came to me one day when I smelt some burning grass and fancied that I caught the tang of burning moor grass in the sun. Homesick for the Yorkshire moors I booked my ticket to England." (William Holt, in a booklet published 1980 to go with an exhibition commemorating him.) Subsequently Holt travelled extensively, working as a stunt man in Berlin, standing as a Communist Party member for Todmorden, was imprisoned following a march in 1932, two years after a visit to the Soviet Union. He was a war correspondent in Spain, broadcast for the B.B.C. from 1940 to 1946, wrote nine books, became a painter and in 1964-65 rode his horse, Trigger, to Rome at the age of 67. He died in 1977, having remarried only two years earlier. Trigger died in 1980.
4. 'The Rock', Listener, 19th September, 1963, pp. 421-3.
5. *ibid.*
6. Songs of Innocence, 'Introduction'. In Blake, Complete Writings, p. 111.
7. 'The Rock'.
8. E.M. Forster, Howards End, Abinger edition, (London: Arnold, 1973), p. 184.
9. 'Desk Poet'.
10. Poetry in the Making, p. 16.
11. A common theme in Charles Tomlinson's poetry, cf. 'Foxes Moon'.
12. "In America the effects of an excessively scientific outlook are much more extreme than they are in England and so the natural cure of it, the plunge into imagination, in the States is that much more desperate. American comics consist to an amazing extent of traditional mythological themes in modern form," Essay 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 68.
13. *ibid.*, p. 60.
14. Cf. Leonard Baskin's drawing of a snake on the cover of Moortown.

This snake resembles the world-snake of Norse mythology, but is only just unfolding, not yet tail in mouth.

15. 'Myth and Education', 1970, p. 65.
16. *ibid.*, p. 66.
17. *ibid.*
18. Cf. Gaudete, p. 69. 'Estridge's younger daughter Jennifer'. Here the wolf, having been imprisoned for so long can only express itself as predator. See also 'The Green Wolf' in Wodwo.
19. "Collapse of religion was only the earliest phase; we have now just such a state of apathy - detached, impersonal passivity - towards our inner life, as we have towards the mountainous outer world of facts and actions." 'Myth and Education', 1970; p. 60. From this it is clear that Hughes's great enemy is passivity, not religion.
20. See Exodus, Ch. 10, v. 2-3:  
"And Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "How long will you refuse to humble yourselves before me? Let my people go that they may serve me. For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory."  
And Joel, Ch. 1.
21. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 69. See also, Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, pp. 53-4, 231.
22. *ibid.*, p. 18.
23. The latter reconciliation is at the centre of the poetry of an American poet, very similar in many ways to Hughes, Robinson Jeffers. Jeffers' hawk poems strikingly bear this out. M.C. Monjian, commenting on 'Rock and Hawk', draws attention to the "strength of purpose, urgency without restriction and the natural nobility of an untamed creature - a purity synonymous with his nature-god." Robinson Jeffers: A Study in Inhumanism, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p. 19.
24. C.M. Bowra, Primitive Song, Ch. 9, 'Myth and Symbol', p. 243. Hughes reviewed this book in the Listener, (3rd May 1962): "Life, to all primitive peoples, is pretty much the same, in so far as it forces them to think unremittingly about animals, herbage, weather, dependants and providers, and the inclinations of the spirits which are everywhere and in everything." (p. 781).
25. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 6.
26. Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, p. 256.
27. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 105.
28. Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, p. 258.

29. 'Desk Poet'.
30. Halifax, Shamanic Voices, p. 16.
31. 'The Rock'.
32. Campbell, The Masks of God : Primitive Mythology, p. 266, cf. 'Grouse-Butts' and 'The Sluttiest Sheep in England'.
33. One is reminded of the parting between Castenada and his teacher, Don Juan, at the end of The Teachings of Don Juan, though it was not a quarrel, rather a surrender to fear on the part of the author.
34. The line "Brains sewn into the ball's hide" is a reference to the ancient Irish practice of taking the brains of a fallen enemy, mixing them with clay and leaving it in the sun to harden. The ball would then be used as a slingshot. ('Sunstruck', p. 70).
35. Campbell, The Masks of God : Primitive Mythology, p. 264.

CHAPTER 8ADAM AND THE SACRED NINE

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,  
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?

Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' (plates 6-7)

The final work that we must consider in this survey of Ted Hughes's more recent poetry is a short sequence entitled Adam and the Sacred Nine, which was first published by Rainbow Press in 1978, and which was collected into the Faber Moortown in 1979. Unlike some other sequences in that collection, such as 'Earth-Numb' and 'Orts', Adam and the Sacred Nine is not a bringing together of diverse material covering a number of years' work, but was conceived as a single whole. Like Hughes's longer sequences it follows a theme, a theme which on this occasion he has clarified in a note on the poems, "in which Adam, fallen prostrate, is visited by nine birds who each in turn bring their gift of 'how to live', for him to accept or reject."<sup>1</sup>

At last Hughes has turned from initiatory enquiry to outline an initiatory invitation. This invitation cannot be proffered by one human being to another. It can only be given by Mother Nature to her erring children by means of her messengers, the nine birds of the sequence. It is appropriate that having followed Hughes through the ordeals and insights of the previous works we should conclude on a new note of hope and perspective. The hope comes from the sense that the only barrier for Adam lies in his freedom of choice. The perspective is expressed in the poet's approach which concentrates less upon the named protagonist than upon his visitors. Although the

situation parallels that of Cave Birds where a hero-figure is confronted by a number of birds, one after the other; in this case rather than being asked to submit to an unavoidable verdict the protagonist is being offered a chance to accept or refuse the knowledge of 'how to live'. It is also noteworthy that it is the knowledge, not the initiatory experience which leads to it, which is regarded as being most important. Hughes is now less interested in the process of initiation and has a greater regard for its fruits.

In this context it is surely no coincidence that the sequence bears a more than passing resemblance in character and tone to the Conference of the Birds by the Sufic master Farid-ud-Din Attar. In his work The Sufis Idries Shah says this of the poet's intention in the Conference of the Birds:

Attar exposes the uselessness of ecstasies, mystics who follow romance for its own sake, who intoxicate themselves with yearnings, who indulge ecstatic experience, and are out of touch with human life.<sup>2</sup>

Although his own "ecstatic indulgence" has been limited Hughes seeks to affirm in Adam and the Sacred Nine his commitment to the realities of human existence. His response parallels that of Chaucer, whose Parlement of Fowles was directly influenced by Attar's work and which rejected the rootless passion of the Courtly Love tradition for an emphasis on the same kind of 'how to live' as Hughes.

Sufism has a number of attractions for Hughes. It has strong similarities to Gnosticism and practices an esoteric interpretation of the Koran, reminiscent of Gnostic treatments of the Bible. Although firmly entrenched within Mohammedanism it is non-conformist and non-dogmatic. Sufism is no more definable than Zen and depends on a habit of thought rather than a religious organization. It affirms the existence of such spiritual entities as angels and yet gives these a

psychological interpretation as a manifestation of man's higher faculties. Hughes's approval<sup>3</sup> for their lifestyle was unqualified in his 1964 review of Shah's book:

Candidates for Sufi-hood are selected for their natural aptitude to live the Sufi way: they undergo many years of rigorous mental and spiritual training in the Sufi schools, a highly refined course of moral self-development, annihilating themselves without heaven or hell or religious paraphernalia of any kind, and without leaving life in the world, into the living substance of Allah, the power of Creation: a master Sufi lives this 'love' and performs therefore incredible miracles as a matter of course. His purpose is to lead others along the Sufi way, but only those who, coming to be led, are capable of being led. The Sufis, fifty million strong, must be the biggest society of sensible men there has ever been on earth.<sup>4</sup>

More important than any of this, though, is the Sufi openness to the feminine:

They speak of divinity as female, idol, mistress. Ibn El-Arabi (the "greatest master" of the Sufis), the Spaniard, used this imagery to such a degree that he was accused of blasphemy.<sup>5</sup>

(Idries Shah)

In their literature Sufis are portrayed as poets, lovers and magicians. The seminal medieval poem 'Le Roman de la Rose' mirrors Sufic poems such as 'The Rose Garden' and Shabistan's 'The Secret Garden'. In the same way that 'Le Roman de la Rose' was used to express devotion to ideal woman and consequently the Virgin Mary, so too these Sufic poems used the image of devotion to a woman as paradigm of their authors' love of Allah. This adds another strand to our perception of the anticipated marriage in the Crow narrative and the consummated marriage in Cave Birds, reminding us that there is always a spiritual aspect to Hughes's poetry.

Adam and the Sacred Nine is a key to the spiritual side of Hughes's work. Its esoteric and compressed nature stands as a stark comparison to the developments we saw in 'Moortown' and Remains of Elmet. But we must understand that the differences are not so much a reversion to an

earlier style as a complement to the everyday nature of the farming poems. Adam and the Sacred Nine gives a framework for the simplicity of the other two volumes. It expresses the possibility of a union with the divine that is only valid if it is not grasped unyieldingly. Hughes shares the perception of Florence Lederer who, writing about 'The Secret Garden', declared that:

The man must not rest in this divine union. He must return to this world of unreality, and in the downward journey must keep the ordinary laws and creeds of man.<sup>6</sup>

In other words the perceptions of 'Moortown' or Adam and the Sacred Nine are meaningless without the contributions of the other. The presence of both in the Faber collection was a direct recognition of this fact by the poet.

In a letter to Keith Sagar which was read during a conference on Hughes's work in August, 1980,<sup>7</sup> Hughes said that he saw the 'Moortown' poems as showing life embedded in mud and death and seeds. "Prometheus is what tries to waken up inside this", while Earth-Numb and Adam and the Sacred Nine show two attempts to come to terms with the world, only that latter one being successful. The poet's rationale for putting 'Moortown' at the beginning of the volume when it was written well after Prometheus on his Crag is thus clarified. Such reasoning puts an even greater emphasis on the Adam sequence as the poet's most developed stance.<sup>8</sup>

Adam and the Sacred Nine opens with 'The song'. The song of the title is searching for a means to express itself. Inanimate objects such as earth, leaves and stones are inadequate to its purpose and are rejected:

The song made of joy  
Searched, even like a lament  
  
For what did not exist

Pouring out over the empty grave  
 Of what was not yet born (Moortown, p. 159)

The song is like the spirit moving across the waters in the Book of Genesis, and in the same way that God articulated his creative impulse by creating Adam, so the song finds expression when Adam comes upon the scene. It is he who is born from "the empty grave", since in the next poem he is "lifted from mud." The Classical Greek myth of the autochthonous birth of humanity from the mud after a great flood is fitted seamlessly against the Biblical implications of 'The song'. The flood has left Adam "low as water" and "Of a piece with puddles", but his bedraggled state does not prevent his dreams of aspiration.

'Adam' links the building impulse with spiritual aspiration, Adam's "tower of light" echoing the Tower of Babel. The implication is that, although inadequate, the "advancement of bulldozers and cranes" is a necessary stepping stone to the final dream of aspiration where "Wrapped in peach-skin and bruise/He dreamed the religion of the diamond body." As we saw in the chapter on Cave Birds the diamond body is the mark of the aboriginal shaman. This dream is the antidote to the defeat of Adam's existence and is the answer to the song's quest, since as we now well know that the threshold dream leads to the confidence of the shaman's song.

The line "Wrapped in peach-skin and bruise" is an oblique reference to Sufic beliefs and provides a point of connection between these and shamanism. Shah records the words of a dervish teacher who likened the tales of the Sufic master Nasrudin to a peach:

You can eat the peach, and taste a further delight - understand its depth. The peach contributes to your nutrition, becomes a part of yourself. You can throw away the stone - or crack it and find a delicious kernel within.<sup>9</sup>

The kernel of the stone stands for Sufism. In the context of the poem what is being said is that the "peach-skin" of human flesh hides the



incredible potential of the kernel, or in shamanic terms hides the diamond.

Adam's dreams make his present situation almost unbearable, and in reaching high his fall into the mud is that much more tragic. "A man's reach should exceed his grasp/Or what's a heaven for", said Browning's Andrea del Sarto in the eponymous poem. Although Adam is left "Open as a leafless bush", as poor and "bare, forked" as Edgar in King Lear, the baring of himself is the doorway to self-knowledge (see also 'Stripped Bare' in Cave Birds).

Prostrated and potentially isolated by despair Adam is also in the perfect position to be instructed. The birds who now arrive are both messengers and teachers, sages who teach by what they are more than what they do. The poem 'And the Falcon came' implicitly repeats the lesson of a story about Nasrudin in which a potential disciple looked at the wrong things in the mullah. Nasrudin blew on his hands and said it was to warm them. He then blew on his soup and said it was to cool it. The disciple felt unable to remain with such an inconsistent master! He saw only the mullah's actions and so was an unworthy pupil. 'And the Falcon came' makes the same point by replacing nouns and adjectives with verbs. What the falcon is and what he does are inseparable. Thus:

The gunmetal feathers  
Of would not be put aside, would not falter.

and:

The talons  
Of a first, last, single blow  
Of grasping complete the crux of rays. (p. 161)

The inside-out grammar of the poem is mirrored by a similar cosmology where the falcon's eye has the properties of a volcano and the falcon is itself the earth. The fire and magma of the volcano are what

continually strip down and reassemble the falcon. The purpose of this fire is the same as that of the fire of love in Sufic literature:

This is the fire of love which purifies, which is different whenever it occurs, which sears the marrow and makes incandescent the kernel. The ore separates from the matrix, and the Perfected Man emerges, altered in such a way that every aspect of his life is ennobled.<sup>10</sup>

The fire in 'And the Falcon came' is the same fire that is found in the twenty-first Prometheus poem where "The mountain is flowering/  
A gleaming man." In both poems the protagonist is a beneficiary of the ennobling power of the fire.

Each of the birds which visit Adam have some symbolic aspect, consistent with the emphasis on their being rather than their doing. The falcon is the king bird of Egypt and thus shares the characteristics of the two other royal birds, the eagle and the wren - the ability to heal and to act as an oracle.<sup>11</sup>

The very presence of the falcon is a challenge to Adam. The bird's nobility challenges his degradation. Its integration challenges his split psyche, dreamer and builder separated. The Faber version of the sequence in fact dispenses with three short poems which more fully outline the inner conflict in Adam and the presence of the falcon as enemy to despair.

In the first of these poems 'Awake!' Adam is encouraged by various representatives of natural life to fulfil his destiny and forsake self-pity:

Get up! hissed the thorn leaf  
Don't discourage the hosts, they are all watching  
Get up! said the thistle  
Do you need to be told how? (Rainbow Press edition, p. 9)

The idea is the same as that found in 'A Citrine Glimpse' where the poetry echoes the Pauline sentiment that all creation is waiting for the sons of God to come into their own.<sup>12</sup> The call to awake is also

that which raised the Primal Man of Gnosticism as he lay in the earth, cast down from Heaven.

The other two poems 'All this time his cry' and 'He had retreated' are only important as reminders that the song of the opening poem is always potential, both in its cry of grief and in the voice in Adam's bones which confronts him with the stars of the Southern Cross and which shows him himself as a shamanic skeleton:

His skeleton glittered in its hanger of emptiness.  
Like the Southern Cross.

The final trophy, the antlers of utter fall,  
And one of the elementals - eternal.

(He had retreated',  
Rainbow Press, p. 11)

The birds in Adam and the Sacred Nine are there to help him to face eternity and to put new flesh upon his skeleton as leaves are put upon the leafless bush of the poem 'Adam'. This aspect of the birds' role can be found in the Koran:

And Abraham said, My Lord! show me how thou givest life to the dead? He said: What! and dost thou not believe? He said: Yes, but that my heart might be at ease. He said: Take four birds, then train them to follow thee, then place on every mountain a part of them, they will come to thee flying; and know that God is Mighty, Wise.<sup>13</sup>

The implication is that if God can do this miracle with birds, He can do it with men. The shamanic belief that dismemberment leads to rebirth is also expressed. The lesson of Adam and the Sacred Nine is the same - if the birds can have such attributes and freedom, so can Adam.

The next bird to come is the skylark which has already been characterized as a bird of revelation in the Wodwo poem 'Skylarks' where the flying larks are called "The mad earth's missionaries." They follow the command "... Not die/But climb/Climb/Sing." (Wodwo, p. 169) The same role is fulfilled in 'The Skylark came'. The climbing aspect is reflected in the portrayal of the bird as "a swinging ladder" up to heaven, "its effort hooked to the sun."

Once again the urge to climb and aspire is linked together with the ability to sing. The lark is blessed:

With its song  
A labour of its whole body  
Thatching the sun with bird-joy

To keep off the rains of weariness  
The snows of extinction (p. 162)

The lark is an agent of the Song, but it does not offer the song to Adam; as with the falcon the lesson is contained in its nature, not any gift. This is made particularly clear by the stress on the nature of the lark's crest, "Which it intends to put on the sun." It is the symbol of the lark's servanthood since it is "The lark that lives and dies/In the service of its crest." Thus in one sense the lark serves part of itself and in another it serves both the sun and the earth.

The lark's instinctual behaviour is a model for Adam since in 'Skylarks' "The larks carry their tongues to the last atom/Battering and battering their last sparks out at the limit-" Likewise in 'The Skylark came' the bird is shown "With its labour/Of a useless excess, lifting what can only fall." The lark lives at the limit, nearest to death and so totally alive. It is totally committed, its song "A labour of its whole body." Adam lacks such total commitment. The presence of the skylark teaches him that he must embrace the same instinctual extremism.

It is obvious that many of the birds in Adam and the Sacred Nine have a special resonance for Hughes. 'The Skylark came' does not only echo 'Skylarks' but also the references to larks and swallows in Gaudete. The swallow is another labourer who challenges human failure:

The swallow - rebuilding -  
Collects the lot  
From the sow's wallow.

But what I did only shifted the dust about.  
 And what crossed my mind  
 Crossed into outer space.

(Gaudete, p. 187)

The same poem ends with a vision of a very different bird:

I saw my keeper  
 Sitting in the sun -

If you can catch that, you are the falcon of falcons.

The last line of the Gaudete poem adds further to the resonance in its oblique reference to the Baskin drawing at the end of Cave Birds. Another Gaudete poem, 'The lark sizzles in my ear' repeats the four main characteristics of the lark. It is a dangerous soarer, a crested singer, a prophet and a creature of the sun.

It would therefore seem that these characteristics have some esoteric importance for Hughes as does the juxtaposition of falcon and lark. As with so many other issues in these works we must turn to a brief consideration of shamanism for our answer. It is the shaman who is able to span the two worlds of heaven and earth. In Siberian rituals he actually climbs a ladder, like the lark's "swinging ladder." He is often characterized as having an external soul, which is represented by a bird effigy on a pole or by a bird mask. He is both singer and prophet, and serves the life-force whether expressed in the earth or the sun, since both are the shaman's domain.

So what of the falcon? This bird would seem to represent the forces of the mystery religions to Hughes; explosive unpredictable rites, dominating Nature rather than flowing with her. The falcon is the ruler, while the shaman is the trickster or fool at the ruler's side. The falcon divides ("dividing the mountain") while the skylark has to cope with the division, living "between dark and dark."

All the other birds fall into one of these two categories, except the crow which refuses both. Thus the wild duck exists "Between earth-

glitter and heaven-glitter", and the swift "Shears between life and death" while "Wren reigns! Wren is in power!" He is the "Wren of Wrens" in the same way that the falcon is Falcon of Falcons.

The Wild Duck flies into this pattern with the same call to wake that we found in 'Awake!'. She is portrayed as herald of the dawn, flying "into dew/Through the precarious crack of light." Her call to wake has both religious and literary antecedents. As we have seen it is the Gnostic call to the Primal Man, whose waking is a metaphor for revelation, linked with dawn or sun as symbol of illumination. Her song is also the song of the Provencal lover calling to the troubador in the Alba, or dawn song. But Hughes's use of the convention is closest to that of Aristophanes in The Birds. The duck's song is a comic and ineffectual quack made beautiful by poetry. Aristophanes does the same with the Hoopoe's song where he calls to the nightingale:

Awake from sleep, my love!  
Sing, O tawnythroat,  
bird with honeyed tongue!  
Awake and sing  
your song and mine,  
                  Itys, Itys!<sup>14</sup>

Neither the hoopoe nor the duck can sing, but both can provoke song in another.

'The Wild Duck' is typical of the Adam poems in that it can stand perfectly well by itself, like the epilogue poems in Gaudete. Yet it is also fully open to incorporation in a more complex schema without falsity or loss of the poem's essential beauty and naturalistic verity. There is no failure of confidence in these poems. The justness of the image allows it to speak for itself. 'The Wild Duck' is important because we respond, not because Adam fails to. The bird is "Calling softly to the fixed lakes/As earth gets up in the frosty dark, at the back of the Pole Star." We can choose to listen too, and share an

aching response to the coming of the dawn.

'The Wild Duck', echoing Hughes's words about Crow, "raises no ghosts."<sup>15</sup> But the next poem, 'The Swift comes the swift' is once again an expression of a strand already expressed in the poet's corpus. The obvious comparison is with 'Swifts' in Season Songs. In that poem the bird is a "little Apollo", godlet of the sun, possessing a "charred scream" and "huge power". In Adam the swift is able to hunt "the winged mote of death into the sun's retina." It screams like a dive-bomber and its effects are that of a bolt of lightening or a meteorite. Like all the other birds so far it is a sun bird. (The duck is a sun bird not only in its role as dawn herald but also mythically. Anserine birds were linked with the sun among Aryan peoples.<sup>16</sup>) The sun image is not the only repetition, since once again a bird is shown as crossing divisions in the manner of a shaman. The swift:

One wing below mineral limit  
One wing above dream and number

Shears between life and death (p. 164)

We next meet the wren whose royalty is shown in its mastery of fire. Other birds have limited mastery in that they soar seemingly close but are not burnt, while the wren is credited in a number of world mythologies as having been able to steal part of the sun to make fire. He gave fire to a Prometheus figure who then imparted it to all mankind. For his presumption he was also punished. Whether for this reason or not, he is still victimized in the Wren Hunts of Ireland and France.

'The Unknown Wren' makes oblique references to the traditional Hunting of the Wren. The "wet bush" he sings in is the furze of the Irish Wren Song. "The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,/On St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze."<sup>17</sup> The style of the Hughes

poem imitates the rhyme of the Wren Song both by its repetition and its subject matter. The "Imminent death" in 'The Unknown Wren' is because the poem is set on the day of the Wren Hunt. Like all primitive kings the wren only reigns for a year and then is slain sacrificially. His willingness to die is his source of power - another lesson that Adam must learn.

The Owl is the next bird. It is next to the wren for the same reason it is next to the robin in Crow (see 'Owl's Song' and 'Robin Song'). The robin is a companion of the wren, also credited with stealing fire (hence its red breast). It is a benefactor, small and unthreatening. The owl is frightening but also a benefactor in a peculiar kind of way since "a frightening object is able to frighten away evil things."<sup>18</sup> Thus the owl is both equivalent and polar opposite of the wren. He also, in his own way, is there to teach Adam about the importance of death. He is himself "Death listening for a soul". The wren's example is that of the victim; the owl's is that of the predator.

Gentleness and violence are also juxtaposed in the form of the Dove and the Crow. The crow is feared like the owl as a bird of ill-omen, yet is a powerful protector if properly courted. The dove is a giver of herself like the wren, a sacrificial victim. "She gave the flesh of her breast, and they ate her/She gave the milk of her blood, they drank her." As with the other birds our picture of the dove can come from common associations, such as the dove as bird of peace or as Noah's bird of promise, or from rather more remote sources.

The image of the dove in the "body of thorns" echoes both medieval Romances and their Sufic sources. The poetic use of the thorn-pierced bird is found in early Iranian verse and is at its most explicit in the following quotation from the Sufic poet Hafiz:



The nightingale with drops of his heart's blood  
 Had nourished the red rose, then came a wind,  
 And catching at the boughs in envious mood,  
 A hundred thorns about his heart entwined.<sup>19</sup>

This same image was reproduced as the central statement of love in 'Le Roman de la Rose' and reminds us of the early medieval poem 'The Owl and the Nightingale'. For Hughes the dove replaces the traditional nightingale - because the dove is identified in his mind with the White Goddess, as we saw in Gaudete.

Owl and dove show different aspects of the deity. She is both a defenceless virgin, symbolized by the whiteness of the dove, being pierced by the bloody and masculine thorn; and she is also the vengeful hag we have seen so much of. Hughes is extending the insight of his early poetic mentor, Robert Graves. "She is the Flower-goddess ... but she is also Blodeuwedd the Owl ... or Circe the pitiless falcon."<sup>20</sup> In Cave Birds the initiatory vision could not go beyond the vision of owl and falcon. In Adam and the Sacred Nine, a pattern is created whereby owl and falcon, with their companions, duck and crow, are offset by lark, swift, wren and dove. The ninth bird, the phoenix, is the sum of these birds and their reconciler.

The former group of birds are all taboo in some sense, either because of their fearsome aspect or some other characteristic. The duck, like the goose, is linked with a number of legends. Their cry is the cry of lost souls. They are called the Wild Hunt or the companions of Bloody Bertha, a horrific manifestation of the Mother Goddess. The crow is ominous because of his love of carrion and in Celtic mythology is the servant of hags who feast upon men's bodies (the Morrigan in Ireland, and Cailleach in Scotland).

The other group of birds are small and harmless. They have no association with wickedness, do not prey on other birds like the falcon,

crow and owl do. Each can sing, while the other birds have distinctive cries. Together the two groups show that death and joy go hand in hand. Their advice and example must be accepted as a single teaching. In common they have their kings - falcon and wren; and their queens - owl and dove.<sup>21</sup>

The coming of the crow both completes this pattern and breaks it. Like the wren he is also a fire-thief. Among the Koryak of Siberia he is supposed to have swallowed the sun, and among the American Indians he steals the sun for mankind's benefit.<sup>22</sup> Thus each group of birds contains a thief as well as royalty. The crow also fits our pattern in that he is not a song-bird, but while the wild duck shouts "Wake! Wake!" he whispers the "love-whisper" into Adam's ear. Adam has not benefitted yet from the arrival of the birds since he has slept through it all! Without the crow's initiative the pattern would be complete and Adam would remain trapped in the mud and his sleep.

The crow's role fits in well with the mythology of numerous cultures where he is regarded as the only bird able to speak the language of men. He was thus used by a number of deities as a messenger. One result has been that the crow is a coveted familiar among those cultures where shamanism is practised. Because in 'The Crow came to Adam' the bird acts as a familiar, the logical implication is that Adam's awakening is a shamanistic one. Since a shamanic initiation must come from threshold dreams it is then arguable that each bird has come in a dream, as was the case in Cave Birds.

If that is the case then the phoenix is the only bird to be seen by the woken Adam. It is both the symbol of his awaking and the direct result of it. As 'The Crow came to Adam' was reminiscent of the 'theological' poems in Crow, so the vision of the phoenix reminds us of the last poem in Prometheus on his Crag where Prometheus shares the

bird's fiery death and thus its rebirth:

And the cloudy bird  
Tearing the shell  
Midwives the upfelling crib of flames. (Moortown, p. 92)

The destruction of what is of the flesh, the "shell of humanity" is also emphasized in 'And the Phoenix has come'. This poem also re-uses the vital theme of new birth as the result of a freely chosen death:

Flesh trembles  
The altar of its death and its birth

Where it descends  
Where it offers itself up

And naked the newborn  
Laughs in the blaze (p. 169)

The poem also brings the constantly repeated sun references and imagery to a crescendo. We are again reminded of the Laurentian imagery of Prometheus on his Crag where "fire is the sudden sun-assertion"<sup>23</sup> and where the sun stands for the all-consuming nature of the life principle:

Its voice flies flaming and dripping flame  
Slowly across the dusty sky  
Its voice burns in a rich heap  
Of mountains that seem to melt (p. 169)

The phoenix shows the awesomeness and consuming power of falcon or owl and the sacrificial willingness of wren and dove. The fire acts as a means of illumination for Adam, as two other poems left out of the Faber edition point out. 'Light' and 'Bud-tipped twig' form a gloss upon the transition from 'And the phoenix has come' to 'The sole of a foot', the transition from the extended focus upon the birds to an insight into their effect upon Adam.

Adam awakes because he listens to the natural world. No matter what the content of the crow's message was, its importance derives from the fact it was responded to. This response to nature dictates what he sees upon awakening:

Eyes, laughing and childish  
 Ran among flowers of leaves  
 And looked at light's bridge  
 Which led from leaf, upward, and back down to leaf.  
 ('Light', Rainbow Press edition, p. 21)

Instead of Crow's brief 'Glimpse' of leaf, Adam is treated to a vision-ary feast:

Eyes ran to the limit  
 To the last leaf  
 To the least vein of the least flower-leaf.

Light smiled  
 And smiled and smiled. ('Light')

He then experiences a sudden pang of fear. His humanity is defined by his ability to criticize, the inability to accept things just as they are. He is "Afraid suddenly/That this was all there was to it."

Having been tempted into awareness by the crow's message, Adam instinctively doubts whether he has made the right choice. He is looking for something more than the light in the leaves, and one suspects that the Crow's Whisper contained a promise - the promise of a waiting bride. Adam fails to see that Nature herself is his bride. He needs to woo and be wooed. This is what begins to happen tentatively in 'Bud-tipped twig':

Bud-tipped twig  
  
 Touched nipple.  
 The tree recoiled, aloof, still wintry.  
  
 Feathery grass-plume touches  
 Stroked across nipple  
 And the grass fled, shrinking, queerly far off.  
 (Rainbow Press edition, p. 22)

Adam's lack of confidence in what he sees is paralleled by the vegetation's lack of confidence in what it touches. Adam wants a degree of attention that the natural world is not prepared to give him:

The sea, preoccupied with moon and sun  
 With earth's centre, with its own substance and the laws of waves  
 Made the breast feel lost.  
 ('Bud-tipped twig')

The clouds have a similar attitude so that Adam is forced to turn as  
 "The first beggar" to the sun:

Breast lifted its simple face  
 To the sun.  
 The first beggar.

The sun's response is to direct him to the earth and rock he stands upon. This is developed in the final poem, 'The sole of a foot' and is what the birds have been patiently preparing Adam for. We have already noted the numerous linkages between each bird, the sun and the coming of the sun. It is through their ministrations that Adam knows that the sun is interested in him. It is because they have shown him the tools of death and sacrifice, the goals of shaman song and joy that he has been born into the vital awareness he now feels.

The work of the birds with Adam closely resembles that of the Muses with the poet. It is surely significant that there are nine birds in the sequence and nine Muses in classical literature. Both nines are sacred to the same person, the ubiquitous White Goddess. The implication is that as Adam is illuminated by the birds, so the poet is illuminated by the Muses and man is illuminated by the Goddess of Nature.

'The sole of a foot' is one of the clearest reminders in Hughes's poetry that he is not postulating some throwback matriarchal religion, but a reverence for and connection with the world around us. The sense of interrelationship is expressed in the poem's admirable and warm central image:

The sole of a foot  
  
 Pressed to world-rock, flat  
 Warm  
  
 With its human map  
 Tough-skinned, for this meeting  
 Comfortable (p. 170)

The very presence of Adam's foot upon the ground is a "meeting", a "first acquaintance." He lay asleep; awake, he must stand. Asleep Adam was independent; awake he has accepted his interdependence. In doing these things he has also accepted his place in the order of the universe. He is grateful to the rock for this understanding, acknowledging that:

I am no wing  
 To tread emptiness.  
 I was made

For you. (p. 170)

Adam is not so foolish as to confuse the aid of the nine birds with an invitation to join them. He has come through to a place of peace that has not been present at the end of any other sequence. He is content to be himself, accepting both limitations and special gifting with equal calm.

NOTES

1. Selected Poems 1957-81, (London :Faber, 1982), p. 238. In this part of the book Hughes gives a short note on each of the important sequences represented in the volume.
2. Idries Shah, The Sufis, p. 108.
3. The poet's approval can be seen also in the 1972 review of Carlos Castaneda's A Separate Reality, where the shaman Don Juan is called a "sort of chthonic sufi - and frequently reminiscent of the eighteenth-century Hasidic Rabbis at their best, and that is saying a lot."
4. Shamanism review.
5. Shah, The Sufis, p. 319.
6. *ibid.*, p. 323.
7. Papers from this conference were collected in The Achievement of Ted Hughes, ed. Keith Sagar, (Manchester :MUP, 1983).
8. It is also surely significant that when making his own selection of work for the 1982 Selected Poems Hughes included seven Adam and the Sacred Nine poems, the highest proportion of poems from any of the published volumes.
9. Shah, The Sufis, p. 78.
10. *ibid.*, p. 109.
11. See E.A. Armstrong, The Folklore of Birds, (London :Collins, 1958), healing, p. 125; oracular powers, p. 132.
12. Romans, Chapter 8, verses 19-21.
13. Chapter 2 (The Cow), Section III, verse 260, trans. Ali, Lahore, India, 1928, p. 48.  
The link between birds and death can be found in the Siberian habit of putting wooden birds on the coffins of dead shamans. The Lascaux cave-paintings in France depict the death of a bird-headed shaman (see Armstrong, The Folklore of Birds, pp. 10-14).
14. Aristophanes, The Birds, trans. W. Arrowsmith, (New York :Mentor, 1961), p. 32.
15. London Magazine, January 1971, p. 20.
16. For instance bracelets have been found which alternate goose or duck figures with swastikas - the Aryan sun symbol.
17. Armstrong, The Folklore of Birds, p. 142.
18. *ibid.*, p. 124.

19. Divan, XIV (trans. Bell), quoted in Armstrong, p. 190.
20. Graves, The White Goddess, p. 448.
21. It may also be significant that one group of birds is most closely linked with mythology and the other with folklore. The owl is the bird of Athene, the falcon of Horus, the crow of Bran, the duck of Bertha, or Agnis, the god of fire in the Vedic Hymns. Whether intentionally or not, Hughes has thus covered Greek, Egyptian, Celtic and Aryan/Scandinavian cultural influences.
22. See Armstrong, The Folklore of Birds, p. 82.
23. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 157.



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This bibliography is not exhaustive. It lists only those works which were of direct relevance to my thesis. In particular, I have sought not to duplicate the exhaustive bibliographies of Keith Sagar in The Art of Ted Hughes or of Stephen Tabor in his University of California at Los Angeles Thesis.

