

Chapter 10 The Laughter of Foxes: *Remains of Elmet*

After *Adam and the Sacred Nine* Hughes at last found himself free to take up a project he had first proposed to the photographer Fay Godwin in 1971, a sequence of poems about the Calder Valley, where he had spent his first seven years. Hughes' lifetime spans the critical years of the valley's decline. In 1930 the mills were in production, and the petrified culture still stood firm. In 1937 the Hughes family left the area. By the time they returned in 1952 huge cracks were already appearing. The textile industry had begun its terminal decline. The churches never regained their stranglehold after the war. Television aerials had begun to sprout, and more families owned cars. Social mobility meant that the valley was no longer an enclosure. Free education now took the brighter youngsters off to university, never to return. By 1975 the collapse was complete. All that remained were derelict mills and memories. Today the transformation is total, with much of Mytholmroyd and Heptonstall a conservation area, and Hebden Bridge a tourist attraction and commuter town.

In the introduction to the first edition of *Remains of Elmet* Hughes wrote:

For centuries it was considered a more or less uninhabitable wilderness, a notorious refuge for criminals, a hide-out for refugees. Then in the early 1800s it became the cradle for the Industrial Revolution in textiles, and the upper Calder became 'the hardest-worked river in England'. Throughout my lifetime, since 1930, I have watched the mills of the region and their attendant chapels die. Within the last fifteen years the end has come. They are now virtually dead, and the population of the valleys and the hillsides, so rooted for so long, is changing rapidly.

Fay Godwin set out to capture some impressions of this landscape at this moment, and her photographs moved me to write the accompanying poems.¹

What Hughes does not mention here is that his own family had lived through this process. In his childhood his maternal grandmother's family had still been farming at Hathershelf, and his uncle Walter, a mill-owner, he described as 'a living archive of the Calder Valley'².

In 1976 Hughes wrote to Godwin:

¹ *Ted Hughes: Collected Poems*, ed. Keegan, Faber and Faber, 2003, 1200. All quotations from Hughes' poems for adults are from this volume.

² *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Reid, Faber and Faber, 2007, 378.

So my first idea became an episodic autobiography — nothing connected. Just poems anchored in particular events and things. I don't know how much there might be, or what it will be like. But I know I do have an immense amount locked up in all that. At times it is overwhelming when I try to release it. ... What grips me about the place, I think, is the weird collision of that terrible life of slavery — to work, cash, Methodism — which was an heroic life really, and developed heroic virtues — inside those black buildings, with that wilderness, which is really a desert, more or less uninhabitable. ... If only some of that could be caught in photographs — the way the primaevial reality of the region is taking over again from the mills, chapels, farms, pubs, bowling greens and cricket pavilions, pompous houses and rhododendrons, walls and reservoirs, stonework of nineteenth century giants, and the black peculiarities of the three points of the triangle — Colne, Todmorden and Halifax.

[*Letters* :378-9]

A great deal of that was indeed caught in Fay Godwin's photographs:

There is a tension in the air of these black and white photographs that provides a visual complement to the tensions between man and landscape, the industrial and the organic, childhood and present, social and natural processes, that are explored in the poems.³

The house in Mytholmroyd where Hughes was born was an end terrace house just fifty yards from the canal. Beyond the canal was the main trunk road connecting the Yorkshire woollen towns and the Lancashire cotton towns, with its constant rumble of heavy lorries. Beyond that the Calder and the railway. Then, rising almost sheer from the valley and seeming to fill half the sky, Scout Rock:

This was the memento mundi over my birth: my spiritual midwife at the time and my godfather ever since ... From my first day, it watched. If it couldn't see me direct, a towering gloom over my pram, it watched me through a species of periscope: that is, by infiltrating the very light of my

³ Gifford, Terry, and Roberts, Neil, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, Faber and Faber, 1981, 233.

room with its particular shadow.⁴

It seemed to seal off everything to the South. Since to the North the land rose almost as steeply from immediately in front of the house up to the high bleak moors (stretching all the way to Haworth), 'the narrow valley, with its flooring of cricket pitch, meadows, bowling greens, streets, railways and mills, seemed damp, dark and dissatisfied' and felt like a trap.

Nevertheless Hughes had a happy childhood. A few yards away from Aspinal Street was the canal where the local children would fish for loach. Hughes and his friends would explore the nearby Redacre Wood. Like Lawrence before him, Hughes acted as an intermediary between the other children and the natural world, pointing out what they would have missed, and communicating his own sense of wonder. Though the Calder may have been 'the hardest worked river in England', most of its tributary valleys were beautiful and unspoiled. Edith Hughes loved walking, and would take her children at every opportunity to picnic, and swim in the pools. There would be shopping trips to Halifax where Ted would choose another lead animal for his collection. Best of all were the paradisaic hunting and camping trips with his brother Gerald, ten years older, his guide to the secret magical places such as Crimsworth Dene.

There was, at least for Hughes and his brother, a ladder out of the dark valley-trap. They could climb through fields towards the moor with its heather and bilberries and curlews and wide horizons. In a letter to Fay Godwin Hughes recalled:

When my brother walked over those hillsides with a gun he was the first person anybody had ever seen just wandering about free up there. He was regarded as an eccentric. Everybody else was clamped to his farm or to the valley bottom and convulsed with the ideals of toil. The great feeling there was that you were utterly free and alone — everybody else was at work and out of the way. It was as if I had the whole place to myself.

[*Letters*, 379].

In 'The Rock' Hughes recalled his first climb to those hillsides: 'It was a balloon view. An alarming exhilaration. I felt infinitely exposed to be up there on the stage I had been trying to imagine for so long':

If any word could be found engraved around my skull, just above the ears and eyebrows, it would probably be the word 'horizon'. Every thought I

⁴ 'The Rock' in *Worlds*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Penguin, 1974, 122.

The purpose of the chapel seemed to be simply to eradicate the joy of life, even if that meant eradicating life itself. Once the place was thrown into a state of battle-fury by a cricket singing from a crack in the wall:

Long after I'd been smothered in bed

I heard them

Riving at the religious stonework

with screwdrivers and chisels.

Now the cracks are widening and the only singing heard in many of the chapels is the singing of crickets.

What the boys preferred to do with their Sundays was to dig, Sunday after Sunday, with iron levers, even while the bells summoned them elsewhere, for the Ancient Briton supposed, according to local folk-lore, to lie under a half-ton rock in Redacre Wood:

We needed that waft from the cave

The dawn dew-chilling of emergence,

The hunting grounds untouched all around us.

['The Ancient Briton Lay Under His Rock']

That rock could not be shifted, nor what it hid, the buried life of England, wildness, the repressed needs of the human psyche, eradicated.

Best of all was the occasion when, after being marched off to chapel in his 'detestable blue blazer', (he would spend the time there imagining a wolf galloping through snow), he was taken to Stubbing Wharf pub, where Billy Red released a couple of rats the landlord had kept for him, and caught and killed them with his teeth. Wolf, fox, rat, became totemic beasts for Hughes. Animals were of tremendous importance to Hughes from the beginning, living representatives of another world, 'the true world', 'the world under the world'.

The poet is engaged in finding metaphors for his own nature, his only touchstone for human nature. His earliest metaphors are drawn from his immediate childhood world, his inheritance. These metaphors in turn give him a way of looking at the further and future world and a way of thinking about himself when

he becomes self-conscious. Thus they shape his nature and bring it closer to the permanent realities. In a radio interview in 1961, Hughes said that the move to Mexborough when he was eight 'really sealed off my first seven years so that now my first seven years seems almost half my life. I've remembered almost everything because it was sealed off in that particular way and became a sort of brain — another subsidiary brain for me'. When the poems are overtly, literally, about it, the magical change from description to metaphor to myth is enacted before our eyes, as in *Remains of Elmet*.

It was a great advantage to Hughes to have been born not in a town, where he might have allowed himself to be shut up in the little box of the exclusively human, nor in the country, where he might have become just another 'nature' poet, but on the very frontier where the two were engaged in a 'fight to the death'. He experienced in childhood the crisis of our civilisation in a very pure form. This experience forced him into a fiercely dualistic attitude to life which released the amazing energies of his first three collections. The subsequent works have been a gradual healing of that split.

But the idea of making *Remains of Elmet* an autobiography of his childhood did not last long:

Then it struck me — this is a book of photographs about a region that belongs to everybody who lives or has lived in it, not only to me. I was suddenly struck, you see, by the embarrassing egotism of my plan to convert the whole region into my childhood stage. So I abandoned my project. After that, I aimed for a blurred focus, generalised mood-evocation in each piece — something that would harmonise with Fay Godwin's photographs, but would avoid that painful collision of sharp visual image and sharp specific verbal image, in which the verbal image, after a moment of psychological distress, always loses. [Letters 633]

Hughes did not wish to go the way of Wordsworth, who made Cumbria his childhood stage, and write only of the seedtime of his soul.

In any case, as he wrote the poems they began to take him in an unexpected direction:

I had always regarded my early life as a Paradise, from which I was wrenched at age eight. But digging down through the strata with verse —

following the goblin — I found dislike, dread, even hatred. What a surprise that was. And difficult to handle. And not at all what I wanted for the book of atmospheric photographs. [Letters 447]

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan is concerned in Part 1 solely with the saving Christian's of soul, with apparently egotistic disregard for anyone else. But Bunyan knows that until Christian has saved his own soul, he is no use to anyone else. Part 2 is a social novel, a communal pilgrimage following the trail Christian has blazed. Hughes now felt sufficiently confident that he was near the end of his personal journey to apply what he had learned to the lives of others, the community which had bred him. Fay Godwin's photographs, evocative as they are, are primarily of landscapes and 'spectacular desolation', and this pushed Hughes in the direction of writing about the place rather than the people.⁶

But it was the effect of the collapse on the human community of the valley that the goblin insisted that Hughes should write about:

When I came to consciousness there, in the 1930s, the process was already far gone, though the communities seemed to be still intact, still entirely absorbed by the life of the factories — or by the slump. But you could not fail to realize that the cataclysm had happened: to the population (in the first World War, where a single bad ten minutes in no-man's-land could wipe out a street or even a village), to the industry (the shift to the East in textile manufacture), and to the Methodism (the new age). Gradually it dawned on you that you were living among the survivors, in the remains. [Collected Poems 1202]

Looking back on the book a few years later, he came to feel that the prominence, even pre-eminence of the striking and evocative photographs, together with what he called 'that diabolical fear of subjectivity' [Roberts 130], had pulled the poems in the direction of landscape and 'impersonal mood pieces', and away from the historical and family concerns which had been pressing for freer expression:

In retrospect I missed the real opportunity: I should have written portraits,

⁶ The large pictorial format of *Remains* and *River* even led to them being displayed in bookshops in the photography rather than poetry sections.

sharp and detailed, of the people I knew there: populated the photographs
without challenging their images. [Letters 633]

The eight new Elmet poems Hughes added, first in *Wolfwatching*, then in *Elmet*,
were all about those survivors, and those who had not survived.

Gifford and Roberts wrote of *Remains of Elmet*:

Ted Hughes has written a social history as a natural history, and in doing so
he has created a densely suggestive language that can relate social to natural
processes in the timescale of a landscape. [242]

He sees the whole human enterprise as 'no more than a brief interlude'.⁷
Everything must be returned to the earth, communities and their buildings as much
as individual bodies. But decomposition is the necessary prelude to regeneration:

Before these chimneys can flower again
They must fall into the only future, into earth. ['Lumb Chimneys']

Hughes saw the Pennine landscape itself is a huge animal which seemed to
let itself be tamed. The network of walls is 'harness on the long moors'. The 'great
adventure' was the attempt to bring the hills and moors with their resources of
grass, water and stone, into the human economy. For a time it seemed to have
succeeded. The hills were plotted and parcelled with mile after mile of stone walls
raised with lifetimes of patient labour, and 'Spines that wore into a bowed /
Enslavement' ('Walls'). The mill hands are compared to the millstone grit ('soul-
grinding sandstone') which seemed to be content

To be cut, to be carted
And fixed in its new place.
It let itself be conscripted

⁷ *Elmet*, Radio 3, 3 May 1980. Also on British Library Spoken Word disc NSACD 55.

Into mills. And it stayed in position

Defending this slavery against all. ['Hill-Stone Was Content']

They too forgot their 'wild roots'. The word 'conscripted' compares them also with the soldiers in the trenches who, as an army, 'stayed in position' while individual bodies 'came and went'. The looms, like the trenches, had to be manned, whatever the human cost.

Nature was, briefly, conquered:

Men got to the summit and

for some giddy moments

A television

Blinked from the wolf's lookout. ['When Men Got to the Summit']

Nature is replaced by technology. It is no longer necessary to look out. The triumphant conqueror of wolf and stone turns his back on space and light and blinks at a screen, an altar to the worship of money and trivia.

But now all that remains of the great enterprise is a hulk, 'every rib shattered'. The spent walls are nothing but a 'harvest of long cemeteries'. The stones of the mills are returning to the earth. In 'Hardcastle Crags' the noise of intense industrial activity has dwindled to a silence indistinguishable from the silence of the rotting of leaves into loam. It is, of course, sad to see a thriving community in decay, but he felt little nostalgia. The lives of the factory hands were sacrificed to the looms. The lives of the farm workers 'went into the enclosures / Like manure' ('Walls'). But now those hills are breaking loose again, slowly shaking the walls, mills, chapels and houses to pieces as in a great sieve. The ruined walls are nothing but a 'harvest of long cemeteries'.

But what really broke the spirit of the community was the first world war:

First, Mills

and steep wet cobbles

Then cenotaphs.

First, football pitches, crown greens

Then the bottomless wound of the railway station

That bled this valley to death. [‘First, Mills’]

All the young men of the valley were recruited into the Lancashire Fusiliers and shipped to the Dardanelles. Of some thirty thousand men in that regiment nearly half were killed. Those who returned, returned, traumatized, to ‘a graveyard for homeland’. Hughes’ father, saved from shrapnel by his pocket-book, would talk to the boy about his ‘four-year mastication by gunfire and mud’:

While I, small and four,
Lay on the carpet as his luckless double,
His memory's buried, immovable anchor,
Among jawbones and blown-off boots, tree-stumps, shell-cases and craters,
Under rain that goes on drumming its rods and thickening
Its kingdom, which the sun has abandoned, and where nobody
Can ever again move from shelter. [‘Out’]

These images superimposed in perfect register upon those impressed on him by the surrounding landscape:

The throb of the mills and the crying of lambs
Like shouting in Flanders. [‘The Sheep Went On Being Dead’]

Even the beauty spots seemed haunted by the ghosts of the young men who went there on Sunday jaunts before the war:

And the beech-tree solemnities

Muffle much cordite. ...

And the air-stir releases

The love-murmurs of a generation of slaves

Whose bones melted in Asia Minor.

[‘Hardcastle Crag’s]

In a radio interview Hughes said that the First World War was more part of his imagination than the second because 'It was right there from the beginning, so it was going on in us for eight years before the Second World War came along ... The First World War was our sort of fairy-story world — certainly was mine'.

So it seemed to the young Hughes that there was a mourning quality in the spirit of the place. And the role of men in that place was to provide the deaths and disasters and wastage for it to be in mourning for:

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.

[*Worlds* 126]

To confront this spirit in its purity, it was necessary to go up onto the moors. There you could listen to the 'dark sounds' of the spirit of the moors: '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.' You could almost see the spirit because of the strange eerie quality of the light (a quality wonderfully captured in Fay Godwin's photographs) 'at once both gloomily purplish and incredibly clear, unnaturally clear, as if objects there had less protection than elsewhere, were more exposed to the radioactive dangers of space, more startled by their own existence.'

What distinguishes the moors from the valley is the fact that, in spite of the mourning, the accumulated deaths, 'the mood of moorland is exultant'. Many of the finest poems in *Remains of Elmet* celebrate the exhilaration which is the recognition that out of these uncompromising materials, this graveyard, this vacancy of scruffy hills and stagnant pools and bone-chilling winds, the place is continually renewing life and making miracles. This had been expressed finely in early poems such as 'Crow Hill', yet even this seems rhetorical against the transparent purity of his later testimony:

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.

[‘Long Screams’]

Such mothers are not, in our sense, maternal. They have no concern to make life easy for plants or animals, let alone humans. The miracle is that ‘out of a mica sterility’ comes the harebell’s blueness, the heather’s nectar.⁸ And this is why Hughes cannot regret that the moors are breaking loose again from the harness of men.

Chapels, chimneys, vanish in the brightening

And the hills walk out on the hills

[‘The Trance of Light’]

Remains of Elmet is entirely about the crime against nature, which here takes the form of the enslavement of a people conscripted into the mills, the chapels, the trenches, conscripted also into the human attempt to conscript in turn the mothers, the sustaining elements of earth, air, fire and water, to degraded, spiritless purposes. Like Blake Hughes seeks to renew the fallen light. The poems and photographs which are set in the valley bottom are harsh and gloomy — mills, chimneys and bridges reflected in the dull canal. What light there is seems trapped by the surrounding darkness, as the human spirit was trapped in the mills and chapels. Water, too, is fallen, conscripted into gulleys, drained of all promise of fertility in ‘the worn-out water of women and the lost rivers of men’ [‘It Is All’]. But on the high moors, ‘a stage for the performance of heaven’, the elements seem to revel and gleam in their freedom. Ann Skea writes:

The contrast is seen, too, in the accompanying photographs,

⁸ As Colin Fraser pointed out in his 1995 thesis *Reshaping the Past: The Personal Poetry of Ted Hughes* (University of New England), Hughes’ concept of the mother was increasingly influenced by his real-life mother, Edith, especially after her death in 1969. One of the purposes of *Remains of Elmet* was to give his mother a ‘posthumous life’. Edith had dug leaf mould from Hardcastle Craggs for her garden. She was herself the leaf mould which nourished his childhood. She mediated to him an Emily-Brontë-like passion for wildness, for exposure to the wind and rain of the moors:

Close to seventy, walking and walking the moor,
Herself the uncontainable weather,
Hurling her delight anywhere —
All she needed was a twist of heather — [‘Edith’]

The music of the Calder Valley Hughes conjures in *Remains of Elmet* is an echo of her ‘strange music’ [‘Source’]:

Giving you the kiss of life
She hung round your neck the whole valley
Like David’s harp.
Now, whenever you touch it, God listens
Only for her voice. [‘Leaf Mould’]

and is most marked if the photograph following 'It Is All' is included in the comparison. In the picture opposite this poem, light glows softly from alley paving stones, but it is surrounded by darkness, trapped in the polluted water of the clog-worn gully, and blocked by the blackness into which the path leads. Similarly, the photographs on page 24 show a disk of light reflected in dark turbid water, looking very like a sun trapped beneath the water's surface. In contrast with these, the picture above 'High Sea-Light' shows a stony causey glowing with a light which becomes soft and pearly where it robes the gentle curves of the open moors beyond. We see a pathway of light leading to the freedom of the lit moors; a path by which to escape into the 'lark-rapture silence. Light and soul, which are trapped in the valley, are, here, released from human constraints and can work with the other elemental energies to revive the damaged earth.⁹

'Heaven' for Hughes means 'sky', not some metaphysical realm. But this does not reduce its numinousness, for sky is light, and light is 'spirit brightness', the radiance of creation at its most evident and spectacular. The same wind that had so threatened the embattled ego in 'Wind' now blows great holes in the sky opening it to the huge light of spirit. The Methodists had built their four-square chapels in an attempt to imprison spirit and keep out Nature, even a single cricket. Nature is now reclaiming them: 'Chapels, chimneys, vanish in the brightening':

The light, opening younger, fresher wings

⁹ Ann Skea, *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest*, University of New England Press, Australia, 1994, 176.

Holds this land up again like an offering

Heavy with the dream of a people. ['The Trance of Light']

However, the people are so cowed after generations of enslavement that they seem unable to awake from their dream, unable to accept the offering. In 'Open to Huge Light' the hills are lit with a visionary brightness, but:

Startled people look up

With sheeps' heads

Then go on eating.

There is a wonderful painting of this poem by Norman Adams. In the centre of the painting the text of the poem glows like a rainbow with all the colours of a rose window. Around the border ill-defined people and cattle plod in a ring, heads down, earth-bound, in a purgatory of muddy greens and browns, blind to the revelation of coloured light being offered to them. This is very like Clare's dismay at the incomprehension of his neighbours, who lack the 'hankering gaze' that would 'Turn the blue blinders of the heavens aside / To see what gods are doing' ['A Ramble'].

The happiest men are those at play, the exposed, pitifully buffeted men trying to play football on the highest ridge for miles.

And the valleys blued unthinkable

Under depth of Atlantic depression —

But the wingers leapt, they bicycled in air

And the goalie flew horizontal ['Football at Slack']

It is a comic poem, but the comedy arises partly from the incongruity of the fact that the men are so determined to enjoy their all-too-brief respite, so focused on a football that they seem totally unaware that their only spectator is a wild god leaning through a fiery hole in heaven:

And once again a golden holocaust

Lifted the cloud's edge, to watch them.

In summer the men again cherish the freedom of Saturday afternoon, this time on a cricket pitch. For a moment the exhilaration of a huge hit seems to offer the men the chance to stampede ‘through the sudden hole in Saturday’. Where to? The North Sea? Batsmen and fielders are running ‘for dear life’. But escape is impossible. The men are bound by the rules of the game (in the ‘cage of wickets’, ‘pinned to the crease’), by the boundary, by the ‘shaggy valley parapets’ just beyond it, ‘pending like thunder’, by the laws of physics (the ball drops far short even of Midgeley), by the economic trap (Monday already looms) and the confines of their own consciousness —

Brain sewn into the ball’s hide

Hammering at four corners of abstraction

And caught and flung back, and caught, and again caught

To be bounced on baked earth, to be clubbed

Towards the wage-mirage sparkle of mills

Towards Lord Savile’s heather

Towards the veto of the poisonous Calder.

After the inevitable tea and sandwiches they return ‘to the cool sheet and the black slot of home’, as if to living graves.

Adult play was a refusal to grow up, an ignorance of time, an assumption that the pattern of life was as unalterable as the hills:

Everlasting play bled the whole unstoppable Calder

And incinerated itself happily

From a hundred mill chimneys.

[‘Tick Tock Tick Tock’]

Only the children, it seems, ever rebelled against the ‘submarine twilight’ of the valley, and tried to let in some permanent light. On his way to school Hughes passed every day a huge derelict mill, where ‘vandal plumes of willow-herb’ tried to survive under the five hundred green skylights. It seemed to him like a sacked tomb:

Lifelines poured into wagepackets

Had leaked a warm horror, like Pompeii,

Into that worn-out, silent dust. [‘Under the World’s Wild Rims’]

But there was something he could do. With a heroic, almost demonic vandalism like that of the plumed and horned willow-herb he set himself, over a period, to break all five hundred skylights with five hundred stones, and he achieved his purpose:

One by one

Five hundred sunbeams fell on the horns of the flowers.

The comedy is part of the feeling of release from that intolerable ‘weight of Atlantic depression’ which had characterized the earlier poems about the Yorkshire Pennines. The style, out from under that pressure, plays like the wind.

Wind is, indeed, prevalent in these poems:

Wind-shepherds

Play the reeds of desolation.

[‘Open to Huge Light’]

But this is no longer the threatening wind of ‘Wind’. Desolation itself is now seen as a huge light, a ‘brighter emptiness’, the silence as the intervals of the wind’s music. ‘It was God, they knew’.

The young Coleridge, still ‘unregenerate’, open to a tentative pantheism, and fascinated by the Eolian harp, (a harp played by the wind), asked:

And what if all of animated nature

Be but organic Harps diversely framed,

That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps

Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,

At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

[‘The Eolian Harp’]

Hughes would have avoided the word ‘intellectual’, but his feeling was the same, that wind is the soul-music and dance-music of all creation, whether the single pipe or violin-note on a bare moor or the full orchestra of a raging river.

Unusually, Hughes himself did not determine the order of the poems in *Remains of Elmet*. That he was willing to leave the ordering largely to Fay Godwin

suggests that he did not see the poems as a sequence leading to any discernible conclusion. He wrote to me that ‘the correct or reasonably working order is still to be found’. The mood of the poems can change as unpredictably as the weather. One moment the landscape is dark and sodden, the next radiant with apocalyptic light.

‘Chinese History of Colden Water’ is a mythic summary of the whole era covered by *Remains of Elmet*. Colden Clough runs below Heptonstall Slack, below the Beacon (the house in ‘Wind’) and Lumb Bank. Lumb chimneys still stand there, almost hidden by rampant growth. Hughes imagines an ‘immortal’ finding himself there. Lulled by the ‘mad singing in the hills’, no doubt from the Methodist chapels, he dreams the whole history of the industrial revolution in that place,

A migraine of headscarves and clatter
Of clog-irons and looms and gutter water
And clog-irons and biblical texts.

He dismisses as nightmare

The bloody matter of the Cross
And the death’s-head after image of ‘Poor’.

He blinks away a whole era, seeing only before and after.

Chapels, chimneys, roofs in the mist – scattered.
Hills with raised wings were standing on hills.

Waves of light wash from his ear ‘all but the laughter of foxes’.

Lawrence’s Rupert Birkin in nihilistic mood wishes he could blink away not only civilization, but humanity and all its products, leaving just the long grass waving and hare sitting up. That is not the mood of *Remains of Elmet*. Of course Hughes deplures any violation of nature, as did Marvell:

So architects do square and hew
Green trees that in the forest grew.

[‘Dialogue between the soul and the body’]

What was wrong with Elmet was not that human beings had squared stone and hewed wood, but that they had done so for inhuman, spiritless purposes. The human ‘adventure’ *must* involve harnessing, to an extent, the natural resources of stone, wood and water. Hughes chose as his emblem for his Rainbow Press an

engraving of a rainbow which had been used by Blake. In Lawrence's *The Rainbow* the rainbow symbolizes the reconciliation of body and spirit, man and nature, in creative living. When Gandhi was asked what he thought of Western civilization, he replied 'I think it would be a good idea'. Lumb chimneys need to fall not in capitulation to rampant nature, but so that they can 'flower again'.

The image of stone returning to the earth is one of many images in Hughes for the restoration to Nature of its own, the healing and rededication of the holy elements before man can approach them again with clean hands, with respect and humility, and for purposes, one hopes, rather more natural, sane and worthily human than the enslavement of body and spirit which has characterized Protestantism and capitalism in England.

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Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation'*, www.keithsagar.co.uk, 2009, page number.