

Chapter 2 Influences.

Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd, West Yorkshire, in 1930, where he lived until the family moved to Mexborough, in South Yorkshire, in 1937. He later claimed that his first six years ‘shaped everything’, and that included his attitude to nature. He described the Calder Valley as ‘the cradle for the Industrial Revolution in textiles’¹. It is a narrow, steep-sided valley into which the sun rarely penetrates. It was the main corridor between the Yorkshire woollen towns and the Lancashire cotton towns. There was scarcely room for the river, the canal, the railway, the trunk road, the mills, shops and houses. To the young Hughes it felt like a ‘shadow trap’²; but he and his elder brother Gerald were able to escape from it onto the high moors on either side. There the poor soil, wuthering wind and almost ceaseless rain made the survival of any form of life seem miraculous. Yet life there was, just hanging on, heather and harebell, curlew and skylark. There were also plenty of corpses, maggot-ridden sheep in ‘quarry dead ends’ [‘The Sluttiest Sheep in England’], the tiny skeletons of baby lapwings, the body of a shot fox.

The geography of Hughes’ childhood world became his map of heaven and hell; the interplay of the elements there gave him his sense of the creating and destroying powers of the world; the local animals became his archetypes. This landscape was imprinted on his soul, and, in a sense, all his poems were to be about it. Nature was his spiritual midwife, and was not benign. In ‘My Fairy Godmother’ Hughes imagines himself at birth surrounded by Wicked Powers. One of them says: ‘The earth for him will have such magnet strength / It will drag all things from his hold, and his own body at length’. Another says: ‘He shall be a ghost, and haunt the places of earth, / And all the stars shall mark his death as little as his birth’. His Fairy Godmother (his muse) prophetically redeems his life by providing him with a magic ladder out of this pit. The ladder surely stands for life’s perpetual capacity for renewing itself.

The significance of wild nature was not only directly experienced by the young Hughes, but also mediated to him by his boyhood reading. Around the campfires on the moor, Gerald and Ted would discuss the wonders they read about in the books of Roderick Haig-Brown, a British expatriate who settled on Campbell River on Vancouver Island and enthralled young people the world over with his stories of fishing, hunting and life in the woods.³ They made a pact to

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

² ‘The Rock’ in *Worlds*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Penguin, 1974, p.124.

emigrate together to British Columbia, but Gerald moved to Australia and Ted went to Cambridge, then no farther than Devon. ... 'For Ted, British Columbia was the road not taken'.⁴

At eleven Hughes found *Tarka the Otter* in Mexborough Grammar School library. It became his bible for two years. When he met Henry Williamson in 1964, Hughes described him as 'full of the most amazing anecdotes about birds and animals'.⁵

In Mexborough Hughes was again able to escape from the mining town into the surrounding countryside where he developed his lifelong passion for fishing. Many of the poems he wrote at school are about his preference for 'lurking in the woods' or wildfowling in the marshes, to school work. But there was always a pencil and paper in his pocket, and in the evenings he would read passages of Greek drama to his friends. By the time he was fifteen Hughes was familiar with the Oriental, Middle Eastern, Egyptian and Irish mythologies, and the *Mabinogion*. What interested him most was the supernatural or underworld women: 'I had a turmoiling sort of baffled constant meditation going on all that' [*Letters* 679]. Just before leaving school that meditation produced the poem 'Song'. The version of this poem in *The Hawk in the Rain* can be read as a love poem, but an early draft makes clear that it is an invocation to the Goddess, already his muse: 'If tombs dream of you, that is my dream':

O lady, let not the wild of the world waste you:
The moon brims with love above lips;
Wind has no faith, and no one lover keeps;
The sea plays idly, or bitterly rapes:
Come where I offer human love, hopes,
O my lady.⁶

He seems already to be familiar with the cost of such love:

And my head, worn out with love, at rest
In my hands, and my hands full of dust,
O my lady.

³ Haig-Brown's first three books were *Silver: The Life Story of an Atlantic Salmon* (1931), *Pool and Rapid* (1932) and *Panther* (1934).

⁴ Boyanowsky, Ehor, *Savage Gods, Silver Ghosts*, Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 2009, 3.

⁵ *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Reid, Faber and Faber, 2007, 234.

⁶ From a photocopy of a typescript given to me by John Fisher, Hughes' English master at Mexborough Grammar School.

As Hughes came to the end of his schooldays, nature came to be mediated to him more and more by his knowledge of a huge body of myth and folklore. As Jung pointed out, these stories tend to gravitate towards a very few closely related structures which seem to operate as paradigms of crucial, archetypal human psycho-spiritual processes. We can speak, for example, in relation to mythic literature, of the death and dismemberment which leads to resurrection, of the quest motif, of the shamanic flight, of the pranks and follies of fools and tricksters, of the healing of the disabling wound and regeneration of the waste land, of the trial, punishment and redemption of the criminal, of the slaughter of the goddess by her son/consort. The commonest of all heroes is the one Joseph Campbell called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, who commits the archetypal hubristic crime against Nature and his own nature, is punished, virtually destroyed, but also corrected after a long quest in search of his victim which is also his true self. Prometheus was one of the earliest such heroes, who encouraged man by example to set himself above Nature.

Hughes' also found time for a colossal amount of reading of literature, from the ancient Greeks to his contemporaries, homing in on just those writers who had most to offer him. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Eliot had claimed that every major poet must obtain, 'by great labour', what he called a 'historical sense':

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.⁷

Hughes, from the moment he began to think of himself as a poet, was extremely aware of himself in relation to this simultaneous order. He had a large pantheon of authors he recognized as his ancestors. Each spoke directly and powerfully to him, and he entered into a perpetual dialogue with them. The combination of such authors as the Ancient Greeks, the Gawain poet⁸, Chaucer, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Donne, Marvell, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Hopkins, Lawrence, Yeats, Dylan Thomas and Eliot himself, reinforcing each other in so

⁷ Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays*, Faber and Faber, 1951, 14.

⁸ One of the set books in Part I of the English tripos in 1953 was passages from Sisam, *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, including an eleven page extract from *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*.

many ways, and matching so closely Hughes' character and experience, clearly exerted a powerful formative influence in his most impressionable years. Together they wove a dense network of meanings which is the inherited wisdom of our culture, the accumulation of thousands of years of human effort to achieve some sense of the proper relationship between human beings, and between human beings and nature.

'Song' reads very like Yeats. Before going to Cambridge, Hughes did two years of National Service at a remote radar station on the Yorkshire coast, where he had little to do but 'read and reread Shakespeare and watch the grass grow'. He also claimed to have learned by heart Yeats' complete poems. Yeats had taken the opposite path from most of the writers discussed in the last chapter. The young Yeats craved 'eternal beauty' and spurned 'all poor foolish things that live a day':

The weak worm hiding down its small cave,
The field-mouse running by me in the grass,
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass.

['To the Rose upon the Rood of Time']

He hears 'evil in the crying of wind' ['He Reproves the Curlew']. He prefers mineral and metal and dreams and the voices of the long dead to the reality of life in the here and now.

In mid-life Yeats used the falcon uncontrolled by a falconer as an image of the loosing of a 'blood-dimmed tide' of anarchy ['The Second Coming'], and spoke of the 'murderous innocence of the sea' ['Prayer for my Daughter']. Only a great house with a walled garden and a life of custom and ceremony could protect his daughter from the howling wind.

It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
Until imagination, ear and eye,
Can be content with argument and deal
In abstract things.

['The Tower']

Byzantium was to Yeats what Nirvana was to be to Hughes in his Buddhist phase. And Plato's Socrates was later to be Hughes' bête noire, the arch-enemy of the muse, the triple goddess.

At this stage Yeats' poems became dialogues between Soul, which seeks to deliver him 'from the crime of death and birth', to deliver, that is, from the wheel of karma, and Self, which insists on re-entering the womb-door 'to live it all again' ['Dialogue of Self and Soul']. Self eventually triumphed, and for the rest of his life Yeats sent Plato and Plotinus packing and sang the praises of the natural world:

'Whatever stands in field or flood,
Bird, beast, fish or man,
Mare or stallion, cock or hen,
Stands in God's unchanging eye
In all the vigour of its blood;
In that faith I live or die.'

['Tom the Lunatic']

He resolves to 'seek those images / That constitute the wild ... Find in middle air / An eagle on the wing' ['Those Images']. At the very end of his life he is making the most sensual music, celebrating the Great God Pan, as in 'News for the Delphic Oracle' where 'nymphs and satyrs / Copulate in the foam'.

Even from this nutshell summary it will be seen that Hughes found in Yeats the seeds of much of his own future work, and that he trod essentially the same path, from rejection of nature to worship of it.

Even before going to Cambridge in 1951 Hughes had begun to read Jung. In a letter to Ekbert Faas he wrote: 'Yes, I met Jung early, and though I think I have read all the translated volumes, I've avoided knowing them too well, which no doubt frees me to use them all the more'⁹. Jung was steeped in the symbolism of complex mystical traditions such as Gnosticism, Alchemy, Kabala and Buddhism, all fields which Hughes was soon to explore and exploit. He was to use Jung's *Psychological Commentary* on the *Bardo Thodol* in his 1960 libretto. It was probably Jung who first introduced Hughes to the psychological interpretation of alchemy, and of the trickster figure.

Jung provided Hughes with a model of the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious:

We have known for a long time that there is a biological relationship between the unconscious processes and the activity of the conscious mind. This

⁹ Faas, Ekbert, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, 1980, 37.

relationship can best be described as a compensation, which means that any deficiency in consciousness — such as exaggeration, one-sidedness, or lack of a function — is suitably supplemented by an unconscious process. ... If such a compensatory move of the unconscious is not integrated into consciousness in an individual, it leads to a neurosis or even to a psychosis.¹⁰

This applied particularly to our image of God, or the creator. When God becomes a god of goodness, love and light *only*, the dark side of god, which won't go away, develops a life of its own, becomes a terrible burden of sin and guilt, a terrible impulse to hatred and violence, in the human unconscious. We are 'possessed'. This idea strongly influenced Hughes' reading of Shakespeare.

Jung believed that every human being inherited a racial memory, a primordial 'collective unconscious' (which Yeats called the *anima mundi*), in the form of a storehouse of potent symbols ('the matrix of all archetypes'), shared by all peoples at all times. These symbols he calls archetypes. When the archetypes are used to make stories, they are myths. These provide a template for our understanding of ourselves in the world, and our characteristic modern 'deficiency in consciousness' is partly a failure to attend to what the archetypes tell us about how to relate to nature inside and outside ourselves.

The unacknowledged contents of the unconscious (the 'shadow') are symbolized by snakes, dragons and monsters. The hero is the defender of the ego against the threat of these. This involves humanity in a perpetual, unwinnable war against Nature, for which the archetype is the mythic figure of the Goddess. The war is an internal one in the male psyche, since the Goddess is also the female part of every male psyche, which Jung called the anima. As in Graves' *The White Goddess*, the Goddess is triple, but indivisible, personified as a maiden, as a witch, and as the earth mother. The imbalanced, ego-bound consciousness cannot hold these in a unified vision.

Jung valued the symbol highly as providing the necessary third ground on which the otherwise polarized halves of the psyche could meet:

What the separation of the two psychic halves means, the psychiatrist knows only too well. He knows it as the dissociation of personality, the root of all neuroses; the conscious goes to the right and the unconscious to the left. As opposites never unite at their own level, a supraordinate 'third' is always required, in which the two parts can come together. And since the symbol derives as much from the conscious as the unconscious, it is able to unite

¹⁰ Jung, C. J., *Collected Works*, 20 vols., Princeton University Press, (Bollingen Series), 1953-1969; London, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1957-1979; vol. 10, 218, 220.

them both, reconciling their conceptual polarity through its form and their emotional polarity through its numinosity.¹¹

As well as the archetypes the collective unconscious provides us with many other things, including 'a living sense of the rhythm of growth, flowering and decay'¹². In *The Myth of the Goddess*, Baring and Cashford argue that in Neolithic times 'this vision was still a living reality and had not yet become a memory and a dream':

Jung, striving to restore to the psyche this forgotten knowledge of the unity and sacrality of all life, knew that the Neolithic experience is not dead and gone, but still lives on in us as the archaic ground of the twentieth-century psyche. It is found, for instance, in the spontaneous world of the child, which is lost with the adaptation to a desecralized society. [105]

Thus Jung provided Hughes with a rationale for his passion for fishing:

Jung used to say that most of his patients would be cured if only they could just reimmerge themselves in the primitive man or the primitive woman for five minutes. All the circuits would suddenly be reconnected. And they'd be restored to their real selves, their biological inheritance.¹³

Fishing, Hughes claimed, could 'reconnect you in a gentle, natural way'.

Jung believed that the imagination of the artist, especially the poet, could also restore this connection, was virtually defined by its capacity to do so:

The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present. ... He [the artist] has plunged into the healing and redeeming depths of the collective psyche.¹⁴

After leaving school Hughes had continued to send his poems to his former English master, John Fisher, who, familiar with his obsessions, gave him a copy of

¹¹ *Collected Works*, vol. 9 part 2, 180.

¹² Baring, Anne, and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, Viking, 1991, 42.

¹³ *Wild Steelhead and Salmon*, Winter 1999, 56.

¹⁴ *Collected Works*, vol.15, pp. 82, 105.

Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* when he went up to Cambridge in 1951. At first Hughes felt some resentment to find Graves 'taking possession of what I considered to be my secret patch'. But he 'soaked the book up' and kept it to hand throughout his university years. It had a profound and lasting impact on Hughes' sense of the poetic vocation, of the necessity, for the poet, of dedicating himself wholly to the service of the goddess, and the cost of doing so.

I suppose through Graves I began to see the whole thing had roots in biology — rather than in the fantasies of different or related nations, I began to see it more as a language in itself. Also, by chance I had started to read Jung before I did my National Service ... so I read Graves through Jung.

[*Letters* 679]

For Graves, the history of our civilization is that of 'the male intellect trying to make itself spiritually self-sufficient' [12], and 'the function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse' [14].¹⁵ In his postscript to the 1961 edition, Graves made clear that the Muse or White Goddess is a metaphor — a poetic 'language in itself', as opposed to a fantasy, or superstitious belief:

True poetic practice implies a mind so miraculously attuned and illuminated that it can form words, by a chain of more-than-coincidences, into a living entity — a poem that goes about on its own (for centuries after the author's death, perhaps) affecting readers with its stored magic. Since the source of poetry's creative power is not scientific intelligence, but inspiration — however this may be explained by scientists — one may surely attribute inspiration to the Lunar Muse, the oldest and most convenient European term for this source? By ancient tradition, the White Goddess becomes one with her human representative — a priestess, a prophetess, a queen-mother. No Muse-poet grows conscious of the Muse except by experience of a woman in whom the Goddess is to some degree resident. [490]

Graves equates a poet's first awareness of the Goddess with his first experience of 'the power of absolutely falling in love', and the pain of reconciling this adoration with the concomitant awareness of 'the cruel side of woman's nature'.¹⁶

The experience of sexual love is replicated in a poet's relationship with the fickle muse; and both are but small personal examples of the difficulty facing

¹⁵ Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, Faber, 1961, 12, 14.

¹⁶ When this postscript was published Hughes' ecstatic marriage to Sylvia Plath was already running into difficulties.

mankind when confronted by Nature herself, who is the source of all love, inspiration and creation, but simultaneously of suffering and mortality.

In conventional Western dualistic thought, which is determined by our dualistic language, the problem is easily dealt with. Nature is divided into the good, which we cherish because it is beautiful, recreational or useful, and the bad which we shoot, poison, ignore or bemoan. But the ‘language in itself’ of ‘true poetic practice’ seeks to avoid the suicidal consequences of dualism by finding metaphors which can contain, and even, possibly, reconcile, all Nature’s moods and powers, creative and destructive, beautiful and ugly, human and non-human, male and female, inner and outer ... One such all-purpose metaphor is that of the Triple Goddess, whose three manifestations are the pure maiden, the fertile, nurturing mother, and the foul crone or witch.

Graves quotes Apuleius’s invocation of the goddess in *The Golden Ass*: ‘O blessed Queen of Heaven, ... which art the original and motherly source of all fruitful things on the earth’ [71]. The goddess responds to his invocation:

I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in Hell, the principal of them that dwell in Heaven, manifested alone and under one form of all the gods and goddesses. [72]

She lays claim to the names Minerva, Venus, Diana, Infernal Proserpine, Ceres, Juno, Bellona, Hecate; but her true name is Isis, Mother of the Gods.¹⁷

Graves also quotes an invocation from a twelfth-century English herbal:

Earth, divine goddess, Mother Nature, who dost generate all things and bringest forth every anew the sun which thou hast given to the nations [73].

Montaigne refers to ‘our great and puissant mother Nature’, and Shakespeare to ‘great creating nature’.

Graves does not glamorize or sentimentalize the goddess. He stresses the difficulty of accepting as worthy of service what Joyce called ‘the sow that eats her own farrow’. She is at home with suffering and death. She is the even-handed goddess of creation and destruction:

The poet is in love with the White Goddess, with Truth: his heart breaks with longing and love for her. She is the Flower-goddess Olwen or

¹⁷ Hughes had a large poster of an engraving of Isis, with all her attributes listed, on the wall of his study. It was reproduced on the cover of the Rainbow Press *Poems: Ruth Fainlight, Ted Hughes, Alan Sillitoe* in 1971.

Blodeuwedd; but she is also Blodeuwedd the Owl, lamp-eyed, hooting dismally, with her foul nest in the hollow of a dead tree, or Circe the pitiless falcon, or Lamia with her flickering tongue, or the snarling-chopped Sow-goddess, or the mare-headed Rhiannon who feeds on raw flesh [448].

She would have horrified Wordsworth and Hopkins, had they dared to look on her. She horrified Coleridge and Tennyson who did. And she horrified Hughes.

Those who reject nature in horror Graves calls Apollonians, enemies of Dionysos:

Determined to escape from the dilemma, the Apollonian teaches himself to despise woman, and teaches woman to despise herself.

Graves continues:

Solomon's wit is bitterly succinct: 'The horse-leech's two daughters: *Give* and *Give*'. The horse-leech is a small fresh-water animal ... with thirty teeth in its jaws. When a beast goes down to a stream to drink, the leech swims into its mouth and fastens on the soft flesh at the back of its throat. It then sucks blood until completely distended, driving the beast frantic, and as a type of relentless greed gives its name to the Alukah, who is the Canaanite Lamia, or Succuba, or Vampire. The two daughters of Alukah are insatiable, like Alukah herself: and their names are Sheol and the Womb, or Death and Life. Solomon says, in other words: 'Women are greedy of children; they suck the vigour of their menfolk, like the Vampire; they are sexually insatiable; they resemble the horse-leech of the pond which plagues horses. And to what purpose are men born of women? Only in the end to die. The grave and woman are equally insatiable'. [448]

Samuel Beckett was the prime modern exponent of this position: 'We give birth astride of a grave'. *Waiting for Godot* was first performed in England in 1955, and first published in 1956, the year in which Hughes wrote 'The Hawk in the Rain':

I drag up
Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth's mouth,
From clay that clutches my each step to the ankle
With the habit of the dogged grave.

Graves stresses the strong association of the goddess with wind, which is both the breath of life and poetic inspiration. In 'Song of a Man Who Has Come

Through' Lawrence renounced his Apollonian ego: 'Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!'. There is a knocking at his door in the night, to which his Apollonian self responds: 'It is somebody wants to do us harm'; but his poetic self welcomes them:

No, no, it is the three strange angels.
Admit them, admit them.

In 'Wind' Hughes faces a similar choice, and reacts very differently:

Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts, and cannot entertain book, thought,
Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

He cannot relax his grip on the Apollonian certainties, the house whose thick walls keep out the elements, the creature comforts of chair and fire, the world of science and high culture, normal human relationships and responsibilities. If the window (the wind's eye) were to admit the wind, all that would be swept away, and Hughes is not yet ready to be so humbled. It is more than sanity and humanity can contemplate to let in to consciousness the 'wandering elementals', the 'looming horde' of demons normally kept safely shut away in the unconscious, 'beneath the floor of the heart'.

Historically, the Apollonian, seeking to separate himself 'from the erroneous material universe to live securely cloistered in his abstract city of light' [Graves 472], had succeeded in dispossessing the Goddess, with the dire consequences of war, concentration camps and atom bombs. *The White Goddess* is not a merely antiquarian eccentricity; it is Graves' heartfelt protest against materialism and the rupture between man and nature; a protest which could not be more topical half a century later.

All but a very few have ... come to the private conclusion that money, though the root of all evil, is the sole practical means of expressing value or of determining social precedence; that science is the only accurate means of describing phenomena; and that a morality of common honesty is not relevant either to love, war, business or politics. ... No: there seems no escape from our difficulties until the industrial system breaks down for some

reason or other, as it nearly did in Europe during the Second World War, and nature reasserts herself with grass and trees among the ruins. [476-82]

Man's 'irreligious improvidence' is rapidly exhausting 'the natural resources of the soil and sea' [486]. In such a world the poet can do no more than make 'a simple loving declaration: "None greater in the universe than the Triple Goddess!"' [492].

That was the ultimate message of *The White Goddess*. But, as Hughes later said of the shamanic role of the poet, 'everything among us is against it', including the poet's own sensibility and upbringing. The question which is to dominate the first third of his career is 'How can such a goddess, Nature, be worthy of worship?'

The early influence of Blake was just as deep and lasting. In 1956 Hughes wrote to Sylvia Plath:

Read Blake, as I divinely said last night, as antidote for all your Christian philosopher trash, and it is trash, all completely crooked, and shouldn't be given the name thought at all. [Letters 64]

Blake confirmed Hughes' own sense that every church had 'from the start been the perch of avarice, greed, cruelty, and tyranny'. Blake called God 'Nobodaddy' and 'father of jealousy':

Why darkness & obscurity
In all thy words & laws
That none dare eat the fruit but from
The wily serpents jaws. [‘To Nobodaddy’]

In the prophetic books God became Urizen, the tyrant, cruelly suppressing all manifestations of energy and freedom.

Blake's main objection to orthodox Christian philosophy was its dualism. The history of Western civilization can be written as the story of the disastrous consequences of dualism. Dualism began in the ancient world as a philosophical and religious idea which gradually filtered into general consciousness and into language to the point where, from the Renaissance onwards, it became almost impossible for educated Europeans to think in any but a dualistic way. Dualism is the belief that everything in life can be divided into two opposing principles or constituents: life and death, body and soul, male and female, light and dark,

summer and winter, and so on. Matter and spirit were seen as independent entities yoked together in life in violation of the essential nature of each.

About two thousand five hundred years ago, a remarkable change took place in man's concept of the gods, the movement towards monotheism, a single male godhead existing independently of the created universe as pure spirit. In its most extreme form this leads to the universal dichotomy of God on one side and the world, the flesh and the devil on the other. Dualism sunders god and nature. It also sunders male and female, encouraging man to frame concepts of militant heroism which ride roughshod over the female in all its manifestations. And it sunders mind from body.

Dualism might not have been so disastrous had it not so often involved value judgements. That is, one of the artificially separated components is usually labelled good and to be fostered, the other bad, to be eliminated or suppressed. Plato spoke of 'the pollution of the walking sepulchre which we call a body, to which we are bound like an oyster to its shell' [*Phaedrus* 57]. Thus man wages war against his own wholeness and the wholeness of his world, in the attempt to impose his own will, vain aspirations and blinkered vision on the world.

The word 'contrary' had a very specific and important meaning for Blake. Like almost all great poets, he was an enemy of dualism, which he saw as, indeed, 'completely crooked'. The Churches seemed to Blake the worst enemies of any true religion and morality. In Blake's time dualism had taken the Christian churches into the spiritually sterile cul-de-sac of preoccupation with sin, defined in obsessively sexual terms. Dualistic thinking is so built into our ordinary language, and the language of philosophy and theology, that the words hardly exist to enable us to think non-dualistically, holistically, that is in terms of systems, patterns, relationships, correspondences, interdependencies. But poetry is such a non-dualistic language, which is why poetry is invariably metaphorical, and the poet is the connection-man and healer. The language and vision not just of Blake but of poetry itself insists that the contraries are equally important and inseparable.

Creation and destruction, birth and death, for example, are not distinct warring opposites, but simply the ends of the same spectrum, neither possible without the other. Without both life would grind to a halt. Lawrence's image of the lion and the unicorn fighting for the crown is a perfect illustration. The lion and the unicorn represent body and spirit. If either triumphed, the crown, life itself, would crumble into ashes. The rhythm of their unending struggle is like the ebb and flow of the sea, the systole and diastole of a heart.

The word Blake coined to try to express his sense of this was 'contraries'. 'Without contraries is no progression', he wrote:

- All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors: 1. That Man has two real existing principles: Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
 3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.
- But the following Contraries to these are True:
1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd body is portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
 2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
 3. Energy is Eternal Delight.¹⁸ [The Marriage of Heaven and Hell]

Blake sought to transform the energies which dualism diverts into violence into creative energies, moving towards mutual acceptance, reconciliation, harmony, expressed in imagery of music and marriage. One of Blake's symbols of contraries held in wholeness was the rainbow, anticipating both Lawrence and Hughes. He was prepared to take on this difficult task even in relation to the most polarized and apparently most mutually exclusive contraries, as he indicated in his subversive title *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Hughes believed from the start that 'the strongest single determinant of a person's poetic imagination is the state of negotiations between that person and their idea of the Creator'¹⁹. He would have found in Blake's 'The Tyger' an example of how such negotiation can make a great poem. Blake inherited an idea of the Creator which seemed to him impossibly selective and sentimental, a God exclusively of the New Testament, of the infant Jesus meek and mild, divinity energy in its most loving and loveable incarnation. He needed to confront and acknowledge the contrary of the lamb to see if it is possible to come to terms with that, to formulate an idea of God which could accommodate tigers. Blake conjures up therefore a sort of demonic essence of tiger, which the poet, shielding his face in awe, interrogates. The poem has eleven question marks, and is in the interrogative mood throughout. The questions are all variants of the same question: what god do we have to imagine capable of conceiving of a tiger, forging it, grasping the fire, clasping the deadly terrors necessary in the actual creation of it. What sort of god would even want to create tigers? Certainly not the loving gentle god of the Christian tradition.

¹⁸ Blake: *Complete Writings*, ed. Keynes, Oxford University Press, 1974, 149.

¹⁹ *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, ed. Scammell, Faber and Faber, 1994, 109.

The tiger is raw, destructive, terrifying energy, like the God of *Job*, who specifically identifies himself with thunder and lightning, with such monstrous creations as Behemoth and Leviathan, and with the eagle on the crag:

From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off.
Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.

The stars do not burn. They glitter with a cold reflected light. They exist above and beyond this world. That they have spears suggests that their function is to defend heaven from hell. They glitter like a heavenly army bristling with gleaming weapons. They seem therefore to symbolize the cold light of reason attempting to control and subjugate the rebellious energies of the nether world. But the tiger outshines and appals them, so that they throw down their weapons and weep in abject surrender. Reason is no match for energy or desire unless it can be somehow chained (as it usually is in human beings). Blake distinguishes clearly between reason, which is reductive, mechanical and visionless, and wisdom, which sees the need for balance, inclusiveness, and therefore does not ultimately desire a world in which lions lie down with lambs. As Blake says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, ‘tygers of wrath’ are wiser than ‘horses of instruction’ (perhaps a dig at Swift’s Houyhnhnms).

What God says to Job about Leviathan could equally be said of Blake’s tiger:

I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportion.
Who can open the doors of his face? His teeth are terrible round about.
When he raiseth up himself, the mighty are afraid: by reason of breakings
they purify themselves.
The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, not the
habergeon.
Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear.
Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear.
He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.
[*Job*, 41:29]

None of the poem’s questions implies an answer. Each question increases the inconceivability of an answer. Yet Blake assumes that there must be an answer; that the tiger itself constitutes an answer, could one but get one’s mind round it, get past the mental block of terror. And that terror is also somehow a form of exultation. The tiger’s symmetry is simultaneously fearful and incredibly beautiful. It is a creature of the forests of the night where sunshine never penetrates; yet it

burns brightly with a fierce flame. Its light and heat must be generated entirely from within. The brightness is spirit; the burning is body-heat, incarnate energy. The tiger's hide is the outward showing of its perfect inner balance, so that one cannot tell whether it is bright tongues of flame against a background of darkness or dark stripes against a background of fire.

The deadly dualism which still causes us to divide the divine creation into the acceptable (the prey) and the unacceptable (the predator) applies equally in the sphere of morality, where the more fiery human passions, such as desire, are rejected as sins. To Blake nothing natural is evil; but the healing of this dualistic split in the human psyche requires nothing less than a marriage of heaven (light) and hell (darkness) in perfect symmetry, like the fearful symmetry of a tiger's skin, burning against its own darkness. Claudio Naranjo, speaking of the tiger as an archetypal dream image, comments: 'the tiger by no means stands for mere hostility, but for a fluid synthesis of aggression and grace and a full acceptance of the life-impulse beyond moral judgement'.²⁰ This is the synthesis and acceptance Blake sought.

Hughes was to take up exactly Blake's line of questioning in 'The Tyger', and make it perhaps his central theme. His tiger is

At the junction of beauty and danger ...
At the paradoxical cross-junction
Of good and evil, and beyond both.
... He balances modestly
The bloodmarks of his canvas
And the long-grass dawn beauty. [‘Tiger’²¹]

Hughes responded to many of Blake's writings and ideas, but his concept of fourfold vision is of particular interest, since this seems to provide a template for Hughes' own subsequent poetic journey.

Single vision, in Blake's terminology is fallen vision, fallen, that is, from an assumed original, primal, unified vision, symbolized by Eden. At the Fall, which is both a curse we inherit and a process we reenact in every life, man is assumed to lose his ability to perceive anything in the spiritual dimension, anything as holy or miraculous. Hence it is a fall into sterile materialism and rationalism. He is assumed to lose his innocence, which is not simply his ignorance and inexperience but his flexibility, openness to experience, good faith, capacity for spontaneous authentic living; to lose his access to the Energies, either within himself or without.

²⁰ Harner, Michael J., *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, Oxford University Press, 1973, 185.

²¹ *Ted Hughes: Collected Poems for Children*, Faber and Faber, 2005, 128.

Fallen man lives a second-hand life, a living death, in a self-made world of false rigidities and mechanisms of thinking and feeling and seeing.

Single vision cannot see wholes, only fragments. It is analytic, compartmentalizing. It cannot see relationships and patterns and wholes, and is therefore solipsistic, reductive and dehumanizing, at the mercy of time and chance and death. Single vision is alienated, hubristic selfhood, and the achievement of twofold, threefold and fourfold vision are therefore stages in the annihilation of the self. The purpose is to regain Paradise — but it will not be the same Paradise. The new Paradise will be 'organized innocence' and atonement on the far side of experience and suffering and many inner deaths. Single vision has been Western man's common condition throughout historical time. Artists and prophets have always cried out against it. Only the symptoms change from age to age, and the artist must diagnose them afresh, for the new symptoms are usually hailed as signs of 'progress'. Blake saw the symptoms in the late eighteenth century as the deification of reason and the five senses (Locke), mechanistic science (Newton), the increasingly repressive Puritanism of the churches, and the first mills of the Industrial Revolution.

Blake's use of the suffix 'fold' implies that each stage depends upon and then subsumes the former. That is, the recovery of true vision, whereby we shall see things as they really are, can only be achieved by passing through all four stages, and in this order. Stage one is the recognition of the all-pervading symptoms of single vision as such, of the need to undertake the psychic or spiritual journey out of its dark prison, and to engage it in a lifelong battle. Stage two is the release of the energies which will be needed for this battle and this journey, energies which, denied and repressed, have become 'reptiles of the mind'. Stage three is the recovery of innocence. Stage four, the recovery of unified vision, will be a vision of the holiness of everything that lives.

What I am suggesting here is that Hughes' career has taken him this very route — not in a straight line, not without temporary diversions and retreats— there are endless recapitulations. The vision once achieved is not subsequently 'on tap': it has to be won again every time. If it is taken for granted, if short cuts are taken, it loses its validity. Every insight must be paid for. Nevertheless, looking at Hughes' poetic career, the paradigm fits. Hughes' embodiment of single vision was 'Egg-Head'; the Energies of twofold vision maraud in 'wind', and throughout *Lupercal*, where the title poem is a ritual attempt to control them; threefold vision is the innocence of 'Wodwo' and 'Full Moon and Little Frieda'; *Cave Birds* and the *Gaudete* epilogue poems strive for fourfold vision, and finally achieve it in *River*.

The most affirmative lines in *The Hawk in the Rain* are the last lines of 'The Dove Breeder', where the destructive hawk in a dovecote is transformed by the dove breeder's acceptance of love:

Now he rides the morning mist
With a big-eyed hawk on his fist.

Hughes was soon to learn that love is an energy not so easily tamed. For the bird-protagonist of *Cave Birds* there is a hard-earned rebirth as a risen falcon; but the poem ends with lines: 'But when will he land on a man's wrist?' Blake's image of thwarted energies is a dragon writhing in a stormy sea. It seems impossible that human vision could ever be reconciled with such energies: the equivalent of a hawk landing on a man's wrist would be for the dragon to lay its head on a man's shoulder or a woman's breast. Yet this is precisely what happens in Blake's *Jerusalem*.

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake wrote:

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? [Keynes, 150]

To restrict perception to the five senses seemed to Blake a willful blindness. He sought a vision employing all his faculties, and that he called imagination. The immense world that opened to him was the world of spirits, which he believed, though acknowledging them to be entirely 'mental' and subjective, to be more real than 'corporeal' things, whose existence he called an 'imposture'. He imagines himself challenged by the man of single vision: "What. When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?" To which Blake replies: "O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty'" [*Vision of the Last Judgement*].

Hughes did not follow Blake in this direction. He was, throughout his life, extremely superstitious; but, apart from *Birthday Letters*, this is surprisingly absent from his poetry. He spoke of 'the objective world where my talent really belongs' [*Letters*, 274]. He does frequently speak of spirit, and of angels and demons. He claims that inside each of us is imprisoned another, far truer being:

And in fact this other rarely speaks or stirs at all, in the sort of lives we now lead. We have so totally lost touch, that we hardly realize he is absent. All we know is that somehow or other the great, precious thing is missing. And the real distress of our world begins there. The luminous spirit (maybe he is

a crowd of spirits), that takes account of everything and gives everything its meaning, is missing. ... Once when his spirits were dictating poetic material to Yeats, an owl cried outside the house, and the spirits paused. After a while one said: 'We like that sort of sound'. And that is it: 'that sort of sound' makes the spirits listen. It opens our deepest and innermost ghost to sudden attention. It is a spirit, and it speaks to spirit. [*Winter Pollen*, 124-5]

Hughes may seem to be very close to Blake here, but I believe the resemblance is deceptive. The 'other' of which Hughes speaks is neither a supernatural spirit being nor a detachable soul. The innermost ghost, on the contrary, is precisely that primeval, buried and silenced self (a demon or daimon) which is our only means of communicating with truth. But Hughes' divinity is the Great Goddess, and she is Nature, incarnate life on earth — which was blasphemy to Blake. If we can pay attention to the voice of this spirit, what it tells us is how to live, how to relate to the rest of creation.²² Hughes had no difficulty in expressing the same thing in natural rather than supernatural terms:

Psychoanalysis re-established, as its first principle, the ancient and formerly divine first law of psychodynamics, which states: any communion with that other personality, especially when it does incorporate some form of the true self, is healing, and redeems the suffering of life, and releases joy. [275]

If the word 'divinity' also requires comment, Hughes himself has defined his use of it:

The word 'divine', with its relatives, can never be more than a convenient finger-post pointing towards those orders of experience which mankind goes on stumbling into, in terror and awe, even while he argues about them in terms of brain rhythms and brain chemistry. [285]

Those 'orders of experience', he would claim, are perfectly natural, in fact at the very heart of nature.

²² Yeats himself was open to the full range of possible explanations, natural and supernatural, of the 'spirits' or 'instructors' who spoke to him through his wife's automatic writing.

One philosopher whose atheistic and Buddhist-inspired ideas did qualify as thought for Hughes at that time, and captured his imagination, was Schopenhauer. In 1956 Hughes wrote to Plath:

Schopenhauer somewhere talks about the English Philosophers and laments the way they all have Religion, and a stupid allegiance to some dogmatic egotist of the post-Christ school, that standing in the midst of their thought like a great rock, and fouls all the free-flowing currents. [Letters 64]

In his 1970 Faas interview Hughes recalled:

The only philosophy I have ever really read was Schopenhauer. He impressed me all right. You see very well where Nietzsche got his Dionysus. It was a genuine vision of something on its way back to the surface. The rough beast in Yeats' poems. [Faas 205]

Hughes read with excitement David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*, a fictional embodiment of Manichean and Schopenhaurian ideas. In the 'Leehallfae' chapter, the protagonist, Maskull, wanders into a strange valley:

With its deafening confusion of sounds from the multitude of living creatures, the little valley resembled a vast conversation-hall of Nature. The life was still more prolific than before ; every square foot of space was a tangle of stuggling wills, both animal and vegetable. ... Maskull sang no paeans of praise in honour of the gloriously-overcrowded valley. On the contrary, he felt deeply cynical and depressed. He thought that the unseen Power — whether it were called Nature, Life, Will, or God — which was so frantic to rush forward and occupy this small, vulgar, contemptible world, could not possess very high aims and was not worth much. How this sordid struggle for an hour or two of physical existence could ever be regarded as a deeply-earnest and important business, was beyond his comprehension.²³

Yeats, too, rejected the sensual music of nature:

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees

²³ Lindsay, David, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, Savoy Books, 2002, 219-20 .

survival-focus, the woad is driven into a peculiarly intellectual ferment by having 'been given the freedom of this place'. Its question 'What am I?' leads it to examine its position vis-à-vis the rest of nature not in self-defence, but as a matter of classifying itself and of orienting itself within a sort of conceptual geography. [10]

Another text, with an opposite charge, which imprinted itself very early on Hughes' consciousness as a defining template for his role as poet was *The Bacchae* of Euripides.²⁵ There an Apollonian ruler Pentheus (what we would call a male chauvinist and control freak) is confronted by a beautiful young man with a band of female followers, who claims to be the god Dionysos himself. Pentheus despises women and has no time for gods. Dionysos undertakes to demonstrate to him that he is a god, claiming that what he stands for is an absolute — something humanity cannot afford not to acknowledge without an inevitable collapse into madness and destruction. To deny the god is, in fact, to go mad. At their first confrontation Dionysos says to him:

I am sane, you are mad.

You do not know what life you live, or what you do, or who you are. [197]

Dionysos' 'holy band of revellers' exemplify perfect sanity and wholeness, in constant communion with the natural world:

And, like a foal with its mother at pasture,

Runs and leaps for joy every daughter of Bacchus. [186]

Their rituals are acts of atonement between humanity and the whole non-human creation, the 'brute wildness' of the mountains and their flora and fauna. The puritanical Pentheus accuses them of mere licentiousness. When all the women (and several men, including the former ruler Cadmus and the seer Tiresias) leave Thebes to join the Bacchae, Pentheus, in the name of reason, civilization and good order, but in fact driven by his hubristic ego, threatens to 'hunt them down'. He is warned not to invite the fate of Actaeon, torn to pieces by his own hounds. Pentheus' threat to mobilize an army to slaughter the women transforms them into an army which finally slaughters him.

²⁵ All quotations are from Euripides, *The Bacchae*, trans. Vellacott, Penguin 1954.

When he imprisons Dionysos, the god, hitherto all gentleness and sweet reason, responds by becoming a giant bull which brings the whole palace crashing down. Pentheus has himself transformed Dionysos ('most gentle to mankind') into 'a god of terror irresistible' [208]. All Dionysos has to do to let Pentheus destroy himself, is to hypnotize him into a state in which he acts out all his secret desires: 'Come, perverse man, greedy for sights you should not see, impatient for deeds you should not do — Pentheus! '[210] Pentheus is the typical Puritan nursing unacted desires, secretly lusting to do deeds for which he would slaughter others. It needs the merest nudge from Dionysos to trigger what Jung calls enantiodromia, a sudden psychic transformation whereby the whole psyche, having become intolerably one-sided, suddenly turns upside down and becomes its own opposite. So the fiercely puritanical and anti-feminine Pentheus suddenly becomes a voyeur and transvestite.

Euripides saw with amazing clarity the madness, the suicidal folly of it. Pentheus is the new man, claiming self-sufficiency, claiming to have no need of anything beyond his own intelligence. Dionysos appears in the play as a new god, but is in fact the oldest of gods, Nature herself, renewed. Some of his cult titles were: Power in the Tree, Blossom Bringer, Fruit Bringer, and Abundance of Life. In the play, Dionysos remains in his dark prison for only a few minutes. Those minutes encapsulate twenty-four centuries from that day to this. For Pentheus is the modern consciousness, ourselves, almost any of our legislators, businessmen, academics, busy despiritualizing the world for all he is worth in the name of reason, order, the 'standard of living', progress.

Euripides told us very early the price we should have to pay for such 'civilization' — in war, crime, mental and emotional breakdown, pollution. But we have gone on insisting that the world, nature, our own bodies and feelings, are there to do what we like with, to exploit and degrade and disfigure and suppress... Is it now too late to reverse the direction of all those centuries and honour Dionysos, whatever name we choose to give him now?

According to E.R. Dodds in 1951:

His domain is not only the liquid fire in the grape, but the sap thrusting in a young tree, the blood pounding in the veins of a young animal, all the mysterious and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature. ... To resist Dionysos is to repress the elemental in one's own nature; the punishment is the sudden complete collapse of the inward dykes when the elemental breaks through perforce and civilization vanishes.²⁶

²⁶ Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the Irrational*, California University Press, 1951, 273.

But at the time when Hughes first read the play that was by no means the received interpretation. In his introduction to the 1954 Penguin translation, Philip Vellacott, following Winnington-Ingram's *Euripides and Dionysos* (1948), gave a diametrically opposite reading, stating that Dionysus is 'not one whom decent people will be prepared to worship':

His nature is not merely amoral but bestial, and hostile to the highest human values which the slow progress of man has won to distinguish him from beasts. ... *The Bacchae* is a play written to convey a solemn warning against a real danger; how real, the parallel of our own time, the growth of mass hysteria, the cult of violence, the spread of credulity, the 'flight from reason', all bring home to us. [27-8]

He goes on to claim that the Nazis 'were in some essentials Dionysiac; and the disease which produced them is not yet dead'.²⁷

This was the prevalent mindset confronting Hughes in his student years, and he was not yet himself entirely immune to it. It would have been fascinating to read *The House of Taurus* (1959), which Plath described as 'a symbolic drama based on the Euripides play *The Bacchae*, only set in a modern industrial community under a paternalistic ruler' [Plath (1975) 355]. Unfortunately, this was subsequently 'scrapped', which probably means, quite literally, used as scrap paper. In a 1970 interview Hughes said 'While we [poets] struggle with a fragmentary Orestes some complete Bacchae moves past too deep down to hear'. *Gaudete* was to be the nearest Hughes came to *The Bacchae* in his own work.

On reading Lawrence's collected essays in *Phoenix* in 1984 Hughes found them 'straight oxygen' [*Letters*, 487]. That phrase reminded me of a sentence in a letter Lawrence wrote to Catherine Carswell in the deathly spring of 1918:

We found some very lovely big cowslips, whose scent is really a communication direct from the source of creation — like the breath of God breathed into Adam. [Collected Letters III, 240-1]

Like Lawrence, Hughes found that he had a gift for receiving such communications from nature, and that they were the most precious things in life.

²⁷ To his great credit, Vellacott was later to repudiate this interpretation.

But for a poet receiving them is only half the battle, the easy half. The real challenge is how to transmit this life-giving oxygen to readers.

Hughes learned from Lawrence a faithfulness and humility before nature, a reluctance to process, label or compartmentalize it. How, for example, can Lawrence render in words not simply the colour of a flower, but the swing of his own heart the first time he sees a wild gentian, ‘so blue, so much more than heaven blue’?²⁸ Hughes is almost silenced by the colour of the harebell, whose veins ‘any known name of blue would bruise / Out of existence’ [‘Still Life’].

Lawrence, Hughes claimed, was the only English writer completely free of ‘the great plastic megaphone mask of English ...which acts automatically as a censor & suppressant of any real material’ [Letters 487]. What he meant by that is explained by a passage in *A Choice of Shakespeare’s Verse*, where he claims that it was

bad luck for Shakespeare’s language that the crippled court-artifice of Restoration speech should have been passed on to the military garrison of the Empire, where the desirable ideal of speech for all Englishmen became the shrunken, atrophied, suppressive-of-everything-under, bluffing, debonair, frivolous system of vocal team-calls which we inherit as Queen’s English.²⁹

Lawrence alone seems to have escaped all that. His language is, at its best, able to transmit the pure oxygen of his experience even in prose. In his verse even more so. In his anthology *The Rattle Bag* Hughes included more poems by Lawrence than by any other poet except Blake and Hardy.

That oxygen was badly needed by the young in the post-war years, as the stifling pre-war hypocrisies gradually reasserted themselves. A great draught of it was provided by one man. Hughes went up to Cambridge in 1951. The previous year John Lane had single-handedly revived D. H. Lawrence’s lapsed reputation by publishing almost his complete works in Penguin to mark the twentieth anniversary of his death. In almost every undergraduate’s room there would be a few of these Lawrence texts. Hughes told Ekbert Faas in 1970 that, except for a few of the poems, he had read Lawrence entire in his teens: ‘His writings coloured a whole period of my life’. Of Lawrence and Blake he said: ‘If I could dig to the bottom of my strata maybe their names and works would be the deepest traces’ [Faas, 202]. He wrote to Nick Gammage:

²⁸ *Mr Noon*, ed. Vasey, Cambridge University Press, 1984, 109.

²⁹ *A Choice of Shakespeare’s Verse*, Faber and Faber, 1971, 198. When this introduction was reprinted in *Winter Pollen*, Hughes toned down this passage.

Inevitably a writer like Lawrence, who brought to consciousness and formulated so much that was coming to life in the country as a whole, is blended into the cultural air we breathe. It is not easy to know what is our own, and what came through him.³⁰

What Lawrence offered to those undergraduates in the early fifties was a blast of fresh air, particularly in relation to sex. Hughes no doubt responded to that as eagerly as the rest of us. But he probably responded even more eagerly to what Lawrence had to say about what modern man had done to nature, bewailing the death of Pan³¹ and the consequent ‘dominion of man over the cosmos, through the collective effort of Mind’³² :

The old religion of the profound attempt of man to harmonize himself with nature, and hold his own and come into flower in the great seething of life, changed with the Greeks and Romans into a desire to resist nature, to produce a mental cunning and a mechanical force that would outwit Nature and chain her down completely, completely, till at last there should be nothing free in nature at all, all should be controlled, domesticated, put to man’s meaner uses. [*Etruscan Places*, 130]

Lawrence and Hughes came from very similar backgrounds: working-class families in heavily industrialized communities, but within walking distance of unspoiled countryside to which they would escape as often as possible. Each was very knowledgeable about the local flora and fauna, and would frequently alert friends to the flower or bird’s nest they would otherwise have missed. Each attended a non-conformist church, a nearby grammar school, and university. Each would organize readings from the classics in the homes of his friends. Each recognized very early the interdependence of all living things, and the frailty of man in the cosmos. Each became, from direct experience, the enemy of everything which had conspired to enslave people and degrade nature.

Many of Lawrence’s fundamental tenets became also Hughes’ — his opposition to rationalism, humanism, and certain aspects of science; his insistence on the sacredness of Nature; his belief that at some time in ancient history there had been a fall, into self-consciousness and hubristic materialism, into knowledge,

³⁰ ‘The Nature of the Goddess: Ted Hughes and Robert Graves’, in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves*, ed. Quinn, Susquehanna University Press, 1999, 149.

³¹ See the chapter ‘Lawrence and the Resurrection of Pan’ in my *Literature and the Crime Against Nature*.

³² Lawrence, D.H., *Apocalypse*, ed. Mara Kalnins, Cambridge University Press, 1980, 196 .

Hughes was to write:

And society is in perpetual turmoil with the efforts of this huge suffering lump of vital shut-away truths to escape and speak, and with our efforts to release it and hear it. ...Some animals and birds express this being pure and without effort, and then you hear the whole desolate, final actuality of existence in a voice, a tone. There we really do recognize a spirit, a truth under all truths. Far beyond human words.³⁵

‘Dark’ is a very common word in both Lawrence and Hughes. In *The Rainbow* Ursula comes to realize that her familiar world of consciousness and knowledge is no more than an artificially illuminated circle in the middle of a limitless forest:

The darkness wheeled round about, with grey shadow-shapes of wild beasts, and also with dark shadow-shapes of the angels, whom the light fenced out, as it fenced out the more familiar beasts of darkness. And some, having for a moment seen the darkness, saw it bristling with the tufts of the hyena and wolf; and some, having given up their vanity of the light, having died in their own conceit, saw the gleam in the eyes of the wolf and the hyena, that it was the flash of the sword of angels, flashing at the door to come in, that the angels in the darkness were lordly and terrible and not to be denied, like the flash of fangs.³⁶

Man, if he were not afraid, could look into the darkness either outward or inward. The artist is the courageous pioneer, on behalf of the race, into that terra incognita, ‘the everlasting hinterland of consciousness’.

Man is always, all the time and forever, on the brink of the unknown. The minute you realize this, you prick your ears in alarm. And the minute any man steps alone, with his whole naked self, emotional and mental, into the everlasting hinterland of consciousness, you hate him and you wonder over him. Why can’t he stay cosily playing word games around the camp fire.³⁷

³⁵ *Winter Pollen*, ed. Scammell, Faber and Faber, 1994, 124-5.

³⁶ *The Rainbow*, ed. Kinkead-Weekes, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 406.

³⁷ *Phoenix*, Penguin 1978, 323.

Something drove Hughes from childhood away from the security of the camp fire to explore the surrounding darkness.

Looking into the darkness came to mean also for Lawrence coming to terms with death. The blue of a gentian was for him an image of life's fullest flowering: 'what in you can answer to this blueness?' ['Flowers and Men'] But that blueness depends on a deeper, darker blue within and beyond the flamboyant fringes, which suggests to him the 'marriage of the living dark' on which all life depends, the reunion of all living things with the source in death:

A lifelong empathy with plants has made it possible for Lawrence to see that life's flowering does not originate in Persephone's escape to the fields of Enna but — as the Greeks knew — in the embrace of Pluto: the living dark which is the source of all life, not least that of the poetic imagination.³⁸

Hughes' 'descent into destruction' was to be a more lurid and terrifying experience, but perhaps, ultimately, fertilizing. In his *Orpheus*, the hero cannot recover his dead wife from Pluto in the body, but her spirit enables him to compose a far truer music than the music of happiness only:

The music of birth and death,
The music of the earth, swaddled in heaven,
Kissed by its cloud and watched by its ray.³⁹

In the year before Lawrence was born T.H. Huxley had published *Evolution and Ethics*, where he claimed that the purpose of education was 'the application of [man's] intelligence to the adaptation of the conditions of life to his higher needs'.⁴⁰ In Lawrence's adulthood that was still the received wisdom, and had become the basis of our entire urban industrial society. Pantheism meant either something archaic or something to do with the Wordsworthian pieties. It had nothing to do with the realities of modern life. It was certainly not a serious option as a religion for the twentieth century. Lawrence took it upon himself to make it so. It was a Herculean task at a time when nature seemed to be disappearing under the 'century-deep deposits of layer upon layer of refuse: even of tin cans'⁴¹, when the machine seemed to have triumphed utterly, when H.G. Wells and the majority for whom he spoke complacently assumed that history was the story of man's progress towards the triumph of mind over both nature and human nature. In the year before

³⁸ Mahood, M.M., *The Poet as Botanist*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 225.

³⁹ *Plays for Children*, Faber and Faber, 2001, 105.

⁴⁰ T.H. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*, Macmillan, 1894, 44.

⁴¹ *St. Mawr*, ed. Finney, Cambridge University Press, 1983, 151.

Lawrence wrote *St. Mawr* Wells had published *Men Like Gods* in which he argued that man should 'bring to trial' every other creature, from the rhinoceros to the tubercle bacillus, and either bring it into line with his requirements or get rid of it.

In the 1950s Kingsley Amis was expressing a preference for 'woods devoid of beasts' ['Against Romanticism'] and echoing, in poems like 'Here is Where', Socrates' view that 'the people in the city have something to teach me, but the fields and trees won't teach me anything' [Plato, 26]. It seems this was still a common view as recently as 1969, when Patricia Merivale stated that 'later writers [than Lawrence] have taken no interest in the Pan-Christ dialectic, or the closely related theme of the death of Pan, or the Romantic transcendental Pan' and that 'Pan is unlikely to become a literary fashion or a public myth again'⁴². Lawrence is assumed to be the last Romantic in this respect, the last writer to try to take Pan seriously. Yet within a year Ted Hughes, reviewing a book on ecology, was invoking Pan in exactly Lawrence's sense:

When the modern mediumistic artist looks into his crystal, he sees always the same thing. He sees the last nightmare of mental disintegration and spiritual emptiness ... But he may see something else. He may see a vision of Eden, 'excellent as at the first day', the draughty radiant Paradise of the animals, which is the actual earth, in the actual Universe: he may see Pan ... the vital, somewhat terrible spirit of natural life, which is new in every second.
[*Winter Pollen*, 129-30]

Lawrence took to be a defining characteristic of the greatest writers

this setting behind the small action of [their] protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature; setting a smaller system of morality, the one grasped and formulated by human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself, surpassing human consciousness.
[*Study*, 29]

This was the aspect of Hughes to which Seamus Heaney drew attention at his memorial service: 'That sense of the world was epic and stern, in that it constantly beheld behind the business of the usual, a sacred drama being enacted'.

Hughes was to create a series of such protagonists: his egg-head, man seeking experience, and six young men; Dick Straightup, Crag Jack and Dully Gumption; Wodwo and Little Frieda; Crow, Prometheus, Jack Orchard, Nicholas

⁴² *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times*, Harvard University Press, 1969, 218, 228.

Lumb, Adam, the nameless protagonist of *Cave Birds*, and finally himself, wading in underbeing in *River* and helpless under the governance of fixed stars in *Birthday Letters*.

The poets represented in *New Lines*⁴³, who, since the poetic silence of Eliot and the death of Dylan Thomas, were most of the poets of any standing, chose a strikingly Apollonian stance in relation to nature.⁴⁴ Eliot and Thomas, opposites as they were in many obvious ways, were essentially the same kind of poet, the kind who believe that poetry, as the language of the imagination, has prophetic and healing powers not to be confined within 'a rational structure and comprehensible language' [Conquest xv], that the poet is the connection man who tries to heal the disabling split of dualism, and that the proper subject matter of the poet is first and last things, and the relation between man and the rest of creation.

The *New Lines* poets wanted no more of this, and even blamed such poetry for Hiroshima and Nagasaki ('Rejoinder to a Critic'). Poetry should play safe, turn its back on the non-human world ('Here is Where'). Poets should write about ordinary everyday things in language which differs from conversation only in that it scans. In a poem called 'Reason for not writing orthodox nature poetry', John Wain mocks the idea that 'God and Nature must be hand in glove', says, of Tennyson, that 'his truth to Nature fits him like a shroud', and describes those who 'devoutly hymn the land' as 'a useless band'. In 'I Remember, I Remember' Philip Larkin (despite his admiration for Lawrence) scorns poets who 'invent / Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits'.

Two poems in particular seem to be addressed to the as-yet-unknown Ted Hughes. Kingsley Amis' 'Against Romanticism' reads like a verbal barricade desperately erected against the looming Hughes:

A traveller who walks a temperate zone
— Woods devoid of beasts, roads that please the foot —
Finds that its decent surface grows too thin:
Something unperceived fumbles at his nerves.
To please an ingrown taste for anarchy
Torrid images circle in the wood,
And sweating for recognition up the road,

⁴³ *New Lines*, ed. Conquest, Macmillan, 1956.

⁴⁴ For a full examination of the opposite positions of Hughes and the *New Lines* poets, see Annie Schofield, 'Hughes and the Movement' in Sagar [1983].

Cramming close the air with their bookish cries.
All senses then are glad to gasp: the eye
Smear'd with garish paints, tickled up with ghosts
That brandish warnings or an abstract noun;
Melodies from shards, memories from coal,
Or saws from powered tombstones thump the ear ...
Over all, a grand meaning fills the scene,
And sets the brain raging with prophecy.

John Holloway warns his guest not to go down to the sea at night: 'It makes no place for those ... who, to sustain our pose, / Need wine and conversation, colour and light':

[I] know, from knowing myself, that you will be
Quick to people the shore, the fog, the sea,
With all the fabulous
Things of the moon's dark side. [‘Warning to a Guest’]

This poem is similar to ‘Wind’, where Hughes fears that everything which defines a civilized human life — ‘book, thought, and each other’ — is under threat. Holloway also fears that exposure to the wandering elementals would destroy his Apollonian pose — ‘wine and conversation, colour and light’. The difference is that Hughes felt it to be his essential commitment as a poet, a votary of the White Goddess, to expose himself to ‘the moon’s dark side’.

In a 1970 interview Hughes commented on the *New Lines* poets:

One of the things those poets had in common I think was the post-war mood of having had enough ... enough rhetoric, enough overweening push of any kind, enough of the dark gods, enough of the id, enough of the Angelic powers and the heroic efforts to make new worlds. They’d seen it all turn into death camps and atomic bombs. All they wanted was to get back into civvies and get home to the wife and kids and for the rest of their lives not a thing was going to interfere with a nice cigarette and a nice view of the park. ... Now I came a bit later. I hadn’t had enough. I was all for opening negotiations with whatever happened to be out there.⁴⁵

Hughes did go down to the sea, and what he found there were ghost crabs.

⁴⁵ Faas, Ekbert, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, 1980, 201.

©Keith Sagar 2009. Quotations should be acknowledged in the following form:
Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation'*, www.keithsagar.co.uk, 2009,
page number.