Chapter 5 Interim: 'The Great Theme: Notes on Shakespeare', 'Myth and Education', 'The Environmental Revolution'.

The years immediately following the deaths of Assia and Shura produced very little poetry. Hughes did, however, publish in 1970 and 1971 several prose statements which revealed his changing attitude to nature. He had begun to feel that a high proportion of potential readers of his poetry had so lost touch with the natural world, with the 'natural man' within, who engages imaginatively with that world, and with the body of literature, myth and folklore which embodies the history of the race in its dealings with nature, that 'the hidden background of my poems is so unfamiliar to most likely readers, that there's more and more of a possibility that they might become wholly incomprehensible'[1]. He came to regard his essays and interviews as a means of providing 'some sort of background' which might be an aid to understanding the poems, and a translation and formulation of ideas embedded as raw experience in the poems. A large proportion of that background was grounded in Hughes' long and deep familiarity with Shakespeare.

In February 1969 Hughes wrote to Charles Monteith asking if he might edit *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* for Faber. In his outline he made no mention of any accompanying essay, but it seems to me that without it, producing 'a single portable book where I can read all my favourite passages from the plays'[2], when he was in the thick of writing *Crow*, would hardly have commanded his attention. It may well be that writing the essay was an attempt to use Shakespeare to validate the direction in which *Crow* was going, or to help him determine that direction. Graham Bradshaw has noted that

> Hughes' complex creative engagement with Shakespeare is *Crow*'s critical twin — as we might expect, on noticing how close Hughes' account of Shakespeare's 'symbolic fable' is to the creative myth in *Crow.*[3]

Bradshaw draws attention to the ways in which *Crow* and the essay illuminate each other:

> Crow, the contemporary of Zbigniew Herbert's Pan Cogito, picks his way through the post-Cartesian debris and the spiritual insufficiencies of

[1] Gifford, Terry, *Ted Hughes,* Routledge, 2008, 86.
[2] *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Reid, Faber and Faber, 2007, 288.
[3] *The Achievement of Ted Hughes* , ed. Sagar, Manchester University Press, 1983, 56.

> materialistic 'civilization' — and traces the disease back to its symptoms. [68]

Hughes sent the selection to Monteith in June, and commented:

> I've spent a long time writing a long introduction to this selection, but finally I think this brief piece is best. My ignorance of Shakespeare scholarship wouldn't recommend me, and it is no place to brandish opinions and interpretations, I think. [*Letters,* 293]

Hughes' knowledge of Shakespeare more than made up for his 'ignorance of Shakespeare scholarship', and may even have been an advantage, since it allowed him the confidence to advance one of the most novel and penetrating of all interpretations. He wrote to Peter Redgrove:

> Not one scholar in a hundred knows Shakespeare well enough to guess whether I have something or haven't. Not one in a hundred of those hundreds has the nose for the poetry to know what I'm distinguishing in the total Himalayas of Shakespearean ore. [321]

The response of almost the whole academic establishment to *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* twenty years later proved him all too right.

It was during the writing of this essay, in March 1969, that, as we have seen, the tragedy occurred which led to the aborting of the Crow project. Since the Crow story no longer offered Hughes a vehicle for his latest vision of nature, the whole thrust of it was diverted into the essay (with the extreme personal urgency of the question: who was responsible for the deaths of Assia and Shura?). Hughes could not, at that time, address such a question publicly. It became, in the essay, the question of who was responsible for the deaths of Lucrece, and Ophelia, and Desdemona, and Cordelia, which meant putting in the dock the several embodiments of the male protagonist, Adonis, Angelo, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Leontes, Prospero, on the charge of murder or attempted murder. And this in turn mutates into the charge against Protestant England ('the young Puritan Jehovah') of attempting to kill

> The Queen of Heaven, who was the goddess of Catholicism, who was the goddess of Medieval and pre-Christian England, who was the divinity of the

> throne, who was the goddess of natural law and of love, who was the goddess of all sensation and organic life.[4]

And that crime is seen as the root cause of the sickness of our own modern world, simultaneously experienced in our civilization as a whole and in our personal lives. Even the extracts themselves, in *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*, were chosen not only as Hughes' own 'favourite passages', but, he claims, as those passages which would most enable us to 'look through them into our own darkness' [104].

It seemed to Hughes that Shakespeare had done exactly the same thing, objectifying a 'knot of obsessions' in his private life, 'a sexual dilemma of a particularly black and ugly sort', into a recurring drama, with parts of himself playing all the leading roles. In each new play he is searching for more accurate and complete metaphors for his own nature. It is a drama which also chanced to be the story of what was happening to England in his time. Since 'the strongest single determinant of a person's poetic imagination is the state of negotiations between that person and their idea of the Creator' it is not surprising that 'the groundplan of Shakespeare's imagination very closely fits the groundplan of the religious struggle which … embroiled every fibre of Elizabethan life' [109]. At the heart of that struggle, according to Hughes, was the effort of the Calvinists and Puritans to complete the Reformation, 'with its accompanying materialist and democratizing outlook and rational philosophy', by extirpating the surviving manifestations of the Goddess.

> Thoughout Shakespeare's lifetime, this was the Civil War within every citizen, as the two fought it out. … And Shakespeare's plays are the fullest record of the opening collisions. And just as fully they predict the close.
> [110]

Elizabeth managed, just, to hold the crisis at bay; but her successor, James, 'openly threw his weight against the old goddess and all her idolatrous witcheries'. Those who were 'too deep in both worlds' could respond imaginatively by creating 'a provisional *persona,* an emergency self, to deal with the crisis':

> They could create a self who would somehow hang on to all the fragments as the newly throned god and the deposed goddess tore each other to pieces behind his face. And this is where Shakespeare's hero comes staggering in. Mother-wet. Weak-legged, horrified at the task, boggling — Hamlet.

[4] *Winter Pollen*: *Occasional Prose*, ed. Scammell, Faber and Faber, 1994, 110.

> Very much as in ancient Greece, it was the moment for tragedy: the agonies of an ancient Dionysus in a world of suddenly hardening sceptical intellect and morality. [111]

Hughes equates Shakespeare's Venus, in *Venus and Adonis*, with Graves' triple goddess. She is the Queen of Heaven, whose doves are ministers of grace, but also Hecate, the Queen of Hell, 'in which aspect her wild boar is the demon of destruction and death', and Isis 'mother of all the gods, and all living things: she is Nature' [112]. The severely puritan and narcissistic Adonis, like Crow, cannot say the word 'love'. He can recognize the love which declares and offers itself only as lust. He cannot see the face of Venus other than as the repulsive face of Hecate — 'black-faced night, desire's foul nurse'. All his passion is for hunting, thrusting a spear into living flesh. In rejecting Venus he is rejecting Nature.

In *The Rape of Lucrece* the roles seem at first glance to be reversed. Here 'the lust-possessed king, Tarquin, rapes the severely puritan young wife, Lucrece'. But for Shakespeare, according to Hughes, whether he knew it at the time or not, the two poems are 'the two unjoined halves of a single story'.

> And the story these two halves make is Shakespeare's fable — his major discovery, the equation on which all his work is based. But the most inspired piece of intuition in the whole assembly, the mechanism on which the dramatic development depends, is still absent. It occurs in the gap between the two poems. If there were no plays, that gap would be a problem. But from the evidence of the plays we can see that the gap corresponds to a strange sudden transformation, a frightening psychic event. It is not only — in a sense — the key to the madness of the Civil War, a madness which bewildered all participants, it is the mainspring of every play, from *Hamlet* on in the Complete Works. [112-13]

What happens in the gap is what Jung called *enantiodromia,* a not uncommon psychic phenomenon whereby a psyche which has become intolerably one-sided, such as puritan or lecher, overturns, and becomes, in an instant, its opposite.[5]

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[5] Hughes was by no means pro-Catholic. He follows Jung in believing that the Protestant is more vulnerable to *enantiodromia* than the Catholic. Jung wrote of the Reformation:

> As soon as the dogmatic fence was broken down and the ritual lost its authority, man had to face his inner experience without protection and guidance of dogma and ritual. … For the Protestant minister … apart from common prayer and Holy Communion … has no ritual ceremonies at his disposal, no spiritual exercises, rosaries, pilgrimages, etc., with their expressive symbolism. He is therefore compelled to take his stand on moral ground, which puts the instinctual forces coming up from the unconscious in danger of a new repression.

Rejected love becomes hate. In Hughes' summary of his projected dramatization of the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* he describes the Goddess Ishtar offering herself to Gilgamesh. He violently rejects her. She summons the old gods who create 'the Bull of Heaven', which devastates the earth. Rejected Dionysos, in *The Bacchae,* becomes a huge bull which demolishes Pentheus' palace. An extreme, frigid, love-denying, life-denying puritanism is the perfect breeding ground for the boar, the murderous tyrant.

Venus, all her offers of unconditional love rejected, becomes her most dangerous and destructive manifestation, a ravening boar. Shakespeare comes close to making this overt when Adonis says: 'I know not love … nor will not know it, / Unless it be a boar, and then I'll chase it'. By thus treating love as a boar, a foul and dangerous thing to be fought and killed, Adonis begins the process of converting Love (Venus) into a boar. For the first half of the poem Venus has been pleading and softly feminine, but now a transformation begins. Adonis forces Venus to become more and more predatory, actually converts her love into ravening lust:

> And having felt the sweetness of the spoil,
> With blindfold fury she begins to forage;
> Her face doth reek and smoke, her blood doth boil,
> And careless lust stirs up a desperate courage.

By attempting to separate out 'pure' love, which is completely subservient to reason, shame and honour, from the totality of love Venus had originally offered him, Adonis splits Venus into the trembling, heartsick woman who warns him so graphically against the boar, and the boar itself. He drives her back in pain into the darkness, the underworld, from which she emerges frothing at the mouth. She warns him in the clearest terms that to choose the boar is to choose death (which Venus calls 'divorce of love') in preference to life, to commit suicide. In rabid defence of his self-sufficiency Adonis strikes out at all forms of love, including sympathy, the ability to suffer with those that suffer; he strikes at the feminine in all its forms — woman, Nature, his own anima. Richard of Gloucester's words would not be out of place in his mouth:

> And that word 'love', which greybeards call divine,
> Be resident in men like one another,
> And not in me! I am myself alone.

[Jung, C. J., *Collected Works,* 20 vols., Princeton University Press, 1953-1969; London, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1957-1979; vol.11, 21.]

(Richard's totem is the boar.) And when he swears by 'black-faced night, desire's foul nurse' he is on the way to transforming himself into a Tarquin or a MacBeth.

Finding the mangled body of Adonis, Venus in her distraction cannot distinguish between herself and the boar:

> If he did see his face, why then I know
> He thought to kiss him, and hath killed him so.
>
> 'Tis true, 'tis true! thus was Adonis slain:
> He ran upon the boar with his sharp spear,
> Who did not whet his teeth at him again,
> But by a kiss thought to persuade him there;
>   And nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine
>   Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin.

It is a just reversal, since Adonis, terrified by the thought of the soft groin of Venus, is keen enough to plunge his spear into the living body of Nature. Venus then stains her own face with Adonis' blood.

Once we have reread *Venus and Adonis* with Hughes' interpretation in mind, it becomes glaringly obvious:

> The boar that demolished Adonis was, in other words, his own repressed sexuality — crazed and bestialized by being separated from his intelligence and denied. The Venus which he refused became a demon and supplanted his consciousness. The frigid puritan, with a single terrible click, becomes a sexual maniac — a destroyer of innocence and virtue, a violator of the heavenly soul, of the very thing he formerly served and adored. Adonis has become Tarquin.
> This metamorphosis is triggered by a simple and one might think academic factor: namely, Adonis' Calvinist spectacles, which divide nature, and especially love, the creative force of nature, into abstract good and physical evil. Nature's attempts to recombine, first in love, then in whatever rebuffed love turns into, and the puritan determination that she shall not recombine under any circumstances, are the power-house and torture-chamber of the Complete Works. [114]

Venus means, at the end, to 'immure herself and not be seen'. Love goes underground, and becomes, instead of a source of joy and harmony and fertility, a cause of suffering, discord, 'war and dire events'. All this would be absurdly

disproportionate if it were a consequence of one young man desiring 'to grow unto himself'. But clearly much more than that is involved. Adonis is a part of Shakespeare also, a part of those who were shaping English history at that time, and a part of each of us. He represents the Protestant attempt to degrade the Queen of Heaven to the Great Whore, but also the perennial male rejection and desacralization of Nature in the name of some perfection or abstraction assumed to be accessible only to the detached male intellect.

The original introduction I have discussed here is completely different from the introduction Hughes supplied for the second edition of *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* in 1991, which makes no mention of the 'tragic equation'. It does, however, give a lengthy account of the importance for Shakespeare (and, clearly, for Hughes himself) of Hermetic Occult Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism was a religious philosophy developed in the fifteenth century in an attempt to heal the widening schism between Protestant and Catholic. Its syncretism appealed to Hughes:

> Archaic mythic systems, various traditions of spiritual discipline, drawn from Pagan, Asiatic, Islamic, Gnostic and Hebraic sources, were incorporated in a giant, religious synthesis centred on a Christ figure, and based on love of the Divine Source. [167]

Giordano Bruno (whom Shakespeare may have known through their mutual friend Sir Philip Sydney) 'expounded this as a practical method of organizing the psyche and the knowable universe within an exalted vision of Love' [168].
As Hughes describes it, Neoplatonism is almost identical with the Perennial Philosophy decribed by Aldous Huxley as

> the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being; the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the perennial philosophy may be found among the traditional lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions.[6]

It seemed to Hughes almost identical with the imaginative discipline of such artists as Shakespeare, Goethe, Blake, Yeats and Lawrence:

[6] *The Perennial Philosophy,* Harper, 1945, vii.

> What it meant in practice was that the 'sessions of sweet silent thought' of an Occult Neoplatonist became, ideally, the visionary trance in which he underwent some change of consciousness and attained access to the depths of his own mind, with a freedom of intuition, imaginative play, and sense of revelation, normally inaccessible to him. [169]

What this produced in terms of poetic language was a nakedness, stripped of all rhetoric and display, 'truth's simplicity'. (When Hughes asked the 'spirit' which spoke to him throught the Ouija board what was its favourite line of poetry, it replied 'Never, never, never, never, never'.) In Shakespeare he finds 'the recurrent appearance of perfect simplicity, the simplicity which is closest to silence, as the highest ethical value — enshrined in his dramatic heroines who bear, and symbolize, the ultimate suffering' [201]. This introduction feeds directly into *The Silence of Cordelia,* the first draft of *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being.*

The character of Adonis we are to meet again and again in the mature works. In middle age he is called Angelo, and is still attempting to freeze out unconditional love. In later life he is called Prospero, now devoting his most potent Art to excluding Venus from the magic circle of his isle. In between, there will be the tragedies, where love, as Venus prophesies, will always be attended by jealousy and betrayal:

> It shall be fickle, false, and full of fraud;
> Bud and be blasted, in a breathing while;
> The bottom poison, and the top o'erstrawed
> With sweets that shall the truest sight beguile.
> The strongest body shall it make most weak,
> Strike the wise dumb, and teach the fool to speak.

Hughes calls this Shakespeare's 'tragic equation', though it is far from being some mechanical formula Shakespeare invented; it is no less than a complex, all-embracing myth, which he forged out of his inheritance of classical mythology and Gnostic and Alchemical wisdom, all transformed in the crucible of his life and times, as his supreme attempt to convert apparently random and painful experience into a process of self-transformation.

And it is not only a matter of self-transformation. Shakespeare simultaneously expresses what Hughes calls 'the fundamental human challenge'. The equation is equally applicable, that is, not only to Shakespeare, but to the template of many of the classics of Western literature (including *The Oresteia,* the

Theban plays of Sophocles, *The Bacchae, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* 'The Ancient Mariner', *Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter,* Hopkins, Eliot, Golding and Hughes himself, especially *Crow, Cave Birds* and *Gaudete*), and to the present world predicament, the ecological crisis.

It is possible to recognize and admire the knowledge and imaginative insight of Hughes' essay, of a depth and intensity that would hardly have been possible except from a major poet, without giving unqualified acceptance to his application of the equation to individual plays. Though his analysis of the plays in terms of the equation in most cases yields invaluable insights, there are several instances where it seems to me procrustean, or even slightly perverse. For example, Hughes ignores the obvious embodiment of the rejected goddess, Mariana, in *Measure for Measure*, and attempts to foist that role onto Isabella. This involves him in the absurd claim that Isabella (who has voluntarily entered a nunnery where she will never again be allowed to so much as converse with a man) 'pleads the cause of physical love' [*Winter Pollen* 113]. On the contrary, she claims that it is 'a vice that most I do abhor, / And most desire should meet the blow of justice'.

Some of Hughes' misses, especially his radical misreading of *The Tempest,* can be explained by his very starting point, his unsupportable assumption, even before the tragic equation comes into play, that Shakespeare is on the side of Adonis:

> Shakespeare spent his life trying to prove that Adonis was right, the rational sceptic, the man of puritan good order. It put him through the tragedies before he decided that the quarrel could not be kept up honestly. Since then the difficult task of any poet in English has been to locate the force which Shakespeare called Venus in his first poems and Sycorax in his last.[7]
>
> Shakespeare's persistence has to be admired. After all his experience of the odds against the likelihood, he did finally succeed in salvaging Lucrece from the holocaust and Adonis from the boar. He rescued the puritan abstraction from the gulf of Nature. He banished Venus, as Sycorax, the blue-eyed hag. He humbled Tarquin as Caliban, the poetry-crammed half-beast. And within an impenetrable crucible of magic prohibitions, he married Lucrece (Miranda) to Adonis (Ferdinand). But what a bitter expression on Prospero's punished face. We know why he wants to drown his book in the sea (where Venus was born — the lap of Creation) — it contains the tragedies, with their evidence. [*Winter Pollen* 119]

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[7] Faas, Ekbert, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, 1980, 197.

Twenty years later, in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, Hughes expanded his account of *The Tempest* to 120 pages, without becoming any more convincing.

According to Graham Bradshaw the problem is Hughes' exaggerated hostility to Prospero, inherited from Graves. It seems to me, on the contrary, that his mistake is his assumption that Shakespeare does not share that hostility. In the Faas interview he baldly states: 'Shakespeare spent his life trying to prove that Adonis was right, the rational sceptic, the man of puritan good order' [197]. He claims, in the later book, without any supporting evidence, that Prospero has 'Shakespeare's fullest and most fascinated collaboration'[8]. These seem to me among the most wrong-headed statements Hughes ever made.

Prospero is motivated not primarily by care of Miranda, but by his lust for revenge (his magic being black magic perfected for that very end), until he is brought to his senses by Ariel. He ensures her compliance in an arranged marriage by instructing Ariel to bewitch both her and Ferdinand:

> It goes on, I see,
> As my soul prompts it. Spirit, fine spirit! I'll free thee
> Within two days for this.

Unusually for Shakespeare, sexuality has had little overt role in this play. But Prospero's determination that it should not rear its ugly head shows that it is a problem for him. He fears Venus as though she were Sycorax. He wants to refine Nature to bring it into alignment with arbitrary and exclusive human values. Or, insofar as his art is alchemical, the island is the crucible in which, now that the missing element, the groom, has become available, he prepares a chymical wedding. One particle of impurity would wreck the whole experiment, now nearing its goal. The experiment requires a very low temperature. The wedding is hedged about with vows, prohibitions, ceremonies. If sexuality is to be magically transformed into spirituality, courtship must be as circumscribed and codified as a game of chess.

Prospero sets up, as it were, a replay of *Venus and Adonis*, carefully rigged by magic to produce the opposite outcome. Venus is excluded, prohibited, replaced by Diana. The natural man in Ferdinand is put in a straight-jacket of prohibitions which almost stops his blood flowing. The result is a wooden tableau of contrived harmony which we cannot imagine surviving transplantation to the real world. To

[8] *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being,* Faber and Faber, 1992, 413.

preserve such purity outside his laboratory, in Naples or Milan, he would have to geld and spay all the youth of the city.

Prospero poisons Miranda's mind with the almost hysterical extremity of his hatred of Venus and his determination to exclude her from his island:

> If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
> All sanctimonious ceremonies may
> With full and holy rite be minister'd,
> No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
> To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
> Sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew
> The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
> That you shall hate it both. [IV i 15-22]

Could the author who had so recently and so delightfully portrayed Perdita's innocent venery give such a speech his 'fullest collaboration'? This is exactly the situation envisaged by Blake in 'A Little Girl Lost', where Blake imagines that future ages will look back with indignation on a time when 'Love! Sweet Love! Was thought a crime'. A youthful pair, not spied on by parents, kiss on the grass, 'And the maiden soon forgot her fear'. But when she returns to her father, 'his loving look, / Like the holy book, / All her tender limbs with terror shook'. He can respond to sweet love only with 'trembling fear' and 'dismal care'.

Caliban is as Hughes describes him at the end of *Shakespeare and the Goddess*:

> Caliban remains the real figure, the attractive and even fascinating bearer of the life of the play, and of uncontainable life itself. This creature who was ready to love Prospero as much as he lusted for Miranda, and for whom the heavens open (and who weeps when they close), and who speaks the poetry of the natural world, possesses a sensibility and a nature that makes his master's seem stale and sour. [497]

Graham Bradshaw pertinently asks what, according to Hughes, Prospero should have done about Caliban:

> Should Prospero *concede* Caliban's title? Since Shakespeare's symbolic fable does retain a purchase on the real world we are in no doubt about the likely consequences of any surrendering of consciousness and responsibility: Miranda would be raped, and Prospero would be paunched with a stake — long live the Goddess! [*Achievement* 64]

Towards Caliban Prospero had originally behaved with a show of 'human care' and 'nurture', but with the same assumption of superiority which had been rationalized as benevolence by the colonists in the New World, who, calling the natives savages because their religion was not Christianity, their civilization unlike European civilization, their language not English or Spanish, their dress and appearance and customs outlandish, denied them full humanity, freedom, and any title to their own lands, and exported them to England, dead or alive, to be exhibited at fairs. The possibility was debated that the Red Indians might not be human at all, but humanoid monsters created as slaves for humanity.

The isle was indeed Caliban's. He retains an affinity with it never matched by Prospero, who quits it as soon as he is able. Caliban's 'gabble' was presumably able to refer to the bigger light that burns by day and the lesser that burns by night if not to say 'sun' and 'moon'. There is a comic contrast between the brutish Caliban's ineligibility as a mate for Miranda, and the cultural appropriateness of Ferdinand's response to her first words to him: 'My language! heavens!'. Because Caliban does not behave in accordance with Prospero's puritanical code of honour, he is denied all human rights, enslaved and persecuted. Prospero might well have killed him had he been able to manage without him:

> We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,
> Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
> That profit us. [I ii 313-15]

Visiting Caliban, provoking and reviling and tormenting him, seems to constitute a form of entertainment for Prospero, like bear-baiting.

Frank Kermode defines Art as 'man's power over the created world and over himself'.[9] We are no longer as likely as in 1954 to find what man has done to the created world and to himself over the 3000 years of his domination as something to be proud of, and are perhaps more likely to admire Caliban's sensitive response to and adaptation to the natural environment. There is nothing exclusively contemporary about taking the side of the native against the colonizer. In our awareness of the destructiveness of Western colonialism we are only returning to ideas which were commonplace in the sixteenth century. Reports from the New World differed widely in their descriptions of the Indians; to some they were demons or savage beasts, to others unfallen man. In his essay 'On the Caniballs' (translated by Florio in 1603) Montaigne argued that 'there is nothing in that nation, that is either barbarous or savage, unlesse men call that barbarisme which is

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[9] The Arden edition of *The Tempest*, Methuen 1954, xxiv.

not common to them', and that even if there were genuine barbarism, this was nothing in comparison with the barbarism of those who presumed to 'civilize' them.

Shakespeare himself in his earlier works which deal with the art/nature conflict had consistently taken the side of Nature, from *Venus and Adonis* to *The Winter's Tale*, where Perdita rejects Polixenes' argument that art, itself a product of nature, can improve on nature. Perdita's reverence for 'great creating nature' echoes Montaigne's for 'our great and puissant mother Nature', and her rejection of 'our carnations and streak'd gillivors' as 'nature's bastards' is a paraphrase of his argument in defence of the natives of the New World:

> They are even savage, as we call those fruits wilde, which nature of her selfe, and of her ordinarie progresse hath produced: whereas indeed, they are those which our selves have altered by our artificiall devices, and diverted from their common order, we should rather term savage. In those are the true and most profitable vertues, and naturall properties most lively and vigorous, which in these we have bastardized, applying them to the pleasure of our corrupted taste. ... There is no reason, arte should gaine the point of honour of our great and puissant mother Nature. We have so much by our inventions, surcharged the beauties and riches of hir workes, that we have altogether over-choaked hir: yet where-ever hir puritie shineth, she makes our vaine, and frivolous enterprises wonderfully ashamed. [Arden *Tempest* 146]

The art to which Perdita refers is cultivation, whereas Prospero's Art (always with the capital) is supernatural, occult, and implies a spurning of the merely natural and earthy. Certainly Caliban is brutish. He is also presented as both physically and morally ugly. This ugliness is usually assumed to derive from his evil parentage, but there is much to suggest that Caliban turns ugly, as Heathcliff does, in response to rejection and persecution.

The very name of Caliban, an anagram of canibal (Shakespeare's spelling of cannibal), and close to Cariban — a native of the West Indies — must have alerted many of Shakespeare's audience to the relevance of Montaigne's much-discussed essay, and the whole topical debate on the morality of colonialism. But Caliban is not simply an American Indian. He is also very much in the tradition of the wodwo, or wild man of the woods, so familiar in English art and folklore of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. (One tapestry depicts a wodwo abducting a woman from a castle.) The wodwo was itself a descendent of the satyr, with whom Caliban has much in common. The satyr had abundant hair and beard, broad nose, large pointed ears, horse tail, hooves, and large, permanently erect phallus. He represented natural as opposed to civilized man, everything man shares with the beasts. His characteristics were naive curiosity and credulousness, acquisitiveness,

lust, drunkenness, lying, boasting and cowardice. He was completely gross and amoral. Yet every Greek tragedian competing in the Great Dionysia was obliged to follow his three tragedies with a satyr play. Neither in the satyr plays nor elsewhere was the satyr presented with disgust. Rather the satyr plays seem to have been celebrations of the life of the body at its most basic as a way of balancing the tragic vision with its relentless progress through suffering towards death. In the words of Tony Harrison:

> This journey back into the service of the presiding god [Dionysus] seems to be paralleled by the release of the spirit back into the life of the senses at the end of the tragic journey. ... The sensual relish for life and its affirmation must have been the spirit of the conclusion of the four plays. The satyrs are included in the wholeness of the tragic vision. they are not forgotten or forced out by pseudo 'refinement'.[10] [*Trackers* xi]

In *The Trackers of Oxyrhyncus*, Harrison's completion of a fragmentary satyr play by Sophocles, Silenus, the leader of the satyrs, tells a story of such Apollonian 'refinement'. Marsyas, a satyr, found a flute and learned to play it so well that he competed against Apollo's lyre. Apollo had him flayed alive for his presumption. Perhaps there is here a deeply submerged link between Caliban's surprising responsiveness to music and the cramps and pinchings to which Prospero subjects him:

> 'How can *he* be a virtuoso on the flute?
> Look at the hoofs on him. He's half a brute!'
> His one and only flaw. He showed that flutes
> sound just as beautiful when breathed into by 'brutes'.
> It confounded the categories of high and low
> when Caliban could outplay Prospero.

By Shakespeare's time the tragic and comic visions had been wholly separated out by dualism, the satyrs permanently excluded from the world of Apollonian high culture. The animal man had to be converted into 'civilized' man, exterminated, or enslaved, whether in the colonies or in the individual psyche. Shakespeare had to rediscover the language of wholeness, even at the cost of relinquishing the high ground of his own rhetorical mastery in the great anthology pieces. The Othello music is discredited; the silence of Cordelia vindicated. Perdita

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[10] Harrison, Tony, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus,* Faber and Faber, 1990, 64.

repudiates art itself as the rape of nature. Once Apollo is silenced, the satyrs re-emerge from their darkness.

Prospero is stopped in his tracks by Ariel just before he launches into bloody revenge. He renounces his tyrannical magic, and accepts his fallible humanity, including everything Caliban embodies: 'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine'.

***

'Crow's Song About Prospero and Sycorax', first published in April 1971, is the most obvious link between *Crow* and the Shakespeare essay. The central theme of the Crow epic was to have been the male's gradual realization of the inadequacy, the criminality, of his relationship with the female, the female as mother and wife, but also as anima, and as earth-mother, Great Creating Nature. It is the same theme Hughes was to handle at length in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being,* where he argues that Shakespeare, from the seed of *Venus and Adonis*, developed the 'tragic equation' which is behind all his later plays. If Adonis is the criminal as a narcissistic youth, and Angelo as a Puritan tyrant, Prospero is the older tyrant finally, according to Hughes, defeating the goddess and taming the boar.

Hughes prefaced a reading of this poem[11] with these words:

> This is a comment or a summary of the debate between Prospero and Sycorax and the debate presumes that Prospero and Sycorax are simply the last, embattled, veteran, invalid, many-times-recuperated, many-times-revamped forms of the two main figures that have fought the war through all of Shakespeare's plays, through Christianity, and through the religious history of the Mediterranean; and after Shakespeare's plays, through Milton and through English history.

This debate between the rational male and 'complete' female is also, for Hughes, a template for the defeat of paganism by Christianity, the defeat of the Royalists in the English civil war, and the expulsion of Lucifer by the Puritan Jehovah in *Paradise Lost*.

The primary theriomorphic image for female sexuality (or sin in Puritan terms) is the serpent or dragon, which George MacBeth describes as 'an image for our animal nature, or more precisely the emotion of fear, which can only be controlled by the ruthless cruelty of the will'. Hughes has many poems, beginning

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[11] Leeds University, 10 March 1979.

with the early ‘Quest’, about armoured knights who represent this cruelty, a kind of heroic madness. When he names this knight, he is usually St. George, as in ‘Myth and Education’ [1971]. St. George, his visor closed to prevent any flow of sympathetic awareness, in the full armour of militant puritan male intelligence, strikes out wildly at a monster of his own making, which he sees as a dragon, though it is really his distorted image of the female, his own mother (like Crow in ‘Crow and Mama’ and ‘A Horrible Religious Error’), or his own wife (as in ‘Crow’s Account of St. George’).

Crow, during his phase of trying to become a man, reads and radically reinterprets many of the classics of Western Literature, including Sophocles and Shakespeare. Oedipus seeks to break out of the cycle of birth, death and renewal represented by his wife and mother, Jocasta, to free his people from the sphinx (another embodiment of the goddess), by insane brutality:

> He split his Mammy like a melon
>
> He was drenched with gore
>
> He found himself curled up inside
>
> As if he had never been bore.
>
> Mamma Mamma ['Song for a Phallus'[12]]

Crow sees Prospero as an older version of Hamlet, who spoke daggers to his mother (a creature of mere ‘appetite’) as an alternative to using them, and who consigned Ophelia to a nunnery, lest she be a breeder of sinners. Lear’s madness similarly expressed itself as horror of the female:

> Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
>
> Though women all above:
>
> But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
>
> Beneath is all the fiend’s: there’s hell, there’s darkness,
>
> There is the sulphurous pit — burning, scalding,
>
> Stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie! pah, pah! [IV vi 126-31]

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[12] All quotations from Hughes’ poems for adults are from *Ted Hughes: Collected Poems*, ed. Keegan, Faber and Faber, 2003.

No man is 'himself' when he is in the grip of such madness.

In 'Prospero and Sycorax', Sycorax, the victimized female, is compared with all of these, Ophelia, George's dragon, Jocasta and Cordelia. It seems to Crow that Sycorax, though barely mentioned in *The Tempest,* is, along with Venus, an embodiment of the Great Goddess Prospero has rejected in order to impose his own godlike power on his daughter, 'his' island, and Caliban. The task which has 'swallowed' Prospero is the task of creating a life from which the female is banished except as dutiful and pure wife or daughter. The poem records the essential knowledge Sycorax has and Prospero lacks, the knowledge of his victims in many other incarnations, of which Ophelia, George's dragon, Jocasta and Cordelia are representative. What Sycorax knows, ultimately, is that in killing the female, Hamlet, St.George, Oedipus, Lear and Prospero have killed essential parts of themselves.

Bradshaw believes that Hughes exaggerates the case against Prospero by expressing it too much in the rather forced terms of the symbolic fable and too little in terms of 'the real world'. It seems to me that 'Prospero and Sycorax' does express Prospero's guilt in terms of real human consequences; and that a passage in an informal letter to a Swedish theatre director, Donya Feuer, in 1979 expresses it (though Hughes is actually speaking of Angelo) feelingly, without needing any justification from the symbolic fable:

> His moral sense, so overdeveloped as a mechanical system, is erotically destitute. And his erotic nature is destitute morally. What is lacking in both is the human warmth and sensitivity that a natural blending of both would give. This is part of what Shakespeare is saying, very clearly. That the puritan extremism not only divides the soul, and makes one part a cold machine, and the other part a sub-human animal, it destroys the most precious extra thing: sensitive loving understanding between individuals.
>
> [*Letters* 415]

***

Hughes continued to ponder his 'tragic equation'. In 1987/8 he published 'A Full House', a sequence of thirteen gnomic poems on Shakespeare characters. The first, for example, on Venus, describes Adonis overcome by 'venereal, uterine heat':

> Hell-mouth he could hear,
> The many mouthed hound in there.

In 1989 Donya Feuer, wrote to Hughes asking

> if anything could be done with our old notion of the last fifteen plays, hugely shuffled and rearranged to make a *perpetuum mobile* maze of metamorphic episodes, play dissolving into play, characters going through their transformations, in and out of each other's worlds, like supernatural, dying and resurrected entities in a real myth. [*Shakespeare* xii]

Hughes' letters to her became, over a period of nearly two years, first a book, *The Silence of Cordelia*, and then a much longer book, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being.*

In the Emory archive there are seven complete typescript drafts of *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Compete Being.* That Hughes should have been willing to give up so much of his time and energy, necessarily at the cost of poems (and, as he came to believe, at the cost of his health) can be accounted for only if his motivation were far more than the merely academic. How much the subject meant to him, and how closely it fitted with his other preoccupations can be gauged from a single sentence in the book:

> The murder of the Goddess is the murder of the source of life: the destruction of mankind. (And of all Nature, and of Earth.) [221]

Thus Shakespeare expresses what Hughes calls 'the fundamental human challenge'. The equation is equally applicable, that is, not only to Shakespeare, but to the template of many of the classics of Western literature (including *The Oresteia,* the Theban plays of Sophocles, *The Bacchae, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* 'The Ancient Mariner', *Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter,* Hopkins, Eliot, Golding and Hughes himself, especially *Crow, Cave Birds* and *Gaudete*), and to the present world predicament, the ecological crisis.

To accuse Shakespeare of being complicit in such a crime, as Hughes does, (mistakenly, as I have argued above, and in the three chapters on Shakespeare in *Literature and the Crime Against Nature*) was a momentous charge, which he could not substantiate.

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In March 1970 Hughes published the first of his two 'Myth and Education' essays.[13] It has never been reprinted. Most of the essay is about the importance of

[13] *Children's Literature in Education* I, March 1970.

story-telling, and telling the right stories, to children. It is only towards the end, when Hughes gives an example of the sort of story that should not be told, that his views on nature come to the surface. The story he selects for this purpose is that of St. George and the Dragon. St. George is the ideal militant hero, dedicated to the slaughter of dragons and any other creatures which threaten to disturb the status quo of rational, civilized morality. Seeing nature as a dragon and killing or attempting to kill it Hughes sees as an 'ideal pattern for any dealing with unpleasant or irrational experience, the complete suppression of the terror':

> In other words it is the symbolic story of creating a neurosis, and as it's the key symbolic story of Christianity, it's the key to the neurotic-making dynamics of Christianity. Christianity in suppressing the devil, in fact suppresses imagination and suppresses vital natural life. [66]

As an epigraph to *Wodwo* Hughes had quoted the lines from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where Gawain fights with all the creatures he meets on his journey towards the green chapel. Gawain is presented to us as the pattern of the pure Christian knight, dedicated to the pentangle of unassailable virtues. But once he is in the real world outside the charmed circle of Camelot, far from his friends, in an unknown country, he has no idea how to deal with the winter weather or with the creatures he meets, whether natural creatures such as snakes and wolves, bulls and bears, of with more questionable creatures such as wodwos and giants. He has one response to all of them, to draw his sword. Like St George, he is locked inside his armour, unable to relate to or negotiate with anything in the world from which the Green Knight is the emissary. Like a dalek he is reduced to one word: 'exterminate'. If *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* were not a comic story, it would be a fight to the death between the knight and the goddess.[14]

In psychological terms, the 'complete suppression of the terror' leads to neurosis. To confront life wearing a suit of armour is the perfect metaphor for such insulation from nature, literally preventing any relationship other than with weapons: 'As if we should deny an enemy, rather than pin him down in everlasting negotiations' [69]. Lawrence had used the same metaphor:

> Today men don't risk their blood and bone. They go forth, panoplied in their own idea of themselves. Whatever they do, they perform it all in the full armour of their own idea of themselves. Their unknown bodily self is never for one moment unsheathed. And the dark self in the mysterious labyrinth of

[14] See the chapter 'Sir Gawain and the Green Girdle' in my *Literature and the Crime against Nature.*

> the body is cased in a tight armour of cowardly repression. … And inside the armour he goes quite deranged.[15]

The poet, by contrast, is one who goes naked.

Hughes' explanation of what was wrong with the story of St. George and the dragon helps to clarify, possibly helped himself to clarify, a difficult poem such as 'Gog' (1961). Faas described Gog as 'another Caliban-like "poetry-crammed half-beast" inspired by both *Revelation* and *The Tempest*' [33]. Gog asks the same question as the wodwo: 'What am I?' His shape and nature are even more questionable. From *Revelation* comes the suggestion that he is a dragon rebelling against God's claim to be Alpha and Omega. Hughes would have remembered this passage from *The White Goddess* :

> The new God claimed to be dominant as Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, pure Holiness, pure Good, pure Logic, able to exist without the aid of woman; but it was natural to identify him with one of the original rivals of the Theme an to ally the woman and the other rival [the devil] permanently against him. The outcome was philosophical dualism with all the tragic-comic woes attendant on spiritual dichotomy. If the True God, the God of the Logos, was pure thought, pure good, whence came evil and error? Two separate creations had to be assumed: the true spiritual Creation and the false material Creation.[16]

'What was my error?' asks Gog in the poem.

According to Jung, when God cast Lucifer out of heaven, he 'cut off a vital part of himself' [*Answer to Job*], his link with the world of the flesh. Gog, massive on earth and driven by appetite, is entirely of that world.

From *The Tempest* comes the parallel suggestion of a creature of earth rebelling, with 'an irruption of enraged energy', against a lord of power who claims complete domination of both him and his world. Moreover, Hughes presumably knew the story, commemorated every year in the Lord Mayor's show, that Gog and Magog were two giants, guardians of the City of London. In that story they are the product of the coupling of the witch-like Alba and a demon, as Caliban is the spawn of Sycorax and the devil Setebos.

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[15] *Phoenix II,* eds. Roberts and Moore, Heinemann, 1968, 621.

[16] Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, Faber and Faber, 1961, 465.

In 1970 Hughes would have known how to deal with Gog, but in 1961 it had been a different matter. In his 1970 interview with Ekbert Faas Hughes stated that 'Gog'

> actually started as a description of the German assault through the Ardennes and it turned into the dragon of Revelations. It alarmed me so much I wrote a poem about the Red Cross Knight just to set against it with the idea of keeping it under control … keeping its effects under control. … The symbol itself is unqualified, it is an irruption, from the deeper resources, of enraged energy. [Faas 200]

He summoned the Red Cross Knight, St, George, to protect himself from Gog. But the knight, being further gone than Hughes himself, is unable to negotiate with Gog. The horseman of iron in Part III of 'Gog' is the same St. George figure we met in 'Quest', but his quest is now seen as fanatical, his intended victim the female, whom he can see only as a 'fanged grail … whose satiation is in the grave'. He cannot distinguish between womb and tomb. He is vaguely aware of her eyes, 'her dance of wants, / Of offering?' But his visor is permanently closed.

> Sun and moon, death and death,
> Grass and stones, their quick peoples, and the bright particles
> Death and death and death —
>
> Her mirrors.

His hostility to nature is ultimately suicidal, but the poem can offer him no alternative vision. Hughes could not at that time translate the vision of little Frieda into the adult world.

'Myth and Education' was originally a talk given at a *Children's Literature in Education* conference. In the discussion which followed the delivery of the paper, Hughes expanded on his main point:

> And so Christian folklore and mythology … tends to have this moral bias which really destroys it as imaginative literature and which has the effects of producing the kind of man who wants to be a Christian saint, ideally, or a puritan extremist, ideally. It's no accident that Puritanism, and the puritanical outlook, runs absolutely parallel to the materialist, scientific outlook, because both oppose the whole world of nature, which is of course what we have to live in, what we are part of, what we grow out of. [69]

The 'puritan extremist' Hughes probably had most in mind was probably Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, since his next comment referred his whole argument specifically to Shakespeare:

> This is what Shakespeare is about really; the battle between the puritan Jehovah which was appearing at the end of the fifteenth century and medieval nature — the big battle in all Shakespeare's plays. During Shakespeare's life it was a fruitful battle because both energies were still both hopeful and human. But in Milton's lifetime it had become too extreme' on one side nature had become Satan, on the other side ordinary morality had become God in heaven. This it seems to me is what poetry is continually trying to do, to realign our extreme, exclusive attitude with our natural environment and our natural biological supply of life. [69]

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Hughes' own effort to realign his attitude with the natural environment and our biological supply of life was greatly aided by a book he reviewed in the summer of 1970, Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution* [Hodder and Stoughton, 1970].

Hughes defined conservation as the huge task of 'salvaging all nature from the pressures and oversights of our runaway populations, and from the monstrous anti-Nature that we have created, the now nearly-autonomous Technosphere' [*Winter Pollen* 128]. He had, of course, long been aware of environmental degradation. In *The Tiger's Bones* (1965), the Master, who is a combination of scientist, economist and developer, 'begins to help the savages' who have hitherto had a perfectly sustainable relationship with their environment:

> First, he clears away the forest, burns it to the ground,
> So there'll be room for vast crops.
> Second, he shoots, poisons and traps all the wild beasts
> That might be a danger, with their long fangs and their hunger.
> Third, he destroys all the wild creatures
> That might eat the crops.
> Fourth, he poisons all the insects
> That would infect the crops with their invisible eggs.
> Fifth, he poisons all the green growth that is not crops,
> That might stifle the crops.
> And now as far as a man can walk in a day
> Like a sea the wheat flows under the wind

Towards the horizon.[17]

When fire destroys the wheatfields, he sets the natives building factories.

Nicholson's book shocked Hughes not only with its horrific evidence of the rape of the world by those who sought to turn it into money, but also by the evidence of indifference or hostility to conservation from the general public: 'We have a built-in amnesia against the fears of extinction. And hunger and greed will always sacrifice almost anything'. Also people had been brainwashed for centuries into seeing the undeveloped as the useless. Hughes made the connection between this and his Shakespeare essay, blaming Christianity for the 'fanatic rejection of Nature', which has resulted in modern man's exile from her. 'The fundamental guiding ideas of our Western Civilization' he claimed, 'are against Conservation':

> They are based on the assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use. … When something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator, and is called an evolutionary dead-end. [129]

What impressed Hughes most was Max Nicholson's 'tremendous imaginative grasp of the true life of the earth, the inner spiritual unity of nature' [135]. Nicholson was part of the movement which was at that time transforming traditional environmental and conservation concerns not only into the new science of ecology, but into the new philosophy and ethics for which Arne Naess two years later was to coin the term 'deep ecology', and which James Lovelock, at the suggestion of William Golding, called 'gaia'. Nicholson's 'imaginative grasp' of ecology brought it very close to Hughes shamanistic view of the role of the poet:

> 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 the real Eden, 'excellent as at the first day', the draughty, radiant Paradise of the animals, which is the actual earth, in the actual Universe … the vital, somewhat terrible spirit of natural life, which is new in every second. Even when it is poisoned to the point of death, its efforts to be itself are new in every second. [130]

The job of the poet is to communicate both the nightmare and the vision of undesecrated life.[18]

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[17] *Collected Plays for Children,* Faber and Faber, 2001, 37.

The shaman-poet, on behalf of his people, seeks 'a proper knowledge of the sacred wholeness of Nature, and a proper alignment of our behaviour within her laws' [*Winter Pollen* 130]. When Tennyson spoke of Nature's law he meant ravine, the survival of the fittest. When he looked at Nature he saw 'dragons of the prime, / That tare each other in their slime' ['In Memoriam']. In one of the 'Memorable Fancies' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* an orthodox angel takes Blake through a church and a mill to a deep cavern full of fire and smoke and blood, spiders and serpents and other monsters, which, catching sight of Blake and the angel, advance on them in fury. The angel flees, and, seeing no Blake, assumes that he has perished. Some time later Blake strolls out, and nonchalently tells the angel: 'All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics; for when you ran away, I found myself on a bank by moonlight hearing a harper'. In other words what we see depends on our vision. A fallen or corrupted vision will see monsters and horrors, which are the images the mind projects onto the receptive face of the world. A mind in a state of innocence will see no such things, but a world reflecting the harmony within. Tennyson confessed himself to be 'a second-rate sensitive mind not in unity with itself'.

The lives of animals are no longer assumed to be 'nasty, brutish and short'. We are becoming more aware that tenderness, loyalty, self-sacrificial care for the young, and grieving for the dead are not a human monopoly. But in any case we tend to be less assured than Tennyson in judging Nature by human values. Hughes is no longer obsessed with predation and mortality. What he means by nature's laws is not in this context the laws that the greater on the less feeds evermore, and that death swallows everything. What he is now concerned with are the laws which preserve the delicate balance of relationships between species, and between species and their environment, on which the continued creation and maintenance of life on earth entirely depends.

The shaman-poet is thus the opposite of the dragon-slaying knight. Hughes now rides out as the champion of nature against the ravages of men. In his early poems Hughes had seen nature as a marauding demonic power always threatening to invade the fragile human world of consciousness, culture, civilization. Now nature is seen as the vulnerable victim, its images the harebell and harvest mouse, its rampaging enemy a new devouring monster – the bulldozer:

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[18] Not only did Hughes subsequently write poems about endangered animals, such as whales and white rhinos, and environmental degradation, but also devoted more and more time as an activist, raising money and campaigning, particularly on behalf of the Atlantic Salmon Trust and the West Country Rivers Trust. He donated the income from several of his Laureate poems to Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth.

> But while the mice in the field are listening to the Universe, and moving in the body of nature, where every living cell is sacred to every other, and all are interdependent, the Developer is peering at the field through a visor, and behind him stands the whole army of madmen's ideas, and shareholders, impatient to cash in the world. [130]

The developer has inherited the quest of the red cross knight, to quell nature, this time by turning it into money.

Hughes But the efficacy of shamanism depends on the receptiveness of the tribe. Nor can the poet contribute to the regeneration of his people without a sympathetic readership:

> Poets usually refuse the call. How are they to accept it? How can a poet become a medicine man and fly to the source and come back and heal or pronounce oracles? Everything among us is against it. [Faas 206]

Like Cassandra, like the Ancient Mariner, the poet-shaman is even more likely than the conservationist to be ignored. The enemy is now the very people for whom the shaman-poet writes. The modern wedding-guest has shares in the company which is ensuring the extinction of the albatross, destroying the rainforest and the wilderness, and possibly the global ecosystem itself.

Nature's only hope, Hughes argues, is that science 'which began by deposing every primitive idea, will end by reinstating them as the essential conditions of life and as true descriptions of the Universe. … Because that is what we are seeing: something that was unthinkable only ten years ago, except as a poetic dream: the re-emergence of Nature as the Great Goddess of mankind, and the Mother of all life' [*Winter Pollen* 132-3]. In the forty years since Hughes wrote this, we have seen science continue to move in this direction, slowly followed by governmental policies and public opinion. The question is whether the process will be too little and too late.

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