Hughes and Blake

My purpose here is simply to take a central idea of Blake's - his concept of single, twofold, threefold and fourfold vision (with some of the attendant ideas) and see to what extent it can serve as a paradigm for Hughes' poetic development. I am going to be highly selective, leaving out of account important aspects of Blake which do not fit into my scheme. And I am going to make Blake's ideas seem more simple, consistent and systematic than in fact they are. If I did not take these liberties, I should end up with a chapter on Blake, not on Ted Hughes.

Single vision is fallen vision, fallen, that is, from an assumed original, primal, unified vision, symbolised by Eden. At the Fall, which is both a curse we inherit and a process we re-enact 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. 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, compartmentalising. It cannot see relationships and patterns and wholes, and is therefore solipsistic, reductive and dehumanising, 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 'organised 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.

It is not assumed that every artist is born with fourfold vision and never loses it. What he can never lose is the sense of something lost, and the obligation to struggle to recover it. The artist is but a man and

has to live in the world of men. His attacks on single vision in others are also attempts to purge it in himself. He is a healer because he recognises the need to heal himself, and the methods which work, being an artist, he is able to make available to others.

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'.[1] 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' work to date, the paradigm fits.

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The Hawk in the Rain **is about man, imprisoned in single vision as in his own body, looking out through the window of his eye at the surrounding Energies, the 'wandering elementals'. Hughes is, in this book, making no effort to come to terms with them, as though that were inconceivable, but is cowering, hiding, peeping through his fingers in fear, gripping his own heart, or running for dear life. In 'Wind', 'this house' is the insulated human world, the world of books, thoughts, human relationships, and a blazing fire creating a magic circle the beasts cannot enter. It contains all human bearings and assurances, yet is as tiny and flimsy as a ship in a storm (the title poem was originally 'The Hawk in the Storm'), and has been 'far out at sea all night'. Wind, sea, darkness and 'blade-light' are images of what it cannot contain or cope with. The wind dents the balls of his eyes, but is itself the lens of a mad eye. He is eyeball to eyeball with everything that what we call sanity cannot cope with, perhaps with**

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[1] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* plate 19.

The huge-eyed looming horde from
Under the floor of the heart, that run
To the madman's eye-corner. ('Childbirth')

protected from it by nothing more than a delicate membrane, a window which 'trembles to come in'.

Castaneda's Don Juan calls what is inside the house (that is, inside the personality - its grip on its own identity and its subtle relationships and adjustments within the world of ordinary, mundane, visionless reality) the *tonal*. What is outside the house, 'where power hovers', he calls the *nagua*l:

> **As long as his *tonal* is un-challenged and his eyes are tuned only for the *tonal*'s world, the warrior is on the safe side of the fence. He's on familiar ground and knows all the rules. But when his *tonal* shrinks, he is on the windy side, and that opening must be shut tight immediately, or he would be swept away. And this is not just a way of talking. Beyond the gate of the *tonal*'s eyes the wind rages. I mean a real wind. No metaphor. A wind that can blows one's life away. In fact, that is the wind that blows all living things on this earth.[2]**

The *tonal* 'would rather kill itself than relinquish control,:

> **Everyone's obsession is to arrange the world according to the *tonal*'s rules; so every time we are confronted with the *nagual*, we go out of our way to make our eyes stiff and intransigent . . . The point is to convince the *tonal* that there are other worlds that can pass in front of the same windows . . . The eyes can be the windows to peer into boredom or to peek into that infinity.[3]**

Men with the courage to confront the *nagual* and 'peek into that infinity' Don Juan calls sorcerers, we call them poets. The poet is one who has

dared to be struck dead
Peeping through his fngers at the world's ends,
Or at an ant's head. ('Egg-Head')

One of the 'world's ends' Hughes describes is the 'whaled monstered sea-bottom'. Perhaps he is remembering, consciously or unconsciously, that passage in Moby Dick where Melville gives us most overtly his version of the *nagual*:

> **By the merest chance the ship at last rescued him; but from that hour the little**

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[2] Carlos Castaneda, *Tales of Power,* London, 1974, p.176.

[3] Ibid pp.172-3. Hughes later came to identify the *tonal* and the *nagual* as the left and right hemispheres of the human brain. See my essay 'Hughes and the Divided Brain'.

negro went about the deck an idiot; such, at least, they said he was. The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned, entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at least to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels them uncompromised, indifferent as his God.[4]

This is the madness of the Ancient Mariner, of Blake himself, of every genuine poet, and the world in which Hughes has had to pursue his vocation is no more receptive than Blake's was: ,'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.'[5]

The man who defends his *tonal*, his single vision, at all costs, Hughes calls 'Egg-Head':

Long the eggshell head's
Fragility rounds and resists receiving the flash
Of the sun, the bolt of the earth: and feeds
On the yolk's dark and hush

Of a helplessness coming
By feats of torpor, by circumventing sleights
Of stupefaction, juggleries of benumbing,
By lucid sophistries of sight.

To a staturing 'I am'.

Our attachment to single vision is a mixture of arrogance and complacency, a willed blindness and deafness. It is hubristic and solipsistic, needing to reduce and degrade the universe to the point where man can feel himself to be a god in it:

it is a role

In which he can fling a cape,
And outloom life like Faustus. **('Meeting')**

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[4] Herman Melville, *Moby Dick,* Signet, New York, 1962, pp. 396-7.
[5] Ekbert Fass, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe,* Black Sparrow Press. 1980, p.206.

It is not enough to purge ourselves of arrogance and complacency. The protagonist in most of the poems, the poet himself, has got that far, but finds himself left with only the utter helplessness, the sense of his own fragility and mortality. This is why he looks with such fascination at other creatures which seem to be able to live permanently in the *nagual*, plugged in to 'the elemental power circuit of the Universe'[6] and drawing their vitality from it. And he is representative enough in this, for this, surely, is why we are all drawn to zoos and wildlife parks and wildlife programmes on television, and why the Esso tiger is the most potent of all advertisements.

In a late poem 'Flowers and Men', Lawrence asks: 'Oh what in you can answer to this blueness?' He saw that every bird, beast and flower faces us with a similar challenge. Hughes was later to write of the blueness of the harebell, and many other softer qualities of the non-human world. But in *The Hawk in the Rain* he is asking the more urgent questions: what in us can answer to the power of the jaguar, the poise of the hawk, the patience of the horses?

Hughes is also fascinated, in this volume, with those moments when man is involuntarily exposed to the Energies - when he is born: 'Miracle struck out the brain / Of order and ordinary', ('Childbirth'), when love strikes into his life like a hawk in a dovecote, and when he is dying. Hughes, like the onlookers in 'The Casualty', or 'The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar', is 'Greedy to share all that is undergone, / Grimace, gasp, gesture of death.' But of chosen or achieved strategies for dealing with the Energies, he has, at this stage, little to say. there is the crudely-imagined grandeur of the Ancient Heroes, the gracious but remote, tapestried chivalry of 'A Modest Proposal'. The most affirmative lines in the book are the ending of 'The Dove Breeder': 'Now he rides the morning mist / With a big-eyed hawk on his fist.' But 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 the lines: 'But when will he land / On a man's wrist'.

An early poem, 'Quest', pictures the Energies as a many-headed cosmic dragon, and interprets the hero's role as sacrificial:

> **My victory to raise this monster's shadow from my people**
> **Shall be its trumpeting and clangorous flight**
> **Over the moon's face to its white-hot icy crevasse**
> **With fragments of my body dangling from its hundred mouths.**

It seems impossible that human vision could ever be reconciled to

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[6] Ibid p.200.

such Energies: the equivalent of the hawk landing on a man's wrist would be the dragon laying its head on a man's shoulder or a woman's breast. But this is precisely what happens in Blake's *Jerusalem*.

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In *Lupercal*, though still very much in awe of the Energies and their destructive manifestations, Hughes is wholly committed to the attempt to evoke and control them:

> **If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control - rituals, the machinery of religion.**[7]

Again the title poem is carefully chosen, for the Lupercalia were precisely religious rituals to tap and control and turn to good energy in its primary manifestation - fertility. The barren women are living a kind of death until their frozen bodies are touched by the Maker of the world, not directly, which would destroy them, but through two sets of intermediaries. First the dog and the goat provide a spark of God's fire, which is then transmitted to the women through the 'flung effort' and 'poise' of the racers.

These racers are not the only human figures in *Lupercal* who are in control of potent energies. The acrobats shine and soar 'with unearthly access of. grace'. Less spectacularly, among pigs and hay and manure and mud, in Nicholas Ferrer and his family the fire of God

> **Burned down to the blue calm**
> **They called God's look, and through years illumed**
> **Their fingers on the bibles, and gleamed**
>
> **From the eagle of brass.**

The same fire kept Dick Straightup alive as he lay in the freezrng gutter, the tramp in 'November' in the sodden ditch.

These are, of course, so exceptional as to be scarcely human. 'Nothing mortal' falters the poise of the racers; the acrobats flash above 'the dullness of flesh'; Nicholas Ferrer 'housekept in fire of the martyrs'; Dick Straightup was more like a tree bole, the tramp more like a hedgehog or a thorn-root, than a man.

A life without doubts or obstructions is either more or less than

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[7] Ibid pp.200-1.

human. Streamlined efficiency is for angels, animals and machines. Which of these is the saint or the genius? In the ordinary man the energies are there, but not available for efficient unified action, creative or destructive. Rather they sabotage all his efforts by warring with each other and demanding mutually exclusive satisfactions he cannot provide.

One problem for the ordinary man is that he cannot be 'blent in the prayer' ('Thrushes') until he has given his god a face. It is one of the characteristics of single vision to be able to see the Energies only in their destructive forms. The Angel in Blake's 'Memorable Fancy', for example, can see the Powers of the air only as 'the most terriffic shapes of animals sprung from corruption'. One of these is Leviathan, whose mouth and red gills tinge the 'black deep with beams of blood'. The Angel flees in horror, leaving Blake alone:

> **And then this appearance was no more, but I found myself sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight hearing a harper who sung to the harp, and his theme was, The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind. (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)**

Hughes' grandfather and alter ego, Crag Jack, calls continually 'On you, god or not god', to reveal himself other than with a wolf's head and eagle's feet.

Hughes knows that the horror with which we view 'Nature red in tooth and claw' is partly a product of our own preconceptions and tendency to take 'portions of existence' (Blake) and fancy them to be the whole. He knows that not until he has begun to understand nature in its own terms will it show him any other face. Many of the poems in *Lupercal* are strategies and experiments for evoking, confronting and negotiating with the Powers. Until that transformation begins, he will see everything, even the thrushes on the lawn, as terrifying. He forces himself to confront the Energies at their most ugly, savage and, apparently, pointless, to look into 'the shark's mouth / That hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own / Side and devouring of itself' ('Thrushes'). Perhaps, here again, Hughes was remembering *Moby Dick*:

> **They viciously snapped, not only at each other's disembowelments, but like flexible bows, bent round, and bit their own; till those entrails seemed swallowed over and over again by the same mouth, to be oppositely voided by the gaping wound. Nor was this all. It was unsafe to meddle with the corpses and ghosts of these creatures. A sort of generic or Pantheistic vitality seemed to lurk in their very joints and bones, after what might be called the individual life had departed. Killed and hoisted on deck for the sake of his skin, one of these sharks almost took poor Queequeg's hand off, when he tried to shut**

down the dead lid of his murderous jaw.

'Queequeg no care what god made him shark,' said the savage, agonisingly lifting his hand up and down; 'wedder Fejee god or Nantucket god; but de god what made shark must be one dam Ingin.'[8]

Blake, we remember, thought the god who made the tiger must be 'one dam Injin', especially if he also made the lamb.

One of the strategies Hughes adopts to try to escape from the limitation of single vision is to let nature speak for itself, through the mouth of a hawk:

> **Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking. Simply Nature. It's not so simple maybe because Nature is no longer so simple. I intended some creator like the Jehovah in Job but more feminine. When Christianity kicked the devil out of Job what they actually kicked out was Nature . . . and Nature became the devil. He doesn't sound like Isis, mother of the gods, which he is. He sounds like Hitler's familiar spirit.[9]**

The strategy does not work because Hughes cannot yet get behind the fallen nature of our tradition, and therefore cannot render the hawk's vision other than in terms of deranged human vision - the vision of Canute or Richard III or Hitler.

'What you find in the outside world is what has escaped from your own inner world', Hughes said in a recent broadcast. It follows that to understand nature, it is not going to be enough to study the behaviour of animals. Our own energies and those of the natural world are the same energies. Fourfold vision, which is true poetic vision, reveals that creatures are not portions of existence but the whole of existence in little, and the same applies to man. Creatures were, to Lawrence, 'little living myths'.[10] They are symbols of our own forgotten, unfallen selves. They roam our own inner darkness, where we fear to look, and speak to us in the forgotten language of darkness - symbolism. In *Lupercal* Hughes is also beginning to use poems as controlled dreams, as a technique for fishing in the deep pond of his own unconscious to draw up into consciousness whatever is alive there. perhaps by opening himself to receive whatever might come up from the world under the world, he can bypass single vision and release his own buried powers, his own demon,

the dream
Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,
That rose slowly towards me, watching. ('Pike')

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[8] Melville, op.cit. p.295.
[9] Faas, op.cit. p.199.
[10] D.H.Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy,* Penguin, 1976, p.88.

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In *Wodwo* the window comes in, the wind of the *nagual* sweeps away order and ordinary, the terrible energies are released, Hughes receives 'the flash of the sun, the bolt of the earth' ('Egg-head) and is almost destroyed. What come up from the world under the world are horrors - ghost crabs:

> **All night, around us or through us,**
> **They stalk each other, they fasten on to each other,**
> **They mount each other, they tear each other to pieces,**
> **They utterly exhaust each other.**
> **They are the powers of this world.**
> **We are their bacteria,**
> **Dying their lives and living their deaths.**

Despite his daring invocation of the energies in *Lupercal*, once they come they are far more inhuman and overwhelming than he had supposed, and he cannot handle them. They completely (and usually instantaneously, with a sudden psychic snap) supplant his normal consciousness, leaving him stripped of his defences against identification with the other, so that he finds himself jammed into or taken over by the consciousness of a hare or a rat in its last agony, or cataleptic, like the man after his battle with the rain horse, or sunstruck, or wandering in a circle utterly without bearings, like the man in 'Snow', or lost in a.nightmare world, like Ripley in 'The Wound', with a hole in his head. The 'elemental power-circuit of the universe, flows through him all right, but it blows every fuse in his mind.

Blake's symbol for the energies is the serpent or dragon. This is the face Hughes now sees on his god or not-god; the serpent as swallower of everything ('this is the dark intestine'), the dragon waiting with its mouth open for the woman to deliver her child. Nature is all 'one smouldering annihilation', unmaking and remaking, remaking in order to unmake again. How could such a god be worshipped, or even accepted.

This is the dilemma which pushed Hughes, for a while, towards a Buddhistic rejection of the world as Karma:

> **And a hundred and fifty million years of hunger**
> **Killing gratefully as breathing**
> **Moulded the heart and the mouth**
>
> **That cry for milk**
> **From the breast**

Of the mother

Of the God
Of the world
Made of Blood.

This was a necessary dead-end, the zero-point of Hughes' journey, from which he, being a poet and therefore committed to this world, could only emerge the stronger. It would seem from 'Logos', where God, himself Creation's nightmare,

. . . gives the blinding pentagram of His power
For the frail mantle of a person
To be moulded onto.

And within seconds the new-born baby is lamenting
That it ever lived -

that the only answer is to close the womb door and put a stop to these senseless cycles of suffering. The only other answer, the only answer for the poet, is the tragic view of life, which attaches a creative value to suffering, and this is the direction Hughes took: 'The infinite terrible circumstances that seem to destroy man's importance, appear as the very terms of his importance. Man is the face, arms, legs, etc. grown over the infinite, terrible All.'[11] He kept his sympathies intact. Purged of selfhood and single vision, annihilated, reborn, he embarked on another, perhaps not doomed, bid to live, another round of negotiations with 'whatever happened to be out there'.[12]

But before we move on to trace Hughes' emergence into threefold vision, it might be useful to look in some detail at the one poem 'Wings', in which Hughes consciously casts himself in the role of a latter-day Blake. In this poem Hughes uses, in addition to the ideas already outlined, another of Blake's formulations, his division of fallen man into 'spectre' and 'emanation'. John Beer explains these terms as clearly as they allow:

The unified personality is unified by the vision which is allowed to shine through it; self-love is equivalent to the setting up of an inward barrier. It creates a new force, the selfhood, which stands between the vision and its free expression.

As the selfhood begins to assume a life of its own, appropriating to its own use the energies of the individual, it becomes, in Blake's terminology, the 'spectre'; the imagination which remains is called the 'emanation'. The terms

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[11] *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose,* ed. William Scammell, Faber and Faber, 1994, p. 227.
[12] Faas, p.201.

may perhaps be associated with Blake,s critique of eighteenth century mathematical thought as a way of thinking which divided the forces of the universe into two distinct phenomena - the 'spectre' sun, the spherical body which provides a focus for laws of gravitation, and the 'emanation' of vivifying light, which is mysteriously produced by this apparently dead body. If men saw even the sun as a divided image it was not surprising that they should conform to the same pattern, becoming what they beheld: each man became centre of his own mechanically organised little universe, disregarding his imagination as a meaningless accessory except in moments when he wished to relax from the serious clockwork of life. Blake felt, evidently, that if men saw the sun as he saw it, a form which is imposed on that infinite energy of the universe which shouts 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty', - and necessarily imposed if human life is to survive at all - they would see their own humanity in the same light. Spectre and emanation would disappear, their functions being integrated back into a human nature which acted no longer as moonlit mechanism but as an expressive unity of vision and desire.

Until such an awakening, the spectre retains power in the individual, permitting his vision to linger on as impotent emanation. In representing the two split forces pictorially, Blake usually gives them both wings: the spectre has the dark sinister wings of the bat, the emanation the coloured iridescent wings of the butterfly.[13]

Blake pictures unified imagination with the soaring pinions of the eagle, his primary symbol for fourfold vision. Single vision he pictures crouching, crawling on hands and knees, or at the bottom of the sea of materialism, like his Newton.

As Blake took real men, Newton and Locke, to stand for fallen vision in his time, so, in 'Wings', Hughes takes a philosopher, Sartre, a writer, Kafka, and a scientist, Einstein, as his exemplars. All have fallen from that true vision which enables one

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour. **('Auguries of Innocence')**

What connects three such different men is that each is under a huge broken wing of shadow; each attempts to fly and produces only a grotesque or pathetic parody of flight.

Sartre 'regrows the world inside his skull, like the spectre of a flower'. His extinct eyeball can see neither heaven nor angels, only facts, and all facts subsumed in the fact of mortality. Hughes' closing image of him clearly parallels Blake's image of Newton trying to encompass the universe on a sheet of paper at the bottom of the sea:

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[13] John Beer, *Blake's Visionary Universe,* Manchester U.P., 1969, pp. 39-40.

He sits on, in the twice-darkened room,
Pondering on the carrion-eating skate,

And on its wings, lifted, white, like an angel's,
And on those cupid lips in its deathly belly,

And on the sea, this tongue in his ear, licking the last of pages.

Nietzsche also knew this type:

Today I saw a sublime man, a solemn man, a penitent of the spirit: oh, how my soul laughed at his ugliness!
Hung with ugly truths, the booty of his hunt, and rich in tom clothes; many thorns, too, hung on him - but I saw no rose.
There is still contempt in his eye, and disgust lurks around his mouth.
He rests now, to be sure, but he has never yet lain down in the sunlight.
His countenance is still dark; his hand's shadow plays upon it.
The sense of his eyes, too, is overshadowed.
To be sure, I love in him the neck of the ox: but now I want to see the eye of the angel, too.[14]

Kafka, for Hughes, 'is an owl'

'Man' tattooed in his armpit
Under the broken wing.

The tattoo can only be seen when the wing is lifted in flight, but the broken wing cannot be lifted. Similarly the large eyes are for seeing in the dark, but Kafka is condemned by his flightlessness to live in the stunning glare, under the arc-lamp of man's rational consciousness. 'He is a man in hopeless feathers', given the need to fly, commanded by his own nature to fly, without the means to fly. It is the predicament he expressed everywhere in his writings: 'There is a goal, but no way, (*Reflections*). *The Castle* in. particular expresses the futility of the attempt to approach grace by reason. There may be away from God to man (if there is a God); but there is certainly no way from man to God. Yet Kafka felt the obligation to keep up his hopeless 'assault on the last earthly frontier' (*Diaries*).

Man has no other equipment for this assault but logic, language and mathematics. Perhaps Einstein flew highest of all, far into space, but without ever escaping from the prison of his own intellect. He saw no miracles in space such as had sustained his ancestors in the desert:

And no quails tumbling
From the cloud. And no manna

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[14] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Penguin, 1975, pp. 139-40.

For angels.
Only the pillar of fire contracting its strength into a star-mote.

Einstein is presented as being unable to wonder, or weep, or pray, or love. The nearest he gets to prayer is in his playing of Bach. But music is also mathematics:

He bows in prayer over music, as over a well.
But it is the cauldron of the atom.
And it is the Eye of God in the whirlwind.
It is a furnace, storming with flames.
It is a burned-out bottomless eye-socket
Crawling with flies
In fugues.

His prayer for motherly love is answered not by angels but by a rising cloud of flies, not by the pillar of cloud by day, but by the mushroom cloud of a nuclear explosion.

These human deficiencies Hughes attributes to a shifting of the centre of gravity away from 'man's sense of himself, . . . his body and his essential human subjectivity', and a surrender of his individuality to an 'impersonal abstraction'. For a physicist 'the centre of gravity is … within some postulate deep in space, or leaking away down the drill-shaft of mathematics'.[15]

The poet and the physicist are exploring 'the same gulf of unknowable laws and unknowable particles', but the poet, not crippled by single vision, not releasing energies he cannot control, not committed to the total comprehensibility of the universe as if it were the mind's mirror, has the truer way. Hughes' metaphor for the poet's way, written as early as 1961, is 'Wodwo'.

Hughes described his wodwo as 'some sort of satyr or half-man or half-animal, half all kinds of elemental little things, just a little larval being without shape or qualities who suddenly finds himself alive in this world at any time'. That Hughes in this poem is expressing, among other things, the attempt of the poet to enter into threefold vision, is clear if we compare the poem with this prose passage:

. . . the living suffering spirit, capable of happiness, much deluded, too frail, with doubtful and provisional senses, so undefinable as to be almost silly, but palpably existing, and wanting to go on existing . . . homing in tentatively on vital scarcely perceptible signals, making no mistakes, but with no hope of finality, continuing to explore.[16]

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[15] *Winter Pollen,* p.222.
[16] Ibid, pp. 221-2.

This could be a paraphrase of 'Wodwo'. In fact, it describes the efforts of a generation of East European poets to come to terms through poetry with the hostile world in which they are obliged to live and to salvage their humanity and self-respect. The wodwo is also an image for certain aspects of the world of the child:

> **Theirs is not just a miniature world of naive novelties and limited reality - it is also still very much the naked process of apprehension, far less conditioned than ours, far more fluid and alert, far closer to the real laws of its real nature. It is a new beginning, coming to circumstances afresh. It is still lost in the honest amoebic struggle to fit itself to the mysteries. It is still wide open to information, still anxious to get things right, still wanting to know exactly how things 4re, still under the primeval dread of misunderstanding the situation. Preoccupations are already pressing, but they have not yet closed down, like a space helmet, over the entire head and face, with the proved, established adiustments of security. Losing that sort of exposed nakedness, we gain in confidence and in mechanical efffciency on our chosen front, but we lose in real intelligence. We lose in attractiveness to change, in curiosity, in perception, in the original, wild, no-holds-barred approach to problems. In other words, we start the drift away from any true situation. We begin to lose validity as witnesses and participants in the business of living in this universe.**[17]

The best example from this period of the child as witness and participant in the universe is 'Full Moon and Little Frieda'. The child is learning words, and using them, like an artist, to recreate the world. The act of naming the moon with such freshness and openness and wonder unifies the whole scene over which the moon presides, including the child and its father. Such unfallen vision is atoning and redeeming.

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The events of 1963 and 1969 darkened Hughes' vision again. The Energies manifested themselves to him as more dragonish and wantonly destructive than ever. He found it necessary, as Blake had done, to find a way to stand outside his own intolerable experience, to hold it at arms' length so as to see it whole, to objectify and systematize it as myth. Also he had to recapitulate, to go back to the very beginning and start his quest again, with harsher discipline, not to be seduced by beauty and by words, with fewer preconceptions, not even those which seem to define our humanity. He took Leonard

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[17] *Children as Writers 2,* London, 1975, p.v.

Baskin's Crow-Man, gave him features from Eskimo, Red Indian and Celtic crow-lore, then hatched him, clueless, into our world, with the task of trying to understand it, and his place in it.

Crow tries out or witnesses all the techniques of single vision - words and numbers, scripture and physics - the result is war, murder, suicide, madness. He confronts the Energies always as something to be fought and killed - dragon, serpent, ogress - obstacles on his blind quest. Crow's quest, though he does not himself know it, is ultimately the same as Hughes' quest, to achieve fourfold vision and thereby become fully a man, reborn into a redeemed world of joy.

The poems which were gathered in *Crow* (according to the dust-wrapper 'from about the first two-thirds of what was to have been an epic folk-tale') are mainly about Crow's mistakes, his mutually destructive encounters with the Energies, his ego-death, his first glimmerings of conscience, his first tentative steps towards reconstituting himself and reinterpreting the world, with the help of his Eskimo guide. Hughes had brought Crow to the point he had himself reached. Therefore, he could see no way forward for Crow. He abandoned him and sought to by-pass him:

> **In the little girl's angel gaze**
> **Crow lost every feather**
> **In the little boy's wondering eyes**
> **Crow's bones splintered**
>
> **In the little girl's passion**
> **Crow's bowels fell in the dust**
> **In the little boy's rosy cheeks**
> **Crow became an unrecognisable rag**
>
> **Crow got under the brambles, capitulated**
> **To nothingness eyes closed**
> **Let those infant feet pound through the Universe.**

Crow's vision is assumed here to be fundamentally at odds with innocence. It is assumed that he can never achieve threefold vision. But Crow refused to be killed off so easily. He lay dormant for a few years waiting for his future to come clear in Hughes' imagination.

Meanwhile Hughes, possibly without at first knowing it, struggled with parallel versions of the same story - *Orghast, Prometheus on His Crag, Gaudete, Cave Birds* (which Hughes referred to as 'continued *Crow*'), *Adam and the Sacred Nine.* The heroes of all these stories - Pramanath, Prometheus, Lumb, the nameless protagonist of Cave Birds, and Adam - are all, to begin with, split or crucified by their inability to unify or

reconcile their mortal and immortal natures. All have violated 'material nature, the Creatress, source of life and light'.

Blake's idea of contraries probably derived from his reading of the Smaragdine Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus: 'That which is above is like that which is beneath, and that which is beneath is like that which is above, to work the miracles of one thing.' This is the tablet Hughes had in mind in 'Fragment of an Ancient Tablet'. But the alchemical wisdom of that tablet is fragmented because Crow cannot yet unify his vision, cannot yet see above and below in any other terms than those of such dualistic clichés, single-vision judgements, as 'good and evil, 'beautiful and ugly' . . . His sexual consciousness is as sick as Lear's in his madness: 'But to the girdle do the Gods inherit, / Beneath is all the fiend's.' The only way in which this conflict can be transcended is 'by creating a being which, like Prometheus, includes the elemental opposites, and in whom the collision and pain become illumination.[18] This illumination is fourfold vision, the recognition of the vulture not as monstrous obscenity, but as Helper and midwife, mother and bride.

Part II of *Orghast,* Hughes tells us, 'is the story of the tyrant Holdfast in the Underworld, the decomposition of the fallen ego among the voices of its crimes, oversights and victims'.[19] This could equally well be a summary of *Cave Birds*. The protagonist's crime has been mutilation and attempted murder. His victim was his own innermost demon, who is also Nature, his mother and intended bride. After his decomposition we witness his reconstitution as a man at the hands of his former victim whom he simultaneously reconstitutes. The image for this healing and atonement is, as in Blake, marriage. In earlier poems of the *Crow* period Hughes had been unable to get beyond the failed, destructive, cannibalistic marriages of 'Lovesong', 'The Lovepet', 'The Lamentable History of the Human Calf', and 'Actaeon'. Now, in 'His legs ran about' and 'Bride and groom, he enters into fourfold vision.

The reassembling of the bits and pieces of disintegrated man which takes place in these poems is, of course, a version of the Osiris story. The process also redeems nature itself by, as it were, sewing it together, together, reintegrating it as a harmonious unity. As Blake puts it in *The Four Zoas* ('Night the Eighth'): 'So Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast / Collecting up the scattered portions of his immortal body.' *Cave Birds*, like *The Four Zoas*, is about man's 'fall into Division' and 'Resurrection to Unity'. That division is seen by Blake as the separation between the male Spectres and their female

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[18] A.C.H. Smith, *Orghast at Persepolis,* London, 1972, pp. 132-3.
[19] Ibid.

Emanations, with consequent torment, sterility and loss of vision. Their eventual reconstitution and marriage initiates Jerusalem, a redeemed world of 'organised innocence', vision, unity, holiness, love and joy.

> **Thus shall the male & female live the life of Eternity**
> **Because the Lamb of God Creates himself a bride & wife**
> **That we his Children evermore may live in Jerusalem**
> **Which now descendeth out of heaven a City yet a woman. {'Night the Ninth')**

The role of nature in this drama is complex in both Blake and Hughes. Blake's quarrel with Wordsworth centred on Blake's rejection of Wordsworth's nature-worship, his claim that nature was Mother of all, creatress of humanity and therefore of the human imagination, a self-validating whole. Wordsworth, too, used marriage as the dominant image of his 'spousal verse'. Paradise was to be regained, or recreated, by wedding 'the discerning intellect of Man' to 'this goodly universe'. Blake believed that neither the mind of man in its fallen state, nor the material universe, were sources of spirit, and called Wordsworth 'pagan'. Wordsworth, he felt, had allowed himself to be seduced by fallen nature, the glamour of the universe, which in Jerusalem Blake calls Vala.

In his marginalia on Wordsworth's *Poems* (1815) Blake wrote: 'Natural Objects always did & now do Weaken deaden & obliterate imagination in Me'. We must remember, however, that with fourfold vision there are no natural objects, since every sparrow, every sandgrain, becomes a world of delight closed to the vision dependent on the five senses which imprison man in a barren world of 'Natural Objects' drained of the spiritual significance only the imagination can bestow upon them.

> **Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?**
> **It has a heart like thee, a brain open to heaven & hell.**
> **Withinside wondrous & expansive, its gates are not clos'd.**
> **I hope thine are not. (*Milton*)**

He renounces the corporeal, vegetable world as having no more to do with him than 'the Dirt upon my feet' (*A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 95), but even that dirt is capable of transfiguration.

Insofar as Wordsworth meant by nature not so much the external universe as the condition of innocent at-one-ness with it found in children and animals, this was more attractive to Blake, but nevertheless had to be consigned to the category of a false or inadequate paradise of unorganised innocence which was too protected and

comfortable to allow the conflict between contraries out of which alone could come progression towards fourfold vision.

Hughes' position is somewhere between Blake and Wordsworth. Nature, as the external universe, he values much more highly than Blake; but he is well aware that only the human imagination, fourfold, can fuse the horror and the beauty, heal the scarred face of the goddess. Coleridge would have agreed with Blake: 'The further I ascend from men and cattle, and the common birds of the woods and fields, the greater becomes in me the intensity of the feelings of life. Life seems to me there a universal spirit that neither has nor can have an opposite'. Hughes' experience has been exactly the reverse. It was by descending again from the far limits of pain and consciousness into woods and fields, among men and cattle, that he recovered his sense of the sacredness of animated Nature. In the farming poems miracles issue from the mud and the body's jellies. In 'Barley', the process of germination is rendered sacramentally:

> **And the angel of earth**
> **Is flying through the ffeld, kissing each one awake.**
> **But it is a hard nursery.**
> **Night and day all through winter huddling naked**
> **They have to listen to the pitiless lessons**
> **Of the freezing constellations**
> **And the rain. If it were not for the sun**
> **Who visits them daily, briefly,**
> **To pray with them, they would lose hope**
> **And give up. With him**
> **They recite the Lord's prayer**
> **And sing a psalm.**

Hughes' version of the Lord's prayer is given at the end of 'The Golden Boy':

> **Thanking the Lord**
> **Thanking the Wheat**
> **Thanking the Bread**
> **For bringing them Life**
> **Today and Tomorrow**
> **Out of the dirt.**

But two poems in *Cave Birds*, 'A green mother' and 'As I came, I saw a wood', show that Hughes was as aware as Blake of the inadequacy of the idea that 'the earth is a busy hive of heavens', where a man may climb 'to the heavens of the birds, the heavens of the beasts. and of the fish'. The green mother is Beulah, offering the hero a return to the

womb, not for rebirth, but for cradling in endless bliss, the everlasting holiday promised by all the religions, without contraries or suffering or consciousness:

> **This earth is heaven's sweetness.**
>
> **It is heaven's mother.**
> **The grave is her breast**
> **And her milk is endless life.**
> **You shall see**
> **How tenderly she has wiped her child's face clean**
>
> **Of the bitumen of blood and smoke of tears.**

In a wood the hero sees all the animals move 'In the glow of fur which is their absolution in sanctity.' But they have never fallen, so that sanctity in simple being is not available to man, and, in any case, would be something less than fully human: 'And time was not present they never stopped / Or left anything old or reached any new thing.' The only religion the hero's deepest humanity sanctions for him is communion with a world in which gods are perpetually crucified and eaten and resurrected, and men move not in perpetual sanctity, but in the bitumen of blood and smoke of tears. There and only there is the ground of his striving towards an earned atonement.

There is a parallel situation at the beginning of the second book of Blake's *Milton*, where the questing hero, Milton or Blake, is poised on the threshold of Eternity, which is fourfold vision. The last country or condition through which he must pass, from which Etemity can be seen, is Beulah.

> **It is a pleasant lovely Shadow**
> **Where no dispute can come, because of those who Sleep. …**
> **But Beulah to its Inhabitants appears within each district**
> **As the beloved infant in his mother's bosom round incircled**
> **With arms of love & pity & sweet compassion. But to**
> **The Sons of Eden the moony habitations of Beulah**
> **Are from Great Eternity a mild & pleasant Rest.**

Eternity, on the other hand, is a place of great Wars, 'in fury of Poetic Inspiration / To build the Universe stupendous'. The Emanations cannot face its brightness and challenge, they cry for 'a habitation & a place / In which we may be hidden under the shadow of wings'. Their prayer is granted:

> **Into this pleasant Shadow all the weak 8r weary,**

Like Women 8r Children, were taken away as on wings
Of dovelike softness, & shadowy habitations prepared for them.

But to rest in Beulah, in the state of threefold vision, would, for the questing poet/hero, be failure; for the state of Beulah can only be maintained by his repeated suffering and sacrifice. His task, like that of the hero of *Cave Birds*, and of *Gaudete* is to 'Redeem the Female Shade' (his own Emanation, his mother and his bride, vision, Nature)

From Death Eternal, such your lot, to be continually Redeem'd
By death & misery of those you love & by Annihilation.

Milton takes the final step into Glory, and his Shadow becomes a Dove.

Blake, like Hughes, makes frequent use of theriomorphic images, not least in his mythology of vision. His image for the darkness of single vision is the Raven, for the energy of twofold vision, the serpent, for the light of threefold vision, the Dove, and for the majesty of fourfold vision, the Eagle, Lion or Tyger.

From the beginning Hughes had been fascinated by the 'murderous innocence' (in Yeats' phrase) of the hawk, its complete mastery of its world. But not until much later was he able to resolve that oxymoron. From the beginning, also, he had represented the energies as snake or dragon. *Lupercal* contains several poems left over from an abandoned sequence of poems about England, its flora and fauna, its betrayal and pollution by single vision. The controlling image was to have been a river, which would metamorphose freely with a snake, an adder, standing for the rejected energies, the buried life of England, almost extinguished. At first there had been no single theriomorphic image for single vision, since that is by definition exclusively human, but in the recapitulation of single vision in *Crow*, crow is himself such an image, and is brought face to face with his mother the serpent (whom he sees as an enemy to be annihilated) in several poems. In Hughes, too, the light of innocence, repeatedly victimised, shines from the dove. 'An Alchemy' is the poem which celebrates its advent, in terms of the redeeming innocence of Shakespeare's later heroines, especially Cordelia, with a miraculous transformation of both crow and serpent:

Lear redivivus
Phoenix-Posthumous
Found breath in Marina
Redeemed all Tempest
His kiss of life
Stirred the Turtle
Of the waters of amnios

The lunar cauldron

Then black Venus
double tongued
Swine-uddered Sycorax
Lilith the night-crow
Slid from the Tree

Released the Rainbow
Breasted Dove
With a leaf of light
Miranda with a miracle
To Adam Adonis

And sank
In the crucible
Tiamat
The Mother
The Scales
The Coil
Of the Matter
Deeper
Then ever plummet
With Prospero's bones
And the sounding Book

In *Gaudete* the death which is also a rebirth and a recovery of innocence is rendered in one of the epilogue poems as the shooting of a dove:

Am I killed?
Or am I searching?
Is this the rainbow silking my body?

Which wings are these?

In *Adam and the sacred Nine* one of the nine birds which come to Adam is a dove, 'her breast big with rainbows', 'a piling heaven of silver and violet', 'a sun-blinding', the sacrificial Christ-bird, always violated, nesting among thorns, to hatch the egg of resurrection. That rainbow is an important image in Blake, too, a promise of the ultimate recovery of Vision.

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One pole of Hughes' achievement is the black vision of *Crow*, twofold vision unredeemed by threefold, a vision of destruction and horror.

The opposite pole is the affirmative, celebratory vision of *Season Songs*. Suffering and death are not absent from *Season Songs*, but are not given enough weight to disturb the essentially up-beat surge. Perhaps some of these poems could only have been written by a man who has come through to fourfold vision; but they do not contain within themselves the struggle and the payment, the painful moment of transformation of dirt into God. That is the biggest challenge Hughes has yet set himself, to hold together and fuse, in a single poem or set of poems, the two poles of his vision, to find verbal equivalents for the magical transformation in consciousness. It is not so impossible as it seems, for the vision of crow was not a vision of reality. Crow was projecting his own blackness and blindness upon the world, like the angel in the 'Memorable Fancy'. When the angel departs, the scene is transformed to reflect instead Blake's own vision of harmony.

The poems in which this is achieved are, it seems to me, the closing poems of *Prometheus on his Crag*, the closing poems of *Cave Birds*, the last poem in *Adam and the Sacred Nine*, a few of the farming poems and odd poems from elsewhere, but, supremely, the Epilogue poems in *Gaudete*. For example:

> **The grass-blade is not without**
> **The loyalty that never was beheld.**
>
> **And the blackbird**
> **Sleeking from common anything and worm-dirt**
> **Balances a precarious banner**
> **Gold on black, terror and exultation.**
>
> **The grim badger with armorial mask**
> **Biting spade-steel, teeth and jaw-strake shattered,**
> **Draws that final shuddering battle cry**
> **Out of its backbone.**
>
> **Me too,**
> **Let me be one of your warriors.**
>
> **Let your home**
> **Be my home. Your people**
> **My people.**

The Anglican clergyman Lumb has undergone a terrifying ordeal in the underworld, which has destroyed his old split self and enabled him to be reborn of the goddess, simultaneously bringing her to a new birth. He returns to the world, to the west of Ireland, stripped of everything but his vision - the memories of his ordeal, his intimations of atonement, and his new sacramental vision which enables him to

perform small miracles such as whistling an otter out of the loch, and to write these poems. The poems contain as much pain as any poems could, but the pain does not cancel the exultation; on the contrary, is felt to be essential to it. In 'Crow on the Beach', Crow grasps something

> **Of the sea's ogreish outcry and convulsion.**
> **He knew he was the wrong listener unwanted**
> **To understand or help.**

The reborn Lumb is the right listener, able to transform the horror:

> **The sea grieves all night long.**
> **The wall is past groaning.**
> **The field has given up -**
> **It can't care any more.**
> **Even the tree**
> **Waits like an old man**
> **Who has seen his whole family murdered.**
>
> **Horrible world.**
>
> **Where I let in again-**
> **As if for the first time-**
> **The untouched joy.**

The atoning, healing, transformations take several forms: the predator becomes an angel or midwife, the monster becomes a bride, pain becomes bliss, terror exultation, the dirt God. Some of these I have already discussed; some have been discussed in earlier chapters. Let us look closer now at the transformation of the predator.

The horror of predation was a common theme in earlier Hughes poems, and reached its definitive statement, perhaps, in 'Crow Tyrannosaurus':

> **The cat's body writhed**
> **Gagging**
> **A tunnel**
> **Of incoming death-struggles, sorrow on sorrow.**

The whole of creation, it seems to Crow, is 'a cortege of mourning and lament'. Yet the horror derives not so much from the reality, as from the split vision of an observer unable to resolve the dualisms of happiness/pain and life/death. Even at the level of field observation it is not accurate. The relationship of prey to predator is not only a matter of struggle and scream. Often the victim will go into a sort of trance of acquiescence. Several lions come upon an old buffalo in the

middle of a pool. They will not go out of their depth, so the buffalo could outwait them. Or it could fight for its life with its formidable horns. It does neither. It walks slowly towards them, and bows its head, exposing its spinal cord to the lioness already on its back.

> **The spider clamps the bluefly - whose death panic**
> **Becomes sudden soulful absorption.**
>
> **A stoat throbs at the nape of the lumped rabbit**
> **Who watches the skylines fixedly.** (*Gaudete* **177**)

Fourfold vision does not cast the predator, anthropomorphically, in the role of villain. The tiger is one more embodiment of the goddess. The eagle is a god:

> **And already the White Hare crouches at the sacrifice,**
> **Already the lawn stumbles to offer itself up**
> **And the Wolf-Cub weeps to be chosen.** **('Eagle')**

'Tiger-psalm' was originally. conceived as a dialogue between Socrates and Buddha. Gradually Buddha's side of the argument was resolved into a tiger and Socrates' into the principle of machine guns, 'as if the whole abstraction of Socrates' discourse must inevitably; given enough time and enough applied intelligence, result in machine guns'. It is an argument between single vision and fourfold vision. The tiger, unlike the machine-guns, is carrying out a perfectly rational, restrained and sacred activity:

> **The tiger**
> **Kills expertly, with anaesthetic hand. …**
>
> **The tiger**
> **Kills frugally, after close inspection of the map….**
>
> **The tiger**
> **Kills like a fall of a cliff, one-sinewed with the earth,**
> **Himalayas under eyelid, Ganges under fur -**
>
> **Does not kill.**
>
> **Does not kill. The tiger blesses with a fang.**
> **The tiger does not kill but opens a path**
> **Neither of Life nor of Death:**
> **The tiger within the tiger:**
> **The Tiger of the Earth.**
> **O Tiger!**
> **O Brother of the Viper!**

O Beast in Blossom!

In his report on visions seen by thirty-five subjects after taking the hallucinogenic drug harmaline in Chile, Claudio Naranjo tells us that seven of the subjects saw big cats, usually tigers, though big cats are not seen in Chile, and tigers, of course, are not seen in the New world. One woman had a tiger guide throughout her journey:

> **I walk next to him, my arm over his neck. We climb the high mountain. There is a zig-zag path between high bushes. We arrive. There is a crater. We wait for some time and there begins an enormous eruption. The tiger tells me I must throw myself into the crater.I am sad to leave my companion but I know that this last journey I must travel. I throw myself into the fire that comes out of the crater. I ascend with the flames towards the sky and fly onwards.[20]**

Another subject actually became a tiger:

> **I walked, though, feeling the same freedom I had experienced as a bird and a fish, freedom of movement, flexibility, grace. I moved as a tiger in the jungle, joyously, feeling the ground under my feet, feeling my power; my chest grew larger. I then approached an animal, any animal. I only saw its neck, and then experienced what a tiger feels when looking at its prey.**

Naranjo comments: 'This may be enough to show how 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.' It may be that most sophisticated urban whites, whose normal vision is single vision, can only achieve this synthesis with the aid of hallucinogenic drugs, but it occurs very frequently in the oral poetry of so-called 'primitive' peoples. Here, for example, is a Yoruba poem called 'Leopard':

> **Gentle hunter**
> **His tail plays on the ground**
> **While he crushes the skull.**
>
> **Beautiful death**
> **Who puts on a spotted robe**
> **When he goes to his victim.**
>
> **Playful killer**
> **Whose loving embrace**
> **Splits the antelope's heart.[21]**

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[20] Michael J. Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism,* Oxford U.P., 1973, pp. 184-5.

Half Naranjo's subiects had ecstatic feelings of a religious nature: 'The sea was in myself. There was a continuity of the external with the internal. . . . The sand and the plants were myself or something of mine. The idea of God was in everything. . . . Beauty, joy, peace, everything I longed for was there. God in myself.'[22] ('All deities reside in the human breast', said Blake.)[23] But there must always be a descent into destruction before this atonement is reached. The characteristic mythic shape of the experience is described by Naranio:

> **The complex of images discussed first as portraying the polarity of being and becoming, freedom and necessity, spirit and matter, only set up the stage for the human drama. This involves the battle of opposites and eventually their reconciliation or fusion, after giving way to death and destruction, be this by fire, tigers, drowning, or devouring snakes. The beauty of fluid fire, the graceful tiger, or the subtle and wise reptile, these seem most expressive for the synthetic experience of accepting life as a whole, or, better,, accepting existence as a whole, life and death included; evil included too, though from a given spiritual perspective it is not experienced as evil any more. Needless to say, the process is essentially religious, and it could even be suspected that every myth presents us one particular aspect of the same experience.[24]**

This, certainly, is the controlling myth of Hughes' career. And one name for that 'given spiritual perspective' is fourfold vision.

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Fourfold vision is everywhere apparent in Hughes' most recent work. At the moment of writing, some twenty poems have been published from a forthcoming collection called *The River*. All are fine, and those about salmon seem to me among Hughes' finest. As in the farming poems, Hughes never takes his eye from the object. Never for a moment does the salmon cease to be a real salmon and become a counter for something else. Yet Hughes' vision reveals, without ever saying so, that the salmon is our prototype/ its life-cycle a paradigm of nature's purposes and of the religious life.

In 'Salmon Eggs' the mating salmon are 'Emptying themselves for each other'. This selfless giving, generosity, openness, is a form of dedication or worship, as is the acquiescence of the October salmon in his slow death:

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[21] Ruth Finnegan, ed. *The Penguin Book of Oral Poetry,* 1978, p.163.
[22] Harner, op.cit. p.188.
[23] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* plate 11.
[24] Harner, pp.189-90.

All this, too, is stitched into the torn richness,
The epic poise
That holds him so steady in his wounds, so loyal to his doom, so patient
In the machinery of heaven.

The dying salmon is the defeated, torn and sacrificed hero, about to become a god.

Blake asks

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?

The same, of course, may be said of every fish, or every living thing: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite'.[25] What Blake means, surely, is that everything contains within itself the clue to the mystery, the principle of the whole, and being continuous with the whole (which cannot be seen in its immensity) witnesses to the whole and makes it accessible to vision. The mystery is 'the redeemed life of joy'. It is a mystery because there is no mechanistic or rational explanation for the transformation of suffering (and everything which cries out for redemption) into joy. The language of poetry can re-enact it. Joy, as Blake or Hughes understands it, has little to do with happiness - a relatively trivial, uncreative state, a distraction, temptation, backwater from the true way through tragic experience. It is the grace of atonement, the exaltation of being used by the goddess for her sacred purposes, 'her insatiable quest'. In an early version of *Gaudete*, one of the prayers to that goddess composed by Nicholas Lumb was addressed to a salmon (in its capacity as our representative):

While the high-breasted, the halved world
Opens herself for you

While your strength
Can enjoy her, lifting you through her

While your face remains free
Of the mesh of numbness

While your spine shivers and leaps
In the spate of your spirit

Before it trickles thin and low
Inhabited only by small shadows

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[25] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

Court the lady of the hill
Press to her source, spend your plunder

For her - only for her -
O salmon of the ghostly sea.

The language of all these river poems is a rich weave of inter-relationships. A poem may be ostensibly about a single creature, but that creature is defined by its relationships with other creatures, with weather and season and landscape. Since 'All things draw to the river' it is therefore the language of atonement. The life of the salmon is the life of the living waters, sea and river, which is the life of earth and sky, which is our only life. Each poem is a microcosm. The salmon is part o{ a flow which 'will not let up for a minute'. The river is itself an archetypal image for life in time, process, the one-way helpless journey towards death. But a river is by no means a one-way wastage:

Something else is going on in the river
More vital than death - death here seems a superficiality
Of small scaly limbs, parasitical. More grave than life
Whose reflex jaws and famished crystals
Seem incidental
To this telling - these toilings of plasm -
The melt of mouthing silence, the charge of light
Dumb with immensity.

The river goes on
Sliding through its place, undergoing itself
In its wheel. **('Salmon Eggs')**

And here the poem approaches the mystery. For the wheel, karma, the 'cycles of recurrence', had formerly been for Hughes, as for most religions, images of horror or absurdity, needing to be transcended. Now it seems that the horror was a product of defective vision, the split psyche, the spiritual blindness caused by dualism, the hubristic desire to improve on the given life, to redeem nature. In the words of Lawrence's risen Christ (in *The Escaped Cock*): 'From what, and to what, could this infinite whirl be saved?'

Since logical analysis is the language of single vision, one would expect the language of fourfold vision to be paradoxical synthesis. The very title of Blake's finest work, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, declares that this is so. 'Salmon Eggs' moves through a series of oxymorons - 'burst crypts', 'time-riven altar', 'harrowing, crowned', 'raptures and rendings'- appropriating on the way all the claims of the

Christian mystery of transcendence -'crypt', 'altar', 'liturgy', 'tidings', 'Sanctus', 'mass', 'font' - claiming them all for the wheel itself, 'the round of unending water' and the salmon egg which is its 'blessed issue', towards the river's simple annunciation: '*Only birth matters*'. For this poem to work as a spiritually fertilising experience, it is necessary to believe that these words express a truth uttered by the river, and not a theory uttered by Ted Hughes. And that is unlikely to happen unless we have accompanied him imaginatively through the four stages of his arduous quest, through all the horrors, sufferings and deaths his earlier poems enact.

What saved Hughes in those worst years in the sixties from despair and world-denial and a Beckettian absurdism was a Blake-like tenacity, against all the odds, in holding firm to the conviction that the human spirit, with its desire for existence, is 'the only precious thing, and designed in accord with the whole universe. Designed, indeed, by the whole universe', and that the universe knows what it is about.[26] These words were written in 1966. When Hughes came to rewrite his essay on Popa in 1977, he attributed to the Eastern European poets something of the vision to which he had himself come through in the interim:

> **At bottom, their vision, like Beckett's, is of the struggle of animal cells and of the torments of spirit in a world reduced to that vision, but theirs contains far more elements than his. It contains all the substance and feeling of ordinary life. And one can argue that it is a step or two beyond his in imaginative truth, in that whatever terrible things happen in their work happen within a containing passion - fob-like - for the elemental final beauty of the created world.[27]**

Hughes could not have written that final phrase in the sixties. Then he would have regarded beauty with suspicion, as something likely to blind man to the essential elemental starkness and awesomeness of the world. As his vision matured, beauty forced its way in again, and to the centre, not as something cosy and pretty and picturesque, but as a radiance testifying to miracle.

The poem in which Hughes most fully receives and expresses that radiance is the poem with which he has chosen to end his *Selected Poems*, 'That Morning'. In 1980 Hughes and his son Nicholas spent some weeks salmon-fishing in Alaska. The place and its creatures demanded a sacramental response. The sheer profusion of salmon was like a sign and a blessing:

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[26] *Winter Pollen,* p.222.

[27] Ibid, p.221.

Solemn to stand there in the pollen light
Waist-deep in wild salmon swaying massed
As from the hand of God. There the body
Separated, golden and imperishable,
From its doubting thought - the spirit beacon
Lit by the power of the salmon
That came on, came on, and kept on coming
…

So we stood, alive in the river of light
Among the creatures of light, creatures of light.

The conclusion of Hughes' *Selected Poems* is the same as the conclusion of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: 'For everything that lives is Holy'.