The Ted Hughes Society Journal

Volume VIII Issue 1

The Ted Hughes Society Journal

Published by the Ted Hughes Society.

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Editorial

The first of this issue's six essays opens with a startling claim: 'There is a kind of land grab taking place in the world of Ted Hughes studies.' I will not steal any of David Troupes's thunder by getting in the way of his own typically lucid and personal explanation of exactly what kind of land grab he has in mind, or how he responds to it, though as his title suggests, his own home state of Massachusetts has a part to play in his careful argument. Instead, I want to reflect briefly on the character of 'the world of Ted Hughes studies': how it might be changing, and the role the *Ted Hughes Society Journal* might play in it.

As anticipated in the last issue, three of these essays are expanded and considerably revised versions of papers given at the memorable conference held at Gregynog Hall fourteen months ago in August 2018. That gathering, like the reach of this trio – and from Hughes's and David Troupes's and indeed Henry David Thoreau's Massachusetts to India you can expect to travel, via the education Krishnendu Das Gupta provides on the intertwining of Hindu Symbology and Hughes's poetry, back to Cambridge, in Di Beddow's expert guide to the city and dank meadows of Hughes and Plath's courtship – reflects the true internationalism of the world of Hughesian scholarship.

But there's another important element to this growing and diversifying community of interests gathered on Hughes's work. Di Beddow's essay quotes one of Hughes's undergraduate poems, which he included in the original composition he submitted for Part I of the English Tripos in 1953. Its title was 'The ear-witness account of a poetry-reading in Throttle College, before the small poets grew up into infinitesimal critics.' Hughes had a genuine fear that poets would indeed shrink into critics; and his own experience of critics, including a 1992 mauling at the pen of another graduate of Pembroke College, Eric Griffiths, led him to complain, in an unpublished letter to Seamus Heaney now in the archive at Emory, of a peculiarly ungenerous 'academentia'. For what it's worth, my own view of the world of Hughesian criticism as I have been privileged to see it flourish and range in the pages of this Journal since inheriting the editorship some years ago is that, while Hughes is not of course exempt from lazy writing – as our tireless Chair Terry Gifford is never afraid to point out in the reviews he writes, alongside commissioning them from others – Hughes's work is also blessed by a notably imaginative, open-minded and remarkably generous community of readers and

writers, united in their admiration of a body of work that we all know has any number of complexities and truths still to yield, and able to connections to writing from across the centuries and continents.

There is of course a real truth to David Troupes's notion of a 'land grab': any scholar wants others to notice the stake they have just discovered they hold in helping reveal some new dimension or orientation to a great poet's work. And every teacher embarking on an academic career in which they can bring Hughes to the attention of a new generation of readers, and buyers, needs all the support they can get. But my experience of working with the contributors – sometimes at real speed: the sad news of Al Alvarez's death a fortnight before this issue went to press has elicited from Mick Gowar, the Society's new Secretary, a wise and personal memory and assessment of the work and life of a writer who knew Hughes and Plath almost too well; sometimes over months, as promising drafts have grown into something sharper, cleaner, and sometimes something bigger – has been that the best scholars are always ready to move beyond the quick planting of a flag and into the labours of love you read here: the fullest, clearest statement of a case for the poetry and its effect on them as readers. That really does inspire others to discover Hughes for themselves and follow in their teachers' footsteps.

The *Journal* is, then, a place where any reader can expect to find examples of a scrupulous, open-minded, 'sympathetic husbandry', care for the work it celebrates and for our understanding of that work and its broader environment. Hughes of course produced such work himself, in and beyond *Winter Pollen*; he also knew it existed elsewhere, even if, to my own personal regret, he didn't think it did in the Cambridge he knew and remembered. And it's not just in the words you read in the Journal that such labours of love are manifest. That labour, that love is also responsible for the handsome design of the last several issues, which David Troupes has managed to find time for alongside writing one of the most important, and personally informed and informing, books on Hughes yet to appear. Readers of the Journal and members of the Society owe David a great debt for all that he has done, and will I hope join me in wishing him all the best for the future.

For my own part, this has meant Hughes's poetry and his fishing diaries making their own land grab on my life. They have not just taken pride of place; they have given me new places, opened them to me as nothing but fishing and reading attentively in his footsteps can: in Ireland, certainly, where this July, forty-one years to the day on which he and his son Nicholas and Barrie Cooke found the stretch of the 'River Barrow' that inspired his great, still under-rated poem, I caught a dace opposite the skull tower on the North bank; but also in Devon, where, one August night this summer, I finally caught the sea trout I've dreamed of catching, on one of

Hughes's favourite Torridge pools, and then, the following evening, caught my first glimpse of a Dart salmon head and tailing in the gorge below Dartmeet.

And in between those two very private acts of pilgrimage a new sort of Hughesian event had taken place, as members of the Society and other friends had walked up the Taw to the Memorial Stone just below Taw Head. Richard Hibbert's lovely piece about Hughes and Dartmoor is a fine result of that long day. From Di Beddow's work in Cambridge, and Ann Skea's work in London, we can expect other Hughes walks in the next months.

Mick Gowar's tribute to Al Alvarez quotes Auden's great poem 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats'. 'Poetry makes nothing happen', Auden wrote there. But Hughes's poetry keeps making things happen, personally and more publicly. On Sunday 27th October readers who have made it by then from head to tail of my own essay in this Journal, expertly and shrewdly brought to net by my co-editor in this issue and successor, James Robinson, may guess where I will be, on the last (I promise) of the adventures I need to finish my own book. And in December, as the International Year of the Salmon draws to a close, at least four of the contributors to this issue and the last will be among the speakers – fisheries scientists, anthropologists, policy makers, story-tellers, anglers, representatives of the Polar first nations and stewards of the rivers and warming oceans through which salmon still swim in ever-diminishing numbers – at a two-day symposium in Cambridge. It will take place in the David Attenborough Building at the Cambridge Conservation Initiative and at Hughes's own College, and it will be inspired by his writing and campaigning on behalf of the fish he came to love even more than the pike. The workshop's title comes from "The Best Worker In Europe": 'Owned by Everyone': the poetry, science and plight of the salmon. One of us will be reporting on the proceedings for the next issue.

Mark Wormald
Pembroke College Cambridge

List of abbreviations of works by Ted Hughes

CB	*Cave Birds* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978)
C	*Crow* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970)
CP	*Collected Poems*, ed. Paul Keegan (London: Faber & Faber, 2003)
E	*Elmet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994)
G	*Gaudete* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977)
LTH	*Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Christopher Reid (London: Faber & Faber, 2007)
IM	*The Iron Man* (London: Faber & Faber, illustrated by Andrew Davison, 1985 [1968])
IW	*The Iron Woman* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993)
MW	*Moon-Whales and Other Moon Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976)
PC	Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar, *Poet and Critic* (London: The British Library, 2012)
PM	*Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989 (1967))
RE	*Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979)
SGCB	*Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992)
UNS	*Under the North Star* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981)
WP	*Winter Pollen* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994)
WT	*What is the Truth?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984)

And by Sylvia Plath

LSP1	*The Collected Letters of Sylvia Plath*, Volume 1, ed. Peter K. Steinberg and Karen Kukil (London: Faber & Faber, 2017)
LSP2	*The Collected Letters of Sylvia Plath*, Volume 2, ed. Peter K. Steinberg and Karen Kukil (London: Faber & Faber, 2018)

The Wound that Bled *Lupercal*: Ted Hughes in Massachusetts

by David Troupes

There is a kind of land grab taking place in the world of Ted Hughes studies: not a grab *of* land but a grab *by* land, or on behalf of land. Pieces of Hughes's poetic soul are being staked and claimed, brought under management of the different places he lived and wrote about. Steve Ely's *Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire: Made in Mexborough*[1] is a case in point, part of a friendly tug of war between Mexborough and Mytholmroyd, South and West Yorkshire. James Underwood raised a worthy flag for East Yorkshire in a recent issue of *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*.[2] Mark Wormald has been busy of late assembling the case for Ireland.[3] Not to be forgotten, Devon now boasts a Ted Hughes Poetry Trail at Stover Country Park[4] and semi-mythic memorial stone to the man,[5] and among recent scholarship Yvonne Reddick's *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* places the West Country at the centre of both Hughes's art and activism.[6] Meanwhile, one of the valuable contributions of Jonathan Bate's *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Biography* is the revelation of just how important London remained to Hughes through his life.[7]

It is in this context and spirit that I wish to make a case – a modest case, but a serious one – on behalf of my own beloved home state of Massachusetts. Ted Hughes lived in Massachusetts for roughly two years, starting in the summer of 1957, when he and Sylvia Plath spent a summer on Cape Cod swimming, sunbathing and writing. They then moved to Northampton, where Plath took up a teaching position at her alma mater, Smith College, and Hughes taught the following spring

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[1] Steve Ely, *Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire: Made in Mexborough* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[2] James Underwood, 'Mayday on Holderness: Ted Hughes, National Service, and East Yorkshire', in *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. VI iss. 2, ed. By Mark Wormald (The Ted Hughes Society), pp. 86-98.
[3] Mark Wormald, 'Irishwards: Ted Hughes, Freedom and Flow,' in *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. VI..2, ed. By Mark Wormald (The Ted Hughes Society), pp. 58-77.
[4] See www.devon.gov.uk/stovercountrypark/ted-hughes-poetry-trail
[5] See www.legendarydartmoor.co.uk/ted_hughes.htm
[6] Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2017).
[7] Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2015).

semester at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (which, incidentally, is where I did my BA, though I was about forty years too late to catch Hughes's lessons). They then moved to Boston for a year before setting off on their coast-to-coast-and-back-again road trip, stopping for a stay at Yaddo and ultimately returning to England.

The standard critical assessment of this time in Hughes's life, it seems to me, is formed by two things. The first is a series of letters written from America, in particular a letter he wrote to his sister on 22 August 1957. It begins with a complaint about cheap processed bread –

> What a place America is. Everything is in cellophane. Everything is 10,000 miles from where it was plucked or made. The bread is in cellophane that is covered with such slogans as de-crapularised, re-energised, multi-cramulated, bleached, double-bleached, rebrowned, unsanforised, guaranteed no blasphemin. There is no such thing as bread. You cannot buy bread. (*LTH* 106)

– and goes on to bemoan the suburban rat race. Sylvia Plath was born in the town of Winthrop, Mass., just north of Boston, and lived there for the first ten years of her life before her mother moved Sylvia and her brother Warren to Wellesley following their father's death. An attractive suburb composed of equal parts affluence and aspiration – Anne Stevenson calls it 'genteel'[8] – Wellesley is where, in the summer of 1957, the young couple were received by Aurelia Plath and all the gathered friends and family of Sylvia's American world, and Wellesley's role in shaping Hughes's impression of America should not be underestimated. My own mother jokingly pronounces the town's name by stretching her jaw and speaking through closed teeth in a pseudo-British affectation – '*Wehhhllesley*' – similar to Plath's curious accent in those BBC recordings. If Ted Hughes arrived in the US on guard for showy consumerism and constant checkings-in with the Joneses, he landed in a town certain to confirm his fears. But he was far from close-minded, and in another letter that summer, after repeating many of the above charges, he acknowledges, 'For all this though there's something–a great deal–about what tiny bit I've seen, that I like,' mentioning the wildlife and the 'kindness of these folk' (*LTH* 101-2).

The standard critical assessment takes this correspondence, adds the observation that *Lupercal*, which Hughes wrote during these American years, is full of Pennine place names and scenery and features no decisively American settings, and concludes that those two years in Massachusetts were somehow poetically void – that the USA had Hughes's body but not his soul. 'This is a book that reveals no

[8] Anne Stevenson, *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath* (London: Viking, 1989), p. 14.

imaginative response whatever to the new country in which its author was living', as Neil Roberts puts it.[9] Hughes certainly saw things this way. In a letter from 1961 he writes to his friend Lucas Myers:

> My American years in retrospect from this look like a barrenly spiritless time, & Lupercal seems to me to suffer from the lack of the natural flow of spirit & feeling which it takes as its subject (it takes the lack as subject, I mean). (*LTH* 178)

It's easy enough to find examples of this bereft mood in *Lupercal*, not least in its closing lines: 'Maker of the world [...] / Touch this frozen one' (*CP* 89). And this is not a new or singular mood for Hughes: the contrast between the overfullness of nature and the impoverishment of the human subject is one of the loudest notes struck in *The Hawk in the Rain*, from the muddy walker of the title poem to the empty vessel of the speaker in 'The Thought-Fox'. *The Hawk in the Rain* is punctuated by absences: the desolate, mirrored alienations of 'The Jaguar'; the ashen apostrophes of 'Song'; the many soldiers who do not return home; the 'dark hole' (*CP* 21) of the poet's own head. These absences bespeak an overall mood of elegy even amid such affirmative displays of natural power as we find in, for instance, 'The Hawk in the Rain' and 'Wind'. *Lupercal* takes the generalised elegy of *The Hawk in the Rain* and commits it to specific places and place-names: Holderness, Crow Hill and Strawberry Hill just among the titles, and Ely argues convincingly for the specificity of many other of *Lupercal*'s poems, such as 'View of a Pig', 'Pike' and 'Sunstroke'. Naming these names and revisiting these scenes may scratch Hughes's homesickness itch, but otherwise *Lupercal*'s world of dripping foxes, Great War veterans and mythic hobos remains very much of a piece with *Hawk*, and with much of *Wodwo* as well: the same dynamic of elegy for the lost *vs* elegy for the living dominates Hughes's first three collections, until he finds in *Crow* a mythic-comedic route toward uglier, stronger, and less qualified affirmations.

Bearing in mind elegy's tendency to comfort the elegist by sealing off trauma and loss, I would like now to quote from a much later letter Hughes wrote to his son, Nicholas:

> That's the paradox: the only time most people feel alive is when they're suffering, when something overwhelms their ordinary, careful armour, and the naked child is flung out onto the world. That's why the things that are worst to undergo are best to remember. [...] So when you realise you've gone a few weeks and haven't felt that awful struggle of your childish self–struggling to lift itself out of its inadequacy and incompetence–you'll know you've gone some weeks without meeting new challenge, and

[9] Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 43.

> without growing, and that you've gone some weeks toward losing touch with yourself. (*LTH* 514)

The sound of the Pennine place names and scenery of *Lupercal*, its continuation of that strong elegiac strain, is, I think, the sound of the difficulty of those American years rebounding off the 28-year-old Hughes's armour. It is the sound of the unreadiness of the poet to accept and transform experience. Hughes's relief upon returning to London was a form of losing touch with himself, of disowning his own recent past. Clearly he was not ready, writing to Myers so soon after their return from the US, to consider that difficult time one of the 'best to remember'.

And then we have this excellent passage from one of Hughes's replies to Bishop Ross Hook:

> I think we get a closer description of the way it [poetic talent] has always operated if we regard it as nothing more than a facility for expressing that complicated process in which we locate, and attempt to heal, affliction–whether our own or that of others whose feeling we can share. The inmost spirit of poetry, in other words, is at bottom, in every recorded case, the voice of pain–and the physical body, so to speak, of poetry, is the treatment by which the poet tries to reconcile that pain with the world. (*LTH* 458)

This statement persuades me completely, particularly regarding Hughes's own poetry. It provides Hughes scholarship with a *sine qua non* and *ars poetica* at once: no poem without the wound. So when we go looking for the significance of America to Hughes, and to *Lupercal* specifically, we begin by looking for the wound. Homesickness is not the wound – at least, not the decisive wound. If the letters Hughes wrote during and just after his time in America are anything to go by (supported by evidence from Plath's frequently harrowing journal account), his time in Massachusetts was a particularly 'awful struggle', its artistic fruits plagued by a sense of 'inadequacy and incompetence'. All the better, then, for remembering.

This leads us to *Birthday Letters,* an act of remembrance and confession and communion with a complicated sense of its own audience. The poems are acts of remembrance by which Hughes revisits his past for the benefit of his own present self; that he took so long in writing and assembling them, and claims to have thought of publication so late in the process, attests to this purely private purpose. They are acts of confession before an uncertain public. Hughes comments that the act of publication, not merely of writing, gave him release. And they are acts of communion with Sylvia Plath, now dead, who is addressed directly by all but two of the eighty-eight poems, 'occasions […] in which I tried to open a direct, private,

inner contact with my first wife'.[10] *Lupercal*'s opacity about its compositional context sends us to *Birthday Letters* seeking bearings. And although any act of remembrance reaching back through decades must be treated with caution, we do not look to *Birthday Letters* for historical fact. We look to *Birthday Letters* to find the perforations in *Lupercal*'s hermetic, Eliotic artistry. At that early point in his career Hughes had apparently accepted Eliot's notion that poetry is an 'escape from emotion' and an 'escape from personality' – a falsehood which we see Hughes identify as such in the movement from *Gaudete* to *Moortown* to the *Elmet* collections and finally to *Capriccios*, *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*, across which 'the man who suffers and the mind which creates' are progressively restored to each other.[11] *Lupercal* has always felt to me like the *tidiest* of Hughes's collections, and the easiest to imagine sitting on a table, by itself, existing only between its own two covers. I mean no insult to the individual poems, some of which are among Hughes's finest, of course, and perhaps I am only reacting to the same lack of natural feeling which Hughes describes to his friend. But if we could perforate that hermeticism, scatter the poems about the room a bit, remind them of their author, and put them in touch with other texts – *Birthday Letters* to begin with, and then the work of other writers – we might locate some of the collection's hidden humanity, and better appreciate the importance of those years in Massachusetts.

The British Library archives contain a wealth unpublished *Birthday Letters* material, including a draft poem about the young couple's 1957 summer stay on Cape Cod. Hughes begins with a line from Plath's 'Daddy' before continuing into his own narrative: 'The waters off beautiful Nauset / Streamed under a moon, that first night'. Right away, an intertextual agenda takes shape. 'Daddy' is one of the key poems of *Ariel*, in which Plath conflates her dead-and-hated father with her estranged-and-hated husband, portraying Hughes as 'A man in black with the Meinkampf look' and declaring that 'Every woman adores a fascist'.[12] Nauset is a Cape Cod beach beloved of Plath from childhood vacations, and Plath's 'beautiful Nauset' phrase has always presented a tonal challenge to my reading, a moment of sincerity and affection in the midst of a poetic performance otherwise teeming with controlled rage and dark wit. Hughes uses the same line to open the *Birthday Letters* poem 'The Prism':

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[10] Lynda K. Bundtzen, "Confession, contrition and concealment: evoking Plath in Ted Hughes's *Howls & Whispers*," in *Representing Sylvia Plath*, ed. by Sally Bayley and Tracy Brain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 167-182 (p. 167).
[11] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent
[12] Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1981), p. 224.

> The waters off beautiful Nauset
> Were the ocean sun, the sea-poured crystal
> Behind your efforts. They were your self's cradle. [...]
>
> I still have it. I hold it–
> 'The waters off beautiful Nauset'.
> Your intact childhood, your Paradise
> (*CP* 1162-3)

Hughes tries here to disentangle Plath's Eden from her Hell. Nauset becomes an image of Plath's talent and a reminder of happier times, instead of a display case for her despised father-god's 'freakish head' and the (as Hughes saw it) fatalistic psycho-poetic machinery of her last phase as a writer; and Hughes claims possession of this pristine vision, this prism – against, perhaps, the evidence of Plath's poem.

The draft poem about their time on the Cape is less elegiac in its handling of the line from 'Daddy'. Hughes simply lets Plath's line introduce his scene, and the poem unfolds below it like the exploration of a musical theme: *this*, Hughes suggests, will be the true extent of my stake in the waters off beautiful Nauset. The scene continues, 'Everything was America, / Stranger to me than the moon', and the results are more positive than we might expect from author of those letters.

> I was washed,
> My very bones were washed. I was My soul was scoured.
> I saw you often in the sea,
> A flower on its root, where horse-shoe crabs
> Drifted their prehistory through shallows.
> You worshipped sea + sun, religious fanatic
> I saw what church had shaped your spirit, and
> You converted me[13]

Hughes zigzags tellingly here between images of his own restoration and his vision of Plath returning to her 'root', attended (with what feels like Hughesian approval) by the ancient horseshoe crabs. I will return to this image later in my discussion. For now, we follow the poem on into a series of disappointments, a lament for the unrealised potential for himself of his new surroundings: 'I could nearly emerge a new creature – / But not quite'. He feels 'numb' and 'disabled'; he is 'too strange to the language / That the wind was speaking' to understand. He summons animals to the poem as if for help: blue jays, chipmunks, cicadas and turtles all attend his 'attempts to awake', but he remains 'stalled', unable to emerge 'Into a brighter + cleaner America. The America'. America was 'a map of treasures', he realises now, and he is left to regret 'how little / I made of it'.

[13] BL Add. MS 88918/1/6/114.

Finally, the draft arrives at a point familiar from many other *Birthday Letters* poems: 'But I sat under your Bell Jar', which he calls a 'radiant prison'. If 'radiant' sounds a little strange – a positive inflection of a negative image – that strangeness is repeated a few lines later: 'I hung / In your happiness there, a subdued prisoner'. Plath was happy, his soul was on its way to being scoured clean – and this made him a prisoner? Hughes must have rejected this poem for a reason, of course, so I don't want to interrogate it too closely. But it is worth noting that the draft ends with two cancelled lines, written with a different pen and with smaller handwriting (though still Hughes's), and so presumably on a different occasion: 'And never noticed the freedom / That started where I stood'. Few published *Birthday Letters* poems rise even to this modest level of self-recrimination and acceptance of agency. Partly, I'm attracted to this draft poem because it addresses a period of their stay in Massachusetts which the published *Birthday Letters* sequence treats with only two poems, 'The Chipmunk' and 'Flounders', and the three poems together provide a positivity uncommon in the book generally. Though all three contain sufficient darkness to fit the overall tone and schematic of *Birthday Letters*, they convey a sense of adventure and possibility which we as readers need if the tragedy at the heart of the book is to strike as more than the grinding of deterministic gears. They also, especially the unpublished draft poem, demonstrate the extent to which Hughes's own health and happiness were at stake during this time, not merely as Plath's husband but on his own account: his own efforts to 'emerge a new creature' in those soul-scouring waters.

'Flounders' recalls an evening of fine fishing off Chatham in which a bounty of landed flounders is 'a visit from the goddess, the beauty / Who was poetry's sister', who comes to 'spoil' the young couple (*CP* 1085). By the time *Birthday Letters* was published the use of fishing as the medium of such a visitation had become a well-established Hughesian trope. But where did this trope begin, this equation of fishing with moments of contact with a spiritually charged natural world? It can be surprising, almost shocking, to realise that *The Hawk in the Rain* contains *no fishing poems*. In *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, Reddick mentions a sheaf of Hughes's undergraduate poetry, which, she has confirmed to me, also contains no fishing poems.[14] On 24 February 1957, still in England prior to their summer 1957 migration to the US, Hughes writes to his brother:

> Though I haven't been fishing for 7 years I dream every single night that I am fishing. Often it is the canal at home – vastly altered, sometimes flowing swift & very deep, with sharks, – mostly it is

[14] Reddick, *Environmentalist*, pp. 93-4.

> Crookhill. I have every kind of fishing adventure. There's always a big fish – and whenever I dream I catch that, the day after I sell a poem. One night I dreamed I caught the grandfather pike at Crookhill [...] the next day I sold my first poem and got married. (*LTH* 96)

Fishing here is a good omen, a harbinger of poems being sold, but not of poems being written. Nor does Hughes write poems of the fishing he dreams. Fishing does not seem to inspire, in the sense of offering the breath of divine utterance and creativity; it merely augurs well for life advancement. Fishing was obviously on Hughes's mind, but it is hard to see a link here between fishing and the activity of writing, as opposed to publishing, the way that, say, fox-spotting becomes bound up with acts of inspiration and chthonic summoning in 'The Thought-Fox'. Did he even own a rod and tackle at this point? Seven years without fishing – it's hard to imagine! But clearly he and Plath were fishing on the Cape, and, writing to his brother in August, he couples a winningly arrogant attitude toward American surfcasters with the news that 'I'm buying tackle for my birthday' (*LTH* 109). So perhaps America, Wonderbread notwithstanding, can at least be thanked for reviving the fisherman in Hughes. But what about the poet of fishing?

After their summer on the Cape, Hughes and Plath lived for a year in Northampton, where, as mentioned, Hughes taught a semester at UMass Amherst. One of the texts he taught was the classic *Walden, or, Life in the Wood* by Henry David Thoreau, the scruffy native of Concord, Mass. I'd like to suggest this text as the origin, or a large part of the origin, of Hughes's fixation upon fishing as an analogue for poetry, and a primary means of renewing his contact with the natural world.

In *Walden*, Thoreau tells us that fishing is 'the true industry for poets'.[15] He writes of the 'wild men, who instinctively follow other fashions and trust other authorities than their townsmen':

> Early in the morning, while all things are crisp with frost, men come with fishing-reels and slender lunch, and let down their fine lines through the snowy field to take pickerel and perch; wild men, who instinctively follow other fashions and trust other authorities than their townsmen. [...] Such a man has some right to fish, and I love to see nature carried out in him.[16]

There is a particularly beautiful passage, full of details sure to catch Hughes's eye, in which Thoreau describes the activity of night fishing in terms which move swiftly from the physical to the metaphysical:

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[15] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (New York: Penguin, Inc., 1980), p. 152.
[16] Ibid., pp. 189-90.

> I have returned to the woods, and, partly with a view to the next day's dinner, spent the hours of midnight fishing from a boat by moonlight, serenaded by owls and foxes, and hearing, from time to time, the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand. These experiences were very memorable and valuable to me,–anchored in forty feet of water, and twenty or thirty rods from the shore, surrounded sometimes by thousands of small perch and shiners, dimpling the surface with their tails in the moonlight, and communicating by a long flaxen line with mysterious nocturnal fishes which had their dwelling forty feet below, or sometimes dragging sixty feet of line about the pond as I drifted in the gentle night breeze, now and then feeling a slight vibration along it, indicative of some life prowling about its extremity, of dull uncertain blundering purpose there, and slow to make up its mind. At length you slowly raise, pulling hand over hand, some horned pout squeaking and squirming to the upper air. It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmological themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook.[17]

The teaching of this text in 1958 coincides with the composition of 'Pike', Hughes's first great fishing poem.[18] And in his dramatic concluding reference to the "dream / Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed, / That rose slowly toward me, watching" (*CP* 85-86), Hughes, like Thoreau, dwells finally not on any physical fish, but on something numinous and transcendental, a visitation from "vast and cosmological themes" hooked out of the air's mirrored lake. Could Thoreau have encouraged Hughes toward 'Pike'?

There is another Thoreau text worth considering, while we are laying out these sympathies, although I admit that the odds Hughes read this one aren't great: a journal entry from January 26th, 1853. Thoreau's journals were published in 1906 and surely would have been available at the UMass library. In this entry, Thoreau describes going down to the frozen lake and being disappointed by how many of the other fishermen were there to, well, *fish*. He refers to his younger self fishing and hunting as a boy, and suggests that he now, as an adult, has found a way to satisfy the same impulse to hunt and fish without actually hunting and fishing:

[17] Ibid., p. 121.

[18] Gillian Groszewski, 'Hughes and America', in *Ted Hughes in Context*, ed. By Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 161. I am trusting Groszewski's dating, based on British Library archive material, though her statement that it the poem was composed 'in the afternoon at Aurelia Plath's house at Elm St in Northampton' is dubious: Aurelia lived in Wellesley, while Ted and Sylvia lived at the Elm Street house in Northampton.

> It is remarkable that many men will go with eagerness to Walden Pond in the winter to fish for pickerel and yet not seem to care for the landscape. Of course it cannot be merely for the pickerel they may catch; there is some adventure in it: but any love of nature which they may feel is certainly very slight and indefinite. They call it going a-fishing, and so indeed it is, though, perchance, their natures know better. Now I go a-fishing and a-hunting every day, but omit the fish and the game, which are the least important part. I have learned to do without them. They were indispensable only as long as I was a boy.[19]

The chain pickerel Thoreau mentions belong to the pike family. And what a close fit this journal passage is for ideas Hughes expresses in "Poetry in the Making," discussing his substitution of first modelling and then writing for the pursuit of actual animals:

> You might not think that these two interests, capturing animals and writing poems, have much in common. But the more I think back the more sure I am that with me the two interests have been one interest. (*PIM* 15)
>
> Finally, as I have said, at about 15 my life grew more complicated and my attitude to animals changed. I accused myself of disturbing their lives. I began to look at them, you see, from their own point of view.
>
> And about the same time I began to write poems. Not animal poems. It was years before I wrote what you could call an animal poem and several more years before it occurred to me that my writing poems might be partly a continuation of my earlier pursuit. Now I have no doubt. The special kind of excitement, the slightly mesmerised and quite involuntary concentration with which you make out the stirrings of a new poem in your mind, then the outline, the mass and colour and clean fine form of it, the unique living reality of it in the midst of the general lifelessness, all that is too familiar to mistake. This is hunting and the poem is a new species of creature, a new specimen of the life outside your own. (*PIM* 16-17)
>
> Recently I felt like doing some pike fishing, but in circumstances where there was no chance of it, and over the days, as I remembered the extreme pleasures of that sport, bits of the following poem began to arrive. (*PIM* 21)

To be sure, these ideas, more or less, are already implicit in 'The Thought-Fox', which predates Hughes's teaching of Thoreau. But had Hughes actually made the conscious connection between childhood stalking and mature writing, one the

[19] Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: Journal IV: May 1, 1852 – February 27, 1853*, ed. Bradford Torrey (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906), p. 480.

substitute (not just the metaphor) for the other, before now? Thoreau's journal entry ends with this observation:

> In civilized nations there are those answering to the rain-makers and sorcerers of savages.[20]

Now, this certainly would not have been news to Hughes, who had already imbibed Grave's *The White Goddess*. But it's hard to imagine a sentence more likely to convince Hughes that he was in the company of a kindred spirit, and whose endorsement of the vocational link between fishing and poetry was to be taken seriously. Even admitting, as I must, the unlikeness (though not impossibility!) that Hughes had perused Thoreau's journals, the line of thought which leads Hughes from fishing and hunting to writing poems could certainly have cascaded out of Thoreau's vatic declaration in *Walden* that fishing is 'the true industry for poets'.

There is another possible source for Hughes's return to fishing as a pastime, and his seminal turn to it as subject for poetry, in a writer I delight in connecting to Hughes: Wallace Stevens. Plath's early admiration of Stevens, and his influence on her work, is obvious; as Hughes himself says, 'He was a kind of god to her, while I could never see anything at all in him except magniloquence'.[21] This is just one of many insults Stevens is paid by Hughes, who engages with the modernist lawyer-poet rather the way you might these days Facebook-stalk your girlfriend's ex-boyfriend: with a mixture of cool insult, jealous mimicry and what-did-you-see-in-him incredulity. My favourite example of this is also the fishiest. Here is the beginning of Stevens's poem 'Thinking of a Relation Between the Images of Metaphors', and an entry from 'Adagia', a collection of aphoristic jottings first published in 1957 in *Opus Posthumous*. The first takes us on a fishing trip to the Perkiomen Creek in Pennsylvania, while the second sketches a quick epistemology of aesthetics.

> The wood-doves are singing along the Perkiomen.
> The bass lie deep, still afraid of the Indians.
>
> In the one ear of the fisherman, who is all
> One ear, the wood-doves are singing a single song.
>
> The bass keep looking ahead, upstream, in one
> Direction, shrinking from the spit and splash
>
> Of waterish spears. The fisherman is all

[20] Ibid., p. 482.
[21] Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), pp. 210.

> One eye, in which the dove resembles the dove.[22]
>
> *
>
> Values other than those merely of the eye and ear.[23]

And here is an excerpt from an April 1957 letter Hughes wrote to Daniel Huws, in which Hughes dismisses Stevens as an eye-nerve poet while extolling John Crowe Ransom, whom he much preferred, as an ear-nerve poet, the ear-nerve being 'directly connected to […] the oldest part of the brain':

> Obviously, I think, people like Wallace Stevens house their demon where the eye-nerve enters – so that everything is arbitrary & colourful & partial & questionable. Whereas Wyatt & Crowe-Ransome [sic] house theirs where the ear enters – so that in them everything is inevitable & final & bottomless & unquestionable as the response of glands or the harmony of moving muscles. (*LTH* 96-7)

Something about Steven's eye/ear motif seems to have got under Hughes's skin – perhaps Stevens's using it in a poem with so many elements Hughes would have considered part of his own imaginative playground: a river full of fish, a fisherman, and the lingering presence of Native Americans. He does his best to turn the figuration against its poet while declaring his own allegiance to the southern agrarian Ransom and courtly Wyatt, and in doing so proclaims to himself that he is to be a poet of depth not surface, a poet of the oldest parts of the brain, a poet of ancient sound.

Another Stevens poem collected for the first time in 1957's *Opus Posthumous* (and it is impossible to think that so committed a Stevensian as Plath would not have got her hands on a copy) is 'Nuns Painting Water-Lilies'. It's a typical Wallace Stevens poem about the refreshing of the material world through imaginative engagement, inspired by real nuns he would see painting lilies in Elizabeth Park in Hartford, Connecticut. A few lines stand out as likely to attract Hughes's attention: the gnomic optimism of its opening line, 'These pods are part of the growth of life within life', and the poem's cryptic mid-point, 'a birth that fetched along / The supernatural of its origin'.[24] Both moments gesture alluringly toward a kind of Jungian individuation, connecting the individual subject (whether lily flower or human) to a collective substrate of life and mystery.

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[22] Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Random House, 1990), p. 356.
[23] Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, ed. by Milton J. Bates (New York: Randomhouse, 1990), p. 190.
[24] Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, p. 120.

Stevens's poem shares three quarters of its title with the Hughes poem 'To Paint a Water Lily', and if there is any poem from *Lupercal* which has a claim to being inspired by Hughes's surroundings in America rather than memories of Yorkshire, it is this. Specifically, those surroundings would be Childs Park in Northampton,[25] a stone's throw from where Hughes and Plath lived while teaching, which she calls 'my favorite place in America'.[26] Written in rhyming couplets pursued with some linguistic contortion and an overall reedy tone, this was the poem which, as Hughes tells it, persuaded him to take up the more authentic language of 'View of a Pig' and 'Pike'[27].

> A green level of lily leaves
> Roofs the pond's chamber and paves
>
> The flies' furious arena: study
> These, the two minds of this lady. (*CP* 70)

By the middle of the poem we can see that Hughes had not yet let go of the eye/ear thing, the pond being full of 'battle-shouts' and 'death-cries' which are (to all but the Hughesian poet) 'inaudible, so the eyes praise / To see the colours of these flies'. Any engagement Hughes may make with Stevens here is of secondary interest, however. Sylvia Plath, I wish to argue, is the subject of 'To Paint a Water Lily', the lady whose two minds are at once green and level, and a furious arena.

But first, why do I say this is a Childs Park poem? Mostly because of the repetition of imagery between 'To Paint a Water Lily' and the *Birthday Letters* poem 'Child's Park' (*CP* 1086-7). The 1957 poem peaks of 'eyes' praising 'colours', 'arcs' of 'rainbow', a 'spectrum' (*CP* 70); we watch a 'dragonfly alight', and finally a 'long-necked lily-flower [...] deep in both worlds [...] trembling hardly at all [...] Whatever horror nudge her root' (*CP* 71). The *Birthday Letters* poem is set with strikingly similar images (all emphases mine):

> I hurried you off. Bullfrogs
> Took you down through *lily tangle*. Your fury
> Had to be quenched. Heavy water,
> *Deeper, deeper*, cooling and controlling
> Your plutonium secret. You breathed water.
>
> Freed, steadied, resurfaced, *your eyes*
> *Alit afresh on colour*, so delicate,
> *Splitting the prism*,

[25] Officially the park has no apostrophe in its name (the land was bequeathed by one Annie Childs), though Plath and Hughes both include one in their poem titles.
[26] Plath, Sylvia, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* (New York: Random House, 2000), p. 393.
[27] Faas, *Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 208.

As the dragonflies on the solid lilies.

There is a small artificial pond in Childs Park, and it is indeed, these days at least, full of water lilies. The confrontation with the young women stealing azaleas for a dance, which Plath records in her journal and later in a poem, and which Hughes's poem 'Child's Park' is primarily about, hadn't happened yet when he was writing 'To Paint a Water Lily'. But his choice to repeat images between 'To Paint a Water Lily' and 'Child's Park' encourages us in the suspicion that 'To Paint a Water Lily' is actually *about* Sylvia Plath: she is that flower with her roots in a troubled psychological darkness and her eyes dazzled by the beauty of the phenomenal world. Recall these lines from the unpublished poem of Nauset beach:

> I saw you often in the sea,
> A flower on its root, where horse-shoe crabs
> Drifted their prehistory through shallows.

This image of Plath compellingly resembles the image of the painted lily, 'deep in both worlds', 'horrors nudg[ing] its root', 'Prehistoric bedragoned times / Crawl[ing] that darkness with Latin names'. It is an image of a woman 'never / More than one step from Paradise' who 'had instant access […] To the core of [her] Inferno' (*CP* 1087). Note, too, the reference in 'Child's Park' to the concluding death-wish of Plath's 'Full Fathom Five': 'Father, this thick air is murderous. / I would breathe water',[28] with which Hughes neatly binds his exploration of Plath's psyche to her own courageous poetic introspection, centred as it is on a fearsome, mythologised father.

'Pike', we can now observe, partakes of similar imagery. The pike 'dance on the surface among the flies', living 'under the heat-struck lily pads'. And Hughes's speaker, too, 'frozen' in place, confronts something – not a fish, a 'dream' – 'freed' from out the 'darkness' whose 'legendary depth' is its own prehistorical ancientness. It is as if Hughes were interrogating both himself and his wife with the same set of symbolic implements, each in a style which suited its subject: Plath with the Childs Park-situated fine-wroughtness of 'To Paint a Lily Flower', and himself with the Anglophilic nostalgia and preternaturalism of 'Pike'. As we consider these two poems, we come closest to identifying the wound. The wound which bled *Lupercal* is not that of missing England, nor anywhere else, nor the natural world, nor family nor friends. It is the wound of missing oneself, one's own and true self, out of a fear of – what? Out of a fear of confronting the unresolved, uncontrolled darkness which sits at the pit of the creature we are. We may add, at this point, a passage from

[28] Plath, *Collected Poems*, p. 93.

Plath's story 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams', in which the narrator (a dry run for Esther Greenwood) relates 'My one dream':

> In this dream there's a great half-transparent lake stretching away in every direction, too big for me to see the shores of it, if there are any shores, and I'm hanging over it, looking down from the glass belly of some helicopter. At the bottom of the lake–so deep I can only guess at the dark masses moving and heaving–are the real dragons. The ones that were around before men started living in caves and cooking meat over fires[.][29]

Writing this in Boston the following year, it is Plath who picks up on the imagery in Hughes's 'To Paint a Water Lily'. Her passage does not provide a source for Hughes's method, but corroboration of its accuracy. Whoever inspired whom, both writers were now exploring the intersection of private memory and trauma with notions of a collective, species-level psychic burden. And yet, pit-dark as the dreams and horrors within us may be, they are also, paradoxically but undeniably, *innocent*. They gesture both to humankind's pre-moral infancy, and to the private soul encountering itself in confusion. That dream-darkness is the naked child flung out onto the world, in every sense. It is our very birth – though it fetch along the supernatural of our origin. And for fear of ourselves we fail to recognise the freedom which starts where we stand, and then we cancel even that wise insight.

The obvious difficulty of their life in Massachusetts dominates all the available texts: Hughes's poetry, and Plath's, and their letters and journals. Hughes's slowly evolving ideas about the validity of autobiographical poetry means that this difficulty is processed and refracted heavily during the writing of *Lupercal*; but more than a few gusts of salt-and-pine New England air do pass through the chinks in his armour, and find their way into the poetry. My desire to see some trace of Massachusetts in Hughes's work is ultimately fuelled by the kick I get out of relating my life to theirs through the medium of a land that I love, and miss daily. I am always gratified, for instance, to consider the sketchbook aptness of these lines from 'Astringency': 'The hundred miles and the thousand false faces / Of the Charles River' (*CP* 1094). The Charles begins in my home town of Hopkinton, and flows not a hundred but eighty miles before reaching Boston; the Boston Marathon also begins in Hopkinton, and runs twenty-six miles to Boston. This should give some idea of how luxuriantly the river meanders through the swamps and mill-towns of eastern Massachusetts on its way to the Atlantic – a constant presence glanced between trees and under bridges, backed up behind occasional mill dams, even managing to kick up some white water once or twice through forested gunnels only to stall and spread out, serpent-like, across the vast flooded marshes of Millis and

[29] Sylvia Plath, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1977), p. 19.

Medfield. 'Thousand false faces' is a brilliant thumbnail evocation of how the Charles is a different creature at every crossing, a different citizen to every town, with secrets tucked everywhere. Hughes lived in Boston for just one year, but he knew the Charles.

There's no point denying the appeal of this sort of thing: of reading about personally meaningful places in the work of a writer you enjoy. This risks sounding unliterary, and perhaps it is. Certainly, it is. The story of Plath and Hughes pulls us, despite ourselves and without our quite being aware of it, away from pure, disinterested scholarship, toward something murkier, and more human. It's the same reason I go out of my way to relate American writers like Stevens and Thoreau, who won my heart when I was still an undergraduate, to Hughes, whose work I first read in my mid-twenties. But this wilful absorption of Ted Hughes, whose poetry works so hard to make the natural world present to us, into my own life – the poets I read, the places I love – continues to make perfect sense.

‘Right to the source of it all’: Ted Hughes and Dartmoor

by Richard Hibbert

On 2nd August members of the Ted Hughes Society walked to the poet’s memorial stone, which was placed in 2001 near the source of the River Taw, a river much loved by Hughes. He requested in a handwritten will that his friend Ian Cook arrange for his ashes to be scattered and a stone to be placed ‘near the rising of the rivers Taw, Dart, East Okement and Teign.’ After a delay of over two years, in which permission was gained from the Duchy of Cornwall, English Nature (as was) and Dartmoor National Park Authority, the stone was finally positioned by helicopter with the assistance of the Army.

The walk was led by Mark Wormald, editor of this Journal and author of the forthcoming book The Catch: Fishing for Ted Hughes*, accompanied by Terry Gifford, Chair of the Society. The route followed the River Taw upstream from Belstone. The group learned of Hughes’s profound attachment to the river, and the part he played in protecting it from abstraction and pollution.*
(Richard Hibbert joined the walk with his sister Nichola.)

> Before we went to Ireland, after living in Court Green for 2 years with Olwyn, my writing was at a very low ebb. I was at a dead end, that I could not get past… The night before we left I had an amazingly vivid dream. I was walking down the upper Taw stream–on Dartmoor, thin acidy pools with skinny dark tiny trout. The moor ended at a cliff, and the Taw stream fell over it–as a thin waterfall, joining a big fast river that flowed along the bottom of the cliff […] As I got to the bottom of the cliff, and stood beside this big river, I saw that masses of huge salmon were rushing up it. What it meant–as turned out to be true–was that going to Ireland broke me out of that arid sterile alienation from myself that life at C.G. had trapped me into, and with a single stride plunged me right into the productive, fruitful thick of my best chances. (*LTH* 710)

Everybody likes a walk with a purpose. For some it’s a Dartmoor letterbox, a particular bird or plant, a parish boundary stone, a pub. Heading for Ted Hughes’s memorial stone, Philip Larkin’s notorious comment about the poet resembling a

'Christmas present from Easter Island' kept coming to mind.[1] How fitting that such a colossal figure should choose to be commemorated in a slab of granite, albeit one laid supine, rather than standing as proud and austere as a Bronze Age obelisk.

Granite is the bones of Dartmoor, it's fundamental fact. How else would Hughes choose to be remembered, but in a man-sized chunk of bedrock inlaid with feldspar and quartz, inscribed with *Ted Hughes OM 1930-1998*? Yet as the above extract from his letter of 20th February 1998 to his son Nicholas above reveals, at one time Hughes was disillusioned with Dartmoor and creatively stifled by his life in Devon. How did he then reach a point where he was again so attached to this place that he requested in a handwritten will that his ashes be scattered and a stone placed?

The singer Joan Shelley said in a recent interview 'The best way to get to know a place is to leave that place.'[2] Is it also true that those that really understand the spirit of a place, feel its rhythms, are those that are not originally from there? Hughes was a Yorkshireman who profoundly understood the landscape, rivers and people of Devon. His connection with fish and fishing drew his eye upstream, and he evidently found something crucial in the thin blue lines of nascent rivers trickling out of spongy mires in Dartmoor's acid uplands.

I'd been a stranger to the poems for a while, but it was no surprise that a long walk to his memorial stone should set them in motion in my mind once again. Mark read 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning' while I culled horseflies – four, five, six. I looked down at my running top, chosen to keep cool on a warm day, and reflected that it would have been more fitting if I had worn a checked twill shirt, such as Devon farmers still wear.

In the week that followed, I read a good portion of the *Letters*, and was left feeling equally inspired and traumatised, as if I were standing at the bank of a river in spate and mesmerised into immersing a boot. Even in the informal prose of a letter, his words have so much generosity, energy, flex. And who knew that Margaret Thatcher once made her living 'researching the maximum number of bubbles that can be pumped into ice-cream, before it disillusions the customers.' (*LTH* 538)? Who would have thought that the author of 'View of a Pig' (or indeed 'Esther's Tomcat') would refer to a pet cat as 'smoggleshonks' (*LTH* 71)?

I then dived into *Collected Poems*, to discover how much I had not read before, and how much I had. The occasional line leapt and reared as it had when I first read Hughes as a boy. Lines like:

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[1] Philip Larkin to Robert Conquest, 15 June 1975, in Anthony Thwaite, ed., *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin 1940-1985* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. 536.
[2] *Uncut magazine* 268 (September 2019), p. 61.

'The month of the drowned dog' (*CP* 81)

'Stiff with weapons, fighting back over the same ground' (*CP* 147)

'…slid away under hard glistenings, low and guilty' (*CP* 517)

This is a poet who can induce even this reader, who doesn't much care for sheep, to see the humanity in a sheep's 'starved-priest expression.' (*CP* 138) I also discovered how much of a debt I owe Hughes in my own writing; how phrases I've used, even whole ways of seeing, I must have borrowed from him without realising it.

The spot where the stone is laid? I'm not going to tell you exactly where, although the grid reference is easy enough to find on the internet. It's on a slight eminence above the headwaters of the Taw – not the source exactly, but slightly downstream, in one of those Dartmoor headwater gullies where it's hard to tell which chuckling rivulet under your feet is the river in question. Did I just step across the Taw, or is it that slight dark shadow over there? A look at the map would suggest that it was the former.

A pelt of purple moor-grass gleams and shifts in the early August sunlight. Meadow pipits flip out weakly from under our feet like dust mites shaken from a rug. A hoverfly inspects my rucksack. Wind. Water. A sarcophagus-shaped stone on top of a gentle bluff, speckled with lichen and encroaching moss. A discussion about how long the lettering will last before being eroded, before needing to be redone, perhaps with the skylark's 'scoring and scribbling chisel.' (*CP* 110)

'Moorland had an effect on me – still has. The moment I get to heather, everything feels better […] I felt it very early, very strong, the feeling for heather' (*LTH* 723) Hughes wrote in a letter to Keith Sagar dated 18th July 1998 – three months before he died. Does this partly explain his feeling for Dartmoor too? Yet heather is in decline on the moor, possibly due to atmospheric pollution and climate change. When Hughes knew it, Dartmoor would have been more purple at this time of year. The only heather we saw at Taw Marsh was in an enclosure where the sheep couldn't get at it. Dartmoor is increasingly clothed in *Molinia caerulea* - purple moor-grass (which is seldom purple). 'I am the grass; I cover all.'[3]

Did Hughes want his ashes scattered at a place frequented by curlews, where 'The curlew's tear turned its edge on the silence' (*CP* 22)? When he knew it, Taw Marsh may well have had a pair or two, although checking through old copies of the *Devon Bird Report* I had to go back as far as 1982 (the year of 'Taw and Torridge') to find any mention of curlews there. This archetypal bird of watery uplands is long gone from this spot now. Curlews were already scarce as a breeding bird in Devon

[3] Carl Sandburg, 'Grass', in Alexander Allison et al (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), p. 926.

by the eighties, but Hughes knew them from his Yorkshire days, and wrote in *Remains of Elmet* of the curlew's cry lifted 'Right to the source of it all.' (*CP* 460)

Hughes called Devon 'my land of totems.' (*CP* 1121) Dartmoor could be seen as an analogue for Hughes's poetry: plunging hillsides with water at their feet, ever in motion; cloud shadow across the uplands, leading in turn to light and insight; shaggy woods and tender meadows below inexorable masses of rock, forged in unimaginable heat and concealing nuggets of crystallised matter. The poems are likewise simultaneously ebullient and elusive; manifest and elliptical, concrete and dynamic, never just there, always on the brink of something else. Their fluid, kinetic attack, one moment scarifying, the next tender, fits Dartmoor perfectly. Or am I over-reaching again?

Up the Taw from Belstone, there's a stretch of unexpectedly calm, peat-steeped water, deep enough to swim in, upstream of a makeshift hand-made dam of stones. The river appears not to flow. That, the bright sunshine and the great treeless pan of Taw Marsh, the moor's largest area of flat ground, combine to create a most un-Dartmoor-like effect. Two Dartmoor constants, the sound of running water and contours more tightly clustered than the grain in an old oak table, are absent here. The conical hulk of Steeperton Tor stands beyond, recalling Widgery's melodramatic painting. Nichola says that it reminds her of Scotland. To me, somewhere else. Wyoming? Ponies stooping at a ford in the heat look like they're on the set of a Western. I half expect a party of whooping Apaches to thunder down the hillside.

Cloud shadows slowly sliding over the green flank of Cosdon Beacon. Ponies stand on the distant skyline, not exactly 'Megalith-still' (*CP* 22) but switching their tails in the heat, symbolic. Then gone the next time I look up. A family of whinchats piping pensively in the bracken. Crossing the ford at Knack Mine. Belted Galloways standing thoughtfully, giant pied teddy bears in the form of cattle – nothing like the Bull Moses, though a calf peering at us between two cows could have passed for an older, hardier 'March Calf.' Did Hughes raise Galloways at Moortown? I doubt it. A dead ram – how apt. One might even take it for a sign, but for the fact that perished sheep are ten a penny on Dartmoor; its hillsides are flecked with their bones, '[…] memorial knuckles / Under hikers' heels.' (*CP* 465)

My sister Nichola knew Frieda Hughes slightly in the eighties. In the same decade I cut my teeth, as every good boy should, on the likes of 'Hawk Roosting' and 'Pike.' When I was twelve, I went on a family holiday to the west of Scotland, and was lucky enough to be initiated into spinning for salmon where a swift river disbursed into a sea loch. I hooked what felt like a monster in a dark pool below a waterfall. When it broke the line, I cried. Did that 'one that got away' instil a lifelong

passion for fishing, a quest to undo that formative snag? No, strangely, it did not. But I still remember the muscled thrum of the line, kind Tony (now long dead) running to assist me, too late.

I live by a celebrated salmon and sea trout river (one with an eponymous poem in *River*). I can hear its 'spicy torrent' from my bed. But I don't fish, much to the consternation of those that do. I've always told myself that the reason is that I like to keep moving (the truth is that I also don't have the patience). My newly acquired camera is slowing down my walks; in time I may reach the correct pace of life for angling after all.

That highland holiday provoked a different passion. I went more to the Hughes of 'Thrushes' and 'Swifts' than that of 'September Salmon', and although I too was gripped by Henry Williamson at a young age, it was ironically *Salar the Salmon* that gaffed me, not *Tarka*. I went with the birds, but still enjoy reading about fish. Do you choose your own totems, or do they choose you?

On the way back I was stumbling. My right ankle kept turning over, my left, always swollen with lymphoedema, was puffy and sore, but I was in a tranquil trance. 'Cancer in the lymph, uncontrollable'(*CP* 670) Hughes writes of a fishing cormorant in 'A Rival', foreshadowing his own death. I think of myself as physically fit and a decent walker, but six hours is a long time to be on the hoof. It's right that Hughes's stone should be in such an inaccessible spot – a location to be striven towards, a goal to be achieved.

The heat of that day has since given way to a slew of wind and rainstorms. The grockles and their slick of sun-cream have been rinsed away, replaced by serious anglers casting over a glistening channel of carbonated cola-coloured water. Hughes described this river as 'spirit and blood.'(*CP* 658) 'Concentrated cow piss', my daughter calls it. I'm sure Hughes would have fished here, and probably trod where I have trodden today, by Week Ford and Queenie Pool. Two crows tread warily on my lawn, then flap untidily away. I picture a tall man with a large, craggy face standing amongst the tossing greenery.

I didn't see any 'skinny dark tiny trout' on the day we walked to the memorial stone. And now here I am, carefully looking for links, scouring the letters and poems for signposts to that lonely spot where his stone lies. But the truth is – what? Have I been too literal? Am I striving too hard to place this man (and myself) in this heedless landscape? I speculate that perhaps Hughes chose this spot for its supposed permanence. Having seen what agri-business and commerce had made of the lowlands and its rivers, perhaps he saw Dartmoor's headwater country, this

'strange Dartmoor nest of Devon's rivers' as a place that would remain protected and unchanged.[4]

The Taw seeps through a hollow and coalesces into something with a name and a form, over and over, incessantly. Ever river out of no-river. Dartmoor is a dome of stone on which people have been inferring meaning and remaking themselves out of the granite, growan and water for generation upon generation. Hughes chose to go back to the source: of the river and of much of his inspiration, his 'best chances.' It could have been the Torridge or the Gulkana – North Devon or Alaska. Millstone grit or 'mapless moorland of granite.' He opted for the latter. Taw, Teign, Dart and East Okement. This source is all rivers, and we make of them, and the poems, what we will.

Thank you to Terry Gifford for the invitation to join the walk, and to Mark Wormald for the invitation and encouragement to write this piece.

[4] Ted Hughes, 'Taw and Torridge', in Anne Voss Bark (ed.), *West Country Fly Fishing* (London: Robert Hale, 1983), p. 25.

‘That was our place’: The Cambridge of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath

by Di Beddow

Ted Hughes omitted from *Birthday Letters* (his award winning 1998 collection addressed to his first wife Sylvia Plath) the poem simply known as ‘X’ which can be found in a notebook in the British Library archive.[1] It begins: ‘Cambridge was our courtship’ and I consider that to be a more suitable, descriptive title for the poem. However, Hughes goes on to clarify what he understands by the Cambridge of their courtship; it is not the actual university, or its buildings, courtyards and pathways. Instead Hughes refers us to an area from the Mill Bridge, situated just down Silver Street from Pembroke College, close to the Anchor pub where Hughes would drink and sing with his peers in his student days. From there the Cam idles, with Coe Fen on the left bank, a green grazing area with small tributaries and sluices, rough pasture and meadow vegetation; on the right, as you walk away from the city, there is a space where the meadows open out into Sheep’s Green and the old course of the Cam, which passes underneath Fen Causeway and across to Lammas Land. The river then strikes out to skirt around Newnham and then on to Grantchester Meadows. It is the Cambridge of the meadows that holds the earthenware head that Plath disliked so very much; this was a gift made by a friend, earlier in her life at Smith College. Plath wanted to rid herself of this image, but was superstitious about throwing it away, so at Hughes’s instigation, they found a bole of a tree in which to place it:

> Just past where the field
> Broadens and the path strays up to the right
> To lose the river and puzzle for Grantchester,
> A chosen willow leaned towards the water. (*CP* 1079)

It is also in this area, on Eltisley Avenue, that the Hugheses found their first married home, remembered by Hughes in ‘55 Eltisley’:

> Our first home has forgotten us.
> I saw when I drove past it

[1] Ted Hughes, “X”, in “18 Rugby Street” notebook, BL Add. MS 88918/1/6.

> How slight our lives had been
> To have left not a trace. (*CP* 1076)

Academic Cambridge, like the earthenware head, remains in Hughes's memory as a representation of something absent, indeed almost of someone absent. The colleges are described by Hughes in terms of an alien world, a surreal panorama, or unimportant places such as the location of the story of the exploding tumbler in 'The Bird' where he casually refers to a sherry party they attended 'In some Cambridge College' (*CP* 1093). The Cambridge of Plath and Hughes, as pictured in *Birthday Letters* and in the poem 'Cambridge was our courtship', a poem he decided not to include in the former,[2] is a place where the university and the academic life of the city are all but perfunctory. The landscapes of Hughes's earlier poetry are also largely missing. No untamed Ireland, primitive or rural Devon; no ancient Elmet here, either. Indeed, when such landscapes do make an appearance they tend to be used as a backdrop only for the central player on stage, who like Godot, never arrives. Sylvia Plath is however very much present in the poetry. Erica Wagner recounts in *Ariel's Gift* that Hughes in writing the work was not consciously writing poems, but the process was essentially about trying to 'evoke [Plath's] presence to myself, and to feel her there listening.' [3] The collection travels from Spain to America, home to North Tawton and to Yorkshire, but when looking at the importance of Cambridge in Hughes's work, the poem 'X' offers an entirely new and different pathway through the university city of the two poets and through *Birthday Letters* itself.

In the weeks before its publication in January 1998, Hughes had sent advance copies of the book to a select few friends and family members. In response to a warm review from Seamus Heaney, he explained how he had battled with the incubation of the collection and how for the previous twenty-five years he had tried to deal with his thoughts and feelings about Sylvia Plath's suicide in 1963:

> I'd come to a point where there seemed no alternative. Given the funny old physical corner I've got myself into, and the mysterious rôle in my life that SP's posthumous life has played-and that our posthumous marriage has played-publication came to seem not altogether a literary matter, more a physical operation that just might change the psychic odds crucially for me, and clear a route. [...] I always had some idea that the real accounting for my dealings with Sylvia would have to emerge inadvertently, in some oblique fashion, through some piece only symbolically related to it - the authentic creative way. But there they are. (*LTH* 703)

[2] The poem was subsequently published in Jack Malvern, "Rough-hewn genius of Hughes laid bare in unfinished verses", *The Times*, 17 October 2008, p. 18.
[3] Erica Wagner, *Ariel's Gift* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000; paperback edition 2001), p. 22.

Birthday Letters is an intensely personal collection; accepting the Forward Prize in 1998, Hughes described it as: 'a gathering of occasions on which I tried to open a direct, private, inner contact with my first wife'.[4] This then, as Hughes was only too aware, is not his accustomed way of working where he would protect his feelings and memories using nature, landscape and myth to fashion a final product, often a world away from the original experience. Neil Roberts summarises this succinctly in his blog on *Birthday Letters:* ' He despised the direct use of autobiographical material, and believed that to make poetry of any value experience needed to be imaginatively transformed.'[5] In this collection though, Hughes uses place to confront and uncover the personal whether it be Spain, America, Yorkshire, Devon or Cambridge. Landscape and imagination are not distancing devices in *Birthday Letters*, but instead, vehicles for confronting and accessing the inner life, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the poems about the city in which the couple met.

'St Botolph's' is probably the best-known of the Cambridge-based poems in *Birthday Letters*; it is Hughes's recollection of the meeting of the couple on February 25th 1956 at the Women's Union in Falcon Yard. Demolished in the late sixties to make way for a shopping mall, Falcon Yard was a very old part of the city, down cobbled alley ways and close to Alexandra House where Hughes shared a room with the 'girls that helped to run it' (*CP* 1060) as he describes in 'Fidelity'. In this poem he remembers his life after the meeting in Falcon Yard and he tastes the fidelity he describes, sleeping in the true sense of the word with one of the waitresses from the British Restaurant, situated on the ground floor. His room is 'Overlooking Petty Cury' (*CP* 1061) where having left his job in London and returned to Cambridge he says he, 'laboured/ Only at you'. There is a hopeful air; he is remaining true to his new love, with pared back belongings, his notebook and a mattress. His fidelity became a 'holy law' but writing in the future and looking back at this time he still wonders whether to 'envy' or 'pity' himself. He thinks of this period: 'As a kind of time that cannot pass,/ That I never used, so still possess.' He was twenty-five: 'Free of University I dangled/ In its liberties.' Cambridge is a place where one can do such a thing; the anthropologist Alan Macfarlane describes it as 'a secure environment within which to take risks.' [6] Whilst the biographical element is strong in these poems, Hughes clearly notes in 'Visit': 'It is only a story. / Your story. My story.' (*CP* 1049)

[4] Quoted in Wagner, *Ariel's Gift,* p. 22.
[5] Neil Roberts, "An Introduction to *Birthday Letters*', 25 May 2016. https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-birthday-letters
[6] Alan Macfarlane, *Reflections on Cambridge* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2009), p. 29.

The collection tends to follow a timeline beginning with 'Fulbright Scholars'. Hughes remembers seeing a photograph of the new intake and although, years later, he cannot recall if Plath were included, he connects that memory with his first taste of a fresh peach: 'At twenty-five I was dumbfounded afresh/ By my ignorance of simplest things.' (*CP* 1045) This is the young man who then meets Plath in Cambridge and, as he continues in the two 'Caryatids' poems which follow 'Fulbright Scholars', his pre-meeting preparation moves from a photograph to reading her first poem and then the confession that his group planned 'An attack, a dismemberment' (*CP* 1047) of her poetry. It is an odd courtship. In 'Caryatids 2' Hughes repeats the metaphor of artifice in his description of the group of young men: they were 'Playing at friendship' (*CP* 1046), then 'playing at students.' Nothing appears authentic in the university element of Cambridge for Hughes, and whilst he had long-term friendships with several of his Cambridge group, the tone of his retrospective writing appears to position his companions as part of the unreal nature of the colleges. Take this August 1955 letter to Liz Hicklin née Grattidge, Hughes's Cambridge nursing girlfriend. He writes:

> I have an idea for a book. Two books in fact. One is about Cambridge. An autobiography of a student written from I'm not sure what angle, during three years, and to sell as a soft back popular thing… The book about Cambridge would be very cynicial, [sic] I feel, very cruel to every one I knew – but the interesting things about everyone I knew, now I look back, seem to have been their absurdities. I don't think I remember that with much affection. [7]

Four years then before Plath starts writing 'Falcon Yard', her unfinished novel about Cambridge and Hughes, he is also planning a Cambridge story; from this letter though, as from 'Caryatids 2', it is clear that Hughes's memories of Cambridge are not of his university education which he calls, 'A dramaturgy of whim' (*CP* 1046). Another anthropologist, Tim Ingold, observes in *The Perception of the Environment* that to better understand our relation to place, we tend not to passively accept knowledge from a culture such as in this case Cambridge University; instead we actively engage with the 'process of knowing' as we make our 'negotiation of a path through the world.'[8] Hughes did not adhere to what Ingold terms the 'corpus of rules and principles' given by the much celebrated culture of Cambridge, but rather carved out his own pathway through it, aware that always there were other ways he could have travelled. Cambridge bears witness to the

[7] Ted Hughes to Liz Grattidge 22 August 1955. BL Add MS 89198 (As yet still not fully catalogued)
[8] Tim Ingold *The Perception of the Environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* (London: Routledge, 2000; 2011), pp. 145-6.

world's opportunities, centring here on the university and into the core arrives the woman who changed Hughes's path for the rest of his life:

> The world
> Crossed the wet courts, on Sunday, politely,
> In tourists' tentative shoes.
> All roads lay too open, opened too deeply
> Every degree of the compass.
> Here at the centre of the web, at the crossroads,
> You published your poem
> About Caryatids. (*CP* 1046-7)

But the poem that captures most powerfully the Cambridge of Hughes and Plath remained unpublished by Hughes. Whilst I maintain that Hughes gained far more from the University than either he admitted, or critics have credited, the poem simply marked as 'X' shows a different focus to the city. Inside the front cover of the notebook containing the poem is a list of poems under the title 'The Sorrows of the Deer' which was the earlier title Hughes used for *Birthday Letters*. 'X' sits between 'IX', which opens, 'You despised my girlfriend,' a poem about Shirley, whom Hughes was seeing when he met Plath at the *St Botolph's Review* party, and 'XI' which starts 'I saw the world again through your eyes'; this became 'The Owl' in *Birthday Letters*. All three of these poems are Cambridge-based and describe places particular to the 1950s lives of the two poets. 'X' though is seminal; Hughes charts the development of his early relationship with Plath through the poem, describing the nature of the area he cites in the opening lines. In the article in which 'X' was published, Jack Malvern quotes the British Library's Jamie Andrews' suggestion that the poem was probably omitted from the final selection to balance the poems between earlier and later life. This though seems much less interesting than Hughes's own ideas as seen in this letter to Keith Sagar in June 1998, where he reflects that he is fascinated by the interpretations other people make of the poems:

> I've been intrigued, I must say, by the maze of interconnections between those BLs. Considering how I wrote them, months often years apart, never thinking of them as parts of a whole – just as opportunities to write in a simple, unguarded, intimate way – to release something! Nor can I recall how I came to shuffle them into that order – following chronology of subject matter was the only rule, I think. (*PC* 267)

This poem then was surely one Hughes needed to write, but it appears that having experienced castigation for his extra-marital relationship during his time with Plath and on the editing of her work after her death, he decided against publishing it. It is important to note that it is one which has no amendments, but is simply written out as though from dictation; the other poems in the exercise book bear the scars of

much reworking. It may of course be that this poem is unmarked and unpublished, because Hughes did not think it of quality, but I believe that it is because it is so localised, too personal and specific. Unless you live or had lived in Cambridge, this area just outside the city centre would not be known or be of any real importance to you, although Grantchester and Newnham do feature in the collection.

In a sceptical review of *Birthday Letters* in *Prospect* magazine, James Wood claims that there is a lack of specificity in the collection's poems:

> His pagan doom, the suckling gods and bloody crypts, do not absolve but dissolve. A real, particular Plath disappears; and a real, particular Hughes disappears too, drowned in a sud of images borrowed from their own poetry, or from the most familiar dirty magics. Particularity is secular, and these dank poems show us why.[9]

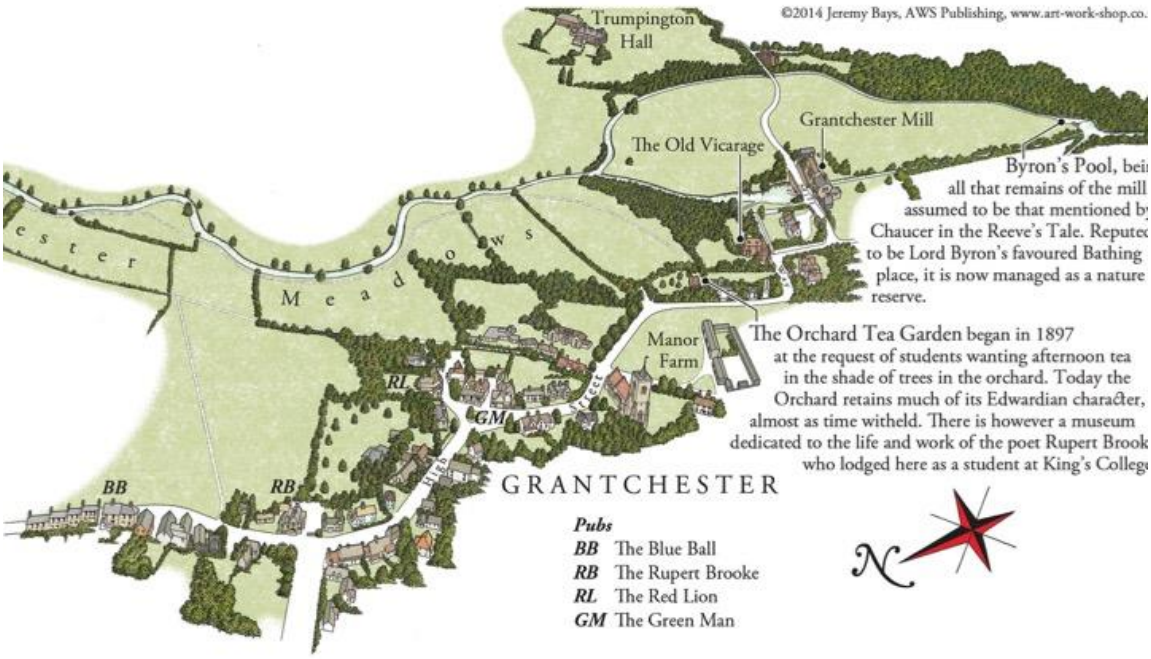
Wood has concluded that Hughes's specificity in this collection is lost because of his recycling of past writings and his self-constructed mythologies; because of this Wood suggests that the poet alienates the reader from the spirituality he is attempting to communicate. Whilst I would disagree with Wood on this in relation to the collection, I assert that in 'X' particularly, Hughes is describing the spiritual and sacred through the landscape. By combining analysis of the poetry with local supporting knowledge of the specific character of this part of Cambridge, I argue that Hughes's writing embraces particularity and the poetry reveals the experience. However, in collecting the poems for publication, Hughes appears to have decided that 'X' is one of the poems he used for dealing with his experience, rather than for a reading public. In that June 1998 letter to Sagar, Hughes says that when he deals with a difficult experience in his poetry, especially a

> traumatic event – if writing is your method – has to be dealt with deliberately. An image has to be looked for – consciously – and then mined to the limit: but not in autobiographical terms. My high-minded principal [sic] was simply wrong – for my own psychological & physical health. It was stupid. (*PC* 271)

He tells Sagar in the same letter: 'God knows what sort of book it is, but at least none of it is faked, innocent as it is.' It is not faked; it is innocent and surely then, it is essentially Hughes's voice about this experience. Reading 'X' informed by an understanding of the place in the poem, it is possible to see that the piece draws up the real significance of what Cambridge meant to both Hughes and Plath; in this small, peripheral area of the city boundaries, the two poets fell in love and revealed

[9] James Wood, 'Dead Letters', *Prospect* 30 (May 1998) pp. 68-69.

to each other their past, their influences and their writing which would all have an impact upon them both for the rest of their lives.



In 'X', this unpublished poem about the area,[10] Hughes describes the landscape as green and flat with

> Full drooping willows and rushes, and mallard and swans,
> Or stumpy pollard willows and the dank silence
> Of the slippery lapsing Cam. That was our place.

The alliteration and repetition of 'willows' and the sibilance throughout the poem describe the Cam as a slow and natural river, with the wildlife that throngs to a country river and takes us away from the hard consonance that he uses to describe the Cambridge of the colleges in the first few lines. Instead, Hughes focuses on the wildlife of the meadows, much less wild or blasted than his Yorkshire landscapes, but with imagery of significance, especially in the three-part description of the willows. First he presents the trees ornamenting the fen: one is reminded of Plath's description in 'Watercolor of Grantchester Meadows': 'It is a country on a nursery plate.'[11] There is something quaint and unreal about the picture of river, willows and cows, reminding us of the Chinese willow pattern design, where the lovers are threatened by the woman's father, until the gods intervene and the lovers are turned into doves, rather than being killed. Hughes's poem itself ends: 'Were what we felt

[10] All images are reproduced with permission of the artist and copyright holder Jeremy Bays, http://www.art-work-shop.co.uk
[11] Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), pp. 111-2.

wings?' The second set of willows here are 'Full drooping' , almost Pre-Raphaelite in their evocation of sadness and elegiac fecundity; again, in relation to the symbolism of the willows, one might note Psalm 137 for its equation of sadness and an inability to sing in a land which is strange to the Israelites:

> By the waters of Babylon,
> there we sat down and wept,
> when we remembered Zion.
>
> On the willows there
> we hung up our lyres[...]
>
> How shall we sing the Lord's song
> in a foreign land? [12]

Cambridge as the world knows it appears in the poem as a strange land to both poets, but Hughes describes this separate patch of land just outside the city as though it were the couple's own enchanted garden. Finally in the set of three, the willows have become 'stumpy pollard' and cut back, much like the archaic symbolism of rebirth that enthralled Hughes, for example in his description of Shamanism in 'Regenerations':

> a magical death, then dismemberment [...] From this nadir, the shaman is resurrected, with new insides, a new body created for him by the spirits. (*WP* 57)

Robert Graves tells us that in mythology, the name of Mount Helicon (a mountain sacred to the poet's muse) originates from 'helicë, the willow-tree sacred to poets, as from the stream which spiralled round it).'[13]

Hughes's tone chimes with the 'dank silence' of this environment, a strange and forbidding description for what was the poets' chosen Cambridge: 'That was our place.' It is a strange use of the adjective 'dank', which suggests dark, dampness and decay, hardly the most conventionally conducive for courtship and love. Hughes is fond of this word 'dank', using it in an earlier unpublished Cambridge poem which he submitted for Part 1 of the English Tripos as an undergraduate. That poem opens:

> The year's dank rag is smouldering under the trees.
> The shattered sunlight sleeps against a root
> Where sunlight never alit all the green days.
> Autumn comes touching at both heart and thought. [14]

[12] Psalm 137, in *The Bible,* Revised Standard Version (London: Collins,1952), pp. 501-2.
[13] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), p. 432.
[14] Ted Hughes, 'The ear-witness account of a poetry-reading in Throttle College, before the small poets grew up into infinitesimal critics.' Cambridge University Library, ENGL1/155.

In this poem the Autumn is dark and ghostly with witch-like screams from foxes and a deathly tone. Writing years later, but reimagining Cambridge, it is as if this area of the city is wet, fen-like and even submerged in Hughes's mind: 'Poem X' describes it as low-lying and sunken under the water. It is therefore discordant somehow to have this dankness describing a private place, for a lovers' tryst in a university city. The Cam is a long way from, for example, the river in 'August Evening' (in his collection *River*. Here, the waterway 'Cools early, star-touched' and the mist 'Breathes on the sliding glass' (*CP* 671). In the same collection, 'The River' shows the water being personified into an immortal god who will 'wash itself of all deaths' (*CP* 664). Again, in 'That Morning' Hughes has a transcendental experience, stimulated by the crowds of salmon around him in the river as he fishes. He describes the fishermen, approached by the swarming salmon: 'As if we flew slowly, their formations/Lifting us toward some dazzle of blessing'. (*CP* 663) Closing the poem are the lines inscribed on Hughes's commemoration stone in Westminster Abbey:

> So we found the end of our journey.
>
> So we stood, alive in the river of light
> Among the creatures of light, creatures of light. (*CP* 664)

This is a world away from the 'slippery lapsing Cam' of the Cambridge poem, but the closing lines of this work themselves recall the image of flight as something divine, here this time found in a relationship rather than Hughes's traditional spiritual affinity with nature. It is also a more questioning, more tentative youthful remembrance of such elevating love, where Hughes doubted that the couple understood the feeling of flight, but asks: 'Were what we felt wings?' The adjectives 'slippery' and 'lapsing' are also problematic when imagining this courtship landscape: 'slippery' could mean that the river curls and winds through the fen, or that the wetness literally makes the banks slippery underfoot. The word though can also suggest something deceitful, elusive and untrustworthy with 'lapsing' being used as falling into decay with lack of use; the latter also has moral connotations especially to the Bible and the prelapsarian lives of Adam and Eve before their fall. This vocabulary does not build a landscape of courtly love, but I would suggest that the reason for this less than idyllic description becomes clearer when Hughes announces, 'That was our place.' The poets appear to have chosen this as their Cambridge because it has no forerunner for either of them; in this landscape they do not need to match expectations of the past, or of academia nearby, but instead they can indulge their love 'In the watery weedy dream' which as Hughes describes, is metaphorically some sort of fish bowl with the university buildings merely

disintegrating turrets under the water. People too are described as if from a dream or merely performing a dance across the set. The scenery and the horizon for Hughes, like an ancient monument, decaying under its own historical and cultural weight, has little relevance to him and his lover; indeed there is a nightmarish and chthonic quality to the vision. He weaves a spell of this scene with an insistent alliteration on 'w' showing that their place was 'willows [...] watery weedy dream [...] world [...] we [...] what [...] when [...] were,' and 'wings'. The poem finishes with the rhetorical question cited above, but this is the final question of several; Hughes asks the spirit of Plath if she can recall what they talked about; if they were actually going somewhere: if they were 'exploring' or if they were trying instead to banish their confusion and to use poetry to formulate their futures, there, along the Cam and across the meadows. Both poets used words, signifiers, dialogue and poetry to create the vision of their future together, just as Hughes uses the same method to understand their past in *Birthday Letters*. In Cambridge the couple forged their future, influencing and aiding each other to make the dream real. Then over forty years on and in earnest after the death of Plath, Hughes again uses poetry and dreams, talking and words to settle in himself his responsibility for the vision of a shared future that, like the poem's vision of the university, becomes disintegrating ramparts and sunken horizons. He dares to return to this murky, nightmarish world in the hope that he can find a better understanding of and expiation from the pain of loss and culpability.

In 1956 at the time of their courtship and indeed for the first term after their marriage, Plath was living at Whitstead, a Newnham college hostel set back from Barton Road, so one presumes that in the poem, when Hughes tells us that the couple walked past a gate as they were talking, he is referring to the gate at her lodgings, probably at the back of the college where Whitstead is situated. There is no gate there now; but could Hughes also mean the gate to the secret garden, the walled garden of Paradise that the world offered them in the future, but appears to them in their courtship to be fastened and inaccessible? The description of the garden though is not paradisiacal; instead, with its 'pollard willows', tarmac pathways and permanent darkness, it sounds more like a postlapsarian garden, with our poetic Adam and Eve, excluded from its delights. The garden also chimes with the Garden of the Hesperides, where Hera's orchard was sited with the nymphs of evening tending the garden. The darkness of Hughes's Cambridge can be explained because the area he is describing in the poem is the area in which they would walk once the day's work and studies were done, so the nymphs of evening in the West with the sunset sit well with this image of the garden in the city. Here, Hughes tells us that individually they consecrated the wooden seats along the

pathways, which resonates with 'Fidelity' where Hughes shared a bed with a young woman, but both of them respected his relationship with Plath like 'A holy law' with the woman serving the goddess, Hughes's fidelity, 'like a priestess' (*CP* 1060-2). Hera, being the goddess of women and patroness of married women, is often depicted with a cow, one of her sacred animals, and in the Cambridge poems of *Birthday Letters*, Hughes aligns the cows of Grantchester Meadows with his future wife: in 'Chaucer' when Plath is reciting from 'the Wyf of Bath' he recalls them being

> enthralled.
> They shoved and jostled shoulders, making a ring.
> To gaze into your face [...]
> Keeping their awed six feet of reverence (*CP* 1075)

Plath had written to Hughes in their forced separation in October 1956, describing her serenity and admiration of the cows in the Meadows:

> Yesterday, straight after lunch, I took my sketch-paper and strode out to the Grantchester Meadows where I sat in the long green grass amid cow dung and drew two cows; my first cows.[...] I got a kind of peace from the cows; what curious broody looks they gave me[....] I shall go back soon; I shall do a volume of cow-drawings. (*LSP1* 1284)

In 1961 she describes herself responding to baby Frieda's hunger in 'Morning Song': 'One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral/In my Victorian nightgown.'[15] And after having given birth to both children, Plath describes herself in her letters as 'cow-tired' (*LSP2* 778) and as having 'cowish amnesia' (*LSP2* 521). Again, in 'The Owl', also set in Grantchester Meadows, Hughes opens up to Plath the world of nature, which she took in:

> with an incredulous joy
> Like a mother handed her new baby
> By the midwife. (*CP* 1064)

Hughes conflates Plath's relish of this new experience as one of a mother, which is in the tradition of the goddess Hera and her protection of marriage and motherhood, with Hera's vengeful spirit in relation to Zeus's lovers and their illegitimate offspring. Plath is passionately expressive in her letters when decrying the affair that took Hughes away from their Devon home:

> She is the barren & frigid symbol of sex. [...] What has this Weavy Asshole (her name is actually Assia Wevill) got that I haven't, I thought: she can't make a baby (and really isn't so sorry), can't make a book or a poem (*LSP2* 797)

[15] Plath, *Collected Poems,* pp. 156-7.

The locked garden imagery in the poem 'X' though derives most clearly from the 'Song of Solomon' in the Old Testament. We have seen how in the poem's final lines Hughes asks if what the couple felt in their courtship were indeed wings with which they could fly over the locked gates of the garden and into the future and the world. Certainly Plath indicates that huge changes took place in their characters at this early stage in their relationship:

> Ted has changed so in the past two months I've known him that it is incredible, just as I've changed too: from being bitter, selfish, despairing of ever being able to use our whole selves, our whole strengths, without terrifying other people, we have turned into the most happy magnanimous creative pair in the world (*LSP1* 1189)

In 'The Song of Solomon' the persona speaks to his beloved and equates her beauty to nature, saying that her eyes are like doves, her cheeks like 'halves of a pomegranate' and her breasts 'like two fawns'. Then, in his adoration of his beloved, he writes in chapter 4, verse 12: 'A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed'. [16] In his poem Hughes cites this locked garden: the couple have not flown into their future, but are in a form of limbo, waiting for their future to become. A commentary on the 'Song' explains:

> We must bear in mind that these words are supposed to be spoken on the journey in the marriage procession. The bride is not yet brought to the royal palace. She is still travelling in the royal palanquin. The idea of a paradise or garden is carried from the beginning of Scripture to the end, the symbol of perfect blessedness. The figure of the closed or shut-up garden represents the bridegroom's delight in the sense of absolute and sole possession – for himself and no other. The language is very natural at such a time, when the bride is being taken from her home.[17]

Plath and Hughes are in courtship in Cambridge; how appropriate that Hughes appears to cite 'The Song of Solomon' in 'X' , for the bride is in waiting and the bridegroom lauds his future bride in natural terms. It is though in 'Fidelity' that he describes himself as the sister of the woman with which he shared a bed; whilst the woman is not his beloved, it is as though Hughes has embraced the language of 'The Song of Solomon' and devotion to his goddess: 'You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride'.[18] It would appear that Hughes, in hindsight, contemplates that he may have been considering a marriage close to perfection, but still he questions whether he was wrong in identifying this, or whether he understood its power.

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[16] 'The Song of Solomon', *The Old Testament Collins Revised Standard Bible* (London : Collins,1952), pp. 536-8.
[17] Pulpit Commentary, at https://biblehub.com/commentaries/songs/4-12.htm
[18] 'The Song of Solomon' 4:9 p. 537.

Just along from their usual walks across Coe Fen is Paradise Island where trees and undergrowth block the walkers' path along the Cam towards Grantchester. Again, Hughes may be remembering this place and contrasting the name and its symbolism with the reality of what became their relationship and their future. The couple however are not walking; instead they are part of the nature in these meadows; they appear to be the ducks or swans of the natural world gliding along the river with the colleges simply a backdrop to their real lives in Cambridge. As in 'Fidelity' where Hughes writes: 'Free of University I dangled/In its liberties' (*CP* 1061), so in 'X' Hughes writes that the university life imprisoned them and delayed them. It was to be endured because, 'Our only life was to come.'

This poem shows that Hughes prized Cambridge beyond his undergraduate years and outside the universally revered walls of the colleges; in a languid flow of the Cam's willows and a 'watery weedy dream' we find a landscape as personal and compelling as any that Hughes wrote of in earlier works and one of significance for him throughout his life.

The Goddess Within: Hindu Symbology in Ted Hughes's Poetry

by Krishnendu Das Gupta

Ted Hughes's presentation of Nature in his work is the result of both his personal experience with Nature, and his long familiarity with the creation myths of various cultures including his knowledge of the 'supernatural women' (*LTH* 679) of the oriental world, which gave shape to his conception of the Goddess in his poetry.[1] The inclination towards the Goddess has been expressed earlier in his teens through his poem 'Song' (*CP* 24) written much before he had a chance to read Graves or Frazer.[2] The poet's mental construct of what Jung would call the 'eternal image of woman' – an archetypal imprint of experience of the female, to borrow the Jungian term, which is also another aspect of his understanding of Nature – is often expressed in his poetry in a form very similar to the Hindu Mother Goddess despite his Protestant mindset.[3] This could be because he became acquainted with concepts of Hindu divinities and Hindu theology and, as we will see, his construct of the Mother Goddess resonated with a new myth, very much Christian at heart, and yet at the core Hindu too.

The poem 'The Hawk in the Rain' (*CP* 19) makes manifest the contrast between the hawk, a face of Nature, and modern man who has turned away from Him. The general atmosphere of the poem is one of violence, represented by the 'banging wind' killing the 'stubborn hedges'. In other words violence is Nature epitomized and the Atlas-figure of the hawk (whose 'wings hold all creation in a

[1] Throughout his life Ted Hughes expressed his dismay at man's alienation from Mother Nature, as a result of man's constant pursuit of the Socratic scientific worldview. This neglect by the western world of Mother Nature who is some sort of a Goddess incarnate for the poet has led to the marginalization of Nature or the Goddess in Her. Ted Hughes has written about this Goddess in his *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. Ann Skea has also discussed about this Goddess of Hughes in her essay 'Ted Hughes and the Goddess' Ted Hughes Homepage, (http://ann.skea.com/THandGoddess.html) [accessed 01/10/2019].

[2] Ted Hughes switched to the course of archaeology and anthropology at Pembroke College, Cambridge which was 'under the 'Cambridge School' of Anthropology indebted most prominently to Sir James Frazer author of *The Golden Bough*'; see Stuart Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes: A Guide to the Poems* (Portmarnock: Wolfhound Press, 1981), p. 7. It is most likely that a voracious reader as Hughes was, he must have read *The Golden Bough* during his Cambridge days.

[3] C.G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*. Trans., R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 56.

weightless quiet') hangs still without even the least strain at the 'master- / Fulcrum of violence'. The hawk has been so integrated into Nature that it serves as the polestar, a symbol of constancy and stillness in contrast to struggling mankind represented by the 'dazed last-moment-counting / Morsel in the earth's mouth' persona of the poem. The sudden vision of the contrasting figure of the hawk right at the end of the first stanza which describes the strained effort of the persona can be compared to the apocalyptic vision that Yeats had in 'The Second Coming' of '[a] shape with lion body and the head of a man,' slouching 'towards Bethlehem to be born'.[4] If Yeats's imagery is of the Second Coming of Christ then the persona in the present poem envisages the supreme omnipotent face of Nature manifested through the stillness of the hawk.

But in contrast to the apparent simplicity of this mythological reading, the poem bears a sign of unexpected but profound creativity for a Hindu reader. For all its imagery of masculine violence (the hawk being addressed as male), the poem is replete with fertility symbols in new creative combination through spilling of the blood on the earth when the vision is offered of the hawk falling to 'mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land'(*CP* 19). The spilling of the blood on the earth resulting from the self-willed death of the hawk also likens him to the self-sacrificing Hindu Tāntrik Mother Goddess Chinnamastā (**Fig. 1**). According to Prāṇatoṣiṇī Tantra, Goddess Pārvatī on the request of her two devotees Dākini and Varnini severs Her own head resulting in the flowing out of blood in three streams which fulfils the hunger of her flanking attendants and herself too.[5] This decapitated icon of the Goddess is known in Hinduism as Chinnamastā or Chinnamastikā. The continuous cyclic order of self-destruction and self-renewal to sustain the self and of the created world is represented by the Chinnamastā icon.[6] Hughes's hawk's self-sacrifice 'maybe in his own time' by crashing onto the earth is only a part of that cyclic order, which according to the fertility rites involves giving up oneself to facilitate new birth. Sir James Frazer has discussed many ancient fertility rites around the globe where the blood or the flesh of the sacrificed life fertilises the land. The sacrifice of the 'bride' in ancient Egypt , the annual human sacrifice of the Pawnees, the sacrifice made by the West African queen, or by the people of Lagos, Guinea, or by the Bagobos tribe of Mindanao, the island of Philippine are some

[4] W.B. Yeats, *W.B. Yeats: Selected Poetry*. Ed. A. Norman Jeffares. (London: Pan, 1974), p. 100.
[5] David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), pp. 147-8.
[6] Harshananda. *Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1987), p. 104.

examples of such ancient fertility rites.[7] Thus Chinnamastā and hawk both become a symbol of recycling energy.

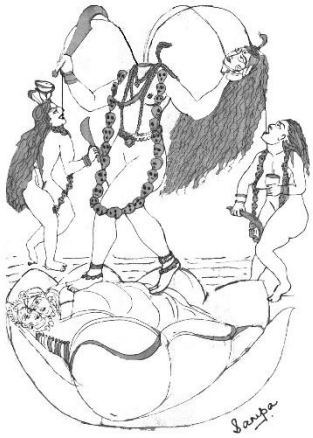

Fig. 1
Chinnamastā

Fig.2
Kāma and Rati (in eternal copulation) under the feet of Chinnamastā

Furthermore, the Goddess Chinnamastā according to Hindu mythology is atop the copulating figures of Kāma and Rati, the God and Goddess of desire (**Fig. 2**). The association of the Chinnamastā icon with the ever copulating images of the God and Goddess of desire, Kāma and Rati, 'emphasizes that the goddess is being charged with the sexual power of the copulating couple.' And this energy surges up through the body of the Goddess and 'gushes out of her head in the form of blood to feed Her devotees and replenish herself.'[8] According to Pattanaik,

> Chinnamastika is a Tantric goddess who embodies rasa, the juice of life. A new life is created only when rasa flows during sex. A life is sustained only when rasa is consumed as food. To produce food, rasa from another life has to be claimed [...] Rasa is what makes the world go round.[9]

The hawk could also be seen in this light. The phrase, 'in his own time' (*CP* 19) could be the hawk's sexual instinct and crashing onto the ground and his heart's blood mixing with the mire of the land offers a new light on Hughes's hawk mythopoeia. The crashing down of the hawk onto the earth is the union of the masculine and

[7] See James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and* Religion (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1993), pp. 370, 432-3.
[8] Kinsley. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, p. 155.
[9] Devdutt Pattanaik, *Myth = Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2006), p. 166.

feminine principles and has an affinity to the semiotic representation in the image of Chinnamastā found atop the copulating God and Goddess of desire. From this perspective, the hawk then assumes the role of Kāma the Hindu God of desire. The Goddess of desire, Rati's role is assumed by the Mother Earth. The crashing of the hawk onto Mother Earth can be seen as the symbolic copulation resulting in the flow of blood which can also be interpreted as the flow of the 'rasa, the juice of life' to propagate a new life. However, the sexual act in the Chinnamastā iconography as well as the symbolic act of copulation mentioned a little earlier between the hawk and the Mother Goddess is not about pleasure but about procreation, an act intended to keep the cycle of life moving onward. From this perspective, in Nature sex is procreative and contributes to the journey of life.

'Hawk Roosting' (*CP* 68-69) has long been pictured as a 'symbol of some horrible totalitarian genocidal dictator', and the boastful pronouncements of the bird might seem to justify this view: 'It took the whole of Creation / To produce my foot, my each feather: / Now I hold Creation in my foot' (*CP* 68-69) or 'I kill where I please because it is all mine.' (*CP* 69) [10] The poet's interviews with Ekbert Faas and later with Amzed Hossein shed a different light on the bird. [11] Hughes told Faas that he intended the bird to be '. . . some Creator like the Jehovah in Job but more feminine.'[12] What the poet had in mind was possibly the Lord's speech to Job in Chapters 38-41 of The Book of Job in The Old Testament. The line from the poem 'I kill where I please because it is all mine' seems to have inherited its confidence from this line in Job: 'Everything under heaven belongs to me.' (Job 41:11). Speaking to Amzed Hossein in Dhaka, Hughes said that in the early phases 'I had in my mind the notion of the Egyptian Horus, who was the hawk'.[13] Horus is the hawk-headed Egyptian sky God; one of his eyes is the sun, representing power, and the other moon, representing healing. In other words Horus combines the dichotomy of the terrible and the benign. This bird, the poet feels, representing Nature, is feminine in quality but in spirit closer to Hitler than to Isis.[14] The hawk in 'Hawk Roosting' therefore is an aspect of Nature which syncretizes the binary opposites of creation and destruction, of the terrible and the benign, and yet without occluding the vast continuum of interstitial ambiguities of life. Hughes's hawk, being feminine in spirit, can neither be Jehovah nor Horus but it can also not be

[10] Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1980), p. 199.
[11]Amzed Hossein, 'An Interview with Ted Hughes.' *The Ted Hughes Homepage*. (http://ann.skea.com/AsiaFestivalInterview.html) [accessed 01/10/2019].
[12] Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 199.
[13] Hossein, 'An Interview with Ted Hughes.'
[14] Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 199.

Isis as Hughes himself said.[15] Was he then looking for a parallel feminine icon to explain his formulation, a Goddess unlike the Puritan God of morality? The feminine icon was to be like the hawk – ('There is no sophistry in my body: / My manners are tearing off heads– [...] The allotment of death' (*CP* 69)) devoid of morality (**Fig. 3**).

This Hughesian image of divinity, invites comparison with the image of the Hindu Mother Goddess Kālī, a representation of absolute power to create and destroy at will. The image of Goddess Kālī displayed

> her two aspects simultaneously, the terrible and the benign. Her four arms exhibited the symbols of her universal power: the upper left hand brandishing a bloody saber, the lower gripping by the hair a severed human head; the upper right was lifted in the "fear not" gesture, the lower extended in bestowal of boons. As necklace she wore a garland of human heads; her kilt was a girdle of human arms; her long tongue was out to lick blood. She was Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, the harmonization of all the pairs of opposites, combining wonderfully the terror of absolute destruction with an impersonal yet motherly reassurance.[16]

Fig. 3
Kālī

And according to Joseph Campbell, 'she unites the 'good' and the 'bad,' exhibiting the two modes of the remembered mother, not as personal only, but as universal.'[17]

[15] Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe,* p. 199.
[16] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces (*London: Fontana,1993), p. 115.
[17] Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces,* p. 114.

Hughes's image of the Creatrix, it can be seen, is more a portrayal of Goddess Kālī than the Biblical Jehovah or the Egyptian Horus after whom the poet initially intended to model his Hawk.

A major area of Hughes's ambivalence regarding the dichotomy of God and "anti-God" in Christianity, is expressed through 'Gog' (*CP* 161-4). Gog manifested itself as the dragon in Revelation just before the end of the world (Revelation 20:7-8); and this is not the God of 'Logos' (*CP* 155-6) , the all benevolent "Complete Being", by whose shout' 'I am Alpha and Omega' (*CP* 161) Gog awoke. Gog, Hughes believed, is Nature, marginalised over the years by Puritan Christianity. The absolute image of God in Christianity pronounced as 'Alpha and Omega' is a denial of the existence of Gog. As Keith Sagar observed, '[i]t is God's claim to be everything and yet to exclude the World, the Flesh and the Devil, which provokes into wakefulness and destructive activity the sleeping dragon, which is all that is not Logos.'[18] This fracturing, Hughes felt, is the result of years of suppression of Nature and he expresses his opinion in unequivocal terms: 'Christianity in suppressing the devil, in fact suppresses imagination and suppresses vital natural life.'[19]

Ted Hughes's opinion in regards to what we might call a 'God/anti-God dichotomy' within Christian thought can also be understood through Mary Douglas's observation that:

> Whenever a strict pattern of purity is imposed on our lives it is either highly uncomfortable or it leads into contradiction if closely followed, or it leads to hypocrisy. That which is negated is not thereby removed. The rest of life, which does not tidily fit the accepted categories, is still there and demands attention.[20]

Hughes's Logos-Gog binary exhibits a similar thought structure. Logos the 'Alpha and Omega' of existence is that strict pattern of imposed purity which faces a challenge from that contradiction of life which remains and seeks attention, that is 'Gog'. In this respect, Gog then is the other aspect, that totality which Hughes felt has been suppressed, but which he finds room for in his poem: 'The dog's god…', 'The mouse's saviour' (*CP* 161). Gog however is not the 'good fellow' (*CP* 156) of 'Logos', Gog is 'great bones' which 'pound on the earth' (*CP* 162). He is himself petrified thinking of the experience the rocks and stones will have visualising his appearance. His song is self-jarring and his feet's bones stamp louder than the weeping of the Mother of the Messiah. Gog therefore can be equated with Kali of

[18] Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), p. 74.
[19] Nathalie Anderson, 'Ted Hughes and the Challenge of Gender', in Keith Sagar (ed.), *The Challenge of Ted Hughes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 99.
[20] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and. Taboo* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1970), p. 193.

Hinduism whom Kinsley throughout his essay 'Kālī: Blood and Death out of Place' has presented as one whose being is untameable, one who is inclined towards wildness and disorder, one who 'dominates the primordial tension between detached calm and frenetic display in such a way that creative action becomes threatening and dangerous.'[21] The rejection of this aspect of divinity by the more established and dominant order of divinity has made Logos and Gog mutually exclusive. However much Gog appears as unacceptable to the established social order, Gog is only the other form of the same divinity, a Kali-form who 'gives birth to a wider vision of reality than the one embodied in the order of dharma. The dharmic order is insufficient and restricting without a context – without a frame, as it were. Kālī frames that order, putting it in a compelling context.'[22] So if Hughes's Logos is seen as the representative 'dharma' then his Gog is the Kālī who contextualises the Logos: 'My feetbones beat on the earth / Over the sounds of motherly weeping'(*CP* 162) or 'The womb-wall of the dream that crouches there, greedier than a foetus, / Suckling at the root-blood of the origins, the salt-milk drug of the mothers.' (*CP* 163).

In section three of 'Gog' (*CP* 162-4) the struggle between Puritanism and Nature is heightened and is exhibited through the mental turmoil of 'the Red Cross Knight', conditioned by conservatism. [23] Taught through ages to refrain from all temptations of the Feminine, from the 'flung web' (*CP* 163) and the coiled vaults, he even wants to be oblivious of his birth from the mother. Despite the 'Shield' by the Puritan world he is a prey to the 'dipped glance', 'the grooved kiss' (*CP* 163), or in other words, his natural instincts. The Knight is out there to wield his weapons 'towards the light' (*CP* 163), against the dark instincts. His sexual inhibition prompts him to ride with shoes that are 'vaginas of iron' (*CP* 163), and to go 'Against the fanged grail' with his 'lance-blade' (*CP* 164) to destroy it. Yet succumbing to instinct he 'gallops bowed', 'under the blood-dark archway' (*CP* 164). Instinct overpowers inhibition and the 'lance blade', the phallus of the Knight enters the

[21] David Kinsley, 'Kālī: Blood and Death Out of Place', in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (eds.), *Devī: The Goddesses of India* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2017), p. 83.
[22] Kinsley, 'Kālī: Blood and Death Out of Place', p. 84.
[23] Hughes, in his interview with Ekbert Faas, refered to the 'blood-crossed Knight' (CP 163) of 'Gog' III as the 'Red Cross Knight'; see Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 200. 'Red Cross Knight', within the context of English literature, has an obvious referent in *The Faerie Queene* where the knight has been described by Edmund Spenser as 'The Patron of true Holinesse, / Foule Errour doth defeate: / Hypocrisie him to entrappe, / Doth to his home entreate.'; see Edmund Spenser, *Edmund Spenser's Poetry: Authoritative Texts Criticism*. Eds. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 6. The knight has been presented by Spenser as an epitome of holiness shunning everything that has been defined by his religion as evil. Hughes's knight tries to put on a similar appearance but cannot resist carnal temptation. This is normal according to Hughes and through the use of the phrase 'Red Cross Knight' in the interview he wants to convey that Spenser's knight is a utopian concept.

'fanged grail', the vagina of the Goddess. This copulation is inevitable since it is the basis of all creation, the eternal truth. Hughes's image resonates a similar image, the image of Śiva Lingam, in Hindu mythology (**Fig.4**). This image is of the union of the lingam, the phallus of the generating God and Yoni, the vagina of the Goddess, and is a supreme symbol of Hindu mythology.

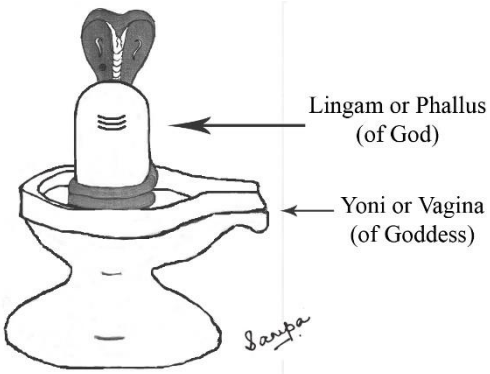

Fig. 4
Śiva Lingam

This union symbolises the generating moment of all life, a truly cosmic act and one considered in Hinduism as holy. As Joseph Campbell told Bill Moyers: 'the symbol that most immediately represents this mystery of the pouring of the energy of life into the field of time is the lingam and the yoni, the male and female powers in creative conjunction.'[24] A strikingly similar image is found in another of Hughes's poems, 'His Legs Ran About' (*CP* 436) in *Cave Birds*: 'His navel fitted over her navel as closely as possible / Like a mirror face down flat on a mirror'. Hughes has used this image to show the inseparability of the masculine and the feminine, an experience of the supreme moment of life. The Tantra philosophy in Hinduism has a geometric representation of this supreme union through the figure of the six pointed star, where the downward pointing triangle is the yoni trough of the Great Goddess and the upward pointing triangle is the shaft of the lingam or phallus of the Generating God penetrating the yoni.[25]

[24] Joseph Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*. Ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Anchor, 1991), p. 212.
[25] Devdutt Pattanaik, *Shiva to Shankara: Decoding the Phallic Symbol* (Mumbai: Indus Source Books, 2006), p. 85.

The whole section III of 'Gog' (*CP* 162-4) is a journey for the Knight from 'Out of the blood-dark womb' (*CP* 163), the womb of the Great Mother, to 'Out under the blood-dark archway' (*CP* 164), symbolising the vagina of the Great Goddess. Throughout, the Knight is being involuntarily drawn towards the object of inhibition, which he regards as the 'helm of the enemy, the grail' (*CP* 163). The shift of locus from the 'womb' to the 'archway' suggests Hughes's stress on the dual relation with the Feminine, the mother-son and of the wife-consort. The Knight's drift towards the Feminine, suggesting the wife-consort relationship is inevitable, and the knight's craving for her is more than that of the foetus, drugged by 'salt-milk' (*CP* 163) in the womb of the mother.

In 'A Riddle' (*CP* 432-3) in *Cave Birds*, the multi-faceted role of the Goddess – the Mother, the Wife, and the Daughter – is more explicit.

> Just as you are my father
> I am your bride. (*CP* 432)
>
> Just as surely as you are my father
> I shall deliver you (*CP* 433)

Hughes's concept of the Goddess in the twin role of the Mother and the Wife, echoes the myth of the Hindu Goddess Tārā. The Goddess Tārā in the Hindu shrine of Tārāpith in Bengal is worshipped in the image of the Goddess breast-feeding her Consort Śiva.[26] Being the universal Mother she is both the Mother and the Consort of Śiva. According to Campbell, a similar concept is found in Christianity too. He points out that the man 'called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.'[27] Eve is the anthropomorphic aspect of the Mother Goddess, the mother as well as the wife of Adam.

Again in *Gaudete*, the image of Lumb's vision of the 'baboon beauty' (*G* 104) which contrastingly betrays the unpreparedness of the devotee resonates with the experience and the state of Arjuna in the eleventh chapter of *The Bhagawad Gītā*. For Lumb the path to the Goddess is not easy; it can never be. The phantasmagoria of the vicar while on the way, and the beating down of the sticks on him (*G* 99) is an experience of suffering comparable to the resistance and impediments faced by the Indian Tāntriks from the Natural forces before the ultimate divine vision. Lumb though able to withstand the impediments of the path is still not prepared to bestow all faith on the divine and unite with Her. When the Goddess tightens Her grip on him and "grins into his face" (*G* 104), Lumb feels his spine crack. Out of sheer fear he puts all his strength to break away from the Goddess. As mentioned, *The*

[26] Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, p. 106.
[27] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (London: Souvenir, 2001), pp. 29-30.

Bhagawad Gītā chapter eleven has a parallel experience though in a different situation. The revelation of the Cosmic Form of the Lord in front of Arjuna is described by Him:

> Divi sūrya-sahasrasya bhavetyugapatutthitā.
> Yadi bhāh sadṛśī sā syātbhāsaḥtasya mahātmanah. 12.
> (12. Should the effulgence of a thousand suns blaze forth simultaneously in the sky, that might be similar to the radiance of the exalted One).[28] (*The Bhagawad Gītā* 11. 12)

Arjuna has the vision of all divine forms in the body of the Lord. It is a fearful Form with numerous arms, bellies mouths and eyes. The Lord is limitless, with a diadem, mace and disc. He is difficult to look at from all sides. Arjuna understands Him as the Immutable supreme One, the imperishable protector of the ever existing religion, the perfect repository of the Universe. He is the eternal Person. But the sight is too much for the ordinary mortal. Arjuna expresses his fear:

> Nabhaḥ-spṛśam dīptam aneka-varṇam
> vyātta-ānanam dīpta-viśāla-netram.
> Dṛṣṭvā hi tvām pravyathita-antara-ātmā
> Dhṛtim na vindāmi śamam ca Viṣṇu. 24.
> (24. O Viṣṇu, verily, seeing Your form touching heaven, blazing, with many colours, open-mouthed, with fiery large eyes, I, becoming terrified in my mind, do not find steadiness and peace.)
> (*The Bhagawad Gītā* 11. 24)

Two other poems of Hughes's from the 1970s – 'Tiger Psalm' and 'This is the maneater's skull' – are also replete with Hindu religious connotations. Hughes's tiger poem 'Tiger-Psalm' (*CP* 577-8) intended by the poet to be a conversation between Buddha and Socrates opens images which bear proximity of ideas to many more of the Hindu religious images. The echo of Hindu images might not be the result of an altogether accidental coincidence. His reading of Robert Graves and Joseph Campbell must have helped him develop a definite notion of the Hindu way of religion and Hindu theology. Towards the end of Graves's *The White Goddess* there is a discussion on the two Indian mystics and devotees of Kalī, Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Ramprasad Sen. In this context, Graves also discusses the Goddess Kalī and such mystical practices as Samadhi.[29] It is quite probable that Hughes's reading of Graves's book quite early in his life had induced in him an impression of Kalī and had drawn his interest towards the great Goddess. Campbell too in his various books and interviews discussed Kalī and other divinities. In *The*

[28] *The Bhagavad Gītā* 11.12, trans. Gambhīrānanda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama,1991), p. 435; all further references are to this edition.
[29] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber, 1961), pp. 483-5.

Masks of God: Oriental Mythology he quotes from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* where the great mystic had described the various forms of Kalī presenting the picture of the Goddess as totality, Protector, Destroyer, and Creatress, what the Hindus call as absolute supreme, the Brahman.[30]

Moreover, as we will see presently, Hughes's own collection of books pertaining to Hindu Gods and Goddesses indicates that he had an interest in this mythology and had thereby derived a concept of the essence of Hinduism. In his mind's eye he could clearly create a one to one relation between concepts of Protestantism and Hinduism. Phrases such as the tiger 'Does not kill', 'blesses with a fang' and 'opens a path' (*CP* 578) suggest the intimate connection not merely of life and death, but their connection, as in Hinduism, to truth and emancipation. 'The tiger within the tiger' (*CP* 578) refers to the power of the deeper self within the tiger that, as Keith Sagar points out, 'in a sense is the goddess.'[31] And here also this Goddess is an embodiment very similar to the Hindu understanding of the Goddess Durga slaying the asuras (demons). The tiger serving as the Goddess's vehicle in some Durgā myths is also inseparable from Goddess Durgā. The words the 'Himalayas' and the 'Ganges' also have poignant Hindu connotations. Again the tiger skin representing the tiger serves as Śiva's waist dress and thereby the tiger is a part of Śiva. In this poem Hughes has made an interesting juxtaposition: 'O Tiger! / O Sister of the Viper!' (*CP* 578). The snake, unlike in Christianity, is not evil in Hinduism and is also a part of both Śiva and Goddess Durgā.[32] The venomous snake remains as a necklace around Śiva's neck and its hood raised covers the Śiva Lingam in a Śiva temple (Fig. 4). The snake also acts as a weapon in Goddess Durgā's hand to punish the demon. So the poet aptly connects them as siblings.

In another tiger poem 'This is the maneater's skull' (*CP* 362) in the epilogue of *Gaudete* the man-eater's skull has the engulfing power that would ultimately devour Lumb, the devotee. That is the only way of emancipation for him: 'I was looking for you [...] You were looking for me.' As Sagar observes: 'The maneater is on the goddess's leash, is the goddess in one of her aspects. Not until he has been devoured, emptied and abandoned can she rescue him.'[33] Like the cockerel,

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[30] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* (London: Souvenir, 2000), pp. 164-5. Mahendranath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: *Vol. I*, trans. Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2009), p. 135.

[31] Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 223.

[32] As Hughes would have well known, Coleridge had quite a different point of view regarding serpents. In *Biographia Literaria* Book XIV he wrote, 'Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward.'; see S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Ed. J. Shawcross (Oxford: OUP, 1907), p. 11.

[33] Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 217.

metamorphosed into a crow and finally rising as an eagle in *Cave Birds*, Rev. Lumb the representative modern minister, alienated from the Goddess in the Prologue of *Gaudete* undergoes a similar transformation in the underworld and reemerges as a different Lumb, a true priest of the Goddess in an archaic set up. This Lumb not only experiences a deep pull towards the Goddess but at heart completely surrenders himself at her feet. 'This is the maneater's skull' metaphorically presents what Lumb has experienced during his journey from the Prololgue to the Epilogue of the *Gaudete*. His getting engulfed by the man-eater would redeem him and he would reemerge as a true devotee shorn of all ego and self-conceitedness. Lumb in the poem 'This is the maneater's skull' is thus experiencing the Goddess deep within himself.

A study of the concept of the Lion in the Hindu scripture enables a better thematic understanding of the tiger blessing with its fang in the 'Tiger Psalm' and of Lumb's getting devoured by the maneater. Canto VI, verses 15-18, of *Devī Mahātmyam* presents a picture of the Lion, the vehicle of Goddess Durgā on the carnage.

> Tato dhutasaṭḥ kopātkṛtvā nādaṅ subhairavaṁ
> Papātāsurasenāyāṅ siṅho devyāḥ svavāhanḥ 15
> Kāṅśrivˊitkarapraharеṇ daitvanasvena cāparāṅ
> Ākrāntyā cādhareṇāyāṅ sa jaghāna mahāsurāṅ 16
>
> Keṣāñcitpāṭayāmās nakhaiḥ koṣṭhāni kesarī
> Tathā talaprahāreṇ śirāṅsi kṛtavānpṛthakˊ 17
>
> Vicchinnvahuśirasḥ kṛtāstena tathāpare
> Papai ca rudhiraṅ koṣṭhādanyeṣāṅ dhutakesarḥ 18
>
> (15. Then the lion, vehicle of the Devi, shaking its mane in anger, and making the most terrific roar, fell on the army of the asuras.
> 16. Some asuras, it slaughtered with a blow of its fore paw, others with its mouth, and other great asuras, by treading over with its hind legs.
> 17. The lion, with its claws, tore out the hearts of some and severed heads with a blow of the paw.
> 18. And it severed arms and heads from others, and shaking its mane drank the blood from the hearts of others.)[34]

Again in Canto XI verse 18:

> nṛsiṅharupeṇogrena hantuṅ daityaṅ kṛtodhame
> trailokyatrāṇasahite nārāyaṇi namostu te 18

[34] *Devī Mahātmyam: 700 Mantras on Sri Durgā*, trans. Jagadiswarananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2012), p. 91.

> (18. Salutation be to you, O Nārāyanī, O you who, in the fierce form of a man-lion[35], put forth your efforts to slay the daityas [demons], O you who possess the benevolence of saving the three worlds.)

It is important to emphasise that the asuras, daityas or the demons destroyed by the Lion get released from the cycle of life. The Lion's divine touch helps them achieve salvation. Hughes certainly had developed a well-constructed conception about Buddhism, Sufism, Hinduism and other cultures, as he told Amzed Hossein: 'In other words, I was interested in other cultures, simple as that, other cultures, in a life in other cultures; I suppose I was interested in that.'[36] His personal repertoire of books connected with Hinduism is indicative of his mental eagerness to understand Hindu religion and ways.[37] From among Hughes's collection of books pertaining to Hinduism Mookerjee's book, *Kali: The Feminine Force* (1988), demands attention because it was a pretty late publication by which time Hughes had already written his major poems. Thus it is an important pointer to the fact that, even late in his career, Ted Hughes was still being drawn to delve into the concrete form and depths of the truth of Kali which was so representative of his ideal Goddess form, the other face of Nature. His deeper understanding of the Hindu theology made him realise that the tiger does not kill but 'opens a path' (*CP* 578), to emancipation. Lumb needs to be consumed by the Goddess manifested as the maneater to transcend as the priest of the Goddess. Like the death of the cockerel in *Cave Birds* this consumption is symbolic: it marks Lumb's severing of the tie from the superficial Socratic world and the world of Puritanic chauvinism.

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[35] As Swami Jagadiswarananda notes: 'Śakti of Viṣṇu in His fourth incarnation as a man-lion'; see *Devī Mahātmyam: 700 Mantras on Sri Durgā*, p. 140 n7.

[36] Hossein, 'An Interview with Ted Hughes.'

[37] I am deeply indebted to Mark Wormald and Ann Skea for helping me get access to the Emory Library Archives now holding books formerly owned by Ted Hughes. Among Ted Hughes's collection of Hindu texts are four books written by Mouni Sadhu, the Polish born writer on spirituality and esoterism who was deeply influenced by the Indian mystic Ramana Maharshi. Other books in this archive whose former owner was Ted Hughes are *Hindu Polytheism* by Alein Daniélou, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (1973) by Wendy Doniger, *The New Manual of Astrology in Four Books: Treating the Language of the Heavens, The Reading of a Horoscope, The Measure of Time and of Hindu Astrology* (1912) *The Laws of Manu* (1991), *The Teachings of Queen Kunti* (1978) by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Ajit Mookerjee's book on Kali, *Kali: The Feminine Force* (1988).

Both Ann Skea in her essay 'Ted Hughes's Vacanas: The Difficulty of a Bridegroom' (2013) and Keith Sagar in his proposed speech 'Ted Hughes, Gaudete, Cave Birds and the 1975 Ilkley Literaure Festival' mentioned that Ted Hughes had first read A.K Ramanujan's *Speaking of Śiva* in 1973-74 and Hughes told Amzed Hossein, 'And I modelled those poems because I was enormously excited at that time by the translations of Tamil Vacanas' (*Vacanas* were originally written in Kannada not Tamil). So there is hardly any doubt that the profound influence that the *Vacanas* had on the poet later acted as a philosopher and guide when he was writing the Epilogue poems of *Gaudete*.

Just as the demons in the Hindu scriptures apparently oppose the Goddess only to completely surrender before Her through death in Her hands, for Lumb also it is the beginning of complete surrender before the Goddess.

Finally, the *River* poems are replete with spiritual undertones and a few among them also have close resemblance to Hindu thought. As I have written elsewhere 'Flesh of Light' (*CP* 642) bears a striking closeness to the birth of the Ganges as described in Hindu mythology.[38] 'In the Dark Violin of the Valley' (*CP* 669-70), the river, like the Goddess, is '[s]earching the bones' (*CP* 669) symbolising dead souls. Just as ancient Hindu sages sprinkled holy water and uttered the Mahā Mṛtsanjīvanī Mantra to reincarnate the dead souls, similarly river water – what Peter Redgrove in his review of *River* called 'the secret elixir of life' – revitalizes the dead land. [39] The sound of the flowing water, her 'fathoming music' (*CP* 669) is the symbolic divine acoustic of the great mantra that brings the land to life. Through the mention of the Hindu word 'samadhi' in 'Strangers' (*CP* 659), Hughes has compared the state of the sea trout with the state of absolute transcendence of a Hindu mystic. With the introduction of a word like 'samadhi', the poem is no longer one of a fish swimming in the river.[40] The experience is a

> deep urge, what the Hindus call, of the Jiva Atman, the finite beings, for the Param Atman, the Infinite Being. The 'sea-trout' here represents the Jiva Atman and the river is the Param Atman, the Mother Goddess. Their swimming in the river is an attempt to merge and unite with the Goddess. The very appearance of the sea-trout, in a state of trance, out of this world, levitated, enjoying supreme bliss, is the state of the yogi, devoid of attachment, in a state of 'manmayah' that is absorbed in the Supreme Being and they have attained the state of 'madbhavam' that is the state of Godhood.[41]

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[38] Krishnendu Das Gupta, Krishnendu. 'Ted Hughes's Vision of Divinity: A Reading of River', in Kalyan Gangarde and Prakash Navgire (eds.) *British Poetry: Critical Essays* (Narwadi: Newman, 2013), pp. 78-90.

[39] Peter Redgrove, 'Windings and Conchings', quoted in Bo Gustavsson, 'Ted Hughes' Quest for a Hierophany: A Reading of River', in Leonard M. Scigaj (ed.), *Critical Essays on Ted Hughes* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992), p. 234. "Sanjīvanī' in Sanskrit means elixir of life, something that can revive. Mṛt means the dead. Mṛtsanjīvanī means reviving the dead and mahā means great. Mantra is the chanting of holy verse in Sanskrit. Not only the text but the acoustic value of the Mantra is important to get the right result. It is always important to chant a Mantra correctly both phonetically and prosodiacally. While reciting the Mantra the user has to sprinkle holy water on the corpse/s to revive them. Indian mythical texts abound in the use of this Mantra to revive the dead.

[40] A state of divine realisation and transcendence that very few Hindu mystics can reach. Mark Wormald was kind enough to inform me that Hughes mentioned in his notebook that the poet's reading of Mouni Sadhu's *Concentration* had prompted his use of a word like 'samadhi' in 'Strangers'.

[41] Das Gupta, 'Ted Hughes's Vision of Divinity', pp. 87-8.

The influence of the 'Bardo Thödol' on the poet is well known.[42] Hughes loved the East and Eastern thought, and also had a deep set of mind very close to that of an Oriental thinker. His fondness for the East was expressed in his interview with Amzed Hossein.

> Yes, I do, yes, yes, I would like to see the West completely injected by the East, [...] to see it completely suffused by the East. I think what the West needs is a lot of the spirit of the East [...] [because] there is an easy acceptance throughout Eastern society that existence is based on spiritual things.[43]

Ted Hughes believed that the common Westerner knows that 'what they are lacking is something, some sort of spiritual foundation.'[44]

And it is this 'spiritual foundation' that gets revealed through his poetry. His anthropological learning over the years had created this fondness and then came to exert a deep influence upon his poetry. His reading of Graves, Campbell and of a range of Hindu books found in his collection or elsewhere could be considered as the silent inspirational source to the images and symbols with Hindu resonance within the poetry. Although he did not say much about his direct influence by Hindu texts except for the *Vacanas* on which he had modelled his Bridegroom and some of the epilogue poems of *Gaudete*, his use of words like 'samadhi' (*CP* 659), 'Ganges' (*CP* 578) and the like are highly suggestive of the obvious influence on him from his various readings on Hinduism. And so, although a Western Protestant raised in Yorkshire, as we have seen, Ted Hughes could often speak like an Indian mystic.

[42] Hughes in fact had his own interpretation of the 'Bardo Thödol', as he told Faas: 'From one point of view, the *Bardo Thödol* is basically a shamanistic flight and return. Tibetan Buddhism was enormously influenced by Tibetan primitive shamanism. And in fact the special weirdness and power of all things. Tibetan in occult and magical circles springs direct from the shamanism, not the Buddhism.'; *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 206.
[43] Hossein, 'An Interview with Ted Hughes.'
[44] Hossein, 'An Interview with Ted Hughes.'

Ted Hughes and the Gender of the Pike

by Mark Wormald

A recent visitor to my room in Cambridge, where I'm privileged to have hanging on my wall a plaster cast of a large pike that an admirer presented to Ted Hughes in the early 1980s, asked me what I was working on. When I told him, he followed up by asking whether I knew Graham Joyce's novel *The Tooth Fairy* (1996). I didn't then. But at a time when the sources of Hughes's early masterpiece 'Pike' have been questioned, I can think of no more striking measure of the lasting power of the poem and the insights it contains than Joyce's opening chapter.[1]

Three small boys are enjoying an afternoon by a green pond overhung by an oak tree. One, Clive, is torturing a newt. Sam and Terry are dangling their toes in the water.

> It was high summer. Pigeons cooed softly in the trees, and Clive's family picnicked nearby. Two older boys fished for perch about thirty yards away. Sam saw the pike briefly. At first he thought he was looking at a submerged log. It hung inches below the surface, utterly still, like something suspended in ice. Green and gold, it was a phantom, a spirit from another world. Sam tried to utter a warning, but the apparition of the pike had him mesmerized. It flashed at the surface of the water as it came up to take away, in a single bite, the two smallest toes of Terry's left foot.[2]

The menace of that pike is unmistakable, immediate, swift. 'Perfect', indeed, 'in all parts' (*CP* 84). But so is its lineage – that is, the lines they come from, in a poem long prized for its observational accuracy, its authenticity, as well as for its own capacity to turn observation into apparition, high summer into mesmerized 'frozen' (*CP* 85) apprehension. Hughes's pike also display 'green tigering the gold'(*CP* 84); all Joyce has done is to release the tiger from those colours, redirect the bite and redistribute the elements of Hughes's verses. Hughes's pike are as 'stunned by their own grandeur' as Sam is; Hughes's pike 'dance on the surface among the flies' (*CP* 84), or 'under the heat-struck lily-pads'; they too are 'logged on last year's black

[1] See Hannah Roche, 'Myths, Legends, and Apparitional Lesbians: Amy Lowell's Haunting Modernism', *Modernist Cultures* 13.4 (2018), pp.568-589, and Terry Gifford, 'Ted Hughes's 'unacknowledged debt to "The Pike" by Amy Lowell', *THSJ* VII.s (2019), pp. 76-78.
[2] Graham Joyce, *The Tooth Fairy* (London: Signet, 1996; Gollancz, 2008), p. 1.

leaves, watching upwards.' Joyce has taken all this and amplified, enlarged: he has taken the observation Hughes made of his miniature pike, 'three inches long' but 'A hundred feet long in their world' and produced a more immediately chilling calculation of the relationship between inches and foot, brought 'submarine delicacy and horror' to the surface of his scene.

For all the admirable fidelity of this tribute, involuntary or deliberate – there is sadly no means of knowing either how conscious it was (Graham Joyce died in 2014), or whether Hughes was aware of it, though *The Tooth Fairy* is not in his library – there are, from the point of view of the purist, a number of problems with its consequences. This may not matter to Joyce: his genre was fantasy, and his opening chapter serves as no more than a brilliant prelude to the tooth fairy of his title. But they are as striking too, perhaps even more striking, because they bring to the fore a hitherto unrecognized curiosity on which Hughes's great poem depended. And recognizing that has had its surprising consequences too, and prompted me to return to terrain which I have explored elsewhere in this Journal's pages.[3]

The rest of Joyce's chapter brings other peripheral figures into play, and then something more than play. 'The two boys who'd been fishing laid down their rods and wandered over to take a look. "What happened? Did he fall in?"[4] The doctor who treats Terry in casualty, applying a dressing and an anti-tetanus jab in the absence of spare toes, is just as stunned by what he's heard: '"A pike?" the doctor repeated in disbelief. "A pike, you say?"'[5] Soon the fathers get involved. Sam's father Nev finds Terry's father Chris strapping a Stanley knife to a broom handle, beside a net on the floor, swearing that '"I'm going to get that pike."'[6] Nev's heart sinks: 'If there was something he knew a thing or two about, it was catching fish. "Not with that thing you won't."' He 'knew it was a hopeless waste of time, that pike number among the most difficult of fish to catch, even with good tackle.' So he lends him some. '"You could fish this for years and not get him"', Nev offers. But 'Chris Morris wasn't listening. He was staring into the dark waters.'

> Dusk came. Nev and Sam left Chris Morris prowling the darkening bank of the pond[…].
>
> "Will he catch the pike?" Sam said, well after they were out of earshot.
>
> "Not a chance in hell," said his father.[7]

[3] Mark Wormald, 'Stealing Trout and Pike, 1962 to 1957', THSJ VI.1 (2017), pp. 42-50.
[4] Joyce, *The Tooth Fairy,* pp. 2.
[5] Ibid., p. 3.
[6] Ibid., p. 4.
[7] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

By the end of this chapter, Joyce's tribute to Hughes has aligned itself with 'Pike' even more closely. Like the poem it has deepened with and into this summer dusk, and become subtler and more probing in its rearrangement of elements. As in the poem, three boys (Clive, Sam and Terry) have become two (the older perch anglers, themselves clearly out of their depth) and then one (Chris). As in the poem, it's the 'pond [the solitary male] fished'. And as darkness falls it's clear that he has both too little, and too much, sense of what he is fishing for. Who is catching, who is watching whom? And what role do different kinds of knowledge of the pike, and pike fishing, play in this poetic or fishy encounter?

To begin to answer these questions, I first want to consider the example of two of Britain's best-known fishing writers, Fred Buller and Brian Clarke, both men who indisputably knew a thing or two about catching fish. Hughes read and met them both in the 1970s and 1980s, long after he had written 'Pike', which we know he had done by August 1958.[8] What Buller wrote and the knowledge he shared, would come to play a crucial informing role in Hughes's own later pike fishing with his son. But for the moment, I want to emphasise not the technical knowledge that Buller and Clarke imparted to their readers but their reasons for beginning to fish in the first place. Both are clear about the sources of pike lore in their own fishing life. Here is Buller, in his own hugely influential book *Pike* (1971), recalling a formative chance encounter he had at about the age of 10, in 1936. A friend of his had already caught a small jack-pike, of a couple of pounds, but then here was:

> a real pike fisherman fishing for live bait. He was a kindly man who patiently responded to our questions. […] Our brains were surfeited with pike lore […] After he recounted his exploits with the big one, we had become pike anglers without having caught a pike.[9]

And here is Clarke, writing in 1997, remembering a rather gorier version of the same wide-eyed meeting with experience half a century before, in 1950, when he was 12 and walking home from school with his friends in Teesdale. Seeing a commotion and realising it was an angler with a big fish, they dropped their bags and ran.

> We found him kneeling athwart a medium-sized pike. The pike had a motorcycle gauntlet clamped in its jaws which, the man said, he had put on while he removed the hooks. The pike had closed its jaws and its teeth had gone clean through the leather, into the hand inside. Eventually, he had jerked his hand free.
>
> All the time that he was talking, the man was holding his hand up, turning it this way and that. All the time that he was talking, we

[8] I am basing this dating on a combination of a British Library notebook of Hughes's (BL Add MS 88918/7/2 and a letter of Hughes to Gerald, with an enclosure by Plath, of 13 August 1958 (*CLSP2* 269).

[9] Fred Buller, *Pike* (London: Macdonald, 1971), p. 21.

> were looking on, wide-eyed. There were several long, fine cuts down the back of his hand. Blood was dripping into the grass.[10]

It is by such early encounters with fishermen, and their own real knowledge of catching pike – knowledge of tackle, techniques and the fish itself that is some distance from what passes for knowledge in that chapter of *Tooth Fairy* – that the frisson, as well as practicalities, of pike lore are communicated, perpetuated, informed and sometimes revised from generation to generation.

Now consider Ted Hughes, born in 1930, four years after Buller and eight years before Clarke. As Hughes made clear, in 'Capturing Animals', the first of the radio broadcasts he made for children from October 1961, then collected in 1967 as *Poetry in the Making*, his fishing began in the Rochdale canal in Mytholmroyd as a five-year-old. A single sentence records it, and one which subtly separates Hughes's brother Gerald's passion for shooting (and Ted's subsidiary role as 'retriever') from his own: 'At the same time I used to be fishing daily in the canal, with the long-handled wire-rimmed curtain sort of net' (*PIM* 16). Over four decades later, Hughes added vivid detail about these experiences in the poems he wrote for *Remains of Elmet* (1979). He caught loach, 'five inches huge', from the crevices where they lurked, 'wild leopards' in the canal wall for whom that net – and the glass jar he kept them in – did mean curtains (*CP* 477), and once encountered an 'ingot' of a much larger trout under 'The Long Tunnel Ceiling' of the Burnley Road bridge over that canal. Hughes was as exact about its size as he was about what it had swallowed to make it so big: it was 'Nearly as long as my arm, solid / Molten pig of many a bronze loach' (*CP* 478). That efficient predation bred a respect which had grown over the years between the poem's origin and its composition: 'There he lay – lazy – a free lord,/ Ignoring me'. That trout remains 'A seed of the wild god now flowering for me / Such a tigerish, dark, breathing lily' (*CP* 479). And the respect continued to grow. A decade later, in 1989, Hughes remembered that trout above all those he'd encountered since: 'the one that disturbs me most faithfully lay there, forty-five years ago, in the Rochdale canal, about four pounds weight'.[11]

But that memory, like the text of these two *Elmet* poems, also reveals the presence of an even greater fish in Hughes's imagination. They both acknowledge another shadow, the shadow of his own poem 'Pike'. Those leopard loaches are two inches longer than that pike 'perfect in all parts'; that 'tigerish' is unignorable to Hughes's readers. The disturbance of that canal trout also remains involuntarily faithful to Hughes's own early masterpiece, and the experiences that inspired it. 'Forty-five years ago' was of course a round number, but if we take it seriously it

[10] Brian Clarke, 'Chilling Tales from the Riverbank', *The Times* 20 December 1997, p. 36.
[11] Ted Hughes, 'Foreword', in David Profumo, *In Praise of Trout* (London: Viking, 1989), p. x.

takes us, and him, from 1989 back not to the Mytholmroyd of his first eight years but to Mexborough. This must be a mistake: a four pound trout would only be as long as an infant's arm, and would reach only to a teenager's elbow. But Hughes's slip does put that trout much more squarely in comparison with the pike he was – as a fourteen or fifteen-year-old in the last years of the war – beginning to fish for, and think of, at Crookhill Pond.

Steve Ely has done some remarkable research into the circumstances of Hughes's teenage fishing at Crookhill Park, and the obsession with pike that he developed there. He has interviewed surviving friends of John Wholey, the son of Crookhill's gamekeeper, and presented their valuable but revealingly limited perspectives on Hughes's time there. These details matter, of course, because although Hughes deflected Terry Gifford in a 1996 attempt to lead pilgrims on a Hughes tour by saying that the site of 'Pike' was 'still classified secret', he immediately conceded that 'there were big pike in that tiny pond at Crookhill'(*LTH* 694). Ely has assembled details of the way Hughes and John Wholey shot birds for their own maggot pile, rather than relying on some of the Mexborough maggot establishments that supplied anglers fishing for the pot during wartime, and the unusual, in fact grotesque, satisfactions of that self-sufficiency. The old boys he interviewed recalled the 'huge' maggots that grew on the carcasses.[12] He has recovered evidence of the casual amorality of the teenagers, throwing a hedgehog into the pond and watching it flounder until conscience kicked in. And he records their sense of the dedication and the persistence of Hughes's fishing, concluding that, from 1944,'it is likely that Hughes would have fished the Crookhill pond every week – in some periods every day – for perch and roach, but mainly for pike.'[13] But those friends of Wholey also admitted that, while they did watch Hughes fishing, they never saw him catch a pike.

What Ely's research does not record is the conditions and wider context of this extraordinary self-reliant and concentrated self-sufficiency, or its literary consequences. This is where the testimonies of Buller and Clarke, who became teenagers either side of the war, provide such striking contrast. They each acknowledged the powerful influence of a real pike fisherman, a grown man. Hughes had no equivalent. His elder brother Gerald, for whose shooting young Ted had acted as 'retriever' in Calderdale, was eighteen as war broke out, and was not available as fishing mentor or guide, even if he had the expertise to pass on. We also

[12] Steve Ely, *Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire: Made in Mexborough* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp. 40-89; p. 86.
[13] Ibid., p. 88.

know that John Wholey's father was a gardener not a fisherman; his role with reference to the Crookhill pond would have been to keep other fishermen off it. And the other obvious candidate, Hughes's father William, was unavailable even if he was interested, running the shop on Main Street. Had he been doing so at any other period, of course, he could have helped supply that lack of time with reading matter: the shelves of his newsagency would have contained plenty of other sources of information for a boy interested in fishing. We know that Ted, inspired by Gerald's work as a gamekeeper in 1938-9 at Alphington in Devon, which had itself been in response to an advertisement in *The Gamekeeper* magazine, was led to borrow *Tarka the Otter* from the school library in 1941. He kept it out for two years, but that suggests that Williamson's novel had less competition from his father's stock than it might have done (*LTH* 724). In *Ted and I* Gerald himself wrote, clearly as elder brother casting a generous eye back on those years, that '[i]t was wonderful having a paper shop with all the comics and boys' and girls' magazines on hand.'[14] Hughes himself credited another publication with more imaginative influence. I've written elsewhere of how literally the structure of the latest edition of the popular part-publication *The Children's Encyclopedia* [sic] may have explained why, as explained to Anne-Lorraine Bujon in 1992, 'the natural world, and the worlds of mythology and folklore all hung together' (*LTH* 624), and, as I will explain later, the *Encyclopedia* had its own fishy influence on 'Pike'.[15] But one thing the Main Street newsagent's did not contain, as it would have done either before the war or afterwards, was a regular supply of fishing stories or tips.

There is of course an impressive tradition of such writing, and Hughes's own library came to be rich in it; he was an attentive and imaginative reader of specialist fishing writing. Buller's own book *Pike* (1971) begins by claiming continuity with William Senior, editor of *The Field* at the turn of the twentieth century. And such traditions help establish and consolidate cultures as well as communicating refinements of approach. But when Hughes wrote 'Pike', and then began writing about the poem, he was entirely unaware of the practical wisdom and acquired learning that Buller was soon to bring within reach of future generations of anglers. In the absence of access to such a tradition it's striking how self-sufficient Hughes becomes, and remains. The poem is of immediate, unmediated personal observation, released into a timeless present tense that confirms a fixity of purpose the pike and poet share – if this is a 'life subdued to its instrument', supplemented first by shared experience, then by solitary memory, it is 'Not to be changed at this

[14] Gerald Hughes, *Ted and I: A Brother's Memoir* (London: The Robson Press, 2012), p. 69.
[15] Mark Wormald, 'Irishwards: Ted Hughes, Freedom and Flow', THSJ VI.2, pp. 58-77; p. 59.

date': a compelling and consuming joint enterprise between boys, individual and fish, between the 'eye' that moves and the 'I' that cast.

Hughes's presentation of 'Pike' in 'Capturing Animals' inherits this pattern, this shift from 'we' to 'I'. But his commentary here also depends on, and exploits, another movement. Hughes's purpose here is to emphasize how much of the poetic process depends on memory, imagination and perception, how little on hard fact.

> Sometimes, on hot days, we would see something like a railway sleeper lying near the surface, and there certainly were huge pike in that pond. I suppose they are even bigger by now. Recently I felt like doing some pike fishing, but in circumstances where there was no chance of it, and over the days, as I remembered the extreme pleasures of that sport, bits of the following poem began to arrive. [...] By looking at the place in my memory very hard and very carefully and by using the words that grew naturally out of the pictures and feelings, I captured not just a pike, I captured the whole pond, including the monsters I never even hooked. (*PIM* 21)

Take that first sentence. 'Sometimes [...] something like a railway sleeper lying' requires the confirmation of 'certainly', but Hughes is as clear as he can be – a legacy, as David Troupes demonstrates in his essay elsewhere in this issue, of reading and teaching Thoreau's *Walden* in Massachusetts in 1958 in the months before he wrote 'Pike' – that he is ultimately more interested in that rhetorical interplay, and in how to '[use] the words that grew naturally out of' the place as it is seen and felt in memory, than he is in actual fish. The only object Hughes mentions in that memory is that 'something', codified by the imaginative image of that 'sleeper lying near the surface'; re-visit that phrase and you see that the pike can only be dreamed up. Strikingly, on the subject of those pike, he is happy to 'suppose' that those 'huge pike' 'are even bigger by now.' Again, that's hardly natural history, but it is what what converts them, by the end of his paragraph, to 'the monsters I never even hooked.' This supposition, or sleight of hand, Hughes confided to Maura Doolan, as he embarked on his broadcasts, was the art he used to hook his audience: 'I shift my ground and leave a great deal unexplained', he wrote of the whole enterprise, but any inconsistencies in his argument that resulted from this deficiency was immaterial to his purpose: 'I believe children respond much more accurately to suggestion in these matters, than to explanation.'[16] This is also the process by which Graham Joyce follows the poet in capturing Hughes's pond again. As years passed, Hughes himself consolidated the results of this suggestiveness, wrote it back into the histories of the poem's origin, and of his ambitions for it and the fish at its centre, that he shared with admirers. Three accounts from 1992

[16] Ted Hughes, undated letter to Moira Doolan; Doolan acknowledged it on 18 January 1961. BBC Written Archive, Caversham.

illustrate the curious edifice of confidence and inconsistency he had raised from these foundations. Writing to Carol Lee that January, he was at pains to emphasise the lofty, indeed the metaphysical, credentials of the fish:

> I deleted all the direct references to associations of that kind, and the present poem is what was left. But the Pike started life as Cherubim. That is why the great pike at the end rises not through water but through the darkness beneath "earthly darkness" [sic] – out of dream space, psychological space.[17]

Two months later, remembering the poems he wrote about pike and hawk in the 1950s, he told Clive Wilmer:

> I was trying to raise the creatures that I'd encountered in my boyhood in South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. I was trying to raise them into some mythic frieze. I was thinking of them as a sort of mural. The pike [...] were to be angels hanging in the aura of the Creator. [...] My model, I remember, was Blake's "Tyger".'[18]

The essay 'Poetry and Violence', also written that year, rehearses and exalts this affiliation still further, making the subjects of 'Pike' and 'Hawk Roosting'

> angels – hanging in the radiant glory around the creator's throne, composed of terrific, holy power,[...] But either quite still, or moving only very slowly – at peace, and actually composed of the glowing substance of the law. Like Sons of God. Pike (*Luce* = fish of 'light'). If the [...] Pike kill, they kill within the law and their killing is a sacrament in this sense. It is an act not of violence but of law.
>
> In writing these verses, then, I was trying to express what had been with me from the beginning.' (*WP* 261-2)

How could Hughes write otherwise? The perfection of 'Pike', its own association with his name as a poet, had long since been so complete as to invite fond parody from his closest friends. On New Year's Day 1985, a day they knew they'd find it closed and so available for their purposes, two of them, Seamus Heaney and Barrie Cooke, went to a workshop in Blackrock, a Dublin suburb, and posed under the sign for: 'TED HUGHES MOTOR CYCLES – Sales & Service – Repairs – Crash Work' with a banner Cooke had stuck against the wall. It read:

> BIKE, THREE INCHES LONG,
> PERFECT BIKE IN ALL

[17] Ted Hughes to Carol Lee, 6 January 1992. BL Add MS 88918/7/1.
[18] Clive Wilmer, 'Ted Hughes', in *Poets Talking: the 'Poet of the Month' interviews from BBC Radio 3* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), p. 147.

The banner's crumpled; its right edge is apparently torn, but the spacing of the words in the bottom line is not accidental. Dennis O'Driscoll took the pictures. Barrie Cooke showed me them in 2013.

Yet that lovely episode has another lesson, too, which by 1985 Cooke was uniquely placed to make, but which Hughes himself could never quite bring himself to spell out. The inevitability of 'Pike' is itself frail. Its perfection is in a curious complex relation to its own parts, and at least one of those was, as in Cooke's poster, missing. For all the tributes, the compliments, the confirmations that Hughes and others have since paid it, the poem is in fact a product of an historical accident, the very local enabling ignorance on which all the subsequent edifices of self-sufficiency I've just documented were founded. As well as exposing that ignorance, in the rest of this essay I want to follow what happened when Hughes discovered its consequences.

*

The most surprising and immediately challenging of all the reactions to that plaster cast of Ted Hughes's pike in my room has come from a writer who Hughes much admired, Marina Warner. She asked me, first, whether the pike was male or female, and then, when I confessed I didn't know (it had always been, at least in public, simply that, *it*) she floored me again: 'Do you know Mary Douglas on "The Gender of the Trout"'?

Mary Douglas's father had been a devoted trout fisherman, and after his death she researched the culture of his passion, reading widely in his library of fishing books, and discovering in that library a curious instance of what she calls 'literary gender': 'the informal gender that sometimes emerges in ordinary conversation or writing, like cars being feminine in the 1920s and ships still being feminine to this day'.[19] Her observation about 'the gender of a trout in an elegant literary genre' had a very specific focus: it 'only applies to fishing writing for the English southern waters, especially the chalk streams; and it applies to writing in the period from the 1880s up to and soon after World War II.' Such writing, Douglas observes, expressed the values and shared assumptions of a social group that took some pride in the refined distinctiveness of their sport, its distance from some sporting pursuits, its affiliation with others:

> In this trout writing the fisher is proud to be a sportsman, he takes it for granted that the sport of catching trout with rod and line is not at all like hunting, and from the way he writes about it we

[19] Mary Douglas, "The Gender of the Trout", *RES* 44 (2003), pp. 171-80; p. 171.

> perceive that it is more like cricket, or rather, a game for two players, so more like chess. The other player is the fish, and masculine.

One effect of reading this essay was to make me revisit Hughes's own trout writing. I've already discussed one instance of the gendering of trout, and it couldn't be much more obvious: 'there *he* lay, lazy, a free lord' (*CP* 478). Another poem, 'A Trout?', first published in 1995, but which we know he had written by Christmas 1980, when as part of a gift to his son he added it in manuscript to a copy of his first fine-press edition of *Animal Poems* (1967), is as its title suggests more uncertain in this regard – it's about the difficulty of spotting a fish below the surface from a vantage point above it amid the play of light and currents.[20] The watcher needs to 'Guess ghosts down, gloved with pressure' (*CP* 857). But there's no doubt about the gender of the fish, however long your look, however much seeing means or does not mean believing: 'Might this be *him*? .... 'Is *he* still here?', and there's no doubt about the way the fisherman depends on the cooperation of Douglas's 'other player':

> Maybe
> You can believe *him* into being.
> Maybe *he*'ll pretend. [Italics mine.]

Hughes first fished these English chalk streams in 1985, with Dermot Wilson, the doyen of dry fly purists. As a direct result, Hughes had even featured in the 1987 edition of Dermot Wilson's *Fishing the Dry Fly*, a book which itself confidently makes the trout masculine (successive chapters, on the natural history of the fish, are entitled 'His Lordship', 'His Element' and 'His Life') and in which Wilson included his photograph of the poet Laureate using the small folding net Wilson recommended.[21] By 1989, when he wrote his foreword to David Profumo's book *In Praise of Trout*, and recalled his own 'free lord' back in the Rochdale canal, which had continued to 'disturb me most faithfully', Hughes was ready to flirt with another element in the fly fishing fraternity's relationship with their noble quarry. He went on to observe that 'One of the most fascinating things about trout is the way they fascinate men', then asked: '[d]o they fascinate women – in the same way?' With the exception of Dame Juliana Berners, he doubts it, wondering '[w]hy have so few women confessed to this weakness in writing?' Acknowledging that plenty are fine anglers, he questions: 'do they ever feel that weird, ghostly kiss at the glimpse, even at the thought, of a trout, as so many men do?' And having opened this sensual and spiritual terrain, he goes on to provide a simile that underlines this point even as it leaves it prefaced with a gentle caveat: 'It seems to be a fact that the trout belongs

[20] Ted Hughes Special Collection, Pembroke College, Cambridge.
[21] Dermot Wilson, *Fishing the Dry Fly: Fully Revised Edition* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), p. 48.

to some special privileged order of creation. They are like the beautiful girl in the school.' That beauty is charmed, charged. While other girls will marry,

> she, as she blossoms, is the one that the teachers – the males without fail – recognize with a primeval touch of fear. Another! What is that small difference – which makes such an immense difference?'[22]

Hughes makes clear that long experience points his playfulness here: he has, he confesses, 'survived acute infatuations with other species.' And it's of course pike that I have in mind in this essay, though it's notable that in the foreword, knowing his book's likely readership of game fishers, he mentions only salmon and sea-trout, neither of which infatuations he had really emerged from, or ever would.

The closest coincidence of pike and trout – literary and dream and ghost and real – came in May 1962, when his first season of fishing on the River Taw (first with a worm, then with an artificial Devon minnow) plunged him physically and imaginatively into all the turbulent energies of its waters and the farmland it charged through, only eight miles north of its source on Dartmoor. As recounted in 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning', this water takes all his attention, all his concentration. It seizes him first in the shallows rushing round his ankles as he wades, '[Roping] my knees, lobbing fake boomerangs, / A drowned woman loving each ankle' (*CP* 139) – a conceit that, I have argued, must date this poem to the days before the visit of David and Assia Wevill that month, and its consequences for Hughes's marriage.[23] Then, as both he and the water deepen, he is made to feel 'all the frights' as the river trails past him off the moor, out of the night; they expose him to

> its eyes
> With what they have seen and still see, a dark insistence
> Tearing the spirits from my mind's edge and from under. (*CP* 140)

It takes 'one of the river's real members' to 'yank me clear' of this dark matter.

At this point, in Hughes's first season of catching trout, there's none of the companionable empathy, or attraction, between fisherman and trout that would subsequently grow in him. Instead, the fish he catches, and the emotion he sees as he does so, is notably inhuman, ungendered:

> A trout, a foot long,
> Lifting *its* head in a shawl of water,
> Fins banked stiff like a trireme
> *It* forces the final curve wide, getting
> A long look at me. So much for the horror

[22] Hughes, 'Foreword', p. xi.
[23] Wormald, 'Stealing Trout and Pike, 1962 to 1957'.

It has changed places. (*CP* 140) [Italics mine]

Of course, the refuge in neutrality is only grammatical. This is not infatuation; this is a conflict as ancient as it is enduring, which still unsettles and appals, at least for a moment, before this fish's eye's view of its captor, its human predator, yields in the poem's final lines to his assimilation into a sporting culture and tradition. He becomes 'a man in a painting' in a country pub.

And so we come to Hughes's pike, which was of course the point of Marina Warner's challenge. Here the story is more complicated, and more profoundly disturbing. In what follows I want to note two aspects of this complication. There is the question of the fish's literary gender; what follows will reveal a history of instability and contradiction in attributing that gender. And there is also the question of the factors responsible for those fluctuations, over the years, which involves tracking the story of Hughes's initiation into the very different culture that, as we have already seen, surrounds pike fishing and has come to separate it from trout fishing, in and before it is expressed in writing. The blood-thirstiness; the threat, which both Clarke and Buller observed addressed and controlled in the adult males they watched as boys.

'Pike' and 'Stealing Trout' have the same strategy with regard to the fish's gender, which is to avoid it. Consider: 'Pike, three inches long, perfect / Pike in all parts', 'three inches long' would indicate a fish too young to be gendered. Consider 'killers from the egg', and that reference to 'a life subdued to *its* instrument' [my italics]. Whether 'its' refers to life or pike, each is neuter. Consider those '[t]hree we kept' in that tank, which finally became one, '[w]ith a sag belly and the grin *it* was born with' [my italics]. Consider those later, larger specimens, 'six pounds each, over two feet long' (size matters, in pike as in trout) joined far more brutally than that later ghost kiss, '[o]ne jammed past *its* gills down the other's gullet' [my italics]. And look again at those 'Pike too immense to stir' in the 'pond I fished', pike which compelled that involuntary casting 'past nightfall', that rapt frozen waiting 'for what move, for what eye might move'. The strange menace of these fish is a function in part of their age, their immobility, their freedom from the distractions or individuations or charms that come with any anthropomorphizing attribution of character, gender. They're killing machines, and then – as we saw with the later Taw trout – they are finally what may or may not emerge from some sub-conscious darkness. Graham Joyce recognizes this too and appropriates this gender-resistant spirit into his own high summer scene at the beginning of *Tooth Fairy*. To remind: '*It* hung inches below the surface, utterly still, like something suspended in ice. Green and gold, *it* was a phantom, a spirit from another world' [my italics].[24]

[24] Joyce, *The Tooth Fairy*, p. 1.

But now consider Hughes's other pike writing. The earliest example of it remains unpublished in full. Keith Sagar quoted from this schoolboy poem, 'On catching a 40 lb pike', in *Ted Hughes and Nature: Terror and Exultation*,[25] and also asked Hughes about it in 1998, eliciting the confession that 'The Pike we caught was big – very big – but not 40lb. Nicholas's 1st Pike, in Ireland, was twice as big. ' (*LTH* 723). It's illuminating to put this poem, now amongst Sagar's papers at Emory, and Hughes's account of it, written more than four decades later, in the context of the material I've already presented. Readers of Christopher Reid's edition of the *Letters* know, from the caption of the photograph it contains of that Irish pike and its grinning fifteen-year-old captor, how much that later real pike weighed: twenty-four and a half pounds. This allows us to calculate the enlarging power of the fantasy at work in the title of his early poem ('very big' is twelve pounds, forty pounds something else again). Most striking, however, is the gender of this enormous pike. In a poem 42 lines or 21 heroic couplets long, there are no fewer than 29 references to its gender, and it is emphatically masculine, as these extracts reveal.

> He lay beneath the hover there,
> A sinister fish in a sinister lair.
> His sullen eyes were smouldering, dull,
> With pent up anger fierce and full,
> His long white teeth were gleaming bared…
>
> For fourteen hours I fought that fight
> And when 'twas dark, by firelight,
> And so until the break of day….
>
> 4 foot of death, there he layed
> And forty pounds in death he weighed.[26]

These lines also reveal how different this kind of attributed masculinity is from the wily and respected sporting opponent that Mary Douglas found, and Dermot Wilson maintained, in English trout writing 'up to and soon after World War II.' Douglas's scrupulous dating of that culture of sporting trout writing itself suggests one reason for the difference. Like 'Stealing Trout', but even more viscerally, this is a war too, a solemn night-fight to the death with a sinister fish, defined not by his age or immensity but by his sullenness, by a rage that the three-inch copper spoon which the teenage poet flutters past those petulant eyes releases into pond-thrashing, weed-threshing battle. It consumes them both, physically; but in the

[25] Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: Terror and Exultation* (Peterborough: Fastprint, 2009), pp. 248-9.
[26] Keith Sagar papers, Emory MSS 1326.

process it becomes a struggle at once much visceral and more recent than Wesley's good fight. It may owe something to Hopkins's night-long wrestling with a mysterious metaphysical adversary in 'Carrion Comfort', something to Yeats. But it's also the fight against a much more vital, present danger, armed to those rows of backward-pointing teeth. Is teenage Ted somehow doing his bit for the war effort, emulating Gerald, at war in Africa? Is that 'sinister fish in a sinister lair' more holed-up gangster than Hitler in his bunker? Or perhaps either of these suggestions is over-dignifying it. Because finally the struggle resolves itself without finesse: at the end of those fourteen hours, as the sun rises, a glimpse of the huge fish down among the tree roots prompts one last effort, and the might of the boy-fisherman's strength outdoes the pike's dimensions. The speaker brags about it for weeks. That's the clinching note of fantasy: as we saw earlier, Steve Ely's interviews with Hughes and Wholey's surviving fishing companions elicited not a single memory of a pike actually caught. Note, too, the distance by which this epic firelit vigil exceeds the much gentler, perhaps rueful admission Hughes gives Sagar in July 1998: 'No, the night fishing did not involve trespassing. We just liked fishing on into the dark.' (*LTH* 721) Note that 'we': in memory's text, unlike in the teenage poem, John Wholey was a real presence: in the poem we have to infer him, as a keeper of that flame. But it clinches the argument that this was Crookhill.

'On catching a 40 lb pike' is, of course, a work of Hughes's youth. But it is also clearly the product of the same teenage years, and the same pond, as the more famous 'Pike', and one final detail both proves this and indicates the sheer force of concentrated attention which Hughes paid to those teenage years around the end of the war, and that place, which connects them. As the huge fish takes that copper lure and surges to and fro across the pond, on the first of its leaping runs, the poet-angler notices how the pads of the lilies it has broken float free. Like 'Pike', and Hughes's later broadcast memories of the 'hot days' that inspired it, this is a summer poem. And that in turn exposes the crucial, enabling error, the precisely dated zoological ignorance at the heart of that masterpiece.

I am aware that in what I am about to propose there is a slight risk that I will be bringing chaos, or at least heresy, into Hughesian studies. But if Ted Hughes, son of a Gallipoli veteran turned newsagent, had been two years younger, he could have been among those who started reading the series of comic strip guides to fishing that began to appear in 1947 in the *Daily Mirror* under the title 'Mr Crabtree goes fishing'. These gentle instructional pieces, in which genial, tie-wearing Mr Crabtree takes his son Peter fishing, targeting different species on different waters around the year, became the piscatorial equivalent of *The Pickwick Papers*. Their author and illustrator, Bernard Venables, became a household name, and when it

was published in 1949 in enlarged form with accompanying prose commentary as a book, *Mr Crabtree Goes Fishing* was hugely popular, selling more than two million copies. My own copy, bought me by my eldest brother, born in 1954, and regarded by him, still, with a certain reverence, is a 1953 reprint.

Mr Crabtree contains many facts about the pike, and pike fishing, that, among fishing fathers and sons, thus swiftly achieved wider currency. I will refer here to only two. First, the pike is a winter fish:

> Of all the fishes in winter, there is none perhaps, that so comes into its own as the pike. The limp and flaccid fish of summer becomes a fierce and powerful fighter that inspires thousands of fishermen in its pursuit, whatever the weather.[27]

The second fact is implied in Venables's rhetorical confirmation of his point, which is worth quoting for its convictions with regard to killing pike:

> It always grieves me to see anglers fishing for pike during the summer. A pike is only a poor thing then, still exhausted from spawning. If it is hooked then it cannot fight as it should. Pike should be left alone until October [...] Who could possibly want to keep a poor flabby creature that has no fight in it and can only look ugly in a glass case? [...] What is the object of killing a pike if it is not to go into a glass case. [sic] And no prize is good enough for a glass case under twenty pounds.[28]

And this second fact, which relates to that reference to spawning, involves weight, and sex:

> Weight is also increased by another factor. All these big pike are females, and in the last two or three months of the season they are ripening for the business of spawning. When you consider that the eggs of a ripe female pike of 32 lb will weigh 5 lb, you will realise how big a difference this can make.[29]

'All these big pike are females'. We may, ourselves, begin to realize how big a difference this recognition, had Hughes been aware of it, either as a teenager or in the years immediately after 1949, would have made, not just to the text of 'On Catching a 40lb Pike', but to the next, crucial chapter in Hughes's imaginative and piscatorial relationship with pike.

But he almost certainly wasn't aware. In a letter to Gerald he wrote in mid-February 1957 from 55 Eltisley Avenue in Cambridge, Hughes revealed that 'I haven't been fishing for 7 years' (*LTH* 96). National Service at Patrington, university

[27] Bernard Venables, *Mr Crabtree Goes Fishing* (London: Daily Mirror, 1949; fifth impression, 1958), p. 3.
[28] Ibid., p. 32.
[29] Ibid., p. 22.

at Cambridge and then life between Cambridge and London, and, latterly of course, marriage to Sylvia Plath, explains why. But despite or because of this distance from the place and conditions where he learned to think, Hughes writes that 'I dream every night that I am fishing. Mostly it is Crookhill.[…] There's always a big fish – and whenever I catch that, the day after I sell a poem.' Forty-one years later, in February 1998, Hughes confirmed this conjunction of poetry and dreaming about fish, and pike in particular, in a letter to Nicholas:

> When I began to write, I began to dream about Crookhill pond. In my dreams, that pond was always different. When I was in good contact with myself, the pond would be full of big pike. …Other occasions it would be empty of any except very tiny pike. That meant – a general state of being in very poor contact with myself. (*LTH* 709-10)

But for understandable reasons he omitted, in this letter to Nicholas, any reference to the most peculiar, as well as the most fantastic, of these dream pike. That had been the prompt for his 1957 letter to Gerald, and in fact the first occasion (however many there had been since) on which dreaming about pike was immediately followed by a sale of a poem. The letter to Gerald was itself only the second of three known instances where he shared this story.

> One night I dreamed I caught the grandfather pike at Crookhill – at the corner near the outflow[…] You and Johnny [Wholey] were pulling at its fins, and I was heaving down the slope – we had twenty feet of it out – and still most of it was in the pond. The next day I sold my first poem and got married. Sylvia is my luck completely. (*LTH* 96)

When he risked telling this story for the third and last time (and the only time outside the family) to the fishing journalist Thomas Pero in 1994, Pero's reaction was immediate and suggestive of one of the reasons why Hughes may not have told his son: 'And you still got married?'[30]

Readers of Sylvia Plath's letters and short stories will be aware of the first telling of the story of that eve of wedding dream, on the night of 15-16th June 1956, and its consequences. He told her, and eventually came to regret it. On 21st October she wrote to her husband in London about a 'very humorous terrible little story' she had written about a 'dreamless woman', whose 'husband is a complete escapist who accepts his vivid dreams as reality […] I shamelessly plagiarized some of your magnificent dreams – notably the fox and pike […] Are you angry?' (*CLSP1* p.1292) Then she went public, with the appearance, in *Granta* magazine in January 1957, of that story, 'The Wishing Box'; five pages separate her story from the Canadian

[30] Thomas Pero, 'So Quickly It's Over', *Wild Steelhead & Salmon* v.2 (Winter 1999), pp. 50-57; p.50.

undergraduate David Wevill's first published poem. And January 1957 was the month in which Assia Lipsley, nee Gutmann, was spending weekends in Cambridge with Wevill, at the start of the affair that would in time lead to her divorce and their marriage.

Hughes could not of course have known this at the time, any more than he could have known, then, of the third, most serious of the consequences – itself more than five years in the future – of what Plath had done with and to that dream. We can speculate, of course, about how he felt, himself, then and in years to come, about her 'terrible' story, which ends with Agnes's suicide by overdose. Beside this, Plath's appropriation of his dream looks innocent enough. Earlier in the tale, husband Harold tells Agnes, the morning after his dream, of a pond where he and his cousin used to fish:

> it was chock full of pike. Well, last night I was fishing there, and I caught the most enormous pike you could imagine – it must have been the great-great-grandfather of all the rest; I pulled and pulled and pulled, and still he kept coming out of that pond.[31]

But now compare this with the letter to Gerald that Hughes wrote within a month of the publication of 'The Wishing Box'. The letter now reads like a quiet retreat from Plath's shameless plagiarism, exaggeration and second-hand implausibility on pike natural history: the letter has 'the grandfather pike', not Plath's 'great-great-grandfather of all the rest'; the letter has, after all his and Johnny and Gerald's pulling, 'still most of *it* was in the pond', not 'still *he* kept coming' [my italics]. Could that be why, following the account of the dream and, the next day, the sale of his first poem – as a result of Sylvia sending a batch to *Poetry Chicago* – and their marriage, Hughes comments: 'Sylvia is my luck completely' (*LTH* 96)? This is somewhere between saying she brings me luck, and the darker suggestion that his luck has enveloped him completely. She was, at the least, a fantasy fish too large to land.

Whatever Canadian fishing journalist Thomas Pero intuited of this (and in the version Hughes told him in 1994, the pike was hooked 'at tremendous depth', genderless and, importantly, caught: 'its head filled the lake. I brought it out and its girth filled the entire lake, that same lake. And I was backing up, dragging the thing out. And this great pike was….') it is unlikely that he would have noticed anything untoward, or unusual, about the neuter pronouns in this version.[32] The 'grandfather' pike, which Steve Ely thinks is an innocent Yorkshire phrase, and it

[31] Sylvia Plath, 'The Wishing Box', in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), pp. 48-55; p. 51.
[32] Pero, 'So Quickly It's Over', p. 50.

may well have been, has now been withdrawn.[33] The fish is strictly an *it*. Based on the Pacific West Coast, Pero was also inconveniently placed to spot what no literary critic has noticed about the date of this dream and the next day, though both of Hughes's biographers record that Hughes and Plath married on Bloomsday, Jonathan Bate noting that Hughes himself recorded this literary coincidence.[34] In Britain, but not in Ireland, which does not grant them such protection from anglers, 16th June is also the start of the coarse fishing season, once pike and other fish have finished spawning, in peace or otherwise. For a fisherman and a poet, 16th June was a curiously charged choice of date for a wedding. And if Pero had read *Mr Crabtree Goes Fishing*, he'd have also seen that the night of the 15th was an even more peculiar night to dream about pike. Anticipating the first of their summer expeditions, father tells son: 'The glorious 16th June tomorrow, Peter. Let's be up at sunrise to fish for tench!'[35]

Olwyn Hughes told me in 2013 that 'Ted was haunted by pike for twenty years.'[36] And if so (and if Hughes's later recollection of when he started fishing for pike – 'at about 10 or 11', he told Pero – is also reliable) then 'Pike', which a notebook entry in the British Library suggests was composed in 1958 in Northampton, Massachusetts, and which a letter from Plath confirms was written by 13 August, comes near the end of that haunting.[37] It may refer, at its own end, to the 'recurrent dream' of pike as 'symbols of really deep, vital life', which, when the pike of his own dreams were large, he told Pero he associated with 'feeling good'.[38] This recurrent dream may be 'the dream / Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed, / That rose slowly towards me, watching.' Had the freeing of that dream been simply the work of dark water, the release of good energies, of contact with elements in his deep imaginative self, that vital life he prized?

Or might that freeing of the dream, and the moving watching eye that rose slowly towards him, in the poem also refer to the work of another kind of darkness Hughes had experienced as a result of Plath's very public plagiarising: the release into a world, a community of readers and their scrutiny of versions of himself, that he had already discovered he couldn't control? If so, 'Pike' might also, or instead, be read as a retrospective autobiographical poem which attempts to fix his own growth into individuality in a world of boys – of people – figured as pike, a world of struggle and continuing menace; a plea for his own experience '[n]ot to be changed

[33] Ely, *Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire*, p. 88.
[34] Elaine Feinstein, *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet* (London: Phoenix, 2002), p. 68; Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2015), p. 116.
[35] Venables, *Mr Crabtree Goes Fishing*, p. 54.
[36] Olwyn Hughes, personal correspondence.
[37] BL Add MS 88918/7/2; *CLSP2*, 269; Pero, 'So Quickly It's Over', p. 50.
[38] Pero, 'So Quickly It's Over', p. 50.

at this date', a defiant celebration of imaginative self-sufficiency. And that celebration became more defiant even as he came to experience the last of the consequences of having shared that dream with his new bride in June 1956, as Harold did with Agnes in 'The Wishing Box', and for that matter even after he acknowledged to Keith Sagar that, along with the other dream Plath plagiarized for his story, the dream of the burnt fox, 'These are dreams I should never have told, I expect.' (*PC* 75)

What prompted that admission? The end of the haunting, perhaps; the end of reliance on a self-sufficiency compromised by an ignorance born of his age and circumstances. Or perhaps it was a decision to free the darkness of 'The Wishing Box' to the world himself. So far as the pike was concerned, he would very soon move into a new and altogether more informed phase of his relationship with them.

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On 17th October 1977 Faber & Faber published Hughes's edition of Plath's collection of short stories, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. It listed the date of 'The Wishing Box's first publication in *Granta*, twenty years before.

A week later, on 25th October, Hughes and Nicholas, then fifteen, arrived in County Clare to fish for pike with Hughes's old friend Barrie Cooke. That trip had been in the making for years. As early as 1971, Cooke had sent Nicholas a home-made wooden pike plug, pointing out the teeth marks a pike he'd caught on it had sunk into the wood. He'd shared his own growing obsession with catching a pike of 20lb, big enough for a glass case; the growth of his ambitions, to a thirty pounder, once he'd built himself a special boat for the purpose in 1972; the explosion of water when a huge pike he'd hooked in the River Barrow in April 1974, at the end of a three-month-long 'siege', exploded in the water below Slyguff Weir, wrapped his line around a tree trunk and came free. 'A tragedy. A magnificent great sow of a fish with jaws like an empty coal grate. Am slowly gathering material for a book about the hunting of a big pike. Maybe…' [39] The ellipses were, like all these letters, designed to lay patient siege to, and hook, poet father as well as fisherman son, and it worked. In 1982 'The Great Irish Pike' would be the result.

But Cooke shared more than enthusiasm. As a struggling artist in the late 1950s he'd supplemented his income by fishing journalism, and had since kept abreast of developments in knowledge about all aspects of fishing. Now he pointed the Hugheses towards the latest generation of pike writing, which provided

[39] Barrie Cooke's letters to Hughes are in the Ted Hughes papers at Emory University, Emory MSS 644 Box 2 Folder 15.

confirming detail of what *Mr Crabtree* had said about timing and tactics and tackle, but also went much further. The two most notable books coincided with Cooke's efforts. One was Barrie Rickards's book *Fishing for Big Pike* (1971); Hughes, in one fishing diary of a 1981 trip to Lough Gur in County Limerick, the inspiration for 'The Great Irish Pike', refers to 'the Almighty Barrie Rickards', and Cooke in due course fished with Rickards, reflecting on the first name they had in common, which their fathers had been inspired to give them by an admiration for the creator of *Peter Pan*.[40] Both were, they agreed, boys who never grew up. The second, Fred Buller's *Pike* (1971), has been described as "The best book about a single species of fish that has ever been written."[41] It is full of pike lore, including that story of his own initiation I've already quoted, pike fishing history, a list of the biggest pike ever recorded – Ted's forty-pounder would have featured at 25th of 67, if real – and evidence that Hughes's own remembered observations of the pike's natural and unnatural history were spot on: Buller includes aquarium photographs of the cannibalizing habits of three inch long pike, and of two Loch Tay fish, six pounders, one rammed down the gullet of the other. Brian Clarke, indeed, told me that he had always assumed Ted's poem referred to Buller's photographs.[42] Buller was, then, essential reading, and Nicholas absorbed it, into his own well-informed dreams of ever larger pike. As Hughes told Peter Keen, with whom he had begun work on *River*, his son prepared for this Irish half-term piking trip 'like a military campaign. Never did I see such exclusive concentration. And he dreamed about catching pike all night. Read Fred Buller's book all day.' [43] His enthusiasm was infectious: Hughes subsequently bought his own copy of the 1979 paperback edition, and it is in his library at Emory University.

There was plenty in Buller to keep Nicholas occupied. He had long been, as Hughes had told Sagar in 1975, 'an extremely keen underwater creaturist' (*PC* 48), and would go on to read zoology at Oxford, so would have been fascinated by what Buller relayed of the sex life of the pike, confirming not just that 99% of all pike over 10 pounds are female, –'if the pike weighs over 15 lbs then the odds against it being a male are astronomical'[44] – but also why the female needed to be larger than the male, and the consequences of that disparity. Observations and underwater photographs made in May 1966 by two Swedish zoologists, Fabricius and Gustafson, produced unprecedented new details of the male's courtship of the

[40] Ted Hughes fishing diaries, BL ADD MS 88918/122/2, f.49; Mandy Lyne, Rickards's partner, personal communication.
[41] Richard Walker, quoted on the cover of Buller's *Pike and the Pike Angler* (London: Stanley Paul, 1981), a retitled version of *Pike* (1971).
[42] Brian Clarke, personal correspondence.
[43] Peter Keen papers, BL Add MS 88614.
[44] Fred Buller, *Pike* (London: Macdonald, 1971; reprint, 1979), p. 94.

female. Buller dug this out of the Swedish zoological journal in which it had been published in 1958 and shared it with his readers:

> If the female was still 'unripe' she was likely to repulse the male with a convulsive jerky head movement. (This behaviour shows a striking similarity to the mouthing movements displayed by a pike about to swallow a large fish, and the scientists say this is probably a 'displacement activity' which has become ritualized in the course of evolution.') It is usual to find two or three males attending one female…'[45]

I have observed and photographed this behaviour for myself, in a fenland lode two hundred yards from my own house.

[45] Ibid., pp. 90-91.

But Buller went further than merely quoting this research. He interpreted it, sometimes sceptically, putting it into dialogue with English pike writing as he did so. For instance, he wasn't so sure about the displacement activity, or its merely ritual nature. Countering the nineteenth-century fishing journalist William Senior's dismissal of the rumour that, after copulation, the female was rumoured to turn on and eat her male partner, Buller wrote: 'I am quite certain that a dowager pike will hardly be influenced by sentiment once she has done with spawning and the demands of the intestine are with her once more.'[46]

And Buller was equally intelligent, and compelling, about another peculiar feature of the act of mating itself, and the scientists' account of it. Fabricius and Gustavson

> revealed that during the spawning act the male pike's position in relation to the female is achieved through an eye to eye orientation. Should an attendant male pike happen to be longer in body than its mate – so that the vent is to the rear of the female vent when he is moving forward with her eye to eye – then presumably the milt cloud would be released to the rear of the falling eggs, in which case the current would tend to [...] frustrate fertilization.[47]

As a result, Buller concluded, 'shorter-bodied male pike are likely to become the more successful parents.'

We can begin to judge the effect of reading Buller, both on Nicholas Hughes and, subsequently, on his father, from a long entry Hughes wrote in his personal journal on the third day of that half-term pike fishing trip to County Clare. It was October 27th 1977. Barrie Cooke had got them fishing on Castle Lake, near Sixmilebridge, and from the first lines Hughes wrote the significance of the day's events are clear. 'Today Nicky caught his 24 ½ lb pike. [...] His mother's birthday.'[48] His account, some 2,500 words long, records not just the drama but the uncertainties of the capture of the fish, and the subsequent discussion that they had with Cooke about what to do next. Here, I will concentrate only on essential questions of gender and size; all italics are mine. First, Nicholas's identification of the species: '"It's a pike, Daddy."' 'Next he feels it's a big one. [...] Once it surfaces, + we see it is a really big one.[...] *It* fights deep.'[49] Hughes takes the first few of many pictures, proud father, though conscious, too, as he often was, that the camera distances himself from the action. In writing this up, he also takes his own first tentative and inconsistent first steps towards returning to, and then complicating, the issues of the literary gender involved for him in his son's pike. The fish comes

[46] Ibid., p.91.
[47] Ibid., p.93.
[48] BL Add MS 88918/128/2 f.21.
[49] Ibid., f.22.

alongside their boat, '+ again we see *him*. *He* certainly looks pretty big.' Soon, '*she*'s tiring. Nicky lifts the pike's head high in the reeds, a huge head, turns her, + brings her back out.' Beside the boat once more, 'her yellow side seems the size of a fair-sized pig'; she is taking her place between Cooke's lost magnificent sow. Then Hughes nets the pike; lying in the boat's bottom '*she* seems incredibly big.' He records the row back to find Cooke in his little boat, and the subsequent, size-related discussion, in which real big pike becomes sportsman's worthy opponent: 'Nicky wants *him* stuffed. Barrie obviously doesn't, + begins to enumerate the problems. Finally, it's if *he*'s thirty, we'll have to.'[50] That is, if the fish meets the threshold for greatness that Cooke had set, himself guided by Buller and Rickards's own criteria. Weighing the fish resolves that. They get the hooks out, and refresh the pike in a rocky inlet where they've landed. 'Nicky embracing *it* etc.' This is complicated: 'it had gorged the bait'. But 'after some surgery' body becomes opponent – 'they carry *him* in the shallow, push *him* to + fro to get the gills going', then nurse opponent back to real life, real pike. The next sentence confirms that: '*She* makes a movement or two.' Soon the pike is recovering. '*She* writhes ponderously', then '*she*'s gone and its over.'

It wasn't over. That diary itself replays events, remembering, reworking. In due course, 'Lough na Cashel's great Queen' features in Hughes's poem he wrote as parent, 'Some Pike for Nicholas', where she

> granted you your prayer,
> Which was to take her in your arms, on your mother's birthday,
> And give her the kiss of life (*CP* 1192).

But well before he wrote that poem, the dedicated fishing diaries he kept recount Hughes's own, as well as his son's, continuing and indeed intensifying efforts to repeat and outstrip that initial success, to catch a great Irish pike.

The following March, 1978, they met Buller himself at his cottage in County Mayo, asking for advice, but because he respected the pike's spawning season, even if Ireland byelaws did not prohibit fishing, he was guarded, vague in what he told these two unexpected and unknown visitors.[51] By October 1979, Cooke and the Hugheses were in County Sligo; Hughes's diary reveals confirmation that by now he too had been hooked by Buller, asking a local man 'about the size of Lough Arrow pike, thinking of Fred Buller's *Domesday Book of Giant Pike*, which we're reading, and staring at, picking up every five minutes.'[52] On that trip Nicholas was to hook and lose a pike in Lough Allen that Hughes was sure, as the pike leapt, weighed

[50] Ibid., f.23.
[51] BL Add MS 88918/122/2 f.176
[52] BL Add MS 88918/122/2 f.155.

more than thirty pounds. That fish too makes it, via an unpublished poem 'Lough Allen' in the archive at Emory, into 'Some Pike for Nicholas'.[53] '*It* reared, the size of a man' (*CP* 1192). Bigger, then, than a Queen.

It was that December when they discovered Lough Gur in County Limerick, where the quest continued over several visits, and where, in March 1981, Hughes himself began catching the biggest pike of his life. Somehow finding wriggle room, in the diaries he kept of this trip, to accommodate the tensions between the knowledge he had and the identifications he felt with the fish he caught and released. He records a pike he only subsequently realises was, at 20lbs, the largest he'd then caught as 'A fish ready to spawn. Slid *him* back, + *he* was gone before I realised we'd caught him.' That same day he notes, finally taking heed of Buller, Rickards, Venables: 'A very big male pike is one over 10 lb – rare.' But not, quite, as astronomically remote a possibility as Buller had suggested. They kept finding enormous teeth marks on the flanks of the large pike they caught. And Hughes kept hoping, dreaming, identifying with the deep, vital life these pike continued to represent. That may be why, in 'The Great Irish Pike', the poem which he wrote and Cooke illustrated in April 1982, this long, deeply imagined but determinedly elusive survivor of changes of knowledge, morals, cultures is as emphatically male as his creators:

> *He* fell asleep in Job.
> *He* woke in The Book of Vermin.
>
> And in the Courts of Beauty-care and Cosmetics
> *His* picture is pinned up – as the criminal norm.
> No trial for those eyes. No appeal
> For that mouth. (*CP* 627)

It's a poem of intense, sympathetic conviction, as well as of recognition that this survivor, as much monk as prisoner, is reaching the end of his time. And now his executioner will not be a fantasying English teenager, nor the much better informed and equipped young man who'd succeeded where his father had failed, but the trophy hunting Germans they had encountered in 1979 on their way to Lough Allen, and recognized each other, Hughes's diary records, as old enemies.

> The pike in his cell
>
> Only survives till the hired German beheads him (*CP* 628)

But this wasn't Hughes's last word on the pike. Nor, for that matter, was 'Some Pike for Nicholas', which he ensured appeared, quietly, in Winter 1997, the literary

[53] Emory, MSS 644 Box 82 Folder 125.

fishing magazine *Waterlog*. In Keegan's edition of the *Collected Poems* this poem, because uncollected, appears after *Birthday Letters*. But Hughes's late great letter to Nicholas, including the reflection on his and his son's own 'animal confrontation dreams', came the month after his final collection's publication in January 1998. Nicholas then was of an age that Hughes was when, in his own 'late twenties and thirties I was trying might and main to make contact with my real resources' (*LTH* 707). Hughes urges his son that such

> effort has to be constantly renewed, because what is pressing towards you, to enlighten you with the truth about yourself, is always developing, always different from the truth which you did manage to admit and integrate with your conscious self, a while ago. (*LTH* 708)

Hughes knew, as he wrote in that letter, that Nicholas didn't want to read *Birthday Letters*. But if he had, or when he did, after this letter, one poem must have caught his eye. 'Dreamers' is Hughes's account –belated and full of hindsight and belatedly acquired knowledge – of the final consequence of sharing his own dream of hooking that enormous pike at Crookhill. The poem tells how, on the visit which the tenants of their London flat Assia and David Wevill paid to the Hugheses at Court Green on the weekend of 18-19 May 1962, Assia fascinated both Ted and Sylvia. Her own eyes were a part of the 'performance' she staged of the 'Fable' she carried with her, making 'puppets' of both her hosts. At first it seems this fable is of her complex European Jewishness, and her eyes play to this: 'When she suddenly rounded her eyeballs, / Popped them, strangled, she shocked you.'(*CP* 1145) But the *coup de grace*, the climactic revelation, followed when she came into the kitchen after a single night under their roof and 'told her dream' (*CP* 1146)– as a suitably prepared reader of 'The Wishing Box', and perhaps also 'Pike', knew would command attention. Here, her staged revelation turns for its full effect on a configuration of eyes, males, females that – as Hughes could not have known for another fifteen years at least, but then, through Buller and Cooke, almost certainly would have done – reverses that underwater arrangement of big female pike and accompanying males, eyeball to eyeball, as they prepare for the act of fertilisation and the potential for both life and death in its savage aftermath:

> A giant fish, a pike
> Had a globed, golden eye, and in that eye
> A throbbing human foetus –
> You were astonished, even envious.

I refused to interpret. I saw (*CP* 1146)

A human face, and eyes, can betray as well as detect the visible signs of astonishment. But that speculation about Sylvia's envy suggests both that this was a subject that husband and wife never discussed and that Hughes had come to guess that her reaction went much further than intense momentary surprise at the dream's peculiarly vivid content. He must also have come to guess that her astonished envy was much more than an author's mystified recognition that one of her readers may just have added a further and terribly effective twist to the materials of her own 'shamelessly plagiarised' story for the reader's own flirtatiously creative purposes. But he can't have known what readers of Plath's letters to her family and therapist from the summer and autumn of 1962 have recently learned, that Assia's barrenness becomes an insistent motif, a jilted partner's and wounded mother's desperate attempts to deny the fertile implications of that dream (*CLSP2* p.791ff.)

Compared to all this, what Hughes saw sounds simple: 'the dreamer in [Assia] /Had fall in love with me and she did not know it', while, simultaneously, 'the dreamer in me / Fell in love with her, and I knew it.' What he later came to know, but still, in writing, could no more than hint at, has been the subject of this paper.

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In 'Poetry and Violence' (1992), Hughes wrote, of 'Pike' and 'Hawk Roosting,' those poems in *Lupercal* whose subjects that he had elevated to murals illustrative of divine energies as well as natural laws, that '[i]n writing these verses, [...]I was trying to express what had been with me from the beginning.' (*WP* 263) It was in December that same year, 1992, that Hughes gave Anne-Lorraine Bujon a full description of the writing that informed that beginning, crediting the *Children's Encylopedia* in his father's newsagency for shaping his love of myth and the natural world, and fusing them together. In an article on 'The Fishes of the Rivers', here is early and powerful proof of Hughes's fidelity to this early source, against all subsequent complicating interventions, appropriations, additions of knowledge.

> We come to the grimmest native of our waters, the biggest fish in our waters that never goes to sea, and by far the most to be dreaded by all other forms of life. The pike reaches four or five feet and more

> in length, with a weight of from 70 to 100 pounds according to legend, but certainly over 50 pounds.[54]

Suddenly, Ted's 40 pounder sounds plausible again.

The *Encyclopedia* article describes the power associated with its weight, the

> huge teeth in the lower jaw, and others in the upper part of the mouth which curve backwards [...] so admitting prey but rendering it impossible for them to escape. [...] Some Loch Tay fishermen found two pike of practically equal size engaged in a deadly grapple. One was swallowing the other alive, and had got it down as far as the shoulders.

So Brian Clarke may have been right after all, or half right: though Hughes wrote his great poem before he acquired his own practical insights into pike's natural history and how to catch them, 'Pike' and Fred Buller turn out to share the same source with the *Children's Encylopedia*. Buller's *Pike* includes a photograph of these Loch Tay pike, which Buller makes clear appeared first in the *Fishing Gazette* in April 1920.

Then the *Encyclopedia* turns descriptive, and in doing so not only makes Hughes's lifelong vulnerability to pike, and tales of them, inevitable; in saying what the pike looks like in its artful lurking, this article also asserts its rights to be a more persuasive candidate to be an influence on 'Pike' itself than the claims made recently by Hannah Roche[55]: 'In its artful lurking in the shade, looking like a submerged log, the pike resembles the crocodile. When it makes its dart there is no escape.' That turns out to be true for Hughes, and through Hughes for Graham Joyce, as well as for any of the other prey the article mentions: the pike's diet includes 'its own young, likely as not; it may be a rat, a water hen, a duck, a dog, a young salmon going seaward.' And it may be that the power of the *Children's Encylopedia* doesn't end there. For the article turns next 'from the worst to our finest of the river folk, the illustrious salmon family, which embraces not only the salmon but the trout, the aristocracy of our inland water world.' The salmon is, it says, in arresting capitals, 'THE LIVING SUBMARINES WHICH COME IN FROM THE SEA.' It begins, all this, to look like destiny.

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[54] Arthur Mee (ed.),*The Children's Encyclopedia* (London: nd, but dated by the Librarian of Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, to the early 1940s), p. 4979.
[55] Roche, 'Myths, Legends, and Apparitional Lesbians'.

High Diver: in memory of Al Alvarez

by Mick Gowar

Death is before me today
like recovering from an illness
and going into the garden
[….]like a break in the clouds
like a bird's flight into the unknown[1]

Sylvia Plath, Thom Gunn, Geoffrey Hill, Ted Hughes, Peter Porter and now Al Alvarez himself: what William Wootten called 'the Alvarez Generation' of extraordinarily talented, dedicated and stylistically diverse post-Modernist British poets is now, finally, 'scattered among a hundred cities/ And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections.'[2] The coincidence with the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, and the stark evidence in the TV commemorations of how few veterans remain, makes one more aware of the passing of this generation of old *cultural* warriors, who had, in Alvarez's words, attempted to go 'beyond the gentility principle', beyond all the 'fiddle' of the stiflingly enclosed and self-regarding worlds of 1960s academia and the petty, backbiting, squabbling clubland of the old school men of letters.

'A matter of life and death' is how William Wootten characterised the seriousness with which Alvarez, Hughes, Plath and others dedicated themselves to poetry, a seriousness which Sean O'Brien (and I'm sure many other poets and critics of younger generations) finds 'barely comprehensible'.[3] But at the time when Alvarez was compiling his ground-breaking anthology *The New Poetry,* which introduced Hughes, Hill, Gunn 77187613 and Porter – and in the second edition Plath, Lowell, Berryman and Sexton – to a much wider readership than the comparatively few who had read their poetry as a result of Alvarez's efforts as poetry editor of the *Observer*, there was a palpable sense of existential crisis. The Cold

[1] From 'Dying', in A. Alvarez, *New & Selected Poems,* (London: Waywiser Press, 2002) p.73.
[2] W. H. Auden 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' in Edward Mendelson (ed.) *W.H. Auden: Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), p. 81.
[3] William Wootten, *The Alvarez Generation: Thomas Gunn, Geoffrey Hill, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and Peter Porter* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2015), p. xi.

War was at its height, the war against German Nazism, Italian Fascism and Japan's 'Total Empire'[4] was a vivid, living memory, and the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust and Japanese prison camps were still being assimilated by a population who could scarcely believe what they had seen in newsreels and documentary films. Writers of all sorts, critics and artists, were acutely aware that civilisation itself had barely survived the totalitarianism of the Right, and now a new threat to artistic and intellectual life was evident behind the Iron Curtain and the recently built Berlin Wall, in China, and much closer to home with the rapidly growing popularity of Mao among European and American students and intellectuals.[5]

There appeared to be no obvious way for poets and writers to respond. The Movement poets indicated a retreat back behind the net curtains of conformity, to show as Alvarez observed: 'the poet is just like the man next door – in fact he probably *is* the man next door'[6]. Others felt that the war, and particularly the Holocaust, had revealed such brutality beneath the surface of what had previously been regarded as the most artistically advanced and sensitive nation that any thought of producing something as comparatively inconsequential and trifling as a poem, a novel, an art song or an opera after Nazism was a form of blasphemy. As Theodor Adorno famously declared 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.[7]

In his introduction to *The New Poetry*, subtitled 'Beyond the Gentility Principle', Alvarez acknowledged the widespread fear that:

> all our lives, even of the most genteel and enislanded, are influenced profoundly by forces which have nothing to do with gentility, decency or politeness[…] forces of disintegration which destroy the old standards of civilisation.[8]

However, unlike Adorno he believed that this awareness demanded not a chastened silence but a new poetry, informed and shaped by 'a new seriousness' which demanded that poets bring to their art an 'ability and willingness to face the full range of his experience with his full intelligence; not to take the easy exits of either the conventional response or choking incoherence.'[9]

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[4] See: Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1999).

[5] Mao's *Little Red Book* was published in 1964, between the first two editions of *The New Poetry*. For a perceptive and illuminating account of the dabbling in Maoism by French intellectuals such as Sartre, Foucault and Henri-Levy see Richard Wolin, *The Wind From The East: French Intellectuals, The Cultural Revolution and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[6] A. Alvarez, ed., *The New Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 25.

[7] Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" In *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,1983), p. 34.

[8] A. Alvarez, ed., *The New Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 26.

[9] Ibid., p. 28.

Although this was intended to be a general demand it could, as Alvarez himself later recognised, have been a description of the poetry of Ted Hughes and his principles of poetry writing – which, at the time *The New Poetry* was first published, he was setting out in his influential broadcasts in the BBC Schools series *Listening and Writing*.[10] And at the time when Alvarerz and Hughes first met, Sylvia Plath, under Hughes's encouragement and tutelage, was also beginning to work in a similar way – leaving behind the painstakingly thesaurus-driven, mosaic-like constructions which she had been writing since her teens and starting to write what Alvarez very early recognised as 'that rare thing: the always unexpected, wholly genuine article.'[11]

But the response to this spiritual crisis wasn't to be the kind of 'log rolling' political poetry like that of the 1930s. As far as Alvarez was concerned, the Second World War and its aftermath had:

> weakened the common decencies and mutual respect on which civilised society depends. In the West artists responded to this unease by turning inwards, though not as a form of escapism. When Lowell wrote about his bouts of madness, Berryman about his chronic boozing, Hughes about the violence of the natural world, and Plath about her rage and grief, they were using their private troubles as a mirror for this bewildering nihilism.[12]

However, it wasn't Hughes's intention to use the natural world simply as a source of metaphors, however startling and inventive, to express or dramatise his personal concerns or to place human concerns within a broader context – as might be said of the work of his Cambridge contemporary Ted Walker, for example. Underpinning Hughes's verse and prose was a complex web of beliefs gleaned from voracious reading in psychology, anthropology, astrology, occultism, conservation and conservative (with a small c) politics and literature – especially Shakespeare and Coleridge – and throughout his working life Hughes struggled, with only limited success, to combined these various strands into a coherent system. For Alvarez the ideas and underlying theories and beliefs were of little intrinsic value or interest:

> it doesn't matter that the wild animals went with a belief in mysteries, the under-life and black magic, or that he increasingly used what I thought was mumbo-jumbo to get where he wanted to be – astrology, hypnosis, Ouija boards or the dottier forms of

[10] Edited scripts of these broadcasts were published in 1967 by Faber & Faber as the enormously influential anthology/handbook *Poetry In The Making*.
[11] A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 25.
[12] Al Alvarez, *Where Did It All Go Right?* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p. 240.

> Jungian magical thinking [….] All that mattered was that the poems he fished out of the depths were shimmering with life.[13]

Despite his scepticism about the beliefs and practices that were of such importance to both Hughes and Plath in the early 1960s, Alvarez, Hughes and Plath became friends – and as biographers of Hughes and Plath have intimated with varying degrees of tact and sensitivity, Alvarez and Plath becoming even closer when Plath and Hughes separated. But it was Plath's death – or rather its aftermath – that caused an irrevocable rift between Hughes and Alvarez.

During that extraordinary period of creativity, when she was separated from Hughes and writing many of the poems that would be published in Ariel, Plath used Alvarez as a (mostly) willing sounding board and testing ground. As he recalled in an article for the Guardian in 2004:

> I would pour her a drink and she would settle cross-legged on the floor in front of the stove and read me her new poems. I no longer remember how many visits she made – three or four at most – but it was enough for me to hear a fair proportion of the poems that went into 'Ariel' and recognize that what I was listening to was new and extraordinary.[14]

However, Alvarez had no illusions as to his real place in Plath's life or affections, whatever biographers of Hughes and Plath might infer:

As far as Sylvia was concerned, I was merely an attendant lord, someone to cheer her up and tell her how well she was writing. Yet the fact that I was an established critic who responded to her new poems and published them in *The Observer* made our friendship seem important to her – for the time being, at least. So did a fighting introduction I had written for my recently published Penguin anthology, *The New Poetry*, in which I attacked the cult of gentility in the English poets who were then fashionable – their very British habit of averting their eyes from unpleasantness and pretending all is well.

All was far from well in Sylvia's life at that time and she was using her troubles as a source for her poetry. By doing so, she was on her own artistically as well as socially, exploring territory where few other poets had yet been, and I think she was glad to know there was someone making a case for the new style of poetry she was now writing.[15]

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[13] Al Alvarez ,*Where Did It All Go Right?* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), pp. 225-6.
[14] Al Alvarez, 'Ted, Sylvia and Me' *The Guardian*, January 4, 2004 [online] https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/jan/04/poetry.highereducation (accessed October 4, 2019).
[15] Al Alvarez, 'Ted, Sylvia and Me', *The Guardian*, January 4, 2004 [online] https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/jan/04/poetry.highereducation (accessed October 4, 2019).

> Possibly through a sense of personal guilt – he wrote on more than one occasion that, he feared that, through his own reticence when Plath visited him on Christmas Eve, 1962, he had contributed to her downward spiral of depression that by most accounts led to her suicide in February 1963 – or perhaps still feeling an obligation to make a case for her, in November 1971 The Observer published the first of two planned extracts from Alvarez's forthcoming book The Savage God[16] which opened with a detailed account of the prelude to and circumstances of Sylvia Plath's death.

Hughes was furious, and a wrote a long, emotional and yet carefully argued letter to Alvarez, at first appealing to him 'as a friend, please reconsider your writings, talks etc. about Sylvia's death'; then imploring him on behalf of Frieda and Nicholas

> for Christ's sake step back & see what you 're doing. Sylvia is still very much alive in these two children – you can't reinvent her according to your theories just for the curiosity of the mob (*LTH* 324)

before concluding in the postscript:

> Nothing can excuse the swinish mindlessness with which you are exploiting this. You seem determined to push our misfortune in this business to the limit. (*LTH* 326)

Alvarez defended himself in a dignified response which pointed out that he had vigorously supported and promoted both Hughes's and Plath's poetry:

> For the last ten years or more, I have taken a lot of trouble to get your poetry and Sylvia's read with understanding and a proper respect. I have done so not because you are friends of mine but because I think you the most gifted poets of your generation. Sylvia knew this and knew I understood in some way what she was trying to do. That, presumably, is why she came to me with her poems after the separation. To imagine now that I am simply cashing in on her death or making a glib intellectual point is a complete distortion of everything I have written, both here and before.[17]

And as Elaine Feinstein noted in her biography of Hughes, what Alvarez had tactfully avoided in his account of Plath's death was the reason for the separation which undoubtedly precipitated Plath's depression: the separation resulting from Hughes's infidelity with Assia Wevill. Also, it had evidently never occurred to Alvarez that Hughes hadn't told the children the true facts about Plath's death – according to Feinstein they had been told she had died of pneumonia.

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[16] A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study in Suicide* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971).
[17] Quoted in Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Path and Ted Hughes* (London: Picador, 1994), pp. 125-126.

As far as I'm aware, there was never a rapprochement between Hughes and Alvarez, but Alvarez's high opinion for Hughes's work and character were fulsomely expressed once again in his autobiography *Where Did It All Go Right?* published a year after Hughes's death. What comes across most strikingly is that, despite the harsh assessment of not only his motives but also his integrity and loyalty by Hughes, Alvarez remained to the end a generous and loyal supporter:

> [Hughes] kept his genius for the muscle and sinew of the language and he saved some of his finest work for the end [….] The poems [in *Birthday Letters*] don't try to soften Plath's violent rages or blur her crippling fears or make their life together seem other than a high wire act – one slip and they were in the abyss – but they bring her startlingly to life, often in a style that sounds curiously like hers: tightly controlled despite their apparently free form, packed with images, fast-talking and full of foreboding. They are the most vulnerable he ever wrote and also the saddest: all that love and talent gone to waste, her death, his grief and corroding guilt. The book serves as a funeral monument to them both.

But I think it would be wrong for this appreciation of Alvarez to end with the last word being about Plath and Hughes. It would be too easy to dismiss Alvarez as a mere footnote to other and more distinguished writers' lives; someone who could have been a contender, who had shown potential but frittered it away in writing journalism (albeit in book form) about his hobbies: poker (*The Biggest Game In Town*, 1983), climbing (*Feeding The Rat*, 1988) and swimming (*Pondlife*, 2013).

Perhaps one of the things that links Hughes, Plath and Alvarez was that each had their 'daemons' (As Philip Pullman conceives them in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy): totemic animal spirits that represented something essential about their characters and predicted to an extent the lives they would lead. For Ted Hughes it was the fox: the scorched creature which upbraided him like a conscience when he was studying English literature ('Stop this. You are destroying us' (*PC* 75), the one animal he could never keep or tame:

> I was always frustrated: twice by a farmer, who killed cubs I had caught before I could get to them, and once by a poetry keeper who freed my cub while his dog waited (*PIM* 19)

and the augury of his failing marriage in the poem 'Epiphany':

> If I had grasped that whatever comes with a fox
> Is what tests a marriage and proves it a marriage –
> I would not have failed the test. Would you have failed it?
> But I failed. Our marriage had failed. (*CP* 1117)

For Sylvia Plath the daemon creatures were bees, arriving in their coffin-like box, the insignia of her father:

> ...locked, it is dangerous,
> I have to live with it overnight
> And I can't keep away from it

and casting her as 'the magician's girl who does not flinch'.[18]

And for Al Alvarez the daemon was the rat, the rapacious creature whose sustenance was the risks he took: abandoning the academic life for freelance journalism; taking the uncompromising position he did in compiling *The New Poetry*; playing high stakes poker; and, the greatest physical risk, rock-climbing. In all of these he found that 'lonely impulse of delight' that held Yeats's airman spellbound and amazed.[19]

As he admitted, his poetry might not have been as outstanding as the poetry he admired, wrote about and praised, but it is nevertheless far better than the 'thin gruel' which Jonathan Bate dismisses so ungenerously.[20] Alvarez's poetic voice may not have the force and authority of Hughes, nor the urgency and anger of Plath – or indeed the self-confidence and inhibited lyricism of his best autobiographical non-fiction (*Pond Life* or *Feeding The Rat*, for example). But as Alvarez himself noted in The Writer's Voice: 'The authentic voice may not be the one you want to hear.'[21] Alvarez's poetry is imbued with what the great Austrian pianist Alfred Brendel has described as 'his own melancholy music'[22] and deals with regrets over past sadnesses and with tender concern over the evanescence of present happiness. Many of his best poems, such as the sonnet 'High Dive', have a prefatory feel, sharing liminal moments just before the narrator or speaker experiences, perhaps, great joy, excitement or danger:

> You poise there, looking down
> Then, inch by inch,
> Slowly raise your head,
> Breathe out, breathe in,
> Then plunge.[23]

Maybe it is revealing of some vestigial reticence that his *New & Selected Poems* (2002) was published under A.Alvarez and not Al Alvarez, the name under which

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[18] Sylvia Plath, *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004). Quotations from numbered facsimile pages.
[19] W.B.Yeats 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' in *Collected Poems* of W.B.Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 152.
[20] Quoted by Ann Skea 'Telling Tales A Review of *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* by Jonathan Bate [online] http://ann.skea.com/Bate%20Biography.htm (accessed 6 October, 2019).
[21] Al Alvarez, *The Writer's Voice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 29.
[22] Quoted on the back over of A. Alvarez, *New & Selected Poems* (London: Waywiser Press: 2002).
[23] ibid., p. 15. For an account of his earliest experience of diving from a high board, and the exhilaration he experienced, see *Where Did It All Go Right* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p. 69.

he published his later highly successful non-fiction prose. A. Alvarez was the name under which he published his literary criticism, and of course *The New Poetry*. And A. Alvarez, it seems, represented the phases of his life when he was a young and highly-respected young academic and then poetry editor of The Observer and influential figure in the literary scene. A damascene meeting with W. H. Auden[24] helped Alvarez make the decision to finally leave both academia and the metropolitan literary scene behind, and to write about those things which brought him excitement, joy and true comradeship – which neither academia or London literary life did. From *The Biggest Game In Town* (1983) onwards all his books (with the exception of *Night*, 1993) were all published under 'Al' – the name by which his climbing, poker-playing and swimming friends would have known him and not under his former, formal initial: A.[25]

However, as the Canadian poet, critic and journalist Todd Swift observed in his review of Alvarez's collection of essays and articles *The Writer's Voice*,[26] what shouldn't be forgotten is how often the younger Alvarez was right: about the Movement, about the importance of Plath and Lowell; and about the importance of the young 'extremists' – the poets of *The Alvarez Generation*, who dared to fish (to paraphrase Hughes) in depths of their psychic ponds:

> That this immensely important shift in taste has since become so successful as to be taken largely for granted should not be grounds for divorcing Alvarez from that [….] He was one of those who helped print those poets' pages, by encouraging them, and making their way in the world of reviews and publication slightly less impossible.[And w]hen one sees how traditional today's English poetry still can be and how driven by gentility (a façade of social gatherings, festivals, awards and book clubs for those good people who want to appear to read poetry, not for those who want to be altered by truly good poems) Alvarez's achievement is impressive.[27]

[24] See Chapter 12, Al Alvarez , *Where Did It All Go Right* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), pp.259-276.
[25] Interestingly, the 2002 new edition of *The Savage God* published by Bloomsbury was also published under Al Alvarez — signifying, perhaps, that this great lover of music considered this book his true 'opus 1'?
[26] Al Alvarez, *The Writer's Voice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).
[27] Todd Swift 'Guiding Back To Poetry', *The Canadian Review of Books*. [Online] http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=4429 (accessed October 4, 2019).

Reviews

Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet, Yvonne Reddick, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 344pp., £79.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-319-59176-6

This book draws together the evidence that has been accumulating over recent decades for the case to be made for Hughes as an environmentalist as well as a poet who would now qualify for a term that he would hardly have known: ecopoet. Yvonne Reddick works hard to chart the interconnections between these two activities which Hughes, to a certain extent, kept separate. As Reddick admits, he would not have cast himself as an ecopoet in the terms established by Jonathan Skinner or Timothy Clark, although after Neil Astley's expansive anthology of 'ecopoems', *Earth Shattering* (2007) Hughes is an ecopoet alongside Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron and Manley Hopkins. Reddick identifies four strands of Hughes's thought that qualify him as an ecopoet from exposing human hubris to 'an ecstatic fusion with an unspoiled nature' in a 'more mystical poetry' (39).

There follows, in a chronological plan, a chapter on the 'Origins of Hughes's Environmental Awareness' in his childhood which places particular emphasis on the killing of animals - a theme that Reddick unflinchingly returns to, especially in her final chapter on 'Hunting, Shooting, Fishing – and Conservation?'. One of the strengths of this study is its willingness to seek out the 'contradictions' in Hughes as an environmentalist without attempting to resolve them. Perhaps it is not surprising that sometimes contradictions appear in Reddick's analysis itself. It is not easy to agree with the statement that 'Hughes did not believe in sympathetic magic' (96) when so many of the fishing poems in particular are what Reddick calls 'lures': 'By implication, Hughes's Laureate poetry has the power to make the rain fall after drought, and to lure the salmon back to British rivers' (96).

Another strength of this book is its use of archive material, which includes the first printing of an unpublished poem from Hughes's typescript of poems submitted for the Cambridge Tripos, more interesting for what it promises than in itself, together with a full draft of 'The Grouse' from *Birthday Letters*. It is really in the 'Green Laureate' chapter that archive evidence of Hughes's reading of the science of water pollution contributes not only to his river poetry, but to *The Iron Woman*. It is interesting that in 1990 Hughes read a Greenpeace report on global

warming which Reddick productively takes into a reading of Hughes's 'Global Environmentalism' in *Tales from Ovid*. Climate change was also reducing the feeding grounds of the salmon, as Hughes had pointed out in 1985. It is in the chapter on hunting and fishing that Reddick exposes the complications and contradictions in the 'hunting conservationist' who had been calling *Birthday Letters* 'The Sorrows of the Deer' in identification with the hunted deer.

This book should indicate the huge potential for more detailed considerations of aspects of Hughes's work such as Mark Wormald's on fishing and Jack Thacker's on farming. There really was no need for the occasional exaggerations of Hughes's interests, or pointing out what previous scholars have missed, or eco-prefixes as in 'eco-georgic' or 'eco-shamanic'. It's also a shame that an Index only of names limits its use by students. But nevertheless this book will be of increasing value to students and teachers as the Anthropocene takes hold. More than just a pioneer as a public intellectual of emergent environmentalism, this book makes the case for Hughes as, yes, one of the most significant ecopoets of the twentieth century.

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Wodwo Vergil: Vergil's Eclogues translated by Adam Roberts, by Adam Roberts, Bristol, Sad Press, 2018, 112 pp., £11.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-244-03477-1

The *Eclogues* of Virgil (the most commonly adopted spelling of his name) have received some rather original translations in the twentieth century of which the most outrageous self-declared 'transmutation' is David R. Slavitt's 1972 version which ends, 'I'd bring the pastoral to its natural end. / We could go together, herding the fucking goats'. Adam Roberts' new translations of the *Eclogues*, which 'make no attempt to disguise their Hughesian influences' (6), work a little harder at modernising Virgil's Latin. Roberts' version ends, 'Time to go. The shade is poisonous to poets, / allergic to shadow. / Dusk falls through itself, / and the goats / jiggle and scramble and bleat their kazoo bleats / going home' (85). It is for the reader to judge just how Hughesian this translation is, but when Hughes's influence comes to be assessed in the present century, this book should be taken into account.

Strangely, in his six-page Introduction, there is no reference to the Wodwo of the title and the above claim of influence is the only reference to Hughes. Even more strangely, in the twelve page essay on pastoral that is an Appendix to the book, it concludes with a paragraph asserting that 'Examination at the Womb Door' is a 'key late 20th century pastoral' before quoting the poem in full with the final comment, 'by thunder I *love* that poem'. Each eclogue is introduced by a personal statement from the translator that both historicizes and modernises the translator's challenges. My own feeling is that the modernisation overrides the poetics: more 'kazoo bleats' than 'Dusk falls through itself'.

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Shamanic Elements in the Poetry of Ted Hughes by Ewa Panecka, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, 144pp., £58.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-5275-0557-5

It is a lazy critical method by which an author moves from quoting, without critical engagement, one authority after another to compile a substitution for her own argument, as Ewa Panecka does in the first half of this book. Such an impression of laziness is only endorsed by repeatedly referring to 'Gifford' instead of 'Gifford and Roberts', to 'Paul' Redgrove, asserting that Hughes founded Farms for City Children and the Arvon Foundation and repeating a sentence under what appears to be a heading from notes (11). To insert a question mark at the end of 'But when will he land / On a man's wrist' is to miss the point of the inevitability of the reassertion of human desire to control nature. That there is no index only demonstrates further how poorly Cambridge Scholars Publishing serves its authors, as it does in allowing poem and essay titles to appear in italics. Any reader employed by a press would have something to say about a sentence such as this: 'The Queen of a secular democracy is head of the Church of England, which must have become an inspiration to Hughes, the worshipper of the White Goddess' (13). Any copy editor would have not have allowed even Lumb to have a 'randez-vous' on a bridge.

It is in the two chapters on *Cave Birds* and on *Gaudete* that Panecka's own interpretations are most independently expressed, although still buttressed by quotations from others. In the former chapter nothing is added to what has already

been said, but in the latter chapter there are some interesting points made, concluding with the observation that in the shamanic parody of *Gaudete* Hughes rejects any possibility of the regeneration of a society for individual spiritual and religious rebirth. A serious consideration of the Epilogue poems as an interrelation body of work might have explored this further. It was perhaps unwise to conclude the book with less than three pages on the complex matter of Hughes's Laureateship where he is reduced to writing 'shamanic chants' for a Queen seen, apparently, 'as an ancient Goddess of Nature, presiding over her people, whose nature is both human, natural and divine' (133). Panecka's book is predicated, not on Hughes having learned from elements of the shamanic narrative and process, but on his actually being a 'modern shaman' (11) and a 'Master Bard' (131). The literalism of this has produced rather wooden simplifications such as might have come from the sermons of Lumb to his parish.

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Ted Hughes, Nature and Culture, edited by Neil Roberts, Mark Wormald and Terry Gifford, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, xviii + 256 pp., £79.99 (hardback), ISBN: 978-3-319-97573-3

Unlike other recent essay collections on Hughes, such as *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes* (2011), *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected* (2013), *New Casebooks: Ted Hughes* (2014) and *Ted Hughes in Context* (2018), which in their titles do not announce specific themes, *Ted Hughes, Nature and Culture* (2018) is comprised of essays that speak to each other in the sense that they all address, in their different ways, the dynamic between nature and culture in Hughes's work. The essays emerged from the seventh international conference on Hughes, 'Dreams as Deep as England', hosted by Neil Roberts at the University of Sheffield in 2015, and while they illustrate the depth as well as breadth of the current critical landscape surrounding Hughes, they also provide a targeted reassessment of the poet's origins, influences and legacy. The introduction to the volume, written by Neil Roberts, begins with Hughes's proposition from his essay 'Myth and Education' (1976) that 'every new child is nature's chance to correct culture's error'. In this statement, Hughes defines the two concepts against each

other – what is not natural is cultural, and vice versa. As Roberts goes on to observe, Hughes's allegiance to nature over culture 'is a powerful – perhaps the most powerful – motivating energy in his work'. Roberts himself is keen to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of Hughes's hierarchal opposition, and unlike Hughes, it is clear that the editors of *Ted Hughes, Nature and Culture* place nature and culture on an equal footing when it comes to reading his work (the punctuation of the title itself serves to encourage a paratactic relationship between them). The revelation at the heart of the volume is that, though he might have claimed otherwise, Hughes was as indebted to cultural currents as he was natural environments. The cumulative effect of these essays complicates the widespread perception of the poet, in Seamus Perry's phrase, as 'a wild man'.

The contributions are divided into two parts: Part I 'Hughes and Environments' and Part II 'Hughes's Cultural Connections', beginning with Hughes's 'greening' and ending with his urbanity – a progression from nature to culture. While this might suggest a distinction between environmental and cultural perspectives, the effect of reading these essays in order (and I have no doubt this is down to the editors' design) is that no such distinction is possible, for the more a given contribution focuses on one of these concepts the sooner it becomes clear that it cannot be considered in isolation. Following the introduction are three essays by the editors, Terry Gifford, Mark Wormald and Roberts, all of which set the tone for the rest of the volume by acknowledging the entanglement of the natural and human worlds. Gifford's essay examines the significance of the post-war 'Two Cultures' debate surrounding the Arts and Sciences on Hughes's poetry and environmentalism, demonstrating how the science of ecology informed his later work and exploring the significance of this for what has come to be known as 'the environmental humanities'. Wormald follows this up with a characteristically grounded yet illuminating account of the entomological expertise on display in Hughes's fishing poetry, documenting 'the intricate and immediate relationship between an extraordinary exemplar of the natural world [the mayfly] and an equally elaborate human sub-culture'. Roberts, meanwhile, examines the ethical substance of Hughes's poem 'A Solstice' in light of the poet's nostalgia and enthusiasm for hunting, offering a sensitive but unflinching assessment of the degree to which such views can be reconciled with the poet's advocation for the rights of animals in human culture.

The remaining essays in Part I chart a progression from a focus on animals to the politics and poetics of place. Daniel O'Connor continues the creaturely theme with a well-pitched essay drawing on John Berger in 'Why Look at Animals?' and examines the ways in which animals provide an 'antidote to culture' in Hughes's

poetry. As O'Connor makes clear, the animals in Hughes's poems are currently at risk of being denied their potency in a cultural climate which fails to appreciate their symbolic value. The image he provides of Hughes's collected works as a 'cordoned space: a National Trust for the English imagination', however, is more troubling than consoling. It was the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who suggested in 1964 that animals are 'good to think with'. Claire Heaney's contribution illustrates how other authors, in this case J. M Coetzee, have since found Hughes's animals especially useful as thinking aids. Meanwhile, Jamie Castell's enquiry into Hughes's nature poetry, including a lively close reading of the poem 'Skylarks', entails an investigation into the nature *of* that poetry, in particular Hughes's use of the simile. One of the strengths of the collection as a whole is the wealth of close readings of individual poems, which, though they are indebted to the 'Leavis style dismantling of texts' (*LTH* 423) that Hughes both excelled in and came to reject as an undergraduate at Cambridge University, remain alive to the vitality of his creations. Hughes's poems are good to think with precisely because, as Castell puts it, his language is 'impossible to domesticate entirely'. A creaturely metaphor is also used to describe Hughes's 'hybrid poetics' in an essay by Vinyan Ravinthiran, who observes that in Hughes's work 'individual words and metaphors circulate [...] like genes, combining and recombining to construct the life of poems'. Ravinthiran's sustained focus on the poem 'Strawberry Hill' contemplates both the reductionism and sophistication of Hughes's representations of race and nationhood. The ecological thread is then picked up again by Janne Stigen Drangsholt, who explores the 'complex and composite' places and spaces, both imaginative and physical, found in Hughes's work.

The first four essays in Part II take as their starting point Hughes's indebtedness to numerous literary precedents, and it is here that the collection offers up some of its most revelatory and original material. James Robinson shows how Hughes's discussion of 'poetic bloodlines' in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', in which he characterises Chaucer as a Francophile court poet and source of cultural orthodoxy, in fact belies a profound case of influence whereby Hughes drew on Chaucer's example throughout his laureate years. The essay provides a welcome reappraisal of Hughes's self-mythologising in this regard and goes some distance in explaining how this anti-establishment former farmhand came to be 'someone far more likely to be found hunting or fishing the estate than working on it'. Another original contribution comes in the form of Katherine Robinson's account of Hughes's interest in *The Mabinogion* and how his knowledge of Welsh myth found its way into sequences such as *Crow* and *Cave Birds*. John Goodby assesses the impact of the 1940s apocalyptic school of poets and the regionalism that was a part

of that movement, going on to explain via a brief but informative history of mid-twentieth-century poetry how, by the 1960s, Hughes had become the 'ambivalent establishment'. His account of the similarities between Dylan Thomas and Hughes is compelling and provides a key piece in the puzzle of how Hughes's early voice developed. Carrie Smith's archival research, drawing on the mathematician Benoît Mandelbrot's theory of 'fractal geometry', demonstrates the merit of paying attention to the minute and the marginal. She charts the biographical, artistic and cultural implications of two cancelled lines of manuscript relating to the figure of Ophelia. An essay by Laura Blomvall considers Hughes's influence on contemporary writers, specifically Alice Oswald. Just as other contributions hint at Hughes's own anxiety of influence, Blomvall detects in Oswald's statements relating to her writing process a similar discomfort in how close her methods are to Hughes's – even if she appears more at ease modulating his voice in her poems. It is the distinctions Blomvall makes between these two poets, not the similarities, which prove the most resonant, especially when it comes to their respective statements on the making of poems.

The collection ends with an essay by Seamus Perry on 'Hughes and Urbanity', based on his keynote lecture at the 2015 conference. This essay is all the better for following what has come before it and does not lose any of its freshness in the way it articulates the implication of the volume as a whole: that Hughes was as cultured as he was unconventional. As Perry aptly puts it, 'the advocacy of anti-intellectualism is never anything other than a highly intellectual thing to do'. He goes on to locate, in both the poetry and the prose, evidence that despite his protestations Hughes could not help but brandish his sophistication and learning. Perry's focus on the refinement of Hughes's prose and the prosaic elements of the poems provides a fitting end to this valuable volume, and my sense is that the reader of this book will struggle to see Hughes in the same way afterwards.

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Ted Hughes & Christianity by David Troupes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, xii + 252 pp., £75.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-108-48389-6

David Troupes is one the most intellectually versatile and singular of the newer generation of Ted Hughes scholars. A poet, librettist, cartoonist and musician as well as an academic, his openly confessed enthusiasms for the poetry of Wallace Stevens and Jean Valentine are unusual, if not exactly heretical, for a Hughesian. One might say the same about his enthusiasm for German language theologians of twentieth century, four of whom – Karl Barth, Jurgen Moltmann, Karl Rahner and Paul Tillich – play important roles in this original, stimulating and sometimes provocative book, which is based on the Ph.D thesis Troupes presented at the University of Sheffield in 2017. (I have my own 'theological' connection with Sheffield, having graduated from the University in 1991 with a B.A. from the now sadly defunct Department of Biblical Studies. 'Biblical History and Literature' was the focus of most undergraduate teaching rather than theology *per se*, although the late John Rogerson's magisterial *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* still has its place on my bookshelf and one of its major focuses is the line of great Protestant theologians – including H. S. Reimarus, W. M. L. De Wette, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, and D. F. Strauss – who paved the way for Troupes's chosen four – including the Catholic Rahner.[1])

Ted Hughes and Christianity is not intended as a systematic or comprehensive overview of its ostensible subject matter, and Troupes cheerfully concedes that his choice to illuminate Hughes's relationship with Christianity in the light of the work of his four chosen theologians - and also his 'secondary aim' of developing a relationship between Hughes's work and that of the American Transcendentalist writers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens - is 'entirely idiosyncratic of my own reading' (2). Rather than presenting such an overview, Troupes's stated aim is to,

> sponsor a conversation between Hughes's work and a body of roughly contemporaneous theology for the purpose of identifying areas of sympathy and conflict, to demonstrate Hughes's sophistication as a religious thinker within the Christian tradition.

In doing so, he aims to show that,

> Hughes's treatment of Christianity is not simply one of ironic pilferings from the Bible and Nietzschean dismemberment of the Christian cultural psyche, but a serious and deliberate engagement

[1] J. W. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984).

> with Christian ideas rather in the spirit of a salvage operation – as opposed to a wrecking ball. (3)

The contentions that Hughes is engaged in a salvage operation on behalf of Christian ideas and that he is a religious thinker within the Christian tradition will be provocations to many of Hughes's readers. After all, perhaps Hughes's most well-known comment about Christianity is that it is 'just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and with the world of spirit' and the religious and spiritual impulse that seems to inform much of his expression seems best characterised as an eclectic and essentially pagan syncretism, drawing on shamanism, neo-Platonism, occultism, animism, near-Eastern religions, 'the Goddess' – and many other traditions.[2] Nevertheless, Troupes makes a good, demythologising fist of what at first sight might seem to be a precarious thesis, and the sustained focus and wide-ranging nature of his argument, its logical structure and clear expression is a strength of the book. It is immediately clear that Troupes takes his argument and subject matter seriously and that the book is emphatically not a contrarian or controversialist conceit. Indeed, there is an expository quasi-Lutheran urgency to the expression which suggests that the monograph is not merely a scholarly trajectory into the intersection of Hughes's poetry and Christian theology, but the outworking of a personal engagement with what Tillich refers to as matters of 'ultimate concern', and thus the book is as much a work of applied theology as it is a monograph in the field of English Literature. The key to this maverick expression lies in Troupes' decision to base his study on the 'idiosyncrasies' of his own reading - that is to say, texts, expressions and ideas that are personally meaningful to him, as well as being of academic interest. It is to Troupes's credit that his apparent personal investment in his subject matter in no way occludes the clarity of his argument or his scholarly focus – indeed, the depth of engagement demonstrates authenticity and secures credibility, thereby validating his method.

Ted Hughes and Christianity tracks Hughes's attitudes to Christianity in a broadly chronological manner, beginning with The *Hawk in the Rain* and ending with *Birthday Letters*. The chapters summarise the nature of each phase of Hughes's engagement with Christianity, seeing the nature of God, the Fall, the Crucifixion, Puritanism and the Goddess, Transcendence and 'Being Christlike' as the key themes. In doing so Troupes tracks a movement from the 'sardonic refutations' and 'ironic appropriations' he sees as characterising Hughes writing about Christianity in Hughes's earlier work (*The Hawk in the Rain* to *Wodwo*) the

[2] Ekbert Fass, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press) p. 205

sacramentalism and transcendence of the later work (*River*), the journey proceeding by means of an analysis of the preoccupations with the Fall and Crucifixion that he sees as characterising Hughes's work from *Crow* to *Remains of Elmet*. Troupes sees little theological development in Hughes's post-*River* work, although he regards *Birthday Letters* as, 'an illustrative summation' of his ideas as they applied to the life and death of Sylvia Plath (6). In describing this trajectory, Troupes outlines a view of Hughes's development broadly in line with the scholarly consensus (for example, Keith Sagar's account of Hughes's movement from the 'world of blood to world of light', or from 'terror' to 'exultation'). That consensus, of course, is not generally expressed in Christian theological terms.[3]

In the process of developing his argument, Troupes makes many illuminating points and linkages. In the chapter entitled 'The Biological Fall' he draws parallels between the assertion in Hughes's essay on William Golding's *The Inheritors*, 'Baboon and Neanderthals' that homo sapiens neanderthalis was the 'perpetually superceded doppelganger' of *homo sapiens sapiens* and Robert Graves's concept, in *The White Goddess*, of the 'archetypal hero's blood-brother, his other self, his weird' (which binary Graves also frames as the 'sacred king'/'tanist' rivalry), using this to explore Hughes's use of the word 'doppelganger' in several of his writings, including the poem 'The Gulkana' from *River* and 'The Head' from *Difficulties of a Bridegroom*, developing a discussion of concepts of the nature of 'selfhood', 'self-knowledge' and 'god knowledge' (41-9). In the chapter, 'The Crucifixion', Troupes uses Emerson in order to characterise the ironic approach Hughes takes to Christianity in *Crow* as a step on a road in which, 'the spiritual man finds himself driven to faith by a series of scepticisms', which is another way of formulating Nietzsche's famous maxim, 'Some things are too important to be taken seriously'. Even in his agnosticism, scepticism, black humour and blasphemies, Troupes sees Hughes as a religious seeker (101). In the same long chapter, Troupes identifies a range of Hughes's poems that deal with the symbol of the crucifixion, (including 'Crow and the Sea', 'Gnat Psalm' and 'The Contender', but not, surprisingly, *Prometheus on his Crag*), and in a wide ranging argument taking in Dickinson, Moltmann, Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Superman Returns*, Leonard Baskin and a host of other poets, novelists, philosophers and cultural figures, argues persuasively that Hughes deploys it as his central symbol of the human condition (120).

Troupes concludes with a reflective and summarising afterword structured around the several poems Hughes wrote with the word 'glimpse' in the title or in

[3] Keith Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000) and *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation'* (Peterborough: Fastprint, 2009).

the body of the poem, seeing the word as not merely indicating a moment of partial perception, but as signifying an imperfect encounter with the 'ground of being' from the point of view of humanity's existential estrangement from that ground. On this basis of his analysis, Troupes reaches a conclusion of sorts about Hughes's beliefs, which, one imagines, mirror Troupes' own:

> We are not adrift in an existential nothingness, but are disconnected - estranged, fallen – from a definite *something*, something profoundly more than our self-contained self. Hughes tells us this much at every turn. (238-9)

Ted Hughes and Christianity is a brave, unorthodox and *unexpected* book – but a very welcome one all the same. Troupes has emphatically made his case that Hughes is a thinker in the Christian tradition – and in his maverick fashion has written a highly entertaining and thought provoking book. He has also done the world of Hughes scholarship a great favour, not only in the book he did write, but in the one he didn't – he has left plenty of room for other academics to provide the comprehensive overview of Hughes's engagement with Christianity that was my preconceived idea of Troupes' project. However, anyone setting out to write that book will now have no choice but to take *Ted Hughes and Christianity* into account, as indeed will those writing about any aspect of religion, spirituality and meaning in Hughes's work.

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Faber & Faber: The Untold Story, by Toby Faber, London, Faber & Faber, 2019, xv +426 pp., £20.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780571339044

Geoffrey Faber founded Faber & Faber in 1929, from the ashes of the dissolved Faber & Gwyer Ltd, 1924–1929. Geoffrey Faber's grandson, Toby Faber, later Faber's Managing Director, tells the fascinating history of the publisher in this new book, which delves into the Faber archive. The bulk of the text is comprised of excerpts of letters, memos and press releases, with commentary to introduce and contextualise each time period covered.

Ted Hughes's first letter to Faber on 20th March, 1957 concerned possible publication of *The Hawk in the Rain*, and Hughes informed the publisher that the

collection had won the First Publication Award in America. This led to confusion on the part of Geoffrey's daughter Ann, who thought that Hughes was American, gently corrected by Hughes in his follow-up. Ann then sent the manuscript to Charles Monteith, who passed it on to T.S. Eliot with the note: 'I don't feel we'd want to take him on yet [...] he might perhaps have a letter of encouragement' (246). Eliot's response is reproduced in facsimile as well as in transcription: 'I'm inclined to think we ought to take this man now' (246).

There are a number of other letters between Hughes and Faber included in the book, many of which are related to Sylvia Plath's work. Monteith asks if 'Sylvia has any stories' and hopes that she will send her novel to him (254). One of Plath's own letters to her mother Aurelia is included alongside the famous photograph of Hughes, MacNeice, Eliot, Auden and Spender from 1960. Monteith sent his condolences to Hughes after hearing the news about Plath's death, and later in 1963, the idea of publishing a collection of Plath's poetry was brought to the Book Committee. Hughes is keen for Plath's views to be known on the cover design for *Ariel*: 'I'd like the cover to be red, the print either black or yellow, preferably black. That was what she imagined' (280). On receipt of Berthold Wolpe's cover design, Hughes writes that 'it was a bit of a shock' (285), although any further information has been omitted. After receiving permission from Heinemann to publish *The Bell Jar* in paperback, Monteith asks Hughes if it can be published under Plath's own name: '[t]here's no secret any more about the identity of "Victoria Lucas"' (288). There are further discussions about Hughes's dissatisfactions with Wolpe's cover designs, with Monteith suggesting that he would prefer *Wodwo* to be given to Shirley Tucker, who designed the cover for *The Bell Jar*. One of the flaws with *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* is that it is not always clear what was finally decided, so there is no indication in the book who eventually designed the cover, although it looks like a Wolpe design. The remaining parts about Hughes relate to *The Iron Man*, with an internal note from Monteith detailing a disagreement between the children's editorial team, who were not in favour of publishing, and the adult editorial team who were. Toby Faber notes, '[i]t is lucky that the adult department got its way. *The Iron Man* continues to sell thousands of copies every year' (296).

This is an interesting book, which is well worth reading for an understanding of Faber & Faber's development up to 1990, where this history concludes. There may not be a great deal of *new* information for Hughes scholars, but it is certainly useful in contextualising Hughes's publication history.

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No Dialect Please, You're a Poet: English Dialects in Poetry in the 20th and 21st Centuries, edited by Claire Hélie, Elise Brault-Dreux and Emilie Loriaux, New York, Routledge, 2020, ix + 210pp., £115.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-367-25804-7

Making Integral: Critical Essays on Richard Murphy, edited by Benjamin Keatinge, Cork: Cork University Press, 2019, viii + 362, £35.00, ISBN 978-1-78205-325-5

These two books each contain a chapter on Ted Hughes, the first by Mike Sweeting and the second by Mark Wormald. They are listed in the updated Hughes Bibliography compiled by Katherine Robinson which is now available on the Ted Hughes Society website. In '"Lumbs and Orts" – Ted Hughes and Dialect' (73-86), Mike Sweeting asks, 'How is Hughes's relationship with dialect made manifest and what does his use of dialect achieve?' (73). His answer to the first question is 'sparingly', 'when family, home, or past come into focus', although 'the entire corpus of Hughes's poetic work is shot through with rhythmic structures which meld the speech patterns of his family and school friends together with those of Nordic and Northern balladry' (85). The detail of this has yet to be explored by a close analysis of examples. On the second question Sweet's answer is evidenced throughout the chapter: 'a jarring effect' that creates emphasis, curiosity, antiquity or 'an impression of "otherness"' (85). Again, the effect is often one of what Sweeting calls 'pulse', 'manipulated with great skill – staccato and laconic at some points, declamatory at others, just like speech that one can hear on market day in any small Yorkshire town' (85). There is probably a technical book to be written on Hughes's use of dialect and speech rhythms, one chapter of which would concern his influence upon the voices of the new Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage.

Mark Wormald contributed a chapter on 'Hughes and Ireland' to *Ted Hughes in Context* (2018) and in this new collection of essays on Richard Murphy he narrows his focus in '"Like fish under poetry's beaks": Richard Murphy and Ted Hughes' (163-182). Wormald charts what began as a poetic friendship, survived the trauma and aftermath of Plath and Hughes's 1962 visit, became a practical one in helping Hughes's short-lived attempt to settle in Connemara in 1966, to become one of mutual support, critique and stimulation. Wormald is particularly insightful in seeing this literary relationship play out behind Murphy's *High Island* (1974) and

Hughes's *Gaudete* (1977), especially in the Irish connections in the latter, more of which probably remain to be revealed in that notebook of verses which emerged like the otter from the shore below Doonreagan in Connemara – the glorious, neglected, vacanas of the Epilogue. This essay represents more than wonderfully detailed literary scholarship, but catches the tone of a warm, but slightly distant friendship and mutual concern. Murphy's papers at the University of Tulsa include notes of a 1974 interview with an American journalist in which Murphy says that Sylvia's conversation 'was really much more violent than his. And there was much more of it; he could hardly get a word in edgeways; she would take the words out of his mouth. Answer questions for him' (164-5). Murphy went on, Wormald reports, to celebrate Hughes's 'marvellous tenderness, love, love of children, and kindness' (165). We should be grateful to Wormald for this excavation alone, to add to the record.

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Mick Gowar is secretary of the Ted Hughes Society and Principal Editor of the peer-reviewed literary and publishing journal *Book 2.0*. Until his recent retirement he was a Senior Lecturer at the Cambridge School of Art and University Teaching Fellow at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. Mick is also widely known as an author of children's books and since 1980 he has written or edited over 100 books for children and young people, including five books of poetry, novels, short stories, and non-fiction books for major educational series such as OUP's 'Treetops' and 'Project X" reading schemes. He has visited schools, libraries, colleges and festivals throughout the UK and abroad to give readings, performances and lead workshops and has undertaken educational projects for, among others, the Philharmonia

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David Troupes has published two collections of poetry, and his work has appeared in literary journals on both sides of the Atlantic, including *Ambit*, *Magma*, *PN Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Nimrod International* and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. From 2016-18 he was a Fellow of the Jerwood Opera Writing Programme, collaborating with composer Joel Rust on a science fiction opera. His comic strip *Buttercup Festival* has appeared in *PN Review* and *Poetry Wales*, and can be read weekly at www.buttercupfestival.com. He was awarded his PhD from the University of Sheffield in 2018 for work which became *Ted Hughes and Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Mark Wormald is Fellow, College Lecturer and Director of Studies in English at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He is co-editor, with Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, of *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected* (2013) and *Ted Hughes, Nature and Culture* (2018), and having edited *The Ted Hughes Society Journal* since 2015 is now handing over that responsibility to James Robinson. Mark's book *The Catch: Fishing for Ted Hughes* is long overdue.