ANIMAL IMAGERY IN THE POETRY
OF TED HUGHES

by

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I should like to thank Professor Patricia Merivale for the help and encouragement she has given me during the writing of this thesis.
THESIS ABSTRACT

Animal imagery is an important element in the poetry of Ted Hughes. These images, catalogued in this thesis, constitute an emblematic bestiary which helps convey Hughes's most important themes: heroism and survival, myth, attitudes to sexuality, and the role and function of the poet. Implicit in Hughes's thematic explorations is his essentially pessimistic world view of a polarized Manichean universe in which many elements of life are in disintegration.

Hughes perceives the traditional role of the hero as incongruous with the fragmented consciousness of modern man. What emerges now as heroic is the will and endurance necessary for survival or for the acceptance of the ultimate merging of the self into the great processes of life. Hughes asserts also the need of man for some mythological framework within which to comprehend what he calls "the elemental power circuit of the universe." Animal images are the central focus for Hughes's important mythic presentations: metamorphosis as an image of the indestructibility of life, and the god-animal as symbol for creative and destructive forces in nature. Sexuality is such a creative force; the uninhibited actions of animals provide Hughes with useful images for his explorations of the attitudes and sexual practices of modern man. On a personal level, he sees sexual attraction as first savagely absorbing, then confining and stifling. However, Hughes views fecundity as a
process linking man with all other life forms, providing a sort of immortality through the continuous wheel of life and death.

The most central theme in the poetry of Hughes is a consideration of the nature and scope of the role of the artist. Hughes uses a wide range of animal images to suggest aspects of the poetic persona and to explore facets of the artist as both hunter and prey. Animal images present the role of the poet variously as prophet, critic, trickster or fool, most notably in the case of Crow.

These themes culminate in Gaudete, Hughes's most recently published book. They are presented in part through an emblematic bestiary and in part, through the "animal" nature of the central character, the Reverend Nicholas Lumb plus his demonic double, who becomes, microcosmically, a representative of the physical, sexual, "animal" side of man.
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INTRODUCTION

Animals appear in the work of Ted Hughes not only as poetic subjects but also in almost every poem as metaphor and symbol. These animal images constitute an emblematic bestiary, revealing in part, Ted Hughes's attitudes to important themes in his work: heroism, survival, myth, sexuality, and the role and function of the poet. This thesis will examine the significance of specific animal images Hughes uses in connection with these themes. Hughes selects animal images to exemplify human attitudes and behavior patterns. Animals react purposefully and instinctively as man often does not; therefore, animals can be seen as a bridge linking man to his primitive past:

Animals...each one is living the redeemed life of joy. They're continually in a state of energy which men only have when they've gone mad. This strength arises from their complete unity with whatever divinity they have...These spirits and powers won't be messed up by artificiality or arrangements...Mostly these powers are waiting while life just goes by and only find an outlet in moments of purity or crisis, because they won't enter the ordinary pace and constitution of life very easily. In fact, they have a hard time in this modern world. People are energetic animals and there's no outlet in this tame corner of civilization. Maybe if I didn't live in England I wouldn't be driven to extremes to writing about animals...My poems are not about violence but vitality. Animals are not violent, they're so much more completely controlled than men. So much more adapted to their environment. Maybe my poems are about the split personality of modern man, the one behind the constructed, spoiled part. 

Animals have been a life-long interest for Ted
Hughes; therefore, it is not surprising to find them an integral part of his work, as David Porter points out:

Animals and fish and birds have come to represent for Hughes intricate aesthetic shapes, life-giving sources to counter the sterility of contemporary life and, quite specifically, analogues of the poem, alert and shapely, and of the poet as well, attempting to survive in hazardous times....Basically, Hughes's animals...are an act of radical subtraction, the paring away of the rubbishes accretions to reveal interior precincts of power and dignity.2

Ted Hughes recalls having spent his first fifteen years trying "all sorts of ways of capturing animals and birds and fish".3 This familiarity has enabled Hughes to describe animals with a naturalist's accuracy, for his interest in animals later became one with his writing of poetry:

You might not think that...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 have been one interest...In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal.4

Hughes uses animal images, in part, as a means of portraying elements of a polarized, Manichean universe; therefore, his world view emerges as an essentially nihilistic and pessimistic one. The poetic animal images discussed in this thesis are selected from a catalogue of animal images in Ted Hughes's poetry (see Appendix). Not included in the catalogue, nor examined
in this paper, are the animal images in Hughes's prose, fiction, drama, writing for juveniles, or in his critical works or reviews.

A logical culmination of Hughes's thematic uses of animal imagery can be found in Gaudete, his most recently published book. This long narrative poem and its Epilogue are full of animal imagery which, once again, explores heroism, myth, sexuality, and the role of the artist. Gaudete deals also with man's divided self: "the split personality of modern man", which is dramatized by the central character, the Reverend Nicholas Lumb and his double who portray the contradictory and competing forces at war within man's soul. The polarities of instinct and reason are both presented in a negative way in this poem, largely through the animal imagery, by Lumb, his double and other characters. Nature is represented by frenzied Dionysiac forces in opposition to degenerate or attenuated cerebral processes which alienate man from natural responses to the rhythms of life.
INTRODUCTION

FOOTNOTES


4 Ibid.
In Ted Hughes's cosmology, heroes are not only men of action, but extraordinary survivors as well. Because animals act instinctively, expressing their bravery through physical action, they provide Hughes with apt heroic images. Sometimes Hughes's heroes are not associated with specific animal images but rather with animal vigour and action. Heroes define a society's values; the heroic examples Hughes provides define his. Many of Hughes's heroes are old or dead, for Hughes views the current state of heroism pessimistically, often looking back to a more physical and vigorous time. All his heroic examples are in tune with their animal nature: their essentially physical attributes of life.

In "The Ancient Heroes and the Bomber Pilot" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 57), the physical qualities of the "ancient heroes" are stressed:

With nothing to brag about but the size of their hearts,
Tearing flesh and swilling ale,
A fermenting of huge-chested braggarts.

Even their imagination is linked to action: "all flames/
In the white orbit of a sword". Because they remain in control, they make "their own good news, restuffing their dear/Fame with fresh sacks-full of heads". Their
fame is "dear" because it is purchased through immense effort and danger, and "dear" to the "bomber pilot" who contrasts their very physical warfare with his own mechanized variety. In comparison to the ancient heroes' "fulsome blood", the pilot is "pale" even though he "can boast/The enemy capitol will jump to a fume/At a turn of my wrist". The modern efficiency of battle is essentially impersonal, attributable to the war machine, not to the men who operate it. Hughes seems to suggest that the distance that mechanical weaponry places between man and object of his combat is directly proportional to the attenuation of his animal strength, thus again linking heroism with animal vigour.

Heroic animal strength is also linked to great will and purpose. In "The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar" (*The Hawk in the Rain*, pp. 58-9), the bishop endures being burned at the stake silently and unflinchingly because he wishes to convince his flock of the truth of his word by dying a hero's death:

Gave all he had, and yet the bargain struck
To a merest farthing his whole agony,
His body's cold-kept miserdom of shrieks
He gave uncounted, while out of his eyes,
Out of his mouth, fire like a glory broke,
And smoke burned his sermons into the skies.

Although the bishop's heroism is displayed in the denial of any overt response, it is still expressed in physical
terms through the incredible stoic endurance which Hughes describes so graphically.

Hughes's heroes can be ordinary too, like "Dick Straightup" ([Lupercal](#), p. 17), an eighty-year-old villager who is effortlessly larger than life. He has prodigious animal vigour "not dazed or bent" with "belly strong as a tree bole". His "great works" surprisingly are simply giant-sized versions of common rural activities. In his prime, he "emptied/...the twelve-pint tankard at a tilt", ate "thirty eggs". Dick's strength is like that of the ancient heroes, he did not need to exercise but was "nourished by stone and height". He is at one with the elements, as he demonstrates by surviving a night in which he "Grew to the road with welts of ice" emerging "warm as a pie" in the morning. Like the heroes of old he is "full of legend and life". Hughes admires Dick for his willingness to just be: he does not need a score card of achievements to define his heroic dimensions. But such men are part of the past. The poem closes with an elegiac obituary verse that makes it clear Dick is now one with the natural world to which he has been linked by his tremendous vitality: "Now, you are strong as the earth you have entered." The weasel, who lives in this earth, is a reminder of the continuity of the old man's strength and vigor:

This is a birthplace picture. Green into blue
The hills run deep and limpid. The weasel's
Berry-eyed red lock-head, gripping the dream
That holds good, goes lost in the heaved calm.
The dream of man's heroic stature lives on, although this world, Hughes suggests, has few men who embody it.

Such a heroic figure is the tramp in "November" (Lupercal, p. 49). The poet finds him lying asleep "In a let of the ditch" where the tramp, so tuned to the complete acceptance of his bitterly cold surroundings, rests peacefully in spite of wind and rain, his "hedgehog" beard "drawn in" for comfort. This makes the poet feel alien to the scene as the tramp is not:

...I thought what strong trust
Slept in him—as the trickling furrows slept,
And the thorn-roots in their grip on darkness

"Grip on darkness" foreshadows the death the poet finds deeper in the wood when he is confronted by "The Keeper's gibbet" with "owls and hawks/. . .weasels, a gang of cats, crows". These animals mimic the actions of the tramp "chins on chests/Patient to outwait these worst days". They too exhibit the heroic endurance, the animal continuity of life that is suggested by the weasel in Dick Straightup's "Obit." Hughes has described here a version of the heroic myth of endurance in the face of a disintegrating world:

Modern literature is devoted, in great measure, to a courageous, open-eyed observation of the sickeningly broken figurations that abound before us, around us, and within. Where the natural impulse to complain against the holocaust has been suppressed—to cry out blame, or to announce panaceas—the magnitude of an art of tragedy [is] more potent...And there is no make-believe about heaven, future bliss, and compensation, to alleviate the bitter majesty, but only utter
darkness, the void of unfulfillment, to receive and eat back the lives that have been tossed forth from the womb only to fail.

In one sense "broken figurations" describes the tramp, by definition an outcast from society and a failure by its standards. Yet his heroic endurance is like that of the animals on the gibbet who are "Patient" in their dead submission to "these worst days". Such endurance is not only heroic but also tragic in its futurity. In spite of this, Hughes sees this endurance, this acceptance of the cold and dead natural world of "November" (perhaps an image for the eleventh hour in the dissolution of the society of man), as an affirmation of the continuity of life. This is only discernible in the deep "wood" of the mind or visible in the elemental world of the tramp and the keeper's gibbet.

An ironic portrait of an obsolete "hero" type is "The Retired Colonel" (Lupercal, p. 42), a decayed relic of Victoria's empire; Hughes calls him a "Mafeking stereotype" which links him with Baden-Powell, "the hero of Mafeking" and his puritanical rules of conduct for boy scouts. In retrospect, this battle was part of an unfair and unnecessary war, but at the time it was celebrated as a victory of British morality and heroism. In Hughes's poem, the old man "lived on/Honouring his own caricature" suggesting an attitude of mixed cynicism and pity; the colonel is like an old
animal that "would not go down". Finally, the poet claims he has "mounted" the old man's head "only in rhymes" and asks "what if his sort should vanish?"

This has, in the view of many, already happened:

...the man-eating British lion
By a pimply age brought down.

Now, "Trafalgar" is, instead, filled with "rabble starlings" (tourists? immigrants?) who swarm around the stone lions which are as cold and unseeing as the dead colonel. "Pimply age" emphasizes the decline seen by the poet as in old Dick Straightup's bar companions who "taste their beer by invitation/Borrow their words by impertinence."

Hughes describes these two old men so admiringly not because of the worth of their actions, but because they have adhered to their particular code of living. Old Dick has remained true to the physical qualities that placed him above others of his kind. Similarly, the old Colonel has remained true to his notions of conduct which have "stiffened in his reddened neck", and true to his ideas of duty to empire. However obsolete these ideas have become, they are replaced in Hughes's view only by "posterity's trash". In both cases it is the staying power, the animal endurance in both men that Hughes admires and holds up for our appreciation.

Another treatment of the subject of a vanished
empire is found in "Gibraltar" described as a "rotted back" tiger: "Like a man-eater/After its aeon of terror to one fang". Its time of strength over, the garrison (like the colonel) is a "curio" being sold to tourists "With a flare of Spanish hands". Now this "rock" is in the palm of the "taxi-driver talking broken American" showing not only the complete disintegration of former imperial glory, but also the parodic nature of what has replaced it. This poem, like "The Retired Colonel" shows how heroic dreams of conquest are outlived by their useless relics. Hughes sees this progression of events as inevitable, for he ends the poem with a warning:

When the next Empire noses this way
Let it sniff here.

Hughes uses specific animal images also for specific aspects of his definition of the heroic ideal. In "The Horses" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 15), the poet is in a forbidding landscape, "a world cast in frost" (like the tramp in "November"). The horses, "Grey silent fragments/Of a grey silent world" symbolize unchanging and heroic power and endurance: "Their hung heads patient as the horizons". This image becomes a touchstone for the poet:

In din of crowded streets, going among the years, the faces,
May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place.
Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews,
Hearing the horizons endure.
The continuity of the natural world that this scene symbolizes for the poet has become a vision of comfort and serenity, unchanging and enduring.

Another example of heroic endurance is "Pike" (Lupercal, p. 56). The predatory nature of the pike is stressed; it is linked in appearance to a tiger: "green tigering the gold"; it is a killer "from the egg". The fish is described through two experiences recalled by the poet. The first is of "Three we kept behind glass" until there was

... finally one  
With a sag belly and the grin it was born with  
And indeed they spare nobody.

"Grin" suggests the rampant energy of the pike, its acceptance of its role of killer even of its own kind. The second example given is of two dead pike the poet finds "High and dry and dead in the willow-herb--". During the effort to swallow its fellow, the aggressor has died--yet both killer and killed have "the same iron" in their eye, a measure of their heroic disregard for the possible outcome of their natural aggression. These pike are linked in the poet's mind to an elemental and unknown force represented by legendary pike in a pool "deep as England", suggesting the continuity of the terrible forces the pike embodies. The idea of pike "so immense and old" fills the poet with fear "That past nightfall I dare not cast."
Perhaps this is the hidden fear of death itself:

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

The pike appears to exult in being part of this
dream of life and death. Hughes's description of their
appearance has linked them with the tiger. Another ex­
ample of his admiration for this heroic engine of death
is seen in "Crow's Table Talk":

The tiger
Kills like the fall of a cliff, one-sinewed
with the earth
Himalayas under eyelid, Ganges under fur—
Does not kill
Does not kill. The tiger blesses with a fang.
The tiger does not kill but opens a path
Neither of life nor of death
The tiger within the tiger:
The tiger of the earth. O tiger!
O brother of the viper! O beast in blossom!

This poem conveys a message about the enduring cycles
of rebirth found in Eastern religious philosophy. For,
in the words of the Bhagavad Gita:

Who believes him a slayer
And who thinks him slain
Both these understand not:
He slays not, is not slain.
He is not born, nor does he ever die;
Nor, having come to be, will ever more
come not to be.

Hughes finds this tranquil acceptance at the wheel of
life and death heroic.
A similar exploration of the heroic merging of the self into the great processes of life, which also uses animal imagery to convey its message, is found in "Cleopatra to the Asp" (Lupercal, p. 66). At the point of her death Cleopatra heroically asserts:

Now that I seek myself in a serpent
My smile is fatal.

As she dies, she becomes one with her kingdom: "Nile moves in me; my thighs splay/Into the squalled Mediterranean." She is as at peace with the eternal natural cycles as the tramp or Dick Straightup. Hughes reminds us once again that heroism lies in the joyous acceptance of one's part in the great cycles.

Hughes explores mock heroic folly in "Scapegoats and Rabies" (Selected Poems, p. 78). The soldiers in "Part I, A Haunting" are given their "heroic loom" from the needs or lacks of others:

From the status stars of old women,
From the trembling chins of old men,
From the napes and bow legs of toddlers

The soldiers are linked to the evolutionary processes by the "lizard spread/Of their own fingers" and their "bird stride". These images suggest they are performing by blind instinct rather than conscious volition. Their "eyeless, earless hearts" emphasize that their bravery is derived from false values, values which
make them part of an endless procession of death:

From the dead millions of ghosts
Marching in their boots,

"Lizard spread" suggests also an evolutionary regression inherent in such a repetitively destructive activity as soldiering. The anti-war sentiments expressed in "Scapegoats and Rabies" ("rabies" associates this frenzied behaviour with disease-maddened animals), is at odds with Hughes's apparent admiration for "ancient heroes". But this can be explained by observing the distinction he makes between the heroic activity of individuals who are strong and free and in touch with their animal strength, and the dehumanized automatons that are caught up in a modern war machine.

A society defines that which is abnormal, or disgusting, as "monstrous". Therefore, images of monsters are a useful means of defining the antithesis to the heroic, or describing actions that are unfamiliar and, therefore, misread or misunderstood. We can discern from Hughes's use of the monster image other elements of his value system not revealed in his presentation of heroes. In many cases, the "monsters" he uses are strange, archaic, or extinct animal images. In "Famous Poet" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 17) he describes a poet who has turned into a "monster" because he has outlived his virtuosity and talent. He had once appeared heroic
to the world but now has burned himself out through the
agony of self-expression:

Once, the humiliation
Of youth and obscurity
The autoclave of heady ambition trapped
The fermenting of a yeasty heart stopped
Burst with such pyrotechnics the dull world gaped

This behaviour has rendered him not only "obsolete", a
"Stegosaurus" but also a curiosity as well:

And monstrous. . .
As a Stegosaurus, a lumbering obsolete
Arsenal of gigantic horn and plate
From a time when half the world burned, set
To blink behind bars at the zoo.

The poet's immolation by his art has caused him to be
seen not as heroic, but abnormal, only worth staring at
as a curiosity. Here Hughes reveals, in part, his view
of society's perception of the artist. It requires "the
old heroic bang" from its artists, but does not compre­hend that they may be destroyed in the process. If
such destruction does happen, it only produces scorn,
ridicule or curiosity, certainly not pity or understand­ing.

But Hughes also sees a withdrawal from engagement
with life's pain and joy as abnormal. His "Egg-Head"
(The Hawk in the Rain, p.35) is monstrous because he fil­ters the reality of the world through a screen of intel­lectual conceit:

Brain in deft opacities
Walled in with translucencies, shuts out the
world's knocking.
The "Egg-Head" sets himself up with "braggart-browed complacency" as superior to

A leaf's otherness
The whale monstered sea-bottom, eagled peaks
And stars that hang over hurtling endlessness

Here is unnatural man, Hughes's example of progression in the wrong direction. The egg-head shapes the world into his own perceptions, through "circumventing sleights/Of stupefaction", therefore his head is a microcosmic image of the world shrunken to his own narrow intellectual dimensions. Hughes emphasizes the reductive nature of Egg-head's approach by using small, petty images: "Dew drop frailty", "pin-/Point cipher", "Fly-catching fervency". The hubris Egg-head exhibits is antithetical to the holistic world view that Hughes argues is more useful and realistic. Our part in comparison to "the whelm of the sun" is insignificant; therefore an attempt to cut the world down to our own proportions is not only mad, Hughes suggests, but monstrous.

An original, if horrific, view of the world is presented in "Last Lines" (Recklings, p.38), a poem in which Hughes describes a man who is slipping into the great scheme of things. The speaker in the poem has been, during life, "a loaded vampire" containing everything. In this interesting metaphysical conceit, the world has been contained by the speaker; this, in effect, makes him a god:
My blood goes now, and the starry city
Struggles every minute more sogged and
Helpless like a gnat in it. The nurses
Waver at the glass and make silent mouths
As their ark founders—but I ignore
Inflexibly and am God uncreating
All things during my minutes. . . .

The fish images Hughes uses for the nurses link them with
the origins of life as the "ark" image evokes the Flood
and the sweeping away of life by God. The speaker, who
has been a "loaded vampire" and who has "preyed on life
all this time", is now the victim of death, the ultimate
vampire, at his neck, not only feeding on him but un­
making him entirely. Here, man is seen either as a vamp­
ire consumer of other life or as ultimately consumed him­self "Into vapours—finally." On a metaphysical level,
too, man sucks experience from every encounter like a
vampire. This is made explicit in "Vampire" (The Hawk in
the Rain, p. 44) wherein a gate-crasher sucks reaction
from the company he both fascinates and drains:

You plead, limp, dangling in his mad voice, till
With a sudden blood-spittling cough, he chokes:
he leaves
Trembling soon after. You slump back down in a
chair
Cold as a leaf, your heart scarcely moving. . .

This may be seen as the monstrous, vampire-like relation­ship the artist has to his society from which he extracts
what he needs; in his every relationship, his central
focus is the obtaining of material for his art. From any
encounter, the poet can be a "grinning sack bursting with your blood". Sylvia Plath alludes to this single-minded blood letting in "Kindness":\(^5\)

The blood jet is poetry
There is no stopping it.

In "Root, Stem, and Leaf" (Selected Poems, p.72), Hughes makes what appears to be a reference to the voracity of Plath, the artist:

\[\text{...not doors, not borders}
\text{Will be proof against your foraging}
\text{Through everything inhuman or human}\]

Monsters can also be internal demons. In "The Black Beast" (Crow, p.28), Crow, like the boys in Golding's Lord of the Flies, searches for this beast everywhere but within. Man often uses psychological projection instead of introspection, finding all the evil or monstrous elements of the human psyche located in others or reposed in some mysterious unknown:

\[\text{Where is the Black Beast?}
\text{Crow split his enemy's skull to the pineal gland.}
\text{Where is the Black Beast?}
\text{Crow crucified a frog under a microscope, he peered into the brain of a dogfish.}
\text{Where is the Black Beast?}\]

Crow's methods of investigation suggest Hughes is calling into question the effect of scientific research, warfare, space exploration, and all other activities of enquiry man uses to chase the unknown. By definition,
an investigation separates and possibly alienates the
searcher from that which he studies. Therefore, the in­
vestigator forgets that both he and his subject are part
of an integrally related existence, as Hughes sees it to
be in "Fire-Eater" (Lupercal, p. 33). In this poem, the
whole of the universe is seen as a unity:

Those stars are the flesched forebears
Of these dark hills, bowed like labourers,
And of my blood.

In contrast, Crow's vain search for the Black Beast illus­
trates ironically mankind's fragmented consciousness. By
such activities of separation as Crow's, all man succeeds
in doing is to isolate his internal demons and beastliness
by recognizing them in others.

The same process occurs in "Crow's Account of St.
George" (Crow, p. 31). The plot of this poem is an adapt­
ation by Hughes of a Japanese folktale wherein a man
dreams he has killed a monster only to find on waking
that he has slain his wife and child. In Hughes's poem,
St. George, through his violent actions, manufactures his
own monsters:

He melts cephalopods and sorts raw numbers
Out of their dregs. With tweezers of number
He picks the gluey heart out of an inaudibly
squeaking cell--
He hears something. He turns--
A demon, dripping ordure, is grinning in the
doorway.
The monsters or demons thus created are, as in the case of "Egg-Head", part of a false and distorted view of the world so often promoted as the true one. William Barrett points this out in *Irrational Man*:

...modern man seems even further from understanding himself than when he first began to question his own identity. Of documentation of external facts we have had enough and to spare, more than the squirrellike scholars will ever be able to piece together into a single whole, enough to keep the busy popularizers spouting in bright-eyed knowledgeability the rest of their days; but of the inner facts—of what goes on at the center where the forces of our fate first announce themselves—we are still pretty much in ignorance...With civilizations, as with individuals, the outer fact is often merely the explosion resulting from accumulated inner tension....

These "inner tensions" produce the "Black Beast", ogres or monsters with which foolish man attempts to do battle, resulting in similarly self-inflicted pain as that of Crow's St. George, who slays his monster only to find instead: "Where his wife and children lie in their blood."

Hughes's attitude to life as shown in these poems suggests he holds a gloomy, yet similarly Romantic view to that expressed in these lines of Wordsworth:

```
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--
We murder to dissect.
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The following comment on Romanticism appears apposite to Hughes's attitudes towards modern man's decline:

However we choose to characterize Romanticism...as the protest of feeling against reason or again as the protest on behalf of nature against the encroachments of an industrial society—what is clear is that
it is, in every case, a drive toward that fulness and
naturalness of Being that the modern world threatens
to let sink into oblivion.

It certainly can be argued that Hughes equates the en­
croaching forces of civilization with the disintegration
of the animal world which results in the subsequent dis­
integration of the imagination. This is seen in "Fourth
of July" (Lupercal, p. 20):

Columbus' huckstering breath
Blew inland through North America
Killing the last of the mammoths.
The right maps have no monsters.
Now the mind's wandering elementals,
Ousted from their traveller-told
Unapproachable islands,
From their heavens and their burning underworld
Wait dully at the traffic crossing,
Or lean over headlines, taking nothing in.

In this case, "right maps" is ironic. "Monsters" are
associated with life forms which make man seem insignif­
icant, puny. There is no vision, no adventure in a tame
and paved world that leaves man dull and uncomprehending.
The ironic title, moreover, emphasizes how little there
is to celebrate in the American way of life, from
Hughes's point of view. In "The Last Migration", 10
man is also seen as a monster of destruction, "a new god
with narrowed eyes", a "God of the Steady Gaze" un­
making the animal world with his rifle. For example:
Then God called to the doves.
And the Passenger Pigeons,
The foliage of a continent's fatness,
Whirled up, darkening the old heaven,
And came whirling down
Into the vortex and rifling
Of the Word.
They dived in under the eyebrow.
Their lineage, like a whip, cracked to an end.

Finally, "God saw everything He had unmade and Behold/
It was what He wanted". But as the poem ends, there is
a suggestion that nature will triumph in the end: "right
around the world, the waters trembled/And began to move
...." This appears to indicate that there will again be
a resurgence of life from the cradle of the sea.

In several other poems, Hughes suggests that nat­
ural forces will re-assert themselves. In "October
Dawn" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 41), the return of an
ice-age is foreshadowed as a "premonition" in each win­
ter:

First a skin, delicately here
Restraining a ripple from the air;
Soon plate and rivet on pond and brook;
And tons of chain and massive lock
To hold rivers. Then, sound by sight
Will Mammoth and Sabre-tooth celebrate
Reunion while a fist of cold
Squeezes the fire at the core of the world.

This "Dawn" of a new era demonstrates the fragility of
man's proud accomplishments. Conversely, the steaming tropical forests or vast deserts of the former age of dinosaurs may also return. This is suggested in "Heatwave" (Recklings, p. 16), in which Hughes describes an unusually hot period in London. He uses desert imagery evoking the ancient Egyptian past; the buildings are "Like shut-eyed, half-submerged Nile bulls". Not only does this hint at a return to a primordial landscape, but also a return to a more savage elemental time, the noise of the modern world silenced:

The main thing is the silence.  
There are no charts for the silence.  
Man can't penetrate it. Till sundown  
Releases its leopard.

Consistently throughout his work, Hughes forecasts the eventual dissolution of modern societies by inexorable natural changes which will return the world to earlier states. An example of such an "Ozymandias" poem is "Snails"; these animals are examples of earlier forms of life still extant: "Out of the earliest ooze, old/Even by sea-stone time." The snails slowly "Climb/The roses", symbols of man's attempt to cultivate and control the natural world.

Hughes finds a warning of what is to come in shells, bones, and relics of animal life forms stretch-
ing back to the beginnings of time; relics of the past foreshadow the future. In "Era of Giant Lizards", Hughes imagines a man as contained inside a primitive insect:

In the little lamp of his belly is an umbrella man
Lost among glittering traffic, and a whitehead quiet at a problem.

This demonstrates how man fails to see the real dimensions of his world because he is a prisoner of his own subjectivity. In contrast, in this poem, the toad is part of the unity of life having "stone-motion, mould pride, loam song--". The most powerful image in "Era of Giant Lizards" is "three notes of a nightingale in a dark wood"; this calls to mind the myths and artist parables associated with this bird. Most important, the nightingale is linked with "the dark wood" of the imagination and with the forces of nature:

A cry that momentarily threatened the earth
Gulped back into a bird the size of an oak leaf.

The listener realizes not only the power of the bird's song, but also that it predates man and may ultimately survive him; although in modern times this power is "gulped back" or diminished.

Although an individual's life is fleeting, the cycles of life endure. Hughes often uses sea images to
convey these ideas. For example, in "Shells", the shells are relics

From that gigantic bed of the sea
Where darkness on time
Begets pearl, monster and anemone

The sea is not only the cradle of life but also an integral part of every living thing, a reminder of life's timeless continuity:

Under the silk of the wrist a sea, tell[s]
Time is nowhere.

This explains, in part, why man is inherently fascinated by the sea.

Crow, too, is fascinated, although he is unaware that he is a relic from the oceanic cradle of life. As he stands on the beach, he ponders the nature of the sea and "grasped he was on earth", but the mysterious sense of separation he feels is painful; therefore Crow wonders "What could be hurting so much?". Perhaps Crow unconsciously longs for an impossible redemptive rebirth.

In "Crow and the Sea" (Crow, p. 82), Crow tries once again to reconcile himself to the strange attraction the sea has for him. He tries "ignoring the sea", "talking to the sea", "sympathy for the sea", to no avail; he cannot adjust. Crow's efforts toward reconciliation mimic the indissoluble but ambivalent relationship the
child has to its mother (which is also explored in "Crow and Mama" (Crow, p. 17). Finally, Crow gives up:

He turned his back and he marched away from the sea
As a crucified man cannot move.

Here, Hughes is describing once more how all elements of life are linked together. Crow, representing mankind, is alone in his consciousness of separation and in his sense of isolation from other forms of life.

This alienation is examined in "Relic" (Lupercal, p. 44). The speaker in the poem finds a jawbone at the edge of the sea and implicitly contrasts the continuity of life it represents with his own sense of singularity. The creatures of the sea have no "camaraderie" but

There, crabs, dogfish broken by the breakers or tossed
To flap for half an hour and turn to a crust Continue the beginning.

Unlike man, sea creatures have only "stretched purpose" in their jaws. The jawbone relic the poet finds did not "laugh" or "grow rich", but "gripped, gripped and is now a cenotaph" or a monument to the splendid and uncomplicated continuity of the sea's creatures, who have a function in both life and death. Although man is a relic from the sea, he has, Hughes suggests, no such
purpose or sense of direction.

Some day, Hughes implies, the sea will claim its supremacy; its power is symbolized by "Ghost Crabs" (Wodwo, p. 21). Many critics, Sagar included, assume that these crabs are Hughes's own invention, when actually they are a species of crab (pallid in colour, hence their name), which are nocturnal feeders, living in the intertidal zones of the North Atlantic. Hughes sees them however, not with a scientific eye but with the eye of the imagination. In this poem, ghost crabs are transformed into symbolic manifestations of the power of the sea. They are warriors, emerging "like a packed trench of helmets" (a World War I image), who appear to be battling man's "nothingness". This is perhaps, in part, an assault on the barriers of civilization which man has set up and which cause him to have a distorted and egocentric perception of his place in the world. It is this the crabs have come to change:

We cannot see them or turn our mind from them. Their bubbling mouths, their eyes Press through our nothingness where we sprawl on our beds, Or sit in our rooms.

This poem reminds us that crustaceans are older than
man; truly "These crabs own this world". Although they are relics of a primordial past,

They are the powers of this world
We are their bacteria
Dying their lives and living their deaths

In other words, man cannot now survive in the sea from whence he came, nor can the crabs survive entirely in man's world. Yet they are a part of both worlds, a bridge reminding man both of his origins and of his weaknesses and limitations, perhaps even suggesting the dubious potential for his survival:

They are the turmoil of history, the convulsion
In the roots of blood, in the cycles of concur­rence.
To them, our cluttered countries are empty battleground.

In Sagar's view:

The horror of this poem is not only in what the crabs are and do, but in the fact that they are so totally oblivious of the devastating effect they have...Crabs are particularly apt since they appear to be machines specialized for stalking, fastening, mounting, tearing, kept, in the daytime, at the bottom of the sea, which is also the unconscious....If they are "God's only toys", it follows that we are not God's toys. God is as unaware of us as the crabs are. For his toy soldiers the world is 'empty battleground'; for him it is empty playground as he childishly, pointlessly, unleashes these murderous toys.

"Ghost Crabs" suggests a cosmic creator who callously watches the nightmarish aspects of the evolutionary processes that he has set going, in the manner of a
clockwork toy, unfold. Hughes, adopting an attitude of inverted romanticism, seems to view survivors and relics from the past such as the ghost crabs as further pessimistic evidence for his nihilistic world view.
CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES


3 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), printed in "Notes", p. 172 as a "recent Hughes poem".


14 "September", The Hawk in the Rain, p. 27.

15 "Crow on the Beach", Crow, p. 40.

16 Sagar, p. 71.
CHAPTER II
THE MYTHIC ANIMAL

Ted Hughes's choices of animal images to portray qualities in man such as heroism, or the capacity for survival, are, as has been seen, interestingly personal and original. This is true also of Hughes's bestiary of mythological animals, although his animal myths are very often allusive and evocative reworkings of familiar mythic forms: biblical, Greco-Roman, Eastern, among others. Hughes adapts existing animal folklore freely to suit his needs; his choices are eclectic, not schematic, and are remarkably wide-ranging, reflecting Hughes's interest in anthropology.

Mythological animal images traditionally mirror specific qualities in man and demonstrate symbolically the shared relationship of man and animals to the dynamic forces of nature. Calvin Bedient calls Hughes "Our first poet of the will to live";¹ Hughes's use of animal myths confirms this, for his mythic animals tend to be survivors, demonstrating his affirmation of life, his gloomy and negative "will to live".

Animal images pervade man's religious and mythological expression throughout the world. Such emblematic animals, like Hughes's, are by no means universal
in meaning; "zoological geography"\(^2\) dictates the selection of mythological animals by a given people:

...the mythological motive upon which they [animal myths] are based is the same always and everywhere. Thus the different characters, the different necessities of the people...requiring them to adopt different homes and climates, led to this result...that what was loved and desired in one place should be feared and dreaded in another, and vice versa; that an object should assume a divine aspect in one place...in another be considered demoniacal.

Similarly, because Hughes's mythic explorations are both microcosmic and macrocosmic, he sometimes uses the same mythic animal image to portray quite different characteristics or to reveal positive and negative aspects of the same idea.

Two important ways Hughes uses the mythological animal image in his work emerge: first, the god-animal as symbol for creative and destructive forces of nature—at work and at war; secondly, the theme of metamorphosis: the animal as symbolic shape-changer. Hughes asserts the need of man for some mythological framework with which to perceive and comprehend "the elemental power circuit of the universe":

When the old rituals and dogma have lost credit and disintegrated, and no new ones have been formed, the energy cannot be contained, and so its effect is destructive—and that is the position with us...
In the old world God and divine power were invoked at any cost—life seemed worthless without them. In the present world we dare not invoke them—we wouldn't know how to use them or stop them destroying us. We have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination—anything bigger introduces problems... That is the psychological stupidity...and we're paying the traditional price. If you refuse the energy you are living a kind of death...What is the alternative? To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control—rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one.

Hughes portrays both the power of creation and destruction in his mythology; he sees them in a kind of contrapuntal balance of forces. Conversely, he describes the myth of the void which is generated internally in man when he has nothing to believe in.

This void is explored in "Gog, I" (Wodwo, pp. 150-3). The title appears to be a parodic parallel to the name of God (or "the dragon in Revelations"). The Speaker in the poem perceives himself as Gog, a gross animal (an image for man, alienated from the rhythms of nature?), who tries to run away from his unbelief:

I woke to a shout: 'I am Alpha and Omega'.
Rocks and a few trees trembled
Deep in their own country.
I ran and an absence bounded beside me.

Paradoxically the speaker personifies God as an animal "absence" which pursues him like an unseen dog. He tries
to argue with himself rationally that the concept of "god" means merely having a basic need supplied:

The dog's god is a scrap dropped from the table
The mouse's saviour is a ripe wheat grain.

Yet he still feels incomplete, envying even the symbiotic harmony of the lichen's existence:

How fat are the lichens
They cushion themselves on the silence.

In contrast, Gog hears, and suffers the pain of isolation and separation:

I listen to the song jarring my mouth
Where the skull-rooted teeth are in possession.
I am massive on earth. My feet bones beat on the earth
Over the sounds of motherly weeping....

This "motherly weeping" represents the woe inherent in life from the moment of birth, and the sorrow of mother nature who simultaneously gives both the gift of life and death to all creatures.

Throughout history, mythic animals have been used as emblems for the power of the continuity of life in the natural world, as well as to illustrate the ultimate destruction of all living individuals, which is implicit in the yearly cycles of growth and decay, life
and death. As Frazer points out: "The corn spirit is very commonly conceived and represented in animal form...this fact explain[s] the relation in which certain animals stood to the ancient deities of vegetation." In "The Green Wolf" (Wodwo, p. 40), Hughes perhaps alludes to an ancient ceremony of the "Brotherhood of the Green Wolf", a vegetation deity ritual which Frazer suggests may have originally involved the sacrifice of the human representative of the vegetation god. In Hughes's poem, "your neighbour" is dying of a stroke which has left him speechless:

... all the huge cries
Frozen in his brain his tongue cannot unfreeze—
While somewhere through a dark heaven
The dark blood clot moves in.

This "dark blood clot" symbolizes the obliteration of consciousness by death; in one sense, nature can be seen as the green wolf which eventually consumes all: "One smouldering annihilation/Of old brains, old bowels, old bodies." In another sense, man too is a "green wolf" or a predator on the green world which in turn, reabsorbs him as nourishment.

This idea is echoed in "A Vegetarian" (Wodwo, p.30). The vegetarian is "fearful" of "the hare with the manners of a lady", of "the bull's tongue snaring
and rending", and "of the sheep's jaw moving without mercy". Yet when the vegetarian dies, "Tripped on Eternity's stone threshhold", he too becomes victim of the inexorable natural world which will begin to feed on him. Now dead, and "Unable to move", he hears "the hounds of the grass" which have come to rend him. Here Hughes emphasizes the predatory nature of all life; both animal and vegetable worlds are mutually dependent in endless cycles of predator and victim, life and death. Thus the title "A Vegetarian" is ironic.

The inevitability of these natural cyclical processes is further emphasized in "Karma" (Wodwo, p. 160) wherein Hughes offers a mythological and historical perspective on destruction of life and the victims of destructive events such as "The seven lamented millions of Zion". Now these dead are obliged to endure their Karma or fate as lower forms of life. They

... have gone into dumber service. They have gone down
To labour with God on the beaches. They fatten
Under the haddock's thumb. They rejoice
Through the warped mouth of the flounder.

All their previous agony, all their "world-quaking tears" are, Hughes suggests, fruitless, and what is more, irrelevant to "The God/Of the world/Made of blood". However, life is less painful, there is more
chance to "rejoice" Hughes implies, from the elemental perspective of "the warped mouth of the flounder" than from the painful consciousness of man.

In "The Bear" (Wodwo, p. 41), a ravenous nature is symbolized by a bear of mythic dimensions. This poem is a shortened form of an earlier one called "The Brother's Dream", wherein the bear, inhabiting the dream landscape of a religious "brother", is slain in a manner reminiscent of St. George's heroic battle. George MacBeth comments:

In a sense it seems to be a reworking of the legend of St. George in modern psychological terms. The bear is perhaps an image for our animal nature, or more precisely the emotion of fear, which can only be controlled by the ruthless cruelty of the will.

In the stripped down version of this poem "The Bear", which appears in Wodwo, the narrative elements have been removed, the bear becoming a more universal, more abstract symbol for the power of nature, the ravenous consumer of all life:

The bear is a river
Where people bending to drink
See their dead selves.

Hughes's choice of the bear as a symbol of such fearful power evokes the bears which inhabit children's tales, perhaps symbolizing for a child all the unknown elements and frightening powers which inhabit a yet
un-experienced world.

In "Bones", a title suggesting memento mori, Hughes points out the unpredictable aspects of destructive natural forces. In this poem, nature is presented as "a crazy pony" which foolish man tries to ride or tame:

\[
\text{Hero by hero they go} \\
\text{Grimly get astride} \\
\text{And their hair lifts.} \\
\text{She laughs, smelling the battle—their cry comes back.}
\]

Nature is ultimately untameable, yet man continues fruitlessly to try to control her:

\[
\text{Every effort to hold her or turn her falls off her} \\
\text{Like rotten harness}
\]

Bones, the "crazy pony", is an apt image for nature's capricious displays of power (floods, earthquakes, for example) and particularly apposite to Hughes's fatalistic attitude:

\[
\text{...this is the stunted foal of the earth} \\
\text{She that kicks the cot} \\
\text{To flinders and is off.}
\]

Hughes depicts the earth as a horse in an earlier poem, "Constancy". In this poem, the power and endurance of the earth is stressed; this is in
contrast to the exploration of the capriciousness of nature in "Bones". In "Constancy" Hughes describes how the earth prevails as man and his dreams do not: "The mind's/clouds are under its hooves", for the influence of man's presence is as fleeting and evanescent as clouds that pass and repass over the earth.

Nature is a creator as well as a destroyer; many of Hughes's mythic animal images represent the powers of generation which can be as relentless and unpredictable as the forces of destruction. In "The Bull Moses" (Lupercal, p. 37), Hughes employs a traditional mythic symbol for fertility: the bull. The boy who watches the animal senses the god-like powers contained in the bull's aloof and self-absorbed presence:

The brow like masonry, the deep-keeled neck:
Something came up there onto the brink of
the gulf,
Hadn't heard of the world, too deep in itself
to be called to,
Stood in sleep....

The power of nature, represented by the bull's virility, is temporarily controlled by man but not conquered: "The weight of the sun and moon and world hammered/To a ring of brass through his nostrils."
Like the bear who "sleeps/In a kingdom of walls/In a
web of rivers", the bull Moses holds his animal force quiescent "In the locked black of his powers". He waits:

Deliberate in his leisure, some beheld future Founding in his quiet.

The "shouting, waving" boy, "Was nothing to him". Throughout the poem, Hughes focuses on the duality of fear and fascination inherent in the boy's response to the power of the bull. His reaction is similar to the ambiguity associated with the mythic ritual of the Spanish bullfight. Hughes's bull is Moses:

The animal lives in a world without time or death. The consciousness of Moses is a racial consciousness. What redeems his servitude is that he 'wombs', that is, he fills the wombs of many cows with his progeny...He is but a link in the unbroken continuity from his wild ancestors to his wild descendants, when man has ceased to rule...like the other Moses, he beholds the promised land...His descendants will escape from captivity and inherit the earth. Providence will see to that—the powers which inhabit the darkness of his dream. [12]

In the context of Hughes's work, perhaps the eventual triumphant destiny of the Bull Moses' descendants is not as certain as Sagar suggests. In many poems, particularly through reptile images, Hughes hints at a return to a more elemental age with primitive forms of life taking over. Moreover, his reptile images
suggest the gradual ascendancy of the powers of the serpent of Eden.

In "Dog Days on the Black Sea", the people on the beach foreshadow a return to an ancient time; the bathers are seen as lizards:

The earth's on heat—all day the fever is a glittering
Creep of cars towards the beaches. There the lizards
Sprawl like a massacre, or lurch from towels
To plunge into the surf of prehistory.

In Hughes's mythology, there is implication that the ultimate demise of man and a return to primitive forms has been inevitable since the time of creation.

In "Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural" (Crow, p. 79), the speaker sees, prophetically, the disintegration of the world:

The trees cough and shake,
And the great lizards go galloping past,
heads high,
And horses breaking to freedom.
The soil cracks between tussock and tussock
Between my feet, as a mouth trying to speak,
The mortuary heart and guts of the globe
Trying to speak, against gravity,
The still-warm, stopped brain of a just-dead god
Trying to speak
Against its thickening death.

The "great lizards" have returned, but they too will
be destroyed as part of

The mauled, blood-plastered, bodiless head
of a planet

Lopped before birth

Perhaps this power of destruction is the serpent's, ever-present and antagonistic to God's creation since the beginning. This is suggested in "Reveille" (Wodwo, p. 35):

No, the serpent was not
One of God's ordinary creatures.
Where did he creep from
This legless land-swimmer with a purpose?

The serpent, a force of darkness, bites Adam and Eve and crushes Eden before moving out into the world:

The black thickening river of his body
Glittered in giant loops
Around desert mountains and away
Over the ashes of the future.

Here, the serpent is transformed into waters of death winding through a wasteland landscape antithetical to God's intended garden, bathed with the waters of life. Ever since Eden, Hughes suggests, the powers of the serpent have been gaining ascendancy. Madame Blavatsky writes that the serpent, as bearer of a divine creative wisdom or logos has taught man to be a creator himself. This is ironic, because most of man's
"creations" have caused the destruction of other living things. Man, Hughes implies, is definitely on the side of the snake. Here he appears to hold a Blavatskian, rather than an orthodox view of the snake.

In "Theology" (Wodwo, p. 149), the serpent is seen as container of the whole world:

Adam ate the apple  
Eve ate Adam  
The serpent ate Eve  
This is the dark intestine

This appears to be a Hughesian version of the Hindu myth which teaches that the world is merely a dream in the mind of the creator, Vichnu, and subject to being dissolved at his will. In "Theology", the snake is in control of creation, leaving God helpless:

The serpent, meanwhile,  
Sleeps his meal off in Paradise—  
Smiling to hear  
God's querulous calling

The snake is "smiling" because he knows any other attempt at creation by God will only result in his having another meal. We, then, as the inhabitants of the "dark intestine", are part of the snake's cosmos, not God's.

Hughes invents a creation myth with ironic humour in "Apple Tragedy" (Crow, p. 78). Here, the
identity of the creator is ambiguous:

So on the seventh day  
The serpent rested.

God then invents cider by squeezing the apple. This is drunk by Adam, Eve, and the serpent who become intoxicated, leading to their first sexual activity and Adam's despair:

Eve drank and opened her legs  
And called to the cockeyed serpent  
And gave him a wild time  
God saw and told Adam  
Who in drunken rage tried to hang himself  
in the orchard.

This poem may allude to the serpent's association with Bacchic orgies as a sacred phallic symbol, or perhaps Hughes is suggesting, as elsewhere in Crow, that sexuality, though basically a creative impulse, also has resulted in man's confusion and rather comic despair. The snake is a symbol of sexuality and, as such, is a symbol of disorder as well:

...Eve started screeching: 'Rape! Rape!'  
And stamping on his head.  
Now whenever the snake appears she screeches  
'Here it comes again! Help! Help!'  
Then Adam smashes a chair on its head,  
And God says: 'I am well pleased'  
And everything goes to hell.

Here Hughes makes fun both of man's sexual predicament
and of God's punitive attitude. This suggests the whole situation is only "tragedy" if man takes himself too seriously. In "Snake Hymn" (Crow, p. 87), the snake is transformed into a god-like phallus that perpetuates life: "It was the gliding/And push of Adam's blood." Because this sexual power is a neutral life force, it does not in itself deliberately cause pain. It is a force oblivious to the feelings of joy or sorrow of the living vessels which contain it:

Nothing else has happened  
The love that cannot die  
Sheds the million faces  
And skin of agony  
To hang, an empty husk  
Still no suffering  
Darkens the garden  
Or the snake's song.

Pain caused by such "love that cannot die" is as ephemeral and as irrelevant as the snake's "empty husk". Yet, the snake's power prevails.

The theme of metamorphosis is an important part of Hughes's mythology. He uses it in a special sense, as an image of indestructibility, of endurance, and survival, most notably through his anthropomorphic character, Crow. In Hughes's poetry, metamorphosis is also an image for the transformation or distortion of life into the gross, the horrible, or the more primitive. In other words, Hughes uses images of metamorphosis as one more way of describing the eternal battle
between the forces of creation and survival and the
forces of disintegration.

Crow, Hughes’s most metamorphic character, uses
his Protean powers for survival; he is "stronger than
death":

Crow is a Proteus whose violent metamorphoses are
modes of minimum survival, his scarcely triumph­
ant tenacity what he has to Crow about. He has,
on contemporary evidence, achieved a better ad­
aptation to the Universe than either God or man. 16

Crow seemingly is set apart from the rest of creation;
Hughes calls him "God's nightmare's attempt to improve
on man". 17 Sagar quotes a recording Hughes made in
which he further explains the mythological origins of
Crow:

Crow is created, as part of a wager, by the myster­
ious, powerful, invisible prisoner of the being men
called God. This particular God, of course, is the
man-created, broken-down, corrupt despot of a ram­
shackle religion...He accompanies Crow through the
world in many guises, mis-teaching, deluding, temp­
ting, opposing and every point trying to discourage
or destroy him. Crow's whole quest aims to locate
and release his own creator, God's nameless hidden
prisoner, whom he encounters repeatedly but always
in some unrecognizable form.

This projected framework is not clearly discernible in
the Crow poems. However, there are many suggestions
that a Protean Crow is in opposition to a Protean God,
who can be viewed either as antithetical or as identi-
cal to the serpent. Such a creator is both ambiguous and paradoxical in attitude and action.

In "Crow Communes" (Crow, p. 30), Crow tries to wake the snoring God, "exhausted with creation". He begins to eat the mountain he sits on which is "God's shoulder". This "communion" transforms him, giving him power and knowledge (as does the apple of Eden), thus making him "impenetrable". Yet, because he has learned the true nature of this creator, he becomes disillusioned by what he learns, and, therefore, is appalled.

Crow's survival is associated with eating, which involves an internal, symbolic metamorphosis. Crow's eating not only signifies the satisfying of essential physical needs, but also suggests the sacramental eating practised by many primitive people who consumed selected animal parts (or parts of slain enemies) which were supposed to transfer to the eater admired qualities such as strength, courage, or wisdom considered present in the ritual meal.

In the satiric "A Horrible Religious Error" (Crow, p. 45), when man and woman first see the serpent, they fall down in worship: "They whispered 'Your will is our peace'". But Crow: "Grabbed this creature by the slack-skin nape,/Beat the hell out of it, and ate it." By this action, Crow has also symbolically communed
with the serpent; thus, he has internalized the Manichean dichotomy into his own being. This gives him a panoramic but bitterly ironic perception of the universe. In "Crow's Theology" (Crow, p. 35), Crow acknowledges this dichotomy:

Crow realized there were two Gods—
One of them much bigger than the other
Loving his enemies
And having all the weapons.

One suspects the god with all the weapons is the snake.

Crow communes also with dead heroes through eating in "Crowego" (Crow, p. 61); this gives him past and future perspective:

Crow followed Ulysses till he turned
As a worm, which Crow ate

Then:

Drinking Beowulf's blood, and wrapped in his hide,
Crow communes with poltergeists out of old ponds.

This transforms Crow into a living book of prophecy:

His wings are the stiff back of his only book,
Himself the only page—of solid ink.

He sees in these old heroes the violence of the past
which is also contained by the present and is to come in the future:

So he gazes into the quag of the past
Like a gypsy into the crystal of the future,
Like a leopard into a fat land.

Crow himself has metamorphic power; he transforms experience into words, but words are elusive (see Chapter IV on the poetic persona), so he tries again and again:

Crow turned the words into bombs—they blasted the bunker.
The bits of bunker flew up—a flock of starlings.

Until, finally, the words take on a life of their own; Crow is left "Speechless with admiration".

Internal metamorphosis is often caused by the need for a defence mechanism against pain. In "Crow's Elephant Totem Song" (Crow, p. 57), this idea is conveyed in a legend or parable form. Once the elephant was

... delicate and small
It was not freakish at all
Or melancholy.

This elephant is envied by the Hyenas who nevertheless worship him with a mock-psalm to his beauties before
they tear him to bits. Then at the "Resurrection" the elephant

    . . . . got himself together with correction
    Deadfall feet and toothproof body and bull-
dozing bones
    And completely altered brains
    Behind aged eyes, that were wicked and wise.

Unfortunately, the elephant in losing his vulnerability has also lost his grace, his "ageless eyes of innocence and peacefulness". Now the elephant too sings a song of longing

    . . . . deep in the forest maze
    About a star of deathless and painless peace
    But no astronomer can find where it is.

The Hyenas, "opposite and parallel" also have a different song, full of bitter realism:

    And they sing: 'Ours is the land
    Of loveliness and beautiful
    Is the putrid mouth of the leopard
    And the graves of fever
    Because it is all we have--'

This parable suggests that the world, in a post-"Resurrection" state, contains all the old violence but is less vulnerable, more "wicked and wise". Metamorphic changes wrought to provide protection against hostility, Hughes implies, only push the tension between forces of aggression and defence to higher levels of intensity.
Hughes also uses images of natural metamorphosis to convey ideas of decay and degeneration. In "Dully Gumption's Addendum" (Recklings, p. 10), maggots are equated with the myth of royal supremacy which the "bumpkin English took...for the words of god-sent laws." These maggots occupy the people, thus keeping them subservient:

So these maggots bit deep into the brains of the bumpkin English.
Englishman after Englishman till eaten to a mummy skin
Around a man-weight maggot and stiffened
To a chrysalis from which a blackfly in no time
Flew up into the rotten face of the Kingdom.

The blackfly image suggests that the same cycle of metamorphosis will continue, perpetuating the debilitating class society of England. The same ideas, hatch ed as new maggots, are passed on from generation to generation.

The maggot image also appears in "Fishing at Dawn" (Recklings, p. 9). Here, too, a maggot is inside the head of the speaker:

God yawns onto the black water
There aches through my dull head
The bellowing of the maggot.

"God yawns" suggests an indifference to the eventual corruption and decay of all life. The "bellowing of the
maggot" may refer to the poet's battle with externally imposed ideas which are dominating his mind, perhaps the ideas described in "Dully Gumption's Addendum". These ideas may also hatch into something parasitic and unspeakable in the poet's art.

Finally, Hughes presents a myth of the eventual destruction of the world in "Notes for a Little Play" (Crow, p. 86). After this destruction, life will go on with horrible metamorphic changes:

Mutations—at home in the nuclear glare.
Horrors—hairy and slobby, glossy and raw.
They sniff towards each other in the emptiness.
They fasten together. They seem to be eating each other.
But they are not eating each other.
They do not know what else to do.
They have begun to dance a strange dance.

Despite the total demolition of the earth, despite the flames in which they move "blindly", these creatures are dancing the dance of procreation. Hughes sees this dance as the compulsive entrapment of sexuality which ensnares all living things. Through his use of animal imagery, Hughes makes provocative and vivid explorations of his ideas about the violence and tension inherent in man–woman relationships.
CHAPTER II

FOOTNOTES


3 Ibid., p. xv.


5 Faas interview, p.9.


7 J.P. Frazer, p. 870.


9 George MacBeth, p. 332.


12 Sagar, pp. 40-41.


14 Quoted by M. Oldfield Howey in "The Serpent as Phallic Emblem", Treasury of Serpent Lore, ED. Brant Ay- 

15 Hodder M. Westropp and C. Staniland Wake, Phal- 
ism in Ancient Worship in the Religions of Antiquity 

17 Faas interview, p. 18.
18 Sagar, p. 118.
CHAPTER III
ANIMAL IMAGERY AND ASPECTS OF SEXUALITY

Animals provide Ted Hughes with metaphors for his explorations of the sexual attitudes and practices of modern man. Some of these attitudes may reflect Hughes's own; others may be seen as the dispassionate findings of an anti-romantic observer of modern behaviour on the sexual battlefield. Sexuality is, of course, inextricably linked with the continuous cycles of life and death which is the central focus of many of the poems. Moreover, because sexuality is frequently associated with violent emotion, it often reveals cruel and elemental aspects of the nature of man. The uninhibited actions of animals are, therefore, useful images for man's sexual activities.

There are a number of poems on sexual themes in Hughes's first book, The Hawk in the Rain, which reveal his fundamental attitudes towards man's sexual nature. In "Macaw and Little Miss" (p. 13), the bird represents the feared power of male sexuality:

Like a torturer's iron instrument preparing
With dense slow shudderings of greens, yellows, blues,
Crimsoning into the barbs

The bird, symbolizing the exotic and fearful unknown
of sexual experience, simultaneously fascinates and frightens little miss who "cajoles" and teases the bird until he bursts forth "in conflagration and frenzy". This she may safely observe because the bird is caged. The macaw is also linked with the warrior she dreams of:

... lightning and iron,
Smashing and burning and rending towards her loin:
Deep into her pillow her silence pleads.

The little miss does not see the bird's inner fires, its "staring combustion":

All day he stares at his furnace
With eyes red-raw but when she comes they close.

suggesting that the girl has not faced her sexual desires except obliquely, not realizing their potential for destruction. Symbolized by the macaw, male sexual power is shown as a force that is both fascinating and terrifying.

A more traditional "bull" image for the male sexual force is used in "Secretary" (p. 21). In contrast, the female secretary is given the image of a starling, a bird of almost frightening fecundity, described elsewhere by Hughes as "rabble starlings" and "mobs...struggling and squealing filthily...like
giant blow-flies". 2 Ironically, the secretary denies and represses her potential generative power. Her fear of sex is reinforced by the "bellies of bulls" surrounding her:

She hurries among men, ducking, peeping Off in a whirl at the first move of a horn.

At night, unlike little miss who lies "bared", she "lies with buttocks tight" unfulfilled and afraid, "hiding her lovely eyes" or evading her sexual attractiveness. Hughes's choice of a starling image (and that of a "clockwork mouse") for the secretary, emphasizes the unnaturalness of her attitudes. This is in contrast to "little miss" who demonstrates the simultaneous fear and longing inherent in a young virgin's attitude towards sexual experience. Both these portraits of unfulfillment are examples of the thwarted sexuality caused by civilized man's denial of his natural animal processes or his lack of opportunity to express them.

In "Meeting" (p. 39), the eye of a goat "A square-pupilled yellow-eyed look", suddenly encountered by a poseur, a man who "Smiles in a mirror, shrinking the whole/Sun-swung zodiac of light to a trinket shape" shocks him into confronting his own animal nature, his goatishness. The goat is associated with Pan,
a fertility god, who causes "panic" in those he encounters. This meeting shows the man the falsity of his notion of life as a "role/in which he can fling a cape", therefore bringing him into touch with his own sexuality. The man now realizes that he cannot "outloom life like Faustus", but that he is governed by elemental forces "Slow and cold and ferocious". Like the secretary, he has denied his animality and when he sees it mirrored in the goat's eye, he is frozen with fear.

Conversely, the possibility of the taming of sexual drives that are too wild and violent by the ordering principles of ritualized or programmed behaviour is explored in "The Dove Breeder" (p. 23) and in "A Modest Proposal" (p. 25). In the first poem, love which is symbolized by a hawk is seen as analogous to violence and disorder:

Love struck into his life
Like a hawk into a dovecote
What a cry went up!

The appearance of the hawk is sudden and uninvited, emphasizing the dominating power of the libidinous urge. It destroys the dove breeder's interest in "fantails and pouters" perhaps images for sublimative activities or less rapacious, more domestic forms of love. At the end of the poem, the dove breeder is no
longer "mild-mannered" but aggressive like the hawk:

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

His sexuality, symbolized by the hawk, has now become a sport as he is transformed from victim to hunter. There is a suggestion of cruel detachment in his new attitude as well: the association of love and sport.

A similar idea is presented in "A Modest Proposal". The two lovers in the poem are as violently antagonistic as "two wolves, come separately to a wood". They are, however, totally absorbed in each other "Distracted by the soft competing pulse", and are mutually bent on the submission or the annihilation of the other:

... . . . Neither can make die
The painful burning of the coal in its heart
Till the other's body and the whole wood is its own.

From a "thicket" the bleeding combatants see a contrasting vision of harmony:

The great lord from hunting. His embroidered Cloak floats, the tail of his horse pours,
And at his stirrup the two great-eyed greyhounds
That day after day bring down the towering stag
Leap like one, making delighted sounds.

Sagar describes this scene as a positive model for a
love relationship:

...Suddenly the violence gives way to grace, the claustrophobia, heat and darkness of the thicket, to cool air, light and space. The two greyhounds embody what the wolves can hardly conceive, a relationship of absolute concord. The wolves for fear of each other are unable to hunt, and therefore to live. The grey-hounds, in partnership, bring down the towering stag every day. Their freedom is a condition of their service to the great lord to whose leash of love they submit. He has tamed them, not by violating them, but by releasing creative energies through the discipline of co-operation and respect and ceremony.

This is true in part, but like the dove breeder's "big-eyed hawk", the greyhounds are directed by the will of their lord, therefore are not free to hunt except by permission. A similar idea is presented in Thom Gunn's "Tamer and Hawk" included in Selected Poems by Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes (which incidentally, includes Hughes's similar poem, "The Dove Breeder"). In Gunn's poem, the hawk/lover is explicitly captive:

Even in flight above
I am no longer free:
You seel'd me with your love,
I am blind to other birds—
The habit of your words
Has hooded me.

Such control, therefore, results in the loss of freedom.

The picture Hughes paints in "A Modest Proposal" is an archaic one, part of a romanticized past; even falconers are few today. Therefore, the concord epitomized by the greyhounds is an ideal, almost unattainable,
and even more rarely sustained. Today, human passions are no longer predictably governed by social order and tradition. Certainly, modern lovers lacking the social restraints that once existed are as free to rend each other as do Hughes's wolves; however, their freedom to do so makes their actions spontaneous as the dogs' and hawks' are not. The lovers who submit to "the leash of love" may find the price of forfeited freedom too high. But perhaps Hughes is also suggesting that some form of governed behaviour is the inevitable sequel to violent passion in such relationships that are able to survive the mutually destructive first phase.

This idea of the changing stages of a love relationship is explored in "Two Phases" (p. 29). In the first "phase" the lovers, like the wolves, are totally absorbed by each other. Thus "holiday ran prodigal". In the second "phase", however, the lover is enforcesly at labour:

Sweats his stint out
No better than a blind mole
That burrows for its lot
Down some dark hole.

The mole's blindness is reminiscent of Gunn's hooded hawk. Hughes's lover must now work for his "Flaming moon and sun" perhaps images for the delights of passion he must now labour to enjoy.
Yeats sees the male-female coming together as "a brief forgiveness between opposites". Hughes, in contrast, describes desire as a "vicious separator" which "cold-chisels two selfs single as it welds hot/Iron of their separates to one" ("Incompatibilities", The Hawk in the Rain, p. 26). The destructive nature of a lovers' union is explored again in "Lovesong" (Crow, p. 88), full of predatory animal imagery, particularly associated with the "she" of the poem:

She bit him she gnawed him she sucked
She wanted him complete inside her

Her smiles were spider bites
So he would lie still till she felt hungry

This may refer to the habit of some female spiders of devouring their mate after union (In reciprocal form, this ferocity is echoed by a line in "FallGrief's Girl-Griends" found in The Hawk in the Rain, p. 28: "...the insects couple as they murder each other"). "Lovesong" proceeds through a catalogue of mutual violence:

And their deep cries crawled over the floors
Like an animal dragging a great trap.

The lovers' fierce actions finally result in a complete loss of individuality: "In the morning they wore each other's face."

David Holbrook, discussing this poem in the con-
text of Hughes's relationship with his late wife, Sylvia Plath, quotes the following pertinent passage from Hughes's interview with John Horder in 1965:

There was no rivalry between us...in these circumstances you begin to write out of one brain...we were like two feet of one body...A working partnership, all absorbing we just lived it. It all fitted very well....

Yet such closeness must surely have been oppressive, too. Olwyn Hughes recalls her brother saying of his marriage to Sylvia, "We were like two gerbils running around in a cage." Gerbils are actually small desert rats, therefore this image suggests the relationship became one of barren imprisonment and sterile repetition, at least from Ted Hughes's point of view.

In "Actaeon" Hughes presents a modern version of the myth as in the context of a husband-wife relationship. The husband is destroyed, not by a goddess-like Diana figure but by an "every-day housewife". In Hughes's version, the husband is punished not for seeing his wife too completely but for not really seeing her at all. Her face is in "jig-saw parts"; her husband "could not see her face". This suggests her psychic fragmentation and lack of identity. The husband is oblivious to her mounting anger caused by the blurring of her individuality by their suffocating union. The parts of her face:
Began to spin  
Began to break out  
Openly they became zig-zagging hounds  
Their hunger rang on the hills  
Soon they were out of control

When the wife's antagonism is finally integrated and focussed, she attacks him:

Those hounds tore him to pieces  
All the leaves and petals of his body utterly scattered.

This is another example of Hughes's concept of the female as potential malignant destroyer.

In "A Childish Prank" (Crow, p. 7), Crow describes sexual attraction as a sort of cosmic joke, which results from his having invented sex. While God sleeps, Crow changes soulless man and woman from "Dully gaping, foolishly staring, inert" to the compulsive lovers described in "Lovesong" (surely an ironic title). Crow does this by stuffing one half of the worm, temptation, in the body of each:

He stuffed the head half head first into woman  
And it crept in deeper and up  
To peer out through her eyes  
Calling its tail-half to join up quickly, quickly  
Because O it was painful.

Crow enjoys his joke watching man and woman entrapped yet somehow oblivious to the nature of the force that
has caught them up in a mutual and endless predicament. Yet their sexual urge has given them a vitality and a purpose which they lacked before Crow's "prank". Woman is presented here in the role of temptress, because it is she who calls to the man. This echoes an earlier poem, "Fallen Eve" (Recklings, p. 17), which has a tone of sadness instead of the ironic humour of "A Childish Prank". Once again sexuality is seen as leading to the obliteration or death of the self. Eve cries:

Love is weak to protect as webs... In April my body begins to frighten me And my sleep fills with weeping— Again and again the forced grave of men.

It is Eve who bears the blame for her destructive function. As Hughes states in "Billet-Doux" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 24), love is a drive towards completion, or an ache for a missing unknown:

I come to you enforcedly— Love's a spoiled appetite for some delicacy

Yet, in "A Dream of Horses" (Lupercal, p. 21), the dream of the grooms of magnificent horses can be seen as a dream of ideal sexuality. Jung, for example, links horses with the sexual impulse, as does D.H. Lawrence. In the dream, the grooms become "bodied by horses/ That whinnied and bit and cannoned the world from its place." This suggests as do the other poems, that sexual activity displaces all else from the mind. The grooms
wish to "die" in the Shakespearian sense:

And we longed for a death trampled by
such horses
As every grain of the earth had hooves and
mane.

When they awake their vision of procreative power has
fled; the appearance of the real world is, in contrast,
dry and barren: "Out through the gate the unprinted de­
sert stretched/To stone and scorpion. . . ." Moreover,
the horses they tend, antithetical to their dreamed
counterparts, are "listless and wretched". This poem,
therefore, links active sexuality with an animal well­
being: "The vital fire, the spirit electrical/That puts
the gloss on the normal hearty male".  

Perhaps the most vivid and positive of Hughes's
descriptions of the vitalizing energy generated by sex­
ual activity is "Bawdry Embraced" (Recklings, p. 24),
written about Sylvia Plath and himself early in their
relationship:

They caught each other by the body
And fell in a heap:
A cockerel there struck up a tread
Like a cabman's whip
And so they knit, knotted and wrought
Braiding their ends in;
So fed their radiance to themselves
They could not be seen.
And thereupon a miracle!
Each became a lens
So focussing creation's heat
The other burst in flames.
The "cabman's whip" image once again links the activity of the lovers to that of horses. The treading cockerel reinforces the idea of the potential fertility of their lovemaking. The mutual obliteration of the self inherent in their sexual union is also a means of illumination, just as the wondrous horses are illumined by the moonlight of the grooms' dreams. "Bawdry Embraced", however, is satiric and anti-romantic in much of its animal imagery. The speaker rejects:

Great farmy whores, breasts bouncy more
Like buttocks, and with buttocks like
Two white sows jammed in the sty door.

The chiasmus in the second line emphasizes the gross repulsiveness of the image. He rejects also: "tigery tarts with rubber backs/Switches for tits and neon blood" and "the foxy slut who still/Scrubs at carrion with her brush." The poet links various sexual attributes of women to the pejorative animal image he finds most appropriate. But all suggest merely the degree of repulsion or lustful attraction they have for him. Even the heroine of the piece, "Sweety Undercut", is described as a slab of meat in this inverted love ballad. There is a suggestion that the speaker in the poem resents the compulsive power her sexual attraction holds over him.

Another example of Hughes's satiric treatment of sexuality is found in "The Court Tumbler and
Satirist". The tumbler is a sexual performer as well as a juggler and acrobat unbeknownst to the "princes" who hire him. They view him as a boar or rogue elephant: "Scrambling after girls, blooding his tusk" and as a "two-backed beast/Sparring neck and neck with every slut". Instead, he cuckold them all and "exercises to correct the court's stiff cock strut". This implies that the tumbler's more animal nature gives him the virility that has been lost by the effete noblemen who posture instead of perform. Ironically, the princes despise the tumbler for the very qualities that make their wives succumb: "Each starchy beauty/Greedy to tumble and make her figure quick." "Quick" suggests either they are made pregnant or they are filled with the animal vitality only the tumbler can supply.

As in "Two Phases", Hughes sees the sexual relationship as a process, changing with changing needs and attitudes, just as the "starchy beauties" now must get from the tumbler "all that necessity can get from duty."

The inevitable process in a love relationship is outlined more explicitly in "Birdsong". First, love is a wren "That sings in the orchard blossoms" suggesting domesticity and fruitfulness as well as a
fiercely protective attitude towards the family unit. Next, love is a "falcon", an image of power and dominance as is the "cruel leopard" which is the next stage, suggesting the mutual ravaging of the wolves in "A Modest Proposal." Then, love becomes a "nightly owl" perhaps foreshadowing the death of content, for in the next stage love dies, a madonna "That did not even say good-bye." But, later, "love" is revived once more: "love like a circus animal returns"; now the relationship is merely the performance of trained animals (like the tumbler), in which "elephants stand on their heads" rather than a spontaneous or voluntary act. The implication here is that "love" relationships often continue out of habit, or economic or other necessity. As the poem ends, love becomes a crow "dancing on a desolation", a negative image only appropriate to a harsh and sterile union. Perhaps few couples today endure through all the stages Hughes has described in this poem, particularly when one considers the trend towards less stable male/female relationships that has occurred since this poem was published twelve years ago.

In "Witches" (Lupercal, p. 48), Hughes once again describes woman's sexual nature in a negative way. He recalls that each woman was once witch-like "each
rosebud, every old bitch" and how they bargained their bodies to the devil "that/Went horsing on their every thought." Because of this, man must continue to suffer: "we are devilled", not only from the supernatural powers once held by women "they scowled the strong and lucky low", but for the uneasiness of mind they still cause: "who's to know/Where their feet dance while their heads sleep?" Once again this poem emphasizes the disruptive nature of female sexuality.

In "Genesis of Evil", Eve herself is seen by implication as a witch, who each night, retells to Adam the "the bloody love-thriller" she hears each day from "her little snake, her familiar". However, this sexual tale makes God, who comes to hear "creeping close in the form of a mouse" so envious of the snake's tale "That he became blind with jealousy". This suggests that sexuality has an invincible power of fascination in spite of its association with evil or bedevilment.

However, Hughes looks at the fulfilment of natural functions through sexuality with a kindlier eye. In "Soliloquy of a Misanthrope" (Hawk in the Rain, p. 22) he states that after death:

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. . . I shall thank God thrice heartily
To be lying beside women who grimace
Under the commitments of their flesh
And not out of spite or vanity.
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Yet, ironically, even 'vanity' can lead to such fulfillment. In "That Girl" the subject of the poem is saving to buy a "maxi-coat"; its purpose is not warmth, but sexual completion:

... she wants it
To hurry her
Down that lane—which her wanted money
Conceals like a bank
Of flowers, and at the end of which,
When the flowers are gone,
She will lie naked on the bottom-most
weave of life.
No better than a bacteria

"Weave" links this image neatly to the weave of the coat her vanity impels her to buy. "Bank" associates the needed money with the bank of earth upon which she will lie. "Bacteria" suggests her only purpose is to multiply. She will now be in tune with even the most basic elements of animal life "coddled and supplied/
By grateful nature."

Fecundity is, of course, an integral part of the cycles of life and death. In "Mayday on Holderness" (Lupercal, p. 11), Hughes describes life as a huge "gut"; the decomposition of one life form becoming the food for another:

What a length of gut is growing and breathing--
This mute eater, biting through the mind's
Nursery floor, with eel and hyena and vulture,
With creepy-crawly and the root,
With the sea-worm, entering its birthright.
"Mayday", traditionally a festival of new life, suggests a celebration of the processes of death and rebirth. These are brought to the speaker's mind as

I look down into the decomposition of leaves—
The furnace door whirling with larvae

"Furnace" suggests both the life-giving heat of the sun and the heat of generation and the quickening of life echoed later in the poem, "Hot haynest under the roots in burrows". It implies also a final conflagration, both natural and man-made, like the "wars" that "smoulder" under the North Sea and are now "Curded to beastings" or are providing food for the next wave of life. The processes of generation and regeneration are seen in this poem as one with the wheel of reincarnation:

Birth soils
The sea-salts, scoured me, cortex and intestine,
To receive these remains.
As the incinerator, as the sun,
As the spider, I had a whole world in my hands.
Flowerlike, I loved nothing.

This poem provides a panoramic look at the cyclical processes of life in a dispassionate way. The speaker is detached as he was not in many of the other poems on sexuality. He is not dismayed by the killings and death implicit in the cycle. Nor do other participants in this dance of life and death show concern:
"the crow sleeps glutted and the stoat begins." The mating couples "are laughing in the lanes". Man, like the other animals, is ultimately indifferent to the eventual destruction of all generated life.

Another treatment of this topic is found in "Toll" (Recklings, p. 14), in which humanity is compared to the generations of fish borne by the Gulf Stream into endless consumption:

These are the aged who hide their sadness
And deaths in rinds of bacon and are inherited by flies
These are the children multiplied every morning
With the harvest of hen-eggs; these are the suburbs
Bearing their cargo of people under the skylines
As the Gulf Stream bears its populations
Without birth-pangs or death-pangs, with only abundance
Into the bellies of Europe.

This is a more pessimistic picture than in "Mayday on Holderness". The aged are "inherited by flies" which suggests a pointless existence. Even the title suggests the tolling of a funeral bell.

In "To Paint a Water Lily" (Lupercal, p. 29), Hughes describes the deaths and births of animal life that "paint" the lily and feed its growth. The pond is like the one in "Mayday on Holderness", a furnace full of the animals of death, animals with "Jaws for
heads, the set stare,/Ignorant of age as of hour". Such a "darkness" is as important as the upper atmosphere to the generation of the beauty of the lily, whose leaves pave "The flies furious arena", where "There are battle-shouts/And death cries everywhere hereabouts." This poem shows that beauty is inextricably linked with death and horror.

In "Lupercalia" (Lupercal, p. 61) Hughes suggests that not to be part of this process is worse than death itself. In this poem, the ancient Roman fertility festival is recounted. In Part I, the sacrificial dog, full of its animal vitality, "loved its churlish life". Its mouth "like an incinerator" links it with the "furnace" in "Mayday on Holderness". The dog is part of the processes of life "good enough/To double with a bitch as poor". Similarly, the sacrificial goats described in Part III are associated with cycles of generation by Pan and Dionysus images: "Bellies round as filled wineskin" and "spirit of the ivy". In contrast, the barren woman waits, like Shakespeare's Calpurnia, to be touched by the "fresh thongs of goatskin" carried by the racers. She is:

...flung from the wheel of the living
The past killed in her, the future plucked out.

The poem closes with a plea "Touch this frozen one", 


an intimation that all who are "snatched in/To the fig­
ure of the racers" should rejoice to be playing a part
in the eternal processes of generation and dissolution.

Ted Hughes's ideas about man's sexual nature are
somewhat ambiguous. On a personal level he sees sexual
attraction as first savagely absorbing then ultimately
confining and stifling. He sees also fecundity as a
process that links man with all other life forms pro-
viding a sort of immortality through the continuous
wheel of life and death. We learn, as in "The Man
Seeking Experience Enquires His Way of a Drop of Water"
(The Hawk in the Rain, p. 37), that though his own
nature is "all/Dropletkin, sisters and brothers of
lymph and blood." Finally, he understands the droplet
"was clear simple water still". In other words, the
processes of life are relatively unchanging. There is
no gained "experience" but simply a circle of birth,
death, and renewal. Hughes's attitudes are akin to
those of Eastern philosophy. Of violence in life and
death, Hughes says:

Poetry only records these movements in the
general life...it doesn't instigate them....Any
form of violence—any form of vehement activity--
invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power
circuit of the Universe.

Modern man apprehends this energy most clearly, per-
haps, through experiencing the power of his sexual
drives.
CHAPTER III

FOOTNOTES

3. *Sagar*, p. 22.
13. Like the wren in *Macbeth*: "for the poor wren, the most diminutive of birds will fight... against the owl" (IV,ii).
16. Faas interview.
CHAPTER IV
ANIMAL IMAGES AND THE POETIC PERSONA

The identification of the nature and scope of the role of artist is an important consideration in the task of defining Ted Hughes's cosmology. Hughes uses a wide range of animal images to suggest aspects of the poetic persona, and to explore facets of the role of artist both as hunter and as prey. The poet, in either instance may be an oracular voice attempting to impose his will on mankind as seer, critic, or change-maker. The role of the poet as Hughes sees it and portrays it through various animal personae has elements of nineteenth century romanticism in its composition, for Hughes views the artist essentially as a visionary. Such romanticism:

...expresses the conviction that there is order and meaning immanent in the natural universe...It is the pure experience of value which arises from...an observation of the natural world...the peculiar task and privilege of the poet, the artist [is] to communicate that experience in the work of art... the artist both repeats and embodies and also makes possible for others the act of seeing through and past, of dissolving all purely human or role-playing perceptions which mask the world....

In "Hawk Roosting" (Lupercal, p. 26), one of Hughes's most admired poems, the poet is seen as a
bird of prey whose "manners are tearing off heads". Here, Hughes sees the artist as both critic and destroyer who creates order through destruction and who holds "Creation" under his control, signifying that the artist has the power to use any aspect of human experience as raw material for his art. This hawk suggests that the end product of art is clarity and truth from the tearing apart of illusion.

The poet, like the hawk, is set apart, emotionally detached from humanity: "The earth's face upward for my inspection". In this poem, the bird is "roosting" and while doing so is contemplating the process and functions of his role. The poet sees himself in a position of ascendancy: "It is all mine"; therefore he views himself at the centre of things. For as the hawk spirals upward he does not acknowledge his own movement, but from his point of view remains at the centre: "I...revolve it all slowly". When he roosts his point of view remains unchanged: "I hold Creation in my foot." Of this hawk Hughes says:

...What I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking...I intended some Creator like the Jehovah in Job but more feminine. When Christianity kicked the devil out of Job what they actually kicked out was Nature....

Through this hawk, then, we see the poet in the
role of spokesman for nature. He views the natural world dispassionately, for it is, of course, based on the cycle of death: the food chain. The hawk as ultimate predator is on top. Analogously, the poet occupies the same ascendant position as destroyer of and feeder upon mankind's actions and ideas, using them for the raw materials of his art.

There is also a component of savagery in the sense of purpose inherent in the artistic process. This is illustrated in "Thrushes" (Lupercal, p. 58), wherein the "purpose" of "Mozart's brain" is linked to the ferocity of a shark's mouth:

That hungers down the blood-smell even to the leak of its own Side and devouring of itself.

The artist creates single-mindedly in spite of the self-destructive aspects of his efforts; as in the myth of Philomela, beauty is born through pain, and pain is metamorphosed into beauty through the agony of the poet.

In the earlier hawk poem "The Hawk in the Rain" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 11), the dichotomy between the limited physical self and the transcendent force of the imagination is symbolized by the hawk who

Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye. His wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet, Steady as a hallucination in the streaming air.
The hawk is an image for the poet's imagination which soars freely and "effortlessly" as opposed to the physical self:

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

The wings of the poet's free spirit in contrast "hold all creation". This equilibrium is impermanent, however, and is tenuously held by "The diamond point of will that polestars/The sea-drowner's endurance", the dynamic tension between mortal limits and the limitless power of the imagination. Once again the will to create is linked with savagery, for the speaker in the poem is drawn toward "The master-/Fulcrum of violence where the hawk hangs still." The final and inevitable destruction of the self is implicit in the hawk's eventual fate: "To mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land." Hughes is never sentimental; here, he reminds us that all effort, poetic or otherwise, is terminated by death. Implicit in this reminder of mortality is the notion of failure also: the hawk dies; the poet's vision fails; or his "prey" eludes him.

In the poem "Wings" (Wodwo, pp. 174-76), several
artists are described as flawed birds of prey. Kafka is seen as a broken-winged owl. Not only Hughes, but Kafka himself connects hunting with the pursuit of his art. Of his writing, Kafka says:

> It can (and this seems most likely) lead to madness... The pursuit goes through me and tears me apart. Or I can (Can I?) manage to keep on my feet and thus let myself be carried along by the pursuit.

It is as a failed predator that Hughes has pictured him: "He is a man in hopeless feathers," who has fallen "stunned by the glare." Perhaps this "glare" is the light of truth, too painfully clear, therefore destroying the artist or preventing him from capturing his imagined goal.

Not all artist personae need be writers. In "Wings—Part III", Einstein too is seen as a fallen bird, his mouth "blasted with star-vapour". As he plays Bach, the musical order and harmony mirror his dazzling vision of the universe and its mystical and terrible order from microcosm to macrocosm. This nihilistic vision has left him shrunken and depleted:

> He bows in prayer over music, as over a well
> But it is the cauldron of the atom
> And it is the Eye of God in the whirlwind.
> It is a furnace, storming with flames.
> It is a burned-out bottomless eye-socket
> Crawling with flies
> In fugues
A strikingly similar theme is found in "Owl's Song" (Crow, p. 55); it is another account of the visionary artist or seer who becomes terrified by the vastness and horror of his own vision of disintegration:

He sang
How everything had nothing more to lose
Then sat still with fear
Seeing the clawtrack of star
Hearing the wingbeat of rock
And his own singing

Even the stars are evidence of the predatory processes inherent in the destructive cycles of the universe.

In "Crow Improvises" (Crow, p. 64), Hughes provides a rather satirical list of examples of the destruction wrought by creative "sparks" including another reference to Einstein's insight into the nature of the universe:

So he rested a dead vole in one hand
And grasped Relativity in the other
The spark that gored through gouged out his wordage.

Antagonistic or destructive elements, however, may conversely generate or instigate positive or creative counter-forces, thus giving impetus to action or expression. In "Crow Hill" (Lupercal, p. 14), the violence of wind and rain which erodes the face of the land therefore:
The arrogance of blood and bone
And thrown the hawk upon the wind
And lit the fox in the dripping ground.

This idea of one force becoming the agent which produces a counter-force is made explicit in "Humanities" (Recklings, p. 3):

When Caesar clamped mankind in his money-mill
With a cry of pain out flew the effeminate soul
And turned into a vengeful Christ
And like an amoeba multiplying himself with Pentecost.

Critic David Porter also believes Ted Hughes's art is predatory in nature:

Ted Hughes...conceives poems as hard and predatory...instinctively about the business of managing the practical difficulties of survival. This radical conception means two basic things: poems inhabit the same world as assassinations and must not allow themselves to be made trivial by comparison; poems make the essential thing happen, they rescue us from inanition. This is their totemic value as the main regenerative acts of the human psyche.

The end products of art forged by antagonistic forces (e.g. Caesar and Christ, a very nineteenth-century antinomy) remain, in spite of the temporal nature of their agents. In "Stations, Part III" (Wodwo, p. 38), there is reinforcement of this idea as well as perhaps a reference to Hughes's late wife, Sylvia Plath:
You are a wild look—out of an egg
Laid by your absence.
In the great Emptiness you sit complacent,
Blackbird in wet snow.

The blackbird thrush, one of the most musical of European songbirds, is silent in winter just as Plath is silenced now by death. Her music lives on, however: "Absence/Weeps its respite through your accomplished music." The thrush in its own way is predatory, too, as Hughes reminds us in "Thrushes": "--with a start, a bounce, a stab/Overtake the instant and drag out some writhing thing." It is evident that Plath did precisely this, seizing elements from her life and her psyche for the purposes of her art.

Hughes goes further as he explains how a poet may feed on both predator and its victims in "Song Against the White Owl". The owl is shaped and nourished by many deaths:

The white owl got its proof weapons
Bequests of its victims.

Although the white owl stares triumphantly from his cold and "fatal terrain", it is the poet who is the ultimate predator:

I spoon your soul from a bowl
And my song steams.
Two jaguar poems also explore the image of a trapped or captive poetic soul. Hughes calls these animals "Invocations of a jaguar-like body of elemental force, demonic force." "The Jaguar" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 12) is not only an image for the poetic persona but is also a powerful and multi-purpose symbol, as Hughes points out:

A jaguar after all can be received in several different aspects... he is a beautiful, powerful nature spirit, he is a homicidal maniac, he is a supercharged piece of cosmic machinery, he is a symbol of man's baser nature shoved down into the id and growing cannibal murderous with deprivation, he is an ancient spirit of Dionysus since he is a leopard raised to the ninth power, he is a precise historical symbol to the bloody-minded Aztecs and so on. Or he is simply a demon.

Caged in the zoo, the jaguar in the poem is contrasted to other captive cats, birds, and snakes which have accepted their fate and are "fatigued with indolence." But the crowds are fascinated only by the jaguar, watching him "hurrying enraged/Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes." Like the poet, the jaguar is remote and inaccessible, made so by the solitary imaginings which imprison the poet as well. Just as the big cat sees "horizons" over the "cage floor", the poet is far-seeing and therefore indifferent to communication with "crowds" who are oblivious to his visionary insights into the nature of things. This is analogous to the relative inaccessibility of
the poetry of Ted Hughes, not in any sense popular or widely appreciated. Nor is accessibility Hughes's intention: "Poets in our civilization...must be difficult".²

It is the emphasis on the sense of being caged or limited which comes across most vividly in Hughes's jaguar poems. Birds or animals are caged by the limits of their environment, whether it be a zoo or their natural habitat; the poet is caged by his society, albeit a global one. Hughes's sense of being confined appears to be related to the limitations of artistic expression. No matter how hard the artist pursues his vision of limitless beauty, truth or revelation, it often either escapes him or fails to be captured completely. But the absorption by art is total:

The eye satisfied to be blind in fire
By the bang of the blood in the brain deaf
the ear—

In "Second Glance at a Jaguar" (Wodwo, p. 25), published ten years after the first poem, Hughes's vision of the animal is more cynical and reductive. The jaguar still hurries with "urgency" but appears somehow foolish:

... His head
Is like the worn-down stump of another whole jaguar,
His body is just the engine shoving it forward.
The animal no longer compels awe or admiration but, instead, moves "gracelessly". Merely a "skinful of bowls" he moves now through a sort of parodic game. This may hint at a growing cynicism in the poet not only towards the worth of his art but also towards its compulsive nature. This poem contains references to Eastern religion or philosophy: "mantra", "drum-song", "prayer-wheel". These references link the jaguar's mindless pacing with a yogic escape into self. However, the animal's purpose is not to achieve detachment and tranquillity but "to keep his rage brightening". Perhaps this suggests the poet must now consciously maintain his sense of purpose too. If the jaguar in the first poem is an image for the poet's pursuit of the artistic ideal, then the "second glance" is a comment on the madness of this quest. Moreover, in the first instance the animal is oblivious to the watching crowds. In the second, the jaguar runs "Like a cat going along under thrown stones, under cover/Glancing sideways. . . ." This may suggest a growing awareness of the intrusiveness of the outside world and an evasive action taken to side-step criticism. Certainly, on a personal level Hughes has had cause to be wary of criticism and curious attention in view of the almost hysterical personal abuse which he has been subject to since the suicide of
his wife, Sylvia Plath. 9

Ted Hughes's two jaguar poems naturally call to mind Rilke's famous poem, "The Panther". 10 Rilke has also captured the essence of a caged and demonic spirit which can be seen as symbol of the poet's creative vision:

His vision from the passing of the bars is grown so weary that it holds no more To him it seems there are a thousand bars and behind a thousand bars no world.

Rilke's intention is made explicit in a letter: "I am trying to follow as uprightly as I can, the way of artistic truth which is my way. It has already once led to the 'Panther'.... 11

Both poets have depicted in a remarkable way the sense of creative and visionary powers trapped by physical and mental limitations. Their symbolic and evocative treatment of the fascination inherent in great cats is in the same tradition as William Blake's "The Tyger", also an expression of vital, creative forces. Of Blake's poem, Hughes says:

Blake's great poem "Tiger, tiger" is an example of a symbol of...potentially dangerous type which arrives with its own control—it is yoked with the Lamb and both draw the Creator...the symbol itself ...is an eruption, from the deeper resources of enraged energy.... 12
In a more recent poem, Hughes echoes this same idea:

As for the tiger
He lies still
Like left luggage
He is roaming the earth light, unseen
He is safe
Heaven and Hell have both adopted him.

The power and awesome grace of the jaguar make it a compelling image for the poetic persona, but a more anthropomorphistic image Hughes has used frequently is Crow. This crow persona may have seemed particularly apt to Hughes after the suicide of his wife, Sylvia Plath. He did not write about crows before this event. "Eating Crow" is synonymous with self-abasement and is the title of a radio playlet written by Hughes wherein this bird is described: "The crow is composed of a terrible black voice. He is neither stone nor light but voice that can hardly utter." Perhaps Hughes's Crow writings are, in part, a reflection of his guilt about his wife's tragic suicide. In legend "The crow always appears as a bird of the worst and most sinister character representing either death or night or winter." Moreover, many of this bird's qualities are unattractive: its voice is harsh and unmusical; it does not sing, but warns and scolds; it is a predator, scavenger, and carrion-eater. In an early Crow poem, "Bad News Good", 
published a few months after his wife's death, Hughes describes some of Crow's traits:

To act crow you need not be black
You only need the appetite
And the mindless gloating look
As you pull something's insides out.

Thus: "Lust to rend and to derange/Is the nature of crow." Hughes is reported to have said this poem is about a woman he blamed for contributing to Sylvia Plath's suicide. This explanation is problematical, however. Hughes would hardly have admitted that it might be about himself.

This particular poetic persona, then, is largely a negative and self-debasing one. Before Crow was published, and several years after Sylvia Plath's death, Assia Gutman, Hughes's mistress for whom he had left his wife, also took her own life and that of her baby daughter, Shura. It is to their memory that Crow is dedicated.

Therefore, Crow becomes the central character for Hughes's explorations of unattractive aspects of the poet's identity: The artist as metaphoric killer, scavenger, and carrion-eater. Of this particular characteristic of Crow, critic Tony Harrison says:
It is the appetite that does not balk at carrion that is central to Crow's capacity for pulling through, and the symbol of man's desperate need to assimilate death, battles, disasters, destructions, even the world's total annihilation. The poetic consciousness of our time has in spite of itself, to turn scavenger. At the moment when the rest of the world is abandoned, "Crow had to start searching for something to eat".  

In spite of the flawed state of the modern artist who is often compelled, like Crow, to use the detritus of a disintegrating planet as the subject of his art, the poet's vision still transcends the gloom of the situation. This is made explicit in "Two Legends" (Crow, p. 13). Crow has originated from a black "earth-globe":

An egg of blackness  
Where sun and moon alternate their weathers  
To hatch a crow, a black rainbow  
Bent in emptiness over emptiness  
But flying.

Crow is a "rainbow" in an intriguing oxymoron, for rainbows by definition are not black. But in this case, Crow contains all the colours of the spectrum absorbed into darkness, as he flies over a nihilistic landscape. This is an appropriate image for the modern artist as anti-hero with an independent mind. He persists, in spite of there being no apparent reason to continue, singing his song that is not warranted or asked for.
In "Crow's First Lesson" (Crow, p. 20), God tries to teach Crow about "love". Crow sees instead of a benign natural world, not only the lethal white shark that is designed for killing, but also death-bearing scavengers and parasites:

Crow gaped and a bluefly, a tsetse, a mosquito
Zoomed out and down
To their sundry flesh-pots.

It is the poet's task to see things as they really are; throughout the Crow poems, distasteful and pessimistic aspects of life are used as poetic subjects. In "Crow's First Lesson", Crow is the realist, God the romantic sentimentalist. In "Crow Alights" (Crow, p. 21) he "shivered with the horror of Creation". This line can be read in two ways: Crow "shivered" at what he saw and also at his distaste for the necessity of using "horror" as subject for his creative expression: "Nothing escaped him. (Nothing could escape)" Crow cannot make sense of a nihilistic universe, nevertheless he survives to observe it all:

Yet the prophecy inside him, like a grimace,
Was I WILL MEASURE IT ALL AND OWN IT ALL
AND I WILL BE INSIDE IT
AS INSIDE MY OWN LAUGHTER
AND NOT STARING OUT OF IT THROUGH WALLS
OF MY EYE'S COLD QUARANTINE
FROM A BURIED CELL OF BLOODY BLACKNESS—

"Crow Hears Fate Knock on the Door" (Crow, p. 23)
Like a war correspondent in the midst of destruction and bloodshed, who must describe the horror he sees, Crow, the poet-recorder of a world in disintegration, must suffer at his task which is "slowly rending the vital fibres".

In "Crow Tyrannosaurus" (Crow, p. 24), Crow sees the web of death necessary to sustain life (the swift "Pulsating/With insects," the cat's body "A tunnel/Of incoming death struggles"), and questions the part he must play in all this. He asks himself if it is not perhaps the artist's duty to detach himself from this process in order to illuminate the scheme of things:

Crow thought 'Alas
Alas ought I
To stop eating
And try to become the light?'

This may be a reference to the West Coast Indian legend in which the Raven is credited with giving the gift of light to the world. Unfortunately, it is impossible for the artist to escape from the process. Therefore Crow, like the thrush with "bounce and stab: begins to feed: "And his head, trapsprung, stabbed". Because the artist cannot divorce himself from his society, he must perforce mirror it:

Weeping he walked and stabbed
Thus came the eye's roundness, the ear's deafness.
He is forced by necessity to put all altruistic notions aside and focus on his own interests and survival, as the creed of the modern world dictates.

In "Crow and the Birds" (Crow, p. 37), a similar idea is presented, although Crow's separation and his distinctiveness in his role of artist is emphasized. In this poem, Hughes lists fourteen other species of birds, and with amazing accuracy and economy describes their typical movements and habits. All these birds seem vainly attempting to adhere to their natural behaviour in the face of the encroachment of man: "And the heron/laboured clear of the Bessamer upglare/And the bluetit zipped clear of lace panties." Crow, as poet, however, must adapt to the changing situation and remain a part of an increasingly flawed world:

Crow spraddled head-down in the beach garbage guzzling a dropped ice-cream.

As artist he must feed on what he finds.

Yet Crow is not merely a survivor; he is not without courage and strength of purpose. This is evident in "Crow's Fall" (Crow, p. 36) when Crow tries to attack the sun: "When Crow was white." Like the fallen angel, Lucifer, Crow "returned charred black", a failure, but unrepentant:
'Up there' he managed, 'Where white is black and black is white, I won.'

This neat chiasmus illustrates the irony of Crow's lopsided point of view.

Crow demonstrates the difficulty today's artist has in choosing an appropriate means of expression, particularly in a world saturated with commercial communication. In "Crow Tries the Media" (Crow, p. 46), Crow "wanted to sing" but:

He didn't want comparisons with the earth or anything to do with it
Oversold like detergents
He did not even want words
Waving their long tails in public
With their prostitute's exclamations
He wanted to sing very clear

But he cannot sing to his muse "simply" with "Manhattan weighed on his eyelid" or "The slow mills of London/Raising a filthy haze"; instead, "her shape dimmed". This suggests that the styles of expression used in the past are no longer effective. This is why Crow's unmusical "voice" is appropriate for a poet today. Of his choice of Crow as spokesman, Hughes says:

The first idea of Crow was really an idea of a style. In folktales the prince going on the adventure comes to the stable full of beautiful horses and he needs a horse for the next stage and the King's daughter advises him to take none of the beautiful horses that he'll be offered but to choose the dirty, scabby little foal. You see I throw out the eagles and choose the Crow. The idea was originally
just to write his songs, the songs that a Crow would sing. In other words, songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple, and a super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say without any other consideration and that's the basis for the style of the whole thing...

Crow as artist is super-sensitive and therefore burdened with the guilt of the world:

His prison is the earth. Clothed in his conviction
Trying to remember his crimes
Heavily he flies

("Crow's Nerve Fails", Crow, p. 47)

In "Crow's Vanity" (Crow, p. 44), he is prophet-ic, and through his own introspection and loneliness, he sees images of disintegration in "the evil mirror". "Webs of cities" merge into "spread of swamp-ferns", suggesting the panoramic vision possessed by the poet seer who encompasses the past and the future through the power of his imagination.

In "Crow Goes Hunting" (Crow, p. 54), the metamorphic power of the poet is described. His words become a pack of hounds chasing the hare or muse of inspiration. Here, the elusiveness of the artist's vision is described:
Crow was Crow without fail, but what is hare?  
It converted itself to a concrete bunker  
The words circled protesting, resounding.  
Crow turned the words into bombs—-they blasted  
the bunker.  
The bits of bunker flew up—a flock of starlings.  
The falling starlings turned to a cloudburst.  
Crow turned the words into a reservoir, collecting the water.  
The water turned into an earthquake, swallowing the reservoir.  
The earthquake turned into a hare and leaped for the hill  
Having eaten Crow's words.  
Crow gazed after the bounding hare  
Speechless with admiration.

This is perhaps an inversion of the poetic ideal.  
Instead of a White Goddess, remote and unapproachable,  
the muse becomes merely a rabbit, bounding away. At times, however, Crow the poet feels invincible and in "Crow's Song of Himself" (Crow, p. 73), assumes godlike powers seeming capable of his own metamorphosis:

When God blew Crow up  
He made day  
When God hung Crow on a tree  
He made fruit  
When God buried Crow in the earth  
He made man.  
When God tried to chop Crow in two  
He made woman  
When God said: 'you win, Crow,'  
He made the Redeemer.

The poet, like a god, can create both gods and crows from his imagination.
Other interesting qualities of Crow as poetic persona are revealed in two separately published Crow poems. In "A Lucky Folly" Crow finds himself a reluctant St. George with a screaming maiden and a dragon on his hands. He longs to escape, but:

Too late. The dragon surrounded him like a seaquake
And the maiden cried lamentably.
Crow cut holes in his nose. He fingered this flute,
Dancing, with an occasional kick at his drum.
The dragon was dumbfounded—he was manic
For music. He began to grin.
He too began to dance. And in horror and awe
The maiden danced with him, incredulous.
"O do not stop," she whispered, "O do not stop."
So the three danced—and Crow dared not stop—
To the creaking beak pipe and the kicked drum.

Here, Crow is a mock Orpheus or Pan. Through the power of Crow's art, opposites are reconciled: beauty, the maiden, and beast, the dragon. Crow enraptures the dragon who can be seen as a metaphor for the critical public or for the intrusive demands of everyday life with which a poet must do battle in order to survive. But once the dragon or public becomes enchanted by the poet's music, it becomes insatiable and begins to make demands:

But at last Crow's puff ran out and he stopped.
The maiden paled
But the dragon wept. The dragon licked Crow's foot.
He slobbered Crow's fingers—
"More, more" he cried, and "Be my god."
This idea is seen earlier in "Famous Poet" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 17):

... "Repeat that!" still they cry.
But all his efforts to concoct
The old heroic bang from their money and praise,
From the parent's pointing finger and the child's amaze,
Even from the burning of his wreathed bays,
Have left him wrecked: wrecked.

Like the jaguar in the zoo, the artist has become imprisoned by an admiring and curious world: "set/To blink behind bars at the zoo." Here, the poet becomes a "monster" albeit a harmless one. This is why Crow is aware that his power to perform is "lucky: in that he can exert his influence over his audience, and "folly" in that it leads him to being obliged to perform.

In "Birdsong", the disintegration of love is explored; however, this love can be seen as analogous to the poet's changing attitudes towards his art and towards the subjects about which he writes. At first:

... love is a fine Falcon
Soaring O soaring brother of the archer

This is the high romanticism inherent in the transcendental view of the role of the poet that is seen in the hawk poems. Next, love is a "cruel leopard" with a
voice that "rips through locks", a similar image to that of the jaguar. Finally, love becomes a Crow, nihilistically viewing a disintegrating world and making his song:

Till love becomes a crow
Upon a desolation
The crow makes a drum
The crow begins to dance
dance
The crow begins to dance.
There is nothing else
The crow has gone mad
Upon a desolation
It drums and it dances
dances
Upon a desolation.

But Crow must ultimately be a survivor; the mad cata-tonic rhythms of his dance are an affirmation of his will to live:

While the clouds above
Roll their great bodies together
And maybe it is love moves them
They do not have to live
live
They do not have to live.

An interesting mock-heroic version of the traditional role of the poet as bird is presented more in this recent poem:

They fringe the earth, a corolla, wings
Lifted in elation, vast
Armadas of illusion
Waiting for a puff.
"Waiting for a puff" suggests Hughes is ironically mocking the role of the poet, yet at the same time he is affirming the importance of poetic art.

Crow, then, is both victor and victim. He is the poet of a "super-simple and a super-ugly language". He sings a proclamation of his existence in a world that appears to contain little to sing about.

In two other images of the poetic persona, the otter and the wolf, Hughes portrays the poet as both hunter and hunted. "An Otter" (Lupercal, p. 46) is on the surface a skilful and interesting picture of the habits and attributes of this animal. But on the metaphoric level, the poem describes the haunting, elusive quality of the archetypal poet-wanderer (in the same tradition as the scholar-gypsy or the Ancient Mariner). The amphibian nature of the otter "of neither water nor land" is linked with a sense of alienation or displacement so often associated with the consciousness of the modern artist. The otter mediating between two
realms is on an endless and eternal quest:

[He] brings the legend of himself
From before wars or burials, in spite of hounds
and vermin-poles;
Does not take root like the badger. Wanders,
cries;
Gallops along land he no longer belongs to

He is "like a king in hiding" who is "Seeking/Some
world lost...he cannot come at since." This suggests
a displacement of the poet from his former status.
Therefore like the otter who is "Crying to the old
shape of the starlit land", the song of the poet is
also often plaintive and melancholy.

The otter can be seen also as a poet in the role
of shaman or mystical wise-man of society. Explaining
his views on shamanism, Hughes says:

Basically it is the whole procedure of becom-
ing and performing as a witch doctor, a medicine man,
among primitive peoples. The individual is summoned
by certain dreams. The same dreams all over the
world. A spirit summons him...usually an animal...
If he refuses, he dies...If he accepts, he then pre-
pares himself for the job...it may take years...the
spirit may well teach him direct. Once fully fledg-
ed he can enter trance at will and go to the spirit
world...he goes to get something badly needed, a
cure, an answer...24

The modern poet-shaman in his role of prophet must at-
tempt to warn society. Interestingly enough, in West
Coast Indian legend, the land otter was associated
with shamanism and considered sacred. During the initiation of a new shaman, an otter was killed by the initiate shaman-to-be who kept the skin. Then the otter became his guardian spirit or "giver of power".25

Hughes's otter, though a hunter, is now himself hunted. His "changed body" has driven him to concealment: "So the self under the eye lies, Attendant and withdrawn." This line can be read several ways: the poet "lies" to tell the truth in that his work is fictive, or lies watching and recording the foibles of mankind, or that the poet remains concealed by his changing personae. The otter is a predator, therefore also linked to the hounds which follow him:

The otter belongs
In double robbery and concealment—
From water that nourishes and drowns and from land
That gave him his length and the mouth of the hound.

His nature, like his environment, is dangerous and double-edged; because of this, he belongs nowhere. The otter "crying" searches for a world of beauty that is forever lost and unattainable. Now he is "hiding", breathing "tainted" air full of "tobacco-smoke, hounds and parsley"—all these images emphasize the encroachment of modern civilization on the natural world; therefore, emphasizing the increasingly precarious existence
of animals (and artists).

The otter, like the alienated modern artist, is essentially homeless, a shape-changer who "enters the water by melting". Eventually he is "yanked above hounds" and "reverts to nothing at all". This suggests the destructive effect critical attacks have on the work of the poet. The otter becomes a "long pelt" and the poet dies forgotten.

In "February" (Lupercal, p. 13), the wolf is the elusive wanderer. This wolf is a dismembered one, and is reduced to only "The hairless, knuckled feet/Of the last wolf killed in Britain." Its feet now obsess the poet and:

Print the moonlit doorstep, or run and run
Through the hush of parkland, bodiless,
headless;
With small seeming inconvenience
By day, too, pursue, seize all thought.

These footprints are images for the elusive dreams, the tantalizing visions, ideas, or inspirations the poet tries to find. But these feet are sinister, and far more powerful than "Nibelung wolves" or the wolves of childhood tales "above the tucked coverlet". These feet are symbolic of terrible hidden aspects of the subconscious. Such wolf relics are from a vanished past. Their actions are reminiscent of those of "The Thought Fox" (The Hawk in the Rain, p. 14) who is
gentler and less terrifying:

Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
In entering the loneliness.

But the poet fears the questing feet of the wolf which are searching not only for "their vanished head", like an antique ghost, but also for the "World/Vanished with the head, the teeth, the quick eyes---". The poet is afraid they will try to possess him, too. The theme of this poem is somewhat parallel to another ancient West Coast Indian initiation rite in which the frightened initiate is kidnapped by wolves (dancers with masks); during this ceremony the entire village becomes terrified as well. Perhaps this initiation can be compared to the fear of the poet of becoming trapped in the dark world of the imagination and being unable to return:

Now, lest they choose his head,
Under severe moons he sits making
Wolf-masks, mouths clamped well onto the world.

Thus this animal of the imagination must be appeased by the poet through the making of "wolf-masks" or poems, permitting him to keep his links with the real world and thereby his sanity.

The effort and single-minded dedication required for the poet's task is described in "Skylarks"
(Wodwo, p. 168). To the speaker, these birds demonstrate the strength of will and the force necessary for his role as poet. Once again Hughes not only describes the bird's behaviour with field-note accuracy, but also provides simultaneously, metaphoric explorations of the artistic process. This poem is an antithetical treatment of the skylark to Shelley's:

Shelley, assuming the skylark's song to be an expression of careless rapture, and feeling that no creature of earth could know such pure delight and 'ignorance of pain', is driven to call his skylark an 'unbodied joy', a 'blithe spirit'. Hughes, on the contrary, starts from the bird of muscle, blood and bone, feathers thrashing, lungs gasping, heart 'drumming like a motor', voice box grinding like a concrete-mixer, and cannot believe that such climbing and singing can be done for joy. Moreover, in contrast to Shelley who sees the bird as an innocent, heavenly spirit, free from care: "Shadow of annoyance never came near thee", Hughes in a similar anthropomorphic pathetic fallacy sees the skylark as a predator "Crueller than owl or eagle". It is lethal and "barrel-chested" its head "barbed like a hunting arrow" and:

Leaden
Like a bullet
To supplant
Life from its centre.

This implies that the poet's message today is not a
happy one, but instead the revelation of truth by the tearing apart of illusion and through painful experience.

The lark goes up "like a warning" and its effort is so agonizingly absorbing that its song grows "inwards as well as outwards", suggesting total involvement in the process of expression. The dual nature of pain and joy inherent in the artistic process is emphasized:

O song, incomprehensibly both ways--
   Joy! Help! Joy! Help!

The effort to communicate "In a nightmare difficulty", moreover, is urgent: "As if it were too late, too late." The bird's song is self-destructive and somehow mad in its obsessiveness. The larks are:

Like sacrifices set floating
The cruel earth's offerings
The mad earth's missionaries

Perhaps this is the modern poet's role: to persist in an effort that is ultimately stronger than death. The larks are "Shot through the crested head/With the command, Not die". This invincibility is similar to Crow's in "Crow's Last Stand" (Crow, p. 81):

There was finally something
The sun could not burn, that it had rendered
Everything down to—a final obstacle
   · · · · · ·
Crow's eye-pupil, in the tower of its scorched fort.
Crow's eye pupil is analogous to the poet's consciousness which persists in spite of all pain, like the lark's song.

When the lark's effort is over and "the sun's sucked them empty", they are free to return:

Weightless,
Paid-up
Alert,
Conscience perfect.

This suggests the purging effect that communication has on the psyche of the artist. Like the Ancient Mariner, his "warning" delivered, the poet may rest temporarily until the necessity for further communication impels him into action once more. "Skylarks" illustrates the transcendent force of art, which can be seen either as an affirmation or as a cry of doom. But in any case, the power and the persistence of the consciousness of the poet is undeniable.

Hughes's explorations of the poetic persona demonstrate the multi-faceted role of the artist as visionary and critic, as spirit of affirmation or bearer of despair. He emphasizes that the poet alone sees things clearly; therefore he is not only alienated from the rest of humanity by this role, but is also dangerous. The poet may view humanity in a predatory way, seeing it as food for his art. The view of the artist as an individual to be feared is of course a
traditional one, as in, for example, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", but Ted Hughes gives it a fresh approach and a topical significance.
CHAPTER IV
FOOTNOTES


6Faas interview.

7Ibid.

8Quoted by Oliver Lyne in his review of Gaudete (TLS, July 1, 1977).

9Interview with Olwyn Hughes, 6 July, 1977.

10M.C.Herter Norton: Translations from the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke (New York: W.W.Norton, 1938), p. 159.


12Faas interview.

13Ted Hughes, "Calves harshly parted from their mamas" (Boston University Journal, Winter, 1975), p. 29.


18 "It is not certain that the child was actually Ted's" (Olwyn Hughes interview).


21 Egbert Faas interview, p. 388.

22 Workshop 10, 1970.


24 H.R. Hays, p. 199.

25 In the kitchen of Court Green, Ted Hughes's Devonshire home, a "long pelt" hangs over one of the kitchen chairs (9 July, 1977 visit).


27 *Ibid*.

28 Sagar, p. 89.
CHAPTER V

GAUDETÉ: THE ANIMAL NATURE OF THE REVEREND NICHOLAS LUMB

All the themes discussed in previous chapters: heroes and survivors, myth, sexuality, and the role of the poet, culminate in Gaudete, Ted Hughes's long narrative poem published in 1977. Once again, these themes are presented, in part, by Hughes's use of an emblematic bestiary. Although these themes are not the only ones to be found in Gaudete, they are the dominant ones, constituting an integral part of the narrative structure of the poem. Moreover, Gaudete provides a panoramic exploration of Hughes's gloomy world view.

Gaudete was originally intended as a film scenario;¹ this can be discerned from Hughes's cinematographic techniques and use of vivid visual imagery. Furthermore, the action moves rapidly; all the events in the story take place in one day. On one level, Gaudete is a surreal fantasy tale about the Reverend Nicholas Lumb:

An Anglican clergyman is abducted by spirits into the other world
The spirits create a duplicate of him to take his place in this world, during his absence, and to carry on his work.
This changeling interprets the role of minister in his own way.

"Argument" (Gaudete, p. 9)²
On another level, the minister and his double can be seen as two aspects of the same personality presented metaphorically. The replacement Lumb represents, microcosmically, the physical, sexual, "animal" side of man. Many animal images in the poem link this Lumb to the instinctive drives which connect man to the cycles of nature. Because the action in Gaudete takes place in a rural English village, the animal-filled natural world provides a thematically important background to the events in the story.

In the "Prologue", the Reverend Lumb finds himself alone in a nightmare landscape; he discovers piles of corpses everywhere but sees no other living being. That he is alone perhaps symbolizes his detachment from the rest of humanity. Possibly Lumb's only relationship to others has been as an observer. Lumb then undergoes a series of experiences which are vaguely evocative of Dionysiac rites or primitive fertility rituals: He is taken to a cave and whipped; tied to a tree and whipped until, finally, the tree is metamorphosed into his double. Then he is forced to kill a bull and is baptised in its blood and entrails. After these events, this original Lumb wanders away lost and dazed; the double emerges from the dream landscape to take his place as a charismatic hero-priest.
to the women in his rural parish. This "goat-eyed" vicar

is starting Christianity all over again, right from the start.
He has persuaded all the women in the parish.
Only women can belong to it.
They are all in it and he makes love to them all, all the time.
Because a saviour
Is to be born in this village, and Mr. Lumb is to be the earthly father. (pp. 113-4)

Through the character of Lumb, Hughes examines once again the qualities which define a hero. Lumb represents animal vitality, physical endurance, and sexual prowess and energy; it is a bitterly ironic portrait, however. Lumb's "heroic" attributes are partially bestowed by default because of the antithetical qualities of the other men in the village. Moreover, until the day in which the action described in the story takes place, the village men have ignored or patronized Lumb:

Old Smayle defends the vicar
He admires him. The vicar, he declares,
Has realized that his religious career
Depends on women. (p. 65)

The village men can be seen as a microcosm of modern society which is depleted both of heroic action and of animal vitality. The low level of sexual
energy apparent in the men of the village is in ironic contrast to their preoccupation with animal breeding and hunting.

The virile Lumb is described by traditional goat, bull, and stag images; the anti-heroic qualities of the menfolk of his followers are also conveyed through appropriate animal images. For example, Major Hagen, husband of Pauline, one of Lumb's devotees, is reptilian. Like a tortoise, he has withdrawn from action and is disintegrating with age: "Drained of the vanities; pickled in mess-alcohol and smoked dark" (p. 24). He has "horny", "carapaced" fingers on his "age-hardened hands." Ironically, now he has reverted to this slow, cold-blooded state, his sexual interests are vicarious; his morning correspondence, for example, is "Concerning the sperm of bulls" (p. 23). Through binoculars, he watches his wife Pauline and Lumb's "draughty, hasty, lovemaking" (p. 25). This briefly transforms Hagen into a predator as he reverts to the old heroic stance of a relic of Empire (like Hughes's lion-like "Retired Colonel"):

There is so much he must not fail
Humiliation of Empire, a heraldic obligation
Must have its far-booming say.

However, his transformation is brief, his anger is dissipated senselessly by killing his pet dog which has
been roused to attack him by his raging voice.

Now Hagen
Swerves the full momentum of his rage on to the
dog
He lifts a chair
This dog is going to account for everything.
Fangs splinter wood and wood shatters.
Only exhaustion will stop him.

Hagen's former heroic manliness has degenerated into
pointless fury against a dog. Hughes suggests here
that the old traditional codes (like the Colonel's in
The Hawk in the Rain) are no longer possible today,
except in ridiculous imitation.

Evans, the blacksmith, is another example of
a heroic type in disintegration. As powerfully built
as Dick Straight-up, Evans commands respect by his
"little slow wolf eyes" (p. 67). Yet when he discovers
his wife's relationship with Lumb, he misuses his great
strength, beating his "vivid and tiny" wife, mother of
his infant child, unmercifully.

Other men in the village appear equally decadent
and unadmirable. Dr Westlake who, like Hagen, is de-
scribed as a tortoise, withdraws from life by pickling
himself in alcohol. Young Dunworth becomes suicidal
when he catches his wife with Lumb. As the rat-like
Garten spreads the news of Lumb's activities, the men
of the village reveal their inadequacies by their
reactions. Some of these Hughes describes in a serio-comic tone:

Dunworth is afraid that if he is left alone he might well Kill himself in a light-minded effort to be sincere. Westlake hunches hooded in tortoiseshell concentration behind his dark-rimmed spectacles. (p. 130).

Holroyd, when he hears the news from Garten, whom he views as an "agricultural pest", seems unable to respond; therefore, he ignores him. Holroyd is engaged in a significant action at the time—trying to re-order the natural world by dehorning a young bull. Through this action Holroyd tries to demonstrate his ascendancy over the world and its unforeseen events:

He returns to his bull. The animal's uplooking eye squirms like a live eye in a pan. It emits a yodelling weird roar, like a steel roof being ripped by a power saw, as the wire bites. (p. 127).

The bull can be seen as a symbol of natural sexual power which Holroyd tries to control and tame because he cannot control or tame his wife.

Only the village women have any animal vitality; this is charged and recharged by their religious fervor. The men in the village can only act collectively. Their valour is propped up by alcohol and guns as they
organize to go after the unarmed Lumb. Their fear of impotence, their mass anxieties, have been exacerbated by Lumb's "new religion". These villagers represent an arid society of men ironically juxtaposed to the vigorous fecund life of their crops and animals. In Gaudete Hughes presents us with an essentially hero-less world. From young Garten, the voyeur, who "ferrets" out the truth about Lumb, to old Commander Estridge with his "Small tight ferocious hawk face/ Evolved in naval command" (p. 41), the men of the village are relics of a decaying society. These men have lost touch with their animal vitality; therefore, the animal images through which Hughes describes them are depressingly ironic.

Hughes's interest in mythology is very evident in Gaudete. It is obvious that he has borrowed heavily from world myth to construct the primitive village ritual described in the poem, which is like a salad made from The Golden Bough. However, Lumb himself is a mythic animal. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the mythic material in Gaudete is the myth of the quest for self which is a version of a creation myth.

The creation of Lumb's "double" or "shadow" (in a Jungian sense) can be seen as a mythic as well as metaphoric search for self. The characters in the
dream landscape of the Prologue may be viewed as personified hidden aspects of Lumb's personality. After Lumb discovers himself to be alone amidst piles of corpses, he sees an old man, "a flailing-armed chimpanzee creature". This old man, "wild as a berry" like Hughes's tramp in "November" (Lupercal, p. 49), is the earthy, elemental aspect of Lumb. He is filled with the sort of sardonic, existential laughter described in Crow. The old man has a "rough-snagged shillelagh of voice, hard and Irish". His voice links Lumb with Ireland, foreshadowing the original Lumb's reappearance at the conclusion of the events in the story. "In a straggly sparse village on the west coast of Ireland" ("Epilogue", p. 173). Perhaps Hughes is suggesting that Lumb has repressed this earthy aspect of his personality or heritage. It is therefore appropriate that the old man lead Lumb on the start of his quest for self; he stands between the death of Lumb's old life, symbolized by the piles of corpses, and Lumb's transformation or rebirth into his double or "shadow" self. Jung points out the significance of the old man figure in dreams:

The archetype of spirit in the shape of a man, hobgoblin or animal always appears in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc. are needed but cannot be
mustered on one's own resources. 4

What Lumb needs to achieve this realization of self is a transforming experience but in his case it is a horrific one. The result of this experience is later partly revealed by the cryptic poems he leaves behind in Ireland; these constitute the "Epilogue" in Gaudete.

The old man leads Lumb to a cave where he confronts an unconscious woman, perhaps an image for his sleeping anima. She is described by wild animal images:

Lumb bends low  
Over her face half-animal  
And the half-closed animal eyes, clear dark  
back to the first creature  
And the animal mane  
The animal cheekbone and jaw, in the fire's  
flicker  
The animal tendon in the turned throat

(p. 14).

The transformed Lumb will be releasing all the savage sexuality symbolized by the woman/anima, who has been dormant in his former self.

The painful, cathartic nature of Lumb's transforming experience, his psychic metamorphosis, is suggested by an earlier poem, "Song of Woe" 5:

. . . he abandoned himself, his body, his blood—  
He left it all lying on the earth  
And held himself resolute  
As the earth rolled slowly away
Smaller and smaller away
Into non-being.
And there at last he had it
As his woe struggled out of him
With a terrific cry
Staring after the earth
And stood in front of him,
His howling transfigured double.

The "new" Lumb is such a "transfigured" double.

Lumb meets his anima again in a dream or hallucination; he is hit on the head when his van goes out of control:

Stub-fingered hairy-backed hands come past his shoulders
And wrench the steering wheel from his grip.
The van vaults the bank.

(p. 98).

Here, Lumb is obviously in conflict with another destructive element of the self, personified by the hairy hands. In his dream, Lumb is called by the anima who has now a patched face, suggesting the fragmentation of her image:

It is a woman's face
A face as if sewn together from several faces.
A baboon beauty face,
A crudely stitched patchwork of faces

(p. 104).

Perhaps this fragmentation has occurred because Lumb has tried to find his anima externally, through sexual experiences with many village women.
This "stitch-face" female figure embraces Lumb to the point of suffocation, perhaps Hughes is symbolically suggesting here that this aspect of Lumb's psyche is strangling him. Finally, he is delivered of her by a birth-like process:

The baboon woman,
Flood-sudden, like the disembowelling of a cow
She gushes from between his legs, a hot splendour
In a glistening of oils,
In a radiance like phosphorous he sees her crawl and tremble.

(p. 105).

Surprisingly, her face is now "undeformed and perfect". This metamorphic change from baboon to beauty suggests, once again, that through pain, beauty is born.

Sagar describes "Song of Woe" as a description of the process of ego-destruction. Perhaps it is, instead, a description of the painful process of self-knowledge, like the experiences Lumb undergoes in Gaudete, which transform him into a poet; thus Lumb's story can be seen as a fable of the creation of a poet. Through the analogous birth-like process which transforms Lumb's anima image from a "stitch-face" to a beauty, the creative process is made explicit. Lumb emerges from his experiences as a poet who has achieved psychic equilibrium through the painful metamorphosis
wrought by experience.

The most obvious use of mythic material in Gaudete is found in the ritual activities of Lumb and his followers. This culminates in their symbolic metamorphosis into animals at the final "Women's Institute" meeting in the basement of the church. These Dionysiac rituals bring the sexual tension which has built up through the events in the poem to a climax. The women of the village, drugged and naked, are symbolically metamorphosed into animals by donning animal masks and skins. Moreover, their behaviour becomes increasingly animal-like as they abandon themselves completely to their elemental, instinctive drives. Lumb becomes a stag:

The smoke ropes them all together.  
Lumb bobs under stag antlers, the russet bristly pelf of a red stag flapping at his naked back.  
Everything and everybody is moving  
As if the music were the tumbling and boiling of a cauldron.

(p. 145).

Felicity, dressed as a hind, is the sacrificial victim, the scapegoat figure:

Inside Felicity a stone-hard core of honey-burning sweetness has begun to melt  
And she knows this is oozing out all over her body  
And wetting her cheeks and trickling on her thighs.
The sweetness is like the hot rough fur of the tiger as it bulges and bristles into presence, A hot-throated opening flower of tiger, splitting all the leafy seams of her body

Felicity understands that she is a small anonymous creature which is now going to be killed. She starts to cry, feeling the greatness and nobility of her role.

(p. 141).

The tiger reference echoes lines in an earlier poem by Hughes: "The tiger of the earth/0 tiger/0. . . . beast in blossom". The tiger is an image for the flowering of her sexual power which paradoxically makes her both a predator and a sacrificial victim simultaneously. She is a predator in that she is Lumb's chosen one, the "goddess"; this puts her in a position of ascendancy over the other women. As victim, she is symbolically metamorphosed into a hind:

Felicity is crying with fear
As Maud spreads the blueish pale-fringed skin
of a hind over her shoulders

She understands she has become a hind
Her bowels coil and uncoil with fear
She waits for whatever it is they are going to do to her.

(p. 145).

In these two roles, Felicity portrays divergent archetypes or the opposing roles of woman's mythic dimensions: aggression and surrender.

As the ritual approaches a climax, collectively, the group is transformed into a pulsing unity, a
mythic portrayal of the power of generation; Felicity is its focus:

She knows she is burning plasma and infinitely tiny, That she and all these women are moving inside the body of an incandescent creature of love, That they are brightening, and that the crisis is close, They are the cells in the glands of an inconceivably huge and urgent love-animal And some final crisis of earth's life is now to be enacted Faithfully and selflessly by them all.

(p. 142).

In this orgiastic ritual with its tragic climax, Hughes demonstrates the powers and the perils inherent in sexual energy, the force of life. Here we see sexuality as the god-animal, which embodies both the creative and destructive aspects of the forces of nature, and which can call forth the animalistic impulse in its devotees.

Throughout Gaudete Hughes once again emphasizes the destructive aspects of sexuality. As has been stated, the men of the village compensate for their sexual inadequacies through vicarious activities: horse breeding, bull rearing, hunting. Their women-folk, on the other hand, are teeming with sexual energy. Hughes describes these energies with colourful animal imagery. Pauline Hagen's sexual urges are traditional-
ly symbolized by a horse:

Something overpowering
Like an unmanageable horse, a sudden wild bulk
Starts rearing and wheeling away, to one side
then to the other
As if it would break out of her.

(p. 31)

Betty, the barmaid, dreams of badgers:

A bigger hot body nestles in beside her
Overpowers her, muscular and hairy as a
giant badger.

(p. 89).

This badger can be seen as an image for Lumb. His
name means "loin", and his first name, "Nicholas",
suggests someone devilish; Betty seems to be possessed.

Commander Estridge's two daughters appear to
him as:

... unmanageable and frightening
Like leopard cubs suddenly full-grown, come
into their adult power and burdened with it.
Primaeval frames, charged with primaeval
hun­gers and primaeval beauty.
These uncontrollable eyes, and organs of horr­ific energy, demanding satisfaction.

Jennifer the younger daughter is both predator
and prey. To Dr. Westlake, she is both terrifying and
fascinating:
...all that loose, hot, tumbled softness,  
Like freshly killed game, with the dew still  
on it,  
Its eyes still seeming alive, still strange with  
wild dawn,  
Helpless underbody still hot  
(p. 72).

Yet, she has driven her elder sister Janet to suicide:

...her sister was in love with the minister  
Mr. Lumb  
Just as he had been in love with her  
... ... ... ...  
But then quite suddenly he no longer loved Janet.  
Instead he loved herself, Jennifer, much, much  
more deeply  
... ... ... ...  
And so she undeceived her sister. ...  
And so Janet has killed herself and that is  
the extent of it.  
(p. 57).

Later, Jennifer dreams she is a wolf:

A girl is struggling across a snow lake  
... ... ... ...  
The girl is Janet, her dead sister  
And she herself is a wolf, circling  
herself dead sister.  
Her dead sister is crying and forcing herself on  
... ... ... ...  
She watches, with a wolf's interested eyes  
Till her dead sister falls.  
Now a wolf is killing her where she lies.  
Her dead sister lies in the snow.  
... ... ... ...  
She starts to howl out over her dead sister who  
lies in the snow.  
(p. 69).

Although Hughes describes sexual pleasure and  
abandon in association with Lumb's activities, there
is not one example of a happy or tranquil union described in *Gaudete*. The sexual powers of Lumb weld the women together as a religious force, yet when they reflect on their individual feelings, their passion for Lumb is personally destructive. In spite of the "religious" nature of the women's relationships to Lumb, human jealousies emerge. Mrs. Evans describes the situation:

It has nothing to do with loving the vicar

Though poor Janet Estridge was infatuated with him and so is her sister and so is Pauline Hagen and Hilda Dunworth and Barbara Walsall and her and her and her and her, its true, all those infatuated with him.

(p. 114).

Maud, Lumb's dumb housekeeper provides the most dramatic example of religious mania mixed with sexual jealousy. During the climax of the "Women's Institute" rites, Lumb "mounts Felicity from behind, like a stag" (p. 146). This act causes each of the women to register her own personal grief and pain:

Huge-headed woodland creatures from a nursery fairy tale
Are dropping on to their knees
Hugging their human bodies with human arms
As the music tears away the membranes,
tearing them as the smoke tears

(p. 146).
But it is Maud who feels jealousy most keenly. After she murders Felicity with Lumb's knife, she regains her power of speech and tells the others the truth about Lumb and Felicity:

She is announcing
That this girl is not one of them
That she is his selected wife
That he is going to abandon them and run away with this girl
Like an ordinary man
With his ordinary wife.

(p. 147).

Then Maud attacks Lumb, and the other women, now disenchanted, pursue him also:

The women have made one undersea monster,
heaving in throes.

(p. 149).

Gaudete is Hughes's strongest statement so far on the destructive nature of sexuality. Yet at the same time, Hughes's many explorations of the theme of male-female relationships can be also seen as a hymn to the power and fascination of man's sexual energies. Moreover, Hughes sees this energy as an impetus for writing poems: "They are the only way I can unburden myself of that excess which, for their part, bulls in June bellow away." "I write about the war between
vitality and death.⁸ Such vitality is integrally bound to man's sexual expression.

One of the most important themes in *Gaudete* is Hughes's further exploration of the nature of the poetetic persona. The story of Lumb and his double is, in part, an examination of the painful integration of all aspects of life into the consciousness of the poet. In *Gaudete*, the focus is on the poet's exploration of his animal nature. Hughes associates Lumb with the otter, one of the central images of the poetic persona in the poetry of Hughes. Both Lumb and the otter are associated with water as well as land: "The otter belongs/in double robbery and concealment--/From water that nourishes and drowns, and from land" ("An Otter", *Lupercal*, p. 47). This dichotomy symbolizes the scope of comprehension necessary for a poet.

The Epilogue in *Gaudete* begins with the prose account of the reappearance of Lumb on the west coast of Ireland. It is still May; therefore, the events that occur in the main part of the story are still recent. Lumb meets three little girls who later tell their priest how the strange man called forth an otter from the water. This otter may represent the animal aspect of Lumb's personality, now purged and integrated
with the natural world. The little girls find a package which the strange man has left behind. It is a notebook filled with poems. The girls give it to the priest who copies them out; these form the Epilogue to Gaudete.

The first poem appears to be a description of Lumb, torn by his psychic experience. He is now "half a man":

His vigour
The bone-deformity of consequences
His talents
The deprivations of escape.

(p. 176).

In the next poem, the poet bewails the problems of human communication; he sees speech as man's curse. This is in contrast to the cries of congregations of birds which are "rapture" and "so long ago perfect". Their music will not "chill into syntax." Speech is a regression, a disintegration:

Words buckle the voice in tighter, closer
Under the midriff
Till the cry rots, and speech
Is a fistula

(p. 176).

The poet's task is not only to communicate but also to identify and follow his muse who is both elusive and frightening. In "Who are you?" (p. 177), the
poet sees the natural world harmoniously integrated even in death:

The spider clamps the bluefly—whose death panic
Becomes sudden soulful absorption
A stoat throbs at the nape of the lumped rabbit
Who watches the skylines fixedly.

(p. 177).

Yet, when his muse calls him, the poet is unsure of his task:

... 'Quick!' you whisper, 'O quick!'
And 'Now! Now! Now!'
Now what?
That I hear the age of the earth?
That I feel
My mother lift me up from between her legs?

Neither the poet's elemental memories nor his comprehensive vision help him in his quest to serve and satisfy his muse.

Another important poetic persona in the work of Hughes, also present in Gaudete, is the lark:

The lark sizzles in my ear
Like a fuse.

This emphasizes the danger in the role of the poet and in the poet's art: "fuse" suggests explosion. Moreover, the poet is a prophet:
Over the lark's crested tongue  
Under the lark's crested head  
A prophecy  
From the core of the blue peace.  

(p. 178).

Perhaps the "core of the blue peace", an image of both sky and water, is the centre of the self: that deep interior of understanding which the poet must acquire so painfully.

These Epilogue poems are cryptic and opaque. It is not possible to deal with them adequately within the scope of this paper. The speaker (Lumb) at times seems to merge with Hughes as subtle autobiographic references appear.

The tone of the poems is that of a subdued, rather resigned hymn of praise to the poet's muse who appears to be the anima, the White Goddess, or the earth mother or female principle. Whatever persona the poet adopts to do her service it is a hard and exacting one. She gives no rewards and her enslavement is complete:

She rides the earth  
On an ass, on a lion  
She rides the heavens  
On a great white bull.  

She is an apple  
Whoever plucks her  
Nails his heart  
To the leafless tree

(p. 184).

It is apparent that Ted Hughes is one of her most faithful servants.
CHAPTER V

FOOTNOTES


2 Hereafter all bracketed page numbers are references to Gaudete (London: Faber and Faber, 1977).

3 Sagar points out: "Beckett defines the 'mirthless laugh' (the 'risus purus', the laugh laughing at the laugh) as the laugh at that which is unhappy (Sagar, p. 169).


6 Sagar, p. 137.

7 "Crow's Table talk", Sagar, p. 172.

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OTHER WORKS CONSULTED


APPENDIX

A Catalogue of the Animal Images in the Poetry of
Ted Hughes

1 alligator: R., p. 33.


3 anemone: W., p. 157, "Shells".


5 aurochs: "The Last Migration".


7 bat: W., p. 20.

8 bear: R., p. 8, p. 36, W., p. 41, "The Brother's Dream".

9 birds:
   i blackbird: W., p. 39, G., p. 80, G., p. 189, "Lumb's Remains, 2".
   ii bluetit: G., p. 37, "The Brother's Dream".
   iii bullfinch: G., p. 37.
   iv buzzard: "March Morning Unlike Others".
   v cockerel: H., p. 30, G., p. 47, "The Court Tumbler and Satirist".
   viii cuckoo: G., p. 120.
x dipper: C., p. 37, G., p. 54.

xi dove: G., pp. 27–28, p. 64, p. 110, p. 197, "The Last Migration".


xiii finch: G., p. 44.

xiv goldfinch: C., p. 37.

xv goose: G., p. 188.


xix heron: C., p. 37, G., p. 107, "Warm Moors".

xx jay: G., p. 44, "The Space-Egg Was Sailing".

xxi lark: L., p. 25, G., p. 178, "Warm Moors".

xxii linnet: C., p. 46, p. 94.

xxiii macaw: H., p. 13, G., p. 44.


xxv nightingale: R., p. 12, W., p. 32, "Era of Giant Lizards".


xxvii parrot: H., p. 12.

xxviii peewit: C., p. 37.

xxix pheasant: H., p. 49, G., p. 61.

xxxi quail: W., p. 175.

xxxii raven: "The Executioner", "March Morning Unlike Others".

xxxiii robin: W., p. 176, C., p. 52.

xxxiv shrike: G., p. 182.

xxxv skylark: W., p. 168.

xxxvi sparrow: C., p. 37, p. 38, "Sunday Evening".


xxxviii swallow: C., p. 37, G., p. 187, "Dog Days on the Black Sea".

xxxix swan: W., p. 166, C., p. 55, G., p. 25, "On Westminster Bridge".


xlii vulture: L., p. 11, "Prometheus on His Crag".

xliii waterhen: G., p. 166.


xlvi woodpigeon: G., p. 29.

xlvii wren: H., p. 25, p. 49, G., p. 143, "Birdsong".


10 buffalo: "The Last Migration".


15 crab: L., p. 44, W., p. 21, C., p. 40, "The Last Migration", "The Road to Easington".

16 crocodile: R., p. 43, C., p. 94.

17 deer: (including stag and hind references) G., p. 63, p. 65, p. 139, p. 140, p. 145, p. 149, p. 150, p. 162, "Song of Woe".


22 elephant: C., p. 57, p. 94, "Birdsong".

23 elk: "Crow Rambles", "The Last Migration".

24 ermine: G., p. 64.


26 fish (continued):
    i dogfish: L., p. 44, C., p. 28, "The Road to Easington".
    ii flounder: W., p. 161, "On Westminster Bridge".
    iii goldfish: L., p. 38.
    iv gudgeon: L., p. 54.
    v haddock: "Karma", "On Westminster Bridge".
    vi minnow: G., p. 44.
    viii piranha: L., p. 20.
    ix skate: W., p. 174.
    x sturgeon: L., p. 42.
    xi trout: L., p. 20, R., p. 7, p. 33, p. 34, W., p. 31, G., p. 92, "To W.H. Auden".


32 insects:
    ii bee: G., p. 58, "March Morning Unlike Others".
    iii beetle: G., p. 51, p. 179, "The Space-Egg Was Sailing".
iv centipede: C., p. 48.

v dew-moth: H., p. 56.

vi flea: R., p. 16.


(3) bluefly: C., p. 20, G., p. 155, p. 177.

(4) butterfly: G., p. 160.


(8) tsetse fly: C. p. 20.


ix grasshopper: W., p. 20.

x grub: C., p. 14, p. 25.


xii larvae: L., p. 11.

xiii lice: R., p. 28.

xiv maggot: H., p. 48, R., p. 9, p. 10, W., p. 36, C., p. 93, "Watersong".
xv mantis: R., p. 36, "T.V. ON".

xvi mosquito: C., p. 20.

xvii moth: G., p. 88.

xviii woodlice: "Lumb's Remains 2".

33 jaguar: H., p. 12, L., p. 20, W., p. 25.

34 jellyfish: C., p. 71.


36 limpet: "Lines to a Newborn Baby".


40 mastodon: R., p. 9.

41 mole: H., p. 29, p. 37, C., p. 23.

42 monkey: L. p. 34, R., p. 41, W., p. 175, G., p. 87.

  i ape: H., p. 12, "Gibraltar".


  iv lemur: G., p. 41.

  v mandrill: "Lines to a Newborn Baby".


47 oxen: W., p. 27.


49 porpoise: "Dice".


52 rhinoceros: "The Road to Easington".


54 shark: L., p. 52, R., p. 8, C., p. 21, p. 31, "Crow Rambles".

55 sheep (including lambs, ewes, etc.): R., p. 20, p. 31, W., p. 30, p. 165, p. 173, G., p. 59, "March Morning Unlike Others".

56 shrew: H., p. 28, L., p. 12, G., p. 30, "Lumb's Remains 2".

57 slug: L., p. 32, C., p. 192, "Dice".

58 snail: C., p. 31, "Lines to a Newborn Baby", "Snails".
   iii asp: L., p. 60.
   iv boa-constrictor: H., p. 12.
   v python: G., p. 86.
   vi serpent: R., p. 17, W., p. 55, p. 149, C., p. 45, p. 78, G., p. 69, "To F.R. at Six Months".
   vii viper: G., p. 66, p. 188.
61 sponge: W., p. 173.
63 stoat: L., p. 11, p. 16, G., p. 177.
65 toad: R.*, p. 8, "Era of Giant Lizards", "Snails", "Warm Moors".
66 tortoise: G., p. 130.
67 vole: C., p. 64.
69 weasel: L., p. 19, p. 31, p. 58, G., p. 82, "The Space-Egg Was Sailing".


APPENDIX

FOOTNOTES

1 This catalogue includes all animal references in Ted Hughes's books of poems for adults, excluding Prometheus on His Crag (in limited edition and unavailable), and in almost all poems published separately.

2 References in books of poems are listed in order of publication and using the abbreviations as follows: The Hawk in the Rain, H; Lupercal, L; Recklings, R.; Wodwo, W.; Crow, C.; and Gaudete, G. Separately published poems in which images occur are listed alphabetically.

3 For locations of separately published poems, see bibliography.