

IX

REMAINS OF ELMET"The fallen sun...."(ROE.23)

The major work which closely followed *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds* in publication was *Remains of Elmet*. It was the third long sequence of Hughes' poems to be published by Faber and Faber between 1977 and 1979 and, unlike *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds* there is no indication that its poems or its theme were conceived earlier than 1977 when the first of the Elmet poems began to appear in print¹. It seems likely, therefore, that the whole Elmet sequence was written within this short two-year period and subsequent to *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*. Certainly, the fruits of Hughes' experience in weaving together several complex themes in a single dramatic and imaginative work can be seen in the balance and unity of this new sequence. The degree to which wholeness and integration were achieved, however, was not only responsible for the favourable public reaction to these poems, but also, paradoxically, led even those most aware of Hughes' ideas and intentions to regard the sequence as little more than a remarkably fine collection of his poems. Few were consciously aware of the deeper thematic aspects which effectively demonstrate Hughes' increasing ability to express and implement his beliefs and purposes through his work. Few, therefore, saw the importance of this sequence in the further development of his poetic endeavours. Far from being a criticism of *Remains of Elmet*, however, this indicated the great skill with which Hughes was now able to use the tools at his disposal and to make myth, ritual, music and drama such an integral part of his work that they are almost inseparable from it. No longer is myth or ritual an easily recognisable framework dictating the basic pattern and momentum of the sequence (as *Alchemy* did in *Cave Birds*) but, as will be seen when the Elmet poems are

¹'Heptonstall Old Church' and 'Football at Slack' were published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in June, 1977.

examined, it is as integral to each poem as it is to the whole cycle of the sequence. In addition, the focus of Hughes' attention has moved from the world of imaginative fantasy to our familiar everyday world. In *Remains of Elmet* he delights in the actual, the world of Nature, grounding his imagery in the real and experienced, and using imagination to recreate this world in such a way that we are made aware of our own shortcomings and of the destructive/creative powers (the *mana*) of Nature which surround us. Nature, in *Remains of Elmet*, is no longer a dark, threatening, and largely unknown power, but an ever present force, the workings of which are constantly visible in our world.

Critical reaction to *Remains of Elmet* when it was published was muted in comparison with the excesses to which some reviewers had been prompted by Hughes' earlier works. Some, like Calvin Bedient, who is habitually roused to aggression by Hughes' poetry, accused him (yet again) of violence and "primal drum-thumping"(1), but the tone of the Elmet sequence was sufficiently different to cause even Hughes' most determined critics to change their complaints. Instead of violence, they accused him of writing poems "neither dynamic nor absolute" but "melodramatic"(2), and of being "perverse and inverted, to a point of indulgent nastiness" whilst, at the same time, repelling the critic by his "extreme ordinariness of language(3).

In general, however, *Remains of Elmet* impressed its reviewers with its power to evoke the bleak, rugged, and haunting beauty of the Calder Valley. Fay Godwin's photographs were universally praised, and Hughes' poems were variously described as "the most restrained, beautiful and unobtrusively effective poems"(4); "his most approachable volume" for a long time(5); and "Landscape poetry"(6). Few reviewers regarded the sequence as much more than Hughes' nostalgic reaction to Fay Godwin's photographs. Only one discerned any connecting thread linking the poems beyond their common concern with the

Calder Valley. Even Gifford and Roberts characterise *Remains of Elmet* as "a social history [written] as a natural history", although they do believe that in this book Hughes is "writing at the height of his powers"(7) and they remark on the frequency with which he achieves "complete unity between the vision of the poem and its language"(8).

Hughes, himself, has said that he did not want "to write a history"(9) but, apart from this, he has done nothing to expand these views of his Elmet sequence, claiming only that Godwin's photographs "moved me to write the accompanying poems"(ROE.Introduction). Similarly, in his note in *Selected Poems 1957-81*, he describes the poems as "texts to accompany photographs, by Fay Godwin, of the Calder Valley and environs in West Yorkshire, where I spent my early years, and where I have lived occasionally since"(SP.238).

True as this may be, a close examination of the sequence suggests that this is not the whole story, and it is as well to recall Sylvia Plath's warning to her mother not to take Hughes' explanations "too seriously". Referring to one of Hughes' early plays she wrote

He is so critical of the play...that he needs to invent elaborate disguises as a smokescreen for it.

(10).

More frequently, it seems that Hughes provides a simple explanation for his work which masks its real complexity, exactly as he did in the programme notes for the Ilkley Festival performance of *Cave Birds*.

Remains of Elmet, in fact, is far less simple than Hughes' published statements about it would have us believe. There is a metaphysical aspect to it which has been almost overlooked², and it has, again, a transforming alchemical

²Scigaj identifies some important metaphysical aspects of the sequence when he notes Hughes' use of "Taoist esthetics" to broaden his personal vision of the world(30).

purpose. It also displays as many congruencies of thought and belief between Hughes and Blake as were evident in *Cave Birds*. It is a sequence not only by virtue of the poems' common geographical location, but also because of a consistent underlying cosmology, and because it represents, as one reviewer, Richard Murphy, perceptively realized, Hughes' attempt to "re-sacralize" the world through poetry(11).

Murphy, despite the fact that he was not wholly enamoured of the Elmet sequence, made several acute observations. Seeing Hughes in the role of prophet and mythmaker, he wrote that

Hughes marshals forces of metaphor, myth and prophecy to reconquer his populous northern territory, and hand it back to nature.

Yet, as the Elmet poems make clear, Nature would regain her territory without Hughes' help, and Murphy describes the situation more accurately when he writes: "Now the puritan god has died, and the older Celtic deity is recovering her rites of the sun and the moon". Hughes' poems in *Remains of Elmet* chronicle this process, but he does, also, attempt a re-creation of his own, and the shaping influence which he brings to bear in structuring the sequence makes this work his own very personal account of an apocalyptic vision of the kind which Blake presented in *Jerusalem*.

To recognise this parallel, one needs to be aware of certain philosophical beliefs, closely linked to Alchemy, which apparently underlie the work of both Blake and Hughes. The clue to these beliefs, and to their importance in *Remains of Elmet*, lies in the continual interaction between light and matter which is evident in the poetry and the photographs throughout the book. This interaction occurs, in Hughes' descriptions of the light on the landscape and in Godwin's dramatic black and white photographs. Metaphorically, it occurs, too, in the illumination, feeling, and insight which the

words and photographs accomplish in the mind of the reader, and in the enclosure of this 'light' in the printed words and photographic images on the page. Just as Blake used his etching processes, "printing in the infernal method, by corrosives" to melt "apparent surfaces away and display...the infinite which was hid"(MHH.49), so Hughes and Godwin use the physical and chemical manipulation of light and darkness in the printing and photographic processes to embody their art.

The concept of the immersion of light in matter and its subsequent release is, of course, fundamental to Alchemy, where it is the basis of the Great Work. It represents a particular cosmology which was common to Neoplatonic and Hermetic philosophy, both of which were familiar to Blake through a number of sources: Thomas Taylor's translation of an Ancient Greek text by Porphyry on Homer's *Cave of the Nymphs*; Dr. Everard's translation of Hermes' *Divine Pymander*; and the alchemical books of Thomas Vaughan, written under his pseudonym, Eugene Philolethes³. Hughes' familiarity with these ideas may derive from his knowledge of Blake, but it is more than likely that he, too, has read these texts, and others. His own writing, particularly in articles and reviews, shows a wide knowledge of Ancient Greek philosophy, world mythology and Hermetic texts.

According to Neoplatonic and Hermetic cosmology, primordial chaos contained infinite Light (often called 'Divine Spirit' or 'Soul'), "an infinite darkness in the Abyss or bottomless Depth", Water, and "a subtle Spirit intelligible in Power"(12) which is called, variously, '*Nimbus Numinis Descenatu*', '*Anima Mundi*'(13), and 'Nature'(14). Light, attracted by the subtle Spirit, 'Nature', combined with it and became "coagulated" matter. So, the sensible

³Kathleen Raine has made a detailed analysis of the influence of these works on Blake's writing in her book, *Blake and Tradition* (31).

world was made, and Soul was incorporated in material bodies to create living creatures. Because of these events, infinite Light and Soul became finite and subject to dissolution. With dissolution, however, the Soul is again released, an event of which Vaughan wrote:

Ignorance gave this release the name of Death, but properly it is the Soule's Birth,
and a charter that makes for her liberty.

(15).

So, the dialectic of light and darkness began, and the cyclical process of the imprisonment and release of divine light (or soul) was set in motion.

Porphyry's description of the process is more poetic. He writes of the Soul's descent into the dark

witches brew of generation (ΓΕΝΕΣΙΣ) which truly mixes and brews together the
immortal and the mortal, the rational and the emotional, the Olympian and the
terrestrial.

(16).

This is our world, the world of Circe, the Moon Goddess, a world dominated by "the cyclical progress and rotation of metempsychosis": it is the Soul's grave, but it is also its cradle(17).

In *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes uses these concepts, and sometimes even Porphyry's exact phrases, in his poems - equating the "witches brew"⁴ with, amongst other things, the wild weather which is so common in the "cradle-grave" of the Calder Valley(cf. 'Moors'(ROE.19) and 'Where the Mothers'(ROE.10)). Similarly, the northern setting which Hughes chooses for his poems acquires symbolic significance when related to Porphyry's statement that "the northern regions belong to the soul descending into generation": and Hughes gives many of the moorland plants and animals a symbolic status which parallels that

⁴Thomas Taylor translates Porphyry's words as "the confused mixture of generation"(32) but the phrase "witches brew" is attributed to Porphyry by the doxographer Stobaeus and is quoted in Lamberton's translation(33).

attributed by Porphyry to Homer. Birds associated with water, such as Hughes' curlews and snipe, take on the role of the Naiad nymphs, which Porphyry "thought of as the soul coming down into generation, and hovering over the water"(18). The "purple aeons" of heather which clothe the "big animal of rock"(ROE.44,48) in Elmet, resemble the organic "sea - purple cloth" woven by Naiads on the stone-loom "bones" of Earth - cloth which Porphyry equates with "flesh, woven of blood" as a "cloak for the Soul"(19). And the "nectar, keen as adder venom"(ROE.48), which attracts the moorland bees, finds a Porphyrian parallel in the amphorae of ambrosial honey that attract bee/Souls to the "pleasures of descent into the flesh"(20), for despite their heavenly origin,

"the Souls are bewitched and softened by the pleasures that lead them back again
to γένεσις [genesis] (21).

Even the goat for which the "shattered" farmers wait in 'Auction'(ROE.107) has a symbolic parallel in Porphyry's essay, where Capricorn is the constellation marking the "southern gate" through which Souls "enslaved by generation, are set free, coming to live again and receiving, as it were, another birth"(22).

The myths of these early cosmologies are expressed in spiritual terms but they also had great explanatory relevance to the degenerative/regenerative patterns so evident in the physical world of Nature⁵. And, whilst it is Nature with which Hughes deals most closely in *Remains of Elmet*, the parallels between the myths and his own beliefs in the "luminous spirit"(23) hidden deep within us - the inner energy which links us with the Universal Energies - suggest the underlying spiritual aspect of his work.

⁵The imprisonment of cosmic energy (Light) in material bodies (Matter) is still a fundamental concept in our scientific explanations of the world - it is basic to our description of photosynthesis, for example.

In addition, evidence that Hermetic myths have directly influenced Hughes' handling of *Remains of Elmet* is to be found throughout the sequence, and Hughes' opening poem 'Where the Mothers'(ROE.10), provides an early and clear example of this. Using rhythms and sounds which capture the wildness of the elements as they are commonly experienced on the pictured moors, Hughes describes the disembodied souls as they, like the wind and the rain, howl through heaven and

Pour down onto earth
Looking for bodies
Of birds, animals, people.

The condition of these souls is linked within the 13 lines of this poem to the fallen condition of our world (so literally a "star-broken stone", separated from, but totally subject to the influence, of the sun) and to that of Hughes' own small part of the world - the Calder Valley: it is an unchanging, changing condition of death and rebirth as part of Nature's cycles, and it is symbolized by the "cradle-grave" throughout this Elmet sequence.

The blackness which dominates Fay Godwin's photograph, encroaching on the light in which the stone crosses stand, suggests the darkness which the disembodied souls are choosing to re-enter. Their "secret and wild" happiness is that of souls choosing to "follow and obey their worst parts and their emotions"(24). For, as Porphyry writes:

The urge for pleasure makes them long for the accustomed way of life in and through the flesh and so they fall back into the witches brew of generation (25).

Thus, these souls choose the "silent evil joy" of mortal life which, as 'Abel Cross' (the name of the pictured stone crosses) may remind us, led our biblical ancestors to evil.

There are echoes of Nordic myth, too, in Hughes' opening lines and the "Mothers" "gallop" like Valkyries across the land looking for bodies to re-animate. But, "The Mothers" are also the elements, the alchemical 'Mothers', Air, Water, and Fire, from which all things are created⁶. In the poem, the vivid immediacy of these elements "howling" through the bleak landscape gives the mythical "witches brew" of the world of generation a physical reality. Here, as in other poems in this sequence, the abstract 'elements' of philosophy are materialized as the forces of Nature, in this case the inclement weather - "The witch-brew boiling in the sky-vat" ('Moors' ROE.19) - which so frequently prevails on these West Yorkshire moors.

Hughes' ability to give abstract ideas a concrete form and to present ancient philosophies in a modern context is exercised to its full in the poems of *Remains of Elmet*. Even the smallest detail of Hughes' landscape is frequently both realistically evoked and of symbolic importance. Just as this first poem captures the harsh wildness of the weather in this region and the sense of exhilaration which it can sometimes bring, so the "lark-song just out of hearing / Hidden in the wind" describes a phenomenon common on these moors where the faint, high, song of the lark reaches the listener in wind-blown snatches. This detail suggests an ephemeral joy which tempers the violence of Hughes' scene, but the ground-dwelling lark which soars so high into the heavens to sing is, also, a suitable symbol by which to link Heaven and Earth, immortal and mortal, just as the lines themselves mark the moment of embodiment in the text of the poem.

The lark is not a common bird in myth or folklore, but it is worth noting that Shakespeare and Blake also made similar symbolic use of this bird. The lark, in *Cymbeline*, sings "at heaven's gate"(26); and, for Blake, the lark was

⁶the Three Mothers...are Aire, Water, and Fire; a still Water...a hissing Fire, and Aire the middle Spirit...The Heavens were made of the Fire, the Earth was made of the Water,...and the Ayre proceeded from the middle Spirit"(34).

"a mighty Angel"(Mil.40:12) which mounts to "a Crystal Gate...the entrance of the First Heaven"(Mil.39:61-2). Kathleen Raine writes that Blake used the lark as a symbol for the "dimensionless point where eternity flows into time"(27) - a symbolism which is particularly apt for Hughes' poem.

As the opening poem of *Remains of Elmet*, 'Where the Mothers' establishes the several themes which will be linked throughout the book. The pagan philosophy and mood of the poem, the hints of Nordic mythology, and the reference to the Earth as a "star-broken stone", establish the historical context from which the present-day Calder Valley evolved. Here, Hughes re-creates the British Celtic kingdom of Elmet which

For centuries was considered a more or less uninhabitable wilderness a notorious refuge for criminals, a hide-out for refugees.

(ROE.Introductory Note).

Such was the "cradle-grave" of the Industrial Revolution and of the people who made it possible.

The theme of 'The Mothers', too, is established here, and is reinforced by Hughes' dedication of the book to the memory of his own mother, Edith Farrar (who died in 1969), and by his prefatory poem(ROE.7), in which his mother lives on briefly for him through her brother. The recent history of the Calder Valley, the dreams and aspirations of its people - "the arguing immortal dead / the hymns rising past farms" - which Hughes records in this book, are her memories and her brother's, "Archaeology of the mouth" which Hughes has attempted to record before the "frayed, fraying hair-fineness" of the thread linking their lives to his is finally broken. Yet, as has already been suggested, there is more to the theme of 'The Mothers' than this. It encompasses, also, the philosophical/alchemical 'Mothers' and, most importantly, Nature (the Mother Goddess herself) and the regenerative cycles by which she redresses the errors of

Mankind and restores universal harmony. The Celtic pre-history of the West Yorkshire, too, is an essential part of this theme, for The Mothers (Matres or Matronea) were an important triad of Celtic fertility goddesses, and Brig (Brigid) the patron goddess of poets, gave her name to the Celtic Brigantian people who once inhabited Elmet(28).

Closely woven into these other themes, is that of fallen divine Light and its ultimate release, which has already been discussed. In addition to the Hermetic and Neoplatonic influences, however, there are prophetic and visionary aspects to Hughes' handling of this theme in *Remains of Elmet* which strongly resemble those of Blake in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. Each poet has been greatly influenced by the visions described in the New Testament book of 'The Revelation of St. John', but in *Remains of Elmet* it is as if Hughes has adopted Blake's symbolism of Albion/England from *Jerusalem* and given it reality. The rock on which Blake's Albion lies becomes the enduring rock of the Yorkshire moors, Blake's "Furnaces" are the fires of the sun, and his "starry Wheels" the "blind skylines revolving dumbly"(ROE.50) over Elmet. All around, the wind, the rain, the storms and the thunder of the Calder Valley rage as they do in *Jerusalem*:

Albion cold lays on his Rock: storms & snows beat round him,
Beneath the Furnaces & the starry Wheels & the Immortal Tomb
Howling winds cover him: roaring seas dash furiously against him:
In the deep darkness broad lightnings glare, long thunders roll.

(Jer.94:1-4).

The initial fall into generation in the first poem of *Remains of Elmet* parallels Albion's turning away "down the valleys dark"(Jer.4:22) of Ulro. From then, until the apocalyptic vision in 'The Angel'(ROE.124), Hughes' sequence chronicles the working of Nature's powers, by means of which the land "stretches awake out of Revelations"('The Trance of Light'ROE.20), the creatures live and die, and the trapped souls are finally released.

In *Remains of Elmet*, as one poem clearly states, "It is all happening to the sun./ The fallen sun"(ROE.23), and the Blake poem which this echoes might well serve to summarise Hughes' healing purpose in this sequence:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
 Who Present, Past & Future sees,
 Whose ears have heard
 The Holy Word
 That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
 And weeping in the evening dew,
 That might control
 The starry pole
 And fallen fallen light renew!

"O Earth, O Earth return!
 Arise from out the dewy grass;
 Night is worn
 And the morn
 Rises from the slumberous mass.

"Turn away no more:
 Why wilt thou turn away?
 The starry floor
 The wat'ry shore
 Is giv'n thee till the break of day."

(28).

X

REMAINS OF ELMET"The Mothers"(ROE.10)

Whilst the first poem in *Remains of Elmet* introduces the important themes of the sequence the final poem is, as usual, of special significance and relevance¹. According to Faas(1), 'The Angel'(ROE.124) describes a recurrent dream which Hughes has "dreamt about once a week during childhood and adolescence" and at regular intervals ever since. In this dream, "a plane, which he flies in or watches, crashes in flame and often, before it hits the ground, changes into a monster animal falling out of the sky"(2). Hughes' first poetic version of this dream appeared as 'Ballad From a Fairy Tale' in *Wodwo*²(W.166).

In both versions of this poem, Hughes describes the vision of a disastrous fiery event, like "a moon disintegrating"(B.4) in the Calder Valley. From the resulting phosphorescent crater there emerges a huge and beautiful swan/angel which lights the moors as it passes low over them and disappears "towards the West"(B.30). The meaning of this "immense omen"(A.24), interpreted for Hughes by his mother, turns the "beauty suddenly to terror"(A.17) and so, horror, beauty and energy are combined in one powerful symbol.

In neither poem are we told Hughes' mother's words, but the detail which links Hughes' vision with everyday life, and which gives her words "doubled"(B.59) significance, is his second sighting of the angel's puzzling halo. This "enigmatic square of satin"(A.21), which ripples in the wind of the angel's flight, when seen again is (as Hughes acknowledged in a response to a query from

¹Scigaj records that Hughes chose the first and last poems of the sequence and then he and Fay Godwin worked together to arrange the remaining text and photographs(16).

²For easy reference in this discussion of 'The Angel' and 'Ballad From a Fairy Tale', when lines are quoted the poems will be referred to by 'A' and 'B' respectively.

me(3)) a piece of funerary furnishing. So, the angelic omen, like the Angel of Death in the Kabbalah, portends destruction.

The location of the vision in the area around Hughes' home, his reference to members of his family(B.ll.43-4), and his reluctance to spell out the associated words and events, all suggest its great personal significance. It is likely that the first version of the poem interprets the vision in the light of Sylvia Plath's death³ for Sylvia is buried in the hilltop graveyard at Heptonstall and the shock of her death left Hughes, as in the poem, metaphorically "in a valley" / Deeper than any dream...And the valley was dark"(B.ll.52-3, 60). In 'The Angel', however, Hughes' dread is less intense and he is able to reach out and touch the satin halo.

Significantly, perhaps, by the time that *Remains of Elmet* was written, Hughes' mother, Edith Farrar, had also died. She is buried in a grave close by Sylvia's on the Heptonstall hillside, and now, literally, she and her words are "joined in earth". These two poems seem, therefore, to link Hughes' vision with both these women who have been of major importance in his life and, since both women were mothers, the poems restate the theme of 'the mothers' which runs through the Elmet poems.

Significantly, also, there are words "engraved in rock" at this place where Hughes' wife and his mother are buried. Only metaphorically are his mother's words "under his feet", for on Edith Farrar's tombstone there are only names and dates. On that of Sylvia Plath, however, is carved:

³Scigaj confirms that both poems "recount dream premonitions" of Sylvia's death (17)

Even amidst Fierce Flames
The golden lotus can be planted.

Such words assert, even in Sylvia's death, the survival of the female life-principle of re-creation and generation which the lotus represents. And, whether or not these are the words to which Hughes refers in 'The Angel', this final poem in *Remains of Elmet* brings together the human mothers and the Mother Goddess whose triple aspects of Bride, Mother and Layer-out Hughes has, elsewhere, described as the different faces of the Angel of Death who is also the Angel of Life(4). The mothers and the angel, therefore, are symbolically linked by the powerful life/death force of which they are the instruments.

In interpreting 'The Angel' as an affirmation of the power of the Universal Energies on Earth, and Hughes' vision as a symbol of *mana*, the transforming and healing influences of his own work during the years between the writing of the two dream/omen poems must be considered. Of particular importance in interpreting the final stanza of 'The Angel' is a sequence of seventeen poems which were published in a limited edition by The Rainbow Press in 1979⁴. *Adam and the Sacred Nine* deals, once again, with the question of human nature, documenting Adam's ambitious dreams, his insignificance, his defeat, his visitation by "sacred" emissaries of Nature, and his ultimate self-knowledge. Adam's problem as Gifford and Roberts remark, "is that of Wodwo, Crow, Lumb and the protagonist of *Cave Birds*"(5); it is, also, that of Prometheus and of every human being. Its significance here, however, lies not so much in Hughes' exploration of Adam's state, as in his ultimate understanding of it and the means by which he expresses this. Through "The sole of the foot / Pressed to world-rock"(M.169)(a traditional symbolic route of enlightenment) Adam, reborn

⁴Twelve of these poems also appear in *Moortown*.

from the sacrificial flames of the Phoenix, wakes to the knowledge of his total unity with Nature. Adam, who was made *of* earth, is also made *for* earth:

I am no wing
To tread emptiness
I was made

For You.

(M.170).

Mother Nature, through her birds, has taught him this, and she now affirms her teaching through the rock on which he stands. So, his mother's words, as in 'The Angel', are under his feet.

The importance of this revelation, and the symbolic relevance of 'The Angel' to the whole of the Elmet sequence, lies in the warning both contain for us of Nature's inevitable resurgence and the destruction of any society which tries to control and suppress her energies in the way that the Elmet people did. Despite the personal context of Hughes' vision, however, his message is universal, and it is similar in many ways to the visions of others who have foreseen the end of the world.

Hughes' Angel of Death, who is also the Angel of Life, has well known parallels in the biblical Book of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation, as well as in the Koran and the Kabbalah. Its appearance, like that of Ezekiel's huge and brilliant heavenly messengers, was heralded by a fiery elemental disturbance; and its massive awesome beauty "was cast in burning metal"(A.20) just as Ezekiel's angels "sparkled like the colour of burnished brass". It, too, heralded news of destruction and salvation, as do the various angels in the Book of Revelation, and "the Crier" who appears when "the moon is cleft in two" at the "Hour of Doom" in the Koran(6).

In both the Bible and the Koran, the forecast destruction is that preceding the Day of Judgment, when "a new heaven and a new earth" will be created(7), the imprisoned human Soul will be released, and unbelievers will be "cast into the Fire"(8). Their angels are male, their Heaven and Earth belong to a male god, and it is he who judges, destroys, and promises salvation. Hughes' angel, however, is female, and she is associated with all that is symbolically female - the moon and the snow, valleys and moors, and with Earth rather than Heaven. She comes from the dark valley and disappears "under the moor"(A.26), and she promises no resurrection but that achieved through Nature, of which we are all a part. Hughes' conception of the universe is pre-biblical, he places humanity within the framework of the ancient beliefs on which the Judeic-Graeco-Christian religions were founded and in which the subtle female spirit of Nature predominates. For him, the Universal Energies are 'The Infinite' - a vast, supreme unity which is, at once, everything and nothing. From this 'One' the physical world emanates, and we are its reflection in miniature.

Yet, our sins and our salvation are in our own provenance. We share in the Universal Energies, and must learn to live in harmony with them, and our guide to this is the divine faculty (the "luminous spirit") within ourselves. Hughes has written that it is the divine faculty which unites our inner and outer worlds: without this faculty "the inner world...is a place of demons" and "the outer world...a place of meaningless objects and machines"; without it "humanity cannot really exist"(ME-2.92). For Hughes, as for Blake, the divine faculty is imagination(ME-2.92).

Through our imagination, Hughes seeks to teach us that Nature, our creator and destroyer, may also be the instrument of our enlightenment. We are perpetually subject to her powers, and a society which misunderstands, suppresses or ignores Nature, and regards the Earth as "a heap of raw materials

given to Man by God for his exclusive profit and use"(9), becomes "horribly sick"(10), because "Nature's obsession, after all," as Hughes wrote in a book review in 1970, "is to survive"(11). Nature will fight back and attempt to restore the balance⁵; therefore, our only hope is to become aware of our true relationship with Nature and to learn to live in harmony with her.

In his imaginative attempts to teach us this, Hughes has described one historical period of retribution in his analysis of Shakespeare's work(12), citing the bloody, religious war which took place when Puritanism enforced suppression of the Old Goddess and the old acceptance of the natural energies. He has written frequently of our own society as being "exiled from nature"(13), and, to this, he attributes the world's current ills, execrating "The Scientific Spirit", this "master of ours", which suppresses the instinctive and imaginative energies, and which was

born of the common hunt for the nourishing morsel, nursed by the benign search for objective truth, schooled in the pedagogic idolatry of the objective fact, graduated through old-maid specialised research, losing eyes, ears, smell, taste, touch, nerves and blood, adapting to the sensibility of electronic gadgets and the argument of numbers, to become a machine of senility, a pseudo-automaton in the House of the Mathematical Absolute. So it ousts humanity from man and he dedicates his life to the laws of the electron in vacuo, a literal self-sacrifice, and soon, by bigotry and the especially rabid evangelism of the inhuman, a literal world-sacrifice, as we all too truly now fear.

(14).

Having such vehement and long standing beliefs in the destructive power of thwarted Nature, it is understandable that Hughes should regard his angelic nightmare/vision as an omen with more than personal significance, and that he should present it to his readers as an apocalyptic vision and a warning.

⁵Hughes' conception of the world as a single organism, each individual element of which is an essential part of a balanced unity, resembles the Chinese Taoist conception of the Universal Energies as a balance of Ying and Yang. Both resemble the Gaia hypothesis (18) which is fundamental to ecological science, and which was first propounded by James Hutton (a contemporary of William Blake) before the Royal Society of Edinburgh in the eighteenth century. It regards the Earth as a living organism which will adapt itself to physical changes in such a way that balance and life is maintained because "living organisms have always, and actively, kept their planet fit for life"(19).

Hughes, like his friend Baskin, shares Blake's "apocalyptic eye" and "a prophetic concern for what Blake called the human form divine"(15). And, just as Blake, in *Jerusalem*, used London and the cities of England to demonstrate his vision of Man's "passage through / Eternal Death and the awakening to Eternal Life"(Jer.1), so, in *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes uses his own small section of England to demonstrate the fulfillment of the angelic portent and to alert us to the danger of our ways. 'The Angel' serves as a coda to the Elmet poems and, by its similarity with other apocalyptic visions, it extends the scope of its prophecy to encompass society as a whole.

XI

REMAINS OF ELMET

"...at the dead end of a wrong direction"(ROE.103)

Between the first and the last poems of *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes traces the history of a society's war with Nature(ROE.26) and the sad misdirection of its energies. In broad outline this history is simply told. First, in a euphoric state of co-operation, the "great adventure" of farming the land began; Nature's powers were pressed into service and "the stone rigging" of the "hill walls"(ROE.30) sheeted the hills into place to work for men. The freedom and euphoria, however, were not to last. Fired with energy by their "brave dreams"(ROE.30) men "conscripted"(ROE.37) and "tamed" "wild rock"(ROE.40) to create mills where "bodies...came and went / stayed in position, fixed like stones" and "became four-cornered, stony"(ROE.37). So began the loss of paradise, innocence and imagination, a process which was completed by the smothering "blackness" of the religion which rose on "Wesley's foundation stone", "blocking the moon"(ROE.82). As the society's spirit died, "arthritic stasis"(ROE.92) and disintegration set in. The few remaining farmers, "rotten and shattered"(ROE.107) like their farms, know that it is only a matter of time before Nature resumes her property: they wait (as Hughes' ambiguously puts it) "for the goat to come up"(ROE.107), as if waiting for Pan. Eventually, all that remains of this society are the "lost jawbones of men / and lost fingerbones of women /...darkening back to heather"(ROE.117). Light and wind and earth and rock are freed of human constraints and, like a "soft animal of peace" from the "pre-dawn" of the world, the land "lies openly sunning /...healing and sweetening"(ROE.114).

Hughes' poetic history does not finish here, however, and what follows is more complex. In the aftermath of this society's death comes

resurrection. Firstly, the Logos, "The Word that Space Breathes", moves through a world filled with exaltation and promise(ROE.117). Then, as a new dawn breaks over "the valley cauldron", heralded by "cock-crows"(ROE.121), Hughes' dead rise from their graves to become "living feathers", "a family of dark swans", birds sacred to the Goddess and to Apollo, symbols of rebirth and healing unity. Reborn, these spirits "go beating low through storm-silver / towards the Atlantic"(ROE.122) - flying in the Goddess's silvery light towards the West, the direction associated in Greek and Celtic mythology with Paradise, and the direction also taken by Hughes' angel/vision(W.166-7:31).

In his poetic sequence, Hughes projects the history of Elmet beyond the present day. The old Calder Valley society is now, as Hughes himself describes it, "virtually dead, and the population of the valleys and the hillsides, so rooted for so long, is changing rapidly"(ROE. Intro.). There has, as yet, been no holocaust and no great natural resurgence, only slow disintegration and decay. The terrifying warning of Hughes' angel/vision has been only partially fulfilled. So, Hughes harnesses the energies to provide a poetic/shamanic resolution to the prophecy and a reconciliation of Mankind with Nature. The spiritual reunion which he describes is the natural conclusion to his theme of the elemental and alchemical 'mothers', and it entails the ultimate release of light and soul from imprisonment in matter and the return to the natural harmony and peace from which the journey began.

The journey itself, as Hughes' poetic account of it shows, has been long and tortuous, and the imagery of division and war appears constantly in the Elmet poems. Often this is linked to the long and turbulent history of England, providing a time scale for the sequence which spans the known existence of people in this region. Such a use of historical perspective is a technique Hughes has employed before to convey the persistence of the natural world and the

relative insignificance and brevity of Man's existence in it (as in 'October Dawn'(HIR.41), for example). In *Remains of Elmet*, however, the historical perspective is used more extensively and with greater effect, so that the "guerrilla patience"(ROE.37) of Nature is seen constantly to undermine human endeavours, making Nature the inevitable victor in the struggle for control. Yet, the war is not only between Man and Nature, but also between man and man, and between the unreconciled parts of the human personality - the Dionysian and Apollonian energies, the spiritual and the physical needs.

All these conflicts have existed in Elmet since the time of the earliest inhabitants. "The Ancient Briton", "The Mighty Hunter", whose energy survives in the tribal memory of the Calder Valley people like "a whorl in our ignorance"(ROE.84), built hill-forts in this area, and to facilitate "worship, defence, contact and trade"(1), he created a network of moorland tracks which later became the stone-paved "causeys" featured in several of Fay Godwin's photographs. He also erected the standing stones such as the Bridestones(ROE.64), which remain as impressive evidence of the human struggle to deal with the inexplicable aspects of this world, and with instinctive and spiritual needs.

Warfare played an inordinately large part in the lives of the Elmet people, and for centuries this "deep, boggy, ditch in the moorlands" was a hideout for rebels, robbers and dissenters. The British Celtic people who lived here were the Brigantes, whose fierce, unruly character gave meaning to the modern English word 'brigand', and from their time on "long screams / dark voices / swift weapons"(ROE.26) were familiar to the people of this region. Here, were England's

Badlands where outcast and outlaw
Fortified the hill-knowle's long outlook.

(ROE.96).

In the history, legends and myths of the Calder Valley, fighting and death figure large, and continually, it seems,

Wounded champions lurch out of sunset
To gurgle their last gleams into pot holes.

(ROE.19).

This "unending bleeding"(ROE.26), and these "lost rivers of men"(ROE.23), contribute to the desolation which imbues the present scene in *Remains of Elmet*. "Everywhere", as in 'Long Screams'(ROE.26), there are "dead things for monuments of the dead", like the distant church spire, symbol of a dead religion, glimpsed through the barbed wire in Fay Godwin's photograph(ROE.27) (a composition strongly reminiscent of wartime pictures of waterlogged trenches in Flanders). In poetry and picture we glimpse the "rummaging of light at the end of the world", and in this phrase, with characteristic economy and ambivalence, Hughes conveys the enormity and horror of a scene where light both rummages and is rummaged. Characteristically too, Hughes' final image in 'Long Screams' links a common local phenomenon with a metaphysical theme, and the curlew, whose plaintive, almost human, cry is heard in the North of England as an omen death(2), becomes a messenger between Earth and "the source of it all", and a symbol of the desolate anguish of Earth - the "mother"(ROE.26).

Evoking memories from his own past, Hughes recalls that "the depression and psychic horror of the first World War crawled around inside everybody like a pestilential secret and there were evil dreams of the war to come"(3), and he connects the decay of the Elmet society and its loss of spirit with this war-sickness, seeing "the throb of mills and the crying of lambs"

Like shouting in Flanders
Muffled away
In white curls
And memorial knuckles

(ROE.43).

Human warfare, however, is a symptom, not a cause of the failure and disintegration of this society, and the divisions between people reflect a deeper division within them that stems from the alienation between their inner and outer worlds. The slavery of war, the daily slavery to the "sewing machine and shuttle", the slavish allegiance to religious dogma, all make Hughes' reference to "a generation of slaves"(ROE.13) particularly apt: all, too, grow from the ambitious pride which dominates the people's lives and separates them from their natural roots.

In 'Hardcastle Crag'(ROE.13), Hughes develops the images of slavery and war to show the deep disharmony which exists between Man and Nature. The "silent valley" of the god, once a "hide-out of elation" has become an echoing graveyard. Nature, here, like the red-squirrel, is at the "branch-end of survival"(ROE.13), and the Taoist quotation with which the poem opens, coming from a system of belief founded on the harmonious balancing of natural energies, emphasises the disorder which prevails¹. In Taoism, too, the god of the valley is Nature, "the mother of the myriad creatures"(4), the female principle through which Heaven and Earth are joined:

The spirit of the valley never dies.
This is called the mysterious female.
The gateway of the mysterious female
Is called the root of heaven and earth.

(5).

In Elmet, however, disharmony with Nature has been such that the Calder Valley, as Hughes presents it in 'First Mills'(ROE.34), is like a deserted battlefield on which a brave society has bled to death. It is a sodden, deserted, "trench", covered by a grey dome which the light scarcely penetrates:

¹In reply to a query from me, Hughes described this quotation as "Chinese, Taoist---but of the precise source I'm ignorant. I found it long ago in a giant Encyclopedia of Proverbs from all languages---a U.S. book I think, and quite old. I imagine it comes from some Taoist text---not from the common stock of proverbs"(11).

A sky like an empty helmet
With a hole in it.

(ROE.34).

Yet, in the final lines of the poem there is a hope of renewal. Using the extended metaphor of a human life-cycle - the cycle of growth and development, aging, death, and disintegration - Hughes contrasts the brevity of our own existence with the endurance of the Earth, and the death of the Elmet society becomes a small event in the "childhood of the earth". After the brief period of mourning, the "two minutes silence", life will continue. Once again, this is a death which presages rebirth: it is a return to the Earth, "the only future"(ROE.14), from which a new beginning may be made. Nature will eventually heal the divisions and the disorder that people have created, and, despite the pervasive imagery of war in *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes' poems convey, also, the endurance and the regenerative power of Nature's energies.

Paradoxically, the energies expended in human warfare are the very energies which might ensure human survival, and the results of war have not always been completely bad. The Viking invaders, who terrorised the Elmet area in the ninth and tenth centuries, eventually stayed on as settlers, and Hughes speaks of the mythology and religion of these Norsemen as being part of "our wealth", part of "our instinct and ancestral memory"(6). Their influence is still reflected in West Yorkshire place-names and in the "gutturals of dialects"('Thistles'W.17), and Hughes approves of the addition their Nordic strengths made to the genetic pool when

The long ships got this far. Then
Anchored in nose and chin.

(ROE.90).

It is these strengths which Hughes admired in Billy Holt, a well known, unconventional, and fiercely independent personality from the Calder Valley². The wry, gentle, humour with which Hughes pokes fun at his taciturn, suspicious, strong-willed fellow Yorkshiremen in the poem 'For Billy Holt'(ROE.90), beautifully demonstrates his affection for both him and them.

The Viking influence, however, was only one factor involved in shaping the idiosyncratic character of the local people. Because, in Hughes' scheme of things, everything is part of an organic whole, he sees the geology and climate of this area as also playing a fundamental role:

The weight of impressive nature has imprinted the people so deeply that they are characteristic - a geological and meteorological phenomena. This helps to explain their obsession with wrapping up well, hot food, keeping warm, cloth and clothing.

(Reading):

Wild Rock

Tamed rock.

Millstone-grit - a soul-grinding sandstone.

Roof-of-the-world-ridge wind

And rain, and rain.

Heaven - the face of a quarry.

Oak-leaves of hammered copper, as in Cranach.

Grass greening on acid.

Wind. Cold. A permanent weight

To be braced under. And rain.

A people fixed

Staring at fleeces, blown like blown flames.

A people converting their stony ideas

To woollen weave, thick worsteds, dense fustians

Between their bones and the four trembling quarters.

Following this reading, Hughes went on to say:

²Billy Holt was a well known character who began work at the mill at the age of twelve, taught himself languages, travelled widely, and became a politician, broadcaster and writer. Scorning conventions, he was content to live on the moors, sharing a stable with his horse, Trigger(12).

Elmet signifies not just a vaguely featured Nonconformist Celtic locale but a naturally evolved organism. This showed up commonly in a bedrock, laconic perversity of character.

(7).

Such perversity of character has been these people's weakness as well as their strength, for their determination, courage, and independence have become pig-headed, stubborn narrowness. Imagination and spirit, of the kind which produced characters like Billy Holt and which once inspired these people and united them with a common purpose, have gone. Now,

the Calder Valley's eruption into modern history when it earned such titles as 'Cradle of the Chartist Movement', 'Cradle of the Industrial Revolution', 'Cradle of the splitting of the atom' is...over. Geology and climate are reclaiming the primeval gorge.

(8).

So, with nothing to direct their energies, the children - "children / of rock and water and a draughty absence / of everything else"(ROE.38), turn to destruction - smashing and burning and toppling what remains of their parents' achievements, before trailing

away homeward aimlessly
Like the earliest
Homeless Norsemen.

(ROE.38).

The destructive loss of spirit which these children personify is shown throughout *Remains of Elmet* as resulting from humanity's continual struggle with its inner and outer worlds. It is a struggle which extends beyond Elmet, for Hughes sees us all as children of Nature who have become victims of our self-made materialistic world, and who turn to aimless destruction as our society crumbles. With the immature egotism of children we have struggled towards material goals, expending, like the people of Elmet, "huge labour"(ROE.14) on the task of bending Nature to our will, only to enslave ourselves in an industrial world which, ultimately, will destroy both itself and us. The title poem of the

Elmet sequence describes this self-destruction in an extended metaphor of eating and digestion, and the Calder Valley is seen as a "long gullet" down which the corpse of Elmet vanished. It is a vivid picture of Nature which, like the Celtic goddess, Cerridwen, becomes "the Mourning Mother / who eats her children"(ROE.44). But the fate of this society, and ours, is self-wrought:

Farms came, stony masticators
Of generations that ate each other
To nothing inside them.

The sunk mill-towns were cemeteries
Digesting utterly
All with whom they swelled.

(ROE.53).

Finally, when the eating is done, all that is left to mark a society's passing are "crumbling, loose molars / and empty sockets" - small defacements of Nature's beauty.

So, despite their "pioneer hopes" and dreams, the Elmet society reached "the dead end of a wrong direction"(ROE.103). Yet, it was not only the physical struggle with Nature which cramped the spirit, but also an internal struggle of the soul against the strictures of a religious dogma which progressively alienated the people from their spiritual roots. In respect of this religion, too, the struggle was largely self-imposed, since the strict codes of the Nonconformist churches were the choice of the people. Two poems, in particular, show the unhappy consequences of this choice - 'Bridestones' and 'Mount Zion'.

In 'Bridestones'(ROE.64), Hughes creates an atmosphere in which closeness to Nature is felt as an integral part of Man's spiritual and religious experience. There are two groups of Bridestones on the Yorkshire moors, both of which are associated with Stone-Age burial practices and with legends of ritual human sacrifice. In Hughes' poem, the stones are the sacred place, the "Holy of

Holies", where the Earth itself is sacrificed in a ritual marriage, her "heart-stuff laid bare" to the "black exclamation mark of rock" which nails her down.

The short lines and frequent caesuras of the first two stanzas of the poem set the scene with a brevity which, along with Hughes' careful choice of words and images, conveys an atmosphere of awe and tension in which "you do nothing casual". In this setting, the use of the pronoun, "you", makes humanity an integral part of the "congregation" of natural elements, and the permanent effect which this involvement has on us is emphasized by the repetitions of "you" in the last three stanzas of the poem. Having once experienced the numinous through the mystical beauty and terrifying power of Nature, we can never completely ignore it: it is there in the elemental, physical and cosmic beauty which surrounds us, as if wreathing our shoulders; it is there in the life-governing power of the sun which controls our light and darkness, touching us with the shadow of these stones, just as their presence touches us with shadowy memories of our early ancestors; and it is there in the moonlight which we associate with magic, superstition, and the subconscious, allowing it to penetrate our skulls and rule our imagination just as it rules the Earth's waters.

In the final lines of 'Bridestones', Hughes suggests the symbolism which these stones have for him, representing evidence of an early closeness with Nature that we have now lost. Starkly silhouetted by moonlight on the crest of the moors, where they seem to marry sky and earth together, the Bridestones are like a spiritual "perch" (the word exactly indicates the precarious nature of the footing) from which Man has since fallen. Through the metaphor of ritual sacrifice in the poem, Hughes hints, also, at the undercurrent of pain and suffering which has accompanied the development of the religious impulse, yet he describes not a human sacrifice but a sacrifice of Earth, as if it were here that the first false step was taken. "From now on" the sun touches humanity as if

fingering our guilt, and "the moon stares into your skull" as if threatening madness.

Strict, Nonconformist religions suited the character of the West Yorkshire people, but in choosing them they imprisoned themselves in a system which ultimately denied them the spiritual satisfaction they so badly needed. The "bottomless cry", the deep instinct which drew them towards religion in a search for some lost, primitive, fulfillment, was like a memory from childhood - like the call of the Ancient Briton of "nursery school history"(ROE.84) whose image perturbed their repressed imaginations. The new beginning and the primitive closeness to Nature which "The Mighty Hunter" symbolises in this poem,

the waft from the cave
The dawn dew-chilling of emergence
The hunting grounds untouched all around us.

(ROE 84),

is the need which originally drew these people towards the church. But, although they still yearned for its satisfaction, still "dug for it" as if for archaeological remains, the instruments with which they chose to dig - the "iron levers" of Wesley's religion - were the wrong ones. "Labouring" within the confines of a system which distorted their view of the world and denied them imaginative freedom they could only move further from their goal.

The terrible irony of this situation is summed up in the poem's title, for Mount Zion was the Christian symbol (and in particular the symbol adopted by the Nonconformist churches) for the Kingdom of Heaven, signifying the attainment of spiritual union with God. But, as in Blake's *Jerusalem*, humanity builds religions which are limiting and destructive to the spirit, and

Mount Zion is become a cruel rock & no more dew
 Nor rain; no more the spring of the rock appears; but cold
 Hard & obdurate are the furrows of the mountain of wine & oil:
 The mountain of blessings is itself a curse & an astonishment.

(Jer.79:4-7).

Physically and spiritually, Hughes shows his people as having misdirected their energies. His society, like Blake's "sleeping Humanity of Albion"(Jer.5:29), has fallen into the state of Ulro - the world of pure matter, error, and illusion, "the nether region of the imagination"(Mil.23:6). In 'The Trance of Light'(ROE.20), using lines which link the natural elements with images of spiritual ecstasy, Hughes writes of

The upturned face of this land
 The mad singing in the hills
 The prophetic mouth of the rain

That fell asleep

Under the migraine of headscarves and clatter
 Of clog-irons and looms
 And gutter-water and clog-irons
 And clog-irons and biblical texts

The almost total lack of punctuation in this poem conveys the inexorable progression of this fall. Hughes, like Blake, uses War, Industry and Religion to symbolise the forces of oppression. He draws his images from the daily life of the Calder Valley, just as Blake's were drawn from the life he knew in England. Trampled by the clog-irons of the slogging mill workers, who were kept in bondage by the "wage-mirage sparkle of mills"(ROE.70), oppressed by daily labour, and "cowed" by the "hard, foursquare scriptures"(ROE.56), light and spirit soon lay all but eclipsed. And, as the grip of industry and religion hardened, even the smallest sign of spirit was, like the cricket that "rigged up its music / in a crack of Mount Zion wall"(ROE.82), relentlessly opposed.

In the Ulro-like world of matter, error, and illusion, which is the materialistic, every-day world depicted in *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes, like Blake,

shows the creative imagination of the people being literally petrified in the walls and chimneys, mills and churches, which they build with self-destructive zeal. These are the physical expression of the immersion of light in matter; symbols of the imprisonment of imagination by materialism, and of the waste of creative energy. Building them,

Spines...wore into bowed
Enslavement, the small freedom of raising
Endless memorials to the labour

Buried in them.

(ROE.33).

So, the imaginative faculty, "the crystal from space"(ROE.118) through which the divine and mystical energies were received³, became "blackened and fell to pieces"(ROE.118). The divine message, which, like the "song" of a great bird, once drew these people to its source, could no longer be received. "Mount Zion" with its "terrified" "mesmerised commissariat", replaced the spiritual warmth of the early church, and the religious impulse, like the once great bird, died. Now, there are only crumbling ruins like those of Heptonstall Old Church(ROE.119), and (as in 'Crown Point Pensioners'(ROE.89)) the "yarning", the "memories", and the "wild improvisations" of the old people singing of "a lost kingdom", to remind us of a former glory.

Sadly, even the few "giddy moments" of glory which men did achieved through their industry Hughes shows, in 'When Men Got To The Summit'(ROE.56), to be fleeting and flawed. Having reached the pinnacle of their dreams, victory for these men was brief. Neither their spirit, their religion, not the fruits of their industry were proof against Nature's "gentle" and persistent undermining of their position:

³This image suggests the shaman's crystal, which Eliade described as magically connecting the human and spirit worlds(13).

When Men Got To The Summit

Light words forsook them.
They filled with heavy silence.

Houses came to support them,
But the hard, foursquare scriptures fractured
And the cracks filled with soft rheumatism.

Streets bent to the task
Of holding it all up
Bracing themselves, taking the strain
Till their vertebrae slipped.

The hills went on gently
Shaking their sieve.

Nevertheless, for some giddy moments
A television
Blinked from the wolf's lookout.

As well as being brief, this victory was hollow. In the imagery and rhythm of the final stanza of the poem, Hughes neatly and ironically qualifies the importance of the climactic moments. The phrase, "a television" is given almost exclamatory emphasis by the line divisions which isolate it, and, as a symbol representing society's ultimate achievement, it stands in stark contrast to the "giddy" emotions, and the suggested domination of raw energy, conveyed in Man's capture of the "wolf's lookout". Hughes' view of television as a destructive, emotionless, and energy-sapping product of the "Scientific Spirit", is to be found in an earlier, uncollected, poem - 'TV On'(9). There, he describes it as an "incinerating mouth", a "drumming crematorium", which transforms everything, even his own dreams, into

a cinder substitute
An ashen simulacrum, a fossil of char,
Which was once the only world.

This is our "simulacrum", our "substitute", for the real world - a scientific wonder which largely replaces imagination and creativity. If what we see on television represents "the dream of our society", then, Hughes told Egbert Faas in 1971, "we

haven't created a society but a hell"(10). Television is also a literal and metaphorical example, like photography, of the immersion of light in matter. So, in *Remains of Elmet*, the television which blinked, physically and temporally, from the wolf's lookout, is a powerful symbol of the misdirection of human energies, and an indication of the terribly flawed character of our achievements on our chosen path of materialism and science.

XII

REMAINS OF ELMET

"Before these chimneys can flower again

They must fall into the only future, into earth"(ROE.14)

Imagination, for Hughes as for Blake, is the one thing which may save humanity from self-destruction. So, in *Remains of Elmet*, he uses his imagination and skill to evoke a world which is both realistic and symbolic, and, through his poetry, he imaginatively engages the reader in the changes which affect the Calder Valley society and which both demonstrate its fate and symbolise its fallen state. Similarly, he evokes the natural energies which oppose destructive human endeavours and which work to redress the delicate balance that people have disturbed.

At times, too, Hughes' lines carry echoes of lines from Blake's prophetic works which reinforce and enhance the symbolic meaning of his realistic imagery. In 'Lumb Chimneys'(ROE.14), for example, Hughes choice of plants, and the similes with which he couples them, realistically suggest the release of Nature's suppressed power in an ecologically and social disturbed environment. Nettles and brambles, and "depraved" sycamore, are in the van of Nature's army: they are the weeds against which we fight an eternal war in our attempt to control our environment, and they epitomise Nature's fecund power, its capacity for using, "like the cynical old woman in the food-queue", every possible means of survival. So,

...the nettle venoms into place
Like a cynical old woman in the food-queue.
The bramble grabs for the air
Like a baby burrowing into the breast.
And the sycamore, cut through at the neck,
Grows five or six heads, depraved with life.

'Lumb Chimneys'(ROE.14).

The echoes of a passage from Blake's *Milton*, in which he describes the "dance round the wine-presses of Luvah"(Mil.29:30) - the orgy of natural energies which accompanies 'War on Earth'(Mil.29:8) - are very strong:

There is the Nettle that stings with soft down, and there
 The indignant Thistle whose bitterness is bred in his milk,
 Who feeds on contempt of his neighbour: there all the idle Weeds
 That creep round the obscure places shew their various limbs
 Naked in all their beauty dancing round the Wine-presses.
 But in the Wine-presses the Human grapes sing not nor dance:
 They howl and writhe in shoals of torment....

(Mil.9:25-31).

Both poems imaginatively and symbolically celebrate the supremacy of the natural energies, but, for Hughes, Nature is not so much rejoicing at Man's downfall, as performing a necessary and inevitable revolutionary function and, in the final lines of 'Lumb Chimneys', Hughes shows such a natural revolution to be our "only future". In Hughes' poem, literally and figuratively, society, its spirit and its achievements, fall, at last, "into earth", from whence they may "flower again". As in an alchemical synthesis, the people of Elmet must undergo death, disintegration and purification in the crucible of Earth before renewal can occur.

The dual capacity of Nature for destruction and recreation, the cycles of death and rebirth, are of central importance in *Remains of Elmet*, as they were in *Cave Birds*, *Gaudete*, and most of Hughes' other work. Now, however, they are related more closely and more consistently to the reality of the natural forces as experienced in a specific location than ever before. Earlier poems, such as 'Pennines in April'(L.25)¹, 'Mayday on Holderness'(L.11) and 'Heptonstall'(W.175), presage such illustrative use of Hughes' native landscape, and the characteristic release from Earthbound naturalistic description into soaring imaginative flight can be found in Hughes' poetry from 'Hawk in the Rain'(HIR.11) onwards, but in *Remains of Elmet* these features are combined in

¹'Pennies in April'(L.25) is a clear precursor of 'There Come Days to These Hills'(ROE.54)

a sustained and deliberate exploration and exploitation of Nature's cycles. Paradoxically, the immediacy and veracity of Hughes' descriptions are such that many readers respond to their forceful reality and miss the unifying symbolism which discloses the hidden presence of the Goddess. Similarly, the nostalgia and empathy the poetry arouses in readers who sorrow for times past, a changing world, and lost loved ones may, equally, blind them to Hughes' deeper purpose.

It is possible, too, that the connection between the finite and the infinite, phenomena and noumena, is now so inseparable in Hughes' own perception of the world that he simply fails to make a clear distinction between them in the Elmet poems. Yet, to accept this view would be to ignore the meticulous care with which Hughes habitually constructs his poetry, and his constant striving towards the reunion of our inner and outer worlds. It is more consistent with Hughes' methods, ideas and purpose to regard his vivid realism in *Remains of Elmet* as deliberate: a means by which he seeks to stimulate the readers' imagination, involve them emotionally in this envisioned world and, thereby, create in them an awareness which may awaken them to their own errors and illusions. In the wild landscapes of the Elmet poems, Hughes recreates the encounter between "the elemental things and...the human"(PIM.78) which he believes stirs up "ancient instincts and feelings" that are "like a blood transfusion to us"(PIM.78). Thus, he exposes us to the "healing and sweetening"(ROE.115) powers which he evokes and uses his poetry as a "biological healing process", in terms of which he once described it(1).

All this is consistent with the magical/ shamanic/alchemical potential which Hughes ascribes to poetry; its power to change what is "depressing and destructive" into something "healing and energising"; its power, ultimately, to create in the reader and the poet

that final mood of release and elation [which] is the whole driving force of writing at all.

(2).

Through his poetic depictions of the moods of Nature and the force of the elements; by harnessing the transforming power of the "unnaturally clear" light of the moors which pervades the poems and photographs; and, especially, through his love for this land and its people, which shines through so many of these poems, Hughes attempts a transformation akin to an alchemical synthesis, by means of which both Elmet and the reader may be enlightened and renewed.

Whatever the nature of Hughes' poetic purpose, in *Remains of Elmet* he re-creates a world where, from very early childhood, he was aware of threatening divisions both in and around him. In a BBC broadcast, the text of which was published in *The Listener*(3), Hughes spoke of the strong shaping influence of his early environment: "The most impressive early companion of my childhood", he said, "was a dark cliff". Always aware of this overshadowing presence, he sought escape on the moors around his valley home:

The rock asserted itself, tried to pin you down, policed and gloomed. But you *could* escape it, climb past it and above it, with some effort. You could not escape the moors. They did not impose themselves; they simply surrounded and waited.

.....

And just as the outlook of a bottle floating upright at sea consists of simple light and dark, the light above, the dark below, the two divided by a clear waterline, so my outlook was ruled by simple light and dark, heaven above and earth below, divided by the undulating line of the moor.

.....

[There] the visible horizon was the magic circle, excluding and enclosing, into which our existence had been conjured, and everything in me seemed to gravitate towards it.

(4).

Clearly, the division between valley and moor, darkness and light, which is so evident in the Elmet sequence, was part of Hughes' earliest experience. So, too, were other more fundamental divisions, for the moors gave Hughes a different perspective, exposing objects in an "unnaturally clear"(5) light and making him

aware of another, vaster, dimension. The disparity between the world of the moors and life in the valley was such that

From there [the moors] the return home was a descent into the pit, and after each visit I must have returned less and less of myself to the valley. This was where the division of body and soul began.

(6).

In *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes generalises this personal experience of a division between body and soul (the division between the exhilarating world of Nature where spirit and imagination are free, and the mundane, pragmatic, materialistic world of the valley) to explain the divisions which he describes in the whole Calder Valley society: divisions which he also attributes to society in general. The parallel, here, with the Porphyrian concept of the immersion of spiritual light in the world of Generation is very strong. Similarly, the impulse which has always driven Hughes towards the moors and Nature (physically and imaginatively) may well be recognised as the struggle of light within him for its own release.

So, Hughes turns to Nature's healing powers to mend this division, and one of the clearest indications of the way he views these powers is found in 'These Grasses of Light'(ROE.16), where the four alchemical elements - fire, earth, water and air, embodied in the grass, the stones, the watery light and the wind of our Earth - are seen as the protective "armour" of the metamorphosing human soul.

The sparse clarity of the poem's lines and images reflects the starkness of the silhouetted trees against the wash of light and darkness in the facing photograph. The small details of the scene, created by the interplay of light and shadow fixed in the photographic image, are at once the individual elements of the picture and of the pictured scene, as well as "the world" (both real and imaged) which together they create. The "grasses" of light, the "stones"

of darkness, the faint suggestion of wind bending the reeds around the lonely seated figure, are not the isolated elements of some greater whole which wait for the imagination to unite them and give them meaning:

Are not

A poor family huddled at a poor gleam

Or words in any phrase

Or wolf-beings in a hungry waiting

Or neighbours in a constellation

They are the mother elements of creation from which the world is formed; the seemingly trivial "bric-a-brac" on which we must rely for our survival; small intimations of a universal power far greater than our imagination can encompass. Like the phenomena of Nature which, for Blake, were the "Children of Los", these, too, are

the Visions of Eternity;
But we see only, as it were, the hem of their garments
When with our vegetable eyes we view these wondrous Visions.

(Mil.28:10-12).

Through imagination we may glimpse the infinite although we see only the finite details of the natural world, just as small details make up a picture or a poem which may stimulate our imagination and stir our emotions, thus uniting our inner and outer worlds.

The photograph which accompanies 'These Grasses of Light' and 'Open to Huge Light' has considerable emotional impact, and this is enhanced by Hughes' images, which suggest the near extinction of the light by darkness, and which fill the emptiness with the "music" of desolation, but 'These Grasses of Light' requires a rational rather than an emotional response to appreciate the complexity of layered meanings.

Such rational complexity is common in Hughes' poetry, but, in *Remains of Elmet*, poems where the intricacies of meaning hold sway are balanced by others in which the emotions predominate, so that again Hughes is seen to be working towards integration and wholeness.

Balance is aimed for, too, in the positioning of the poems, so that the exhilarating and the numinous qualities of Nature counteract the sadness and despair aroused by Hughes' pictures of a disintegrating society. This particular kind of balance was discussed by Hughes in reference to his *Moortown Elegies*, published in a limited edition a few months before *Remains of Elmet*. In a taped reading of some of these poems Hughes talked of the emotional impact of poetry and of his

superstition that the writer, even more than the reader, is affected by the mood and the final resolution of his poem in a final way. [For] In each poem, the writer to some extent finds and fixes an image of his own imagination at that moment. But if a poem concludes in a downbeat mood his imagination is to some degree fixed and confirmed in that mood. In the ordinary way his imagination would heal itself - move on to new moods, but the poem stands there, permanent, vivid and powerful and tries to make him continue to live in its image.

(7).

To combat this 'downbeat' effect, Hughes deliberately sets out to write poems "whose whole accent" is upbeat. So, in the Elmet sequence, a particularly downbeat poem like 'Remains of Elmet'(ROE.52) is followed by one full of exhilaration, movement and hope - 'There come Days to These Hills'(ROE.54). In this poem, as our perspective changes from the dark valley to the freedom of the moors, Nature is metaphorically freed from the ugly remains of Man's endeavours and the whole mood lightens. The next poem in the sequence, 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves'(ROE.55), continues the change of perspective by placing the world (like the World Tree of mythology, which the imagery of the first two stanzas suggest) in a cosmic framework:

Dead Farms, Dead Leaves

Cling to the long
Branch of the world.

Stars sway the tree
Whose roots
Tighten on an atom.

Within this broader framework, the birds, "the cattle of heaven", move symbolically and with magical ease between known and unknown worlds as they

Visit

And vanish.

Like the birds and animals in Hughes' earlier poetry, those in *Remains of Elmet* are symbols of natural energy. They are common, realistically portrayed denizens of the Calder Valley landscape but they are, also, imaginative keys with which Hughes, like Blake, attempts to unlock our "single vision" and open our senses to the "immense world of delight"(MHH.7:4) in and around us. He uses them to draw us imaginatively into the elemental realm of the Goddess, but their appearances in this poetic sequence are few, and their role as shamanic guides or emissaries of the spiritual world is not of central importance, as it was in *Cave Birds*. Instead, they provide links with the Universal Energies, channelling imaginative life and beauty into the sequence at times when it is most necessary, or evincing the continuing existence of such energies in the midst of desolation and decay.

Sometimes the animals are victims of the decay, enduring, like the sheep, enforced participation in human endeavours. Yet, although the "few crazed sheep"(ROE.30) that survive the "shipwreck" of this society are bedraggled, maggot-ridden, wormy and "the sluttiest sheep in England"(ROE.104), still their eyes reflect the powerful energies of Nature from within and around them. The elemental "witch-brew boiling in the sky-vat" of the

moors "spins electric terrors in the eyes of sheep"(ROE.19), and the gaze of their "demonic agates"(ROE.104) can, like that of the "square-pupilled yellow-eyed" "black devil" goat in the early poem 'Meeting'(HIR.39), stir the imagination, disturb our equanimity, and remind us of our true insignificance in the vast compass of the Universal Energies.

In 'The Sluttiest Sheep in England'(ROE.104), these bedraggled angelic "beggars" sent by the "god-of-what-nobody-wants", the god of "this lightning-broken huddle of summits" which is our Earth, remind us of our ancestry as they

clatter
Over worthless moraines, tossing
Their ancient Briton draggle-tassel sheepskins
Or pose, in the rain-smoke, like warriors -

They serve, like Hughes tramps, to demonstrate the primitive strengths we have lost through our war with Nature.

The role of the sheep as the Earth-god's angels, and the pervasive imagery describing their watching "demonic" eyes, suggests the presence of some great implacable power which, through them, observes our steady progress towards self-destruction, biding its time before appearing. A possible resolution to this waiting is given in the next poem in the sequence, 'Auction'(ROE.106), where Hughes shows a society so alienated from Nature that even the farmers are "rotten and shattered", like their possessions. In such a society there can be little hope. Yet, with the wind "pressing the whole scene towards ice" they wait for a goat, symbol of fertility, form of Pan the god of shepherds and son of Hermes/Mercury, and the one creature which might survive in this barren land and bring new life to the area. The ambiguity of the final line of the poem allows for the awaited emergence of Pan from the Underworld - Pan

whom Nietzsche, first in the depths, mistook for Dionysus, the vital, somewhat terrible spirit of natural life, which is new in every second.

(8).

At the same time, this describes a realistic auction situation.

Unlike the sheep, the birds in *Remains of Elmet* rarely share the lives of men. Because they are not earthbound, but move with ease between Heaven and Earth, Hughes consistently uses them to link the physical with the metaphysical. He chooses birds which are common on the Yorkshire moors, and which have folkloric connections with the spiritual world as well as mythological significance. In particular, Hughes' curlews and snipe play significant roles in returning the fertility of the Goddess to a plundered and ravaged Earth, and punctuating the dark atmosphere of the poetic sequence with shafts of light and beauty.

Following a series of poems in which Hughes describes the entrapment, enfeeblement and degradation of energy and spirit in warfare and materialism, come the two poems, 'Curlews in April'(ROE.28) and 'Curlews Lift'(ROE.29), in both of which the natural beauty of the world predominates.

The first of these poems takes up the final, grievous, image of 'Long Screams'(ROE.26), and the cry of the curlew, the "moist voice" in which Hughes once identified the "peculiar sad desolate spirit" of the moors(9), becomes magical harping over the misty valley. The curlew's strange nocturnal cries have led to widespread folkloric associations of it with Gabriel Hounds and the souls of the dead², but it is also a fertility symbol. In Hughes' poems, both these aspects of his "wet-footed god of horizons" are present. In April, the month of springtime and renewal, its "wobbling water-call" conjures the moon: "new moons

²Graves(41) links these Hounds with Herne the Hunter, Hermes, and the British god Bran, amongst other Underworld gods.

sink into the heather" and rise from it "full golden" and bulging. The sexual connotations are implicit and are reinforced by the procreative connotations, luxurious sound and active tense of "bulge" (the word is also emphasised by its typographical separation from "full golden moons"). This, together with the impression of temporal contiguity, which is given by coupling the two events in linked lines, suggests the magical fecundity of the moon, which rises from the Earth radiant with the promise of new life.

In the second poem, the curlews are associated not only with the Goddess through the poem's imagery, but also with the "nameless and naked" energies themselves. Like a human soul leaving its earthly body, they "slough off" the Goddess's "maternal", earthy environment and lift skywards away from the "magic circle" of the moorland horizons, which Hughes once saw as a "high definite hurdle" blocking physical and mental escape from the valley(10). They are spirits of light and water which, like the nymphs in Porphyry's essay *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, enact the soul's perpetual cycle of descent and return between temporal and eternal worlds(11).

In the freedom of air, the poetry imitates the rhythms and pattern of the birds' flight as, with their sinewy bodies, their voices and their "trembling bills", they connect the elements - earth, air, water and light: lifting out of earth, negotiating air with masterly skill, they lance the water with their voices to release the light trapped beneath this "skin". The ultimate result is the release into their world, and ours, of something inspiring awe, or ecstasy, or both; something which nourishes the soul.

Another common moorland bird used by Hughes to invoke the fecund power of the Goddess is the snipe. In mythology and folklore, snipe, because of the aerial drumming noise they make, are Rain-birds or Thunder-birds, attributed with the magical power of rain-making and, consequently, linked

with fertility gods. In *Remains of Elmet*, on the open moors, "snipe work late" whilst the fleeing wraiths from mankind's history perform in ghostly drama all around them(ROE.19). The purpose of their work becomes apparent in 'Spring Dusk'(ROE.66), where Hughes uses their energy to re-connect Heaven and Earth. Their drumming becomes the invocation of supernatural powers by a "witchdoctor" or shaman, and their flight draws down the moon to a wounded and dying Earth to promote new life. The imagery likens them to doctors swiftly suturing a body's wounds, but their healing, in this poem, is magical, fertile, and beautiful.

In this poem, too, Hughes, the shaman/witchdoctor/poet, makes an invocation of his own which brings soothing and healing energies to the sequence. The poem revolves around the witchdoctor's "drumming in the high dark" in theme, atmosphere and form, moving from a frail, broken state, through an urgent, rhythmic, circular 'stitching', to a soothing gentle balance which culminates in the unity and promise of "eggs".

'Spring-Dusk' comes in the middle section of the Elmet sequence and completes a group of poems dealing with the elements. Its healing, fertile, power is necessary to balance those fierce and destructive energies which scour and purify the land, preparing it for a new beginning. The poems from 'High Sea Light' to 'Spring-Dusk' lift us from the dark valley into the freedom of the moors. There, Hughes explores the interplay of earth, water, light, air and a few moorland animals in terms of energy and action, and the motifs of worship and sacrifice, which run through these poems, culminate in moonlit healing and the promise of new life.

Light, which early in the sequence was represented as "the fallen sun"(ROE.23) held by suffering "worn-out" water, becomes, in 'High Sea-Light'(ROE.62), glowing and pearly. On the moors, the sun and water which

share the exhausting lives of the men and women of the valley(ROE.23) become free and energetic. The streams absorb heaven's glow with eager "gulping mouths", and the light energises the "busy dark atoms" of an Earth which Hughes links with the sun in his final image. Here, Earth is both a "stone of light" and "wreathed" by that light, an image similar to that used in 'Walking Bare'(CB.54), where the protagonist is described as a planetary "spark" swept by the sun's corolla.

The contrast is seen, too, in the accompanying photographs, and is most marked if the photograph following 'It Is All'(ROE.23) is included in the comparison. In the picture opposite this poem(ROE.22), light glows softly from alley paving stones, but it is surrounded by darkness, trapped in the polluted water of the clog-worn gully, and blocked by the blackness into which the path leads. Similarly, the photographs on page 24 show a disk of light reflected in dark turbid water, looking very like a sun trapped beneath the water's surface. In contrast with these, the picture above 'High Sea-Light'(ROE.62) shows a stone causey glowing with a light which becomes soft and pearly where it robes the gentle curves of the open moors beyond. We see a pathway of light leading to the freedom of the lit moors; a path by which to escape into the "lark-rapture silence". Light and soul, which are trapped in the valley, are, here, released from human constraints and can work with the other elemental energies to revive the damaged Earth.

The Earth, in this small group of poems, is a living organism, its body a "prone, horizon-long limb-jumble of near-female"(ROE.63) energised by the light, scoured by wind and oppressed by the "shadowy violence"(ROE.50) of the skies. In 'Where The Millstones of Sky'(ROE.66), Hughes captures the peculiar weight of grey Yorkshire skies which seem to rotate above the Earth like a millstone, altering the colours of the landscape and making light and shadow

"purple-fine". The wind and rain which such skies portend do, indeed, grind away the Earth's surface "skin", exposing the "raw true darkness" of the soil which seeps, like blood, from the wound.

Trees, like the one in 'A Tree', are "stripped" of leaves and tortured by the elements into contorted and cruciform shapes. Few survive, and generally the land is naked but for grass and the few tiny plants, such as harebell and heather. These flowers bring seasonal colour and life to the scene, covering the "huge bones and space-weathered hide" of the living Earth with "blue delicate milk"(ROE.114), and clothing it in "sea-purple" Tyrian hues as if with the cloth woven by the Naiads in the Porphyry's essay on the *Cave of the Nymphs*(12). The "euphoria" associated in the poem with the flowers connects them, like the moorland animals, with the life energies which endure and multiply:

The upper millstone heaven
Grinds the heather's face hard and small.
Heather only toughens.

And out of a mica sterility
That nobody else wants
Thickens a nectar
Keen as adder venom.

(ROE.48).

Euphoria is generated, too, by this nectar, which is a portion of the universal energies, an ambrosia which attracts the bees and which thereby performs its essential role in the interconnected patterns of natural life³. Porphyry, too, connects nectar with intoxication, quoting Greek myths and rituals, and explaining its "relationship to purification, to prevention of decay and to the pleasure of descent into the flesh" for souls, "whom the ancients specifically call bees"(13) and who are also priestesses of Demeter, the Goddess⁴. Such

³Like the perfume of the flowers in Blake's *Beulah*, "...none can tell how from so small a centre comes such sweets / forgetting that within that Centre Eternity expands / its ever during doors"(Mil.34:47-49).

⁴Graves also notes a legend in which Osiris was immured in a heather-tree(42), and other heather lore.

conjoined good and bad qualities are conveyed in 'Heather'(ROE.48) by Hughes' description of the nectar as "keen as adder venom".

Where it is not clothed with harebells and heather, the living body of Earth is scoured by the elements, and Hughes envisages its silent, almost barren, expanses as an "agony of numbness" in which the infrequent, watery sun appears like a nurse who "swabs and dabs" the bleeding wounds. The essence of this metaphor is "the idea of nature as a single organism" which, Hughes once wrote, was "man's first great thought, the basic intuition of most primitive theologies"(14). His use of it here, however, is Platonic and Alchemical in its linking of Earth with the divine and in its cleansing purpose. In the words of alchemist, Thomas Vaughan:

the texture of the universe clearly discovers its animation. The Earth...represents the Grosse, carnal parts. The Element of Water answers to the blood...The Aire is the outward refreshing spirit, where this vast creature breathes, though invisibly
(15).

And the alchemical cleansing and healing power of the sun's celestial fire is, as in *Cave Birds*, the means of Earth's purification.

Despite this cleansing, the world of the moors and world of the valley are still separate. Men on the moors experience the elemental freedom, regaining, as in 'Football at Slack'(ROE.68) and 'Sunstruck'(ROE.70), some of their childhood energy and playfulness. But they are out of their depth in this elemental world, and unable to escape the pull of the valley.

In 'Football at Slack',(ROE.68) despite the atmosphere of jollity and the merry plunging, bouncing, spouting, bobbing and flying of men and ball (which share movement and action as if connected by invisible strings), the press of the weather pervades the poem. We see the men tread water whilst the "winds from fiery holes in heaven", the mad "glare light", and "the steel press" of rain,

loom over the playing fields and the valleys, and "a golden holocaust" lifts "the cloud's edge to watch them". Here, and in 'Sunstruck', the dialectics of light and darkness, freedom and imprisonment, temporal and eternal, and of man's inner and outer worlds, are joined in poems which are full of humour and playfulness but which convey, also, the ominous power of the sun.

The "bunting colours"(ROE.68) of the "merry-coloured" men on the football field, and the image of cricketers "stampeding / through the sudden hole in Saturday"(ROE.70), give the impression of a brief holiday from the routine of the working week. That this routine is of stultifying "misery", is most apparent in 'Sunstruck', where each escape and return of the ball parallels the players' urge to escape and the inevitability and disappointment of recapture. Even at play on the cricket pitch the men's bodies remain Earthbound, confined within the "cage of wickets", physically "cornered", "pinned" and "chained": only their hopes and dreams fly with the ball, but are "caught and flung back, and caught, and again caught".

In the paradigm of a cricket game, the complete escape of the ball is impossible: in the material world of men, complete escape for the spirit is impossible. "Caught" and "bounced", and "clubbed" into submission by the circumstance of our lives, our defeated spirits submit, and our eyes turn from the seemingly impossible vision to the dregs and crumbs within our reach, just as the cricketers' eyes

glad of anything, dropped
From the bails
Into the bottom of a teacup,
To sandwich crusts for the canal cygnets.

Yet, the urge to escape the imprisoning pattern of the abstract "theorem" of our routine existence, the urge to return to the Source and make contact with the natural energies which once fuelled our childhood play, persists, and so the cycle

is repeated. As in the football and cricket games of these men, the exhilarating experience of flight, although momentary or vicarious, changes us so that we return from it "like men returning from a long journey", exhausted but refreshed. In this repeated experience lies hope, and so, in his poems and in the structure of the sequence itself, Hughes repeatedly draws us, in imaginative flight, from the dark and stultifying atmosphere of the valley.

If the poems from 'High Sea-Light' to 'Spring-Dusk' depict the power of the elemental energies to heal the Earth, then 'Football at Slack' and 'Sunstruck', although light and humorous in part, demonstrate the feebleness of Man's own efforts to free himself from darkness.

In both poems the men are dwarfed by the land and the weather⁵. The footballers, precariously exposed on a "bareback of hill" between "plunging valleys", are awed by the piled "hills darkening around them". On the sodden slopes they defy the weather which threatens to wash them back into the "gulf of treetops" and the "foundering" world of the valleys.

The cricketers, too, are limited in their play by the "shaggy valley parapets / pending like thunder", which can be seen overshadowing their homes in Fay Godwin's accompanying photograph. They are "burned" by the sun which dazzles and nags at them, inducing a kind of hallucinatory madness as it did in the early poem 'Sunstroke'(L.59) and in 'The Harvesting'(W.82-92). "Sunstruck", their "brains sewn into the ball's hide", they identify with the ball and imagine the impossible release - "The ball slammed flat! And the bat in flinders! The heart soaring!", and the "wild" affirmation of their hopes of freedom. In their sun-induced hallucinatory dream they believe they can escape the dark valley. But

⁵Commenting on the poems, Hughes said: "On Hebden ridge(?) between two steep sided valleys was a football field, precariously balanced. From my bedroom window I could watch the play. These verses describe the scene on what memory produces as a typical day"(43).

their imagination stretches only as far as the flight of the ball in their unimaginative games, and neither spirit nor body is able to withstand exposure to the sunlight for long. Driven by a "cross-eyed, mid-stump, sun-descending headache", they turn in relief to the "cool sheets and the black slot of home", despite the slavery and negation which these entail.

The lack of imagination and spiritual strength which precipitate this return to the valley are not, however, due to an innate deficiency in Mankind, but result from a lack of maturity. Certain aspects of the poems convey this: such as the uninhibited, childlike energy which the men bring to their games, and their careless disregard of the prevailing weather. The narrator's birds-eye perspective, too, reduces the men to toy-like figures whose slightly ludicrous actions, orchestrated by their "elastic" connections with the ball, remind one of a child's game in which all the pieces are joined together by strings hidden beneath a board⁶.

The spiritual immaturity of Mankind has been suggested throughout the Elmet sequence by the egocentricity and foolishness of the peoples' aims and actions. It was symbolized in the aimless children of 'Mill Ruins'(ROE.38), and it is clearly stated towards the end of the sequence in 'Tick Tock Tick Tock' where, in an extended metaphor based on J.M.Barrie's story of Peter Pan (the "ageless boy" from Never Never Land) the fate of the Calder Valley is attributed to the "everlasting play" of a whole society.

Because of its immaturity, Mankind is, like the football and cricket players of Hughes' poems, trapped by its own limitations. For as long as we seek the sun, our situation is not without hope. But, because of our divided state and our single vision, our spirit - the divine spark within us - has grown weak. Like

⁶Lines from Blake's 'Songs of Innocence' spring readily to mind in connection with this poem: Such such were the joys / When we all girls and boys / In our youth time were seen / On the Echoing Green(44).

Blake's sleepers in Ulro, we need to be awakened, taught the error of our ways, and shown the path of enlightenment. Otherwise, we have no choice but to keep returning to the dark "valley cauldron"(ROE.121) until the "golden holocaust" finally occurs.

Throughout the Elmet sequence, Hughes prepares for the final apocalyptic event which was prefigured in his vision of the Angel. By the agency of the elemental energies and, in particular, through the cleansing power of celestial fire, he works towards the golden holocaust in which light will be released from the valleys and the fallen souls released from the generative world so that " a new heaven and a new earth may be established"(16).

Time, in the sequence and in the poems, is not wholly linear. It makes inter-related spherical patterns, circling back on itself so that the early days of this society are meshed with later events, and figures from the past are invoked in modern settings. Its movement at times resembles Yeats' spiraling Gyres, but it is also that of Nature whose revolutions are continuous and endless. So, the fall of the people and their society into Earth occurs many times and is interwoven with the exposure of everything to the elements, and with the repeated return of the spirit to the moors, as "it does what it can to save itself alone"(ROE.14).

This repetition and intermeshing of themes and events produces an impression of formlessness, such as was found by some early critics in Blake's *Jerusalem*. Yet, this formlessness is apparent only if one expects events to be described chronologically, which in *Jerusalem* and *Remains of Elmet* they are not. Paley commenting on *Jerusalem* adopts the word 'synchronic' to describe the way that Blake, like Ezekiel and John in the prophetic books of the Bible, describes a

single event in a number of different ways⁷. *Remains of Elmet* resembles all these writings in its 'synchronic' form and in its apocalyptic theme, and there are other parallels in the way Hughes' apocalyptic vision is expressed.

The most obvious of these parallels is, of course, the angelic vision which has already been discussed, but the cyclic recurrence of destruction and death in Hughes' poems is like the repeated devastation wrought by the various angels in *The Revelation*. The great elemental disturbances of the biblical visions, the "peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning"(17), find parallels in the Calder Valley weather which "spins electrical terrors in the eyes of sheep"(ROE.19). And the poisoning of the Earth's waters occurs just as surely through modern industrial pollution, which has created the "veto of the poisonous Calder"(ROE.70). In each case, the vision is of war and death and "unending bleeding", like the "rummaging of light at the end of the world"(ROE.26). And the smoke darkened skies of the Calder Valley provide us with a realistic foretaste of the "bottomless pit" where:

there arose a smoke out of the pit, as smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

(18)

Clearly, however, Hughes does not use Christian symbols in their usual biblical form. He transposes them into modern settings, embeds them in Nature, and creates his own myths around them, relying on the resonant connotative power of words like 'Egypt' and 'slavery' (in 'Willow Herb'(ROE.73), for example) to conjure the biblical myths into the mind of the reader. Similarly, underlying Hughes' vision of devastation, there is the promise of a natural, rather than a Christian, resurrection. 'Willow-Herb'(ROE.73), for example, with its

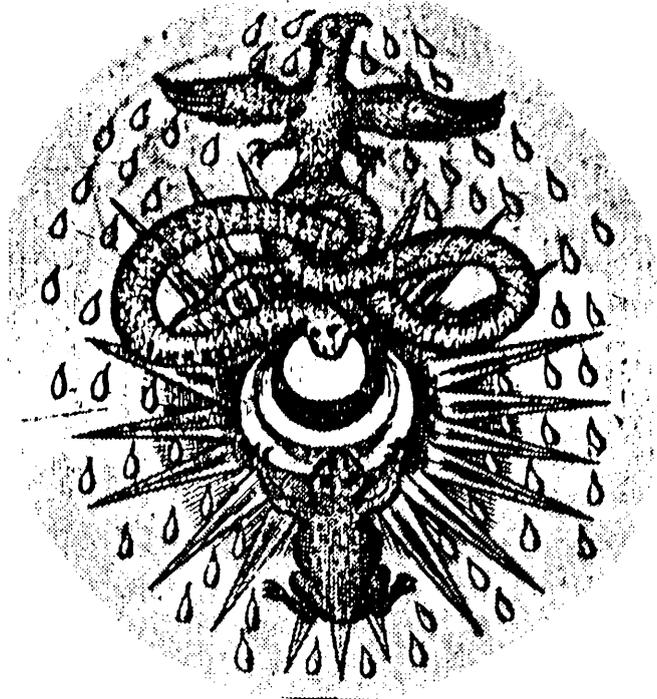
⁷Paley credits this term and concept to a 17th century commentary on *The Revelation* by Joseph Mede, and he quotes an example provided by Mede's contemporary, David Perens: "each of the seven visions of the Revelation ends with a last judgment, even though there is only one Last Judgment"(45). Scigaj makes an essentially similar observation about the form of *Remains of Elmet* when he describes it as "sonata form"(46)

reference to "Egyptian Water", "slavery and religion", and the "rusts" and the stagnation of the canal, suggests close parallels with "the cauldron whose rust is therein"(19) of Ezekiel's vision. Embedded in the poem, however, is the almost hidden symbol of a serpent which has biblical, natural, and cosmogonic significance.

The serpent, toothless but dangerous, good and evil, is present in the alliteration and sibilance of 's' throughout the poem. The "ripples" of its "slack", "gleam-black", body form the slow-moving serpentine canal which we see in Godwin's photograph, and, in the final line of the poem, its ambiguous smile is symbolised in the Willow-Herb - a common weed amongst city rubble, where its "vandal plumes" mark the beginning of natural regeneration. In the circularity of the poem, where the title is integral and important to the text so that Hughes starts and ends with Willow-Herb, we see the cosmic serpent - the Uroborus - symbol of eternity and regeneration.

Characteristically, Hughes' use of the Willow-Herb plant in this poem is both realistic and symbolically precise. Through its name, the plant is linked with the prophetic and divinatory Willow Tree of the Moon Goddess. It is also commonly known as 'fireweed'(20), and its appearance in this poem presages the moment in 'Under the World's Wild Ruins'(ROE.79) when, for the first time in the Elmet sequence, the sun's fire enters the "submarine twilight" of the valley, falling as sunbeams into the moon-crescent "horns" of Willow-Herb flowers, and thus symbolically joining sun and moon, Heaven and Earth, body and soul. That Hughes' imagery is alchemical as well as natural is clear, and this is supported by the fact that although the mention of horned flowers suitably continues Hughes' metaphor of vandal invaders, the description (contrary to Hughes' usual practice) is not botanically accurate: it is, however, consistent with

alchemical symbolism, where the crescent moon is a symbol for the receptive Soul(21), the vessel in which the synthesis occurs.



Celestial dew, the serpent, the sun and the crescent moon - alchemical symbols. From the frontespiece of E. Ashmole, *Theatreum Chemicum Britannicum*, (1652).

Hughes' use of Christian, biblical, mythological and natural symbolism is especially apparent in his treatment of Earth's rocky substrate in *Remains of Elmet*. The biblical symbolism of rock as the Lord(22), and as the tomb/womb from which Christ was resurrected, is an important part of Hughes' prophetic message, but its Christian framework is submerged in the diverse myths which Hughes, here, weaves around it.

The ancients, as Porphyry noted, used rock to symbolise the first matter, dark, infinite and without form(23). From this matter the world was made, and

from the presence and supervening ornament of form...it is beautiful and pleasant.
(24).

In Elmet, Nature and Mankind impress changing form on the rock's surface: "Heather and bog-cotton fit themselves"(ROE.50) to it, softening and ornamenting it with a "grizzly bear-dark pelt"(ROE.48); Nature seasonally transforms it; and Man quarries and carts it, shaping it into mills and houses and walls. Yet, although Hughes makes use of this ancient philosophical concept of matter and form, throughout the Elmet sequence he personifies the rock.

The natural, physical, changes in the "big animal of rock"(ROE.44) which Hughes creates, reflect the changes that take place in the Calder Valley: and the animal's song serves as a metaphor for the immutable soul which is the essence of its mutable bodily form. In its association with Man, some rock is "tamed"(ROE.40), loses its spirit, forgets its "earth-song"(ROE.37) and is "content to be cut, to be carted / and fixed in its new place"(ROE.37). In this state it is "soul-grinding sandstone"(ROE.40), sharing the dispiriting world of people, and imposing, as well as receiving, "four-cornered stony"(ROE.37) spirit and form. "Wild rock"(ROE.40), however, the natural millstone-grit which is the prevailing geological rock of the Calder Valley, retains its soul. On the "roof-of-the-world-ridge", overlooking the smoking pit of the valley where brown sheep fleeces are "blown like blown flames", the quarry rock-face is "Heaven"(ROE.40). Such an Earthly heaven is coloured and tainted by its proximity to the valley, but still, as in religious painting by Cranach, Earth's natural splendour becomes a symbol of a greater spiritual world⁸. Fay Godwin's photographs on pages 40 and 41 depict Heaven and Hell, showing the contrast between them. Similarly, the rhythmic and typographical balance of the first two lines of 'Wild Rock'(ROE.40) equates wild rock with millstone-grit and contrasts this with tamed rock, which is soul-grinding, soul polishing sandstone. From the dark, looming, wild rock-face of the

⁸Lucas Cranach, the Elder, was a German Renaissance painter whose primary Protestant theme was 'The Fall and the Salvation' of Mankind. In his many versions of this he placed Adam and Eve in a natural setting which was treated in a richly symbolic and ornamental manner.

quarry in Godwin's photograph on page 41, one of Heaven's "angels"(ROE.104) (looking like a Paschal Lamb) stares down into the "fixed" order of the valley, where mill chimneys symbolize "slavery"(ROE.37), and where bare trees and bare hillsides "tremble" under a shifting haze of smoke.

Away from the valley, however, the "big animal of rock" is "in its homeland"(ROE.44). Crouched on the moors, like the dark rock in Godwin's photograph(ROE.45), it is the foundation stone of the natural world: Mother to "root and leaf"; "kin" to the animals and birds, bodies and souls, of the generative world who "visit each other in heaven and earth". In the metaphor of worship, which pervades 'The Big Animal of Rock'(ROE.44), the rock is the "cantor", the precentor who leads the spiritual song at this "Festival of Unending", this festival of the Goddess of Life and Death who, like the hag, Cerridwen, "eats her children"(25). From the cantor/rock comes the sacred music which connects the multifarious changes around it to a single spiritual theme, and the world of Elmet, Hughes' poetic world which is also our world, is the church in which it officiates. Its songs punctuate the poetry, stopping whilst other rituals take place, but always returning to lead the worship until the final "Hallelujah!" in 'The Word That Space Breathes'(ROE.117) announces the Messiah.

Early in the Elmet sequence this rock-animal kneels singing amongst the stone ruins which are the "cemetery of its ancestors". Through "lasting purple aeons"(ROE.48) the wind "curries" its heathery, grassy pelt and, as the sequence progresses, people come and go, and are "ground into fineness"(ROE.50) by the revolving skylines where the millstone-grit of Earth (Hughes puns on the geological name) and the "upper millstone heaven"(ROE.48) touch. The traces of human life are ground away, the elements cleanse the land, and, at last, the "swift glooms of purple", mingling skylines and heather, wind, water, earth and light, swab "the human shape from the freed stones"(ROE.103).

As this purification of Earth progresses, the land becomes bare and wintry, as if the awaited "star-drift of the returning ice"(ROE.48) approaches. Dramatic changes begin to occur. The magic circle of hills is broken, their "fragments" drift apart(ROE.92), and the Goddess, in the disembodied semblance of wolf-goddess, Cerridwen, "that cannot any longer on all these hills / find her pelt"(ROE.95), vents her wrath on the world, rolling it in rain "like a stone inside surf"(ROE.95) whilst the elements from her "cauldron of thunder"(ROE.100) crash and splinter and claw at the closed doors and the closed minds of those who suppress and exclude her. At last, the "howling"(ROE.103) skylines close in, the stones are "freed", and, with the beggar/angels watching from the "lightning-broken huddle of summits"(ROE.104), the wind "presses everything towards ice"(ROE.105)⁹.

In the photographs on page 108 and 109 we see the star-drift/snow-drift ice-age begin. The change from empty moorland, ridged by the horizontal plough-lines of ancient and primitive farms, to the broken walls and fences leading into a snow covered landscape which fades away to nothing in the distance, marks the completion of one more cycle. In the loss of definition towards which the eye is led in the second photograph, the world returns to elemental chaos; to matter in which form can no longer be distinguished; to a wintry white drift of nothingness.

The two poems which immediately follow these photographs dwell on this nothingness. 'Widdop'(ROE.110), is, at a first reading, one of the least satisfactory poems in the Elmet sequence because of certain internal ambiguities. The mood of the poem is unclear, but that it is about nothing and nothingness is

⁹Because the Goddess is lover as well as Mother and Layer-out, Graves regards her as the Muse - inspiration of poets (47). The Brontes, Hughes' "three weird sisters"(ROE.100), witch-like, tasted Cerridwen's cauldron, turning her inspiration to poetry and stories. "The brother" tasted, too, and was destroyed, "electrocuted"(ROE.100) by the "elemental power circuit of the Universe"(48) because he used no ritual methods, like poetry, of keeping the energy under control.

apparent from the repetition of these words within the poem. There is negativity in the imagery - the lake is "frightened", the wind "trembling", and the grass "in fear". There is artificiality, too: Widdop Reservoir does not have the natural "happiness" of "broken water at the bottom of a precipice"(ROE.13), it has been "put" there by "someone", and the trees around it blindly "act" a pretence of reality. Yet, the "stony shoulders" of the earth "broaden to support" the lake as if accepting it; the "trembling" of the cosmic wind may be due to fear or awe; and the gull, a heavenly visitor associated with the souls of seamen and travellers, and with ploughed fields and fertility, "blows through" the veil of clouds out of the cosmic nothingness into the nothingness of this scene, and may be viewed with hope or despair, or perhaps both.

In the form of the poem, the end-stopped stanzas physically and rhythmically isolate the various components of the scene from each other. Disjointed and repeated phrases reflect a discontinuity in the natural harmony of the place described, but there is, also, a suggestion of tentative acceptance - the earth supports the lake, the wind sniffs at it, the trees combine to give it reality, and the "heath-grass" creeps close.

Ultimately, the poem circles back to its beginning so that the lake, like the gull, has only a fleeting presence, coming through "a rip in the fabric" of time and space, "out of nothingness into nothingness". This, perhaps, is the import of the poem: its nothingness creating a pause in the spiritual music, a stillness in the cycle of regeneration which is like Eliot's "moment in and out of time"(26).

If 'Widdop' creates a pause, a disjunction in the sequence, then in the next poem, 'Light Falls Through Itself'(ROE.113), movement and harmony are re-born. In the photograph of snow which accompanies the poem, the crystalline whiteness of snow reflects and transmits the light which falls on it, so that light

literally falls through itself creating an almost formless chaos of light. Similarly, in the photographic process, the light falling on the molecules of photographic emulsion has been trapped so that the resulting image is almost totally of whiteness and light.

From this elemental chaos of light Hughes creates an alchemical metaphor of rebirth. The snowy whiteness resembles the crystalline spiritual purity achieved in 'Walking Bare' in *Cave Birds*, but here it is transformed by the reality of the Calder Valley. Like a purified soul, stripped of "most of itself and all its possessions", light falls "naked" into the poor stripped earth of Elmet where, in the central images of the poem, warmth and life are breathed into it. The "poor cow", whilst being a realistic part of the poverty stricken landscape, nevertheless embodies the maternal, succouring qualities of the Mother Goddess; and the wind fanned flames trembling at the blue crucible-edge of the far skylines, fuel the transmutation. So, the pale, "threadbare", winter light of the sun kindles life in the windswept snowscape: light is reborn from light, and "creeps" and "cries" and "shivers", like a baby, in the grass.

With the re-birth of light, the ice-age of winter passes and, fuelled by the strengthening sun, Nature's resurgence begins. The spirit, too, revives. 'In April'(ROE.114), the time of spring and renewal, the "black stones" which have survived the "pre-dawn" chaos of the Earth emerge, as if "from under the glacier", to lie "healing and sweetening" in the sun. In the poem, 'In April'(ROE.114), Hughes' image of a soft, shaggy, cat-like creature, stretched ecstatically in the sunshine, beautifully captures the mood of a warm spring day when the land is newly softened by vegetation and looks fresh and peaceful. The image reintroduces Hughes' earlier metaphor of the rock-animal, the cantor, which now emerges to lead the Messianic singing. At the same time, this "soft animal of peace" symbolically parallels the biblical "covenant of peace"(27) made by the

Lord with the people of Israel after their resurrection in the valley of bones(28), and its emergence can be equated with the appearance of the Lamb in The Revelation(29), which is accompanied by the music of deliverance.

Now, the music of the cantor-rock is heard again, leading the elemental choir in Hughes' own music of deliverance. In 'The Word That Space Breathes'(ROE.117), drawing on the great choral tradition of the North of England, in which Handel's *Messiah* is widely known and well loved, Hughes creates a *Messiah* of his own. Handel's oratorio celebrates the birth, Passion, death and resurrection of Christ, and the 'Hallelujah Chorus', which is perhaps the best known part of the work, glorifies Christ risen from his sepulchre of rock. Hughes, too, celebrates "the Messiah / of opened rock", but his song owes more to the ancient sacrificial rituals associated with Nature's cycles of death and rebirth, than to the Christian celebration which replaced them¹⁰.

The parallels with the prophetic books of the Bible, however, are strong. The Word, the promise of Man's redemption, which is to be heard at the resurrection, is here, as in Ezekiel's vision, the breath of the wind blowing through the "tumbled walls"(ROE.117) of the land and breathing life into the scattered bones of the people(30). And, as in The Revelation, this disembodied voice is accompanied by the music of the people, the land, and the skies, a beautiful, sad echo of the singing once heard in the valleys but, nevertheless, a "Song of Deliverance":

as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

(31).

¹⁰The Shorter Oxford Dictionary gives the derivation of the word 'Easter' as from the OE word 'Eostre', meaning 'dawn-goddess'.

In Hughes' poem, the walls which the people so painstakingly built, the enclosures into which their lives and cares went "like manure"(ROE.33), guide the spiritual wind-song (as the eye is guided by them in Fay Godwin's photograph), leading it upwards "from every step of the slopes" to a crest where clouds and walls meet. As if in a musical crescendo, the "huge music of sightlines" is gathered into a dramatic focus which joins Heaven and Earth, and this climax is echoed in the final stanza of Hughes' poem like an "Hallelujah!", marking the moment when the Word and The Messiah become One and the circle of the poem is complete.

In many ways, it is a pity that 'Heptonstall Old Church'(ROE.118) and 'Tick Tock Tick Tock'(ROE.120) intervene between 'The Word That Space Breathes' and the next poem describing apocalyptic events, which is 'Cock-Crows'(ROE.121). The first of these poems reiterates the fallen state of Elmet, the literal and metaphorical extinction of light in the valleys, and the freeing of the land as

The valleys went out.
The moorland broke loose.

(‘Heptonstall Old Church’(ROE.118)).

Such reiteration is consistent with the pattern of cyclic recurrence which has prevailed throughout the sequence, and it reflects the synchronic form of the biblical prophecies, but it also dissipates the elated mood established by the previous poem and breaks the momentum. The second poem, 'Tick Tock Tick Tock', begins to re-establish this momentum, and together the two poems act like the restatement of a musical theme in the approach to a grand finale. As such, they should increase, rather than dissipate, the tension and build towards a greater climactic release. It is doubtful whether these two poems actually achieve this.

'Tick Tock Tick Tock', however, concerns Hughes' own prophetic role in the sequence of events and is part of the group of poems dealing with his childhood which will be discussed separately. The theme of time which dominates this poem, and the way in which Hughes' unique perception of impending danger is encapsulated, appropriately link it to the coming events.

The last three poems of *Remains of Elmet* are the climax of the sequence. Each one of them is part of Hughes' visionary prophecy of transformation, and part of the poetic alchemy by means of which the trapped light will be freed from the valley, the souls released, and, as in *The Revelation*, "a new heaven and a new earth"(32) created.

The title of 'Cock-Crows'(ROE.121), which is the only place in which the word 'cockcrows' is hyphenated, provides the first hint of the poem's underlying theme of the renewal of Earth. By hyphenating the two words Hughes not only suggests an initial imperative bird-call from which the chorus grows, but also makes mythological allusions. As in *Cave Birds*, the cock is a common symbol of unenlightened Man, it is also the symbol of the reborn solar hero and of Hermes Mercury, the guide of souls. Here, it is separated from, but linked to, the crows, thus connecting the bird of dawn, which is also a symbol of the fool, with the bird of darkness, which is also the oracle bird of the sun-gods. Thus, in a single hyphenated word, Hughes embeds the complex idea of the consubstantiality of opposites which allows change and renewal.

Hughes vision in 'Cock-Crows' has many precedents. The prophet, Ezekiel, set by God "upon a very high mountain"(33), saw the holy temple of his people of Israel, and, like the rising sun, "the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east...and the earth shined with his glory"(34). John, too, in *The Revelation*, "saw heaven opened"(35) and "an angel standing in the sun"(36):

he, too, was carried "away in the spirit to a great and high mountain"(37) from which he was shown the new Jerusalem of "pure gold"(38).

The imagery of mountain tops, sunrise, gold and splendour, is common to these visions, as it is to that of 'Cock-Crows' and to the final part of Blake's *Jerusalem*. Hughes' vision, however, owes more to Blake than to any other visionary prophet, and his opening lines echo those of Blake's poem addressed 'To the Christians' which begins:

I stood among my valleys of the south
And saw a flame of fire, even as a Wheel
Of fire surrounding all the heavens:

(Jer.77:1-3).

These lines precede Chapter 4 of *Jerusalem* in which the awakening of Albion and Jerusalem takes place, and the vision described by Blake is one of natural oppression and disaster akin to Hughes' vision in 'Ballad from a Fairy Tale'(W.166) (which also echoes these lines) and 'The Angel'(ROE.124). In 'Cock-Crows', however, Hughes has left the valley to stand on "a dark summit, among dark summits". As elsewhere in *Remains of Elmet*, these moorland summits become like wave-crests¹¹ and, in the "tidal dawn splitting heaven from earth"(the phrase suggests the appearance of a new world as well as a new day), Hughes envisions the parting of the dark primeval chaos of the waters to reveal, like the parting valves of a rough grey oyster, the living colour and beauty within. His imagery, here and throughout the poem, fills the imagination with the light, colour and sound of Cerridwen's cauldron which, like an alchemical crucible, ferments a fiery mixture that briefly allows us to "taste gold".

¹¹Cf. the imagery of 'There Come Days to the Hills'(ROE.54).

The dawn which Hughes sees and hears is a magical awakening of the dark valley of Elmet. Equivalent events occur in Blake's *Jerusalem* at the awakening of Albion who rose from his rock like the sun,

the wrath of God, breaking bright, flaming on all sides around
His awful limbs; into the Heavens he walked, clothed in flames
Loud thund'ring, with broad flashes of flaming lightning and pillars of fire.
(Jer.95:6-9).

Blake's illustration, here, shows Albion (who is also Los and the sun) rising phoenix-like in flames from his aged body(39), just as in Hughes' poem the "fire-crests / of the cocks", symbols of the sun and a new dawn, rise from the dying valley of Elmet.

Although Hughes' imagery is quite different to Blake's and is founded in the reality of a Calder Valley sunrise, the parallels are clearly present. Just as, for Hughes, the cockcrows kindled "under the mist" before "clambering up the sky", so Blake's sun/Albion is seen "in heavy clouds struggling to rise above the Mountains"(Jer.95:11). Hughes' "sickle" cockcrows, "tossed clear" of the valley mist and "soaring harder, brighter, higher", until they burst "to light / brightening the undercloud", are like Blake's "arrows of flaming gold"(Jer.95:13) which fly forth into the heavens from Albion's "horned Bow"(Jer.98:3) until "the dim chaos brightened beneath, above, around"(Jer.98:14). The bubbling "valley cauldron" resembles the "Furnaces of Affliction"(Jer.96:35) which, in Albion's vision, become "Fountains of Living Waters", out of which the "Sons and Daughters of Albion"(Jer.96:39) rise from their sleep. And the rhythm and diction at the central climax of Hughes poem echo those of Blake in their exultant, expanding, glorious power.

From the first hint of life and colour, as the "tidal dawn" begins to separate the dark Heaven from the dark Earth, the rhythm and momentum of the poem reflect the gradual awakening of the valley. The cockcrows kindle first,

like a new fire, "deep" under the mist, "sleepy" and "bubbling". Then, in a couplet full of soft sibilance, a caesura stops the "tossed clear", escaping sound; and, by a paradoxical coupling of words, the "rocket" becomes a "soft" glow falling back into the mist with the dying fall of the second line. So, the form reflects the content, and continues to do so as, in the next stanza, the sound, movement and colour build to a crescendo. The harshness and forcefulness of words like "soaring", "tearing", "bursting", "challenge", "hooking", are softened by the imagery of rounded "bubble-glistening", bringing light and beauty to the dark "undercloud", and by the warmth of the red-combed, "fire-crests of the cocks" and the melting echoes of their crowing "hanging smouldering from the night's fringes". Now, the world is lit by the internal fires of the cauldron, bringing an end to the dark valley night, and now the brimming molten sound becomes

A magical soft mixture boiling over,
Spilling and sparkling into other valleys.

So, the climactic rhythms of the 4th stanza precede the spreading of light and beauty over the Earth, and its repetitions, mood and rhythms resemble strongly those of Blake's vision of Albion as he cries

Awake, Awake Jerusalem! O lovely Emanation of Albion,
Awake & overspread all Nations as in Ancient Time;
For lo! the Night of Death is past and the Eternal Day
Appears upon our Hills. Awake, Jerusalem, and come away!

(Jer.97:1-4).

Slowly, Hughes' vision, like the visions of the holy city seen by Ezekiel and John, fades. The fiery cockcrows, "lobbed-up" like "horse-shoes" of glowing metal from the man-made world of "sheds" and "hen-cotes" and "farms" in "other valleys", fade and die away, "sinking back mistily" (the phrase applies equally to the cockcrows and the sheds, hen-cotes and farms from which they come) until the last "spark" of life has died.

Hughes' "golden holocaust"(ROE.68) is over. As the fiery "embers" pale, the Earth is left like a cooling crucible of volcanic lava, "dark rims hardening", lifeless and smoking. So, all that is left at the end of the poem are sun, water and air - the alchemical 'Mothers' - and the formless rock of the Earth. The cycle has been completed. The tidal dawn, heralded by cockcrows, has become the dawn of "a new heaven and a new earth"(40), and, as the sun climbs into the "wet sack" of the Earth's atmosphere, Heaven and Earth are reunited, and the "day's work" of re-creation is begun.

In the vision of 'Cock-Crows', Hughes sees the fires of the Earth released and the Earth wholly cleansed. Now, in the wake of this golden holocaust, the souls trapped in the world of generation are freed. In 'Heptonstall Cemetery'(ROE.122), however, unlike the biblical visions of the apocalypse, Hughes sees no judgment of the dead, no sorting of the sinners from the saved. The risen souls are those of his family and his people - the people of Elmet.

Once again, in the rhythms, theme and content of 'Heptonstall Cemetery' there are echoes of Blake's *Jerusalem*, for "Thomas and Walter and Edith", "Esther and Sylvia" are like Blake's "Urizen & Luvah & Tharmas & Urthona", and "the Sons and Daughter of Albion...Waking from Sleep"(Jer.96:39-41). Similarly, the great radiant glow of sunlight in Fay Godwin's photograph could well illustrate this same moment of awakening in *Jerusalem*, when "all around remote the Heavens burnt with flaming fires"(Jer.96:40). Again, however, Hughes' imagery is different and unique, and the elemental energies which fill the poem are both symbolic and real. The opening lines of the poem recall similar sea/storm imagery in Hughes' early poem 'Wind'(HIR.40), where the disturbances of a stormy night are also linked by a biblical reference with

Christ's promise of salvation¹². In the Elmet poem, the whole Earth is in motion, and under the wind and "spray" the moors become one "giant beating wing" in which the risen souls are "living feathers". In the cauldron of the elements Man and Nature are united as a single creature, and as the spiritual wind - the divine breath of resurrection - blows across the land, "all the horizons lift wings", becoming a "dark family of swans" flying towards the Western Paradise (the Atlantic is west of the Calder Valley).

Hughes' swans, unlike the pure white swans of Aphrodite and Apollo, are "dark", and it is appropriate that the newborn, newly fledged, souls should resemble cygnets. Most importantly, however, as birds of the Sun God and the Goddess, they are symbols of unity which heal the divisions between Heaven and Earth, Man and Nature, the corporeal and the spiritual. So, harmony is restored, and a new beginning can be made. Hughes, in this penultimate poem of the sequence, makes a powerful return to the origin, and this, too, is the final vision of Blake's *Jerusalem*:

All Human Forms identified, even Tree, Metal, Earth & Stone; all
Human forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied
Into the Planetary lives of Years, Months, Days & Hours; reposing,
And then Awakening into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.

(Jer.99:1-4).

¹²The couple in this poem imagine "hearing the stones cry out under the horizons", a reference to Luke 20:40 in which Christ tells the Pharisees that if the disciples who rejoice at his coming "should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out".

