

SOURCES IN THE WORK OF TED HUGHES.

by

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SUMMARY

Ted Hughes' poetry is the chronicle of his quest for *mana*, the source of healing energies. Through a close examination of *Cave Birds*, *Remains of Elmet*, and *River*, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the way in which Hughes' recent poetic sequences document this quest and, also, show the increasing skill with which he uses Nature and her energies to achieve his re-creative poetic purposes.

Hughes has strong views about the nature of the creative arts, their link with the all-powerful, natural, Universal Energies which he believes to be the source of life and death, and about the artist's ability to contact and, to some extent, control these energies. He sees every imaginative art as essentially part of the life of the artist who works with it, and as an expression of the artist's deepest thoughts, feelings and perceptions. He sees each, too, as a means of negotiating with the Energies and of exploring and experimenting with their destructive and creative powers for personal and/or altruistic purposes. Hughes' poetry, therefore, chronicles the ways in which he has approached such exploration and experimentation; it demonstrates, too, the increasing skill and ease with which he contacts the Energies and channels them imaginatively into our world.

Hughes' ideas about the role of the artist and the creative arts in counteracting the sterile and destructive influences of rational and scientific thought in our society, and the efforts of Mankind to suppress the natural energies, to control nature and, consequently, to deny the old Goddess of Life, Love and Death, emerge strongly from his own writing. This thesis explores these ideas and the way in which they have increasingly led Hughes to regard the natural world as the source of imaginative stimuli imbued with powerful re-creative energy.

Using opinions expressed in many of Hughes' articles and reviews, this thesis examines, first, Hughes' view of poetry, and the way in which Hughes' knowledge and experience of literature, music, anthropology and occult arts have predisposed him towards a belief in the "magical", alterative powers of this art. It also looks at his experience with light, sound, drama and myth in *Orghast*; at his involvement with Sufi philosophies and *Conference of the Birds*; and at the influence of these experiences on his choice of the heroic epic journey as a universally understood framework within which to undertake his exploration of the Energies and to develop both his ideas and his poetry.

From the perspective of Hughes' own beliefs and purposes, *Cave Birds* is seen as his poetic attempt to achieve an alchemical transmutation, presented as an epic journey, through which both he and his readers may be spiritually enlightened and renewed. The care and precision with which Hughes uses the alchemical synthesis as a framework for the *Cave Birds* sequence is closely documented, and the continued use of an epic hero/Everyman figure, such as was apparent in *Crow*, *Orghast*, and *Prometheus on his Crag*, for example, is examined. The close parallels which exist between *Cave Birds* and William Blake's version of the biblical story of Job are discussed, as is these poets' common interpretation of the nature of our society's ills.

Remains of Elmet is examined in detail to show Hughes' further use of the poetic sequence as a vehicle for his ideas, techniques and purposes. In it, Hughes returns to his source: his homeland, his family, his childhood and his early formative experiences become the inspiration for his poetic re-creation of his world. He frames the poetry, too, within a primitive cosmology which deals with The Source and the creation of all. In addition, certain poems in *Remains of Elmet* explain the source of Hughes' belief in his own prophetic role, whilst the sequence

as a whole expresses his prophetic and altruistic purposes and fosters the resurgence of the Goddess and her powers in our world.

Finally, *River* is examined. This work represents the most rich, complex and successful (in terms of Hughes' own poetic purposes) of Hughes' poetic sequences. In it, Hughes turns directly to Nature as the source of *mana* and, using the cycles, moods and energy of Nature, he again imaginatively involves himself and his readers in an epic, heroic journey through which each may gain a new perspective of our world, and thereby be enlightened and renewed. In *River*, Hughes draws strongly on his own experience of nature, and on his Yorkshire-Celtic-Norse heritage. The subtle merging of his own identity with that of an Everyman figure is demonstrated, as is the melding of Hughes' own imaginative energy with the energies of his subject, Nature. By these means, this sequence becomes a vehicle for, as well as a demonstration of, the flux and unity of the energies of The Source - of *mana*.

DECLARATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in the preparation of this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

PREFACE

This thesis is based on original research into the work of the present Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes. The research was undertaken using both primary and secondary sources, and those sources directly related to this thesis have been specifically acknowledged in the text and in the Selected Bibliography. All of Hughes' published and recorded work was consulted, as well as relevant work by other authors, scholars and critics, but not all these works have been included in the Bibliography. The complete bibliography of Hughes' work from 1946-1980, compiled by Keith Sagar and Stephen Tabor, and published by Faber and Faber, was a valuable resource for tracing Hughes' work. Work produced by and about Hughes since 1980, I have, as far as possible, kept track of, and collected, myself.

Original material was consulted at Exeter University, Exeter, The British Library, London, and at The National Sound Archive, London. I also wrote to and received helpful letters from Ted Hughes.

The following poems, discussed in this thesis, were dealt with more briefly and from a different perspective in my M.Litt. dissertation, *Myth, History and Religion in the work of Ted Hughes*: 'Bridestones'(RE.64), 'Where the Mothers'(RE.10), 'For Billy Holt'(RE.90), 'Heptonstall Old Church'(RE.118), 'Mount Zion'(RE.82), 'The scream'(CB.7), 'The summoner'(CB.10), 'The interrogator'(CB.12), 'The judge'(CB.16), 'The plaintiff'(CB.18), 'The executioner'(CB.22), 'The accused'(CB.24), 'His legs ran about'(CB.52), 'The owl flower'(CB.58), 'The risen'(CB.60). In addition, Chapter II draws heavily on A.C.H.Smith's book, *Orghast at Persepolis*, which chronicles events connected with the performance of *Orghast*.

Leonard Scigaj's book, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, appeared when this thesis was substantially written and, in many ways, it complements what I have to say, but its approach is different, and its coverage of individual poems is less detailed than will be found here. The main content of this thesis and the arguments presented are my own original work.

Generally, the conventions of the Macquarie Dictionary have been adopted in this text, and, whilst thought has been given to the gender-bias of the language, in the interest of consistency with Hughes' own usage, and of fluency, the generic term 'Man' has frequently been used.

For convenience, the following works are referred to in the text by the initials shown, followed by the relevant page number, or, in the case of Blake's works, by the Plate number and line numbers as shown in *The Illuminated Blake* annotated by David Erdman(see Bibliography):

Works by Ted Hughes

C.	<i>Crow</i>
CB.	<i>Cave Birds</i>
ED.	The drafts of <i>Cave Birds</i> held at Exeter University
G.	<i>Gaudete</i>
HIR.	<i>Hawk in the Rain</i>

L.	<i>Lupercal</i>
M.	<i>Moortown</i>
ME-1.	'Myth and Education', New York, 1970
ME-2.	'Myth and Education', London, 1976
O.	<i>Orghast</i>
PIM.	<i>Poetry in the Making</i>
R.	<i>River</i>
ROE.	<i>Remains of Elmet</i>
SP.	<i>Selected Poems 1957-1981</i>
SS.	<i>Season Songs</i>
W.	<i>Wodwo</i>

Works by William Blake

Eu.	<i>Europe</i>
Jer.	<i>Jerusalem</i>
Job.	<i>Illustrations for the Book of Job</i>
MHH.	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
Mil.	<i>Milton</i>

Works by C. G. Jung

MC.	<i>Mysterium Coniunctionis</i>
PA.	<i>Psychology and Alchemy</i>

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Dr. Geoff Gunther of the Department of English, University of New England, has been my supervisor, and his interest, comments, guidance and friendship have been invaluable. I am grateful, also, to Mrs Alison Hoddinott, Department of English, University of New England, (my temporary supervisor throughout 1985) for her concern, encouragement and friendly interest.

Other of my friends who have been especially helpful are Narelle Nicholls and Vacy Vlazna.

Without the support and tolerance of my family, this thesis could not have been written. And without the skill and the sheer hard work of my husband, David, this text could not have been submitted in its present form.

I am most grateful to them all.

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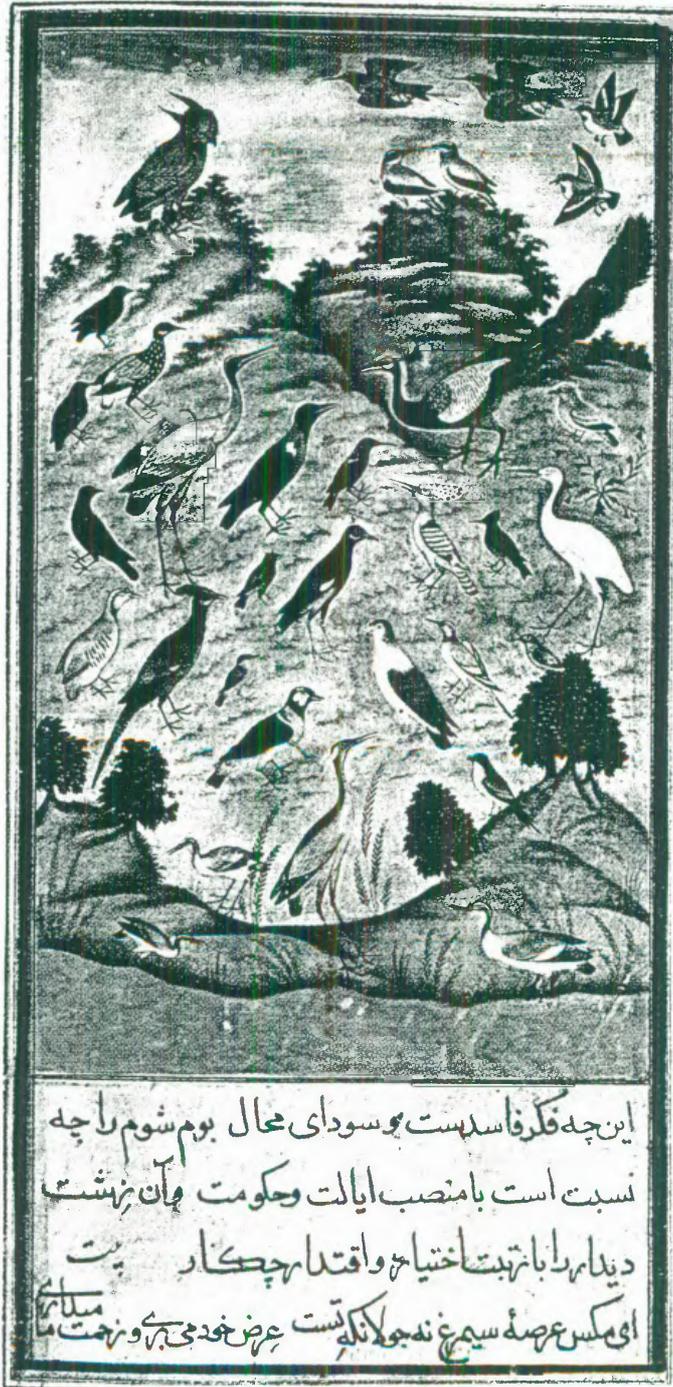
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