CHAPTER VI

THE IMAGINARY WORLD

... I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them... Maybe my concern has been to capture not animals particularly and not poems, but simply things which have a vivid life of their own, outside mine.1

writes Ted Hughes in his Poetry in the Making. Once a poem is born it assumes a life of its own, vitally linked to the poet's mind and at the same time organically existing as a separate unit "with a certain wisdom" (PM, p. 15). There is a certain close kinship between the animal world and Hughes's poems as such. Both pulsate with "a vivid life of their own, outside mine". Thus, even while writing about animals, Hughes's main interest seems to have been to portray not mere animals, but vital beings outside the human sphere with an inherent power not always found in human beings. And it is his unique concern with the other world alive "out there" that impelled him to write about imaginary beings like the Earth-owl and the Moon whale. "Some things up there," he writes about his dream-moon "are very like certain things on earth but inside out, or upside down, or the other way round" (PM, p. 114).
The intangible world beyond the concrete and the physical has always held its fascination for the poet and thinker alike. Speaking of the world beyond the natural, Samuel Palmer, the most aesthetic of Blake's disciples wrote:

General nature is simple and lovely, but compared with the loftier vision, it is the shrill music of the 'Little herd grooms'. . . . Everywhere curious articulate, perfect and inimitable of structure, like her own entomology, Nature does leave a space for the soul to climb above her steepest summits.\(^2\)

This imaginary space of the soul, both vague and definite, lying outside the sphere of normal perception, is the realm that creates the greatest impact and forms the deepest impression on a sensitive mind. Though common sense fails to understand the significance of the imaginary forces and on encountering them tries to rationalize them away or neglect them entirely, the poet and the mystic constantly live surrounded by them and abandon themselves to the dictates of this seemingly intangible power. William Blake, the romantic visionary writes thus of the manifestation of this power and the reasons for its being normally neglected by the general populace, what he calls the Natural Man

All that we See is Vision, from Generated Organs Gone as soon as come, Permanent in The Imagination, Consider'd as Nothing by the Natural Man.\(^3\)

The transient nature of these forces, their intangible quality and their shadowy vagueness provoke the ordinary human viewer to dismiss them as nonexisting. It requires a superior vision and insight to be able to perceive these powers and understand their import. D. H. Lawrence too in one of his letters speaks
about these supernatural forces:

We want to realize the tremendous non-human quality of life—it is wonderful. It is not the emotions, nor the personal feelings and attachments that matter... Behind it all are the tremendous unknown forces of life coming unseen and unperceived as out of the desert to the Egyptians, and driving us, forcing us, destroying us if we do not submit to be swept away. ⁴

These inexplicable powers have unimaginable strength and energy and are quite capable of creating and destroying as they wish. They are the intangible driving force behind the tangible and the real. In his poem "The force that through the green fuse,"

Dylan Thomas illustrates the force of its emanation:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.

... .

The hand that whirls the water in the pool
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Hauls my shroud sail.

This unseen force that lies beyond both man and nature is wonderful in its beauty but terrifying in its strength. It is the creative force, but it also has the capacity to destroy.

W. B. Yeats considered this supernatural power to be the very essence of Celtic imagination. In his opinion, in former times, even the ordinary Celtic townsman had the capacity to perceive these forces. In his Essays and Introductions, he writes of the wonderfully alert creative imagination of the ancient peoples:
Once every people in the world believed that trees were divine and could take a human or grotesque shape and dance among the shadows; and that deer, and ravens and foxes, and wolves and bears, and clouds and pools, almost all things under the sun and moon, and the sun and moon, were not less divine and changeable.

This ancient tradition of divining unique things in the seemingly ordinary is what gave the Celtic tradition its natural magic and beauty. It is this tradition, carried along by the British poets and visionaries from generation to generation, that has contributed to the vitality and strength of British poetry. Ted Hughes obviously owes much of the vigour and force of his poetry to this unique tradition. In *Poetry in the Making*, he writes of his indebtedness to the imaginary world:

... the number and oddity of the creatures which inhabit the earth or the planets, are nothing to those which inhabit our minds, or perhaps I ought to say our dreams, or the worlds from which our dreams emerge, worlds presumably somewhere out beyond the bottom of our minds.

Hughes writes of the imaginary world within his mind, which is manifested in the external world through strange occurrences and unusual figures. His ingenious capacity to weave fantasies and create a whole series of new beings through his poetry earned him instant recognition and popularity. When Sylvia Plath, the American poet, later to become his wife, first met him at Cambridge, this unique facet of Hughes's character immediately captured her attention and admiration. She wrote home to her mother in delight about this unusual talent of Hughes:
He tells me fairy stories, and stories of kings and green knights, and has made up a marvelous fable of his own about a little wizard called snatchcraftington, who looks like a stalk of rhubarb. He tells me dreams, marvelous coloured dreams, about certain foxes.

Hughes continually developed this natural aptitude for story-telling, creating new beings and weaving fantastic stories to delight children and terrify the adults. He made use of several opportunities to revive the oral tradition of story-telling by employing ballad rhythms and the structures of nursery rhymes and having poetry-reading sessions. Apart from the knowledge of primitive lore gleaned through his study of Anthropology, Hughes acquired more information on folklore by further individual effort. Between 1960 and 1967, Hughes reviewed several books concerning the folklore of the West and the East. In an essay "Myth and Education," he explains the use of stories for religious teaching by the Sufi mystics:

By stories alone, or almost alone, they claim to be able to bring a man to communion with his highest powers and abilities to communion with God in fact. The hearer needn't necessarily understand the significance of the stories, as long as they work on his imagination. So working on and altering his imagination, they alter his ideas about himself, about mankind, about the world and about all the strategies that operate in it. They use specific stories for specific purposes.

Hughes has attempted to employ a similar strategy in his poetry, making use of existing folktales, whenever available, generally giving them a new and often unexpected twist thereby viewing the whole situation through an unfamiliar perspective. Hughes's description of the East European poet Vasco Popa's methods of
poetic creativity can be applied to his own creative process:

It is in this favourite device of his, the little fable of visionary anecdote that we see most clearly his shift from literary surrealism to the far older and deeper thing, the surrealism of folklore. Folktale surrealism is always urgently connected with the business of trying to manage practical difficulties so great that they have forced the sufferer temporarily out of the dimension of coherent reality into that depth of imagination where understanding has its roots and stores its X-rays.9

The greater reality of the imaginary world cannot often be expressed in the language of normal verbal communication. This is where myths and symbols acquire their significance. Joseph Campbell, in his *Creative Mythology*, explains:

Mythological symbols touch and exhilarate centres of life beyond the reach of vocabularies of reason and coercion. The light-world modes of experience and thought were late, very late developments in the biological prehistory of our species.10

Mythological symbols, being subtler and more primitive, would communicate more easily, and reach out far more powerfully to different kinds of people. Therefore, to evoke them would be the ideal means for a poet to communicate the deep and more significant truths to the common reader. Campbell proceeds to explain the functions of mythology:

The first function of a mythology is to reconcile waking consciousness to the mysterium tremendum et fascinans of this universe as it is: the second being to render an interpretive total image of the same, as known to contemporary consciousness. Shakespeare's definition of the function of his art, "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature," is thus equally a definition of mythology. It is the revelation to waking consciousness of the powers of its own sustaining source.11
These two functions of mythology are precisely what Ted Hughes attempts to develop and perfect through his poems. Initially he tries to make one conscious of the submerged vital powers in the universe and the corresponding absence of these energies in the contemporary human being. He goes on to depict the social relevance of the absence of these powers and poetically displays the imaginary consequences of its possible excesses in Gaudete.

Hughes also strictly adheres to what Campbell has marked out as the third function of mythology: the enforcement of a moral order. When social and religious sanctions are neglected by any group of people, there cannot but be serious repercussions on the whole community resulting in violence and bloodshed as seen from the sequence of events in Gaudete. Hughes's use of different stages of the myth of the Moon-goddess, as retold by Robert Graves in The White Goddess, is significant in this context. He presents an ailing female goddess in Gaudete, sick and weary from the affronts suffered at the hands of mankind. There is no religious solution to the problem of sickness and sterility in the arid Wasteland of contemporary civilization. The only answer lies in the emotional transformation of the individual to a natural way of life invoking the powerful elemental energies. Hughes employs animals as mythical symbols or external manifestations of the natural power or vigour of the earth mother. He also warns against the possibilities of the power running amuck and resulting in violent destruction unless immediate remedial action is taken to get the situation under control.
Hughes believes in the need for a supernatural agency to support and encourage the course of normal life. As he sees it, the poet holds a position of great significance in society: his function is that of the bard, much like in the ancient times. Like the visionary, the poet has the uncanny ability to see into the mysteries of the world and recognize the drawbacks of a godless age. Being shaman-like, it is his duty to communicate his divine wisdom to the ordinary folk unable to envisage it and give them not only an honest perspective of the situation, but also to provide suitable alternatives to it. It is in this concept regarding the role of the poet and his social responsibilities that Hughes differs from contemporary nature poets like R. S. Thomas, who, although hailing from Wales, the land of bards, retains little hope of communicating his poetic message to the masses. Talking about his own poetry, Thomas says:

A large majority of the people of the United Kingdom, Welsh or otherwise, is urban and participant in the scientific-technological revolution. Of what significance to them are the poetic statements of one who has deliberately kept to the backwaters of rural life, concerning himself with the things that are passing away?12

By aggressively upholding through his poetry the need for the vital energies gradually draining away from the living sphere of contemporary man, Hughes has tried to communicate its significance and at the same time warned against the dangers attendant upon the same powers. As in the practice of a shamanistic seance which includes a flight to the spirit world through a dream or a trance, Hughes uses the means of imaginary
episodes and visionary or mythical beings to reveal his deeper truths.

The imaginary world of Hughes's poetry began to make its presence felt in the volumes published after the traumatic period following the suicide of his American wife Sylvia Plath. A strong believer in the extraordinary capabilities of the supernatural powers like Hughes, Sylvia actively participated in the occult practices and even encouraged his faith in them. Together they approached the ouija board, calling forth innumerable spirits through it to provide thematic material for their poems. With Wodwo (1967), his poetry took an entirely new turn. He graduated from being a creator of very realistic and concrete beings to a conjurer of rather hazy and surrealistic situations, clearly arising out of a grotesque and tortured inner being. This growth from the physical world to the imaginary, developing out of his sordid individual experiences gave him greater scope to express his more intense thoughts and feelings.

Hughes's explorations into the imaginary world, as also in the case of his physical poetry, take completely different directions. On the one hand he conjures up fairy-tale creatures like Nessie the mannerless monster and Ffangs the vampire who are quite harmless and even loving towards their fellow beings. They are sincere and affectionate and hence pass through a series of misadventures as the result of their unsullied and naive outlook on a world habituated to a distorted and trained perception. Like the relatives he had described in Meet my Folks, these
creatures are friendly and lovable, but constantly fall into disfavour with the world due to their incapacity to fit into acceptable modes of behaviour. They are able to think like humans and are pained by the conscious segregation imposed upon them by mankind, for they are warm, gentle and loving creatures with a yearning for love and companionship.

On the other hand, Hughes conjures up a series of horrorsome grotesque beings alien to the world and even destructive. They are demoniacal and possess a frightening power, difficult to counter. Evil in intent and devilish in their approach, they are nightmarish and uncontrollable with vast resources of dangerously alien force. They are often twisted and grotesque manifestations of the traditional notions of innocence and goodness, a fact which only increases their menacing alienness.

The weird creatures that appear out of the dark sea at night in "Ghost Crabs" (Wodwo) are a sinister but concrete manifestation of the unspoken tensions troubling the poet's imagination. Taking their form out of repressed passions and subdued fears and imbued with a strange imaginary force, they burst out of the receding waves of the sea at night and proceed to conquer the earth in their strange and unique way. Their origins in the indefinite area between land and sea indicate the vague and shadowy nature of their existence. Their appearance out of the water at night is suggestive of their associations with the dark forces of the unconscious as well as the primitive natural energies. Though shadowy and apparently unreal, they
take concrete form before the poet's eyes, with obviously evil intent, "mustering from the guls and the submarine badlands." Yet they are intangible, for they are ghosts, "ghosts-crabs" bearing marked resemblance to the dead men in the war trenches in physical appearance, possessing an incessant stare and gathering into themselves the "sea's cold." What makes them most terrifying is their capacity to reach beyond all imaginable boundaries and enter into the most private and secure of refuges:

Our walls, our bodies, are no problem to them.
Their hungers are homing elsewhere.
We cannot see them or turn our minds from them.
Their bubbling mouths, their eyes
In a slow mineral fury
Press through our nothingness where we sprawl on our beds,
Or sit in our rooms.

Being vague and intangible creatures, no concrete wall can shut them out and they move in and out of concrete buildings, objects and even human beings with confident ease. The human onlooker can only watch quietly and helplessly as

All night, around us or through us,
They stalk each other, they fasten on to each other,
They mount each other, they tear each other to pieces,
They utterly exhaust each other.

The human individuals appear quite insignificant in proportion to the size of the creatures and the force of their sinister power. Hughes provides a rather vague explanation of these creatures in whose consideration the human individual seems puny and unimportant:

They are the powers of this world.
We are their bacteria,
Dying their lives and living their deaths,
At dawn, they sidle back under the sea's edge.
They are the turmoil of history, "the convulsion
In the roots of blood, in the cycles of concurrence.
To them, our cluttered countries are empty battleground.

But the explanation provides little consolation to the terrified human being watching the whole drama in silence, for he knows that "they recuperate under the sea" and therefore will appear once again when night falls. There is no escape from them for him despite the fact that they retreat at daybreak. And there is no shelter for them even with God, since they are God's instruments, "God's only toys" and they "own this world."

Though this portrait of the ghost crabs appears horrifying, it pales into insignificance when placed alongside the vision of the angel in "Ballad from a Fairy Tale." It is in the terrifying twist given to the traditional notion of the angel as a friendly and helpful agent of God, that the tension of the poem takes root. Initially the protagonist is quite excited at the vision that takes form before him as he stands on a dark snowy valley one night as the moon disintegrates. At first he takes the "slow, colossal power" that "came beating" towards him to be "a swan the size of a city," but soon discovers that it is white angel, beautiful and delicate as in the bedtime stories:

An angel of smoking snow
With bare, lovely feet
Her long dress fluttering at her ankles
And silent, immense wingbeat.

With a child's delighted excitement, he runs to tell his mother of the supernatural event. His mother's reply provides the first insight into the unexpectedly evil consequences of the event:
'Mother,' I cried, 'O Mother,
I have seen an angel
Will it be a blessing?
But my mother's answer
Even now I dare not write.

For the angel, normally a benevolent agent of a loving God, turns out to be the harbinger of bad news. Though physically possessing "enormous beauty," the vision had some unusual characteristics. Unlike the traditional angel, this apparition wore no halo and flew slowly towards the West without fading away causing much discomfiture to the observer.

Wearing no halo
But a strange square of satin
I could not understand it
A rippling brim of satin
That fluttered its fringed edges
In the wind of her flying.

The strange occurrence would probably have passed out of his memory if it had not reappeared, much closer, almost within his reach. The valley and the surroundings were obviously real for they were "Deeper than any dream," but the vision remained exactly the same with its sinister and unhappy connotations, already foretold by his mother. By making a heavenly angel, the representative of dark foreboding and gloomy portents, Hughes tries to shock the reader out of his dull apathy. By leaving the mother's words unsaid, he adds to the implications of horror, allowing room for the reader's imagination to conjure up unmentionable horrors. The actual consequences of the strange event are left unsaid leaving only a sense of foreboding as he ends the poem with the words:
And through my mother's answer
I saw all I had dreaded
But with its meaning doubled.
And the valley was dark.

The poem ends in darkness and gloom, leaving the reader unillumined as to the real course of events. The protagonist is also covered in darkness and misery, for his worst fears are confirmed and only sorrow can be the outcome of his vision. The whole episode could be a symbolic presentation of Hughes's own personal experience with women, who appeared beautiful and wonderful when viewed with the innocent vision of a child, but turned out to be the heralds of grief and misery. The immense gap between the general notion and the reality are stressed in the poem, and the possibilities turn out to be terrifying.

Thus the conventionally friendly epitome of goodness, the angel, is seen to assume dangerously frightening proportions when imbued with evil connotations. But Hughes achieves a similarly horrsorousome experience with traditionally ill-intentioned creatures such as the Biblical Gog, the powerful dragon of the Book of Revelations which is evil both in intention and action. It awakens into consciousness hearing the affirmation of God's power over the Universe. It cannot understand its role in this Universe for it does not accept its moral codes. His God is the Lord of the Stomach:

The dog's god is a scrap dropped from the table.
The mouse's saviour is a ripe wheat grain.
Hearing the Messiah cry
My mouth widens in adoration. ("Gog", Wodwo)
Though it appears reverential and passive, it is not so. Like the "rough beast" in Yeats's "Second Coming" it is only biding its time and waiting to carry out its evil intentions. Hughes explains the premises of his writing this poem:

That actually started as a description of the German assault through the Ardennes and it turned into the dragon in Revelations. It alarmed me so much I wrote a poem about the Red Cross Knight just to set against it with the idea of keeping it under control... keeping its effects under control.15

The Gog has within itself vast resources of uncontrollable capacity for evil. It is awaiting the birth cry in hungry anticipation in order to devour the child Christ. In *The Poet Speaks*, Hughes speaks of his creation. It is...

... the dragon in Revelations that's waiting under the woman in heaven, between the sun and moon, waiting for her to deliver the child with its mouth open.16

But the power of the dragon in conjunction with the power of the woman can be overcome by the "hooded horseman of iron." He is the symbol of the male principle, the light opposed to darkness. The dragon, the symbol of incarnation and reincarnation has joined forces with the woman, who is both mother and the partner of the man to keep him within the confines of a phenomenal life. The poet warns him to keep away from the woman who would be the agent of his bondage.

That is the nightmare pillow
That is the seal of resemblances
That is illusion
That is illusion ("Gog III", Wodwo)

In the creation of Gog, Hughes has combined elements of the
Biblical dragon with aspects of oriental thought. The Knight is given qualities of the individual ego or *atman* seeking release from worldly illusion or *maya* and trying to find union with the divine. The total effect is terrifying.

The confusion and misunderstandings generated by the unnatural or supernatural beings are not always frightening as indicated earlier. Some of the creatures, as in the children's poems and fables mentioned earlier in this chapter are quite gentle and innocent and even friendly.

In the case of Wodwo, the prevailing emotion is one of bewilderment. The term "Wodwo" appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (p. 720-24) in verse which can be translated as

> Sometimes with serpents he fought, and with wolves also
> Sometimes with wodwos, that lived in the rocks,
> Both with bulls and bears, and at other times with boars,
> And giants that pursued him on the high fells.  

This "wodwo" could be interpreted as either a wood-dweller or a troll or even a satyr. While this narrative suggests an aggressive community of beasts or humans, Hughes poem indicates an intelligent and rather harmless but confused individual discovering a new land and trying to identify with it. It is the unspecified nature of his identity that makes him so unique. Finding himself in strange unexpected surroundings, the creature thinks aloud about its condition. It cannot understand how it came to be or how it should relate to its surroundings. He finds the situation familiar yet strange:
I seem
separate from the ground and not rooted but dropped
out of nothing casually I've no threads
fastening me to anything I can go anywhere
I seem to have been given the freedom
of this place what am I then?

The unusual construction of the verse itself communicates the
feeling of incoherence. The sentences follow one another without
any break or any orderly arrangement. The confused situation
is akin to the one described by T. S. Eliot in *The Wasteland:*

> On Margate sands,
> I can connect
> Nothing with nothing.

The same feeling of desolation and despair is echoed by the wodwo.
But the futile meaninglessness of the drab pursuits described
by Eliot is replaced by a fresh and innocent outlook. The wodwo
is able to perceive everything anew. His view is quite the opposite
of the jaded attitude in Eliot. Though the wodwo's questions
find no answer he continues in his seeking of the internal
essential self and its relationship to others. He can only
find meaning by eliminating the unnecessary elements. As it
is difficult to find out what he is, he tried first to discover
what he is not. This is akin to the *Upanishadic* concept of
neti neti" where something which cannot be defined is explained
by eliminating the positive concepts one after the other. The
wodwo discovers that he is not rooted, that he does not belong
to the world of the weeds. But he cannot find explanations to
several of his unconscious actions. He imagines himself to be
the exact centre of all creation and feels that everything around
him stops to watch him when he himself stops. His ideas of his own importance veer towards the human notions which though partial are often accepted as final. But the wodwo is not yet convinced of the available answers to his doubts. He is determined to go on looking in his quest for identity. The absence of a fullstop or any other punctuation mark at the end of the poem is itself indicative of the continuing action. The technique is that of a cinematic fade-out as the wodwo continues to search for its identity. Hughes's portrayal of the wodwo's state of mind appears to bear a marked resemblance to his own description of the condition of a generation of East European poets and their efforts in his Introduction to Vasco Popa's Selected Poetry:

...the living suffering spirit, capable of happiness, much deluded, too frail, with doubtful and provisional senses, so undefinable as to be almost silly, but palpably existing, and wanting to go on existing...homing in tentatively on vital scarcely perceptible signals, making no mistakes, but with no hope of finality, continuing to explore.18

Perhaps it is this unhappy and unsure spirit of contemporary East European poetry that Hughes tried to give form through his wodwo. It remains a vague, partly human, almost disembodied creature, unsure of itself, yet full of the thirst for knowledge. It reflects part of the mood of confused agony and the mixture of tragedy and pathos probably experienced by the poet during the period. It is an innocent creature concerned only with itself and doing no harm to anyone. Thus Hughes provides repeated proof of the fact that his poetic characters arise out of his
attempts to study and analyse his personal experiences.

Confusion and its attendant pathos and suffering are not merely the prerequisites of the naive and the innocent in the Hughesian canon. The guilty or the partially guilty individual experiences it with much greater intensity but is able to survive his agony, both physical and mental, with superhuman powers of endurance. The painful experience helps him mature into a more worthy and genuine person who has developed his inner resources towards greater inner wisdom.

Hughes has skilfully adapted Shakespeare's concept of the tragic hero, whose noble qualities increase the pathos and tragedy of his fall, and given it poetic form in his creation of the superhuman Prometheus lying on his proverbial crag and suffering perpetual punishment through the incessant attacks on his liver by the vulture.

Prometheus, the Greek titan, is the protagonist of whole series of poems titled *Prometheus on His Crag*. Though a Titan, Prometheus is very much in sympathy with the human beings and their hopes and aspirations for, he steals fire from the Gods to help mankind.

Although a titan, Prometheus has espoused the cause of Zeus, thus manifesting his native sympathy for law and order; but as he was essentially a nobler type than Zeus himself he could not long maintain the allegiance. When the chief Olympian found mankind hopelessly faulty and planned to create a new race in its place, Prometheus broke with him and defiantly became sponsor of the human cause. This generous devotion is the source of his power in myth.
It is his affection for the human race that prompted poets and storytellers from time immemorial to write about him and immortalize him in their works. Inspired by the noble humanness and gentle virtue of this powerful giant, rendered helpless as a punishment for his nobility, Shelley wrote in his Preface to Prometheus Unbound:

Prometheus is . . . the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives, to the best and noblest ends. 20

Prometheus was a paradoxical character. He combined in himself the qualities of a God as well as those of a man. Hughes has made full use of this double-sided personality of Prometheus. In Hughes's poems titled Prometheus on His Crag, he is the epitome of unending human suffering. Despite all his strength, he is powerless against the cruelly painful onslaughts of the vulture. But Prometheus is capable not only of suffering the pain manfully but also of going beyond it. Initially he suffers physical pain. Later he undergoes untold mental torture when he is beset with countless doubts and suffers existential anguish. He is not even sure whether his foresight regarding his release is a fact or only an illusion. He is even able to sing a "song to his wounds"

A pure
Unfaltering morphine
Drugging the whole earth with bliss. (PC, 12)

He becomes so accustomed to the suffering and pain that he can ignore it and look outwards to a world beyond it which appears to be to his advantage:
Prometheus On His Crag

Had such an advantageous prospect He could see, even as he slept,
The aeons revolving.

Between the aeons—dark nothing. But he could see
Himself wading escaping through dark nothing
From aeon to aeon, prophesying Freedom— (PC, p. 15)

This capacity to go beyond suffering is what makes him remarkable and God-like. It is this quality that man must possess if he must endure. It is this capacity to endure in mankind that gives Faulkner his faith in mankind: "I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail." He admired human nature because it possessed the soul which included the spirit of "compassion and sacrifice and endurance." Faulkner believed that it was the poet's duty to not merely record the achievements of man, but be one of the supports that helps him to endure and prevail. Hughes, in his efforts to link the world of human suffering with the superhuman capacity to endure, has tried to display to mankind the need to prevail rather than to merely suffer.

But when the human being rises to superhuman levels or even elevates himself to the stature of God, God's position becomes uncertain and even insecure. His position is almost usurped by the individual being strengthened by his personal sufferings and torments.

Hughes's portrayals of God undergo marked variations as we proceed from one group of poems to the next, indicating the significant alterations in his outlook. In the early poems, Hughes does not make mention of God. He sees Nature as his God
in these poems, revering and worshipping its power and resplendent beauty.

In the Wodwo poems, God is mentioned. But Hughes's characters do not turn to Him with respect or hope of succour. The initial reference to heaven which appears in "Her Husband" (Wodwo) indicates a God who pays no heed to earthly problems. The incompatible couple are constantly at loggerheads, each unhappy and hateful of the other. They have no hope of a solution to their persistent problem, for there is only indifference in heaven to their earthly misery. "Their brief/Goes straight up to heaven and nothing more is heard of it." The situation is clearly an illustration of the present human dilemma as described by Hughes in an interview with Egbert Faas:

In the old world God and divine power were invoked at any cost--life seemed worthless without them.
In the present world we dare not invoke them--we wouldn't know how to use them or stop them destroying us.

Hughes's lack of trust in a conventional God is seen in other poems as well. In "Logos" (Wodwo), he dramatizes God's "perfect strength" and speaks of "the blinding pentagram of His power."

Then he goes on to illustrate the failure of His power over evil:

The sea pulling every thing to pieces
Except its killers, alert and shapely.
And within seconds the new-born baby is lamenting
That it ever lived--

God is a good fellow, but His mother's against Him.

Hughes appears almost condescending in his attitude towards God. It is obvious that He is powerless especially when placed against a hostile female divinity--perhaps the Moon Goddess.
In the *Crow* poems, Hughes's image of a Christian God deteriorates further. God appears as a tired and worn out person, whose attempts at creating anything good or worthy meet with constant failure. He is unable to teach Crow a noble emotion like love in "Crow's First Lesson." He is so weak and helpless that Crow can easily play pranks on Him and His creations, as a result of which the whole of mankind suffers. Sometimes God goes off in despair, as in "Crow's Song of Himself", thereby giving up and indulging in one of the seven deadly sins Himself. But at other times, it is God's foolish actions that aggravate a bad situation making it a scene of disaster. In "Apple Tragedy", for instance, it is God's reactions that make Adam, Eve and the serpent realize the immorality of their innocent action consequent to the imbibing of His own creation--the cider. Hughes's attitude of contempt and disillusionment towards God persists through the *Cave Birds* sequence, *Gaudete* and *Remains of Elmet*. In *Gaudete*, even the White Goddess seems to have been displaced by man. Man remains supreme in the *Moortown* poems as well. Nature is now subservient to man's wishes. Man's help is required to revive the Goddess.

God figures prominently in Hughes poems once again in *What is the Truth*. There he appears on Earth and speaks to his flock at the behest of his son. He is obviously disillusioned by what he sees there. He is acutely disappointed by the lack of communication and coordination between the human and the animal worlds. So, he is constrained to remind them that he contains
within himself all the animals, so that the human beings would recollect the divinity within the animals and stop exploiting them or destroying them:

"The Truth", said God finally, "is this. The Truth is that I was those worms." God's Son stared at his Father, looking blank. "And the Truth is" God went on, "that I was that Fox. Just as I was that Foal. As I am, I am. I am that Foal. And I am the Cow. I am the Weasel and the Mouse. The Wood Pigeon and the Partridge. The Goat, the Badger, the Hedge hog, the Hare. Yes, and the Hedge hog's Flea. I am each of these things. The Rat. The Fly. And each of these things is Me. It is. It is. That is the Truth." (WT, p.121)

But despite all God's disillusionment, He is not as full of despair as the God of Crow was. He now has more faith in his flock. He is content that they will improve.

God, in these poems, is a stern father, commanding both respect and love from his flock. Yet despite his overbearing presence, he is loving and even indulgent as he allows his son to argue Him into paying a visit to earth. It is obvious that he hopes for a better future for he permits his son to remain on the earth.

God's son represents the hope for the future. He is young and innocent and very much like an ordinary child. He stands for the new chance given to mankind. He is fresh and direct in his attitude to life. He cannot yet understand the complex and fixed attitudes that are a part of nature existence. He is without preconceptions and therefore perfectly equipped for leading a new generation toward salvation. From the very beginning he is favourably disposed towards mankind. He is the link between Man
and God. Not imperfect and full of folly like mankind or merely unthinkingly vital like the animals, God's son possesses a strong element of the intangible, yet real spirituality and a genuine belief in the goodness of man. He can also logically reason out with his father about the advantages of travelling to earth. He is naturally curious like any human child. He combines within himself the positive aspects of both the Dionysian and the Apollonian approaches to life. The very fact that he is left behind on earth—even without his being conscious that he wanted it—is suggestive of his role as the new saviour of mankind. The crowing of cocks in the background of the poem brings in a note of ambiguity. Does the cock crow indicate a new morning, the dawn of a new, divine age? Or does it indicate the presence of another betrayer in the making? Concealed in this can be the seeds of Hughes's future poetic development.

God's son is probably the perfected example of the future Godlike man. The emphasis shifts from the interest in God to the welfare of Man's state of mind. As God fades slowly out of existence, light dawns upon mankind waking up to its daily chores. God's son is left on earth to lead mankind to perfection. Possessing an intimate knowledge of the divine alongside the innocent alertness of a child, and a hopeful outlook towards the future, he seems to be the perfect type upon which humanity could model itself. Both the normal human beings and God are shadowy beings and fade away at the touch of light.
Hughes seems to suggest that salvation for mankind lies within itself rather than in looking up towards a distant God. Man should find the virtuous and superhuman qualities in himself and develop them in order to make his life more worthy and fruitful. He should look within himself for transcendence and spiritual support and move towards perfection. Significantly, he looks to the east where the sky though bright has a "long low cloud" which could serve to help the sun light up the place better for it by subduing the dazzle of its brilliance and help illumine rather than cover up by means of its glaring light.
NOTES


6 Ted Hughes, Poetry in the Making, p. 110.


11 Ibid.


16 Quoted by Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 74.

17 Ibid., p. 98.

18 Ibid.

