

## SHAMANIC IMPLICATIONS IN THE POETRY OF TED HUGHES

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### ABSTRACT

*Hughes witnessed western man exiled from nature which further alienated him from the world within. He strongly believed that reformed Christianity and the advent of Enlightenment had caused man's estrangement from his essence. Hughes's poetry documents the epic journey of such Western man who returns to his primitive self as he reconnects with the non-human world of Nature. The poet adopts the role of a shaman in his attempt to achieve cosmic balance and initiate healing function of poetry by speaking for what is forbidden and neglected in his culture and society. Seamus Heaney also reacted to his appointment as poet laureate by proclaiming him to be "shaman of the tribe" because he would bring his readers in "vital imaginative contact with the geological, botanical, historical, and legendary reality of England itself." (Quoted in Scigaj 64). The paper aims at exploring shamanic features in some of his famous poems. The question is that in what sense Hughes is termed as a shaman of his tribe? Definitely not in his appearance of a shaman who performs the activities of drumming, dancing and singing in front of his tribe for recuperating the suffering souls but in his role of a poet who, with the power of his mythic imagination, creates a regenerative response to psychological crisis.*

**Keywords :** Shamanism, Séance, Regeneration, Archetypal, Redemption

Ted Hughes, a poet of mythical imagination who saw folk tales as central to the culture argued for the inclusion of myth and storytelling in education system. He expressed his distrust to 'the scientific style of mind' an outcome of 'rational enlightenment' on the ground that it, 'had begun by questioning superstitions and ended by prohibiting imagination itself as a reliable mental faculty, branding it more or less criminal in a scientific society, reducing the Bible to a bundle of old woman's tales, finally murdering God.' (Hughes 56) He also believed that social and scientific materialism had created environmental and cultural crises. Much of his poetry portrays this crisis which, however, delivers a healing force through the

shamanic adventure. It is therefore that his work became an appropriate subject for the interdisciplinary study of environmental humanities. Simon Armitage praised him as a 'poet and eco warrior'. The poet continues to place emphasis on the inseparability of human and animal world. The poet strives, in his later poetry, towards achieving complete harmony and unity between the human and the non-human world. Hughes finds the process of making poetry analogous to the initiation patterns of shamanic séance.

While replying to Egbert Fass's question about what is Shamanism, Hughes outlined the shamanic experience thus:

Basically, it's the whole procedure and practice of becoming and performing as a witch-doctor, a medicine man, among primitive peoples. The individual is summoned by certain dreams. The same dreams all over the world. A spirit summons him... usually an animal or a woman. If he refuses, he dies...or somebody near him dies. If he accepts, he then prepares himself for the job ... it may take years. Usually he apprentices himself to some other Shaman, but the spirit may well teach him direct. Once fully-fledged he can enter trance at will and go to the spirit world ... he goes to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs. Now this flight to the spirit world he experiences as a dream . . . and that dream is the basis of the hero story. It is the same basic outline pretty well all over the world, same events, same figures, same situations. It is the skeleton of thousands of folktales and myths. And of many narrative poems. The Odyssey, the Divine Comedy, Faust, etc. Most narrative poems recount only those other dreams ... the dream of the call. Poets usually refuse the call. How are they to accept it? How can a poet become a medicine man and fly to the source and come back and heal or pronounce oracles? (Fass)

The term shaman is derived from the language of the Evenki (Tungus), a hunting and reindeer herding human race of eastern Siberia, and was used to refer to their spirit intermediary (saman). The other derivative of the term is from the Indo-European verb root *sa*, meaning 'to know' (in Pali, *samana*; in French, *savoir*) and that the cultural-historical conceptualization of shamanism may be traced in Buddhism or in other scriptural traditions of Asia.

Giving a description of the shaman's call and practice in his review of *Shamanism* by Mircea Eliade, Hughes wrote:

The shaman is chosen in a number of ways. In some regions, commonly among the North American Indians, the aspirant inflicts on

himself extraordinary solitary ordeals of fasting and self-mutilation, until a spirit, usually some animal, arrives and becomes henceforth his liaison with the spirit world. In other regions the tribe chooses the man - who may or may not, under the initiation ordeals, become a shaman. But the most common form of election comes from the spirits themselves; they approach the man in a dream. At the simplest these dreams are no more than a vision of an eagle, as among the Buryatg, or a beautiful woman (who marries them), as among the Goldi. (WP 56)

According to Hughes, shamanism is not a religion, but a technique that provides corrective measures to social and psychological disorders of individuals and the community as a whole. The idea that shamanism and poetry produce regenerative powers through healing properties is what characterizes Hughes's understanding of poetry. He regarded a shaman's psychic journey as, 'one of the main regenerating dramas of the human psyche: the fundamental poetic event' (WP 58) and went on to establish a connection between shamanism and English poetic tradition:

[T]he initiation dreams, the general schema of the shamanic flight, and the figures and adventures they encounter, are not a shaman monopoly: they are, in fact, the basic experience of the poetic temperament we call 'romantic'. In a shamanizing society, Venus and Adonis, some of Keats's longer poems, *The Wanderings of Oisín*, *Ash Wednesday*, would all qualify their authors for the magic drum. (WP 58)

Thus, Hughes regards Shakespeare, Keats and Yeats as shamanic poets and discovers shamanic measures in the English poetry which bears strong ties with romantic tradition. Just like a shaman, Hughes develops strong relationships with animals and predatory birds which become the shaman poet's totems. The poet reaches beyond the material known forces and ventures into the realm of the unknown through his animal totems such as the hawk, the jaguar, the bull, the fox, the pike, the otter, the bear and the wolf. He taken on a shamanic

journey to fulfil the healing function of poetry. In his role of an intermediary, Hughes has the poetic responsibility for restoring the intimacy between the human and the animal spirit world. Writers and scholars of shamanism have identified three common stages of the initiation ceremony of shamanic séance. A shaman has to undergo through enduring pain, symbolic death and only after having endured hardships and dismemberment, he is reborn into a healer of his community.

Like a shaman, Hughes seeks help from animal spirits and turns himself into them. This quality of the poet is quite discernible in his animal poetry where he perceives the world through the eyes of a hawk, a jaguar, an otter, a salmon, a skylark, a crow and so on so forth. While responding to the accusations of promoting violence and fascist tendencies in relation to Hawk Roosting, Hughes made it clear that:

Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking. Simply Nature. (Fass).

The chief characteristic of Hughes' animal imagery is his delving deep into the body and mind of his animal subjects. He enters into their consciousness and speaks their thoughts in his poems. 'This very process of metamorphosis into an animal spirit is called *khubilkh* in shamanism.' (Eliade 2004)

## AN OTTER

The otter has great importance in some shamanic traditions. The land otter was believed to have close associations with shamans of Northwest Coast Native Americans. One can observe certain affinities in terms of mental states and living manners between an otter and a shaman. Eliade writes that the animal is sacred to the Ojibwa Indians. The myths tell that the messenger of the Great Spirit considering the miserable state of sick and enfeebled humanity, revealed the most sublime secrets to the otter and inserted mlgis (symbol of the midé) in its body so that it should become immortal and be able to initiate and at the same

time consecrate men. Thus, the otter skin pouch plays an essential part in the initiation of the midé; in it are placed the mlgis, the small shells that are believed to hold magico-religious power. (Eliade 316-17) Thus, the otter can perform the function of a shaman as it is endowed with healing power.

**Of neither water nor land. Seeking**

**Some world lost when first he dived, that he cannot  
come at since,**

**Takes his changed body into the holes of lakes;**

**As if blind, cleaves the stream's push till he licks;**

**The pebbles of the source; from sea**

**To sea crosses in three nights**

**Like a king in hiding. (Hughes, "An Otter," CP 79)**

An otter is an animal that lives successfully between two worlds, earth and water, and is believed to possess great insight and vision due to his 'double existence'. Likewise, a shaman has the ability to travel through different spheres. He makes brisk movement in the sky, land and water along with chanting, waving, blowing and grunting in order to recapture a lost soul. Hirschberg accounts for the shamanistic abilities of the otter:

While the otter, for Hughes, is a symbol of the soul in hiding, the deep soul, his spilt existence makes him particularly suitable as a projection, in the form of a totem animal, of the shaman's habitual mental state of being conditioned to allow his soul and body free movement in different realms. ( Hirschberg 17)

Kieth Sagar likens the doubleness of otter with that of man's duality. The otter is torn between the two worlds. The world of water or sea is portrayed as hidden and secret where the otter, 're-enters by melting'. However, he confronts with life threats on land and is hunted by dogs and men. The otter's struggle for survival ceases when its pelt, stretched over the back of a chair, decorates the house of a man. **An Otter** most clearly articulates Hughes's preoccupation with survival.

**Yanked above hounds, reverts to nothing at all,  
To this long pelt over the back of a chair. ("An  
Otter," CP 80)**

Another reference to an otter is found over a decade later in *Gaudete* (1977). Here, the poet makes some girls recount a story of a strange man named Lumb and the otter to a priest. In this story, Lumb feels alienated from his own soul and desires to regain the lost home. His invocation of the otter spirit leads to his redemption. Lumb's otter is a messenger from the underworld. He comes from the inner depth of our soul, and he also serves as another helping spirit of the White Goddess. The otter is a symbol of poetic inspiration. As such he can bring about the spiritual rebirth of those who have witnessed his summoning and to the summoner himself, in other words, both the readers and the poet experience revitalization.

In an interview with Alvarez from August 1960, Hughes recalls:

While I was writing ['An Otter'] I was reading a great deal of old English history, in other words pre-Conquest history; and this notion of the life in England, and particularly the life of the animals in England, carrying on from generation to generation, and through all the historical eruptions that were going over them, this life continues as a single life, as a single thread of life. So that, in fact, in the first part I speak about not generations of otters but one otter, as if the one otter were thousands of years old, and were a pre-historic animal surviving [...] And in the second part I make this more definite. Coming down from the succession of generations of otters, I come down to this particular otter – and this particular otter in a crisis when he's being hunted for his life. (Interview with Alvarez 1960)

## PIKE

In 'Pike', we come to know about the importance of the unconscious in the art and craft of poetry. The

images of pike rising from the unfathomable depth towards the poet is a potent metaphor for the poems that arise from the unconscious. Fishing as a metaphor described the poet's quest for creative inspiration. Here in this poem, the craft of poetry is suggested through the act of pike fishing. The poem is also said to be, 'a celebration of a totem'. (LTH, 133) For many years, the pike had become his totem, a poet shaman's helping spirit which triggered his poetic imagination and took him down into the unexplored depths of spiritual knowledge. The poet as a wounded individual evolved into a great healer of not only his personal grief but his audience in general. And all this could be possible with the helping and guiding spirits of his powerful predatory animals. By attuning himself to the natural environment of the pikes, Hughes accessed the in-depth realms of poetic creation in the concluding lines of the poem:

**Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,  
That rose slowly towards me, watching. (CP 86)**

The 'watching' has to continue as long as Hughes writes poetry. The poet takes his shamanic journey through dreams. In the first part of 'Pike', the poet defines the nature and existence of the creature as, 'Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin'. He further recollects his fishing trip to the pond that had, 'Stilled legendary depth' and, 'was as deep as England'. Hughes frequently visited the Crookhill pond for pike fishing and that he was to be obsessed by it at the Crookhill. He once admitted of having recurring dreams of pike in its habitat of Crookhill pond.

## SECOND GLANCE AT A JAGUAR

In 'Second Glance at a Jaguar', Hughes depicts the initiation ceremony of a shaman through the movements of a Jaguar. The poet identifies himself with the jaguar of this poem who eventually gets transformed into a shaman. The jaguar of earlier poem is caged and hurries enraged through the darkness. He is said to be a visionary who feels freedom in a state of imprisonment. Here, the poet

makes use of general symbols and language to define the attributes of jaguar which makes him an uncomplicated, ordinary creature. However, the jaguar of *Second Glance* is variously described as 'a cat going along under thrown stones ... 'a thick Aztec disemboweller ... 'his head like a brazier of spilling embers ... 'a butterfly ... 'a gorged look, Gangster. This is how the jaguar becomes an endless chain of signifiers whose meaning is unstable and constantly shifting. He sets himself free from his material body as he has to wear his skin out and takes on various shapes. He gets ready for the ritual as a practising shaman by, 'Muttering some mantra, some drum song of murder'. (CP 152) Hughes's jaguar attempts to free himself from the clutches of mind and the burden of sin as his body bears the marks which reminds us that of Cain's. With the gorged look of a gangster, he conceives of a vengeful murder to satisfy his fury. He seeks self-regeneration and transcendence over impulsive action through some mantras which, according to Indian mythology, if enchanted repeatedly, exerts magical power. The jaguar's rage is directed inwardly to the extent that his skin begins to dissolve and he succeeds in liberating himself from the very condition of being a jaguar.

**He coils, he flourishes**

**The blackjack tail as if looking for a target,**

**Hurrying through the underworld, soundless.**

**(Hughes, "Second Glance at a Jaguar," CP 151)**

A different sort of remedy is suggested here where the destructive power of rage is turned against itself. 'It is a common mythological and folklore motif that the wound, if it is to be healed, needs laid in it the blade that made it' (WP 95). Hughes revealed to Egbert Fass that the poems about jaguar had real, 'summoning force'.

A jaguar after all can be received in several different aspects . . . he is a beautiful, powerful nature spirit, he is a homicidal maniac, he is a supercharged piece of cosmic machinery, he is a symbol of man's baser nature shoved down into the id and growing cannibal murderous with deprivation, he is an ancient symbol of Dionysus since he is a

leopard raised to the ninth power, he is a precise historical symbol to the bloody-minded Aztecs and so on. Or he is simply a demon . . . a lump of ectoplasm. A lump of astral energy. (Fass)

Carib Shamans of Dutch Guiana teach the trainees to turn into jaguars and bats before they take up their ecstatic journey to become full shamans. (Eliade 27)

## THE KINGFISHER

'Among the Yakut people of Siberia, the shaman begins his ecstatic journey to escort the soul of a sacrificed animal to the sky. Three trees stripped of their branches are set up outside the yurt; the middle one is a birch, to whose top is fastened a dead kingfisher'. (Eliade 232) Here in this poem, the kingfisher is portrayed like a shaman whose evasiveness of continual shifting positions into different directions deliver the mystical shamanic flight. The metaphors and images of the poem project the kingfisher as a talismanic fisher who, having 'escaped from a jeweller's opium', with the speed of an electric current, 'x-rays the river's toppling tangle of gloom'. The kingfisher is a symbol of not just speed and energy but precision and accuracy too.

**Now he's vanished—into vibrations.**

**A sudden electric wire, jarred rigid,**

**Snaps—with a blue flare. (Hughes, "The Kingfisher," CP 662)**

The Kingfisher-shaman whirls through the air and vanishes into vibrations, 'with a blue flare'. The next moment, he, 'erupts through the mirror of the river, with his 'beak full of ingots'. The fruitful eruption is also a sign of the river's fecundity. The reader-observer captures the fishing moments of the kingfisher and is awestruck by the suddenness that permeates the bird's movements:

**And is away—cutting the one straight line**

**Of the raggle-taggle tumbledown river**

**With a diamond—**

**Leaves a rainbow splinter sticking in your eye.**

**Through him, God, whizzing in the sun,  
Glimpses the angler. (CP 663)**

The reader's eye, being the eye of the mind, and ear, being the ear of the soul, seem to have been filled with motley colours and Keatsian sensuousness. As and when the resplendent kingfisher swoops into view, the poet presses the release button of his poetic camera. The bright variegated colours of the bird are suggested through the gemstones and metals used in jewellery. Just as a diamond is used in cutting glass in any desired shape, the Kingfisher also flies away while cutting the one straight line of the river with a diamond. The poem ends with his going invisible again leaving behind the sparkling light of his sapphirine body. Here, the Kingfisher functions as a healer who stimulates the vitalizing force in each one of us.

**And look! He's  
—gone again.  
Spark, sapphire, refracted  
From beyond water  
Shivering the spine of the river. (CP 663)**

## SALMON

Pike was replaced with salmon as the next totemic fish for Hughes whose poems about salmon in his collection *River* not only helped the poet recover from his personal grief but served as 'living medicine' to his readers who had been hopelessly caught in the trials of life. Edward Hadley quotes Hughes as he discovered, through self-realisation, the main purpose of art: 'the idea occurred to me that art was perhaps this – the psychological component of the autoimmune system. It works on the artist as a healing. But it works on others, too, as a medicine.' (Hadley 199) Many critics have suggested that the poems about aquatic landscapes and species function as redemptive signs for the traumatised soul of Hughes. The poet's wife Sylvia Plath committed suicide in her estrangement in 1963. Six years later, his partner, Assia Wivell, committed suicide which was followed by the death of his mother Edith Hughes. His fishing expedition to Alaska with Nicholas Hughes had the underlying

purpose of healing his grieving soul. For Hughes, fishing was instrumental towards the reconstitution of his archetypal self with that of his mind and body and helped him reconnect spiritually to the landscape.

**One inside me,  
A bodiless twin, some doppelgänger  
Disinherited other, unliving,  
Ever-living, a larva from prehistory,  
Whose journey this was, who now exulted,  
Recognising his home,  
(Hughes, "The Gulkana," CP 667)**

The trip informed parts of *River* especially the poems about salmon. The poems in this collection entitled as *September Salmon*, *October Salmon*, and the closing poem *Salmon Eggs* construct a full life-cycle of salmon when he returns to the pool of his birth showing persistence in pushing himself upstream the river for procreation and death after a journey of four years into the sea. The salmon, which he came to regard as a spirit guide as well as a pivotal part of his own consciousness, proved to be an essential key to the development of his ecological ecological vision.

## SALMON EGGS

The poet's concern about salmon conservation and water quality is noteworthy in the poem *October Salmon* which evolved into a mission. Terry Gifford in an essay entitled "Gods of Mud: Ted Hughes and the Post-Pastoral" created a new category of "post-pastoral" literature to describe Hughes' environmental activism ingrained in his poetry. (Gifford 26) Hughes ecological vision developed through his early childhood fascination for recognising the healing truths of Nature through birds, animals, fish, rivers and mountains. His studies and deep interest in mythology, shamanism, zoology and anthropology brought him closer to the animating forces in the world of Nature. One key motif expressed by the advocates of neo-shamanism



is that, through the experience of shamanic consciousness and contact with the world of the spirits, people will be able to rediscover their 'connections with nature'. The underlying lines smack of Hughes' deep ecological sensibility.

**And this was the only mother he ever had, this  
uneasy channel of minnows.**

**Under the mill-wall, with bicycle wheels, car tyres,  
bottles**

**And sunk sheets of corrugated iron. (Hughes,  
"October Salmon," CP 679)**

'The river is a god...inviolable / immortal', wrote Ted Hughes in the poem *River* of eponymous book of poetry. Hughes was so much fascinated with the rejuvenating power of river that he once recognised, 'The voice of the river moved in me'. (Gulkana) The poet-shaman presents his poems about salmon's journey of life and death as cures, powerful healing therapies that tend to reconcile the human self with the natural world.

'The salmon poems are all hymns to the goddess, tributes to the mythic heroism of the salmon, dying in the cause of the goddess. Their sacrifice is also a sacrament, the consummation of being reborn from their own eggs and sperms'. (Sagar 165). Thus, the cock-salmon of *October Salmon* becomes a totemic figure of endurance for the humankind, an embodiment of the 'urgency for survival.' Kieth Sagar indicates that the theme of *October Salmon* is the bliss of unmaking. Helen Vendler calls it, 'Hughes' self-elegy, masked as an elegy for a dying salmon.' (Vendler 207) M. Malay affirms that *Salmon* is, 'one of the central creatures in *River*, and a figure which unites so many of the poet's distinctive concerns: energy, vitality, renewal, rebirth.

**About six pounds weight**

**Four years old at most, and hardly a winter at sea –**

**But already a veteran,**

**Already a death-patched hero. So quickly it's over!**

**So briefly he roamed the gallery of marvels!**

**Such sweet months, so richly embroidered into  
earth's beauty-dress,**

**Her life-robe –**

**Now worn out with her tirelessness, her insatiable  
quest,**

**Hangs in the flow, a frayed scarf –**

**An autumnal pod of his flower,**

**The mere hull of his prime, shrunk at shoulder and  
flank (CP 677-78)**

The poem uses the imagery of warfare to describe endured hardships of the salmon's journey back to his birth place. He has already fought many battles and proved his military prowess. Like a death-patched hero, the salmon shows resolution to complete his final journey. Having swum over two thousand miles through the oceanic 'gallery of marvels' once 'so richly embroidered into earth's beauty-dress', he bears the signs of death reflected in the discolouration and worn out condition of 'her life-robe'. The body as a borrowed gift is reclaimed by the river.

**The primrose and violet of that first upfling in the  
estuary –**

**Ripened to muddy dregs,**

**The river reclaiming his sea-metals. (CP 678)**

The whole poem as a journey deathward constructs the drama of regeneration to which the key is the salmon's unyielding faith in himself and the white goddess. Death here signifies not the end but the generation of new life. Salmon's stoicism in the face of death is the result of a primitive desire to keep the life rolling all over and which, for Hughes, is the 'savage amazement of life.'

**What a change! from that covenant of polar light**

**To this shroud in a gutter!**

**What a death-in-life – to be his own spectre!**

**His living body become death's puppet,**

**Dolled by death in her crude paints and drapes**

**He haunts his own staring vigil**

**And suffers the subjection, and the dumbness,  
And the humiliation of the role! (CP 678)**

According to Hughes, the salmon's success lies in the epic poise that has held him so upright and determined, 'in his wounds, so loyal to his doom, so patient/In the machinery of heaven.' This is what Hughes had desired the most in his career of fifty years as a poet. There is a personal touch in the last lines; for Hughes, by the time he wrote this poem, had already become a veteran poet. His inner woundedness must have secured a proper revitalization when he had the dream of big salmon, the one that he shared with Nicholas Hughes through a letter. Furthermore, the salmon's journey appears to be a pilgrimage, a self-sacrificial act and foremost a prototype of human life. The virtues of generosity, dedication and self-giving manifested in October Salmon have universal redeeming capabilities. The salmon's acquiescence, views Kieth Sagar, is the worship of the poem.

**The epic poise**

**That holds him so steady in his wounds, so loyal to  
his doom, so patient**

**In the machinery of heaven.**

**Salmon, a blithe spirit, completes his journey as a  
functionary in the machinery of heaven.**

**(CP 679)**

## **SALMON EGGS**

The poem which ends the 1983 collection *River* becomes the first of the 1993 *Three Books* sequence. The poem is located in the river Torridge in the north west of Devon where Hughes had bought a house after having spent some time in London with his wife Sylvia Plath. He lived there until his death in 1998 from cancer. The poem captures the moment when salmon return from the ocean to the upper reaches of river Torridge for the purpose of spawning on gravel beds.

**The salmon were just down there –  
Shivering together, touching at each other,**

**Shedding themselves for each other – ( Hughes,  
"Salmon Eggs," CP 680)**

After spawning, 'They peel away deathwards.' However, concurrent with their death is the starting over of new life inside the salmon eggs. The dying salmon sprinkle the seeds of new life before death. The poem envisions death as an expression of a creative principle of the cosmos.

**I make out the sunk foundations**

**Of dislocated crypts, a bedrock**

**Time-hewn, time-riven altar. And this is the liturgy**

**Of Earth's advent – harrowing, crowned – a travail**

**Of raptures and rendings. Perpetual mass**

**Of the waters**

**Wells from the cleft.**

**This is the swollen vent**

**Of the nameless**

**Teeming inside atoms – and inside the haze**

**And inside the sun and inside the earth.**

**It is the font, brimming with touch and whisper,**

**Swaddling the egg. (CP 681)**

In a letter written in 1981, Hughes acknowledged that he intended to invoke Sheela-na-gig figures and the ancient ur-goddess through Salmon Eggs which appears as a sequel to October Salmon. The tension between death and torture of October Salmon finds resolution in, 'the swollen vent/Of the nameless teeming inside atoms.' The two poems present life and death as part of 'Earth's' spinning wheel. The passage quoted above abruptly erupts at the concluding part of the poem. Surprisingly, we encounter a religious language that awakens sacramental associations in our minds. Hughes sends a profound message by discovering that with the gift of new life in the deep workings of *the river*, there is a continual renewal. What matters is not death but something 'More vital than death' that lies beneath the river. Here the river, Torridge, becomes the universe where Creation's Life never ceases to exist.



First realising and then telling this truth through Salmon Eggs, the poet achieves redemption. His audience too achieves redemption through their encounter with, 'the font, brimming with touch and whisper,/swaddling the egg.' (CP 681) The font is the spawning ground or the redd of salmon eggs. The poet seems to have deployed Christian terminology to describe modern paganism.

## CONCLUSION

Writers and scholars of shamanism have identified three common stages of the initiation ceremony of shamanic séance. A shaman has to undergo through enduring pain, symbolic death and only after having endured hardships and dismemberment, he is reborn into a more wholesome, egoless individual who heals his community by moving between the human and the spirit world. The later works of Hughes, *Crow* (1970), *Gaudete* (1977) and *Cave Birds* (1978) tell the story of heroic quests and struggles of the protagonists who achieve the final goal of self-redemption and self-union through the discovery of healing truths. One can not deny personal touch in the poems of these collections. They are the manifestations of the poet's own psychological crisis which conclude with his attainment of self-recuperation and self-healing in the act of poetry making. Poetry helped him re-establish his contact with the White Goddess and the larger forces in Nature. After his birth, *Crow* begins to understand the workings of Creation. *Crow's* learning and testing journey parallels with the apprenticeship stage of the shamanic pattern of initiation. (Moulin 239) In *Gaudete*, Nicholas Lumb, an Anglican clergyman plays a shamanic role in his descent and return from the underworld. The Epilogue poems of *Gaudete* also bear the elements of shamanic rebirth. Hughes described *Cave Birds* as a symbolic drama of disintegration and reintegration. The protagonist, a criminal on trial, takes a journey through suffering, death and resurrection all symbolised in his psychological growth towards maturity.

Abbreviations used for the works of Ted Hughes

- CP Collected Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 2003)
- LTH Letters of Ted Hughes (London: Faber & Faber, 2007)
- WP Winter Pollen (London: Faber & Faber, 1994)

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