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WATER IN THREE POEMS BY T. HUGHES (A SYMBOLIC JOURNEY INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS)

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Abstract: *This paper presents the analysis of 3 poems by Ted Hughes. The aim of the paper is to offer an innovative approach to Hughes's poetry based on symbol analysis, and thus contribute to the emerging Hughes scholarship. The poems were analysed on the basis of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, archetypes, and symbolic representations. A set of archetypal symbols discovered in the selected poems was analysed to produce novel interpretations. On the basis of these new interpretations the author was able to prove the hypothesis, that in his poetry Hughes used symbolic language in order to speak of the contents of the unconscious.*

Key words: *Ted Hughes, Carl Jung, symbol, archetype, water.*

1. Introduction

"It is the world of water, where all life floats in suspension; where [...] the soul of everything living, begins; where I am indivisibly this and that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me." (Jung, 1968, 21-22)

A number of Hughes scholars (Sagar, Faas, Middlebrook, etc.) have hinted at the connection between the writing of Ted Hughes and the psychological theories of Carl Gustav Jung. However, none of these authors focused on the possible readings of Hughes's poems through Jungian archetypes. The present paper has therefore set as its goal to explore this connection as manifested in selected Hughes's poems.

The paper studies the meaning of archetypal symbols in three poems from Hughes's second collection titled Lupercal. The hypothesis is that Hughes used these archetypal symbols as a means of revealing the hidden contents of the collective unconscious. In order to prove the hypothesis, a reading based on the Jungian notions of 'archetype' and 'collective unconscious' was launched.

Three important archetypal symbols: water, otter and fish, were discovered. The possible archetypal interpretations of these symbols were collected, mainly drawing on The Book of Symbols (2010). The analysis proved that all of the poems might be read as accounts of the mythical journey into the unconscious and the speaker's confrontation with the unconscious contents. The reading presented in this paper corresponds to the interpretation of Hughes's writing proposed by other scholars, i.e. that Hughes described,

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criticised, and attempted to heal the spiritually impoverished 'civilised' humans, but at the same time it provides a new insight by proposing that Hughes is concerned not only with the society and culture in general, but also specifically with the unconscious and the psyche.

In a letter to Ekbert Faas, Hughes acknowledged his interest in the theories of C. Jung, saying that he had "met Jung early and [...] read all the translated volumes." (quoted in Faas 37) He went on to add: "I've avoided knowing them too well, which no doubt frees me to use them all the more" (ibid.). These two statements prove two crucial points, i.e. that Hughes was indeed familiar with Jung's theoretical concepts, and that he used these concepts when writing his own poetry.

It is assumed that the most important parallel between the two authors lies in their approach to the contemporary Western society. In his essay Das Grundproblem der gegenwärtigen Psychologie (1931, The basic problem of contemporary psychology[2]) Jung described how the contemporary society's materialism impedes the ability of humans to understand their psychic life. Modern people tend to view all phenomena as caused by the forces of the outer world. Even the mental processes of the psyche are considered a product of external influences. However, the rejection of the independence of psyche is, according to Jung, a fallacy. He claimed that, on the contrary, the psyche influences the outer world, as all human contact with this world is mediated through the mind (1994, 11-27). Elsewhere Jung wrote: "Our intellect has achieved the most tremendous things, but in the meantime our spiritual dwelling has fallen into disrepair." (Jung, 1968, 16) Humans refuse to accept that their unconscious can be ruled over by the intellect only from a small part, and the rest stays inaccessible and cannot be controlled in any way. Thus they in fact allow the unconscious to unleash all its destructive powers. (Jung, 1994, 184) The entrance to the depths of the unconscious is blocked by the over-reliance on the intellect (Jung, 1994, 179).

Hughes addressed the same problems in the contemporary society. He claimed that "when the modern mediumistic artist looks into his crystal, he sees always the same thing. He sees the last nightmare of mental disintegration and spiritual emptiness. … This is the soulstate of our civilization" (quoted in Sagar 3). Just like Jung, Hughes held the belief that the excessive rationality along with the rejection of the primal depths of the human psyche have a devastating effect on the so-called 'civilised man'. The following chapters of this paper analyse the archetypal symbols as used by Hughes, concentrating on how he as a poet-shaman tried to enable the readers to reconnect with their own unconscious. The focus is placed on the symbol of water, which is considered the basic symbol of the unconscious (Jung, 1968, 18).

Jung mentioned water as the symbol of the unconscious several times (1968, 17-18, 24, 222, 322, etc.). In the analysis of dreams water, especially deep, dark, seemingly bottomless water, is understood as the psyche, the mind, the unconscious, or the soul (Lurker 565). The unconscious is often symbolised by a specific kind of water - the sea. The sea as a maternity symbol reflects femininity, which Jung associated with the unconscious, as opposed to masculinity which he linked to the conscious, the rational, and the traditional. (Lurker 328). Both, the sea and the unconscious are dangerous and almost impenetrable. Just as the sea is the home of ancient creatures, which have not change since the beginning of life on earth, the

[2] The author's translation

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unconscious houses primal psychic patterns as old as humankind. The realm of the unconscious, exactly like the underwater world of the sea, is independent from human knowledge - it exists without being noticed or understood. The sea seems bottomless, and as such it can swallow up the greatest of human inventions, huge boats or airplanes. The unconscious, as well, is able to absorb the conscious. (Ronnberg 36) What is more, in the depths of the seas the most terrible earthquakes are born, giving rise to tidal waves which sweep the land. In the same way the powers of the unconscious may awaken and cast the conscious mind into chaos. However, while traversing the vast seas might be dangerous, it still leads to the discovery of new horizons. Similarly, exploring the unconscious can bring knowledge and a better understanding of the self. (38)

Besides the sea, two other symbols directly connected with water are analysed, namely otter and fisher or fishing. These two symbols stand for the two ways how a person can enter their unconscious. An otter symbolises the instinctive entering into the unconscious - as an otter dives into the water, a person dives into their unconscious, without thinking about it, without analysing what is found there (Jung, 1968, 28). The second symbol - that of a fisher or of fishing - represent the purposeful journey into the unconscious, whose goal is to find the fish (the "living contents of [the] fluid medium", i.e. the unconscious, Ronnberg 202). The fisher is able to purposefully reach for unconscious contents, uniting the two parts of their psyche without damaging their consciousness. (202)

Thus the sea, the otter, and the fisher constitute three important elements of the journey into the unconscious. The sea represents the unconscious itself, its dark depths promising both, danger and hidden treasures. The otter stands for the one who enters the unconscious without realising it, driven by instinctual impulses. Finally, the fisher embodies the one who willingly plunges into its menacing waters, in search for the missing parts of their self. Following are the analyses of three poems, which reflect these three parts of the journey into the unconscious: "Relic" (sea), "An Otter" (otter), and "Pike" (fish, fisher, fishing).

2. *Relic*

"Relic" is a short poem of only 16 verses; however, even this limited length was sufficient for Hughes to explore in depth one of his favourite themes - the circle of life and death (Gifford & Roberts 74-75, 82). Moreover, it is assumed that "Relic" can also be read through archetypal symbols, in which case it represents an introduction to the problem of the unconscious.

The language of the poem serves as a good example of Hughes's characteristic techniques: rhythm, the use of simple diction, and the employment of sound effects or onomatopoeia. (Heinz 271) The rhythm in the poem is not achieved by a fixed meter, but rather by repetition, as well as by the extensive use of monosyllabic words which increases the pace of the poem on being read. Various forms of repetition are employed, on the level of individual sounds it is alliteration ("broken by the breakers") and consonance, especially repeating the sounds of [t],[θ] and [s] ("Time in the sea eats its tail, thrives, casts these"), which might evoke the sound of the splashing waves. On the level of words, some examples of epizeuxis can be found (e.g. "But gripped, gripped and is now a cenotaph."). Onomatopoeic words are used, e.g. "flap" or "gnawn". Other sound effects serve the purpose of making the poem more 'physical', i.e. when pronounced they require articulatory effort ("Slacken, go down jaws, go gnawn bare. Jaws").

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The poem starts as a narrative in the first person ("I found this jawbone at the sea's edge:"). The speaker finds himself on a beach, observing the various remnants of sea creatures, that the waves have washed up to the coast. Then he moves his attention to the sea and reflects on the processes taking place under the surface - the dead bodies of animals are slowly decomposing, until nothing remains but bones and shells: "This is the sea's achievement; with shells/Vertebrae, claws, carapaces, skulls." In the end the speaker goes on to generalise - the processes in the sea reflect the passing of time ("Time in the sea eats its tail"). All the living creatures eat, die, and are eaten, and these are the workings of the never-ending cycle of nature.

The following paragraphs present an attempt at extending this basic interpretation by introducing archetypal symbols, especially that of the sea. Some attributes connected with the sea in the poem support the reading from the point of view of archetypal symbolism; these are especially the reference to the darkness of the sea, to the sea being deep, cold, and remorseless ("The deeps are cold:/In that darkness camaraderie does not hold:"). Jung points to exactly the same characteristics of water (depth, darkness, uncanniness, spookiness) in the dreams of his patients, and in all these cases he sees the deep and dark water as a symbol of the unconscious (1968, 17-20). In the poem the opposition of the beach/the surface and the depths of the sea mirrors the opposition of the conscious (surface) and the unconscious (depths).

After introducing the meaning of unconscious, the poem gains a new dimension. The speaker walks on the beach, near the surface of the sea, in other words he is in the realm of the conscious. There he finds the remnants of animal bodies which were brought up from the depths, i.e. he discovers parts of the content of his unconscious. But what the sea gives him are not whole fish, but just skeletons, "cenotaphs", i.e. empty containers; he has no access to the real contents of the sea from his position on the beach. The sea (= the unconscious) seems deep and dark, definitely not inviting the speaker to dive into and discover the original form of the skeletons. Thus, the contents of the unconscious remain out of reach of the speaker's conscious mind.

This interpretation is supported by the title of the poem, too. A relic is defined by the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as "an old object [...] that reminds people of the past or that has lived on from a past time" (Summers 1,386). The remnants of the water animals in the poem thus become relics of the unconscious; tiny bits and pieces preserved from the vast ancient part of the human mind, which has now fallen into oblivion.

3. *An Otter*

Jung regarded otter as the symbol of the instinctive descent into the unconscious. He derived this symbolism from the fairy tales of Oskar Schmitz (Jung, 1968, 24). This interpretation of the otter symbol is also supported by the various symbolical meanings listed in the dictionaries of symbols consulted. Otter is a natural fisher, however, unlike in the case of human fishers, it does not reflect on its actions, but performs them instinctively and naturally. Otter represents the feminine, the irrational, the instinctual. It is connected with the element of water (i.e. with the unconscious) and it represents an antidote to the conscious part of the human mind and to rationality. It functions as a helping spirit that enables humans to reach the depths. (Chevalier & Gheerbrant; Stefko; Woolcott)

The analysis of "An Otter" by Ted Hughes presented in this chapter takes into account the above mentioned symbolic meanings, and attempts at an interpretation which reveals the archetypal nature of the otter symbol.

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Unlike in "Relic", in "An Otter" Hughes played with end rhymes. The last two stanzas contain perfect (thick - lick, cold - hold) and imperfect end rhymes (nowhere - a chair). Moreover, in a number of other stanzas where a true rhyme cannot be found, the author ended the verses with words containing similar sounds (lakes - licks, lungs - belongs, since - sea). Such slight similarities of sounds, along with consonance ("gallops along land") or assonance ("no 'longer be'longs to") can be observed throughout the poem, creating rhythm and sound patterns. The author even experimented with internal rhyme, although the sounds are never completely identical (head - tomcat, along - belongs). This tension between pattern and irregularity helped the author achieve an unsettling tone, which makes the poem more vivid and at the same time reflects the unsettling nature of its subject - the otter, which can never decide whether it belongs to the land or to the water.

Although most sentences have regular word-order, some contain poetic inversion ("neither fish nor beast is the otter", "when first he dived"). Furthermore, the author often employed enjambement. Thus the contrast between regular and irregular, characteristic of the phonetic elements of the poem, can also be observed in its syntax. The word stock of "An Otter" is slightly more poetic than in the case of "Relic" ('taint', 'cleave', 'limpid'), however Hughes still relied mostly on common, everyday vocabulary, using even informal register ('walloping').

"An Otter" is a poem divided into two parts. The first part consists of four stanzas, each of which has five verses - in total it has 20 verses. The second part is also composed of 20 verses, however they are divided differently, i.e. into five stanzas of four verses. The formal division of the poem is reflected also in its subject-matter. The first part presents a view of the otter as an animal with two homes, the land and the water. It describes the otter as a creature unsure of its position, which is "neither fish nor beast", with feet and tail resembling a fish and a head akin to that of a cat. However this split personality presents a problem to the otter, as it now belongs nowhere, although it can survive in both elements. The second part of the poem observes another aspect of the otter's life, i.e. its role as a hunter. The otter is a fisher. It sits in the mud, patiently waiting for hours, taking deep breaths of the air, until it catches the trout. The hunt is instinct-driven ("Blood is the belly of logic") and the otter "will lick/The fishbone bare."

The symbols employed in "An Otter" strongly suggest the possibility of archetypal interpretation. The most important archetypal symbols included in the poem are otter, water, and fish. The water in this poem is assumed to represent the unconscious. The otter is then the symbol of one's instinctive journey into the unconscious, as explained above. The otter is said to have "underwater eyes"; it is able to see under water, i.e. recognise thing in the darkness of the unconscious. It is "water-gifted" and able to "outfish fish". A person who is an otter is instinctively able to grasp the hidden contents of their psyche. The otter "brings the legend", comes from the time "before wars and burials"; it belongs to a primal world far older than the history of humankind. Now it is confined to the conscious civilised world it "no longer belongs to", but keeps "Seeking/Some world lost when first he dived, that he cannot come at since,/Takes his changed body into the holes of lakes". In other words, the person as an otter entered the primal reality of their psyche, and after they have emerged, changed, they feel a certain confusion in the face of their conscious mind. Moreover, the otter is mentioned to enter the waters "as if blind", not willingly or knowingly, but instinctually. It goes through the psychic experience in the night (the unconscious) and emerges again in the light of the day (the conscious).

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In the first part of the poem, the otter is depicted as swimming in a river. This is another hint at its connection with the two layers of the mind, as crossing a river is a typical symbol of moving from the ground to the underground, i.e. from the upper to the lower level of the psyche (Ronnberg 40). The second part then depicts the otter as a fisher. An otter stands, "Pads on mud," on the borderline between land (conscious) and water (unconscious), waits for and then captures and consumes the contents of its unconscious. In the process of fishing again, the instinctual nature of the otter's behaviour is highlighted. The final stanza of the poem offers a commentary on the situation of the otter in the human civilisation: "Yanked above hounds, reverts to nothing at all,/To this long pelt over the back of a chair". The otter is stripped of its supernatural power and becomes just a thing, a trophy of the human-hunter. However, this calm statement contains a hidden menace. After the humans cut off the instinctual connection with their unconscious, there will remain no access to it at all. Only its "Reflections [will] live on."

4. *Pike*

Although "Pike" is certainly a poem rich in symbolic meaning, this analysis focuses on two ancient archetypal symbols, namely fish and fisherman. These two symbols, as mentioned above, have direct connection with the symbol of water, and thus they constitute crucial elements of the mythical journey into the unconscious.

Fish is the central symbol of this poem, and thus also the symbol on which its traditional interpretations are based. However, although this symbol is certainly of great importance for the analysis presented in this paper, the second symbol, i.e. that of a fisher, is assumed to be even more significant. The fisher is an archetypal symbol which Jung directly associated with one's deliberate descent into the unconscious and their effort to capture and make use of its hidden content (Jung, 1968, 24). The fisher moreover has the ability to come to terms with their unconscious, appease it, and this way they are no longer threatened by the sudden outbursts of its repressed contents.

A fish hidden in the dark depths of water is a symbol of the mysterious elements of human psyche. It is, as in the case of water and otter, a feminine symbol, corresponding to the feminine nature of the unconscious (Becker). Moreover, according to Becker, it does not symbolise all kinds of unconscious contents, but especially those which can bring salvation. Thus when a fisher is able to capture a fish, on the symbolic level they have succeeded in finding salvation within their own mind.

As in the case of the two previous poems, "Pike" is written in free verse. Moreover, the whole poem contains considerably less sound effects than "An Otter" and "Relic", although cases of slight consonance and assonance can be found. In general, the sound of the poem is very close to the sound of everyday English, which reflects Hughes's interest in the sound patterns of ordinary speech (Bassnett 72).

On the other hand, the poem is rather poetic on the level of words and vocabulary. Hughes employed repetition of words in the form of epizeuxis ("Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old"; "Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,") and as an anaphora in the two opening verses ("Pike, three inches long, perfect/Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold."). The word-stock differs from the previous poems as well, as it contains more elevated, unusual, or poetic words (malevolent, grandeur, tigering, tench) and also a number of surprising epithets ('amber cavern of weeds', 'submarine delicacy', 'malevolent aged grin', 'floating woods', etc.). However, this elevated style alternates with colloquial expressions, e.g. in "And indeed they spare nobody./Two, six pounds each, over two feet long,/High and dry and dead in the willow-herb -/",

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where the first verse represent a poetic statement, even an emotionally coloured judgement, while the second one offers a matter-of-fact description of the fish's proportions, the third being a description, once again expressed in a poetic, even romantic style (achieved by the use of a polysyndeton and of dramatic contrast between a dead fish body and gentle flowers). This opposition of two registers, elevated and colloquial, emphasises the opposition between the two aspects of a pike: on the one hand it is the fish's baser nature of a cruel, instinct-driven killer; on the other hand it is its perfect beauty, the grace if its movements, and its controlled power.

The author's use of various sentence structures is similar to his work with the vocabulary. He employed poetic inversions ('a pond I fished', 'three we kept') and elliptical structures ('[They are] A hundred feet long in their world.') alongside stylistically unmarked sentences ('They dance on the surface among the flies.') or even colloquial omissions of subject ('[we] fed fry to them -"). In addition, sentences are often divided by pauses explicitly marked by colons or dashes ("as a vice locks -"). Thus unlike in the case of "Relic" and "An Otter" where the poetic effect of the text was achieved chiefly by the arrangement of sounds, in "Pike" Hughes relied more on syntactic figures of speech and poetic vocabulary.

The poem develops around the central image of pike. The first four stanzas offer a general description of a pike As soon as in the first stanza it is possible to detect the speaker's contradictory sentiments towards the fish, which run through the whole poem. The speaker admires the fish, its perfect form, its "grandeur", but at the same time observes its darker side, its malevolence ("Killer from the egg:"). He is simultaneously repulsed and attracted by the "submarine delicacy and horror", by the virtuosity of nature which fitted the pike with all the instruments it needs for killing.

The last four stanzas depict the speaker as a fisherman standing on the edge of a deep ancient pond. The night has fallen and the speaker has cast his rod in darkness and silence. He feels fear of what is under the surface ("With the hair frozen on my head/For what might move, for what eye might move."). In this moment of loneliness and suspense he falls into a state of psychic unrest, as if hallucinating, and at this point the poem ends.

The archetypal nature of the poem's symbols and of the events depicted in it is unmistakable. The introductory stanzas, describing the pike as a thing which at the same time lures the speaker and provokes fear in him, echo Jung's observation of the dreams of his patients in which the darkness of the unconscious and its hidden contents are so terrifying that they can drive a person back in spite of the promise they offer, which is evident for example in the following description: "He knew in the dream that something had always prevented him from approaching the lake. This time he resolved to go to the water. As he approached the shore, everything grew dark [...] He was seized by a panic fear, and awoke." (Jung, 1968, 17) The fish is a dangerous creature as its strong destructive powers cannot be controlled by reason. The contents of the unconscious are also menacing and uncontrollable, and a person instinctively knows that their unconscious has the power to destroy them. However, despite the fish's deadly powers, the speaker decides to go fishing for it. He realises the power of the water, which is highlighted by the repetition of the word 'immense', and feels great fear, exactly as the dreamer in Jung's record ('past nightfall I dared not cast'), however he is able to overcome it and keeps fishing, observing the surface of the pond for signs of danger ("For what might move, for what eye might move."). Suddenly the darkness 'frees' something from the pond and this apparition rises towards the speaker, watching him.

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The reading of "Pike" presented above approaches the poem as a parable of the deliberate descent into one's unconscious. The poem describes the fish in a Jungian manner as a strong and menacing power beyond one's control which can bring destruction, but at the same time salvation. The water is deep and dark; it provokes fear in the fisher and almost drives him away. However the fisher is representative of a psychically strong figure, a shaman, who is able to overcome their panic, descend, and face what they find under the surface of the mind. The poem's end is open. Something rose from the depths to face the fisher. So far it is just watching him. Only time will tell whether it will bring blessing or destruction.

This paper offered an analysis of three poems by Ted Hughes, focusing on a set of archetypal symbols connected with the unconscious. All the three poems come from Hughes's collection Lupercal, where they appear in the same order as in which they were analysed. As such they represent a tale of the mythic journey into the unconscious. In "Relic" the poetic persona discovers the existence of their unconscious after being confronted with the remnants, or relics, of its contents in his consciousness. In "An Otter" his mind is instinctively driven into the unconscious, gaining an experience which renders him irreversibly changed. Finally, in "Pike", he embarks on a purposeful journey into the deeper layers of his psyche. He is paralysed by fear of the unknown, inexplicable and uncontrollable depths of his mind, however he is able to overcome this fear and fish for the hidden contents. At the end of his journey he still is not sure whether these contents will bring him salvation or destruction.

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