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Joanny Moulin: "Krogon & Moa: Ted Hughes's Philosophical Approach to Logos"

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It is notorious, though inconspicuous, that the poetry of Ted Hughes lies on the bedrock of a silenced cosmology. In another occasion, I have shown that that Weltanschauung was developed to the verge of articulation in Hughes' collaboration with Peter Brook in 1971 to the experimental play Orghast[1]. But there is no published or written text of Orghast, which leaves something like a silent hypertext at the core of Hughes' work. It is an imperfect silence, though, for A. C. H. Smith, who attended to that no doubt great moment of elucubration (the play was very much composed and acted by candlelight), took notes and later published a precious work for Hughesian scholars. In Orghast at Persepolis (1972), Smith explains most of the Blake-like, Yeats-like pantheon Hughes evolved, and, as an illustration, he also published a drawing the poet had made on a piece of foolscap, and which Smith entitled "Ted Hughes's physiology of Orghast" (92). This autonomous cosmo-logia is, literally, a silent anatomy.

It may look complicated at first sight, but it is in fact exceedingly simple. At the heart of Hughes' cosmos is the fundamental principle of polemos, that conflict which Heraclitus evokes in his fragment 53 – "conflict is the father of everything, the king of everything; some he proves to be gods, others, men; some he turns into slaves, others, free men"[2]. The conflict which opposes KROGON (Prometheus' talkative head) to MOA (his silent belly), has its origin in the paradoxically cloven harmony of HOAN, the original pleroma. HOAN is represented as LIGHT in Orghast, and as the sun in this drawing. I take the oval form in the top right corner to possibly be a figuration of the original egg, the womb of all things. But in fact, in theological terms, it is a syzygy – from suzugoV (suzugos), the yoke -, it is both ONE and TWO at the same time. Like all eggs, this pleroma must either hatch or rot. And so it is paradoxically both plenitude and change. Æons succeed to æeons, represented, in part, by that waterfall of glands which cascade down the boby, cleaving it into two halves. But this idea of an original pleroma both opens time and the prospect of eternal conflict, and intimates the possibility of a paradise regained, which would be the end of conflict and of time. And, in the long duration, in due course of æons, there appears in Hughes' cosmology an inflexion, the beginning of an end, a prospect of redemption. Like the titans of Greek mythology, Hughes' Prometheus is the son of the first gods.

But, unlike his Greek homonym, he is one and only, he is everything – "The unity fractured in this way is PRAMANATH (Prometheus), the divine self of creation in human form" (Smith 94). The whole cosmos is equivalent to the anthropomorphic body of Prometheus. Merely to glance at Hughes' drawing brings confirmation of this, the conflicting entities are located both inside and outside his standing body. MOA is what he is standing on as well as what he has in his stomach. KROGON is roosting on his head, but its beak and claws penetrate him so deeply that it has become one with him. The original light, HOAN, is represented as shining behind him, in the sky, but it is also the flame he has in his bowels. And there, it is represented both in its spherical form of original purity, and under its degrades species, USSA, MOASHA, FURORG. Man and woman are also part of this body. So Prometheus is

one with everything, and, if it is possible to conceive of him as occupying one moment of the mythology, he is first and foremost the very topos in which the mythology is embodied.

Pramanath is himself Light, creative fire, the original single substance. He is also the Sun and Moa, as the divine created self reproduces in itself these energies, and enjoys them in human form. His wisdom is the natural law of the universe, since the substance of the universe is what he is. His foreknowledge is complete, his knowledge of the divine harmony, and the harmonies into which it multiplies in the created world, is complete (Smith 94).

It is very clear, form this, that Prometheus is characterized best by his completeness. He is light and original matter. He is one with HOAN. But at the same time, like the original pleroma, he is cloven. Like the syzygy, he is of a paradoxical essence, being both the one and the many. He is complete but cloven, single but several, union but division.

But he is fractured. He is the crossroads of eternal light and ecstasy, and temporal doom, pain, change and death. Conscious in eternity, he has to live in time. And he cannot solve his dilemma. He hangs between heaven and earth, almost torn apart, an open wound, immortal (94).

Now, and this is a crucial point indeed, this defines Prometheus as the incarnation of the symbol itself. And by symbol, I mean the *tessera*, that small tablet used as a token of a human contract, for it has been broken into two pieces, the matching of which is as unique as a fingerprint. Without necessarily seeing any religious implications in that, it may be worth noticing that Ted Hughes (1930-1998), together with Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), mentions the cross as the most elementary symbol. When Smith, for Hughes, speaks of a "crossroad" between eternity and death – "He is the crossroads of eternal light and ecstasy, and temporal doom, pain, change and death" – Lacan says "cross" and "intersecting" to evoke what defines humanity – "the symbol par excellence, the one by which man will always be known to have been here, by the cross man draws, intersecting access and closure"[3].

The proximity of this to the Christian ethos should not be a surprise. Neither is it merely a matter of words. Both Prometheus and Christ are crucified, but there is more to this picture. It lies in this definition of Prometheus, which looks back to the very beginning of the mythology of *Orghast* and the definition of light. Indeed, "Pramanath is himself Light, creative fire, the original single substance". One should read this while bearing in mind the similarity of Hughes' vision with Heraclitus' notion of fire. For Heraclitus, the original fire is the *logos*. And Heidegger, who knew the pre-socratic philosopher well, offered a definition of this heraclitean *logos* which does cast some light on the question. It matches Lacan's definition of the symbol –

But *logos* dos not primarily mean speech, saying. The same word stand for nothing that is directly related to language. *Lego*, *legein*, in Latin *legere*, is the same as our col-ligate; "lecture" is only one kind of "colligating". That word means the putting one thing beside another, putting them together, in a word, gathering them; in that operation, things are simultaneously distinguished from one another[4].

The only difference is a considerable one, for Heidegger denies any "immediate" relation of this to language. Yet, in a "mediate" way, precisely, there seems to be some relation indeed between the two things he wishes to separate, since he chooses "lecture" or reading as the best example of what he is demonstrating. Now, language consists precisely in that –

distinguishing to articulate, murdering to dissect, bringing together in a necessarily alienating manner, mediating in the very effort of apprehending. Whether Hughes is ready to recognize it or not, that make Prometheus and embodiment of *logos* in the Heraclitean sense of the term. Even for Heidegger, who advances with caution, "Logos is Christ" (135). Like Christ, Prometheus may be defined as the Word Incarnate, for "Word" and "Logos" are equivalent at least in so far as they both refer to Iahveh's "I AM" (Exodus 3 : 13 – 14), that on which the symbolic law is founded. And Prometheus' symbolic gift of fire to mankind is the gift of language. Prometheus and Light are one. And Smith insists that, in *Orghast*, fire and language are one and the same thing – "The gift of fire and the gift of language have the same meaning : both are the gift of specific humanity to man, distinguishing culture from nature, will from instinct, the cooked from the raw" (.i.Smith 37). This can only be questioned in a polemical, dualistic vision of things, which Hughes tends to adopt, for whom *logos* is only separation, and can only be the contrary of colligation.

But be it as may, though, it will soon be clear that Prometheus is not Christ. And I suspect that Hughes' choice of precisely this hero is partly motivated by this very ressemblance and its potentially subversive dimension. The confusion is directly cultivated elsewhere, in poems like "Take What You Want But Pay For It" (*Wolfwatching* 42 – 44). And the mere fact that a confusion be possible allows the myth of Prometheus to work as a counter-myth to the crufixion of Christ. Yet, Prometheus is not a historical character, he is not a god, and not exactly a man; he is a hero, and first of all a myth, in the sense that Prometheus is an icon of *logos*.

Now all that is not only a form of very recondite cerebration. It is the metaphysical and mythical spine of Hughes' poetry. As a system, it works; as a cosmology, it operates in his poems. One clear example is to be found in *Prometheus On His Crag*, which opens as the hero starts speaking

A world of holy, happy notions shattered
By the shout
That brought Prometheus peace
And woke the vulture (*Moortown* 73).

"The shout", or what is here thought as a very access to speech, the primordial cry or howl, is warped, as a concept, on the side of disruption, in terms that make it a paradox. This access is a closure; this violent opening of conflict is also the alliance meant by peace. And this shattering of the unique original world is at the same time a collapsing of the several and of the conceptualized. Under superficial simplicity lies the essential paradox. Should Prometheus have remained silent, should he have said nothing as before, and there would have been no vulture to tear him to pieces. Now here we are, at the threshold of an axiology, where logos is bad, and silence better.

Prometheus, an icon of *logos*, is a wounded anthropomorphic body – "He hangs... an open wound, immortal". But living bodies have this marvellous power, they cicatrize. And the metaphor of the wounded body feeds the hope of one day healing up the wound opened by speech, of sometime bridging the gap of language. That is the old pagan myth of Prometheus, whose liver is daily eaten by the eagle of Zeus, but heals up every night. And this is one major difference with Christ, who may have been resurrected from the dead, but never really recovered from his wounds. And what Hughes is interested in (and interesting for) is that the opportunity remains open for the organic tissue to grow back, and for the horrible bird to be

annihilated. And such is the destiny of Pramanath. He is one of the sons of MOA, which she gives birth to to the sole end of destroying the tyrant. His condition is comparable to that of all the sons of KROGON and MOA, he is imprisoned and mutilated by his father :

He is born into time as Krogon's child, SOGIS. His destiny, as with all Moa's sons, is to destroy Krogon. He suffers the imprisonment of the heir to the throne. Sunken in the degenerating matter of the crazy Moa, he is inwardly blind and no longer able to see his part in the design (Smith 95).

As a son, he is at once the place and the stake of the conflict between the two poles of the dualism. He may either be conquered by KROGON, and become his heir, another KROGON. Or else, aided by MOA, he may "kill Krogon and cure the universe" (95). He is this becoming, he is this undecidedness. And, much as Freud spoke of the destinies of impulses in *Metapsychology*, Prometheus has two possible destinies, embodied in two avatars – SOGIS and AGOLUZ. SOGIS is his destiny such as MOA conceives it; he is the redeemer. And AGOLUZ is said to be an equivalent of Heracles, the classical hero who, in some versions of the myth, frees Prometheus. But in Hughes, he is rather appreciated for other tasks of his.

When he is launched against KROGON, AGOLUZ fails, because he enters a dialectic of *logos*, a "dia-logic" as it were, which actuates KROGON into existence, like the rough beast and his centuries of sleep which "Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle" in Yeats' "Second Coming" (211). The vulture partly is the materialization of this awakened force of disruption. To use another complicated Hughesian and Heraclitean term, that makes AGOLUZ the hero of *enantio-dromia*, which is literaly le running in the opposite way. For he is indeed the hero of *enantio-logia*, or contradiction. And by contradicting KROGON, he puts himself in the position of being conquered by the tyrant, and becomes a mirror image of him, reproducing him. "Agoluz's role is to convert the Krogonishness inherent in himself (his real father being Krogon) to a sane, rational, albeit limited and partial order, which is workable". AGOLUZ becomes the civilized and rational hero of humanity, but by doing so, perpetuates the crime against Moa, or the silent body of nature :

As Sogis releases Ussa and comes near to killing his father, and does in fact reduce him to a chattering vicious bird, so Agoluz kills his wife and children, thinking they are evil birds, but now knows the cure for his father, which is to unriddle the Vulture, the evil bird (96).

What I find instructive is that it shows that the reason why AGOLUZ fails is that by killing KROGON, he perpetuates conflict itself, that *polemos* which Heraclitus says is the universal father. Thus Hughes brings a sort of no doubt involuntary codicil confirmation to Freudian theory, which is that to kill the father is to perpetuate the father. This is rather commonplace, but it is the way in which AGOLUZ helps defining SOGIS as his opposite. SOGIS is the alternative destiny. Starting from MOA's desire to kill KROGON, when SOGIS arrives in the arena, he lays down his arms and stops fighting.

Sogis frees Ussa. All the voices that called her to assassinate Krogon now call on Sogis, and he pauses, hearing instructions from every corner of heaven and earth. Then the voice of Light warns him. As the voice speaks, Krogon withers to an imbecile, senile, birdlike thing, croaking empty sounds. But his violent nature remains : he is caged.

Sogis releases the Sun and marries the Light as it is embodied in this latest representative of Moa, Ussa. Simultaneously the Sun, Moa and Light reunite, and the universe flows through

its full circuit, materialized spirit and spiritualized matter, undivided and reconciled to itself (95).

In much more simple and concrete terms, SOGIS is the ideal of the hero at the end of the short story "The Rain Horse", who "longed to stretch out full-length... and forget himself in the last wretchedness of the mud" (*Difficulties of a Bridegroom* 77). He is also the knight, in *Cave Birds*, whose conquest is paradoxically a surrender – "Has conquered. He has surrendered everything" (28). Hughes' Sogis is an icon of *logos* as colligation.

Thus it is that Hughes' Prometheus enables the formulation of that myth of a hero, or a super-man, who would manage to free himself from the alienation of language. Prometheus does not war, but weds. He marries MOA with KROGON. In other words, he ideally merges the disruptive anatomy of *logos* with the cohesive autonomy of silence. In other words, still, he is an anti-Christ in the sense that he is the myth of anti-logos. It is also a mythical expression of C. G. Jung's ideal of an integrated Self, who could merge the conscious with the subconscious, marry the "outer world of things" with the "inner world of spirits". To sum it up in a word, Hughes nurture the dream of a human condition undivided from nature, and builds the myth of an *ana-logos*, a proportionate relation of man to the world. And his poetry can be read as the practice of a new, anti-anatomical tongue, which would no longer "murder to dissect" (Wordsworth 105), but would rather, as Stéphane Mallarmé put it, remunerate the defect of tongues – "seulement, sachons,n'existerait pas le vers : lui, philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues" (364). __

NOTES:

[1] "La jouissance dans les poèmes de Ted Hughes", *Le corps dans tous ses états*, Ed. Marie-Claire Rouyer, Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1995.

[2] "Le conflit est père de toutes choses et roi de toutes choses; dans les uns il relève des dieux, dans les autres des hommes, des uns il fait des esclaves, des autres des hommes libres" (106-7).

[3] "[C'est] le symbole par excellence, celui auquel se reconnaîtra toujours le passage de l'homme quelque part, par la croix qu'il dessine, entrecroisant l'accès et la clôture" (Lacan, *Le séminaire*, II 347).

[4] "Mais *logos* ne signifie pas originairement discours, dire. Le mot même ne désigne rien qui se rapporte d'une façon immédiate au langage. *Lego*, *legein*, en latin *legere*, c'est le même mot que notre col-liger; la "lecture" n'est qu'une espèce du "colliger". Ce mot signifie : poser une chose à côté d'une autre, les mettre ensemble, bref : rassembler; dans cette opération les choses sont en même temps distinguées les unes des autres" (Heidegger, *Introduction à la métaphysique* 132).

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