



Ted Hughes
Society Journal

Volume VIII Issue 2

The Ted Hughes Society Journal

Editors

Dr James Robinson Durham University

Reviews Editor

Prof. Terry Gifford Bath Spa University

Editorial Assistant

Dr Mike Sweeting

Editorial Board

Prof. Terry Gifford	Bath Spa University
Dr Yvonne Reddick	University of Central Lancashire
Prof. Neil Roberts	University of Sheffield
Dr Carrie Smith	Cardiff University
Dr Mike Sweeting	
Dr Mark Wormald	Pembroke College Cambridge

Production Manager

Dr David Troupes



Published by the Ted Hughes Society.

All matters pertaining to the Ted Hughes Society Journal should be sent to:
journal@thetedhughessociety.org

You can contact the Ted Hughes Society via email at:
info@thetedhughessociety.org

Questions about joining the Society should be sent to:
membership@thetedhughessociety.org

thetedhughessociety.org

This Journal is copyright of the Ted Hughes Society but copyright of the articles is the property of their authors. Written consent should be requested from the copyright holder before reproducing content for personal and/or educational use; requests for permission should be addressed to the Editor. Commercial copying is prohibited without written consent.

Contents

Editorial.....	4
List of abbreviations of works by Ted Hughes	7
‘Owned by everyone’: a Cambridge Conference on the Salmon.....	8
Mark Wormald	
A Prologue to <i>Capriccio</i>	12
Steve Ely	
Crow Zero: Leonard Baskin, Ted Hughes, and the Birth of a Legend	31
Peter Fydler	
The Key of the Sycamore.....	42
Steve Ely	
Reviews.....	65
Contributors	78

The Key of the Sycamore

by Steve Ely

In the summer of 2017, in my role as the Director of the newly-established Ted Hughes Network at the University of Huddersfield, I was working on two projects that led to me develop an interest in Ted Hughes's poetry about Assia Wevill, the woman for whom Hughes left Sylvia Plath in the autumn of 1962, and who would remain his partner until 23 March 1969, the day of her death. The first project involved developing a range of public engagement activities - workshops, talks, the provision of discounted and free tickets to students and community groups - related to the Obra Theatre Company's staging of Hughes's long narrative poem *Gaudete* at the Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield.¹ The second was beginning of the Network's attempt to acquire a comprehensive collection of Hughes's small press and limited edition work for the University's archive at Heritage Quay. In preparing for these projects, I re-acquainted myself with *Gaudete*, encountered the Gehenna Press *Capriccio* for the first time, refreshed my knowledge of the relevant scholarly literature and conducted research in the Ted Hughes archives at the British Library and Emory University, and in the archive of the Gehenna Press at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.²

In the process I became aware of Wevill's role in the early development of the main narrative of *Gaudete* and of two poems in the 'Epilogue' that seemed to be about her (see below), but had not previously been recognised as such by scholarship.³ In the *Capriccio* planning materials in the British Library, I encountered some fragmentary, journal-style entries that had affinities with and to some extent shared the distinctive imagery of the 'Epilogue' poems I had identified as being about Wevill. That imagery was also present in some of the *Capriccio*

¹The performances took place on 14 & 15 March 2017. The poem was adapted for the stage by Kate and Oliviero Papi.

²See Steve Ely, 'Prologue to *Capriccio*' in this issue of *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, pp. 12-15.

³A number of letters from Hughes to Wevill in the Ted Hughes Archive at Emory University indicate that the film script that became *Gaudete* was informed by Wevill's ideas, and that he consulted closely with her as he drafted. In a letter dated 3 January 1964 he refers to the work as 'our saga' and in another letter, sent on 5 January, he comments, 'What do you think, Assia, your ideas are so good and real, how shall we work all this up?', Ted Hughes, letters to Assia Wevill, Emory MSS 1058, Box 1, ff. 9, 11.

poems. Read intertextually with the poems, these fragments revealed a wholly unexpected biographical dimension of the Hughes/Wevill relationship: the previously unknown location where Hughes secretly disposed of the ashes of Assia and their daughter Shura in the autumn of 1969.⁴ The disposal site is located in a landscape very closely associated with Hughes. It is also a landscape I know well, and by subsequently field-walking in the area, I was able to identify the precise site where the ashes were buried. The identification of the site enabled the combination of the three broad research methods outlined above – intertextual readings of Hughes’s poems, archival research, and research in ‘the living archive’ of a landscape closely associated with Hughes – to coalesce more certainly in a mutually informing triangulation that provides not only the methodological basis for the arguments and conclusions of this paper, but the means for the identification of further poems that allude to Wevill in Hughes’s wider oeuvre.⁵

Assia Wevill

Assia Wevill was born in Germany in 1927, the daughter of Lonya Gutmann, a cultivated Jewish doctor of Russian descent and his wife Elisabetha, a nurse from a Lutheran background in Saxony.⁶ In 1933, she became a refugee when her family fled from their home in Berlin to Tel Aviv in British Mandate Palestine after the Nuremberg Laws made it impossible for Dr Gutmann to practice, and the prospect of intensified Nazi persecution of Jews seemed imminent and inevitable. However, dissatisfied with the prospect of life – for themselves and their daughters (Wevill had a younger sister, Celia) – in a place they saw as a cultural backwater, the aspirational Gutmanns sent Wevill to the Anglophone Tabeetha private school near Tel Aviv, where they intended for her to learn the manners, accent and deportment of an upper class English lady, with the ultimate aim of giving her the wherewithal to find a well-to-do English husband and thus a passport back into cultured, metropolitan society, for herself and the whole family.

⁴Although Alexandra Tatiana Elise ‘Shura’ Wevill took her mother’s married surname, Hughes is named as her father on her birth certificate, Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*. (London: William Collins, 2015), p. 240.

⁵The ‘living archive’ is a term developed by Gail Crowther & Peter K. Steinberg in the context of their researches into the work and life of Sylvia Plath. It refers to the landscapes, places, buildings and artefacts once associated with the subject of study, knowledge of which has the potential to inform research. See Gail Crowther & Peter K. Steinberg, *These Ghostly Archives: The Unearthing of Sylvia Plath* (Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2017), p. 15.

⁶ The biographical summary given here draws on a range of sources, but predominantly Yehuda Koren and Eilat Negev, *A Lover of Unreason: The Life and Death of Assia Wevill, Ted Hughes’s Doomed Love* (London: Robson Books, 2006). Born Assia Gutmann, and successively taking the surnames of her three husbands (Steele, Lipsey and Wevill), I will refer to Assia as ‘Wevill’, her surname during the period of her relationship with Hughes.

By her mid-teens Wevill had become a strikingly beautiful young woman (as an adult she would be compared to Sophia Loren and Elizabeth Taylor) and she attracted many suitors, including John Steele, a banker's son from Bromley, who had been posted to Palestine with the R.A.F. during World War Two. Steele first met Assia in 1943 when she was fifteen years-old and he was twenty-one. He was immediately smitten and began to court her. Elisabetha Gutmann saw in Steele a potential husband for her daughter and in 1946, when Steele was demobbed to the UK, she despatched her daughter to London so that she might re-contact him. Wevill did so, and in 1947 she and Steele were married. Wevill was dazzled and enthralled by London (even in the austerity of the immediate post-war period) and she threw herself into its social, artistic and cultural whirl, eager to meet new people, extend her range of experience and make the most of life. Wherever she went, her beauty drew male attention, causing Steele constant pangs of jealousy. In 1948, unable to make a satisfactory living in London, Steele was persuaded by his father to try his luck in Canada, and Wevill reluctantly accompanied him to Vancouver, then another cultural backwater, where she helped to make ends meet by working in a succession of unsatisfactory jobs - chambermaid, hat-check girl, fish gutter in a salmon cannery, typist and secretary.

By 1949 the differences in temperament and ambition between the staid, suburban and reserved husband and the vivacious, cosmopolitan and outgoing wife had resulted in the collapse of the marriage and Wevill conducted several affairs before marrying the bohemian young economist Richard Lipsey in 1952. The two moved to London in 1954 and lived in a loose commune in Bayswater with other intellectuals, during which period Wevill developed her literary, cultural and artistic interests, refined her self-presentation as an upper class English lady and calibrated what Hughes would refer to in his poem 'Dreamers' as her 'Kensington jeweller's elocution' (*CP* 1145). In 1956 Wevill fell in love with the young Canadian poet David Wevill and began a passionate affair with him that ultimately led to her second divorce. In 1959 she moved with David to Burma when he took up a post at the University of Mandalay. In Burma they married, and for a time Assia lived the life of a colonial *memsahib* and presided over a social circle that was something of an expatriate artistic salon. Returning to London with David in 1960, she worked as an advertising copywriter – a career she would work in, with some success, for the rest of her life – and once again took her place at the heart of a fashionable, bohemian and literary set where she developed a reputation as a great beauty, *bon vivant* and *femme fatale*.

It is generally asserted that Hughes first met Assia Wevill in the summer of 1961. He and his first wife Sylvia Plath were seeking to sublet their North London

flat preparatory to their imminent move to a new home at Court Green in the Devonshire village of North Tawton, and the Wevills arrived for a viewing. The narrative of this event is usually presented – for example, in Cohen and Negev’s biography of Wevill – as their first meeting.⁷ However, a document in the *Capriccio* materials held at the British Library seems to refer to a prior meeting between the two. The document is a numbered list of Hughes’s early encounters with Wevill that seems to be placed in chronological order. It begins with Hughes recalling that he and she had exchanged ‘a glance in the office’ (possibly at Notley Advertising, where Assia worked for two periods, 1957-59 and 1960-61, alongside Edward Lucie-Smith, Peter Porter and Peter Redgrove, Hughes’s friends from ‘the Group’).⁸ Hughes goes on to note that during the viewing of the flat, that glance led to, ‘gradually recognition’, and implies that it was this unstated frisson of attraction that led him to take the initiative in the ‘desperate manoeuvres’ Hughes and Plath subsequently undertook to ensure the flat was sublet to the Wevills, even though Hughes and Plath had already accepted a deposit cheque from another potential sub-lettee.⁹

These ‘manoeuvres’ suggest that a seed of attraction between Hughes and Wevill had begun to germinate as early as the summer of 1961, and indeed, point four in the list: ‘Sherry – the broken bed – the thick waist, relieved that there was an argument to defend his escape’, may indicate in its sequencing (placed before the visit to Court Green) that he and Wevill met for an assignation earlier than is usually asserted, before he and Plath moved to Devonshire.¹⁰ Whether this is the case or not, the two couples became friends, and Hughes and Plath met socially with the Wevills ‘about half a dozen times’ during the following weeks.¹¹ After their move to Devonshire, the Hugheses extended to the Wevills an invitation to visit them at their new home. The Wevills arrived for a weekend on Friday 18 May 1962, and during the course of that visit, the attraction between Hughes & Assia developed further, over the summer becoming a passionate affair.¹² For several months Hughes moved between London and Devon, carrying on the affair more-or-less openly. His decisive break with Plath came on 11 October 1962, when, at Plath’s

⁷ Koren & Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, pp. 80-81.

⁸ BL, Add Ms, 88918/1/17, f. 163. ‘The Group’ was a regular meeting of poets, originally established at Cambridge by Philip Hobsbaum and Peter Redgrove, but which continued in London from the mid-1950s to the early 60s, (from 1959 under the convenorship of Edward Lucie-Smith). Hughes was an irregular attender at meetings until late 1957, the year in which Assia and David Wevill also began to attend; see Koren & Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, pp. 65-68. I am not aware of any evidence that suggests that the Wevills and Hughes actually met at any meeting of the Group.

⁹ BL, Add Ms, 88918/1/17, f. 163.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Koren & Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, p. 82.

¹² See Bate, *The Unauthorized Life*, pp. 185-187.

insistence, he left the marital home for good.¹³ He moved to London and continued his relationship with Wevill. In November of that year, Plath also moved to London and on 11 February 11 1963, in circumstances that are too well-known to repeat, gassed herself in the Fitzroy Road flat she was renting. Hughes and Assia continued their relationship after Plath's death, sometimes cohabiting and sometimes living apart.

On 3 March 3 1965, their daughter Shura was born and for a time it seemed that the couple might develop a sustainable ménage, first at Cashel in Ireland and latterly at Court Green. However, the hostility of Hughes's parents (and other members of his extended family) to Assia, combined with Hughes's (and sometimes Assia's) indecision, prevented them from settling down, and they began to live separately once more, although they still saw themselves as a couple and went house-hunting together even in the last week of Assia's life. By 1967 Assia was becoming increasingly conscious that her commitment to Hughes was greater than his to her. She was also aware that Brenda Hedden, a woman in her twenties with whom Hughes had become acquainted in Devonshire, had become a rival for his affections. On 23 March 1969, increasingly despairing of Hughes's commitment to her, conscious of her declining physical allure and dreading the prospect of the much reduced life she feared was her inevitable fate as an aging single mother, Assia gassed herself and Shura in their South London flat in a way calculated to both emulate and 'surpass' Plath's suicide (Plath did not murder her children when she took her own life, even though the late poem 'Edge' seems to indicate she had imagined the possibility). Assia's suicide-murder was an act at least partially intended to strike a horrible and despairing blow at Hughes, who she deeply resented, blaming him for the straits she felt herself in.¹⁴

Assia Wevill in the *Gaudete* 'Epilogue' Poems & *Capriccio*

During the 1970s and for most of the 1980s Wevill's role in the life of Hughes was almost totally ignored in critical, biographical and even journalistic writing about him. This was a consequence of a combination of the poet's private nature and his concerns for his reputation and the well-being of his family and children led him to discourage any reference to the marital and extra-marital scandals of the 1960s and the chaos and deaths that followed in their wakes. Accordingly, until the late 1980s, when more informed biographical works about Plath began to be published, the story of Wevill's relationship with Hughes was known only to a relatively small

¹³ Sylvia Plath, Letter to Aurelia Schober Plath, Friday 12 October 1962 (*LSP2*, 855).

¹⁴ In a will Assia wrote in 1968 she bequeathed to Ted Hughes, 'my no doubt welcome absence and my bitter contempt', Koren & Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, p. 178.

circle of cognoscenti. However, as indicated earlier, Hughes had begun writing poems about Wevill as early as the 1970s, at least two of which he published in the 'Epilogue' to his 1977 collection *Gaudete*, although their gnomic opacity has caused many readers, even today, to overlook the possibility that they are about her. The Gehenna Press *Capriccio* also seemed to avoid any significant biographically focused critical scrutiny on its publication in 1990. Publicity materials for the book avoided mentioning Wevill, and the very limited print run was also prohibitively expensive (\$9,000 for a standard copy, \$14,000 for a special edition).¹⁵ Accordingly, *Capriccio* concealed even as it revealed, just as the Wevill-focused 'Epilogue' poems had done previously.

The formal conceit of the *Gaudete* 'Epilogue' poems is that they are the utterance of the main character in the wider work, the Reverend Nicholas Lumb. However, it is easily seen that the Lumb of the 'Epilogue' poems is at least partly a persona for Hughes - a device that allows him to write personally and autobiographically without fully exposing himself to biographical scrutiny. Hughes's model for the 'Epilogue' poems was the South Indian *vacana* tradition he first encountered in A.J. Ramanujan's *Speaking of Siva*.¹⁶ *Vacanas* are poems which directly or indirectly address a deity - in the case of Ramanujan's translations, the god Siva. They adopt a simple, spontaneous manner and do not shrink from the expression of feeling and emotion. They are personal, open, and fundamentally devotional lyrics. Ann Skea characterised the form as,

A form of worship in which the devotee speaks directly and truthfully to the god as an ordinary man or woman might speak to a particularly demanding husband or wife, using natural, colloquial language to express their love and devotion, but also to vent their anger, puzzlement and despair.¹⁷

Hughes was particularly influenced by Ramanujan's versions of the twelfth-century saint-poet Basavanna. Basavanna addressed his *vacanas* to an avatar of Siva worshipped in the area around his natal Kudalasangama. He refers to this manifestation of Siva as the 'Lord of the Meeting Rivers' - the rivers in question being the Krishna and its tributary the Malaprabha, which joins the larger river near Kudalasangama. Basavanna regarded Siva as the embodiment of 'the Divine Creative Source' - with which, by his devotions, he sought to achieve mystic unity.¹⁸

¹⁵ For more on the Gehenna press edition of *Capriccio* see, 'Prologue to *Capriccio*', p. 12.

¹⁶ A.J. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

¹⁷ Ann Skea, 'Ted Hughes' *Vacanas*: The Difficulties of a Bridegroom', in Terry Gifford, Neil Roberts and Mark Wormald (eds.), *Ted Hughes: from Cambridge to Collected*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 82-95. My understanding of the relationship of the *Gaudete* 'Epilogue' poems to Ramanujan's translations is much indebted to Skea's research.

¹⁸ Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*. pp. 62-63

For the muse-poet Hughes, Robert Graves's 'White Goddess', was the Divine Creative Source and adapting Basavanna's example, he addressed his *vacanas* to her in the form of the 'Lady of the Hill'.¹⁹ Like Basavanna, Hughes chose a local topographical feature to personify the avatar to whom he would address his poems, and the hill in question is the one visible from his home in North Tawton and which he once pointed out to Marina Warner, informing her it had formerly been the site of a grove sacred to the goddess 'Nymet', which he understood to be an alternative name of the Celtic goddess Nematona, 'she of the sacred grove'.²⁰ In the *vacanas* selected for publication in the *Gaudete* 'Epilogue', explicit references to the 'Lady of the Hill' were edited out in the drafting and revision process, although several survive in the materials held in the Ted Hughes Archive at Emory University.²¹ Nevertheless, at their most fundamental level, the poems of the 'Epilogue' are devotional poems to 'the goddess' in which the speaker assumes the role of the 'spiritual bridegroom of his Lady of the Hill' - that is, one who has submitted to and is in service of the goddess.²²

Although Hughes's expression in the 'Epilogue' poems is wrapped up in this mythic concept, he saw the goddess as manifest in every woman, and every woman as partaking of the nature of the goddess. In the notebook in which he drafted his *vacanas*, he wrote, 'It has taken every living woman/To make a body for you to live in'.²³ Hughes confirmed the autobiographical basis of some of the 'Epilogue' poems in a letter to Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, indicating that 'I know well' is about his friend and former lover Susan Alliston, and various critics have noted that 'Once I said lightly' is about Sylvia Plath.²⁴ In 1998 Hughes told Ann Skea that 'Waving goodbye from your banked hospital bed' is about Edith Hughes, his mother.²⁵ Given that Hughes seems to have incorporated poems about his mother, Sylvia Plath and Susan Alliston into his address to the 'Lady of the Hill' in the 'Epilogue' poems, it seems reasonable to assume that he also included at least one poem about Wevill in the sequence, and the poem beginning 'The grass-blade is not without' (*CP* 367) now seems a blatant reference to the exchange of messages that, in June 1962, effectively began their affair, and to which he also alludes in the *Capriccio* poem 'Chlorophyll' (*CP* 799). Initiating the affair, Hughes visited Wevill at work and

¹⁹ Skea, 'Ted Hughes's *Vacanas*', p. 82.

²⁰ Marina Warner, unpublished after dinner talk at the Elmet Trust's Ted Hughes Anniversary Dinner, 17 August 2016.

²¹ For example, 'O lady of the hill/Stop correcting the world to fit my wrongness/Correct me'. Ted Hughes, Notebook 17 fragment, before 1977. Emory MSS 644 box 57, folder 16, f. 31.

²² Skea, 'Ted Hughes's *Vacanas*', p. 83.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Skea, 'Ted Hughes's *Vacanas*', pp. 92-93.

²⁵ Skea, 'Ted Hughes's *Vacanas*', p. 93.

finding her at lunch, left a message, 'I have come to see you, despite all marriages'.²⁶ Wevill responded by mailing him an envelope that contained a single blade of grass.²⁷

In the 'Epilogue' poem, Hughes describes the grass-blade as being 'not without/The loyalty that was never beheld.' In this sentiment there may be an echo of Hughes's later characterisation of Wevill, in a letter to her sister Celia Chaikin, as his 'true wife and the best friend I ever had' (*LTH* 290), and perhaps a recognition of the faith in the future of their relationship she sought to maintain, increasingly against the odds, right up until her suicide. However, the primary and paradoxical 'loyalty' to which the poem refers is to the powerful *eros* that drew Hughes and Wevill together - the spontaneous, instinctual and carnal attraction that overwhelmed them and led them to embark on the affair regardless of the consequences. 'Dream of A', a rough, unpublished poem held at the British Library, is a paean to Wevill's beauty, her ability to provoke desire, and the lovemaking she and Hughes shared, which is variously described as an, 'inexplicable miracle of light and matter,' 'some masterpiece/Translated from the language of the extinct people,' 'the eternal thing,' the 'Song of Songs' and 'the offering of so much wild beauty [...] earth could not tolerate it'.²⁸ Although the affair began in betrayal, was characterised by turbulence and was the ultimate cause, as Hughes believed, of at least five deaths, in the paradoxical use of the term 'loyalty' Hughes affirms the relationship and the decision to begin the affair.²⁹

For both Hughes and Wevill, disloyalty was to be found in self-betrayal: the denial of the promptings of the inner life and in the repression of carnality, instinct and feeling. True loyalty lies in honouring the wholeness of the self and giving expression to those things. 'The grass blade is not without' acknowledges that living naturally and spontaneously in this way brings risk as well as pleasure. The blackbird in the second stanza of the poem lives moment-by-moment on the edge of 'terror and exultation' and the price the 'badger' of stanza three pays for living its instinctual life is to have to fight to the death against the brutal diggers who ultimately kill with a spade. For Hughes there is something sacramental in this struggle for life on the threshold of death and he sees wild animals as 'warriors' of the goddess, enacting her grace by simply living in obedience to their natures, negotiating potentially lethal hazards as a routine and inevitable part of life. Hughes

²⁶ Bate, *The Unauthorized Life*, p. 188.

²⁷ In her corrections of the typescript of Diane Middlebrook's *Her Husband*, Olwyn Hughes states that Hughes and Wevill both independently confirmed to her the truth of the sometimes disputed 'grass blade' story. Emory MSS 980 Olwyn Hughes Papers, box 2, folder 20, f. 167.

²⁸ BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, ff. 167-168.

²⁹ For more on Hughes's belief see 'Prologue to *Capriccio*', pp. 12-30.

refuses to regret his affair with Wevill despite its consequences; that would be the ultimate disloyalty – to her memory, their relationship and the exhilarating vitality of the natural world as embodied in the goddess. Rather, he identifies his relationship with Wevill with the exemplary lives and deaths of the blackbird and badger, culminating in a note of extraordinary defiance: ‘Me too/Let me be one of your warriors’ (*CP* 367).

Another ‘Epilogue’ poem also seems to be about Wevill. ‘Looking for her form’ (*CP* 369-70) is a cryptic and opaque poem consistent with the method of ‘concealing while revealing’ which Hughes adopts in this sequence. However, intertextual readings of the poem alongside ‘Folktale’, ‘The Coat’, ‘The Error’ and ‘Chlorophyll’ (*CP* 788-9, 792, 795-6, 799) from *Capriccio*, and some related drafts and documents in the British Library, illuminate not only the meaning of ‘Looking for her form’, but provide the key that reveals the location where Hughes disposed of Wevill and Shura’s ashes. The poem opens by describing the speaker’s unsuccessful search for a woman:

Looking for her form
I find only a fern.

Where she should be waiting in the flesh
Stands a sycamore with weeping letters. (*CP* 369)

Alerted to Wevill’s possible presence in the ‘Epilogue’ poems, the reader might see in the words ‘form’ and ‘flesh’ a reference to the physical beauty that defined her and ‘fern’ as an alternative representation of the ‘grass-blade’ discussed above. The ‘weeping letters’ of the sycamore are a fluid and elegiac description of the autumnal fall of keys from the tree.³⁰ This may be a representation of grief, but may also allude to the ‘signed piece of paper’ Wevill found in her flat after her last meeting with Hughes and which he identifies in drafts of the *Capriccio* poem ‘Flame’ (*CP* 798-9) as the proximate cause of her suicide: the letter notifying her of the finalisation of her divorce from David Wevill.³¹ In the fifth line of ‘Looking for her form’, the speaker moves from consideration of the woman to consideration of himself, asserting, ‘I have a memorial *too* [my italics]’, indicating that the place of ferns and sycamores in which the speaker looks for the woman is somehow also a ‘memorial’ (*CP* 370).

³⁰ The winged fruits of the Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplanatus*) are known as ‘keys’. In autumn they spiral to earth, dispersing by drifting on the breeze.

³¹ In the draft Hughes refers to the ‘signed piece of paper’ as ‘the last signature of divorce’ and a ‘sealed contract’, BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, f. 142. In a draft of the *Capriccio* poem ‘Descent’ (*CP* 787) in the same folder, the signed piece of paper is referred to as a ‘solicitor’s envelope, a black flame that left you in flames’. BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, f. 80.

The same lovely image of falling sycamore keys found in ‘Looking for her form’ recurs in ‘Chlorophyll’, the final poem of *Capriccio*.

She sent him a blade of grass, but no word.
 Inside it
 The witchy doll, soaked in Dior.
 Inside it [...] (CP 799)

The poem is structured like a Russian matryoshka doll. It begins by rooting the deaths of Plath, Wevill and Shura in the fatal attraction symbolised by the grass-blade. ‘Inside’ the grass-blade is Wevill, the ‘witchy doll’; inside Wevill, is Plath’s ‘gravestone’; inside Plath’s gravestone are Wevill’s ‘ashes’; inside Wevill’s ashes is Shura’s ‘smile’; inside Shura’s smile are ‘the keys of a sycamore’, which in turn contain other keys, ‘falling ... falling and turning in air’. The sycamore is somehow a terminus, a symbol of the end of the lives of Assia and Shura and of the end of Hughes’s relationship with Assia. The phrase, ‘the keys of the sycamore’, is repeated three times in the final eight lines of this short poem. Hughes is too good a poet to step out of the concrete image, and the keys he describes remain the tumbling winged fruits of an actual autumnal sycamore tree. However, the curious and emphatically repeated line-breaks in the last eight lines have the effect of separating ‘keys’ from ‘sycamore’, stressing the discrete importance of both. Hughes seems to be signalling that the ‘key’ to something undefined is contained in the ‘sycamore’. Ann Skea asserts that the significance of the sycamore in ‘Chlorophyll’ is related to its status as the ‘tree of Osiris’ in Egyptian mythology, and thus the tumbling keys, which contain the germ of future life, symbolise Wevill’s passing into the immortality of the afterlife.³² However, the related content of ‘Looking for her form’ and its reference to a ‘memorial’ enables the development of a supplementary hypothesis: that the sycamore is connected to the location of Wevill’s memorial, the place where Hughes disposed of her ashes (and those of Shura), and where her journey on this earth came to an end. It is at this point where archival material and knowledge of the landscape – ‘the living archive’ – can be deployed to identify the location of that ‘memorial’.

‘The Living Archive’: Lumb Bank

In the summer of 1963, Hughes resolved to move to Yorkshire with Wevill, and put Court Green up for sale. A buyer was found, and he and Assia viewed a number of Yorkshire properties, including Lumb Bank, a substantial former mill owner’s home located in Colden Clough (also known as Colden Valley, or Lumb Valley) below

³² Ann Skea, *Capriccio: The Path of the Sword* (5): ‘Opus 131’, ‘Familiar’, ‘Flame’, ‘Chlorophyll’ (2007), <http://ann.skea.com/Capriccio5.htm>. Retrieved 29 January 2020.

Heptonstall, only a quarter-of-a-mile from ‘The Beacon’, the home of Hughes’s parents. The imposing stone-built house, bounded by substantial, high stone walls, is set on a steep, wooded slope looking down the valley towards Mytholm. A terrace overlooks two meadows before the slope drops even more precipitously down a wooded canyon to the Colden river. Wevill loved the house and its dramatic location and Hughes made an offer. This was not the first time Hughes had considered buying Lumb Bank, and it would not be the last. (He eventually acquired the property in May 1969, two months after Wevill’s death, and lived there with Brenda Hedden and their respective children in the autumn of 1969, before abandoning the Yorkshire experiment and returning to live at Court Green in December of that year.)³³

The *Birthday Letters* poem ‘Stubbing Wharfe’ and associated archival materials indicate that, on their return from America in late 1959, Hughes tried to convince Plath that they ought to acquire Lumb Bank and make it their home:

[...] ‘These side valleys,’ I whispered,
 ‘Are full of the most fantastic houses,
 Elizabethan, marvellous, little kingdoms,
 Going for next to nothing. For instance
 Up there opposite – up that valley.’ (CP 1111-1113).

The Stubbing Wharf pub is located at the mouth of Colden Clough. Lumb Bank is a fifteen-minute walk up the Clough, and Hughes and Plath would almost certainly have walked past it on their journeys to and from the Beacon. An early draft of ‘Stubbing Wharfe’ was actually entitled ‘LB’ and in it Hughes writes how he suggested to Plath, that ‘we could live up there’, but Plath could not ‘get excited about that future’.³⁴ There is little doubt that Lumb Bank is the house Hughes describes in this poem.

Hughes’s intended 1963 purchase of the house collapsed on the day of completion due to problems with the sale of Court Green and a last minute increase in the price of Lumb Bank.³⁵ Hughes had already packed-up the Devon house and he and Wevill – sleeping in separate bedrooms, at the insistence of Hughes’s parents – and Hughes’s children had been staying at the Beacon for weeks in preparation for the move. Echoes of this period can be found in archival materials held in the British Library and at Emory. In the *Capriccio* planning notebook, Hughes seems to be listing fragments of memories that might serve as the basis for poems. On the second page he remembers ‘A’ at his parents’ home, being harangued by his Aunt Hilda in the presence of ‘her enemies’ – Hughes’s parents, who could

³³ Ted Hughes, undated (Aug/Sept 1989) letter to Leonard Scigaj. Emory MSS 644 box 53, folder 4.

³⁴ BL, Add Ms. 88918/1/7, f. 229.

³⁵ Bate, *The Unauthorized Life*, p. 224.

see Wevill only as the triply-married scarlet woman who had shamelessly seduced their son, caused the suicide of his wife, orphaned his children and brought scandal that risked his reputation and career.³⁶ This memory is succeeded by a second note recounting a memory of 'A' at Lumb Bank from the period, recounting the destabilising effect Wevill's glamour had on a local farmer as she and Hughes viewed the property, flustering him out of his usual register into pompously describing the house's impressive boundary stonework as a 'Noble wall!'.³⁷ The 'noble wall' motif is echoed in *Capriccio's* 'Folktale':

She wanted the silent heraldry
Of the purple beech by the noble wall.
He wanted the Cabala the ghetto demon
With its polythene bag full of ashes. (*CP* 788)

In the planning notebook Hughes speculates about Wevill's feelings about Lumb Bank, summarising her ambivalence in the words 'longing' and 'horror' - her aspirational longing for the upwardly mobile arriviste's dream - the 'silent heraldry' of an English country house, balanced by her horror at the prospect of isolation from metropolitan life in the constant, hostile and suffocating presence of the close-knit Hughes family.³⁸ In a diary entry from this period Wevill characterised her stay at the Beacon as like being locked in a 'cage with six macaws wearing each other out with noises enough to occupy a whole street'.³⁹ However, it is telling that 'Folktale's' evocation of Wevill at Lumb Bank in 1963 is immediately followed by a reference to Wevill at Lumb Bank in 1969 - reduced to ashes in the polythene bag. Brenda Hedden confirmed to Yehuda Koren and Eilat Negev that Hughes told her that he kept Assia and Shura's ashes in their bedroom at Lumb Bank, although she claims not to have been aware of the 'casket' as the bedroom was so cluttered with 'his things'.⁴⁰

An unpublished poem in the *Capriccio* planning materials at the British Library puns on the similarity of the words 'ashes' and 'Assia' to identify Wevill with her fate and to exploit the horrible irony inherent in her life and the manner of her death - although she was able to escape Nazi Germany and thus death in the gas chambers and reduction to ashes in the death camp crematoria, she ultimately died by gas poisoning and was subsequently cremated. 'Ashes' begins in Hughes's bedroom at Lumb Bank, 'So there were your ashes, plump in the polythene bag,' in

³⁶ BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, f. 213.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Assia Wevill, Journal entry Monday 8 April 1963 to Monday 30 May 1963, Emory MSS 1058 Box 2/2, Emory.

⁴⁰ Koren & Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, p. 220.

a 'freezer bag, in a little oaken casket', on 'a bookshelf, in my bedroom./So there were what Hitler was looking for/And I had found.' The poem goes on to give a summary of Wevill's life and a sense of her personality, referring, among other things, to her life in Canada, her second husband, 'Dickie' Lipsey and characterising her as someone who lived for 'love and laughter'. The poem moves to a culmination with the birth of Shura: 'Ashes had a child', but 'in the end they gathered her: your ashes/Infected her with ashes.' The final lines return to the image with which the poem began - 'Ashes [...] overtaken/By the end of the world. There in the plastic bag.'⁴¹

A complex of imagery including ashes, slopes, sycamores, paths, ferns, rocks, stones and walls recurs in several *Capriccio* and *Gaudete* 'Epilogue' poems, suggestive of a Lumb Bank setting. In 'The Coat' Hughes projects the ferocity of his passion for Wevill onto Assia herself by describing her as a tigress that gripped him 'by the broken small of the back' and forced him 'through the brambles', leaving him imprinted with her perfume like the 'Noon-stench of a discovered corpse.' This reference to death is immediately followed by,

[...] Nobody
Can deter what saunters
Up the ferny path between
The cool, well-ironed sheets, or what spoor
Smudges the signature of the contract. (*CP* 792)

The 'ferny path' between the sheets is, of course, an allusion to Ophelia's admonishment of her brother in *Hamlet*:

Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the *primrose path* [my italics] of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.⁴²

Although the allusion to Hughes and Wevill's own fatal 'dalliance' seems clear, a more direct source of the phrase is found in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. In the closing pages of the book, Orlando walks up a winding 'ferny path' to a hilltop on which stands the tree that inspired his/her book-length poem, *The Oak Tree*, a laureate-like pastoral vision of England, with the intention of burying the notebook that contained the work under the tree that inspired it.⁴³

⁴¹ BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, F. 230.

⁴² *Hamlet*, 1:3, l. 47-51.

⁴³ *The Oak Tree* is a fictionalised representation of Vita-Sackville-West's book-length poem, *The Land*, a pastoral paean to an idealised England seen through the prism of her family estate. Sackville-West and Woolf were lovers and Woolf wrote *Orlando*, 'a phantasmagoria of Vita's life

The ‘ferny path’ is therefore a dual symbol of the fierce and reckless passion that possessed Hughes and Wevill and led them to embark upon their affair fully aware of the fact that this would almost certainly wreck their respective marriages (‘smudge[s] the signature of the contract’), and of the necessity for the muse-poet to nevertheless unhesitatingly embrace his passions for his life and poetry’s sake, echoing the sentiments of ‘The grass blade is not without’. More literally the ‘ferny path’ is also the steep, rocky and fern-infested path under the ‘noble wall’ at Lumb Bank that leads to the wood where Hughes buried Wevill and Shura’s ashes under a sycamore in the same way as Orlando intended to bury *The Oak Tree* under the hill-top oak. The *Capriccio* planning materials in the British Library include a note rhetorically addressed to the (deceased) Wevill, referring to their viewing and abortive purchase of Lumb Bank in 1963. Hughes writes:

You thought you would live in these rooms, looking over these fields - [illegible] in the [illegible] walk down that stony fery path under the sycamores behind this great wall - happiness for a while [illegible] in the [illegible] of it. You did not think you would lie under the sycamores, or be drunk by ferns – that just have a view of the terrace wall & the barn, as the only state forever - happy or unhappy. That only two people in the whole world would know where to look for you, or where to send their thoughts to you, however useless.⁴⁴

The wood to which the note refers is about two hundred yards distant from Lumb Bank, visible from the terrace (looking down to the left, across a meadow, behind a low stone wall). Although the wood is mixed and contains beech and oak among other species (and a profusion of ferns) the edges of the wood and the path leading down to it are dominated by sycamores. The revelation that Wevill and Shura’s ashes are buried in the wood is confirmed by another archival note drawing on memories on Hughes and Wevill’s 1963 visits to Lumb Bank, in which Hughes speculates whether at that time Wevill could have divined,

[...] that her ashes would reside there, down there, down that path, in that wood, with Shura, who at that time, was not yet born. Yet no image. Only LB & the knowledge that she surveyed it all - as if it were hers.⁴⁵

Drafts contained in the British Library reveal that the *Capriccio* poem ‘The Error’ was, throughout the drafting process, entitled ‘The Grey Cairn’.⁴⁶ The poem

spread over three centuries’, for her. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, ed. Merry. M. Pawlowski, (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), p. vii.

⁴⁴ BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, f. 166.

⁴⁵ BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, f. 213.

⁴⁶ BL Add. MS 88918/1/17. ff. 85-86.

speculates about why Wevill did not simply leave Hughes ('why didn't you just fly?') when the chaos and controversies attendant on the suicide of Sylvia Plath engulfed her, before returning once more to the notion of Wevill as 'ashes', this time 'incinerating' herself in the 'shrine' of Plath's death. Echoing the unpublished 'Ashes', 'The Error' presents a fatalistic understanding of Assia's whole life as a process of, 'Waiting for your ashes/To be complete and cool' and ends with the line, 'Finally they made a small cairn' (CP 795-6). It seems likely that this line alludes to the final disposal of the ashes of Wevill and her daughter, when Hughes emptied them from their caskets, and buried them beneath a sycamore at the edge of the wood (from where there is a view of the 'terrace wall' and 'barn'), under an autumnal rain of tumbling sycamore keys.⁴⁷

The echoes of *Orlando* in 'Folktale' and other resonances Woolf's novel has with aspects of Hughes's relationship with Wevill suggests the possibility that date of the interment was on (Saturday) the eleventh of October, the seventh anniversary of the day he finally left Sylvia Plath to begin his new life with Wevill, but also the date on which Orlando walked up the 'ferny path' to bury *The Oak Tree* and is reunited with her beloved husband Shelmardine.⁴⁸ Of course, earlier in the novel, as a man, Orlando falls deeply in love with Sasha, a beautiful, sophisticated and capricious Russian princess who is nevertheless destined to become unwieldy and lethargic 'at 40', the age at which Wevill intuited her looks would begin to fade and at which age she would 'end it' (she was actually 42 when she killed herself).⁴⁹ *Orlando* contains many other affinities with *Capriccio* and aspects of Hughes's relationship with Wevill, strongly suggesting that the book was at least at the back of his mind as he wrote. Passionate and scandalous love affairs between well-known literary figures provide the biographical background to both works, and Orlando is a poet who throughout his/her life considers the nature of poetry and the poetic vocation, throws him/herself into passionate love affairs, in those contexts considering questions such as, 'Which is the greater ecstasy, the man's or the woman's?' and expressing sentiments such as 'Life! A Lover!' and 'was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice?'.⁵⁰ This is not the place to leap off into another article altogether, but the parallels with Hughes's own life, writings and artistic interests - particularly as expressed in his writings about Wevill - are immediately clear. Although *Orlando* is not listed as being among the works

⁴⁷ Perhaps with another person - the 'they' in the final line of 'The Error' is ambiguous and the archival source quoted above (BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, f. 166), indicates that 'two' people know 'where to look for you'. The ambiguity leaves open the possibility that the 'small cairn' of ashes may have been marked by a 'small cairn' of rocks.

⁴⁸ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 162.

⁴⁹ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Woolf, *Orlando*, pp. 6, 120, 160.

in Hughes's personal library (now held at Emory), there is no doubt that he had read the book or that he had once owned a copy. In her journals, Sylvia Plath writes, somewhat contemptuously, that in January of 1962 Hughes wanted to give a copy of *Orlando* to Nicola Tyrer, the precocious teenage daughter of the North Tawton bank manager, who Hughes was helping with her English Literature 'O' level studies. Plath saw the teenager as disingenuously coquettish and ingratiating and was suspicious of what she saw as Hughes's indulgence of her (*JSP* 632).

It seems that it was always Hughes's intention to bury the ashes, rather than scatter them. At the funeral lunch after Wevill and Shura's cremations, Hughes noticed an exquisite ring on the finger of the jeweller Pat Tormey. He impulsively asked Tormey to give it him, 'because it is more like her [Wevill] than anything I ever bought her', and outlined his intention to, 'bury it with her ashes'.⁵¹ Tormey complied and Hughes presumably carried out his intention. Hughes's decision to bury rather than scatter the ashes may have been related to the feelings of guilt that plagued him about his decision to have Wevill and Shura cremated rather than buried. In her will, Wevill had instructed that her 'cadaver' should be buried in 'any rural churchyard' that would have her (as a potential suicide she anticipated that few Church of England vicars would be prepared to allow her interment in hallowed ground, hence her willingness to accept burial in 'any' churchyard).⁵² It is unlikely that Hughes ever saw the will, or that he was aware of Wevill's wishes in this matter. This notwithstanding, his decision to cremate Wevill and their daughter subsequently troubled him enormously. In a letter to his brother Gerald dated 19 August 1969, he writes about the deaths of Assia and his mother (in May, 1969):

Assia's death completely shattered me for some time. Ma's death I seemed hardly able to respond to. The day of Assia and Shura's cremation was certainly the most horrible day of my life, and I shall never forgive myself for letting it happen, after everything else. Ma was going to be cremated too but Olwyn stopped that - I might well have let that happen too. People at funerals are so stunned anybody's suggestion is swallowed, everybody seems helpless.⁵³

Hughes seems to account for his decision to cremate Wevill and Shura by alluding to a state of suggestible passivity that descended upon him in the shock of his grief; 'someone' suggested cremation and he went along with it, a process that was almost repeated with his mother. He clearly bitterly regretted the decision, but the regret did not stem from not following Wevill's wishes, but from a combination of other factors. Wevill's Jewishness was in many way more important to Hughes than it was

⁵¹ Letter from Ted Hughes to Patricia Tormey, Spring, 1969. Emory MSS 644, box 182, folder 49.

⁵² Koren & Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, p. 178.

⁵³ Ted Hughes to Gerald Hughes, Emory MSS 854, Gerald Hughes Papers, box 1.

to her and he would certainly have known that orthodox Judaism forbids cremation because the belief in the resurrection of the dead requires the revitalisation of the Ezekiel's 'dry bones'.⁵⁴ There is also a sense in which cremation, particularly if the following disposal of the ashes is not physically commemorated by a public memorial or ceremony, represents not only the erasure of the physical remains of the body, but also of the life - it is as though the dead person had never existed. This was particularly so in the case of Wevill, who at the time of her death had few close friends, whose few remaining family members lived thousands of miles away, and who was secretly interred in a private 'ceremony' to which neither friends or family were invited and which took place in a location that none of them would ever be aware of. She simply disappeared and was almost forgotten.⁵⁵ Given the scandal attached to Hughes's relationship with Wevill, and the attitudes of many of his family and former friends towards her - they blamed her for Plath's suicide and expressed the desire that she had never come into his life - it might have subsequently occurred to him that the decisions to cremate Wevill and to dispose of her remains in the way he did amounted to a form of acquiescence to the wishes of her 'enemies', effectively erasing any trace of her from his life, as well as from her own.

However, the main source of Hughes's sense of guilt was related to the role his decision to cremate Wevill played in the grotesque, domestic parody of the Nazi extermination process that ended her life and destroyed her body. A rough,

⁵⁴ Ezekiel 37:1-14. Wevill was Jewish only on her Father, Lonya Gutmann's, side. In Germany, the secularised Gutmann considered himself a 'Russian in exile' and was 'devastated' to be classified as a 'Jew' by the Nuremberg Laws. The family's flight to Palestine was borne out of an attempt to escape Nazi persecution, and did not represent a commitment to Zionism or Judaism on Gutmann, or his wife's part. Although Wevill did not disavow her Jewishness, she was not practising, and it is not clear that any consciousness of her Jewishness played a *major* role in her day-to-day life or in the identity she created for herself in England, although she spoke Hebrew and was clearly marked by both family and personal experiences of antisemitism and by her time in Palestine. See Koren and Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, pp. 11, 185-186.

⁵⁵ Of course, Hughes did dedicate *Crow* (1970) to Wevill and their daughter. However, the dedication - 'In Memory of Assia and Shura' - seems to have generated little critical or popular curiosity and neither Assia or Shura were mentioned in the two most influential early monographs about Hughes's work, Keith Sagar's *The Art of Ted Hughes* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1975) and Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts's *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber, 1981). Of course, Hughes may have discouraged any inquiries about, or references to, his dedicatees. The effacement of Assia and Shura in writing about Hughes is perhaps evidenced by the fact that when I first acquired a copy of *Crow* (in 1985), I found it impossible to identify the dedicatees by reviewing the then extant literature. It was only with the publication of Linda W. Wagner-Martin's *Sylvia Plath: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988) and subsequently Ann Stevenson's *Bitter Fame* (London: Viking, 1989) that the identities and roles of Assia and Shura in the life of Hughes become widely known. Although it is now established in scholarship that Assia's death marked the end of the *Crow* project, this view didn't really begin to develop until the publication of *LTH* in 2007 and Hughes's letter to Keith Sagar of 18 July 1998, in which he explains that Assia's death, combined with the death of his mother, 'knocked *Crow* off his perch' and that he wrote the last *Crow* poem 'a week before A's death'. *LTH* p. 719.

with ‘snowflakes melting’ in the ‘sparkly black fox fur’ of her hat, gradually disappearing from his sight in the blizzard, is haunted by sustained imagery of dissolution, fire and burning that suggests both the Holocaust and Hughes’s experience of the cremation. Wevill’s walk down the hill is described as, ‘An unending/Walk down the cobbled hill into the oven/Of empty fire’. Under the thick flakes of settling snow, her ‘life is burning out in air’, between ‘char-black buildings [...] through Judaeen thorns’, with the flakes of snow clinging to her ‘charcoal crimped black ponyskin/Coat’. The poem closes with a mortuary image of total erasure - the snow ‘drawing its white sheet over everything/Closing the air’ behind her (CP 789-80). ‘Snow’ is the most moving of all the *Capriccio* poems, and one of Hughes’s most tender elegies.⁵⁸ Yet even this beautifully crafted and tender poem is infected with his horror at Assia and Shura’s fate, and his role in it.

Other Poems Alluding to Wevill

The patternings of Lumb Bank-related imagery noted above also occur in other poems in Hughes’s oeuvre, some of which may now be presumptively regarded as incorporating allusions to Wevill. ‘Lumb Chimneys’ from *Remains of Elmet* describes the wider Colden Clough landscape, probably as seen from the terrace at Lumb Bank. The line ‘Brave dreams and their mortgaged walls are let rot in the rain’ stands primarily as a metonym for the historic futility of human effort in the valley. But it is difficult not to see references to Hughes’s abortive attempts to make a home at Lumb Bank with Wevill, Brenda Hedden and even Sylvia Plath in these lines. Similarly, the line, ‘Heirloom bones are dumped into wet holes’ alludes in general to the graveyards and cemeteries of the valley, but surely contains within it allusions to the interments of not only Assia and Shura, but of Plath, buried in Heptonstall cemetery only a short walk from Lumb Bank, alongside Hughes’s parents and members of his extended family. In the context of this landscape, the reference in this poem to a ‘baby burrowing into the breast’ in association with ‘the sycamore, cut through at the neck’, with ‘five or six heads, depraved with life’ is easily interpreted as a cryptic reference to both Shura and her many-married mother, whose lust for life was ultimately as futile as the endeavour of the mill owners who erected the chimneys that are the ostensible subject of the poem and whose fate is to ‘fall into the only future, into earth’, as both Assia and Shura have already done (CP 456-7).

The phallic chimneys of Colden Clough seem to have been the inspiration behind Hughes’s naming of the equally phallic protagonist of *Gaudete*, Nicholas

⁵⁸ *Editorial Note*: ‘Snow’ was also one of the only *Capriccio* poems Hughes is known to have read in public, during his reading at the Hay Festival, 30 May 1996.

Lumb, and the three poem sequence ‘Astrological Conundrums’ (CP 747-749) has affinities in language, content and mood with that work, especially the second poem, ‘Nearly Awake’, with its visceral bull imagery.⁵⁹ However, it is the first poem of the sequence, ‘The Fool’s Evil Dream’ (CP 747-748), that contains the patternings of imagery that evoke Wevill via her association in Hughes’s mind with Lumb Bank and her ‘memorial’ in the wood there. The poem’s speaker recounts a dream in which he encounters a ‘glowing beast - a tigress’ in a landscape of trees, ferns and ‘rocks sticking through their moss jerseys’. As in ‘The Coat’, Wevill is often described as a tiger or associated with tiger imagery in Hughes’s work. This probably arises from Assia’s dressed-to-kill appearance during her 18 May 18 1962, visit to Court Green, elements of which are described in the *Birthday Letters* poem ‘Dreamers’ (CP 1145-6) - ‘flame-orange silks’, ‘soot-wet mascara’, ‘black Mongolian hair’ and ‘tiger-painted nails’. An unpublished poem in the British Library, ‘The Were Tiger’, is set during this visit, and characterises Wevill as a demonic, sexually-predatory tigress who calls to him as he weeds the bean rows.⁶⁰

The bean/tiger imagery of this poem is echoed in the *Wodwo* poem ‘The Green Wolf’ - ‘Worst of all the beanflower/Badged with jet like the ear of the tiger’ (CP 159-160). Originally entitled ‘Dark Women’, ‘The Green Wolf’ is a highly cryptic poem – another example of the ‘concealing while revealing’ mode Hughes often adopted when writing about his personal life – concerning the advent of Wevill into his life and the rebirth that he anticipated would flow from it, contrasting this with what he saw as the deathly paralysis of his later years with Plath, articulated in the poem via the metaphor of the debilitating stroke suffered by his elderly neighbour, Percy Key.⁶¹ In a letter to his sister Olwyn, explaining the origin of ‘Dark Women’, he writes, ‘It began as a poem about the old man, then it turned into a poem about Assia’.⁶² In ‘The Fool’s Evil Dream’, Wevill is portrayed as a ‘glowing’ spirit tiger, still smelling of the nurturing earth her ashes have been dissipating into for so long - ‘flower smells, wet-root smells,/Fish-still-alive-from-their-weed-river-smells’ yet still possessing ‘eyes that hurt me with her beauty’. The Fool accepts the invitation of the tigress to ‘play’. He lies with her and becomes ‘folded/In the fur of a tiger’ as the two fly to the tigress’s ‘cave’, ‘an escape route from death/[...] into a timeless land’. The Fool then experiences a version of the shamanic call, as the tigress, now clearly a representative of the goddess, tells him the story of a ‘very holy man’ who

⁵⁹ The original ‘Astrological Conundrums’, published in *Wolfwatching*, contained only two poems, ‘The Fool’s Evil Dream’ and ‘Tell’. ‘Nearly Awake’ was added in the 1995 *New Selected Poems*.

⁶⁰ British Library, Add MS 88948/1/17, ff. 16-17.

⁶¹ Sylvia Plath wrote about Percy Key’s stroke, recovery and funeral in two poems, ‘Among the Narcissi’ and ‘Berck-Plage’. *Collected Poems*, 190 & 196-21.

⁶² BL, Add Ms 88918/1/17, ff. 16-17.

fed himself to a tigress ‘because hunger had dried up her milk’ and thus became ‘the never-dying god who gives everything/Which he had always wanted to be’. The Fool is invited to sacrifice himself in the service of the goddess in sentiments very similar to ‘The grass-blade is not without’: ‘Me too,/Let me be one of your warriors’ (*CP* 367).

The Fool is ‘dissolved’ into the ‘internal powers of tiger’ and becomes an unborn child, ‘swinging under her backbone’ until the cry of an infant, the sudden cry of his ‘fear’ – which is also the imagined death cry of Shura – breaks the reverie and the Fool wakes up, ‘Wet and alone/Among starry rocks’, the ‘bright spirit’ having left him, ‘weeping’. The Fool’s deep fear of becoming ‘the never-dying god who gives everything’ has led him to respond inadequately to the tigress’s call - he is unable to abandon his ego and offer the required total submission, trust and commitment, just as the Reverend Nicholas Lumb failed in *Gaudete* - and just as Ted Hughes believed he had failed in his relationship with Wevill, a failure described in this poem, which is difficult to read in any other way but as an allegorical account of Hughes’s relationship with her as the inadequate bridegroom to Wevill transfigured as a theriomorphic goddess. That the poem is about Wevill may be confirmed by the poem’s affinity with an unpublished and untitled poem in the *Capriccio* planning materials, which seems to anticipate Wevill’s death and interment in the wood below Lumb Bank from the perspective of the first night she and Hughes spent together, in a London hotel:

The Fool
 Does not know what
 Unthinkable dying
 What stonewall funerals have to be got through
 What alternative corpses have to get through
 [...]
 Unthinkable horrible dying
 That body on the bed has to get through
 [...]
 What funerals have to repeat
 And deepen the grave, putting the body
 Back in & again back in deeper
 To ashes and again back in
 And still not shift from that hotel bed.
 To drain that glass?’⁶³

⁶³ BL, Add Ms, 88918/1/17, f. 53.

Reflections & Memorials: Assia Wevill in the Poetry of Ted Hughes

The utility of this research is that the triangulation of methods that inform it – intertextual readings of relevant texts, combined with research in ‘traditional’ and ‘living’ archives – has enabled new and enriched interpretations of several of Hughes’s poems. The research has also revealed a hitherto unknown biographical dimension of Hughes’s life. These outcomes underline the importance of Assia Wevill to the work of Ted Hughes and, along with the tripartite method, provide the means for the identification of further poems that may allude to her within Hughes’s published oeuvre and in archival material. However, I anticipate that some might disapprove of my decision to reveal the site where Hughes disposed of Wevill and their daughter’s ashes, seeing it as an egregious or even ghoulish intrusion into their post-mortem privacy, a betrayal of Hughes’s apparent intention to keep the site secret, and a de-facto invitation to peanut-crunching literary tourists to trespass on the site of a ‘private’ memorial. The proximity of Sylvia Plath’s grave at nearby Heptonstall cemetery, with its steady stream of visitors – not all respectful – is a precedent that some might not want to see repeated in the woods below Lumb Bank. In response to these anticipated objections, it is important to note that the site where Hughes chose to scatter the ashes is emphatically *not* a private place. It lies adjacent to a public footpath in a place frequented by dog walkers, mountain bikers, creative writers, tourists and hikers. Children play across the site and families picnic close by. Further, when anyone makes the decision to inter the ashes or bodies of their loved ones in a place to which the public has access – whether that place be a graveyard, the grounds of a crematorium, a football pitch, a park, a woodland or any peaceful rural setting – they inevitably give up the right to exclusive privacy. In a graveyard, anyone may pay their respects or stand before a memorial of any other person at any time, and the same principle applies to less formal interments.

As we have seen, Wevill left instructions that her body should be buried in a rural graveyard.⁶⁴ Her desire was for a memorial in a tranquil and beautiful *public* place where she imagined that she and her daughter might be at peace together, and where friends, family and others might visit and pay their respects. The fact that Wevill specified in her will that her gravestone should carry the flamboyant,

⁶⁴ In *Reclaiming Assia Wevill: Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and the Literary Imagination* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 2019), p. 157, Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick indicates that the U.K. website Find-a-Grave has listings for both Assia and Shura Wevill, which assert that their ashes are scattered in St. Mary the Virgin Church in Ashford, Kent. This identification is presumably based on Brenda Hedden’s report to Koren and Negev that Hughes told her that he intended to dispose of the ashes ‘over a churchyard in Kent’, subsequently ‘disappearing’ before sending her a postcard postmarked ‘Ashford’. Neither Hughes or Wevill had any connection to ‘Ashford’ and this anecdote can only be seen as disinformation – and a bad-taste joke at Hedden’s expense. See *A Lover of Unreason*, pp. 219-220.

knowing, gently self-deprecating and subtly accusatory epitaph, ‘Here lies a dreamer and a lover of unreason’, implies that she envisaged (or hoped) that not only friends and family would visit her grave, but a wider public.⁶⁵ It is difficult to see such self-definition as anything other than an attempt to frame the post-mortem reception of her life, perhaps knowing that she would be posthumously recognised as an important character in the biography of a famous poet, if not for her own achievements. The location of Assia and Shura’s memorial in the wood below Lumb Bank is certainly a beautiful and often tranquil place, but the location has only ever been known to two people: Ted Hughes and one, unknown other, and now at least one of those people is dead. Others, including family and friends, have never been able to pay their respects, or remember Assia and Shura at their final resting place. They will now be able to do so.

⁶⁵ Koren & Negev, *A Lover of Unreason*, p. 178.