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Owen Johnson

TED HUGHES: SPEAKING FOR THE EARTH

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1991.

This thesis explores the attempt in Ted Hughes' poems to reconcile 'fallen' human consciousness and unreflecting, instinctive involvement in the Earth: consciousness must learn to understand, and to speak for, the Earth it is alienated from. Part One suggests the relevance of the thinking in Hughes' poetry and prose to contemporary ecological theories; it also tries to answer liberal, Marxist, feminist and other critiques of Hughes' work and to justify his ideas on free will, reason, violence, schizophrenia, ritual, shamanism and other subjects. The thesis, secondly, argues for poems' aesthetic importance: Part Two explores a large number of individual poems, offering paraphrases for their more philosophically complex arguments and showing how themes such as the flux of existence (symbolized by wheels and rivers) run through Hughes' oeuvre. Wodwo, Crow, Cave Birds, the Gaudete epilogue, Moortown and River are considered as unified wholes, whose end, of speaking for the Earth, is occasionally and briefly attained.

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NOTE

If a reference (in brackets) takes the form of 'Sagar 1978' (date second), see bibliography, section 4 (general works).

If a reference takes the form of '1981 "A Reply"' (date first), see bibliography, section 3 (miscellaneous writings by Hughes). If the writing in question is reprinted in 'Appendix 1' of Ekbert Faas' Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe (pp. 163 - 194), reference is also made to this, as the most readily available source. Faas' 'Appendix 2' is the only source I give for quotations from Hughes' two interviews with Faas, of 1970 (not published until 1971), and 1977.

Section 2 of my bibliography provides sources for the uncollected poems by Hughes referred to in this thesis.

Section 1 of the bibliography gives the editions of Hughes' major works used in the thesis: numerous textual variations occur among editions.

INTRODUCTION: LITERARY CRITICISM AND HUGHES' POETRY

One aim of this thesis is to consider the coherence and responsibility of Ted Hughes' thinking on society, and on poetic technique. His advocates as well as detractors seem to have underestimated his position as an innovative or significant thinker: he 'is, of course, no philosopher' (Sagar 1978 p. 65), being 'more successful as an informed observer than as a weighty thinker' (Bold 1976 p. 68), 'a mime' 'not... an arguer' (Derwent May in Dodsworth 1970 p. 162), 'the least academic of poets' (Raine 1979). When he calls Vasko Popa 'the sophisticated philosopher' (1967 'Popa'; Faas 1980 p. 184), Hughes' interpretation of philosophy seems of something more private and intuitive than our culture's, but the poet who had Plath reading 'books on folklore, fiddler crabs and meteorites' (in Faas 1980 p. 41) remains deeply learned, intellectually rigorous in his poetry and sane in his ecological spokespersonship.

The ordering device of the first chapter is to represent and answer critics' and poets' misinterpretations of Hughes' ideas. Although one's response to so uncompromisingly romantic a writer will, to a certain extent, remain temperamentally determined, a lot of the hostility and impatience concerning Hughes' work is still born of nothing more than misunderstanding: twelve years on, Cave Birds and Moortown surely remain among the least read books of their stature.

Part Two of the thesis attempts to analyze Hughes' important poems, cataloguing the kind of mannerisms and complexities Part One defines, and, on occasion, simply providing glosses. Such analyses (where criticism aspires to the absolute objectivity of the sciences) will in one way certainly insult the poems, imposing a single solution upon them and trampling over linguistic subtleties. But I think the sheer bewilderment with which Cave Birds or the Gaudete lyrics are still met can justify the reductions: Hughes' poetry seems large enough to accommodate and respond to this kind of criticism, as well as any number of other kinds. Keith Sagar's suggestion that our 'standard



critical equipment' expects 'kinds of rational, paraphrasable meaning the poems don't in fact offer' (Sagar 1990) appears curiously askew. Most critics seem puzzled by Hughes' poetry because, I shall be arguing, it is far more 'rational' - better to say 'thought-ful' - than most contemporary verse. Though scholarly criticism, of whatever kind, seems a betrayal of Hughes' commitments to imagination and to everything beyond literature, it is one, perhaps, in the nature of the Fall, as Hughes understands it; of writing poetry itself.

I end Part One of the thesis by suggesting how the gap, in Hughes' poems, between manner and message, words and reality, dualistic consciousness and imaginative wholeness, is never perfectly bridged. If his poems depend on the intellectuality they speak against, if they seem as much schematic as visionary, his own critical remarks at least come to recognize the scholar's problem of conscience. An early poem, 'Tutorial', expresses plain contempt for 'the onslaught of the academics' (Booth 1985 p. 152) - 'plucking the heads and legs off words'. (After two years of Cambridge English, Hughes dreamed a fox-headed spirit planted a blood-stained paw on his latest essay and said, 'You're killing us' - Sagar 1978 p. 8.) Hughes asked Faas not to print parts of their January 1971 interview presumably 'to avoid sending his critics', as Eliot sent his, 'off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail' (Faas 1971 p. 5), feeling it 'better if the [Crow] poem operates without... scholarly-pedantic baggage' (in Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 260). Adapting Seneca's Oedipus, he omitted nearly all mythological allusions. (Hirschberg's 'computer print-out of every conceivable [mythological] reference' (Garfitt 1981 p. 850) seems surprisingly seldom to help understanding of the poems: this is one annotation I provide only where it still seems unavoidable.)

Yet Hughes not only feels unable to claim Crow does operate 'without... baggage' but admits he 'should perhaps have taken more trouble to bridge

the culture gap that seems to render... Crow nearly inaccessible to some readers' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4) - which seems to delegate the business to academics. An enthusiastic critic himself - a whole book on Shakespeare, The Silence of Cordelia, is forthcoming - Hughes' verse inevitably stands largely within a tradition developing in symbiosis with academic criticism. 'I imagine every writer has' 'a jury of critics sitting over what [they] write', he tells Faas (1980 p. 202) - Yeats being his judge. 'The fact that I know that my main audience will be an academic audience, in a roundabout way and against my will, influences the kind of thing I write. I tend to build in satisfactions for that audience' (*ibid.* p. 55). What 'against my will' jumps over seems the apparently unavoidable gap between perfect, unself-conscious self-expression, and fallen consciousness.

If Hughes' conscious techniques ask critical comment, so does his most 'unconscious', 'inspired' poetry: Hughes, consciously retrospective, offers his own (see, for instance, Gifford and Roberts 1981 pp. 256 - 260, and 1981 'A Reply' pp. 5 - 6) with a tentativeness disclaiming authorial priority. 'It's easy enough [for him] to give interpretations [of Crow poems] ... but whether they'd be the real explanations [he does not] know' (Faas 1980 p. 207).

Here he still posits a 'real' (objective) explanation; but misreadings can singlehandedly illuminate it: 'in one main sense, ['Truth Kills Everybody'] is about just the sort of misreading it seems to provoke - the cuttlefish ink-clouds, behind which the real nature of the thing escapes, are Rorschach blots, of a kind' (1981 'A Reply' p. 6). Often, however, 'as far as interpretation goes[, he leaves] all options open' (Faas 1980 p. 214). (When in 1990 Sagar attempted a patchwork synthesis of Hughes' 'interpretations' of Crow, Hughes vetoed the paper, calling it 'embarrassing' (Sagar 1990) and feeling, presumably, that, if understood as his conclusive statement about the book, it would stultify personal, critical readings.) Deconstruction is

hardly one of Hughes' allegiances, but his thinking (since, indeed, 1966 or earlier) does idealize relativity and subjectivity (and recognize the absolutism inevitable to such idealizations). The way a 'symbol' (like his Jaguar) 'works', Hughes believes, 'depends... on the nature of [the] mind' 'that meets it' (Faas 1980 p. 199). His choices of Shakespeare's verse 'have to make their meaning out of the... experience, the flux of half-memories and broken glimpses, in their reader' (1971 Shakespeare p. 10). 'Everything we associate with a poem is... part of its meaning, no matter how New Critical purist we try to be' (1966 'Thomas'; Faas 1980 p. 182).

My thesis could be partly seen as a synthesis of the approaches of Gifford and Roberts (1981), Thomas West (1985) and Craig Robinson (1984, 1989) - though among books due for publication in 1991, Nick Bishop's interpretation of Hughes' successful transcendence of aesthetic self-consciousness, and Alexander Davis' of his failure to transcend the dualism of perceiver and perceived, should prove particularly relevant to my arguments. Gifford and Roberts' attempt to show 'that Ted Hughes is a great poet, in whose hands our language is both familiar and different from anything we had thought possible' (1981 p. 11) seems circumscribed only by their decision not to 'set Hughes's vision in its historical [and social] context' (Garfitt 1981 p. 849), and by what seems to me finally their aesthetic conservatism: Hughes at his most 'different' - in the Gaudete lyrics (see Gifford and Roberts 1981 pp. 193 - 196), in much of Earth-Numb¹, and perhaps River (see Roberts 1985 p. 4) - does appear disappointingly underestimated.

West's exciting exploration of the relationship between words and reality, consciousness and the unconscious, is, conversely, confined to abstract terms by his refusal to 'address the poems' not as psychotherapeutic props but 'as

¹ Moortown (1979) contains the Moortown Diary (republished under that title in 1989), Prometheus (On His Crag), Adam (and the Sacred Nine) and Earth-Numb, itself including 'Earth-numb' and 'Orts', a selection of Orts (1978).

if they might have an important meaning on their own... as objects or as objective narrations' (1985 p. 73). Hughes has cited respectfully Dickinson's 'we both believe, and disbelieve, a hundred times in an Hour' (1963 'Dickinson'; Faas 1980 p. 169), and Popa's inclination to 'trust no poem with his meaning for more than fifteen or so lines, before he tries again from a totally different direction' (1967 'Popa'; Faas 1980 p. 185). The 'deconstruction' in his ideas itself makes Hughes unwilling, I shall try to suggest, to subordinate imaginative units to his books' structure or beliefs' exposition: his volumes have structure, but this is part of their anarchy of interdependence; the 'irony' of Hughes' early model Ransom seems superseded by a self-regulating systole and diastole of consciousness and intuition, assurance and doubt, a refusal to reinforce the whole by falsifying the moment. Critical conclusions, therefore, I think, must include readings of the poems, one by one.

Robinson and Sagar, in representing Hughes' moral consciousness, are also bound to straitjacket the poems - to represent Hughes the teacher's advocacy of imagination by denying the poet's imaginative waywardness. In the 1970s, Sagar's transaction was to redeem the poems from charges, in effect, of immorality. But in claiming a 'didactic effort' (Sagar 1983 p. 281) even for the Moortown Diary, Robinson is bound to disturb critics, like Claude Rawson, wary of 'quasi-moralizing... commentary which allegorizes and domesticates what in the poems exists as a bare, unmoralized... notation' (Rawson 1976 p. 324). Robinson's assessment, though, of the final 'didactic' effect of Hughes' opus is one with which I concur - and Rawson seems mistaken in defining as 'amoral' what departs from his own (liberal) morality. 'Amoral' Hughes' imaginative notations may sometimes be. And he is 'not at all sure how much... of a... moral trajectory you can fix onto a symbol [Jaguar poem] by associated paraphernalia' (Faas 1980 p. 199). But these 'paraphernalia' (the poems' structural contexts) are conscious artefacts: 'the form [of Crow] proposed itself... as a means of domesticating many things

that interested me' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5 - I italicize¹ the word Rawson used in 1976 (above, p. 5) to criticize Sagar's The Art of Ted Hughes). 'It can be explained' (1979 'The Head' p. 81): one of Hughes' characteristics is his obsession with moralizing - indeed rationalizing - his jumble of imaginative sources (the Shamanic vision, the Hermetic 'Great Work', the intrapsychic quest) in terms of his society's actual desecration of inner, and outer, Nature: Jung's method was similar. The 'constants and variables' of myth, Hughes suggests in an unpublished draft, work 'quite a bit like algebra'. It is the distance between our alienation, and the desired remarriage to the anima, that makes the moral landscape of the quest in Cave Birds so foreign, or disturbing. (Hughes' juxtaposition in Earth-Numb of 'Seven dungeon songs' and 'A knock at the door' seems to acknowledge this distance. For me, Robinson over-emphasizes the 'didactic effort's' practical focus: Hughes has never considered the everyday precision of the naturalistic novel's 'moral... paraphernalia'.) I am not, it seems important to admit, qualified to speak of Cave Birds' moral adequacy. The approbation of a Peter Redgrove - who is much better qualified - and the striking parallels between Hughes' poetry and the annals of psychic reorganization, must suffice one.

Among other critics, Ekbert Faas is exceptional in successfully representing Hughes, not as a relic caveman, but 'his country's major spokesman for mankind's sudden and unprecedented evolution into a new global culture' (Faas 1980 p. 25). Faas' informed discussion of this spokespersonship has to remain my point of departure; but his criticism of the poems can depend less on aesthetics than speculations about Hughes' inner life - speculations which would, surely, mystify Hughes himself. Even after reading Hughes - and I suppose this thesis testifies to the imaginative effect of reading him - I remain enough of a rationalist for parts of the poetry to remain inaccessible for me, as they will for a number of readers; Hughes' advocacy of the imagination, therefore, will still sometimes sound disappointingly abstract. The difficulty has to be faced; however, I think Hughes' poetry is bound to remain

1 ie. underline

open to Western aesthetics and thought-patterns in a way primitive visionary art cannot be.

Faas was not alone in feeling Hughes' remark that Dylan Thomas' 'life, letters and legends belong to his poetry, in that they make it mean more' (1966 'Thomas'; Faas 1980 p. 182) begs 'biographical' criticism of Hughes' own poetry (though chronological inaccuracies - see Faas 1980 p. 86 - make a mockery of Faas' own attempts). Even Edward Larrissy's suggestion that Gaudete shows Hughes repenting a previous misogyny (Larrissy 1983 pp. 31 - 41) misrepresents unhappily, I think, the visionary work's scrupulous impersonality and moral commitment. Though we must acknowledge that profound personal pressures provoked Hughes' finest writing, the poems never seem to refer back to these pressures in a way justifying critical exploration of the biographical background. Faas' appendix does not reprint the end of Hughes' 1966 essay, where he suggests that, for Thomas, 'the poetry which is, among other things, an escape from personality, was not to be written' (1966 'Thomas' p. 783). (Hughes' critical comments are not necessarily reflexive either.) Certainly he commended C. R. Anderson for, in Emily Dickinson's Poetry, '[concentrating] his closest attention on the verbal', not biographical, aspect of a writer nearer, perhaps, Hughes' ideal of himself than Thomas was (1963 'Dickinson' p. 394).

Faas: So the underlying story [of Crow] would be some kind of autobiographical myth.

HUGHES: Why autobiographical?

(Faas 1980 p. 213).

Hughes' advocates have failed to reach any consensus yet over what constitutes the core of his achievement. For Sagar, 'Gaudete is perhaps the summit of [this] achievement' (1978 p. vii). Gifford and Roberts consider Gaudete flawed and feel 'Cave Birds is... Hughes's finest book' (1981 p. 199). Scigaj believes Remains of Elmet 'far superior to Cave Birds' (1986 p. 235). Hirschberg wishes 'there were ten more books of Crow poems to read' (1981 p. 68). Beth Truebell finds Crow 'not a very appealing book of poetry' (1985

p. 333). West thinks 'River is perhaps Hughes's finest collection' (1985 p. 115). Compiling Selected Poems 1957 - 1981, Hughes himself drew most heavily on Wodwo and Moortown. Hughes' books themselves map out a stylistic journey as long as Shakespeare's: from the big-boned blood-and-granite rhetoric of The Hawk in the Rain and the first Histories, via the nacreous cul-de-sac of Lupercal and the Sonnets with their lyrical laments for the brevity of art and life, to the Stygian release of riotous energies which are Hamlet and Wodwo - a tragic vision passing, through the stormy bleakness of Lear and Crow, towards a recolonization of the old descriptive grace, but in a language heavy now with felicitous idiosyncracies, and a gathering concern with marriage, and reconciliation; till, in 1608 and again 370 years later, tragedy, irony and most human interest - what we consider essential - are thrown into the sea, and the visionary lyricism remains; Henry VIII and Wolfwatching represent a return almost to the start, a new direction Shakespeare had no time to follow. The breadth of the development seems a hallmark of a major poet.

Some of Hughes' poems - 'Invitation to the Dance', 'Theology' - anticipate this succession, whilst ideas in prose ('churches collapse'; 'at the end of the ritual up comes a goblin' - 1970: Faas 1980 pp. 207, 204) often re-enter the poetry years later (Gaudete p. 190; Cave Birds p. 62). More remarkable seem the abruptness of his re-orientations and his ability to pursue different matters contemporaneously. 1977 saw him preparing Gaudete and Moon-Bells for publication, revising Cave Birds (published privately in 1975), 'digging up parts' of his version of the Bardo Thödol (Faas 1980 p. 210), and writing most of Remains of Elmet as well as the last myths in Earth-Numb and the first River and Flowers and Insects poems. Yet soon afterwards he almost ceased his 'mythic' work.

The handful of readers who can meet Hughes' poetry with the kind of intimate understanding which a wide audience will bring to other poets, more of their time and place, are unanimous in their claims for him (and tend, by the merely ignorant, to be ridiculed: 'devotees'; 'enthusiasts'). If Crow's songs

were located within their 'Epic Fairy Tale'; if the adventure of Orghast were wholly literary; if Gaudete, in intent and execution, were as fully and impressively a novel as a poem; or if Cave Birds were all of the stature of 'The knight', I would subscribe to Sagar's claim that Hughes is 'the natural successor to... Yeats, Lawrence and Eliot' (1978 p. 1). Hughes himself has never scrupled to compare his themes and ends with his most celebrated antecedents' and contemporaries'; it seems clear to me that his attempt to articulate a society's hopes and fears, however partially, is that of a major poet. Probably, however, negotiations along a broad front (rather as in River) towards the definition of a complex world-view characterize the romantic poet's method less than will the creation of a number - for Hughes a great number - of individually memorable, discrete poems. Though the consideration of Wodwo, Cave Birds, Gaudete, Moortown and River as single wholes is central to this thesis (the large-scale intentions are implicit everywhere in Hughes' expansive, occasionally self-parodying voice), Selected Poems, if augmented with later work, would still represent most of his actual, artistic achievement. Although the book - reprinting in its entirety Selected Poems 1957 - 1967 - contains a disproportionate amount of early work (and was itself influenced, Terry Gifford suggests, by critical response to poems), the later material here seems almost uniform in its excellence.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE: THE EARTH

1a: Hughes and Human Ecology

When Gifford and Roberts suggest 'the function of the poet's theories is to assist the production of good poetry' (1981 p. 35), even they seem to underestimate Hughes' convictions. The Earth, in short, comes before Speaking; which is why in this thesis the exploration of ideas has at least to take precedence over the study of Hughes' style. It seems characteristic of critics with a partial understanding of Hughes to dismiss the place in the production of his poetry of these 'theories'; and sometimes, with a kind of out-dated aesthetic human solipsism, the theories themselves. Here is Douglas Dunn (who has written incisively on Hughes elsewhere):

I think Ted Hughes is probably a traditional English nature poet in his heart, but because of contemporary humbug, as well as the humiliations and upheavals of the twentieth century, and the distortions upon the imagination which they've produced - the affront of recent history - he's been deflected away from an attention to nature and creatures, which I think is his love, in order to orchestrate feelings within a kind of Lawrencian ideology: it shouldn't really be necessary.
(Haffenden 1981 p. 33).

Stan Smith's Inviolable Voice, considering the influence of social history on contemporary verse, edges past Hughes' allegiances as inconsequential 'nostalgia for the future' (Smith 1982 p. 169). Claude Rawson even suggests the ecological devastations of Crow are 'objects of aesthetic delight for [their] own sake, as much as any plum in Stevens' (Rawson 1976 p. 325), whilst Alan Bold thinks Hughes fails 'to see the epic significance of our scientific age' (Bold 1976 p. 131), Earth forbid.

The theory behind Hughes' work is not a shapeless grudge against liberal humanism, but a self-sufficient system of beliefs which finds, in his poetry and social criticism, a powerful and, on its own terms, thorough and balanced exposition. 'Deep Ecology' (Naess) suggests how our society's evolution has been to see its responsibilities diverging: Dickens' novels evidenced an

incipient concern to domesticate, within familial welfare and compassion, a nation's social structure, whilst suspecting the Mrs Jellybies who hoped to domesticate the human world, as the global village has now done for us. At present, the task (a challenge to anthropocentrism succeeding Copernicus', and Darwin's) becomes to familiarize the Earth itself, seen, in the sentimentalization of Lovelock's theory, as Gaia, one living, sentient being. If our decades have been unprecedentedly characterized by anomie and despair, this could be because, God dead and mankind the closed society of 1984, nothing seemed to stand, over and against everyone, to unite us - except the manifestations of death and our unmitigated discordance. A recognition that tragic hubris succeeds the assumption of supremacy, Aryan or human; of the innate limits of technological complexity; and of the impracticalities of evading, *beyond Earth, what technology makes of Earth, would be to reinstate*, in a relative universe, one practical absolute, or touchstone of values - a divinity whose iniquitous children we remain, the Earth.

The science of anthropology has shown us societies in final decay - the Kaingang, the Yanomamö (Girard 1977, p. 125 etc.) - and suggested how genuinely (yet curably) sick Western civilization too becomes. 'Judged in the perspective of the primitive religions', writes Mircea Eliade, a novelist and anthropologist who is not in the way of making sensational claims, 'the anguish of the modern world is the sign of an imminent death, but of a death that is necessary and redemptive, for it will be followed by a resurrection and the possibility of attaining a new mode of being, that of maturity and responsibility' (Eliade 1960 p. 237).

In collusion, human ecology suggests, with an older, aggressive, goal-orientated patriarchy, our sensate culture - where the objective scientism of Bacon, Descartes and Newton lingers to preside over a depotentiating dualism of mind and matter, spirit and matter, and mind and body - has interpreted the

universe as waste matter for our consumption, an agglomeration of discrete, rigidly-related atoms. The realm of thought is reduced to as many, discrete disciplines; illness, time and death are attacked with technology, and the affective life and the non-human world are jeopardized through the single-minded pursuit of bodily comforts by means of consumerism and unremitting economic growth.

'All thinking worthy of the name must now be ecological', remarked Lewis Mumford near the end of his life. Even if we accept that, on temperamental grounds, Hughes' successful articulations of the above ideas will be abstract and ideal rather than practical, claiming commitments so precise for him might still appear to be like the Ban the Bomb group which wants to adopt Nessie the Mannerless - and unaccommodable - Monster as Mascot. 'The poet must recognise that he is not in the business of initiating a revolution or peddling propaganda' (Sagar 1983 p. 12); 'Hughes is not offering *global solutions to the problems of Western Civilisation*' (Schofield in Sagar 1983 p. 208). It seems customarily assumed that when in 1970 Hughes distinguished the writer who 'develops... outwards into society and history, using wider and more material', and the one who 'develops inwards into imagination... using... maybe even less' (Faas 1980 p. 204), he defined a retreat of his own from shared reality. But a writer 'can develop both ways simultaneously': and it is in this category, surely, with Eliot, who recognized 'the disintegration of Western civilization' and whose own 'sickness told him the cause', and Yeats, whose 'mythology is history, pretty well', that he intends to place himself (*ibid.*; Hughes probably underestimates Eliot's practical awareness of environmental issues). 'Wordsworth... is an example of both the true poet and the false, the man trusting his gift and producing the real thing, and the man searching for his satisfaction among more popular and public causes'. But the true poet is political as the false cannot be: 'these soul-notes of a mountain-watcher... what did these have to do with the great

issues of the time? Nothing whatsoever, till the spirit that worked through Wordsworth... chose [him] for its parables' (1962 'Context; Faas 1980 p. 164).

In his informed 'Desolation and Development', Roger Garfitt defines 'the two halves of Hughes's imagination, his modern existential awareness of the "boundless, godless, cavernous nothingness" [John Cowper Powys' The Brazen Head], and his recovery of the ancient, religious sense of the universe' (Garfitt 1981 p. 849). What he does not explore is how precisely the latter answers the former, how far Hughes exposes the 'desolation' simply as a Cartesian anachronism's myopia. Crow and the 'materialist disillusionment' of Beckett's 'Black Comedy' 'are in fact absolute opposites' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4): 'as with the paintings of Francis Bacon, a totality of horror is narrowly and intensely insisted'^{on}/in Crow, Anthony Thwaite assumes (Thwaite 1985 p. 60); Hughes, however, '[likes Bacon] very much.... Because in a way like Eliot and Beckett he's suffering the disintegration.... Yet one doesn't at all have a feeling of desolation, emptiness, or hopelessness' (Faas 1980 p. 208).

Hughes claims the same sense of hope for Vasko Popa, Miroslav Holub, Zbigniew Herbert and János Pilinszky: 'finally, with delicate manoeuvring, they precipitate out of a world of malicious negatives a happy positive' (1967 'Popa'; Faas 1980 p. 184). 'They are not the spoiled brats of civilisation disappointed of impossible and unreal expectations' (ibid. p. 183), but only in odd poems is Hughes' 'positive' their simple, heroic stoicism: 'they have gone back to the simple animal courage of accepting the odds' (ibid.); 'in Pilinszky's love poems "he" is separated from "her" as the flesh is separated from meaning and hope, and as the spirit is separated from any form of consolation' (1976 Pilinszky p. 11). Incomparable Marriage is always Hughes' eventual goal; an elaborately-rationalized safety-net of psychology, alchemy, social history and faith in Nature lies under the tightrope, for him, of 'unalterable horror' (1976 Pilinszky; Faas 1980 p. 194), and his two odd suggestions that 'their world' too 'is the world of the little pagan religions and cults' (Faas 1980 pp. 205,

207) seems a misrepresentation to obscure as much: only occasionally, as in Holub's 'The Fly' or 'Experimental Animals' do these poets evoke an obviously 'green' positive.

Brandes (1990) argues that only recently has the conspicuousness of Laureateship provoked Hughes to reorientate his mythical poetry in terms of society and history where 'Every second there is less and less' of 'The Black Rhino'. Even in 1970, however (1970 'Nicholson'), Hughes was advocating strikes to demand a healthier water supply. 'Any artist who resists the suction into [the] galactic firestorm' 'of the [Cartesian] Mathematical Absolute' 'finds ranged against him the worldly powers of our age and everything that is not the suffering vitality of nature' (1962 'Baskin'; Faas 1980 p. 167).

History, and personal convictions, may have met in Hughes, just as Puritanism and Marian nature-worship did in Shakespeare, generating a 'civil war' which has still not 'played itself out' (Faas 1980 p. 19) and transforming The Tempest into a 'tribal dream' (Faas 1980 p. 212). Hughes, then, can write of Shakespeare - as he could not of Hopkins - and pursue the dream ('South Bank Show' 15/2/81: see Sagar 1983 p. 67). 'The whole religious dilemma of New England' (the divorce from nature), again, 'became the mirror-image' (the opposite) of Dickinson's 'marriage' to her Muse (1968 Dickinson; Faas 1980 p. 185), whilst Russia's history partners Mandelstam, Pasternak and Akhmatova's poetry ('South Bank Show': see Martin 1981 pp. 18-19). '[Hughes] would not include himself' in this company, Martin presumes (ibid. p. 19). 'To read Hughes's myth-making literally is to mis-read it. That is what the devotees do.' Martin does not suggest how fully Hughes' myths can answer the Cartesian paradigm. Hughes' original acceptance of the Laureateship itself no doubt answered his ideal of social activity. Occasionally, he has tried to fulfil the shamanic role, publicly invoking, for instance:

... A care-worn Angel. An old midwife crone
With the touch of Earth.
Our past under one arm

As a roll of TV Times
For bandages.
Our future under the other -
For anaesthesia
A portable telly....

or:

... An Angel of Blood.

A lucky omen.
Only the darkest hour
Finds this star.

Only the emptiest eye finds it
Between the faintest stars. The slightest smudge of opinion
Will miss it...

('The Crown of the Kingdom').

Hughes' representations of ecological thinking remain impressive, and impressively before their time, though it is in his nature to simplify and dramatize (and perhaps to forfeit skeptics' patience): interviewed in Children's Literature in Education (1970) he admitted his views seem 'extreme' (1970 'Myth' p. 69). His intense consciousness of 'the wilderness of Darwin and the physicists' (1965 'Singer' p. 9) and of two world wars 'where suddenly and for the first time Adam's descendants found themselves meaningless' (1965 'Men Who March...' p. 208) seems to belong with history now - as, Davis (1990) suggests, does the retreat into myth from a political scene understood as the irredeemable cold-war stalemate of 'A Woman Unconscious'. Today's environmental crisis, however, can hardly be exaggerated.

The loss of beliefs to answer the discoveries of science, Hughes argues, has made 'the creation... a heap of atoms, a sterile promontory battered by blind appetites' (1965 'Singer' p. 9). 'That historical moment might well be seen, by a detached Spenglerian, as a development from the spiritual plane... a millennial change in the Industrial West's view of reality that had roots far back in time' (1983 'Translation' p. 9). The Cartesian paradigm, alienating mind from body and sponsoring the passive objectivity Hughes characteristically

represents by a nerveless, staring eye, has left 'the inner world, separated from the outer world... a place of demons' and 'the outer world... a place of meaningless objects and machines' (1976 'Myth'; Faas 1980 p. 192), and our existence one of 'cynical materialism emptied of meaning' (1965 'Singer' p. 8), of 'epidemic alienation from society, from reality and from self... where respectable societies can remain, at bottom, in a baffled condition of animal apathy and anarchy, or be overtaken by a sudden lunatic uniform' (1964 'Dr Dung' p. 324). 'Our sexual organs and interests tyrannize over a vast psychic idleness or a swarm of neurotic ailments' (1962 'Man and Superman'). 'We are dreaming a perpetual massacre', our 'psychotic democracy' having become one of 'violence', 'emptiness and meaninglessness' (Faas 1980 p. 198).

There was a person
Could not get rid of his mother
As if he were her topmost twig.
So he pounded and hacked at her
With numbers and equations and laws
Which he invented and called truth.

('Revenge Fable').

Hughes understands the older scientific models as the heirs of Socratic rationalism and the twins of 'the subtly apotheosised misogyny of Reformed Christianity', itself 'proportionate to the fanatic rejection of... both inner and outer nature' in 'the last nightmare of mental disintegration and spiritual emptiness' which he finds 'is the soul-state of our civilisation' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 pp. 186-7). Anthropocentrism alienates people from 'the draughty radiant Paradise of the animals, which is the actual earth' (*ibid.* p. 187) and fosters the belief 'that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use' (*ibid.* p. 186).

'But while the mice in the field are listening to the Universe, and moving in the body of nature... the housing speculator is peering at the field through a visor, and behind him stands the whole army of madmen's ideas' (*ibid.* p. 187). 'The great civilised crime of intelligence that... has turned on its mother' (1966 'Plath' p. 84) is now 'Obliterating her with... Bulldozers and detergents'

('Revenge Fable'). In The Tiger's Bones (1965):

The Master begins to help the savages.
First, he clears away the forest, burns it to the ground,
So there'll be room for vast crops...
... he poisons all green growth that is not crops....
(The Coming of the Kings, p. 43).

The crops soon fail; 'But the Master has a solution.... He has [the natives]
building factories, to make motor-cars' (ibid. p. 45). 'Commercial pirates'
(p. 48) thwart this venture, and the natives starve, upon 'the blackened plains':

They'd have become
A flourishing modern industrial society
Within a few years. They've done everything wrong...
(p. 49)

the Master reflects. By 1980, Hughes' home river, the Taw, had become:

... the main sewer
Of the Express Dairy Cheese Factory -
"Biggest in Europe".
A miasma

Mourns on the town bridge at odd hours
Over the old home, now her grave.
('Nymet').

The water-colourist of human progress
Is painting the ponds afresh...
('The Great Irish Pike').

'Within a very short time' from Hughes' Moortown Diary entries, 'the [farmer's]
product itself had become a weirdly scandalous, unwanted surplus, the livestock
a danger to public health (and nobody knew better than the farmer what he
pumped into them), the very soil a kind of poison, the rivers sewers' (Moortown
Diary, p. ix).

In 1987, The Times commissioned 'First Things First', 'An election Duet,
performed in the Womb, by foetal Twins', and got more, about 'our stupidity
and greed, and our shiftless, imbecile governments' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas
1980 p. 188) than it (or for that matter Lord Gowrie) asked:

... If the cost of the Gross National Product is
for trees no leaves

for waters no fish
and for you
cortical plaques, neurofibrillary tangles...

Then let what can't be sold to your brother and sister be
released on the third world and let it return by air
and sea to drip down the back of your own throat
at night....

The Sphinx is man's nobility
The riddle - our own story.
Bored, experimental beast.
Earth for laboratory....

Our riddle is [sing Thatcher and Kinnock]: "Why aren't we right?"
So to correct our error
We can only double it
In exponential terror....

Hughes' mistrust of (reductive) science is that of many non-scientists, and might worry one. Yet, unlike many post-Cartesian thinkers, he cannot be seen as an irresponsible or thankless Luddite: 'a scientifically biased education has produced a chronically sick society. Some even go wider and suggest scientific civilisations must be sick' (1970 'Myth' p. 60). 'There's no question of reversing the trend, abandoning science, though that seems to be what a lot of people would like to do' (*ibid.*). The 'Scientific ideal' 'is OK for scientists' (*ibid.* p. 57); 'without it, the modern world would fall to pieces: infinite misery would result' (1976 'Myth' p. 87); 'how it has improved our comforts!' (1962 'Baskin'; Faas 1980 p. 167). His ideal in 'Myth and Education' is to reconcile us to technology and science by respiritualizing their effects; only once - 'Einstein Plays Bach', in the first English editions of Wodwo - does he actually exacerbate the science/art dyad by satirising a scientist possessed of spiritual vision equal to his own. It is perhaps surprising that his hostile critics have never dismissed Hughes' achievement as part of the sixties' 'mass craze of Hippie ideology' (1983 'Translation' p. 9) - though Robert Shaw (Sherry 1985 p. 272) very unhelpfully suggests the Gaudete lyrics 'have a numb, disconnected tone which makes them seem almost a parody of the pop mysticism of the counterculture'. In 1959, Hughes tells Faas, he 'had no

idea [he was] riding the zeitgeist so closely' (Faas 1980 p. 205); he has consistently condemned 'the mass epidemic of infatuation with hallucinogenic drugs' (1983 'Translation' p. 9), but, looking back in this 1983 essay, he at once disassociates his adventure (and Popa's) from, and circumscribes them within, the sixties' phenomenon: 'the mood of doom found a strange kind of hope... in the poetry of humanity felt as a whole, as a single threatened creature' which 'became central to the exploration of drugs, of Buddhism, of imaginative systems from the childhood of the race.... Only... a momentary utter fatigue of all other civilized promises, could have let this happen.... Obviously it could not last. Mankind readjusted, the ego recovered its resilience' (ibid. p. 10) - and Hughes turned away from mythic utterance.

It is representative of Hughes' method that his 'Foetal Twins' - infantile politicians and tomorrow's voters - should, like Crow, symbolize both the bankruptcy of the old, and the gestation of the new. His temperament is, in the last resort, an optimist's, anticipating 'Everyman's Odyssey' Forwards to Mother Nature; the ideal of Crow is 'Trickster Literature', where 'metaphysical beliefs are only just being nursed into life, out of the womb and the soil' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4); we need to shift our 'foundation to completely new Holy Ground' (Faas 1980 p. 207). Henry Williamson, 'a North American Indian sage among Englishmen' (1980 'Williamson' p. 163) helped his own thinking: 'he worshipped natural creativity', working tirelessly towards 'repairing society, upgrading craftsmanship, nursing and improving the land' (ibid. p. 162) and championing, against 'the worst side of democracy, the shoddy, traditionless, destructive urban emptiness', 'tradition, order, community and productive labour... in intimate harmony with a natural world that [is] cherished' (ibid. p. 163): ideas which 'seem to [Hughes] good and right for every time and every place' (ibid.).

The advocacy of reason over the affective faculties has, historically, imposed on children as much as women. The child's mind is 'far closer [than ours] to the real laws of its real nature. It is a new beginning, coming to

circumstances afresh. It is still lost in the honest amoebic struggle to fit itself to the mysteries' ('Children as Writers 2' 1975 p. iii; Sagar 1983 p. 297). Via his children's writing, essays on education, teaching and such work as the Arvon foundation, Hughes has rested his faith in these beginnings. 'A personal concern for the natural life around us, on which we depend more closely than was suspected until very recently... is passive in most of us. I imagine we are agreed that the possibility of making it active, and even creative, lies with local schools rather than with national or even regional government' (1972 'Letter' p. 2). His hope is less the chiliast's than that, if society continue to evolve, shedding outmoded paradigms, it will be equal to new difficulties: 'our Civilisation' now seems 'an evolutionary dead-end' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 P. 186), like the industries whose ossification and death Remains of Elmet represents. Hughes' frustration with our 'shrunkened, atrophied' Queen's English stems primarily from its ceasing to evolve three centuries ago: an important poet, like Douglas, 'is a renovater of language' (1963 'Douglas'; Faas 1980 p. 170). Indeed our anomie can 'watch the whole world gradually disintegrate without lifting a finger... as if all history were over' (1970 'Myth' p. 60).

'While Politicians, Sociologists, Economists, Theologians, Philosophers and the rest pick over the stucco rubble of a collapsed civilisation, the Conservationists are nursing a new global era' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 p. 187): Hughes' 'polyhistoric eclecticism' (Faas 1980 p. 49) and his anthropologist's overview lead him to mistrust the old analytical fragmentations. The most important consequence of holistic thinking has been the recognition of the earth as one system, to whose requirements we are inextricably bound. 'Our sudden alertness to the wholeness of nature, and the lateness of the hour, is only the crest of a deeper excitement and readiness...: the re-emergence of Nature as the Great Goddess of mankind, and the Mother of all life' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 p. 187). When, in 'Revenge Fable', 'With all her babes in her arms', Nature dies, the man's 'head [falls] off like a leaf' (another mean-

ing here being that rejecting the 'feminine' results in a Cartesian dissociation of a man's mind and body). In 'Brambles', Hughes compares the brambles in a wood to the cells in his body: 'They too crown a plant/ Of peculiar numbness' - yet, somehow, a living whole.

Hughes recognises quantum physicists' role in dismantling the Newtonian world-model: 'their "rationality" has evaporated in an astonished watchfulness and the struggle to keep a grasp on the human dimension.... They've landed themselves... in a delicately balanced... Creation, at the backdoor of the... "supernatural".... The only respectable sanities to survive undiscredited' may 'be physics and art' (1964 'Superstitions'; Faas 1980 pp. 172-3).

Physics has converged with 'the wild Heraclitean/ Buddhist notion that the entire Universe is basically made of fire' (*ibid.* p. 172), substituting rhythm for matter, interaction for objects, relativity for absolutes. It is this same concept of rhythm - 'characteristic speech patterns, body movements, [and] gestures' (Capra 1983 p. 327) - which Hughes adapts when he suggests we can 'see everything, the whole biography' of someone 'in one flash' through their walk (Poetry in the Making, pp. 120-121), or when the enemies meet in 'Law in the Country of Cats'. Interviewed on Orghast, he associated this 'flash' recognition with the pure expression of spiritual being in some calls and voices (1971 'Talking Without Words'; Faas 1980 p. 190). 'In real speech... what is being said is not nearly so important as the exchange of animal voices and expressions' (1971 Shakespeare p. 11). The idea of organic growth-rhythms is certainly central to Hughes' poetry, the image of the dancing gnats in 'Gnat-Psalm' being the same Coleridge adopted to illustrate his sense of the systolic/diastolic play of energies in a living poem.

Hughes has shown interest in the rehabilitation of fields - extrasensory perception and the occult - disregarded by Cartesian scientism; whilst his advocacy of Jungian psychology approaches, as Faas suggest, the didactic (Faas 1980 p. 51). Jung's essential tenets - the need for psychic 'individuation', the revalorization of the feminine principle, the law of 'enantiodromia', and

the restorative nature of artistic ritual - underlie all Hughes' writing: already, by the 1950s, he considered Jung 'the philosopher of the next hundred years' (reported by Redgrove in Sagar 1983 p. 93). 'I think I have read all [Jung's] translated volumes', he told Faas (23/8/77: Faas 1980 p. 37). 'I've avoided knowing them too well, which no doubt frees me to use them all the more.'

1b: Poetry and Ecology

Jung believed 'all art intuitively apprehends coming changes in the collective unconscious' (Jung 1964 p. 83). Just, then, as the artistic revolution of the Renaissance (and the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo) fed into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' socio-scientific upheavals, and the return to stability under Descartes' and Newton's world-models, so the Romantic reaction, and then the ideas of quantum physics and natural ecology, become the driving force behind the chaos of our own search for different paradigms, for a new harmony between ourselves and our conception of our universe.

This thesis contends that Hughes' work is the most complex and intriguing translation of the new thinking into poetry, at (as for Shakespeare) Capra's 'turning point'. Its complexity, and its uniqueness, evidence the difficulties inherent in this negotiation: ecology, and the significance of its recruitment of the imagination, have yet, for English literature, to make their mark, in the way, perhaps, they have for history (Toynbee's Mankind and Mother Earth) or philosophy (Mannison, McRobbie and Rowley's Environmental Philosophy, etc.).

Ecological thinkers like Roszak, J. Donald Hughes and Fritjof Capra repeatedly invoke the support of poetry (or write it); 'ecological consciousness seems most vibrant in the poetic mode', suggest Devall and Sessions hopefully (1985 p. 102). The 'quark' was christened from Finnegans Wake, Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis by William Golding. Yet despite the examples of Arthur Koestler, Wendell Berry or Gary Snyder (and Vladimir Rasputin whose environmental campaigning, he maintains, leaves him no time to write) poets and novelists in

this century have hardly begun to re-occupy the positions of cultural answerability which might seem incumbent upon them. (See, for instance, Spender's 'Inside the Cage' in The Making of a Poem, 1955 pp. 14-34.) Hughes has denounced (rather simplistically) what he understands, not as the heroism, but the retreat of despair - the clinging to old anonymities - of, for example, the 'Beckett-rat, a solitary, hysterical, apathetic, mentally decomposed combination of rat-organs' which 'falls disintegrating through starry space' (1964 'Oppug-nancy' p. 840).

ESTRAGON: We should turn resolutely towards Nature.

VLADIMIR: We've tried that.

ESTRAGON: True.

(Waiting for Godot, pp. 64-5).

Critics remain equally silent: D. I. Janik's essay, 'Environmental Consciousness in Modern Literature' (in J. D. Hughes and R. C. Schulz ed. Ecological Con-sciousness, Washington D. C. 1981) discusses the cases of Lawrence, Huxley, Jeffers and Snyder; nor are the issues ultimately dissociable from the whole Blakean, Modernist, Transcendental and Feminist traditions. John Lane's The Death and Resurrection of the Arts, published under the aegis of The Green Alliance in 1982, only begs more questions, since as an equalitarian Lane sees no answer to the 'ever-increasing symptoms of infantilism, narcissism [and] loss of function' in the arts except in the rejection, for craft and process, of the 'Renaissance' model of the Maker as privileged solitary. The privileges and significance accorded the individual visionary - Shaman, bard or Michel-angelo - happily or otherwise - are surely a human constant.

Confining oneself to environmental consciousness in contemporary British poetry, one finds informed concern, but little (even in Ramsay's Transformation or Common Ground's Trees Be Company) to demonstrate the subject's amenability to imaginative writing, let alone their game-ness. In 1988, Michael Kirkup and Edward Bond edited a small anthology - Tidelines - in aid of the Druridge Bay Campaign. Everyone - from R. S. Thomas to Anne Stevenson and Ursula Fan-thorpe - showed willing, but no important poems emerged. Macbeth's 'The Kill-

ing' represents the world-wide consequences of Promethean crusades against disease and mortality; Mahon's 'The Banished Gods' is particularly informed, but characteristically defeatist; one could propose Larkin's 'Going, Going' - or, to be fairer to him, 'The Mower'; Harrison's 'Art and Extinction' sonnets; or Tomlinson's 'Hedgerows'; yet Hughes' response is something quite different.

In prose, Lessing's achievement stands near Hughes'; and there seem parallels between Hughes and Adrienne Rich (a commitment served by ruthless poetic intellectualism, and by occasional bloodthirstiness). Faas (1980 pp. 23ff.) sets Hughes within the American 'new' poetry. Comparison here, however, recalls to me Hughes' early remarks on Dickinson: 'like Whitman and Emerson... she has been enlightened by an ecstatic vision.... But she is more interesting than Whitman or Emerson, and more up-to-date, in that she is not sure she likes the looks of this soul-thing. Her ecstasy... is also terror' (1963 'Dickinson'; Faas 1980 p. 168). Modernism's response to Relativity - to juxtapose, fragment and disorder - has born more fruit perhaps in the novel than the lyric. Robert Duncan, certainly, shared Hughes' interest in alchemy and Caballism, but not until River was any similarity in results perceptible. More relevant here are Jeffers, Snyder and Wendell Berry, digging their vegetable beds in the sacred grove. Jeffers had something of Hughes' force, though Hughes - except in Gaudete - lacks his peculiar naiveté; he was probably recalling Jeffers' most powerful poem, 'Hurt Hawks', when he wrote 'Orf'. Hughes' exact contemporary (and another anthropology student), Gary Snyder, enjoys Hughes' faith in 'the voice of nature herself, whom the ancient poets called the great goddess, the Magna Mater' (Snyder 1974 p. 107), and, though more consistently drawn to Eastern mysticism, shares, with Rothenberg, Dorn and others, his love of Trickster- and other 'primitive' literatures. (Hughes was evidently unaware of this interest when in 1965 he suggested 'primitive literature... has not arrived' except in Plath's case (1965 'Greenway'; Faas 1980 p. 177). Wendell Berry's poetry is much closer to the Wordsworthian (English) tradition: his imagery of nature's turning wheel and river closely resembles Hughes', and Farming: A Hand Book,

1970, bears obvious affinities to the Moortown Diary.

To move from Snyder's 'Mother Earth, Her Whales' to Heathcote Williams' celebrations of dolphins, whales and elephants may be to recognise a more significant achievement. 'The poem is overwhelming', Hughes wrote of Whale Nation: 'brilliant, cunning, dramatic and wonderfully moving, a steady accumulation of grandeur and dreadfulness - and never any sense of exploiting the subject for poetic or literary effects, just a measured unfolding of real things from the heart of the subject' (Williams 1988, blurb). The Hughesian quality of voice - grand, colloquial, embossed, submerged - is unmistakable, but the book abstracts more - about whales - than it ploughs back - in linguistic innovation - which, within the 'tradition', seems bad literary husbandry.

Perhaps one should not ask ^{for} 'major' ecological literature in our patriarchal, hubristic, gigantified culture's sense of the word. River (whilst being enlarged by its place in Hughes' oeuvre) lays to rest many of his own aspirations and Redgrove judged it 'small' (beside Perse's Pluies, Neiges and Amers); yet concludes that its capacity to awaken the Imagination 'is perhaps one of the principal "great" things we should ask of any poet of our time' (Redgrove 1983 p. 1238).

An ecological aesthetic: a poem should be 'a new species of creature', a 'unique living reality' with an inner gravity and an outer home-spot, Gaster's 'topocosm'. It should be 'intricately organic, jumping about'. If Flaubert changed a word, the butterfly-effect transformed pages. 'The words [should] lie in precise and yet somehow free relationships', an elaborately-worked 'mosaic, pictogram concentration', the 'texture of the language solid', acknowledging paper's worth. It should not be too grave, but 'riddling, oblique', full of 'games - of opposites, parallels, mirrors, chinese puzzles', 'weird music and patterning [and] unfailing surprise', 'the most extraordinary jumble of styles'. Yet it should be 'selfless' in 'trial and error exploration', 'wary pursuit of the actualities beyond', infinitely sensitive to the individual words we have already 'given an abnormal testing', 'saturated with the

homeliest imagery and experience', 'a utility general-purpose style'. It should respect process, craftsmanship, appearing 'freakishly homemade' by the 'back-yard improvisation' of Intermediate Technology, recycled 'out of whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying around,' culturally eclectic. Above all, it should not be a photograph, nor a jigsaw-puzzle, but a window, open on 'the teeming carnival of world-life'.

The quotations all come from Hughes' critical advocacy (of Shakespeare, Dickinson, Thomas, Riding, Popa, Pilinszky and Douglas) and apply (variously) to his own work, lest one suppose he has only broken the dead wood. His poetry lacks, of course, the classic poise, the ease of attainment of a constant quality, which writers working in a mature tradition enjoy. He is, occasionally, shoddy, excessive, sprawling, superficial. But he remains committed - reconciling us to death, as bodily super-repair,¹ in Wodwo; exploring, in Crow, how Anarchy - Crow's 'black flag' - can mature towards new, green positives; diagnosing our sickness in Gaudete and Earth-Numb; celebrating the recovery of nature's 'spirit-confidence' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980p. 186) in the Moor-town Diary, and the cosmic dance of particle physics in River. Most importantly and strangely of all perhaps, his poetry does not falter in the optimism crowning the big cycles - in 'Littleblood', 'The Risen', 'Your Tree - Your Oak', or 'Salmon Eggs'.

2a: David Holbrook on Hughes

Some of the most bizarre remarks on Hughes have come from David Holbrook, who, as a Leavisite, will concur with half I have said: 'we have to free ourselves from the "bonds of Newtonian abstraction".... This is Blake's cause: but Ted Hughes is on the other side' (Holbrook 1977 p. 114), having 'for his own reasons clung to objectivity and reduction' (ibid. p. 148). 'What Hughes takes for "brutal truth" is out of date, and in fact arises from the belated effects in the Humanities of out-of-date nineteenth-century natural science' (ibid. p. 133).

¹ Death 'repairs' all time's ravages by necessitating (and leading to) new births.

'The message of Samuel Beckett's cult of inanition has sunk dismally home' (ibid. p. 138): Hughes 'omits... any recognition of creative potentialities in man, by which he might be persuaded to live in harmony with the animals' (ibid. p. 109); 'his poetry denies, in its insistence on dissociation, the imaginative links between man and his world' (ibid. p. 112). 'This is the price to pay for accepting the "scientific" universe' (ibid. p. 126),

Holbrook's arraignment of Hughes somewhat resembles Hughes' very partial one (in 1970) of Shakespeare. Allowing Holbrook's competence (his critique of 'Thrushes' is curiously perfunctory: he (mis-) prints the poem as prose, and remarks the result sounds 'clumsy and awkward' (ibid. p. 103), two questions seem begged: Hughes' genuine retention of 'philosophies of life based on natural scientism' (ibid. p. 118), and - a problem at the heart of ecological thinking - the reconcilability of visionary humanism and the conservationist's perspective.

2b: Hughes' 'Natural Scientism'

Unlike Holbrook, Hughes has never publicly questioned the idea of evolution, nature's red claws. Hughes' natural religion, however - his sense of the sacredness of the whole, process and product indistinguishable - could itself leave evolution resembling more Leavis' teleological nissus than Darwin's blind chance: our development was in the Goddess' hands (Hughes, sometimes, does consider us her darling, an end of selection). Less significantly, How the Whale Became proposes a self-conscious, Lamarckian evolution; whilst, fifteen years later, Tales of the Early World is more nearly creationist. Hughes has adopted Schopenhauer's idea of the 'will' (to survive natural selection); Bradshaw (Williams 1979 pp. 101ff.) considers his idea of the 'crime of life' - survival at others' expense - over-simplifies Schopenhauer, but Hughes' position here is ambiguous, and best considered later.

Humanists (and ecologists) reject Darwin's evolution generally because

they assume it to promote more of mechanistic simplicity and brutal competitiveness than they find in nature or want in society. Hughes' early 'Thrushes' inhabit this conception of Darwin's universe - 'More coiled steel than living... No indolent procrastinations and no yawning stares'; only humans (like Jane Austen) seem betrayed into the impertinences of culture, 'Carving at a tiny ivory ornament/ For years'. This is a poor poem, not least since, for every minute's hunting, thrushes spend five precisely in 'indolent procrastinations'. They sing, too: 'Evening Thrush' (1975; Season Songs) might specifically answer for the earlier poem. The bird is singing - that is, 'carving':

Switing¹ idols,
Rough pre-Goidelic gods and goddesses,
Out of old bits of churchyard yew.

Hughes' poetry attains the sense that, somehow, the exigencies of survival (Darwinian or otherwise) generate, everywhere, every kind of 'useless excess' ('The Skylark came').

The Peacock butterfly, pulsing
On a September thistle-top
Is just as surely a hole
In what was likely...
(*'Photostomias 2'*).

'It's no use so why do I do it' ('Wodwo'). Poetry, culture, might seem only another part of nature's exuberance. The reductive pseudo-Darwinian efficiency our society espouses, 'giving' nothing, simply betrays earth's prodigality.

Once upon a time there was a girl [Eng-land]
Who tried to give her mouth
It was snatched from her and her face slapped...
(*'Crow's Song About England'*).

The obvious, but nevertheless significant, definition of 'life' in terms of its resistance to general entropy, its 'excess', was first proposed by Schrodinger in What Is Life? (and claimed by Duncan as the inspiration of his poetry - see Nemerov 1966 p. 133). Hughes - say 'birth' for 'life' here - concurs:

¹'Cutting' (Devon dialect)

But who is stronger than death?

Me, evidently.

Pass, Crow.

('Examination at the Womb-Door').

Grevel Lindop thinks the 'mechanical imagery' for the creatures in Flowers and Insects '[generates] a sense of deadness and [suggests] that the poet is cherishing a subtle dislike of his material' (Lindop 1987 p. 244). Descartes believed animals' cries of pain are the squealings of malfunctioning machinery; but when the mature Hughes describes, for instance, the world as a heap of discrete atoms, he is emphasising, in metaphor, its paradoxical spirituality, or satirising the Cartesian paradigm, or both. Only once, perhaps - 'Pibroch', which must be seen in the context of Wodwo - does his world-view remain 'reductive', in the Cartesian sense.

'A keen feeling for a biological law - the biological struggle against entropy - quickly sprouts its social and political formulations, with all the attendant dangers of abstract language' (1980 'Williamson' p. 162). Williamson's (Darwinian) vision of nature 'led him to imagine a society based on natural law, a hierarchic society' (*ibid.* p. 163). Hughes' politics resemble, at best, that aspect of ecological thinking (Schumacher's) which emphasises order and tradition; it seems fortunate - or telling - he has never (except qua Laureate) written towards specific political ends. Reviewing Vitus Dröscher's Mysterious Senses, however ('Oppugnancy'), Hughes is intrigued by an experiment reproducing all symptoms of modern society's sickness by alienating from its subjects 'the primordial cellular law of animal life: the law of degree.... They no longer have nature behind them, though no doubt they're full of rationale and consider themselves the first of free' - well, not people, rats. But Hughes' rhetorical coup, and invocation of Shakespeare's Ulysses, should not obscure the disturbing implications here. Body-cells are precisely not organized hierarchically: as Hughes admitted by 1970, 'every cell is sacred to every other, and all are interdependent' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 p. 187). The priv-

illegals discontinued the rats was that of males to maintain territories (each cage, having doors to two others, was indefensible) - as if, in Hughes' ideal society, women are guinea-pigs. Finally, the natural order of one male per territory exemplifies pseudo-Darwinian (free market) competition less than could the free-for-all pecking-order - 'unnatural' on Hughes' terms too - which such experiments (on mice at least) do generate.

The irreconcilability of Hughes' vision with the sentimental, pacific utopian's is obvious: like Jung, he emphasises the 'violent, chaotic nature of the liberated imagination, as well as the chaos succeeding its suppression. (Though one should remember even Snyder's rejection of 'otherworldly philosophies', his celebration of the 'food-web... the scary, beautiful condition of the biosphere' (1983; Devall and Sessions 1985 p. 13).) Early in his career, Hughes espoused Freud's questionable concept of Thanatos - a death-force, and by analogue force of evil, equal to the life-force. Freud was 'alarmed' by 'the possibilities of what a child might absorb from its lineage' (1964 'Superstitions' p. 500), from: 'the dead... with their revenge' ('O White Élite Lotus'). Cruelty - 'the turmoil of history, the convulsion/ In the roots of blood, in the cycles of concurrence' ('Ghost Crabs') seems 'of the species' ('Wilfred Owen's Photographs'), 'a nature whose very abandoned bones / Will be an outpost of weapons' ('O White Élite Lotus'). Faas (1980 pp. 27-28) suggests Hughes soon modified this dualism, in terms of Lorenz's hypothesis - sounder science - that our aggressive impulses are naturally modified by inbuilt, social mechanisms.

'Life is Trying to be Life'

Death also is trying to be life.

Certainly, in 1970, Max Nicholson's enthusiasm could convince him 'that we are not hopelessly in the grip of our... stupidity and greed' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 p. 188). Lorenz's biological determinism, however, remains antipathetic to the ecologist's idea that it is 'by repressing feeling, sentiment,

intuition, we have ended up with an ~~in~~ complete, degraded and horribly aggressive image of human nature' (Porritt 1984 p. 107); that, in Spinoza's vision, evil is the outcome of an unlived life. Given Hughes' interest in relativity, environment, and the formative influence upon character of deliberate, cultural mechanism ('rituals and dogma'), it seems disappointing he has adhered to the deterministic theory so much.

I have suggested that Hughes dramatises, pessimistically, the 'bigotry and the especially rabid evangelism of the inhuman' he finds in our society, anticipating 'a literal world-sacrifice, as we all too truly now fear' (1962 'Baskin'; Faas 1980 p. 167). A Holbrook, however, would be mistaken in interpreting this bang/whimper vision of 'Universal Schizophrenia with its two heads ... the omnipotent infantile bomb... and the cast-off snake-skin of a civilization' (1962 Dogs) as defeatism. Hughes invokes Schopenhauer's 'will' (to survive at all costs) to applaud Nicholson's The Environmental Revolution: 'in contrast to the hopeless gloom of all comment on our civilisation, it is right that his tone should be so hopeful, and his will so purposeful.... He makes it seem possible that we can come to our senses in time' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 p. 188). Like many critics, Faas remarks the 'puzzling split between the poet-prophet of apocalyptic doom and the philosopher-storyteller dreaming up the impossible solution' (in Sagar 1983 p. 119) - between 'Hughes' relative optimism as storyteller-critic and his uncompromising vision as vatic poet' (ibid. p. 122) - and, true to his times, assumes 'the latter voice in [sic] his more truthful one' (ibid.). Such categorization seems not only to miss the delicate balance between hope and gloom within Hughes' cycles (and to beg the question 'optimism about what?' - Cartesian folly or conscious dualism?) but completely to misrepresent Hughes' idealism and purpose. Apropos of the Moor-town Diary (1978 'Tape') Hughes defines 'upbeat' and 'downbeat' poems, which leave us cheered and uplifted, or downcast. An 'upbeat' poem controls the climaxes of all his cycles. (Faas assumes '"Bride and groom lie hidden for

three days" seems to draw on the lighter and more optimistic tone of Hughes' poems for children' (Sagar 1983 pp. 123-4) so can be dismissed.) Crow never despairs. The 'upbeat' ends and hopes are offspring, not hostages or betrayers, of the 'downbeat' texts and fears. 'The pessimism of the theme is an inevitable part of the working out of the theme' (Hughes to Faas, on Gaudete: Sagar 1983 p. 120).

2c: Contradictory Influences of Blake and Graves

As late as 1975 David Holbrook was able to ridicule Hughes' 'fashionable Sunday newspaper preoccupation with the Ecocatastrophe', belonging 'more to the... colour supplements... than science or serious biology of ultimate concern' (Abbs 1975 p. 32). Holbrook's concern is to awaken humanity from Newton's Sleep, without subjecting us, instead, to environmental imperatives, or to 'the capacity of the witch-doctor to evoke spectres, or the hysterical projections of the occultist' (Holbrook 1977 p. 150).

Soon after its publication, Hughes' schoolmaster presented him with the copy of The White Goddess which was to remain his companion for years; 'if I could dig to the bottom of my strata', he told Faas in 1971, 'maybe [Blake's name] and works would be the deepest traces' (Faas 1980 p. 202). Blake and Graves' antithetical evaluations of the Druids, Ezekiel, or Shakespeare's quarrel with Nature, only imply the profound irreconcilability of their response to their society's predicament. Hughes' position has been associated fairly uncritically with Blake's by Sagar and Scigaj, whilst I shall imply his affinities to Graves may go deeper; the incompatibility of these primary models, however, can be defined to demonstrate synecdochically the radical split not only in Hughes' thinking but ecologists' in general: between, on one side, the Visionary Humanism of Blake (Holbrook) and the whole Platonic/ Human Potential/ New Age/ Aquarian Conspiracy bandwagon; and, on the other, Graves' mysticism, scientific environmentalism, and much of Jung or Lawrence's thought.

Aquarians claim a role, according to the Chain of Being, of stewardship over, or transcendence of, a Nature best loved tamed in farms or gardens or, in Blake's case, regarded with real hostility ('Nature teaches nothing of Spiritual Life'; 'where man is not[,] nature is barren'; 'Nature is the work of the Devil'). The environmentalist's sense of our apartness from nature is the opposite: we are, and will remain, an evolutionary disaster who must, by interfering as little as possible, at least become answerable for our 'fallen' destructiveness. The ideal of Taoism, comparably, is a return to the neolithic, whilst John Fowles - whose critique of masculinity resembles Hughes' - writes of our 'black soul... bred by that disastrously arrogant aspect of Christianity (and other male-dominated religions) which supposed man to be in God's image and duly appointed him, like some hopelessly venal and ultimately crazed gamekeeper, the steward of all creation. Given the proliferating and savagely parasitical species mankind is, that was to place our destiny in the power of the rat, the locust, the plague' (King and Clifford 1989 p. xiv).

Natural 'Energy' is the second, 'Marriage' (to anima/ animus) the third fold of Blake's Four-fold vision; for Graves, the Goddess is an absolute of Energy no man can unite with. His poet, therefore, worships and yearns towards the unattainable, from his fallen state - a solitary, whose sickness shamanically redeems the community's. For Blake, the poet's vision equates to the ideal citizen's: since a man's ('all souls are male') perceptions and artistic statements determine perceived 'reality', culture is the essence of human experience (a transcendence of the Graeco-Roman tradition not being entertained). Blake's Urizen is a figure of contempt, his rationalism alone obscuring (as excessive emphasis on guilt and responsibility will) the species' nobility: for all the discouragements of history, human perfectability is never questioned. The 'Gravesian' orientation, respecting 'tradition' more than 'culture', envisages unending negotiations with our baser nature, sanctioning ritual control, even sacrifice or organized warfare. 'If' - Jung's enantiodromia - 'the fathers

drag down the balance on the side of love, peace, and production... the balance will spring back violently to hate, rage, and destruction' (Lawrence 1936 p. 529).

Ultimately, the tension here is that between today's humanist, whose paramount concern is humans' consciousness, best impulses and welfare, and homo religiosus (nowadays, the 'fanatic'), who subordinates these concerns to divine demands. (Unless, that is, humanists' translation of the requirements of personal relationships into universal terms becomes as much an illogical, tyrannizing absolute as any religion's.) Humanists like Holbrook have assumed that (as, already, for Animal Rights terrorists) Hughes' earth-worship demands just this subordination; I argue, however, that, on these terms - too crude to be critically meaningful - he remains a 'secular humanist'. His interest in Shamans concerns their analeptic powers, never their supernatural allegiance.

Hughes' Blakean revolt against the Puritanical ambience of his childhood cannot be over-estimated. But his interpretation of Blake as one of the great 'poets of violence' (Faas 1980 p. 198) is obviously partial, as are his comparisons of 'Jaguar' and 'Second Glance at a Jaguar' with 'The Tyger' (ibid.). Not until his story 'The Guardian' of 1987 does he depotentiate his tiger to Blake's extent. (Plato's 'Guardians' were humanized shamans.) Hughes at once believes the Neoplatonic, alchemical tradition an 'artery' of English poetry, going underground with Shakespeare and resurfacing in Blake (Skea, 1990, interprets Remains of Elmet in terms of a dualistic 'imprisonment of light in matter and final apocalyptic release') and, like Graves, considers Plato (and, in Shakespeare's Prospero, hermetic theurgy) behind our tragic inheritance of dissociated mind and matter, reason and corporeal spirit. In many early poems, he expresses the conservationist's sense that our consciousness, our humanity, inevitably alienates us from natural energies and the Goddess in nature. In the visionary work, however, cultural continuities are celebrated and the Goddess seems precisely realised enough to ask a devotee - whose speech, and human form, should transcend inhuman matter in communion with her: for 'The Risen', earth is a mere 'shell', recalling Blake's 'Mundane Shell'

of unilluminated nature. Though the Christian doctrine, that nature requires a 'steward', seems an alarming self-deception, the sense that, in evolution, we are - consciousness is - something new and special, need not be. Recently, though, Hughes has re-emphasised the ugliness, and dangers, in our fallen state, and the inevitable opposition of nature and culture. 'Big noisy monkeys' (What is the Truth? p. 14), we are simply 'the crime' ('The Black Rhino') against earth. 'Creatures are [our] toys. Some [we] keep, some [we] break.... Not even the swiftest' 'escape unbroken' (What is the Truth? p. 99). The 'Foetal Twins'' pejorism doesn't only mock our politicians' 'hopeless gloom':

BOTH TWINS (singing):

Man's brain is such a toxin
(O hear our foetal shout)
Nothing surer than man's brain
Will wipe the menace out....

Then off to bed, for every head's
In labour with the pains
Until the Monkey Mutant
Can bear a brain with brains.
(*'First Things First'*).

2d: Zen, Memory, Subjectivity

This interpretation of 'Blakean' and 'Gravesian' poles in Hughes' poetry can help to illuminate his response to Buddhistic philosophies, memory, and subjectivity. Graves (1961 p. 484) dismisses all oriental monism as 'the unchivalrous rejection of the Goddess'; Lawrence, too, attacks 'the Nirvanists'' idea of 'man as a fixed entity, a changeless ego, which is capable of nothing, ultimately, but reemerging into the infinite' (Lawrence 1968 p. 457). A Scigaj, therefore, discussing Hughes' Buddhist affiliations, must recall the apparent association of oriental and Platonic 'Illusions' in 'The Perfect Forms' and (according to Sagar, 1978 p. 76) 'Gog III', and the Gravesian prejudice still informing: 'That plastic Buddha jars out a Karate screech' ('Do not Pick up the Telephone').

Blake believed imaginative poetry irreconcilable with 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', with 'imitation of Nature's Images drawn from Remembrance' (Milton II, 41 l. 24). Lawrence, here, concurs: 'there is no revelation of God in memory. Memory is not truth' (1968 p. 414). Plotinus suggested to remember implies having forgotten, so appertains to Illusion, never to recognition of the Forms. But here is Hughes: 'in my experience, it is a help to give pupils some time to carry the subject in their heads before they begin to write' (Poetry in the Making p. 23). He composed 'Pike' 'by looking at the [pond] in [his] memory very hard and very carefully' (ibid. p. 21) and wrote 'The Thought-Fox' 'years after those events' that inspire it (ibid. p. 19).

'All imaginative writing is to some extent the voice of what is neglected or forbidden, hence its connection with the past in a nostalgic vein' (ibid. p. 51), its provocation of 'a turmoil of memory and association' (1976 'Myth' p. 86). The exclusions of memory, and the recollection of traditions, are central to the 'Gravesian' vision. Just as Freudian psychoanalysis involves anamnesis, shamanic rituals (see Eliade 1960 p. 234) re-enact the Fall and a rebirth from Nature's womb. Primitives often believe a dying person must recall their whole life.

This is why it was Mnemosyne whom Apollo suppressed as the Muses' parent: to remember origins is to gain magical, or imaginative, power. As Bergson first recognised, 'memory' defines two distinct phenomena: the 'abstractive memory' (Koestler 1978 p. 48) of mechanical association; and eidetic, holistic recall. Wordsworth's 'recollection' can imply a bodily arrest as much as Blake's 'imagination': 'past' is not hierarchically subjected to, but co-exists with, 'present'. 'In the poetic act, time is suspended' (Graves 1961 p. 343). This is precisely the phenomenon Hughes' 'May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place' ('The Horses') evokes. The self-mutilation in bereavement he celebrates in 'After the first fright' (and defined to Gifford and Roberts (1981 pp. 259-260)) heals by bridging the time-gap, pain to remembrance, in just this manner.

Hughes' move from Mytholmroyd to Mexborough 'Sealed off [his] first seven years I've remembered almost everything because it was sealed off in that particular way and became a... subsidiary brain for me' (in Sagar 1983 p. 4).

Six years into her posthumous life
My uncle raises my Mother's face
And says Yes he would love a cup of tea.
(Remains of Elmet p. 7).

Nostalgia - the subordination of past to present emotion - seems alien to Hughes (though Remains of Elmet involves it). So does that tradition of nature poetry domesticating landscape by framing it, along with everyday human concerns, inside the 'abstractive' memory. Most of Hughes' nature poetry describes the North Devon countryside, a far remove from his native Calder gorge; the Moor-town Diary tries to avoid 'mingling' natural description with 'memory and conscience' (of the dualistic, abstractive kind) 'altogether' (1978 'Tape').

Scigaj suggests Hughes' 'epistemology of the act of perception' is 'essentially Blakean' (1986 p. 281). Hughes' first ideas seem an old-fashioned essentialist's, assuming the objective reality of nature - or Graves' Goddess - and the perceiver's privileged exclusion from this reality - and satirising Buddha, 'whose one thought fills immensity' ('The Perfect Forms'). Dualistic essentialism is not easily reconcilable however, Hughes seems to have admitted, with his critique of Descartes and ideal of implication within nature: 'my poems... are attempts to prove the realness of the world, and of myself in this world, by establishing the realness of my relation to it. Another way of saying this might be - the poems celebrate the pure solidity of my illusion of the world' (in Summerfield 1974 p. 126).

The critique of Sartre, who 'regrows the world inside his skull' ('Wings') concerns, Davis (1990) suggests, the existentialists' subordination of perceived other to perceiving self, a hierarchy merely inverting the essentialists' and which Hughes' visionary work may not wholly avoid: 'what you find in the outside world is what has escaped from your own inner world' (Hughes in Sagar 1983 p. 292).

Blake's own ideal, 'to be seen and seeing', bypasses the impositions both of the objective, and subjective, stare, as (applied more or less symbolically to the macroscopic world) does 'Copenhagen school' quantum mechanics' continuum of subject and object, matter and consciousness (a particle's behaviour can depend on the experimenter's expectations). Beauty and the beholder's eye are in each other, then, and aesthetic or abstract absolutes - Graves' Goddess, Pirsig's 'quality' - become innocuous, perhaps philosophically required. How far Hughes' interest in quantum physics extends I am unsure, but I feel a deconstruction stopping before the reality of the earth, and no undue contemplation of inconceivables, are at least his ideals. 'Morality is that delicate, for ever trembling and changing balance between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness' (Lawrence 1936 p. 528).

Words retreated, suddenly afraid
Into the skull of a dead jester
Taking the whole world with them -

But the world did not notice.

And Crow yawned - long ago
He had picked that skull empty.
(*'The Battle of Osfrontalis'*).

3a: Graham Bradshaw on Hughes

Holbrook's Leavisite response to Hughes is articulated much better by Graham Bradshaw. Again, however, an essay like 'Hughes and Shakespeare' (Sagar 1983 pp. 52-69) seems full of misconstructions. The problem, I believe, inheres in Bradshaw's refusal to allow that 'Nature' and 'Morality' mean, not even opposite, but unrelated things to Hughes and himself. For Bradshaw, 'Nature' is conditioned by culture - our (or J. F. Danby's) synthetic dyad of 'natural goodness' (Cordelia) and 'natural bestiality' (Goneril). And if our culture's history reveals our natures as wholly 'bestial', and Cordelia a poetic figment, only un-natural Reason and restraint can preserve that culture. 'Should Prospero

concede Caliban's title?... Miranda would be raped, and Prospero would be paunched with a stake - long live the Goddess!' (ibid. p. 64). Hughes, to recapitulate, would maintain Nature - the Goddess - is neither 'good' nor 'bestial' - how we respond to her merely colours her manifestations. 'Snowdrops' ('The Crown of the Kingdom') are 'all Cordelias./ Or else all green-veined Gonerils': it is our choice. Only if Prospero/ Shakespeare rejects the Goddess, restraining Caliban, will Caliban grow vicious - and then only imaginative negotiation - Crow drilling holes in his 'nose' and lulling the dragon with flute-notes ('A Lucky Folly') - can redeem us.

In 'The Cult of Irrationality', Bradshaw impugns the mauvaise foi of critics who do not recognise Hughes' remarks on the need to 'create rituals and dogma' to contain the Goddess' 'energy' (Faas 1980 p. 200) as 'facile irrationality, nostalgic primitivism, and [a] sweepingly dismissive attitude towards "civilisation"' (Bradshaw 1981 pp. 79-80) in the Blakean sense. 'We can joyfully [castigate] those who won't worship Nature and "accept the Goddess" or we can join in the Knocking Rationality game' (ibid. p. 75). 'My fears for my children's future don't issue from a belief that there is an excess of rationality in our troubled times' (ibid. p. 81). Bradshaw allies himself to Leavis' statement (actually his paraphrase of Marjorie Grene) that 'the Cartesian-Newtonian dualism must be exorcised from the Western mind' (Leavis 1975), but scarcely envisages the repercussions. Allowing Gifford and Roberts that environmentalism is the 'practical side' of Goddess-worship (Bradshaw 1981 p. 78), he suggests 'practicality' is itself a Cartesian concept. It seems a useful one to me, if you want to survive - what is Cartesian being the dissociation of 'ideal' and 'practice'.

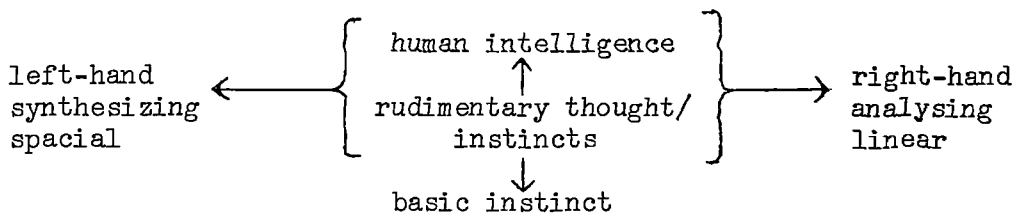
3b: Reason

Bradshaw's misunderstandings really seem to concern terminology: 'Reason', 'Ritual'. By 'Reason' ('Logic', 'Rationality') a humanist signifies everyone's

capacity to suppress or to over-ride instinct - to think. Hughes, meanwhile, signifies a particular, rigidly-interpreted method of suppression: a habit of thinking (linear, dualistic) which eliminates alternative methods (such as the use of the imagination) and eventually refuses to admit them:

left-hand, irrational, female, bestial	←————→	right-hand, civilized, male, human
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The brain's (imprecise) bicameral organization really has nothing to do with the hierarchy of brain-stem, limbic system and neocortex:



'Primitive man' - consider the computational feats of south-seas navigators -
'is no more logical or illogical than we are' (Jung 1964 p. 52).

Thought, I love thought....

Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending.

(Lawrence: 'Thought').

Thus Blake's Fourfold Vision involves Urizen's Reason: one limited means of being human, of thinking. Since this 'Reason' is reductive, oppugning (like Hughes' hostile critics) realms of experience it can't understand, Urizen has only a quarter-brain, a low forehead: Snyder - following Lévi-Strauss - points to the diminution of our brain-capacity since Neanderthal times; 'our brain case shrinks, our thyroid glands are going to sleep, our adrenal glands are withering' (1962 'Man and Superman'). 'Reason' sponsors 'convergent' (Tyrell) thought-patterns over 'divergent' ones - as if 'everything in the Universe [were] a track of numbers racing towards an answer' ('Crow's Account of St. George'). 'My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of fact, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot con-

ceive' (Darwin's Autobiography: 1974 pp. 83-4). Hughes has emphasised how Urizenic skepticism's restraint of the affective faculties provokes enantiodromic excrudescences of 'irrationality'; but logical process can produce behaviour 'illogical' on its own terms - the building of a nuclear plant before waste storage methods have been determined upon; the idea (René Dubos suggests) of indefinitely-sustained economic growth. At the bottom of Hughes' thinking seems a sense that, just as less-evolved animals manage physical negotiations instinctively, and are subject, in unusual situations, to grotesquely inappropriate behaviour (feeding cuckoos), so humanity, in its evolution so far, has managed the ideative world 'according to... orders' ('Crow's Account of the Battle') - via, that is, noetic 'instincts' - precise moral codes, such as rational skepticism, the grotesque inappropriateness of whose stipulations, much of the time now, appears self-evident. In The Tiger's Bones, the Master claims he, with his scientific expertise, can re-inspire a dead tiger. He does. It eats him. What over-rides 'instinct', physical or noetic, is Thought, Bradshaw's 'Reason'. In requiring greater maturity, imagination, and personal, moral responsibility of people, Hughes is reasoning with, not against, Bradshaw.

3c: Myth and Ritual

Hughes' apologists, Bradshaw continues, conceal the dangers inherent in Hughes' advocacy of 'rituals and dogma' ('the old method is the only one' - Faas 1980 p. 201) by implying his observations are entirely metaphoric. (And conceal, other critics would presume, the impossibility of actual 'rituals' being reconstructed within our society.) 'The rituals which formerly controlled [instinctive energies] cannot now be reconstituted', Sagar assumes. 'At a communal level, the only substitute we have for ritual is art' (Sagar 1978 p. 209).

Hughes' conception of 'rituals and dogma' is, I believe, metaphoric; old communal rituals, imposing on the individual, may symbolise for him intrapsychic rituals, the means of reaching individual decisions in mind and soul. Whereas Lane, for instance, proposes our re-adoption of 'initiations' involving (to

strengthen the sense of sharing and belonging) 'excruciating pain' (Lane 1982 pp. 18-19), Hughes suggests - for his harmonized society - only the narration of myths and the composition of poetry; 'one doesn't [claim] that [The Iron Man] would cure schizophrenia' (1970 'Myth' pp. 66-67). To chop a finger off is simply 'part of the coherent, balanced, successfully adapted system by which [other] societies manage life' (Hughes' letter, in Gifford and Roberts 1981 pp. 259-260). If, like Graves, Hughes had believed Anglicanism and Goddess-worship irreconcilable, he would not have traded the shamanic ribbons in his cap for Wordsworthian ones. He makes poetic firewood of rituals, and the Goddess, as he could not of the subjects of his elegies; occasionally his attitude seems semi-satirical. (A man tumbling down Scout Rock becomes 'a community peace offering' ('The Rock'; Summerfield 1974 p. 124), a sports car 'a surgical model/ Of the uterus of The Great Mother of The Gods' ('O White Elite Lotus').) The Sufis' 'highly refined course of moral self-development' relies, Hughes approvingly observes, on no 'religious paraphernalia' (1964 'Shamanism'). He warns against the 'devotion and ritual' a respect for 'order' may degenerate into (1965 'Singer' p. 9) and opposes Pilinszky's religious sense to 'dogmatic Christianity' (1976 Pilinszky; Faas 1980 p. 193). 'The swarming cults' (1976 'Myth' p. 91) cannot redeem us. The eagle-hunter's song (Cave Birds p. 30) is 'Two, three, four thousand years off key'.

(Exposing Hughes' inconsistencies cannot in the end entirely defend him; his interpretation of the Monarch as the 'tribe's' leader is bound to disturb people, and it remains that he envisages writing poetry in terms of primitive 'ritual' (1962 'Douglas'; Faas 1980 p. 165): he has compared 'Earth-numb' to 'Aboriginal drawings' (1980 'Earth-Numb') and Terry Gifford (1990) supports David Moody in criticising the lack in this poem of Hughes' usual empathy with the hunted animal. Nor is the leisured fisherman the starving primitive hunter.)

It can help, meanwhile, to distinguish properly 'Myth', 'Fable' and 'Ritual'. (Gifford and Roberts (1981 p. 45) presume 'collectively produced' myth is 'inseparable from ritual' and that myths (ibid. p. 119) are practical anecdotes.)

'The unspoken definition of myth is that it carries [imaginative] truth' (1976 'Myth'; Faas 1980 p. 192). 'Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be stated in words' (Ananda Coomaraswamy in Capra 1983 p. 410). According, at least, to Lévi-Strauss, there are only a handful of mythic archetypes, common to all societies. Primitives distinguish, suggests Eliade (1964A p. 9) between these and the 'fables' people invent to 'explain', for instance, animals' anatomical peculiarities. 'Ritual' is the individual's interpretation, or re-enactment, of the Dream-time mythic models. 'A genuine ritual... cannot be fabricated; it can only be discovered. Some ritual forms may in time become collectively valid. Initially their discovery will have to occur by virtue of individual search' (Whitmont 1987 p. 247). 'A ritual... often is a work of art' (*ibid.* p. 24). (Erich Neumann meanwhile believes that ritual in our society must remain, as for the artist, intrapsychic.) Bradshaw (1981 p. 81) seems mistaken in considering aesthetics incidental to Shamans' songs.

Hughes, then, exercises his imagination by composing 'fables' - How the Whale Became; Tales of the Early World. Within the structures of the received 'myths' - the Myth of the Fall; of Oedipus; of Jensen's 'dema divinity' (see Eliade 1959 p. 101: 'The Golden Boy'); of 'the abandonment of the solar hero' (see Eliade 1960: 'Creation of Fishes') - he also works his private ritual self-adjustments.

For Bradshaw however, even authentic ritual, departing from rational humanism, seems 'a hopeless soiling of the intellectual conscience' (Williams 1979 p. 104). Hughes could respond it is the non-intellectual conscience which needs help. Lawrence thought that 'for the mass of people, knowledge must be symbolical, mythical, dynamic' (1961 p. 73). '[Some] brains are just lying down snoring and occasionally turning over.... I am one of that clan myself' (Poetry in the Making p. 56). The scientific, rational ideal is 'disastrous for human beings in general' (1970 'Myth' p. 57) in 'the outer world, under which ordinary men and women have to live' (1976 'Myth'; Faas 1980 p. 192).

Hughes might also argue that even today everyone '[staggers] under a whole magico-religious paraphernalia which, however, has degenerated to the point of caricature and hence is hard to recognize for what it is' (Eliade 1959 p. 206). The need is to make the paraphernalia work better again. Pace Bradshaw, 'though... myths, by presenting themselves as sacrosanct models, would seem to paralyze human initiative, actually they stimulate man to create' (Eliade 1964A p. 141), asking constant ritual reinterpretation, and, within the psyche perhaps, advancing Jungian individuation.

Peter Scupham suggests Hughes' 'vatic... prophecies must tingle at our nerve-ends or be relegated to case-books' (Scupham 1980 p. 6). One set of nerve-ends seems enough.

3d: Shamanism

One ritual method, with which Hughes has associated his own operations to a degree that might seem to justify Bradshaw's charge of ridiculous anachronism, is shamanism. 'It is clearly impossible for a modern English poet to be a shaman', Gifford and Roberts assume (1981 p. 20). Sweeting considers writing poetry 'a metaphorical shamanic act' (1982 p. 3). Anthony Libby, though, claims: 'the role [Hughes] plays as poet must be understood literally in terms of the activity of the shaman' (Libby 1974 p. 391). Snyder would seem to associate the roles without difficulty: 'the Shaman-poet is simply the man whose mind reaches easily out into all manners of shapes and other lives, and gives song to dreams' (Snyder 1969 p. 122).

As a psychologically-motivated 'chosen one', the shaman will be presumed to practise his or her art whether or not the community attends. ('Some shamans shamanize to amuse themselves' - 1964 'Shamanism'; Faas 1980 p. 175.) But the shaman goes into a trance, dances, drums, even flies. Hughes does none of these things. (Some societies claim their shamans used to fly; Castaneda's Don Juan suggests the flight is literal for those who believe.)

In so far as Gaudete shows Hughes' advocacy of a 'Blakean' model - everyone their own psychic redeemer - over a 'Gravesian' - the poet as pastor - Shamanism's social manifestations are quite peripheral to his concerns. But the Shamanic role has provided a metaphor of constant fascination for him. The psychic drama will be so private here that perhaps any interpretations are unpardonable; but Hughes' observations, and projections, from 'Quest', 1958, on, of third-person shamans, suggest to me the main poetic impulse (the vector sum, that is, of impulses of faith and despair) remains self-castigation over his failure to translate the Shamanic ideal into interpersonal therapies - or even to fulfil the psychological demands.

Seventy years have I lived,
Seventy years man and boy,
And never have I danced for joy.

(Yeats: 'Imitated from the Japanese').

'The American healer and prophet Edgar Cayce is an example of one man who dreamed the dreams and accepted the [shamanic] task.... And of course he returned with the goods' (Faas 1980 p. 206). Here, Hughes' significant remark is that Cayce 'was not a poet'. The poet's 'goods' will be psychic, imaginative, not somatic: but it would be altogether uncharacteristic of Hughes to associate his real-life achievements with Cayce's in this way. 'I don't think I ever came near what was needed' to translate the authentically shamanic Bardo Thö-dol into English, he admits (ibid. p. 205). 'In a perfectly cultured society one imagines that jaguar-like elementals would be invoked only by self-disciplinarians of a very advanced grade. I am not one' (ibid. p. 199). If he had been able to give his 'poems about jaguars... real summoning force', they would have been 'ethically dangerous' (ibid.). Clearly, he does not believe he has.

When the spirits choose a shaman, 'the individual is summoned by certain dreams' (ibid. p. 206). Hughes seems to have interpreted dreams of his own in this light (though by 1977 he no longer found the dream behind 'The Wound' 'too easily interpretable' as a translation of the Bardo Thö-dol vision (ibid. p. 210).) 'If he accepts' the dream, the shaman 'prepares himself for the job

... [sic] it may take years.... Once fully-fledged he can enter trance at will and go to the spirit world... [sic] he goes to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs' (ibid., p. 206). Hughes suggests that 'the actual flight' (1964 'Shamanism'; Faas 1980 p. 15) informs 'the epics of Gilgamesh and Odysseus' (ibid.), 'the Divine Comedy, Faust etc.' (Faas 1980 p. 206). These tend, however, not to be the works (he doesn't even mention their authors here) with whose creation he has most closely associated his own writing; his description of this as getting 'onto my perch' (to Scigaj: Scigaj 1986 p. 251) in fact specifically precludes 'flight'. 'Most narrative poems recount only those other dreams... [sic] the dreams of the call' (Faas 1980 p. 206): and it is in this category that he sets '"Venus and Adonis", some of Keats' longer poems, "The Wanderings of Oisín", "Ash Wednesday"' (1964 'Shamanism'; Faas 1980 p. 15) - the poems with which he has compared his own. 'Poets usually refuse the call. How are they to accept it? How can a poet become a medicine man and fly to the source and come back and heal or pronounce oracles? Everything among us is against it' (Faas 1980 P. 206). And if they refuse it, 'somebody near [them] dies' (ibid.). But I have already repudiated criticism as biography.

4a: Dennis Walder on Hughes

Holbrook and Bradshaw are advocating much of Hughes' own thinking. To read critics with no such allegiance tends to be rather depressing; certainly synopses such as Press', Martin and Furbank's, Rosenthal's or Berke's reveal only how difficult it is to set a poet of Hughes' stature and radicalism within the contemporary scene (P. R. King's study is something of an exception). Calvin' Bedient has made incisive remarks on Hughes' style but his representation of him (twinned as it is to reservations concerning the 'queer optimism' (Bedient 1974 p. 100) he finds in 'Wilfred Owen's Photographs') as 'a total nihilist' (ibid. p. 101) exposes Bedient's rejection of Hughes' more recent (and taxing)

output as, simply, a refusal to grasp what Hughes is saying. Dennis Walder, meanwhile, has written hundreds of pages on Hughes' poetry without more than an inkling of what happens in it. This worries me because Walder arrogates a position not only of tolerance, but an absolute of moral guardianship, telling his readers what they should~~not~~ explore, accept or enjoy. His Ted Hughes (1987) seems a fine little George's helmet: 'so much of what Hughes produced during the sixties and seventies fails to convince' (p. 61). 'None of these works have been [statement] more than fitfully successful; nor, in my view [pseudo-tolerance, dependent of course upon the statement], have they deserved much success' (p. 60). 'Are not these [poems]... monotonous and banal?' (p. 72).

Walder's agitation at 'the crude physicality' of 'Seven Dungeon Songs' (p. 76) is disturbing: the poems ask acceptance of the crude and physical. 'Tiger-Psalm' he considers 'damning' (ibid.). The poem, surely, has two morals: i) don't shoot people; ii) try to attain a more honest relation to the tiger's 'sacred activity of life' (Hughes' description at a public reading in Leeds, 10/3/79; Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 244). 'The whole abstraction of Socrates' discourse must inevitably, given enough time and enough applied intelligence, result in machine guns' (Hughes, in Sagar 1981 p. 37) - and in the tiger's practical extinction. Really, it is Walder himself who does the 'damning' (of the poem, and, by implication, the tiger) - affording a particularly blatant example of the 'paranoid projection' instinct, Hughes argues, to rational skepticism.

It is this projection that makes Walder's own obtuseness sound like an exposure of 'the (on occasion) austere beautiful, but largely impenetrable poems of Cave Birds, and Earth Numb' (1987 p. 73). He might at least have observed the hyphenation. Even C. B. Cox can suggest Gaudete would be better without its 'incomprehensible' epilogue (Cox 1977 p. 3), and Martin Booth qualify his respect for a poetry 'narrowed to the few who understand its implications' (Booth 1985 p. 149). Hughes' visionary poetry is difficult because it is concerned to express complex, subtly modulating mental states, and oper-

ates at a considerable remove from everyday experience. Occasionally, perhaps, as with Shakespeare, different diction could have illuminated more for us; and Hughes' Dickinsonian idiolect ('window', 'shoe', 'wheel') may bewilder. Sometimes he sets riddles - time-honoured mental training - requiring us to name the animals whose creation Tales of the Early World narrates.

I saw my keeper
Sitting in the sun -

If you can catch that, you are the falcon of falcons.
(Gaudete p. 187)

- I am in your keeping. Not even in the private Recklings or Orts poems is he irresponsibly or playfully elitist.

4b: Hughes and Feminism

Walder still presumes Hughes' model of the 'suppressed' 'female principle in nature' is 'subjective and unhistorical' (1987 p. 80). How the general notion that Hughes' 'attitude to women remains markedly negative right up to... Gaudete' (Larrissy 1983 p. 34) gained credence seems thoroughly puzzling (though Walder's inference that Hughes' presentation of 'the ritual rape and murder' of Felicity must evidence his own 'overbearing machismo' (1987 p. 70) and faith in 'authoritarian, chest-beating, "macho" qualities' (ibid. p. 76) reveals the kind of logic at work).

Walder elaborates his misconceptions into some pages of approximate feminism. In 'Life is Trying to be Life', he meets 'the cave-wife'. 'Yes, she would be sewing, back in the cave, wouldn't she? Even more predictable than the caring, yet secondary figure thus represented, are the threatening overtones also connected with her' (ibid. p. 81). Observe it is Walder, not Hughes, who denigrates millennia of feminine activity; automatically invents a 'cave-husband' and depotentiates the woman by assuming she is 'secondary' to him; but is dispossessed himself by the genuine, aggressive power Hughes uses the figure to symbolise. (A page earlier, Walder has diagnosed a 'lighter, gentler and more

feminine strain' in Season Songs, and then dismissed - as if it was Hughes' - the belittlement as sexist. Later, he alienates 'destructive' elements from 'the "feminine"' in Hughes' nature altogether (ibid. p. 85).)

Beth Truebell also queries Hughes' 'ambivalent male attitude towards women as creative/destructive' (1985 p. 13) and believes 'Witches' (in which Hughes considers whether patriarchal puritanism has suppressed genuinely necromantic powers in the feminine psyche) 'not very flattering to women' (ibid. p. 167).

Hughes would certainly claim that, like Redgrove, he has always argued 'for the real dignity and sacredness of woman' (Hughes' blurb to Redgrove and Shuttle's The Wise Wound, N. Y. 1978) by positing two universal principles - one masculine and analytic, the other feminine, holistic, non-logical. - and by claiming the latter, patriarchally subjugated, answers now to Western society's wants.

What could worry one here is not surely the definition of two principles, but Hughes' claiming (as a man) to associate one with men, one with women (as patriarchal China came to associate Yang and Yin). Bad sociology such association may be, and morally perilous, but it remains a fertile, elegant metaphoric device in a poetry which treats women as social beings too seldom to seem in danger of seriously reducing, or patronising, them. (Though Anderson (1990) shows how even 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days', for instance, insidiously understands the male bird's acts in terms of creation, the female's more as discovery or manipulation.)

Problems, however, relate even to the metaphoric association. Graves' 'poet' is a man, seeking the Goddess. His 'poetess'' role - to imitate the Goddess - is conditioned by the opposite gender's expectations. (Poems of Hughes' like 'Incompatabilities' and 'Lovesong' expose the consequences of just such expectations.) Plath actually seems to have tried to enact Graves' 'poetess'' role; but Hughes' comments ('Emily Brontë' and on Dickinson) accord with the expectation that a woman visionary, like Mahadevi, will, rather, seek a male Muse, just as Jung's 'animus' answers the 'anima'.

This suggests another problem: Jung's norm is the male (heroic) quest for the anima; the woman's, for her animus, has none of the socio-ecological implications. (Annas Pratt (1981) has re-interpreted the female 'quest' as one in, towards the woman's own femininity.) For Hughes, at least, there will be a danger of conflating the male's position with what it is to be human: an individual, at once desiring re-integration into nature's community, and combatting the chaos of life and time. This is what led Lawrence to interpret the nisus of history and culture as an essentially male principle, transcending procreative self-annihilation; and provoked (suggests Carolyn Merchant, 1983) the revision of the Gnostic/ alchemical equality of male and female, heaven and earth, into the model of the passive insemination of land by sky, nature by mind. Walder, however, is mistaken in assuming that for Hughes, too, 'the life force can only be imagined in... male terms' (1987 p. 81). He is referring to Crow, 'the spirit of the sperm' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5); but 'life force' would more properly signify the pool of energies in Hughes' feminine Nature; the questing individual in Crow 'is looking for the egg' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4) - and then no inhuman abstract but 'every human thing that is not itself' (ibid.). Crow's puritanical ability to resist the feminine principle is not Hughes' 'macho ideal' at all, but an infantile impotence. Jungian psychology - in contradistinction to Lawrence's morality - teaches that a union of 'feminine' and 'masculine' elements is the prerequisite of psychic individuation. Crow's being 'too full of ideas for sexual samadhi' (ibid. p. 5), for 'self-immolation in new, greater and other life' (ibid. p. 4) renders him a symbol not of the Individual, the poet, the male, but our own dead-end patriarchy: Hughes in fact has suggested that a woman's capacity to associate more readily with the eternal impersonal of nature is a 'privilege' (as well as a 'price') if she is 'an initiate into the poetic order of events' (1966 'Plath'; Faas 1980 p. 181).

'Marriage' to the anima involves the old ego's extinction; the parallel to the phallus' suicide, and to the re-absorption, in death, of the individual (male) into the oneness of 'feminine' Nature is too obvious not to have enticed

the poet.

My mouth is the despair of God
Formed only for men....

I sing, stamping the gruelling drum-beat
To renew fallen men...

Again and again the forced grave of men.
(*'Fallen Eve'*).

It would, once again, be naive to assume that the archetypes of male individual and female death-force map out the behavioural complexities of individual men and women in the poetry (a kind of assumption Jung warned against). The 'individual's' role is assumed by Frieda Hughes in 'For F. R. at Six Months', and the woman in 'Root, Stem, Leaf'; the quest of the protagonist in Cave Birds is paralleled by the woman's he marries. But the predominant model in the poetry remains, as Walder suggests (1987 p. 80), 'irredeemably phallocentric'. This limitation does not seem to make Hughes' opus, compared with Hemingway's, alien to women; but Redgrove ('I am not a Cartesian man' - Sagar 1983 p. 103) admits his own 'vision [may be] closer to most women's experience than Hughes' is to date' and suggests as much alone can advance the Jungian harmonisation of masculine and feminine principles (*ibid.* p. 99). In Gaudete, Hughes' treatment of the women's predicament seems unconvincing (even allowing the form's restrictions). Little of the blood dripping from his poems is menstrual ('Fleeing from Eternity'; 'The Virgin Knight'). Though in the poetry the unenlightened male figure's fear of consumption by feminine nature is heavily invested with telling sexual symbolism, that adhering to his final submission to nature, towards rebirth - the phallus' suicide - remains curiously abstract, or unfelt ('Socrates' cock'). The consequent negative bias of the erotic imagery seems akin to what I feel is the awkward callowness of 'Sketch of a Goddess' or 'Sun-struck Foxglove': a residual puritanism part, of course, of what the poetic negotiations are required to heal.

5a: Martin Dodsworth on Hughes. The Individual and the Community; England

Walder's editor-in-chief was Graham Martin - for whose assessment of Hughes, see above, p. 14. Boris Ford, again (1983), has, writing on Hughes, Martin Dodsworth ('Hughes can't and won't think' - The Guardian 19/5/77) - and David Holbrook. 'Sexual expletives', we learn from Holbrook (he has just thrust upon us the only one I can recall - from a private edition; 'Song for a Phallus' includes a near miss) 'colour the pages of Hughes' later work, and the reader retires exhausted - or giggles' (Ford 1983 p. 358).

Dodsworth's essay bears more scrutiny. Although he seems less concerned to represent than to denigrate Hughes, defining a 'wholesale negative behind [his] positives' (ibid. p. 283), his observation that 'Gaudete... does not appeal to a sense of community[;] like most of Hughes's poems it embodies fundamentally isolated experience' (ibid. p. 287) locates a problem central not only to Hughes' claims as shaman or polemicist but to his poetry. 'The essential history... has not been lived by his people' (Gifford and Roberts: Sagar 1983 p. 96). Hughes' 'main concern' in Crow, indeed, 'was to produce something with the minimum cultural accretions of the museum sort - something... [that] might be invented after the holocaust and demolition of all libraries' (Hughes in Sagar 1978 p. 107). 'There are now quite a few writers about who do not seem to belong spiritually to the Christian civilization at all.... Their world... is the world of the little pagan religions and cults' (Faas 1980 p. 205). Gaudete might actually be understood as a didactic rejection of shared religious experience.

For Jung, 'the premise we [in the West] start from is and remains Christianity' (Jung 1959 (9:2) p. 175). Hughes, too, does depend poetically on the Bible as much as any holy writing; Christian imagery ('Salmon Eggs') perhaps sounds more felt and urgent than Islamic ('Riverwatcher'). For all his antipathy to Anglicanism, he remains Poet Laureate, and The Coming of the Kings is a wholly Christian Morality. Christianity (1976 'Myth' p. 90) is a formerly-adequate mythology unequal to our times.

But The Coming of the Kings is also palpably Protestant. Hughes' feudalistic-hierarchical ('Gravesian') social theories and his individualistic ('Blakean') imaginative ideal remain hopelessly at odds. (Hughes even praises Blake's poetry as part of 'the explosion against the oppressive crust of the monarchies' - Faas 1980 p. 200.) He has spoken of 'the Jewish heart' remaining 'in one piece through three thousand years of such oppressions and temptations as dissolved other peoples in a few decades' (1965 'Singer'; Faas 1980 p. 178).

A Nation's a soul.
A soul is a wheel,
With a Crown for a Hub
To keep it whole.

('A Nation's a Soul').

But a soul is not a nation. 'Given our social natures', Hughes is even able to lament, 'poets almost never manage to keep up' the individual quest (Faas 1980 p. 188). Shakespeare becomes an elusive solitary (as well as a would-be puritan): 'he goes direct from centre to centre but you never see him on the stairs or the corridors' (ibid. p. 203). Hughes not only respects this, but fears (on artistic grounds) 'our infatuation with our English past in general', the 'terrible, suffocating, maternal octopus' of tradition (ibid. p. 201).

In Howards End, Forster lamented the lack of an English national mythology to supplant the Greek. Hughes has certainly tried to answer Dodsworth's stricture that his myths cannot speak for his society: the Northern 'deities of our instinct and ancestral memory' are 'much deeper in us, and truer to us, than the Greek-Roman pantheons': 'they are the better part of our patrimony still locked up' (1964 'Myths'; Faas 1980 p. 171). 'One of the starting points [of Crow] was that the Crow, as the bird of Bran, is the oldest and highest totem creature of Britain'. 'Whatever colour of Englishman you scratch you come to some sort of Crow' (letter to Alan Bold, 27/2/73: Bold 1976 p. 117). The Queen appoints Nessie the Mannerless Monster 'vice-regent of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland', suggesting England is beyond respiritualization: but Hughes' location of the loss of its 'soul' (1971 Shakespeare) as late as the

Civil War shows him redeeming as much of English people's inheritance as he can.

Hughes has said he uses 'Elmet... to signify not just a rather vaguely-featured Celtic and criminal and nonconformist inheritance, but a naturally-evolved local organism, like a giant protozoa, which is made up of all the earlier deposits and histories' (1980 'Elmet') - a 'land... like an offering// Heavy with the dream of a people' ('The Trance of Light'). Without his Elmet-dialect, he doubts 'if [he] would ever have written verse' (Faas 1980 p. 202). But that seems an exaggeration (Sagar feels Hughes' accent is a quarter American), and Remains of Elmet seems as happy to celebrate the decay of tradition as its lineage.

What Hughes' poetry more generally celebrates, however, is English soil and countryside: which need not demand (consider Emily Brontë) an inheritance of local blood or traditions. 'Several of the poems in Lupercal', Sagar writes, 'derived from an abandoned long poem about England, for which 'Mayday on Holderness' was to have been a sort of overture.... The central figure was a river, the bloodstream of England' (Sagar 1978 p. 46). The poem was to contain all the animals; the pike's pond is 'as deep as England' (and 'now a rubbish dump, pretty well, with an oily puddle in the bottom' (Hughes in Summerfield 1974 p. 269).) Ruins of the plan adhere to Lupercal's frequent archaic diction, and the repeated, plangent use of the word 'sunk'. But the poem itself had to wait thirty years before emerging as the celebration of 'the tangled, crimson, twisted yarn/ Of lineage and language' 'Behind the sequin separateness of faces' in 'The Crown of the Kingdom':

Flying from the Zenith
An Angel of Water.
All the Kingdom's hurt rivers flicker
In its veins.
Wells marked with a cross, blocked wells, lost wells
Are its pores....

And here are the shoulders that inched the longships
Under Holderness.
And the broad-vowelled women
Of the vales, as if they sang,

Nursing the North
Sea's hard, hacked edges....

Hughes' nature poetry, however, never appears to me as intensely (inexplicably) 'English' as the tradition of Housmanesque nostalgia. River allows us no co-ordinates within 'the/ Gently-breasted/ Counties of England' ('April Birthday'). Donald Davie has suggested that Hughes' landscape seems more Irish than English in its evocation of uncircumscribed wilderness. Hughes might concur (the period of his best nature poetry began with a visit to Ireland in 1962); Davie, meanwhile, advocates (over 'mythological Never-Never lands ruled over by goddesses' - Davie 1973 p. 102) Larkin's humanist response of '[making] himself numb to the nonhuman creation in order to stay compassionate towards the human' (ibid. p. 66): 'there is to be no historical perspective' (ibid. p. 65), only a recognition 'that Britain as a whole is the most industrialized landscape in the world' (ibid. p. 72). Just as Vedenyapin in Doctor Zhivago argues (Pasternak 1988 p. 48) that overpopulation has rendered meaningless the mythic sense of nature, Hughes, too, suggests, in an essay on White's Voss, that, whereas the Australian soul can find its analogues in the continent's hinterland (in the 1950s Hughes very nearly bought a farm in Australia), 'for an Englishman there is no such natural and belonging symbol. The inmost region of England does not correspond in any satisfying way to the deepest reach of the Englishman's soul, or to the further darkness of his mind' (1964 'White' p. 230).

Most criticism of Hughes' cultural awareness, however, concerns his refusal to bring his sense of English heritage up to date. His idea of poetry (at least before Wolfwatching) can 'tell us nothing about the urban and civilised human world' (Colin Falck in Sagar 1978 p. 143) - except, I argue, metaphorically. Given the sometimes incisive nature of the metaphoric, abstract commentary, and among poets the near-universality, until recent decades, of a Hughesian mistrust of the banal or particular, criticism of his method seems unconstructively partial.

5b: Hughes and History

Rand Brandes (1990), arguing 'the craze for myth is the fear of history' (Rahv 1970 p. 210), suggests Hughes' 'mythic' work precludes (except concerning World War One) a sense of historical or cultural development. The critique is basically convincing but, our obsession with 'history' being little more than a century old, itself unhistorical. (Shakespeare would no more have understood the comedy of anachronism in The Coming of the Kings than he would Hughes' historical interpretation of his own imaginative crisis.) In fact, Hughes' definition of storytelling's role in 'Myth and Education' 1976 - naive or otherwise - is precisely Thucydides' of history: a grasp of good and evil is engendered via 'historical anecdotes'. 'The better we know', say, Hitler's biography, 'the more of ourselves and the world is revealed to us' (1976 'Myth' p. 82).

5c: People in the Poems

'I think [Hughes] has understanding of people', Heaney remarks (Haffenden 1981 p. 74). This 'understanding', however, is surely what Hughes' generalizations and abstract utterance might stunt. To ask added 'human understanding' of imaginative art could be to doubt its intrinsic value (as our culture does). Gaudete, certainly, describes convincingly a range of psychic extremes; often the later poems seem to hold - perhaps an accident of composition - superficial:

Spring

Just hesitates. She can't quite
Say what she feels yet.

('March Watercolour 2')

and inner:

It learns to talk, watching the others' mouths.
It laughs and shouts and listens to itself numbly...
('Life is Trying to be Life')

fragments of authentic novels. But 'human understanding' seems to me a palpable quality - dignity and dedication - which Hughes does not deliver. When

he remarks that 'out of all the writing about people that is in existence, it is unbelievable how little seems to contain any life at all' (Poetry in the Making p. 42) his sense of 'life' is presumably an idiosyncratic one; but to say his people are not people (Gaudete originally went 'on in [Hagen's] head' (Faas 1980 p. 215), The Iron Man in Hogarth's) only sidesteps the question. If literature operates in three fields - person/ person, person/ earth, mind/ soul - of comparable significance, I suggest (though our culture has marginalized the second two) - then Hughes (until Wolfwatching, again) definitely under-acknowledges the first. Before the Moortown Diary and River, his persona remained intensely solitary. He admits no debts to novelists (Williamson's achievement as novelist is barely addressed) and his essays on Dostoyevsky, Singer, White and Michael Baldwin ignore the novels' social aspect; in Poetry in the Making, 'Writing about People' and 'Writing a Novel' pointedly ignore characterization. (Hughes refers respectfully to Tolstoy's - quite uncharacteristic - description of one character as 'a blue triangle', introducing The Reef (1980 p. 3).) 'Is there much knowledge of society behind his denunciation of it?... His concern is too general.... It is... for the authoritarian' (Dunn 1978 p. 80).

6a: Eric Homberger on Hughes

Eric Homberger's Marxist-materialist response towards the thinking Hughes represents is, understandably, one of bewildered hostility and sheer misinformation ('Snyder's practical intervention into the politics of ecology turns out to be thoroughly utopian' - Homberger 1977 p. 209). 'Hughes sees no "cause" worth fighting for' (ibid. p. 210). 'He is utterly dependent as a writer upon an extremely elaborate myth of the nature of the primitive. His response to that myth involves the creation of another structure of myth about the nature of modern Western society' (ibid. p. 213). (The 'relationship of art to [human] life' (Booth 1985 p. 144) whose absence Homberger criticises in Hughes

is precisely what Booth respects Hughes for reinforcing.) I have suggested Hughes mistrusts Homberger's scientific 'progress' less than he feels the time nears when the objective reduction it demands can give us little more except alienation and psychosis. 'No good peppering people with the plague', the Devil chortles (Sean, the Fool, the Devil and the Cats, The Coming of the Kings p. 88). 'Doctors come with their needles and everybody's happy./ No. Now I strike for the mind.... Now I make people crazy.' Perhaps the biggest problem with current ecological thinking is its tendency to repudiate the historical and ongoing means - Cartesian rationalism, Capitalism, male exploitation of nature - by which today's creature-comforts have been supplied, without contemplating the sacrifice of such comforts. Hughes' poetry's emphasis on physical suffering, the cancellation of these comforts, is surely a precise, profoundly honest, acknowledgement of their importance to us now - and not frustration concerning 'our near-obscene obsession with death, suffering, and pain as if these were evil in themselves' (Lovelock 1988 p. 211) or over-emphasis on the education or revelation of the spirit through (mental) suffering.

6b: Fascism

Though the 'exaltation of violence for its own sake' (Homberger 1977 p. 213) which Homberger diagnoses is, therefore, paradoxically part of Hughes' poetry's social relevance, his claims that such exaltation is 'fascistic' (ibid.) could still seem pertinent: advocacy of visionary energies (like Hughes') among writers of an earlier generation did tend to fascism, potential in the case of Yeats, Lawrence or Eliot, fully-fledged in that of Heidegger, Pound and Williamson. Part of the fascination of Adorno's 'no art after Auschwitz' inheres in the extent to which Fascism was a travesty of the energies and symbolism imaginative literature characteristically invokes. For once, the imagination became a politician: and its handiwork proved a monstrous inversion of what humanism presupposes. Hughes has certainly made clear his (individualistic) antipathy towards socialism - 'the great "co-operatives" of non-competitive mutual para-

sitism': 'is... competition... as thoroughly evil in fact as it is in imagination? When non-competition is enforced, what sort of genetic torpor ensues, and worse?' (1963 'Vagrancy' p. 294). He has, however, accorded Communism the same 'heroic' stance he does 'the Movement' (Faas 1980 p. 201): 'Communism is the ideological antithesis of the Holy Life, created by Jews living in defiance or denial of God, as Lucifer, fallen from praising in heaven, organized the abyss' (1965 'Singer' p. 9). The moral of Sean, the Fool, the Devil and the Cats is at least equalitarian: Katy (the imagination?) will only be healed if the capitalist, Mr Poppacopolis, shares his income equally among his workers. Heaney diagnoses in Hughes 'a kind of anger at work' against bourgeois complacency (Haffenden 1981 p. 73). It is, however, the aristocrat's.

Absolutes - Nazi, Communist or ecological - nowadays seem bound to translate into political totalitarianism. (Graham Greene's attempted three-fold reconciliation of absolutes of 'Good' and 'Evil', a pluralistic, liberal-humanist concern with 'right' and 'wrong', and basically socialist politics, seems a possible blueprint for human ecology here - of whose fascistic debts and tendencies little gets said.) Hughes has the advantage over Yeats and Lawrence of several history lessons; he 'had terrible arguments' with Williamson 'about his politics' (1980 'Williamson' p. 164) in the sixties (easily done, one presumes). In the last resort, I suggested, humans' wellbeing will for him take precedence over supernatural claims. To ask, of the individual, moral responsibility, discipline and the courage to act upon personal decisions, is enough, he seems to hope, to preclude any recrudescence of fascism: in 'T. V. On', he associates the moral paralysis born of staring at a T. V. screen with the conditions leading to the Third Reich. (Peruvian shamans nowadays include in their repertoire songs against 'film sickness'.) Active thought and syntax disintegrate: 'And woe woe woe/ Cannot blame Hitler or Evil'. In the same way, the photographer's objectivity (1970 'Myth' pp. 56-57) is what prevents him from deciding to beat the tiger off.

Hughes' respect for tradition must not be uncritically associated with

'patrician and conservative' narrow-mindedness (1962 'Douglas'; Faas 1980 p. 165). There remain in his thinking, however, a chauvinistic patriotism, and a fascination with racial inheritance, which seem potentially fascistic: his - albeit fashionable - sponsorship of 'Celt' over 'Saxon' precisely inverts Gobineau's (which was behind Nazism), whilst his definitions of 'Britishness' ('Englishness') and his monarchism stand in the way of his (ecologist's) sense (-see Poetry International 1967 programme) that 'the idea of global unity is not new, but the absolute necessity of it has only just arrived, like a sudden radical alteration of the sun, and we shall have to adapt or disappear' (1980 'Inspirational Message' p. 2). M. G. Ramanan ('Macaulay's Children', London Magazine, February 1985; quoted approvingly by Walder, 1987 p. 94) has denounced Hughes' old-fashioned patriotism as 'an insecure... mental condition' born - I do not misrepresent - of reflections on India's independence, and his retreat towards such trivia as 'the English landscape, [and] the pikes [sic], otters, hawks and crows of England.' 'In violent desperation [he] attempts to impose his myths on us and to wrest an identity for England' (more or less what Dodsworth suggested he refuses to do). His 'violent imagery is closely aligned with that... side of British society... which says "keep England British".' Many of Hughes' 'myths' actually derive from 'the immense Indian reserves', of which tales he is familiar with 'some hundreds' (1964 'A Hero's History' p. 7). Ramanan's critique (founded I presume on a misreading of 'The Old Colonel' and perhaps association with Larkin's 'Homage to a Government') could stand as a test-case here: one can in fact offer direct refutation from Hughes' writings. Major Hagen is Hughes' quite uncompromising exposure of Ramanan's poet: 'Humiliation of Empire, a heraldic obligation/ Must have its far-booming say' (Gaudete p. 34). Westernization - 'Ugly as a brass-band in India' ('Rhododendrons') - has extinguished the 'depth and communal coherence' (1964 'A Hero's History' p. 7) of the native cultures.

When the next Empire noses this way
Let it sniff here.

('Gibraltar').

Hughes' idea of British heritage, like Defoe's in 'The True-Born Englishman', is one of continuous waves of colonizers - and therefore accommodates:

... here, in the scald of the Kingdom's cauldron,
The peacock oils
From Shiva's thumb,
And the medicine seed
From under the tongue
Of the African lion...

('The Crown of the Kingdom').

6c: Violence and Tenderness

Even in 1970, Hughes was trying to untangle the confusion concerning his presentations of 'violence' (Faas 1980 pp. 197-201). His definition of the psychoses endemic to today's alienated lifestyle, and to the 'romantic' temperament of a Hölderlin (not a Blake), as the consequences of unskilled suppression of the energies within us - or their resurrection as a mere form, like foxhunting - surely merits respect. Hughes - far more than Lawrence - certainly considers it a requirement of humanity to control instinctive energy via the agency of deliberate thought (the ideal the disasters in Gaudete outline is one - like Hara-Kiri - of an exceptionally complete subordination of body to soul, though without coercion). Hughes merely proposes means to this end more sophisticated, and time-honoured, than rational puritanism.

Gifford and Roberts have observed that Hughes' definition of both 'energy' and 'psychosis' as 'violence' is counterproductive, and bound to confuse people; 'Hughes is certainly abusing language here - his hostile critics would say, in a symptomatic and sinister way' (1981 p. 13). I would query this stricture: Gifford and Roberts suggest that dismissing, say, a lion as 'violent' would be 'characteristic of the "civilized" ['puritanical'] attitude against the grain of which his work so evidently runs' (ibid.); but to foreclose the word ('violent') by attaching moral disapprobation to it (and 'energetic' is clearly not what we want for the lion) surely evidences the puritanism Hughes is exposing as much as does foreclosing the lion's behaviour as a potential model

for us.

Superficial readings of Hughes' poetry will inflame the gloom and horror. The ubiquity of violent episodes is bound to raise comment (familiarity assimilates them: Hughes might deny they obtrude), but, as an essential strength of his voice, they should disturb one less, perhaps, than, for example, Larkin's self-pity. The label 'violence' also embraces three distinct negotiations. There is the 'energy' of an 'Ancient Hero', a 'Hawk Roosting', a swift. There is the 'suffering' which brings Prometheus or Lumb nearer this absolute of energy. And there is the 'violence', the 'cruelty', of St. George or Hagen, who have mismanaged the energies. In Hughes' mature work, 'energy' transcends actual, human comparison, so criticism of his method concerns confusion of 'suffering' and 'cruelty'.

Edward Lucie-Smith, in 1962, observed Hughes' descriptions of 'suffering' (as initiation, like Bishop Farrar's) do not feel ugly because 'the words act out the agonies' they describe (Lucie-Smith 1962 p. 41). The sense of authorial empathy the Gaudete lyrics earn is impressive. This kind of empathy - Aristotle's 'pity' and 'terror' - is essentially dramatic: Hughes' Oedipus on stage could be a success; Gaudete was staged in the year of its publication.

But it is telling how few of Hughes' images of violence on the page ('these teeth that seem to have bitten through hot iron' Wodwo p. 115) are actually excruciating. (One could cite plenty of literature which is.) Hughes' presentation of 'suffering' (even allowing physical pain is often a metaphor for mental pain) frequently seems coloured (voyeuristically) by his preferred method of portraying 'cruelty' (puritanical violence), which is to write with rubber gloves, sardonic, aloof. The surgeon's moral commitment to the patient prohibits infection. 'It is all violence in the head' (Homberger 1977 p. 215; my italics).

But Hughes' disgust at the 'cruelty' is counterbalanced by the fascination of its relationship to 'suffering'. The ambiguity can result in serious art-

istic problems: the 'cruelty' in Crow, at once insistent and perfunctorily addressed, necessarily becomes monotonous; Hagen's destruction of his labrador (Gaudete pp. 34-35) is the unmotivated act of a man we do not yet know, so disturbs us as little as a press report, and as unhappily as if we had met him ten minutes ago. Surely the representation of what is 'bad' does not necessitate bad art; and Hughes' noninvolvement resigns a mimesis that still seems potentially illuminating.

The emphasis on suffering makes the hierophanies of reconciliation and tenderness in Hughes' poetry, when they do arrive, deeply affecting, and earned: 'Full Moon and Little Frieda', 'Crow's Undersong'; 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days', many Moortown Diary poems. The paucity of these illuminations may represent Hughes' aesthetic sense of the right balance, or his consciousness of how far his 'gift' can, or cannot, be pushed. Certainly his conception of the relationship between violence and tenderness differs from Blake's ('a Warlike State never can produce Art'), but even sympathetic critics have interpreted his world-view as a discarding of compassion. Hughes would presumably feel David Holbrook (who considers 'Christ's hot pounding heart' in 'Truth Kills Everybody' one of 'an infinite variety of forms of hate' (Holbrook 1977 p. 132)) is beyond arguing with; but Graham Bradshaw too (Sagar 1983 p. 218) understands the rejection of his own (liberal) concept of sympathy in Cave Birds as an argument that: 'any morally compassionate impulse, any empathy with another creature's suffering, represents a weakness, something unnatural and indeed criminal'. The Cave Birds protagonist's 'crime' is, surely, his pretence of inevitable empathy without risking implication; his liberal sympathy - Kant's advocacy of conscious, rational 'duty' over natural, maternal 'love', precisely when such censorship of instinct seems unwarranted - is rejected, as Kant's was by Schopenhauer. The differentiation is Blake's: between Urizenic 'rational pity' and fourfold 'pathos' (see Beer 1969 pp. 48-49): between the Red Cross Knight's 'octaves of order,/ The law and mercy of number' ('Gog III') and the

compassion informing 'A Woman Unconscious' or 'That Moment', which discovers one death equal in the scales to an apocalypse. For Hughes the 'civilisation of men' involves 'forming traditions of kindness and summoning a spirit of sympathetic understanding, even in the smallest things, rather than exercising any further the overdeveloped weapons of the heart [the Cave Birds' figure's arrogation of empathy, perhaps] and the head' (1961 'Adamson' p. 712).

7: Al Alvarez on Hughes

An unhappy fate of Hughes' earlier volumes was Al Alvarez' advocacy of them: critics often assume his 'bunk' has had a 'disastrous' 'influence' on Hughes' 'development' (Holbrook 1977 p. 101) - rather than acknowledging 'a traditional, classical poet, who has studied the great writers of those calm, genteel ages of the French Revolution and the First World War' (Newton 1967 p. 402). Alvarez' interpretation of Hughes' 'soliloquies in which murder is no longer disguised or excused' or Crow ('unkillable precisely because he is without hope.... His pessimism is unwavering... pure death instinct' (Alvarez 1971 p. 215)) are really very unfortunate. (Hayden Carruth is one poet whose feathers were tarred by the Alvarez oil-slick, but who recognized Crow is about anything but despair, and remembered Hughes writes for children: 'Crow has the qualities of Children's literature, the same condescension not only towards the reader but, what is worse, towards the substance.' (Carruth is also speaking of Auden, Spender, Durrell and Chesterton here.) 'Existential agony has become as slick as Winnie-the-Pooh' (Carruth 1974 p. 328).) One would like to attribute to Alvarez' influence the remnant one finds of Hughes' 'violence' (or to Baskin's 'owls of night and ignorance... distorted into my vision of aggressive predatory tyranny' (Sagar 1978 p. 171), but that seems to patronize Hughes.

8: Provinciality

If Hughes is English, and a contemporary poet, it follows he is 'provincial'. Claude Rawson, reviewing Sagar's The Art of Ted Hughes, (Rawson 1976) suggests that arguing his 'major' status is itself 'a sign of the incurable provinciality of the English literary scene' (p. 324) - which seems difficult to rebut. If Rawson had understood Hughes more fully, he would not have undertaken his extended comparison of Hughes' aestheticism and Wallace Stevens' (to the latter's advantage). It was perhaps the irrelevance of this that provoked Hughes to tell Faas the following year he 'could never see anything at all in [Stevens] except magniloquence' (Faas 1980 p. 210) - a remark not quite true, since he prints 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' in Poetry in the Making.

Hughes' non-involvement, as an Englishman, in his vision's core, 'the crowded perspective of recent history' and its 'inescapable preparation for some final human confession' (1983 'Translation' p. 9), is also held against him. 'Hughes, like his wife, Sylvia Plath, arrogates to himself the disillusionment and burnt-out sense of history that we associate with Nazi Germany's victims and with East European experience' (Rosenthal and Gall 1983 p. 462). As Americans, Rosenthal and Gall might be inclined to underestimate Hughes' involvement by proxy in the First World War (the pierced smallbook in 'Crow's Account of the Battle' is not a piece of 'surrealist improvisation' (ibid.) but a genuflection to his father's own survival at Gallipoli). Hughes has suggested his generation is 'still in the living thick' of the trenches experience (1965 'Parsons' p. 208) which echoes round Remains of Elmet and Wolfwatching, and himself warns of the 'frustration with the absence of direct experience of atrocities' informing much Western poetry of political protest (Modern Poetry in Translation editorial 1969, attributed to Hughes; Sagar 1983 p. 40).

As the co-founding editor of Modern Poetry in Translation, and chief literary adviser to the International Sacred Literature Trust, Hughes is as little likely as anyone to be stylistically 'provincial'. But - insofar as

he has turned from the international humanism of Herbert and others towards primitive models and his native soil - he has circumscribed his territory, and sacrificed 'major' status, in a way that may in time become called for.

CHAPTER TWO: SPEAKING

1a: Poetry and Nature

Of the trio of negotiations I defined above - person/ p^{er}son, person/ earth, mind/ soul - the second now seems so undervalued as to make Hughes' commitment to nature poetry almost a political act. 'Scenery!' cries Slylooking, the rationalist (talking of cows). 'That's what they ponder about. They gaze at the scenery and it looks as if they're pondering, and so they get a great name as thinkers. They're no use for important, deep problems such as ours' (How the Whale Became p. 32). 'It's only now', Hughes wrote to Scigaj in 1980, 'that certain essential things are coming back into focus [for me]' (Scigaj 1986 p. 286). Hughes' nature-writing certainly maintains the 'tradition' of:

Pe hasel and pe hazþorne were harled al samen,
With roþe raged mosse rayled aywhere...

of:

Oaks:... speaking generally no doubt the determining planes are concentric, a system of brief contiguous and continuous tangents.... But beyond this... there is of course a system of spoke-wise clubs of green - sleeve-pieces...

of:

myriads of tree-trunks, enormous and streaked black with water, thrust like stanchions upright between the roaring overhead and the sweeping of the circle underfoot...

(Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 744-745; Hopkins, the Journal, 11/7/1867; Lawrence, The Rainbow p. 493).

More importantly, perhaps, it is one major facet of 'primitive' poetry he can reproduce with complete integrity:

... The neck
heavy with brass rings.
The eyes
gentle like a bird's
The head
beautiful like carved wood.
When you suddenly escape

you spread fine dust
like a butterfly
shaking its wings...

(Yoruba hunter's poem: 'Kob Antelope' trans. Ulli Freer;
The Rattle Bag p. 202).

A peculiar empathy with trees accompanies the 'ecological' consciousness of Hopkins, or Chekhov; Hughes' trees tend to remain ambiguous, though, for instance, Lumb is one with the oak and the speaker of the second 'March Water-colour' is a tree. Meanwhile, like Plath and Tomlinson, he is a draftsman.

Pilinszky's 'right hand' (the 'masculine' side) has, Hughes argues, a 'hard grasp of a revealed truth of our final condition', while in his left, 'so much more human and hurt, is his mystically intense feeling for the pathos of the sensual world' (1976 Pilinszky p. 13); just as Henry Williamson weighed the agony of Europe against his love of English land, and found them equal. Hughes, too, feels that 'what we need... is a faculty... which keeps faith, as Goethe says, with the world of things and the world of spirits equally' (1976 'Myth'; Faas 1980 p. 191). Goethe, with his sense of the Bildungstrieb of evolution and of Earth as a single organism, seems to have anticipated recent thinking, as did his trust in empirical, not theoretical, investigation. Although one must stress Hughes' word 'mystically' (and the degree to which nature, particularly in Wodwo, merely symbolizes the psychic drama), his allegiance, too, is to the philosophies - alchemy, Taoism - that emphasize not the absolute, but the particular. 'Alchemy is a science of just those "secondary qualities" that Galileo, Descartes, Locke had banished: the feel and odor, hue and texture of the world's sensible stuff' (Roszak 1973 p. 314). Pace Dr. Johnson, you can be sure, when you look at a green field, you have never seen anything like it before.

But the relationship between prima materia and elixir, between shadow and Form, should suggest where Hughes' 'descriptive' writing serves two different ends. He can represent the world's chaotic manifestations (Moortown Diary), or he can try to locate a particular essence (something approaching the 'mythic' mode):

The sea's elsewhere
Than surrenders to sand and rocks,
Other than men taste who drown out there.
('The Voyage').

Now something is stirring in the smoulder.
We call it a foal....
He wants only to be Horse,
Pretending each day more and more Horse

Till he's perfect Horse. Then unearthly Horse
Will surge through him, weightless, a spinning of flame...
(What is the Truth? pp. 17, 19).

Even now, however, Hughes' preferred method of representing a creature is to startle us by showing how far it departs from our prior, Platonic idea of, say, 'mouse':

high on his trembly legs
Very long legs really and his queer little pink hands
Little monkey's hands very human I always think...
(What is the Truth? p. 69).

The technique is seldom Shklovsky's 'defamiliarization'. When the ground is familiar, Hughes can play the fool describing it: 'in Hughes's conceit the delight is in the full recognition of the untruth of such separateness and fixity' (Newton 1976 p. 83). But in describing a heron as 'A writhing unmade bedstead' (River p. 20), his concern is not to startle us into a new perception of something familiar, 'heron'. He is availing himself of every technique simply 'to capture the infinite depth of [heronhood] in the [heron's] flight... - you could go on for a very long time with phrases of that sort and still have completely missed your instant, glimpsed knowledge of the world of the [heron's] wingbeat' (Poetry in the Making pp. 119-120). When:

A raven,
Cursing monotonously, goes over fast
And vanishes in rain-mist

('Rain'),

Robinson (Sagar 1983 p. 259) suggests: 'what is actually seen is neither rain and mist, nor misty rain, but an independent entity somewhere between the two for which we have no single word'. Drizzle? Mizzle? Scotch-mist? Hughes also seems to be mistrusting too snug a word/fact articulation (arthritis always

threatens). Redgrove diagnoses the 'tentative, vulnerable feeling-out, like waking up out of sleep' in River's 'method of exploration' (Redgrove 1983 p. 1238). 'Often the language is simple, Biblical in a slightly clumsy[,] nosing, nudging sort of way', writes George Szirtes of What is the Truth? (Szirtes 1984 p. 794); Lawrence's distinctive descriptive technique, too, was to define his subject by throwing out and drawing in, line by line, a series of deliberately approximate phrases, instead of clutching at it.

Reading Moortown, Peter Scupham (1979 p. 6) was simply disturbed by the 'lack of aesthetic distancing, the rejection of checks and balances'. Hughes by no means always writes like this, and even in the Moortown Diary, I shall argue, reality has been organized and interpreted (what, fundamentally, art does) via a variety of stylistic and structural techniques. Certainly, on grounds of personal preference, one might criticize Hughes' minimalization of such techniques (poetic form, unificatory and self-generating imagery - like the repeated 'stars' and 'light' in Remains of Elmet - or even the 'scientific explanation' (Robinson in Sagar 1983 p. 259) with which we customarily structure what we perceive). Implicit in the Hughesian position here, however, seems a genuine reinterpretation of what an external reality means to us. At a time when mankind's treatment of the earth becomes central to the survival of culture and society, a culture that does not look, respectfully, outside itself might seem tragically impertinent or hubristic. (Terry Gifford (1990) defines Hughes' best poetry as a transcendence of the objectification, or humanization, of nature behind the 'pastoral' tradition.)

1b: Words and Reality

Contrasting Moortown and Gunn's Selected Poems, Dick Davis (1979/80 p. 61) concludes that Gunn's 'words are used as counters or symbols standing for experience but not evoking it' whilst 'Hughes' poems do not define but evoke, ... the images as it were circling and calling to the central (ineffable?)

truth.... A reader's final preferences... will be temperamental'. (Gunn, incidentally, considers Hughes 'the greatest living poet writing in English' - at a poetry reading in San Francisco, cited by Rice 1985.)

'Steering a course between crystal clouds of utterly incommunicable non-verbal states - and the gleaming daggers and glittering nets of language', as Snyder (1969 p. 118) optimistically puts it, certainly fascinates and troubles Hughes. 'Many people, perhaps most of us, do think in words all the time' (Poetry in the Making p. 118); yet there is 'a huge gap... between our understanding of what happens around us and inside us, and the words we have at our command to say something about it' (ibid. p. 119). I have suggested how Hughes can maintain a sense of external reality - an absolute earth - of thoughts apprehended without 'words' - without dualistic objectivity. Oliver Lyne, however, takes issue with the 'rather cramping view of the relationship of art to life' (Lyne 1977 p. 800) evidenced in Poetry in the Making. (Cramping, that is, to the artist.) He does not extend this to individual poems, but Graham Bradshaw (Williams 1979 p. 90) finds the same 'post-Romantic' pessimism in 'Crow Goes Hunting': Crow feels (without Hughes' trying) he can never describe the hare adequately. Terry Eagleton's stricture, meanwhile, is exactly the opposite: 'one never has the feeling... that Hughes's language self-reflectively takes the measure of its own limits and capabilities' (Eagleton 1978-9 p. 78). Eagleton sees no need to query Cartesian 'reality'; whilst Bradshaw seeks a Blakean recognition of the perceiver's ennobling role as generator of what is described. 'Words and perceptions go out like a "shaft of attention" (Husserl) to make reality and truth.... The universe has meaning because a child is looking at it' (Holbrook 1975 p. 35): Holbrook finds in 'Full Moon and Little Frieda' an exemplification of just what Bradshaw misses in 'Crow Goes Hunting'. Hughes' position alters somewhat (from 'Gravesian' to 'Blakean') between poems (though in the latter poem it is principally Crow's Cartesian alienation that is exposed, whilst the former has to be read in the light of Hughes' 'not many human voices can make the spirits listen' - 1971 'Orghast' p. 1174: Frieda

summons the moon which appears, as a reality beyond her words). It would also be inapposite to suggest that, in respecting truths beyond words, Hughes is a 'traditionalist' rather than a 'Modernist' (see Davie 1967 p. 14). Orghast's collage technique may seem modernist and Scigaj (1986 p. 15) has - though I would question this - excused Hughes' skimmed treatment of the everyday human world on the grounds of Modernist aestheticism. For Hughes, 'the bequest of [the Modernist] generation... as far as its usefulness to a living poet goes... is', simply, 'obsolete' (1970 'Riding'; Faas 1980 p. 188).

In Poetry in the Making, Hughes describes words as 'tools... with which we try to give some part of our experience a more or less permanent shape outside ourselves' (p. 119). But in 'Old Age Gets Up': 'words evade/ Like flies with their own notions'. Lupercal 'culminated a deliberate effort to find a simple concrete language with no words in it over which I didn't have complete ownership' (Faas 1980 p. 209). Poets speak the language, and it speaks them. Remembering Hughes admits a continuum of subjective and objective reality, speech and spirits, mind and matter, this fundamental ambiguity translates into two kinds of poems: presents; and thank-you-notes: flash-visions from English-speaking spirits ('once when his spirits were dictating poetic material [verse itself?] to Yeats' - 1971 'Talking Without Words'; Faas 1980 p. 190), and attempts to express these visions in conscious language ('we go on writing poems because one poem never gets the whole account right' - Faas 1980 p. 204). Eliade (1964B p. 99) suggests the same ambiguity is inherent in Shamanism, at once the tranced utterance and the quest for healing. Thus, many Crow-poems, Hughes at least claims, 'wrote themselves quite rapidly' with 'something of a shock' (Faas 1980 p. 207), while the Gaudete lyrics are 'densely corrected' (Gaudete p. 173). The latter mode is more representative even of Hughes: in Poetry in the Making (writing for the non-'inspired'), he speaks only of 'dribbling... out over pages in tinglings that can only just be felt' (p. 121) the 'single 1,000-volt shock' of observation (p. 120). He accepts the translation of poetry, on the grounds, as it were, that poetry is a provisional translation of spirits' speech.

Coleridge's systole/ diastole theory includes the alternation of active intelligence and passive inspiration. E. F. Schumacher considered the 'reconciliation of irreconcilables' in ecological thinking to be something more than self-contradiction; it is basic to quantum physics (especially the 'ensemble' and 'bootstrap' interpretations); Jung calls the alchemical coniunctio oppositorum 'the transcendent function' (1959, 9:1, p. 289). Hughes, here, at least, asks for compromise: 'Patrick White has devised a narrative style of writing which is partly passionate incantation, partly immensely precise, scientific formality, partly wild, impressionistic poetry' (1964 'White'; Faas 1980 p. 175). 'Cool, analytical qualities are heavily present in everything [Singer] does, but organically subdued to a grasp that is finally visionary and redemptive' (1965 'Singer' p. 8). 'Every poem... is an armed truce between the life of energy inside men [involving language] and the facts of the world outside, after severe fighting and heavy losses on both sides. Every poem is both a violation of the facts it uses and a violation of what we feel about the facts' (1962 'Creatures of the Air'). The 'violation' is at once betrayal and intellectual triumph.

Hughes respects conscious technique refined to the point where it gets mistaken for supernatural inspiration. 'By hitting one nail [Shakespeare makes] fifty others jump in of their own accord' (Faas 1980 p. 203). There are 'two kinds of simplicity.... The first common type has the simplicity of excluding all but a few salient effects. [The] other rare type has the simplicity of an inclusion of everything in a clear solution' (1980 'The Reef' p. 2). Here, Hughes describes metonymy (the selection of aspects of the crow's flight, 'to economize on time' (Poetry in the Making p. 120)) and metaphor, the non-logical thought-pattern instinct to poetry: not:

Men die. Socrates is a man. Socrates will die.

But:

Men die. Grass dies. Men are grass.
(Gregory Bateson in Capra 1989 p. 83);

not the partial presentation, but the independent imitation, of the spirits' talking.

Orghast, meanwhile, was an attempt at absolute 'presentation', and, though one in spite of the (superficially) metaphoric nature of developed language, more impressive in performance, apparently, than one could anticipate. 'Urgith - look inside yourself, and it means death' (1971 'Orghast' p. 1174). Hughes' search for an actual, mantic 'speech of earth' (ibid.) resembles Jung's sense of the concrete nature of the 'archetypes', 'the world itself speaking' (Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 34); Robinson (1989) compares Heidegger's sense of the absolute nature of Language, which, competently used, might foster a new stage in the evolution of matter into consciousness. Robinson '[knows] of no evidence that Hughes is familiar' with Heidegger's philosophy (ibid. p. 3), but Heidegger's conception of the ideal unity of sound and meaning, speech and earth, comprehensively equates to one position (the 'Blakean') in Hughes' thinking about humans' consciousness and planetary duty. (It would be inapposite, for instance, to associate Orghast with the contemporaneous experiments in 'sound' poetry - informed more by simple mistrust of consciousness - of Horovitz, Jandl, McClure or Schwitters.)

lc: Hierarchy, Relatedness, Structure

The Orghast experiment represents not contempt for actual speech, inadequate though this remain to the earth, but profound, almost religious, respect for its physical manifestation. ('I prefer poems to make an effect on being heard', a 'charge and charm and series of operations' - 1963 'The Poet Speaks'; Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 33.) If words can be absolute objects, their own conversation - an interdependence - becomes something more than grammar. Thus Latin/Greek words ('Tamed now/ To its own mystifications') clear little arenas for themselves, whilst to construe the syntax (not the sense) of:

A condensation, a gleam simplification

Of all that pertained

as one amalgam of meaning would be to miss completely the complexities and poetry: the words are not slaves, but servants.

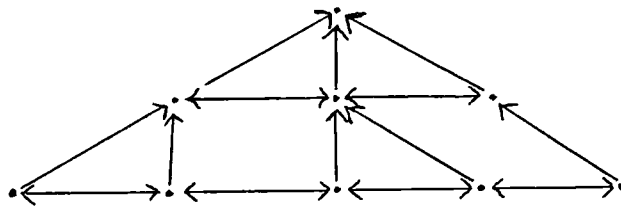
Hughes' critical remarks reveal an interest in the possibilities of amalgamation and juxtaposition of parts, at least at the level of sentences. (On a larger scale, his failure to combine units effectively must be regarded as a limitation. The attempt in Cave Birds or Prometheus is obviously impressive, but his exercises in re-assemblage ('Boom', 'Stations', etc.) seem curiously casual. Rigid subordination of parts to a whole, which the novel represents and Gaudete refuses to undertake, perhaps answers to an old (Cartesian) sense of hierarchy. But, twenty years on, Crow remains incomplete, here a feather, there a claw. Hughes' advice on 'Writing a Novel' - start at the beginning - Poetry in the Making pp. 87ff. - is distinctly unhelpful.)

'It is one of those curious facts that when two things are compared in a metaphor or a simile, we see both of them much more distinctly than if they were mentioned separately' (Poetry in the Making p. 44). A Tyger can be controlled by 'fixing the symbol in context' beside a Lamb (Faas 1980 p. 200). In Shakespeare 'the play binds the words magnetically, decides their meaning and polarity, seals them off from ordinary life, consecrates and inspires them' (1971 Shakespeare p. 9). The structure of Gaudete at least helps the lyrics make their effect on us, through all the clutter of everyday experience, which can be difficult for a poem.

Hughes' observations on Riding's 'new-molten supple wild and free language' (1970 'Riding'; Faas 1980 p. 189), Dickinson's ability 'to hold words in precise, yet at the same time somehow free, relationships [so that] the individual words seem trembling on the point of slipping into utterly new meanings' (1963 'Dickinson'; Faas 1980 p. 170), or the 'constellation of statements' which provides the 'inner form' of Douglas' poems (1963 'Douglas'; Faas 1980 p. 171), lead Faas to associate his manner uncritically with that of American modernists. But, by retaining grammar, Hughes has never sacrificed poetry's claim to represent the soul's more instinctive eloquence. At the same time, his language

never retreats from feeding itself, too, into the alchemist's physical transformation: the contrast with for instance Snyder's unimplicated statements, more oiltanker than dolphins, seems salient.

Koestler's model of the holon may suggest why Hughes' linguistic suppleness seems (in a small way) new. Our cells are all autonomous, living and dying. Yet they are all subordinate to the larger meaning, the body. Again a non-linear model:



is needed to represent the simultaneity of complete freedom and submission. Hughes has himself drawn parallels between cellular and linguistic organization: in Plath's poems, 'everything [clings] together like a family of living cells, where nothing can be alien or dead or arbitrary' (1965 'Plath'; Faas 1980 p. 179). In 'Brambles', the 'Court-world' of 'jackdawdom' is dependent upon the individual, unconscious birds just as 'mute [cells]', through 'godlike syntax and vocabulary', make up his own conscious self.

I could translate my diagram from terms of the inherent relation of words, to how our minds subjectively relate them - which is more important - by labeling the horizontal axis 'space' (the page) and the vertical 'time' (rising). As we listen, 'now', that is 'space', lasts about ten seconds - the time within which sounds echo in our heads, and we can grasp and sort the number of linguistic components that has defined the 'sentence' for all literatures. If we want to argue a single point (not tell a story) for longer than ten seconds, we must rely on the vertical, hierarchical axis, either exercising the 'secondary' memory Blake decried or becoming disorientated (logical thinking - like this paragraph - easily loses sight of the whole or end). 'Sometimes we want not just our thoughts about this thing, or that thing. We want the progress of thoughts - the way one follows another, as in... [an] argument.... This is the

next step, lesson two' (Poetry in the Making p. 63). It shows Hughes' unusual awareness of the dangers inherent in building large structures on the same organizing principle as the sentence that he should distinguish the two 'lessons' to this extent (and argue his poems only appertain to the first). Since our minds grasp all the elements of a (simple) sentence simultaneously, the rigid hierarchy of the grammar itself holds no dangers. Beyond this grasp, conversely, a holistic structure seems an important alternative. A hologram contains all its information within each of its 'cells'. River's sentences stand in strikingly free relation to each other, representing not paragraphs of an argument but events in a story whose (nonlogical) nature permits each episode to infiltrate one entirely: poetic development is prescinded, but the poems are already 'there'. Hughes' poems are often criticized for allowing lines or stanzas to be subtracted without prejudicing their (logical) meaning. This potentiality seems precisely their newness and importance. (When, as in the Gaudete lyrics, a complex argument is to be articulated, Hughes pushes the 'sentence' - the 'now' - to its structural limits. We have to turn the poems in our minds as single icons - as pictures:

But the stars
Are sunbathing
On the shores
Of the sea whose waves

Pile in from your approach...

(#13, p. 182).)

Hughes has dramatised the conflict of hierarchic and holistic thought-patterns in 'Tiger-Psalm'. The machine-guns represent Socrates. They 'Talk, talk, talk across their Acropolis', and 'eliminate the error/ With a to-fro dialectic'. Their side of the poem advances step by step ('Talk', 'carry on arguing', 'go on chattering', 'Proclaim the Absolute', 'laugh', 'speak', 'permit themselves a snigger'). The Buddha's argument proceeds by slow intensification of 'The tiger/ Kills', transcending logic ('The tiger/ Kills/ With the strength of five tigers') and confounding Socrates by appearing to be on both sides at once: 'The tiger... Does not kill': the poem reconciles the tensions of the

cultural moment it speaks for, and concludes with a simple psalm to 'The Tiger of the Earth'.

The Buddha's lines represent the simplest kind of non-hierarchic advance, Hughes' infamous 'list' structure. It is not a technique I want to criticize, being at its best an aesthetically satisfying substitute for stanzaic or rhythmic organization, and possessing in performance a culminative power which on the page - its termination pre-apparent - it cannot imitate.

The Gaudete lyrics are uncharacteristic in the degree of their logicity. Hughes tends to foster non-logical, non-hierarchic structures even within the 'safe-zone' of the sentence. His metaphors are not so much 'complex' as free enough to make transitive 'structuring' by the reader impertinent:

The blue
Is a daze of bubbly fire - naked
Ushering and nursing of electricity
With carressings of air. Earth,
Mud-stained, stands in sparkling beggary.
(*'First March Watercolour'*).

All the images these lines suggest have to be accepted, passively, one after another - in a way never quite dispossessing the tenor, the spring air. In 'primitive', pre-logical poetry, 'the units of speech [tend to be] less differentiated.... Each is combined with other units to give a rich, accumulative result' (Bowra 1962 p. 23). An anthropologist's translation is unlikely to imitate the syntactic idiosyncracies, but there are obvious affinities to Hughes' particular method in, say:

On the weeping forest, under the wing of the evening,
The night, all black, has gone to rest happy;
In the sky the stars have fled trembling,
Fireflies which shine vaguely and put out their lights...
(Bowra's translation of R. P. Trilles' translation of a
Gabon Pygmy elephant-hunting song).

Hughes' mature poetry also displays features characteristic of l'écriture féminine: non-logical structuring; inconclusiveness; punning; multiple voices (Socrates/ Buddha); rubbed-out punctuation; and the occasional derailment of syntax ('The survivor of cease'; 'The gunmetal feathers/ Of would not be put

aside, would not falter'). We find as much, however, in Shakespeare, or Dickinson.

2a: Stylistic ideals

'All falsities in writing - and the consequent dry-rot that spreads into the whole fabric - come from the notion that there is a stylistic ideal.... That... belongs rather to the study of... group jargon. [The] words should be not "How to write" but "How to try to say what you really mean" - which is part of the search for self-knowledge' (Poetry in the Making p. 12). 'One could quarrel with this as a partial view; quite as likely to lead to quantities of bad verse as the opposite approach which he rejects - the "falsity" of having ideals of good writing' (Morgan 1976 p. 881). To abjure 'style', after all, is a stylistic absolute; Hughes' aim is to subordinate 'how to say it' to 'what to say', which asks conviction. 'I tend to suspect that my poems are written by about three separate spirits or three separate characteristic states of mind' (1963 'The Poet Speaks'; Sagar 1975 p. 2). Bishop (1990) considers Hughes has succeeded in his professed ideal of ridding himself of upward-striving, aesthetic ideals - a 'death of poetry' which makes way for a transparent, humbler, utterly unselfconscious writing. But a poem like 'Crow and the Birds' certainly remains selfconscious in its rejection of aesthetic flights for a 'head-down' assimilation of unredeemed matter; Hughes defines (1980 'Moortown') the renunciation of stylistic techniques in some Moortown Diary 'poems' as something quite unrepresentative; the superseding of linguistic consciousness, this thesis certainly contends, is a metaphysical, not, ultimately, an aesthetic, negotiation.

One must at least emphasise Hughes' role as a stylist. Dickinson, he claims, 'was able to manage such a vast subject matter, and make it so important to us, purely because of the strengths and ingenuities of her poetic style' (1968 Dickinson p. 14). Nor should to claim Hughes abjures 'stylistic ideals' be to imply he is not stylistically a perfectionist. Scigaj, demonstrating Hughes' debts to Ransom and Tate, argues for his stature as exponent of the

'well-made poem', as this thesis will for his aesthetic discrimination in general. Rice, however (1985 p. 91), quoting the central lines of 'Swifts', suggests there is 'clearly "too much power" here'. One could respond that art's role of organizing and interpreting experience remains reconcilable with the mimesis of absolute energy - the swifts' - by means of consciously jettisoning what - elegant moderation - the poem still understands as aesthetically correct.

'Revenge Fable' is generally considered an unsatisfactory poem. Its being a song 'that a Crow would sing' (Faas 1980 p. 208), is excused, at least, by Crow's structure. In a different way, it is clearly a 'good' poem: change one word, and you ruin it. Again, I feel, its transgression of aesthetic propriety is calculated and dramatic.

Blasting the whole world to bits
Was too like slamming a door
Too like dropping in a chair
Exhausted with rage
Too like being blown to bits yourself
Which happened too easily
With too like no consequences.
('Crow's Account of the Battle').

Larkin can generate the same disturbing effect - of indignation, even rage - by kicking over his own (prosodic) traces:

Life is first boredom, then fear.
Whether or not we use it, it goes...
('Dockery and Son').

2b: Simplicity

The stylistic clarification Bishop analyses, however, has been defined by Hughes in terms less of actually escaping linguistic selfconsciousness than of seeking 'a simple concrete language' (Faas 1980 p. 209) as sheer and monumental as the reality it addresses: a pursuit - certainly one of the most salient and significant elements of the poetry - whose achievement not philosophy but the lyrics themselves will speak of.

Applauding Keith Sagar's poetry's 'unsentimental, workmanlike practicality' (1980 'The Reef' p. 4), Hughes finds such plainness ('on the other side of personality and fashion', ibid.) in Tolstoy and Edwin Muir; 'good folk rhymes have this kind of simplicity - experience itself seems to have produced them' (ibid. p. 3). 'In [Stephen] Crane it produces little visionary parables, as it did (with infinitely greater illumination) in Blake' (ibid.). For Crane 'the readiness to abandon the verbal charms of conventional poetry' (ibid.) leads to 'anti-poems, of a sort' (ibid. p. 2). 'But at its best [this manner] is not marginal (Picasso, Kafka)' (ibid. p. 3). Hughes discovers the same qualities in Pilinszky's 'linguistic poverty', the 'primitive element in the way [he] grasps [his] subject' (1976 Pilinszky p. 8), in Popa, whose participants 'are deeper than our reality as puppets are deeper' (1969 Popa p. 15) and in Douglas, whose language 'renews the simplicity of ordinary talk' (1964 Douglas p. 12) and 'has the trenchancy of an inspired jotting' (ibid. p. 13). 'Some of [Singer's pages] are very near a bare, point-blank, life-size poetry that hardly exists in English... blazing with life and actuality' (1965 'Singer' p. 10). Williamson's Tolstoyesque 'presentation of objective realities in prose' generates 'a sensation I have never felt so acutely in any other [writer]... The icy feeling of the moment of reality' (1980 'Williamson' pp.160-61).

In a poet, like Lawrence, to whose writing 'coloured substance' and 'a poetry of observation' (Faas 1980 p. 213) seem so central, the super-simplicity of 'View of a Pig' (ibid. p. 212) or much of Crow might still seem self-betraysals. 'The first idea of Crow was really an idea [an ideal?] of a style' (ibid. p. 208). '"Theology" was a note for a poem, and turned out itself to be a better poem than I could have written at that time' (ibid. p. 211). Hughes repudiates his later imitation, 'Reveille', but in Crow looks the 'dirty, scabby little' gift-horse in the mouth. Pilinszky admitted Hungarian is a 'poor language' (1976 Pilinszky p. 8): Hughes could not imitate such 'linguistic poverty' in English.

'It is a notorious fact that the slightest "improving" touch from a skilled poet... kills... a Blake Song stone dead. That sort of simplicity - so deep

and impersonal and somehow all-inclusive - cannot be faked' (1980 'The Reef' p. 3). Mimesis, too, seems, central to Hughes' talent. He can describe nature - or imitate Vasko Popa. (He may not sufficiently distinguish the 'innocence' of a Blake and the classical simplicity - the sophistication of complete reserve - of a Popa: 'nothing prevents these poems from being merely ingenious, or virtuoso pieces of phrasing and timing, except the shock of recognition they impart' (1969 Popa p. 15). The 'primitive' element in Pilinszky, however, is itself 'deeply part of [his] most sophisticated effects' (1976 Pilinszky p. 8).)

2c: Roughness and Smoothness

By taking the kind of risks poets in our century tend to have retreated from, Hughes, like most earlier writers, has written shoddy pages, though the lack of historical sense (or sympathy with the workings of imagination) in the vehemence of the criticism this has occasioned is itself disturbing. (Eagleton - 1979/80 p. 80 - refuses to consider 'Hammering... with a hammer' was deliberate. Hughes says (1980 'Moortown') 'Tractor' was not one of the unrevised diary-entries: it is easy to underestimate the care and effort behind the poems. The wholesale revisions incorporated in Selected Poems 1957-1981 evidence concern over every comma.) Hughes permits 'Of' at the start of lines and relies on his ponderous, precise Yorkshire accent, rather than verbal shuffling, to see him through tongue-twisters. (Although a celebrated performer of his work, his collaborations with draftsmen and photographers have emphasized the written word more perhaps than is fashionable: poetry-readings may distract from the grammatical intricacies the language is capable of; poems from Lupercal like 'Things Present' - and the Gaudete lyrics - are barely readable aloud.)

Sometimes, indeed, Hughes' poetry seems part of the recent sophistication. His lyricism can grow almost Victorian; 'T. V. Off' is fashionably constructed in its oblique reference to an unspoken narrative; in 'Eclipse' and many recent poems Hughes whirls the reader round his head and lets go on the last line.

But the nicer requirements of today's critics tend to be what Hughes' ideas on style deliberately insult. He discovers what he calls 'homemade' or 'improvised' qualities in Pilinszky, Popa, Shakespeare, Riding and Douglas - though certainly not carelessness. Bedient's criticism - that 'Hughes seems to lay about for phrases, not to care much about the words themselves' (1974 p. 112) - was presumably made in ignorance of Hughes' interesting definition of Shakespeare's 'homely spur-of-the-moment improvisation out of whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying around' (1971 Shakespeare p. 11).

A bricklayer's pointing will grow more perfunctory at the top of a tower, partly because he knows no-one will notice, partly because he is concerned not to fall off. One must still question whether Hughes' emotional intensity alone 'consecrates and inspires' the 'slapdash' 'near-gibberish' of 'densely peculiar verbal poetry' in the way Shakespeare's plays' 'visionary world' will (1971 Shakespeare pp. 9-11): his method can fail, I suggest, in the more delicate atmosphere of Lupercal, Flowers and Insects and much of Season Songs.

Hughes' 'slapdash' seems the opposite of a contempt for language. Though an exponent of poetry translation, his most characteristic work is about as translatable as Shakespeare's or Hopkins', thanks to puns, revamped clichés in the manner of Hill, and the degree to which English suits the loose-limbed, intuitive mode. (Hughes finds 'the fluidity of a child's vocabulary' in Michael Baldwin's writing (1963 'Baldwin' p. 347), though Pilinszky's 'syntax', too, is 'quite idiosyncratic' (1976 Pilinszky p. 7).) Particularly sensitive appear his remarks on Shakespeare's 'pincer movement, where he embraces an idea with a latinate word on one wing and an Anglo-Saxon on the other' and on his 'instinct to misuse latinisms, but in an inspired way' (1971 Shakespeare p. 11) - as colloquial English misuses 'aggravate', and Hughes' own poetry, for instance, the Gallic 'malinger' and 'accoutrement' (frowned upon, in 'Lupercalia', by Dodsworth, Ford 1983 p. 285). He also speaks of 'the freakish blood-and-nerve paradoxical vitality of [Dickinson's] latinisms' (1968 Dickinson p. 14). Emily Brontë, similarly, invokes a heightened sense of physicality via Lockwood's

mincing niceness ('pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed'; Wuthering Heights ch. 1) and I find this in Hughes:

The expenditure of swift purity
Nevertheless goes on...
('Dee') -

these lines also echoing:

Absent thee from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain...
(Hamlet V, ii, 339-340).

The homage paid to every word is certainly central to Hughes' books' religious exhilarations.

2d: Rhetoric

Sagar (1983 p. 11) considers Hughes' mature 'transparent purity' antithetical to 'rhetoric'. West, however, dismisses much of Earth-Numb as 'palpably and artificially rhetorical' (1985 p. 103) and Grevel Lindop considers most of Flowers and Insects, linguistically at an opposite extreme, a pretext 'for impatient flourishes of coarse-grained rhetoric' (1987 p. 244). The word 'rhetoric' has been steadily denigrated, but nowadays there is impatience with much of what it first stood for: persuasiveness, a straightforward dramatic sense of timing, canniness over which phrasing will hit hardest. Elizabeth Sewall (1961 p. 31) has suggested that 'rhetoric' cannot be dissociated from poetry's entire nonlogical effect. Though Hughes' conception of poetry both as personal therapy and as 'transparent medium for matter' (Bishop 1990) suggest otherwise, most of his work includes and manipulates the reader as skilled rhetoric. Though The Hawk in the Rain is often 'rhetorical' in the wrong sense - non-organic flourishes disguising inner banality (one might say as much of the structural conventions, the somewhat paltry choice of received tricks, and very abjuration of dramatic excitement in much contemporary poetry) - the 'rhetoric' in his mature work remains one entirely compatible with the 'careful

refusal to surrender [oneself] to any mechanical progression imposed on [one] by the tyranny of [one's] own words or images, [the] endless scrupulous alertness on the frontiers of false and true' Hughes respects in Popa, Pilinszky and others (1977 Popa p. 3).

Rhetoric is simple. To represent the epic nature of one's subject, one can mention 'stars': 'When all the stars threw down their spears'; 'Before the last sea and the hapless stars'; 'We are tossing in a net of stars' (Pilinszky's 'Fish in the Net'). Hughes knew this by 'Song'; 'crumble', 'grain', 'lit', he now understands, have a comparable, constant summoning power for him. More complex will be the musical rise and ebb of 'Kubla Khan' or - scarcely less climactic - 'The Thought-Fox' - a wave cresting over at 'its own business' (the fox is not after us) and falling off the steady shore of window and clock.

2e: Poetry and Music

Hughes' poetry - often at its most 'primitive' - can be musically structured:

But Crow Crow
Crow nailed them together,
Nailing Heaven and earth together -
 ('Crow Blacker than ever').

'My interest in poetry is really a musical interest, I think', he told Peter Orr (1963 'The Poet Speaks' p. 87). Beethoven (Faas 1980 p. 202) shares the bottom of his soul with Blake and 'Cadenza' and 'Grosse Fugue' exactly imitate music (Beethoven's in the latter case). Hughes' method in The Hawk in the Rain was 'something like the method of a musical composer. I might say that I turn every combatant into a bit of music, then resolve the whole uproar into as formal and balanced a figure of melody and rhythm as I can' (1957 'Ted Hughes Writes'; Faas 1980 p. 163). The remark may be more illuminating applied to, for instance, Cave Birds' bewildering structural counterpoint of alchemical, shamanic and Egyptian motifs, its synthesis of Socrates' last days, a schizophrenic episode and the Odyssey.

Music, like Orghast's 'earth-speech', seems an absolute utterance, beyond the betrayal of words - an utterance of absolute, spiritual reality: 'some animals and birds express this being pure and without effort' (1971 'Talking Without Words'; Faas 1980 p. 190). It is 'almost mathematical' (1965 'Plath'; Faas 1980 p. 179) ('the more free [Plath's verse] gets, the more musically exact it gets.... Every one of its casual free lines is like a sudden new melody - surprising and inevitable' (1971 'Plath' p. 170), but a sheer expression of emotion too: Popa's 'poetry is near the world of music, where a repository of selected signs and forms, admitted from the outer world, act out fundamental combinations that often have something eerily mathematical about their progressions and symmetries, but which seem to belong deeply to the world of spirit or of the heart' (1969 Popa p. 12).

Hughes' own word-music is one of precise, but increasingly subdued, consonants, and (excluding the early work, Crow and Wolfwatching) vowels in close rich harmony, rather than the spiky, jumping counterpoint of a classicist. A predilection for what with most poets would simply chime ('Out of bedrock your blood's operation'; 'Foxglove, harebell neither protest nor hope/ On the steep slope') has, more recently, been elaborated not only for obvious ('a standstill/ In brand new stillness'; 'snowdrops, pert and apart') or serio-comic ('wooing of wolves/ And rumpus of walrus') effect, but as the essence of his strangest melodies: 'In dumbness uttering spirit brightness'; 'a monument/ Of its lament/ On a headland of life'.

How 'mathematical' poetry should be, Hughes does not define. Blake considered 'Mathematical Form' the bane of 'Living Form'. Certainly imaginative visualization should not resemble 'mental arithmetic' (Poetry in the Making p. 18). Riding's 'precision' is the inverse of our 'naively mathematical computerised ideal of language' (1970 'Riding'; Faas 1980 p. 189). Plath 'wrote her early poems very slowly... as if she were working out a mathematical problem' (1966 'Plath'; Faas 1980 p. 181) - which Hughes mistrusts unless the mathematics accord with one's inner voice's 'mathematical symmetries' (ibid. p. 180).

2f: Prosody

Hughes uses 'formal devices' 'here and there' (Faas 1980 p. 208). His best free verse represents no surrender of control or inevitability: the net is down, but it is a high-wire act, not tennis. Hughes still thinks 'it's true that formal patterning of the actual movement of verse somehow includes a mathematical and a musically deeper world than free verse can easily hope to enter' (ibid.). (His qualification - 'easily' - must be remembered.) Probably he could never have become a fine judge of formal technique (his remarks on Douglas' 'technical accuracy' (1962 'Douglas'; Faas 1980 p. 165) strike me as odd), though the constant near-disasters of The Hawk in the Rain in fact imply total control, the doggerel in The Coming of the Kings is managed with some flair and prosodic effects can be genuinely seductive: (rhyming 'man')

But the herd stays in Paradise, where everything began,
Where the rivers are rivers of foaming milk and the eyes are African.
(What is the Truth? p. 22).

During his Crow period, Hughes almost abandoned enjambement but some returns to it ('The tap drips darkness darkness/ Sticks to the soles of your feet') are very effective. In 'April Birthday', or 'Milesian Encounter on the Sligachan', he achieves dramatic gear-changes without relying on obvious rhythms at all. Though his use of stanzas permits some effective counterpoint against the spoken rhythms, his readiness to divide poems regularly still suggests some kind of guilt at abandoning traditional prosody.

Hughes speaks of Plath's success in coming 'clear of the domination of heavy iambic lines' (Newman 1970 p. 191); Brian Morse considers Wodwo 'a more complete escape from the iambic pentameter than English derivations of recent American experimentation' (Chambers 1980 p. 119). Little terminology exists for analyzing verse which is strongly rhythmic but not regular; let me suggest, for Hughes' case, a norm (...-u-u-u...) alternating stress and non-stress, and - besides the steel girders of subdued rhythms - two manifestations: viaduct

and suspension-bridge: the former the regular, meditative walking pace of nearly all our 'iambic' tradition; the latter the self-reflexive or rhetorical magniloquence of the later Shakespeare, of Hopkins, Meredith, Swinburne, Christabel and the ballad, the alliterative, anapaestic and dactylic modes, which, by omitting or adding unstressed syllables (any number, according to Hopkins' 'Sprung Verse' theory) energize the stresses. Hughes' allegiance is to this latter, striding, surging measure (though his measured delivery will prevent its rollicking). Some River poems, however, approach the steady paragraphs of Wordsworthian viaducts, and he often drifts into this mode's symmetrical plangency to balance an ending:

What humbles these hills has raised
The arrogance of blood and bone,
And thrown the hawk upon the wind,
And lit the fox in the dripping ground.
('Crow Hill', 1958).

The fascination of iambics, when, even treated cavalierly, they bring in this kind of dividend, is of course immense: Hughes produces them far more often than Morse implies. Part of the music of the Gaudete lyrics is their drift towards, or commencement with, soft iambic pentameters ('I hear your congregations at their rapture'; 'Sometimes it comes, a gloomy flap of lightning'; 'Which is the magic baggage old men open'), their immediate recoil into uncouthly broken rhythms, and final attainment of a subdued, lyric compromise. One of Hughes' ambitions seems to be to reproduce the hypnotic simplicity of the ballad-measure (in Dickinson 'a device for bringing each syllable into close-up, as under a microscope' - 1968 Dickinson p. 14) without fulfilling the precise prosodic requirements - loosely, as Eliot wrote unrhymed terza rima in 'Little Gidding'. 'Snake Hymn', 'For Weights of Blood' and 'I said goodbye to earth' nearly manage this; and 'She rides the earth' (Gaudete p. 184) for its eight lines seems somehow to succeed completely.

3: Humour in the Poetry.

It is obvious from his children's writing that Hughes has real gifts as a humourist. But, just as Shakespeare distressed succeeding theoreticians by the comedy of his tragedies, the simultaneity of humour and seriousness in Hughes' poetry (and the Yorkshire trick of sounding more serious than he is - 'Mozart's brain had it' ('Thrushes')) seems to confuse people. Derwent May (Dodsworth 1970 p. 136) recognizes 'a witty example of the mock-sinister' in 'October Dawn' but feels the 'extravagant but sardonic humour' often 'lurches into portentousness that suggests he has not always been quite sure where the humour begins and ends' (*ibid*, p. 140). Neither, perhaps, has Seamus Heaney, questioning Hughes' 'titanic extravagance' (Sagar 1983 p. 20). Gifford and Roberts (1981 pp. 50ff.) regard the humour in the way of self-forgiven lapses, adjunct to the emotive effect.

Hughes' extravagant, self-conscious humour and his 'inspired' moral seriousness do not, I suggest, qualify, but sustain, each other. The result seems a genuine departure (shared to a degree by Redgrove): G. K. Chesterton suggested a future Western religion might be built round the human sense of humour. Crow ('A Grin', 'The Smile', etc.) tries to define this 'zestful and creative' 'laughter' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4), but I am referring less, here, to this book's slapdash (seldom 'funny' in Trickster Literature's manner) than to the robust and agile self-belittling self-confidence, the delight in metaphor, the strangely moving grace and sheer creaturely enthusiasm in, say:

As earth gets up in the frosty dark, at the back of the Pole Star
And flies into dew
Through the precarious crack of light

Quacking Wake Wake

('The Wild Duck').

One can paint blue squares, but it's no good slipping anamorphic skulls into the corners.¹ Hughes' (essentially unRomantic) humour substitutes for the self-conscious irony critics tend to miss in him; no-one succeeds in making nature

¹ Abstract Expressionism's 'high seriousness'; the wit in Holbein's 'The Ambassadors'.

sound less solemn, more lived-in, than Hughes. 'Shamanizings are also entertainments, full of buffoonery' (1964 'Shamanism'; Faas 1980 p. 175). In Singer Hughes finds: 'a comic note, a sort of savage enjoyment... weirdly blended with pathos, simplicity, idyllic piety, horror' (1965 'Singer' p. 10). But Hughes' inextricable wit - the absence of High Seriousness or élitism, attending even the deepest questionings - seems quintessentially English, too, the quiddity of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens. Hughes' indebtedness to Shakespeare is obvious; but speaking to Faas of influences in 1971, he mentioned reading Chaucer more than Lawrence, Blake, or Yeats (Faas 1980 p. 202).

The microcosm of this still mistrusted simultaneity is the pun.

He hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.
(King Lear, V, iii, 313-315).

Hughes seems as fond of puns (where both meanings are serio-comic) as Shakespeare (and if they are subliminally-suggested, he doesn't revise them out). They can, as for 'punning schizophrenia', outwit dualism and reconcile irreconcilables. Walder considers 'the pun on "tale"' in 'Life is Trying to be Life' 'an absurdity, however you read it' (Walder 1987 p. 81): if he had read more carefully, he would have found calembours even in Hughes' most lyrical cadences - here, on 'readiness' (to 'set' sail for next year):

The wind is oceanic in the elms
And the blossom is all set.
('Sheep: 1').

4a: Influences, Sources and Analogues

In a way Hughes' place into today's delta of poetic traditions - rural craftsmen, campaigners, modernists and Sunday Blakes¹ - is syncretic. He has recognized the Movement's 'essential English strengths' but calling it 'an heroic position' is in Hughes' terms partly condemnation (Faas 1980 p. 201): it goes to meet the dragon carrying a clasp-knife instead of mandragora. Larkin one would except;

¹As in Jay Ramsay's Transformation.

and, from thirty years' distance, Hughes' early work bears real similarities to, for instance, Davie's syntactic yoga-positions. Hughes also invented the 'Martian' style - or adapted it from Dickinson ('"Landlords" turn the drunken Bee/ Out of the Foxglove's door' - poem 214) - long before Reid and Raine. (Raine acknowledges Hughes as his first important model.)

Hughes, though, has few would-be imitators (Massingham, Walker, Glyn Hughes, Wevill; perhaps Frances Horovitz benefitted more than anyone from an intimate reading of his mature, Shakespearean style). Although he too feels 'the great period [is] now just over' (1970 'Riding'; Faas 1980 p. 188) and 'that some of the Scots ballads still cut a deeper groove than anything written in the last forty years' (Faas 1980 p. 204), and is inimitable, Hughes' poetry still seems to me accessible as a model, suggesting how thinking and lyrics remain reconcilable. Burns Singer argued poetry can only imitate the feel of discursive thought, a process not a product, not politics or philosophy but an ornament. When Dickens presented a wrong, he necessarily proposed its rectification, beside which our political poetry tends to be so much garden-gate gossip. Hughes' major arguments are genuine. He has also invented several forms - the Ort, the River-poem, the diary-entry, the Elmet-fragment, the Tiger-psalm - alternative to the precisely-formulated 'lyric' which occupies so much of poetry today.

'Every man skin his own skunk' (Hughes' response to Agenda's questionnaire on the state of poetry today - Agenda 27 no. 3, Autumn 1989 p. 40). Since his models eventually helped him find his own voice (and to retreat from 'style'), we find few subconscious and fewer conscious derivations in Hughes' mature lines. '[We] Left to God the calf and his mother' ('Birth of Rainbow') acknowledges, he says, Frost's 'Something has to be left to God' (Moortown Diary p. 64). 'The small madness of roots' ('The knight') might make contact with Banquo's 'insane root/ That takes the reason prisoner' before the patterns of crazy-paving, or the 'nightlong frenzy' of rootdwellers ('Mayday on Holderness'). The sense of death and the posthumous in the haunting 'In the scarves of dew,

the wet hair of nightfall' ('The Green Wolf') may grow from Dickinson's:

The Dews drew quivering and chill -
For only Gossamer, my Gown -
My Tippet - only Tulle -
(Poem 712).

The hair is also the Goddess', in which she snares the dead; but in Aranda mythology, dew falls from the hair of the ancestor Kantija (Bowra 1962 p. 237: Hughes reviewed this book a few weeks before writing the poem). As late as 'Two Legends', 'packed in furnace' recalls Thomas' sea, 'tumbling in harness'. 'The knight' and 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days' variously recall the last section of Pasternak's 'Fairy Tale' (Doctor Zhivago): after his hubris in attacking the dragon, the knight lies beside his bride while

Rivers. Fords.
Years. Centuries...

pass them by:

At times excess of joy
Triples their tears,
At time a dead sleep
Holds them in its power....
(Pasternak 1988 p. 485).

The resemblance cannot really be to Hughes' advantage and may be unconscious. (Hughes has told Neil Roberts he recognizes the prose/ verse relationship in Gaudete is much like Doctor Zhivago's.) Often, though, these echoes tell more about the way the spirit works, worldwide, than who influences whom. Consider three conclusions:

... like a toad in a baking stone
Interested only in water, water.
(Hughes: 'A Fable', 1960)

... These are the isolate, slow faults
That kill, that kill, that kill.
(Plath: 'Elm', 1962)

And hold in my arms a child
Of water, water, water.
(Dickie: 'The Lifeguard', 1962)

- or, to be fairer to Hughes:

Beguile me, change. What have I fallen from?
(Roethke: 'Fourth Meditation', 1958)

I have fallen a long way. Clouds are flowering...
(Plath: 'The Moon and the Yew Tree', 1961)

Collision with the earth has finally come -
How far can I fall?
(Hughes: Gaudete p. 180 - c. 1974)

- or, ending paragraphs:

... and the sun
Rises upon a world well-tried and old.
(Hughes: 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning', 1964)

and the sun rises on an acknowledged land.
(Bunting: Briggflatts, 4, 1965).

An error of Faas' (1980 p. 86) about the vintage of the Wodwo poems (now, in the way of such things, current, as in Wagner-Martin's biography) has suggested a debt to Ariel - which they nearly all antedate. To Gifford and Roberts, too, 'it seems... likely that the greater rhythmical freedom, compression and elliptical language of Hughes's poetry from Wodwo onwards owes something to the example of Sylvia Plath's later work' (1981 p. 22). Safest to say that, as between Picasso and Braque, the imitation was mutual: I find very few recollections of Plath in Hughes' later poems, though the redemptive moment at the end of 'Football at Slack' linguistically recalls 'Mary's Song'.

In 1959, Hughes introduced Roethke's Words for the Wind to Plath; Roethke's style seems to have influenced Hughes' as he was moving towards Wodwo, his free sequences of almost surreally emotive yet earthbound images paralleling, for instance:

The expressionless gaze of the leopard,
The coils of the sleeping anaconda,
The nightlong frenzy of shrews.
('Mayday on Holderness').

Roethke's 'Meditation at Oyster River' foreshadows Hughes' idea of unifying such images via the symbol of the river. Hughes never used 'I' to anything

like the extent of Roethke or Plath, but one vein of his children's writing continues to recall Roethke's nonsense-fantasies in I Am! Says the Lamb (1961).

The examples of Eliot, Hopkins, Donne, Thomas, Ransom, Douglas, Yeats and the influence of Blake, Shakespeare, and the alliterative tradition, have been considered elsewhere, while the parallels to Lawrence seem too obvious to have been much emphasized. Lorca's vision and debt to folk-poetry will also have influenced Hughes, though only a bad piece of Wodwo-surrealism ('After Lorca', 1963) acknowledges it. 'The Song' bears close affinities to Lorca's 'The Song Wants to be the Light' (James Wright's translation). Richard Gravil (1983 pp. 198-199) assesses Hughes' parallels to Wordsworth. (His 'nature' and 'memory' are Wordsworthian, not Blakean.)

The grass-blade is not without
The loyalty that never was beheld

(Gaudete p. 189)

certainly recalls to me 'Nature never did betray/ The heart that loved her' ('Tintern Abbey'); and the blank-verse line is more Wordsworth than Hughes. No-one has explored Hughes' links with Shelley, who of the Romantics was most interested in the Shamanic role. There is the same improbable synthesis of lyrics, like fragments of stars, and ideal yet robust Promethean radicalism; the validity of the comparison seems to me to show how high one's estimation of Hughes' achievement can justifiably be.

It is worth remembering that Hughes considers Emily Dickinson 'a poet who stands easily and not outlandishly with our two or three greatest' (1963 'Dickinson' p. 394). Dickinson's visionary poems, commonsensical and inevitable and unearthly, seem blueprints for Hughes'. Occasionally ('Life is Trying to be Life'), comparison appears justified.

Hughes has also described Henry Williamson as 'one of the two or three truest poets of his generation'; 'he added masterpieces to the literature of his country' (1980 'Williamson' pp. 161, 165). Tarka the Otter 'entered into [Hughes] and gave shape and words to [his] world, as no book ever has done

since' (ibid. p. 160). Though Williamson's appeal will occasionally have been to Hughes' worser nature - if we can call it that - the uncivilized, forthright simplifications of some early poems - Hughes' version of Williamson shows how seriously he takes nature-writing, even facing 'the dreadful world of "Modern History"' (ibid., p. 162).

Among his contemporaries, Hughes has only really paid homage to Yehuda Amichai and several Eastern Europeans. His translations of Amichai evidence his interests in Jewish culture more than important affinities. Herbert and Holub's liberal skepticism, their reserved focus on the human and particular, and their interpretation of verse as everyday discourse (Holub derived his voice from W. C. Williams, he claims (see Alvarez 1968 p. 138)) are also far removed from Hughes': what he respects is how next to nothing they hold between themselves and history. (Herbert's Pan Cogito is Crow's younger cousin.) Popa is a different kind of poet in that he is principally a stylist, his concerns being more existential than moral. His aesthetic is more classical and bleaker than Hughes', but 'Revenge Fable', 'Song of Longsight' and 'Four Tales Told by an Idiot', with their diagrammatic naïveté, bear out the influence. This, then, is generally baleful, but 'Seven Dungeon Songs' and 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days' manage to incorporate the bald geometry within Hughes' own vein.

4b: János Pilinszky: Guilt and Free-Will

Hughes' translations of János Pilinszky reveal the unapproachable grandeur of an old master, but at the same time a practical moral sensibility beyond his own. Pilinszky's surreal and violent imagery can closely resemble Hughes', whilst poems like 'Pibroch', written before Hughes encountered Pilinszky, recall his subjects ('the dialogue of God and man/ destruction and birth' - 'Gradually'). To me, however, Pilinszky's hermetic, Catholic humanism seems closer to Hill, his solitary stoicism closer to Larkin. Perhaps his real,

and important, influence on Hughes was, somehow, moral. (Hughes has defined these poets' stylistic 'scrupulous alertness' as 'in effect... an intensely bracing moral vigilance' (1977 Popa p. 3).) Pilinszky's poetry dramatizes, to extraordinary effect, the sense of guilt that only matures in Hughes' with Crow. Poetry, the lawcourt of the mind, educates the sense of responsibilities - humans', for instance, towards the Earth. Pilinszky, beyond this, implies how it is the victim, as much as the aggressor, who feels the guilt of history. If victims of natural disaster invent a cause for their punishment, this is to humanize fate, to come to terms with it; secondly, to steal victimizers' guilt is to enter and understand their minds (and perhaps even to barter your suffering). Assuming another's guilt is the scapegoat's role: 'it is impossible not to feel that the spirit of [Pilinszky's] poetry aspires to the most naked and helpless of all confrontations: a Christ-like posture of crucifixion. His silence is the silence of that moment on the cross, after the cry' (1976 Pilinszky; Faas 1980 p. 193; omitted from 1989 Pilinszky). 'It is characteristic that his affinities are not with other poets, but with such figures as Van Gogh, certain of Dostoevsky's characters, and, above all, perhaps with Simone Weil' (1976 Pilinszky p. 12).

Hughes' presentation of suffering in the early poems is generally uncomplicated, but in Wodwo he takes the victim's part. Several thinkers resembling Hughes - Kafka, Calderon, Heidegger, Schopenhauer - have interpreted life's suffering as retribution for 'the sin of having been born' (Beckett on Proust), and Artaud and the Existentialists, more specifically, for the crime of causing pain to others by your existence. The young protagonist in Cave Birds is 'an innocent - that is, a guilty one' (1975 'Cave Birds'), but Hughes' optimism, and rationalizing tendencies, would not rest content with this stoicism. The protagonist's guilt is precise, determined by the behaviour of 'The Judge' and the suffering of 'The Plaintiff' - the guilt of the rational humanist who refuses to accept the 'guilt' of '[eating] flesh and [drinking] blood' (Cave Birds, p. 42) - that of the man in 'Existential Song' who only experiences Sartrean

despair at the pointlessness of our 'race' because he steps outside it - the guilt, that is, of the Fall. Many mature poems, commencing with 'Criminal Ballad', practically answer Artaud by arguing that refusing 'to live' causes others only greater suffering.

Hughes' adaptation of Oedipus continues to replace Seneca's stoic moral with the recognition that Oedipus' suffering is significant if, as a scapegoat, he redeems Thebes ('a King's fear is a nation's fear' - p. 16; Hughes' addition). Not only are Crow's sufferings 'purely psychological' (Hughes' letter, October 1979; Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 256), but, like Prometheus', they can be made redemptive and meaningful by his choice: he can reach The Happy Land, attain his natural being². 'Guilt', then, in Hughes' mature work, seems to have three aspects: the guilt of the Fall, of betraying nature; the shaman's or scapegoat's guilt, a deliberate assumption of the whole fallen community's; and the guilt - Lumb's or perhaps Hughes' - of failing to fulfil this shamanic role.

While he was revising his sense of essential, in terms of 'fallen', guilt, Hughes was also modifying his deterministic idea of a 'stalagmite/ Of history under the blood-drip' ('Lines to a New-Born Baby'). His talk of 'how [in poetry] the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error' (Faas 1980 p. 198), of Douglas' 'plain foreknowledge of his own rapidly-approaching end' (1964 Douglas p. 13), or his own 'suspicion that no poem can be a poem that is not a statement from the powers in control of our life' (Newman 1970 p. 194), may seem denials of free-will and human potential (endemic, as Yvor Winters would claim, to visionary Romanticism). But Hughes' speculation in Newman's book concludes: 'the powers in control of our life, the ultimate suffering and decision in us'. The 'spirit' in us, being on terms, or one, with universal 'fate', permits us absolute freedom. Lawrence's thinking was similar: 'we have really no will and no choice, in the first place. It is our soul which acts within us' (Lawrence 1961 p. 127). Hughes' poetry, asking dialogue with the 'soul', sponsors therefore, as much as any liberal thinking,

² 'Being' is not used in a specifically Heideggerian sense in this thesis.

independence and 'openness' in the face of everyday experience. What Hughes describes as his photographer's intellectual 'choice', not to beat off the tiger (1970 'Myth' pp. 56-57) represents, in his terms, the tyranny of rigid codes (objective rationalism) over everybody's potential freedom and altruism. A poem of real spiritual authority can 'give Fate a twist' (1978 'Tape'). What Hughes calls 'the laws, or the anarchy, of fate' (ibid.) seems, like Jung's 'synchronicity', too complex to be pigeon-holed as 'predestination': 'our ignorance' is 'total' (ibid.). 'Astrology', Hughes understands, 'enslaves minds and interferes with free consideration, replacing natural response and observation with abstract rules' (1964 'Superstitions' p. 500). 'History tends to be boring' because 'it does not often contain people', their ultimate suffering and decisions (Poetry in the Making p. 42). The main text of Gaudete repeatedly describes the illusion of predestinate helplessness: as for the photographer, scientific objectivity's blind stare has stultified the characters' 'ultimate... decision'. The imaginative release of the epilogue reveals the 'fateful' events, rather, as analyzable 'Error on error' (Gaudete p. 180). 'You Hated Spain' is about the pathos of our conviction (in defiance of what 'the... decision in us' has determined) that 'In the happy world [you have] your whole life waiting, / Happy, and all your poems still to be found', if only you can 'wake up' - this misconviction being what betrays our deepest actions in the moment of reality. If, like the hero of Cave Birds, consciousness learns to listen to and passively to trust the soul's 'decision', which is naturally right, one can be 'saved'. Such 'reverence... for the actuality of inner experience' is, in the case of Hara-kiri, 'not short of worship' (Hughes' letters, October 1978 and October 1979; Gifford and Roberts 1981 pp. 259-260), whilst for the Hasidic Jew, 'the Existential Choice, taken to its absolute limit of wholeheartedness, becomes inevitably a religion - because man is deeper and more complicated than merely rational controls can keep hold of. Then his beliefs, disciplines, and prohibitions have to be cultivated against the odds as in a world of poisons one chooses - sensibly after all - food that nourishes' (1965 'Singer'; Faas 1980 p. 178).

5a: Mono No Aware Wo Shiru

Hughes' idea of 'simplicity' may also be as much metaphysical, and hence moral, as stylistic. Years in advance of the poetry, his best prose often struggles to represent the unfallen, flash-vision sense of our mortal instant, the flux of time, the voice of Earth, which comes when physical extremity strips the neocortex's insulations. Williamson's 'objective' simplicity ('that rare simplicity or clarity which is superior to the Pauline charity - since the greater includes the lesser' - Williamson 1934 p. 83) 'made [Hughes] feel the pathos of actuality in the natural world. It was the first time I was ever aware of it. But I now know that only truly great writers are ever able to evoke it' (1980 'Williamson' p. 160). Pilinszky's 'vision' is of the 'Universe of Death, an immovable, unalterable horror, where trembling creatures still go uselessly through their motions.... The convict's scraped skull, the chickens in their wooden cages, the disaster-blanching wall, which recur like features of a prison yard - all have an eerie, glowing depth of perspective, like objects in an early religious painting' (1976 Pilinszky; Faas 1980 p. 194). Plath's muse '[floats] over a landscape like that of the Primitive Painters, a burningly luminous vision of a Paradise. A Paradise which is at the same time eerily frightening, an unalterably spot-lit vision of death' (1965 'Plath'; Faas 1980 p. 179). 'When we hear [our buried spirit] we understand what a strange thing [it/there] is[,] living in this Universe.... Some animals and birds express this being pure and without effort, and then you hear the whole desolate, final actuality of existence' (1971 'Talking Without Words'; Faas 1980 p. 190). 'The modern mediumistic artist... may see a vision of the real Eden, "excellent as at the first day", the draughty radiant Paradise of the animals, which is the actual earth, in the actual Universe: he may see Pan, whom Nietzsche mistook for Dionysus, the vital, somewhat terrible spirit of natural life, which is new in every second' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 pp. 186-187). Children, before they 'begin to lose validity as witnesses and participants in the business of living

in this universe', all have this 'naked process of apprehension' ('Children as Writers, 2' 1975 p. iii; Sagar 1978 p. 99). Behind Plath's poems 'there is also a child desperately infatuated with' (1965 'Plath'; Faas 1980 p. 179) 'the elemental final beauty of the created world' (1977 Popa; Sagar 1983 p. 311). Such 'a wild supersensitive creature' is Williamson's John Bullock (1980 'Williamson' p. 161): 'for four years, France was like England's dream world', a naked spiritual reality which 'had to wait for later embodiment in the prose of Henry Williamson, and in David Jones's "In Parenthesis"' (sic; 1965 'Men Who March...' p. 208). I would question whether this sense of 'the solving emptiness/ That lies just under all we do' (Larkin: 'Ambulances') is, in all its manifestations, negative and positive, palpable yet indescribable, as extraordinary as Hughes implies. Zen names it: mono no aware wo shiru, to sense, sunt lachrimae rerum. (Aware is a vision of universal transience; wabi, a recognition of Hopkinsian 'inscape'; yugen, a sense of immanence, an Intimation of Immortality - see Watts 1962 p. 200.) In Hughes' best poems, like 'Dawn's Rose', or 'Night Arrival of Sea-Trout', it is certainly there.

5b: Panta Rhei; the Wheel and the River

The sense, granted by this 'spot-lit vision of death', of Heraclitus' panta rhei, where 'Everything is inheriting everything' ('Root, Stem, Leaf'), seems powerfully to inform Hughes' poetry's individuality. Inside the shell of perceived reality, a seethe of forces and atoms is ready to turn into anything. 'Death is all things we see awake' (Heraclitus, fragment LXXXIX). The anthem of West Yorkshire, as Sagar (1978 p. 7) remarks, is 'On Ilkley Moor Bar T'Hat'. This 'single poetic Theme of life and death' (Graves 1961 p. 251) allows Hughes a realist's surrealism in yoking images uncannily: it answers his strangest coinages - 'an old woman's mouth/ When the eyelids have finished/ And the hills continue' ('Dawn's Rose'); 'man is the face, arms, legs etc. grown over the infinite, terrible All. Popa's poems work in the sanity and fundamental sim-

plicity of this fact, as it might appear to a man sitting in a chair' (1969 Popa p. 15) - or carrying one on his back ('Snow'); it explains his most seemingly gratuitous idiolect ('shoes' are the rational mind's insulation against the 'mud' of all-things, 'windows' against the 'rain' of eternity. 'Buckets' and 'puddles' abstract water from the omnivorous round.)

'The concentrated essence of Druidic, as of Orphic Greek, philosophy was Rheo, "I flow away".... The main problem of paganism is contained in Riuben.... "Must all things swing round again for ever? Or how can one escape from the Wheel?"' (Graves 1961 p. 140). For Blake, the Fall occurs as Urizen imprisons in time and individuality the running everything. We 'fall' as we grow up: 'in other words, we start the drift away from the flux of reality and so from any true adaptation' (Hughes in 'Children as Writers 2' 1975 p. iii; Sagar 1978 p. 99). Thus, like Urizen, Marduk-St. George slays the seamonster-goddess Tiamat, and, in Lawrence's vision, Plato 'popped the Logos into the mouth of the dragon, and the serpent of eternity was rounded off' (Lawrence 1968 p. 427): 'perhaps, instead of being one big old boy, [the dragon] is really an infinite number of little tiny boys: atoms, electrons, units of force or energy...' (ibid.). Lawrence was one of the first to understand that Cartesian objectivity, 'the habit... of visualizing everything', has made us, like Newton's billiard-ball particles, 'a complete little objective reality' (1936 p. 523). 'What art has got to do... is to reveal things in their different relationships.... Each thing, living or unliving, streams in its own odd, intertwining flux, and nothing... is fixed or abiding' (ibid. pp. 524-525). The idea of our oneness-of-substance with Earth and sea is central to ecological (and Heidegger's) thinking. Baptism and burial still recognize it; for Chief Seattle (speech to the tribal assembly, 1854, reported by Henry Smith; realized in Seed 1988 pp. 68-73): 'the shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors.' 'You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers' (pp. 69, 71).



According to a repeated model in Hughes' poetry, the despiritualized visualization of the 'wheel', behind the rationalist's desire to escape it, itself binds one. The 'Myth of the Eternal Return' gave eternity a graspable meaning; 'when it is desacralized, cyclic time becomes terrifying: it is seen as a circle forever turning on itself, repeating itself to infinity' (Eliade 1959 p. 107). Hughes resacralizes the seasons, as an icon, in Season Songs, the Moortown Diary, and River. Another favourite icon is the 'wheel' itself - the Year-King's life (Graves 1961 p. 262) or image of Nemesis, Isis or Fortuna, the White 'goddess of the turning year' (ibid. p. 255); or the millstone of the world upon Cardea's hinges, in 'Fragment of an Ancient Tablet' and Remains of Elmet. If Hughes had lived by the sea, the presiding icon might have been ocean, as it is in lesser poems like 'Relic', 'Shells' or 'The Voyage'. In actuality, the house at Mytholmroyd stood above the Calder, while at Mexborough the Don meets the Dearne, and the Taw flows past Tawton.

The rivers are flowing, the air moving,
The landmark mountains are lasting: this persisting
Pig-headedness of the earth is not resisting
Time, but a rider astride it arriving.

The cloud of the mind climbs, declines,
The flowing of rivers a stay to its going...
('Constancy')

This uneasy poem from 1958, indebted to Hopkins' '[in]stress' that 'rides time like riding a river' ('The Wreck of the Deutschland' st. 6) is probably Hughes' first use of the 'river' icon. By 1962, panta rhei had become an almost ubiquitous theme, the 'river' transforming time into space, events into a frieze of detail on the banks.

CHAPTER THREE: FOR

1: Dualism and Consciousness

It is telling that, while Dodsworth decries Hughes for failing to think, and Eagleton to distance himself from his subject, other critics claim he thinks and distances himself too much, relapsing into the dualism he rejects. Richard Webster (1984) unites a sensitive reading of 'The Thought-Fox' to an imputation that, like Lawrence, Hughes is 'an intellectual in rebellion against his own rationalism, a puritan who never ceased to quarrel with his own puritanism' (p. 38). 'There is a much closer relationship between the sensibility which is expressed in Hughes's poem and the sensibility of "puritanical rationalism" than would generally be acknowledged' (p. 39). Even 'The Thought-Fox' reveals Hughes 'indulging' his 'feminine' 'poetic sensitivity' 'only within a protective shell... of tough "manly" posturing' (pp. 39-40). Why Webster should presume that the courage to outstare an advancing opposite, in unflinching passivity, is a masculine prerogative I am not sure; as with many critics, his (dualistic) refusal to acknowledge that, for Hughes, there are meant to be, on a second plane, masculine and feminine kinds of energy (and tenderness) provokes a failure to observe Hughes' distinction of 'energy', 'the elemental power-circuit of the universe', which he tries to accept, and the 'puritanical violence' (Webster 1984 p. 42) he attacks. (Webster evidences as 'puritanical' Hughes' definition of poetry in terms of 'Capturing Animals' (Poetry in the Making pp. 15ff.)). Hughes stopped 'capturing' animals when 'about fifteen': 'my life grew more complicated and... I began to look at them' 'from their own point of view' (ibid. p. 16). His eventual substitute - writing poems about animals - includes respecting their selfhood and otherness. Hunting - the ritual not the boy's diversion - is persuading (1978 'Tape') the animal to be your prey: the opposite of the deritualized puritanical assault. The self-exposure of hunter and fish is, ideally, reciprocal.

And already the White Hare crouches at the sacrifice,
Already the Fawn stumbles to offer herself up
And the Wolf-Cub weeps to be chosen.
('Eagle').)

John Adams (Chambers 1980 pp. 101-108) suggests Hughes is a puritan where Lawrence was not: 'where Lawrence opens himself to a meeting with animals, Hughes watches and captures them, an act that precludes involvement. I find this not very different, in effect, from the state of paralysis induced by the scientific attitude he condemns' (pp. 102-103). Lawrence's condemnation of the objective eye, Western man's 'slowly formed habit of seeing just as the photographic camera sees' (1936 p. 521) so that 'there is nothing inside us, we stare endlessly at the outside' (1961, p. 62) closely resembles Hughes'. The position is confusing: the 'paralyzed' stare of the experimental scientist or the person watching T. V. becomes an attack on the world (the moral of The Tiger's Bones is that the camera - or telescope - does lie). Imaginative vision, a positive, reciprocated charge going out to the world, may, conversely, seem 'paralyzed': it is 'to stand respectfully, hat in hand, before this Creation, exceedingly alert for a new word' (1964 'Superstitions' p. 500). 'I lean and watch the water, listening to water/ Till my eyes forget me...' ('Salmon Eggs'). Good descriptive writing 'will be detailed, scientific in [its] objectivity and microscopic attentiveness' (Poetry in the Making p. 64) and indeed 'something approaching photographic observation' (ibid. p. 90). When 'Sparrow Saves the Birds' (Tales of the Early World p. 12) 'it [is] just as if his brain [is] a telescope', but this almost-objective vision, needed to lead us out of the 'black hole' of modern alienation, is redeemed by the 'seed' of inspiration Sparrow holds in his bill. Hughes (on Orghast) contrasts the noetic remove of vision and sound's visceral immediacy: 'the deeper into language one goes, the less visual/ conceptual its imagery, and the more audial/ visceral/ muscular its system of tensions' (Smith 1972 p. 45). Hughes' best poetry remains intensely visual (and a far remove from Orghast); his argument - Lawrence's, that 'sound acts direct... upon the affective centres' (1936 p. 62) - runs character-

istically counter to Blake's ideal of seeing (conceptually) through, not (physically) with, the senses; whilst Roszak (1973 pp. 88ff.) suggests hearing and vision are equally conceptual in their transcendence of the physical world-self contact which touch, taste and smell require. (The Tales of the Early World continually emphasize sounds' physical impact.) Once, however, these ambiguities, and Davis' contention (1990) that Hughes never wholly manages to humble his objective vision, are faced, Adam's critique must be recognized as invalid.

Geoffrey Thurley ('[Hughes] is an agent of the occult. Or is he not a double-agent, one who receives information and uses it for other purposes than the transmitter intended' - 1974 p. 188) and Margaret Dickie, who suggests Hughes' 'logical utterance' and 'hallucinatory, hypnotic, alogic' voice are irreconcilable (1983 p. 51), are pursuing Webster's argument. So are Hirschberg ('Hughes condemns a trait which is strongly in evidence as a defence mechanism in his own poems and stories, i. e. the tendency to totally [sic] analyze a phenomenon in order to defeat it' - 1981 p. 86) and Gifford and Roberts ('individual consciousness, insisting all the time on its separateness, is the cause of painful and destructive alienation from [the] inner life.... But consciousness is inescapable, and [the] poems are ultimately acts of consciousness' - 1981 p. 62).

The extent to which dualism is redeemable, or inextricable from humans' quest towards intelligence and dominance, is the whole ambiguity in 'Speaking for the Earth'. An observation as uncompromising as Gifford and Roberts' will be offered in skepticism regarding oriental philosophy's monistic teaching, or the attempts of feminist and 'postlogical' thinkers to supersede Cartesian dualism, Bateson's 'mind is the essence of being alive' (in Capra 1989 p. 88), or Blake's Fourfold Vision. Hughes, certainly, can sound puritanical. The poems answer preceding puritanical fictions, whilst the buried spirit must speak something like the language of puritanism to be recognized. (In 'The Head', the narrator's wife 'has never learnt to speak or to write' (p. 99), but was allowed to appear to him first as beautiful woman, not giant ape.)

'Gog III' was not written as specific exposure of the Gog-fighting mentality, but 'just to set against ['Gog I'] with the idea of keeping it under control' (Faas 1980 p. 200); remembering Hughes' enthusiastic description of Douglas coming 'to the subject of Time [the feminine All-things] like a man coming to fight a bear' (1962 'Douglas' p. 1070), one might interpret 'The Brother's Dream' similarly.

For the child Hughes, 'the return home' from the moors 'was a descent into the pit, and after each visit I must have returned less and less of myself to the valley. This was where the division of body and soul, for me, began' ('The Rock'; Summerfield 1974 p. 126). Hughes' final dilemma - the necessity to abandon for Goddess' or Earth's sake a dualistic consciousness which alone, he fears, empowers him to speak for Goddess or Earth - equals Dickinson's, who, 'when she tries to describe her mystical experience direct, as it occurs to her in meditation, [finds it] generally too terrifying for words' (1963 'Dickinson'; Faas 1980 p. 169), or Graves', writing:

Thankfully I consent
To my estrangement
From me in you

('To Whom Else')

as conscious craftsman. Thomas West shows Hughes' response to this 'must/mustn't' 'double-bind' to be - from early poems like 'The Hawk in the Rain' and 'Pike' onwards - a characteristically schizoid one, splitting off an 'upper', unfallen self and a 'lower' human one. Betrayed by puritanism (Mount Zion chapel or Krogon in Orghast), the lower, objectively-staring self sees 'nature' (with which the upper is one) as abominable, herself a staring vulture. Just as the individual dies, the 'vulture' eats the lower ego: but the upper self can watch the sacrifice, and write 'inspired' poetry still.

West suggests that Hughes replaces Graves' idea that the fall towards logical dualism began, at the earliest, in Socrates, with Lawrence's sense of 'the inevitable polarity of the human psychic system' (Lawrence 1961 p. 118), of the genetic, Edenic fall, the evolution of the neocortex. Shakespeare's

vocation 'embodies the biological polarity of the life of the body and archaic nervous system and the life of the reflective cortex' (1971 Shakespeare p. 199), but I would stress how often Hughes' optimism does posit the Gravesian or ecological model of a negotiable, historic fall, when 'England lost her soul' (ibid. p. 197). For all Hughes' divided loyalties, his thinking may in fact acknowledge Eliade's interpretation of the two 'falls' many primitive beliefs posit (Eliade 1959 p. 213). Soon after creation, mind and matter were split. We lose our unity with nature but gain the power to manhandle her; the shaman's songs assuage the guilt of singing consciously; sacrificing the scapegoat atones for the ascendancy the conscious mind has gained over violent death (see Girard 1977 passim). This fall is essential, human, and equates, in Jungian terms, to the child's 'individuation' from the mother. The second fall is the dissociation of spirit and matter, which happens when shamanic and sacrificial rituals break down and the sense of the sacred is lost. A community may suppress violent death - and the hierarchy of priest and scapegoat - altogether. Hughes' poetry will often distinguish, then, between inevitable dualism, and Socratic negotiable folly.

It is indicative that West should find 'intolerably flat' (1985 p. 104) the Moortown Diary, which, as a farmer's notebook, escapes the alienation, moral discriminations and rational restructurings incumbent upon 'fallen' shaman and dualist alike: 'in a sense, the method excludes the poetic process' (Moortown Diary p. x). 'Struggle' tells of a cow giving birth to a calf who dies - 'two mortally wounded duellists'. Though, here, I cannot suspect a pun, the role of 'we' (not 'I') is clear: to be 'the good shepherd' (1978 'Tape'). In 'An Abortion' (collected in The New British Poetry, p. 110), Liz Lochhead represents the same event in a comparably 'unpoetic' voice, but, qua poet, associates herself with the cow: there are problems here, yet by presenting the farmers' (agribusinessmen's) midhusbandry

as if they were policemen
and she knew exactly what she were guilty of....

Lochhead compares the 'abortion' to her own writing and the affairs of 'fallen' humanity ('men', in her terms) in a way Hughes, in 'Struggle', cannot. Although I feel the Moortown Diary includes some of Hughes' most satisfying poems (in another way they are painfully 'honest'), they can only stand at the point-of-departure of Moortown's quest, which would be to reconcile Earth to humanity in the fallen condition. Approaching 'celebration', art 'to praise' ('The Scream'), they must be distinguished from Hughes' more characteristic 'laments', art for Earth's sake, the perplexed soul's outcry.

For Hughes, poetry is not 'absolutism', an 'abstract, suicidally-high demand' (1970 'Riding'; Faas 1980 p. 189), but a 'chattering fever of approximations and compromise' (ibid.). In only a few poems does his coniunctio oppositorum propose an end to dualism and lack. Rather, he wants to negotiate, near the limits, towards retaining maxima of individual freedom, consciousness, science and creature comforts, the language and photographic vision that make for poetry, against the demands of the Earth and the spirit. He is asserting the indispensibility of 'rhetoric... dark gods... the Angelic powers and the heroic efforts to make new worlds' and showing simultaneously how these can 'turn into death camps and atomic bombs' (Faas 1980 p. 201), claiming the need to control these energies even as he represents the perils and betrayals of doing so.

2a: The Myth of Hughes' Poetry

Crow's journey to The Happy Land includes the composition of 'Notes for a Little Play', projecting, in grass-roots post-holocaust terms, his marriage to his anima, through a story. 'It turns out that there are a great many of these stories, but he finds one particularly attractive tale - treated by Sophocles and again by Seneca and again by Freud - and he thinks, "There's room for another"' (Hughes in Sagar 1983 p. 189) - and sings his 'Song for a Phallus'. Hughes' method of negotiating between mind, matter, spirit and time is to dig

a single mythic 'quarry' (Faas 1980 p. 213), just as Blake's allegory transcends itself and Graves elaborates 'the single grand theme of poetry: the life, death and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year, the Goddess's son and lover' (Graves 1961 p. 422). It seems useful to outline Hughes' myth, in ecumenical and unscholarly fashion, now.

The quarried strata outcrop in Orghast ('earth-speech', Org (life) and Ghast (spirit) united). The drama takes place inside Pramanath (Prometheus) - humanity, after the 'first fall', the division of mind and body, hung on Elbruz between Hoan (spirit-light) and Moa (Earth-flesh). His condition is one of endurance, pierced with nails; and Hoan and Moa's son in time, Krogon, Hold-fast, the Logos-God, attempts to stop these cycles of suffering and death (like Blake's Urizen). This is the 'second fall': he denies the flesh, imprisoning Moa, who grows violent. Krogon has made her appear like a vulture: he therefore is represented by the vulture squatting on Pramanath. Whenever a son (by Moa) overthrows his physical manifestation, this son becomes another Krogon, perpetuating the tyranny of law, puritanism and Christian patriarchy.

Hughes' role as shaman-poet is to defeat Krogon and to liberate Prometheus - to re-associate spirit and matter; to champion the prisoner, Moa; to speak for the Earth. His task is to find a warrior - a son of Krogon and Moa - to undertake this. On the spiritual plane, the champion is Sogis.

'Christianity [spiritual Krogon] deposes Mother Nature [Moa] and begets, on her prostrate body, Science [physical Krogon], which proceeds to destroy Nature, but which in turn, on its half-destroyed mother's body, begets the Computer, a god more powerful than its Father or its Grandfather, who reinstates Nature, its Mother and Grandmother and Great-Grandmother, as the Holy of Holies, mother of all the gods' (Faas 1980 p. 187). This comes from, of all places, Hughes' 1970 review of Max Nicholson's The Environmental Revolution - suggesting (counter to West's argument) how inextricable myth and history, poetry and politics, are for Hughes. Nicholson's rather Aquarian technolatriy has inspired the deification of the Computer here, and the exceptional optimism

('this is what we are seeing' - ibid.): in Orghast, Sogis' material counterpart is Agoluz, a Hercules figure, who employs violence against Krogon, succumbing to his vulturine fascination and leaving humanity - except for the instant of Krogon's defeat - still fallen. Sogis is an absolute, and absolutes pertain to the Logos: Hughes splits the two, as he does his two selves during the ego-death, to manage the impossible paradox; Moa, the physical bird, is already extinct. (Sagar's assertion that Agoluz, the St. George figure, is superseded by Sogis, is confusing.)

Hughes' other, and later, poetry, however, continues to seek an adequate champion. Crow, 'the spirit of the sperm', should be immune to Krogon's puritanism. He is the son of 'God's nightmare' (1970 'Crow' p. 149), imprisoned Moa:

Swithold footed thrice the 'old;
He met the night Mare and her nine-fold...

(King Lear, III, iv, 118-119).

God's saint is St. George; 'the Night Mare is one of the cruellest aspects of the White Goddess' (Graves 1961 p. 26); 'God' is Krogon, the Logos. But, like Agoluz, Crow still falls for the rational puritanism he opposed. He becomes Western 'man', at once 'science' and the begetter of 'the Computer' which discredits the Cartesian paradigm.

Crow stops without Crow's fulfilling his task; in evolving societies, the Trickster, 'the spirit of the sperm' yet also of the fallen state at its most absurd, is replaced by the scapegoat, whose sacrifice (to Nature, the turning year) redeems the community's sins - instinct, and rationalism - where Trickster exteriorized them. Prometheus (On His Crag) is himself the guinea-pig whom Hughes infects with our disease and experiments upon, towards remedy. But as a society ossifies, the scapegoat becomes not an image, but a substitute, for repentance. Lumb's sacrifice merely reinforces the puritanical husbands' authority, suppressing the individual champion.

The sacrifice of the Goddess' representative therefore becomes her re-imprisonment by the next Krogon. Adonis, in Shakespeare Hughes' symbol for the

puritan, was originally such a representative, as were Perseus (see Graves 1961 p. 421) and Hercules: etymologically Agoluz and also 'Bran, the English Crow-god' (Sagar 1978 p. 192) - Crow, nature-spirit become puritan knight.

Hughes' most consistent symbol for the puritan/ rationalist is Oedipus. Solving the Sphinx's riddle might represent the 'first fall', in which humans gain power over Nature, and build cities. The 'second fall', resulting in plague or eco-catastrophe, is the rejection of Nature, his wife and mother, Jocasta, and of the 'sin of life' which Oedipus' necessary, individuating murder of his father symbolizes. Like Krogon, he kills posterity too, and, rejecting his own organs not 're-organizing' them as Artaud demanded, becomes an alienated unseeing eye.

The Cave Birds' hero's restitution for this crime is to go, like Orpheus, to the land of death and recover the bride. 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days' was originally sung by Crow when carrying his bride, as an ogress, across a river, Styx perhaps. But in 'Crow's Courtship', the marriage is thwarted by his rationalist's stare, as Orpheus' was: he peers into God's workshop, there is an explosion, and nature, his bride-to-be, is destroyed. Orpheus probably evolved as another scapegoat-sacrifice, whose annual dismemberment by Maenads would in Hughes' terms be the death (consumption by nature) consequent upon the sin of being a shaman-poet: literate consciousness becomes the objective stare which defeats the heroic role of liberating Moa-Eurydice. Orpheus, however, was Sewell's (Blakean) symbol (Sewell 1961) for the linguistic self-awareness that redeems; in the play Orpheus, Hughes 'cheats' (this is his description, valid on these terms, of Shakespeare's method in the 'Romances' (1971 Shakespeare p. 194): art itself transcends death, the sea, and the hero is married to his lost anima, beyond dualism). Orpheus does not look back: he recovers Eurydice, and escapes the Maenads. His music has been changed by his suffering:

The music was not the music of dancing
But of growing and withering,

Of the root in the earth and the leaf in the light,
The music of birth and of death.

Krogon's fear of death has been charmed away, and nature and man are one:

And the ears that heard it were also of leaf and of stone.
The faces that listened were flesh of cliff and of river.
The hands that played it were fingers of snakes and a tangle of flowers.

If, however, like Shakespeare, Hughes puts a finger in the pan, the effect in 'The Head' seems almost to define a disturbingly Calvinistic 'grace': allowing the narrator's success in deliberately, ritualistically cancelling his shadow and marrying his anima, his redemption remains, apparently, fortuitous. 'The head-bird had come looking for me, to deal justice, but had killed in error in the poor light' (1979 'The Head' p. 96). The skeptical, insensitive narrative voice (his linguistic consciousness) also forces us to question the nature of this redemption. If Orpheus, again, wins his bride but retains his staring eyes, Blake's reciprocal ideal of vision is betrayed: Davis (1990) argues that this ideal is one Hughes only feels able to project in ultimately negative, unproductive terms - 'a mirror face down flat on a mirror' ('His legs ran about'). After the ritual, the (male) persona still enjoys his masterful, objective consciousness.

2b: Poetry and Silence

The biggest problem Hughes seems to face, as he engineers his rituals of rebirth, concerns the possible ~~sameness~~ of the rational ego's death and the body's, the end of consciousness. The end of poetry - speaking, beyond rationalism, for the earth - is therefore the end of poetry: unlike Bishop (1990) I take Hughes' phrase 'the death of poetry' to be grimly ambiguous. To betray one's gifts is 'suicide, metaphorical in the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge, actual in the case of Mayakovsky' (1962 'Context'; Faas 1980 p. 163); but to stay true to them is not to go on writing, utterly unselfconsciously, but, like Riding, to

fall silent. 'To respect words more than the truths which are perpetually trying to find and correct words is the death of poetry. The reverse, of course, is also the death of poetry - but not before it has produced poetry' (1970 'Riding'; Faas 1980 p. 189).

Hughes' poetry, then, represents no conclusive reconciliation of body and mind: dualism is the essence of the champion, Orpheus, Agoluz, Crow, and even 'relatives only' is an absolute. But - Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance seems to me in some ways the book nearest his philosophical achievement - Hughes discountenances Riding's absolutism, or despair, of silence. (Pilinszky has said "I would like to write as if I had remained silent" - 1976 'Pilinszky' p. 80; my italics.) The poems argue out their own conclusions within each book; not until River does the desire of male, literate reason to surrender itself (perhaps as in Barthes' A Lover's Discourse) to feminine nature begin to pre-dominate. Inasmuch as the book represents Hughes' suicide as a Bloomian 'strong', egotistic poet, it remains the valid culmination of that 'strong poet's' adventure. Hughes' symbol for the 'sexual samadhi' of the sperm is the salmon:

Court the lady of the hill
Press to her source, spend your plunder

For her - only for her -
O salmon of the ghostly sea.

(an early Gaudete poem; Sagar 1983 p. 310).

In many poems, we sense suddenly how incidental the rational fisherman has become to the flowing river. I open River at 'After Moonless Midnight': the poem's first word is 'I' - the aggressive hunter, the phallic ego, who speaks in courtly, fairly elaborate syntax. But the first sentence ends with 'me'; 'deepening', the poet tries to face an opposite whose loveplay, stare and indifference alike seem, not opposite to, but quite beyond, his tackle, words.

The whole river
Listened to me, and, blind,
Invisibly watched me. And held me deeper
With its blind, invisible hands.
'We've got him,' it whispered. 'We've got him.'

The final gesture, in the whole suicidal rendition towards speaking for the Earth, can only be one, after all, of slapstick throwaway.

'Shakespeare... conducted what is essentially an erotic poetry into an all-inclusive body of political action' (1971 Shakespeare p. 194), developing the (metaphoric) social relevance of his relations with 'the feminine'. Hughes seems to have come close to doing as much.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE: SOME EARLY POEMS

1: The Hawk in the Rain

The most important poem in The Hawk in the Rain is 'The Thought-Fox', which looks years forwards in its wit (snow/ page; 'prints'/ 'printed') and its reference to the real ('the clock's loneliness', a starless window). How much is 'imagined' is immediately made clear. To 'imagine', however, is not to falsify, but to accept consciousness's role of recreating the world, and empathizing with it. In many of the book's poems, the irresolute, yet self-regarding, diction only betrays the unfortunate forthrightness of subject, but here a simpler, tenderer language accompanies the recognition that 'Something else is alive'. This 'alive' other, 'more near' than the stars 'Though deeper within darkness', is not only 'fox' but 'twig, leaf' too: a microcosm; the Earth, re-entering the 'loneliness' of alienated rationalism. The speaker's head, a sinister 'dark hole', becomes a fox's earth, a part of the world; he can feel the 'cold' of the fox's nose '[touching] twig, leaf'. The poem's title may well have been added later: the fox is less a metaphor - as many critics have assumed - for the poetic process (thought, imagination) than part of a ritual to recall lost energies and one's full being. (Hughes saw himself fox-headed in the Cambridge dream; he 'had written nothing for a year or so' (Poetry in the Making p. 19) when he composed 'The Thought-Fox'; 'almost all the poems in Lupercal were written as invocations to writing' (Faas 1980 p. 209).) The fox is 'both a fox and a spirit' (Poetry in the Making p. 20); the spirit would have been more effectively summoned - even as the poem as artefact lost authority - if Hughes 'had found livelier words' for 'its movements, the twitch and craning of its ears' (ibid. p.20). Hughes' fingers are already 'moving' before the fox-spirit hears and comes. The poem, then, is partly about the earth - the unconscious energy - the precisely-described fox - which interrupts poetry, conscious speaking. With the last line - 'The page is printed' - we realize we have missed

the actual, momentary reconciliation of speaking and earth which produced it (and which the fox's lamplike eyes could have illuminated). But Hughes' remark about finding 'livelier words' still seems (in 1961) to underestimate the poem's complexity and importance, and its anticipation of his mature themes: apparently without fully conscious effort, it '[came,] about its own business' - as artefact - to speak of a oneness-with-the-earth that Hughes has only for odd instants been able to re-attain. It remains an introductory poem in that it makes us ask what things will be achieved now this earth-confidence has been won and its formula 'printed'; but Hughes' opus reveals how impossible it is for us to proceed much beyond this stage, as yet.

The other almost completely assured poem in the book is 'Song', which though the earliest (1949)¹ bears most affinities with Hughes' mature style, in its matter, 'the world's decay' or flux, and its tenor, the alienation of the poet from (unusually here) the society of others, from beauty, and from the Goddess, who, unlike the fox but like Catherine Earnshaw, 'will not... come home'. The Keatsian indulgences, the religious contemplation of icons for their own sakes - 'a marble of foam', 'the moon's full hands', 'the world's breast' - and the long final cadence involving considerable syntactic juggling and hairsbreadth control ('the wind's hands'/ 'my head'/ 'my hands'/ 'my hands') - are already there.

The Hawk in the Rain is ordered thematically: five poems with animals (hawk, jaguar, macaw, fox and horses), followed by thirteen love- or woman-poems (inextricable from poems about the poet's role); then seven (the last 'Meeting') about the suppression, or betrayal, of natural energies, five describing these energies, three more in which they are rejected, and finally ~~seven~~ about violent death. The first real nature-poem is 'The Horses'. As often, the first person and past tense make for uneasiness with Hughes, though this poem has the un-self-

¹ The date, given when interesting, has to be approximate; often it is that of the poem's first publication.

consciousness of later work and still defines precisely (~perhaps half-subliminally) the observer's alienation 'Song' laments. The horses are 'Grey silent fragments// Of a grey silent world' but the poetry stresses the mystery of what seems furthest from the observer himself: 'the big planets hanging'; 'the valleys ... draining the darkness', seen from the tops; 'the horizons,/ High over valleys, in the red levelling rays', seen from below. (In 'The Rock', Hughes says he has 'horizon' engraved round his scalp: 'the magic circle, excluding and enclosing' (Summerfield 1974 p. 125).) The conscious mind orders the moors' vast freedom, making the horses a return 'megalith' landmark and defining them in relation to Platonic horsiness - they should 'snort', 'stamp'. The language can ('Evil air', 'tortuous statues', 'Megalith-still') only impose human expectations (morality, art, religion) on the inhospitable strangeness. The conclusion is ambiguous - Hughes seems to look forwards to remembering, out of timelessness; the recollection in tranquillity is at once what has alienated persona from moor, and what posits Hughes' 'memory' as a denizen of the moor, to be 'met' there like the horses themselves. But the poem ('May I') already doubts whether Wordsworthian 'memory' is sufficient to redeem the Fall. (The poem's - unconscious - error seems to be to conceive of passively 'Hearing', not of helping, 'the horizons endure', by speaking for them.)

A more wholly convincing poem is 'Wind'. Hughes is able to invoke the flux of all things (the magpie is sacred to the Goddess); 'the great fire' recalls Heraclitus'. Hughes attempts to treat of natural energy extreme enough simply to overwhelm the mind's alienation. If the daylight is 'Flexing like the lens of a mad eye', the speaker's eyes too - the noetic stare - are physically subdued and 'dented' by 'the brunt wind'. 'Brunt' itself really belongs with 'eye': the poem begins like 'The Horses' in the past tense but drifts into chaotic participial constructions. If wind and darkness have mashed the world's categories together, Hughes does not unravel them: 'The woods' are 'crashing through darkness', 'The hills had new places' bypasses an 'it was as if'; 'the hills'

themselves are 'booming'. The opening word - 'This' - implicates a reader: what Hughes asks of us is to perform that intellectual restructuring whose necessity alienates the perceiving eye in 'The Horses'. This also liberates the poet of 'Wind' to be comically adventurous: the hills become a marquee, the house a 'green' goblet; the family 'cannot entertain book, thought, // Or each other'. The last stanza retreats into rational perception ('We watch'; the 'window' trembles like a live thing but holds death and the storm out), but the poem is at once an irresistible show-piece - so that 'we grip/ Our hearts' too - and a re-education towards 'Hearing the stones' of the earth 'cry out'.

This linguistic foolery is one bamboozlement of rational responsibility. Another is imitation of folk-poetry's earth-speech. But 'imitation' can only convince if it is also 'inspiration'. Sometimes -

First, love is a little bird
That sings in the orchard blossoms
I think it is a wren
It sings in the brambles and out of the wall
It sings out of the wall...

('Birdsong')

- Hughes really seems to capture the progression - so alien it is unquestionable - of old ballads (as he does, very differently, in the last lines of 'A Modest Proposal', recalling cummings' 'All in Green Went My Love Riding'). By contrast, the 'low beams' of 'Roarers in a Ring', with its ballad-measure, seem neo-Tudor. The invocation of natural energies in the poem remains convincing, because Hughes has begun to elaborate the idea of Panta Rhei. Between the moors' 'white/ Running sea' and the inn's - albeit 'griddled' - fire, the farmers are the 'living images of their deaths'. Yet even as they burn like hams, and take 'their fall' with the snow, they stay 'Blindly and rowdily balanced' (unfallen) upon the living 'world' as it falls too 'in the bottomless black/ Silence': the 'cataract' for a while is the laughter of unconscious life, washing away the 'dust' of 'sober' death (and Reason).

The three poems, all in Selected Poems, preceding this sequence about the

energies, present the 'heroic' efforts of the rationalizing or solipsistic individual to defeat or deny them. The most open-minded of these individuals is 'The Man Seeking Experience' (p. 39); the poem is also one of the volume's most satisfying: its world is not one of paper but of 'The Tuscarora', 'the cup of tea', 'the decaying dead bird'. (Hughes' exemplifications in The Hawk in the Rain are odd. Whole poems remain irredeemably abstract, whilst ('Grief for Dead Soldiers, II') mention of 'a bomb' provokes a quite unhelpful visualization of its '[diving] to the cellar and [lifting] the house'.) The 'Man's' conscious mind 'solves' the 'solution' of the flowing universe into one 'dewdrop' and claims to be outside this, unimplicated. The poem is a precision balance of ridicule at Descartes' hubris, and celebration of human consciousness. The dewdrop Earth is a 'without heart-head-nerve lens'. The staring hour-old baby - water come into human shape - seems no more, but is already a 'world-shouldering monstrous "I"' - that is, an em-body-ment of the earth's lens, its brain, memory and 'Word'. The brain and 'lens' in partnership make rationalism's stare; but the man's eventual humility, 'knowing his nature all/ Droplet-kin' - his sense of Panta Rhei - seems to have redeemed Logos, the Word, the fallen mind. He listens 'for himself to speak for the drop's self' (for the earth), and, though the lines are profoundly ironic, the last indeed fearful, the unresponding child, humanity, has, 'alone-in-creation', the potential to stand, 'world-shouldering' - and to speak.

One thoroughly humane poem in which consciousness and vision are also celebrated is 'The Casualty' (1954). The poem typifies The Hawk in the Rain in its 'well-wrought' sophistication, its admixture of lines ('As if a firefly and a spider fought') whose static, slightly archaic elegance recalls Ransom (or the early Lowell), and sheer perversity ('Some, who saw fall, smoke beckons'). The opening, causing us to follow the farmers' eyes aloft, implicates us in the crime of Blake's 'rational pity', the eyes' refusal of genuine empathy, as we 'lean over headlines, taking nothing in' ('Fourth of July'). We 'wait with

interest for the evening news'; the airman's death only seems to add something - 'interest' - to the housewives' island-selves. 'Sympathies' merely 'Fasten to the [pilot's] blood like flies'. 'Here's no heart's more/ Open or large than a fist clenched'. 'Complacency' appears an 'Unscratchable diamond' (the image probably referring to Hopkins' spiritual comfort of non-implication in nature's - or the aircraft's - 'Heraclitean Fire'). Pheasant, hare and wren are more profoundly affected by the disaster, and the poem emphasizes how close under civilization genuine empathy remains: 'tears', 'Greedy to share all that is undergone', 'start to the edge/ Of such horror close as mourners can'. This is not enough; but perhaps only 'the handkerchief' of convention stands between the union of victim and mourners' eyes, Owen's 'eternal reciprocity of tears'.

The best of these 'death' poems, however, is 'Six Young Men'. Over the photograph, Hughes can negotiate all ways between mind and reality, flux and memorial, without trespassing beyond personal experience. The flow of water is also understood as a potent invocation of the 'contradictory permanent horrors' of life-and-death:

From where these sit
You hear the water of seven streams fall
To the roarer in the bottom, and through all
The leafy valley a rumouring of air go.

The photograph's celluloid is at once 'alive' as a man you meet and dinosaur-'dead'; its 'exposure' exposes us to battles it never portrays. It is inadequate to the dead men's 'smoking blood', yet is syntactically one with the blood. It can 'de-ment', bypassing the inculpations of sympathetic 'regard', and at the same time 'shoulder' even the body into the remoteness of visualization and memory.

The poem, like many of Hughes', gives us no help towards the essential distinction between natural energy ('the roarer in the bottom') and perverted violence (war). Consequently, the poetry's pity is easily mistaken. There

are a lot of poems in The Hawk in the Rain where lapses from genuine empathy somewhat resemble those 'The Casualty' denounces, and the book's stylistic shortcomings are a sure pointer to these inadequacies. One can only argue that nearly all the poems are genuinely sophisticated, often in a chilling way. Any 'enemy capital' (p. 59) would sooner face an army of 'Ancient Heroes' than one 'Bomber Pilot'. The pilot's alienation is that of 'rational pity': he can speak of 'the huge earth... shaken in its frame' but not confront it. The Heroes, by contrast, are one of Hughes' very rare presentations of undegenerate natural energy in human shape (the tramps or Dick Straightup in Lupercal resemble them); the dangers - of naivety and sentimentality - in this representation are obvious. The heroes' behaviour is the turning earth's: rather than 'sitting still', their swords make a 'white orbit' and they turn 'Their chariot-wheels', 'Replenishing both bed and board'. Now, the 'turn of [a] wrist' can drop a bomb, but sterile mechanization - 'a stopped clock' - has imprisoned true, revolving energy and made the heart - the organ of empathy - 'cold and small'. If 'The centuries are a stopped clock', Hughes laments also that 'progress' has brought no change, that we fight as many wars as we did millennia ago, though technology has rendered the consequences so much direr.

'The Conversion of the Reverend Skinner', with its representation of the enantiodromic consequences of Lumbish puritanism, and the affront of both towards 'the thin moon staggering through the rough/ Wiping her wound', should warn one against imputing mere 'misogyny' to these poems. 'Secretary' and 'Soliloquy of a Misanthrope' (an impressive poem in its simple, unfussy evocation of reality - 'Gritting my teeth in the chill from the church-floor') merely imply that women, as much as men, are behind the betrayal of our absolute nature. 'Fallgrief's Girl-Friends' (1955) is one of Hughes' more socially responsible poems (we should not miss the sympathy for Fallgrief's first girl-friend, who, abandoned, discovers he is not the idealist of his boasts: the irony is both at Fallgrief's expense, and against his abnegation of multiplying human respons-

ibilities). The poem anticipates 'Existential Song' in its exposure that to choose to hold 'this diamond' of selfhood outside the race of fallen existence, society and 'the pitch dark where the animal runs', is an insupportable delusion: life interposes 'a woman with such wit and looks' that Fallgrief falls instead to bragging of her in the 'company' of his previously-anonymous 'City' 'neighbours'.

2: Lupercal

An attitude - as of someone taking four-foot strides through a wood at midnight and blundering into things - unifies The Hawk in the Rain, as a quite different one does Lupercal ('a lot of my second book... is one extended poem about one or two sensations' (1965 'Desk Poet')). Hughes' development during this period was rapid (four or five years separate The Hawk in the Rain from 'Theology' and the first drafts of Gaudete) and in Lupercal the poetry has grown up into the light faster than Hughes' feelings and commitments have put out roots, leaving the book often willowy and precious. He has described the 'animal poems as little totem texts written in search of the demon god of fertility' (to Faas, as paraphrased in Faas 1980 p. 64) - and if the poems remain ritual 'objects', the animals in them - the lit fox in the dripping ground - have the same carved, discrete, iconic quality. The book is much more humanistic than The Hawk in the Rain: even 'the ridges of ruined stone' ('Crow Hill') sound manmade, and the lament for transience extends to that of art and culture ('To Paint a Water-Lily', 'Historian', 'Urn Burial'). Imagination's flight ('Pennines in April', 'Acrobats' etc.) is still understood as a transcendence of earth and flux, not the task of 'The mad earth's missionaries' ('Skylarks'), our duty to earth. Poor poems, meanwhile, like 'Thrushes', continue to belittle consciousness's achievements. The sour-and-sweet beauty of much of the poetry probably derives from the very gap between subject - energy - and style (close, sometimes, to what 'Strawberry Hill' exposes): an enamelled precision turning blood-drops to jewels.

... The weasel's
Berry-eyed red lock-head, gripping the dream
That holds good, goes lost in the heaved calm

Of the earth you have entered.

('Dick Straightup').

'Nicholas Ferrer' seems to exemplify this manner. Much of the pleasure comes simply from working out the metaphysical complexities. Observing the strife of achievement and time, the poem remains loyal to communal solidarities, and the memory of Hughes' ancestor, the puritan settler. The birds, by migrating, hold their place upon 'earth's sure tilt'; but the 'landmark' manor-house, brunting 'the shroud// Of weather and dissolution', can only decay.

And again the fire of God
Is under the shut heart, under the grave sod.

Significantly, Hughes included none of the above lines (except those from 'Crow Hill') in Selected Poems. 'Cleopatra to the Asp' he does: this seems a remarkable poem in its accommodation of all the Lupercal eccentricities into a single whole not typical of Hughes, yet convincing. The successful adoption of the (lisping, snakelike) feminine persona is unusual; Hughes really seems to have trespassed upon the territory Shakespeare fortified in the stylistic opulence and sensuality of Antony and Cleopatra. (The trick 'my soul, my soul' recalls the Sergeant's 'As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion', Macbeth I, ii, 35.) Cleopatra's 'soul', interpreted by her mirror, has 'drunk' Caesar, Antony and Pompey, like the world's Nile, even while they imagined they 'drank' her. Now her 'self', devoured by the asp, must 'Swim like a fish toward Rome'. This probably anticipates the journey of St. Paul: 'the self-anaesthetising schizophrenia' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 p. 187) of the Christian fish is the Augustan 'virginity' that, unlike Caesar, will ruin itself by suppressing 'coiled Egypt's' 'moon-horned river' of ritual negotiations.

Poems in Lupercal like 'To Paint a Water-Lily' claim, elaborately, to 'see into the life of things' and, Hughes admitted to Faas in 1970, fail. The way

out of this impasse proved (Faas 1980 p. 208) to be the objective humility of 'View of a Pig': by abandoning all pretensions to enlightenment - 'It was too dead' - Hughes let the poem and corpse Come Alive. Several of Lupercal's fine animal-poems, like 'Esther's Tomcat', have the sound of a man talking to himself, slowly and bewildered, trying to remember. The end of 'Pike' may seem to compromise this poem's effect by obtruding too consciously again, with patent, spooky intent. Certainly 'The Bull Moses' subdues its aspirations more comprehensively. The language is particularly close to plain conversation, its symbolism unobtrusive (presumably the bull, with his imaginary 'beheld future', was called 'Moses'): the tone anticipates the early Heaney as much as anything of Hughes'. The speaker does not finally claim to understand the bull's mystery: after pretending to interpret his faith in a future release of puritanically-restrained energies and - a parallel inauthenticity - to see the young poet through Moses' eyes, the poem admits that 'nothing of our light' can find 'any reflection in him'. In a final, subdued pun, to '[push] the bolt' is to reach the stage of simply running away (into adulthood) from the mysteries. The scrupulous restraint of such poetry may impress; its adroitness may, however, again begin to appear self-conscious, self-congratulating.

The language of 'Hawk Roosting' is even simpler. For Lawrence, hawks are 'almost visionless. Sight in them is sharpened or narrowed down to a point' (1961 p. 61). But this 'volitional vision' (ibid. p. 62) must be distinguished from its rational analogue, 'the cold, almost cruel curiosity of the upper will ... such as is the acute attention of an experimental scientist' (ibid. p. 60). The same distinction is central to Hughes' poem: the speaker, through whose 'closed' eyes we see, is absolute hawkhood ('Nature... thinking' (Faas 1980 p. 199)), who sits at the wheel's hub, can 'fly up, and revolve it all slowly' and travel not on 'the wheel of the living' ('Lupercalia') but 'direct/ Through the bones of the living'. The irony of the last stanza informs us of the presumption of the individual 'Hawk in the Rain' who arrogates the ur-hawk's role.

What the poem does not actually say is that it would be doubly arrogant for mankind to assume 'the earth's face [is] upward for [our] inspection'. The comparison is implicit, however, in Hughes' giving nature rational language. 'He doesn't sound like Isis, mother of the gods, which he is. He sounds like Hitler's familiar spirit' (*ibid.*). Though, in the terms of Hughes' visionary period, language is borrowed from the 'mother of the gods', to speak for nature seems inevitably to make energy resemble - as for the puritan's gaze - the vulturine or Fascistic violence which, when un- or mis-managed, it will, for fallen consciousness, become. The poem, then, tells of the perilous difficulty of speaking for earth, and of the need for consciousness to control the Hitler-hawk inside each of us.

It was probably frustration at the inability of critics to recognize as much that led Hughes in Selected Poems to move 'Wilfred Owen's Photographs' forward onto the facing page (i.e. 'just to set against it with the idea of keeping it under control' (Faas 1980 p. 200)). That this poem's 'uncomplicatedly humane attitude' (Rawson 1966 p. 126) is also simplistic in its presentation of instinctive empathy overwhelming lifetimes' aggressive conservatism, reveals what an early stage it represents in Hughes' moral exploration. But just as Owen's 'poems... were meant to frighten people, and to incite political action' (1965 'Men Who March Away'), Hughes evidently still feels the optimism here worthwhile.

Selected Poems also moves 'November' next to 'The Retired Colonel' (1958), perhaps to guide our interpretation of the latter's 'endurance'. This poem mimics the old man's 'shrunk, atrophied, suppressive-of-everything-under, bluffing, debonair, frivolous... Queen's English' (1971 Shakespeare p. 198) and also his confused mind: he barks at his dog - a 'whipcrack' for which his own 'reddened neck' is down; lions will die naturally, of age, but by 'pimply age' the Colonel means the youth of a degenerate age. Refusing to die before 'posterity' (what follows his death), he prefers a 'caricature' of the past to history's development. 'Wife dead, daughters gone', male heroism becomes

uncontrolled and barren. Hughes refuses to justify or to condemn; but, like 'those starved gloomy times' of wandering wolves, or the roosting hawk, the colonel fascinates the poet to the degree where he must implicate his own utterance, for honesty's sake, in the aggressive lifestyle he exposes: 'Here's his head mounted'.

One kind of endurance Hughes can celebrate, with the kind of compassionate authority of his East European contemporaries' poems about war, is that under the exactions of the Panta Rhei of local climate. In 'The Hawk in the Rain', the persona '[drowns] in the drumming ploughland'; in 'November' his boots represent his alienation. The 'cold' does not 'weld' him to the landscape, and his voice is distanced in a quiet, humane way; he is free enough to imagine 'the thorn-roots in their grip on darkness', 'the hare crouched with clenched teeth'. The consequence of humanity is that he runs away from the rain altogether, 'Shuttered' (like a camera-eye) 'by a black oak'. What the 'trust' is of the tramp, to which this retreat is compared, the poem never says: it is defined by contrast with the gibbeted corpses, and, in the last lines, syntax and tone pull in opposite directions. Endurance, the irony claims, is meaningless as a dead thing's anticipation of spring. Endurance, says the language, drains time ('these worst days') through the body, not the body through time: until spring come.

Gifford and Roberts (1981 p. 85) interpret 'A Woman Unconscious' as 'a trite refusal to be frightened of a nuclear holocaust'. The poem's observation that apocalypse, the Jungian shadow of our complacency, seems dangerously elusive of contemplation, is at least honest; 'now' has whimperingly 'malingered' (gone on worsening slowly) and many people have died in hospital. The woman is the Goddess, 'mother' Earth's other guise, and also Hughes' refusal to discriminate, in poetry, between the death of millions, and the death of one: the last stanza's compassion, where the music of two full rhymes suddenly sounds, seems to me intense. Hughes' equation of 'leaf and insect' and 'the toil of all our ages' shows how humanistic many Lupercal poems are, whilst the syntax's

desperate mystifications expose how far Hughes is yet from speaking for the earth.

'An Otter' (1958) sets Hughes' Lupercal-style of 'great labour over a long period' (part one) against the mature, robust style that 'virtually [writes] itself' (Hughes in Sagar 1978 p. 39): sets the 'otter's nostalgia for an earlier paradisaal existence', and Hughes' lyrical laments, against its ideal of 'limitless energy as survivor' (part two; Hughes to Alvarez, in Scigaj 1986 p. 60). In part one, the oddities of diction ('to outfish fish'), the curt and broken voice slowly softening, the impressive fragments ('Wanders, cries', the idea of the otter's 'world lost'), which do not quite add up, recall 'Pike' in particular; part two begins dramatically, the language subserving the drama or else attaining the strangeness of proverb ('Blood is the belly of logic'). Here, an individual otter lives, mates and dies. Most significantly, part one consciously avoids the perceiver's role, part two acknowledges it: the otter's 'self under the eye lies,/ Attendant and withdrawn' and not quite seen; whilst, for the underwater impersonal television-documentary gaze of part one, the otter 'licks/ The pebbles of the source' 'As if blind'. Here, the 'farms' are 'sunken' out of the otter's way; in part two's world of human smells, it is the lungs that are 'sunk'.

'Snowdrops' reminds us how utterly alien in its unfallen being is even something familiar from childhood, an appropriated little symbol. Hughes introduces the flower from the mouse's viewpoint, so it looks 'heavy as metal'. Typically, the images demand we press them to their logical - their absurdly illogical - conclusions: if the 'globe', earth, is 'tight' round the mouse's heart, weasel and crow (and snowdrop) in the 'outer darkness' are themselves our 'brutal' constellations. Inner and outer 'energies' are one.

'The Perfect Forms' is not a good poem; its interpretation of history is obviously partial, but the rigours of the thought anticipate later work. Images of birth and conception - 'phallus', 'fills', 'carries', 'nurses', 'abortion', 'fosterings', 'child' - bear Hughes' tenor of ridicule, as in 'Egg-Head', towards the mind that imagines it gives meaning to and 'fills immensity'.

(The echo, and consequently arraignment, of Blake - 'One thought, fills immensity' - was probably subliminal, though the poem is unBlakean.) What are criticized are Eastern monism, and Plato's philosophy of 'Forms', which makes reality an 'abortion of the Absolute'. Following Graves, Hughes associates Greek and Judaeo-Christian idealism (Pisces, the fish, again): Socrates, who thinks his mind inseminates reality, becomes - with his satyr's face - Christ's donkey (or pregnant with him). Perhaps our minds will take over the task of 'nursing' an imperfect world from such 'fostering' less-evolved intelligences as the 'reptiles'. Hughes, here, asks that we look for 'the kingdom of heaven' not in 'Perfect' absolutes but our 'monstrous-headed' world itself. The argument, meanwhile, involves layers of irony.

Two poems in particular anticipate Wodwo, and the metamorphosis of the minor craftsman lamented of many into the visionary genius. Plath considered 'Fire-Eater' the best poem in Lupercal (Sagar 1978 p. 57). The theme of Panta Rhei permits Hughes to yoke images with a new surrealistic authority ('These dark hills, bowed like labourers'; 'The tree is caught up in the constellations' - the lines are also precise evocations of Calderdale, and a tree seen at night). Recognition that the universe is one Heraclitean fire exposes us terrifyingly to infinity, just as Mary or Semele were visited by God and Jupiter: 'The death of a gnat is a star's mouth'. One's self-definition, one's 'skin', is 'thin// As the skin of fire', of inner, and outer, atomic energy. In a chaos so total, star becoming blood, blood star, it is as conceivable that the skull, burrowing molelike, devour Orion as Orion it. Relativity deconstructs even Hughes' ridicule of the egg-head solipsist.

To me the landmark poem of Lupercal seems the companion-piece, 'Mayday on Holderness' - originally the 'overture' to the 'poem about England', 'announcing all the main themes' (Sagar 1978 p. 46). Around the 'melting' Humber, the poem builds a whole world of growth and decay, 'The furnace door whirling with larvae' - set in space ('Hull's sunset smudge') and time ('This evening'). Leaves rot; insects mate and die; birds have eggs, couples laugh; night falls

and an owl hunts. Even Hughes' own oiseau noir is there, '[sleeping] gluttoned'. The river is earth's gut, suffering everything. As Hughes grew up, his own 'gut' bit 'through the mind's/ Nursery floor', with earnest of fallen life's need to feed on life and our 'birthright', death. As Cave Birds' protagonist recognizes, to exist is to bear guilt for deaths; and for the past, the 'Cordite ooziings of Gallipoli' Hughes' father just survived. The memory of war was Hughes' first food ('beastings'). The language is already Wodwo's, nightmarish yet luminous, latinisms ('decomposition of leaves') adventured as if by Chaucer, war replacing landscape, abstract particular, effortlessly, to relapse in turn; images ('The stars make pietas') communicating before understood; when understood ('cradle the dead half of earth'); and afterwards, too.

CHAPTER TWO: WODWO

In Wodwo, Hughes found his voice and created 'a single work' (Wodwo p. 9) and vision of psychic death and remarriage, though circumscribed beside the cycles of the seventies. The poems were not written as part of a structure: by considering them in their published, not their written order, I try to explore the thematic links which, Hughes found, their complexity accidentally allowed him to make, and their diversity - they span seven eventful years - does not undermine. The resultant book addresses 'the discovery of death, or rather its discovery by the intellect and its rejection by instinct and emotion' (Koestler 1978 p. 17), reconciling the two not in terms of transcendental religion, but by a steady focus on precisely the nature of our imprisonment in the flowing world - and attempting to define a justifiable conception of selfhood, responsibility, and universal compassion, in the conditions of Panta Rhei. The structure recalls the Bardo Thödol which Hughes translated around 1960: part one, Chikhai Bardo, concerns death; part two, Chönyid Bardo, the dream- or underworld; part three, Sidpa Bardo, the urge towards rebirth. This last denies Buddhist nirvana; but for the shaman, trance, then rebirth, is the source of spiritual power.

The first word - 'Against' (p. 17) - introduces the terms; conflict, dualism and privation. Though at first we are in the thistles' own monistic world (1960) - we feel the 'rubber' of the cows' tongues, see no more than 'hoeing hands', sense the 'spiking' urge of growth and seed-bearing's 'blue-black pressure' - the second stanza begins to attribute human 'revenge' to the thistles, which gain 'fists'. By the third, half of English history is implicated - too subtly for us at once to sense how. In fact the poem moves in two directions, punning characteristically ('manages' - in hand, like a horse/ succeeds in producing; 'feud' - land held on condition of service/ familial strife). One half celebrates the thistles, their simple, enduring vitality; the other, underground like the Vikings, moves, instinctively rather than logically, towards a sense of

human violence, loss and 'grey'-haired vulnerability.

'Still Life' (1961) preserves the tone of essential complacency, by celebrating the thistle-like endurance of the Platonic 'harebell' and casting the doomed dualistic observer, the lower self, absurdly, as a stone. The stone, intent on preserving its selfhood, is an egg-head imagining it '[landmarks]/ The fly-like dance of the planets' and (re-)'marks' the 'land' from an unimplicated hub. 'It expects to be in at the finish' - but does not recognize itself as Quarry, not hunter. It watches 'The landscape moving in sleep'; but never senses that the sleeping 'maker of the sea', its own grandfather (line 6), will one day, 'recovered', awake. The poet, meanwhile, claims equal right to speak for the sea's maker as for the rational stone, according to the adequacy of art, a 'still' of a 'still life' which still lives. Since, however, we associate naturally with the transient, the last line's revelation awakens our empathy with the stone, our symbol all along.

In 'Her Husband' (1961), the individual's humanity is no longer eluded. Hughes does not want to attach a simple 'message' to specific events: the poem in fact exposes the dangers of imposing one's interpretations upon others' actions. The title implies propriety, Derrida's différance; the woman imagines her husband grimes the sink deliberately and binds her by recalling her 'obligations'. ('Their rights' may recall Weil's distinction of illusory material claims, 'rights', and the redemptive sense of 'justice' that makes someone enquire, as Hughes does in Wodwo, 'Why am I being hurt?') Certainly the poem's pathos is to show that Heraclitus' fire, which burns chips as finally as people, allows no time to repent our actions, to escape them, or to conjure divine retribution: this is Hughes at his most existential.

The effect of these poems is to zoom in on one's own mortality - from thistledom to a crumbling stone to her husband to a woman's funeral, 'Cadenza' (1963), the individual's music against the orchestral impulse. As with 'Still Life', art holds a plea with time (the lifted husk, the swallows, the coffin and bat all describe the orchestra's appearance). The artist - the violinist -

is also probably a shaman, who must sing the woman across 'The loaded estuary of the dead'. The poem is one of Hughes' earliest attempts to synthesize quite different narrative threads; the shock of actual death fragments the style into the clashing claustrophobia of surrealism ('Folktale surrealism' according to Hughes' definition of Popa's manner, not 'surrender to the dream flow for its own sake'. 'Practical difficulties... have forced the sufferer temporarily out of the dimension of coherent reality into that depth of imagination where understanding has its roots and stores its X-rays' (1967 'Popa'; Faas 1980 p. 184).)

In 'Ghost Crabs' the participant 'strolls' along like that of Cave Birds (Cave Birds p. 30); but 'Something [is] happening': a flash-vision of reality, Freud's 'cycles of concurrence' and Styx's 'sliding/ Staring/ Thickness of silence' jams the brain 'blind'. Individuals are transient manifestations of the world-sea's guardians, 'bacteria,/ Dying their lives and living their deaths'. Perhaps one feels all this is less 'folklore' than science-fiction surrealism (Hughes had written an introduction to Wells' The War of the Worlds for the Sunday Times of 24/6/62, a little before writing this). The pedigree of the genuine lines - 'Their singing is like a thin sea-wind flexing in the rocks of a headland' - seems to obtrude.

Selected Poems expands 'Boom' (largely 1961), the analysis of the 'empty battleground' of 'our cluttered countries' where the Crabs' violence operates. An economic 'Boom' can only be seen to drive straight against the humbling but regenerative revolutions and flux of the day-and-night earth:

Like rearlights away up the long road
Toward an earth-melting dawn
Of the same thing, but staler.

(The 'road' of linear logic becomes a frequent symbol from this time, as in 'The Road to Easington' and '?') The closing lines of 'Bcom' bear three simultaneous messages: what 'mouths' (especially in the countries whose economies, in a round world, bear the brunt of others' 'Booms') are crying out for really are not the shop-window goods, for which consumerism has to keep inflaming unassuag-

able demands, but those inalienables, 'Air Water [and the spirit's] Life', whose quality the expanding economy prejudices to its peril. Secondly, market economies' 'More More More' itself places increasing pressure on 'Air' and 'Water', which (like earth's 'Life') are finite commodoties. Thirdly, the ashes of a death no sales boom can reprieve become indistinguishable from the fallout of a different explosion, insidiously consequent perhaps (trade wars) upon the first.

This kind of disorientation is a favourite trick of Hughes: in 'Bar-Room TV' (Selected Poems p. 69), the actors in the western become one with the drinkers whose souls (like the 'Wino's') the 'foul water' of the mesmerizing screen, and patriarchal ill-winds bringing nothing of women, children or the future, cannot re-immense in earth's healing flow.

Tutor and tutee (Selected Poems p. 70) betray both 'words, the homunculi' and 'The scarred world'. The scholar can only delude himself he is 'advancing into the depths' of the world's river and ends 'Lodged in dune sand', lacking with his tutee the 'eyes' of living, reciprocating things. His 'wharf-weed' beard recalls the inactive puritan, Hamlet, duller 'than the fat weed/ That roots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf' (Hamlet I, v, 32-3).

The Selected Poems 'Boom' ends with a revision of 'Kafka', much the best section of 'Wings' (1966; Wodwo pp. 174-6). In its recognition of the place of art in our cultural unease, it takes over from the insignificant 'Ludwig's Death Mask' in the original Wodwo. 'Wings' is Blakean in the worst sense, but in 'Kafka' the arrogance is largely replaced by pity: only by flapping his spiritual, artistic wings can owl-faced Kafka reveal the whole 'man' tattooed in the armpit. But rationalism's 'wall of glare' has grounded him.

"Second Glance at a Jaguar" is a curiosity for me. I wrote it while standing in front of the jaguar's cage, in Regent's Park Zoo, in direct contradiction to my notions of how poetry ought to be composed' (Hughes in Summerfield 1974 p. 269). Written in 1962, therefore, it anticipates the headlong randomness of the Moortown Diary. 'Hurrying through the underworld, soundless',

the 'lump of astral energy' (Faas 1980 p. 199) shrugs off all the fallen poet's humanizations, in terms of priest or prayer-wheel. To that degree, this (unlike 'View of a Pig') is an anguished, anxious, almost hysterical poem, a poem about the failure of poetry, qua ritual. It also breaks new ground in the sheer risk of its imagery: 'His head/ Is like the worn down stump of another whole jaguar...'

Its 'control', in Selected Poems, is 'Fern' (1967), where art and perception seem entirely successful in charming the energies, earth's river: 'the retina/ Reins the creation with a bridle of water'. The fern, conductor or dancer to its own conducting, can, in terms of its very growth within life's revolution, freeze it, and own a kingdom. The mouse hears it is safe; the fly bequeathes itself to the spider. 'The one note of silence' is probably 'OM', the Hindu sound of eternity, heard when the music of flux ceases. The poem's exquisite lyricism, however, does not preclude ironic self-consciousness: the fern's 'Kingdom', to which it will return, is the soil 'the low hills' are ground into.

After this spring instant, 'A Wind Flashes the Grass' (p. 29; 1966) and autumn 'Leaves pour blackly across'. In the river of existence, no entity is distinguishable: trees are horses, 'bewildered' (made wild); a tree is 'the shadow of [our] bones' too. Civilization blows away and we realize empathy with the earth, clinging to it and 'pierced afresh by the tree's cry'. Syntax blows away as well: the trees are afraid and 'momentary/ Streams rivers of shadow', and afraid of ~~being so~~. The poem sees no possibility of speaking 'the oracle of the earth', 'Meanings' 'below words' 'that will not part from the rock'. There is only meaningless, claustrophobic transience.

The 'Vegetarian' (p. 30; 1962) is 'fearful' of swimming, eating and dying in this world, 'Eternity's stone threshold': but, as he stares 'into the emptiness' of his Heaven, 'he hears the hounds of the grass' - of the grave, the flesh's universal transience, devouring him too before he might reach it. 'Sugar Loaf' (1961) repeats 'Still Life' grimly: the eroding waters are no longer celebrated in one harebell, but invisibly and fearsomely digest the hill and its indistinguishable reflection. 'Bowled Over' (1962), a simple and

beautiful poem, again focuses on the individual's death: earth 'arrives' at the end of its revolutions (on which 'spinning' and 'flaring' characteristically pun).

These four poems represent Wodwo's particular nature-style, and emphasis on Panta Rhei, at its most striking. Selected Poems now prints 'Root, Stem, Leaf' from Recklings, which belongs with them but is even more weirdly beautiful. Hughes has taken an old theme, the transience of the flesh, and employed it with such imaginative and linguistic daring that it seems his own. Metaphysical terror and calm religious contemplation of the icon seem united:

Foxglove, harebell neither protest nor hope
On the steep slope where she climbs.

The invocation of the circling river looks years forwards:

the river
Is a prayer to its own waters
Where the circulation of our world is pouring
In stillness - ...

Year after year the trout in the pools
Grow heavy and vanish, without ever emerging.

The reconciliation of riverine description and the tenderness of elegy is unusual; somehow the images compromise neither's effect:

The field-walls float their pattern
Over her eye
Whether she looks outward or inward.

In Wodwo, the next three - less successful - poems oppose instability the opposite way, mythically. 'Logos' (1966) proposes (stanzas 1 and 2) an unalterable God. In stanza 3, reality appears irreconcilable with this vision, and, 4 and 5 paralleling 1 and 2, God is seen not as the supreme Deus otiosus whose indifference suffers corruptions, but the Logos, invented by men in defiance of our 'Mother', the sea. God never 'created Man', only 'the men we know' (1970 'Crow'). His Word is no more adequate than the poet's, 'the phras-

ing falling to pieces'. The serpent, of life and death ('Reveille', 1966), is not 'One of [his] creatures'. 'The Rescue', a deliberately imprecise allegory, considers the illusion that the 'five' (points or senses, upon which 'the frail mantle of a person' is 'moulded' ('Logos' : even in 1962 Hughes himself would not presumably have subscribed to the Humean reduction)) can survive, on earth's waters, after 'the end of the island' of our seventy years: a spirit-ship comes, 'Cleaving the nightmare' ('this existence', the Night Mare's realm), 'slicing it open,/ Letting in reality', Plato's absolute. Yet, far from 'slashing [one's] eyes back alive', the old self's death leaves the senses 'sucked empty': we are stripped back down to oneness with the Goddess, 'Like mummies with their bandages lifted off'. The speaker, like Ripley, seems unreconciled yet to the necessity of the death-and-rebirth experience.

'Stations' is the climax of Part One, meditating comprehensively, yet with complete linguistic precision, upon the religiously meaningful death, not of Christ (Stations of the Cross) but everyman. Mind is what insulates us from the horror of, and makes us an 'island' (insula) in, the ocean of flux, whose eternity will drink us, but of which our rational selves 'drink nothing' (II): sea, island, lifeboat coffin (cf. 'Cadenza') and portholed wrecks are all re-assumed from 'The Island', but the manner is quite different, a 'few poor objects' and 'gigantic empty vistas' (1976 Pilinszky; Faas 1980 p. 194) focusing the entire nature of our existence: while 'The stalk of the tulip... And his jacket' cling to each other like mourners, 'the great stars [are] swimming through where he had been'. Part III (Selected Poems text) addresses, and rejects, the possibility that the dead recover their previous consciousness in their next agglomeration in the flood. They would only suffer death a second time, say in a hare; and one's own conscious experience (one's eyes reflected in 'the mirror's seamless sand') acknowledges little or nothing of pre-existence. Our atoms' past roles, which have bequeathed us (IV) the 'wild look' we see in the mirror, seem a blank, an 'absence' to us. The blackbird

(indeed 'you'), unfallen and unconscious, cannot make this 'comparison', so, 'complacent', does not anticipate death. It will indeed 'leave everything to' its after-absence, Panta Rhei's 'total Emptiness', but its passivity - leaving 'everything to' fate - is your only ideal. Absence's 'respite', however, is not only your transient present life, but the 'music' which, inherited by instinct (and, for you, by culture) from ancestors' 'Absence', prevents your complete 'Absence' for ever: absence 'Weeps' its defeat. Scrupulously, the poem (thematically close to Hardy's 'Proud Songsters') finally qualifies this positive by reminding you the individual bird's feeding and feathers are manifestations of its non-existence on these eternal terms; but in their synthesis of plangent lyricism and an intellectual sophistication we associate more with evolved religions than single poems, the lines' quite new abstraction anticipates the achievement of the Gaudete epilogue. The poem's final section replaces sea with wheel. Human, blackbird or poet, the earth will - the immediacy is shocking - run you over. Hughes' talent for syntax broken yet apparently unalterable makes us recognize that our necks are simply part, with the plantains, of the rails being proceeds along.

In 'The Green Wolf', the dead man becomes your own neighbour (in Selected Poems' honest revision 'my', the Hugheses', Percy Key, who died in June 1962 'after a short grim illness during which time his wife repeatedly needed [their] help' (Newman 1970 p. 194)). Hawthorn, bean and Venus are manifestations of the Goddess, who unmakes and remakes us, 'One smouldering [an-nihil-ation]'. The title (it was first called simply 'Dark Women') suggests one way in which death becomes meaningful: a community sacrifice, towards the new life of June, 'defined as an inexact imitation of [that] generative act' the last lines evoke (Girard 1977 p. 269).

So much, however, becomes irrelevant when 'The Bear' (p. 41; 1966), who 'In a web of rivers' glues the circle's 'Beginning to end... In his sleep', brings your own death. 'Ready to awake/ And instantly focus', he has been the 'gleam in the pupil' seen in the mirror in 'Stations', or here in the 'river/

Where people [bend] to drink' and are drunken, like the 'old dry wrecks'.

'You [have watched this] approaching but you [could not] fear it' ('The Green Wolf'). The price 'To dead land' is 'everything' our lives know; yet, perhaps, the old ego's extinction 'is everything' to us - one's sole conceivable redemption.

In Part Two (1959-60), 'The Wound' portrays the re-orientation in the underworld towards rebirth of the soul made whole by marriage to the anima, whilst the stories present individual people encountering the flux of death, but the ego retreating within its puritanical shell. In 'The Brother's Dream', the monk tried to subdue his mother, the bear, not by visionary meditation but heroic opposition, '[opening] a river'. Now, the participant in 'The Rain Horse' meets his memory in a lonely place. The story - stylistically related to 'November' - is probably the only wholly convincing one here, though the prose can seem disturbingly clumsy. Mud, as in 'The Hawk in the Rain', 'webby rain' (cf. 'Something was happening') and the hills 'awash with every tide' (p. 55) are the world's river, against which to defend themselves the 'old and stiff' participant (p. 46) has shoes, and a suit, which get ruined, and the farmers (p. 55) 'plough, binders and the rest'. The fall - growing up and retreating from the land - has made the buried self, the horse, alien and dangerous, and the man, lacking the techniques to ride it, only assaults, cutting out 'some important part' 'of his brain' (p. 55).

Michael in the semi-autobiographical 'Sunday' also wears his 'Sunday shoes'. The story explores how the alienation in 'The Rain Horse' came about. At the rat-catching, Michael wants 'to [let] events go their own way' but to watch the rats is to compassionate with them and to become implicated in the cruelty of existence. In an established Krogonic tyranny, this inevitable fall is contemporaneous with the fall into puritanism: Michael can no more 'run' away from the constricted valley than the rats; and to fall into disgust at the reality of rat-baiting is itself to succumb to the churches' prohibitions,

just as Redd's 'little rustling voice [makes] Michael want to cough' too (p. 67).

'Snow' conjures Beckett's universe of despair to imply its inadequacies, but a very different source would be 'The Yellow Boots', one of Williamson's most powerful short stories, in which hounds pursue a convict through Exmoor fog. (Hughes' persona thinks of '[evading] an enemy', p. 74.) Emotionally alienated by wartime experience, the convict's only hold on sanity is to play hide-and-seek with a brass pin: 'it fell, and he trembled; his throat was dry until he found it. How glad he was when it prickled his finger, and he picked it up and put it in its place. It was an ordinary pin, made of brass, the bright plating of which had long since worn off' (Williamson 1970 p. 377). Dropped by an aircraft (modern science?) into an 'absolute waste' of pure 'energy' (p. 72) 'rivering along the ground', Hughes' persona feels he has 'nothing to do but endure', walking in a 'circle' with his very footprints decaying in seconds. Fallen, his 'mind is not [his] friend' nor even (p. 73) 'himself', because it tries to insinuate despair. 'The thing to do is to... recognize these treacherous paralysing, yes, lethal thoughts the second they enter, catch them before they can make that burrowing plunge down the spinal cord' (p. 72). But I think we have to recognize Hughes is already impatient with this stoicism: there may be 'no danger of... ever losing' an inanimate chair, or, in the total blindness of snow, it seems, of dying: but the man has already lost wife and family, the responsibilities adherent to significant action.

'The Harvesting' elaborates the fine Lupercal poem 'Sunstroke': the persona loses consciousness and awakens to '[lie] healing' as one with 'the ragged length of a dog fox...'

With eyes open, forepaws strained at a leap -

Also surprised by the rain.

'All your life [death has] been this fraction of a second away' (Wodwo p. 88). Grooby's ideal of shooting is as 'a gesture in a conversation' (p. 84) where

man and nature might communicate with ritual ease. But when the old self's death comes, mechanization and civilized restraints (and a lack of empathy from Grooby) seem to have left it meaningless: there is no rain.

The possibility of marriage to the anima, and of ritual negotiations' (flute-playing) controlling the 'battle-cry' (p. 103) of violence is at least brought closer in 'The Suitor' (where the debt seems to be to Heine's 'Der Doppelgänger'). Like the victim in 'Invitation to the Dance', the persona has 'never danced' in the world, but now walks five miles through its wind and rain, in dancing shoes whose 'soles... are too thin' so that he 'can feel them blotting up the wet' (p. 93).

In 'The Wound' the self-blinded (p. 106) 'bitchproof' (p. 128) beweaponed ego - afraid of eating (p. 129) and of the mud and rain, feeling you must 'narrow your mind now, Ripley' (p. 142) - becomes ready to abandon itself, beyond its death, to marriage, and the persona is reborn. This midsummer-night's dream-vision (p. 107) reads like a prospectus for Hughes' themes in the 1970s, but not really like literature: Hughes' habit of transcribing his own dreams is one of his most consistently disastrous (he repudiates his interpretation of this one to Faas in 1977 (Faas 1980 p. 210) and has come to see all his (eighteen or so) plays as 'mere bagatelles'. 'The parts that were interesting became poems' (in Sagar 1983 p. 154). 'The theatre belongs to the actor' (1971 'Talking Without Words'; Faas 1980 p. 191).

Selected Poems, in place of the prose, reprints two important poems, 'Scapegoats and Rabies' (1966) and 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning' (1964). In the former sequence, the victims of World War One become scapegoat-sacrifices on England's part to keep the century's confusion and violence - like rabies - safely beyond the 'ebb of the Channel'; but a 'RED CARPET' of blood welcomes the infected victim home to bite London. The language represents Hughes' surrealism at its most demanding: the subject - and the new, angry tone - were what Crow's style evolved to convey, and this transitional poem does

sometimes seem aridly schematic, and over-ambitious. Its analysis of guilt resembles Pilinszky's (Hughes read Pilinszky in the mid sixties, at the time of this poem's publication). 'Under the ancient burden of the hill', the conscripts continue 'HAUNTING' us. The victims of Thanatos are conflated with nature's doomed creature, in 'the muddling streams,/ And the hill's eyeless outlook', 'the bombardment of afternoon sunlight', at the same time as the language's two-tiered self-consciousness ('abandon', 'paid up', 'facelessness', 'brainless', 'concentrating', 'helpless') forces the recognition that war and natural death are opposites, that no 'armed anonymity' can escape the fallen conscious mind's responsibilities towards the individual and the future.

Millions of soldiers die but consciousness, 'HAUNTING', endures: Hughes reconciles these two ideas through 'THE MASCOT', the army's 'general' conscience whom 'Every shell that bursts/ Blows... momentarily out'. He is 'a footbridge' (two boots) through whom the 'flood' of 'Every attack' 'Storms'. His 'lantern' of awareness illuminates 'the ring of light', Vaughan's 'eternity': but the pity of war has reduced universal consciousness to a mere 'skin' - the brains (our ability to act sensibly) seem to have been 'cured' away.

This is 'WIT'S END'. The language suggests that, as much as 'Crystal balls', poetic conscience, that makes 'the battlefield flat as a sheet of foolscap' and can '[raise] the hair on men's heads' but never the flesh, has itself grown meaningless,

... A LANTERN
 IN THE HAND
 OF A BLIND PEOPLE....

'The silence of artistic integrity "after Auschwitz" is a real thing. The mass of the human evidence of the camps, and of similar situations since, has screwed up the price of "truth" and "reality" and "understanding" beyond what common words seem able to pay' (1976 Pilinszky; Faas 1980 p. 193). But what Pilinszky can do is 'write... with a seasoned despair, a minimal, much-examined hope, a special irony' and 'an appeal to God' (who 'is the Truth'). It is to

this God, the inner reality of everything's flux, not the Logos-absolute, 'The General' should '[commit] his emptiness'.

For Hughes, part of 'the Truth' is that the bureaucrats at home were 'A BLIND PEOPLE', rational Oedipuses, their only mourning 'TWO MINUTES' SILENCE' in the gunfire. The scapegoat Englishman (like Williamson's John Bullock), his boots 'beautifully bulled', carries away 'downwind' our 'stink' - the incidentals of our magic happiness ('The Conjuror's hankie...'); dualistic disgust at our bodily functions; our assembly lines (with graves at the end of them), which, like the sewage discharged into Thames, the 'mushroom' shellbursts and war-death itself, seem human travesties of the natural recyclements in 'A HAUNTING'. As in 'Boom', social and ecological catastrophes can both succeed disloyalty to the flowing nature of things.

'The crowded walls' withstand this sea of flux but suggest siege, not assault. John Bullock returns to England, an unwelcome ghost, emotionally crippled. Hughes' soldier has 'made it home... - // Into mud', which he was born from: but the 'leaves'' trembling reminds us there is only one 'earth'. In a parody of the construction of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, plate 27), the 'alive' corpse (the rationalist, and history) lies on London.

The soldiers ('A HAUNTING') have been 'Whelmed under the flashing onslaught of the barley,/ Strangled in the drift of honeysuckle'. 'Stealing Trout', the opposite pole of Hughes' genius, remains nevertheless part of the same vision: 'This headlong river is a rout/ Of tumbrils and gun-carriages, rags and metal....' The poem looks forwards twenty years to River, though only occasionally -

As the sun melts the hill's spine and the spilled light
Flows through their gills...

- adventuring that volume's visionary exhilarations. It is as 'witty' as 'Scapegoats and Rabies', but now there is the leisure and authority to play the fool:

A new earth still in its wrappers
Of gauze and cellophane,
The frost from the storage still on its edges....

Even the bizzarrest coinages ('The sugared spindles and wings of grass/ Are etched on great goblets') and the scoopings-up of something deeper ('The earth is coming quietly and darkly up from a great depth,/ Still under the surface') make their effect unquestioned, with no fuss: because, for the first time, I would suggest, the subservience of everything in the poem to anything in the May dawn seems never in doubt. Thus far, it represents a major departure.

The poem, reconciling inner and outer realities, is also one of Hughes' most sophisticated attempts to outwit dualism: at the start, his puritan crucified guilt, the staring eye, misprises even the sheep:

Every sheep within two miles
Is nailing me accurately down
With its hellishly-shaven starved-priest expression.

But really they 'are not much more than the primroses': 'The air, after all, has forgotten everything' and '5 a. m.' is Eden, 'unused fish' in the river itself 'washing its soul... clear/ Of the discolourings bled in/ Off ploughlands and lanes'. His stare cancelled, Hughes 'At first... can hardly look at it': its spirits 'drag the flag off [his] head, a dark insistence/ Tearing the spirits from [his] mind's edge'. (Alan Watts described ego-consciousness as 'waving a flag called me' in Beyond Theology - cited by Newton (1971 p. 384) apropos of Crow 'Flying the black flag of himself'.) To wade in the river is to sacrifice, eerily, much of the old ego, one's co-ordinating memory and non-earthed personal gravity:

Till the tightrope of my first footholds
Tangles away downstream
And my bootsoles move as to magnets.

But fishing is a ritual, balanced struggle between fisher and river, 'A drowned woman loving each ankle', obliteration and assertion: from the first, Hughes '[stands] square in it, against it', and is 'heavier'. The fish-arm is, ambig-

uously, the river's attempt 'To yank [him] clear' of himself (death, in Wodwo's context), and something 'To yank [him] clear' of the mesmerization. 'It has changed places' and he catches it. The poem wants to show that this ritual 'death', this partial self-abandonment, is sufficient to reconcile speaking, and earth-confidence. 'Now' that he returns to his self (in the river, and perhaps writing the poem) art and reality seem one, stuffed fox and summoned totem:

Now I am a man in a painting
(Under the mangy, stuffed head of a fox)
Painted about 1905
Where the river steams and the frost relaxes
On the pear-blossoms.

One is balanced, as if for an instant, between night and day, fallen and reconciled states: 1905 is not Eden ('the sun/ Rises upon a world well-tried and old'), but no more is it 'Now' - or pears apples.

Part One of Wodwo has presented the feminine river of existence; Part Two, the response of individual men, that of puritanical violence; Part Three attempts the reconciliation. Eating ('Theology') and sex inevitably surrender the individual to the serpent of flux, death. The patriarchal Logos-religion has tried to interpret this as a 'Corruption' of Edenic stasis, inculcating Eve, representative of the flux; 'All that's simply/ Corruption of the facts'. The poem (1961) not only anticipates Crow but is as successful as any of Crow's simple poems in saying as much, as quickly.

The Logos-God (p. 150), 'Alpha and Omega', the 'absence' we have added, has, attaching its own violence to what it sees, turned nature into 'Gog' (1961), the dragon of Revelations. 'And the dog... opens its mouth to exult and, appalled, hears the roar of the beast of death' (on Baskin's 'The Hanged Man': Faas 1980 p. 166). The poem 'turned into' what it is and 'alarmed' Hughes (Faas 1980 p. 200): certainly the symbolism is organically subdued to the dramatic effect. Part II (original edition) is more schematic: 'the creatures

of earth/ Are mere rainfall rivulets'. Like the 'Thistles' plumes, 'The grass-head' attains a minimal existence but 'will never know it exists'; in Part III the 'Red Cross Knight' (St. George, in The Faerie Queene, Book I, who fights Duessa, Catholicism) 'mounts, shaking his plumes clear of dark soil'. Like 'Ghost Crabs', these lines are fragments from Difficulties of a Bridegroom (Faas 1980 p. 212) and share the same faults.

At first it seems St. George's voice finds Pozdnyshev's murder of his wife 'good' ('Kreutzer Sonata', 1962), as Tolstoy did: but it is her 'good' that has been stabbed. Hughes conflates with Othello's crime Tolstoy's advocacy of the suppression of the energies Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata represents. (It is characteristic that elsewhere Hughes should praise Tolstoy: not only his 'simple' manner (1980 'Williamson' p. 161; 1980 'The Reef' p. 3) but the 'archetypal... two-way journey toward Reality' of his lifestyle, 'rejecting ego and possessions' (1963 'Vagrancy' p. 293), much as he once compared Pilinszky's silences to that of 'Socrates... before his judges' (1976 Pilinszky; Faas 1980 p. 193).) For Pozdnyshev to reject the feminine (and energy) is to 'castrate' himself, while the puritan's 'envious spirit's assault' is not ritual sublimation of extraneous instinct, but an inflammation of 'supernatural greed'.

Written in March 1963, 'Out' was 'an attempt to have done with the First World War' (Hughes in Summerfield 1974 p. 270): compared with 'Dust As We Are' and 'For the Duration' it remains a self-obsessed, even slightly self-pitying poem. Bill Hughes sits in his chair, like the man in 'Snow', and his five senses - his time-sense - just keep him from his memory's 'rain' of death (the image in lines 8 - 12 representing an avenue of the metaphysical conceit no one else seems to have trodden). 'For four years', for those 'Out' on service, 'France was like England's dream world' (1965 'Men Who March Away'), and if 'we are still in the living thick of it' (ibid.), it is our mythic constant, our 'Dream Time' Alcheringa with which ritual negotiation must have it out: first (part II) by presenting slaughter as a birth: 'The dead man in his cave.

beginning to sweat'. But the surviving soldiers' unsung return as 'clerks' has already bankrupted this arresting image. Hughes' final appeal ('Remembrance Day') is to the forces of regeneration ('refreshing of ploughs' recalling Blake's 'Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead'): the 'dead' - those living (Matthew 8: 22) who are not 'saved' - must bury their own generation. But what Hughes' prayer implies is that 'the dunkings of the Atlantic' - Tiamat's flux of death - must retreat, as St. George demanded: which is as likely, the poem itself tells him, as England's surfacing like an anemone and closing in the air.

'New Moon in January' (1962), like 'Cadenza', surreally evokes death - the painless extinction of the staring ego - and the voyage (cf. Lawrence's 'The Ship of Death') to dead land. When the eye is destroyed only a lash remains, but the lash-shaped moon - the Goddess - and the year are going to grow back, even though now, at 'zero', the nadir, everything seems 'Frozen'. This puritanic stasis, and inheritance ('Out'), combine as themes in 'The Warriors of the North' (1962). Calvinism is the Vikings' Pozdnyshvian disembowelling 'envy' and their hostility towards genuine civilization - 'the elaborate, patient gold of the Gaels' - recrudesced. Hughes' viewpoint is a weird unearthly synoptic one ('The slow ships feelered Southward, snails over the steep sheen of the water-globe'): in 'Karma' (1966) he synthesizes all the history 'Of the world/ Made of Blood': that of the neocortex helpless before the blood-instincts climbing the jugular.

'Song of a Rat' (1963) perhaps rebukes the Karmic conceptualization: the dying individual rat 'cannot think'. The trap is really 'the whole earth' about to reconsume the rat; 'the constellations' will not 'keep off' any longer. Selected Poems omits parts II and III, leaving the objective section as one of the few Wodwo poems which actually assert a recognition of universal horror. It is an impressive part in the slow intensification of this theme, during the third quarter of the book. The ruined church at Heptonstall (p. 165) can no more endure the 'rain' than other insular entities: 'dreams' of humanity

'die back/ Where they were born': into (Selected Poems), the 'Skull of an idiot'. One slipped letter ('tries'/ 'tires') casts down even the 'dream' of language (an effect recalling the eventual last-line manifestation, as 'Lonely rock', of Jeffers' title 'O Lovely Rock'). Heptonstall is near Hughes' birth-place: the poems have been homing in on his own mortality again, so that 'Ballad From a Fairy Tale' focuses - or refuses to focus - on actual bereavement.

'Skylarks' (1966) pulls away in a new direction, celebrating the poet-bird's shamanic flight, the deliberate, terrifying summoning of ego-death, 'The plummeting dead drop' and the consequent mastery over earth-drag and fall:

Weightless,
Paid-up,
Alert,

Conscience perfect.

The larks are 'Obedient as to death a dead thing' - obedient to song and life as a corpse is to death, and so obedient as to be dead - immune - to death. Therefore they inherit the nature of the flux, 'Like a breaker of ocean milling the shingle'; even 'the sun goes silently and endlessly on with the lark's song'. For Lawrence, the lark was 'a fragment of earth which travels to be fused out, sublimated, in the shining of the heavens.... But it is not death', it is 'The Crown', transcending life and death (Lawrence 1968 p. 374). For Blake, it represented the sublime: 'the straining of the eye to follow it into the heavens is matched by an unorganized expansion of the physical senses produced by its song' (Beer 1969 p. 7). For Hughes here, the senses cannot quite be initiated into larkdom:

[illegible]

After which the sky lies blank open
Without wings, and the earth is a folded clod.

His 'idleness curdles' and like Michael he - and the earth he might speak - remain trapped in 'the dreary Sunday morning' of puritanism. Death and rebirth

remain projections not experiences. In Selected Poems, part VIII contrasts the 'strapped' hero Cuchulain's death by the lark to the free poet's failure of empathy with the death-drop and his relief (VII) when the flight is abandoned.

In 'Mountains' (1962), by contrast, the persona accepts his passibility and its consequences. He is a fly, and the mountain-gods will crush him. This liberates him to celebrate 'the agony of love and the agony of fear and the agony of death' with which eternity decks itself, as in 'Still Life'. But so much depends on the dishonesty of the opening 'if'. 'You Drive in a Circle' (1967), at least, rebukes the fantastic anthropomorphism: even sheep, suffering 'the mist-gulfs of no-thinking', can only be conceived as 'sponges', 'fossils'. The alienation, from 'the powerful rain', upon which 'Mountains'' reconciliation itself consciously depends, is here acknowledged - as is its frailty: 'Rain-sog is rotting your shoes to paper' and 'melting' the 'windshield'. Neither 'your hardest look' nor 'your coming days' can get a freehold on the world's flowing 'Everything': 'You Drive in a Circle' on the claustrophobic wheel, birth to death, and 'Your destination waits where you left it'. Hughes, Sartre, Kafka and Einstein still seem earthbound, unlike the lark.

'Pibroch' (1960) is at once the nadir of wingless existence, and the start of the book's last, successful effort to come to terms with Panta Rhei, its attainment of Sufic baga, reason and oneness beyond the fana-fi-lah of self-annihilation. It presents the universe 'without self-deception': but even a 'Pibroch', a 'lament', is art, which here seems able to come to terms with reality, and, in a way, ordering chaos into icons and stanzas, celebrates it, discovering the spirits behind imprisoning physicality. The wolves (p. 178, 1963) sing too, their howling somehow 'without [the] world' of 'Pibroch', even though 'The earth is under [the] tongue' of the individual wolf, who is 'living for the earth'. It howls as much from 'joy' as 'agony'. The eternal stars, 'the glitterers in the black' (p. 162), bowing ('Pibroch') before reality, now come snowing softly down.

'Like men come back from the dead [the Eastern European poets] have an

improved perception, an unerring sense of what really counts in being alive' (1969 Popa p. 10). 'Gnat-Psalm' (1966: the year before the essay) is set not in eternity but at the union of stabbing (l. 8) day, and darkness, the gnats' 'wings blurring the blaze' of Heraclitus' everything. The poem - anticipating the religious grandeur and spaciousness of Hughes' later work - evokes the insulation from anguish of one's relinquishment to the instant, the simultaneous renunciation and acceptance of responsibility, just as the gnats 'are the nails/ In the dancing hands and feet of the gnat-god'. The gnat-cloud, 'Everybody everybody else's yoyo', is at once the individual and the whole, transient body and eternal spirit, minute and 'the greatest of all the galaxies'. Therefore they transcend death and the wheel, 'singing/ That the cycles of this Universe are no matter' (they are the enduring spirit): their bodies, relative and absolute, 'are their own sun' of spirit, 'Their own brimming over/ At large in the nothing'. (In a Gabon pygmy song:

The spirits of the dead flit hurrying there.
Their crowd is like the flight of mosquitoes,
The flight of mosquitoes which dance in the evening...
(Rothenberg 1969 p. 104).)

The undying gnats' very 'agility' has liberated them from 'the claws of the grass' (recalling, as many of the poem's images do, here 'Claws' of flame ('Skylarks') and 'hounds of the grass' ('Vegetarian')). 'Their little bearded faces' lead us towards the human implications of their lesson - learnt, perhaps, by the 'Hasids', exponents 'of the truly effective Existential discipline' with its 'Universal significance' (1965 'Singer'; Faas 1980 p. 178). In the gnats, 'Ridden to death by [their] own bodies/ Riding [their] bodies to death', body and will are still one. For a moment, they can redeem the dualistic poet: 'My hands fly in the air, they are follies....' Their 'dancing// Rolls [his] staring skull slowly away into outer space'. The rational stare becomes transitive, passible Vision.

Although the gnats are 'dancing' and 'singing' (ceol beag, not the ceol mor of a Pibroch), their very realization of ephemerality (and the staring eye's

cancellation) seems to prescind enduring art: their 'Cabala' (an oral tradition) is 'dumb'; they '[rub] out everything they write'. In 'Full Moon and Little Frieda' (1962), however, reality and art seem indistinguishable, the moon becoming - itself in an image - an artist, life a painting which comes alive in turn. (Hughes' most optimistic poems are often his most assured too: this is one of his favourites - see Gibson 1973 p. 87.) The world's waters are held in a pail simultaneously 'still and brimming'. Again, the time is an evening, 'shrunk' to a point involving its own past (the cows, unlike the sheep in 'You Drive in a Circle', have a 'home' to go to) and future (the web anticipates the dew's touch, the pail is lifted for the star's sake). Hughes demonstrates the reconciliation of 'Gnat-Psalm' in personal terms, the child being proof of the rising of the wheel, the 'dark river of blood' in 'the world/ Made of Blood' ('Karma').

'At the end of the ritual up comes a goblin' (Faas 1980 p. 204). Wodwo (p. 183) is a 'goblin creature... just discovering that it is alive in the world. It does not know what it is and is full of questions' (Poetry in the Making p. 62). Being 'separate from the ground', without 'threads', it is a prototype (1961) of Crow, whose animal curiosity yet alienation is always relapsing into scientific objectivity. (Goethe's Faust, qua experimenter, 'digs for riches with greedy hands/ And revels to turn up a worm'.) It has learnt language; apparently Sir Gawain will perceive Wodwos as ferocious monsters. (One part of the poem is an academic joke, the only people who really worry what Wodwos are being medieval scholars, who would reprove this one's punctuation.) The only safeguard is unpunctuated openmindedness and self-knowledge (Lear must go onto the heath to answer 'What am I?' and perhaps Wodwo's horrible submersions await its eponym, entering the river's 'water' for the first time). 'Exceedingly alert for a new word' (1964 'Superstitions' p. 500), one must be satisfied to 'go on looking'.

CHAPTER THREE: CROW

The omnivorous, untrustable Crow was England's first totem (Hughes claims), the Raven Blake's bird of Urizenic single vision. In Williamson's 'The Chronicle of Halbert and Znarr', Znarr the crow, fostered by a thrush whom he eventually swallows, is taken by the boy Halbert to London where, escaped, he causes chaos before adapting. Crow also resembles Hašek's Good Soldier Švejk and the Mullah Nasreddin of Sufi parable, but his important ancestor is the Trickster - who survived as Pulchinella, the Fool's Pope, or the alchemical Mercurius ('To a black crow I am kin'). The figure, among primitives, might serve two roles, exorcising aggressive instincts by objectifying them as absurd, and acting as the shaman's helper in the spirit-world. Crow, in this second capacity, tests out Hughes' way (really an un-Tricksterish one) towards the ego's death, 'self-immolation in new, greater and other life' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4). (Marriage to nature being his end, Crow must not therefore indulge in the wayside obscenities characteristic of Trickster.) If consciousness can die and be redeemed, the poetry never says. The book represents a kind of cultural paedomorphosis, backing out of our 'evolutionary dead-end' (1970 'Nicholson'; Faas 1980 p. 186): a version of the Dadaistic 'destruction of language' which Eliade (1964A p. 72) understands as a way to artistic spiritual recovery. Something of the gracelessness and brutalism in the twentieth century's arts is imitated, to be redeemed. Crow, the childlike survivor, is (interpreted, for the critics' sake, in the light of his later development, by Hughes) 'full of ideas' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5), 'optimism and creative joy' (ibid. p. 4) and 'zestful and creative laughter' (ibid.). In so far as Crow represents our own rationalism, Hughes, presenting 'all history... happening simultaneously' (in Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 116) - which is not to say, avoiding it in myth - can exorcise what Lawrence, in corvine mood, once called 'the railway-smash of love' (1961 p. 134) and humanism; by playing devil's advocate, he escapes the moralizing flavour of 'Fourth of July' or 'A Woman Unconscious'.

Hughes' ideal was Trickster-literature's 'deep humane realism' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4); 'his horror at the physicality and wretchedness of [our] trap is without any taint of disgust' (1976 Pilinszky p. 11): he presents 'the human tragedy' (in Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 103) of 'God's masterpiece, Man' (in ibid. p. 116). Though Trickster is amoral, the fool of his instincts and his reason, he is not, characteristically, malicious. (One evil of ours, war, seems beyond him, as it does Crow.) Nor is he psychotic; yet his accident-prone pathos centres on his inability to grow like Wodwo aware of his body or selfhood, or to fulfil or unify his being. Hughes describes Crow as 'ready to turn into I don't know what' (1973 'Crow'), or turn into man (1970 'Crow'). Animals, unfallen, 'are', in body and mind. (Schmidt, 1979 p. 388, comments on 'the authority with which Hughes uses the verb "to be" - with the power of a transitive verb'.) In How the Whale Became, this takes practice: Donkey 'hated the thought of becoming any single creature' and 'used to practise them all in turn' (p. 82), ending a sad no-shape, with

... his quite small body, tough and tight and useful,
Like traveller's luggage,
A thing specially made for hard use, with no trimmings,
Nearly ugly.

(What is the Truth? p. 56).

If we, like Crow, now 'live equally out of our bodies, and out of our minds' (Laing 1967 p. 50), this kind of alienation characterizes particularly the mental problems we call schizophrenia. David Holbrook (1977 pp. 115 f.) diagnoses paranoid schizophrenia in Hughes; 'breathhtakingly impertinent' (Bradshaw 1981 p. 79) as his 'speculations' are, they do speak of one skeleton in Western civilization's cupboard - which Hughes tries, rather impressively in his abstract way, to unlock. 'Mystics and schizophrenics find themselves in the same ocean, but the mystics swim whereas the schizophrenics drown' (R. D. Laing in Capra 1983 p. 422). Blake learnt to swim; Hughes' reading of psychological texts like Milton Rokeach's The Three Christs of Ypsilanti (1964 'Dr. Dung': 'it's a sinister book') will have advanced his understanding

of a sickness that some people feel sums up Western civilization's discontents, and of which personal tragedies could have rendered Hughes particularly qualified to speak.

According to Antipsychiatric practitioners like Laing (who seems to have influenced Hughes), schizophrenia can begin in a child that feels insufficiently loved by its mother. A sense of being, mirrored in the mother's face, is not won, and the child imagines itself made wrongly, hating itself as responsible for the rejection. Images of the mother are simultaneously longed for and rejected in turn: a man may split off his feminine nature, and retreat into arid intellectuality. The real, sensitive soul can be hidden from a world understood as malicious ('implosion'), or tutored to be impassible, like stone ('petrification'); or half of it may be split off, and tendered as sacrificial appeasement. According to Bateson's 'double-bind' model, the split, and the 'punning' madness, are responses to irreconcilable requirements, a father's 'imitate me'/'don't encroach' or the simultaneous love and hate for the mother. Rejection of the mother can take the form of a fear of engulfment in nature or 'the feminine', often symbolized (Laing 1960 p. 47) by water.

In a society which itself manifests these symptoms, the individual schizophrenic's protest will also be redemptive.

The relevance of all this to Hughes' poetry is obvious. Faced with the task, and the apparent impossibility, of speaking for the earth, of submitting to the river of death (misunderstood, by puritanism, as hostile to the individual's life) and withstanding it, his response, especially in early poems, is to offer half his split self as victim. Crow is at once patriarchal rationalism, and the departure towards reunion with nature; the instinctive 'scream', and the mind that blocks it.

Robinson has defined this ambiguity as the cycle's main ideative limitation; though in earlier poems Crow tends to be alternately Western Man and natural energy, the dialectic of energy and fallenness (both true to Trickster's nature) provokes, aesthetically, any variety of scenarios, as Crow

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... comes forward a step,
                        and a step,
                        and a step -
                        ('Crow's Battle Fury').
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(The movement is towards his growing more fully human, as his energetic and rational natures start blending.) The result is a book which stops and starts, repeats itself and departs variously with the devised artlessness of a Bruckner symphony. In what we have - verse fragments from 'the first two thirds of what was to have been an epic fairy tale' (dust cover, first edition).- Crow never gets near marriage to his creatress in the Happy Land. Sometimes Hughes describes From the Life and Songs as one 'poem' in its own right - rather than a structuralist's parallelism of myth, 67 ways of looking at a Black Bird. 'A more graphic idea of the context... ought to have been part of those published fragments' (1981 'A Reply' p. 6), but it is as difficult as it is pleasing to imagine the 'story' - conclusively interpreting the lyrics and foreclosing them from reality - as an exciting book (Hughes elaborates it in readings) - or accommodating all the poems. The story was 'a way of getting the poems. So it is not the story that [he was] interested in' (Faas 1980 p. 213). Even in 1970, Hughes admitted: 'the story is not really relevant to the poems as they stand.... I think the poems have a life a little aside from it' (ibid. p. 206). Certainly he deliberately chose the fragments' extant sequence; encouraging readers, perhaps, to work out their own Folk-tales.

'The first idea of Crow was really an idea of a style' (ibid. p. 208). That is, around 1966, Hughes sensed the surrealism of Wodwo was starting to rot: he published a few more poems in this manner ('Dog Days on the Black Sea', 1968), but the pruning of Crow is stylistic as much as cultural. In 1967, he had also translated Seneca's Oedipus: Seneca may not seem an ideal model, especially as Hughes outSeneca's him, scraping off the smooth crust of latinity. He also makes a better play, adding all his version's most memorable lines, heightening the drama, and, of course, elaborating Jocasta's role.

Hughes' idea of producing something 'as it might be invented after the holocaust and demolition of all libraries' (in Sagar 1978 p. 107), 'that raises

no ghosts' (Faas 1980 p. 208), seems absolutist: chopped-up prose, as Bedient remarks (1974 p. 114), has ghosts and cadences; and the Bible and Shakespeare¹ are already on the island. Certainly Crow was of its time in adopting a manner of childish, uneducated transparency to expose how absurdly our society incurs its ailments (recalling Edwin Morgan and particularly Kurt Vonnegut). Expository, Brechtian plainness is the especial property of Marxists (Weiss, Mitchell, Bond) - and re-appropriated at the Visionary's peril. Hughes sometimes begins - after Stephen Crane - by imitating an actual colloquialism ('There was this man'), but never keeps it up. Despite its quite different texture, the style in fact remains as eccentric, as surreally inventive on the surface, as ever:

Somehow his feet were two old postcards
Somehow his head was a broken windowpane
('A Bedtime Story')

clearly does not mimic Holub's or Popa's scrupulous reserve.

He thought he saw a Rattlesnake
That questioned him in Greek:
He looked again, and found it was
The Middle of Next Week.
(Carroll's 'Mad Gardener's Song'; in The Rattle Bag p. 257.
Hélène Cixous proposes Carroll as a grandfather of l'écriture féminine.)

- Hughes has a strange gift for making even the truth sound fascinating and impossible. 'The sacred Thoth baboon of the upper Nile... has a very stocky body, a beautiful peppery green fur, a long thick tail, an enormous head and extraordinary eyes' (Faas 1980 p. 214).

What is really impressive about the style of Crow is the pulling power it does exert - through sheer verbal muscle-and-tendon. (Like most of Hughes' stylistic experiments, it allows great conciseness.) Also, though unified, it is remarkably varied: from primitive grace ('Two Legends') to sheer riot ('Crow Improvises'); from bleak sophistication ('Crow Alights') to a musician's performance hours after bereavement ('Criminal Ballad'). The manner gains in

¹'Crow's Song about Prospero and Sycorax' in 'Orts'.

bulk - Selected Poems only prints 16 songs, most written at the beginning of the project, though many (simpler) are perhaps as convincing.

The style can quickly lead to portentousness if there is neither complexity of attack nor self-regulating ridiculousness - as there is not until 'It's a boy!' on page 16. The bifold balance of the 'Legends' (p. 13; 1967) probably reflects Crow's schizoid nature. (If Crow seems to loathe his blackness, the poem shows us how unreasonably we too shun a word, 'black'.) Crow is the rationalist swallowing 'the cry' of true being (I); and also the flying rainbow hope, 'plunging in [the] foam' of existence (II). 'Lineage' holistically re-interprets these poles as top and bottom of the wheel of fertility, the Goddess ('Mary') begetting Logos ('God') whose very sterility and dead-end despair beget 'the spirit of the sperm', Crow - who, as life-force, can 'Scream'. Even art ('Guitar') has its place between beauty ('Violet') and suffering ('Sweat').

In the death-myth, death comes into the world by accident. In Crow, suffering and transience are data: but death is subordinate to Crow (p. 15). 'Only birth matters', writes Hughes in 'Salmon Eggs': and (re-)'birth' - what Crow represents - is the word conspicuously absent from the annihilations of the significantly titled 'Examination at the Womb-door'. If Crow here stands for refusal to despair, 'A Kill' shows him growing schizophrenic: his body - a bundle of dead stuff 'stabbed' with life - is horrible, or a mere object troubling eternal mind. Hughes' comment seems to be that such philosophy is irreconcilable with the production of proper poetry.

In 'Crow and Mama', schizophrenia is generated by mother earth's seemingly intolerable demands. These provoke guilt, guilt self-loathing, self-loathing dualism, dualism technology whose impositions inflame the guilt - the double-bind. Crow feels unable to escape his mother on the essential terms of individuation (driving a car, for instance) so, eventually, does try to escape via the psychotic abnegation of all claims and responsibilities which has been

space-flight. I have deliberately interpreted this poem at several removes from the actual words (as Hughes does 'Truth Kills Everybody' in 'A Reply to my Critics' pp. 5 - 6), to show what variations many good songs are open to. 'A Childish Prank' (1967), by contrast, can only be contemplated on its own terms - being one of the few Crow-songs to approach the seriousness of original myth. Maupassant, for instance, felt sex was created not by God, but a mocking demon (see Lawrence 1936 p. 161). But in the previous poem, 'The Door', Hughes presents the genitals (with mouth and navel: Panta Rhei's hold on us) as 'plants' for the body's earth (just as 'Mountains' decorate 'their limbs/ With the agony of love....') and the staring eye as open to space and rationalism. Now, 'inert' and deathless, 'Man's and woman's bodies [lie] without souls... foolishly staring'. Only sex and death can fill the eye up safely (l. 13), and, paradoxically, spiritualize us.

That might be the first 'fall': Crow arrives, through the eye's 'doorway', as redemptive energy. In 'Crow's First Lesson' (1967), God appears distinctly not as the archetypal Deus otiosus but as Krogon/Logos. This is the second fall: God's puritanical expectations come to pervert corvoid energy (Crow - 'Say Love' - is not a budgerigar): sex now seems unnatural, the language (ll. 11 - 15) conflating 'genital' (flower) and 'head' (the disembodied stare). 'Why were we driven out of Paradise?... Not because we sinned, but because we got our sex into our head' (Lawrence 1961 p. 81). The essentially sterile Krogon boycotts death and sex alike.

Crow flies away (Kro-gon), but gets himself corrupted by dualistic expectations. 'Crow Alights' is a split poem: Hughes describes what - a superficial, emotional response - seems horrible, yet, analysed with the kind of awareness and total thoughtfulness his poetry cherishes, grows marvellous. The mountains' dead matter becomes a living herd; the sea, Ophion itself. The 'nothing' of space turns into a forest, 'fuming' stars the 'mushrooms' transforming decay into rebirth. The universe is a 'hallucination of... horror', and its 'horror'

a 'hallucination'. In Blake's Beulah, 'Contrarieties are equally True'; Hughes' design - like 'Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires' or the Zen koan - is to bewilder dualistic thinking (David Holbrook's here: see Abbs 1975 p. 37) which mistrusts reconciled opposites (the alchemical coniunctio oppositorum). The 'rain-sodden' shoe, the 'waste of puddles' and the 'garbage can, bottom rusted away' will now be familiar as unenlightened attempts to still the flux of existence. ('When a Master was asked what Buddhahood consisted in, he answered, "The bottom of a pail is broken through"' - D. T. Suzuki, cited by Jung 1958 p. 543.) Crow's blinking camera-eye is also unenlightened: behind one unbroken window, he sees, 'motionless', 'the world when we know it apart from ourselves, in the mean separateness of everything' (Lawrence 1968 p. 512): if it is 'dusk', it will be dawn; but this, and the Taoist positive in 'Nothing' (the forest, l. 4), 'escapes' Crow - like Lear.

The 'cigarette' is an isolation of Heraclitean fire which burns one way - to the 'dusk' of death. It is typical of Crow that reductive or Beckett-like vision should be promptly succeeded by enlightened - and essentially poetic - empathy ('That Moment', 1967). The particular instant ('Full Moon and Little Frieda', 'That Morning') is often redemptive for Hughes. The cigarette is revised into a 'pistol': Crow's horror of 'infinity' becomes that of recognizing the subjectivity of perception.

The next two poems (as the first lines suggest) closely repeat the dyad of 'Crow Alights' and 'That Moment'. Crow, hearing 'Fate Knock on the Door' (p. 23; 1970) is the reductive, analytical mind, feeling 'helpless'. He wants to be 'INSIDE' the world, unconsciously as in 'LAUGHTER': but this can only come with the death which Krogon's attempts to stop time - the 'steel spring' - themselves delay. The poem elaborates an image from 'Root, Stem, Leaf':

But not your skin, nor doors, nor borders
Will be proof against your foraging
Through everything unhuman or human
To savour and own the dimensions of woman
As water does those of water.

In 'Crow Tyrannosaurus', empathy too recoils, like rationalism, from Panta Rhei; as in 'That Moment', the need to eat seems irreconcilable with ears open to sympathize and eyes spirit-plugged against Krogon's stare. That this is not Hughes' final judgment is evidenced by the cleverly delayed acknowledgement of partiality in stanza one ('It was a cortege... Crow could hear' - my italics) and Crow's relapse into positively Manichean dualism ('ought I... to become the light?'). Perception of the brain's 'criminal' incinerations depends on, and seems inevitably to generate again, 'Crow thought' (ll. 20 - 21).

In 'Crow's Account of the Battle' (1967), the round staring 'eyes [are] full of deadliness' and 'screams' are 'higher' and 'groans deeper/ Than any ear could hold' - the syntax attributes empathy only to the collapsing wall. 'Weeping' now comes merely when 'stabbing' ('Crow Tyrannosaurus') ends. Crow's argument is that we are what we chose to believe 'reality' is, what 'Universal Laws' we formulate: if we make a 'mishmash of scripture and physics', there seem no grounds left to distinguish the earth's 'torrent in a dark cave' and warfare's 'tearing deafness', bleeding veins and drain-pipes, 'fate' and 'excitement and orders', 'bullets' and 'sudden traps of calculus'. After 'Scapegoats and Rabies', the 'leaves trembled': now, human guilt has been projected onto nature's 'Everything': 'Not a leaf flinched, nobody smiled'. It is easy to reject all this as 'totalitarian poetry' (Rosenthal and Gall 1983 p. 462) - certainly it stands in despite of the norm of literature, which, Hughes' opus acknowledges, is to specify and to particularize. But Crow's moral indignation still seems to hold genuine, enduring authority.

'The Black Beast' explores our misprojection of guilt and responsibilities onto nature-devil, pineal gland, universe, whatever, the opposite way: in slapstick allegory. This is one of the genuinely comic Crow-poems:

Crow flailed immensely through the vacuum, he screeched after the dis-
appearing stars -
Where is it? Where is the Black Beast?

The 'last' with which Crow pounds on the wall to tell his neighbours the pound-

ing is keeping him awake is also the world's Last chance.

Grinning savagery - of 'the Old Adam in extremis - where shocking things are done and undergone in a sort of dreadful, reckless glee, with wild laughter' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5) - is frequent in Crow. (In Douglas' 'Gallantry', 'the bullets cried with laughter,/ the shells were overcome with mirth'.) Ridicule, Crow's hyenas' 'putrefying laughter', for Beckett the 'pure' or 'mirthless' laugh 'at that which is unhappy' (Watt), represents a recoil, instinct to us, from novelty, experience, empathy, betraying the 'openness' Hughes' poetry asks of its participants. However, Hughes told Faas in 1970 (Faas 1980 p. 207), the symbolism varies: 'A Grin' is a frightening, amoral poem, simply presenting our instinctive energies. But if the grin (and smile) represent Crow's reconciliation of self-awareness and instinctive being, one plus the other, the simple cancellation of consciousness, here, leaves instinct - 'temporarily' - 'nonplussed'. Crow's attempt (p. 30) at 'Communion' - the ritual appeasement of instinct - is half-successful; but his taking the rite literally - worshipping as it were graven images not spirits - appeases his animal hunger too, and leaves him physically 'much stronger' (and, 'Appalled', blackly 'impenetrable') as well as spiritually 'Half-illuminated'. It is a 'jest' to conceive of the energies' management except via considered 'speech', 'hearing' and 'understanding'.

'Crow's Account of St. George' presents (like Hercules Furens) the critical 'break-down' of such no-longer-adequate sacrificial rites (see Girard 1977 passim): the 'second fall' into despiritualized rationalism. The benign Urizenic dream of St. George's slaying Tiamat, the scientist the germ, the society its 'Grin', becomes in effect the repudiation of the feminine and of what ritual order the 'ceremonial Japanese decapitator' stood for. Perhaps cells squeak, had we, 'dumb-faced', empathy to 'hear'; and to step off the wheel's 'track of numbers' is to murder one's children.

In 'A Disaster' and 'The Battle of Osfrontalis' (1967), Crow seems immune to the 'word', Logos, the frontal bone of rationalism, which lacks nature's

power to reproduce itself (Crow scavenges on the brains of dead jesters). But to have received 'news' of a 'word' implicates him ('A Disaster' is a pitifully inadequate word for what happens) - as does 'musing', perhaps. His 'yawning' at the paradox of subjectivity is a retreat from full awareness; 'Crow's Theology' (p. 35) is dualistic (an ironic misapprehension of the actual positions of Logos and imprisoned Moa): his God is a father; he does not want to 'mummify' under the Goddess of the Wheel. 'Crow's Fall' (p. 36) has been one into 'charred black' dialectic: one cannot 'become the light' (p. 24) without blackening everything else. His '[laughing] himself to the centre of himself' symbolizes the schizophrenic 'implosion', to avoid self-extinction. Crow 'suffers everything, suffers nothing - like Horatio' (1970 'Crow'). Horatio, the puritan, with his inadequate, sensate philosophy, his repudiation of the enlightened Hamlet's reflections on Panta Rhei, and his failure to expire, will presumably not be Hughes' hero. Crow, nowhere near submission to life and death, is ostracised by 'The Birds' (p. 37), who represent the natural turn of existence ('plumped'; 'bulbed'; 'crooked'; 'dewball'). Yet his 'fallen' condition, with its 'conscience' and 'promise' (ll. 5 - 6), may alone manage the detritus of a fallen civilization.

In these poems, Crow has come to stand for Western Man: 'Criminal Ballad' need not even mention him. Hughes' meat-chopper style abstracts essential guilt from the clutter of existence: to make love 'belly to belly' is to become responsible for one's wife's labour-pains. Feeling that such guilt is 'criminal' can make it genuinely so, according to Hughes' characteristic model of reaction: the man thinks his hands are 'bloody', like St. George's, and again runs from the house, schizophrenically alienating himself from being and dependents. If a man has to come to terms with individuals' births and deaths, Crow, the spirit of the sperm, has to come to terms with the whole sea, Panta Rhei embodied. Retreating, 'on the Beach' (p. 40), as Western Man, he does everything a full Crow should not: sucking his tongue, tightening his goose-pimples, gripping with his toes. Schizophrenically, he imagines himself 'wrong' and

'unwanted'. Only his curiosity, and some empathy, keep him in contact with his imprisoned ocean-bride, 'To understand or help'.

'The Contender' - an offshoot from Orghast - is one of the collection's most important poems. Hughes has described it (September 1986) as 'an attempt to begin to align yourself to an answer' to the question 'How is the weakest the strongest?' (Taoism teaches how 'The submissive and weak will overcome the hard and strong' (Tao te Ching s. 79A) by submitting to the flux of things.) 'Though his body [is] sweeping away like a torrent', the Contender refuses, like Crow/gon, to submit to extinction, 'nailing himself with [the] nails of nothing' of the static (mushroomless) model of the universe. Like Crow (and like Logos' son, Christ, who can never wholly die in the spring-sacrifice), his immortality incapacitates him as scapegoat. Christlike, he abandons his body to an idea (survival) rather than re-organ-izing it, beyond mind. If the Three Maries (Graves 1961 p. 142) are the Triple Goddess, the 'women' here represent her lifes-and-deaths; but their tears' vinegar only adds 'embitterment/ To his effort'. 'Oak forests' come and go 'with the hawk's wing' while the bound year-king lives on. Like Coriolanus in 'Gog, III', the Contender, being 'sense-less' and deaf, schizophrenically 'imploded', refuses to submit to the women and children's representations. Probably 'All the women in the world' and 'All the men in the world' being unable to 'move him' genuflects to Cesar Vallejo's 'Masses': more and more people implore a dead soldier to get up, without avail;

Then all the men on the earth
Stood around him; the corpse looked at them sadly, deeply moved;
He sat up slowly,
Put his arms around the first man; started to walk...

(trans. Robert Bly; The Rattle Bag p. 281 - 2).

With its particularly pure and effective 'simple' style, 'The Contender' seems to synthesize most of Hughes' concerns at this time, remaining silent over the hope of Krogon's displacement. The last ten lines seem a particularly arresting evocation of grim endurance: suddenly distanced and released as Crow realizes so much is 'senseless'.

Alternatively, it may only be Crow's skepticism that sees the scapegoat's experiment as inconsequential. 'Oedipus Crow', rather, runs away: but this is part of the same repudiation of death and the Goddess ~ Oedipus' rejection of Jocasta. Crow flees his 'mummy' with her paraphernalia of embalmment, grave-stones and flowing rivers. (The Tao is 'the valley spirit', sometimes popularly represented by a Tiamat-like water-dragon.) Oedipus sacrificed his eyes to escape his guilt and responsibilities; schizoid, Crow abandons half his self to death. But even the remnant gets 'held... up' (crucified) by death: if his 'watch', which goes on 'running', abandoning him, is his ego's self-conscious stare, Crow's 'correction' here is a genuine 'step forward' - yet he remains 'just alive'.

'Crow's Vanity' (p. 44) - his sense of self-sufficiency and refusal to die - has had a shock: he is so breathless from the chase that 'Looking close in the evil mirror' of self-consciousness he sees not the 'usual grinning face' but the various manifestations of feminine existence (and consequences - 'civilizations' - of his dual nature) in which the very differential between his 'breathing' life and space's 'cold' must involve him.

The mirror of self-perception is at once dangerous, and essential for Crow's realization of his full being. It depends - like nature's vulture or sphinx - on how he stares at it. The sphinx can 'show us /a simple riddle' and 'lift everything aside' (Oedipus p. 11), but in 'Song for a Phallus', Crow's Oedipus will not question her towards knowledge of 'four legs three legs two legs one leg' but hack her apart: Krogon's attempts to 'beat the hell out of' the devouring feminine (p. 45), and Harrow death, only make her hellish, himself blind: 'A Horrible Religious Error'. Splitting the atom (1. 2) has helped render nature, for our 'peering' stare, the waste of modern physics. The 'final fact' of life is death, 'our peace'. The snake of life's 'alibi self' is its survival of the individual's death. Such evidence and energy should not be puritanically assaulted, but negotiated with.

The next seven poems, unremittingly plain though alternately exuberant and bleak, reconnoitre principal themes one by one. 'Crow Tries the Media' (p. 46), to reconcile rational language and respect for nature, but civilization seems beyond redemption. His 'Nerve' (p. 47) - connecting slipped 'brain' and body - 'Fails' and, like the puritanical Hamlet imprisoned on earth, he feels criminal again. 'Laughter' (p. 48) is the alternative to Guilt. Beckett-like, Hughes here tempts protest at the inhumanity of laughing when 'Cars collide and erupt luggage and babies' - then provokes us too as 'The meteorite crashes/ With extraordinarily ill-luck on the pram'. Complicity established, 'zestful, creative laughter' (1981 'A Reply' p. 4) is presented as, potentially, a ritual displacement of 'grinning savagery' (cf. Lorenz and Koestler). When 'Crow Frowns' (p. 50) he recognizes that he is not self-sufficient, but the agent of his imprisoned creatress, who must have 'made him// Of nothing', but whom he does not recognize yet.

The 'Magical Dangers' (p. 51) of conscious thought lead, potentially, to hierarchy and technology and, inevitably, death.

Crow thought of intelligence -
It turned the key against him and he tore at its fruitless bars.

Dualism seems inescapable, since even to imagine re-acceptance into 'nature's stupor' is to engage in an alienation from it only death, the end of imagining, will repeal. Not Crow's thoughts, but his children (his 'fruit') manage to sit in the oak that succeeds him.

But if Crow is 'a key' ('Crow Frowns'), he can open the 'fruitless bars' of 'intelligence'. (For the jaguar 'there's no cage... More than to the visionary his cell'.) 'Prayer', or at least vision, is self-transcendent. 'Robin Song' suggests how: our perceptions, 'knowledge', Thoughts, 'make' our world, Crow's oak, as much as it makes us. 'The R. B. radicals [ie. letters for the months flanking midwinter's day] recall robur, the Latin for "oak" and "strength", and also the Celtic word "robin". For at this point in the year, in British

folklore, the Robin Red Breast as the Spirit of the New Year sets out with a birch-rod to kill his predecessor the Gold Crest Wren' (Graves 1961 p. 186). The Robin is a 'hunted [year-] king', unlike The Contender: his 'strength' consists in accepting 'the rainworld', his parent, and the earth's wheel 'That rolls to crush/ And silence [his] knowledge'. From now on, the creation of what is perceived is a dominant theme; and the winter's song marks a turning point, half in Roman, half in italic print (in the original edition - printing the two legends separately - 30 poems both precede and follow it; in the revised - printing them together - 33).

In 'Conjuring in Heaven', Crow, towards his own re-education, learns that the 'nothing' of 'Crow Frowns' is a positive: and he is genuinely involved in it. He 'Goes Hunting' again (p. 54) - poetically; now his only failure is one of confidence - he thinks he gazes 'after the bounding hare' (the Goddess' animal), not recognizing he gazes before, recreating it. As in 'Crow Communes', he is left 'Speechless': yet not 'Appalled', but 'with admiration'. Certainly his attempt precedes three 'Songs'. 'Owl's Song' explores - with the eerie 'icy feeling' Hughes diagnosed in Williamson - the frightening responsibilities behind generating what is beheld. Owl, precisely by 'singing' of a universe empty even of anthropomorphism and 'hope', has insulated himself from facing his despair. But he did not mean the ambiguity in 'died beyond knowledge' (it needs a living body to feel - to create - cold); when he stops singing, self-consciousness grabs him from the emptiness he defined. He is responsible for his insulation, the sound of 'his own singing': and also for the clawed, winging bird of his own, stringomorphic universe, 'numb' or dynamic as he will.

In the breeding season, Crows sing very softly too. 'Crow's Undersong' begins to recreate, with a painful, haunting simplicity, Crow's own creatrix, recognizing that even the 'crying in the city' and his own lapse into rationalism are by her grace and lead back to her.

'Crow's Elephant Totem Song' (1970) tells of how his beast-totem, 'delicate and small', is sacrificed as a dema-divinity by the hyenas, whom the guilt of

existence, 'In hourly battle with a death/ The size of the earth' has 'crammed', like the dog in 'Crow Tyrannosaurus', with 'putrefying laughter'. (In 'Crow's Song About England', the land is helplessly abused until the energies it contains recrudescence as male violence, Venus returned as Tarquin.) In the next world, the elephant protects himself with 'Deadfall feet and toothproof body and bulldozing bones'. This translates into a retreat, for Crow, from the vulnerability of interaction: but the elephant has suffered the death of the old ego, returning perhaps enlightened, 'a walking sixth sense' whom the rational hyenas ridicule, but still able to sing,

... deep in the forest-maze
About a star of deathless and painless peace
But no astronomer can find where it is.

In 'Dawn's Rose', however, there falls 'Among conifers' a 'Star of blood'. The poem remains startling here because Crow's cerebral - or visceral - private (human) world melts into our everyday earth, described with the tenderness and openness of Hughes' late nature-poetry - 'a crow talking to stony skylines'. (The dead woman's mouth rots; 'the eyelids have finished/ And the hills continue'.) The poem could be criticized as out-of-place, were it not so magnificent an anticipation of Hughes' finest work, Crow's simplicity united to an 'icy' descriptive honesty. Such writing, though, seems no more accessible to aesthetic criticism than the rest of Crow, which, to reharmonize mind and heart, demands, firstly, an intellectual response - then engages the emotions when, as it were, the reader is not looking. One can only suggest this is the most compassionate and universal poem Hughes had yet written, and must be tentatively sensed, not grasped, as such.

After acknowledging that perception generates reality, a danger is to retreat from the responsibility by objectifying one's creations as the 'gods' of organized religion. 'Crow's Playmates' (p. 60) usurp his own role as unifier of self and world, 'lessening' him and leaving him - 'Lonelier' and more alienated 'than ever' - simply 'what his brain could [still] make nothing of': the

Black Beast inside - precisely that which does need to be objectified in religious negotiation. Literary heroes are one such practical objectification (p. 61). But, having split off gods, Crow's ego ironically celebrates re-incorporating these - ending as no more than 'a leopard'.

'People [are] prepared' for 'The Smile' of raw energy now (p. 62). But this time it seems redemptive, the anticipation of (Crow's) ego-death,

... for a moment
Mending everything

Before it swept out and away across the earth.

'Crow Improvises' (p. 64) to find out what, if anything, is redemptive about mortality. An individual life seems insufficient to reconcile our crimes and our non-recognition of them. But Crow's mastery of analytical progression is not adequate, here, to his imagination, and he fails to differentiate human and natural disasters; 'Not even Leonardo// Could have fathomed' 'The Smile's' redemptive quality, he concludes.

But Crow is himself the energy behind 'The Smile', like the sun (p. 66) - the subjective, transitive eye that 'Robin Song' stipulated - blacker than individual death. (The idea of a 'sol niger' is spontaneously coined among schizophrenics (Laing 1960 p. 218).) The imagery foreshadows Crow's marriage, the alchemical blending of Yin and Yang. In Taoist philosophy, a crow (Yin) lives in the sun; the pupil, conversely, is understood as pure Yang (Kaltenmark 1969 pp. 133 - 6). 'Crow's Battle Fury' (p. 67) can send him, though deathless, 'A hair's breadth out of the world' (as far as the Goddess' 'hare', p. 54), reducing his fallen mind to the 'head of a month-old baby' - a 'step' 'forward'. His experiments become more fruitful, though the dualistic 'Creation' of 'Nailing Heaven and earth together' (p. 69) is a mistake. 'Philosophy, religion, science, they are all of them busy nailing things down, to get a stable equilibrium' (Lawrence 1936 p. 528). What is required is not a cross with nails, but the holistic spontaneity of a tree, which dualistic Man

('Revenge Fable', 1967) tries to 'hack' apart. Our onslaught upon nature - according to the small degree to which the poem is externally orientated - and on ourselves, is our perverted energies' 'Revenge'.

Paranoid schizophrenics may never feel themselves wholly anywhere (Laing 1960 p. 168). The persona of 'A Bedtime Story' with his 'half a face' fails to recognize his perceptual implication in the world's reality: 'Somehow his eyes [are] in the wrong way round'. Yet he also believes himself made wrong, like a basilisk: the battleship's sinking becomes a 'welcome [for] his glance'. 'Nothing could connect'. 'Somehow his guts were an old watch-chain' rather than the snake of life. He cannot even write: 'Creation [has] failed again' to make its conscious, speaking self.

In 'Crow's Song of Himself', he is the energy which, violently repressed by the Logos, recrudesces as money, alcohol or the fall and, without genuine religious negotiations, is simply amoral. Christian dualism is represented as the cession of material reality to such unredeemed energies. But the tenor of Whitman's poem is one's implication in all matter; 'Crow Sickened' presents Crow's recognition that he is 'tied' to the world he perceives: when 'His eyes [seal] up with shock, refusing to see', he 'falls'. If we see something fear-ful (Crow's universe), the 'fear' is in us. Crow, inadvertently, discovers the Black Beast:

With all his strength he struck. He felt the blow.

Horrified, he fell.

This 'step forward' incapacitates him for several pages. His 'Song for a Phallus' (1967) 'can only ever exist as an addendum, a commentary, a goblin appendix' (in Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 103). Originally it was a satyr-song for Oedipus (art at the least remove from primitive dramatic ritual): a hymn to the phallus' natural regenerative suicide.

Think of the joy will come of it
Tomorrer and tomorrer....

Krogon/Laius wants to stop this cycle: patriarchy walls up Jocasta's womb. But Oedipus bounces off the earth (Moa - being Jocasta) and kills his father: Hughes - warping the story into a deliberate parody of his own conceptualization - omits the murder at the crossroads to imply Oedipus' guilt is simply that of being a 'murderous little sod' (earth himself). Laius' ghost also makes clear the Sphinx and Jocasta are one: by puritanical violence (splitting her; extirpating her grip on his eyes) Oedipus, another Krogon, re-enacts his father's real crime. In the play, Oedipus' revulsion at the 'necessity' of incest causes him to imagine

you need to be born again suffer for everything again
and die again over and over lifetime after lifetime
every lifetime a new sentence.

(Oedipus p. 50.)

The poem sees no end to the self-justifying cycles of puritanical self-chastisement and violence. Trying to split apart 'The World' of cyclic nature (to let in God's future, as in 'The Rescue'), Oedipus only finds 'himself curled up inside' - towards the self-knowledge not of enlightenment but dualistic mirror-consciousness: 'As if [as Agoluz] he had never been bore'.

'Apple Tragedy' reproduces the comparatively traditional, less argumentative voice of 'Theology'. The 'apple' is Crow, crushed by God to make 'alcohol' ('Crow's Song of Himself') - the perversion of natural energies which sends 'everything... to hell'. This is one of the important Crow poems that can stand entirely on their own terms.

'Oedipus Crow' fled the Tao's valley-spirit; now 'Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural' (1970), entering earth's river at the single remove of art. His 'thin shoesoles tremble' but 'A million years' can pass while, 'the ghost/ Of a great general', the poet (cf. 'WIT'S END') plays, not with tanks (l. 4), but on a chessboard, merely manipulating reality. 'The dusk [of death] waits' to redeem him still, and mankind, 'The mauled, blood-plastered, bodiless head of a planet', 'lopped before birth' from oneness with the 'mother' by the

cycles of puritanism ('Revenge Fable'), cannot yet marry 'The mortuary heart and guts of the globe' and enable this 'to speak, against gravity'. The symbolism of the one earth - human half and natural half - 'Trying to speak' places this at the imaginative centre of Crow, as does its recollection of so many other poems - 'Six Young Men' at 5 - 8, 'Seven Dungeon Songs' at 16 - 19, 'Crow's Account of St. George' at 12, the first 'Legend' at 29, 'Gnat-Psalm' at 23 - 6, Season Songs at 30 - 1. The poem is astonishing, too - though less convincing than 'Dawn's Rose' - in its struggle to incorporate as much within a few icy moments, while

... a blackbird sitting in the plum tree
Shakes and shakes its voice.

'Crow's Last Stand' (1967) is equally remarkable in its presentation, as a palpable icon, of the book's argument - Crow's immunity to Heraclitus' fire:

... among the glaring furnace clinkers
The pulsing blue tongues and the red and the yellow
The green lickings of the conflagration

Limpid and black -

The rational, or else energetic 'cockeyed' ('Apple Tragedy') 'eye-pupil, in the tower of its scorched fort' is what refuses to submit to the feminine. But it is only through the senses that respect for nature can enter: 'Crow and the Sea' precisely inverts the image. Crow's 'eyes [wince] from [the sea] as from open flame'. Whether his body proves unkillable, however, or his mind refuses the idea of death, the result is the same: Crow marches away from his bride 'As a crucified man' - a scapegoat hero - 'cannot move'.

'So Crow [finds] Proteus' (p. 83). 'Truth Kills Everybody' represents 'the chief positive step that Crow ever takes'; this time he presses on 'till he breaks through to what he wants' - which is 'to lose himself in [the] spirit-link with his creator' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5). 'Truth kills everybody. The truth of a man is the doomed man in him or his dead body' (1964 Douglas p. 13).

But 'taking it too suddenly, unprepared and ignorantly, by force, he can't control the self-transformation. The spirit-light emerges as shattering flame. So his momentary gain destroys him, and is itself lost' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5). In one way, it is only Crow's schizoid self-projection that is 'blasted to nothing': he has 'stood aside, watching his body go blue/ As he held... and held' the 'naked powerline'. Therefore it remains half upon the terms of rational, conceptual language that 'The earth, shrunk to the size of a hand grenade' (my italics), explodes at all.

So Crow remains deathless, engaging - a literalization of the schizoid 'petrification' - in a battle with 'Stone' (p. 84) whose only real consequence is the smashing (p. 85) of the alchemist Hermes Trismegistus' Smaragdine Tablet: 'What is above is like what is below. What is below is like what is above' (in Scigaj 1986 p. 130). Head and body, Crow and anima, seem unmarriageable in our society. Even Leonardo could not 'fathom' 'The Smile' (cf. pp. 64 - 5) below the neck: 'the act of coitus and the members that serve it are so hideous that, if it were not for the beauty of the faces... the human species would lose its humanity' (Notebooks). The poetry, however, already anticipates the ('cheating') celebration of that same marriage in Shakespeare's Pericles. Thaisa, who has seemed dead in childbirth (l. 10 here), is recognized by Pericles through the miracle of speech (l. 9); Pericles recognizes in his daughter his 'queen's square brows... her eyes as jewel-like/ And cas'd as richly' (V, i, 107 - 110). Crow's anima's 'brow [is] the notable casket of gems'; her 'lips' (another distinguishing feature for Pericles) are 'well-known'.

Crow cannot die yet but, unlike the man in 'A Bedtime Story', he can 'write his autobiography', describing ('Notes for a Little Play') his brush with Proteus and the transcendence of dualism: the 'sun' of destruction and recreation 'fills all space'; the 'clothes' of the Fall are 'torn off' and Adam and Eve remarry without self-consciousness - or Crow, as 'guest' ('A Childish Prank'), to interfere. Crow's Leonardan distastes, however ('Horrors - hairy and slobbery, glossy and raw'), do clearly interfere still; and a 'Play'

needs someone, not 'guest or God' but living Earth, to watch it. So Crow's coming marriage (to the Earth) is not projected properly.

Crow (p. 87) enjoys the undying life-force in the 'Snake' and the blood; his transcendence of scapegoat-crucifixion, individuals' 'names' or 'suffering', leaves him, as in 'King of Carrion', a mere 'empty husk'. People give the force names, however: Adam swears it is 'love'. 'Lovesong' (1967) represents part of the story which Hughes has felt the need to clarify. Crow, carrying an ogress - his bride - over a river, is asked: 'Who paid most, him or her?' If he answers wrongly, she gets heavier, so he tries everything, borrowing the image of 'hooks' (l. 28) from Plath, of the 'lopped melon' from his 'Song for a Phallus', and of the trepanning promises (l. 33) from Dickinson's definition to Higginson of the effects of poetry, or a recollection of his own 'Battle Fury'. 'The Lovepet' (Moortown p. 131) - an even more alarming poem - is Crow's answer to the ogress' 'Was it an animal? Was it a bird? Was it an insect? Was it a fish?' The poems are part both of Crow's ignorance, and his education; they are irreducible to human reason: the Lovepet seems to be Time - 'It ate into their brains/ It ate the roof...' - but then the lovers are alive again: 'They wept they called it back...' The disorientation the form and virtuoso key-changes provoke recalls to me E. M. Forster's interpretation in Howards End of the theme of the scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - returning in the finale - as the movements of a 'demon' of destructive energy.

In one Californian trickster-cycle, Coyote, taken by the loveliness of leaves' falling, asks how he can join in. Let go of a tree. One broken neck. (Snyder 1977 p. 71.) 'Glimpse', at least, represents one of Crow's closest approaches to Skelton's 'Diana in the leavës green'. His 'song', however, cannot 'comment' on the Goddess: he only seems able to enter the 'god's head' by losing his own.

In the 'Legend' which opened the book, Crow/gon was 'the cry that, swelling, could not/ Pronounce its sun'. We see him last as 'King of Carrion', a 'last cry... Returning, shrunk, silent// To reign over silence'. This strangely

negative poem may represent the final cancellation, on his way to his bride, of Crow's rational half, the death-, not life-force to whom the 'last blood' has been given. The Grail King's thigh-wound prevents his marriage or regeneration; his 'kingdom is empty' and riverless before the recovery of the grail, 'the vessel of life' whose 'last splinters' here make Crow's 'crown'. In Orghast, as Ussa's voice calls on Sogis to cancel him, Krogon 'withers like a bird' (Smith 1972).

The Waste Land is like the arctic; but if Crow cannot redeem it, humanity might. 'Fleeing from Eternity' (p. 92), Eskimo-man gashes eyes and a mouth to enable him to eat, and die. 'The pain and the blood' of 'life' - of remaking consciousness as he first made it - he gives, as menstruation and childbirth, to woman, for a 'song'. 'The woman felt cheated', because the bargain is imperfect: songs for the Goddess can only be borrowed from the Goddess (woman), and since without her 'There would have been no city' (p. 56), patriarchy's arrogation of all non-corporeal activities - art, the substitution for reproduction within the 'ghostly' timelessness man first knew, and Reason - is a falsehood. Possibly this song is sung by a woman (many Eskimo shamans are women); certainly it introduces a new perspective on the male poet's speaking for the earth, which will be elaborated after Gaudete.

'Water' (p. 93) cannot imitate the flight from eternity. It weeps for its alienation, as the man in 'Song of Woe' does, till 'Something [comes] clear': but whereas for a man this itself represents a retreat from being, it turns out, paradoxically, to be water's fulfilment. Unlike black Crow, water finds the wise possibility to lie 'Utterly worn out utterly clear'. 'It is because it does not contend that it is never at fault' (Tao te Ching 1, 22). Unlike Crow, therefore (in his present state), it can help redeem us, washing away sins since it is 'incapable... of manifesting [itself] in forms' (Eliade 1959 p. 131). It is no longer seeking anything, but 'plays' its part 'at the bottom of all things'. 'The ways of liberation make it very clear that life is not going anywhere, because it is already there'. In other words, it is playing,

and those who do not play with it, have missed the point' (Alan Watts, Psychotherapy East and West, NY. 1975 p. 184).

'Ritual, fundamentally, is psychodrama; it is a conscious, earnest and devoted play' (Whitmont 1987 p. 240). In 'How Water Began to Play', Hughes not only projects - at a distance - something close to his ideal of being, but comes as near as he does anywhere to the integrity of primitive poetry qua ritual: for the first time in Crow, the 'simple style' creates an utterly convincing - and utterly new - aesthetic object, repetitiveness eluded by the merest touches (the stall of lines 4 - 5), straightforwardness by ambiguities that sound unconscious and probably were (why should water 'burn' trees? What is 'the stone door'?) The satisfying, mathematical regularity - moving with deceptive ease from 'wanted to live' to 'wanted to die' - becomes equal somehow to a complex, human compassion - the apparent discrepancy may indeed have been the only way of generating such (imaginative) empathy, with mere water.

The other poem in which the simple style works is 'Littleblood' (1968). Crow, of whose endurance Littleblood is totem, sings 'O Littleblood', for the earth's sake, without the absurdity of 'O Leaves': and, unlike Eskimo-man, asks for the 'blood' of all life, not an intellectual betrayal of it, to 'Sing in [his] ear'. Though not redeemed yet, he seems reconciled to the cycles of suffering. Crow blocked the light, but Littleblood is 'Wounded by stars and leaking shadow', having, too, 'Grown so wise grown so terrible'. The invocation has a strange, beautiful effect, as of the end of Lady Chatterley's Lover or A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, the book's dedication to relativity, eternity.

CHAPTER FOUR: CAVE BIRDS

'Nevertheless, there are more important things than crows to try and say something about' (Poetry in the Making p. 120). Cave Birds is Hughes' most ambitious, unified presentation of the schizoid or heroic quest towards socio-psychic regeneration and marriage to the anima. Originally subtitling it 'The Death of Socrates and his Resurrection in Egypt', Hughes has described Cave Birds as 'a critique of sorts of the Socratic abstraction and its consequences through Christianity to us. His resurrection in Egypt, in that case, would imply his correction, his re-absorption into the magical-religious archaic source of intellectual life in the East Mediterranean, and his re-emergence as a Horus - beloved child and spouse of the Goddess' (in Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 260). If Buddhists would say Wodwo interprets the Bardo Thödol back-to-front, Cave Birds reverses the parable of the cave in The Republic. The 'honorable Platonist' (1975 'Cave Birds') retreats to the mind's primeval caves, finding there not 'the sun on the wall' (p. 7) but spiritual reality and the sun itself (p. 56); the already-enlightened give him hemlock. (Hughes' Blakean half, however, spoke in Platonic terms to Faas (Faas 1980 p. 123) of the outer events in Gaudete as mere '[shadows] on the wall in the cave'.) In 'The Perfect Forms', Socrates is 'complacent as a phallus'; the protagonist here being 'Socrates' Cock' presumably puns on his suicide and rebirth in marriage to the Goddess. His individuation is the alchemical forging of homo quadratus, the 'Incomparable Marriage' celebrated in for instance J. C. Andreae's The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz, a 'seminal' book for Hughes, on which he had based Difficulties of a Bridegroom in 1963. (This thesis cannot explore the alchemical/ anthropological side of Cave Birds, on which Robinson and others have already written extensively.)

'Essential' schizophrenia (to be distinguished, here, from 'paranoid' schizophrenia, where the senses remain open but the brain misinterprets everything in terms of its own fantasies) probably represents the mind's spontaneous

quest for re-individuation, 'an initiation ceremony - a death and rebirth' (G. Bateson ed. Perceval's Narrative, Stanford 1961 pp. xiii - xiv). If Hughes was familiar with R. D. Laing's The Politics of Experience, he would have remembered the case-history of Jesse Watkins' ten-day self-reorganization (and final retreat): 'his "ego" had died on day one', Laing remarks. 'Projected images of one's own mind may be experienced as persecutors'. 'At one time' (Watkins) 'I actually seemed to be wandering in a... desert landscape' (Laing 1967 p. 123). Campbell (1985 pp. 181 - 2) expresses ideas about Watkins' testimony recalling Hughes' in Cave Birds: 'who, indeed, would be able both to face and to accept to himself willingly the whole impact of an experience of what life truly is - what the universe truly is - in the whole of its terrible joy? That perhaps would be the ultimate test of the perfection of one's compassion: to be able to affirm this world, just as it is, without reservation, while bearing all its terrible joy with rapture in oneself, and thereby madly willing it to all beings!'

It seems important to recognize the inadequacy of Bradshaw's interpretation of the 'trial' here as 'that of an unusually sensitive, suffering man' (Sagar 1983 p. 221: Bradshaw's interpretation of 'a (rational) humanist'), whose very 'empathy' (ibid. p. 220) is what 'is unnatural and criminal', and of the new values he is taught as amoral ones rebuking simply 'failure to establish a relation between the death, the surviving self, the contingent world and the lapsing of time' (ibid. p. 221). What is 'unnatural' about the humanist bird's position is his failure to face complicity in the guilt of existence - what the Eskimo shaman Aua called 'those perils which arise from the fact that we, hunting animals as we do, live by slaying other souls' (Halifax 1980 pp. 164 -5). If we distrust the idea of essential guilt (as Hughes may have done), the persona remains 'unnatural' in rejecting his anima (who represents genuine empathy). Such empathy and virtue are not - to reduce humanism - inbuilt in us, but the end of a quest beyond death. Humanism's familiar, no-longer-adequate tenets are what the hero's individuation departs from - towards a dif-

ferent, Blakean humanism, a more personal conception of freedom and responsibility.

Cave Birds, in fact, is the most thoroughly human of Hughes' mature volumes; the later poems re-interpret Baskin's birds in human terms. Baskin's failure (the drawings dated 1976) to complement this development to much effect (compare Blake's eagle-headed guardian visionary, Jerusalem plate 78) alerts one to the limits of the partnership's compatibility. The drawings seem to me largely responsible for the cycle's slightly claustrophobic effect, its reference, not to earth, but more art; to the alchemist's study, the cave, the psychiatrist's chair. When we do see where we are - 'On a heathery moor, [by] a roofless church' (p. 26) - the breath of fresh air is unmistakable. Certainly Cave Birds should be Hughes' most important book: the percentage of questionable, or downright bad, writing (which his projects seem unavoidably to generate) is much lower than in Gaudete or Crow: the best poems, like 'The knight' or 'The risen', are central, not, like 'Dawn's Rose', peripheral, to the story's imaginative impact. However, the volume's hotch-potch gestation, and Hughes' inability to combine his imaginative units to the degree he envisages, do seriously compromise the narrative effect (as comparison with The Pilgrim's Progress might suggest). Furthermore, the book's seriousness, and conciseness of argument, seem to have persuaded Hughes to abandon his usual style of flowing, persuasive grace, that keeps pace with itself. Only intermittently - in for instance 'The executioner', in lines like:

Her feathers are leaves, the leaves tongues,
The mouths wounds, the tongues flames

The feet
Roots

('The plaintiff'),

and towards the end of the story, are Hughes' sense of pace, and extraordinary control over readers' emotions, really in evidence. Most of Cave Birds demands, instead, one scene-sets and story-tells out of one's own imagination: the language's self-obsessed strangeness (eg. 'The owl flower') might make reading

seem part of the initiation ceremony (Eliade's interpretation of the aim of Finnegans Wake, 1964A p. 188).

Even if we recognize the voice in 'The scream' is Hughes' naturalistic 'imitation' (in Irigaray's terms) of an effete liberal humanist's, such mimesis may still sound incompatible with the familiar, abstract symbolism here. (Mindless body - the 'mate' - and bodiless mind - the 'Calves' heads' - are dissociated. The persona observes natural life and death but, while pretending to be 'creaturely', believes himself a 'bronze' eternal monument (though 'iron' would smash bronze); he conflates car-wheels which, trying to go somewhere, crush 'rabbits', with 'the wheel of the galaxy', turning on itself and 'rode' to one's own death - or beyond.) Whether the 'mate' is a purely symbolic flourish, or an attempt to flesh out the persona's life, or to suggest his childishness, as yet, will bewilder a reader. (A prose introduction, such as Hughes has supplied in readings, would certainly help these poems.)

The protagonist's mind is that of the narrator of 'Daffodils':

I was still a nomad.
My life was still a raid. The earth was booty.
I knew I'd live forever.
(Flowers and Insects p. 13).

But as he arrogates the empathy of poetry, opening his 'mouth to praise', 'The scream', the true suppressed self (as in many later poems), '[vomits] itself'. (Arthur Janov has pioneered an abreactive therapy where an involuntary 'scream' heals the psyche. See Capra 1983 p. 428.)

'The summoner', one of the earliest Cave Birds poems, is, at least in the first lines, nearer to what one values in Hughes' particular genius, eerie, invulnerable to comparison. (The narrator, not the humanist, speaks.) The imagery is much tighter, sinewed like a live thing: the hero's 'foreclosure' is his 'arrest' for non-payment of dues (empathy) - and also the failure of mankind's psyche, in 'final arrest', to develop further. His 'Nursery picture' (p. 7) was 'the sun on the wall'; the summoner, his death, is a 'Shadow stark on the wall', but also (adopting 'bronze'), his own 'carapace' or body, which

betrays him to death after protecting him. ('The scream' 'Vomited itself'; now 'his own self... brings him to court' (1975 'Cave Birds'): the persona is simultaneously suppressor, victim, and healer.)

'He [p. 10] is confronted in court with his victim. It is his own daimon.... He protests, as an honourable platonist, thereby re-enacting his crime in front of his judges' (1975 'Cave Birds'). 'Sanity' and 'Civilisation' are relative concepts, whose standard is the ability not to subsume but to negotiate with 'The stopping and starting/ Catherine wheel in [one's] belly': as, for example, through 'a deliberate, controlled translation of psychological pain into physical pain' - a 'reverence... for the actuality of inner experience', even for its 'language that excludes concepts and words' (in Gifford and Roberts 1981 pp. 259 - 260). American Indian shamans also chop off fingers to 'go cold' to this world and summon a dream-vision. (Hughes presumably hoped that the numbness of - the mystery in - the humanist's private, bewildered diary-note of a poem will be emotionally effective, and convey some impression of the 'him'. But it, too, could simply alienate readers.)

'The interrogator' 'ransacks' the truth about 'his own daimon' from the Western man-bird, a 'mule' (animal-cum-godhead) 'at his concrete shadow' of technology, his 'startled eyeball' a blind stare. The hero must face his previously camouflaged 'hunger', the natural man.

'She seemed so considerate' (which has the problems of 'The scream') reproduces the bird-hero's trial in more human terms. (In the Selected Poems notes, Hughes describes the 'contrapuntal roles played by birds and humans' (p. 237). The counterpoint is not regular: in the middle poems the roles blend, though diverging significantly at the end.) At first, like Lear, the persona is 'mortified' by his hand's smell of mortality; but a 'fern's' death enables him to accept his condition, through total empathy. He cannot reject his mortal life, but 'life' can decide 'to cancel' him. Now, he is 'glad' to 'be held' by death - which is the way to rebirth. But, as Robinson remarks, he has still to 'care' for, deliberately to choose, ego-death.

In nature's court (p. 16), his bird-judge is his own humanism. Having judged, he is judged - by his 'Absolute' of right and wrong, his 'armour', against the world's instability, of 'precedent', 'idea', and 'Cosmic equipoise', his dualism and 'garbage-sack' body, his nature as 'Nero', fiddling around as if, because the Heraclitean fire of mother Roma is inextinguishable, it should be of no concern to him: Nero is also a matricide. Courting, as in 'Crow Aligns', misinterpretations like Holbrook's, Hughes simply elaborated this paradox - the Judge judged - in his radio-introduction: 'the visible representative of natural law does not partake of its splendour'. The hero's ungainly crime is given authority over the other bird-spirits because it, too, departed from, and is owing to, the Goddess, nature. (The absolute 'representative of natural law', the sun, is in-visible from rationalism's 'starry web': merely 'listened to', it remains 'silent', judging by proxy.)

'The plaintiff' (p. 18), the benevolent humanist's 'smile's shadow', is the anima rationalism disowned but paradoxically 'nursed'. Another representative of the sun (or 'moon', reflecting its approach), she is a 'life-divining bush': at once the 'fire of God' ('Nicholas Ferrer') which does not consume, but will illuminate his 'darkness', and the diviner, in his 'desert', of the waters of Life. She 'comes to supplant' the hero, and to replant him in Earth. For the first time, the poetry - held up by the symbolic framework - is compelling and urgent enough to make us feel with the protagonist, and enter into the story. 'You' becomes, as Hughes intends, the reader.

This same 'depth, breadth and weighty momentum' (which Hughes finds in Amichai's 'subtle and intricate poems', 1988 blurb) sweeps up the humanist's voice in 'In these fading moments...'. The long main sentence has an exhilarating rightness-of-shape to it. The persona is still pretending to genuine empathy as a humanist. Coming 'close... to a flame', retaining one's 'spine', is not enough: as the anima ('She') exposes, his 'life/ Has been a cold business' not of rivers and mountains themselves but the 'snow' and 'mud' incidental to them: only now do the snows melt and 'The brown bulging swirls' carry

out the 'mud' and 'anaesthetic' (the very 'chloroform' the hero boasted of). 'The 'whole earth' is not there to gratify the persona's empathetic delusions. If it '[turns] in its bed/ To the wall', he dies (the opposite death to that of sexual union with the earth). 'Snowflakes [vanish] into themselves', all nature's 'river'; the 'door' closes on his liberal 'friends', and, turning the page, one is confronted with the black 'mountain' of Baskin's 'Raven of Ravens'.

'The executioner's' inversion of Genesis - the actual turning-point of ego-death - is one of Hughes' most frightening and unquestionable achievements. Even if it was revised as much as the poems around it, it sounds inevitable, as if written straight down. In fact 'now lifting your hand you touch at your eyes' would be a recognized hypnotic technique (Hughes 'often used to hypnotize [Plath] to sleep' (Faas 1980 p. 210)). Hughes has a remarkable facility for rendering unthinkable states of mind physically palpable - 'He fills up your thoughts to the brims of your eyes'. Death, the executioner, is like 'The scream', a part of the protagonist's inheritance and being: when 'you touch at your eyes... You touch him'.

You have no idea what has happened
To what is no longer yours....

Socrates drank 'his hemlock' by choice: 'The accused' (p. 24) is now permitted willingly to surrender his 'hard life lust' (as if sexually). 'Blood-aberration' implies, more than Bradshaw's 'crime of life', the hero's 'wandering' from the blood's destiny: the crime is to see life as 'crime'.

The alchemical 're-integration' (Selected Poems p. 237) towards 'beatitude' begins. For the first time, the protagonist speaks obvious 'poetry': 'First, the doubtful charts of skin' is a ritual anamnesis of the preceding poems in terms of The Odyssey. It also answers the last poem: redemption (from schizoid self-rejection) is not to lose one's body but to have gained it. The cycle's next stage, starting here, represents rebuilding, re-integration. Here, each 'fallen' organ is, through its abandonment, re-organ-ized, in Artaud's terms.

After birth into 'the skin's' selfhood, and the 'harmless, irrelevant marvels' like the hawk's 'craftsmanship' (p. 7) in which the 'bored' young bird seemed unimplicated, he was 'wrecked' by 'The summoner' and recognized 'the small and large intestine' of his true, carnivorous being. Then the spider-judge tried him; on 'the islands of women' he encountered 'The plaintiff', his anima. Now, he has reached The Waste Land with its 'roofless church' (cf. The Waste Land, 387 - 8). His redemption must occur here. The 'gravestone/ Which shared [his] dreams' tells him his 'loose bones' are 'weapons'. Death is rebirth: by abandoning even his bones, the bird attains his full being, Sogis, Parzival, a warrior.

'The knight', therefore, 'Has conquered' (p. 28) by having 'surrendered everything' - even 'his victory' (he consciously '[unlaces] his steel', yet 'His submission is flawless' (floorless): only the alchemical 'paradox' can solve the human 'double-bind'). 'He has conquered in earth's name' - by inheriting, on the wheel, the name of 'earth'. 'Skylines tug him apart', and the guilt of living and killing is shared out equally. This is one of Hughes' most important poems: for the first time, he succeeds in condensing his particular vision of the pity of existence into an instant in no way circumscribed by time, place, or submission to objective actuality - entirely imaginative, and entirely earthly; uniting the dignified ('His spine survives its religion'; 'He is himself his banner and its rags') and the suicidally off-hand ('And that is right'; 'Beetles and ants officiate// Pester him with instructions') within one whole. Probably the mathematical form helps unify the poem more than one first presumes; the second line's speech-rhythm closely echoes the first's, as 28 - 33 ('And already - rags') do 8 - 13 ('Committing - rag') - we meet these, I suggest, with a feeling of déjà vu or inevitability.

The persona died for his anima. This relation, too, is now redemptively inverted. She ('Something was happening...') is dying for him. Her warrior is armed; but her condition, in the conscious world, is still 'getting worse and worse'. Though riding the wheel, the participant's 'liberal' inertia still

presumes to 'stroll' and, when he meets Panta Rhei's 'thin, webby rain', to choose: 'Ought I to turn back, or keep going?' In his gleaming 'shoes', he retreats, behind 'the window', from the earth's 'far rims' (the 'skylines' tugging 'him apart') and scrubs the 'mortification' (p. 14) off his nails, even munching Christmas 'turkey'. (The old sacrifice is desacralized: all eating - the man is a cockerel - is cannibalism, and must be felt as such, not undertaken 'vacantly'.) The consequence of his continued rejection of nature's circularity is that his anima's 'heart stopped beating, that second' (time), and she burns, like Nero's Rome (p. 16): or else the 'life-divining bush' (p. 18). All cycles - even the regeneration of the leaves dead in line two - therefore terrify the hero. Yet terror's involvement redeems. 'While the hero undergoes his vigil [as 'knight' or mourner] a Helper begins to work for him, calling on the Eagles' (1975 'Cave Birds'). Having learnt, potentially, to aid himself, the hero finds the spirits not accusers, but helpers.

If the first 'trial' cancelled his crime even as he re-enacted it, a second now advances the repentant's reconstitution. A 'Sphinx' 'gatekeeper' (p. 32) 'strips' the figure of his 'insulation' of (independent) life: he is a 'bare piece of ground' really - the space on page 31. 'Everything' he was taught 'comes back' and he remembers that to 'choose' rationally ('Ought I to turn back...?') is not the inner terms of his existence. Only our response to 'the ultimate suffering and decision in us' determines whether we fall 'into a bog' or reach the Eagles.

Consciousness, therefore, must 'not fight/ Against whatever is allotted to' us (p. 34) but, as in Pilinszky's 'Under the winter sky', 'be so obedient and good'. The literate humanist is reduced to 'A globe of blot', a questioning Wodwo; the wordless earth, falling and rising beyond the judge's 'Cosmic equi-pose'. His one-way 'stroll' (p. 30) has come round into a world-egg womb. The language's symbolism, and strangeness ('This cry alone struggled in its tissues') seems, by now, no longer wayward, but detail in, and background to, the story's great, mazelike complexity and remote, emotional exploration.

Consistently, from here, the whole enlarges, and electrifies, the parts.

'The baptist' is, besides, a beautifully formed lyric. In the alchemical ablutio, the persona is re-enfolded in amniotic 'mummy' fluids, which en-balm him in a 'winding' sheet that is also the Curve of regeneration, the 'circulation' of sea, 'balm' for his 'puckering hurts'. 'One of the most frequent metaphors that you find in psychedelic reports... is that of the circulation of water in nature. The universal consciousness is likened to the ocean - a fluid, undifferentiated mass - and the first stage of creation to the formation of waves' (Stanislav Grof in Capra 1989 p. 111). The 'whale of furtherance' has swallowed the hero, like Jonah, towards enlightenment and rebirth. Ice and snow (cf. p. 20) '[shrink] towards the equator'; 'a seed in its [egoless] armour', the earth will bear him.

'Reduced to total dependence on the help of the Eagles, the hero begins to feel the first stirrings of humanity again' (1975 'Cave Birds'). He 'dropped off' and 'Only a little sleep' of death showed him his frailty as 'the last [and first] of [his] kind'. Yet, 'in the nest among the bones' of his old self, his waking consciousness is also the risen Phoenix.

That is a recognition of the necessity of re-individuated selfhood. In a new stage of the trial, 'A green mother' (p. 40) tempts him back towards the womb of established 'religions', 'a bliss in sleep', unfallen, subhuman oneness with nature. The hero is 'Everyman's Odysseus'; Blake interpreted Circe as a nature-goddess delaying remarriage to Penelope and offering 'vegetation' in Beulah, paradise of unfallen love (see Beer 1969 p. 44). This represents a retreat from the hero's responsibilities: we make real 'bitumen' and 'smoke' which - unlike 'blood' and 'tears' - nature alone cannot 'wipe' away. The example of Japan suggests how detrimental to practical environmentalism the 'ecological' positives of monism, and a Buddhistic sense of oneness-with-nature, may indeed become. Hughes' hero must not grow innocent again of the alienations of Western humanism but progress, through them, remembering his lessons, towards a conscious acceptance of responsibility.

But the bird still seems 'As [he] came', ignorant: it takes another poem to dismiss the green mother's claustrophobic blandishments. Socratic absolutes of right and wrong, perfection and 'ec-static' stasis, do not fit the human condition; so the protagonist rejects 'absolution in sanctity' in 'the wood'. If the animals are fulfilled 'like savages... in the middle of a ritual', his alienated stare is Krogon's that has 'photographed' them. The iron bell in his skull is 'cracked': he must continually 'pray' for some redemption. 'To eat flesh and to drink blood', not to pretend herbivorous harmlessness, is sin ('blood-aberration') and 'prayer' at once.

'A riddle' introduces the bird's real mother, for only the second time since page 20. The hero's relation to her - that of Osiris to Isis - and to the 'changed, unchangeable' Nature his perceptions constantly father, is expressed in terms indebted to Shakespeare's Romances, and bearing their haunting authority. Marina - 'that beget'st him that did [her] beget' (Pericles V, i, 194) - enables her father, 'great with woe', to 'deliver weeping' (l. 105) the tears that redeem him, and leads him, through, in Eliot's 'Marina', weather, water and grey rocks, to marriage with his Thaisa again.

Just as surely as you are my father
I shall deliver you

My firstborn
Into a changed, unchangeable world
Of wind and of sun, of rock and water
To cry.

'To cry' is spontaneously to manage 'The scream' that nearly choked the young persona. Then (p. 7), he saw 'Calves' heads' that 'Grinned like masks' in comedy. Now, in a working ritual (p. 46), 'The scapegoat' must, through self-parody, assert his consciousness of his crimes and his repudiation of them.

One stage of the ritual remains, the bird's alchemical marriage. (From here on, alchemical imagery proliferates.) His anima is personified as 'a woman' (p. 48), a homuncula, his equal. Enlightenment is to recognize how one has 'come about' upon the wheel, but also that one is 'here now'. Her body

'comprehends' (l. 19) all things; her mind comprehends (via 'her mirror', the hero) its own being.

'When everything that can fall [the bird, Adam] has fallen/ Something rises' (p. 50). Reborn, the hero must be individuated from his 'snow mama'; earth's magnetism, no Socratic absolute, guides his growth up, 'evading there/ And that and this'. 'Tumbling worlds/ Open [his] way'. Such images ('the hall of judgment'; 'On a flame-horned mountain-stone') seem to suggest vast, distant, occasionally-visible visionary stage-properties around the protagonist, whose human insignificance, yet uniqueness, becomes powerfully sensed. (Baskin's drawings are irrelevant to this; they admit little or no environment.) The last poems all have such a sense of placing (Henry James' 'solidity of specification'), or enlightened reference to final realities.

The hero (p. 52) unites with his anima, 'Like a mirror face down flat on a mirror': but such genuine 'greatness and truth' is not 'the end of everything': the continuity and destination of the search, in a relative universe, are indistinguishable (the guide is 'The searcher/ The finder' simultaneously): in a particularly haunting modulation, at the climax of one long sentence, Hughes compares marriage, on the wheel, to the burial-ceremony: 'when the mourners have gone'

... the earth, bristling and raw, tiny and lost,
Resumes its search

Rushing through the vast astonishment.

'Walking bare' pursues the insistence on relativity. The participant's 'gem of... self' represents, according to Lawrence's model in 'Love', the 'single self, inviolable and unique', defined precisely by interaction, 'as the gems were perhaps once driven into themselves out of the confusion of earths' (1936 p. 154). He is 'A bare certainty, without confection' (a ready-made article of clothing - or morality) making 'progress beyond [the] assay' of the judge's 'precedent' or Cartesian expectations, 'breath by breath', word by

word. The weight of earth's claims seems the 'one gravity' acknowledged. The bird, '[resting] just at [his own] weight', recognizes his frailty, yet great strength, withstanding 'Hurrying worlds of voices, on other errands', that 'Traffic through [him]'. The earth is also part of himself: 'new skylines lift wider wings'; he is a 'planet', a point personally appointed to exist only in relation to the corolla/ corona (a pun on the diminutive, cf. Gaudete p. 157) of the spiritual sunflower of everything.

In 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days', 'they have just found each other, hardly created yet, on an earth not easily separable from the heaven of the eagles' (1975 'Cave Birds'). Ideal and actual, Sogis and Agoluz, have begun to split (in 'Walking bare', 'mica' and 'torment', 'light' and simplicity, were compatible quantities). But the 'two gods of mud', reorganizing themselves in each other's perception (repeatedly and constantly, within the cycle), can still 'bring each other to perfection', out of relativity itself; and, in the mythic illud tempus, 'keep taking each other to the sun'. Yet 'They bring each other to perfection' recalls, to one response, many lines of Elizabethan blank verse, imperfect now 'perfection' is no longer quatresyllabic, double-stressed. The language seems to sense incomparable marriage beyond itself, falling short, with a sigh.

The poem began as ferryman Crow's (correct?) answer to the ogress': 'Who gives most, him or her?' Free from Cave Birds' structural demands, it represents a purer, less purposeful, imaginative plane, casting back to the Song of Songs ('The joints of thy thighs are like jewels') and the erotic mysticism of Tantric yoga. (A more immediate parallel would be André Breton's 'Free Union' (David Antin's translation).) Even the absurdity of 'she has brought his feet, she is connecting them/ So that his whole body lights up' becomes part of the tender, stately celebration.

Departing directly from Baskin's bird, the final alchemical roasting (rubedo) of 'The owl flower' attempts to combine a variety of earlier themes - the staring eye, the sun, Odysseus' ship, the blossoming 'seed in its armour',

water, Egyptian mummies, the world-egg, the 'egg-stone' lapus, rainbow-fires, coffins, circling and rebirth. The poem suggests we must 'Apply' 'A leaf of the earth' to Baskin's bare spiritual owl, 'a cooling health' for earthly senses, a human 'application' of that vision.

Meanwhile, perception's 'leafless apocalypse' in 'The risen' represents Sogis' ideal reconciliation, which Agoluz, on earth, can only bungle again and again so that ('Finale') 'At the end of the ritual/ up comes a goblin'. 'The risen' is an end-product of this ritual - harmonized hero, or perfected poem. The latter possibility is what probably inspired Hughes: the lines deconstruct the sequence. In art, 'The dirt becomes God'. A translation of pure spirit from one mind to another, and from ideal to reality, it 'shifts world weirdly as sunspots/ Emerge as earthquakes'. 'On [its] lens/ Each atom engraves with a diamond', the dance of matter making something static and enduring, an engraving, 'A burning unconsumed': 'in words carbon has already become diamond' ('After Lorca'). But the spiritual significance of its creation (and 'alighting' perception) is only momentary: 'music escapes its skull, its clock and its skyline'; emerging from 'the Creator's' brow, it 'slips behind the world's', its 'each wingbeat' 'a convict's release': never again will it 'land/ On a man's wrist'. 'What [it] carries will be plenty': the poem (the ideal Sogis) has transcended the poet (the mundane Agoluz); in a relative world, where everything exists by virtue of everything else, Sogis, poem, moral statement, are only momentarily relevant; the very celebration of relativity necessarily becomes a meaningless absolute. Even the poem's recognition that poetic absolutes 'will [not] land/ On a man's wrist' has to be endorsed by a Grand 'Finale' which is not part of the score but stands outside 'the ritual' - Hughes emphasises 'Finale' is not a poem by simply reprinting an impromptu remark from his well-known interview with Faas. Ritual, or reading, can only be a continual process; and 'speaking' is as nothing beside 'the earth', precisely because it 'soars' clear of it. The 'goblin', dualistic consciousness, returns each instant. The protagonist's perfect ego-death is never accessible to us.

CHAPTER FIVE: GAUDETE

'[Western Man's] complicated living conditions and the influence of his environment are so strong that they drown the quiet voice of nature. Opinions, beliefs, theories and collective tendencies appear in its stead and back up all the aberrations of the conscious mind. Deliberate attention should then be given to the unconscious so that the compensation can be set to work' (Jung 1959 (9: II) p. 21).

Gaudete is a more ambitious work than Crow or Cave Birds, and its shortcomings proportionately more serious. Combining the tales of Thomas the Rhymer and the golem, Hughes avoids the problems in Crow's double-role, as Western Man and 'the spirit of the sperm', making a double-Lumb, half of whom, characteristically, can survive the other's ego-death.

The first epigraph (p. 8: Heraclitus, fragment CXVI) tells of the essential monism of Hades and Dionysus, 'soul' and 'body', death and ecstasy, religion and dramatic art, and - according to Panta Rhei, and Dionysus' spring sacrificial rites (cf. Girard 1977 p. 255) - death and rebirth itself. (Hughes misquotes Heraclitus and probably misrepresents him: Heraclitus' exposition of the body's intimacy with death was towards the repudiation of the flesh.) Gaudeamus, Hughes concludes, since even a society's mortal sickness is a way to ritual regeneration. 'A new relation, a new relatedness hurts somewhat in the attaining' (Lawrence 1936 p. 530). What Smayle's version of Christianity ('Something about women.... Either a babe at the tit... Or else a young fellow collapsed across [Mary's] knees') neglects is 'the terrible things' (p. 65) themselves - upon which Gaudete attempts to focus.

The second epigraph (Parzival XV 740f.) tells of the battle of Parzival and his pagan half-brother: the unmanaged warfare, in our society, of religion and instinct, spirit and flesh. 'There is no schizophrenic person; there is only a schizophrenic system' (R. D. Laing in Capra 1989 p. 134). What may strike one as the narrative's uninventive repetitions - the dyads of Estridge and Hagen,

Dunworth and Westlake, Janet and Jennifer, or the two underworld rites (pp. 15 - 19; 98 - 106) - seem in fact Hughes' orchestration of the consequences of 'Two worlds,/ Like two strange dogs circling each other' (p. 125): two suicides, two murders, two car-crashes, two dead wood-pigeons, two dogs destroyed, two shootings, two dehorned bulls - one, as it were, for the upper, one for the lower, world. (Campbell (1985 p. 135) associates part of Hughes' Parzival epigraph and Heraclitus' 'Good and evil are one' to say we must love all things equally. His book (first published 1973) conceivably influenced Hughes' juxtaposition.)

Central to understanding Gaudete is a recognition of the distinctions Hughes makes between the individual's demands, and the community's. Lumb's resurrected rituals are, communally, a disaster. (Social ritual needs cultural traditions, Hughes' 'dogma'.) Though 'Christianity depends on women' (p. 65), Lumb, like Crow's eskimo, uses women for his own ends. His murder is the sacrifice of the split-off outsider reinforcing the hierarchy that performs it, an abnegation of the husbands' individual responsibilities. Violence provokes its own reaction, Hagen, figured repeatedly as mere earthenware, despatching the mere 'log', Lumb. If our age 'surpasses in horror the worst times of the so-called "Dark" Ages... this problem cannot be solved collectively, because the masses are not changed unless the individual changes' (Jung 1959 (9: I) p. 349). Each married couple in Gaudete might make a character, combined; what the log-Lumb's social errors do help is his double's psyche's harmonization, enabling him to see its potential to exist with nature. Jungian individuation involves separating oneself 'from [one's] unconscious, not by repressing it - for then it simply attacks [one] from the rear - but by putting it clearly before [one] as THAT WHICH [one] IS NOT' (Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, trans. R. F. C. Hull 1966 p. 73): to create one's Hyde, then formally disown him. The Anglican clergyman's 'shadow', then (his love for Felicity, for instance), becomes his own, intrapsychic scapegoat, ritually cancelled not puritanically held under. Lumb's underworld adventures are Crow's -

the quest for his anima - Hughes explains (Faas 1980 p. 213). Lumb's role as his own shaman is juxtaposed (as happened in classical Greece) against communal, Maenadic rites which end only in Felicity's murder. (The maenadic - proto-dramatic - element depends on the story's original manifestation as film-script. Westlake's 'opportunistic sense of theatre' (p. 56) catalyzes the group catastrophe.) In Jung's terms, submission to the 'participation mystique' is for a modern individual a schizoid failure to leave the womb: as in much 'Romantic' poetry and nostalgia for re-immersion in nature. If Robinson Jeffers, for instance, finds in nature none of the ugliness repelling him in humanity, this implies nature is partly an 'escape' for him, not the vehicle for his recognition of human responsibilities. This criticism - incident to nearly all 'nature poetry' - is one that cannot be levelled at Hughes. His nature talks back. In Gaudete, the log-Lumb dies in such a flight from responsibility, towards the womb of nature. The real Lumb's struggle in the epilogue, therefore, towards the recovery of nature's 'spirit-confidence', is one of self-disciplined maturity.

The 'spirits' choose Lumb as their helper towards communal restoration because, as a vicar, he at least acknowledges God. (Inner and outer, 'spirits' requirements and the psyche's 'ultimate suffering and decision in us' (Newman 1970 p. 194) are indistinguishable in the symbolism.) But secular and spiritual 'healing' are themselves split in our society. (Faced with the wounded Goddess, Lumb feels 'He is not a doctor. He can only pray' (p. 15). We never see Dr. Westlake healing anyone: he confirms Janet's death (p. 56) and tries to kill Lumb.) Eliot's 'wounded surgeon', Lumb must first cast out the beam (the 'log', the sensual man) from his own 'I' before casting the mote out of his - or Parzival's - brother's.

A log burns in the Heraclitean - or Beltane (p. 170) - fire. When Faas asked about the significance of the name, 'Lumb', Hughes responded: 'it means chimney, the tall factory chimney' (Faas 1980 p. 214), as if in answer. If we

remember the chimneys below Lumb Bank, and the rejected title 'Lumb's remains' (Ilkley Festival, 1975 and The Listener 93, p. 375) for the epilogue-poems, the 'charred black chimneys' (p. 11) will represent the consequences of 'the present quiet civil war' (Faas 1980 p. 19) of puritanical suppressions of sexual energy: the work-ethic generates travesties of lingams and the log-Lumb, himself a travesty of an accommodated fertility-spirit. Lumb also finds himself (p. 19) 'in a derelict basement full of builder's old lumber' - dead wood, lost to the tree: life gone (p. 55 etc.) 'n/umb'.

Parzival can only redeem The Waste Land by asking the Grail King why he is sick. Not until the epilogue is Lumb compelled to speak, for the Goddess, whose 'representative' Maud (Hughes: Faas 1980 p. 215) is 'd/umb' until page 147. The two worlds' 'two strange dogs' seem incommunicado, and, just as in a town strangers stop greeting each other, the characters ask no more than they must: all we actually hear in the story is one 'Bloody Hell!' (p. 161) from Evans - which is all we are sure we hear about Hell, too.

Hughes wanted to write in 'almost a monotone' without 'irrelevant novelistic digressions' (Faas 1980 p. 214) and produce something 'dramatic and readable, at every point' (ibid. p. 215). (Gaudete is more 'readable' than one could hope.) 'At the same time' it should be 'slightly puppet-like' (ibid.). Hughes suggests Popa's participants in 'Games' 'are deeper than our reality as puppets are deeper than our reality; the more human they look and act the more elemental they seem' (1969 Popa p. 15). That is 'the simplicity of an inclusion of everything in a clear solution' (1980 'The Reef' p. 2). Hughes' concern was not the novelist's one of drawing life-sized, flawed individuals whom the reader sympathizes with and events educate. (Faas (1980 p. 214) speaks of our 'sympathy' being with Lumb; mine is with no character.) Only once (Dunworth on page 87) does a participant perhaps suffer compassionate, rather than passionate, love, the 'instinct for loss and woe and lamentation', as Smayle objectifies it (page 66). Nor is the book about (sexual) passion: the need to present what emotions survive or erupt 'crazed with deprivation' in our society as 'the

inching hydra strength' (p. 183), joyless, means that Hughes cannot represent here with any convincing intensity his sense of 'some final crisis of earth's life' (p. 142), or the consequences of a 'religious mania' (p. 57) which needs to be so accurately distinguished from his own imaginative position. The narrative method, I feel, is one of Hughes' least satisfying innovations. Gifford and Roberts (1981) compare the book to Redgrove's The God of Glass; another parallel might be J. G. Ballard's The Unlimited Dream Company, with its story of the successful respiritualization of an English village adopting as shaman a pilot crashing in the Thames: the novel exposes the limitations of Hughes' - far deeper - vision.

If 'Gaudete suggests that Hughes could not write a novel' (Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 168), so much emphasizes how thoroughly 'poetic' his inspiration is. But the degree to which he has tried to write one must be faced. To say the drama is intrapsychic - Hughes 'had originally planned to make it [the] story... of what's going on in [Hagen's] head' (Faas 1980 p. 215; my italics) - is inadequate: Hughes' tactics in Crow and Cave Birds are different; in Gaudete, where the 'nature' is obviously real, 'the whole situation [is] impossibly crystallized in the immovable dead end forms of society' (Faas 1980 p. 215). Clearly, part of the book intends to transfer the consequences of puritanical suppression into social terms: to put the 'virtuoso bacterium's' (1963 'Vagrancy') 'culture under a microscope' (p. 131), photographically. The novel's claims of all-inclusive objectivity can only expose the limitations of Hughes' method: when 'faces [at] windows and doors' (p. 143) and 'a straggle of boys' (p. 144) impinge upon the husbands' vengeance, we recognize with a shock that the puppet-synecdoches do not embrace the community's entire psychic field. Distancing the Maenadic rite by comparison to 'a nursery fairy tale' (p. 146) only makes us realize how petty, even ridiculous, the story may appear.

Hughes does not observe the novelist's wariness of describing dramatic action. As a lyricist, again, he is used to producing quickly poems which bear

an emotional charge comparable to what he felt, and wanted to preserve, when writing them; narratives somehow communicate much less compassion and excitement than they have to be written with: if Hughes scorned to make distorting allowances, Gaudete will sound more disturbingly callous than he intended. Finally, the storyteller, unlike the lyricist, should perhaps pity the reader: Gaudete allows us few co-ordinates and indeed, like Crow, seems to court misinterpretation.

The novelistic elements remain 'grossly reliant upon the stereotypes of an outdated popular fiction' (Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 197): or Under Milk Wood, played as tragedy. 'You write interestingly only about the things that genuinely interest you. This is an infallible rule' (Poetry in the Making p. 96). Comparing:

Rooms retreat.
A march of right angles. Barren perspectives
Cluttered with artefacts, in a cold shine.
Icebergs of taste, spacing and repose
(Gaudete p. 32)

with:

... the hearth fire, its blood-flicker
On biscuit-bowl and piano and table-leg...
('Out, I' - 1967 text)

it becomes clear where the narrator and teacher is not only bored but fears we know the subject better than he does (and so leaves too much social scenery untold of). An instinctive novelist might have set the story fifty years ago, 'defamiliarizing' all the social trivia and making the narrative impact, as well as the moralitas, expose our continuing subjection to the material. Curiously, it is the moralitas, in Gaudete, that already seems dated: the psychodrama, where for tight-suited women rigid codes tyrannize the energies of a nature evident, unlike in a city, all around (we find poachers and blacksmiths, but nothing about council-estates), represents Hughes' model of puritanic suppression at its most simply Freudian (one could compare The Way of All Flesh).

The main text's roving camera eye, with all its scientifically-precise revelations, adopts a favourite mannerism of Williamson's. (Faas has compared the technique in 'The Suitor' to the Nouveau Roman, 1980 p. 87). Hughes' contempt for the medium for which he wrote the film-script obviously colours the final narrative:

As if it were all something behind the nearly unbreakable screen glass of
a television
With the sound turned off...

(p. 35).

Both the sense of something artistically only half-realized, and of something despised, seem disturbing in a text of this length: Hughes at once considers 'the actual bodies of the people' 'emissaries' from the spirit-world (Faas 1980 p. 215) and repudiates them as 'the immovable dead end forms of... physical life'. As with a film-script, the human personality of the narrative engineer is almost entirely erased. This recalls 'The Head', where the monolithic objectivity - technically overwhelming - through which the 'terrible events' are recorded seems irreconcilable with the vulnerability and presumable changedness of the narrator. In Gaudete, the impersonality seems as much distasteful in itself as would the voyeuristic indulgences Hughes avoids; 'The Head', certainly, is conceived with far greater imaginative intensity.

'The whole thing [is] just... the story of English Maytime' (Faas 1980 p. 215). Hughes may have intended what Webster (1977) finds, the resacralization of Eng-land. (He had been 'vaguely thinking of... the balance between German/ Scandinavian, and ancient Briton/ Celtic' (Faas 1980 p. 215): 'long-skulled' Briton Lumb, Teuton Hagen, Norse Garten, 'Saxon squire' (p. 91), 'gypsy' Felicity (p. 91). This intention may seem crippled precisely by the book's inclusion of all Britain, its lack of a home-spot, a sapience, or slow self-recognition in earth-terms: the action flits from 'the North of England' to a never-never Devon (beside the river) to the mountains and lakes of Lumb's (imaginary?) holiday with Felicity, to 'the West Coast of Ireland'.

This forces one to question the relationship between the book's parts. 'When I was shaping up Gaudete, I realised there should be something at the end and that [the lyrics] would be ideal if I could write [them] in the right context' (Faas 1980 p. 138). Hughes' statement suggests his usual - perhaps justified - modesty about his sense of structure; but also that he conceived narrative and lyrics upon terms of equality which the word 'Epilogue' really obscures. The lyrics - the positive half of the equation - must surely bear more than half of this eventually positive book's weight. They represent in some ways Hughes' final and most compelling, and aesthetically convincing, death-and-rebirth drama.

Clearly the poems would benefit from location within a 'visionary world' (1971 Shakespeare p. 10) organically one with them: which the main text is not. It would be more helpful to consider the narrative as a straight man, or even, like the Thought-Fox, a distraction from, an alternative to, the real psychic 'underworld' drama - rather like the relationship between prose and verse in Pale Fire. Certainly the 'headlong' (Faas 1980 p. 214) two-dimensional merry-go-round horse of wooden Lumb's exploits never represented Hughes' stylistic ideal, its failure to manage its own energies emphasizing Lumb's self-control in the lyrics. (The alternation of prose and verse in the main text serves a purpose more readily apprehended than defined: I suggest it underlines the topsy-turvy state of affairs, the verse, like Hagen's park that 'Decorative and ordered... tugs at a leash' (p. 26), representing puritanical self-restraint (and often creating a painful tension) but the prose succeeding in the moments of the emotional release and self-abandonment towards nature which we generally associate with poetry: consider pp. 25, 49, 58.)

I do not imply that Hughes deliberately and simply writes badly in the main text; or that he spends 160 pages introducing 25. But to exemplify Hughes' poetry from this text ('I mean, Gaudete is the most beautiful register of vegetation, almost every line has riches' (Heaney in Haffenden 1981 p. 74)) is surely an affront. Hughes - with salt-and-sugar malcombinations - presents

the world as Urizen sees it, nature not yet understood and organized by shamanic experience. Or, as in 'A Bedtime Story', 'vision', imagination, becomes 'intermittent', flashes ('heels drive deep moons among the wolf-spiders', p. 159) alternating with picture-postcard abstractions and the frustrated alienation of Pauline Hagen 'too tall' for 'The level sprawl of world' (p. 31) - compare Plath's 'I Am Vertical' and the start of 'The Rain Horse'. In so far as this immitigable apartness will resemble most of our perceptions of nature more than the 'spirit-confidence' Hughes customarily allows, the descriptions afforded here - 'damp cave and black-beamed ruinous attics/ Of intergroping boughs' (p. 27) - are perhaps at least as likely to impress. They are part, after all, of the 'nature tradition' with its emphasis on 'scenery' and exiled nostalgia. But it seems essential to recognize this is an uncrippled actor's Richard the Third. 'This is poetry suited to a tepid, coddled welfare society... dreaming of violence in front of the television screen, which is projecting its immaculate coloured detail, blood or sunburn, wildlife or underwater, superbly shot by telephoto lens', fulminates John Bayley (1977 p. 726). That is surely what Hughes intends. The narrative might be understood as a gesture towards Modernism: Hughes adopts a persona's voice, ignorant, undisciplined, over-enthusiastic; emphasizing, self-reflexively, like Pound in the Cantos, the actual process of composition. The book's shortcomings imply how uncongenial to him such procedures had to be.

The Prologue

'I found myself in a village. I realize it has been deserted: it is in ruins; there is no life in it...' (Laing 1960 p. 152). That is 'James', a chemist, recounting a schizoid vision. 'A sudden jagged darkness... rends [Lumb] apart', 'from the top of his skull downwards' (p. 15), so that he recognizes the institutionalized schizophrenia of a dead-end society, the living 'multiplying corpses' (p. 12) down cul-de-sacs, the dead treated 'Like an article of furn-

iture' (p. 57) - our mismanagement of 'Hades', dying, is, as in Wodwo, a central impulse in the book. These pages seem as convincing and eloquent concerning readers' possible dream-worlds, or the lost world of childhood terrors, as daylight literature could be; and show off the Gaudete manner at its best.

The Reverend Nicholas Lumb walks hurriedly over cobbles through the oppressive twilight of an empty town, in the North of England.

After Wodwo, the sentence, as prose, is impressive.

At first Lumb 'runs regardless of the soft hands, the spread hair' (p. 12). The start of an education towards empathy is symbolized by the Goddess' 'startling brilliant gaze [knifing] into him' (p. 14), visceral reaction succeeding visual objectivity: Lumb 'sees every detail of the pattern' of the whip, through his scalp (p. 15), and 'becomes absorbed in watching' (p. 16). As a log, he will mistakenly try to resurrect the kind of effective ritual he now experiences, in which mankind 'chews earth and loses consciousness' of the fallen state (p. 16), becoming one with a tree.

Lumb recovers consciousness, as a log, in the modern world whose desecration Hughes represents by moving from a 'steep rocky wood' (p. 15) to 'puddled concrete' (p. 18) under a 'high steel roof' (p. 17), and suggesting an abattoir. The bull in this fertility-rite taurobolium is dehorned (p. 18). Lumb has mistaken the devotees for 'lions' (p. 15) but recognizes the workers here only 'imitate' lions (p. 18). Before, even a tree was presumed capable of feeling, and flogged. Now, Lumb is punished for the insensibility Hughes believes characteristic of the carnivorous humanist. He must pull the trigger himself, and, like the man in 'Criminal Ballad', gets covered in blood. 'Taken neat', Bull's blood 'was regarded as a poison deadly to anyone but a Sibyl or a priest of Mother Earth' (Graves 1961 p. 105). Lumb does not die; yet his respiritualization is itself despiritualized. No more can he retreat, like the Criminal, 'under the leaves': he must climb the steps and encounter, in his blood-drenched

state, the 'woman with shopping' (cellophane-wrapped meat), the mongrel dog (cf. p. 125) of our world, and its 'rusty railings' which keep underground the brutality of the too-'ordinary accident' (p. 20) of which Lumb bears the stigmata. 'Suddenly he remembers the streets full of corpses, but his dread then was nothing like what he feels now.' Anyone revealing our subterranean violence may suffer contempt; Lumb is also a spirit entering the modern world for the first time.

The Narrative

Taking 'Binoculars' as a synecdoche for large tracts of the text, it becomes clear that Hughes relies, as often, on idiolectic symbolism (which - the dove Hagen presents his wife - is not the organically-subdued imagery of a novel). 'Rifles [Hagen] and whisky [Westlake] and bored sleep [Betty]' ('Revenge Fable') 'obliterate' the inner 'nature'. Here, Hagen, 'at his window', is his binoculars, 'a still focus'. 'Anaesthetised' by modern English, he leaves coffee 'untasted', 'Drained of the vanities' of watery feelings. His face is 'graven', stone reduced to 'gravel', a 'Viking weatherproof' to resist the rains of flux. 'A nerve is flickering' in his skull, but his watchful poise 'Absorbs the tremor'. The landscape feels 'the binocular pressure' of his gaze, but the 'tiger' is dead, its own eyes removed and 'a small man-made hole' substituted.

There is a remarkable amount of invention and finesse to these pages, but mere expertise is thrown away. The style, unlike Cave Birds', has no means of enlarging and intensifying at climaxes (pp. 34 - 5); since it depends on events' first appearances, startling and disorientating, on its own oddity and suddenness, and on a sense of unspoken mystery, it will not gain momentum as the book builds up, but pall. Only intermittently - Pauline's 'nerve-harrowed face', Hagen's frustration at 'Humiliation of Empire' - are the 'characters' brought before us as characters. What makes the story always worth re-reading is the constant, genuinely innovatory description of immediate mental states -

and of the stage-props; 'sagging conifers/ Which are still loaded with cavernous night-chill' (p. 43).

My interpretation of Gaudete's symbolism casts the log-vicar as a simple, inhuman object, or energy, 'Lumb's absence' (p. 25). But at p. 49 the style alters, attempting something more complex and impressive: Hughes is exploring the idea of the end of the Prologue, and representing the (human) feelings of the log, on earth for the first time. Readers may feel this helps redeem an arid symbolism, or lament the drift towards 'irrelevant novelistic digressions' (Faas 1980 p. 214). But the narrative's style, surely, finds no room to convey the full strangeness of the log's condition. (If this were one of total earth-hood, it would presumably be indescribable, in fallen language.) Sentences like:

He tries to pray with the sun -
Feeling it break off, dry in his mouth
He tries to find in himself the muscle-root of prayer...
(p. 52)

seem to set this section up as a counterweight to the epilogue, where consciousness struggles back towards being and energy. Lumb's conscious awareness of (and involvement in) 'the unalterably strange earth', here, 'the emptiness beyond it/ And the emptiness within it' (p. 49), is contrasted, yet also associated, with the other participants' wooden, alienated sense of being 'The puppet/ Of some monstrous, real, irreversible act' (p. 85). (Though, in so far as Lumb and his adventures are not real, and final, 'everything/ Will... be cancelled, the whole error/ Carefully taken apart' in the epilogue (p. 150; my italics). Hughes leaves us unable to project the characters' lives beyond the end of the narrative.)

But lines such as:

Between the root in immovable earth
And the coming and going leaf
Stands the tree
Of what he cannot alter

(p. 50)

tell how far these pages are from the epilogue's concise striving. Hughes' characteristic, complex metaphor ('the tree') is not knitting ideas together so much as looking round for some. It is representative of the main text's flaccidity and lack of verbal tension: the first paragraph on p. 59, for instance, is so easy to read because the arresting images ('Her own rosy private darkness', 'the looseness of her hips and vertebrae', etc.) can be felt (and convey the general meaning) without the structure of Hughes' typically long sentences (here, however, without 'pedantic solemnity of subordinate clauses' (p. 74)) - or the role of their rather weak verbs - being understood. Hughes' serious poetry must be understood, and felt, together. In the Gaudete narrative, Hughes lets the mere words and images lie, inert.

Lumb's first vision (pp. 77 - 83), as 'He recognises voices out of his past' (p. 77), probably allegorizes the beginning of the vicar's psychic 'split' in his sexual love for Felicity. (The literalization is a favourite joke of Hughes'.) His mismanagement is puritanical, grappling with his submerged nature and plucking off the hand of his own body which offends him (Matthew 5: 30). Hughes may also be looking forwards, more hopefully, by adopting the line from 'Two in Search of Evil' with which he prefaced 'The Wound': 'I came back without a hand, but my comrade was devoured' (Wodwo, p. 104). Lumb the churchman (or the shadow) is left behind, and his self loses a hand, like Joe Moss (Wodwo p. 131) in death, or, like Ripley, in marriage to his anima (here, in hymning the Goddess). The disappearance into the lake - the book's constant symbol for the underworld - certainly anticipates the log's death. In Bohemia, until historical times, the May-king was sacrificed by drowning (Weston 1957 pp. 54-5).

'I was standing in the middle of a barren landscape.... My feet were stuck in mud' (Laing 1960 p. 152) recalls 'James'. Lumb's second vision (pp. 98 - 106), recapitulating his cattle-yard initiation, probably represents the deprived spirits' first attempt to 'cancel' the double and to recall Lumb to his real task (or the attempt of his own soul, 'trying to get out of a drowning body', p. 116), and his dim guilt at being unable to fulfil the task. He must raise

from the mud into their true human being (the central image of Moortown) his parishioners, including 'hare-like' Pauline; and give birth (p. 105) to the Goddess (through vision, and Vision), as Cave Birds' hero (Cave Birds p. 44) marries his daughter.

'In the Cathedral' (p. 111), the 'ecclesiastical dignitary' advances 'Like an invalid's first inches'. Lumb's third vision (pp. 118 - 123) represents the spirits' hope of a religious revitalization, undertaken by women. 'Their noise [being] a shrill million sea-bird thunder' (p. 119) recalls Mrs. Westlake's sense of 'the weird pathos of biochemistry' as 'gull-cries from beyond the world's edge' (p. 39). 'The Cathedral/ [oozing] smoke from every orifice', (p. 136), however, only anticipates Lumb's final church-crypt pyre.

The characters in Gaudete 'are what they drive', protests Peter Conrad (1977). Hughes actually suggests as much: the W. I. rites make the women 'mechanical parts' in 'a repetitive machine' (p. 139). Maud, the spirits' advocate, seals Lumb's fate (p. 136) by decapitating a pigeon and dropping his car-keys in an 'unoccupied grave'. He is first attacked (p. 153) by an alsatian, 'a hurtling runaway wheel' (these most arresting images normally emerge from the symbolic undercurrents: the dog also represents the 'wheel' of life-and-death for Lumb). We are so unused to our feet, Hughes implies, overturning Holroyd's landrover, that we cannot even manage a proper ritual pursuit of the Year-king.

This story 'has the therapeutic effect of liberating the reader's repressed fantasies', suggests Scigaj (1986 p. 177). To me, anyway, the pursuit seems the most wholly convincing part of the narrative, playing on one's longing for re-immersion in nature and the book's pummelling insistence on our 'separateness' from 'the too wide-open world' (p. 157). Lumb's opponents own every quarter of the fenced country; he can only 'come in a circle' (p. 161), being no 'working gleam on the nape of a waterfall' (p. 163) but an instant of the flood, 'susceptible/ To extinction' (p. 164). Gaudete, gaudete, Christus est natus: but 'this crux of moments' crucifies our would-be scapegoat-saviour.

While moorhens lay 'eggs, on the clump of decay' (p. 166), and 'The box-profile of a truck' (p. 167) - unrevitalized rationalism - travels on along the 'road', Lumb's journey finishes. Hagen, in whose head we started, despatches him. His 'Mannlicher' (p. 167) is 'the... bride/ Of his ecstasies in the primal paradise', his only means of re-integration into nature, and also 'the midwife of Eden's beasts', delivering them into (the world of) death. As a 'midwife', the gun is the spirits' means of making Lumb give birth to the Goddess (p. 105); midwifed, he too is reborn, in Ireland. The animals are 'delivered' from Eden 'as if to be named' by Hagen resuming his fallen existence, and by Lumb's next manifestation as poet.

The Epilogue

The contemporary society within which the story has taken place remains unlocated, abstract. The epilogue immediately places itself on the Earth and within our own cultural heritage; but at the vast remove of Loyolan asceticism and the earth-faith and flower-bedecked wayside Marian shrines of 'the West Coast of Ireland'. (The Christian symbolism in Gaudete is generally understood as ironic: it might however be read as Hughes' attempt to reconcile himself to a Christian tradition, after incinerating our Puritan inheritance: Hughes' mythology, in the 1970s, of a 'Fall' from contact with a loving Creator, whose especial care mankind is, and our need to redeem ourselves by subduing animal instinct (through ritual) and by magnifying that divinity, would be largely sympathetic to many Christians.)

The three pages of bridging prose particularly recall the atmosphere of Shakespeare's Romances; but, perhaps because they were written as a 'bridge', Hughes' heart does not seem in them. (Unlike Gifford and Roberts, I do not interpret this chilliness as actual cynicism.) In direct contrast to the main text, words and perceptions, as in Shakespeare, are celebrated as redemptive. The priest '[becomes] curious about [Lumb]'. 'He [asks] the girls more', and

they recount their story. Lumb has 'wanted to know the names of... all the mountains in sight', and (like St. Cuthbert) summons an otter with his voice: 'The man stared at the lough and [as if consequently] the sound went out'. He 'could have reached out his hand and touched' the otter; the girls, seeing it by '[looking] where he was looking', can 'smell' it. They empathize completely with the incinerated Lumb's whistling: 'their nerves seemed to shrivel, like a hair held in fire'. The sound is as of pain itself deliberately mastered - 'a tiny, gentle screaming'. 'The priest [listens] to [the girls'] story' but is 'carried away by his words' too. 'Who knows what spark had jumped on to him from the flushed faces of the three girls?'

Lumb's 'head and shoulders' watching Felicity from the lake (p. 79) and his 'crawling out of the river/ Glossed as an exhausted otter' (p. 106) have prefigured the otter's epiphany. Now, summoning it is like a 'miracle' (or at least an image of the kind of 'spirit-confidence' Hughes requires). For all Maud's occult paraphernalia, there were no miracles in the main text; not even a child born. Now, the children play, gaudentes, and the otter's gallop is 'merry' (p. 174). The creation, one 'infinite creature of miracles' seems to the priest like 'an endless, blazing sunrise', after Lumb's sunset death. He thinks 'something supernatural had happened'; for Hughes, the earth is super-Natural in the very self-transcendence of its naturalness, its 'inscape' (Hopkins was more indebted to Scotus here than the priest's Ignatius; though the Ignatian ideal of chastity and sacrifice resembles the burden of Lumb's lyrics). This redemptive recognition has only intruded once or twice upon the narrative - in Lumb's observation of 'the unalterably strange earth' (p. 49), and as Westlake 'observes... his rose-blooms' 'with a self-mesmerising stillness' and

... marvels again that they are precisely where they are,
Neither an inch this way nor an inch that way,
But exactly there, with their strict, fierce edges.
(p. 74).

But this sense is essential to the lyrics.

Hughes began, about 1974, to write these poems - along with Orts - 'as little prayers', fearing he had cancer of the throat (Faas 1980 p. 138): healing charms, and the meditations upon the skull, strikingly free from self-pity, of a man facing death. It is important to bear in mind the ambiguities of the gap between this experience, and Lumb's, whose ego has genuinely died, but whose enlightenment may depend upon continuous self-consecration to mortality. (Presumably many of the lyrics written later refer specifically to Lumb's condition.)

'The outstanding characteristic of the shamanistic conception of illness is the belief that [it] ... is the consequence of some disharmony with the cosmic order' (Capra 1983 p. 335). Lumb realizes - as Hughes may have feared - his life has been a betrayal of his true being, and nature's confidence. He must become a successful 'doctor' (p. 15), healing not the community but the individual within it: shamanizing itself cures one's former illnesses (Eliade 1964 B p. 28). Although several poems recall Lumb's drastic cancellation, the lyrics' preferred ritual therapy is a slow, yogic recollection of sin in order to comprehend and exorcise it. (Eliade, 1964A p. 89, distinguishes these two shamanic methods.) If the prologue presented the split between Lumb's mind and body, and the narrative the body's ritual annihilation, the eloquent and possessed voice of the lyrics is pure mind. In so far as this departs from the Jungian ideal of synthesized mind and body, Lumb continues to lament his body's alienation, one dualism that seems impossible to manage.

I feel justified in speaking of Hughes/ Lumb as a shaman here, because the lyrics move beyond Hughes' usual implicit self-doubts (and self-effacement). He didn't die. The actuality of the religious experience - the urgency, to the persona, of choice and suffering - must be continually borne in mind, even if not comprehended. Metaphysically, the cycle represents Hughes' most complex answer to the paradox that, to attain conscious enlightenment and to praise, verbal consciousness must be sacrificed in mortal love towards the Goddess.

The comparison with Dickinson's most spiritually intense, yet intellectually coherent, poems, such as 'My life closed twice, before its close', is inevitable, and perhaps justified. Hughes has revealed, however, that his model here (Faas 1980 p. 137) was the Kannadan vacanas of the bhakti religious movement, especially (ibid. p. 138) Allama Prabhu's. The similarities - epigrammatic parallelisms, non-literary diction, allegorical riddles, puns and the juxtaposition of domestic and heroic metaphors - are very important:

Looking for your light,
I went out:

it was like the sudden dawn
of a million million suns,

a ganglion of lightnings
for my wonder.

O Lord of Caves,
if you are light,
there can be no metaphor.

(Allama 972; Ramanujan 1973 p. 168).

The vacana, however, is 'a spontaneous cry [and] a cry for spontaneity - for the music of a body given over to the Lord' (Ramanujan 1973 p. 38; my italics) - even the line-divisions are editorial; whilst Lumb's poems are 'densely corrected' (Gaudete p. 173) 'virtuoso pieces of phrasing and timing' (1969 Popa p. 15), whose starting-point is the impossibility of speaking the earth.

Perhaps because Lumb's condition approaches that of disembodied mind, the lyrics are more cerebral than anything Hughes has composed, approaching, as they diverge from current conceptions of poetry, his sense of verse as 'mathematics'. 'The world has burned away beneath his book' ('Phaethons'): 'The grim badger with armorial mask' (p. 189) is a partial one; this, for me, is what makes the poems so exciting: if we fall off - and syntax and vocabulary are almost unmanageably slippery - we feel that rather than landing on the grass we shall go hurtling through outer space. Reading becomes itself a meditative exercise. Like Cave Birds, the lyrics abjure rhetoric, ending unnervingly quickly: they demand a readerly response, poised on the instant

of themselves. They are also difficult - Lumb is discovering his own position, not explaining it to a reader - and perhaps one must admit this is why only West, Newton, and, by 1989, Robinson, seem to have anything like the measure of them. Though many exist only in context, they surely include a number - #8, 15, 26, 30, 32, 36, 40, 41, 44¹ - of Hughes' most accomplished poems.

Reducing them as far as possible in order to expose the line of thought, I shall consider the poems as a single psychic narrative, though obviously one less rigidly defined than Cave Birds. The first two lyrics express the fallen predicament, mind grievously alienated from body. (Hughes describes the poems as a man's 'diary of coming to his senses, or of trying to come to his senses' (Selected Poems p. 237) - 'come to' implying 'to reach'. Hughes praised Max Nicholson for '[making] it seem possible that we can come to our senses in time' (Faas 1980 p. 188).) The schizoid Lumb is 'half a man' (p. 176); the weirdly-visualized 'one-eyed waking' from the shaman's sleep serves as a transition from the montage-style of the narrative. The Tree of Life was often represented as half-living, to symbolize the duality of life and death in fallen mankind but their single stem ('Hades and Dionysus are one') (Campbell 1962 p. 390). But Lumb's asymmetry is also the impotence of the lamed Grail-King. (Noah, in one fable, is lamed by a lion - the devotees on pages 15 - 19 are 'lion'-like. Noah's 'bone-deformity' exiles him, since the imperfect could not serve as priests (ibid.).) Lumb's body has been 'shorn' (cut off/harvested - 'aftermath' is the second crop) so that even the mind's reawakening now seems like sleep to what its association with body once was. As in a vacana, Hughes elaborates his paradox three-fold; meanwhile 'aftermath' makes his 'negative' incineration (p. 170) recall a holocaust, leaving him a solitary, the survivor (military 'veteran') 'of cease'. The Goddess, however - as 'aftermath' - second crop - itself implies - can still 'make' something of him (understand him/ re-organ-ize him: genetically, 'half a man' and half a woman

¹ Scigaj's numbering (1986). Below, page-references are provided too.

'make' a child).

The Fall (#2, p. 176) has reduced beasts' absolute self-expression to the frontal lobes' 'syntax'. ('Beetling' describes our foreheads but also anticipates #6.) As we speak, we choke the soul's 'cry' (Pauline Hagen's 'scream, which she dare not utter' (p. 31). The text frequently anticipates the epilogue's imagery, though the 'remote approaching express' (p. 26), the 'lifting wingbeats' (p. 51) and the dipper (p. 54) seem to connect with Orts - numbers 19, 1 and 12 in the Moortown selection.) 'Speech// Is a fistula', an ulcer, the cry's rot, that, like the doctor who tends it, charges us both in killing us at last, and in the pain of deferring until 'tomorrow' the release of the cry in union with the Goddess - in death, the end of the life's sickness, the wages of the Fall. But 'congregation', and perhaps 'nostrum' (paternoster), should alert us to the religious imagery that co-exists - as in a vacana, and Dickinson - with the surgical: a 'fistula' (the word the form highlights) also signifies the pipe through which the wine of the Eucharist is drunk: speech seems the only pipe through which we can 'drink' the spiritual cry, or drain off an inner rottenness, or at least repay ('fees') the Fall.

Lumb, therefore, speaks. 'Who are you?' (#3, p. 177). Having admitted his fallen nature, he offers himself to redemption, in terms, he conceives, of the bluefly's 'absorption' into an oversoul, the passive rabbit (cf. p. 68) 'fixing' itself onto the far skylines. But, attempting to transfer this salvation to 'people', all he manages is a 'photograph' (Urizenic vision) which interprets the effects of the 'gust' (death) but not the breath itself (of inspiration, leaving people 'open-mouthed' in unheard praise). Perhaps, for consciousness, the experience of life is itself 'death': though, when the Goddess 'grabs' Lumb, his teeth shut on the escaping cry, photographic vision is replaced, redemptively, by 'hearing', 'feeling', a sense of work to do 'Quick!' and of the 'Now' of thoughtless eternity, 'the age of the earth' itself.

After this imperfect renovation, Lumb feels himself reborn as an innocent (#4, p. 177), unable to interpret the Goddess' injury (not 'In labour// [nor]

in hunger' but ' - ': something, as yet, ineffable. 'In front' of him - potentially - is the 'useful-looking world' of Cartesian vision: he has just left Plato's cave, but his steps, being 'aimless', are not in this direction of ours. Significantly, he is 'happy' for the first time - after the narrative where 'Rejoice' (p. 94) is lamented, the capitalized 'She' (possibly a printer's error) 'weeping' and joy at best a subdued 'eerie pleasure' (pp. 59, 95. Oedipus (Oedipus p. 53) calls blindness 'pleasant'). The log-Lumb's activities have been mere warfare 'In the battle for life' (p. 198), not manifestations of joie de vivre and 'useless excess'. In the Timaeus, Plato laments the soul should split vertically into head, heart and belly - in Lumb's terms 'dolls' (our still-immature neocortices' playthings), 'gods' (the emotional centres, objectified inadequately) and 'squabblers' (unredeemed hyperthalamie instinct): this, Maclean's 'triune' representation, however, lends itself to synthesis in a way that the left-right schizoid bipolarity of #1 (and the narrative), which it supersedes, did not.

#5 and 6 oppose Lumb's 'aimlessness' against the animals' singleminded energy. The lark (p. 178) seems the fatal 'petrol fuse' that burned the log (p. 170): 'When you touch his grains' (the 'harvest' of #1) 'Who shall stay?' But, redemptively, 'the blue peace' possesses a 'core' now, not simply the alienation of skylines, the world's 'sapphire' a 'flaw' to enter through, and the 'dust' of the flesh the 'sun' of Hoan within it: the lark is 'in' Lumb's ear (the senses being reciprocal), and the 'beetle' (p. 179) walks 'inside [his] body'.

The cycle takes the form of explorations of all possible means of superseding dualism. This one is immediately rejected. To vegetate at the centre of 'the whole world' betrays Lumb's Odyssey. The Goddess, outside him, beckons, giving his 'steps' (cf. #4) aim.

Helpless guilt at his condition (#7, 8, 11 ('Once I said lightly')) alternates with readiness 'for opening negotiations' (Faas 1980 p. 201) (#9 ('Trying to be a leaf'), 10). In I Kings 21, Jezebel gets Naboth stoned to

appropriate his vineyard, and, dying, is cast to the dogs. Lumb (p. 179) seizes (or inherits, thanks to the husbands' 'violence' in killing him) 'The trousseau of the apple' - life, the Goddess (cf. p. 184) and the consequences of the Fall, in the world's orchard. (The idea of the 'crime of birth' invoked here will soon be transcended.) Lumb's life was Krogon's attempt to hold onto existence, 'assailing' nature 'In a world where all is temporary' and 'People come and go'. Only 'patience' - the readiness to suffer (pati) death - can bring Lumb 'to degree of' (in kinship with) the Goddess.

If he was cast on the ground in death, 'Collision with the earth has finally come' (#8, p. 180). This does not seem like union with the Goddess, so Lumb presumes (line 2) he must go on 'falling'. Though self-abasement will prove redemptive, the real need has here become to gain balance with the earth: seaweed drifts but does not sink; the earth's own 'mountain' hangs 'Rooted in stone of heaven'. The moon-Goddess' 'mangling' ocean of matter is Lumb's proper home, but his emotional dejection, in these first poems, is always ready to slip into panic. The relativistic ideal just makes him feel 'aimless' again, 'A needle of' not earth's gravity but 'many Norths', and therefore 'Helpless to fit' together - with the 'needle' - or 'helpless' at fitting in with - 'the pieces of water' which probably represent the Goddess' 'face [which should be] sewn together from several faces' (p. 104). (In the Kalevala, Lemminkainen is dismembered and his limbs thrown into the lake of Tuonela, but his mother sews him together again.) Attuned to eternal, absolute expectations, Lumb feels his body, Noah's 'Ark of blood', covenant of 'dusty' flesh, is meaningless, being bound to sink in Panta Rhei's 'sea': 'at the great moment of need', the expiring man opens this 'magic baggage', and finds inside no adamant soul - only 'Error' (Lumb's past) which was the joyless Will to live (the baggage's unifying 'ribbon') - so much 'fury'. However, these lines may also recall the Orphic creation-myth: the Titans eat Dionysus and Zeus burns them. We are their smoke - foul flesh redeemed with a trace of spirit (Dodds 1971 p. 155). The incinerated Lumb's 'errors', therefore, are redeemed by his spiritual, poetic 'fury'.

This poem holds about as much (supra-) logical argument as 80 words can (there is more I cannot follow) whilst sacrificing nothing of Hughes' most characteristic voice:

A sea
Full of moon-ghost, with mangling waters...

- or of stylistic integrity ('smoke', for instance, emotionally associates 'per-fume', 'ribbon' and 'fury').

Lumb's next attempt at integration (#9, p. 180) is 'Trying to be a leaf'. But his very consciousness, and his 'trying', are the 'straps' transforming prayer into electric chair and rendering the communion as transitory as its inverse: death which bursts these 'straps'. The attempt is counter-productive: the very electrocution becomes a return from leaf to living 'face and hands'.

But the instinctive 'screech' inside him (#10, p. 181) seemed, in the prologue, to 'abort' all such consciousness. This ego-death never quite untied his 'knot' of selfhood, though earth with its 'gravity'/ grave 'stone' is 'so nearly' the 'nothing' of ultimate cancellation. With this screech, Lumb may still have attained shamanhood. 'The comedy' - the narrative - 'began' with the log-Lumb's 'legs' (mere animal body) 'galloping to help' the Goddess; but 'the curtain' of his murder 'came down' before he 'got to her'. Now 'the play' - the Bacchic drama with its puppets' 'masks' - is replaced by the 'uncurtained' meditations of solitary Mind.

To the unimplicated mind (#11, p. 181), to '[fall] into the earth' and to be 'devoured' (by earth) may seem the same, as lovers might imagine death 'uniting' them. Since Hughes' religion admits no afterlife, nothing could separate us more; and for Lumb, his cancellation 'in the pan' of the bonfire still seems to have abstracted him utterly from the Goddess who is the earth she 'falls' back into.

Lumb's next meditation (#12, p. 182) conceives that people and their Goddess may communicate through art, which, like earth, 'eats people' - but not

their entire self-consciousness: death 'leashed' and bearable. But music only seems able to reorganize what a real ego-death has 'Already/ Emptied and rejected'.

The body, the log, is subject to 'The rain' of death (#13, p. 182). But rain flows into the 'sea' of infinity which, according to relativity, has 'shores' in the dimension of time. This leads Lumb to imagine that, after his ego's death, his soul remains consciously in the Goddess' arms: if he is his 'grey' hairs and her 'arms' all his 'hair', then the grey (what time touches) cohabits with the black of her unalterability.

The next meditation (#14, p. 183) pursues this more convinced assertion of the possibility of union. 'The maneater's skull' (Hagen's paperweight) becomes either art, or Lumb's own skull (as on p. 168). If art, 'it' and 'you' (lines 10 - 12) seem interchangeable; if Lumb, 'I' and 'you'. Lumb, or his art, is the Goddess' own being.

The implications of involvedness in the Goddess seem frightening; 15 - 17 suggest Lumb attempting to flee them. #15 (p. 183) is (especially without the last line, as in Selected Poems) among the finest. Lumb retreats into 'nostalgia' for his unfallen oak-life, 'An acorn stupor'. The oak's insemination of the wind (the Goddess, a 'gust' (#3) made visible) is as far from him now as 'Nuptials among prehistoric insects'; but if Lumb lies under it, he is the 'acorn' his own self dropped, just as the Cave Birds figure, in the first stages of regrowth, is 'a seed in its armour' (Cave Birds p. 36). Lumb must become something like another oak, crucified simultaneously to death and the 'dying' of life, dropping both 'twigs' and 'acorns': 'dumb', he will also 'utter' praise.

Yet, within the cycle, #16 (p. 184) represents a retreat from self-dedication to the composition of poetry for its own sake. The celebration of eating and dying becomes crystallized in myth. The person imitating the prologue's reintegration with his oak-self is not Lumb but 'Whoever'.

#17 (p. 184) suggests procrastination. Lumb will rend his heart to pieces,

some day. Maenadic ritual - and such communal anachronisms as foxhunting - are at least rejected for voluntary self-sacrifice. Dabbing his blood on nature's cheek will set him on equal terms with the Goddess: his death is her (foxhunting) initiation into mortality. In all her manifestations, she is new. (A Fox Under My Cloak, the title of Williamson's war-novel, may have suggested Hughes' image. Williamson refers to the tale of 'the Spartan boy', but implies characters and a culture turned upon themselves.)

#18 (p. 185) still shows Lumb speaking of death, and reciprocal vision, in abstract terms. The Goddess is simultaneously primrose or hare (through which Blake's Vala 'reveals herself') and a 'veiled' otherness beyond them: a subject/ object ambiguity (Lumb and nature perceive, and sacrifice, each other) reflected in the syntax of 'Somebody// Something... bangs the brow'. Nature seems at once eternity braining the living against herself, and the living which die - when blood (song: Lumb's whistling is 'like a fine bloody thread', p. 174) 'drips from the mouth'.

The association of song and experience, self and divinity, already seems complete; but, as in Wodwo, Hughes now renders death suddenly immediate: it is not as anticipated. A relative's death (#19, p. 185) can unmake 'the world', leaving the Goddess' sun dark, one's own 'heart non-existent', and oneself - punning on 'temple' - a meaningless 'column' after their destruction. The sacred bull's 'head is like the capital/ Of a temple column' on page 17 whilst the Goddess 'sits on [Lumb] like an iron crown on a stone pillar' (p. 51). (The image-cluster seems to grow from Ransom's symbol for disassociated mind and body in 'Painted Head' - 'a capital on no/ Column' or an 'iron acropolis'.) The pillar, without its bull-Goddess-head, is 'defunct', and, in the camera-eye's world, an architecturally invalid fragment of a once ritually whole social construct - Greece with its Bacchic rituals. 'One little motionless wooden figure stirs more than all the Parthenon frieze. It sits in the place where no Kodak can snap it' (Lawrence 1936 p. 526).

The Goddess waves; and (#20, p. 186) Lumb '[says] goodbye', exchanging her 'earth' for air, fire, and water, and a shadowless Manichean absolution in light. But even 'the nails of nothing' of 'the hole which is bottomless' (p. 185) are part of the Goddess' crucifixion. The atoms pray 'To enter [the snowflake's] kingdom' of flux. Lumb's real commission is 'to bleed' fallen song and 'To be broken like bread/ On a dark sill', feeding the birds reconstructed from him.

For earth's nature (#21, p. 187) is one 'rebuilding' on the turning wheel ('sow's wallow' recycled as 'swallow'). The swallow in turn 'Collects the lot' (all the mud/ its destiny) - to transform itself into its young. Lumb has retreated from such sacrifice, shifting the 'dust' of mortality around, prevaricating rather than wiping the Karmic mirror. 'What crossed [his] mind' - his poems, mental crucifixion - 'Crossed into outer space' beyond his skull, and have not swung round again: for his children, 'read' these, a mere 'obituary' of his living 'absence'. So how can the Goddess 'gather' what he feels; or, birdlike, his 'aftermath' (p. 176) nest-straws? Again, the poems assert the adequacy of their own crucifixions. She is already his 'keeper/ Sitting in the sun' - to 'gather' whom would require no swallow, but a falconing falcon.

The rainy wind of Panta Rhei blows (#22, p. 187); oaks fall, 'The stone tower' of civilization 'flies': but total extinction, which 'would have devoured' Lumb, has been, in a way, 'driven off' by his freely entering the 'wolf's', the Goddess', cave, as its constant suicides make a 'Skylark' 'to death a dead thing' - in Adam, its song is a roof to 'keep off the rains of weariness'. Ego-death might make Lumb one with the life-force surviving the physical cancellation Hughes anticipated as he wrote.

#23 (p. 188) relates a repeated dream of Hughes' (Faas 1980 p. 139). Lumb is reborn as the lioness-Goddess' own son, and watches himself, 'a gleaming mass', as Dunworth sees Hilda (p. 87), 'Elk-antlered' as in the crypt, after colliding 'with the earth' (p. 180), starting 'to get up' from 'the road's edge' (p. 179) 'like [the] discarded foetus' of 'the abortionist's knife'

(p. 181), yet 'already grey haired' (cf. p. 183) in Panta Rhei's 'blowing of bright particles'.

But birth (#24, p. 188) can be seen as abstraction, into the self, from nature's vipers, geese, elk and lions (here, tusks, mountains, sea, etc.). Such a model excludes what in us seems one with the Goddess, the 'clouds and stars' of inspiration. The 'self' it acknowledges is only the discrete consciousness whose 'flame' perceives and advances our Oedipal fall: how we 'rip up' the cycles of nature's womb with the 'sword' of Justice and 'torch' of Reason to find, not a son, regeneration, but Logos, who begets 'Nothing' ('Lineage').

#25 (p. 189) may have been inspired by Allama 42:

... the body is a wagon...

Unless you ride it
in full knowledge of its ways
the axle
will break,
O Lord of Caves.

(Ramanujan 1973 p. 149).

The intellect, which thinks of roads, not cycles, quests, not being, feels death is 'a wrong turning' ('screws' alerting us to the pun) and laments the tilted 'earth can't balance its load' 'to start' on the journey and the heavens' 'creaking' axles ever 'get there' - the destination being Logos' rationality. Consequently, Lumb's despiritualized 'coffin'-self does, as in 'Cadenza', take 'a wrong turning'. The 'creaking', really, is not an imperfection but the music of the spheres. Poetry is for the fatally pierced Lumb to circle on the spot of one north's fixed 'needle' (cf. p. 180).

The blackbird (#26, p. 189) indeed 'Balances' on the point of its full being; the badger's needle of utterance is its 'backbone'. The fatal 'grass-blade' of our own flesh is inherently loyal to the Goddess, the 'worm-dirt' underlying. But Lumb's flesh has been, in a way, burnt away; his plea, 'Let me be one of your warriors', is still not actual union: in #27 (p. 190) he retreats (as on page 184) into unimplicated lyricism. The sexual double ent-

endres (erections/ defile) simply recall the log's inadequate animal devotions. Again (#28, p. 190) bereavement rebukes Lumb: the elegy, as often, provoking an important poem. (The real-life 'you', Susan Allison, dying of cancer herself.)

#29 (p. 191) exemplifies how the very terseness and abstraction of Hughes' conceits seem to regenerate the emotional weight and immediacy staled in the narrative. The manner somewhat resembles Shakespeare's in Antony and Cleopatra. Sun and moon evidence, remotely, Nature's love for us. So, immediately, does death, the love-bite Lumb, the devotee, requires.

Lumb is now, half unconsciously, attaining enlightenment: the voice turns from anguish towards deliberate celebration. #30 (p. 191) represents enlightenment paradoxically as a thunderhead or tree's shadow. (Among the Soyot, 'one who is touched by lightning becomes a shaman' (Eliade 1964B p. 19).) The 'gloomy flap of lightning' - an image as far from logic in its authority as anything of Hughes' - is the 'sudden jagged darkness that rends [Lumb] apart' (p. 15): the thunder flushes the gossip-birds and Garten's 'tale that kills' the log. Sometimes, however - the contrast of Soto and Rinzai Zen seems evoked - the slow pain of time can itself bring mortal enlightenment ('veils of wrinkle' suggest 'Vale of Tears' - cf. p. 197 - and the Goddess' 'veils' (p. 185) of corporeal manifestation). In so far as Lumb's past is invoked, the whole adventure has redeemed him slowly.

Enlightenment follows suffering. Pleasure can be 'given away' (#31, p. 192) and renounced: but pain only 'paid down' by living it through. Crow's eskimo exchanged 'The pain' for intellectual hubris. Hughes demands a simpler honesty - such as perhaps this poem represents: Lumb is purchasing 'what can be no part of falsehood'.

He still laments his inability to meet the Goddess unveiled (#32, p. 192). Part of Lumb has died, however, and his grave is 'the print of the earth', running in circles: his 'memorial' is his spirit, which can encounter the Goddess, being drunk by her. Matter, spirit and art seem indistinguishable: the sycamore, like the unenlightened Lumb, is 'weeping letters' for the Goddess'

absence: but the Goddess too is 'singing'. As often, Hughes emphasizes the new monism by half-chiming 'form' (the hare's home) with 'fern' and 'waiting in the flesh' with 'weeping letters'.

The enlightened (#33, p. 193), rather than hanging on to their individuality, abandon self-consciousness and stretch out hands to pray to 'the hole which is bottomless' (p. 185) - such abandonment appearing to Lumb beyond a mere 'man' or 'woman'. But one's ego-death (#34) could seem to awaken one's spirit and make it one with the Goddess, whose 'granite' 'threshold' - the 'dark sill' of page 186 - indistinguishable now from the 'eyelid' - is 'Anointed' with the human blood (song) it grinds, and 'stirs' into new life. The threshold, after all, is not one to be passed - into the heaven of the 'Vegetarian': Lumb, constant, '[lets] in' (#35, p. 194) 'The untouched joy' of enlightenment.

Lumb is now able (#36, p. 194) to suffer for the Goddess' condition. Real things are not her 'brides, nor [her] grooms': her 'freedom' from death is an aloneness of constant bereavement, a 'cage' she paces. She 'can't stay with those trees' which will be unmade soon; it is not the river's parents - cloud, mountain, her - that pass away, but itself. The flowers 'look for' her - and 'look for' her sake - 'and die looking'. In a characteristically vaulting metaphor, Lumb himself becomes simply his grave (cf. p. 193), her tread.

If (#37, p. 195) to be born 'out of the earth' is to be about to die and 'already unconscious', we can bequeath no poetry, only 'a gagged yell'. But the last two lines re-interpret: to be 'near-fatally wounded' need not mean to be about to die: 'convalescence' is possible. This, as in Lumb's case, generates 'libraries' of new poetry, not the 'sodden paper', a blueprint of forgotten rituals, which Lumb on page 100 could not read.

#38 (p. 196) resembles #24 (pp. 188 - 9): birth separates our skin, eye, heart from the skin, eye and heart of everything. But Lumb, this time, does not 'dry' his flesh to light it, and turn into Krogon, but '[soaks] it all' and eats it, sacrificing selfhood and becoming 'the maneater', the artistic inspiration that #24 denied. When he has eaten himself (#39, p. 196), he can 'almost'

make a living alchemical steel man; the Goddess' actual groom: the steel is 'the river' of all life, incorporating the Goddess' 'sun', even when this particular world falls to 'fragments'.

In #36 (pp. 194-5), none of the animals seemed the Goddess' heirs. But 'Heaven and hell have both adopted' (#40, p. 197) the 'tiger', art (p. 182). Calves, parted from the mother-Goddess, choke the 'cry' of true being and grow communal - 'So much for calves'. The solitary tiger-spirit abandons its sleeping body like 'luggage' (cf. p. 180, 'baggage'), and feels 'safe' from death, like the reborn Lumb.

On page 27, Hagen shoots a dove; but his gun (p. 167) 'midwives' the animals from Eden. In #41 (p. 197), Lumb seems this dove, awakening (after his tiger's sleep) in the world of fallen matter, 'a vale crumbling with echoes' of the Goddess' music. The attainment of enlightened empathy 'opens' the 'eyes', but disorientates. If the gun was the midwife, Lumb's compassion must give birth to the dove: ironically he still fears he 'cannot bear it'. But Lumb and dove themselves grow indistinguishable: 'Am I killed?/ Or am I searching?' Maud's dove (p. 116) was the Goddess' bird (Venus' dove). Lumb need not - answering page 180 - 'search' for her now, as the dove is the 'centre' of himself, Ararat; 'north'. 'The compass'' needle will just spin, like the wheel; the rainbow-bridge's covenant - the dove's colour, as in 'The Dove Came' - is 'silking [his own] body'. Incredulous, he seems to have fulfilled the dream (p. 105) of 'bearing' the Goddess, and have found his 'Wings' of spiritual liberation.

There is still a danger that, after coming to his 'centre', Lumb will vegetate there. In Selected Poems, Hughes introduces at this point 'Lumb' from Orts (Moortown p. 144), though its desolate tone seems to belong earlier in the cycle. If Lumb 'waits', he is a 'castle' whose 'blocks of pain' - whose conscious being - alone keep out the 'banners' of besieging death; if he 'sets out', he is a 'kayak' whose pain is the stitching keeping him from 'the bottom of the Arctic sea'. The double-bind still seems a schizophrenic's; but Lumb

must set out: the unenlightened person (#42, p. 198) lives without 'moving' (anyone). 'He prays he will escape' suffering, but death 'arrives'. The poem plays on paradox: the living man is 'dead'; but Hagen's 'bullet' - Lumb's enlightenment - comes not as extinction but the demand to be, to try to 'sing'. The 'facts' of mortality remain 'inescapable' - for the unenlightened - but seem, syntactically, transcended by song. The 'cry' of true being is 'Incomprehensible [because it is] in every language'. The ego-death is the Goddess' 'kiss' (cf. 'Bowled Over'); if she 'misses' him she 'misses' him, like the bereaved lover of #36 (pp. 194 - 5).

The cycle has represented a series of retreats and 'closer' approaches to absolute, steely union with the Goddess, but Lumb has never lost consciousness and speech. He finally recognizes that this relative is itself his enlightenment, much as Attar's thirty birds realize they are themselves the Simurgh ['thirty birds' / 'source']. The world (#43, p. 198), as for physics, gets bigger, smaller, more intense.

#44 (p. 199) represents the 'closest' of the approaches to union here, and the cycle's apotheosis: Lumb contemplates the Goddess in the oak he once was. The 'wiggler of dazzle' (p. 82) or 'sudden jagged darkness' (p. 15) which once rent him 'apart... downwards', is now inverted, a climbing bond. (Black lightning (Scigaj 1986 p. 202) is Boehme and Paracelsus' image for the coniunctio oppositorum; visible lightning is the 'return stroke', from ground to sky.) The Veil of the Temple (life - p. 185) is 'grabbed' (l. 3) together again; the 'Agony' of the flesh is itself the 'temple' of the spirit, in which birth and death, 'Annunciation' and 'Agony', 'thunder' simultaneously. The stag-headed dead or winter's tree is now Yggdrasil, 'Waist-deep' in 'earth', uniting 'seas' and air: the Tree of Life (cf. #1) during whose 'moment' even the stars crumble; 'the pure well' of the river of yearly leaves and living things. Lumb's own eyes can embrace 'centuries' during an instant's 'pause', and are transient 'as gnats [trying] to winter'.

There is no definite end to Gaudete: the difficulty of the lyrics slows us down, to set us smoothly, changed Hughes hoped, in reality. It is left for Lumb to evoke (#45, p. 200) a continuity of enlightenments such as we were privy to, even in a man returned to ordinary life, his own 'house' (and still, perhaps, anticipating death). Lumb has lost his 'skin', the ego's selfhood, but the very 'grass' of flesh crumpled by death's tread offers spiritual illumination. The language here seems deeply moving in its restraint, refusing to elaborate upon the agony, joy or tension of continual cohabitation with infinity. What it does embody is the confidence behind Hughes' most elaborate attempt to argue himself out of the fear of death, to proclaim the adequacy of words, and to attain some sort of founded and defined faith in the earth, of which the poetry can imitate a little.

CHAPTER SIX: MOORTOWN

'The whole drift [of Moortown] is an alchemising of a phoenix out of a serpent' (Hughes in Sagar and Tabor 1983 p. 90): spiritual wings and self-reconciled intelligence out of Ophion's river of matter, Heraclitus' flames: front cover to endpiece. In so far as it contains almost the whole range of Hughes' styles, it is the most comprehensive exploration of his universal theme.

Moortown Diary

Despite the falsenesses and limitations I have suggested - the attempt to be both William and Dorothy, a dedicated bard and innocent of poetry - the Moortown Diary remains Hughes' most confident elusion of dualism, an attempt to write (until Orchard's death) a wholly 'up-beat' book of reconciled endings (1978 'Tape'). Although this must be placed in the context of Moortown's progression beyond the fall, and out of the mud, the cycle seems also singularly honest - indeed heroic - in its intensely personal refusal to impose Hughes' themes - guilt, the Schopenhauerian Will - upon experienced reality. 'If Schopenhauer', wrote Albert Schweitzer, who felt 'everything should end in a major key', 'instead of retreating with distinction... had been forced to take the post of schoolmaster in a poor mountain village... he would have acquired the deep conviction that life is not only a battlefield, but that it is at one and the same time a struggle and a victory' (My Life and Thought, trans. C. T. Campion 1966 p. 55). All Hughes' cycles are about 'victory', but the Diary, representing an actual farmer's experience, can replace the eventual alchemical apotheosis with the repeated, genuine excitements of primitive literature, as we 'know/ [the spring] is not going to die' ('March Morning unlike others'), or at the 'ceremonial' 'satisfactions' (Hughes in Sagar 1978 p. 243) of making hay.

That these poems were written 'as casual journal notes' (1989 p. xi) need not imply that they are crude, or even structureless. As early as 1964,

Hughes suggested Douglas' poems have 'the trenchancy of an inspired jotting' (1964 Douglas p. 13). Hughes explains 'meditating' in 'Happy Calf' (itself one (1980 'Moortown') of the 'direct' diary-entries): 'I remember thinking... "What a subject for an old Chinese painter!" This evoked the idea of a Chinese sage, on his mountain, in a trance, deep in Tao. The calf was obviously in a religious daze.... Our lost birthright. I kept all that from intruding with the single word "meditating"' (1989 p. 65).

The opening poem, 'Rain' (4/12/73), in a way re-enacts the birth of a language: 'Rain. Floods. Frost. And after frost, rain...' which is still not adequate - 'Mist-rain off-world' - to reality. (Hughes often starts a poem as simply as possible, ending with a more lyrical complexity; nearly all these 'diary-entries' are conscious of where they begin and end.) The first verb - describing individual animals' movement - does not come until line 9 (cf. 'March Morning unlike others'). Or else - as in the Oedipus choruses - different, groping voices seem to converse (one obsessed with the rain, one with cold) and converge upon the poet's role of everyfarmer. The conversation seems significant, for to perceive appears to ground the flowing world, impressionistically: 'A farm gleaming,/ Then all dull'. The third effect is of slow incorporation into the glimpsed land, from a sight of farms, to the close-up solidity of 'Brown water backing and brimming in grass', to the task of driving post-holes. The 'brimming world/ And the pouring sky' we have awoken in seem, astonishingly, 'the only places/ For [life] to be', nature revolving 'fox corpses' and 'calves' as one, leaves live as frogs and cattle 'under blackened backs' of inanimate stuff, 'sodden' fieldfares and 'the sodden wood'.

The cows ('Dehorning', 14/5/74) belong in the world's river, their eyes, in the farmer's 'crush', 'like the eye of a fish/ Imprisoned in air'. But responsibility, the fall, has 'lost' us our 'birthright' (1989 p. 65), animals' 'defence' of unreflecting monism. The farmers must empathize with the cow they dehorn, sitting 'in the dentist's chair' themselves. 'As if the horns

had been repeatedly sawn off me' (1989 p. 61). But language can also liberate one from the wheel's measured turning, to anticipate - or escape - sympathy. The 'brindle' will have a name, but that doesn't apply here (her sons could end on our dinner-plates): Hughes makes us suffer for one minute as one horn is sawn off; then just: 'the other side the same. We collect/ A heap of horns'.

Next, in both trade editions, 'Poor Birds' (10/12/73) shows language at a further evolution. 'The crush' was a real one; now dusk's 'Electrodes of stars' are a poet's indulgence, alienating our sympathy from actual starlings.

Finally (1979 order) language grows able to narrate 'Struggle's' story (17/4/74), everything 'We had been expecting', remember and feel guilt for - so the birth is already 'like a pieta' in the 'Easter-ly' daylight. Struggle dies but in 'Feeding out-wintering cattle at twilight' (17/2/74), 'The wood [becomes] a struggle - like a wood/ Struggling through a wood' as the sequence retreats from particular tragedy to the herd's 'joyful breathings'. Consciousness becomes the 'headlights' making brief sense of nature, this side of 'the near edge/ Where the world becomes water/ Thundering like a flood-river at night'. Images inspired by Panta Rhei seem, often, to be the most arresting here.

'Foxhunt' (27/12/75) introduces '[writing]... down' actual verse ('Xmas'), and the human world. (For us it 'Roars distantly' but through the fox's ears we can hear a whole 'suburb/ Of indifferent civilized noises'.) The year changes, and 'Lorry engines' are 'modulating on the main street hill', but Hughes again contrasts the road of intellect to nature's turning wheel. The fox 'runs' efficiently (to 'turn to iron' would save him from Panta Rhei but this - a frequent symbol here for stoic endurance - will not happen); the foxhunt-machine's 'Rolling stock' sounds 'rusty'. Though 'orchards/ And the hedges stand in coma', there will be more 'Big lambs' in spring; but 'The hunt/ Has tripped over... At the threshold', a bad omen for a marriage whose only sons are 'Dog-shit and dead foxes'.

The foxhunt is 'two days after Xmas'; 'On the third day' (3/1/75) the wheel already spins efficiently: 'Last leaves... Bowl along roads', 'Every twig-end/ Writes its circles', 'The river/ Thunders like a factory' (the enjambements emphasizing the active verbs); and the gale 'nearly [blows]... up the chymbley' the villager with his flesh burning as he laughs. (The flux is often represented by Heraclitus' bonfire here; and Orchard, with his 'cigarette comfort' (1979 p. 63), died of lung cancer.)

'Roe-deer' was written quickly (13/2/73) but seems more sophisticated in its contrast of gift and translation: fallen 'dirty' daylight '[revises] its dawn inspiration/ Back to the ordinary', just as these 'lasting seconds' will, 'lasting' in 'the processes of "memory", the poetic process' (1989 p. x), become an 'ordinary' event. The spirit-deer, from the spirit-dimension 'where the trees [are] no longer trees', hesitate in matter's 'all-way [and constant] disintegration', then fade; Hughes has 'missed the moment' (1989 p. xi). Secret deerhood represents an ideal of poetry (where even nature might have a pass-word), not, like the Thought-Fox, its realization on the 'lonely' snow-page.

Four or five diary entries are in themselves finished and important - and fully human - representations of all nature's circularity. One is 'Ravens' (15/4/74). Hughes, observing the whole flock, dead and living (and humanizing the geography: 'lawn', 'midfield'), understands the flux's paradox: 'It died being born'. This makes no sense to his nephew, who has 'eyes... only for' each individual lamb in turn, entering into them utterly: '"And did it cry?" you cry'. It is this crying that makes Hughes, too, pretend the dead lamb - its 'tissues pulled out/ In straight lines' not bound on the wheel - did cry, and give it life: perhaps because the child is so clearly Panta Rhei focused to a human point, the unfallen 'up-beat' spot-vision overcomes the conscious abstraction: the day of the lamb's birth and death demarcates geological eras: 'the skyline of hills, after millions of hard years', is 'Sitting soft'.

'February 17th' (written the same day as 'Feeding out-wintering cattle': many of these best poems date from early 1974) follows 'Ravens' with an inversion: strata topsy-turvy, a 'downpour... sunrise', a lamb head-over-heels that cannot 'get born', 'Strangled by its mother', a head severed to save a life. Responsibility and linguistic consciousness (we see Hughes 'Teaching a dumb calf') requires not moral or dualistic absolutes but constant compromise and inculcation. The Cave Birds' figure's redemption depended not only on his acknowledging his Goddess but his having, like Judas, betrayed her; and what seems so arresting and painful about this poem - like some fishing poems in River - is its emphasis that deliberately hurting, betraying and alienating oneself from life, must continue to be part of human consciousness' penance and salvation.

Dying, the lamb gains 'all earth for a body'. In 'Birth of Rainbow' (19/3/74), 'A daisy/ Mud-plastered [unmixes] its head from the mud' of the 'drowned sod', and Rainbow attains individual being, 'wet as a collie from a river'. The miracle, 'the highest crest of the round' wheel's revolution, is the point where the earth's curve intersects the 'pouring haze' of the spirit's bow. The rainbow immediately fades and 'the world' 'disappears' as 'morning' flows into 'squall-smokes' 'black as nightfall', but Rainbow exists.

'Coming down through Somerset' (8/8/75) summarizes the individual's position on the wheel, the longing that even dead things - 'passengers' of one's vintage - turn to iron and 'stay', 'like an iron nail/ Driven, flush to the head,/ Into a yew post'. The badger's 'masterpiece skull' and 'painted face' resemble the poetry Hughes writes to hang onto eternity: 'the high moment' on the wheel is not now a 'flash-glimpsed' morning-birth, but a lovingly-nursed death 'in the world-night'. 'How strangely/ He stays on into the dawn' - Hughes wants him 'To stop time': to stop, a long time; or to 'stop' (up) time's 'shrunken rivers' for him, 'Blocking time' (as in Parliament), 'A badge[r] on my moment of life' - 'Not years ago, like the others' he caught in childhood's eternity, 'but now', in the fallen state, an absolute inclusion:

'I stand/ Watching his stillness'. The half-protruding 'nail'-head is also Hughes' logos-head (and an image of rational numbness in 'The Head'). Yet, the final ambiguity claims, 'Something', skull or poem, is indeed bound 'to stay'.

This is one of the most 'fallen', retrospective poems in the cycle, 'Last load' (20/6/75) perhaps the least: haymakers, 'On all the little emerald hills', are wholly implicated in the weather's turn, finding it 'Hard now to remember' and recognizing that, in the present, 'you've lost those seconds forever'. Rain, when it comes, generally prefigures death: the 'tobacco reek' now could almost anticipate Orchard's, along with the subtly elegaic key: 'over the whole land... The tall loads are swaying towards their barns'. Hauntingly, the last image - 'singing heard across evening water' - translates to an alienation as great as the style permits, with its conscious lyricism, overview, sundering waters and reference back (like the 'elf-bolt' birds in 'Feeding out-wintering cattle') to unremembered legends of 'the deep lanes'.

The last six poems (1976) concern Orchard's death. His 'monument' is the fence built in the first poem. 'Deep under the roadside's car-glimpsed May beauty', it will never be seen: 'a great blank' is in the land's 'memory' ('The day he died'): this way of life seems one never building more of linguistic heritage than 'root-archives', the 'tomes' of 'mud-lane annals' ('The formal auctioneer'). In 'The day he died', the stanza after Orchard's death retreats to the ur-language of 'Rain': everything must start all over again 'in this slow realization of light'. Orchard has gone beyond the world, among 'Mars and Saturn and the Moon dangling in a bunch/ On the hard, littered sky' - the 'total darkness' ('Now you have to push') which alternates throughout the cycle with what little Hughes' eyes illuminate - and 'The bright fields ... have... come back without him'. His death is a rebirth for the land, 'Childlike... With... a great blank in its memory'.

Perhaps the most moving of Hughes' elegies is 'Now you have to push', envisaging Orchard's utter absorption in Heraclitus' flames - he is already utterly the land, 'This patch of ancient, familiar locale'. The poem - one long, controlled sentence - is a metaphysical conceit whose wit somehow sacrifices nothing of humanity, of unselfconscious dedication to the fact. It is one in which Hughes realizes the finest qualities of primitive verse - where 'most effective of all, perhaps, are the laments. "She has gone from us; never as she was will she return"' (1962 'Primitive Song' p. 781).

Prometheus On His Crag

Consciousness, dead with Orchard, returns to Prometheus. The sequence - a fairly early exploration of Hughes' mature theme of the attainment of reconciled being, and more exciting perhaps thematically than stylistically - is an offshoot of Orghast and it seems important to understand the vulture, for instance, as Krogon/ Logos, not as simply 'pain'. I think it acceptable to schematize the sequence in this way, since l7 - 'No chains - only sinews, nerves, bones' - is obviously intended to slide along the cycle, unzipping the allegory. Prometheus' opening 'I am' (l) is the divine voice of Coleridge's primary imagination: the freedom of creating what is beheld. The fall, however, is immediately - inevitably? - to qualify this claim by presuming 'Something' (natural suffering) 'has happened' to him, passively. His very assumption renders him passible, enchaining him: Krogon, who squats on us (by 3), is our own projection. R. D. Laing suggests Prometheus Bound as an image for the schizophrenic (1960 p. 189): merging, in one version, with his rock, to arrogate the 'I am' of individuated being, out of Panta Rhei, seems beyond him. 'The rock and the eagle can be seen as two aspects of the mother, to whom one is chained... and by whom one is devoured... [in] a nightmarish inversion of the normal cycle of feeding' (ibid.). 'Only through feeling responsible for the effects of one's actions, and learning to control them by

reasoned planning, regardless of spontaneous impulses and shifting feelings, can a sense of solidity of the I am be gained', itself 'necessary before the next step in the evolution of consciousness can be achieved' (Whitmont 1987 p. 62). Now, Prometheus just lets 'his mouth-mask far off// Loll in the light'. 'His laborious chest [lifts] him' and - on an impulse - he asks 'Am I an eagle?' 'I am' becomes 'am I', true being dislocated.

'Letting [one's] veins venture for [one]' and gulping 'huge clarity' could however be a way towards corporeal self-recognition, the questioning passivity of a new start:

Prometheus On His Crag

Relaxes

In the fact that it has happened.

(2).

If his 'brain' is 'simple as an eye', he is immune to rational despair. But the vocabulary (2) implies how his 'brain' 'strength' and 'prayer' will grow - through a kind of adolescent stage - from the staring 'eye' - that is, in the direction of rationalism, before reaching an enlightened maturity. If 'The blue wedge through [the] breastbone' represents the 'first fall', succeeding the 'I am' of human consciousness, the 'second fall', the loss of 'holy, happy notions', is the birth of Krogon, puritanism which turns nature's birds of flux and pain into another bird of pain, the vulture, Logos, the word. Reality (3) pains Prometheus and to earn the 'peace' of physical comfort he attacks nature with 'a world's end shout' - 'That... woke the vulture'.

The vulture, then, is Prometheus' corrupted vision of the world. But each instant a new Krogon kills and replaces the old; Prometheus (4) could escape what he mis-generated: 'Today is a fresh start'.

5, written after the 1973 sequence, is probably the first self-sufficient section, generator of its own symbols. Prometheus dreams he is not his whole eternal self but an individual 'liver' (the pun in 4), 'earth-soaked', touched by a flux 'of cold air'. The paraphernalia of judgment and 'revelation' which

the fall - Pandora's 'jar' or his own gift, fire - constructed round him, humanity's scapegoat, he 'resolves', 'maelstrom-molten', as a cow swallows the 'after'-effects of the calf she creates. Yet the 'afterbirth' only really midwives the creation, 'calf'-man possessing legs now to 'escape' 'over the dark earth'. The fall cannot simply be swallowed, nor consciousness, the Promethean absolute, '[emerge] mortal'.

Twice fallen, the spirit of mankind (6) has bitten off earth's potential voice. The vulture, Logos, the word, having betrayed Prometheus, he fears speech; religious expression lies dead as its Egyptian manifestations. Heaven's 'punishment', the fall, should have made us consciously eloquent, but our hearts hide in sand ('ostrich'), our brains, jammed by Creation's 'horoscope' (perhaps), are random as horoscopes, dumb as dead foraminifera. We have as much 'voice' as 'A monkey' (typing Paradise Lost?). Old wisdom about living, and dying, gets jumbled up: we do not mature properly, towards I am; even history regresses.

Prometheus (7) represents mankind, 'Arrested half-way' between absolute unplundered immortality and unconscious transience. The ancient unity of Hoan and Moa is symbolized only (l. 4) by 'Orghast' in his belly, uniting him to flowery and solar, earthly and heavenly, regrowth. Orghast might be released (8) from our mere 'numb bliss' by Prometheus' 'scream' of despair: the release, in Hughes' poetry, of the true nature, but not in itself, yet, prophetic speech. Prometheus' role seems to have approached that of the communal scapegoat; 9 (representative of the 'numb' style of the best sections, honest and plain but mathematically elegant) shows him able to speak but not to die, Christlike: the river of transience is 'Dammed to powerless stillness' in him. Disembowelment's near-death seems (ll. 13 - 14) his only genuinely soteriological utterance - but this comes from Krogon's mouth. If Prometheus will not be 'let' 'stir', he must determine to stir himself and discover the 'secret' under his 'stillness': he, not Krogon, must utter this secret; he, not Krogon (10), must balance 'the gift of life// And the cost of the gift'

and learn the fall is not worth 'nothing'.

These simply-presented facts speak to us but not to Prometheus. The following sections are more concerned to generate some degree of empathy with Prometheus' agony, as he tries and rejects solutions to it. (Its narrowness of empathy is probably the cycle's principal failing, after Cave Birds and Gaudete.) Dreaming (11) merely betrays the reality of iron, sky, sea. Singing (12) 'drugs', similarly. Merely lyrical poetry (cf. 'WIT'S END') seems unable to respond to the 'smoulder' and 'cities' consequent upon the fall (the theft of fire). Yet Prometheus (13) should not repent his creation of Heraclitean mortality and (14) the spinning wheel. A top actively 'leaps' upright as a result of its own passive wheel-spinning - as must Prometheus. Death (15) can only be managed within one's lifetime. Prometheus (16) cannot come to terms with his constant dying by convincing himself he is an effective scapegoat, since by now his suffering should have redeemed everything for us - and his 'Life-in-Death' does not end - as it did for the Ancient Mariner - to enable him to go among 'his people' and tell them a word of his story.

The vulture (17) is Logos, the word. But Krogon's cancellation - and he only exists in Prometheus' error - will not abolish language: Orghast, the redemptive part of consciousness - of earth and mind united - is 'A word' too. The 'theft' of this consciousness - the fall - which is behind Prometheus' punishment is as 'vital' (redemptive) as it is 'immortal' (repeated each day). Prometheus feels that if this 'word' is the 'vital' soul inside him, he cannot 'utter' it. But it is by holding it back that he dies, and bleeds, continually. In 18, he simply draws 'breath', whilst a mere lizard, a 'trickle' of earth's river, 'whispers'. 'Listening near [his] ear', the lizard knows what makes Prometheus' fallen condition 'so lucky' is the power of speech. There are two characters in Hughes' 'icon': the earth, and mankind. The latter must speak the former. But this poem resembles 'Hawk Roosting' in that Hughes' 'speaking for' the lizard inevitably insults - betrays - nature's unfallen, dumb absoluteness. (Lizards have good hearing: but if this one was

like the 'deaf adder' (Gaudete p. 183), its 'listening near the ear of Prometheus' would encapsulate, and suggest, the larger self-contradiction.)

Hughes seems to have constructed the cycle on a complex symmetrical basis: 16, for instance, recalls 6 (dumbness), 17, 5 (abnegation of divinity). 19 clearly answers 3: the word, which was one with Logos, is also (qua Orghast) one with Earth. But - as for 'The risen' - speech only redeems an instant: beyond which it asserts Krogon-like Absolutes, and reinforces the fallen state (as Hughes has shown 18 doing). The paradox seems beyond Prometheus.

In 2, Prometheus found 'his strength' by 'exulting' in simple reality. He gets back to the same passivity in 20 (an openness the opposite of the stubborn helplessness evoked in 9 and 10, the other two sections Selected Poems reprints). He thinks, now, before speaking, but the absence of absolutes finally satisfies him. 'I will find the answer is that an answer?' (Oedipus p. 11) - one dare not assert, yes. The vulture, therefore, is no longer Krogon, homing in like a mathematical solution. It is the nature, a bare nought, the wheel, which puritanism first mistook. It flies off Prometheus, and simply 'circles', surrounds, him.

That is Prometheus' redemption, the second fall unworked by Sogis. 21 celebrates the 'I am' betrayed in I, reintroducing images from most preceding sections to make a triumphant poem which remains dependent upon them (though there still seems a numbness, in the short sentences, a lack, for once, of conviction: five sentences begin 'And' but Prometheus' redemption is not an 'And', an afterthought: it is an ultimate 'So'). Prometheus 'sways to his stature', entering the point of his (spiritual) being, defined at the centre of the vulture's circle (the 'pearl' of 15). He is reborn out of, and into, the earth, 'His mother', as lava or crocus (the sudden introduction of the individuating symbolism remains potentially disconcerting). The image of silence bled from the unspoken word (17) is inverted: now 'The mountain is uttering/ Blood'. The ideal consciousness is not the Word made flesh, but

flesh rendered eloquent: flesh, Orghast, is our Word. In 7, Prometheus 'flowered/ Flowers of a numb bliss... Gathered by withering men': now, the Easter crocus is an 'evangel' - the 'good news' Prometheus could not tell us in 16, the newsprint of 4 cancelled. The chains, mortality, are not broken but transcended in 'the fourth dimension': 'blossoming means the establishing of a pure, new relationship with all the cosmos. This is the state of heaven' and of 'a man when he knows himself royal and crowned with the sun, with his feet gripping the core of the earth' (Lawrence 1968 p. 471) - Hughes' imagery also recalls James Wright's 1963 poem 'A Blessing':

Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

The 'cloudy bird', the vulture, now no longer mistaken as Krogon but recognized as a midwife, tears 'the shell' of Prometheus' flesh to give birth to new avatars: not death (14) but 'Only birth matters' (River p. 124). The 'falling crib' - the child's fall as it grows 'up' - is indeed 'upwards', to a higher state. Prometheus 'balances' the peacock's rainbow of possibilities in 20 - the task in 10 he delegated to Krogon's skepticism. The 'space-fright' (19) 'where the world floats' turns into the 'pouring' rainbow linking Hoan and Moa. 'The universe flows through its full circuit, materialized spirit and spiritualized matter, undivided and reconciled to itself' (Smith 1972, p. 96).

Earth-Numb

The alchemical rainbow lingers with the 'simmering' 'earth-brim' and 'red-hot iron' of the world's dawn in 'Earth-numb'. 'The general theme running through all the pieces under this title concerns events and confrontations along... the boundary... between awareness [of Earth], and unawareness, between the life of the one and the mere circumstances of the other [Krogon's deadness],

and the baffled sort of collision between them' (1980 'Earth-Numb'): our everyday negotiations, that is, attendant upon the Fall, rather than Prometheus' absolute self-liberation. The descent into the quotidian is more convincing than Gaudete's, though the poetry remains astonishingly variable, often both schematic and incoherent. (Hughes never recoiled from risking everything in new experiments - and does not regard publishing as a sacred rite.)

Rewritten over two or three years (1978 'Tape'), 'Earth-numb' is both a powerful visionary poem and a transition from 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning' to River. The poem depends upon a perhaps sentimentalized equality of fisher and river, 'Hunting... And [the] hunted', conscious and unconscious. The persona resembles Prometheus' vulture, the bird and mistaken as Krogon, and Prometheus, free and bound: his 'searching' is 'Like the slow sun... A surgeon operating/ On an open heart, with needles', but also 'a flower opening'; whilst the river grabs, 'A mouth-flash... trying to rip life [a 'liver'] off [him]'. This is one of the poems where Hughes actually tries to compare his role to the shaman's: when his song came suddenly right (1978 'Tape') it seemed to work as a hunting charm; having 'offered himself' to nature, he feels himself her priest, linking 'the river to the sky...the sky into the river' - Hoan and Moa, spirit and flux, united by means of 'fallen' consciousness. He is the 'surgeon', the alchemist, and the smith, making a homunculus, a 'steel spectre of purples/ From the forge of water'. (Cf. Gaudete p. 196. Smiths are often considered Shamans (Merchant 1983 p. 4).) Enlightenment is the mind's numbness to, and paradoxically therefore its self-discovery within, the Earth: 'an unconscious kind of consciousness' (1978 'Tape').

The next poems show representatives of our society mismanaging these essential negotiations with earth and time. 'That girl' (1974), whom consumerism's travesty of Panta Rhei hurries towards mating, then death, ends 'No better than a bacterium'. And she has been no more 'joyful' or 'coddled' or significantly married alive than dead, never having known the 'warm' of

shamanic inspiration.

'Nobody knows what to think' of death (p. 98). The dead are, indeed, 'coddled[,] with waterproofs', 'in their wedding chambers'. Under the cars built to drive off the turning wheel, 'the House of the Dead' is 'Open to everybody'. But 'the House of the Lord' is closed to tramps: even charity, 'Cash for renovations' not of the dead, nor 'the West Front Saints' crumbling features', but the living, brings down 'Christian Knights'' wrath, as we drift 'Out', brief candle, from the Cathedral, and Eden. Neither the Church, the rich German, nor the 'de-moral-ised' (p. 101), are concerned about our society's rejects, the 'effluent' and raw sewage on its own holiday to the seaside.

When these people reach 'Old age' (p. 102), Cartesian values - 'The light at the window, so square' - bring no comfort. Regarding ourselves as 'pieces' and 'clouds of star-gas' - an 'amnesia' of the 'real injury' of existence - we have no 'words' for the 'Something' - spirit - that 'tries to save itself' (as Prometheus saves himself).

Animals are slaughtered as sacrifices to 'Nefertiti' (1977), whose remove from death in her 'office' and painted face still leave her no better than an 'insect'. The ritual involves defloration - 'Pigs flinging their legs apart with screams' for the pen. In Shakespeare 'pen' puns on 'penis': the poem suggests men and women are equally guilty of the 'office' of betraying nature, via factory farming and - once again - failure to acknowledge our full, carnivorous nature, and that we, like slaughterhouse animals, die: cattle at 'market' are held in pens; Nefertiti's 'pen' is 'in the office'. This is perhaps Hughes' only poem apparently dependent on one of Plath's: 'The Fearful' (1962) uses Nefertiti to represent the 'Dead and perfect' childless woman who betrays her true nature for the sake of male admiration, becoming man-like herself.

'A Motorbike' (1967) is a more important poem, uniting the Juvenalian 'pity' and 'indignation' Hughes defines in Owen's poetry (1965 'Men Who March

Away'). The soldiers return not from the First, but the Second World War: following 'Nefertiti', 'surrendered their weapons/ And hung around limply' and 'herded into their home towns' permit the satire to be at the expense of those who feel 'The foreman, the boss, as bad as the S. S.' But the pun in 'working a life up' respects a genuine existential problem, and the pathos of the end - perfect and personal, unlike the surreal present of Gaudete - can be sharp (though, reading the poem, Hughes does not draw out the pity, or satire). The motorbike is 'outclassed/ By... Bombs', but is still a death, to be deliberately awoken just as danger falls asleep; natural death on the turning wheel is forestalled by 'the long straight west of Swinton'. Hughes has spoken of Edwin Muir's special 'place in [his] imagination' (1980 'The Reef' p. 4); 'A Motorbike' recalls 'The Return of the Greeks' in its juxtaposition of the soldiers' unhappy frustration with civilian life, and the individual's pathetic loss (Penelope's).

The pity of 'Deaf school' - where the step-by-step, expansive description is Lawrencian - comes clear of such structural complexities. Individuals, in these seven poems, have seemed increasingly victims of a civilization - here, a nature - which leaves 'the self' incommunicado, and for which they are in no way responsible.

Hughes in 'Earth-numb' mediated shamanistically between the fallen state and 'apparitions from tombs... In the river's black canyons'. But Photostomias (p. 107) - 'a galaxy' of Energy in the 'outer darkness' - is a 'ghost' that 'craves' for admittance in vain, peering in 'At the sunken window' (cf. p. 102) of a rationalism that cannot cope. The divine body, he is a 'radiant host' inviting us to communion, a 'feast, charged with lights': but no-one comes, to receive the 'ghost' of spiritual illumination. And (2) we need not go to the sea's depths to find a sense of the spirit. Photostomias' miracle is 'no further' from doubting Thomas' 'numb finger' of rationalism than the glow-worm; 'The Peacock butterfly... Is just as surely' stigmatic proof of the miracle of life's one constant Resurrection:

Blossoms

Pushing from under blossoms -
From the one wound's.
Depth of congealments and healing.

The 'wound' is Einstein's vision (1) 'Of the gravity/ With which this Universe shall consume itself', an intellectual's despair; and also Prometheus' earnest of being - despair accepted, to transform it to 'opium' 'bliss' - 'volcanic, meteoric ooze/ Opens an eye'. Life - 'the tiger/ In his robe of flames' or the 'heather-flower' - seems to transcend universal death: 'Earth is gulping the same/ Opium as the heart'. The poem makes a hinge for Earth-Numb, suggesting it is our business, Promethean, to balance (3) the despair of 1 and the hope of 2, Krogon's 'decatalogue' and 'rainbow' covenant, to see 'Creation's hammer' or helpless 'Nothing', miracle or machine.

These poles resemble the two interpretations of love Crow was trying to decide between in 'The lovepet'. The man in 'Second birth' must listen to 'what [life, or a loved one] says now'. 'Nothing else can speak for it'. He can choose to swallow and void the earth-Word, like an animal, carry it, like the unenlightened, or, finally, like the hero of Cave Birds after his 'scream', die, towards speaking enlightenment. Hughes presumably rejects the Yogic 'against-the-stream' return to the point of origin, and thence to Nirvana: 'Longsight' tries, like Krogon, 'Living in uplooking fear', to stop the cycles of life and death, Yes and No, having, like Krogon, attained an abstract overview of the dialectic. Only concentration on the individual case seems to redeem the 'bitter' 'laws of space and matter'. Ironically, the preservation of Yes becomes itself a dedication to No, to sterility.

'Life is trying to be life' translates this dialectic into human terms. The poem is one of Hughes' greatest and most compassionate: he has introduced it (1980 'Earth-Numb') as 'an answer to the question - how live is life? How dead is death?' and, in a more recent reading, an argument between 'Life-in-Death and Death-in-Life' over what in life is 'most alive'. The triple Goddess' life-in-death, then - the inextricability of the two, upon the wheel -

is contrasted with Krogon's deathlike pursuit of continuous life. More exciting, for me, is the way Hughes reproduces, perhaps subliminally, tracts of schizoid case-history. 'Death' is the shadow, the double whom the schizophrenic fails to manage properly, so turns into. In our schizogenic culture, a 'good' baby can be 'a child who has in some way never come alive' (Laing 1960 p. 198). 'Realness and life may not any more be directly felt or experienced, although the sense of their possibility is not lost' (*ibid.* p. 155). 'Death', who 'only wants to be life' and 'cannot quite manage' (like the man in 'Bedtime Story') is 'weeping... As for a mother it cannot remember', or who has rejected 'it'. (Laing's patient James called his wife 'it'; as for Crow, schizophrenia involves a kind of sexlessness.) Laing recounts the case of his patient Julie, whose 'self-being had become so fragmented that she could best be described as living a death-in-life existence' (*ibid.* p. 212; Laing's italics). She seems to be simply what she sees ('That's the rain. I could be the rain'); Death ('is it a kitten?'; cf. Prometheus' 'Am I an eagle?') 'stares at the windowlight and cannot make it out'. (Exteriorize it; and, within the book's symbolism, make sense of the energies beyond reason's windowpane.) Like the deaf children, 'It learns to talk, watching the others' mouths'. It cannot feel its self-being: it 'stares at its fingers and hears: "Look at that child!"'. It is 'Tortured by daisy chains' (the binding flux of life) 'and Sunday bells'. (Julie called herself a 'toll'd bell': a belle, Laing interprets (p. 203), who was told what to do too much.) 'It is dragged about like a broken doll' (Julie called herself 'Julie doll' (pp. 210 - 11); as a child she confused herself with a doll which, critically, got broken). 'Little girls playing at mothers and funerals', meanwhile, already begin their individuation towards adulthood. The schizoid soul 'is unable to incorporate anything.... In a world of wet, it cannot quench its thirst' (*ibid.* p. 156; cf. 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' ll. 119 - 122). Like Longsight - Death sees not the river but 'the grass/ In its position just as yesterday' - the Ancient Mariner, claimed by 'The Nightmare LIFE-IN-DEATH' (l. 193), cannot die

and is distanced from Photostomias' marriage-feast, death and conception, telling 'his horrible tale': his sin has alienated him from his full being.

Life itself would come with the Scream, 'the shout in joy', Gaudete's lightning enlightenment that blasts 'the lonely oak', leaving it 'empty' (of leaves) like 'the antlers of the Irish Elk'. This emptiness is 'death', but 'not' Death, because it reveals where there was life, self-sacrificing self-perpetuation, the thread 'in the cave-wife's needle of bone'. A shark regrows teeth continuously: each individual, who (cf. 'Criminal Ballad') accepts the need to kill and 'lament', is shed from the 'head[-]land' of all 'life' upon which Death (the Mariner) may never set foot. The weird ebb and flow of argument here - the return, after the exhilaration of lines 23 - 5, to a subdued openness superficially like the opening's perplexity - represents Hughes' refusal to translate the pity of mental illness into chiliastic prophecy. He lets the poetry tell of the true being one has lost.

'A citrine glimpse' reflects Prometheus' 'golden'-age ideal as Earth's mouthpiece. But the earth's quake, anticipating '[singing] through real mouths' is itself puritanically misunderstood - as rationalism's cry chokes itself, perhaps irredeemably. The persona cannot 'lift' the earth 'in his arms' but is '[hanging] / A nerve torn from the root of the tongue' - an element of consciousness that cannot link Promethean brain to earth's body's tongue: the world appears an aberration from Logos' absolute, the wolf a 'deformity'. Earth anticipated 'only days' to wait. But days - each new Krogon - seem eternity. Mankind (p. 119) becomes the Idiot not recognizing the 'Rains' of decay and 'krait' (snake) of life (1), the grinding of matter ('illusion') and the sunset of death (2), the reabsorption into nature (3), and the nothings of physics (4), are our intended 'dimension'. Consciousness is not an actor who goes home after an hour upon the stage, escaping from the river of life (1), to the desert of death (2), to the stars (3), and then a 'HOLE' through to something else (4): our 'significance' lies in accepting our candlehood.

'Actaeon', which, divorced from a stylistic adventure like Crow's, seems

somewhat foursquare, was also intended for Cave Birds, being 'based on the death of Socrates' (Hughes in Gifford and Roberts 1981 p. 260). Nature's avenging Eagles, in Cave Birds, become beagles: a disorganized, lifeless world-view kills and dismembers the rationalist. Just as 'James' considered his wife a robot (Laing 1960), Actaeon - 'the hunter who looked too close at the wrong woman' (Oedipus p. 39) - stares with scientific objectivity at the naked Goddess, imagining her creatures 'useful gadgets' to be factory-farmed, used to test cigarettes, or whatever: he has 'paid for' this through the Fall. 'He could not see her face' - the stitched-together baboon-beauty (Gaudete p. 104) - Earth's 'jigsaw parts' might be conceived as holons in one living creature. For Western Man, 'life [has] ceased', and art, imitating nature's 'comfortable wallpaper' of the human room, is fragmented too, 'decorating the floor'.

'Seven dungeon songs' is the most assured and aesthetically compelling vatic sequence here. (In Selected Poems Hughes finds he can simplify the structure by omitting 1 and 6.) 1 implies how each 'soft-brained' generation, seen, by Lockean scientism, as a 'tabula rasa', can, when adult and 'hardened', be liable to make puritanical judgments ('Wolf!') against the Goddess (the earth, carrying us among the stars) and turn into a new Krogon. In 2, this has - as if in an unpreventable instant - happened: despiritualized, nature seems fragmentary dead-matter ('space-earth'). Krogon 'consecrates' to his ends each new generation only Moa, imprisoned in her 'Dungeon', can actually beget, as her potential champions: he himself would (leaving 'names' only) be Logos' 'Nothing' without her space-mud spirit. In 3, one potential champion is armed. But Krogon has made nature seem like a vulture, squatting on the persona. Nature's asking him to get up himself, like Prometheus, and himself cancel Krogon's fictions, is interpreted as her hostility: in 4, the persona mistakes her for a mere obstacle in his avenging path, and seeks Manichean light instead. He has submitted to the fiction 'like the already-dead', the desacralized. Light, really, is a tree growing from earth. It, too, laments

earth's purpose is betrayed. The avenger (5) now conceives his body, imperfect and circular, is nature's 'evil will's' corruption of Logos' straight absolutes. Rushing counterwise, not moving to earth's moves (cf. 7), he can find no such 'steady place' on the turning wheel. As in 'A citrine glimpse', the warrior does not stand, be, or speak for the earth, but '[dangles] and [dances]/ The dance of unbeing'. Eventually (6) he anticipates a Logos-like 'final justice', rejecting earth as 'humbled' 'rubbly dust'. He expects the earth's old oracles to speak without his own effort: humans are staring 'witnesses' merely, 'graves/ Of silence'. Earth has failed to make a champion to 'speak' for her: 7 seems to represent her final despair - only an impossibly inhuman body 'Might speak [her]'. Mankind is simply earth's Jungian deathly 'shadow', which must be cancelled: our moving 'to [earth's] moves' becomes part of the impossible 'If'. The positive side to the poem is that human consciousness has nevertheless 'spoken' it.

It is characteristic of these poems' bleak sincerity that Hughes should return from an abstract attempt to speak the earth to the problem's everyday negotiation, 'A knock at the door' (p. 129) and 'a shatter of your expectations'. An emissary of earth - humanity unaccommodated of ideals, the 'tied rawness' of the fifth song with 'Its glistening full veins' - visits Hughes' own rationalism: the tramp's 'sheltering bulk' becomes the vulturine nature of the third song. 'A hurt wildness stands there for help/ And is saying something', but earth-speech, 'Ducking under speech', seems beyond you: 'you can't decode' it. 'He waits for you/ To feel through to his being alive'. The poem asks sympathy's sensory interaction, to feel 'dagger-stab glances' in the 'great nerves to the eyes'. But in this world, 'MONEY' seems needed first. Unimplicated charity fails: mankind will only 'fall within two hundred yards' once more. As in 'February 17th', to do good seems itself to compromise everything. Like the narrative of Gaudete, the attempt to speak for the everyday world here is full of innovation and commitment, but comparing the effect of Edwin Morgan's 'At the Snack Bar' might suggest that Hughes has again -

after the inimitable splendours of the dungeon songs - trespassed beyond what he then felt happiest handling.

Many 'Orts' are byproducts of the creation of the Gaudete epilogue.

'Speech out of shadow' (11), one of the best of a variable selection, in some ways answers the last dungeon song: the persona, as if hopelessly, seeks the Goddess, beyond the 'veil', the sun beyond the 'shadow' of fallen reality. But, like Lumb, he makes 'Speech out of shadow', redeeming the fall even as he laments it, just as the 'tamed' 'falcon' is a symbol for effective ritual 'mystifications' in 'The Dove Breeder'. 'Night arrival of Sea-trout' (13) is an utterly compelling invocation of the immanence in icy reality. The shaman catches earth's spirits in his drum; the rituals of year- and corn-king help accommodate nature, so people almost hear 'Earth singing under her breath'. Terror at the ubiquity of devouring death, 'the river's hole', becomes, throughout Hughes' best work, itself redemptive.

'Prospero and Sycorax' (24; 1970), one of Crow's most accomplished (and literate) songs, represents Hughes' poetry at its grimmest and angriest: it sounds like a poem of political protest, and I would claim the myth is not purely abstract, timeless. Earth, 'the blue-eyed hag', is conscious that Krogon's 'blind' illogical Logic will always find the 'death' of spiritual being - and the 'death' of nature - 'Easier to live with' than the experiences in Cave Birds. The whole world can end through an absurd misapprehension, a hallucination, which 'must be discounted', St. George mistaking the hurt princess' 'screams' for an aggressive 'dragon'. None of Hughes' poems seem to make the folly, and hopelessness, of our condition so frightening.

14 also claims our 'Flight from Egypt' - where Socrates' Cock is resurrected - was the inevitable consequence of the fall (our Promethean theft). Fallen consciousness seems to have had 'only [one] beast available': Socrates, 'The ugliest of the ugly', the donkey, Rationalism, and patriarchal religion, which lose men the bride, inner and outer nature.

'Lucretia' (8) by contrast celebrates nature's regeneration. The Goddess'

betrayed innocence will overtake 'Englishness', the 'suppressive-of-everything-under, bluffing, debonair' puritanism which, Hughes understands, Shakespeare's parable anticipated (1971 Shakespeare p. 198). Krogon, like a glacier retreating, has only 'jolted her cup' of fertility or interrupted 'the river of honey'.

Several 'Orts' assert the absolute adequacy of words: Dartmoor granite (3) works with life, and words with earth, to one end, survival. Words, 'what adheres/ To the lips' stir', engraved on 'Granite headstones' by 'soft-hand absence', remain, like shadows of the hands that carved them. 'Poets' (6) wait for a 'puff' of inspiration, to fly. When they die, the world returns to the state before 'the first word lumped out of the flint', but the poem presents this as an apocalyptic chaos: the world only exists now in how we speak it. 'The Cathedral' (9) - art, or speech - is the 'ghost' of its builders, like coral reef or skull. But if this 'life' was breath, words are breath too, and as real as earth - inspiring us, killing us finally, or - as Krogon - enchaining us (these lines adapting the rejected Cave Birds' poem, 'Your Mother's Bones...'). Without language (17), Panta Rhei is a 'constant/ Of ignorant life', death alternating with

... that exhausted ecstasy
The loaded hunters of the Pleistocene
Never recorded either.

In Hughes' poem, however (he presumably recalled 'I heard a fly buzz when I died', Dickinson, poem 465), linguistic consciousness - something more than the spider's 'Intelligence' - makes the fly's death a lasting monument; and something personal.

Other 'Orts' celebrate the reciprocity of vision. Our eyes (1) accept 'the candidate/ For being'. This task of realization wearies the rational 'brain', but the inner spirit always welcomes the earth. Their marriage flies clear of time, or (15) despair. 'Look back' (16) is uncharacteristic of Moortown in its liberal acceptance of a manmade image, and its gently

human quality. We exist in others' consciousness, but the eye of poetry can also 'see' and 'notice' and somehow guard us. 19, again, is able to see the Goddess - or fail to 'see' her - in an express train. ,

'Heatwave' (4; 1962, in Recklings: Hughes has now fully recolonized Wodwo's exuberance) shows 'human rubbish' drifting on the world's river; but the 'sundown' of death reveals us too to be subject to it. Our bones 'melt' in awe at the Goddess, the leopard. In 5, the M5, our travesty of the river 'going nowhere and everywhere', also leads to death - by 'lead', or 'carbon-monoxide' poisoning.

Earth-Numb refuses the positive conclusion of Prometheus. Buddha , in 'Tiger-psalm', celebrates the triumph of life but 'The stone' is an elegy, like those that end the Moortown Diary. It is probably the poem's very restraint that makes the final conceit - 'she', like the harebell, will out-live time - such a genuine assertion that 'Something/ Has to stay' (p. 49). (Taoism's passive, resigned ideal is often figured as 'the Uncarved Block', which is 'forever nameless'.

Only when it is cut are there names.
As soon as there are names
One ought to know that it is time to stop...
(Tao te Ching, s. 72).

The intense, personal emotion of the elegy, then, subverts the oriental teaching.)

'Stained glass' suggests that imprisoned Moa, 'Dreaming rituals of moon-religions', the 'dark world/ Hanging on [the] dark tree' of the fallen state, can only be championed, and reconciled to Hoan, by a feminine Sogis (resembling rather - 'Her lance was her naked waist' - Ransom's 'Judith of Bethulia'). A better poem is 'A god' (1976), representing a midway state in Prometheus' struggle towards self-liberation. The god remains the scapegoat of ends he cannot comprehend; like the creature in Moortown, unrisen from 'mud', he 'cannot be born', his 'head hangs'. Prometheus, when born, can hold the earth. People are half-way to being born like this, but cannot 'understand what

[has] happened', or that they have 'become' earth's mouthpiece.

Adam and the Sacred Nine

In the Selected Poems order, this poem - as dark as anything Hughes has written - ends Moortown. But in the original edition, Adam follows Earth-Numb, anticipating not the redemption of Prometheus, the absolute, but of everyman. (In Selected Poems, again, 'The song' of puritanical retreat significantly terminates Adam.)

'The idea is that Adam has, as usual, fallen.... His creator... sends down nine birds to become his guardian exemplary spirit' (1980 'Adam'). They 'each in turn bring their gift of "how to live", for him to accept or reject' (Selected Poems p. 238; my italics). To 'live' is to fulfil one's being, to enjoy absolute energy, to flesh spirit in a body equal to it, and not lie hand stretched out in the hope God will be able to grasp hold of it. 'It is the Deed of life we have now to learn' (Lawrence 1968 p. 510). The form is one of Hughes' simplest but most satisfactory - though (without 'Light' and 'Bud-tipped twig') potentially simplistic and more than half an excuse for seven of Hughes' most splendid visionary nature-poems. American Indians take animals as existential exemplars: 'the Redtail teaches us to have a broad view of things, while not missing the stirring of a single mouse' (in Snyder 1977 p. 87). Or Fleming and Macy (Seed 1988 p. 88) describe a contemporary 'ritual' - a spontaneous drama - advancing a recognition of oneness with the earth. 'One after another the [animal] beings offer their particular powers to the humans in the center'. Attempts like Robinson's, however, to show how, in Adam, each bird's behaviour translates into particular human terms, and how each example progresses beyond the last, appear somewhat unproductive: the sequence seems imaginative, decorative and static.

Adam (p. 159) cannot escape his role as earth's 'host' (p. 170) or mouthpiece, a creator of what he perceives, since even Krogon's song ruffles

'the stones' 'indifference'. The wren's 'song sings him' but Adam's song, rejecting the world, rejects his body too, 'the empty grave' of a living selfhood 'not yet born'. He communicates less ('morse' p. 160) than a squeaking mouse. His spiritual impoverishment accompanies technology's supramundane aspirations. Rituals cancel the 'double', but this dream masters him 'like a giant tabby'. He dreams towers and aeroplanes to reach a Manichean light; but the birds' wings establish their own centre of being, as Adam's footsole must. If Adam is 'Rigged only with twigs', his own 'bulldozers' will destroy him; creature comforts seem nothing against the 'wind and rain' of death. 'The diamond body' - the Cave Birds' hero's 'gem' of 'self' - is the Taoist ideal of enlightened selfhood (The Golden Flower) - which is defined, as by the birds, in proper relation to an environment only 'bruising' Adam.

The following poems are among Hughes' best, even the snaking unpunctuated progressions of 'The sole of a foot' reading clearly and inevitably. The simple style now re-admits effective enjambement ('... into the target/ Collision') and unites the analysably efficient ('Screams guess its trajectory'), the understandably emotive ('Calling softly to the fixed lakes') and the unadulterated vision of 'her voice of thunder/ A piling heaven of silver and violet', which takes over completely in 'And the Phoenix has come'. Description and imagination, however, are inseparable throughout the poems. Each bird - eating, nesting, then dying - is still 'a first, last, single blow', its eternal manifestation, shedding individual generations, 'Papery ashes/ Of the uncontainable burning'. (The individual's death is emphasized less as the cycle proceeds: the Phoenix is an ideal of immortality.) Earthly bleakness, where 'Heaven eats. Earth is eaten.// And earth eats and heaven is eaten', generates not 'bulldozers and cranes' of modern efficiency, but every manner of divine 'excess' (p. 162), in the birds more perhaps than in any other life-forms.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SOME WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Hughes' (later) children's writings ask to be considered on the same terms as his books for adults. Season Songs shows his poetic technique at its most instinctive, witty and unrestrained: in as far as the better poems here are so innocent of received structural expectations, taste and sobriety - and 'innocence' perhaps describes better than 'simplicity' Hughes' ideal of what to write with - they should be seen as among his most important. It is in his children's work that he has been most successful at writing his way beyond the Fall: the sense of enlightenment, and of respect towards nature, becomes profound. Season Songs gets its orientation from the structure of the seasons (and of a bullock's life: 'Right from the start... oxen on spits'); human affairs are revealed in their real, final context, the earth's - whose birds sing

Not knowing who lives in the house, or who has lived,
Or what year this is, or what century this is...
('He Gets Up in Dawn Dark').

But now the 'master' of this house seems able to communicate with and help the animals with his 'quiet, meaningless words'.

Another structural device in Season Songs is to alternate (ding-dong in the revised 'Autumn' and 'Winter') freely-written nature-poems and stanzaic Songs of Innocence (a style going right back to 'The Little Boys and the Seasons', 1954). Hughes' wayward tendencies and expansive, impulsive genius might seem unsuited to this more restrained, decorative versification, where any lapse of tone is disastrous. But 'There Came a Day', 'The Seven Sorrows' and, especially, 'Leaves', convince as whimsical, but utterly felt, ballads. (Even more compelling, in its marriage of urbane, comic utterance and barbaric rhythmic urgency is the Farmer's song of the scapegoat fox in What is the Truth?:

... And he's nailed our fear of darkness to his four paws dipped in quickness,
Our cowardice a nail
In the white tip of his tail,
With the limestone from our hearts, he's whitewashed his underparts,
And he flees us like a robber, says the Hunting Horn...
(p. 93).)

'December River' (Season Songs 1985 p. 80; 1974) was one of Hughes' first
'River' poems. As in River, acute observation -

Blackly
Crusty tricorne sycamore leaves are tick-tocking down
To hit the water with a tiny hard crash -

unites with an unrestrained fertility of metaphor ('express lights/ Are riding
behind bare poles') and images whose music and mathematics bear much of their
burden ('Leaves spinning and toiling in the underboil') - this last element
will be further developed, as the heart and nerves of the living poem.

'December River' is as much like a piece of nature, however, for the number
of ideas, or responses to nature, within it, to seem surprising: the 'fire-
baked thigh' is also that of Ceridwen, winter's hag; the salmon's task is
'Of getting right through to the end and beyond it'; the need for total em-
pathy and scapegoathood is suggested ('Jupiter crucified and painful'; 'I...
am admitted/ To glance down...'), as is the mind's longing to stay the wheel,
'while the moment still [holds] open', and win a 'steady name'; nature, mis-
interpreted, becomes a 'stare'; the 'backwater [milling] rubbish' is not
overlooked.

'A March Calf' is one of the most accomplished poems here. Its urgency
and purposefulness (surfacing in the apparently inevitable division into
stanzas) is generated by its being as much about the Fall, and lost innocence,
as a calf: the narrator is Krogon, '[blocking] the light, a bulk from space',
and implicated with the 'Butchers developing expertise and markets': we cannot
find ourselves ourselves, or, Prometheus, stand, or moo. The poem therefore
begins with a humanization diminishing the calf, an almost vulgarized diction
(a wedding natty get-up'), and the trudging rhythms of merely factual vision

('standing in dunged straw// Under cobwebby beams, near the mud wall') - it witnesses to Hughes' abilities that we still sense this will become a genuine poem. But even to watch the calf seems redemptive: by the third stanza, the language has attained a purity and simplicity as if the calf were speaking: 'A little at a time, of each new thing, is best'. Soon, the poem recoils again into the observer's ironic, whimsical apartness; the calf is 'shut up in his hopeful religion'. The movement towards, and away from, enlightenment and understanding is repeated, with recoils at 'What did cattle ever find here...', 'Hungry people are getting hungrier', and 'Unaware of how...'. At this point, it seems clear that the calf is ignorant, the narrator informed, of the reality of existence: the calf's 'whole lineage/ Has been tied up' into a turning circle of generations, a 'race' where it is impossible 'to win'. But the last stanza suddenly moves into quite a different plane of poetry, and the calf is imagined '[plunging] out' of merely human ken, 'winning' the argument and coming 'free on the surface of such a wideness', 'present at [the miracle of] the grass'. 'Black is the earth-globe, one inch under' ('Two Legends') - and the lines recall to me Ransom's Janet, 'Running across the world upon the grass' ('Janet Waking') - but the poem champions Being and innocence against fallenness and experience.

In two poems in particular, 'Swifts' (1974) and 'Starlings Have Come', Hughes uses the particular stylistic freedom and outrageousness characteristic of Season Songs to push language even further towards the ineffable excess and strangeness of nature - to greater effect, perhaps, than ever. ('Swifts', characteristically, edges, like the Moortown Diary entries, into a far more palpable lyricism to finish itself - the energy of the rest of the language works so obviously against 'finish' or 'closure' of any kind.) The anthropomorphism ('international mobsters' with 'Speedway goggles'), self-contradictions ('mole-dark labouring' of flight) and overblown exaggerations make 'Swifts' also a kind of deliberate crime against the real nature of swifts and the aesthetics of poetry. The sense of the poem is of guilty exhilar-

ation, and of guilt: Hughes makes us associate the swifts' energy not being his (or 'ours') 'any more' not with the rats' depredations, but his inability to help the undernourished fledglings. A narrative frankness like the Moor-town Diary's prevents the theme of guilt from seeming contrived or self-pitying.

In another important poem, 'A Crane fly in September' 'cannot be helped in any way'. Though Hughes' better nature poems impose no direct, humanizing emotional response upon the strangeness they describe, full, Promethean being is clearly to be pitied and sought fearfully, as much as envied.

In 'Apple Dumps', Hughes turns the self-betraying buffoonery of 'Swifts' into a structural device. The conceit - the human response - is put in charge of the trees and the poem and, significantly, drags us, as it grows more serious, adult and 'fallen', from a spring festival into a nuclear winter. The visionary triumphant Blake plate of 'a dawn-lipped apocalypse' seems to carry with it violence and disaster. 'The Harvest Moon' (1974) 'grows up' even more deliberately from the opening clownish rhymes towards the religious (or sexual) imagery of:

Till the gold fields of stiff wheat
Cry "We are ripe, reap us!" and the rivers
Sweat from the melting hills...

(where the simultaneity of naive craftsmanship and visionary splendour recalls not Blake, but Samuel Palmer or Paul Nash).

The most entirely successful section of Season Songs is undoubtedly 'Autumn': a sense of loss and exile perfectly tempers the evocative exuberance. The fourth 'Autumn Nature Note' explicitly makes landscape a metaphor for emotion - a 'traditional' trick Hughes would normally be wary of. The same metaphor is implicit, even more poignantly, in the first 'Note': the beautiful restraint of 'The laburnum-top is silent, quite still...' is rare after Lupercal. The tree is also the poet, rarely admitting natural joys and energies, the goldfinch 'sleek as a lizard' who soon

... with eerie delicate whistle-chirrup whisperings
... launches away, towards the infinite

And the laburnum subsides to empty.

'Goose', the best poem in Under the North Star, bears comparison with the bird-poems in Adam. Like them, 'Goose' misrepresents and betrays its subject in one way that 'Swifts' does not: it presents an icon of (here) loveliness, freedom, and, one gathers, joy, rather than an observed, suffering bird: the viewpoint, if anyone's, is, as in Adam, God's (in heaven). Outside a structure like Adam's, the sentimentalization might trouble one. The poem, like Adam's, hangs from inner musical patternings ('South, south', 'high, high' etc.) but this, outside the larger structure, could seem self-indulgent too: 'North, north/ North, north' really serves to display the line 'Wingbeat wading the flame of evening'. Imagery of such quality, I think, fully redeems this poem; it has a healing function, awakening the imagination and the sense of wonder at the world; but the problems with many late poems are already in embryo.

What is the Truth? avoids these problems, of rarefied solemnity and false indulgence, by returning to plainer styles. Though the descriptions of most animals are imaginatively thorough rather than aspiring, the book could have been a very ambitious one: Cave Birds is recalled in the abstraction of the souls of everyday modern people - 'so clever, and yet so ignorant' (p. 9) - towards their re-education by spiritual beings. 'When they are asleep, they are widest awake' (p. 9). But the plot is more pretext than purpose, and the Chaucerian echoes can only disappoint: Hughes, though he represents the human responses of surprise and wonder, is not very concerned about how his characters' different occupations engender different attitudes (towards nature), nor how these attitudes can interact, the poems compete with each other, or a new plane of awareness be attained (our dreams - normally, here,

anyway - are already enlightened). The colloquial is certainly employed with Chaucerian flair, and the voices' elaborate counterpoint towards one plain conclusion - God is all the animals (even the Vicar finds him an anti-climax) - remains fascinating. ('God', in the later children's books, is both 'Nature' and the Logos whose folly departs from, and leads back to, Nature. Creativity involves both holy vision and fallen consciousness. In Tales of the Early World, God's ideas differ somewhat from his maltreated mother's - his creation cannot really accommodate the force of her Tiger - but are not actually evil.)

Hughes' imagination and ingenuity have not begun to falter in What is the Truth?, but the greater reach and independence of some of the earlier poems he includes perhaps stand out. On page 99 is a fine river-poem; 'Foal' was first published in 1978, 'Dead Vixen' in 1981:

... I waded the river's way
Body and ear leaning
For whatever the world might say
Of the word in her womb
Curled unborn and dumb....

The understatement of its conclusion (adopting 'waded') is moving: all the vicar finds is the fox:

Ears on guard for her searchers
She had risked a sleep
And misjudged how deep.

Only in the last three poems do the book's implicit, slowly-explored dyads of mind and matter, art and death - can poetry please God? - come to clear expression. 'There's a wonderful line in Hughes's "Pike" - "stunned by their own grandeur" - but it's not really true. I don't criticize that kind of poem for a moment, but I wanted to write a poem that is all dog' (Thom Gunn in Haffenden 1981 p. 53). Gunn's intention ('Yoko') was essentially to escape consciousness, 'filling [yourself] out with [yourself]' (Gunn, Selected Poems p. 128). In the vicar's dog-dream (What is the Truth? p. 110), the

falseness is partly excused by the narrative context: in a dream - or when one writes poetry - even communion with God appears possible. But the poem reminds us it was written by a waking mind; Hughes, unlike Gunn, uses clever syntactic tricks to suggest 'infinite dogginess' (Gaudete p. 93). He disrupts time ('When he stood I was so quick/ Already standing'), the subject/ object dyad ('I... was a bark/ Working at the postman'), the dissociation between mind and body ('My ears fairly ached/ At stopping and starting') and between self and reality ('My panting/ Finally used all the work up'). Then:

... I slept without a pause
Even when the sleep-wolf
Jeering at me, dashed through my skin
Like a clock-alarm...

(p. 112).

The wolf is the untamedness usurping the collie's body in dreams. But it is also the vicar's waking self, in the world of alarm-clocks. When he wakes, the unfallen dog in him - his buried self - simply sleeps 'without a pause'.

In the schoolteacher's poem that follows, it is possible to see the narrator and his returning friend as the two halves of one fallen self: one is the 'estranged' mind returning to a natural world realized only in memory, art or the 'ritual' of hunting, 'the leaf-wet oils/ Of his memory's masterpiece' (p. 112), the other - like the vicar's buried self - is 'the dog' (p. 114). The fox - 'the magician' (p. 114) - is the scapegoat who brings together the friends, 'The mind's wandering elementals' ('Fourth of July'): 'between us, on the tussocky ground,/ Somebody is struggling with something' (p. 117). This 'dream' of psychic harmonization involves shooting the fox (God), 'And [tunnelling] that sky-bursting bang/ Through... Into the earth beneath him' (p. 117), and yet, as in Cave Birds, only lasts a moment:

And I stand awake - as one wakes
From what feels like a cracking blow on the head....

There the memory ends.

We must have walked away.

(p. 118)

The Shepherd's final poem, 'a shocking noise' like a donkey's 'trying to laugh at them all' (p. 118), seems to dispel all hopes of integration into nature. The earthworm was a symbol of Blake's for unfallen desire in Beulah, without 'fuss or shame' (Beer 1969 p. 20). The Shepherd's lobworms do not 'struggle' with themselves like the fox but '[twist] together like two loving [dumb] tongues/ And they had not a care for the world and its wrongs', (p. 119), such as 'the famous Somme battle'.

It was Adam and Eve in the earliest light -
And I was like Satan, for they suddenly took fright.

Their loving was chilled at the touch of my stare...
(p. 119).

Yet what the poetry does seem to have done is to have fascinated God's son so that (this recalls Buddha more than Christ) he stays among mankind. If - always Hughes' first concern - the individual characters have been awoken to an enlightenment like the birds', the human world still waits.

And below him [God's son] could see the roofs of the farm. And there in the early mist was the village, and beyond it, in every direction, other farms, where the people still slept, but where the cocks were already beginning to crow.

(p. 126).

Though I suggested Hughes' talent is entirely poetic, much of his most satisfying poetry for children is in prose. The Iron Man (1968) is possibly his most coherent myth for the re-accommodation of the spirit. It tells three stories, inside (Hughes suggests) the boy Hogarth's head: the first - the most purely imaginative - recounts the 'fall' (off a cliff) and re-organ-ization of the inner man. 'Nobody knew the Iron Man had fallen' (p. 13). Blake's image of the 'fall' of Adam Kadmon, whose body has been fragmented into smell, hearing, sight and touch, is literalized. (The ear, Los/ Urthona, is imagination: in Hughes' version, this can never be fully redeemed. One ear is lost.) The second story tells of a failed attempt puritanically to 'bury' the Iron Man's energy, and Hogarth's idea of making friends with him instead.

Thirdly, the Man transforms the 'space-bat-angel-dragon' of our fear of desacralized infinity into the Music of the Spheres (which it always was), via a shamanic ordeal. People '[stop] making weapons... All they wanted to do was to have peace to enjoy this strange, wild, blissful music from the giant singer in space' (p. 62). The reawoken imagination fulfils its ideal role of making 'meaningful relationships [between] ... the student, the technology and the chaos, and his terror of the two' (1970 'Myth' p. 63).

The Iron Man is a myth, How the Whale Became a collection of 'fables' - deliberately fanciful interpretations of animals' peculiarities, which may also 'heal' if they stimulate the imagination, as 'How the Bee Became' surely should. Hughes can resurrect this part of primitive literatures without dishonesty. What may seem dishonest is the failure to respect, to glorify, the animals' essences and dignity (except the Bee and the other birds in 'Why the Owl Behaves as it does'): Chaucer's Chanticleer is more fully a farmyard creature. From here, failure to respect the reader is only one remove.

None of these strictures apply to Hughes' return to the Fable in Tales of the Early World (1988). The greater inventiveness, wit, narrative flair and humanity make a genuine and surprising departure within Hughes' oeuvre, and the book's imaginative depth perhaps justifies Andrew Sinclair's claim that Hughes is 'the finest writer of children's stories for all ages since Kipling' (Sinclair 1988 p. 19).

Though Tales of the Early World makes a cycle, one of Hughes' 'primitive' techniques is to mis-align the parts: mouse, cat and other animals are created differently in different tales. Some stories return to old themes: LEftOver's mock-crowning, to accommodate him in the bush, recalls Segismundo's in Life is a Dream (a source for Orghast): it might comment on our hubris in dreaming that, with 'the hunger of God [urging us] forward' (p. 110), we are king of the animals. In 'The Guardian', 'Man [is] stretched out in a trance, under a tree, among the Monkeys' (p. 23) until God's mother's 'magic' awakens woman

(his anima) - and the unmanageable tiger. In 'How Sparrow Saved the Birds', the Black Hole - a frequent image of fear among schizophrenics - which swallows the birds up could be the twentieth century's despair, where the Owls represent Single Vision:

The various Owls glared, trying to give a little light with their eyes.
But it wasn't the sort of light any other bird could see by.

'We are in a deep, deep pit,' said the Snowy Owl. 'Don't you see?'

'It looks pretty hopeless,' said the Barn Owl.

(p. 8).

Sparrow '[has] it in [him] to be a real pest' (p. 15); but he has not 'fallen' - his song is 'like a Stone-Age man trying to strike a spark between two flints, and not having much success' (p. 15). Though at first childless, he is Venus' bird, the bird of generation, of Life-in-Death not Death-in-Life: he alone creatively 'sees' - a world in a grain of corn. 'With the seed in his bill, and the sound of the surf in his ears, he saw the long shore, and the great slow combers crumbling to whiteness' (pp. 11 - 12): his four-fold vision guides him back to earth, and enables God to 'save' the birds. 'God tied the Black Hole and its mother into a tight knot, and fed them to the constellation of Capricorn' (p. 14).

The story, with its awed evocations of all the birds, is also a vision of the extinctions attending our 'Black Hole':

God wandered over the hills, calling to the birds.... How could he begin again? How could he ever create a Hummingbird again? Or a Sparrow-hawk? Or a Skylark? Or a Wren? Or a Kingfisher? Or a Snow Bunting?

(p. 6).

The most important symbolism in the book compares animals and art.

'In the beginning, there were even more song contests than there are now'

(p. 37); eel is ridiculed for ugliness, but learns he is 'the sweetest of all'.

Mere Darwinian survival is subordinated to the pursuit of beauty and excess.

God, like the poet, is creator, but also has to compromise; the nightingale's broken voice - like most of his books, Hughes seems to be wryly suggesting - is 'obviously only the bits and pieces of something much more tremendous'

(p. 18). Parrot, once, was 'nearly as big as Woman... thickly covered with every-coloured feathers' (p. 38), and the best singer of all. But while 'Some things [or poems] take an awful lot of work', others 'just seem to turn up, somehow. All ready-made' (p. 74). 'I knew there was something down there', says God, digging up Newt. '"Maybe somebody else is making them too," suggested Man, getting interested' (p. 74). The final story makes the comparision between animal and poem explicit - parturiunt montes, et nascitur ridiculus mus. (God has quoted Horace to the Elephant on page 30.) The creative ideal is the marriage of the mouse God makes, and the mouse from the mountains. The conclusion of the book seems to me one of Hughes' loveliest and serenest hymns to reconciled, reciprocal imagination, and most moving expressions of the perhaps immitigable alienation of fallen consciousness from this unity: the two mice dance, and their joy fills the world:

And [God] had the feeling that somewhere in his Creation, somehow, there was a huge happiness hidden from him.

And strangely enough, the Elephants could feel it too. They didn't know what it was, but out in the forest, as the stars rose, they became more and more restless, and shifting from great foot to great foot they began to dance. And under the flickering stars the jumbled range of mountains began to dance softly. The whole night was filling up with the happiness of the Mice, as they danced in the firelight. While Man and Woman, gazing out from under their bedclothes with the flames of the fire reflecting in their eyes, watched them. Till God had to get out of bed, muttering: 'What is keeping me awake? What is it?' And he paced to and fro in his bedroom, and stood at his window and stared out over the forests at the hills, and at the shaking stars above the hills, and again he walked to and fro, his arms clasped tightly across his chest and his eyes glittering.

(p. 122).

CHAPTER EIGHT: REMAINS OF ELMET, RIVER, FLOWERS AND INSECTS

1: Remains of Elmet

Around 1971 (1980 'Remains of Elmet'), Hughes saw Fay Godwin's earliest Calderdale photographs (eg. 'Heptonstall backlit', on the cover), and they 'moved [him] to write the accompanying poems' in Remains of Elmet (p. 8). (In 1975, Pilinszky had published Space and Relationship, poems 'interspersed with photographs of the sculptures of Erzsabet Scháar' (1976 Pilinszky p. 10); poets like Gunn and George Mackay Brown have also collaborated with photographers.) Godwin's photographs of course have nothing to do with Hughes' 'photographic vision': they are imaginative recreations of reality. In 1980 'Remains of Elmet', he explained how the photographs provided the kind of 'hooks' he was looking for to be able to write about his birthplace without depending on 'personal memories'. Recently, however, he has come to feel the photographs make too impersonal and merely 'topographical' what he wanted to say about childhood, and is trying to publish a wholly revised, unillustrated Remains of Elmet, several of whose much more intimate poems appear in Wolfwatching. (For the original private and trade editions, Godwin (Scigaj 1986 p. 236) generally decided which poem should accompany which photograph, and their order.)

Hughes (1980 'Remains of Elmet') explains how the 'breast-bone'-like arches in the photograph led him to see 'A great bird' in 'Heptonstall Old Church' (p. 118). Several times, poem and photograph work together: beside

Dead Farms, Dead Leaves

Cling to the long
Branch of world...

walls branch, with farms clinging; Heptonstall's wet, worn cobbles (p. 22)
interpret, in one way,

... gullies
Cut in the cold fire

By the worn-out water of women... ('It Is All'),

whilst page 72 explains 'the Egyptian walls' in 'Willow-Herb'. Conversely, the snow opposite 'First, Mills' may have influenced: 'Everything fell wetly to bits/ In the memory'. In 'Heptonstall Cemetery', 'the horizons lift wings/ A family of dark swans' - as we see them doing opposite. This may be the finest collaborative effect here; 'The Angel', which follows, stands, like 'Six years into her posthumous life'¹, outside the visual framework, and could deliberately qualify the pathetic fallacy that the image, typically of the book, provoked: hills look like swan-wings, as if the dead under them were 'living feathers'; but the portent of Edith Farrar's death 'was', after all, 'no swan' (p. 124).

Photographs do not remember. The eerie light on page 55 can suddenly illuminate 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves', 'And vanish'. The lyrics Hughes devised are something quite new: fragments, frozen in the eternity they stand for. As in Popa's poems, the laws of physics are forgotten; stars break the stone they might share photographs with, words make new worlds. The poems' imagination is bound, in one way, to rebuke the camera's single vision; but Hughes, rather than filling in sounds and smells and colours, tends to use abstract, noticeably achromatic imagery of snow, stars, clouds, 'Poverty thin water' (p. 113). He lets the photographs carry as much as possible of the responsibility of emotional placing and of scene-setting (telling us 'Heptonstall Old Church' is a ruin).

Hughes' dissatisfaction with his half of the book is understandable. The poems date from the zenith of his 'visionary' period, but their jewel-like brevity, as much as the collaboration, cramps the personal emotions behind them. (Their visionary, rather than human, nature is itself an adjustment to the eerie, depopulated photographs; Hughes says (1989 'Wolfwatching' p. 3) he wanted to produce something like 'film music: non-visual, non-specific,

¹ Hughes confirms this in Scigaj 1986 p. 236

self-effacing'.) The book inevitably has little structure, and tackles little new. The order of the first few poems is Hughes', and they set out the various themes. 'Six years into her posthumous life' employs Hughes' linguistic daring and characteristic complex image-clusters towards ends - humanity, and the exploration of memory - not normally associated with his poems but anticipating Wolfwatching. The poem has to make clear that the industries and puritan heritage which moulded the 'strange depths' of the valley's inhabitants are already 'a dream', or at best 'glimpses [folded] away' by 'the dark river' of nature's flux. 'Where The Mothers' contemplates this river, the 'earth' of matter tormented by the 'heaven' of transforming, reappropriating spirit. The 'silent evil joy' starting up within matter and spirit, 'in the wind' and the 'star-broken stone', seems a successor of the outgrowth of puritanism (in 'Mount Zion' a noisy, holy wretchedness). 'Hardcastle Crag' translates the vision into particular terms. 'The dilapidated river' in its gorge wears away the 'palaeolithic moorland' and 'siftings of sewing machines and shuttles' but not quite 'The love-murmurs of a generation of slaves', the war-dead. Many Remains of Elmet poems, suggests Scigaj (1986), try to make their 'joy' a kind of Taoism, attuned to 'The wild gentle god of everywhere' (p. 63). 'Think often of the silent valley, for the god lives there' is a Taoist proverb, Hughes says (Scigaj 1986 p. 236). 'The valley spirit never dies' (proverb: Campbell 1962 p. 425): yet the 'But' of Hughes' second line suggests the Calder valley's remoteness from the conditions nursing the serenity of Taoism. The conifers where the 'elation' hides are to native ears still 'a grave of echoes'; what 'mystifies' the river's voice are 'Name-lists off cenotaphs'.

Meanwhile 'beech roots repair a population/ Of fox and badger'. The possibilities of change and forgetting are considered in 'Lumb Chimneys', a typical poem in its interior development: the hopelessness of 'Nose upwind' and the grim pun on 'mortgaged' suddenly allow recognition that 'soil deepens' and finally submit to a sense of the rightness of decay into the one positive

of earth - just as the verse suddenly attains balance and music.

Before these chimneys can flower again
They must fall into the only future, into earth. /

This is to be taken seriously, at face value.

Unlike Moortown, Remains of Elmet seldom balances this intimation with the sense that nature needs humans and their actions. However, when, in 'Heptonstall', the churches fall silent

... the fragments
Of the broken circle of the hills
Drift apart.

This precisely inverts an image from Recklings (where people and natural forces were seen simply as at odds):

Having taken her slowly by surprise
For eighty years
The hills have won, their ring is closed.
('On the Slope').

(Both images are perhaps indebted to Tennyson's 'year by year our memory fades/
From all the circle of the hills' (In Memoriam, 101).)

A similar theme almost absent from Remains of Elmet is that of the relation between art and reality (the directness of the reference to the photographs would have made this a preciousness). 'Churn Milk Joan' shows even the fallacy of what brief legends adhere to millennial rock. The poem does not 'want' to remember the 'futile stumbling and screams/ And awful little death' of any previous inhabitant of the 'blank' 'skylines'. The visionary (though not the human) half of the book considers forgetfulness a prerequisite of renewal: in this, it recalls the earlier ('Those champions,/ Forgetfulness, madness' - 'Egg-Head') Hughes, not his more humanistic middle period. In 'Walls', language and heritage leave behind not vital 'manure' but only a worthless 'harvest of long cemeteries'.

Lifted at the day's end
Like the palms of the hands

To cool in the slow fires of sleep...

with its elaborateness of metaphor, folded over and over itself, and its timeless, universal imaginative effect, could stand for the nature and method of Remains of Elmet's most representative poems. These are not, yet, the ones evoking Hughes' own experiences or even those about the human element in Calderdale, but 'Open To Huge Light', 'Widdop', 'Rock Has Not Learnt', the curlew poems, and others, which, like the photographs, define Moorland essentially in the abstract, and life in relation to moorland. The best of these poems may be 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves'. 'The tree is caught up in the constellations' ('Fire-Eater') becomes, with much greater intensity, 'Stars sway the tree'. Its 'roots/ Tighten on an atom' - the simultaneity of abstraction and earthiness in Hughes' technique seems an effort to mediate between faith in the world and fear of infinity. The sensuousness, and love of words - 'The birds, beautiful-eyed, with soft cries' - balances on top of decadence.

2: River

The idea behind River, Hughes told Scigaj (7/6/85), was Peter Keen's. Hughes' poems, however, were not directly inspired by the photographs - several antedate the project - and - with one lovely exception - the two:

River

Fallen from heaven, lies across
The lap of his mother, broken by world

- are not bound together. According to Sagar, Hughes felt the collaboration did not suit his poems; but there is surely a way the poems and images work strikingly towards an end the opposite of Remains of Elmet's: of colour, movement, flashes of light, 'Baroque superabundance' (p. 28).

River was the natural culmination of Hughes' representations of Panta Rhei; but the presiding image itself consumes the obsession: Hughes no longer leans on the actual symbol, and indeed emphasizes nature's radiant stabilities. The book's shortcomings - a limited subject, a language becoming occasionally banal through its very excess - are obvious. But I argue it is one of Hughes' most important and consistent (there are many uncollected River-poems: the secondary ones): a serene flood of inspiration, like Richard Strauss' last period. Reviewing the book, Redgrove (1983 p. 1238) discussed not its novelty but parallels to Henri Michaux' Au Pays de la Magie and Ruskin's Praeterita. The most important antecedent will be Williamson's Salar the Salmon: Hughes' discrete lyrics cannot generate the novel's dramatic impact, immediacy or sense of awed involvement with the salmon's quest, but they operate on a higher imaginative plane.

Mythic references are particularly subdued and implicit here. Water is Taoism's passive, eternal 'valley spirit'; divine grace, in neoplatonism, constantly redeeming our world ('Flesh of Light'), 'the god hidden in matter, the divine Nous that came down to Physis and was lost in her embrace' (Jung 1967 p. 104). In *The Waste Land*, the Fisher King seeks the salmon (also the first Celts' totem) whose flesh confers all Knowledge (or, in River, enlightenment upon the wheel). The book represents Hughes' rediscovered trust in linguistic beauty, the lyric abandon typical of the most complex 'primitive' poetry, Navaho or Polynesian. Shamans often have a vast secret vocabulary and after the minimalisms of Crow Hughes colonizes something like that: eclosion, damascened, 'glare light' in 'Football At Slack' becoming 'glair light'. Enjambement elaborates the verse-music. Pure sound triumphs: 'this telling - these toilings of plasm - / The melt of mouthing silence' - the result is Hopkinsian; but Hughes has a subtler ear. Every word weighs, towards remarkable conciseness: 'A cool small evening shrunk to a dog bark' ('Full Moon and Little Frieda') now, more intensely, 'Dog-bark stillness' ('River Barrow'). The poems might seem formless; but one senses just where

they must end. Hughes, in fact, deliberately disunifies them, so that they net as much world as possible; any crystallizations the river soon sweeps away. (Paul Jennings, in his book The Living Village (1968 p. 40), laments our 'civilization' is 'based on hard things': 'no one attempts a work of art like a river, something flowing, warm, irresistible, broadening out from living human springs'.)

The book's opening paragraph (English edition; p. 8) starts, like the Moortown Diary, with language relearned, and a six-line wait for a strong verb. What is particularly striking is the sotto voce ease and tranquillity, and the embodiment of Hughes' ideal of childlike sensitiveness and passibility (the tense is the perfect: the embracing emotion is just fading to loss). The way the subject 'Everything' (l. 1) is slipped into the list of specific nouns shows the poetry's well-concealed skilled management. The verb - 'pushed' - is so potent when it does come because it awakens the submerged imagery of the Wheel of being ('standstill', 'Wheel-ruts frost-fixed'); now 'spokes of melt and sparkle' anticipate the year's acceleration. The persona believes the dead salmon 'irreplaceable' but the alternation of life-and-death (and their oneness in the imagery) must re-educate him: the river is 'Flint-olive', at once stone and fruit: the 'death-bloom' dead are 'lilies of fungus'. Frost kills but brought other salmon on, 'ripened them'. The eggs are a 'treasure' but by the poem's end the whole world is 'Treasure-solid'. As in 'Where The Mothers', matter and spirit are not, finally, mutually destructive: 'The river-trees... Were fractured domes of spun ghost'. The dome, eternity's white radiance, and trampling death, cannot be syntactically distinguished.

In the Gaudete lyrics, Hughes prolonged each unit - the 'now' of reading - as long as he dared. Here (as in the Gaudete narrative) he keeps them staccato, the lines full of commas and redirections cancelling what preceded, so, reading easily, one is swept along, to meet new things, a weir, a fall, with a kind of helplessness, as in a river. (The language is free to be swirled around, or else a deliberate strange dance of twistings and recoilings.) Human actions

seem holy, dizzily in harmony with nature: consider:

... Then, lovingly, the rinsings,
The lavings, the drainings, the rewashings -
A few eggs trundle clear and vanish
Into the white crash of the weir.

Brain and eye are edged round when possible, for us and Hughes:

That morning
Dazzle-stamped every cell in my body
With its melting edge, its lime-bitter brightness.

The only acknowledgement of how the poem refreezes the 'melting' touch upon
'every cell in [the] body' of the world comes, as naturally as precisely,
in the last lines:

A flood pond, inch-iced, held the moment of a fox
In touch-melted and refrozen dot-prints.

The return to 'The Thought-Fox' is presumably deliberate; Redgrove (1983
p. 1238) contrasted 'Buds fur-gloved with frost' - the opening words - to
'Ice/ Has got its spearhead into place' ('October Dawn').

The snow-woman in 'Japanese River Tales' is called Yuki-onna, Scigaj
says (1986 p. 297). But the poems are the opposite of myths in that they
show art's inadequacy to reality: they do not synthesize and rationalize it
but simply imitate and subserve a part of nature. You read the tales once;
on earth

The tale goes on [forever]
With glittery laughter of immortals
Shaking the alders -

The sense is partly of the pathos of art's trying to speak of the ineffable;
of its own (deliberate) absurdity - as if the poet, loving the Goddess most,
must ridicule the poetry which is his own error and alienation. The end of
the second tale cancels the first - the Maiden's love is predatory, not fairy-
tale; but Hughes cancels this too by presenting us the two tales on equal terms.

Such ambiguity is central to 'Flesh of Light' but here it implies words' adequacy to a paradoxical reality. (Therefore the poem is a 'myth', intrinsically, not referentially, meaningful, claiming to manage where Crow, in 'Truth Kills Everybody', failed: 'taking it too suddenly, unprepared and ignorantly, by force, he can't control the self-transformation. The spirit-light emerges as shattering flame' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5).) Is 'light' one possible type, or property, of 'flesh'; or does 'light' merely sometimes 'flesh' itself in matter? Is the 'core-flash' a heart blazing into visibility, or a flash lost to us, being buried? Is 'thunder-silence' audible? Does the 'smelting' 'crawl' among the stones because it belongs there, or has it fallen, crippled, from the sun? Knower and known, mind and matter, are somehow balanced, and one river becomes 'The mill of the galaxy'. The 'prone adoring land' can worship no abstracted godhead, but itself. (In the light of 'Crow's Playmates', Adam and Eve's 'brows [bumping] the ground' was part of the 'Horrible Religious Error'.) The poem represents the River style at its most thoroughly novel. Any parallels will be unexpected: the risky final cadence ('to the blossoming// Of the sea') as it happens precisely recalls the end of A. R. Ammons' 'Easter Morning' (1981), with its River-like religious lift, its own sense of relativity and of the monad of flesh and eternity:

... a dance sacred as the sap in
the trees, permanent in its descriptions
as the ripples round the brook's
ripplestone: fresh as this particular
flood of burn breaking across us now
from the sun.

After an abstract hymn, Hughes characteristically specifies individual suffering. In 'New Year', in fact, we presume it is the river who is operated on, who will survive the vital 'loss' by Caesarian insection. But the last line - Hughes has become increasingly interested in these rhetorical reverses - reveals the mother as 'The lank, dying fish'. The narrator's mind also seems part of the suffering and one with nature: he 'shall feel in [his]

head the anaesthetic' because he finds it 'Painful// To think of the river tonight - suffering itself' (itself suffering too; suffering impersonate; suffering its own existence). (One's reservation with such a poem will be that the language may not seem impressive enough to justify Hughes' claim to empathize with what, compared to 'February 17th', is still an abstraction. The artificiality and non-involvedness of many River poems seems one limitation. Hughes is a poet 'imagining' (line 3) or fancying, not a person experiencing.)

The first 'March Watercolour' is one of Hughes' most innovative attempts to describe earth without betraying it. The natural images are patterned not in relation to mind, but to each other, so that the organization seems nature's.

... Cows soften their calls
Into the far, crumble-soft calling
Of ewes:

the speaker admits neither his reorganization nor his misinterpretation of the sounds; sound is translated to touch, visceral immediacy (though 'Spring is over there' deliberately locates the world round an alienated observer). His 'shadow' is planted within the landscape, and 'soft-edged'. (The syntax makes 'it' - line 4 - refer to shadow as well as sand.) Like the land, the narrator 'pays full attention' to everything, and so is prevented from commenting upon the 'jet'.

In the second Watercolour, the speaker is a 'tall' tree, supersensitive to the coming warmth, the 'buoyant up-boil' the skylark feels. At the same time, the 'edge' is really still one of cold, and the forethought is Promethean, human: the 'tall tree' is really a metaphor. Unlike the first watercolour, the poem unifies itself with an undercurrent of reasoned metaphor - trade, debt, solvency.

By the fourth Watercolour, the gap between self and nature has widened. Hughes and the salmon look at each other but the water's chaos - a repeated

idea in River - prevents their eyes' interaction, 'an invisible restraint'. Hughes can withdraw his consciousness by closing his eyes (line 17) but the 'Trapped' salmon's eyes are 'lidless'. Like the pun 'watercolour', the poem attempts to attribute art to earth itself, whose mouth (line 4) pronounces 'The river-epic'. (The 'rehearsal' is a performance, not an anticipation. It is also a new funeral, a 'hearse'.) But the Baroque 'superabundance' can only imitate the earth's infinite capacity to '[embellish] afresh and afresh/ Each detail'. That said, Hughes' imitation is so consistently inventive in River as, perhaps, to suggest an infinity of unstated elaboration.

'Dee' is organized more conservatively, but the inspiration seems as fresh. 'The snowdrops...'

Hurt into perfection, steal a summer
Out of the old, river-worried
Carcase of winter...

recalls, adequately,

... daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty...

(The Winter's Tale IV, iv, 118 - 120).

'The lit queenliness of snow hills' makes an impression before the logic of the metaphor is perceived; the imagery of the turning wheel (like a key to unlock the new year) is now so familiar in Hughes' opus as to seem part of a 'tradition'. ('Lock' elegantly suggests stilled water - in a canal - and the queen's hair.)

'The Merry Mink' could represent humanity, despiritualized, 'lost from [our] mythology' (and ecological niche) and inventing a new one, 'a Platonic idea'. (If the mink is 'the Mighty Northern Light', he must incorporate all the stars; but the ramsons he pushes through are 'Each one a constellation'.) Like people, he wants to stop time: he does not kill simply to eat (his hole is 'his freezer'); sex no longer seems a means to an end. As if in consequence, 'Salmon-taking Times' exposes the irreconcilability of nature and perceiver:

the wedding imagery (and the dubious folk-wisdom about 'turning') only leads to a defloration. As throughout 'Japanese River Tales', the anthropomorphism is deliberately heavy-handed. Hughes did not 'take' salmon but 'stayed clear' of the river's alien environment. Even when the weather seems to accept him, the foam is:

... so delicate
I touch it and its beauty-frailty crumples
To a smear of wet, a strengthless wreckage
Of dissolving membranes.

Just to describe seems to impose ('take' and 'shower of petals' reinforcing 'deflower'), and Hughes dare not claim this is 'a religious moment'.

Few River poems discuss any consolidation of humans' harmony with nature in terms of tradition (though we never feel Hughes obviously tries to escape humanity: fishermen and flotsam enter as they will). 'Under the Hill of Centurions' (thematically recalling Housman's 'On Wenlock Edge') is an exception, with its complex, unifying imagery of Christian worship and Roman ruins (and their recovery in the sorting and straining of an archaeological dig). 'Stickle' is indeed dialect (Devon) for 'white water'; Hughes even incorporates the old looms of Yorkshire. Consequently, art and nature relate again: not only can Hughes imagine the minnows' song, but the poetry can imitate it for us, 'Deep-chested, striving, solemn'.

To counterbalance this optimism, 'A Cormorant' is a witty presentation of inevitable alienation. 'Here before me': the speaker at once claims visual mastery over the outer scene; and admits the cormorant was there first, owning him (he does 'Stay a stump' while it dives). He feels ready 'For a year in the Pleistocene'; after which he dies. The cormorant is with us still; Hughes' 'futuristic, archaic' carry-on is only a pose. The cormorant's fishing-lesson is one of 'Dissolving [yourself]/ Into fish, so dissolving fish naturally/ Into [yourself]'. The angler, 'high and dry' - vertical and despiritualized - in his 'space-armour' of non-participation, foreseeing

every change in the weather, can only 'offer' a bauble 'to space in general', and catch some twig-snags, fence-barbs, and himself.

Hughes explores possible negotiations one after another, concluding nowhere. In 'Stump Pool in April', we, cormorantlike, enter the river: 'Oxygen/ Boils in its throat'. The descriptive effort melts down linguistic and intellectual structures, so that when they reform (spring must rise into the trees, unfolding not dragonfly wings but buds) they work towards myth: instinct and logic seem married.

'Go Fishing' also applies the cormorant's lesson: the fisherman really claims to become the river, 'ceasing' as an alienated consciousness and '[losing] words'. 'Everything circling and flowing and hover-still', the fear of death seems exorcised. The return to the mortal world, 'Busy with urgency words' (the pun on 'hospital' Wards emphasizing 'words' themselves) is to 'Try to speak and nearly succeed' in recapturing in words, for 'other people', the wordless ecstasy; but not quite. Meanwhile the next poem bears a dedication: it is one of Hughes' finest dramatic encounters between hunter and hunted, rational and inner selves, self and nature. Hughes confuses us, for instance, whether the ogress-salmon watches through her judas-hole from within a cell of 'the ruinous castle of Skye', or, as gaoler, observes the imprisoned Judas, Hughes, who '[fades] from the light of reality', not in death, but by going fishing - or is it by failing to catch anything, by leaving Skye, the only 'reality'? (A Boggart is a Yorkshire gnome, a Glaistig a fairy laundrymaid, a Gruagach Gaelic for bridesmaid.)

In the finest poems, like 'River Barrow', Hughes tries genuinely to extend the techniques available to the descriptive writer. One has the five senses, and comparisons to other things in the world. Synaesthesia gives ten more senses; but what Hughes experiments with is making comparison to whole possible parallel worlds (of the sort he began to imagine in The Earth-Owl and Other Moon-People).

Sun going down clear
Red-molten glass-blob, into green ember crumble
Of hill trees.

Embers, in this world, do not go green. By planting us in another where they do, Hughes characterizes the strangeness, and, somehow, the reality, of the evening-lit trees. These are the 'heads and tails' (1971 Shakespeare p. 11) of thought, 'Hurrying worlds of voices, on other errands', trafficking through our dimension of fact ('Walking bare'), onto which Hughes clamps words, so that, making connexions where we can, we follow them a little before the inertia of reality drags us back, or else the linguistic realization starts 'Collapsing away under its own weight' ('Salmon Eggs'):

A cow's moo moves through the complex
Of internestled metals, a moon-spasm
Through interfolded underseas.

Although this may have taken its departure from the river's 'unfolding metals' in 'December River' (Season Songs), the lunar imagination here is quite new. It only comes when Hughes pretends to be 'Half-unearthed, an old sword in its scabbard,/ Happy to moulder'. Soon after he returns to himself, 'Midge-bites itching and swelling', the poem's world falls away.

As the river's 'sunken calendar unfurls,/ Fruit ripening as the petals rot' ('An August Salmon'), the cycle introduces the Salmon, 'the armature of [natural] energy' (p. 112), 'a god, on earth for the first [and only] time,/ With the clock of love and death in his body' ('An August Salmon'), the individual 'Stuck in the sliding sky' of the river: 'time' - the Goddess as an unfaithful wife - 'will run out on him', 'The bridegroom, mortally wounded/ By love and destiny'. After all Hughes' attempts to avoid dualism and death, he begins, 'After Moonless Midnight', to centre upon their inevitability, the doomed salmon's 'riveted skull/ And its ghoulish decor', memento mori. Graves' year-king never will destroy his shadow-rival and 'marry' the Goddess.

Once again, however, Hughes sets an abstract celebration against 'An August Salmon': 'The Vintage of River is Unending'. Both these poems enjoy a privileged outlook. The former, realistic, recognizes our existence as a slow dying, a mere dedication to the future. This, mythical, interprets it as continuous life:

Unending river
Swells from the press
To gladden men.

It is the formlessness of the former poem that may disappoint, the smug abstraction of this.

'That Morning', the poem with which Hughes concluded Selected Poems in 1982, steers between both shortcomings. In its blending of untamed Alaska with 'fallen' remembered Yorkshire, it is also one of Hughes' most vigorous and exhilarating attempts to undo dualism, the salmon 'Lifting us toward some dazzle of blessing// One wrong thought might darken'. 'So we found the end of our journey': but even here the final line appears ambiguous, at once ecstatic repetition, and a faltering, an assertion straining against doubt: the effect of 'They bring each other to perfection'.

The 'spirit brightness' of 'River' is uttered 'In dumbness' only. Here, Hughes deliberately adopts the hectoring tone recognized as potential to the end of 'That Morning', whilst making a very convincing poem: myth seems able to midwife the river's 'delivery of this world'. Like Lawrence in 'The Escaped Cock', Hughes is now ready to reconcile the resurrection of Osiris, 'Scattered in a million pieces', and Christ 'At a rending of veils'; Tarot pack and mother-Goddess ('hung by the heels down the door of a dam').

Next follows a sinister particular; 'Last night// The river seemed evil'. To wade the river is to '[stand] in a grave' - your own. The voice - in so far as it convinces - is that of a man trying to understand and expiate experience, so as to be able to utter another mythic positive. 'Gulkana' is a more complex negotiation. At first (though we learn later this is recalled,

from over the 'unremoving corpse' of Greenland), the poet, a rational European, responds unimaginatively to Alaska ('the black spruce forest'), finding bearings only in terms of the 'word', 'Gulkana', 'A pre-Columbian glyph' 'scrawled with a childish hand/ Through our crumpled map' of a forgotten inner world. The sentence-structure of the first and especially the third paragraphs is latinate-civilized (reminding one how precise a departure is the apparent grammatical chaos elsewhere). Only when he goes fishing does Hughes unfreeze to the land ('the lifted horizon fringe of rag spruce'). He '[feels] hunted': the 'bodiless twin, [a] disinherited being/ And doppelganger other' inside Hughes, the submerged natural man, colludes with his puritanical 'illusion' of nature's aggressiveness: his scientist's eyes 'felt blind somehow to what I stared at/ As if it stared at me'. The perfect atonement for fallen dualism is to offer oneself up to the Goddess, to the death. The salmon remain an image for this:

We watched them
Move like drugged victims as they melted
Toward their sacrament - a consummation
Where only one thing was certain:
The actual, sundering death. The rebirth
Unknown, uncertain. Only that death...

'Watched', of course, implies Hughes' refusal to undertake the corresponding sacrifice which 'Earth-numb' or 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning' claim to evoke. The salmon's example intimidates; Hughes' hope of abrogating dualism has begun to despair. 'I came back to myself' might imply a full remarriage to the natural man. But, as in 'Milesian Encounter on the Sligachan', it really represents a retreat into one's rational self, 'A spectre of fragments'. (After 'Truth Kills Everybody', Crow 'reappears elsewhere as the same old Crow, or rather as not quite the same. A Crow of more fragments, more precariously glued together, more vulnerable' (1981 'A Reply' p. 5).) The salmon lead only to 'their own Eden': catching them fails as a ritual self-reconciliation. Hughes is no longer the genuine being of his true childhood, or

dreams:

I imagined our aircraft
As if a small boy held it
Making its noise....

Word by word
The burden of the river, beyond waking,
Numbed back into my marrow. While I recorded
The King Salmon's eye.

Even 'recording' the facts in poetry - inextricably conflated with photography itself on page 82 - seems, every 'word', an inevitable betrayal of self and earth. The barrier of 'incomprehension' between the western man and the Indian (absolute, like an animal, 'his face/ A whole bat that glistened and stirred') remains, as at the start, a Language Barrier.

River refuses to imply either that its inclusions are wish-fulfilment, or its exclusions cynicism. Everything depends upon relation. The next poem is a serene and convincing mythologization: the river is art, a 'music/ Like', at least,

... a needle sewing body
And soul together, and sewing soul
And sky together and sky and earth
Together and sewing the river to the sea.

'August Evening' shows Hughes overhauling his linguistic/ mental machinery, returning to a verbless ur-language. In 'Last Act', conversely, words ('Act', 'damsselfly') start to tyrannize: 'he' becomes 'she', tragedienne. As in the theatre, disbelief in the absurd (and that words can imitate reality) has to be suspended. But the actress' '[switching] her scene elsewhere' tells how she exists beyond the performance, or the capacity of conscious mind to accommodate her. As the curtain comes down, we face the invalidity of the conflation between nature and art (the theatre) which the unspoken 'I' of 'Find him later' has, in fact, engineered. The damsselfly, dead, is a 'Midget puppet-clown' whose 'strings' were the poet's fancies. (It is nature's 'puppet-clown', too, as is the 'I'.)

The effects of human activity - a 'barley disaster' (p. 92), 'bicycle wheels, car-tyres, bottles/ And sunk sheets of corrugated iron' (p. 114), and certain pipelines driven through by the book's sponsors - are peripheral to River. The fine 'Eighty and Still Fishing for Salmon' is the only poem exploring the consequences of our dualism. When the old man goes fishing, he takes his 'ritual mask' from the wall, 'An old Noh dancer'. But the 'heavens' that 'fail' are not the 'touch of weather' still moving him like a prayer-wheel on its 'bearings', but the monks - that is, ourselves - who are responsible for the fish-stocks, yet forget the old wisdom.

'October Salmon' - an earlier poem - resembles Moortown Diary's realism, the furthest remove from myth: an obviously human narrator gives us 'the salt mouthful of actual existence':

And that is how it is,
That is what is going on there, under the scrubby oak tree, hour after
hour.

Rereading, it surprises one how much imagery - clothes - is introduced to unify the meditative description.

'Torridge' ('The Woman in the Valley' in Selected Poems) is one of the best 'mythic' poems. After the individual salmon's death, the Goddess' survival is celebrated, 'As if her sauntering were a long stillness' (though 'not once tasted death' is slyly ambiguous). (The river is Eve but 'Adamah', a feminine noun, meant 'red earth' - like east Devon's.)

Perhaps because the book has associated the poems with the whole river, it is the latter's life, not the salmon's death, that controls the ending, 'Salmon Eggs': Hughes, defying charges of sentimentalization, speaks of the earth's survival: 'Only birth matters/ Say the river's whorls', the revolving of Panta Rhei.

And the river
Silences everything in a leaf-mouldering hush
Where sun rolls bare, and earth rolls,

And mind condenses on old haws.

Any answer to the river's assertion is buried in earth itself. 'Death is neither here nor there.... In the absolute, it means nothing' (Lawrence 1968 p. 374). Hughes' sense of relativity itself constructs this one absolute, a religion of the earth, convincingly I believe. 'And this is the liturgy/ Of the earth's tidings -harrowing, crowned'. The river harrows hell and is crowned, a 'Perpetual mass' of solid reality, 'More vital than death... More grave than life', as the salmon 'curve away deathwards' on the river 'undergoing itself/ In its wheel'. The mist-dimmed 'veined yolk of sun' has the energy for its rebirth, 'the mud-blooms' are death and regeneration together (cf. 'death-bloom' on p. 10). Hughes' 'eyes forget [him]' for a last time, whilst he can find words enough for 'the charge of light/ Dumb with immensity'.

3: Flowers and Insects

After the triumphs of River, the descriptive poems in Flowers and Insects have a slightly numbed, tired aura. The diction of 'Narcissi' possesses a typically beautiful but chilling restraint:

The Narcissi shiver their stars
In the green-gold wind of evening sunglare.

Delighted involvement has slipped into regretful, barely-feeling exhaustion with 'Tonight, too, will be precarious stars/ On the Moon's hill' or 'Their happiness is weightless./ Their merriment is ghostly'. The narrator's memories and sense of time's swiftness colour the narcissi: they

... are untouchable
In a rustling, silent film
Of speeded-up dancing
And laughing children
From the 1918 Armistice.

Even earth's flowers turn the poet's mind towards the 'Starry wreath' of

universal death. (Plath's 'Among the Narcissi' describes the frailty and age of Percy Key.)

'A Violet at Lough Aughrisburg' again evokes what Hughes' poetry has been a flight from: the imprisonment of a few poor objects within the knowledge of approaching death.

Against the opened furnace of the West -
A branch of apple-blossom....

Milk and blood are frail
In the shivering wind off the sea.

'Daffodils' explores this knowledge via another conversation of upper and inner selves, consciousness and Life. The daffodils, which Hughes picks and sells, speak for the spirit buried 'Inside walking, darkly-coated people':

That night, on my pillow,
My brain was a chandelier of daffodils!...

I could see right into their flame-stillness
Like seeing right into the eye-pupil
Of a person fast asleep, as if I'd lifted the eyelid -

To write a poem consciously (as we see Hughes doing in lines 6 - 10) is to pick a daffodil: 'To each scared, bright glance/ I brought a defter cruelty'. Nature, therefore, seems to 'stare' (not 'glance') at him; but with the fall, above all, Hughes '[recognizes]/ The nuptial flight of the rarest ephemera - / My own days'. 'Suddenly I saw what I owned': not 'A cauldron of daffodils, boiling gently.// A gilding of the Deeds', but a rented body that will be picked and sold too. 'The idea/ Of white-frosted galaxies, floating apart' does not now, as in the Gaudete lyrics, become an experience of death and 'Resurrection!', 'The earth-weight of nightmare', enabling the poet to understand the daffodils 'gone to ground inside [him]'. It frightens him back into his unenlightened brief spring-time. All Hughes can finally do is 'flit' from truth and poethood, into a vernal regeneration that suddenly half seems superficial.

I wrenched free.
I flitted
With my world, my garden, my unlikely
Baby-cries leached from the thaw - my shiverers
In the draughty wings of the year -

These poems typically retreat from their own revelations, from themselves, as if this were the only survival. 'Saint's Island' drifts towards a meditation upon life - '(What are we doing on earth?)' - in terms of the mayfly who reduces it to an hour, the absurdity of every procreative self-dedication:

And there they go. The Lough's words to the world.
This is what it thinks,
This is what it aspires to, finally,
This is the closest it comes
To consciousness, and the flight into light -

Yet Hughes finally recoils, humanistically, from interpreting or empathizing with the religion of Life (or that of the Irish island 'Saints') or from giving the Lough-'Mother' her real words.

All round us
Fanatics faint and wreck shuddering, gently
Onto the face of evening.

'Tern', again, is:

... a precarious word
In the mouth of ocean pronouncements.
His meaning has no margin.

Hughes, disturbed by starlings even 'Where [he sits] Writing [his] Letter',
uses second-hand, imperfect words, and will not speak for the ocean. 'The
Honey Bee' 'Can't be taught a thing', and 'Cannot imagine' the Beekeeper
(the poet),

Though he's a stowaway on her carpet of colour-waves
And drinks her sums.

'In the Likeness of a Grass-Hopper' makes the insect merely a trap, set by

'Cloud-fingered summer' to catch its stridulations, 'a love-sick, perfume-footed/ Music of the wild earth'. 'A sinewy violin/ Has caught its violinist'. Catching the earth's music involves a transposition of 'subject and object impossible for the conscious poet.

'Eclipse', from the Moortown Diary years, still represents the same retreat, from being. The poet almost becomes a 'voyeur' of 'the famous murder' of male consciousness by female life-force, 'mighty nature/ In a purposeful mood'. The anticipation of the 'murder' may deliberately suggest a kind of paranoia; the reason, in fact, we never see it, is that with these spiders (identifiable as Steatoda bipunctata) the sexes share a web peacefully; and the larger, Hughes' 'she', is the male. This - sadly ironic - error obviously undermines the poems pretensions of scientific scrupulousness and respect for reality in the increasingly-qualified statements: 'I thought... I guessed... maybe'. (Even to observe seems to become implicated. 'So I stopped watching'.) The final sentence cleverly introduces a new perspective:

Is she devouring him now?
Or are there still some days of bliss to come
Before he joins her antiques. They are hidden
Probably together in the fusty dark,
Holding forearms, listening to the rain, rejoicing
As the sun's edge, behind the clouds,
Comes clear of our shadow.

The elegant period leaves us to determine whether 'our shadow' is just the moon, or Krogon, the peering poet, squatted vulturing over 'the childhood of earth' ('First, Mills'), for a few thousand years in the spiders' ages.

CHAPTER NINE: WOLFWATCHING

The first poem in Wolfwatching, 'A Sparrow Hawk', shows Hughes' old descriptive style further divorced from the unmannered energy and inspiration of River.

(The sparrowhawk is another animal whose females occasionally devour the males.) Its placing, however, must be meant to make Wolfwatching recall The Hawk in the Rain: next comes a big cat, then soon a macaw; there are quatrains of five-stressed lines, half-rhymed after Douglas. (The idea of

Naked men
Slithered staring where their mothers and sisters
Would never have to meet their eyes, or see
Exactly how they sprawled and were trodden
('Dust As We Are')

recalls to me Douglas' 'But she would weep to see today/ how on his skin the swart flies move' ('Vergissmeinicht').) The title implies that, as in The Hawk in the Rain, the poet is an exile, a voyeur of energies - wolves in a zoo - whose loss to us might seem irredeemable. The young wolf's tarot-card eyes are 'Like doorframes in a desert/ Between nothing and nothing'.

But its imitation of The Hawk in the Rain claims Wolfwatching as a new beginning, language stripped down again to terse, gaunt sentences. The important poems here are the Remains of Elmet revisions, representing an exciting new dimension in Hughes' work. Two other animal-poems, 'The Black Rhino' and 'Little Whale Song', are explicitly occasional - written out of commitment more than inspiration. There are finally a few rather tentatively-narrated myths, whose linguistic barrenness might, like Crow, be criticized for stultifying the 'imagination' they purport to speak for. The first, 'The Fool's Evil Dream', recalls the first Dungeon Song, 'The wolf', in which the human baby seems predestined to make puritanical judgments against predatory nature. The Fool, here, is devoured by nature, the tiger, and, reborn, seems to cry 'A sudden cry of terror, an infant's cry', instinctively rejecting the tiger: 'A bright spirit went away weeping'. But the poem also suggests the 'timeless land' inside the tiger is undesirable, 'Evil', for us now.

Humanity has been born, for a new kind of independence:

I sat up
Wet and alone
Among starry rocks.

The second 'Astrological Conundrum' also implies mankind's inborn tendency to turn into Krogon, and shoot the Raven. Here, the persona does not abandon his 'old steel bow', but at least, using 'all [his] might', wins the freedom to 'hesitate'.

'Take What You Want But Pay For It' is a more straightforward, optimistic presentation in myth of how puritanism split body and soul, and denied the body, to escape the 'cries' of nature's true being. But Logos inevitably 'Pays' for 'Taking' away the body: the spirit's 'cry' reunites it to the body and an anima-figure lifts the body out of puritanism's 'prison'.

The next poem, again by contrast, returns towards the Freudian determinism of Hughes' earliest thinking. The cathedral is Logos' 'prison/ For the contorted body/ Of the beast' ('Take What You Want But Pay For It'): our cultural heritage becomes 'The long Shrine of hunger', a crystallization merely of corvine instinct. What we make of this reductive despair depends on our response to the last, isolated line, as 'up-' or 'down-beat', leaving us depressed or enlightened (1978 'Tape'). The cathedral is an 'Empty gullet...// To which lichens of Gothic adhere lightly'. 'Gothic' - ie. art and civilization - may be not a mere by-product of predatory existence, but what distinguishes humans' particular 'hunger' and lifts it (cf. Moortown) from mud towards 'light' (the last word). It would be difficult, however, to interpret 'Macaw' in this way. Whether or not we trap it, the bird seems imprisoned by 'the dancing stars' of universal law and the 'Torture instrument' its own beak has evolved into. The poem has the thematic problems of early pieces like 'Thrushes'; the language, correspondingly, becomes over-emphatic, with unconvinced emjambements and no room for a climax.

The first Elmet reworking the reader encounters is 'Slump Sundays'. Hughes is able to explore the nature of industrial and puritan inheritance more thoroughly than in the earlier book because he is now more than ever writing poems with an upper, descriptive level and that submerged, intellectually coherent argument-in-images which was one of his most important inventions: puns ('no man's land') bind the two halves, but the binding is elegantly unobtrusive: the Somme was wet enough to rot 'seed-corn'; Mytholmroyd 'Under [its] rainy ridge' looks like a 'goblin clump/ Of agaric'; the food determines the period. The problem here is that the poem's upper level, or story, seems off-puttingly short of intensity and coherence. Only slowly does the real, under-argument become perceptible (though 'Climbing into Heptonstall' will help by representing the same themes directly). The industrial remains in the Calder valley are a fungoid decay, but 'The valley god' of Taoism, or nature, is trying to '[pull] itself together'. Even in Edwardian times, the young should have been 'seed-corn' for such a renewal. But the War implicated them in the same rottenness. Hughes, too, and his (poetic) language, grew into part of this 'kind of fungus'. (The 'window' of rationalism shut out nature's, or the anima's 'Girlish birches' right from his birth - when he 'came to'.) The people at Sunday dinner in the 1930s are 'mourners' of the same decay ('hallucinogen' binding 'mushroomy' and 'smokers'). But such 'hope' as the lost war-generation represented might still 'return' from the 'wild' 'no man's land' of sheep and boulders.

'Anthem for Doomed Youth' is similarly constructed, though here the last lines more clearly propose the symbolic undercurrent as the poem's raison d'être. 'Slump Sundays' claimed Hughes' generation and the war-dead were victims of the same rottenness. Now, Hughes and his companion - perhaps his brother - are 'conscripts' of a history which is no more than 'a dream' to them, but remains inescapable: though they are 'Exorcists of [their] own Annunciation' (ie. of the events before their birth), the grouse become the dead soldiers remembered now by poppies: 'Crack! And the echo: Crack!'

The poem is about the 'fall' into adulthood (the First World War was the 'fall' into our century): the epigraph suggests the game are a divine gift, a covenant, but, shot, they '[drop] to numbers' in Krogon's eyes, 'Surprised by darkness'. The hunters (as they were 'Doomed' to) shoot their own innocence, lining up 'Backsight and foresight' with 'All adolescence there' in 'the magazine of the rifle'. They 'crawled' like animals 'Through the [second] war's drizzling afterdawn', but the reports 'woke' them into a Knowledge of the first. Though it sounds like self-pity to compare one's 'Doomed Youth' to a soldier's, the association, later, of 'the portly birds' and women I think makes the poem universal and self-condemnatory again: war, even grouse-poaching, are undertaken by men who put the anima ('Your soul, a warm egg,/ In her beringed fist') 'in the backseat': the last lines, recalling 'Big Poppy' in Flowers and Insects, make the fall like a seduction, or rape.

'Leaf Mould' also associates the First war with every child's 'fall'. 'You were [your mother's] step-up transformer': the same charge passes, at a new level, along each generation. 'She grieved for her girlhood and the fallen./ You mourned for Paradise and its fable'. Hardcastle Crags is an 'echoey museum', its exhibits 'leaf mould' of 'sewing machines' and 'cordite'. (Since Hughes wrote 'Hardcastle Crags', the new prosperity of tourism has of course greatly altered Calderdale.) Now, Hughes claims to have almost eluded the area's history:

Feel again
The clogs twanging your footsoles, on the street's steepness,
As you escaped.

This poem combines the cerebral undercurrent of 'Slump Sundays' with the emotional authenticity and tenderness that makes the 'relatives' poems here much more successful: the images gain simplicity and rightness, and that kind of objective humility earlier, self-involved, dramatic poems like 'Out' lacked:

She hung round your neck her whole valley

Like David's harp.
Now, whenever you touch it, God listens
Only for her voice.

Hughes' inner self, his 'spectre-double', remains 'dedicated' to this valley, a 'temple' where God hears 'her Missa Solemnis' for the dead, even now she, like Beethoven, does not.

The five other poems about Hughes' family printed here - 'Dust As We Are', 'Source', 'Sacrifice', 'For the Duration' and 'Walt' - have a humanity and alertness which little in Hughes' earlier writing about people led one to anticipate. (- Except his elegies. These people are dead, too.) With their short, precise statements, tender and uncompromising and objective, retreating and trying again when they feel they have betrayed something, the poems possess a beauty which grows with repeated readings. This is the first time since the fifties Hughes has obviously written with a role-model in mind - Lowell's Life Studies. The poems (for all their originality) are also Hughes' closest approach to the style and ends of most contemporary verse (which owes a lot to some later Lowell): Dunn's Elegies, especially, are stylistically comparable. Each poem's series of small images or events - and the human emotions which they subtly, even inexplicably, do stand for - are no longer subjected to Hughes' usual, single, intellectual drift or end; something emotionally complex is built up from quite simple pieces of language. The most deeply compassionate pieces, 'Source' and 'For the Duration', abjure any kind of metaphoric undercurrent, such as the themes of 'laughter', and of washing away the horror, which unify 'Dust As We Are'.

The poem most recalling Lowell is 'Sacrifice', with its apparently inconsequential, but utterly solid, series of curious reminiscences, its almost-clumsy, exciting and economic narration (though Hughes' language is, still, more elaborate and opaque). Hughes' uncle's suicide comes, finally, mid-stanza, with such a sharp shock not only after the poem's humour but because the language has in fact suggested it (much as it took shape in the

man's mind): 'Born at the bottom of the heap' (l. 1); 'When he was little he'd drop/ And kick and writhe' (ll. 5 - 6); 'His fateful forehead sank' (l. 11); 'an elastic vault into freedom' (l. 18); ' - to the drop' (l. 31); 'His fireside escape... Was a kick at the ceiling' (ll. 37 - 9); 'Flight! Flight!' (l. 43); 'I just flew straight up - and when I dropped... For once/ I landed smack on my feet' (ll. 52 - 5). The suggestions must impress us subliminally, though they are too well disguised to obtrude as contrived. The death in fact happens in a subordinate clause, emphasizing how the man was never wholly permitted to exist: cushions are plump again 'Before he'd stepped'; 'His laugh', not himself, 'thumps' Hughes. The story exposes the personal urgency behind the presentation of Janet's suicide in Gaudete.

Hughes uses a different style to portray his uncle Walt: 'The Atlantic' seems to reject even overt sympathy as potentially falsifying or diminishing. Once Hughes' uncle was 'The Millmaster... whose frown/Tossed my boyhood the baffling coin "guilty"'. Now, Hughes nurses the dying man, but discovers his guilt somehow remains: 'I dare hardly look at him'. 'His reaching stare/ Meets mine watching him. I can't escape it/ Or hold it. Walt! Walt!/ I bury it/ Hugger-mugger anyhow/ Inside my shirt'. In Calderdale, money mixes with humanity eerily, and war-wounds seem to determine everything. Sea-imagery also binds together Walt's life: his family-life's 'full-rigged fortune' is wrecked, leaving him a 'Strange Dead Sea creature'; his attempted suicide 'swamped and drowned/ The synapses, the breath-born spinnaker shells' of speech; Hughes 'found him... Fish-eyed... clawing at air'. Now, his breathing 'Aye' seems part of the (warlike) 'thuds and sighs' of the world's ocean's 'Mountains of dissolution' and of his approaching death - 'Black, tilted bedrock struggling up,/ Mouthing disintegration'.

Hughes calls 'On The Reservations' 'a salute to the South Yorks poet Jack Brown, and my old schoolfriends' (1989 'Wolfwatching' p. 3). It is also a social poem far more convincing than Earth-Numb's, variously resembling Harrison's exactly-contemporaneous V: Hughes says more (in much less space)

and hopes where Harrison laments. The poem's fugal structure - as bewildering, or off-putting, as Cave Birds' - tries to knot together Wolfwatching's themes: a culture's inheritance, the play of memory, the evils in Western civilization, and the hope, above all, that the spirit will eventually come clear. In part one, 'Sitting Bull on Christmas Morning' finds in 'his stocking' what the Western life-style has to give him: it looks like a camera. Simultaneously, a Yorkshire coal-miner contemplates souvenirs and memories. (Sitting Bull's campaigns grew from his refusal to grant mining rights on the Sioux reservations.) 'Though', like an Indian, 'tribally scarred (stitch-tattoos of coal-dust)', the miner 'feels like a new man', washed clean, and existentially freed, each day, 'Two eyepits awash in the millenia'. But, arrestingly, 'He stands... With his foot in his stocking'. The industrial, technological and puritan inheritance seems an inextricable part of him (the reader cannot distinguish the miner's recollections from the abandoned coal-mine). 'A doll's cot. And a tiny coffin' are buried in the mine too; a new generation, according to Hughes' Freudian determinism, does not come to Logos' patrimony, 'Chapels pews broken television', as innocent as Sitting Bull. 'Orca Tiger Eagle', nature's untamed energies, were 'tattered' 'before [our] memory began'. More than the wisdom of 'a North American Indian sage' (1980 'Williamson' p. 163) seems needed to end 'this lifetime nightshift'.

The 'Nightvoice' is the miner's wife's spirit's, 'incommunicado' (1971 'Talking Without Words'; Faas 1980 p. 190) except in dreams that are themselves incomprehensible - a direct result, Smohalla would claim, of Puritanism's work-ethic. Smohalla's speech (the epigraph) continued: 'You ask me to dig for stone [or coal]. Shall I dig under her [the earth's] skin for bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body and be born again' (in Margot Astrov The Winged Serpent, N. Y. 1946 p. 85). We, too, no longer manage or understand the river, and fire, of life, nor are born again: the woman dreams she is not 'soaking in but/ bulging pulsing out of [her] pores' the Don with its sewage; 'her Dad alive/ dug up is being/ pushed into a wood-burning stove/ by pens-

ioners'; the spoil-heaps are piles of corpses, 'every/ pit-shaft a/ mass-grave', while 'the message/ of the survivors' has been 'washed off her wrists/ and hands'. She is 'a state numeral' (1967 'Popa'; Faas 1980 p. 183), 'an ant/ in a formicary' in Stalin's Russia (or 'the laboratories/ Between Mersey and Humber'). Only at the end do her dream, the surrealism, and the syntax, grow meaningful: Panta Rhei's 'flare of pure torrent/[sluices] the pit muck/ off [her husband's] shoulder-slopes'. Self and anima are meaningfully married and section one's Christian 'bible of coal' burns now 'in their hearth' as a spiritual epiphany, the actual earth which underlies our dreams and history:

fingers of the original sun [open]
the black
bright book of the stone
he'd brought from beneath dreams....

The woman - 'did she dream it' - seems unable to manage this fleeting enlightenment. Sitting Bull's 'Ghost Dance' movement failed largely because it was spiritual more than practical. The punk rocker of Hughes' poem - the son, perhaps, of the miner and his wife - is evidence of the buried 'aboriginal' energies in their newest generation, 'weeping, asking for life', 'Bomblit' but also 'rainbowed' after the 'flooded cellar'. Yet the spirit's urge to 'Start afresh' has already, 'a bacchus chained', been perverted by puritanism, and seems ('Swastika limbs') like Nazism's.

'A Dove' is an older poem (1979), but juxtaposed to 'On the Reservations' it takes on an extra meaning: the 'twig-tether' resembles our millstone of history, the flying 'love-weights' the winged, liberated spirit. 'Nearly uncontrollable', the doves can still manage themselves via ritual, 'Temple-dancers'. Hughes reprints the poem here because he still wants an 'up-beat' ending, and as a kind of prayer for the survival of the earth and its creatures, whatever happens to Krogon.

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