

AN EXAMINATION OF THE NOTIONS  
OF "MASCULINITY" AND "FEMININITY"  
IN THE POETRY AND PROSE OF TED HUGHES AND SEAMUS HEANEY

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SYNOPSIS

Throughout Ted Hughes' work, the "lack" that he sees as the fundamental constituent of Western culture is approached in terms of gender. His work is informed by the belief that the history of patriarchal civilization is a record of exile from a plenitude of being, an Imaginary unity with what is troped as a maternal nature. The role of literature is, in some way, to restore the alienated subject to fulfilment, the latter taking two forms: an expanded, visionary male, in the quest-romances of the 1970s, who bears comparison with Blake's Sons of Eternity; and, in his later poetry, a less hyperbolic quasi-Wordsworthian worshipper of a humanized, feminine nature.

In the case of Seamus Heaney, whilst the prose explores modes of writing revolving around a masculine/feminine polarity, the vexed issues of colonialism and nationalism prompt, in the 1970s, a series of "sexual conceits" which express his sense of alienation from a motherland violated by "masculine" imperialism. The archetypal and mythic parallels which inform these concerns come under increasing scrutiny in the more recent work, which, in a comparable manner to Hughes, can be read as a "demythologizing" of earlier preoccupations.

What both writers' use of gender reveals is an intense engagement with history; their notions of masculinity and femininity are to be seen as part of a formal attempt to find aesthetic resolutions to socio-political conditions which, in various ways, limit and circumscribe individual desire and gratification.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this thesis I have used the following abbreviated forms of the titles of the major poetry and prose works of Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney. For full publishing details see the relevant sections of the bibliography.

### TED HUGHES

- C        *Crow*, augmented impression (1972)  
CB       *Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama* (1978)  
CSV      *Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (1971)  
FI       *Flowers and Insects* (1986)  
G        *Gaudete* (1977)  
HR       *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957)  
L        *Lupercal* (1960)  
M        *Moortown* (1979)  
MD       *Moortown Diary* 1989)  
PM       *Poetry in the Making* (1967)  
R        *River* (1983)  
RE       *Remains of Elmet* (1979)  
SS       *Season Songs*, second edition (1985)  
W        *Wodwo* (1967)

### SEAMUS HEANEY

- DN       *Death of a Naturalist* (1966)  
DD       *Door into the Dark* (1969)  
FW       *Field Work* (1979)  
HL       *The Haw Lantern* (1987)  
GT       *The Government of the Tongue* (1988)  
P        *Preoccupations* (1980)  
S        *Stations* (1975)  
SI       *Station Island* (1984)  
WO       *Wintering Out* (1972)

**PART I POETICS AND GENDER**

**EARLY POETRY AND THE PROSE WRITINGS**

## CHAPTER 1. TWO POET-WARDENS: THE EARLY POETRY OF HUGHES AND HEANEY

### I. THE WITHOUT-WORLD OF THE OTHER

Matthew Arnold once wrote of human existence that it is "hurl'd ... on the Field of Life, / An aimless unallay'd Desire". Such melancholic resignation seems a long way from the energy and vibrancy of Ted Hughes' early poetry, which, in 1957, he described as engaged in "the war between vitality and death".<sup>1</sup> Vitality, in these texts, is said to be visible in the world of nature because it has been largely suppressed by modern culture. Poetry articulates this lost, dynamic energy, and is reactionary in that it reacts against what Wordsworth, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, labels an obsession with "gross and violent stimulants".<sup>2</sup> For Hughes, no less than Wordsworth over a century and a half before him, the stimuli of modernity have created a sensibility that is atrophied. As a quasi-Wordsworthian "worshipper of Nature" - a point developed at length in chapter eight - Hughes directs his readers away from this diminished sense of being, towards a plenitude that is most clearly expressed, at least in his early poems, by animals. Hughes' nature worship, however, is clearly related in other early poems to an awareness of the unallayed desire which, as in Arnold, is the basic condition of "the Field of Life". This field, or battleground, is the space in which Hughes' poetic speakers and personae become aware of the alienation they experience with regard to a complete or "natural" sense of being. This alienation, however, is frequently explored in the distinctly *cultural* field of masculinity and femininity; the female signifying - like nature to culture - the desirable other whom the male self seeks to appropriate in order to allay a consciousness riven by lack.

Through a series of close readings, the first section of this chapter will seek to outline the significance of femininity in

Hughes' early poetry, and tie the preoccupations of his often ignored love poetry to those of his better known nature poems. I will conclude this analysis by linking Hughes' concerns to those of two German philosophers - Schopenhauer and Nietzsche - whose work can be seen to provide a useful context in which to place Hughes' own.

Hughes' somewhat uncharacteristic early love lyric, "Song", is an example of his poetry's frequent displacement of the alterity of the object world of nature onto the female object of a desiring male subject. The poem reads as a paean of praise to a Muse by a lover-poet, and has a tone quite different from those other early poems concerned with women as hags, whores and witches. In this light, one may well view this poem as a sort of "apostrophe", that is, an address to a fantastic female in a style distinct from Hughes' usual manner in *The Hawk in the Rain*, *Lupercal* and other contemporaneous uncollected poems. In Ekbert Faas' words, it is thus a "love address to a female of mythic dimensions", who can be equated with the Moon Goddess made famous by Robert Graves' eccentric anthropological study, *The White Goddess*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the poem is structured around the twinned concepts of alienation and desire that predominate in the early love poems. The desire for the woman is closely bound to Hughes' obsession with a maternal nature; the essential "spirit" of which, it is argued, has been repressed by a culture given over to an erroneous patriarchy, and from which humanity has consequently been exiled. These are concerns which Hughes examines in his prose works of the 1960s and '70s, a plethora of essays and reviews that I will be returning to in the course of this chapter and, more fully, in the next.

O lady, when the tipped cup of the moon blessed you  
You became soft fire with a cloud's grace;  
The difficult stars swam for eyes in your face;  
You stood, and your shadow was my place:  
You turned, your shadow turned to ice  
O my lady.



O lady, when the sea caressed you  
You were a marble of foam, but dumb.  
When will the stone open its tomb?  
When will the waves give over their foam?  
You will not die, nor come home,  
O my lady.

O lady, when the wind kissed you  
You made him music for you were a shaped shell.  
I follow the waters and the wind still  
Since my heart heard it and all to pieces fell  
Which your lovers stole, meaning ill,  
O my lady.  
(*HR*, p. 19)<sup>4</sup>

Leonard Scigaj claims that this is a relatively "straightforward lyrical love poem", in which the lover-poet "transcend[is] the limits of isolated selfhood".<sup>5</sup> However, it can be argued that, on the contrary, such transcendence remains tantalizingly elusive, that the displaced woman, who "will not die, nor come home", functions as the embodiment of the very inability of the isolated self to escape a state of crippling solipsism. This introduces a central theme of Hughes: the sense that subjectivity is a condition infused with lack, dominated by the desire to appropriate the "other" in order to find some sort of fulfilment. In this way, the male's loss of the woman's presence in "Song" can be seen to inaugurate the common structure in Hughes' poetry of the quest-romance, which comes to fruition in *Crow*, *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*. In the present text, the desirable *telos* of this quest, the location of the mysterious female, remains deferred. We shall see how the frustration of this early male quester, endlessly following the water and the wind, comes to achieve greater resonance in the more developed quests of the 1970s. "Song" concludes on a note of utter failure:

O lady, consider when I shall have lost you  
The moon's full hands, scattering waste,  
The sea's hands, dark from the world's breast,  
The world's decay where the wind's hands have passed  
And my head, worn out with love, at rest  
In my hands, and my hands full of dust,  
O my lady.

The disintegration of the male is interpreted as the inevitable result of his catastrophic loss of the nameless lady. Yet that loss has been inscribed since the opening of the poem as the lack which is the mainspring of the poem's apostrophic desire. The only conclusion to this desire is the "rest" of death, as the speaker's subjectivity (his "head") crumbles into "dust". Interestingly, it is not the lady - as would seem logical - who resides in the final place of rest, but a void in which any distinction between subject and object has been annihilated, where desire is utterly "worn out". In the realms of space and time the poet-lover seems doomed to a perpetual repetition of his quest, and a constant apostrophe, because a rest from his desire would, paradoxically, destroy not only the identity of that which is desired, but also the desiring subject himself. This oxymoron is central to the early lyrics, and extends its connotations throughout Hughes' work. As Brian John comments about Hughes' early poetry in general, "this is a world in which man is not permitted the comfort of feeling 'at home'".<sup>6</sup>

This brief close-reading of Hughes' earliest collected poem is useful in that it can be seen to map out certain key features of Hughes' oeuvre. The theme of an exile that seeks to become an exodus is one of particular importance, and is an issue that ceaselessly turns on the notion of an alienation from a female figure. Femininity, as well as merely denoting the female other to the male self, also becomes the vehicle, in *Crow*, *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, for the concept of "inner", repressed being, in *Wodwo*, the noumenal essence or "will" of nature, and, in the descriptive poetry from *Season Songs* to *Flowers and Insects*, the "outer" world of natural phenomena. From all these "others" Hughes' speakers and protagonists find themselves alienated. Similarly, the paradox that annihilation is simply the flipside of plenitude (as both imply the absence of desire) is one that becomes more and more central to Hughes' texts up to and including *Cave Birds*. In *The Hawk in the Rain*, this paradox is submerged beneath the more

overt aim of Hughes' relatively undiscussed love poems: the desire to annul the lack at the heart of the male singer of "Song" by encompassing and controlling the female other. The poems prefigure one half of what a review of 1970 calls the "quest for a marriage in the soul or a physical re-conquest".<sup>7</sup> The spiritual marriage comes to the fore in the major works of the 1970s, in, for instance, the alchemical "marriage" narrated in both *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, whilst, in the early love poetry, it is physical reconquest that predominates. Nevertheless, both quests, as I will make clear in the course of this thesis, are attempts to find fulfilment, to allay the lack and hence desire that finds its earliest expression of "Song".

Before considering the attempted mastery of the woman, the relations between the sexes in these texts is worth documenting. The short poem, "Parlour-Piece", is typical:

With love so like fire they dared not  
Let it out into strawy small talk;  
With love so like a flood they dared not  
Let out a trickle lest the whole crack,

These two sat speechlessly:  
Pale cool tea in tea-cups chaperoned  
Stillness, silence, the eyes  
Where fire and flood strained.  
(*HR*, p. 20)

The term "strained" might be taken as an adjective pertinent to the majority of these lyrics,<sup>8</sup> in which the repression or containment of primal energies ("fire and flood") in the fragile vessel of the human body is perceived as a straining synonymous with a debilitating restraining. The repetition and rhyme of "dared not" in stanza one foregrounds the extent to which the poem is a rather crude satire on the limits social convention sets around existence. In contrast to the parlour's lovers one should, as the poem "Billet-Doux" declares, "hold that 'not' to the light", to reveal the flaws of cultural norms. For Hughes, quite simply, the negation or repression of these rather ill-defined

energies is dangerous and destructive. I will have more to say on this subject later in this chapter. For the present, the hampering negatives of society, hammered home via the complete identity of the rhyme on "not", can be seen to be offset by the "talk"/"crack" and "chaperoned"/"strained" half-rhymes, where the form works with the content to imply an incipient failure to contain unallayed desire within the fragile china of social mores. In this light, I simply cannot understand F. Grubb's belief that, in "Parlour-Piece", "the lovers regard each other speechlessly, relishing the plenitude".<sup>9</sup> It is precisely the suppression of a plenitude (which would be a form of annihilation, the destruction of the lovers' frustrated desire) and the seeming immanence of such passionate intensity that is the poem's concern.

"Billet-Doux" translates the passion of "Parlour-Piece" into the male desire of "Song". The male self's "truth" - "Walking the town with his head high / And naked as his breath" - is that of the man celebrated in "Dick Straightup" in *Lupercal*, the far from subtle title of the latter poem implying an over-weening and seemingly self-sufficient masculinity. It is this attitude that spurns the female, as in "Soliloquy of a Misanthrope", where the persona, considering his burial, "shall thank God thrice heartily / To be lying beside women who grimace / Under the commitments of their flesh, / And not out of spite or vanity" (*HR*, p. 22). Inversely, it is this same attitude that desires the woman. The man, in "Billet-Doux", declares he "has looked far enough", if he has found one,

Who sees straight through bogeymen,  
The crammed cafes, the ten thousand  
Books packed end to end, even my gross bulk,  
To the fiery star coming for the eye itself,  
And while she can grabs of them what she can.

Love you I do not say I do or might either.  
I come to you enforcedly -  
Love's a spoiled appetite for some delicacy -  
I am driven to your bed and four walls  
From bottomlessly breaking night -

If, dispropertied as I am  
By the constellations staring me to less  
Than what cold, rain and wind neglect,  
I do not hold you closer and harder than love  
By a desperation, show me no home.  
(HR, p. 24)

The Petrarchan resignation of "Song" is replaced in this text by a desperate urgency. Nevertheless, both speakers share a hyperbolic anxiety when confronted with the possibility of solitude: to be alone is to be gripped by a desire for which the conventional term love is wholly inappropriate, the latter merely a dilettantish "spoiled appetite for some delicacy". Margaret Uroff (one of the few critics of Hughes to recognize the importance of the love lyrics in *The Hawk in the Rain*) makes the relevant point that "many early poems embody an unreconciled contradiction between the man as possessor and the violent and destructive power of love as possession. And beneath this contradiction is an ambiguous fear and praise of women."<sup>10</sup> But if it is less love than desire which is the impulse behind the male speakers in these poems, then the possession of the woman is simply the attempt to surmount the sense of being without "home", trapped in an unaccommodated and unstable existence. Throughout Hughes' work the individual is "dispropertied", a condition which is interpreted as the result of the "progress" of Western culture away from nature. The desperation of the male lovers in *The Hawk in the Rain* is the first articulation of this plight, and one must therefore be wary of endorsing Michael Schmidt's statement that "Hughes is a manly poet, and his attitude to women in the poems - infrequently voiced [sic] - is often tinged with fear and revulsion. Isolation seems synonymous with independence."<sup>11</sup> The final sentence of this judgement misses the central issue that structures the early poems. The fact is, woman becomes a synonym for that which the male lacks, here a stable ground that is metonymically imaged as a "bed and four walls". Nonetheless, the desperation of desire is one which outstrips itself, as the poem "Incompatibilities" makes clear:

Desire's a vicious separator in spite  
Of its twisting women round men:  
Cold-chisels two selfs single as it welds hot  
Iron of their separates to one.

Old Eden commonplace: something magnets  
And furnaces and with fierce  
Hammer-blows the one body on the other knits  
Till the division disappears.

But desire outstrips those hands that a nothing fills,  
It dives into the opposite eyes,  
Plummets through blackouts of impassables  
For the star that lights the face,

Each body still straining to follow down  
The maelstrom dark of the other, their limbs flail  
Flesh and beat upon  
The inane everywhere of its obstacle,

Each, each second, lonelier and further  
Falling alone through the endless  
Without-world of the other, though both here  
Twist so close they choke their cries.

(HR, p. 26)

Desire is here seen as the very constitution of subjectivity, which can only have meaning in its ability to differentiate itself from the object world. That is, desire "cold-chisels two selfs single", even in the sexual possession of the desired object: to allay the ceaseless deferral of desire requires nothing less than the obliteration of the subject, whose identity is a construct of the alienation from the other in the bottomlessly-breaking night of being. In terms of gender, the notion of masculinity only has meaning in its difference from femininity: sexual identity is a product of "women twisting round men". What is typical of Hughes in this image is the sense that the female provides the limit to the male; it is femininity that is the other, not masculinity. For instance, the drunken, crazed Reverend Bladderwrack, in *The Burning of the Brothel*, finds the other to his somewhat inadequate spiritual self in the whores who twist around him:

Bloodied, Bladderwrack stood,  
The bottle-neck in his hand,  
His back to the bolts, but the rude  
Fingers of whores wound  
Every inch of his every  
Member as if they meant  
His body a braille breviary:  
["My lost sheep," he cried, with tears.  
The wolves' grins split their ears.<sup>12</sup>

In "Incompatibilities", Bladderwrack's desire is one that seeks to overcome the rending dualism of male and female, self and other, by fusing the two into one, welding "hot / Iron of their separates to one". Yet this is said to be no more than an "old Eden commonplace", a wish-fulfilment as intangible as the lady sought by the protagonist of "Song" and the home the speaker of "Billet-Doux" desperately requires. The incompatibility of desire, however, is that possession rather than inaugurating an atonement causes a further alienation, one now as much from oneself as from another. The condition of the woman in "Billet-Doux", "who sees straight through ... To the fiery star coming for the eye itself", is here reversed: the lover "plummets" into the abyss, the "maelstrom", of the other, searching "for the star that lights the face". Lack is the very constitution of Hughes' desiring subjects; in the words of "Law in the Country of the Cats", "each looks into the gulf in the eye of the other" (HR, p. 47). The "without-world of the other" exposes the hollowness Hughes believes exists at the very core of the human condition. Sexual desire merely foregrounds the given of existence, the "falling alone" of a self which remains unsatisfied, exiled from a final object of desire for which the sexual partner provides an inadequate substitute. Uroff again touches the nub of this issue but fails to draw a sustained problematic from the poem when she writes: "the union of man and woman is a moment of shared *otherness* in which the pair are joined violently, obliterated, and yet filled with a desire for the other who has disappeared."<sup>13</sup> The other is that for which another human subject can only provide a poor compensation; desire "outstrips" this object, pitching the subject into an even greater sense of exile.

The text of this poem as originally published in *Nation* magazine is clearer on this score but misses the oxymoronic feel of the phrase "a nothing fills" in the collected text. The former's third stanza begins:

But desire, outstripping the hands that mere touch  
fills,  
Has dived into the opposite eyes,  
Plummeting ...<sup>14</sup>

That desire cannot be satisfied simply by sexual possession is a central concern in these poems. However, the phrase, "nothing fills", expresses far more clearly than "mere touch fills" the paradoxical notion that as nothing can fill or satisfy desire, then an initial lack, a fundamental "nothing", must inhabit or fill a subjectivity that thus can never be sexually fulfilled. The "bottomlessly breaking night" of "Billet-Doux", the exile from the already exiled woman in "Song", is, in this respect, the incompatibility of the present poem. The sexual act opens up the space of desire rather than annulling it within the lovers' embrace.

Another early poem, not collected in *The Hawk in the Rain*, provides a sustained narrative of this desire to enlace and weld two into one. "Bawdry Embraced", relates the story of Tailfever and Sweet Undercut to Bawdry, setting the lovers up as a model of annihilating satisfaction. The "bawdreur good", Tailfever, seeks out his "bawdriste":

Till bright a day, and dark a day,  
His palate picked out  
Of promiscuity's butchery  
Sweet Undercut.

Born bawdriste, in all England  
Never came better.  
Heaven itself blazed in her bush.  
Tailfever got her....



They caught each other by the body  
And fell in a heap;  
A cockerel there struck up a tread  
Like a cabman's whip.

And so they knit, knotted and wrought,  
Braiding their ends in;  
So fed their radiance to themselves  
They could not be seen.

And thereupon - a miracle!  
Each became a lens  
So focussing creation's heat  
The other burst in flames.

Bawdry! Bawdry! Steadfastly  
Thy great protagonists  
Died face to face, with bellies full,  
In the solar waste

Where there is neither skirt nor coat,  
And every ogling eye  
Is a cold star to measure  
Their solitude by.<sup>15</sup>

This peculiar lyrical ballad is, in many ways, synoptic of the early love poetry. The sexual act, as in "Incompatabilities", is seen as a desperate attempt to "weld ... separates to one", to fuse desiring subject and desired object in a totality that would destroy the solipsism of the dispropertied quester of "Song". The "knotted and wrought" lovers look forward to the image of the Reverend Bladderwrack's body as a "braille breviary" to the whore's fingers, and, like that clergyman's fate, the "braiding" is portrayed as, in Julian Gitzen's words, a "physical desire ... that can be satisfied only by devouring its object".<sup>16</sup> However, the satisfaction of desire requires not only the destruction of the object of desire but that of the identity of the desiring subject. If "Incompatabilities" revealed the impossibility of physical consumption providing a closure to desire, so too the physical conquest of "Bawdry Embraced" is less significant than the apocalyptic conflagration of Tailfever and Sweet Undercut - as each "other burst in flames" vis-à-vis the other - where death satiates the protagonists.

"Bawdry Embraced" may be seen as somewhat crudely reworking the overwhelming desire of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* to be each other. A desire which, in Catherine's famous outburst to Nelly Dean, is believed to be achieved: "Nelly, I am Heathcliff - he's always, always in my mind - not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself - but as my own being". Nevertheless, Catherine must die before she attains this sense of utter unity with the desired Heathcliff. In Juliet Mitchell's view, both Catherine and Heathcliff are "the bisexual possibility of the other ... evoking a notion of oneness which ... can only come with death".<sup>17</sup> Brontë's novel, like Hughes' poem, is caught within the dilemma that desire can only be satisfied when the very concepts that inform it, subjectivity and objectivity, cease to exist, when the "great protagonists" (Heathcliff and Catherine, Tailfever and Sweet Undercut) die "face to face". On Arnold's "Field of Life", in contrast to the oneness of death, desire is subject to what Hughes mildly - and ironically - terms incompatibility, where each lover is "falling alone through the endless / Without-world of the other". This is the condition which "a nothing fills", comprised as it is of a fundamental lack which nothing, save death, can satisfy. In the following chapter I will place the structure of desire adumbrated in Hughes' work within a psychoanalytical context; for the present, the powerful paradox of "a nothing fills" needs to be examined in relation to the male fear of the unmaning woman.

In the first of the "Two Phases", the double-bind of desire - that in seeking to appropriate the other it further expropriates the self - is clearly bound to masculinity:

You had to come  
Calling my singularity,  
In scorn,  
Imprisonment.

It contained content  
That, now, at liberty  
In your generous embrace,  
As once, in rich Rome,  
Caractacus,  
I mourn.  
(HR, p. 29)

The "singularity" of the male self is revealed by the woman to be a solipsistic "imprisonment". The woman's "generous embrace" appears to be a liberation from this state, and yet, as the analogy with Caractacus suggests, the physical act is yet another instance of a further expropriation. This metaphor of sexual colonization is the vehicle for the dispropertied condition of the male, however, the property (the "bed and four walls") of the woman that the man desires to possess in "Billet-Doux" is exchanged here for the notion of the male as a property to be possessed and hence exiled by the woman. As in "Incompatabilities", the very act of sexual possession further dispossesses. Woman is thus as much a threat as a desirable object, as is made apparent in the second phase:

When the labour was for love  
He did but touch at the tool  
And holiday ran prodigal.

Now, stripped to the skin,  
Can scarcely keep alive,  
Sweats his stint out,  
No better than a blind mole  
That burrows for its lot  
Of the flaming moon and sun  
Down some black hole.

It would be easy to gloss this as referring to a love that traps and threatens the protagonist, unlike earlier love affairs which were a liberation, a "holiday". Yet, that the "touch at the tool" is *his* touch implies that the "content" of the first phase was one of self-love, of onanism. The contented because seemingly secure "singularity" of the male seems to lie in a masturbatory synthesis of desiring subject and desired object. The presence of the woman disturbs this imaginary possession: the liberty of her embrace is

seen as a form of exile or expropriation from earlier wish-fulfilling fantasies, a recognition of the hopeless, restless condition of desire, in which the male pursues the elusive *telos* of the "flaming moon and sun", within the bottomlessly-breaking night of the "black hole".

*Lupercal* and *Wodwo* are generally devoid of such extravagant evocations of sexuality. Nevertheless, there is one poem in the former collection that ties into the problematic as announced in *The Hawk in the Rain*. This is the short lyric, "The Voyage":

Without hope move my words and locks  
Toward you, to claim  
Neither known face nor held name -  
Death-bed, book might keep those. The whole sea's

Accumulations and changes  
Are the sea. The sea's elsewhere  
Than surrenders to sand and rocks,  
Other than men taste who drown out there.  
(L, p. 43)

The implicitly female - "other than men" - addressee is perceived to be as vast and in<sup>com</sup>prehensible as the sea. The geographical image of the unplumbed oceanic depths of the other has the same sort of connotations (if a different locus) as Freud's "dark continent" of female sexuality, one more conventionally employed in "Cleopatra to the Asp", also in *Lupercal*:

Nile moves in me; my thighs splay  
Into the squalled Mediterranean;  
My brain hides in that Abyssinia  
Lost armies foundered towards.  
(L, p. 60)

In "The Voyage", the male cannot fathom the without-world of femininity, and thus, reading the poem in conjunction with "Cleopatra to the Asp", makes one wonder how Pamela Law could believe that in the latter poem the "female principle has none of the real sexual threat that you feel in the male principle (in Hughes' early poems)".<sup>19</sup> The threat lies in the fact that the

male's desire finds no satisfaction in the sexual possession of the woman: her physical identity, her face and name, can be both held and known, like a corpse or a book. But this in no way allays the sense of a lack present even at the very moment of the woman's "surrender" to the male. The sea thus becomes less an image of the female, than a metaphor for desire itself, as both refuse to centre on a single physical location or object, suggesting instead a constantly shifting "elsewhere".

The above fairly formalist approach to those of Hughes' early poems concerned with sexuality and "love" is a convenient point of entry into Hughes' more celebrated "nature poems". The most remarkable example is "The Thought-Fox", a poem which deserves quotation in full:

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:  
Something else is alive  
Beside the clock's loneliness  
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:  
Something more near  
Though deeper within darkness  
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,  
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;  
Two eyes serve a movement, that now  
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow  
Between trees, and warily a lame  
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow  
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,  
A widening deepening greeness,  
Brilliantly, concentratedly,  
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox  
It enters the dark hole of the head.  
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,  
The page is printed.  
(HR, p. 14)

This poem is beginning to achieve the school-anthology familiarity one associates with poems such as Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud". Encrusted with criticism it is increasingly difficult to attempt an original reading of it. As such, I will discuss it indirectly, via the remarks made by Heaney in his essay, "Englands of the Mind". There Heaney writes:

Hughes' aspiration in these early poems is to command all the elements, to bring them within the jurisdiction of his authoritarian voice. And in "The Thought-Fox" the thing at the beginning of the poem which lies beyond his jurisdiction is characteristically fluid and vovelling and sibilant: "Something else is alive" whispers of a presence not yet accounted for, a presence that is granted its full vowel music as its epiphany - "Something more near / Though deeper within darkness / Is entering the loneliness." It is granted this dilation of its mystery before it is conjured into the possession of the poet-warden, the vowel keeper; and its final emergence in the fully sounded i's and e's of "an eye / A widening deepening greenness," is gradually mastered by the breaking action of "brilliantly, concentratedly", and by the shooting of the monosyllabic bolts in the last stanza.

(P, p. 154)<sup>12</sup>

Heaney's notion of poetic "mastery" is pertinent to Hughes' evocations of the female object discussed above. In "The Thought-Fox", the desirable other is the vowel-fox, a "something else" that the poetic subject seeks to appropriate in order to fill the "dark hole of the head". In Heaney's reading, such mastery is achieved through the act of writing, by that which, on the same page as this extract, he refers to as the "disciplining consonants" he traces in Hughes' *oeuvre*. I will return to the idea of "feminine" vowels and "masculine" consonants in Heaney's own work in the following section of this chapter. In the present context, the important point to note is how Heaney associates Hughes' poetic with an "authoritarian voice". This "voice" controls the elusive "thing", bringing it into the bounds, the "jurisdiction", of the writer. The fox, although without a specific gender, is thus similar to the female object of, for instance, "Song", and male desire comparable with the creative

act. In all these texts, there is the wish to locate a sense of full self-presence, by allaying desire and lack. Indeed, Richard Webster's reading of "The Thought-Fox" is one which explicitly casts the text in terms of gender. Webster argues that Hughes perceives his "poetic sensibility as 'feminine'" but that he can "indulge this sensitivity only within a protective shell of hard steely 'masculine' violence".

In "The thought-fox" itself this conflict of sensibility appears in such an attenuated or suppressed form that it is by no means the most striking feature of the poem. But ... the conflict may still be discerned. It is present above all in the tension between the extraordinary sensuous delicacy of the image which Hughes uses to describe the fox's nose and the predatory impulse which seems to underlie the poem... Indeed it might be suggested that the last stanza of the poem records what is, in effect, a ritual of tough "manly" posturing. For in it the poet might be seen as playing a kind of imaginative game in which he attempts to outstare the fox ... refusing to flinch, refusing to show any sign of "feminine" weakness.<sup>20</sup>

Webster is right to note the submerged sexual imagery at work, but, by taking this poem in isolation, his analysis makes the sexist associations of "sensuous delicacy" with femininity and "predatory" toughness with masculinity. This is a minor instance of what Mary Ellmann has termed "sexual analogy": "The hunter is always male, the prey female".<sup>21</sup> In relation to Hughes' love poems, it is more pertinent to see "The Thought-Fox" as exploring the issue of a necessary appropriation of the without-world of the other, which is here located in the animal kingdom, rather than in the unsatisfactory locus of the female body. The end of the poem seems to imply that the hollowness of the desiring subject, "the dark hole of the head" - an image reminiscent of the "black hole" of "Two Phases" - finds fulfilment. Nevertheless, we shall see that the poem is, in fact, another problematic if less overt expression of the endless deferral of satisfaction.

The self-referential quality of "The Thought-Fox" is indicative in that it foregrounds the similarity between desire and writing in

Hughes' work: in both the subject seeks to erase the alienation between subject and object, and thus obviate the solipsism of a writing/desiring self. Poetry, throughout Hughes career, has the aim of fully *re-presenting* the absent referent, and, in this light, Heaney's practical criticism, with its emphasis on the almost physical "elements" of the text - its assonantal and alliterative qualities - is extremely faithful to a project in which the poem has to achieve the solidity of the object it stands-in for.

Hughes' is thus a poetic of appropriation, in which "The Thought-Fox" is an exemplary parable of the wish to recoup the - in Heaney's words - "presence" of the absent referent. As Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts comment: "the mimetic language works two ways, evoking the movements of the fox which in turn provide an image for the movement of the poem itself".<sup>22</sup> Mimesis is therefore the ability of the authoritarian poet to *capture* the elusive "thing" within the play of signifiers. However, when one turns to Hughes' own reading of the poem, as set out in *Poetry in the Making*, one realizes that the poem is in fact a sort of *compensation* for the inability to master the reality of the animal. Hughes writes: "An animal I never succeeded in keeping alive is the fox. I was always frustrated". In contrast, the poetic fox is brought within the jurisdiction of the poet's authoritarian *diction*:

This poem does not have anything you could easily call a meaning. It is about a fox, obviously enough, but a fox that is both a fox and not a fox. What sort of fox is it that can step right into my head where presumably it still sits ... smiling to itself when it hears the dogs bark. It is both a fox and a spirit. It is a real fox; as I read the poem I see it move, I see it setting its prints, I see its shadow going over the irregular surface of the snow. The words show me all this, bringing it nearer and nearer. It is very real to me. The words have made a body for it and given it somewhere to walk... If I had not caught the real fox there in the words I would never have saved the poem. I would have thrown it into the waste paper basket as I have thrown so many other hunts that did not get what I was after. (*PM*, pp. 19-20)



What both Heaney's and Hughes' readings share is the idea of poetic "hunt", of an artistic stalking that brings the thought-fox "nearer and nearer", as the words embody, form and re-present the "real". Yet this thought-fox is explicitly a substitute for the original animal, and the writing of the poem is thus a substitute act for the failure to capture that previous creature. The thought-fox's apparent presence is, in fact, a wish-fulfilling fantasy, a compensation for what remains an initial lack. Dennis Walder quite rightly notes the pseudo-extraneous quality of the thought-fox when he comments that in the poem "Hughes discovers the strange otherness of the imagination",<sup>23</sup> but he fails to perceive that the possession of this "otherness" is wholly imaginary and compensatory. Heaney may well believe that Hughes' poems are "circles within which he conjures up presences" (*P*, p. 154), but a fuller reading of Hughes' poetry will make clear that his texts are repeatedly haunted by the doubt that poetic language can actually achieve such presence except in a deferred form.

Indeed, a close-reading of "The Thought-Fox" reveals the dispossession that undermines the seemingly unproblematic appropriation the poem narrates. The text progresses from the neutrality of the statement concerning "this blank page where my fingers move" to the quiet triumph of the declaration: "The page is printed". As such, the poem appears to narrate its own composition, or even poetic composition *per se*. The metaphorical creature of the third, fourth and fifth stanzas is both this process and, in its culminating entrance, the final product, the poem itself, "The Thought-Fox". However, this fox is less one that is *thought of* than one that is *written down*. It is the movement of the fingers on the page that seemingly draws into presence the animal, as the pen prints black marks comparable to the pawprints the fox leaves in the snow: the fox "now / And again now, and now, and now / / Sets neat prints into the snow". The reiteration of the present "now" is meant to imply the tentative process by which the poem re-presents the creature in the

fullness of its presence: the empty "page" of the snow is inscribed by the fox's spoor just as the poet "prints" the poem. However, the analogy between the printed page and the fox's trail is far from straightforward. The tracks, or "prints", left by an animal are not the mark of its presence but of its absence: they are spoor which record the trace of a creature which has since moved on. Likewise, a written text proper does not mark the full presence of the referent (here, the fox), it simply *signifies* it in its absence, inscribing the trace of a deferred referent. The written-fox is the stand-in for the fox which eluded capture by the young poet, and, in this manner, writing is a kind of desire: the quest for a presence which writing by its very constitution can never hope to deliver.<sup>24</sup>

What "The Thought-Fox" shares with the love poems, if in a more covert way, is what may be termed the wish for "atonement", the cessation of desire, that is the closure of lack, in the plenitude of full self-presence. This remains a constant theme throughout Hughes' work from the poetic plea of "Song" through *Crow*, to find its most impressive formulations in the desperate sexual activity of Lumb, in *Gaudete*, and the mystical marriage of the bird-man protagonist of *Cave Birds*. Alongside, these various quests, however, hovers the nagging doubt that language is inadequate to the task of representing this ideal.

In *Lupercal*, several poems concentrate on the twined issues of psychic integration and the function of art in this process. A useful point of entry into these texts is via the 1963 prose piece, "The Rock". There Hughes describes the landscape of his childhood, its aspect and effect. Chiefly, it is the dualism created by a black cliff and the pale sky surmounting it which was, in his words, "the *memento mundi* over my birth":

... And just as the outlook of a bottle floating upright at sea consists of simple light and dark, the light above, the dark below, the two divided by a clear waterline, so my outlook was ruled by simple light and dark, heaven above and earth below, divided by the undulating line of the moor. If

any word could be found engraved around my skull, just above the ears and eyebrows, it would probably be the word "horizon".<sup>25</sup>

This polarity was reinforced by the boy's love affair with the clear, open moors above and beyond the Rock: "From there the return home 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 began."<sup>26</sup> The prose passage clearly projects onto the natural environment the same structure of "division" between antithetical elements - light and dark, heaven above, earth below, body and soul - that is at the core of the early poetry. The need for unification is a desire not unrelated to Jung's search for the "individuated" Self, a Yin-Yang integration I will analyse in my consideration of Hughes' prose works and his later "alchemical" quest-romances. The role of the artist in such integration is central to one of the most intriguing of the poems in *Lupercal*, "To Paint a Water Lily". The text outlines a dualism very close to the division sketched out in "The Rock":

A green level of lily leaves  
Roofs the pond's chamber and paves

The flies' furious arena: study  
These, the two minds of this lady.  
(*L*, p. 29)

In conversation with Ekbert Faas, Hughes said of this poem that he "felt very constricted fiddling around with it. It was somehow like writing through a long winding tube, like squeezing language out of the end of this long, remote process."<sup>27</sup> In one respect, this comment (made in 1970) is a justification for Hughes' stylistic shift from the traditional conventions of the English lyric to the more "open" form of a poem such as "View of a Pig", which is the prelude to the anti-lyricism of *Crow*. On another, not unrelated level, the comment foregrounds the connection drawn between desire and writing in "The Thought-Fox" in that the "long, remote process" of composition is perceived as a kind of

frustrating deferment. For Hughes, poetry should function as a means to overcome the dispropertied condition of being. In the context of "To Paint a Water Lily", it is thus interesting that whilst the thematic core of the text is the split identity outlined in "The Rock", the poem, on another less obvious level, is an expression of the poetic desire of the poet-warden of "The Thought-Fox" to annul such division.

The poem, as Felicity Currie notes, is structured around the contrast between the mediation and hence deferral of writing and the apparently more immediate art of painting. Currie writes: "although we know words normally interpose between concept and object, here there seems to be a deliberate attempt to infuse words with the power of immediate contact between thing and idea."<sup>28</sup> As such, the poem is another manifesto of the poetic of appropriation: the three levels of the sign - signifier, signified ("concept") and referent ("object") - collapse into one another; the stubborn "tube" of writing thus disappears as the without-world of the lily burgeons into the full presence Currie accords to painting. This imaginary resolution is a means of dealing with the other "division" present in the poem: the "two minds of this lady", the daylight arena of the flies, and the darkened violence of the pond bed. Like "The Rock", if on a smaller scale, the natural phenomenon provides an image of a self divided into two "minds". The imagery Hughes deploys to describe these antithetical dimensions of the psyche is telling: the pond's surface is a realm of aggressive will-to-power, with "battle shouts / And death-cries everywhere hereabouts", whilst the pond-bed's depths are likened to "prehistoric bedragoned times". This is not so much a depiction of the natural environment, as a metaphor for the condition of the human subject. The lily, "deep in both worlds", provides an objective correlative for a sundered being, caught between a "consciousness" dominated by the need for some sort of

physical conquest and an "unconscious" which is a realm of repressed, primal energy.

That this lily is a "lady" inscribes the poem within the thematics of alienation and desire present in the love lyrics. The "painting" of the poem is the fantasy of the poet-warden to make manifest the referent in a manner directly analogous to the unrequited desire of the early male quester of "Song" to appropriate the female object of his apostrophe. "To Paint a Water Lily" thus has a double structure: the artistic impulse - the "painting" - of the title is to be the resolution of the division which the poem's referent becomes a metaphor for.

In "February", however, this poetic finds itself rendered somewhat ambiguous. The dream-wolf of the poem follows a trajectory close to that of the thought-fox. Whereas, the latter printed the trace of a deferred sense of self-presence, the former is a psychic imprint of the anguished emptiness that makes up existence. As so often in Hughes, there is the postulated loss of the greater original, an entropic downward spiral: "The worst [wolf] since has been so much mere Alsatian",

Now it is the dream cries "Wolf!" where these feet

Print the moonlit doorstep, or run and run  
Through the hush of parkland, bodiless, headless;  
With small seeming of inconvenience  
By day, too, pursue, siege all thought  
(L, p. 13)

The without-world of the dream-wolf "disdain[s] all that are caged, or storied, or pictured". Art, like a caged animal, is at one remove from the natural vitality it seeks to represent. And yet, it is precisely this lost vitality that Hughes' texts seek to accommodate and reappropriate for a diminished post-war culture. As the poem, "Fourth of July", comments (recalling the quest motif of "Song" and the otherworldly sea of "The Voyage"): "The hot shallows and seas we bring our blood from / Slowly dwindled",

whilst the "mind's wandering elementals, / [are] Ousted from their traveller-told / / Unapproachable islands" (L, p. 20). That which the inability to satisfy desire in the sexual possession of the other in the love poems and the purely consolatory appropriation of the thought-fox implicitly signify is made explicit in this poem: that is, the basic lack in human existence is due to the repression of psychic "wandering elementals", which are glimpsed in distorted form in dreams, but which resist artistic presentation. As was the case for the lovers in "Parlour-Piece", the conventional repression of these elemental forces is said to be dangerous: the dream-wolf's feet

Through and throughout the true world search  
For their vanished head, for the world

Vanished with the head, the teeth, the quick eyes -.  
Now, lest they choose his head,  
Under severe moons he sits making  
Wolf-masks, mouths clamped well onto the world.

The artist seemingly sublimates the wolf-like energy in the creation of the artifact, the stylized mask. The "making" of a representation of the vanished wolf's head is a desire to reappropriate that other "world", even if vastly "dwindled". Yet, this is equally a defensive gesture: the art-work provides a means of accomodating what have become, through repression, violent energies. Stan Smith latches onto the duplicity of this poetic stance when he remarks:

Thought is now besieged by these implacable revenants, which have come simply to reclaim their own, to reappropriate a lost unity, from the world which transformed them into images. To avoid repossession, the man himself sits making substitute heads, wolf-masks, to propitiate these vengeful intruders.... Hughes's own poems in a sense are wolf-masks, with which he seeks to placate forces robbed of fulfilment in a world which denies their possibility.... These forces are both within the self, in its most archaic recesses, and beyond it, in a future yet to come into its own.... [Hughes'] own atavistic nostalgia summoned these greedy revenants. Ultimately, it is a nostalgia for the future, not the past.<sup>29</sup>

The poem-as-mask is both a substitute that protects and a mediation that wishes for yet dreads its own effacement. The poem, as Smith notes, is thus nostalgic: fearful of history as a record of entropic decline, prophetic of an apocalyptic return of the repressed that will result in a terrible synthesis.

Nevertheless, that "lost unity" is the atonement to which Hughes' poetry flails: it is the human subject who, more than the "implacable revenants", has been "robbed of fulfilment". This is the lamentable condition of all of Hughes' early personae, who remain caught within what Smith calls the "enclosure of the bourgeois self".<sup>30</sup> The contrary to this limited and limiting existence is seen as evident in animals such as "The Jaguar", whose "stride is wildernesses of freedom", and, whilst "he spins from the bars", there, is in fact, "no cage to him" (HR, p. 12).

Hughes' animal poems are thus less about the object they address than the implicit criticism they direct back at human subjectivity and society at large. They figure forth what Keith Sagar calls, in the context of "The Jaguar", a "vivid otherness",<sup>31</sup> one which embodies a complete absence of the cage of solipsism and desire that is the human lot. In this manner, the limitations of the notion of a "bourgeois self" are not revised in favour of another model of human subjectivity, but are simply juxtaposed and denigrated in comparison with the desirable and largely imaginary "freedom" of the non-human.

The butt of Hughes' early poetry is hence the "Egg-Head", who is trapped within the solipsistic cage that the jaguar is free of. The subject/object dualism of the love lyrics is once again the cause for a sense of unallayed desire:

A leaf's otherness,  
The whaled monstered sea-bottom, eagled peaks  
And stars that hang over hurtling endlessness,  
With manslaughtering shocks

Are let in on his sense:  
So many a one has dared to be struck dead  
Peeping through his fingers at the world's ends,  
Or an ant's head.  
(*HR*, p. 35)

The bourgeois self is here that which Hughes calls the "staturing 'I am'" at the end of the poem, whose existence rests on the repression of the desire that drives on the speakers of poems as diverse as "Song" and "Billet-Doux". However, as in those two texts, the fulfilment of the lack that is broached as soon as one peeps "through [one's] fingers at the world's end", is annihilation: "to be struck dead".

This is the fierce double-stroke of these poems: the poet's making of the mask in "February" is an attempt to circumnavigate this dilemma, as the poetic task appears to be one in which the poet "gives-face" to that which cannot be faced without the very destruction of the poetic subject. Yet, this necessarily precludes and defers the desired immediacy of the confrontation of poet and the without-world of the other in poems such as "The Thought-Fox" and "To Paint a Water Lily". Poetry is hence a *mediator* between a cultural "I" and natural "being". This is the central dualism in Hughes' poetry, which finds its chief metaphor in the masculine/feminine opposition, where gender tropes the oppositions culture/nature and conscious/unconscious.

Those tropes find their earliest full expression in *Recklings* and *Wodwo*. Before introducing the concerns of those collections, the aesthetic broached in the preceding reading is worth comparing to that of Nietzsche's early work. In this context, it is pertinent to adduce Hughes' own reading of both this philosopher and his precursor, Schopenhauer. In 1970, Hughes declared that, "the only philosophy I have ever really read was Schopenhauer. He impressed me all right. You see very well where Nietzsche got his Dionysus. It was a genuine vision of something on its way back to the surface. The rough beast in Yeats' poems."<sup>22</sup> This, of course, is



the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* rather than, say, *Human, All too Human*, as Hughes appears to be equating Nietzsche's Dionysus with Schopenhauer's will. J. P. Stern's admirable summary of Nietzsche's Dionysian disposition usefully explicates Hughes' reading of Nietzsche in this Schopenhauerean light:

[Nietzsche] sees the [Greek] chorus, quite literally, as the crowd of satyrs accompanying Dionysus, the god of the vine and of ecstasy, on his drunken revels through the forest. In their ecstasy and in the dirge they sing, the satyrs and their god are one: they are a single, undivided expression of the impermanence and desolation of human existence, its "ground of experience". This "ground" is like the earth that was without form and like the darkness that was upon the face of the deep. It stands for and is a single, fundamental human disposition, involving as yet no division between self and world, and thus no knowledge that is not instinctive and intuitive.<sup>33</sup>

This state is lost with the "terrible wisdom of Silenus", that given in answer to a question posed by King Midas, who asks what is it man most desires. Silenus answers: "What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be *nothing*."<sup>34</sup> And thus, simply put, the birth of tragedy in the cruel consequences of such a realization. That Hughes links Dionysus to Yeats' "rough beast" of "The Second Coming" implies that the former is to be read as the antithesis to the modern culture produced, at least in part, by the Christian and Socratic traditions both Hughes and Nietzsche attack.<sup>35</sup> It is unnecessary to argue for the validity of Hughes' reading of Nietzsche; what is more important is that, for Hughes, the Dionysian is to be linked to the condition which the egg-head fears, in which the "division between self and world" is simply not present. However, humanity has been exiled from this instinctive and intuitive ground of experience, thrown onto Arnold's field of life, on which desire can find no satisfaction except, as Silenus claims, in the very annihilation of being itself.

The mask-maker of "February" can be seen as making the attempt to impose what Nietzsche calls the Apollonian order of beauty on the

terrors of the Dionysian flux. Nietzsche, commenting on Raphael's *Transfiguration*, writes: "Here we have presented, in the most sublime artistic symbolism, that Apollonian world of beauty and its substratum, the terrible wisdom of Silenus, and intuitively we comprehend their necessary interdependence."<sup>36</sup> In "A Modest Proposal", Hughes presents a wish-fulfilling consolation for the wisdom of Silenus by recourse to an order which is very close to Nietzsche's Apollonian imposition. The plight of the lovers in the poem echoes that outlined in "Incompatibilities", whilst the lupine "slavering rush" of their desire suggests that, like the wolf of "February", the cessation of lack is "not to be":

Neither can make die  
The painful burning of the coal in its heart  
Till the other's body and the whole wood is its own.  
Then it might sob contentment toward the moon.

Each in a thicket, rage hoarse in its labouring  
Chest after a skirmish, licks the rents in its hide,  
Eyes brighter than is natural under the leaves  
(Where the wren, peeping round a leaf, shrieks out  
To see a chink so terrifyingly open  
Onto the red smelting of hatred) as each  
Pictures a mad final satisfaction.  
(*HR*, p. 25)

Contentment, the possession of the other and the entire without-world of the "whole wood", is a "mad final satisfaction" that remains deferred, merely a *pictured* fantasy. The contrary to the wolves' desolation and desire is provided by the procession of the lord and his hounds, who signify a form of Apollonian "beauty", a kind of wolf-mask:

Suddenly [the wolves] duck and peer.  
And there rides by  
The great lord from hunting. His embroidered  
Cloak floats, the tail of his horse pours,  
And at his stirrup the two great-eyed greyhounds  
That day after day bring down the towering stag  
Leap like one, making delighted sounds.

Keith Sagar views these hounds and their master as "releasing creative energies through the discipline of co-operation and

respect and ceremony."<sup>37</sup> Such discipline is that of the poet-warden, here perceived as an *Übermensch*, harnessing the Dionysian substratum of the wolves in the form of hounds; and, in this sense, he is an embodiment of the poetic authoritarianism Heaney perceives in Hughes' texts. He may be said to enact what Nietzsche claims is the "truly serious task of art - to save the eye from gazing into the horrors of night and to deliver the subject by the healing balm of illusion from the spasms and agitations of the will."<sup>38</sup> I return in more detail to Hughes' formulations on the "healing balm" of art in my discussion of the prose works. For the present, it is Nietzsche's reference to the "illusion" that art provides which is significant to Hughes' poetic as expressed in these early poems. Like the appropriation of the thought-fox and the wearing of the wolf-mask, the act of creation is a compensatory activity, seeking to allay the spasms that are the simple given of post-Silenus existence.

Nietzsche's Dionysus, as Hughes implies in the above quotation, is an adaptation of Schopenhauer's will-to-live. *Wodwo* is largely an exploration of this will, which Hughes, in his review of Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution*, terms Pan. Hughes makes the claim that Nietzsche, "mistook [Pan] for Dionysus, the vital somewhat terrible spirit of natural life, which is new in every second".<sup>39</sup> This Heraclitean flux is doubly Pan: a vital, "natural" ground of being which is, nevertheless, a "terrible" principle of constant change. The will-to-live is the essence of existence, a noumenon which finds manifestation in every living thing. In Schopenhauer's words:

The phenomenon, the objectivity of the one will-to-live, is the world in all the plurality of its parts and forms. Existence itself, and the kind of existence, in the totality as well as in every part, is only from the will. The will is free; it is almighty. The will appears in everything, precisely as it determines itself in itself and outside time. The world is only the mirror of this willing; and all finiteness, all suffering, all miseries that it contains, belong to the expression of what the will wills, are as they are because the will so wills.<sup>40</sup>

The will is the thing-in-itself, which, like Nietzsche's Dionysian substratum, is theoretically undeniable yet, existentially, virtually unbearable. For both Schopenhauer and the early Nietzsche, art makes this substratum of existence tolerable in a manner analogous to Wallace Stevens' conception of the imagination, which covers the poverty of reality with tropic satisfactions. The example of Stevens is one I will return to at the close of this thesis, in my reading of Hughes' more recent work. For the present, the alienated desire that permeates Hughes' early poetry can be rewardingly read in the light of Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism: that is, the noumenal Panic will is the very foundation to the field of life, the root of all its vitality as much as the cause of all its sufferings and miseries. However, as in all adaptations of Kant, such a thing-in-itself eludes perception, glimpsed solely in the "mirror" of the object world, manifested in human sexual desire, in the tooth and claw of the animal kingdom, in the stubborn struggle of various flora to survive. *Recklings* and *Wodwo* are full of poems which express various phenomena's will-to-live ("Thistles", "Still Life" and "Skylarks", to take three poems almost at random), and, more significantly, the two volumes also mark the appearance of Hughes' feminine personification of this will or spirit of nature.

"Trees", in *Recklings*, centres on the difficulty of perceiving or representing such an elusive essence. The poem casts the speaker in the role of Wodwo-like questioner: "I whispered to the holly, 'What is your life if...?'" The feminine will-to-live is both immanent and bafflingly absent:

I whispered to the birch, "How can you...?"  
My breath crept up into a world of shudderings.  
Was she veiled?  
Herself her own fountain,  
She pretended to be absent from it, or to be becoming  
air,

Filtering herself from her fingertips  
Till her bole paled, like a reflection on water;  
And I felt the touch of my own ghostliness.<sup>41</sup>

The will resists direct apprehension, it is "veiled" by the phenomenal birch, which is simply the "reflection" of the noumenon. Yet it is this "vital, somewhat terrible" Panic spirit that is the ultimate ground to the "world of shudderings". Unlike the egg-head, the speaker has dared to "let in on his sense" the knowledge of an essential will of which he too is merely the ghostly manifestation. The dire consequence of refusing to accept this metaphysical dichotomy is charted in the third section of "Gog" in *Wodwo* (which was originally published as a separate poem called "The Knight [A Chorus]") and the uncollected poem, "Quest". The figure of the male knight is, for Hughes, emblematic of modern culture's attitude to the Dionysian substratum or feminine will-to-live. In an exchange printed after his 1970 paper, "Myth and Education", Hughes lambasts the myth of Saint George and the Dragon: "It records ... and it sets up as an ideal pattern for dealing with unpleasant or irrational experiences, the complete suppression of that terror."<sup>42</sup> This is the suppression that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, as the tale of Saint George and the Dragon is "the key symbolic story of Christianity.... Christianity in suppressing the devil, in fact suppresses imagination and suppresses vital natural life."<sup>43</sup> However desolate the ground of experience which the dragon - a variation on Yeats' rough beast - signifies may be, it is vital, and to suppress it is to be trapped within the worthless shell of the egg-head. This is the predicament of the protagonist in "Quest", whose quest-romance is the ironic counterpart to that of the subject of "Song":

I ride, with staring senses, but in  
Complete blackness, knowing none of these faithful five  
Clear to its coming till out of the blind-spot  
Of the fitful sixth - crash on me the bellowing heaving  
Tangle of a dragon all heads all jaws all fangs,  
And though my weapons were lightning I am no longer  
alive.

My victory to raise this monster's shadow from my people  
Shall be its trumpeting and clangorous flight  
Over the moon's face to its white-hot icy crevasse  
With fragments of my body dangling from its hundred  
mouths.<sup>44</sup>

In Kantian-Schopenhauerean terms, the "faithful five" senses are linked to the principle of sufficient reason,<sup>45</sup> which is inadequate to the task of comprehending the Dionysian dragon. As the speaker of "Trees" half-recognizes in his bewildered questioning, it is only to be intuitively apprehended through the "fitful sixth". The knight, like Christianity, turns what is vital and natural into a "monster" through repression, an act which - as we shall see in the following chapter - is indicative of the massive, collective repression Hughes believes has been made by Western civilization. In "The Knight", this denied will-to-live is explicitly described as feminine:

Out through the dark archway of earth, under the ancient  
  lintel overwritten with roots,  
Out between the granite jambs, gallops the hooded  
  horseman of iron.  
Out of the wound-gash in the earth, the horseman mounts,  
  shaking his plumes clear of dark soil.  
Out of the blood-dark womb, gallops bowed the horseman  
  of iron.

(W, p. 151)<sup>46</sup>

Like the protagonist of "Quest", the knight rides in search of a monster who is, in fact, the essence of his own being. The imagery is thus that of birth: he leaves the "wound-gash" of an earth troped as female, as a mother's "blood-dark womb". The rich compounds or kennings imply that he is a manifestation of this feminine will, but with an appalling irony it is precisely this ground of his existence that he must suppress and destroy:

The rider of iron, on the horse shod with vaginas of  
  iron,  
Gallops over the womb that makes no claim, that is of  
  stone.  
His weapons glitter under the lights of heaven.  
He follows his compass, the lance-blade, the gunsight  
  out

Against the fanged grail and tireless mouth  
Whose cry breaks his sleep  
Whose coil is under his ribs  
Whose smile is in the belly of woman  
Whose satiation is in the grave.

Out under the blood-dark archway, gallops bowed the  
horseman of iron.

He separates his "blood-dark" origins from his conscious, spiritual existence "under the light of heaven". As at the Rock, light and dark, heaven and earth, soul and body are set in opposition, although here it is a hierarchial one, in which the latter term is denigrated in favour of the former. The spurned femininity, that is the dark substratum of his phenomenal body, becomes a monstrous "fanged grail" due to the repression that, like the knight of "Quest", he subjects this vital aspect of being to. The knight, in Hughes poetry, is a symbol of the vain-glorious wish to deny that the body is a mirror of the Panic will, of the refusal to accept that it is an objectification of the noumenal will-to-live - "Whose cry breaks his sleep / Whose coil is under his ribs". It is consequently his own body which becomes the arena of his gladiatorial self-mutilation.

The opening section of "Gog" is spoken by a male who is the complete antithesis to the knight; a Dionysian figure who appears to have failed to hear the terrible wisdom of Silenus, and who thus accepts the desolation of existence as given:

I woke to a shout: "I am Alpha and Omega."  
Rocks and a few trees trembled  
Deep in their own country.  
I ran and an absence bounded beside me.  
(V, p. 150)

Gog is to be seen as God's without-world. The Christian God, for Hughes, is the supreme expression of the egg-head, a staturing "I am" who exists solely through the suppression of His other, Gog or Pan. He must have faith that there is no will-to-live outside His own declarations of infinite subjectivity: "I am Alpha and Omega".

God is, for Hughes, a kind of proto-existential hero, who makes the fallacious claim that He is determined solely by Himself, through His own ability to *choose*. I will be returning to the issue of Hughes and existentialism in later chapters; in the present context, one can note that God's freedom is simply a rather grand solipsism: His shout is contradicted by the fact that the rocks and trees, metonymic of nature, tremble in "their *own* country". Nature, as Schopenhauer argues, is the most obvious locus in which to observe the ceaseless struggle of the will-to-live. For Hughes, the essential spirit of nature lies beyond the realm of God's *jurisdiction*, beyond the diction, the Logos, of God: as Keith Sagar comments, Gog is "all that is not Logos".<sup>47</sup> In the gender-based binary opposition of Hughes' work from *Wodwo* onwards, this "space" is the suppressed "feminine" without-world to the "masculine" and patriarchal outlook of Christianity and, by extension, occidental thought in general. To look forward to *Crow*, Gog personifies the answer to Crow's perplexed questions concerning creation in "Crow's Theology":

          he realized that God spoke Crow -  
Just existing was His revelation.

But what  
Loved the stones and spoke stone?  
They seemed to exist too.  
And what spoke that strange silence  
After his clamour of caws faded?  
(C, p. 35)

Crow has to learn that he is not the "revelation" of God but the manifestation or objectification of a far greater will. Much as the feminine will-to-live eluded verbal formulation in "Trees", this unrepresentable thing-in-itself can, for Crow, only be apprehended through intuition, the fitful sixth sense of "Quest". That expressive silence is the "absence" that bounds beside Gog; the non-verbalized knowledge of all that resists the totalizing logocentrism of God's theology.



One needs to extend the implications of this issue, and realise that it is this unbearable, unrepresentable other that Hughes' texts seek to bring within their own juris-diction. The absent fox that, in Heaney's reading, Hughes brings into presence in "The Thought-Fox" is an early instance of what Gog more clearly symbolizes. Hughes indicates Gog's significance via two aphoristic images:

The dog's god is a scrap dropped from the table.  
The mouse's saviour is a ripe wheat grain.  
Hearing the Messiah cry  
My mouth widens in adoration.

These lines outdo Geoffrey Hill in their sensitivity to the nuances of language. The "dog's god" is its nature, its will-to-live, as is the "mouses's saviour". With a Rabelaisian zest, the near-palindrome of the former phrase and the quasi-pun in "saviour"/savour, subvert God's egg-headedness and undermine His authority. What Gog expresses is the pithy knowledge of "Logos": "God is a good fellow, but His mother's against Him" (W, p. 34). In this light, we can see that the Panic beast of the first section of "Gog" is to be set against the knight of the poem's third and final section: their relationship being close to that between knight and dragon in "Quest".

However, Hughes is not simply satirizing the knight in favour of the rough beast of Gog: the latter's Dionysian existence is so extreme that it is terrifying. Hughes himself has said:

I wrote ... [a] jaguarish poem called "Gog". That actually started as a description of the German assault through the Ardennes and it turned into the dragon in Revelations. It alarmed me so much I wrote a poem about the Red Cross Knight just to set against it with the idea of keeping it under control.<sup>48</sup>

This is reminiscent of the earlier "A Modest Proposal", which also sought to set some sort of Apollonian order against the desolation of the Dionysian flux. In *Wodwo*, this is due to the

acknowledgement that the will finds itself mirrored in an amoral struggle of entity with entity that the rational consciousness can only balk at. The central section of "Gog" concludes with this pessimistic outlook, one that deploys Schopenhauer's image of the mirror of phenomena in conjunction with Hughes' feminine personification of the noumenal will:

Sun and moon, death and death,  
Grass and stones, their quick peoples, and the bright  
particles  
Death and death and death -

Her mirrors.  
(W, p. 151)

All the phenomena of the object world previously mentioned in this section - sun, moon, flora, fauna, earth and atoms - are the reflections of a greater reality. This is at the core of the metaphysic "Gog" opposes to the Christian Logos, in which the feminine will is all that exists without God. This will is His "Mother", as "Logos" puts it: she is also the female of "Karma": "the mother / Of the God / Of the world / Made of Blood" (W, pp. 160-161).

The paradox inherent in Hughes' early poetry is that in attacking the Christian and patriarchal Logos, Hughes simply repeats the misogynist thinking he is lambasting, only in an inverted form. This is clear if we link "Gog" to a later prose comment:

The idea of nature as a single organism is not new. It was man's first great thought, the basic intuition of most primitive theologies. Since Christianity hardened into Protestantism, we can follow its underground heretical life, leagued with everything occult, spiritualistic, devilish, over-emotional, bestial, mythical, feminine, crazy, revolutionary, and poetic.<sup>49</sup>

Nature becomes "feminine" in this argument because that which is resisted - here patriarchy represented by the male trinity of the Protestant religion - is perceived as "masculinist". All that is rejected, denied and suppressed by patriarchal culture accrues to

its other, nature, which assumes the nostalgic status of an imaginary plenitude, in which no lack existed. The result of patriarchal religion is the production of an implicit list of binary oppositions: Christian/"occult", God-like/"devilish", restrained/"over-emotional", rational/"bestial", reasonable/"crazy", and conservative/"revolutionary". All of which, in this model, can be subsumed within the "masculine"/"feminine" antithesis. Ordering these oppositions into hierarchial oppositions is the image of *depth*, the latter term having been suppressed by the former, driven into an "underground heretical life", yet threatening to emerge like Yeats' rough beast as the present gyre shifts into its opposite.

What is problematical about the attempt to integrate society with nature through the retrieval of the suppressed halves of these oppositions is that Hughes equates his "heretical" nature worship with what are *already* patriarchal stereotypes of femininity, such as madness, the over-emotional and the devilish. I shall be pursuing, in the following chapters, the inability of Hughes' texts to escape from patriarchal models they implicitly condemn. For the moment, it is apparent why, from his early poems of desperate unallayed desire for the sexual object, Hughes' poetry of the 1960s should create a mythology of nostalgia in the face of the world of natural objects. And, as Hughes' comment about "Gog" suggests, this is a profoundly *ahistorical* nostalgia. That a poem which originally began as an account of a particular event in the latter stages of World War II, can be transformed into the prophetic apocalypse of Revelation, is indicative of the manner in which Hughes' poetry repeatedly turns from the material facts of history to the metaphysical consolations of a supra-historical, archetypal feminine will, and, in his later poetry, to the cyclical round of natural time.

Nostalgia is therefore bound to the notion of desire with which I began this chapter. In Hughes' work up to and including the symbolic quest-romances of the 1970s, nostalgia is a kind of

death-wish: the resolution of desire in the plenitude of integrated being is virtually indistinguishable from the cessation of *Karma* in the state of *Nirvana*. As Gifford and Roberts remark: "If ... [Hughes'] imagination is to a considerable extent death-orientated it is because the fact of death, resolutely contemplated, is the ultimate type of that unity of the inner self and 'external' nature which he attempts to express in his poems celebrating intense life."<sup>50</sup> This is the mirror image of what Thomas West calls the "unbordered I" of "Wodwo",<sup>51</sup> the egg-head's anti-self. Hughes' early claim that his poetry is concerned with the "war between vitality and death" hence becomes increasingly misleading as his work develops: it is vitality that is the Schopenhauerean "war" of the will-to-live; death provides the satiation of that struggle, the desirable retreat from the field of life. It is only with the failure of the quest-romance in *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, and the contrary position taken by the nature poetry of the '70s, that we shall see a revision of this tenet.

## II. VOWELLING EMBRACE

Seamus Heaney's early love lyrics are comparatively slight. Although formally accomplished, they lack the taut oxymoronic interest of Hughes' love poems. Nevertheless, they do provide a point of entry into the outstanding place-name poems in *Wintering Out*, where femininity begins to take on the symbolic connotations which inform the "archetypal" female of the bog poems in *North*. Whereas Hughes' use of femininity is usefully linked to the metaphysics of Schopenhauer and the early Nietzsche, Heaney's notion of femininity in these early poems (and his criticism) asks to be read in the context of post-structuralist and post-modernist critiques of "origin" and "ground". What I will argue is that Heaney's early poetry, culminating in *North* (which I consider in chapter five), runs contrary to such theories, asserting the need for a form of grounding "closure"; one which, unlike Hughes'

ontological Dionysian ground of experience, takes the form of regional and national identity; in, short, of "motherland".

Heaney's early love poetry, such as "Valediction", celebrates the balance of man and woman in a reciprocal relationship and laments the disharmony of their separation:

Lady with the frilled blouse  
And simple tartan skirt,  
Since you have left the house  
Its emptiness has hurt  
All thought. In your presence  
Time rode easy, anchored  
On a smile; but absence  
Rocked love's balance, unmoored  
The days. They buck and bound  
Across the calendar  
Pitched from the quiet sound  
Of your flower-tender  
Voice. Need breaks on my strand;  
You've gone, I am at sea.  
Until you resume command  
Self is at mutiny.  
(*DN*, p. 46)

The extended metaphor of this poem, that of the pilotless ship, stresses the "need" of the man for the presence of the woman. Like the floundering male of Hughes' "The Voyage", the man needs to locate and anchor himself through his "claim" on the female. Carlanda Green, in one of the few articles to directly examine "the feminine principle" in Heaney's poetry, implicitly sees the structure of "Valediction" as one repeated throughout Heaney's work:

For Heaney, the feminine essence may be embodied in a woman, an otter, a cow or a water pump. Wherever it is found, the feminine principle indicates an otherness about the female.... Because he often cannot understand how she knows what she knows, man, chiefly rational, finds her mysterious and often mistrusts her. Without her, however, he is fragmented and disorientated.... Through union with woman, man finds rejuvenation, increased sensitivity to life's mysteries and self-completion.<sup>52</sup>

The essentialism of Green's argument, however questionable, is faithful to Heaney's poetry. It is but a short step in the course of Heaney's work from the notion of a general "feminine essence" to the national essence of motherland that is the central concept of nationalism. That this essence is perceived as "an otherness" to a "rational" male self will find further development in Heaney's sense of *displacement* from the irrational fidelity and atavistic piety that he comes to associate with Republicanism.

"Valediction", of course, has no overt political content. It simply examines what Green terms the fragmentation and disorientation that the male experiences without the female other. The central metaphor relies on the notion of woman as both anchor, a secure ground for the male, and pilot, that which gives direction to his temporal voyage. Her "presence" in space allows him to control time, her "absence" precipitates a frightening failure in the man to retain any ability to master time's progress. This ship of time, however, forces the metaphor into an ambiguous conclusion, one that questions Robert Buttel's belief that the poem is "too neatly clinched".<sup>53</sup> Firstly, the poet describes his womanless situation as some sort of gasping "strand" whilst, secondly, the vertiginous lack of "balance" revitalizes the cliché "all at sea". The uncontrollable "sea" of, say, emotion becomes the "need" from which the poet is stranded. He is both all at sea and bereft of it.

These two meanings are not irreconcilable. Both, as the position of the semi-colon implies, are bound to the general movement of the central metaphor, and rely on the same sort of connection as, for instance, in Coleridge's famous lines, "Water, water, every where, / Nor any drop to drink",<sup>54</sup> where that which is desired is both absent and yet (seemingly) tantalizingly all-pervasive. However, there is another metaphor entwined with that of the unquenching, restless sea of need: that of the woman's voice. The subdued puns on "pitched" - both cast and timbre - and "sound" -

depth and noise - weave in the importance of the presence of her voice to the metaphorical drift of the sea and ship imagery. I will return to the idea of the "feminine" voice later in this chapter; here, it is sufficient to note the proximity of the various notions of "home", presence, voice and the woman. These are some of the markers I will use to map out Heaney's poetic territory. What, in the case of Hughes' metaphysical extravagance are also central terms, become, in Heaney's early love lyrics, bound to a mundane domesticity, that captured, for example, in "Night Drive":

I thought of you continuously  
A thousand miles south where Italy  
Laid its loin to France on the darkened sphere.  
Your ordinariness was renewed there.  
(*DD*, p. 34)

The need to lay loins together in order to find renewal and hence still the mutiny of emotions is perceived, in contrast to the frightening loss of selfhood experienced by the male in many of Hughes' lyrics, as a restraint that is, paradoxically, liberating. As "Poem For Marie" declares:

Love, you shall perfect for me this child  
Whose small imperfect limits would keep breaking:  
Within new limits now, arrange the world  
Within our walls, within our golden ring.  
(*DN*, p. 48)

The poem invites comparison with Donne's "one little roome, an every where",<sup>55</sup> although, of course, it fights shy of the contorted conceits of Donne's poem. In "Poem", the limitations imposed by the woman are a renewing arrangement of the male. The perfection of the circle, the "golden ring", circumscribes the lovers within love's walls, these walls being expressly equated with the woman to whom the poem is addressed. These are the walls celebrated in "Scaffolding": "We may let the scaffolds fall / Confident that we have built our wall" (*DN*, p. 50). The communion of the male and the female is a sublimation of both terms into a renewed entity. I will have much to say about the image of sexual

communion in later poems, here, at a simpler level, an emphasis is laid on interdependence. One instance of this uplifting "ordinariness", combined with a sexualization of the landscape akin to that of "Night Drive" (a motif used to different ends in *North*), is that contained in the short poem "Lovers on Aran":

The timeless waves, bright sifting, broken glass,  
Came dazzling around, into the rocks,  
Came glinting, sifting from the Americas

To possess Aran. Or did Aran rush  
To throw wide arms of rock around a tide  
That yielded with an ebb, with a soft crash?

Did sea define the land or land the sea?  
Each drew new meaning from the waves' collision.  
Sea broke on land to full identity.  
(*DN*, p. 47)

The harmony here is the diametrical opposite of the disharmony of the "Valediction". The metaphor of the sea is combined with that of the land to force a "collision" of two that combine to achieve a "full identity"; the loss of "Valediction" being the antithesis to this definition of "new meaning".

The embrace of "Lovers on Aran", the appropriation of the other in order to achieve a stable identity, is given fuller expression in "Undine". The female persona, a water-spirit, represents that which Green calls the mysteriousness of *both* the woman and the land. The poem charts the taming of these by the male lover and farmer - "the liberating, humanizing effect of sexual encounter", as Heaney puts it in "Feeling Into Words" (*P*, p. 53):

I swallowed his trench

Gratefully, dispersing myself for love  
Down in his roots, climbing his brassy grain -  
But once he knew my welcome, I alone

Could give him subtle increase and reflection.  
He explored me so completely, each limb  
Lost its cold freedom. Human, warmed to him.  
(*DD*, p. 26)



"Undine" is particularly interesting in that even as the poem defamiliarizes the land, via the sprite-like personification, it narrates an appropriation of the strange by the human. This gesture is central to Heaney's poetry. Femininity becomes increasingly the sign for all that is somehow "extraneous" to the male poet. Dillon Johnston has perceptively remarked that in the second part of *Wintering Out*, the poems from "A Winter's Tale" through "First Calf" "portray woman, moved by elemental forces of moon and tide, as antithetical to the pragmatic world of man."<sup>56</sup> The persona of "Shore Woman", walking the strand, has rights on the beach's "fallow avenue" (*WO*, p. 67) apart from her husband; whilst the unmarried mother of "Limbo" drowning her child in the shallows opens up a region, "A cold glitter of souls / Through some far briny zone", that the male Christ is denied access to:

Even Christ's palms, unhealed,  
Smart and cannot fish there.  
(*WO*, p. 70)

The outcome of associating femininity with the non-pragmatic, the mysterious and the irrational will be the connection Heaney draws between this gender and an archetypal and atavistic sense of national identity, one which the poet of *North* seeks to probe and appropriate in an analogous manner to the male digger of "Undine". Indeed, the poet as spadesman is present from as early as the poetic manifesto "Digging":

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.  
(*DN*, p. 14)

I find myself in partial agreement with Thomas Dillon Redshaw, when he writes that Undine "seems to be Gaea, mistress, and Muse possessed by male energy.... Heaney's laborer, also a poetic 'digger', finds his regional coronation in Undine's final embrace, which turns him into husbandman."<sup>57</sup> However, this "embrace" needs to be seen in relation to the poet-warden invoked in "Englands of the Mind". That is, the digger-poet's "exploration" of Undine is

as much an attempt to circumscribe her - to appropriate her via the pen-spade - as is her reciprocal possession of him. The poet as husbandman is Heaney's variation of the poet as warden; that which Heaney desires to draw within the "jurisdiction" of his early poetry is what "Valediction" terms the necessary "presence" of the other, without whom the self can have, in the words of "Lovers on Aran", no "full identity".

To return to Heaney's comments on Hughes also opens out another relevant and related dimension of this poem, which, alongside the emphasis laid on the issue of identity, provides a means of entry in the place-name poems of *Wintering Out*. In "Englands of the Mind", Heaney referred to the poet as not only a "warden" but as a "vowel-keeper". This curious appellation is pertinent to "Undine" as one of Heaney's chief delights in this poem is not the metaphorical narrative but the phonic properties of the title. In "Feeling Into Words" he writes:

It was the dark pool of the sound of the word that first took me: if our auditory imaginations were sufficiently attuned to plumb and sound a vowel, to unite the most primitive and civilized associations, the word "undine" would probably suffice as a poem in itself. *Unda*, a wave, *undine*, a water-woman - a litany of undines would have ebb and flow, water and woman, wave and tide, fulfilment and exhaustion in its very rhythms.  
(*P*, pp. 52-53)

To "sound" a vowel is both to voice it and to "plumb" its depths; and it is also to "sound it out", to explore its "dark pool" and locate the exhausting fulfilment of its manifold connotations. The poet who could write the poem Heaney imagines in this extract would be the "vowel-keeper" *par excellence*. In the case of "Undine", the narrative, on one level, is an allegory of such a sounding, as the poetic husbandman seeks to possess the water-woman. What is significant in the above quotation is that the "associations" that the word spawns are, in Heaney's opinion, more than simply intelligible meanings: the very *sound* of the rhythmic properties of *Unda*, *undine* should suggest onomatopoeically the

conceptual meaning of the words. Heaney's phonologism is central to his poetry and closely bound to the notion of the embracing poet-warden. As I will make clear, the vowel, for Heaney, also has a kind of gender and signifies a certain nationality. This, in turn, is linked to the "political linguistics" of *Wintering Out* which pick up on and amplify the non-political issues raised in the early love poems. It is to the first part of this collection - with several glances back to previous volumes - that I now turn.

*Wintering Out* opens with "Fodder". Immediately the reader is introduced to a poem indicative of many in the volume: poems concerned with the aural quality of words, and centred on - like the love poems from *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door Into the Dark* - the notions of presence and identity, and their antitheses, absence and lack.

*Fodder*

Or, as we said,  
*fother*, I open  
my arms for it  
again. But first

to draw from the tight  
vise of a stack  
the weathered eaves  
of the stack itself

falling at your feet,  
last summer's tumbled  
swathes of grass  
and meadowsweet

multiple as loaves  
and fishes, a bundle  
tossed over half-doors  
or into mucky gaps.

These long nights  
I would pull hay  
for comfort, anything  
to bed the stall.

(VO, p. 13)

The anecdotal dimension of this poem is negligible: the catching and casting of bundles of hay into cattlesheds. Of more importance is the manner in which the word "fodder" may be said to signify home, both in its *provincial* pronunciation, "f<sup>o</sup>ther", and the manner in which such pronunciation merges "mother" and "father" within a single noun. In many ways, it is thus the vocal "embrace" of the maternal/paternal sign, rather than that of the hay, that is the significant event in the text. The regional word provides a sense of linguistic identity; and, in this light, the poem appears to be similar in theme to Paul Muldoon's "Quoof", where the homely word of the title is seemingly even more private than Heaney's localized term:

How often have I carried our family word  
for the hot water bottle  
to a strange bed,  
as my father would juggle a red-hot half-brick  
in an old sock  
to his childhood settle.  
I have taken it into so many lovely heads  
or laid it between us like a sword.

An hotel room in New York City  
with a girl who spoke hardly any English,  
my hand on her breast  
like the smouldering one-off spoor of the yeti  
or some other shy beast  
that has yet to enter the language.<sup>58</sup> ~

"Fodder" differs from "Quoof" in that the former text's titular word has a provincial signification, whilst Muldoon's "quoof" is, apparently, a more restricted term, familial rather than local. Heaney's speaker expresses a sense of regional identity, whilst Muldoon's expropriated persona seems to be caught within a sense of linguistic isolation and alienation. And yet, the poem "Quoof" is, on one level, simply a definition of the signifier, "quoof" - it is a taking of the term into the reader's head, thus allowing it to "enter the language". The result, almost paradoxically, is that the reader finds an affinity with the displaced *étranger* in a foreign city, as he or she learns to comprehend the "shy beast" of

the sign. Contrariwise, Heaney's "we" is exclusive rather than all-embracing: the reader of "Fodder" is the outsider, excluded from the desirable community evoked in this instance of regional identification. We will see more clearly the implications of Heaney laying a word - "like a sword" - between the indigenous and the stranger in "Broagh". In "Fodder", the anecdote is the basis for a subtle examination of a central issue in Heaney's early poetry: the need to define the self within the boundaries of what I will broadly label *heritage*. Here, that heritage is communal; elsewhere, it is more specifically national.

On a related level, the metaphorical encircling of the intimate and exclusive word, in "Fodder", is close to those poetic "circles" within which Hughes, according to Heaney, conjures up "presences". If in a far less charged manner, Heaney's text is equally an exercise in which the poet-warden seeks to allay a feeling of lack; he is wintering out, yearning, in Robert Buttel's words, "for the prelapsarian blessings of hay".<sup>59</sup> However, in contrast to the manifest meaning of "The Thought-Fox", the quasi-Proustian moment narrated in this poem (where "meadowsweet" replaces Proust's "*petites madeleines*")<sup>60</sup> speaks of something past, not, as in Hughes' poem, something, "now / And again now". The remembrance does not fully compensate for the apparent inadequacies of the present; the poet is left within "long nights". This sense of displacement recalls the disorientation of the speaker of "Valediction", although, in the present text, the expropriation takes on a far less specific meaning.

The lack of full identity that infuses "Fodder" can be explicated by turning to the introductory note to *Stations*, a series of contemporaneous prose epiphanies which Heaney links to Wordsworth's "spots of time":

Those first pieces [composed in California in 1970/71] had been attempts to touch what Wordsworth called "spots of time", moments at the very edge of consciousness which had lain for years in the unconscious as active lodes of nodes, yet on my return a month after the introduction of

internment my introspection was not confident enough to pursue its direction. The sirens in the air, perhaps quite rightly, jammed those other tentative if insistent signals.  
(S, p. 3)

The prose poems are, like "Fodder", highly personal reminiscences, whilst the "jamming" of the act of remembrance is said to be the result of political events. Throughout Heaney's poetry, the turbulence of Irish history functions as a kind of white noise which threatens to block out the "tentative if insistent signals" of a Wordsworthian recollection of the individual's past. The phonic- and place-name poems provide a wish-fulfilling compensation for the "lack" that Heaney perceives as the consequence of the colonial heritage of Ireland. The sense of displacement present in a poem as straightforward as "Valediction", is transformed into a far more complex feeling of regional and national expropriation; one which the ability to "sound" the semantic and aural properties of language, as in a poem such as "Undine", provides an imaginary method of combating.

In this respect, "Anahorish" is indicative, as it postulates a necessary and intimate bond between sound and home:

My "place of clear water",  
the first hill in the world  
where springs washed into  
the shiny grass

and darkened cobbles  
in the bed of the lane.  
*Anahorish*, soft gradient  
of consonant, vowel-meadow  
(VO, p. 16)

The translation of the place-name, Anahorish, into English evokes a locus which has, in Terence Brown's words, a "Gaelic purity".<sup>61</sup> This, in turn, is the prelude to an expression of what is little less than the Edenic plenitude lacking in "Fodder": this is "the first hill in the world". What is more striking still is the manner in which the word's phonemes are, in the second stanza, perceived as themselves signifying the very "nature" of the place:

"soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow". The aural properties of the word are not arbitrary sounds, but contain the very essence of the primal location. The articulation of the word restores the essential properties of this original place, bestowing a full identity upon the memory of the poet.

Robert Buttel glosses this search within place-names for roots and origins - for a stable ground within a troubled historical perspective - with the commentary: "Language is one more genius of the place; its roots are in natural sounds and in the native tradition, the Gaelic sound often indeed a transliteration of nature's ur-language."<sup>62</sup> Buttel's remark, however, suppresses the element of linguistic playfulness that infuses a place-name poem such as "Anahorish". It also fails to question the fallacious intimacy postulated between sound, sense and place, and hence fails to interrogate the necessity that drives Heaney to make such a fantastic link. It is pertinent to see these poems as suffering from the phonologism that Jacques Derrida has described as the belief that, "the formal essence of the signified is presence, and the privilege of the proximity to the logos as *phonè* is the privilege of presence".<sup>63</sup> Heaney's relish of words and, in particular, place-names, is one that posits a necessary link between sound and - to quote the title of one of Heaney's essays - a "sense of place" (see *P*, pp. 131-149); one which hence grants the privilege of presence in the comprehension of the signified, the "place of clear water". This, in turn, feeds back into the desire for a secure locus and origin for a self which feels itself to be displaced and expropriated by historical events.

This dimension of Heaney's early poetry is worth comparing with the post-modernism of a poet such as John Ashbery. In "Down by the Station, Early in the Morning", Ashbery, like Heaney, is drawn to the texture of almost insignificant details culled from the past in order to buttress a threatened self-presence:

It all wears out. I keep telling myself this, but  
I can never believe me, though others do. Even things  
do.  
And the things they do. Like the rasp of silk, or a  
certain  
Glottal stop in your voice as you are telling me how you  
Didn't have time to brush your teeth but gargled with  
Listerine  
Instead. Each is a base one might wish to touch once  
more  
Before dying. There's the moment years ago in the  
station in Venice,  
The dark rainy afternoon in fourth grade, and the shoes  
then,  
Made of a dull crinkled brown leather that no longer  
exists.  
And nothing does, until you name it, remembering, and  
even then  
It may not have existed, or existed only as a result  
Of the perceptual dysfunction you've been carrying  
around for years.<sup>64</sup>

Ashbery's interest in time is, of course, in its dislocation, but interestingly it is still an attempt at self-comprehension via remembrance and naming. As Ashbery himself has said:

When one is writing one is somehow at a command post of one's entire life and one's experiences get intruded in the wrong chronological order. Suddenly an experience or a poem that I read years ago and haven't thought about since, will somehow insert itself in a poem without my really having anything to do with it or knowing how it happened. But it's an example I guess of being concerned about time.<sup>65</sup>

These two passages from Ashbery's work help orientate Heaney's position within the post-modern world of sliding signifiers and rapidly disappearing grounds to the autonomous self. I will be exploring this in more detail in relation to the political aspects of Heaney's verse, but we can profitably begin with the difference between these two contemporary poets' approach to the issues of time and remembering. Ashbery's experimentalism may be read as a struggle to examine disparate events as they impinge on and construct the present moment of individuality even as they deconstruct the very notions of a stable self-presence. His truncated and disorientated approach is suitably radical to this



task. Heaney's place-name poems may appear as equally experimental but, in fact, they are highly traditional. They are derived from Irish poems called *dinnseanchas*, which Heaney, in "The Sense of Place" describes as "poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology" (*P*, p. 131). It is both important and indicative that Heaney's meditations on place-names should be based on poems which are Irish and which attempt not to slide the signifier but to explicate its "original meaning", to unearth its central signified. Etymology, in this case, is a record and a remembering that seeks to ground the poet in a language he is, in part, expropriated from, but which exists - in Buttel's term - as a primal "ur-language". One should thus be wary of fully endorsing Richard Kearney's belief that,

Heaney's notion of homecoming as an endless circling around an origin that is no-longer or not-yet, an absent centre, a siteless site, is in tune with the basic post-modernist emphasis on cultural discontinuity and heterogeneity... [His] poems often serve as ironic self-parodies of the orthodox Irish cultural aesthetic, with its concern to retrieve a sacred, mythic motherland... Here one finds parallels with the post-modern philosophy of Derrida and Foucault, the post-modern literature of Ashbery and Pynchon.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast to Kearney, I argue in this chapter and, more particularly, in chapters five and seven that Heaney's desired homecoming should not be read in this neo-Heideggerian manner. The absence of a stable origin or centre is suppressed by Heaney's elaborate poetic play with etymology - as in the place-name poems - and, as in *North*, by the construction of a "sacred, mythic motherland" which is *not* to be read as ironic. In their delight with the sensible texture of language - the signifier - the place-name poems, in *Wintering Out*, do engage with post-modernism, yet the engagement is one that seeks to occlude the sense of "cultural discontinuity" by *sounding out* or retrieving a heritage (which acts as a kind of transcendental signified) in which to situate an expropriated self. That this becomes an increasingly

problematical and, ultimately, impossible desire is one of the principal arguments of this thesis. To erase this issue in the light of questionable affinities between Heaney and certain contemporaries is to repress a large part of the tension in Heaney's work. As we shall see, both Heaney's poetry and prose fit uneasily into the preoccupations of post-structuralist and post-modernist thought; it is only with Heaney's more recent poetry that a highly tempered variety of post-modernism begins to question the strategies at the heart of his earlier work.

Heaney takes the grounding adumbrated in "Anahorish" to extraordinary imaginative lengths. The strategy of these poems is one that seeks to grant the phonic aspect of language an essential "homeliness". The desire is to create what Heaney refers to in "Mossbawn" as the "*Omphalos*", the umbilical, "natural" attachment to motherland: "Broagh, The Long Rigs, Bell's Hill; Brian's Field, the Round Meadow, the Demense; each name ... lie[s] deep, like some script indelibly written into the nervous system" (*P*, p. 20). This necessity tempers the quasi-hedonistic delight taken in the material properties of language, a bliss present as early as the poem "Saint Francis and the Birds", in *Death of a Naturalist*. This text, as Blake Morrison notes, concerns "Francis ... as a poet discovering his creative powers".<sup>67</sup>

When Francis preached love to the birds  
They listened, fluttered, throttled up  
Into the blue like a flock of words

Released for fun from his holy lips.  
Then wheeled back, whirred about his head,  
Pirouetted on brother's capes,

Danced on the wing, for sheer joy played  
And sang, like images took flight.  
Which was the best poem Francis made,

His argument true, his tone light.  
(*DN*, p. 53)

The joy described in this short lyric is compatible with the verbal delight articulated<sup>in</sup> the place-name poems, but unqualified by their nostalgic, almost elegiac quality. The play the Franciscan poet indulges in is illuminated and qualified if we juxtapose this poem with another account of the Franciscan bliss, one that also throws light on the stance Heaney's work takes towards the post-modern and post-structuralist notion of "freeplay". The following quotation is taken from Roland Barthes' eulogy of Sevro Sarduy's *Cobra*:

*Cobra* is in fact a paradisiac text, utopian (without site), a heterology by plenitude: all the signifiers are here and each scores a bull's-eye; the author (the reader) seems to say to them: *I love you all* (words, phrases, sentences, adjectives, discontinuities: pell-mell: signs and mirages of objects which they represent); a kind of Franciscanism invites all words to perch, to flock, to fly off again: a marbled, irridescent text.... *Cobra* is the pledge of continuous jubilation, the moment when by its very excess verbal pleasure chokes and reels into bliss.<sup>58</sup>

The Franciscan playfulness that Barthes describes is the *jouissance* Barthes' translator renders, perhaps a little weakly, as "bliss". In Heaney's poem such paradisiac jubilation is the verbal pleasure of the creative act. Words are, as in Barthes, metamorphosed into carefree birds, without aim, without restraint. Nevertheless, it is clear that if "Saint Francis and the Birds" is "about" bliss, it does not enact it in quite the manner Barthes ascribes to Sarduy's text, much as Heaney's concern with time past and self-presence clearly differs from that of Ashbery. This is bound to the curious reference at the close of the poem to a "true" "argument". For Barthes, the "truth" of the text is antagonistic to its *jouissance*. By "truth" Barthes intends us to understand an involvement of "the written ... in the social contract.... [T]he text authenticates writing: its literalness, its origin, its meaning, that is to say, its 'truth'."<sup>59</sup> It would be going too far to suggest that this is identical to the "truth" at the close of "Saint Francis and the Birds", but the checking or closure - the *grounding* - of linguistic play in the place-name

poems is precisely bound to a faithfulness to origins, meaning and a historical contract with Ireland and the Irish that is, in the words of "Belderg" from *North*, "persistent if outworn" (*N*, p. 14). This is the "site" which Barthes believes to be absent from Sarduy's text; and is that elusive site Kearney argues is likewise a veiled Being or "not-yet" in Heaney's poetry of homecoming. It is a contract made to this site, however, that helps the reader come to terms with the foregrounded phonologism of the place-name poems.

The poet is thus interpreting names, meditating on the relationship between language and referent, signifier and signified, attempting to see a necessary link between the two, an intimacy which will appease the winter of discontent glimpsed at the close of "Fodder". Pope writes famously in his *Essay on Criticism*, that "the *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*".<sup>70</sup> Heaney pushes such a "commonsensical" belief to its utmost limits, seeking all the time to direct his Franciscan play to the site of his nostalgia. The predicament of the displaced poet is that expressed via the figure of the "Servant Boy":

He is wintering out  
the back-end of a bad year  
swinging a hurricane-lamp  
through some outhouse;

a jobber among shadows.  
Old work-whore, slave-  
blood, who stepped fair-hills  
under each bidder's eye

and kept your patience  
and your counsel, how  
you draw me into  
your trail. Your trail

broken from haggard to stable,  
a straggle of fodder  
stiffened on snow,  
comes first-footing

the back doors of the little  
barons: resentful  
and impenitent,  
carrying the warm eggs.  
(*WO*, p. 17)

The reference to the "straggle of fodder" recalls the speaker of "Fodder". Like him, the boy is in "some outhouse", without a home, dispropertied in a winter environment. Heaney binds this condition to that of the woman - "whore" - and the "slave". I will be returning to the latter in the case of the "Freedman" in my reading of *North*. In *Wintering Out*, the "whoring" voice of "The Last Mummer" reiterates the image of the "work-whore" in "Servant Boy". The mummer is a marginalized artist in the contemporary world; his marginalization perceived as closely bound to a subdued anger, a "resentful / and impenitent" voice, as he picks "a nice way through / the long toils of blood" (*WO*, p. 19). This "whoring" tongue, vociferating through "feuding", broaches the political and historical import of these poems, linking the situation of mummer and servant boy to the position of the Catholic in Northern Ireland.

In conversation with Neil Corcoran, Heaney has commented on the writing of Czeslaw Milosz in terms that seem to be at the same time applicable to the political dimensions of many of the poems in *Wintering Out*:

Milosz I just find enormously close: the wonderful sense of loss of what is most cherished, and the way he can turn what, in lesser hands or with a lesser writer, would be a poem of personal nostalgia into a symptom of great cultural and historical change, without portentousness. That move from personal lyric lament to visionary, tragic lamentation: I just love the *note*. And he's so stern too, he's both stern and tender, and I like that very much. And I guess somewhere in it is a closeness because of the kind of Catholic subculture into which his sensibility pays, and out of which it springs.<sup>71</sup>

In the hands of the artist, personal loss must be transformed into more than individualistic nostalgia - the latter tone dominant in

many poems in *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* ("Follower" and "Ancestral Photograph", for instance). Heaney's remarks concerning Milosz apply more fully to many of the poems in the first part of *Wintering Out*, which expand upon the nostalgic backward look of a large amount of poems in the previous collections. The poem, apparently, must be *symptomatic* of history, a product of a particular historical conjuncture, and a record of or lamentation at the change history has wrought. This, in turn, is linked to a Catholic "subculture": for Heaney, the sense of expropriation or homelessness are seen as part and parcel of this culture in Northern Ireland.

The need for the stable ground in the early love poems is hence politicized in many of these texts, where Heaney redeploys femininity as a trope for his Irish identity. In "A New Song", a female figure becomes the vehicle for a meditation on the relevance of "site" and situation that informs a place-name poem such as "Anahorish":

I met a girl from Derrygarve  
And the name, a lost potent musk,  
Recalled the river's long swerve,  
A kingfisher's blue bolt at dusk

And stepping stones like black molars  
Sunk in the ford, the shifty glaze  
of the whirlpool, the Moyola  
Pleasuring beneath alder trees.

And Derrygarve, I thought, was just,  
Vanished music, twilit water,  
A smooth libation of the past  
Poured by this chance vestal daughter.  
(*WD*, p. 33)

The girl is a kind of *petite madeleine* who precipitates through recollection the "smooth libation of the past". It is her very presence that makes vocal what is absent: the place, Derrygarve, though "vanished", is intimated by its place-name, by the sign "Derrygarve". The power of names in recalling referents is stressed in Heaney's hyperbolic reference to the "lost potent

musk" of the name, where the sensible properties of the sign are such that, in a remarkable synesthesia, it stimulates the sense of smell. This is the potency of language in Heaney's early poetry; acting in conjunction with memory, language enables the speaker to endow the place with an anthropomorphic identity: Derrygarve, in the second stanza, is personified, given teeth, eyes and a quasi-sexuality, the river "pleasuring beneath alder trees". However, in the final stanzas - which Eileen Cahill felicitously terms "orally militant" -<sup>72</sup> this striking evocation of nostalgia is bound to language, nationality and creed, and hence politicized:

But now our river tongues must rise  
From licking deep in native haunts  
To flood, with vowelling embrace,  
Demesnes staked out in consonants.

And Castledawn we'll enlist  
And Upperlands, each planted bawn -  
Like bleaching-greens resumed by grass -  
A vocable, as rath and bullaun.

The site of Derrygarve becomes loaded with political implications as the girl starts to accrue the suggestiveness of the female figure of an *aisling*. The Franciscan delight with language at the opening of the poem is here modulated into a semantic sounding that is now no longer simply nostalgic but organized around the historical and social determinants of language. The nouns of these two stanzas have a significance which is the product of Anglo-Irish enmity: demesnes are Protestant sites, whilst the rath referred to in the final line derives from the Irish word for a hill-fort, the residence of a tribal leader. That these two nouns signify sites is important. As in "Anahorish", the play of the signifier is seen to be limited by the word's "contract" with a historical *situation*. In what may well seem a more extravagant manner, Heaney also grants the division of the alphabet into consonants and vowels a political dimension. Consonants metaphorically stake out the non-indigenous Protestants' demenses; in contrast, the "native" Catholics are granted a "vowelling embrace". One can turn to the autobiographical passages in the

first section of *Preoccupations* to explicate the political resonance of these stanzas' interpretation of the vocalic and consonantal aspects of language, and thus position Heaney in "between" the two antagonistic cultures outlined in "A New Song". The most relevant passages are those in "Belfast", where Heaney writes:

I was symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between "the demesne" and "the bog".... Mossbawn was bordered by the townlands of Broagh and Anahorish, townlands that are forgotten Gaelic music in the throat, *bruach* and *anac fhíor aisce*, the riverbank and the place of clear water. The names lead past the literary mists of a Celtic twilight into that civilization whose demise was affected by soldiers and administrators like Spenser and Davies, whose lifeline was bitten through when the squared-off walls of bawn and demesne dropped on the country like the jaws of a man-trap.... I think of the personal and Irish pieties as vowels, and the literary awareness nourished on English as consonants. (*P*, pp. 35-37)

The sense of being "in between" is a constant in Heaney's work: between two cultures and two languages. The differentiation between vowel and consonant becomes an image for this division, foregrounding one distinction between English and Irish. The point Heaney drives home is the displacement he feels; one which he seeks to overcome in the attempt to occlude the distinction between sign and referent in the place-name poems and in the desire to bring vowel and consonant together in the "vocal" announced at the end of "A New Song". A "vocal" is not only that which is sounded by the voice, but, importantly, in an *obsolete* or forgotten sense, a "name". It is just such a name that the speaker remembers through the course of the poem. To forget is to be expropriated from a heritage both personal and national; the reappropriation through memory becomes politicized because, as Neil Corcoran notes, the term "rise" recalls the Easter Rising and, in this sense, the "flood" is an insurrection.<sup>73</sup> This is an extension into the wider realm of socio-political events of the need for harmony and stability voiced in the early love poetry. However, it is clear from the



tone of the above passage that Heaney is drawn to one half of his opposition, to the civilization whose umbilical "lifeline" was curtailed by the colonial "mantrap". This is, in Heaney's words, the "feminine element [that] for me involves the matter of Ireland" (<P, p. 34). That Heaney labels Irishness "feminine" is due in large part to the rhetoric of Irish nationalism, with its personification of Ireland as a female figure (which I discuss in more detail in chapter five). Nevertheless, this use of gender in relation to national ground is another extension of the stable ground offered by the female in Heaney's love poetry: a motif that continues up to the marriage poems of *Field Work*. The displacement from this sense of place likewise dominates Heaney's work throughout. As, for instance, in "Terminus" (collected in Heaney's most recent volume of poetry, *The Haw Lantern*), where the speaker declares, "I grew up in between":

Baronies, parishes met where I was born.  
When I stood on the central stepping stone

I was the last earl on horseback in midstream  
Still parleying, in earshot of his peers.  
(*HL*, p. 5)

Such an "in between" existence is, in Heaney's poetry up to and including *Field Work*, seen as a site of disablement. In "Terminus" - which is representative of Heaney's more recent work as a whole - the displacement is seized upon as an alternative "centre": the "central stepping stone" is a new ground. I will be returning to the nature of this revaluation of displacement in chapter seven and in my concluding remarks on both Heaney and Hughes. As regards *Wintering Out*, the decentered Irish poet, like the servant boy, is caught in an "outhouse", somehow alienated from his origins. Colonialism has created a poetic nostalgia that is not merely personal, as in "Fodder", but, in the case of "A New Song", national. Hence, the emphasis laid on the need to appropriate heritage, the provincial and the Irish language by the place-name poet.

Heaney's "vowelling embrace" thus bears comparison with Hughes' poetic, specifically as outlined in Heaney's essay, "Englands of the Mind". Whereas Hughes, as a poet-warden, encircles vowels within his consonantal voice, Heaney seeks to liberate the suppressed vowel-like voice of the native, and embrace the imperial consonant. In both writers the encircling is an appropriation of some sort of presence, and thus, although vowel and consonant in "A New Song" invert Heaney's reading of "The Thought-Fox", the postulated movement in both texts is not dissimilar: both chart the desirable reappropriation of that which is at present absent and lost. In this manner, the resemblance between Heaney's "A New Song" and Hughes' "Song" is quite striking: in both songs the locus of desire is prefigured in the figure of a "girl" or "lady". Nevertheless, in the case of Heaney, the political aspect of this gesture is important: the girl, like the visionary woman of an *aisling*, partly signifies a feminine Ireland. Hughes' lady, on the other hand, is an early personification of the "apolitical" substratum of natural being from which humanity is exiled. As mentioned, in Heaney, the presence he accords to the word, and its intimate relationship to the voice and to place, positions his place-name poems in an antagonistic stance to much contemporary thought on language and meaning. The aural "pleasuring" of "A New Song" and related texts is, in Heaney's sense of the term, Franciscan, playful; nevertheless, this verbal pleasure is determined by the "truth" or the Real of history. Bearing this in mind, one must read these poems as politically inspired, and, in contrast to the manifest content of Hughes' poetry, closely linked to a historical context and, in Barthes' words, bound to a "social contract". This is particularly the case in "Toome":

My mouth holds round  
the soft blastings,  
*Toome, Toome,*  
as under the dislodged

slab of the tongue  
I push into a scoterrain  
prospecting what new  
in a hundred centuries'

loam, flints, musket-balls,  
fragmented ware,  
torcs and fish-bones  
till I am sleeved in

alluvial mud that shelves  
suddenly under  
bogwater and tributaries,  
and elvers tail my hair.  
(*VO*, p. 26)

Once again it is the phonic aspect of the signifier that spawns associations. The act of articulating the place-name, the lifting of the tongue in the mouth and the pursed lips, produces a sense of verbal archaeology, in which the place-name's history is "sounded". Blake Morrison remarks of this fancy:

The finds ... recede and descend through time - from the loam of the recent past, through the "musket-balls" used by the British military during the late eighteenth century skirmishes ... to the 'torcs' (neckware) of the ancient Irish.... The [final] image ... declares that the poet has located his primeval, preliterate self and "guttural muse".... He has done so not by leaving his native ground but by looking into it more deeply; he chooses excavation rather than exile.<sup>74</sup>

This is inadequate and misleading. The poem is a meditation on the "exile" revealed by the verbal "excavation". The mouth "holds round", verbally embracing, the place-name, which, in a Proustian manner similar to "Fodder", recalls the past, invigorating the present. However, the past created here goes beyond the individual and into what is a racial memory; as Stephen Dedalus muses in *Ulysses*: "The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh".<sup>75</sup> This is the umbilical link of the "Omphalos", that which the intrusion of the British broke with "the squared-off walls of bawn and demesne". The poem narrates a desire for a verbal continuity with this vanished past. The final image is suggestive of an embryonic security: the poet is

"sleeved", cauled in the "mud" of the motherland, an "alluvial" matter that, historically, lies before the imperialist possession of Ireland.

The prose poem, "Cauled", from *Stations*, examines a childhood memory in an ahistorical light, but interestingly links the motif of embryonic security - the cauled child - with the familiar voice - the calling adults:

They thought he was lost. For years they talked about it until he found himself at the root of their kindly tongues, sitting like a big fieldmouse in the middle of the rig. Their voices were far-off now, searching something.

Green air trawled over his arms and legs, the pods and stalks wore a fuzz of light. He caught a rod in each hand and jerked the whole tangle into life. Little tendrils unsprung, new veins lit in the shifting leaves, a caul of shadows stretched and netted round his head again. He sat listening, grateful as the calls encroached.

(S, p. 4)

This is not fully representative of *Stations*. Many of the poems in the volume transform personal nostalgia into historical lamentation in the manner Heaney perceives Milosz's work as achieving. That said, the cauled/called homonym is crucial to any understanding of Heaney's poetry up to and including *North*. The "kindly tongues" are the familiar, family voices - the Irish voices that the lost poet desires to be cauled in. It is precisely such a re-calling that is enacted at the close of "Toome"; yet it is a wish-fulfilling verbal appropriation of a past from which the poet of the early 1970s is necessarily displaced. Therefore Morrison is misguided to believe there is no "exile": the exile is a sense of dislocation from an "unsullied" (a notion I return to below) motherland. Full identity is only achieved through this compensatory verbal appropriation of heritage; through the retrieval of what is less a "pre-literate self" than a pre-English locus. The self submits to this "essence", making a surrender in some ways similar to that which T. S. Eliot makes to "Tradition".<sup>75</sup> The tradition, in Heaney's

case, is that which Jon Silkin identifies as follows in his reading of the place-name poems: "Poems that inter-relate place names and Gaelic word-sounds ... to produce a quiet but self-defining 'Irish Ireland', represent Heaney's saddened, cautious transmission of a political attachment to his 'land'; his positive expression of this comes through his concern with the partly submerged Gaelic language."<sup>77</sup> The "nationalist" nature of this "attachment" to a Gaelic tradition is tentative, but central to the poems.

Delving into the past is a constant in Heaney's early poetry. I have already invoked the poetic announced in "Digging", where the poet attempts to make his craft a continuation of his father's and grandfather's spade-work. However, its concern with (family) tradition - as the rather heavy-handed and militant conclusion stresses - is as much a desire to appropriate ancestral precedent as a convincing figurative alignment:

But I've no pen to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

The notion of a digging pen is, of course, fanciful; the notion of the poem as an archaeological dig even more so. But the extravagance of the image is intimately linked to the phonologism of the place-name poems. The delicious consonance in "Digging" attempts to re-present the "squelch and slap / Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge / Through living roots". The "roots" here are as much familial as natural; in the place-name poems they also become linguistic. This desired "grounding" is, as we have seen, at the heart of Heaney's work: it is a wished-for stability similar to that which Hughes' poems strain toward. In fact, in an astute reading of "Digging", Neil Corcoran has suggested that Heaney's poem is, in a sense, a reworking of "The Thought-Fox". Both poems "situate their poets behind a window, pen in hand, in the act of composition":

The Hughes poem is more specifically preoccupied with its own making, as it intently conjures up the notion and image of "fox" which ... is also the conjuration itself.... Heaney's poem is less intent on its own process and more concerned, ultimately, to enforce a moral and propound an aesthetic, but its progress is very similar to Hughes's.... [J]ust as the fox enters "the dark hole of the head" in "The Thought-Fox", [the] associated memories merge in Heaney's head, and emerge as words on the page.<sup>78</sup>

Whether it is intentional or not, it is interesting that Corcoran employs Heaney's own image - in "Englands of the Mind" - of "conjuration" in relation to "The Thought-Fox". The poetic conjuring is the wish-fulfilling act of the poet-warden as he seeks to recoup a sense of deferred self-presence through a poetic of appropriation. Heaney's vowelling embrace is the desire of the expropriated poet to "re-caul" himself by recalling familial heritage (as in "Digging"), the historical past (as in "Toome"), or the personal past (as in "Cauled"). This is a "sleeving" in what increasingly comes to be seen as a feminine tradition. The conclusion to "Bogland", in *Door into the Dark*, presents the excavating self in search of such origins, and, in Dick Davis' words, presents "the earth as both mother and lover":<sup>79</sup>

Our pioneers keep striking  
Inwards and downwards,

Every layer they strip  
Seems camped on before.  
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.  
The wet centre is bottomless.  
(DD, p. 56)

The poet as pioneer or digger is close to the poet-warden of *Wintering Out*. Heaney makes the link via the multiple meaning of the word "sounding" in "Gifts of Rain": "He fords / his life by sounding. / Soundings" (WO, p. 23). The necessity for these soundings - that are, as in "Valediction", both of voice and depth - is that articulated in the third section of this poem: it is "in the shared calling of blood / arrives my need / for antediluvian lore." The poet-pioneer sounds out place, recalling the past like

an archaeologist; seeking a tradition that is pre-colonial, and, in a striking metaphor, "antediluvian". The recourse to a ground prior to displacement, before the imperialist flood, is, of course, the vocal sounding of the place-name poems. The link between sign and place postulates a (now disrupted) intimacy not only between the voice and ear, the "lobe and larynx" of "Oracle" (VO, p. 28), but also between the poet and that which "At a Potato Digging" calls the "black / Mother" (DN, p. 31) of a feminine Ireland.

However, just as these poems seek to caulk the self within an Irish Ireland, so too the poems tend to exclude the non-indigenous - as in "Broagh", a poem which, perhaps as much as "Digging", bears comparison with "The Thought-Fox":

The garden mould  
bruised easily, the shower  
gathering in your heelmark  
was the black O

in *Broagh*,  
its low tattoo  
among the windy boortrees  
and rhubarb-blades

ended almost  
suddenly, like that last  
gh the strangers found  
difficult to manage.  
(VO, p. 27)

The simile in the final stanza explicitly equates the place with the native word. The bond created by the rhetorical device is another expression of a regional and hence, by extension, a national identity. The vivid connection drawn between the onomatopoeic quality of the phoneme and the natural event, the sudden halt to the rain - both end "suddenly" - is reinforced by the link made between calligraphy and native soil by the mark left in the earth by the heel. The circle of this "black O" embraces the poetic self and excludes the "strangers". The word is thus, as Heaney says of Hughes' poetry, a circle within which presence

is conjured, in which the lack of "Fodder" is allayed in the achievement of self-presence.

However, with reference to the undecidable movement of "The Thought-Fox", "Broagh" repeats, in its own manner, the necessity of culling images from writing, or marks, that can only contradict the very claims made for the exalted appropriation of identity via the voice. The "heelmark" is that which complicates Heaney's text, as like the fox's spoor - which apparently wrote "now" - the *mark* left by the shoe refers to the very absence of the printing foot. It is a foot-print, a covert pun that lends credence to the fanciful comparison with the shape of the printed "O". In "The Thought-Fox", the fox's trail revealed its full presence to be endlessly deferred in the without-world of the other; the "capture" of the animal was a purely imaginary recuperation. So too, the totality of Heaney's conceit is undone at the very moment it seems to achieve maximum credibility. If the *spoken* word, "Broagh" is, in Heaney's words, "forgotten Gaelic music in the throat", the written "O", is even more so a mark of absence and loss: the footprint can only re-mark upon its maker having moved on. The poet is, in fact, estranged from the "figure" who marked out the very place that the poet feels himself to be at home in. As Seamus Deane comments:

In *Wintering Out* [Heaney] associates himself with outcasts or lost remnants of a tradition, with victims in fact. We can see this in smaller details too. How often people are poignantly remembered by the mark they leave behind - heelmarks ["Broagh"], wound scars ["Veteran's Dream"], the traces of rings embedded in the flesh or bone ["Mother of the Groom", "The Tollund Man"].... The estrangement of these figures is itself a medium or metaphor of the poet's estrangement.<sup>80</sup>

It is against such estrangement (the "black stump of home", as the poem "Stump" brutally puts it [WO, p. 41]) that the poems overtly pit themselves. In the light of Heaney's comments in



*Preoccupations*, the foregrounding of the vowel "O" in "Broagh" can be seen as signifying the wish to locate an Irish identity through a word which is non-English, which cites a primal Gaelic past. However, the poem subtly makes the reader aware of the fact that, as Terry Eagleton comments in *Criticism and Ideology*, "language ... is in reality a terrain scarred, fissured and divided by the cataclysms of political history, strewn with the relics of imperialist, nationalistic, regionist and class combat."<sup>31</sup> This is the displacing fissure of the colonial "in between" that gives rise to the poetic "estrangement" Deane notes. "Broagh" is a poem that seeks to make the vowel embrace with an Irish site, and thus overcome this divide, and yet paradoxically, but perhaps inevitably, the poem ends up writing the failure to overcome a sense of alienation. The speaker is as much a "stranger" as those invoked in the final lines.

In Heaney's *oeuvre*, the linguistic and regional consequences of imperialist history are linked to a notion of "sexual" division and conflict. In his texts, the notions of mother tongue and mother earth are inseparable, and the struggle between Ireland and Britain can, as it were, be read in the "combat" between vowel and consonant, male and female. This is explicit in a poem with the telling title, "Traditions":

Our guttural muse  
was bulled long ago  
by the alliterative tradition,  
her uvula grows

vestigial, forgotten  
like the coccyx  
or a Brigid's Cross  
yellowing in some outhouse

while custom, that "most  
sovereign mistress",  
beds us down into  
the British isles.  
(*WD*, p. 31)

The imperialist invasion of Ireland is imaged as a male violation. As John Wilson Foster remarks: "For Heaney then the Irish landscape and culture are, after Joyce, not merely a river but female - vowel-vaginal, we might say, unlike the Anglo-Saxon tradition which is male terrestrial, phallic-consonantal."<sup>82</sup> Foster is right to make these connections. However, it must be stressed that such "femininity" is, as "Traditions" makes clear, no longer unsullied, but "bulled" by colonialism. The poet of the phonic lyrics may express a desired communion with the "vowel-vaginal" landscape, but concurrent with the wish for a cauling in the "maternal" collective tradition is a sense of estrangement, due to the overweening presence or intervention of the "masculinity" of English imperialism. "Traditions" thus looks forward to the sexual conceits of *North*, to which I turn in chapter five.

In both Heaney's and Hughes' early poetry, the poetic condition is thus one of alienation, of expropriation and estrangement, whilst poetry is a medium in which is articulated the desire for the consolations of a deferred "feminine" ground. The differences between the two writers are, obviously, considerable; and in order not to erase or iron out these differences I will be exploring the shared theme of alienation and desire, and its relation to the notions of masculinity and femininity, in separate discussions of their later volumes of poetry. However, before doing so, the conclusions I have drawn in this chapter can be usefully supported and expanded upon by a reading of their prose works, one undertaken in the following, concluding chapters of Part I.

CHAPTER 2. THE SATIETY OF THE VOID: HUGHES'  
NON-FICTIONAL PROSE

I. POETRY AND MENTAL HEALTH

In interview with Christopher Ricks, William Empson once remarked:

The poem ought to be about a conflict which is raging in the mind of the writer but hasn't been solved. He should write about the things that really worry him, in fact worry him to the point of madness. The poem is a kind of clinical object, done to prevent him from going mad. It is therefore not addressed to any public, but it is useless to him unless it is in fact clear and readable, because he has to - as it were - address the audience within himself. It isn't expressed unless it's a thing which somebody else can read, so if it's obscure it actually fails in this therapeutic function, it isn't saving his sanity.'

This characteristically invigorating comment suggests that "the poem" is addressed to oneself as much as another. Poetic language is a formal attempt to resolve what otherwise remains a tortuous contradiction; it attempts to impart an understanding which will "prevent" madness, bring sanity. Interestingly, if somewhat surprisingly, Hughes and Empson are both concerned with the same issue: the therapeutic function of art. In the case of Hughes, this is largely an inheritance of Romanticism; in his key 1970 essay, "Myth and Education", and its extensively revised version of 1976, Hughes argues that the poem as a kind of "clinical object" needs to liberate Empson's inner audience via what is a neo-Romantic conception of vision and imagination. This expansion of subjectivity is close to the visionary imagination held by William Blake to overcome the crippling limitations of what, in *Jerusalem*, is described as "the Eye of Man, a little narrow orb, clos'd up & dark".<sup>2</sup> To breach such an egg-headed sensibility is to overcome the dualism outlined in the early poetry between self and other, conscious and unconscious existence. The therapeutic consequence would be a condition of being close to that

personified in Blake's *Universal Man*, those who, at the close of *Jerusalem*, are described in the following grand fashion:

The Four Living Creatures, Chariots of Humanity Divine  
Incomprehensible  
In beautiful Paradises expand....  
And they conversed in Visionary forms dramatic which  
bright  
Redounded from their tongues in thunderous majesty, in  
Visions  
In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of  
Intellect,  
Creating Space, Creating Time, according to the wonders  
Divine  
Of Human Imagination ...  
& they walked  
To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each  
& clearly seen  
And seeing, according to fitness and order.<sup>3</sup>

By vision, Blake means the perception of the human in all things; that is, the object world is not something "out there", but is, in fact, the imaginative projection of the subject. Blakean fourfold vision is imaginative perception; in other words, the "wonders Divine / Of Human Imagination" restore an ability to *humanize* the world, to see the vast array of isolated phenomena as distinct entities yet as comprising a unified if diverse totality. Likewise, in Hughes, the faculty of imagination is projected as that which may overcome the alienation at the heart of the early poetry. As we shall see, in my readings of Hughes' symbolic works of the 1970s, Hughes' central trope for restored vision is that of a "marriage" of opposites followed by the rebirth of a figure similar to Blake's *Universal Man*. In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the prose analyses which inform and clarify Hughes' dense and often elliptical quest-romances. The notion of a therapeutic, redemptive imaginative, I argue, needs to be seen in the context of Hughes' highly problematical critique of a patriarchal society dominated by Blake's fallen "Eye of Man". Hughes' cultural criticism is covered in later sections of this chapter; the present section is concerned with Hughes' theory of the imagination. Firstly, its relationship with Romanticism, one

which finds a seemingly curious antagonist in existentialism (a philosophy that questions both Hughes' belief in the "healing" possibilities of imagination and his notion of an essential, or "natural", being that expanded vision is said to redeem); and, secondly, the similarities that exist between Hughes' aesthetic and C. G. Jung's concept of "individuation" or psychic integration.

The 1976 revision of "Myth and Education" contains a forceful argument for the necessity of a visionary imagination, one that will enable the individual to attain a wholeness of being that - however commonsensical Hughes' thesis appears - is nothing short of Blake's hyperbolic condition of Eternity, where "every Man stood fourfold". Like his Romantic precursor, Hughes claims that the despotic eye has curtailed the individual's ability to react in an imaginative manner. He writes:

But we sit, closely cramped in the cockpit behind the eyes, steering through the brilliantly crowded landscape beyond the lenses, focussed on details and distinctions. In the end, since all our attention from birth has been narrowed into that outward beam, we come to regard our body as no more than a somewhat stupid vehicle. All the urgent information coming towards us from the inner world sounds to us like a blank, or at best the occasional grunt, or a twinge. Because we have no equipment to receive it and decode it. The body, with its spirits, is the antennae of all our perceptions. The receiving aerial for all our wavelengths. But we are disconnected. The exclusiveness of our objective eye, the very strength and brilliance of our objective intelligence, suddenly turns into stupidity - of the most rigid and suicidal kind.<sup>4</sup>

The image of the cockpit suggests that the eyes' lenses, whilst perceiving the object world, make the self slavishly dependent upon it. This is the condition that Wordsworth, in *The Prelude*, terms the state "in which the eye was master of the heart".<sup>5</sup> In Hughes' essay, the result of such a limited and limiting vision is what he calls an "objective intelligence", wholly reliant upon the "objective eye". It is a mode of perception that recalls Blake's statement that the physical eye "leads you to Believe a Lie / When you see with, not thro', the Eye".<sup>6</sup> In consequence, the world of

objects is perceived as a series of dislocated aspects, by a consciousness that is both alienated from the outer world and ignorant of the existence of the inner world. This, of course, is the diminished existence of the "Egg-Head": he who "shuts out the world's knocking / With a welcome, and to wide-eyed deafnesses / Of prudence lets it speak". The "wide-eyed deafness" of the objective eye creates a diminished form of imagination, one that is visual (like Coleridge's Fancy), which Hughes labels the "objective imagination". This is a faculty, however, far more crippling than Coleridge's concept of Fancy because it turns what Hughes in "Myth and Education" calls the "inner world, with its spirits", into a demonic unconscious. In chapter one, we saw how Hughes deploys the figure of the knight in "Quest" and "Gog" to symbolize the repression of a "feminine", unconscious will; and that - in the exchange following the oral delivery of the 1970 version of "Myth and Education" - he interprets the myth of St George and the dragon as a "key symbolic story" in Western culture; a narrative which has as subtext the suppression of both "imagination" and "vital natural life". St George, as befits a national saint, thus represents a condition that, for Hughes, is largely that of modern existence:

People rushed towards the idea of living without any religion or any inner life whatsoever as if towards some great new freedom. A great final awakening. The most energetic intellectual and political movements of this century wrote the manifestos of the new liberation.<sup>7</sup>

The savage irony directed at modernity in this passage reveals that, like Blake, Hughes' work needs to be seen in the light of its historical context, however ahistorical or "mythical" the latter's poetical writings frequently appear to be.<sup>8</sup> In Blake's case, the revolutions in France and America led to an initial belief in the possibility of a new Jerusalem being constructed on Earth through political action. Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, however, Blake soon lost faith in this radical possibility, and, in a move characteristic of the Romantic poets, turned to a more subjective apocalypse: a revelation through the emancipation of

vision. In the case of Hughes, one turns to a very different historical conjuncture. Hughes came to public fame during the cold war period, and his interest in Eastern European writers and their political situation attests to a profound interest in the socio-economic context within which poetry is produced. The pre-*Glasnost* stalemate of East-West relations leaves its mark in Hughes' poetry and prose as a profound dissatisfaction with the possibilities of political change. The early poem, "A Woman Unconscious", is a rare example of a poem which directly refers to the nuclear age, but it is indicative of what Stan Smith calls "the inner experience of an era of social impasse"<sup>9</sup> that permeates a great deal of Hughes' work. Turning to the prose, the 1978 introduction to Vasko Popa's *Collected Poems 1943-1976*, repeats this experience whilst indicating Hughes' faith in transcendence on an individual plane:

Circumstantial proof that man is a political animal, a state numeral, as if it needed to be proved, has been weighed out in dead bodies by the million. The attempt these [East European] poets have made to record man's awareness of what is being done to him, by his own institutions and by history, and to record along with the suffering their inner creative transcendence of it, has brought their poetry down to such precisions, discriminations and humiliations that it is a new thing.<sup>10</sup>

Transcendence, in this poetic, is a subjective or "inner" redemption. History and the state apparatuses' "institutions" impinge upon but in no way negate a creative autonomy that stands apart from the realms of ideology and politics. This is the heritage of Romanticism; and it is this firm belief in "inner creative transcendence" that lies behind the attack, in "Myth and Education", on those "energetic, intellectual and political movements" of the modern era. One of these movements can be singled out for further discussion in relation to Hughes' theories of the imagination. The belief in a "new freedom" that rejects both the notion of a repressed unconscious and the need for religion is, in this century, espoused most vocally by existentialism, particularly in its popular Sartrean form. Hughes

explicitly attacks Sartre's existential freedom in the early poem "Wings", where Sartre's denial of the inner life in favour of an absolutely free consciousness leads less to existential anguish (which is a positive expression of freedom) than to an empty idealism, where the objective imagination paradoxically empties the object world of meaning:

He regrows the world inside his skull, like the spectre  
of a flower....

The skull-splitting polyp of his brain, on its tiny  
root,  
Lolls out over him ironically:

Angels, it whispers, are metaphors, in man's image,  
For the amoeba's exhilarations.  
(W, p. 174)

In Sartre's work, imagination is necessarily an annihilation of reality: to imagine something one has to posit its *nothingness*, that is, its non-existence as an object of perception. Therefore, according to Hughes, this visual objective imagination turns the material world into a "spectre" whilst simultaneously locking the self within the cockpit of the skull, condemning it to an absurd, solipsistic creation of no-thing. In "M. Sartre Considers Current Affairs", Hughes mocks this view of a free intentional imagination as simply a more sophisticated form of egg-headedness. In "Myth and Education", it is arguable that Hughes silently returns to the earlier target of his satire, and proceeds to attack the freedom of Sartrean imagination as a pointless liberation that, in denying human nature, forces one's inner life into repression. Consequently, "the defrocked inner life ... fell into a huge sickness. A huge collection of deprivation sicknesses. And this is how psychoanalysis found it."'' However, the "cure" Hughes postulates for this sickness is not so much a Freudian one as it is a unique combination of Jungian analytical psychology (in particular, Jung's concept of individuation) and the sublime transformation of perception that is present in Romanticism's redemptive imagination. I will return shortly to the former of



these cures; the second Hughes describes, in "Myth and Education", as a faculty that is not solely dependent on the object world, instead, it brings that outer world into some sort of relationship with repressed inner life:

So what we need, evidently, is a faculty that embraces both worlds simultaneously. A large, flexible grasp, an inner vision which holds wide open, like a great theatre, the arena of contention.... This really is imagination. This is the faculty we mean when we talk about the imagination of the great artists. The character of great works is exactly this: that in them the full presence of the inner world combines with and is reconciled to the full presence of the outer world. And in them we see that the laws of these two worlds are not contradictory at all; they are one all-inclusive system.... They are the laws, simply, of human nature.<sup>12</sup>

Hughes' concept of human nature is that of an essence which, contra existentialism, precedes existence. In his review of Max Nicholson's book, *The Environmental Revolution*, Hughes makes precisely this point when his dualistic model of outer and inner worlds is inscribed within the context of nature. It is "both inner and outer nature" that consciousness is exiled or alienated from, and, in a manner typical of Hughes' work from *Wodwo* onwards, that inner nature is troped as feminine, as "Mother Nature".<sup>13</sup> This trope foregrounds the extent to which Hughes' attack on contemporary society comes into a rather uneasy relationship with the feminist movement that, even more so than existentialism, has gained strength in the post-war period. In Hughes' view the limitations of the objective eye and the objective imagination are products of a Western Civilization that is inherently patriarchal. In the review cited above, Hughes makes the connection between a civilization "against Conservation" (one that makes "the assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials ... given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use") and a society that suppresses women: "The creepy crawlies which infest [the earth] are devils of dirt and without a soul ... put there for his exclusive profit and use. By the skin of her teeth, woman escaped the same role."<sup>14</sup> In Hughes' two major volumes of the 1970s,

*Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, the expanded visionary imagination that the protagonists assume is a rejection of the misogyny that, in Hughes' view, Reformed Christianity has bequeathed to the twentieth century. In chapter six, we will see how those two texts thus need to be read in a double focus, as Hughes' quasi-Romantic (and anti-existentialist) prose formulations of the objective eye and its contrary, the visionary imagination, are rewritten within the context of sexual politics.

I discuss Hughes' important review of Max Nicholson's book in more detail later in this chapter. In "Myth and Education", Hughes' merely leaves his critique of patriarchy implicit. His principal concern is the role of literature in the healing of the divided psyche. Such healing is synonymous with a valid form of education, in which "great" literature works upon and enlivens the reader's imagination:

I think if you are to think of imaginative literature as an educational tool, you are finally up against the fact that imaginative literature is therapeutic and does have a magical effect on people's minds and on their ultimate behaviour. This is the appeal of great works of imaginative literature to us as adults, that they are hospitals where we heal, where our imaginations are healed, that when they are evil works they are also battlefields where we get injured.<sup>15</sup>

This aesthetic, in which a timeless work of art redeems an historically conditioned subject, is bound to an ethic: that is, quite simply, that art can be good or evil. Reading is not quite the relaxed occupation some pass an idle hour with, but rather a space where one's very existence is decided.

In the children's primer, *Poetry in the Making*, Hughes writes a parable of the composition of an imaginative work of literature:

The special kind of excitement, the slightly mesmerized and quite involuntary concentration with which you make out the stirrings of a new poem in your mind, then the outline, the mass and colour and clean final form of it, the unique living reality of it in the midst of the general

lifelessness, all that is too familiar to mistake. This is hunting and the poem is a new species of creature, a new specimen of the life outside your own.  
(*PM*, p. 17)

This short allegory ties Hughes' poetics firmly to issues raised in his early poetry. Both centre on poetic "hunting", the appropriation within the writer's jurisdiction of an "other" without whom the self is in some way lacking. What is important here is that the other is a part of the self: the hunter hunts "within" his mind for a life "outside his own". The hunt is hence close to the desire expressed in certain early poems: the appropriation of the without-world of the poem would be a synthesis of poet and poem, a resolution of the Empsonian "conflict" invoked at the beginning of this chapter. The above passage from *Poetry in the Making* is frequently - and rightly - linked to the poem "Pike" in *Lupercal*, but it can be equally read into "The Thought-Fox". The poet-warden of that text encircles the poem in a paradoxically passive gesture, through that which Hughes, in *Poetry in the Making*, calls an "involuntary concentration". The poetic thus narrates another fable of the desire for what, in the early poems, is a "feminine" other, which an anti-conservational modern world has, along with actual women, suppressed. Like the early poems, the appropriation of this other will help to heal a divided psyche, whilst it is the repression of the rough beast, the "devil of suppressed life", that causes mental illness, that exiles the human individual from a natural plenitude of being. The reading of "great works" of literature lifts this repression because it is part of the process of their composition that they have confronted a "life outside" the writer's own. They have reached beyond the confines of the egg-head to acknowledge what is usually suppressed in modern culture and rejected by such "manifestos of the new liberation" as existentialism. Therefore, for Hughes, "these works seem to heal us ... it is imagination which embraces both outer and inner worlds in a creative spirit".<sup>16</sup>

However, this desirable therapeutic function is rendered problematic by Hughes' realization that poetic language transgresses such resolution. This is a problem that, implicit in the deferment of writing in "The Thought-Fox" and "To Paint a Water Lily", becomes more and more explicit in Hughes' poems of the 1970s. In *Poetry in the Making*, Hughes writes, "it is this little goblin in a word which is its life and poetry, and it is this goblin which the poet has to have under control" (*PM*, p. 18). The "life" of the word is, as the personification suggests, transgressive, *impish*. It is this goblin which resists the closure of the rending divide Hughes believes to be the modern human condition, first articulated in the unresolved exile narrated in "Song". As in that poem, closure exists only as an ideal which language incessantly compromises. Hughes makes clear the difficulty of controlling language in an article on Laura Riding:

Her pursuit is religious only in the sense that Wittgenstein's demands on and final despair with language can be called religious.... Some abstract, suicidally high-minded demand for an ideal has got the upper hand of the creature sunk in the chattering fever of approximations and compromise which is the life of expressive speech.<sup>17</sup>

The *impish* "life of expressive speech" is the slippage of signifiers that complicates the "truth" value of the words the poet has at his or her command. The "ideal" asks to be read as somewhere "beyond" the ambiguous "approximations and compromise" of material language. The difficulty for the poet-warden is exerting control over the goblin-word: it should bow to the authority of the author. However, the word's transgression appears to be essential to its "life" - to utterly "control" it would, implicitly, be its "death". Again, this strikes a chord with the early poetry. In the latter, the final control or appropriation of the other is seen to entail an annihilation of subjectivity, a destruction at the root of the fear that is the corollary of the desire expressed in the poems. In Hughes' entire

corpus, plenitude, in all its forms - from the possession of the sexual partner to the fullness of a stable linguistic meaning where the signifier does not compromise or approximate the signified but is at one with it - is the mirror-image of the void. The "exile" of the material signifier from the ideal signified, that is its slippage with regard to one determinate meaning, is thus seen as a precondition of the "life" or existence of language, of "expressive speech", much as desire is seen in the poems as the necessary precondition of life itself. Hughes' attitude to language is thus highly ambivalent, echoing the ambivalence of his attitude to the without-world of the other in the early poetry.

Hughes' difficulty, in the case of poetic language, is in large part due to his belief that cognition is separate from linguistic competence:

It is the same with all our experience of life: the actual substance of it, the material facts of it, embed themselves in us quite a long way from the world of words. It is when we set out to find words for some seemingly quite simple experience that we begin to realize what a *huge gap* there is between our understanding of what happens around us and inside us and the words we have at our command to say something about it.

(*PM*, p. 119; italics mine)

The first sentence makes a judgement about the felt or lived experience of existence; words appear to have a problem getting to grips with this dimension. Hughes' "material facts", although impossible to articulate, are *a priori* certain: the goblin-word cannot fully express that which the "understanding" has already comprehended. It is with this vague and debatable notion of "understanding" that Hughes' poetics are obsessed. Words do indeed refract reality, but - *contra* Hughes - "understanding" is structured by the symbolic order of language the human individual is inserted into: there is no non-linguistic consciousness with which to compare one's use of language. Hughes' text seems to suggest that one can step outside the, in his words, "huge gap" between signifier and signified, and realise, in a transcendent

world of "understanding", our error: the Fall that language entails.

Poetic language is thus, in this poetic, an inadequate tool for the poet who seeks to use imaginative literature for therapeutic ends. Ekbert Faas, quoting Hughes, summarizes this dilemma when he asks: "But how can such an insight into the 'world of final reality' be embodied in human language, a medium so much of conscious reasoning and purpose-orientated communication?"<sup>18</sup> Faas, in a reading of what he terms Hughes' "'flash-vision' creativity", argues that the poet denies "metaphysical claims for language as a secret code to the Absolute" as symptomatic of the "unwarrantable claim ... that all creation is ruled by an underlying 'Logos'". He applauds Hughes' work as similar in aim to Eastern principles which consider language as a "means to those ends which are ultimately inaccessible to any form of human communication".<sup>19</sup> Presumably, Faas is referring to the Indian notion that, "one has but to alter one's psychological orientation and recognize (re-cognize) what is within. Deprived of this recognition, we are removed from our reality by a cerebral shortsightedness which is called in Sanskrit *maya*, 'delusion'".<sup>20</sup> Language is, as "human communication", such a form of "cerebral shortsightedness"; as Faas puts it, it can only be a "means". Whatever Faas' intention, this is a truly "metaphysical" solution: it relies on an acceptance of the "beyond" of language being recognizable to our "understanding" when material language has been accepted as *maya*. Hughes' article on Laura Riding is relevant in this context:

Perhaps her secret lies in this combination of a concentrated, ruthless drive towards things *beyond language* with a new-molten supple wild and free language. She has a "religious" respect for the thing to be said, but no respect at all for the available means of saying it. "The poetry does not matter". But only a poet with an immense natural verbal gift can get away with that.<sup>21</sup>

Hughes' attitude towards this opposition, between the sensible "supple wild and free language" and those intelligible "things beyond language", is clear from the comment that shortly follows this statement:

[Riding's] priorities were right. 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.

This, of course, argues that the signified - "the thing to be said" - is the important element of the sign; the signifier - "the available means" - is a secondary surplus. The latter is that which needs to be kept under control, corrected by the truth of the former. Once again, the imagery of transgression and restraint is inseparable from that of life and death. The first "death" is that caused by ignoring the "understanding" of the "recognized" mind; the second, that of the impish "life" of the goblin-word. This conception of language is only conceivable within a semiology that opposes the conceptual to the material, with the latter perceived as a Fall, a transgression, from the former but intimating a *transition* back to transcendental truths.

If the division between conscious and unconscious existence is the cause of society's sickness ("the inner world, separated from the outer world, is a place of demons. The outer world, separated from the inner world, is a place of meaningless objects and machines"),<sup>22</sup> the closing of this wrenching split by imaginative literature is forestalled by the "huge gap" present in language itself. Hughes' desire to heal a sundered psyche hence develops an aesthetic in which "great" art has a moral - an ethical - duty to unite a split identity into what is comparable to Jung's notion of the individuated "Self".

For Jung, individuation is "the metaphysical process" in which "consciousness must confront the unconscious and a balance between

opposites must be found". The desire for this healing reconciliation springs from "the religious need [that] longs for wholeness, and therefore lays hold of images of wholeness offered by the unconscious".<sup>23</sup> The unconscious thus functions as the alienated other to a consciousness which perceives itself as lacking totality or wholeness. The Jungian Self is not to be confused with the egocentricity of the Egg-head or individuation with the synthesis of desiring subject and desired subject in the masturbatory "contentment" of the first of the "Two Phases". This would result, in Jung's words, in "a hopeless conceptual muddle. Individuation is then nothing but ego-centeredness and autoeroticism... Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to one's self."<sup>24</sup> Individuation provides a useful parallel to the central impulse in Hughes' work: the desire to heal the psyche by the destruction of a repressive egg-headed ego-centrism.

However, the Empsonian obscurity of poetry impinges on this aesthetic of totalization. Hughes' belief in the approximations of language jeopardizes the task of imaginative literature to heal the psyche to itself. This is the dilemma Hughes stresses in the following remark, made in conversation with Faas.

You choose a subject because it serves, because you need it. We go on writing poems because one poem never gets the whole account right. There is always something missed. At the end of the ritual up comes a goblin. Anyway within a week the whole thing has changed, one needs a fresh bulletin. And works go dead, fishing has to be abandoned, the shoal has moved on. While we struggle with a fragmentary Orestes some complete Bacchae moves past too deep down to hear. We get news of it later ... too late. In the end, one's poems are ragged undated letters from remote battles and weddings and one thing and another.<sup>25</sup>

This remarkable passage concentrates several of the elements considered above. The notion of distinct but potentially complementary "worlds" disjointed but, however inadequately, able to be mediated by the poet's craft, is caught in the imagery common to Hughes of fishing. The fisherman's line is a mediator



between two worlds separated by the thin film of the surface of the water; his is a chancy trade: the "shoal" may well "move on". This image recalls the parabolic fishing in *Poetry in the Making*, as well as the mediating "tube" of writing Hughes invokes in the context of his early poem "To Paint a Water Lily". It is also close to Joseph Campbell's "monomyth", in which the subject seeks to undergo "detachment or withdrawal ... a radical transfer of emphasis from the external to the internal world". This is the heroic quest for "a portion of [a] lost totality",<sup>26</sup> which, like Jung's process of individuation, is the internalized quest-romance for a renewed existence devoid of the division between conscious and unconscious experience. Campbell's monomyth is reinterpreted in the light of creativity in Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle's *The Wise Wound*:

It is acknowledged that the process which leads to discovery in science and to the creation of new works of art involves a creative surrender and a rhythm. No artist, no scientist, no poet can make his works by a deliberate act of will.... There is a descent and a return, with the knowledge and prize of inner riches.<sup>27</sup>

Redgrove's and Shuttle's "creative surrender" is another form of Campbell's "withdrawal", and is equally informed by the Jungian desire for "wholeness". But lacking in these accounts (and, incidentally, in Redgrove's poetry) is the element of despair so central to Hughes' work. If Hughes' poetics may be seen as revolving around the same structure of alienation and desire that infuses the early love poetry, it is thus no surprise that poems are perceived, in the above quotation from the 1970 interview with Faas, as "ragged ... letters" - approximations and compromised expressions - from, amongst other locales, remote "weddings". The alchemical wedding between "masculinity" and "femininity" is an image I shall return to in later chapters. For the present, it is noteworthy that, as in the poems, there is a need to appropriate a remote without-world in order to overcome the sense that existence is nothing more nor less than lack. The frustration of desire in the poems is repeated in the prose due to the inherent deferral of

language. In Hughes' cultural writings, the deferred wish for plenitude is reinscribed in the context of femininity.

## II. NATURAL DESIRE: NATURE, CULTURE AND HISTORY

In the early love poems we saw how a desirable plenitude of being - the "wedding" of self and other, subject and object - finds a mirror-image in the "death" of the singular subject. Annihilation negates all dualisms and is that which lies beyond and without desire. Although Hughes' work is explicitly related to Jungian analytical psychology, this paradox is more obviously a psychoanalytical one. In classical Freudian terms, desire for the mother is an incestuous wish curtailed by the intervention of the father and the threat of castration. Wilhelm Reich, whilst disputing many of the tenets of psychoanalysis, reiterates the Freudian notion of the unallayed desire which stems from the Oedipal moment, whilst casting it into a terminology more pertinent to Hughes' texts: "*The striving for non-existence, for the Nirvana, for death, then, is identical with the striving for orgasmic release, that is, the most important manifestation of life.*"<sup>28</sup> Death, in this schema, is fundamental to a full life, as it mirrors the fullness Reich locates in sexual climax. Desire structures post-Oedipal existence because the latter is riven by a "striving" for the lost relationship with the mother, a desire - at least for Reich - only allayed in "orgasmic release". In many ways, this may be said to echo Hughes' emphasis on "physical reconquest" in the early love lyrics. However, such release fails to satisfy fully Hughes' alienated personae and protagonists: Hughes' texts are consequently more aware than Reich's that to end desire, as Buddhist thought acknowledges, entails the rejection of subjectivity, of life itself. The Buddhist concept of *Nirvana* denotes "non-existence", beyond all "striving": *Nirvana* literally means "without wind", and it is the "wind" of *karma* which is equatable with the unsatisfied striving of Freudian desire.<sup>29</sup>

This powerful if pessimistic realization is central to Freud's later work. The primary repression of the desire for the mother results in the substitution of other objects of desire, in a chain whose initial link would be a plenitude that Freud's use of the "Nirvana principle" could only relocate in the void of non-existence or death.<sup>30</sup> Jacques Lacan's interpretation of Freud is relevant in this context, in particular, his formulations of the "imaginary" and the "symbolic".<sup>31</sup> The "imaginary" identification of the child with the mother's body is a form of *metaphorical* equation or identification, whilst the displacement of "symbolic" desire can be, Lacan insists, thought of as structured *metonymically*.<sup>32</sup> It is rewarding to consider Hughes' social and historical comments in terms of Lacan's psychoanalytical appropriation of these two figures of rhetoric. The reason being that Hughes' view of poetic language is inseparable from his cultural criticism: both turn on the same axis and share the same problematic. At the core of each is the notion of a desirable transition back to an "imaginary" plenitude, either of meaning or being; a transition which is in constant danger of becoming a Fall or a transgression. His texts chart an exile comparable to what Lacan terms the "symbolic order", in which the subject, in the psychoanalyst's words, is "caught in the rails - eternally stretching forth towards the *desire for something else* - of metonymy".<sup>33</sup> That "something else", in psychoanalysis, is principally the mother's body, which the symbolic order of society, family and language *denies* the child. What replaces the mother is a series of substitutes, which in Lacanian theory are termed "*objet petit a*". Just as post-structuralist theories of meaning argue that language is an incessant sliding of signifiers, with no final transcendental signified, so too, according to Lacan, desire is an inexorable slippage from *objet petit a* to *objet petit a*, with no closure (save death). For Hughes, this condition of constant metonymic displacement from object to object is - as we shall see in the context of his review of Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution* - on a cultural plane,

the very structure of Western civilization. This is a civilization which has substituted a host of "objects" for the now lost relationship with "Mother Nature". Recalling the signifier's exile from a full meaning as set out in certain prose works, and the lack at the heart of the desiring subject in early poems such as "Song" and "Incompatibilities", Hughes, in his cultural criticism, lays this model of alienation and exile like a transfer upon upon the development of Western culture. He charts an alienation from nature, expresses an awareness of humanity's lack (due to the "re-cognized" understanding outlined above), and thence proposes the need for an "environmental revolution" which will be synonymous with a return to a "lost" unity of "inner" and "outer" nature.

In the light of Hughes' articles on the necessity for a visionary imagination, that will liberate a now suppressed natural being, what Stephen Heath calls the "Reich-Cooper sexology" - that "commands us to authentic orgasm in the name of a repressed or alienated nature" <sup>-34</sup> arguably informs Hughes' historicism. Juliet Mitchell summarizes this concept of "alienated nature" in her analysis of Reich: it is a passage equally applicable to Hughes:

Reich's simple proposition was that Nature and Culture are today at loggerheads, but were not so in the primitive past, nor need be so in the primitive future. If Nature and Culture would be at one again, so would all lesser conflicts. <sup>35</sup>

In Stan Smith's words, quoted in chapter one, this is the nostalgia for the future present in a poem such as "February". In Hughes' prose, such nostalgia becomes the central element of a powerful cultural narrative, one most clearly set out in his review of Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution*, from which I have already cited several passages. The following quotation is the impassioned heart of the review:

The subtly apotheosised misogyny of Reformed Christianity is proportionate to the fanatic rejection of Nature, and the result has been to exile man from Mother Nature - from both inner and outer nature. The story of the mind exiled from Nature is the story of Western man. It is the story of his progressively more desperate search for mechanical and rational and symbolic securities, which will substitute for the spirit-confidence of the Nature he has lost. The basic myth for the ideal Westerner's life is the Quest. The quest for a marriage in the soul or a physical re-conquest. The lost life must be captured somehow. It is the story of spiritual romanticism and heroic technological progress. It is a story of decline. When something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator, and is called an evolutionary dead-end. According to this, our Civilisation is an evolutionary error. Sure enough, when the modern mediumistic artist looks into his crystal, he sees always the same thing. He sees the last nightmare of mental disintegration and spiritual emptiness, under the super-ego of Moses, in its original or in some Totalitarian form, and the self-anaesthetising schizophrenia of St. Paul. This is the soul-state of our civilisation. But he may see something else. He 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. This is what will survive, if anything can.<sup>36</sup>

The vibrant "paradise" of the animal world in Hughes' poetry is due to their "imaginary" identity with Mother Nature. For humanity, the "symbolic" alienation of culture has severed this pre-Oedipal duality, through the intervention of the patriarchal totalitarian Father, "the super-ego of Moses". The result is that "exile" which, in psychoanalysis, is the trajectory of desire. Freud's family romance hence becomes the image of a collective tragedy, that of a "technological progress" which, in reality, is a catastrophic "decline". This entropic decline - reminiscent of "Fourth of July" or "February" - is a narrative of the Western "mind", a psychic journey which turns the exile into a "Quest", an Exodus. But the quest for the "Marriage in the soul" is transgressive, displaced onto "rational and symbolic securities", metonymic substitutes comparable to the Lacanian *objet petit a*. An Edenic plenitude of being is thus superseded by "mental

disintegration and spiritual emptiness", the condition outlined in "Myth and Education" as that of an existence stripped of imagination. Therefore, it is the role of the imaginative, or "mediumistic", artist to glimpse what has been lost, re-cognize the lack at the very centre of his or her community.

The key term in this "story" is, of course, nature. A necessary fiction of culture, it is that which exists beyond and before civilization. It is an other that is both the Dionysian substratum of being and the object world of nature itself. For Hughes, nature is most suitably personified as feminine and as maternal, as Mother Nature, whilst Western culture, due to its Judaic-Christian heritage (Moses and St Paul), becomes implicitly troped as masculine. This binary opposition is reminiscent of the early poetry, in which the cultural egg-head, "the staturing 'I am'" of the symbolic order of society and language, is usually male, alienated from a variety of females, ranging from the petrarchan lady of "Song" to the quasi-Schopenhauerian feminine will of "Gog". Woman and nature thus become that which man and culture define themselves against. Joseph Campbell makes this very point when he writes: "The fear of woman and the mystery of her motherhood have been for the male no less impressive forces than have the fears and mysteries of nature itself".<sup>37</sup> However, Campbell, like Hughes, fails to question this patriarchal belief, thus foregrounding the element of sexism inherent within the "quest" to reappropriate Mother Nature. As Hélène Cixous comments:

So in the end woman, in man's desire, stands in the place of not knowing, the place of mystery. In this sense she is no good, but at the same time she is good because it's this mystery that leads man to keep overcoming, dominating, subduing, putting his manhood to the test, against the mystery he has to keep forcing back.<sup>38</sup>

The notion of femininity occupying the place not only of a lost origin but of a radical inscrutability is one I will return to in the following section and in my reading of *Crow*. For Hughes this

original mystery has been supplanted by substitutes which simply provide "symbolic securities". The text claims that such displacements or transgressions are due to the refusal to acknowledge the repressed desire for a metaphorical identification with the appealing fiction of a lost nature. The feminine is thus, as origin, to be venerated rather than reviled. In the oral exchange following the 1970 version of "Myth and Education", Hughes declares that the patriarchal revulsion of all things feminine is a construct of Protestantism: "The fundamental pattern was made within Protestant Christianity that the devil, woman, nature were out of bounds".<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, such a marginalization - the equation woman = devil = nature - is one that, *in the very act of veneration of all things feminine*, Hughes' prose articulates. Luce Irigaray opens out the patriarchal strategy that structures Hughes' apparent rejection of patriarchy, when she writes of the masculine "desire to force open, to penetrate, to appropriate for himself ... the secret ... of his origin."<sup>40</sup> It is precisely this desire that colours the whole of Hughes' work, and it is one that seeks to interpret history as the exile from an origin that *must*, in the realm of the transcendent "understanding", be seen as a telos. This is why the review foregrounds the importance of "conservation, our sudden alertness to the wholeness of nature, and the lateness of the hour". This is "only the crest of a deeper excitement and readiness", because humanity is on the brink of "the re-emergence of nature as the Great Goddess of mankind, and the Mother of all life".<sup>41</sup> Conservation is thus clearly a part of the general theme of the appropriation of the without-world of the other; it is a cultural movement that re-cognizes the necessity for the collective individuation of nature and society into a new "wholeness". Unlike the contemporary political interest in "green" issues, however, Hughes' sense of conservation as an intimation of the resurrection of a lost totality is seemingly above political considerations. As Terry Eagleton has written:

If the woman figures a politically subversive desire, she can also come to symbolize, like *Nature* itself, the great pre-political matrix from which all cultures proceed, and which supposedly transcends their petty particularities. Woman would appear in this sense to be on the side of both anarchy and order, though the order she symbolizes runs "deeper" than the political.<sup>42</sup>

Hughes' feminine Nature is projected as just such a pre-political matrix. It is a consoling fiction which derives, in part, from Rousseau - an invention castigated by Nietzsche as humanity's need for "good nature": "a corner of the world into which man and his torments could not enter".<sup>43</sup> This myth of nature as a refuge in which society's problems are transcended is, of course, a cultural vision: such a nature is always already a dream of culture, the space of an imaginary resolution of cultural problems. It therefore comes as no surprise that Hughes entertains a desire for a form of "natural" society: a *naturalized* culture in which the without-world of nature has been reappropriated, thus fulfilling the lack at the heart of industrial society.

This is the culture that is described in Hughes' highly ambivalent interpretation of Henry Williamson, for whom he delivered a memorial address in 1977. Like the 1971 review of *The Environmental Revolution*, this is a crucial document in any discussion of Hughes' social criticism, and has been lamentably ignored in recent studies of his work.

The fascination of this address lies in its acceptance of certain of Williamson's central tenets whilst, concurrently, displaying considerable unease at their political consequences: "we had terrible arguments about his politics, wonderful evenings when he told his stories".<sup>44</sup> Hughes' conception of nature, in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*, is itself a "story", a powerful narrative of civilization's continuing exile from its maternal origins. It is this fiction that the address condones as those "real and good things", the fundamentals that Williamson



celebrated: "Everything ... in the real moral basis of his vision, seems to me good and right for every time and every place".<sup>45</sup> It is this morality that Hughes wishes to disentangle from Williamson's political beliefs, principally from the latter writer's faith in the defunct "order" of the country estate. The estate is an example of a cultural construction of an apparently timeless, apolitical and hence "natural" society, with all the ideological implications such a construction depends upon. Underlying this belief of Williamson, is one that is more conducive to Hughes. Williamson, in Hughes' interpretation, finds in nature abundant vitality and, specifically, energy: "[Williamson] worshipped energy. And worshipping energy, he feared - with a fear that was always ready to become rage - inertia, disintegration of effort, wilful neglect, any sort of sloppiness or wasteful exploitation."<sup>46</sup> Hughes' opinions coincide exactly with Williamson's here: "inertia" is simply another name for the stultifying "objective imagination" lambasted in the 1976 essay on myth and education, and identified there as a product of the "scientific outlook". A scientific culture, it is argued, alienates the self from nature, offering an "objective perception" devoid of natural energy. However, Williamson's questionable political interpretation of this fundamental energy must be marginalized as simply a peripheral excess, one which in no way negates the validity of his central "vision". In order to isolate this essence in Williamson's work, Hughes' text is forced into what is largely a semantic sleight of hand. The result is a reading that betrays itself as as ideologically motivated as the work under consideration:

Even here, we can see how 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. He worshipped natural creativity - and therefore he rejoiced in anybody who seemed able to make positive things happen, anybody who had a practical vision for repairing society, upgrading craftsmanship, nursing and improving the land. He worshipped the clear, undistorted spirit of natural life - and this led him to imagine a society based on natural law, a hierarchic society, a society with a great visionary

leader. It seemed to him that he had glimpsed the perfect society in the stable, happy world of the big old estates, where discipline, courtesy, tradition, order, community and productive labour flourished in intimate harmony with a natural world that was cherished.<sup>47</sup>

The fairly neutral tone of this commentary should not mislead the reader. The biological law invoked at the opening of the paragraph is one which lies behind Hughes' contention in the review of *The Environmental Revolution* that, according to the law of entropy, Western civilization is an evolutionary error and thus a dead-end. Williamson's own error was to translate his awareness of this "fact" into the dangerous dimension of "abstract language". Aside from this erroneous judgement, Williamson is said to remain faithful to the truth of his vision in his worship of the essential substratum of existence: "the undistorted spirit of natural life". The fullest cultural expression of this spirit - which the earlier review calls the "spirit-life of nature" - is a society which is glossed as "based on natural law". Hughes here repeats precisely the mistake attributed to Williamson, as he, like Williamson, reads nature into the "social and political formulation" of the "big, old estate." Hughes rescues Williamson's vision by refusing to admit that the estate is determined by economic not natural laws. The adjective, "natural", is itself becoming dangerously abstract, as it ceases to simply denote a law of nature and starts to connote implicit cultural values: those of stability, tradition, order, etc.

That this natural prejudice is ideological is exhibited in the society projected by the text. The "intimate harmony" between the estate and the objective world of nature proper is due to the former having supposedly modelled itself on the latter; the same laws structure both. This justifies the naturalness of "a hierarchic society, a society with a great visionary leader". Indeed, democracy is as unnatural for Hughes as it is for Williamson: it is, in the words of the address, "the shoddy, traditionless, destructive, urban emptiness" of contemporary

society.<sup>49</sup> The neo-Yeatsian portrait of the great country house is an apparently better imitation of nature's hierarchial structure. Once again, however, the terminology of the passage undoes its own assertions. As mentioned, discipline, courtesy, tradition, order and community are all glossed as natural. That this is a somewhat unlikely description of an English estate is irrelevant; what is more pertinent is the glaring discrepancy between these attributes and the blind "energy" the passage originally invoked. In the course of the attempt to naturalize a specific culture, natural "energy" - a form of Schopenhauer's will-to-live - finds itself displaced into "natural creativity". The two terms - "energy" and "creativity" - are hardly synonyms; one cannot praise energy unless it is interpreted as a positive attribute, as "creative". Contrary to the views of many of his critics, Hughes is not a nihilist: his work relies on an equation in which the amorality of nature is interpreted in a moral light. Only by eliding energy into creativity could a morality based on such a reading of the hierarchic model of nature be constructed. The estate-society is a "reading" of nature, one conducted under a cultural aegis, which relies upon an identification of "energy" and "creativity", the suppressed difference between these two terms becoming apparent in the increasing ambivalence as to what the signifier "nature" actually denotes. Consequently, for all Hughes' wariness with regard to Williamson's theories, his commentary finds itself reiterating and amplifying precisely those reactionary elements in Williamson from which he seeks to distance himself.

Williamson's estate is a desperate attempt to reinstate nature in modern culture. Hughes' ambiguous response to this cultural vision is in large part due to the historical perspective outlined in his review of *The Environmental Revolution*: the exile described in the review needs the far more "revolutionary" possibilities of global conservation than that provided by the example of Williamson's quasi-feudal society. In the striking "Note" he appended to his selection, *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*, Hughes

describes a particular period within the more general historical schema of the review. This is the period from the Middle Ages to the English Civil War, with particular emphasis on the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. It is a period, Hughes argues, crucial to an understanding of the loss of the Edenic "imaginary" unity with Mother Nature. Like the review, the "Note" narrates this episode in the "story" of the West in terms of gender, recasting the subjects of history within a sexual fable.

In granting this historical period such importance, Hughes joins forces with T. S. Eliot, who, in a famous passage of "The Metaphysical Poets", makes the claim that "in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered".<sup>49</sup> For Hughes this dissociation, in its origins, predates the seventeenth century; it is also more than simply a question of aesthetic sensibility: it is the final destruction of an already weakened belief in a feminine, natural principle. These differences aside, it is noteworthy that both writers desire to locate a unity of being they feel is absent from twentieth century existence. In Hughes' view, Shakespeare's work is the supreme record of this momentous loss:

The groundplan of Shakespeare's imagination very closely fits the groundplan of the religious struggle which - history tells us convincingly - embroiled every fibre of Elizabethan life.

This struggle was, of course, the struggle between the radical Calvinists and the Reformed Church at the head of which stood the Queen. The Calvinists, or Puritans as they came to be called, intensified their efforts throughout Shakespeare's time ... claiming that the Reformation in England had been muffed, that it had done no more than replace the Pope with the Queen, and that all the old evils were still there, still to be rooted out.  
(CSV, p. 185)

Calvinism simply foregrounds the misogyny that, in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*, is seen as informing Protestantism as a whole. The Queen is a link, however weak, with the Mother Nature worship Reformed Christianity wished to suppress. Such

worship, in a debased but still prominent role, survives within Catholicism in the adoration of the Virgin Mother (see CSV, pp. 185-187). This gender-orientated "religious struggle", which Hughes locates in the Elizabethan era, is the outward face of a larger crisis, one in which all traces of "the old evils" were to be stamped out:

The Queen of Heaven, who was the goddess of Catholicism, who was the goddess of Medieval and Pre-Christian England ... who was the goddess of all sensation and organic life - this overwhelmingly powerful, multiple, primeval being, was dragged into court by the young Puritan Jehovah. It was a gigantic all-inclusive trial: the theology of it being merely the most visible face of the social revolution included behind it. Throughout Shakespeare's life-time, this was the agitation inside everybody, as the two fought it out.

(CSV, p. 187)

In Hughes' reading, the determination of the religious struggle provides the "most visible face" of what is, in fact, a "social revolution". The "Note" thus appears to hint at a necessary distinction between the theological debates of the time, the political power-struggles lying behind the church's religious debates, and the ultimately determining economic factor of the rise of the bourgeoisie, as the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism accelerates. However, Hughes' reading is by no stretch of the imagination an exercise in historical materialism. Hughes collapses any notion of base and superstructure into his non-dialectical model of history as decline; the religious issues are used to foreground a moment which, like a sudden downward movement on a graph, is merely an increase in the angle of culture's Fall from a state of nature. The contradiction centrestage in the case of this historical period thus becomes a concrete instance in the historical overview set out in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*. This is what Hughes labels a "trial" of the original, valid worship of Mother Nature by the usurping, erroneous Christian faith, in its virulent form of Calvinism: "So the quarrel opened an archaic mythological dimension beyond the immediate theological one" (CSV, p. 186).

In conclusion to this section, we can reduce Hughes' cultural criticism to the following formula: before the "evolutionary error" of civilization, there was nature. In both the review of *The Environmental Revolution* and the "Note" on Shakespeare, this is conveyed in terms of gender, femininity providing a trope for what is the other to a patriarchal culture. This suppressed femininity must be returned to the centre: "She is", in Heinrich Zimmer's words, "brahman, the life-force of the universe that secretly dwells within all things".<sup>50</sup> This is analogous to Hughes' "vital, somewhat terrible spirit of natural life", that essence which is the substratum to all existence. The cultural criticism is thus structured around the same concerns as both the early poems and the prose formulations of poetic language. In all, the dominant tone is *nostalgic*, a hankering after a plenitude of being, language or culture, a fullness that merely remains a constant object of desire. In the final section of this chapter, I read these issues into Hughes' literary criticism, taking as my text Hughes' interpretation of Shakespeare in the "Note", a paradigmatic essay which also raises the importance of the practice of shamanism in Hughes' poetry after *Wodwo*.

### III. CRITICAL DESIRE: SHAKESPEARE AND THE CRITIC AS SHAMAN

At the heart of the "Note" lies a contradiction, one that involves a crucial vacillation between two opposed readings of Shakespeare. The first is that which predominates throughout the "Note": this one may term the "unmediated" relationship between poet and history, poet and audience, text and critic. Shakespeare presents, in his "skeleton-key fable" (*CSV*, p. 182), the bare bones, as it were, of a psychic history:

As will be seen, I trust, when I come to outline it, this fable of his, this very private assembly of his deepest obsessions, *reflected perfectly* the prevailing psychic conflict of his times in England, the conflict which exploded, eventually, into the Civil War.  
(*CSV*, p. 184; italics mine)

Shakespeare's work is a perfect reflection of its three referents: his private "conflict" (in Empson's sense), the national "psychic conflict" and the historical situation I briefly analysed at the close of the preceding section. However, these three different referents are themselves reflections of one another, as what Hughes calls Shakespeare's "sexual dilemma" (the "tap-root" of the poetry and plays [CSV, p. 181]), is, in fact, the mirror image on a individual plane of the psychic dilemma gripping sixteenth and seventeenth century society in general. Shakespeare's *oeuvre* is thus simply the passive representative of a "world picture". This mimetic criticism of Shakespeare, however, seems to contradict a remark made late in the "Note", one which broadens the narrow focus adopted so far:

Inevitably, his fable takes account of other parallel worlds of experience, besides the state of religious feeling in his day. It is a perfect example of the ancient universal shamanistic dream of the call to the poetic or holy life.  
(CSV, p. 199)

The "other worlds of experience" remain unexplored in the "Note", but the question this contradiction raises is: can a shamanic Shakespeare be compounded with a Shakespeare who is simply a passive recorder of social and psychic conflicts? The shaman, or priest-doctor, is an educator and healer in certain so-called "primitive" societies. His active, communal role is one Hughes perhaps feels is weakly shadowed in the public position of Poet Laureate. That aside, what needs to be stressed is that the shaman is a mediator between a tribal community and what Hughes calls "parallel worlds of experience". Claude Lévi-Strauss' interpretation of shamanism succinctly explains the significance of the shaman's role:

The shaman provides the sick woman with a *language*, by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressible, psychic states can be immediately expressed. And it is the transition to the verbal expression - at the same time making it possible to undergo in an ordered and intelligible form a real experience that would otherwise be chaotic and

inexpressible - which induces the release of the physiological process, that is, the reorganization, in a favorable direction, of the process to which the sick woman is subjected.<sup>51</sup>

The shaman seeks to verbalize the individual's sickness and thus enact some sort of cure. This is similar to the emphasis Hughes lays on the necessity of imaginative literature releasing repressed elements of the sick psyche into creative co-operation with the conscious mind. In the context of the "Note", Shakespeare would thus be a poetic healer as much as a recorder of a sick society, for, in Hughes' interpretation of shamanism, it is the practicality of the shaman's trade, his social function within the tribe, that is important. As Hughes writes, in a review of Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism*: "Shamanism is not a religion, but a technique for moving in a state of ecstasy among the various spiritual realms, and for generally dealing with souls and spirits, in a practical way, in some practical crisis. It flourishes alongside and within the prevailing religion."<sup>52</sup> Shamanism is marginal, "alongside and within", it is parasitical upon a more full-blown religion. It is less a theology than a career, a skill or a *technique*. And like all techniques, it requires a gift to practise it well - not all can shamanize. In this respect the shaman and shamanism are an obvious choice as metaphors for the poet and the poetic act, especially when chosen by a poet particularly concerned with the "ethical" uses and abuses of poetry. As Hughes puts it: "Some shamans shamanize to amuse themselves, but usually the performance is public and to some public purpose".<sup>53</sup>

For Hughes, then, the shamanic act is a metaphor for the healing that imaginative literature should enact. It is principally an image of the desire to close a division between the "two minds" of the psyche that are described in "To Paint a Water-Lily" and that find extensive formulation in the prose. Eliade's comprehensive book on shamanism - one that obviously influenced Hughes' own texts - makes the pertinent point that, "each time a shaman



succeeds in sharing in the animal mode of being, he in a manner re-establishes the situation that existed *in illo tempore*, in mythical times, when the divorce between man and the animal world had not occurred."<sup>54</sup> Like Hughes, the shaman is thus, in this reading, *nostalgic*, concerned with the restoration of wholeness and individuated being. Hughes emphasizes this point in his review of Eliade's work:

The results, when the shaman returns to the living, are some display of healing power, or a clairvoyant piece of information. The cathartic effect on the audience, and the refreshing of their religious feeling, must be profound. These shamanizings are also entertainments, full of buffoonery, mimicry, dialogue, and magical contortions.<sup>55</sup>

Hughes thus sees the shamanic poet, such as the Shakespeare intimated at the end of the "Note", as a doctor and educator effecting catharsis. At the same time, however, the solemnity of this role is combined with what, in my reading of *Crow*, I term (after Mikhail Bakhtin) a "carnavalesque" irreverence, a "buffoonery". This is all due to the shaman's marginal status, his tangential relationship with the dominant religion. He is hence, like Hughes' ideal writer of imaginative literature, not in cahoots with a society's principal mores because he brings back to society that which it represses. However, Shakespeare, in the majority of the "Note", is read as failing to do more than reflect the puritanical suppression of femininity. Shakespeare's texts merely repeat the dilemma gripping Jacobean society; a dilemma, it appears, that they do not attempt to cure but simply re-enact in various degrees of savagery. The throw-away reference to Shakespeare's shamanic status towards the end of the "Note" is largely undermined by the predominant emphasis on his passive reflection of the spirit of the age. In fact, in a move that we shall see to be analogous to *Crow's*, it is the critic of Shakespeare who adopts the role of the shaman rather than Shakespeare himself. Hughes' criticism becomes the healing medium that, in the essays on education, he had granted to imaginative literature, the object of critical study. Shakespeare's texts

become the "sick woman" who, in Lévi-Strauss's words, the shamanic critic "provides ... with a language". One of the principal interests of the "Note" lies in Hughes' reasons for taking this somewhat odd critical approach.

Recalling Hughes' view of this historical period, it is apparent that Shakespeare's texts are produced from within a historical context that is a lynchpin in the decline of social and religious life. At one end are the Middle Ages, Catholicism and a weak but pervasive sense of the Mother Goddess and all that that entails. At the nearer end lies the symbolic patriarch Cromwell. It is the passage from one to the other that *The Complete Works* describe and presage. This transition makes its first presence, interestingly, in an absence, in the blind spot between the two poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Hughes' interpretation of these two works is central to his essay as a whole:

At first glance, each of these [poems] is the obverse of the other. In the first a love-goddess - the love-goddess - tries to rape Adonis, a severely puritan youth. In the second, the lust-possessed king, Tarquin, rapes the severely puritan young wife, Lucrece.... Venus is not only the goddess of love, she is the Queen of Heaven, whose doves are the original ministers of grace.... She is also the Queen of Hell, in which aspect her wild boar is the demon of destruction and death.... As Venus, again, she is also Isis, mother of all the gods, and all living things: she is Nature.

(CSV, p. 189)

This is the initial critical reading; what is required of the critic, however, is a rigorous re-reading:

Once we have seen that the two poems are each other's obverse, in the fairly mechanical way common in mythology, we can see that they are also, in a deeper sense complementary. In the first, the Divine Power in female form offers her love with such fullness and intensity that ordinary defensive humanity does not know to accept it. In the second, the Divine Power, enraged after rebuff, in male and destructive form (Mars is the Shiva behind the boar and behind Tarquin), completes the visitation fatally.... Now perhaps we can see how the two poems are, in fact, the two unjoined halves of a single story. (CSV, pp. 189-190)

This is, to mix metaphors, the "skeleton-key fable" in embryonic form. It is also the Hughesian Fall read into Shakespeare. The "story of the mind exiled from Nature" finds poetic expression in his two early poems. Hughes, as critic, takes texts that appear to be mirror images - that is, reversed or "obverse" images - and makes them "complementary", bringing them together in a linear development. The result is a revenge fable: the Goddess is spurned, incensed she returns "in male and destructive form", wreaking vengeance. The "feminine" has two guises: welcomed she could be creative, rejected or repressed she turns destructive. It is this national psychic repression that Shakespeare records and that the critic must identify as the latent content of Shakespeare's work. Those texts, however, not only record this national illness, they are themselves a part of it. The poems and plays reflect the suppression of the feminine by the patriarchal puritans and partake of the puritanical attitude themselves. Shakespeare's texts finally plummet to the depths of repression, as Prospero drowns his "book in the sea" because "it contains the tragedies, with their evidence" (CSV, p. 198). The shamanic critic, like the shaman proper, is thus to be seen as in some sense marginal to the orthodoxy espoused by his primary texts.

The early narrative poems tell "the two unjoined halves of a single story", yet this is the story in its infancy, at the beginning of Shakespeare's work, where the "national tragedy" (CSV, p. 197)<sup>43</sup> lies hidden in the abyss between the poems:

And the story these two halves make is Shakespeare's fable - his major discovery, the equation on which all his work is based. But the most inspired piece of intuition in the whole assembly, the mechanism on which the dramatic development depends, is still absent. It occurs in the gap between the two poems.

(CSV, p. 190)

The movement of Hughes' reading of history springs from such a "gap", an absence or lack, as does his view of the function - and dangers - of poetic language. The *telos* that is a return to an "imaginary" state - the desirable outcome of conservation in Hughes' "story" of humanity - reappears in the "Note" on Shakespeare as the aim of the critic. He makes the shamanic flight and return that brings to light the repressed aspects of the text - its "unconscious" - and restores the text to a plenitude of "meaning".

The "gap" in the text is read as the point at which the "Divine Power" changes "nature", and switches from benevolent love to destructive rage. It is the moment where Venus turns into Hecate, where the female takes on male attributes. That this gap is closely associated with the nature of femininity is more than coincidental. At the root of Adonis' downfall is his failure to fully comprehend Venus: denying her sexual advances, he leaves her, in Hughes' reading, *unfulfilled*. She thus returns in terrible form to gore him in the shape of a boar: "The boar that demolished Adonis was, in other words, his own repressed lust - crazed and bestialized by being separated from his intelligence and denied" (*CSV*, p. 192). Denying Mother Nature (Venus), his own Dionysian nature (the boar) - as in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*, the two are interchangeable - returns but, because unsublimated, only to destroy him. The critic's role, like the shaman's, is to articulate this inexpressible "sickness", and thence reappropriate what Shakespeare - and Adonis - repress.

Such an interpretational approach has as its object of desire the mysterious, inscrutable void in the text, an absence that is linked to the notion of femininity, to Venus. Jacqueline Rose has explored and documented this relation of "femininity" to textual mystery and critical bafflement. Particularly relevant to the present argument is her discussion of T. S. Eliot's reaction to *Hamlet*:

The place of the *Mona Lisa* in Eliot's reading of Hamlet suggests that what is felt as inscrutable, unmanageable or even horrible for an aesthetic theory which will only allow into its definition what can be controlled or managed by art, is nothing other than femininity itself.<sup>56</sup>

Hughes' work is itself dogged by the *Mona Lisa* syndrome. His poetry and prose is in large part a narrative of the desirable appropriation and control of what increasingly becomes imaged as feminine. In the "Note", if Hughes is overtly criticizing the "puritanical" Adonis, his strategy is drawn by the same enigma - that of the woman. That Hughes' text remains fixated but baffled by an enticing gap is noted by David Holbrook, at a point where the latter writer himself goes on to admit to his own bafflement: "In Ted Hughes' Note we never, in fact, learn fully what this sensational dilemma is.... I cannot follow how he moves from these observations to see *in the gap* between these two poems 'a frightening psychic event' - which is the key to the Civil War!"<sup>57</sup> Holbrook pinpoints Hughes' connection between such inscrutability and the issue of femininity as follows:

Hughes sees the religious struggle as having its roots in the sexual dilemma - as a war over "the dark and vicious place", a struggle over the fallen body and a final loss of the creative soul. The "dark and vicious place" is a fantasy of woman's genital.<sup>58</sup>

In chapter four, we shall see that Holbrook does not escape the sexism he here attributes to Hughes; nevertheless, his essay usefully foregrounds the association in the "Note" between inscrutability and femininity.

In trying to locate that which lies in the "gap" between the two narrative poems, Hughes' critical desire is displaced onto a later link in the Shakespearean fable, onto *Measure for Measure*. This text is read as exposing the absent cause of the narrative poems: "it is in *Measure for Measure* that we see most clearly what is missing from the broken joint between the two long poems":

A demon has arrived. Angelo is suddenly, and dead against his will, inflamed, as Dryden might say, by Venus. Angelo is no longer Angelo. His brittle puritan mask is split - and another being emerges. At the same point, in the parallel story of the long poem, Adonis has ceased to be Adonis. In his case, Shakespeare is younger and things occur in a more mythical remove. The demon stands in its symbols uninterpreted. But a demon has arrived there too - in the shape of a boar. Adonis is suddenly destroyed by Venus in her infernal aspect, as a mythographer might say - he is taken over by Venus as the Queen of Hell. The brittle puritan gentleman ceases to be. In his place we have a flower - interpret that as we like. This blood-splashed flower is what stands in the gap between *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.  
(*CSV*, pp. 190-191)

Angelo's lust for Isabella is a mirror-image of Tarquin's for Lucrece. Angelo is an Adonis who becomes a Tarquin, whilst the boar represents their infernal desires. The shamanic critic has found the answer to the Shakespearean equation. Or has he? The bafflement still persists, the displacement onto the later play leaves the previous enigmatic moment obscure. There is the not unsurprising use of the image of the boar to "symbolise" Adonis' repressed lust, and it is this the critic latches onto, the boar, as it were, leaping the divide between the two poems. But if this is the bridge, the interpretational link, the metamorphosis of the male protagonists in this now triple drama (Adonis = Tarquin = Angelo), is complicated by Adonis' particular metamorphosis in the earliest text, that of a man into a flower: "This blood-splashed flower is what stands in the gap". The absence springs forth a presence. But it is one that evades interpretation - we may "interpret that [the flower] as we like." The boar is really a substitute for the original object of desire, the "nature" of the gap. And the flower-gap remains uninterpreted. Hughes is not alone in being frustrated - one need only consider Venus herself as she contemplates the transformed boy:

... the boy that by her side lay kill'd  
Was melted like a vapour from her sight,  
And in his blood that on the ground lay spill'd,  
A purple flower sprung up, checker'd with white,

Resembling well his pale cheeks and the blood  
Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood.

She bows her head, the new-sprung flower to smell,  
Comparing it to her Adonis' breath;  
And says within her bosom it shall dwell,  
Since he himself is reft from her by death ...

"Poor flower," quoth she, "this was thy father's guise,-  
Sweet issue of a more sweet-smelling sire,-  
For every little grief to wet his eyes;  
To grow unto himself was his desire,  
And so 'tis thine ...."<sup>59</sup>

The narrative voice makes an initial interpretation, of how the flower "resembles" the dead boy. The flower is a substitute that is, in turn, a metaphor; the referential reality of the boy "melted like a vapour" - even the metamorphosis is metaphorical. Vapourized, the Real is replaced by the anemone. It is this "reality" Venus had been unable to possess, instead she is given a stand-in, a flower, which she plucks. Via the latter's presence she can designate that which is absent: Adonis. The flower is, it appears, a form of "language", one that Venus employs to articulate her grief. It signifies the dead boy's breath by its smell, and she will thus keep it to substitute for "he himself ... reft from her". Venus' predicament seems to prefigure that of Hughes; both are unable to *possess* the object of their desire.

Hughes' "Note" chases the boar through the tragedies to be confronted with the final plays. Of the former, *Macbeth* is read as displaying the nature of the gap, but it is simply yet another displacement:

[Tarquin] reappears, almost at once, as *Macbeth*. Shakespeare limits this play to a close-up of that vital moment - the switch from Adonis to Tarquin, a magnified, slow-motion close-up of what happened in the gap between the two long poems, a microscopic analysis of that flower springing from the blood of Adonis, a continuous explosion, *Macbeth* emerging from the rags of a former Adonis in a cloud of bloody blackness. The blackness, too, is analysed and it turns out to be *Macbeth*'s state of possession by demons - actually his wife, behind whom stand the three witches, behind whom stands no other than Hecate herself - Venus in

the underworld. This is the full-length portrait of the Shakespearean moment. Adonis, fully conscious, and dead against his will, understanding just what it means to become Tarquin. Macbeth's horror at himself, as the change works, is the greatest horror in the plays.  
(CSV, p. 196)

It appears that the critic here grasps the flower by the stalk: "This is ... the Shakespearean moment". This moment, however, is once again complicated by the issue of femininity. The "slow-motion close-up" cannot freeze frame; the interpretation finds its object of attention displaced from the demons to the wife to the witches to Hecate to Venus to become a "continuous explosion". When does the "moment" actually occur? The metamorphosis of Macbeth has challenged and baffled generations of critics and students of Shakespeare. Does it occur during the drama or before the play commences? Who is the agent of his destruction: his wife, the witches, himself? For Hughes, all the demonic females are embodiments of Venus in her aspect of Hecate. It is this "other" that Macbeth has repressed and which violently redounds upon him, in a manner highly reminiscent of the dangers of repressing inner "nature" in "Myth and Education". The problematical "moment" of motivation, however, is unlocatable; and this interpretational uncertainty is bound up with the status or "nature" of the women in the play. Hughes attempts to identify the cause of the drama in the successive shadowing of Venus that the Hecate/Lady Macbeth/demonic possession chain exhibits, but the result is an uncertain "blackness" that shrouds the "moment". The effect is catastrophic but the source, the "tap-root", evades the critical gaze. The action of the play turns around a terrible vagueness, around the "gap", around the woman. The "lack" is that which has spurred countless critics into wild flights of interpretational fancy, in an attempt to comprehend the play, to give the text a determinate meaning and thus achieve narrative closure. One may well feel that Macbeth himself is the first to be dismayed. Cheated by the prophecy that "no man that's born of woman / Shall e'er have power upon thee", he is the first critic to fall and fail in his reading of femininity, the first to



realise the play to be - in his frustrated interpretation - "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing".<sup>60</sup>

In one sense then, the critic feels cheated. Shakespeare, to a certain degree, has failed Hughes:

Shakespeare's persistence has to be admired. After all his experience of the odds against the likelihood, he did finally succeed in salvaging Lucrece from the holocaust and Adonis from the boar. He rescued the puritan abstraction from the gulf of Nature. He banished Venus as Sycorax, the blue-eyed hag.... And within an impenetrable crucible of magic prohibitions, he married Lucrece (Miranda) to Adonis (Ferdinand). But what a wooden wedding! What proper little Puritan puppets!  
(CSV, p. 198)

In turn, critics of Hughes feel themselves cheated by his critical judgement of Shakespeare. This seems to be a universal predicament (excluding Keith Sagar, who merely paraphrases the fable).<sup>61</sup> Holbrook is, of course, thoroughly disgusted by virtually the whole procedure:

It is surely deeply disturbing to find a writer respected for his contributions to education and poetry, and now Poet Laureate, attempting thus to cut Shakespeare down, to fit his own limited and bleak philosophy of being - to something like the shrunken lump of pitiful pulsating insignificance to which Hughes reduces life in his repugnant, cynical and nihilistic *Crow*.<sup>62</sup>

Other, more sympathetic, critics are, however, equally unconvinced by Hughes' judgements on the final plays. Graham Bradshaw feels that Hughes is here - and elsewhere - too much under the influence of Robert Graves' reading of the final plays: "Within the imprisoning dualism of the Gravesean schema, any idealistic, morally constructive effort becomes suspect, 'cynical', a hubristic assault on the Goddess".<sup>63</sup> Ekbert Faas, in a different fashion, believes that Hughes' later work (post 1981) "may arrive at an answer to the 'cruel riddle' which he believes - I think erroneously - Shakespeare did not solve".<sup>64</sup> Holbrook's reaction

is a paranoid reflex to impertinent comments about the Bard; Bradshaw's, a more subtle defence of Shakespearean Englishness, a defence which, as Bradshaw seems to realise toward the end of his essay, is close to Hughes' own views on the essential character of the English; whilst Faas' is a belief in Hughes' and Shakespeare's prophetic or "shamanic" potential. However, all these critics are concerned with salvaging Shakespeare from desecration. All, including Hughes himself, use *The Complete Works* to support their own positions. "Shakespeare" becomes caught in a merciless game of appropriation: all seek a "truth" of the text, a truth which is merely a rewriting for more or less explicit purposes.

Hughes, in trying to pin down the source of the Shakespearean narrative, runs back and thence forth across the text, chasing the elusive boar through its substitutions. The desire is not only one that seeks to explicate Shakespeare, but also one that seeks to locate the "moment" of the "creative soul", before "England lost her soul" to the "Puritan abstraction" (CSV, p. 199). This abstraction is synonymous with the transgression from Mother Nature analysed above. Transgression as much as alienation is a terror in Hughes' early poetry and his prose writings. It reduces poetry to "ragged ... letters", qualifying its therapeutic function; it is also the movement of history, which is consequently a record of exile. Informing Hughes' analyses of poetic language, the meditations on nature and culture, and the reading of Shakespeare is the constant desire for "closure" - of a sundered psyche, of a fragmented society, of history, and of narrative. The shaman provides a powerful metaphor for any creative act which attempts such closure. Nevertheless, to appropriate Shakespeare myself, it is worth concluding with a line from one of the narrative poems which are so central to Hughes' "Note": "The sea has bounds, but deep desire hath none".<sup>es</sup> Desire, transgression, lack and gender - it is these concepts which inform Hughes' major poetry of the late 1960s, the '70s and '80s, and to which those chapters on Hughes in the second part of this thesis address themselves.

### CHAPTER 3. SEXUAL/TEXTUAL POETICS: HEANEY'S CRITICISM

#### I. FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

An interesting perspective in which to view Heaney's criticism is provided by Mary Ellmann's often humorous, frequently merciless, reading of "sexual analogy" in traditional literary discourse. Ellmann succinctly sums up such questionable analogies in the phrase: "Western criticism begins with this ... tedious distinction - between manly Homer and womanish Virgil."<sup>1</sup> Such a distinction, obviously enough, is a typical sexist formulation, nevertheless, Ellmann still concludes by granting the literary text a "gender". Mary Eagleton, quoting from Ellmann's *Thinking About Women*, neatly summarizes her position:

She does not write of "male" and "female" but of "masculine" and "feminine" modes of writing, characterizing the "masculine" in terms of an authority apparently absent in the so-called "feminine". Crucially, she presents this masculine voice as not necessarily the prerogative of the male writer, nor is the feminine voice possible only for women.... It is in the writing which expresses the "disruption of authority" or the "disruption of the rational" that Ellmann finds the characteristics of "what were previously considered feminine habits of thought."<sup>2</sup>

Do we have here another "tedious distinction" or a radical formulation? As Eagleton goes on to suggest, Ellmann's modes of writing prefigure the *écriture féminine* advocated by writers such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Their concept of a "feminine writing" also does not, in itself, entail a female author. As Cixous comments: "Great care must be taken in working on feminine writing not to get trapped by names: to be signed by a woman's name doesn't necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could well be masculine writing, and conversely, the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity. It's rare, but you can sometimes find

femininity in writings signed by men: it does happen."<sup>3</sup> In this argument, the text is "feminine" because it is disruptive of the Law, of patriarchal authority; and "femininity", in this sense, takes its "meaning" from its subversive relation to the male bias of culture.

Seamus Heaney's criticism enters this arena with an alarming ingenuousness. Heaney, like Ellmann and Cixous, is drawn to the definition of modes of writing that can be dubbed "masculine" and "feminine"; and for which, in his case, the most clear formulation is that made in an essay on Hopkins, "'The Fire i' the Flint': Reflections on the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", included in his first collection of prose works, *Preoccupations*. In a key passage in this essay, he writes that he is

setting up two modes and calling them masculine and feminine - but without the Victorian sexist overtones to be found in Hopkins's and Yeats's employment of the terms. In the masculine mode, the language functions as a form of address, of assertion or command, and the poetic effort has to do with conscious quelling and control of the materials, a labour of shaping; words are not music before they are anything else, nor are they drowsy from their slumber in the unconscious, but athletic, capable, displaying the muscle of sense. Whereas in the feminine mode the language functions more as evocation than address, and the poetic effort is not so much a labour of design as it is an act of divination and revelation; words in the feminine mode behave with the lover's come-hither instead of the athlete's display, they constitute a poetry that is delicious as texture before it is recognized as architectonic.  
(*P*, p. 88)

This masculine/feminine opposition is, in the main, "tedious" and traditional, locked into the stereotypical bind Freud noted - and, perhaps, passed over - in the 1915 revision of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: "'Masculine' and 'feminine' are sometimes used in the sense of *activity* and *passivity*, sometimes in a *biological*, and sometimes, again, in a *sociological* sense. The first of these three meanings is the essential one".<sup>4</sup> Heaney's examples in the essay on Hopkins are, to rewrite Ellmann's phrase, "manly" Hopkins and "womanish" Blake, his distinction largely

informed by Freud's connection between masculinity and activity, femininity and passivity.

*Preoccupations* is a collection of essays that tends to circle around such stylistic binary oppositions. The passage quoted above is the most striking, but it is symptomatic of the volume as a whole. The poles of the opposition are modes of writing that Heaney frequently regards as antithetical, and that, in "The Makings of a Music", he links to Valery's distinction between *le vers donné* and *le vers calculés*. The former for Heaney is the feminine mode, where the music of the poetry is "hypnotic, swimming with the current of its form, rather than against it". This is a passive mode of writing. The active, masculine mode, on the other hand, is one in which, "instead of surrendering to the drift of the original generating rhythm, the poet seeks to discipline it, to harness its energies in order to drive other parts of his mind into motion". (*P*, pp. 61-62). However, this is, in fact, not a true polar opposition. As Heaney's reading of *le vers calculés* makes clear, the active masculine mode *works upon* the feminine *donné*. The writer, in this mode, harnesses the palpable rhythm and coerces it into a calculated form. Heaney's example of this kind of active music is, in "Makings of a Music", Yeats. Elsewhere, in "Yeats as an Example?", he makes clear that this music involves both elements of the stylistic opposition, because Yeats "narrows the gap ... between mystery and mastery" (*P*, 103). As I hope to demonstrate in this section, the example of Hopkins implies a similar compounding of the two modes. This, in turn, links to the impulse in Heaney's own poetry, in that the "surrender" to poetic rhythm is bound to a desire for authorial "mastery". In the case of the place-name poems from *Wintering Out*, such a crossing of the two modes resulted in a poetry that foregrounded a surrender to sensible texture whilst, simultaneously, stressing a calculated assertion of an intelligible stance. In chapter one, I suggested that such desirable poetic closure distinguishes Heaney's Franciscan play from post-structuralist notions of freeplay. Instead, Heaney expresses

what, in both the prose and the poetry, becomes an increasing vacillation over a desire for an untrammelled play of language, the delights of the signifier, and a belief in the need to ground this "bliss" in the final authority of an intelligible "signified". In this chapter, I will explore this dilemma in the light of the preoccupations of the prose, preoccupations which, in Part II, we will see informing the direction of the poetry from *North* onwards.

What emerges throughout the twenty odd years of Heaney's critical writing is a recurrent interest in poetic "playfulness". In the earlier articles this is labelled a feminine, rhythmic quality; in the more recent writings, it is the liberation of lyricism from political orthodoxy and social determinations. However, in both cases, this play is one that is finally limited by what may be termed "masculine" mastery, the final authority of the author. As shown in the examples of "Fodder", "Anahorish" and "Broagh", Heaney displays an implicit unease with the formulations of post-modernism, with its critique of the governing tongue of the author and its rejection of determinate meaning in favour of a more "open" textuality.

In the essay on Hopkins, this unease can be seen as soon as one seeks to compare Heaney's notion of a feminine mode with Ellmann's and Cixous' feminine writing. Heaney's mode can be seen to resist identification with an interpretation of feminine writing as a rupturing of masculine authority, mainly because it does not *oppose* the masculine mode, but submits its "play" to authorial "command". This distinction can be usefully broached by examining the sexist connotations of Heaney's argument.

Heaney states that, unlike Freud's "tedious distinction", his modes have no "Victorian sexist overtones". However, the imagery Heaney deploys is far from neutral: the two modes' defining characteristics contain a host of physical and, as we shall see,

sexual attributes. To concentrate the key terms in the essay's vocabulary is to extract certain commonplaces. The masculine mode is one of *address, assertion and command*; it is a *conscious quelling and control, a labour of shaping*; it is *athletic and architectonic*. The feminine mode, in contrast, is a *drowsy slumber, an unconscious divination and revelation, a lover's come-hither that is delicious as texture*. This crude distillation of Heaney's definitions forces one to realise more fully the "sexual analogy" the essay invokes, that which made Edna Longley find Heaney's criticism "at once strangely sexy, and strangely sexist."<sup>5</sup> In the passage under consideration, Heaney does appear to avoid blatant "sexual analogy": athleticism can pertain to male or female, lovers exist in both sexes, etc. Indeed, all the attributes seem to be strictly speaking non-sexual, *just as the two modes are concerned with textual "gender" rather than authorial sex*. Biological determinism is thus avoided. This is Heaney's intention: he wishes to be "sexual" rather than sexist. And yet, the rhetoric is underscored by - although it does not use it to evaluate - Ellmann's ancient distinction. The terminology is, on a closer inspection, that of conventional patriarchal thought. Hélène Cixous, with remarkable concision, sums up such imagery as follows:

*Where is she?*

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Logos/Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground - where steps are taken, holding-  
and dumping-ground.

Man

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Woman<sup>6</sup>

Heaney's formulations draw sustenance from such sexism; following Cixous' formulations one may rewrite his prose as follows:

Address/revelation,  
Assertion, command/divination,  
Conscious/unconscious,  
Labour of shaping/lover's come-hither,  
Athletic/drowsy, slumber,  
Architectonic/delicious as texture.

Masculine/feminine.

One can follow the import of such phallogocentrism throughout Heaney's reading of Hopkins, his preoccupations tending to centre on what Cixous - echoing Freud's distinction - locates as the "absolute constant which orders values and which is precisely this opposition: activity/passivity".<sup>7</sup> Early in the essay, Heaney links Shakespeare's Poet's words (from *Timon of Athens*), "Our poesy is a gum which oozes / From whence 'tis nourished", to Eliot's "dark embryo within [the poet] which gradually takes on the form and speech of a poem":

The symbolist image of poetic creation, one might say, is the unburdening of the indefinable through pangs that are indescribable, where the poem survives as the hieroglyph of a numinous nativity. At any rate, from Shakespeare's ooze to Eliot's dark embryo, we have a vision of poetic creation as a feminine action, almost parthenogenetic, where it is the ovum and its potential rather than the sperm and its penetration that underlies their accounts of poetic origins. And out of this vision of feminine action comes a language for poetry that tends to brood and breed, crop and cluster, with a texture of echo and implication, trawling the ear with a net of associations.

(*P*, p. 83)<sup>8</sup>

The Eliotic "awful daring of a moment's surrender", that "annihilation ... in itself indescribable",<sup>9</sup> which is a constant in Eliot's work from *The Waste Land* to the late essays collected in *On Poetry and Poets*, is reiterated in Heaney's essay via a religious image: "the poem survives as the hieroglyph of a numinous nativity". The feminine poetic action results in the



parthenogenetic or virgin-birth of the poem: this is the writer as mother. Mary Ellmann has a fine passage on this poetic virgin-motherhood:

often, the uterus alters its sex and character, and becomes a creative force of an autogenetic variety. The male uterus-mind, engaged in the production of some work, usually a work of art, seldom seems to have required the impetus of fertilization.... In writing, this analogy is responsible for that vast body of comparisons, on which a moratorium will shortly be set by the government, of the imagination of the womb (Joyce: "O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh").<sup>10</sup>

Heaney's parthenogenetic "numinous nativity" is an image the forthcoming moratorium cannot ignore. In particular, what should be noted is that his virgin-born poem is endowed with a remarkable fecundity: its language broods, breeds, crops and clusters. The metaphors turn on a stereotypical axis - spirituality-fecundity - one which the Christian Nativity narrates so well: God's transcendental penis becomes the Logos, that which creates the Word made flesh in a kind of aural intercourse. Joyce's "virgin womb" and Heaney's quasi-oxymoronic "almost parthe<sup>A</sup>ogenetic" both rely on the image of Marian impregnation, that curious notion realized, for example, in Yeats' arcane reference, in a note in the *Collected Poems*, to certain "Byzantium mosaic pictures of the Annunciation, which show a line drawn from a star to the ear of the Virgin. She received the Word through the ear, a star fell, and a star was born."<sup>11</sup> Like Mary, the "male uterus mind" - in contrast to the labial creativity postulated by feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray<sup>12</sup> - is an appropriation of female biological processes for the purposes of expressing the apparent "otherness" of male imaginative creativity.

The reader, like Mary, experiences the feminine fertility of language aurally: the brooding and breeding, with metaphorical difficulty, "trawls" the ear. It cannot penetrate, of course, because it is not "masculine". This marine imagery, in what is largely a Marian context, is adopted due to its suggestions of

fluidity in contrast to masculine "architectonics". This rhetorical gesture has analogues: Virginia Woolf, musing upon a "girl with a pen in her hand", makes the same move, binding femininity, fishing and the workings of the imagination:

The image which comes to my mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the experience, the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men. The line raced through the girl's fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber.<sup>13</sup>

The phrase, "far commoner", tempers any suggestions of biological essentialism, if only just. What the passage describes is close to the drowsy "slumber" of Heaney's intuitive "feminine action", the surrender to "unconscious being". Such creative bliss is similar to Hughes' description of poetic "capture", in *Poetry in the Making*, that I quoted in the previous chapter: "At every moment your imagination is alarming itself with the size of the thing leaving the weeds and approaching your bait. Or with the world of beauties down there, suspended in total ignorance of you." Woolf's and Hughes' allegorical accounts seem to contain a notion of poetic creation which, to a certain extent, is summed up in Heaney's *trawling* vocabulary. Writing is a kind of listening, a passive desire for the word; the writer is "hung/Listening", as Wordsworth in *The Prelude* phrases such "wise passiveness".<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Wordsworth's poetry, in "The Makings of a Music" is presented as an exemplary instance of *le vers donné*, the poet allowing "himself to be carried by [the poem's] initial rhythmic suggestiveness, to become somnambulist after its invitations" (P, p. 61). This poetic passivity does seem, in Ellmann's words, to express a "disruption of the rational", nevertheless, the mode's patriarchal connotations negate any reading that would align it with a "disruption of authority". This comes across clearly as soon as one turns to Heaney's discussion of the masculine mode in

relation to Hopkins. This develops further the fertile womb/fertilizing penis antithesis, the latter image overtly firing Heaney's description of Hopkins' poetry:

In Keats, the rhythm is narcotic, in Hopkins it is a stimulant to the mind. Keats woos us to receive, Hopkins alerts us to perceive.... There is a conscious push of the deliberating intelligence, a siring strain rather than a birth-push in his poetic act. Like Jonson, he is *poeta doctus*; like Jonson's his verse is "rammed with life", butting ahead instead of hanging back into his own centre ... in his maturer work [his posture] is one of mastery, of penetration. His own music thrusts and throngs and it is forged.

(P, pp. 85, 87)

Hopkins' phallic verse, his "siring strain", brings to mind the arresting opening sentence of Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*: "Is the pen a metaphorical penis?" Gilbert and Gubar suggest that, for Hopkins, it was exactly that:

The artist's "most essential quality", he declared, is "masterly execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women, the begetting of one's thought on paper, on verse, or whatever the matter is".... The poet's pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis.<sup>15</sup>

In order to avoid, or sidestep, Hopkins' Victorian sexism, Heaney does use the pen-is as a figure. This, however, can be read as merely a more unconscious form of sexism. Heaney's rhetoric, like Hopkins' letter to R. W. Dixon (from which Gilbert and Gubar quote in the above passage), remains fixated with the poetic phallacy. The masculine action is a "conscious push .. of intelligence", as opposed to the "unconscious birth-push" of Keats (or that of Blake's "fecund" poem, "The Sick Rose" [see P, p. 84]). The verse is "'rammed with life'", "butting" with "mastery" and penetration"; it "thrusts" as it pen-etrates; and it is "forged". This final image, like the feminine trawling, is not explicitly sexual. It is employed because Heaney perceives the act of beating out metal as a metaphor antithetical to the trawling,

marine surrender. The image prefigures a later passage describing Robert Lowell's poetic craft - from Heaney's 1977 memorial address - where he dwells more fully upon the metallic metaphor of writing:

[Lowell] had in awesome abundance the poet's first gift for surrender to those energies of language that heave to the fore matter that will not be otherwise summoned, or that might be otherwise suppressed. Under the ray of his concentration, the molten stuff of the psyche ran hot and unstaunched. But its final form was as much beaten as poured, the cooling ingot was assiduously hammered. A fully human and relentless intelligence was at work upon the pleasuring quick of the creative act.<sup>16</sup>

In this reading, (feminine) fluid matter is coerced, controlled by (masculine) form; "intelligence" works upon the "unconscious", "sensible", "pleasuring quick" of the poetic raw material. Cixous' "Form ... Matter" dichotomy informs this poetic parable, as the imagery implies the compounding of what may appear, at first sight, to be opposites. To put it bluntly, something has to be controlled or coerced, the pen-is has to sire or "work upon" another element. Therefore, the forged verse has the masculine mode's "command"; in contrast to the "gum which oozes/From whence 'tis nourished", it may be said to be a product of "the quick forge and working-house of thought".<sup>17</sup>

The phallic imagery in the discussion of Hopkins is thus centred on the notion of active, authorial mastery. As Gilbert and Gubar comment: this is "the patriarchal notion that the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world".<sup>18</sup> The connection they draw between the Authority of God and that of the author is pertinent to Heaney's vocational reading of Hopkins: "Composition, in other words was not just a matter of natural volition and personal appeasement but had to be a compliance with and an enactment of the will of God" (*P*, p. 95). God's hand is behind, or controlling, Hopkins': the poet-priest complies with, submits to, indeed, *surrenders* to His will. With a strange twisted movement the masculine poet re-creates creation - he *embodies* a

higher Authority. This is hence, somewhat paradoxically, the Marian predicament, that articulated in the quotation from Joyce which Ellmann singles out: "O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh". Hopkins' poetry is thus a conflation of the two modes; Heaney's sexual imagery cannot but compound the two modes in a hierarchial relationship, where masculine authoritarianism turns the feminine matter into form.

This is consequently an important, albeit oblique, commentary on the early poetry. Hopkins is, in Heaney's reading, another poet-warden. His texts do not disseminate meanings; they seek to sire or authorize them. In the context of Ellmann's "sexual analogy", both modes are consequently aspects of the "male uterus-mind". It is thus interesting, perhaps almost inevitable, that, in his essay on Hopkins, Heaney himself should cite the same Joycean formulation as Ellmann:

The new rhythm that was haunting his ear had the status of dark embryo, but it needed to be penetrated, fertilized by the dark descending will; the rector's suggestion had the status of an annunciation in what Stephen Dedalus, that other scholastic artist, called "the virgin womb of the imagination".... Hopkins's poems were conceived as the crossing of masculine strain on feminine potential.  
(P, p. 95)

This echoes the reading of Hopkins made by Gilbert and Gubar: Hopkins is seen as fathering his own text. This has ramifications that recall the distinction in Heaney's early poetry between the Franciscan "play" and a "true argument", one that finds expression in the manner in which the play of the place-name poems is subject to closure. In the terms of the Lowell memorial address, the "pleasuring quick" of the feminine mode is, in Hopkins, checked by masculine "relentless intelligence". Like Hughes, Heaney, in a quieter manner, is drawn to the desire for the poet-warden's control and command, even where he foregrounds language's sensible properties. The essay on Hopkins is indicative of this trait in Heaney's work; it relies upon Cixous' "Intelligible/Palpable" opposition because the palpable texture of language is limited by

the authoritative assertions of intelligible meaning. The play of the signifiers serves a determinate signified. Heaney is quite explicit about this in his reading of Hopkins' poetry: "The words are crafted together more than they are coaxed out of one another, and they are crafted in the service of an idea that precedes the poem, is independent of it and to which the poem is ultimately subservient" (*P*, p. 84). As we have seen, Heaney's own feminine or Franciscan poems, however much they foreground the "pleasuring quick" of the signifier, are themselves "subservient" to an "idea", one that is a mark of regional and national identity.

In the essay, the opposition begins to undo itself as the voice of "command" and "control" comes to be written of in the vocabulary of the feminine, that is, subservient and supplicatory in the face of its idea, that Logos it embodies, so to speak. In semiological terms, the signifier merely opens up the way for an apprehension of the signified. As Jacques Derrida writes:

The semiological, or, more specifically, linguistic "science" cannot therefore hold on to the difference between signifier and signified - the very idea of the sign - without the difference between sensible and intelligible, certainly, but also not without retaining, more profoundly and more implicitly, and by the same token, the reference to a signified able to "take place" in its intelligibility, before its "fall," before any expulsion into the exteriority of the sensible here below. As the face of pure intelligibility, it refers to an absolute logos to which it is immediately unified. This absolute logos was an infinite creative subjectivity in medieval theology: the intelligible face of the sign remains turned toward the word and the face of God.<sup>13</sup>

Derrida's link between Saussure and a theological theory of meaning is pertinent to Heaney's "crossing" of the masculine and the feminine modes in Hopkins. There the "intelligible" precedes and directs the "sensible" - the "idea" has mastery over the potential material. To "command", or "control," is above all - at least in this argument - to *communicate* a stable meaning; the "idea" is the higher Authority that the "sensible" must bear

forth. There is thus a necessity for the atonement of signifier and signified, but in a hierarchical relationship, one of supplication, of devotion. Only then is the poet also a kind of priest, his language embodying and imparting the Logos. Heaney thus reads Hopkins' poetry in the light of an image that is both a sexual and a religious Atonement of masculine "mastery" and a "melting" femininity :

And just as Christ's mastering descent into the soul is an act of love, a treading and a melting, so the poetic act itself is a love-act initiated by the masculine spur of delight. But Hopkins was no doubt aware that even the act of love could be read as a faithful imitation of Christ, a sign of grace, insofar as the Church fathers perceived the sign of the cross in the figure of a man and woman splayed.  
(P, p. 97)

The essay on Hopkins is a projection of poetic preoccupations that structure Heaney's own early work onto another writer. Hopkins' submission to the authority of God, and the compelling desire for determinate meaning, are echoed in Heaney's own texts where the authority and determinations are not religious but national/regional. The example of Hopkins, in this respect, as a writer subservient to what we may term "orthodoxy", reaches forward to Heaney's more recent prose. In "The Government of the Tongue", he reappears as a poet who corrects Heaney's emphasis on the autonomous self-government of the tongue:

All the same, as I warm to this theme, a voice from another part of me speaks in rebuke. "Govern your tongue," it says, compelling me to remember that my title can also imply a denial of the tongue's autonomy and permission. In this reading, "the government of the tongue" is full of monastic and ascetic strictness. One remembers Hopkins' "Habit of Perfection", with its command to the eyes to be "shelled", the ears to attend to silence and the tongue to know its place.  
(GT, p. 96)

In "'The Fire i' the Flint'", the masculine mode checked and commanded the feminine; in "The Government of the Tongue", there is a more troubled but no less imperative desire to curb the

Franciscan play. There is a world of "public and private repressions" where the "undirected play of imagination" is possibly licentious. This realm Heaney links to the predicament of writers curbed or curtailed by an authority greater than their own: such as "ideal republics, Soviet republics ... the Vatican and Bible-belt" (GT, p. 96). The command is one that comes from this further authority rather than from the author's own, yet, this is not so much an "authoritarian censorship" as "an implacable consensus" (GT, p. 97), one Heaney claims is present in the poetry of George Herbert or the later Eliot. These are examples of poets who "embrace the claims of argument and idea" (GT, p. 98). In their work, the intelligible properties of the signified are raised at the expense of the sensible delights of the signifier. The essay proceeds to invoke Zbigniew Herbert's "A Knocker": "Herbert's poem ostensibly demands that poetry abandon its hedonism and fluency, that it become a nun of language and barber its luxuriant locks down to a stubble of moral and ethical goads" (GT, p. 100). This takes us back to the Heaney of the place-name poems, texts that likewise barbered their linguistic luxuriance to a determinate social consensus, that of the native in opposition to the "strangers" in, for instance, "Broagh".

## II. MODES OF AUTHORITY

The issues of play and authority involve the poetics in politics. For Heaney, sexual vocabulary bridges any possible distinction; as Manly Johnson comments (using stereotypical vocabulary common to Heaney as well): "The conflict in his poetry between the principles of 'siring' and the 'birth-push' reflect the conflict in Ireland, and not only the trouble in the North but the primordial maternal Eire of legend and literature up against the cocksure, brawling force of weaponry and street violence."<sup>20</sup> This kind of crude "sexual analogy" is something I will return to in more detail in my interpretation of Heaney's sexual conceits in *North*. In the present context, it is the manner in which poetry



might relate to or engage with the socio-political sphere that needs to come centre-stage.

This introduces the issue of poetic obedience to political, social and ideological "ideas" - forms of higher "authority" - raised in Heaney's criticism of Hopkins. It is the notion of poetry's *freedom* from such factors that Heaney explores in his 1986 T. S. Eliot memorial lectures, gathered under the title *The Government of the Tongue*. Heaney defines his lectures' title as follows:

When I thought of "the government of the tongue" as a general title for these lectures, what I had in mind was this aspect of poetry as its own vindicating force. In this dispensation, the tongue (representing both a poet's personal gift of utterance and the common resources of language itself) has been granted the right to govern. The poetic art is credited with an authority of its own. As readers, we submit to the jurisdiction of achieved form, even though that form is achieved not by dint of the moral and ethical exercise of mind but by the self-validating operations of what we call inspiration.  
(GT, p. 92)

The feminine surrender and the masculine address are replaced in this formulation by, as Jerry Eagleton rather sharply put it, "a reach-me-down Romantic individualism... Society is an implacable demand out there, beyond the wayward innocence of the lyric impulse."<sup>21</sup> This is indicative of the movement of Heaney's verse from the 1970s to the 80s. For the post-*North* Heaney, poetry is self-validating: its address is a form of "authority" that is, in some way, removed from the messy business of societal reality. This is a reworking of the figure of the poet-warden, and, interestingly, Heaney redeploys the term "jurisdiction" - "the jurisdiction of achieved form" - that he had earlier used to describe the authoritarianism of that figure in "Englands of the Mind". In the later text, the poetic jurisdiction is the autonomous vindicating force of the lyric. This self-government of the poetic act is linked to a variety of Neo-Platonism that justifies the apparent rejection of, and "wayward innocence" from,

not only morality and ethics but from ideology and history. In the same titular lecture Heaney declares:

the order of art becomes an achievement intimating a possible order beyond itself, although its relation to that further order remains promissory rather than obligatory. Art is not an inferior reflection of some ordained heavenly system but a rehearsal of it in earthly terms; art does not trace the given map of a better reality but improvises an inspired sketch of it.

(GT, p. 94)

On the same page Heaney writes that this is a "revision of the Platonic schema", that is, art is not a shadow, "an inferior reflection", but a material "rehearsal". However, like the Platonic shadow, the work of art is somehow inadequate in relation to the perfected "idea": it can only gesture towards a deferred "perfect reality". Art is henceforth a "promissory" mode, a premonition of the constantly deferred achievement of a utopian social order. The inspired sketch that is poetry is thus a diminished version of Northrop Frye's literary universe, in which literature provides an imaginary model of social harmony. Catherine Belsey makes the following relevant comments on this aspect of Frye's criticism:

he is Neoplatonic, seeing literature as realizing a potential golden world rather than imitating a brazen one. Literature is not a means of access to solid things and unmediated experiences, but constitutes a realm of "autonomous culture" which he defines as "the total body of imaginative hypothesis in a society and its tradition".<sup>22</sup>

This autonomous culture is in Heaney's case one that is linked to a playfulness that is a form of liberation from the restraints of the brazen world he writes from within, a spurning of the orthodox stance of a poet such as Hopkins or the later Eliot. However, this same autonomy or freedom from society's mores is also an alienation of poetry from political consequence, or even intervention. As Heaney comments in "The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov's Cognac and a Knocker", poetry is always in one sense a free gift:

lyric poetry, however responsible, always has an element of the untrammelled about it. There is a certain jubilation and truancy at the heart of an inspiration. There is a sensation of liberation and abundance which is the antithesis of every hampered and deprived condition. And it is for this reason that, psychologically, the lyric poet feels the need for justification in a world that is notably hampered and deprived. (GT, p. xviii)

Thus, however much the poet might seek to represent or "speak up for" the deprived, his verse contains as a part of its very essence an element of "abundance" that is incompatible with a wholly "responsible" role. The jubilant component of the lyric marginalizes poetry, removes it from the realms of discourse that eschew the waywardness of the lyric mode. Literary transcendence is thus necessarily bound to a truancy from history.

Bearing this in mind, along with Heaney's use of femininity and masculinity as analogues for the sensible and the intelligible, we can reinvolvement Heaney's criticism in the political dimensions of recent feminist formulations of what "femininity" may be said to signify. I began this chapter by quoting Mary Eagleton's analysis of Ellmann's masculine and feminine modes of writing; conveniently the former also binds these modes to Julia Kristeva's concepts of the "symbolic" and "semiotic":

In several ways Ellmann's remarks foreshadow contemporary French feminist theory. Her interest in "the 'sex' of the writing", as Toril Moi expresses it, rather than the sex of the author, would accord with Terry Eagleton's comments on the work of Julia Kristeva and her concept of the "semiotic": "the semiotic is thus closely connected with femininity: but it is by no means a language exclusive to women".... Ellmann's interest in the feminine as a playfulness, an irony or an excess which displaces authority and the rational, echoes the description of the semiotic as "a means of undermining the symbolic order" (Eagleton), and as the "pleasurable and rupturing aspects of language which can become part of a subversive political challenge" ([Mary] Jacobus).<sup>23</sup>

The notion of the symbolic order is derived from Lacan, and I have already introduced it in the context of Hughes' prose writings.

To reiterate briefly my definition of this concept, it should be read as denoting the linguistic, familial and social order into which the child is inserted, thus losing his imaginary identification with the mother's body. Kristeva sees the semiotic disposition as preceding the symbolic order, as having its origins in early childhood and as remaining ever-present within symbolic discourse as a sort of untrammelled element, particularly evident within psychotic and poetic language. In "From One Identity to Another", she writes:

Before recognizing itself as identical in a mirror and, consequently, as signifying, this body is dependent vis-à-vis the mother. At the same time instinctual and maternal, semiotic processes prepare the future speaker for entrance into meaning and signification (the symbolic)... Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element.<sup>24</sup>

Social communication, the apparent atonement of signifier and signified, is symbolic "meaning and signification". The disruption of the semiotic survives, in art, as "the flow of jouissance into language.... [Alrt specifies the means - the only means - that jouissance harbors for infiltrating that [social and symbolic] order. In cracking the socio-symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself, and releasing from beneath them the drives borne by vocalic or kinetic differences, jouissance works its way into the social and symbolic."<sup>25</sup> This is the textual bliss or "jouissance" that Barthes labels Franciscanism in his reading of Sarduy's *Cobra*, which I quoted in chapter one. Our interest is what relationship, if any, Heaney's jubilant, truant lyric mode bears to this radical reinterpretation of a playful, pleasurable and disruptive "femininity".<sup>26</sup>

Elmer Andrews argues that Heaney's "feminine mode of being and discourse is not an alternative to the male, authoritarian 'symbolic order' (not that that in itself would constitute a politically revolutionary gesture), but an internal limit of its conventional privileged value".<sup>27</sup> In the light of the interpretation offered above of Heaney's reading of Hopkins, I feel that Andrews fails to perceive the sexist connotations of much of Heaney's work; those which render extremely questionable Andrews' belief that "the fluid and diffuse, evocative, vowel-based, eroticized element in [Heaney's] poetry offers a resistance to the male metaphysical world of abstraction, division and fixed essence".<sup>28</sup> Andrews' case rests on the view that Heaney's "poetry reflects the attempt to *reconcile* the tension [between] the masculine/feminine opposition".<sup>29</sup> This "liberal" ideal of a middle way is, to my mind, compromised by Heaney's fidelity to the possibilities of *command* offered by the masculine mode. In this manner, his work - whatever its intentions - does not offer any real "resistance" to patriarchal conceptions of the author, nor does it mark out an "internal limit" to the symbolic order. As we saw above, it is apparent that the feminine mode is, in fact, bound to a (in Ellmann's sense) "masculine" authority, much as the Franciscan poetic play was bound to the authorization of a regional and national significance (a social truth) in the place-name poems. In *The Government of the Tongue*, this cultural authority is rejected in favour of a poetic tongue liberated from such determinations. Nevertheless, I will argue that Heaney simply turns from one mode of "symbolic" authority to another, both of which resist the radicalism of contemporary theories of a feminine writing.

In "The Government of the Tongue", Heaney returns to the imagery of bird-like playfulness first mooted twenty years before in "Saint Francis and the Birds". Via a meditation on Mandelstam's meditation on Dante, Heaney introduces a notion of untrammelled playfulness that cannot but recall the earlier Franciscan bliss:

Dante becomes for [Mandelstam] the epitome of chemical suddenness, free biological play, a hive of bees, a hurry of pigeon flights, a flying machine whose function is to keep releasing other self-reproducing flying machines, even, in one manic extended simile, the figure of a Chinese fugitive escaping by leaping from junk to junk across a river crammed with junks, all moving in opposite directions.  
(GT, p. 95)

Heaney is drawn to Mandelstam's extravagance not only because he shares the Russian poet's interest in Dante, but also because the "pigeon flights" of his language provide an instance of what Heaney calls "free biological play". This jubilation is an expression of a rejection of, or flight from, social and cultural determinations; a variety of the Barthesian baring of the backside to the Political Father. The poet as fugitive is said, in the same essay, to "locate ... his authority not in his cultural representativeness ... but rather in his status as an exemplar of the purely creative, intimate, experimental act of poetry itself" (GT, p. 96). This passage, like the earlier essay on Hopkins, bears heavily on Heaney's own poetry. Heaney now celebrates the freedom of poetry from that which Barthes terms a "social contract" and that which Heaney labels "cultural representativeness": these "constraints" were precisely those which were accepted in the regionalism and subdued nationalism of his earlier place-name poems. In the context of Heaney's poetry, this is a change of direction I will follow up in chapter seven. In the prose, Heaney is, however, to be seen as simply rejecting one form of authority for another. The new authority is neither social nor cultural: it is, very simply, that of the author's creativity. This is not the Barthesian freeplay that is the consequence of the death of the author and the subsequent birth of the reader;<sup>30</sup> it is, on the contrary, a play that is firmly under the author's command. Just as Heaney's feminine mode did not entail a questioning of masculine authority, so too, his untrammelled poetic does not exert, in Mary Jacobus's words, any "subversive political challenge"; instead, this variety of

*jouissance* is simply a wish-fulfilling desire to stand outside politics and society.

Nevertheless, Heaney's playful language does share one feature with the semiotic. For Kristeva, the semiotic instinctual, rhythmic, maternally rooted *signifiante* underlies symbolic "meaning and signification";<sup>31</sup> it cannot, except as childlike "babble" exist - perhaps not even then - without the discourse of the Father. (Of course, the opposite must be true: that the symbolic is necessarily already fissured and disturbed). Importantly, Heaney's jubilant, truant poetry is likewise in large part rhythmic, instinctual and childlike. In both "Treely and Rurally" and "Dante and the Modern Poet" Heaney cites with approval Mandelstam's reading of Dante in contrast to Eliot's chastened and chastening interpretation. Mandelstam emphasizes "the infantile aspect of Italian phonetics, its beautiful childlike quality, its closeness to infant babbling."<sup>32</sup> In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva, it is arguable, uses Mallarmé's essay "Le Mystère dans les lettres" to make a similar critical point relating to rhythm within language, a rhythm that is, in essence, untrammelled: "indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation."<sup>33</sup> This is surely close to the Ariel aspect of poetry that, in Heaney's essay, "Sounding Auden", is regarded as a type of "magical incantation, fundamentally a matter of sound and the power of sound to bind our minds' and our bodies' apprehensions within an acoustic complex". Ariel is therefore opposed to Prospero, under whose auspices "poetry is a matter of making wise and true meanings, of commanding our assent by the intelligent disposition and inquisition of human experience" (*GT*, p. 109). The magical or mysterious aspects of poetry gently puncture the "true meanings", the socio-symbolic significations, of Prospero's discourse.

But this is no "revolution in poetic language". In the early poetry, as for instance in the place-name poems, Heaney had sought to connect Ariel's sensible play to Prospero's intelligible assent. This insistent pressure on the lyric poet surfaces in the later prose, most clearly in the deliberate ambiguity of the phrase "the government of the tongue", which cites both governments simultaneously, and the reappearance of the example of Hopkins. But Heaney's two "governments" do not make up a binary opposition: the closure of "Franciscanism" in some sort of signified "truth" is simply repeated in the autonomous self-governing tongue of the later prose via an emphasis on *individual* rather than cultural authority. For Kristeva and Barthes, the untrammelled elements of poetic language resist all authority; for Heaney, they escape social and cultural determinations but remain firmly subjected to the "masculine" command of the author. The quasi-opposition simply pits the claims of the individual artist against the claims made by the society the writer belongs to. This is the core of the dilemma that infuses the later poetry: the tongue must be governed, but by whom or what?

In *The Government of the Tongue* this issue is developed through the seemingly antithetical figures of the poet as witness and the poet as fugitive. If Mandelstam provides an example of the latter, in "Lowell's Command" - which draws upon the MLA contribution, "Current Unstated Assumptions about Poetry" - the American poet becomes an instance of the former. He is a poet who, in the terms of a Keatsian formulation Heaney makes use of throughout *The Government of the Tongue*, is devoted to Truth rather than to Beauty. However, Heaney is wise to the fact that to witness the truth is not necessarily to be equated with political intervention on behalf of that Truth. Lowell's command, as present in "For the Union Dead" and "Waking Early Sunday Morning", is in the "public" mode, but the poems "do not address the world in order to correct it" (GT, p. 140). The masculine command and address is within the socio-symbolic order, but Heaney does not make the naive assumption that poetry can effect change



via such address. Lowell is thus linked to the prime poet as witness, Wilfred Owen. Echoing Geoffrey Hill's *The Mystery of Charles Péguy*, in "The Interesting Case of Nero" Heaney terms Owen the writer who "so stood by what he wrote that he seemed almost to obliterate the line between art and life.... [His poems] so opt for truth that the beauty consideration is made to seem irrelevant" (GT, p. xiv).<sup>34</sup> The writer who chooses Truth "represents poetry's solidarity with the doomed, the deprived, the victimized, the under-privileged. The witness is any figure in whom the truth-telling urge and the compulsion to identify with the oppressed becomes necessarily integral with the act of writing itself" (GT, p. xvi). This is remarkably close to the stance taken in *Wintering Out*, where Heaney is drawn to witness certain figures, like the Servant Boy, who are emblematic of oppression and subjugation.

But Heaney is increasingly drawn to a poetry that resists such identification. The example of the poet Osip Ma<sup>o</sup>delstam thus provides the attractions of a poetry that appears to be contrary to the writing of the poet as witness:

So if Owen sponsors an art which seems to rebuke beauty in favour of truth, Ma<sup>o</sup>delstam, at an equally high-price, sponsors all over again the Keatsian proposition that beauty is truth, truth beauty ... a reminder that humanity is served by the purely poetic fidelity of the poet to all words in their pristine being, in "the steadfastness of their speech articulation".  
(GT, pp. xix-xx)

The conclusion of "The Interesting Case of Nero" is a paean of praise for these transcendental qualities of poetry, a transcendence in which the tongue is governed solely by itself. Nevertheless, Heaney once again undoes what seems to be an opposition through his insistence that the author's authority still serves society, albeit in a more subtle manner than the poet as witness: "It gains access to a condition that is unconstrained and, while not being practically effective, is not necessarily inefficacious" (GT, p. xxii). This condition is that which I have

termed as close to Frye's theory of literature: it is a promissory "plane" of art that springs out of time, and yet provides a deferred model for history.

Both the fugitive poet and the truthful witness thus serve humanity, yet both appear to be impotent in the face of the world of telegrams and anger. To witness is not to "correct"; likewise, the self-governed tongue merely offers the unfulfilled promise of a "better reality". This is an impasse if the aim of Heaney's poetic is to engage and intervene and "correct". But, as he writes at the close of the final lecture in *The Government of the Tongue*: "To what extent should the tongue be in the control of the noble rider of socially responsible intellect, ethics or morals? I have, on the whole, inclined to give the tongue its freedom" (*GT*, p. 166). In the main, that freedom has been a late-Romantic wish to grant literature a Neo-Platonic plane of existence, but such a mode of authority threatens to be read as merely a retreat into the realms of Beauty as Truth, hence the rebuking conscience that is "a voice from another part of me", saying "Govern your tongue".

In conclusion, the artist, for Heaney, can choose to play as a fugitive at the margins of his society, or, guilty, he can turn back and accept his role as a witness; he can submit to the "government" of the social consensus or elevate the self-validity of his own inspiration as a utopian ideal. However, unlike the various feminist conceptions of a "feminine" form of writing, neither mode undermines "authority", whether that authority is a socio-political one or, more simply, that of the lyric poet's autonomy from ideological and other factors. In "Current Unstated Assumptions about Poetry" we are presented with the pathetic condition of James Wright, another Franciscan poet, whose work marginalizes him from a world perceived to be anathema to his poetry, and in which, in consequence, the lyric becomes a flight from the inadequacies of the equally alienated figure of the poet as witness.

... Then I think how his style is an instrument to express vulnerability rather than an instrument with which to wound or command ... this reflects an abandoned trust in poetry's power to bear the historical brunt, to bear witness to a trust in common sustaining values. Wright's sense of the numinous, his Franciscan love of nature and men and women is explicitly at odds with the way things are in the world beyond his poems.<sup>95</sup>

This encapsulates the dilemma explored in Heaney's prose. His liberalism accepts that there are "common sustaining values" that poetry, governed by the social consensus, should bear witness to. However, the delight in a realm of Beauty seems ultimately to bear less a promissory relationship to historical reality than a desire to turn one's back on "the world beyond ... poems", and take succour in the "liberation and abundance" that lyric poetry offers as a wish-fulfilling recompense.

In the consideration of Heaney's poetry that follows, we shall see Heaney circling this area of poetic authority and poetic marginality. We shall see how his poetry develops from a desire in *North* to govern the tongue in the service of a form of orthodox consensus to a troubled desire to serve the authority of the individual conscience in *Field Work*. This, in turn, is developed into the poetic "tangent", which the figure of James Joyce urges the poet to take at the close of "Station Island", a line that seeks to strike away from orthodoxy, into the consolations of imaginative form. As we shall see, at the heart of all these concerns is the imagery of masculinity and femininity.

PART II

MYTHOLOGIZED, DEMYTHOLOGIZED

#### CHAPTER 4. TRANSGRESSION AND EXILE IN CROW

##### I. CROW, CRITICISM AND FEMININITY

I concluded my consideration of Hughes' non-fictional prose in chapter two with an analysis of the "Note" on Shakespeare. That essay was published in 1971, between the first and second editions of *Crow* (1970 and 1972 respectively). This close proximity of dates of publication allows one to read the "Note" in one of the two manners Hughes suggests as applicable to the stories and play in *Wodwo*: as "notes, appendix and unversified episodes of the events behind the poems" (*W*, p. 9); the poems, in this case, being those in the later collection, *Crow*. Both prose and poetry will be seen to share the same problematical concerns.

In the earlier discussion of the "Note", I took a lead from Jacqueline Rose's essay "Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*", and suggested that the critical frenzy and bafflement exhibited in the "Note" is linked to the notion of femininity in the text. The *Crow* poems reiterate this issue in a form that I will explore through several complementary approaches to the sequence: firstly, an examination of Crow's relationship with the critical reader as a variety of shamanic interpreter; and secondly, an examination of the figure of the woman as the text presents her. A third approach opens beyond these two, where the notion of "femininity" is displaced from critical or poetic image into an analysis of the stylistic features of the poems.

In the case of the first approach, Rosalind Fowkes has drawn attention to the issue of interpretational desire and its concurrent bafflement in the existing criticism of *Crow*. She points out that Crow's "elusiveness has led to a great deal of exegetical frustration in critics, students and readers at large.

To pin down the philosophy of Crow or to give him only one place to stand are both impossibilities".<sup>1</sup> What is intriguing is that such "exegetical frustration" is, in fact, one of the principal themes of *Crow* itself: the reader's frustration in the face of this text is analogous to Crow's *own* thwarted hermeneutic zeal.

The publication history of *Crow* is relevant in this context. The Crow poems cover several years' publication, years in which two crucial prose pieces saw publication. One, the "Note", I have acknowledged, the other, the review of Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution*, is no less important. I have already analysed these texts in some detail above. Here, it is imperative to see them as part of a textual *mélange* which also contains the two trade editions of *Crow*, magazine publication of several uncollected Crow poems, limited editions, and lastly, readings given by Hughes which point to a narrative scenario - a prose saga - that is omitted in the published works but that crops up, in various forms, in several critical studies on Hughes. The object of critical study is not so much the volume, *Crow*, as the complicated tissue made up of these diverse sources. Several critical forays are possible into this daunting field. The "biographical" is one point of entry - one which Ekbert Faas labours:

But for the event remembered in its dedication, *Crow* without doubt would be a different book. The deaths of Assia and Shura in March 1969 not only brought the actual writing of the poems to a sudden standstill; the sequence as it was put together about a year later also seems to differ markedly from the original impulse behind *Crow*. Even when Hughes, early in 1970, talked to me about the typescript he was then to send off to Faber, his almost obsessive focus was on Crow's descent into the underworld where the quester rescues a desecrated female through his own disintegration before both become bride and bridegroom. Yet of this the published sequence reflects as little as of the actual *Crow* story as a whole ... none of [the] poems published shortly after *Crow* covers the rescue of the desecrated female by her bridegroom, a happy end which the tragic events of March 1969 removed from the poet's reach.<sup>2</sup>

This, in many ways, is what one might term a distinctly "Hughesian" reading. It echoes a remark made in a review of Dylan Thomas' letters where Hughes writes - *contra* "New Criticism" - that "Yeats's life is not the less interesting half of his general effort, and one wonders what his poetry would amount to if it could be lifted clear of this biographical matrix. Quite a lot, no doubt. But how much less than at present!"<sup>3</sup> Yeats' "life" is a sort of "text" which is no less worthy of study than his collected works. This is less naive than Faas' somewhat simplistic *reflection* of private tragedy and published work, nonetheless, the former's reflective approach leans heavily on Hughes' critical strategy in his "Note" on Shakespeare. There, Shakespeare's "fable" is a mirror image not only of a national psychic catastrophe but also of a private "sexual dilemma". In Faas' analysis, there is a more precise and reductive biographical use of the reflective fallacy: the book, *Crow*, fails to mirror the quest for the "desecrated female"; an initial "obsessive focus" is turned aside due to a personal, domestic tragedy. Faas' attempt is one that wishes to account for an absence he locates at the heart of the volume, one that, like the "gap" in Hughes' reading of Shakespeare, he seeks to pinpoint and explain. What I will demonstrate is that such critical desire is prefigured in *Crow*'s own efforts at self-interpretation, as he attempts to fulfil the lack at the heart of his being, and that, as in the "Note", this lack is associated with an absent without-world of femininity. We can begin to explore this issue by examining portions of the various accounts of the "actual *Crow* story", as Faas terms it, that Hughes has delivered, in order to mark a common thread through all.

The broad outlines of the story with which Hughes "fills out" his readings of *Crow* are well documented. Our chief interest lies in one particular aspect, concentrated, by Keith Sagar, in a crucial episode:

[Crow] finds himself embarked on a quest for [his] creator. His adventures bring him into contact with various women and

female monsters. Because they are ugly, often horrific, he fights them, or evades them, or in some way mismanages the situation, not realizing that each time he is meeting his own mother, his intended bride. He comes to a river. Beside it sits a gigantic horrible female, an ogress, who will not let him cross unless he carries her on his back. As they cross, she gets heavier and heavier, driving Crow into the river-bed until the water is up to his mouth. Then she asks him a question to which he must sing the right answer, quickly. The questions recapitulate the various mistaken encounters he has had with her in the past; that is, they are all, in some sense, questions about love.<sup>4</sup>

This comes from the end of the narrative, towards the completion of this "epic folk-tale in prose with songs by and about Crow".<sup>5</sup> Sagar's account usefully foregrounds the connection Crow draws between non-comprehension - and hence bafflement - and femininity: Crow's contact with the "various women", results in a constant "mismanagement". Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts also lay due emphasis on this aspect of Crow's encounters with women in the course of his story: "During his adventures he begins to wonder who his own creator is and he encounters various female figures who are avatars of his creator, but he never recognizes her and always bungles the situation".<sup>6</sup> Poems directly concerned with this dimension of the sequence were, at the 1975 Ilkley reading (according to Gifford and Roberts), those revolving around "seven dilemma questions about love set to Crow by his disguised creator".<sup>7</sup> "Lovesong" is Crow's answer to the question, "Who paid most, him or her?" whilst "Bride and groom lie hidden for three days", from *Cave Birds*, was inserted into the narrative as the answer to the question, "Who gives most, him or her?". This evidence of revision is explained by Gifford and Roberts as follows:

It would be reasonable to see the reading of "Bride and groom" [at Ilkley] as a *correction* to the emphasis of the published *Crow*; even to suspect that the question to which "Lovesong" is an answer was not part of the poem's inspiration but a later attempt to qualify its effect.<sup>8</sup>

Such a supposition, however plausible, is less important than the fact that Gifford and Roberts introduce the notion of "correction"



into a reading of *Crow*. If Hughes is to be seen as a "correctional" interpreter (here, of his own work, in the "Note", of Shakespeare), so too is Crow. Gifford and Roberts implicitly make this very point when they give their own version of the narrative of *Crow* as outlined by Sagar:

At a late stage in his adventures Crow encounters a hag.... She forces him to carry her across a river, asking him questions about the nature of love as he does so. They are dilemma questions, questions with no answer, so each time Crow tries a series of answers. The more wrong his answers are, the heavier she becomes, and his head is forced down into the water. *When this happens he corrects himself and she becomes a little lighter.* So each of these poems is a fresh start, a new attempt at an answer.<sup>29</sup>

The provisional quality of Crow's songs is due to his need to interpret his situation aright - hence his constant self-correction. The problem, however, is that Crow's interpretations are frequently misinterpretations: in his encounters with the various females, he sees them as "ugly" and "horrific", failing to interpret them as so many manifestations of the "feminine" aspect of his being. Therefore - recalling Jacqueline Rose's analysis of the *Mona Lisa* syndrome in the critical approach - we can be justified in viewing Crow as a strange kind of "reader", however un-Eliotic he appears. This is especially clear from the interaction between the poem "Truth Kills Everybody", a letter of Hughes written to Gifford and Roberts, and Hughes' own article on *Crow*, "A Reply to My Critics".

As so often in the *Crow* poems that view Crow from a narrative stance (as opposed to his songs and the poems which neither mention Crow nor are prefixed with "Crow's Song About ..." or "Crow's Account of ..."), the reader of "Truth Kills Everybody" encounters Crow pondering and examining an enigmatic subject. In other words, he or she reads an account of Crow interpreting, one which, as Hughes' "Reply" makes clear, is also a record of Crow reading:

So Crow found Proteus - steaming in the sun.  
Stinking with sea-bottom growths  
Like the plug of the earth's sump-outlet.  
There he lay - belching quakily.

Crow pounced and buried his talons -

And it was the famous bulging Achilles - but he held him  
The oesophagus of a staring shark - but he held it  
A wreath of lashing mambas - but he held it

It was a naked powerline, 2000 volts -  
He stood aside, watching his body go blue  
As he held it and held it

It was a screeching woman and he had her by the throat -  
He held it ...  
(C, p. 83)

Crow's search for the truth that kills turns on the elusive figure of Proteus. A compound of knowledge and inscrutability, the latter is difficult to comprehend; as the object of interpretation, he is hard to fathom. As Hughes comments, in "A Reply to My Critics":

"Close reading" is evidently not enough to save us from misreading, or to break through the projection of fixed ideas, conditioned reflexes, preconceptions, etc. which often seem to be the only lenses we have.... In one main sense, that poem ["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.<sup>10</sup>

The "real nature" that eludes Crow's approach is that which lies beyond the Protean "ink-clouds"; it is an essence that Crow's limited "lenses" can only partially apprehend. The clouds are thus reminiscent of the *maya* that, in Hughes' prose works, is a condition of subjectivity and, in particular, language. "Truth" is endlessly deferred by a medium of communication which, at best, merely approximates an ideal. The subsequent deferment of "truth" is, for Hughes, a dilemma which confronts both reader and writer. In "Truth Kills Everybody", Hughes reworks this central concern of his poetics into the problematical confrontation of Crow and

Proteus. The truth or noumenal essence of the latter is one distorted by the series of Protean transformations the text describes. The poem narrates these metamorphoses until Proteus turns

to the size of a hand grenade

And [Crow] held it he held it and held it and

BANG!

He was blasted to nothing.

The last line echoes the poems "Crow Frowns" and "Conjuring in Heaven" where the reader learns that Crow is made of "nothing" (C, pp. 50, 53). Thus, although blown to nothing, Crow may be said to remain essentially unchanged, as his essence is the site of an overwhelming lack. In this light, the poem recalls the early "Song", as in both texts the plenitude of truth is sought by a creature hollowed out by a desire for fulfilment. Like that made by the earlier protagonist, Crow's attempt seemingly fails, and yet, in failing he remains fundamentally unchanged, still alienated from the object of desire. This might be taken as a preliminary reading. That is, the reader succeeds where Crow fails; Proteus unveils his "meaning" to the critical eye, casting aside his dissembling transformations. As so often in the sequence, the reader may well feel that he or she is being invited to cock a snook at Crow's ineptitude. The result is an interpretation such as that made by Stuart Hirschberg:

In "Truth Kills Everybody" Crow grapples with several metamorphoses of Proteus to learn the ultimate truth... Ironically, the ultimate truth he meets is the "nothingness" which spawned him in "Lineage"; the ruthless discarding of self-deception, the stripping away of illusion after illusion is Crow's ultimate meaning.''

Hirschberg plays a game of critical one-upmanship with Crow, treating the poem like the classical Proteus, hanging on to it until he is - supposedly - rewarded with the knowledge of "Crow's ultimate meaning". He sees Crow's attempts as *ironic* because he

believes he is in a better position to perceive Proteus', and hence the poem's significance. Crow, on the other hand, is unable to locate *this* hidden "truth", until all is revealed in his comic destruction. However, Hughes' own reading of the text, in the letter to Gifford and Roberts, presents a very different interpretation:

What Crow is grappling with is not "something dangerous" but what becomes - at the end of all his mistakes and errantry - his bride and his almost humanity. To every action, an equal but opposite reaction: in their alarming aspect, the transformation images are mirror-images of his method of interrogation. The hidden thing defends itself with these.<sup>12</sup>

The first sentence foregrounds Hughes' central image of an essential, "hidden" noumenon; one troped as feminine and desirable - a form of "bride". This is the "truth" Crow, at the end of all his "mistakes and errantry", is here said to attain, even if this resolution remains absent from the published sequence. Femininity is thus assimilated to the notion of an inscrutable truth residing at the close of a quest-romance; and, indeed, the term "errant" implies not only the idea of straying from the path of accepted decorum but also, in its archaic form, the wandering knight errant, often in quest of a dragon or damsel. Crow, as we shall see, brings together both these senses of errantry in a single figure.

This desirable truth is, however, concealed behind the ink-clouds of Proteus' metamorphoses. Hughes describes these Protean turns as so many tropes or figures of a single literal meaning:

The components of each image are: one aspect of the hidden thing ... and of the incompatibility between [Crow's] mentality and the hidden thing, plus a representation of the fleeting escape of the hidden thing, the momentariness of his glimpse of it and the strain of his efforts to hold on to it.... The hidden thing is a simple existence, an actuality. But the defensive images it throws up are ... compound metaphors, instructive warnings in the form of hieroglyph symbols.

Crow's variety of practical criticism is one that reads the Protean text with the aim of analysing - correctly - the multiple turns of phrase. These compound "hieroglyph symbols" comprise the textual surface of Proteus which interposes between Crow and the essence or truth he desires to extract from his "reading". But, in interposing, they also alienate Crow from the meaning of this peculiar text, displacing Crow from the "simple existence" of Proteus. This is strongly reminiscent of Hughes' poetics, where the poem is comprised of words which are impish "goblins", where poems are "undated ... letters" that merely intimate a remote but desirable "wedding". Crow, like the poet, is also exiled from the locus of desire, his postulated bride; like Hughes' early protagonists, he too has to reappropriate this without-world and erase what the letter calls the "incompatibility" existing between Crow and the other. Nevertheless, contra Hirschberg, Hughes sees Crow as making an "advance" in his interpretation. This is why Hughes describes the poem as narrating a *qualified* success rather than as an account of an absolute failure in reading:

That ... [Crow] explodes is positive. It is not an image of "violence" but an image of breakthrough. If he had withdrawn, he would have remained fixed in his error. That he pushes to the point where he is annihilated means that now nothing remains for him but what has exploded him... This is Crow's greatest step forward. But he regresses, and has to make it again and again, before his gain is finally consolidated in his union with his bride.

Crow's annihilation is an overcoming of the "error" of his exile. The final "nothing" of the poem is thus not the lack that is the mainspring of desire in both Hughes' poetry and prose, but is instead the void or *Nirvana* that is the flipside of plenitude and fulfilment. Crow breaches his egg-headed solipsism and, in a diminished manner, confronts his own nature. The poem is thus, according to Hughes, "one of Crow's face-to-face encounters with the object of his search ... with his creator". Crow's creator is his "bride"/"mother", who is equatable with the Mother Nature of the review of *The Environmental Revolution*, with whom Western civilization, like Crow, has lost "spirit-confidence". Crow

desires to restore what Hughes, in his analysis of the poem, calls a "spirit-link"<sup>13</sup> in a union imaged as an incestuous marriage. This image, whilst existing only as the faint intimation of a "suppressed" subtext in *Crow*, becomes more explicit in Hughes' later quest romances, *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*.

"Truth Kills Everybody" thus firmly ties *Crow* to the association drawn between critical desire and femininity in the "Note" on Shakespeare and the exile and quest elaborated in the review of Max Nicholson's book on conservation. "Crow's Song About England", "Crow's Song About Prospero and Sycorax" and "An Alchemy" continue this process, inscribing the concerns of the prose pieces within the *Crow* sequence but, as it were, from a distance: none of these poems appears in either of the trade editions. "Crow's Song About England", as its title suggests, falls into the grouping of Crow's own idiosyncratic songs. It is a song which, divorced from its title, reads as a harsh commentary on sexism:

Once upon a time there was a girl  
Who tried to give her mouth  
It was snatched from her and her face slapped  
She tried to give her eyes  
They were knocked to the floor the furniture crushed  
them  
She tried to give her breasts  
They were cut from her and canned  
She tried to give her cunt  
It was produced in open court she was sentenced<sup>14</sup>

Bearing in mind the poem's title, however, the poem, when read in conjunction with the contemporaneous prose works, becomes yet another narrative of the exile from Mother Nature. In this broader "historical" and national sense, the early poem, "A Woman Unconscious", provides an interesting parallel to Crow's song:

Russia and America circle each other;  
Threats nudge an act that were without doubt  
A melting of the mould in the mother,  
Stones melting about the root....

And though bomb be matched against bomb,  
Though all mankind wince out and nothing endure -  
Earth gone in an instant flare -  
Did a lesser death come

Onto the white hospital bed  
Where one, numb beyond her last of sense,  
Closed her eyes on the world's evidence  
And into the pillows sunk her head.  
(L, p. 15)

As noted in chapter two, the exile from nature related in "The Environmental Revolution" leads to a "progressively more desperate search for mechanical and rational and symbolic securities", amongst them nuclear power and all its horrific potential. The result, according to the review, is a dislocation from the "truth" of humanity, that is, the now repressed otherness of inner nature and the alienated object world of the natural environment. In the poem, the macrocosmic catastrophe (nuclear war) is mirrored in the microcosmic one (the woman's death), much as Shakespeare's "sexual dilemma" is a reflection on the individual plane of Elizabethan and Jacobean collective history. Thus, the woman's is not a "lesser death", but the mirror image of the greater crisis Mother Earth is undergoing. Crow, in his rougher vein, re-sings this song. The girl is England: she has suffered the complete realization of the Eliotic "dissociation of sensibility" which the "Note" expands upon. However, she is more than England, she is, in the words of the "Note", "the Queen of Heaven", an "overwhelmingly powerful, multiple, primeval being", who was "dragged into court by the young Puritan Jehovah". Like the primeval feminine being of the "Note", the female in the song wreaks terrible vengeance for this puritanical suppression. She becomes a personification of the demonic unconscious which the essays on myth and education declare is the inevitable consequence of repression:

She stole everything back

She was mad with pain she humped into a beast  
She changed sex he came back

Where he saw her mouth he stabbed with a knife  
Where he saw her eyes he stabbed likewise  
Where he saw her breasts her cunt he stabbed

He was sentenced

This can be read as a versification of the "Note"'s reading of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, where "the [female] Divine Power, enraged after rebuff, in male and destructive form ... completes the visitation fatally". The song records this change of "sex" as Venus becomes Hecate and Adonis erupts into Tarquin, into Macbeth. Macbeth, as discussed in chapter two, is a critic who mismanages his interpretation of femininity. In the song, the nameless he makes a similar error, stabbing in blindness and in puritanical fear. But this "he" is her: his horrific misreading is one close to Crow's in "The Black Beast", where the error is a failure to read correctly one's internal nature ("Where is the black beast?" [C, p. 281]), which, repressed rather than welcomed, turns its creative potential into destructive violence. In the 1970 interview with Faas, Hughes explicitly makes this connection between critical reading and the "misreading" of femininity made by Adonis, Tarquin and Macbeth: "[Adonis] was so desensitized, stupefied and brutalized by his rational scepticism, he didn't know what to make of her. He thought she was an ethical peril. He was a sort of modern critic in the larval stage ... a modern English critic."<sup>15</sup> The stupefied "rationalism" of the modern English critic finds partial embodiment in Crow's engagement with Proteus in "Truth Kills Everybody", and is that which Hughes attempts to correct in both the "Note" and the Crow and Shakespeare poems.

The poem, "An Alchemy", collected by Sagar in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes* as a Crow poem, makes just such a reading, interpreting all of Shakespeare's "heroes" as Adonisian, puritanical critics.

War in the egg  
                  Lustig the Moor  
Aaron began it ...  
                  Died Adonis' agony  
Butchered by Richard



The lineal boar  
Who darkened darkness  
With ravishing strides  
And an Ass's horn  
To gore Titania ...  
Hamlet's muse  
Hamlet's madness  
Soused by Tempest  
To Venus's Island  
With her wierd sisters  
The blue Hag Hecate  
Deflecting the dagger  
With some rough magic  
Into the Sanctum  
Of Saintly Duncan  
Double Macbeth  
The crown's contagion  
Drawn by the blade of Tarquin ...<sup>16</sup>

And so on. The poem is a distillation of the the critical project of the "Note", where Shakespeare's "sexual dilemma" starts as a "war in the egg", which, hatching, lopes across the textual chain as "the lineal boar". The movement of the boar is that of the inscrutable switch from Venus to Hecate that Macbeth, in particular, if simply among others, dramatizes so well. The poem thus reads each play in the light of those before it and those to come, charting the various occurences of what the "Note" calls the "Shakespearean moment". The critical voice of "An Alchemy", perhaps that of Crow as shamanic critic, seeks to engage with that "moment" which the *Complete Works* fail to fully comprehend. It is precisely this critical strategy which Hughes emphasizes in the 1970 interview with Faas:

Shakespeare spent his life trying to prove that Adonis was right, the rational sceptic, the man of puritan good order. It put him through the tragedies before he decided that the quarrel could not be kept up honestly. Since then the difficult task of any poet in English has been to locate the force which Shakespeare called Venus in his first poems and Sycorax in his last.<sup>17</sup>

This remark opens up a reading of "An Alchemy" as a poetical interpretation that acts as a kind of addendum to Shakespeare; a marginal commentary which, like a footnote, is to be inserted into

the incomplete body of the text in order to complete it, to fulfil it. The poem corrects not only Adonis' mistake, but also Shakespeare's error. And this error centres on locating the "meaning" of femininity, of the significance of Venus/Sycorax. Hughes makes his own reading of Venus at the close of "An Alchemy":

Then black Venus  
  double tongued  
Swine-uddered Sycorax  
  Lilith the night-crow

Slid from the tree

Released the Rainbow  
  Breasted Dove  
With a leaf of light  
  Miranda with a miracle  
To Adam Adonis

And sank  
                                In the crucible  
  Tiamat  
  The Mother

The Scales  
                                The Coil  
  Of the Matter  
  Deeper

Than ever plummet  
  With Prospero's bones  
And the sounding Book.

This is identical to the reading made of Shakespeare's last plays in the "Note": those texts, taken as a single extended narrative, show an elevation of the puritanical Miranda and, in a corresponding movement, the suppression of Sycorax. In Hughes' poem, "black Venus" (Hecate) is the dark aspect of Venus, that is, Sycorax, who is none other than Lilith, whilst all these females are, in turn, said to be personifications of the biblical serpent. That the Tree will later bear Christ, the second Adam, is not to this paradise's credit, especially if we consider who the first Adam is in this reading: Adonis.<sup>18</sup> It is he who misunderstands Venus and turns her into Hecate, who "sank / In the crucible / Tiamat / The Mother". Adonis' repression is repeated in

Shakespeare's concluding puritan, Prospero. His repression of "The Mother" is completed in the drowning of his "sounding Book", which is, in turn, a metaphor for Shakespeare's final, desperate attempt to conceal the inadequacies of his rational "puritan good order". The poem sounds out this last-ditch attempt, rewriting the plays in the light of this apparent subterfuge.

In "Crow's Song About Prospero and Sycorax", Crow makes his own interpretation of *The Tempest*:

She knows, like Ophelia,  
The task has swallowed him.  
She knows, like George's dragon,  
Her screams have closed his helmet....

She knows, like Cordelia,  
He is not himself now  
And what he says must be discounted  
Though it will be the end of them both.

She knows, like God,  
He has found  
Something  
Easier to live with ...

His death and her death.<sup>19</sup>

Crow's reading is antithetical to the puritanical, rationalist and sceptical criticism Hughes attacks in the interview with Faas. In Crow's song, Prospero thinks, like Adonis, that Sycorax is an "ethical peril"; like the modern English critic, "he is *simply incapable* of seeing Venus from any point of view but that of Adonis." Hence, "what he says must be discounted", *The Tempest's* enunciation of the puritanical "abstraction" must be shunned, for the truth lies in the silence of Sycorax. She does not have a tangible presence in the play, not a word to say, her sojourn on the island merely reported. Like Hughes, in the "Note", Crow makes this "gap", this silence, yield up the hidden, central meaning of the text, as he restores Sycorax's repressed significance.

Restoration, in a field distinct from Shakespeare, is the concern of Crow's actions in "Crow Blacker Than Ever". Detecting an incomplete, sundered state of affairs, Crow makes a shamanic intervention to correct an imbalance in the state of the "Universe". As in the prose and the early poetry, the notion of a necessary mediation of a rending division becomes of paramount importance. In the present text, it is the relationship between God and man that is crumbling:

When God, disgusted with man,  
Turned towards heaven.  
And man, disgusted with God,  
Turned towards Eve  
Things looked like falling apart.  
(C, p. 69)

This is the by now familiar image of the Fall. As in the critical, poetic and shamanic acts what is required is a successful unification or closure: a variety of atonement. Crow thus dons the shamanic mantle, but with unfortunate consequences:

But Crow Crow  
Crow nailed them together,  
Nailing Heaven and earth together -

So man cried, but with God's voice.  
And God bled, but with man's blood.

Then heaven and earth creaked at the joint  
Which became gangrenous and stank -  
A horror beyond redemption.

Crow is shown, as Gifford and Roberts comment, "in a story that bypasses metaphysics by representing [the problem] ... in practical terms".<sup>20</sup> As in Hughes' prose writings on shamanism, emphasis is laid on the practicality of the shamanic technique. Here, in the manner of a *bricoleur*, Crow picks up his tools and sets to work.<sup>21</sup> It is this sense of makeshift practicality that tends, I feel, to make Sagar's reading of this poem as, "an effort towards wholeness, an effort to live simultaneously on earth and in all the heavens and hells rather than allow things to fall apart"<sup>22</sup> sound, if not inaccurate, somewhat inappropriately

pompous. It is, as Hirschberg phrases it, "a patchwork job".<sup>23</sup> The impish quality of Crow forstalls any reading of him as highminded in his interpretations, which are frequently bungled and mismanaged. The poem ends:

The agony

Grew.

Crow

Grinned

Crying: "This is my Creation,"

Flying the black flag of himself.

Throughout the sequence, Crow functions as a shamanic buffoon, misreading, in Hughes' ethical function of criticism, demonically. "Crow Blacker than Ever" is simply one instance in a series of poems that all express Crow's misinterpretation of a host of "texts", whether these are religious ("A Horrible Religious Error"), or sexual ("A Childish Frank"), or historical ("Crow's Account of the Battle") or cultural ("A Disaster"), or linguistic ("The Battle of Osfrontalis"). Crow's transgressive function is a representation of the endlessly deferred desire for psychic, cultural and linguistic closure outlined in "Myth and Education", "The Environmental Revolution", the "Note" and the many reviews of the 1960s and '70s; and in this sense, he bears a striking resemblance to the goblin-word of the poetics, which always falls short of, always approximates, the ideal. The ideal remains promissory, as in "Truth Kills Everybody", but is never actualized. Crow exists as a fragmented quest-romance, the shards of which merely intimate the ideal shape of Crow's teleological progress; that described in the "prose saga" Hughes has outlined in readings of the poems.

Having thus firmly established Crow as a *potential* but transgressive critic in the correctional mode elaborated in the "Note", we can turn our attention to the relationship between such

interpretation and the nameless feminine of the volume, *Crow*. In "Crow and Mama" there is a rather ineffectual attempt at a comprehension of femininity; in fact, Crow takes the Adonisian approach to Venus, one which inevitably leads to the violence of a Tarquin:

When Crow cried his mother's ear  
Scorched to a stump.

When he laughed she wept  
Blood her breasts her palms her brow all wept blood.

He tried a step, then a step, and again a step -  
Every one scarred her face for ever.

When he burst out in rage  
She fell back with an awful gash and a fearful cry.  
(*C*, p. 17)

Informing this fable is, of course, the notion of Mother Nature. Crow, errant and occidental, is alienated from this origin; he tries a step in the right direction but he has not learnt the required supplication, one close to the shamanic dismemberment and re-integration of "Crow's Battle Fury", where Crow with "his glared off face glued back in position ... comes forward a step" (*C*, pp. 67-68). Crow is, as yet, too much of a Nietzschean "dogmatist" to take this step, for, as Nietzsche declares, "is the suspicion not well founded that all philosophers, when they have been dogmatists, have had little understanding of women? that the gruesome earnestness ... with which they have hitherto been in the habit of approaching truth have been inept and improper means for winning a wench?".<sup>24</sup> Crow's gruesome and earnest advances, his crying, laughing and rage, are bungled attempts to grasp the "truth" of Mama Nature. This is the error of Adonis, and because the female hence becomes inscrutable Adonis is exploded into Tarquin. He bursts out in rage and instead of healing the rift between himself and this without-world, she now falls "back with a gash and a fearful cry". Consequently, because her baffling *Mona Lisa* aspect is now too horrible to face, the male tries to repress her, and yet, however much he seeks to distance himself from her,

she remains as his own essential nature forever immanent, if in a grossly mutated form:

He jumped into the car the towrope  
Was around her neck he jumped out.

He jumped into the plane but her body was jammed in the  
jet -  
There was a great row, the flight was cancelled.

He jumped into the rocket and its trajectory  
Drilled clean through her heart he kept on ...

Crashed on the moon and awoke and crawled out

Under his mother's buttocks.

The remorseless repetitiveness of Crow's strategy, the baffled impishness of his "trajectory", as his escapes are constantly undone, parallel the futile attempts at communion outlined in the opening couplets. In neither half of the poem is he successful: he is caught in a transgressive exile, that separates but binds him to his Mama. His predicament thus repeats that of Western civilization in "The Environmental Revolution", which is umbilically linked to a nature it exploits and degrades, but on which it is totally dependent.

This is the issue raised in the cryptic Eskimo Song, "Fleeing from Eternity", where "man came running faceless over the earth / Eyeless and mouthless baldface he ran" (C, p. 78). The eternity of the title is that "imaginary" identification with Mother Nature which lies before the Fall that is Western history. Hughes presents this collective loss in parabolic form, in which one man attains individual subjectivity, metonymically imaged as the twin powers of sight and speech:

He got a sharp rock he gashed holes in his face  
Through the blood and pain he looked at the earth.

He gashed again deeper and through the blood and pain  
He screeched at the lightning, at the frost, and at  
time.

The acquisition of such selfhood is a sense of temporality, of being in the world. But in opening the space of this existential project in time, the anguished subject needs to suppress the other in order to retain his precarious sense of autonomy. Like the uncollected Crow poem, "Existential Song",<sup>25</sup> the Eskimo Song is a critique of a philosophy of being which, in Hughes' opinion, is a spurious denial of "nature" and essence in favour of an empty freedom. On a related level, "Fleeing from Eternity", like "Crow and Mama", can be read as an allegory of the whole of western culture's exploitation of material nature. Both levels of meaning are presented in the man's mutilation and subjection of a female figure:

Then, lying among the bones on the cemetery earth,  
He saw a woman singing out of her belly.

He gave her eyes and a mouth, in exchange for the song.  
She wept blood, she cried pain.

The pain and the blood were life. But the man laughed -

The song was worth it.

The woman felt cheated.

In Lacanian terms, one may interpret this as the entrance into the "symbolic order" of language and subjectivity, which, as we saw in Hughes' prose writings, is a "life" dominated by exile and lack. The cheating of the woman, the taking of the song, is an image of the need for "symbolic securities" to assuage the emptiness at the very core of a culture given over to the limitations of an egg-headed existence.

"Oedipus Crow", places Crow in exactly the same crisis, as "Mummies stormed his torn insides / ... / He contorted clear, he vomited empty - / He flew" (C, p. 43). His flight recalls the previous attempts at eluding the truth of his nature in "Crow and Mama", as well as echoing the plight of the primitive existential male fleeing from eternity. Crow's Oedipal complex is one in which he too is displaced from an "imaginary" plenitude, an



alienation which results in a misinterpretation of the "truth" of his being:

A gravestone fell on his foot  
And took root -  
He bit through the bone and he fled.

The water-spirit in the happy valley  
Twined his brains with primroses, dogroses,  
Pulling his mouth down to the wet humus -  
With a howl he left what she held.

The Hecate/Venus duality is misunderstood by Crow as he becomes an Adonis, fearful and mistrustful of Venus, the "water-spirit", and hence manages to repress Hecate, the "gravestone", only by severing a part of himself. Errant "dogmatist" that he is, he attains a condition similar to that of the protagonist of "Revenge Fable", a man who, because he "could not get rid of his mother", pounds and hacks her "with numbers and equations and laws / Which he invented and called truth" (C, p. 70). This, however, is not the "truth" revealed in "Truth Kills Everybody": it is, instead, the erroneous non-truth of Western civilization, which is a poor compensation for the loss of the original truth of nature.

It is this noumenal truth that is envisaged in the poem "Crow's Undersong". The title suggests a song *under* Crow's harsher lyrics, one that lies beyond the approximations of expressive speech or "song". The poem describes an elusive female, who Sagar calls "the essential female, the eternal Eve".<sup>26</sup> In this light, the text brings together the twinned preoccupations of the prose: the deferment of truth in language and the repression of nature by culture. Like Crow's Mama, but in a less repulsive manner, this woman tantalizingly flickers between absence and presence:

She cannot come all the way

She comes as far as water no further

She comes with the birth push  
Into eyelashes into nipples the fingertips  
She comes as far as blood and to the tips of hair

She comes to the fringe of voice  
She stays  
Even after life even among the bones.  
(C, p. 56)

The poem is overtly in praise of the enigmatic female. Nevertheless, as a reworking of the desire expressed in Hughes' early poems, the woman may be interpreted as presenting a threat to the existential solipsism of the male self. This leads Margaret Uroff to a reading of the poem quite contrary to that made by Sagar: "The title of 'Crow's Undersong' reveals ... [Hughes'] view of man's place against the woman who insatiably comes and comes and comes, even while Crow attempts to fend her off by claiming she cannot manage anything but coming."<sup>27</sup> Thus, the poem may not narrate the alienation from the object of desire but a more subtle rhetorical containment of her. However, it is more pertinent to hold the poem in a dual focus, one which incorporates both these viewpoints. The without-world of the female other is seen as *both* desirable and threatening to the male self. As the suppressed "truth" of patriarchy she figures forth what, to Crow, seems a frighteningly fecund energy. Yet to deny this vitality, as in "Crow and Mama", is to become like Tarquin, turning Venus into the demonic unconscious of Hecate. Crow's linguistic dilemma, like that of the speaker of "The Thought-Fox", is how to *re-present* this elusive without-world, to bring into full presence that which, like the Schopenhauerean will-to-live of *Wodwo* and *Recklings*, resists direct apprehension by the rational mind. In the words of Hughes' article on Laura Riding, Crow must learn to "respect ... the truths which are perpetually trying to find and correct words". Crow, as a singer, has to learn the inadequacies of the material word in the face of the truth of nature, a process of re-education elaborated in several poems.

Such is the theme of "Crow's First Lesson", where God attempts to teach Crow how to master the goblin-word "love":

God tried to teach Crow how to talk.  
"Love," said God. "Say, Love."  
Crow gaped, and the white shark crashed into the sea  
And went rolling downward, discovering its own depth.

"No, no," said God, "Say Love. Now try it. LOVE."  
Crow gaped, and a bluefly, a tsetse, a mosquito  
Zoomed out and down  
To their sundry flesh-pots.  
(C, p. 20)

God takes the sensible signifier, "love", and tries to make Crow grasp its intelligible meaning. However, the demonic Crow instead applies the sign to a referent other than that of God's choice: to a shark, a bluefly and a tsetse. Is it that the conceptual knowledge of love is beyond Crow's grasp, or is Christian Love, Agape, beyond Crow's comprehension, beyond his stupefied gapings? Crow certainly does not understand the meaning of the latter, as the poem "Crow Communes" makes clear: "God lay, agape, a great carcass. // Crow tore off a mouthful and swallowed" (C, p. 30). The poem's pun on "agape", where the signifier denotes two somewhat incompatible signifieds, foregrounds that which Crow demonstrates in his first lesson: the slippery quality of language. For God, in "Crow's First Lesson", such fork-tongued punning is anathema: the sound "Love" should atone with its "meaning". For Him there is to be no poetic transgression, no "huge gap" within the sign. For Crow, on the other hand, there is a discrepancy between word and referent. Crow's signifiers are, like himself, errant and aberrant: they zoom "out and down" being down and out - a reversibility of phrase which is itself indicative of Crow's failure to achieve determinate meaning. Curiously, considering the satire on Christianity that gives Crow most of its humour, God's desire to make Crow master language echoes Hughes' belief, in his prose writings, that the poet should *control* the goblin-word. The importance of this unconscious similarity will become clearer in the second section of this chapter. For the present, we can simply note that Crow himself shows little ability for this artistic task.

The frustration Crow suffers in both his "critical" or interpretational quest for the female and his engagements with language, caught, as he is, within God's and Hughes' rubric of transgression as a Fall and an exile, come together as the concern of the poem "Crow Tries the Media".

He wanted to sing about her

He didn't want comparisons with the earth or anything to  
do with it

Oversold like detergents  
He did not even want words  
Waving their long tails in public  
With their prostitute's exclamations

He wanted to sing very clear...

He wanted to sing to her soul simply

But still Manhattan weighed on his eyelid

He looked at the corner of her eye  
His tongue moved like a poisoned estuary

He touched the smiling corner of her mouth  
His voice reverberated like the slow millstone of London  
Raising a filthy haze,

her shape dimmed.

(C, p. 46)

This nameless female is another example of the elusive "bride" or Mother whom Crow must locate as, in Hughes' words, "his almost humanity", his nature. She is also the environmental nature which culture, in Hughes' view, has suppressed to the same degree as it has repressed "inner" nature and women. As in "Crow's Song About Prospero and Sycorax", Crow wishes to articulate this buried "truth", "to sing to her soul simply". Yet, as in "Crow's First Lesson", he finds language unreliable when it comes to the seemingly simple act of denotation. His solution, in the present context, is to strip away superfluous poetic diction, spurning metaphor, those "comparisons with the earth". Crow's desire here closely echoes what Hughes has said was the main idea behind Crow. The poems sprang from an initial impulse to write "songs with no

music whatever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language which would shed everything except just what [Crow] wanted to say".<sup>28</sup> The "music" of poetry is, for both Hughes and Crow, figurative language. The belief both express, however fallacious, is that by reducing poetry to a bare "literalism", Crow can somehow "sing very clear". And yet, "Crow Tries the Media" is a poem aware that this desirable clarity is simply not available to Hughes' (and Crow's) poetics. In rejecting metaphorical "comparisons", the text employs the device of simile ("oversold like detergents") to qualify that which is to be dispensed with. More complex, is the use of "Manhattan" as a synecdoche for the pollution of cities, where the rhetorical figure *as such* becomes an image of Crow's inability to sing "simply": it is the deferring trope itself which "weighed on his eyelid".

This vividly enacts the recurrent notion in Hughes' work that language is remote from ultimate "truths". Crow's exile from his "bride" comes to represent the displacement from origins, from nature, that infuses both prose and poetry. Language, as a "prostitute's exclamations", is simply symptomatic of humanity's exile. Language thus pollutes his song much as humanity has polluted Mother Nature - a doubleness neatly expressed in yet another simile: "His tongue moved like a poisoned estuary".

This helps to explain why the feminine telos postulated in the various accounts of Hughes and his critics as the aim of Crow is absent from Crow. The book is a narrative of transgression. However, to critics such as Faas, with whom I began this chapter, the volume also narrates a transgression from its original impulse. It is this paradox that brings the critics to the text, to blindly repeat Crow's gesture, to locate the text's "meaning", one which is - far from coincidentally or even fortuitously - bound to the status of femininity within the text. The critics, like Crow, speak up for the silent Sycorax, lauding or condemning. This issue is usefully introduced by briefly examining two critical responses to "Crow's Account of St George", who - much

as in "Myth and Education" - is a man who " sees everything in the Universe / Is a track of numbers racing towards an answer. / ... /He refrigerates an emptiness, / Decreates all to outer space, / Then unpicks numbers" (C, p. 31). Thomas West calls St George a "teleological totalitarian":

[He] sees each answer and each whole automatically imputed to each question and each part. This absolutism means, of course, that George must murder his origins and his future.... Crow represents an urge for a body that the arch demon Logos, the answer-in-every-question George cannot conceive. This is one way of escaping or even paralysing George and his confrère the voyeur.<sup>29</sup>

West thus clearly distinguishes Crow from St George, yet, the fact that he associates the latter with "teleology" paradoxically links him to the former, as *Crow*, as mentioned above, is the scattered pieces of a quest-romance. Crow does not "escape" or "paralyse" St. George: both are in a state of "exile"; both seek ultimate answers to their probing, insistent questions; both misread and thus "murder" or attack their "origins". As Faas comments: "like Crow himself, St. George is a creature who in his craze for order, 'truth' and dominion over nature, has denied the Black Beast in himself".<sup>30</sup> West's and Faas' readings appear to be diametrically opposed, however, their contradictory responses both share the desire to, as Fowkes puts it, "pin down" Crow. There is nothing unreasonable about this, only the reader must be aware that such critical desire is prefigured in the primary text. Crow himself desires to locate the "truth" of his being within the fantastic world of the sequence. The readings suggest that Crow can be said to simply represent one of two positions; either the puritanical "dominion over nature", like St. George, or the natural "body" itself. Faas and West both wish to identify the "meaning" of Crow, but remain blind to the very indeterminacy of Crow's aberrant trajectory, his thwarted attempt to locate and identify himself.

That said, in David Holbrook's reading the meaning of *Crow* is all too obvious:

[Hughes'] "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. So, if we do some work on philosophical problems, we can expose both *Crow* and his creator and "finish" them, in their attempts to lock us in an inescapable idolized despair.<sup>31</sup>

The text is lifted into the realm of paraphrasable content, which, according to Holbrook, is obsolete and abhorrent. The polemical motivations behind this interpretation are obvious enough: the critical act seeks to bring the hidden, somewhat disgusting, "truth" of the text to light, lay it bare and dismiss it. This is not far removed from the adulation of a critic like Faas, because both writers seek a "philosophical", extractable meaning, whether it is to be read as a truth or an error. This emphasis on doctrinal content involves at least a partial identification of Hughes with his creation, *Crow*. In Holbrook's opinion, "that this *Crow*-self is one aspect of Ted Hughes himself becomes clear ... he must cling to *Crow* and identify with him".<sup>32</sup> The irony of this reading is that Holbrook, in making "Crow's Account ..." synonymous with "Hughes' Account ...", repeats Hughes' own simplistic reflection of Shakespeare and Prospero towards the end of the "Note" on Shakespeare. *Crow*, like Prospero, is simply the mouthpiece for the poet, and the text becomes merely a projection of the latter's "sexual dilemma". The text becomes the transparent and unproblematical mediation of authorial intentions. What is occluded in an approach such as this is the fact that the text is, in fact, a riven exploration of the difficulty of locating "truth".

Similarly, that truth and femininity are closely entwined in *Crow* finds an echo in the manner in which the "meaning" of femininity draws the critics as much as it does *Crow* himself. All seek to identify what femininity may be said to signify in the world of *Crow*. Holbrook, for instance, believes that Hughes suffers from

something close to what Jacqueline Rose calls the *Mona Lisa* syndrome; and that in finding femininity horrible he thus identifies with the the egg-headed masculinity of "The Contender", the man who wrongly believes "he was the strongest / Of the strong", who "crucified with all his strength", is blindly locked into a "senseless trial of strength" (C, pp. 41-42). For Holbrook, this is Hughes' "characteristic protagonist"<sup>33</sup> because, in Hughes' work,

Man can only be a contender, cultivating the hate in himself, and having his horse's feet shod with "vaginas of iron" ["Gog"]. That is, all the weak, female, elements in himself are to be beaten out into pseudo-male, aggressive, strong defences, and vulnerable creativity trampled underfoot.<sup>34</sup>

Holbrook, as so often, remains blind to his own insights. In the light of Hughes' early poetry and his prose, the contender is a figure whose "masculinity" is being derided as synonymous with a refusal to acknowledge the without-world of the other. His tightly closed eyes are yet another expression of his refusal to, in the words of "Egg-head", "peep ... through his fingers" at the "manslaughtering shocks". Masculinity, for Hughes, signifies a dangerously solipsistic state. Thus, the contender, in one sense, is Hughes' "characteristic protagonist", but he is a figure repeatedly lambasted.

Geoffrey Thurley, in a more measured tone, makes a related criticism of Hughes to that of Holbrook. For Thurley, Hughes is a kind of Adonis or Pentheus: "his masculinity is Faustian, Orphic - a refusal to allow the feminine its due".<sup>35</sup> Hughes is a writer who erects what Holbrook calls "strong defences": "He rejects the Bacchante because they insist upon the human spirit being possessed, i.e., dispossessed, made female, passive, yielding. Hughes like Lawrence ... can never bring himself to submit to the law of the feminine."<sup>36</sup> Like Holbrook's, Thurley's remarks contain a large grain of truth. Hughes' poetry, as we have seen, does express a fear of dispossession, of the annihilation implicit



in the destruction of the egg-head, in opening the contender's closed eyes to a "leaf's otherness". However, the terminology deployed by Holbrook and Thurley to describe femininity is as patriarchal as that which they find in Hughes'; they associate the "weak", the "vulnerable", "passivity" and "yielding" with the "feminine". For them, as for Hughes and Crow, the attempt to render femininity determinate is the *telos* of critical desire.

## II. THE CARNIVALESQUE AND FEMININITY

Maurice Blanchot's description of modernist poetry seems especially applicable to *Crow*: "The poem is exile, and the poet who pertains to it belongs thereby to the dissatisfaction of exile, is always outside herself or himself, outside of a native place.... This exile which the poem is makes the poet a wanderer [l'errant], always lost, she or he who lacks a steady presence and a genuine abode."<sup>97</sup> This notion of an exile from a "genuine abode" is central to *Crow*; *Crow* is Blanchot's "errant" poet, whose songs and accounts and narrative episodes speak of a lack of the "steady presence" he desires, and of the homeless dissatisfaction he suffers from. To turn now to a consideration of the "style" of *Crow* is not to leave off interrogating this structure.

As shown in chapter three, in Heaney's poetics the "feminine mode" resists being labelled subversive in any feminist sense, whilst Heaney's untrammelled tongue is firmly dictated to by the "government" of the author. In contrast, it is tempting to see what, after Mikhail Bakhtin, I will term the "carnavalesque" qualities of *Crow*, as a subversive, playful mode of writing that bears comparison with the "feminine writing" argued for by feminist critics like Ellmann and Cixous. However, Juliet Mitchell's criticism of the alignment between play and femininity will be seen to provide an oblique correction to any reading that would claim that the "super-ugly" language of *Crow* is, in Kristeva's sense of the word, "revolutionary". Mitchell attacks claims that the "area of the carnival can also be the area of the

feminine"; rather, "it is just what the patriarchal universe defines as the intuitive, the religious, the mystical, the playful".<sup>39</sup> *Crow* appears to be a satire at the expense of the patriarchal universe of God; it is, in fact, trapped within patriarchal assumptions. For convenience, I will confine my discussion to two poems: "Apple Tragedy" and "Song for a Phallus". The text of the former is as follows:

So on the seventh day  
The serpent rested.  
God came up to him.  
"I've invented a new game," he said.

The serpent stared in surprise  
At this interloper.  
But God said: "You see this apple?  
I squeeze it and look - Cider."

The serpent had a good drink  
And curled up into a questionmark.  
Adam drank and said: "Be my god."  
Eve drank and opened her legs

And called to the cockeyed serpent  
And gave him a wild time.  
God ran and told Adam  
Who in drunken rage tried to hang himself in the  
orchard.

The serpent tried to explain, crying "Stop"  
But drink was splitting his syllable  
And Eve started screeching: "Rape! Rape!"  
And stamping on his head.

Now whenever the snake appears she screeches  
"Here it comes again! Help! Help!"  
Then Adam smashes a chair on its head,  
And God says: "I am well pleased"

And everything goes to hell.  
(*C*, p. 78)

The poem is constructed along somewhat Wildean lines: the simple technique of inverted expectation - even if stripped of all Wilde's subtlety. On the "seventh day" not God but "the serpent" rests. God, rather than being shown as a divine Authority, is presented as bumbling if amiable. The inference is that He was

not present at the Creation, but now enters the Edenic scene as an "interloper". The serpent (or Satan) and God switch places: the traditional Judeo-Christian hierarchy, with Satan as a Fall, a transgression, from the truth of God, being inverted at the turn of the first line. The "apple" becomes part of a "game" - an entertainment at odds with the "tragedy" of the title - which is subject to a combination of rules and chance that provides a humorous degradation of the theological paradox of free-will and predestination. One could continue to analyse the poem along these lines: God as instrumental in the Fall; Adam as a proto-Judas, trying to "hang himself in the orchard", rather than presaging Christ, the second Adam; and, finally, the ambivalence between a colloquial or religious reading of the final line: "And everything goes to hell". Throughout the poem there are playful manipulations of language. For instance, the serpent when drunkenly copulating with Eve is "cockeyed". Incapable of coherent speech, for "drink was splitting his syllable", his cries of "Stop", when split, would sound like "Sss-top", providing, in miniature, a witty Just-so story of how the snake got its hiss. *Crow* invites such readings as these - not as a quasi-Blakean prophetic book, but as a grotesque comic poem. In fact, the introduction of the term "grotesque" implies two interrelated contexts for *Crow*: the carnival and the trickster. The latter is much commented on in criticism of Hughes, whilst the former is not. This omission is somewhat strange when one considers that writers on the figure of the trickster see direct parallels between his antics and carnivalism.

How might *Crow* be considered carnivalesque? For Mikhail Bakhtin, the carnivalesque enters literary form in the mode of Rabelaisian "grotesque realism":

No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can co-exist with Rabelaisian images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook.<sup>39</sup>

There is much in this formulation that seems applicable to *Crow*. The "super-ugly language" of the poems is far from appearing "finished or polished"; they read in a manner which calls to mind Hughes' description of Shakespeare's verse as a "backyard improvisation".<sup>40</sup> Likewise, *Crow* echoes the irreverence Bakhtin locates as a major feature of carnivalism. This irreverence stems from the popularism of the carnival and its disruption of all forms of authority in parody, revelry, in "degradation". The lack of authoritarianism derives, in part, from the fact that, according to Bakhtin, the carnival stems from the folklore of primitive peoples, however "removed [it is] from the primitive community's ritual laughter." The "preclass and prepolitical"<sup>41</sup> folklore of the trickster cycles is a literary form that prefigures the Mediaeval carnival's irreverence. In both forms, this lack of authoritarianism has a subversive potential, a point borne out by Paul Radin, Karl Kerényi and C. G. Jung in Radin's work, *The Trickster*. Radin comments:

What we really have here is something equivalent to certain semi-religious mediaeval performances where the participants feel that no harm can come to them and where they can pretend to themselves that they cannot be accused of sacrilege or of ridiculing the traditionally accepted order.... We have here, in short, an outlet for voicing a protest.<sup>42</sup>

Jung is likewise "struck", in the figure of the trickster, "by the European analogy of the carnival in the mediaeval Church, with its reversal of the hierarchic order",<sup>43</sup> whilst Kerényi sees a close resemblance between the narrative cycles and Rabelais' "grand bawdy book".<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the adjective "Rabelaisian" is used by all three writers as somehow expressive, to the modern Western mind, of the peculiar quality of the "primitive" trickster myths. It appears that one crucial meaning of this term, for Bakhtin and the trickster's critical triumvirate, is an inversion of certain existing hierarchical structures, as in the quotation from Jung above and in the following words of Bakhtin: "that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract: it is a

transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity".<sup>45</sup> This is a jubilant process of interrogation in the spirit of laughter. *Crow*, it is arguable, is written in precisely such a spirit of poetic "degradation". And it is this notion of positive laughter that leads Hughes, in "A Reply to My Critics", to stress that *Crow* is closer to the informing essence of Trickster mythology than to the nihilistic despair of Black Comedy:

In Black Comedy, the lost hopeful world of Trickster is mirrored coldly, with a negative accent. In Trickster Literature, the suffering world of Black Comedy, shut off behind thin glass, is mirrored hotly with a positive accent. It is the difference between two laughs: one, bitter and destructive; the other, zestful and creative, attending what seems to be the same calamity.<sup>46</sup>

Bracketing off, for the moment, the divergent historical conjunctures of our three texts - *Crow*, Rabelaisian-carnavalesque-grotesque realism and trickster cycle - the shared theme of degradation can supplement my previous reading of "Apple Tragedy", and expand the connotations of the inversions I glossed above by the term "Wildean".

The poem derives its humour from two rhetorical devices: inversion of convention and a fork-tongued punning, a type of ambiguity. These two devices are not to be rigorously delineated. The "puns" imply a degradation that, like the manipulation of Christian mythology throughout *Crow*, cannot be liberated from that which is transgressed. Like Hughes' recourse to imagery of a Fall from a prelapsarian plenitude and exile as a form of Exodus, *Crow*'s transgression is a movement embroiled in a Christian signification. Similarly, both Hughes and God, as we have seen, view transgression in language, the slippage of the goblin signifier from a determinate meaning, as errant, in need of authoritarian control. In the context of "Apple Tragedy", it is clear that to invert a value is not to free it from the existing value system : "displacement" is caught up in the notion of

"placement" and of propriety. In fact, this is a criticism often leveled at Bakhtin's carnivalism, as Terry Eagleton comments: "Carnival, after all, is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art."<sup>47</sup> This Kristevan "revolution in poetic language" is a quality which is not confined to Marxist writings. There is much in *Crow* that might well meet this definition; for instance, David Porter believes *Crow* to be "poetry that is folk-orientated, radically political."<sup>48</sup> However, Porter's remarks are put into a more clear-headed perspective in the light of the following criticism of Jonathan Raban:

I think that the *Crow* poems are profoundly about the illicit euphoria of venturing into the territory of the taboo, and that this makes them essentially social.... Their language, far from being post-Christian, post-civilized, is a language obsessed by institutional rules. They munch nonchalantly away at the apple in the garden, not because they have not heard of, or do not care about, God's injunction, but because they know that it will get them into trouble.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the transgression of *Crow* is bound to and, to a certain degree, in cahoots with the Authority it attacks. To take a single example from "Apple Tragedy", the noun "hell". The signifier is colloquially degraded, the Christian locus displaced and secularized; but this does not negate the religious connotation - to put it bluntly, if it did, the line wouldn't be funny. And neither would the carnival *Crow* be aberrant. The importance of this is that Hughes' degradation simply plays within the space of that which it mocks. As mentioned, Hughes in all spheres of his work is, like the satirized Christian God in *Crow*, concerned with overcoming transgression. In *Crow*, as his reading of "Truth Kills Everybody" makes clear, Hughes' interest lies in *Crow's* attempts to surmount his transgressive, bungled graspings at truth, rather than in the latter's grotesque behaviour in the face of a monolithic "truth". This relates strongly to the political implications of *Crow*.

Hughes is not, as Porter claims, radical but strongly reactionary; he reacts against a culture that, because it has exiled itself from Mother Nature, is, in the words of the review of *The Environmental Revolution*, "an evolutionary dead end". Crow's errantry is a projection of this belief: he should turn exile into the quest of the knight errant. His failure to do so is what turns *Crow* into a broken-backed quest romance, a narrative of dissatisfaction.

Hughes overtly seeks a different authority from that of the Christian God, one that, in his words, involves "a shifting of your foundation to completely new Holy Ground, a new divinity, one that won't be under the rubble when the churches collapse."<sup>50</sup> However, this female "divinity" is simply the specular reflection of the rejected male God; she is constructed, as we saw in the prose writings, within the patriarchal universe that Hughes claims to be criticizing. In this sense, Hughes' use of a patriarchal concept of femininity is directly analogous to his non-subversive carnivalism. In Juliet Mitchell's words:

You cannot choose the imaginary, the semiotic, the carnival as an alternative to the symbolic, as an alternative to the law. It is set up by the law precisely as its own ludic space, its own area of the imaginary alternative, but not as a symbolic alternative.... It was suggested in another paper at this conference that this area of the carnival can also be the area of the feminine. I don't think so. It is just what the patriarchal universe defines as the feminine.... It is not that the carnival cannot be disruptive of the law; but it disrupts only within the terms of that law.... This type of disruption is contained within the patriarchal symbolic.<sup>51</sup>

Mitchell resists any simplistic equation of femininity and the carnival (and the imaginary and the semiotic). The "meaning" of femininity in this equation would be that which resists the authoritarianism of a totalitarian meaning: that which ruptures, politically and linguistically, the law of the socio-symbolic realm. In Hélène Cixous's words, such *écriture féminine* "works on the difference",<sup>52</sup> resisting the authority of those binary

oppositions that, as we saw in chapter three, Cixous believes structure patriarchal society. However, in *Crow*, the errant trajectory of the protagonist is set up as a kind of "ludic space". This "space", in the narrative of *Crow*, is Crow's impish fall from the projected but deferred "marriage", whilst, in relation to the stylistic qualities of the volume, the ludic carnivalism is obviously conditioned by Hughes' belief that "goblin" language must also not transgress too far from the ideals it must try to express. Hughes dare not let the notion of an Atonement - an ultimate, beneficial marriage with Nature - fall into an exile without the consoling possibility that there is an Exodus back to an imaginary identification with nature. The paradox, simply put, is that *Crow's* degradation curiously, but inevitably once the concerns of Hughes' prose are considered, must align itself with that which it seeks to subvert: the patriarchal authority lambasted, but still embodied, in the figure of God.

Bakhtin considers the novel as the only literary genre to break with the monologic "epic". Kristeva, expanding his arguments, sees as polyphonic (i.e. that which, in a carnivalesque stroke, breaks with the monology of the law, etc.) certain revolutionary "novels", extending from the doubling of Socratic discourse up to the modern versions of the Menippean novel (for example, Joyce, Proust, Kafka and Sollers).<sup>53</sup> Following Terry Eagleton I would not exclude, as Bakhtin does, certain drama or poetry from this schema (Brecht or Berryman's *Dream Songs*, for instance).<sup>54</sup> Kristeva's description of the dialogic and the monologic discourses helps us to position *Crow* within this tradition and introduce an historical dimension to the present discussion:

We have on the one hand *monological discourse*, including, first, the representative mode of description and narration (the epic); secondly, historical discourse; and thirdly, scientific discourse. In all three, the subject both assumes and submits to the rule of 1 (God). The dialogic inherent in all discourse is smothered by a prohibition, a censorship, such that this discourse refuses to turn back upon itself, to enter into dialogue with itself.... [On the



other hand, the Menippean type [of discourse] ...  
transgresses prohibition.<sup>55</sup>

The surreal universe of *Crow* appears to be one far removed from the "epic" mode of representational description. However, the thematic concerns of the book are dominated by a desire to prohibit transgression. *Crow* should eventually submit to a greater authority than his own, to a nature which is as totalitarian as any God. In relation to the style of *Crow*, the dialogical qualities of the text are ultimately governed by those notions of authorial "control" raised in Hughes' reflections on Laura Riding. Language should not transgress prohibition, it should be under the control of the author, the "1 (God)". A reading of "Song for a Phallus", with its grotesque degradation of the Oedipal myth, supports this supposition, illustrating how Hughes' carnivalism remains merely the inverted image or "ludic expression" of the socio-symbolic order it transgresses:

There was a boy was Oedipus  
    Stuck in his Mammy's belly  
His Daddy'd walled the exit up  
    He was a horrible fella  
                                Mamma Mamma

You stay in there his Daddy cried  
    Because a Dickybird  
Has told the world when you get born  
    You'll treat me like a turd  
                                Mamma Mamma ...

O do not chop his winkle off  
    His mammy cried with horror  
Think of the joy will come of it  
    Tomorrer and tomorrer  
                                Mamma Mamma

(C, p. 75)

Hughes describes this poem as a "goblin appendix" to *Seneca's Oedipus*.<sup>56</sup> It is an addendum which inverts high tragedy, not into parody, but into the grotesque. The fairy tale world and the rhythms of the nursery rhyme puncture the lofty world of classical drama. Veronica Forrest-Thomson feels this to be cheap and sensationalist: "The most we could say would be that the nursery

rhyme jingle echoes the theme of infantile helplessness; and this is, of course, the reduction of the formal level to its most slavish dependence on the external expansion of a bad Naturalism."<sup>57</sup> Such a reading misses or flattens the poem's doubling of high/low, classical/popular which may well be thought of as "dialogical", the latter term questioning the status of the former as the inversion degrades and bursts into laughter (at) the former. It is a laughter which is, to my mind, far from Forrest-Thomson's "irrational obscurity".<sup>58</sup> It is instead the vocabulary of the playground - "Mammy", "Daddy", "dickybird", "winkle" - which rewrites Seneca's interpretation of a Greek myth. The colloquialism of the Porter degrades and deflates, in the final stanza quoted, Macbeth's tragic moment. Syntax, as in the line "there was a boy was Oedipus", is disrupted but not negated into nonsense, whilst punctuation is ignored and supplanted by mere spacing. A vocabulary "prohibited" by the English lyric, which in its stanzaic form, this poem purports to be, is seized with relish: "turd", for instance, and later, "bollocks", "sod" and "bastard" rupture the semantic field announced by the Latin "Phallus" of the title. The refrain itself challenges and baffles: a cry that never seems to enter into a relationship with the stanza it follows. Is it a plaintive cry or a jubilant shout? And yet, for all this degradation, the poem, is, in fact, a "ludic" expression of a single "law": the Oedipus Complex.

Psychoanalysis posits this complex - in which, simply put, the male child's desire for the mother is driven into repression due to the fear of castration at the hands of the father he comes to identify with - as necessary for the move into the socio-symbolic order. For Hughes, as we have seen at some length, this narrative is the narrative of Western patriarchal civilization: it is a story of loss, exile and repression. The carnivalesque treatment of the classical myth in "Song for a Phallus" is a degradation of the Freudian theory, one in which Oedipus' repression turns him into a Tarquin, a patriarch whose desire for Mama has been transformed into brutal male violence:

Oedipus raised his axe again  
The World is dark, he cried  
The World is dark one inch ahead  
What's on the other side?  
Mamma Mamma

He split his Mammy like a melon  
He was drenched with gore  
He found himself curled up inside  
As if he had never been bore  
Mamma Mamma

Nevertheless, the poem simply mocks and degrades Freud's theory, it does not negate it: as carnival it can only play within the precincts of the law. Two other "laws" are the Judaeo-Christian myths of the Fall and Exodus, which for all the irreverence of *Crow*, Hughes' unusual quest-romance ultimately remains dependent upon. Likewise, *Crow* is a volume structured around a bastardized version of the Freudian family-romance, with *Crow* as child to the Mama, whilst the paternal figure of God acts as some sort of super-ego. Hughes' carnivalism seeks to direct a critique at a patriarchal culture by casting the Daddy, God, as a powerless fool, thus emptying the repressive mechanisms of the super-ego of any consequence. In this sense, the sequence is a grotesque interpretation of "The Environmental Revolution", where a misogynist Western civilization is seen as suffering under the totalitarian super-ego of Moses. This ludic version of Freud's Oedipus complex hence foregrounds the incestuous desire for the mother's body as a metaphor for the need to return from a repressive culture to nature (the dyadic relationship between child and mother functioning as an image of a "natural" state). This carnivalesque treatment of the family-romance, however, simply disrupts the model within its own terms: *Crow* remains a ludic version of the patriarchal constructs of both a Judaeo-Christian universe and the nuclear family. Like all carnival this provides no real solution to the problems of a given society, merely an anarchic disruption of that society's conventions and beliefs. "Song for a Phallus" thus ends with a repetition of the only non-solution open to Hughes' desire for a cessation of

transgression, alienation and exile from Mother Nature: "As if he had never been bore" is more than the wish for a dyadic, "natural" relationship, it is the desire for the end of desire, which is death. The importance of *Nirvana* in Hughes' poetry and prose has been touched on above. In chapter six, we shall see its centrality to both *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*.

CHAPTER 5. SEXUAL CONCEITS: "THE TOLLUND MAN",  
*NORTH* AND "AN OPEN LETTER"

I. A CORPUS OF CORPSES: READING THE BOG PEOPLE

*North* develops a similar "masculine"/"feminine" opposition to that present in Heaney's prose, and it is one that, once again, is centred on the issue of authority. In Heaney's essay on Hopkins (and related comments), we saw that Heaney was reluctant to "allow" his feminine mode of poetry any subversive potential in the face of a masculine authority. His poetics thus remain within a model where feminine matter is ultimately subservient to masculine form; where the sensible qualities of language are secondary to intelligible meaning. This, in many ways, echoes Hughes' poetics and the limitations of the carnivalism of *Crow*. In Heaney's case, poetic authority, or what Hughes in *Poetry in the Making* calls artistic "control", is that which Gilbert and Gubar term the patriarchal notion that the author fathers his own text. This is central to Heaney's poetics, however much they stress the attractions of the "play" of material language. In *North*, this issue revolves around two allegorical figures, Antaeus and Hercules, who in many ways personify Heaney's two poetic modes. As Elmer Andrews comments:

Hercules and Antaeus may be seen to represent two different kinds of poet, two opposing tendencies which Heaney recognizes in himself. Antaeus is the instinctual, feminine, artesian, assuaging principle.... Hercules ... is a rational, masculine, architectonic, aggravating intelligence, associated with technology and imperialism. Antaeus, Heaney seems to imply by the arrangement of poems in the book, prevails in the symbolic, mythicizing approach of Part 1 of *North*; his defeat in the last poem of Part 1 prepares for the emergence of the rational and personal explicitness of Part 2.<sup>1</sup>

Andrews, quite rightly, perceives that "the two parts, however, do not divide up as neatly as Heaney implies"; that the presence of

Hercules, "crafting words in the service of an idea that precedes the poem", is felt throughout Part I. For Andrews, this is a failure in the volume, Heaney forcing his art against its natural bent. To my mind, the result is rather more complicated. The poems repeat the need expressed in the place-name poems, that is, the desire to subjugate what Heaney labels the feminine aspects of poetic language to the masculine, rational intelligence. In this sense, the poems have a declarative nature, taking "declaration" to imply the need to recognize the demands of history and politics. That Antaeus must submit to Hercules' authority is the inevitable consequence of Heaney's poetics.

However, there is another, related form of authority in question in *North*. In many ways, the book anticipates Heaney's more recent prose formulations on "the government of the tongue", particularly with respect to the volume's fluctuation over the implications of accepting the authority of a religious and national identity, of governing the tongue in the service of a collective ideology.

To turn to the text itself: Part I is introduced by the emblematic figure of "Antaeus", the titan son of Gaea, who declares:

When I lie on the ground  
I rise flushed as a rose in the morning.  
In fights I arrange a fall on the ring  
To rub myself with sand

That is operative  
As an elixir. I cannot be weaned  
Off the earth's long contour, her river-veins.  
Down here in my cave

Girdered with root and rock  
I am cradled in the dark that wombed me  
And nurtured in every artery  
Like a small hillock.

(*N*, p. 12)

This son-figure is close to the indigenous lover of names in *Wintering Out* and the child of *Stations*: he is the native and the cauled, secure child. The lyric compounds these two figures into

that of the earthbound titan, who is contrasted with his eventual vanquisher, Hercules:

He may well throw me and renew my birth  
But let him not plan, lifting me off the earth,  
My elevation, my fall.

The mythological persona of Antaeus compacts several motifs present in earlier collections. Like Keats' *Hyperion*, he represents a state overthrown by usurping intrusions (the classical Greek pantheon). In the light of the concerns raised in *Wintering Out*, the subsequently lost maternal ground of Gaea is, it seems, to be read as the motherland of Ireland, and Antaeus' tragedy as analogous to the colonization of that nation. Taking this as a somewhat reductive paraphrase, the poem can be seen to read these preoccupations into its companion piece, "Hercules and Antaeus", which lies at the end of the volume's first part.

Hercules is clearly described as the antithesis of Antaeus: "Sky-born" rather than a son of Earth, he is associated with light rather than dark, with independence rather than dependency. More importantly, the verbal contrast is matched by an account of supersession:

Antaeus, the mould-hugger,  
  
is weaned at last:  
a fall was a renewal  
but now he is raised up -  
the challenger's intelligence  
  
is a spur of light,  
a blue prong graiping him  
out of his element  
into a dream of loss  
  
and origins  
(*N*, p. 52)

The usurpation inaugurates an exile, one precipitated by what the text labels a "challenger's intelligence". Heaney has provided his own interpretation of the significance of the displacement of

Antaeus by the Herculean figure. Of Hercules he has remarked to John Haffenden:

Hercules represents the possibility of the play of intelligence, that kind of satisfaction you get from Borges, the play and the pattern, which is so different from the pleasures of Neruda, who's more of an Antaeus figure. That kind of thinking led into the poetry of the second part of *North*, which was an attempt at some kind of declarative voice.<sup>2</sup>

This "declarative voice" is associated with a poetic that, in the same interview, Heaney rather oddly claims is inherent in the use of the "rhymed stanzaic poem": "It's a different enterprise, when you begin to look for the truth, when you want to say your social truth rather than yield yourself to the suggestions and gifts of the poem."<sup>3</sup> This, of course, is close to the definition Heaney provides of the masculine mode of poetry in "'The Fire i' the Flint'" and elsewhere, whilst the need to articulate "social truth" anticipates Heaney's interest in the poet as witness in *The Government of the Tongue*. The "suggestions and gifts" of Antaeus, on the other hand, relate to the feminine mode of poetry that Heaney finds in writers such as Keats or Blake. It is this poetic mode that Heaney implicitly associates with the first part of *North* (and related poems from *Wintering Out*). For example, in interview with Helen O'Shea, he says:

There's poetry that comes about by a process of surrender to language in its own generating faculties ... those I think are the "shut-eyed" poems, where you surrender, and let language find its own forms in you and through you, and where you dream of things and surrender to the dream.<sup>4</sup>

This recalls the "lover's come hither" of the feminine poetic mode, where poems are rewarding for their sensible texture, their seemingly palpable form, as opposed to the architectonics of the masculine poem.



Heaney's most concise definition of the structure of *North* is that made to Seamus Deane, when he declares: "Hercules represents the balanced rational light while Antaeus represents the pieties of illiterate fidelity. The poem ["Hercules and Antaeus"] drifts towards an assent to Hercules, though there was a sort of nostalgia for Antaeus."<sup>5</sup> In summary, we may say that, for Heaney, Antaeus signifies "surrender", a "'shut-eyed'" pious illiteracy; whilst Hercules signifies a "declarative", "rational" "intelligence". Heaney appears to be drawing a rather sharp distinction between the two halves of *North*, and it is one many critics have followed. M. P. Hederman, for instance, rewrites this distinction in terms that simply give a quasi-Heideggerean gloss to Heaney's comments, and hence fail to interrogate the volume's somewhat loose binary structure: "Hercules and Antaeus represent two different kinds of poet.... The first is the self-assertive poet, the political poet, who has a definite vision of things.... The second kind of poet is he whom Martin Heidegger calls the 'more daring' or the 'more venturesome' because he works from the heart".<sup>6</sup> Heaney's remarks in interview have, it appears, been a deliberated commentary on the structure he wishes to be perceived in *North*, and an attempt to bind firmly the preoccupations of the prose to those of the poetry.

However, there is a certain naivety about this demarcation, one that critics like Hederman fudge rather than clarify. This is apparent in Heaney's rather vague use of the term "play" in his various comments. If the second part of *North* is to be aligned with a "play of intelligence", then the first part, with its "surrender to language", is surely to be read as a development and continuation of the poetic behind certain poems in *Wintering Out*, of which Heaney says: "There are little poems there, like 'Servant Boy' and 'Fodder', where the pleasure of the poem for me, and I think anyone who gets anything out of them, is in the rustle of the language itself, the way it unfolds and plays, and that was also the actual feel of writing them, delight and pleasure."<sup>7</sup>

This formulation recalls the tempered Franciscan "delight" of Heaney's early poetry. In many poems in the first part of *North*, such unfolding, rustling language is equally foregrounded, as are those distinctive meditations on the oral and aural properties of words. Nevertheless, even more than in the earlier volume, such "play" is carefully limited, confined to a meditation on the "political" implications of language. Can this be distinguished very easily from the Herculean "play of intelligence", especially when one considers that Heaney is as interested in the intelligible meaning of words as he is in their sensible properties?

Heaney's "confusion" of terminology is apparent in another interview, one with Harriet Cooke, where the "masculine" writer Borges is once again invoked in the context of a play supposedly distinct from that of the place-name poems' unfolding playfulness. Heaney comments: "I'm attracted to writers who are not at all like me, the sidereal beauty of things, like Borges; it's all so wise, and it doesn't seem to depend on language. It depends on intellection, wisdom and play."<sup>8</sup> Poetic play, it seems, belongs both to a language which foregrounds its sensible properties, its "rustle", and one that stressing its "intellection" apparently eschews material language altogether.

This cross-over of the term, "play", is closely bound to the fact that the place-name poems (and, as we shall see, Part I of *North*) attempt closure by appeal to a "ground". In chapter one, we saw how the Franciscanism of these poems is not to be read as a variety of post-modernist freeplay, that Heaney is no Irish Ashbery. Instead, Heaney's poetry circles around the self-imposed necessity for poetic play to succumb to the authority of some sort of determinate "truth", whether regional, national or political. In *North*, Heaney is drawn to the declaration of a related "social truth", one intimated at the close of "Hercules and Antaeus": all that the mask of Antaeus declares himself for is articulated here:

... a dream of loss

and origins - the cradling dark,  
the river-veins, the secret gullies  
of his strength,  
the hatching grounds

of cave and souterrain,  
he has bequeathed it all  
to elegists. Balor will die  
and Byrthnoth and Sitting Bull.

Hercules lifts his arms  
in a remorseless V,  
his triumph unassailed  
by the powers he has shaken

and lifts and banks Antaeus  
high as a profiled ridge,  
a sleeping giant,  
pap for the dispossessed.

The "dream of loss / / and origins", is that of the "inner émigré" in "Exposure", to whom I return at the end of this chapter. In the present poem, the significance of such a stance is caught in the final line, where the reference to the mother's "pap" is reminiscent of Antaeus' assertion that "I cannot be weaned / Off the earth's long contour". This is that which "Hercules and Antaeus" refutes: "Antaeus, the mould-hugger, / is weaned at last". He becomes figuratively representative of the lost maternal or native security, a pap or nipple for the "elegists". In this sense, he is also the pap-meat for the "dispossessed" children, of whom the poet, as elegist of Antaeus, apparently numbers himself. The close link that Heaney forges between woman and land is also marked in the fact that "pap" is a dialect word for a round, conical hill - a breast-shaped landmark (a meaning perhaps suggested in the phrase "a profiled ridge"). The umbilical attachment of the place-name poems to region and nation is repeated here, the bond having modulated from the "omphalos" to the "pap", from the navel to the breast. Also woven into the poem's conclusion are references to the theme of invasion: Balor, Byrthnoth and Sitting Bull are all emblematic of despoiled natives, "dispossessed" and expropriated. In this sense,

Hercules, as usurper and invader necessarily recalls the English Bull of "Traditions" in *Wintering Out*. The poetic allegory is thus bound to a political one, as Heaney himself has made clear:

The Hercules-Antaeus thing came to seem like a myth of colonization almost - that Antaeus is a native, an earth-grubber, in touch with the ground, and you get this intelligent and superior interloper who debilitates the native by raising him, taking him out of his culture, his element, and leaving him without force. You could think about Ireland in those terms.<sup>9</sup>

The obvious problem with the allegorical significance of Hercules is that he is being forced into two roles which are not entirely compatible. Firstly, he represents a rational, declarative form of poetry, that Heaney "drifts towards an assent to" in "Hercules and Antaeus". Secondly, he represents colonialism, and thus creates "a sort of nostalgia for Antaeus". There is an element of friction between these two layers of meaning, that I will be returning to later in this chapter. For the present, it is important to see that Hercules, as a poetic model, suggests an inevitable displacement from an unproblematical sense of national identity. This is precisely the dilemma of the poet in the bifurcated situation in Northern Ireland. It is the imperialism which Hercules represents that - in Heaney's opinion - renders any notion of being "in touch with the ground", of Heaney identifying himself with Antaeus, impossible. Instead, as the close of "Hercules and Antaeus" makes clear, the latter becomes symbolic of a ground *now lost*, of a desirable unity between a mother "culture" and a now debilitated "native".

Nevertheless, the sense of "pap" as simplistic drivel cannot be excluded from a reading of the line. The two meanings foreground the oxymoronic stance so prevalent in *North*. On the one hand, Antaeus, and all that he symbolizes, is representative of the historical tradition of the native's land, now a "dream of loss / and origins", whilst, on the other, he signifies the naive nostalgia of an untenable "dream". The latter meaning is less

obviously present, but it is precisely this sense of what we may term a recognition of the imaginary and consoling properties of an enabling construct (tradition, nation, heritage), that will come, in Heaney's later poetry, more and more under sceptical scrutiny. All the same, it is this quality of nostalgia that haunts the first part of *North*; a quality reminiscent of the sense of alienation, the wintering out, of many poems in the previous collection. *North*, like *Wintering Out*, is concerned with the "embrace" of nation and tradition, the close connection between the two volumes clear from the fact that the dedicatory poem to the earlier volume is reprinted, with minor revisions, as the closing section of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" in the second half of *North*.

*Is there a life before death? That's chalked up  
on a wall downtown. Competence with pain,  
coherent miseries, a bite and sup,  
we hug our little destiny again.*  
(*WD*, p. [5]. See *N*, p. 60)

The linguistic embrace of the phonic-poems in *Wintering Out* is prefaced by this politicized embrace (the "hug" of the final line) of the Catholic predicament in contemporary Northern Ireland. This commitment produces a form of "ideological closure" to the poetry, which, in both volumes, is that of a troubled but insistent nationalism. It is a government of the poet's tongue by the authority of both a social grouping and a political stance, which make misery at least "coherent". *North* picks up on the importance of the "little destiny" of Ireland, and seeks to make it coherent through what becomes Heaney's most distinctive image of this period: the bog. *Wintering Out*, however, contains the first instance of the series of remarkable "bog poems" - which had as catalyst Heaney's reading of P. V. Glob's *The Bog People* -<sup>10</sup> in "The Tollund Man". This text opens with the desire to make a pilgrimage to the preserved Iron Age corpse in Jutland:

Some day I will go to Aarhus  
To see his peat-brown head,  
The mild pods of his eye-lids,  
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country nearby  
Where they dug him out,  
His last gruel of winter seeds  
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for  
The cap, noose and girdle,  
I will stand a long time.  
Bridegroom to the goddess,

She tightened her torc on him  
And opened her fen,  
Those dark juices working  
Him to a saint's kept body ...  
(*VO*, p. 47)

Heaney, on one level, provides simply a poetic commentary on Glob's text and the photograph of the drowned man. He even goes so far as to quote a translated phrase in the line, "his pointed skin cap."<sup>11</sup> The meditation is thus not so much on any sight of the body as upon the photographs and written text of *The Bog People*.<sup>12</sup> These bodies, in fact, become more than drowned corpses, instead they become a corpus, a textual body, that the poet reads and attempts to interpret. For this is what a poem such as "The Tollund Man" is precisely concerned with: the nature of interpretation, of gaining a "coherent" explanation. The poem prefigures many in Part I of *North*, and like the later poems, it writes itself in the margins of Glob's book, seeking a continuity between the past violence of Jutland and the contemporary Irish Troubles.

The garrotted sacrificial victim is held in a violent embrace, by the goddess's "torc". Cyclical imagery is central to Heaney's poetry, although, as we shall see, it is rendered increasingly negative in later volumes. The potential similarity between bog man and poet who "hugs" his destiny in the introductory verses to *Wintering Out* is one that the following two sections of the poem

will expand upon. In the initial section, the similarity is expressed via the stanzaic arrangement: the lines "I will stand a long time. / Bridegroom to the goddess, / / She tightened her torc on him", work both with and against the syntax, suggesting a complicity between the men. As David Cairns and Shaun Richards state: "The weakness of the full-stop after 'time', coupled with the enjambment which spans the two stanzas, produces a reading in which Heaney is both rapturous recorder and fated victim of a violent, and sexual, sacrifice."<sup>13</sup> The relevance of this notion of sacrifice becomes clearer in *North*, but the idea of a motherland of which the poet is, in some sense, a victim is already apparent in *Wintering Out*. Arthur E McGuinness writes: "The 'fen' is a bog and, with the 'dark juices working', one is back to the essential human mystery of the bog-woman-goddess whose 'wet centre is bottomless' ('Bogland')".<sup>14</sup> This is an exact gloss on Heaney's procedure in the bog-poems: the "essential human mystery" will be seen as an archetypal blueprint of psychic and social behaviour, a maternal tradition common to both Jutland and Ireland.

It is this "ground" that the bog poems seek to outline or to map, in a process that centres on how the bodies are interpreted. Like Crow's encounter with Proteus in "Truth Kills Everybody", these are poems concerned with the nature of "close reading", where the body (Proteus, bog man) becomes the "text" that the poet must read. Heaney foregrounds the textual nature of these corpses when, in "Belfast", he declares that poems can arrive "like bodies come out of a bog, almost complete" (*P*, p. 34). It is equally valid to invert this remark and claim that the bodies in the bog are "almost complete" poems. To turn aside from "The Tollund Man" for the present, to the related poem "The Grauballe Man", in *North*, will make clearer the "textual" quality of these preserved corpses:

The grain of his wrists  
is like bog oak,  
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.  
His instep has shrunk  
cold as a swan's foot  
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge  
and purse of a mussel,  
his spine an eel arrested  
under a glisten of mud.  
(*N*, p. 35)

The referential reality of the man's body is largely occluded by the densely tropic nature of the poem. In this manner, the drowned body is at one and the same moment defamiliarized and, in a curious way, absent, as the vehicles of each simile achieve a greater prominence than the tenor. Edna Longley, in a not uncritical reading of the bog poems, perceives a rhetorical elision of historical fact in this movement when she remarks: "The chain of inventive similes reinforces the point that the Man has been translated into the element of the bog, and is thus at one with the faintly healing Nature.... In fact the poem almost proclaims the victory of metaphor over 'actuality'".<sup>15</sup> The upshot of this questionable "victory" is, as Longley realises, crucial to Heaney's strategy in the bog poems. The "translation" outlined in these texts is an attempt to make both the Grauballe and the Tollund men *meaningful*, that is, their corpses are to be made *significant* within a historical continuum of violence, as their brutal "actuality" is reinterpreted through "metaphor". In the case of "The Grauballe Man", the over-determined figural language of the first four stanzas leads into a consideration of the more prosaic aspects of the sacrificial victim:

The head lifts,  
the chin is a visor  
raised above the vent  
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened....



Who will say "corpse"  
to his vivid cast?  
Who will say "body"  
to his opaque repose?

In Longley's view, the metaphorical metamorphosis of this poem suppresses the reality of the actual circumstances of the man's death. In this sense, the questions asked of the reader are merely rhetorical: he has become a "vivid cast", his body is an "opaque repose". This is directly related to the rhetorical consequences of the opening similes. As mentioned, the referent, in a certain manner, has been spirited away and hence the sign "corpse" becomes inappropriate to the now transformed man. But these questions take on a different form of urgency as a result of the concluding lines:

I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph ...

but now he lies  
perfected in my memory,  
down to the red horn  
of his nails,

hung in the scales  
with beauty and atrocity:  
with the Dying Gaul  
too strictly compassed

on his shield,  
with the actual weight  
of each hooded victim,  
slashed and dumped.

In an analogous manner to the actions of the bog's "dark juices", the poem has produced a "perfected" version of the original body. All the same, such perfection cannot completely ignore that which pre-exists it: his peculiar attraction is forced to confront his obvious enough suggestions of an ancient "atrocity". The earlier questions thus may - and should - be reread with an eye to their urgency, as a refutation of all that the poem's textual strategy has so far implied. That is, the reader *must* call him a "corpse",

otherwise his significance as a victim is lost. On this level, the "actuality" of the body is to be weighed against the figural "beauty" of the opening similes.

The undecidability of the tone of the questions in the poem recalls the ambiguity of the Antaeusean "pap". And it is not merely the fact that in both cases two readings are possible. More importantly, it is the manner in which both poems are concerned with establishing the relevance of the tradition in which the poet is trying to place, and thus understand, the contemporary violence. Is it an unjustified reading, "pap" rhetorically "twisted" - like the corpse - into a significant "beauty"? In this case, the reader is exhorted to declare, to say, "corpse" to the victim. Or is he a meaningful, emblematic sign of the tribal dimensions of past and present "atrocities"? In this alternate reading, the banality of the sign, "corpse", is inappropriate to the implications or connotations of the man's transformed body. Interwoven with this shuttling of meaning is, of course, the complexity of Heaney's stance: liberal recoil coupled to a desire to justify tribal or collective action. But one should beware of thus explaining away the ambiguity into a balanced ambivalence. What the poem declares to be "hung in the scales", the preserved body, is open to two interpretations, readings that either justify or deny the metaphorical/metamorphic dimensions of those transforming "dark juices" of pen and bog.

"The Tollund Man" is equally involved in this movement. The poem seeks the bog man's meaning, attempting to articulate his muted, shattered form. As in "The Grauballe Man", Heaney reads into his death a vast sacrificial backdrop to the "little destiny" of Northern Ireland. The poem's second section thus turns from the Iron Age victim to recent Irish ones:

I could risk blasphemy,  
Consecrate the cauldron bog  
Our holy ground and pray  
Him to make germinate

The scattered, ambushed  
Flesh of labourers,  
Stockinged corpses  
Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth  
Flecking the sleepers  
Of four young brothers, trailed  
For miles along the lines.

In drawing this link between pre-history and history, Heaney displaces a recent Irish atrocity from a socio-political perspective to a religious, tribal one. In Terence Brown's words, this poem, like the other bog poems, "juxtaposed pre-history and history, myth and moment in ways which gave us to know an awesome, yet curiously religious and therefore consolatory inevitability in the current troubles."<sup>15</sup> The pessimistic determinism of this technique has, as its manifest content, the desire to explain the otherwise perhaps "meaningless" violence of the contemporary scene. Reading the corpse results in an apparent understanding of the actions of the Loyalists and the Republicans. One can turn to many remarks made by Heaney in prose analyses written at around the same time as these poems were composed for overt statements of this strategy. For instance, in a *Listener* article of December 1972 he comments:

The early Iron Age in Northern Europe is a period that offers very satisfactory imaginative parallels to the history of Ireland at the moment.... [There you] have a religion centering on territory, on a goddess of the ground and of the land, and associated with sacrifice. Now in many ways the fury of Irish Republicanism is associated with a religion like this, with a female goddess who has appeared in various guises.... I think that the Republican ethos is a feminine religion, in a way.<sup>17</sup>

What some would term sectarian murder, others justifiable military action, becomes, for Heaney, sacrificial. The parallel Heaney thus draws provides the "satisfactory", consoling construct of a tradition that is pre-political, tribal and religious, "centering" on the land. This is more complicated than a simple justification of Catholic reaction to Protestant repression; it is, instead, an

"imaginative" interpretation. Just as the poet sought to limit the play of the Gaelic place-names in a regional significance, the "fury" of Republican violence is made coherent, centred in the closure of a tradition of worship and sacrifice, in the name of a "feminine ethos". In many ways, Heaney's technique here can be presented as a striking instance of what Fredric Jameson terms a "symbolic act". This is where a text does not "reflect" history (which is an impossibility anyway), but rather seeks to resolve the aporetic dilemma an historical conjuncture forces on the author: "The aesthetic or narrative form ... [has] the function of inventing imaginary or 'formal' solutions to unresolvable social contradictions".<sup>18</sup> Heaney's "imaginative parallel" in no way represents the Real of History: it is a truly formal solution to the crisis in Northern Ireland, which it does not ignore but rewrites in a manner that lends itself to contemplative coherence. Such a solution is made in "The Tollund Man", at the point where the poem's third section fully parallels the bog man to the "stockinged corpses" of section II:

Something of his sad freedom  
As he rode the tumbril  
Should come to me, driving,  
Saying the names

Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard,  
Watching the pointing hands  
Of country people,  
Not knowing their tongue.

Out there in Jutland  
In the old man-killing parishes  
I will feel lost,  
Unhappy and at home.

The resolution is made by recourse to a supposedly archetypal continuum of violence, perpetrated in the name of a regional piety to the "old man-killing parishes". The concluding lines hence terminate in a powerful paradox: Jutland, as an "imaginative parallel" to Northern Ireland is "home", even homely. However, the poet's *loss* is less easy to paraphrase. Does it, somewhat banally, mean that though "parallel" to his real home, it cannot

be that particular locus, or does it mean that even at home the poet feels lost? In the former case, is it that in not understanding the native tongue, the poet necessarily experiences that loss of a verbal identification with the "holy ground"? In this reading, the articulation of the various Jutland place-names, "Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard", unlike "Toome", "Broagh" and "Anahorish", does not open into vistas of oral/aural speculation on the intimacy between place, word and home. In Jutland, the incantation intimates a kind of exile, as the poet is displaced from the language of the "country people". Such displacement from a native place is not present in the poet's confrontation with Irish place-names; and this would make Heaney's parallelism of Ireland and Jutland less convincing. That is, Heaney here numbers himself among the "strangers" excluded from the locality of "Broagh", because the necessary relationship between place and language is not present to the outsider on another's "territory".

There is, however, a more vertiginous possibility contained in these lines. The other suggested reading of the final paradox would interpret the loss as present even at home. In "Broagh", as we saw in chapter one, Heaney's imagery of writing - the "Black O" - defers the desirable vowel embrace of language and nation. The poem, in fact, is about the absence of security. That latent dilemma ties into the oxymoronic conclusion of "The Tollund Man", and would, interestingly, reinstate the parallel between Jutland and Northern Ireland. That is, in Ireland, Heaney experiences a sense of alienation that is simply given more palpable form in a foreign country. This is due to the fact that, as explored in "Traditions", Heaney's Irish identity is a construct of colonialism, which is a record of linguistic and regional expropriation. This, in turn, brings out the importance of the allegory of colonialism narrated in "Hercules and Antaeus". The "dream of loss / / and origins" is there said to be that of the "elegists", of whom the voice of the poet of "The Tollund Man" is one. In other words, the Tollund man is becoming, like

Antaeus, "pap" for the "dispossessed" poet; he provides a meaningful parallel to the latter's sense of internal exile, of having the status of an "inner émigré". If the loss of origins, in "Hercules and Antaeus", is felt to be an inevitable consequence of the success of the colonizing Herculean incursion, the poet is not only "lost" in Jutland but necessarily also lost when he is literally "at home". The poet is "out of his element" by virtue of his elegiac stance: he commemorates what no longer exists. This provides Heaney with a role as displaced "digger", probing into the past in order to locate some sense of a non-English ground he is forever removed from. This troubled nationalism finds expression in the sixth section of "Kinship", where Heaney declares his allegiance - in opposition to the imperialist chronicler of Northern barbarians, Tacitus - to those who resist "the legions":

And you, Tacitus,  
observe how I make my grove  
on an old crannog  
piled by the fearful dead:

a desolate peace.  
Our mother ground  
is sour with the blood  
of her faithful,

they lie gargling  
in her sacred heart  
as the legions stare  
from the ramparts.

Come back to this  
"island of the ocean"  
where nothing will suffice.  
Read the inked faces

of casualty and victim;  
report us fairly,  
how we slaughter  
for the common good

and shave the heads  
of the notorious,  
how the goddess swallows  
our love and terror.  
(*N*, p. 45)

Heaney kins himself with those beyond the pale of colonial subjugation; with the Republicanism that finds an imaginary corollary in the Northern tribes Tacitus chronicled. The latter is exhorted to return to the North, to "read" the present Republican "slaughter" in the light of his knowledge of ancient Germanic practices. Indeed, such a parallel was emphasized to a greater degree in an earlier version of this poem, where Tacitus was urged to read not casualties and victims but "the inhumed faces / / of the sacrificed".<sup>19</sup> The unrevised line stresses the parallel Heaney is drawing between the fate of those like the Tollund Man and those who are sacrificed to the "feminine ethos" of Republicanism. As Richard Kearney remarks:

The IRA's ideology is *sacrificial* to the degree that it invokes, explicitly or otherwise, a "sacred" tradition of death and renewal which provides justification for present acts of suffering by realigning them with recurring paradigms of the past and thus affording these acts a certain timeless and redemptive quality.<sup>20</sup>

Heaney's extraordinary move is to take the matriarchal religion outlined in *The Bog People*, and turn this into evidence of a "recurring paradigm" of sacrificial surrender to the collective good of the "tribe" in modern Ireland, thus creating the formal solution to social contradictions.

However, how seriously are we to take the harsh "social truth" declared at the end of "Kinship"? Blake Morrison sees it as as "controversial as ... Auden's phrase in 'Spain' about 'the necessary murder'". The poem "ends up speaking the language of the tribe, brutal though that language may be".<sup>21</sup> Neil Corcoran, on the other hand, claims that "there surely is irony in the phrase.... To bring into casual connection the barbarity of 'slaughter' and the civility of that English translation of the Roman ideal of civility, the *res publica*, is indeed an irony, and one not necessarily directed only against the native practice: those legions who stare from the ramparts are also quite capable

of slaughtering for the common good".<sup>22</sup> The fact that the line can generate these two divergent interpretations is indicative of a vacillation throughout *North* over the sustenance the faith in the "pap" of a feminine Ireland might provide. The line's ambiguous tone simply underscores Heaney's ambivalence to the parallel he has constructed; it may be mere "pap", a falsification of historical reality in an attempt to turn the "atrocities" of, for instance, the Grauballe Man's corpse into the consolations of imaginative form. Behind this artistic doubt lies the problem of the stance the artist should take towards nationalism.

At this point, *North* engages with the questions of authority raised in the prose writings: to whose authority should the writer submit? To the collective government of the tongue, or to the self-governing poetic voice? In retrospect, it is possible to see the issues raised in *The Government of the Tongue* as first coming to the fore with the publication of *North*. In this collection, Heaney makes a wary surrender to the authority of his community, a commitment that is revised in favour of poetry's autonomy in the face of political and social crisis in subsequent volumes. In "Kinship", for example, for all the ironic undertones of the passage, Heaney's goddess still acts as an image of a maternal tradition that grounds the present atrocity in a sacrificial past, and in doing so gives a pedigree to Republican "martyrology" that lifts its actions into an archetypal realm. This is the key stroke of Heaney's symbolic act, which draws upon the overtly apolitical and ahistorical dimensions of the Jungian archetype of the Terrible Mother to explain what are, of course, political and historical events. The close of "Kinship" leans heavily on this form of solution, deploying the female archetype that the Jungian writer, Erich Neumann, describes in the following terms:

The mysteries of death as mysteries of the Terrible Mother are based on her devouring-ensnaring function, in which she draws the life of the individual back into herself. Here the womb becomes a devouring maw... Here belong ... the blood-drinking goddesses of death, whose hunger can be



appeared only through the slaying of innumerable living creatures.<sup>23</sup>

Heaney's goddess, "who swallows / Our love and terror", is Neumann's Terrible Mother in the form of Nation. The response made to her is a worship that is atavistic: a pseudo-primitivist sense of land that can only be understood through the parallel with a true tribal formation, namely the Iron Age inhabitants of Denmark. This is wholly imaginary, but as a symbolic act it enables the reader to locate its true subtext: the persuasive ideology of nationalism and Republicanism.

But *North* is a richer work than the preceding reading may suggest. Heaney's apparent formal solution is shown to be rendered highly problematic by the framing device of the mythological pair, Antaeus and Hercules. The binary opposition of these two figures is subject to the same sort of cross-over that comes out in Heaney's use of "play" to pertain to both parts of the book. The figure of "Antaeus" is said to signify a closeness to the ground and hence nation; but it is, in fact, the process of loss that he undergoes, through Hercules' "elevation", that is significant in the volume. As in *Wintering Out*, the poems are ultimately nostalgic: they intimate the dispossession of an "original" national identity. The thrust of the poetry is to overcome this sense of lack, by creating imaginative links through the bog people. Bound to this "reading", is a structure of desire which echoes the early love poetry: Heaney's "goddess" becomes the personification of land, nation and heritage - all that the dispossessed male poet seeks to reappropriate. However, this use of gender leads to the inevitable non-coincidence of a desiring male self and a desirable feminine other, one which, as we shall see, has important political dimensions. To take a straightforward example, in "Bone Dreams" the male speaker declares:

I hold my lady's head  
like a crystal

and ossify myself  
by gazing.  
(*N*, p. 29)

The possession implicit in the embrace of the woman's head is, nevertheless, undercut by the alienation necessarily present in the act of "gazing", where the woman becomes an object to the scopical male subject. This politically neutral instance is, however, indicative of the structure of the politicized "sexual conceits" of *North* as a whole. The significance of this structure of possession and dispossession may be translated into the terms of Heaney's allegorical figures by stating that the dominant male persona of these poems inhabits the cross-over moment when Hercules raises Antaeus. On the level of the political and historical dimensions of these figures, this simply means that, for Heaney, the predicament of the poet of *North* is that he is caught in a colonial confrontation of what are perceived as two contrary cultures (Antaeus and Hercules). In the terms of his poetics, this is closely related to what is a rather odd alignment: that of making Hercules, not only an emblem of imperialism, but representative of rationality and a declarative voice. In "'The Fire i' the Flint'", Heaney's opposition between masculine intelligence and the feminine gift is one that results in a crossing of the two modes, the latter submitting to the authority of the former. I have already suggested that this is reflected in Heaney's place-name poems, where the "surrender" to the "gift" of the poem is crossed with a very strong sense of "address" and "assertion". In *North*, the rational assertiveness that Hercules represents, repeats this modal crossing, as he becomes necessary to articulate the "illiterate fidelities" that Heaney claims Antaeus stands for.

Clair Wills, in an interesting comparison between Medbh McGuckian's poem, "Rowing", and "Hercules and Antaeus", makes a related point to mine, which should help to clarify the above remarks. Wills sees "Heaney's conception of poetry as a fusion of two types of discourse, imaged as on the one hand, male rational

light, and on the other, female earthly power. This opposition in Heaney becomes equivalent to the opposition between imperial power and territorial atavism". The problem inherent in this equivalence is, according to Wills,

symptomatic of a contradiction between two views of poetry - between his description of poetry as the necessary fusion of male and female elements, and alternately as an attempt to "reach" the "irrational fidelities" governing society through rational means. Heaney accepts the split between rationality, "ordering", and the repressed and attempts to "ground" rational thought in his poetry... [However,] his poetry can not overcome the split at all, since he is using "rational" and "imperial" language to express the irrational and colonized. By designating it irrational, female and earthly he can only ever objectify his own non-English origin, his motherland.<sup>24</sup>

Wills ignores the fact that, in his prose, Heaney's crossing of two modes is less a "fusion" and more of a "subjection" of the feminine by the masculine. That said, she is clearly right to note that the result of this elaborate, and frequently contradictory, use of gender is to leave Heaney's masculine subject estranged from a "motherland" he still feels is the ultimate "ground" to his sense of national identity - a position neatly foregrounded in the quotation from "Bone Dreams" cited above. What we are left with is yet another expression of that sense of being "in between", of dislocation, that is so strong in Heaney's work, and that has as its origin the colonial formation of modern Ireland, the residue of which remains as the "Northern problem".

"Kinship" revolves around this sense of displacement, whilst, as a socially symbolic act, it attempts to resolve the "contradiction" that Wills notes through an extraordinary "rational" or formal solution: that is, Heaney makes the object of the bog assimilate all the linked and linking notions of tradition, "sound" - in the sense of voice and depth - psychic archetype and "femininity":

But *bog*  
meaning soft,  
the fall of windless rain,  
pupil of amber....

Earth-pantry, bone-vault,  
sun-bank, embalmer  
of votive goods  
and sabred fugitives.

Insatiable bride.  
Sword-swallower,  
casket, midden,  
floe of history.

Ground that will strip  
its dark side,  
nesting ground,  
outback of my mind.  
(*N*, pp. 41-42)

The stripping away of the ground that this poem describes is, according to Heaney, intimated in the very form of the poem: the "thin small quatrain poems", that predominate in the first half of *North*, are said to be "drills or augers for turning in and they are narrow and long and deep."<sup>25</sup> The ingenuity of this remark has led to accusations of ingenuousness: as Blake Morrison counters, "there is no self-evident reason why the form in itself should enable a poet to go 'more deeply' into his subject."<sup>26</sup> But Heaney's stress on the form of these poems is at one with the thematic wish to create "imaginative" links between past and present. The early image of poetic "digging" is transmuted into a belief that the actual spacing of black print on white paper is in itself meaningful; that is, the very *shape* of the printed poem signifies.

Alongside this stress on the material shape of the poem, there is an examination of the sensible properties of words; in the words of "Bone Dreams", there is a scrutiny of "philology and kennings" (*N*, p. 29). As regards philology, in "Kinship", Heaney analyses the Irish root to the English word, "bog", *bogach*, or "swamp", derived from *bog* or "soft". The English word's semantic depths

are thus sounded to locate an Irish relevance. The poet furthers this process of verbal archaeology by creating kennings in, for instance, "earth-pantry, bone-vault", linking two terms to create a third meaning. Like the actions of the bog on corpses and objects, these metaphors create a defamiliarized "meaning". It is therefore becoming apparent why Heaney asks Tacitus to "read" the corpses: they are, like the bog, "textual", they can be interpreted so to create an intelligible "sense" from the actual atrocity. This intelligible meaning is inexorably bound to the "feminine principle" Neumann believes to be a permanent archetype in the psyche, and that Heaney claims is present in the ethos of Republicanism. The "insatiable bride" is mapped out on both the Irish landscape and the "outback of my mind". Nevertheless, the mapping out cannot but foreground the distance between poetic subject and the - in Wills' words - "irrational, female and earthly" object world that is poured over and scrutinized in order to ground the male, rational self.

The result of this strategy is that the poetic "auger" becomes a form of augury. An augur is one who reads and explicates signs, and in the first part of *North*, such signs are obsessively read, meditated upon, and interpreted. This is an attempt to raise the irrational, feminine ground into the light of Hercules' masculine rationality. The embrace of the woman in *Death of a Naturalist* and the linguistic embrace of the phonic signifier in *Wintering Out* has, in *North*, modulated into a remarkable edifice which encircles and seeks to appropriate all that is considered native and natural.

"Punishment" is a poem which centres on the desire to reach the "irrational fidelities" of Republicanism through the augury of the poem. Once again, the poem is a meditation upon a bog corpse, a girl ritually slaughtered in a manner similar to that of the Tollund and Grauballe men. One point of entry into this remarkable text is via the divergent critical readings it has prompted. Ciaran Carson's response is one that questions the

imaginative parallel the poem's conclusion draws between the Iron Age and the early 1970s in Northern Ireland:

I am the artful voyeur  
of your brain's exposed  
and darkened combs,  
your muscles' webbing  
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb  
when your betraying sisters,  
cauled in tar,  
wept by the railings,

who would connive  
in civilized outrage  
yet understand the exact  
and tribal, intimate revenge.  
(*V*, p. 39)<sup>27</sup>

Carson replies:

Being killed for adultery (for example) is one thing; being tarred and feathered is another, and the comparison sometimes leads Heaney to some rather odd historical and emotional conclusions. In "Punishment" he seems to be offering his "understanding" of the situation almost as a consolation.... It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened; they happened then, they happen now, and that is sufficient ground for understanding and absolution.<sup>28</sup>

Carson's cruel paraphrase echoes Terence Brown's words cited above, latching onto the dubious nature of many of the "consoling" parallels drawn between past and present violence in *North*. It is also relevant that Carson employs the term "ground" to explain why Heaney makes his (fallacious) comparison. The parallel, for the poet, is just that: "sufficient" - supplying the needs of - "ground". Against this questionable base, Carson pits his humane "civilized outrage", perceiving Heaney's "understanding" as, in fact, a gross *misunderstanding*. The critic's attitude is therefore one of the alternate responses contained within the poem itself, although Carson believes Heaney has isolated the wrong one.

Inevitably, much criticism of this poem responds in this manner: the "trial" that is meditated upon in the poem finds itself repeated in criticism of the text. If Carson is prosecutor, James J. Lafferty's comments can be read as a form of defence. The tarring and feathering is to be seen as the consequence of "a betrayal of the icon Kathleen Ni Houlihan.... [The] poet has been struck dumb, until now, and has stood passively by rhyming off the sanctioned retorts in the paradoxical stance of the 'civilized outrage' against this atrocity." Thus, the poet was at one time like Carson, "but the outrage is a mask, for at a deeper level of his being, he sees the archetypal punishment as ineluctable".<sup>29</sup> The "archetypal" is pitted against rational "civilized outrage", the critics repeating the poem's and, in an extended sense, the volume's own debate. However, both these readings assume that, as Morrison puts it, the word "'connive' decisively tips the balance, suggesting that Heaney's civilized outrage is forced and artificial".<sup>30</sup> In this light, it is intriguing that John Stallworthy silently quotes this word, yet uses it in connection with the "punishment" rather than the "outrage":

The poet who has appeared for the plaintiff now appears to take his place with the prosecution, but his indictment is directed less against the betraying sister/s than against the onlooker - himself - who would connive with those who inflict this punishment, whilst admitting to contradictory feelings of *civilized outrage and tribal understanding*.<sup>31</sup>

Stallworthy is right to note that Heaney is on both the council for the defence and the council for the prosecution, because the poem is less about the Windeby girl than it is about the validity of the poet's attitude to her corpse. As plaintiff, his charge is brought more against himself than the "sister/s": he is a culpable "witness", on trial to justify his implicit assent to the "justice" meted out by the Republicans on the "adulterous" girls. Stallworthy, however, in shifting the verb balances the opposition the poem has created, rather than allowing the balance to tip in favour of the "tribal" understanding. His own court of law metaphor should have made him more scrupulous: "connive" is a

legal term pertinent to the poem, signifying the giving of assent to the commission of a wrong-doing. Thus, the "punishment" is, in contrast, "legal" or *justifiable*, whilst the "civilized" response to the deed gives encouragement to a sort of felony. By the position of this term the text lifts the only seemingly "criminal" act - that perpetrated on the girl - out of court: it is the interpretation of the violence that is being placed on trial.

The poet is not a participant in the actual deed, he is, rather, an observer. Like Tacitus, invoked in "Kinship" VI, his role is that of reader and recorder: reader of the textual corpse and interpreter of his finds. In "Kinship", Tacitus is asked to "report us fairly / how we slaughter / for the common good / / and shave the heads / of the notorious". In "Punishment", however, it is now the indigenous Heaney who stands back and observes the head-shaving of the "notorious" girl:

Her shaved head  
like a stubble of black corn,  
her blindfold a soiled bandage,  
her noose a ring

to store  
the memories of love.

Heaney's response to - his "report" of - this girl and her treatment is to confess: "I almost love you / but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence". Balanced against the vociferous "civilized outrage", the "stones of silence" are the mute admission of complicity with her punishers. As such Heaney takes his stand with what, in "Kinship", he terms, with whatever degree of irony, the authority of "the common good". On the other hand, however, the poem's opening stanzas suggest an intimacy with she who is punished:

I can feel the tug  
of the halter at the nape  
of her neck, the wind  
on her naked front.



It blows her nipples  
to amber beads,  
it shakes the frail rigging  
of her ribs.

Lafferty comments: "In his opening stanza, Heaney immediately identifies with the bog woman: shares an empathy with her".<sup>32</sup> To feel empathy is not, necessarily, to identify with another. One needs to see that the relationship analysed in the poem is closely related to the predicament apparent in Heaney's figure of Hercules. On the one hand, he desires to declare his sympathies with the punishers, but, on the other, the poem charts a failure to translate this empathy into a "rationalized" identification. His own authority, the government of his own tongue, resists that of the "tribal, intimate revenge".

This is more obvious when one consults the various manuscript variations of this poem, a transcript of which has conveniently been made available in Arthur E. McGuinness' study of Heaney's process of revision. In the first stage of the poem's genesis the poet completely identified with the girl, the poem being written in her voice ("I felt the wind on my neck ..."), aside from a single intimation of the vacillatory stance of the *North* text in the reference to "her brain".<sup>33</sup> The second and third stages of revision, in fact, display a confused oscillation between this female first person position and that of the male observer:

Her shaved head,  
Her stubble of black corn,  
was broached as they spied  
my gluttoned furrows

and numbered all her bones.  
Beneath the stone  
my unshorn loins  
had been atoning.<sup>34</sup>

What is intriguing about this jumble of subject positions is that it prefigures in a more foregrounded manner the confused poetic

stance in the final text. Lafferty, by eliding empathy and identification, misses the problematical nature of this position. In identifying with the girl, the poet is imagining himself as the girl, in her *position*, the torc tightening. But if the reading is merely empathetic, the poet recognizes the distance that separates them. Indeed, that "tug" imaginatively felt may well be read as referring to the executioner's hand that holds the "halter". This would certainly make sense considering the culpability the poet expresses towards the poem's close. As was the case with Heaney's ambiguous use of "pap", the oxymoronic close of "The Tollund Man", and the indecisive tone of the questions raised in "The Grauballe Man", a fluctuating indeterminacy is indicated by the speaker's response. These instances are not minor difficulties of syntactical compression, nor are they ambivalences that can be fused into a balanced whole. Rather, the texts demand that we should - as they in turn attempt to - read and "understand"; placed in the position of Tacitus, we are asked to "read the inhumed faces" of these men and women. The duplicity of the poet's stance, victim or victimiser, outraged or culpable, is one that this poem seeks to interrogate, but from the very first verb his position is curiously ill-defined. From this point the poet, as Lafferty comments, "becomes increasingly the observer describing the way in which the adulteress was found."<sup>35</sup> As such he, like the reader, assumes the position of Tacitus until that supposedly less confusing verb, "connive", integrates the poet within the tradition opposed to the "legions" of "Kinship" VI. His empathy thus gives way to the understanding that she is a necessary "scapegoat", and as such reinvolves the suggestion that he is indeed complicit in her destruction. In this reading, "Punishment" progresses from indecision to recognition, a movement mapped out in the change of verbs.

I do not think this an unreasonable interpretation, but it is one that seems to iron out certain complexities of meaning that the poem displays. If the poet has cast himself in the role of girl, butcher, outraged liberal and tribal representative, he also

suggests that he may well be, figuratively speaking, the girl's illicit lover. His reading of her body is one heavily imbued with sexual connotations, a form of quasi-necrophilic scopophilia. It is a sly "artful" peeping, the poet eyeing the brain's opened "combs" as if they were female genitalia, his empathetic "feeling" giving way to desire. This is, of course, a different form of "guilt" to that of the executioner just as it is markedly different to "civilized outrage". The principal point is that the girl of this text becomes more and more objectified as the poet's desire increases; and, as an object of desire, it is also intriguing that she becomes increasingly non-human. Like the Tollund and the Grauballe men, she is no longer a literal woman but a figural one: "she was a barked sapling / that is dug up / oak-bone, brain-firkin". The kennings stress her defamiliarized significance, as she is metamorphosed into the bog. Thus, in possessing, however imaginatively, this woman, the poet achieves, once more, a sense of ground, as he forges the imaginative parallel between past and present. His desire - and guilt - centre on this reading of her corpse, as she turns to "pap for the dispossessed". The "burrowing inwards" of "those thin small quatrain poems" is beginning to take on a powerfully (male) sexual suggestiveness, one closely linked to Heaney's reading of Hopkins discussed in chapter three. The Antaeusean poems appear to be bound to that half of Heaney's poetics that emphasises a "surrender" to the "gifts of the poem", which, as mentioned above, recalls the feminine mode of writing Heaney finds in Blake and Keats. However, that mode was ultimately inseparable from a masculine authority, that needed to sire the feminine potential. Heaney's "auger"'s augury, in the bog poems, is such a siring, as the Herculean, masculine rationality seeks to turn the feminine pleasure of the poetic gift to declarative ends.

This declaration remains ambiguous, due to Heaney's heightened vacillatory position. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the Herculean "play of intelligence" is becoming an appropriate description of these poems, as the poems attempt to extract an

intelligible - imaginative - sense from their sensible referents. Their strategy of "reading" is not that of a variety of Barthesian "rustle of language" (Heaney's phrase is, in fact, the same as the title given to a posthumous collection of Barthes' writings),<sup>36</sup> but, rather, a hermeneutical attempt to grasp what is "signified" by these textual "inhumed faces". The texture of the corpse must be made to reveal, to offer up like a body from a bog, one particular meaning: that maternal tradition that can be glimpsed *beneath* the disparate times, places and people of Ireland and Jutland. In this sense, these poems of "surrender" are as much concerned with "social truth" as the more outspoken declarations made in the second part of the volume. The difficulty inherent in this approach is that Heaney's "rational" poetic subject is forever forced to, in Clair Wills' words, "objectify", and thus dislocate himself from, the "irrational" feminine ground. The movement of the male speaker in "Punishment" dramatizes this difficulty, as the desire to identify with the "feminine ethos" of republicanism leads, in fact, to a loss of identification between himself and the sacrificial scapegoat. She becomes increasingly an object which may offer up some sort of understanding to the scopoc close-reading of the "artful voyeur", but that same rationalised knowledge sunders him from any intimacy with the "illiterate fidelities" she, as victim, implies.

## II. SEXUAL POLITICS

Several poems in *North* develop a sexual allegory of colonialism that is connected to the dilemma experienced by the voyeuristic reader of bodies. "Act of Union" casts the relationship between England and Ireland as similar to the subjugation of a woman by a man. This conception of a feminine Ireland is given voice earlier in the volume, in "Bog Queen": "I lay waiting / between turf-face and demesne wall" (*N*, p. 32). As, in Neil Corcoran's words, "a symbol for disaffected native resentment",<sup>37</sup> the queen rightly speaks of the divided nature of a colonized state, in "between" two cultures, the bog and the demesne. "Act of Union" makes the

suggestiveness of "Bog Queen" explicit, and may be read as a poetic counterpart to the following prose remark by Heaney:

To some extent the Anglo-Irish enmity can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and goddess. There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelary of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever; and her sovereignty has been temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson, and whose godhead is incarnate in a rex or caesar resident in a palace in London. What we have is the tail-end of a struggle in a province between territorial piety and imperial power. (*P*, p. 57.)<sup>23</sup>

That "new male cult" is, like the bog queen Mother Ireland, granted a monologue in *North*. The personification of England, in "Act of Union", makes much of the geographical shape of England and Ireland, using this to develop an intriguing sexual conceit on the subject of imperialism:

Your back is a firm line of eastern coast  
And arms and legs are thrown  
Beyond your gradual hills. I caress  
The heaving province where our past has grown.  
I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder  
That you would neither cajole nor ignore.  
(*N*, p. 49)

The historical Act of Union is powerfully presented as the forced "sexual" act of a union undesired on the part of the "woman". The consequence of this rape, as the conceit continues, is a child:

And I am still imperially  
Male, leaving you with the pain,  
The rending process in the colony,  
The battering ram, the boom burst from within.  
The act sprouted an obstinate fifth column  
Whose stance is growing unilateral.  
His heart beneath your heart is a wardrum  
Mustering force.

The male child is a personification of the Ulster Protestants and, consequently, part of the "male cult" opposed to the "feminine ethos" of Republicanism-cum-nationalism. Anglo-Irish politics is

thus metamorphosed<sup>h</sup> into sexual politics, a move symptomatic of Heaney's desire to confront political and social reality through the terms of "imaginative parallels", rather than in socio-political terms. The equation might be presented as follows: a Protestant and imperial England = "masculine", whilst a Catholic and subjugated Ireland = "feminine".<sup>39</sup> Bound to this sexual dichotomy is another opposition, that of the master and the slave, (which I consider in the following section), one linked to the imperial/subjugated aspects of the above equations.

However, this construct is made problematic when one considers how it bears upon the relation between the male poet and the femininity of the bog-ground. In both the bog poems (with the exception of "Bog Queen") and the present political allegory, the speaking subject is male. As a result of this coincidence, masculine desire permeates both the troubled nationalist consciousness of the subject in "Punishment" and the imperialist persona's colonization of a female Ireland in "Act of Union". This curious parallel is made strikingly clear when one turns to the earlier version of "Act of Union", published in *The Listener* under the title "A New Life". This poem, divided into four sonnets, takes a broader historical perspective than the revised text in *North*. The first sonnet is a slightly different version of the first part of "Act in Union", whilst the second expands upon the sexual nature of the imperial colonization preceding the Act.

When I came among your loughs and bushes,  
Your soft levels between gradual hills,  
Your hide-outs among ferns and webbing ivies,  
Your mounds and ring-forts, secret grassy wells,

I came determined upon occupation.  
You were a wood-kerne that I would uncover.  
I'd bring you past the wood's skirts where my bawn  
Stood on the planted ground, in crops and clover.<sup>40</sup>

The octave charts a process of colonial appropriation in a vocabulary dominated by a desire to "uncover" and occupy. The

overall conceit plays with the Petrarchan conventions of the male subject wooing and winning a silent other, the female addressee. This is hence remarkably similar to "Come to the Bower", a poem whose title implies nationalist sentiments rather than imperial violence, yet in which the male speaker is engaged in a process of "foraging" which is equally a revelation and possession of an objectified, feminine other:

My hands come, touched  
By sweetbriar and tangled vetch,  
Foraging past the burst gizzards  
Of coin-hoards

To where the dark-bowered queen  
Whom I unpin,  
Is waiting. Out of the black maw  
Of the peat, sharpened willow

Withdraws gently.  
I unwrap skins and see  
The pot of the skull ...  
(*N*, p. 31)

The "dark-bowered queen" is another expression of the bog queen, the "insatiable bride" of "Kinship". The poem is consequently an implicit commitment to the feminine ethos of Republicanism but one couched in the language of male sexual desire. It is a poetic augury, a "digging" into a symbolic bog that signifies both nation and the psychic "outback of my mind", the ultimate source of those illiterate fidelities Heaney wishes to articulate. As in the poetics, the feminine is thus a sort of "unconscious" potential that requires a masculine "conscious quelling and control" (*P*, p. 88). The poem concludes with a final image of the wish to ground the rational male subject in the objectified feminine "outback":

I reach past  
The riverbed's washed  
Dream of gold to the bullion  
Of hef Venus bone.

The association between "woman" and "bullion" stresses the preciousness of this queen, and hence the importance of locating a

sense of national identity. The analogy emphasizes the importance of *possessing* her, handling her like gold. Shoshana Felman (writing in the quite different context of Balzac's story, "The Girl With the Golden Eyes") has made some relevant observations concerning this use of gold and femininity:

The golden brilliance of the girl with the golden eyes is fascinating, says Henri, because it is an "amorous gold, gold that wants to come into your pocket". Paradoxically, gold as the metaphor of the utmost value is an image, at the same time, of possession and appropriation through which the ideal woman is again reduced to a mere *object*, whose sole function is to be possessed and owned by man.<sup>41</sup>

The transformation of the girl in "Punishment" is just such a process of objectification by the desiring poet, whilst, in "Come to the Bower", the indecision of that text is replaced, by means of the bullion metaphor, into a quiet but insistent commitment to values the poet feels partly sundered from, but which he desires to possess and appropriate. However, the structure of the poem is virtually identical to that of "A New Life", as the male's unpinning and unwrapping of the dark queen repeat the actions of the uncovering hands of the "imperial / Male" persona.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, The "webbing ivies" finds an echo in the poetic voyeurism of the girl's "muscles' webbing" in "Punishment". This shared phallogocentrism, in turn, plays back, into the phonocentrism of the place-name poems in *Wintering Out*. The third sonnet of "A New Life" contains the following admission of the violating colonizer: "Your mouth is fluent with my language now". Ireland's dominant tongue is no longer Irish but Hiberno-English. The meditations on the Irish place-names in *Wintering Out* were attempts to reappropriate the "homely" language which the English language has largely displaced, and thus attempt to make the Catholic Heaney intimate with a linguistic tradition a Protestant writer perhaps cannot be. For instance, Michael Longley's short poem, "On Hearing Irish Spoken", employs an image reminiscent of Heaney's "stepping stones like black molars" in the river Moyola,



which, in "A New Song", is received as "a smooth libation of the past". Longley, on the other hand, simply hears:

An echo of technical terms, the one I know  
Repeating itself at desperate intervals  
Like the stepping stones across a river in spate.<sup>43</sup>

There are, it seems, no desperate intervals in Heaney's phonological poems, yet, the very impulse behind those texts is a product of the displacement, and the desire to surmount it, that Heaney perceives as inherent in colonialism, a displacement that is imaged as ravishment in the sexual conceits of *North*.

Like "Act of Union", "Ocean's Love to Ireland" employs the metaphor of imperialist violation, both linguistic and geographical, to create an imaginative parallel. The imperial opportunist, Raleigh, in his violent seduction of an unfortunate maid, provides a figure for the way "Ireland is backed to England":

The ruined maid complains in Irish,  
Ocean has scattered her dream of fleets,  
The Spanish prince has spilled his gold

And failed her. Iambic drums  
Of English beat the woods where her poets  
Sink like Onan. Rush-light, mushroom-flesh,

She fades from their somnolent clasp  
Into ringlet-breath and dew,  
The ground possessed and repossessed.  
(*N*, p. 47)

The writing of his own version of *dinnseanchas* in *Wintering Out* simply foregrounds Heaney's distance from the native tradition of Irish poetry, which suffered drastically from colonialism and the "iambic drums / Of English". His meditations on Irish words and place-names are an attempt to repossess that which was dispossessed and largely lost through several centuries of English rule. As I will demonstrate, this goes a long way to explaining

the dual use of masculinity in *North*, and the volume's inability to maintain a neat binary structure.

On one level, Heaney is drawn to the powerful and traditional symbol of a female Ireland, a spirit of the nation who, as Heaney puts it, has been "temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult". This phrase partly betrays an essentialist belief in national identity, one that, in many ways, is a construct of the imperial power, which casts the colonized nation as its other. As Declan Kiberd argues:

the Victorian Englishman continued to attribute to the Irish all those emotions and impulses which his strict code had led him to deny in himself. Thus, if John Bull was industrious and reliable, Paddy was held to be indolent and contrary; if the former was mature and rational, the latter must be unstable and emotional; if the Englishman was adult and manly, the Irishman must be childish and feminine.<sup>44</sup>

Heaney's words suggest that the colonized can also be drawn to a belief in a racial essence that is untouched by the "temporary" infringement of colonialism. This is a central tenet of nineteenth century Irish nationalism, which sought to resist the subjugation of John Bull by drawing upon the same sort of antithetical thinking that Kiberd's Victorian gentlemen were subject to. The slogan of the organ of the Young Irelanders, *The Nation*, is a synoptic expression of nationalist thought: "To create and foster public opinion in Ireland and make it racy of the soil". David Lloyd interprets the ideology behind this phrase in words that are echoed in Heaney's belief in a quintessential Irishness:

The concept of the Irish race is thus grafted to its *roots* in sensuous contact with the land, through which it imbibes the particular taste of its spirit. And if the ambition of the nationalist is to create nationalist opinion, he will achieve it as re-creation, fostering the seed that is an *a priori* presence in the soil of Ireland.<sup>45</sup>

Many of Heaney's bog poems and place-name poems are an articulation of a "sensuous contact with the land", whilst poems

such as "Bog Queen" and "Come to the Bower" seek out that "a priori presence" in the Irish soil; a presence traditionally personified as a feminine being in Irish poetry, of whom James Clarence Mangan's "Dark Rosaleen" is simply one of the better known examples.

Such time-worn sentiments are present in Heaney's most vehement expression of his sense of nation, "An Open Letter" (1983). Regardless of its more recent date of publication, this poem is useful in the present context, as it makes explicit the nationalist aspects of *North* and the reasoning behind the adoption of sexual imagery in many poems in Part I. It may be said to function as a kind of "throw-back" to issues Heaney's other more recent texts tend to distance themselves from. The occasion for the poem goes a long way to explaining why it reverts to the terms of the earlier volume, rather than those of *Field Work* (1979) and *Station Island* (1984). The verse letter is a justifiable rejection of the label "British", under which Heaney (and six other Irish poets) were included in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* in 1982. In the central stanzas of the poem, Heaney returns to the imagery of ravishment, femininity and dispossession prevalent in his sexual allegories:

You'll understand I draw the line  
At being robbed of what is mine,  
My *patria*, my deep design  
    To be at home  
In my own place and dwell within  
    Its proper name

Traumatic Ireland! ...  
The whole imagined country mourns  
    Its lost, erotic

*Aisling* life. But I digress.  
"The pang of ravishment." Now guess  
The author of that sweet hurt phrase.  
    Lawrence? Wilde:  
No way, my friends. In fact it was  
    That self-exiled,

Vigilant, anti-cavalier...  
    Donald Davie.

The pattern of the patriot  
Is Davie's theme: all polyglot  
Newspeak conference flies he'd swot  
Who *lhude sing*  
Foucault, Foucault. But that is not,  
Just now, my thing.

It is the way his words imply  
That *patria* is maidenly  
(Is "pang of ravishment" not O.K?)  
That touched me most  
Who long felt my identity  
So rudely forc'd.<sup>46</sup>

Heaney's brief digression in the second stanza quoted is, in fact, central to the meditation on *patria* or fatherland that follows. The *aisling* is an Irish vision or a dream poem, in which the speaker encounters a female figure representative of Ireland, asks her identity, is answered, and thence left in a state of melancholy dejection. The *aisling* woman is an Ireland that, in "An Open Letter", is perceived as not only "erotic" and hence desirable but also irrevocably lost. Heaney, however, wishes to find his "identity" in relation to the Ireland this woman personifies, only then - in a gesture that recalls the place-name poems - will he be at "home", within the property of a "proper name". The lines are thus closely related to the intriguing insistence on the "maidenly" quality of *patria*. Heaney is driven to this violation of etymology because he needs to interpret his own nationalism and patriotism within the context of the female personification of Ireland in *North*. The remarkable result of this is that the poem attempts to redefine the speaker's gender to conform to that of the spirit of the nation. The allusion to Eliot's allusion in *The Waste Land* to the myth of Philomela and her "rudely forc'd" ravishment at the hands of King Tereus, regenders the male poet as a "ruined maid". His Irishness is a form of femininity, and the appropriation of his identity within the parameters of both the British Penguin anthology and British Ulster is a form of masculine violation.

Nevertheless, at the very moment when Heaney declares his Irishness and femininity, he recognizes that this is another "dream of loss / / and origins". Heaney can only seek to identify himself with the *violated* maid; the unsullied, pre-colonial Ireland is unobtainable, its existence filtered through as the "lost, erotic / / *Aisling* life". It is a "dream" of nation, simply "pap for the dispossessed". Indeed, Heaney's own "*Aisling*" in *North* centres on a failure to identify with another, non-violated, chaste feminine presence:

He courted her  
With a decadent sweet art  
Like the wind's vowel  
Blowing through the hazels:

"Are you Diana...?"  
And was he Actaeon,  
His high lament  
The stag's exhausted belling?  
(*N*, p. 48)

The courting is, as the poem's use of the Greek myth suggests, a form of scopophilia. The desirable "goddess" is only available as the object of a gaze that prompts an equivocal response. Contrary to the *aisling* format, the man's question is unanswered, a silence that foregrounds Heaney's sense of inadequacy in the face of the "illiterate fidelities" he feels he owes to his nation. As in "Punishment", the scopic male remains estranged from the "slaughter" he believes implicit in the acceptance of Republican sentiments. He cannot confer upon himself the role of an Irish Actaeon, willing to be martyred in the name of a feminine ethos. Heaney's confused subject and even gender position in these two poems articulate a half-submerged recognition that the present culture in the North is, in the terms of Heaney's metaphorical conceit, *both* masculine and feminine. "An Open Letter" thus returns to the imagery of birth that concluded "Act of Union", but with an important qualification: Heaney now stresses that there are two children, not one:

A shudder in the loins. And so  
The twins for Leda. And twins too  
For the hurt North,  
One island-green, one royal blue.  
An induced birth.

One a Provo, one a Para,  
One Law and Order, one Terror -  
It's time to break the cracked mirror  
Of this conceit.  
It leads to nowhere so why bother  
To work it out.

The hidden Ulster lies beneath.

That "hidden Ulster" is a reaffirmation of the dream of origins, and is similar to the Ulster of John Montague's *The Rough Field*, which is "a part of our past disinherited".<sup>47</sup> In contrast, the present Ulster is caught between the appalling reality of Heaney's twins. Heaney's sympathies are obvious enough, but it is noteworthy that the speaker's stance is not a simple identification with the feminine ethos, but rather a personified objectification of the struggle in the North.

Heaney's own "cracked" conceits therefore leave him straddled between a desire to identify with what is imaged as a "feminine" nation, and the implicit realization that his identity is also a product of "masculine" imperialism. The crossing of positions that results recalls the crossing of poetic modes elsewhere in *North*. Like the majority of the poems in Part II of that volume, "An Open Letter" is, obviously enough, a poem of "masculine" assertions, one that is indeed subservient to the idea it seeks to present. It is a "rhymed stanzaic poem" of "social truth", one that wishes to express the fidelity of Antaeus in the language of Hercules. This stylistic equivocation finds a more significant parallel in the equivocal position Heaney takes *vis-à-vis* nationalism and solidarity with what, in the imagery of "Punishment" and "Kinship" VI, is termed the tribe.

The allegories express another sort of crossing, one caught powerfully in the spatial imagery of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union". In both those poems, it is the proximity of the two countries, of colonizer and colonized, that is stressed via the imagery of violation. They are "backed" to one another, geographically and historically. From their "union" has sprung not only the Unionist, with "his parasitical / And ignorant little fists", but the predicament of the Northern Catholic. That is, Heaney is a product of what, in "Act of Union", he calls a "half-independent shore". He is "in between", the product of the cross-over of cultures that is the consequence of colonialism. Heaney's sexual conceit can only imply that his identity is constructed by both "masculine" imperialism and a "feminine" nation, that his subjectivity is, in a certain sense, "chiastic".

Much of *North* expresses a desire to resist this crossing of culture and language, to reach back to some sort of pre-colonial, non-English source, to the maid prior to her "ruin" at the hands of Raleigh. This is the impulse behind the subdued nationalist sentiments of a poem like "Come to the Bower", which seeks an affinity with the "dark-bowered queen" of nation. However, other poems, such as "Punishment", are painfully alive to the fact that this "tribal" belief in a feminine spirit of the nation is a fetish and a construct. The real strength of the conceit is that it draws upon the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society to provide an analogy for the oppression present in colonialism. That is, a colonized Mother Ireland draws significance from her *relationship* with her imposing other, John Bull: the notion of a "feminine" origin *distinct* from the infringing "masculine" aggressor has no such analogy to relations between the sexes as it postulates, at some date, a femininity *without* a masculinity.

What this plight reveals is that neither politicized "gender" can be exclusive, each needs to define itself against that which it declares itself not to be, and thereby reveals the curious interdependence of the colonizer and the colonized, masculine and

feminine, as both terms rely on their difference from the other to construct their own identity. As an Ulster Catholic Heaney is constructed along this plane of difference; and it is this equivocal stance that helps to understand the adoption and denigration of masculinity in the text. The first section of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" concerns the fiercely male Raleigh:

Speaking broad Devonshire,  
Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree  
As Ireland is backed to England

And drives inland  
Till all her strands are breathless:  
"Sweesir, Swatter! Sweesir, Swatter!"  
(*N*, p. 46)

The poem is based on an anecdote of the poet-courtier reported in John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*.<sup>49</sup> The violent seduction, due to the play of the title, becomes an obvious enough sexual conceit of colonization of the subsequently "ruined maid" of Ireland. Raleigh, in different guise, appears in the witty prose poem, "Kernes", in *Stations*:

The bicycle, with its chrome insignia and rivetted breastplate of Sir Walter Raleigh in his inflated knickers, motioned,

"No surrender! Up King Billy every time!"

He came through us with his head sunk and the pedals flying and further down the road was standing to on the first bar of their yard gate, singing "God save the King".

One by one we melted down lanes and over pads, behind a glib he hadn't even ruffled.

(*S*, p. 14)

The comically inflated (and thus deflated) Raleigh is, as the politically resonant noun, "kernes" (here, the Catholic boys), makes clear, associated with the Protestant presence in Northern Ireland, and thus opposed to Heaney - a "fucking papish" as the Protestant boy, Dixon, calls him and his friends earlier in the poem. This Protestant infringement<sup>e</sup> is apparently unable to alter



or affect that *a priori* presence located in the unruffled "glib" of the Irish soil. And it is precisely this presence Heaney digs back for in the augers of *North*. Nonetheless, it is an object of desire that remains tantalizingly elusive, largely due to the encroachments of colonization narrated in, for instance, "Ocean's Love to Ireland".

This is interesting in the way it bears upon the admiration meted out to Raleigh in "Current Unstated Assumptions about Poetry". There, the English colonizer becomes representative of that masculine voice of assertive "social truth" that is heard in "An Open Letter" and Part II of *North*: "When I think of Lowell, I think of Andrew Marvell and Sir Walter Raleigh, the Marvell of the 'Horatian Ode', and the Raleigh of 'The Lie', poems of definitive statement, enemy-making poems by men who moved skilfully and visibly in the political world."<sup>43</sup> The signifier "masculinity" is thus being forced into two roles: it is, on the one hand, a sign for all that is destructive to Mother Ireland, whilst, on the other, it signifies a voice that is suitable to make a "definitive statement" in her name. This crossover is, to my mind, inseparable from the fact that Heaney presents himself as displaced from what he terms the "feminine" quality of Ireland - outside the grove, composing an *aisling*. On a stylistic level he requires the poetry of Hercules (the rational statement of a poet such as Raleigh) to articulate the illiterate fidelity of Antaeus; on a political level, Heaney is a cultural product of a divided province.

What Cairns and Richards call Heaney's "re-appropriation of essentially Arnoldian categories"<sup>50</sup> - the feminine nature of the Celt in contrast to the masculinity of the Anglo-Saxon race - are accepted in so far as they allow him to treat the colonizer England's relation with a colonized Ireland as a similar fear and arrogance to that of a threatened male identity towards its essential, yet marginalized female other. However, the texts reveal his own stance's dependence on the masculine intruder on

both the stylistic and national level, and thus reveal the self-divided nature of contemporary Northern Ireland: neither one nor the other. The nature of this curious bifurcation in position is what forces Heaney to adopt yet another hierarchial opposition, that of the master and the slave, and to employ the "in between" figures of the denizen and the inner émigré.

### III. THE POET AS DENIZEN

"Freedman", from the second part of *North*, is centred on the opposition of the master and the slave, superimposing it onto the England/Ireland antithesis discussed in sexual terms in Part I:

Subjugated yearly under arches,  
Manumitted by parchments and degrees,  
My murex was the purple dye of lents  
On calendars all fast and abstinence.

"*Memento homo quia pulvis es.*"  
I would kneel to be impressed by ashes,  
A silk friction, a light stipple of dust -  
I was under that thumb too like all my caste.  
(*N*, p. 61)

As the poem's epigraph - taken from R. H. Barrow's *The Romans* - makes clear, the poet's Irish identity is refracted through that of a barbarian, a slave in Rome. The opening verb, "subjugated", derives from the Latin word, *jugum*, "yoke": the speaker is yoked like an animal by a master. The sense of "bondage", however, brings the Roman scenario into the Elizabethan period; the *O.E.D.* giving the first usage of "subjugation" in this sense as 1589. The Elizabethan period is, of course, a crucial one in Irish history, and is analysed by Heaney in several poems in both *Wintering Out* and *North* - poems such as "Bog Oak", "Traditions" and "Ocean's Love to Ireland". These two meanings coexist throughout the poem, the one playing off the other. Barrow's justification of slavery in the early Roman Empire - that a "man from a 'backward' race might be brought within the pale of civilization, educated and trained in a craft or a profession, and

turned into a useful member of society" - is used as an ironic analogy, or imaginative parallel, for the plight of the Irish speaker. As so often, Heaney centres on the relation between colonization and language: the man's manumission is a form of emancipation in that it is gained through education, by "parchments and degrees", and yet it is a liberation through loss. The use of two Latinate words, "subjugated" and "manumitted" implies rather neatly the crisis: the "slave" is "freed" into an alien culture, and an alien language. Latin here is thus representative of the English language, recalling Heaney's reference, in "Feeling Into Words", to the "rex or caesar resident in a palace in London".<sup>51</sup>

By speaking Latin/English and losing his barbarous tongue the freedman is thus "brought within the pale of civilization", as Barrow terms it. As "A New Life" declares: "Your mouth is fluent with my language now." However, although appropriated, the poet is excluded in that curious double movement at work throughout *North*. He is within the Latinate society yet without it too. His "murex" is not that of the rulers but rather a poor substitute, a lean luxuriousness of lents, fasts and abstinence:

One of the earth-starred denizens, indelibly,  
I sought the mark in vain on the groomed optimi:  
Their estimating, census-taking eyes  
Fastened on my mouldy brow like lampreys.

The implications are of a caste-system, the barbarous Catholic anglicized but still "marked-out, earth-starred".<sup>52</sup> The nudging hint at the Jews under the Nazi's thumbs is shocking but pertinent when we consider that it is the noun, "denizen", that carries the weight: he is indeed a form of resident foreigner, enjoying only certain rights as a citizen.

The master/slave hierarchical opposition has an obvious enough correlative in the masculine/feminine dichotomy that dominates Part I of *North*. It is yet another interrogation of the colonizer

and colonized; in Cairns and Richards words, "the colonized are thereby constrained to assert a dignified self-identity in opposition to a discourse which defines them as, variously, barbarian, pagan, ape, female; but always subordinate and inferior."<sup>53</sup> The poem ends on a note of linguistic divorce:

Then poetry arrived in that city -  
I would abjure all cant and self-pity -  
And poetry wiped my brow and sped me.  
Now they will say I bite the hand that fed me.

The emancipation of poetry is double-edged: that it *wipes* the poet's brow implies that it removes the mark of caste and hence of subjugation. Poetry is thus liberating; nevertheless, the removal of the mark implies that, in some sense, the poet is removed from his roots. The manumission of the first stanza is repeated in the final one: he is still constrained within the imperial tongue. As a "denizen", his is still a subjugated status, like that of the woman; denied a "barbaric" or Irish identity he is still not at one with the imperial optimi.

This sense of displacement flickers through the second part of *North*. The section is largely comprised of "the rhymed stanzaic poem", the "masculine" poem of "social truth". The change in metrical form is coupled to a change in emphasis, as the poetry responds more directly to recent events in contemporary Ireland. The modal gender, however, plays back into the confusion of "political" gender, as Heaney finds himself embroiled linguistically with that which he is somehow defining himself against. In a way, and following Heaney's own sexual/textual fable to its ultimate conclusions, we are dealing with a poetic and political "bisexuality", that is, an ambiguous stance linked to the status of the poetic denizen. As Terry Eagleton comments: Ireland is a "nation whose very language is self-divided, silenced by the alien speech of imperialism".<sup>54</sup> This self-division is at the heart of *North*; and, due to Heaney's connection between imperial and rational masculinity (as in the duplicitous figure of

Raleigh), leads to a sense of alienation from the fidelities he purports to assert. This is the dilemma lying behind "Whatever You Say Say Nothing":

On all sides "little platoons" are mustering -  
The phrase is Cruise O'Brien's via that great  
Blacklash, Burke - while I sit here with a pestering  
Drouth for words at once both gaff and bait

To lure the tribal shoals to epigram  
And order. I believe any of us  
Could draw the line through bigotry and sham  
Given the right line, *aere perennius*.  
(*N*, pp. 58-59)

The "tribal shoals" recall the "tribal, intimate revenge" at the close of "Punishment". Yet Heaney's desire to raise such dark archetypal feelings to the rational light of "epigram and order" is a - in more than one sense - Herculean task. The poetic act seeks to be "gaff and bait", a means to locate the irrational heart of the contemporary conflict. But it remains a "drouth", a dry, barren enterprise. The figure of the poetic fisherman is, in this sense, a reply to the poetic auger's augury. Both plumb depths but the active burrowing of the auger in search of auguries becomes, in the case of the poetic fisherman, a passive "lure". Part II foregrounds the sense of distance from the tribal origins that are postulated as at the core of the Troubles.

The "declarative voice" of Part II is thus, in the terms of *The Government of the Tongue*, the voice of the poet as witness, but to witness, as "Punishment" makes clear, is to replace identification with empathy. *North* thus concludes with what is rightly one of Heaney's most celebrated poems, "Exposure", a poem that is synoptic of the poetic denizen's exposed and marginalized role:

It is December in Wicklow:  
Alders dripping, birches  
Inheriting the last light,  
The ash tree cold to look at.

A comet that was lost  
Should be visible at sunset,  
Those million tons of light  
Like a glimmer of haws and rose-hips,

And I sometimes see a falling star.  
If I could come on meteorite!  
Instead I walk through damp leaves,  
Husks, the spent flukes of autumn ...  
(*N*, p. 72)

Hercules, the "spur of light", diminishes to "the last light". The subsequent loss of enlightenment recalls the first part of the volume where the voice of "North" tells the poet to "Compose in darkness. / Expect aurora borealis / in the long foray / but no cascade of light" (*N*, p. 20). The crepuscular moment is, like the flickering light of the borealis, one where nothing is clear-cut or stable. One thinks of the double-edged symbol of the auroras in Wallace Stevens' "Auroras of Autumn", which express, in their "frigid brilliances ... The color of ice and fire and solitude", the fundamental ambivalence of the Romantic imagination, that is as "grim as it is benevolent".<sup>55</sup> For Heaney, they are a less spectacular expression of his equally troubled stance vis-à-vis his poetic's attempt to throw light on the darkness of the "tribal shoals" from a rational perspective, and via a language implicated in imperialism. The twilight of "Exposure", and the December setting, is a pathetic fallacy pertinent to this predicament of the poet as denizen. The oppositional structure of *North* - dark/light, dependence/ independence, tribal security/individual conscience, Antaeus/ Hercules - is finally exposed as anything but clear-cut. "North" declares that "the longship's swimming tongue / was buoyant with hindsight", but Heaney's "buoyant" fisherman's hindsight is the consequence of his "elevation" at the hands of colonialism. This is thus read as a kind of "fall", a subjugation caused by Protestant encroachment, the latter, in the words of "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966", "raised up by what he buckles under" (*N*, p. 68). Heaney ends "Exposure" with a haunting admission of this sense of fidelity and exile:

I am neither internee nor informer;  
An inner émigré, grown long-haired  
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,  
Taking protective colouring  
From bole and bark, feeling  
Every wind that blows;

Who, blowing up these sparks  
For their meagre heat, have missed  
The once-in-a-lifetime portent,  
The comet's pulsing rose.

That pulsing rose returns us to the half-buried nationalism of the volume; that it is *missed* foregrounds Heaney's inability to surrender to atavism. After *North*, Heaney's poetry will begin the attempt to turn to a positive reinterpretation of this fraught position.

## CHAPTER 6. MIXED MARRIAGES: GAUDETE AND CAVE BIRDS

## I. PATRIARCHAL ERROR AND GAUDETE

If the carnivalism of *Crow* may be said to situate its intended degradation within the law's own "ludic space", Terry Eagleton's strictures on the style of *Gaudete* would seem to align the later volume with the earlier. Contrasting Hughes' language with the "deconstructive ... process" of Peter Redgrove's verse, Eagleton writes:

one never has the feeling ... that Hughes's language self-reflectively takes the measure of its own limits and capabilities; it is, rather, a language somehow locked tight in the bursting fullness of its presence, and so ironically closer to traditional realism than it would superficially seem. The fact that almost everything is in the present tense is an index of this fact: despite Hughes's ambitious experiments with "open" forms, a single, sometimes tyrannically controlling mode of speech remains firmly in authority throughout.... Perhaps the most interesting contradiction of Hughes's volume is that, if its "content" is clearly non-realist, the "stance" it takes up within language, the lack of any "doubling" or genuine interplay of writing forms, remains ultimately within the realist problematic.... Hughes's language fails to assume any attitude to what it speaks of; it is positioned laconically outside those events, "mirroring" rather than constructing.'

Eagleton's distinction between "stance" and "mirroring" is suggestive with regard to the overall concerns of Hughes' texts. To remain within the "realist problematic" - in its broadest sense - is to assume that the sign can become identical with the thing, an assumption that exists as a desirable poetic aim in many of Hughes' articles and in a poem such as "The Thought-Fox". This is the authoritarianism of the poet-warden, and it is thus no coincidence that Eagleton grants Hughes a "tyrannical ... controlling ... authority". The realist mode is one of mastery, of apparent presence and recuperation, as in it the word seemingly atones with the extra-linguistic. The Bakhtinian carnivalesque or



"dialogical imagination" - Eagleton's "doubling" - is anathema to this "mirroring" imagination because the latter seeks to control the errantry of the signifier. Crow, in many ways, is a personification of such errantry; his crisis is his refusal to atone with his essential meaning, the law of his "nature". We have seen a similar crisis in Hughes' prose writings, where language is perceived as comprised of slippery goblin-words that always appear to be at a distance from their conceptual truth. The poems that make up the Epilogue to *Gaudete* are likewise concerned with the difficulty of *articulating, or presenting*, the repressed natural essence of humanity. This essence, once again termed feminine, eludes a transgressive tongue:

I hear your congregations at their rapture  
 Cries from birds, long ago perfect  
 And from the awkward gullets of beasts  
 That will not chill into syntax.  
 (G, p. 176)

Human communication, metonymically condemned as cold "syntax", is removed from the natural "rapture" of the animal kingdom, which makes no recourse to the mediation of language to express its atonement with Mother Nature. Humanity, on the other hand, due to the medium of language, exists in a state of alienation:

And I hear speech, the bossed Neanderthal brow-ridge  
 Gone into beetling talk  
 The Java Man's bone grinders sublimed into chat  
  
 Words buckle the voice in tighter, closer  
 Under the midriff  
 Till the cry rots, and speech  
  
 Is a fistula  
  
 Eking and deferring ...

The fistula that is language is a mark of the exile from nature presented in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*. Language defers the fullness that would be announced if the Egg-head encountered a "leaf's otherness". However, as in "Truth Kills

Everybody", such plenitude is always already a form of annihilation:

Trying to be a leaf  
In your kingdom  
For a moment I am a leaf  
And your fulness comes

And I reel back  
Into my face and hands

Like the electrocuted man  
Banged from his burst straps  
(G, p. 180)

This poem is like one of those "ragged undated letters" Hughes refers to in the 1970 interview with Faas: it narrates the deferred promise of a "fulness" which it can never fully represent. This recalls Crow's linguistic dilemma, as his songs are also displaced from the "Undersong" that intimates the destructive totality he lacks. In "Glimpse", for instance, the word "leaf" merely approximates the fulness of the referential leaf's being:

"O leaves," Crow sang, trembling, "O leaves -"

The touch of a leaf's edge at his throat  
Guillotined further comment.  
(C, p. 90)

Hughes seeks a language that would "mirror" this absolute otherness, but the guillotine that falls between word and referent (inner and outer "nature") turns language into a clot or fistula. This is, indeed, a major problem for an aesthetic that is charged by the belief that the phenomenal world is simply the cover for a noumenal reality that eludes all expression or perception, a thing-in-itself that human subjectivity gropes for but which it can never fully comprehend. For Hughes, this final reality is the locus of our desire: in the cryptic words of one Epilogue poem: "Let your home / Be my home" (G, p. 190). The main narrative of *Gaudete* is a parabolic exploration of this desire, and is hence, on one level, simply an expansion of the concerns raised as early

as "Song". Unlike that lyric, however, *Gaudete* narrates, in part, a successful atonement of conscious self and a suppressed "nature". Whereas, the Epilogue centres on the difficulty of language managing to write of the goddess, the main narrative turns to the related importance of *perceiving* her. Such redeemed vision recalls the importance laid on a variety of "fourfold" vision in the virtually contemporaneous 1976 revision of "Myth and Education". As we saw in chapter two, this essay argues that imaginative vision enacts a "closure" of a split psyche; in *Gaudete*, the metaphor of sexual union and a subsequent rebirth becomes the tropic equivalent to such integration. In the course of analysing this redeeming vision and the redeemed marriage of opposites, I will shift Eagleton's commentary on the style of the book into the issues raised on the thematic level of the text. Several of the terms Eagleton deploys in his review - "presence", "control", "mastery", "authority" and, in particular, "mirroring" and "doubling" - will be seen to provide useful labels for these issues, especially with regard to the central motif of the *doppelgänger*.

The Argument Hughes prefaces *Gaudete* with provides a convenient point of entry into the notion of the double. The shorter version printed in the hardback edition is as follows:

An Anglican clergyman is abducted by spirits into the other world.

The spirits create a duplicate of him to take his place in this world, during his absence, and to carry on his work.

This changeling interprets the role of minister in his own way.

The narrative recounts the final day of events which lead to his cancellation by the powers of both worlds.

The original man reappears in this world, but changed.  
(G, p. 9)

The Argument presents a seemingly simple opposition of the Lumbs, "original"/"duplicate", the latter a kind of mirror-image of the

former. However, this is a distorted or warped reflection, one signalled by the description of the duplicate Lumb as a "changeling", that is, in the fairy tales, a frequently sickly child substituted for a healthy human one. The doubles are therefore not identical: in the words of the paperback edition of *Gaudete*, the duplicate is an "exact duplicate ... but he is a log. A changeling."<sup>2</sup> The exactness of the similarity is belied by this essential difference, and it is this hair's-breadth discrepancy that is the image for the huge gap between a sterile conscious existence - that of the original Reverend Lumb - and a previously rejected and thus demonic and sickly unconscious being - the grossly sexually active duplicate. The narrative, according to Keith Sagar, is thus about "only one Lumb. He is undergoing a spiritual/psychological crisis."<sup>3</sup> Each double is one-half of a single man, and the presentation of two men is simply an extended metaphor of a psyche divided against itself, seeking some sort of integration.

Linked to this notion of what is, in large part, the Jungian concept of individuation, is the motif of supplanting, of the abduction and the substitution of the changeling. Sagar, in his analysis of Lumb's crisis, describes the Argument's abduction of Lumb as the result of a maltreatment of "the spirit Nature". The latter thus "becomes demonic and runs amok within the psyche, supplanting normal consciousness."<sup>4</sup> Sagar backs up this interpretation by affixing a quotation from Hughes' "Note" on Shakespeare, concerning the Tarquinian explosion: "that occult crossover of Nature's maddened force - like a demon - into the brain that had rejected her" (*CSV*, p. 192). Implicitly, this "psychic supplanting"<sup>5</sup> is to be contrasted with the cultural "substitution" outlined in the review of Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution*: those "mechanical and rational and symbolic securities, which will substitute for the spirit-confidence of ... Nature". This is the error of patriarchal Western civilization, one that, in Sagar's opinion, Lumb, as a Christian minister, has made in his attitude towards nature. The

abduction of Lumb thus becomes emblematic of a violent uprooting of these substitutions, a revelation of that which has been denied and repressed, with the ultimate aim of reappropriating that lost spirit-confidence. But, like Tarquin's demonic violence, the result is as chaotic as it is creative. As Sagar comments:

It will be seen that the structure of the work is symmetrical - a crossover. Each Lumb is snatched against his will from his own world, thrust into a world he is not at all equipped to deal with, subjected to many horrors, and finally returned to his own world. But the differences are much more significant than the similarities, for one Lumb wreaks havoc and has to be "cancelled"; the other performs his healing task, is reborn, and returns bringing inestimable gifts for mankind.<sup>6</sup>

Lumb at one and the same time is supplanted in a double-stroke that forces his "conscious" existence - as Reverend - to confront his previously denied "unconscious" nature, whilst, simultaneously, his cultural mask of vicar is ruptured by those primitive and repressed "realities" that lie behind the symbolic substitution of Christian belief. Such is the "symmetry" Sagar notes. However, in his shamanic confrontation with his own natural being he is successful and consequently "heals" a mutilated Mother Nature, whilst, in his communal role as a village priest he fails, bungling the ritualized marriage ceremony in the travesty of shamanism conducted at the W I. This is Sagar's "difference" between the two Lumbs. The two, however, may be read as ultimately compatible: the duplicate's efforts are a pale or distorted reflection of what the original attains. This is indeed the sense of a remark made by Hughes in a letter to Faas:

*Gaudete* obviously is connected to *Crow*. *Crow*, in full, with big developments, would be the yolk, and *Gaudete* would be the shell. I projected the life of Lumb in the underworld, and it became entangled with *Crow*, and the episodes became like the real events of which the *Gaudete* events are like the shadow on the wall in the cave.<sup>7</sup>

The "big developments" of *Crow* would, presumably, be the fulfilment of Crow's quest for the woman, and his atonement with nature, with natural "truth". These would parallel the underworld "episodes" that occur in *Gaudete*, where the original Lumb achieves a bizarre rebirth via a mysterious "baboon woman". The events of the main narrative, culminating with the havoc at the W I and Lumb's death at the hands of the male villagers, can be read as the poor reflection of the original's healing: the duplicate's errors are a "shadow" of the "real" atonement. Thus the supplanting of Lumb must stress that his Tarquinian or Dionysian role as an obsessive seducer of the women of his parish is a perversion of the underworld "episodes", duplicates of a greater original, but, as in Plato's cave, shadowy intimations of the ideal form.

That Hughes' letter refers to Plato's cave displays how close this notion of pale reflection of a greater original is to the "cave drama" of *Cave Birds*, which I will discuss in detail in the final two sections of this chapter. For the present, it is noteworthy that, regardless of Hughes' monological voice, *Gaudete* is a text structured around the theme of doubling and reflection. This, if anywhere, is where the self-reflectivity of the text lies. The escapades of the duplicate, which greatly predominate in the main narrative, are to be read as related to the fistula aspects of language lamented in certain Epilogue lyrics. Those lyrics are themselves like shadows on the wall of the cave, deferring yet intimating the full presence of the female deity. They are haunted by the immanence of this being, who yet remains just beyond the speaker's ken: "I was looking for you. / / You were looking for me" (G, p. 183); "Who is this? / She reveals herself, and is veiled" (G, p. 185). Likewise, the duplicate's bungled mission provides a poor reflection, the shell, to the yolk or ultimate reality of the underworld episodes. The duplicate Lumb, like Crow, becomes a personification of transgression, a quality, according to Hughes, equally present within language. Both *Crow*

and *Gaudete* are thus to be read as meditations on the issue of transgression, and the remoteness of that ideal marriage present in the original conception of *Crow*.

Transgression is opposed to authority in the poetics, the goblin-word requiring authorial control. In *Gaudete*, authority is also at stake, but it lies in accepting the tyrannous authority of one's essential nature, which modernity has sought to forget. The speaker of the Epilogue poems desperately seeks this authority. His anguish is the exact opposite of existential *Angst*, being the product not of absolute freedom, but the pain of failing to submit utterly to the essence that precedes his existence. What has to be realised by this ecstatic poet is that "All I have / / For an axle / / Is your needle / Through my brains" (*G*, p. 189).

This surrender of selfhood to a deterministic "nature" is a reply to Sartrean freedom, which we have already seen to be the implicit target of "Myth and Education" and "Fleeing from Eternity", whilst it is overtly condemned in "M. Sartre Considers Human Affairs" and "Existential Song". We shall find that existentialism is once again a covert antagonist in *Gaudete*, as simply a more sophisticated expression of the Egg-head's predicament in a world of illusory shadows, mere spectres of the real. The attempt to appropriate the "axle" of nature takes, in *Gaudete*, the form of accepting an unconscious dimension of the Self that has been repressed in everyday existence. This is at the heart of the underworld encounter with the baboon woman, where Lumb shatters his egg-head to unveil this aspect of being. Before analysing this incident and its parodic counterpart at the W I, the significance of the doubled protagonist needs to be outlined and related to the thematics of authority.

The abduction of the original Lumb, and his substitution by the changeling, is recounted in the Prologue as a violent transformation. The original Lumb is tied to an oak log. Both man and tree are flogged.

So, stroke by stroke, he and the tree-bole are flogged, tied together, until Lumb chews earth and loses consciousness.

He comes to, under heavy sloggings of water, naked and lying on concrete.... Lumb sees this other is himself. He stares at him, in every familiar detail, as if he stared into the mirror.

(G, p. 16)

The gap between paragraphs, the loss of consciousness, appears to be the moment of abduction, after which the duplicate Lumb - the log - sees his reflection, *his* duplicate. The "original" in this instance loses not only consciousness but priority, he becomes the mirror-image of his own duplicate image. This enfolded relationship of Lumb as self and another is more complex than the Argument seems to suggest. The complexity is crucial, for the text has to suggest that the supplanting duplicate is, somewhat paradoxically, *more* "original" because more "natural" than the substituting (culturally adulterated) original Lumb. He represents, however demonically, an *a priori*, or essential vitality that the original reverend finally locates in his rebirth via the baboon woman. He provides the Tarquinian reflection of the natural origins the vicar needs to reappropriate. It is thus telling that the exchange in the Prologue is marked by a third person pronoun, "he", not a proper name: the signifier "Lumb" is not at one with a single referent, it does not "mirror" a single identity, but denotes a divided self.

The doubles' complex inter-relationship is further felt when one turns to the narrative episode in which, it appears, original and duplicate stare each other in the face. Here, after having been shot by the cuckolded Dr Westlake, the duplicate Lumb is found "at the river's edge", washing his wound (G, p. 77). By the end of the page this river has modulated into a "lake". Place is confused, perhaps *doubled*. Sagar makes the additional suggestion that the time has changed - thus explaining away the apparent alteration in locale - and that the lakeside fight is, in fact, an earlier incident than its position in the narrative would suggest.



Sagar believes that, after the exchange of Lumbs narrated in the Prologue "we see nothing more of the real Lumb until the Epilogue, except for a number of occasions when his consciousness leaks into that of his double, and one scene [at the lakeside] where, for a time, it completely supplants it.... This is surely a flashback to the old Lumb.... It seems to be a prelude to the crossover which took place in the Prologue".<sup>3</sup> This is a baffled explanation (there is no real evidence in the text for this supposition), one which will account for the fact that the naked fiend-like Lumb who emerges from the lake to wrestle with the other Lumb does not act in accordance with what the reader has already gleaned of the "character" of the original Reverend. It is an attempt to restore narrative continuity and "realism", by making the fight a flashback.

The oily backwater, with the sparkle of fl<sup>a</sup>otage,  
Turns, clearly focussed.  
(G, p. 77)

These are the lines that Sagar turns to in order to locate the turning point of present to past present, as they come between the reference to the river and that to the lake. But nothing, in fact, is "clearly focussed" at all. The scene retains a disturbing doubleness, one foregrounded in the stress laid on the water as a kind of mirror that doubles a single identity. The lake is said to be "oil-still / As if it were pressed flat, / Ponderous-still, *like mercury*" (G, pp. 77-78; italics mine). A mercurial hall of mirrors, the page dazzles and disturbs critical coercion. As in the Prologue, the attempt to separate original and duplicate, the "real" and the image is rendered increasingly difficult. References to the reflective capabilities of the water accumulate in the lines leading up to the fight "between" the Lumbs. For instance:

The tops of the blue pyramid mountains, in the afterlight  
Tangle with ragged, stilled, pink-lit clouds  
That hang above themselves in the lake's stillness.



And now Lumb realises  
That his antagonist is his own double ...  
Finally, gasping and immobilised, they lie face to face,  
gripping each other's hands,  
One grinning and the other appalled.  
(G, pp. 81-82)

That one Lumb remains "appalled", whilst the other (previously said to be "laughing like a maniac") simply grins demonically, illustrates that, in this parallel incident to that of the Prologue, Lumb has not fully realised the significance of his split-identity and the need for integration rather than conflict. In this light, the naked antagonism of the "two" Lumbs at the lakeside is illuminated by the second of the two epigraphs which introduce *Gaudete*, that drawn from *Parzival*. The battle mentioned there appears to dove-tail with Lumb's fight:

Their battle had come to the point where I cannot refrain from speaking up. And I mourn for this, for they were the two sons of one man. One could say that "they" were fighting in this way if one wished to speak of two. These two, however, were one, for "my brother and I" is one body, like good man and good wife. Contending here from loyalty of heart, one flesh, one blood was doing itself much harm.  
(G, p. 8)

The epigraph asks the reader to interpret the complex doubling of Lumb in the context of the thematics of authority. The father's offspring should be "one". A single entity is destroying itself; it is not "individuating". In Jung's words, it is not "becoming a single, homogenous being", and thus fails to locate essential being, "our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness".<sup>9</sup> However, "they" are not, even in their struggle "two": "These two, however, were one". What should be self-identical is neither at one nor apart. Such is the "contending" at the lakeside, where the indeterminacy of the text forestalled identification of duplicate and original, opening the space of a "battle" analogous to the predicament of the contemporary psyche as described in "Myth and Education".

The epigraph also colours all that we have examined so far in a filial light. The "one man"'s sons should re-present him, be at-one (with him). They should mirror each other as "one flesh, one blood" and thus reflect their father. He is their author, and they have transgressed his authority. Consequently, a tripartite identity is shown as troubled and fragmented. What is telling about this deferred masculine harmony of three-in-one is that it is portrayed in an image other than that of father and son or brother and brother: "they" should be like "good man and good wife". This announces the metaphorical "marriage" of both *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, which becomes the central trope in a narrative of the re-unification of a shattered *male* <sup>s</sup>psychic identity. Marriage and/or sexual consummation<sup>m</sup> in these texts is the symbol of a perfect union of two, a fusion which results in one. A ruptured authority is visualised as exclusively masculine, an individuated, but still male, whole as a synthesis of masculinity and femininity. Before detailing the "marriage" of opposites in the present work, however, this issue of masculine mastery and authority, and the attitude *Gaudete* takes towards it, requires closer examination.

The first word of the main narrative following the Prologue is "binoculars". They are held in the "age-thickened hands" of Major Hagen, as he gazes out of his room at the changeling Lumb and his younger wife embracing. Scopophilia, in a minor key, is introduced: it will become a major theme as the narrative progresses. Binoculars, telescopes, the unseen watching eye, the camera - all these will be turned on Lumb and the women of the village, generally with voyeuristic intent. This, in large part, is a dramatization of what, in "Myth and Education", Hughes claimed to be the ultimate expression of a atrophied "objective perception", that is, "the morality of the camera ... [which] has imprisoned us in the lens".<sup>10</sup> That the "cancellation" of the changeling Lumb is in large part precipitated by a somewhat compromising photograph of himself and one of the women of the village is an index to the extent that *Gaudete* engages with such a

warped "morality". Objective perception, in the narrative, is portrayed as patriarchal; and, consequently, the setting of the village may be considered in the light of Laura Mulvey's comments on patriarchal society in general: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between an active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly". Mulvey is considering the medium of the cinema in the light of this remark, and it is thus revealing that *Gaudete* started off as a film script. That aside, the narrative as published is fixated with femininity as a property that, in Mulvey's words, "can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*".<sup>11</sup> The main narrative opens with Hagen's determining male gaze directed at his wife and Lumb:

Binoculars

Powerful, age-thickened hands.

Neglected, the morning's correspondence

Concerning the sperm of bulls.

(*G*, p. 23)

The binoculars' mastery of distance, their ability to bring near what was far, to control space, is a *substitute* for the man's inability to physically master his wife. Unseen, the voyeur is in some ways the author of what he perceives. Hagen's artificial power can thus frame the figures of Lumb and Pauline Hagen on the ornamental Japanese bridge: their "two figures complete the landscape artist's arrangement." And yet, simultaneously, his authority remains displaced from the female object of his gaze: "He can watch his wife / But not the darkness into which she has squeezed her eyes, / The placeless, limitless warmth / She has fused herself into" (*G*, pp. 25-26). The stimulants to the eye are bound to the "neglected ... correspondence / Concerning the sperm of bulls"; a substitute has supplanted an original sexuality, as scopophilic desire and voyeuristic fantasy replace the reality of procreation.<sup>12</sup>

Those distinctly male "hardening lenses" (G, p. 25) can also be the unseen but all-seeing lenses of the eyes. For instance, another male voyeur, Garten, lurking in the woods, watches Mrs Westlake smoking in her car:

Garten's eyes are quiet, like a hunter's; watching the game feed closer. His heart deepens its beat, expectant.

His fantasy agitates, richly, monotonously, around the cool drawn features of Mrs Westlake, the high china cheekbone, the dark mouth....

He fastens himself to her, as if to a magnification, fading from himself, like a motionless lizard.  
(G, p. 30)

It is Garten who will later take the snapshot of Lumb and Mrs Evans. He will thus become, with Hagen and the other male villagers, a hunter of Lumb. Here, however, he is a hunter of the female "game", his hunt, however, merely a "fantasy". The eye's lens, like Hagen's binoculars, provides an illusory form of mastery over the observed object, a fallacious authority that the text will seek to oppose to the valid appropriation of the feminine other in the original Lumb's encounter with the baboon woman. Garten's "fastening" onto another is simply a "magnification", a telescopic foreshortening. Nevertheless, such fantastic fastening is dangerous: as in Hughes' early poetry, the loss of distance between self and other (even in fantasy), is itself in danger of imparting a loss of self-authority, a "fading from himself". Garten's autoeroticism thus opens a rupture in his masculinity, even as he bolsters himself up through apparently mastering the other. The ambivalence of the gaze is that in seemingly confirming the observing subject's power over the observed it simultaneously exposes its slavish dependence on its object of desire.

Commander Estridge, like Hagen and Garten, relies on such ambiguous telescopic control:

In Estridge's lens  
A middle distance farm has come close....  
Estridge is pleased with his telescope  
Which brings him a hen flattened under a cock in the barn doorway....  
Now he watches Lumb [and Mrs Holroyd] ...  
Within the hallway, within the magnified circle,  
Turning, she sets Lumb's hands on her breasts and bites his neck.  
(G, p. 47)

Mrs Holroyd is the "country love" of Estridge's "youth, who never appeared" (G, p. 47). Seemingly distant, untouched, he can now "bring" her to himself in a "magnified circle", in a position of sexual excitement similar to that of the hen and the cock. That which is in fact absent - she is a substitute for one who never existed - can be made present in fantasy. But such illusory possession of the desirable woman, as was the case with Garten, is double-edged. For example, watching his daughter Jennifer playing the piano, Estridge can only observe the young woman in baffled stimulation and horror:

Commander Estridge  
Is stricken with the knowledge that his dream of beautiful daughters  
Has become a reality.  
Simply, naturally, and now inevitably, there by the open window.  
The dream was as beautiful as the daughters.  
But the reality  
Is beyond him. Unmanageable and frightening.  
Like leopard cubs suddenly full-grown, come into their adult power and burdened with it.  
Primaeval frames, charged with primaeval hungers and primaeval beauty.  
Those uncontrollable eyes, and organs of horrific energy, demanding satisfaction.  
The music she plays bewilders the old man.  
He cannot interpret those atmospherics  
And sounding and cries.  
It is shouting something impossible, incomprehensible, monstrous.  
(G, pp. 41-42)

Brought face to face with femininity, Estridge cannot control it. His telescopic magnification had given him an illusory power over

the female object, the "reality", however, "is beyond him". The male gaze shares the delusion that is condemned in the figure of St George in both "Myth and Education" and "Crow's Account of St George". St George, as we have seen, is representative of that civilization condemned as an exile from Nature in *The Environmental Revolution*; he may well believe that "he sees everything in the Universe", but there is always that repressed and hence demonic aspect of being that forever eludes the mastery of his purely objective imagination:

He concentrates -  
With a knife-edge of numbers  
He cuts the heart in two. He shivers -  
Looks up. A demon with a face as flat as a snail  
Or the underface of a shark, is grinning at him  
Through the window. It vanishes. Confused,  
Shaken, he aims his attention -

The demonic other to the rational, conscious mind becomes, in Estridge's confused response to his daughters, nothing more nor less than femininity itself, which he finds "unmanageable and frightening". His daughter's music disturbs him by exposing his impotence in the face of a power he can only find "impossible, incomprehensible, monstrous." Estridge is another male who suffers under the *Mona Lisa* syndrome, where the enigma that is femininity transgresses male authority, becoming not only baffling but horrible. In the narrative of *Gaudete* this incomprehensibility takes the form of a female promiscuity unimaginable to the male scopophiliacs.

In the light of the above remarks, it can be argued that the male characters, duplicate Lumb included, all share a quality that is usefully described in existentialist terms. This prefigures Hughes' latent rejection of Sartrean thought in the Epilogue lyrics. The males in the narrative of *Gaudete* provide an example of the impossibility of inter-subjective relations in an existential world. For Sartre, the other is always a threat to the self's freedom because the self, in order to exert its own



free selfhood, to be master of its existence, must negate the freedom of other beings. Each subject desires to turn other subjects into slaves to its own existential project within the world. *Gaudete* engages with this process of subordination by dramatizing what Sartre calls "the look of the other" - a dramatization closely bound to the satirical exposure of the misogyny of the male villagers. For Sartre, the other's gaze is that which turns the self into an object of "the look", thus devoiding it of freedom. Interestingly, Sartre's central example is the voyeur at the keyhole, whose free subjectivity is undermined by being caught. From being the scopophiliac subject, the Peeping Tom suddenly becomes the object of another's gaze and experiences shame. Sartre concludes:

My original fall is the existence of the Other. Shame - like Pride - is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such. Strictly speaking, it is not that I perceive myself losing my freedom in order to become a thing, but my nature is - over there, outside my lived freedom - as a given attribute of this being which I am for the Other.<sup>13</sup>

The scopic males in *Gaudete* are those who seek to turn the object of their gaze - the woman and eventually the duplicate Lumb - into a subjugated being, to whom they confer an identity or give a nature (as in Estridge's fantasy "country love", which he imposes on Mrs Holroyd). This is the phallic power Freud locates in the scopophiliac, whose sadistic delight is also the desire to master the object of perception. In *Gaudete*, the belief that a condition of freedom is the overcoming of another's freedom, a to-and-fro dialectic of master and slave, is shown to be a patriarchal error: the male voyeurs remain slaves to the female objects they think they master. This is equally the duplicate Lumb's mistake, that which inaugurates his eventual cancellation: he finds himself trapped within the fantastic existential project of seeking to turn the women of the village into slaves to his creation of a saviour. Mrs Evans summarizes this project when she declares that "Mr Lumb has a new religion":

He is starting Christianity all over again, right from the  
start.

He has persuaded all the women in the parish.

Only women can belong to it.

They are all in it and he makes love to them all, all the  
time.

Because a saviour

Is to be born in this village, and Mr Lumb is to be the  
earthly father.

(G, pp. 113-114)

The reader is invited to laugh at the foolish vanity of this attempt: Lumb, in a Crow-like gesture, rereads the Gospel of Love, assuming the position of the Father by whose authority a "saviour / Is to be born". This provides the degraded or bathetic reflection of the original Lumb's rebirth from the baboon woman in the central underworld episode.

Lumb's travesty at the W I shortly precedes his death at the hands of Hagen. It is the concluding episode of his absurd desire to redeem the village through a saviour, a redemption undercut by Lumb's complicity in the misogyny surrounding him. At the W I, Lumb tries to initiate Felicity into his female "congregation". Felicity is the principal target of Lumb's desire; she promises a freedom from the project he has become a slave to. However, it is Lumb's inability to fully master femininity which turns this parodic version of individuation against him. The ritual becomes, in the words of Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, a "horrible débâcle", a ritual generated by such artificial stimulants as electronic music and magic-mushrooms. Gifford and Roberts aptly cite Hughes' assertion in "Myth and Education", that a "drug carries its user to a prison in the inner world as passive and isolated and meaningless as the camera's eye from which he escaped".<sup>14</sup> Lumb's marriage ceremony is thus no answer to the scopie world of the village.

Lumb's housekeeper, Maud, is dressed as a bride. She, however, is aware that Lumb desires not her but Felicity, with whom he plans

to steal away from the village. Maud thus murders Felicity at the moment she is to be initiated:

The hind's skin is plugged to the nape of her neck  
Like a coat on a peg  
By the hilt of Lumb's dagger  
Whose blade is out of sight, inside her body.  
(G, p. 147)

Death rather than rebirth is the result of this mixed marriage, as Lumb's authority is overturned by the crazed Maud. The penis attached to the stag's skin Lumb is wearing as he mounts Felicity is, in Maud's hands, turned on him: "She is flogging him over his bald head with the cable-hard, twisted, horny stag's pizzle" (G, p. 149). Lumb's desire to father himself in the form of a saviour-son is thus thwarted by the enigmatic female figure of Maud, whose status in the text is never fully explained. She remains a *Mona Lisa* figure, as is apparent in the difficulty critics have experienced in trying to explain her role within the narrative's fable. Hughes himself claims that she "is the representative in this world of the woman that [Lumb] is supposed to cure in the other world.... Maud is her Doppelgänger". Yet, the duplicate Lumb fails to achieve any sort of "cure" in the village; like Estridge confronted with the inexplicable phenomenon of his daughters, he cannot comprehend femininity, both in the figure of Maud and, in a tellingly scopic image, the dead girl, Felicity:

Lumb is kneeling.  
He bows over her, close to her face,  
His cheek almost touching her cheek  
As he searches her face....  
(G, p. 148)

Lumb's visual search is made in vain, and will be contrasted with the "visionary" awareness of the reborn original Lumb. The duplicate cannot achieve control over this turbulent world of women, an inability which finds expression in Lumb's difficulty in escaping from the basement after the murder: "Lumb tries to struggle free / But women have twisted to a weight like enfolding

nets under water" (G, pp. 148-149). Lumb's failure in this episode thus serves to highlight the successful atonement of his double; this is the function of the changeling Lumb: he provides the shadow on the cave wall of the enlightened mission of the real Lumb. His role, like Crow, is a transgressive one, and, in this manner, he is implicated in the "patriarchal error" that Edward Larrissy notes is the "main theme" of *Gaudete*.<sup>15</sup> Such erroneous misogyny is clearly evident in Lumb's voyeuristic fascination before an "archaic carving" of an Earth Mother figurine:

Lumb's eyes  
Are locked  
To an archaic stone carving, propped on his mantel, above  
the fire.

The simply hacked-out face of a woman  
Gazes back at Lumb  
Between her raised, wide-splayed, artless knees  
With a stricken expression.  
Her square-cut, primitive fingers, beneath her buttocks  
Are pulling herself wide open -

An entrance, an exit.  
An arched target centre.  
A mystery offering  
Into which Lumb is lowering his drowse.  
(G, p. 110)

Like Hagen, Garten and Estridge, the log-like Lumb finds his eyes "locked" to the female object. He thus becomes a slave to his gaze, unable to free himself from the limitations of an objective form of perception which can only see the female as "an arched target centre". Lumb's desire to sire a son is one that finds it impossible to conceive women as anything other than so many objects to be targeted and mastered. The irony of this conception is that Lumb inevitably becomes the slave to this obsessive project, as he is drained of all existential choice:

[He] tries to imagine simple freedom -  
His possible freedoms, his other lives, hypothetical and  
foregone, his lost freedoms....  
And surrounded by still-empty, never-used limitless freedom.  
He yields to his favourite meditation.  
Forlorn, desperate meditation. (G, p. 50)

*Gaudete* is a powerful attack on the illusory "simple freedom" of existential being-for-itself. The village becomes a grim parable of the consequences of an existence centred on the fruitless oppositions of master/slave, male subject/female object, one in which the Sartrean assertion that Hell is other people is viewed through the perspective of sexual politics. It is therefore no surprise that, excluding the Epilogue, *Gaudete* should conclude with the subjugation of Lumb, as he becomes the "feminine" object to the "masculine" mastery of Hagen's rifle.

Lumb's death is the parabolic outcome of the patriarchal society lambasted in the text. Lumb's failure to escape the catastrophic consequences of his desire to turn the whole of the female population into his personal coven, results in him becoming the slave to the project of the patriarch Hagen - which is quite simply the annihilation of the cuckolding Lumb. The latter thus becomes literally the target of Hagen, who shoots him at precisely the point Lumb feels he has escaped from the pursuing men, enraged with the realization of Lumb's mass seduction. Their collective revenge Gifford and Roberts have linked to the fate of Pentheus in *The Bacchae*.<sup>16</sup> A suggestive parallel, it is necessary to stress that it is the *men* who destroy Lumb rather than, as in Euripides' play, the female Bacchantes, inspired by Dionysus, tearing apart Pentheus. (This reversal of roles is marked in that, in a Greek play, the Chorus follows on from the Prologue. In *Gaudete*, the first character encountered after the Prologue is not a Bacchant but Hagen.) Hughes' inversion of Euripides' use of gender foregrounds that this assertion of male authority is the inevitable result of the patriarchal error of the village.

Hagen's telescopic rifle links scopical desire to existential mastery, and in this sense he is not the contrary to the log-like Lumb; rather, he has managed to exert his own freedom at the expense of Lumb's. I thus find it impossible to fully concur with Edward Larrissy's reading of Lumb's destruction: "it is Hagen who

annihilates the hopefully Dionysian oak-version of Lumb, and the gun with which he does the deed is described in significantly sexual terms.... His relationship with his gun ... is a parody of the 'true marriage' in which Hughes now believes."<sup>7</sup> Hagen's love-affair with his rifle is indeed a parody of the "true marriage" of Lumb and the baboon woman, however, the oak-version of Lumb is by no means to be interpreted as "hopefully Dionysian": his actions in the village are simply the mirror-image of Hagen's, as is clear from the way in which Hagen's sights are "locked" to Lumb in much the same manner as Lumb's eyes "locked" to the "arched target centre" of the female goddess:

[Lumb] does not feel  
The pressure  
And ten magnifications  
Of Hagen's telescope, in which he jigs like a puppet....  
The crossed hairs have settled on Lumb's crown.  
And now the trigger  
Caresses in oil, and the kiss of sweetness jolts softly  
through Hagen's bones.  
(G, pp. 165, 167)

Hagen's telescopic sights provide him with a form of scopic power that can be translated into tangible mastery of the perceived object. What is perhaps surprising is that Hagen's "phallic" rifle is described in exclusively female terms:

The Mannlicher .318  
Regards Lumb's distant skull dutifully, with perfect tooled  
and adjusted concentration.  
Germanic precision, slender goddess  
Of Hagen's devotions  
And the unfailing bride  
Of his ecstasies in the primal paradise, and the midwife of  
Eden's breasts,  
Painlessly delivered, with a little blood,  
And laid at his feet....  
(G, p. 167)

However, this personification simply emphasizes the male mastery Hagen seeks to exert over an object world troped as a subjugated femininity. Therefore, the final image of Lumb - "splayed like a stunned frog" (G, p. 168) - quietly echoes a previous reference to

one of Lumb's female targets, Betty, whose splayed legs were "spread like a dead frog's" (G, p. 61). Lumb himself thus becomes a "feminine" object-to-be-looked-at, as the master/slave dialectic of the village swings to another's advantage.

What is at stake in a reading of *Gaudete* is the question whether this remarkable exploration of patriarchy in miniature is not severely qualified by the positive counterpart - the rebirth of Lumb from the baboon woman - to its negative critique. On a stylistic level, *Gaudete*, like *Crow*, limits Rabelaisian "degradation" by confining the text to a monologic voice; in Eagleton's reading, the text, however, "experimental" is ultimately "realist", the liberation or openness of form is subject to a tyrannical authorial control. That "control" finds a curious parallel in the actions of the scopophiliacs, who also seek their own variety of authority over the without-world of the other. The lambasted voyeurs thus strangely anticipate the reborn Lumb of the Epilogue, whose desire is also the *comprehension* of femininity, and the need to surmount his alienation from the object of desire: "Every day ... / Your comings get closer. / Your goings get worse" (G, p. 199). Unlike Larrissy, I will argue that there is an unconscious similarity between the scopophiliacs' desire to master the other and, as we shall see, Lumb's own desire to individuate his split being so as to be "like good man and good wife".

In the Prologue, the original Lumb's gaze is impotently directed at "the woman, tangled in the skins of wolves": "He protests there is nothing he can do / For this beautiful woman who seems to be alive and dead" (G, pp. 14, 15). This woman reappears in the central vision of the main narrative, where the baboon woman is, it seems, "healed" by the no longer "baffled doctor" (G, p. 75) in a shamanic act of dismemberment and rebirth, followed by a sense of expanded vision. It is this episode that seems to enact a closing of the divide between conscious and unconscious existence, where, in the words of "Myth and Education", "the full presence of

the inner world combines with and is reconciled to the full presence of the outer world". I have discussed this essay in some detail in chapter two. In the present context, it is useful to interpret the "reconciliation" of Lumb and the baboon woman as the symbolic expression of the prose work. The existential "hell" of the main narrative is corrected in Lumb's rebirth, as he overcomes the rending dualism of subject and object, outer and inner worlds. It is the male villagers' slavish dependence on the limitations of the objective imagination that has locked them to an existence riven with lack, which they vainly seek to fill by recourse to the scopoc mastery of various female *objet petit a*. This is the predicament of the "outer world" of the village, in which the duplicate Lumb fails to achieve any sort of success. Lumb's redemption, however, is to turn to the repressed "inner world", to the other of his consciousness, and to seek to combine the two into "one all inclusive system". This is, therefore, a repetition of the prose's inability to think through "redemption" on a collective or political plane. Hughes' texts can only conceive of a non-alienated subjectivity on a purely individual level, as a personal form of "revolutionary" change. This, as we shall see, is equally the case in *Cave Birds*, and I will conclude this chapter with some reflections on this emphasis on the self.

On one level, then, the crucial event of *Gaudete* can be glossed as a metaphorical account of Jung's concept of individuation, which is also a wholly private process, resulting in an integrated, visionary Self. Hughes follows Jung in troping this process in sexual terms: the violent metamorphosis of Lumb, as he is reborn from a female form he himself becomes, is close to the "chymical marriage" that Jung says is an appropriate image of individuation. For Jung, the Medieval and Renaissance "science" of alchemy "leads in the ultimate phase of the work to the union of opposites in the archetypal form of the *hieros gamos* or 'chymical marriage'. Here the supreme opposites, male and female (as in the Chinese Yang and Yin) are melted into a unity purified of all opposition and thus incorruptible."<sup>12</sup> An alchemical reading of this episode is a



common one, and it is valuable. Nevertheless, the text, on another level, describes this union of opposites in terms of a radical alteration in Lumb's perception, and thus asks to be read in contrast to the scopophilia of the village world and the duplicate Lumb's baffled response to the dead Felicity. At first, as Lumb gazes with astonishment at the surreal landscape of crushed and shattered human forms, "no explanation occurs to him / They are all there is to it."

But now he hears a sharp crying. He looks for it, as for a  
clue....

It is the head of a woman  
Who has been buried alive to the neck.  
(G, p. 102)

The woman's presence here - like the earlier reference to an enigmatic, disintegrating piece of "sodden paper" (G, p. 100), handed to Lumb by a denizen of the underworld - remains inexplicable, horrible and monstrous. Like Hagen observing his wife at the opening of the narrative, Lumb's gaze sees the woman as an object he cannot fully comprehend; he remains trapped within a limited mode of perception, one that has no real mastery over its object. Lumb's bafflement is made strikingly apparent in the way in which the woman's face refuses to stabilize in his sight:

The rain striking across the mud face washes it.  
It is a woman's face,  
A face as if sewn together from several faces.  
A baboon beauty face,  
A crudely stitched patchwork of faces.  
(G, p. 104)

This stupefied, patchwork vision is a covert criticism of the male gaze, the patriarchal form of objective perception. When individuated, Lumb's vision of the baboon woman will be one which will see this female face in a manner that totalizes the several faces into one. All the same, this new unity is presented as the desirable outcome of a fiercely violent struggle, one that faintly echoes the meeting of Bawdry and Sweet Undercut in "Bawdry Embraced":



fore, as Lumb is apparently born from the woman, as he feels his "bones give" and he "slides" and "fights" in "hot liquid". The second line, with its doubling of Lumb as he is delivered by and from himself, contains both senses: he bears and is born.

On another level, what is fascinating about the passage is that, although it centres on the process of Lumb and the woman becoming "one" through a string of references to brute physical force, the verb which comes to the fore at the close of the quotation is "to see". At this point, one may say that Lumb becomes the embodiment of the visionary imagination praised in "Myth and Education", as he lifts the repression that, Hughes claims, is the product of such myopic philosophical movements as Sartrean existentialism. Lumb manages to achieve an "inner vision" that confronts what has become (as in the case of St George) a demonic inner world, and in so doing brings it into a relationship with his conscious existence. Therefore, although the passage reads as a critique of the sterile gaze of the male voyeurs in the village, who are trapped in a mode of perception which is wholly reliant on the object world, it still concludes with a scopopic image: "He sees her face undeformed and perfect". The result of the "chymical marriage" is an ability to comprehend the previously baffling "crudely stitched patchwork of faces" of the baboon woman. The masculine subject/feminine object dualism, which the passage seeks to break down and bring into some sort of synthesis, reappears at the end as Lumb manages to achieve what the village scopophiliacs could not. That is, his redeemed vision allows Lumb to become master of the female target, just as he has authorized (partly by taking on female characteristics) his own identity, the fathering of himself, a desire denied the changeling.

In this manner, Hughes' critique of patriarchy becomes highly questionable, as the positive pole of the text re-employs the same image of scopopic mastery of a female object as was satirized in the escapades of Lumb and Hagen et al. *Gaudete*, like *Crow*, is a work that seeks to direct a piercing critique at the male-dominated

society that is the product of the suppression of Mother Nature; a suppression, according to Hughes, environmental, sexual and psychic. That it fails to deliver this critique is due to the fact that Hughes' model of femininity - as other, as object, as unconscious existence - is still a patriarchal construct. And it is a construct that reappears in Hughes' other major symbolic work of the 1970s, *Cave Birds*.

#### INTERLUDE. DEMONIC MODULATION IN *CAVE BIRDS*

*Cave Birds* is subtitled "An Alchemical Cave Drama", a pointer to the same shared "sources", of Plato's cave and the "chymical marriage", that are less explicitly present in *Gaudete*. Nonetheless, granted the usefulness of this subtitle, the volume's fascination with the obscure and its own oblique presentation tend to turn the best criticism of the book into commentary and paraphrase.

The plot describes a double-protagonist, who echoes Lumb, who realises the guilt of his own "maltreatment" of nature ("The scream"), is thus summoned by a spirit world of strange birds, is interrogated, dies ("In these fading moments I wanted to say"), embarks on a quest ("First, the doubtful charts of skin"), is annihilated ("The knight", "A flayed crow in the hall of judgement"), baptised, and thence tempted from the right path ("A green mother", "As I came, I saw a wood"), rejects his deluded "masculine" consciousness ("The scapegoat"), is guided, achieves an alchemical communion with the Woman (previously intimated in "The plaintiff", realised in "Bride and groom lie hidden for three days"), and rises, apotheosised, and individuated as "The risen".<sup>19</sup> On the level of crude paraphrase, the sequence thus narrates a marriage of opposites that, in Faas' words, is "a certitude guaranteed by reincarnation".<sup>20</sup> In this light, the nature of the participants, that is, birds, suggests that one may read the symbolic marriage as that denied Crow,<sup>21</sup> whilst the thematic resemblances to *Gaudete* could suggest that this is the

"complete" version of the original Lumb's underworld experiences, those only tentatively broached in *Gaudete's* enigmatic visionary passages.

The generally optimistic orientation of the sequence is, however, played off against the concluding gnomic fragment, "Finale": "At the end of the ritual / up comes a goblin" (CB, p. 62). This, on a far smaller scale, parallels the failure of the duplicate Lumb's mission in the village world of *Gaudete*, as well as recalling the transgressive, "goblin" quality of language lamented in certain prose writings. In fact, the two line poem is drawn from Hughes' 1970 interview with Faas, from the passage I quoted in chapter two concerning the difficulty poetic language, as "ragged dirty undated letters", faces in comprehending the essential nature repressed by Western civilization: "one poem never gets the whole account right. There is always something missed. At the end of the ritual up comes a goblin." As with the concluding lyrics to *Gaudete*, *Cave Birds* admits the difficulty that "fistula" language, constantly "eking and deferring", has in stepping outside the play of shadow and reflection that is the phenomenal world of Plato's cave.

In contrast to the "realist" narrative form of the central section of *Gaudete*, *Cave Birds* is an interconnected sequence of highly metaphorical lyrics. In this interlude, I will briefly examine the densely-packed tropic quality of the poems, and introduce a literary context for the extended metaphorical scenario of the trial of the male scapegoat and the alchemical unity or "marriage" of being that is the thematic core of the text.<sup>22</sup> In the following section, I will reread these tropes in relation to the problematical critique of patriarchy analysed in *Gaudete*.

A comment from Hughes' prose suggests a critical approach that helps to orientate the narrative along rhetorical as much as thematic lines. In "Myth and Education", Hughes writes:

If the story is learned well, so that all its parts can be seen at a glance, as if we looked through a window into it, then that story has become like the complicated hinterland of a single word. It has become a word. Any fragment of the story serves as the "word" by which the whole story's electrical circuit is switched into consciousness, and all its light and power brought to bear. As a rather extreme example, take the story of Christ. No matter what point of the story we touch the whole story hits us. If we mention the Nativity, or the miracle of the loaves and fishes, or Lazarus, or the Crucifixion, the voltage and inner brightness of the whole story is instantly there. A single word of reference is enough - just as you need to touch a power-line with only the tip of your finger.<sup>23</sup>

The quotation marks around the word "word" imply that it is, in fact, not a word at all, but a *symbol*. M. H. Abrams defines the symbol as "a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself." One of Abrams' examples is "the Cross", "a symbolic object ... of which the further significance is determinate within a particular culture."<sup>24</sup> Hughes makes this very point when, in the same essay, he goes on to write of the word "crucifixion" as simply a "meaningless hieroglyph ... unless the story behind the word ... [is] known."<sup>25</sup> The symbol, in this definition, is in itself a "hieroglyph" that signifies due to cultural accretions and maintains this signification through historical repetition. This is not dissimilar to Northrop Frye's idea of the "archetype", which (unlike Jung's interpretation of the archetype as an inherited "primordial image")<sup>26</sup> is a recurrent literary image:

The symbol ... is the communicable unit, to which I give the name archetype: that is, a typical or recurring image. I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience.<sup>27</sup>

Hughes' "word" is such a "typical or recurring image", one which inevitably implies its traditional "story". In some ways, it is remarkable that critics of Hughes have not taken advantage of his system in relation to *Cave Birds*. Firstly, the poem is a

veritable mine of Frye's "archetypes" and "universal symbols", and illustrates two forms of imagery Frye isolated, the "apocalyptic" and the "demonic". Secondly, Frye's definition of "myth" is, in many ways, relevant to an understanding of Hughes' highly-charged metaphorical style in the sequence. The former writes that,

In terms of narrative, myth is the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire.... The world of mythical imagery is ... apocalyptic,... a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body.<sup>28</sup>

The final image in this quotation is suggestive of the ambitious dramatic exercise, *Orghast*;<sup>29</sup> in relation to *Cave Birds*, the terms "metaphor" and "desire" have a particular relevance. For Frye, "realism is an art of implicit simile, myth is an art of implicit metaphorical identity"; myth is not "like what is known".<sup>30</sup> In this definition, *Cave Birds*, with its doubled protagonist, the cockerel-man, its bird-like summoners and plaintiffs of a vast, otherworldly trial, can only be "mythical" - it is indeed like nothing "known". Using Frye's terminology in relation to four poems, "The baptist", "Bride and groom lie hidden for three days", "The owl flower" and "The risen", clearly demonstrates the applicability of this definition of myth. The first example can be read as displaying the apocalyptic symbol of water: the "dissolution which follows ordinary death, or the reduction to the inorganic."<sup>31</sup> The protagonist has died and been dismembered ("The knight"), and is now to be purified prior to his alchemical marriage. Thus he both "dissolves" and carries future potential: he is "an iceberg of loss / ... / Or a seed in its armour" (CB, p. 36). The "marriage" of "Bride and groom" is a communion that can truly be said to be at the limits of desire, and may itself may be glossed as a "universal symbol", that is, "sexual fulfilment" at the end of an archetypal "quest"; it is "two bodies made into the same body by love."<sup>32</sup> As an alchemical union this would still be apocalyptic: Frye explicitly situates "the symbolism of alchemy" as apocalyptic symbolism that unites "the center of the spiritual

world, the soul of man ... to its circumference in God."<sup>33</sup> In "The owl flower" the archetype of fire, "the flickering face of flames" (CB, p. 58) appears as "The image of the burning bird ... the legendary phoenix", whilst the flower itself implies "the 'jewel in the lotus' of the Buddhist prayer".<sup>34</sup> This "world of total metaphor" where animal, human and divine worlds exchange positions reaches its apotheosis in the imaginary totality described in "Bride and groom". This potential plenitude, without lack, is posited as the *telos* of the protagonist's quest. As "The risen" he is a vast presence, "filling the doorway", binding alchemical transubstantiation (where "The dirt becomes God", or gold) to the "Creator's face". This is his "leafless apocalypse", where Christ-like he is "a cross, eaten by light" (CB, p. 60).

However, I have weighted the scales in this brief reading. Hughes is out to invert, in a Crow-like gesture, the Christian atonement. As Faas remarks: "the general scenario - an apocalyptic world of evolutionary collapse in which the protagonist is put on trial by an assembly of birds - recalls the heretical inversions of Judaeo-Christian cosmology in *Crow*."<sup>35</sup> The narrative of *Cave Birds* thus uses apocalyptic imagery in a non-Christian context, and the world of desire in *Cave Birds* is presented in what Frye would term "demonic imagery". This is, in Frye's words, "the world that desire totally rejects.... [R]emote, invisible gods ... demand sacrifices, punish presumption, and enforce obedience to natural and moral law as an end in itself."<sup>36</sup> Such demonism is paramount in the earlier poems of the sequence which are constructed around the notions of trial, punishment and self-sacrifice. In the opening poem, "The scream", those seemingly remote gods mock the presumption of the protagonist:

When I saw little rabbits with their heads crushed on  
roads  
I knew I rode the wheel of the galaxy ...  
Then I, too, opened my mouth to praise -  
But a silence wedged my gullet.



Like an obsidian dagger, dry, jag-edged,  
A silent lump of volcanic glass,

The scream  
Vomited itself.  
(CB, p. 7)

The obsidian dagger is an image that implies Aztec human sacrifice, which was made in order to make the sun rise.<sup>37</sup> The protagonist must purge the illusory self of "The scream", and sacrifice himself in order to rise like the sun of "The risen". This punishment is inaugurated in the demonic violence of "After the first fright", where the humanist rationality countered in "The scream" must submit to a seemingly irrational act of self-mutilation:

When I said: "Civilization,"  
He began to chop off his fingers and mourn.  
When I said: "Sanity and again Sanity and above all  
Sanity,"  
He disembowelled himself with a cross-shaped cut.  
(CB, p. 10)

This apparently undesirable alternative will be modulated in the course of the sequence to accommodate the archetype of the *sparagmos*, or, in Frye's words, "the tearing apart of the sacrificial body",<sup>38</sup> in "The knight", where dismemberment is seen in a redemptive light:

His sacrifice is perfect. He reserves nothing.  
  
Skylines tug him apart, winds drink him,  
Earth itself unravels him from beneath -  
  
His submission is flawless.  
(CB, p. 28)

In a manner reminiscent of certain poems in *Crow*, Christian atonement is thus inverted or undercut by the notion of shamanic dismemberment, whilst the Christian myth of the risen sun/Son is corrected by a violent metamorphosis similar to that recounted in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.<sup>39</sup> This is a movement that Frye calls "demonic modulation":

the deliberate reversal of the customary moral associations of archetypes.... Imagery traditionally demonic may be used for the starting-point of a movement of redemption.... Alchemical symbolism takes the ourobus and the hermaphrodite (*res bina*), as well as the traditional romantic dragon, in this redemptive context.<sup>40</sup>

The re-interpretation of the dragon is made by Hughes in his essays on education, "Crow's Account of St George", and the children's book, *The Iron Man*.<sup>41</sup> The alchemical symbolism of *Cave Birds* works in a similarly "redemptive context", the hermaphrodite signifying the individuated, "married" self of the bride and groom. The Christian mythology of "The risen" is thus demonically modulated from its original significance, and concludes a process dominated by the dismemberment of the *sparagmos*, as the protagonist submits to trial by the "natural law" of his repressed being.

An archetypal interpretation thus appears to be a particularly relevant one in the case of *Cave Birds*. What we have is a densely symbolic poem, centred on two principal tropes: that of a "chymical marriage" and an otherworldly, demonic trial. However, the second of these extended metaphors is, on closer inspection, rendered increasingly problematical. And it is made thus by Hughes' use of the same double-edged imagery of the male gaze that was central to *Gaudete*. Scopophilia, in *Cave Birds*, is however placed in a rather unusual context: in Plato's cave. The protagonist of the sequence needs to confront - to see - the reality that the phenomenal world of shadows merely intimates, he must step outside the cave so that, in the words of "The Risen",

He stands, filling the doorway  
In the shell of the earth....

On his lens  
Each atom engraves with a diamond  
(*CB*, p. 60)

The paradoxical reversal of the sequence is that this enlightened "lens" must be achieved through a rejection of the false mastery of the male gaze, the patriarchal form of objective perception. This rejection, imaged as the expulsion of a masculine scapegoat, is presented via a rewriting of the trial of Socrates.

## II. PLATO'S CAVE AND SOCRATES' GAZE

One postulated subtitle of *Cave Birds* was "The Death of Socrates and his Resurrection in Egypt".<sup>42</sup> Why Socrates? In a reading of "Tiger Psalm", collected in *Moortown*, Hughes labelled the tiger "Buddha" and the machine-guns "Socrates".

The tiger kills hungry. The machine-guns  
Talk, talk, talk across the Acropolis.  
The tiger  
Kills expertly, with anaesthetic hand.  
The machine-guns  
Carry on arguing in heaven  
Where numbers have no ears, where there is no blood....

The machine-guns  
Permit themselves a snigger. They eliminate the error  
With a to-fro dialectic  
And the point proved stop speaking.  
(*M*, pp. 150-151)

Socrates is the first Egg-head in history. His "masculinity" is the initial step in the suppression of Mother Nature, one that finds analogous expressions in St George, Christianity and scientific culture. Numbers, words, dialectic - in the Socratic sense of reasoned argument - are all contrasted with that enigmatic sense of a further, essential reality that is the "undersong" to speech and mathematics. This is what lies beyond, in the words of "Theology", the Logos of "God's querulous calling" (*W*, p. 149). Graham Bradshaw interprets the importance of the "death" of Socrates to *Cave Birds* as due to the latter's "patriarchal correction" of the worship of the Mother Goddess; one which was "compounded by the fatal convergence of Socratic and

Christian attempts to isolate dualistic, abstract conceptual principles of Good and Evil."<sup>43</sup> In the poem, "Actaeon", which Gifford and Roberts claim Hughes was at one time meaning to include in *Cave Birds*, and which originally bore the subtitle "based on the death of Socrates",<sup>44</sup> the Socratic Actaeon's "abstraction" is, as in *Gaudete*, a form of impotent, male voyeurism:

He looked at her but he could not see her face.  
He could see her hair of course, it was a sort of  
furniture.  
Like his own. He had paid for it.  
He could see the useful gadgets of her hands. Which  
produced food naturally....

You can get used to anything.  
But he could not see her face.

He did not understand the great danger....  
And just went on staring at her  
As he was torn to pieces.  
Those hounds tore him to pieces.  
All the leaves and petals of his body were utterly  
scattered.

(*M*, p. 122)

This male's scopophilia is close to Lumb's initial inability to contain the baboon woman's face within his gaze: he can "not see her face". His mastery of what he believes to be "his own" is a fallacy, and he will be forced to pay for that which he thinks he has already "paid for". The weakness of objective perception is that it is unable to glimpse the "inner world" of human nature - it remains fixated with individual phenomena. Actaeon's gaze, like St George's, is thus only capable of seeing dislocated elements, such as hair and hands, but these exist as a disordered patchwork. As was the case for Lumb, the failure to identify or "fix" a female face becomes an image of patriarchal vision's inability to comprehend the unconscious life it represses: this is the inner world that, in the words of "Myth and Education", has become "elemental, chaotic, continually more primitive and beyond our control".<sup>45</sup> It is this "sick" unconscious that the Socratic cockerel-man of *Cave Birds* has to "cure" through a genuine

comprehension of his natural being. In "Something was happening", for instance, the protagonist remains blind to the suffering his feminine nature is undergoing:

Her body was trying to sit up, her face unrecognizable  
As she tried to tell  
How it went on getting worse and worse  
Till she sank back.

And when I saw new emerald tufting the quince, in April  
And cried in dismay: "Here it comes again!"  
The leather of my shoes  
Continued to gleam  
The silence of the furniture  
Registered nothing

The earth, right to its far rims, ignored me.  
(*CB*, p. 30)

The "unrecognizable" face of the woman again recalls the patchwork face of the buried baboon woman in *Gaudete*. The speaker's failure, in the present poem, betrays a comparable sense of alienation from nature - the earth, even to the limits of his gaze, resisting his sight. Like Lumb, the protagonist of *Cave Birds*, needs to undergo a *sparagmos*, an Actaeon-like rending apart in order to, in "Bride and groom", find a "perfection" (*CB*, p. 56) comparable to the reborn Lumb's vision of the baboon woman's face as "undeformed and perfect". The necessarily violent destruction of egg-headedness that occurs is close, not only to that present in Lumb's encounter with the baboon woman, but also to that recounted in the Epilogue lyrics: "The one I hunt / The one / I shall rend to pieces / ... / Is under my coat" (*G*, p. 185). In *Cave Birds*, Socrates must be tried, punished and die, in a move that transforms the historical Socrates into a signifier: that which denotes all that must be ousted in order to regain a complete sense of being. This cockerel-man, as in Aristophanes' different portrayal of him in *The Frogs*, thus becomes a type of scapegoat or *pharmakos*. The scapegoat, in Frye's terms, is:

a typical or random victim ... neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes.... He is guilty

in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society....  
The two facts do not come together; they remain ironically  
apart.<sup>46</sup>

Sagar makes this very point with regard to *Cave Birds* when he comments: "The protagonist is an innocent ('that is', says Hughes, 'a guilty one'), an everyman. He has certain features in common with Socrates, whom Hughes holds responsible for the disastrous course of Western civilization, the committer of the original sin.... [H]e is also an ordinary man ... no more guilty than any of us."<sup>47</sup> Hughes' poem, "The scapegoat", describes Socratic guilt in sexual terms, as a form of overweening masculinity. The male scapegoat is a personification of the patriarchal error of the "civilization" the protagonist had clung to in "After the first fright", and it is precisely this that must be erased or expelled in order to attain the individuated being of "The risen". That the limited edition of *Cave Birds* collected this poem under the title "The Culprit",<sup>48</sup> emphasizes the naive culpability of such a "guilty one":

The beautiful thing beckoned, big-haunched he loped,  
Swagged with wealth, full-organed he tottered ...

The flag of the crotch, his glistenings tapered to  
Furled and unfurled, in chill draughts of sun. touch,

The comedian  
Of the leap out of the body and back in again

Let out a mandrake shriek  
In a jabber of unborn spirits, a huddle of oracles.

The joker  
That the confederate pack has to defer to

Gambled and lost the whole body -  
An I. O. U. signed by posterity, a smear on the light.  
(*CB*, p. 46)

The lost gamble is a harsh metonymic reduction of the error of Western civilization as denounced in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*; this is the "I. O. U." that Socrates,

according to Hughes, bequeaths to "posterity". As an everyman, the scapegoat is simply that culpable aspect of every egg-head; that which needs to be dismembered as a *sparagmos* and excluded as an undesirable *pharmakos* to regain an identification with natural being and a subsequent sense of "the whole body". As Stuart Hirschberg writes: "the ritual dismemberment of Scapegoats as diverse as Dionysos, Osiris, Attis and the king of the wood are necessary before individual or collective self-renewal can take place."<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, as in *Gaudete*, it is noteworthy that the redemption narrated in *Cave Birds* is *not* collective: the sequence is a late variant on the Romantic quest-romance of an *individual* psyche for personal apocalypse. Society, like history, is explicitly absent from *Cave Birds*: Socrates serves as a symbol for what Hughes calls the "evolutionary error" of Western civilization, but this is a latent rather than manifest meaning in the text: the "presence" of Socrates having been effaced from the trade edition.

At the beginning of *Cave Birds*, prior to any such "self-renewal", the persona of "The scream" is deluded by the scapegoat's "smear on the light", unable as yet to free himself from the world of images that is Plato's cave: "There was the sun on my wall - my childhood's / Nursery picture". Socrates in the cave sees only illusions on the wall, the reflection rather than the reality. The sun's enlightenment, the liberation from the ephemeral delusion of illusions, will become more and more central as the sequence progresses, until, in "The risen", the protagonist is shown as having left the cave, "filling the doorway / In the shell of earth". In "The summoner" the protagonist starts "to recognize the identity / of [his] protector", the latter none other than those dimensions of Self that the existential "I" of "The scream" had sought to ignore: he is now summoned to a "drama" within the cave that is thus the trial of Socrates by his own "inner" being.

The metaphorical trial thus introduced, the text turns to the figure of "The interrogator":

Small hope now for the stare-boned mule of man  
Lumped on the badlands, at his concrete shadow.

This bird is the sun's key-hole.  
The sun spies through her. Through her

He ransacks the camouflage of hunger....

With her prehensile goad of interrogation  
Her eye on the probe

Her olfactory x-ray  
She ruffles the light that chills the startled eyeball.

After, a dripping bagful of evidence  
Under her humped robe,

She sweeps back, a spread-fingered Efreet,  
Into the courts of the after-life.  
(CB, p. 12)

In one respect, the poem is a reworking of the existential look of the other, as the male becomes the object of a withering female gaze, turning him into an object-to-be-looked-at, one who must realise the shameful existence he is living, and the violence he is inflicting on his "feminine" inner being. The existential freedom of "The scream" - "I knew I rode the wheel of the galaxy" - is shown to be an empty idealism, whilst the objective perception of "Something was happening" becomes an admonished "startled eyeball".

Similarly, the bird may be interpreted as the messenger of the "sun" that was merely a reflected image in "The scream", and this, coupled to the title of Baskin's illustration that accompanies the poem, "A Vulturess",<sup>50</sup> allows a reading of the poem as an account of a man caught beneath a desert sun, whose corpse is eventually dismembered by the vulture. As Gifford and Roberts remark: "Unless one recognizes Baskin's interrogator as a vulture, for example, it is impossible to understand the sustained metaphor of the poem."<sup>51</sup> The poem thus declares itself to be a metaphorical account of the protagonist undergoing shamanic dismemberment as a *sparagmos*, the bird being an image of the summoned's shamanic



*flight*. This would grant an extended or "sustained" metaphorical reading of the poem: an identity of literal and figurative meanings in the proper meaning of death and dismemberment. Within this larger metaphorical structure are several individual images, the most striking example being: "This bird is the sun's key-hole. / The sun spies through her." The literal meaning of the figure of the "key-hole" is, of course, a dark slot, an aperture for a key, whilst the figural meaning connotes the silhouetted bird. On one level, then, the bird against the sun's face is the tenor of the metaphor, however, on another, the bird, in order to take its place within the extended metaphor of the poem, must be the vehicle of a larger metaphor - that of the shamanic flight, one "back ... / Into the courts of the after-life". These "courts" and the title of the poem, "The interrogator", that is the bird, being themselves metaphors extending into the realms of the symbolic trial of the culpability of the Socratic everyman.

The metaphor signalled out concentrates the imagery of light and shadow, that predominates in the poem as a whole, within an image centred on sight. The "mule of man" is "lumped" at his "concrete shadow", whilst the vulturess, with "her eye on the probe", stares down at him, the sun in turn burning down "through" the bird's "probe" at the man. The enlightenment of the sun - which the protagonist assumes in "The risen" - is, as yet, in "shadow", and, importantly, it is *his* shadow. He remains trapped within the cave. However, as Graham Bradshaw notes there is a discrepancy between the literal and figural meanings of the image:

The powerful evocation of a black bird seen against blinding light is immediately complicated by the dizzying, paradoxical reversal of the light/dark opposition, in the suggestion that the sun spies (and can be spied) through the black spot, the keyhole in the sky. This is metaphysical in a way that might have delighted Donne, since sun-spots are the result of a particularly intense concentration of energy (so, light).<sup>52</sup>

The image of the "sun's keyhole" is so startling, so persuasive, that the reader is initially dazzled by its rightness, and yet,

any attempt to be aware of its construction is to inevitably undo it. Bradshaw retotalizes the image as "metaphysical", a term which occludes or ignores the necessity for such rhetorical subterfuge. To Bradshaw's, one can add another reading of this figure. The proper meaning, or ground, of the metaphor would seem to be that the shape of the bird resembles a dark key-hole shape on the sun's orb. But the vehicular key-hole, that figuratively translates the sun into a door, must resist this movement, because the sun must spy "*through*" the bird, in which case we would read, say, the surrounding sky as the door. As that black image on the sun, the bird is, in fact, that which partially obstructs the sun's rays, but the figure demands we read it otherwise. The metaphor is the poem's blind-spot, as the bird is the sun's: its confused proper meaning shows a certain impropriety with regard to the suggestions of spied-out culpability.

The significance of this complexity is not immediately apparent, yet the dislocation in this metaphor can be seen to expand its connotations throughout the metaphorical scenario of the trial. And it does so in a convoluted manner. "The judge", in fact, *explicitly* questions the cockerel-man's "guilt" by overturning the central figure of the extended image of the symbolic trial, that is, the judge himself; and does so by making an implicit critique of the mastery of the male gaze.

The pondering body of the law teeters across  
A web-glistening geometry ...

The garbage-sack of everything that is not  
The Absolute onto whose throne he lowers his buttocks.

Clowning, half-imbecile,  
A Nero of the unalterable.

His gluttony  
Is a strange one - his leavings are guilt and sentence.

Hung with precedents as with obsolete armour  
His banqueting court is as airy as any idea.  
(CB, p. 16)

What began as a rhetorical paradox in "The interrogator" starts to increase in consequence here. Let us see what is at stake. The peering sun, that authority which looking through the vulturess-interrogator spies out the Socratic guilt, will reappear in "The knight" as that which - once "The accused" "confesses his body" (CB, p. 24), acknowledging his natural being in contrast to clinging solely to conscious existence - "strengthens its revelation" (CB, p. 28). The protagonist's revelation will be that enlightenment he previously saw only an intimation of in "The scream"; illusion will be *seen for what it is*, an image on the cave wall. Beneath the sun, outside the cave, he will be stripped bare, at-oned with the sun, and will rise, Son-like in "The risen".

However, the sun cannot be an omnipotent Logos or Divine Father, because Hughes must "modulate" his apocalyptic imagery in order to question the patriarchal Christian solar myth. Thus, in "The judge" the notion of an "Absolute" personification of "natural law", even at the cost of confusing the whole metaphor of the trial, must be rendered *blind* to the protagonist's redemption, much like the bumbling God of *Crow*. That is, the dubiousness of the "key-hole" figure's proper meaning (all-seeing eye / shut door) is echoed in the necessity of the (natural) law having no omnipotent judge, no overseeing ethical conception such as the Christian God. There is, in fact, no final authority to spy out the protagonist's "guilt", no divinity to "sentence" him. This recalls Hughes' overt criticism of the male gaze in *Gaudete* and "Actaeon" because, in one sense, an omnipotent Absolute is the ultimate voyeur, seeking to oversee the whole material universe. The summoned in *Cave Birds*, although under judgement, will have no final judge to account to. It is this "irony" that Gifford and Roberts condense in the rhetorical question, "who is to sit in judgement and what can the concept of judgement mean in the material universe?"<sup>53</sup> The arrogance of the "masculine" consciousness assuming itself to be at the all-seeing, all-comprehending centre of the universe is the misconception made by

the protagonist in "The scream": the "wheel of the galaxy" has no centre, no "absolute ... throne". In images that recall the foolish scapegoat, the judge is "clowning, half-imbecile, / A Nero of the unalterable". His stupidity is the fallacy of any conception of a divine Authority - the joke is that the judge believes he exists. Thus, in an image that recalls the "Puritan abstraction" in the "Note" on Shakespeare, "his banqueting court is as airy as any idea." The abstract "idea" is sundered from the "reality" of a material universe because in the latter there is no *primum mobile*. The play of the poem is to describe the devoid idea in sensible or sensory terms, as a "strange" "gluttony". In a Crow-like degradation, the lofty idea is, inversely, attributed gargantuan baseness.

Hughes' text thus starts to deconstruct one of its central tropes, as the upshot of that extended metaphor is to imply an ultimate, scopio judge. Socrates' trial is therefore a metaphor which has no real identity with that which it figuratively designates: the protagonist's ultimate, although qualified, reappropriation of and atonement with his inner nature.

Unlike *Gaudete*, which repeated the condemned scopophilia in the perfect comprehension of the baboon woman achieved by Lumb, *Cave Birds* introduces the trope of alchemical individuation not in terms of a perfect mastery of the object of the gaze, but through the necessary annihilation of the subject's sight. The "chymical marriage" of "Bride and groom" is preceded by several poems that link blindness to a process that seeks to bridge that division between subjectivity and the repressed inner world. Recalling Lumb's drowsiness before the carved figure of the archaic goddess, "In these fading moments I wanted to say", begins the destruction of the Egg-head. From this, the narrative turns to the erasure of the mastering gaze, as "The executioner, "with his hemlock", "comes in under the blind filled-up heaven":

He fills up the mirror, he fills up the cup  
He fills up your thoughts to the brims of your eyes

You just see he is filling the eyes of your friends  
And now lifting your hand you touch at your eyes

Which he has completely filled up  
You touch him

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

It feels like the world  
Before your eyes ever opened  
(CB, p. 22)

Blindness is here a productive moment, as Socratic consciousness takes hemlock and embraces that which, in chapter two, I termed the satiety of the void. This complete dissolution of subjectivity results in an "existence" that is not far removed from Nirvana, as the subject loses all sense of alienation and desire in a moment that Gifford and Roberts term "non-being"<sup>54</sup>. However, such nothingness is simply the prelude to a sense of being that knows no lack. In this manner, the image of the "mirror" filled-up with darkness is suggestive of a return to an existence that precedes Lacan's famous Mirror Stage; to a state that is devoid of alienation and lack, one that "feels like the world / Before your eyes ever opened". This extraordinary image seeks to convey a sense of a foetal-like plenitude that is simply the obverse side of annihilation, where the notions of subject and object, self and other, find no expression. It is thus analogous to the equally oxymoronic condition described in "A flayed crow in the hall of judgement":

Darkness has all come together, making an egg.  
Darkness in which there is now nothing....

Nothingness came close and breathed on me - a frost  
A shawl of annihilation has curled me up like a new  
foetus.

(CB, p. 34)

Darkness and nothing present the obverse of enlightenment and complete being, much as the dismemberment of "The knight" is simply the prelude to the integrated Self of "The risen". As in

*Gaudete*, this Self concludes a process which has as its final stage the rebirth of a "new foetus". This links to the notion of alchemical unity because, according to Jung, that arcane process of transubstantiation also expresses, in symbolic form, the notion of a plenitudinous Self that equally knows no lack and consequently no desire. The crippling alienation that the desiring scopophilic experiences is thus transformed into a complete appropriation of the other and a subsequent destruction of egg-headed selfhood. Hughes' language becomes increasingly hyperbolic as he seeks to present this moment. In "His legs ran about", the image of the mirror once again appears in a context closely bound to the "chymical marriage":

His arms lifted things, groped in dark rooms, at last  
with their hands

Caught her arms  
And lay down enwoven at last at last ...

His navel fitted over her navel as closely as possible  
Like a mirror face down flat on a mirror  
(*CB*, p. 52)

The entangled male and female achieve a sexual bond that is a metaphor for a communion that marks the cessation of desire. The extravagant image of the "mirror face down flat on a mirror" expresses a complete closure of the psychic division that is the predicament of Socrates at the opening of the sequence. If a reflection can be said to imply the alienation of the subject in a specular image, the effacement of the act of reflection - a mirror face down on a mirror reflects nothing - can be interpreted as the absolute ef-face-ment of those two "faces" of the divided subject: his conscious existence and his repressed unconscious being. Again, Hughes resorts to an anti-scopic image to foreground this closure: the cockerel-man "got what it needed, and grew still, and closed its eyes".

Nevertheless, this critique of Socrates' gaze is, as in *Gaudete*, merely the prelude to an all-encompassing sight. This is the

perception of the newly-integrated or individuated Self, that has achieved an enlightened vision. Thus, the "chymical wedding" described in "Bride and groom" opens with a respiration of the male's sight by the now comprehended female figure:

She gives him his eyes, she found them  
Among some rubble, among some beetles ...

They keep taking each other to the sun,  
they find they can easily ...

So, gasping with joy, with cries of wonderment  
Like two gods of mud  
Sprawling in the dirt, but with infinite care

They bring each other to perfection.  
(*CB*, p. 56)

The result of this mixed marriage is a "perfection" that allows the protagonist to confront the "sun" outside Plato's cave, to perceive the "reality" his Socratic egg-headedness repressed. The reciprocal interchange of male and female in the text appears less open to the criticism I have directed at Lumb's ability to master the baboon woman within his sights; however this "bisexual" being is a metaphor for an individuated male Self, the dominating all-seeing "he" of "The risen". The mastering "lens" of that poem is the product of the ability of the cockerel-man to have stepped outside Plato's cave, so that, in the words of "The owl flower", he "blinks at the source" (*CB*, p. 58).

Both *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds* are critiques of scopophilia - as a metaphor for "patriarchal error" - that make recourse to scopic imagery in their positive marriages. This is symptomatic of Hughes' culpability within sexist thought. The projected being at the close of both volumes is a male who has mastered femininity; he is, like the redeemed character of Hughes' related sequence, *Prometheus On His Crag*, "a gleaming man" (*M*, p. 92). That this is a desire that is transgressed by the "goblin" who comes up at the close of *Cave Birds*, is an admission that the plenitudinous Self remains merely a male dream. "The risen" also admits this in the

announcement made in its concluding couplet: "But when will he land / On a *man's* wrist". The text suddenly exposes its tropes as a series of "ragged undated letters" and the Socratic cockerel as a wish-fulfilling consolation.

If the sexual politics of these two texts are ultimately highly suspect, their respective resolutions are equally problematic on a more "purely" political level. They suggest no notion of the collective renewal of civilization suggested, in "The Environmental Revolution", as the aim of conservation. Hughes' poetry shirks the communal transformation of the "exile" that is, in the same review, said to be the history of the West. It is at this point that the applicability of Frye's work to Hughes' becomes even more striking. The "leafless apocalypse" of both the reborn Lumb and the cockerel-man is extremely close to Frye's Blakean notion of apocalyptic redemption:

By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate. "The desire of man being infinite," said Blake, "the possession is infinite and himself infinite."<sup>55</sup>

Such desire is that narrated in Hughes' major quest-romances of the 70s, where Blake's Son of Eternity finds a counterpart in Hughes' various gleaming men. However, this quest for the individuated Self is, in fact, a retreat from the socio-political problems announced in the contemporary prose works. Fredric Jameson's chastening words on Frye's vision of an organic society is equally pertinent when applied to Hughes' work of this period:

[The] very concept of apocalypse as the end of history and the culminating struggle of the collectivity is here curiously redirected, by the image of Blakean absolute "man" and transfigured body projected out upon the universe.... [The] image of the cosmic body cannot stand for anything further, for anything other than itself. Its figural and political momentum is broken, and the collective content of the image has been reprivatized in the henceforth purely individual terms of the isolated body and the merely personal ecstasy.<sup>56</sup>



The "goblin", who undercuts the whole ritual of the "personal ecstasy" of Hughes' version of Blakean absolute man, is an admission that such apocalyptic change is a desire that cannot be satisfied within the present social formation. From this impasse, where the ecstatic fiction comes crashing down about his head, Hughes' poetry will subsequently turn to a less hyperbolic solution. It will be seen to be another retreat from collectivity, if made by another route.

CHAPTER 7. FROM CIRCLE TO TANGENT: *FIELD WORK* AND *STATION ISLAND*

I. A HAVEN FROM HISTORY: *FIELD WORK*

If Hughes' symbolic quest-romances may be said to marginalize collectivity in favour of the libidinal revolution of the purely personal ecstasy, Heaney's poetry after *North* may also be read as a "flight" from social and historical dimensions. However, unlike Hughes, the return of history is explicitly registered in Heaney's texts as a force impinging upon and limiting personal freedom and poetic *jouissance*. *Field Work* opens with a poem which analyses the pressure felt to be exerted by history, and attempts to circumnavigate this pressure by outlining a stance made in opposition to much of Heaney's earlier poetry.

"Oysters" is most rewardingly read in conjunction with "Freedman", from *North*. Both poems draw on Roman imperialism to represent subjugation in general, whilst, related to this shared structure, both texts centre on the difficult issue of the position poetry should take vis-à-vis ideological and political oppression; an issue, as we saw in chapter three, at the heart of Heaney's more recent prose writings. In "Oysters", the poet declares his anger at the oppressor and his sympathy for the politically "violated":

Over the Alps, packed deep in hay and snow,  
The Romans hauled their oysters south to Rome:  
I saw damp panniers disgorge  
The frond-lipped, brine-stung  
Glut of privilege

And was angry that my trust could not repose  
In the clear light, like poetry or freedom  
Leaning in from the sea. I ate the day  
Deliberately, that its tang  
Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb.  
(*FW*, p. 11)

As an opening poem, "Oysters" also bears comparison with the first two texts in *North*. In "Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication", the domesticity of "Sunlight", coupled to the simplicity of a pastoralism absent from the volume as a whole in "The Seed Cutters", is set aside from the central binary opposition of the volume. In "Oysters", the desirable refuge described in those poems is directly measured up against the world of colonial imperialism, the world of "gelignite and sten" (*N*, p. 57). Domestic, private bliss, the "toasting friendship", is circumscribed by a violence that is felt to be public, historical and brutal. But this notion of a public, political realm "out there" is, in fact, an ideological expression of autonomous selfhood. "Freedman" may well be a less accomplished poem than "Oysters", but it is far more aware that the public/private division is a complex interchange rather than a straightforward opposition. In the earlier poem, the poet's tongue is perceived as an appropriation of a ruling discourse by an expropriated people: identity, both personal and poetic, is constructed out of the collision of colonizer and colonized.

In *North* as a whole, the complex sexual conceit describes both a mythologized matriarchal past and, more powerfully, the sexual analogy between male aggression/violated femininity and colonizer/colonized. In "Oysters", the position is less subtle and consequently more problematic. The problem lies in Heaney's ambitious simile, his desire that "trust" might "repose / In the clear light, like poetry or freedom / Leaning in from the sea." The identification made between the "violated ... bivalves" and the consequences of imperialist expansion may suggest that the poetic calling itself derives from a wish to articulate the predicament of the subjugated. The freedom that leans in from the sea would thus be a hoped-for public freedom; the "tang" that "might quicken me all into verb, pure verb" would thus be, as "Linen Town" terms it, "the tang of possibility" (*WO*, p. 38). This is the poetic concretely expressed in Part II of *North*: the poet as witness.

However, the "tang" poetry offers may well be interpreted as the Neo-Platonic, "promissory" realm of individual freedom Heaney declares literature intimates in "The Government of the Tongue". In this sense, the freedom can be seen as an escape *from* socio-political factors, a retreat into a wish-fulfilling realm of poetic play and delight. The latter reading is that stressed by Blake Morrison, who comments:

[Heaney] aspires to a poetry of "clear light", untrammelled by the darkness and opacity of the past. To eat the day is to give oneself up to the present; being "verb, pure verb", liberated from names and nouns and qualifiers, becomes an image of artistic independence.... In this opening poem Heaney announces his determination to be determined by history no longer: his mind darting freely wherever it will, he will be leant on only by the poetic imagination.<sup>1</sup>

To my mind, this foregrounds one meaning at the expense of another that *does* qualify the qualifier "pure". Neil Corcoran is surely closer to the truth when he notes that the "free play of the imagination" is "desired" but "cannot be attained by mere effort of will".<sup>2</sup> The "clear light" is a dream of poetry cleared of external public demands, untrammelled by ideological and political influences. In Heaney's early poetry, however, such "freeplay" is always ultimately determined by these factors; it is the desire to break with such insistent determinants that characterizes the dilemma present in *Field Work*, one which finds itself projected onto two female figures in the "Triptych" that follows "Oysters".

I see a stone house by a pier.  
Elbow room. Broad window light.  
The heart lifts. You walk twenty yards  
To the boats and buy mackerel.

And to-day a girl walks in home to us  
Carrying a basket full of new potatoes  
Three tight green cabbages, and carrots,  
With the tops and mould still fresh on them.  
(*FW*, p. 12)

Coming at the bottom of the first panel of the triptych, "After a Killing", these lines foreground the wished-for freedom from a

troubled public sphere that is postulated in "Oysters". It is a freedom picked out in a port scene where a delicately suggestive clear light is seen leaning in from the sea, and where the "ahistorical" vignette of the arriving girl bearing country produce becomes a personification of a space cleared of historical and political violence. Against this naturalistic girl is set the mythological sibyl of the poem's third section. Taking a backward look to the framework of *North*, this female is the Bog Queen of Ireland, her voice now filled with despair:

"The ground we kept our ear to for so long  
Is flayed or calloused, and its entrails  
Tented by an impious augury.  
Our island is full of comfortless noises."  
(*FW*, p. 13)

That the sibyl should twist a phrase from *The Tempest* is appropriate, as both Shakespeare's and Heaney's texts have the shared concern of colonization and its effects.<sup>3</sup> However, if the Jacobean play articulates an emergent imperial power's optimism, Heaney's poem speaks of the woe that is in such an unequal marriage as John Bull and Kathleen Ní Houlihan. In many ways, "Sibyl" asks to be read as a critique of the archetypal and "mythological" female who structures the basic imaginary parallel (Jutland/Ireland) in Part I of *North*. That consolatory "ground", referred to in the final stanza, no longer suffices, a fact signalled by the failure of the sibyl to fully answer the poet's question. The dominant female figures of *Field Work* tend to empty-out the symbolism of the earlier sexual conceits; they are closer to the woman of "After a Killing" - seemingly "literal", rather than archetypal. That said, they too are tropes: femininity in *Field Work* comes to signify a new ground, one that seeks to occlude the encroachments of history.

In the final panel of the triptych, "At the Water's Edge", Heaney's continues this revaluation of the mythical framework of *North*:

On Boa the god-eyed, sex-mouthed stone  
Socketed between graves, two-faced, trepanned,  
Answered my silence with silence.  
A stoup for rain water. Anathema.  
(*FW*, p. 14)

Here the mythical holds no succour for the embattled individual: its answers are vacuous, silent. It is arguable that the final one word sentence, "anathema", implies Heaney's desire to distance himself from the questionable maternal tradition, or "feminine ethos", that he tentatively embraced in *North* and implicitly invokes in "Sibyl". In "At the Water's Edge", the first two stanzas appear to hollow out the mythical construct (the "mysticism for tourists", as Tony Curtis neatly puts it)<sup>4</sup> that Heaney had created out of his "imaginative parallels" between past and present in *North*. This, in turn, is linked to the fact that the poetic "augury" or significance those parallels created is that which the sibyl now declares is "an impious augury". That is, those earlier phonological and sexual conceits that Heaney had "read into" place-names, the bog and the bog people, are beginning to be deconstructed, revealed as simply "fictions". Nevertheless, as the poem makes clear, the space opened up by the removal of Heaney's parallels is hardly one of untrammelled freedom: the historical referent to "At the Water's Edge" is the Bloody Sunday of 1972, where the British military shot thirteen unarmed civil rights protesters. That event, and the march at Newry made a week later, are here stripped of the consoling myths of *North*, and thus leave the speaker's wish to "bow down, to offer up, / To go barefoot, foetal and penitential" a fruitless expression of his earlier fidelity and piety to motherland. If myth no longer provides an ordering mediation of history in *Field Work*, then alongside the various dismantlings of earlier frames of reference, must come an alternative source of consolation than that of the sibyl.

I will turn to the nature of this new "ground" in my discussion of the "Glanmore Sonnets". For the moment, several more examples of

Heaney turning round on his earlier poetry require documentation. In "The Guttural Muse", Heaney implicitly engages with his figure of the sibyl. As a noun "guttural" denotes the sound pronounced in the throat or at the back of the tongue; as such, the title recalls the speaker's questioning of the muse in "Sibyl", where the poet's "tongue moved, a swung relaxing hinge". In the present poem, however, the muse is an ironic appellation for "a girl in a white dress / ... being courted among the cars" (FW, p. 28). The girl is closer to the young woman of "After a Killing" than to the mythological female of "Sibyl", yet, in this instance, she provides no sense of uplifting freedom from historical violence:

I felt like some old pike all badged with sores  
Wanting to swim in touch with soft-mouthed life.

It is pertinent that this image echoes the diseased fish of "Augury" in *Wintering Out*. The banality of the earlier lyric is lifted by its title, which implies that the dying fish is the sign for a larger illness, one that, considering the overall thematic concerns of *Wintering Out*, seems to be a national sickness similar to that expressed in "Sibyl". In "The Guttural Muse", it is, in contrast, the poet who is "badged with sores". On one level, The isolation of the poet, "at [his] window over the hotel car park", poignantly suggests his alienation from the apparently contented youthfulness of the girl and her friends. On another level, the poet's thwarted desire to make contact with such contentment becomes the vehicle for an equally poignant reply to the augury of *North*, through which Heaney had sought to provide some sort of diagnosis of what "Sibyl" calls the "flayed or calloused" ground of contemporary Ireland. Here, Heaney becomes merely a sign of the times, rather than the time's augur. The slender lyric thus provides an indirect meditation on the history it can no longer find a rhetorical "conceit" for, within which violence may be comprehended on an archetypal, ineluctable level. In Fredric Jameson's words, "History is [here] what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis".<sup>5</sup> History is the "absent cause" of all

literature: its explicit absence in "The Guttural Muse" is a ruse, for it is the hurting that is history that generates the ahistorical and apolitical wish-fulfilment projected onto the crowd leaving the discotheque. In both *Field Work* and *Station Island*, history becomes a kind of Other: pressing in on and limiting the autonomy of the self, leading Heaney, in the latter collection, to embrace the simplistic aesthetic of Joyce's Stephen, fleeing from the "nets" of history, religion and politics, into a utopian realm of imaginative freedom.

In "The Badgers", the questionable augury of *North* is further decentred. The speaker may well claim that "visitations are taken for signs" (*FW*, p. 25), but his reading is couched in the uncertainty of Eliot's Gerontion.<sup>6</sup> The cold comfort of *North* is undermined by the way in which the observer of the badgers refuses to turn them into portentous signs. Unlike the metaphorical "reading" of the bog corpses in the bog poems, Heaney's response to the dead animals stresses their bald actuality:

the bogey of fern country  
broke cover in me  
for what he is:  
pig family  
and not at all what he's painted.

There is a shadowy criticism of the "painting" - the artistry - of *North* in these lines. As Neil Corcoran has pointed out, the references to painting and framing are central to the conceits of the previous volume.<sup>7</sup> *Field Work* remains sceptical of the confines of the frame, that which separates in order to allow for a constructed response. For instance, "The Skunk", like the badger, refuses to fully assume symbolic meaning:

And there she was, the intent and glamorous,  
Ordinary, mysterious skunk,  
Mythologized, demythologized,  
Snuffing the boards five feet beyond me.



It all came back to me last night, stirred  
By the sootfall of your things at bedtime,  
Your head-down, tail-up hunt in a bottom drawer  
For the black plunge-line nightdress.  
(*FW*, p. 48)

The skunk hovers on the edge of becoming "mysterious" and "mythologized", yet never quite assumes such proportions. Instead, the tendency to demythologize wins out, and the animal becomes simply the humorous counterpart to or figure for the wife's hunt for her nightdress. This is a measure of the manner in which *Field Work* is a subtle, and often witty, reply to the extravagant conceits, the constructed mythology, of *North*.

"At the Water's Edge" also introduces, somewhat obliquely, the issue of elegy. This is a genre central to *Field Work*. Heaney himself will create, in the words of the first stanza of "At the Water's Edge", "the keeper's recital of elegies / Under the tower." The section of poems before the "Glanmore Sonnets" is dominated by elegies, of which the most rewarding is arguably "Casualty". In the first part of this poem, the subject of the elegy, the fisherman, is distinct from the poet: "incomprehensible / To him, my other life" (*FW*, p. 21). The progress of the poem is one that will attempt to align these two distinct figures in a gesture that, as in all elegy, will recuperate strength for the living from the dead. But this is also a poem that is "under the tower" in another sense: under the influence of Yeats and his poem "The Fisherman"; as Morrison comments, both poems mark "the same kind of turning away from populist ambitions".<sup>6</sup> However, the "agon", as Harold Bloom terms it, between Heaney and his "precursor proper, the middle Yeats"<sup>7</sup> is more complex than Morrison's reductive reading would suggest. The echo of Yeats is intentional, as both subject matter and metre make clear. Yeats' desire that

"Before I am old  
I shall have written him one  
Poem maybe as cold  
And passionate as the dawn"<sup>10</sup>

is an address made to "a man who does not exist, / A man who is but a dream". Yeats turns in "scorn of [his] audience" to what is an early version of the anti-self: the constructed mask that provides the tropic complement to the artistic self. In Heaney's poem (which also concludes with an emblematic dawn) his fisherman is, in contrast, a "real" one, Louis O'Neill. As in "At the Water's Edge", Bloody Sunday provides one historical referent to the text, as O'Neill was an unfortunate, and unintentional, casualty of the IRA's reprisal for that lamentable episode. Thus, unlike the desirable movement away from a social "context" in "The Fisherman", "Casualty" appears to narrate the manner in which history provides the only Real against which art can define itself: "But my tentative art / His turned back watches too: He was blown to bits ..." (FW, p. 22). "Casualty" is another poem stripped of the consoling paradigms of *North*, yet it is a poem which seems to provide a similar sort of redemptive "admonishment" as that recorded in "A Drink of Water", where the mundane, domestic act of an old woman drawing and setting water "out on the table", leads the speaker to declare:

... I have dipped to drink again, to be  
Faithful to the admonishment on her cup,  
*Remember the Giver* fading off the lip.  
(FW, p. 16)

The poem teeters on the brink of gaucheness - such is the risk of this kind of Wordsworthian bathos. But it is precisely the shift from the hyperbolic sexual conceits of *North* to the bathetic "literalism" of a poem like "A Drink of Water" that is an index of Heaney's distrust of his previous "imaginative parallels". Those parallels I read as a variety of what Fredric Jameson calls a "symbolic act": an aesthetic resolution to what is an "unthinkable" socio-political aporia. Heaney's "flattened" approach in *Field Work* is one partly made against those earlier poetic "solutions", as the "old bat" of "A Drink of Water" provides a sort of ironic commentary on the figures of the Bog

Queen, Nerthus, and the sibyl of "Triptych". For M. P. Hederman, the sonnet, all the same, posits no resolution of its own:

[It] spells out the failure of the poet to provide "A Drink of Water" and ... the rest of the important poems in this collection are more or less explanations and apologies for this failure.... The clear impression we get is that the "she" of Heaney's earlier poetry has grown old, that her visitations to him have ceased and that he, as poet, is haunted by a certain lack of faithfulness to her as the source of that water which used to broadcast its secrets through him, the diviner.

And so we leave the world of Antaeus and re-enter the world of Hercules.<sup>11</sup>

This is, perhaps, more than the poem can bear, nevertheless, Hederman is right to note the turn made against the "she" of *North*, and the subsequent reaction against the "grounding" poetic play of Antaeus. But Hederman short-circuits the poem, and the volume, when he claims that this can be simply translated into the terms of Heaney's earlier allegorical figures, and that Heaney simply shifts to the pole of Herculean "assertion", the poem of "social truth". We have seen that the binary oppositions of Antaeus/Hercules, feminine/masculine in *North* comprise, in fact, a kind of chiasmic structure, and that this, regardless of Heaney's intent, is the true "political unconscious" of his work: the text functions as a type of palimpsest, where the manifest bipartite structure of the volume only partly conceals the far more complex latent record of the divisions and contradictions of Northern Ireland.

"A Drink of Water" is the necessary prelude to all the elegies, including "Casualty": paring away any "false" recourse to the imaginative resolution of a quasi-mythical framework, intimating the confrontation of what "The Grauballe Man" terms the "actual weight / of each ... victim" without the mediation of that framework's aesthetic "beauty". In this light, the description of the funeral in the second section of the elegy can be read as a

critique of the "filial" bond Heaney made with the "goddess" at the close of "Kinship":

The common funeral  
Unrolled its swaddling band,  
Lapping, tightening  
Till we were braced and bound  
Like brothers in a ring.

As Corcoran has pointed out, there is something constricting about this image - something almost "infantile".<sup>12</sup> This is a pointer to Heaney's mistrust in *Field Work* of a simple reduction of history to the tradition of the nationalist community. The importance of this revisionary position is that, in writing of history free from the sexual conceits of the bog poems, Heaney is foregrounding the desire of "Oysters" to "repose / In the clear light"; to reject certain wholly unpalatable aspects of recent Irish history for what is a desirable ahistorical utopia similar to that glimpsed in "The Guttural Muse".

That repose is the ground Heaney now wishes to set against the maternal ground or feminine ethos of *North*. In "Casualty" this place of clear light is introduced through imagery of water. The verb "lapping", in the above quotation, looks forward to section III's reference to the funeral cortège as "*shoaling* out of his lane" (*FW*, p. 23; italics mine). This is reminiscent of the "tribal shoals" of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing", that the poet sought to bring to "epigram and order". But the real connection drawn between poet and fisherman is that they are estranged from such shoals:

But he would not be held  
At home by his own crowd  
Whatever threats were phoned,  
Whatever black flags waved....

How culpable was he  
That last night when he broke  
Our tribe's complicity?

The desire to break free from the constraining circle of nationalism and the collectivity of the "tribe's complicity" is the concern of the poem's final section. There, the poet is seen as another fisherman, one who can declare: "I tasted freedom with him." This palpable relish of an abstract state takes the reader back to the central metaphor of "Oysters", where poetry and freedom leaned in from the sea. The sea becomes a metaphor for a "ground" that is the contrary to that of the nation or land. The poet's "proper haunt" is now "somewhere, well out, beyond..." (FW, p. 24) those "swaddling band[s]". In this manner, the poem seeks to sidestep the naked confrontation with history with which it began, and thus, intriguingly, makes a subtle shift toward the Romantic individualism of Yeats' text. History simply becomes unbearable to the demythologizing poetic of *Field Work*.

In the "Glanmore Sonnets", Heaney examines the nature of the "haunt" glimpsed at the end of "Casualty", exchanging the figure of the fisherman for that of the ploughman. On a related level, to counterbalance the theme of elegy and loss he introduces the second dominant motif of the collection, that of wedded love. The ploughman and the fisherman are poetic figures distinct from the poet as digger, opening doors into the "clear light" praised in "Oysters" rather than the dark depths of the bog. This is made explicit in the first sonnet:

Now the good life could be to cross a field  
And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe  
Of ploughs.  
(FW, p. 33)

The plough replaces the emblematic spade, whilst the linear furrow becomes an image of the iambic pentameter, which supersedes the "narrow drill" of the quatrain-poem in *Worth*. Sonnet II draws an overt comparison between the poet's craft and that of the ploughman: "Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground, / Each verse returning like the plough turned round" (FW, p. 34). To the

linear is bound the circular - the line of verse is wedded to the plough's furrow, a line that returns, that turns round. The full rhyme links the two lines with a consonance that is matched syntactically in the smooth transition from the first to the second line of the couplet and semantically by the parallelism of the thought expressed. The couplet turns round and it holds round: "a movement that beautifully enacts its theme", as Jon Stallworthy puts it.<sup>13</sup> The sonnet's reference to the importance of the "hedge school of Glanmore" is summarized in the tripartite harmony of these two lines: it is a stable ground to the poet, a place of secure repose. This is the ahistorical and apolitical ground that Heaney opposes to the disturbed national ground of "Sibyl". Glanmore thus signifies a place that, unlike those meditated on in the place-name poems, transcends the specificity of national/regional locales.

Edward Said has argued that anti-imperialist literature, including Irish literature, is distinguished by "the primacy of the geographical in it":

Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of his/her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored.<sup>14</sup>

Certain poems in *North*, including "Act of Union" and "Ocean's Love to Ireland", are expressly concerned with the "geographical violence" present in English imperialism, whilst the place-name poems from *Wintering Out* could equally be read as the attempt to restore a sense of "geographical identity". The "Glanmore Sonnets", however, appear to mark a rejection of this aspect of anti-imperialist literature. There is no need to restore Glanmore to the self: it is abundantly *there*. All the same, the historical connotations of the "hedge school" refer, however quietly, to a darker undercurrent to these sonnets, one that surfaces in the

fearful tone of sonnets VIII and IX. History remains the subtext to the sonnets, rupturing through their overt desire to marginalize the record of a colonial past and its residue in the contemporary moment. This, in turn, emphasizes the merely desirable nature of the "good life" described in I. In this light, the second sonnet can be read as quietly qualifying its own harmonious resolution:

... Then I landed in the hedge-school of Glanmore  
And from the backs of ditches hoped to raise  
A voice caught back off slug-horn and slow chanter  
That *might* continue, hold, dispel, appease ...  
(italics mine)

The tentative nature of that "might" is matched in the first sonnet by the qualification that the "good life *could* be to cross a field". As in *The Government of the Tongue*, the freedom poetry announces is only promissory, an ideal rather than a reality. But it is the curious citation of Chatterton's "slug-horn" that is intriguing in this context. The term - made famous by Browning's *Childe Roland* - is falsely archaic, an erroneous use of etymology. The root is the Irish *sluaghghairm*, an Irish warcry, the modern word "slogan" deriving from this source. The word serves two functions for Heaney. Firstly, it brings the poet past the more recent Irish "hedge schools" to the ancient Irish "subsoil of each sense" (sonnet I). The word thus continues to remind the poet of the tradition of violent solidarity that fascinated him in *North*. Secondly, however, it orientates these sonnets toward the English poetic tradition, due to the word's appearance in Chatterton and Browning. Such orientation is central to the sequence: later sonnets refer to Wordsworth and Thomas Wyatt explicitly, whilst the sonnet form itself links these poems to an alternative tradition - in Corcoran's words, "the otherness of the English iambic line".<sup>15</sup> This doubleness of reference in a single word is a subtle indication of the duplex quality of the volume as a whole, as Irish history remains latent beneath the purely literary tradition that the sonnets gesture towards in their form.

The third sonnet ties this struggle with history to the preoccupation with marriage, and inscribes this issue within Heaney's distinctive use of gender terminology:

I had said earlier, "I won't relapse  
From this strange loneliness I've brought us to.  
Dorothy and William -" She interrupts:  
"You're not going to compare us two ...?"  
Outside a rustling and twig-combing breeze  
Refreshes and relents. Is cadences.  
(*FW*, p. 35)

The retirement to the country is, it seems, to be read as analogous to that of the Wordsworths. But the male does not actually make the comparison; it is the woman who suggests he might be about to and, apparently, doubts its applicability. Why should he not be allowed to make the comparison? Is it audacious or inaccurate? The audacity would lie in the Wordsworths' canonized status, the inappropriateness would be due to Seamus and Marie Heaney being a married couple, whilst William and Dorothy were, of course, brother and sister. This is not mere quibbling. In Sonnet III, the validity of the implicit analogy is undercut; the dialogue doesn't progress, it <sup>e</sup>shews debate; the two voices do not find any ground of agreement. This is "crepuscular" (as the octave describes the "twilight"), if we take care to read that word as not merely a synonym for "dusky" but one that cites its roots in the Latin word for "obscure". The contorted rhythm, the awkward syntax implicitly question - like the woman - the semantic, syntactic and consonantic harmony of the close of Sonnet II, particularly in the linguistic deviance at the close of the final couplet of Sonnet III: "Is cadences". The punctuation foregrounds the verb in this grammatically incomplete sentence. Are we to elide the full stop - to read the cadences as those of the breeze; or, with a Hughesian liberty, do we grant the verb the status of a noun and the noun, "cadences", a verbal function? Either way the grammatical disharmony of this closing "clause", echoed in the Muldoon-like rhyme "breeze"/"cadences", finds itself



pitted against the rise and fall - the refreshing and relenting cadence - of the closing couplet of Sonnet II. The harmonious stability of that poem's conclusion is rendered doubtful by Sonnet III, with its intimations of marital discord and duplicitous linguistic closure. This sonnet's riven surface is hence the formal expression of a shuttling movement between the wish to locate the "freedom" of "Oysters" and the constant return of a partially repressed sense of society, politics and history. The retreat to Glanmore fails to surmount or occlude the "comfortless noises" of Ireland. Glanmore should signify what the speaker of Sonnet VIII declares "out loud":

"A haven,"  
The word deepening, clearing, like the sky  
Elsewhere on Minches, Cromarty, The Faroes.  
(*FW*, p. 39)

The "haven" is the sanctuary where, in the words of Sonnet V, the poet can be an "etymologist of roots and graftings", that is, in what is an almost dilettantish manner, a poet governed solely by the authority of his own tongue. In VII, this is thus the poet who can playfully trope the symbolic sea of the close of "Casualty" as an "eel-road, seal-road, keel-road, whale-road". Those Northern compounds may well seem to refer back to the poet of *North*, with his dark obsession with "philology and kennings" (*N*, p. 29).<sup>16</sup> However, the present kennings do not lead to a sense of verbal archaeology, where linguistics seek to reinforce the "imaginative parallel" between past and present "Norths" by plumbing the diachronic history of words. Instead, they are a variety of linguistic "field-work", an exploration of the synchronic "surface" of language, a playful "grafting" of word to word. It is this same relish of the sensible properties of language that leads into another list of nouns: the names of the ships driven into the haven the speaker finds himself in: "*L'Etoile, Le Guillemot, La Belle Hélène* / Nursed their bright names this morning in the bay". The French names imply a romance tradition that is an alternative to the Northern one examined in

previous volumes. That these names are also qualified by "light" is a subtle pointer to the "clear light" of "Oysters", where a desire for linguistic delight likewise leant in from the sea.

However, such bliss exists only by the exclusion of the hurts of history. These puncture the haven in Sonnet VIII, where the sight of "a magpie with jerky steps", leads to thoughts of "dew on armour and carrion", and thence to the question: "Do you remember that pension in *Les Landes* / Where the old one rocked and rocked and rocked / A mongol in her lap, to little songs?" (FW, p. 40). The "poetry or freedom" of "Oysters" is rendered as futile as the "little songs" of this old woman. Her pathetic songs are reduced to bathos when juxtaposed with the mongol child, whilst the "Glanmore Sonnets" find their poetic haven drained of its consolations as the rural object of a bird leads the poet to considerations of cultural violence. Sonnet IX continues this process by juxtaposing the pastoral retreat with a violence that, it seems, exists *within* its confines:

We have our burnished bay tree at the gate,  
Classical, hung with the reek of silage  
From the next farm, tart-leafed as inwit.  
Blood on a pitch-fork, blood on chaff and hay,  
Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing -  
What is my apology for poetry?  
The empty briar is swishing  
When I come down, and beyond, your face  
Haunts like a new moon glimpsed through tangled glass.  
(FW, p. 41)

The classical bay tree is undercut by the "inwit", or inward knowledge, that is as banal as "silage". The inwit is that latent acknowledgement that the haven's ground is itself a "fiction", a retreat from the Real of History. And thus, the plea, "what is my apology for poetry?", finds no answer: the haven makes no apology, it is as intangible as the elusive female face, distorted by the windowpane.

Heaney is caught between the horns of a dilemma: if *Field Work* charts a kind of mild refutation of his earlier sexual conceits, the ground of "poetry or freedom" he replaces those constructs with, for which Glanmore becomes the symbolic locus, finds itself exploded as as "fictional" as the mythical scaffolding of *North*. Sonnet X culminates the short sonnet-sequence by foregrounding the empty consolations of a haven from history:

I dreamt we slept in a moss in Donegal  
On turf banks under blankets, with our faces  
Exposed all night in a wetting drizzle,  
Pallid as the dripping sapling birches.  
Lorenzo and Jessica in a cold climate.  
Diarmuid and Grainne waiting to be found.  
Darkly asperged and censured, we were laid out  
Like breathing effigies on a raised ground.  
And in that dream I dreamt - how like you this? -  
Our first night years ago in that hotel  
When you came with your deliberate kiss  
To raise us towards the lovely and painful  
Covenants of flesh; our separateness;  
The respite in our dewy dreaming faces.  
(*FW*, p. 42)

Carlanda Green sees this sonnet as a positive culmination:

Once he faces the grim reality of life and passes the ceremonial test of strength and maturity, he is ready for renewal with the moon-faced woman who lies down by his side in a dream reunion of ritualistic love. Thus, the cycle of life is renewed, and peace and hope are once again evident in the "dewy dreaming faces" of the couple.<sup>17</sup>

This is a reading that fails to take account of the more disturbing elements in the final sonnet, elements that continue to raise the spectre of doubt that runs through the sequence as a whole. Green's emphasis on the supposed "peace and hope" of this poem is severely qualified once we note that the man and the woman of the earlier sonnets are here being compared to Lorenzo and Jessica, Diarmuid and Grainne. These are lovers who, as Morrison points out, "fled their homes in order to be together, living in constant danger of discovery and death."<sup>18</sup> If the Wordsworths returned to the Lakes to find some sort of tranquility and

communion, these couples find themselves driven out of their homes, into the wilderness. Figures of displacement usurp those of domesticity, thus confirming the woman of Sonnet III in doubting the applicability of attributing a Wordsworthian status to the couple's relationship. But there is a third instance of intertextuality in this sonnet, aside from Shakespeare and Irish myth. The echo of Thomas Wyatt's "They flee from me" at the opening of the sestet, throws cold water on those seemingly harmonious "covenants of flesh". Like Heaney's sonnet, Wyatt's poem is also concerned with dream, with past and present, and with sexual love. After lamenting that those who loved him are now "besely seking with a continuell chaunge", Wyatt's speaker declares:

Thancked be fortune, it hath ben othrewise  
Twenty tymes better; but ons in speciall  
In thyn arraye after a pleasaunt gyse  
When her lose gowne from her shoulders did fall,  
And she me caught in her armes long and small;  
Therewithall swetely did my kisse,  
And softly said "dere hert, how like you this?"

It was no dreme: I lay brode waking.  
But all is torded thorough my gentilnes  
Into a straunge fasshion of forsaking;  
And I have leve to goo of her goodness,  
And she also to vse new fangilnes.  
But syns that I so kyndley ame serued,  
I would fain knowe what she hath deserued.<sup>19</sup>

Wyatt looks to the past to find compensation for his present suffering, searching for a moment of stability to counter the fickle world of the present court. Yet what he recounts is simply another deception. Wyatt's persona, in the second stanza quoted, is forced to acknowledge that his brief erotic affair is as fragile as the woman's "thyn arraye". Consequently, the "brode waking" is as much a figure for the prosaic dissatisfactions that follow his dream-like amour as it is a statement of fact. Why should Heaney cite this troubled narrative of sexual guile and fickle fortune? In Heaney's sonnet, the male lover also recalls a "deliberate kiss" and a moment of intense privacy. However, as

was the case for Wyatt's lovers, such "covenants of flesh" are merely - in Heaney's telling word - a "respite" from the encroachments of the public world - whether it is Wyatt's court, or the socio-political machinations described in *The Merchant of Venice*, or even the tribal society of the legend of Diarmuid and Grainne. All three intertexts help to bring out the emptiness of the more overt desire present in the sonnet, as they turn the speaker's "dream" into a hollow wish-fulfilment.

The fragility of Heaney's haven is the concern of the series of sensuous and sensual poems concerning domestic love which follow the "Glanmore Sonnets". "High Summer", "The Otter" and "The Skunk" all describe events that happen to the poet outside Ireland, and, aside from the second, concern writing itself. Marriage becomes the trope through which Heaney explores the notion of a self-validating form of poetry, one free from the demands of Irish heritage as outlined in *North*. Throughout these poems, however, the family-circle finds itself broken into. In "The Otter", for example, the generally buoyant tone, as the poet watches with pleasure the swimming woman, is strangely undercut by the following assertion:

I sat dry-throated on the warm stones.  
You were beyond me.  
The mellowed clarities, the grape-deep air  
Thinned and disappointed.  
(*FW*, p. 47)

The disappointment remains inexplicit, but the sense that the idyllic moment is partly drained of self-sufficiency, that there is a lack inherent in these "mellowed clarities", infuses the text.

Similarly, "The Skunk", records a remembrance that is infused with a sense of, in the words of Sonnet X, "our separateness". On one level, this is simply the absence of the speaker's wife as he writes alone in California:

After eleven years I was composing  
Love-letters again, broaching the word "wife"  
Like a stored cask, as if its slender vowel  
Had mutated into the night earth and air

Of California. The beautiful, useless  
Tang of eucalyptus spelt your absence.  
The aftermath of a mouthful of wine  
Was like inhaling you off a cold pillow.

As in "The Otter", domesticity is seen as a private haven, the centrality of which is caught in Heaney's intriguing image of the "slender vowel" of "the word 'wife'". As we saw in chapter one, the vowel in Heaney's work is a signifier for both femininity and Ireland. In the present poem, however, the broached vowel finds its Irish connotations poured away, leaving simply the notion of femininity, now recast as a literal woman. The poem thus acts as a demythologizing of the conceit of a vocalic Mother Ireland, and thus, by extension, pinpoints the ahistorical locus that the volume as a whole strives towards, but which remains as double-edged as the "beautiful, useless / Tang of eucalyptus".

In "High Summer", the three themes of domesticity, writing and history are brought together. The family holiday in the *pays basque*, like the Tuscany of "The Otter", is a situation in which, surely, history no longer hurts or disappoints individual desire. The rural barn seems to provide "an ideal place to write", yet, as a pastoral refuge, this ideal is a disappointment, a fact underlined by the description of the flies that have hatched from the bait the poet had bought to fish with:

On the last day, when I was clearing up,  
on a warm ledge I found a bag of maggots  
and opened it. A black  
and throbbing swarm came riddling out  
like newsreel of a police force run amok,  
sunspotting flies in gauzy meaty flight,  
the barristers and black berets of light.  
(*FW*, pp. 45-46.)

Public violence enters the poem via a simile ("like newsreel ...): the repression of history which, in "The Otter" makes its presence felt in the vaguest of manners, is here still marginal, but it is intrusive. Throughout the volume historical bloodshed makes its presence felt in this manner, as much as in the more palpable manner of poems like "Casualty". If, like the skunk, the poems seek to "demythologize" the earlier sexual conceits, to acknowledge history in the less mediated attitude of that elegy, they no less make the attempt to keep history at bay. In this light, "Homecomings" is instructive. The poem ends with the following extraordinary statements:

Mould my shoulders inward to you.  
Occlude me.  
Be damp clay pouting.  
Let me listen under your eaves.  
(*FW*, p. 49)

This is vaguely erotic, but the desire expressed is more simply one for security, for home, for a ground such as "the worn mouth of the hole" where the sandmartin "kissed home" in the poem's second stanza. As in "Oracle", with its "lobe and larynx / of the mossy places" (*WD*, p. 28), the mouth and ear dominate "Homecomings". To kiss home and to listen under eaves are both a wish to be occluded, shut in, to be "inward" like the child in the hollow willow tree. However, "occlude" also implies exclusion, a sense which foregrounds the imperatives, verbs which express desires rather than achievements: "Fetch me...", "Mould my...", "Occlude me...", "Be damp clay...", "Let me listen...". The haven of this poem finds itself deferred, opening out as a possibility but never attaining the condition of, in the words of Sonnet VII, the "marvellous and actual".

In a reading of Heaney I have had cause to mention above, Richard Kearney has linked this double process of occlusion, of homecoming/alienation, to the later Heidegger's meditations on "the poet's search for Being as a dialectical passage towards 'home' through the 'unhomely' (that is, our experience of the alien

strangeness of death)."<sup>20</sup> In the case of the poem "Homecomings", this framework leads Kearney to make the following judgement:

Heaney would seem to be affirming the experience of home as a *positive* goal. He mediates upon the "homing" manoeuvrings of a sandmartin as it circles back to its nest.... The poet sees this instinctual, almost atavistic, homecoming of the sandmartin as an analogy for his own aspiration to return to an originating womb of earth where he may regain a sense of prenatal silence, unity and belonging.... But we must not forget that Heaney's first collection of poems is entitled *Death of a Naturalist*. All of Heaney's writing is informed by an awareness that the poet as a resourceful dweller in language has replaced the naturalist as an innocent dweller in nature.... [He] is someone who is, at best, hankering after something that he knows full well is irretrievably *lost*. Homecoming thus becomes a dialectical search for some forfeited or forbidden presence in and through the awareness of its *absence*.<sup>21</sup>

This powerful interpretation is marred by certain elementary errors regarding the contents of Heaney's collections. The above passage relies strongly upon Kearney wrongly attributing "Homecomings" to *North*. In that volume Kearney quite rightly notes a desire for "unity and belonging" to that which, I have argued above, is basically a nationalist-cum-Republicanist concept of motherland, rather than an existential search for Being. The Heideggerian notion of the ultimate absence of the dwelling place may well be seen as central to the nostalgic excavation into history of that volume - but only when it is reinterpreted in terms of colonial history, and the nationalist desire for some sort of essential if elusive "spirit of the nation".

However, "Homecomings" is, of course, printed in *Field Work*, a collection that revolves around a quest for home or ground that is *not* the "linguistic search for historical identity"<sup>22</sup> as was the case in *North*. The home in "Homecomings" is the ground opened in the "Glanmore Sonnets": a ground that is beginning to bear the watermarks of Heaney's reflections in *The Government of the Tongue*. This is the autonomous poetic identity which seeks to sidestep the thorny issues of cultural and national identity. The



sonnets are a testament to the difficulty of this search, as historical violence flickers around the edges and even within the self-governed poetic haven. It is at this point that Kearney's thesis can be deployed in modulated form, for this haven is desirable precisely because it is also absent. Like the first five stanzas of "The Skunk", "Homecomings" is structured around the absence of the desired object; the erotic wordplay spells, finally, lack rather than plenitude. Taking this short poem as indicative of *Field Work* as a whole, the volume may be read as a fraught rejection of the national "home" of *North*. The governing of the tongue by history, and mythical interpretations of history, gives way to the self-governing tongue, the "pure verb[s]" of "Homecomings". Tropically, this is indicated by a replacement of the images of Nerthus and the bog by those of the field and the various demythologized female figures. What must be insisted upon, however, is the fact that both the ground of the bog and the field are "fictitious" constructs: *North* posits a dubious imaginative parallel between two highly distinct epochs, whilst *Field Work*, in turning on this construct, erects a questionable haven from history.

## II. AT A TANGENT: *STATION ISLAND*

With *Station Island* Heaney continues to explore, in his words, "the ... tension ... between two often contradictory commands: to be faithful to the collective historical experience and to be true to the recognitions of the emerging self."<sup>23</sup> What had, however, been a largely fruitless tension in *Field Work* is, in *Station Island*, rearticulated as a "positive" poetic, although we will come to see that it is one as problematical as the wish-fulfilment of a poem such as "Homecomings". Alan Robinson, in drawing attention to the above quotation from "Dante and the Modern Poet", rightly sees this stance as one that "inescapably recalls that of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus."<sup>24</sup> It is thus no surprise that in the collection Heaney both implicitly and explicitly draws the reader's attention to Joyce's novels. In this respect, the fine

lyric, "A Bat on the Road", is exemplary. Robinson's reading of this poem centres on the epigraph - from *A Portrait of the Artist* - and provides a critical interpretation that is pertinent to the volume as a whole. The epigraph is as follows: "A batlike soul waking to consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness". Robinson comments:

For Stephen this "bat-like soul" is a "type" of Ireland, "a woman without guile, calling the stranger to her bed". It suggests an allegory of Ireland as the ingenuous victim, yielding uncomplainingly to her colonial oppressor.... Stephen's anger ... is the impotence of the would-be national artist feeling that he will never succeed in hitting the "conscience" of the race and reshaping their imaginations to something more noble. The flitting bats that elude Stephen's pursuit, like Heaney's in this poem, represent the "thoughts and desires of the race" that the Irish artist must seek to capture. Joyce was conscious of his inability to reach this peasant consciousness; through the pagan sensibility of Sweeney (whose bird-like flights double with those of the hunted bat) Heaney hopes to come closer to the authentic spirit of the place, conjured in the delicate lyricism of this poem's sound patterning.<sup>25</sup>

This is an astute and suggestive reading. Where I question Robinson is in his failure to see that Joyce's Stephen, in fact, provides Heaney with a figure who resists the desire to hit "the 'conscience' of the race". Joyce's Stephen, with his highly ambivalent attitude towards nationalism, provides Heaney with a new angle from which to re-examine the haven of *Field Work*. Similarly, the significance of the adoption of the mask of the legendary bird-king Sweeney, in the final section of *Station Island*, lies in Sweeney's distance from any essentialist and nationalist belief in an "authentic spirit of ... place".

Again, then, Irish history and politics stand as the ultimate referents to the poetry, yet, unlike *Field Work*, Heaney uses the medium of another Irish writer to refract these referents, to provide a new context in which to reread the sexual conceits of *North*. In this light, one can pursue further the intertextual

relationship the present poem has with Joyce's novel. In the sixth stanza Heaney again quotes from the *Portrait*:

You would hoist an old hat on the tines of a fork  
and trawl the mouth of the bridge for the slight  
bat-thump and flutter. Skinny downy webs,

babynails clawing the sweatband ... But don't  
bring it down, don't break its flight again,  
don't deny it; this time let it go free....

What are you after? You keep swerving off,  
flying blind over ashpits and netting wire;  
invited by the brush of a word like *peignoir*,

rustles and glimpses, shot silk, the stealth of floods  
*So close to me I could hear her breathing ...*  
(*SI*, p. 40)

In Joyce's novel the italicized phrase occurs in the same passage as that from which Heaney has drawn his epigraph. The young nationalist Davin has stopped to request a glass of water as he walks over the Ballyhoura hills. A pregnant woman asks him to stay as her husband is away. Davin reports the incident to Stephen in the following words:

... And all the time she was talking, Stevie, she had her eyes fixed on my face and she stood so close to me I could hear her breathing.... I didn't go in, Stevie. I thanked her and went on my way again, all in a fever. At the first bend of the road I looked back and she was standing at the door.

The last words of Davin's story sang in [Stephen's] memory and the figure of the woman in the story stood forth, reflected in other figures of the peasant women whom he had seen standing in the doorways at Clare as the college cars drove by, as a type of her race and his own, a batlike soul waking to consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness and, through the eyes and voice and gesture of a woman without guile, calling the stranger to her bed.<sup>26</sup>

The batlike woman is a leitmotif in the *Portrait*:<sup>27</sup> she is an image of Ireland, "a type of her race and his own". Heaney's poem, in citing Davin's words, asks to be read as a reply to Heaney's own version in *North* of what Robinson terms Joyce's

gender-based "allegory of Ireland". Like Davin, Heaney, in the earlier volume, had been drawn to and virtually "seduced" by the rhetoric of motherland. In "A Bat on the Road", the notion of a national spirit is shown to be as elusive as a bat in flight, one that in constantly "swerving off" refuses to be located and pinned down. The wish to capture the "feminine" bat in the first stanza thus acts as a reflection on Davin-Heaney's nationalist desires, which are, in turn, superseded by the pleas to relinquish this aim: "this time let it go free".

This is at one with the rejection of the construct of the sibyl in *Field Work*. Coupled to such a "demythologized" approach is the presence of Joyce who, in section XII of "Station Island", reappraises the desire for what "Oysters" terms "poetry or freedom / Leaning in from the sea". Joyce acts as a familiar ghost, giving instruction. He is first seen walking "straight as a rush / upon his ashplant", yet the advice he gives is to seek a poetic direction that is more circumlocutory than forthright:

"...You lose more of yourself than you redeem  
doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.  
When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim

out on your own ..."  
(*SI*, pp. 93-94)

To walk straight and yet to swerve free is expressed in the tangential movement Joyce recommends to the poet-protagonist. This is to be marginal, "out on your own", a desire that takes us back to the close of "Casualty" both in the imagery of water and in thematic urgency. In the elegy, the circle signified the artistic constrictions of political affiliations: "braced and bound / Like brothers in a ring". Joyce recommends that the writer should strike the "circle" of nationalism at a tangent, the artist asserting his autonomy from collective concerns. This idea picks up on issues raised in the lyrics which comprise the first part of *Station Island*. In "Away from it All", for instance, a dinner scene highly reminiscent of "Oysters" provides

the setting for a discussion of the impasse of *Field Work*. Like that volume, the poem concentrates on the opposition between the public, historical world and the private haven:

... quotations start to rise

like rehearsed alibis:  
*I was stretched between contemplation  
of a motionless point  
and the command to participate  
actively in history.*  
(SI, p. 17)

The quotation from Czeslaw Milosz provides a formulation for a distinction between the "contemplation" of a transcendent ahistorical "motionless point" and a more concrete or active participation in historical process, which echoes the "tension" Heaney alludes to in "Dante and the Modern Poet": that between "collective historical experience" and the "emerging self". That this distinction is an "alibi", however, suggests that this opposition, crucial to the speaker of "Oysters", is an evasion, that it is, in fact, false. It is in this light that one needs to read the poem's following stanza:

"*Actively?* What do you mean?"  
The light at the rim of the sea  
is rendered down to a fine  
graduation, somewhere between  
balance and inanition.

The question engages with Stephen's refusal to participate in the commitment of Davin. Through its allusion to the latter's encounter with the peasant woman, "A Bat on the Road" rendered the nationalist's action problematical: what meaning does Davin's "active" commitment to the notion of nation have? "Away from it All" recasts this question in more general or abstract terms. However, the alternative, the contemplative attitude also finds itself thrown into doubt. The highly ambivalent dusk provides an image that implies that what may be thought of as a "balanced" response may equally be seen as simply one of exhaustion. This recalls the inanition of the speaker at the close of the "Glanmore

Sonnets", where the rural retreat is diminished into nothing more than a "respite".

"Making Strange" provides one answer to this dilemma by rethinking inaction in terms which will be given more vocal expression in Joyce's advice at the close of "Station Island". "Away from it All" ends with the admission that "I still cannot clear my head / of lives lived in their element". Such a "life" is one of two between which Heaney finds himself "stretched" in "Making Strange":

I stood between them,  
the one with his travelled intelligence  
and tawny containment,  
his speech like the twang of a bowstring,

and another, unshorn and bewildered  
in the tubs of his wellingtons,  
smiling at me for help,  
faced with this stranger I'd brought him.  
(SI, p. 32)

The binary opposition of *North* hovers in the background of what here begins as a comic little fable, as the indigenous "feminine" Antaeus faces the "travelled intelligence" of the "masculine" Hercules. In *North*, the antithesis between these two figures is finally a chiasmic structure; implicitly revealing the poet's identity to be constructed out of both halves of his national and linguistic antithesis. That self-division is largely lamented in *North*, leaving the poet as a kind of denizen in his own land. In "Making Strange", on the other hand, this sense of doubleness is seized upon as a source of strength. The empty alternatives of "Away from it All" are here bypassed by a "cunning middle voice", which tells the poet to delight in the predicament of the "inner émigré" in "Exposure":

"Be adept and be dialect,  
tell of this wind coming past the zinc hut ...  
But love the cut of this travelled one ...

Go beyond what's reliable  
in all that keeps pleading and pleading ..."

To be dialect is to retain that sense of place which is central to the place-name poems; to be adept, on the other hand, is here linked to the displacement that was associated with the "travelled one", Hercules. Yet the poem does not simply seek a median between these two poetics. The poem ends with the speaker "driving the stranger"

through my own country, adept  
at dialect, reciting my pride  
in all that I knew, that began to make strange  
at that same recitation.

The speaker, who has brought the stranger, also leaves with him, leaving behind the down-at-heel Antaeus. Heaney thus rewrites the previous disablement of the "inner émigré" in a positive manner. The failure to "actively / participate in history", which in "Exposure" was the inability to fully identify with the "pulsing rose" of nationalism, is here adopted as a desirable position. The making strange of the final lines is a form of artistic defamiliarization, as what was in the place-name and bog poems the *familiar*, the local and national, is now viewed from a perspective self-exiled from political concerns. It is thus less a variety of what the Russian Formalists called *ostraneniye*,<sup>28</sup> than an expression of the tangent - striking away from historical and political issues, refusing to make a Davin-like commitment to them. What this seems to suggest is a reworking of the flight from history in *Field Work*, which had indeed resulted in a sense of exhausted inanition. It implies that history cannot be occluded, but that it is not the final referent to literature, that the individual artist remains in part transcendent from political and ideological factors. I will go on to question this stance, and to argue that Heaney's texts themselves throw doubt on this untrammelled poetic.

For the present, to return to the essay on Dante with which I began this section: Heaney comments there that

the choice of Lough Derg [in "Station Island"] ... did, in fact, represent a solidarity with orthodox ways and obedient attitudes, and that very solidarity had to be challenged. And who better to offer the challenge than the shade of Joyce himself? He speaks here to the pilgrim as he leaves the island, in an encounter reminiscent of "Little Gidding" but with advice that Mandelstam might have given.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to realise that, as we saw in chapter three, the Eliot of *Four Quartets* is a poet of self-denial, a poet reborn into "the stricter exactions of *philosophia* and religious tradition" (GT, p. 98). He is an orthodox figure at odds with the Joycean challenge that Mandelstam represents for Heaney. Mandelstam's Dante, unlike Eliot's, is a poet of pigeon flights of meaning, of linguistic play, of a freedom from the "solidarity with orthodox ways". This issue becomes clearer in Heaney's words to Joyce, in "Station Island", which make direct reference to *A Portrait of the Artist*:

"Old father, mother's son,  
there is a moment in Stephen's diary  
for April the thirteenth, a revelation  
  
set among my stars - that one entry  
has been a sort of password in my ears,  
the collect of a new epiphany,  
  
the Feast of the Holy Tundish."

The relevant diary entry of Stephen is as follows:

13 April: That tundish has been on my mind for a long time. I looked it up and find it English and good old blunt English too. Damn the dean of studies and his funnel! What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us? Damn him one way or the other!<sup>30</sup>

Stephen is looking back to his conversation with the dean in which Stephen refers to the funnel with which the oil lamp is filled as a "tundish" " - Is that called a tundish in Ireland?" asks the dean. Stephen meditates on this colloquy in a passage that Heaney had, in part, used as an epigraph to "The Wool Trade":



- The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.<sup>31</sup>

In his essay "The Interesting Case of John Alphonsus Mulrennan", Heaney draws our attention to the importance of this passage for himself as a writer: "To put it another way, Stephen feels excluded from the English tradition.... His own tradition is linguistically fractured. History, which has woven the fabric of English life and landscape and language into a seamless garment, has rent the fabric of Irish life, has effected a breach between its past and its present, and an alienation between the speaker and his speech."<sup>32</sup> It is precisely this "history" that Heaney charts in certain poems in *North*, such as "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Freedman". Nevertheless, it is telling that the diary entry that Heaney seizes upon at the close of "Station Island" is one that rebuffs Stephen's earlier mediation on his "fractured" linguistic identity. The entry for the 13 April declares that a word that had seemed to exclude Stephen is in fact "good old blunt English too." The effect of this discovery is not to reappropriate Stephen within the discourse of the English tradition, weaving him into the seamless "fabric of English life and landscape and language". Instead, it ruptures through linguistic oppression, and makes it seem, to Stephen at any rate, somehow irrelevant: "Damn him one way or the other." This is echoed in Heaney's Joyce's jeering answer to the speaker's praise of the epiphany he has granted him: "Who cares ... any more? The English language / belongs to us." If "A Bat on the Road" acts as a delicate rebuttal of the sexual conceits of *North*, Joyce's outspoken claim, like the "cunning middle voice" of "Making Strange", overturns the centrality of the phonologism of the place-name poems. National and linguistic identity are swept

aside as Heaney voices through Joyce what, in his own voice, he asks for in "Stone from Delphi":

*that I may escape the miasma of spilled blood,  
govern the tongue, fear hybris, fear the god  
until he speaks in my untrammelled mouth.*  
(SI, p. 24)

The desire for an "untrammelled mouth", free from the miasma of Irish history is, of course, also one of Stephen's. This is still clearer if one turn to the *Portrait's* diary entry that follows that of the thirteenth. This has, in fact, fascinated Heaney more than that which is taken as so important at the end of "Station Island".

14 April: John Alphonsus Mulrennan has just returned from the west of Ireland. (European and Asiatic papers please copy.) He told us he met an old man there in a mountain cabin. Old man had red eyes and short pipe. Old man spoke Irish. Mulrennan spoke Irish. Then old man and Mulrennan spoke English. Mulrennan spoke to him about universe and stars. Old man sat, listened, smoked, spat. Then said:

- Ah, there must be terrible queer creatures at the latter end of the world.

I fear him. I fear his redrimmed horny eyes. It is with him I must struggle all through this night till day come, till he or I lie dead, gripping him by the sinewy throat till ... Till what? Till he yield to me? No. I mean him no harm.<sup>33</sup>

Heaney turns to this passage in three different essays: "John Bull's Other Ireland", "The Interesting Case of John Alphonsus Mulrennan" and "A Tale of Two Islands".<sup>34</sup> In the second and third of these articles Heaney interprets Stephen's words as follows:

The old man represents the claims of the pious archetype on the free spirit. Stephen fears him because his red-rimmed horny eyes are in the end myopic, because that mountain cabin where he lodges is hung with the nets of nationality, religion, family, the arresting abstractions.<sup>35</sup>

It is such stereotypical portrayals of the peasant that Joyce rejects, as does Heaney in his rewriting of Yeats' "The Fisherman" in "Casualty". This goes hand in hand with the spurning of any attempt, on Stephen's part, to emulate Davin's nationalism: "he will forge a personal truth", as Heaney succinctly puts it.<sup>36</sup> It is this flight from the concerns of the archetype that Heaney describes at the close of "Station Island", and, in the context of his own work, this should be read as a flight from the archetypal world or "arresting abstractions" of *North*.

The rejection of the archetype is present from the very first poem in *Station Island*. "The Underground", is, on one level, simply an anecdotal account of "honeymooning, moonlighting, late for the Proms" (*SI*, p. 13), yet, within the space of sixteen lines, Heaney employs at least three mythical and fairy-tale parallels for the couple. In the first stanza, the male's pursuit of his wife in the "vaulted tunnel" of the London underground becomes the ground for a comparison between the couple and Pan's vain chase of Syrinx "before [she] turned to a reed". This gives way to the story of Hansel and Gretel, in stanza three, which in turn folds into the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, when "after the trains have gone", the speaker says he is "all attention / For your step following and damned if I look back". This overdetermined use of myth paradoxically calls into question its very applicability. The classical and fairy-tale frames of reference self-consciously fall one into the other, failing to develop a coherent imaginative parallel. This may be interpreted as an understated instance of the "cunning middle voice" articulated in "Making Strange". That is, the poem offers a mildly witty rebuke to the desire to erect the cumbersome mythical scaffolding of much of Part I of *North*. The female object and male subject of the poem slip through three entirely different contextual identities, none of which provide an entirely adequate parallel to their present situation.

"La Toilette" continues this process, re-engaging with the question voiced in "The Badgers": "how perilous is it to choose / not to love the life we're shown?". The later lyric answers this question by refusing to refract the female object of attention through the prism of analogy. The poem begins by elaborating an ingenious similarity between religious paraphernalia - a ciborium, "the little, fitted, deep-slit drapes / on and off the holy vessels" (*SI*, p. 14), the chasuble - and a woman's wet nakedness under a bathrobe. But at its close this particular Christian parallel is rejected in favour of a bathetic secularism:

But vest yourself  
in the word you taught me  
and the stuff I love: slub silk.

Femininity, in the lyrics, functions in a manner analogous to the girl of "After a Killing" in *Field Work*. In their very "literalism", the female figures further hone down the symbolism of his earlier poetry. In like manner, if in a more ambitious fashion, "Sheelagh na Gig" and "An Aisling in the Burren" work as revisions of the archetypal females of *North*. In the former poem, the poet takes a voyeuristic stance vis-à-vis a carved female figure:

Her hands holding herself  
are like hands in an old barn  
holding a bag open.

I was outside looking in ...

And then one night in the yard  
I stood still under the heavy rain  
wearing the bag like a caul.  
(*SI*, pp. 49-50)

The gazing male recalls the foraging poet of "Come to the Bower", the female exacting the same sense of desire the dead girl prompts in the "artful voyeur" of "Punishment". Such use of gender, I have suggested above, is to be read as an expression of Heaney's ambivalent but insistent nationalism, the woman personifying the notion of nation, and the trajectory of the speaker's desire

signifying his feeling of estrangement from a pre-colonial motherland. That same model of masculine desire structures the present poem: the male poet's fascination is drawn almost exclusively to the gargoyle's genitalia. Elmer Andrews sees the pre-Christian and pre-Celtic sheelagh na gig as "an ancient, collective prototype, rooted in elementary perceptions of human existence".<sup>97</sup> She is thus another expression of the quasi-Jungian archetype of the Great Mother which Heaney uses as a means of comprehending the "feminine ethos" of Republicanism. Politics and history remain absent from the poem, but the presence of this symbolic female, coupled to the speaker's infantile relationship with her (he imagines himself as wearing the bag "like a caul"), cannot but recall the attempts Heaney makes to come to terms with what he views as the tribal situation of contemporary Irish politics. Andrews fails to make this connection, interpreting the poet's scopophilia as a metaphor for "the free play of thought and feeling, in a spirit of passionate detachment".<sup>98</sup> However, it is only with the following section of the poem that we see Heaney detaching himself from the political implications which are the subtext to this poem, as the sheelagh na gig offers advice similar to that of the "cunning middle voice" of "Making Strange" and that made by Joyce in "Station Island":

[She is] grown up, grown ordinary,  
seeming to say,  
"Yes, look at me to your heart's content

but look at every other thing."  
And here is a leaper in a kilt,  
two figures kissing,

a mouth with sprigs,  
a running hart, two fishes,  
a damaged beast with an instrument.

Unlike the doom-laden voice of the sibyl in "A Triptych", the imperative announced by this female is to turn away from the mythical obsessions of much of Heaney's poetry of the early 1970s. In the first section of the poem, the figure was imagined as indirectly "saying push, push hard, push harder". That sense of

penetration, so central to the "phallic" archaeology of many of the bog-poems, with their long, thin auger-like poems, is here countered by <sup>the</sup>gargoyle's direct speech to "look at every other thing", away from the archetype. She thus denies her own significance, becoming "ordinary", directing the poet to celebrate, in a variety of Franciscanism, an environment which is comprised of arbitrary phenomena: lovers, dancers, animals. Only the final reference to the "damaged beast with an instrument" suggests the presence of violence in this transcendental realm of poetic interest.

"An Aisling in the Burren" is another instance of Heaney's attitude towards his previous concerns. The visionary female of the "Aisling" in *North* had inscribed the classical myth of Actaeon within the archetypal notion of sacrifice to the motherland. In the later poem, the female, like the sheelagh na gig, articulates an alternative response to the "northern shore". As opposed to the classical Diana (or, here, Aphrodite), this woman is not to be read as mythical:

she arrived, not from a shell  
but licked with the wet cold fires of St Elmo,  
angel of the last chance, teaching us  
the fish in the rock, the fern's  
bewildered tenderness deep in the fissure.

That day the clatter of stones  
as we climbed was a sermon  
on conscience and healing,  
her tears a startling deer  
on the site of catastrophe.  
(*SI*, p. 47)

The last line contains the same suggestions of historical violence as did the final line of "Sheelagh na Gig". Like the gargoyle, however, the *aisling* female directs the poet away from politics and history; she "teaches" a version of pastoral behaviour, one which, in the concluding stanza, echoes the Duke Senior's words in *As You Like It*: "And this our life, exempt from public haunt, /

Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones and good in everything."<sup>33</sup>

Shakespeare's play is largely an exposure of this naive belief in a space free from the political machinations and barbarity of the "public haunt". Heaney's embrace of the pastoral is as suspect as the Duke's: he seeks a space free from the "miasma of spilled blood", that self-validating government of the tongue which, in Heaney's reading of Joyce, is expressed by Stephen. The "startling deer" in the *aieling* is a metaphor for this untrammelled poetic, and is an image that reappears throughout *Station Island*. In "A Migration", for instance, the pastoral retreat of "our lyric wood" contains the "restive, quick and silent / ... deer of poetry" (*SI*, p. 26). Poetry, as a privileged form of "conscience and healing", is pastoral to the extent that Heaney grants it a mode of operation free from political and ideological determinants, even as it offers, in the words of *the Government of the Tongue*, an "inspired sketch" back to the public domain it stands outside. The female figures in the two poems discussed above become the vehicles for this aesthetic.

However, female figures function in two quite distinct manners in the volume. In the lyrics, they serve as demythologized versions of the earlier goddess, rejections of the mythic framework through which Heaney previously engaged with history. In "Station Island", however, due to what Heaney calls the "feminine ethos" of Irish Republicanism, and the more general image of a subjugated and violated "female" nation in *North*, the claims of motherland are also represented by what are, in this section of the volume, negative images of women. Femininity in the title poem signifies the orthodox attitude, the subjection of the self to collective interests.

These women are the Catholic pilgrims undergoing what, in his note to the sequence, Heaney calls "the penitential vigil of fasting and praying which still constitutes the basis of the three-day

pilgrimage" (*SI*, p. 122). That round of prayer becomes the image for an orthodoxy that is not only religious but also national. The fact that each of the pilgrim's stations "involves walking ... round the 'beds', [or] stone circles" (*SI*, p. 122), provides Heaney with another example of the "circle", the "swaddling band" of national identity, which, in "Casualty", is termed the "tribe's complicity". It is this complicity that the Joycean tangent strikes away from, and which the poet is exhorted to take at the end of his own pilgrimage. Throughout the sequence various male characters - often fierce individualists, sometimes men sceptical of the benefits of communal beliefs, occasionally even the victims of those beliefs - provide preludes to this main theme, opposing the tribal solidarity of the female pilgrims.

Section I, for instance, ends with the renegade outsider to Heaney's childhood community, Simon Sweeney, "an old Sabbath-breaker", telling the poet: "Stay clear of all processions!". His advice will be given more substantial form by Joyce, whilst his name will find an echo in the pagan king Sweeney of the concluding poems in the volume, a man exiled by the rising hegemony of Catholic church. However, at this point in his quest, the protagonist follows the female pilgrims:

Sweeney shouted at me  
but the murmur of the crowd  
and their feet slushing through  
the tender, bladed growth  
opened a drugged path

I was set upon.  
(*SI*, p. 63)

The "drugged path" is the capitulation of the self to the communal government of the tongue, to the "crowd". The image reappears in section VI, where the poet hears "a somnolent hymn to Mary". The Marian is one aspect of the femininity that here connotes "tribal" complicity. Catholicism is not the only somnolent denial of Dedalean autonomy in the poem: the poem also criticizes both nationalism and Republicanism. The drugged path, the following of



the crowd, are antithetical to the Joycean tangent, the solitary path, and the relevance of the former thus finds itself gradually eroded in the course of the poem. As Neil Corcoran comments: "it is possible to read the sequence as a kind of reverse palinode, directed at some of the innate assumptions and attitudes of Heaney's own earlier work - a palinode which actually rejects the orthodox communal doctrine and morality, rather than giving final assent to them."<sup>40</sup>

William Carleton, in section II, is another Sabbath-breaker, a man whose spurning of the Catholic faith provides Heaney with yet another example of the outsider.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the vagrant Simon Sweeney, however, he is also a writer, and thus inscribes the former's command to stay clear of all processions within an artistic context. Carleton throws scorn upon the notion of orthodox belief - he is a self-confessed "old fork-tongued turncoat" (*SI*, p. 65). This self-condemnation, however, opens up the space of what Heaney reads as a liberating poetic. To be fork-tongued recalls the "cunning middle voice" of "Making Strange", and is an attitude that is closely linked to artistic individualism: as Carleton declares, "It is a road you travel on your own". This masculine solitariness is opposed to what is seen as feminine subjection via the poet's account of a particular instance of bathetic Marian devotion:

"I come from County Derry,  
born in earshot of an Hibernian hall

where a band of Ribbonmen played hymns to Mary.  
By then the brotherhood was a frail procession  
staggering home drunk on Patrick's Day

in collarettes and sashes fringed with green."

The frailty of this procession implies the questionable viability of an adherence to political ("green") as much as religious tenets. Likewise, in section IX, the imaginary voice of a dead hunger-striker leads Heaney to reject certain of the Republican attitudes he had, albeit tentatively, assumed in *North*. He now

says: "I repent / my unwearied life that kept me competent / To sleepwalk with connivance and mistrust" (*SI*, p. 85). Along with a recurrence of the image of somnambul<sup>b</sup>ance in association with collective praxis, this poem implicitly turns a scathing eye on "Punishment". In that text, Heaney found that his genuine sympathies lie with the "feminine ethos" of Republicanism; he had only "connive[d] / in civilized outrage". However, in "Station Island", it is precisely his tribal understanding that is now seen as a form of "connivance", a type of the drugged path of section I.

In the course of "Station Island", the orthodox stance loses all its consolatory attributes. The young priest in IV, for example, who "rotted like a pear" in his mission in the rain forest (*SI*, p. 69), now returns from the dead to rebuke the poet for choosing what he calls "convention" (*SI*, p. 70). In life, this man had represented the attractions of this "circle" for the young poet, who had "waded silently / / behind him, on his circuits, visiting" (*SI*, p. 71). In contrast, now dead, he offers an intimation of the "straight walk" of Joyce in XII, claiming that "the god has, as they say, withdrawn". This notion of divinity functions as the transcendental signifier which, in Heaney's earlier poetry, is the archetypal sense of motherland. With the withdrawal of this essentialist prop, Heaney is led to put the following words in the untrammelled mouth of his Joyce: "That subject people is a cod's game, / infantile, like your peasant pilgrimage".

If Parts I and II of *Station Island* follow *Field Work* in "deconstructing" much of Heaney's earlier convictions, Part III, "Sweeney Redivivus", attempts to construct an alternative poetic in the figure of Sweeney. One way into these pithy and often enigmatic poems is not only through their relationship to Joyce, but also via their resistance to another Irish writer, Yeats. The above discussion of *Station Island* allows us to rewrite the Audenesque title of one of Heaney's earlier essays to now read, "Joyce as an Example?". The original title of that essay is, of

course, "Yeats as an Example?" (see *P*, pp. 98-114); and if Joyce seems to provide the attractions of a Franciscan play shorn of all sense of "social truth", one that keeps at a tangent to questions of nation and language in favour of Dedalean "personal truth", Yeats' poetic is rejected as a prime example of the creation of "pious archetypes". In "The Master", in "Sweeney Redivivus", Yeats is said to have "dwelt in himself / like a rook in an unroofed tower" (*SI*, p. 110). Such a withdrawal is, it appears, similar to that made by Heaney at the close of "Casualty". All the same, alongside the attractions of Romantic individualism that Yeats offers, is his insistent "mythologization" of Ireland and all things Irish; and it is this from which Heaney seeks to distance his own poetry. For Yeats, the old man Mulrennan spoke to in Joyce's *Portrait* is equivalent to both his Connemara fisherman Heaney rewrites in "Casualty" and that Ireland he exhorted "Irish poets" to sing of: "Sing the peasantry, and then / Hard-riding country gentlemen, / The holiness of monks, and after / Porter-drinkers' randy laughter".<sup>42</sup> As Heaney puts it in "A Tale of Two Islands", "The old man is for Yeats ... a portal, a gleam of half-extinguished thought."<sup>43</sup> He provides a consoling fiction, in the words of "The Fisherman", "a man who is but a dream". For Heaney, Yeats now signifies the wish "to posit an original place and an original language and culture and pine for its restoration."<sup>44</sup> That such origins are ideological fictions comes across clearly in Heaney's recognition that Ireland is to writers more than one island; the characteristic "pining" for linguistic and national roots in Heaney's earlier poetry is now no longer a viable alternative.

On a related level, Neil Corcoran has suggested that "The Master" is a reply to Harold Bloom's review of *Field Work*.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the poem overtly charts what might be read as parabolic of an "anxiety of influence". The self-conscious exploration of this Oedipal struggle is witty and, in a sense, cunning, foregrounding, as it does, the unconscious process of Bloomian anxiety.<sup>46</sup> The ephebe

is here Sweeney, who fails in his Browning-like quest to the Dark Tower, rewritten as Thoor Ballylee:

How flimsy I felt climbing down  
the unrailed stairs on the wall,  
hearing the purpose and venture  
in a wingflap above me.

However, the master, in dwelling in himself creates what might be read as a single-minded, or solipsistic, viewpoint (as opposed to the duplex Sweeney, both bird and man, and the fork-tongued poetic of "Making Strange"), one similar to the "myopic angers" of "The Scribes" (*SI*, p. 111) and the myopia of the old man Mulrennan talks to. Yeats' particular brand of Romantic literary nationalism found itself increasingly politicized, regardless of any assertions he made to the contrary. Heaney's albeit quite different sense of nation in *North* is equally political, equally romanticized: Yeats thus provides, however paradoxically, the binary opposite to the Joyce, and is thus countered in the rather dismissive final "wingflap" in the poem.

The imagery of birds and flight is central to "Sweeney Redivivus" as a whole, and is also drawn from the *Portrait*. In a famous passage, Stephen talks of the oppressiveness of his cultural heritage in precisely these terms:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.<sup>47</sup>

Stephen's desire to escape the old sow that eats her farrow finds an echo in the flight of the exiled King Sweeney, turned to a bird by St Ronan's curse, whose story Heaney has translated in *Sweeney Astray*. In the introduction to that work, Heaney reads the transformed king as, in part, "a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance". His displacement from a sense of community and place - caused by Ronan - thus represents "the quarrel between free creative imagination and the

constraints of religious, political, and domestic obligation."<sup>49</sup> Ronan signifies those "nets" of nationality, language and religion, which in "Sweeney Redivivus" frequently become reinscribed within the contemporary moment (as, for instance, in "In the Beech", where the early medieval king watches "the tanks' advance" [SI, p. 100].) Metaphors of flight come to supersede those of the earth (bog, field) in *Station Island*, and in this light one may well interpret the significance of Heaney's renewed interest in Kavanagh in "The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh". There Heaney quotes with approval Kavanagh's reference, in "Walking Eagerly", to "wings like Joyce's" (GT, p. 12). Heaney's meditation on Kavanagh's later poetry draws on the image of airy escape; it is "the discovery of a direction rather than any anxiety about the need for a destination" that is admired. This, in turn, links in with Heaney's admiration for the pigeon flights of language that Mandelstam read in Dante. Here, unlike the feminine play of the place-name poems, centre or ground is strangely absent. Likewise, the line that follows direction rather than seeking a destination is a perfect gloss for the tangent, the line that strikes an edge rather than locating a centre.

"The First Gloss", as its title suggests, provides a brief demonstration and exposition of this poetic of the tangent:

Take hold of the shaft of the pen.  
Subscribe to the first step taken  
from a justified line  
into the margin.  
(SI, p. 97)

This miniature manifesto's first line reaches back, obviously enough, to the digging metaphor of *Death of a Naturalist* through to *North*. (George O'Brien describes the poem as a re-write of "Digging".)<sup>49</sup> However, the second sentence of the quatrain (its final three lines) outlines a very different poetic to that of the poet as archaeologist. The characteristic image of the pen as a spade is modified into the Joycean tangential stance as narrated

at the close of "Station Island". The second sentence's more overt pun on "subscribe" links the act of writing to a commitment similar to Joyce's "straight walk": the "first step" is made away from the "centres" of nation and politics "into the margin". This image of writing on the edges of the page denotes a poetry which is "justified" (as straight as Joyce's walk) by its freedom from the centres of power, from ideological and political dimensions. However, to simply paraphrase this poem is to miss most of its significance. The witty puns on "subscribe", "justified" and "margin" enact a Franciscan delight in language; and such wordplay, where the signifier overtly declares its slippage with regard to the signified, is closely bound to the linguistic "cunning" of "Making Strange" and to the pigeon flights of language Madelstam reads in Dante. The sign slides "between" two possible meanings, and hence, the "first step" is not analogous to the quest after original certainty, a stable locus of meaning, as was the projected movement of Part I of *North*, but a more "cunning middle voice", a making strange via - in Blake Morrison's words - a "twin-flexed" voice.<sup>50</sup>

However, as I argued in the context of Heaney's more recent prose pieces in chapter three, this desire for artistic autonomy is in danger of being read as simply a rather late and lame version of Romanticism (of the non-nationalist variety). The metaphor present in the notion of the government of the tongue is an unconscious reflection of the fact that the idea of a self-governed tongue is itself an ideological one. The polysemic Joycean cunning promised by "The First Gloss" tends to lapse during the sequence into what is really nothing more than a liberal humanist belief in the autonomous imagination. Sweeney (like, it may be argued, Stephen Dedalus, who is treated in a far more ironic manner by Joyce than Heaney's poetry and prose suggests) becomes simply a belated example of the Romantic artist, stripped of his Shellyean prophetic powers, yet hanging on doggedly to the myth of an absolute airy freedom. Elmer Andrews, in a reading of "An Artist", describes this freedom as "fidelity

to his vision, regardless of its effect in the public world; the relentless pursuit of whatever as yet lies blank and unconceived - these are the things which count".<sup>51</sup> But to whom do they count? Andrews simply echoes Heaney's questionable belief in the possibility of an absolutely apolitical poetry, but the recurrent emphasis on individualism, the personal and private act, is a political statement: it is a liberal conviction which articulates a profound dissatisfaction with the efficacy of collective action. Heaney's recourse to the notion of an untrammelled tongue is politically motivated to the extent that it is a reaction to historical contradictions for which earlier poems had failed to create full aesthetic resolutions.

"Sweeney's Returns" may be read as an oblique commentary on the problems inherent in the Joycean "flight" of the bird-king. On one level, the poem simply reworks material from the source-legend, yet, on another, Sweeney's loss of his wife due to his transformation reads as a subtle interrogation of the speaker's faith in the freeplay of the imagination:

when I perched on the sill  
to gaze at the coffers of absence  
I was like a scout at risk behind lines  
who raises his head in a wheatfield  
to take a first look, the throb of his breakthrough  
going on inside him unstoppably:

the blind was up, a bangle  
lay in the sun, the fleshed hyacinth  
had begun to divulge.  
Where has she gone? Beyond  
the tucked and level bed, I floundered  
in my wild reflection in the mirror.  
(SI, p. 114)

The image of the scout behind lines implies the solitary nature of Sweeney and, by extension, the artistic isolation present in this view of poetry. But what is the "risk" involved in such art? For a contemporary Western writer, at the height of his public success, the use of a metaphor drawn from warfare seems far from apt: the hyperbolic claims made on behalf of this variation of the

Romantic self lead to little more than covert expressions of bourgeois individualism. But it is arguable that the final stanza turns round on those hyperboles, questioning their validity. The absence of Sweeney's wife, Eorann, acts as an image for Sweeney-Heaney's plight. As we have seen, throughout *Station Island*, femininity functions in two seemingly contrary manners: as a positive demythologizing principle in the lyrics, and as a negative image of orthodoxy in "Station Island". However, as in the later prose, this apparent binary opposition is buttressed on both sides by the central notion of authority: the "government" of self or community. In "Sweeney's Returns", the failure to find the female ("Where had she gone?") leads into an image where all sense of authority has vanished: "I floundered / in my wild reflection in the mirror". The supposedly self-evident, autonomous imagination finds itself caught in a disturbing play of reflections, one which recalls section IX of "Station Island", where the drunk poet finds himself, "lulled and repelled by his own reflection" in the bathroom mirror (*SI*, p. 86). Authority becomes a hopeless floundering, the attractive posturings of the "free" artist thrown into a repellent, caricatured image, simply a "wild reflection".



CHAPTER 8. A TEMPORAL HABITATION: *SEASON SONGS*,  
*REMAINS OF ELMET AND MOORTOWN DIARY*

With what delight could I have walked thee round,  
If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange  
Of hill, and valley, rivers, woods and plains,  
Now land, now sea, and shores with forest crowned,  
Rocks, dens, and caves; but in none of these  
Find place or refuge; and the more I see  
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel  
Torment within me, as from the hateful siege  
Of contraries ... ' 1

The periodical publication of Hughes' poetry during the early and mid 1970s shows that, at the same time as the cryptic poems later collected as the sequence *Cave Birds* were being published, so too were the more straightforward observations of nature collected in *Season Songs* (first edition, 1974) and several poems intended for *Moortown Elegies* (first edition, 1978). In the late '70s, poems from the latter volume continued to appear (along with various miscellaneous pieces collected in the "Earth Numb" section of the trade edition of *Moortown*) alongside the poems that comprise the 1979 sequence on the Calder valley, *Remains of Elmet*. Chronology is significant in two respects here. Firstly, in the early '70s, Hughes can be seen to be drawn to both a symbolic quest-romance, culminating in the projected Promethean subjectivity of "The risen", and a descriptive mode of verse centred on the object world of nature. Secondly, by the end of the decade, Hughes' poetry has largely turned from the concerns of the alchemical drama to an exploration of the phenomenal environment. To take a concrete example: in 1974, Hughes published, in a January issue of *The Listener*, "Spring Nature Notes", collected in *Season Songs*; in September of the same year he published an early version of "The Risen" in the *New Statesman*.<sup>2</sup> That Hughes should have been writing two such dissimilar poems at roughly the same time can be seen as indicative of, in Milton's Satan's words, a "siege / Of contraries". Thomas West, citing Hughes' adaptation of a phrase

of Goethe, considers these two sides of Hughes' work as demonstrating an interest in a world of the spirit and a "keeping faith with the world of things".<sup>3</sup> I will argue, however, that these two sides are not as complementary as a critic such as West tends to assume, and that the rejection of the theme of the "chymical wedding" by 1980 displays a radical alteration in Hughes' work as a whole.

As we saw in chapter six, the reborn man who is the product of the mixed marriage in both *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds* is a symbolic expression of an individuated being, one who has identified the essence that precedes his existence. The power that results from this is described, in both texts, as a scopic power, as Lumb sees the baboon woman's face "undeformed and perfect", whilst on the risen Socrates' "lens / Each atom engraves with a diamond". This unimpaired vision is clearly related to the imagination's visionary property, which, for Hughes, is necessary to heal a divided psyche. In the words of the 1970 version of "Myth and Education", "without full operation of the various worlds and heavens and hells of imagination, men become sick, mechanical monsters".<sup>4</sup> When Hughes rewrote this essay in 1976, he clarified this imaginative healing as being where "the full presence of the inner world combines with and is reconciled to the full presence of the outer world".<sup>5</sup> In the quest-romances, this reconciliation takes the metaphorical form of an alchemical marriage of opposites; the mastering male gaze that results is, in turn, a metaphor for a visionary awareness. Keith Sagar argues that Hughes follows Blake in this quest for an ultimate visionary capacity, as his protagonist's visionary imagination is comparable to Blakean "fourfold vision". In Sagar's synopsis, this quest takes the following form:

Single vision is alienated, hubristic selfhood, and the achievement of twofold, threefold and fourfold vision are therefore stages in the annihilation of the self.... Stage one is the recognition of the all-pervading symptoms of single vision as such, of the need to undertake the psychic or spiritual journey out of its dark prison, and to engage

it in a lifelong battle. Stage two is the release of the energies which will be needed for this battle and this journey, energies which, denied and repressed, have become "reptiles of the mind". Stage three is the recovery of innocence. Stage four, the recovery of unified vision, will be a vision of the holiness of everything that lives.<sup>6</sup>

This is a useful paradigm in which to consider Hughes' work. The most obvious problem it raises, however, is that it leads Sagar to make a largely teleological reading of Hughes' work. *The Hawk in the Rain* is thus read as centring on fallen single vision, whilst *Lupercal* begins to broach the twofold vision brought to a head in the terrors of *Wodwo*. *Crow* announces the quest towards fourfold vision, a journey which requires the "innocence" of *Season Songs* to find its *telos* in "the closing poems of *Prometheus on his Crag*, the closing poems of *Cave Birds*, the last poem in *Adam and the Sacred Nine*, a few of the farming poems and odd poems from elsewhere, but, supremely, the Epilogue poems in *Gaudete*".<sup>7</sup> Against this interpretation should be held one that pays closer attention to the fact that the visionary mastery of Lumb and "The risen" is, in fact, negated by the "fistula" properties of language present in Lumb's lyrics and in the "Finale" to *Cave Birds*. There, Hughes admits that the metaphysical dichotomy he draws between the phenomenal or, as "Myth and Education" terms it, "outer world" and the "inner world" of noumenal essence, renders exceedingly problematic the desire to re-present such fourfold vision of the "goddess" in poetic language. Sagar believes that "fourfold vision is everywhere apparent in Hughes' most recent work", especially in the salmon-poems from *River*.<sup>8</sup> However, it is equally rewarding to read the "nature poetry" that culminates in *River* as a direct response to the unremitting qualification of visionary experience in poems such as "The Risen". Hughes' poetry is dogged by a pessimistic view of tropic language, one that runs counter to the generally optimistic orientation of *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, and it is this that leads Hughes to seek a less totalizing "journey" than Sagar's argument would suggest.

One point of entry into these texts can be made via considering Hughes in relation to not only Blake, whose Universal Man finds a belated expression in Hughes' redeemed protagonists, Lumb and the cockerel-man, but also Wordsworth. A quotation from one of the finest critics of Wordsworth, Geoffrey Hartman, clarifies the stance Hughes' more recent work takes in relation to his two High Romantic precursors:

"Where man is not, nature is barren", says Blake; and Wordsworth, at about the same time, declares: "All things shall speak of Man". By this he does not mean an extension of the anthropomorphic viewpoint, or even, as in Blake, an infinite expansion of the concept of Man. It might have been better to say, "All things shall speak to Man". Only by such converse can the naked spirit be clothed, the burden of existence become fruitful, and the rape of vision cease. Wordsworth does not insist on Blake's *All* ("More, More, is the cry of the deluded spirit. Nothing but all can satisfy Man") but rather on the *Any*. The Wanderer's final oration [in *The Excursion*] evokes a world from which solitude, though not individuality, has been removed, because each thing has the capacity to communicate its being, to "go out".<sup>9</sup>

The Blakean "All" is that which Hughes finds an analogy for in the oxymoronic satiety of the void in the mixed marriage of *Cave Birds* and *Gaudete*. This "infinite expansion of the concept of Man" is where, in Sagar's thesis, fourfold vision is made possible. Sagar cites Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in this context of redeemed being: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite".<sup>10</sup> This re-orientation of perception is a return to an Edenic existence, as temporality, that is the history outlined in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*, is perceived as a condition of exile and Fall. Likewise, Blake's cry, "More, More", is not dissimilar to the deluded mouths of "Boom" in *Vodwo*, a volume full of the cries of exasperated and unsatisfied Man:

More More More  
Meaning Air Water Life  
Cry the mouths  
That are filling with burning ashes.  
(*V*, p. 23)

For Blake, the resolution of this desire is the expanded vision and imaginative properties of the Universal Man, whose manifestation in *Jerusalem* I quoted in chapter two. Nevertheless, if, as I have argued above, Hughes shares Blake's retreat into individual apocalypse and personal ecstasy, Hughes' texts also imply the impossibility of actually attaining the redemptive condition at the present time: there is always the goblin at the end of the ritual. In the Epilogue to *Gaudete*, for example, Lumb's perception, regardless of Sagar's belief that it is fourfold, remains a vision that explicitly questions the finality of the chymical wedding:

I know  
The flowers also look for you and die looking....

Like me  
These are neither your brides, nor your grooms.  
(*G*, pp. 194-195)

In the light of this admission, the reborn Lumb and the risen cockerel-protagonist present a unified being that is rendered problematical even as it is announced. This is linked to the dual focus of Hughes' work in the '70s, as quasi-Blakean quest-romance is measured against what Hartman calls a Wordsworthian faith in the Any, and is found wanting.

The Any, in Hughes' poetry, takes the form of the natural world, its flora and fauna. It is the *relationship* between the Any of external world and the meditating solitary mind that comes to the fore in the *Season Songs* and the farming poems, written between 1973 and 1976, first published as *Moortown Elegies* and recently reissued as *Moortown Diary*.<sup>11</sup> These two volumes, I suggest, are best read as part of the "siege / Of contraries" in Hughes' work in the early '70s. These are not "contraries" in Blake's sense of that term,<sup>12</sup> and as such it is not pertinent to read the former work, as Sagar does, as an expression of an "innocent" threefold vision. Instead, they are contrary in a non-dialectical way,

seeking a different outlook on Hughes' central theme of an alienated subjectivity.

The poems are best approached on two related levels. Certain poems, published in both *Season Songs* and *Moortown Diary*, may be read as reinterpreting the subject/object or inner/outer dualism of the quest-romances in the light of a Wordsworthian interactive exchange between man and, what in Hughes, is troped as a feminine nature; a personification that is closely linked to the figure of "the Mourning Mother" in the later volume *Remains of Elmet*. On another level, the concluding elegies in *Moortown Diary*, written in memory of the farmer Jack Orchard, present a different conception of masculinity than that of the unbounded Promethean male.

With regard to the first level of enquiry, Thomas West comments:

From an idealist point of view, *River* could be said to mark a total collapse of the imagination - very much as, in the diary poems of "Moortown", a flatness and an absence of dramatic tension reflect a refusal or an unwillingness to symbolise and to interiorize sensations.<sup>13</sup>

West's observation is sensibly set against Sagar's reading. It is precisely the "unwillingness to symbolise and interiorize" - even to mythologize - that distinguishes not only *River* but *Season Songs* and, as West notes, *Moortown Diary* from *Cave Birds* and *Gaudete*. As in Heaney's poetry in *Field Work* and *Station Island*, recourse to the archetypal is superseded by a desire to demythologize. In Hughes, that which replaces, in Northrop Frye's sense of the terms, apocalyptic and demonic archetypal symbolism is a feminine troping of the landscape that casts it as yet another desirable "object-to-be-looked-at". In this manner, the poems rework the scopic imagery of *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds* in a new configuration, but one that still retains a patriarchal conception of femininity as the desired object of a male self's gaze. Coupled to this, is the wish to control poetic language's propensity to eke and defer, to remain remote from the referent

that Hughes wants to re-present as completely as possible. Both these desires are present in the Preface to *Moortown Diary*, where Hughes describes his "diary entries" in terms that recall the scopophilia decried in the male voyeurs of *Gaudete*: "these improvised verses are nothing more than this: my own way of getting reasonably close to what is going on, and staying close, and of excluding everything that might be pressing to interfere with the watching eye" (*MD*, p. x). The diary method is thus one that may avoid the "goblin" who raises his head in the alchemical dramas. Hughes stresses this possibility via an image that confounds the mediation of writing with the seemingly less mediated medium of the cinema:

I regarded them as casual journal notes, and made no attempt to do anything with them, until one day a magazine editor asked me for a poem. Thinking I might find something to work on, I then looked these pieces over, and picked out "February 17th". It didn't take me long to realise that I was in the position of a translator: whatever I might make of this passage I was going to have to destroy the original. And what was original here was not some stranger's poem but the video and surviving voice-track of one of my own days, a moment of my life I did not want to lose.... Altering any word felt like retouching an old home movie with new bits of fake-original voice and fake-original actions.  
(*MD*, p. xi)

The move from archetypal narrative is motivated by the same fear of alienation that is present in *The Hawk in the Rain* through *Cave Birds*. Hughes again approaches the object world with the aim of "staying close", of mastering the without-world of the other. What is markedly different from the apocalyptic rebirth of Lumb and "The risen" is that in these poems emphasis is laid on that which the displaced Satan of *Paradise Lost* calls the "sweet interchange" he desires from earth, rather than the Edenic totality in which time and space find no place. The change in poetic strategy is clearly apparent in a poem such as "March Morning Unlike Others", collected in both *Season Songs* and *Moortown Diary*. Its powerful personification of the earth as a convalescent woman strikes a keynote to the *Songs*:

The earth invalid, dropsied, bruised, wheeled  
Out into the sun,  
After the frightful operation.  
She lies back, wounds undressed to the sun,  
To be healed,  
Sheltered from the sneapy chill creeping North wind,  
Leans back, eyes closed, exhausted, smiling  
Into the sun. Perhaps dozing a little.  
While we sit, and smile, and wait, and know  
She is not going to die.  
(SS, p. 17; MD, p. 32)

This particular humanizing metaphor is, stylistically, distinctly un-Wordsworthian. However, the veneration of nature with regard to its effects on the human individual, to whom the death of nature would be catastrophic, is Wordsworthian. The sick female is healed in a way that rightly echoes Lumb's healing of the patchwork face of the baboon woman, but the healing here is projected onto the object world of nature rather than onto a symbolic goddess. Sagar implicitly relates this to Blake's Beulah, a place of threefold experience ("the recovery of innocence") in his essay on "Fourfold Vision in Hughes" cited above. Yet, in his earlier study, in *The Art of Ted Hughes*, he appears to make a larger claim for these poems whilst, interestingly, adopting a Wordsworthian tag: the poems "are really addressed to the child who is father of the man. That is, they are attempts to cut through the conditioned responses (or conditioned non-response) of adults to the natural world, to restore *unfallen vision*".<sup>14</sup> Such "unfallen vision" would be fourfold, that of the Blakean "Sons of Eden" in *Milton*;<sup>15</sup> therefore, to make sense of Sagar's reading, this passage must be read with an emphasis upon the belief that the poems are "attempts", rather than suggesting they constitute a success. There is thus a certain inconsistency between Sagar's essay and the earlier critical study. This is not critical nit-picking: the whole *raison d'être* of *Season Songs* is that it is not concerned with illustrating or nodding towards the Edenic experience, the questionable telos of the quest-romances. The "nature poetry" does not picture Fallen nature as the transitional



state of Beulah, from which one can see eternity. Instead, these poems attempt to circumnavigate the fact that temporality, the end of the ritual in *Cave Birds*, undermines the apparent restoration of unfallen vision that the reborn males in *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, experience.

In the *Songs* and the *Diary*, Hughes seeks to, in the words of the Preface to the latter volume, "stay closer" to "a moment of my life". Such a point of temporality is recorded in "Coming down through Somerset", in *Moortown Diary*, where Hughes' desire for a dead badger's carcass to defy decay, to "stop time", is bound to a vision that is very much "a moment of ... life":

A badger on my moment of life.  
Not years ago, like the others, but now.  
I stand  
Watching his stillness, like an iron nail  
Driven, flush to the head,  
Into a yew post. Something has to stay.  
(*MD*, p. 41)

The diary entries and *Season Songs* are frequently recordings of moments, aware of the temporal context in which the often banal events they centre on occur. Indeed, Sagar, with no sense of contradiction, makes this very point in *The Art of Ted Hughes*. Writing of Lindsay, Eliot and Beckett in relation to Hughes he comments:

They assume that everything ephemeral or temporal is valueless. To be sacred is to be absolute, and nothing in time or space is absolute, so the world is crying out for redemption. The argument is theoretically strong, but whether it is felt to be true seems to be a matter of temperament, and of the individual's ability to recognize the sacred in unredeemed nature.<sup>16</sup>

Regardless of the validity of this snap-judgement of the writers invoked, and the remark's total failure to conform to the previous reference to "unfallen vision", Sagar is quite correct to see *Season Songs'* locale as "unredeemed", and thus (if only by

implication) to note the volume's deviation from the Promethean quests of the '70s.

To return to Sagar's more recent essay, one finds his thesis marred by a misunderstanding of the Wordsworthian view of nature, which he believes to mean "not so much the external universe as the condition of innocent at-one-ness with it". This smacks of Matthew Arnold's reading of Wordsworth, who, in the former's "Memorial Verses", is said to have spoken

and loosed our heart in tears.  
He laid us as we lay at birth  
On the cool flowery lap of earth,  
Smiles broke from us and we had ease;<sup>17</sup>

The influence of this reading still persists, at least in the popular conception of the poet. Sagar simply reiterates this notion of a tranquil and tranquillizing Wordsworth, and thence proceeds to suggest that "Hughes' position is somewhere between Blake and Wordsworth. Nature, as the external universe, he values much more highly than Blake; but he is well aware that only the human imagination, fourfold, can fuse the horror and the beauty, heal the scarred face of the goddess."<sup>18</sup> In contrast, one should see that what we have in the texts from *Season Songs* to *River* is a "position" that is closer to Wordsworth in that, *unlike* Blake, Hughes resists, with various degrees of success, Blake's assertion that "Natural Objects always did & now do Weaken deaden & obliterate imagination in Me."<sup>19</sup> Hughes, like Wordsworth, will not or cannot make such a judgement: the imagination - which, regardless of Sagar's assertion to the contrary, is as important to Wordsworth as it is to Blake - now seeks to establish a creative and active interchange between the mind and the feminine nature that comes to replace the archetypal goddess of *Gaudete*.

In the context of Wordsworth, what John Jones describes as the centrality of "careful observation as the means of achieving a state of action and reaction between observer and observed",<sup>20</sup> can

be equally said of Hughes' natural observations. Such observation does not imply passivity; in Wordsworth's words, from the Preface to *Poems* (1815), "[The] processes of imagination are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to react upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence".<sup>21</sup> In Hughes' poetry, the conferring or projection of "additional properties" takes the form of a female personification of the external world. The creation of this "new existence" - Mother Nature - out of the interaction of mind and object world is, as we shall see, a kind of "necessary fiction"; it is an imaginative product that seeks to make natural phenomena significant for the human observer.

Hughes thus demythologizes Blake by making his Beulah "literal", that is, it really is the natural world when perceived imaginatively and creatively. Blake's "moony shades and hills" of Beulah, in *Milton*,<sup>22</sup> are, in "March Morning Unlike Others", drenched by the Spring sun. It is an enlightenment that is a delightful peace after a wintry season. The praise of temporal rejuvenation is stressed throughout the volume - as in the response exacted by the return of the "Swifts" in the "Summer" section of the book: "They've made it again, / Which means the globe's still working, the Creation's / Still waking refreshed" (*SS*, p. 33). The important point is that we should not equate the positive, natural experience in Hughes' text with the dream-like state of the mental traveller who enters Blake's Beulah. Instead, Hughes shies away from - or fights clear of - the contrary stance taken in "The green mother" in *Cave Birds*. In that poem Hughes, on one level, merely reiterates Blake:

The city of religions  
Is like a city of hotels, a holiday city.  
I am your guide.  
In none of these is the aftertaste of death  
Pronounced poor. This earth is heaven's sweetness.  
(*CB*, p. 40)

Sagar interprets this poem as an expression of the inadequacy of the attitude to nature present in *Season Songs*: that must be left behind to achieve an Edenic totality. The earth of "heaven's sweetness" in *Cave Birds* is, as Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts note, disparaged and the poem should be read as laced with irony.<sup>23</sup> This is Blakean to the extent that one cannot read the transition from the words of "The green mother" to the terrible expansion of the bird-man in "The risen" without recalling the frightened voices of the emanations in Beulah:

But the emanations trembled exceedingly, nor could they  
Live, because the life of Man was too exceedingly  
unbounded.  
His joy became terrible to them, they trembled & wept,  
Crying with one voice: "Give us a habitation, & a place  
In which we may be hidden under the shadow of wings.  
For if we, who are but for a time, & who pass away in  
winter,  
Behold these wonders of Eternity, we shall consume.  
But you, O our fathers & brothers, remain in Eternity.  
But grant us a temporal habitation...."<sup>24</sup>

In *Season Songs*, it is precisely this "temporal habitation" that is celebrated - not as the misleading condition of "A Green Mother", which is indeed analogous to Blake's feminine Beulah, but as the material reality of Nature. Nonetheless, like Blake's Beulah, nature in the *Songs* is frequently described in feminine tropes, in contrast to the masculinity both writers associate with the regenerated, eternal son. For instance, note 1 of the "Spring Nature Notes" contains this simile:

And the whole air struggling in soft excitements  
Like a woman hurrying into her silks.  
(SS, p. 20)

A female landscape and environment pervade the entire book: in "April Birthday", for example, reference is made to "the / Gently-breasted / Counties of England" (SS, p. 25). Nature takes on the form of a desirable woman, but the violent desire of the early love poems for the female object is mitigated by a tropic zest that

does not centre on pursuit and appropriation. That said, these feminine tropes still picture nature as a feminine "object-to-be-looked-at" - as in the anthropomorphism of "Hay", where the grass "lifts her skirts":

Happy the grass  
To be wooed by the farmer, who wins her and brings her  
to church in her beauty,  
Bride of the Island.  
Luckless the long-drawn  
Aeons of Eden  
Before he came to mow.  
(SS, p. 38)

This poem is still constructed around the dualism of a male subject and a female object, but the marriage imagery (farmer and hay) in this stanza is indicative of the *Songs* in that the alchemical marriage of *Cave Birds* is replaced by an emphasis on postlapsarian temporality rather than Edenic totality. The very format of *Season Songs* implies a greater emphasis on cyclical time than on the linear quest. Once again, to give a sense of perspective to these poems, the difference between Blake and Wordsworth is worth bringing to bear. If there is one poem in the language that *Season Songs* cleaves to in tone and spirit, it is surely Wordsworth's "Home at Grasmere". There one finds lines that Hughes' sequence is indebted to in its attempt to swerve away from the quest for some sort of Edenic state:

The boon is absolute; surpassing grace  
To me hath been vouchsafed; among the bowers  
Of blissful Eden this was neither given  
Nor could be given, possession of the good  
Which has been sighed for, ancient thought fulfilled  
And dear imaginations realized,  
Up to their highest measure, yea and more.<sup>25</sup>

Both Wordsworth and Hughes suggest that the changeless state of Eden is, in a curious sense, lesser than the "surpassing grace" of the Fallen world. In this sense, it is valid to read *Season Songs* as a revaluation of the Schopenhauerean pessimism of *Wodwo*, where nature was simply the manifestation of the amoral will-to-live.

Rather oddly, Leonard Scigaj claims that the poems, on the contrary, are a kind of "throw-back" to the earlier volume:

The poems [in *Season Songs*] often contain a Schopenhauerian pessimism, a sense of nature as a deceptive, blind will more suited to the sixties surrealism than to the positive perception of the feminine qualities of nature in Hughes's third period.<sup>26</sup>

To declare quite flatly that the dominant tone and philosophical import of *Season Songs* is pessimistic is to misunderstand that a primary aim of the *Songs* is to wrestle a significance from the "feminine" world of nature, rather than to lapse into eloquent despair in the face of the blind will. The crocuses in "Spring Nature Notes", that "remind you ... you too are being worn thin / By the blowing atoms of decomposed stars" (SS, p. 21), grant a significance that "the incomprehensible cry / From the boughs", that the poet hears in "A Wind Flashes the Grass" (W, p. 29), does not impart. The former inform the poet that he is embroiled in natural cycles, whilst the hyperbolic hares in this poem, which "Down the moonbeams come ... Hobbling on their square wheels" are positive; indeed, in their outlandish "hobbling", they are reminiscent of the ecstatic hare in Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence", who is "running races in her mirth".<sup>27</sup>

What Scigaj, in the above quotation, calls the "feminine qualities of nature" are most strikingly present in the figure of "the Mourning Mother" in *Remains of Elmet*. This personification requires examination before Hughes' treatment of masculinity in the figure of Jack Orchard in the *Diary* can be fully understood.

"Long Screams", from *Elmet*, employs the tentativeness of a simile to introduce a personification that will situate the essential being of the baboon woman of *Gaudete* in the natural realm:

And now this whole scene, like a mother,  
Lifts a cry  
Right to the source of it all.

A solitary cry.

She has made a curlew.  
(RE, p. 26)

The "whole scene" in the sequence is the Calder valley area, which is treated as another example of a temporal habitation. Hughes' note to the volume stresses that temporality is a process of historical decline, as the habitation of Elmet inexorably decays: "Throughout my lifetime, since 1930, I have watched the mills of the region and their attendant chapels die. Within the last fifteen years the end has come" (RE, p. 8). Hughes tropes this Fallen environment most clearly in "The Big Animal Of Rock":

Here

At the Festival of Unending  
In the fleshy faith  
Of the Mourning Mother  
Who eats her children

The cantor  
The rock,  
Sings.  
(RE, p. 44)

Scigaj correctly notes that the round of the mourning mother is that of the cyclical seasons within the phenomenal world. However, he insists on interpreting this as simply the "cover" to a noumenal essence that is linked to the same theme of rebirth as present in the alchemical drama:

The earth in *Elmet* regularly manifests the traditionally female attributes of soft receptivity, mystery, change, renewal, and sympathy with creation. In "The Big Animal Of Rock" the enigmatic "Festival of Unending" is the dynamic, ceaseless Taoist flux, the constant interplay of feminine *yin* and masculine *yang* in the phenomenal world, in which the "Mourning Mother / Who eats her children" simply represents a principle of decay and change. The presence of the Valley Spirit in *Elmet* assures the possibility of renewal in this flux.<sup>29</sup>

Scigaj, by reading *Remains of Elmet* as a sort of Taoist nature manual, translates the dominant feminine figuration into an

uncomplicated expression of Buddhist beliefs. In fact, this patriarchal image of Mother Nature is one that seeks to modulate Hughes' quasi-Buddhist attitude in *Wodwo*, where the phenomenal world of Nature is the realm of *karma* and alienation from the satiety of Nirvana. In the earlier volume, "Pibroch" deploys a feminine personification of a natural object in a manner that encapsulates the stance taken in *Wodwo* as a whole:

Drinking the sea and eating the rock  
A tree struggles to make leaves -  
An old woman fallen from space  
Unprepared for these conditions.  
She hangs on, because her mind's gone completely.  
(*W*, p. 177)

Here, nature is completely stripped of any significance for humanity: the metaphorical senile "old woman" becomes a harsh metonymic reduction of the material environment to a space utterly devoid of meaning. It is but a short step from this attitude to the internalized quests of *Crow* onwards, which turn away from a senseless object world to the possibility of subjective redemption. In *Remains of Elmet*, the, in some ways, similar personification of the mourning mother works in an utterly different manner. The senility of the tree, in "Pibroch", is an image for the irrationality of the feminine Panic spirit that, as we saw in chapter one, is Hughes' reworking of Schopenhauer's will, where all is meaningless "struggle", ceaseless eating and drinking. The adjective in the personification of the mourning mother, projects a different property onto nature, seeking to humanize it, and to create some sort of "interchange" between the subject and the object world that surrounds the speaker. This is made possible only within temporality, the "festival of Unending", which is a locus of both destructivity, the devouring of the "children", yet equally a place of perseverance. For instance, "There Come Days To The Hills", ends:



Even the sheep, standing windslapped  
High in rigging  
Look heroic

Every flashing face gazes Westward -  
(RE, p. 54)

The concluding dash has almost a semantic dimension, implying a direction that faces up to without overturning the decline intimated in the setting sun. "When Men Got To The Summit" grants humanity a similarly desperate heroism:

The hills went on gently  
Shaking their sieve.

Nevertheless, for some giddy moments  
A television  
Blinked from the wolf's lookout.  
(RE, p. 56)

In both poems, bathos is transformed into pathos. This reaction against the de-humanizing environment of *Wodwo* is crucial to an understanding of Hughes' poetry of the '70s other than the symbolic works.

In the short story, "Snow", from *Wodwo*, human action in contrast to *Elmet* is utterly bathetic. The narrator inhabits a surreal existence that is incomprehensible and absurd: a snowscape from which there is no escape, where conscious deliberation and action is rendered meaningless. Hughes encapsulates this pessimistic outlook in the protagonist's bizarre circumstances: caught in an endless blizzard, with only a chair on which to rest. Without the chair he would be buried alive as soon as he attempted to sleep. The man's only comfort is the futile, teasing game he plays: leaving the chair, he risks his life by walking a certain number of paces away from it. He then turns, walks slowly toward it:

To control myself then is not within human power. Indeed I seem to more or less lose consciousness at that point. I'm certainly not responsible for the weeping, shouting thing that falls on my chair, embracing it, kissing it, bruising his cheeks against it. (W, p. 80)

The story is parabolic of the impotence of the human mind when it seeks to measure itself against the blind will in nature. In *Wodwo*, this parable is translated into terms of gender in the short radio play at the centre of the book, "The Wound". The soldiers in the play, like the man in "Snow", are caught within an absurd existence, culminating in a nightmare party at a chateau in no man's land, where they are destroyed by a hoard of demonic females. The main character, Ripley, cries:

These women are dragging them all into the ground, it's a massacre. No, they're all sinking together in the black glass, it must have melted with their dancing or the floods have got at their cellars, they're all going under with their women round their necks, with their women panicking and choking their efforts.  
(*V*, p. 143)

That Ripley survives this underworld experience illustrates the fact that he is the precursor to the male protagonists of the quest-romances of the 1970s. It is the quest to redeem the bathos of the human predicament outlined in "Snow" - an extended metaphor for the exile later outlined in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*, and the mental stagnation described in the essay on "Myth and Education" - that is announced at this point in Hughes' career. *Remains of Elmet*, on the other hand, is indicative of the contrary movement in Hughes' poetry, that which finds its first expression in *Season Songs*, and which has replaced the alchemical drama by the late '70s. The mourning mother of Elmet is the tropic alternative to the Queen of "The Wound", a symbolic female who anticipates the baboon woman of *Gaudete* and the bride of *Cave Birds*.

The mourning mother is also present in *Moortown Diary*, in the poems preceding the elegies to Jack Orchard. "Struggle" culminates in the mother devouring her offspring; nevertheless, this is not the Schopenhauerian struggle of the tree in "Pibroch", nor is it the pointless struggle of the soldiers in "The Wound".

Where the feminine represents a without-world those men have denied - like so many Tarquins - at their own peril, the mother in the later text signifies the temporality of the object world, the object in question being simply a doomed calf:

his eye just lay suffering the monstrous weight of  
his head,  
The impossible job of his marvellous huge limbs.  
He could not make it. He died called Struggle.  
Son of Patience.  
(*MD*, pp. 12-13)

The self-conscious shift in the significance of femininity from *Wodwo* to the poems of *Moortown Diary* and *Remains of Elmet* is most clearly evident in two poems: "Ballad from a Fairy Tale", in *Wodwo*, and the rewritten version of this text, "The Angel", in *Remains of Elmet*. In both texts, the elusive Angel causes the child to question his mother, asking, "will it be a blessing" (*W*, p. 166) and "is it a blessing" (*RE*, p. 124). In both cases the mother's response is not given to the reader, who merely learns that her words cause a vague sense of terror in the child. However, it is in the account each poem gives of the speaker's second encounter with the angel that the two poems diverge. "Ballad from a Fairy Tale" ends:

When I next saw  
That fringed square of satin  
I could have reached and touched it ...

And through my mother's answer  
I saw all I had dreaded  
But with meaning doubled.  
And the valley was dark.  
(*W*, p. 167)

This threatening conclusion foregrounds, albeit vaguely, the pessimism dominant throughout *Wodwo*. The mother's words provide no succour, no relief to the Schopenhauerian world as will. "The Angel" concludes with a moment equally hazy but, by contrast, this is described as a point at which the meaning of the mother's words grants the speaker a strange feeling of security:

When I next saw that strange square of satin  
I reached out and touched it.

When next I stood where I stood in my dream  
Those words of my mother,  
Joined with earth and engraved in rock,  
Were under my feet.  
(RE, p. 125)

What are the mother's words? Of that the reader cannot be certain. What is clear is the *response* made by the poet. In the ballad, the object world, the valley, falls into darkness. In "The Angel", on the other hand, the object world finds itself clarified, as the mother's words achieve the engraved solidity of the gravestone's inscription. This image of a female's words "joined with earth and engraved in rock" is an implicit reference to the female troping or personification of the world of nature throughout these poems. The mother's death and burial partly humanize the without-world of nature, providing the sense of some sort of filial bond with this other via a rhetorical strategy less ambitious than the dense symbolism of the earlier works.

"Emily Bronte" provides another example of how Hughes attempts to project human characteristics onto, and hence derive human satisfactions from, the Yorkshire landscape. Brontë's life and work provide the basis for a short sexual fable:

The wind on Crow Hill was her darling.  
His fierce, high tale in her ear was her secret.  
But his kiss was fatal.

Through her dark paradise ran  
The stream she loved too well  
That bit her breast.

The shaggy sodden king of that kingdom  
Followed through the wall  
And lay on her love-sick bed.  
(RE, p. 96)

The environment is Heathcliff: his personality personifies the harsh bleakness of the moors. But Heathcliff, of course, is a fiction. The poem thus humanizes the landscape via recourse to a

figure who has no reality outside Brontë's novel. *Wuthering Heights* thus provides Hughes with a fictional frame of reference within which he can construct a representation of the referential reality of nature. Inge Crosman Wimmers argues that when one reads a novel - and thus, by extension, a poem - one's reading experience is always conditioned by various forms or frames of reference. A principle form of reference is that made to other texts. Such intertextuality is where "reference is not from word to world but rather from text to text ... reading takes place against a backdrop of something already said or written".<sup>23</sup> Hughes' poem does not refer from word to world: its referent is another text. The object world of nature is thus mediated through a textual, fictional world; paradoxically, it is only through the intertext that Hughes' own text can represent the Real of the moorland.

In like manner, Brontë herself becomes another frame of reference with which Hughes can describe Elmet. She provides a life that is somehow emblematic, even representative of this "kingdom". Put simply, she, like Heathcliff, is a text: her existence as a "real" woman is less important than the metaphorical significance she bestows upon nature:

The curlew trod in her womb.

The stone swelled under her heart.

Her death is a baby-cry on the moor.

Like the Mourning Mother, Brontë is to be read as a rhetorical figure; and like the Mourning Mother she is a trope that represents temporality, the "Festival of Unending" that was equally present - if treated with greater zest - in *Season Songs*. In the final line of the present poem, she becomes a mother figure, suggesting cyclical time, whilst, like the mother of "The Angel", her "words", that is, *Wuthering Heights*, provide a means of making reference to, of "joining", with the natural world. In this sense, intertextuality in this poem works in an analogous

manner to personification in other poems. Both literary devices seek to mediate between poet and object world; they are hence rhetorical strategies that help the poet, in the words of the Preface to *Moortown Diary*, to get "reasonably close to what is going on, and stay ... close". However, they also necessarily intrude between subject and object: they do not close the gap between word and world, instead they may be said to "stand-in" for the object's absence. Throughout this thesis, we have seen how for Hughes language ekes and defers; the personifications of *Remains of Elmet*, on one level, appear to provide a way out of this impasse, yet they are also a testimony to its overwhelming presence. Indeed, there is one poem in *Remains of Elmet* that reveals the subterfuge inherent in the feminine personification of the landscape: "Churn-Milk Joan". The Joan of the poem is a product of oral tradition; her pathetic story the creation of a process of historical chinese whispers, by the eventual elision of a common noun, "jamb", into a proper noun, the name "Joan":

Only a word wrenched, and the pain came,  
And her mouth opened.

And now all of us,  
Even this stone, have to be memorials  
Of her futile stumbling and screams  
And awful little death.  
(*RE*, p. 59)

In some respects, the woman brought down in the snow by foxes is a figure for the temporal habitation of nature: her death is another exploration of the Mourning Mother who eats her children. But Joan, like Heathcliff, never really existed: she is a "fiction", another sort of textual entity who enables the poet to humanize, however negatively, the crushing effects of the outer world on the self. As Gifford and Roberts comment: "[The poem] is an explicit indication of the implicit project to find a language to explore the mystery of man's interaction with this place."<sup>30</sup> This interaction is a part of Hughes' resistance to the empty idealism that I argued earlier he identifies in existentialism. If Sartrean existentialism strips the object world of meaning, the

deployment of the feminine trope is a means of projecting significance back onto the world the subject finds him- or herself self existing within.

However, the personification is, of course, an imaginative creation. Interestingly, in Sartrean terms, Hughes is creating a *no-thing*, that is, the personification has no concrete existence, or "thingness", in the object world: it is simply an imaginative construct which seeks to humanize a seemingly resistant and unaccommodating environment. This can be viewed as a form of idealism - regardless of Thomas West's assertion that Hughes' later volumes, "from an idealist point of view ... mark a total collapse of the imagination" - one which covers the "poverty" of reality with the wealth of imagination's tropes. The citation here of Wallace Stevens' terms is deliberate: as we shall see, in my concluding reading of *River*, Hughes is often remarkably close to the American modernist in his urgency to make palatable the object world. The wrenching of the word in "Churn-Milk Joan" is a graphic example of how a fiction, albeit far from supreme, may interpret reality in a new, revealing manner. Like the intertextual frame of reference in "Emily Bronte", or the figure of the Mourning Mother, Joan is a humanizing projection of a no-thing onto nature, thus opening up the possibility of imaginative interchange between the human subject and the non-human world.

In "Churn-Milk Joan", the "negative of the skylines is blank". As for Stevens, the poetry seeks to inscribe the "blank" of reality with significant meaning, and like Stevens this is a distinctly Wordsworthian move. In the former's words: "It is difficult even to choose the adjective / For this blank cold, this sadness without cause".<sup>31</sup> "The Plain Sense of Things" is inhuman, unbearable: it is consequently a characteristically human gesture to wrench "jamb" into "Joan", to turn the blankness, via poetic deception, into a revealing fiction. The poem, in admitting that "her legendary terror was not suffered", admits the negative knowledge that the poet creates a rhetorical structure over and

against the referential world. It is worth briefly comparing this poetic with that of a contemporary of Hughes, A. R. Ammons, who is more obviously a descendant of Stevens. In "Gravelly Run", Ammons' encounter with nature is as negative as the realization at the heart of "Churn-Milk Joan":

no use to make any philosophies here  
I see no  
god in the holly, hear no song from  
the snowbroken weeds: Hegel is not the winter  
yellow in the pines: the sunlight has never  
heard of trees: surrendered self among  
unwelcoming forms: stranger,  
hoist your burdens, get on down the road.<sup>22</sup>

The Mourning Mother figuration is a resistance to what Ammons calls "unwelcoming forms". Although, in many ways, very different writers, both poets are concerned with the fallacy of personification or anthropomorphism - indeed, with the pathetic fallacy as Ruskin originally condemned it. This goes a long way to explaining the brooding terror in much of *Remains of Elmet* - a gloom reminiscent of Wordsworth as he wanders over Salisbury Plain - as the sequence attempts to humanize what is often seen as an inert, inclement and unwelcoming landscape. In this respect, one must read the phrase from "Churn-Milk Joan", "and now all of us / ... have to be memorials", as a resigned acceptance of the "false" story of Joan. Like Brontë's novel, it provides a necessary frame of reference with which to interact with a blank world; and it is this frame that enables Hughes to see the human in Elmet, as, for instance, in "The Weasels We Smoked Out Of The Bank", which contains a typical image of an aspect of the Morning Mother:

After the time-long Creation  
Of this hill-sculpture, this prone, horizon-long  
Limb-jumble of near-female

The wild gentle god of everywhere-ness  
Worships her, in a lark-rapture silence.  
(*RE*, p. 62)



That "wild gentle god" is the necessary antithesis to the absent "god in the holly" in Ammons' poem. His worship of the female landscape is an image of the relevance of the phenomenal world when humanized through personification. Yet, this is by no means an expression of the desire for the Blakean All of Promethean being, the infinite expansion of the human subject: the god of "everywhereness" is instead to be read as Hughes' version of Wordsworth's Any.

The reappraisal of femininity in these volumes is matched by a re-examination of masculinity. This is most obviously evident in *Moortown Diary*, in the portrait of the farmer, Jack Orchard. The *Diary* was first published as a limited edition in 1978, and was subsequently reprinted as the first section of the trade collection *Moortown*. Publishing details are once again pertinent, as the import of these poems depends on whether one sees the *Diary* poems as a self-sufficient volume (as seems to be Hughes' view, considering the reprinting of the sequence on its own in 1989), or whether they are to be read as a prelude to the other sections - including *Prometheus On His Crag* and *Adam and the Sacred Nine* - contained in *Moortown*. The volume, as a whole, opens with poetry close to that of *Season Songs* and *Remains of Elmet*, and - aside from the rather loose collection of disparate poems contained in "Earth Numb" - concludes with two symbolic works analogous in theme to *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*. As a series of sequences, the volume as a whole may thus be read as constituting a unified whole, one which can be read as a convoluted expression of the quest-romance of the '70s.

Such an argument has been proposed by Leonard Scigaj who believes that "the alchemical structure of *Moortown* concerns the transformation of the serpent energy of a farmer figure, a fallen Adam laboring in a fallen world in the opening 'Moortown' sequence, to his phoenix rebirth into the cabbalistic Adam Kadman, the primordial man in the concluding 'Adam and the Sacred Nine'".<sup>33</sup> Scigaj is drawing heavily on the belief that Hughes'

powerful nostalgia or Romantic quest is consistently Blakean, that the temporal habitation of the *Diary* poems must give way to a projected Eden and the risen Adamic man. In this reading, the book's four sections are organized around the "transformation of the farmer's Orc-like serpent energy into the seer's visionary imagination, the phoenix voice of poetry".<sup>34</sup> The phoenix - an appropriate symbol for the reborn Universal Man - in the penultimate poem of "Adam and the Sacred Nine", "And the Phoenix has come", rises in a Lumb-like rebirth, an apocalyptic redemption similar to the "leafless apocalypse" of "The risen":

Flesh trembles  
The altar of its death and its birth

Where it descends  
Where it offers itself up

And naked the newborn  
Laughs in the blaze  
(*M*, p. 169)

Like Sagar, Scigaj interprets this as the *telos* of Hughes' work: it is an utter transfiguration of the earthbound existence of the opening poem in *Moortown*, "Rain", which begins by stressing a temporal rather than an Edenic condition: "Rain. Floods. Frost. And after frost, rain" (*M*, p. 15; *MD*, p. 1). Scigaj, of course, was not to know that Hughes was prepared to detach *Moortown Diary* from the rather elaborate structure he reads from *Moortown*. It may be going a little too far in the opposite direction when Thomas West comments that the book comes close to "being just an anthology of unrelated parts",<sup>35</sup> but, in the light of the preceding discussion, it seems unwise to read *Moortown* as the expression of an alchemical quest. The "fallen world" of the *Diary* is a Hughesian Grasmere; like Elmet it is one half of the siege of contraries in Hughes poetry of the '70s, of which the other half, the Adamic condition of the individuated Promethean man, is not to be interpreted as the end-product of Hughes' entire *oeuvre*.

Many critics have noted the *Diary's* similarity to *Season Songs*, due to its "texture and ... informality" and "vivid immediacy yet universal vision".<sup>36</sup> This stylistic similarity is matched in the diversion both these two volumes, and *Remains of Elmet*, take from the quest towards the redeemed phoenix-man. The significance of the bathetic contrary to the Promethean figure - Jack Orchard - is usefully introduced by comparing him to the priest in "Tree", from *Remains of Elmet*:

A priest from another land  
Fulminated  
Against heather, stones and wild water.

Excommunicated the clouds  
Dammed the wind  
Cast the bog pools into outer darkness  
Smote the horizons  
With the jawbone of emptiness

Till he ran out of breath -  
(*RE*, p. 47)

The priest's mania is a purgation of the object world; it is a desire to free the subject from any relationship with material nature. The juxtaposition of the tree of the title with the figure of a priest turns the latter into an inverted image of the log-like Reverend Lumb in *Gaudete*. As we have seen, that strange minister is an embodiment of natural being, which repressed has turned demonic. Nonetheless, he offers the deferred possibility of an atonement with nature, as, for example, in the description of his unmediated relationship with natural objects: "He leans his forehead to an ash tree, clasping his hands over his skull.... / He sinks his prayer into the strong tree and the tree stands as his prayer" (*G*, pp. 52-53). The priest in "Tree" provides the opposite to this; where the former surrenders subjectivity to the object, the latter attempts to deprive the object world of any significance for the subject. As contraries the two stances are equally extreme. In *Moortown Diary*, Orchard comes to represent a third position, one which is centred on the interaction between subject and object. He thus comes to serve as a kind of

Wordsworthian admonishment, and in this sense is related to Wordsworth's leech-gatherer in "Resolution and Independence".

The similarity between the two men can be gleaned from the second of the elegies for Orchard that conclude the *Diary*, "A monument". Like the leech-gatherer, Orchard is shown in this poem undertaking a far from sublime task: erecting a wire fence. Hughes' note to the poem draws out the importance of this seemingly mundane exercise: "The concentration with which he transformed himself into these tasks, and the rapt sort of delight, the inner freedom, they seemed to bring him - all without a word spoken - gave me a new meaning for the phrase 'meditation on matter'. He made me understand how Stonehenge was hauled into place and set up as a matter of course, even if the great bluestones had to come from Limerick" (*MD*, p. 67). To meditate on matter is the impulse behind all the poems discussed in this chapter. The meditation is one that attempts, much like Orchard's tasks, to see subject and object world in interaction. Orchard's "burrowing, gasping struggle" is a concrete example of this, and once again, this "struggle" must be set against the absurd struggle of "Pibroch" in *Wodwo*. On one level, Orchard's "floundering away" appears to be the same sort of despair as that undergone by the speaker in the early poem, "The Hawk in the Rain". However, whereas that poem sought to juxtapose the limitations of a human individual, dragging up "Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth's mouth", to "the hawk / / Effortlessly at height" (*HR*, p. 11), "A monument" sees no alienation, no exile, from nature in the farmer's work. In this sense, these elegies are intensely pastoral: the farmer provides a yardstick by which to implicitly measure the shortcomings of urban culture:

That appalling stubbornness of the plan, among thorns,  
Will remain as a monument, hidden  
Under tightening undergrowth  
Deep under the roadside's car-glimpsed May beauty,  
To be discovered by some future owner  
As a wire tensed through impassable thicket,

A rusting limit, where cattle, pushing unlikely,  
Query for two minutes, at most,  
In their useful life.  
(*MD*, p. 55)

There is no irony here in the discrepancy between labour and the product of that labour: the latter is still a monument. In tune with *Elmet* and *Season Songs*, his is a temporal existence, as intimated in the reference to his successor, the "future owner", and more explicitly in the final reference to him "using [his] life up". Wordsworth's leech gatherer, whose occupation is also apparently far from monumental, acts in a similar manner on Wordsworth in a context that, like "A memory", is centred on temporality and mortality:

He told, that to these waters he had come  
To gather leeches, being old and poor:  
Employment hazardous and wearisome  
And he had many hardships to endure:  
From pond to pond he roamed, from moor to moor;  
Housing with God's good help, by choice or chance;  
And in this way he gained an honest maintenance.

The old Man still stood talking by my side;  
But now his voice to me was like a stream  
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;  
And the whole body of the Man did seem  
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;  
Or like a man from some far region sent,  
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.<sup>37</sup>

The comparison should not be laboured; yet it is striking that both texts centre on the admonishment provided by the most unlikely of subjects. What both men intimate is a kind of "resolution" that renders existence meaningful. Similarly, they both have a quality that is in some sense *foreign*: the leech-gatherer is one who enters Wordsworth's solipsistic meditation as if "from some far region sent". Orchard, likewise, is described in the note to "A memory" as a man who "spoke the broadest Devonshire with a very deep African sort of timbre" (*MD*, p. 68). For Wordsworth, this quality grants the leech-gatherer the curious status of a quasi-divine intervention. For Hughes, the "drum guttural African curses" (*MD*, p. 57) of the farmer imply a sort of

non-Western subjectivity that - recalling the thesis of the review of *The Environmental Revolution* - is admonitory to the "evolutionary error" of occidental man.

Nevertheless, what is striking about Orchard is that he is not a Prometheus: he is the now dead human subject of the elegies. He provides the elegist with a figure who purports to be a reality rather than a figuration - much as Wordsworth based "Resolution and Independence" upon an actual encounter with a decrepit old wanderer. This is all part of the flight from symbolic drama and dense metaphorical style that Hughes emphasises in the Preface to the *Moortown Diary*. The attempt to erase textuality in favour of referentiality is stressed in the remarkable admission that "the pieces here which begin to look a little more like 'poems' mark the occasions where I had 'missed the moment'" (*MD*, p. xi). This appears to run contrary to the deceptive trope of the Mourning Mother, however, Orchard himself, regardless of Hughes' intentions, is himself a sort of tropic figure. He provides Hughes with a frame of reference that is as much a "fiction" as the Emily Bronte of *Remains of Elmet*. By fiction, I again mean to imply a Stevensian structure that, like Wordsworth's conferring and abstracting imagination, seeks to render reality bearable and human. In a sense, this is the function of all elegy: it seeks consolation for the living more than justification for the dead. In *Moortown diary*, this is caught in the way in which the addressee of "A monument" (and all the final elegies, aside from "The day he died") is, in fact, the reader the text will never have: as a message the poem can only communicate to those to whom it is not explicitly addressed, to the living. This is an implicit reminder that Orchard is reinscribed as a textual construct, as too is Wordsworth's leech-gatherer or, to take an example from elegy proper, Milton's Edward King in "Lycidas". In this way, Orchard provides a reply to the condition of culture outlined in the review of *The Environmental Revolution*. He becomes a personification of the Devonshire described in the Preface, where "these old Devonians lived in a time of their own":

It was common to hear visitors say: "Everything here's in another century!" But what they really meant, maybe, was that all past centuries were still very present here, wide-open, unchanged, unexorcised, and potent enough to overwhelm any stray infiltrations of modernity.

(*MD*, p. viii)

Orchard's death becomes a metaphor for the demise of this rural community, as "that ancient world and its spirit vanished" (*MD*, p. viii). He signifies, as a memory, a memorial to a temporal habitation that is seen as anti-modern; and he thus becomes a personification for the "reactionary" existence Devonshire represents for Hughes. He can consequently be seen as surmounting the exile from nature that is described in "Something was happening", in *Cave Birds*, as a condition of solipsistic anguish:

The earth, right to its rims, ignored me.

Only the eagle-hunter  
Beating himself to keep warm

And bowing towards his trap  
Started singing

(Two, three, four thousand years off key.)

In Orchard's Devon, at least until recently, Hughes believes that the alienation described in that final parenthesis is absent, the "past centuries" still present despite the encroachments of the modern world. Like Wordsworth's leech-gatherer, Orchard thus breaches the poet's solipsism, and brings the object world of the "earth" into a relationship with him that is far from "off key".

With the farmer, Orchard, Hughes' pastoralism thus attempts to overcome the opposition between culture and nature, by recourse to a intermediate figure. Craig Robinson makes the pertinent points that "the farm, *par excellence*,... is the meeting place of the two worlds, natural and human", and that Orchard, "in an almost Wordsworthian enterprise, [has] his moral qualities extracted".<sup>29</sup> The farm has a similar significance to the rural estate that, in chapter two, we saw Hughes, in his reading of Henry Williamson,

covertly identify as a kind of natural culture. Robinson fails to see this connection, and thus fails to note the reactionary beliefs that support this veneration of the rural and the denegration of the urban. The estate and the farm are components of a pastoral vision that allow Hughes to *naturalize* the human as much as nature is humanized. This double movement comes across clearly in "A memory":

Your bony white bowed back, in a singlet,  
Powerful as a horse,  
Bowed over an upturned sheep  
Shearing under the East chill through-door draught  
In the cave-dark barn, sweating and freezing -  
(*MD*, p. 57)

The simile in the second line transforms the human Orchard into the bestial horse, a metamorphosis which leads Gifford and Roberts to state that Orchard represents "a human life that had the toughness, sureness, vitality and wholeness that Hughes had previously observed only in animals."<sup>39</sup> Like the farm, the farmer himself becomes a link between the rending opposition of nature and culture. The scenario of "A memory", that of sheep-shearing, is an obvious pointer to human and animal in a moment of co-operative relationship, this, in turn, supported by the way in which the language of this passage brings opposites together: the man "bowed over an upturned sheep", both "sweating and freezing".

This pattern continues in the final elegies, which strip away symbolism, to give the impression of a mimetic directness. However, their seemingly unstudied directness, their journalistic immediacy, is governed by Orchard's constructed significance. "Hands" concludes the volume by writing Orchard within the familiar context of gender:

Your hands lie folded, estranged from all they have done  
And as they have never been, and startling -  
So slender, so taper, so white,  
Your mother's hands suddenly in your hands -  
In that final strangeness of elegance.  
(*MD*, p. 60)



Orchard in death combines male and female, those opposites that, as we have seen, dominate Hughes' work. He does so in a manner distinct from the "chymical wedding" of *Cave Birds* and *Gaudete*: this is no prelude to individuated being; it is an expression of the manner in which Orchard, in life, is emblematic of a male who is not alienated from the without-world of what has been projected as a feminine nature. This is the elegiac consolation of *Moortown Diary*, as the dead addressee intimates to the living addresser a condition which surmounts the expropriation present in Hughes' work from as early as "Song". "The day he died" emphasizes the admonishment Orchard has provided, and couples this to the fiction with which he has covered the poverty of reality. The temporal habitation survives Orchard, yet it is reduced to a "naked" condition, a *tabula rasa* from which the inscription of the farmer has been erased to leave a "great blank" devoid of human relevance:

The bright fields look dazed.  
Their expression is changed.  
They have been somewhere awful  
And come back without him....

From now on the land  
Will have to manage without him.  
But it hesitates, in this slow realization of light,  
Childlike, too naked, in a frail sun,  
With roots cut  
And a great blank in its memory.  
(*MD*, p. 54)

CONCLUSION. POETRY AND THE REAL:  
*THE HAW LANTERN, RIVER AND FLOWERS AND INSECTS*

As the previous two chapters have argued, the work of both Hughes and Heaney can be seen to fall into two stages, the second of which asks to be read as a critical reflection on the first. Broadly speaking, the move from one stage to the other takes the form of a rejection of the archetypal, "mythic" impulses that inform volumes as diverse as *North* and *Cave Birds*, followed by the assumption of a "demythologized" poetic.

As I made clear in chapters two and three of this thesis, both Hughes and Heaney follow Romantic precursors in granting the imaginative faculty a power that has become unfashionable in recent years. For Hughes, the imagination is therapeutic, inspired art heals the mind to itself; whilst, for Heaney, in his more recent formulations, the inspirational "government of the tongue" is no less than "poetry as its own vindicating force". Hughes' formulations on the healing properties of the poetic imagination and Heaney's belief in a Neo-Platonic, promissory realm of literature, are testimony to the tenacity of the Romantic impulse in the late capitalist era. What hovers at the margins of these compensatory aesthetic gratifications is a History from which they seek to remove all determination, but which exists as the necessary cause of that very desire for poetic "freedom". In Heaney, the "facts" of Irish history continue to make their presence felt in his poetry, often registered explicitly; but stripped of the imaginative parallels of the bog poems, historical process is presented as something "outside" the transcendent haven of the artist, however much it may threaten it. In Hughes, both the deferred subjective apocalypse of the symbolic quest-romances and the less hyperbolic "sweet interchange" of the more recent poetry, are evidence of a deep dissatisfaction with the course of

Western history, and an implicit argument that it is only on an individual level that change is possible.

In *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney continues to "revise" his earlier work through a series of poetic parables. These texts emphasise what Alan Robinson calls the "slippery relativism of all (mytho)graphic attempts to reduce society and the environment to discursive control.... It is impossible to discover an originary 'autochthonous tradition', a primal authority or transcendental signified anterior to the refractions of language." Robinson's post-structuralist terminology is indicative of the extent to which Heaney's most recent poetry has been influenced by developments in literary theory, to the extent that, like so much recent so-called post-modernism, the "sources" of a poem such as "Parable Island" may be said to lie in the very "secondary" methodology that can be used to explicate the "primary" text. For instance, section III of the poem concludes:

Now archaeologists begin to gloss the glosses.  
To one school, the stone circles are pure symbol;  
to another, assembly spots or hut foundations.

One school thinks a post-hole in an ancient floor  
stands first of all for a pupil in an iris.  
The other thinks a post-hole is a post-hole. And so on -

like the subversives and collaborators  
always vying with a fierce possessiveness  
for the right to set "the island story" straight.  
(*HL*, p. 11)

This deconstructive turn is one made against Heaney's own poetic archaeology. The proliferation of glosses is a recognition that Heaney's own "island story", the sexual conceit of *North*, is one that is simply a perspective or interpretation, not a final closure of history in a "truth" which, as the first section of the poem tells us, can only be an imaginary, wish-fulfilling one:

Meanwhile, the fork-tongued natives keep repeating  
prophecies they pretend not to believe  
about a point where all the names converge  
underneath the mountain and where (some day)  
they are going to start to mine the ore of truth.  
(HL, p. 10)

In the poem's third section, Heaney's first example, the "stone circles", takes us back to the critique of circular history, the eternal recurrence in history of pre-historical violence and sacrifice, that was, in large part, the covert target of the finally resisted "feminine" pilgrimage in "Station Island". The alternative to the archaeologist's "gloss" - the symbolic analogy of Nerthus and the "feminine" ethos of the Republican cause - was, of course, the Joycean tangent. The Sweeney-style flight from the nets of various nationalist and Unionist attempts to provide narrative closure to "the island story" finds itself usefully "glossed" by Robinson's deployment of Derridean terminology. However, such an interpretation also provides a form of closure - if of a hallucinatory variety - in its recourse to that most modish of transcendental signifiers: *indeterminacy*. The poem's self-conscious critique of Heaney's earlier stance as the poet as auger/augur leads finally to a belief that, if all history is textual gloss, then history has no determination as such, and can thus be bracketed off from the autonomy of the free-playing imagination like so much waste paper. However, it is, of course, the continuing presence of an armed conflict in Northern Ireland that is the cause for the poem's disillusioned and dispirited reaction. This historical "fact" resists Heaney's demythologized poetic, which can find no aesthetic resolution with which to accommodate and explain the continuing violence, and is thus driven back into the *negative* consolations of reading all responses to this Real as so many examples of ideological false consciousness.

The central sequence of sonnets, "Clearances", continues the critique of the centre, the origin, and the circle, and the history of repetition through a series of elegiac memories of the poet's mother. The first sonnet is much concerned with

inheritance and heritage - "on my mother's side" - yet this is a family heritage rather than the mythic maternal tradition of *North*. On one level, one may read this as close to the "shrinkage" of *Field Work*, as the focus turns from the forging of imaginary connections between past and present to a notion of familial and domestic heritage. Nevertheless, on another, the meditation on the unusual inheritance of a "cobble thrown a hundred years ago", is one that leads to a subtle and understated examination of the earlier treatments of history. The cobble is a reminder of a minor instance of sectarian violence: his great-grandmother's marriage: "Call her 'The Convert'. 'The Exogamous Bride'":

Anyhow, it is a genre piece  
Inherited on my mother's side  
And mine to dispose with now she's gone.  
Instead of silver and Victorian lace,  
The exonerating, exonerated stone.  
(*HL*, p. 25)

The exonerating the stone provides is not immediately apparent. As in the admonishment granted the poet by the old woman in "A Drink of Water", Heaney runs the gauntlet of bathos at the close of this poem: the object of the stone seems wrenched into the status of objective correlative to the speaker's feelings. However, if one allows the text to read as a broader analysis of the relationship between the poet and orthodoxy, the exonerating stone, becomes a mark of the speaker's adherence to his "great-grandmother's turncoat brow", that is, the cobble is a symbol of *dissent* from what "Casualty" calls the "tribe's complicity". And thus, the laconic "and mine to dispose with now she's gone", implies the ability to choose one's own determinations. The sonnet's gesture towards such "wider" interpretations, and this is particularly the case as regards the subject of their elegy, the poet's mother. She is rendered in as "literal" a manner as were the women of "Skunk", "The Otter" and "La Toilette", yet she also bears a larger range of "meaning". This aspect of the sequence comes across clearly in Sonnet 4:

With more challenge than pride, she'd tell me, "You  
Know all them things." So I governed my tongue  
In front of her, a genuinely well-  
adjusted adequate betrayal  
Of what I knew better. I'd naw and aye  
And decently relapse into the wrong  
Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.  
(HL, p. 28)

This has shades of Tony Harrison's *School of Eloquence* sequence about it.<sup>2</sup> However, aside from the anecdote's obvious sense of submerged family conflict, the poem can also be read as a "metaphorical" treatment of Heaney's relationship with the construct of a maternal tradition, to which the filial poet held a troubled allegiance in *North*. If that "gloss" of Irish history is deconstructed in "Parable Island", the sonnets chart a comparable transcendence of the constrictions of the archetype and the nationalist icon. In the present sonnet, this translation of the domestic surface of the text into the terms of its historical subtext, is most easily broached via the reference to the poet's governed tongue. As in "Stone from Delphi", in *Station Island*, the citation of the double-edged title of *The Government of the Tongue* forces us to consider the poem in the light of the preoccupations of the more recent prose. In contrast to "Stone from Delphi", the tongue is here a "betrayal" of the individual voice in deference to the mother's tongue. The fraught bond between mother and son is present throughout the sonnets. In 5, for example, the couple, folding sheets, are shown as "coming close again by holding back / In moves where I was x and she was o" (HL, p. 29). The mother's voice is therefore, quite simply, the mother tongue, the voice of "feminine" orthodoxy manifest throughout Heaney's work; the death of the mother hence reads as the relinquishment of "her" government, in favour of the autonomous, untrammelled government of the tongue that Heaney celebrates in a writer such as Madelstam.

Sonnet 8, which centres on the woman's absence after death, implies this relinquishment through the citation and adaptation of a phrase from section III of "Station Island":

I thought of walking round  
and round a space utterly empty,  
utterly a source, like the idea of sound  
(*SI*, p. 68)

Like "Clearances", this part of "Station Island" is concerned with death, that of a young girl and the family dog. In the context of the sequence as a whole, those two deaths provide an oblique and - in the latter case - a bathetic reflection on the loss of any sense of orthodox belief, which remains simply as "habit's afterlife" (*SI*, p. 67). In Sonnet 8, that source takes on a similar quality:

I thought of walking round and round a space  
Utterly empty, utterly a source  
Where the decked chestnut tree had lost its place  
In our front hedge above the wallflowers.  
The white chips jumped and jumped and skited high.  
I heard the hatchet's differentiated  
Accurate cut, the crack, the sigh  
And collapse of what luxuriated  
Through the shocked tips and wreckage of it all.  
Deep planted and long gone, my coeval  
Chestnut from a jam jar in a hole,  
Its heft and hush become a bright nowhere,  
A soul ramifying and forever  
Silent, beyond silence listened for.  
(*HL*, p. 32)

This vacant centre, recalls the "empty round / of the steering wheel", in "On the Road", the final poem in "Sweeney Redivivus" (*SI*, p. 119), where the vacuous circle was an image for the empty rounds of the "peasant pilgrimage" at Lough Derg. In the sonnet, the loss of centre is, of course, the loss of the poet's mother; indeed, the sonnet is closely bound to Sonnet 7, which states baldly "then she was dead", and concludes:

The space we stood round had been emptied  
Into us to keep, it penetrated  
Clearances that suddenly stood open.  
(HL, p. 31)

The empty space caused by the woman's death is close to the "dried-up source" that the driver of "On the Road" finally comes to at the very end of *Station Island*. The notions of centre, origin, source are found to be without substance; like the chestnut tree of Sonnet 8 they "collapse", become a "bright nowhere", as elusive as that single lode of "truth" the inhabitants of "Parable Island" claim exists. With such loss come "clearances that suddenly stood open", spaces which, in the sonnets, remain inexplicit, but which in other poems in *The Haw Lantern* are connected to the poetic of *The Government of the Tongue*.

For instance, "From the Frontier of Writing", like "On the Road," presents the poet as a driver, steering away from his previous preoccupations. He is now "waiting for the squawk of clearance". From being "subjugated, yes, and obedient", the poet at the "frontier of writing", moves beyond these to a place cleared of the pressing issues of Northern Ireland:

And suddenly you're through, arraigned yet freed,  
as if you'd passed from behind a waterfall  
on the black current of a tarmac road

past armour-plated vehicles, out between  
the posted soldiers flowing and receding  
like tree shadows into the polished windscreen.  
(HL, p. 6)

The world of soldiers and armour-plated trucks becomes a place of "shadows". In relation to the Neo-Platonism of Heaney's recent poetics this is telling: writing takes the form of an enterprise which transcends or is "cleared" of a material history which is seen to be less substantial than the ideal realm of poetry.



"Alphabets", the first poem in *The Haw Lantern*, links this notion of an autonomous imagination to the dream of a world before difference, one which Robinson calls a sphere of "imaginative wholeness".<sup>3</sup> What Robinson does not emphasize, however, is that the plenitude of the primal imagination is a compensation for the "lack" Heaney finds in history; and, in this sense, it is as consoling a fiction as the previous archetypes. "Alphabets" narrates the speaker's childhood acquisition of language: of English, Latin and Irish. It is another poem concerned with writing, and the power of writing to inscribe the individual within society and history. The first section concerns the child's attempt to learn letters through turning them into objects:

Then draws the forked stick that they call Y.  
This is writing. A swan's neck and swan's back  
Make the 2 he can see now as well as say.

Two rafters and a cross-tie on the slate  
Are the letter some call ah, some call ay.  
(*HL*, p. 1)

The objects, however, are in no way a part of the meaning of the letters: letters have no referents. "This is writing": the child is learning a series of arbitrary rules, much as he learns that "there is a right / Way to hold the pen and a wrong way." Letters rely on their difference from other letters to have any significance, as words rely on their difference from other words to signify a referent. This is a world of difference and a world of cultural rules.

Bearing the above in mind, Robinson's analysis of this poem is interesting. He believes that in the poem:

Heaney rebels against what Lacan would describe as the child's inevitable progression from the "Imaginary" to the "Symbolic Order"; his loss of imaginative fulfilment is the price of taking up his foreordained position in the established social and linguistic system... What revisionary psychoanalysis would describe as the suppression of the prerational fulfilment of the "Imaginary" by a

patriarchal Law also presupposes for Heaney a political loss. For the "masculine" domination of the "feminine" sensibility (associated psychoanalytically with the pre-Oedipal child's identification with the mother) is developed in *North* into a full-blown allegory of the sexual act.<sup>4</sup>

He concludes by stating: "A nexus of associations links the expropriated Gaelic 'lamentation against exile from a cherished territory' with the child's repressed desire for a lost, originary plenitude imaged in reassuring identification with the maternal." This is a suggestive interpretation, for it shows how Heaney, in narrating the individual's inscription within the Symbolic order of difference (learning the arbitrary rules of language), is also narrating the loss of, and hence the desire for, an "Imaginary" or "maternal" Ireland which predates the imposition of a "masculine" imperial order. If the symbolic order necessitates a displacement from the mother, then imperialism can be glossed as an expropriation from the native's motherland. That the imagination, in Robinson's reading, occupies the same Imaginary locus as the notion of a pre-colonial Ireland, demonstrates how *both* act as wish-fulfilling models of plenitude. Nevertheless, Heaney's poetry is a painstaking and often painful record of the absence of territorial plenitude; one which, in the present text, is shown in his description of the Irish alphabet as one that "felt like home". In contrast to the masculine "stratified columns / .../ Marbled and minatory" of Latin, the Irish language is personified as a female, "in her snooded garment and bare feet, / All ringleted in assonance and woodnotes" (*HL*, p. 2). The Latin language may be said to carry the same sort of imperialist implications as it did in "Freedman", where the barbarous slave's acquisition of Latin provides an imaginative parallel to the Irish poet's knowledge of English. For Robinson, "Alphabets" presents a similar case: Heaney is "an Irish Catholic whose social and cultural identity is constructed within the English language",<sup>5</sup> and, in part, within English literature:

The Globe has spun. He stands in a wooden O.  
He alludes to Shakespeare. He alludes to Graves.

The "clearance" of imaginative fulfilment appears to offer a way out of this impasse. As we saw in relation to Joyce's advice in "Station Island", the untrammelled imagination renders history irrelevant. As Joyce claims at the end of that poem: "The English language belongs to us"; and: "That subject people stuff is a cod's game". The recourse to an autonomous realm of imaginative freedom offers an idealist escape from the contradictions of material history. It is an Imaginary totality, a fantasy construct, made in order to fulfil the lack that remained unfulfilled by the (now-deconstructed) nationalist glosses of *North*.

It is at this point that one must add to this reading the third element of the Lacanian tripartite structure of subjectivity, of which Robinson only introduces two (the Imaginary and the Symbolic). The third is the Real: that which the subject can never fully apprehend, but which can only be grasped through the symbolic order. In her reading of Lacan, Anika Lemaire comments: "[the] act of substituting a sign for a reality is ... an operation of mediation, whereby the subject places himself at a distance from the lived experience and is thus able to locate himself as a subject distinct from his surroundings".<sup>6</sup> Fredric Jameson has made the important suggestion that the Real "is simply History itself";<sup>7</sup> that the subject can only approach the Real "in the anxiety of the moment of truth ... and from such an approach to the Real the subject then tends to retreat again, at best in possession of abstract or purely intellectual schemata when not of personally charged narrative representations".<sup>8</sup> The Real or History can thus never be experienced except through what are basically the narrative forms of ideology, which provide, in Louis Althusser's words, "a 'representation' of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence".<sup>9</sup> Heaney's approach to and retreat from the Real, as this thesis has demonstrated, takes two forms: the mythic, archetypal parallels and the untrammelled imagination, both of

which are frequently explored and presented in the terms of gender. That the first of these remains caught within the ideology of nationalism and Republicanism may be said to spur on the second, which seeks to distance itself from ideological considerations. However, to dissolve various narrative representations of the Real into text, as Heaney does in "Parable Island", is not to escape ideology, nor is it to fly by the nets of history.

Hughes' *River* displays a comparable engagement with the Real. However, unlike *The Haw Lantern*, history may be said to make its mark in its almost complete absence from the volume. Instead, the poems can be seen as continuing the process outlined in the previous chapter, that is, attempting to create some sense of "sweet interchange" with natural reality. Leonard Scigaj, following Keith Sagar, however, has argued that the volume is, on the contrary, the *telos* of the quest-romance, and that the individuated Self desired in *Cave Birds* is portrayed at the close of the sequence: "Hughes sustains a Blakean Edenic vision by reintegrating the intellect into the whole, the Jungian quaternity of thought, feeling, sensation, and intuition."<sup>10</sup> This is somewhat debatable: like the descriptive poetry of the 1970s, *River* does not constitute a fully resolved quest. Instead, it is tempting to describe the relationship which Hughes attempts to forge between the mind and world in late Heideggerean rather than Blakean or Jungian terms. In "The Thing", the German philosopher muses on his own version of fourfold experience, which, unlike Blake's fierce condition of Eternity, is a that of humility and reverence in the face of Being:

Earth and sky, divinities and mortals - being at one with one another of their own accord - belong together by way of the simpleness of the united fourfold. Each of the four mirrors in its own way mirrors the presence of the others. Each therewith reflects itself in its own way into its own, within the simpleness of the four. This mirroring, lightening each of the four, appropriates their own presencing into simple belonging to one another.... The

appropriative mirroring sets each of the four free into its own, but it binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being toward one another.<sup>11</sup>

Like Wordsworth's, this is a vision in which the Any - to echo and amplify the quotation from Geoffrey Hartman in the previous chapter - has the capacity to communicate its being, and in doing so provides a veiled apprehension of Being. Reality remains comprised of distinct entities, yet, within these, there is no sense of solitude, all enters into what Heidegger calls "the enfolding clasp of their mutual appropriation".

The reverence of natural entities is present throughout *River*, and is a condition in which Hughes does indeed express a sense of "mutual appropriation" between the observing subject and the world of objects he observes. In Thomas West's words:

The poet simply surrenders to sensations: as the inner drama recedes, the importance of poetry as description grows, but a description where ideal interference is so reduced as to let Nature become radiant before it becomes symbolic.... In this way the focus of mythic activity shifts from exorcism and questing to dedication and chanting celebration.<sup>12</sup>

I will conclude this chapter by arguing that the "celebration" of reality is at one with a desire to marginalize history and culture in favour of the temporal habitation of nature. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to examine the related issue of the manner in which Hughes uses gender in these poems as part of his revision of the "questing" impulse of the alchemical dramas. As we shall see, the almost exclusive description of nature as feminine can be seen to render the desirable "mutual appropriation" of observer and observed highly questionable; instead, nature again assumes the position of a female object-to-be-looked-at. The end result of this process is that Hughes' rhetoric implicates itself, once more, within the far from "mutual" arena of sexual politics.



landscape. In this manner, even the prospect of nothingness becomes presented in human terms.

The snow princess is an important figure in *River*, particularly in the volume's early poems, those concerned with winter and its transition into spring. Scigaj argues that these poems, that is those before "After Moonless Midnight", comprising roughly the first half of the book, express an "ironical, abstracting intellect".<sup>13</sup> This is a stance which can be usefully explored through a comparison between Hughes and the modern master of abstracting irony, Wallace Stevens. The latter's *Snow Man* is usefully juxtaposed with Hughes' snow princess:

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.<sup>14</sup>

The *Snow Man's* vision is a reduction to reality, which, as Harold Bloom has remarked, is an "intolerable" abstraction: "The voice speaking *The Snow Man*, which by the end of the sequence has become the voice of the Snow Man, urgently seeks to avoid any indulgence of the pathetic fallacy."<sup>15</sup> However, the *Snow Man* is not human; to behold the utter Nothing of his vision is beyond the capabilities or the desires of human consciousness. Stevens' urbane tone is, of course, not that of "Japanese River Tales", all the same, Hughes' wildly extravagant princess is an attempt to

create some sort of imaginative interaction between the self and the external world, and thus impose an "idea of order" on the blankness of snow. In lifting off the illusion the space of a further illusion is simply opened: the referential reality simply re-trope'd by another feminine figure. Illusion, worried over in "Milk-Churn Joan" in *Remains of Elmet*, is here realized as a condition of poetry. Hughes' poetry thus bestows the pathetic fallacy in abundance upon the natural world; like Steven's Supreme Fiction, the anthropomorphic metaphor is a necessary mediation of reality, a deception which allows the real to be accommodated to human experience. As Bloom notes, Ruskin's formulation of the pathetic fallacy can be read as denoting a "necessary lie against nature and time".<sup>16</sup> In the context of Hughes, this characteristic Bloomian hyperbole can be applied to the way in which the feminine personification is a fallacy, or "lie", which is necessary in that it turns the alterity of nature into a type of humanized "subject". This consequently opens up a rapport between poet and nature, a sense of "sameness" and hence mutual interchange.

It is important that snow figures so prominently in the early lyrics of *River*, much as numbing cold was stressed in the early poems in the *Moortown Diary*. As "Dee" declares: "The hills locked in snow / Have locked up their springs" (*R*, p. 30). Snow signifies a reductive clarity that, like the Stevensian abstraction to the First Idea, must be transfigured, just as Hughes' "river nags to be elsewhere." In the third of the "Four March Watercolours", snow and reduction are all powerfully compressed in an anaesthetic image: "An inch of snow / Whitened last night and the world / Slipped back under" (*R*, p. 26). Nature's loss of consciousness is comparable to the Nothing that the listener of "The Snow Man" experiences; reality simply has no "meaning" without the humanizing imagination. This idealist position is far less self-conscious than Stevens': there is none of the American's self-reflexive ponderings in *River*. Nonetheless, like Stevens, the cycle of the seasons becomes the natural analogy to the way in which the imagination needs to



"cover" reality: as nature cloaks the barrenness of Winter with the rejuvenation of Spring, so too the observing poetic subject, in Wordsworthian terms, confers and abstracts properties to and from his environment. Thus, in the fourth watercolour, the passing of Winter becomes linked to artistic defamiliarization:

The river-epic  
Rehearses itself. Embellishes afresh and afresh  
Each detail. Baroque superabundance.  
Earth-mouth brimming. But the snow-melt  
Is an invisible restraint.  
(*R*, p. 28)

The river is imaged as a poetic text, an "epic", and Spring as a natural embellishment to the cold fact. The choice of an architectural style associated with extravagant detail, not only implies Spring's metamorphosis of the landscape, but also grants nature a quasi-cultural dimension. Spring is poetic to the degree that it acts like an artisan or even an artist on the raw blank of Winter, creating a "Baroque superabundance". Yet those embellishments exist only as the patina to reality: just as Spring is here restrained by the "snow-melt" of Winter, so too Hughes' baroque personifications are simply a humanized surface to nature. It is this "restraint" that resists the internalization of nature into the symbolism of the alchemical dramas: the feminine environment of *River* is not a symbol of the repressed "inner nature" which finds symbolic expression in the baboon woman of *Gaudete* and the bride of *Cave Birds*; it is the phenomenal world of "outer nature". Indeed, in *Flowers and Insects*, this technique virtually attains the status of self-parody. The description of an iris, in "Sketch of a Goddess", turns the act of observation into what is little more than male scopophilia:

She utters herself  
Utterly into appeal. A surrender  
Of torn mucous membranes, veined and purpled,  
A translucence of internal organs  
In a frisson,  
Torn open ...

Actually  
She's lolling her tongue right out,  
Her uvula arched,  
Her uterus everted -

An overpowered bee buries its face  
In the beard of her ovaries.  
(*FI*, p. 36)

Leonard Baskin's illustration which accompanies this poem is a fairly realistic representation of the flower. Hughes' text, on the other hand, turns the appeal of the blown flower into the terms of male voyeuristic desire. This is the extreme pole of the humanizing metaphor in Hughes' descriptive poetry, yet its very extremity can be read back into the more understated personifications of *River*. The "pathos" of *River* lies in the ability to translate nature into Mother Nature. Without such female personifications, nature remains a without-world which is non-human, and which thus would have no significance for the poet. In "New Year", for instance, the river, strewn with the dead salmon, is seen as a suffering female patient: "I imagine a Caesarian":

And walking in the morning in the blue glare of the ward  
I shall feel in my head the anaesthetic,  
The stiff gauze, the congealments. I shall see  
The gouged patient sunk in her trough of coma -

The lank, dying fish. But not the ticking egg.  
(*R*, p. 18)

The two verbs linked to the subject - "I shall feel" and "I shall see" - are an index to the extent to which observation, as in Wordsworth, is not passive; instead, the observing subject achieves interchange with the object of observation through the imposition of the cultural image (the hospital) onto nature. This expanded notion of the pathetic fallacy opens the space, not only for pathos, but also empathy.

It is in this light that the salmon poems of *River* are best understood. These texts, which come to supersede the poems of

Winter, are in large part reworkings of the marriage imagery of the alchemical dramas. In "An August Salmon", the dying male fish, "with the clock of love and death in his body", undergoes a *sparagmos* which may well seem to resemble that of "The knight" in *Cave Birds*:

Monkish, caressed  
He kneels. He bows  
Into the ceaseless gift  
That unwinds the spool of his strength ...

sinks to the bed  
Of his wedding cell, the coma waiting  
For execution and death  
In the skirts of his bride.  
(*R*, p. 64)

Like the cockerel-man of the earlier sequence, the cock-salmon becomes the vehicle for a quasi-Heideggerian "monkish" humility. However, this is not a symbolic dismemberment, an extended metaphor for a process of psychic individuation. That the salmon's life-cycle entwines mating and death in close proximity makes them a suitable expression of the mortality inherent in existence. In "September Salmon", for example, the male fish is described as "a tree of sexual death, sacred with lichens" (*R*, p. 98). Hughes tends to concentrate on the male salmon, and these dying males, as in "October Salmon", become a natural object in which the speaker's own subjectivity can be seen as a humble being-towards-death:

So briefly he roamed the gallery of marvels!  
Such sweet months, so richly embroidered into earth's  
beauty-dress  
Her life-robe -  
Now worn out with her tirelessness, her insatiable  
quest,  
Hangs in the flow, a frayed scarf -  
(*R*, p. 110)

The humanized fish, like Jack Orchard in the *Diary*, grants the poet an admonishment: the knowledge that he is merely a surplus if attractive decoration to the temporal processes of nature. Like

the inhabitants of Elmet, selfhood is subject to the Mourning Mother, she who eats her own children. Therefore, the marriage imagery, in "An August Salmon", is not developed into the alchemical symbolism of *Cave Birds*: Promethean visionary subjectivity is not the outcome of the observations of nature in *River*. For instance, in "Gulkana", the salmon lead to a very different form of imaginative revelation:

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  
In the mercy of water, at the star of the source -

Devoured by revelation,  
Every molecule seized, and tasted, and drained  
Into the amethyst of emptiness -  
I came back to myself.  
(*R*, p. 84)

The knowledge the salmon impart is that the "consum<sup>m</sup>ation" of life is death; their sacrament peels away the illusory possibility of achieving a plenitude of being in the course of life; such a rebirth can only remain "unknown, uncertain". If the notion of a reborn, individuated Self is undermined in the salmon poems, what takes its place is the natural cycle of seasonal birth and death. "*Only birth matters / Say the river's whorls*", in "*Salmon Eggs*", the concluding poem to the volume (*R*, p. 124). The recognition of the ineluctable reality of death must be measured against the equally inevitable processes of birth. This is the "reality" at the heart of *River*; the ability to trope that reality with the anthropomorphic metaphor brings the poet into a consoling relationship with a non-human nature, where there can be no solipsistic alienation as all share a common fate.

If the natural cycle may be said to be the reality of *River*, the Real, however, is precisely what this sort of pastoralism seeks to exclude. Natural time supplants history, which, as Hughes' work

has consistently implied, lies beyond redemption. "That Morning" is indicative in this respect. The massed salmon the poet and his companion come across in that text impart a vision in which "the fallen / World and salmon were over", replaced by a feeling of harmonious interaction between the humans and the natural environment: "So we stood, alive in the river of light / Among the creatures of light, creatures of light" (*R*, p. 72). This experience is directly measured against the Fallen realm of history:

We came where the salmon were so many,  
So steady, so spaced, so far-aimed  
On their inner map, England could add

Only the sooty twilight of South Yorkshire  
Hung with the drumming drift of Lancasters  
Till the world had seemed capsizing slowly.

The "inner map" of the salmon is a location outside the geography of politics, society and world war. Those concerns exist as the inescapable limit to the individual reverie, whose ecstasy, if less extreme than that pictured at the close of *Cave Birds*, is another retreat from collectivity to the personal, and equally, a desire to replace the Real of History with the consoling "reality" of natural temporality. The enclave the latter provides is bound to the humanizing of nature in female terms in "Narcissi", from *Flowers and Insects*. This poem also engages with world war, and hence, by extension, with history *per se*, in the description of the rustling Narcissi as like a silent film of "laughing children / From the 1918 Armistice" (*FI*, p. 9). As in "That Morning", however, nature serves as a wish-fulfilling region that is the direct contrary to the restrictions imposed upon the individual by society. The flowers are

skinny, modish girls,  
Hair blown back, thin lips parted, pressing  
Into a cold sunglare, cheekbones flared  
And delicate as lit ice.

They will never be hurt.

Like Heaney's transcendent plane of literature, Hughes' nature seems to provide freedom from socio-symbolic and historical determinations. Both writers' complex use of gender terminology, throughout their work, may be seen as an attempt to confront, comprehend and, finally, neutralize those determinations. But, mythologized or demythologized, their notions of masculinity and femininity make sense only as powerful attempts to wring fulfilment from the dissatisfactions of a Real which condemns the subject, poetic or otherwise, to a condition of lack and hence desire.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. Ted Hughes, "Ted Hughes Writes ...", *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 15 (September, 1957), p. 1. The Arnold poem is "Destiny". See *Matthew Arnold: The Oxford Authors*, edited by Miriam Allot and Robert H. Super (Oxford, 1986), p. 74.
2. William Wordsworth, *The Poems*, edited by John O. Hayden, 2 vols (Harmondsworth, 1977), I, p. 872.
3. Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, 1980), p. 71. See Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, fourth edition (London, 1961)
4. All references to major poetry and prose collections by Hughes and Heaney are given in abbreviated form after quotations in the text. See the list of abbreviations at the beginning of the main text.
5. Leonard Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Form and Imagination* (Iowa, 1986), p. 51.
6. Brian John, "Ted Hughes: Poet at the Master-Fulcrum of Violence", *Arizona Quarterly*, 23 (Spring, 1967), p. 12.
7. Ted Hughes, "The Environmental Revolution", *Your Environment*, 1 (Summer, 1970), p. 82.
8. Faas believes that rather <sup>than</sup> merely "strained", certain poems in *The Hawk in the Rain* show a "falling apart of style and content" (Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 58). However, the strain exerted in these poems may point at something more than simply an unsure wedding of style to purpose; it may be symptomatic of the oxymoronic desire expressed in the individual lyrics.
9. Frederick Grubb, *A Vision of Reality* (London, 1965), p. 216.
10. Margaret D. Uroff, *Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (Chicago, Illinois, 1979), p. 47.
11. Michael Schmidt, *An Introduction to Fifty Modern British Poets* (London, 1979), p. 386.
12. Ted Hughes, *The Burning of the Brothel* (London, 1966), unpagged.
13. Uroff, *Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, p. 50; italics mine.
14. Ted Hughes, "Incompatibilities", *Nation*, 185 (20 July, 1957), p. 34.

15. Ted Hughes, "Bawdry Embraced", *Poetry*, 88, 5 (August, 1956), pp. 12-14. Collected in Ted Hughes, *Recklings* (London, 1966), pp. 42-44.
16. Julian Gitzen, "Ted Hughes and the Triumph of Energy", *Southern Review*, 7 (Winter, 1973), p. 68.
17. Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution* (London, 1984), p. 293. See Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, edited by David Daiches (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 122.
18. Pamela Law, "Poetry as Ritual: Ted Hughes", *Sydney Studies in English*, 2 (1976/1977), p. 79.
19. Interestingly, Pamela Law uses the term "conjuring" herself in her reading of "The Thought-Fox", whilst broaching the often ignored element of threat that accompanies the animal's emergence: "The poet is conjuring this fox by his language, and not without a sense of fear...." (Ibid, p. 73.)
20. Richard Webster, "'The Thought-Fox' and the Poetry of Ted Hughes", *Critical Quarterly*, 26, 4 (1984), pp. 39-40.
21. Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women* (London, 1979), pp. 8-9.
22. Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London, 1981), p. 43.
23. Dennis Walder, *Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath* (Milton Keynes, 1976), p. 12.
24. That "The Thought-Fox" engages at a certain level with "writing" and the deferred presence of its referent, which, in fact, turns out to be another print, and thence another deferral, inserts the text into the contemporary problematic of the sign. From a multitude of possible references I append this passage by Jacques Derrida which should clarify the remarks made in the main body of the text: "The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, 'thing' here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present ... we signify, we go through the detour of the sign.... The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence.... And this structure presupposes that the sign, which defers presence, is conceivable only on the basis of the presence that it defers and moving toward the deferred presence that it aims to reappropriate. According to this classical semiology, the substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both *secondary* and *provisional*: secondary due to an original and lost presence from which the sign thus derives; provisional as concerns this final and missing presence from which the sign in this sense is a movement of mediation." (Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass [Brighton, 1982], p. 9.) This "classical semiology" - that Derrida is out to



deconstruct - informs the trajectory narrated in "The Thought-Fox", where the desire to reappropriate the "meaning" of the fox involves all that the "lost" origin signifies in Hughes.

25. Ted Hughes, "The Rock", *The Listener*, 19 September, 1963, p. 422.

26. Ibid, p. 423.

27. "Ted Hughes and Gaudete", an interview with Ekbert Faas, in Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 208.

28. Felicity Currie, "Poet as Maker: Reflections on Ted Hughes's 'To Paint a Water-Lily'", *Critical Quarterly*, 21, 4 (Winter, 1979), p. 44.

29. Stan Smith, *Inviolable Voice: History and Twentieth Century Poetry* (Dublin, 1982), pp. 168-169.

30. Ibid, p. 168.

31. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 9.

32. "Ted Hughes and Crow", an interview with Ekbert Faas, in Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 205. For an analysis of Hughes' poetry making considerable reference to Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism, see Calvin Bedient, "On Ted Hughes", *Critical Quarterly*, 14, 2 (Summer, 1972).

33. J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche* (London, 1978), p. 44.

34. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy From the Spirit of Music*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1967), p. 42.

35. Hughes and Nietzsche share a dislike for Socrates. In the case of Nietzsche see *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 81-98; in that of Hughes, see chapter six below.

36. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 45.

37. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 22.

38. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 118

39. Hughes, "The Environmental Revolution", p. 82.

40. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, translated by E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols (New York, 1966) I, p. 453.

41. Hughes, *Recklings*, p. 24.

42. Ted Hughes, transcript of oral discussion following, "Myth and Education", *Children's Literature in Education*, 1 (1970), p. 65.

43. Ibid, pp. 65-66.
44. Ted Hughes, "Quest", *Grapevine*, 5 (February, 1958), p. 9.
45. See Schopenhauer's appendix, "Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy", in *The World as Will and Representation*, I, pp. 413-534.
46. First published as "The Knight (A Chorus)", *Critical Quarterly*, 8, 1 (Spring, 1966), pp. 6-7.
47. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 74.
48. "Ted Hughes and *Crow*", p. 200; italics mine.
49. Hughes, "The Environmental Revolution", p. 82.
50. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 100.
51. Thomas West, *Ted Hughes* (London, 1985) p. 60.
52. Carlanda Green, "The Feminine Principle in Seamus Heaney's Poetry", *Ariel* (July, 1983), pp. 4-5.
53. Robert Buttel, *Seamus Heaney* (Lewisburg, 1975), p. 47.
54. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", 11. 119-120, in, *Poetical Works*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London, 1912).
55. John Donne, "The good-morrow", in, *Poetical Works*, edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford, 1933).
56. Dillon Johnston, "The Enabling Ritual: Irish Poetry in the Seventies", *Shenandoah*, 25, 4 (Summer, 1974), p. 8.
57. Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "'Ri' as in Regional: Three Ulster Poets", *Eire-Ireland*, 9, 2 (Summer, 1974), p. 45.
58. Paul Muldoon, *Quoof* (London, 1983), p. 17.
59. Buttel, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 72.
60. See Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, 3 vols (Harmondsworth, 1983), I, p. 51.
61. Terence Brown, *Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster* (Dublin, 1975), p. 179.
62. Buttel, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 81.
63. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), p. 18.

64. John Ashbery, *A Wave* (Manchester, 1984), p. 14.
65. John Ashbery, An Interview with John Murphy, *Poetry Review*, 75, 2 (August, 1985), p. 24.
66. Richard Kearney, *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Dublin, 1988), p. 218 n. 20.
67. Blake Morrison, *Seamus Heaney* (London, 1982), p. 32.
68. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller (London, 1976), p. 8.
69. Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text", translated by Ian Mcleod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young (Boston, 1981), pp. 32-33.
70. Alexander Pope, *An Essay in Criticism*, l. 365, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, edited by John Butt (London, 1963).
71. Quoted in Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney* (London, 1986), p. 39.
72. Eileen Cahill, "A Silent Voice: Seamus Heaney and Ulster Politics", *Critical Quarterly*, 29, 3 (Autumn, 1987), p. 60.
73. See Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 86.
74. Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 44.
75. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 43.
76. "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." (T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, third edition [London, 1951], p. 17.)
77. Jon Silkin, "Bedding the Locale", *New Blackfriars*, 54 (March, 1973), p. 131.
78. Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, pp. 45-46.
79. Dick Davis, "Door into the Dark", in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, edited by Tony Curtis, second edition (Bridgend, 1985), p. 30.
80. Seamus Deane, review of *North*, *Sewanee Review* (Winter, 1976), p. 203.
81. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London, 1976), p. 54.
82. John Wilson Foster, "The Poetry of Seamus Heaney", *Critical Quarterly*, 16 (Spring, 1974), p. 44.

CHAPTER 2

1. "William Empson in Conversation with Christopher Ricks", *The Review*, 6-7 (June 1963), p. 34.
2. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, plate 49. l. 34, in *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1966).
3. *Ibid*, plate 98. ll. 24-25, 28-32, 39-40.
4. Ted Hughes, "Myth and Education", in *Writers, Critics, and Children*, edited by Geoff Fox (London, 1976), p. 87.
5. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Stephen Gill (Oxford, 1970), xi. 172.
6. Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel*, d. ll. 105-106, in *Complete Writings*.
7. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 90
8. In answer to a magazine questionnaire, Hughes makes certain remarks, concerning the relationship between history and High Romantic poetry, that stress his awareness that the relation between historical event and poetic text does not have to be a simplistic narration or representation of the former by the latter: "The important issues of the two decades following the French Revolution were, in England, overwhelmingly social and political, one would say. Wordsworth and Coleridge and Blake were the great poets of that time, in English, and were involved, intellectually, in those issues ... but that seems to have had very little to do, directly, with their poetry.... This flower, this little girl, this bird, this old man paddling in a pool, this boat-stealing and woodcock-snaring, these soul-notes of a mountain-watcher, and these magical damsels in a magical forest and this dream flight with a dead bird, and these angels and black boys and roses and briars, all this infatuation with infancy and innocence, what did these have to do with the great issues of the time? Nothing whatsoever, till the spirit that worked through Wordsworth and Coleridge and Blake chose them for its parables. And looking back now, if we wish to see the important issues of those two decades, we see nothing so convincing and enlightening to so many of us, as the spirit which seems to touch us openly and speak to us directly through these poems." (Ted Hughes, "Context", *The London Magazine*, 1 [February, 1962], pp. 44-45.)
9. Smith, *Inviolable Voice*, p. 156.
10. Ted Hughes, Introduction to Vasko Popa, *Collected Poems 1943-1976*, translated by Anne Pennington (Manchester, 1978), p. 1.
11. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 90.

12. Ibid, pp. 91-92.
13. Hughes, "The Environmental Revolution", p. 82.
14. Ibid.
15. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1970), p. 60.
16. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 92.
17. Ted Hughes, "Laura Riding", first published in Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 188.
18. Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 44.
19. Ibid, pp. 45-46, 45.
20. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* (London, 1962), p. 13.
21. Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 189; italics mine.
22. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 92.
23. *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, edited by Herbert Read and others, translated by R. F. C. Hull and others, 20 vols (London, 1953-1973), XI, second edition (1969), p. 469.
24. *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, VIII, second edition (1969), p. 171.
25. "Ted Hughes and Crow", pp. 204-205.
26. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, second edition (New York, 1968), p. 17.
27. Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle, *The Wise Wound* (New York, 1978), p. 274; italics mine.
28. Quoted in Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 191.
29. See Campbell, *Oriental Mythology*, p. 240.
30. See "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited and translated by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London, 1948-1974), XVIII (1955), pp. 7-64. Toril Moi glosses Freud's theory as follows: "There can be no final satisfaction of our desire since there is no final signifier or object that can be that which has been lost forever (the imaginary harmony with the mother and the world). If we accept that the end of desire is the logical consequence of satisfaction (if we are satisfied, we are in a

position where we desire no more), we can see why Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, posits death as the ultimate object of our desire - as Nirvana or the recapturing of the lost unity, the final healing of the split subject." (Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* [London, 1985], p. 101.)

31. The "imaginary" and the "symbolic" are the two most influential formulations in Jacques Lacan's reading of Freudian psychoanalysis. The imaginary stage of human development is bound to what Lacan terms the "mirror stage": "*In the other, in the mirror image, in his mother, the child sees nothing but a fellow with whom he merges, with whom he identifies.*" (Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, translated by David Macey [London, 1977], p. 78.) The child moves from this immediate relationship, via the Oedipal crisis, into the "symbolic", mediate order of society and, crucially, language. Such displacement results in a "quest for objects which are further removed from the initial object of his desire." (Ibid., p. 87.)

32. See Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud", in *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), pp. 146-178. Terry Eagleton's synopsis of Lacan's long and complex argument is pertinent in this context: "We can think of the small child contemplating itself before the mirror as a kind of 'signifier' - something capable of bestowing meaning - and of the image it sees in the mirror as a kind of 'signified'. The image the child sees is somehow the 'meaning' of itself. Here, signifier and signified are as harmoniously united as they are in Saussure's sign. Alternatively, we could read the mirror situation as a kind of metaphor: one item (the child) discovers a likeness of itself in another (the reflection). This, for Lacan, is an appropriate image of the imaginary as a whole: in this mode of being, objects ceaselessly reflect themselves in each other in a sealed circuit, and no real differences or divisions are yet apparent. (Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* [Oxford, 1983], p. 166.)

33. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 167.

34. Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix* (London, 1982), p. 79.

35. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 191.

36. Hughes, "The Environmental Revolution", pp. 81-82.

37. Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York, 1955), p. 59.

38. Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", translated by Annette Kuhn, *Signs*, 7,1 (1981), p. 49.

39. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1970), p. 70.

40. Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which is Not One", translated by Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton, 1980), p. 100; italics mine.
41. Hughes, "The Environmental Revolution", p. 82.
42. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 88-89; italics mine.
43. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1982), p. 17.
44. Ted Hughes, "Address Given at the Memorial Service at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, at 12 Noon on Thursday, 1 December, 1977", in *Henry Williamson: The Man, The Writings: A Symposium* (Padstow, Cornwall, 1980), p. 164.
45. Ibid, pp. 162, 163.
46. Ibid, p. 162.
47. Ibid, pp. 162-163.
48. Ibid, p. 163
49. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 238.
50. Quoted in Campbell, *Oriental Mythology*, p. 205.
51. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 198.
52. Ted Hughes, "Secret Ecstasies", *The Listener*, 29 October 1964, p. 678.
53. Ibid.
54. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques in Ecstasy*, translated by William R. Trask, second edition (Princeton, 1964), p. 401
55. Hughes, "Secret Ecstasies", p. 678.
56. Jacqueline Rose, "Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*", in *Alternative Shakespeares*, edited by John Drakakis (London, 1985), p. 101. Terry Eagleton, employing Rose's findings, comments: "Woman is that which man can never possess, that which eludes his mastery and so breeds in him a feverish activity of 'over-interpretation'." (Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, pp. 64-65, 69.)

57. David Holbrook, "The Crow of Avon? Shakespeare, Sex and Ted Hughes", *Cambridge Quarterly*, 15, 1, pp. 2, 5; italics mine.
58. Ibid, p. 11.
59. William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, ll. 1165-1181, in *The Poems*, edited by F. T. Prince (London, 1960).
60. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, edited by Kenneth Muir (London, 1951), v. 5. 26-28.
61. See Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 140-145.
62. Holbrook, "The Crow of Avon? Shakespeare, Sex and Ted Hughes", p. 12; italics mine.
63. Graham Bradshaw, "Ted Hughes and Shakespeare: Visions of the Goddess", in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, edited by Keith Sagar (Manchester, 1983), p. 66.
64. Fass, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 140.
65. Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, l. 389.

### CHAPTER 3

1. Ellmann, *Thinking About Women*, p. 42.
2. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, edited by Mary Eagleton (Oxford, 1986), p. 73.
3. Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", p. 52.
4. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, VII, p. 219.
5. Edna Longley, "Heaney - Poet as Critic", *Fortnight* (December, 1980), p. 16.
6. Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays", in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, translated by Betsy Wing (Manchester, 1986), p. 63.
7. Ibid, p. 64.
8. Elsewhere, Heaney again quotes the Poet's words and comments: "That is something that I think all poets experience, now and again, and want more and more: the sense of supply, the sense of a hinterland of energies, or a depth of energies, opening and giving you something, and you discover it coming in your own hands. But there's another, more Yeatsian view of poetry. When he talked about poetry, Yeats never talked about the 'coze' of 'nurture'.



He always talked about the 'labour' and the 'making' and the 'fascination of what's difficult'." (Seamus Heaney, "Poets on Poetry", *The Listener*, 8 November 1973, p. 629.) The Yeatsian "view" is one that Heaney aligns with the masculine mode. See below.

9. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* in, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1969), p. 74; T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1957), p. 98.

10. Ellmann, *Thinking About Women*, p.16.

11. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, second edition (London, 1950), p. 536.

12. Irigaray exalts the labia as the fountain of creativity. The vaginal lips are linked to a feminine or, rather, a female discourse, opposed to the "single-minded" phallic logic of the male. For instance: "Speak just the same. Because your language doesn't follow one thread, one course, or one pattern, we are in luck. You speak from everywhere at the same time.... We are not voids, lacks which wait for sustenance, fulfillment, or plenitude from an other. That our lips make us women does not mean that consuming, consummating, or being filled is what matters to us." (Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together", p. 73.)

13. Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, edited by Michèle Barrett (London, 1979), p. 61.

14. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, v, 381-382; "Exposulation and Reply", in *The Poems*, I, p. 356.

15. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, 1979), pp. 3-4. In reply to Gilbert and Gubar, Terry Lovell correctly counters - as the examples from Heaney aptly illustrate - "novel-writing [or poetic composition] is frequently seen as 'feminine' rather than 'masculine'. Even male writers can be found who make this association". (Terry Lovell, "Writing Like a Woman: A Question of Politics", in *Feminist Literary Theory*, p. 83.) This, of course, does not invalidate what Gilbert and Gubar have to say about the "pen-is", but their remarks should be read as rather one-sided.

16. Seamus Heaney, "Robert Lowell: A Memorial Address Given at St Luke's Church, Redcliffe Square, London, 5th October, 1977", *Agenda*, 8,3 (Autumn, 1980), p. 26. See also this related remark: "The opening sonnet of *The Dolphin*, for example, the one where he speaks of gladdening a lifetime ... may even seem on first reading an indulgent one.... But it is saved from self-entrancement by the iron frame of its lines.... We register and are fortified by the commitment that has been made possible in the note of command. We catch a glimpse of an approving Horace in the illegible

bronze." (Seamus Heaney, "Current Unstated Assumptions about Poetry", *Critical Inquiry*, 7, 4 [Summer, 1981], p. 649.)

17. William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, edited by J. H. Walter (London, 1954), v, chorus, 23.

18. Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 4.

19. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 13.

20. Manly Johnson, "Collected Works", *World Literature Today* (Autumn, 1981), p. 677.

21. Terry Eagleton, "Caught on the Hop", *The Observer*, 12 June 1988, p. 43.

22. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, 1980), p. 22.

23. *Feminist Literary Theory*, pp. 201-202.

24. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and art*, edited by Leon S. Roudiez, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford, 1981), p. 136.

25. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller (New York, 1984), pp. 79-80.

26. One must be careful to treat the semiotic and femininity as analogous to one another rather than as identical. Toril Moi makes this very point when she writes: "Femininity and the semiotic do, however, have one thing in common: their marginality. As the feminine is defined as marginal under patriarchy, so the semiotic is marginal to language." (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 166.)

27. Elmer Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: All the Realms of Whisper* (London, 1988), p. 15.

28. *Ibid*, p. 14.

29. *Ibid*, p. 9; italics mine.

30. For the now classic statement on this issue, see Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in Barthes, *Image - Music - Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (London, 1977), pp. 142-148.

31. For a definition of *signifiante* see the Translator's Note in Barthes, *Image - Music - Text*, p. 10.

32. Seamus Heaney, "Treely and Rurally", *Quarto*, 9 (August, 1980), p. 14; Seamus Heaney, "Dante and the Modern Poet: Envy and Identifications", *Irish University Review*, 15,1 (1985), pp. 15-16.

33. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 97.
34. See Geoffrey Hill, *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* (London, 1983), p. 9.
35. Heaney, "Current Unstated Assumptions About Poetry", p. 646-647

#### CHAPTER 4

1. Rosalind Fowkes, "Pass, Crow: A Discussion of Ted Hughes's Last Published Collection of Poetry", *UNISA English Studies*, 11 (1973), p. 52.
2. Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, pp. 116, 117; italics mine.
3. Ted Hughes, "Dylan Thomas's Letters", *New Statesman*, 25 November 1966, p. 783.
4. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 235 n. 1.
5. Ibid, p. 106.
6. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 116.
7. Ibid, p. 116.
8. Ibid, p. 118; italics mine.
9. Ibid, p. 257 n. 6; italics mine.
10. Ted Hughes, "A Reply to My Critics", *Books and Issues*, 3 (1984), p. 6.
11. Stuart Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes* (Dublin, 1981), p. 120.
12. Quoted in Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 256 n. 5.
13. Hughes, "A Reply to My Critics", p. 5.
14. Ruth Fainlight, Ted Hughes and Alan Sillitoe, *Poems* (London, 1971), p. 14.
15. "Ted Hughes and *Crow*", p. 198.
16. *Poems for Shakespeare 2*, edited by Graham Fawcett (London, 1973), p. 13.
17. "Ted Hughes and *Crow*", p. 197.

18. Among many diatribes see the sleeve note to Hughes' 1973 recording of *Crow*: "This particular God, of course, is the man-created, broken-down, corrupt despot of a ramshackle religion, who bears about the same relation to the Creator as, say, ordinary English does to reality." (Ted Hughes, *Crow* [Claddagh, CCT, 9-10, 1973].)
19. Ted Hughes, *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*, second edition (London, 1973), p. 106. Reprinted with alterations as "Prospero and Sycorax" in *M*, p. 148.
20. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 119.
21. I am indebted to Jarold Ramsey for the use of this term (which he draws from Lévi-Strauss) in relation to *Crow* as handyman. See Jarold Ramsey, "Crow or the Trickster Transformed", in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, pp. 171-185.
22. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 116.
23. Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes*, p. 110.
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 13.
25. More overtly than "Fleeing from Eternity", "Existential Song" is a critique of the existential rejection of an essence preceding existence and the belief in freedom of choice:

Once upon a time  
There was a person  
Running for his life.  
This was his fate.  
It was a hard fate.  
But Fate is Fate.  
He had to keep running.  
He began to wonder about Fate  
And running for dear life.  
Who? Why?  
And was he nothing  
But some dummy hare on a racetrack?

At last he made up his mind ...  
Yes yes he could stop ...  
There he stood - stopped.  
And since he couldn't see anybody  
To North or to West or to East or to South  
He raised his fists  
Laughing in awful joy  
And shook them at the Universe

And his fists fell off  
And his arms fell off  
He staggered and his legs fell off

It was too late for him to realize  
That this was the dogs tearing him to pieces  
That he was, in fact, nothing  
But a dummy hare on a racetrack

And life was being lived only by the dogs.  
(*London Magazine*, 10 (July/August 1970), pp. 19-20)

26. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 127.
27. Uroff, *Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, pp. 209-210.
28. "Ted Hughes and Crow", p. 208.
29. West, *Ted Hughes*, pp. 76, 77.
30. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 106.
31. David Holbrook, *Lost Bearings in English Poetry* (London, 1977), p. 133.
32. Ibid, pp. 130, 132; italics mine.
33. Ibid, p. 135.
34. Ibid, p. 121.
35. Geoffrey Thurley, *The Ironic Harvest* (London, 1974), p. 187.
36. Ibid, p. 188. For related comments see Anthony Libby, "God's Lioness and the Priest of Sycorax: Plath and Hughes", *Contemporary Literature*, 15, 3 (Summer, 1974), esp. p. 400; and Uroff, *Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, p. 199.
37. Quoted in Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London, 1986), p. 26.
38. Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution*, p. 291.
39. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p.3.
40. "Ted Hughes and Crow", p. 203.
41. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 6, 7.
42. Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, with commentaries by Karl Kerényi and C. G. Jung (London, 1956), p. 152. Briefly put, the figure of the trickster

is the central character in a series of widespread "primitive" mythical narratives. These cycles contain an account of this impish creature's adventures during which he runs amok with the created world, playing pranks of an anarchic nature and being, in turn, duped himself. I take as read a familiarity with the indebtedness of *Crow* to these stories. Critical commentaries abound: see, in particular, Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 114-115; Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes*, pp. 69-128; Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, pp. 120-121; Graham Bradshaw, "Ted Hughes's *Crow* - Trickster-hero or Trickster-poet?", in *The Fool and the Trickster, A Festschrift for Enid Welsford*, edited by Paul V. A. Williams (Ipswich, 1979), pp. 83-107; and Jarold Ramsey, "*Crow*, or the Trickster Transformed".

That Hughes' poem, historically speaking, is necessarily removed from such pre-class communities' oral tales and "ritual laughter" implies that, in Bakhtin's argument, it belongs to the modern, "existentialist" grotesque, where "the satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 12). Similarly, divorced from the actual historical event of the Mediaeval Carnival, the modern grotesque can only interpret carnivalesque degradation through a Romantic past, and thus distort the reality of the original. Such interpretation is that made by Wolfgang Kayser, on whom Bakhtin comments: "For Kayser the essential trait of grotesque is 'something hostile, alien and inhuman'.... He formulates [grotesque laughter] as follows: 'Laughter combined with bitterness which takes the grotesque form acquires the traits of mockery and cynicism, and finally becomes satanic.' We see that Kayser interprets laughter in the spirit of ... Romanticism. The gay, liberating and regenerating element of laughter, which is precisely the creative element is completely absent." (Ibid, pp. 46, 51.) Such "bitterness", etc. are the elements of *Crow* that have generated the most criticism. Predictably, Hughes', in "A Reply to My Critics", defends the poem by stressing that it in no way draws on contemporary existential despair: "Black Comedy is the end of a cultural process, Trickster Literature is at the beginning.... In Black Comedy, the despair and nihilism are fundamental, and the attempts to live are provisional, clownish, pathetic, meaningless, 'absurd'. In Trickster Literature the optimism and creative joy are fundamental, and the attempts to live, and to enlarge and intensify life, fill up at every point with triumphant meaning." (Hughes, "A Reply to My critics", p. 4.) Hughes expressly declares that *Crow* "is set" in the "ritual laughter" of Trickster tradition; that it is sundered from the conditions of production for such literature is occluded in his argument. To my mind, regardless of Hughes' claim for an affinity between the sequence and the trickster cycles, he inevitably interprets and rewrites these works in much the same way as Bakhtin believes Kayser reads the carnival, that is, in "the spirit of ... Romanticism". Pre-class and pre-political literature is hence appropriated by a poet writing in a late capitalist conjuncture in order to satirize the inadequacies of this culture in the light of a "romanticized" past.

43. C. G. Jung, "On the Psychology of The Trickster Figure", translated by R. F. C. Hull, in Radin, *The Trickster*, p. 195.
44. Karl Kerényi, "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology", translated by R. F. C. Hull, in Radin, *The Trickster*, p. 185.
45. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 19-20.
46. Hughes, "A Reply to My Critics", p. 4.
47. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin; Or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, 1981), p. 148.
48. David Porter, "Ted Hughes", *American Poetry Review*, 4, 5 (1975), p. 13.
49. Jonathan Raban, *The Society of the Poem* (London, 1971), p. 166.
50. "Ted Hughes and Crow". p. 207.
51. Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution*, p. 291.
52. Quoted in Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 108.
53. See Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 71
54. See Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Selected Essays* (London, 1986), p. 192, n. 36.
55. Kristeva, *Desire in Lanaguge*, pp. 76-77.
56. Quoted in Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 103.
57. Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice* (Manchester, 1978), p. 149.
58. Ibid.

#### CHAPTER 5

1. Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, p. 100
2. "Seamus Heaney", in John Haffenden, *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation* (London, 1981), p. 70.
3. Ibid, p. 65.
4. "Interview with Seamus Heaney" (Helen O'Shea), *Quadrant*, 25 September 1981, p. 14.

5. "'Unhappy and at Home': Interview with Seamus Heaney" (Seamus Deane), *The Crane Bag*, 1, 1 (1977), p. 63.
6. M. P. Hederman, "Seamus Heaney: The Reluctant Poet", *The Crane Bag*, 3, 2 (1979), p. 66.
7. Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, p. 65; italics mine.
8. Interview with Seamus Heaney (Harriet Cooke), *Irish Times*, 28 December 1983, p. 8
9. Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, p. 70.
10. For one instance among the many remarks made by Heaney regarding the influence of Glob's book on himself and his work see "The Saturday Interview" (Caroline Walsh), *Irish Times*, 6 December 1975, p. 5.
11. P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved*, translated by Rupert Bruce Mitford (London, 1969), p. 20.
12. In fact, in the case of "The Tollund Man", Heaney had not even seen the real corpse before he composed the poem. As he remarked to Robert Druce: "I hadn't been to Denmark when I wrote 'Tollund Man'. But I went twice, and after the second time, I wrote the 'Grauballe Man'." ("A Raindrop on a Thorn: Interview with Seamus Heaney" (Robert Druce), *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 9, 1 [1979], p. 32.) See also "The North: Silent Awarenesses with Seamus Heaney", in Monie Begely, *Rambles in Ireland* (Old Greenwich, Conn, 1977), p. 168.
13. David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester, 1988), p. 144.
14. Arthur E. McGuinness, "Hoarder of the Common Ground: Tradition and Ritual in Seamus Heaney's Poetry", *Eire-Ireland*, 13, 2 (Summer, 1978), p. 86.
15. Edna Longley, *Poetry in the Wars* (Newcastle, 1986), p. 152.
16. Terence Brown, *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays* (Gigginstown, 1988), pp. 243-244.
17. Seamus Heaney, "Mother Ireland", *The Listener*, 7 December 1972, p. 790; italics mine.
18. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London, 1981), p. 79. I am extending, and adapting, Jameson's concept to include non-narrative literature, and more recent writings than he appears to be prepared to grant the status of a socially symbolic act.



19. Seamus Heaney, "Kinship", *James Joyce of Quarterly*, 11 (1974), p. 232.
20. Richard Kearney, "Myth and Motherland", in Field Day Company, *Ireland's Field Day* (London, 1986), p. 66.
21. Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 68.
22. Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, pp. 119-120.
23. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, translated by Ralph Manheim, second edition (London, 1963), pp. 71-72.
24. Clair Wills, "The Perfect Mother: Authority in the Poetry of Medbh McGuckian", *Text and Context*, 3 (Autumn, 1988), p. 96.
25. "An Interview with Seamus Heaney" (James Randall), *Ploughshares*, 5, 3 (1979), p. 16
26. Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 45. Morrison's remark is seconded by Edna Longley's somewhat dismissive comment that the qualtrains are sometimes "mere layout unjustified by stress or sense." (Longley, *Poetry in the Wars*, p. 164.) Neil Corcoran, to my mind, is closer to the significance of poetic form in the volume when he comments: "The fallacy of imitative form in a particularly virulent condition, it may be thought; but in a book so interested in the plastic arts, it is unsurprising that Heaney should have been encouraged by the fact that his forms themselves have the shape of archaeological implements, that they look like a means of returning to the light of human scrutiny what has lain so long underground." (Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 108.)
27. The girl is known as the Windeby girl. Glob includes photographs of "her brain's exposed / and darkened combs" and the the "soiled bandage" of her blindfold. See Glob, *The Bog People*, plates 39 and 40.
28. Ciaran Carson, "Escaped from the Massacre", *The Honest Ulsterman*, 50 (Winter, 1975), p. 184.
29. James J. Lafferty, "Gifts from the Goddess: Heaney's 'Bog People'", *Eire-Ireland*, 17, 3 (Fall, 1982), pp. 134-135.
30. Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 63.
31. Jon Stallworthy, "The Poet as Archaeologist: W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney", *Review of English Studies*, 33 (May, 1982), p. 168.
32. Lafferty, "Gifts from the Goddess", p. 133.
33. See Arthur E. McGuinness, "The Craft of Diction: Revision in Seamus Heaney's Poems", in *Image and Illusion: Anglo-Irish*

*Literature and its Contexts*, edited by Maurice Harmon (Dublin, 1979), p. 79.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

35. Lafferty, "Gifts from the Goddess", p. 133

36. A coincidence we must thank Barthes' translator for. See Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard (Oxford, 1986). The difference between Heaney's and Barthes' respective "plays" might be summed up in their attitudes to the contemporary. The response Heaney makes is *nostalgic*, a desire to stabilize the self within history by "digging" back into the past and language. Hence, his linking of philology and a quest for origins expressed most succinctly in the pun on "roots". For Barthes, on the other hand, "there is only one way left to escape the alienation of present-day society: *to retreat ahead of it*: every old language is immediately compromised, and every language becomes old once it is repeated." (Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 40.)

37. Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 114.

38. Another example of such a sexual analogy can be found in Heaney's "The Labourer and the Lord: Francis Ledwidge and Lord Dunsany", a review, in part, of Dunsany's *The Curse of the Wise Woman*. Of this text, Heaney writes: "Its hero is abroad, engaged on some diplomatic business for the new Irish Free State.... The emotional division in the heart of a Unionist landlord, living in a newly independent Ireland, is emblematically realized in the setting. The boy hovers between the privileged structures of Eton and his walled estate, and the mysterious lure of the bog and its denizens. The hero's world is masculine and feudal, its spirit the gun and dog; the primeval landscape beyond the walls is feminine, its spirit is the wise woman. Both are threatened by the impersonal enterprise of the Peat Development (Ireland) Syndicate.... [These are the constituents of what might be a myth for the shaping of modern Ireland." (P, p. 205.)

39. Ciaran Carson belittles this equation mercilessly: "when he writes 'Act of Union', Ireland's relationship with England is sentimentalized into something as natural as a good fuck - being something that has always happened, everywhere, there is no longer any need to explain; it is like a mystery of the Catholic Church, ritualized and mystified into a willing ignorance." (Carson, "Escaped from the Massacre", p. 185.)

40. Seamus Heaney, "A New Life", *The Listener*, 22 February 1973, p. 239.

41. Shoshana Felman, "Rereading Femininity", *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981), p. 24.

42. Corcoran notes the shared image but fails to draw any significance from the similarity. See Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, pp. 113-114. Mary P. Brown makes the following relevant remarks concerning Heaney's double use of gender in *North*: "The female goddess is Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the terrain itself; but she is also a subject people and by association the Irish Catholic consciousness. The male figure also takes on different identities: it is imperial power colonizing a subject people and hence England or Ulster Protestantism but it is also all Irishmen who are sacrificed to the holy mother, earth. The over-lapping categories, the necessary interdependence of the male-female figures, is part of the complicated reality of Northern Ireland". (Mary P. Brown, "Seamus Heaney and *North*", *Studies*, 70 [1981], p. 293.)
43. Michael Longley, *Poems 1963-1983* (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 160.
44. Declan Kiberd, "Anglo-Irish Attitudes," in *Ireland's Field Day*, p. 87.
45. David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (California, 1988), p. 68.
46. Seamus Heaney, "An Open Letter", in *Ireland's Field Day*, p. 27.
47. John Montague, *The Rough Field*, fourth edition (Dublin, 1984), p. 35.
48. See John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, edited by Oliver Lawson Dick (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 418.
49. Heaney, "Current Unstated Assumptions about Poetry", p. 649. Heaney explicitly links the poetry of "definitive statement" in *North* to that of Lowell in a remark made to Helen O'Shea: "The second half of *North* and some of the poems in the *Field Work* book, I think, are indebted, for better or for worse, to the Lowell example." ("Interview with Seamus Heaney", p. 13.)
50. Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 145. See Matthew Arnold, "On the Study of Celtic Literature", in Matthew Arnold, *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, edited by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1962), and Cairns and Richards' analysis of this essay in *Writing Ireland*, pp. 46-49.
51. Irvin Ehrenpreis' analysis of this poem is worth quoting due to its pertinence to my argument: "The Latinate words go with the Protestant masters. The boy himself has a plain 'mouldy brow', implying his ties with the soil. 'Groomed' suggests 'groom', which once meant an officer of the royal household. The Protestants are 'estimating' because of their commercial pursuits.

They are 'census-taking' because they anxiously reckon the growing proportion of Catholics in the Six Counties. But the census is also a function of the overlords, and the word has the same root as 'censor', which evokes the moral rigor of Presbyterianism. Lampreys are parasitic as well as clinging, and suck the blood of the fish to which they attach themselves. I am only hinting at the weightiness of Heaney's language." (Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Digging In", *New York Review of Books*, 8 October 1981, p. 45.)

52. Heaney has said of his childhood divisions: "It was an Orange-Green thing. You were on one side or the other. It was a caste system, really, I suppose. You belonged to one caste, or tribe, and you breathed in the attitudes." (Begley, "The North: Silent Awarenesses with Seamus Heaney", p. 161.)

53. Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 8.

54. Terry Eagleton, "New Poetry", *Stand*, 17, 1 (1975), p. 78

55. Wallace Stevens, "The Auroras of Autumn", in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (London, 1955), pp. 413, 417.

#### CHAPTER 6

1. Terry Eagleton, "New Poetry", *Stand Magazine*, 19, 2, (1978), pp. 78-79.

2. Ted Hughes, *Gaudete*, first paperback impression (London, 1979), p. 9; italics mine.

3. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 189.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid, p. 190.

6. Ibid, p. 189.

7. Quoted in Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 123. To this may be appended an extract from an unpublished letter of Hughes written to Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts: "Is it [*Gaudete*] really about what I thought it was about? Is it about the collision of healing and creating energy with a fixed, decayed rural community that has lost all sense of spirit energy: Is it about the debasement of that spirit energy - brought about by the material stupor that it ought to enlighten and transform and supply? Because what I held in focus as I wrote was a sense of the spirit energy staggering through the crassness of the living cells, in this group, and emerging in its way as stupefied and benighted, and going about its mission almost somnambulist, almost unconscious, tinkering with Heath-Robinson paper-back magical operations as an instinctive but muddled attempt to re-establish contact with the real origins and the real calling.... As if the

brilliant real thing were happening to creatures of light in another world - but these are the shadows of it, confusedly glimpsing and remembering, translating it all into puppet and monkey and routine reflex, and helpless to manage even that, broken or demonised by the flashes of it". As in the letter to Faas, the imagery is that of "light" associated with the "real" and the "origin", and that of the "shadow", which is a "demonised" distortion of the "real calling".

8. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 188, 201.

9. *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, VII, translated by R. F. C. Hull, second edition (London, 1971), p. 171.

10. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 88

11. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, 16, 3 (1978), p. 11. For evidence that *Gaudete* was first conceived as a film script see, "Ted Hughes and *Gaudete*".

12. Freud describes scopophilia as follows: "The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake.... [The] pleasure in looking [scopophilial] becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust..., or (c) if, instead of being preparatory to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it." (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, VII [1953], pp 156-157.) In *Gaudete*, all three aspects of scopophilia may be said to be present: Lumb, in his voyeuristic observation of an archaic carving (see below) is an example of (a); less obviously, the destruction of Lumb as a "feminine" object-to-be-looked-at (again see below) may well be interpreted as Hagen "overriding" his disgust at the sexual proclivities of Lumb; (c) is, of course, the variety of scopophilia that predominates in the narrative, as, for instance, in the opening description of Hagen and his binoculars.

13. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York, 1956), p. 263.

14. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, pp. 183-184.

15. Edward Larrissy, "Ted Hughes, The Feminine, and *Gaudete*", *Critical Quarterly*, 25, 2, (Summer, 1983), p. 36.

16. See Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, pp. 150-151.

17. Larrissy, "Ted Hughes, The Feminine, and *Gaudete*", p. 38.

18. *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, XII, translated by R. F. C. Hull, second edition (London, 1968), p. 37. The whole of this volume provides many fascinating parallels to the imagery of

integration, marriage and rebirth in both *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*. Nevertheless, a delight in source-hunting is wisely tempered by Edward Larrissy's comment: "The point to stress in all this is not the idea of alchemical opposites in general, but the specific conception of these opposites as masculine and feminine, and as having to go through a black stage before renewal. *Gaudete* is a work on these themes." (Larrissy, "Ted Hughes, The Feminine, and *Gaudete*", p. 37.)

19. This outline, of course, applies only to the 1978 trade edition of *Cave Birds*. The composition of this text went through several stages, reflected in the different styles of the individual poems. My analysis of the book is not particularly concerned with this complex genesis; for details see Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 243-244, and Graham Bradshaw, "Creative Mythology in *Cave Birds*", in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, pp. 223-224.

20. Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 142.

21. Sagar sees *Cave Birds* as intimately linked to the postulated complete or "full Crow": "it is our main evidence for the direction" this work will take. (Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 171.)

22. For details of alchemical parallels see Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes*, pp. 153, 158-159, 165; and Bradshaw, "Creative Mythology in *Cave Birds*", pp. 235-236.

23. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 80.

24. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, fourth edition (New York, 1981), p. 195.

25. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 81.

26. "[The archetype] is an irrepresentable, unconscious, pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche and can therefore manifest itself spontaneously, anywhere, at any time." (*The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, X, translated by R. F. C. Hull, second edition [London, 1970], p. 449). This obviates any notion of an historical process of accumulated associations.

27. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957), p. 99.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

29. *Orghast* is the name for the ambitious dramatic experiment that Hughes created, with Peter Brook's International Centre of Theatre Research, for the 1971 Shiraz-Persepolis Festival of Arts. The play was written in an invented language, called "Orghast", and has survived only in published extracts. Nevertheless, the

general "myth" developed in the work is clear enough, and is closely related to Frye's apocalyptic symbolism. In *Orghast at Persepolis*, A. C. H. Smith gives a lengthy account of "the *Orghast* mythology". All that need be noted, in the present context, is that "the story ... [is] enacted within the body of Prometheus on his rock". (A. C. H. Smith, *Orghast at Persepolis* [London, 1972], p. 91.) As in Blake, a whole range of mythological characters inhabit this infinite body, playing out a drama of divided being, and the search for integration and redemption. Aside from Smith's book see, Tom Stoppard, "Orghast", *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 October 1971, p. 1174; Geoffrey Reeves, "The Persepolis Follies of 1971", *Performance*, 1, (1971), p. 47-71; and Ossia Trilling, "Playing with Words at Persepolis", *Theatre Quarterly*, 2 (1972), pp. 33-40. Extracts from the play are included in Smith's, Stoppard's and Reeves' pieces, whilst *Prometheus On His Crag* draws on the same issues as the unpublished work.

30. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 136.

31. Ibid, p. 146.

32. Ibid, p. 118.

33. Ibid, p. 146.

34. Ibid.

35. Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 141.

36. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 147.

37. On this practice and the nature of the "Obsidian Goddess" see Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 190.

38. Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 148.

39. See *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, edited by W. Y. Evans-Wentz (London, 1960).

40. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 156-157.

41. Unlike the traditional story of St George and the Dragon, *The Iron Man* ends with the knight, the Iron Man himself, harnessing the creative potential of the space-bat-angel-dragon to peaceful ends, rather than destroying him. The latter circles the earth, singing the music of the spheres: "The strange soft eerie space-music began to alter all the people of the world. They stopped making weapons. The countries began to think how they could live pleasantly alongside each other, rather than how to get rid of each other. All they wanted to do was to have peace to enjoy this strange, wild, blissful music from the giant singer in space." (Ted Hughes, *The Iron Man*, second edition [London, 1985], p. 62.)

42. That is according to a letter by Hughes to Gifford and Roberts. See Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 260 n. 2.
43. Bradshaw, "Creative Mythology in Cave Birds", p. 215.
44. See Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 260 n. 2.
45. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 90.
46. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 41-42.
47. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 171-172.
48. Ted Hughes, *Cave Birds*, limited edition (London, 1975), unpagged.
49. Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes*, p. 188.
50. For information regarding the titles of Baskin's drawings see the entry for *Cave Birds* in Keith Sagar and Stephen Tabor, *Ted Hughes: A Bibliography 1946-1980* (London, 1983), pp. 65-69. The drawing's titles are also often the subtitles to the poems in their magazine publication. For instance, "The interrogator" is subtitled "A Vulturess" in *The Listener*, 12 February 1976, p. 188.
51. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 201.
52. Bradshaw, "Creative Mythology in Cave Birds", p. 230.
53. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 208. See also their excellent account of this poem, pp. 208-209.
54. See Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical study*, p. 99.
55. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 119.
56. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 73.

#### CHAPTER 7

1. Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 75.
2. Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 131.
3. See *ibid*, p. 134.
4. Tony Curtis, "A More Social Voice: *Field Work*", in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, p. 109.



5. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 102.
6. See "Gerontion": "Signs are taken for wonders. 'We would see a sign!'" (*The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 37.)
7. See Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, pp. 98-99.
8. Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 79.
9. Harold Bloom, "The Voice of Kinship" *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 February 1980, p. 137.
10. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, p. 167.
11. Hederman, "Seamus Heaney: The Reluctant Poet", p. 67.
12. See Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 138.
13. Stallworthy, "The Poet as Archaeologist: Yeats and Seamus Heaney", p. 171.
14. Edward W. Said, *Yeats and Decolonization*, A Field Day Pamphlet, 15 (Derry, 1988), p. 11.
15. Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 144.
16. See, for instance, section II of "Kinship": "Earth-pantry, bone-vault, / sun-bank, embalmer / of votive goods / and sabred fugitives. / / Insatiable bride. Sword-swallower ..." (*N*, p. 41).
17. Green, "The Feminine Principle in Seamus Heaney's Poetry", pp. 11-12.
18. Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 86.
19. *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, edited by Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool, 1969 ), p. 27.
20. Kearney, *Transitions*, p. 113
21. *Ibid*, p. 104.
22. *Ibid*, p. 103.
23. Heaney, "Dante and the Modern Poet", pp. 18-19.
24. Alan Robinson, *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry* (London, 1988), p. 130.
25. *Ibid*, 132.
26. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Frogmore, 1977), p. 166

27. See, for example, "She was a figure of the womanhood of her country, a batlike soul...." (Ibid, pp. 199-200.)
28. See Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique", *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, edited by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, 1965), pp. 3-24.
29. Heaney, "Dante and the Modern Poet", p. 19.
30. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 227.
31. Ibid, p. 172.
32. Seamus Heaney "The Interesting Case of John Alphonsus Mulrennan", *Planet* (January, 1978), p. 35.
33. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 227.
34. Seamus Heaney, "John Bull's Other Island", *Listener* 29 September 1977, pp. 397-399; Seamus Heaney, "A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on the Irish Literary Revival", in *Irish Studies 1*, edited by P. J. Drudy (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 1-20.
35. Heaney, "The Interesting Case of John Alphonsus Mulrennan", p. 39; Heaney, "A Tale of Two Islands", p. 17.
36. Heaney, "A Tale of Two Islands", p. 18.
37. Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, p. 190.
38. Ibid.
39. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, edited by Agnes Latham (London, 1975), ii. 1. 15-17.
40. Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 163.
41. For a prose appraisal of Carelton see, Heaney, "A Tale of Two Islands", pp. 11-12.
42. "Under Ben Bulbin", in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, p. 400.
43. Heaney, "A Tale of Two Islands", p. 18.
44. Heaney, "The Interesting Case of John Alphonsus Mulrennan", p. 39.
45. See Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 174.
46. For his theory of the anxiety exerted by the precursor poet on his ephebe or successor, see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York, 1975). Interestingly, at the end of his review of *Field Work*, Bloom declares "all critics and lovers of

poetry must wish him every cunning for survival." (Bloom, "The Voice of Kinship", p. 138.) Such cunning, here, is in many ways turned against Bloom's own arguments concerning the influence of Yeats on Heaney. Whatever the merits of that standpoint, the cunning Heaney adopts in parts of *Station Island* is to be read as Joycean or Dedalean..

47. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.
48. Seamus Heaney, *Sweeney Astray* (London, 1984), introduction unpagged.
49. George O'Brien, "Incertux Redux", *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 15, 1 (1986), p. 74.
50. Blake Morrison, "Encounters with Familiar Ghosts" , *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 October 1984, p. 1192.
51. Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, p. 130.

#### CHAPTER 8

1. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ix. 114-122, in *The Poems of John Milton*, edited by John Carey and Alastair Fowler, second edition (London, 1980).
2. Ted Hughes, "Spring Nature Notes", *The Listener*, 10 January 1974, pp. 48-49; "The Sentenced", *New Statesman*, 27 September 1974, p. 433.
3. See West, *Ted Hughes*, p. 188. See also Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 92.
4. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1970), p. 60.
5. Hughes, "Myth and Education" (1976), p. 92.
6. Keith Sagar, "Fourfold Vision in Hughes", in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, p. 286.
7. *Ibid*, p. 305.
8. *Ibid*, p. 309.
9. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (Cambridge Mass, 1987), p. 322.
10. Sagar, "Fourfold Vision in Hughes", p. 309.
11. The *Diary* was first published as *Moortown Elegies* (London, 1978), and reprinted as the first section of *Moortown*, pp. 13-68. All references are made to the 1989 reissue (see bibliography), which usefully dates the "diary entries".

12. See, for example plate 3 of Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *The Complete Writings*: "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence".
13. West, *Ted Hughes*, p. 116.
14. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 160; italics mine.
15. Blake, *Milton*, plate 30, l. 13.
16. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 165.
17. *Matthew Arnold: The Oxford Authors*, p. 139.
18. Sagar, "Fourfold Vision in Hughes", pp. 300-301.
19. William Blake, "Annotations to 'Poems' by William Wordsworth", in *Complete Writings*, p. 783.
20. John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination*, second edition (London, 1964), p. 44.
21. William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Poems* (1815)", in *The Poems*, II, p. 915.
22. Blake, *Milton*, plate 30, l. 5.
23. See Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 219.
24. Blake, *Milton*, plate 30, ll. 21-29.
25. William Wordsworth, "The Recluse. Part First. Book First. Home at Grasmere", ll. 103-109, in *The Poems*, I.
26. Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, p. 255.
27. William Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence", l. 10, in *The Poems*, I.
28. Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, p. 236.
29. Inge Crosman Wimmers, *Poetics of Reading: Approaches to the Novel* (Princeton, 1988), p. 6.
30. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 240
31. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, p. 502.
32. A. R. Ammons, *The Selected Poems* (New York, 1986), p. 11.
33. Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, p. 258.
34. *Ibid*, pp. 260

35. West, *Ted Hughes*, p. 95.
36. Ibid, p. 103; Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 249.
37. Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence", ll. 99-112.
38. Craig Robinson, "The Good Shepherd: *Moortown Elegies*", in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, pp. 263; 281.
39. Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 251.

#### CONCLUSION

1. Robinson, *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry*, p. 154.
2. See "From The School of Eloquence", in Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems (Harmondsworth, 1984)*.
3. Robinson, *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry*, p. 149.
4. Ibid, pp. 151-152.
5. Ibid, p. 152.
6. Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 51.
7. Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan", *Yale French Studies*, 55/56, p. 384.
8. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (California, 1979)
9. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster (London, 1971), p. 162.
10. Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, pp. 268-269.
11. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated Albert Hofstadter (New York, 1971), p. 179. Craig Robinson, in a study which was published too late for discussion in this context, devotes a considerable amount of space to an analysis of Hughes' relationship with the later Heidegger. See the first chapter of Craig Robinson, *Ted Hughes as the Shepherd of Being* (London, 1990).
12. West, *Ted Hughes*, pp. 115-116.
13. Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, p. 289.
14. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, p. 9.

15. Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca, 1977), p. 54.

16. *Ibid*, p. 56.

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