VIOLENCE AND THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE IN THE POETRY OF TED HUGHES

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis probes the conditions of violence in Hughes's verse, explains why it occurs so frequently, and gives reasons for its use. While scrutinizing Hughes's use of violence, I also demonstrate the strong celebration of life which occurs in the poetry. I show that both violence and the celebration of life spring from the same impetus or spirit which works together to give humankind a sensitive and complete vision of the universe. I prove that the seemingly diametrically opposed concepts of violence and the celebration of life actually exist because of each other, and are in fact the same exultant energy occurring in different forms. My thesis deals with Hughes's less-known works: River: New Poems, Season Songs, Under the North Star, The Tiger's Bones, The Iron Man, and selected poems from Crow.

This thesis is dedicated to my Beloved Master, Sant Darshan Singh, whose love, strength, and guidance is mine, forever.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INVESTIGATIONS

The most poignant definition of the use of violence in Hughes's verse comes from the poet himself. When Egbert Faas interviewed Hughes for London Magazine in 1970, he commenced the session by asking Hughes if his poetry could indeed be considered a poetry of violence. Hughes answered:

> When my Aunt calls my verse "horrible and violent" I know what she means. Because I know what style of life and outlook she is defending....She has an instinct for a kind of poetry that will confirm the values of her way of life....In a sense, critics who find my poetry violent are in her world, and they are safeguarding her way of life (5-6).

Poetry, for Hughes, must not hide behind a philosophy of life that perpetuates the naive idea that the world, the universe, is simply kind and safe. Rather, it is the vision of the world as a whole, of nature as a whole--its beauties and its terrors, its compassion and its violence--that matters to Hughes. This is the idea, the feeling, that poetry must perpetuate. For Hughes, violence, acknowledging its existence in nature, is the catalyst needed to usher humankind

back into a dynamic vision of the universe. "Any form of violence--any form of vehement activity--" says Hughes, "invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe" (Faas 9). According to Hughes, Western man has tended, over many years, to shut out the terrifying aspects of the world, the aspects which refuse to be explained by rational or moral thought. But in walling out "the elemental power circuit of the Universe," humankind has severed a vital link between itself and nature, between itself and the life-giving forces of the world. In "The Bull Moses," from Hughes's second book Lupercal (37-8), the bull, locked in a dark shed, is a metaphor for humankind's severed link with nature:

> Each dusk the farmer led him
> Down to the pond to drink and smell the air,
> And he took no pace but the farmer
> Led him to take it, as if he knew nothing
> Of the ages and continents of his father,
> Shut, while he wombed, to a dark shed
> And steps between his door and the duckpond;
> ...
> But the grasses whispered nothing awake, the fetch
> Of the distance drew nothing to momentum
> In the locked black of his powers.

Just as Moses has forgotten his original, historical self, so have we. And in his renouncing of "the black of his powers," we are reminded of our own refusal to participate in the fullness of the world. Yet within Moses "the ages and continents of his fathers," are wombed within him, as he is wombed

within the dark shed. A great potential is gathering within both wombs, an energy at work that must be, will be, birthed. The potential storm gathering within Moses, his birthright to exist in "The weight of the sun and the moon and the world hammered / To a ring of brass through his nostrils" is also our potential and birthright. Hughes says that though we may be cut off from the "elemental power circuit of the universe" today, we have the potential, threatening potential, to return to the universe. His poetry guides the way.

The "elemental power circuit of the Universe" is a conductor for neither good nor evil. It conducts mere energy, energy unharnessed, and, like fire, when its properties and potentials are discerned and controlled, can nourish life, but when neither understood nor controlled, destroys life. "Once contact has been made--it becomes difficult to control. Something from beyond human activity enters" (Faas 10). By harnessing this energy, by making ourselves available to it, completely available, we can live a meaningful life, Hughes implies. But instead "we have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination--anything bigger introduces problems...because force of any kind frightens our rationalist, humanist style of outlook" (10). So, if you "refuse the energy, you are living a kind

of death" (10), where there is no vital relationship between humankind and the universe.

Being energy, violence--as Hughes conceives it--can be channeled into two directions, into that which is great or into that which is perverse.

> Violence that begins in an unhappy home can go one way to produce a meaningless little nightmare of murder etc. for T.V. or it can go the other way and produce those moments in Beethoven (7).

The choice, if indeed we choose to live in a vital world, lies wholly with us. "For Hughes, the poet cannot see too much or experience too much" (Sagar 33). And it is this, becoming absolutely vulnerable to the forces of the universe, that Hughes, through his poetry and prose, compels us to do. The idea of vulnerability, of surrender, is exquisitely captured in "The Knight," from Hughes's book Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama (28). Here, the poet shows that it is through surrender that a person conquers the universe. The Knight is a sacrifice unto himself and the world--only his bones remain, and even they are being ground into oneness with the earth. The poem is one of absolute humility:

The knight

Has conquered. He has surrendered everything.

Now he kneels. He is offering up his victory
And unlacing his steel.

In front of him are the common wild stones
of the earth--

The first and last altar
Onto which he lowers his spoils.

And that is right. He has conquered in
earth's name.
Committing these trophies

To the small madness of roots, to the
mineral stasis
And to rain.

An unearthly cry goes up.
The Universes squabble over him--

Here a bone, there a rag.
His sacrifice is perfect. He reserves nothing.

Skylines tug him apart, winds drink him,
Earth itself unravels him from beneath--

His submission is flawless.

...

Wedded with the idea of violence is the idea of life to be celebrated. Both, in Hughes's vision, are inextricably tied to one another. There is no life, Hughes insists, unless violence, or rather energy, is embedded in it. And violence, or energy, can only exist where there is life--dynamic life.

> So in Ted Hughes´s poems, there is a constant striving towards moments of significance; moments of greatness which will last... Ted Hughes values such moments for their intensity; but he has to isolate them from past and future, cause and effect, reflection and evaluation before he can savour them to the full. Hence the absence of compassion, anger, humility, nostalgia, disgust and the other attitudes belonging to the perspectives of time (Dyson 221).

Hughes´s violence is pure--primordial. "The most self-evident feature of Hughes´s vision is its elemental character" (John 5). No judgments, no interpolations of meaning--nothing is allowed within his poems which doesn´t, somehow, breathe; his poems mine that elemental powerhouse, releasing this primordial energy in poetic, and, therefore, controlled form. His poems are not playgrounds for philosophical arguments: "For Hughes, poetry is an attempt to move behind the abstracting and moralizing mind in order to find the vitality that has been submerged by it" (Uroff 31). His poems are visions, momentary insights into the dynamic life of the universe.

> Poetry need not always evaluate experience. Sometimes its main function is to extend awareness, creating new areas which the reader can assimilate into his own total morality later, as he will (Dyson 225).

In order to retain this purity, Hughes must, as much as possible, efface his own existence within the poem. His

vision, of course, is the poem's impetus, but the vision must somehow contain truth outside of Hughes's personal life and history. J.M. Newton has made this observation about Hughes:

> The person who is the poet doesn't seem to be there at all, making a fuss or an effort.... The ferocity of nature isn't the poet's. He himself stays whole and sensitive and impassive. The ferocity comes over as the nature of things, the zest of life itself ("Some Notes on Crow" 379).

Again, for Hughes to retain a pure vision, he must do so by laying his entire existence at the threshold of this primordial energy.

> His most difficult task is to remove the obstacles...to bring himself into a state of full awareness, openness, excitement, concentration.... I believe Hughes to be a great poet because he possesses the kind of imagination which issues in the purest poetry, charged poetry, visionary, revelatory poetry that sees into the life of things (Sagar 3).

That which is "the life of things," is none other than the energy or violence that Hughes seeks to constructively unleash through his poems. It is that "energy itself is the foundation of existence, the apotheosis of endurance and the logical end of this poet's search. It is arguable that the majority of Hughes's poems constitute a massive celebration of energy" (Gitzen 70).

So far we have been considering violence as an energy infusing the universe with terror and beauty. And yet there is another kind of violence existing at the heart of Hughes's verse, and this is the physical violence of the natural world. "Not favoring nor elevating violence, he observes it in the world around him" (John 6). This is where the poet parts from personal judgment and seeks the "whole" vision, the true or eternal vision of the natural world.

> Hughes has a good deal to say about both violence and the cruelty of nature. But this cruelty is regarded as inevitable and, more important still, as unwitting, as part of the natural order. Hughes is thus aligned not so much with (his) contemporaries...as with certain great poets of tragic vision in the past (Lucie-Smith 36).

It is this acknowledgment of violence, the physical kind, which insists on Hughes's assertion of bravado, the undaunted heroic being.

> The will to live might seem the first and healthiest of subjects, but in fact it is almost the last and most morbid. Men come to it after the other subjects have failed. It is the last stop, waterless and exposed, before nothingness. Civilization blows off, love and utopia evaporate, the interest the human mind takes in its own creations washes out, and there, its incisors bared, stands life, daring you to praise it (Bedient 103).

Earlier, as Faas observed, humankind has the choice whether to transform violence into that which is truly profound or into that which is perverse.

When Hughes strips the illusion out of life, we finally have a chance to come to the truth about ourselves: will we survive at a more vital level of existence, namely the heroic, or will we go mad? "Pain and death seem, for Hughes, to be machines that are designed to wring every drop of significance out of life; or levers that raise our unsatisfactory daily existence to a mythical, heroic level" (Press 184). In this sense, Hughes's creatures and landscapes are physically real. There is little difference between physical and spiritual violence. Physical violence is the inevitable result of spiritual violence; both are energy released in order to redress some imbalance, says Hughes in his interview with Faas, occurring within the universe. The anticipation of both spiritual and physical violence are perfectly balanced in "Cat and Mouse":

> On the sheep-cropped summit, under hot sun,
> The mouse crouched, staring out the chance
> It dared not take.
> Time and a world
> Too old to alter, the five mile prospect--
> Woods, villages, farms--hummed its heat-heavy
> Stupor of life.
> Whether to two
> Feet or four, how are prayers contracted!
> Whether in God's eye or the eye of a cat.

Hughes is famed as an animal poet. Doubtless, "No poet has observed animals more accurately... But the description generates metaphors which relate the creature to all creatures and to human experiences and concepts" (Sagar 37). Hughes turns to animals (and other aspects of the natural world--oceans, rivers, moors) for many reasons. First, animals, for the most part, exist in the elemental world which Hughes continually praises and evokes. By existing in a more vital world, animals have more contact with the violence of nature, and seem to exhibit the different qualities of which the natural world consists. By focusing on animals, Hughes brings us closer to the vital world, closer to that vehement energy, spiritual and material, he tries to capture in his poems.

> Unlike the animals, for which the conditions of survival have changed little over the ages, man has successfully eradicated certain threats to his existence, threats which while operative demanded remarkable cunning and strength. Conditions for human survival have become less strenuous (Gitzen 69).

Animals, too, have often been used in poetry and prose to illuminate human characteristics.

> As George MacBeth says in his introduction to the Penguin Book of Animal Verse, "all good poems about animals are about something else as well." Medieval bestiaries proved long ago that animals lend themselves very easily to the symbolizing of human behavior (Mollema 9).

But Hughes is not merely interested in the human; the human is not the centrifugal force about which the universe operates. The human has a place, but that is all. However, it is the human toward which Hughes's poems are necessarily directed. The poet seems to displace humanity from its illusion of centralness in the world in order that humanity may retain a clearer and more vital vision of itself within nature (and nature, here, can mean many things--from the physical, "natural," world to the elemental forces residing therein).

> Hughes's technique is original, his attitudes are instructive--the reader is intended to learn, to admire (or condemn) and do otherwise (or likewise). The poems give us the emotional jolt we need (Grubb 223).

Hughes seldom lectures, especially in his later verse, on what is wrong with humanity. The poet's main concern is with discovering and harnessing energy; "energy is a supreme force, eternally capable of engendering and sustaining new life. Hughes's vision offers a further dimension of hope by centering not upon erring humanity but upon the chief agency of life itself" (Gitzen 73). Hughes's landscapes and animals embody this energy--they are both real and supra-real. "Indeed, Hughes's landscapes and animals sometimes reflect internal states and, when not reflective, illuminate them" (John 5). These states are spiritual; they are different

expressions of the same elemental energy pervading all life. [This point will be closely examined through Hughes's writings in the following section.] It is when we realize that Hughes conceives himself as a twentieth century shaman that we come to understand his pivotal use of animals figures and landscapes within his poetry. We "can infer that the creatures in his poems...are totem beasts, messengers from the spirit world who bring the protagonist a 'clairvoyant piece of information' or 'some display of healing power'" (Hoffman 64). Healing power is the main concept, the raison d'etre of Hughes's verse. This power is released in the form of a violent energy, a jolt strong enough to waken slumbering humanity. Again, Hughes wants us to comprehend the multi-powered universe, to be healed, from this vision, into a more vital relationship with it. Hughes's animals then are only figure-heads (in one sense, and perhaps in the main sense) pointing toward that elemental energy from which humankind has hidden itself. Hughes

> must go beyond individuals or species to life's fountainhead, the forces which through the ages have supplied it with innumerable forms... There alone will he gather substantiation for his faith in life's....potential (Gitzen 70).

His poems often attack the reader's senses with frightening zeal; spirited verbs jump from the page into the reader's mind and heart, daring the reader to feel the tremendous powers in the world.

> So many a one has dared to be struck dead
> Peeping through his fingers at the world's ends,
> Or at an ant's head.
> (The Hawk in the Rain 35)

In Faas's interview, Hughes speaks in some length about the concept of poet as shaman:

> Basically, it [shamanism] is the whole procedure and practice of becoming and performing as a witch-doctor, a medicine man... Once fully fledged he [the shaman] can enter trance at will and go to the spirit world...he goes to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs. Now this flight to the spirit world...is the basis of the hero story. It is the same basic outline pretty well all over the world, same events, same figures, same situations. It is the skeleton of thousands of folktales and myths. And of many narrative poems. The Odyssey, the Divine Comedy, Faust, etc. Most narrative poems recount only those dreams...the dream of the call (15).

Hughes's poetry is not a record of his excursions to the spirit world; his poetry is the cure, the "answer" his journeys provide. Each poem is a new gift containing a different aspect of that "energy" we so desperately need psychologically to survive. And because that energy, that elemental source, which is pure spirit, is inexhaustible, Hughes never has to change his theme. Each poem, therefore, is different though its source is the same.

Hughes admits that such a role is a difficult one for this age. He says:

> Poets usually refuse the call. How are they to accept it? How can a poet become a medicine man and fly to the source and come back and heal or pronounce oracles? Everything among us is against it (15).

Nevertheless, Hughes's verse assures us that he has completed many journeys to this spirit world. His aim, his cure, is the regeneration of spirit--not only for himself but for those who partake of his songs.

These poems, or "cures," are most often celebrations--celebrations of life. These constitute Hughes's finest verse. When the violence (physical and/or spiritual) is evident, but not self-indulgent, then Hughes is capable of balancing beauty and terror in a sensitive, profound way. "[W]hat distinguishes Hughes is his...celebration of existence, and his reinstatement of man's heroism, courage, and dignity, in the face of...insuperable odds" (John 15). As will become evident in the following chapters, violence and the celebration of life are inseparable for Hughes. Light cannot be comprehended without darkness. If we choose to see only loveliness, then we are living in a naive illusion, one which has no basis in real life. Therefore we remain cut off from life and from all the vital energy flowing therein. Hughes's "conception [is] of life as a value worth celebrating...of life as the primary value" (Gibson 303).

CHAPTER II

UNITY OF BEING: THE OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE WORLD

I have selected for examination poems from two of Hughes's children's books: Season Songs and Under the North Star. I find that these poems, in Sagar's words "are attempts to cut through the conditioned response of adults to the natural world, to restore unfallen vision" (160). Whether Hughes's verse is conceived for adults or children matters little; his voice, his assertion that we make ourselves susceptible to the "power circuit of the Universe," remains the same for each. "[T]hat which distinguishes Hughes as a poet is present even in his children's books in verse and prose, so that both 'serious' and 'light' are clearly expressions of the same original vision" (John 5).

Hughes's verse is at its most powerful when he knits together his subject's external environment and internal psyche, when neither the subject nor the subject's environment can exist without the other. "The metaphysical apprehension that most often recurs in the poems, in ever new and

differing ways, is--crudely--that each different centre of life is the spatial and temporal centre of all life, of the universe" (Newton, "Ted Hughes's Metaphysical Poems" 398) in its own particular form. Each creature illuminates a new aspect of the primal spirit (or energy) and the natural world; the spiritual and physical "states-of-being" have created animals and landscapes, have imbued them, to illuminate themselves. "As Hughes has said, landscapes are valuable to us not simply because of the presence of the elements, but for the encounter between the elemental things and the human feelings the landscapes inspire" (Uroff 20).

In the poem "Goose" (Under the North Star 41), the bird's migratory flight sets the world turning:

> The White Bear, with smoking mouth, embraces
> All the North.
> The Wild Goose listens.
>
> South, south--
> the Goose stretches his neck
> Over the glacier.
>
> And high, high
> Turns the globe in his hands.
>
> Hunts with his pack from star to star.
> Sees the sun far down behind the world.
>
> Sinks through fingers of light, with apricot breast,
> To startle sleeping farms, at apple dawn,
> With iceberg breath.
>
> Then to and fro all Christmas, evening and morning,
> Urging his linked team,
> Clears the fowler's gun and the surf angler.

Homesick
Smells the first flower of the Northern Lights--

Clears the Lamb's cry, wrestles heaven,
Sets the globe turning.

Clears the dawns--a compass tolling
North, north.
North, north.

Wingbeat wading the flame of evening.

Till he dips his eyes
In the whale's music

Among the boom
Of calving glaciers

And wooing of wolves
And rumpus of walrus.

In this poem, as in many others, Hughes achieves his interrelationship between subject and universe by making his subject no less important than the universe itself. He often capitalizes the names of his animals, portraying them as powers greater than the creatures they represent. The first line of this poem, "The White Bear, with smoking mouth, embraces / All the North" indicates that the Polar Bear is more than an animal: the Polar Bear is a metaphor for the North and the North is a metaphor for the Polar Bear. The "smoking mouth" is as much the bear's warm breath against the ice as it is the clouds and creeping fogs of that frozen land.

"Goose" is divided into three sections, indicated by movement. During the first section, the Geese fly South, bringing winter with their arrival to the new land:

> Sinks through fingers of light, with apricot breasts,
> To startle sleeping farms, at apple dawn,
> With iceberg breath.

Then, in the poem's mid-section, the Geese momentarily "rest," though rest for these creatures means flying "to and fro all Christmas, evening and morning." This movement, again, keeps the world spinning. Finally, as the poem moves to its close, the Geese, "Homesick," return "North, north" and with them they carry winter (their "iceberg breath") back to its original land, and their flight, as before, "sets the globe turning." The Geese, then, never rest. Only the winter which follows their migration rests over the lands to which they fly. The Geese must continue their flight just as the world must continue its spinning.

The Geese, then, are many things: they are birds, they are heralds of winter, they <u>are</u> winter, and they are the motion of the universe. This motion and change of seasons also indicates the motion of time and the change it brings. The Geese, then, are time, or embodiments of time, servants of time. This poem, then, brings more to the meaning of "being Goose" than do any meanings conceived of in the language or ideas of the Euro-Western world. The goose is a creature of this world, yes--yet the creature in Hughes's poem, is both mortal and divine. In Hughes's conception of the Goose, both itself and its generations to follow are

entrusted with a very great task. And the loss of this creature to the world would be--in terms of this poem--devastating.

Winter is a violent season, its arrival a violent one. But the tone of "Goose" indicates that the coming of winter is a wondrous thing, an arrival to be celebrated. The poem does not discuss the consequences of the winter season, yet its dreaded arrival, in terms of the difficulties and struggle of life that results, is part of a greater cycle; winter has a beauty and dignity as it flies (in the form of Goose) to and from the world.

As has been indicated in some of the lines, this flight of the Goose and winter is a cosmic flight. On its way from the North, the Goose "Hunts with his pack from star to star. / Sees the sun far down behind the world." And on its return to the North, the Goose "wrestles heaven." Whether this is a struggle between the seasons or between gods is not mentioned within the poem. But the flight, it seems, is beset with dangers and is not easy. The arrival of winter, then, can also be seen as a triumph.

"The Snowy Owl" (Under the North Star 16) is a magical poem--a poem of transformations. Here the poem appears in its entirety:

Yellow Eye O Yellow Eye
Yellow as the yellow Moon.

Out of the Black Hole of the North
The Ice Age is flying!

The Moon is flying low--
The Moon looms, hunting her Hare--

The Moon drops down, big with frost
And hungry as the end of the world.

The North Pole, rusty-throated,
Screeches, and the globe shudders--

The globe's eyes have squeezed shut with fear.
But the stars are shaking with joy.

And look!

The Hare has a dazzling monument!
A big-eyed blizzard standing.

On feet of black iron!
Let us all rejoice in the Hare!

Snowy Owl O Snowy Owl
Staring the globe to stillness!

The Moon flies up.

A white mountain is flying.

The Hare has become an angel!

The poem is one of celebration and horror, exultant terror. The universe participates in the seeming violence of the Owl "hunting her Hare." A mythic quality pervades the poem for the Owl is the ancient Moon about which so many tales have been written. The language, too, is of the world of myths, for the poem deals with those ancient powers which were once thought of as treading the universe. To Hughes these powers

have never left, and in every simple act, such as the preying of an owl on a hare, they renew themselves. Here the Owl is the Moon. But, the Owl is also the North Pole and the Ice Age flying. All three titles call on great powers. And yet the Hare is "A big-eyed blizzard standing," and in this description we understand that both Owl and Hare are a part of each other--a blizzard and an ice age--and should be properly wedded. The final line, "The Hare has become an angel!" signifies the Hare's death in its "union" with the Owl. Though death may appear dreadful, here it is alchemized into wonder--flesh becomes spirit. Hughes here is brilliant in his wedding terror to celebration.

In the lines "The globe's eyes have squeezed shut with fear. / But the stars are shaking with joy," we are confronted with two points of view. The "union" of the Owl and Hare takes place on the earth, the home of flesh. Here flesh is destroyed and is given death. The Owl, however, is also the Moon and therefore is an inhabitant of the stars, an inhabitant--metaphorically speaking--of the heavens. The Hare, through the Owl's death-gift, is seen rising into heaven--its body and its spirit (the Hare's body being "A white mountain ...flying" and the Hare's spirit becoming "an angle"). The earth is losing and therefore has fear, but the heavens are gaining, and therefore have joy.

The Hare can also be seen as a sacrificial victim. And before its death great honor is bestowed upon it by these words: "Let us all rejoice in the Hare!" then, the entire *universe becomes motionless--the heavens from anticipation,* the earth from fear. "Snowy Owl O Snowy Owl / Staring the globe to stillness!"

This poem also reiterates the argument of spirit vs. flesh. The Hare is clothed in flesh, yet spirit--the "angel"--dwells within. When the flesh has been sundered from the spirit, then the spirit may go forth unhindered. Whereas earth sees death as a great sorrow ("the globe shudders"), the spirit-powers (Hughes's "elemental power circuit of the Universe") know otherwise and rejoice in the slaying ("the stars are shaking with joy") which enables the spirit to be set free.

For a complete wedding between the external world and the internal world of a creature's psyche, we can turn to the first poem appearing in Under the North Star, "Amulet" (9). Here, Wolf and forest create each other and cannot be understood except in terms of each other:

Inside the Wolf's fang, the mountain heather.
Inside the mountain heather, the Wolf's fur.
Inside the Wolf's fur, the ragged forest.
Inside the ragged forest, the Wolf's foot.
Inside the Wolf's foot, the stony horizon.
Inside the stony horizon, the Wolf's tongue.
Inside the Wolf's tongue, the Doe's tears.
Inside the Doe's tears, the frozen swamp.
Inside the frozen swamp, the Wolf's blood.
Inside the Wolf's blood, the snow wind.
Inside the snow wind, the Wolf's eye.
Inside the Wolf's eye, the North Star.
inside the North Star, the Wolf's fang.

The environment that created the Wolf and perpetuates it, is a harsh winter environment. Perhaps the Wolf can be understood as being one of the various moods of its environment, yet being incarnate, haunts all the other moods (and creatures thereof). The poem seems almost a recipe, ingredients which create wolfness: snow wind, frozen swamp, mountain heather, stony horizon--all those things which are durable and pitiless.

In this poem, the reader is constantly shifting from the internal world to the external world and back again, until a spell has been knit and the reader enters both worlds at once. Each line is a complete sentence beginning with a prepositional phrase "Inside" and ending with the sentence's adjective and noun. There are thirteen lines, a number of foreboding and ill-luck, as is the tone. The poem, also, is circular--complete in itself, like a perfectly carved gem. It ends where it begins and begins where it ends. There are no

questions left unanswered or possibilities left unaccounted for. The spell is complete.

According to Webster's Third New International Dictionary, an amulet is "a charm (as an ornament, gem, or relic) often inscribed with a spell, magic incantation, or symbol and believed to protect the wearer...or to aid him" (75). Here the poem is meant to aid the reader; it is an incantation which creates a bridge, a portal through which the reader may enter the language and world of the book.

The poem summons the four elements: air (snowy wind), fire (North Star), water (frozen swamp and Doe's tears), and earth (stony horizon). The elements, though, take on peculiar states and therefore are not pure--the water is frozen (or pitiless) and born of grief (the Doe's tears), the air is bitter cold, the earth is hard and unyielding, and the fire is cold and distant. Foreboding is the tone--all is not well with a universe in which both Wolf and environment seem to conspire against a Doe--as it was the Doe's tears which aided in the Wolf's creation (and therefore aided in the creation of this harsh land). Nevertheless, the language is so beautifully wrought, a lulling incantation upon the mind and senses, that the reader cannot but go on, entering the world of the North Star.

That which certainly breeds and is bred from a violent world is also celebrated in this poem. What "Amulet"

celebrates is neither life nor death, but strength and endurance. The Wolf and its world have their own beauty, that beauty which can be seen glimmering in the light of the cold, distant North Star. According to the poem, the North Star is also the Wolf's fang. And both require honor and celebration for they are both physical and spiritual realities. Hughes's world is not a moral one. What Hughes wants us to celebrate is life--every kind of life, violent or peaceful. "Violence, for him, is the occasion not for reflection but for being; it is a guarantee of energy, of life" (Dyson 221). By harkening us to the violent life he seeks to restore balance, as he perceives that most people turn their eyes from the beauty of the Wolf's fang and seek beauty in an unreal, eternal Spring.

Another poem of magic indicating complete union between creature and environment is one entitled "A Lynx" (Under the North Star 22).

> The hushed limbs of forest,
> Of clouds, of mountains, here
> Take their hard-earned rest
> Under the Lynx's ear.
> In his sleep, they sleep--
> As in a deep lake--deep.
>
> Do not disturb this beast
> Or clouds will open eyes,
> Soundless the forest
> Will fold away all its trees
> And hazy mountains
> Fade among their stones.

Besides being a marvelous piece of fancy, this poem is a warning: "Do not disturb this beast." There is a perfect unity between the Lynx and the mountains, between the Lynx and the forest. If we disturb the Lynx--attempting to sever the creature from its perfect harmony with nature--then the mountains and forests will fade not from the Lynx nor from themselves, but will fade from us. With every "violence" we commit <u>against</u> nature, nature will recede from us. This is why, Hughes seems to say, that we live such incomplete, dissatisfied lives. We cannot live as the Lynx lives, sleep as the Lynx sleeps, with the entire universe sleeping and living within us, for we sundered ourselves from nature and its world long ago. But by disturbing those who do live in accord with their natural environment, we move even further away from our first home and therefore from ourself, which is buried within the land. According to Hughes, and witnessed throughout his works, the difference between the violence humanity commits and the violence nature commits is that ours <u>is</u> violence, but nature's has only been termed as violence by man, and is completely misunderstood. The violence occurring in nature is primordial and implacable and, according to Hughes, creates balance. The violence committed by humanity against the unity of the natural world is not natural but is a result of misunderstanding and perhaps fear.

"The Mosquito" is another poem in Under the North Star (44) which shows how even a Mosquito coming into life is a moment of celebration, of miracle. The entire universe partakes in the Mosquito's creation, but it is mainly winter that tends to the creature's formation. And indeed the Mosquito bites like the winter which shaped it--a vicious shard of ice:

> To get into life
> Mosquito died many deaths.
>
> The slow millstone of Polar ice, turned by the Galaxy,
> Only polished his egg.
>
> Subzero, bulging all its mountain-power,
> Failed to fracture his bubble.
>
> The lake that held him swelled black,
> Tightened to granite, with splintering teeth,
> But only sharpened his needle.
>
> Till the strain was too much, even for Earth.
> Winter sank to her knees.
>
> The stars drew off, trembling.
> The mountains sat back, sweating.
>
> The lake burst.
>
> Mosquito
>
> Flew up singing, over the broken waters--
>
> A little haze of wings, a midget sun.

The poem is focused on the idea of miracle. What fosters the mosquito's creation, not even the earth can bear. The ice and cold and vicious nature of winter only nurtured the tiny creature "Till the strain was too much" for earth and "Winter

sank to her knees." Hughes's "empathy with the animals he contemplates is so thorough and so concretely specific that the effect is of magical incantation, a conjuring up of another possible kind of self" (Rosenthall 229-30). "Mosquito," "Amulet," "Lynx," and "Goose" instruct in the most subtle of ways our attention to focus on the spirit-value not on the material-value of each creature. There is more to nature and its inhabitants than we have allowed. Understanding Hughes's vision of the world requires us to dare more; dare to see not just with our eyes but with every bit of our mind and heart and senses that are available to us. Hughes wants us to exist in the same vibrant world that he sees his animals and spirits existing in. He also wants to humble us before the universe--to see ourselves as a small part of a miraculous world. He wants to give the mystery of the world back to the world.

What makes "Mosquito" so effective is that its argument for miracle is based on fact--the tiny egg of the mosquito survives the harshest and most violent of seasons whereas many creatures cannot. "Lynx," however, has no basis in scientific fact and could therefore be considered a poem of fancy. But fact and fancy are only tools to Hughes. That which is considered fancy is often more real in its accounting of "spiritual" realities than scientific facts,

because fancy often seeks to evoke the emotive reality which is not accessible to strings of facts.

When moving into the themes prevalent in Season Songs, we focus mainly on one aspect of the environment or the animal within its environment. There is little attempt to show how closely knit the creature is to its world for this relationship seems understood. Here, though, the focus is mainly on landscapes. According to Hughes, these landscapes

> are the remains of what the world was once like all over. They carry us back to the surroundings our ancestors lived in for 150 million years.... Those prehistoric feelings, satisfactions we are hardly aware of except as a sensation of pleasure--these are like a blood transfusion to us, and in wild surroundings they rise to the surface and refresh us, renew us (Poetry in the Making 76).

In the poems from Season Songs the voice is mainly one of pure praise of life in spite of or even because of death. Here the external world is unequivocally one with its inhabitants, but the poems don't focus on this relationship. The evocation of praise of life and death, shadow and light, is Hughes's main concern.

In Season Songs "Hughes has described the poems as 'verses of simple observation,'...grounded in knowledge, familiarity, inwardness" (Uroff 243). The observations "are intensely visual, but not at all photographic or aesthetic; the visual images are simply clues about what is going on

underneath the surface" (243). The first poem in this collection, "A March Calf" (9), emotively records a calf's joy at discovering the world. But underneath the joy flows a current of dread--for the calf is not considered by humankind to be an animal that can possess feelings, whether of joy or pain. The calf's consciousness or awareness of life is not important to the "Hungry people [who] are getting hungrier." The calf is "Unaware of how his whole lineage / Has been tied up." This underlying current appears only briefly within the poem, but is enough to shadow our experience of the calf's joy:

> Right from the start he is dressed in his best--
> his blacks and his whites.
> Little Fauntleroy--quiffed and glossy,
> A Sunday suit, a wedding natty get-up,
> Standing in dunged straw
>
> Under cobwebby beams, near the mud wall,
> Half of him legs,
> Shining-eyed, requiring nothing more
> But that mother's milk come back often.
>
> Everything else is in order, just as it is,
> Let the summer skies hold off, for the moment.
> This is just as he wants it.
> A little at a time, of each new thing, is best.
>
> Too much and too sudden is too frightening--
> When I block the light, a bulk from space,
> To let him in to his mother for a suck,
> He bolts a yard or two, then freezes,
>
> Staring from every hair in all directions,
> Ready for the worst, shut up in his hopeful religion,
> A little syllogism
> With a wet blue-reddish muzzle, for God's thumb.

You see all his hopes bustling
As he reaches between the worn rails towards
The topheavy oven of his mother.
He trembles to grow, stretching his curl-tip tongue--

What did cattle ever find here
To make this dear little fellow
So eager to prepare himself?
He is already in the race, and quivering to win--

His new purpled eyeball swivel-jerks
In the elbowing push of his plans.
Hungry people are getting hungrier,
Butchers developing expertise and markets,

But he just wobbles his tail--and glistens
Within his dapper profile
Unaware of how his whole lineage
Has been tied up.

He shivers for feel of the world licking his side.
He is like an ember--one glow
Of lighting himself up
With the fuel of himself, breathing and brightening.

Soon he'll plunge out, to scatter his seething joy,
To be present at the grass,
To be free on the surface of such a wideness,
To find himself himself. To stand. To moo.

This poem shows Hughes's remarkable versatility in handling point of view. He is a master of description--"Right from the start he is dressed in his best--his blacks and his whites--" and yet before long Hughes crosses over from describing the calf to evoking its consciousness: "This is just as he wants it. / A little at a time, of each new thing, is best." Hughes flows back and forth from describing the calf to inhabiting it, from standing outside the creature to entering within. At one point the poet stands far enough outside his

subject to venture a rhetorical question about the nature of cattle, the terms of their existence within the universe: "What did cattle ever find here / To make this dear little fellow / So eager to prepare himself?" The question is left unanswered, in the didactic sense, but the poem's final stanza embodies the answer as it embodies the joy of life this calf feels "to scatter his seething joy, / To be present at the grass, / To be free on the surface of such a wideness, / To find himself himself. To stand. To moo." The poem concludes here; the poet has completely entered the calf's consciousness not to return. Life, the celebration of life, is enough of a reason to withstand the butchers of the world. The undercurrent of dread does not reduce this calf's life to fear. What fate the calf will meet in the end will not cancel out the joy of <u>being</u>--living fully in every moment. In a way, Hughes introduces the idea that the calf's destiny only makes its life that much sweeter. "It is easy, certainly, to see why Hughes is criticized for violence; yet it isn't violence he celebrates but an energy too strong for death" (Bedient 107).

"The Golden Boy," is another exceptional poem from <u>Season Songs</u> (38-39) about life, death, celebration, and prayer. The poem is a prayer-like chant; its tone is heroic. The story is about a Golden Boy, who was orphaned by man, nurtured by the universe, slayed by man, who in turn sent prayers of thanks for this redeemer of life back to the universe. It is a story of the

nurturing of life, the taking of life to nurture more life, and the praise and thanks for all life. Again, out of violence and death come life and celebration. The poem here is produced in its entirety:

In March he was buried
   And nobody cried
Buried in the dirt
   Nobody protested
Where grubs and insects
   That nobody knows
With outer-space faces
   That nobody loves
Can make him their feast
   As if nobody cared.

But the Lord´s mother
   Full of her love
Found him underground
   And wrapped him with love
As if he were her baby
   Her own born love
She nursed him with miracles
   and starry love
and he began to live
   and to thrive on her love

He grew night and day
   and his murderers were glad
He grew like a fire
   and his murderers were happy
He grew lithe and tall
   and his murderers were joyful
He toiled in the fields
   and his murderers cared for him
He grew a gold beard
   and his murderers laughed.

With terrible steel
   They slew him in the furrow
With terrible steel
   They beat his bones from him
With terrible steel
   They ground him to powder
They baked him in ovens
   They sliced him on tables
They ate him they ate him
   They ate him they ate him

Thanking the Lord
Thanking the Wheat
Thanking the Bread
For bringing them Life
Today and Tomorrow
Out of the dirt.

Through the voice of observation and chant Hughes has revived the heroic spirit: he celebrates the dignity and beauty of life and death. Death is not mourned with despair, but is an occasion for praise, because out of death rises life. What Hughes celebrates here, then, is not the supremacy of one life form over another, but the continuous and deathless spirit of life--deathless in that the energy which produces life survives all deaths, is itself beyond death. Continual flux and change is the theme of this next poem, "The River in March" from Season Songs (11). The river is viewed in two diametrically opposed conditions--rich and poor. The fullness and beauty of the river seems more rich when shown its susceptibility to impoverishment. Each condition cannot exist without the other:

Now the river is rich, but her voice is low.
It is her Mighty Majesty the sea
Traveling among the villages incognito.

Now the river is poor. No song, just a thin
mad whisper.
The winter floods have ruined her.
She squats between draggled banks, fingering
her rags and rubbish.

And now the river is rich. A deep choir.
It is the lofty clouds, that work in heaven,
Going on their holiday to the sea.

The river is poor again. All her bones are showing.
Through a dry wig of bleached flotsam she peers up
ashamed
From her slum of sticks.

Now the river is rich, collective shawls and
minerals.
Rain brought fatness, but she takes ninety-nine
percent
Leaving the fields just one percent to survive on.

And now she is poor. Now she is East wind sick.
She huddles in holes and corners. The brassy sun
gives her a headache.
She has lost all her fish. And she shivers.

But now once more she is rich. She is viewing
her lands.
A hoard of kingcups spills from her folds, it
blazes, it cannot be hidden.
A salmon, a sow of solid silver,

Bulges to glimpse it.

The river's possession of fish distinguishes her wealth from her poverty. Without her "children" she is bereft of beauty and wealth. But when in possession of her creatures, her fullness cannot be denied. The fish participate in her moods--and when in her full majesty, the fish seek to glimpse her

from within and without. The focus of this poem is on the river's moods, yet the brief participation of the creatures who live within her gives us a fuller appreciation of the river's beauty. Instead of focusing on the salmon, as would have undoubtedly occurred in Under the North Star, Hughes here focuses on the creature's environment. The salmon is richer for its association with the capricious life-giving source. The river is also understood in terms of human characteristics: "She squats...fingering her rags and rubbish"; "Through a dry wig of bleached flotsam she peers up ashamed"; "The brassy sun gives her a headache." The river is in possession of pride. It is this pride which distinguishes her moods--either majestic or ashamed. By seeking to evoke a river in terms of human characteristics (but human characteristics at their most intense moments), Hughes brings the river's spirit closer to our own. We marvel at the river when seen in terms of our own intense, vital moods. The moods are shown in terms of time; they are knit by time, one following the other. Yet this river will outlast any of the humans or creatures living in time, and is therefore a time-honored spirit. Anything which came so long before man or animal, and anything which will outlast them, is their teacher. We have not taught the river its pride or its shame. The river, however, has taught us its moods. Again, creatures and environments are but mirrors of each other.

Hughes's poems are "made out of...experiences which change our bodies and spirits, whether momentarily or for good" (Hughes, Poetry in the Making 32). Each poem is to be a whole experience, one that will be strong enough to revitalize our lives. In "The Seven Sorrows" (Season Songs 54-55), the mood and spirit of autumn is evoked by naming creatures and landscapes that appear in an impoverished state. Each verse is a poignant event, a vingette that is linked to those events around it merely by the mood and tone which each verse evokes. The subjects in each verse are subtly personified--whether fox, pond, or sun. Yet no subject vies for importance, there are no levels of significance within the poem. The players in this season are each important in themselves, and only together can they produce autumn. The sun gathering "The minutes of evening" contributes no more or less to this season (or poem) than "the pond gone black" or "the pheasant who hangs from a hook with his brothers." Hughes says that "a poem...is...an assembly of living parts moved by a single spirit" (Poetry in the Making 17). There are six lines per verse, the first line of each verse numbering the sorrow and beginning with "Is," while every second line of every other verse says "is the slow goodbye." This structure is needed to link the images and tighten the mood. The poem is an ode. The poem evokes a season so thoroughly that it becomes the season it names.

The first sorrow of autumn
Is the slow goodbye
Of the garden who stands so long in the evening
A brown poppy head,
The stalk of a lily,
And still cannot go.

The second sorrow
Is the empty feet
Of the pheasant who hangs from a hook with his brothers.
The woodland of gold
Is folded in feathers
With its head in a bag.

And the third sorrow
Is the slow goodbye
Of the sun who has gathered the birds and who gathers
The minutes of evening,
The golden and holy
Ground of the picture.

The fourth sorrow
Is the pond gone black
Ruined and sunken the city of water--
The beetle´s palace,
The catacombs
Of the dragonfly.

And the fifth sorrow
Is the slow goodbye
Of the woodland that quietly breaks up its camp.
One day it´s gone.
It has left only litter--
Firewood, tentpoles.

And the sixth sorrow
Is the fox´s sorrow
The joy of the huntsman, the joy of the hounds,
The hooves that pound
Till earth closes her ear
To the fox´s prayer.

And the seventh sorrow
Is the slow goodbye
Of the face with its wrinkles
   that looks through the window
As the year packs up
Like a tatty fairground
That came for the children.

Violence in the "Seven Sorrows," as elsewhere in his poetry, is not Hughes's violence; it is the violence of the subject, in this case the season. To experience the season, violence and sorrow must not be excluded or diluted, otherwise without these elements we do not experience the real season but experience our own diluted fantasy of it: the "whole" experience will be denied, and our lives will remain far from revitalized.

The poems selected for this section in no way exhaust Hughes's genius in the ability to evoke a unified consciousness in the participation of both inner and outer worlds. Under the North Star is more concerned in presenting and knitting together both worlds whereas in Season Songs this unity is implied. Yet consistently apparent in both selections is the necessity to name violence as it occurs within the subject and its environment, to exemplify how important this violence is to evoke a spirit of celebration. Usually that which is celebrated becomes exalted or made even more beautiful because of the difficult odds it must face in its survival, or because that which created it was, in human terms, terrible or vicious--like the harsh winter playing nursemaid to the mosquito, or the harsh environment clothed in winter creating the spirit of the Wolf. Because Hughes can evoke animal and landscape as unified and complete, our experience of both is immediate. We cannot deny the realities

of landscape or animal because they are so real to us, both physically and spiritually, and this immediate perception of "truth" allows us to assimilate both the violence and beauty that attends them:

> The value of such poems is that they are better, in some ways, than actual landscapes. The feelings that come over us confusedly and fleetingly when we are actually in the places, are concentrated and purified and intensified in these poems (Hughes, Poetry in the Making 80).

Should we deny the violence of the world, we deny the entire world. Hughes seeks to reintegrate our entire experience of those landscapes and animals around us. And that which embodies those landscapes and animals is also a portion of ourselves. By perceiving the unity about us, we are subtly asked to participate in this world, to open our eyes again, and to feel and live with our minds and body and soul.

C H A P T E R I I I

T H E M Y T H I C C O N S C I O U S N E S S

In this section I will discuss some of the devices Hughes uses to revitalize the human spirit through his poetry and prose. Though he has asserted that the human being is not central in the universe, it is to this human being that Hughes's work is necessarily directed. To get humanity back in touch with the world, Hughes harkens back to the archetypal images and myths which are buried deep in the racial unconscious of the human mind. He attempts to evoke the necessary "powers of the psyche to be recognized and integrated in our lives, powers that have been common to the human spirit forever, and which represent that wisdom of the species by which man has weathered the millenniums" (Campbell 13). One of Hughes's methods is the visionary story. It is "the visionary story which Hughes sees both at the root of imaginative literature, and at the root of his own poetry, prose, and drama....fusing mythic stories with contemporary colloquial language" (Bubbers 3134-A). Hughes's book The Iron Man and his play "Orpheus" are telling examples of his ability to tell visionary stories.

Another device Hughes employs is the creation of a feeling of ritual--death especially is evoked as ritual and must be accepted to give meaning to life. "The function of ritual, as I understand it, is to give form to human life, not in the way of a mere surface arrangement, but in depth" (Campbell 43). The ritual of suffering and death is skillfully demonstrated in some poems in Under the North Star, River, Season Songs, and in a particular poem from Crow.

Finally, Hughes delights in creating his own mythologies. And as Hoffman has commented in his article "Talking Beasts: The 'Single Adventure' in the Poems of Ted Hughes,"

> Hughes is not concerned to retell old myths in new clothes, or to mythologize contemporary life. His concern is to treat certain experiences as though for the first time, as though he, their first experiencer, were their first poet, the maker of their myths. Therefore his myths do not ordinarily invoke old names from vanished pantheons, but reveal intrinsic patterns of actions, of realization, which the old myths, too, expressed (54).

Through some selected poems from River and a poem from Crow I hope to show how Hughes establishes a mythical environment, a mythical stage on which his spirit-powers act out scenes from the universal and timeless collective unconscious.

The Visionary Story

The Iron Man depicts an almost indestructible machine-like monster who at first harasses mankind by consuming their cars, tractors, telephone wires--anything containing iron or metal--but who ends up offering himself as a sacrifice (to get rid of a greater nuisance--a fire-breathing space dragon) as a redeemer, restoring life to earth. The Iron Man is a version of the archetypal heroic figure which proliferates folktales and ancient myths. Living at the bottom of the sea and emerging only from time to time, the Iron Man is an element inhabiting the universal pool of unconscious, typified in Jungian imagery as a huge body of water. That which abides in the water is collective. "Access to the collective psyche means a renewal of life for the individual" (Jung 118). Hughes makes use of this archetypal pattern--the pool of unconsciousness and the heroic figure--to arrest the reader's attention and to provide the reader with an ancient universal remedy to restore vitality of spirit and of mind. The Iron Man is an evocation of the archetypal image necessary to call into motion the elemental and universal powers associated with it. Hughes's concept for healing is actually a Jungian one:

> Since neuroses are in most cases not just private concerns, but social phenomena, we must assume that archetypes are constellated in these cases too. The archetype corresponding to the situation is activated, and as a result those explosive and dangerous forces hidden in the archetype come into action (Jung 66).

The final chapter in The Iron Man, "The Iron Man's Challenge," is the one most interesting to this brief study. The Iron Man challenges the "space-bat-angel-dragon" to a test of strength: an iron pyre was built which the Iron Man lay on, a fire raging beneath. After he turned red and almost molten with heat, the fire died and it became the "space-bat-angel-dragon's" turn. He, however, was told to lie on the sun as no pyre could be built for him--he was too huge. This challenge was repeated a second time:

> At last, the Iron Man looked up at the dragon. He could hardly speak after his ordeal in the flames. Instead, he simply pointed towards the sun, and jabbed his finger towards the sun, as he gazed up at the monster.
>
> "That's twice," he managed to say. "Now it's your turn" (54).

The space dragon did return after his second trial on the sun, but he was changed:

> The fires of the sun had worked on him in a way that was awful to see. His wings were only rags of what they had been. His skin was crisped. And all his fatness had been changed by the fires of the sun into precious stones--jewels, emeralds, rubies, turquoises, and substances that had never been found on earth (55).

When the Iron Man challenged the "space-bat-angel-dragon" to a third round, the space monster had to submit. Instead of destroying the creature, though, the creature was integrated into society--it was asked to teach the earth inhabitants the song of space, the music of the spheres. The plot of the story seems to issue directly from Jung's writings:

> It is precisely the strongest and best among men, the heroes, who give way to their regressive longing and purposely expose themselves to the danger of being devoured by the monster of the maternal abyss. But if a man is a hero, he is a hero because in the final reckoning, he did not let the monster devour him, but subdued it, not once but many times (119).

Whether the space-monster actually represents the maternal abyss is unimportant to the story. Its name, the "space-bat-angel-dragon," is unusual, basically because of the third element in its name--angel. The creature has not only elements of mystery (space), night (bat), and terror (dragon), but integrates an element of transcendent goodness. When burnt in the sun's fires, the dragon's fat alchemized into precious jewels. That which was at first feared--because of the direct action taken by the heroic Iron Man--becomes honoured and beautified. Also it is discovered that the dragon has a wonderful gift, the gift of music--a music not found on earth, the known, but arising from mystery, the unknown:

> The soft eerie space-music began to alter all the people of the world....All they wanted to do was to have peace to enjoy this strange, wild, blissful music from the giant singer in space (58-59).

Hughes shows us that beautiful gifts can come from the unknown when it is not hidden but is confronted and grasped through strength and compassion. The violence of the fires, the tribulations which ensued before the unknown could be mastered and approached, became a violence necessary to release feelings of compassion--compassion for one's own self and compassion for the world. The tribulations undertaken by the Iron Man, his mastery over fear, culminate in the ultimate sacrifice of himself for humanity's sake. By confronting danger head on, the Iron Man's victory allows humanity to coexist with the unknown and mysterious powers the space-dragon represents.

The Iron Man shows us that happiness can be attained by relinquishing fear and subservience to the petty self. This story is an allegorical recipe for the proper methods to be taken in order to celebrate life. Within the story we encounter primordial images--the heroic figure, rebirth through strife, reconciliation with the part-animal part-divine figure represented by the space-dragon. These primordial images and patterns are older than the historical man...inborn in him from the earliest times, and eternally living, outlasting all

generations, [which] still make up the groundwork of the human psyche," (Jung 21). Hughes asserts with Jung through this story and many other prose and poem tales that "It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them" (Jung 21).

The play Orpheus from The Tiger's Bones is another visionary story which seeks to integrate the necessity of death to fully appreciate the beauty of life. "This is the story / Of Orpheus the Magician, whose magic was music" (95). At the beginning of the play, we are told that Orpheus plays pop music, and, when he plays, the stones, trees, and animals dance about him. Eurydice, we are told, is the secret of his music and his happiness. Soon a voice warns him that:

> In the world of the trees,
> In the world of the stones,
> In the world of the grog, of the vole, of the linnet--
> Every song has to be paid for (97).

In Faas's interview, Hughes describes his poetry as "the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress balance disturbed by human error" (Faas 7). When Eurydice is found dead, "Orpheus mourns for a month and his music is silent" (99). After the musician journeys to the underworld, Pluto seeks to explain Eurydice's death:

> Nothing is free. Everything has to be paid for... For every life--a death. Even your music...had to be paid for. Your wife was the payment for your music. Hell is now satisfied (104).

After a brief argument, Orpheus begins to play--and as he does, two things occur--first, his music is no longer pop, we are told, but "solemn--Handel, Bach, Vivaldi, or earlier" (105); secondly, Persephone's face begins to bloom (it had been a closed flower, a bud):

> It is in my power to release the flower
> In your wife's face and awaken her. Release my wife...
> A wife for a wife (105).

Orpheus returns with Eurydice--not with her body but with her soul. However, his music is completely changed:

> The trees did not dance. But the trees listened.
> The music was not the music of dancing
> But of growing and withering,
> Of the root in the earth and the leaf in the light,
> The music of birth and of death.
> And the stones did not dance. But the stones listened.
> The music was not the music of happiness
> But of everlasting, and the wearing away of the hills,
> The music of the stillness of stones,
> Of stones under frost, and stones under rain, and
> stones in the sun,
> The music of the seabed drinking at the stones
> of the hills.
> The music of the floating weight of the earth.
> And the bears in their forest holes
> Heard the music of bears in their forest holes,
> The music of bones in the starlight,
> The music of many a valley trodden by bears,
> The music of bears listening on the earth for bears.
> And the deer on the high hills heard the crying
> of wolves,

> And the salmon in the deep pools heard the whisper
> of the snows,
> And the traveler on the road
> Heard the music of love coming and love going
> And love lost forever,
> The music of birth and of death.
> The music of the earth, swaddled in heaven, kissed
> by its cloud and watched by its ray.
> And the ears that heard it were also of leaf
> and of stone.
> The faces that listened were flesh of cliff
> and of river.
> The hands that played it were fingers of snakes
> and a tangle of flowers (107-08).

The play ends, ecstatic. Again, Hughes calls for the integration of the whole experience of life which includes death. Without the vision of death, an individual leads a happy, surface, "fun" life which can never achieve the maturation of a full and everlasting vision and experience of real life.

Hughes's play may appear on the surface as simplistic, but as the work progresses, he displays the "problem" of humankind--its inability to accept the responsibility of facing life, its beauties and terrors, and shows how much more meaningful existence can be when faced and experienced in the full. By facing death, Orpheus was able to recover his wife's soul--the part of her which existed in himself, and with this recovery <u>of himself</u>, he could continue with his music, with his existence, in a much more fruitful way. The seeming "violence" of death, actually restored life. It restored the ability for Orpheus to celebrate life as it co-exists with its antithesis, death.

Ritual

A ritual Hughes reenacts often in his poems is the ritual of death--the sacrificial offering needed to sustain life. Hughes offers a solution to the problem of confronting death--his creatures do not fear death, instead they crave it. The ultimate sacrifice, the offering up of one's own existence to perpetrate another, is an act of complete humility and compassion. It is almost a code of honor for Hughes's animals to be chosen for this role. And in fact it is a role--a part in a huge pantomime. We should not hide from the roles chosen for us, Hughes intimates, but we should face their challenge; play them fully, and play them well.

Jackson Cope, in his article "Ritual in Recent Criticism," aptly defines ritual in this way:

> "Ritual," I take it, is a ceremonial order of acts which at first level imitates; that is, it reenacts an established pattern. But at its second level of definition, ritual demands that this conservative reenactment be really efficacious, effective in its representations as it was in its origins. Thus ritual is a present act which historically recalls the past for the purpose of reordering--even predetermining--the future (852).

Hughes, then, defines death occurring in the natural world as a ritual--an event which will order our experience

of what we believe to be a brutal world, and through this established order allows us to accept, and in a sense, understand. And instead of demeaning nature by seeing it as a chaotic world without justice or sense, ritual brings us closer to the mystery of the natural world, allowing us to participate in its awesome beauty.

> What Hughes has strained so long for is balance on the earth, converting what had seemed mutually exclusive opposites into the poles of a single state, a single world of being (Sagar 167).

Ritual helps to reunite the opposites, life and death--his most recurrent subjects--showing their dependence on each other and their mutual sanctity. Keith Sagar has commented in the same book by stating that "Hughes is...concerned to discover whether negotiations are possible between man and Nature" (4), and I believe the use of ritual allows more meaning to exist in our perception of Nature, carrying us closer to the eluctable mystery and therefore to its Creator.

One of Hughes's finest portrayals of the sacrificial ritual occurs in "Eagle" (Under the North Star 46). The poem is reproduced here in its entirety.

Big wings dawns dark.
The Sun is hunting.
Thunder collects, under granite eyebrows.

The horizons are ravenous.
The dark mountain has an electric eye.
The Sun lowers its meat-hook.

His spread fingers measure a heaven, then a heaven.
His ancestors worship only him,
And his children's children cry to him alone.

His trapeze is a continent.
The Sun is looking for fuel
With the gaze of a guillotine.

And already the White Hare crouches at the sacrifice,
Already the Fawn stumbles to offer itself up
And the Wolf-Cub weeps to be chosen.

The huddle-shawled lightning-faced warrior
Stamps his shaggy-trousered dance
On an altar of blood.

Granted, there is nothing nice in this poem; it is a poem of pure power--both in language and in subject. "The words take us beyond their obvious and conventional references into primordial worlds inhabited by warring energies" (Abbs 11). The Eagle as a blood-thirsty sun-god is a familiar image in ancient myth and folklore. This familiar image is used to strengthen the sacrificial ritual and make it more immediate. Joseph Campbell states in his book Myths to Live By, "Myths are the mental supports of rites; rites the physical enactments of myths" (45). By using the eagle/sun-god metaphor, the ensuing ritual is removed from our censoring, reasoning, good/bad attitude and is asked to be understood by a larger,

more universal attitude towards life. The ritual/myth combination appeals to a deeper part of our heritage, not to our personal, civilized mind. And, as Hughes stated in his book Poetry in the Making, "[C]ivilization is comparatively new, it is still a bit of a strain on our nerves--it is not quite a home to mankind yet" (74). When "the White Hare crouches at the sacrifice," and "the Wolf-Cub weeps to be chosen" we are not outraged because these creatures live in a deeper, more meaningful existence, in a world in which eagles are sun-gods, or represent a sun-god-like energy which exists in the universe and which creates the beings that represent it.

In "The Defenders" from Season Songs (53), Hughes portrays a ritual of redemption. Each fruit or grain named in the poem is imbued with a certain elemental characteristic which, when combined with the others, creates an underground fellowship. Together these entities conspire to fight the coming winter, to keep their charm or amulet (the bee) alive during the hardest months so that when all preparations have been made, "the secret hero" will emerge and conquer the cruelest season. The poem is simple and direct and reads like an incantation. We are given the idea that this is the duty of each fruit and grain named here, a duty which is being reenacted each fall--a ritual which affects the entire creation:

With the apple in his strength,
And the quince, his wise adviser,
And the pear his thoughtful brother,
With the blackberry and his thorn,
So ready to shed his blood,
And the plum with his stony bone,
With the wheat in his millions,
The barley and the rye
We shall hold our own
Against all winter's armour.

With the pumpkin in reserve
The turnip and the marrow
We shall hold our fire.
We shall go guerrilla
Asleep among the squirrels.
Over open ground we'll go
In the likeness of a crow.
When the gale comes we shall claw it
With a claw like a tree,
Then we'll hide down in the roots.
Or in a fox's footprints
Escape across the snow.

And nightly underground
We'll prepare the secret hero,
The little honey bee,
Whose drum, when it begins,
Will bring back all the blossom
And sink the iceberg winter
In the bottom of the sea.

The cadence is iambic and lulling, sprinkled with an occasional rhyme. The secret brotherhood who sacrifice their lives to "prepare...The little honey bee" redeem the lives of all who are thrust into winter's claw. The poem is both an incantation and a warrior's call inspiring hope in the face of winter's bleak breath.

"River," from River: New Poems (51), is another work which briefly touches on the "ritual of redemption" theme:

Fallen from heaven, lies across
The lap of his mother, broken by world.

But water will go on
Issuing from heaven

In dumbness uttering spirit brightness
Through its broken mouth.

Scattered in a million pieces and buried
Its dry tombs will split, at a sign in the sky,

At a rending of veils.
It will rise, in a time after times,

After swallowing death and the pit
It will return stainless

For the delivery of this world.
So the river is a god

Knee-deep among reeds, watching men,
Or hung by the heels down the door of a dam

It is a god, and inviolable.
Immortal. And will wash itself of all deaths.

"River" is about, among other themes, the indestructibility of water, and (the poem hints) at the river's attributed ability to clean--both spiritually and materially. The river is both a physical reality--"lies across the lap of his mother"--and a spiritual reality--"Fallen from heaven....the river is a god." Also, these two characteristics are inextricable: the physical and spiritual realities actually exist in terms of the other. This water from heaven (spiritual reality) and the sky (physical reality) falls "In dumbness uttering spirit brightness." The water here can be defined either as two hydrogens and one oxygen, or as spirit--energy--itself.

Should the water's or river's origin and mystery be solved, the poem suggests, so would the origin and mystery of life (and death) be solved. Even when the river is sacrificed at the expense of humanity, "hung by the heels down the door of the dam...It will return stainless / For the delivery of this world." The river as a god transcends all violence done to it (as it will redeem the world) and all violence done within it (as it "will wash itself of all deaths"). The idea of water and river as being spirit and god makes us feel the sanctity of the world around us--brings us closer to this world, the natural world, giving us awakened eyes to see, awakened souls to feel. A river is, also, a centrifugal force, a source needed and appreciated by both man and animal, earth itself. The river supports life equally to all. Observing life as a series of interwoven rituals reenacted time after time by animals, vegetables, oceans, or rivers--beings which are representatives of the spirit world--gives life greater meaning and allows our participation in the mystery which Hughes points to over and over again.

Myth

As was indicated earlier, Hughes does not "retell old myths" but reveals "intrinsic patterns of actions, of reali-

zation, which the old myths, too, expressed" (Hoffmann 53). Keith Sagar also remarks, along the same vein of thought, that "Hughes says little new, but it seems new because he has found words, images, rhythms, to make it new, and to embody autonomous reality, fullness of being, and wonder" (160).

The function of myth is society, as it is approached in this thesis, can be best defined by Terry Eagleton who states that this function is one which

> provides a measure of freedom, transcendence, representativeness, a sense of totality; and it seems no accident that it is serving these purposes in a society where those qualities are largely lacking (239).

In the second of "Two Eskimo Songs," Hughes compels us to see water in a different way:

> Water wanted to live
> It went to the sun it came weeping back
> Water wanted to live
> It went to the trees they burned,
> it came weeping back
> Water wanted to live
> It went to the flowers they crumpled
> it came weeping back
> It wanted to live
> It went to the womb it met blood
> It came weeping back
> It went to the womb it met knife
> It came weeping back
> It went to the womb it met maggot
> It came weeping back it wanted to die
>
> It went to time it went through the stone door
> It came weeping back
> It went searching through all space for nothingness
> It came weeping back it wanted to die

Till it had no weeping left
It lay at the bottom of all things
Utterly worn out utterly clear

The title of this chant-like poem, "How Water Began to Play," seems rather flippant. It is an objective description of water, its rising and falling, evaporation and rain. From an objective point of view this motion, rising and falling, is playful: thus the title. But placed up against the real action of the poem itself, the grim search water makes first for being then for nothingness, the title is wholly inaccurate. The journey that water makes in this poem is a painful one--full of torment. In fact the poem indicates that it is through suffering that water attains clarity and becomes, through its total abnegation of self, the source of life. The heroic journey, as examined in The Iron Man, is repeated here. "How Water Began to Play" tries to instill in us a respect for the most common of elements, to see it as an existence also struggling within the world.

The recurring line, "It came weeping back," and the simple words and plot or action label this poem as an attempt at creating a primitive chant. Hughes speaks about primitive poetry in his review of C.M. Bowra's book Primitive Song:

> Poetry at its most primitive seems first to occur as a one-line chant...in accompaniment to the rhythm of a stamping dance...developing later into repetition and variations, and possibly rhyme (Hughes, The Listener 787).

Hughes says the ultimate development of primitive poetry occurs in lyrics and laments, which this poem represents:

> The bulk of these songs are power-charms, tools and practical agents in the business of gaining desired ends, or deflecting the spirits of misfortune from planting their larvae in the psyche....or simply the humane relief of strong feeling (787).

"How Water Began to Play," if it were truly written as a primitive lament, would most fit this last comment, that its raison d'etre were "simply the humane relief of strong feeling" (787), and on one level it is this "simple relief," the depiction of a heroic and unrelenting energy, water, becoming "utterly worn out utterly clear." The poem was not written by an Eskimo but by a twentieth century European man, and therefore cannot be considered as a true Eskimo Song; with this in mind, the poem can be considered as simply another message from Hughes, another device to compel us to participate more fully in the universe. Hughes's use of "myth" is distinctive; he personifies elemental energies, clothing them in different material manifestations: we saw energy of the sun-god spirit in an earlier poem clothed as an eagle. We saw the heroic redeemer of the universe in

an earlier poem clothed as a river. In this poem, our perception of water is transformed, and we see its true, hidden nature to be a beautiful elemental force sustaining life. Water, in fact, becomes through pain and sorrow the source of life itself. Like "River," it is a redeemer, a god.

In "Creation of Fishes" from Hughes's latest publication River, we are given a complete myth grounded in a mythology that fully explains itself: the two figures, Moon and Sun, are common to all the mythologies of the world, and since they are so basic to them, they need no explaining outside themselves.

All day
Sun burned among his burning brood
As all night
Moon flamed and her offspring spangled.

Under the Moon and her family
The souls of earthlings tried to hide in the sea.
Under the Sun and his family
Earth gaped: tongue and root shriveled.

Said Moon to Sun: "Our children are too much
For this Creation. In their flame-beauty
They are too intolerably beautiful.
If the world is to live, they must be quenched."

Sun and Moon, solemn,
Gathered their children into a sack, to drown them.

Noble Sun, tear-blind, plucked his darlings.
Subtle Moon gathered glossy pebbles.

Both emptied their sack into the rivers.

Enraged, the hoodwinked Sun stared down, bereft.
Smiling, the Moon sloped away with her family.

> The raving Sun fished up his loveliest daughter
> To set her again beside him, in heaven,
> But she spasmed, and stiffened, in a torture of colours.
>
> He fished up his fieriest son who leaped
> In agony from his hands, and plunged under.
>
> He fished up his quickest, youngest daughter--
> With dumb lips, with rigid working eye
> She dried in his fingers
>
> Flaring, his children fled through the river glooms.
>
> Fingers dripping, the Sun wept in heaven.
>
> Smiling, the Moon hid.

As is often the case in myths, the story is a tragic one. The Sun, typically a male figure, is outwitted by the precocious female Moon. The poem does what good myths are supposed to do--it explains the world (in this case how fishes came into being) around us. Hughes shows us a magical way of perceiving the universe--by perceiving through the imagination. Whether the story is "true" or "false" should be of no concern to us--what matters is that the universe be comprehended not by the rational, materialistic mind, but by the intuitive mind. If we think of fish as being the Sun's drowned children, we certainly appreciate their life more; we see them as part of the mystery, the beauty, the energy of the world. By perceiving fish as being the Sun's drowned children, we perceive the unity of the universe--sun, moon, rain, fish, all interact with each other. The universe, then, is personalized through myth; it becomes a more

interesting and less fearful world. In Hughes works, therefor, myths have a twofold purpose: they dispel fear by naming the powers existing in the world, thus personalizing this "elemental power circuit of the universe," and they awaken in us a sense of veneration for the universe around us, awakening us to the dangers inherent in the universe, making us respect this energy and power which does exist outside our own mind. Myths give this energy form so that we can approach it and understand it is some sort of "human" way. The stories don't have to be real, but the forces they name and seek to contain <u>are</u> real. And myths do seem to <u>contain</u> this energy--they are charms which allow us participation with the energy without being overrun and controlled by it.

CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE: SOUND, SENSE, AND THE UNTAMABLE WORD

Hughes has extraordinary respect for the spoken and written word. When speaking to children about language, and the word in particular, Hughes remarked that every word has "eyes, ears and tongue or ears and fingers and a body to move with. It is this little goblin in a word which is its life and its poetry, and it is the goblin which the poet has to have under control" (Poetry in the Making 18). It is this ancient belief in the power of the word which is at the crux of Hughes's assertion that his poems are the correct "medicine" needed to awaken humankind from its stagnant and repressed existence. To enliven humanity, to bring it back into participation with the "power circuit of the Universe," Hughes must instill life to awaken life. The power he needs are the "goblins" residing in words: "In bad poetry...the words kill each other" (18). In order to properly release the energy dormant in the words,

> You do not look at the words...you keep your eyes, your ears, your nose, your taste, your touch, your whole being on the thing you are turning into words. The minute you flinch, and take your mind off this thing, and begin to look at the words and worry about them... then your worry goes into them and they set about killing each other (18).

The important thing, Hughes implies, is not to allow the rational, judging side of the mind to enter into the poem's creation--the poet is to remain in direct contact with the spirit it is trying to capture. If you "use any...word that comes into your head so long as it seems right at the moment of writing it down, you will...have captured a spirit, a [living] creature" (18-19). When speaking about a poem he wrote on a pike, Hughes says that "by using the words that grew naturally out of the pictures and feelings, I captured not just pike, I captured the whole pond, including the monsters I never even hooked" (21). In order to capture spirit, life, Hughes indicates that he must somehow transcend his own existence and enter into that other life he wishes to evoke. The ability to efface himself in order to fully experience another life is the activity of a shaman, "a medicine man [who]...can enter trance at will and go to the spirit world...to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs" (Faas 15). The words he uses are the flesh, the material

containers filled with spirit or life. Hughes's method can be surmised like this: he chooses what kind of energy or "cure" he wishes to invoke, finds the corresponding landscape, animal, or combination thereof which best embodies the energy, and then he enters into communion with his choice. The words contain the essence of this communion. Hughes strives to go beyond a word's literal meaning. "Though he is a traditional poet of the written word, and the normal action of the meanings of words is essential to his effects on us, he has an exceptional gift for making words act out the processes they are describing" (May 162), that is, awakening the goblins in each word, making them cry out in unison, incanting a spell.

When editing a collection of Keith Douglas's selected poems, Hughes described this poet as being "a renovator of language" (12). When speaking specifically about Douglas's use of poetic language, Hughes revealed his own struggle for simple, direct speech:

> His [Douglas's] triumph lies in the way he renews the simplicity of ordinary talk, and he does this by infusing every word with a burning exploratory freshness of mind--partly impatience, partly exhilaration at speaking the forbidden thing, partly sheer casual ease of penetration (12-13).

Hughes wants each word to be stripped down and bare. Simple affectation of language is waste, and sets words warring against each other: affectation covers. Hughes wants his language to discover or uncover or recover. He wants each word to fully and intentionally mean and be. He wants only that which is alive, "words which act and seem to use their muscles" (Poetry in the Making 17). He wants his words to pierce, to penetrate the mystery, so that when read they can point directly toward that which they name.

As indicated previously, Hughes must somehow transcend his own being to discover another being; he must transcend his own energy and life to capture another. Rosenthal, in his book The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II, claims that it is Hughes's "attempt at a clear, hard language and rhythm that will liberate the poem from its maker" (234). Hughes's language, then, is direct, issuing not from his own life but from the direct communication with that other life, the poem.

But words not only mean, they sound. In the introduction to Hughes's collection, A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, Hughes speaks about the sound of words being equally important to the meaning:

> The idea is conveyed, but we also receive a musical and imaginative shock....Just as in real speech, where what is being said is not nearly so important as the exchange of animal music in the voices and expressions....a condition of total and yet immediate expressiveness (11-12).

Hughes's words are indeed direct. Yet they do not delineate in a literal sense--they cannot, for they embody and point towards a mystery that by its very nature cannot rationally be known. However, the mystery can be experienced, and this is what Hughes compels us to do--contain the experience of the mystery, contain the experience of Hughes's communion with the mystery. The words, then, directly and precisely name the experience by containing the experience. Each word, each goblin, must be arranged in proper order and sequence--literally, the words mean, musically the words evoke, "for instance, Shakespeare's [language]...combines a colloquial prose readiness with poetic breadth, and ritual intensity and music of an exceedingly high order with clear direct feeling, and yet in the end is nothing but casual speech" (Selected Poems: Keith Douglas 14).

At the root of all language is sound, sound which is filled, drenched with the emotive force that produced it; in the form of a scream, the sound is full of the soul's energy that expresses it. Though sound, conveyed through a scream,

is free of any literal meaning, it is full of its creator's pure experience and conveys purely that same experience.

In "Puma" from Under the North Star (39), the Cougar has created the "hollow cliffs, the brinks / And the abyss" of her environment. The Cougar is "the organist / Of the cathedral-shaped echoes." Through her screams, the pure expression of her soul, "she tries to break into heaven / With a song like a missile." She is her scream, and her scream is her. Being the full expression of herself, the Cougar has nothing else to say:

> She lifts the icy shivering summit
> Of her screech
> And climbs it, looking for her Maker

In "Crow's First Lesson" from Crow (8), Hughes shows us how language cannot--in his world--be taught if the student, in this case Crow, does not somehow contain the essence of the word already in his very being. In this poem "God tried to teach Crow how to talk. / 'Love,' said God. 'Say, Love.'" Devastating things occur. Crow cannot say Love. The word is an element or spirit which doesn't exist in him. At his first attempt to speak "Love,"

> Crow gaped, and the white shark
> crashed into the sea

The second, third, and fourth attempts at "Love," produce equally shocking disasters. Hughes shows us that words cannot be divorced from the spirits (or goblins) that inhabit them, that to speak "Love" is to love, and by entrusting words (and therefore entrusting the powers alive within them) to beings who don't possess the same qualities the words represent is to bring chaos and destruction into the world. In some ways, Hughes's concept of words is the same as his concept of landscapes or animals--both are flesh containing powers; they are representatives, and can be dangerous when not properly controlled.

In some of Hughes's poems, things <u>are</u> sounds; they are parts of speech. In "September Salmon" from <u>River</u> (66), a pool of water is "The parochial downdrag / Of the pool's long diphthong." A diphthong literally means a "gliding monosyllabic speech...that starts at or near the articulatory position for one vowel and moves to or toward the position for another....the beginning and ending limits of the slide" (<u>Webster's Third International Dictionary</u> 638). In this poem, a diphthong has its essence, its being, in the natural world. It is a remnant of the Word: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1). In "Flesh of Light" from <u>River</u> (7), the river

is described as "thunder-silence" and in "Lineage" from Crow (2), Hughes reshapes the creation of the universe: "In the beginning was Scream."

It is the marriage of both sound and sense in Hughes's language that makes us reaact so strongly to his verse: "[T]he physical realization of a meaning, quick with its own rank presence, occurs in all the best work of Hughes" (Rosenthal 225). The "physical realization of meaning" indicates how closely sound and sense must merge in order to achieve that quality of life which Hughes insists must remain in words for them to have any affect. Another critic, noticing how physical Hughes's language actually is, remarked that "Hughes studs his poems with verbs, adjectives, and nouns denoting powerful muscular activity" (Press 4). Abbs remarks that "Lines...do possess...verbal texture and energy... The lines drive their extraordinary imagery into the marrow of one's bones. It is part of Ted Hughes's genius to be able to convey immense clustering sensations" (20-21). Hughes does not want to cloud our thought with lulling rhythms and rhyme. He wants to awaken us. His words are as physical as the images they express. His tone is musical, incantatory, but directly so. His poetry and prose are "designed to render the energy of the mind in its moments of most significant thought, its deepest awareness" (Hoffman 66).

Psychologically, and physically his language is directed to affect both.

Violence appears not only in the environments he evokes but in the words he uses--the sounds are often as jarring as the sense which informs them. And as I have concluded, the violence is energy released and is ultimately compassionate. The language, harsh or soft, tries to speak Life back into the human heart. Hughes's language is, as are his poems, a celebration.

C O N C L U S I O N

Many critics have accused Hughes's poetry and prose as being excessively violent, others as being excessively narrow in his almost exclusive concern with evoking the lives of animals and landscapes. Both accusations are correct. Hughes does explode the myth of harmony and peace as being exclusive gods governing the universe. Hughes shows that no life can be worth its own breadth without acknowledging that survival is a dynamic struggle, and that this struggle of existence to exist is the foundation, the source of celebration. Hughes also shows that what we consider violent may just be our own misunderstanding. Violence, he intimates, is merely energy and energy is the spirit, the spark of Life itself. And when he concentrates on animals and landscapes, he concentrates on the spiritual energy they stand for, that which they contain. Those who see Hughes's animals as merely physical realities and don't sense the powers they stand for, the powers they evoke, shun any healing affect his poetry or prose may have. Hughes's poetry and prose is medicine, a cure, for the blind. It is meant to give each reader a jolt, an electric shock from "the elemental power circuit of the Universe."

Hughes's mission is not the mission of just one poet, but of all poets: getting humanity back in touch with the whole and eternal spirit of Life. Hughes has found a formula that works. The elements which go into the formula, the subjects--landscapes, animals, objects from the natural world--may be considered narrow, but the effects of their combination, of the energy they release, seek to affect all who enter their world. The subjects may be narrow, but the spirit which inhabits them is universal. Hughes puts us into direct confrontations with the Unknown.

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