



TED HUGHES & ROMANTICISM A Poetry of Desolation & Difference

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The common end of all *narrative*, nay, of *all*, Poems is [...] to make those events, which in real or imagined History move in a *strait* Line, assume to our Understandings a *circular* motion—the snake with its Tail in its Mouth.

—— Coleridge, Letter to Joseph Cottle, 1815.

In the 1960s and early 1970s a new mood began to make itself known in British poetry, manifesting itself in greater linguistic daring and a reassertion of the primacy of the imagination. This mood was far removed from the realism and trivialities of the Movement. In an interview, Ted Hughes delineates the difference:

One of the things [the *New Lines*] poets had in common I think was the post-war mood of having had enough [...], enough rhetoric, enough overweening push of any kind, enough of the dark gods, enough of the *id*, enough of the Angelic powers and the heroic efforts to make new worlds [...]. The second war after all was a colossal negative revelation [...], it set them dead against negotiation with anything outside the cosiest arrangement of society. They wanted it cosy. It was a heroic position [...]. Now I came a bit later. I hadn't had enough. I was all for opening negotiations with whatever happened to be out there. [Faas 201]

Hughes's willingness to open "negotiations with whatever happened to be out there" places him in a dynamic relationship with important undercurrents in what we like to think of as Romanticism. Like Yeats and Eliot, Hughes represents thematic and stylistic innovation in the context of a religious, spiritual and mythic past. However, his belief in the revolutionary powers of the imagination places him beyond a static incorporation of spiritual and mythic elements. Hughes's poetry represents an attempt to reach "into that depth of imagination where understanding has its roots and stores its X-rays" [*Winter Pollen* 226], resulting in a mythopoetic process that can be seen to have its ancestry in, or to exist in a universe co-extensive with Romanticism. This process is manifested both as what Harold Bloom might

term an “interiorisation of quest romance” and as a metaphorical mode of expression.

The following will delineate the function of these two parallel lines in Hughes. I will start out with the meaningful quest, which is connected to Romanticism on several levels. The Romantics frequently employed the plot structure of the pilgrimage or the quest where the quester undergoes suffering and hardship in order to move back towards the point of origin. In *The Ringers in the Tower*, Harold Bloom points out that Romanticism, in fact, is characterised by an internalisation of quest romance. Interestingly, the pattern of the quest is based on a recognition that truth is found in the dynamic process itself rather than in any resulting synthesis, echoing the post-Kantian belief that any system is self-generative and self-contained [Abrams 181]. In this sense, the meaningful quest is inseparable from the idea of totality as represented in Schelling’s theories of the symbol and in the Hegelian dialectic. It constitutes a system within and through which humanity makes sense of the world on the basis of reconciliation. Thus, it has no ending and should be regarded as a “radical typology,” that is to say, a system that functions according to the not-yet of apocalypse [Coupe 108]. Within this paradigm, the fulfilment of one narrative promise is followed by the promise of further myth-making, allowing the quest to move in a dialectic manner, like a spiral based on the presence of the already and the not-yet.

In much Romantic theory, the metaphor is discussed as fundamentally similar to the structure of quest romance. Like the quest, metaphor is inseparable from the idea of totality. To some extent, it seems analogous to what Schelling terms “emanations of the absolute” [19]. For Schelling, art is “the *real* representation of the forms of things as they are in themselves” [32]. Thus, metaphor is a trope not founded on the basis of similarity, but one that functions as the manifestation of itself as truth. In accordance with the concept of totality, truth, in this context, has nothing to do with Platonic “agreement,” but with a certain sense of openness or with letting something be seen.

In his seminal article “The Concept of Romanticism,” René Wellek claims that the romantic poets are “symbolists whose practice must be understood in terms of their attempts to give a total mythic interpretation of the world to which the poet holds the key” [165]. This is very similar to Hughes’s views on the relationship between myth (as source of metaphor) and poetry. For Hughes, myth as a poetic ritual is a manifestation of “man’s relationship with the creator and the world of spirit” [Faas 205]. While rituals and dogma have functioned to contain the energy generated through myth in the past, poetry can have a similar role. Thus, the incorporation of myth does not lend itself to allegorical readings whereby the other is subsumed under the same. On the contrary, myth in Hughes, as the basis of metaphor, seems to represent what one might term an openness. This process can be explained by drawing a parallel to Heidegger. In his *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, Heidegger treats poetic language as a degree of openness to Being. The degree of openness to Being is, in “Letter on Humanism,” defined as a stance which does not situate the human being as a subject (that is, as opposite to an object), but as thrown into the open

region that clears the “between” within which there can be a “relation” of subject to “object” [252]. As such, it constitutes space as an element in which singularities are shown and offered. In a similar manner, myth in Hughes is not an incorporated element fundamentally foreign to the poetic expression, nor is it something that has been amalgamated with the poem. It is a space that is fundamentally part of the poem while at the same time being an openness to the truth previously processed as rituals and dogma. It is a space through and in which what Heidegger would term Being is brought to language.

One of the most profound effects of such an openness is a predominance of process and circularity. The poetry is underpinned by the Christian opposition between the eternal order of being and the temporal chaos of becoming. This antinomy is particularly perceptible in *Wodwo*, where the universe is presented as an eternal cycle of physical regeneration from which life longs to escape. The heavenly ideal, however, has no connection to this world. The world is merely a transitional space “where the staring angels go through” [177]. This life is meaningless. Yet, at the same time, the poetic sequence is characterised by a relentless quest for meaning in the form of a lyrical voice that “go[es] on looking” [183]. In this sense, *Wodwo* equals what Lacoue-Labarthe terms an “internal transgression that at once cancels and preserves the opposition or the contradiction that gave birth to it” [240-41]. Although it continues to believe in the meaninglessness of the universe, it simultaneously contradicts this by a constant process towards meaning.

Wodwo is constructed around this circular pattern of contradictions. In the poem “Logos” [34], the presence of God as the Creator is undermined by the introduction of God’s mother in the last line, suggesting that there is no such thing as a “pure” beginning. This recognition is also indicated through the lines “And within seconds the new-born baby is lamenting / That it ever lived.” The alliterative juxtaposition of “lamenting” and “lived” seems to enact a negation of life itself, through its reversal of the natural order. The darkness of death casts a shadow over life even before the latter has had a chance to begin. At the same time, death as apocalypse is situated as a not-yet through the presence of life as something that has already begun. In this sense, the poem lays out the sphere of the eternal and the fleeting while placing both within a circular pattern of life and death. Chaos (mother) and apocalypse (death) are respectively opposed by order (God) and creation (life), establishing a dialectic between the meaningless and the meaningful. This is not to say that God and life constitute unequivocally positive forces as such in the poetic sequence, but they function as elements in a quest which, as a poetic process, functions as a lever against meaninglessness.

In *Wodwo*, the human being exists in a vacuum where the real is something that it can neither see nor turn its mind away from, as can be seen in the poem “Ghost Crabs” [21-22]. Here, humankind is tormented by ghost crabs, disgorged from the sea at nightfall. Although the human being cannot see the crabs, it recognises them in dreams, in the seconds before awakening “With a gasp, in a sweat burst, brains jammed blind,” and as a felt thickness that prevents true intimacy, but it can never consciously recognise or contemplate their presence. Ironically, the poem concludes that “They are

God's only toys," signalling the human being's total insignificance in the universe. The alienated hero in an inhuman universe is, of course, one of the themes shared by post-world war and romantic poetry.

Like Wordsworth, Hughes is reluctant to commit himself to a procreative marriage between mind and nature. Harold Bloom points to the misunderstanding that the central desire of Romanticism is to merge oneself with what is greater than oneself [16]. Although this desire can definitely be found in writers such as Coleridge, Bloom terms Romantic poetry as a whole an "antinature poetry," in the sense that it exhibits a painful awareness that there can be no reconciliation between nature and the human being [20]. Rather, the Romantic goal is to move from nature to the freedom of the imagination.

This is also an aspiration that can be found in Hughes, although it is not unproblematic. Like Blake, Hughes identifies the fall of man from unity into division and death, so that redemption will be the reversal of this process through a "Resurrection to Unity." Where Blake's redemption is figured as a circling back of divided man to his original wholeness, however, Hughes does not visualise a holistic resolution to the problem of division. In Blake's *Jerusalem* the unifying principle is Jesus, or the human imagination, which constitutes the saving vision holding the potentiality to re-create everything. Hughes renders the regathering of the Eternal Man's severed parts into unity through the mythical form of marriage between male and female opposites. This resolution is ultimately based on the Hegelian synthesis as a quest for unity, as well as on the teachings of Neoplatonism and Plotinus [Abrams 147-48].¹ Plotinus' teachings are based on the belief that the first principle of the universe is the One, or the Good. By virtue of its perfection, however, the One overflows through a series of stages, or "hypostases," which descend along a scale of ever-increasing division and remoteness whereby evil constitutes the farthest state. In order to attain redemption the human being must return to the One, a return which is frequently represented in the trope of the redeeming marriage.

In Hughes, the dialectic between division and reconciliation, leading up to the unifying trope of marriage, is mainly presented through the metaphorical body.

Although the lyrical subject continuously relates itself to some other, this other seems to be situated as much within as beyond the subject. The complexity of this trope may be seen to suggest the lack of solution to the problem of reconciliation. On the one hand, the body appears to represent the potential of unity and sameness, not only in relation to the other but also towards itself. As a physical entity, however, the body can only achieve synthesis through a fundamental transformation. As a result, the transcendence of self is envisaged as amalgamation with a divine being, alchemical rejuvenation, mutual transformation of masculine and feminine elements, rebirth or, as in the poem "I skin the skin" [196] from the epilogue of *Gaudete*, self-dismemberment or, even, self-cannibalism:

¹ Hegel, too, wrote of marriage as a symbol of larger unity, and it was a recurrent trope in Romanticism as a whole, for example as found in Schlegel's *Lucinde*.

I skin the skin
Take the eye from the eye
Extract the entrails from the entrails

Eat

Eat

The desire to be devoured and to devour is a theme found in Romantic writers such as Schelling and Coleridge. In all these writers, however, this process represents one of absorption of self into an other, rather than synthesis. At the same time as the lyrical subject longs for the dissolution of self the other also evokes pain and horror, as in the poem "Who are you?" [185] where the other attacks him from behind: "Something grips by the nape / And bangs the brow, as against a wall." In these poems, taken from the epilogue of *Gaudete*, the other is presented as a "nameless female deity" [Faas 125], thus carrying the promise of marriage. The inherent masculinity of the lyrical subject and the femininity of the other do not lead to a redeeming marriage, however. The aforementioned horror, together with the inherent lack of balance offered by a trope of the physical absorption of a human subject into a deity, remove any redeeming quality from this resolution of division. This kind of union holds similarities to the Romantic concept of the sublime. In Wordsworth, for instance, a terror of separation always follows the opening up to the imagination. In psychoanalytical terms, it seems partly analogous to what Kristeva terms *abjection*, that is, a subject-object relationship based on a mixture of overpowering *angst* towards the non-object (the unnameable) mingled with an obsessive fear of separation [35-38]. This basis, then, is far removed from the redeeming power of love on which marriage is based.

Another problem with this trope is the tendency towards self-sufficiency of the body's individual parts. The body is to a large extent presented as a random collocation of parts and, as such, as fundamentally dismembered. In the poem "When it comes down to it," the lyrical voice states that

Hair is afraid, face is afraid

They stand off, like clothes
Traucherous, cool, no part of you

This feeling of disconnectedness is intensified until "the brave hunger of your bones [...] displaces you" [*Caprichos* poem five] and the lyrical voice is brought to witness its own annihilation by an other aspect of self.²

A similar kind of alienation towards aspects of self followed by transformation is found in poems such as "The Plaintiff" [72]. Here, the male protagonist is confronted by a female figure whose voice seems to emanate from the depths of his own self. The immense gap between the various parts of the protagonist's self is emphasised through lines such as:

² This quote was transcribed from a photocopy of the poetic work *Caprichos*, included in the Hughes-Sagar correspondence found in the British Library. It is not the same as the *Capriccio* collection that is included in the *New Selected Poems*.

What is this thing, feathering and ruffling?

A holy creature of wounds.
And it is yours.

The line "A holy creature of wounds" generates associations to Christ's sacrifice and love for humankind. Leonard Baskin's accompanying drawing, "A Hermaphrodite Ephesian Owl," moreover, refers to Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, which is structured by an image of how we are all one through the love of Christ. The kind of love alluded to here seems similar to what Hughes describes in his essay "Poetry and Violence." Speaking of the conversion of Saul as a moment of unity with Christ, Hughes describes it as an "admirable violence" [*Winter Pollen* 251]. This term might be seen to denote an experience shattering conventional definitions of love and hate, turning them into an all-encompassing entity. Love is presented as a total unity that is almost impossible to embrace. In the context of the poem, the closing lines, concluding that the other is "Your heart's winged flower / Come to supplant you" [72], constitute both a promise and a threat. The metaphorical flower is connotative of what Hughes, in his study of Shakespeare, calls "the flower of rebirth." In Shakespeare's lyrical poem "Venus and Adonis," Adonis is killed by a boar in punishment for his refusal of Venus' love. At the moment of his death, however, Venus transforms Adonis into a flower as a sign of her forgiveness. In Hughes's interpretation, Adonis rejects the goddess because of a misplaced focus on logic and rationality, leading to a process of self-destruction from which he can only escape by renouncing individuality and submitting to the whole [389-93]. In this context, the flower represents the process towards integration in the whole. The reference to the heart furthermore signals the Dionysian qualities of the other, evoking associations that are obverse to the rigid rationality of the mind. It seems that the heart, or, the body, has fostered what the mind has repressed, suggesting a severed disjunction between rationality and instinct (the bones). The poem also continues the conflict between the poetic subject's longing to integrate, and repulsion towards, the all-inclusive other. In other poems, the lyrical voice appears to actively seek fulfilment through a transcendence of self into an exteriorized object. In the Epilogue poems of *Gaudete*, the lyrical voice certainly seems to beg "you" to include him in the oneness of nature:

Me too,
Let me be one of your warriors.

Let your home
Be my home. Your people
My people. [189-90]

The poetic subject here seems willing to immerse himself in the pantheistic unity represented by the various aspects of nature. At the same time, he appears to be unable to let go of his human identity and individuality. This dialectic, parallel to Nietzsche's opposition between the human being's desire to sustain its divided individuality and the impulse to return to the one life which is its substrate, is the ultimate focal point within the poetic universe. Although the lyrical subject struggles to transcend this opposition, it simultaneously proves unable, or unwilling, to let go of its own self.

As suggested above, this feminine entity could be referred to as a Dionysian force dissolving boundaries, threatening individuality and forcefully uniting the subject with its other. In this sense its femininity is only relevant in relation to its subversive function. At the same time, the presentation of the lyrical subject as masculine and its counterpart as feminine is essential in relation to the trope of the redeeming marriage and, by extension, various aspects of love. The poetry seems to incorporate a suggestion that the root of the ills of civilisation is our desperate clinging to the principle of selfhood, frustrating the redemptive principle of integration that the Romantics called "love." The obsession with individualism seems to prevent it from embracing love because it constitutes some kind of death to the lyrical subject. Although the Romantics welcomed love as a form of amalgamation in works such as *Ode to the West Wind*, Shelley's *Alastor* and *Epipsychidion* mirror Hughes in suggesting the apocalyptic threat of unity. Although the subject yearns for a total unity between itself and whatever lies beyond, it is simultaneously prevented from entering into marriage by a restraining rationality treasuring separateness. This is what it fails to understand when it pleads with the goddess to "Let me be one of your warriors" [1977 190]. Love does not allow for distinctiveness. Love is absolute. It is an opening up towards the other that transcends and explodes the system of self.

In some poems the lyrical subject seems to be on the verge of grasping what love means. Countering these moments of openness, however, are statements such as "What there truly remains of me / Is that very thing—my absence" [152], expressing no sense of fulfilment or joy. The fear underpinning the lyrical subject's inability to open up towards the other is formulated as a terror of being "filled up" by something beyond the "I":

You touch him

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

It feels like the world
Before your eyes ever opened [*Cave Birds* 75]

The alchemical transformation of the subject does not hold a promise of a healing synthesis, but rather of a regressive movement to the chaotic darkness preceding creation. This tone undermines love and, consequently, the trope of marriage as a redeeming power that returns the subject to the healing oneness of trans-individualism. The total unity symbolised by marriage is a constant threat to the freedom of the lyrical subject.

As indicated above, it is the absorbing qualities of the feminine counterpart that constitute the threat towards the masculine subject's character and person. One of the reasons for the lyrical subject's fear is the feminine counterpart's fundamental similarity to what Plato terms "the third genus," [*Tim* 48a; 52a] the ambiguous *khôra*. The *khôra* belongs to a metaphysical reality consigned to the one, that is, *logos*, a reality eluding the binaries of logocentrism. In his article "Khôra," Derrida states that it alternates between a logic of exclusion and participation which "stems perhaps only from a provisional appearance and from the constraints of rhetoric, even from some incapacity for naming" [89]. On one level, this

incapacity for naming presents a fundamental problem within Hughes's poetic universe. The obscure poem "Who are you?" [*Gaudete* 177] shows us a lyrical subject attempting to name an anonymous "you" whom it apparently both fears and is drawn to. The poem is organised as a set of questions that receive no answers, suggesting that the truth of the other cannot be articulated within the parameters of referential language. The closest the lyrical subject comes to identifying the other is a paradoxical recognition that "She reveals herself and is veiled" [185].

On the level of trope, however, Hughes seems to grant poetry the capacity not only to name, but to be the name incarnate. To the extent that poetry functions as a ritual it does not suffer from the constraints of rhetoric, but constitutes a space between various aspects of wholeness. Thus, poetry transcends binaries. The main metaphor in this context is the feminine counterpart, the goddess. The goddess metaphor is absolute to the extent that it represents truth, not as an extra-textual real but through its own (re)presentation. A way of explaining this is to regard the goddess metaphor as a parallel to what Schelling described as "emanations of the absolute" or "the forms of things as they are in themselves" [19; 32]. This type of metaphor refuses to concur with a mimetic real or any thing beyond itself. Rather than saying something else, it turns back on itself offering itself as truth. In this sense, the goddess metaphor can also be described in terms of marriage. It is a dialectical dynamicity within the poetic language itself that simultaneously opens up towards and is truth.

It should be noted, though, that some poems do attempt a thematic reconciliation between the goddess and the lyrical subject. In these instances, the Blakean marriage forms a thematic ritual capable of balancing the powers of being, both within and beyond the subject. The most obvious example is found in the poem "Bride and Groom Lie Hidden for Three Days" [*Cave Birds* 97-98]. One of Hughes's most celebrated poems, it portrays a metaphorical process of creation and transformation that ends in "perfection" [98]. This process of transformation traces a simultaneous dissolution of otherness and preservation of heterogeneity, so that the marriage is one between masculine and feminine elements that remain counterparts. This lack of alchemical amalgamation disrupts the process described earlier in the same poetic sequence, in poems such as "The Baptist" [85]. Rather than letting oneself be absorbed into the other, marriage means that one should open up to the other as difference without regarding it as such. The poetic sequence proceeds, though, by questioning the possibility of such a resolution to the problem of division. The following poem, "The Risen" [100], portrays an anthropomorphic protagonist in absolute unity with itself. This human equivalent to the hawk in "Hawk Roosting" [*Lupercal* 26] is inhuman in its totality. The poem demonstrates how, in order to amalgamate fully with the other, one must function as a total incorporator of oppositions, presented in the poem as a constant process of recreation and assimilation. The urgency of this process is emphasised through the use of the present tense: "He lifts wings, he leaves the remains of something, / A mess of offal, muddled as an afterbirth." The poem presents a transcendent being that incorporates and acknowledges all oppositions without presenting them as binaries. This symbolic rebirth is, however, represented as a utopian potential which has yet to "land / On a

man's wrist." What is more, its potential as an absolute resolution is decisively cancelled in the poem "Finale" which, typographically manifested as an inverse spiral, negates any return to unity: "At the end of the ritual / up comes a goblin."

As Plotinus delineates in his teachings on the One, the spiral winds around a fixed point at an ever-increasing distance from it. Spirals demonstrate that nothing is stable or fixed and that everything moves in both a repetitious and progressive manner. The spiral, in fact, constitutes an absolute system as a constantly evolving process of oppositions, eternally turning towards a state in which all oppositions will be reconciled. What "Finale" suggests, moreover, is that reconciliation does not equate a static conclusion. As in the Hegelian synthesis, reconciliation leads to another opposition evolving into another synthesis, so that the system constitutes an ever-churning spiral. As a consequence, unity is not found in the resulting synthesis, nor in any of the individual propositions severed from the whole, but in the dynamic process itself.

In their book on German Romanticism, *The Literary Absolute*, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy find that the Jena Romantics sought an end to partition and division and tried to produce something entirely new. The goal, again, was the process itself. Within this process, literature was regarded as a new genre—"the genericity, so to speak, and the generativity of literature, grasping and producing themselves in an entirely new, infinitely new Work" [11]. Within this definition, literature is regarded as an isolated entity in perfect closure upon itself. As suggested above, a reading of literature as a self-constituting mode of production, or ritual, has interest in relation to metaphor and myth, especially as seen by Schelling. Myth is a tautological entity that says nothing other than itself. What Schelling seems to indicate is that myth transcends the binary oppositions that govern our understanding of world, because it holds no reference to the reified world but refers only to what Heidegger might term the given, that which is shown. Myth is, in fact, non-mimetic.

In his work on metaphor, Hans Blumenberg introduces the concept "absolute metaphor" referring to a trope that does not describe anything that really is [23]. A metaphor dealing with truth, for instance, does not describe truth in any way, but rather establishes a new category which is truth as we know it. The assumption here is that language cannot reveal truth in its totality, but through elements such as "absolute metaphor" it instigates a process through which truth may become a constitutive aspect of the human being. In Hughes's poetic universe, the quest for truth is manifested through the metaphorical / mythical mode of expression. Hughes's views on the role of poetry as reaching "into that depth of imagination where understanding has its roots and stores its X-rays" [*Winter Pollen* 226] seem to designate poetry as a truth-revealing process enabling the human being to re-establish contact with manifested truth. To the extent that Hughes's poetry acquires its dynamicity through the very impenetrability of metaphor it seems largely parallel to Blumenberg's "absolute metaphor." It does not necessarily refer to some specific thing, but rather asks questions and establishes images that seem as impenetrable to the reader as they do to the poetic subject who does not consciously seek,

but is sought out by a truth situated both within and beyond (his own) being. As Gifford and Roberts point out in their study,

Hughes's use of myth is not, like that of a modernist writer, explicitly self-conscious. Myth and ritual [...] are not applied to the experience of the poem but seem to be glimpsed through it. [155]³

The absolute metaphor incorporates dichotomies as totalities, which involves a refusal to regard them as amalgamated unities *or* binaries, at the same time as their difference is acknowledged. It posits them as parallel entities that partly seem to co-exist within a vacuum that is self-sufficient and points back only to itself. In this sense, the absolute metaphor is a parallel to Coleridge's image for the perfect shape of a poem, it is a "snake with its Tail in its Mouth." In a similar manner it can be understood as analogous to Coleridge's distinction between symbol and allegory. For Coleridge, allegory is "but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses" [661]. An allegory, then, is a concretisation, an imitation that seeks to subsume the other under the same. A symbol, on the other hand, is "a translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal." The symbol does not imitate, but it is a totality in itself.

As seen above, this totality arrives as a violence, willing the subject to speak in a language that is more like a song or a dance than the empirical language of "inescapable facts." In this context, it is for the reader to decide what lies beyond the song and the dance, and whether it is at all possible to transpose and capture it in a prosaic function of language:

But it arrives
Invisible as a bullet
And the dead man flings up his arms
With a cry
Incomprehensible in every language

And from that moment
He never stops trying to dance, trying to sing
And maybe he dances and sings

Because you kissed him.

If you miss him, he stays dead.
Among the inescapable facts. [*Gaudete* 198]

The positive element in this poem is the lyrical subject's ability to dance in tune with the cosmos, which seems analogous to the ending of Yeats' "Among School Children," asking the question "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" [245]. Both poems, in fact, seem to echo D.H. Lawrence's statement that,

What man most passionately wants is his living wholeness and his living unison [...]. I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me, [...] the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surface of the water. [149]

³ In order to fit the format of an article, myth and metaphor are regarded as more or less concurrent.

Like Lawrence, Hughes appears to give an account of how the human being once did and may again incorporate heaven and earth, God and man. Whereas Lawrence sees this as a clear goal, however, Hughes incorporates the possibility that the target might be "missed." The poetic subject cannot completely assimilate or embrace what has happened. Nor can it enunciate it or comprehend it within its human rational framework. This inability finds its equivalent in many of Hughes's poems. In the remarkable poem "Gnat Psalm," for instance, the dance of the gnats forms an alphabet as they write "on the air, rubbing out everything they write" [*Wodwo* 179-81]. Although the poetic subject cannot rationally comprehend this language, the dance of the gnats has a profound effect, causing him to roll his "staring skull slowly away into outer space" [181].

The metaphorical dance and song referred to in these two poems make an embodiment of truth that ensures a sense of unity, without referring to it as an extratextual entity. The dance/song as truth/unity is the poem itself. Although it may also exist beyond the poem, it is not something that can be enunciated. It is in this sense that the poetic idiom neglects to refer to anything beyond itself. In many ways this metaphorical mode of expression echoes the words of Shelley's Demogorgon that "The deep truth is imageless." Imageless in the sense that it cannot be captured in an Aristotelean mimetic language, but only in the absolute totality of metaphor. In the same manner, recurring tropes scattered throughout Hughes's works incorporate a non-referentiality that complicates analysis.

In *Wodwo* the colour blue, wind, stone, water and sleep constitute such tropes. These metaphors seem to suggest process in a sequence of eternal perpetuity and becoming. At the same time, however, the wind is "Able to mingle with nothing" [177] and sleep is merely a "nothingness" [21] suggesting static emptiness. The trope is filled with nothing to the extent that it seems packed with nihilistic meaninglessness. At the same time, however, this is also the point where meaninglessness becomes meaningful. According to Heidegger, the first step towards overcoming nihilism is "to go expressly up to the limit of Nothing in the *question* about Being, and to take Nothing into the question of Being" [2000b 217]. A thinking of the essence of nihilism will enable us to think Being as the unthought ground of all metaphysical thinking. The totality of Being, then, allows us the potential of actually thinking the true. In this sense, wind and sleep do not refer to their empirical counterparts, but to truth as an absolute.

The inherent potential of metaphor seems to be its ability to bring about reconciliation. Because it is a total entity it is also a reconciliator of opposites. But the metaphor incorporates opposites without amalgamating them into a whole. In this lies the true potential of art as poetry. It is the same recognition that was reached by Coleridge that art is "the mediatrix between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanizing nature [...]. [It is] the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human" [Abrams 316]. Nature, of course, does not merely refer here to an empirically observable reality, but to Truth as something that encompasses the entire realm of being. It refers to what Schelling deemed a reconciliatory force in which the universal and particular are one [§ 39]. It is posited as an absolute form where "burns in

eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart" [231]. This renders poetry the result of a "mythic interpretation of the world" in a total sense, as a language which effects the reconciliation of sacred and profane time while at the same time inhabiting a concrete position in history. In this sense, metaphor itself involves a transcendence of the becoming world of the human being. On the one hand, one could say that this makes art into a form of escapism that closes its eyes to finitude and death. On the other, one might claim that it does not really matter that a goblin turns up at the end, because the poetic language has always already allowed us to engage in a dialectic of generative contraries in which the process rather than the envisioned synthesis brings about understanding.

In a similar manner, the dynamicity of the Hegelian dialectic ensures an ongoing process in our comprehension of Romanticism. The various aspects of Romanticism had their historical ancestry in currents dating from before the Enlightenment, such as Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Giordano Bruno, Augustine, etc. In this sense, Romanticism is revitalisation, but as a process rather than as an imitation. In this sense, Hughes cannot be determined a neo-romantic. While Hughes's poetry incorporates the epistemology, symbolism and myth of the Romantic movement, it does so in a highly dynamic manner. In this sense, it should not be studied as an echo of Romanticism, but rather as coextensive with it. In order to fully comprehend the system of ideas and poetic practices, they have to be studied as part of a process, that is, as an evolving phenomenon inextricably linked to a willingness to start negotiations with "whatever is out there."

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