AN EXPLORATION OF THE EFFICACIOUS PROPERTIES OF POETRY AS CHARM IN THE WORK OF TED HUGHES

&

PINHOLE CAMERA

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An Exploration of the Efficacious Properties of Poetry as Charm in the Work of Ted Hughes & Pinhole Camera

ABSTRACT

This thesis has two parts: criticism of Ted Hughes and a poetry collection. They reflect and refract mutual concerns: mythology, the natural world, poetry's aspirations to efficacy and their implications for language and self. The criticism also represents a part-exorcism of Hughes's influence from my poetics.

Poetry is 'magical', says Hughes, 'one way of making things happen'. Elsewhere: 'great works of art […] heal us'. I interrogate this will to efficacy in both Hughes's critical writing and his poetry, which stresses transformation, ego destruction/reconstitution, and cultural/psychological healing. This study asks: how does Hughes's poetry make 'things happen', and what are the repercussions for poem and reader? I examine poems Hughes supports with explanations of efficacy, and interrogate those explanations and the poems' efficacy by turning to 'charm'. Charm is both an analogy through which efficacious properties yield to examination, and a source of influence upon Hughes's poetry through anthropological and mythological discourse – and is an ancestor to aspects of poetry more generally. Charm tries to affect the world; assumes the world will respond to efficacious address; and binds its targets in ritual cooperation, upholding the authority of its (in Hughes, shamanic) user.

Hughes claims our culture is 'sick' and our language-use is (correspondingly) open to misunderstanding; he argues that 'intact[ness]' of language and culture are coterminous. Given this, I argue that charm's "'special language' of power" has become unreliable – incompatible with Hughes's idea of the broken compact between language and culture. Instead, Hughes's sense of efficacy relies on techniques he finds dependable: sound, rhythm, violence, deployment of archetypes. Hughes's use of charm attempts to constrain interpretation, homogenise the individual and the culture to which he/she belongs. I argue that Hughes's shamanism is not a conduit to cultural harmony but to stagnation. Examination of my poetics follows: its differing, revelatory efficacy.

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE EFFICACIOUS PROPERTIES OF POETRY AS CHARM IN THE WORK OF TED HUGHES

List of Abbreviations

CP	Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003)
LTH	*Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Christopher (London: Faber and Faber, 2007)
WP	Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, ed. by William Scammell (London: Faber and Faber, 1995)

Introduction: Efficaciousness as Charm in the Work of Ted Hughes

1. Introduction and primary claims

Edward James Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd on 17 August 1930, the third child of William and Edith Hughes. His father was a carpenter who had served in the First World War at Gallipoli, a campaign which had suffered horrific losses. William had been one of only seventeen survivors from his battalion, and is remembered in Ted Hughes's poem 'Dust As We Are' (1989) as reticent to speak of the experience at all: 'My post-war father was so silent | He seemed to be listening' (*CP*, p. 753). The First World War continued to loom large in Hughes's consciousness, just as he claimed it did in the British consciousness in general.[1] Hughes's sense of family life is one wary of its possible effects of stagnation: 'The moment you do anything new,' he says in an interview in the *Paris Review*, 'the whole family jumps on it, comments, teases [...]. There's a unanimous reaction to keep you how you were.'[2] In this there is a ready parallel to what would become in Hughes's view, instead, a harmonious form of coherence and understanding in a tribal people – underpinned by what he calls 'mythology' – such as is championed in his long essay 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' (1994) (*WP*, pp. 310-72). That Hughes recognises this negative aspect of close-knit community in such an early aspect of his life and yet finds himself its exponent is an irony made even clearer by his awareness, in that essay, of the possibility that 'a familiar person' may become,

[1] See Ted Hughes, 'National Ghost', *WP*, pp. 70-72 (1965).
[2] Ted Hughes, interviewed by Drue Heinz, 'The Art of Poetry No. 71', *The Paris Review*, 134 (1995), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1669/the-art-of-poetry-no-71-ted-hughes> [accessed 19 June 2016].

‘in a flash, an entirely different animal’ (*WP*, p. 335). The negative aspects of that community cohesion are among this study’s core concerns.

Hughes’s fascination with the natural world began prior to the poetry which it would come to enliven. He went shooting and trapping with his older brother Gerald from an early age, and would later compare his capturing of live animals to the activity of capturing that live element of a poem.[3] It was not until after Gerald had enlisted in the RAF at the outbreak of the Second World War that Ted began to find an excitement in poetry, after his mother, prompted by Ted’s English teacher’s encouraging remarks on his writing, ‘went out and bought a whole library – second hand – of classic poets’ (*LTH*, p. 725). Consequently, Hughes writes, he was ‘in that cooker from the age of about eleven’. It was around that time, too, that Hughes ‘became infatuated with folklore’ (*LTH*, p. 579). Echoes of that tradition’s influence would continue to resound through his work, and be most clearly heard in *Crow*. That influence, along with the influence of shamanic traditions, also played a part in his transition from reading English at Cambridge to, in the third year, Archaeology and Anthropology – a transition which marks a reinvigoration in his poetry and a seemingly epiphanic dream he would later retell as an introduction to his poem ‘The Thought Fox’.

At Cambridge Hughes met Sylvia Plath, whom he would marry in 1956 and with whom he would have two children, Nicholas and Frieda, before her suicide in 1963. That tragedy would reoccur in the death of Hughes’s partner Assia Wevill in 1969, whose suicide also claimed the life of her daughter Shura. His second wife, Carol Orchard, whom he married in 1970, outlived Hughes, who died in 1998 at the age of sixty-eight from a myocardial infarction. He had served as Poet Laureate since 1984 – a position from which one fosters and maintains a national cohesion which echoes the familial cohesion Hughes

[3] See Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making: An Anthology of Poems and Programmes from ‘Listening and Writing’* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp. 15-23.

found so stifling. Hughes observed the role of the monarchy (seldom in recent times far away from the idea of the Royal Family) as similarly cohesive: in 'Solomon's Dream' (1992), the frontispiece poem of *Rain-Charm for the Duchy and Other Laureate Poems*, it is 'a crown at the hub' of the nation's 'soul' which 'keep[s] it whole' (*CP*, p.802). Hughes also comments on Queen Elizabeth's 'role as bearer of the mythic crown in a collective psychic unity' (*LTH*, p. 506). At the time of his death he had written some fourteen collections of poetry, two collections of short stories, numerous books for children, essays, plays, and a great wealth of correspondence. He is commonly regarded as one of the most important poets of his generation.[4]

This study ought to be understood as one born of my own concerns as a poet. The primary question it seeks to answer, therefore – and its *raison d'être* – is: what are the repercussions of Hughes's influence on my own poetics, and how do I seek to distance myself from that influence, given the dangerous and disagreeable aspects of charm I find are present in his work and thought? Hughes's influence represents one pole of my poetics – the desire for accurate description of physical (often creatural) phenomena, an inclination towards brawny sonic profiles, and the notion that poetry may allow access to some form of ultimate reality (though in Hughes's work, too, this is often questioned and complicated). The poet whose influence I consider to occupy the opposing pole is Wallace Stevens, wherein the physical and the imaginative are intermingled and often suggested to be coextensive. There, reality is felt, instead, to be a 'pressure' against which the imaginative act of art pushes and whose distressing chaos it seeks to re-order.[5] The final chapter of this thesis discusses my own ideas of this intermediary position of my poetics in relation to the prior chapters'

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[4] For a more detailed account of Hughes's life, see Elaine Feinstein, *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 2002).

[5] Wallace Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *The Necessary Angel: Essays on reality and the imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 27.

findings. That position is one characterised by a more problematic affiliation between imagination and reality and by the use of charm techniques in such a way as to disrupt the kinds of address and efficacy with which they are usually associated (and the direct access to reality they likewise suggest) – finding, for instance, that 'there are no things but in ideas'.[6] During the study in general, however, Wallace Stevens's poetry and thought appear at times in a supporting role as a foil to Hughes's in order to throw Hughes's influence on my own poetics into sharper relief.

As I have already pointed towards, in many ways this study is less favourable than its title might suggest. Rather than simply meaning 'effective', or merely 'functioning in a desired manner', the 'efficaciousness' broached there is one revealed in a more negative light, making use of – indeed, demanding and seeking to enforce and reinforce – the close-knit cohesive understandings the prior paragraphs have just introduced. Further to that, I examine the desirability of those effects. The study makes use of the term 'charm' to encompass a will towards efficacy, certain figures of language that are analogous to and/or inherited from the language of traditional charms and which call for or seek to embody effects (for instance, apostrophe, sound patterning, narratives of compulsion), and in order to better parse and understand Hughes's anthropological and shamanic inclinations. In this way, the study moves through an examination of the lyric's aspirations to effect change as derived from charm-address (and visible in lyric apostrophe) to the two potential targets for that efficacious address – first, the desire for direct impact upon the world and, second, upon a reader or audience. This can be further understood as efficaciousness in utilitarian and aesthetic dimensions; however, effort to constrain and enforce effects upon readers threatens to override the aesthetic in order to maximise utilitarian efficacy.

[6] 'Room', below, p. 229.

The study proceeds to a closer look at how Hughes treats the problem of differing, even undesirable interpretations by his readers, the repercussions for his poetry's efficaciousness, and how problems of understanding and interpretation might be overcome; how to surmount the problem, for example, of a 'picture language based on a single species of bird' which is 'too precise to attract the interpreter, and too exclusively specific to admit the person who knows nothing about it' (*WP*, p. 313). Since the language of traditional charms requires universally understood functionality in its users, and it is thanks to that universal understanding and deployment that the users are united, it becomes necessary for Hughes to attempt a solution to the disparate understandings of his readership. The secondary questions this study seeks to answer, then, are: 1) What kinds of efficaciousness can we find at work in Hughes's poetry and thought, as examined through charm? 2) What does Hughes seek to achieve through charm technique and what are its dangers? And 3) How does Hughes's stance on and calls for efficaciousness relate to poetic – and lyric – traditions in a wider sense?

By way of introducing several of his poems – first among them, and most implicated, being 'Earth-numb' (1979) – Ted Hughes tells us that 'Poetry is traditionally supposed to be magical' and this magic 'is one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen'.[7] Elsewhere he says, 'You cannot create imaginatively anything that isn't made in healing yourself, otherwise it just isn't imaginative'.[8] Likewise, on reading, Hughes says, 'great works of art […] seem to heal us' (1976) (*WP*, pp. 150-51). Remarks such as these, alongside poetry that stresses transformation, self-sacrifice and subsequent reconstitution, and

[7] Ted Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series' (Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978), transcript by Ann Skea (1990), <http://ann.skea.com/CriticalForum.htm> [accessed 14 June 2016].
[8] Ted Hughes, 'Myth and Education' [I], *Children's Literature in Education*, 1.1 (1970), 55-70 (p. 68).

psychological and spiritual healing, serve as the basis for this current study, whose goal is to inquire into how Hughes's poetry makes 'things happen', what kind of things might be happening, and where such effects occur. Charm here should be understood as both analogy through which the efficacious properties of Hughes's poetry can be better understood, and also as a source of influence upon that poetry – both in the wider sense of being an ancestral source of many of the devices of poetry, and more narrowly as influencing Hughes through his anthropological and mythological interests. Charm seeks to take effect upon a world of responsive forces and also works in a social, co-operative manner, bringing its participants together in group activity. Therein, too, lie the two simplified targets of charm-address: world and reader/audience.

This introduction establishes the study's terms, sources and main concepts, and falls into the following parts: 1) the primary claims of the study and sources from which it directly arises; 2) a discussion of the varying readings of Hughes's work and how the current study is situated among and in contrast to them, with an emphasis on wounding and healing and how criticism has sought to place Hughes's use of language in relation to the world; 3) an introduction to charm and how it illuminates those concerns; 4) the shamanic elements of Hughes's poetry and thought, understood through the lens of charm's social function; and 5) summaries of the chapters that ensue.

My main claims are as follows. Charm at least stages a request for nature to be responsive to the poet's calling, and should this language in fact be revealed as staged then its call becomes a request to the reader to buy into such claims; the target is shifted, and the importance of the poet's claim to authority as charm-wielder is revealed. The efficacy of traditional charms is connected with the mythological universe to which they appeal for their powers. Hughes's understanding of 'mythologies', explored in his essay 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', extends this to interpretability of language in general. The correspondence

between a word and the thing (or psychological concept of the thing) it signifies is somehow less variable in members of a more intact, tribal group of people. What lies behind that claim is a further claim for the ability of language – of poetry – to gain access to reality, which for Hughes is often synonymous with 'nature'. Hughes extends this sense of intactness in language to intactness in a social group and, further, to spiritual wholeness. The implication is that if one desires to propagate such intactness through poetry one must likewise foster similarity in interpretations, and I will trace the anxiety in Hughes that attempts to limit interpretations of his poetry.

Hughes comes to occupy a puzzling and dangerous position as dictator of correct encounters with his work, one that can be understood through the vying forces of the shamanic, wherein a will to authority and a will to self-sacrifice or self-abnegation appear. As I will argue, this is pushed decidedly towards the former, with the poems and Hughes's thought mobilised towards assaulting the ego of the reader in such a way that it might thereafter be reconstituted in Hughes's desired manner. Hughes mobilises charm to gather his readers in co-operation towards common interpretation as an attempt to amend the fractured social, spiritual and linguistic state in which Hughes finds his readership and his culture. The actual healing quality of Hughes's work, then, is equivocal. It may even be harmful. The effects are such as to remove dissenting voices, minimise difference, and to homogenise spiritual, cultural and social aspects of its participants.

This study owes something to the work of the critic Ann Skea, whose studies deal predominantly with the magical elements of Ted Hughes's work. Skea's criticism places emphasis on systems of magical techniques, rituals and their apparatuses, how they have informed the genesis of Hughes's poetry, and how they may be helpful for its interpretation. Her work includes, for instance, studies on Hughes's use of Tarot and Cabbala in *Birthday Letters,* Cabbala in *Adam and the Sacred Nine*, astrology in his laureate poems, and other

more general discussions of Hughes's relation to the 'occult arts'. [9] Above all, though, it is the statement in her paper presented at Emory University in 2005 that gives my study its initial point of departure:

> Ted Hughes's belief in the role of the poet as shamanic healer, one who is summoned to the spirit world in order '*to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs*', has been widely discussed. What has not been examined is the way in which he practiced this healing role in his own poetry.[10]

This study intends to examine Hughes's healing role by focusing on his poetry and his explanations of its purportedly healing effects. Skea's paper departs from that introduction to a defence of poets as 'wielders of magic', then the wounding in Hughes's work as one inflicted by hyper-rationality, and finally to a brief statement of Hughes's experimentation 'with all the magician's tools', experimentation which is used to support Skea's Cabbalistic emphasis in her studies of *Birthday Letters*, *Howls & Whispers* and *Capriccio*. [11]

Skea's occultic accounts of Hughes's sequences are one example of a general reading of the Hughes oeuvre as fulfilling the movement of a quest: i.e., that the poems taken as a whole represent a search for one or two things in particular, and that through the quest, and perhaps thanks to finally locating these sought things, the poet may be transformed. Indeed, Skea's most influential and complete work announces this quest reading explicitly: *Ted*

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[9] Ann Skea, 'Birthday Letters: Poetry and Magic', <http://ann.skea.com/BLCabala.htm> [accessed 14 June 2016]. '*Adam and the Sacred Nine:* A Cabbalistic Drama' <http://ann.skea.com/AdamHome.html> [accessed 14 June 2016]. 'Ted Hughes and 'The Zodiac in the Shape of a Crown'', <http://ann.skea.com/Zodiacpoem.htm> [accessed 14 June 2016].'Occult Energies', *Translation Café*, No. 84 (February 10, 2010) <http://revista.mttlc.ro/94/page01.html> [accessed 14 June 2016].

[10] Skea, 'Creatures of Light', presented at Emory University, Atlanta, USA (October, 2005), <http://ann.skea.com/Emory.htm> [accessed 14 June 2016]. The quotation from Hughes in the first sentence is from Ekbert Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 206.

[11] 'This wound we have given ourselves by overvaluing the rational, objective side of human nature', Skea, 'Creatures of Light'.

Hughes: The Poetic Quest.[12] It is my aim to shift the focus away from a unifying thematic appreciation and towards a study of the poetic tropes at hand – in particular with a view to discovering the figures of efficacy present in the poems, and the kinds of efficacy Hughes champions. This approach seeks to make sense of the varied themes present in Hughes's work, almost all of which are abstracted from rich systems unto themselves, each with their own (in the original instance) coherent logics. In their original forms they cannot accommodate each other except in those abstracted figures that take broader inclinations, movements, gestures and attitudes as the basis of like-mindedness. Neil Corcoran's assessment of Hughes's 'essential effort' in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* and also in Hughes's essays on Eliot, Plath and Coleridge is that his aim is to try 'to identify the single myth in these poets – which might in fact be syncretic' and to 'unravel, with a species of agonistic patience, the way this is a "daemonic" given which the poet must first locate and then work through in the accumulating individual poems of an entire life'.[13] It is the same syncretic will that finds critics attempting to locate a unifying 'myth' in Hughes's work, and it is for this reason that studies of Hughes's work often make an initial choice between admitting this immense variability (indeed, inconsistency) of thematic clothing, or the selection of one or two particular lenses which are supposed to account for a unified reading of the material – most especially the quest reading. This use of 'daemonic' derives from the epigraph of *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*.[14] The epigraph is a quotation from Yeats: 'Myths are the activities of the Daimons, […] [who also] shape our characters and our lives. […] There is some one myth for every man, which, if we but knew it, would make us understand all he did and thought'.[15] This use of 'daemon' encompasses

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[12] Skea, *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest* (Armidale: University of New England Press, 1994).
[13] Neil Corcoran, 'Hughes as Prose Writer', *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 130.
[14] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. xvii.
[15] W.B. Yeats, 'At Stratford-on-Avon', *Yeats: Selected Criticism*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 102.

Hughes's belief in the truth-telling, archetypal nature of myth. Hughes's attempts to find that essential truth, the 'one myth', of Shakespeare in *Shakespeare and the Goddess*, invite critics to do the same with his own work.

These readings more often than not trace in a semblance of biography the development and vicissitudes of a poetic self abstracted from Hughes's life and poetry – so, the effects of the poetry on that self and the effects of the self on the poetry, and how the two inform each other. In contrast to this approach, my own study's purpose is to examine how Hughes's poetry and thought are mobilised towards effects upon world and reader – not in terms of reader-response but in the productive space that lies between Hughes's thoughts on poetry and his poetry itself. To this end the poetry on which this study primarily focuses is that which Hughes discusses directly in supportive, explicatory pieces of writing. The following is an attempt to anatomise the notion of Hughes's healing quest in order to examine how his poetics may aim, instead, towards a readerly homogenisation which goes under the guise of healing.

2. The Quest: Healing as Reconciliation with Nature; Nature as Reality

This section is a discussion of the purported healing aspects of Hughes's work and the interpretations of it that critics have put forward. That healing centres on nature; one is wounded by living a life separated from nature and likewise healed by reconciliation with it. Therefore the following also serves as an introduction to the notion of nature in Hughes's work. Hughes himself appears to offer the blueprint for such quest readings of his oeuvre in a 1970 review of Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution*:

> The story of the mind exiled from Nature is the story of Western man. It is the story of his progressively more desperate search for mechanical and rational and symbolic securities, which will substitute for the spirit-confidence of the Nature he has lost. The basic myth for the ideal Westerner's life is the Quest. [...] It is a story of decline. When something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator [...]. According to this, our Civilization is an evolutionary dead-end. (*WP*, p. 129)

The core concern of many quest readings lies in the above: that Hughes is seeking, through his poetry, reconciliation with nature for himself and for his readers. This 'Quest' intimates, further, that reconciliation is a balm for 'Western man' and for our 'dead-end' civilization. That this 'Quest' is ironised here points to the fallen, living-in-exile character of the Westerner whose main orchestrating myth is to search for 'symbolic securities, which will substitute for the spirit-confidence of the Nature [man] has lost' (*WP*, p. 129).

Hughes presents the natural world as a form of ultimate reality, seeing it not just as a physical catalogue of flora and fauna but also a spiritual, cultural centre-point from which man has mistakenly exiled himself – thereby creating the wound which must be healed. So it is that critical readings deal with how Hughes's poetry quests to get beyond those 'symbolic securities' and whether his poetry might, not substitute for but, instead, reach that 'spirit-confidence'. Keith Sagar's reading is a succinct example of this:

> From the beginning Hughes is searching for a way of reconciling human vision with the energies, powers, presences, of the non-human cosmos. At first his main concern

is to identify these energies and describe them, not only in human terms but in their own, that is, in Nature's terms.[16]

Sagar's reading in *The Art of Ted Hughes* occurs along primitivist lines extended from his discussion of D.H. Lawrence. This reading is advanced in the later book *The Laughter of Foxes* to emphasise a transition in Hughes's corpus from pain to healing, made clear in the fourth chapter 'From World of Blood to World of Light'.[17] That transition for Ekbert Faas is 'towards a re-immersion of self in reality' – a reality that encompasses the same domain as Nature does in Sagar.[18] Faas considers that transitionary quest in the same light that Hughes considers Plath's work – as 'chapters in a mythology where the plot, seen as a whole and in retrospect, is strong and clear.'[19] Stuart Hirschberg's *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes* defines the Hughes quest according to three stages in his development: 'First [...] as self-sufficient, self-centered Shaman, then as the misfit Trickster and lastly as tormented Scapegoat'.[20] Through shamanism, claims Hirschberg, Hughes seeks 'communion with cosmic life and force, and a re-centering of the personality and a corresponding sense of the renewal of the universe as an ecstatic and euphoric experience'.[21] This is, though, broadly true of all three stages: it is the means by which it is sought that differ, taking on, for instance, a flagellatory role as 'Scapegoat'. This movement is akin to 'maturing' in Craig Robinson's *Ted Hughes as Shepherd of Being*, in which the particular lens is Heidegger's philosophy. There, too, 'Hughes' long-term concern is to bring his readers into fruitful contact with nature's indispensable energy'. Nature is 'the indefeasible source of reality'.[22]

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[16] Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 4.
[17] Keith Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 104.
[18] Faas, p. 29.
[19] Faas, p. 16, quoting Ted Hughes, 'Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems', *Tri-Quarterly*, 7 (1966), 81-88 (p. 81).
[20] Stuart Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes: A Guide to the Poems* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1981), p. 9.
[21] Hirschberg, p. 11.
[22] Craig Robinson, *Ted Hughes as Shepherd of Being* (Houndmills: The Macmillan Press, 1989), p. 22.

If nature is indeed taken as the inarguable location of an ultimate form of reality the question becomes what particular qualities Hughes claims for it and how he suggests one ought to reunite oneself with it – and Hughes, while aiming at a necessarily universal form of nature (such is the demand of attempting access to a mutual, final reality), nevertheless does present one that is strikingly idiosyncratic. The natural world in Hughes's poetry appears largely in his portrayal of a great variety of animals as well as other phenomena such as rivers, landscapes, hills, rocks and the like. The violence for which Hughes's work is renown is present most unambiguously in the earlier collections – the imperious killer of the hawk in 'The Hawk in the Rain' (1957) and 'Hawk Roosting' (1960), the bristling jaguars of 'The Jaguar' (1957) and 'Second Glance at a Jaguar' (1967), the murderous 'Pike' (1960) and even the 'brunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes' in 'Wind' (1957) (*CP*, p. 36). In those first collections, violence is harnessed as a method of assaulting the ego of our 'dead-end' civilisation, as Hirschberg has argued, thanks to which, 'the sterile personality created by society is destroyed and the instinctual suppressed self can emerge liberated'.[23]

Crow (1970) marks the turning-point wherein that emergence can begin to be sensed. However, the book's abandonment means Crow's redemption – his healing – is left an implication.[24] There, birth and death, dismemberment and resurrection are shown as inseparable: the dawn comes 'Wordless | As the newborn baby's grieving' (*CP*, p. 239); questions of ownership and destination of 'Examination at the Womb-door' are answered with '*Death*' (*CP*, p. 218); and when Crow sees 'the patient' begin to worsen towards death, a slew of progressively more grotesque alterations to Crow's body begins, punctuated by his laughter, and ending in his returning 'A hair's breadth out of the world' (*CP*, p. 243). Crow's return, there, marks a change to his consciousness similar to that of the shaman who has

[23] Hirschberg, p. 13.
[24] *Crow*, unless explicitly stated, indicates all those poems gathered in the *Collected Poems* under its *[Crow]* section.

undergone an initiation dream in which he is dismantled and put back together again, after which he possesses special knowledge and insight. Throughout the poems, though, Crow's shamanic side is indivisible from his role as trickster – he never does anything so unambiguous as to carry out healing. However, self-sacrifice and reconstitution is present for the first time most clearly as targeted towards reconciliation with a feminised nature – a goddess figure, maternal and destructive, beautiful and disturbing. Those dichotomies are noted in 'Fragment of an Ancient Tablet' (*CP*, p. 254). Crow is never fully healed or reunited with that figure, also his lover. He invariably bungles every encounter with her, for instance bursting in on God's creating her in 'Crow's Courtship' at 'the worst moment', resulting in a 'heap of ashes' (1971) (*CP*, p. 270). Instead Crow is endlessly taken apart and put back together again in varying iterations, his character progressing very little over the arc of the poems.

Crow is guilty, destructive and suffering, despite his mischievousness, and that motif of suffering and self-flagellation develops more fully from *Prometheus on his Crag* (1973) and onwards – a motif which Craig Robinson, for instance, equates with Heidegger's 'angst', such that it brings about human maturation, and which Hirschberg points to as Hughes's 'Scapegoat' phase.[25] The vulture which comes to tear at Prometheus's innards is seen, in the twentieth poem of the sequence, as perhaps a 'helper' that comes 'again to pick at the crucial knot | Of all his bonds' (*CP*, p. 296). So, too, the first-person narrator of 'Seven Dungeon Songs' in *Earth-Numb* (1979) – wolf, murderer and self-pronounced God – suffers the 'tangled ball | Which was once the orderly circuit of my body', fails to 'jerk the knot' and so must 'dangle and dance | The dance of unbeing' (*CP*, p. 561). The Christ figure of 'A God' (1979) hangs in pain like 'a hanging half-pig', a 'poulterer's hanging hare', 'helpless as a

[25] Robinson, p. 5.

lamb', 'the cleverness of his fingers' as much good as a 'bullock's hooves, in the offal bin' to its 'severed head' (*CP*, pp. 581-82). The suffering explicitly escapes understanding in the final two lines: 'He could not understand what had happened || Or what he had become' (*CP*, p. 582). Nevertheless, it brings about a sympathetic affinity with wounded nature. In 'Systole Diastole' of *Capriccio* (1990) the heart, itself a 'torn god' which 'wrench[es] to be free of his bruising ribs', is hidden in a flower 'where pollen might repair it', only to be recaptured at the end by a mysterious feminine force, 'a lioness of noon', who both 'gnaw[s] at it' and 'guard[s] it' – an act that defeats the male character's desire for self-containment and self-healing which denies the destructive side of nature (*CP*, pp. 786-87).

To enter into reconciliation with that natural reality, then, requires an act of penitential self-sacrifice, self-abnegation and an ensuing reconstitution in accordance with nature's laws – and in accordance with the poem's demands. To cast more light on the character of those laws and demands, it is instructive to look at the source of the wound that Hughes is purportedly attempting to heal. This Hughesian healing is required to remedy a cultural loss felt in the aftermath of the two world wars and the '"dissociation of sensibility" that befell England during the Reformation', alongside the growing strength of rationalistic scientific dogma.[26] Spirituality, cultural being and attitude to the natural world are conflated, as the following remark from Hughes's review of Max Nicholson also indicates:

> The fundamental guiding ideas of our Western Civilization are against Conservation. They derive from Reformed Christianity and from Old Testament Puritanism. […]

[26] Raphaël Ingelbien, 'Mapping the Misreadings: Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, and Nationhood', *Contemporary Literature*, 40.4 (1999), 627-58 (p. 629). Ingelbien is quoting Ted Hughes, 'Notes on Shakespeare', *WP*, p. 119. In turn, Hughes is quoting T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 64.

> They are based on the assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use. (*WP*, p. 129)

Despite this, the attitude of the poetry most often leans in favour of a spiritualised, cultural form of nature, rather than one which calls for ecological awareness. The 'non-human cosmos', to borrow Sagar's phrase, is at all times, in fact, anthropocentric.[27] The most clearly ecologically-minded collection is *Season Songs* (1976), the poems of which 'began as children's poems, but they grew up'.[28] There the tone nears a form of didactic pedagogy, with 'A March Calf' 'Unaware of how his whole lineage | Has been tied up' (*CP*, p. 307), and, in 'March morning unlike others', the world waiting in the sun 'To be healed', while we 'sit, and smile, and wait, and know | She is not going to die' (*CP,* p. 309). Instead, much of Hughes's poetry is mobilised towards disrupting those values he views as inherited from Christianity – repeatedly the Christian myths are disturbed and confounded by Crow, whose presence harks back to older folklore traditions; the Reverend Lumb of *Gaudete* is unable to heal the half-human, half-animal 'beautiful woman who seems to be alive and dead. | He is not a doctor. He can only pray';[29] Adam is 'cast out' in the opening lines of 'Cappricios' (1990) in favour of Loki, Frigga, and the 'bride's mirror | in the form of a cauldron', which is 'the soul's rebirth' (*CP*, p. 783). The over-rationalising mind appears also as a destructive force. 'Crow's Account of St George' (1970) sees the latter titular character, his head and heart filled with 'numbers' mistaking his wife and children for demons and murdering them (*CP*, pp. 225-26). 'The Judge' of *Cave Birds* (1978), 'half-imbecile, | A Nero of the unalterable' whose 'body of the law teeters across | A web-glistening geometry' is an 'offal-

[27] Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes,* p. 4.
[28] Ted Hughes, *Season Songs* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), back-cover.
[29] Ted Hughes, 'Prologue', *Gaudete* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 15.

sack of everything that is not | The Absolute on to whose throne he lowers his buttocks' (*CP*, p. 422).

Sagar states of Hughes's earlier work that its 'main concern' is in the identification of nature's energies and their description in nature's terms. Likewise, Faas suggests that identification is a 'last ditch effort to recapture some of her lost elemental forces by a poetic invocation of plants and animals' in order to remedy the '"split personality of modern man", of his self-exile from Mother Nature'.[30] Those efforts, however, are decidedly as much aimed at man as they are to a potentially responsive nature. It is after all the human ego, the undesirable attitudes of 'Western Civilization', which the work aims to aggress and redress. Hughes's position teeters between reader-oriented and nature-oriented calls for effect. In this way that position reveals itself as aimed at earning a certain form of authority; that the reader believe in the efficaciousness of a call to responsive nature, and in the poet and the poetry's ability to make that call. Here 'invocation' provides an initial clue to the relationship between language and natural world which lies in charm language: the entreating of the natural world for response according to the user's desires. Healing appears to require a different attitude to language – one involving invocation rather than description, thanks to which the divide between man and nature may be crossed. Charm provides a language and a model of invocational and vocative address through which this can be examined, and apostrophe is one figure of that relationship between language and world.

As Sagar boldly states in 'Hughes and his Landscape', 'poetry is religious or it is nothing', and Hughes's healing efforts are religious in the most basic sense of binding and

[30] Faas, p. 16. He is quoting an interview of Ted Hughes by John Horder, 'Desk Poet', in *The Guardian*, 23 March 1965, p. 9.

connecting that the word's etymology makes explicit.[31] Hughes suggests the same in a letter to Bishop Ross Hook:

> Some very great poets have come near to formulating what was, pretty well, an alternative religion—a new religion. It's the shaman streak in the poetic temperament. [...] One thing, I suppose, is sure. Real poetry, whatever its compass bearing on the true North of the perfect spiritual life, offers to the reader a spiritual life of sorts, even if, as I say, it is only a temporal substitute for the spiritual life.[32] (*LTH*, pp. 460-61)

This apprehension of the religious aspects of Hughes's poetic interests and aims speaks to that second target of charm; charm may be used to bring about social co-operation, traditionally in ritual action, through which the bonds of a group may be strengthened.

It is from this religious attitude that Hughes's work gains and makes use of the mantle of the mythic: 'Mythic poetry', Rand Brandes tells us, 'serves the same function as religion'.[33] This function, 'as mythic poet', is to 'liberate and to heal – the soul, the body, the mind, the community and the world'.[34] Hughes uses 'myth' and 'mythology' with a degree of interchangeableness, with the latter most often indicating a plurality of the former. However, his use of both terms is nuanced by his background in anthropology, and so his understanding of them is always consonant with culture, and the collective psychologies of cultures. Hughes himself says, 'mythologies are dodgy things' (*WP*, p. 310). For him 'mythologies' are 'the

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[31] Sagar, 'Hughes and his Landscape', *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 2.

[32] See also, Seamus Heaney's welcoming of the newly-laureate Hughes: 'That [Britain] should turn to a poet with an essentially religious vision [...] [and] with a strong trust in the pre-industrial realities of the natural world, is remarkable. In fact, it is a vivid demonstration of the truth of the implied message of Hughes's poetry that the instinctual, intuitive side of man's, and in particular the Englishman's, nature has been starved and occluded and is in need of refreshment.' Seamus Heaney, 'The New Poet Laureate', *Critical Essays on Ted Hughes*, ed. by Leonard M. Scigaj (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992), pp. 45-46.

[33] Rand Brandes, 'The Anthropologist's use of myth', *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 68.

[34] Brandes, p. 68.

picture languages that we invent to embody and make accessible to casual reference the deeper shared understandings which keep us intact as a group' (*WP*, p. 310), which begins to indicate in what way the mythic and mythological are involved in the binding together of a community. This adds a revealing nuance to Hughes's act of poetic healing: that this healing involves the unification of a tribe, its culture, through shared mythological stories and, more generally, attitudes towards the natural world (indeed, reality) which underpin a harmonious life within that tribe. It is charm's purpose to bind a group of participants into social co-operation. The 'healing', unifying effect of the charm in Hughes's work appears to be exactly that binding in common enterprise, occurring in such a manner as to spiritually homogenise its participants. Furthermore, mythology is implicated in the call for response which charm embodies, as a system of names and powers to which charm appeals for its effects.

Hughes's portrayal of the natural world is one of timeless, 'indefeasible', archetypal elements.[35] In 'The Horses' (1957) horizons 'endure' (*CP*, p. 22); the caged jaguar is irrepressible in its seer-like gaze, his stride encompassing 'wildernesses of freedom' (1957) (*CP*, p. 20); the 'aged grin' of the 'Pike' (1960) and its 'jaws' hooked clamp and fangs' are 'not to be changed at this date' (*CP*, pp. 84-85). In 'Pibroch' (1967) 'Minute after minute, aeon after aeon, | Nothing lets up or develops' (*CP*, p. 180). The dance of the gnats in 'Gnat-Psalm' (1967) is 'never to be altered' (*CP*, p. 182). The names and powers to which charm appeals – this Hughesian natural real – follow in that indefeasibility, and that timelessness is harnessed to bolster the authoritativeness of Hughes's calls to nature. So, too, is the case with the archetypal, totemic, mythic portrayal of animals. A 'Second Glance at a Jaguar' (1967) sees it 'Hurrying through the underworld, soundless' (*CP*, p. 152); 'The Bear' (1967) is Charon-like, 'ferryman | To dead land' (*CP*, p. 160); and the hawk whose 'eye has permitted

[35] Robinson, p. 22.

no change' declares that it is 'going to keep things like this' (1960) (*CP*, p. 69). Here is Hughes's 'syncretic will', his attempts to locate and enforce that 'daemonic given' in the recombinatory tactics of appropriating elements from various myths and conflating them with collective psychologies and with the natural world.

For many studies of Hughes it is the figure of shaman that stands at the centre of such unificatory efforts. For Leonard M. Scigaj, 'like the tribal shaman, the poet journeys to heal both his or her psyche and that of a society', and, thanks to this shamanic-poetic action, 'the participating reader can enhance his or her potential for achieving wholeness, personality growth, spiritual fulfilment, and develop a more cohesive bond with society';[36] Brandes suggests 'it would be the shaman and his mythic quest that served as the primary paradigm and sacred script for the poet as healer and liberator';[37] Hirschberg finds that 'for Hughes the significance of shamanism […] is the sense of power it offers, communion with cosmic life and force, and a recentering of the personality and a corresponding sense of the renewal of the universe as an ecstatic and euphoric experience;'[38] and Faas believes that Hughes's '1964 review of Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism* mapped the area of world poetry to which his own has been contributing ever since.'[39] Furthermore, Scigaj cautions us to remember:

> The important point is that whole communities for many centuries and in very different geographical areas [...] found shamanic techniques psychologically efficacious [...] The paradigm and its effects are important, not the performer or methods.[40]

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[36] Leonard M. Scigaj, *Ted Hughes* (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne, 1991), p. 1.
[37] Brandes, p. 68.
[38] Hirschberg, p. 11.
[39] Faas, p. 15.
[40] Scigaj, p. 153.

It is the question of how these techniques, elucidated by charm, may be ‘psychologically efficacious’ which I will take up as this study progresses. Moreover, contrary to the above, I insist that the performer and methods are just as important as ‘the paradigm’ at hand; Hughes, through appeals to the shamanic, hopes to situate himself as the propagator of societal unification, and in that position takes on tremendous responsibility for the manner of that unification and also its resultant form. Just as Neil Corcoran says that Hughes’s criticism of other poets is such as to attempt to find the single guiding ‘myth’ of their bodies of work – that syncretic interpretation – so too does Hughes’s work aim at a form of syncresis: of audience, tribe and culture. In this sense Hughes’s interests in shamanism and myth-making are as syncretic methodologies.

How, then, does this syncresis mobilise itself in the language of the poetry itself? Charm is the language of communion, of ritual gathering and cultural, tribal reconnection – re-harmonisation with other members of a community and, through shared stories and attitudes, with their world-view. This is problematic for Hughes, however, since the crisis he seeks a remedy for is precisely that lack of commonality – both in attitude to (his notion of) reality and nature, and in terms of language use. Language in Hughes’s work, then, promises both access to reality and at the same time represents a barrier to it – a situation for language which he imagines to be untrue of the tribal society he depicts in ‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’ in which meanings are shared and understandings nearly absolute. This situation supports Paul Bentley’s view that Hughes’s poems ‘are too often read for their referential content: the word is taken to be transparent, a window onto what is being described or depicted’.[41] Instead, Bentley finds a ‘marked uneasiness [...] with language as a means of representation [...]. The illusion of reality here is an effect of language and imagination – or so the poems

[41] Paul Bentley, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion & Beyond* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p. i.

seem to suggest.'[42] Furthermore, 'the Real for Hughes is thus what human meaning covers over, what words veil; but it is also what may rend this veil (of language-based consciousness) at any moment.'[43] This uneasiness with language as representation or unquestioned correspondence requires us to attend, not only to the thematic, but also to the incantatory, invocational effects of the poetry.

I think, though, that Bentley's view of Hughes's form of 'reality' as 'illusion' is a step too far. Hughes's attempts at reaching archetypal elements of human consciousness – through myth, and through his thoughts on unitive cultural states, languages and folklore – suggest a common reality (a common nature) does exist, and that it must fall largely upon language (even in its current form of crisis) to reach and to reconcile with that reality. Thereby, as Robinson states, Hughes's 'therapeutic power' is put in service of 'Hughes's long-term concern [...] to bring his readers back into fruitful contact with nature's indispensable energy'.[44] Scigaj proclaims that 'Hughes has 25 centuries of oral and written literary evidence to support his positions about constants within the psyche, the purpose of literature, and the author's controlling intentions'; in contrast, the 'deconstructionists […] reduce textual activity to the free and ever-changing encounter between a reader and a work'.[45] The repercussions of the 'author's controlling intentions' are exactly what this study examines. Scigaj finds the energy of Hughes's poetry best mobilised to 'ideally [produce] an almost hypnotic, trancelike excitement that has practical, psychological, social, and spiritual benefits'.[46] It is my aim to account for those healing, reconciliatory, unificatory, hypnotic effects through charm.

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[42] Bentley, p. 1.
[43] Bentley, p. 104.
[44] Robinson, p. 25.
[45] Scigaj, p. 24.
[46] Scigaj, p. 1.

3. Charm

These concerns regarding Hughes's use of language are readily elucidated by turning to charm. Charm language seeks efficacy both in terms of effects upon the world and in terms of bringing about social co-operation and social cohesion. Through public, ritual enactment of charm, a tribe of people strengthens its communal bonds while also requesting or demanding of a responsive nature actual change upon the physical world. In this sense charm is both an analogy through which the activity of Hughes's poetry may be better understood, and also a source of that activity in terms of the influence of anthropological thought and discourse on Hughes's work. In the following section I introduce the sources of my thinking about charm and discuss how exactly charm helps us to examine Hughes's poetry.

The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics provides a helpful working definition of charm:

> In practice, verbal charms accompany ritual actions and are themselves treated as physical actions or 'verbal missiles' (Malinowski)—thus can be turned back by a stronger magician. Charms are used world-wide in traditional cultures for healing (medicinal charms, fertility charms), success (hunting charms, weather charms, love charms), and attack and defense (curses, protection charms). They are usually fixed, traditional texts, partly in a 'special language' of power marked by thick, irregular patterns of repetition (sounds, words, phrases) and often involving archaic vocabulary, unusual phonological and grammatical forms, esoteric names and allusions, other elements of obscure meaning.[47]

[47] Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 183.

This definition is itself sourced in part from Bronislaw Malinowski's *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (1935). My own sources for the activity of charm are Malinowski's aforementioned work, Andrew Welsh's *Roots of Lyric* (1978) (itself at times drawing on Malinowski), and Northrop Frye's *Spiritus Mundi* (1976). The definition above reveals one of the kinds of effect charm has, and which I have mentioned: effect upon the world of things, the outcome of ventures, the weather, one's friends or enemies. To limit these varied targets and forms of effect to a single kind of effect may risk oversimplification, but it helps us to establish a binary in Hughes's work between direct call for change upon the world and change which comes about as part of the congregational aspects of charm. The above definition also suggests that the purported efficacy of charm arrives alongside the unusual usage of language in the charm itself. Many of those aspects of the 'special language' of charm likewise belong to the special language of poetry. For now an important addendum to this definition is the aspect of charm which fosters group activity, like-mindedness, and social and societal cohesion.

'Charms', Welsh says, 'are meant to make things happen, to cause action. [...] Wind and rain, fertility of the land, success in trading, human love, sickness and healing, or the arrival of death are always *caused* by something or (more often) by someone'.[48] Welsh continues: 'Charm magic tries to control these elements by manipulation of the hidden forces in nature.' Charm addresses itself to the responsive forces of nature and assumes such forces are responsive. Hughes's expectation that nature be responsive is apparent in both his poetry and his criticism. 'Poetry', as he says, 'is traditionally supposed to be magical,' and this magic 'is one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen'.[49] The effects of such magic may be as localised as a poem whose purpose is to enable the poet to catch fish

[48] Andrew Welsh, *Roots of Lyric* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 144.
[49] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

more effectively (as in the poem 'Earth-numb'), or as generalised as the healing effects associated with a reconciliation with nature that appears as a predominant concern throughout his work.

The presence of aspects particular to charm's 'special language' in lyric poetry helps to further examine charm in Hughes's work. It is the apprehension of that presence which informs Andrew Welsh's *Roots of Lyric.* Welsh locates the language of charm among the core elements of the lyric tradition. What Wordsworth considers some of poetry's worst features, 'a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintness, hieroglyphics, and enigmas', Welsh finds to be 'not artificial and degenerate abuses of the natural language of poetry, or mere ornaments hung on that language, but actual sources of the language'.[50] These are the artefacts of charm from which lyric has developed and which lyric has partially retained. In Malinowski the same elements lead to his trying to discover the meaning of 'meaningless' words:

> For the magician in the Trobriands as elsewhere deals out verbal elements of the abracadabra, sesame, hocus pocus type, that is, words the function of which is not 'meaning' in the ordinary sense, but a specific magical influence which these words are believed to exercise. In what way the 'meaning of meaningless words' can be conveyed is a paradoxical problem of linguistic theory.[51]

The location of sense, of meaning, is tied to function and efficacy in charm utterance: 'To us the meaning of any significant word, sentence or phrase is *the effective change* brought about by the utterance within the context of situation to which it is wedded.'[52] Welsh finds those

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[50] William Wordsworth, 'Appendix on Poetic Diction', *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 316. Welsh, p. 10.
[51] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, *Volume Two: The Language of Magic and Gardening* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), p. 213.
[52] Malinowski, p. 214.

potentially meaningless elements in fact make use of a kind of meaning 'unique to lyric poetry' – one bound up in a call for efficacy the lyric has inherited from charm.[53]

One device of charm which has been inherited by lyric is apostrophe, a device which foregrounds the lyric's aspirations to take effect upon the world by direct address. Jonathan Culler's discussion of apostrophe finds this address is used by poems to 'call to be calling, both to display their poetic calling and to mark the belief that language can sometimes make things happen.'[54] Culler suggests that critics and poets find apostrophe 'embarrassing' since it foregrounds the poet's aspiration to prophesy and effect change upon the world and so makes this apparent as artifice. For Culler the apostrophe comes to stand for the aspirations of the lyric to effect change upon the world – even if this is pure aspiration, and exists solely in a staged, fictionalised sense. 'The high calling of poetry,' for Culler, in terms of both vocation and vocative, is to '[transmute] the temporal into the eternal, life into art'.[55] The event – the effective change – occurs in the discursive, eternal time of art, and in this way 'transcend[s] time'.[56]

Alongside Welsh's recognition of the sources of lyric in charm, and Culler's location of the lyric's aspirations in apostrophe, I want to put forward Hughes's use of mythology as both source of his poetry and its aspiration. The mythological actively supports and is supported by charm, as Northrop Frye states:

> Wherever we turn in charm poetry, we seem to be led back to some kind of mythological universe, a world of interlocking names of mysterious powers and

[53] Welsh, p. 9.
[54] Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?', *PMLA*, 123.1 (2008), 201-06 (p. 204).
[55] Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 152.
[56]Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 152.

> potencies which are above, but not wholly beyond reach of, the world of time and space.[57]

Culler finds the lyric poem attempting to transcend time so as to constitute the poem's own enactment, its own effects; the mythological likewise transcends historical time in its returning of its effects to a set of shared understandings, affirming them. Rather than appealing to a set of lyrical conventions, the request to a responsive nature to cause effects is concomitant with hierarchies of powers and potencies existent within a culture. Charm language simultaneously calls to those powers and affirms the mythology which surrounds them. An appeal to the mythological universe brings to the fore the request for efficacy – the call to be calling, the poet's vocation of prophecy and transmutation – even more strongly than is the case for lyric not directly concerning itself with mythology. Hughes's attempts to get closer to the archetypal elements of mythology can be understood in this light as an attempt to get as close as possible to the ultimate, ahistorical forms of those powers and potencies to which charm appeals, rather than those embedded in particular cultures, and to affirm them where they are lacking. Inasmuch as we readers are persuaded by those elements, it is also the point at which mythology makes a claim upon reality.

This understanding of mythology as a source of power and of societal cohesion elucidates Hughes's discussion of the problems of interpretation in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. In that essay, mythologies are 'the deeper understandings that keep us intact as a group' (*WP*, p. 310). Hughes encounters the problem of interpretability of a text in terms of whether or not its readers belong or do not belong to the 'mythology' or 'picture language' the poem makes use of; if they do not share that mythology, they cannot properly interpret the poem. That mythology may be as simple as having knowledge of the behaviour of a

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[57]Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 136.

particular bird, or of having knowledge of how a type of rhythm ought to be encountered. This is an especial problem for Hughes, in light of what I have said above about charm, because it reveals the static, acknowledged effects of charm's 'special language' as, in poetry that hopes for more than an extremely limited audience, open to misunderstanding or total ignorance. The problem of confused or even differing interpretations, therefore, becomes the problem of diffused powers, defused efficacy and cultural, spiritual disintegration.

Hughes's account of 'mythology' is such as to tie the understanding of language (a single language, namely English) to the coherence of a culture. Misunderstanding, or even subtly different understanding, speaks to lack of cohesion within that culture. Hughes's desire for a seemingly tribal culture in which all members belong to and make use of the same 'picture language' arises from this situation of 'mythological' disunity, and so disunity in the understanding of words (*WP*, p. 310). Hence, he says,

> the answer of the old Hopi woman to the Anthropologist who asked why Hopi songs are so short. 'Our songs are short' she said, 'because we know so much.' Meaning, because we all know so thoroughly the mythology of our system of shared understandings, which is the life of our people, nothing needs to be explained. [...] If that sounds like cultural stasis, cultural stasis might feel like a perfect state to those who enjoy it. (*WP*, p. 311)

It is in this cultural stasis that the language of charm likewise finds its static and acknowledged effects; the universe of power to which it appeals is thoroughly known and understood by every member of the tribe. This is, further, why those elements of charm's '"special language" of power' rarely appear in Hughes's work. Their deployment would be to foreground not only the 'embarrassing' artifice but also the splintering of the universe of power to which such elements appeal, and so also the splintering of culture. Hughes does use

‘rich webs of sound’ similar to those of charm but he rarely makes use of its ‘meaningless’ words.[58]

While such elements of charm may not ‘make sense’ in the manner of other uses of language, their function is nevertheless understood in those cultures which make use of them. Their being uttered can in itself perform the work of affirming those functions and affirming the world-views of those cultures. Hughes’s view on language in ‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’ is such that his poetry must find a place along the spectrum between ‘the multicultural lingua franca’ (the form of language most understood, though also less precisely understood by its users) and particular uses of ‘mythologies’ (which are more precise, but also more limited to particular cultures, in many ways themselves delineating those cultures) (*WP*, p. 312). In this way Hughes’s use of charm seeks the largest range it can, often following the basic purpose of charm towards efficacy and social co-operation, and in a way abstracting it from the traditional language-usage of charms.

This is visible in what Chen Hong has called Hughes’s ‘totemic’ use of animal figures, which amounts to a prosopopoeia of human psychic life.[59] The ‘totem or shamanic animal’, Hong says, possesses the power ‘to move freely out of its own physical existence into the spiritual/mythic realm whilst communicated as a textual force from beyond, yet obviously expressed within, human culture’.[60] In ‘The Thought Fox’ (1957), the creature ‘now, and now, and now || sets neat prints into the snow’ just as both narrator and writer set their own prints to make the poem itself (*CP*, p. 21). So it is that the poem presents the exact meeting point between reality – what is outside the narrator’s conscious grasp – and where it comes to be internalised, as if by an act of possession or dictation by a spirit. The poem is an

[58] Welsh, p. 145.
[59] Chen Hong , ‘Hughes and Animals’ , *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 41.
[60] Hong , p. 41.

atemporal ouroboros, forever making itself by describing its own making. The fox becomes the poem and the poem becomes the fox. This is, however, only a figure of encountering reality – the other, or alterity. The poem's aesthetic appeal, inasmuch as it possesses appeal, and where a reader might encounter otherness rather than accommodation, must be somewhere different from the reducing of such a meeting-point to a kind of iconicised recall. In the role of a didactic image of an encounter with a nature-reality, the poem risks reducing itself to a self-referring image which immediately familiarises itself.

Of a piece with Hughes's desire for an absolutely-understood tribal language is his treatment of what he terms Shakespeare's 'double language'. That language is one defined by its ability to both simplify and complicate, and in so doing to appeal and be understood by both groundlings and the elite of Shakespeare's audience. The problem of interpretability of obscure words is 'so real that all writers or speakers who hope for a popular audience obey the rule as a law: avoid strange, complicated, new words'. To combat this, Hughes claims, Shakespeare takes the obscure word and 'interprets it, or translates it, with one or two better-known synonyms, or an explanatory simple phrase, or even a metaphor.'[61] Hughes himself makes use of similar devices. In 'Billet-Doux' (1957), the 'grandiloquent truth' is anthropomorphised in such a way as to not only make 'truth' more approachable by concretisation ('head high | And naked as his breath'), but also the word 'grandiloquent'; it is 'translated' into truth's possession of 'twelve bright brass bands', an image visibly grand ('twelve bright'), figuratively sounding very loud (as twelve brass bands would be expected to), and whose grandiloquence is affirmed by the alliteration (*CP*, p. 26). Not only this, but the grandiloquence of truth is translated for us *and* subverted; those brass bands have been 'Diverted down mouseholes'. Subsequently we gain an understanding of both the potentially foreign word 'grandiloquent' and the nature of 'truth'. Similarly, in 'The Bull Moses' (1960)

[61] Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess*, p. 129, p. 140, p. 141.

it is the ‘fetch’ of the ‘distance’ which ‘[draws] nothing to momentum | In the locked black of his powers’ – ‘fetch’ indicating a potential movement thwarted by that more echoing, more abstract, less action-oriented ‘distance’ (*CP*, p. 74). In ‘Strawberry Hill’ (1960), the stoat ‘bit[es] | Through grammar and corset’– grammar has been objectified into a kind of corset, and corset has likewise been conceptualised into a kind of grammar for the body (*CP*, p. 63). While these examples may not present the same degree of difficulty as translating words that are wholly unfamiliar to an audience, the poems do present a relationship of translation which is the same as charm’s relationship with the world, founded in myth: figures of encounters with reality, with the other, which are accommodated into conceptual vehicles – poems, totemic animals – and with appeal to an anthropologically-minded syncretism of myths (the title ‘The Bull Moses’ makes this explicit).

This tribal language Hughes suggests we might find to be a ‘perfect state’ finds ready parallels in discourse concerning charm language. Welsh contrasts the assumptions of naming in charm with that of *phanopoeia* (which is associated with riddles). In *phanopoeia*, ‘names are a consequence of things, but not the thing itself’.[62] Indeed, this realisation is what destroys the charm-capability of a riddle, as Frye comments: ‘If one can “guess,” that is, point to an outside object to which the verbal construct can be related, the something outside destroys it as a charm’.[63] The revelation of objects, perception, and reader (guesser) are tied, in riddle, to the realisation of the arbitrariness and materiality of language. By contrast:

> In the charms things are a consequence of names, called forth by powers residing in names ‘from the beginning.’ Control of those powers depends not on clear vision but

[62] Welsh, p. 98.
[63] Frye, p. 137.

> on obscure, esoteric knowledge, traditional or personal, which no amount of vision alone can uncover.[64]

This view of charm is one that supposes an innate power of words over their respective objects, a power which arrives from their being concomitant with their (possibly divine) arrival and presence in the world. Malinowski likewise tells us, 'a spell is believed to be a primeval text which somehow came into being side by side with animals and plants', and that 'the magical word is coeval with that aspect of reality which it has to influence.'[65] In this understanding of charm language, the correspondence between word and object is motivated rather than arbitrary; there is something of a thing's essence in its name. This situation of charm language is one that Hughes cannot directly make use of, acknowledging as he does the problems of interpretation his readers encounter in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' (pp. 310-19).

In the quotation from Welsh above, he partly ventriloquises through those who believe in the efficacy and origin of charm's language. Hughes occupies a similarly dual position of one both outside the traditions of charm and one also trying to make use of them. In Hughes these two aspects are better understood as anthropologist and shaman. Hughes's anthropological understanding of the activity of charm in tribal cultures leads him to appropriate it for use in poetry whose audience belongs to a very different culture and world-view. Therefore, he must find a form of charm efficacy for an audience who does not share understanding (or belief) of the efficacy of the traditional figures of charm. This dual position is also apparent in Hughes's prose where he insists on the seemingly supernatural efficacy of poetry while also explaining that efficacy at other times as psychological effect. For instance,

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[64] Welsh, p. 160. See also: 'The movement [of the riddle] is towards identity rather than, as in Ovidian metamorphosis, away from it.' Frye, p. 140.
[65] Malinowski, p. 218 and p. 229.

Hughes's assertion of 'the psychological effect' of magic, and that 'everything lies in the dramatic power of the blessing or the curse, our own susceptibility' is contrasted (in the same piece of writing) with his impression of how his poem 'Earth-numb' has stupefied the salmon he is trying to catch.[66] Even if we imagine Hughes's calls to a responsive nature are staged – a fiction the reader buys into, as he sometimes suggests and sometimes contradicts – then that fictive expected change can still be examined, and especially in terms of how such calls may seek effect upon a reader. Charm allows us a route into considering the nature of 'effective change' – the nature of the change, its location, its target – in Hughes's work very directly.

This observation also helps us consider the efficacy of Hughes's poetry in terms of whether these are actual requests for effect or staged as part of the poetry's aesthetic position and affective strategy. Frye, in contrasting magician (utilitarian effect) and poet (aesthetic effect) tells us that 'the poet is a magician who renounces his magic, and thereby re-creates the universe of power instead of trying to exploit it'.[67] The will towards actual magical ability and, conversely, the recreating of a mythological universe, appear as vying elements of Hughes's work and poetic thought. Indeed, Hughes's poems are only successful *as poems* insofar as they are unsuccessful as purposeful utilitarian texts – i.e., spells. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore the fact that Hughes's poetry seeks to make a real claim for access to reality itself; it is not just a recreation but, through its syncresis and its archetypal questing, aims to be a concretisation and mutual affirmation of a mythologically-explored, nature-inflected reality.

While the splintered state of language-use and culture prevents the tacit understandings of small tribal communities, Hughes nevertheless attempts to make use of what he perceives to be the most active components of words. He connects this idea of active

[66] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.
[67] Frye, p. 145.

component, which is most often tied to sonority, with the idea of cultural inheritance. Seamus Heaney discusses this nexus of cultural inheritance and sonority in his essay 'Englands of the Mind':

> Hughes's vigour has much to do with this matter of consonants that take the measure of his vowels like calipers, or stud the line like rivets. 'Everything is inheriting everything,' as he says in one of his poems, and what he has inherited through Shakespeare and John Webster and Hopkins and Lawrence is something of that primary life of stress which is the quick of the English poetic matter. His consonants are the Norse-men, the Normans, the Roundheads in the world of his vocables, hacking and hedging and hammering down the abundance and luxury and possible lasciviousness of the vowels.[68]

Alongside this effort to reconnect with an English inheritance of prosody, so too is there an effort to reconnect sounds with their most active components, which in Hughes's mind equate with sensory experience. His advice in *Poetry in the Making* attests to this: 'Words that live are those which we hear'.[69] Robinson, in this vein, finds that Hughes 'reconnects words with their roots, sometimes reinvesting clichés with new feeling and conviction, sometimes taking an abstract word back to its physical basis, [...] and, more often, as we shall see, through his music', and that it is 'through the forming of the poem's sounds in the reader's mind and body, the therapeutic power of verbal music has its righting effect'.[70] The efficacy of particular aspects of charm's '"special language" of power' are not available to Hughes thanks to his perspectives on interpretive and cultural discord; Hughes appeals to sound

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[68] Seamus Heaney, 'Englands of the Mind', *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 80-81.
[69] Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 17.
[70] Robinson, p. 4 and p. 9.

symbolism (or simply sound response) in an effort to find the least equivocal components of language within a 'multicultural lingua franca' understanding (*WP*, p. 312).

Hughes's Anglocentric sense of the development of rhythm and metre is one made apparent by his discussion of them in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. That Anglocentrism brings to the fore his appropriation of otherwise culturally dissonant elements from his anthropological and shamanic sources, but also speaks to his anthropological-poetic attitude.[71] This is an attitude which seeks cultural commonalities without much regard for their original sources, as if through this he might locate the underpinning of cultural cohesion in general. Heaney's apprehension that Hughes's 'aspiration […] is to command all the elements, to bring them within the jurisdiction of his authoritarian voice' is one that speaks clearly to Hughes's effort, here through sound and rhythm, to locate and assure a common cultural ground thanks to which cultural healing can take place.[72] Likewise, in 'Ted Hughes and the Classics', John Talbot finds the influence of classical prosody on Hughes one that he actively resists: 'Yes, he will visit Rome (and Greece) in his poetry, but his admiration will sometimes be tinged with the ruefulness of a Briton whose native culture has been subdued, and threatens to be superseded, by Mediterranean civilization'.[73]

Hughes, in a letter to Daniel Huws, says that the 'nerve from the ear […] is connected directly to the Medulla – the oldest part of the brain', whereas, 'the nerve from the eye is connected to quite a recent part of the brain, and is associated with the areas […] apparently responsible for abstract & constructive thought, & speculative' (*LTH*, p. 96). 'Obviously', he continues,

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[71] Something of an irony considering his apparent distaste for the '*multicultural* lingua franca' (my emphasis) as expressed in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', *WP*, p. 312.

[72] Heaney, p. 81.

[73] John Talbot, '"I Had Set Myself against Latin": Ted Hughes and the Classics', *Arion*, 3rd ser. 13.3 (2006), 131-61 (p. 136).

> People like Wallace Stevens house their demon where the eye-nerve enters – so that everything is arbitrary & colourful & partial & questionable. Whereas Wyatt & Crowe-Ransome house theirs where the ear enters – so that in them everything is inevitable & final & bottomless & unquestionable as the response of glands or the harmony of moving muscles. […] The former – the eye – only interprets things from outside, in a domineering speculative way – the latter, the ear, expresses movements from inside, in a servantish & obedient way, that have already quite definitely & completely occurred. This is the argument for the superiority of the latter kind of poetry. (*LTH*, pp. 96-97)

Hughes's privileging of sound over sight is clear, as is his telling desire for its accompanying sense of finality and unquestionability. This is, however, more than simply a preference for sonic effects over image; it points to a larger attitude towards the world, towards reality in general. Hughes privileges unconscious mechanism which ties to that 'unquestionable' nature of ear-oriented poetry (which presumably includes his own) – the activity of glands and muscles, as opposed to the 'speculative' examination of what is 'arbitrary' and 'questionable'. This is in line with what Hughes writes elsewhere concerning the hemispheres of the brain: 'The left side processes verbal language, abstract concepts, linear argument, while the right side is virtually wordless, and processes sensuous imagery, intuitive ideas, special patterns of wholeness and simultaneity.' Hughes goes on to privilege the right hemisphere in much the same way as he does the ear, marking the left as responsible for 'the onset of rationality' which 'institutes proceedings for a kind of divorce', with 'the result' being 'an automatic suppression of right-side activity'. Where this suppression becomes 'habitual,' it,

> removes the individual from the 'inner life' of the right side, which produces the sensation of living […] not only removed from oneself, but from the real world also,

> and living in a prison of sorts, since the left side screens out direct experience, establishing its verbal 'system' as a hard ego of repetitive, tested routines, defensive against the chaos of real things, resisting adaptation to them.

Hughes equates this onset of rationality with where 'the Goddess-destroying god begins to get the upper hand'.[74] Through Hughes's views of the ear and of the right side of the brain, it becomes apparent that the poetry he privileges is anti-rational, destructive of the quotidian ego, and, in being and performing those things, approaches 'the real world', the 'chaos of real things'. Sound is partly responsible (capable) of this, but what is also important is an attitude of unquestionability, inevitability, and motivation rather than arbitrariness.

In the above there are clear parallels with charm. Charm seeks to order a world of potentially destructive forces, and to destroy and reformulate the individual ego through ritual congregation, and does so through anti-rational methods. Just as sonority is of great importance to Hughes, so too is it a major part of charm. This is not only an aspect of charm's language 'being sacred, set and used for an entirely different purpose to that of ordinary life', and so making use of words unusual to everyday speech in patterns indicative of the sacredness of the occasion.[75] Sonority in charm is tied explicitly to hypnotic compulsion. For Frye, charm is the radical of '*melos*', and his definition is 'the hypnotic incantation that, through its pulsing dance rhythm, appeals to involuntary physical response, and is hence not far from the sense of magic, or physically compelling power.'[76] Sound and sense are key aspects of Welsh's analysis of charm, too, and he draws directly on Frye's terms *melos* and *opsis*, whose radicals are charm and riddle respectively. '*Melos*' is 'an element analogous to or otherwise connected with music', while '*opsis* […] has a similar

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[74] Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess*, p. 157, p. 158.
[75] Malinowski, p. 213.
[76] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 278.

connection with the plastic arts' and 'mental "vision"'.[77] They also correspond respectively with sound-as-hypnosis, and seeing-as-revelation – with charm and riddle, with sound and sense. The hypnotic power of charm is in part its ability to override sense. This is made clear in Frye's example drawn from *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*:

> 'Can you do addition?' the White Queen asked. 'What's one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one?'
>
> 'I don't know,' said Alice. 'I lost count.'[78]

Frye does not claim that the White Queen is employing a charm but suggests she 'illustrates the overwhelming of sense by sound, which is where charm starts.' This hypnotic aspect of sound patterning is one Hughes mentions, also:

> The couplets [...] compel the reader to co-operate physically. Each line is like a dancer who, if you are going to read the line at all, forces you to be a partner and dance. [...] You can pronounce the line as silently as you like, but that launching of the inner self into full kinaesthetic participation is, so to speak, compulsory. [...] As everybody knows, between the sitting and standing person and that same person dancing there gapes an immense biological gulf. [...]
>
> And yet, obviously, it is a natural enough thing, in the right circumstances, to leap that gulf. And almost as a rule it produces the most intense pleasure for the one who does. (*WP*, pp. 334-35)

Dancing here is analogous to the ritualised actions of charm which the spoken words traditionally accompany. The line of his he is discussing comes from 'The Horses', but a clearer example of the sound-sense nexus can be found in a pair of lines from 'The Jaguar',

[77] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 244.
[78] Frye, *Spiritus Mundi*, p. 124.

also from *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957): ‘The eye satisfied to be blind in fire, | By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear’ (*CP*, p. 20). In that right-brained-blindness the jaguar is a ‘visionary’. The bludgeoning pulse of his instinctual self drowns out the rational prison of ‘his cell’, just as the bludgeoning sounds, accompanied by the torqued, hyperbatic syntax might bar the reader from sense in favour of a sensory onslaught.

In being hypnotised by charm, the recipient is pushed into a position where she becomes impressionable, malleable, such that the compulsive effects of charm may take effect upon her. ‘The central idea of the magic of charm is to reduce freedom of action’, Frye tells us, ‘either by compelling a certain course of action or by stopping action altogether. [...] Or you can compel by the force of rhythm and sound alone, […] [a] movement that the thing being charmed will be forced to imitate.’ Much depends on the benign nature of the charmer, and ‘sinister charms’, Frye also states, ‘[push] us or our enemies into a lower state of existence’.[79] In that lower state of existence it is difficult or impossible to mount resistance.

The use of charm in hypnotically determining particular responses (in Hughes’s analogy, dancing) is one whose homogenising, cohesive effects are suitable as a potential remedy for Hughes’s anxieties over differing interpretive responses to his poems; those differing interpretations are, to his mind, telling of cultural discord. This interpretive and cultural remoulding, from that perspective, can be a terrifyingly dictatorial thing.

[79] Frye, *Spiritus Mundi*, pp. 124-25, p. 131.

4. The Shamanic: Charm and Social Role

Before I come to discuss in more detail the social activity of charm, which helps to elucidate and is itself elucidated by Hughes's appeals to the shamanic, I want to discuss the presence of shamanism in the criticism of Hughes, as well as bring to the fore some of the anthropological texts that likely influenced this aspect of his attitude.

Scigaj's study includes an instructive list of the anthropological works Hughes most likely encountered at Cambridge.[80] Scigaj admits the difficult, perhaps impossible task of bringing together aspects of Hughes's themes, whose 'combination of surrealism, the myths and folklore of ancient and tribal societies, and various Oriental influences helped to make his poetry strikingly original, but also baffling to most reviewers'.[81] From those anthropological works, Scigaj claims, Hughes 'learned that religion had always been the one center for organizing the inner energies of humans and reducing the otherness of nature by enfolding mind and environment into one coherent whole.'[82] It is in this light that Hughes's use of such influences can be made clear as an aspect of his effort to find those elements most germane to organising culture, for bringing about its coherence. It is this purpose which dictates his appropriation of motifs and methods from those texts.

The role of shaman is one which Hughes employs as a position from which such cultural organisation may be brought about. This is clear from the importance that Hughes

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[80] That list of anthropological reading is revealed by Scigaj when he asks Professor David Trump of the Cambridge University Department of Archaeology and Anthropology for the reading list for the 1954 tripos, and receives in return that for 1953 (the year in which Trump studied), amongst which are: 'Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer* and *Witchcraft among the Azande*, Firth's *We the Tikopia* and *Elements of Social Organization*, Malinowski's *Coral Gardens of the Pacific* and *Sorcerers of Dobu*, Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, and books by Mayer Fortes, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, R.F. Fortune, and Durkheim. Trump misremembered one reference: R.F. Fortune wrote *Sorcerers of Dobu.*' Scigaj, pp. 161-62. A search of Ted Hughes's library, held at Emory University, reveals that Hughes had only one of the above (*Witchcraft*) in his possession (finally). He did possess, however, some nine books by Mircea Eliade, four books by Claude Lévi-Strauss (including *Totemism*), and more than twenty books on shamanism. Emory University, 'discoverE Search', <http://discovere.emory.edu/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do> [accessed 14 May 2016].

[81] Scigaj, p. 11.

[82] Scigaj, p. 27.

himself places on the synergising effects of his reading on shamanism, as he details in a letter to Moelwyn Merchant, 29 June 1990:

> At about the age of 12 or so, I became infatuated with folklore. [...] At University, I spent 3 years sitting in the University Library reading folklore & mythology. Collecting it too.
>
> Also at university, I discovered the literature of Shamanism.
>
> So then these separate things—my wild life, my mythology, and a series of dreams which had recurred since I was quite young (two of them are my first memories)—showed me that something about Shamanism explained or incorporated everything that concerned me. (*LTH*, p. 579)

Just as shamanism incorporates everything that concerned Hughes, so too does the position of shaman allow him a role from which he may attempt to enact or resolve those concerns.

This role should be understood as one in part taken up as a means to an end, out of a set of influences, rather than reflecting a particularly stable definition of the shaman or the shamanic. This understanding in turn helps in considering Hughes's position as nuancing – and as nuanced by – the effects he seeks. Even in anthropological studies the shamanic is far from a consistent category, as H. Sidky notes: 'Although there is a vast body of literature on shamans and shamanism, intractable problems beset the field of "shamanic studies." One of these is a disagreement over the nature of the phenomenon in question. […] "What exactly is shamanism?"'[83] Sidky goes on to argue that Eliade's influence, 'despite numerous criticisms of his work', is one of the sources of this confusion.[84] An article by Hughes concerning Eliade's *Shamanism* appeared in the *Listener* on 29 October 1964. In the review, Hughes

[83] H. Sidky, 'Ethnographic Perspectives on Differentiating Shamans from other Ritual Intercessors', *Asian Ethnology*, 69.2 (2010), 213-40 (p. 214).
[84] Sidky, p. 214.

claims that shamans ‘seem to undergo […] one of the main regenerating dramas of the human psyche: the fundamental poetic event. Mircea Eliade carefully reviews all that is known about Shamanism […]: it is a major survey of the subject’ (*WP*, p. 58). A large number of the aforementioned studies make varying use of Eliade’s work on shamanism. Faas, for instance, suggests that *Shamanism*, ‘mapped the area of world poetry to which [Hughes’s] own has been contributing ever since’.[85] Hughes’s interest in the connection between the human psyche and the supernatural is far from exhausted by shamanism; it also includes, for example, the Ouija board and astrology.[86] Rather than discussing the shamanic in works such as Eliade’s and applying this to Hughes, I treat these practices as elements representative of a closely related set of Hughes’s interests, and where the question of the shamanic arises, attempt first to see Hughes’s own inflection upon that shamanic purpose. That provisional definition of Hughes as poet-shaman is of an intermediary figure between cultural splintering and cultural wholeness – wound and healing; and the tool he wields to this end is charm. Hughes’s understanding of shamanic practice as a ‘regenerating drama’ and ‘the fundamental poetic event’ clarify his use of the shamanic as a position from which he seeks to enact healing – regeneration.

Furthermore, treating the shamanic in this manner helps in understanding the questions critics ask of Hughes’s convictions with regards the occult and the shamanic again in terms of aesthetic staging – and, moreover, as manipulative tools. Some Hughes scholars come to occupy a similar stance as Hughes in trying to justify his shamanic and occultic leanings through pseudo-scientific statements or even by suggesting it as common sense. Faas, for instance, finds that ‘Hughes, after all is said, is far from being a poet of the occult’. Instead, Hughes’s is a ‘natural reaction of a poet exasperated by our customary rejection of

[85] Faas, p. 15.

[86] See, for instance, one of his sketched horoscopes, this one for his sister Olwyn, in a letter from 1956. *LTH*, p. 78.

the entire realms of psychic and mythic experience'.[87] Faas notes, too, that 'modern parapsychologists seem to agree with him in acknowledging some kind of negative or positive psychic power in everybody'. There is a difference between 'a poet of the occult' and a poet drawn to occult motif and method, and this difference points to Hughes's use of the occult and the shamanic as contributors to a staging of authority and special access to reality. Timothy Materer comes to a similar conclusion as Faas, though from quite the other direction, finding Hughes, instead, somehow too rational: 'If Sylvia Plath's fascination with the occult reached the level of neurotic obsession, Ted Hughes's seems in contrast detached and intellectual'.[88] Materer finally believes that Hughes is unlikely to have achieved the self-healing others acknowledge (his guilt, which in Materer's treatment arises directly from the deaths of Sylvia Plath and Assia Weevill, is too immense) and he takes issue with Scigaj's study for suggesting otherwise. [89]

Rather than pursue self-healing, I am instead more interested in the cohesion and cultural healing Hughes wishes to foster. Hughes's seeking of some kind of cultural shared ground is also implicated in Materer's critique, since poets may 'draw upon occultism because it represents habits of mind, and a kind of sensibility, that seem lost to modern culture […]. Yet no artist, nor even a group of artists, can replace what a civilization once provided.'[90] This is a problem Hughes is very much alive to, in particular in his long essay 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. Hughes is eminently concerned with practical applications above all else – and it is these practical applications I will be paying particular attention to in an

[87] Faas, p. 50.
[88] Timothy Materer, *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 141.
[89] The vulture of Hughes's *Prometheus on his Crag*, in Materer's view, in 'Swallowing [...] [Prometheus's] liver' does not, in fact, 'manag[e] also to digest its guilt'. *CP*, p. 290. See, also: 'We have to accept some radical psychological assumptions to accept Scigaj's claims for Hughes's poetry: "Readers who acknowledge their own demons and desires have a much better chance of integrating their conscious lives with their buried selves and thus achieving peace. [...] Hughes delights us with his metaphors and formal dexterity as he teaches us how to understand our culture and achieve personal wholeness."' Materer, p. 152. He is quoting from Scigaj, p. 19.
[90] Materer, p. 143.

effort to examine the kinds of effects Hughes expects from his poetry, whether these amount to aesthetic or actual effects (upon reader or world) and how he goes about explaining them.

Nevertheless, the self-healing just mentioned does play a part in the shamanic role, consonant with self-sacrifice or self-abnegation. The vying forces of personal power and authority and self-annihilation co-exist in the role of shaman. I have already mentioned the influence of Eastern thought on Hughes's development which Faas, and also Scigaj, find in Hughes, and I want to briefly detail this influence here, too, since it presents a location where those vying forces can be seen clearly and resolved in a way that suggests the former's dominance. In Faas's study, Hughes's shamanistic tendencies, his 'search for shamanistic rebirth in a new mythic world', are incorporated alongside some facets of Eastern philosophy.[91] The most important source of that influence is the *Bardo Thodol*, whose impact on Hughes Sagar's commentary helps to elucidate:

> The *Book of the Dead* was traditionally a guide to the living to help them assist the dead in their passage through the Bardo, the 'between' state [...] It is the place the shaman visits when he wants to speak with the dead, the astral plane, the limbo where dead and living can meet. Though this translation was never published or produced it seems to have had an enormous impact on Hughes and his development as a dramatist. For it is from this project that we can assume he found his true setting, not simply a Hemingway-like arena of violence to intensify life, but a transcendent zone.[92]

Hughes's transcendent zone is somewhat different. Rather than providing an emphasis on communion between the living and the dead, the focus is cultural healing supported by

[91] Faas, p. 18.
[92] Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes*, p. 159.

communion and sympathetic affinity between man and nature in whose intermediary position stands the shaman. If the *Bardo* marks Eastern influence on Hughes's development, then it is the influence of Eastern *shamanism* (as the quotation from Sagar above makes clear). The kind of Eastern influences Faas finds, which are associated with personal processes such as meditation, are revealed here as refracted through shamanism in such a way as to make an individual serving as conduit necessary for the transition and transformation to occur. Instead, the shaman is one who has been elected by the spirits, often dismembered and resurrected in dreams and visions. Hughes alludes to having experienced this himself. In a letter to Lucas Myers (28 August 1964, two months before Hughes's article on *Shamanism* appeared, and following the recent break-down of Myer's marriage), Hughes writes:

> I got a magnificent book to review—'Shamanism'—it's a classic scholarly review of the whole field. [...] You'll be glad to know that your (& my) obsession with physical disintegration, being torn into fragments & fitted together again, is the great Shaman initiation dream, & that after such a dream, an Asiatic knows that if he does not take up serious shamanising he will die. (*LTH*, p. 235)

This provides a further understanding of Hughes's use of shamanism as staging of power – personal, poetic, and cultural-organisational. The shaman has already undergone self-destruction and reconstitution, and his connection with nature, endorsed by the spirits, is beyond question. Through ecstasy the shaman may come back with 'something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs'; but the shaman's connection to the beyond-our-world is a static, pre-decided one which is made available to the tribe, and through which it is transformed.[93]

[93] Faas, p. 206.

With this transformation in mind, the target of that self-destruction and reconstitution is shifted from the shaman-Hughes to the participants – his readers. Hughes's discussion of the compulsion associated with reading a line, dancing, and with leaping the gulf, indicates that this is in part achieved by hypnotic means – which is the remit of charm. What is required of one who would leap the gulf is 'that the familiar person becomes, in a flash, an entirely different animal with entirely different body chemistry, brain rhythm and physiological awareness' (*WP*, p. 335). This is the process of ego-destruction and reconstitution Hughes desires a reading of his poetry to bring about, and which is necessary for the full co-operation required of one who would leap the gulf.

Such reconstitution is put to the purpose of generating unitive states. Scigaj's presents an optimistic view of this when he finds that Hughes has much 'in common with Blake, Yeats, and Lawrence', such as the 'advocacy of unitive states of being and visionary perception to repair the divorce of the perceiving subject from its object.'[94] Charm language works to achieve and maintain similar unitive states; however, these are not unitive states borne out of personal revelation, such as those that might repair Scigaj's 'divorce' of subject and object. The unitive state implied by Hughes's views on cultural harmony and cultural understandings (exemplified in his idea of 'mythology') is one of static understanding: 'cultural stasis' (*WP*, p. 311). The unitive state brought about by charm is a restricted, homogeneous one, governed by the congregational power of charm and by the authoritative position of the charm-user (Hughes as shaman). Hirschberg's study finds that position in Hughes's shamanic stance, with the power this involves brought to the fore: 'For Hughes the significance of shamanism […] is the sense of power it offers, communion with cosmic life

[94] Scigaj, pp. 16-17.

and force, and a recentering of the personality and […] renewal of the universe as an ecstatic and euphoric experience'.[95]

The language of charm has a social use immediately fitting Hughes's attempts to generate such unitive effects, as Frye notes: 'charms can also be social, and one use of repetition is to bind the community into a single enterprise.'[96] Social co-operation takes a prominent role in Malinowski's study too, and he suggests that 'modern political oratory would probably yield a rich harvest of purely magical elements. Some of the least desirable of modern pseudo-statesmen or gigantic politicanti have earned the titles of wizards or spell-binders'.[97] In Malinowski's statement lie some of the dangers that might be associated with charm's effects, whose homogenising, unitive powers can be mobilised to remove dissenting voices, minimise difference and enforce authority. That danger is apprehended by Frye, too, who states: 'The power of words over things, the central principle of charm, eventually separates the magician who has the power of words from the bewitched creature who has lost it and become a mere object'.[98]

More than merely writing and deploying charm in his work, Hughes situates himself – or hopes to situate himself – as the primary charm-user of the tribe, a position achieved by appeals to the shamanic. It is through the shaman's link between the spirit world and the illusory, material world that ordinary members of a tribe achieve the healing, unitive effect. Hughes presents himself as a shamanic conduit between fragmentation and wholeness, wounding and healing. Through that role the foundational, shared elements of culture are reinforced, and the participators in (or targets of) charm are drawn into what is purported to be reconnection with a common ground. That common ground is Hughes's nature-accented,

[95] Hirschberg, p. 11.
[96] Frye, p. 128.
[97] Malinowski, p. 238.
[98] Frye, p. 140.

Goddess-overseen reality. Mythology is the enabler of charm's traditionally-understood power and, therefore, what must be made to cohere in a stable, convincing fashion for that power to function. With that power thrown into doubt – with a lack of that common understanding – 'mythology' (being also the 'picture language' of a people) becomes, as well, the problem of diffuse interpretations and a disrupted unitive power.

If Timothy Materer's problem were possible to overcome, if an artist were able to 'replace what a civilization once provided' or at least help reinstate, re-establish, and cement the binding attitudes of a civilisation, then the figure of the shaman is a sensible choice from which to perform such work.[99] Charm likewise emerges as a socially-organising, compelling force with which to bring about such unitive states. The shaman serves as a conduit from a world thought to be somehow false or illusionary (or, in its technocratic accentuation, over-rational, downright noxious) to a unitive state of reconciliation with nature. For Hughes, the tribe in question is the nation of England. Hughes says to Seamus Heaney, in a letter from 1990, that he makes a 'clean division' in his mind 'between the poets I think of as truly great (spiritually great—voices of the whole tribe at a moment of crisis) [...] [and those] who are simply never picked up by the national gods' (*LTH*, p. 574). This conception of what makes a poet truly great is one that speaks to his own aspirations. Likewise, Hughes's tribute to T.S. Eliot, 'The Poetic Self' (1992), suggests that Eliot's 'tribe, perhaps, included all Western man' (*WP*, p. 272). Hughes's preoccupation with mythology, his anthropological interests and attitude, the attempt to produce a healing reconciliatory and unitive effect, and many of the recurring tropes of poetry whose aspiration is efficaciousness are united in the figure of charm.

[99] Materer, p. 143.

This study has three chapters. In the first I examine a particular case where Hughes accompanies a poem with claims for its effects. That poem is ‘Earth-numb’ to which he ascribes his enhanced ability to catch some salmon: ‘the impression on me was that somehow I’d broken down their resistance’. Hughes explains the efficaciousness of poetry as ‘magical’, ‘one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen’.[100] From this apprehension of Hughes’s thinking on poetry’s effects, I move to examine those effects. Through Walter Benjamin’s ‘On Language as Such and on the Language of Man’ I come to recognise and discuss the mythological underpinning of Hughes’s remarks on efficacy – an appeal to ‘the mythological universe, a world of interlocking names of mysterious powers and potencies which are above, but not wholly beyond reach of, the world of time and space’ from which charm gains its powers.[101] A close reading of ‘Earth-numb’ reveals that poem as a narrative of compulsion and an enactment of it as well. A close reading of Wallace Stevens’s ‘Anecdote of the Jar’ offers a contrasting sense of dominion and also provides insight into the nature of reality in Hughes’s and Stevens’s poetics. This raises the question of the relationship between narrative and enactment, such that, through Jonathan Culler, I seek to answer to what extent Hughes’s aspirations to efficacy are staged; further, I explore how charm implicates the poem as a utilitarian – rather than aesthetic, affective – object. I argue that the aspirational situation of apostrophe towards efficacy which Culler delineates is also characteristic of charm. Following that discussion we find Hughes insistent on trying to persuade us, at least, of actual effect.

The charm address is revealed as one supported by and supportive of the mythological: powers which may be called upon to act on behalf of the caller. A close reading of ‘Pike’ demonstrates how Hughes’s ideas of nature, reality and mythology are

[100] Hughes, ‘Ted Hughes: “The Critical Forum” Series’.
[101] Frye, *Spiritus Mundi*, p. 136.

coterminous. By examining the mythological nuances Hughes privileges we begin to see the kinds of societal unification he desires – the desired effects of the poetry upon the readership. Hughes's idea of 'mythologies', those 'picture languages that we invent to embody and make accessible to casual reference the deeper shared understandings which keep us intact as a group' is the topic of the second chapter (*WP*, p. 310). Hughes's 'mythology' encompasses language, culture, and world-view. This use of 'mythology', understood in relation to charm's gathering, harmonising capabilities, likewise implicates efficacious power, interpretation, and social cohesion.

Hughes's use of 'mythology' in this sense appears in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', the first half of which I analyse in the second chapter. Hughes's essay is situated as a response to several readers struggling to interpret Hughes's poems. Hughes characterises this interpretive failure as a failure to possess the necessary mythological understandings upon which the poems rely. The opposite extreme of a mythological understanding appears as the 'multicultural lingua franca', which Hughes presents as a more universally understood, though infinitely blunter, form of language. Hughes's term 'mythology' is one which allows him to characterise any interpretive failure as likewise a failure in the cohesion in a culture. This has repercussions for charm which draws upon the commonality of mythological understandings for its effects, and so the problem of unshared mythologies becomes a problem that must be addressed somehow for the cohesive goal of charm to be achieved. Further to this, Hughes's insistence on particular interpretations, belonging to particular mythological understandings, emerges as a desired constraint and homogenising of a culture. There must be a way for a divide between mythological understandings to be crossed: a way for cultural splintering to be remedied. Hughes stands at the centre of such efforts to harmonise culture as the shaman, a position which represents a claim to authority as a conduit-to-reality. I interrogate his ideas of 'mythology' and 'multicultural lingua franca' in

relation to that idea of reality in Hughes's poetics. A close reading of Stevens's 'The Idea of Order at Key West' provides a counterpoint in which the interpreter, instead, is the one who encounters provisionality and the other. I suggest the lingua franca as vital in the process of renewing our experience of the world. I then carry out a close reading of 'The Horses' both to see what tropes of charm can be uncovered and to begin to see how a crossing between shared and unshared understandings might be achieved: the poem presents itself as a narrative of such a crossing.

From this recognition of what is at stake in Hughes's use of charm in attempting to bring about cultural cohesion arrives the topic of the third chapter. This chapter analyses the rest of 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. The third struggling interpreter is the misquoted Roy Fuller, a straw man for Hughes's argumentative, defensive posture in the essay; he has supposedly claimed the final line of 'The Horses' is 'unsayable' (but never said any such thing). As a response to that imagined criticism, Hughes embarks upon an account of the English prosodic tradition, dividing it into orthodox and unorthodox metres. The implication is that rhythm, too, is a part of one's mythological understanding. However, either spontaneously or thanks to instruction, one may 'leap the gulf', Hughes says, entering into active participation with the musical orchestration of the poem. In this sense, one may negate the barriers between shared and unshared mythologies. Rhythm, Hughes suggests, may be interpreted properly by anyone who is open to it and has been instructed in the possibility (which, Hughes claims, is a rejection of one's usual inurement to orthodox reading strategies, rather than being itself a 'mythology').

Understanding this act of leaping the gulf through Georges Bataille's *Eroticism* shows more clearly the ego-destructive effects of giving oneself up to charm's rhythms. It clarifies, also, the social co-operative role and hypnotic effects of charm. Hughes supports his rhythmical interpretations by appealing to the representative elements of the poems at hand.

From this, with support from Julia Kristeva's 'Revolution in Poetic Language', the interpretive restraints Hughes imposes and his efforts at reinstating cultural harmony reveal themselves as a constraint of readerly identity, and likewise, therefore, of cultural being. Giving oneself up to the preferred interpretation of rhythm requires 'that the familiar person becomes, in a flash, an entirely different animal with entirely different body chemistry, brain rhythm and physiological awareness' (*WP*, p. 335). That different animal is one who does not offer a dissenting or even differing interpretation of Hughes's poems. Therein we find the homogenising, dictatorial facet of Hughes's employment of charm and of his insistence on cultural cohesion. Rather than raising to awareness the structures on which society and sense of self sustain themselves (and calling them into doubt, destroying them), Hughes seeks to generate and reinforce such structures to bring about cultural, spiritual harmony. Instead of this procedure resulting in an experience of the liminal, provisional nature of the subject's relationship to the other, this relationship and its results are restrained; the encounter produces a new ordering of the targets' relationships with signs (and, therefore, world) and seeks to affirm that ordering into constancy. Through this, Hughes engenders the cultural, tribal harmony he desires.

The final chapter serves as a bridge between these insights into Hughes's poetry and *Pinhole Camera*. Further to this, the chapter offers insight into my own poetics: the forms of its efficacy, its use of charm, its deployment of strategies actively at odds with those I have discerned in the work of Hughes, and the difference in the condition of poetic being from that in Hughes's poetry. On the one hand, charm which tends towards the hypnotic relies upon the authority of a central figure such as Hughes and binds its participants into a like-mindedness reinforced by and reinforcing of structures: particular, didactic attitudes to world, to poem, to interpretation. On the other hand, charm which tends towards *phanopoeia*, revelation, the solving of riddles, seeks to raise the reader to an active participant in the dissolution of

structure, towards defiance, revolution and against authority. This chapter examines the development of my poetics towards the second of these. I contrast my poetic techniques with those I have examined in Hughes's work by exploring the efficacy of rhythm and sound, then the repercussions for signification, then in turn the repercussions for otherness, familiarity and being.

Chapter 1: Efficacy; Charm, Prophecy and Mythology

This chapter begins by discussing a particular case where Ted Hughes views one of his poems to be efficacious. It goes on to explore the way in which he supports those claims, and interrogates them through a close reading of the poem in question – 'Earth-numb' (1979) (*CP*, pp. 541-42). The poem describes a fisherman narrator 'Hunting salmon' at dawn. He concentrates on his lure until 'Something terrified and terrifying | Gleam-surges to and fro' through him, a 'fright' which soon 'flows all one way down the line'; the fish has come under his power, and is dragged to land. Hughes's will towards effect – upon world, upon reader – is especially clear in the way in which he discusses the poem. His insistence upon poetry's efficacy in relation to one poem in particular provides the opportunity to directly examine his claims. This chapter then moves on to discuss different targets of effect (which are, broadly, reader and world) in order to see which targets can be evidenced as experiencing the effects of charm in Hughes's work, and in 'Earth-numb' in particular. I then interrogate the forms of address by which those effects are achieved: whether that address is efficacious thanks to its direct call to a responsive nature, which a reader overhears, or as a claim to poetic, visionary authority. Hughes argues for the efficacy of his address to natural forces while also, at the same time, implicating it as part of a staging of effects. From there, an introduction to the idea of mythology in Hughes's work shows it to be a source of power for the workings of charm language, and lays the ground for more detailed analysis in the later chapters.

In a 'Critical Forum' series transcript in which Hughes introduces several of his poems, he insists that 'Poetry is traditionally supposed to be magical', and that this magic 'is one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen'. Hughes continues:

> That somebody's prayer should affect the course of some other person's disease, is not so incredible – we call that 'the psychological effect', 'the power of suggestion' or even 'the projection of healing energy'.

The leap from suggestion to healing energy gives the sense this final item is what Hughes is truly interested in. Hughes conflates ideas such as 'healing energy', 'psychological effect', 'magic' and 'prayer'. His notions of supernatural healing work in tandem, almost interchangeably. Thanks to the inflection, the progression to 'the projection of healing energy', some of these terms appear present in order to make the more outlandish ones palatable. Hughes's tendency to shore up less believable claims with appeals to (pseudo)science and (para)psychology is visible there. Hughes makes reference to the activity of the poems themselves in a vaguer manner, either by reference to the 'hunting poems that all primitive peoples invent', thereby appealing directly to 'anthropological literature' and writing that directly makes use of charm and its effects; or, by suggesting the mood-altering properties of his own poems, which end on either a 'downbeat' or an 'upbeat' and leave the reader feeling correspondingly changed in mood. This is not a rhythmical beat: 'I set out to write a poem whose whole accent would be, for me, "upbeat"'. Hughes says, perhaps even more than a reader, 'the writer to some extent finds and fixes an image of his own imagination at that moment. But if a poem concludes in a 'downbeat' mood, his imagination is to some degree fixed and confirmed in that mood'. The poet, Hughes suggests, puts himself at risk from the efficacious properties of his own poetry – from the same charm elements which may also '[fix] an image' of the reader's imagination.[1]

Hughes's discussion of 'hunting poems' and 'anthropological literature, [in which] there exist astonishing descriptions of the operation of that kind of magic recitation'

[1] Ted Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series' (Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978), transcript by Ann Skea (1990), <http://ann.skea.com/CriticalForum.htm> [accessed 14 June 2016].

evidences that the kinds of effects he is thinking of are those associated with charm, here tied directly to its roots in the poems of 'primitive hunting peoples'. In addition, Hughes says that if a 'curse is pronounced in a solemn way, and even more so if some incomprehensible, alarming-sounding, mumbo-jumbo phrases are included, we expect that person to be very depressed'. This is an inventory of devices similar to that seen in *The New Princeton Enyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*'s definition of charm, which involves 'archaic vocabulary, unusual phonological and grammatical forms, esoteric names and allusions, other elements of obscure meaning.'[2] Magic is for making things happen how 'you want them to happen'.[3] It is the force of one's own vision impacting the world, against or in accordance with the will of whomsoever else is involved. In that, it becomes apparent that healing is not the only thing this language, this 'energy', might be able to achieve. Hughes's focus on healing is explained by the fact that the purpose of healing is raised to the most responsible use of poetry's energies. More than this, the 'biological healing process' of poetry is for Hughes of central importance to the act of writing:

> [Poetry] seizes on what is depressing and destructive, and lifts it into a realm where it becomes healing and energizing. Or it tries to do. That is what it is always setting out to do. And to reach that final mood of release and elation is the whole driving force of writing at all.

Here is an opportunity to set out clearly one primary insight of this study: what Hughes, here, hopes will be a healing, energising force in his poetry may instead restrict readerly freedom, seek to homogenise response, embody a tyrannical view of what constitutes nature and reality, and in so doing espouse a conservative form of poet-reader relationship. Hughes is

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[2] Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 183.
[3] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

aware of the poem's capability of turning its charm energies back on its creator, as well, since the (upbeat or downbeat) 'poem stands there, permanent, vivid and powerful, and tries to make him continue to live in its image'.[4]

Hughes clarifies the 'psychological effect' of poetry by saying: 'everything lies in the dramatic power of the blessing or the curse, our own susceptibility, and our total ignorance of the laws or the anarchy of fate'.[5] Magic in this model is part re-rendering of Aristotle's *Poetics*, an act of fiction whose probability is to be bought into: 'Transformation from adversity to prosperity, or from prosperity to adversity', writes Aristotle, 'in a probable or necessary sequence of events'.[6] The extent of belief predicts the extent of effect; those involved are bent to the conventions of the text, should it function as intended (and should it be itself appropriately rendered). The function is a kind of persuasion, thanks to 'our susceptibility'. If the effect were indeed solely a fiction to be bought into, the true target of effect would be the reader; address to a responsive universe would be relegated to a bit-part in the drama to which the reader gives his credence. Hughes contradicts that notion, though. Rather than hunting poems describing a successful kill, these are 'composed and recited before the hunt in order to make the hunt successful'. At first this is not so difficult to accept, since the hunter is thus 'psychologically prepared, hypnotized into the alertness and concentration of perfect confidence, etc.', but, as Hughes points out, 'we wouldn't be so ready to agree with the hunter's view of it: that the incantation stupefies the game and makes him give himself up'. When it comes to speaking of his own 'curious encounters with the old-fashioned type of hunting magic', it is this 'hunter's view' which Hughes favours:

[4] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.
[5] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.
[6] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 27.

> I worked at this piece over two or three days and finished it. At last it seemed to me I'd got it just right. The following day I caught a large salmon. And two days after, two more salmon, one of them even larger. The impression on me was that somehow I'd broken down their resistance. Everything had to happen as in the poem.

Rather than suggesting that the poem has improved his skill at fishing in a comparable manner to the almost-ecstasy experienced by a tribal hunter, Hughes regards it as the hunter does. Fishing for salmon is, at any rate, a more passive activity in that sense than the hunt for wild game the tribal hunter prepares himself for. If the 'original motive for the poem was not [...] to bring the salmon into [his] power', it is certainly how Hughes regards its effect in retrospect. The salmon's nature has been altered, rather than his; he has 'broken down their resistance'.[7]

Hughes's account of hunting suggests that attention has supernatural effects, that it is communicative. The kind of attention one pays to one's quarry has effect upon the quarry's behaviour, and upon the success of the hunt:

> Anybody who has done much stalking of wild game, for instance, knows that there are two successful attitudes of mind. One is to concentrate on the fact that the game is already dead: it is a certain kill. This has the effect of paralysing it, or it seems to have. The other, is to deflect one's attention: not look at the game except in occasional glances.

The qualification, 'it seems to have', marks another point where Hughes is trying to hedge his bets; he presents the tribal hunter's view as part of the argument for the efficacy of his own poem, and yet attempts to make this more palatable for a sceptical reader. This description of

[7] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

his stalking methods is preceded by the claim that, ‘we’re beginning to accept the fact of telepathic control working between people’.[8] In the same vein, the hunted animal here is not conventionally aware of the hunter; the animal experiences the sense of being stared at.

A clearer idea of Hughes’s insistence on the quasi-mystical, parapsychological activity supposedly involved in both his hunting account and his poem can be given by turning to texts that support a similar world-view. One such text is an early essay of Walter Benjamin’s ‘On Language as Such and on the Language of Man’:

> The linguistic being of things is their language; this proposition, applied to man, means: the linguistic being of man is his language. Which signifies: man communicates his own mental being *in* his language. However, the language of man speaks in words. Man therefore communicates his own mental being (insofar as it is communicable) by *naming* all other things.[9]

In Benjamin’s ontology, here, all encounters are essentially linguistic encounters, with language residing in the thing rather than the observer of the thing. ‘To whom’, Benjamin continues, ‘does the lamp communicate itself? […] The answer is: to man […]. If the lamp and the mountain and the fox did not communicate themselves to man, how should he be able to name them?’ Benjamin sees the world as a numinous creation; his view arises from Judaic teaching that the word of God quite literally resides in each created thing. Man is the knower of things, in contrast to the role of God as their creator. All things come to be known through an act of announcement – just as hunter and quarry, by managing this announcement, may sense or fail to sense each other. ‘In man God set language, which had served *Him* as a medium of creation, free. […] Man is the knower in the same language in which God is the

[8] Hughes, ‘Ted Hughes: “The Critical Forum” Series’.
[9] Walter Benjamin, ‘On Language as Such and on the Language of Man’, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, *Selected Writings: Volume 1 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 64.

creator.'[10] This view grants tremendous power to the literary artist since he is dealing, therefore, directly with the stuff of being. Language, though fallen from creation to knowledge, is anything but arbitrary in its relationship with things.

Benjamin's notion of 'linguistic being' means that a word must be directly connected to the essential nature of the thing it signifies. In Benjamin this is complicated by the fall of language, though a slightly different fall of language is one central to Hughes's viewpoint also. That fall is one refracted through his concerns over cultural unification and the problem of differing mythological understandings (indeed, mythology is made central to culture). Part of his poetic impulse should be understood as an attempt to return to language the more closely-aligned (more common and congruent) relationship between word and thing he believes might be present in more socially intact societies: 'the mythology of [their] shared understandings, which is the life of [their] people', Hughes writes in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' (1994) (*WP*, p. 311). In Benjamin, language does more than signify; animate and inanimate objects announce themselves by their very presence. 'Hence, it is no longer conceivable,' Benjamin says, 'as the bourgeois view of language maintains, that the word has an accidental relation to its object, that it is a sign for things (or knowledge of them) agreed by some convention.'[11] In Bronislaw Malinowski's *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, this is true of spells (so also charm). The Trobriand islanders believe a spell to be 'a primeval text which somehow came into being side by side with animals and plants [...]. Why should such words be as the words of common speech?'[12] In this there is a parallel to Hughes's 'dramatic power of the blessing or curse'. Both contain the idea of appropriate composition, appropriate kinds of language whose abilities – and whose provenance – allow words to affect world.

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[10] Benjamin, p. 68.
[11] Benjamin, p. 69.
[12] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, *Volume Two: The Language of Magic and Gardening* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), p. 218.

The provenance which upholds this situation for language is mythological support. In this situation things may be directly affected (and circumstances effected, though in Benjamin not outright created) by language. Malinowski recognises this equivalence between word and thing in the charms of the Trobriand islanders:

> The magical word is coeval with that aspect of reality which it has to influence. But the word is always something to be uttered by man. The magical word, therefore, is really an attribute of the relationship between man and thing. The magical word, we might expect has got some affinity with the name which linguistically defines the relation of man as speaker to the object addressed.[13]

Malinowski's description of the magical word as attribute of the relationship between man and thing arises from his ethnographical position, and represents his analysis of the situation. Hughes's position is similar, as that of both anthropologist and poet. The 'relationship' Malinowski notes is that which Hughes seeks to exploit, and which is, in Hughes's work, founded in his address to a responsive nature and to responsive readers. Above all it is a relationship of power: the salmon is brought under his power; the quarry is brought under the power of the hunter; the reader is brought under the power of the poem, and of the persuasive apparatus his pre-amble to 'Earth-numb' exemplifies. That apparatus not only draws on mythology but seeks to construct a mythological universe within which such power is operative, fending off scepticism as it does so. Through these methods, the reader (in a sense part of Hughes's tribe) is brought closer to the poet's vision of reality.

The mythological support structure to which Benjamin appeals and which Malinowski describes is telling of the attitude that words and world are concomitant – 'coeval'. For Hughes this is problematised by his sense that the tribe of Western man has become

[13] Malinowski, p. 229.

splintered in its understanding of language (and, therefore, world); this is Hughes's crisis of modernity in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. The sense in the transcript is that language could again claim effect upon the world and upon the linguistic beings of men, if only it were believed – if only an enabling support structure of myth were once again subscribed to. Hughes's conflation of mythological stories with the correspondence of words to things in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' – which together, he claims, form the basis of a people's cohesion – makes finding the right language to effect change coextensive with finding the right world-view, the right cultural membership. Thanks to this nexus which Hughes constructs, it is apparent that the mythological coherence – the reconciliation with reality and with nature – which Hughes wishes to foster is one that permits him power over the world. It is a world-view which permits the activity of charm. 'Wherever we turn in charm poetry', Northrop Frye writes, 'we seem to be led back to some kind of mythological universe, a world of interlocking names of mysterious powers and potencies which are above but now wholly beyond reach of, the world of time and space.'[14] Hughes's attempts to locate mythic archetypes by laying claim to aspects of a variety of mythologies (and to the discourse of mythology itself) coincides with a desire to locate (or construct, or persuade us of) a similar essential archetypality in language. This mythological influence is tied up with an insistence on getting closer to some essential spirit of our relationship with the world – our relationship, in Hughes, with nature, and our reconciliation with it. In doing so, the poetry also appeals to systems of belief – mythologies – that support the efficacious nature of language. The discussion of 'Earth-numb' in this transcript tries to convince us of just that, and so the mythological archetypes of Hughes's poetry and its aspirations towards the mythological, also appear to exist in part to fulfil this kind of persuasion.

[14] Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 136.

The effect of the hunter's attention upon the quarry in Hughes's account is one contingent upon consciousness's ability to affect that which is outside it in a supernatural manner. The main effort of Hughes's introduction to 'Earth-numb' is the attempt to claim that consciousness (and, therefore, also language) may take effect upon the world. Hughes contradicts his own suggestion that an act of magic is a fiction that one either believes or disbelieves. Clearly, it is important to Hughes that his readers are convinced of these 'magical' possibilities for language; at the same time more sceptical readers are offered pseudo-scientific explanations. Those efficacious possibilities for poetry and for poet, rather than the act of magic itself, is the fiction – the fiction at the heart of Frye's 'mythological universe [...] of interlocking names' – we are invited to have faith in. That claim of efficaciousness is also a claim to authority; the poet is either a magically-gifted visionary privy to ancient, tribal truths, or he is an especially psychically sensitive kind of medium. After a close reading of 'Earth-numb' I will return to these questions of how mythology aids the effects of charm: how mythology presents a context to which charm appeals for its power and through which its power becomes clearer to interpretation; how that mythological universe occupies a space beyond 'the world of time and space'; and exactly where we locate the effects of charm – whether on reader, writer and/or world.

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'Earth-numb' (1979) is a poem that describes a narrator fishing (*CP*, pp. 541-42). He watches his lure, which 'is a prayer', waiting for it to move in that tell-tale manner indicating he has hooked a fish – explicitly, in the poem too, a salmon. The first half of the poem evokes the lulled state of the fisherman. His stillness builds the tension which the flurry of action in

the second half will shatter. That tension grows with each added participle – ‘smouldering’, ‘simmering’, ‘out-crumpling’, ‘ruffling’, ‘hunting’, ‘smoothing’, ‘searching’, ‘opening’, ‘operating’. The continuous verb form expresses the as-if-unchanging character of the scene and also, with each addition, makes that state seem all the more untenable. One gets the sense that the poetry simply cannot sustain the denial of an active verb; and it cannot, as, with a ‘bang!’ the ‘river grabs’ at the fisherman. The active verbs now tear through the stillness with ‘stiffens’, ‘hauls’, ‘thumps’, ‘hums’, ‘gleam-surges’, ‘shatters’, ‘cartwheels’, ‘flows’, ‘grows’, and ‘fix’. Another is ‘and I have one’, where the language suddenly relaxes into a triumphant dominion as the narrator captures the salmon. That down-turn in the poem’s register (which is preceded by the sonically dense and metaphor-rich ‘the river stiffens alive, | The black hole thumps, the whole river hauls’) marks, in its language, a shift from the charm language necessary for compulsion (and appropriate to the description of compelling the salmon out of the water) to the moment of the compulsion’s success, and the dissipation of its energies.

The construction of similes in the poem’s fourth strophe marks a transfigurative sequence exemplifying the nature-changing effort of the poetry upon the salmon:

> The lure is a prayer. And my searching –
> Like the slow sun.
> A prayer, like a flower opening.
> A surgeon operating
> on an open heart, with needles – (*CP*, p. 541)

The lure begins as a ‘prayer’ under the narrator’s attention which is ‘like the slow sun’, and immediately brings to mind that method of stalking wild game mentioned earlier, ‘to deflect one’s attention: not look at the game except in occasional glances’. The attention here is

almost incidental, much as the sun's. Nevertheless, that attention couples with the lure, making its prayer-hood 'like a flower opening'. Ambiguity generated by the lineation and punctuation, here, presents the possibility for differing readings. In this way, 'my searching' is both 'like the slow sun' but also alike to both 'lure' and 'prayer'. This is true of every item in the strophe, with varying degrees of appropriateness of comparison; a reader is most likely, for instance, to connect 'surgeon' to the narrator using his lure ('needles'). The possibility for this strategy of meaning arises precisely out of the poetic quality of the writing at hand, and particularly out of its lineation, placing 'searching', for instance, within the lineal unit of meaning which 'lure' and 'prayer' also constitute. This is itself a 'lure' to a reader: the demand that these riddles be 'solved' (sorted and matched). In this way the poem asks of the reader that she discover her own relationship to poem, world and these objects according to the relationships present in the strophe.

More than this, though, is that the interaction of these objects is a figure of the exertion of will over the world which the reader, too, cannot escape. The similes constitute a chain of transfigurative events. The attention, 'my searching', is fundamentally transformative; furthermore, it is a transmission of energies, of power. The ripples of that attention are felt in the language, as the sun and flower give way to the humanized 'surgeon operating | On an open heart, with needles'. The ambiguity reveals itself as characterised by agency; the fisherman may be the surgeon, but so may be the lure (and more immediately). The 'attention' which shoots down like a lightning bolt through the conductive material of both language and described world goes about bringing everything into its domain. The river is brought into it – into the human realm of the fisherman's attention – as 'an open heart'.

What is taking place in the poem is a kind of combat, not just between fisherman and fish, but between their respective domains of language. This is clear from the third strophe where the fisherman senses his action turned back upon him:

Hunting salmon. And hunted

And haunted by apparitions from tombs

Under the smoothing tons of dead element

In the river's black canyons.

The fisherman, not literally 'hunted' by the salmon, nevertheless feels pursued by a sense of imminent threat, an inkling that just as the salmon may be dragged from its world, so too may he be unwittingly dragged into its. Terry Gifford points to this sense of being hunted when he discusses this poem: 'The insights gained are not those derived from actually killing fish, but from the attentive, vulnerable, respectful, fearful mode of hunting'.[15] This suggests that reconciliation with nature is an exchange of sympathies – even, or perhaps most of all, when engaged in killing the animal with which one is sympathising. In contrast to this, Charles Johnson thinks that there is a 'lack in this poem of Hughes' usual empathy with the hunted animal' and that 'the leisured fisherman [is not] the starving primitive hunter'.[16] Brian Taylor comments in a similar vein, saying that 'as a hunter's prayer ["Earth-numb"] emphasises predatory encounter rather than elements such as reciprocity, gratitude and communality'.[17] This is, then, a poem leaning more towards personal power rather than 'gentle, practical co-operation between man and natural environment'.[18]

The salmon's is a world of only half-felt understandings, appreciated as 'apparitions', the distortion of 'smoothing tons', and the precipitous dangers of the river's 'black canyons'. It is only when dragged clear of the river that the salmon becomes solid, entered into the fisherman's understanding of the world and its language, a 'ghost' that 'grows solid', its

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[15] Terry Gifford, *Ted Hughes* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 146.

[16] Charles Johnson, *Ted Hughes: speaking for the earth* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 1991), p. 42.

[17] Brian Taylor, 'Ted Hughes, Shaman of the Tribe?', *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 4.1 (2014), 101-14, (p. 108).

[18] Craig Robinson, *Ted Hughes as Shepherd of Being* (Houndmills: The Macmillan Press, 1989), p. 201.

creatureliness understood in terms of a land-dweller with ‘a lizard green slither’. As the fish is hooked, the river puts up a fight as well:

> And bang! the river grabs at me
>
> A mouth-flash, an electrocuting malice
> Like a trap, trying to rip life off me –
> And the river stiffens alive,
> The black hole thumps, the whole river hauls
> And I have one.

This is precipitated by that simile, the ‘surgeon operating | On an open heart’, as if the river sensed the imposition of it. The healing connotations of that operating surgeon bring to mind Hughes’s ‘healing energy’, but the healing, we might imagine, is for the fisherman. In a 1994 letter to Terry Gifford, Hughes says fishing puts ‘the individual back in contact with the primitive being’ (*LTH*, p. 658). Here again is the theme of reconciliation with nature – and it also points to the kinds of effect one might expect of this poem upon Hughes himself as meditative.[19] The violent energy of the river is brought to bear and is expressed in a switch from the continuous participles of the first half to the simple present tenses of the second, and also by a sudden thicket of stresses: ‘mouth-flash’, ‘rip life off me’, ‘black whole thumps’, ‘whole river hauls’. The density of sounds in that fourth line of the strophe, including the onomatopoeic ‘thumps’, and building to the expansive long vowels of ‘whole’ and ‘hauls’ along with the threading play on ‘h’ and ‘l’ sounds beginning at ‘hole’, culminates in the line ‘and I have one’. Its simplicity expresses the triumph where the poem’s energies momentarily

[19] ‘So you see, fishing with a float is a sort of mental exercise in concentration on a small point, while at the same time letting your imagination work freely to collect everything that might concern that still point.’ Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making: An Anthology of Poems and Programmes from ‘Listening and Writing’* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 61.

dissipate. It is a momentary lull, however, and the fisherman and fish are brought into an exchange of sympathy as ‘something terrified and terrifying | Gleam-surges to and fro through me’. This is not only an account of the feelings of the fish and fisherman, though, as they meet and struggle with each other, but also a sense of the grander scheme of hunter and prey which they are returning themselves to by the act. It is a ‘something’ that ‘gleam-surges’ ‘from the river to the sky, from the sky into the river’, reflecting the energetic discharge of the event amid the grander scheme of nature. This poem and the event it recounts attempt to take their place as a contributing story in the mythology of nature.

Alongside the rush of stresses and verbal activity that indicate the upsurge of what is at home in the ‘river’s black canyons’, that world, so the methodology of the metaphor-making rises up to meet it. The ‘mouth-flash’ is understood as an ‘electrocuting malice’, a ‘trap’. Then the experience transmutes into a ‘piling voltage’, an electrical ‘gleam-surge’. Finally, the salmon itself has a ‘wagging stone pebble head’ amid the ‘steel spectre of purples | From the forge of water’. In other words, as soon as the imposition of the humanising language present in the surgeon metaphor is felt, a similarly humanising slew of simile and metaphor pushes home the advantage, until the salmon appears subdued, with a ‘wagging stone pebble head’. The ‘wagging’ brings to mind the obedience of a dog, while the tautological adjectival construction ‘stone pebble’ presents itself as a desire that the salmon be as inert and as manageable as rock. The surplus nature of that tautology indicates how it is more than just description: it is as if the act of repeatedly naming the creature against its nature will transform it. Even as that ‘mouth-flash’ is imbued with the danger of a ‘trap, trying to rip life off me’, so too is that use of metaphor active in rendering it powerless. The metaphorical methodology itself is the force of the hook and the line, disturbing the calm of both fisherman and river, dragging the salmon into its power. The realisation of ‘as if I were the current’ predicts the fisherman’s victory in ‘till the fright flows all one way down the

line', after which the language once again begins to relax. The simile in 'as if I were' emphasises the fisherman's own proximity to – and yet also irrevocable difference from – the natural elements with which he is in a way communing. Rather than the quatrains and cinquains interrupted by exclamatory single lines, the poem slips into couplets and one tercet. The anaphoric gestures of 'And a', 'Then the', 'Then the', which begin the three penultimate strophes, help to make distinct and digestible the different stages of sensory experience as the salmon is pulled inexorably onto land, and into the narrator's domain. The capture is finally completed as the salmon's eyes 'Fix their death-exposure of the celandine and the cloud'. Their final, mechanical, photographic act is to become imprinted with the fisherman's domain. At the same time this also represents a returning of the act of fishing to a natural cyclicality. The articles, '*the* celandine and *the* cloud', whose definiteness suggests this poem's entry into the Romantic tradition by allusion, disperse the stresses across the significantly longer line, and we have returned to the pace of the first half of the poem. The line harks back to William Wordsworth's 'The Small Celandine', in which the eponymous flower finds itself (acceptingly) at mercy of the weather – 'the cloud', here.[20] The image of celandine and cloud is another figure of natural cyclicality. There is one stowaway in that simple present tense verb beginning the line, 'Fix', which, even as it relates to a photographical term in a 'death-exposure' of all that is inimical to the salmon's own habitat, also suggests that some of the language of that struggle lingers on, that the exchange of languages is not entirely one-sided, that perhaps the fisherman's nature has been changed as well. The fisherman is affected in a way similar to the writer who 'to some extent finds and *fixes* an image of his own imagination at that moment' (my emphasis).[21]

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[20] William Wordsworth, 'The Small Celandine', *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 288.
[21] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

The poem is one of compulsion – it is both a narrative of that compulsion and an enactment of it. One must wonder, also, to what extent Hughes's method of introducing the poem is an additional compounding of that persuasion. Furthermore, it is very tempting to read 'Earth-numb' as an account of the interaction between poet and reader. The language of the poem compels us into its domain and, according to its skill, we are either dragged from our own linguistic domain and into the world of the poem, or we manage to slip the lure. Often we slip the lure because we recognise it as just that. It is this language of persuasion and compulsion which underpins charm. Recognising the mythological universe to which charm appeals provides a way to return the methods of persuasion to a common-ground wherein they may enact and solidify their supported effects. It also provides an avenue through which we might better understand what is at stake in Hughes's use of 'mythology' to describe elements of the world and of language which we share or do not share to differing extents.

What emerges from Hughes's account of this poem 'composed and recited before the hunt in order to make the hunt successful' is that language can both take the hunter into an altered state (which is readily believable), and also alter the nature of his quarry. In his account there is the matter of action being deserved; Ted Hughes gets his salmon-stupefying poem 'just right', so the quality of his poem is such that the salmon cannot help but be stupefied. Hughes catches his fish (and with good lines, no less). The manner in which salmon and fisherman give themselves to language – their linguistic natures – has been changed, such that he is here given the title of fisherman, and such that salmon are big things whose nature it is to be caught and eaten. The thing that has judged the quality of his poem is unlikely to be anything supernatural, and much more likely to be Ted Hughes's own sense of what makes a good poem. His account's underlying purpose is to convince us of this as well.

As a contrast to 'Earth-numb' and my reading of its sense of dominion, I want to provide a brief reading of Wallace Stevens's 'Anecdote of the Jar'. Both poems are eminently concerned with dominion. Roy Harvey Pearce proposes that Stevens 'must have had in mind a specific fruit jar, the "Dominion Wide Mouth Special"'.[22] The jar of Stevens's poem, then, is literally a 'dominion jar', providing the metaphorical grist for the poem's expansion.[23] The jar, 'placed upon a hill', assumes the hill as part of its bearings, causing the 'wilderness' to surround the hill, 'no longer wild', such that the jar 'took dominion everywhere'.[24] Its artificiality humanises and organises, 'tall and of a port of air', bringing connotations of the mercantile, of financial and aesthetic value to the 'slovenly wilderness'. The lyric 'I' of the first line ('I placed a jar in Tennessee') disappears thereafter: the lyric I's powers have been subsumed by the jar and the act of seeing it embodies. So, too, are seeing and place made coterminous: Tennessee holds the jar, just as the renewed sense of Tennessee (appearing in the final line, as well) flowers out from (and, in a sense, within) the jar. 'Dominion' is not the only pun at work in the poem; the jar *jars* open, creates and contains, the space, place and the sense of the place on which it brings its bearing. The iambs march the wilderness into the jar's dominion, with the only metrical jolt present in, 'It made the slovenly wilderness'. The two dactylic words give a sense of just that slovenliness. So, too, do rhymes bind the sense of location, of jar and ordered wilderness: 'The jar was round upon the ground'; 'air', 'everywhere', 'bare'. The jar is the fulcrum point, an epicentre.

Perhaps the reason the poem has invited such critical attention is that it offers a figure of hermeneutics itself. Resemblance is its modus operandi. This awareness means that I might say the jar is a figure for the human mind and yet the jar remains stubbornly a jar. That

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[22] Roy Harvey Pearce, '"Anecdote of the Jar": An Iconological Note', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 1.2 (1977), 65.
[23] See Bill Lockhart, Beau Schriever, Bill Lindsey, 'The Dominion Glass Companies of Montreal, Canada', <https://sha.org/bottle/pdffiles/DominionGlass.pdf> [accessed 16 June 2016].
[24] Wallace Stevens, 'Anecdote of the Jar', *The Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), p. 76.

is the view of reality it presents: one inextricable from the viewing, and in this sense it seems Hughes is not far from right in placing Stevens's demon in the eye (*LTH*, pp. 96-97). For Stevens the nature of reality is founded precisely in the mental operations of likeness which structure it, and which it likewise structures:

> In short, a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a resemblance: that reality of its own is a reality. This may be going round in a circle […]. Poetry is part of the structure of reality.
>
> […] The structure of poetry and the structure of reality are one or, in effect, […] poetry and reality are one, or should be. This may be less thesis than hypothesis.

The equivocation and the circular nature of Stevens's 'hypothesis' point to more than uncertainty or rhetorical play. They speak to the interrelated nature of reality and the imagination (and mind and senses). There is no ultimate reality except in this mechanism itself – here, resemblance. It follows that the 'proliferation of resemblances extends an object', in Stevens's treatment extending its sense of reality in so doing.[25] The extension of reality and of likeness (and therefore of 'realization' which is both recognition and real-making) ripple out from the jar almost literally as it extends its contiguity into congruence.

The differences in the forms of dominion in the two poems at hand then become clearer. Reality in Stevens's poem is provisional, and lies in the ordering activity of the individual mind (which itself has relations to more public resemblances). The opportunity to recognise extensions of an object (the jar) is an opportunity to 'realize' – to intensify the sense of reality and one's proximity to it, and this in turn produces pleasure (so follows Stevens's thought in 'Three Academic Pieces'). Sense, though, is key, because it is the sense

[25] Wallace Stevens, 'Three Academic Pieces', *The Necessary Angel: Essays on reality and the imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 79-81, p. 78.

of reality which *is* reality, in this treatment. The mind is a metaphorical engine given the opportunity to likewise extend itself through recognition of such likenesses. The ambiguities sustained in 'Anecdote of the Jar' are diametrically opposed to the kind of concretisation of power and mythological structure that Hughes espouses in the transcript and the poem.[26] By contrast, Hughes's lure is an objectified agent of charm's activity, and of both the narrator's and (according to his account of the poem) also Hughes's mental (parapsychological) exertion of power. It both depicts and attempts to alter (indeed, has altered) reality. Its relation to that reality is one of direct address to objective phenomena. At the same time, Hughes's thought suggests a fixed, accessible reality inflected by his various concerns which readers should be brought to share in, rather than the more individual polysemy of likeness Stevens presents.

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In light of my close reading, I want to use the remainder of this chapter to begin to examine the relationship between the sense of natural reality I find in Hughes and charm, and the way in which, through charm, Hughes's use of mythology makes its claim on reality. There is a difference between purporting to have an effect (which is to say, describing the efficacy of a poem upon the world) and being genuinely efficacious upon the world. Whether 'Earth-numb' did indeed cause Hughes's salmon to be fished more easily is to some extent impossible to say. However, if a poem were truly efficacious in this manner, any reader or audience would be superfluous to the procedure. Indeed, the poem would be a spell, rather

[26] 'The ambiguity that is so favorable to the poetic mind is precisely the ambiguity favorable to resemblance. In this ambiguity, the intensification of reality by resemblance increases realization and this increased realization is pleasurable.' Stevens, 'Three Academic Pieces', p. 79.

than a poem. It is this observation that underpins Malinowski's own question as to what possible social activity could be occurring when a Trobriand islander 'addresses a spider or a bush-hen, a lawyer-cane or a dolphin.'[27] There, the social, convocational elements of charm emerge as key components of its efficacy.

Likewise, it is difficult to avoid noticing that Hughes's poems emerge as aesthetic objects only thanks to a lack of full utilitarian efficacy. They require a readership and, furthermore, their relationship with readers is not lacking in ambiguity; they are hardly traditional pieces of propaganda. Here it becomes apparent that the efficacy of the poems upon the world must be – at least primarily – mediated through readership; and, that something about the poem provides an ideal vehicle for this efficacy – which is its proximity to and use of charm. Last, I argue that, through this, what I have referred to as the mythological support structure for charm (from which it seems to receive its powers) is what charm in turn supports and cements; and that it is through this procedure that efficacy on the world is visible. The nexus is one of charm, mythology and charm-user (shaman). Charm is the device through which mythology makes an insistence upon reality. The position of shaman which Hughes adopts is one of ratified-by-the-tribe conduit and spokesperson for that insistence. The relationship (and his reality) is inflected, therefore, with his concerns.

In order to make the character of this tripartite nexus clearer, I want to examine more closely the ways in which its elements interrelate. Through this, charm's relation to lyric and to mythology – and Hughes's relation to these as aspects of his authority – will themselves become clearer. The relationship between charm and world is one typified by apostrophe, whose function, Jonathan Culler tells us, is:

[27] Malinowski, p. 215.

> To will a certain state of affairs, to attempt to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to your desire. In these terms the function of apostrophe would be to make the objects of the universe potentially responsive forces: forces which can be asked to act or refrain from acting, or even continue behaving as they usually behave. The apostrophizing poet identifies his universe as a world of sentient forces.[28]

Culler wants to find out why critics find apostrophe 'embarrassing'. The reason is that it makes apparent as artifice 'this high calling of poetry' which Culler identifies as the ability for poetry to address a responsive universe and command change, and also to '[transmute] the temporal into the eternal, life into art.' 'Readers,' he says,

> Temper this embarrassment by treating apostrophe as a poetic convention and the calling of spirits as a relic of archaic beliefs. What is really in question, however is the power of poetry to make something happen.[29]

Culler's conclusion matches W.H. Auden's explicitly – that poetry makes nothing happen, but is, instead, a way of happening.[30] This way of happening occurs thanks to the lyric's detemporalised nature. By addressing objects, the poem enters them into the temporality of writing, which is a timeless present: 'If one puts into a poem *thou shepherd boy, ye blessed creatures, ye birds*, they are immediately associated with what might be called a timeless present but is better seen as a temporality of writing'. With those entities 'located in apostrophes', they 'resist being organized into events that can be narrated'; rather, they are 'inserted […] as elements of the event which the poem is attempting to be'. The end result of

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[28] Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 139. The ensuing references fall between pp. 135-152.
[29] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 135, p. 152, p. 140.
[30] 'Poetry makes nothing happen: it survives | […] A way of happening, a mouth.' W.H. Auden, 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 246.

Culler's analysis of apostrophe amounts to something of a consolation prize: a fictional world is recreated in a timeless (or ever-present) state. Apostrophe calls attention to itself as the exemplar of poetic voice, through which the poet establishes himself as prophetic voice, at the expense of making it plain that he cannot truly prophesy.

From the above I want to draw several comparisons and conclusions. In Culler's description of apostrophe there lie also the three parts of Hughes's charm-myth-shaman nexus of efficacy. The efficacious address which apostrophe makes obvious is the radical device of a precondition of charm's deployment. Apostrophe merely makes over-blatant (embarrassingly so) the efficacious address which all charm poetry assumes. Likewise, 'this temporality of writing', rendering its objects into plural archetypality ('*ye blessed creatures, ye birds*'), is the temporality of myth in which the charm poem such as Hughes's tries to manifest itself as an event. It is, furthermore, the realm from which charm draws support for its effects and to which it returns confirmation of those effects (by dissemination of those mythological truths). Frye's idea of charm poetry also points towards this supportive effect and its temporality ('a timeless present', 'a temporality of writing'): it leads us back to 'a world of interlocking names of mysterious powers […] above but not wholly beyond reach of […] time and space'.[31] Last of all, the relationship between speaker and world, poet and world, which apostrophe and charm imply, marks the poet's attempt to claim authority and seer-like status. The poem is not a missive sent from one seer to nature, but 'a verbal composition which will be read by an audience. What is the effect of introducing this third term?'[32] The answer, for Culler, is that this vocative form is used,

> To establish with an object a relationship which helps to construct him [the poet]. [...] One who successfully invokes nature is one to whom nature might, in its turn, speak.

[31] Frye, p. 136.
[32] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 141.

> He makes himself poet, visionary. Thus, invocation is a figure of vocation. [..] If asking winds to blow or seasons to stay their coming or mountains to hear one's cries is a ritualistic, practically gratuitous action, that emphasizes that voice calls in order to be calling, to dramatize its calling, to summon images of its power so as to establish its identity as poetical and prophetic voice.

Given that such 'ritualistic' address is 'practically gratuitous', the prophetic nature of that voice is as fictionalised as the world in which the poem constitutes itself as an event. However, to call the claims upon power that this relationship between poet and world makes fictionalised is not to remove it from the fact that it might be socially and psychologically quite real in its effects. In Hughes it is more than just an aspect of authoritative persuasion, but part of the fielding of his shamanic persona as conduit which his readers (his tribe) ought to follow from a false, potentially mechanistic and over-rational, out-of-accord-with-nature state of being – to reconciliation and *reality*.

I am going to use these three elements of lyric (loosely: address; atemporality or eternity; and authority to prophesy) to explore and introduce here their equivalents in Hughes: charm, mythology, and shamanism. Through that, Hughes's relation to lyric, to efficacy, and therefore his notion of reality yield themselves to examination.

i) Charm Address

Hughes rarely uses apostrophe, and even less often makes use of the explicitly apostrophic *O*. Nevertheless, the aspects of apostrophe which Culler explores are aspects of the lyric (apostrophe represents a kind of lyrical gesture in the extreme), and are eminently helpful for

considering some of the basic attitudes underlying Hughes's poetry.[33] For Culler apostrophe comes to stand for the aspirations of the lyric towards efficaciousness. Rather than thanks to addressing the salmon directly, 'Earth-numb' has its supposed effect simply by describing the activity. There is a sense of apostrophe as Culler describes it having become completely complicit with and implicit in the poetic act. In fact, an observation approaching from the opposite direction may be more accurate: the apostrophic trope comes into existence *as trope* only as poetry, derived from primitive song, becomes more and more estranged from its initial impulse of effecting change upon the thing being addressed.[34]

Hughes's work is not entirely bereft of apostrophe, however. Paul Bentley suggests, for instance, that the 'unwritten half of *Gaudete* [...] is in a sense embodied in the Epilogue poems, whose apostrophe form replaces the linear, sequential narrative. [...] The lyric apostrophe [...] in this sense obviously befits the articulation of spiritual or "timeless" experience'.[35] Bentley is agreeing with Neil Roberts (who in turn is drawing on Culler), who tells us that 'the fact that narrative has been supplanted by lyric is exactly what we have to understand'.[36] Even here, though, 'Hughes does not use apostrophe in the formal sense which Culler says modern critics find embarrassing'.[37] By being 'addressed to the "nameless female deity"', the poems 'supplant the narrative of events in "the other world" by being narrative events themselves'. The suggestion in Hughes's comments regarding 'Earth-numb' is that this procedure works backwards, as well: that narrative, there, has replaced lyric. The descriptive elements of the poem are given over to their affective and effective capabilities –

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[33] 'The lyric is characteristically the triumph of the apostrophe.' Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 149 .

[34] I want to disambiguate this claim by making clear that the term 'apostrophe' of course is being in a sense applied retrospectively here: I am not suggesting the origins of 'apostrophe' are other than in Greek rhetoric, but that the underlying mode of such address in charm operations does have its initial impulse in the addressing of the natural world that is expected to yield itself accordingly.

[35] Paul Bentley, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion & Beyond* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p. 74.

[36] Neil Roberts, 'Hughes, Narrative and Lyric: an Analysis of *Gaudete*', *Narrative and Voice in Postwar Poetry*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 56.

[37] Roberts, p. 57.

altering our mood, or capturing salmon. This indicates the thin line between address and narrative in Hughes's poetry. His use of narrative, for instance here in 'Earth-numb', is an oblique address to nature.

Apostrophe is the distant ancestor of exactly the same procedure as Malinowski's islanders addressing flora and fauna. As Malinowski says of the vocative address, 'I cut thee my garden-site': 'To use it a Trobriander would have to be inspired by a poetical desire to address a garden-site—an occurrence unlikely to be realised.'[38] Naming it a 'poetical desire' is an instance of the cart drawing the horse. 'Poetical' in fact indicates how the poetic has evolved in part from instances of sympathetic address to the other which attempt to enact particular results – such as the Trobrianders'. Malinowski's own culture has long since rendered that address fictional in the sense of Culler's apostrophe, and so he sees it as a 'poetical' trope. That same fictional sense – the fictional world in which the poet is permitted his self-announced prophetic voice, and its effects upon an interiorised world – underpins Frye's conclusion that a poet is a 'a magician who renounces his magic, and thereby re-creates the universe of power instead of trying to exploit it'.[39] 'Apostrophe is not the representation of an event,' says Culler: 'if it works, it produces a fictive, discursive event.'[40] In the work of Hughes and Stevens I have presented, 'fictive' is misleading, however. The event which a poem produces makes a genuine claim on reality in the thought of both poets. In Stevens, though, it is the polysemy of encountering that event and its opening up of new likenesses – the mechanism of that event-making – which is itself the locus of reality; in Hughes, it is the opportunity for the event to become part of a particular world-view which

[38] Malinowski, p. 226.
[39] Frye, p. 147.
[40] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 153.

Hughes privileges, and to take its place as a mythology by which such world-views are organised in a public rather than private orientation.

Given this, what Culler marks as characteristic of the lyric is even more characteristic of charm – and inherited from and partaking of charm. This observation is announced in the title of Andrew Welsh's *Roots of Lyric*, too. Culler's statements in 'Why Lyric?' also attest to the radical nature of charm elements in lyric:

> Lyric is characteristically extravagant, performing speech acts not recorded in everyday speech and deploying not only meter and rhyme, which connote the poetic when encountered elsewhere, but also its own special tenses, such as the lyric present. [...] The special language of lyric generates this distinctive lyric temporality.
>
> Northrop Frye speaks of the roots of lyric as *melos* and *opsis*, babble and doodle—neither of which are reducible to narrative representation, both of which involve patterning of language. And *melos*, in its relation to song, calls us to focus on the lyric as linguistic event. Lyric is the foregrounding of language, in its material dimensions, and thus both embodies and attracts interest in language and languages—in the forms, shapes and rhythms of discourse.[41]

Culler's 'Apostrophe' marks Hughes's attempts at power over the world as fiction, in 'our susceptibility' to the 'dramatic power of the blessing or the curse,' and 'our total ignorance of the laws or the anarchy of fate'.[42] Hughes clearly wishes to persuade us that his claim is more than fiction. Furthermore, his poetry, in its accommodation of apostrophic address as an implicit condition of the poetry, is of a piece with his attempt to return the once-unargued

[41] Culler, 'Why Lyric?' *PMLA*, 123.1 (2008), 201-06 (p. 205). See Welsh: 'Lyric, if it chooses, can keep free of such demands [to 'make sense'], staying close to language charged with the fundamental powers of melopoeia and phanopoeia for its final as well as initial basis of growth and organization.' Welsh, p. 144.
[42] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

efficaciousness of such primitive address as Malinowski details to the poetic act. What underlies apostrophe is in fact exactly this aspect of tribal charm. The entire natural world – the entire world – in Hughes's work brims with the ability for the will to impact it, damage it, reconcile with it, and so on. Where apostrophic poems 'call to be calling, both to display their poetic calling and to mark the belief that language can sometimes make things happen,' Hughes, as I have shown in the transcript (and as I will show again in, for instance, 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'), makes use of his supportive, critical work to suggest the same.[43] The call to a responsive nature is apparent in 'Earth-numb' as a description of catching salmon which Hughes claims to be literally prophetic. It is not only prophetic in the sense of forecasting the future, but presents a scene which nature is then forced to imitate: 'Somehow I'd broken down their resistance. Everything had to happen as in the poem'.[44]

ii) Mythology as Public Reality and Locus of Efficacy

Hughes's critical texts often derive their support from discussions of mythology, with *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* – a critical study devoted to identifying the two archetypal myths which Hughes claims guide almost all of Shakespeare's oeuvre – representing the ultimate form of that. It is a mythological apprehension of the world matching those of the Trobrianders which we are invited to have faith in by Hughes's remarks about 'healing energy' in the transcript (shored up though they may be by appeals to 'psychological effect'). I aim to introduce Hughes's mythological aspirations here so as to lay the ground for further discussion in the next chapter.

[43] Culler, 'Why Lyric?', p. 204.
[44] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

On the one hand, it would seem that charm traditionally requires an entire, established mythological universe in order to be efficacious; on the other, one might think that, when it comes to poetry, one or two myths supporting the efficacy of language in particular might suffice. The way in which charm and myth give rise to each other, there, is indicative of the role Hughes plays. His uses of 'mythology' and 'myth' are often fairly interchangeable, with the former denoting a plurality of the latter; however, it also points to his anthropological stance (mythology as the study of myths). That stance puts him simultaneously among and outside the tribe to which myths belong. He partakes of myths but also manipulates them (and access to them) in a role analogous to the shaman. In so doing he manipulates cultural being and cultural relationship to reality (nature). Mythology *is* (myths *are*) that relationship. This becomes even more apparent in his essay 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', in which mythologies are made coterminous with language. They are 'the picture languages that we invent to embody and make accessible to casual reference the deeper shared understandings which keep us intact as a group' (*WP*, p. 310). The relationship between word and thing is an encapsulation of the relationship between myth and world. Mythology, then, is at once involved with providing the efficacious credentials for charm language and is also in itself the structure of understanding (and power) which charm language addresses and in turn cements through social ritual. Reading is analogy to that social ritual, though the lack of total congruity is a cause of some of Hughes's interpretive anxiety.

Hughes's approach to myth is as much about denigrating some world-views as it is about privileging others. Joanny Moulin's essay 'Ted Hughes's Anti-Mythic Method', for instance, examines the tendency in Hughes – most notably in *Crow* – towards being an 'anti-Christian polemist':

> In the first 'Myth and Education' paper, he defined the story of Saint George, which in his opinion is the 'key symbolic story of Christianity,' as 'the symbolic story of

> creating a neurosis,' saying that it was 'the key to the neurotic-making dynamics of Christianity.' He went on to explain that it was 'exactly the story and exactly the symbolic condition' that, in his story of *The Iron Man* at least, he was 'trying to *reverse*'.[45]

Moulin's conclusion that 'Hughes's poetry is then no longer to be seen as the ever iterated construction of new myths, but as the ideal sloughing off of the chrysalis of words' plays directly into Hughes's hands.[46] According to this view of Hughes, some myths are more real than others; that is to say, Hughes, in keeping with his shamanic position – a position as a conduit, or keeper of the way to the stuff of true being – appears to likewise select which myths, and which aspects of myths, to privilege.

The locus and temporality of the mythological beyond the world of time and space matches Culler's observations on lyric temporality. This sense of mythological time is likewise discussed by Timothy Materer in investigating the ambivalence in certain poets towards their occultism (Hughes among them). In support of this he quotes Philip Rahv: if 'the road back to genuine mythic consciousness is closed' then 'one way certain intellectuals have found of coping with their fear is to deny historical time and induce in themselves through aesthetic and ideological means a sensation of mythic time'.[47] Hughes is not quite content, though, to abandon that road back to genuine mythic consciousness, and his attempts to heal his culture can be understood as attempts to access that same (unified and unificatory, rather than the culturally splintered consciousness of the contemporary West) mythic consciousness. That temporality of writing is clear in 'The Thought-Fox' (1957) as the

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[45] Joanny Moulin, 'Ted Hughes's Anti-Mythic Method', *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (e-book edition) (Lisse: Taylor & Francis, 2005), p. 89.
[46] Moulin, p. 92.
[47] Timothy Materer, *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 153. He is quoting from Philip Rahv, *Literature and the Sixth Sense* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 208 and p. 210.

creature 'now, and now, and now || Sets neat prints in the snow' (*CP*, p. 21). The half rhyme of now/snow further binds the figural myth of writing to a discursive, eternal temporality (a temporality enacted, just as the poem is enacted, every time the poem is read).

The full mythological dimension of this temporality is made even clearer, though, by a look at the poem 'Pike' (1960). It makes for an interesting counterpoint to 'Earth-numb'; both poems are about fishing, but in 'Pike' the narrator appears unable to confront and contain the otherworldly savagery of the titular fish. Even the 'Three we kept behind glass' refuse to be inured to their captivity: 'Suddenly there were two. Finally one || With a sag belly and the grin it was born with' (*CP*, p. 85). The pike stubbornly refuses efforts to domesticate it. However, the tone of the poem shifts markedly and quite abruptly in its final third which I quote here in full:

> A pond I fished, fifty yards across,
> Whose lilies and muscular tench
> Had outlasted every visible stone
> Of the monastery that planted them –
>
> Stilled legendary depth:
> It was as deep as England. It held
> Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old
> That past nightfall I dared not cast
>
> But silently cast and fished
> With the hair frozen on my head
> For what might move, for what eye might move.
> The still splashes on the dark pond,

Owls hushing the floating woods

Frail on my ear against the dream

Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,

That rose slowly toward me, watching. (*CP*, pp. 85-86)

The natural world has conquered the – notably Christian – human efforts at containment and making-safe. The pond's 'Stilled legendary depth' is as 'deep as England', and the pike inside it are 'too immense to stir', 'immense and old'; the effect immediately is one of dream-like heightened reality – indeed, of myth. The pike are each leviathans going against the will of God. The pond is the cultural well of the tribe of England. Hughes is too afraid to fish for its live elements but is compelled to. This part of the poem sees the first entrance of the lyric I, too, and the reflective qualities of the pond are signalled by a pun on 'for what eye might move'; the narrator is fishing within himself, just as he is fishing within a kind of shared consciousness. So, too, are the pike poems. In introducing 'Pike', Hughes tells us he captured not 'just a pike', but 'the whole pond including the monsters I never even hooked'.[48] The personal, nostalgic (for Hughes) is intermixed with the public, mythic.

Stillness commensurate with the mythological, timeless realm in which Hughes is fishing is emphasised throughout: 'Stilled legendary depth'; the pike 'too immense to stir'; the narrator 'silently' casts 'With the hair frozen on [his] head'; and the ambiguous 'The still splashes on the dark pond' ('still' might be noun or adjective, and 'splashes' noun or verb) provides a paradox which only heightens the dream-like stasis. The movement for which the fishing narrator waits ('fish[es] | For what might move, for what eye might move') predicts the same moment of capture that 'Earth-numb' included; more than that, it indicates the moment when Hughes hooked the poem 'Pike' itself, pulling into our world a still-wriggling

[48] Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 21.

artefact of a timeless, common-consciousness, mythological realm: the realm of the natural and the cultural – of the real.

As Paul Bentley points out, the reason that in Hughes 'nature is no longer so simple has to do with its mediated status: refracted through religion, myth and ideology, nature, in effect, becomes culture'.[49] The operation goes both ways, though: myth and nature are likewise culture. The pike takes its place as a cultural totem of England, and as such it embodies and espouses certain mythic truths which are present in the poem. For instance: nature is savage, though humanised ('malevolent'); Christianity and the manmade monuments of it are strictly temporal, ephemeral ('Had outlasted every visible stone of the monastery that planted them'); the diviner of such myths (the fisher of such pike; the poet; the shaman) puts himself at some kind of mysterious risk in doing so; he is compelled to do so, and what he does produce is given an otherworldly provenance (it is *real*, beyond the strictly human, irreproachable; it marks the diviner as one elected or chosen by supernatural forces). Furthermore, ecological aspects of Hughes's poetry (here and more generally) are subordinated to the mythic by this form of mythic temporality. We are not asked to concern ourselves with *these* pike in *this* very real location, and their ecological import in the non-human world. Instead, the pike are given totemic, psychological, symbolic value immediately. They are 'malevolent', arrogant and vain ('stunned by their own grandeur'), nightmarish. Hughes fishes for the detemporalised pike of the mind, of the culture, of England – *ye pike*.

The 'monastery' of 'Pike', lying in wrack and ruin, ephemeral and inoperative, represents a swipe at the myths of organised religions. Keith Sagar's *The Laughter of Foxes* finds an anti-mythic undercurrent similar to that which Moulin also finds, though there

[49] Paul Bentley, 'The Debates about Hughes', *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 30.

mobilised as the oxymoronic-sounding ‘true myths’ and the tautological-sounding ‘false myths’:

> The most important role for the poet is to challenge the false myths we all live by and offer true myths which involve the inward journey and the painful acquisition of self-knowledge, which illuminate and purge the dark interior, and which help us to discover ‘a proper knowledge of the sacred wholeness of Nature, and a proper alignment to our behaviour within her laws’ (or, as Hughes puts it elsewhere, ‘to realign our extreme, exclusive attitude with our natural environment and our natural biological supply of life’).[50]

What emerges from this again, couched though it is in some of the vaguer terms of Hughes’s insistence on realignment with Nature, is that any insistence on such realignment privileges aspects of mythologies – it is a ‘proper’ knowledge and a ‘proper’ alignment, though proper according to whom? In short, Hughes’s anti-mythic mode is set to dissolve those elements at odds with his mythic mode. Therein lies the reality to which Hughes lays claim.

An analysis of Hughes’s uses and discussions of mythology reveals the kinds of effects he desires from his poetry, and provides the provenance, the genealogy of power, for those effects. This is visible in the readings Hughes produces of other poets, ones which seem to reflect desired readings of his own corpus (for instance, of Plath’s work as ‘chapters in a mythology where the plot, seen as a whole and in retrospect, is strong and clear’ and of T.S. Eliot as shamanic figure).[51] Through Hughes’s mythic mode, too, the effects he desires upon

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[50] Keith Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 3.

[51] This seems at least overstatement when applied to Plath’s four poetry collections – three of which were published posthumously and edited by Hughes, who applied his own order to establish exactly this mythological plot. If the chronological plot were so clear, one has to ask why he felt the need to apply a differing order to the poems in *Ariel*. Ekbert Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 16. He is quoting Ted Hughes, ‘Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath’s Poems’, *Tri-Quarterly*, 7 (1966), 81-88 (p. 81).

his readership, and upon the culture of his readership, can be located more clearly. Those are effects which he points towards as a form of healing achieved through harmony and unification. Mythologies are ‘the deeper understandings that keep us intact as a group’ (*WP*, p. 310), he says in ‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’, and to him ‘the natural world’ itself fulfils the criteria of a ‘“mythology”’ (*WP*, p. 312).

iii) Prophecy, Shamanism and Authority

As Patrick Deane has noted in ‘British Poetry since 1950: Recent Criticism, and the Laureateship’, there is a ‘disconcerting’ tendency in the criticism surrounding Hughes ‘to legitimize [him] in relation to the dominant (yet contingent) axiology of the day’, and this is particularly the case with the value of nature in Hughes’s work (Deane, for instance, also points this out in relation to the ‘unscrutinized feminization of nature’).[52] Even where Hughes directly discusses ecological conservation, in his review (1970) of Max Nicholson’s *The Environmental Revolution*, that discussion is heavily couched in terms related to cultural inheritance, and religious reference, and he goes on to say:

> The story of the mind exiled from Nature is the story of Western man [...] The basic myth for the ideal Westerner’s life is the Quest [...] The lost life must be captured somehow. [...] it is a story of decline. When something abandons Nature, or is

[52] Patrick Deane, ‘British Poetry since 1950: Recent Criticism, and the Laureateship’, *Contemporary Literature*, 40.3 (1999), 491-506 (p. 500). Deane refers to Leonard M. Scigaj as guilty of this. He ‘applauds Hughes’s percipience and ecological awareness: “With uncanny consistency,” he writes, “Hughes’s thematic development throughout his career has paralleled the development of major issues in the recent bonding of ecology with environmental ethics”. So despite his unworldliness and his own idiosyncrasies as a thinker, Hughes ends up enlisted on the correct side in contemporary environmental politics.’ Deane, p. 499. He is quoting from Leonard M. Scigaj, ‘Ted Hughes and Ecology: A Biocentric Vision’, *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 164.

> abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator [...] According to this, our Civilization is an evolutionary dead-end. (*WP*, p. 129)

That 'evolutionary dead-end' appears almost as a stowaway, a biological-sounding justification of his cultural themes. That 'story of decline' is expressive of Hughes's views on Western culture as experiencing a kind of 'sickness'. Hughes says in a review (1963) of Philip O'Connor's *Vagrancy*, 'civilization is horribly sick' (*WP*, p. 37).[53] The answer as to how Hughes thinks one might reclaim the spirit-confidence of Nature seems to lie in a differing kind of quest: the mythic quest-like structure of his, and others', work. The blueprint for this quest-reading of Hughes's work may have arrived from his own reading of T.S. Eliot's corpus, found in the centenary tribute to Eliot towards the end of *Winter Pollen*, 'The Poetic Self' (1992). In that piece he presents Eliot as a shaman-like figure confronted by and attempting to deal with a cultural catastrophe, a 'tribal disaster [...] presumably just that convulsive desacralization of the spirit of the West', and that tribe of his 'included all Western man, or perhaps, even, simply spiritual man' (*WP*, p. 272). Indeed, this manoeuvre – identifying Eliot as Hughes himself seems to want to be identified – reveals more clearly Hughes's treatment of mythology in relation to the world (and the natural world in particular). That relationship is used to shore up the claims to authority the charm aspects of his poetry demand. It is of a piece with attempts to mark his lyric voice as prophetic, the voice which Jonathan Culler says 'calls in order to be calling, to dramatize its calling, to summon images of its power so as to establish its identity as poetical and prophetic voice.'[54]

Alongside the account of Eliot's crisis and attempts to come to terms with it, is the idea of the poetic self from which the title arrives, which, Hughes says:

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[53] It is to this state of affairs which the shaman must attend; he must bring back from the extra-material realm 'something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs'. Faas, p. 16.

[54] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 142.

> lived its own life separate from and for the most part hidden from the poet's ordinary personality; that it was not under his control, either in when it came and went or in what it said; and that it was supernatural. The most significant of these peculiarities was that it was supernatural. (*WP*, p. 268)

Hughes is laying claim to a privileged position for poets, one that includes special knowledge of the supernatural. The knowledge that 'religious institutions and rituals had ceased to be real in the old sense, and that they had continued to exist only as forms of "make-believe"' (*WP*, p. 269) represents a threat to and desacralisation of the poet's privileged position to enact ritual-based, supernatural change, just as much as it is a danger to the alignment of culture with nature. He draws the same conclusions as he did when mentioning that Western myth-quest, that 'story of decline', when he says 'we live in the translation, where what had been religious and centred on God is psychological and centred on the idea of the self' (*WP*, p. 274); indeed, it is visible there with especial clarity that Hughes's desire – and his modus operandi with charm and myth – is to return the private, personal world to a public, shared, enforced mythic consciousness.

To conclude this chapter I want to present an example of Hughes's myth-making which attempts to mark itself as prophetic voice in a similar way to Culler's observations on apostrophe. In 1951, Hughes began studying English at Pembroke College, only to transfer to Anthropology and Archaeology in his third year. While he studied English it seems he wrote no poetry, and he refers to his capabilities in 'dismantling [...] texts' as demonstrating 'nearly a sadistic streak [...] not only a foolish game, but deeply destructive of myself' (*LTH*, *p.* 423). Hughes claims that his change in course coincides with his dream of 'The Burnt Fox' (1993) (*WP*, p. 8). The dream itself is not recorded until his letter of 1979 sent to Keith Sagar, in which he writes: 'in 1953, my second year at university, I was going through some kind of crise [sic] [...]. It became impossible for me to write a sentence, except in lucky moments'

(*LTH*, *p.* 423). Later, a more formal account of the dream would be published in *Winter Pollen*, in 1993. In the dream, a burnt, suffering fox-like creature comes to Hughes as he studies and says, 'Stop this – you are destroying us', laying a bloody hand (and its print) upon the page in front of him (*WP*, p. 9).[55] In the letter, it is clarified that he had 'escaped from a fire' (*LTH*, p. 423). That fire appears to be the destructive force of Hughes's critical, rational faculties.

Rand Brandes in 'The anthropologist's use of myth', discussing this dream, suggests that 'when Hughes switched his course of study at Cambridge from English to Anthropology he did so because he had experienced what he believed was the shaman's call'.[56] Hughes, though, is careful not to say this outright. Certainly he points to it in his other work – 'the most common form of election comes from the spirits themselves: they approach the man in a dream', he writes in his 1964 review of Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism* (*WP*, p. 57) – but he allows his commentators and anthologists to make that kind of grander claim on his behalf. The placement of the fox-dream in *Winter Pollen* (it is the third piece anthologised) points to this tendency in seeing the dream, with the benefit of great hindsight now, as a gateway into Hughes's work, just as it seems to be a gateway for him into his own poetic calling.

In addition to Hughes's announcing himself, retrospectively, as a shamanic figure, is the implication his dream has for critical examination of poetry. Hughes's own examinations of his course material necessary for writing his weekly essay manifest themselves as an act of violence upon the animating spirit of that literature – in fact, just what the spirit belongs to is relatively unclear, and the fox appears to be an emissary of the force of something grander still (perhaps, indeed, of nature). Hughes's critical investigation enacts not just an

[55] See, also: 'Stop this. You are destroying us'. *LTH*, p. 423.
[56] Rand Brandes, 'The Anthropologist's use of myth', *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 69.

impoverishment but a violent penetration that breaks down the structure and functionality of what he is looking at – and also, he suggests, of himself, in transgression against his own poetic impulse. One has to wonder just how a critical examination of a text can constitute such a visceral act of violence. It appears that Hughes felt that too close an examination might risk revealing the artificial character of the prophetic voice, in exactly the same manner as Culler suspects others find the *O* of apostrophe embarrassing. Furthermore, with the language of charm in mind, the suggestion is that if one were to recognise the methods of compulsion at work, the spell, as it were, would be broken – 'the revolt of the intelligence against the hypnotic power of commanding words', as Frye puts it.[57] Hughes's account of the dream is a text supportive of his authority as one to whom the spirits speak. At the same it tries to persuade the reader not to examine too deeply the kinds of charm at work in the poetry – lest the reader, too, be guilty of burning his foxes. Instead, one is invited to give oneself over to the power wielded by the poet and in the poetry without trying to demystify it.

Whether or not the charm techniques Hughes mentions in the transcript have 'magical' effects upon a world of responsive forces is impossible to say; however, his desire that we believe in the possibility for such effects is clear. Hughes presents his poetry as 'a verbal formula used for magical effects'.[58] Those effects are 'healing' ('as if poetry were a biological healing process'), success in activities involving personal prowess such as hunting, and involve a reader's susceptibility to blessings or curses.[59] These are the effects of charm. Furthermore, Hughes deliberately draws upon the traditions associated with charm. As he comments in his 1962 review of the book *Primitive Song*: 'The bulk of the songs are power-charms, tools and practical agents in the business of gaining desired ends [...]. The poems seem to gain in beauty and complexity as they lose in purpose' (*WP*, p. 34). The irony there is

[57] Frye, p. 137.
[58] Preminger and Brogan, p. 183.
[59] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

that Hughes's poems, too, owe their beauty and complexity to their aesthetic effect and their failure as outright utilitarian devices.

Charm here is a language supported by and supportive of mythology – the 'universe' to which it appeals for its power and which it likewise helps maintain by its calling – and whose purpose is to persuade, compel and ultimately to transform. Charm encompasses persuasion and compulsion, ritualisation, a base of power founded in the mythological, the attraction of something lustrous or aesthetic, rhythmical and sonic patterning, and a reliance on this mythic common-ground for its effects. Through it, Hughes wants us to believe that reality might be encountered – though this is a makeshift reality, a public story to keep us tribally intact. Indeed, the poetry's charm effects upon the reader may be helpfully examined in reference to the unificatory desires Hughes displays through discussions of mythology – and this is what the next chapter explores more thoroughly.

Chapter 2: Mythologies, Interpretation, Charm

In the last chapter I argued that charm in Ted Hughes's work appears as language supported by and supportive of the mythological in his poetry, and that the relationships between world and man implied by charm are in many ways the antecedents of fuller-fledged mythologies. Further to that, I asserted that charm in Hughes's poetry is not limited to a handful of gestures and tropes but is rather an attitude that informs the efficacious stance of the poetry in its relationship to the world and to its readership. These claims are what this chapter will continue to pursue, here with a focus on his essay 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' (1994). That essay encounters some of the problems of interpretation (and thus readership and reader participation) through the lens of 'mythology'. Examination of it will yield the mythological situation that underpins Hughes's use of charm and the repercussions this has for charm's activity. That mythological situation resonates with Frye's notion of the 'mythological universe, a world of interlocking names of mysterious powers and potencies which are above, but not wholly beyond reach of, the world of time and space'.[1] Interpretation, mythological universe, and the efficacy of charm are bound together. Hughes's essay explores his concerns over the abilities of language to be universally and predictably understood, and so its ability (or lack thereof) to both partake of and assure such an overarching mythological universe and the names, powers and potencies it supports and is supported by.

In 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', Hughes argues for the intimate connections between 'mythology', interpretation, unification and poetic effects. From that nexus I locate a corresponding one in charm whose efforts are to effect change, gather a group in social

[1] Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 136.

enterprise, cement commonality, and whose language appeals to mythological powers for its efficacy. This in turn brings a clear understanding of Hughes's conflation of interpretation and cultural membership and his position in relation to this as a poet.

From the ensuing analysis of Hughes's essay I want to establish and explore the following things. 1) Hughes's defensive attitude, his anxiety over differing interpretations, is directly related to efficacy. 2) The character of Hughes's sense of a crisis of modernity is such that the universality of a language and the health of a culture become, to a large extent, equivalent. Language in Hughes's treatment *is* culture and vice-versa. 'Intact[ness]' or unitivity and disintegration/discord are the opposing poles of the continuum which both culture and language constitute (*WP*, p. 310). 3) This situation for language and culture has direct impact upon the nature and power of charm, such that a fracturing of the 'mythological' understandings that keep us intact as a group is likewise an impoverishment of charm's power in two ways: mythologies themselves (stories about the world which harmonise a group) are not commonly available or understood, particularly in any way that might be harnessed for efficacious address or ritual action; likewise, what Hughes names the 'mythological' quotient of language – its precision, its common availability, and the predictability of the mental images a word produces in its users – is also made unreliable.

Charm, in this sense, becomes something close to the structural element identified as 'mana' by Leonard M. Scigaj, as an expression of the power of the poet's will, and also as a language which might bring access to nature, to the real, as Paul Bentley and Craig Robinson likewise identify as integral to Hughes's project.[2] Something of a paradox exists in Hughes's use of charm, whose purpose is in part the exercising of personal will ('poetry is traditionally

[2] 'Hughes is especially concerned with the affective function of language, with using the mana power of his poetry to help the reader activate and integrate psychic energies'. Leonard M. Scigaj, *Ted Hughes* (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne, 1991), p, 22. See p. 19, above.

supposed to be magical', and magic 'is one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen'), but whose effort is also to attempt access to a kind of spiritual, natural reality.[3] Reconciliation with nature stresses the destruction of the quotidian ego, but nevertheless occurs through a single individual in a position from which he can manipulate that activity. The role of that individual – Ted Hughes – is shamanic. Hughes defines the role of the shaman in a letter to Moelwyn Merchant dated 29 June 1990:

> Shamanism appeared [...] as a spontaneous collapse of the cultural ego—in some individual—and a simultaneous 'organised' internal plunge back into the animal/spiritual consciousness that had been lost. From this lost 'divine' consciousness, the Shaman returns with all kinds of things that the alienated 'exiled' ego consciousness of his group needs. In some way, he plunges not into his own animal/spiritual consciousness, but into that of the whole group. This is how the great ones become Holy Men, Prophets, Healers, spiritual leaders. In that sense, Shamans become, briefly, incarnations of the sacrificed God. (*LTH*, p. 581)

One has to ask how or in what way one can question whether someone has undergone such a process, particularly outside of such tightly-knit societies. Hughes details his own shamanic initiation in accounts such as the fox dream mentioned in the previous chapter. The shaman is one whose alignment with a spiritual, natural centre-point is approved by supernatural forces, and already beyond question by those whom he serves. He undergoes ego-destruction and reconstitution; through his conduital act of ecstasy, the consciousness 'of the whole group' is altered – healed, brought into alignment with reality, its communal and cultural bonds re-strengthened. The demands for particular inflections on this sought tribal coherence invite a further observation: desired 'intact[ness]' is taken to be reconciliation with nature, so there is

[3] Ted Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series' (Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978), transcript by Ann Skea (1990), <http://ann.skea.com/CriticalForum.htm> [accessed 14 June 2016].

either something contradictory in its being effectively governed by a single individual, or rather arrogant, anthropocentric, in the assumption of a position from which one can speak for nature.

1. ‘Mythology’ as Language and Culture; Hughes’s Crisis of Modernity

‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’, published for the first time in *Winter Pollen*, is structured around a defensive posture aimed at those who have had trouble in reading and interpreting Hughes’s work. Hughes discusses three poems – ‘some verses […] dramatizing wrens’ (*WP*, p. 313), ‘In the Likeness of a Grasshopper’ (1986) (*CP*, p. 723), and ‘The Horses’ (1957) (*CP*, p. 22).[4] Alongside them, he mentions the readers who have had difficulty with the poems and what those difficulties are (mostly according to Hughes). Those troubled interpreters are a ‘US urban poet’, (*WP*, p. 313) a ‘correspondent’ (*WP*, p, 318) and the poet Roy Fuller, respectively.

Each of those interpreters has a somewhat different set of difficulties, but Hughes groups them together and responds to them in turn, believing that their problems are essentially similar and are all framed within the question of what is or is not shared – which in his treatment is the question of ‘mythology’. Before I come to discuss those interpreters, I want to examine Hughes’s use of ‘mythology’, the situation of language it implies, and its repercussions for charm. Hughes initially defines ‘mythologies’ as follows:

[4] The wren verses most likely belong to ‘The Unknown Wren’ (1979) (*CP*, p. 447). His mention of the wren ‘singing itself into convulsions’ matches with this poem (*WP*, p. 314).

> By 'mythologies', here, I mean nothing more than the picture languages that we invent to embody and make accessible to casual reference the deeper shared understandings that keep us intact as a group – so far as we are intact as a group. (*WP*, p. 310)

Hughes's 'mythology' is a cultural bank of symbols whose values are almost absolutely understood by its users; more than merely indicating a common understanding of the thing a word refers to, this understanding also encompasses a common world-view in which the thing takes its place (and so, also takes its place in stories which seek to make sense of that thing's presence and role – myths). The statements in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', however, are less absolute statements on traditional understandings of mythology, but more illuminating remarks on a particular kind of 'mythological' interpretive freight. In fact, it is the conflation of mythological stories and understandings of the world and language which is particularly telling of Hughes's stance; language, power and cultural unity are, for him, coextensive. Charm clarifies that stance further: charm consists of cultural, societal co-operation, appeal to commonly understood mythological powers for effect, the deployment of commonly understood language techniques and phrases, and a shared attitude towards the world that it will respond to efficacious address. Bronislaw Malinowski tells us that, 'magic […] acts as a powerful social organising force', helping to unite a people through 'the utterance of a magical formula' which is 'a very momentous and sacred act', and that 'charms can also be social, and one use […] is to bind the community into a single enterprise.'[5] This reveals the cohesion of culture, further, as implicated in how well understood such symbols are. 'Civilization is horribly sick', Hughes proclaims in his 1963 review of Phillip O'Connor's

[5] [5] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, *Volume Two: The Language of Magic and Gardening* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), p. 9 and p. 128.

Vagrancy (*WP*, p. 37). The disunity of culture is coterminous with disunity in these 'mythological' understandings.

Hughes introduces the idea of a continuum between the 'lingua franca' a 'multi-cultural society develops' and a 'sub-group's system of shared understandings' (*WP*, pp. 311-12). That multicultural lingua franca is the form of a particular language (English, here) which will be understood by the most interpreters across the most sub-groups. For Hughes the lingua franca is:

> Shallow, arbitrary, empty, degraded and degrading, even destructive, if not altogether meaningless. Setting aside just how any writer resolves or fails to resolve this dilemma, the fact remains that each modern literary work has to take its place on a continuum between some sub-group's (the author's) system of shared understandings (and its mythology) and the most inclusive, ideally global wave-length of multicultural lingua franca. (*WP*, p. 312)

While this may seem at first to be simply arguing for the contextual understanding necessary for the interpretation of any word, the spectrum between the 'multicultural lingua franca' and a 'sub-group's' understanding reveals a sense of cultural loss as words become less and less specific in their connection with particular conceptions of things, and the stories associated with their place in the world become less well known and/or less congruent across members of a culture. Moreover, Hughes's use of 'arbitrary' reveals a key difference between the conception of language in charm and the situation of language Hughes sees as a crisis of modernity. Malinowski tells us that 'a spell is believed to be a primeval text which somehow came into being side by side with animals and plants, with winds and waves, with human disease', and that 'the magical word is coeval with that aspect of reality which it has to

influence.'[6] Such an understanding of the magical word reveals that it is not arbitrary. Instead, it is motivated: there is something of the thing in the word and vice-versa. Word and thing possess, therefore, a mythologically-supported natural correspondence.

This seeming binary between motivated and arbitrary signification is an on-going area of debate in linguistics, and a turn to some of the associated texts helps to clarify what is at stake for Hughes. In Ferdinand de Saussure's seminal text *Course in General Linguistics*, first published in 1916, Saussure argues for the arbitrary relationship between signified (the psychological concept of a thing) and signifier (an utterance, though also the written word) which make up the sign:

> The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*.[7]

This is in stark contrast to Walter Benjamin's statement in 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', written in the same year, that 'it is no longer conceivable […] that the word has an accidental relation to its object'.[8] Benjamin's essay is couched in a degree of magical thinking, in which objects announce themselves to be named – a worldview consonant with that of charm. Hughes would seem to have both of these conceptions of the sign vying for prominence in his mind. His anthropological attitude, whose rationality recognises the problems of interpretation in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', is drawn to Saussurean arbitrariness even while his shamanic side wishes for the power over the world (and the surety of interpretation) which motivated language (and magical thinking) grants to

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[6] Malinowski, p. 218 and p. 229.
[7] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Wade Baskin (London: Peter Owen, 1974), p. 67.
[8] Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', trans. by Edmund Jephcott, *Selected Writings: Volume 1 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 69.

words. This state of affairs can be elucidated further, though, by a slightly deeper look at Saussurean semiotics:

> The fundamental principle of the arbitrariness of the sign does not prevent our singling out in each language what is radically arbitrary, i.e. unmotivated, and what is only relatively arbitrary. Some signs are absolutely arbitrary; in others we note, not its complete absence, but the presence of degrees of arbitrariness: *the sign may be relatively motivated*.[9]

Saussure's sign is ontologically arbitrary, therefore dissonant with a charm conception of the world, but it may possess degrees of motivation: intra-linguistically (according to the patterns of the language in which the sign takes its place), socially and historically. Indeed, *culturally*. As Claude Levi-Strauss notes: 'The linguistic sign is arbitrary a priori, but ceases to be so a posteriori'.[10] Signs acquire connotations particular to members of the culture which make use of them, and 'language always appears as a heritage of the preceding period'.[11] 'Because the sign is arbitrary, it follows no law other than that of tradition, and because it is based on tradition, it is arbitrary.'[12] In degrees of arbitrariness, the 'lingua franca' is vastly more so than the mythological understanding of a sub-group.

The upholding of tradition and the dependability of the signifier-signified relationship are shown there as coextensive, and this is a key concern for Hughes in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'; his worry over the interpretability of signs – that the values of signifiers return dependable psychological conceptions of things – reveals itself as a highly conservative attitude towards culture, language and even the thought-worlds of his readers. That it is

[9] Saussure, p. 131.
[10] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1977), p. 91.
[11] Saussure, p. 71.
[12] Saussure, p.74.

always *understanding* of things which Hughes is concerned about marks another disjunction between shamanic and anthropological attitudes: the Saussurean notion of the signified as psychological conception has eclipsed the magical word's claim to the *things themselves*. There is an irony in Hughes's conservative attitude, since his remarks later in the essay about rhythm (with reference to Gerard Manley Hopkins) and his notion of the history of orthodox and unorthodox verse (anthropomorphised as an uneasy marriage in which he favours the latter, feminine persona) favour a more radical poetic strategy (*WP*, pp. 369-72). There again lie Hughes's conflicting anthropological and shamanic sides; he is attempting to rationalise (in a sense, conservatise) his own irrational, radical attributes and output.

Hughes does not explicitly hope for or suggest the possibility of a non-arbitrary language. Nevertheless, an anecdote from an earlier essay, 'Tricksters and Tar Babies', a review of *Literature among the Primitives* and *The Primitive Reader* (originally published in the *New York Review of Books*, 9 December 1965), expresses the vying pulls of motivated and arbitrary language succinctly:

> When the Bindibu were first discovered in the Australian desert they were using the word 'pudjikat' for a cat; 'pussycat' had discovered them first. Wherever culture grows, the enigma of spontaneous archetypes and the banality of straight theft are inextricably meshed. (*WP*, pp. 74-75)

Despite the problems of language explored in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', Hughes implies here that language might nevertheless somehow touch base with spontaneous archetypes common to our consciousnesses. In the granting of agency to the signifier – '"pussycat" had discovered them first' – Hughes's recognition of the power of words in forming and instructing culture is clear.

Hughes desires what appears to be the next best thing to ontologically motivated language: a language whose correspondence to conceptions of things is congruent across its users, who make up a correspondingly congruent, intact society – a culturally motivated and culturally motivating language. Another anecdote concerning the Native American Hopi tribe attests to this:

> Hence the answer of the old Hopi woman to the Anthropologist who asked why Hopi songs are so short. 'Our songs are short' she said, 'because we know so much.' Meaning, because we all know so thoroughly the mythology of our system of shared understandings […]. If that sounds like cultural stasis, cultural stasis might feel like a perfect state to those who enjoy it. (*WP*, p. 311)

Malinowski meets a similar response in trying to discuss verbal magic with the Trobrianders: 'this is magical speech—we cannot talk about it. There is nothing which meets it'.[13] The sense there is not that they are forbidden (though an element of taboo surrounding the casual divulgence of the sacred certainly can be divined), but that speaking about it is insufficient or pointless, much as for the Hopi woman so much could be left unsaid because it was a tacit part of the fabric of their cultural identity and general relationship with the world. This ultimate form of shared mythological understanding, which the Hopi woman's response exemplifies for Hughes, is a language of static and acknowledged correspondence, which might amount to 'cultural stasis'. Indeed, for Hughes, mythologies are, or amount to, exactly that culturally motivated and culturally motivating language. Such a language likewise supports the effects of charm, and is itself supported by the repetitions of charm (both literally and, for instance, as part of ritual action). The congregational ritual of charm in which magical words are spoken strengthens by repetition the correspondence between the

[13] Malinowski, p. 225.

magical word and the desired effect. Through that, also, cultural cohesion is strengthened – through, for instance, assuring the congruency of the thought-worlds of its members. In turn, the 'mythological universe, a world of interlocking names of mysterious powers and potencies' to which charm appeals for its efficacy is assured and understood.

Indeed, Hughes's essay helps to make sense of his ambivalence towards language as a means of representation. Just as Paul Bentley suggests that Hughes demonstrates a 'marked uneasiness [...] with language as a means of representation', that 'the illusion of reality here is an effect of language and imagination,'[14] so too may it be seen, as Leonard M. Scigaj proposes, that 'for Hughes language [is] [...] not a suspect entity that has no essence or thinghood.'[15] Hughes's position in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' is in the admission that such 'thinghood' is desirable but impossible – moreover, that it is no longer believable. It appears the best a reader can do if he does not share the 'mythology' at hand is to '[import] an interesting meaning' since most poems are 'mixed and generalized enough to provide something for most, and in fact a deliberate confusion of effects will usually elicit a response, since it challenges the interpreter in us' (*WP*, p. 313). This importation is thanks to the poem's proximity to the 'multicultural lingua franca', however, and next to this a 'mythology', such as 'the picture language based on a single species of bird', is 'too precise to attract the interpreter, and too exclusively specific to admit the person who knows nothing about it' (*WP*, p. 313). Importation does not appear to bring about cohesion – merely 'response' and 'an interesting meaning'. Cultural disunity robs words – and the poet – of their power; use of the 'multicultural lingua franca' likewise appears to '[degrade]' culture and experience (*WP*, p. 312). While Hughes's remarks concerning importation and, contrastingly, accurate interpretation appear as conflicting attitudes between an open-handed and a tight-

[14] Paul Bentley, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion & Beyond* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p. 1.
[15] Leonard M. Scigaj, *Ted Hughes* (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne, 1991), p. 24.

fisted approach to reader-response, they resolve themselves through that understanding as an antagonism between 'mythologies' and the 'multicultural lingua franca'. 'Finally', he writes in a letter to Keith Sagar in 1974, 'poems belong to the reader – just as houses belong to those who live in them not to the builder' (*LTH*, p. 349). It is the character of belonging, the character of the poems and the character of the reader, however, which are the crucial elements of this equation. Importation does not appear to bring about cultural healing. In fact, the lingua franca on which importation relies – the most democratic, accessible, widely shared form of a language – appears to actively alienate its users from their particular cultural hub.

So, through Hughes's remarks on the fractured state of language and of culture, his view of language's impoverished relationship with the world becomes plain. 'Charms are meant to make things happen' by making address to the responsive forces of nature.[16] They do so 'partly in a "special language" of power'.[17] However, Hughes's remarks on the state of language and its users indicate how language itself has become estranged from the unitive locus of a particular culture – and in the case of the 'multicultural lingua franca', is itself potentially estranging. The elements of charm's special language of power are simply no longer reliable; a language which must communicate across sub-groups is not a dependable one in which to request response since neither the request nor the response can be properly understood by all of its users.

Andrew Welsh argues that charm's elements in lyric are 'not artificial and degenerate abuses of the natural language of poetry, or mere ornaments hung on that language, but actual sources of the language'.[18] There is in Hughes's thought, however, the sense of this source

[16] Andrew Welsh, *Roots of Lyric* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 144.
[17] Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 183.
[18] Welsh, p. 10.

being inaccessible to our modern sensibility, the current state of cultural and linguistic splintering. Jonathan Culler finds apostrophe to be the embodiment of lyric's aspirations towards efficacy. It represents 'the high calling of poetry' to '[transmute] the temporal into the eternal, life into art' – though in that role it is 'embarrassing' to critics.[19] That embarrassment would be particularly acute in Hughes, in this light, since the aspiration to efficacy which it embodies has been shown to be inaccessible, subject to misunderstanding and confusion. Thanks to that, furthermore, charm's '"special language"' cannot perform the act of calling to common enterprise which it does within a tight-knit cultural group. The problem of confused or even differing interpretations, there, becomes the problem of diffused powers and defused efficacy.

'Mythologies' are directly tied to the very nature of cultural being that defines and strengthens the tribe's relationship with the world and with every member of that group. It is exactly what Hughes is after when he speaks about the powers of shared mythologies which 'keep us intact as a group'. Hughes does not have access to that 'cultural stasis', that 'perfect state' enjoyed by such a tight-knit social and cultural group; language cannot enjoy the same kind of commonly-understood correspondence. Words cannot hope to be 'coeval' with things.[20] Hughes's work must partake of the 'multicultural lingua franca' in order to reach any kind of sizeable readership and be understood – and the continuum on which the sub-group/lingua franca occupy opposing poles is also the continuum of culturally motivated/arbitrary signification. When Hughes writes a review of *Primitive Song* in 1962 and finds that 'the bulk of the songs are power-charms, tools and practical agents in the business of gaining desired ends', he opines that 'the poems seem to gain in beauty and complexity as they lose in purpose' (*WP*, p. 34). A reason for this might be that, over time,

[19] Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p, 152.
[20] Malinowski, p. 229.

the original audience of those texts does not know quite so much as the Hopi woman; their mythological understandings have become less absolute, less commonly shared. Instead, they begin to make greater use of the lingua franca, and concern themselves less with direct effects which require a deep knowledge of a specific language of magical ritual. In short, the texts begin to look more like poetry, which has lost the claim on magical effect and purpose that charm makes. Indeed, that the poems 'gain in beauty and complexity as they lose in purpose' reveals here that much of the appeal of poetry is directly at odds with the static, paradisal language Hughes describes – a language permitting no great individual or cultural revelation.

Hughes has no access to such cultural stasis or correspondingly dependable language. His work is very frugal when it comes to deploying those 'amulets, abracadabras, Latin tags, jargon words, formulas' of charm language, though he certainly makes use of Frye's inventory of 'refrain, rhyme, alliteration, pun, antithesis'.[21] Allusions may be referenced, Latin tags translated, obscure words easily looked up and 'understood' in terms of the 'multicultural lingua franca', but never as part of the intimate understanding of a 'mythology'. Hughes's penchant instead is for subtler modes, found in sound patterning and rhythmical strategies. His use of language recalls Malinowski's observation that even 'ordinary words, by association with others [...] are incorporated into a complex prosodic structure, specifically magical in character'.[22] Likewise, the use of apostrophe in Hughes's poems is rare.

There are some exceptions to this, however, and most notably 'Song', the earliest poem included in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), written in 1949 when Hughes was 19 years old. 'Song' is an apostrophic poem whose four stanzas each begin 'O lady' and end 'O my lady' (*CP*, pp. 24-25). The poem represents a more naïve attitude before Hughes's worries

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[21] Frye, p. 138, p. 126.
[22] Malinowski, p. 220.

over what might be lost in communication. Hughes's comments on the poem in a 1992 letter to Nick Gammage attest to this:

> Of all the verse in my books that is the one piece I got hold of before I stepped into the actual psychological space of contemporary literature, smogged as that is by the critical exhalations and toxic smokestacks and power stations of Academe. So it is the one song I sang in Arcadia—that came to me literally out of the air, utterly unaware of all that lay ahead, like Aphrodite blowing ashore, eager for a blissful life of endless procreation. (*LTH*, p. 617)

Hughes claims the poem was, in effect, dictated to him. He references Arcadia, the ancient Greek province rich in mythological and poetic connotations, and the domain of Pan. Hughes later wrote to Keith Sagar claiming that he contacted a spirit of the same name by use of a Ouija board, and that the spirit was responsible for dictating to him the second part of his poem 'An Otter'.[23] 'Song' stands apart in Hughes's mind from the rest of his work, however: 'I never again made contact with the natural music of Song' (*LTH*, p. 618).

The poem allows us access to a pre-crisis poetics, and it follows that the poem is richer in blatant charm elements and more overt in the display of its charm attitude. The 'lady' the poem addresses retains mystery and obscurity throughout but is clearly given mythological importance. Despite resemblances, Hughes had not yet read Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. In a letter to Nick Gammage of 7 April 1995, Hughes writes: 'I first met The White Goddess September 1951 […]. I recall my slight resentment to find him taking possession of what I considered to be my secret patch' (*LTH*, p. 679). The 'lady' of 'Song' shape-shifts, and her presence likewise effects change upon whatever comes into contact with

[23] 'About Otter: Yes, Pan asked me to write it […] I became aware of a written scroll hanging somewhere in the air just to my right. [...] I copied the words down—and the whole poem came out as it is in part II' (*LTH*, p. 721).

her: ‘when the tipped cup of the moon blessed you | You became soft fire with a cloud’s grace’; ‘when the sea caressed you | You were a marble of foam, but dumb’; ‘when the wind kissed you | You made him music for you were a shaped shell’. These symbiotic interactions with natural forces recur in every stanza except the final one (where the focus becomes the poem’s ‘I’, implicating it to be among those natural forces) in the form of the anaphoric ‘when’ construction. The effect is of a mythological creation story whose mnemonic qualities approach ritual in these structural devices. The rhymes support this effect, with the four central lines of each six-line stanza working towards the same end-rhyme sound. Over this, the echoing repetitions of ‘you’, which ends every first line of each stanza, and ‘lady’, which does the same with each ending line, enclose the stanzas with reaffirming of the addressed and a spoken ritual of what appears to be devotion. In addition to this, the hyperbation to satisfy rhymes on some lines strikes as archaic in such a way as to hark back to both older poems and also the ritual utterances of religious gatherings: ‘I follow the waters and the wind still | Since my heart heard it and all to pieces fell’. The lady in question is and is not nature, affecting and affected by the natural forces in the poem. She is a feminine ideal of a human relationship with nature while she is also supernatural – she ‘will not die, nor come home’. It becomes more and more apparent that the lady in question is what would become the Goddess of Hughes’s personal mythology, and of his poetics. Western civilisation, Hughes claims in his letter to Gammage, has suffered ‘the hideous destructiveness of everything post-Restoration’, and the ‘overall pattern of Goddess-centred matriarchy being overthrown by a God-centred patriarchy’ (*LTH*, p. 680).

The devotional aspect of the poem runs through those lines which involve the contrapuntal ‘I’ of the poem. All characteristics of that ‘I’ are contingent upon the addressed lady: ‘You stood, and your shadow was my place: | You turned, your shadow turned to ice’. The final stanza expresses the effect on the speaker of having ‘lost’ the addressed lady:

O lady, consider when I shall have lost you

The moon's full hands, scattering waste,

The sea's hands, dark from the world's breast,

The world's decay where the wind's hands have passed,

And my head, worn out with love, at rest

In my hands, and my hands full of dust,

O my lady.

The enjambment between the first two lines of this stanza reveals the situation to be more complicated than simply losing contact with the lady. If one reads through it, both that meaning and the meaning in which the speaker loses the ensuing natural elements are identifiable. This points again towards the ambiguous nature of the addressed: both part of nature and manipulator/manipulated. The irony in this concern over loss brings to the fore Hughes's charm attitude in his later poetry. The poem addresses the lady who is explicitly absent ('will not come home') and present in variable forms in nature, yet unapproachable. The temporality of the poem permits it the paradox of the 'I' having already lost contact with the lady, yet addressing her, yet concerning himself with 'when I shall have lost you'. That is the temporality of myth – and, moreover, of the mythological situation which underpins Hughes's poetics. The poem embodies the lack which Hughes spends his life trying to account for, to reach, to reconcile with. It is a half-elegy for a goddess he hopes might be resurrected. That resurrection is also the healing of our sick civilisation, our reconciliation with nature, much against the 'post-Restoration' English culture whose 'psychic life' is 'cut off from its true source and grafted onto other supply lines, alien ones' (*LTH*, p. 680).

2. Advice to Struggling Interpreters; Defensiveness, Authority and Experience

I want to turn, now, to discuss the struggling interpreters of Hughes's poems as he details them in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. Doing so will reveal more explicitly the repercussions of the state of language for charm and interpretation I have just outlined. It will also help to clarify the defensive and authoritative – even authoritarian – elements of Hughes's position and, through that, the further implications of his use of 'mythology' in this manner. In addition to this, I clarify Hughes's relating of 'mythology' to the necessity of direct experiential understanding as, at root, an insistence on consistent thought-worlds of a culture and of his readership.

Defensiveness is a key aspect of Hughes's remarks. Laying claim to interpretation as part of mythological discourse in itself lends a sort of cultural immunity to such 'deeper shared understandings' in the form of a double-bind: those understandings cannot be reproached by someone outside of the culture to which the understandings belong; and, should one be a member of that culture, one already understands them. More than this, the essay acts as an amendment for where readers have failed to grasp such understandings: it is a supplement for failed charm which seeks both to '[instruct]' future readers in how to approach the poems and also to assure Hughes's position as propagator of successful poetry and cultural cohesion (*WP*, p. 364). Hughes gains his own cultural immunity by positioning himself indirectly as speaking for a culture in which such mythological understandings are supposedly prevalent. A further inkling of the defensive tone enters with the tentative scare-quotes around '"mythologies"', echoing the admission of the prior sentence, 'mythologies are dodgy things' (*WP*, p. 310).

Dodgy things they are indeed, or appear to be in Hughes's treatment, and his term enjoys a vagueness throughout the essay that allows him to lay claim to a variety of tropes in

order to explain how his poems ought to be read. Hughes's argument, revolving around the act of interpreting language, reveals his notion of mythology as likewise intimately tied-up with linguistic understanding. Joanny Moulin comments upon this, further, in 'Ted Hughes's Anti-Mythic Method':

> Hughes's definition of myth is very close to that of the referent, that is to say an extra-linguistic fact, of which a given group of people may have a common experience, or mythology. A set of such given references, which amounts to the common 'picture language' of a poet and his readers, is what Hughes calls 'mythos'.[24]

I cannot find the same consistency in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. Hughes defines 'mythologies' themselves as 'picture languages', which makes the claim that Hughes calls such a picture language 'mythos' either strictly inaccurate or interchangeable in nature (*WP*, p. 310). However, that Hughes's ideas of mythology implicate the realm of the referent is apparent in his text. The correspondence between word and thing (or understanding of thing) serves as the problem around which his argument is based. Interpretation implicates our relationship with the world. Insisting on particular interpretations is an attempt to constrain and delimit that relationship.

Importantly, though, Hughes's implication of the referent really is that – an implication. Throughout the essay Hughes brackets the referent in much the same way as does Saussure: the thing to which a signifier refers is always something *experienced* and it is always the *character of the experiencing* which is of most importance. I do not intend this as a nod to solipsism or to the fallacy of nomenclaturism but so as to emphasise that the importance of reality – of real animals, objects, etc. – is found for Hughes in how the

[24] Joanny Moulin, 'Ted Hughes's Anti-Mythic Method', *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (e-book edition) (Lisse: Taylor & Francis, 2005), p.87.

psychological experiences and images of them inform culture. It is not even that Hughes makes a point of the inaccessible nature of the referent, of things, but that he is simply far more concerned with psychological impressions of them. Indeed, one subtext of Hughes's worries over interpretation is that we – we readers – cannot be trusted to have consistent, reliable conceptions of the things we have or have not experienced. Moreover, it is not that we ought to have accurate, truthful experiences of reality (whatever that might mean) – we merely ought to have ones consistent enough across our culture *that our culture and our membership of it not be disrupted*. Hughes's notion of reality is borne out of the utilitarian purpose of cultural harmonisation, and the rationalised limits of interpretation which may propagate that harmonisation – and these are strictly psychological factors. Hughes's reality is thoroughly anthropocentric, thoroughly cultural; nature is culture. Furthermore, those psychological factors assume that epiphany – sudden, new, experience of the world and of ourselves – might amount to cultural dissidence. Indeed, Hughes's poem 'Song' appears to be not just a figure of a more naive approach to language and poetics but to reality itself. Its apostrophes address reality – the goddess – and find (in a sense *are*) her absence. The poem is a knell to a naive realism – to the referent, to things, to Hughes's interest in things rather than psychological conceptions of things, to nature rather than culture.

The correspondence between word and concept, and how it orients experiential relationship with the world, can be observed in how Hughes addresses the problems encountered by the first two failed (as he sees them) interpreters of his poems. He says of his wren poem that it 'makes that demand: the wren must be part of the reader's mythos' (*WP*, p. 313). That mythos is revealed as what can be depended upon as common knowledge, rather than what can be counted on to retain some kind of usual mythical significance:

> Unless one establishes the full, naturalistic context of such a peculiar idiosyncrasy, and supplies the credentials for the reality within which wrens actually do behave like

> that, it is impossible to use this bird's inclination to 'sing itself into convulsions' as the accepted feature of a well-understood symbol in a 'shared' mythology (*WP*, pp. 314-15).

Hughes's use of 'full, naturalistic context' cannot save the wren from the starkly isolated, housed '*the* reality *within which* wrens actually do behave like that'. The primary importance is placed on the credentials which bring about understanding; the actuality of behaviour, of reality, is less vital than its acceptance as a symbol in an interpreter's thought-world. The effect, brief though it is, is a conjuration of the endlessly multiplying personal realities of readers who may or may not have encountered a wren, alongside the other infinite varieties of their experience. These private realities are, for Hughes, a problem which results in the discord of culture and the corresponding imprecision and unreliability of language. A difficulty in negotiating Hughes's reasoning for his reader's lack of comprehension lies in the fact that he is far from specific when it comes to describing the exact problem his US urban poet reader encountered, beyond 'exclaiming in utter incomprehension' (*WP*, p. 313). Hughes, though, imagines that it is because the wren is a very particular kind of bird:

> The picture language based on a single species of bird is too precise to attract the interpreter, and too exclusively specific to admit the person who knows nothing about it […]. My wren, perhaps, was an example of this commonest kind of non-transmitting symbol of the psychological life, within certain kinds of verse. (*WP*, pp. 313-14)

Intimate experiential acquaintance with the referent is subordinated to the 'symbol of the psychological life' for which Hughes wants to make use of it. The problem of the wren is less that a person have direct experience of it, more that the same person be accepting of the characteristics which Hughes appends to the bird; wrens, after all, 'actually do behave like

that' (*WP*, p. 314). The repeated use of 'dramatizing' as his verb of choice to describe the verse in question reveals, also, an anxiety that the lines may indeed be 'obscure, arbitrary, forced' (*WP*, p. 314). Regardless, his ensuing recourse to lines from William Shakespeare in which the wren is described in an informative fashion shows further that what he is referring to is a shared knowledge of a bird's behaviour – more precisely, shared understanding, which also takes into account connotative meaning, as the second example of failed interpretation makes even more apparent.[25]

The second poem, 'In the Likeness of a Grasshopper', fares similarly (*CP*, p. 723). This time Hughes includes his letter in response to the correspondent who could not understand the poem, and he explains by prose paraphrase the poem's meaning. His reasoning for the lack of comprehension, however, differs subtly and importantly. The verses 'draw obliquely on a mythology (the Grasshopper's summer world) that has all but vanished from England, and the mode seems, well, obscure at the least' (*WP*, p. 318). These are progressive stages in an argument, rather than entirely similar examples: where knowledge of the wren was vital to properly interpret the first poem, here it is knowledge of the 'Grasshopper's summer world'. The scope of the context has grown (at least become more explicit), and Hughes's reasoning more closely matches something readily appreciable as a kind of mythology. The grasshopper moves within a world wherein it has special significance and agency as an envoy of summer, a status compounded by the childhood nostalgia inherent in a scene which has 'all but vanished from England'.

This is closer to Northrop Frye's observation that 'wherever we turn in charm poetry, we seem to be led back to some kind of mythological universe, a world of interlocking names

[25] 'The poor wren, | The most diminutive of birds, will fight – | Her young ones in the nest – against the owl'. *WP*, p. 315. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by A. R. Braunmuller (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), IV. 2. lines 9-11, p. 216.

of mysterious powers […] above, but not wholly beyond reach of, the world of time and space'.[26] The mythological universe here, the 'grasshopper's summer world', consists of a very particular form of denotation and connotation; the usually private, individual associations which constitute the connotative meanings of a word take a more central position, such as to become part of the denotation. The interlocking of those connotations in a sense *denotes* the mythology they embody. This is exactly the manner in which words may enjoy cultural motivation over time. That privileging – and mutualising – of the connotative meaning is what amounts to a shared 'mythology'. Hughes's limiting of sanctioned interpretations, in this manner, has much in common with W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 'The Affective Fallacy'.[27] In that essay, however, the authors' guidance is to recognise and disregard the more incidental, connotative meanings of a word in favour of direct denotation. For Hughes these less central meanings are every bit as important – if not more important, as hallmarks of a culture's cohesion and of an individual's membership of that culture.

The obsolescence of the grasshopper myth, its reliance on experiential knowledge which has 'all but vanished from England' and rendered the poem 'obscure at the least', points to another way in which Hughes's anthropological, rational understanding (and worries) impoverish a traditional charm-conception of the relationship between language and the world. The mythological universe on which the poem relies is shown to not be 'beyond the world of time and space' at all. Hughes's anthropological realisation sees the mythological to be reliant upon shared experiential understandings, on commonly understood correspondence between word and concept, and assured connotative meaning. This has in

[26] Frye, p. 136.
[27] 'The word "athlete" may be said to *mean* one interested in sports, among other things, but merely to suggest a tall young man.'. W.K Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Affective Fallacy', *The Verbal Icon* (London: Methuen,1970), p.22.

turn destroyed the ability of the poem's referential aspects to make a claim upon the eternity of discursive time; the poem cannot constitute itself as an event because it is a broken signifier whose signified no longer exists (except in the thought-worlds of those who can remember it). Just as is the case with all of these poems, they may be encountered in three different ways: either they have irrevocably failed (or their interpreters have, in fact); or they may be capable of re-cementing a mythological commonality, and gathering readers to it; or something of a poem must nevertheless exceed Hughes's hyper-rational, utilitarian concerns over its limitations. Hughes appears to be of all three minds simultaneously; they represent disunity (cultural sickness), healing (homogenised, homogenising response), and importation respectively.

The mythological quotient of the grasshopper poem is clearer than is the case for the wren poem, though that mythological reasoning belies the fact that he devotes a good deal of space to simply explaining the poem – and not any particular quality reliant on the mythological domain to which it belongs but rather, say, that 'the 'trap', waiting in the field-path, is the grasshopper itself' (*WP*, p. 318). Perhaps the trap is part of another mythology, which may or may not be shared, and indeed one might be given to arguing as much thanks to Hughes's preoccupation with trapping animals, one that he likens to trapping the spirit of a poem:

> You might not think that these two interests, capturing animals and writing poems, have much in common. But the more I think back the more sure I am that with me the two interests have been one interest. [...] In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. (*WP*, p. 10)

Really, then, the trap-hood of the grasshopper is such a highly specific analogy that it might be best understood as part of Hughes's own personal mythology; in that apparent oxymoron

lies the defensive worth of Hughes's use of 'mythology'. Any kind of inaccurate analogy or interpretive failure may be understood, in this way, as a failure of mythological understanding and cultural membership. Hughes stands as the gatekeeper to that membership.

Hughes continues his explanation of the poem in a similar vein to his defence of the wren description:

> The 'caterpillar', which I describe as the 'bait', is the Grasshopper's own 'belly of amorous life' – which does look and feel like a little caterpillar, among the brittle stalky, raspy, dry-grassy parts of the rest of its body. It throbs and twitches, eager for a mate. (*WP*, p. 318)

Anyone who has much taken part in writing workshops will recognise the plaintive cry of, 'But it does actually feel/look/taste/sound like that!', here rather mitigated by the established poet deigning to help the undistinguished, struggling interpreter. The idea that the grasshopper's belly 'throbs and twitches, eager for a mate', for instance, is more than a small stretch from the actuality of a grasshopper and its stridulations. The closing paragraph of this section of the essay, though, clarifies this transference of connotation to denotation again:

> However this [his explanation of the grasshopper poem] may clarify the 'plot' of the poem, it can never supply on its own the living memory of the total world within which this little action takes place, and on which it still depends for its meanings. It can only be a 'sort of translation' of one world and its mythology into the terms of another world and mythology – my correspondent's, where perhaps it now sits with no more real life than verses (with notes) about Quetzalcoatl. (*WP*, p. 319)

One has to ask why, if such an explanation must ultimately fail to make up for the 'living memory of the total world within which this little action takes place', Hughes bothers to

present it at all. The act of defence, of amendment and elucidation it embodies must be important in and of itself, as a salvaging of authority – and also suggests the lack of that living memory may not be as totally debilitating to the poem's interpretation as he claims. Finally, according to Hughes's argument, the disparate mythological, cultural backgrounds of his readers mean that complete understanding of the mythological-semantic elements is impossible if they are not already shared.

Hughes's complaint that his explanation must fail to 'supply on its own the living memory of the total world within which this little action takes place' is clarified when one considers that the mythological realm is that to which one appeals for the power of charms (*WP*, p. 319). Culler asserts that the efficacy of lyric, embodied by apostrophe, upon a universe of 'potentially responsive forces: forces which can be asked to act or refrain from acting, or even continue behaving as they usually behave' is removed to 'a fictive, discursive event'.[28] That efficacy is removed one step further in Hughes's treatment. The world in which that event takes place, and the event itself, are thus subject to misapprehension and failure if the mythology of that universe is not shared by the reader. As Hughes says earlier in the essay: 'You cannot trust your audience to supply the missing "reality context" of first-hand direct experience and affectionate familiarity: the context of shared understanding of the natural world' (*WP*, p. 315).

The charm-relationship between word and world in fact helps to make sense of Hughes's use of 'mythology' rather than, say, simply experience: along with it comes the sense of loss of power over the world through language. The divergence, the lack of congruence, in the relationship between word and concept in the usage of disparate sub-groups coincides with the loss of spiritual and cultural wholeness. Hughes's healing of

[28] Culler, p. 139.

culture must take place through the cementing of what is already shared, or by the instigation of new mythologies, or be dependent upon some form of non-semantic commonality – or, moreover, be possible through some exceeding of the hyper-rational limitations of interpretation with which Hughes is concerned. There are other reasons Hughes might use mythology as his term – it allows him to claim a cultural importance that possesses the lure of antique wisdom, and allows him to legitimise his explaining how he would like to be read as if his suggested method of reading had primacy over others. Further, it serves to indicate how closely interlinked Hughes's notions of language, culture, interpretation and power really are.

3. 'Livelier Words'

In the preceding section the antagonism between the 'multicultural lingua franca' and 'mythological' understandings helped to negotiate Hughes's ambivalence towards language's representational abilities. So too, here, this antagonism helps to negotiate Hughes's feeling for the primacy of experiential understandings, and his use of the 'multicultural lingua franca'. Hughes suggests in *Poetry in the Making* that 'in a way, words are continually trying to displace our experience'.[29] This cannot be the case with 'mythologies' which claim their provenance from experience of the world – which in fact *constitute* a relationship with the world. This antagonism is present in the experience of writing too. 'If, at the time of writing', 'The Thought Fox', he writes in *Poetry in the Making*, 'I had found livelier words, [...] the fox would probably be even more real and alive to me now […] Still, it is there as it is'.[30] Hughes was prone to extensive redrafting, and so his half-wish to have found 'livelier words'

[29] Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making: An Anthology of Poems and Programmes from 'Listening and Writing'* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 120.
[30] Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 20.

strikes as disingenuous, at least with the implied claim that he is now incapable of changing them, or signifies a very mercurial attitude.[31] Words are, Hughes says, 'learned late and laboriously and easily forgotten' and 'are unnatural, in a way, and far from being ideal for their job'.[32] Given this, he would seem to seek, as he says of Laura Riding, 'a medicine bag of provisional magic and rough improvisations' (*WP*, p. 238).[33] These impressions of writing poetry are much at odds with his experience of writing 'Song', however, whose seemingly quite literal *inspiration* as a form of dictation or possession, Hughes suggests, has bypassed the otherwise problematic relationship language has with reality – at least for him, during its composition.

'Livelier words' again suggests that words might touch base with archetypes common to our consciousnesses: 'Words that live are those which we hear, like "click" or "chuckle", or which we see […], or which we taste, […] or smell'. Hughes is primarily interested, of the five senses, in sound, and goes on to clarify the representational qualities of the sounds of words through, in turn, the other senses, saying that words 'belong to several of the senses at once […]. It is the little goblin in a word which is its life and its poetry, and it is this goblin which the poet has to have under control'. He gives an example of such a goblin in the word '"click"' which 'not only gives you a sound, it gives the notion of a sharp movement such as your tongue makes in saying "click". It also gives you the feel of something light and brittle, like a snapping twig'.[34] Hughes's appeal to sound symbolism, there, reveals another aspect of his attitude to language: that sound symbolism may be depended upon to engender very similar responses among readers.

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[31] See, for instance, Keith Sagar's examination of the drafting process of 'The Dove Came' in Keith Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 87.
[32] Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 119.
[33] Originally published in Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 189.
[34] Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 17, p. 18.

The question arises: if there is the choice of ‘livelier words’, even if they belong to an exclusive ‘mythology’ and are ‘too precise to attract the interpreter’, why does Hughes make use of the ‘multicultural lingua franca’ at all? Reaching an audience beyond his own ‘sub-group’ understanding must be of considerable importance. As he says, the wavelength of the ‘multicultural lingua franca’ ought to be ‘ideally global’ (*WP*, p. 312). Indeed, its usage would be the only way to engender a cohesive effect outside of those cultures which are already whole. Despite the inadequacies of language, there may be a way to provide a crossing between shared and unshared understandings. More than this, though contrary to Hughes’s worries over interpretation, the very fact that such understandings are unshared might be integral to the appeal of a poem – as a personal moment of epiphany, an encounter with otherness. There is a considerable irony in the recognition that those poems which Hughes appear to privilege by appeal to irrational sources, such as ‘Song’ and ‘An Otter’, also represent the purest encounters with alterity. ‘Song’ represents a pure, if momentary, contact with Hughes’s muse, the Goddess, the embodiment of a natural reality; ‘An Otter’ has been dictated to him by the spirit Pan. Both those, and the fox dream he marks as his shamanic initiation, run counter to the rationalistic accounts of writing and interpretation detailed in *Poetry in the Making* and ‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’. Those irrational accounts undoubtedly win him a defensibility of the poems in question. It is a provenance which is difficult to assail, and which contributes a mysticism to his position which marks that role as magical in the same way as Culler’s observations on apostrophe mark that magic as artifice. More, though, it suggests that Hughes ought to be permitted these encounters with alterity so that his tribe – his readership – need not have to face them themselves. Again the analogy is to the shamanic. The shaman leaves his body in ecstasy and comes back changed by alterity, and the wisdom this grants him is used to heal his tribe.

Hughes finds a mirror for his shamanism, the crisis he encounters in disharmonious language and culture, and his (subsequently necessary) use of the lingua franca, in William Shakespeare:

> The anthropologist would ask, if Shakespeare was indeed, in his psychic temperament, a shaman of this kin, why did he appear just then? It seems to be a rule that the shamanic visitation occurs where it is desperately needed. Almost all primitive groups are desperately in need of that help 'from the other side', all the time. Within more evolved, historical cultures, it occurs only at certain moments – typical moments of breakdown or crisis. Throughout history, as countless precedents show, wherever a people, or a culture, or a social group, is threatened either with extinction or ultimate persecution and assimilation by the enemy, the great shaman tends to appear. The lesser shamans heal and solve problems with transcendental help. The great shaman, typically, gathers up the whole tradition of the despairing group especially the very earliest mythic/religious traditions, with all the circumstances of their present sufferings, into a messianic, healing, redemptive vision on the spiritual planes. […] Another would certainly be Eliot […]. Yeats would certainly be another.[35]

Hughes's 'breakdown or crisis' is refracted through his anthropological knowledge of tribal cohesion and language-use (of great importance to him as a poet). If the character of that crisis pertains to language-use itself, there must be a way for poetry to serve as a vehicle to 'heal and solve problems with transcendental help'. The lingua franca Hughes describes is differently nuanced in his discussion of Shakespeare – as part of a technique which promotes cross-cultural understanding. Hughes calls it 'double language', which Shakespeare employs

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[35] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 89.

in order to ‘speak the high language and the low language, simultaneously, at top speed, as if they were one vividly comprehensible language’. When Shakespeare makes use of an ‘over-recondite word’, he ‘interprets it, or translates it, with one or two better-known synonyms, or an explanatory simple phrase, or even a metaphor’.[36]

More than that, though, this device is a linguistic radical of an equation which Hughes extends to the right and left lobes of the brains of interpreters:

> Excluding imagery and emotion, and promoting the rational, analytical verbal formulation of life, in other words lifting the left side into dominance literally by suppressing the right, seems desirable in some situations. But where it becomes habitual, it removes the individual from the ‘inner life’ of the right side, which produces the sensation of living removed from oneself. Not only removed from oneself, but from the world also, and living in a prison of sorts, since the left side screens out direct experience, establishing its verbal ‘system’ as a hard ego of repetitive, tested routines, defensive against the chaos of real things, resisting adaptation to them.[37]

This is a departure from Hughes’s concerns in ‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’. The ‘prison’ is an uncanny, individualised reflection of the ‘cultural stasis’ which Hughes’s ‘mythology’ might amount to (*WP*, p. 311). Nevertheless, there is a slight, though jarring, contradiction in the ‘inner life’ mentioned here and the shamanic, transcendental, conduital role that the poet adopts in order to break that prison. The poet in a sense sanitises the other, makes it approachable, makes it perhaps an image of epiphany rather than epiphanic. A readerly approach requiring ‘importation’, after all, suggests the introduction of *something which does*

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[36] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess*, p. 141.
[37] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess*, p. 158.

not belong in the poem. Metaphor, here, 'is a sudden flinging open of the door into the world of the right side, the world where the animal is not separated from either the spirit or the real world or itself', with the 'curious result' that 'everybody laughs, or at least smiles, or at least feels a sudden lift, a sudden waft of oxygen'.[38] The desire to restrain interpretation, cement preferred experience, homogenise cultural membership – Hughes's shamanic impulse – lies at odds with this operation which opens the door to otherness in the private interpretive worlds of his readers. The lingua franca is shown, through this equation, to be an essential element of that re-encountering of our experience of the world. It can renew the very provisionality of the nature of experiencing *thanks to* the act of estrangement with which Hughes credits it. The shamanic impulse with which Hughes approaches (and constructs) the nexus of culture, power and interpretation, and the hyper-rationalistic worries over regulated response which accompany that nexus, in fact threaten to impoverish this ability for poetry.

Another mirror for these concerns may be found in Wallace Stevens's 'The Idea of Order at Key West'.[39] The poem's topic is song: 'She sang beyond the genius of the sea'. That song is not the sea – not the natural reality which has inspired it: 'The water never formed to mind or voice'; 'it was she and not the sea we heard'. Nevertheless, the song is 'More even than her voice, and ours, among | The meaningless plunging of water and the wind'. Nature and singer – object and subject – disappear in favour of an artifice, an order, which is greater than both. However, the poem is not a lyric. It is not just the singer and the sung-about which disappear, but the song itself. In its stead, we encounter the speaker's idea of order. Interpretation itself is given central position, and it is according to that interpretation that the sky becomes 'acutest at its vanishing', and the hour measured to 'its solitude'.

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[38] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess*, p. 159.
[39] Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West', *The Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), pp. 128-30.

Reality is rejected as ‘meaningless’. Besides, it is nowhere accessed in the poem, but always subordinated to voice: voice concerning voice. Instead, we witness the ‘words of the fragrant portals’ by which the speaker comes to understand ‘ourselves’ and ‘our origins | In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds’. It is the same door which for Hughes opens ‘into the world of the right side, the world where the animal is not separated from either the spirit or the real world or itself’, but the thresholds of Stevens’s portals cannot be crossed. Instead, the interpreter stands in an intermediary position where the seeming-external and the seeming-internal create an order out of each other. It is not the poet – shamanic, conduital – who stands between otherness and internalisation, but individual interpretation. Further, it is the act of interpretation, of ordering, which this poem embodies, which is the locus of its action.

Indeed, it is the locus of the poem’s spirit: ‘Whose spirit is this? We said, because we knew | It was the spirit that we sought’. Hughes subordinates the reader of metaphor to ‘the animal’ who ‘is not separated from either the spirit or the real world or itself’. However, that same animal only encounters spirit, the world, itself as a ‘translation’. That translation is a tool which for Hughes assures Shakespeare’s success – a translation of the lingua franca into the mythological. All aspects are cultural, and all are ratified by the shamanic poet. In Stevens that conduital role is, instead, internalised by the interpreter:

> And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker.

The primary self, in fact, is neither sea nor singer nor song, but belongs to the speaker, the interpreter.

Keith Sagar speaks to Hughes’s use of the ‘multicultural lingua franca’ when he says that Hughes ‘sought a simplicity not of retreat or exclusion but on the far side of experience

and complexity'.[40] The divide between mythological understandings and the 'multicultural lingua franca' does implicate the issue of exclusion and inclusion, however; the exclusionary aspect of 'mythologies' occurs *thanks to* experience. Still, experience is also that through which the poet and the poetry gain a form of authority:

> The other rarer type [of poetry] has the simplicity of an inclusion of everything in a clear solution. We recognize the difference because we recognize in this latter kind that the observer has paid in full for what he records, and what has earned him a superior stake in reality [. . .]. Good folk rhymes have this kind of simplicity – experience itself seems to have produced them.[41]

They seem thus produced because they are so intrinsically linked into our common cultural heritage – our 'mythology' – and perhaps also because they make use of those 'words that live'. The poet, here, is the specialised experiencer, much like the shaman who 'goes to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs'.[42] Following the above remarks on folk rhymes, Hughes goes on to say, 'a writer needs […] the readiness to abandon the verbal charms of conventional poetry'.[43] He does not mean charm as I do here – he means that which is extraneous and merely decorative, in contrast to the necessary 'reckless drive towards essentials'. Here lies the opportunity for a different insight into the way in which words might 'displace our experience' and what might constitute the 'essentials': experience of the world and cultural membership are ratified through whoever is in the position of authority to approve, reiterate, cement and bind such

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[40] Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes*, p. 21.

[41] This is an extract from the introduction written by Ted Hughes for Keith Sagar's book of verse *The Reef*, (Ilkley: Proem Pamphlets, 1980), and also included in *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar*, ed. by Keith Sagar (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2012), p. 301.

[42] Ted Hughes's response to interviewer Ekbert Faas in Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 206.

[43] Sagar, *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar,* p. 301.

experiential meanings for the culture at hand. It is a double-bind in which approved poetry is produced by 'experience itself', and experiential meaning likewise approved by the poetry.

The displacement of experience is an important element of charm, in fact, and this speaks to its hypnotic abilities which may '[push] us or our enemies into a lower state of existence'.[44] Where, in traditional charms, it is 'the power of words over things, the central principle of charm' which 'eventually separates the magician who has the power of words from the bewitched creature who has lost it and become a mere object', here this occurs thanks to an authoritative position from which experience is approved and cemented.[45] The loss of the power of words is a loss of ownership of valid experience, and through the repeated use of 'words that live', a common sound symbolism, even if it does not exist in the first instance, may be cemented. In this way interpretations and response are likewise limited to those which are approved.

I want to make clear, here, that while the defensiveness in Hughes's essay and its corresponding positing of authority are distinct from the charm efficacy of the poems, they nevertheless contribute to its powers – even where they seem to contradict each other. An example is where Hughes says that 'most poems are mixed and generalized enough to provide something for most, and in fact a deliberate confusion of effects will usually elicit a response, since it challenges the interpreter in us, who soon imports an interesting meaning' (*WP*, p. 313). The implication is that, failing an absolute understanding – which is the complaint that guides the whole essay – this will at least suffice. The 'interesting meaning', imported as it is, stands somehow separate from the poem, like a foreign imposition. This, coupled with the generally defensive tone, indicates that Hughes cares at least as much that the poem be judged successful (i.e. that the reader find something of interest) as he does that

[44] Frye, p. 131.
[45] Frye, p. 140.

the reader encounter the poem in the right sort of way (i.e. entering into his preferred shared meanings, his ‘mythology’). Should the charm fail it is nevertheless preferable that the reader not ‘[jib]’ (*WP*, p. 364). In that light, the essay appears as a supplement, an amendment, for where charm has failed. Hughes’s authoritative role as charm-wielder, as shaman and propagator of approved responses to his poetry, appears as an important element of charm, even given that charm and its ‘mythology’ have already failed for the interpreters in question. Indeed the overriding implication is that the interpreters themselves have failed in their ‘jib[bing]’.

One has to question to what extent a reader *really* needs to be intimate with the actual behaviour of a wren or the actual summer world of the grasshopper in order to successfully grasp these poems – and to ask that question is to approach the problem from the other side, with an understanding of those things as they are included in the ‘lingua franca’, rather than in Hughes’s ‘sub-group’. If that lingua franca understanding is so impoverished, so totally incapable of approaching the mythological understanding, then either Hughes has published these poems mistakenly, or for an extraordinarily limited selection of readers, or with total disregard for any readership whatsoever. To suggest that these poems must entirely fail for the reasons Hughes puts forward is, at the very least, to overstate the significance of such ‘naturalistic context’ and to underestimate the imagination’s ability in making up for its lack (*WP*, p. 314). So, in this way, it becomes apparent that something is being harnessed to support where a reader may not share the same mythological set of understandings: those aspects of the poem that make of it a success, through persuasion and compulsion, even in such extreme cases as where semantic meaning may be totally unapproachable by and incomprehensible to the reader. That, too, is charm. If that suggests certain dangers – that a reader may be swept along without fully understanding the referential elements of what he or she is being swept along by – then it is with good reason, since such deployment of charm

may be readily used for ill as well as more benign purposes.[46] The vantage of purpose is a good one from which to view charm's deployment in Hughes's work: charm, here, has been restrained by a more rationalistic appreciation of the world and of language, by anthropological understanding of charm's cultural utilitarian role, and by cultural splintering of the charm's audience. It is charm's purpose to facilitate a crossing between 'mythological' understandings – through harmonising, homogenising, and compulsion. This amounts to Hughes's recommended reading strategy, which results from his hyper-rational concerns over the limitations of language. The reading strategy of importation – representing a form of dissent – which permits private encounters with the other, run counter to this sanctioned and sanitised encounter with the alterity which Hughes has pre-approved. Indeed, the implication is that this encounter is not with alterity, per se, at all – but with familiarity-as-reality, with the correct way of being.

The act of buying into a fiction, as Hughes says of magic, then, becomes tantamount to the success of both the poem and the charm, such that if a reader encounters interpretive problems not adequately made up for by charm techniques, the poem is a failure.[47] It becomes apparent, there, why Hughes is so insistent that we believe in the possibility for poems to have effect, by some mysterious means, upon the world, and likewise why he insists on particular interpretive approaches, the outcome of which serves to dictate the reader's imaginative participation. Success of language whose correspondence Hughes can claim as consistent across cultures without the degradation of the 'multicultural lingua franca', success of charm, positing of authority, and success of the poem become tied together.

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[46] As Malinowski says, 'the subject of advertisements' is 'perhaps the richest field of modern verbal magic', and 'modern political oratory would probably yield a rich harvest of purely magical elements. Some of the least desirable of modern pseudo-statesmen or gigantic politicanti have earned the titles of wizards or spell-binders.' Malinowski, p. 237 and p. 238.
[47] Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series'.

For Hughes the most successful of poems somehow covers the greatest distance in bridging the gap between the lingua franca and the 'mythology' to which it belongs – in so doing, the reader assents to being drawn from their familiar world of meanings and into the possibility of another, where language takes on a particular kind of associative and allusive correspondence that Hughes calls mythological. The trick is in allowing the poem close enough to the lingua franca so the reader is not repulsed by the unintelligible, while also keeping it as far away from the lingua franca as possible to allow the greatest distance to be traversed. It is in traversing that distance that the poem generates much of its pleasure: 'Between the sitting or standing person and the same person dancing there gapes an immense biological gulf. […] Almost as a rule it produces the most intense pleasure [to leap that gulf]' (*WP*, p. 335). Alongside this process Hughes provides a support structure for the charm's effects, found in claims to authority, defensive expositions of intention, and prescriptive accounts of interpretation. After all, 'let us remember', Malinowski reminds us, 'it must be the voice of the accredited and fully instructed magician, and […] his voice must correctly utter the words of an absolutely authentic spell'.[48]

4. 'The Horses' as a Crossing from the 'Multi-cultural Lingua Franca' to a 'Mythology'

The third interpreter of 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' is Roy Fuller, and the poem is 'The Horses' (*CP*, p. 22-23). The poem itself dramatises and enacts the meeting of the worlds, languages, and mythologies Hughes adduces as part of his interpretive theory. Fuller 'seized

[48] Malinowski, p. 216.

on that last line' of 'The Horses' ('Hearing the horizons endure'), 'and pointed out, confidently, that it was "unsayable"' (*WP*, p. 320). 'Confidently' is a beautiful stroke from which Fuller's opinion can only fall, and Hughes conducts his defence as before in mock neutrality, managing to appear as much as possible merely the helpful instructor. Fuller's criticism is the fulcrum from which Hughes's argument swells, and it is telling that Fuller, in fact, at no point in his review says any such thing. What Fuller does say is that this line is one of the book's 'very bad patches', and that 'such things seem ill-judged rather than pretentious – the ill-judgement of a young poet who is preserving too many poems to make a first book'.[49] His complaints are more to do with diction: 'The energy of the diction seemed not quite to correspond to the energy of the poetic impulse: it is fatally easy, once the trick has been discovered, to use verbs like smash, crash, bang and hurl'. The incorrect assignation of the criticism 'unsayable' to Fuller originates in a letter to Craig Raine of 1982 in which, discussing the metricality of some pieces Hughes had put forth to the then-editor at Faber for the book *What Is the Truth?* (though Raine was not that book's editor), Hughes devotes a paragraph to the aside:

> Roy Fuller quoted my romantic line 'Hearing the horizons endure' as an example of my metrical imbecility, and called it (I think) 'unsayable'. On the other hand, I was specially proud of it. In fact, it still seems to me that if you're going to say it at all, you can only say it as I want it said. It's just that Roy Fuller refuses to surrender his officer's moustache, even provisionally. (*LTH*, p. 454)

Fuller is a straw man around whom Hughes is able to construct his defensive, instructive argument.

[49] Roy Fuller, 'Review of *The Hawk in the Rain*', *The London Magazine*, 5.1 (1958), p. 61.

I want to look at how 'The Horses' helps to illuminate Hughes's notions of 'mythology' in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', even before he begins to contradict Fuller's supposed claim that his line, 'Hearing the horizons endure', is unsayable. The poem is quite explicitly one of oppositional states which are created by sites of potential activity, some of which come to fulfil that potential (for instance, between frost and thaw, stillness and movement). The poem begins in the pre-dawn hour in which 'evil air, a frost-making stillness' has left the world 'cast in frost', quite 'still' and 'silent'. In fact, the poem has 'frost' twice, 'stillness' and 'still', and two iterations of 'silent' in the first fifteen lines, sitting alongside breath as 'tortuous statues' in 'iron light', the 'dense grey' of the air, that the horses are like 'megalith[s]' and are 'making no move, | […] Making no sound'. The horses are also 'huge' (as well as 'megalith[s]'), 'grey', and the world in which they stand is also 'grey' (fourfold 'grey', in fact). The bludgeoning tautology is not simply an unconfident conjuring of ambience and theme, or a clumsy attempt at emphasis; rather, just as the stillness, immensity, silence and lack of colour are established again and again, so too do their counterparts enter the poem and advance with every reminder of their opposite. This is assisted by the constant reminders of kinetic and temporal potential of the scene found in 'but the valleys were draining the darkness', 'blackening dregs of the brightening grey', that the horses 'mak[e] no move' or 'sound', and the negated image in 'not one snorted or jerked its head'. The dawn is an inevitable presence from the first line, and its thawing influence anticipated.

The effect of this is of a narrator straining to see, to sense movement, and to hear, with the implication that there is colour, movement, sound in presence but beneath his detection. Nevertheless, he detects their presence, the possibility of their apprehension, and

attempts to mine his way through to them.[50] The repetitions are signs of the narrator's senses being refuted; each inquiry into the scene's nature returns the same result, though with the growing possibility of breakthrough. The effect of the recurrent inquiries indicated in the repetitions is of wearing down the scene's resistance, much as Hughes's claims his poem 'Earth-numb' did to the salmon. 'Repeating an idea or a word strengthens it', Jonathan Roper states in 'Towards a Poetics, Rhetorics and Proxemics of Verbal Charms'.[51] While the narrator moves past, finding himself at odds with his surroundings, what he manages is only hard-won repetitive understanding eked out of an unyielding world. The air, to him, is 'evil', and even the megalithic horses keep him still just long enough to document their stillness. It is only when he stops and '[listens] in emptiness on the moor-ridge' that he hears the curlew's 'tear' that 'turn[s] its edge on the silence' which heralds dawn. In listening 'in emptiness' he bends himself to the demands the scene seems to be making of him. Before that, the horses are 'grey silent fragments || Of a grey still world'. The horses are beyond parsing by the narrator's understanding of things, and the world to which they belong, sequestered from the reach of his senses, can be encountered only partially in the form of these fragments. The strophe-breaks around 'Of a grey still world', the only single-line strophe in the poem, enact the silence of that world through blank space; so the silent world of the horses begins to seep into the narrative, and the narrator enters it slowly with the coming of the dawn, as 'slowly detail leaf[s] from the darkness'.

The sun's arrival enacts an epiphanic revelation:

Then the sun

Orange, red, red erupted.

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[50] See Hughes's remark about Coleridge later in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms': '[He] was constantly digging through to a sea of music that he could hear but not reach. Like somebody imprisoned in a tossing galleon – his only release was into that music'. *WP*, p. 331.

[51] Jonathan Roper, 'Towards a Poetics, Rhetorics and Proxemics of Verbal Charms', *Folklore*, 24 (2003), 7-49 (p. 20).

Silently, and splitting to its core tore and flung cloud,

Shook the gulf open, showed blue,

And the big planets hanging –

The light and colour come forcefully, that repetition of 'red' highlighting how its sounds are then scattered across the verb 'erupted', a striking rendering of the chromatic eruption through the sounds. The stresses of the line, too, seem to swell, stronger with each one, allowed a little space by the two commas, such that the *e* of 'erupted' is like a small intake of breath before 'red' is again attempted but exploded by the sudden *rupt*, only to be picked up again by the diminished unstressed syllable *ed*. The shift of gear in the attention paid to sound patterning is made all the more apparent by the realisation that what is happening happens 'silently'. The positioning of the rhyming 'core tore' is achieved only by unusual use of syntax, with the result that the two colliding equal stresses create an unpunctuated caesura in the line. The lack of punctuation suggests as much collision as tearing apart, a violence generated by just that collision that is found in those two wide-mouthed, awe-filled sounds smashing each other. The caesura is a space between two symmetrical sides, predicting the shaking open of the gulf in the next line. The constant reminder, the narrator's experience, is that there ought to be sound here, or that there *is* sound but it cannot be heard in a conventional manner. The twisted syntax of that line beginning 'silently', which makes it at first seem that it is the sun 'splitting to its core' implies a revelation in the act and manner of seeing, and not just a sudden application of light. So when the narrator sees 'the big planets hanging' (in fact, the sun explicitly 'show[s]' them to him), we understand the sight as somehow supernatural – after all, even if he were able to see a planet, it is unlikely he would see more than one or two, and they would hardly have the ponderous hugeness that the line

suggests. The narrator senses them, their immensity, hanging weightless above him (though the effect is of the sudden realisation crashing down).

With that realisation, he turns, ‘Stumbling in the fever of a dream’, compelled. The slight reeling horror of the line reminds one of Northrop Frye’s remark on certain ‘states of mind, where one experiences the real horror and malignancy of being under a spell [which are] usually states of nightmare or insomnia’.[52] Here, though, it is of the spell of the mundane being broken – the awe of it is that this is somehow more real. The effect is one of being pushed or drawn from one’s usual waking appreciation of the world into a different and unsettling one that is nevertheless insistent on its equal, even greater validity. The narrator’s arrival at the horses is sudden, with a foreshortened line:

> And came to the horses.
>
> There, still they stood,
>
> But now steaming and glistening under the flow of light,
>
> Their draped stone manes, their tilted hind-hooves
>
> Stirring under a thaw while all around them
>
> The frost showed its fires. But still they made no sound.

His arrival is also utterly unexplained – the realisation that shook open the sky, showed him the immense turning worlds above, passes beyond critical interrogation. The break in the line across ‘horses. | There’ generates an abruptness that suggests the narrator’s surprise at coming to them again, and the time and space required to absorb that fact. The difference between the two encounters with the horses turns on the word ‘still’, now used in the

[52] Frye, p. 128.

adverbial. The change marks an aliveness to the numinous in the narrator. Even though the horses are as motionless and as soundless as before – emphatically so, with the addition of ‘stone’ in the refrain-like description – the way towards the beginnings of understanding has been opened. The surroundings act upon them as they did not before, stirring their manes and hind-hooves, though they themselves are not given agency: ‘Not one snorted or stamped’. The final meeting of the two parties on a common ground is made clear by the ‘red levelling rays’ of dawn that illuminate them. Somehow the world that at first seemed barren and lifeless has drawn the narrator back and shown how it might begin to be interpreted. He has been charmed into that realm – though a full comprehension is still beyond reach. The poem ends with two strophes that show in smaller scale the meeting of the two worlds:

> In din of the crowded streets, going among the years, the faces,
> May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place
>
> Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews,
> Hearing the horizons endure.

Finally the sound of the ‘horizons endur[ing]’ (in which echoes another scattering of ‘red’ and ‘erupted’) – an otherwise visual phenomenon – is undefined, approached only as a general apprehension of a world going on around the fleeting images of ‘crowded streets’, and so on. Even as a memory, the suggestion is that it is a thing quite external to the narrator, to which he is drawn, seeking as he does to ‘meet my memory’. The effect of the charm lingers long after the enactment of it, much as the poem that ‘stands there, permanent, vivid and powerful, and tries to make [the poet] continue to live in its image’.[53] The transition in the poem from silence and soundlessness to hearing (though the only explicit sound is the

[53] Hughes, ‘Ted Hughes: “The Critical Forum” Series’.

curlew) marks how the poem is narrating the effect of charm through sound. If that sound which the narrator strains to hear were heard conventionally – and therefore understood – one imagines the effect of the charm would be shattered, and the world of the horses would remain unthawed or return to frost – the image of them, how they are encountered, would be dictated by the narrator's unaltered worldview. The epiphany is inexplicable, and remains as such because otherwise it would cease to be epiphanic – much akin to those aspects that function as charms, according to Frye, 'as long as they are not understood'.[54] The intellect remains repulsed even as the horses stir. The organising principle that might be found in what might be heard remains distant and half-felt, hardly understood.

Following Hughes's notion of 'mythology', the narrator has been drawn to that common ground in which the horses are able to mean more, within that world of special associations, than the 'lingua franca' version of themselves. The poem emerges as a figurative narration of the kind of interpretation Hughes discusses in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. The difference, though, is that the narrator, at first utterly unable to interpret the horses and their world, is nevertheless drawn into doing so – into a realm of seemingly extra-rational meaning that is the counterpart to the way in which Hughes suggests mythologically-charged words, symbols and scenes also transmit their especial meanings. Charm is the way in which this is achieved within the poem's narrative, with the suggestion that it might be how it can be achieved in the poem's language also. It is important to differentiate between what is said to happen in the poem, and how the narrator reacts, and how the poem might act upon a reader. They are, of course, not always necessarily distinct – sympathy might well lead a reader to follow quite closely the psychic journey or transition undertaken by or enacted upon the narrator.

[54] Frye, p. 138.

For this section of my inquiry, I want to emphasise how much a model this is of Hughes's mythologically-based ideas about interpretation. The Hughes of 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' 'set[s] aside … the dilemma' of how a work might appeal to a reader outside of the author's and the work's set of mythological meanings (*WP*, p. 312). More than this, he seems outright pessimistic: even explaining a poem 'can only be a "sort of translation" of one world and its mythology into the terms of another world and mythology – my correspondent's' (*WP*, p. 312). If this were truly the case, Hughes would hardly have bothered to pen such an exhaustive – and explanatory, defensive – account of how his work ought to be approached. The essay, as I have suggested, begins to look increasingly like an attempt to fix where his poetry has been less than fully persuasive, and in that way appears as an amendment to charm technique. 'The Horses' suggests this transition between mythological understandings is possible. If we follow Hughes's assertion that such a transition between those topographies can only be a sort of 'translation', it *appears* that the location where reader and author – indeed where the tribe – ought to be reconciled is a location outside of referential meaning, in *reality*. That is why the seemingly fantastical description of the hanging planets, the suddenly stirring horses, come across with such impact – these experiences are presented as closer to the real than quotidian apprehensions of the world, the 'din of the crowded streets'. However, *appearance* is key. Hughes's encompassing of cultural, natural, *real* centre-point *within the referentiality of language* as 'mythology' means that the extra-referential, the truly other, is always occluded, always put to one side in favour of commonly-held values and world-views. Indeed, the static understandings of Hughes's paradisal form of a 'mythology' (such as that he suggests the Hopi woman partakes of) are what, for him, *constitute* a proper relationship with nature and reality – those understandings, finally, *are*, in Hughes's treatment, that reality. Hughes is always aware of language's positioning on that spectrum between 'some sub-group's' understanding and the 'lingua franca', a fact which delimits most of charm's

traditional '"special language" of power' to deployment of sound patterning and other structuring elements.

This is visible in the sounds and repetitions of 'The Horses', devices which bear a striking resemblance to Jonathan Roper's description of 'significant sound' in his essay 'Towards a Poetics, Rhetorics and Proxemics of Verbal Charms':

> So, syllables with a high degree of semantic redundancy, which are frequently found in charm traditions of this and other cultures, may still be significant: not semantically, but as significant sound. This notion allows us to see how echoic series of phrases, nonsense syllables and near-nonsense syllables, abracadabra words, foreign words, macaronicisms, nonce words, unclear archaisms, tautological expressions, magic names […], holy names […], synonyms, epithets, attributes, euphemisms and other forms of extended naming can, by realizing significant sound patterns, be significant.[55]

Thanks to the constraints of the lingua franca/sub-group situation which Hughes illuminates through the term of 'mythology' there are few examples of the devices above. There are few instances of apostrophe and limited magical naming, beyond isolated examples such as the apostrophic 'Littleblood' (1970) (*CP*, p. 258). Charm should be understood as part of an attitude which pervades Hughes's desires for his poetry's efficacy, rather than being limited to particular tropes and figures whose effects Hughes's account of language has thrown into doubt.

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[55] Roper, pp. 9-10. For comparison, Malinowski: 'The weirdness [of magical language] consists very largely in artificial form, in the ungrammatical use of certain roots, in reduplications or couplings, in mythological references and concrete topographical allusions. There are magical pseudonyms for objects or animals. There are certain esoteric allusions. But on the whole it is formal presentation of the spell which gives the magical imprint to the language.' Malinowski, p. 230. And Frye: 'Refrain, rhyme, alliteration, pun, antithesis: every repetitive device known to rhetoric comes into play'. Frye, p. 126.

In ‘The Horses’, there is the presence of a device similar to a ‘historiola’, which Roper defines as:

> The little story [which] presents an analogy between the recent situation and a mythical precedent, in which, to use the jargon of the structural analysts of folktales, a lack is ‘liquidated’.

The mythical precedent is the encounter with the horses in an epiphanic moment, and the ‘din of the crowded streets’ is the recent situation. The memory is brought forth to liquidate a lack of contact with reality, as if the memory were a talisman. The trope follows that of verbal charms which attempts to assert ‘as A, so B’: ‘Typically, A is a natural, inevitable, beneficent process, and B is a process currently desired by the charmer and his patient. The charmer, by yoking together these concepts […] works magic by analogy’. As a form of ‘benediction’, it follows the appropriate formula, ‘[relying] on the modals such as “may”’, as in ‘may I still meet my memory’.[56]

With the efficacy of charm’s ‘“special language”’ thrown into doubt, in the splintered state of cultures and languages Hughes considers the Western world, that efficacy is indeed transferred mostly to ‘magic by analogy’: the process of reading the poem. In Roper’s analysis of verbal charms, this approaches the ‘thought-world’ he mentions: ‘The thought-world of the charmer and the charmed must also be vital in the process; this is acknowledged by those who ascribe any benefits accruing from the use of verbal charms in healing to psychosomatic processes’.[57] Hughes cites such psychosomatic processes in his explanations of healing and psychic energy, as is visible in his discussion of magical poetry. It is this alignment of thought-worlds, through the success of the poem’s charm, over our limited

[56] Roper, p. 22, p. 26.
[57] Roper, p. 9.

referential understandings, that brings about cultural harmony and, so Hughes claims, reconciliation with nature.

Although Hughes rarely makes use of blatant apostrophe, there is another exception in the form of a poem from *Crow*: 'Glimpse' (1970) (*CP*, p. 256). I refer to it here because it helps to encapsulate some of the concerns I have just mentioned:

> 'O leaves', Crow sang, trembling, 'O leaves—'
>
> The touch of a leaf's edge at his throat
> Guillotined further comment.
> Nevertheless
> Speechless he continued to stare at the leaves
>
> Through the god's head instantly substituted.

While Neil J. Roberts cautions us to 'remember that Crow had his head cut off for singing "O leaves"', the poem in fact describes a moment where Crow demonstrates uncharacteristic apprehension of the world beyond himself.[58] All at once Crow sees through to nature, to reality, an act that requires immediate self-sacrifice in the form of a literalised ecstasy: he is decapitated and his head 'instantly substituted' for a god's. This is simultaneously the transition between kinds of vision – from the frozen world of illusory references to the thawed one of epiphany and repulsion of the rational intellect – that 'The Horses' narrates. It is also that of shamanic experience wherein the shaman acts as conduit between our realm and the real: 'Shamans become, briefly, incarnations of the sacrificed God' (*LTH*, p. 581).

[58] Neil J. Roberts, 'Hughes & The Female Addressee', *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (e-book edition) (Lisse: Taylor & Francis, 2005) p. 79.

The embarrassment of the apostrophic and the restriction of charm-address find Hughes only comfortable deploying it through his character Crow – and, with this exception, Crow is otherwise unable to manage such glimpses of the real. Indeed, in that poem the word 'leaves' appears to achieve a total, embodying correspondence with the object Crow is addressing – and it is only in narration of an entirely fictionalised world that this can work. Likewise, 'Littleblood', the instance of magical naming mentioned above, is also from *Crow*. The poem's being placed in sequence with the other *Crow* poems makes its apostrophic mode truly limited to that fictional universe. Even there, the lack which apostrophe embodies is clear. Just as littleblood '[Eats] the medical earth', so too does it '[Suck] death's mouldy tits'; the life of littleblood – our lives – is sustained by death (*CP*, p.258). Its survival is also its cancellation. Invoking littleblood invokes not only its absence, but the speaker's own death: 'Sit on my finger, sing in my ear, O littleblood'.

The annihilation of self – involving, in 'Glimpse', shamanic dismemberment – that communing with reality brings about, is extended, later in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' to the reader who manages to leap the 'gulf', thereby participating in the act of reading metre (or, in Hughes's analogy, dancing) (*WP*, p. 335). Hughes himself demonstrates marked ambivalence over the decision between the power of will – attempted control over certain readings, the defensiveness of the essay at hand – and the road to self-abnegation. Hughes's claim on reality, as the location in which his unifying and healing effects take place, is a move that possesses a certain unequivocality, and, through his argumentation, a form of cultural immunity. The only judgment for the success of that unifying and that healing is the success of the poem itself. This, of course, is a dangerous observation. Much of charm technique might then be directed towards assuring a kind of authority that returns the value of 'success' – i.e., compulsion, of a lack of disagreement with the poem, regardless of the referential content of the poem at hand. In that mode, Hughes can be as manipulative, even tyrannical.

In this way, Hughes's shamanic charm-using role and his use of charm in the poetry are mobilised towards the same goal: a position from which readers may be 'instruct[ed]' when they '[jib]', authority may be maintained, and the efficacy of the poetry harnessed for cultural cohesion which occurs according to that position, through that individual as conduit. In this chapter I have shown that, in Hughes's mind, charm's '"special language" of power' has been rendered inoperative by a lack of cultural cohesion – by a lack of congruent mythological thought-worlds on which charm depends for its acknowledged, thoroughly understood effects upon the (mythologised) world. The repetition of structural elements, such as those in 'The Horses', may still function, and it is by their repetition that their function is made clear and assured. It appears that, in Hughes's mind, sound symbolism might be depended upon to garner common responses from readers, too. I will pursue this desire to constrain response and limit interpretations in the next chapter, alongside Hughes's thoughts on violence, sound, metre and rhythm, and further investigation of the repercussions for the individual and for culture.

Chapter 3: To Leap that Gulf: Charm's Assault on the Readerly Ego and Hughes's Unpublished Remarks Concerning Violence

The previous chapter described the operation of charm technique and the purposes it is put to in aiding the traversing of the gap between, in Ted Hughes's terms, shared and unshared 'mythologies'. There is a certain catchment area in which charm can operate to facilitate a crossing into a partially shared mythological domain, which is the process my close reading of 'The Horses' explored. It is not until the narrator of 'The Horses' 'listens in silence', thereby bending himself to the demands of the scene at hand, that the scene begins to become interpretable, impressive, effective. We readers are invited to do the same.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how charm techniques aid in overcoming the problems in 'interpretation' Hughes puts forth, whether they are bound by the same dilemmas Hughes expounds upon in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', and the repercussions for charm's targets. Much of what I am going to discuss draws on Hughes's ideas of interpretation as expressed in that essay but also necessarily disagrees with or differs from those ideas. 'Mythology' in this chapter should be taken as incorporating Hughes's views on interpretation in that essay in light of the previous chapter's findings, and also the notion of the mythological universe to which charm appeals for its effects. Mythology comes to encompass thought-worlds, community, culture, and involve their harmonisation (healing) through charm. I will also trace an undercurrent of anxiety in Hughes regarding the success of the poem, one that finds Hughes reluctant to release his work to the full participatory capabilities of charm. Furthermore, I draw on archival research of Hughes's unpublished writing to better see the character of efficacy he aims for – one consonant with violence and ritual.

More than this, the manner of readerly participation and Hughes's desired outcomes of reading his poems are inextricably linked. Those outcomes can be simplified as either: 1) a reading which produces no argument – no critical engagement – on the part of the reader; which solidifies familiarity, homogeneity in terms of an interpretation's similarity to all others within the culture to which it belongs; which likewise reinforces the wholeness (in Hughes's positive nuance) of that culture and helps to ensure similar future interpretations of those readers belonging to it; or 2) a reading whose value centres around an encounter with what is other to the reader rather than what is familiar; which emphasises personal revelation over public solidarity; which invites critical engagement and varying meaning; whose effect is the recognition of the self's mutability, provisionality, such that it might readily be changed by (and incorporate) the otherness it encounters. Hughes's orientation is not entirely toward the former, but where he does espouse that kind of reading – that healing – it is damaging to the capabilities of the latter possibilities for reading. It is damaging to the very poetic capabilities of the poem – what makes a poem a poem, rather than a piece of religious doctrine.

The nature of reality is directly implicated in the binary above. In the first instance the reality which the poem attempts to contact – which the reader attempts to contact – is a common cultural ground inflected with Hughes's political, moral, mythic concerns. That is the 'mythology' he espouses and which the poem makes use of, the 'picture language' whose purpose is to make the world 'accessible to casual reference' but which, if followed absolutely, must also necessarily limit that world itself by the manner and restriction of its reference (*WP*, 310). In the second part of the binary, reality is not limited or exhausted by language or vice-versa. Reality instead is extralinguistic, irrational, exceeds reference, and is experienced moreover in the very recognition of the provisionality of consciousness and of self. Experience of it is liminal, Stevens's 'fragrant portals', Hughes's 'sudden flinging open

of the door into the world of the right side' of the brain, where 'the animal is not separated from either the spirit or the real world or itself.'[1]

Critical understanding of charm in relation to these two outcomes outlined above proposes a continuum in technique between charm-as-hypnosis-or-compulsion on the one hand and riddle-as-revelation on the other. 'The riddle is essentially a charm in reverse: it represents the revolt of the intelligence against the hypnotic power of commanding words'.[2] 'If in riddle names are the consequence of things [...] then in the charms things are a consequence of names'.[3] This continuum (that riddle is a charm-reversal) indicates a fundamental similarity in their natures, and in a sense it is the space between those two poles which this study has been exploring. Importantly, a deployment of charm in language *can be a riddle* if approached by a reader in such a way that, rather than being compelled by it, she recognises and dismantles it through critical attention. Likewise a riddle can be a charm if one fails to answer the Sphinx's question and is accordingly destroyed. This is not to deny the accounting of charm-technique-as-such or riddle-as-such in a text, but to point out how integral readerly response is in deciding which is which. It is also why I present riddle-revelation as an *outcome* rather than as a device distinct from charm. In – and thanks to – charm, both outcomes are possible along a continuum of probability. Indeed, this range across which charm operates is contiguous (though certainly not entirely congruous) with a series of crude continua, which can be outlined in the following oppositions: aesthetic / utilitarian; lingua franca / mythology; private / public; personal / congregational; Hughes's defensiveness / his more open-handed pronouncements; irrationality / rationality; interpretive freedom / constraint; fragmentation / wholeness; otherness / familiarity; difference /

[1] Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West', *The Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), p. 130. Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 159.
[2] Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 137.
[3] Andrew Welsh, *Roots of Lyric* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 160.

homogeneity; the aleatory / the pre-decided or pre-conditioned. In my own poetics a further simplified continuum exists: Wallace Stevens / Ted Hughes.

So it is instructive to follow Hughes's account of Roy Fuller's failure to read the line 'hearing the horizons endure' as an account of charm's radical components – sound and rhythm – and how the defensive posture of that account illuminates Hughes's use of charm, his expectations of it, his desired readerly outcomes according to it, and how sound and rhythm operate (or ought to operate) to assure its effects (*CP*, p. 23). Those effects encompass assent, cultural identity, and access to a cultural common ground and consciousness over which the poet presides.

1. Audience, Sound and Self; Charm Targets

Before coming to Hughes's discussion of rhythm and sound in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', however, an examination of sound's importance to Hughes helps to establish its poetic, congregational, spirit- and reality-reaching powers. That importance, in terms of how sound functions upon a recipient and in terms of its referentiality, is best observed in the theory behind his project-cum-play-cum-language *Orghast*, performed in 1971 at the Festival of Arts of Shiraz-Persepolis. Here again, Hughes's desire for the kind of 'deeper shared understandings which keep us intact as a group' is clear (*WP*, p. 310). Hughes delineates the philosophy behind the project in a short essay in *Winter Pollen*, originally published in *Vogue*, December 1971:

> In this special kind of drama, the real poetic potential would lie in the physical events, which would be of a special sort, and in the pattern of their sequence, but above all in

> the actor. The actor is the problem. [...] An inspired director is helpless if the actor is closed. Finally everything depends on what the actor finds, and how purely he can release it. [...] To sensitize an actor to the poetic reality of a situation, so that he can open it wide and release it purely, is a matter of immensely arduous psychic tempering [...]. To teach him to do what almost nobody can do, to teach him to become the vehicle for a spirit, not for a bundle of repressed passions, but for those powers much closer to the source, that speak and move so strangely, but who supply everything finally that we really want and need, and who once we have met them threaten to make our whole life seem trivial and false, that is almost impossible. (*WP*, p. 126)

The actor's role in this situation is as a 'vehicle' for otherness. The actor must give himself up, for at least a limited period of time, to 'a spirit', to forces which are outside of him, and this is what makes the action 'poetic', gives the situation 'poetic reality'. This is the language of possession and of ecstasy, and these statements help us to see through to the forms of ecstasy at work in Hughes's thinking and writing. The actor must '*jump the gulf*' in a manner similar to the reader of rhythm in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', in an act of self-sacrifice and 'immensely arduous psychic tempering' which leaves him altered (*WP*, p. 364).

This role is different from either that of the reader or the writer, though; the actor's job is to bring back 'everything finally that we really want and need'. Indeed, his job is similar to that of the shaman who 'goes to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs'.[4] He does so under guidance, though, and is not hindered by the problems of 'mythology' – of interpretation – because of the artificiality of the play's language. Unlike Hughes as shaman-poet, the actor does not

[4] Ted Hughes's response to interviewer Ekbert Faas in Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 206.

decide the language, and is instructed to prevent any 'jib[bing]' (*WP*, p. 364). In order to reach this state, Hughes and Peter Brooks devised a language without referential meaning (at least initially), attempting to reach an 'instinctive recognition of a "mental state" within a sound.'[5] A.C.H. Smith in *Orghast at Persepolis* elucidates the goals behind this succinctly:

> if a sound may transmit a complicated mental state to *anyone*, regardless of his native tongue, providing the right sound can be found, the implication would be that there exists in the human race a common tonal consciousness, 'a language belonging below the levels where differences appear', in Hughes's words. It would be a finding about vocabulary parallel to Noam Chomsky's case that identical 'deep structures' of grammar exist in every human mind, and are 'biologically determined'.[6]

Hughes and Brooks sought a tonal archetype to human consciousness in much the same way as Hughes recognises mythological archetypes in the shifting of cultures.[7] Such a language would be biologically rather than culturally motivated. In reality, such a play becomes a microcosm of the way in which language can accrue referentiality from context:

> When they have a new sound which has no precise intellectual content they have to search their resources for an actuality which will give it content – unless they're just going to make it empty noise. They reach for the most living feeling in them at the moment [...]. The real issue is to confront their whole response at that moment.[8]

The language accrues its meaning largely from the action of the play and the manner in which it is spoken by the actor (which in turn is related to the action, and under direction). The

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[5] A.C.H Smith, *Orghast at Persepolis* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), pp. 46-47. Smith is quoting an interview with Tom Stoppard in *The Times Literary Supplement* (1 October, 1971).
[6] Smith, p. 47.
[7] See, for instance, Hughes's tracing of the myth of the Goddess: 'Tiamat, the monstrous Mother of First Created Things […] takes on a double existence as Inanna (Ishtar, Astarte, Athtar, etc.), who is Goddess of love […] and Ereshkigal (Allatu, etc.), who is Goddess of the Underworld'. Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess*, p. 6.
[8] Smith, p. 49. Smith is quoting from notes Hughes has given him directly.

audience here has no opportunity to construct – to perform – tone, rhythm, sound for itself, but must in a sense solve the complementary relationship between sound and meaning. This is similar to what Hughes will go on to say regarding the reader who leaps the gulf by assenting to 'musical interpretation' in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', and it is also what Roy Fuller has failed to do in reading 'The Horses' (*WP*, p.334). The actor, when he is not 'the problem', is the perfect vehicle for Hughes's preferred deployment of sound and rhythm in such a way as to complement (construct) semantic and expressive meaning. This form of active participation is impossible for the audience. There is no Roy Fuller among it who can hear a differing intonation, or fail to find any intonation at all. The effect, the goal, of this situation is made clearest by a note Hughes has written in a notebook, dated 17 January 1968:

> Healing fictions are a permanent norm. The only altering thing is resistance to them i.e. the state of mind of the audience. […] Compare it with the state of mind of a church congregation, even of an opera audience. The necessary thing now is some way of unifying the audience—sense of occasion raised to the 40th power—& divided from the day/ordinary […] mind. Is Brook doing this […]?[9]

The audience is unified in the way charm seeks: through a sense of ritual action (of 'occasion raised to the 40th power'), congruency of thought-worlds, the breaking down of its resistance in order to make its members malleable – so that they might be, in Hughes's term, healed. The audience of the play encounters its strangeness, but they only bear witness to the show of ecstasy the actors perform. Their encounter is with a representation of an encounter with otherness. Furthermore, even the actor is likely to quickly familiarise himself with the language and action of a scene, and thereafter to *act* rather than undergo any fundamentally

[9] British Library, Edward James Hughes Papers, Unpublished poetry drafts and personal reflections, 17 January 1968-2 August 1984, Add MS 88918/9/9, fol. 2.

transformative event. In contrast to this, Hughes undergoes shamanic flight into reality and brings back record of an encounter with it as poetry. Those 'initiation dreams', Hughes says,

> the general schema of the shamanic flight, and the figures and adventures they encounter, are not a shaman monopoly: they are, in fact, the basic experiencing of the poetic temperament we call 'romantic' [...]. The shamans seem to undergo, at will and at phenomenal intensity, and with practical results, one of the main regenerating dramas of the human psyche: the fundamental poetic event. (*WP*, p. 58)

Hughes's 'fundamental poetic event', much like the actor's sensitisation to the 'poetic reality' of the situation, is brought about by 'regenerating dramas' much as it is by 'healing fictions'. Healing, poetic event, tribal unification performed by the shaman, and the necessary breaking down of 'resistance' to perform it are all conflated. It requires the gathering of particular modes of consciousness through which cultural (tribal) identity and membership is established and/or reaffirmed, much like a 'church congregation'.[10] This is not just a championing of utilitarian readings of poetry, but a propagandist one. It is only, in fact, *by not entirely belonging to the mythological picture language of the poem that a reader can encounter any otherness at all.* An encounter with the unfamiliar, however, comes at the high cost of the poem being deemed (at first, or possibly always) 'unsayable', uninterpretable – and of Hughes's being likewise toppled from his position as shaman-poet and leader of the tribe (*WP*, p, 320).

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[10] Compare Frye: 'Charms can also be social, and one use of repetition is to bind the community into a single enterprise' in Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 128; and Malinowski: 'Modern political oratory would probably yield a rich harvest of purely magical elements. Some of the least desirable of modern pseudo-statesmen or gigantic politicanti have earned the titles of wizards or spell-binders', in Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic, Volume Two: The Language of Magic and Gardening* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), p. 238.

Hughes's thoughts on the antagonism between intellect and instinct are concomitant with the activity of charm and its actions upon its recipients. For the actors of *Orghast*, the search for an 'instinctive recognition of a "mental state" within a sound' runs parallel with a lack of 'precise intellectual content'. Intelligent, critical engagement is suppressed for the sake of instinctual response. That antagonism also typifies the sickness of our civilisation (of, perhaps, the human condition itself) which Hughes attempts to heal. In 'Baboons and Neanderthals: A Rereading of *The Inheritors*', Hughes writes:

> That estrangement between 'instinct' and 'intelligence', the prototype of the human tragedy, is what Graves meant by 'There is one story and one story only' – but here in a prehistoric cloud of Anthropological dust. […] Homo Sapiens Sapiens wanders out of it, trying to separate his street map from the legal conditions for divorce.[11]

The Inheritors, a 1955 novel by William Golding, depicts a group of Neanderthals much of whose communication and sense of the world appear to spring from heightened intuitive abilities (which approach a kind of telepathy). Accordingly, Hughes writes that the instinct has 'superior senses, superior intuitions, and that superior grasp of reality'; it is the subconscious which is a 'lost, natural Paradise' in which 'the lack of intellectual inquiry […] coincided with a perfect awareness of being alive in the moment, and in reality, […] a state of blessedness'. It is the same paradise of stasis Hughes suggests is enjoyed by the Hopi people whose mythological understandings are so thoroughly intact (*WP*, p. 311). Furthermore, 'this theory […] has come to influence almost every modern therapy' and lies behind 'most old religious/mystical disciplines' (and behind 'the "one story" that has preoccupied myth and

[11] Ted Hughes, 'Baboons and Neanderthals: A Rereading of *The Inheritors*', *William Golding: The Man and his Books*, ed. by John Carey (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 163, p. 164.

literature'). The hypnotic, intellect-bypassing qualities of charm are a therapy partaking of those disciplines.

Hughes wrote 'Baboons and Neanderthals: A Re-Reading of *The Inheritors*' between 1983 and 86, the same time-frame as the uncollected poem 'The Live Bait' (*CP*, pp. 686-87).[12] The poem is a neat counterpoint to 'Earth-numb', also describing the act of fishing, but in a markedly different manner. It, too, draws on ideas of instinct and intelligence. The fisherman is a 'A Mighty Intelligence', and the 'live-bait' is a confusion of man and fish who 'numb with shock, | Rolls down, arms spread, past crying' after that same Mighty Intelligence 'Has brought the hook-point out at his navel' (*CP*, p. 686) . In contrast to its humanised form, the bait also has 'bitten-away gills' from which 'flood' 'Death-orgasm supernovae'. The Intelligence's cast is unsuccessful, and, 'saddened', he,

> Drags his catch to light –
> All that remains of it:
>
> The jaws, the flayed skull and savage neck-stump
> Of an undreamed mathematical system.
>
> And finds the bait still alive, though pulpy.
> He unhooks him, grateful, to save him –
>
> Lays him carefully on a rock
> With navel bleeding and face clenched.

[12] See British Library, Edward James Hughes Papers, Uncollected Poems, [1983-1986], Add MS 88918/2/5, 'The Live Bait'. On the back of many of these uncollected poems there survive drafts of Hughes's 'Baboons and Neanderthals'.

The Mighty Intelligence and humanised bait tell of man's split personality between intellect and instinct, governing rationalisation and suppressed self to which the former commits acts of violence. Failing to hook anything external to his being, the fisherman's act of 'sav[ing]' the bait is a kind of stupid, virtuous cruelty which leaves the bait (and his holistic self) wounded and pained. The fact that the Mighty Intelligence is described in such abstract terms emphasises, on the other hand, the corporeal suffering of the bait and the physical violence it endures.

In something of a double-irony, though, the poem is also an analogy for charm's action upon its target. The intelligence – the will – of the user suppresses the ability of the target to mount a resistance, much as 'sinister charms' can '[push] us or our enemies into a lower state of existence'.[13] Just as the bait is made human so the target is made somewhat bestial (championed as instinctual), dumb, and helpless to get itself off the hook. These two overlapping readings of the poem indicate the duality of the value of violence in Hughes's work in relation to readership and audience. Just as we have done violence to ourselves by living apart from nature, so too is violence supposedly required to begin the act of healing. Our egos – our 'mathematical system[s]' – must be reduced to 'jaws, flayed skull and savage neck-stump'. We must become 'pulpy' – malleable.

For Hughes, the deployment of violence in his work (and in the work of others) is the product of psychic upsurges, quite independent of any moral judgement:

> Any moral judgement about such images [of violence] has accept [sic] that it is not ultimately but immediately a moral judgement about the large and momentous impulses—symbolised by these animals which have everywhere signified, in their symbolic form, the creative/destructive Goddess or the Dionysiac-type god—that

[13] Frye, p. 131.

> create new forms of social life. Obviously without such impulses any society would soon stagnate and become moribund. At the same time, it is up to the societies in which they arise to decide what kind of novelty they want, good or evil or how mixed. The impulse itself is neither good nor evil: it is simply that kind of energy on the move.[14]

Behind Hughes's deployment of violence, according to his defence above, lie two important things. The first is that it arises to create new forms of social life; the second is that the poet is merely a cultural (or spiritual, or both) conduit for these impulses. The social, gathering aspects of charm are put to the purpose of the first, while Hughes's shamanic position supports the second. Whereas in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' and elsewhere the idea of a static society is one approaching paradise, Hughes uses the possibility of a stagnant, 'moribund' society here as a defence for his animals of violence.

For Hughes that trust – that artists ought to be trusted as reliable antennae for their people – is a particular concern. These statements on the validity of his violence are a response to claims that he is 'celebrating violence'. Instead, Hughes is merely a particularly, psychically sensitive conduit for society:

> does it make any sense whatsoever to say that in these poems Blake, Yeats or Popa were 'celebrating violence'? Or does it make a little more sense to say: 'these sacred animals emerged into the field of vision of these poets, charged with great glamour and force, and the poets simply recorded what they saw—at the same time making an attempt to impose ethical control on it.'[15]

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[14] British Library, Edward James Hughes Papers, Autobiographical notes and commentaries on literary works, 7 June 1985-6 December 1997, Add MS 88918/7/2, fol. 1.
[15] BL, Edward James Hughes Papers, Add MS 88918/7/2, fol. 1.

The bestial apparition of these forces is what also marks them as ‘visionary’ and ‘mythic’:

> ‘Mythic’ […] does not necessarily mean that the subject matter of the poem is taken from the mythology of some historical culture, but that it constitutes an image of a particular kind. […] The whole subject matter is the image of a subjective event of visionary intensity. Obviously many poems take myths as their subject matter, or make an image of a subjective event, without earning the description ‘visionary’, let alone ‘mythic’. It is only when the image opens inwardly towards what we recognize as a first-hand as-if-religious experience, or mystical revelation, that we call it ‘visionary’, and when ‘personalities’ or creatures are involved, we call it ‘mythic’.[16]

The violence in Hughes is far more pronounced than in any of the poets he mentions. Its appearance – its upsurge – is of a Sphinx shocking enough to minimise critical response (and where that fails, defences such as this one take up the slack). Rather than simply representing a psychic upsurge, the representations of violence – such as the gored, half-human live bait – are shocking enough to be in a sense *bestialising*, quite clear in that poem in the half-animal, half-human bait. Charm’s lustrous, seductive capabilities give way to magic that makes us dumb swine – impressionable, malleable, with our psyches exposed to intervention. If we, like Eurylochus, escape expecting treachery, we are pursued by a defensive account. Furthermore, Hughes’s ‘ethical control’ is equivocal:

> All I want is endless energy—good bad or whatever makes no difference anyway. The only energy is from the source, from the creating source […] Senses & faculties unfaded—from permanent renewal in the source […] prayer & ecstasy.[17]

[16] British Library, Letters to Ann Skea: from Ted Hughes and others, 10 November-28 September 1996, Add MS 74257, fol. 18. This is a draft of revisions to *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, 1993 edition.
[17] BL, Edward James Hughes Papers, Add MS 88918/9/9, fol. 2.

Experience of violence is religious experience – prayer and ecstasy – and the moral import of the energy governing it is irrelevant. Where 'Bob Conquest, […] or others, […] pinned onto these creatures their commercial label "poetry of violence", I looking from the inside saw only "Holy" in Blake's sense.'[18] Hughes conflates violence, religious congregation and audience into a nexus telling of his attitude:

> If I truly am intended to make a closer communion with divinity, or with my sense of divinity, and this is the steady illuminating thought in my waking life, I ought to make more serious moves. Any established church appals & repels me. […] Is it that I lack any sense of belonging to a community of worshippers. Yes, it is. […] If I imagine the community of worshippers which I could seriously form, then I see it is not likely I shall find it. It is something externally primitive. […] What is it prevents me entering my religion then. […] habit of provisional existence. Dilettantism of intellectual approach. Busyness. Scepticism.
>
> […] Yet more than anyone I know I am my own master, with freedom to shape my life, & my self, as I please.
>
> Everything returns to the same energy: the will. […]
>
> What is inhibiting me is the idea that what I write will be read. This sense of constant audience in which I now live is crippling me. Somehow, I have to escape it.[19]

Audience is the problem, and the solution offered is self-mastery through will and, in turn, the potential access to divine communion and the formation of a 'community of

[18] Bob Conquest is Robert Conquest, British-American poet and historian who was a prominent member of The Movement and editor of its associated anthology *New Lines*. BL, Edward James Hughes Papers, Add MS 88918/7/2, fol. 1.
[19] BL, Edward James Hughes Papers, Add MS 88918/9/9, fol. 3.

worshippers'. Will, in the form of charm, is put to gathering such a congregation and assuring his mastery of it.

Charm's role as the solution to the problem of a dissenting, dissatisfied audience is made all the clearer by an exchange between Hughes and Keith Sagar:

> A great concern of mine, over the past few years, has been to disperse in myself that sense of the wrong audience – which is so inhibiting & falsifying, & wearisome. The more concentration one achieves, the more one is aware of its real enemies. By wrong audience I mean all those who, without being the people for whom you write, yet have a strong idea about you and enough scraps of your hair & nails. I'm trusting you'll understand. (*LTH*, pp. 337-38)

This is a continuation of Hughes's concerns in his notes about the stifling sense of having an audience. It is in response to Keith Sagar's including in his book 'some nine pages only of biographical material in a typescript of information and most of it deriving from you'.[20] Sagar balks at Hughes's demands that these pages be struck from the record: 'surely it is perfectly natural for members of your right audience [...] to ask what sort of person writes such poems and out of what sort of background and experiences'.[21] Even here, Hughes seeks to control responses to his poetry – particularly those drawing on biographical details. Sagar attempts to soothe him, saying these readings are unlikely because Hughes has 'striven for and achieved a great impersonality in [his] work'. These readings are damaging because they jeopardise Hughes's role as tribal leader. Attention to details of his life he would rather leave unknown or undispersed threaten to damage his shamanic mystique and authority. The poems, in light of biographical information, may be toppled from their position as encounters with the spirit

[20] British Library, Ted Hughes Correspondence Vol. I., Correspondence between Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar, 1969-1998 Add MS 78756, fol. 10.
[21] BL, Ted Hughes Correspondence Vol. I., Add MS 78756, fol. 10.

of the non-human realm (particularly acute for poems such as 'Song' and 'The Otter') and into traceable experiences of the quotidian which anyone may have, and potentially distil.

Hughes's restriction of information regarding his poems extends further than the biographical. In another letter to Sagar he extends his gratitude for Sagar's having 'deleted some of [his] earlier negative comments':

> Not that I'd deny you your negative judgements—but why propagate them when, with all of us, there are such huge gaps in our understanding of anything, and such final huge gulf of difference between our tastes, quite unarguable.[22]

Negative judgements of his poems are simply misunderstandings. The 'gulf' appears again as the gap between our understandings – between our finding a poem unsuccessful and assenting to it uncritically. In 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' it is not just a case of our being unable to cross the gulf due to our lack of shared understandings but, in the case of sound and rhythm, may also be thanks to our stubbornness, our unwillingness to participate, our being in effect brainwashed by the prevailing orthodoxy of reading strategy. More than this, the nexus Hughes constructs of understanding, religious experience, (primitive) congregational activity, violence, will-power, and 'wrong' audience indicates how he senses charm ought to operate on that audience.

The gulf of understanding is the gulf of our personal differences between each other. Dissolving that gulf, leading us to cross it, is for Hughes an act of healing which marks the poem's success, and marks him the governing force of that wholeness. The gulf is the same as that in Georges Bataille's *Eroticism*. There, 'between one being and another, there is a gulf'.[23] The gulf lies between the being one currently finds oneself to be, and that one may

[22] BL, Edward James Hughes Papers, Add MS 88918/7/2, fol. 5.
[23] Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 12. Further references to *Eroticism* are given after quotations in the text.

become by assenting to charm – which is not *a being*, but rather a oneness with a ritual congregation. Bataille makes it explicit that this gulf is also one of understanding, comparable to the shared understandings of Hughes's picture languages, mythologies:

> This gulf exists, for instance, between you, listening to me, and me, speaking to you. We are attempting to communicate, but no communication between us can abolish our fundamental difference.
>
> [...] None the less, we can experience its dizziness together. It can hypnotise us. This gulf is death in one sense, and death is vertiginous, death is hypnotizing. (pp. 12-13)

The death is the death of ego – of the self. The 'whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives' (p. 17). This is also the hypnotic nature of charm, and marks its ability to bring about ego-destruction in favour of congregational wholeness. In crossing it, in assenting to a form of death, we experience pleasure akin to the live bait's 'Death-orgasm supernovae'. Hughes's desired 'community of worshippers' is 'externally primitive' in just such a manner. For Bataille, too, this is the power of poetry, ritual, and of religion. An abolishment of our fundamental differences is achieved in crossing the gulf, such that our differences – as living, breathing animals – are likewise eroded, and our understandings made coherent – in feeling, in 'primitive' bond, rather than critical, intellectual content. The assenting reader experiences the 'disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence into question' (p. 31). Furthermore, he 'loses himself deliberately, but then the subject is identified with the object losing his identity. [...] The deliberate loss of self in eroticism is manifest' (p. 31). In 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' the reader is instructed to do just this: to cross the gulf, to become a new 'animal', and have his differences, his individuality, eroded in the process.

Violence is key in this assault upon the ego. Eroticism is consummate with ‘the meeting of the ways for violent impulses at the very heart of things’ (p. 24). Bataille’s poet of violence is Arthur Rimbaud, whom he describes as ‘one of the most violent of poets’ (p. 24). He draws on the following lines:

> Elle est retrouvée.
>
> Quoi? L’eternité.
>
> C’est la mer allée
>
> Avec le soleil.
>
> Poetry leads to the same place as all forms of eroticism—to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity. Poetry is eternity; the sun matched with the sea. (p. 25)

The sun’s match with the sea is the liminal, reflective point of oneness with a congregation that is taken to be ‘eternity’, reality. It is also the timelessness of the poem-as-event which charm reaches out of to turn into a psychological reality. It is also the span ‘Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews’ in ‘The Horses’ (1957), where, in reaching a super-sensory oneness with the spirit of reality, we might ‘[Hear] the horizons endure’ (*CP*, p. 23). Those lines, epitomising the congregational reach of the charm, are the lines Hughes claims Fuller found unsayable – which Hughes’s Fuller does not assent to, which he refuses to participate in. This is not simply a desire for a temporary loss and reconstruction of self, either. A desire for lasting change lies in the use of the memory as something like a talisman. It is a desire for permanence within the social convocation, for the minimising of difference, the familiarising of the other, the discontinuing of discontinuity, which the charm enacts. ‘The concern is to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity’ (p. 15). The modal form expresses a desire to bring this substitution into play at

any given moment where the subject's discontinuity becomes apparent: 'In din of crowded streets, going among the years, the faces | May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place'.

2. Musical Interpretation; Leaping the Gulf and Restriction of Readerly Ego

Orghast's 'real poetic potential' lay in 'physical events […] of a special sort, and in the pattern of their sequence' and the relation of those ritualistic events to the play's artificial language. In 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', the sonic profile of a poem is the ritual pattern which likewise binds the poem's semantic aspects into particular significances. Sound helps to govern sense, and sense likewise helps to govern sound. It is in the space between the two where much of charm's activity takes place. Solving the relationship between sound and sense, participating in a construction of intra-informing meaning, may result in either of the two outcomes for charm I detail at the beginning of this chapter. Hughes's desire, though, is that the reader submit herself to being part of the congregation, to communing with the 'reality' the poem espouses. Hughes wishes this to occur in particular ways, such that restriction and limitation on the manner of joining that congregation, of leaping the gulf, are of key importance. It is a limitation of the self-discovery a poem may instigate. The act of reading rhythm in this mode is analogous to the audience participation at a religious service – chanting, for instance. In the case of such congregation, the performance of rhythms either self-harmonises according to the other raised voices or harmonises according to a lead figure. Hughes is just such a figure. Just as chanters may be unaware, or only dimly aware, of the sense-content of their chants, so too may charm be used to push out senses which are seen as undesirable, particularly with the aid of defensive support such as 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'.

Assenting to rhythm appears, in fact, to come one step earlier than the recognition of sense; charm may lead us to 'dance', to participate in and assent to reading texts whose semantic and sense elements we do not fully understand (*WP*, p. 335). Hughes rationalises and critically engages with the idea of rhythm in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', but something about rhythm and sound remains irrational, 'instinctual', 'primitive', capable of bypassing sense and intellect and, in turn, the problems of shared and unshared understandings Hughes calls 'mythology'. Nevertheless, much of the sense-bypassing capability of charm has already failed by the time Hughes comes to construct his defensive counter in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. Intellectual engagement with sense-content is the very problem, and is what generates anxieties over differing 'mythologies'. Instead, what Hughes proposes is a way of reading rhythm which attempts to assure desired forms of contact with the sense and sound quotients of the poem, and to assure assent in the way the two inform each other.

Hughes's argument in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' proposes a collation of hermeneutical and rhythmical interpretation which is telling of his attitude to the sound-sense nexus. The manner of reading Hughes champions amounts to 'The Demands of Musical Interpretation' (*WP*, p. 334). Rather than a knowledge of metre, musical interpretation requires an assenting attitude, and a handling of rhythm which Hughes presents as a freeing of approach, rather than constraint by convention. Referential meaning has already been removed to a system of understandings often 'too precise to attract the interpreter' (*WP*, p. 313). 'The "mythologies" that give meaning to language are one thing. The rhythms that give musical expressiveness to it are another' (*WP*, p. 320). The first section of 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms', which details the problem of the unassailability of unshared referential meaning (unshared 'mythology'), is situated as contrast to rhythm. Musical interpretation is presented as a freeing of the mind from such problems as the understanding of 'mythologies' and may also act to salve or bypass those problems. Charm, without the commonly-understood

correspondence of (at least, imagined by Hughes) true tribal languages, relies on the sound-sense nexus for its effects, in this manner a method of coping with that situation of fractured referential correspondence. Charm offers a new potential, cultural motivation between signifier and signified, thanks to musical interpretation, which is less reliant on knowledge than it is on common feeling. Charm, in this mode of reading sound and rhythm, requires one to give oneself over to annihilation and reconstitution of the readerly ego. In this reconstitution, in accordance with the work at hand, lies the unificatory 'healing' effect, which is the evolutionary form of charm's 'powerful social organising force' and its 'bind[ing of] the community into a single enterprise.'[24]

Hughes's argument begins from a position of defensiveness against Fuller's supposed claim that the final line of 'The Horses', 'Hearing the horizons endure', is 'unsayable', and so demonstrates the same anxiety he finds in Coleridge and Hopkins: 'the only other poet [apart from Coleridge] in the canon who expresses this kind of anxiety about the audience's incomprehension of his metre is Hopkins' (*WP*, p. 329). As such, the essay is an attempt to instruct that audience in how Hughes's metre – more broadly, his rhythms – ought to be read. This is achieved by exhaustive appeal to the traditions of 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox' metre, such that, by the end of Hughes's analyses of Coleridge's 'new principle', Hopkins's 'sprung' and 'reversed' rhythms, Keats's 'Endymion' and, finally, Wyatt's 'They fle from me' (as compared and contrasted with Tottel's metrically bowdlerised version 'They flee from me'), the 'unorthodox' tradition is established as something closer to an alternative orthodoxy. Nevertheless, it appears important for Hughes that this tradition with which he aligns himself is seen as somehow underground, rebellious, almost occult. It has something

[24] Malinowski, p. 9 and p. 128.

of the lustre of forbidden knowledge. Those orthodox, unorthodox, and reversed metres are summarised as follows:

> My three steps so far are: first, lines obeying a single, metrical law; second, lines moving through a field of tension between two metrical laws; and third, lines moving through a field of tension between one law not merely braced against the other law but 'reversed' metrically against it. (*WP*, p. 345)

The fourth step concerns Wyatt's rhythms, which Hughes approaches at one point by ventriloquising through a 'modern poet', who, attempting to count and place the stresses in three of Wyatt's lines, discovers, 'well, that [line] seems to have five, spaced like that. But that's not the point. The poem isn't written in "metre". It is internally free of a particular metre' (*WP*, p. 353). Hughes's counter to this imagined modern poet for whom 'the verse would be read just like speech, loosely controlled within an overall harness of rhymes' is that, 'Wyatt was not of course writing "free verse" within a loosely containing rhyme scheme' (*WP*, p. 353). Instead, Wyatt wrote according to '*a kind*' of metrical control based around 'what the stressed syllables did to the unstressed', rather than according to an overarching metrical structure which somehow ghosts the rhythm (and thereby allows differences to be read according to variation upon that overarching metre) (*WP*, p. 354).

In order to discover the expressive possibilities of the rhythm, Hughes says, one requires 'musical interpretation':

> *Those three stresses, required by the pentameter basic pattern, are enforced by wilful musical interpretation*. In other words, this last phrase, trying to hurry, is forced to slow down. i.e. the sinister stealth of 'stalk' is allowed to surge powerfully but gently and smoothly on through '-ing my chambre', with the effect of yoking three strong

> beats (that begin with ‘stalk-’) into the phrase (in Hopkins’s words ‘distributing them in some manner’). (*WP*, p. 362)

Behind Hughes’s demands for musical interpretation lie several assertions: 1) that a reader uninitiated in the possibility of musical interpretation may be unable to carry it out but is easily initiated into it and may just as well find himself able to carry it out spontaneously thanks to assenting attitude rather than knowledge; 2) that a reader who is musically, tonally, rhythmically deaf, or wilfully fractious, or narrow-mindedly inured to the orthodox tradition, cannot or will not manage it; 3) that what is at stake, according to Hughes, is an amplified appreciation – carried out by choice – of the representational meaning of the poem. This final step I can take a little further: first, the entanglement between sound and sense fundamentally alters the representational qualities of a poem; second, sound may override sense in a hypnotic manner that assures assent, as lies at the root of charm-as-hypnosis. What is also at stake is the success of the poem – indeed, the success of exactly the charm quotient of the poem – a fact which produces the defensive posture of the entire essay.

While interpretation of the rhythmical profile of a poem is not in the same way limited by mythological knowledge, nevertheless a boundary does appear – a ‘gulf’ that the reader must surrender himself or herself to, thereby surrendering to the text in order to enter a domain which is analogous to congregation, shared feeling and potentially shared understanding. A crucial difference between the gulf of mythological meanings and that of reading rhythm is that the reader (just as, in Hughes’s metaphors, dancer or singer) must *choose* to leap, an act which generates ‘pleasure’ (*WP*, p. 335). In discussing Coleridge’s ‘Christabel’ and Hopkins’s ‘Inversnaid’, both examples of ‘unorthodox metre’, Hughes says:

> The couplets [...] compel the reader to co-operate physically. Each line is like a dancer who, if you are going to read the line at all, forces you to be a partner and dance. […]

> You can pronounce the line as silently as you like, but that launching of the inner self into full kinaesthetic participation is, so to speak, compulsory. Otherwise you can't read the line. […] Between the sitting and standing person and that same person dancing there gapes an immense biological gulf. […] What is required is that the familiar person becomes, in a flash, an entirely different animal with entirely different body chemistry, brain rhythm and physiological awareness. And there is more to it than fear of the biological leap.
>
> And yet, obviously, it is a natural enough thing, in the right circumstances, to leap that gulf. And almost as a rule it produces the most intense pleasure for the one who does. (*WP*, pp. 334-35)

This gulf is felt, in poetry, wherever '"natural quantities" do not exactly coincide with the required number of stresses in the line' (*WP*, p. 335). What is crucial is the matter of assent and instruction. If the reader has been instructed in the 'hidden law', they may yet '*jump the gulf*. […] If the reader is willing, all is well. But if the reader jibs at the brink, and flatly refuses – then the line has to remain, for that reader, "unsayable"' (*WP*, p. 364). The pleasure that jumping the gulf generates is the continuity of eroticism, the sense of submitting oneself to ritual congregation – the 'launching of the inner self into full kinaesthetic participation'. Hughes's assertion of the reader's failure is reminiscent of his letter to Sagar regarding the gulfs in our understandings, which he notes are 'quite unarguable'. Assent, willingness, is central. More even than assent, what is required is an active constructive input from the reader into the question of where stresses are placed, where otherwise distinct syllables become diphthongs (without obedience to a clear metrical constraint), and where one might 'modulat[e]' one's reading to provide emphasis without typographical signs such as

enjambment.[25] What is required is ‘psychosomatic co-operation with the vitality of the statement. […] it is the demand of “musical interpretation”’ (*WP*, p. 334).

So far, this may seem reasonable enough as a kind of radicalised, even rebellious, approach to the reading of rhythm, one emphasising freedom and active participation over convention. However, in the manner in which Hughes finally comes to discuss how ‘musical interpretation’ aids the reader in constructing meaning, he puts weight on particular hermeneutical outcomes, such that Hughes’s ‘instruction’ is a palpable constraint. This is visible in the way in which Hughes argues for particular musical interpretations that draw out particular meanings from the lines; the music of a line serves purely to enhance the semantic content, in the same manner as an actor placing emphasis in order to create dramatic effect, and is therefore itself also informed by the semantic content. The *expressiveness* of rhythm, which could in this mode be readerly *self*-expression and therefore revelation, becomes the expressiveness of a particular gathering modus operandi. The poem’s sound-sense nexus in this way becomes semanticised and limited in accordance with the world (that set of understandings) the poem represents, at the expense of greater polysemy. Rather than stand on the brink of the ‘fragrant portals’ where self and reality (rhythm and representation) indicate and unlock the provisionality of each, one is invited to step through and concretise both.

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[25] See where Hughes transforms two of Robert Graves’s lines into a single pentameter line: ‘Any reader who ignores it and simply reads through the enjambement without modulation is to that degree misreading Graves’s meaning, destroying his music, and missing one of poetry’s keener pleasures. The single pentameter line into which I reshaped those two phrases contains no such visible signal. In that case, the effect has to be imported by the reader. The reader’s voice, scanning the whole line ahead, as a performing musician would, for maximum expressiveness according to the meaning, introduces the effect as it were wilfully, in the way of “musical interpretation”.’ *WP*, pp. 324-5.

Hughes uses lines from ‘The Horses’ to establish this rhythm-representation relationship. He says ‘The Horses’ has as its ‘“governing principle” [...] a line of five accents’, and offers two contradictory scansions of the penultimate line:

/ / / / /

Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews

x x x / / x x / / x / x

Between the streams ( ) and the [red clouds], hearing curlews (*WP* 365)[26]

The first of these belongs to the recitation of ‘others’, and the second is how he hears the line ‘in [his] own head’ (*WP* 365). The poem’s general rhythmical movement – that of the five-stress line – leads the reader towards an expectation of each line as having five stresses. That is the pre-existing rhythm at hand. Such expectations alone, if the reader does not too quickly assume the poet incompetent, may lead her to recognise the possibility for divergent musical interpretation, but so far any such musical interpretation remains no more desirable than the conventional one. In order to indicate why the second scansion of his line from ‘The Horses’ is his preferred one, Hughes draws on other semantic content in the poem:

> Where the prolonged rising introductory phrase lifts the whole line to a physical height and launches it as a ‘melody’ (as distinct from a statement) in which the ‘red clouds’ and the ‘curlews’ can be suspended, against the backdrop of unending sky. After that, the final line comes as a condensation of a similar rhythmical movement. (*WP*, p. 365)

[26] The parenthetical ‘[red clouds]’ here indicates where Hughes suggests the stress is ‘distributing itself in some manner’. *WP*, p. 365.

The validity of his reading is argued for because it relates to and enhances the representative capabilities of the poem's referential meaning – the landscape being described. In this conception of the sound-sense nexus, sound yokes sense, and the reading of rhythm likewise yokes reader and poem. This is the interplay between the semantic physical description – i.e. imagery – and a semanticised capability of rhythm. Hughes encourages the reading of rhythm towards precisely that direction where it mostly closely coincides with the poem's representative tactics, as opposed to the recitation of an arbitrary and conventional measure or one reflecting usual speech patterns. This is likewise a crucial thematic element of the poem at hand, since it enacts and describes the narrator's 'meet[ing] [his] memory' in a 'din of crowded streets', just as the reader, in the din of their own setting, is drawn by the locating and constructing of a relationship between rhythmical and imagistic meanings, into the mythological understandings of the poem (*CP*, p. 23). Here, then, drawn partially from Hughes's argumentative framework and strategy of relating rhythmical profile to the scene being represented, lies an exact figure of how a desired rhythmical profile, arrived at by the reader, enacts a drawing of that reader towards the unshared mythology it partakes of and depicts. At root, Hughes's apprehension of the way sound and imagery inter-inform indicates the belief in a common tonal consciousness similar to that sought in *Orghast*. More than this, the activity of readerly participation in constructing the nexus between sound and sense may *generate* associative motivations in the absence of such a biological tonal commonality. Instead of biological, that common consciousness is readerly, congregational, cultural.

This interpretive demand of rhythm is generated by Hughes's anxiety over the varied, fractured mythological understandings of cultures and sub-cultures, correspondence between word and thing, and the dissonant thought-worlds of cultural members. This method for interpreting rhythm presents a countering motivation in the relationship between sound and sense founded in a synaesthesia which is in turn founded on the notion that sounds may have

archetypal significance across readers. Musical interpretation thus arises as an attempt by Hughes to salve the lack of a common correspondence supposedly enjoyed by tribal societies. Furthermore, if the reader is to become a wholly different animal in the act of musical interpretation, Hughes demands the reader become, in a way, *his* animal. The instruction of how to read the rhythm in uncovering this relationship with the referential content trumps – or hopefully trumps – any jibbing on the part of the reader.

The arbitrariness of sound and rhythm may also be an avenue towards an essential freedom in its interpretation, rather than a limiting and more finite, definite relationship with the semantic content. The active participation in the construction of the sound-sense nexus *is* the reader-as-process. A freedom of rhythmical interpretation is likewise a freeing of the reader – personal revelation of self and thought-world, rather than congregational, communal hypnosis. Clive Scott explores that freedom of rhythmical interpretation in 'Translating Rhythm'. He draws directly on Hughes's notion of 'kinaesthetic participation', saying that such participation,

> requires two related modifications in the reading mind. First, the substitution of a rhythmical mode for a metrical one, reading for the unpredictable, the aleatory, rather than for the preordained – reading metre as expression rather than as knowledge, or convention aptly handled. Second, reading rhythm with the paralinguistic in mind, that is, reading rhythm not only as expression but as self-expression.[27]

Hughes, though, does base his demands for musical interpretation on a kind of knowledge. The interpretation of rhythm in his account must occur in such a manner as to be in

[27] Clive Scott, 'Translating Rhythm', *Translation and Literature*, 6.1 (1997), 31-47 (p. 31).

accordance with the semantic meaning of the words to which the rhythm is tied. In contradistinction to that, Scott's account centres on the reader and his or her freedom in reading rhythm, thanks to which the reader arrives at a 'discovery of a scansion' which 'is the discovery of one's psychophysiological relation to the world; rhythm is the experiential and existential dimension of utterance'.[28] Hughes's emphasis is on likeness rather than difference. We participate in the breaking down of our resistances so as to enter into a congregational continuity of thought-worlds.

Rather, then, than permitting the self-discovery inherent in the act of reading rhythm, Hughes attempts to limit the 'entirely different animal with entirely different body chemistry, brain rhythm and physiological awareness' the reader may find him or herself to be. Instead of discovery of that existential dimension in which one exists, one must bend oneself to the text. Hughes's demands are centred on the poem, the particular mythological like-mindedness the reader is supposed to enter, the unification and coherence in a particular manner of a just-then-generated congregation of readers. Further to this, Scott finds the arbitrariness of metre an essential aspect of its expressive relationship with language:

> Because metre is not a constraint immanent to the language, it is arbitrary and cultural rather than motivated and textual. [...] Either, then, the attention we give to metre is in excess of what it can reveal about a text; or the very arbitrariness of metre is what makes it peculiarly revelatory, is a crucial part of the 'making strange', or the expressive potentiation, of language.[29]

A demand for a reading of rhythm dependent on a particular relationship between sound and sense – a constraint that Hughes must here create since it is not 'immanent to the language' –

[28] Clive Scott, *Reading the Rhythm: The Poetics of French Free Verse 1910-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 7 and p. 122.
[29] Scott, *Reading the Rhythm*, p. 7.

may not only be a constraint found as a product of culture, but must, further, be a constraint in itself of culture. It is by constraining cultural, social response to the reading of rhythm that Hughes's poetry, insofar as we follow Hughes's account of how it ought to be read, generates its cohesive abilities. That cohesion, the fostering of 'intact[ness]' (*WP* 310) is one of tribal, cultural homogeneity at the expense of (and necessarily forces out) a larger set of options in reading rhythm that allows personal rediscovery and a dissenting attitude.

These constraints upon the reading of rhythm – upon the reader of rhythm – become clearer still through comparison with Roman Jakobson's distinction between 'verse instance' and 'delivery instance' in 'Linguistics and poetics' (originally delivered as a closing statement at the 1958 Indiana University conference):

> Usually the free variation of [verse instances] is denoted by the somewhat equivocal label 'rhythm'. A variation of *verse instances* within a given poem must be strictly distinguished from the variable *delivery instances*. The intention 'to describe the verse line as it is actually performed' is of lesser use for the synchronic and historical analysis of poetry than it is for the study of its recitation in the present and the past. Meanwhile the truth is simple and clear: 'There are many performances of the same poem—differing among themselves in many ways. A performance is an event, but the poem itself, if there *is* any poem, must be some kind of enduring object.'[30]

In Hughes's model of rhythmical interpretation, that free variation of verse instances becomes considerably less free. While the various possibilities inherent in the verse instance must remain extant to a reader who declines Hughes's instruction, a limiting of recitation options if it is assented to leads back likewise to a limitation in viable, approved verse

[30] Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and poetics', [no translator noted], *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge, (Harlow: Longman, 1998), p. 45. Jakobson is quoting from W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *Hateful Contraries: Studies in Literature and Criticism* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), p. 116.

instances. 'How the given verse-instance is implemented in the given delivery instance,' Jakobson continues,

> depends on the *delivery design* of the reciter; he may cling to a scanning style or tend toward prose-like prosody or freely oscillate between these two poles. We must be on guard against simplistic binarism which reduces two couples into one single opposition either by suppressing the cardinal distinction between verse design and verse instance (as well as between delivery design and delivery instance) or by an erroneous identification of delivery instance and delivery design with the verse instance and verse design.[31]

It is the space between delivery instance and design and verse instance and design that Hughes seeks to collapse, resulting in an object that is less multi-dimensional, less polysemantic, and so more controlled in its definite access to a particular shared ground, thus seeking to account for the problems in interpretation described in the first part of his essay.

What Jakobson locates as the 'relevance of the sound-meaning nexus' is 'a simple corollary of the superposition of similarity upon contiguity', resulting in part in a necessary 'total re-evaluation of the discourse and all its components whatsoever. [...] So in poetry any verbal element is converted into a figure of poetic speech'.[32] This recalls Malinowski's observation that even 'ordinary words, by association with others [...] are incorporated into a complex prosodic structure, specifically magical in character'[33] and also Frye's 'mythological universe, a world of interlocking names of mysterious powers and potencies which are above,

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[31] Jakobson, p. 46.
[32] Jakobson, p. 51 and p. 55. Jakobson finds sound symbolism to be an 'undeniably objective relation founded on a phenomenal connection between different sensory modes', though this may just as well clash with the semantic sense of a word, often in a productive way (which he clarifies by appeal to Stéphane Mallarmé's observations on the dark, languid sound of 'jour' as contrasted with the bright sound of 'nuit', through which Mallarmé finds that 'words lose their meaning in the darkened realm of sound'). Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crisis in Verse', *Symbolism: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. by T.G. West (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 7
[33] Malinowski, p. 220.

but not wholly beyond reach of, the world of time and space.'[34] Seen in this way, Hughes's attempts to prescribe the relationship between sound and sense, if successful, make static the realm of interlocking objects and their names which constitutes the mythological universe to which charm appeals for its effects. Through that, Hughes attempts to salve and make up for the lack of a 'mythological', commonly-understood correspondence. More than this, the reader, in becoming such a new animal, is likewise 'associated with what might be called a timeless present but is better seen as a temporality of writing' and 'inserted in the poem as [an element] of the event which the poem is attempting to be.'[35] The reader, reconstituted in such a way, remade in a prescriptivised form, is entered into the mythological domain of the charm, made an adherent – a set inhabitant – of its world.[36] This interlocking nature of the mythological universe extends to the very nature of poetic discourse, a discourse whose defining trait is one of 'equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity, while the combination, the build up of the sequence, is based on contiguity', such that:

> *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence. In poetry one syllable is equalized with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assumed equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress; prosodic long is matched with long, and short with short; word boundary equals word boundary, no boundary equals no boundary; syntactic pause equals syntactic pause, no pause equals no pause. Syllables are converted into units of measure, and so are morae or stresses.[37]

[34] Frye, p. 136.
[35] Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 149.
[36] Jakobson recognises the apostrophic nature of charm and of poetry, also: 'Thus the magic, incantatory function is chiefly some kind of conversion of an absent or inanimate "third person" into an addressee of a conative message'. Jakobson, p. 36.
[37] Jakobson, p. 39.

This equivalence may be put to use in renewing the associations between words and other words, and between words and their objects, in a manner which is closely related to that of metaphor. However, that renewal in Hughes's work, if we follow his instruction, is again limited. Rather than experiencing the essential provisionality of sound, sense and self at any given moment, (whose momentary resolution into a newly constituted self makes exactly that provisionality apparent), the reader is invited to adhere to a particular method of resolving the relationship between sound and sense in a closed, pre-decided fashion. Thanks to that, one experiences a unification, a homogeneity, in existential and interpretive modes.

3. Cultural, Readerly Homogenisation through Charm

I want to delve, now, back into the ego-destruction and reconstitution which Hughes seeks through violence, manipulation of thought-worlds, shamanic position, defensive accounts, and musical interpretation. Doing so will show these as a set of closely allied tactics put to the same purpose: the breaking down of individual resistance and the ritualistic gathering of a 'healed' congregation. In undergoing the process of charm there is a sense, and, as Hughes points to, a 'fear', of the loss of the self. This apprehension is well supported in Hughes's writerly experience as well – in, for instance, the poem that 'stands there, permanent, vivid and powerful, and tries to make [the writer] continue to live in its image'.[38] Charm represents a challenge to cognitive closure and a generation of new and different possible closures. In doing so it may also indicate the provisionality of those closures, amongst which and reliant on which is one's own sense of self and one's sense of the world with which that self is

[38] Ted Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series' (Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978), transcript by Ann Skea (1990), <http://ann.skea.com/CriticalForum.htm> [accessed 14 June 2016].

consonant. This is true even if we follow Hughes's instructions for musical interpretation: the generation of new, approved closures is just severely limited. The analysis of a group of poems in *Wodwo,* offered by Craig Robinson in *Ted Hughes as the Shepherd of Being,* brings this self-annihilation to the fore, further, in terms of themes in Hughes's poetry:

> 'Song of a Rat', 'Skylarks', and 'The Howling of Wolves' have all been concerned to explore animal sound and communication. On each occasion paradox has been necessary to encompass what the sound seems to express. [...] It is 'Skylarks' which provides the essential link with 'Gnat-Psalm', through the notion that the joy is only to be achieved [...] through risking everything in an act of self-sacrifice. This is the springboard to the final affirmations in *Wodwo* [...] stressing the loss of the old as no longer purely destructive, but instead the essential preliminary for a fresh start.[39]

For instance, at the start of the 'The Howling of Wolves' (1967), the howling is 'without world', though as the poem progresses we see that it is the 'forest delicate as an owl's ear' – the poem's world – that they are 'dragging up and out on their long leashes of sound | That dissolve in the mid-air silence' (*CP*, p. 180). The untranslatable howl of the wolf that 'howls you cannot say whether out of agony or joy' becomes a symbol for the landscape and its relation to it, and our following that interpretation becomes either 'agony or joy'. It is in making that connection between sound and landscape, in establishing the signification of the wolf's howl, that the listening 'you' of the poem undergoes the narrated effect of charm. The listener either shuns it, generating 'agony', or embraces it, resulting in 'joy'. Any interpretation, however, risks bringing

> the wolves running – brings the steel traps clashing and slavering,
> The steel furred to keep it cracking in the cold,

[39] Craig Robinson, *Ted Hughes as Shepherd of Being* (Houndmills: The Macmillan Press, 1989), p. 48.

The eyes that never learn how it has come about

That they must live like this,

That they must live.

The howl of the wolf, discovering its 'world', heralds the wolf itself, which embodies the annihilatory danger of lingering to interpret the howl in the first place. Likewise, in 'Gnat-Psalm' (1967), the fearless gnats attempt to match the sun's energy, 'giving their bodies to be burned' (*CP*, p. 182).

Hughes's animals of violence represent psychic upsurges in cultural consciousness. They mark Hughes's poetry as 'visionary', he claims in the first instance, and 'mythic' when that visionary intensity turns inward to represent 'mystical revelation'. The animals are figures that yield to psychoanalysis precisely because they are presented as archetypes, embodiments of mental energies. It is as accurate to say, as Paul Bentley does, that 'Hughes approaches the insights of psychoanalysis through myth' as it is to say that psychoanalysis is approaching the insights of myth in the first place.[40] It is that Jungian strain of psychoanalysis which Hughes appears to favour, inasmuch as he favours psychoanalysis at all.[41] Ego destruction and reconstitution carried out by archetypal, spirit animals, rhythmical assent and the authority of Hughes's position, overlap eroticism, psychoanalysis and shamanism in a way bringing Hughes's harnessing of their efficacy to the fore. That efficacy is charm. Bentley points to this underlying equivalence in Hughes's shamanistic, psychoanalytic and poetic practice:

[40] Paul Bentley, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion & Beyond* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p. 6.
[41] Hughes's views on psychoanalysis are encapsulated in his statement that, 'We live in the translation, where what had been religious and centred on God is psychological and centred on the idea of the self'. *WP*, p. 274.

> Both primitive shaman and contemporary poet are simultaneously products of and manipulators of a system of representations (i.e. a culture), and it is on this structural plane that analogies between the practices of each may be legitimately pursued.[42]

This is in key with Claude Lévi-Strauss's assertion that the 'unconscious activity of the mind consists of imposing forms upon content'.[43] The manipulation of that unconscious activity – of the thought-worlds of readers – is that which these practises seek. The charm outcomes of revelation or hypnosis, as seen through psychoanalysis, are seen at their clearest in Julia Kristeva's 'Revolution in Poetic Language'. Charm,

> exposes the subject to impossible dangers: relinquishing his identity in rhythm, dissolving the buffer of reality in a mobile discontinuity, leaving the shelter of the family, the state, or religion. The commotion the practice creates spares nothing: it destroys all constancy to produce another and then destroys that one as well.[44]

Here the reading of a rhythm, unfettered by Hughes's semanticising (indeed, symbolising) demands for rhythm and sound, causes the subject's annihilation and reconstitution with the recognition that all such (re)constitution is likewise as provisional as that which preceded the rhythmical interpretation; thus comes an understanding of, as Scott says elsewhere, 'one's psychophysiological relation to the world'.[45] In the outcome of personal revelation which the above demonstrates, of *phanopoeia*, cognitive closures are called into question in such a way as to indicate their profound provisionality. In this recognition comes a glimpse of reality – of

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[42] Bentley, p. 7.
[43] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1977), p. 21.
[44] Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', trans. by Margaret Waller, *Postmodernism: Foundational Essays*, ed. by Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 713-714.
[45] Scott, p. 122.

world and self – as a liminal experience. This precedes the symbolic, in such a way as to thereafter be a constraint of social organisation, which is 'always already symbolic':

> The kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* precedes the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject.[46]

Ritual activity – kinaesthetic participation – opens the participator up to the provisionality of signs in such a way that they may be re-affirmed or altered. This is the erotic function of ritual which charm also makes use of. Undergoing this, the subject in language 'decenter[s] the transcendental ego, cutting through it and opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorical understanding is merely the liminary moment of the process'. That liminary moment is 'always acted upon by the relation to the other dominated by the death drive and its productive reiteration of the "signifier"'.[47] If a poem strays too closely to ritual – cultural constraint – it ceases to be poetry at all, according to this. Poetry's power is in refusing to resolve otherness into familiarity – the kinetic functional stage of the semiotic into pre-decided signs.

Hughes's efforts through charm are such as to attempt to make static that newly constituted subject, which is the activity of religious, erotic ritual. In this way the liminal moment of the process – which is leaping the gulf – is not itself the focal point of the activity, but rather the necessary means to an end. The social organisation of charm, there, and the tribal unification of Hughes's scope, is achieved by annihilating the original constraint of (Western, spiritually splintered, unreconciled-with-nature) society, and generating one anew.

[46] Kristeva, pp. 700-01.
[47] Kristeva, p. 703.

Rather than experiencing the rupture's essential provisionality, the subject experiences a new 'ordering', a new 'constancy' that is not, finally, destroyed.

This activity of charm is supported by Hughes's authoritative and defensive position. His discussion in 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' of the two brands of metre, 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox' is a riposte to Roy Fuller's statement that the ultimate line of 'The Horses', 'Hearing the horizons endure', is 'unsayable' (a situation complicated somewhat by the observation that Fuller in his review of *The Hawk in the Rain* never claimed any such thing) (*WP*, p. 320).[48] Fuller in his misquoted form appears a convenient straw man against whom Hughes is able to mount his defences. The essay is at least in part motivated by the fear of being found, as he suggests Tottel finds Wyatt, 'metrically incompetent' (*WP* 354). It is out of this position that Hughes seeks to conflate semantic and musical interpretation, with the implication that any such interpreter finds corresponding difficulties in attempting to interpret either form of datum. Fuller is used as a rhetorical device in an argument where a dissenting voice must be painstakingly removed. It is not, though, that Fuller, here, declines directly the kind of interpretation that collates rhythmical, sonic data with semantic representation; his dissent lies one step before that, and he finds himself unable to give himself up to the necessary kinaesthetic participation of the charm – unable to '[relinquish] his identity in rhythm' – and so the metrical constraints he expects of the poem indicate the opposing cultural constraints to which he belongs, to which he is unwilling to give up his membership. The charm has failed.

Even where the target of charm is unable to relinquish his identity in rhythm, the hypnotic capabilities of charm may be employed in such a way as to prevent dissent. This

[48] Roy Fuller, 'Review of *The Hawk in the Rain*', *The London Magazine*, 5.1 (1958), p. 61.

occurs when musical interpretation is impossible – when the target of charm is not in a position to actively construct the relationship between sound and sense. Audience members of *Orghast* would have experienced this, but it is also the case for audience members of poetry recitation. This is in part the subject of a letter from Hughes to Doreen Schofield, in which Hughes explicitly mentions Fuller's review. Schofield had written to Hughes asking for advice on the recitation of 'The Horses', a poem which she had chosen as part of a verse and prose examination at the London Academy of Music and Art. Hughes responds:

> It is a poem I have rarely read out to any audience. An audience is rarely aware of the reader's (or reciter's) problems, but I cut down my own problems, in recitals, by choosing to read only those poems which, for me, recite themselves. These are the poems where the internal concentration is intact, & remains so in any circumstances. And where the musical structure—the assembly of inflections—needs no help from the performer. These poems are quite few.
>
> But if one can stay within the poem, concentrating only on the meaning, everything else takes care of itself, I find. What the audience does not know is how [...] one's attention goes all over the place. That is when you need 'technique'–which serves, as far as the audience is concerned, just as well as the most achieved communion with the spirit of the poem, & what lies behind it. Though it leaves the 'reader' unsatisfied.
>
> In 'The Horses' there are problems, I can see. When I first published it, I was rebuked, by Roy Fuller, for the last line–I forget what he said, but he implied that I had wooden ears, & had somehow mishandled our English verse Tradition. (*LTH*, p. 432)

The implications here are that ‘The Horses’ is a poem which does not ‘recite [itself]’, that its ‘internal concentration’ is not ‘intact [...] in any circumstances’, and that the ‘assembly of inflections’ does indeed require ‘help’ from the performer. The further implication is that by facing and overcoming these challenges, one achieves ‘communion with the spirit of the poem, & what lies behind it’ – an aim problematised here by the pragmatic concerns involved in recitation before an audience. ‘Communion’ is the kinaesthetic participation espoused in ‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’. It is musical interpretation, through which one reaches ‘what lies behind [the poem]’, which is ‘reality’, and which, further, is the location of social, charm, ritual convocation. The religious connotations of ‘communion’ support this further in the sense of communing with both spiritual source and spiritual community.

In encountering the difficulty of one’s wandering attention, however, two alternative options are suggested: a poem whose ‘internal concentration’ is ‘intact’ (one, then, of clear deployment of orthodox metre); or the deployment of ‘technique’, which is the deployment of a rehearsed, memorised, static set of intonations. If we look to Hughes’s remarks in ‘Myths, Metres, Rhythms’ on the language of myth and the ‘multicultural lingua franca’, that most interpretable end of the ‘continuum’ on which a ‘modern literary work has to take its place’, that ‘internal concentration’ shows itself as the sure bet, the poem that cannot fail to arrange itself and be understood by the largest proportion of the audience (*WP*, p. 312). At the same time, of course, this is pragmatic advice to a reciter of poems in a position of tension. The poem partaking of ‘technique’, one unlike ‘The Horses’ which makes a demand for musical interpretation, requires no active input (at all, according to Hughes’s claim, though I would more realistically say, in a diminished sense) from the reader/reciter in order to organise the musicality of the piece. The audience cannot participate in musical interpretation whatsoever. Just as the actor in *Orghast* undergoes a form of shamanic ecstasy to come back with something badly needed, so too does the reciter undergo communion to which the audience

bears witness. A show of communion does just as well, though, and what appears important is that the audience does not balk at the reciter's place before them, or at the poem she reads. It is important the listeners are swept along and offer no dissent. This is pragmatic enough, but it is also a microcosm for Hughes's shamanic position and his attitude towards his readers beyond the act of recitation.

There is little in this advice of the claim that Hughes later makes to Raine regarding 'The Horses', that 'it still seems to me that if you're going to say it at all, you can only say it as I want it said' a statement which must be taken within the context of private exchange between two poets, and one which is marked by a surly, compensatory confidence provoked by Fuller's criticism (*LTH*, p. 454). The most universally acceptable poem, then, employs a readily appreciable and therefore conventional rhythmical profile. Nevertheless, this universal acceptability denies the 'pleasure' generated by 'leap[ing] that gulf' into the participation of musical interpretation, and so presents no opportunity on the part of the audience to find themselves reconstituted, either according to Hughes's prescriptive healing or Kristeva's 'relinquishing [of] [...] identity in rhythm'. The risk that is taken here is that the audience will not find the reader worthy of attention – it is to the end of winning that attention that a poem with intact concentration is deployed or, failing that, 'technique' is utilised. Either way, interpretation by the audience is not required. As long, then, as the recipient of charm is either mesmerised in an act of limited participation, or arrives at the correct kind of participation by active input into the musical interpretation of the poem, all is well. It is enough, if the reader (here, audience) is unable to assent, that they do not dissent.

It is exactly how the reader is 'satisfied', that 'communion with the spirit of the poem, & what lies behind it', which the straw man Fuller is unable (or unwilling) to make manifest for himself. Nevertheless, Fuller does attempt to read the line, and finds it dissatisfying. It is the risk of this failure – that a reader may attempt, in fact, to read the line and still find it

wanting – that prompts Hughes's defence in the essay. Hughes's privileging of certain kinds of participation also becomes clear from that situation: namely, those that find the poem satisfactory, and which offer no threat to Hughes's position as propagator of successful verse. Around 'The Horses', a poem that is lacking in devices that lend themselves to intact internal concentration, whose 'assembly' requires 'no help', there springs from Hughes a wealth of explanation, exposition, and defence, as if the possibility of the poem's failing were extremely wounding. The Hughes of 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' is acutely aware of himself in a similar manner to a reader standing before his audience – 'that sense of the wrong audience – which is so inhibiting & falsifying, & wearisome'. When a poet recites his work before an audience he invites a risk to his authority found simply in his being judged worthy or unworthy of attention, and the advice regarding recitation given by Hughes to Schofield is a neat synecdoche of the exact anxiety which drives those defensive elements of 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms'. Hughes's advice and attitudes that we have seen are everywhere defensively accented, essentially intolerant of differing interpretation wherever such is tenable (or can be made to appear tenable). This is a vital element of the charm-relationship between poem, reader, and world which Hughes attempts to make accountable to static effects.

Hughes in the figure of poet-shaman appears as a propagator of cultural homogenisation from which he nevertheless necessarily stands apart, and notably in a position of instigation, manipulation, authority. The move towards loss of self in cultural (tribal) mass and towards actualisation of self in propagator and manipulator of that mass appears in a contradictory fashion throughout Hughes's poetry, with its themes of death, underworld descent, flight, dismemberment, reassembly and resurrection, and the critical writing of, for instance, 'Myths, Metres, Rhythms' with its preoccupation with defensive, corrective argumentation.

In the figure of shaman, whose role it is to unite the public and the personal, there exists vacillation between self-sublimation/annihilation and self-apotheosis, ecstasy and leadership in social enterprise. The shaman undergoes an encounter with otherness (with reality) which causes ego-destruction and reconstitution – the extraction of 'the body from its homogeneous shell' and its being 'turn[ed] into a space linked to the outside'.[49] Hughes attempts to restrict his readership from having the same encounter – his shamanic, conduital role works to instate a reaffirmation of homogeneity, extended to a cultural body.

Hughes is a poet whose efforts at generating participation, leading to the pleasure of 'leap[ing] that gulf' and to harmonious cultural membership, exist alongside authoritative posturing, efforts to remove dissenting voices and, indeed, efforts to remove the very ability itself to dissent (*WP*, p. 335). Where Frye finds the poet who uses charm to be 'a magician who renounces his magic, and thereby re-creates the universe of power instead of trying to exploit it', Hughes – poet, magus, artifex, channeler, shaman – is instead insistent on the magical, communal, harmonious abilities of poetry and upon his own role as its overseer.[50] By encountering Hughes's views on mythology, culture and linguistic understanding, I have shown in this chapter how charm's efficacy is mobilised to constrain the act of interpretation, constrain the nature of the individual and thus foster 'intact[ness]' – homogenisation – of the culture to which he or she belongs.

[49] Julia Kristeva, 'The Subject in Process', trans. by Patrick ffrench, *The Tel Quel Reader*, ed. by Patrick ffrench and Roland François Lack (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 143.
[50] Frye, p. 147.

<u>Chapter 4: There Are No Things but in Ideas</u>

The last chapter examined Ted Hughes's use of charm to produce effects upon his audience, in particular through the innate power of sound and rhythm. Hughes's healing is consonant with an effort to homogenise the cultural membership of its targets. This healing is put to the task of eliminating differences in understandings, as problematised in Hughes's thoughts regarding 'mythology' (*WP*, p. 310). In so doing, it is the poetic embodiment of the congregational rituals of charm which likewise attempt to break down the egos of their targets, and thereafter to harmonise them in such a way as to minimise difference between participants. Rather than raising to awareness the structures on which societies and the sense of self sustain themselves (and calling them into doubt, destroying them), Hughes seeks to generate and reinforce such structures to bring about cultural, spiritual harmony. Instead of this procedure resulting in an experience of the liminal, provisional nature of the subject's relationship to the other, this relationship and its results are actively restrained; the encounter produces a new ordering of the targets' relationships with signs (and, therefore, world) and seeks to affirm that ordering into constancy. Through this, Hughes engenders the cultural, tribal harmony he desires.

However, this homogenising charm-act at the same time bars access to the rupture between ego and other which is the liminal moment of such ritual. If any revelation does take place, it is strictly governed through Hughes's conduital role as shaman. He undergoes contact with the other (or a show of contact with the other, such as the 'technique' he suggests to Doreen Schofield) and his audience are adjusted accordingly (*LTH*, p. 432). If one assents, one is led to a public revelation which is thereafter affirmed by the poem. The poem is, according to this, a limited object whose potential polysemy (whose potential

inexhaustibility) is reduced by Hughes down to his preferred interpretations, preferred encounters with otherness which thereafter becomes familiarity. If one refuses to '*jump the gulf*', one is either actively excluded from cultural membership, from right audience, or may yet be hypnotised by charm and defensive manoeuvres into offering no dissent (*WP*, p, 364). Through this focus on a poem's efficacy as a social, utilitarian device, Hughes seeks to limit the poem's multidimensionality – its capability for polysemy – and its capabilities for aesthetic, private effects. The poem's social efficacy is therefore, for him, to bind its readers into like-mindedness and to uphold Hughes's authority over those readers; correct interpretation affirms authority, and authority likewise affirms correct interpretation. The notion of reality here is of a set of understandings – moral, political – which Hughes endorses and wishes to propagate. In fact, Hughes, through poetic activity analogous to shamanic ecstasy, is the only one who undergoes contact with what could be considered reality – with nature-as-such, with the unmediated other.

The aim of this chapter is for it to serve as a bridge between these critical insights into Hughes's work, and how those insights have informed and are informed by the original composition of *Pinhole Camera*. Further to this, the chapter offers insight into my own poetics: the forms of its efficacy, its use of charm, its deployment of strategies actively at odds with those I have discerned in the work of Hughes, and the difference in the condition of poetic being from that in Hughes's poetry. On the one hand, charm which tends towards the hypnotic relies upon the authority of a central figure such as Hughes and binds its participants into a like-mindedness reinforced by and reinforcing of structures: particular, didactic attitudes to world, to poem, to interpretation. On the other hand, charm which tends towards *phanopoeia*, revelation, the solving of riddles, seeks to raise the reader to an active participant in the dissolution of structure, towards defiance, revolution and against authority. This chapter examines the development of my poetics towards the second of these. I contrast

the poetic techniques and themes of *Pinhole Camera* drawn upon here with those I have examined in Hughes's work. I do this first by examining the efficacy of rhythm and sound, then the repercussions for signification, then in turn the repercussions for otherness, familiarity and being.

The findings in the critical component of the thesis, and the arc of the poems, represent an exorcism of those aspects of Hughes's influence I see as supporting the controlling, authoritarian elements of charm. Indeed, influence is a recurring theme in the poems, as a point at which what is thought to be exterior and what is imagined interior meet and commingle. In 'Influenza', poet and lyric subject read about the mimicking capabilities of the lyrebird; but neither are merely mimics.[1] The self is projected into the external just as the external is projected inward: 'a cabin breathes above the earth', and 'a well shouts into me, listens for the echo'. Subject and object disappear in this commingling into an inexhaustible nondualism, an enduring liminality. The reader, too, is brought into the poem's commingling of exterior and interior, hearing 'inside of inside'.

Sonic and rhythmical effects in the poems are put towards supporting this process. Slight modifications to Hughes's suggested approach to reading rhythm – 'musical interpretation' – yield an approach which privileges the reader's freedom in interpretation. This is the same approach which Clive Scott champions:

> Reading metre as expression rather than as knowledge, or convention aptly handled. Second, reading rhythm with the paralinguistic in mind, that is, reading rhythm not only as expression but as self-expression.[2]

[1] 'Influenza', below, p. 219.
[2] Clive Scott, 'Translating Rhythm', *Translation and Literature*, 6.1 (1997), 31-47 (p. 31).

In contrast to Scott's reader-oriented methodology for reading rhythm, Hughes's musical interpretation aims for a predictability of reading methods among readers; interpreters of rhythm ought to read in such a way that complements semantic meaning to in turn yield interpretations of the poem at hand which are as similar as possible. The projection of self into the reading of rhythm ought to be as similar as possible among readers so that those readers will be harmonised in their communing with the poem (and with what is taken to be beyond the poem – its spirit, or reality).

While the reading of rhythm is invariably inflected by the idioculture to which a reader belongs (so, his or her 'mythology'), it is not my desire that any such idioculture be restrained, affirmed, or disseminated across an audience. As Derek Attridge notes, 'individuality is not *exhausted* by idioculture; that is to say, I am more than the sum of the parts of the cultural systems I have absorbed'.[3] Hughes's demands for musical interpretation are more than just a limitation of the reading of rhythm, but a limitation of reader, of subject, in such a way that the reader becomes a set of malleable attributes which it is possible to harmonise with those of others, or throw into discord, or suppress and exclude. The subject may be a 'node within a set of noncontinuous and heterogeneous networks' but is not reducible to those networks.[4] Furthermore, Hughes, in seeking his cultural healing, wishes those networks to become *that network*, an impossibly homogeneous idioculture which provides at least a feeling of continuity.

Furthermore, reading rhythm is not necessarily just self-expression, as Scott asks of it, but a projection of self into what is alien to it, a realisation of language's materiality – and the materiality, arbitrariness of those aspects of language which have come to be a part of the self. Reading for the 'aleatory, rather than for the pre-ordained' is a form of self-expression

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[3] Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 22.
[4] Attridge, p. 22.

which can in fact represent the disjunctive hyphen between self and expression.[5] The effect is recursive, homuncular, matryoshka-like: the self looking at itself pouring itself forth into what is other to it (language) which is being poured into the self. Under that kaleidoscopic effect, the reading of rhythm can cast light upon the provisional nature of the closure of selfhood; self *is* and yet *is also* elsewhere than the set of networks it informs and is informed by. In the mutual exchange of projections, which is reading rhythm for the aleatory, the materiality of language can estrange us from ourselves, as Attridge also notes:

> I am always, in a way, other to myself. It is this instability and inconsistency, these internal and external pressures and blind spots, this self-dividedness, that constitute the conditions for the emergence of the other […]. The other brought into being in a creative event is thus at once implicit in the cultural field and wholly unpredictable from it.[6]

This implicit-yet-unpredictable nature of otherness is what contributes to a poem's capability for polysemy. Even the multiplicity of meanings of a poem's polysemy cannot be exhausted by idioculture because neither can the reading subject.

This inexhaustibility of self and poem is not free from potential constraint, however, as my exploration of Hughes's work has sought to make apparent. This constraint is a theme in *Pinhole Camera* as much as is freedom from constraint. Rhythmical effects (and options) are harnessed in an effort to break down such constraint. The claustrophobia of a stagnating consciousness is felt in poems such as 'Homunculus', 'Room', 'Tree'. 'Lessons for Little Pig', 'Claustrophobia', and others. In many of these poems that closing of consciousness is represented as a room, house, or even the body itself. In 'Horses', a poem which confronts

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[5] Scott, p. 31.
[6] Attridge, p. 25.

Hughes's 'The Horses', this constraint is the fenced and gated field in which the horses are enclosed, but extends itself further to perception of the scene in general. The scene presented is actively at odds with that experienced by the epiphanic wanderer of Hughes's poem. Rather than walking in the revelatory light of near-dawn through an area of relative wilderness, the narrator of 'Horses' is aware of the potential bathos of witnessing the domesticated horses, with their 'quiet rhythms', eating grass and wearing 'green overcoats'.[7]

Nevertheless, the potential for unrestrained wildness, of encounter with otherness at present effortfully restrained, is also apparent. That is 'the music of interruption | it is the forceful rhythm of pause and void'. The rhythm of the poem threatens to sweep the reader along, just as the scene threatens to be uneventfully mundane; and yet, one cannot ignore the disjunctions generated by the unpunctuated lines. Many of the clauses can belong to more than one potential sentence, and in this lack of clear belonging the structure of the sentence in general (just as the reliability of the perceptual structures determining the scene for an onlooker) are threatened with destruction. While one may experience the 'small impact of the scene', so too may one experience that 'small impact' as belonging to 'each density of hoof', such that instead one can read 'of the scene I stopped and watched' to indicate the narrator's commingling of self with scene. Through this, the reader is led to consider increasingly aberrant interpretations of semantics and syntax, each marked by and marking a unique rhythmical profile tied up with that choice (and that positioning of reader-as-subject-in-process in relation to it). 'It is the forceful, rhythm of pause. And void | the void of oppressive, body of the stampede fear'; 'The fear of the circling | and once. The gate closes once. The gate opens'; 'The gate closes [only] once the gate opens'; and so on. When those

[7] 'Horses', below, p. 245.

elements of the poem's techniques lie closest to charm-as-hypnosis, so too does a correspondingly riddle-like force appear:

> their lips like the slender blue lip of a bowl
>
> pouring out a dark liquid of flank and pupil
>
> pouring out the centrifugal swirl of tea leaves
>
> pouring out the vision of horses that could be
>
> of moderate wildness pouring round the field

The refrain of 'pouring out' is coupled with lines which tend toward a rhythm of five beats per line. Even as the refrains and rhythm attempt to build into a hypnotic consistency that consistency is undercut by the way in which the stresses shift positions along the lines. The choice of stress-positioning also comes to the fore in the pile up of potential stresses: 'blue lip', 'dark liquid', 'tea leaves'. Even the refrain itself offers the potential modulation which stresses 'out', where inner and outer are a key opposition in the poem. The shifts in register which accommodate 'centrifugal' and 'moderate' offer further pause; what could be the build of a 'wild', stampede-mimetic rhythm, relates instead to horses of only 'moderate wildness'. As these points of potential disjunction increase, the contrasting potential to overlook the semantic meanings of the lines diminishes. One may notice the hallucinatory, jarring quality of the horses with plural 'lips' that are like the singular 'blue lip' of a bowl which is itself pouring the horses metonymically forth as a 'dark liquid of flank and pupil'. The horses become their own 'vision', as if read from 'tea leaves' which they both are and are 'pouring out'. The images reflect and refract in a way which asks to be solved and yet cannot be, except in a way that begins to dissolve under logical attention. This is the multiplicity of such 'vision', and the narrator's (and reader's) position in relation to that vision likewise dissolves in being turned to look at itself.

This reflexively disassembling aspect of the poetry has repercussions for lyric's aspirations towards efficacy upon the world and for the aspirations of the lyric persona to speak, perceive or feel on behalf of some common cultural (or biologically archetypal) consciousness. In Hughes's work the lyric I is the trusted experiencer of real-world encounters. We are invited to trust such encounters because, as he says in introducing Keith Sagar's *The Reef*, 'the observer has paid in full for what he records, and what has earned him a superior stake in reality [. . .]. Good folk rhymes have this kind of simplicity – experience itself seems to have produced them'.[8] In *Pinhole Camera* experience constantly casts doubt upon itself as reliable. The common habit of the lyric I which attempts to account for, accommodate, *commodify*, experience of the world does so in such a manner which *may make the world exhaustible*: it reduces encounters with otherness to a familiarity it presumes has already exhausted otherness. This jaded manner encompasses epiphanic cliché (which 'The Horses' surely risks), and a habit of mind which in attempting to understand the world casts its shadow everywhere (in fact, perceives and receives its shadow in lieu of the world). The poem 'Owl' depicts this mental claustrophobia in a way which draws indirectly on Wallace Stevens. It is something of a counterpart to Stevens's 'Owl in the Sarcophagus', of which Northrop Frye says:

> We are constantly trying to close up our world on the model of our own death, to become an 'owl in the sarcophagus.' As long as some reality is still outside us we are still alive, and what is still external in that reality is what has a renewing power for us.[9]

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[8] *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar*, ed. by Keith Sagar (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2012), p. 301.

[9] Northrop Frye, 'Wallace Stevens and the Variation Form', *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 294.

In this exhaustive solipsism we are all ‘the last of [our] species’, seeing ourselves as homunculi in houses ‘with a wonderful view | of itself in a stagnant lake’. Hughes’s admonishment of ‘Reformed Christianity’ and ‘Old Testament Puritanism’ for encouraging ‘the assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use’ is hypocritical in this light (*WP* 129). The aspects of his poetics I have examined seek to render reality a similarly exhaustible heap of materials whose use is in the uniting of what is purely human. Charm’s traditional efficacy, embodied in calls to a responsive nature, likewise ends in an exhaustion of otherness, because it seeks to account for and *tame* the ineffable; nature is reduced to a list of utilitarian gestures and calls of which apostrophe is a descendant.

This is the situation for lyric which the poem ‘Soliloquy Overheard by the Rest of the Cast’ in part explores. The lyric I wanders through the poem seeking embodiment, casting itself onto and into various natural objects: a ‘the mountain goat’, ‘the two eyes | that appear at the cave’s entrance’, ‘the skull […] abandoned by the brain’.[10] However, this is an act of ‘translat[ion]’, and the attempts to locate and to become a singular unifying voice for the natural world end in a preoccupation with the death that such an effort exemplifies: ‘death you are probably thinking I think that too’. Even as the voice tries out its various objects for possession the ambiguities in the unpunctuated lines generate an opposing force; the double meanings of ‘finally it’s trying’ and ‘that’s just’ are two examples. At the same time, though, a reader may find herself ordering the meaning of the lines more easily than is the case with ‘Horses’, and the temptation on revisiting the poem over multiple readings may be such as to cement the kind of closure of world the lyric voice is likewise seeking; the renewal and disruptions of the poem’s polysemy must be striven for.

[10] ‘Soliloquy Overheard by the Rest of the Cast’, below, p. 227.

Hughes's desire for harmonious cultural being and the homogenous thought-worlds of a tribe is problematised by the way in which signs may be misunderstood or understood differently across various members of a culture. His salve for this is in part to attempt to constrain the relationship between subject and world which the semiotic constitutes. This effort is consonant with his deployment of mythic personae in his poetry, his anthropological unravelling of myths to locate supposed archetypes, and his efforts to shift the locus of being from the (private) mind to the (public) spiritual. 'We live in the translation, where what had been religious and centred on God is psychological and centred on the idea of the self' (*WP*, p. 274). The world of charm, with its shorthand utilitarian gestures requesting efficacy on an accounted-for natural world, with its harmonious absolute understandings, is likewise 'a perfect state to those who enjoy it' (*WP*, p. 311). In all this, either biological (as sought in *Orghast*), or accrued, cultural motivation between signifier and signified is key to this harmony. As I have already gone some way to suggesting, my view is that such unquestioned cultural motivation is stultifying, and results in a kind of death, as Attridge also points towards:

> A culture that does not continually find ways of opening itself to the excluded other on which it depends can hardly be said to be ethical—there can be no guarantee that the alterity brought into the world by a particular literary or artistic work will be beneficial. In the worst case, the introduction of alterity could destroy a culture.[11]

Rather than seeking the affirmation and continual re-cementing of the cultural motivation of signification, my poetry seeks to call that motivation into question – to open itself (and the reader) up to the other. Seen through this nexus of language, myth and being, Hughes in effect undercuts his efforts to reach any true being-as-such. Instead, he reaches for control

[11] Attridge, p. 60.

over the para-denotative elements of language-as-being, an act which renders any potential irruption of otherness, in its place, an endless return to what is familiar.

A glimpse of reality arrives in 'Ideas of Order at Key West' at the liminal point of the 'fragrant portals', and Hughes in a similar vein describes the way metaphor's revelatory character can swing open the door from the left to the right side of the brain.[12] Those portals and that doorway are language itself. Language is something both inseparably of us and, in its materiality, not of us. Hughes is disdainful of language's slippery materiality. For him, words are: 'learned late and laboriously and easily forgotten'; 'are unnatural, in a way, and far from […] ideal for their job'; 'are continually trying to displace our experience' (*WP*, p. 19). Hughes appears to denigrate the 'multicultural lingua franca', which for him is 'shallow, arbitrary, empty, degraded and degrading, even destructive, if not altogether meaningless', precisely because it raises to awareness the arbitrariness, provisionality and materiality of language. On the other hand, 'mythology' encompasses language that has been so absorbed into the working consciousness of its users as to go some way to *constituting* that consciousness. 'Mythology' exemplifies a total inurement to particular structures of understanding; only a powerfully disruptive act might indicate the impoverishment of otherness that 'mythology' (Hughes's 'cultural stasis [that] might feel like a perfect state to those who enjoy it') suffers from (*WP*, p. 311). So, in this sense and in others, the poetry of *Pinhole Camera* is anti-mythological.

This anti-mythological stance is best seen in the 'Invention of' poems. In 'The Invention of Tongues', the effort to mythologise the beginnings of language (both pre-language and post-language, and in a sense –lapsarian) using language deranges itself. In so

[12] Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West', *The Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), pp. 30. Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 159.

doing, the poem attempts various differing mythic explanations for that origin: plucking tongues ‘from the centres of large flowers’; the influx of the external in ‘the pine-tree in the lung,’ and the ‘apple seed sprouting | in the stomach lining’; and, finally, a scene of a village community ‘squabbl[ing] to shout into their communal hub, a well, ‘where spermiform eels spawned in millions | and moved in streams under the houses’.[13] The initial line ‘there’s nothing to it in the end’ is answered by ‘*it* gets lost’; language through its schematising of things (its ‘section[ing] the graveyard’) is both responsible for the loss of the possibility of access to things, and also the medium through which the absence and presence may be felt. In seeking failed myth-dom of before and after states, these poems instead sit with a degree of discomfort at a liminal point between the two, deploying a suitably diffracted temporality as they do so. In ‘The Invention of Clocks’, the abstract notion of time and the clock used to measure it become commingled. The time the poem describes – prior to time, and then after time – is impossible, and the narrative structure of the poem, in attempting to organise itself into a familiar structure, falls apart. The clock exists in a stasis within itself – between the ‘two straight black trees’ which are the marks upon its own face, ‘in unabating fever | which isn’t, will be, already was.’[14] The liminal is also the atemporal; time, in a form which strikes itself (and which ‘flinches when struck’) tries first to think away its situation (‘the before, the after: that’s | where the living happens’) and then to escape itself within itself. The discursive event of the poem, within its own temporality, likewise tears itself apart in a fit of recursion. In ‘The Invention of Eyes’ that mythic, lyric temporality is again interrogated, as is the public nature of myth. The accusatory initial line, ‘your eyes are guilty of childhood’, is one which we encounter and may wish to shake off, somehow.[15] The details of that childhood – a private

[13] ‘The Invention of Tongues’, below, p. 238.
[14] ‘The Invention of Clocks’, below, p. 225.
[15] ‘The Invention of Eyes’, below, p. 232.

mythology, already an oxymoron (much like the natural world Hughes encountered and 'found ready to hand' in his youth (*WP* p. 312)) – are uncomfortably specific:

> They [your eyes] watched the echoing
>
> space between the kitchen clocks
> when your father failed
> to strike your mother.

From those particulars – a traumatic, absent trauma – a diminishment of experience is felt, represented in fleeting glimpses, 'limited as a pupil | under the glare of fluorescence'. The urge to describe the world in terms of one's childhood, in terms of one's personal mythology (at heart a psychoanalytical urge) becomes a deictic imperative: 'Look, someone says, […] Look, a guide to connect the dots'. With such ready-made explanations for the world in place, the eternity of poetry – the sun matched with the sea, between the streams and the red clouds – becomes an interrelation of structural suppositions, 'the bruise of a skyline' which 'the sun creates | by plunging into it again and again'.[16] In that final line, mythic temporality is not an *atemporal* event, but a temporality of repetition founded in personal neurosis.

Violence, which Hughes employs through mythic characters to assault the everyday egos of his readers, is modalised differently in these poems. The violence of 'The Invention of Eyes' is perpetrated by the on-going mythologising of childhood – a violence of stagnation and repetition, of inescapability. In 'Familiar', violence is present not just as 'the process of torture progresses', a phrase of cold, bureaucratic description, but in the extraction of pre-decided interpretation, in the view that 'all things alike | may appear on schedule and be

[16] See Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 25.

reckoned'.[17] In 'Lessons for Little Pig' the morbid construction material of 'a satchel of bones' with which the narrator is to 'build a house' rests on the metaphorical bridge between house and body itself.[18] Body, internality and externality, and mind are commingled in the metaphor-making methodology. The otherness that may enter is at once desired and feared, 'a body which is a blunt weapon | to make mine forget and forgotten'.[19] The potential for violence there is more in line with Hughes's, but it is still only potential. The overriding fear is in the self-wrought stagnation of one's mental and physical closures. The door, 'which means enter, leave | and what's left over' exists in the hopes that such claustrophobia might have an ending. Violence is felt throughout the poems as absent, as an absence, and as an absent-making force. Where Hughes's violence is harnessed to directly transgress the everyday viewpoints of his readers, and in so doing to gather them towards particular modes of being, the poems of *Pinhole Camera* often generate violence through shifts in register between bureaucratic-sounding language, metaphor, and imagery. This is, in turn, granted further disjunction by contradictions and ambiguities in meaning generated by, for instance, lineation. In 'Changes Hands', a suggestion of violence arrives as a 'rending noise | that gets stranger and louder'.[20] The violence itself is still elsewhere, somehow unapproachable, but felt in the destruction of the bindings between the objects which change hands. In this absent-present nature of violence, that violence is always something performed by the poem rather than described. It occurs only in the moment when the reader opens herself up, on the threshold, to the irruption of the otherness which – personally, privately – performs its act of disruption and derangement to the systems of understanding, systems of personality and of being, which occupy a reader's sense of self. In 'Changes Hands' this disruption cuts loose the objects which change hands from their signification within each moment. Taken 'in

[17] 'Familiar', below, p. 265.
[18] 'Lessons for Little Pig', below, p. 250.
[19] 'Lessons for Little Pig', below, p. 250.
[20] 'Changes Hands', below, p. 262.

stasis', each item is unapproachable. The technique of the poem works towards this cutting loose as well:

> As it is taken, as it is passed, it brings
> about a lingering –
>
> the robin's egg bowl
> the antiquated coin
> the signet ring
>
> – whatever it is in the centre of clasping

The poem never quite makes clear what the 'it' of the first line is; likewise, the list of three objects in the second strophe, in its plurality, seems to deny being comfortably related to that pronoun. Further, those objects themselves can be read as constituting the 'lingering' of the second line. By the fourth strophe, a floating, unanchored monostich, the subject has been elided entirely: 'nevertheless drifts away from somewhere'. Finally, the poem throws doubt upon itself, as a textual object, its own parts drifting, its own voice one of 'rending noise | that gets stranger and louder': 'none understand it | and those who can hear it are liars'. Even as it makes its own statement suspect, it is still a statement against, for instance, Hughes's attempts to cement common, culturally motivated correspondence between signifiers and signifieds. More than this, though, it refutes and throws into doubt the experience a reader has of reading the poem itself; the line is not 'those who *claim to* hear it are liars'. The poem tears its objects apart, itself down, and anything that might be said about it is dealt with in similar fashion – as lies. It follows that all of the above cannot escape, either, from being a lie of sorts.

I said earlier that the metaphor-making of ‘Lessons for Little Pig’ attempts to remain on the bridge between house and body. That strategy for metaphor is one which recurs in *Pinhole Camera* as an enactment of liminality in perception. In ‘Owl’ the narrator is both human voice and animal, the distinction between subject and object (‘“Owl” is’, ‘I too am’) blurred.[21] In ‘Burial’ the ‘thoughts’ of the final two stophes grow increasingly embodied, wearing ‘head-dresses and bangles’ and with ‘fur’, such that the physicality of a corpse and the abstraction of thought are commingled and confused.[22] In ‘Oracle’ this is clearest of all, as the ‘bull’ exists as a corporealised metaphor from which subjectivity is to be divined in an act of ‘scapulimanc[y]’: ‘Watch it now (watch you now) step’.[23] That act renders subject as object, and vice-versa. This strategy of metaphorical liminality has its roots in the tactics of riddle, which is a ‘metaphor with one term concealed’ but whose purpose is to ‘reveal rather than conceal’.[24] The solving of a riddle is also the triumph of the intellect, the defeat of dangerous hypnotic powers (one is killed by the Sphinx for failing its riddle), and the renewal and revelation of those elements involved in the riddle’s format. The distortion of those elements in the riddle where ‘two overlapping meanings do not quite fit’ which is where ‘paradoxes arise’ is amplified in the distortive metaphors of *Pinhole Camera*.[25] The concealed element of these metaphors is, in a sense, metaphor itself. The metaphors can be ‘solved’, but never entirely comfortably, and the paradoxes inherent in them remain intransigent, and often take centre-stage: ‘Tree’ is ‘where a violin is thinking | about being hurled into the earth’.[26] The perception of phenomena on which a sense of reality hinges is itself, in this fashion, thrown open to the disruptions and distortions of those paradoxes. The effect is such as to collapse the space between ontology and phenomenology. ‘There are no

[21] ‘Owl’, below, p. 221.
[22] ‘Burial’, below, p. 261.
[23] ‘Oracle’, below, p. 254.
[24] Andrew Welsh, *Roots of Lyric* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 28.
[25] Welsh, p. 41.
[26] ‘Tree’, below, p. 224.

things but in ideas' proclaims 'Room'.[27] This is the nature of reality and of being which underpins the poetics of *Pinhole Camera*. This is not necessarily a refutation of the possibility for Heideggerian Dasein or agreement with Derridean textual inescapability (experience of beyond the semiotic is possible, even if afterwards we are only left remembering the smell of madeleines). Rather, it is the restriction (or enablement) of thought-worlds, of consciousness, whose bounds are defined by structures such as language, or by the symbolic faculties of the brain on which language depends. The otherness of reality is felt where those structures are called into question, indicated as provisional, destroyed and reconstituted. This is in some ways a poetic strategy descending from Wallace Stevens and amplified. The dream logic of the 'old sailor' of 'Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock' who, 'drunk and asleep in his boots, | Catches tigers' is present throughout *Pinhole Camera*.[28] In the self-destructive experience of 'the literal characters, the vatic lines' of poetry, otherness enters, '[takes] on color, [takes] on shape and the size of things as they are'. 'The greatest poverty is not to live | In a physical world', Stevens says in 'Esthétique du Mal'.[29] If any conviction underlies the poems of *Pinhole Camera* it is that this is no poverty at all, but rather, at root, a condition for the inexhaustibility of self, world and poem.

I have, over the one introductory and four main chapters of this study, interrogated my sense of the potentially dangerous ethical, political and perceptual aspects of Ted Hughes's poetics through the notion of charm and, in particular, charm's efficaciousness. The purpose of this has been, at root, two-fold. First was a feeling that criticism of Hughes had overlooked the negative aspects of his poetic attitude towards nature, reality, and the forms of efficacy extant

[27] 'Room', below, p. 229.
[28] Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West', *The Collected Poems*, p. 66.
[29] Wallace Stevens, 'Esthétique du Mal', *The Collected Poems*, p. 325.

in his poetry and thought whose efforts are to harmonise his readers both with each other and with that natural-real – and, in so doing, 'heal' them. Hughes's poetic and critical strategies all too often prioritise a championing of his authority-as-poet, his shamanic position. We readers become a tribe to whom Hughes turns his anthropological interest; we are near-sub-human objects to be manipulated for our own good. Charm's efficacy is put to that purpose: to limit our world-views, our thought-worlds, our relationships with each other and with the world with which we are supposed to be harmonised. At the same time as providing the hypnotic power for ritual congregation and the destruction of the quotidian ego, charm's fusion with shamanism provides Hughes with a position of conduital authority between, in his eyes, a mechanistic, technochratic, dissociative and illusory sense of reality, and that which is one of static, tacit, 'mythological' understandings inflected by his ethical, political concerns and the hierarchy of perception at whose zenith he places himself.

The second purpose is, in locating and explicating these aspects of Hughes's poetics, to exorcise their influence from my own work – and to antagonise the elements of that influence in the poetry itself. This chapter has sought to place my own poetics in relation to that exorcism and antagonism of Hughes's, and also in relation to Wallace Stevens's. Those aspects of poetry which Hughes attempts to restrain and cement – semiotic understanding, particular interpretations, the reading of rhythm, the poet's authority – are, instead, essential avenues for the efficacy of my own poetry. *Pinhole Camera*'s sense of reality is founded in the awareness of the very provisionality of perception, of subject and of object. That provisionality not only opens us up to the other, but indicates how we are other to ourselves, and how the other is likewise inexhaustibly a part of ourselves. Hughes's harmony might instead be read as stagnation – of culture, of self, of world.

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PINHOLE CAMERA

Influenza

A cabin breathes above the earth
and a well is for putting into, and drawing nothing.
A tree can be a very quiet place for living.

Nightly imports from floating townships of owls:
I hear inside of inside,
my hearing the smallest matryoshka doll.

I read that the lyrebird can mimic any sound.
Car alarm and chainsaw surround the wood
and the wood repeats them.

I reread that the lyrebird has no sound at all
but the voicebox is a vacuum flask, and must be filled:
when it calls, you are already within,

as the dog alarming with barks
brings you to its underworld.
What is seen bears record of what saw it –

I look at the hearth fire until it fevers.
Earth breathes a cabin
and a well shouts into me, listens for the echo.

Mineshaft

Wait long enough and the body is most things

Clothes fitted so close that it's like being on fire

To believe in a dynamo converting elements

To break this rockhead down to constituents

Thought as an opposable thumb

But all day looking into the dark
the dark didn't look back

Other than: here is my carbon
my springwater

Other than: that's the mind's closed circuit,
no? the thumbed-in eye

There they are pulling something up in a harness
which slips out before reaching the light

Owl

i.

is informant to the shrew. Concerning
arcs in the air. Concerning how
a graphed parabola
appears to be swooping somewhere.
More on this later.

The owl has fledged
as quills will push through a pillow –
coalesced around a vantage
from which prey is something purely
stooped upon.

I mean, body as plotted points
and a project for gaining mass –
though also a house with a wonderful view
of itself in a stagnant lake.
I too am the last of my species.

ii.

Without time, the parabola
swoops both ways.
No one goes anywhere,
the shrew always eaten/not-eaten.
With time, the parabola does not recover:
after the hunt
a shift of axis dashes flight. Y flat-lines.
X becomes small stones, feathers, rodent pulp.
Flints also lie down in the graveyard
and fence posts are where the air sits
and observes.
I digress.

iii.

At the sky's torn edge:
clouds climb
to where my thoughts have been collecting.

Frost stiffens the plumage.
Hollow bones hold a space for ague,
the mind for mausolea,
but I will rise
as sky lets itself down into branches:

after snowfall it's difficult to remember
the shape of friend, creature or plant.
How is the absent thing present?
Earth in the sky. Sky in the trees.

Tree

I am exhausted by not dying.
The tree, at least, exists, is
where a violin is thinking
about being hurled into the earth.

The Invention of Clocks

The shaking-quietly-to-oneself
chose a body: oracular O
with a pale face that flinches when struck.

Looking for its fear
is like looking for the face
behind an astronaut’s helmet.

Thinking back, the choice
was inevitable. Winding the hands
requires the instant of each blow

and the instant of each blow
is so small
it hardly exists: one way to cope.

The before, the after: that’s
where the living happens, as if
life were birth and burial.

Between the two straight black trees lies
that unaccountable winter,
the country of clocks,

in which sleepy chickens
glottal-stop in their hutch
as if to remind themselves of their bodies;

and the clock still shivers
in unabating fever
which isn’t, will be, already was.

Instrument

The piano wants to be used to bring the worms roping up,
to turn worms to rope –
look at their grained cords, it plays, look

at their knotting and unknotting, their moving
over each other like the strings of a knot pulled loose.

It wants to be carved from pure weather, its rhythms,
weather in the abstract. The sky reads
light notes in the black lacquer of its lid.

The maple tree exists nowhere, the wood
made material, made immaterial.

The pianist leads out each sound
or is tenderly led. Look at his fingers, his hands,
wriggling to be free of their skins.

The piano is the lignified fall of rain on the earth
that carries on sounding –

rain that brings worms roping up
to escape vibration.

Worms are a state of mind, it plays. Worms are a destination.

Soliloquy Overheard by the Rest of the Cast

it has been my custom and task to translate
the sounds of rocks falling asleep heavily
and the mountain goat when he trips
and I think how embarrassed his horns
wincing into spirals trying to curl away
and that too I translate and the two eyes
that appear at the cave's entrance
I like to translate those as me and perhaps
also the bones near a firepit
and the nested skull how full the skull
ladies and gentlemen held up to a spotlight
how trepanned by your gaze
but it has limited meanings
death you are probably thinking I think that too
and the skull has little to relate
abandoned by the brain
it just keeps on opening
its mouth its dilapidated headcase
as if all aperture were good enough
to speak and what's it speaking exactly
I don't know I think finally it's trying
to remember what it meant to say
or what it could say
and if the jaw locks in the wind no great loss
and then if it lolls in the wind that's just
the wind which anyone can translate
and might already be quoting by accident

The Invention of Ears

What began in vibration
is tricky to tell. To tell the truth
the shuddering doubles.

Along the corniced promenades
we went clutching our heads
awaiting the falling-out-thing.

When did it enter, when did entering
go so in vogue? I shook my head
like a diver to the very bottom of no.

It was fingertip before, a closeness.
The movements of breath,
not the gauze of noise.

Sirens were a pirouetting red.
Then the heart, a depthcharge,
from which the diver flees – still saying no.

No, in waking, to the thumped floorboards,
the elephant children running upstairs,
the cricket chirruping a smile to its knees.

What began in vibration is bursting,
a foetal rolling-over. Can you call in
the child, the dog, or the day

with a word? Or are they the sound coming?–
Played-on sinews, vibrato blur,
the gift of distance – loss.

Room

it is prisoner to its prisoner, the one
with the constellated antlers, the one
with the Aztec head-dress, the one
with the tattoos of familiar gods
or the moccasins or even the schoolgirl
socks that fall down repeatedly,
its walls at mercy of picking fingernails
or the damp of stems in a vase,
or the days and nights as they are
observed from what windows it allows
and what sight allows it cannot control,
and, after all, the eyeball is like a cage
the showman motorcyclist
throws his centrifugal force against,
but all this is speculation, the foreign
prying apart, the speculum mirror,
and there are no things but in ideas,
and if the vase were totally invisible
would it be water, and if the walls
let in a little time to lend
a weathered façade, would air
erect its force-field, and what I mean
is the idea – what I mean – would it go
out amid the pocketless spaces
of thrashed autumnal releases
and the unsandwiched afternoons
and would the prisoner bring his
witnesses and which prisoner is that

Gym Recursion

Perhaps he is thinking to outpace himself
on the treadmill when, as if only now aligned,

mirror strikes mirror.

Where he looks perhaps he sees the body as plosive
and expansive, infinite and contained,

the inners going out forever, touching everything
which is itself. Perhaps there are thrown thoughts

like hackles that keep on rising,
demarcations of *from* till *to*.

He thinks others must throw around kettlebells
of brains, pendula of judgments (brain

swinging out onto the seen thing) to consider him
in motion by the pendula of hips and shoulders, spine

rigging the many trapezes of the body they must consider
admirable, pitiable, of them and not of them, in the way,

and in that way infinite and contained, impinging
upon everything which is themselves forever.

Attempting the Correlative

In a form that resists
abstraction, statement and sentiment
the correlative remains. The bull that saunters
into your living-room and radiates CURIOSITY.
When I am feeling dramatic I like to think
of blood, the dawn as a deli counter,
and also the oracular dead, juggling skittles,
adept with the way of exclamatory shapes.
The sky opens its flowerhead.
The windows are surprised at light
fleeing – always the light is pouring away
to autumn's carry-all, which is a pinhole camera.
When we came home from the big top,
from the clowns and sword-eaters,
the rain moved with us into the bedroom,
birds at the window sat as still as in a museum.
I was comparing your spine
to a golden bulrush, and so swan-necked
I barely saw the clots of your lips, the sky's
bloodied petals, my hand at the doorknob
compelled by metal's curves
and the likenesses of ephemeral flesh.

The Invention of Eyes

Your eyes are guilty of childhood.
They watched the echoing space

between the kitchen clocks
when your father failed
to strike your mother.

When you look within for this guilt
each eye is an eggyolk trying to burgle the other's shell.
The strike merely connects

elsewhere, its target
as limited as a pupil
under the glare of fluorescence.

Look, someone says,
and there's a woman speaking.
Look, a guide to connect the dots

which in fruition are the bruise of a skyline
the sun creates
by plunging into it again and again.

Meat Locker

I had gone down shaking to the freezer
where my face waited in a pail of milk

when the door closed, and I wasn't afraid –
I realised, like lifting free the stubborn

radius from the forelimb, this room lay larger
than the banked meat above, the shop

and its window, the chill street and its ceiling
of stars – that room shut behind me.

Pearlescent fat of marmoreal Greece, ramparts
of rainbowed steaks pulled me onwards

while the little lights of my eyes, the stoving
touch of each my fingers sparked a thaw.

If I stared long enough the flesh began to move.
I had a glimpse of the butcher, then,

as he staggered between the aisles
of sweating carcasses that swayed apart,

stopping to bring down the cleaver,
to make small and consumable, to carve off

clods of gristle for his dog
or supple geometries,

and squeezing each in his hands,
apportioned for the cabinets above.

Dog

Her looking almost every way an act of nerves –
she quivers in a windmouth.
Expert in brinks, or is it indecision? The door
both behind her and ahead.
So many children laugh daily through that white
arch, stopping to knead her brow,
shrugged in such a human way, and growing more
knuckly with each passing.

Ahead is difficult to understand. It wasn't always.
Stripes of musculature, hardhoof stones,
and the children growing towards the entrance
to a smoky place she cannot turn and look at.
Ahead which is behind, which is a used-up place
full of pelt-shakes, full of looking-at-self-in-waters.
Zests of dung, sweat, clamouring leaves with raindrops,
crowd her with their lostness like stars.

Homunculus

I'm only hearing about it now
(the unwatched room, the unlit bulb,
the table at which nobody will sit)

and it begs the question how
anyone could enter a doorless house
that doesn't exist from outside,

whether the window is open or not,
or if a lawn mower performs its drone
and a scent of cut grass permeates –

which is, now consider,
also the scent of death being overlooked.
Vapours rise from a distant field,

the ground-swell exhalations
of nothing alive and nothing dead either.
No thing alive and none dead also.

*

This thought crawled in my ear:
sympathy is a creature leaving

the body and entering another's.
Amid the stink of cut stems

[continues on next page]

I lost sight
of what was thought and what was felt.

Where the blades had failed to travel
a bee bent a flowerhead to the ground.

I was small, off-centre,
as insignificant as you.

Glass Riddle

The fish are almost all face,
like coins at the bottom of a well.

If their glares cross they glance away.
A brush of fins detonates them.
Is this what made them look at you?

When you lifted a foot from the woodchips
a weed uncoiled; did you summon it?
Earth plays understudy to your every step.

Did they look – or did their pane of glass
and yours align to put you in their aisles
and them on stage? But they come closer,

swoon around at the great meeting,
and you eat them. No one intervenes.
There is no one else looking in.

The Invention of Tongues

There's nothing to it in the end:
an enduring thought but it betrays the body
and sections the graveyard

which was much troubled by walking.
There the tongues lolled
from the centres of large flowers,

at least that's one take but in the end one
doesn't take anything: it's returned
to the pine-tree in the lung,

the apple seed sprouting
in the stomach lining, then out
under the sky's awning, where it shakes

its spores. *It* gets lost.
At such times we formed a queue
at the village well and squabbled

to be next to bellow down into the dark
where spermiform eels spawned in millions
and moved in streams under the houses.

River

The drowning boy is exhausted
from a life being made flexible by water.
As if he spent all night gathering blue flowers
to find they adopt the hue behind them by day.

He breathes in sheets of glass.
He pounds his chest
so as to shatter, to cough the shards
the river keeps reassembling.

The banks retreat.
If he reaches them they crumble, so he gives up
trying to order the particular-turned-particles.
Other children skim their years on the surface.

Lay him in the barn
where the wood thuds. Look at the dark of his mouth,
the clotted voice. He breathes
and blue roots move in the moonlight of his hands.

The Invention of Lungs

Air is the intimacy. This much is certain,
the rift between desire and smothering:
over your face the playful pillow

of summer air, the wetted air
in which pinguid daffodils slip about
and the cloying feathers

of alembic-headed birds drip with sunlight.
They're sucking the same air.
They're roiling in the images of the air.

We were such late-comers
to this flapping of a laughing-gas orgy.
Isn't this the world with haptic pavements

pounding upon the foot-soles, isn’t this
the bright world branding the retinas, no,
nor in the slamming of doors – here it is,

familiar tongue and cyclical bellows,
with such generous precision
giving its kiss of life.

Fable

Said the frog, After you've opened me up
you'll never need open another of my kind.
My insides are out, then out of the question.
The heart has hallways, vestibules
we will walk down, the body's chambers
frequented and filled.
When you have turned off the lights,
pushed in the chairs, checked the Bunsen flames,
you can leave the room for good
and begin to take apart the sky
– that forgetful student – before it opens you.

Spider

reverberating spans of webs
for the already-failed acrobats

the spaces that capture what
cannot be rescued the portioned

intermissions where the air
garrottes itself where

the eye rheumed with kaleidoscope
fractals the verdancy

the once-there has no choice
but let-it-fall-in let-enter

and it quivers and awaits
dissection and consumption

until the web closes until the dust
swept from the lashed corner

Diagrams

Now with mounting density the spiders set their traps.
The field is a warehouse of sheeted furniture.

(once I saw two trees intersect
so the air between them
had a man's shape
I could have occupied)

And if the field speaks they've sewn up its lips
and if it unlids an eye – it's too hard to imagine.

Argument

For the sake of argument let's pretend

this breeze that stirs the cricket readjusting
his gauntlets, his stirrups,

and this ear of corn loaded with listening

and this flint-ridden field
striking sparks of cornstalks

exist only so long as the chirrup sustains.

And let's pretend the root of the plant he sings on,
wringing its nerves,

projects up towards the song
in wait for the finale.

His legs straddle his abdomen,
he is steed and rider and urgings-on –

tell me, which is more solid?

Was it song or the body that began first?

Horses

there they were moving without aim unlikely
coalescing of muscles beneath a tarp pulled taut
bringing down relentlessly the quiet rhythms
of hooves as they stepped to stoop to eat
the grass received each density of hoof possessed
something meteoric in the small impact
of the scene I stopped and watched the outliers
wearing their green overcoats looking up now
and then to let gaze go to the end of the field
the fence threw it back to the eye like a ball
their lips like the slender blue lip of a bowl
pouring out a dark liquid of flank and pupil
pouring out the centrifugal swirl of tea leaves
pouring out the vision of horses that could be
of moderate wildness pouring round the field
and out of the frost-bit gate the immense fear
of their fearfulness that their bodies are funny
sacks of boulders with a mind to avalanche or
without mind but whose mind goes out nuzzlingly
among the coral-quivering of their nostrils
the bitterweeds of tails unfurling at flies
who pays mind in the sunlight currency of look
here at the glints in their eyes watching you
oh that is the music it is of interruption
it is the forceful rhythm of pause and void
the void of oppressive body of the stampede fear
the void of the fear of the circling
and once the gate closes once the gate opens
there’s no difference it's the maelstrom hiatus
that opens out and closes out to the field
of not-horse the unending coalescing of likely

Artifex

Posit

This animal stood where it centred the meadow. This one stood at the centre of fear. This one stood at the centre of hunger, which it could do because hunger had become a circle of bones. This one pointed at that one. This other stood between itself and its reflection. This animal watched a bird fly and so could not itself fly. This one watched the worm and was digging.

Thesis

We followed the long curve to the definite island of questionmark. We swung in the extendable thuribles of the far-off places. And not with each other we came together, say there were ten of us, then there were ten USes all banging about in the crowded headspace. The censer's smoke, headsmoke, being breathed in elsewhere, by you lot in the unforgiving we.

Together

I am the least in forgiveness to which you supplicate. Hugs of bringing the arms round endlessly into the huddle. All our work together goes into exile: the much-studied silver of birches, the stained man with the over-sweaty face, the mutt that goes gleefully to its low bowl, the not-our-light that illumines over-the-river and over-the-tree.

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Charm

What is the music making an us for? It makes a them to come orderly, it makes out a space, it hacks at thickets and thoroughly gardens. The small boats knock in the water and amid the song, where tethered, might tow the content from a continent. Find the right path in, find the right step, cover your eyes and your mouths for the glitzy flies. The copse insists its solitude, a bosky ultimate, to build the tree-house there. That animal, lean little fellow, stood at the far reach of the world and was not reached for.

Phenomena

But it beats in multiple in singleness. The what beats in and you are tempted to turn away, making the small order the smallest up to the whole. The temptation is not to open the box at all. Boxed, beaten and buffeted by waves, wave, sea, water, salt. The small boat might burst. Its driftwood on another shore gets boated and reboated continually. At last there is none of the same wood in it, just the temptation to familiar water, air pooling amid the planks, the palpable endings of journey.

[continues on next page]

Apart

Air argues searingly for the blade-separates of sensation. To go in rhythm over the chasms, the hills, the pavements and potholes, to go noting a rhythm sprung from each step that echoes piecemeal in one's head, and tears to pieces. Dirigible autumns! Middles of holdings! The temptation when taken apart is to open the other's body. To go blearily into the indefinite exit. Ah, the irretrievable utterance of just being. Look on your being worked, look on your looking. Always the referred-to whole of apart. Noisily, with great regular drumbeats, they go into distance, or is it breath, or is it blood, the rumble of your clenching jaw?

Claustrophobia

Living is a room that follows us from room to room.

Beyond it, trees tapping their presence,
exiles who have lost
all sense for the keeping of time.

A table in the room is a future book
of future fires. Whose was the shadow
in the empty house before day walked in?

*

Each room has its purpose, we have room to do what.

Beyond it, broken motorcycles after
a science fiction 'bull fight'
and the oiling of the long-agoes in black lethargy.

The wheel in a room gets dizzy
and issues the stink of tar. Over the hub
the horizons circulate their sunny little pamphlets.

*

To ruminate gives the idea: a chewy spacious room.

Beyond-it is an airlocked existence
which through a sudden pinhole
is sucked inside.

The beyond-it is domesticated easily
by offerings such as a bowl it can eat to the bottom of
and see its face, reflected or painted there.

Lessons for Little Pig

A satchel of bones
to build a house.
At nightfall the house holds its breath:
the lights left on.
The diaphragm drops,
ushers in expectation,
and the porch draws shadow into its enclosure.
The door means enter, leave,
and what's left over: body
as breached.
There's a law
that describes waiting for someone
to knock, or touching the telephone
just before it rings.
Whoever knocks
has a body which is a blunt weapon
to make mine forget and forgotten.

Butterfly Antennae

after Alexander Calder's *Antennae with Red and Blue Dots*

Tonight there is too much interference to think.
In a town's scattered Rubik's cube of televisions
one face is switched to static.

*

In a wood of slow electrical pylons
sparks of butterflies
make it difficult to think.

There is the brain's confetti, as if shaken
into the air by a petal-headed child.

*

I have heard of a man who was lighting a film set
when a hawkmoth mistook his ear for an escape
and writhed against the eardrum.

*

Then it was always raining, even on the train,
where a fly caught against the window
travelled the length of the country like a rumour.

We travelled weeks in search of the wind’s bellows,
a slack-cheeked god,

our progress overseen
by the moon’s persistent surgeon’s face.

[continues on next page]

*

Locked in my palm
the butterfly loses itself among my fingers,
and the hand knows only chalkdust.

This is how the word *butterfly* was first absorbed –
with the rubbing of palms, and prayer.

*

Tonight all thought is interfering.
I never shook that intruder loose,

The rain of untuned radios
is swarming

above the buildings, over the river
which is a shifting mirror made of craneflies
with so much to observe it has shattered its attentions.

Yellow Wagtails

must be mined from the earth
for the metals we cut from their bellies
or squeeze from the plucked quills –
we children who thought too fondly of flight.
Bulbs pour forth from between our eyes
as if they were enough
to mark what's precious
under the mountain's mirth,
its sitting-down-heavily, its piggyback ride.
It's as if we've pickaxe shafts in place
of windpipes, blades in lieu of collarbones
and lungs rasping a marching song
like rooks trapped in chimney-stacks.
Then the cry will go up for a cage
and oven mitts to handle what's molten.
They're magma. Must be spied from a pinhole
like tiny eclipses. You have to hold them steady.
We pull years and years from the rock's grumbling.
We sleep cold with our fingers worn to stubs.
We let our minds burgeon past our small bodies
to dreams of girls in yellow dresses
with birds in their laps,
of mechanical birds on gleaming branches,
the turning of the leaden soul to feather.

Oracle

Only the carnival is lit, as if night
is staring at it. You are brought
before a woman with skin so veal-pale,
so sheer you can see the muscles
struggle underneath like animals in a sack,
skull pressing against her scalp.
She holds your head and you see
a bedroom in which you are waking.
She cries up to your window
When will it be time and how will we know?
Winter gnaws the dawn's tail ragged.
The river has run its course and dried
so you may consider its source.
And with your fingers pushing
into the grooves under her ears
and as the attendant drops a lantern
a memory flares – do you remember?–
under the alders when the sky fell pulverised
and each drop balked at its isolation
before the ground shattered it.
Her cortices, under that muslin, are forests.
Connotation is the work.
From the forest she leads a bull
whose body has been pieced together.
When are we going back? she asks.
Who will play scapulimancer, mark
the scathes on the bull's shoulderblades
or the nuances of its stride?
We will speak together, she says
and brings it a mirror.
Watch it now (watch you now) step
into the tent with you to unbelt its body.

Mute Swan Theory

Three a.m. is no words in the house,
windows clutching their sides.
Broken glass is doubly free

with what's beyond it:
out of the lake's wrinkled brow
rises an interpretation –

a mute swan, drifting to land
like a harnessed iceberg.

There must be consideration for the rhythm
of its walk, the locksmith feet
springing sounds from their prisons.

The fragility of an inside-out pillow –
the way a shocked white chicken
might call to mind a dropped milk bottle.

The swan has no place in the house
it approaches, cannot speak; to speak
is forbidden, but one must be able.

Instead, two children sleep
as if sleep were a chord
reached only with both voices mute.

Instead, someone touches
where a branch tapped the window,
not hard enough to crack it,

[continues on next page]

and thinks of the possible
white star, whirlpool
or watching eye.

Giant Impact Hypothesis

I bought a satellite's eye from the market.
To look through it involved the whole god-orbit,
a cotton-wooled Fabergé Earth –

sight as a megastructure,
hung in my own sphere above a sphere

and above that the umbilical tug
of a natural satellite.

My mouth, too puny to be seen, said to me:
did you think the moon
would taste like a new tooth?
It's collision, a negative crater
knocked from the planet:
in truth the apocalypse was years ago,
and you can always choose another faith.

The Invention of Mouths

The space between *en*trance and entr*ance*
opened on a slick tongue, unnerving
split of the nerves of the lips, flushed.

Bowl of plum tomatoes on a table,
reds of peppers, ivory pips, the jammed
light within a lidded jar of glass.

What a fast to break.
Then the body became a door
the tongue tried its axe against.

Then the canteen, the house, the home
had taken you into its viscera.
Where the walls could relent, you ran

like an animal that sees the gate
open, charges, burning its innards,
and is yanked back by the chain at its throat.

Reading Lamp and Robber Fly

Who looks will find – at least find absence,
like a roof on calm days.

I leave the windows open

and a robber fly pierces the room's atmosphere,
able, with its syringe, to draw the insides out.

There among the moths and crane flies
I'd been waiting for a no-one who could not arrive,

for you and the rain, or you in the rain
which touches everything and takes nothing for itself.

The Invention of Sleep

You must entrust the thought of yourself
to the water. Under the surface
bubbles the drowner's calm.
How do you do it when you cannot
know how it’s done? Happens once only

many thousands of times. Distortion
goes nude through the weeds,
minnows encoil the limbs
and the stings of long-ago-saids
nudge by with nil propulsion,

swallowed down by a trapdoor
that lets the whirling away.
How can the breath go on?
So many oil-spill scales

to catch and tear the ragged breaths,
the pumped underwater bellow breaths,
the empty-swollen breaths.

Burial

the dead who had buried the dead being buried

the bodies which were filled with an unusual substance
going empty and being used at last to fill the ground

which had in advance been partially emptied
having been constituted and reconstituted and never

finalised but always the familiar dung dry blood
dry flesh and greatly thought upon as not much

itself at all but mostly a space where a door had
been opening during some time or other in fact a door

the mind had been leaning on as if with a shoulder
and the more it thought the more shouldering the more

the door budged downwards into the dark
and it being a place to dwell in and being a place

whatsoever at that a place the thoughts preened for
and prepared their glittering head-dresses and bangles

and lushed their fur in uneager smiling expectation

Changes Hands

As it is taken, as it is passed, it brings
about a lingering –

the robin's egg bowl
the antiquated coin
the signet ring

– whatever it is in the centre of clasping,
and, static in the ongoing moment
of palms shifting under and away and towards

nevertheless drifts away from somewhere

and as it does so lets loose a rending noise
that gets stranger and louder
until it has travelled so far in stasis

none understand it
and those who can hear it are liars.

A Clutch of Eggs

The size of the clutch can tell a species' lifespan:
so winter gazes into the brains of birds,
annihilating the neurons responsible for song,
and sheer air forces out flight.
In the blue and rust-corrosion eggshells
swells a smaller winter of repetition

while under the crystal look the wings of insects
go crisp in the killing locus.
There'd been a little doubt, that the moth's specked wings
had not evolved to hide on bark: smokestacks
sooted them down to the DNA. Down

is the motion, the motive of the dispelling look,
which sunders atmosphere, air, water, earth,
till earth diamonds under the pressures and goes on
not in time but in space unending,
a fractal unfurling its calculus.

It's so cold one might give up picking the snow
from where it grows uniquely for the microscope,
compactably for the weight of the look
that goes lumbering over the nest,
birthing or breaking where forces meet.

The Invention of Hands

Loss fell into pockets
and into the linings of coats.

Then the breakable was broken
and the blood crawled under the skin
and the wrist-nooks suggested a small shivering
creature had lived there all this time and won't
you take its moth-wings and unfurl it –

how to rediscover
the crushed creature before it was held?

Uncovering is to be uncovered, and it goes on,
continues where the chisel makes itself from stone,
where flesh grasps itself becoming flesh.

Familiar

Manningtree, 1644

The Witchfinder General has decreed that each form
must be true, tested then tried, of certain mettle,
or of meal or for the worm or for the weather,

put in service of the arbitrary, put in vice,
put in steely certainty or fetter, of moderate fettle,
else put to the sword.

*

four nights in the pits of sleeplessness which were my eyes
sandy that rended flesh from flesh
that scrubbed the vision from the eyeball's tip
like a lens scalpelled off the vision from the tip

and to me the lord of the unmistakeable property appeared
and an invisible mirror
that blasphemously sees

stepping through

the polecat terrified of the ends of magnets

the greyhound slinking under the stormcloud

the black Rabbet chewing as if trying to mutter gluey words

the Spaniel fattened to the point of leglessness

and the white kittling altogether uncatly

[continues on next page]

*

Ah, the seditious Peck in the Crown, a pitchforked thought
appears slowly as the process of torture progresses

to Hopkins and nine other witnesses, much as the imbroglio
grey of the lake, under the inklings of rain, appears

to the Italian artist. As if the guilty red of sunset
made the sun burn perpetually, made the martyr burn.

*

And Greedigut, the last emanatory imp
whose standing is an act of eating
of mashing and of swallowing

meaning all things are acceptable
to consume meaning all things alike
may appear on schedule and be reckoned.

Church by the Sea

The bell stumbles in the wind, wind barges the bell,
and rings it to a rhythm whose bars
are so long it does not sound like music.

When we thought our thoughts
they rose into the sky and pooled there
above the clouds, and thinking about that
is like casting from the promontory

where a child picks through rank crab shells
and the sea comes up to meet him
whenever he tires of the beach inventory.

The Invention of Distance

Lateness brings the late fruits down,
the worried boys, haphazard girls inside,
brings the raincloud underneath

in puddles, scrubby grasses,
sprouts under those
who lingered too long, hearing

their parents calling them indoors.
Where it enters the ground there grow
the sticky, over-ripe fruits of distance.

It arrives in the body and cannot be
out-run. Where will you run to now
in your dragging petticoats?

The lateness will not stay. It drags
in the sediment, the emptied cans, leaf-veins
through which the lateness has ceased to run.

Applaud the evening light:
the lamp; the longest and the shortest
accordion: the telephone. Lateness leaves

the phone off the hook, singing such shower-head,
such common-speech emptiness into the room –
the word-turned-telescope.

Let the loosed hothouse birds in frocks
and plague-doctor masks, before they go
wait a moment on the wires, without message.

Road Signs

Just at the border will be fine.
There they refer to trees

as wishbones, a wink costs an eye;
there the air arrives in a panic

and butterflies gather at the mouths of cattle
like thoughts to the mind.

Do you remember what they call
the sky in these parts? In that language

to walk is, literally,
to hasten the change.

There is a church in this village
that did not exist when we set out,

lavender making a home in its empty bell
away from the siphoning arc of the wind.

Here there are crows
picking a scarecrow apart.

But please: keep your eyes on the road.
I've noticed you checking the stars.

Locate the End

Your back adopts the slant of the harp
as you play, the flickering muscles
strung to where spine echoes forepillar.

Your hands spasm: the force surprises
each note into next, the resonance
swept between, undoing each string –

thing to thing devout with unending.
The force surprises me
from the space between each second,

each vertebral notch.
Did you set the metronome going?

Or did I move through a room of strung beads,
knowing the entrance, knowing an exit?

The Invention of Hearts

The signature on the apple reads *sol fecit*.
Above the grasses its balled aorta
pumps the sunlight, making it make it.

There are the nudes, lying on the grass,
made with hands that grasp, made
for the making of what made them.

The punishment is to have the life
squeezed out of you, giving life: to think
winged by lungs the heart beats there

the finite circuits of blood.
What beat brought the beating?
The clothed, with a table between them,

cut open an apple
and take it within
where it goes on splitting,

have you noticed? – how lovely the evening
is, I mean, in the orchard at sunset,
as if made for us, as if our making.

Dance

Recall the dance you were just now in the middle of
before turning away. At least remember how each
thing took its place in the air – the skirt

of swinging knives, plungepools of necks,
how the lengths of music, unravelled from the piano
require one to lean in and listen close, require one

to stamp out measures of it, catch it squirming
underfoot. Soon between the two of you
there's just the dance, like a striking

window you forget to look through.
And the music, made by movement, taken apart
in the ear and re-pieced, knuckled and trampled,

loses the sounds of itself in the repetition
of itself, in segment and multiple. Soon between
the one and one of you there is always

the dance, a gowned force above the squamous floor.
And the music, which possesses no movement,
which is your movement through time remembering

the differences between moments – beat and
off-beat – becomes a nothing in the ballroom
of this and this other somebody's head. At least

recall that what you have just seen is not
what you see, heard not hear, felt not feel,
there on the island of acoustic and awkward pose,

[continues on next page]

where the scaled sea has frozen but too thin
to cross, where the dance is a door forever,
is a wall to hold you here forever. Now turn.

Quiet Now

The porch lights blacken. I'll go inside
wearing this out of gratitude
to whatever made it, and won't be seen –
trajectories, fields of vision, these make a ballistics
out of being alone,
out of the draft in the house which is one
wall supposing another. I wear this skin
for you: something, watching always, keeps me
human and in such dimensions.

Root

It is the most compact of hotels
whose occupants
are leaning out of windows
and listening to the rain

and the noise it makes
is a noise like architecture

and their listening

walks en pointe so far

it leads the listeners astray,
leashless and without crumb,

halved and aching
as an axe not yet made.

False Awakening

What words point to wait behind the moon.

You can feel their tidal lapping which is waterless
and hear their breezes which are mouthless.

Just now the moon woke me. It had come very close
to the window like a sulky cat. Seen that way
it was the cat, and also the bowl of milk it wanted.

All light – even this Anglepoise I startle awake –
seeks an opened eye. Awash on the window pane

the moon’s come so far it’s unable
to pull itself together. I let it in anyway
to splash its face in the basin.