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Gaining the Poetic Voice. Ted Hughes's *Gaudete*

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Abstract. *"Gaudete" is one of Ted Hughes's best-known volumes of poetry, although it has frequently been underappreciated by critics otherwise well-disposed towards Hughes's work. In the present article, I try to show that "Gaudete" not only continues the poet's overarching theme of the struggle between imagination and logic, or between science and poetry, but also introduces a mythical story of a man's path to winning his own poetic voice. By setting the volume against Hughes's other writings, it is demonstrated that he primarily desires "Gaudete" to be a song in praise of the new-found language in which to celebrate the goddess-figure, a divinity capable of bestowing the poetic gift. "Gaudete" is thus argued to dramatise the birth of a poetic inspiration beyond stripped-down logic and unhinged fleshly desire.*

Key words*: Ted Hughes, contemporary English Poetry, myth, poetic voice*

Most commentators on Ted Hughes's poetry, including the first league of his critics: Keith Sagar, Leonard Scigaj, Terry Gifford and Ann Skea, have endeavoured to identify patterns inherent in the bulk of the collected poems. Every study of the poet to date has in one way or another sought to unravel a complex mythical structure underpinning each lyric in the oeuvre. Sagar (2006, 5), introducing his general goal in the now classic *The Laughter of Foxes*, notes that "the very nature of the creative imagination is holistic; its primary function is to make connections, discover relationships, patterns, systems and wholes". Much earlier, referring to Hughes's experience of living in Mexborough for the first seven years of his life, Sagar (1983, 4) observed that "the landscape was imprinted on his soul, and, in a sense all his poems are about it". The birthplace mattered to many a poet, suffice it to mention Hughes's friend Seamus Heaney's poems such as "Mossbawm" or numerous essays dealing with "the sense of place," or Hughes's early master Yeats and his Sligo. But few would argue that *all* Heaney's and Yeats's poems "are about" the poets' land of childhood. Similarly, Michael Parker (1983, 51) stresses that "to do full justice to Hughes' achievement it is necessary to view his work as a totality"[1]. To a large extent it is Hughes himself that encouraged just such a way of reading his work by repeatedly claiming that poetry is derived from primitive rituals of shamanic healing, "You cannot create imaginatively anything that isn't made in healing

[1] This pattern-oriented thinking in the critical approaches to Hughes is discussed by Alex Davies (2011, 163-66)

yourself, otherwise it just isn't imaginative" (Hughes 1970, 68), adding in an interview with Faas, "organizing the inner world or at least searching out the patterns there and that is a mythology" (Faas 1980, 204). Moreover, in his only foray into the world of academic literary criticism, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, he repeatedly demonstrates, sometimes with skill and sometimes by hammering his message home to the reader, that Shakespeare's entire oeuvre is in fact a song of the subjugation of the primordial figure of the goddess to the Puritan patriarchal God. This replacement causes man to repress all the drives that the goddess symbolises, which in turn results in the loss of the primitive link with the natural world. In view of this fact, the poet is faced with the task of healing the gaping wound between man and the world that he inhabits, by now, alas, unconsciously. Thus, as it is often argued, Hughes pursues a spiritual journey like a modern-day shaman; starting with evocations of the violent and measureless world of animals in *The Hawk in the Rain*, *Lupercal* and *Wodwo* and progressing through a mutilation-restitution ritual in *Crow, Gaudete, Cave Birds* until he comes to a new intimacy with the world and its spiritual powers in *Remains of Elmet, Moortwon, River* and beyond.

The undertow of the myth of the goddess, as it is delineated in Hughes's Shakespeare book and Graves's *The White Goddess*, a treatise that left an indelible mark on Hughes's imagination, returns in numerous studies of the poet. Hughes (2007, 460-61) himself frequently made the point, which he stated in no uncertain terms in a letter to Bishop Ross Hook, "poetry is forever trying to do the work of religion – as local 'healers' are perpetually setting up as an alternative to orthodox Medecine (*sic*). Some very great poets have come near formulating what was, pretty well, an alternative religion – a new religion". There is no doubt that Hughes's imagination operated in terms of grand visions of the powers of the natural world and apocalyptic struggles with the logic-oriented Western mind. However, by emphasising this unified aspect of Hughes's oeuvre we sacrifice the ingenious variants on the main theme that he plays out in each of his book and sequences of poems. This is true of one of his most often-depreciated collections: *Gaudete*. Recently Joanny Moulin (2015, 127) has called the volume "a sort of light erotic farce" that may contain "some of Hughes's strongest poetry" in the sequence of haunting lyrics at the end yet it "did not break any new ground, as nearly all the previous collections did". He goes on to argue that *Gaudete* "is a repetition and a variant of the same shamanic flight in its archetypal narrative, which describes a form of the 'regression' that is essential to the psychoanalytic experience" (127). Also, Rand Brandes (2011, 74) declares that "*Gaudete*, especially when compared to *Crow* or *Cave Birds*, is by far one of Hughes's most under-realized works". These remarks may arguably derive from Hughes's own criticism of what has come to be included in *Gaudete*; writing to Sagar in May 1977, Hughes (2007, 383) confessed, "this whole batch of writing has an odd character for me – it looks provisional and interim. Probably because I did it when I was preoccupied with farming and crises, that disrupted every line of thought or work." Yet, this "provisional" character, as he later explains, unravelled into a story that was "full of potential". He further elaborated on the theme of the book two years later, when he responded to the rather depreciatory evaluation of it by Gifford and Roberts given in the typescript of what later became the well-known *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*. They commend *Gaudete* partly along the lines suggested by Hughes:

> The battery image of the poem was of transcendental energy jammed – unconscious and deformed in the collision – into dead-end objects, dead-end claustrophobic egos, dilettante museum egos, second-hand bailer-twine-repaired mechanical egos, and galvanising them in a perfunctory fashion, bowing their inadequate circuits. (2007, 427-8)

This deadness of egos, man's ossification in the frame of a clichéd culture, has to be redeemed and pushed back into working. To this effect, Hughes says further on in the same letter, a special language, as full of energy as the vitality it sought to evoke, was needed:

> I had found a language of enactment, nowhere fine or studied, nowhere remarkable in detail – tolerant of a good deal of vernacular commonplace, which nevertheless was an intense pleasure to create. My feeling for it, very hard to convey, but nevertheless a clear sensation, was a cutting into a stiff headwind at an angle sensation of harshness, a heightening that I felt mainly as a slight ugliness, a feeling of abbreviation and foreshortening, ugly as I broke through it, but beautiful to me when I'd found it, and ideally each line a single lumped summary rather than an unfolding paragraph. (2007, 428-29)

The discovery of language, simple and ugly, sounds a familiar note to the invention of Crow-idiom; however, something pronouncedly absent from Crow is implied in this letter. What Hughes emphasises in the above excerpt is an unexpected pleasure at having actually hit on the right poetic vernacular that, once apprehended, reveals itself as beautiful. The transition from ugliness to beauty on the level of language, what Hughes (2007, 362) called "an irreducible beautiful ugliness, like a Caesarian (*sic*) operation", informs the whole book. Therefore it is argued here that in *Gaudete* Hughes manages to describe not so much a process of healing of the society that requires spiritual purgation as a painful awakening of an individual into poetry. If we accept that "the 'Epilogue's' closing poems point to a fuller recognition of the Goddess followed by redemption and rebirth" (Brandes 2011, 75), then the entire salacious narrative that culminates in the shooting of the demoniac doppelganger leads to the priest's discovery of poetic voice. Focused though it inevitably is on an encounter with the goddess figure which is neither absolutely maleficent nor completely benign, *Gaudete* also traces a symbolic path to the discovery of the gift for verse that can sing for the goddess.

The volume began as an idea for a film scenario and goes back to 1963, although it was put aside for over a decade. It came back to life only in February 1975 when Hughes (2007, 363), reassured by Charles Monteith, accepted that *Gaudete* "wasn't completely unpublishable". By May 1976 the volume had reached its final form, Hughes (2007, 377) telling Monteith that "'Gaudete' is ready now, pretty well, as far as it will ever be". As it is, the plot of the narrative part of *Gaudete* is succinctly described by Hughes in the "Argument":

> An Anglican clergyman is abducted by spirits into the other world.
> The spirits create a duplicate of him to take his place in this world, during his absence, and to carry on his work.
> This changeling interprets the role of minister in his own way.

> The narrative recounts the final day of events which lead to his cancellation by the powers of both worlds.
> The original man reappears in this world, but changed. (1977, 9)

The clergyman, Reverend Nicholas Lumb, finds himself in a place that resembles "an empty town, in the North of England" (Hughes 1977, 11) but soon it turns out to be a nightmarish space of oneiric phantoms: "The sky is darkening. / The charred black chimneys jag up into the yellowish purple" as "He turns abruptly into a side-street / And is immediately stumbling," for "All the length of the street, dead bodies are piled in heaps and strewn in tangles everywhere between the heaps" (1977, 11). As it appears, "The whole street is a mass-grave" (1977, 12). The blood-chilling image of the gory landscape of death heightens the feeling of horror at this "unreal city," summoning Eliot's frightening image of London where "Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London Bridge" (Eliot 2002, 54-55). Moreover, the vocabulary that Hughes employs here like "bodies piled in heaps" and "mass-grave" echo the direct language of the Eastern European poets that Hughes admired so greatly. Hughes's evocation of the horrid spaces of the city sounds an akin note to, for example, János Pilinszky's (1989, 28) heart-rendingly accurate description: "harnessed men / haul a huge cart" that "burden of the skies". Furthermore, the streetscape of the bloody spectacle is depicted as though it were a nightmare vision comprised of scenes that flow one into another: "He turns again to the empty street where he first walked. But directions have shifted. And the street he comes into is carpeted with corpses" (Hughes 1977, 12). This oneiric scene rife with unspeakable violence would twenty years later become a hallmark of the drama of another troubled young prodigy, Sarah Kane. Like the protagonists of Kane's plays, Lumb rambles about the city in a haphazard and hapless way, however, constantly seeming to be in the same heinous place: "The whole town is a maze of mass-graves" (1977, 12). As he repeatedly tries to get away from the gory place, he meets "an old man in scarecrow rags" who leads him deeper into the city where Lumb encounters a "woman tangled in the skins of wolves, on the rock floor, under the dome of rock" and an "aged aboriginal creature crouching beside her, stroking her brow, stroking the hair off her brow, with glistening fingers with a trembling tenderness" (1977, 14). Lumb approaches the odd couple, "kneels to understand what is happening / And what he is to do. / He thinks most likely this woman also is dead," adding to the panorama of demise. As it appears that she has no pulse, Lumb "stands in confusion / And looks round at the shadowed hollow faces / Crowding to enclose him" (1977, 14-15) and

> Declares he can do nothing
> He protests there is nothing he can do
> For this beautiful woman who seems to be alive and dead.
> He is not a doctor. He can only pray. (1977, 15)

Drawing a parallel with Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, a quote from whom stands as a motto to *Gaudete*, Michael Sweeting observes that "Lumb is unable to respond from his humanity when confronted with the suffering ruler," in the case of Hughes's poem it is mother-nature allegorised as the ostensibly dead woman; for Lumb "is dominated by a system based upon denial" (Sweeting 1983, 86). His shortcomings as a spiritual healer, a doctor of the soul, are compounded by the fact that he represents a

figure of complete passivity, for whom neither praying nor helping others in an earthly manner seem to matter.

By striking such an immobile figure in the other world, Lumb would have appeared to be a proper choice for his flock back in England in that the inhabitants that populate the town of the poem's main narrative are equally bereft of the will to act. There are nine men whom we meet at various moments of the sweeping narrative. The first to enter the tale is Major Hagen. As Lumb's double makes love to his wife Pauline,

> Hagen
> Undergoes the smallness and fixity
> Of tweed and shoes and distance. And the cruelty
> Of the wet midmorning light. The perfection
> Of the lens. (1977, 26)

A ludicrous figure of self-consciousness, Hagen represents man's mindless cruelty and blatant disregard for the natural world. He clearly relishes bird-hunting, which gives him a vicarious pleasure of being able to exert total power over animals, paying no heed to their freedom and daring:

> A ringdove, tumbling with a clatter
> Into wing-space
> Under the boughs and between boles
> And swerving up towards open field-light
> Is enveloped by shock and numbness.
> The bang jerks the head of twenty bulls
> And breaks up the distance. (1977, 27)

Hagen fulfils the role that the speaker of Hughes's early masterpiece expressed in the ending of "The Hawk in the Rain": "That maybe in his own time meets the weather / Coming the wrong way, suffers the air, hurled upside down" (Hughes 2003, 19). Both poems project images of falling down and being stranded in the earth, emphasising the dream of a world debased, a world that man never even tries to understand. Obviously enough, whereas the hawk is a masterfully lethal bird-of-prey, which may to some extent account for why the speaker wishes him dead, the ringdove does not seem to pose any threat to Hagen; it is shot dead and becomes an offering to Lumb's double and Pauline when, in a characteristically-*Gaudete*an sudden change of scene, Hagen discovers them sitting together in the Hagens' house. The offering of the dead ringdove is also the last stage of Hagen's appropriation of the bird in that he reaps self-contentment and a sense of accomplishment only when the bird's head has been cut and "rides alert, as if on a tree-top, / A liquid-soft blue head floating erect, as the eye gimbals / And the Major presents it, an offering, To his wife" (1977, 28). This proprietorial attitude is given a new vantage, for Hagen is shown to bind his own self-image with that of the British Empire. When he almost realises that the double and his wife are having an affair, this is more than just a personal insult: it is "Humiliation of Empire" (1977, 34).

Similarly to Hagen, Holroyd, the town's cattle herder, is ruthlessly cruel to animals, dehorning his bull in the scene in which we meet him. In tormenting the animal, Holroyd

seems to find compensation for his wife's infidelity. Although he suspects her of being unfaithful, he never confronts her about it:

> Seeing his wife climb into her car, and knowing where she is going, Holroyd shuts his mind from her, grimacing like a face in the dentist's chair, as he concentrates on the rip of the wire, the angle of his double punching pull, and the ammonia smoke of the horn burn. (1977, 126)

As a victim that is unable to speak out its pain, the bull represents "a consecration of the non-human," as Hughes put it (2007, 383), on the altar of Holroyd's suppressed frustration. Seeming to accept the torments as though it understood the nature of Holroyd's repressed anxiety, "The animal's uplooking eye squirms like a live eye in a pan. It emits a yodelling weird roar, like a steel roof being ripped by a power saw, as the wire bites" (1977, 127). The bull no longer represents "Something come up there onto the brink of the gulf / [...] too deep in itself to be called to," as in "The Bull Moses." Where once the bull symbolised nature's ominous detachment that dwelt in "Blackness" that "is depth / Beyond star" (Hughes 2003, 74), now it is a passive victim of Holroyd's pent-up angst. The subjugation that animals suffer is extended to the wives of all the inhabitants of the town. When the double's lascivious endeavours are photographed and the extent of his deceit begins to dawn on the unsuspecting or plainly obtuse husbands, it is Evans, the local repairman, which gets the confession of the affair from his wife, Janet: "She starts to tell, coaxed by questions / Which are converted to blows" (1977, 113).

Just as Hagen and Holroyd represent the fallen empire of the Western man who has lost his link with nature, so Joe Garten and Doctor Westlake are the conceited, the deceitful and the treacherous. A sanctimonious secret lecher, Westlake quickly gives in to the dishevelled charms of Jennifer Estridge, the younger sister of Janet who has just committed suicide on learning that Lumb's double loved Jennifer more: "The perfumed upheaval of all this ringing emotion and physical beauty / Is exciting him" (1977, 56). Although he tries to follow her story, "Westlake / Keeps losing Jennifer's words / As he gazes fascinated / Into the turbulence of her body and features" (1977, 57). Her allure notwithstanding, Westlake maintains his professional air, plunging his budding desire into the nethermost abyss of repression. In a similar manner, Garten, who engineers the double's fall by taking photographs of his sexual exploits and then showing them to all the husbands whose wives have been seduced by the otherworldly priest, reveals himself as a reticent and voyeuristic youth: "Near a comfortless sycamore / Garten studies [the photograph]. / He is a little tipsy with the power of his new role" (1977, 120). The quiet eighteen-year-old suddenly finds himself in possession of the power, as he correctly surmises, over life and death. Yet, his insecure lynch-mongering shows Garten, "venturing jokey, overbalancing insinuations" against the double, to be a prim and cowardly youth who leaps at the chance to assert his position among the men of the town, who have thus far lacked respect for him.

When Garten makes a futile attempt to uncover the double's activities, he is put down by the only man in the town who at the end does not participate in the revenge chase after the Vicar. Old Smayle, an enigmatic character who seems to play the role of the village fool *cum* sage, explains to the pub congregation that the vicar

> Has realised that his religious career

Depends on women.
Because Christianity depends on women.
For all he knows, all those other religions, too, depend on women.

What would he do for congregation these days
Without women.
Old Smayle has read it. The church began with women.
Through all those Roman prosecutions it was kept going by women.
[...]
Christianity's something about women. (1977, 65)

Thus Old Smayle obliquely alludes to the story of the goddess and realises that man has usurped the position that seems to rightfully belong to woman, for there is "Something about mothers – maternal instincts. / Something about the womb – foredoomed, protective instinct" (1977, 66). Despite his pretences, Smayle, "eloquence pour[ing] from his travelling library" (1977, 65), understands the importance of the female element in people's and societies spiritual structure: the divinity must be life-, not law-giving. Old Smayle not only chastises Garten but also scorns the men of the town, the complacent Hagens and Westlakes that regard themselves as the heirs to the British Puritan tradition. Once the decision to end the double's debauchery has been made, the men make it a point to impose anew the old *status quo*:

Somehow everything
Will have to be cancelled, the whole error
Carefully taken apart
And the parts put back where they belonged.

Everybody has to return to exactly where they were,
To stillness, calm, and normality,
Everything has to be cleansed, groomed and made quiet, as at the start (1977, 150-51)

"The whole error" being "taken apart" is a peculiar collocation, suggesting that the error is a misconceived construct rather than, as it is traditionally defined, a deviation from an accepted pattern. After all, an error is what causes a construct to be easily destroyable. What the poet seems to imply, however, is that "the error" represents an abnormal reformulation of the structure, in this case, of society. The men crave total subjugation to the customary mores: "stillness, calm, and normality" – those "dead-end objects, dead-end claustrophobic egos, dilettante museum egos, second-hand bailer-twine-repaired mechanical egos" from the above-quoted letter; they would rather repeat after Adam and Eve: "Your will is our peace," as Hughes phrased the total subordination to God in "A Horrible Religious Error" (2003, 231), than take action, no matter how defiant and apostatic. If they do act, it is on behalf of the life as they have known it all along.

The situation that the men desire to bring back is a complete subjugation of the female element, the wives in particular, for "what is this other strange tale, this new religion? Something diabolical, concocted, filthy, very possible. A lecherous priest and a gaggle of spoofed women. Hysterical bored country wives. Credulous unfortunate females" (1977,

128). This description of the "strange tale," this thing about women or a female goddess, rings close to Hughes's description of Puritan reaction to goddess figures such as Shakespeare's Sycorax (Hughes 1994, 118). The men are incapable of accepting that woman may enjoy some boon unavailable to them. In the husbands' view, the wives remain "credulous unfortunate females."

Lumb's double seduces the women by giving them a chance to escape the mundane drudgery of everyday lives that they lead beside their uninspiring husbands. Pauline Hagen with her "body's thirty-five year old womb-flattered abandon" (1977, 25), symbolised by "the tough-looking lilies, their clenched knob-flowers / In the cold morning water," falls easy prey to the double but "their draughty hasty lovemaking has failed to disentangle" "A deadlock of submarine difficulty" (1977, 25). Her stifled existence is enervated by the affair with the insatiable priest, however, the sudden breaking of the social dam comes at a price and Pauline "feels weirdly oppressed" by the overwhelming pull of nature; as she stops on a path in the nearby forest, "She is gouging the leaf-mould, / She is anointing her face with it. / She wants to rub her whole body with it" (1977, 31) and "wants to press her face into the soil into the moist mould, / And scream straight downward, into earth-stone darkness" (1977, 32); eventually the overpowering experience of the sexual encounter with the double makes her a stranger to her former life. In a like manner, Mrs Westlake, also suffering the abortive relationship with her husband, tries to quell her growing desire by staring "towards her husband's medical reference library to num herself on its dull morocco" but "It is no escape. Those volumes are swollen with the details of Lumb's body" (1977, 39). The pub owner, Mrs Walsall also succumbs to the temptation and in wild abandon, as though she were possessed, she "is biting a stick" and

> Animal gurgles mangle in her throat
> While her eyes, her whole face, toil
> In the wake of a suffering
> That has carried her beyond them.
> Her head thrushes from side to side among small ferns and periwinkles.
>
> Lumb labours powerfully at her body. (1977, 96)

Mrs Walsall loses not only her selfhood but also her humanity as her animal nature is unleashed. This is an act of self-abnegation that lays open the path to a greater awareness of life; the dam-breaking occurs at a moment of ecstasy, as she and Lumb are "bound" and "are flung / With more life than they can contain / Like young dogs" (1977, 93). Yet, the sex is by no means only a ritual of awakening, for it results in the women's bewilderment and anxiety. Lumb's double may have some spiritual revival on the agenda of the Women's Institute but all in all he is revealed to be, at least in part, a fake shaman.

In spite of his unquestionable success in freeing the women of their mundane day-to-day routine, the double does not manage to turn them into vessels of a new religious experience. When he finally gets Felicity, the only unmarried and youngest of all the women, to enrol on his Institute and participate in a ritual, it appears that he is no better than a murderer and a false seer. During the ritual Felicity "knows she herself is to be the sacramental thing. / She herself is already holy / And drifting at a great depth, a great remoteness, like a spark in space" (1977, 141) until "Somehow she has become a

goddess," they all "are the cells in the glands of an inconceivably huge animal and urgent love-animal." However, she also realises that "some final crisis of earth's life is now to be enacted / Faithfully and selflessly by them all" (1977, 141). At the climax Lumb's double, with the help of his house-keeper-turned-witch Maud, stabs Felicity. If this is to be a dance in praise of the spiritual power that the double seems to worship, it is, by far more appositely, a horrendously mad spectacle of death. The double is no healer, he is a "demon of phallic energy," as Hughes called the mythological Trickster-figure (1994, 241); the double may be trying to accomplish some good, quite like the Trickster-Crow, still all he contrives to do is kill and bring swift retribution on himself.

The double's feats are only half-successful, since he himself is only "half a man / Half a face," as Hughes puts it in the first Epilogue poem (1977, 176). Throughout the main narrative, the double has to fight for his life four times: against a golem-like female, a struggle that parallels the actual Lumb's encounter with the dead female in the Prologue; against Lumb, who has suddenly appeared near the town, against his own fear of what is to come, a travesty of Jesus' Gethsemane prayer that God "remove this cup" (Lk 22: 42) – itself an allusion to Christ's double nature: both human and divine; and finally against the husbands who eventually hunt the double down. Those struggles remind us that the double is in no way a separate being, it is not an independent changeling but a projection of or an emanation from a part of Lumb's own self. As it is evident in the fight for Felicity, Lumb and his double represent two sides of a single persona: "There is only one Lumb. He is undergoing a spiritual/psychological crisis" (Sagar 1978, 189): "And now Lumb realises / That his antagonist is his own double / And that he is horribly strong" (Hughes 1977, 81). As the only woman to initially resist the double's advances, Felicity represents a kind of natural innocence, a perfect simplicity and good will and so the fight here assumes mythical proportions in that whereas Lumb becomes the defender of mere life, the double is "a lean leaping figure, moving like a monkey" – a mad Dionysian reveller. Thus the adversaries enter a long line of agonists, beginning with Jacob struggling with the Angel, through Milton's Satan and his army battling God's hosts, all the way to Blake's numerous conflicts between his various mythical personas.

Perhaps the closest parallel to Hughes's image of agon can be found in Blake's *Jerusalem*, where at the beginning Los is divided and the Spectre of Urthona emerges, "Cursing the terrible Los, bitterly cursing him for his friendship / To Albion" (Blake 1988, 149, plate 6: 6-7). The spectre begins to persuade Los to abandon Albion by allusions to Albion's "deceitful Friendship" (1988, 149 plate 7, 10), luring Los "by tears, by arguments of science & by terrors, / Terrors in every nerve, by spasms & extended pains" (1988, 149 plate 7, 6-7). However, Los will be neither beaten nor reasoned into submission, he confronts the Spectre and asserts: "Comfort thyself in my strength" (1988, 150 plate 7, 54). The division within Los is aptly discussed by Bloom(1988, 929-30): "From this point [plate 5, 66] on an involved conflict peculiar to this poem commences, the struggle of Los against the Spectre of Urthona, his own brother and other self. [...] The Spectre of Urthona is now everything in Blake's psyche that wishes to join Albion in his fall, while Los is everything in Blake that goes on writing poems and painting pictures." Whereas Los is the imagination, the Spectre of Urthona represents the logical mind; and so their struggle grows to the level of a mythical strife within every person between the creative self and the mundane self that lives a life of self-deception. A variation on this conflict seems to also lie at the foundation of the fistfight between Lumb and his double. Just as Los, whose life depends on the ability to soar imaginatively along

with the resurrected Albion, Lumb is fighting for the right to live, to return to this world for good, not only for a troublesome furlough. Still, at this point in the narrative it is unclear what it is that Lumb will have to learn in order to be returned to earth but as it turns out the struggle with the double and the horrible sojourn in the other world are necessary for Lumb to overcome his inactivity and gain a voice.

The double's life is forfeit not only when his escapades are brought to light but more importantly when he takes Felicity's life. What Lumb managed to save in the forest is now destroyed and the double's sin seems to consist in violating the very principle that he represents: the unbounded, uncontainable life. When he takes aim, Hagen appears to suddenly become the agent of the goddess even though she manifests her presence in the most improbable object of male cult: the rifle – the "slender goddess / Of Hagen's devotion" (1977, 167). The moment the double is shot dead, Lumb reappears in a village on the West Coast of Ireland and leaves behind a notebook full of poems. The internal cohesion of *Gaudete*, the flight-change-return pattern, implies that Lumb's shamanic journey to self-awareness is in fact a journey parallel to that of Miltonic Satan, discovering the strong assertion of individuality: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven" (1992, 156); or of Los who unites with Albion in the song of Jerusalem, or of the Ancient Mariner who gains his preternatural ability to tell mesmerising tales of his doom after he has undergone the painful trial at seas. As the double with his animal-Dionysian frenzy which knows no limit to its insatiable appetites is overcome, Lumb, so far a meek priest bereft of the will and skill to act, becomes the poet. The lyrics that comprise the Epilogue are "about atonement, what it would be like to be [...] reconnected with the cosmos" (Sagar 2006, 145), yet the position of the speaker wearing for a change no symbolic animal-masks is emphatically maintained throughout the sequence. The voice that speaks these verses is what Bloom has called "poet *as poet*," a term that can be traced to Blake's "The Real Man The Imagination which Liveth for Ever" – by which Blake means imaginary creativity that issues forth from an ailing man. Blake conceived of the idea in a letter to George Cumberland, in which he added, "I have been very near the Gates of Death" (1988, 783). The bodily life, frail though it may be, becomes only a pretext for singing the now reborn imaginary self.

The figure of poet as poet in the Epilogue is an allegory of a lyricist's quest for the affections of the goddess, a theme recurring throughout Hughes's oeuvre. However, unlike elsewhere in the collected poems, in *Gaudete*, the series of song-evocations is shown to be a victory of the poetic self over both the mundanities of life and a nearly animalist sexual proclivity. Only surmounting his former condition, being "The veteran of negatives / And the survivor of cease" (1977, 176), and defeating the double, albeit indirectly, allow Lumb access to the song. No longer "half a man," Lumb feels himself born again, lifted "from between [his mother's] legs" (1977, 177), and "Slowly I filled up with the whole world;" but the process of maturation is, as it must always be, forestalled: "Only one thing stayed outside me, in the glare. // You beckoned" (1977, 179). The "you" is identified with "An unearthly woman" (1977, 183) who at various moments in the sequence comes to play different roles. She is at once the scourge of the earth by whom the speaker is "devoured" (1977, 182) and a substitute for Christ, as "She rides the earth / On an ass, on a lion" but offers no redemption: "She is an apple. / Whoever plucks her / Nails his heart / To the leafless tree" (1977, 184); elsewhere she may be a swooning damsel, "your chin sank to your chest, / With the sheer weariness / Of taking away from everybody / Your envied beauty, your much desired beauty" (1977, 191) but also a

saviour, conquering death with a kiss, as a dead man who "never stops trying to dance, trying to sing / And maybe he dances and sings / Because you kissed him" (1977, 198). Whichever aspect of the goddess manifests itself to the poet, he at all times feels obsessed with her, "All I have // For an axle // Is your needle / Through my brains" (1977, 189) and, as every poet must, offers his own body and life to her although he knows perfectly well that such genuflection is likely to meet the cruellest aspect: the goddess as devourer.

Despite his self-offering, Lumb understands that his efforts to win the goddess's favour will end up in failure, for he cannot overcome his earthly condition that Hughes identifies as man's greatest flaw ever already at the outset of his career, in the memorable opening of "The Hawk in the Rain" in which he declares, "I drown in the drumming ploughland" (2003, 19). In the sequence, Lumb sees that "Collision with the earth has finally come" (1977, 180), even though this fact may at first seem a promise of stability, "Even if the worst happens / We can't fall off the earth" (1977, 181). Nevertheless, the possible firmness of foundation is only illusory, for the earthly condition is tainted, "Error on error / Perfumed / With a ribbon of fury" (1977, 180). There are only errors but he persists in his quest for the appreciation of the goddess. Yet, his search is thwarted and he knows it, "Looking for her form / I find only a fern" (1977, 192). Eventually Lumb's relationship to the goddess resembles a tidal wave: it waxes and wanes: "Every day the world gets simply / Bigger and bigger // And smaller and smaller" while "Your comings get closer. / Your goings get worse" (1977, 199). Lumb can only attain the consort with the goddess in a series of thwarted trysts, where he is abandoned, mocked or forgotten. However, the persistent wooing of the recalcitrant goddess results not only in the poet's purchase of pain but also, and these are the healing abilities that the poet-shaman wins through his onerous spiritual exploits, in some pristine joy. Mentioned only briefly at one point in the sequence, the ripples of this joyfulness run through the entire volume and, indeed, the entire

> Horrible world
> Where I let in again –
> As if for the first time –
> The untouched joy. (1977, 194)

Even the final admission of painful failure, "So you have come and gone again / With my skin" (1977, 200), does not convey complete misery but rings with a hopeful note: for a fleeting moment she was there and though she has gone and taken a part of the poet, he has won a momentary blessing, all the more precious for it has been bestowed reluctantly and only in recognition of the exertions that he has made. In the West of Ireland, poetry returns to the world at last and *Gaudete*, despite Lumb's and the society's tribulations, suggests that this gain outmatches the torment that Lumb as poet to be had to undergo: "This payment is that purchase" (1977, 192).

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