

## Afterword

Readers who have found these chapters valid and helpful on specific authors or texts, will, I hope, be drawn towards certain generalizations about literature and criticism, the creative imagination and its relevance to the present ecological crisis. I shall now allow myself the luxury of setting out, for what they are worth, some of the generalizations to which I have been driven.

As we embark on the third millennium, one question rightly dominates the thinking of the sane: is there any reasonable hope of reversing, halting, or even slowing, the destruction of the environment on which we totally depend. Nature has been ill-treated in many ways, spurned, despiritualized, exploited, polluted. Man's systematic attack on Nature has been, in effect, hacking at the tree of which he is himself a leaf, and therefore suicidal madness. Man's attempt to destroy the ecosystem is now so close to succeeding that the belated attempt to stop and heal the damage dwarfs all other human concerns.

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. ... It is the story of spiritual romanticism and heroic technological progress. It is a story of decline. When something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator, and is called an evolutionary dead-end. [Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, 129.]

The history of Western civilization has been the history of man's increasingly devastating crimes against Nature, Nature defined not only as the earth and its life forms, powers and processes, but also as the female in all its manifestations, and as the 'natural man' within the individual psyche. It is the story of man's mutilation of Nature in his attempt to make it conform to the Procrustean bed of his own patriarchal, anthropocentric and rectilinear thinking. We are all familiar with protests against the dehumanization and blighting of the earth by the industrial revolution. But the industrial revolution was possible only because of changes which had been taking place for thousands of years in the human mind, and when Lawrence realistically describes a pit-bank, 'flames like red sores licking its ashy sides', in the language of symbolism he is describing something no different from the

plagues of ancient Thebes or the dumping of nuclear waste. In Lovelock's words man himself has become a plague ravaging the earth.

There is nothing new about ecology except its terminology, and the fact that what is now a rare kind of consciousness (holistic, biocentric) which a minority is trying to recapture, may once have been the universal consciousness of the race. Or perhaps it was lost as early as the evolution of the divided brain in Cro-Magnon man. This is the argument of Jean Marais in *The Soul of the Ape*, of William Golding in *The Inheritors*, in the writings of Paul MacLean taken up by Arthur Koestler in *The Ghost in the Machine*, and in Ted Hughes' essay 'Baboons and Neanderthals' (in Carey, *William Golding: The Man and his Books*). Joseph Campbell, Marija Gimbutas, Baring and Cashford, argue that it was still characteristic of Neolithic man, and came to an end only with the inauguration of the terrible Age of Bronze. John A. Philips claims that it lasted until the beginning of civilization 'which seems to require a seizure of religious power by male gods, in order to break the ties of humanity to blood, soil and nature'. Robert Graves and D.H. Lawrence followed Nietzsche in dating the 'fall' to the sixth century B.C. Socrates and Plato presided over the crucifixion of the old consciousness. At the birth of Christ the spirits wailed round the Mediterranean 'Great Pan is dead'. The Renaissance, the Age of Reason, the Industrial Revolution, the Age of Technology and the Multinationals, have all mutilated the body, which will not quite die.

There is now widespread agreement that we must try to recapture something of that earlier vision. This can be attempted in two ways, through deep ecology and through imaginative art. It is my argument that these are, and need to be recognized as, essentially the same. Perhaps our greatest hope lies in a marriage of deep ecology, the life-sciences and the imaginative arts. George Sessions distinguishes between deep and shallow ecology, and Fritjof Capra comments:

Whereas shallow environmentalism is concerned with more efficient control and management of the natural environment for the benefit of 'man', the deep ecology movement recognizes that ecological balance will require profound changes in our perception of the role of human beings in the planetary ecosystem. In short, it will require a new philosophical and religious basis. Deep ecology is supported by modern science, and in particular by the new systems approach, but it is rooted in a perception of reality that goes beyond the scientific framework to an intuitive awareness of the oneness of all life, the interdependence of its multiple manifestations and its cycles of change and transformation. When the concept of the human spirit is understood in this

sense, as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels connected to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is truly spiritual. [Capra, 458]

The shallow ecologist sees only the symptoms in the material environment. The deep ecologist uses imagination to search for the hidden, deeply-rooted causes within:

What, after all, is the ecological crisis that now captures so much belated attention but the inevitable extroversion of a blighted psyche? Like inside, like outside. In the eleventh hour, the very physical environment suddenly looms up before us as the outward mirror of our inner condition, for many the first discernible symptom of advanced disease within. [Roszac, xvii]

Deep ecology seeks to respiritualize Nature, to heal the split in the human psyche, replacing anthropocentric with biocentric consciousness, to provide the only viable religion for the third millennium. Capra goes on to claim that such a framework has been 'set forth many times throughout human history', citing Taoism, Christian mystics, and philosophers from Heraclitus to Heidegger. He concludes:

It is found throughout Native American culture, and has been expressed by poets ranging from Whitman to Gary Snyder. It has even been argued that the world's greatest pieces of literature ... are structured according to the ecological principles observed in nature. [458-9]

For this vast enterprise ecology needs imagination, and imagination's most articulate expression, literature. What has kept the old consciousness alive through the thousands of years of its gradual rejection and persecution, in spite of the obliteration of the beliefs and rituals of nature religions and the total desacralization of modern life in the West, has been art, myth, and, especially, poetic literature. The literary imagination connects all the severed halves - inner and outer, self and other, male and female, life and death, man and Nature. Every metaphor is a stitch in the suture.

Imaginative speech is essentially metaphorical. For the process of making metaphors Wordsworth made the astonishing claim:

This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite and all the

passions connected with it, take their origin: it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and moral feelings. [‘Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*’, 1800]

Metaphor is the linguistic equivalent of touch. It is the link, the bridge, the meeting, the marriage, the atonement, bit by bit reconstructing the world as a unity, blissfully skipping over the supposed chasms of dualism. Hughes speaks of it as '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 of the real world or itself' [*Shakespeare* 159]. Lawrence speaks of poetry as a 'magical linking up':

The religious way of knowledge means that we accept our sense-impressions, our perceptions, in the full sense of the word, complete, and we tend instinctively to link them up with other impressions, working towards a whole. The process is a process of association, linking up, binding back (religio) or referring back towards a centre and a wholeness. This is the way of poetic and religious consciousness, the instinctive act of synthesis.

[*Apocalypse*, 190]

Imagery is the body of our imaginative life, and our imaginative life is a great joy and fulfilment to us, for the imagination is a more powerful and more comprehensive flow of consciousness than our ordinary flow. In the flow of true imagination we know in full, mentally and physically at once, in a greater, enkindled awareness. At the maximum of our imagination we are religious. And if we deny our imagination, and have no imaginative life, we are poor worms who have never lived. [*Phoenix*, 559]

The images, which most consistently achieve this magic, are symbols. Jung valued the symbol highly as providing the necessary third ground on which the otherwise polarized halves of the psyche could meet:

What the separation of the two psychic halves means, the psychiatrist knows only too well. He knows it as the dissociation of personality, the root of all neuroses; the conscious goes to the right and the unconscious to the left. As opposites never unite at their own level, a supraordinate 'third' is always required, in which the two parts can come together. And since the symbol derives as much from the conscious as the unconscious, it is able to unite them

both, reconciling their conceptual polarity through its form and their emotional polarity through its numinosity. [Aion, 180]

Imaginative art would be in a privileged position to lead the way in our time if there were a large enough readership capable of responding appropriately to it. But the capacity for such a response had already in Lawrence's day become rare:

The man who has lost his religious response *cannot* respond to literature or to any form of art, fully: because the call of every work of art, spiritual or physical, is religious, and demands a religious response. The people who, having lost their religious connection, turn to literature and art, find there a great deal of pleasure, aesthetic, intellectual, many kinds of pleasure, even curiously sensual. But it is the pleasure of entertainment, not of experience. ... They cannot give to literature the one thing it really requires - if it be important at all - and that is the religious response; and they cannot take from it the one thing it gives, the religious experience of linking up or making a new connection [Apocalypse, 155-6]

The greatest challenge to literature, education and literary criticism is to try to help readers to recover this faculty. As Lawrence writes:

The great range of responses that have fallen dead in us have to come to life again. It has taken two thousand years to kill them. Who knows how long it will take to bring them to life. [78]

That ancient vision of atonement is preserved in myth, and both preserved and perennially recreated in art. The purpose of art is to preserve it, and imaginative art cannot do otherwise, since the very nature of the creative imagination is holistic; its primary function is to make connections, discover relationships, patterns, systems and wholes.

Imagination is not a separate faculty which some are born with. It is what happens when the faculties we all have are freed from their usual bonds and divisions, resist the process of training and indoctrination, and speak out with the voice of nature - the voice of human nature of course, but not a human nature which defines itself in contradistinction to the rest of life, the voice of a man or woman, but not one who represses the anima or animus which is their continuity in consciousness. The language of the imagination is necessarily holistic and biocentric. It is grounded simultaneously in the depths of the

artist's being and in the external universe. It breaks down the walls of egotism, sexism, nationalism, racism, anthropocentrism. It expresses relationships and wholes. Its language is metaphor and symbol.

A work of imagination shares with a living creature or the ecosystem itself the characteristic of not being reducible to its parts, or explicable in terms of the technique of its manufacture. It cannot be exhausted by analysis. It is a system of interrelationships which, since it extends far beyond the words on the page, engages with everything else in the reader's conscious and unconscious experience, and is therefore virtually infinite. It is a microcosm, a model of the universe.

The living poem is the opposite of a well-wrought urn (or billiard-ball in Lawrence's comic terminology) complete in itself; it sends out countless roots and tendrils, ripples, shock-waves, shrapnel, grapnels, to touch, engage, disturb, grapple with the world, and with a different matrix of experiences in each reader.

Imagination's goal is atonement, the healing of the split between the mind and the rest of our faculties which has brought us to our present chronic, perhaps terminal condition. The analytic reason, operating in a void, is absurd. It has no validating or vitalizing contact with either inner or outer realities. If thought were a matter of mind only, man would be a windowless monad, an ego-bound obscenity, a clever imbecile.

The imagination is by no means the enemy of intelligence or civilization. Its function is to correct any imbalance, which has come about in the psyche, to reconcile and harmonize the warring, artificially polarized elements. What we call intelligence is often merely the analytical and manipulative aspects of intelligence developed to the exclusion of, at the cost of, all other aspects - intelligence cut off from its sustaining and validating connections with the rest of the psyche, with the body, and with everything outside itself. Yeats said 'God save me from thoughts men think in the mind alone'. Such thinking is what Blake called 'single vision and Newton's sleep'.

At a reading Hughes explained how it had come about that a poem ('Tiger-psalm') which had begun life (in the sixties) as a dialogue between Socrates and Buddha had ended up as a dialogue between machine-guns and a tiger:

the whole abstraction of Socrates' discourse must inevitably, given enough time and enough applied intelligence, result in machine-guns ... machine-guns descending directly from a mechanical, mechanistic development of logicity which grows from the abstraction of dialectical debate.

The ultimate in 'applied intelligence' and 'mechanistic development of logicity' was perhaps the computer-based systems-analysis of the Rand Corporation which largely directed American foreign policy in the nineteen-sixties - perhaps the apogee of disembodied reason in our history, when the computerized dialectical debate focussed on what figure of American losses in a nuclear war, between fifteen and a hundred million, would be 'acceptable' or 'sustainable'. Dean Acheson said of American policies and actions at that time: 'The criteria should be hard-headed in the extreme. Decisions are not helped by considering them in terms of sharing, brotherly love, the Golden Rule, or inducing our citizens into the Kingdom of Heaven' [quoted in Stein, *Peace on Earth*, 281]. Of the brinkmanship of the Cuban missile crisis Acheson said: 'Moral talk did not bear on the problem'. Nor did it bear on American action in Vietnam. In 1964 the analysts assured the U.S. government that a war in Vietnam could be quickly won. When in 1967 the Rand Corporation's computer was asked when the war would end, it replied that America had in fact won it in 1964. Perhaps the most realistic literature of the sixties was the so-called 'absurd' fiction of Heller and Vonnegut.

What is normally thought of as thinking, all those methods of 'thinking' which have been developed over the centuries in Western civilization, whose dualistic assumptions have been built into the very structure of our language, which has specialized in separating things from each other, then separating the parts, analyzing, vivisectioning, compartmentalizing, until it has drastically weakened our capacity for thinking in a way that puts things together, makes connections, perceives patterns and wholes. For most of the history of the human race the language of myth and folk-tale was to some extent generally understood, and understood to have a relevance not only to metaphysical truths, but to the health of the race and to the practical business of living. This has largely gone.

Starting from the narrow world we all inhabit, with its hubristic human perspectives and habitual complacencies, the imagination reaches inward towards the roots of our being and outward towards the powers of the non-human world. We know that all mirrors held up to nature, even by scientists, are distorting mirrors. All descriptions of nature are coloured by attitudes, are partly descriptions of the contents of the observer's own psyche projected onto the receptive face of nature. For the scientist this might be a problem, but for the artist it is the whole point of his art. Ted Hughes develops the case:

The character of great works is exactly this: that in them the full presence of the inner world combines with and is reconciled to the full presence of the outer world. And in them we see that the laws of these two worlds are not contradictory at all; they are one all-inclusive system; they are laws that somehow we find it all but impossible to keep, laws that only the greatest artists are able to restate. They are the laws, simply, of human nature. And men have recognized all through history that the restating of these laws, in one medium or another, in great works of art, are the greatest human acts. ... So it comes about that once we recognize their terms, these works seem to heal us. More important, it is in these works that humanity is truly formed. And it has to be done again and again, as circumstances change, and the balance of power between outer and inner world shifts, showing everybody the gulf. The inner world, separated from the outer world, is a place of demons. The outer world, separated from the inner world, is a place of meaningless objects and machines. The faculty that makes the human being out of these two worlds is called divine. That is only a way of saying that it is the faculty without which humanity cannot really exist. It can be called religious or visionary. More essentially, it is imagination, which embraces both outer and inner worlds in a creative spirit. [*Winter Pollen*, 150-1]

But before imagination can operate in this way upon the outer world, it must make the necessary inner and outer connections to allow creative energy to flow through the body and all its faculties. The artist as physician must first heal himself.

Imagination can be defined as a mode of access to and control of the contents of the unconscious. According to Jung

if the conscious psyche of individuals or of groups (such as nations or even the human race as a species) has become distorted, then the unconscious psyche will, apparently intentionally, compensate for this distortion by insisting on an opposite point of view in order to restore the balance.

[Baring 554]

Thus imagination is subversive, and the imaginative writer of sufficient courage says, in Melville's phrase, 'No, in thunder!' to the prevailing orthodoxies, unquestioned assumptions and shibboleths of his time. The dramatic festivals of ancient Greece virtually came into being in order to testify to the crime against Nature and warn of its inevitable consequences - consequences for the individual, for the state, and for the race. Those protests



and warnings have not hitherto been heeded. The truth is too uncomfortable, the implications too radically revolutionary.

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It is unfortunate that the word 'hero' with its inevitable associations with bravery, nobility and greatness of soul, should have come to be used to describe the chief male character in any story, for we shall see that many of the so-called heroes of myth, epic and drama are in fact criminals against Nature who should be viewed with horror as exemplars not of heroism but of hubris, or rather of hubris in their very heroism. Vaclav Havel writes:

The natural world, in virtue of its very being, bears within it the presupposition of the absolute which grounds, delimits, animates and directs it, without which it would be unthinkable, absurd and superfluous, and which we can only quietly respect. Any attempt to spurn it, master it or replace it with something else, appears, within the framework of the natural world, as an expression of *hubris* for which humans must pay a heavy price, as did Don Juan and Faust. [*Living in Truth*]

Perhaps the most damaging perversity in our response to great literature has been our insistence on treating as heroes the anti-heroes, the criminals. Prometheus has been celebrated as winning man his freedom from the tyranny of the gods. What Prometheus did was to teach man to regard himself as autonomous, to regard nothing as sacred, to 'strike wounds in the divine environment' (Kerenyi), to relegate nature to a heap of raw materials, to regard technology as the highest achievement, to probe nature's deepest secrets and not hesitate to play with fire. In other words, Prometheus set the feet of the race on the road to where we now have to live. Odysseus in *The Odyssey* has been universally praised for similar cleverness and independence, for unscrupulousness, for sacking cities, for butchering young women, subjecting all other considerations to his own name and fame.

We meet hubris in many of the protagonists of Greek tragedy - Agamemnon, Creon, Oedipus and Pentheus for example; in Sir Gawain; in several of Shakespeare's most fascinating characters - Adonis, Theseus, Angelo, Hamlet, Macbeth, Prospero; in Gulliver, and the Man Who Loved Islands, and Pincher Martin; in the poets themselves as well as in their alter egos from the Ancient Mariner to Crow.

It is common for critics to assume that the greatest writers are deficient in basic moral perceptions, that, for example, Homer identifies himself completely with Odysseus, Euripides with Pentheus, the Gawain poet with Gawain, Shakespeare with Prospero, or Swift with the Houyhnhnms. Nearly all the protagonists discussed in this book are simultaneously heroes and villains. In acting out their particular fates they suffer the tragi-comic human condition in all its glory and horror.

Hughes once said at a reading that he was always astonished by 'the extraordinary assumption by critics that they are the judges of literature, rather than criminals merely reporting on the judgements passed upon them by literature'. This is not to say that critics must hold back from passing any kind of judgement, only that such judgement must not be made on the assumption of the superiority of the analytical critic to the imaginative artist. There are other ways in which judgements can be made. Artists frequently pass severe judgements upon themselves: no-one knew more deeply than Coleridge himself how desperately he had mismanaged his talent. Even when the artist is, outside his work, less aware or less honest than Coleridge, his best work can pass judgement on him, in accordance with Lawrence's formulation 'Never trust the artist, trust the tale'. The artist can be, both outside his art and in his conscious intentions in his art, a 'dribbling liar', yet still reveal the truth of the imagination.

The great writers are far from being exempt from the criminality of their species and culture. The difference is that the writer recognizes his own guilt, puts himself in the dock, submits to correction by his own deepest self, the voice of nature within him. Thus in *The Odyssey* Homer makes reparations for the false values of *The Iliad*. And *The Bacchae* is as much a repudiation of Euripides' own former values as of those of Athens. It is the central problem for the Romantics and remained so for the moderns. Eliot found Nature unthinkable (when unredeemed from beyond itself), Beckett absurd, and Sartre superfluous.

The creative writer is not a privileged being, a born judge or infallible seer. I am less interested in writers who are concerned simply to castigate others for failing to live by their own superior values than in writers whose imaginative depth and honesty leads them to reveal, even when they are about quite other business, their own complicity in the crime against nature and their own natures. Such writers earn an authenticity and universality lacking in propagandists for however good a cause. The great imaginative writer may be one who has achieved a measure of fourfold vision - early Wordsworth, early Coleridge, Whitman, early Hopkins, later Yeats, later Lawrence, later Hughes.

But that achievement is made at great cost. He is also likely to be the opposite, for much of his life, or in his more normal state - a cursed sufferer from single vision, from egotism, materialism, dualism, who differs from the rest of us in lacking our complacency, in knowing that he is sick and striving in his art to diagnose that sickness, to punish and to heal himself. The artist is a criminal like the rest, but differs from us in that his loyalty to his imagination forces him to acknowledge his guilt and seek correction. Rarely, he manages to get himself, to a degree, corrected.

We are all criminals in the sense that we have all persecuted, exploited or denied essential parts of ourselves, particularly that part which Jung called, in men, the anima. And that innermost self is representative of all that we persecute, exploit or deny in the outer world - women, 'undeveloped' peoples, animals, Nature herself. Imagination is the faculty, which enables us to locate and release the violated prisoner, or at least to give her a voice. Those who are most successful in this we call poets. Initially, that voice may well be embittered, revengeful, destructive. It passes a harsh judgement on the poet, our representative. The punishment may be terrifying, as in 'The Ancient Mariner' or bloody as in *Gaudete*. But the pain and the fear, which may be real enough in some cases, are also symbolic of a process which is simultaneously destructive and creative, the breaking of the complacent, self-sufficient ego, which is the locus of guilt. Subsequently the voice becomes gentler, and the healing process can begin.

The 'Nightingale' and 'Grecian Urn' odes are great poems because in them Keats accepts defeat in his fervent attempts to transcend nature. That acceptance opens the way for an even greater poem 'To Autumn', which, with phenomenal courage, transforms to beauty the very flux and transience of nature which, he knew, was shortly to claim his life. The ode 'Intimations of Immortality' is another fervent but failed attempt, of great value to the reader as such, but of none to Wordsworth, since he was unable to acknowledge the failure, which therefore opened the way to nothing but the long decline. Yeats' journey to Byzantium, on the other hand, another magnificent failure, led to the chastened return and acceptance of his greatest poems.

Joseph Campbell claims that with any writer whose realization of his own experience has been 'of a certain depth and import, his communication will have the value and force of living myth' [*Creative Mythology*, 4]. Jung had said the same in *The Spirit of Man*:

The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious, which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-

sidedness of the present. [82] Whenever the collective unconscious becomes a living experience and is brought to bear upon the conscious outlook of an age, this event is a creative act, which is of importance for a whole epoch. [98] He [the artist] has plunged into the healing and redeeming depths of the collective psyche. [105]

Beyond that the artist must, of course, have the ability to communicate the whole experience through language in a way, which produces an authentic miracle - that some sounds, or marks on a page, should transmit a healing and fertilizing power.

Yet the very act of transforming experience into art through the 'poetic' mastery of language itself exposes the artist to a new dimension of temptation, a new disguised form of criminality. The temptation is to process experience, in Lawrence's terms to cook it in the artistic consciousness, until it loses its savour, its very life and truth, and becomes another form of egotism. There is the temptation to succumb to the embrace of what Hughes called the 'maternal octopus' of the English poetic tradition, to produce your own version of what has been done so beautifully, so expressively, so powerfully, in the past; the temptation to write the sort of poetry that is currently valued, that critics and publishers seem to want; the temptation to put on display one's talents, as the young Yeats put all his circus animals on show in the full confidence that words obeyed his call; the temptation, having achieved some success, a readership, to repeat the same effects and write what Hopkins called Parnassian. Both Yeats and Lawrence at the time of the First World War were arguing that at such a time the poet could earn the right to be noticed only by going naked: 'Everything can go, but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, today' Lawrence wrote in 1916. When Eliot read that fifteen years later he responded with rare fervour:

This speaks to me of that at which I have long aimed, in writing poetry; to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem *points at*, and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get *beyond poetry*, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*. We never succeed, perhaps, but Lawrence's words mean this to me, that they express to me what I think that the forty or fifty original lines that I have written strive towards. [Mattheissen 1958, 90]

A few years later, at the beginning of another World War, Eliot wrote the line: 'The poetry does not matter' ['East Coker'].

Ted Hughes had the same lesson to learn, the need for the self-abnegation by a famous poet of the pyrotechnics, the 'old heroic bang' on which his fame depended. He admired a generation of Eastern European poets such as Popa and Pilinszky whose work was purged of rhetoric, deliberately impoverished, 'a strategy of making audible meanings without disturbing the silence' [WP 223]. He sought a simplicity not of retreat or exclusion but on the far side of experience and complexity:

This other rare type has the simplicity of an inclusion of everything in a clear solution. We recognise the difference, because we recognise in this latter kind that the observer has paid in full for what he records, and that has earned him a superior stake in reality, which is not common. Good folk rhymes have this kind of simplicity - experience itself seems to have produced them. ... To succeed in any degree in producing it, a writer needs ... a touch of that martial/ascetic brand of temperament - usually alien and even hostile to aesthetic sensibility - to provide the reckless drive towards essentials, and the readiness to abandon the verbal charms of conventional poetry.

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

The achievement of such nakedness is a shedding of what Lawrence called 'the full armour of their own idea of themselves', a form of ego-death. It is also a shedding of the husk, which must split before the seed can germinate. From such humble beginnings whole new myths might grow.

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It could be argued that a 'living myth' is not a new myth but a rediscovery and release of the power of the oldest myths. In *The Myth of the Goddess* Baring and Cashford write:

Nature is no longer experienced as source but as adversary, and darkness is no longer a mode of divine being, as it was in the lunar cycles, but a mode of being devoid of divinity and actively hostile, devouring of light, clarity and order. The only place where the voice of the old order breaks through, though so disguised as to be barely recognizable, is where the inspiration of poetry re-animates the old mythic images. [298]

It was my first dim realization of this twenty-five years ago which set me out on a quest which revealed that the old order breaks through, either by reanimating the old mythic images or by other means, in a surprisingly high proportion of the greatest imaginative writers of our tradition, and that it is 'barely recognizable' only because we have been conditioned not to recognize what is staring us in the face. So Auden looked at the great body of mythic imagery within and behind Yeats and called it mere silliness. And Philip Larkin gazed blankly at the 'common myth-kitty' and dismissed it as irrelevant to his own or any other poet's concerns, thus castrating his own poetry and criticism. His best poems are about his desperate need for the spiritual healing he allowed his lesser self to spurn.

The distinctive energies of modernism were centrifugal - 'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold'; now, quite suddenly, as if some world-wide chemical reaction had taken place, these energies have swung round and become centripetal. Fiction has blossomed world-wide as a healing force, with women (who had little to do with modernism) now playing their proper role. Poetry always was a healing force, and this has been strongly reaffirmed by such contemporary poets as Robert Bly, Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, Ted Hughes, Peter Redgrove and Seamus Heaney. More and more disciplines, formerly aligned against Nature or attempting to function independently of it are now gravitating to a common centre which is the recognition of the interdependence of all life.

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It is precisely the periods of greatest national growth and confidence which have produced, in reaction, the dark imaginative vision - Periclean Athens, Elizabethan England, the Age of Reason, the Industrial Revolution, the age of Victorian expansionism, and our own century of technological wizardry. But the situation is different now. Perhaps at last, at this eleventh hour, with so many other voices raised in support, the great writer might gain some serious attention. And the contemporary writer has a different challenge. We no longer need visionary artists to give us warnings; we are bombarded with warnings from every side. The role of the artist now is, more than ever before, to heal, to discover and embody possibilities of regeneration.

The status of the imaginative writer in our own society and in relation to our own impending disaster is very different. In 1970 Ted Hughes wrote of the call to the shaman to go to the spirit world 'to get something badly needed, a

cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs. ... Poets usually refuse the call. How are they to accept it? How can a poet become a medicine man and fly to the source and come back and heal or pronounce oracles? Everything among us is against it' [Faas, 206]. Perhaps since then it has become a little less unthinkable. Art, science, philosophy, religion, converge towards a common centre which we are now in a position to recognize as holistic, sacramental, a rapidly growing awareness that, in Coleridge's words, 'we are all one life'. No longer are poetic visionaries voices in the wilderness. Their vision, formerly seen as idiosyncratic and eccentric, is coming to be seen as the essential vision of the nascent world-age.

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