The Relation of Sound to Content in the Poetry of Richard Hugo

By Tantra Bensko

With thanks to

Hunt Hawkins

David Kirby

Sheila Taylor

And Florida State University

LucidPlay Publishing

Berkeley, 2012

http://lucidplaypublishing.weebly.com

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Richard Hugo may exert more influence on contemporary poetry than any other poet. Not everyone is happy about Hugo's potential for influence: Hayden Carruth bemoans this possibility in a long, 1984 review of Hugo's collected poems. Carruth accuses him of increasing, phoney pessimism, unimaginative megalomania, solipsism, short-sightedness, and degeneracy. Of more concern to this essay, Carruth complains of his tediousness and bad iambic pentameter. He claims that Hugo has a tin ear. Hugo's poetics, he says, is actually "befuddlement" (13). Coming right after Hugo's death, this acidic reassessment of his life-work and influence raises questions which I hope to answer in Hugo's favor. Although Hugo gained wide recognition and held prestigious teaching positions, his poems have been accused of ugliness and monotony throughout his career.

In "Writing Hurt: the Poetry of Richard Hugo," Alan Helms exhibits the sensibility Hugo is up against; we can appreciate his distinctive unconventionality. Helms says Hugo, celebrated, influential, winner of the Roethke Memorial Prize and other honors, is disappointing. Helms picks "Night with Cindy at Heitman's" as an example of structural weakness and erratic stops and starts that disperse energy and attention. Helms arranges some of Hugo's enjambed lines into end-stopped blank verse, believing his own to be superior,

to demonstrate that Hugo perceives in one form and writes in another. Helms catalogues several other problems with Hugo's writing in general, at times finding convincing one line examples. Then he attacks another excellent poem, "A Map of Montana in Italy" saying the lines, which are chopped up, then "blowsy," go against the rules of blank verse. Hugo's advice about not sticking to the triggering idea of a poem disgusts him. He is disturbed by Hugo's modernist, respectful theory, "Why track down unity when the diffuse / is so exacting. . . . / The world should always pour on us / like this: chaos showering, / each thing alone, dependent as a dream." He accuses Hugo of thinking ahistorically, apolitically, writing banal, chauvinistic poems, and having a stupid poetics. He attacks what is good and wants him to write more logically arranged, public poems--bad advice. He says the new poems, 31 Letters and 13 Dreams are constructed well to give licence to flaccid, prosy, breezy, vulgar, simplistic, drunken, boring, private poems with no center.

Reading even well-meaning criticism, one can be turned away from Hugo's poetry. The essays abstract his monotonous and uninviting subject matter from the context of the overall sound of the poem and the build-up of surprising lines. This essay will focus on the sound itself, because it helps produce and express the imaginative and emotional leaps which constitute his appeal. Bridging the gaps, the reader feels he has participated, and is primed to rediscover his world. Yet later, he may puzzle over the memory of the excitement he felt while reading about repetitive and depressing subjects. Hugo's

technique, far from befuddlement, yields musical, creative lines which produce that excitement.

Hugo does not have a tin ear; he places more emphasis on sound than almost any other contemporary poet. He teaches that in order to write, one should assume that sense conforms to music (Triggering Town, 3). By strictly following his idiosyncratic technical rules, repeating four to eight syllables later the sound of a word he likes, for example, he frees his imagination by transfering rigidity away from the content to the sound. The rules, as explained in The Triggering Town, helped him say powerful, unexpected things in each line. The rules have also earned him a reputation built on the jerky, congested sound.

The sound harkens back to poets who were also condemned at times for ugly writing, but eventually praised for their craft. Auden, in his verse plays, used Anglo-Saxon sounds as Hugo did, with frequent ellision, alliteration, monosyllables, and strong stresses. Earlier, Hardy awkwardly clustered hard consonants to help portray a violent, cruel world. Hugo's convoluted, private language compacted with words used unconventionally reminds one of Hopkins. Hugo's teacher, Roethke, wrote very differently, pleasing the public with soft, feminine, light sounds made up of rapid and varied rhythms, many unaccented syllables, and soothing consonants. However, Hugo learned from him to value language more than statement; he also gained a feel for assonance, consonance, repetition, and organic form, and a habit of writing from exaggerated stances, particularly that of defensiveness protected by

blustering sounds. Perhaps more important to his develpment were Hugo's family, who fervently limited their world. Imitating them, Hugo places rigid restrictions on his poetry. Paradoxically, he also resents old feelings of restriction; thus his poems are tense with underlying rage.

The basic sound struggling against the rules dominates his poems and the books which employ his distinctive sound dominate his career, overwhelming the subtler effects. I chose to arrange the thesis chronologically to emphasize the sound's progression to fit changing needs; the sections include descriptions of the reception of each book and brief descriptions of other poets, who in general write in a more relaxed style. Hugo's style balances two impulses: tension and relaxation. The first section covers a long, unified period. It consists of poems he wrote over a fourteen year span and then divided into two books: A Run of Jacks and The Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. The poems in the first two books display the tension of compact language that never becomes slack, always strains to do all it can. We can see him working against the restraints of his technique. The tension of energy straining against limitations always corresponds to the discipline he has in his approach to the world. Hugo's struggle to conquer his personal weakness contributes to the hard, nervous character of the poems. We can see him, at the time he wrote the first two books, constantly keeping his emotions in check. In later books when he overcompensates yielding to nostalgia, self-pity, and carelessness, the lax, prosy sound of the poems reflects his lack of

discipline. The second and third stages contain both relaxation and tension; he breaks the barrier against showing "weak" feelings in a sudden surrender of hard self-possession in Italy, as he describes in two poems set in Spinazzola. The second stage begins with a weak book, Good Luck in Cracked Italian, which fittingly details that surrender in "Spinazzola: Quella Cantina La". The stage ends with What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American, employing even more obviously the less combative sound resulting from his surrender to emotionalism in Italy. This stage is his high point stylistically because of the famous, abrasive Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir. More flexible than his first two books, it scintillates with tense sound because it writhes with the turmoil of his personal affairs of that time, yet displays great discipline. The poems balance most successfully two qualities: imitating the feel of the experience, and generating poems by rules of sound. The last stage also begins with a personal surrender, related in rambling, garrulous letter poems written during his treatment for alcoholism; it ends with the relaxed book, The Right Madness on Skye, in which his process of emotional healing is obviously near completion. White Center, the middle book, resembles the middle book of the second stage. It explores, rather tensely and imagistically, his personal problems.

I will show the various techniques he uses and how they correspond to his life and the type of poem he is writing. I hope to show that the poetry's music is effective and varied. And, depending on the control of tension and relaxation, the music is an important

factor in the quality of the content. My definition of sound is very broad: the broadness is part of my point. My definition includes regularly measured aspects such as consonants, vowels, pitch, meter, rhyme and caesuras. It includes less often considered aspects: syllabics, sound repetition as defined by Kenneth Burke, and end stops. It also includes aspects usually considered formal such as the pauses created by line and stanza breaks, and sentence length. Though not commonly noted, other factors influence sound, including these: if a word is used a strange way and positioned unusually, we say that word with more careful enunciation and strength; when a sentence is compacted so the reader must supply connective phrases such as "it is," tension is created because we must slow down enough to hint at the phrase in our head, but also read quickly because of the parataxis; when sentences begin repeatedly on important, strong sounding words, the sentences are jerky and pounding; sudden shifts of meaning and tone disturb the flow; and sentence structures dictate the patterns of sound we hear.

Exploring and evaluating Hugo's techniques is important because he is so influential. His dominating voice seduces young writers. He has been a teacher at places such as Iowa, and has published The Triggering Town, essays on writing, which some universities use as a textbook. Impressionable writers imitating him will probably ignore the poems on the relaxed end of the spectrum, such as those in his last book. Those poems have little of his distinctive character, no very obvious sound techniques, and are not

the type that have garnered him fame. The advice he gives in his essays is good as far as it goes, but mainly refers to the most obvious kinds of effects he obtains in earlier collections. If a person is to imitate Hugo, he should study the range of subtle techniques appropriate to a more delicate or idea-oriented kind of poem, and also consider the limitations of his method. I include critical responses and some poets setting the norms of the times because an imitator should also be aware of his relation to convention. The most familiar style was softer, more gradual and continuous, even for those poets, such as Ashbery, Olson, Levertov, Wakoski and Tate, whose purposes are very dissimilar from Hugo's kind of poetry.

This study is also important because while much criticism has been written on Hugo the works have all focused on thematic, social, and psychological apects of his poetry, rarely mentioning the incredible beauty found in each line. Individual lines show us nature in fresh ways, and hint at our psychological transformations of our world. The line by line excitement, pumped by the sound, cannot be explained by relating it to the larger themes. Neither does explication bring us close to what seems magical. His rules of writing through sound repetition, compression and playing with syntax explain the phemonenon (The Triggering Town, 5). Writing from sound to sense is a form of automatic writing that unlocks the imagination, which the symbolists and surrealists tried to do. It is obvious that an ordinary writer could not use Hugo's method of playing with sound

to unleash the imagination, and produce masterpieces like his. It would be fruitless to try to do so without the guidance of a highly trained conscious mind. Surely Hugo knew this when he claimed that no sequence of ideas one writes lacks meaning in a poem (Triggering, 5). He is a careful observer concerned with important psychological and social problems. Writing his last book, he does not even use conscious rules; his technique has become intuitive. Few individual lines produce the striking effects of his early poems, but his imagination has been freed from his bugbear, self-destructive, compulsive thinking, by, among other things, years of writing poetry. The sound quality of his poems has made a change from hermetic knottiness. His final book's sound is appropriate to straightforward communication. Thus, his struggle to balance tension and relaxation produces variation of sound throughout his career, an interesting sound texture in the poems, a reflexive subject, and therapy.

We must consider the complicated relationship between content and technique to find reasons for his changing use of sound, to understand the emotional effect of the sound, to determine how effectively he matches sound with subject, and to show the kinds of subjects which do not work well with his type of sound. Exploring the reciprocal influence aids in understanding the creative process, and proves that sound has such an important role in creating poems that it is the most important factor in determining the value of the content. Content influences his use of sound more than his level of maturity does. This can be seen in my arrangement of his work into three

stages, each of which is treated in a separate chapter. The first stage, which shows him alienated from people and feelings, lasts for many years, and shows no growth; the sound and content, while both interesting, are repetetive. With the trip to Italy that generates the next book, he experiences growth; he can allow himself to express emotions. However, the naive breakthrough produces poor poems in Good Luck. In Lady, he finds the proper subject matter which expresses powerful emotions. The third book has a kind of fin de siecle feel. He has learned how to confess and recreate emotional experiences and wishes to keep doing it, but has poor motives for chosing his content. The uninspiring content and his lack of further growth resultes in lackluster sound. The second stage contains poems written at most a few years apart; the poems within the group do not improve as he ages. The subjects he choses to write about make the middle book far superior. The third stage begins like the last one with new growth still so fresh the content and sound of the letter poems are the work of an unbalanced man. Yet the dream poems, written at the same time, are superior because of the type of content. The next book, White Center, corresponds to Lady, as his controlled, but emotional book in which growth takes place before our eyes. In the final book, written at the same time as White Center, the sound lightens to fit the more objective content. Its success shows he has learned to handle in poems the new area of personal growth, direct communication, begun with the first book in this stage, 31 Letters. Each stage is characterized by the specific problem he confronts. Solving the problems leads him to

write with increasingly relaxed sounds which work best when they have some kind of control. He struggles throughout his career to find the right kind of sound to control each new type of content.

Chapter 2

The first two books reveal Hugo's conscious use of sound most obviously. In The Triggering Town, he explains the rules he made up when he was a young man. Whenever he writes a word with a sound he likes, he repeats it, or a variation, three to eight syllables later, to foster more creative word choice (10). The examples of similar sounds, such as "victim" and "final," "martyr and drama," "cascade" and suicide," show he takes for granted the kind of musicality explained in The Philosophy of Literary Form, in which Kenneth Burke discusses the similarity of cognate acrostic structures, augmentation, chiasmus, and diminuation (369-78). Hugo further shows the amount of subjective preference involved in his sound technique by saying he "likes" "l," "n," and "k" (Triggering, 13). Showing a preference for monosyllables, he says they create feelings of honesty, toughness, relentlessness, rigidity, and a world of harm. He acknowledges the usefulness of polysyllables, which, though they soften the impact of language, can be used well to show compassion and tranquility in a warm, fluid world (Triggering, 8). He takes seriously Pound's advice to say what one has to say in as few syllables as possible. He cuts out every extra word or line, rearranging sentences, and shortening words (Osborne, 68).

He gives sound the strenuous job of holding together the shifting focus (Triggering, 4). Each sentence lunges or twists away from the

previous one, provoking a new effort of will and muscle each time. The shifts portray a man in a world that gives no comfortable rest. In "Graves at Coupeville," the subtly repeated sounds keep the ideas associational and gradual, but the abrupt changes in subject emphasize the sense of being a vagabond:

> "When weather shouted at us: vagabond
> we looked for weathered towns where men are strange.
> Our clothes were older than those stones where words
> erased by moss are silly said aloud.
> We had idols that the light deranged.
> Last night's strangers could have been our friends.
> The dead were singing slogans in our blood. (Kapowsin, 54)

Just as rhythm variations would, the sudden shifts fill the poem with stops and strongly accented, pounding starts, as in "La Push":

> Fish swim onto sand error.
> Birds need only the usual wind
> to be fanatic, no bright orange
> or strange names. Waves fall
> from what had been flat water,
> and a child sells herring
> crudely at your door. (Jacks, 9)

Hugo claims that whatever one writes is somehow connected to the previous sentence: everything is linked in the world of imagination (Triggering, 4). Though making the subject of each sentence as different as possible from the last may seem dangerously

irresponsible, giving sound too much work to do as a cohesive factor, it has advantages in his case. He readily admits to being obsessive. Therefore, forcing tangential thinking is necessary to avoid digging himself into the ground. The sudden shifts require his distinctive sound to complement and unify them.

Playing with language leads one into the world of the imagination, just as tangential sentences do, keeping the mind from repeating the same dull thought. About going into the amoral world of the imagination through these routes, he says "There's fear sometimes involved but also joy, an exhilaration that can't be explained to anyone who has not experienced it (Triggering, 16). Actually, the reader can experience it vicariously through his poems. Individual lines lead us out of the rut of linear, rational thinking; "startling" is the most common word his first reviewers used. His main message to writing workshops is that one should transfer rigidity from the content to the sound through playing with the music.

He is uneasy with poems that have no music. In "Obsessive Ear" he says that writing without metrics is ridiculous, something he does not understand. He cites "Easter 1916" as perhaps the most emotionally packed poem written, and points out that Yeats wrote it in strict form. He praises Dylan Thomas also as a formalist who carefully counted syllables (26).

Sound, then, is an important tool in keeping the lines fresh, in packing the poem with emotion, and creating pleasing music. But there is a deeper reason for a poem's characteristic sound. By using rhythms

and images that correspond to the emotion, the "private poet" discovers the reasons behind his haunting mood. Rather than "public poets," who risk becoming didactic, the private ones with a close relationship to language have been the best ones of the century (Triggering, 14). Hugo explains the interconnections of sound, word, and meaning:

> So you are after those words you can own and ways of putting them in phrases and lines that are yours by right of obsessive musical deed. You are trying to find and develop a way of writing that will be yours and will, as Stafford puts it, generate things to say. Your triggering subjects are those that ignite your need for words. When you are honest to your feelings, that triggering town chooses you. Your words used your way will generate your meanings. Your obsessions lead you to your vocabulary. Your way of writing locates, even creates, your inner life. The relation of you to your language gains power. The relation of you to the triggering subject weakens. (Triggering, 14)

In "Obsessive Ear," Hugo says that clusters of sounds give him ideas for poems, because he never writes from ideas but from experience (26). It seems he equates sound with experience. Playing with sound is not simply a means of generating freak sentences. A type of sound arises from his subconscious, and as he finds the objective correlative for it, he discovers the complexity of his inner self.

He teaches writers also to find more tangible objective

correlatives for the inner self. He feels a kinship with small towns that have seen better days. Beginning with small, physical things lets the imagination expand (Triggering, 7). Rigidly sticking to a specific scene performs the same function as his rules of sound; it keys him into his obsessions and lets his imagination take off from there. He writes that all good art arises from obsessions (Triggering, 7). A sound should be keyed into one's deepest concerns. Therefore, writers imitating Hugo should imitate the principle and find their own sounds; copying his will leave the imagination locked up and produce poems which have nice sound and perhaps unexpected images but no meaning. Even such extreme restrictions as cutting every unnecessary syllable, and such long-standing obsessions with scenes of inescapable small town homes, belong to Hugo by way of his background.

In "Hill Going East" (208), he clarifies his personal reasons for using these rigid methods to escape monotony. His father abandoned his young mother, and she left him with his grandparents, who raised him during the Depression. He was comfortable with their old fashioned ways, which explains the desire for the world to remain the same. He respected their habit of purposefully limiting their world, growing vegetables in order not to shop, never going to movies or anywhere, except for occasional fishing expeditions. He says their reason, which was shared by all his neighbors, was fear. Until he served in Italy during the war, he had never left the region, and when he returned, he reacted to his venture by staying home for three more years. Because his grandparents were too old for him to identify with, he turned to

nature. Because of his orphan's fear of dispossession, he also became obsessed with towns as dwellings. His experiences explain the lingering feeling of being poor, the need for acceptance, and the role of nature and small towns. But they also explain his method of writing: by putting restrictions on the sound of the poem, he mimics his family's stubborn attempt to restrict their world. It is no wonder that the prevailing sounds are sad, but tough, holding back anger, struggling out from inarticulateness, sometimes almost choking. His family also restrained their feelings; he never received or witnessed any physical affection when growing up; as a teenager, he thought only people in movies kissed. In his poems, he turned an atmosphere of caution into a productive habit, but his background did lead him into danger of monotony. Writing always from a specific place caused him to be labeled a regionalist, and the limited number of interests he developed in his deprived childhood allow him little variety of subject matter, or sound.

The stances he writes from, and the sounds that help express them, also grew out of his childhood. He grew up in White Center, Washington, a town to be ashamed of; people there lied and said that they lived in Seattle when they applied for jobs. Not having a father as a role model, he idolized the street-fighters of White Center. He looked beyond them, also, to the tough heros of the screen like Cagney and Bogart, and to film characters like Rhett Butler. He was a "sissy" actually, he said, and in poems, substituted for his true personality a more acceptable stance, imagining himself unemotional, brave, and

cruel, speaking in harsh consonants and driving iambs.

The landscape of White Center and Seattle, to which it is attached, also influenced his poems in a less emotional way. We can read his description of Seattle in "Gains Made in Isolation" (298-99). The view in Seattle is broken. New views suddenly appear. Growth is thick and tangled, trees crowd right in front of one's face, and the bushes beat against fishermen along the bank. Everything is dramatic and dark, never gradual, and the hills are steep. The dense language of his poems and the images coming quickly, without warning, mimic the claustrophobic feel of his region. The poems very often focus on his attempts to gain a sense of control over the natural world: "He would hoard this hill, this salal, / and this air hard as alder, / mallards in a naive wedge slit south" (Jacks, 11). Controlling such an overpowering, sneaky antagonist as Seattle proves a difficult feat. According to Garber in "Fat Man at the Margin," Hugo's poems' taut and muscular rhythms catch the rhythms of his world. His lines leave no empty spaces for sounds to echo in just as Seattle has no blanks where anything can rest. Density is a theme, a compulsion, and a sound made up of rapid jumps and the pressure of words compacted into relationships.

> In many tongues, hawkers scream our fingers
> off the fruit display. All day, we never see
> the rows of lightbulbs shining. Rages faked
> by blinding grapes and pears make eating
>
> [no stanza break]

cosmopolitan. In The Athenian
Negro faces do no better than the white
against the sea outside. A prude might wait
long enough to see the U.S. Fleet pull out.
Voyeurs keep dark islands in reserve. (Jacks, 52)

Rhythmically throbbing poems which are dense with sound repetition, jumping from idea to idea in writhing syntax, form the base of A Run of Jacks. The first poem, "Trout," is the epitome of that basic style at its most refined and controlled:

Quick and yet he moves like silt.
I envy dream that see his curving
silver in the weeds. When still as snags
he blends with certain stones.
When evening pulls the ceiling tight
across his back he leaps for bugs.

I wedged hard water to validate his skin--
call it chrome, say red is on
his side like apples in a fog, gold
gills. Swirls always looked one way
until he carved the water into many
kinds of current with his nerve-edged nose.

And I have stared at steelhead teeth
to know him, savage in his sea-run growth,

[no stanza break]

to drug his facts, catalog his fins
with wings and arms, to bleach the black
back of the first I saw and frame the cries
that sent him snaking to oblivions of cress.

The regular, iambic rhythm shapes the poem. Several lines scan trochaically, but except for the attention-getting first line, usually only if the last syllable of the preceeding line was unaccented. Thus, he carries through the regular rhythm (-´-´-´- / ´-´-´-´-). In three cases, the pattern breaks at the beginning of a line. In the first case, a dash takes the place of an unaccented syllable. The other cases are the only instances of two adjacent words alliterating: "gold/gills," and "black/back." In both lines, a previous word also contains the alliterative consonant. Sound sets the two colors, gold and black, in opposition to each other because of their important relationship. The trout he sees is gold and he tries to transform the first one he saw, an ominously black one which he had scared away, into this trusting one. Double accents in alliterative pairs of descriptive words remind one of Hopkins, whose inscapes are similar to this poem; both poets strain to understand an animal and capture it so well in poetry that they form a mystical relationship. "Hugo," in the poem, works desperately, obsessively, to control nature in the form of fish, using perception as the tool: "And I have stared at steelhead teeth/ to know him, savage in his sea-run growth,/ to drug his facts, catalogue his fins/ with wings and arms." The link with arms is telling not only because Hugo wants to identify with the fish but

because elsewhere he often links beautiful women, whom he cannot have, with fish. Control over nature is misplaced emotional control. For example, in "Skykomish River Running" (Jacks, 12), he says "I will cultivate the trout, teach their fins/ to wave in water like the legs of girls/ tormented black in pools." In the first book, he comes no closer to romantic love. The sound of the poems would not be giving enough to accomodate tenderness.

The controlled rhythm of "Trout" breaks midline only in a few places, for effect. It never breaks in the first stanza which forms a base just as the perfect poem forms a base for the book. In the second stanza, the line "I wedge hard water to validate his skin" disturbs the regularity with a sense of physical force working against an obstacle. A strange irregularity, "Swirls always looked one way," ("until he carved the water into many/kinds of current" can be scanned four ways, none iambic, echoing the meaning of unstable, changing appearance. The trout has a "nerve-edged nose," which must be hard enough to carve water. Therefore the phrase changes the rhythmical pattern with its triple hard accents emphasized by a hyphen once more reminiscent of Hopkins. The third stanza throbs with a similarly hyphenated metrical variation: "savage in his sea-run growth." The uncooperative, hard accents make the growth seem uncivilized. The double accent in "to drug his facts, cataloque his fins" makes Hugo savagely relentlessness.

Sound causes it to cohere. Repeated consonants riddle the lines. Harsh ones such as "k," "d," "t," and according to Burke, the

strongest sound in English, "st," teeth" express the constant tension. The undertone of sibilants and slithering liquids set the watery scene and express the elusiveness of the fish. He picks the vowels carefully too. For example, "i," which gives the impression of things glittery and tiny, begins and ends the first line, "Quick and yet he moves like silt." In We Are Called Human, Allen says the "i" and "e" sound in "Trout" grab our attention and we feel intimate with Hugo and the trout, which seem equally important; when we see the fish closely, we understand a bit of Hugo (9). Slant end-rhymes like "cries" and "cress." pull the poem together. He purposefully overdoes the cohesiveness nearly to the point of discomfort, paradoxically creating aspects of incohesivesess. The reader has difficulty saying and absorbing the lines because of the great density. Words hard to say together put one in mind of Old and Middle English texts, which are compelling because of the athletic sounds. Hugo also follows the tradition by omitting unimportant words. Therefore, the words remaining have greater weight and cohere unnaturally closely. The actual rhythm is somewhat jerky with sentence fragments, at times insistent with parallel sentence cataloques. He leaves in few polysyllables to soften the language. There are only five or six polysyllables per six line stanza; only two are three syllables. Though in this particular poem, he retains the connective word "when," breaking the "when" clauses off into fragments makes the sound jerky. The "and" he retains does not really connect anything because it begins a sentence; using it makes the rhythm a strong iambic.

Anapest and dactyl rhythms are not very prone to jerkiness. Even the robust twirlings of William's "The Dance" flow: "In Breughel's great picture, the Kermess, / the dancers go round, they go round / and around." The iambic meter is not usually a graceful, dancing rhythm. In Hugo's poems, as in Tennyson's "He clasped the craig with crooked claws," it pounds. When stopped by hard consonants, word and sentence endings, they sound jagged. As in the Tennyson poem, "The Eagle," "Trout," pounds because of the consonants like "k" and "t," which create crisp breaks between words. Importantly, the break is not as final as a period; forced coherence adds to the tension of the pounding rhythm. Alliteration plays two roles. Very short sentences only moderately contribute to the jaggedness in the first book. One, two or three word sentences do not appear as often as they will in Lady. Therefore, the tone of the early poems expresses less emotion.

"Trout," locked into even stanzas, a regulated number of polysyllables and a rhythm varied only for specific purposes, is a perfect artifact. Other nature poems are just as well packed in salt. "Ocean on Monday" (Jacks, 26), a description of finality, rounds off in twelve lines with the metaphorically onomatopoeic "boredom banging in your face,/ the horizon stiff with strain." "Bass" (5) simply concerns fish. The tight corresponds with tight emotions: the panic of small fish and the self-possession of the bass. It ends also with banging--"he bangs with blazing hunger, head held high in the world to display a meal." choice of words such as "skills" in "Evening clicks with oars and reeling skills," reveals his "sound before sense" credo.

The longer poems open out to less forcefully controlled emotions; they express more ambiguous or relaxed attitudes. One cannot hold these poems in one's hand like polished stones. "Skykomish River Running" (40), like "Trout," centers on his desire to know the trout; but it also conderns his desire to capture the rhythm and music of the river:

> Aware that summer baked the water clear,
> today I came to see a fleet of trout.
> But as I wade the salmon limp away,
> their dorsal fins like gravestones in the air,
> on their sides the red that kills the leaves.
> Only sun can beat a stream this thin.
> The river Sky is humming in my ear.
>
> Where this river empties in the sea,
> trout are waiting for September rain
> to sting their thirst alive. If they speed
> upstream behind the kings and eat the eggs
> the silvers lay, I'll pound the drum for rain.
> But sunlight drums, the river is the same,
> running like old water in my ear.
>
> I will cultivate the trout, teach their fins
> to wave in water like the legs of girls
> tormented black in pools. I will swim
>
> [no stanza break]

a week to be a witness to the spawning,
be a trout, eat the eggs of salmon--
anything to live until the trout and rain
are running in the river in my ear.

The river Sky is running in my hair.
I am floating past the troutless pools
learning water is the easy way to go.
I will reach the sea before December
when the Sky is turning gray and wild
and rolling heavy from the east to say
late autumn was an Oriental child.

His artistic, aesthetic orientation lapses into cruelty or inhumaness: he wants to make the trout into tortured girls, and says "I will swim/ a week to be a witness to the spawning/ to be a trout, eat the eggs of salmon--/ anything to live until the trout and rain are running in the river in my ear." The rhythms of such inhuman lines belie his moments of tension. Consonants as in "I'll pound the drums for rain" show his fierce need. A more leisurely tone predominates, however. The stanzas are each one line longer than in "Trout," there is one more stanza, and each line is about two syllables longer. The ordinariness of the first sentence sets the casual mood: "Aware that summer baked the water clear,/ today I came to see a fleet of trout." The sentence begins in no hurry, with a subordinant clause. It contains little obvious consonance, though it echos with quite a bit

of pretty assonance. Compare it to the first line of "Trout": "Quick and yet he moves like silt," which is memorable, compact, sound conscious, paradoxical, more visually clear, and ungrammatical. The beginning of "Trout" takes us out of the time dimension. The first sentence of "Skykomish," takes place in a specific day and only holds true for the speaker at that time. Therefore the first sentence sets up less of an existential, timeless joining of man, poem, and nature. The sounds do not need to perform a dramatic fusion this time, just a slow transformation. He repeats, in each stanza, increasingly pleasant variations of a sentence about running water. The poem is less tense and more rolling. The sentences stretch out to their natural, grammatical, straightforward length. There are more polysyllables--eight or nine per six lines, until the surrender at the end, where there are twelve per six lines: the fact that he allows variety of tension, leading to surrender, makes the poems more narrative, less a perfect embodiment of an essence. In the first two stanzas, the sentences begin more civily with subordinant clauses, not directly with the subject. The third stanza, which includes the sadism and relentlessness, contains both insistent parallelism and two sentences beginning with forceful "I will"'s. In the last stanza, sentences begin with the subject, yet manage to be relaxed; the verbs are all passive, "ing" forms, descriptive rather than willful. All through, the metrical feet break the polysyllables and one can say the words easily together. The sentences are ordinary and there are several liquid consonants; so the sound flows. The poem, though relatively

relaxed, never becomes slack. Hugo controls the poem with several techniques: equal stanza lengths, similar line lengths, end rhymes placed for surprise, regular iambics in the first stanza, later by, carefully varied iambics. The hints of tension opposed by relaxation point the way to his wistful surrender: "I am floating past the troutless pools/ learning water is the easy way to go."

Hugo used to imagine himself by the Duwamish river with all the bravery and toughness he desired. One poem growing out of that, "Duwamish" (58), combines tension, as a desire for escape, and relaxation forced by circumstances. Sound does not exist in a vacuum: when we read the beginning lines of "Skykomish," the content prepares us to see it as an attempt at calm. We pronounce the sound accordingly. When we read "Duwamish"'s "Midwestern in the heat, this river's/ curves are slow and sick," the subject matter readies us to notice the slow "sl" and the uncomfortable "ick." We say the rest of the poem accenting the dull thud of the water knocking against the bank. We are aware of the alliteration, line breaks, and the "revulsion sound," "uh," making us emphasize with bitterness: "the crud/ compounds the gray." Without the bitterness of the content, we would not be open to the emotional subtleties of the sound:

> Midwestern in the heat, this river's
> curves are slow and sick. Water knocks
> at mills and concrete plants, and crud
> compounds the gray. On the out-tide,
>
> [no stanza break]

water, half salt water from the sea,
rambles by a barrel of molded nails,
gray lumber piles, moss on ovens
in the brickyard no one owns.
Boys are snapping tom cod spines
and jeering at the Greek who bribes
the river with his sailing coins.

Because the name is Indian, Indians
ignore the river as it cruises
past the tavern. Gulls are diving crazy
where boys nail porgies to the pile.
No Indian would interuupt his beer
to tell the story of the snipe
who dove to steal the nailed girl
late one autumn, with the final salmon in.

This river colors day. On bright days
here, the sun is always setting or obscured
by one cloud. Or the shade extended
to the far bank just before you came.
And what should flare, the Chinese red
of a searun's fin, the futile roses,
unkempt cherry trees in spring, is muted.
For the river, there is late November

[no stanza break]

only, and the color of a slow winter.

On the short days, looking for a word,
knowing the smoke from the small homes
turns me colder than wind from
the cold river, knowing this poverty
is not a lack of money but of friends,
I come here to be cold. Not silver cold
like ice, for ice has glitter. Gray
cold like the river. Cold like 4 P.M.
on Sunday. Cold like a decaying porgy.

But cold is a word. There is no word along
this river I can understand or say.
Not Greek threats to a fishless moon
nor slavic chants. All words are Indian.
Love is Indian for water, and madness
means, to a Redman, I am going home.

The scene is hopeless; even on bright days the sun is obscured. The speaker not only responds to the scene but seeks it out: "I came here to be cold." Combined tension and relaxation of form express the resentment of a life forced to be static. While the stanzas vary in length, the iambic almost never varies. Elliptical, short sentences tighten the rather long poem. The sentences are complex but never wordy. The result of the combination is a tough, masculine, defeated, meditative voice.

Masculine toughness takes its pure form in "Digging is an Art," in which the speaker does not try to hide his bitterness over a woman's cruelty to her husband (63). During her burial, his excessive feelings are too deep and complex to be clearly explained in the poem. What he does not say gives great stength to what he does say. The poem begins in an irregular meter but it ends regularly. The low and middle pitched vowels fit the deathly tone. Consonants repeat obsessively, once again banging: "Bang the Bible hard in broken rhythm." Effects such as the banging and the curt commands ("Shovel, digger."), risk being overdone; they sound like the work of other poets. However, the main effect is haunting.

In addition to short, symmetrical poems, and his medium-length, well-controlled ones, the book also includes four long ones. He cannot successfully control such ambitious, long poems. "Triangle for Green Men" (11) makes an attempt at dramatics; the poem is about an unnamed "he" who does extraordinary things like canonizing the street-lamp shine with the liquid of his eyes. Hugo's old theme of controlling nature and releasing of hate unifies the three sections. As it progresses, the unity becomes shaky: one begins to suspect that he arranged the lines arbitrarily. And the sound links the images together less effectively. One can see that he pays attention primarily to sound, like Dylan Thomas, slighting the sense. One can see him attempting to make each line different from the next, letting the words take control. He seems to be doing what he describes: "He followed the journey's finger/ where it points," and

later, "Like any search this ended/ in a home-made swamp." Many phrases are meaningless: "What choice had he been forced to/ by the subtle days, chaos scratched on a convenient slate," "Once he fractured darkness like a rough moon." Some are unproductive decoration: "leather clouds." One suspects Hugo of writng in a manic frenzy, letting the overblown exhilaration mar his judgement. So many extraordinary transformations into the metaphorical world take place we cannot accept them. This poem parodies his style, and points out the problems of using his method without great judgement; it also shows that if the sound matches the mood, one had better choose the mood carefully. The rhythms, line and stanza lengths are extremely erratic. Therefore he relies only on tangential writing and the repetition of vowels and consonants to guide him. Placing so much responsibility on a few rules makes the poem dangerously unbalanced. The "l" and "h" repetition in the beginning calls attention to itself but unproductively conveys a different message than the content: "He would hoard this hill, this salal/ and this air hard as alder,/ mallards in a naive wedge slit south." Bizarre images and the way they are presented sound too much like Georg Trakl; "Even when wind caves the ribs of a fawn/ the mountain, bred by blueness, is not stunned."

The other three long poems are just as ill-crafted. "A Troubedor Removed" (23) has the same problem with easy surreal images; the whole poem strays too far from present reality to interest the reader. The content and sound are both dull. "Cape Alva" (37) is just as dull. He often fails when his sounds are ordinary and his images do not realign

our vision; his themes cannot stand on their own. This poem has no theme at all, no character, situation, or anything to make the overwhelming statements cohere. No sound gives them emotional meaning. "Ballad of the Upper Bumping" (34) is dull, largely because of distance from everyday reality, and symbolic meaning. Luckily, though the sound quality does not affect the reader, it is a departure from his norm. The long, loose sentences and the lack of driving emotional iambs show a different mood from his usual, tense one. Undertones of iambs and a few short, supposedly bitter sentences give the poem conflict. An unusual number of words of more than two syllables mock jargon about death. The opposition of facile speech and more simple, honest statement such as "The king is dead" create the irony of the poem. Several true rhymes end the lines, in a mildly sinister sing-song. Internal rhyme boosts the irony: "He thought the waters loyal,/ and the rivers know where royalty can go." Playful word choice keeps the irony light: "Now absolutist beavers clog the stream." At least the poem employs relaxation purposefully. In most cases he cannot handle too much of it.

"Centuries Near Spinazola" (36) uses relaxation more productively:

> This is where the day went slack.
> It could have been digestion of the line
> of elms, the wind relaxed and flowing
> and the sea gone out of sight.
>
> [no stanza break]

This is where the day and I surrendered
as if the air
were suddenly my paramour.

It is far from any home. A white
farm, tiny from a dead ten miles
of prairie, gleamed. I stood on grass
and say the bombers cluster,
and drone the feeble purpose of a giant.

Men rehearsed terror at Sardis
and Xerxes beat the sea.

And prior to the first domestic dog,
a king of marble, copper gods,
I must have stood like that and heard
the cars roar down the road,
the ammo wagon and the truck,
must have turned my back on them
to see the stroke of grass on grass
on grass across the miles of roll,
the travel of my fever now, my urge
to hurt or love released and flowing.

A public yes to war. A Greek will die
and clog the pass to wreck our strategy.

[no stanza break]

There will be a time for towns to burn

and one more sea to flog into a pond.

The medium length poem, prefiguring later poems, actually discusses relaxation. It recreates one of the most important moments in Hugo's life. When stationed in Italy, he found himself lost, lying in the tall grass near Spinazola for hours, harmonizing with the world, not caring who won the war, not desiring to keep up his tough pose. But he immediately betrayed this moment of enlightenment when he refused to sell cigarettes to a native woman. This poem shows he can write about extreme relaxation of the tension necessary to guide his life. He can mimic the lackadaisical feeling in the poem without becoming slack or carried away. The idea of a poem should be grounded and the poem should not be too long or irregular. Tension and relaxation do not fight as they do in "Ballad." Hugo, in Spinazola, was in control of his senses; the careful prosody fits the his clear thinking and recreates the powerful effect of his enlightenment. Short sentences and hard consonants chop up the regular rhythm; the iambs break the pollylables; the lines run-on; and the unemphatic stresses further the irregularity. But the sound is not too romantic, nor in danger of being too loose. The tranquil mood requires the low and middle pitched vowel. The sound never seems either forced or clenched. No rhymes occur and few consonants repeat. The only repetition occurs in one section of rolling and spacious sounds: "to see the stroke of grass on grass/ on grass across the miles of roll,/ the travel of my fever now, my urge/ to hurt or love released and flowing." Banal, meaningless

words find no room here. Sound repeats dramaitically in the end: "There will be a time for towns to burn/ and one more sea to flog into a pond."

This poem proves him an accomplished stylist. He can relax some of the strictness of his rules and still write well, if he has a good subject and controlling tone. Neither sound nor subject unify the long poems; perhaps the weak sound quality did not conjure up a subject. To trigger good poems, perhaps he needs either a sound truly arising from experiences that reached his soul, or the actual experiences themselves. His method of tangential writing does not work well when the subject is purely imaginary and unrestricted; this failure confirms his theory. His method produces many striking images and lines:

> Nothing final
> the day is rifle hard
> and fields assume a second green.
> Frost, broken by the noon, slips
> down slanted ages of the dirt
> to feed the river. There is summer
> hinting on your back and your hunt
> for winter, for the latent face
> that is seldom one year older. (27)

Often such descriptions merely decorate. Because of his limited understanding of himself, he reluctantly confesses what little he admits and understands of his feelings.

One poem makes an artistic statement regarding the chaos he risks by writing tangentially, and following the flow of sound. "Keen to Leaky Flowers" (20), shows that even at this early stage he is a post-modernist concerned with similar ideas as are avant-garde poets like Ashbery. He writes "Why track down unity when the diffuse/ is so exacting--crocodiles give clouds/ a candy meaning in the manic frame./ The world should always pour on us/ like this: chaos showering,/ each thing alone, dependent as a dream." Critics rarely mention such philosophical ideas in connection with Hugo. Alan Helms, however, condemned him for these lines. This belief in keeping the integrety of independent bits of the world shows up in the poem's structure and clarifies the reason for his preponderance of unrelated images. In many poems the momentum from separate, exquisite lines, and unconnected images builds toward a psychologically meaningful ending. Many poem, however, end with another bit of the chaotic world, another independent, exact image: "A skate is spread to surface in the dark" ends "Schoolgirl at Seola" (29). Sometimes the poems seem about to end on a statement, but bow back to the imagistic: "You will juggle during time's suave slaughter/ a stack of silver and some trillium seed" (21). The philosophy of the poem excuses superficial descriptions resulting from play with sound. Someone considering writing from sound to sense, which produces disconnection, should ask himself it he embraces a philosophy similar to Hugo's.

Reviews of Hugo's first book are rare, short, surprised, and mixed. The sound is the controversial attraction. The Times Literary

Supplement describes his hard, muscular sound, praising the restraint, admiring the expertise so much that the reviewer permits lapses of taste (153). X.J. Kennedy likes the "good lumpy Old English sounds" as well as the fresh perceptions (4). Schevile finds excitement in individual parts but not wholes. He chides Hugo for forcing unnatural originality (4) (Yet, Hugo teaches against attempting originality in Triggering Town). Vernon Young says Hugo does not worry over the appearances of the poems, which lack form, and is lucky to have a region to exploit (25). While they pay attention, positive or negative, to the surface of his poems, reviewers do not at this point consider Hugo as a man with significant ideas.

* * *

In 1965, Hugo published The Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. He wrote many of the poems during the same time as the first book. Yet Frederick Garber finds more immediacy, and openness of sound and self (1965, 228). The tight compression of poems like "Trout" reccurs in poems about rivers. In the first half, the overall feel is controlled because there are no long poems, except for one, "Mission to Linz." He consistently remains objective and, in the first half, never relates to people. If he stopped there, he would be a limited poet. But the last section, "Limited Access," concerns people. It gains more power because his intimacy with human emotions is hard to come by, and uncomfortable. What survives his resistance and the resistance of his rules seems worthwhile.

Trends continue from the first book, with some changes. The first

two poems, for example, are objective, clenched poems about fishing, and the toughness of "Duwamish" becomes exaggerated in "Duwamish Head" (11). But "Mission to Linz" (32) is a noticable, experimental departure. The beginning consists of graceful lines never cluttered or confused, drawn out to exhilarating lengths, dancing back to short lengths to give breathing space to the already short stanzas. Hard consonance stands out well, but remains pretty: "Nothing is heard in the north,/ and the northern temperature grows cold with the height./ There is the stark crack of voice." Stanzas repeat hypnotically, adding to the sense of mystery: "It must seem wierd, incommunicable,/ the desire for ozone/ cold and unremembered terrible." The eerie, airy sound expresses the flight. The third section changes to nervous, hurried, claustrophobic stanzas: "The dagger black explodes and the praying increases/ until the over-ripe melon of day, cracking its hide/ chews the re-moist fear just back of your brows." The caesuras are insistent, the lines and metaphors uncomfortably full. By the end the lines become less eerie and nymphlike. They are shorter and more solid, but pleasant: "The engines sing you to the world of men,/ the earth, and think of it; its browness,/ its solidity, its greeness." This first successful long, and irregular poem proves he can exert control without resorting to his usual rules.

We can find one of the most startling uses of sound in "In Stafford Country" (43), which describes William Stafford's state, Kansas. Hugo already understands the effect living in a flat, empty place has: "The land is flat, words are far apart./ Each word is seen,

coming from far off" resembles his much later description of his Montana-influenced works. He does not adapt the sound he explains. Instead, he goes to the opposite extreme to show reactionary fear. The short sentences and fragments show his anxiety; he exagerates his Seattle sound: "No shade. Sun bruises/ the oats gold." Extra accents pack the meter; the first line contains only one unaccented syllable. Punctuation creates stong caesuras midline. Yet he does respond to the scene somewhat: assonance sounds like crooning, gusting wind, hypnotic. The first line repeats "i": "No hills. Raw wind unchecked, brings word." The second line repeats "u" and the third repeats "o." His affinity with the wind allow him to understand something of any windy region and his sound responds.

Writing exclusively about dead or departing people in the section titled "Limited Access" stresses his alienation. The burned taverns, decaying towns, and antique stores which he seeks out remind one of his prediliction for sadness and decay. His obvious need to be tough influences the sound; the sound helps us understand the less revealing content. He writes poems about destructive relationships, unpleasant places, and scarred behavior using closed, protective sounds. For example, "Port Townsend" sounds bitter and invulnerable (45). Portraying a grimy town, and its dreamy inhabitants, to which no one pays attention, he reveals its simple theme in dense language:

> On cliffs above the town, high homes disdain
> what is not Victorian below
>
> [no stanza break]

but Indian and cruel. A plaque declares
a chapel older than the town.
(Many worship God before they're born.)
The Keystone ferry sails without a car,
a passenger, not even tailing gulls.
The pulp mill shouts bad odor at the sun.

Arriving here is a feeling some old love--
half a memory--a silly dream of how
a war would end, a world would settle down
with time for hair to gray before you die.
The other half of memory is sight.
The cliffs will hold another thousand years.
The town is rotting every Sunday night.

A novel fakes a start in every bar,
gives way to gin and talk. The talk gives way
to memories of elk, and elk were never here.
Freighters never give this town a second look.
The dead are buried as an afterthought
and when the tide comes glittering with smelt
the grebes have gone to look for meaty ports.

The repetition is not so intense as to fuse disparate things together, and not musical enough to set up echoes. Instead, simply creates a medium too thick to allow movement. Chiasmus, the reversal of sounds, holds words in a tight cohesiveness: "placque" / "declare," "trailing"

/ "gulls," "pulp" / "mill," "ports" / "smelt," and "town" / "night." End rhymes tighten the grip: "disdain" / "town" / "born" / "sun," "sight" / "night," and "bar" / "here." Sounds and actual words repeat often: "a war would end, a world would settle down." Stops and plosives continue through the poem to keep the sound dismal. For example, the first stanza displays eleven "t´s" and the third one forteen "t´s." The second stanza booms with nine "d´s", and the first stanza cuts the reader with seven "k´s." The repetion stresses the words "town," "cruel," "dream," "rotting," and "talk." Similar words drone with "n´s"; there are thirteen in the first stanza. "S´s" thoughout the second stanza stress "silly." "F" and its cognate "v" repeat often in the mildy positive words. Short, frontal vowels, especially "i," cause an "icky," petty feeling in the first stanza, picturing the town: "cliffs," "disdain," "is," "Victorian," "Indian," "worship," "trailing," and "mill." The sound continues to emphasize the key word that ties together the past and present: "silly." Long, high pitched vowels, as in "here" and "year," in the second stanza reflect the intensity of hopes and emphasize the word "dream." In the third stanza, the open "ah" sound is perfect for the drunken escape in the word cluster "novel," "start," "bar," and "talk."

The line lengths, stanza lengths, and meter are rather inflexible. Trochaic pentameter and truncated trochaic takes every line to its thudding close on an accented syllable. Periods end lines; all but one sentence end stops. Therefore, sentences do not play off each other but exist alone as statements, relentlessly

stomping with a sense of finality. No beauty or unpredictible change pulls the poem in another direction. The difference in vowel tone in stanzas emphasizes the meaning and shows change well--but a simple, familiar path of change. The suggestion of past hopes colliding with present depression loses its dramatic duality because so many other surrounding poems contain the same theme. Though Hugo shows bravery in composing a ruthlessly ugly and hopeless poem, the one dimensionality and simplicity keep the poem static.

In "Port Townsend," he knows the analogy too well, controls the idea too firmly, owns the town in his mind. When he transforms this type of control to people, the effect is more shocking and productive of more poetic tension. "For a Northern Woman" is as simple as "Port Townsend," but the love relationship complicates the theme:

> I reach for you. You smile and I am male.
> Mornings when we stroll this pale canal,
> past these poplars factories turned brown,
> yet with height and swing insisting
> they are green, your eyes say what north
> you're from. They call me man. Your hair
> is orphan as I break it in my hand.
>
> Lady, I control you. On command
> you kiss some old stream south to home.
> Let's name what's warm along this quay:
>
> [no stanza break]

the trawl that pounds desire for the sea,
pregnant cats, fishing men who need
no fish, the ancient hanging wash.
My plan for you is cruel: to roast you
in the light I steal from your form.

Smile me male again. Or never smile
by this canal gone gray from waste
or from that early sky the northern know.
Poplars stretch so far above us, branches
tick the sun. I know that aching bark.
I ache to cast you hot in northern stone. (44)

He allows more freedom in line and stanza lengths, and meter. This poem is not insistent with percussives, but instead soothes strangely with "l's." Every group of lines plays with a sound, progressing from "l" to "e" to "an" to "s" and so on. The repetition is freeform and pleasing to the ear. Some chiasmus ("form" / "from"), diminuation ("branches" / "bark"), and a combination of the two ("Smile me male again") makes the sound musical, but not thick as in "Port Townsend." Lines alternate between end-stopped and mid-stopped, which is phsycologically correct for the interplay of lyrical affection and insistent pronouncement. The beautiful combines with the cruel, controlled, and final in a hyponotic way. Certainly Hugo is brave to publish a poem admitting his chauvenism.

The careful control of such poems leaves him, in spurts, as in

"December 24 and George McBride is Dead." The erratic elegy has a tone fallen dramatically from the poetic:

> You a gentleman and I up from the grime--
> now wind has shut your dark, dark eyes
> and I am left to hate this Christmas eve.
> Christ, they're playing carols. Some crap
> never stops. You're dead and I'm without
> one goddam Wagner record in the house
> to play you up to what for some must be
> behind the sky with solid orchestration.
>
> Rest in your defeat, you studid jerk,
> so fat your heart gave out, so sweet
> you couldn't help but hear the punks.
> "One gulp. The whole quart, Mac." That town
> you died in--so unlikely--vineyards,
> sunny valleys, start white missions
> and the pale priest summoning
> brown sinners from olive grove.
> I'll not know your grave, though I believe
> our minds have music that can lead us
> through the tangle to the lost stone of a friend.
>
> I get along, write my poems. Essentially
> a phony, I try my feelings now
>
> [no stanza break]

> and know I fail. George, it's Christmas eve
> and bells are caroling. I'm in the kitchen,
> fat and writing, drinking beer and shaking. (38)

He loosens the form in poems in which he allows questions and ambiguities. Irregular, they have fewer conventional sound repetition, and longer sentences. Lengths, meter, and sound repetitions do as they please in this poem. He shows vulnerable emotion and concern for anther, at last, admitting his lack of control. He goes so far with relaxing objectivity and restraint that the poem becomes a weak, one dimensional complaint. He rarely combines control and relaxation well to create a complex subject in this section venturing into the world of men. Relaxation and control still fight in that arena, though he excells in the first two books in condensed poems fusing solitary man and nature.

* * *

The reviews of Kapowsin are mixed. Choice praises Kapowsin highly for the carefully wrought tough language and dancing truncated sentences. The reviewer believes Hugo deserves a place on any discerning American's shelf (1965, 483). Paul Fussell calls the startling, risky language, which follows the shape of experience, the most exciting since Lord Weary. However, though the wry, twisted language dazzles him, the themes disappoint him (30). Roger Sale becomes defensive:

> arrogant athleticism in Hugo . . . refuses to supply
> connectives between lines, sentences, or stanzas or to

> care if a poem starts with one subject and ends with another. The result is an air that insists the reader is at fault when a poem doesn't quite come off. But he has at least one poem to which almost none of these strictures apply ["Port Townsend"], and it is my choice for the best of the season. (307)

Sale then adds: "it would take an intrepid reader indeed to take Hugo's tough, haughty manner with anything like his valuation of it." He predicts a bright future for Hugo though he is a "habitual poet." He explains an important and difficult point: "Hugo is completely immersed in his landscape; all he knows can be expressed in the motion from one line . . . to the next" (308). Jack Gilbert, though he likes the tough, substantial honesty, is bothered by clumsinesss, monotony and merely decorative conceits. And he complains that the format remains unvaried: a statement of place or occasion, itemized details, and a line of emotional expansion. He says Hugo has little interest in the strategies of poetry, and because of inadequacy, writes in a syntax too foreign to understand (131). Mark McCloskey prods Hugo for excessive image lists, lack of clarity, and a repetitive format, but says he is relieved that "Mission to Linz" provides good variety. He does like some of the personal poems (125). The Virginia Review praises the power, compassion, and beauty Hugo finds in violence and ugliness (cxxi). Overall, his methods of writing produce good reactions but their repetitiveness results in negative criticism. His relationships with language and nature win him respect, but his

thought processes seem foreign to readers. He still is involved in an alien world.

* * *

Other poets finding their voices at the time shared important differences from Hugo. Their thinking was not tangential. Because of linear sequences, ordinary syntax and word usage, and moderate sound repetition, their poems show them recording their thoughts after they have been understood and accepted, refined and ordered. Hugo's poems accumulate short sentences, which can hold only one aspect of experience in each. By proceding bit by bit, he discovers his complex feelings. Other poets write long, complex sentences. Their ideas may be emotional but they release their emotion too easily into the content to affect us through sound. Hugo holds back his emotion even as he discovers it. The driving rhythm and choking consonants express the emotion more powerfully than direct revelation. The restraint keeps pressure on the poem, expressing intensity. The other poets focus on different techniques from Hugo's. Robert Lowell definitely avoids monotony in his career. Lord Weary's Castle, to which one critic compares Hugo's poems, pay just as much attention to sound; but he seems to be more well-bred. His poems of the sixties show Lowell loosening up, as most maturing poets do. Sylvia Plath shows mastery in Ariel; the extremely varied poems delicately expresses nuances through sound. James Dickey, far from delicate, tries for drama and "sincerity." James Wright, one of Hugo's favorite poets, also emphasizes sincerity in speechlike phrases and childlike sentences and

sounds. Hugo's main test of a poem is its sense of sincerity. William Stafford is Hugo's other favorite, because, as Hugo says in Madrona, when "I'm reading him I find that more things are happening to more parts of me. Some things are even happening to the central nervous system and I just find I love his sounds and so forth" (69). Stafford's early poems resemble Hugo's; his later poems are leisurely and soft, often easy. Hugo takes Stafford's sentimental poems as a model to loosen up himself, he says in "Hills Going East" (276). Howard Nemerov, the opposite of Hugo, manipulates sound minimally, by the book, writing prosy, end-stopped idea-poems of direct statement.

Chapter 3

Psychoanalysis, a move to panoramic Montana, a divorce, and a visit to Italy begin what Hugo calls his "Leslie Howard period" (Zwinger, 255). No longer trying to appear as tough as Humphrey Bogart, he lets his emotions show. He desperately desires to communicate with the emotional Italians to whom he had to act coldly before. In Montana, distance from people makes one want to speak simply, and loudly, to be understood. Wanting readers to pity and forgive him because of his unhappy past, he gives us the pitiful details. We may characterize this stage by his struggles to let emotions into his poetry, which had been extremely restrained before. In some poems in Good Luck in Cracked Italian, and in What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American, his motives for sharing his emotions are impure at times, and his approach inadequate. In his need to communicate, and in his excitement over permissable emotionalism, he often skips the creation of the reader's experience; he addresses us as if he were a public figure making a speech. Yet he overcomes the problem completely in one book, The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir, a supreme expression of emotion through action and action sounds. The success or failure of his books does not result from their sequence; the general type of content characterizing each book elicits a certain type of sound. While we can say that Lady is good because it is tense,

and What Thou Lovest disappoints because it is relaxed, we must look more carefully at Good Luck. All the poems in that book stand in the middle of tension and relaxation. The poems usually have good lines that save them, but also some unproductive images, and questionable writing. The sound is graceful, nonassertive, less forced than in the first two books. The success of the superior poems in the book depends on the degree of fusion of the sound and content. When he feels compelled to write from the sound of his stubborn subconscious, his poems are unified, musical, and very touching.

He tells us that in 1964, he went back to the places he had occupied after WW II; in 1968 he returned while staying in Europe on a Rockefeller grant to complete the book Good Luck in Cracked Italian. Even Hugo says he is disappointed with the book. Its unusual length, 94 pages, is sorely tried to sustain interest in Italy. The poems suffer because he does not carry out his own commandment never to write on a subject that ought to be written on. He writes in the New American Review that he is no good at writing poems in the public arena because they lack a sense of discovery (221). Yet we can see impure motives at work: one reason he went courting poems on this potentially popular subject was to show he was not limited to one region. He gloats in a Madrona interview that now no one can call him regionalist (54). But he should remain a regionalist to create a consistently successful sound. Richard Howard says Hugo is a high class regionalist because he is one with the region (232). Gardiner

writes that in Hugo's best poems landscape is a possible self (139). Their statements are not true in the case of many poems in Good Luck. Most scenes in Good Luck are not integrated with Hugo and the sound is not always intense enough to hold the parts together. He does not transform the world as much as he does in other books, or violently link disparate things together, or to himself, in a real union. Therefore, he requires less energetic sound for fusion. He simply says he wants to be joined with the Italians in spirit; he thinks the union is easy and therefore does not struggle with language: "If here before / with hate, you walk a street called war / and beg a man who was a beggar then: / now I have no gun, show me how to cry" (13). In actuality, he stands apart as a contemplative outsider, speaking in a sound less driving and immediate than in earlier books. Often, when he does link bits together oddly, out of habit it seems, his sound cannot carry it off:

> Padova, I'm proud our Clinton grape
> helped save your failing wine. Is your time
> coming too? Galileo left and Venice
> sinks four inches every hundred years.
> You hid all your Jews in 'forty four.
> The ghetto's just a name. We need a name,
> not Jew or man but something not so old
> formed wild downstream. I hate to bargain
> but I bargain for the Giotto yellow
>
> [no stanza break]

of a pear before bells send the farmers home.
I remain with pigeons, cats, the first bite
of my pear important in my teeth. (Good Luck, 18)

His previous sound is more powerful, suggesting that Hugo needs to stay in his narrow range of compulsions to generate energetic language.

E.D. Blodgett writes that for poets like Hugo, the poem is a "sense organ," a means of seeing (270). Hugo's first two books are sense organs, even if the vision is distorted. But much of Good Luck is cognitive writing for the purpose of explaining ideas to the reader:

So why return? You tell me I'm the only one
came back, and you're amazed
I haven't seem Milan. I came in August
and went home in March, with no chance
to experience the miles of tall grain
jittering in wind, and olive trees
alive from recent rain. (36)

Hugo says one should not write for anyone except himself: "Never worry about the reader, what the reader can understand. . . . If you want to communicate, use the telephone" (Triggering, 5). However, in many poems, he blatantly explains his past to the reader: "In 1943 we turned these ruins/ into first aid stations, then gave first aid/ to peasants we had shelled" and "That bay had a fleet of half-sunk ships" (14). Thoughts such as these would not be in the head of the

person experiencing the poem; he would already know the information and have no need to tell himself. Sidetracked from his vision, he tells the reader the sociological importance of his tour. He does not make personal discoveries through language as often as he did in the first two books, though many of the poems show he is still capable of doing so. Poetry should help the reader experience and understand his feelings too subtle and complex to be addressed directly. Several of the poems do just this, as Hugo turns over and over his irrational compulsions and feelings. Most of the poems, however, nearly abandon poetry's role.

The general form of the poems almost never varies, contributing to monotony. The only poem of a different length and shape fails. "There We Crashed" (3) too obviously tries to sound important and experimental. It self-consciously avoids capitals, punctuation and grammar, and uses lists of swear words and exclamations, all of which are flashy gimmicks. Dividing the poem into one-to-three word lines avoids rhythm. The melodrama becomes laughable; the emotion is not earned; and the poem seems so long and broken one can hardly read it. An example:

you end
now
here
explode
damn

[no stanza break]

damn

Steinberg

pilot

should

have found

more sky

you end

here

boom

now

boom

gone

no more

gone

good-bye (39)

One other poem breaks the mold a bit. "Maratea Porto: the Dear Postmistress There" (Good Luck, 60) a regular length poem, surprises with a funny tone The anapest creates humor. Repetition adds to the irony as each stanza ends with the same short line, telling him he has no mail. Though the poem is not particularly brilliant or affecting, it shows a different side of Hugo, who was a humor writer in college:

This is Odysseus. I've come a long way.

I've beaten a giant, real mean with one eye.

Even the sea. I've defeated the water.

[no stanza break]

But now I´m home, pooped. Where´s Penelope?

Niente per voi, today.

One poem stands out simply because it is so bad. In its relaxation, "Note from Capri to Richard Ryan on the Adriatic Floor" (Good Luck, 45) prefigures his later letter poems. Like them it is made up of direct statement, irregular meter, and words and sounds loosely strung together. The lines do not flow gracefully: "I thought of steaks and quotes/ from funny men. Two bottles of white wine." Sometimes the awkward lines are even incomprehensible: "Four others ended with you and your bombadier went babbling to Bari in restraint." The sentence lengths and line breaks do not create interest or music. Because he parades his sincerity, the poem does not work well. He falls into sentimentality. The poem ends with a mawkish one-sentence stanza: "Dick, I went back to those rocks today, and sat there gazing at the sea." Centuries of overuse have rendered the simple theme meaningless.

The link between boring idea and uninspiring sound is important. In "Note from Capri," he uses every verb conventionally. He omits no words to create thickness of emotion and sound. He uses no striking adjectives, and never places them in startling positions. In addition to using little sound repetition or emphatic meter, he creates no powerful sound through meaning. His rules are not at work here. He discovers nothing new from his unconscious; he merely tells us about sadness he already understands. He places the main emphasis on the content. The poem displays the sound of his conscious mind.

When, in "Storm in Aqcuafreda," Hugo returns to a subject and tone we have seen often in his other books, he keys in again to his subconscious (Good Luck, 75). The resulting sound of the poem is more rigorous, more personal; therefore the ideas and images reflect his sense of discovery. When we read any of the lines, the words surprise us; the way he breaks us out of our rut of our rational thinking is exhilarating. So we linger over the rich words, speed up the animated words, and deepen the painful ones. We are keen to the inherent beauty of the words:

> You could see it way out crawling slow
> across the sea, a line dividing gold and black
> coming at you like yourself. Dark air
> said it early in the olive leaves.
> A silver flutter built ten minutes
> into rage. Hours before the day went wild,
> the sea went wild and rain began to carve,
> shutters on the homes were raised, streets
> were cleared of children, and the reason
> you like storms went vague when black arrived.
>
> Thunder jars your teeth and something flashed
> so sudden you assume from widely separated
> olive trees split open it was lightening,
> but you're still half blind and certain only
>
> [no stanza break]

it was light. What's electric is the sea
laddering white voltage up the cliff.
What's not electric is your life.
Nothing flashes past you anymore, not even
ugly women in convertibles. You'd settle
for the menial, say pieceword packing vegetables
or peace, a passive marriage to the drainage,
giggling down ditches to the end.

Another gold-black line starts far out at you.
It is not you. Gold approaches slow
and it means nothing. Weather's no more
symbol than a broken heart. Bad storms come
and go, but lightening and the tons of rain
leave ruin sun can only make more clear.
You are lucky. Light cannot define you.
And the gold comes on. Gold water drips
off stone. Gold bakes the field dry gold.
Gold everywhere, more coming, and it is not you.

This exquisite poem does not really relate to Italy as a country; it concerns storms physical and emotional, as do the poems in his best book, The Lady in Kicking Horse Revervoir. He truly relates to his surroundings; in the less successful poems, he superficially connects the scenes to events that just happened to occur there. It is a "you" poem; the "you" poems are generally more universal, timeless, and

searching. Poems working with specific war memories rarely match the "you" poems, more imaginatively, or abstractly summing up his troubled psyche. "Acquafredda" goes beyond the other poems showing the relationship between his pain and the environment. Complex, and avant-garde, it makes and then denies the symbol.

Most of the poems do not use sound as a symbol. In other words, they have no relation to his deepest self. Instead, he tells stories, describes a Breughel painting and Keat's gravestone, not out of compulsion to come to terms with the haunting sound of his constant discontent. The poems in the first sections, witty, distanced, facile or forcibly emotional poems, show only moderate interest in language or sound. He self-consciously brings in flip, sarcastic slang, which has the effect of disrupting the flow and distancing the reader: "Don't scream at me, you God Damn' wops, / Nine at night. I know what the headline says. / Blasted by some creep in Dallas" ("Kennedy Ucciso," 26);"He boots a cat, ass over claws, and laughs" (57). Opening himself to feelings, he can not yet be comfortable with them. "Napoli Again", a disjointed collection of memories, some slang, and a plea for closeness, is the kind of poem not honestly related to his deepest self, not searching to discover irrational feelings through. The sound does not reverberate, has no particular character. The lines are end stopped and ordinary. The rhythm's uninspiring regularity is not turned into intensity by strong stresses or sound repetition. It is a casual poem trying to sound sincere:

Long before I hear it, Naples bright
with buildings trumpets from the hill.
A tugboat toots "paisan" and I am back.
That dock I sailed from eighteen years ago.
This bay had a fleet of half-sunk ships.
Where those dapper men are drinking wine,
a soldier beat an urchin with a belt.
Fountains didn't work. I remember stink.
Streets and buildings all seemed brown.

Romans hate such recent ruins,
bombed out houses you do not repair.
Better pillars one must work to date.
Forget the inocent cut down,
cats gone crazy from the bombs
waiting down those alleys for delicious eyes.
Here, the glass replaced in galleria roofs,
cappuccino too high priced, it's hard
to go back years and feed the whores for free.

I'll never think of virgin angels here.
Did I walk this street before,
protesting: I am kind. You switch the menu,
gyp me on the bill. Remember me? My wings?
The silver target and the silver bomb?

[no stanza break]

Take the extra coin. I only came

to see you living and the fountains run. (14)

Though the poem is not carelessly crafted, it does not arise from a sound of his emotions. It does not really affect a reader as do the very specialized kind of gut-wrenching explorations of his personality. Because straying from his habitual style produces superficial poems, Hugo seems trapped in a very limited kind of writing; one can understand his fears of losing his inspiration, pain. He says during his stay in Italy, he suffered a breakdown because of drinking to keep his pain alive and obnoxiously acting out the agonies of the troubled persona in his poems.

"South Italy, Remote and Stone" connects his twisted need, his yearing for happiness he will not let himself have, to the scene. This type of poem occurs often, connected to the scene and the sound of his desperation, at the end of the book. They are the most moving. This poem, in irregular iambics, approximate pentameter, slightly different stanza lengths, and some internal and end near rhymes, is not forced. It beats like the wind. The lines and sentences end on stresses. He clips the sentences: he sounds as if knows the answer now. Lines begin near the end of the lines. Strong stresses pound:

The enemy´s not povery. It´s wind.

Morning it beats you awake to the need

for hoeing rock. The priest proclaims

it´s not a futile wind. This air moves

with undercurrents of hope five stunted
olive trees pick up. You'll live all year
on the gallons of olives you sell
and hope the stone will be soil
enough to grow something in. Your hoe and wind
have fought this stone forever and lost.

Up north, the kind have issued your name:
paese abbandonato. It rings now
in this wind that clears my eyes. Your hands
are not abandoned, and the harsh length
of each day forces you to love whatever is--
a screaming wife, a child who has stared
from birth. The road I came on must be old
or some state accident. In heat, this place
is African. In cold, a second moon.

Even your tongue is hard. Syllables whip
and demons, always deposited cruel
in the prettiest unmarried girl,
must be whipped by the priest into air
where bells can drive them to rivers. Or she
will be sent out forever, alone on the roads
with her madness, no chance to be saved
by a prince or kind ox. And so on, a test
of your love. Only the ugly survive.

I'm still alive. My love was tested and passed
something like this. Much better soil.
A more favorable chance at the world.
I sent myself out forever on roads.
I'll never be home except here, dirt poor
in abandoned country. My enemy, wind,
helps me hack each morning again at the rock. (73)

The emotions explored in the good poems do not arise from circumstances, but express his personality and its ongoing manifestations. This poem helps the reader understand the odd sense that in describing the depressed towns of Italy, Hugo is really describing himself, a successful poet and teacher.

While the tortured sound creates his most succesful poems, it has limits. For example, when his tortured, tight style returns in "The Yards of Sarajevo" (46), the simple content does not fit it:

Time of day: a dim dream, probably
late afternoon. Children watch our train
pull into the yard. Other late dark
afternoons and porches seem remote.
These people, tracks and cars were what
we came to bomb nineteen years ago
and missed six miles through blinding clouds.

One war started here. The coal smoke

[no stanza break]

of our dirty train compounds the gloom.
The past is always dim. A plot. A gun.
The Archduke falling. A world gone
back to mud. Our long day from Dubrovnik
grates to a stop. Air is getting black.
I was five miles up there sighting
on this spot. I can't speak Serb or read
Cyrillic listings of departure times.

Even long wars end. Dukes and Kings
tell peasants old jokes underground.
This was small and foreign five miles down.
Why am I at home? The tongue is odd,
the station loud. All rebuilt
and modern. Only the lighting bad.

The consistently short and elliptical sentences, the jerky rhythm, and fragments serving as examples in lists remind one of his early poems. The enigmatic suggestion of emotion too strong for ordinary sentence structures combines with the dreamy, vague quality of the past to bypass the reader. Though Hugo speaks about the war, what he says is impersonal, sketchy. We read the poem quickly and little slows us down. His famous sound is not appropriate to all kinds of poems. His habit of listing appears almost silly here. The content makes the short, disconected sentences seem childish, too easy, superficial. The sound makes the content strange, and makes the potentially good ending

go by too quickly. The poem shows us that Hugo's sound has definite limitations which a poet should carefully observe. Perhaps aware of the limited use of the tense style, he begins to move toward the possibility of breaking down rigid structures which he had glimpsed lying lost on the field in Spinazzola.

He describes the event most important to his career, to Good Luck, and to this study in the successful "Spinazzola: Quella Cantina La" (43) which concerns the event described in the earlier poem set in Spinazzola. The new poem does not use the relaxed sounds of "Centuries Near Spinazzola" to emphasize the way "the day went slack" (Jacks, 36). Instead the sounds show the struggle of changing his attitudes:

> A field of wheat gave license for defeat
> I can't explain. The grass bent. The wind
> seemed full of men but without hate or fame.
> I was farther than that farm where the road
> slants off to nowhere, and the field I'm sure
> in in this wine or that man's voice. The man
> and this canteen were also here
> twenty hears ago and just as old.
>
> Hate for me was dirt until I woke up
> five miles over Villach in a smoke
> that shook my tongue. Here, by accident,
> the wrong truck. I came back to the world.
>
> [no stanza break]

This canteen is home-old. A man can walk
the road outside without a song or gun.
I can't explain the wind. The field is east
toward the Adriatic from my wine.

I'd walked from cruel soil to a trout
for love but never from a bad sky
to a field of wind I can't explain.
The drone of bombers going home
made the weather warm. My uniform
turned foreign where the olive trees
throw silver to each other down the hill.

Olive leaves were silver I could spend.
Say wind I can't explain. That field is vital
and the Adriatic warm. Don't our real friends
tell us when we fail? Don't honest fields
reveal us in their winds? Planes and men
once tumbled but the war went on absurd.
I can't explain the wine. This crude bench
and rough table and that flaking plaster--
most of all the long nights make this home.

Home's always been a long way from a friend.
I mix up things, the town, the wind, the war.

[no stanza break]

I can't explain the drone. Bombers seemed
to scream toward the target, on the let-down
hum. My memory is weak from bombs.
Say I dropped them bad with shaking sight.
Call me German and my enemy the air.

Clouds are definite types. High ones, cirrus.
Cumulus, big, fluffy kind, and if with rain,
also nimbus. Don't fly into them.
I can't explain. Somewhere in a gray ball
wind is killing. I forgot the stratus
high and thin. I forgot my field
of wind, out there east between
the Adriatic and my second glass of wine.

I'll find the field. I'll go feeble down
the road strung gray like spoiled wine
in the sky. A sky too clear of cloud
is fatal. Trust the nimbus. Trust dark clouds
to rain. I can't explain the sun. The man
will serve me wine until a bomber fleet
lost twenty years droning home.

I can't explain. Outside, on the road
that leaves the town reluctantly,
way out the road's a field of wind.

He does not simply recreate the ultimate relaxation and wonder at it, but, with the sound, shows his difficult transition from being closed and self-protective. Still tense, he writes tightly, but with more energy than he did in the earlier books. Vowels and word sounds repeat densely and intricately. Cognates cluster in each line. Sentence structures and even lines repeat. Sentences are brief and the longer ones seem broken because of the mid-sentence punctuation and the heavily accented line endings. The pentameter changes to tetrameter in a few spots, creating a sing-song kind of irony pertaining to poverty: "The man/ and this canteen were also here/ twenty years ago and just as old." He has refined his old technique to fit a complex subject. The listing effect works especially well because of the refrain "I can't explain." He does wonders with the individual statements and images, desperate, arbitrary attempts to explain an illumination which can only be hinted at from many sides. We can see him approaching one subject in two ways by comparing this and his earlier, the more relaxed version of the incident. What is evident is this-- only after he really confronts his experience by writing about it in a way that satisfies him, can he incorporate what he learned from the experience in his life. What he learns from the experience leads him in the direction of stability, but also to the slack, direct poems in later books.

Hugo still excells at using sound in a variety of ways that express the content excellently. Expertly, he makes the sound of "Cantina Iannini" (58) different than "Spinazzzola" in which a unique

moment has a lifetime packed into it. Wondering when he will stop, he goes to the cantina. He does not jam-pack the poem with sound repetitions and potent images. The sentences are drawn out, the meter less insistent. The sound creates the resigned tone and tedious ongoing action: "Tomorrow/ you'll return to this grim charm, not quite broken,/ not quite ready to release your eyes." Although he does not say he goes there often, we have the sense that he does, or spends his life going to such dirty places, where others also go compulsively. Each line ends with an extra accented syllable lingering on, or, if the foot is complete, on an unaccented syllable. This creates a feeling of weakness. The poem begins with subtle, musical turns of phrases, dancing from one line to the next as if he had time to consider, to put the most interesting face on the scene: "Walls were painted blue so long ago, you think/ of old sky you thought lovely turned as it did,/ in your lifetime, dirty." Time is stalled, through recurrence and through inability to move to the next stage of maturity. Time is also stalled because the poem contains the past and present, non-linear syntax and a relaxed tone:

> Walls were painted blue so long ago, you think
> of old sky you thought lovely turned as it did,
> in your lifetime, dirty. Six crude wood tables
> and the pregnant cat seem permanent
> on the pockmarked concrete floor. The owner
> gives too much away, too much free wine
>
> [no stanza break]

and from his eyes too much grief. His facial lines
amplify in light the two small windows
and the opaque door glass flatten out.
To enter you should be poor by consent.

You and the world that hurts you should agree
you don't deserve a penny. Nor a clear tongue
to beg sympathy from dark wine as your life
and rich as your dream you still are nothing in.
And you should agree to cross your throat
and weep when the casket passes. You should kneel
when wind crosses the olive groves in waves
of stuttering coin. At nine the light goes down.
You weave home to homes you'll never own.

Only men in broken rags come back
to drink black wine under the painting
Moonlight on Sea a drunk thought lovely--
turned as it did, in his lifetime, muddy.
You hear the wind outside turn white. Wasn't
some loud promise in another wine? Sea cliff
with a girl, her hair streamed out your lifetime
down the sky? Your wine is dead. Tomorrow
you'll return to this grim charm, not quite broken,
not quite ready to release your eyes.

Compare it to "Spinazzola" in which time stalls because a radical

shift in his maturity level, a lifetime of mistakes, and a lifetime of possibilities flash before him; he does not even care if he is in trouble for lingering. The lack of polish reflects the suddeness and spontaneity of his revelation.

* * *

Hugo has attained great stature, assuming the Theodore Roethke Chair, directing the creative writing program in Montana, winning nominations for the National Book Award, and taking the Theodore Roethke Memorial Poetry Prize for Lady and What Thou Lovest. But reviews show critics reluctant to praise fully, some even attacking him. Good Luck, though possibly written with popularity in mind, garners little attention. Richard Howard, O.L. Mayo, and Publisher's Weekly center on his theme rather than technique. John Dempsey, in a horrific prose style, questions his ability to keep the interest level high for so long. Overall, the reaction is neutral.

* * *

The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir, written simultaneously with Good Luck in Cracked Italian, draws on his divorce and broken love affair. Critics acknowledge Lady as his best book, which once again shows that subject and tone, more than his age, determine the quality of his books. Rather than depending on carefully prepared rules of sound for their production, the poems seem to flow out of the sound of his pain; the poems follow closely the rhythms of violent thought and action. While some other books flounder when he does not follow prepared sound rules, the intensity of the emotions,

and the obvious hard work and brilliance he put into the book, make "The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir" strong. Lady contains the hard iambs, blunt words, and noisy consonants of the first two books. Sentences and fragments are cut even shorter. The emotions of the first books are sad, unexplored, and carefully limited. In more substantial poems and stanzas, Lady bursts with energy arising from action and immediate problems. The energetic poems generally concern wind. The active sound of struggle in the wind poems arises because of the forced passivity of defeat in the town poems, which have their own, more repressed sound. In the struggle between those two impulses of tension and relaxation, and in trying to deal with the overall problem of this stage in his career, emotion, he begins to crack. Cracking and fragmenting sounds comprise the third kind of sound we find in this book. The appeal lies in our identification with his dramatic struggle. The three types of sound, especially the dramatic one, help us to become involved in these poems even more then in the others.

The poems in Lady closely resemble each other in subject: death, dashed dreams, humiliation, weather, struggle. But the poems avoid monotony: he has freed his emotions enough that we can see a variety; the general subject, loss, resonates in everyone's emotions; Hugo's self-mockery allows us to see more of him. The poems' immediacy and sense of struggle work with the energetic sound to keep excitement high. We take part in the existential fight against hard wind; the drama engages our strongest emotions.

Lady shows he understands his need for defeat, and seriously questions the supercourageous pose: "There's too much / schoolboy in bars. I'm tougher than you" (13). Because his Italian experience, and psychoanalysis opened him up to weak emotions, he no longer needs to rely on rigid rules to keep himself in line. He lets language trace the writhings of his emotions of that particular period of his life. He still has not begun to look back on his problems nostalgically. The balance of awareness and compulsion produces irony, brilliant psychological insights, and the tension of contradictory impulses. The balance of following, and breaking, his rules of sound produces the best effects of both processes.

In "Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg" (Lady, 28), his most famous poem, we feel the powerful immediacy of his thought processes as the rhythms of the sentences play off each other and carry us into his mood. In Contemporary Literature, he says the poem is the culmination of a kind a writing; it is the poem he had been trying to write for years. Everything fell into place and he wrote it in four hours (149). In an interview with Donna Gerstenberger, he says he knew at the time of writing that it was the best poem he had written: "Too many right moves were coming out on the page somehow. The phrases seemed to be touching off each other and I could just smell it (214). The movement from one line to the next is unexplicably beautiful:

> You might come here Sunday on a whim.
>
> Say your life broke down. The last good kiss
>
> [no stanza break]

You had was years ago. You walk these streets
laid out by the insane, past hotels
that didn't last, bars that did, the torured try
of local drivers to accelerate their lives.
Only churches are kept up. The jail
turned 70 this year. The only prisoner
is always in, not knowing what he's done.

The principle supporting business now
is rage. Hatred of the various grays
the mountain sends, hatred of the mill,
The Silver Bill repeal, the best liked girls
who leave each year for Butte. One good
restaurant and bars can't wipe the boredom out.
The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines,
a dance floor built on springs-
all memory resolves itself in gaze,
in panoramic green you know the cattle eat
or two stacks high above the town,
two dead kilns, the huge mill in collapse
for fifty years that won't fall finally down.

Isn't this your life? That ancient kiss
still burning out your eyes? Isn't this defeat
so accurate, the church bell simply seems

[no stanza break]

a pure announcement: ring and no one comes?
Don't empty houses ring? Are magnesium
and scorn sufficient to support a town,
not just Philipsburg, but towns
of towering blondes, good jazz and booze
the world will never let you have
until the town you came from dies inside?

Say no to yourself. The old man, twenty
when the jail was built, still laughs
although his lips collapse. Someday soon,
he says, I'll go to sleep and not wake up.
You tell him no. You're talking to yourself.
The car that brought you here still runs.
The money you buy lunch with,
no matter where it's mined, is silver
and the girl who serves your food
is slender and her red hair lights the wall.

The tone changes from Bogart in the beginning to Leslie Howard in the end of the poem, to use Hugo's terms (Contemporary Literature, 149). The change functions as a plot: we see the persona progress through different ways of facing the central conflict. Cynical at first, he becomes involved in the depression of the town. Savoring the awfulness of it, he asks if the town is not a correlative for his life, possibly for the life of the reader. Once he lets a question lengthen into six

lines, he prods deep into the real problem: the lingering effects of his childhood in White Center. The ironic tone which causes him to make the correlation in the form of a question, however rhetorical, sets up the possibility of a negative answer to the question. Because he has allowed the tone to become exploratory and personal as he wishes for things "the world will never let you have/ until the town you came from dies inside" he escapes from the cynical defeatism and begins to consider his life more clearly. The answer to the questions is "no." Yet the things he finds to comfort himself with are so feeble, he seems like a Leslie Howard character type, not forceful enough to pursue real satisfaction.

Instead of startling words and images, the emotional music of the questions and statements predominates: "Isn't this your life? What ancient kiss / still burns your eyes?" Because the rendition of his conscious thoughts during an epiphany seems raw, the sentences are straightforward and the words ordinary; they do not give the impression of a careful portrait of an inscape. The energy remains high without brilliant images. Earlier poems use iambic metrics as a catalyst in an alchemy brought about by unusual wording. Here, the hypnotically repetitive, exquisite rhythm expresses the play of emotions. Though iambic, the rhythm resembles speech because instead of aching with unnatural stresses, the sentences contain only a few important strongly stressed words: "You might come here Sunday on a whim. / Say your life broke down." (Underlines mine.) Because of the speechlike quality, the distintive voice of the man exerts a powerful

effect.

In another poem about a place as dismal as Philispsburg, he makes statements, rather than asking questions. He strikingly exhibits a new sound for him, a way of successfully writing in direct statement. A new approach to the content elicits the change. He has gained enough distance on societal forces requiring toughness to discuss the problem from the viewpoint of society. "The Tinker Camp" (52) laments the way society keeps gypsies criminal and hard. Society says "Steal. Beg. Don't feel anything. Don't dream. / They sleep well with our money. We are the world that will not let them weep." The poem is one stanza, a rare form for Hugo, who generally uses stanza breaks to go off on tangents; here, he does not explore, but states. He does not use the driving rhythm associated with his personal craving. He substitutes a more rational, prosy sound, as he sets the truth before us. The ending, full of fragmented commands, sounds so bitter we realize how close he really is to the gypsies, how little the poem is an objective sermon. The prosaic stance collapses into his more emotional kind of line breaks in which new sentences begin close to the end of the line, working off each other. An extra, accusing accent emphasizes "We" at the end of a line, pointing out that we, society, are the real culprits.

Poems about sad, old towns provide a telling contrast to the poems of hope and confrontation. Their quietness explains the desperate noisiness of the other poems. Except for a few, the town poems are not quite so successful in themselves, however, because if the sound

matches the mood, the poem must drone dully. The poems lack discovery. He likes decrepit towns because he feels he can own them. He even tells students to actively pursue such ownership: "You must take emotional possession of the town" (Triggering, 12) "Montgomery Hollow" (44) says "To know a road you own it." But if he owns a place, he feels condescension, and almost smug all-knowingness. As he says in "2433 Agnes, First Home, Last House in Missoula," "I'm somewhat torn, On one hand / I believe no one should own land. You can't respect / what you own" (63). The strong sound startles us when he discovers something or fights against a powerful enemy like the wind.

An excellent vehicle for his best sound, wind is the constant in the book, though it might as well be any other form of resistance in nature:

Dog Lake with Paula

Snow air in the wind. It stings our lunch sacks,
arcs the nylon line. Being from the farm
you can take forever in your wild face
the boredom of wind across the boring glare.
In the farm, it's wheat. Here, water. Same.
Same binding. Same remorseless drive
of yesterday and dream. A car starts
on the moon and the suffocating caves
the mountain lion leaves are castle halls.

[stanza break]

This wind is saying things it said at home.
Paula, go upwind to spawn, years across
the always slanted buffalo grass
and centuries past wheels that mill the water.
Deep in the Bear Tooth range the source of wind
is pulsing like your first man in the wheat.
It's not a source of wisdom. It's a wise mistake.
The wise result: pain of hungry horses,
howl of wild dogs in the blow. You swim upwind
so hard you have become the zany trees.

Look away when the lake glare hurts. Now,
look back. The float is diving. Deep down,
deeper than the lake, a trout is on the line.
We are, we always were, successful dogs.
Prehistoric beaches burn each other dawn for loner.
Listen, Paula. Feel. This wind has traveled
all the way around the world, picked up heat
from the Sahara, a new Tasmanian
method of love, howl of the arctic whale.

The woman again becomes a fish though her habitat is wind. He says the wind tells Paula to go upwind to spawn. Then she swims upwind so hard she becomes "zany trees." The transformational phenomenon carries over from the water poems to the wind poems. Mountain lion caves become castle halls. The speaker and Paula are dogs. The transformations are

no longer willfully forced with language--the magic formula of compression, iambs, dense sound repetition, and symmetrical forms. The transformation is easier to come by: it flows rather than being traumatic. In the wind poem, the line lengths, particularly in the other ones, vary some, as do the stanza lengths. The polysyllable count seems naturally rather low, but does not fit a strict pattern. While the lines invariably end on accents, the lines do not follow conventional metrics. Short sentences cluster effectively among longer ones. Midline periods play off endline ones. Sound repetition does not call attention to itself, but often works more subliminally to create good effects. For example, in the first stanza, the repetition of "or" in "forever," "boredom," "boring," and "remorseless" make the boredom she has felt seem ruthless. The sound repeats, slightly changed in "air," "glare," "here," "farm," and starts." The "s´s" in the beginning two lines make the wind hiss. The meter, also subtle, contains beautiful rhythms which are never slack, and always inventive: "Snow air in the wind" Begins and ends symmetrically with spondees. Each accent takes on great force which echoes wind coming in spurts, but always coming. The rhythms and word sounds are beautiful, and the poem gains poignance from hitting on the essence of his life problem, "same remorseless drive / of yesterday and dream." But the remorseless drive portrayed in the poem is not that hopeless, ugly, changeless one on "Ovando." Instead, it flows, affects people in ways that brings out affection and understanding, and allows for progression of meaning though the poem. Unlike a depressing town poem

like "Ovando" or a clenched nature poem, this one is not static and iconic, although it does present a tightly symbolic moment. He speaks to a living, responsive person, trying to persuade her about the wind's message. The sound of the poem contains enough leeway for the natural flow of wind and human intercourse, but never becomes slack. It pulsates wonderfully with the energy of the wind and the urgency of the speaker's feeling. Hugo shows his mastery when he can balance between controlled and adaptive form, between naturalism and sound effects, between archetypal subjects and narrative events.

"A Night with Cindy at Heitman's" similarly explains the wind's significance, but with more complexity (48). A woman transforms to a fish. Wind is the enemy carrying memories. Still, he uses wind, and at times he wants to open up to it:

> Outside: forecasts of humiliating storms.
> We're both warm from Jim Beam and bad jokes
> understood. One thing about hard wind--
> no one fights in it. Loud air takes the place
> of rage. You climbed a trembling chair
> to see if you were lovely in the mirror.
> Daddy's face was stuck there, blank and waiting
> to be claimed. If you scream now as then,
> will go unnoticed as the oaks crack off.
>
> Storms are memories of old storms at the door.
>
> [no stanza break]

Don´t let them in. Just name them. I say shame,
the poverty, mundane and in the mind.
Hundreds of others with money next door happy.
You do not belong. When bells rang
your invitation to the wedding wild across
the lake, you had a boat and shabby clothes.
Hours of pool balls click. The liquor clicks.
The jukebox booms out fun I thought was dead.
My head is rolling full of ocean. You
are swimming countercurrent, your fin
resilient. You should have a weather
all your own. I´ve fantasized a thousand homes
to live in. You´re in all of them and not in one.
Sweet derilict, your eyes spit
man´s first bad weather back at it.

He uses few conventional controls on the sound. The stanza length and line length varies, the meter is irregular, and few sound repetitions are obvious. Only the emotional clusters, "name," "say," "shame," "mundane," and "derilict," "spit" stand out. The sound remains strong, however. The polysyllable count is rather low except in the middle stanza. The short sentences begin rigorously, jerkily, cynically, yet relentlessly telling the hard truth, bitterly advising Cindy. Sometimes endstops emphasize the rhetoric and the final sounding world weariness; even the onematopoeic rhyme stresses the mood of "Hours of pool balls click. The liquor clicks. / The jukebox

booms out fun I thought was dead." Cracking sounds show some inflexibility. But usually the unexploratory tone is balanced by the sound of discovery: most lines are not endstopped, and they play off each other, instead of tiredly, or pedantically stopping. The combination of hopelessness and vigor in the content corresponds to the sound. The poem is not muscularly pumped up to be totally hard. The emotions and relationships are too subtle, complex, and vulnerable for that. But the strength of the rhythms and compact, exciting language works on us like exercise, or a brisk walk in the wind.

"Bear Paw" (76) shows ambivalence about the wind, which is infantile and cruel. Wind cries "give in, give in." He wants to fight out his rage: "If close enough to struggle, to take blood / on your hands, you turn your weeping face / into the senile wind." Yet he also wants to give up as he did in Spinazzola: "Pray hard to weather, that lone surviving god, / that in some sudden wisdom we surrender." The poem wavers in itself between end-stopped and mid-stopped lines, between an iambic meter and an irregular one, between long sentences and clusters of short ones.

As poems like "Bear Paw" suggest, his poetry alternates between the sound of hard resistance and sudden, overwhelming fluidity and ease. Sound, of course, corrresponds to content. The hard sounds and self imposed obstacles one sees in his poetry paradoxically result from a disciplined approach yet create the sound of his subconscious. The flowing, conversational sounds more commonly found in poems of his mature years show him relaxing the rules needed to tap his deeper

self. The paradox thickens when we realize that he sees himself as inherently soft inside, putting on a tough front. When he tries too hard to be cool, and does not surrender to emotion, he may crack. "Crack" is one of his most used words; the brittle sound is one of his most common.

"Where Mission Creek Runs Hard for Joy" (7) shows him fighting; in the fight, his armour breaks slightly, and opens him to the joy of confronting his agony head on. The sound combines some cracking with the sound of active struggle. Rapids shake the low hung limbs like hair.

> In your wine old fields of wheat replay
> gold promises of what a kiss would be. In your face
> a horse still flogs your face. Whatever is odd,
> the Indian without a tribe who dresses mad
> in kilts, the cloud that snaps at mountains,
> means, to you, life at normal, no rest
> from the wierd. My obsessions too
> ugly out in air and down the driving
> water to the dam. We rest easy in these pines.
> This run-off, lives or water, leaves us mute.
>
> I fight the sudden cold diminished light
> with flashbacks of a blond, somewhere
> outside Bremerton, her face my first sun
>
> [no stanza break]

and I never knew her name. Was it you
across this table now, Mongolian and Serb,
invested in your face still pink from
the wind's slap and that sadistic wheat?
Money's in the creek. Gold stones magnify
to giant coins, and you poise gold alone
on rock above the wealthy water
and the slow swamp of some early bitter scene.

Kiss my wine and pour it down my tongue.
Pour it twisted down my hair. Protective armour
fragments in the creek's roar. You are right
to say the trees here grow too straight.
I am right to bring back all the harsh
bizarre beginnings of the dirt, the long beat
of each sun across the cabbage, and the hate
that comes from nowhere, that's accounted for
in photos of ourselves we took and still sneak
looks at late at night. And we are right--
the coins are real, the low hung limbs are hair
and Mission Creek, this wild high run-off
in our mouths is clearly on its way.

The sound uneasily celebrates the breakthroughs, and shows his hesitant acceptance of problems and his transformations of the surroundings. The meter and the rate of polysyllables vary. Long

sentences interrupt short ones. The tumbling sounds give the effect of something large and rapid rather than small and controlled as in "Trout." He throws all his problems and loves into the jumble of the poem. But the expansiveness remains energetic. And his sentences are twisted, coy, and fragmented enough to keep pressure on what is said with a dangerous directness. The hesitancy keeps it from being an idea poem.

In "Ovando" (59) he fragments again, but more completely. Though he still sees fragmenting as a privilege, he writes in a sardonic tone:

> If dry air turns
> what had been anger brittle, you
> can fragment at pale leisure, one hair
> at a time, one nose, one arm, all flaking
> slowly until all of you is gone
> except some silhouette, obese, passed out in dust.
> Old women may have noticed but they say hello.

Subtle differences between the sinister "Ovando" and healthy "Mission Creek" show his agility. "Ovando" begins with two lines of tetrameter, a length that can be effectively blunt, epigrammatic, and knowing. The lines are hard to say, and, like the whole poem, full of "d"'s and "t"'s; the first line ends with three accented monosyllables, and the second line begins on an accented "t" cognate "th." Consonance connects inner and outer landscapes: "Dust that clouded your last drunk dream / thickens in this degrading wind." Conversely, "Mission

Creek" begins with lines full of pretty "l"s. Soft consonants all through reflect the mood of openly explored emotions, with lyrical love, and water. The positive word "gold" is emphasized by rhyming it with "old" and echoing it with "low". Also, "gold" occurs in a spondee. In the next line, pounding reminiscent of "Ovando" crops up momentarily, expressing his ambivalence: "in your face / a horse still flogs your face." The poem pits idealistic dreams of youth against the questionable present. Spondees accent positive phrases about gold and the sun, and onematopoeic action words, all the way though "Mission Creek," keeping up the joyful undertone. In "Ovando," spondees fall heavily at the ends of lines on negative adjective/noun pairs which are rhymed or alliterated within themselves and with other end-of-the-line spondee pairs. The meter switches between iambic and trochaic at caesuras, adding to the jerkiness. The short, loud accents seem to bark: the first line is "Dust that clouded your last drunk dream." In "Mission Creek" words are more often accented by the length of time one says them: the first line is "Rapids shake the low hung limbs like hair." We must say this line more slowly; the words require more pause in between. The last word, "hair," is one syllable we always drag out to nearly two. Both lines contain triple hard accents, but "last drunk dream" pounds. "Ovando" speaks accusingly to "you," stressing self-caused degradation in declarative simple sentences. "Mission Creek" shows him comfortable enough to speak as an "I" in gentler sentence patterns.

"Cornwall, Touring" (50) presents another kind of cracking. With a

frightening sound, he has cracked through limits set up by being stuck in a poverty stricken small town, with "odds against the travel in our blood." The poem ostensibly describes the sea in pieces and "white with fear along the edges," but by the end admits the subjectivity of the vision:

> Our lives glint us off those broken
> bits of glass, stained windows
> we broke out through, bottles of cheap wine.
> We found the sea in pieces at Pendeen,
> rock breaking off and rock homes far apart.

The beauty of sound allows him to mythologize and create the metaphors. Cracking consonants and sudden shifts in meaning capture the brittleness. Elsewhere in the poem, open vowels, "b"´s, and "d"´s create the dull pounding of endlessly frustrated desires: "Water pounded rock / with favored odds and open tin shafts played old tunes." The poem lilts like a folk song about the romantically named Pendeen; phrases and structures of meaning repeat in verse-like stanzas. The rhythm is regular and simple until the last stanza, when honesty wins out over enforced happy objectivity. But then a repetition of the first line reestablishes the rhythm, and the fragily maintains the victorious tone.

The theme and sound of cracking make way for the less armored, more vulnerable, smooth sounds of his next books. We can see the change from hard to soft in the plot-like change of tone, from tough to emotional or optimistic, within individual poems. Lady is

imagistically exciting but mostly important because of the insights dramatically portrayed in the sound of the poems.

Living in Montana influences the book somewhat. The sound remains taut, the sentences linked by internal pressure. The meaning still fights through language. But now the simple rules he set up for himself are not quite so obvious; he seems to work more on instinct, letting individual poems govern the technique. We can determine more easily why the sentences are gathered in the same poem. No longer does his willpower force pieces of the poem together from the outside. The sentences are somewhat less convoluted, the language less self-consciously poetic, the stances less romantic and outrageous.

* * *

Reviewers of Lady attempt to decide what they like about his poetry. They are puzzled because they do not realy understand the book; though they all understand the poems to an extent, none really does justice to what Hugo is doing. Dick Allen says it is the sense of the man; however, the poetry itself is flawed by overly specific personal allusions, meaning forced on lightweight subjects, and a repetitive format. Still, he names the book exceptional (671). Kent Jacobsen believes the central tension creates the appeal. Though he goes too far in his analysis, he insightfully contrasts Hugo's need to master and to surrender to experience. He likes Hugo's virile style that one responds to physically (83). Virginia Quarterly complains that he never strays far from iambic pentameter and never writes a graceful line of it (cxl). Some years later, reviewers realize how

extraordinary the book is.

* * *

We can detect only a few instances of Montana influencing his poems in Lady. Though his change of scenery is somewhat evident in the unsuccessful poems of Good Luck in Cracked Italian, the different surroundings influence What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American and the following books the most. In "Gains Made in Isolation," he explains the effect:

> I think there is almost a direct relationship between the place, the kind of vision I have, and the way I write . . . . In Montana, it's open, panoramic. You can see things coming from far off. There are seldom any surprises . . . . And if you look at the poems when I got to Montana, they begin to open up. You can see the images, anticipate them a little more, from farther off. The lines, perhaps get a bit longer, more open, and the language gets a bit softer and a little bit more gradual. (299)

While living in Montana may make Lady accessible enough to penetrate, it makes What Thou Lovest somewhat slack, easier and not particularly original.

What Thou Lovest borrows some of the flatness of Montana. Several of the poems are very good, and most contain excellent lines. But, perhaps realizing Lady is good because it is dramatic and immediate, he unsuccessfully forces many poems into

contrived ways to discuss the past, or several time sequences in the present tense. Instead of being dramatic because of narrative excitement, the poems merely dredge up his past once more for scraps to relate to us in overly specific terms. Existential struggles are gone. He substitutes monotonously grim, stereotypical scenes. His points about time and memory help the concept of the book a bit.

The contrived present tense, stereotypes and flatness flaw "Saying Goodbye to Mrs. Norraine." He remembers wrongly the characters he speaks of; they are so generic and dull; however, it does not really matter. The predictible problems are related like editorials: "Her husband's / agonizing prolonged death. Her plan to live / her last years in another city south" (5). "A Snapshot of the Auxiliary" (3) is almost indistinguishable from the other poem. The lines now have six feet, being relaxed. The irregularity of the meter but follows no thought pattern, captures no stance, and forges no music. Unaccented syllables and "s"'s pile up. The main problem is the short, simple sentences and fragments. He seems to be trying to make the unpoetic content sound poetic, unfortunately by using a sound that accents the unpoetic quality. In the midst of slack sounds, short sentences carry one through the poem too quickly. They sound silly and unnatural. Only the humorous lines, describing Lutherans, work well with the choppy sound.

> In this photo, circa 1934,
> you see the women of the St. James Lutheran
>
> [no stanza break]

Women's Auxiliary. It is easy
to see they are German, short, squat,
with big noses, the sadness of the Dakotas
in their sullen mouths. These are exceptions:
Mrs. Kyte, English, who hated me.
I hated her husband.
Mrs. Noraine, Russian, kind. Mrs. Hillborn,
Swedish I think. Cheerful. Her husband
was a cop. None of them seem young. Perhaps
the way the picture was taken. Thinking back
I never recall a young face, a pretty one.
My eyes were like this photo. Old.

This one is Grandmother. This my Aunt Sarah,
still living. That one--I forget her name--
the one with maladjusted sons. That gray
in the photo was actually their faces.
On gray days we reflected weather color.
Lutherans did that. It made us children of God.
She believed she believed the words.
She turned me forever off hymns. Even
the good ones, the ones they founded jazz on.

Many of them have gone the way wind recommends
or, if you're religious, God. Mrs, Noraine,

[no stanza break]

thank the wind, is alive. The church
is brick now, not the drab board frame
you see in the background. Once I was alone
in there and the bells, the bells started to ring.
They terrified me home. This next one in the album
is our annual picnic. We are all having fun.

In many poems, language no longer hugs the pieces of the poems, or mimics Hugo's internal pressure that once gave poems unity. Sequences therefore become incoherent, the language careless:

This narrow space I slept in twenty years,
a porch walled in, a room just barely added on.
I own this and I know it is not mine.
That day I found locked doors in Naples, streets
rocked in the sea. The sea rocked in the hands
of brutal sky and fish came raining from volcanoes.
I see the horses swirl into the barn. I hear
two shots, no groans. When I say I'm derelict
the horses will return to flank the farmer.
Again, the three die gray as April 7, 1892. (20)

At times he makes no attempt to make a poem convincing. "Invasion North" (38) bears no relations to realism; but Hugo has not labeled it a dream. Neither does it embody an emotional symbol, though we could possibly analyze it and discover some rational connection to Hugo. To set the scene, he throws in the stereotypical words "igloo" and "polar bear," "the walrus." The poem begins with a long description of

dandelions, but the last stanza surprises us with the bewildering line: "of the entire garrison, I am the only survivor." We cannot believe he is a last survivor especially because he has not prepared us for the overly dramatic situation and because the sentence does not sound like something the lone survivor would say to himself: by this time he has realized the fact and would have no need to say it, especially in such formal language. The conquering women even offer him the captain's skeleton. The speaker plans to hide from them for fifty years if need be. The large number of anapests add to the unintentionally silly tone. When the anapests and dactyls lie next to even more unaccented syllables, the sound approaches ugliness. The stumbling sound leaves the strange subject to fend for itself.

A number of the poems create no sense of discovery. Hugo's rules of sound do not delight him with new images as in the first two books, and the rhythms do not mimic his thought processes becoming aware of themselves as in Lady. Instead, he often relates stale ideas and anecdotes. When he goes even further away from the unconscious into the public side of the personae, the poems live up to the title of the section "Lectures, Soliloquies, Pontifications." The speakers combine the boringly mundane with the windy:

> Have the women
> make dinner. We camp here. Tomorrow
> we should be close to that forest and the next day
> we will find to live as destined. (51)

In another poem in the section, a similar speaker sounds off:

I thank you

for this award, this handsome plaque I'll keep
forever above my mantle, and I'll read
the inscription often aloud to remind me
how with your courageous backing I fought
our battle and won. (49)

The numerous unnaccented syllables, the polysyllables, the boring, unimportant words, and everyday phrasing unfortunately complement the unpoetic subject.

Many poems delight and move the reader. But Hugo has relaxed his standard of coherence. Consider these ridiculous last lines of a poem: "I claim the cabin by occupancy rights. / I pray each dawn. How my words climb cedars / like squirrels uttered by God" (29)! He seems to need some kind of structure to work as his power of judgement. The sound does not always cohere with the content. A few poems use his old style, turned sour. "Changes in Policy at Taholah" (41) is a public minded poem. The iambics, enjambed short sentences and fragments, alliteration, and assonance seem inappropriate to the mood: "They're denying whites the beach. The tribe says / no more casting for perch in the surf. No fires. / No walks under the moon."

The poems that succeed completely are masterpieces. In adequate language not too different from his old style, "Listen, Ripley," "Hilltop," and "Cattails" movingly portray men struggling with themselves. The final poem, "The Art of Poetry" (70) departs from anything he has done. It combines music that flexes with the mind, and

the new softness in a poem that lyrically washes over the reader again and again. The stanzas are long, the accents very gentle. But the verbs and adjectives are strenuously perfected:

> outside, gulls
> scar across your fantasy. Rifled spray on glass
> unfocuses the goats you stock on the horizon,
> ladder blue like dolphins, looping over the sun.

Romantic lines and phrases repeat and ideas seem to drift in and out, to hint at something inexplicable: "Sad Raymond, twice a moment tides come in." Amazingly, he manages to keep the poem beautiful and undercut the romantic surface at the same time: "All's in a name, What if you were Fred. Then none / of this need happen." Raymond is really Hugo, with desperate dreams in his youth and a soured maturation, wishing he were like his heros. This poem alone justifies the rather high reputation of this book.

Some reviewers find fault with What Thou Lovest, while some are only comfortable with what resembles other poetry. The new flat tone divides loyalites. William Pritchard writes that one cannot tell one poem from the other, that the speaker talks on and on without speaking poetry (295). Frederick Garber, in "Large Man in the Mountains," finds the tone more balanced and distant than ever, the craft and self more integrated, and the last section brilliant (249). On the other hand, Library Journal strangely finds a gain in intensity (1975, 858). Choice discovers echoes of Stafford in the understated toughness. The reviewer mentions the self-pity caught just in time, and the lack of

certainty which makes Hugo more human (1973, 842). Vernon Young says Hugo does wonders with the flat tone (594). Helen Vendler finds the book an improvement on earlier explorations of drabness, though the last section is "scrappy"; the flat authority leads to somber power (8). Dave Smith, in a long essay on Lady and What Thou Lovest, defends him against the accusation of being obsessed with wretchedness (125). Hugo's use of sound and his personality still continue to disturb critics. The self-pity and slack sound of What Thou Lovest are exaggerated in the next book making up the minds of his hesitant critics.

* * *

The slack, discursive, repetitive sound of What Thou Lovest resembles much contemporary poetry. Most poets coming into their prime in the 1970's show less propensity for stylisic changes and psychological turmoil than those of the previous decade. Their sound, more dignified and calm than the sound of Hugo's books, even What Thou Lovest, makes it appear as if the content found its way into sound with ease.

Some use small, often precious poems. Robert Creeley writes small poems about ideas in irregular meter, normal syntax, and prosy language, emphasizing the smallness by the title Pieces. Philip Levine, in The Names of the Lost, writes in narrow lines, and long stanzas, very straightforwardly and prosaically. The poems are often narrative. Donald Justice writes small, controlled poems in short lines and stanzas. Light with anapests, the quiet and elegant sound

refuses to forge great conclusions.

Other poets use subtle narration. Galway Kinnell's The Book of Nightmares consists of long poems. He pieces together narrative fragments, descriptions, or discussions, separated by space, adding up illogically to a sense of closure. Therefore, his means of progression resembles to Hugo's. He is also very sound-conscious, varying the sound patterns of each fragment. Robert Penn Warren's poems reflect his obsession with time: they are narratives trying not to be, wishing the world were not continuous. He can claim no familiarity with sensuous sounds, being an abstract thinker. When he does aim for music, he badly overdoes the sound effects. His anapests create a superficial tone. Elizabeth Bishop writes narratives, in which the action is spatial; for example, a little girl's consciousness spreads out all over the world as she reads a National Geographic in a waiting room. Bishop writes in small stanzas, her sound concentrating on speed or its lack, and words that humorously stand out from the meter. Sentences begin as if they were simply amusing thoughts; she sounds as if she were trying to be cheerful.

Hugo's books in this period never follow the trend of lightness. And even the prosy ones are more chopped up by emotion, ellipsis, music, and the difficulty of communication than other poets' work. Writing small, precious, his rough, tortured sensibility would never allow him to write small, precious, elegant artifacts. His poems, the better ones in particular, are spatial, not conventionally narrative. He captures the relationship of his self and the scene through sound.

His music plays a more significant role than music does in others' poetry. Trying to make it play that difficult role, he writes heavy, jerky, twisted lines. Though when he abandons the struggle and writes more like the other poets, the poems may seem more accessible and gentle, more professional, they are far inferior to his more unique writing.

Chapter 4

As in the second phase, Hugo's third phase again includes a surrender of tension and acceptance of emotion, a trip to a foreign country, and a book dedicated to his childhood. As before, the three books of the phase share the same period of composition. The explosive, drastically different and honest book that begins the phase puts the past, including Hugo's semblance of control, behind him. In this phase, we predominantly see Hugo healing himself. He refers most commonly to that theme. 31 Letters and 13 Dreams is triggered by his breakdown in 1971 due to the cognitive dissidence of success. He describes heavy drinking keeping his old pain alive so that he alienates all around him. Writing in Seattle while recuperating from alcoholism and a bleeding ulcer, he lets go of the desperate toughness he had once used to cover up his softness, and abandons the strict discipline he used when writing. He makes little attempt to shape most of the poems into conventional poetry, even going to prosaic extremes: "I'm the last poet / to teach the Roethke Chair under Heilman" (3). The line refers to Robert Heilman, then chairman of the English department at the University of Washington. In "Gains Made in Isolation" he says he had no intention of changing his style. But the has style changed because the techniques became second nature to him; and "once that happened, I must have intuitively sensed that I could go to very personal things and talk directly about them and still have

enough artistry left so that it would remain poetry" (291). Whether most of them are really poems is questionable. He does not seem committed to the sound: in the same interview, he says: "I found that if I jotted it out in that 14 syllable line, and propped it up with an anapest now and then just to show poeple I was still a poet, that I could come on this way [directly]" (292). Perhaps writing can come too easily, and a technique is useful not so much for the expressiveness of the poem as for productive discipline. "Letter to Scanlon from Whitehall," like the other, written from home while he imagined the title town, shows the random, mundane quality:

> Dear Dennice: I'm this close but the pass is tough this year.
> I'm stranded by this rotten winter. My car is ailing
> and the local mechanic doesn't know what he's doing
> or he does but never learned clear phrasing. It will take
> four hours or a week. An odd town. A friendly waitress
> says the main drag is the old road so I must have been here
> but I don't remember. It looks like several towns
> in Montana. Columbus, for one. Even, a little, like the edge
> of Billings. You know. On one side, stores, cafe, a movie
> theatre you feel certain no one attends. And across
> the street, the railroad station. Most of all, that desolate
> feeling you get, young hunger, on a gray sunday afternoon,
> when you survive only because the desolation feeds
> your dying, a dream of living alone on the edge
>
> [no stanza break]

of a definite place, a desert or the final house in town
with no threat of expansion, or on the edge of a canyon,
coyotes prowling below and a wind that never dies. Girl,
you wouldn´t believe the people who live alone, preparing
themselves daily for dying, planning their expenditures
to the penny so just when they die their money is gone
and the county must bury them, a final revenge on a world
that says work is god, plan for the future. They did, And dear
Dennice, bring their laughing bones no flowers. Pay them the honor
of ignoring their graves, the standard bird authorities
chip on stones, a magpie designed by the same man
you always see in towns like this, sitting in the station,
knowing the trains don´t run. The soup in the cafe I was lucky
enough to pick of the available three, turned out thick
tomato macaroni, and the chicken salad sandwich, yum.
The mechanic says my car is done. He says, if I understand,
is ready and no charge. He says, if I understand, he
just wants to be friendly and it wasn´t anything really wrong.
Homestake grade is sanded. I may even beat this letter
to your home. It´s saturday and I suppose there´s a dance
somewhere in Butte tonight. Would you please consider?
Would you come? I hope it´s one of those virtuoso bands,
you know, songs from the generations, jazz, swing, rock.
And a big crowd. Girls in mini minis, tighter than skin

[no stanza break]

> over their behinds, and a friendly bar, a table where
> we can talk. Think about it. Say yes. Be nice. Love. Dick.
>
> (47)

The best way to enjoy the poems is to scan them quickly, passing over the boring parts. Even Hugo questions the book's quality; in Contemporary Literature he says the book disappoints him because after the first poems were popular, he made the mistake of forcing poems when he had no impulse to write (146). This is the mistake he makes in Good Luck and What Thou Lovest. In the Madrona interview, he says the danger with letter poems is that "things become too said and the poems don't take strength from what is left out of them" (62).

The dream poems also let down restraints, this time purely in subject matter; most poets avoid dream poems because "anything goes"; they seem too easy. Still, Hugo's are successful glimpses into man's inner life, related like a grim comedy routine: "Fred Astaire dances / his way past the warden into the country" (66). Being tightly constructed and sound-conscious helps keep them interesting and legitimate, although he does use the same technique over and over. Being dreams, they fit his usual style of bizarre images and jumpy sequences: "The camel is a yacht. You cruise / a weird purple river. Girls doze on the bank" (49). They retain narrative continuity by being in single stanzas. Deadpan statements in irregular meter, with little sound repetition, they sound like monologues of a Kafkaesque stand-up comic with perfect timing. The poems begin each simple,

repetivive subject/verb statement bluntly, with a hard emphasis after caesuras and periods, a comic sound that heightens the irony: "You walk up Main Street. / You are hungry. You take this opportunity / to eat. You have no money. They throw you out" (29), Relentless accumulation of horrible events turns sadness into black humor. Most of the poems begin with stark statements of the new terrible situation: "Though alone, you know just over the hill / the army is ready" (61) which make the reader laugh "Oh God!" If the occurences are not immediately bad, the reader squirms, waiting for the bad news. Even unimportant activities like fishing become ominous. Even at the beginning of "In Your Wild Dream" we expect trouble:

> You are fishing but have walked away from your rod.
> Your rod bends and flies into the lake. You swim
> to the rod and start reeling in. A huge fish on.
> A gray fish. Bloated. Dull. You finally land him.
> On shore he snarls, a viscious mustard dog.
> He wants to kill you. He rages with hate and glare. (49)

His technique, perhaps honed while he was a humor writer in college, creates the mood of the poems. Though too subtle for readers who only pay attention to content, the sound is successful variation on his usual mode. Refreshed after the interlude of 31 Letters, happily remarried, he again tackles more traditional forms.

* * *

Hugo is perhaps the most influential poet of the times; directing the writing program in Montana, touring the country lecturing on the

writing process, and publishing Selected Poems and The Triggering Town as well as poetry volumes in close succession have a lasting empact. The sound of his later books compromises with the more familiar sound: his sound is toned down and other poets are imitating him. His books gain an unusual amount of attention from critics, especially the letter poems because they explore an unusual genre.

Most critics writing positively about the book ignore the sound technique. Hugo's newfound means for a brash display of his personality overwhelms other matters. Michael Allen finds the letter poems refreshing in their original look at society (1978, 175). Robert Holland shows surprise that Hugo could combine the two unsavory topics of western toughness and name-dropping academia and produce honest, generous, strong poems (252). In Western Poetry Review, Dick Allen calls him a moral man writing for people who want to be better than they are and depend on precarious connections with other poor souls (313). Hank Lazer's essay "The Letter Poem" suggests that letters hold an attraction for poets, who secretly want to give in and say what they want. Hugo, he says, more than other poets, takes advantage of the genre's informality, in beautiful, unfashionably abstract poems. The poems still struggle out of isolation; but now the style and stance no longer struggle to become content (242).

Only one favorable review concerns the language and sound. Showing understanding of Hugo's poetry, Frederick Garber traces the change from the tense knottiness of the Northwest Baroque to his careless, flat poems; the change reflects his diminishing need for control. The

poems take on the timbre of the relationship and the best ones turn in on the self. He compares Hugo to Stafford, who also writes about his own open landscape as if knowing it from the inside (16).

Some critics show preference for one type of poem. Mark Seidman, though he likes the realism of the dreams, writes that Hugo, wearing his heart on his sleeve, risks falling flat with overstatement, strained pathos, and even bathos (24). Stephen Yenser also prefers the vivid, compressed, shrewd, and affecting dream poems, which show the darker side of his letters's anxious chatter. The letters, neither compact nor intense, proceed in seven foot lines that encourage garrulousness, undynamic poetry (93). Margaret Gibson is relieved when the dreams save her from the windy, tendentious letters in which the openness indulges nostalgia, self-pity, bravado, chauvinism, and whining cynicism (2166). Emily Grasholz reverses the decision saying that the moving letters are far superior to the unintelligible dreams (230).

Those who are not so accepting of Hugo's personality react against both the letters and the dreams, though they focus their attacks on the letters. Choice accuses him of a dishonest stance, and of hiding behind his poems. Hugo's self-consciousness the reviewer finds boring and superficial; Hugo needs intense, original language to create a feeling of truth (1978, 16). Charles Molesworth discovers little sense of verse line in the letters and no reference to the epistle tradition. They are ruined by nostalgia and self-pity. His compulsion to remove his mask becomes another mask. Like Wright, he

strains to demonstrate sincerity and meanwhile his folksiness and hybrid language flop (685). James Cotter, who feels like an FBI agent opening Hugo's mail, cannot tell one poem from the next. Hugo, whose "ulcer burns with a hard, gemlike flame," writes self-indulgent parody and banal poems and takes cheap shots. Nothing redeems its flat lack of invention. Hugo's ego is richer than most people can stomach (214). They all are let down by Hugo's flat language. Oddly, no one mentions the humor of the dreams.

His reputation survives the disfavor; when the Selected Poems appears, critics appraise his career as a whole, not one condemning him. According to Choice, Hugo is prosy, not a poet of memorable lines but memorable observations and sensitivity, with a wide range of experience and breadth of outlook (1979, 1305). Michael Allen says the reader will be greatly rewarded, especially by the choices from the first three books, all singing, technically dazzling baroque poems about loss. Allen names Hugo's the strongest Western voice and Lady, which dominates the selection and his career, his greatest book (1981, 309). John Vernon says he is glad that Hugo is the most widely imitated; he feels Hugo is a healthier choice than Ashbery. He too calls Lady the best book. Hugo's predictible sound is a decision to plod, but to see clearly; the decision is brave in an era of experimentation, the revolution when poets suddenly relaxed their lines. He feels Hugo is extremely balanced (353). Vernon Young agrees that Hugo limits himself to the one thing he knows well (even Italy sounds like Montana). The repetetiveness of 31 Letters increases

Vernon's discomfort. He wants to kick Hugo for his excess of humility. ("I remain a common laborer, stained by the perpetual / dust from loading flour or coal. I stay humble, inadequate / inside" (Letters, 54). He finds him comically immature about sentiment and about love of failure (228). Hugo has achieved an image of a plodding, limited, sad man whose wholesomeness stolidly keeps the evilly modern poet from taking over the western town.

* * *

A book entitled White Center, the name of his home town, sounds ominous, as if he will once again detail his mundane, degrading youth. However, though the concept of home is central, he no longer sees the past as fascinating in itself. In fact, the book concerns losing the need to replay old defeats. The complete surrender and honest of the letter poems seems to have rid his system of the need for pity. A happy marriage gives him confidence. Giving up alcohol lets him let go of his pain. The poems repeat, but not painfully. The theme of recuperation from depression reccurs in some form, usually very subtly, in every poem:

> No matter
> how this water fragments in the reeds, it rejoins
> the river and the bright bay north receives it all,
> new salmon on their way to open ocean,
> the easy tug returned. (62)

The moods, forms, and subjects vary dramatically; his compulsions no longer trap him. The way he embodies his theme in symbols and

experiences shows the artistry he has when he has enough distance on his problems. The motif of release recuring through the symphonic book is touching, upbeat, and brings back the sense of discovery. He rarely addesses the poems to us, but reminds himself with fresh surprise each time: "In me today is less rage than ever, less hurt" (51). Most poems follow the movement of the experience as they did in Lady; now the experience is mental, with no natural forces to fight. The tenor approaches the strength of Lady. But now he does not have to gather all his strength in order to fend off pain and loss of self-control. Now he enjoys the hardiness of health and balance. We miss the old dramatic, immediate fight. The general feel of the book is not as memorable as Lady. The voice belongs to a charming, mature man trying to come to terms with ambivalence. The maturity and contemplative mood make White Center become lost among other conventional books. Still, he packs the poems with startling images and sounds. He frees them from the clenched sound of the first two books and the overstimulation of Lady. He writes the poems quite conventionally; sound is no longer in control. Though one wishes for more dynamic language and surprising lines of sound-controlled poems, one can appreciate that he can now write conventionally with excellent craft.

"Second Chance" (8) is one poem unabashedly written for the reader, as a consciously created statement, making use of his new ability to handle this rather conventional way of writing:

I can't let it go, the picture I have of myself
in ruin, living alone, some wretched town
where friendship is based on just being around.
And I drink there a lot, stare at the walls until
the buzzing of flies becomes the silence I drown in.
Outside, children bad mouth my life with songs
their parents told them to sing. One showers
my roof with stones knowing I'm afraid
to step out and tell him to stop. Another yells.
"You can't get a woman, old man. You don't get a thing."

My wife, a beautiful woman, is fixing lunch.
She doesn't know I dream these things. She thinks
I'm fine. People respect me. Oh, she knows all right
I've seem grim times. But these days my poems
appear everywhere. Fan mail comes. I fly east
on a profitable reading tour. Once in a while
a young girl offers herself. My wife knows that, too.
And she knows my happiness with her is far more
than I ever expected. Three years ago, I wouldn't
have given a dime for my chances at life.

What she doesn't know is now and then
a vagabond knocks on the door. I go answer
and he says, "Come back, baby. You'll find

[no stanza break]

a million poems deep in your destitute soul."
And I say, "Go away. Don´t ever come back."
But I watch him walk, always downhill toward
the schoolyard where children are playing `ghost,´
a game where, according to the rules, you take
another child´s name in your mind but pretend
you´re still you while others guess your new name.

Employing a subtle kind of ironic, self-mocking confessional tone, he narrates the story in the ongoing present. The situation, images and the symbolism of the ending lets the reader participate. The language resembles everyday speech; he writes in long, awkward sentences, as he wrestles with getting his meaning across. The difficulty of what he wants to say causes the problem; he has reservations about saying it and believing it. Polysyllables occur frequently because the emotion is not raw, at least on the surface. For a similar reason, the rhythm consists mostly of slow, repeated triple measures instead of driving iambs. The subject puzzles him; he needs to repeat it, not to increase pity as in What Thou Lovest, but for the purposes of healing. As the loose, open sounds would suggest, the poem does not desperately attempt to capture the emotion. He calmly explores the problem. The new poems, being relatively tighter than the letter poems, express his regained balance. In "Gains Made in Isolation" he says his final two books are more open, back to conventional forms, making big jumps. He says we can "hear all the little sounds rattling around. And in a rather strict framework like that, a stanza pattern, I find that my

imagination loosens up a great deal, and I can move around fast" (293).

He continues with the conventional approach to composing; he addresses "To a Woman" (51) even more obviously to someone other than himself. Thought rather than sound generates the statements. The language does not follow the rhythm of private thought: he never veers off into private imaginings, but sticks to one stanza to convey one messege. Yet he still uses sound masterfully. He constructs almost all the sentences in faintly accusing subject/predicate structures: "You start it all. You are lovely." His desire to appear a bit tough keeps the poem taut, but his defensive toughness arises from a healthy reason. He is humbling himself in front of the woman for the sake of honesty and change. His pride naturally makes him curt. Yet he manages to use the lyrical tone one always finds in poems to his daughter and to women of his fantasies. The words are almost all monosyllables, but pretty, with lots of liquids instead of hard consonants. It seems he thinks only simple, nice language is romantic and easy enough for a woman to understand. The rhythm is primarily a repetitive, lyrical anapest. Only for a moment does he use harsh sounds: "I no longer imagine her cringing / in cornstalks, cruel father four rows away / beating corn leaves aside with a club." Because he now controls such harshness, feeling less rage and hate, the women need not support him: "This is release you never expected / from a past you never knew you had."

He shows mastery of humorous sound in another poem written

conventionally, according to a plan. Calling on the myth of rising and falling destinies, Hugo writes a hilarious poem called "Wheel of Fortune" (16). The beginning follows his sudden escape from the kind of sardonic humor of his dream poems. He leaves his family, takes up with a blond actress, begins painting and having fantastic success with it-- except for one review. He plans the murder of the reviewer, stops painting, and runs out of money. He is sued by the museum and cuckolded by Burt Lancaster. Once he returns home, his family treats him like a child:

> You sit there contrite in your rocker and watch TV.
> Your wife is cooking your favorite: clam fettucine.
> The children say you watch too many crime shows,
> you ought to take more walks.

The poem deliciously captures the infantilism of fantasies. The heady, dangerous, game-show instability is suggested in thirteen syllable lines, the odd number necessitating some kind of irregularity. He keeps the irregularity sliding, never merely using a truncated foot at the end; the mood remains edgey. The childlike narrative moves quickly by way of "and"'s, the sentences running on breathtakingly from one line to the next. The lines are end-stopped at crucial changes on subject or tone, and at the end; the ending irony needs end-stopped lines and no transitions, as he returns to the hopelessness of his dream poems. In the last two lines, he reduces the syllable count to six, a sensible, inarguably final sounding number.

Other poems also showing his awareness of his regressive

tendencies continue the trend away from the tortured sound he used when still hopelessly involved in his psychological problems. "Fairfield" (50) paints a respectful portrait of his old self: "I'd expected hurt, the small town kind everyone / knows and ignores, a boy who tried and tried / to leave home, sobbing his failures alone / at the mirror back of the bar." This time the sentences are not the repetitive, simple, elliptical structures of comedy or trauma: "Where I ate, the waitress was too in love / with the cook for things I wanted to say." The poem, unstylized and objective, just presents, rather sadly, the way he was without trying to transform it or tell the reader how to react. While the sound is unspectacular, it fits the content; he shows us his emotional progression away from the sad images of the poem.

Another poem about escaping the past uses sound to show his relationship to the content; however, this time the content is logical and the sound emotional. In "The Towns We Know and Leave Behind, the Rivers We Carry with Us" (29), the sound scintillates with the unease of his precarious transition from serious psychological problems, and also with an awareness of danger. The poem progresses in the form of a logical argument (to James Wright) presenting assumptions and syllogisms. However, the logic of the meaning is associational and mystical. It concerns forgiveness and murder, real and symbolic. The problem:

"The river, I am not sure which one,
says water has no special power.
What should I do?
Or you?
Now water has no need to forgive
what shall become of murder?
How shall we live
when we killed, when we died by the word?

The next stanza poses an answer. But it is only partial; he still seems to rely on water but forgets that it has no power. We expect the inconclusiveness because of the sound and appearance. The line-end dashes and the many short lines which look wrong interspersed randomly with longer lines create an unfinished, broken appearance. It looks as if he has torn away one side. The basic anapest is disrupted over and over by other rhythms. The elliptical meaning forces the reader to stop to supply the omitted words; the colons and dashes require similar pauses. Often he pauses after a stage in the argument as if saying "OK. Now." Every sentence ends at the end of a line, contributing to the jerkiness. Brilliantly, the sentences never convey the whole meaning, because the bit by bit argument concerns hard-to-grasp ideas. We therefore hurry to the next sentence in an uncomfortably fast pace speeded up by the sequences of very short sentences in a row.

He ends on a completely different type of sound, very complete and certain. The happy, Whitman-like expansiveness of "White

Center" (70), the last poem gives us bits of everything. Pouring forth many scenes of cruelty he releases an old build up of tension: "I'd hoped forty years / I'd write this poem." He's certain he remembers the degredation wrongly: "If not, why is this road lined thich with fern / and why do I feel no shame kicking the loose gravel home?" The overpowering size and shape makes his revelation seem very important, emotional, but free.

He reveals that he is now balanced, no longer needing extreme tension or collapsing into extreme relaxation. The forms of the poems adapt well to the subjects, yet he carefully controls them, freeing his imagination. The sense of discovery, and the balance of tense control and willingness to make the language supple enough to flow with experience, make this book resemble Lady. Still, White Center is not such a classic. White Center is too conventional; the language is not spiked enough by his rules of sound; and the mood is not dramatic enough to make it as famous as the earlier book.

* * *

The Right Madness of Skye quietly describes the island off the coast of Scotland where he and his family lived, supported by a Guggenheim grant, in 1977. "A Map of Skye" explains the desirability of that place: he needs a land that corresponds to his pleasures: recovery from depression, and discovery through restriction. The paradox, summed up succinctly in the first line: "We'll be confined and free," also describes the balance of qualities in his best poems. Those two words form the basis of his poetics as exhibited in most of

his books. To a degree, the more confined the structure and sound of the poem, the more free is his imagination. The poems which are not confined at all, such as the letters, show his mind obsessive, discovering nothing new, stuck with ordinary language and mundane emotions. The poems in Skye are not particularly confined: he does not write elliptically, trying to cut out every possible syllable; he does not restrict himself to regular meters, regular line or stanza lengths; he does not structure the poem according to rhyme; he does not limit himself to indirection in the content. Neither are the poems slack and formless. "A Map of Skye" contains medium length, conventional sentences. The rather high polysyllable count varies. The iambic/trochaic meter breaks down often: the first stanza leaves the meter 7 times, the second 13 times, and the third stanza 12 times. Mostly, extra unaccented syllables break the meter. Only in a few places do we find any noticable rhyme. The stanzas and line lengths vary. In spite of the relative freedom he allows himself, the poem sounds graceful. The extra unaccented syllables do not especially please the ear, but never become excessively awkward. The excellent ideas carry the poem. We can sense his mood of neediness by the repetition of the shrill assonance in "We'll be" and "We'll need." "A soft longing" sounds slow and haunting as it should. He is not intensely controlling the experience of the poem as he was in the first two books, or hopelessly involved in it as he was books like Lady. He is not depressed or slap-happy. But he is in touch with his emotions, however mild they are. This poem, written before his

journey, shows the balance characteristic of most of the book; but this poem feels much more comfortable because we understand the mood. Subtle as his need is, we can hear it in the sound repetitions and the many strong, muscular sentences, especially their insistent beginnings:

> We'll be confined and free. Roads end fast
> and water leads slow ways to open water.
> The harsh names on this map are Nordic,
> the soft words Gaelic. We can love there well
> grateful what is cruel ran out.
> Even ruins will be civil, moss on ruins,
> anger drained from ghost.
> The only irritants, a soft longing for mist to clear
> and a nagging feeling more should happen.
>
> It's happened already. That will be the charm.
> Not one isolated Indian war, relatively recent
> and forgotten, but Celtic memory way back
> primal things to hate kept smoldering. . . .
> England, Viking, the ninth century storm
> that leveled farm and tower, and the tower down
> the day of the invasion. It is all here
> in the names, the sound of broken bone and blood.
>
> We need that land of slow recovery, the grief passed

[no stanza break]

wife to daughter, some continuum of song
and we need bays that contain,
that promise a wider world beyond
the final promontory, as if travel
still involves the unknown. Read the roads.
A lot of switchbacks and a lot of time to find Portree.
And read the water, how salmon glow like swords
and checkpoints never run out. (12)

His intuition that people need "bays that contain, / that promise a wider world beyond" shows startling insight. Articulating the need of the disillusioned to feel that "travel / still involves the unknown" fills a great need readers have to see their private, vaguely troubling feelings expressed clearly and beautifully by another.

One sentence in the poem describes the slightly anxious feeling generated by most of the book: "The only irritants, a soft longing for mist to clear / and a nagging feeling something more should happen." In most of the other poems, the very neutral sound leaves us uncertain about how to respond. We sense that Hugo too is distanced from his feelings, hesitantly accepting his new calm. Several statements clarify the uneasy feeling imparted by the "recent peace, a composure we never quite trust / in family portraits" (34). He seems disconnected from the world and pain, and says "We want severed connections" (38). "Culloden," beginning with the apt phrase "Nothing seems right," says he has to trust the stories of battle because he can not imagine it. "We say, yes, yes, yes, we we hear the pipes, the

drums. / We see the charge. We hear the fatal screams. / / We are simply being polite" (47). He remains on the outside of strong emotion, only imagining "picnics, cold salmon and wine." "The Cairn in Loch An Duin" (53) shows him again wanting in to the center: "Is this all we will know of the dark, / bone dark under rock and just our / of dry reach?" Perhaps because now he is very intellectual in the poems, he no longer understands the depths. He continues: "It must have been planned, the cairn / set just beyond our wading range, / some message understood: leave us alone." He asks, "Dead, will we, without going mad / envy the town we see every day and can't enter?" The list questions reflects somewhat the sound of his desperation to be on the inside again. These relatively honest, emotional poems provide relief to the reader from the brilliantly disturbing composure of most of the other poems.

"The Standing Stones of Callaninsh", in which he circles a closed circle, also shows his difficulty in remembering history (48). Something lost forever to him is more than history however, but a solid pattern on which to base his feelings. Likewise, he does not structure the poem with his old rules. The intelligent idea of modern man's desire for an impossible pattern is the important element of the poem. The unintrusive sound, extremely irregular and unstressed, leaves the idea by itself. He speaks too calmly of all important matters. The content influences our uneasy reaction to the calmness. Only the ending sounds strong and assertive; he is asserting complete loss of anything to hold the world together:

See them in snow under a full moon they told me.
The shadows will take you out of yourself to when
the Stones were erected, the time it took and the reason
we try to guess today. Some claim, a way to tell time.
Others say, religion. I guess pattern itself,
the delight of pattern, and, if we ride birds,
center, circle and spoke looked down on lovely.
Contrast it with uncertain currents of sea,
gales that rip up what seemed
well rooted rock and send flying like suicidal stars.
These stones wear better than sky. See
the clouds in tatters and blue faded to weak cream
at noon with no explanation. Gales clear the grounds
of brochures torn in frustration at phrases--
`the dates are unknown´--`Herodotus states Abaris
told Ptolemy´--when? I try
to remember history and can´t get past World War 1.
I´ve walked around them twice, December in my bones,
knelt to get an angle on the two long rows
going north from the hub, one direction I´ve alwaysbelieved.
And I´ve calculated the weight of the one big one
and guessed the number of men it took and the work
to bring it from Wales where some say it´s from,
a special barge that wobbled and rode high without cargo,

[no stanza break]

and that special day they put it in place and settled
the way they´d hoped and it held. That was long before
people knew how to cheer, shake hands or offer a toast.
I imagine them resting a moment, then grim with resolve
starting down to the sea to get to the next stone,
and one woman thought strange but obeyed,
urging them on and muttering hard at the sky
a word we´ve lost. It sounded like `shape.´ It meant `world.´

More superficially, the neutral sound seems right for the curious wanderings of a charming foriegner. Taking the sense of release from the past one step further than the previous book, he seems to moves, lightly in most poems, beyond thoughts of the past. He needs no sound to express the irrational, overpowering, unspeakable feeliings. He does not pack the sentences with words used strangely in new contexts, because he no longer performs heat-induced alchemy. The sound no longer writhes as it did in Lady, as he hints in "Ness":

If you find me
broken and babbling on rock, listen very hard.
The tongue may be dated. If you pick up a phrase
you can match it with words on that scrap of paper.
You found it in Wind. You don´t worship wind any more. (50)

The book is relatively happy, the poems often delicate: "Open bright sky, and I look across Uig bay / and ru Chorachan to the river cascading / nine miles away down the Waternish cliff" (14). Even the poems which are angry easily express normal, justified feelings. Now

that he has escaped his obsessions, and the poems sound less eccentric, the sequences no longer flail around and his subjects, though focused on death, are more varied. We see him curiously poking around Skye, fantasizing about legends and imagining the past. He no longer churns so much in private despair. In Contemporary Literature he shows his surprise over the change:

> I always assumed I was a hermetic poet and how I ended up so public is beyond me. . . . At one time I thought just the sound of the words themselves would be interesting enough. I've always had that in me. But finally it became a bigger thing, that is to say, I've tended to open up more in the poems. It's a side of my nature that won out. (145)

He describes the progress of his changing career in "Langaing", a poem which shows more commitment, more certainty than most in the book:

> We are what we hear. A well known singer died
> yesterday in Spain. Thirty-five years ago
> I got fired for sneaking off to hear him. I sobbed
> "sorry" at the foreman, fired days later himself.
> I cast blue nylon high over water turned black
> by peat and light diminished by heavy Highland low sky.
> I heard music and lost my job. I've not worked hard since
> on anything but words, though I fish all waters
> devoted and hum old songs when I fish alone.
>
> [stanza break]

I hum "My Heart is Taking Lessons," a song
the dead singer sang. I hum "I Had the Words and You
in My Heart." I remember him singing that.
I hum flat and off key, but that's hardly my fault,
the lack of gift, of training. In this lake (read `loch'
to be local) trout run black as the water though Scots
like us call them `browns,' the old Scots, `Loch Levin!"
I hum "Makes No Difference Now," the best recording
the dead singer made and he left lots of good records.

To relax, to slide with, ride the forces of whatever
sweeps us along, jokes well timed, phrasing under control--
that was my ideal. I didn't come close in real life.
A soft impulse was proof I was weak. I laughed
at any weak jokes, still do, and believed our purpose
to lighten the day, to be tougher than fate.
In reaction to that, I believed we should give into pathos.
Today I believe: fish hard and hum every tune
I remember hearing the dead singer sing
and leave believing in being like him to others.

Does that make us brothers? Let's be. My bobber
jitters and I know it isn't just wind. I set my line
too soon and lose the black brown. The eagle yells
from the Quaring, "Go easy. Give him time to take it."

[no stanza break]

I hum "White Christmas," though I never liked it.
Snow on mainland mountains across the minch (if you're
American read `straight') reminds me I'm fishing
late in the season. I may be breaking Scot law.

Christ, what rain and no real Jesus in it.
No real king. No friend. What lover first inserted a tongue
in a lover's ear? And where? It must have been pre-
Polopelosian war. It must have been pre-all
language and hunger, and located song prior to lyris.
Fishing preceeded song. We know this from instinct,
not records. I've finished this loch often before
and alone with my ghosts felt free to sing.
I've got a brown on. My line is writing a song.

I'm fishing. I'm singing. My heart is not exactly
giving lessons though I've been lucky enough in rate
moments to take heart in some words, and to have
a job teaching others to sing, to locate by game
some words like `brown' in black water, to cast
hard for that word, then wait a long time to set.
Now the reeling in, the fight, the black trout lovely
on heather, the dead singer in songs
we recover, and hum when alone, and hum wrong. (41)

He obviously is describing the tough pose in the first two books, which gives way to pathos in the Italian book, What Thou Lovest, and

the letters. Now he wants to create beauty for others, to celebrate life. He searches out his words to sing with, this time finding "brown" in Skye. The poem sums up his life like an essay, but the action works with the sound to keep it a poem. He integrates the direct statements, though rather unnaturally, with memories of the singer and fishing; concreteness keeps the poem from being lethally discursive. Some sentences can be short because they do not all describe calm thoughts; some express immediate action. Because of the events, the emotions in the poem can vary. Reptition of phrases in different stanzas points out his changing orientation. Because of these changes in action, emtotion, and sound, the poem is adequate. But it does not sing. The rhythm substitues nothing pleasing for regularity. The awkward asides about different wording work with the theme of finding the right words, but feebly attempt a casual, almost humorous tone that is too relaxed and self-consciously unpoetic. The awkward language such as "In reaction to that" surprises in a poem about beauty. The poem is wordy and disjointed, perhaps too easily symbolic. His overly relaxed attitude, shown in the light, secure, unpolished sound, strengthen the greeting card affinities of his new motivation for writing. Even the song titles sound sentimental and self-indulgent. He expresses his relief in Contemporary Literature that though he lacks the motivation resulting from self-hatred, he can still write (144).

In Skye, he is more concerned with art than with revealing his troubles. The sound, though at times too easy and discursive, is

superior to a completely discursive one. Still, though he is now free to make his poems pretty, most of the tortured poems of Lady and many of the early poems struggling through inarticulateness are more beautiful. The sound of "Carloway Beach," for example, a poem full of numbers, approaches ugliness: "Within two centuries / we'd upped the ante to 30, / moved out of the broch and into stone huts" (50). Paradoxically, when he opens up this fully, he can not reach us deeply through sound. His delicate, fairy tale sound mixed jarringly with toughness and honesty corresponds to the subtle content: "Doesn't the tinkle of a far off cow bell though faint / explode you out of sleep?" (28). In the book, anger--"died of exposure, 4 A.M., 40 yards from home" (20) mixes with casual humor--"Head on he looks like a bat. / Bela Lugosi's returned, I say" (18). In some poems, the well-planned reflexive structures and the evocative mood of myth substitute for sound as a means to great poetry that reaches deep emotions.

We can see the reflexive structure where his old theme of overcoming depression recurs, in two beautiful poems about legends. The fairy tale and the tough mix surprisingly: "These tiny wise creatures, you'd better believe, / have lived through it all." He has enough distance on his transitional phase to form it completely into art. "Glen Uig" (24) tells us to believe in a couple who identify with tiny elves that have been through hard times: "Believe you and I sing tiny / and wise and could if we had to eat stone and go on." The poem progresses conventionally from stanza to stanza: now that he does not let tangential thinking carry him through the poem, he can arrange

more sophisticated structures. His longstanding preoccupation with other versions of the self in the poem becomes more complex here. The reflexive relationships of the characters, including the speaker, are refined into an avant-guarde kind of writing that moves beyond working with sound and emotion.

Another personal fairy tale poem, "Sneaosdal" (26) concerns the phantom water horse who disquises himself in other forms for destructive purposes:

> What a walk. First mile uphill. The road
> went rock to peat to mud. The final
> five hundred yards we floundered through lumpy swamp.
> Whatever we've read in old novels, it's no fun
> to walk in heather, and we'd have to cut this wind
> in half to enjoy a kiss on the moor.
> We believe him worth it, the legend
> of this loch: Each usige, water-horse.
> Hasn't he kept us in terror all our lives?
> This is where he lives, in this eerie black water
> tucked in behind the crag
> that rises like a bad past between our faces
> and all of the afternoon sun. We know his disguises:
> gentleman of the evening, sheep dog, normal horse.
> And we know he comes to our village for no reason
> other than to frighten what we used to call maidens
>
> [no stanza break]

or to kill the mayor
we've never been organized enough to elect.
He's not drunk with power. He comes
just now and then when least expected, when
we enjoy an innocent picnic
or go to the store. Sometimes
we think we see him and don't. A dog looks wrong
in certain light or one horse won't run with the others
exhilerated by gales. When we see a man,
white tie and tails, given our lives we know
that much charm is suspect. We lock our doors
when a lone hawk seems to enjoy the storm.
He hasn't come for so long, today we've tracked him
to his home. We had a hard time finding you.
We were wet and cold. The blackface sheep resent us.
The shepherd won't return our wave. With the world
on its way to certain disaster, can't you reappear,
rise slimy and majestic out of the loch and snort
at least one minor threat to keep us in line?
Or are we out of monsters? Are we now reduced
to sensible conclusions like empty water,
with no one more interesting than ourselves to fear?
We take the long walk back, mud to peat
to rock, the last mile easy downhill.

[no stanza break]

Our car has never waited for us this long before.
We are embarrassed by what we hold in,
the hopeful and hopeless child that wants to cry--
We saw him. We saw him. He is really there.

He describes it objectively at first, but once he says he and his companion have tracked down the water horse, Hugo begins addressing it as "you" in an uppity tone, asking it to appear. He wonders if they are out of monsters, "reduced / to sensible conclusions like empty water, / with no one more interesting that ourselves to fear?" The loss of loss puzzles him; he realizes that he can not keep blaming his upbringing for his problems. The beginning sentences, short and out of breath, tell that he expects a monster after his climb. For most of the poem, the sentences are long, matter-of-fact explanations. Then he pleads with and accuses the water horse in shorter sentences. His childlike need shortens the ending sentences even more: "hopeful and hopeless child that wants to cry-- / We saw him. We saw him. He is really there." The poem, though tight and well-crafted, resembles fiction: the one stanza narrative creates suspense and employs the prose techniques of making speech patterns realistic and expressive. The legendary symbols in the book make the poems reflexive, about narratives. The fiction-like form and sound work effectively to help the poem like a fairy tale, mysteriously penetrating to our inner selves. This poem does not need his old sound techniques to sneak into our subconscious. It keeps a sense of discovery because he makes up a myth rather than simply telling the bare facts.

The book ends with the mildly zany title poem (61) about faking his death in the spirit of the right madness for Skye. The lines, though long and wild, mostly combine short sentences commanding, questioning, startling, exclaming, and teasing: "Are we on course again? Good. Isle of Skye, right? / This is the day of my death. Only feigned tears, like I ordered". Each sentence beginning interrupts the rhythm, usually with iambics or spondees, making the lines seem jerky, tossed off, slap-happy, and spontaneous. His categories of possible responses have expanded: he does not "posses" any of the places on the island; neither does he fight the unknown. Now he embraces what he does not know about the island, and about life.

* * *

The reception of the final two books is almost homogenously good, if less passionate and controversial; this reaction is to be expected because he takes few risks and displays few personal faults. Most reviewers consider the books together. Robert Shaw says the poems are not interesting as verse because Hugo tries, like many other Americans, to write something that is as close to prose as possible. The nondescript style cannot attempt subtle effects, but it is flexible, and livelier than expected; the take-it-or-leave-it tone is attractive. Hugo is moral and tough (497). Michael Allen hears assonance, rhyme, and dance (1981, 312). Peter Stitt says he has never written better and he has always been one of the best, most careful craftsmen (187). According to North American Review, the Hugo poem, half epistle, half confession, has dozens of published imitators and

the books are good to give to poets and to poetry haters (70). A reviewer for Library Journal is impatient with White Center's oppressive sameness of flat, unfigurative poems fixating on self and the past. He is thrilled by the difference in Skye: its strange hard beats that his poems have not had for years. Still, his poems remain suseptible to overwhelming sentiment (1980, 1087). Carolyn Lembeck neutrally describes the book's theme (29). Michael Allen published a solid, but unsurprising book about Hugo, called We are Called Human, in 1982 and A Trout in the Milk, a sentimental book of essays and poems about him, appeared the same year.

The Rhetoric of Contemporary Literature, 1980, a book by Jonathan Holden, includes an important chapter on Hugo. He defends Hugo from the attacks of the supremely influential critic, Marjorie Perloff, at the recent MLA convention. She had used Hugo, citing "In Your Young Dream," as an example of conservative, Wordworthian poetry, the plague of contemporary writing. Hugo is far from avant-garde; he is pre-modernist, she said. Ashbery is post-modernist because of discontinuity, irony, incoherence, and irreducibility. Holden points out the narrowness of her vision and the problems with all her historical categories. He shows Hugo differernces from Wordsworth. Holden sees sardonic humor and parody in Hugo's dream poems, and gives his own reasons for calling them avant-guard. and parody, really are, for reasons different than hers. He says Hugo is "one of a handful in the country willing to forge beautiful lines, to create hauntingly lovely sounds." The music embodies the theme. His poems are

irreducible because one can not explicate them: idea and feeling are assimilated in music; form and content are one (112-135). Even going by Perloff's standards of irrationality, irony, and discontinuity, Hugo is avant-garde.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Critics seriously undermine our appreciation of Hugo when they concentrate on his objectified themes of decay in small Western towns, the beauties of nature, and the mistakes of war. His use of sound should make it clear that these uninspiring themes are symbols for his inner turmoil, but not the center of his poems. Except in his period of writing lax poems which are completely idea oriented, he is not preaching a simple message but trying to come to terms with his intense emotional handicaps, which many people share in some way. He does so by exploring the sound of his irrationally persistant mood.

In his poems throughout his career, we can see him wavering between the tense sound speaking to the unconscious, and the relaxed sound of the conscious. The vacillation produces variable quality, moderate variety, adaptation to express his emotional states, and integration of sound and content. Differences in the tense, sound oriented poems and the relaxed, idea oriented poems result largely from the degree of control he exerts. Jacks, Kapowsin, and Lady are all very good, sound oriented books, using the tense sound with increasing flexibility. Only the idea oriented poems in Jacks fail. The stronger poems in Jacks show us nature in new ways, and hint at man's complicated relationship to the earth, a relationship that is virtually impossible to understand and express directly. Kapowsin,

even more than Jacks, captures the despair of small town life which contrasts with a life affirming relationship with nature; his disturbing suppressed anger makes his words reverberate. Control over nature and the towns correspond to the control he struggles to maintain over himself and the poetry. He cannot lift the control enough to successfully form or explore relationships with people. In Lady, the mood behind the sound becomes clearer and freer. Now that he recognzes and confronts his anger and needs, the sound becomes supple enough to follow the movement of his violent thoughts. He exerts only enough control over his emotions to make sure they are not escapist or dishonest, and only enough control over the poems to keep them firm and muscular enough to embody the athletic emotions. The poems are both sound and content oriented, in the precariously correct balance. The energy is exhilerating.

Good Luck combines a few good sound oriented, toned-down versions of the poems in Lady, with unstable idea oriented poems about the war. He embraces all emotions, no matter how sentimental. In his newfound sense of freedom, he feels no need to control anything. He approaches his themes more and more directly. Because the poems are not written out of compulsion but for plain communication with the readers, he does not use sound to explore the inarticulate areas of his deepest self. What Thou Lovest, and the letter poems are idea oriented, weak books never leaving his very private feelings and past. His lack of control is achingly obvious both in his life and the poems. The slack sounds shows that poems are no longer sense organs, but cognitive. He

does not use sound as a means of discovery.

The dream poems, White Center, and The Right Madness of Skye, show him gaining a sense of reality and proportion. He has lost his need for either excessive control or lack of control. The poems are actually neither sound nor idea oriented; they seem rather lost and diffuse, not oriented at all. However, as he does in Lady, here again, he uses sophisticated techniques to make the sound follow the action--this time being mental action. He demonstrates that he can handle a more conventional style; the new man he has become is conventional. The poems are good, but now that they lack the tension of juggling opposites, the balance seems somewhat insipid. The poems are not so striking or emotionally affecting. But they show him to be charming and more self aware. They allow humor, changing tones, and sophisticated structures. Hugo is more secure; the poems bear little resemblence to his brilliant but desperate early work.

The phrase from Skye, "we'll be confined and free," sums up his work. A hard won balance of both impulses results in his best poetry, such as Lady. His early work uses extreme confinement to produce freedom from obsessive thoughts; but he uses so much confinement that his emotions are too locked up to be expressed. Books such as What Thou Lovest try to reach freedom without restriction and fall flat, not even attaining any real freedom. The final poems show the two impulses no longer pitted against each other. Because he feels no compulsion to confine himself anymore, and has attained personal freedom, the productive tension is gone, along with the risks of

excessive control or relaxation. Other matters gain more importance, such as humor, reflexivity, and complicated structures.

We can also follow his trends by looking at the degree to which he is compelled to struggle to discover something for himself. We can see, in his early poems, his difficulty in getting his meaning across because of his reticence, a penchant for indirection, and strict poetic rules. The more difficulty he has setting forth his ideas, the more the poems have a sense of discovery and surprising lines, rich images, emotional symbols, integration with the settings, and beautiful, affecting sound. Suggestion through imagery, experience and sound produces better writing than direct communication, though the accessibility of his more direct poems makes him more acceptable, more like other popular poets.

Poems written for the public, on subjects on which he "ought to" write, in styles which are popular, filled with explanations, or created to elicit sympathy, disappoint in their content and the generally relaxed sound. Those poems he is compelled to write for himself make good use of powerful sound to create and express strong content. He shares himself. His last two books, which do not have a sense of obsession, are not written to tell the readers something; he wants nothing from the readers--no pity or adoration. He simply loves to make something beautiful for us and seems to do it rather easily. The poems are things of beauty, but not so much a part of the man. In most of the poems, the less disturbing sound lets us finally listen to what the words say, without reading into them as much inarticulated

significance. The sound makes his words graceful and appealing to pay attention to.

For most of his career, Hugo's distinctive use of sound causes problems. Some critics see his poems as ugly, overdone, and clumsy, because of the driving but often irregular iambs, the hard consonants and stark monosyllables, and the choppy sentences. The dense, tense sound, appropriate to tortured emotions under restraint, does not fit all kinds of moods. If he uses the sound for the wrong subject the poem baffles; if he relies only on the tense type of sound, therefore, he cannot change moods. Likewise, he restricts himself to monotonous themes. Though he does change themes and sounds in his career people connect his name with the period that made him famous and see the other poems as unimportant tangents, which they sometimes are. The charge of montotony which results is not founded.

Another problem is that years of imposing strict discipline on himself, and struggling with indirect statement, cause him to react by going to the other extreme. We can tell that he abandoned his standards in Good Luck, What Thou Lovest, and the letter poems, in which he desperately needs quick, direct communication. Because he has learned to rely on tight sound, when he does not use it, he produces slack sound and content. This failure might lead one to question his genius in any area but the musical.

An unfortunate reason for his success is that his dramatic and tight sounds arise from emotional problems. He feels he should be tough and brave. He cannot accept that he can succeed in anything. He

is not even sure he wants to. This link in itself may cast a poor light on his accomplishment. One cannot help thinking of his books as the confessions and self-therapy of a neurotic artist. Once he becomes more able and willing to communicate, and be optimistic, he loses his special sound. But it is his talent that allows him to face and express his problems in spite of the difficulties. In the last books, he simply has the courage to give up the worn-out pose and use his talent for less dramatic and motr immediately gratififying aspects of poetry.

Obviously, then, he risks failure by using his particular, overwhelming sound based style. His outrageous sound and disconnected, tangential thinking require control, maturity, and an appropriate subject to keep the poems from being ridiculous and incoherent. His indirect communication risks being lost on literal-minded readers. And he often does lose control, sounding theatrical, and self-indulgent. He only attains maturity in his last book. He can only handle the few subjects which correspond to his type of sound. Often he tries to branch out and fails. Someone imitating him should learn from Hugo's risks and limitations; he should also take as a warning the link between the sound and Hugo's own troubled personality.

His sound, however, has overwhelming advantages. His method of composing for the music allows him to make emotional and imaginative leaps, tap his unconscious, keep a sense of discovery, and avoid rigidity. The sound, integrated with the content, expresses meanings which directly stated ideas could not. Although obsessively exploring

certain sounds leads to monotony of theme, the practice allows great surprises in the individual lines. If readers can remember to judge him by his best quality, rather than by his themes, he will retain his reputation.

Writing from sound also helps him to understand his problems, allowing him to grow and progress through his career. Therefore, though the themes may be montonous in each book, as he takes them to their limits, his themes make great changes over the years. For example, the restraint in the poems of Jacks show him the folly of his tough pose. The sentimentality of later poems show him that one should not wallow in such feelings.

His sound makes him successful. Now that readers have gotten used to his unique style, the music of his potentially depressing poems has wide appeal. His distinctive voice arises from his innovative use of sound very different from the norm. The music also gives him a voice authoritative and beautiful enough to make slightly surreal, far fetched metaphors. In part, because of their softer, more open sound, other poets could not manage such extreme emotions captured in bizarre images without seeming silly and overly "poetic." Hugo's skill and intelligence is obvious in the first lines, prompting the reader to finish the poem. We can accept anything Hugo says in the poems with consistently well-done sound. An imitator who learns from Hugo's mistakes can make good use of his advice in Triggering Town and of his powerful, compact sound produced by extreme discipline and honesty. Monosyllables, ellision, powerful stresses, iambics, and sound

repetion are good tools to try, even in more experimental, free form works. An imitator should also not forget to study Hugo's less unique, but masterful use of sound in his later books. Besides being less obviously Hugo's property, the use of lighter sound can be effective and it allows one to concentrate on other aspects of poetry.

We can learn by studying Hugo's poems, which are not so monotonous and clumsy as people often believe them to be. His heavy sound is always carefully employed to express deep emotional states. His method of composing words in tune with the sound keeps his thought patterns from becoming rigid. His trademark depressing themes of small town decay and the beauty of nature are really beside the point. The important emphasis, the battle of impulses staged through language, is energetic and compelling. Once we shift our concern from the stale and uninspiring general subjects which cause many readers to avoid Hugo's books, we can see that the sound and the real content are intrinsically joined, more so than with most other poets. His weak poems speak for themselves. But the true content of his good poems cannot be understood completely except through the sound. And through sound, they can be understood in a way that fully takes advantage of the medium of poetry, and engages our whole being.

Looking at Hugo's poems instensively, we can discover a paradox in human nature: a pose may lead one to one's inner self. Hugo first employed the hard sounds to cover up the softness of which he was ashamed. He used strict discipline because he felt he was a sissy. He paid attention to sound to avoid his natural thought patterns. He used

all this avoidance and surface show to discover and express what lay below the surface. Of course, the books he wrote in the middle of his career suggest that he actually could be a soft sissy if he gave in to his weakness. But once he did, he overcame that problem, as we can see in the maturity of the final books. The strength of sound and form exhibit health, not compulsion. The other, more disturbing paradox is that those poems written out of compulsion are more appealing and vital.

Works Consulted

Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Choice 15 (1978): 88.

Allen, Dick. "The Gift to Be Simple." Rev. of The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir. Poetry 124 (1974): 103-16.

Allen, Michael. Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Western American Literature 13 (1978): 174-75.

---. Rev. of Selected Poems. Western American Literature 15 (1981): 308.

---. We Are Called Human. Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1982.

---. Rev. of White Center and The Right Madness on Skye. Western American Literature 15 (1981): 312-13.

Rev. of A Run of Jacks. Library Journal 1 Feb. 1962: 564.

Rev. of A Run of Jacks. London Times Literary Supplement 3 Aug. 1962: 559.

Blodgett, E.D. "Richard F. Hugo: Poet of the Third Dimension." Modern Poetry Studies 1 (1970): 268-72.

Burke, Kenneth. "On Musicality in Verse." The Philosophy of Literary Form. 3rd. ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 1973: 369-378.

Carruth, Hayden. "Gods Aside . . . ." Rev. of Making Certain It Goes On. American Book Review Nov/Dec. 1984: 13.

Cotter, James. Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Hudson Review 32 (1978): 207-17.

Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Choice 2 (1965): 483.

Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Virginia Quarterly Review 41 (1965): cxxi, cxxiv.

Davis, Lloyd. "Semi-Tough: Richard Hugo's `Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg.'" A Book of Rereadings. Ed. Gred Kuzma. Crete, Nebr: Best Cellar Press, 1979: 198-204.

Demos, John. Rev. of Good Luck in Cracked Italian. Library Journal 15 Feb. 1970: 671.

Dillon, David. "Gains Made in Isolation: An Interview with Richard Hugo." Southwest Review 62 (1977): 101-15.

Friedman, Sanford. "Torn Divinities." Modern Poetry Studies 4 (1973): 344-49.

Fussell, Paul. "How to Sing of a Diminished Thing." Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Saturday Review 3 July 1965: 30-31.

Garber, Frederick. "Fat Man at the Margin: the Poetry of Richard Hugo." Iowa Review 3.4 (1972): 58-69.

Garber, Frederick. "Large Man in the Mountains: the Recent Work of Richard Hugo." Western American Literature 4 (1975): 205-18.

Garber, Frederick. "On Richard Hugo and William Stafford." Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. American Poetry Review 9 (1980): 16-17.

Gardiner, Thomas. "Interview with Richard Hugo." Contemporary Literature 22. 2 (1981): 139-151.

Gerstenberger, Donna. "On Hills Going East." A Trout in the Milk: a Composite Portrait of Richard Hugo. Jack Meyers, ed. Lewiston, Ohio: Confluence Press, 1982. 207-221.

Gerstenberger, Donna. Richard Hugo. Boise: Boise State U, 1983.

Gibson, Margaret. Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Library Journal 102 (1977): 2166.

Gilbert, Jack. Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Kenyon Review 28 (1966): 131-32.

Rev. of Good Luck in Cracked Italian. Publishers's Weekly 22 Sept. 1969: 79.

Grosholz, Emily. Rev. of Selected Poems. Hudson Review 33 (1980): 293-308.

Helms, Allen. "Writing Hurt: the Poetry of Richard Hugo." Modern Poetry Studies 9 (1978): 106-18.

Holden, Jonathan. "Instant Wordsworth." The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1980. 112-36.

Holland, Robert. Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Poetry 179 (1978): 346-54.

Howard, Richard. "A Beginning, a Middle, and an End to Terminus." Rev. of Good Luck in Cracked Italian. Poetry 119 (1971): 34-39.

Howard, Richard. "Richard Hugo: Why Track Down Unity When the Diffuse is So Exacting?" Alone with America: Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States since 1950. New York: Atheneum, 1969. 232-46.

Hugo, Richard. 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. New York: W.W. Norton, 1977.

---. A Run of Jacks. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1961.

---. Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965.

---. Good Luck in Cracked Italian. New York: World Publishing Company,

1969.

---. Selected Poems. New York: W. W. Norton, 1980.

---. The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir. New York: W. W. Norton, 1975.

---. The Right Madness on Skye: Poems. New York: W. W. Norton, 1980.

---. The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Creative Writing. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.

---. What Thou Lovest Remains American. New York: W. W. Norton, 1975.

---. White Center. New York: W. W. Norton, 1980.

---. "The Obsessive Ear: Remarks on the Craft of Poetry." New Collage 1.3 (1971): np.

---. "The Writer's Sense of Place." South Dakota Review 13 (Autumn, 1975): 30.

---. "The Writer's Situation." New American Review 11 (1971): 221-24.

"Interview with Richard Hugo." New Salt Creek Reader 6 (1974): 84-109.

Jackson, Richard. "The Scattered Self." Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Prairie Schooner 52 (1978): 292-95.

Jacobsen, Kent. "An Authority of Sorts." Rev. of The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir. Library Journal 1 April 1973: 1173.

Kennedy, X. J. "Sometimes It's the Sound that Counts." Rev. of A Run of Jacks. New York Times Book Review 15 July 1962: 4.

Krapf, Norbert. Rev. of The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir. Library Journal 1 April 1973: 1173.

Lazer, Hank. "The Letter Poem." Northwest Review 19:1-2 (1981): 235-

45.

Lembeck, Carolyn. Rev. of White Center. Best Sellers 40.1 (1980): 29.

Logan, William. Rev. of Selected Poems. Library Journal 1 Oct. 1979: 2103.

Martz, Louis. "Recent Poetry: Looking for a Home." Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Yale Review 55 (1966): 458-69.

Mayo, E. L. "A Kind of Liberation." Rev. of Good Luck in Cracked Italian Northwest Review 10.3 (1970): 115-18.

McCloskey, Mark. Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Poetry 107 (1965): 125-27.

Meyers, Jack, ed. A Trout in the Milk: A Composite Portrait of Richard Hugo. Lewiston, Idaho: Confluence Press, 1981.

Molesworth, Charles. Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Georgia Review 32 (1978): 683-88.

Osborne, J. K. "A Conversation with Richard Hugo." Madrona 3.8 (1974): 45-71.

Perloff, Marjorie. "Roots and Blossoms." Rev. of The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir. Washington Post Book World 16 Sept. 1973: 6-7.

Pritchard, William. "Despairing at Styles." Rev. of What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American. Poetry 127 (1976): 292-302.

Ramsey, Paul. Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Sewanee Review 86 (1978): 454-60.

Rexroth, Kenneth. "Written in America." Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. New York Times Book Review 21 Feb. 1965: 4, 14.

Sale, Roger. "New Poems, Ancient and Modern." Rev. of Death of the Kapowsin Tavern. Hudson Review 18 (1965): 299-308.

Schevill, James. "Experience in Image, Sound, and Rhythm." Rev. of A Run of Jacks. Saturday Review 5 May 1962: 24-26.

Rev. of Selected Poems. Choice 16 (1979): 1308.

Shaw, Robert. "Utensils Down the Drain." Rev. of The Right Madness on Skye. Nation 2231 (1980): 476-78.

Simmons, T. Rev. of Selected Poems. Christian Science Monitor 13 Aug. 1971: B1.

Smith, Dave. Rev. of What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American. Library Journal 1 May 1975: 858.

Stafford, William and Richard Hugo. "The Third Time the World Happens: A Dialoque between William Stafford and Richard Hugo." Northwest Review 13.3 (1973): 26-47.

Stitt, Peter. "Purity and Impurity in Poetry." Rev. of White Center and The Right Madness on Skye. Georgia Review 35 (1981): 182-89.

Vendler, Helen. "FalsePoets and Real Poets." Rev. of What Thou LovestWell, Remains American. New York Times Book Review 1 Sept. 1975: 6-8.

Vernon, John. Rev. of Selected Poems. Western Humanities Review 33 (1979): 351-55.

Rev. of What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American. Choice 12 (1975): 842.

Rev. of White Center and The Right Madness on Skye. Library Journal. 105 (1980): 1087.

Rev. of White Center and The Right Madness on Skye. North America Review 265.4 (1980): 70.

Williams, Norm. "Richard Hugo and the Poetics of Failure." Yale Literary Magazine 146: 4-5.

Wright, James. "Explorations, Astonishments." Fresco 1.3 (1961): 153-4.

Yenser, Stephen. Rev. of 31 Letters and 13 Dreams. Yale Review 68 (1978): 83-97.

Young, Vernon. "The Body of Man." Rev. of What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American. Hudson Review 28 (1975): 593-95.

Zwinger, Susan. "An Interview with Richard Hugo." The Daily Iowan 29 Jan. 1971: 4.