Muthos as Logos: The Concept of Truth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes

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1. Introduction

My dissertation deals with the quest for truth in the poetry of Ted Hughes, as made manifest through tropes such as metaphor, paradox and anthropomorphism. For Hughes, poetry seems to represent a truth-revealing process with the potential of enabling the human being to establish contact with the world-as-it-really-is. Not as an empirically comprehensible entity, but as a presence that seems at once terrifyingly familiar and alien to human comprehension. In short, I will argue that the poetry represents an approach to truth governed by the multitude of traditions and meanings incorporated in the concept of *logos*. Interestingly, the poetry seems to acquire its driving force through the impenetrability of metaphor and the non-reconciliatory force of paradox. With Hughes, the paradox generally lies in the poetry's refusal to unite in singular, coherent meanings. It remains obscure to the extent that truth can only be found in the opposing, multifarious meanings of the words and phrases. Similarly, the Hughesian metaphor appears to be tautegorical in the sense that it is not constructed on the basis of similarity. This statement is inspired by Schelling's claim that myth refers only to itself as truth as well as Hans Blumenberg's definition of the 'absolute metaphor' as an expression that cannot be reversed into a logical sphere of thought and reasoning. For Blumenberg, philosophical and scientific language is built upon a number of absolute metaphors that express truth. These metaphors do not refer to some thing else and are consequently not transferable into any other type of discourse. The indeterminacy and lack of allegorical reference dominating this kind of metaphorical expression seem to result from it being an expression only of itself as truth. Truth, in this context, has nothing to do with Platonic 'agreement', but has everything to do with letting something be seen, or, to quote Heidegger: 'The 'Being-true' of *logos* as *aletheia* means that in *legein* as *discourse* the entities *of which* one is talking must be taken out of their

hiddenness, one must let them be seen as something unhidden (*aletheia*), that is, they must be *discovered* (Heidegger 1962: 56).

Due to the indeterminate basis of the metaphorical expression, it might seem difficult to establish a terminology capable of adequately analysing and describing these poetic processes. In order to establish a framework, however, I intend to employ the concepts *muthos* and *logos* as points of departure. In this paper, I will discuss the various meanings of *muthos* and *logos* as they have been interpreted within a Western metaphysical tradition, in order to establish a foundation on which to base my investigations into the truth-revealing processes in the poetry of Ted Hughes. *Muthos* and *logos* incorporate and generate innumerable nuances, gaps and possibilities of truth, not just as a dynamic binary, but as movements contained within and transcending the operation of language. In order to make use of these terms within an analytical context, however, it is mandatory to investigate the premises that underpin an understanding of *logos* and/or *muthos*. In Christian tradition, *logos* is God, both as the word and as the will of God. In philosophical tradition, it represents a window into what is. I distinguish between two general definitions of truth (*logos*), that is, between Plato's understanding of *logos* as truth in the shape of an analytical tool revealing a world that is definable in logical terms, and Heidegger's designation of *logos* as disclosing truth present within and beyond specific discourse. In relation to the latter's definition of *logos* I will also discuss a chapter of Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, in which Nancy, by founding his discussion on readings of Heidegger and Bataille, shows how literature may function as a *muthos* which opens up to *logos*. In order to determine the functions of *muthos* and *logos* within my dissertation, it seems relevant to discuss them within the context of these philosophical traditions. A clarification of the foundation underlying my readings of the terms will enable me to employ them as a basis for the study of metaphor and as epistemological points of departure in relation to the quest for truth within the poetic universe of Ted Hughes.

2. A transition from muthos to logos?

In philosophical tradition, the Greek *muthos* and *logos* were originally used interchangeably. Although etymologically unrelated, they belong to the same semantic field as both nouns, among other things, can mean 'word'. Their verbal forms, moreover, *mythein* and *legein,* both mean 'to speak'. The pre-Socratics frequently used the two terms synonymously. According

to Marcel Detienne, in his book *The Creation of Mythology, muthos* was a synonym for *logos* in various contexts throughout the sixth century and even in the first half of the fifth century (Detienne 1986: 45). Detienne holds that the scholarly work of philosophers from Xenophanes to Empedocles 'belies the opinion of our contemporaries who attribute to "rational thinking" the purpose of eliminating any other form of thought such as "myth" in the sense of sacred narrative or discourse on the subject of the gods' (1986: 46). In establishing rules for addressing the deity, Xenophanes says that men should sing 'with auspicious texts (*muthoi*) and pure words (*logoi*)' (Xenophanes 1992: 1.21-22). This quotation attests to the neutral status of *muthos*, which Detienne also finds in the philosophical work of Parmenides and Empedocles (1986: 46). Increasingly, however, the differences between the two became an issue in Greek philosophical writings. *Muthos*, belonging to an oral tradition where elements such as chanting and repetition worked to convey what one might term a trans-logical truth, was increasingly regarded as inferior to the rational and balanced arguments of *logos*. According to Detienne, we can detect this tendency in Pindar and Herodotus, in whose works any mention of myth is rare (1986: 47). In fact, Pindar states that *muthos* was born of rumour and demands that it must be cast aside and removed from the ranks of 'reliable witnesses' (Pindar 1997: 1. 54). For Pindar, it seems, myths represent only the illusion of real life and not the true word, the *logos* (Detienne 1986: 48). The result of this reasoning was that *muthos* and *logos* developed into concepts with opposing status, one belonging to a category of unreliable fiction, whereas the other acquired status as bearer of truth.

By the time of Platonic philosophy they had been established as binaries both as far as form and fundamental significance were concerned. *Muthodes* now designated the marvellous, that which was suited to oral expression and the poetic genres (*Rep* 522a8; *Tim* 26e5), while *alethinos logos* characterised truthful, verifiable discourse. The concept of *muthos* thus came to be regarded as non-rational fiction, whereas *logos* was placed in a category of rigorous analysis and the strict ordering of conceptual material. This mode of rigid classification was more or less concomitant with the transition from oral to written discourse, whereby *logos* came to mean demonstrative truth. Even so, Platonic philosophy makes room for *muthos* through the compound *mythology*. One might assume this compound to subordinate *muthos* effectively within the rational hegemony of *logos*. Some scholars, indeed, regard it as an effacement of *muthos*, that is, a refusal to retain it as an independent, sanctified practice. Although

muthos still has a mediating function, it is only seen to benefit the state within the paradigm of the logical reasoning that had come to dominate Greek consciousness. Figurative language was superfluous within philosophy and furthermore belonged primarily to rhetoric, the art of persuasion, which Plato viewed with great suspicion. As argued by Nickolas Pappas, the primary function of myth within Platonic philosophy is merely to remind the reader that there is a higher tribunal of justice than the poetic imagination (Pappas 1995: 216). This view is also adopted by Luc Brisson who, in his book *Plato the Myth Maker,* contends that when Plato employs the word *muthos* he both describes it as a particular kind of discourse and criticizes it from the perspective of philosophical discourse (*logos*) (Brisson 1998: 7). At the same time, however, myth, although morphologically synthesised with *logos,* in fact assumes an ambiguous rôle within the philosophical universe. Rather than an inherent part of the dialogue, myth frequently emerges as an autonomous element. In *Phaedo,* for instance, a myth justifying belief in the immortality of the soul concludes the logical demonstration, whilst the *Republic* ends with the myth of Er, depicting a process of reincarnation which dramatises the rewards of justice and philosophy. In these instances, the structural formation of the dialogue establishes myth as an appendix beyond the reach of the rational dialectic. In his article 'The Theatre of Myth in Plato', Jean-Francois Mattei reads this ambiguity as an affirmation that there are elements that cannot be sufficiently explained through the speech of logos: 'Logos is capable of elaborating a *theory of knowledge* at the conclusion of dialectical conversations only after muthos has oriented the philosopher with a *knowledge of theory*' (Mattei 1988: 68). The ambiguity that we find here may of course result from a lack of coherent theory of myth in Plato. Even though Plato overtly regards myth as inferior to the discursive practice of philosophy it still occupies an essential space in the dialogue. Although Pappas may be right in asserting that the official role of myth within the dialectic is to remind the reader of the primary status of philosophical discourse, *muthos* simultaneously appears to function as a basic foundation for *logos.* Hence, Mattei's conclusion that *logos* can never be elaborated on its own. Although *muthos* is overtly discarded as secondary, it permeates the Platonic dialogue, quietly subverting the hegemony of truth as the conformity of things and intellect.

It should be noted, that Plato's enunciated partiality towards argumentative discourse diverges radically from the preference for myth found in the poetic universe of Ted Hughes. Poems such as 'Wings',

'Crow's Account of St George' and 'Revenge Fable' moreover exhibit a fundamental mistrust of the Socratic dialectic, which Hughes appears to find abhorringly rationalistic. The sequence *Cave Birds,* originally entitled *The Death of Socrates and His Resurrection in Egypt,* is underpinned by a basic theme which Hughes describes as 'the psychological crime, punishment and compensation of Socrates' (Gifford and Roberts 1981: 260). For Hughes, Socrates, as presented through the Platonic dialogues, represents a form of misguided rationality which functions to shut out everything that cannot be explained or conceptualised. In general terms, this rationality could be equalled with a definition of *logos* as true speech, applauded by Plato as philosophical discourse based on agreement, whereas the kind of truth that Hughes would subscribe to is found in the 'magical-religious archaic source of intellectual life' (Gifford and Roberts 1981: 260), which, it would seem, can be interpreted as a form of *muthos,* or, at least, as related to a pre-socratic understanding which poses *muthos* and *logos* as more or less interchangeable in a trans-rational whole.

As indicated above, however, *muthos,* although overtly discarded for the sake of *logos,* does inhabit an important space both within and beyond the dialogues, functioning as an epistemological basis upon which *logos* is positively founded. Brisson, for example, suggests that for Plato reason can never be liberated from myth (Brisson 1998: 3). He finds evidence of this in dialogues such as *Meno* and the *Phaedo,* which show how the doctrine of Forms has its origin in what the priests and priestesses relate. According to Brisson, an analysis of *muthos* in Plato reveals that he understands it as synonymous with what one might term 'oral literature'. This is important because of what seems to be a predilection for the oral word throughout Platonic philosophy. The Socratic dialectic is generated by the principle 'to know oneself through the detour of the language of the other' (Derrida 1981: 121). This is a practice, then, governed by the presence of the other's, as well as one's own, direct speech. *Phaedrus* exhibits a fundamental distrust of the written word, specifically through the myth of Theuth. In telling this myth Socrates illustrates the dangers of displacing speech by writing, and posits writing as inimical to the philosophic exercise of memory of the good and the practice of dialectic. In contrast to living memory, which represents truth and self-knowledge, the written word offers only 'forgetfulness in the learners' souls' (*Phae* 323). In his 'Plato's Pharmacy', however, Derrida investigates the dimensions of text in the *Phaedrus* that counter the presumption that the dialogue unequivocally condemns writing, positing direct speech as the proper vehicle for dialectics and Truth. Derrida

reads Plato's *pharmakon* as signifying his ambivalent attitude towards writing through its double meaning of 'poison' as well as 'remedy'. Plato's of towards writing, Derrida furthermore claims, resulted in the formation of the hierarchical oppositions that have come to dominate Western thought, classifying writing as an imperfect representation of the pure ideas contained in the living voice of speech. Plato's distrust of writing, however, is not totally unambiguous. Derrida shows how the text itself complicates Plato's enunciated misgivings towards writing, and says that even an insensitive reading would show that Plato is not merely dismissing the writer's role. Furthermore, the mythological basis of the argument is not as straightforward as it might seem. In fact, according to Catherine Pickstock, in her book *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy,* Egyptian mythology links Theuth as much with orality as with writing (Pickstock 1998: 26). In this context, the Platonic dialogue cannot be read merely as resting upon a mere binary between the written and the oral word. More importantly, however, the relationship between *muthos* and *logos* is more intertwined and indeterminate than what is explicitly enunciated on a thematic level. It seems most significant that Socrates' condemnation of writing and his appraisal of direct speech as the proper vehicle for the dialectic comes in the form of a myth rather that as a balanced argument. Derrida also states that writing could not have done without myth, despite its dismissal by the Western tradition that he criticises. As a result, one might assume that the speech/writing, *muthos/logos* binaries are not as firmly separated as they might seem. Even though Plato may seem to discard one and favour the other, the inclusiveness of the text appears to tell a different story.

3. Heidegger: Throwing oneself in the draft of Being

In the same manner as Plato eulogises memory Heidegger emphasises its value in the lecture 'What Calls for Thinking?' (1993b). Here, he establishes Socrates as the purest thinker of the West, because he placced himself in what Heidegger terms 'the draft of Being' (1993b, 382). For Heidegger, *muthos* was never destroyed by *logos* because 'nothing religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the god's withdrawal' (1993b, 376). In order to reconnect with the god, that is, Being, the human being must let itself be drawn into the god's withdrawal. This is the only space in which thinking can be attained – 'even though he may still be far away from what withdraws, even though the withdrawal may remain as veiled as ever' (1993b, 382). This perception of man's potential

of moving towards truth is similar to the one found in Hughes' poetry, where truth 'reveals herself, and is veiled' (Hughes 1977: 185). Truth, here, is not about conformity with facts, but about opening oneself up to a revelation that rather than light brings a more pervading darkness.

Because Socrates placed himself in this draft, he remains the purest thinker of the West and wrote nothing. Heidegger claims that 'anyone who begins to write out of thoughtfulness must inevitably be like those people who run to seek refuge from any draft too strong for them' (1993b, 382).[1] It seems that for Heidegger, as for Plato, writing is connected with forgetfulness, whereas memory – the recalling of things past – connects us to *aletheia*. In fact, Heidegger deems memory essential because it constitutes the foundation for poetry: 'Memory, Mother of the Muses – the thinking back to what is to be thought – is the source and ground of poesy' (1993b, 376). Paradoxically, however, the point where Heidegger and Plato seem to converge is also the point where they drastically diverge, as Heidegger continues:

Surely, as long as we take the view that logic gives us insight into what thinking is, we shall never be able to think how much all poesy rests upon thinking back, recollection. Poetry wells up only from devoted thought thinking back, recollecting. (1993b, 376)

What Heidegger seems to say here, is that poetry and thinking are intrinsically connected in what one might term a dialectic schema; each of them opening up towards and enabling the other. Thought, or, thinking back, underpins poetry, and poetry enables the human being to make the leap into the realm of thought, that is, Being. Unlike Socrates, however, Plato fails to make this leap, despite his focus on the importance of processes of recollection. This failure stems fundamentally from what Heidegger terms a focus on reason as such rather than on the origins of reason (Heidegger 1984: 60). In short, Heidegger claims, Platonic philosophy is based on a misguided interpretation of *logos*.

Discarding metaphysical interpretations of *logos* as relationship, cosmic order, judgement and meaning, Heidegger retreats to what he sees as its original meaning as a derivative of *legein* which signifies 'gathering' or

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[1] It should be noted that what Heidegger terms 'thoughtfulness' here does not coincide with 'thinking' in the true sense of the word. In the essay 'What Calls for Thinking' Heidegger argues that we do not yet know what thinking is. 'Thoughtfulness' is not thinking, because it is something one does rather than something that calls on one. Thinking comes to us, which is why we must stand in the draft of Being. We must assert less and listen more.

'laying' (Heidegger 1962: 55). *Logos* names that which gathers together and lays out all that is present in its presence. That is, *logos* makes open or reveals that which is hidden or veiled, allowing Being to disclose itself in its own presence. The disclosure of Being through and as *logos* is furthermore the emergent aspect of *phusis*, authentically collected in and by the *logos*, which is truth as *aletheia*, that is, the opening up of the hiding place (Heidegger 1962: 261-63). Heidegger emphasises that *phusis* is the emergence that can be experienced everywhere, not as nature, but an aspect of Being itself by which beings first become and remain observable (Heidegger 2000: 15). By virtue of this revealing function of *logos* truth is unveiled.[2] Not as *homoiòsis* or some form of 'likening' between things and the soul's experience of them, however. As indicated in the introduction, Heidegger posits the idea of agreement as secondary to the concept of *aletheia*. The 'Being-true' of *logos* as discourse means that the elements of which one is talking must be seen as unhidden (*aletheia*), that is, they must be discovered (Heidegger 1962: 56). Thus, *logos* is not the seat of truth but, rather, that within and through which that which is present takes place and is discovered. Moreover, while *logos* as gathering and disclosing is manifested through language, discourse is not the seat of truth. This thought contrasts with the Platonic perception of truth as agreement, resulting in a perception of discourse as the locus of truth through its adherence to an *idea*. Here, the character of truth changes from fundamental unhiddenness of the *essent* to the reasonable value of a statement, or correctness. Consequently, Heidegger asserts, there can be no relation with Being within this parameter of thought.

The divergent approaches represented by Heidegger and Plato as regards the concept of truth can be exemplified through an extract from *Phaedo*, where Socrates proposes the following analogy:

> I thought that [...] I ought to be careful that I did not lose the eye
> of my soul; as people may injure their bodily eye by observing and
> gazing on the sun during an eclipse, unless they take the precaution
> of only looking at the image reflected in the water, or in some
> similar medium. [...T]his was the method which I adopted: I first

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[2] *Logos* is equivalent to letting something be seen to the extent that it can mean 'discourse'. According to Heidegger, *logos* as 'discourse' means 'to make manifest what one is 'talking about' in one's discourse. [...] The logos lets something be seen [...], namely, what the discourse is about; and it does so either *for* the one who is doing the talking (the *medium*) or for the persons who are talking to one another, as the case may be' (Heidegger 1962, 56).

assumed some principle which I judged to be the strongest, and then I affirmed as true whatever seemed to agree with this, whether relating to the cause or to anything else; and that which disagreed I regarded as untrue (Plato 1956: 165-166).

In the context of this quotation, the difference between Heidegger and Plato can be stated as follows: Where Plato regards *logos* as that which protects us from the sun, Heidegger sees it as that within and through which one might stand directly in the sun's light. For Plato, it is better to withdraw during an eclipse than to be caught in the draft of the withdrawal. In *Dissemination,* Derrida quotes a translation of the *Phaedo* where the Socratic method is described as a quest for truth through 'recourse to the world of *idea* (*en logois*)'(Derrida 1981: 83-84). Platonic philosophy can consequently be regarded as an immobilisation of Being, in the sense that it withdraws from the world in order to seek the truth through agreement with a static, metaphysical idea. Within this schema, *logos* is elevated to a position of supremacy whilst *phusis* becomes frozen in the aspect presented by it and Being is reduced to a constancy of presence. The true *phusis,* that is, a continuous emerging and appearing, is pushed aside for the benefit of the static idea, which becomes the singular, proper meaning of Being. What Heidegger seems to suggest, on the other hand, is a dualistic perception of *logos,* arising from the aforementioned contention that *logos* is both that within and through which presence takes place. Heidegger points out that early Greek philosophy held *logos* to be at one with, or, at least, belonging together with *phusis* in and as Being. This aspect of *logos* seems to transcend the human being in the sense that it is described as 'apprehension', which, as Heidegger stresses, is not a constitutive essence of man. *Phusis,* as Being, is 'that for the sake of which apprehension happens' (Heidegger 2000: 184). In spite of this fundamental beyondness, however, the human being will always seek truth as Being and attempt to render Being manifest through, or in, the *essent.* This act renders *logos* a constitutive essence of man. Occurring in and through man as the gathering and apprehending of the being of *essents,* *logos* becomes a feature of the constitutive essence of the human being and, in this sense, ceases to be an element of Being itself.[3]

In its former state, then, *logos* is a possibility and necessity within Being itself, whilst in the second aspect it has been made manifest in and

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[3] It should be noted that this does not mean that *logos* is at any time not a part or not in accordance with Being, it is merely part of Being in a different sense.

through the human being. As *logos* becomes manifest through and in the *essent*, the human being leaps into language. This is a fundamental movement, in the sense that language is that which gives form to the *essent* and opens it up in its being. For Heidegger, language is *logos* in the sense that it is a collecting and a gathering together, and, thus, it also functions to disclose *logos*. Accordingly, the human being becomes a gatherer through language, with the task to fulfil and preserve the disclosure of Being, that is, to unveil and keep open Being to itself and others.

The main ways of bringing Being to stand in and among the being of things are poetry and philosophy. Heidegger asserts that language was established in the 'breakaway of humanity into Being. In this breakaway, language, the happening in which Being becomes word, was poetry' (Heidegger 2000: 182-83). Language is an offering handed over from Being to thinking, that is, to the essence of man that has already been handed over from Being in order to establish a relation to the latter. In fact, language is 'the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of Being insofar as they bring the manifestation to language and maintain it in language through their speech' (Heidegger 1993: 217). This kind of discourse is defined by Heidegger as speech or talk [*Rede*], which involves not only speaking out and asserting, but also hearing and listening, heeding and being silent and attentive (Heidegger 1962: 55-58).

What is particularly relevant about Heidegger's discourse in relation to my project is its inclusiveness in the sense that *logos* and *muthos* are one in their revelation of truth as truth, a point I will return to later in the discussion. Truth acquires a self-sufficient status for Heidegger, in the sense that the poetic saying offers it not as a qualified object but as itself. The poetic saying opens up to thinking and to Being by offering itself as itself – not as something that agrees with logic or with positivist reality. This seems vital to an analysis of truth as it presented or offered by Hughes, that is, not as an answer but as a 'naked powerline, 2000 volts' (Hughes 1972: 83).

4. Opening up to the limit – the importance of muthos as logos

In his book *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy awards literature a similar role as does Heidegger. Influenced by Heidegger, Nancy presents many interesting perspectives on what one might term the dialectic

between *muthos* and *logos*, as well as on the relation between *muthos* as literature and *logos* as thinking. Heidegger does not overtly analyse *muthos*, except in a passage from the lecture series *Was Heisst Denken*, in which he declares that *mythos* and *logos* are fundamentally the same:

> *Mythos* and *logos* become separated and opposed only at the point where neither *mythos* nor *logos* can keep to its pristine existence. In Plato's work this separation has already taken place. Historians and philologists, by virtue of a prejudice modern rationalism adopted from Platonism, imagine that *mythos* was destroyed by *logos*. But nothing religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the god's withdrawal (Heidegger 1993: 375-76).

When Heidegger talks about *logos* as logic, he is referring to the period following the separation of *muthos* and *logos*. Prior to that he refers to *mythos* as that which lays bare and lets appear, that is, a function which performs the same tasks as *logos* as gathering (cf. 1993: 375). This perception of *muthos* and *logos* is echoed in *The Inoperative Community*, where Nancy states that for the early Greeks '*muthos* and *logos* are the same. This sameness is the revelation, the hatching or blossoming of the world, of the thing, of man in speech' (Nancy 1991: 49). Thus, *muthos* is, if not the origin of *logos*, the essential aspect wherein the human being is able to access truth. The kind of speech that Nancy refers to here is not mimetic, echoing Heidegger's claim that the truth of *logos* does not primarily concern agreement. Nancy quotes Schelling and says that myth is tautegorical, that it says nothing other than itself and is produced in consciousness by the same process that, in nature, produces the forces that myth represents. What Nancy seems to say here is that myth transcends the binary oppositions that govern our understanding of the world, because it holds no reference to the reified world, but refers only to the given, that which is shown, that is, *logos*. As indicated in my introduction, this non-mimetic aspect of myth is also important in relation to the Hughesian metaphor, and is something that I will return to later. This perspective is, of course, similar to Heidegger's contention that Being is revealed or disclosed through *logos* in, or as, language. It appears that what Heidegger terms language, Nancy terms myth. This is a very interesting parallel, offering the conclusion that myth is the form of *logos* that reveals itself as Being, or *kosmos*, to the human consciousness. Thus, myth is also *kosmos* within *logos*, because as it has a mediating position between the two, which are really one, it can be seen to constitute the structure both of *logos*

as it reveals itself to the human consciousness and of the *kosmos* as it would invariably structure itself in accordance with *logos*.

While Nancy founds his analysis on a reading of Heidegger, his discussion does not simply echo the latter. Interestingly, Nancy employs what he terms 'community' as the basis for his analysis, claiming that myth in contemporary community does not exist, in the sense that it is continuously interrupted.[4] Here, Nancy bases his argument on Bataille's claim that contemporary society is pervaded by an 'absence of myth' (Bataille 1994: 48). Bataille's contention is that society, even though it is founded on a mediation between the human being and the natural world, has denied its foundation of ancient myth. Furthermore, it has deluded itself into believing that it is without myth and persuaded itself that it is no longer in need of ritual, since the human being has come to rule over nature. This 'absence of myth' also means an 'absence of the sacred', which Bataille equals with an absence of communication. A society which is unable to communicate ceases to be a society, resulting in an 'absence of community' (Bataille 1994: 81). Thus, Bataille establishes a chain of cause and consequence, beginning with the negation of myth leading to non-communication and ending with the dissolution of community. In a society based on the hegemony of rationalism, however, reality itself becomes a myth. This is how Bataille can contend that the 'absence of myth' is itself a myth: 'The fact that a universe without myth is the ruin of the universe – reduced to the nothingness of things – in the process of depriving us equates deprivation with the revelation of the universe' (Bataille 1994: 48). Western civilisation is living a lie, by which it denies its mythological basis and posits reality as an ontological given that can be located and conquered. For Bataille, the solution lies in a re-creation of ritual, something that cannot be achieved through poetry, as literature cannot escape the absolutism of the ritualisation of the absence of myth. Nancy, however, sees this differently. For Nancy, there is no such thing as a choice between presence and absence of myth: 'If we suppose that "myth" designates, beyond the myths themselves, even beyond myth, something that cannot simply disappear, the stakes would then consist in myth's passage to a limit and onto a limit where myth itself would be not so much suppressed as suspended or interrupted' (Nancy 1991: 47). Nancy, then, agrees with Heidegger that myth is not destroyed, that is, absent, but

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[4] 'Community' here appears to constitute a specific form of communication which functions to fill the space previously inhabited by myth.

rather displaced, that is, interrupted or withdrawn. What interrupts myth is its lack of a communal function within a contemporary society determined by singularity. At the same time, however, community as such is not lost, but may be located on the limit of singularity. The generator for the process leading to the limit is a movement which Nancy denominates 'passion'. 'Passion' appears to signify a *muthos* enabling the human being to reach the limit of singularity as a space in which myth is suspended, that is, potentially reached. In other words, 'passion' designates an inherent aspect of the human being connecting it to truth as some specific form of communication.

The truth, or community, located at the limit of singularity, then, is not the kind of community in which a group is tied together through common beliefs, norms or the like. Myth founds 'the becoming-world of subjectivity' (Nancy 1991: 56), rather than community as such. As indicated above, 'community', as Nancy understands it, appears to designate a revelation or disclosure of singularity as a limit in the space established between singularities. Hence, Nancy's 'community' is more redolent of Kristeva's descriptions of a revolutionary language than of Bataille's recourse to communism. According to Nancy, the interruption of community irrevocably exposes singularity to its limit, that is, to other singularities. Thus, the interrupted community is one that is constantly in process, to use a Kristevan term, one that never forms a totality of any kind, but which exists in the invariable interruption, propagation and showing of singularities as Being. In this sense, Nancy's community as communication bears a resemblance to Kristeva's semiotic language, which functions to challenge the boundaries of the thetic subject thus generating a subject in process. Semiotic language, of course, refers to the engendering of meaning in the text, that is, elements that challenge the ordering structure and relatively straightforward communication of the symbolic, transgressing limits and distance. In this sense, it seems that the interruption of community is also an important factor as a constant generation of identity. The focus on singularities rather than totalities appears to indicate a revolt against a static, closed off identity, which might function to ensure a constant openness as a process enabling the human being to cope with the other as difference and variation rather than as a threat to its (limiting) unity. This is yet another important aspect in connection with Hughes' poetry, which tends to focus on the dangers inherent in establishing a fixed identity and emphasises the importance of process and openness in approaching truth.

In the exposure and offering of singular beings, Nancy holds, the human being takes part in myth, which is interrupted by literature.

Interestingly, Nancy argues that literature, in fact, could be seen as the myth of mythless society. In the same sense as myth, literature reveals the unrevealable, namely, that it is itself. In contrast to myth, though, literature's revelation does not reveal a completed reality, nor does it reveal some thing (1991: 63). Literature unfolds and exposes the singularity of the community, and is thus yet another aspect of the interruption of community. Seen in relation to Nancy's interpretation of Heidegger's Being as the singular aspect of beings rather than as communing in itself with itself, literature becomes a process disclosing Being. Rather than *mimesis*, the text represents the extreme edge of being and has as its being the common exposure of singular beings. Literature, although failing to reveal the totality of a community (as communication), reveals Being through the exposure and sharing of it as singularity, a reading which situates literature as *muthos* as *logos* in its aspect as a constitutive essence of the human being.

As far as beings are concerned, Nancy emphasises that being-in-common *is* nowhere – it does not subsist in a mythic space that could be revealed to us. Consequently, literature does not give it a voice; rather, it is being-in-common that *is* literary. Hence, as indicated above, literature is established as non-referential in the sense that it does not function as a vehicle referring to or providing a voice for some other thing. Rather, it constitutes a movement or a process that opens up and exposes that which is without actually establishing it as a space other than itself. This definition of literature is significant in relation to Schelling's definition of myth as tautegorical, because it reinforces the parallel between myth and literature as truth. Being-in-common as literature points to the sharing between singularities as a continuous process. Furthermore, literature as being-in-common warrants a kind of openness that seems to render it a parallel, if not equivalent, term to Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world'. In his 'Letter on Humanism', Heidegger explains this term by defining 'world' not as a realm of beings but rather as an openness to Being. The degree of openness to Being determines the human being's humanity, in the sense that it stands in this openness on the basis of its thrown essence. This stance does not situate the human being as a subject (that is, as opposite to an object), but as thrown into the open region that clears the 'between' within which a 'relation' of subject to 'object' can be (Heidegger 1993: 252), that is, a space as an element in which singularities are shown and offered. For Heidegger, 'being-in-the-world' is literary in the same sense as thinking is. It constitutes a space which seems to be similar to that in which thinking in its saying brings the unspoken word of Being to language.

'Being-in-the-world' is to think, and thinking gathers language into simple saying. In fact, Heidegger states that 'language is the language of Being, as clouds are the clouds of the sky' (Heidegger 1993: 265). Thus, language, and specifically poetry, is our way toward thinking, which is our only possibility to stand out as thrown in the withdrawal of Being (cf. Heidegger 1993: 382).

This thrownness into the withdrawal of Being is, to some extent, comparable to the process of identity discussed above. Poetry seems to equal, or even generate, the process preventing a ramified and unified identity and ensuring a continuous movement and opening towards Being. Literature, as it is presented here, is an ongoing and never ending movement or process, which unremittingly interrupts myth and thereby sustains the interrupted community. Literature is the dividing line where singular beings are exposed to one another (Nancy 1991: 65). This idea is reminiscent of Kristeva's parallel presentation of literature (poetry) and love as aesthetic and ethical practices. As indicated above, Kristeva argues that these practices push the subject to the very limit of being, putting it on trial, that is, in process. The difference is that Nancy does not limit the practice to the human being, but seems to adopt Heidegger's idea of being in a more general sense. Also similar to Kristevan theory, however, is Nancy's emphasis that what is shared on this extreme and difficult limit is not communion, nor any kind of completed identity. Rather, what is shared is sharing itself, as well as the nonidentity of the beings involved. This is exactly what Kristeva identifies as the object of aesthetic practices, that is, to dissolve any firm sense of identity through an opening up towards the other. What is important here is that Heidegger, Nancy and Kristeva focus on the movement and the continuous process that literature is and generates in beings. Literature is the indefinitely repeated and indefinitely suspended gesture of touching the limit, of indicating it and inscribing it, without totally abolishing it in the fiction of a common body or a community. Literature exposes the very edge upon which communication takes place, that is, the limit where one's identity is ruptured, where boundaries are blurred and where truth is exposed:

> It is each time the voice of one alone, and to the side, who speaks, who recites, who sometimes sings. He speaks of an origin and an end [...] he comes to the edge of the stage, to its outer edge, and he speaks at the softest limit of his voice [...T]his voice, or another, will always begin interrupting the myth again – sending us back to the limit (Nancy 1991: 67-68).

This can be tentatively demonstrated through the example of Hughes' poem 'Pibroch', which seems to express such a movement towards a liminal experience. The title of the poem refers to a piece of music for bagpipe, which consists of a bag frequently made of an entire goatskin, rendering it simultaneously an organically and culturally determined object. The implied presence of the goatskin furthermore generates associations to *pharmakos,* or the scapegoat, an important allegory evoking associations not only to the tension between *pharmakon* as both 'remedy' and 'poison', but also to other Hughes poems, where it frequently functions to suggest the fallacy of Western consciousness in putting all its faith in unerring rationality. The poem itself describes what appears to be the fundamentally meaningless existence of the sea, a stone, the wind and a tree, focusing on the static condition of the universe: 'Minute after minute, aeon after aeon/Nothing lets up or develops'. In the final stanza, however, the determiner 'this', repeated thrice in the last three verses, points to magical and divine elements, such as stars and angels, thus opening up towards a transcendent presence. The repetition of the determiner 'this' functions as a liminal denominator, simultaneously pointing towards itself as a boundary between a universe 'reduced to the nothingness of things' (Bataille 1994: 81) and the fullness of Being, and reaching beyond itself to the presence, and, potentially, the disclosure, of that which is hidden. In this sense the poem functions both as a manifestation of the kind of writing which is 'poison' in the sense that it works within the boundaries of 'meaningless voice[s]', as well as an expression of 'remedy' in that it points towards truth even if that is to be found in a space beyond the linguistic presence of 'this' and, consequently, of the poem as a written product.

Hughes' poem, then, may be seen to demonstrate how literature, and poetry in particular, forms a dividing line between poison and remedy, semiotic and symbolic. This liminal aspect is important to the extent that it functions to reveal Being. As indicated in the quotation cited above, literature discloses Being in the sense that this is identical with the singularity of Beings. This aspect of literature is similar to Kristeva's understanding of love as something that teaches us to move towards identity as an open system, referring to the other as a stimulus towards process. For Kristeva, love is the closest one gets to touching an other's being, representing an extreme experience of liminality which, potentially, can generate a subject in process and, thus, function to establish subjectivity as an open system. Thus, love becomes not only a subjective experience, but an integrated aspect of one's own subjectivity. Of course,

the kind of singularity suggested by Nancy and, indirectly, by Heidegger, does not point merely to an individual subjectivity, but to the more general being. Even so, Kristeva's theory might help us to comprehend the positive role of literature as an element opposing static nothingness.

For Nancy, nothingness would only exist as far as this singularity stops being revealed or exposed, in which case one would have immanence instead of space. This is how Nancy understands Heidegger, and, presumably, his sense of poetry as the House of Being. What is interesting here, however, is how all of the aforementioned terms can be regarded as metaphors or symbols for two terms – *muthos* and *logos*. As discussed above, Heidegger presents *logos* as Being, and says that language is, and can connect us to, *logos*. Nancy claims that *muthos*, or myth, communicates nature in a mediate as well as an immediate way. Nature is a common translation of the Greek term *phusis,* which Heidegger interprets as signifying an aspect of Being whereby beings become observable, and which, furthermore, is part of an original unity with *logos* as Being. In contemporary society, *phusis* as singularity is communicated as literature (or language), enabling us to take part in sharing. Nancy's sharing, or exposure, is close to Heidegger's *logos* as 'gathering'. In this sense, it might be possible to regard the discourse of literature as *muthos,* in the sense that this is the kind of speech that enables us to reach the limit of being and to share in Being. Of course, Nancy maintains that this kind of communication is myth interrupted, and that myth no longer exists, but *muthos* is not necessarily the same thing as myth (although it can be), in the sense that myth establishes community whereas *muthos* exposes and reveals truth as *logos*. Myth as a truth-telling element forming community is *muthos,* but this does not mean to say that it constitutes the totality of forms that *muthos* is capable of taking. Although literature, according to Nancy, fails to establish a community it represents a practice connecting the individual to something else, which is what happens through sharing, even though this establishes a being *in* common rather than a 'common being'.

5. Conclusion

In my view, even a superficial analysis of the language of Heidegger and Nancy confirms this supposition about its metaphoricity. Their language is purely metaphorical, through images such as 'the House of Being' and 'the interrupted community' which function to lay out what is. At the same time, it is not metaphorical, because it describes what *is*, and through

language what is described becomes what is, because the sign and the referent, so to speak, are so indeterminate. To some extent one might say that this literary event resembles Jonathan Culler's description of *catachresis* as a truly creative metaphor which names something that previously had no name, disclosing and identifying something that we have no other way of describing (Culler 1981: 206). At the same time, however, the kind of metaphor dealt with here does not necessarily refer to 'some thing'. Rather it seems to be an event or an act of opening up, establishing a connection and reaching toward a limit.

The German philosopher Hans Blumenberg has an interesting theory concerning metaphors that cannot be paraphrased or reduced to purely logical concepts, which he calls 'absolute metaphors'. Blumenberg poses the question whether there are metaphorical elements in philosophy and science that cannot be replaced by logical terms. In this context, metaphors, as a continuation of basic myths, constitute part of the foundation of philosophical language, 'transferences' that cannot be reversed into a logical sphere of thought and reasoning (Blumenberg 2002: 23). Here, metaphor does not actually describe anything that really is. A metaphor dealing with truth, for instance, does not describe truth in any way, but rather establishes a new category which is truth as we know it. Blumenberg describes it as something inside a glass. Reality exists on the outside of the glass, which means that it cannot be touched or felt, but one can still form one's own opinion of what it is like, which becomes truth for the subject located within the glass. The 'absolute metaphor', then, functions as a protective device against the absolutism of reality. The assumption here is that language cannot reveal truth in its totality, but through elements such as 'absolute metaphors' it instigates a process through which *logos* may become a constitutive aspect of the human being. Although Blumenberg's theory may seem unassertive as to the possibilities of attaining truth, it is interesting for its assumption that figurative language is the only acceptable means through which truth can be manifested and comprehended. Potentially, within this *muthos, logos* is manifested and becomes a part of *Dasein*.

Furthermore, *muthos* as laying out belongs to a metaphysical reality consigned to the one, that is, *logos,* that appears to elude the binaries of logocentrism and enter upon the field that Plato terms 'the third genus' (*Tim* 48a, 52a), that is, the logic of the ambiguous *khôra*. In his article 'Khôra', Derrida states that the *khôra* only names immanence – it appears to be 'neither this nor that, at times both this and that', alternating

between a logic of exclusion and participation which 'stems perhaps only from a provisional appearance and from the constraints of rhetoric, even from some incapacity for naming' (Derrida 1995: 89). According to both Heidegger and Hughes, however, poetry does not suffer from the constraints of rhetoric, rendering it a medium that incorporates the potential not only to name, but to be the name, the word, incarnate. Here, the space that Nancy insists upon as a guarantor for communication does not disappear, but rather is transformed into a distance not between binaries, but between various aspects of *logos* as Being.

As indicated in the introduction, the quest for truth in Hughes' poetry is primarily manifested through a metaphorical mode of expression dominated by an indeterminacy and lack of allegorical reference that seem to result from it being an expression only of itself as truth. Metaphors, read as continuations of fundamental myths, constitute part of the foundation of philosophical language in the sense that they can be regarded as 'transferences' that cannot be reversed into a logical sphere of thought and reasoning. With Hughes, metaphor and paradox are constituents of a poetic strategy I have termed myth as process, designating the writing subject as a gatherer who lays out poetry in an attempt to reach and reveal that which is hidden. That is, truth as something glimpsed in the singularities of being laid out by the writing subject in the complexity of the poetic text. Hughes' views on the role of poetry as reaching 'into that depth of imagination where understanding has its roots and stores its X-rays' (Hughes 1994: 226) seem more concrete and optimistic than Heidegger's, in the sense that he speaks of 'understanding' rather than 'gathering'. In both instances, however, poetry represents a truth-revealing process enabling the human being to re-establish contact with *logos* as manifested truth. To the extent that Hughes' poetry acquires its driving force through the very impenetrability of metaphor and the non-reconciliatory force of paradox, it seems largely parallel to Blumenberg's 'absolute metaphor'. It does not necessarily refer to some thing, but rather asks questions and establishes images that seem as impenetrable to the reader as they do to the poetic subject who does not consciously seek, but is sought out by a truth situated both within and beyond (his own) being. The indication here seems to be that truth arrives as a violence, willing the subject to speak in a language that is more like a song or a dance than the empirical language of 'inescapable facts'. In this context, it is for the reader to decide what lies beyond the 'song' and the 'dance', and whether it is at all possible to transpose and capture it in a prosaic function of language:

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

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

Because you kissed him

If you miss him, he stays dead
Among the inescapable facts
(Hughes 1977: 198)

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