

# SUSAN MUSGRAVE

## *The Self and the Other*

*Dennis Brown*

**S**USAN MUSGRAVE'S *The Impstone* (1976), begins by presenting a mystery. "Anima," the first poem, addresses a shadowy "you" who exists entirely as smell:

You smell of  
the woods  
You smell of  
lonely places.

You smell of  
death  
of dreams I am  
afraid of.

When the "I" persona reaches out for this "you" it abruptly vanishes: untouchable, inaudible, invisible, it retreats "into the only darkness / animals come from." Yet for all its mysteriousness, the "you" will be familiar to those acquainted with Miss Musgrave's poetry (a poetry admired by an increasingly wide circle of readers). For it is associated with the characteristics of her unique and disturbing world — "woods," "lonely places," "death," "dreams," fear — and, as I shall argue, this "you" constitutes the key to an understanding of that world. For the Musgrave "wilderness," as Ted Hughes has called it, is essentially relational; a product of the outward gropings of selfhood toward the "you" in its varying aspects. At the core of the poetry is a fluctuating relationship between the self and the other.

To emphasize the uniqueness of this self-world is not to deny the influences upon the poetry — which include Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which such influences have been assimilated, even in the early poems. This may be partly because Musgrave has not had a formal education in literature, and has been able to keep her mentors at a distance — often difficult in an academic situation. But there is a more im-

portant reason. For the Musgrave self, if often victimized, fragmented, confused, is, in the last analysis, very tough indeed. It commits itself to encounter — with the natural world, lovers, mystic creatures, demons, fairies — yet always emerges, integral if not unscathed. Not betrayal, desecration, rejection or apparent annihilation can finally destroy the persona whose voice is the voice of the poetry. “I will eat my way out / of my own skinny veins . . . / I will ruin you,” she vows to the threatening other in “Songs of the Sea Witch.” That this is not pure bravado is attested by the persistence of the same self-voice in poem after poem, in the face of threat after threat. And in terms of poetic influences, as in terms of the dramatic antagonists, the self is never about to be swamped. In short, Susan Musgrave uses her influences; very rarely is she used by them.

With respect to dramatic situations in the poetry, of course, the persona’s toughness must not be overstressed. It is a strength *in extremis*: a final capacity for transcendence of crisis, engendered only out of sensitivity, vulnerability and solitude. Even while the poetic voice persists, the dramatic self may be rent into more pieces than Adonis. Hence the unity of the self is experienced only through a contradictory fragmentation. The self is fluid, metamorphic, undergoing in poem after poem an almost ritual journey into disaster, separation and destruction (that “long journey beginning nowhere”). And part of what is involved in the quest is, in fact, the problem of whether there is such an entity as the self at all.

The first poem in *Songs of the Sea-Witch* (1970) constitutes a useful point of departure since it looks back to childhood and postulates a family unit of experience — “we.” An open gate in a field initiates a world of children’s shouts, mushrooms, grandpa, and imitated birdcalls. It is somewhat Edenic (hence “unreal”), but the ending sets a pattern for the sombreness of many later poems: “our hearts toll like clappers / in the bell of the dark.” “The Spilled Child” leaves this world of communal experience behind, while yet alluding to it — the title phrase recurring three times. The protagonist’s childhood is the prey of the shadowy other who demands its destruction — a prolonged “burning” postulated at the end. The horror of alien incursion is conveyed in startling images: “The abandoned bird / wingless and screaming”; “to sew her body / to the ground with worms.” Here, then, the “you” — presumably a lover — demands a part of the self as the price of relationship. The world of “we” is sacrificed to the world of “you” and “I”, and in the process the “I” too is torn apart. Already the world is expressed as balance of power, relationship as barter and sacrifice, selfhood as splitting and loss.

However, this is not always so. In “For Sean” the self-other dialectic is more optimistically drawn. The vision of the “lady of the green” sets up the fundamental relationship which achieves a tentative apotheosis:

and I breathed as you  
in the dark ocean night

caught beneath your moon  
 caught in her laughter  
 that was yours —  
 almost then  
 I knew who I was

The sense of assimilation into the partner's world is central here: it occurs essentially through the magical intermediary — the poem opening and closing with the lady. In effect, the other has been dualized into lover and anima or muse. The lady is "your lady / lost to you," and at the same time she creates the reality of the lover for the self: "she seeded in the full of the moon / your heart / — pushed it behind my breast." At the end she threatens to leave, trailing the ambiguous phrase "through your wake." Can the relationship last without her? Certainly, as presented, it has been wholly created through her. The self "possesses" the lover by being "possessed" by what "possesses" him. Just as in later poems the self becomes the spirit she invokes, so here the other becomes an identity (hence gives the self identity too) by virtue of his spiritual daemon.

The "spiritual" factor is the basic key to the tone and purport of Musgrave's poems. Whether the self apprehends its own temporal physicality, the natural world, or a sexual partner, the mood of the verse is determined by the presence or absence of the spiritual (or imaginative) dimension. It is very like Martin Buber's distinction between "I — Thou" and "I — It" (as whole existential postures), with the difference that Susan Musgrave's "Thou" may at times appear almost as chilling as her "It." But the "Thou," however mythologized, is positive in that it gives meaning — and hence defines the self. Without it the other is nauseous in the Sartrean sense: relationships are arid, exploitative; the natural world becomes a wilderness of fragments: the self is dissipated into a vortex of unrealities. In "Once More" the despiritualized "you" is a nothingness: "You are / only a madman / in all the spaces I can't fill"; hence the self becomes reified and fragmented in a rigmarole of carnality: "I toss you / random pieces from my thigh, / fingernail parings, / a section of hair." Or in "After the Battle" the "you" literally becomes a corpse and all that remains is nonentity: "That is — / nothing to remain, / nothing to destroy." But unlike Sartre or Beckett, Musgrave is not expressing the logical inevitability of meaninglessness. The question of meaning is essentially experiential: it either is or is not *there*, depending on the random visitations of vision. Her landscapes are frequently despiritualized because the other has just deserted them. The moment of many poems is the moment of withdrawal of the other, leaving only the husks of personality, the rag-ends of an empty world. In "January 6" this is dramatized in terms of love:

Since you left  
 I have waited like the hours  
 unseen and heavy . . .

The long days mate with  
the nude on the calendar

I have packed time like a suitcase

Now there is nothing to do  
but organize my boredom.

The other as “Thou” (or muse) may be simultaneously sexual, natural, imaginative and religious: it is the well-spring of creativity and meaning in this world. Of course the bulk of the poems — especially the earlier ones — are devoted to bewailing its absence. In a quite strict sense Musgrave’s poems are Romantic. But it is precisely this Romantic search for ultimate meaning in almost everything she writes that most distinguishes her poetry from the hundreds of other poems about love, landscape and the lost self that appear in magazines each year.

THE SECOND BOOK *Entrance of the Celebrant* (1972) shows a greater concern with the poem as artefact; an attempt at fuller objectivization through the use of mythological figures, talismanic objects and semi-ritual situations. The verse is tighter, less rhetorical — at times, in fact, too elliptical and somewhat obscurantist. But the (many) successes achieve a quasi-mystic power, as in “Gathering in the Host’s Wood.” The dramatic situation is central here: but it is by no means static and the pattern of its transitions must be assimilated by careful reading. The poem is essentially atmospheric, so that we have less ritual enactment than the mood of enactment built up through cinematic glimpses. This is appropriate since the subject — a rare moment of apotheosis of the self with the other — is arcane. The poem expresses the imaginative act itself. The first section effects an accumulation of preparations — the host’s gathering, the plight of “the hunted,” the Elf-queen’s departure, the vision of the “little friend.” In the record a preliminary union of the self and skuld is dramatized: “My tongue kisses / the cold kiss of her / mouth, her lips / the borders of constellations.” In the third the magical forest is presented: it is a place of the dead, but of the magical dead, frozen in the mirror of art, where one footfall could awaken them. And so to the final apotheosis:

She  
as a toad, and I a squirrel,  
embrace in the  
royal fire, spitting ash  
in memory of a king.

The word “we” in this section signals the rare moment of union. The self is possessed in possessing its anima — a unique summation won from all the rejec-

tions, persecutions, bafflements exorcised in other poems. But it is typical of Susan Musgrave's world that this summation should have nothing of the Adamic gleam or Beatific Vision about it. It is pagan, witchy, animistic, awesome; celebrating an ecstasy of coldness, death, triumph and possibly revenge.

The bulk of the poems in this collection express, once again, not so much apotheosis as the need for it. The self is trapped in a world of partial becoming and incipient destruction; of birth through death and death in life; of variable lovers, mysterious familiars and fearful, if fascinating, elemental powers. It seeks for communion with stones and bones and stars; it mates and wrestles with men and mankind; it hunts with birds of prey and consults with witches; almost always it turns back in on itself, returns to un-creation, becoming lost in a wilderness of blood, feathers and dying ash. But the search for apprehension persists: "Everything must learn / How *I* have dreamed it"; "the / closed thought open to delivery"; "dreaming how I would / love him if I knew him"; "everything I have become is something already gone." In poem after poem Musgrave keeps her appointment with herself — and with the world that has made and unmade her, the metamorphic shapes of that other which haunts her as much by its absence as by its sudden epiphanic visitations. And almost always she manages to articulate a pattern of meaning to mark some important boundary: "the shape of darkness, a sound / that nowhere would dare to form."

The poems may be approximately differentiated into three main kinds: those which concern the self and the natural world; the self and the male; the self and its familiars. Such categorization is arbitrary, of course: the familiars may speak through natural objects; the lover's world will include both objects and familiars; the familiar may appear as an aspect of the male, and so forth. Nevertheless the distinctions serve to focus emphases in the poems as well as to facilitate discussion of them. In the first category the emphasis is on the lone self caught in the toils of birth, death and becoming, and encountering the impersonal objects of the natural world which stand potentially as codes to meaning. "Facing Moons" can be quoted in full:

This night spent  
 watchful, waking,  
 no sound as the  
 moment of all sound  
 echoes  
 anything else,

this moment facing moons in  
 darkness, dull glow  
 from watchers, here and I

here but not here  
 before myself

inside —  
 moon of sleep constant inside  
 sleep, moon that I am  
 creeping down.

The poem articulates a polarity between the self (“watchful,” “darkness,” “here but not here”) and the object, (“moon of sleep,” “dull glow,” “constant”). The self responds actively to the other: there is “no sound” but the moment “echoes / anything else”; the self is “here” but yet not so, and is “before myself / inside.” In a sudden transition at the end it moves to assimilate the moon into its own need (“moon of sleep”), hence, “moon that I am / creeping down.” It is a relatively simple poem but it expresses one form of dynamic in the Musgrave self-world — awareness, complication, assimilation. In inspired moments the natural world may be apprehended by appropriation: or, the self may be apprehended by becoming the other.

“The Herd” (unhelpfully titled, I think) is considerably more complex. Again it starts from a specific place (“No one would come here”) and time (“*this* time”), but it holds the potentiality of “forever” and “distances.” It concerns solitude and hence its ultimate locus is the dimensionless vortex of the individual mind: “I am somewhere / nearer myself”; “All I am becoming anyway / is wrong”; “Again and again I grow / no older.” The self is in search of its identity — any kind of identity. It is “like roots,” exists in darkness, hears but cannot remember sounds, senses “all things disappearing,” remains ageless, imagining, but not finding, a man: yet also it asserts its own immortality and integrity (resisting self-betrayal), senses the inevitability of process and finds a partial identity in aloneness, “haunting the dark ground.” Not only is the world alien here, but the self is, too — a perceived flux, living and partly living, nauseous yet to be protected, inventive but also fated; its own creative strivings seen as a function less owned than trapped in. It is a powerful poem and one that yields to empathetic interpretation even as it admits confusion: “The words tell / *again* and *again* and maybe *this* time / dream of finding what it was they say.” As in “Simply” the self is “there . . . / moving, not yet / not alive”; and yet this also is a living experience: the predicament of the self exiled both from the meaningful other and its own meaning.

In poems about the self and the male the motivation is similar to that in the love poems in *Songs of the Sea-Witch*. In “Crow Wood” the male is also a familiar, a spirit (“every man / his ghost”), and the self acknowledges his passing rather than becoming part of his life: in “To Someone Asleep” there is relationship, but between active self and passive other; in “Finding Love” the relationship is more human and changeable: “I told you, then / the first lie I had in my heart”; in “As Death Does” it is nostalgic, sensual, elegiac. The dialectic is never repeated as such: each poem sounds out, as if by radar, the imagistic pattern of a

new relational experience. What is remarkable, indeed, is the absence of cliché; the absence, even of any inherited guidelines in the encounter of self with male. All is intuited uniquely within the confines of Musgrave's private vision.

"The night, the real night . . ." is particularly interesting because it suggests the degree to which the self half-creates the male other:

I had dreamed him before,  
the stranger within me  
I have been waking beside. For a long time  
it was so dark  
I couldn't remember anyone  
Then I wanted it to be night again.

The poem proceeds to postulate a negation, the lover announcing "I have vanished!" "*That* sadness," the poet notes, "I was waiting for"; she has a vision of him "walking / into the blind sun" and the poem moves on to speculate on "this gladness we have shared / together in our first loneliness." "Shared" is an important word in Susan Musgrave's verse, and a comparatively rare one. It typically embraces dimensions of solitude and betrayal which appear as its normal opposite. Assimilation and differentiation, togetherness through an awareness of the other's essential aloneness, fidelity woven out of dreams of betrayal are hall-marks of this relational world. "It is doubtful . . . / that I shall return by you / in the same shape as I came" we read in "Finding Love." Relationship is tenuous — every new start may seem a different kind of failure — yet the need for it remains. In fact the male other is the frequent objective correlative of the larger "Thou." In a sense all Musgrave's poems are love poems, for her sense of the universe is essentially relational. This explains the peculiar "conjugation" of her verse, which one might term the First Person Vocative. Both the "I" and the "You" look beyond the reader to some ultimate Other as the real addressee.

The spirit-world evoked in poems about the self and its familiars may, as I have suggested, express its own kind of horror. But it provides meaning — for the poet, probably a magical meaning; for the reader, at the least a metaphoric one. In "Sounding," for example, the unnamed spirit ("she") is virtually a projection of the self: "she is / the same as I am and / I am the same / as anyone alone." This projected lady assumes the kind of external identity the self often lacks on its own. She is prodigal, tenacious, forceful, mysterious, pervasive, courageous, faithful in her fashion. She never threatens to engulf the self as the male often does; rather she represents a self-echo and provides a form of transcendence even in the poem's typical ending-in-crisis: "She follows me / attentive / to the failing edge." In "The Tribe of the Sea" the other is an apparition seen in relation to a group of old men. Her eyes are "the moon's colour"; she personifies the grave, seclusion, seduction; she sprouts flowers, is naked "with the new moon's life." Not surprisingly she is too much for the old men, who go fishing elsewhere; meanwhile the

lady glides off “riding / the last wave out.” Almost surprisingly, the poem succeeds on its own terms. The lunar spirit is fully evoked. There is no Celtic Twilight fayness or dreaminess in her presentation: she is sensual, magnetic, dangerous. To this reader at least, she succeeds in invoking the white Goddess as few of Robert Graves’ poems actually do.

“Night and Fog” presents the familiars as “voices”: it expresses separation between the self and these others and hence offers a useful counterpoint to “Sounding” and “The Tribe and the Sea.” But its central importance springs from overt declaration of the realities which underline virtually all these poems. “Night and Fog” is structured as a dialogue between the self’s meditative characterization of the voices and its direct appeal to the other they represent. The voices have called her into the woods; they are “everything,” dimly figured (“Moss grew / over their faces, seaweed / was their hair”); they inhabit mist, fire, moon; they represent a deep part of the self — “theirs are the wounds / beneath the scar” — indeed they have created it; but they are dying, and then “they are dead now / and / do not answer.” In fact, they refuse to answer throughout the poem: hence the anguished appeals of the persona:

*‘Stay with me — you who are  
other to all*

*I am — you whose darkness is the  
shadow of my birth’.*

*‘Stay beside me — you I have  
returned to  
more times ever than  
before; you I have returned to  
other than anyone,  
other to myself’.*

*‘Stay with me, I need your  
comfort now. One wish is that  
you would return and  
all would be warm again!’*

(italics mine)

Throughout the world of Musgrave’s poems — behind the identity of the self and its functions, the reality of objects, lovers, familiars — is heard the echo of these voices of the other. And in this poem — as in many others — even the echo threatens to vanish. At the end there is a final appeal, “Stay with me,” and then a note of assertion: “Out on the / trailing edges of darkness / I scatter their last bones before me / to my will.” This is fair rhetoric, but no answer to the need expressed in the poem. When the mood of defiance is passed the self will have to



wait for these “last bones” to live again, for the voices to speak as animistic Word. For the voices constitute the life-principle behind the “will” itself.

**G**RAVE-DIRT AND SELECTED STRAWBERRIES (1973) constitutes an important new stage in Susan Musgrave’s poetic development. It is divided into three sections — *Grave Dirt*, *Kiskatinaw Songs* and *Selected Strawberries* — each rather different in subject matter, intent and tone. *Selected Strawberries*, in fact, is quite unlike anything Musgrave has written before. I shall consider it only briefly, for I do not believe this delightful tour-de-force points a permanent direction for her poetic development. *Strawberries* is witty, light-hearted, knowing, mock-proverbial, satiric: full of surreal images, pseudo-information, pastiches and zany conceits. The self as protagonist is entirely withdrawn, leaving the field clear for the preposterous, hilarious, all-purpose symbol of the strawberry, which is located at the very centre of world history. The collection is splendid, and one hopes for more like it, since it expresses a vital new vein of talent. But it is not a product of Musgrave’s central poetic imagination: it constitutes rather a witty spin-off from her deep and darker preoccupations with the self-world. The issues articulated in *Sea-Witch* and *Entrance* can only be elaborated in a poetry which takes up where they leave off.

*Kiskatinaw Songs* (written before the Grave-Dirt poems) effects this in a unique way. For Susan Musgrave has here employed “primitive” rhythms and “natural” images to create a neo-tribal synthesis of self and other:

Grand-father, rise up  
 Spread earth  
 Over me.  
 That man’s eye  
 Was a fire that burned  
 Into me.

What sort of fire, grand-daughter,  
 What sort of fire?

*Ashes to animal  
 It could be that.*

(“Transformation Song”)

or:

Bindweed bind  
 The hunting moon  
 Bind the stars

Bind the hollow mountain  
The dry stream.

Bind the backed-up  
Broken water

Bind the sky.

(“Net Maker’s Song”)

This new mythological objectivity (expressing a Collective Consciousness as well as Unconscious) does indeed “bind” self to other, other to other, and female to male. Self-as-fragmentation becomes transformed into the tribal self, where the world has social coherence. Thus the concealed “tense” in these poems is the First Person Plural — the lost “we” of “After the Rain” projected as Indian communal consciousness.

The transcendence resulting from this breakthrough is evident in the new relations with nature, male and Spirit respectively. Female-male interchange, for instance, shows none of the familiar exploitation and anguish. On the contrary it becomes playful, sensuous, comradely, wholesome.

Go to the right place  
My thick one — empty out  
Go ahead  
I keep my face hid.  
Go on  
Like this, when the fish jump.

(“Counting Song”)

In “Children’s Song” the sexual act, far from being isolating and disillusioning, is a shared game which fructifies the larger community. The children watch and learn themselves, enjoying the interchange in Blakean innocence: “He puts it in / He pulls it out. . . . Because I like to watch / They show me.” And such relational warmth characterizes even separation here. “Song at Parting” expresses affection, tenderness and mutual understanding: “When I fly up, / Don’t look out!” says the woman repeatedly, and near the end: “Between us there is / Much to be remembered.” The simple dignity of these words contrasts strongly with the strident recrimination of many earlier poems. And there is also here the notion of simple affectionate service, one to the other: “Should you fail and darkness come. . . . Then I will come to that place / And bury you.” This is a far cry from the sophisticated self-male world where death and burial tend to be psychic annihilations visited by one partner upon the other.

Natural objects and spiritual forces are also fruitfully inter-dependent in this collection. Where the modern self is normally divorced from its fragmentary world

and fleeting familiars, the tribal self is part of both spirit and nature. There is no need for the "I" to yearn for a "Thou" beyond the "It" because all entities unite here as "We." Reality has become a spiritualized continuum:

From the throat of a  
Fish-hawk  
I fell in

From the gullet of a  
Black-shag  
I fell in

From the shroud of my  
Grand-father  
I fell in.

("Cradle Song")

Bind my dried-up  
Deadhand sister

Bind the backed-up  
Broken water

Bind the hunched-up  
Humpback salmon

Bind the witch

("Net Maker's Song")

As in the earlier realm of the familiars, this world may at times be cruel, dark and ugly. But it has meaning — a meaning not dependent on present mood. Hence even suffering and death may achieve their appropriate ceremony: "Fish-eye feeds the / White bird / Lay bones around his heart." In *Kiskatinaw Songs*, then, the preoccupations of the earlier poems achieve at least a temporary consummation: the questing persona has here attained wholeness in the other as communal self. However, the "tribe" is ultimately self-projected, even self-invented — Musgrave is of the modern Western culture, for all her delicate mythologizing. Hence these songs represent a further mapping of her mental territory, not the end of the journey.

In *Grave-Dirt* and in the later poems from *Impstone* (which I shall consider together because they represent a single period of development) we are back in the world of fragmentation and loss. However there is a still greater degree of objectivization here — especially in certain poems. The fear of rejection and violation remains — at times projected in new and startling ways: "I want / enormous darkness / inside me, / unnatural / emptiness, / not small fingers and /

bodies all lodged and / lost . . . ” (“Afterthought”). But the self-other dialectic is also developed in two uniquely objectivized ways: by mask and by narrative myth. These devices, together with the presence of “occasional” poems (“Burial of the Dog,” etc.) indicate the extent to which Musgrave has begun to distance and control her preoccupation with the self-world.

The use of mask to get outside the suffering “I” and thus achieve a certain balance is especially effective in relation to the theme of solitude. Agriv is given public identity as “The Hermit,” while the girl in “One-Sided Woman” is seen consistently from the outside — both her “inner” world of thoughts and dreams and her outward habits and appearance (her sexual organs are the most fully described part of her) being peculiarly reified. In this poem as in “The Hermit” we have an accumulation of short sections which build up refracted glimpses of life through a considerable time-span — in contrast to the earlier emotive “moments.” The girl is the victim of both natural forces (e.g., “the / moon’s pull”) and the male “hunger.” She is world-weary, forlorn, geared to habit. Yet a part of her still rebels:

The person inside her  
is beating the  
damp walls —  
Knocking on stone  
now and again  
in the wreckage of  
her dreams.

Like Tennyson’s Mariana she exemplifies a type of stricken vulnerability. Any possibility of transcendence of the situation (suggested here in terms of “maps,” “a journey”) is crushed by nausea, anguish, boredom. The past and present is inescapable: a new future apparently impossible. We have here not active torment but passive suffering. The self becomes reconciled to its world in terms of passive despair: “the / calm centre of a / different storm.” In section XII the exploitative men cannot finally touch her: “her eyes like stones / that water / could not reach.”

Agriv’s technique of survival in “The Hermit” is an even completer surrender to stoical passivity. An old man, he is at the opposite pole to the young woman of other poems. Time works on him not only as memory, but as physical erosion. Horrific images express the assaults of the natural world.

The ravens came for his  
eyes; Agriv said  
nothing. . . .

eels risked his  
left nostril. . . .

Agriv has eyes  
 like burned-out  
 stumps in a  
 second-growth  
 wilderness.

Agriv is almost a case-study of the self at bay. He represents Minimal, even Terminal, Man — like a Beckettean tramp transmogrified into a West Coast Wordsworthian rustic. He must endure the assault of predators, of wind and ice, of time, of the female apparition, of his own exhaustion and self-laceration. Yet he has both Independence and a form of Resolution. He achieves co-existence with the world through stoicism: “Agriv said / nothing.” He apprehends and subsists — shivering, breathing “in the thin light,” hearing the sounds of his own decay, learning the suffering of woman, “not pitying age” — not even his own. He has learnt to be what he is — what the other renders him. Instead of the agonized fragmentation of *Songs of the Sea-Witch* we have here a bitter integrity which constitutes a form of self-sufficiency: “A man could be lonelier / always / sharing the same bed.” The creator in “Genesis” has no better defence against solitude.

“The Carver,” the last poem in *Impstone*, reveals a natural connection between the mask and the narrative myth as devices. The carver is to an extent a mask of the poetic self, suffering (“waves break / over his heart”), but also creating (“Metals are clearer, / bone is nearer, / but wood understands”). But the carver is in fact Time, and so the poem becomes a myth of *natural* creation — that sculptural erosion which unbares the final shape of an Agriv. Time as process (the natural world as other) is both separate from the self in the manner of its creation and closely related to it in being creative. Myth provides the meaning and wholeness to a world that too often seems fragmented and incoherent. But the myth is of a special kind here. Though it is “personal” (as opposed to the communal myth of *Kiskatinaw Songs*) the self does not appear as character in relation to the mythic other (cf. “Gathering in the Host’s Wood”). Following Hughes’ *Crow* poems, perhaps, Musgrave has created a series of unique myths — narrative rather than dramatic — which are self-subsistent, constituting an apotheosis of the self-other opposition without exploiting the polarity directly.

“The Impstone” is a prime example of this, combining the resignation of “The Hermit” with the fable-like impersonality of, say, “Genesis.” The self-other dialectic achieves synthesis at a further level: neither escape from nor a turning loose of emotion, in Eliot’s celebrated terms, but the establishment of a finally Romantic “objective correlative” — like Wordsworth’s Peele Castle, at once adamant and luminescent. “This stone has been / rained on / this stone has been / left out in the / dark.” But resignation does not preclude creative activity. So the stone can create woman (the other?) in I; can register poetic truth in VI (“knowing the

truth's disguised / as a bulldozer or a / typewriter"). In fact the impstone provides an almost excessively fitting summation of Miss Musgrave's preoccupations to date. It is multifaceted like the strawberry; it comprehends single identity and relationships and transcendence; it is primeval and archetypally modernist at once; it symbolizes both self, and world, and therefore the self-world. In addition, along with other poems from "Grave-Dirt" and *Impstone*, it adds to the earlier paradigm the important dimension of Time. The "carver" is always immanent here, setting the poems beyond the earlier "tense" of the psychological present. The past has now its own reality, irrespective of present mood ("This stone / was an island / once . . ."); the impstone's identity includes all its past metamorphoses. The ending of the poem is somewhat melodramatic (literally gun-in-mouth), but the central symbol transcends this. Suffering, creating, enduring, the impstone is a touchstone which consolidates Musgrave's poetic identity: as a Canadian survivor, a psychic survivor, a Romantic survivor.

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