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“Good Luck in Cracked Italian”: Richard Hugo in Italy

There’s an arcade in Naples that they call the Galleria Umberto. It’s in the center of the city. In August, 1944, everyone in Naples sooner or later found his way into this place and became like a picture on the wall of a museum.

The Neapolitans came to the Galleria to watch the Americans, to pity them, and to prey upon them.

The Americans came there to get drunk or to pick up something or to wrestle with the riddle. Everyone was aware of this riddle. It was the riddle of war, of human dignity, of love, of life itself. Some came closer than others to solving it. But all the people in the Galleria were human beings in the middle of a war. They struck attitudes. Some loved. Some tried to love.

But they were all in the Galleria Umberto in August, 1944. They were all in Naples, where something in them got shaken up. They’d never be the same again—either dead or changed somehow. And these people who became living portraits in this Gallery were synecdoches for most of the people anywhere in the world.

Outside the Galleria Umberto is the city of Naples.

And Naples is on the bay, in the Tyrrhenian Sea, on

the Mediterranean. This sea is a center of human life and thought. Wonderful and sad things have come out of Italy. And they came back there in August, 1944. For they were dots in a circle that never stops.

—John Horne Burns, *The Gallery*¹

I

And you, straniero, why did you come?

TRAVEL IS UNDERTAKEN FOR VARIOUS REASONS. When it is voluntary it is usually taken for adventure or for discovery, or both. We travel to new places to find out about them and the ways we will react or respond to them, or we return to known places to find how they have changed (or stayed the same), or how *we* have changed since we visited there before. That is, we travel to find out about ourselves as well as about the places we visit, and we rely on the places we travel to to tell us what we are seeking, or finding have found. And thus travel is always, ultimately, an interior or imaginative journey, a matter of mind caught in a new, or newly different, landscape, with new sights to see, new people to meet, new things to do—even if it is also always a kind of repetition or a revisiting of place, of some sense of self we knew we knew but had forgotten, or of something we had hoped to find or re-find in ourselves. But travel can also be chosen for us, can be involuntary, travel we take because we are told to. We take, or undertake, such journeys because someone else wants us, or forces us, to do so.

In this essay I want to consider an American poet who, first, was forced to go to Italy, but who chose to return, years later, to find out something about himself in that past—something he wanted to discover or rediscover, something he wanted to know—not just about what he was then, but about what he had become, or had always been, something he felt he could not know without “finding himself” there again, in Italy, in his early life there in that place—which had been for him, initially, so foreign but which had become somehow, now, so inevitable that he knew he needed to go back. For Richard Hugo the place he first traveled to, the place he was sent to—was first forced to visit—and then came back to, was Italy. And when he first went, when he was sent there, the time was war.

II

. . . a land / where all doors open in.

It was literal war, World War II, and Hugo saw it, and Italy, as a participant in that war. Hugo arrived in Italy in August, 1944, not long out of high school, no more than a boy. He describes his experiences as a bombardier this way: “Our bomber was the B-24, a heavy bomber, the flying pregnant water buffalo we called it. We flew fewer and longer missions, and we flew at high altitude. And we were located near Cerignola, which is not Rome, in drab, hostile Puglia” (see Ripley Hugo, et. al., *The Real West Marginal Way* 95).

In terms of his role as a bombardier Hugo was perhaps unduly modest. He wrote, “I was the world’s worst. One day I missed not only the target in the Brenner Pass, but the entire Brenner Pass itself, thirteen miles wide at that point” (*Triggering Town* 75). In his poem, “Letter to Simic from Boulder” (279-80) Hugo wrote:

Dear Charles: And so we meet once in San Francisco and I
learn I bombed you long ago in Belgrade when you were five.
I remember. We were after a bridge on the Danube
hoping to cut the German armies off as they fled north
from Greece. We missed. Not unusual, considering I
was one of the bombardiers. I couldn’t hit my ass if
I sat on the Norden or ride a bomb down singing
The Star Spangled Banner.

Next time, if you want to be sure
you survive, sit on the bridge I’m trying to hit and wave.

But, whatever his success or failure as a soldier, Hugo came away from the war with two convictions: that “the world was brutal and dangerous and I didn’t belong in it.” Even so, the war and his bombing missions clearly haunted Hugo throughout his life. A late poem, “In Your War Dream” (281) begins and ends with the line, “You must fly your 35 missions again.” (One assumes that the “it” in the phrase, “I didn’t belong in it,” refers to the war, but in some ways it seems clear that Hugo, like most poets, felt suspicious about his “belonging” even in the world itself.) The danger and the “insanity” of flying bombing missions in World War II has been memorably documented in Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22* (1961). Indeed, Heller has coined a phrase, “Catch-22,” that has come to define the “insanity” of World War II (and, by extension, any number of smaller “madnesses” that men encounter in life). The “Catch-22” that Heller had in mind in terms of the war states that a

man “would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn’t, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn’t have to; but if he didn’t want to he was sane and had to” (46). In a section of *The Real West Marginal Way* entitled “Catch-22, Addendum” Hugo describes a pilot who, like Heller’s protagonist Yossarian, seeks, and finds, a way out of the war, around the “Catch-22.” For Hugo, the “fictionalized facts of *Catch-22*” were “psychological realities” (97).

Perhaps Hugo’s most vivid early poetic description of a bombing raid is “Mission to Linz,” the long poem in the center of his second book, *Death of the Kapowsin Tavern* (82):

You fly north to a point, swing slowly
to the east, open your belly and brace
before the eight-minute course, planned
on violent maps a smile before, but now
Linz opens like a flower below your nose
and the silence drives louder airs into the bay.
The dagger black explodes and the praying increases
until the over-ripe melon of day, cracking its hide
shows the red-moist fear just back of your brows.²

As a bombardier in the 15th Air Force, Hugo flew thirty-five heavy bombing missions out of Italy before he came back home in the spring of 1945 to attend college on the GI Bill and study creative writing with Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington. But Hugo had learned to write, or he had learned what he wanted to write in Italy, in the war. As he himself put it—metaphorically, but with the vivid reality of his experience of war-torn Italy clearly in mind—he had learned that “our landscapes choose us and writing poems is a momentary burst of self acceptance in alien country” (Heyen 126). Additionally, Hugo felt that he was required to be responsible to the places he was taken to, or that he visited, literally or imaginatively—or both. Thus the war and Italy were to become Hugo’s “triggering subjects” for his early poetic practice and for a number of his poems, early and late.

III

... *an imagined town* . . .

Hugo wrote many poems identified with particular towns. Some were real places he had visited, others only places that he had “visited” imaginatively, and some were places that he had simply imagined. As he said in *Triggering Town*, “an

imagined town is at least as real as an actual town” (13-14). “If the poem turns out good, the town will have become your hometown no matter what name it carries” (17). He added, “[w]henver I see a town that triggers whatever it is inside me that wants to write a poem, I assume at least one of the following: . . . It is not on any map” (19, 23).³ Hugo’s notion of the “triggering subject” of poems—which has almost become a cliché in talking about contemporary writing, is defined and discussed in *Triggering Town*, one of the most important and useful books on the craft of creative writing written in recent memory. Hugo describes what he means by the “triggering subject” this way:

A poem can be said to have two subjects, the initiating or triggering subject, which starts the poem or ‘causes’ the poem to be written, and the real or generated subject, which the poem comes to say or mean, and which is generated or discovered in the poem during the writing. . . . The initiating subject should trigger the imagination as well as the poem. If it doesn’t, it may not be a valid subject but only something you feel you should write a poem about. Never write a poem about anything that ought to have a poem written about it. . . . The point is, the triggering subject should not carry with it moral or social obligations to feel or claim you feel certain ways. If you feel pressure to say what you know others want to hear and don’t have enough devil in you to surprise them, shut up. (4-5)

In terms of the war and Italy as “triggering subjects” it is worth remembering Hugo’s comments on landscape and poetry—the way poets use their own landscapes or the landscapes that they come to “own” in terms of writing poems. Hugo defined a “landscape poet” as “a poet who uses places and experiences in those places as starting points for poems. For such a poet . . . there are two landscapes, one external and one internal.” For Hugo, the poet “must emotionally own the external landscape.” Indeed, “the external must be possessed, not just observed.” As such a landscape poem is one in which “[t]he world is psychologically restricted but the vision is vast.” The “real poem” then is “the one growing out of the inner landscape and revealing previously unknown personal relationships with the world” (see “Problems with Landscapes,” 33, 37, 34, 37).⁴

IV

. . . *away from war.*

Hugo returned to Italy in 1963.⁵ It wasn't easy for him to do so. He was almost forty years old, and to make the trip both he and his wife had quit their secure steady jobs in Seattle, determined to live on their savings until they ran out of money. During this year away—"This year in Italy / succeed[ing] that year of war" (158)—Hugo wanted to revisit the scenes, to find himself and what he had been back there then as a boy, to see what he had seen, the *sites* and the *sights*, of his earlier life.⁶ He no doubt hoped to find himself both in terms of his somewhat dead-ended life in the present, and in terms of his youth and young adulthood (lost and found again in Italy) all over again. Even so, as he soon discovered (as if he had not known) the Italy he returned to was not the Italy he had been to before. The Italy Hugo remembered from 1944 was "brown and gray and lifeless." And that was the Italy he expected to find again when he came back. As he said, he had fallen "in love with a sad land," and he "wanted it sad one more time" (*Triggering Town* 76).

And so if there were "good reasons for loving the sad early Italy" (*Triggering Town* 76) of his youth, Hugo wanted to find them—or find them again. In this sense his return was a return not to a past but to a future, and the possibilities in that future that were ahead of him. And he did find that past and that future in the poems that came out of his return trip, poems that combined his early time there with what he was or had become in the interim, poems that in some sense allowed or permitted that early life to be not only named and finally more fully understood, but also justified and made peace with, put into place in the past—and in the present and in the possibilities for what was to come. The way Hugo accomplished this mission was by writing his poems about that past, many of them subsequently collected in his book *Good Luck in Cracked Italian*.

In his first section heading, "Where All Does Open In," Hugo, inviting entry, begins at the beginning, with "Docking at Palermo" (13), in which he recounts his first arrival in Italy, when, as he said, he walked "a street called war." This opening poem ends with what might be Hugo's plea throughout the whole book, a plea that echoed out over his whole year back—"now I have no gun, show me how to cry." Then, even though he knew that "it's hard / to go back years" (14), he makes his way back, retracing his tracks across Italy the way he had back then, from Sicily to Naples, and then across the country toward the Adriatic and the eastern coast where he and his bombing crew were based.

If it is the case that "Maybe in books / what happened and why [has been] worked out" (115), Hugo wants to work it out now on and in his own terms, in the present and in the presence of his past. In "A View from Contana" (116) he remembers:

Twenty years ago today, the G.I.'s came.
Did bells ring then? Were the natives glad?
The liberators, loud and oddly young,
ignored this view, the lovely dome
of the cathedral halfway down the hill,
the yellow tile igniting summer
spreading to that wide south out of war.

If now, “away from war,” the “miles were clean” (117), Hugo knows, when he gets to Cerignola, that “This is Puglia and cruel” (118)—or at least it was back then. It is, it was, a place where “Harsh heat and roaring cold / are built in like abandonment” (119). And yet:

It used to be my town. The closest one
for bomb-bomb boys to buy *spumanti* in.
It reeked like all the towns. Italian men
were gone. The women locked themselves in dark
behind the walls, the bullet holes patched now.
Dogs could sense the madness and went mute.
The streets were mute despite the cry
of children: give me cigarette. But always flat—
the land in all directions and the time. (119)

But since he “was desolate too,” Hugo “survived.” Now he asks himself, “So why return?” And his answer is “You’re still my town” (119). And he remembers—and remembers something he missed:

I came in August
and went home in March, with no chance
to experience the miles of tall grain
jittering in wind, the olive trees
alive from recent rain. (119)⁷

If it is the case that a “poet’s voice is a record of reactions, the sound of a way of seeing,” and if the elements of such a voice “are in part determined by the specifics of the landscape to which he is answering”⁸ then Italy and the Italian landscape Hugo sought out and found again were part of both his voice and his vision, antiphonal elements alive in mind, memory, and memory’s mind.

V

An empty field.

When Hugo arrived back in Italy he especially wanted to find two specific places. One was Tretitoli, the squadron area where he had lived for the eight months he was there, and the other was “a field somewhere south of a town call Spinazzola. . . . An empty field” (*Triggering Town* 82). He found them both. And he defined what he found in that deserted place and in that (then and even now) empty field in two memorable poems: “Centuries near Spinazzola” and “Spinazzola: Quella Cantina Là.”

“Centuries near Spinazzola” (29), an early poem, both describes Hugo’s immediate experience with this small town in terms of his war experiences there and describes it in terms of the long history of that area in Italy’s long history. First he sees it in the context of the general locale, and then in an imaginative reconstruction of what it must have seemed like to one on the ground as the bombers flew their missions overhead, and finally in terms of the ways in which such distancings occur.

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

And then, thinking more immediately, and now “traveling” in his “fever,” Hugo imagines himself there—or back there then—but imagines it all—past and present—in an immediate past and present “memory”:

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. . . .⁹

“Spinazzola: *Quella Cantina Là*” (124-26), which one critic has called “the most important single poem in Richard Hugo’s career”¹⁰—a claim I wouldn’t want to make—begins in that same empty field near that small town in southern Italy with a quintessential Richard Hugo line, one which is immediately followed up by the refrain that will hold the poem together, being repeated (in various places, and in each stanza) like a monotonous “explanation” that insists on its own refusal to

explain things—as *it explains things*.¹¹ These are lines and this a refrain that, in many ways, define much of Hugo’s poetry—and much of his life.

“Spinazzola: *Quella Cantina Lå*” begins:

A field of wind gave license for defeat.
I can’t explain.

VI

. . . without hate or fame.

The wind, so pervasive in so many of Hugo’s poems—and so pervasive and insistent in this one—is a wind that “seemed full of men but without hate or fame.”¹² And Hugo, back to find himself in that field near Spinazzola—which is both a kind of magnet and a fixed focus of what and who he once was there—finds himself somewhat lost, or at least confused, near a farm he thinks he remembers, near a road that “slants off to nowhere.” The field is mixed in memory and wine and in an anonymous man’s voice (it might be the young Hugo himself) “twenty years ago and just as old.”

The grass bent. The wind
seemed full of men but without hate or fame.

I can’t explain.

And then he remembers the war and flying, and waking up “five miles over Villach in a smoke / that shook [his] tongue”—just as this poem of memory has also shaken his tongue loose in its lines. “Here” then again, “by accident,” Hugo—lying for the sake of truth—tells us, “I came back to the world.” Or at least he imagines that he has, even if, as he keeps acknowledging, insisting, that he “can’t explain” exactly why or how it happened, or is happening now. But, even though he was brought back by the “wrong truck,” he finds that “home-old” canteen. And he finds that here, again,

A man can walk
the road . . . without a song or gun.
I can’t explain the wind. The field is east
toward the Adriatic from my wine.

Never before had he been able to walk “from a bad sky / to a field of wind.” And, again, he says he “can’t explain.” But if, back then, “The drone of bombers going

home / made the weather warm,” now “the olive trees / throw silver to each other down the hill.” And in this way that field in rural Italy becomes “vital” to Richard Hugo—past and present, boy and man—even as the war (perhaps both the literal one in the past and the mental one in the present) “went on absurd.” He asks an awkward, poetic, thematically repetitive question in an attempt to find an answer, to help himself “explain” or understand: “Don’t honest fields / reveal us in their winds?”—even while planes and men keep tumbling as the wars go on “absurd?” He keeps saying, explaining, “I can’t explain,” and yet he knows, and now knows he knew then, that somehow those “long nights,” long ago back then, just as these new nights now, made and make that foreign place a “home,” a place one could, or must, return to. Even so, he knows and knew, he mixed “up things, the town, the wind, the war. / I can’t explain. . . .” Still imagining, still imaginatively recreating his search—as if it were yet another bombing mission, another target he had to find and hit—he says:

I forget my field
of wind, out there east between
the Adriatic and my second glass of wine.

But then, keeping the war as metaphor in mind, he asserts, or reasserts:

I’ll find the field. I’ll go feeble down
the road strung gray like spoiled wine
in the sky.

And he knows he will keep thinking and drinking until that “bomber fleet / lost twenty years comes droning home.”

The poem ends with a three line coda, an “explanation” of the knowingly unknown that the poem and Hugo has here searched for and found:

I can’t explain. Outside, on the road
that leaves the town reluctantly,
way out the road’s a field of wind.¹³

VII

Something seemed familiar.

In a prose memoir of his time in the war Hugo describes an occasion when, hitchhiking to see a friend, he got dropped off, “lost in the Italian countryside,” in a town he’d never seen, “miles off-course” (*Triggering Town* 83). The town was Spinazzola.

I sat down to rest by a field of grass. I was tired, dreamy, the way we get without enough sleep, and I watched the wind move in waves of light across the grass. The field slanted and the wind moved uphill across it, wave after wave. The music and motion hypnotized me. The longer the grasses moved, the more passive I became. Had I walked this road when I was a child? Something seemed familiar. I didn’t care about getting back to the base now. I didn’t care about the war. I was not a part of it anymore. Trucks went by and I didn’t even turn to watch them, let alone thumb a ride. Let them go. I would sit here forever and watch the grass bend in the wind and the war would end without me and I would not go home, ever. Years later . . . I wondered if it would be there, Spinazzola, the road leading out, the field of grass. . . . My wife and I . . . found the old dirt road. . . . And there, near where the road led out of town, was an old cantina. . . . We sat there and drank wine, and the cantina became very much like that field of grass I still had to find. I found it. It was a lot farther than I’d remembered and I was surprised I’d walked so far that day nearly twenty years before. . . . I saw it just for a moment as we sped by in the car and I didn’t ask the driver to stop. I didn’t even mention it to my wife at the time. . . . Back in Cerignola, I told her I’d seen it. It was still there and long ago something, important only to me, had really happened. Whatever it was . . . by now I was old enough to know explanations are usually wrong. We never quite understand and we can’t quite explain. (*Triggering Town* 83-84, 85-87)

But then he asks—meaning to talk, I take it, both about his poem, his “explanation,” and the experience itself—“Do you understand?” And he answers,

“I’m not sure I do.” But he knows, “I had to find the field again. I had to find Spinazzola and retrace that day. If you need a reason, say I am a silly man (*Triggering Town* 85). Hugo, of course, knew he needed to know, to understand, and his poem, in spite of continually insisting that he “can’t explain,” *is* his understanding, his explanation, of that day in Spinazzola—which is, in turn, his “explanation” of his early life in the war, in an Italy he had both literally and imaginatively gone back to and here, in this poem, finally, “safely reclaimed” (*Triggering Town* 89) almost twenty years later.

VIII

A map can make you dream.

But “Even long wars end” (127) and “bombed-out panes have been replaced” (129). If there is a hint, here, at the beginning of this poem, “Galleria Umberto I” (130), that Hugo is punning on “panes” and “pains,” the pun is made explicit before the end of the poem, when Hugo writes, “There’s no metaphor for pain, despair. / It’s just there. You live with it, if lucky / in a poem.” At the end of “Galleria Umberto I” Hugo writes:

How could this poem
with no tough man behind it, come to me
today, walking where I walked
twenty years ago amazed, when now
no one is hungry, the gold facade is polished
and they have no word in dialect for lonely?¹⁴

“[T]he cost of death is time” (137). The pain of war and the memories of it, if one is “lucky,” even in “cracked Italian,” can be dealt with, made peace with, in poems. And you will “come back always knowing what to love” (134). As he says in a poem near the end of the book:

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. (147)

And if—at the end of this long journey back to a beginning—Richard Hugo “still wasn’t sure why” he’d gone back to Italy, he finally came to know that “it must be [for] the best reason in the world” (*Triggering Town* 98). And it was. It was so that he would be able to write his poems.

And isn’t that, finally, why we all travel? To be able to tell about it—where we have been, and why, and what we’ve found, and to truly find ourselves and to be able to put ourselves, with those places, into words?

Notes

1. Cf. Hugo’s “Galleria Umberto I,” in which he writes, “It was here that John Horne Burns / saw war summed up, the cracked life / going on. . .” (*Making Certain It Goes On: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo* 129). All subsequent references to Hugo’s poetry will be to this collection and will be referenced in parentheses in the text.
2. James Wright, Hugo’s friend and fellow poet, called “Mission to Linz” a “great poem” as well as a “shockingly graceful” one. It was, Wright said, “a secret account of the spiritual life” (see Wright’s *Collected Prose* 296). Interestingly enough, in a poem in *Good Luck in Cracked Italian* (25), one that Hugo excluded from his *Collected Poems*, he suggests that words can be bombs (“whatever word is bomb”)—that words can “explode.”
3. Hugo lists seven pages of “assumptions” here.
4. Holden, thinking along these lines, suggests that sometimes a Hugo landscape is “intended not merely as a metaphor to describe the speaker’s felt inner life; it is offered as a confirmation of it. By singling out the appropriate evidence in the landscape, the speaker has justified his own vaguely intimated predicament. He has found outside himself, in the very elements of the landscape, not just an ‘objective correlative’ for his misery, but a sort of company for it.” Therefore, at least in some instances, “[p]ainful autobiographical facts and a sense of personal failure have been reworked into an art-object, converted into aesthetic victory. Almost incongruously, by an exceedingly circuitous route, experience which had seemed to be hopelessly without value—fraught with pain, guilt, and shame—has been redeemed” (see “West Marginal Way” 28, 32).
5. Hugo actually made two trips back to Italy in the 1960s. The first with his first wife, Barbara, in 1963; the second, in 1967, by himself.
6. In perhaps his best known, indeed his signature poem, “Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg” (216-17), Hugo writes: “all memory resolves itself in gaze.”
7. Holden calls this poem (“April in Cerignola”) Hugo’s approach to the “geographical and visionary center” of the book. “Like all the settings in Hugo’s pivotal poems,” he says, “the wartime landscape that he recollects is desolate, a living monument to experience that has been abandoned, repressed, left for dead” (*Landscape* 75). Here, of course, Hugo has gone back, has returned.

8. See Garber, "Large Man in the Mountains," *A Trout in the Milk*, 238. Garber argues that there are poems in Hugo's canon (like "Where Mission Creek Runs Hard for Joy," 168-69) where he "shows himself watching his own seeing at work" and "recognizes that his reading of a scene shapes the scene into subjective patterns which open up more of the world within than of the world outside" (242).
9. Speaking of this experience, Hugo said: "I came to a field of long grass, with the wind blowing across it, and a very strange thing happened. Suddenly I felt very harmonized somehow with the world" (see Gerstenberger, "On Hills Going East: An Interview with Richard Hugo," *A Trout in the Milk* 218).
10. Allen, 72. Allen, contending that the "field of wind" in this poem is "an image at once turbulent with possible terror from the air war and full of the tenacity of natural processes, self-regeneration, and renewal," argues that this "field of grass outside Spinazzola is where World War II stopped for Hugo" (77).
11. The refrain in "Spinazzola: *Quella Cantina Là*" is reminiscent of a similar, but a less overt series of repetitions in "Mission to Linz," where an insistent line (like the flight itself from Italy to northern Austria which the poem documents?)—"There are places away from the world where the air is always winter"—is repeated and then balanced (as if the flight has been successful and the crew is returning home) by another long line—"There is land away from the sky where the sound is always summer" (80, 83). Cf. a line in Hugo's first published poem, "West Marginal Way": "Some places are forever afternoon" (6 and Holden "West Marginal Way" 26).
12. As has often been noted, wind is important to many of Hugo's poems. The critics have taken their key from Hugo himself: "One of my favorite weathers is windy, rainy weather" (*The Real West Marginal Way* 256). Indeed, in his poem "Landscapes" (244) Hugo writes:

If I painted, I'd paint landscapes. In museums
I stop often at van Ruysdael, and the wind he painted
high in European oaks gives license to my style.

The wind I paint
is low and runs the grass down dancing to the sea.

As long as wind is pouring, my paint keeps farming green.

Gitzen argues that Hugo "derives symbolic effects from weather conditions" (79) and that "his landscapes served as impressionistic paradigms of his inward state" (76). He adds, "The most pervasive single atmospheric feature of his poems is wind, never the positive wind of change but always the whirlwind of destruction. If he rarely uses the term 'death,' it is simply because wind serves him as a synonym" (79). The final section of *Good Luck in Cracked Italian* begins with a poem, "South Italy, Remote and Stone" (146-47), that almost seems a sequel to "Spinazzola: *Quella Cantina Là*." Its opening line reads, "The enemy's not poverty. It's wind."

13. Holden suggests that “The vision of the field is but an extreme instance—a spontaneous vision—of the kind of realization toward which all Hugo’s pivotal poems strive” (*Landscape* 78). He adds: “Hugo’s vision is the perfect negative of Wordsworthian vision. Whereas in Wordsworthian spots of time, the poet remembers being drawn away from civilization into a sense of kinship with his surrounding landscape, by discovering in it reassuring evidence of kindly human attributes and nurture, in Hugo’s vision the poet is drawn back into a sense of kinship with civilization by remembering landscapes that contain depressing evidence of human defeat and futility. Through the sharing of such vast negations, which cut across all human distinctions, Hugo finds that he does indeed belong among people; he is a member of the community of the homeless and the failed, a community that includes everybody, the living and the dead, thus absolving him of his sense of private and special shame. This absolution, which is the goal of the protagonist’s quest and which brought him to Spinazzola, informs the remainder of the book” (*Landscape* 79).

14. Garber argues: “For a poet like Hugo, who carries all of his old worlds with him, the elements of voice are also determined by all that he has faced that is still there for him: Seattle and some ancient pains are continually modifying—and being modified by—whatever new territory he reaches” (“Large Man in the Mountains,” *A Trout in the Milk* 238). As a follow-up to his own various comments on his life in terms of his writing, Gerstenberger describes Hugo’s “consciousness of directions” and considers his “relationships of physical space . . . not only a psychological mapping of limitations” but “an aspect of Western American consciousness” and of the “belonging to a land not fully possessed, an outward map that has physical space in it commensurate to and useful for expressing the inner journey of self” (19) as crucial to his understanding and to his poetry, even to that poetry that is set somewhere else, i. e. outside of his native “region.” Cf. Garber’s comment: “. . . the region in which he is located is as much within him as without, and most often in both places at once. The landscape where things happen to Hugo goes as far into his mind as it goes outside of it. . . . Thus, if we want to call Hugo a regional poet we have to extend the region he encompasses to include the mind which makes the poems out of those meetings” (“Fat Man at the Margin,” *A Trout in the Milk* 223). And Dave Smith, thinking of Hugo’s “ziggagging search for home” and remembering lines like “You weave home to homes you’ll never own” (136), says “For Richard Hugo, the quest for self and the quest for home are virtually synonymous.” Smith adds, “Hugo is fascinated with maps . . . because they spatialize what would otherwise have to be a linear and narrative progression. But his home does not lie on any map. It exists inside language alone, in poems, so that language itself becomes not merely the referent of what is real but the literal container and shaper of what is real. To invite all those places into the poem is, therefore, to give them a chance to live. . .” (282, 284).

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