

“AWASH PERILOUSLY WITH SONG”:
THE POETRY OF JOHN V. HICKS

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first scholarly study on the work of Saskatchewan poet John V. Hicks, and focuses on the themes of music and spirituality in his poetry.

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"There were many reasons, unspoken, why
Progress was no more than satisfactory; why
Purpose, measuring first ventures against
Outcomes, settled for the partial success."
- "The Ritual Hours"

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"Not quite away / is where turtles will go / always." - John V. Hicks

For Susan Willigar (1971-2002) who wanted me to call this project "Turtles are Slow" and who is always "not quite away" in my heart.

For my dad, Allan Isinger, (1943-1998), and my grandparents, Evelyn Russell (1911-1997) and Frederick J. Russell (1897-1989) who couldn't be here to see me accomplish this, but who I know were watching over me every step of the way.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| F&S | <i>Fives & Sixes</i> |
| MM | <i>Month's Mind</i> |
| NIAFC | <i>Now is a Far Country</i> |
| OBC | <i>Overheard by Conifers</i> |
| RR | <i>Renovated Rhymes</i> |
| RT | <i>Rootless Tree</i> |
| SLTS | <i>Silence Like the Sun</i> |
| S&S | <i>Sticks and Strings: Selected and New Poems</i> |
| WYS | <i>Winter Your Sleep</i> |

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: A POET'S JOURNEY

They say rude things about
the creatives. They know for certain
not only how it should have been
done, but the essential what.

- "Critiques," *Overheard by Conifers*, 64

Tuning the Orchestra

In a letter to Thistledown Press in 1978, prior to the publication of John V. Hicks's first book of poems, well-known Canadian poet Earle Birney wrote that Hicks "is surely Canada's most neglected poet." Hicks has been widely published in prestigious journals across both Canada and the United States, and is the author of ten books. Despite this impressive publication record he has received little in the way of national attention, and there has been little critical work done beyond the scope of book reviews. Hicks has been awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, an honorary D. Litt. from the University of Saskatchewan, a lifetime award of excellence from the Saskatchewan Arts Board, and although touted as "a major Canadian poet" by Doris Hillis, Hicks remains relatively unknown outside of Saskatchewan and select literary circles.

John Victor Hicks—"Jack" to his friends—was born February 24, 1907, in London, England, but immigrated to New Brunswick, Canada, with his parents while still an infant. The family moved to Montreal where Hicks spent his boyhood, then relocated to Alberta before finally settling in Saskatchewan where Hicks remained until his death in 1999 at the age of 92. Although he had no university education, Hicks worked as an accountant, first with a wholesale grocer in Prince Albert, and later with the provincial government until his retirement in 1971. He began writing poetry in his thirties and published poems in journals long before his first book, *Now is a Far Country*, appeared in 1978. Hicks's work has appeared in such prestigious publications as *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Washington Post*, as well as most of the major Canadian literary journals. As for his musical education, little information is

available to indicate what type of training he received, although he served as the organist at St. Alban's Anglican Cathedral in Prince Albert for over sixty years. Hicks was married to Marjorie (Kisbey) Hicks, a composer and musician, until her death in 1986.

Hicks's poetry can typically be classified as lyric poetry, which can be defined as "poetry in which music predominates over story or drama" ("Lyric Poetry"). Traditionally, such poetry was "sung, chanted, or recited to a musical accompaniment," but today is most often characterized by an emphasis on emotion, personal experience, or meditative qualities. The "music" of modern lyric poetry is "more likely to be a suggestion at best, like a vestigial memory" ("Lyric Poetry"). Hicks's poetry in particular seems to attempt to restore the early connection between music and poetry as they complemented one another to create something that was more than sound and words, something that resonated in a way that ensured listeners could carry away a part of the experience with them. The repeated refrains of early lyrics were passed from player to listener to be carried in the body memory of the listener—listeners could recall the pleasure of the musical experience by recreating the sounds or the lyrics as remembered. In the same way, Hicks strives to leave his reader-listeners with not only a sense of meaning, but an auditory memory as well.

Although Hicks began writing in the 1930s, his book publishing career did not begin until 1978, suggesting two distinct periods of influence upon his writing—the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century poets he read as a young man and the writers who were his contemporaries when he began to receive attention for his books beginning in the seventies. Bidwell writes that "It should not...surprise us that to read through Hicks's work is to hear the overtones of earlier poets. A writer's distinctive voice and mannerisms are of course no more separable from those of writers he has read than anyone's voice and mannerisms are free of family resemblance" (9). The presence of poetic echoes is neither a criticism of Hicks nor is it uncharacteristic of writers in general. We are all products of what we read and listen to, and Hicks's strongest influences were Yeats, Frost, and Eliot. In his own work, Hicks struggled with many of the same themes that these writers explored, including issues of spirituality, devotion, and human relationships. Walter de la Mare, Wallace Stevens, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and John Keats can also be heard, as well as earlier religious poets like John Donne and George

Herbert. Although Hicks prefers traditional lyric forms and in spite of the criticism that his language is sometimes archaic, he is clearly a twentieth-century writer with modern language patterns and concerns.

Hicks makes no secret of the fact that he is standing on the shoulders of greatness; allusions to other poems are intended, and meant to be picked up by the well-versed reader. “Four Quartets” and “Ash Wednesday,” two of Eliot’s best known works, exemplify the twin themes of music and spirituality that also permeate Hicks’s poetry, and Hicks’s poem “Ash Wednesday” is meant to recall Eliot’s piece. Like Eliot, Hicks preferred the focus to remain on the poem rather than the poet; in keeping with Hicks’s humility, he adopted the practice of sending anonymous poems to friends because he felt it was the words that were the most important, not his role in their creation.

Hicks never owned a television, relying on public radio, books, and recordings for his information and entertainment, often revisiting books or recordings as he would old friends. This appreciation of classical canonical works may explain in part why there is little discernible stylistic change in Hicks’s writing over his publishing career. Although it can be argued that his work becomes more reflective and perhaps more tightly written in the last two books, it appears that Hicks was comfortable with the lyric form and used it with confidence to express his ideas. Hicks, who also never owned a car and hated to travel, remained somewhat isolated from his contemporaries, preferring to inhabit a world of close friends, music, and literature. He had no ambitions to become a well-known poet, and was content to pursue his writing for the sake of the work itself and the pleasure it gave him. Arguably, if Hicks had been a more accessible public figure, if he had travelled to promote his work, or if he had been more open to the changing landscape of Canadian poetry, it is likely that his work would have received greater attention among his contemporaries.

Hicks, as both musician and poet, operates from a knowledge of composition that bridges the two art forms. The process of composition—whether poetic or musical—is, in many ways, the same. Words achieve the same function as notes, placed in phrases between moments of silence (rest). Rhythm can be charted in terms of meters and feet in poetry, measures and time signatures in music. Tempo increases or decreases by altering line lengths, adding punctuation, choosing words whose letters slide together in harmony

or crash noisily against one another creating dissonance. As poet and musician, Hicks is acutely aware of these elements and how they complement one another, so that for Hicks language is its own kind of music. The process of poetic composition and the resultant text cannot be separated from his understanding and awareness of music.

In *A Prosody Handbook*, Shapiro and Beum state that “Poetry—like prose, and like music—is an art of sounds moving in time” (1), a concept Hicks would certainly have supported. The study of prosody is based in an awareness of, not only the subject of a poem, but its execution with regard to sound, specifically rhythm, rhyme, tempo and flow, the poet’s “control of the stream of sound” (2). A skillful poet, which Hicks certainly is, will “shape a prosodic form that is perfectly suited to the point he wants to make” (2); in other words, the marriage of sound and subject is vital to the poetic experience because a “poem’s music affects us whether or not we make it conscious” (Hirschfield 9). Hicks was keenly aware of the necessity of creating poetic compositions that not only conveyed his ideas, but spoke to readers at a more basic level, creating a music that would inspire a sense of intimacy and connection. Jane Hirschfield has suggested that poetry creates a “startling intimacy” (8), and I believe Hicks would support her idea that in reading a poem there remains “some echo of a writer’s physical experience” (8). Most clearly that experience can be understood in terms of the language choices which help to create the overall sense of the poem by providing a cadence of stressed and unstressed sounds, hard or soft consonants, liquid vowels, and rhythms which can imitate anything from the beating of a heart to the slow lapping of water.

My attention has mainly concentrated on the language that Hicks uses in his poetry and how that language serves to enhance the poem’s ideas with phonological reinforcement. I have paid particular attention to the way word choice functions as a means of creating particular sounds meant to resonate with the reader. Although prosodic analysis encourages the scanning of poems for analysis, I have stayed away from this process except in particular instances where an understanding of rhythm is helpful in examining emphasis within a poem. Scansion is not an exact science, and even musical

scansion (assigning stressed and unstressed syllables a musical value), which allows for greater degrees of variability than graphic scansion, is subjective.¹

In exploring music as a primary motif in the poetry of John V. Hicks, I was faced with several key challenges that influenced the way research was conducted. First and foremost, as has already been noted, critical and scholarly material on his work is practically non-existent despite his prolific publishing record. Aside from a handful of book reviews and a few brief news articles, there are virtually no critical sources. Paul Bidwell's introductory essay for the collection *Sticks and Strings* is essentially the only academic source available. The lack of criticism should be taken, not as a judgment on the fundamental merit of Hicks's work, but rather as an indication there is still work to be done on poets who do not immediately catch the attention of academics and critics. Poets published by small, regional presses rarely have the funding or publicity to gain a national audience and are less likely to attract high-profile reviewers. In part Hicks's failure to capture attention may also be attributed to his personality; he was well-known for his humility with regard to his work. People who knew Hicks characterize him as someone who actively embraced the practice of writing, who took joy in the act of doing the work, and a person for whom going out and sharing the work was secondary; indeed, if someone else liked the work, it was merely an added pleasure and not a requirement for continued perseverance. Since little scholarly work has been done on Hicks, the main focus of my examination centres on providing close readings of the poem themselves, highlighting Hicks's use of language and thematic elements to create a body of work that reflects his knowledge of and attention to music, as well as the way music and spirituality are intrinsically linked. By providing close readings of the primary texts, I hope to provide not only a sample of Hicks's work examined with an eye towards its musical sensibilities, but also to establish a starting point for further discussion and more extensive scholarly investigation.

Where possible, I have tried to support my readings with critical material drawn from writings on the larger themes of poetry and music, but such broad areas of

¹ Paul Fussell's *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* is an extremely useful guide to prosodic analysis, and scansion in particular. In my experience, scansion is far more open to interpretation than Fussell maintains and therefore somewhat problematic as a means of analysis.

investigation are not always suitable or even helpful. A general survey on the subject of music and poetry spans centuries and results in a selection of texts that tend to approach music and poetry from a historical point of view. The majority of texts that link the terms “music” and “poetry” suggest ways in which the two disciplines complement or resist one another; most studies deal with the inter-relationship between poetry and music where they exist as two distinct arts within specific junctures of time, reflecting thematic elements from a larger social or historical context. Studies of the music in Shakespeare’s plays, seventeenth-century liturgical music, or African-American jazz lyrics do not provide much either in the way of concrete theory, or in terms of relevant points of reference.

In *The Tuning of the Word: The Musico-Literary Poetics of the Symbolist Movement*, David Michael Hertz touches on Baudelaire and Barthes, but the connection between music and poetry is dealt with in relatively abstract terms. *Music as the Language of Emotion* by Carroll C. Pratt proposes that “for most listeners music makes an appeal to the mind, not the body” (8). The suggestion seems to be that whatever emotion the listener might experience is merely a “signifier” of emotion divorced from the true emotional experience. Although there may be some merit in exploring this concept in relation to music, it seems that whether the listener experiences a visceral reaction or assigns emotional significance to the experience is mostly a matter of perception. There is relatively little difference between the experienced or the *perceived* effect of poetry on the listener. Furthermore, it is difficult to extrapolate from music directly to poetry and the study does not make any concrete connections between the two.

Sidney Lanier’s work *Music and Poetry: Essays upon Some Aspects and Inter-Relations of the Two Arts* does connect the two arts, although it is limited in its usefulness. Published in 1898, the book emphasizes the notion that there is a measure of divine inspiration connected to the creation of music and poetry, and offers little in the way of concrete examples of how the arts intersect other than to discuss general similarities (i.e. how poetry grows out of an oral tradition and is connected to minstrels). More helpful is James Anderson Winn’s *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations Between Poetry and Music*, although again the disciplines are considered as separate and only discussed in terms of mutual influence in particular time periods or

how they share similar traits, such as rhythm or language. Although the book does acknowledge that “the divisions between academic disciplines make musicologists and literary scholars unlikely to read each other’s work” (x), the study stresses how people can benefit from a more interdisciplinary approach as a way of deepening their knowledge of their own discipline rather than offering anything specific about the understanding of poetry as expressing musicality through language and sound, which is where my own interest lies.

Studies of individual authors who were either musicians or who featured musical themes prominently in their work were helpful only to a point. *Paul Valéry and Music* by Brian Stimpson was useful in providing a limited model of how music and writing could be examined concomitantly if one was writing a book-length study. T. S. Eliot’s writings in *The Sacred Wood*, and critical responses such as *T.S. Eliot’s Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music* offered insight into Eliot’s work and his views on music and poetics, but ultimately it was difficult to find anything that attempted to address the musical nature of poetry itself, the sense of how language often duplicates the emotional/visceral response most readily associated with music. Hicks probably comes closest to Eliot in his attempt to create poetry that equals music’s ability to be transcendent, but at best Eliot’s poetics can only offer a starting place.

My interest in John V. Hicks’s work is not primarily in the way his poetic output intersects with musical composition, although the transformation of his work into music is certainly worth examining, albeit by someone with a more thorough understanding of musical principles and composition practices than I have. Rather, I have always been attracted by the fact that his work is, in and of itself, *musical*, and I mean that in a way that extends beyond the notion that all poetry is in some way musical. It is simplistic and reductive to make such a claim, and it is even greater folly to invoke the converse: that all music (or song) is inherently poetic. In “The Music of Poetry,” T. S. Eliot asserts that “My purpose here is to insist that a ‘musical poem’ is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one” (342). For Hicks, poetry is meant to be read aloud, to be heard. Through the act of listening, the reception of poetry becomes a physical experience. As Christians receive spiritual sustenance through the physical act

of taking in bread and wine during Communion, poetry is also taken inside the reader-listener through a physical process. This type of communion is meant to be transformative, and the listener has undergone an *experience*, has been involved in the poetic process in a way that goes beyond reading the words on the page. Form and content become unified in a way that creates something closer to an ideal. Walter Pater asserts:

It is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form. In its consummate moments, the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each other, and to it, therefore, to the condition of its perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire. (qtd. in Adames 130)

Hicks's poetry seems to be the embodiment of this striving to achieve a unity of sound and sense. Writing about music, he employs language that attempts to create a musical effect.

In "The Music of Poetry" T. S. Eliot says there are no ugly words, but Hicks could be criticized for opting for archaic or uncommon vocabulary. Bidwell points out that "[o]ne feature of Hicks's verse which has troubled some readers is the tendency of its diction to stiffen and to set. Robert James Merrett has complained the words in Hicks's poems are often 'archaic, Latinate, and stilted,' citing 'foliate' as an example of an 'obfuscating tendency'" (Bidwell 10). However, it is obvious that Hicks is choosing his words with an awareness of achieving an optimum effect of both sound and meaning. Arguably, giving close attention to word choice is something that all poets do with lesser or greater skill and awareness; however, Hicks consistently chooses words that function on both visual and phonological levels, clearly demonstrating that the best word must also be the best-sounding word as well. Even when Hicks is not explicitly writing about music, his work maintains a lyrical quality that consistently demonstrates an awareness of how the work will sound to the listener.

Program Notes

As it is always necessary in a critical study to locate oneself in relation to the work, particularly when it informs and influences the nature of the study, I must identify myself not only as a burgeoning academic, but also as a writer. By writer, I mean one who actively pursues the creative process on a regular basis with an eye toward publication. I include this information as a way of understanding not only my interest in Hicks as an academician, but as a fellow writer. My skill as a musician is minimal, its development limited to some piano and voice training, and I am not equipped to make learned assessments of the quality of the music inspired by Hicks's poetry; this lack on my part should not be a problem for the writing of this thesis given that my interest is primarily in language and the musical nature of language reproduced on the page or read by the human voice. Hicks's work has particular appeal to those interested and involved in creative writing. He is a poet's poet, suggesting he serves as both a model for those who wish to pursue the discipline and for those who can appreciate the craft in his compositions.

The idea of musicality is central to this thesis, and yet I will be the first to acknowledge its fluid definition. It is an elusive term despite the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary's* best efforts to define it precisely: "having a quality of being fond of, sensitive to, or skilled in music. Having a quality (of sounds, etc.) of being melodious, harmonious." For my purposes, the term musicality is being used to suggest an inherent sound quality that helps enhance the denotative meaning of the work. Hicks seems particularly astute at selecting words and word combinations that do double-duty to convey meaning and to provide a kind of underlying music to the piece. His work is generally pleasing to the ear. Although the sounds cannot, and should not, be separated from the meaning, the sounds themselves are as much a part of the poetic experience as the words.

In the sense that a master's thesis is a long essay, this undertaking employs the root sense of the French word *essayer*, "to try"; in other words, I have attempted to identify the aspects of Hicks's work that create this sense of musicality by examining three themes that appear in both form and subject matter: silence, sound, and speech. Eliot wrote that "while poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be

conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains, all the same, one person talking to another; and this is just as true if you sing it, for singing is another way of talking" ("Music of Poetry" 339). Therefore, while speech often translates into conversation, I mean "speech" to signify a larger range of communications between people including ways in which music and other forms of communication often take the place of speech. It is my assertion that Hicks employs the three concepts of silence, sound, and speech both thematically and structurally to infuse the work with a sense of musicality that is difficult to describe, yet clearly present. Like a musical composition that employs rests to convey pauses, a selection of various instruments to produce particular sounds, and the selection of lyrics, tones, and dynamics to evoke an emotional response, Hicks's literary compositions use language carefully chosen to play to the reader's ear, mind, body, and spirit. Reading his poetry is therefore not unlike listening to a symphony—the reader-listener is likely to be moved, and yet may be unable to articulate the exact nature of the effect.

Other Canadian writers have informed my exploration of Hicks. In the absence of concentrated scholarly articles to assist in the debate, essays by contemporary Canadian poets who have also explored the themes of poetics and music in their writings or readings have proven helpful. Dennis Lee's exceptional essay "Body Music" provides a basis for understanding "[h]ow a poem's music makes a statement of its own—before, beneath, and shot-through the particular content" (21), as well as providing some necessary definitions for talking about poetry as a musical endeavour. Other poets offer insights into their own creative process, allowing for extrapolation of commonalities that might be applied to Hicks's writing.

As previously stated, there are no scholarly articles that allow me to engage in debate regarding the merits of Hicks's work, which is why I have opted to concentrate on close readings of the poems. At this juncture, I feel an emphasis on the poems themselves is more valuable; therefore, my reading focuses largely on explication and analysis, as well as identifying how the selection of poems exemplifies prosodic techniques by which Hicks has created a sense of musicality.

A reliance on close reading and explication reflects what has awkwardly been named "New Criticism." This approach supports "the detailed analysis of the complex interrelations and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative

components within a work" (Abrams 181). By concentrating on the poems themselves, I am able to provide an overview of Hicks's thematic concerns, particularly ideas that repeat throughout his body of work, and can identify techniques he uses to create a sense of musicality throughout his work. T.S. Eliot was one of the key figures of New Criticism and is used as a critical and poetic touchstone in examining Hicks. I have strayed somewhat from the assertion that a poem is "an independent and self-sufficient verbal object" (Abrams 181) by including some biographical readings, but essentially this thesis focuses on the poems rather than on the poet.

In his lifetime, Hicks produced nine published books of poetry, one volume on the craft of writing, *Side Glances*, and a chapbook, *Hours*. These volumes account for more than 500 poems, not including poems that may have been published only in journals or which remain unpublished among his personal papers in the university archives. As well, at the urging of a local Prince Albert business, Hicks recorded a cassette, *Small Voices*, of himself reading a selection of poems. Several of his poems have been set to music by Canadian composers, and each year Thistledown Press handles requests from composers wishing to transform his work into music. His body of work is impressive in size, perhaps more so because he only began publishing in book form when he was in his seventies, and continued to actively publish in literary journals until the time of his death in 1999.

Hicks's musings on the writing process are limited to one slim volume of short essays aimed at giving young writers insight from an established voice. *Side Glances* was a project jointly proposed by Thistledown Press and the Saskatchewan Arts Board, but it was undertaken by Hicks when he was convinced that readers might be interested in his thoughts on the subject of writing. Although Hicks acknowledges that "Nothing within [his collection, *Side Glances*] can be claimed to be highly original, except as it may reflect personal illuminations," he promises to "pass them on in turn" (*Side Glances* 10). This acknowledgment seems to contain implicitly the instruction that the reader should also pass on to others whatever he or she finds useful in the text. In much the same way, this project is simply the beginning of scholarly investigation into an author who has been sorely neglected. Inasmuch as it is a first step, the research and ideas in this document, necessarily limited by the size and scope of a Master's thesis, represent

only the beginnings of what still needs to be done to bring Hicks's body of work to the attention of literature students, general readers, musicians, critics, and scholars.

Raising a Voice to Heaven

A cursory reading of any volume of Hicks's poetry will allow the reader to identify easily his primary concerns as a poet: music and spirituality. For Hicks, who was a dedicated organist and a regular church-goer, music and spirituality were inextricably linked in his work and his life; the connection between the two naturally carries over into his writing. Beyond crafting work that resonates musically when read aloud, Hicks also creates poetry that is intended to echo viscerally; reading and listening are meant to be transformative experiences where the reader-listener should feel that he or she has been moved in some way. The way an individual reader might be "transformed" by Hicks's work is difficult to articulate, but I believe the elusiveness is part of the attraction of Hicks's style. Naturally, not every reader will be moved—just as not every listener is moved by Bach or Handel—but in general, given the number of reviews that cite Hicks's melodiousness as his strength, it is fair to say there is something in his work that resists easy definition. The elements of silence, sound, and speech—applied both literally and metaphorically—create an underlying sense of musicality in Hicks's poetry. Because music is most often linked by Hicks with the spiritual, the intangible, and the divine, reading his work is intended to create an experience that is both visceral and profound. Establishing authorial intention is always fraught, but given his obvious spirituality and his love of music, it seems reasonable to suggest that in many ways the author did not consciously separate what is musical, spiritual, or poetic, but that the three aspects are ever-present in his work, a balanced trinity whose elements complement one another to varying degrees.

Although it is an oversimplification, Hicks does not separate what is musical from what is divine, particularly since much of his work explicitly referencing music does so within an ecclesiastical context. Both music and poetry can be used to represent expressions of humanity's relationship to the divine. Silence represents a break from sound, but also an opportunity for prayer and meditation. Sound is a medium for

communication—it can be either natural (and therefore divine in its creation) or human-made (a means of celebrating or interacting with the spiritual). Speech also reflects a desire for communication, not only with humanity but with oneself and the larger spiritual world, a desire for understanding beyond one's corporeal state. For Hicks specifically, music is the metaphor through which spirituality is most often expressed. This connection between the sacred and the secular is most clearly seen in *Hours*, a series of poems built around the canonical hours, prayers which are typically sung. Although they are not specifically about music, their form suggests the importance of song. The three long poetic sequences that make up the chapbook, *Hours*, were published in other volumes first, and subsequently in the collection *Sticks and Strings*. The *Hours*' poems can be seen as three movements in a larger piece; when approached individually, each offers a single day's devotion, but when taken as a trinity each is enhanced by the presence of the other two.

Audience Expectations

According to Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, *melos* is “poetry which shows an analogy to music, if not an actual influence from it” (256). Although Frye's arguments about musical and unmusical poetry are somewhat rigid, he makes some interesting points. Frye suggests that the “use of *melos* in poetry does not, of course, necessarily imply any technical knowledge of music on the part of the poet, but it often goes with it” (257). While Frye maintains that poets are most often influenced by the music of their day and Eliot suggests “the music of poetry...must be a music latent in the common speech of its time” (“Music of Poetry” 339), it is essential to note that Hicks was predominantly influenced by the church music he performed, as well as the classical rhythms he enjoyed. Perhaps Hicks's emphasis on traditional themes and forms at a time when Canadian poetry was experimenting with more radical techniques such as sound and concrete poetry is in part a reason for the lack of attention to his work.

Chapter two explores music as a predominant theme that runs through Hicks's work. Music is defined as “the art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion” (“Music”), yet such a definition could apply to poetry as well. Hicks does not produce poems that are merely a

collection of sounds without meaning; the sounds are equally as important as the denotative value of the words to the understanding of each poem as a whole. In his use of poetic and musical language (literally drawing inspiration from musical forms and instruments), in his reliance on images relating to music and sound, and in his attention to structure, Hicks makes the experience of reading his poetry akin to listening to a masterful musical performance.

To facilitate an understanding of how musical elements are employed throughout Hicks's *oeuvre*, the focus of the chapter moves between thematic and structural elements, concentrating within three major categories of silence, sound, and speech. Examples drawn from a number of poems illustrate how Hicks repeatedly employs these concepts to infuse his work with musicality. Further divisions of the categories attempt to give clear evidence of Hicks's skill as a poetic craftsman and demonstrate that the musicality is neither accidental nor inconsequential, but is part of Hicks's devotion to music.

Within the exploration of music, special attention must be given to the implications of silence. Silence holds almost as important a place in Hicks's work as music itself. In Paul Bidwell's introduction to the collection *Sticks and Strings* he draws attention to "the paradox of dumb or silent utterances" that force the reader "to consider the special importance of silences, of stillnesses to Hicks's imagination" (12). Hicks's facility with both silence and sound in his poetry has prompted Anne Szumigalski to praise "Hicks's ability to use words almost as though they were phrases of music" (qtd. in Bidwell 12). In this way both sound and silence work together to create a balance within the context of Hicks's traditional and devotional themes.

Chapter three moves away from the larger thematic look at Hicks's poetry to an exploration of poems that express Hicks's preoccupation with both sacred themes and devotional music. By focusing on the three poetic sequences in *Hours*, which represent ritualized forms of devotion, the relationship can be explored between the spiritual and the musical aspects associated with these parts of Christian worship. Hicks expertly shapes poems that reflect the hours at which particular prayers would be held, most often sung, yet draws them outside the narrow realm of ecclesiastical verse by using them to explore secular themes, such as love, in a sacred context. Although explicit reference to music is occasional in these poems, the repetitive structure and the devotional themes

help convey a sense of musicality. Like John Donne and George Herbert before him, Hicks skillfully blends the devotional and the secular, using the constructs of silence, sound, and speech—the essence of Hicks’s musicality—as the elements that connect the two. Music and spirituality are coded the same for Hicks—both are assigned a high degree of respect and significance in the creation of his work.

As a reader, writer, and spiritual person, I first encountered Hicks’s work while growing up in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. What most touched me about Hicks’s work was the feeling of transcendence that came with it. Not only does it flow musically over the tongue and the ear, the words carry a weight that is both literal and figurative. They darken the page, they resonate in the chamber of the ear, and they carry a meaning formed as part of the conversation between the author and the reader-listener. Eliot suggests that poetry in a foreign language is similar to instrumental music. One can experience the sound, but without the meaning, there is no poetry. Likewise, if the poem does not move the reader, it is also meaningless ("Music of Poetry" 339). The connection of these two things seems to lie in the notion that sound and meaning must work in conjunction to create a meaningful experience for the reader—one that happens both intellectually and emotionally, yet is open to a variety of interpretations. Eliot suggests the “different interpretations may all be partial formulations of one thing; the ambiguities may be due to the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate” ("Music of Poetry" 339). Hicks seems to have an intuitive grasp of how language works on a subconscious level to evoke emotional responses that push the reader to consider his or her place in relation to the text and to the world at large. That elusive feeling, the sense of wonder which his work left me with, is largely responsible for my continued interest in reading and writing poetry, for pushing to experience the emotional core of what we read. Whether we define that elusiveness as music or spirituality or something in between, there is no doubt that Hicks’s work encourages the reader to seek a deeper connection.

CHAPTER 2 THEMES AND VARIATIONS

Composers begin
with less than fragments, a note of no sure value
lodged in the mind, slowly steadying itself

B A Variations on an Unstated Theme, @ *Rootless Tree*, 75-77

Music for the Mind and Body

In the same way that the devotional matter of George Herbert's poetry is attributed to his being a minister, or that the landscape can be recognized as a dominant subject in the literature of the prairies, Hicks's poetry has been unmistakably influenced and profoundly shaped by his experiences with music. Hicks was immersed in music as part of his work as organist and choirmaster for more than sixty years (Dahl A6), so it can be assumed with some confidence that he was a capable musician in his own right. As well as playing music, Hicks was also a great fan of listening to recordings and would often comment on his current listening interest in his short notes to Thistledown Press. *Side Glances* contains many references to composers such as Bach and Handel.

Hicks is also a man who lived most of his life in Saskatchewan, so imagery of the prairies enters into his work as well. In addition, he was a man of great spiritual commitment, whose role as cathedral organist and choirmaster demonstrated only one level of commitment to his local church. In an article published in *The Prince Albert Daily Herald*, Rt. Rev. Anthony Burton summarized Hicks's relationship with music this way: "He would enter another space as he played Bach before the service. It was for him prayer and sacrifice. He played for God, and it was neither here nor there if others overheard or valued his playing" (Wiberg). Burton's assessment is consistent with other accounts of Hicks's personal humility, and can easily be applied to his poetry as well, reinforcing the all-important connection between creativity and spirituality that Hicks foregrounds.

Musicality—the underlying sound of the poem and how that sound enhances the denotative meaning of the words—is inseparable from Hicks’s notions of spirituality. It is the medium through which Hicks seeks the divine within the ordinary. Music—represented through silence, sound, and speech—is the means of interaction with the spirit, as Baudelaire writes: “In poetry the effects of harmony and rhythm are borrowed from music not simply to create musicality but to suggest a more absolute, more perfect harmony which is essentially spiritual” (qtd. in Stimpson 4). A combination of word and sound, meaning and emotion attempts, more than the invocation of particular words, to convey the elusive nature of spirituality that is central to Hicks’s poetry.

In the Introduction to Hicks’s collection *Sticks and Strings*, Paul Bidwell writes: “Hicks’s fellow poets...have warmly appreciated his work. Perhaps, indeed, the chorus of approval has been so harmonious because Hicks’s lyrics are especially attractive to those who are tuned to his frequencies. He is in some ways a poet’s poet” (9). That is not to suggest his work is accessible only to those who share his passion for poetry—quite the contrary, given that much of the attraction of Hicks’s work is that he writes about the things that are most important to him, and which by extension are recognizable areas of common interest such as relationships, love, nature, spirituality, music, and work.

In spiritual terms, the importance of body and blood is paramount, and it seems that at least part of what Hicks is doing is advocating getting closer to the spiritual by connecting to the physical. Hicks has written: “And I know that one of the most important aspects of poetry is its *effect*...Poetry is like that. You are never done with it when you (think you) have discovered what it *means*. It is your blood that knows what it means” (*Side Glances* 48). Indeed, Hicks was concerned with creating work that would move the reader, that would encourage a more visceral, and therefore memorable, transformative poetic experience.

In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Edgar Allan Poe has also discussed the importance of effect in poetry: “It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal [sic] necessity, brief” (433). In this essay, Poe’s step-by-step analysis of “The Raven” suggests that achieving an effect upon the reader is what drives the poet

to create. Arguably this connection is what all poets seek, yet Hicks was adamant about the importance of the *experience* of the poem. If one can equate the emotional with the physical—in the sense that an emotional response generates changes in one’s physiology—it seems reasonable to suggest that Hicks hoped readers would understand his poems on an intensely personal level. Poe also highlights the importance of selecting the right sound—in fact, he recounts how it was the need for a particular sound that led to his selection of the word “nevermore”—emphasizing the connection between sound, language, and emotion, something that Hicks obviously considered paramount.

Scholarly investigation pushes us towards objectivity yet makes us responsible for our subjectivity as well. We are encouraged to step back from an object of study, examine it without emotional connection, provide textual evidence to support our theories and ideas, draw conclusions that can be clearly articulated and presented to others for approval or debate. I have no argument with this process except to point out that it seeks to distance the scholar from the work, and, in the case of poetry, this is not necessarily the best approach. I would argue that with Hicks’s work in particular, a strictly objective investigation can carry the reader only so far. Textual analysis and close reading are useful in identifying thematic and prosodic elements, but to understand Hicks’s work, it must be experienced not only with the eye, but the ear, and the rest of the body. It must be listened to. Its music must be heard and felt. For Hicks, music and poetry are not only expressions of the spiritual, but the physical as well. In both poetry and music the listener is affected physiologically; both forms are arguably diminished when they only appear as notations on a page. To appreciate Hicks’s work, the reader must be open to experiencing the text as Hicks saw it—as a vehicle for connection to something fundamental that can only be reached through physical experience. Through the physical, it is possible to achieve a sense of transformation or change, thereby putting the reader-listener in closer touch with the spiritual realm, regardless of how one defines it.

Hicks embraces the concept that the poetic is personal, that it not only could, but *should*, reflect the experiences and imagination of the poet: “The writing of poetry (or anything else) is nothing if not personal and private” (*Side Glances* 37). Like T.S. Eliot, Hicks demonstrates a preoccupation with certain themes: the passing of time, the decline of society and the relevance of religion for humanity. However, while Eliot maintained

that poetry should not be personal, but should use universal symbols to convey meaning, Hicks seems to reject this notion while exploring the same themes. For Hicks, the only way to reach the universal—to convey experience that other people might respond to on the most basic level—is to write what he knows, believes, experiences.

Hicks encourages young poets to consider the importance of the everyday: “If you put the ordinary to work in your creative mind, and let it have its way, it may very well shape itself into something fresh and interesting, even profound” (*Side Glances* 39). Not one to endorse a practice he does not partake in, Hicks infuses his poetry with moments drawn from his own experiences transformed through the medium of poetry. His “Ode to This and That” is a playful poem that takes the form of a Horatian ode and the weight of the ode’s poetic tradition, and in the title marries it to the everyday. “This and That” implies things that are not important enough to be named, yet Hicks’s poem touches on topics ranging from the formation of the universe to the everyday:

Geometric miracles, the sphere as one
example, galaxies bowing in subservience
to the circle carried to infinity, forming
circles within circles, put together as one;
the rolling stone shaped through millennia
into this finality; the luscious apple
skinned over by minutest calculations
to this refinement, this tart-tongue perfection. (S&S, 25-32)

He moves from the grand topics to the ordinary and seems to suggest in doing this that it is ultimately the ordinary, the apple, the taste of it on one’s tongue, that provides a moment of true perfection, an almost divine moment.

Hicks as both a poet and a musician is fundamentally aware of the importance of sound and rhythm in the process of composition. In the essay “Body Music,” Dennis Lee writes, “A poem tries to enact that wordless tumble and surge in its own medium—in line breaks and pauses, syntax and sound, the ripple and clarion strut of sense on the page. Through the nitty-gritty of craft, it tries to recreate the cadence of how things are” (197). As fellow Saskatchewan poet Steven Ross Smith confirms in a review published in *Prairie Fire*: “And music, yes, always the music, as an element of content, and in the shaping of the language itself” (121). Both techniques are equally important in developing an understanding of the musicality of Hicks’s poetry.

Silence

The problem is to put silence into speech
without breaking it

– “Q.E.D.”, *Rootless Tree*, 85

Perhaps one of the most difficult ideas to capture in poetry is silence. In music, the silence created by rests is deliberate and necessary to create an overall impression or achieve an effect. It may provide a transition from one theme to the next, or be an anticipatory pause before the finale of a piece. Silences are equally important in poetry. The reader will automatically know what is meant by the word “silence,” may even bring to the reading various connotations of what silence means, but it remains a challenging concept to convey. For Hicks, silence is not only a thematic element, but an intrinsic part of the creative process. As his instructions to other writers in *Side Glances* makes clear:

Cultivate silence. Not concentration, just relaxed and total silence. Silence for its own sake. The stray words and phrases which intrude on this silence (and they will, in their own time) are your own creative material. Why else did they appear, why let you hear them in your secret heart? They are the gifts of the spirit. (11)

Here, Hicks makes the connection between the spirit—the Muse—and the craft of writing. He argues that writers must be receptive to ideas, and that receptivity includes the ability to set aside the noise of life and seek something deeper.

Neither is silence merely the absence of sound. For Hicks it is a thing unto itself and is as important, if not more important in some cases, than other repeated elements he uses. A thorough examination of Hicks’s nine books of poetry results in the discovery of an astounding number of pieces that explicitly refer to silence—more than sixty poems—in addition to references that offer an implicit or correlative description: “your footstep suffering no sound / to assault the ear” (“Firelit Wall” SLTS 72). Silence offers a respite from the “assault” of life, and clearly carries with it the spiritual notion of sanctuary, of finding a state of grace that transcends the common sufferings of life. Silence carries the weight of profundity and is possibly the most important element in Hicks’s work.

Considered as a thematic element, silence is expressed in a number of ways. First, it is represented as a moment of quiet, a pause or respite from daily tasks. It is fleeting and precious. In “Cold Morning,” the poetic voice marks the bustling nature of

the world driven by “the tyranny of the clock,” and rejoices in a moment of both silence and stillness:

I am still now
and spoken to. I know myself
the last survivor of haste, sole possessor
of this day handed me by the sun,
not to give up in, but to feel silence
filtering to refill the emptied vessel,
a draught I had all but forgotten in
the day by day of false thirst, false hunger. (MM, 13-20)

The person in the poem is both still and spoken to, reflecting the idea that in stillness/silence comes understanding. He characterizes himself as a “survivor,” paints the possession of the day as a victory that has been hard-won in a battle whose purpose the voice can barely remember. Here silence is as tangible, as necessary to survival as water is to maintain life. The spiritual life is in jeopardy and the human soul requires silence to renew itself. One can clearly see Hicks hoped his poems could be read as pauses that people could use to renew themselves, just as the poems represent his offer of thanks for the ability to renew oneself through creative expression.

Silence can be a means of warning, and it is in these moments that the body is most attuned to listen to things beyond the natural realm:

I tell you I have knocked at people’s doors
and found no answer, and tried knocking louder,
and in a holdbreath silence following
have heard as plain as if someone close by
had whispered, “No use, there is no one here;”
and after that I have not knocked again. (“Out” WYS 18-23)

Hicks’s poem is reminiscent of Walter de la Mare’s “The Listeners” where the Traveller’s knock is greeted by “a host of phantom listeners” (13) and whose exit is marked by “how the silence surged softly backward / when the plunging hoofs were gone” (35-36). Although de la Mare’s listeners are passive, Hicks’s phantoms use the moment of silence to encourage the visitor to leave: “what I say is that I have heard a house / whisper to me that I had best be gone, / and afterwards I have not knocked again” (34-36). The “holdbreath silence” is a stunning image that captures the physical feeling of anticipation that is felt in the body because the phrase contains no sound that allows

for inhalation. The voice of the poem indicates that he has understood the message of the house as clearly as if someone had spoken, and yet no sound from the house has been made. Silence here is an animate thing, able to move and convey emotion through its presence:

but when a knock brings nothing from behind
a sounding panel, and one knocks again
and summons only silence from beyond
to press about and gather in the ears,
then it is time for one to listen closer. (13-17)

Silence is not only active, but intrusive in this case. It invades the listener's ears, forcing him by its very presence to pursue the activity of listening more closely. The poem's focus on the unknown and the consideration "of how much harm / further insistence is like to do" (30-31) suggests a tension between the need to maintain silence and the need to seek answers. Hicks's "Doorway" provides another variation of de la Mare's poem. The house in this poem also offers silence, but feels more inviting:

you could scarcely call
silence a welcome; but the silence
waits like a comfortable chair
with arms outstretched. (6-9)

Here the visitor's personal association with the house seems to make the difference in how he is received, suggesting that a relationship with something changes one's experience of it. Silence in familiar surroundings may be comfortable; in an unknown environment, it may engender uncertainty, unrest, even fear. Silence becomes a signifier of how connected one is to the world at rest, how willing one is to hear what is being said. In another variation on de la Mare's poem, "A Gift Withheld," Hicks's persona is inside the house when an unseen visitor arrives. No overture to enter the home is made and the voice of the poem is left wanting:

Nor did my "Who's there?" evoke any
audible answer
while three breaths might run;
and then the night wind whispered down
from the eaves a soft
"No one, no one." (SLTS 13-18)

Although there is no "audible answer" (14), the narrator nonetheless experiences a sense of knowing that something was "offered and withdrawn" (23) in the silence, that an

opportunity was missed. Silence in many cases represents promise, potential, and the possibility of communication, often with a source that is transcendent or beyond the human realm; occasionally it represents loss or absence, or, in the case of the last poem, both ideas are present.

As in the second poem above, “Doorway,” silence is often collocated with memory. In “Last Rite” a moment of silence may provoke a recollection:

We will remember, surely, how we stood,
one with the silence in the grouse-grey wood,
and heard the wind pronouncing overhead
its benediction upon all things dead (WYS 1-4)

Silence effectively creates a bridge between past and present by creating a space in which memory can be explored. Memory is elevated to the realm of something almost holy—certainly precious—and the wind’s “benediction” or blessing reminds the reader of the importance of honouring that which has passed on or away. Much of Hicks’s later work demonstrates a preoccupation with death, particularly *Overheard by Conifers* and *Month’s Mind*, both published after the death of Hicks’s wife.

People most often encounter deeper spiritual understanding of themselves or the world during an absence of sound:

There is time for reflection, time
to refrain from determinations,
time to accept the sanctity
of silence (“The Late Summer Weeds” MM 19-22)

Here silence is sanctified, made holy. Likewise, in “The Other Side of the Hill,” Hicks conveys a reverence for silence and an acknowledgment of its necessity as “this final time / finds out my hope’s substance faith / and yet so it is again a reward of silence” (NIAFC 21-25). Silence here is equated with death—the final silence when the physical body is completely at rest—but the association is not primarily negative. It reflects Hicks’s Christian belief in something beyond death, that the final silence is a transition to something as yet undefined, but obviously positive because it is characterized as a “reward.”

Silence can be a sense of waiting for something to be revealed, and carries with it a sense of expectation, that only in silence can certain things be discovered: “Silence / rises to divulge its secrets / falls again” (“It Needs Still Water” S&S 8-10). This idea of

anticipation reflects a spiritual position consistent with Hicks's Christian faith. One waits for the coming of Christ, for eternal reward, and a time when God's plans will be revealed. However, as in music, the waiting is not simply an empty space—it is filled with a measure of silence, a rest, that is necessary to reach the next step. The silence that greets the end of a performance is not quite the same. Although it leaves the listener a space to contemplate and reflect on the experience, it is often brief and precedes a return to the bustle of life. Silence in both instances provides an opportunity to meditate on the larger meaning, to place the experience within a context, and to provide a bridge between one experience and the next.

Silence for Hicks seems to have as many variations and cadences as music itself: it “sets like the sun” (“Office Hours: Compline” S&S 1), it “is a causeway” (“Silence is a Causeway” MM 10), a “gift” (“Autumn Hearing” OBC 15). It is most often associated with natural elements. The title *Silence Like the Sun* is noteworthy because of its synesthesia, combining visual and auditory sensations. The sun offers a strong symbolic focus from both biblical and mythological perspectives, and works well as a metaphor for faith, which is based on the unseen, the silent.

Silence's visual counterpart is stillness and this also receives attention in Hicks's work. Dennis Lee says: “The white space of the page starts to feel like a deeper-breathing silence, with this aimless welter of words slipsiding around it” (“Body Music” 33). In Hicks's “Keep Quite Still,” the reader is encouraged to:

listen

keep quite
still (SLTS 16-18)

The visual layout of the poem and the repetition of the phrase “keep quite still” in both the title and twice within the poem make the desired point. The use of increased white space helps to simulate silence by inviting the reader to enact larger pauses when reading. The visual presentation of the poem's final three lines (shown above) is a tight formation, and this visual reinforcement, which requires minimal eye movement for reading, adds to the overall effect of the poem. The retreat into lower case words after the initial capital and the complete lack of punctuation—a departure from Hicks's usual technique of punctuating conventionally—adds to the sense that the poem is holding itself together

without additional supports. The visual openness of the ending leaves the reader holding his or her breath in expectation, waiting for the period that typically signals conclusion. The structure and rhythm of the poem force the reader to re-create the act of keeping still that the poem encourages. In this way, the effect of the poem is masterfully achieved.

Stillness, like silence, provides the opportunity to see and experience new sensations: “Be still. How quiet it is. / Feel the movement of the moonlight” (“Kiss of Death” RT 17-18). Stillness, ironically, allows a person to feel movement that might ordinarily be missed or passed over, echoing Hicks’s idea that silence offers a place for spiritual understandings that are often lost in daily life. In “Winter Zero,” Hicks employs both white space that moves across the page like sweeping drifts of prairie snow as well as the idea of stillness to convey nothingness—yet, as is consistent with Hicks’s style of using structure to enhance meaning, the nothingness is anything but empty:

To experience *nothing* you must see
the prairie town at mid-morning under its
stifle of snow. All the crops that ever were
are buried there, resting in peace. All the
hoppers that will ever be are down there
pinhead-eyed, unable to stroke crackling leg joints
yet, waiting for the swing of the world
to embrace the sun.

Nothing
will warm itself barely over the night (S&S 1-10)

Stillness and silence here are both to be *experienced*. They are not an absence so much as an opportunity for something else to take the place of absence. The concept of nothing requires the use of all the senses to understand. The onomatopoeic stifle gives a sense of heaviness, of weight, and of waiting. Crackling and stroke are sound and movement frozen beneath the snow, imagined sounds that cannot break the silence except in the mind of the reader. By employing the word all repeatedly, Hicks elevates the morning on the prairie to an archetypal experience of winter. In that single moment, all time seems to exist and the reader is given an opportunity to understand something deeper and more important than one experience. The image of death—“buried there, resting in peace”—further creates the sense of a world at rest, a world frozen, literally and figuratively. Here perhaps, Hicks most closely demonstrates Eliot’s idea of using a recognizable concept to create emotional resonance:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (*Sacred Wood* 100)

However, the moment captured in the poem is clearly personal and drawn from Hicks's experience of life on the prairies. Eliot's thinking is too narrow—he seems to suggest there is only one way of evoking an emotional response and that people will respond almost without exception—whereas Hicks seems more open to allow for a variety of responses. The emphasis in Hicks's work is on the idea that an emotion is experienced rather than trying to identify how to achieve a particular emotional response by invoking a common image.

In music, a pause indicated by a rest or a fermata—the latter often used to indicate a dramatic or intensely climactic pause as a note is sustained—is as important to the overall composition as any other element. A rest is assigned values in the same way that notes are and is considered comparable to any note in that it is sustained for a duration equal to a note of the same value, and can therefore be considered equally important. Silences, conveyed on the page through the use of white space, line breaks, and punctuation, are considered with as much care as the placement of notes.

Hicks's silences are as important as the words that surround them. Bidwell writes: "Indeed, the paradox of dumb or silent utterance informs so many of Hicks's poems that the reader is drawn to consider the special importance of silences, of stillnesses to Hicks's imagination" (12). Bidwell further articulates how each poem begins and ends in the silence of the page: "All poetry, all utterance, is in this respect, a temporary disruption, a breaking into the silence. *Rest*, whether *remainder*, *bed*, *grave*, or even *musical rest*, implies an ultimate silence to which all poetry moves" (13). Silence allows for the contemplation necessary for creative endeavour, or at least provides the opportunity for the writer to "hear" in a new way, as well as allowing for the spiritual renewal that brings personal growth. In "Poet's Den" Hicks expresses how out of a deliberate attempt to be quiet, inspiration can begin to speak:

A pattern of rain on the window
stirs the ear, and in the ear voices
begin their exercises, wishing

to be overheard, to be identified (S&S 5-8)

The poem further articulates Hicks's awareness of both sound and form and how the two aspects work in conjunction to create poetry: "The ear is neighbour to the eye; both know / what facts are to be shared, fragmented, / shuffled into new shapes and orders" (12-14). Shapes indicate an attention to the visual, while orders suggests both pattern and communication.

Hicks's religious beliefs inform the necessity for silence as a step to other forms of communication, including spiritual connection. In "Ash Wednesday" silence becomes a paradox. The repetition of the word silence throughout the poem, like a rising chorus, transforms silence into something so present it cannot be ignored:

Voices of other wanderers are in my ears,
a sighing in the wind that is not the wind only.
Wind in pine and spruce is like the far sound
of waters, silence separated into its components,
yet being unbroken. The eyes of the wanderers
are on me, and I hear the silence reclaimed,
silence itself appearing and returning;
it is all one, silence and the voices of silence.
They attend my contemplations
standing silent in the forest files. (S&S 27-36)

Silence serves as both the means to hear messages that are "not the wind only" and to bear witness to the act of contemplation. This poem in particular manages to convey that silence can be both awe-inspiring and frightening, and that silence will not necessarily provide the answers, merely the means of searching for them.

Each poem represents a movement from birth to death in some respect, as each poem is an act of creation where life is breathed into the form upon reading and is returned to the grave of the page upon completion. From silence the poem is born, and to silence it is returned. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, silence to silence. Whether the silence represents a slowing down, a chance to ponder the human condition or the spiritual nature of being, it is a deliberate construction designed to guide the reader to recreate the conditions of the poem—whether visually or phonologically. Hicks uses silence to exert control over pacing to shape a specific auditory experience. Like a composer who includes rests as precisely as he selects notes, Hicks uses silence—both the word and the concept—to slow the reader down. Silence is not a word one can say quickly. The

protracted long i in the first syllable makes the reader stretch the moment, whether he or she wants to or not. The cumbersome ence requires a combination of movements within the mouth to articulate the three separate phonemes for the first vowel and two consonants. The sibilance of the ending echoes the s of the beginning before fading into nothingness, forcing the reader to make a clear break before moving on to another sound. Hicks uses such attention to sound to his advantage to establish sanctuaries within his writing, places where breaths are allowed to expand into empty spaces, where the eye must be turned toward blankness, where the brain is forced to break from the persistent presence of text. Silence becomes not simply another construct within the text, but one that also supports and sustains the other structures and ideas, reinforcing the musicality of Hicks's work by also calling attention to where there is what some might call absence, but what is for Hicks merely a different kind of music.

Sound

Beware of the sounds. You may think
at first they are voice. Pay heed
to none of them.

- "Horror Country," *Silence Like the Sun*, 34

For Hicks, almost any sound can be made musical through his treatment of it. He gives great care and attention to his choice of language and his placement of words, as well as selecting words which provide a satisfying sound when read aloud. Poetry is an oral/aural medium for Hicks, as well as a visual one, and he composes his work with this awareness in mind. In *Side Glances*, he refers to Henry Rago, former editor of *Poetry Magazine*, who "said that good writing should stand up off the page and have *vibration*" (27). Hicks qualifies the image in his own unique way: "It is the way the words seem to quiver for a moment in the pit of your stomach" (27), reinforcing the need for writing that affects people, that causes reaction, that makes people notice. In order to draw such attention, Hicks employs sound consistently to create work that resonates with the reader.

Sound is pervasive throughout his work. It would be impossible to catalogue every reference or every usage in a work of this length; however, there are particular thematic elements that appear again and again, and which fall into two main categories of sound: natural and man-made. Natural sounds include those occurring in nature: birds,

the wind, water, animal sounds, and other nature-related sounds such as the movement of trees, leaves, and landscape elements. Man-made sounds include musical instruments, particularly bells, which hold both a musical and religious meaning for Hicks, and sounds that denote industry: clocks, mechanized sounds, work-related sounds, etcetera. For the sake of brevity, only specifically musical human-made sounds (in addition to the natural sounds listed above) will be discussed in this chapter. The main focus here is how these sounds are employed by Hicks as thematic elements, how he reinforces their musical nature with structural techniques, and how these repeated references create an overall effect of musicality—that the reader experiences an auditory sensation similar to listening to music—and an awareness of sound.

Bells

In *Side Glances*, Hicks writes: “Bells have tongues. They speak a language of their own” (52). Throughout his work, bells do indeed have their own language, representing something at once spiritual and musical. The sound of a bell can be anything from a delicate ring to a full-throated peal rippling from a cathedral spire: “From the high tower, / hearing of holy mysteries / at the bells’ mouths” (“Elevation” S&S 1-3). To build upon the phrase of another Canadian writer, Marshall McLuhan, the bell is both the medium and the message. The sound of the bell is both a call to listen and the message itself. It can be used to warn or to herald the completion of a period of time. The bell is a spiritual image, a call to worship, but also a sign of a regimented society now forced to answer to alarm clocks and school bells and end-of-work whistles.

Hicks, like many authors, is wary of those who would impose meaning on his work: “Taking a poem apart to find out what it is made of is a dangerous experiment. You may very well come to the conclusion that it isn’t made of anything. What is a peal of bells made of? (Not the bells, but the peal.) A poem is to a great extent an effect” (*Side Glances* 14). Although I suspect he would be flattered to be the subject of a thesis, on another level, I fear he would believe I had missed the main point—namely to enjoy the *experience* of his poetry rather than the explication of it. It is, however, possible to determine what a peal is made of, possible to record and chart the particular frequencies produced, the notes achieved and their duration. In doing so, one risks missing the

overall effect achieved by experiencing the sound within its original context, and that, I believe, is Hicks's point: that poetry offers the reader an experience. It is not always necessary to reduce it to its parts in order to understand it or attribute value to it. Lee, as another poet concerned with the sound experience of poetry, supports this: "It's customary to take the auditory sense as primary....But that's too restrictive. We need to include the rhythmic experience of the whole body. This involves hearing, and sometimes sight and touch....Our body becomes the instrument the rhythm is played on; we register it viscerally, absorb it as carnal knowledge" ("Body Music" 21). The peal of the bell is not only a phrase to be read on the page, but one that instantly summons an auditory memory. Most readers in the Christian parts of the world will hear the sound accompanying the image. The word bell itself resonates with the bilabial b which requires air to be pushed through the lips, resulting in a hard initial consonant, much like the striking of the bell itself. The double l at the end of the word draws out the sound slightly as the e stretches to be heard before the tongue touches the tooth ridge and blocks the air, dissolving the word into the softer l sound, much like the retreating echo of a bell. Bidwell has provided a wonderful close reading that explores sonic devices in the poem "Elevation": "The very word 'mouths,' here referring to the bells' opening (bells have tongues, too, of course), brings poet and reader together as joint articulators of the verse" (12). In this way, each mention of the word bell resonates throughout the work like an echo of the first peal. Although the resonances may not be identical—may be distorted or changed in tune—they come from the same place, signifying a deep spiritual connection that also resonates throughout the work.

The silent bell is also a significant image:

hangs silent
the clapper that sounded
sweet proclamations
against the singing lip ("Silent Bell" S&S 1-4)

It represents lost opportunity; because of death "so much was pealed, / so much left unrun" (9-10). Silence is unwelcome in this particular instance, as opposed to the more positive notions of silence not connected to the bell image. In "Day of the Bells," the listener in the poem does not actually experience hearing the bells. The ringers are waiting for a perfect moment:

They at the ropes wait
 for a sky totally clear, an air
 totally still, a promise of total
 shine, an atmosphere for bells
 to make pronouncements of perfection in. (RT 6-10)

The listener knows “[t]here may never be such a morning” (11), yet the waiting is part of the experience, and “the ear falls only a whisper short of hearing / the bells, the jubilant, victorious / bells, as they ring, as they ring” (18-20). Even though it may only be in the mind’s eye or the listener’s inner ear, the bells are clearly audible in the poem. The last two lines embody the words written there, and the repetition of the final line is as much a resounding peal as anything else.

In “Fear Assumes the Shape of a Tolling Bell,” the bell calls the listener to a funeral service. Although the poem purports to set up a premise of the bell as frightener, employing language of violence and fear, the poem ultimately reinforces the bell’s purpose as a call to worship. The veil of sleep distorts the true sound of the bell that instructs the listeners to grieve the passing of the dead, and in some way transfers the feelings of anger and dissonance created by death to the bell itself. The bell is not only the call to observe death but the embodiment of death itself that has intruded into the lives of the listeners. Here voices “chanting a welcome to the approaching dead” (14) become the balm that begins the process of renewal promised in Christian tradition. The bell ceases to be an object of fear as its sound dies away and is replaced by human interaction.

Bells are most often associated with religious significance in Hicks’s work. They represent both his connection to the spiritual realm and his awareness of their importance as a Christian symbol, functioning on both an auditory (musical) and a denotative level. Thematically, the bell as a repeated image serves to reinforce the importance of spirituality for Hicks. Each bell that appears in subsequent poems is an echo of the previous ones; collectively, they assume a thematic weight almost equivalent to Hicks’s use of silence. However, structurally, the bell whose music is recreated in the onomatopoeic language of ring, clang, dong, and even in the word bell, among others, also literally resounds in the ear of the reader with a noticeable, and lingering, sound.

Musical Instruments

A thorough exploration of the number of poems that employ musical instruments would require a project of its own. However, it must be noted that Hicks not only uses instruments to evoke particular sound images and relationships, but seems knowledgeable about the instruments, which is to be expected given Hicks's view on the subject of writing what you know: "Truth, in writing, stems from the simple fact that you know what you are talking about because you have experienced it. Nothing will show up falsity faster than the suspicion that the writer is just guessing....Guessing at how a particular business is run. Guessing at music. Falsity will quickly shy a reader off" (*Side Glances* 62). He concedes, however, that "it is well to remember that it doesn't matter how you know" (62). Whether through personal experience or meticulous research, Hicks manages to leave the reader with an experience of each instrument almost as if the reader/listener had attended a concert. Arguably, a reading of Hicks's poetry is simply a concert of a different kind, but one still melodious.

In "The 'Orphic Thread' Poems" (S&S 92), each section of the poetic sequence is crafted to reinforce the particular sounds and images associated with the instrument in question to leave the reader with the impression of having an experience of those instruments. Not surprisingly, this series of poems has also been set to music by Regina composer Elizabeth Raum in a song cycle for mezzo-soprano and wind quintet.

"Girl Playing Scales" replicates the back and forth movement of hands upon a keyboard with the rhythmic flow of lines that consistently alternate between trimeter and tetrameter:

Those lines, tedious, well-fingered,
hung neck to finger-tip like swaying
spans, measure disciplines of earth,
hearth, home, the fashioning of races (S&S 17-20)

The layout on the page also replicates the repeated back-and-forth idea with very little change; the visual embodiment of tedium, yet the poem speaks of large concepts spanning time and space: "free, wild, conforming to strictures / underlaid by earth's foundations / and the pulsing of star courses" (14-16). The subject somehow becomes diminished by the form, and that is the catch. Hicks, as a musician, knows both the necessity for practice and the monotony of it. While the hands enact remembered

rhythms, the mind is free to wander down other paths, yet must consistently return to ensure repetition is carried out correctly, and therefore the conjunction of phrases like “free, wild” alongside “conforming to strictures” is perfectly understandable and in keeping with both the thematic material and the poem’s structural integrity.

“Bassoons” is full of the round sounds of letters b, p, and l, and the more nasal m and n sounds that slow the reader down and resonate in the nose and mouth. One might even argue that the bassoon with its unique double-reed sound (particular to the oboe family) could be considered nasal in some respects, as the wind moves through an elongated tube that “is bent back upon itself” (“Oboe Family”). Visually the poem also reflects this bending with a curve in the middle of the poem, which may represent the bassoon’s shape. Furthermore, the initial “double-talk” of the instrument also helps to reinforce this duality as the bassoon is described as “comic one minute / sobering the air the next with chorales and crucifixions” (1-2). Hicks playfully terms the bassoons “the constitutionally not quite in time, / knowing them yet able to undo the stablest concepts / in the dry tenor of their unique seductions” (15-17). The poem itself has seventeen lines, unusual for Hicks, who tends to rely on even-numbered lines for symmetry and rhythm. The poem serves as both an auditory and visual representation of the bassoon and its unique sound, and resonates with the rhythmic uniqueness that the instrument itself embodies.

Two sections of the poetic sequence refer to the flute: “Girl with a Flute” and “Music for the Flute.” Bidwell suggests that in the first poem “when we encounter the words, ‘shape the elliptic phrase,’ the adjective exactly describes the shape of the hole as the flautist’s lips blow across it” (11). More likely, the elliptic phrase is meant to evoke the line of open holes along the length of the instrument and which the flautist’s fingers seek to cover as she attempts to “blow softly, find a memory’s ear” (9). The girl who plays with her “lips at the lip of song” (10) evokes the clarity of flute music. Images of brightness, sunshine, and crystal add to the sense of clarity in the poem. The repetition of blow forces the reader to duplicate the action when saying the word. The girl is equated with an almost primal force, like the wind, with which to “blow away the hours,” yet ultimately the sound softens into memory and song. The poem closes with a sense of expectation and waiting, being at “the lip of song” (10), the edge of realization.

“Music for the Flute” offers an entirely different experience for the ear and the mind. The poem is a sensual experience represented in a dream moment. In the same way the flute’s melody is high-pitched and uplifting, the poem moves from darkness to day break, from gentle awakening to sexual climax:

tonguings, fumblings at the lip;
wind in the eaves noted
her entry, the unmeasurable point
in the arc’s rising, how her flowing phrase
took wing, rose, fell, soared again,
little by little drew
daylight from its hiding. (6-12)

Even if one ignores the phallic nature of the flute as the girl “searched the darkness for / her instrument” (4-5), the poem replicates the rocking motion of sexual experience particularly in the rhythm of “took wing, rose, fell, soared again” where the stop-start pauses of punctuation coupled with the one-syllable words create an auditory experience that replicates the thematic content.

Returning to the dichotomy of natural and man-made sounds, it is clear that the human-made sounds are most often associated with music because the sounds referenced have to do explicitly with music. However, natural sounds are also equated with music and musicality.

Wind

Referred to more than forty times throughout Hicks’s *oeuvre*, wind is the most frequently occurring natural sound in the poems. It appears to have a dual function—it is either anthropomorphized, acting as a personified presence whose sound is interpreted as voice, whisper, or language; or it is a sound element, providing mood and atmosphere through its description. By identifying wind as a “natural” element, I do not wish to downplay the importance of its use as a spiritual or artistic metaphor as well. Hicks’s pattern of connecting music with spirituality allows the wind to serve as a conduit to spiritual reflection: “Voices of other wanderers are in my ears, / a sighing in the wind that is not the wind only” (“Ash Wednesday” WYS 27-28). Although Hicks does not explicitly play on the biblical notion of the spirit as the “breath of God,” it seems

plausible, given the references to wind, that the image is meant to convey both spiritual and natural undertones.

In “Two Pastorals,” for example, wind is a feature of both autumn and winter. In autumn “Airs will sharpen, / winds turn and crisp / colours glow from blade and thicket” (S&S 1-3). Hicks gets extra linguistic mileage out of the word crisp using it to echo the sharpness of the first line applied to the wind, before allowing its more usual adjectival purpose. The words themselves are constituted by sharp sounds full of consonants that require clear enunciation. In the poem’s second section, winter is “word of the wind / white word” (1). As Bidwell points out, “its twelve lines are entirely devoid of the hisses we’ve been hearing. The verse is muffled as the white, ‘feather-foot’ world of winter covers the sharp sounds of autumn” (13). Winter is encouraged to

play [its] calm
cold melody through every
hallway of the mind,
grotto of the heart. (9-12)

Because winter has been explicitly linked with wind, despite the poem’s attempt to contain the wind beneath a stillness, the listener is encouraged to hear its “cold melody” being played.

“Wind in the Corn” is a narrative piece that embodies Hicks’s fascination with the wind as a natural element and as a conduit to creative energy. The narrator of the poem remembers he wants to tell the odd-job man to leave two rows of corn standing in the garden after the harvest is finished. (The echoes of Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall” are, I believe, a deliberate attempt to create even deeper resonance for the canonically-literate reader.) The reason is a quintessentially Hicksian form of logic: “The wind says things in winter you’d not guess” (NIAFC 28). The narrator continues in this vein of thought knowing that the interaction of the wind and the corn, both natural elements, will result in something unmistakably musical, vocal, and interesting to hear:

I own friends
would do nigh anything for me for asking,
but none who’d leave two rows of dead corn grounded
on into winter for no better reason
than that I might drop by from time to time
and stand beside it when the wind was blowing. (35-40)

Natural music—as opposed to that created by human-made instruments—seems to allow access to a deeper level of awareness. Like silence, it appears to provide the occasion for spiritual awakening, although Hicks never specifies what deeper understanding might be reached through the experience.

Water

Like wind, water is another natural element that most often becomes a voice or a way for nature to speak if a person is willing to listen. Water expresses a quiet repetitive kind of sound—the lapping of waves against a shore, the fall of raindrops—almost like a bass line in music that provides a resonant backdrop. Through repetition of the word (and by association the sound), water functions in Hicks’s poems as both a kind of sustained chord and a low-level percussive beat.

In “Drought,” the poem creates tension between two competing concepts of the sun as both “life giver” (7) and “deliverer of / judgments, deaths” (8-9), and places these against images of water, albeit water that is absent. Water here is like silence. It is mentioned, but it is wholly absent, “dried at last into small vapors” (2-3) and there are “scant memories only / of waters in dry river beds, wraiths” (4-5). What is remarkable here is the sense of water coursing throughout the poem even as the topic is drought. The poem invokes images of wetness only to steal them away with an overlay of heat and destruction. The final line, “pools blurring to the splash of rain” (14), features the word plash, which is both onomatopoeic and suggests the more common splash. It cleverly echoes the tears that “are put away” in the poem’s first lines and leaves the reader with a sense of hope to counteract the drought.

An entire essay could likely be devoted to Hicks’s sense of the metapoetic, or poems that discuss the act of writing poems. In “Writing Poems,” water is both the sound—the reader does not discover it is without sound until the end of the stanza—and the image that winds its way through the poem:

There’s Willa
pouring her pail into
water at the lake’s edge
water swallowing water
without sound. (S&S 1-5)

Hicks uses the repetition of the word water and its /w/ sound in “Willa,” swallowing and without to convey musically the sense of water lapping at the shore. The vowel sounds of pouring, swallowing, without, and sound add to the sense of hearing the actions taking place; one must actually open and close the mouth, reminiscent of swallowing, to form both the /aw/ (sound) and the /or/ (pouring) phonemes. The alliterative l and s also slow down the poem. The words work on both structural and thematic levels to enhance the poetic effect. This water imagery is also enacted visually as “the third stanza trickles down into the fourth” (Bidwell 14) and continues with the poet declaring:

Here am I
making my most of thunders
out of silence and these
raindrop syllables. (17-20)

The act of creation is born out of silence and sound, and when connected to the contemplative/spiritual qualities of natural elements, the poem serves as a fitting description of Hicks’s work.

Birds

Continuing the metapoetic nature of Hicks’s poetry, “The Moonlight of the Winter Owls” offers another examination of the writing process as owls and a winter landscape are transformed into “shadowy smudges” on the page (S&S 11). Bidwell concurs that the words of the poem “evoke the poet’s tools” and that “[t]he final pun in ‘Who’s there?’ invites us to connect the moonlight owls with the wise poet himself” (14). The final line also evokes the owl’s cry, as does the title of another owl-centred poem “Who,” using a simple but effective technique to remind the reader of the onomatopoeic sound of the bird. Hicks’s “Who” is also filled with “faint scratchings” (5) and “padded air / beaten by proofed wings as they converged / to pool their separate findings” (SLTS 6-8). The scratchings are no doubt the work of a poet and the concept of being “beaten by [proofreading] wings” suggests a playful jab at editors, or perhaps readers, who might come to contradictory conclusions. The repeated /p/ sound, a voiceless bilabial stop, which gives a kind of breathless sound after its initial consonant, helps evoke the airiness of the atmosphere of beating wings. The repeated /ing/ sounds in scratchings, wings, and

findings also help to give the reader a sense of repeated movement like the rise and fall of a wing.

The image of the bird can also be used to evoke a spiritual response given that the spirit is often depicted as a dove in Christianity. In “Three Kernels of Parched Corn,” Hicks is obviously alluding to the Parable of the Sower who planted his seed in different types of ground, and only the grain sown in fertile ground took root. On the surface, the poem is about luring a bird closer with the temptation of corn:

You were very near,
three grains distant only,
when the sound rose, the whirr of flight,
and the thousand voices, the migration
calling, calling you to come. The flock
was brilliant in the blue air, the sky
sang with thanksgivings. (SLTS 8-14)

On a deeper level, the poem is about lost opportunities, both real and spiritual. The persona is left with only the three kernels to be pressed “one by one into the cold ground” (18). The bird rises into the air, called home by the music of celebration, leaving the persona unsatisfied and alone. Hicks’s typically positive outlook is muted by the hard edges of a reality that must face the need to sow the seed before being able to reap its rewards; or as the corn has already been harvested, the need to persist in a continued sowing until the time comes to ascend to a more spiritual plane. By using such images to his advantage, Hicks masterfully creates both an aural and an imagistic impression of the world, both natural and spiritual.

Speech

So may the waters make an end of speech,
for lack of any shore to reckon with,
and the old silence fall upon the deep,
rest being wholly won, and peace unbroken.

- "Cycle," *Sticks and Strings*, 57

Speech, for my purposes, refers to intelligible sound produced by human beings for the purposes of communication or articulation. It may take the form of a whisper, a laugh, a spoken utterance, or a song. Here the concept of voice—of particular interest to poets and musicians alike—is explored, and the voice must also be considered a musical

instrument. It is capable of producing great range of emotion and sound, of evoking reactions in other people, and of conveying intellectual ideas. Because the other two major categories of poetry are dramatic and narrative, lyric poems have come to be recognized as typically shorter in form. Hicks's preference for short, personal poems seems to suggest he shares a greater connection to the lyrical tradition than many of his contemporaries who were exploring new forms, such as Anne Szumigalski with the prose poem or Fred Wah with the haibun; or perhaps Hicks's reliance on traditional forms simply suggests a level of comfort with long-standing literary traditions.

In Dennis Lee's eclectic terminology, Hicks would be considered a practitioner of "kintuition": "direct apprehension of a body music that lies beneath or beyond the actual words, and furnishes the rhythms by which they move" (*Thinking and Singing* 48). A mastery of language, rhythm, sound, and linguistic movement makes up body music, as well as the ability to understand or experience these aspects as physical/emotional manifestations. In the vernacular, we would say a poem "moves" a person; Lee takes that a step further by insinuating that much of what a truly masterful poet does is experienced at a subconscious level ("Body Music" 28). The reader reacts without knowing what in particular he or she is reacting to or why. This concept is consistent with Hicks's repeated insistence that the effect of the poem is its primary purpose for being, although I would suggest Hicks considered the intellectual meaning—at least at the most basic level—as necessary to experiencing the poem's complete effect.

Hicks embodies the notion of "fixed order" (Lee 28): "Truth in rhythm consists of orchestrating order and flux at once." On the surface his work may be perceived as conservative and traditional given that it uses immediately recognizable literary structures and themes. He is a white, middle-class male writing about religion and music, nature and humanity. A quick glance at his books reveals mainly left-justified, traditionally stanzaic poems marked with conventional punctuation and capitals. In many instances rhyme is present—both internal and end-rhyme—and traditional forms such as the sonnet appear regularly. He likes structure, as evidenced by the series such as "The Ritual Hours," "Love's Hours," and "Hours Secular" (which are explored in detail in Chapter 3). However, to judge the work by such exterior criteria is to miss the heart of what makes Hicks "one of the best poets writing in North America" (*The Malahat Review* –

quoted book jacket SLTS)—namely, the musicality and orality/aurality, the underlying rhythm and attention to sound detail that elevate the poetic experience to another level. Playfulness, puns, self-effacement and jest are all present, as are personal reflections and criticisms. His work embodies the balance of order and chaos that Lee identified as underlying the best rhythmic poems. He not only uses that balance as a rhythmic guide, but also a thematic one, often paralleling disparate ideas and exploring paradoxes: sound and silence, stillness and movement, harmony and dissonance, the human and the divine.

Like silence, song is a concept that is a consistent refrain throughout Hicks's work. The word itself is used for celebration, communication, and religious expression in more than sixty poems. Birds sing, people sing, even "[t]he typewriter sings furrow songs" ("For Margaret" SLTS 60). By invoking the concept of the song, Hicks is doing more than simply calling attention to the lyrical nature of poetry. Rather, in an embodiment of Lee's notion of being both structured and in flux, Hicks uses song and its related variants to suggest both musical sound and speech, to imply something both familiar and original, and to evoke spiritual as well as secular connotations. Music, and by extrapolation, words inherently connected with music appeal to the listener in a way that a linear discursive text cannot. Hicks, through his writing, is attempting to make the reader experience more of what happens when he or she listens to music.

In what is probably one of Hicks's best-loved poems, "The Speech of Your Country," he states:

The speech of your country is like music
resisting translation, sufficient of itself
in phrase and cadence, flowing eloquently towards
the perfect understanding. You walk beside me
a stranger, yet at the touch of hand and hand
words rest upon the tongue, needless
of being spoken. It is like light
kindled at morning, like song's unburdening
from the first outlined tree. (1-9)

Clearly this is Hicks's understanding of both language and music. Perfect understanding is not achieved through linear text and discursive analysis. Words on a page cannot represent the range necessary for true communication. Communication here is as intangible as light—yes, it can be broken down into its properties and explained, much like the peal of a bell, but it cannot be entirely understood from only that information.

Hicks wants readers to approach his work as if they were approaching a piece of music: “People who complain that they can’t understand poetry might be very well asked to stop probing and just listen” (*Side Glances* 54). This is not to say that meaning is not important to the poet, as the opposite has clearly been established, but for Hicks “Language is sound” and cannot be separated from it (*Side Glances* 11). When language is operating properly, when poetry is doing its job, the necessity for explicit analysis becomes secondary:

They will ask why
I come silent from my journey, why I bring
no message, no least token; and I shall say,
the speech of her country is like music
not to be translated, sense of its own sound,
entire with meaning. Set adrift in the heart,
it finds the ear in its own fashion. I
have heard it, and I understand. (S&S 10-17)

The message of the poem is clear. Certain things must simply be accepted as they are. Music, whether expressed through silence, sound, or speech is an elusive thing. Its parts can be dissected and examined, and still fail to equal the whole, much like the peal of the bell. Hicks resists ascribing only one meaning to things or trying to provoke one response from the reader/listener. Instead, he offers a multi-layered, almost multi-media approach to poetry, which allows for the expression of something personal and profound, yet may evoke a response greater than simple appreciation of the poem’s text. Hicks creates poems that are songs without musical notation, yet which are clearly more musical than the sum of the phonetics in the words. This ability to infuse his work with music and spiritual meaning is what sets him apart from his Canadian contemporaries.

Coda

To see a poem you look
through the poet’s flesh;
to see a poem you look
through the hard shell, the
tight winding.

– “Look Through my Body,” *Rootless Tree*, 64

Poetry, like music, must be understood first with the body, then with the mind.

Robert Bringhurst in his essay “Poetry and Thinking” articulates the same idea: “[poetry]

is the language of the world...a music that we learn to see, to feel, to hear, to smell, and then to think, and then to answer" (163). Hicks would concur: "The basis of music is rhythm, its driving force. The basis of poetry is the same. A poetic insistence must control your free verse. At its best it will have a sort of race memory of its beginning, of being turned in new directions, of singing instead of speaking, of thought guided into some new level of expression" (*Side Glances* 60). Hicks's ability to create poetry that resonates with the listener demonstrates his awareness of the importance of language as well as his finely-tuned musical ear. The reader would be hard-pressed to find a poem that does not create a sense of rhythm that supports the thematic ideas, or language that is not carefully chosen to augment the ideas as well as to stir the listener's auditory memory.

Perhaps the desire for poetry or language for its own sake is considered quaint or old-fashioned, an idea whose time has passed. However, Hicks's understanding of poetry, particular his own poetry, encapsulates a notion that is perhaps most embraced by contemporary sound poets like bp Nichol, Steven Ross Smith, and Gerry Shikiti: that the poem in itself is enough. Hicks writes: "Think of your poem as an investigation....Poetry is investigation of the spirit. If a poem you read moves you, something must have happened....if it stirred in you an awareness that left your senses glowing and your body with them, then it was poetry for its own sake. It investigated you. It did its job" (*Side Glances* 64). However, Hicks wants the best of both worlds, sound and meaning. He plays with language in "Distortia," a poem dedicated to Shikiti, but Hicks is clearly being coy:

Ears ex/dis tended
as visual hysteria
invite one to listen
inattentive. What you intercept
is counterchoice; by hazard-hap. (OBC 1-5)

Hicks's decision to use traditional styles to his work are a "counterchoice" inasmuch as Shikiti's works, or the poetry of Christian Bök that is almost impossible for the reader to reproduce orally. Still, there is clearly a mutual respect for the ways poets choose to address the age-old problem of getting readers to listen to their poems, whether listening

is for the pure enjoyment of the sound experience or to encourage understanding on a more profoundly personal level.

Steven Ross Smith, writing in “Some after words for John V. Hicks,” articulates many of the themes of Hicks’s poetry:

And now the *silence*. Silence you,
attuned, had overheard with your acute listening.
You caught the unhearable signal, that note at the
point of its breaking. How I hedge. Cup over my
good ear. You chimed. Each peal, a resonant note,
and diminuendo. Death, I suspect, is just so, and
without anxiousness. Death rings a secret, which
when revealed, unravels with its bearer. You now are
word-shorn, yet your words gather, they root and
branch, verse upon verse at my reach. But around
me a patter of noise and clench rattles my solemnity,
my intent. (15-27)

Smith’s respect and admiration for the man he describes as “a master” (Rev. of OBC 121) is evident in his attention to incorporating symbols and references that Hicks consistently used in his own work. The image of the bell seems particularly relevant as a metaphor for Hicks’s life and work, combining his spiritual commitment with creativity that clearly “rang out,” expressed through music and poetry. It is apparent that Smith believes in the staying power of Hicks’s poetic legacy, as well as its ability to inspire others who work with words. Well-known for his own experimental sound poetry in the tradition of bp Nichol, Smith is certainly well-qualified to speak to the musical nature of the language that Hicks employs: “Whatever the tone, in reading Hicks, one has the feeling of precision being enacted—clarity of thought, rendered in precise language, and with a master’s handling of composition, rhythm, and sonority. Lines and stanzas are shaped or broken with a deft eye and an attuned ear” (121-122). It is telling that some of Canada’s least traditional poets still regard Hicks as a clear master of the craft. Contemporary sound poets seem to understand and appreciate Hicks’s skill in a way that more conservative poets fail to recognize, perhaps because on the surface Hicks’s work appears less complex than it actually is. Only with attention to language as well as structure, with an awareness of music as both thematic element and linguistic device, can Hicks truly be appreciated.

CHAPTER 3 BRIDGING THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR

While the sleepless earth turns, the hours
rotate, Love refreshes the offices
of another day. Somewhere time and space,
histories and projections, conjoin,
a slow hand moving toward the midnight bell.

B A Love's Hours: Compline," *Sticks and Strings*, 61

A Moment of Meditation

For Hicks, a devoutly spiritual man, music and religion were deeply linked. He was the organist at his local Anglican Church for over sixty years and his poetry reflects this marriage of musicality and spirituality. While Chapter Two focused on the occurrences of silence, sound, and speech as primarily thematic elements—like a repeated theme or motif in music—this chapter concentrates on a set of three previously published poems arranged together in a chapbook called *Hours*. Just as the canonical hours of the mass are sung prayers, Hicks's poems are hymns that celebrate the journey of each day. These three pieces—at times reverent, at times playful—reflect spiritual and secular concerns, and how the two are intimately connected. In liturgical services, music is the means to lift the words to heaven; Hicks uses his repertoire of motifs drawn from the previously outlined categories of silence, sound, and speech to create his own kind of music that functions as a form of prayer. For Hicks, language and music are both intended to create an effect that transforms the experience for the reader/listener. It is possible to produce poetry that is musical and that translates into a physical experience for the body, while not overtly referring to music per se.

It is always dangerous to speak of religious traditions one has not participated in, so it is necessary to locate myself in reference to Hicks's religious background. While he was a practicing Anglican, I consider myself a practicing Roman Catholic. For my purposes, the differences between Anglicanism and Catholicism are relatively minor, and I will attempt to indicate where definitions have been taken from a Catholic or Anglican

tradition. However, the focus herein is on a decidedly Christian form of devotional practice and when discussing religion I am referring to practices commonly used in Christian religions and not necessarily pertaining to one particular ecclesiastical branch. My own experience with the canonical hours as practiced by modern Christians has been mainly in relation to the Benedictine traditions where psalms are sung at ritual hours throughout the day.

The chapbook *Hours* is comprised of three long poetic sequences and was produced in a limited run of 300 signed and numbered copies to be distributed to family and friends of Hicks during the 1994 Lenten season. Although each of the poems appears in other books and all three are represented in Hicks's collection *Sticks and Strings*, their appearance in *Hours* as a "trinity" reflects Hicks's awareness that the pieces work exceptionally well together, reflecting related themes within complementary structures. That Hicks himself was responsible for this collection being produced—without the urging or input of editors—also indicates that he viewed the three pieces as significant works, worthy of publication on their own. The distribution of *Hours* during Lent—the season preceding the Christian celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter—suggests an awareness of these pieces as fundamentally linked to the religious season. From all accounts, Hicks considered himself to be a spiritual man and a devoted Christian, and yet, although these pieces do convey feelings of reverence and respect, they are more concerned with everyday matters, issues of the heart, and secular ideas than larger matters of religion or faith. He uses traditional forms and devotional language to elevate the secular to the level of the sacred. He employs the same techniques and elements of silence, sound, and speech to continue to give his work a lyrical quality, consistent with the idea that prayers are often sung, and he further evokes silence, not only for its musical implications, but for its spiritual ones as well.

Although Hicks's repeated use of specific images—the bell, for example—may sometimes seem like an over-reliance on what is familiar, in these three poems the repetition helps connect the poems. The bell that is "An Angelus / of our beliefs" in "The Ritual Hours" is revisited in "the midnight bell" of "Love's Hours." "Hours Secular" does not expressly invoke the image of the bell, yet the last lines—"the whisper of a single note / descending, assuming its own silence"—seem to carry the echo of notes

sounded in the earlier poems. Hicks's use of repeated images—and thereby repeated word-sounds—sets up reverberations that carry through his poems like the ripples that spread out from a dropped pebble. The effect may be diminished over distance, might even fall into silence, but the movement is still noticeable.

Even the design of the chapbook, a simple stapled form printed on dapple-grey cardstock, reflects the poet's tendency towards understatement. There is nothing austere about the collection, nor anything overtly religious in its appearance. The cover image is a "reproduction of a sixth century [sic] silver Anglo-Saxon brooch, an artifact of the British Museum" (back cover) and the sections are marked by the uncomplicated design of a Celtic-style knot. These are hardly the images one would associate with modern Christian devotional practices.

Consequently Hicks consistently resists the push towards modernity in both his content and form, which may be part of the reason for his failure to capture popular attention. He adopts language that is often considered archaic, and each carefully-chosen word has layers of meaning. An exploration of his work through close reading is the best way to understand the care he puts into crafting his poems.

His exploration of the secular uses traditional forms and devotional language to elevate the material of the every day to the level of the sacred. Each of the poems in this collection is shaped around one of the canonical hours of the Christian church. As outlined in the previous chapters, Hicks's craftsmanship extends to selecting language that resonates both phonetically and semantically. He takes the concept of choosing the best possible word to the extreme, and gets as much interpretive mileage as he can out of each selection. Words are selected both for their sound and musical qualities, as well as their thematic resonance. The continued use of common or repeated ideas, particularly those that also invoke an auditory concept (i.e. silence, wind, voice) helps convey a sense of ritual where every invocation echoes—literally and figuratively—with the weight of previous references, and helps to provide a sense of the spiritual as a daily practice.

The Ritual Hours

"The Ritual Hours" consists of eight sections of twelve lines each. The uniform nature of each section—the similar line lengths, rhythms, and twelve-line limit—embodies the

notion of ritual, an action that gains significance from repetition over time. The poet creates a structure that textually replicates what ritual means, conveying the idea to the reader in both a visual and auditory way.

The poem represents a journey from morning until nightfall, marked by the progression of the sun across the sky as well as the Christian hours of prayer. Yet in the poem prayer takes many forms, and ritual sometimes becomes habit with its connotation of an action that is done “often and almost without thinking” (“Ritual”). The lines between the divine and the mundane are blurred as the reader tries to determine what actions have been completed, which ones have been left undone, and whether there is any real significance either way. The poem is not noticeably focused on anything significant, just people—unidentified people, mainly—going about the habits of their daily lives and within those actions are moments of prayer, but also moments of existence without meaning.

Ritual implies sameness, as well as a familiarity. It provides readers, writers, and practitioners of religion with a structural framework in which to work. As Western texts are laid out in a particular form with sentences reading from left to right, religious rituals rely on recognizable cues and repetition to ensure that followers are able to easily assimilate the prayers into their daily lives. The sharing of the ritual with other followers of a faith gives credence to the beliefs by allowing practitioners to feel they are not alone in their practices of worship. A task repeated by many people often assumes a significance far beyond the task itself, and although the nature of the task must surely be considered, the repetition itself increases familiarity.

In a religious tradition, although the words may lose a certain measure of strength with repetition, the act of repeating is in itself important. In some cases, the observation of the ritual is almost more important than the words themselves. Hicks is drawing attention to the reality that meaning is often lost as people go about their daily lives, and meaning in different forms must be sought.

In each of the poetic sequences, Hicks creates section titles that reflect religious ritual and tradition. He uses the term matins, as well as the seven canonical hours of prayer associated with Christian monastic tradition: lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, compline. Matins is not included in these seven hours, but is the “service of

morning prayer in the Anglican Church” (“Matins”), although how often it is still observed is unknown to me. Derived from the French word for “morning,” in its archaic use it can also signify the “morning song of birds” (“Matins”). Hicks would have been aware of all of these meanings and is consciously employing them to suffuse the poem with additional connotations and images that are not explicitly present, but that would be known to most Christian readers.

Hicks’s “The Ritual Hours” begins with “Matins,” which although “properly a night office, [is] also recited with lauds at daybreak or on the previous evening” (“Matins”). The poem starts with a blending of images from night and early morning, much the same way that matins is a prayer extending across the division of the day.

None know for certain when the moment
falls, how time to come takes over
from an exhausted past, one more
ambition blending into the dream
as always. It is gone. There is just time (1-5)

The moment that “falls” marks the transition from one stage to the next, from one day to the next. People going about their lives often miss this transitional moment, particularly because it occurs while the world sleeps, a metaphor for a passive lack of awareness. Hicks uses language that imbues the poem with a musical sense of slowness—an extensive use of the languid m and n sounds and the long o forces the reader to slow his or her pace, making the sound of the poem match its meaning. The poem speaks of a world just awakening, yet for all its slowness, particular moments of significance may still pass unrecognized: “one more / ambition blending into the dream / as always.” There is the sense of inevitability—“as always”—and that “we are unaware of our beginnings.”

Hicks is suggesting people are often unaware of their spiritual roots, that religion has become a ritual repeated without meaning, a “duty” to be “discharged,” an activity carried out in a dream-like state. The opportunity to recognize the importance of a stronger future, the “time to come [that] takes over / from an exhausted past,” is fleeting and in a moment, “It is gone.” Hicks relies on the traditional image of the seed—both a staple in nature literature and biblical parable—to suggest “[t]here is just time” to plant the notion in people’s minds, to set forth one small thought that may yet grow into

something more. The seed is connected with the beginning of both sound and speech here: “the intonation / is sounded, the first word spoken” recalling John 1:1 “In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Hicks, in his own way, is planting the same seed with his poem. By calling to mind the lack of awareness, he seeks to heighten awareness in his readers so that in “the exchange of hour for hour” they will gain something beyond the mere passing of time.

Hicks employs a familiar image, the night watchman, as a sort of Everyman. He is doing the work he has been assigned, yet as the “watchman tramps in the street,” he is “uncertified,” which seems to imply a lack of awareness or a lack of preparation for the task appointed to him. He is the one who must “watch,” but he is only “guided by approximations.” There is no certainty in what he does, no understanding of the task set to him. It is nothing more than “duty” that is “well enough discharged / if he but mark the exchange of hour for hour.” As a metronome marks time in a purely functional way, the watchman does the same. In Psalm 127, the watchman’s task is useless unless done with an awareness of God’s presence: “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” Although it may be enough for the watchman, the implication is that it should not be enough for anyone who wants to rise about the darkness and experience the light—metaphorical or spiritual.

Hicks, who was certainly aware of the allusions generated by the image of the watchman, likely also had in mind the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) in which the foolish virgins fall asleep, failing to keep watch for the bridegroom (Christ) who is coming. Bach’s chorale piece “*Wachet Auf*” or “The Watchman’s Chorale” where the music resonates with the watchman’s cries can also be considered part of what informs Hicks’s understanding and use of the image, providing the poem with layer upon layer of rich interpretive ground.

“Lauds,” the second poem in the sequence, is also “the office of the first canonical hour of prayer, originally said at daybreak” (“Lauds”). Here time is a coach drawn by horses, an image which evokes classical mythology and the chariot of the sun god, Apollo, and may signify the tension between the secular and the divine. The pace

has improved slightly from the watchman's trudging, but greater speed does not imply greater awareness:

The coach of time rattles its blind way
over cobbles, into outskirts,
through lanes, down rutted roads,
jostling the patience of passengers (1-4)

Those who are participating in "this dark opening of a day's journey" (5) are impatient, restless and within the coach traveling sightlessly through darkness, they are also blind. "All is not well" (6) the poem suggests, subverting the watchman's traditional cry of "all's well," and the reader can conclude that this turn of events was not unexpected; there is no sign of active life within the poem. People seem content to be passengers on the journey rather than participants in control of its direction. They are content to journey "blind," and their low expectations are never exceeded—a sad commentary on the spiritual state of affairs.

However, all is not lost. Things are "well enough / to engage the hopes of the tired horses / drawing at last to ease of pavement" (7-9). The buildings here are "tall" suggesting at least the possibility of reaching beyond the "rutted roads" that the passengers have emerged from, and if the horses are able to find hope, perhaps there will also be "improved conveyances / that whisper to the touch." Conveyances here carries the double meaning of a mode of transportation, but also the sense of communication that is necessary for change to take place, although they are still only a "whisper." The quiet of the poem echoes the silence of the hour, the slow awakening of sound. It is significant that there is a line break after "There is time" as it suggests not only the immediate need "for a quick thanksgiving before sunrise," but the more far-reaching and ultimately more important need of restoring a sense of involvement in spiritual rituals.

The third section represents "the office of the second canonical hour of prayer, originally said at the first hour of the day (i.e. 6 am)" ("Prime"). The world again becomes populated as "[r]anks of the sleepers thin" (1). The notion of the journey is reawakened as the "processions" that imply religious pageantry and formality are mingled with images of people proceeding to work and tourists proceeding "to the day's points of interest" (3). The "guide" here may be either textual or human, but regardless is used as a way to suggest there is something of significance to be seen:

Here,
 the guide says, is the first stage
 in the ordeal of light. It was here,
 according to legend, darkness,
 discomfited, gave up its rights, fire
 rolled to a sphere (3-8)

Hicks is using a creation myth, but he does so in a way that implies doubt rather than blind adherence to one's faith. By using the phrase "according to legend," he not only introduces the idea of legend as something that is "a popular but unfounded belief" ("Legend"), but also that it has been transmitted to the guide from another source. The repetition of the word here, rather than reinforcing the truth of the statement, seems only to undermine it when set alongside the uncertainty of says and "according to." Speech is a construction, and a flawed but necessary one. In spite of darkness being defeated and light being allowed to exist, it is still characterized as an "ordeal," a struggle, which is not an inappropriate metaphor for the process of wrestling with one's faith in a modern world. Although light triumphs, the victory is short-lived for "suffering / began to move, crawl, infect alike / air, earth and water" (8-10). It as if darkness held these things in place, and light has released them to venture forth. It is only time, therefore, that "takes darkness by the wing, binds / tooth and talon" (10-11). Darkness is bound, has lost some of its strength, but is not vanquished, and becomes part of an endless cycle of alternating light and darkness from which "[w]e rise again" (12), like the phoenix from the ashes of destruction.

Beyond its Christian application, the word prime most often means first, but it has other significant denotations that may apply. Hicks was a consummate wordsmith who loved the interplay of language across levels and fields of interest. He was not only a spiritual man, but a musician and a mathematician. In math, prime is defined as a number "having no common factor but unity." Applied to the poem, it seems that this section in particular upholds the need for binaries in Christian tradition. Without darkness, there cannot be light. Without suffering, there is no opportunity to rise above it. Furthermore, prime is also defined as "the state of the highest perfection of something"—ironically, the moment of creation in the poem is also the moment when suffering is released. What should be considered the pinnacle of creation includes the

seeds of its own downfall, and yet, hope is offered in the closing refrain of “[w]e rise again,” suggesting there is nothing that cannot be overcome on another day, at another hour. The phrase “We rise again” not only suggests a physical movement, but the inevitability of repeating the same action. As a song returns to its refrain, so does this end phrase serve to restart the process for worshipper or reader. There is always another chance, another song or story.

“Tierce” casts off the slow steady awakening of the previous sections and gets down to business with a recognition of the adage that “time stops for no one:”

There is every evidence of haste. Prayers
omitted in course will never be said now.
The earth is about its business, and has been
for some time. The sky is the same blue.
Orisons have been chanted to
the source of light, life, the world’s turning,
and the day turns to its responsibilities. (1-7)

This section suggests the pace of life, which often is blamed for interfering with the ability to include spiritual practice in one’s daily life, is simply a product of our own inability to set priorities. The earth and the sky are able to continue their daily rituals without fail, yet those who worship rush through the day without awareness. Prayers are said or forgotten with equal conviction, and Hicks’s choice of the word orisons, a little-used if not entirely archaic word for prayers, suggests a criticism of an archaic attachment to prayers that “have been chanted to / the source of light, life, the world’s turning” (5-6), things that are at the same time important-sounding and vague. “Orisons have been chanted to” is a cumbersome line, and deliberately so. Hicks wants to convey the sense of being weighted by, on the one hand, an overbearing sense of traditionalism, and on the other, a shifting away from the importance of spirituality. Speech in this secular world does not seem to carry the same musicality as it does in the rest of Hicks’s poems where speech tends to be synonymous with the lifting of voices, the desire to communicate. Rather, even the language of the poems is by turns slowed down and deadened by the heaviness of ritual without meaning, or rushed along by a world that keeps turning. It is also likely that Hicks appreciated the play on the word terse, which implies the same brusqueness and haste implicit in the poem.

Hicks's concern with the notion of awareness in spiritual endeavour is evident here as people are glad to be "[i]nddoors at last" and away from the source of light for which prayers were offered. The irony is not lost as "artificial radiance / takes over" (10-11). There is a shift from light as a natural source to something constructed. This shift can be taken on two levels. First, Hicks is making a connection to the worker who, like the earth, must go about his business in a repeated ritual of everyday employment. The economic necessities of modern times force most of us to labour indoors, often in professions that provide little in the way of creative or spiritual renewal. Secondly, the movement from natural to artificial light may signify a movement within Christian communities away from a focus on fundamental spiritual principles towards an emphasis on rituals that do not offer people more than "a fellowship of contract" (9), a fulfilling of obligations without receiving anything in return. Although the final line of the poem suggests labouring under such conditions "will do," the reader is left with precisely the opposite impression, much like the watchman who can mark time, but should strive for more.

Hicks uses the variable spelling terce rather than the more familiar terce, although the significance is negligible. Terce is also a musical term for the interval that spans two octaves plus a major third ("Terce"), perhaps a suggestion of how far people are stretched in the fulfillment of their duties, whether sacred or secular.

The fourth canonical hour occurs around noon and "Sext" continues Hicks's exploration of the theme of light as metaphor for spiritual awareness. Here the light that bursts from the first lines of the poem is a spotlight seeking out what is hidden: "Falls upon all things the full blaze / of the great light, lanterned to search out / our secrets, show things as they are" (1-3). The light is neither artificial nor from within, suggesting that here it has become Christian ideology in its most blatant outward presentation. Like the previous section, this poem also plays with the parallel worlds of church and state, worshipper and worker. Noon brings a break from work—"respite time"—yet it is also "time to indulge habit / put forward by the best mechanics; / a chance to hide for an hour from open charges" (4-6). The eye of the Church, the institution, here sweeps over people like a search light over a concentration camp, forcing people to adopt one of two stances: to continue on as is, or to turn away from the light. Neither is much of a

solution. Once again the symbol of the lantern, tool of the watchman, is used as a signifier of the potential for change and literally, illumination.

As in most of his poems, Hicks uses multiple layers of meaning to his advantage. Office is not only a place of employment, but also “an authorized form of worship” and “a ceremonial duty” (“Office”). The worlds of work and worship merge into one, and each is complicated by the difficulties of human interactions:

The office drones on
in psalm and invocation, hymn,
gossip, a touch of slander here and
there, the wish to put off old selves (9-12)

Work is both boring—“drones”—and worthy of praise—“hymn.” Prayer exists side by side with gossip and slander; music and talk are intermingled as if there is little difference, something Hicks would see as a travesty. He is both criticizing institutionalized religion and recognizing that Church is made up of people who are trying through repetition and ritual “to put off old selves,” to progress towards something better, more spiritual perhaps.

As the sequence nears its end in “Nones,” Hicks also begins to draw together the threads he has woven throughout the piece: “All the solemnities we know move / into one place now” (1-2). The longer words force the reader to slow down, consider, evaluate: “Cautious, we think over / accomplishments, begin to wonder / what can be safely left until tomorrow” (2-4). Hicks encourages the reader to look not only backwards, but forward, acknowledging the importance of process. Significance will only be found, however, if the reader seeks it out: “Nothing went wrong, particularly; / we hit our stride, held it” (5-6). The status quo is easy to maintain, and repetition of familiar practice is likewise manageable. Yet, repetition is not enough, and Hicks advises: “let us pray / for industry, right relations, ferial rhythms / uninterrupted; let us offer praise.” Ferial refers to a type of celebration related to a Christian midweek feast day, but the word is also close enough to the baser feral to consciously be suggesting both meanings. Hicks easily moves between the sacred and the profane, drawing attention to how seamlessly people put on and take off their spiritual beliefs and roles. The joint admonition to pray and offer praise is important. Although connected, the two actions

are not the same. One implies an asking for something while the other offers thanks for blessings already received. The message is clear: true spirituality requires both actions.

“Vespers” sees a revisiting of the activities of a busy life, but from a more contemplative perspective. The sixth canonical hour of prayer marked by the rise of Venus as the evening star also sees a decline in the frequency of images of light. Here the sun is only “a western beam, slanting against / windows” (2-3); its strength to illuminate has diminished with the progression of the day, yet still visible are

printed floors
 patterned with the haphazard tracings
 of our activities, our frantic runs
 to this point and back, that point
 and return (3-7)

The words printed, patterned and tracings all imply an order of sorts, but Hicks subverts that notion by characterizing the motions as “haphazard” and “frantic.” The vagueness of a “point” that is reached but is of no significance is nonetheless important for conveying the notion of how often people pursue actions that essentially achieve nothing and lead nowhere. Hicks is concerned with not only the mindless repetition of spiritual ritual, but also the blind acceptance that life must be a journey that appears to lead nowhere. People become discouraged by an inability to move beyond their circumstances and there is “seldom a continuation / to the beyonds we hoped for” (7-8). A spiritual reward becomes unattainable, no more than part of the “legend” (“Prime”).

However, even within these moments of despair for the state of spirituality: “An Angelus / of our beliefs, insistent, rings / for the last time” (8-9). The Angelus is a bell rung in the Roman Catholic church to signify the call to devotional prayer, but is also the practice of that prayer at morning, noon, and night, commemorating the Annunciation, when Mary was visited by the arch-angel Gabriel. For Hicks, the bell is a strong symbol of spirituality. Its recognizable musical sound, absent from early sections of the poem, is here clear and striking, and most particularly, “insistent”; it is a sound that cannot be ignored even if it “rings / for the last time.”

“Vespers” ends on a hopeful note: “That much, then, / is certain; let us look toward new / strengths, peace of sorts at the last” (10-12). Yet as is typical of Hicks, hope is tempered by a realism that cannot be denied. Even as there is certainty, it is

qualified; only “that much” is certain, and in this case, “that much” refers to the last chiming of the bell identified with beliefs. Are we to believe Hicks is suggesting it is inevitable that ritual must fade away to be replaced by something else? No, but he is definitely prodding the reader towards an increased awareness and ownership of spirituality. Throughout the poem he has included himself in the “we” of the poem. There is nothing he suggests for others that he does not also expect for himself. He not only sounds the bell, but is prepared to answer its call as well. There is an awareness of each individual’s role in creating change within a spiritual community and the awareness of the “fellowship of contract” (9) that is required by participants in organized religion (“Tierce”).

The poem reaches its promised ending in “Compline,” “last of the canonical hours of prayer, said before retiring at night” (“Compline”). This section is the most introspective, the most obviously contemplative regarding the larger question of spirituality:

There were many reasons, unspoken, why
progress was no more than satisfactory; why
purpose, measuring first ventures against
outcomes, settled for the partial success. (1-4)

It is no surprise, given Hicks’s tendency to view the best communications as silent or “unspoken,” to see a return to silence here. The repeated why at the end of the first two lines suggests that the poet has not yet come to terms with the questions posed by the poem and requires a more meditative space to seek the answers. The mathematician in Hicks seems to want a system of neat checks and balance, a measuring of “progress” against “purpose,” and “ventures” against “outcomes”. The section reads like an evaluation that might be given to a worker: “no more than satisfactory,” “partial success.” However, the poem seems to recognize the importance of the journey even if the destination fails to be all it was intended to be. “Rest is never earned” (6) the poem suggests, but does that mean rest is what awaits everyone whether successful or not? Perhaps. “Compline” acknowledges that light fades and “grain by grain / the mounting cone of time is spent” (8-9); if light is connected with spirituality, both institutionalized and personal, the poem maintains that a period of darkness is necessary for renewal. In Hicks’s sequence, darkness has typically been connected to silence, and this connection

suggests that the spiritual understanding that can be drawn from silence is necessary as well.

Recalling the binaries used in the earlier stages of the poem, Hicks allows the reader to come to rest before the process begins again with the upending of the hourglass: “it is enough; hope is in the ritual / reversal, the upending; peace / takes now the night’s measure. Amen” (10-12). Hope, which in the beginning resided only with the horses, has now become part of the process of renewal. The reversal here is significant, for it suggests a need for change while at the same time maintaining a familiar structure. “Hope is in the ritual” seems to imply a dependence on structure to provide the framework for the future, yet the surprising “reversal” on the next line immediately subverts the notion of maintaining the established order of things. This kind of line arrangement is typical of Hicks’s sense of play, as well as his willingness to be open to change. Although the poem operates within a clear and somewhat rigid structure, the line breaks and word choices suggest a playfulness that subverts the more traditional form. Just as Hicks seems to suggest religion can benefit from a shift in its understanding of its own rituals, the poem demonstrates how opposition can work within an existing structure to create something interesting, provocative, and still inherently respectful of established patterns and ideas.

The poem closes with Amen—so be it—and although it is a traditional close to prayer, it also suggests the poet’s acceptance of the limitations of the poem. After the journey has been completed, after the accounts have been tabulated, there is little time left to institute change. It is only while the ritual is allowed to repeat that the opportunity for change, and ideally growth, can be seized.

Love’s Hours

The second sequence of Hicks’s “hours” poems is less complex and less overtly religious, although it still uses the structure of the canonical hours to give it shape. However, the rigid twelve line structure has been abandoned in favour of a more fluid framework where the middle three sections move directly into one another through the use of ellipses. Bracketing the middle section, the other pieces follow a fourteen line form. As in the previous poetic sequence there is movement from morning to night, from

“Mattins” (a variable spelling of matins) to “Compline” with the addition of an “Office Hymn,” which takes the form of a traditional Petrarchan sonnet. The subject matter is Love, capitalized and anthropomorphized. There are aspects of a divine love here, a dedication to the sacred, yet the emphasis is on a physical rather than a spiritual love. Although it is treated with such respect as to elevate the corporeal experience of the flesh to the level of the divine, the music that resonates throughout the piece is most often equated with the sounds and rhythms of humanity.

The opening passage in “Mattins” may easily be applied to sleep or the aftermath of a sexual experience:

No sooner the eyes close,
breathing regulates, pulse at the throat
subsides, and the body, stilled
at last, lies emptied of response, than
sentinels may report the spirit
as elsewhere flown. (1-6)

More likely the poet intends the reader to recognize the signs of love making—elevated breathing, increased pulse, which are both rhythmic and sonic—rather than simply the normal responses of the body at rest. Particularly telling is that the body is “emptied of response,” suggesting the experience of sexual climax; the sexually charged “O come” may be a lyrical call to worship on a physical or spiritual level.

Hicks joins the physical and the spiritual by raising the experience of sexual love to an act that is at once holy and worthy of praise:

Love sends her messengers into far places,
down much trodden paths, seeking
one voice to sound the first note
of a day’s praise. O come. (7-10)

The modern experience of love is often confused with sex and has become mundane, ordinary. As in the previous piece which sought to encourage the reader to elevate the daily grind to a spiritual pilgrimage through awareness, this poem likewise seeks to identify love as an experience that can also be sacred. Here “the lips, moving, / shape the name of silence only” yet the call is “let us sing” (11-12). The tension between silence and song, between love as a private experience and one that should be praised, is clear when the poem suggests “Steal away, steal away” (13); the impulse to hide love in

darkness rather than carrying it into the light is a natural one, yet the poet insists that praise be released, aloud, and be allowed to spill forth in much the same way that the sexual response is allowed to reach fruition. Communication here requires sound, but all it takes is one voice to “sound the first note” (9). Only when that communication is heard is it effective.

“Lauds” revisits the earlier image of the traveler that was utilized in the same section of “The Ritual Hours.” The poem is peopled with “refugees clogging the roads, / returning from ravaged places” (1-2), and it is only “at the first light / and note of praise” (4-5) that they experience movement. Music—a note—here is the impetus to take action, to shake off the passivity that characterizes many people’s lives. As in the previous poem, light seems to indicate a shift towards a spiritual realm where “hands in supplication / [are] outstretched beyond darkness” (6-7). Darkness is something from which people must arise, and it is in part Love’s task to ensure this movement.

There is a great deal of repetition in this small section. The word hands is repeated three times; the word come four times. Hands, which are important symbols of prayer, are initially full of “despairs,” then used in “supplication,” and finally “lifted, beckoning.” Hands go from being passive vessels filled with sorrows to a more active role that invites contact with the spiritual and physical realms. Come here carries both the more sexual connotation and the sense of movement: “we come we come” transforms into “Come away, come away,” echoing the “steal away” of the previous section. The movement from darkness into light necessitates the shift in language as well from the notion of stealth and theft to a more open-handed beckoning. Interestingly, it is the synesthetic “sound shapes” that “beckon” (14), suggesting that the tension between the unseen (sound) and the visible (shape) is beginning to merge. The poem plays with oppositional ideas—deprivation and treasure are paralleled, and the presence of Love makes one “forgetful.” The suffering experienced on the journey where even the sky is “threadbare” is a minor thing compared to what Love offers. Likewise silence and singing are bridged by time, echoing the movement from darkness to light, from the secular to the divine.

In “Prime,” once again music comes to the fore in honour of “Love’s homecoming” (3). Until this point it has hovered in the background like a stereo on low,

existing mainly in the cadences of language, the repetition of images. Here, the reawakening of overtly musical references—words such as song and chime and note—suggest celebration, joy, and a movement towards enlightenment. As the poem reaches a climax, so to speak, the musical resonance becomes more evident.

The poem is shaped as an address to the reader with instructions to:

Rise up,
be decked with the waking petal, join
the softwind chanting. Rise to
song phrase and sentence, chime
of the note cluster. (3-7)

The language reflects the poem's two-fold concern with love as sexual experience and love as sacred celebration. The sexual imagery is unmistakable from the repeated refrain of "rise up" to the image of the "waking petal." There is "taut string" and "new-edged reed" and "All in readiness / stands" (7-9). Sharp upright images are placed alongside softer resonances—the chime, the rounded cymbal, the flute. The poem builds towards its own climax:

This is the hour that launches
measure and movement, builds
the upward curve's bright sunburst.
Be strong, shape the new antiphons,
prepare our thanksgivings. (10-14)

Words like launches, builds and sunburst convey the feeling of dramatic movement and the chaotic nature of creation, echoed by the reminder to "be strong." Measure is both an indication of length and a unit of musical time, and the music is carried on in "new antiphons" (13). An antiphon is "a hymn or psalm, the parts of which are sung or recited alternately by two groups" ("Antiphon"); even the selection of song expresses the duality of love, and the option of recitation or vocalization further reinforces the coming together of speech and music.

The poem moves from a passive position to encouraging an active participatory stance. What is "poised, waiting" eventually moves towards the passive activity of "be[ing] decked," then takes a step forward with a joining. By the end of the poem, the reader is given courage to "shape" and "prepare" actions, suggesting a shift towards leadership and an awareness of the need for action.

The following three sections—“Terce,” “Sext,” and “None”—really comprise a single poem spread over three pages. Hicks is invoking the idea of the “Little Hours”—the group of prayers from Prime to None—and using them to increase movement through the middle section of the sequence. Each section is only six lines long and the poems move from one to the other through use of ellipsis.

Much like a band of children who are to be seen and not heard, “[t]he Little Hours troop in / softfoot, halting, the shy gaze / probing among spaces” (1-3). He draws attention to the change in form and rhythm by cautioning the reader:

Do not turn
from what you are doing, do not
offer greeting, question purpose,
disturb the issue of this ... (3-6)

Naturally, the reader is prompted to do exactly what he or she is cautioned against. The idea of little in proximity to the word issue puts the idea of children in the mind of the reader. Hicks and his wife had no children and although a biographical reading is not necessarily any more accurate, it might be supposed that this longing for “issue” is wistfully connected to the notion of “dream” at the beginning of “Sext.” The middle section contains a definite sense of play, picked up explicitly in “None” when the reader learns: “and here the children have been told / not to play through the heats of afternoon” (1-2). The notion of progeny as something important, yet also something removed from the regular rhythms of life, is telling. For those who do not have or are unable to have children there are other means of creation available through the act of composition (both musical and literary), and there is a recognition that “Only Love / grows old, sees visions, imposes peace” (5-6). Children and youth are vibrant, busy—“Childhood / cannot contain pause; there is so much / seeking, so little time”—and yet the time given to childhood is fleeting (3-5). It requires maturity and time to fully understand and appreciate what love has to offer, and as Love ages, the movement from sexual to sacred becomes more evident. Love becomes the culmination of experiences both spiritual and physical, and both are necessary for understanding.

“Vespers,” as in the last sequence, is a more reflective piece, drawing together the day’s movement from one evening to the next. The language suggests dissonance: “[r]ecollections of her touch *bite* / into the evening. Sunglaze on water / *troubles* the

sight” [emphasis added] (1-3). Images of hunting are invoked and movement is uncharted, uneven, chaotic. Uncertainty is hinted at as “the silent reader [is] / left meditating upon fictions” (9-10) and the only thing that can be relied upon is the passage of time and, inevitably, death: “Sunset / is certain” (11-12). The “last sky” in the last line is a “blurring reflection” (14) suggesting the mystery that lies beyond death.

“Love’s Hours” paints life as a crescendo of movement from passive to active with time in between for play and dreams and diversions. During the last three poems, there is an awareness of slowing down, a progress towards an inevitable decline that replaces sensual pleasures with spiritual ones. In “Compline” there is a sense of acceptance. Longer lines slow the reader down with more prose-like constructions, an excess of sibilant s sounds, and the inclusion of the numerous prepositions that help extend the poem’s long exhalation:

Silence sets like the sun. Darkness
cannot be hurried, takes time
in its stride, settles in the mind,
on the senses, into the heart. (1-4)

Likewise the poem cannot be hurried either. Hicks is masterful at using language to replicate the emotional tenor of the piece. His usual precise word choices give way to larger, more abstract concepts like silence, darkness and peace. Memory fails with “a last flickering / of forgetfulness” (7-8). The stars are vaguely “somewhere” (8), yet even in this diminished place “Love refreshes the offices / of another day” (11-12). Love promises renewal and the final image of “a slow hand moving toward the midnight bell” at once suggests both a finality and a hopefulness. The hand is slow, but it is still moving, and the bell is silent, but will not remain so. Love has the ability to “refresh,” to make the world new again. The final image is a melding of the physical and the spiritual offset by the word “conjoin” (13) and like the “Amen” of “The Ritual Hours” that suggests acceptance, the final image of the reaching hand is a symbol of hope.

The final poem, a Petrarchan sonnet entitled “Office Hymn,” is an address to Love written in a traditional iambic pentameter. The octave follows an abba abba rhyme pattern and, as is common in this form, presents the question or problem to be explored. In this instance, Hicks examines the notion that love is often taken for granted. He uses religious language to raise Love to the level of the divine and casts the poem as an

address to this new god. What would typically be an address to God is now a prayer to Love, which is represented as having the ability to be merciful and to forgive, and which can be blasphemed against. Love is “the very meat and drink by which we live” (4); it is the equivalent of the body and bread of the Christian church that feeds the “starven forms” (7). At the same time as love is deified, the octave is rife with images that conjure up the sins of the flesh: “mortal flesh,” “immortal shame,” and the all too sexual notion of a body “spent beyond our labour to revive” (7-8). The poem is sensual and sexual while at the same time bearing the earmarks of a traditional structure and form. It is reminiscent of the early confessions of saints, such as St. Augustine, that delightfully described sins in order to persuade others to avoid them.

In the sestet that follows the traditional cdecde pattern, the turn is completed with a return to more purely spiritual notions. The wasted youth is replaced by wise experience: “Yet if we had but known, in this our day, / wherein was peace, surely our hands had stayed / from wasting the desire of age and youth” (9-11). The image of worshipping at the altar of Love is revisited, but now the emphasis is on love as a false god, or at least a misunderstood one, and the reader is left with the notion that although love is indeed a sacred thing, its importance is rarely understood until it too late to really experience it. These are the reflections of someone writing in maturity, looking back on life. In his own way, Hicks seems to be offering the final sonnet—a song outside of the canonical hours—as an acknowledgment of wisdom gained over time, the experiences of a lifetime crafted into a testament to Love.

Hours Secular

The third sequence, “Hours Secular,” represent a shift in the order of the canonical hours as well as a complete rejection of the earlier strictures placed on form. Hicks begins with “Prime” to reinforce the notion of creation, of firstness, and alludes to the Genesis story. For the first time the poem features an I. The I is both the poet creating the composition and the first being human at the very moment of formation: “I have done no wrong. Even thought / has not yet risen to embrace / the various evils I am equal / to” (1-4). The I is also eye, and Hicks uses the idea of a camera’s shutter, a device which allows light to enter the lens, to doubly convey the image of opening up and

of seeing: “Here at the shutter’s first flicker, / the imminent baring of the lens” (1-2). Like the first person who was as a blank canvas, a naked body not yet tainted by sin, the poem’s voice remains objective, able

to survey
the purlieus of my properties, my
course with no confrontation to question
my rights, or any casual seduction
to lure my footstep yet untried. (8-12)

In such an objective state, there is as yet no dichotomy, no balance; however, this can only be achieved by remaining static. Once the “I” moves, choices must be made: “I turn, and the first motion warns / the intimate electronics of the body / that another race begins” (13-15). There is no longer time to “bask in the simple wonder of being / for its own sake” (21-22), and the journey of the “I” is not so much a choice as a predetermined course. The poem shifts again from I to we, perhaps suggesting the joining of Adam with Eve, and the I does not reappear until “Compline” at the end of the day. The movement from first person singular to first person plural suggests the persona’s connection to the larger community and the notion of the shared experience of Christianity:

we shall arrive as we did before
at day’s end, the same havocs wrought,
nothing discovered, really, yet
rediscovered always, confirmed (26-29)

The poem expresses a sense of futility while at the same time extending the promise that each day offers “a flash / of disclosure” (30-31). Each day is a “lost life” but also “an offering new made” (30-32) and supports the Christian assertion that even in death there is the opportunity for new life. This notion continues the idea of ritual and repetition introduced in “The Ritual Hours,” but without the structural limitations of enacting the ritual poetically.

“Tierce” returns the reader to the familiar world of work so ably linked with daily service in “The Ritual Hours”; however, in this section, work is “our enduring / slavery to this, to that, to anything / that promises our material survival” (5-7). Work is not devotion, but merely something to fill in the hours “until evening come again, evening smiling / into our faces” (8-9), and yet there is also a kind of slavery in “furious relaxations, the fixed / idea that that was what we lived for” (2-3). Hicks is playfully

drawing attention to the no-win situation of most people's lives: the busy-ness that passes for relaxation combined with the unsatisfactory labour in order to earn a living. Hicks suggests "[t]hat we are admitted once more to our arenas / is something" (11-12), although whether the "arenas" constitute the world of work or relaxation is purposely unclear as both seem to be zones of contention within the poem. Yet the fact that the "defeats have not been recorded" (12) suggests that there is the opportunity to pick up and carry on, to learn from the mistakes of the day and the mistaken assumptions about which actions constitute service and which constitute slavery.

"Sext" continues Hicks's commentary on the relationship between work and spirituality. He is critical of society's increased need for productivity and industry: "we have turned our attention / to gain in every hour" (8-9). He mourns the loss of the traditional life where the movement of the sun shaped the activities of the day:

Cities used to drowse in a noon's heat,
 stir at first light, subside with fading light.
 There were times of traditional rest between
 activities sufficient for life, health,
 profit, the passing down of estates (1-5)

What was once "sufficient" is no longer enough, yet society appears to have gained little in trade: "in this noon / small halts, quick forays after food, / carry no metaphors" (6-8). To a poet, a lack of metaphor is a damning criticism. A society that is productive, yet produces no lyrics, no art, no words is bereft. Work is merely a place of "marking time" (10) and the poet is suspicious about what benefits there might be: "we / may return refreshed, if slightly, not disarmed" (11-12). The wording of the last line is deliberately awkward. While it suggests the possibility of hope, the word may is hardly a strong endorsement, particularly when followed by the phrase "if slightly." The final phrase "not disarmed" employs double negation to cloud the reader's understanding of what is being said. To paraphrase, the last line might read: we may return a bit refreshed, but still armed. Ultimately, this assertion is a criticism of a world where "[w]e dare not leave / our businesses" (9-10) and the negative aspects clearly outweigh the benefits.

"Nones" is both a radical departure from the previous subject matter and an interesting addition if interpreted with an eye to spirituality. On the surface it appears to be a depiction of the Washington State Mount St. Helen's eruption of 1980, whose smoke

and ash were seen and felt even here in Saskatchewan. It also passes as a decent description of any apocalyptic event where death comes from the sky:

There were ash-grey clouds mounting in the southwest,
gnashing wisps of teeth; innocuous vapours
able to woo temperature (that, too, harmless)
to their undisclosed purpose, swirling,
beginning their death dance, willing rains
to forget nourishment and rain down instead
destruction on the earth. Stone them, stone them,
destroy, destroy. (1-8)

The images of “ash-grey” and “innocuous vapours” in particular call to mind the Mount St. Helen’s event, but the addition of “gnashing wisps of teeth” recalls Matthew 13:50 “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth [in Hell].” The image of destruction raining from above is definitely an Old Testament one and also works with the notion of the Great Flood and the forty days and nights of rain. However, where the flood was meant as punishment with a cleansing purpose, the evocative “stone them, stone them, / destroy, destroy” offers no hope. Several biblical tales involve stonings—for example, the narrating of events leading up to Christ’s admonition “let him who is without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:2-11)—and the double repetition of the phrases further calls to mind the chant of “Crucify him, crucify him,” which is part of the Christian liturgy leading up to Easter. If, as Hicks has expressed, part of the poetic experience is to hear the music of language with the body, the angry refrain of “crucify him,” the cry of a crowd gone mad, is clearly intended to resonate.

The poem stops the reader right in the middle both visually, by using increased white space, and linguistically by employing a line made up of five one-syllable words roughly following a pattern of unstressed, unstressed, stressed, stressed, stressed.¹ The appearance of three strong words at the end of a line that is also visually offset cannot be ignored by even the most careless reader: “But the Sun said no” (9). Even if said is read as an unstressed syllable, the final d does not allow the word to fade away without some strength. Add to that the capitalization of the word Sun and the spiritual significance of

¹ There will naturally be some debate regarding the scansion of any particular line. I cannot help but read the line with three stressed syllables at the end because it seems to be such an emphatic statement.

its homophone Son and you have the poetic equivalent of a bolt of lightning, a revelation. Apocalypse has arrived, but the Sun/Son stands between it and humanity. There is no appearance of the personal pronouns in the first eight lines; it is only after the intervention of the Sun/Son, the break in the poem, that “our fate hour changed course” (10). Hicks is aware of the power of divine intervention and he is not a careless poet. Every syllable, every line break is utilized for its ability to convey meaning on multiple levels at the same time.

Just as the poem delivers redemption from the horror of the apocalypse, it gently reminds the reader that spirituality should not be a passive activity: “and now the softening air moves again / toward gleaming windows, another evening, / subsiding fears, clusters of unearned escapes” (12-13). Contained within these lines is a warning to remain aware, that deliverance may not always arrive unearned. It is arguably one of the best examples of Hicks’s ability to confront the reader with an idea and then step back from it, leaving the reader to make up his or her mind.

Both “Vespers” and “Compline” represent hours at the end of the day and as such continue the reflective and meditative stance established in the previous sections. Following upon the apocalyptic vision of “Nones”—ominous in itself with the implication of nothingness suggested by the title—these two pieces are disappointing. “Vespers” is a pale echo of the brilliant light espoused in “Prime”: “It is time to turn / to grateful yellow light, inward / where warmth is” (7-9). The poem catalogues the details of a quiet evening: a garden past its harvest, the slow progress of a comet, the steam of soup upon the stove. The poem slumbers towards its conclusion without saying anything at all, although the “increase of shadows underfoot” (15) suggests all is perhaps not as comfortable as it should be.

“Compline” shows sparks of the emotion generated in “Prime” but seems content to fade into silence with only “small angers [to] / attend the afterglow” (1-2). The poem hints at unrest and intrusion. There are “faint gusts like / persistent rumour” (3-4), “shadowed branches” (5) and “restless leaves” (6). However, the suggestion of disquiet is placed in the form of a question:

Will the night
bring peace, bring silence, or do
the little clouds massing there

on the world's rim prepare to serve
 argument to the dark hours, grievances
 to air over the heads of sleepers? (6-11)

The question undermines the strength of the earlier sections of the poem. Where previously the "I" of the poem stepped forward into action, the reappearance of the "I" marks a downward spiral towards death and what appears to be complacency: "I shall be content / if nothing is settled" (13-14). Where the phrase seems to suggest an acceptance of things as they are, the poem immediately begins to move towards defining a state of unrest that will only be resolved:

if the old despairs
 find speech, rumble their way
 into whatever dreams may come, liven
 the breathless hours with echoing
 of the old rages. (14-18)

The progression from silent contentment to speech, to a rumble that becomes life and eventually rage, however old, suggests there is still spirit even at the close of the day and reiterates Hicks's preoccupation with the necessity of silence as part of the process towards enlightenment. Death in a spiritual context is not simply a passing away, but a passing towards something greater and it is not enough to settle "for acceptance even / now when the day is ended" (19-20).

The sequence ends with the uplifting renewal of the morning prayers: "Mattins and Lauds" grouped together as would be allowable in the recitation of the canonical hours. The image of Saint Cecilia's "portative"—"a small portable organ of the late Middle Ages" ("Portative")—being born by angels suggests a passing into a spiritual realm where "[t]here is neither paeon / nor lamentation" (4-5), neither praise nor sorrow. This poem represents the culmination of the work done in the previous sections. Those people who progress through work and service and even through apocalypse, may enter into a new experience at the end of it: "a tablet cleansed / of error, hope, regret, desire" (10-11). Human cares—the things that shape our daily lives whether positive or negative—are left behind. The image here is of transcendence, suggested by both the angelic presence and the absent saint, and although "preparations / are in process" (3-4), it is not yet possible to understand what awaits. The closest Hicks can provide is

imagined through music: “the bitter rising, the sweet falling, / the whisper of a single note / descending, assuming its own silence” (11-13). Like a church service that has ended, the poem descends into silence leaving the reader to ponder its meaning. “The faithful are still” (8) and Hicks intends for the reader, at least in the conclusion of the poem, to be marked as one of the faithful by sharing that final moment of silence.

Whether the reader continues to embrace any notion of spirituality beyond the terms of the poem is irrelevant, but during the reading of the piece, the reader becomes as much part of the “we” as the poet himself.

The chapbook remains a testament to Hicks’s devout faith as a Christian, but also to his consummate skill as a poet. He pays tribute to the traditions of the Church by utilizing its patterns and rituals as a structure for his work, yet the ways he departs from this structure or makes it his own suggest that he is more than a passenger on a blind journey. He uses the language of religion to explore spiritual themes, but also to subvert religious pedantry. His playfulness, his layers of meaning, and his willingness to introduce secular concerns suggest a deep commitment to understanding and experiencing spiritual ideas to their fullest. He continues to employ silence, sound, and speech as thematic and structural elements to convey additional depths of meaning and to establish an audible sense of musicality that serves to reinforce his concerns.

Music, although not explicitly referenced, is most often implicitly connected with light and movement signifying progress in the spiritual realm; silence offers rest and a chance to contemplate, but is often linked with darkness and the need to be shown the way. Human communication is the substance of everyday life and as such helps embody the tension between spiritual and secular concerns that Hicks is exploring. Desire, death, love and work all become subjects for spiritual consideration and can be elevated to objects of worship, whether to positive or negative effect is sometimes uncertain. However, it is clear that Hicks infuses every piece with a hopefulness. Although quick to criticize a society that embraces ritual without understanding, repetition without meaning, he is equally clear on the possibility of redemption, change and renewal at the end of the day. Each day is a clean slate, a new opportunity to find meaning—to find music—in the small moments of everyday life, whether in the sounding of a bell or the simple act of breathing.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION: A LIFE WELL-PLAYED

Here am I
making my most of thunders
out of silence and these
raindrop syllables.

– “Writing Poems,” *Sticks and Strings*, 84

A Familiar Refrain

Robin Skelton, reviewing *Winter Your Sleep* for *The Malahat Review*, calls Hicks “quite simply, one of the best poets writing in North America.” Skelton goes on to explain his reasons for thinking so: “His work has lyrical delicacy, intellectual strength, wit, euphony, an approach that is original without being aggressively quirkish, and a vision that is profound without being obscure” (131). Choice describes him as: “this quiet companion of some of our century’s best-loved poets.” Ray Penner, a friend and reviewer, writes of Hicks in *Poetry Canada Review*:

John’s love of music and literature is obvious when you enter his home. A well-kept grand piano in the corner of the living room, the records of Beethoven, Brahms, Bach and other classical composers, the copies of sheet music, cohabit with the volumes of books containing the poetry of Auden, Yeats, and Dylan Thomas....He is a careful craftsman, and his fine sense of rhythm, of the musical quality of words, serve to point out any misdirection in his work....John gave me the impression that he wrote poems the same way he might build a fine violin. Once the task is finished, the sweetness of the music that issues forth has been ensured, is meant for others, becomes someone else’s.

And, of course, there is the oft-quoted Earle Birney who dubbed Hicks “Canada’s most neglected poet.” However, if Hicks is so well-respected and, according to his peers, one of the finest poets of the twentieth century, the question remains: why has he failed to receive any attention beyond a handful of mostly small reviews, many of which say the same thing: namely that Hicks’s work is profound and well-crafted, that it is inherently musical and original.

I believe reviewers and readers of Hicks's work are all confronted with the same fundamental problem in examining his poetry. Yes, it is everything the reviewers claim; it is moving and lyrical and original. However, it is also extremely difficult to pinpoint the exact qualities that make it that way. Everyone points to language selection, poetic devices, choice of subject, and stylistic integrity when reviewing poetry. Yet what makes Hicks's work interesting and unique is not merely a matter of technique in one or more of those areas. Clearly technique is part of it, and the poet was as aware of how he placed his words together as a person navigating the edge of a high cliff or building a stone wall would be. Precision and care and exact placement of well-measured language are essential for the structure to hold.

However, Hicks's work resists simple definition. It refuses to be assessed merely in terms of rhetorical or thematic devices. It offers the reader an experience that is both aural and textual, that is at once intellectual and spiritual. The active reader-listener may feel moved or changed, much as one does when listening to a piece of music, but be unable to articulate the exact nature of that effect or transformation. The reader may not even be entirely aware that something has taken place until the poem has settled into his or her subconscious and had time to take root.

Hicks maintained that poetry must be personal. In the same way, I believe the best scholarly endeavours are those in which there is a piece of ourselves at stake. I find myself returning to certain pieces with new eyes and ears, finding harmonies I was previously not open to hearing or gaining understanding that I was certain was not there before. Arguably this sense of discovery happens with the majority of what we read and re-read, but Hicks's work is particularly resistant to easy articulation of its effect. From reading the reviews, I do not believe I am the only one who has experienced this sense of frustration in being moved, but being unable to satisfactorily explain the exact nature of the experience.

The Poetic is Personal

Given that Hicks's body of published work consists of more than 500 poems, finding a place to begin a scholarly investigation was a daunting task. Generally reviews are positive (and short) and intended to help sell books, and realistically do not always

provide a critical overview of a writer's work. Instead of academic articles, I had more than 400 pages of archival materials from the University of Manitoba and Thistledown Press, including hand-written notes and photocopied articles, many without dates or publication information. There are still an additional twenty boxes of Hicks's personal papers sitting in the University of Saskatchewan archives waiting for someone to assess the contents, and that is clearly the next step that must be undertaken. I purposely chose to concentrate on the primary texts as it seems fundamental to look at the text as a groundwork for anyone who might come afterwards. Because of these challenges, this project is necessarily and most definitely personal, and rightly so; Hicks would be disappointed if it was not.

The Sound and The Silence

In attempting to define what exactly in Hicks's work constitutes his unique musicality and its effect on readers, it seemed prudent to identify Hicks's main preoccupations. One cannot help noticing the constant references to the twin themes of music and religion running through his work like finely woven threads. These concepts are central to an understanding of what Hicks values as a poet and as a man.

Silence, sound, and speech provided a suitable framework for beginning to articulate common practices in Hicks's work. Silence conveys both an absence of sound and the potential for a spiritual presence that appears in moments of contemplation. Silence is the blank page that surrounds and shapes the poem, and it is the emptiness in which understanding takes place. Hicks uses it consistently to provide moments of pause within his work both structurally and thematically either by invoking the word itself and the connotations it suggests, or by employing white space, line breaks, and punctuation to create a sense of pause in the same way a composer would include a rest.

Sound, both natural and constructed, resonates both textually and aurally to help create Hicks's unique musical style. Images of birds, wind, water, and other natural concepts suggest clearly definable sound patterns that readers will "hear." Hicks selects language to echo the drip of water, shapes the text on the page to simulate the movement of falling water as in "Writing Poems," and lets words flutter across the page in their own migratory flight. He is keenly aware of the multiple levels of interpretation and uses

them to allow readers of all skill levels to take something from the poems. Hicks's poems are not sound poems in the tradition of bp Nichol, but there is no question that his poems resonate with sound. The combination of individual word sounds, the way vowels and consonants thrust against one another creating harmonies and dissonance are only part of the craft; Hicks manages to provide a "sound shape" that is more than simply language or image. It is as difficult to define as the effect of music on the listener, but his musicality is the poet's attempt to produce that effect, to invoke a physical (emotional) and perhaps even a spiritual response to what is being heard and understood.

For Hicks not only is "the speech of your country ... like music," language in general is music. Much like a musical composer, Hicks scores his poems with sound variations that reflect the full range of instruments available to him. Soft sibilant sounds and harsher more guttural sounds come in to play specifically and intentionally as Hicks uses language to build mood as well as meaning. Words are as unique as the instruments in an orchestra, and though all violins can replicate the same notes, each instrument plays with a slightly different, inherently unique sound. In the same way, Hicks utilizes words, selecting and combining them to the greatest effect: sometimes prayer, sometimes benediction or orisons. The differences in sound and sense are nuanced, and Hicks is in tune with what those subtleties might mean to both the understanding and the ear of the reader/listener. Sound is the medium and the message—it is part of the intellectual experience of the poem, but it is also the experience itself, and that is largely what makes Hicks's work so difficult to define in conventional terms.

Speech as it appears in Hicks's poems represents an attempt at communication just as the poems are Hicks's realized desire to communicate with the reader. Operating at both the textual and the subtextual levels, as visual and aural media, Hicks's poems are translated into experience by the reader. Many composers have been attracted to Hicks's work and have set numerous pieces to music—usually with vocal accompaniment, supporting the idea that he is writing lyric poetry in the truest sense of the tradition. For those that understand the fundamentals of music, the poetry provides a built-in framework for transformation. His understanding of tone and rhythm, his awareness of rhyme, and his sense of tempo and pacing create the same kind of patterns that composers draw from when they work. Creating actual music from Hicks's poetry seems to be the

logical culmination of his efforts and in some ways is the ultimate testament to the inherent musicality of his writing.

Silence, sound, and speech are three of the ways in which Hicks is able to convey his sense of music and his understanding of the divine. The three concepts function as a trinity that rely on one another to create a unified whole in which it is often difficult to determine exactly what part each has played in the creation, yet it is indisputable that each is present and important. Even though the patterns can be identified, assessed and categorized, an explication of any one element fails to provide a complete picture of the work. Sometimes the study of artistic expression requires, as Hicks was no doubt aware, a leap of faith.

The Rest is Silence

Hicks was a composer in every sense of the word. He chose to use words instead of notes and instruments, but he understood that language is another form of music. The rhythms and cadences of consonants and vowels, the silences and breaths, create a sound experience that resonates in the body. All poetry does to a certain extent, but Hicks was masterful in layering his language to provide the strongest possible aural and poetic effect by selecting words that resonate both on the page and in the ear. Poetic sequences, particularly those contained in *Hours*, read like movements of a larger piece of music. His books offer various musical styles—from children’s rhymes in *Renovated Rhymes* to the sophisticated jazz improvisations in his more experimental poems, such as those dedicated to Shikítani. He knows his instruments and like one of the most gifted composers, he makes brilliance look effortless. He is perhaps overlooked because the work is so well done that it seems less complicated than it is. People are moved by it in ways they find difficult to articulate, yet that is testament to his skill, not an indicator of a lack of depth.

Hicks’s work is all about invitation. His poems insist readers open their ears, as well as their minds. There is a sense of welcome, yet like the best mysteries, not all is revealed at first glance. One can slide into a poem and feel at one with it, yet know there is more waiting to be discovered upon returning. Like the peal of a bell, the echoes will reverberate even after the movement has ceased. Hicks’s work offers the kind of

contemplative space Hicks valued in his personal and spiritual life. It is simple without being simplistic, and profound without getting lost in its own importance. In short, it reflects its author and his values, his attention to detail and his passion for music and life.

For Hicks, everything seems to come down to the concept that language is another form of music and can be inherently musical in its form and execution. Language and music are practically inseparable in Hicks's poetry, as it should be in well-executed work where "music and content not only support one another but are indistinguishably one" (Hirshfield 9). Hicks's writing requires more than the simple identification of thematic elements or the recognition that sounds reinforce meaning; his work is the creation of someone who instinctively heard language with a poet's sensibilities and a musician's ear. A repertoire of techniques only goes so far in helping craft language that sings, and ultimately any articulation of such things falls helplessly short in identifying the elusive quality that makes some poetry more effective than others. Bach used the same notes as other composers, yet it is not merely the arrangement of the particular notes that creates a masterpiece. The subtleties of craft are as difficult to define as the effect on the listener, yet although our language falls short of being able to capture the essence of artistic endeavours we must continue to explore the works of poets such as Hicks and most importantly, listen to poetry with both mind and body.

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APPENDIX
 Alphabetical List of Poems Appearing in Published Volumes

| Poem | Book | Page |
|---|-------|---------|
| "Der Tod Und Das Madchen" | SLTS | 53 |
| "Lo, How a Rose" | OBC | 77 |
| "When Lutes Be Old" | MM | 22 |
| "Woman at a Window" | SLTS | 52 |
| "Woman at a Window" | S&S | 59 |
| 13 Ways of Looking at a Blackboard | WYS | 76-77 |
| 20 Steps Go Down to Earth | NIAFC | 112-113 |
| 42nd Street | OBC | 47 |
| A Book Called Winter | MM | 25 |
| A Corkscrew Sun | RT | 115 |
| A Cup of Black Tea | RT | 91 |
| A Day in March | SLTS | 59 |
| A Dry Pond Ringed with Playthings of Children | SLTS | 105 |
| A Gift Withheld | SLTS | 94 |
| A New Commandment | OBC | 70 |
| A Night of Endless Rummaging | RT | 127 |
| A Patch of Sky | SLTS | 43 |
| A Peal of Birds | NIAFC | 52 |
| A Small Window Overlooking the Animals | NIAFC | 40-41 |
| A Song for Sylvia | SLTS | 24 |
| Afterbirth | WYS | 43 |
| Alone with Dances | NIAFC | 73 |
| And Long Ago | NIAFC | 11 |
| Annunciation | MM | 51 |
| Another Groundhog | OBC | 54 |
| Apostrophe to a Pinned Insect | MM | 24 |
| Apple Picker | OBC | 25 |
| April Landscape | OBC | 10 |
| Are You There, Mrs. Goose? | S&S | 38 |
| Are You There, Mrs. Goose? | WYS | 38 |
| Art School | NIAFC | 12 |
| Ascent to Silence | SLTS | 73 |
| Ascent to Silence | S&S | 60 |
| Ash Wednesday | WYS | 60-61 |
| Ash Wednesday | S&S | 42 |

| Poem | Book | Page |
|---|-------|-------|
| Asides | NIAFC | 38-39 |
| At the Music Festival | RT | 69-74 |
| Aubade | NIAFC | 88-90 |
| Autobiography | OBC | 49 |
| Autumn Comes to the Park Benches | NIAFC | 45 |
| Autumn Flight | S&S | 118 |
| Autumn Nearing | OBC | 48 |
| Baa, Baa, Black Sheep | RR | 23 |
| Back Off | OBC | 44 |
| Bare November Tree | WYS | 9 |
| Bare November Tree | S&S | 29 |
| Basketries | F&S | 29-32 |
| Bassoons | WYS | 23 |
| Bassoons (OTP) | RT | 140 |
| Beast Without | MM | 52 |
| Bedtime Stairs | MM | 49 |
| Berry Harvest | OBC | 29 |
| Between a Fortune Cookie and an Epic Poem | MM | 56 |
| Biblicals | F&S | 57-60 |
| Biblicals (cont.) | F&S | 61-64 |
| Bio | WYS | 105 |
| Biography | NIAFC | 115 |
| Bisciuts la Menagerie | NIAFC | 28-30 |
| Blow | RT | 11 |
| Blow | S&S | 67 |
| Blow Me a Tune | MM | 9 |
| Bluebeard's Chamber | S&S | 125 |
| Book jacket | F&S | |
| Book Jacket | MM | |
| Bo-Peep | RR | 1 |
| Boxes | F&S | 21-24 |
| Briar | RT | 23 |
| Burnt Wood | WYS | 63-68 |
| By Night, Looking Down | WYS | 13 |
| Calm | RT | 92 |
| Carol in Three-Three Time | WYS | 28-29 |
| Cauchemar | RT | 82 |
| Cautionaries | NIAFC | 35 |
| Cecilia | MM | 40 |
| Celestial Bears Have Long Tails | MM | 53 |
| Certain Sympathies are Expendable | OBC | 46 |
| Chant Macabre | WYS | 39 |

| Poem | Book | Page |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Cherilyn | NIAFC | 74 |
| Cindy Lane | SLTS | 79 |
| Clarinet | WYS | 22 |
| Clarinet (OTP) | RT | 145 |
| Clay-Coloured | MM | 26 |
| Cleopatra | MM | 10 |
| Cling | S&S | 110 |
| Cold | NIAFC | 75 |
| Cold Morning | MM | 27 |
| Come Out of the Sea | RT | 112 |
| Companion | RT | 83 |
| Continuo for a Chorus of Bats | WYS | 25 |
| Copla: Dance of the Moths | MM | 54 |
| Corkboard | F&S | 41-44 |
| Correction for an Imaginary Sundial | S&S | 130 |
| Count Summer Out | MM | 55 |
| Counten Rime | MM | 11 |
| Create Away | NIAFC | 14 |
| Credo | S&S | 149 |
| Critiques | OBC | 64 |
| Currency | S&S | 131 |
| Cycle | S&S | 57 |
| Cycle | SLTS | 41 |
| Dali | MM | 58 |
| Dance Scriabin | S&S | 143 |
| Dancer | MM | 57 |
| Dark Morning | S&S | 39 |
| Dark Morning | WYS | 40 |
| Das Lied von Der Erde | OBC | 18 |
| Day of the Bells | RT | 41 |
| Dedication | SLTS | 9 |
| Dedication | RT | 5 |
| Dedication | WYS | 6 |
| Dediction | NIAFC | 6 |
| Departures | SLTS | 64-65 |
| Descant | S&S | 144 |
| Difficult Child | S&S | 85 |
| Difficult Child | RT | 81 |
| Dimension | SLTS | 80 |
| Ding-Dong | S&S | 145 |
| Distortia | OBC | 35 |
| Diurnale | RT | 19 |

| Poem | Book | Page |
|--|-------|-------|
| Divisions of a Liturgy | NIAFC | 15-17 |
| Do Not Ask | RT | 118 |
| Do Not Disturb | SLTS | 95 |
| Doorway | RT | 107 |
| Dresden | OBC | 30 |
| Dried Blood | WYS | 83 |
| Drought | RT | 31 |
| Dry Run | SLTS | 76 |
| Duo | RT | 130 |
| Ear-Rings | OBC | 26 |
| Easter | OBC | 51 |
| Echo from a Mountain | NIAFC | 91 |
| Elephant Aloft | RT | 95 |
| Elevation | NIAFC | 46 |
| Elevation | S&S | 21 |
| Emmaus | OBC | 80 |
| Epigraph | OBC | 8 |
| Epigraph | SLTS | 11 |
| Epiphane | WYS | 44 |
| Equines | F&S | 45-48 |
| Eruption | RT | 114 |
| Explicatus | WYS | 69 |
| Faded Bell | WYS | 62 |
| Faery | F&S | 49-52 |
| Fantaisie | OBC | 9 |
| Fear Assumes the Shape of a Tolling Bell | RT | 106 |
| Feast of the Transfiguration | OBC | 79 |
| Feather in the Wind | NIAFC | 47 |
| Felix | OBC | 39 |
| Fireflies | MM | 78-80 |
| Firelit Wall | SLTS | 72 |
| First and Gracious Sight | S&S | 150 |
| First and Gracious Sight | NIAFC | 76-80 |
| First Call | SLTS | 48 |
| First Fall | OBC | 36 |
| First Person | RT | 90 |
| Flash | S&S | 119 |
| Flat World | OBC | 17 |
| Flight at Sunset | RT | 97 |
| Flyleaf | S&S | 53 |
| Flyleaf | SLTS | 17 |
| For Margaret | SLTS | 60 |

| Poem | Book | Page |
|--------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Four and Twenty Blackbirds (1) | RR | 10 |
| Four and Twenty Blackbirds (2) | RR | 11 |
| Four and Twenty Tailors | RR | 17 |
| Frog on a Leash | RT | 105 |
| From a Highway Window | MM | 59 |
| From Fence of Sleep | SLTS | 89 |
| Fugitive | NIAFC | 20 |
| Full Moon | RT | 116 |
| Full Moon | S&S | 89 |
| Garden Gate | RT | 26 |
| Garden of Clio | MM | 60 |
| Gardener | S&S | 69 |
| Gardener | RT | 18 |
| Georgie Porgie | RR | 18 |
| Ghost Talk | RT | 96 |
| Girl Playing Scales (OTP) | RT | 139 |
| Girl With a Flute | SLTS | 49 |
| Girl With a Flute (OTP) | RT | 141 |
| Gleanings | S&S | 120 |
| Goose Feathers | F&S | 69-72 |
| Goose Feathers | S&S | 103 |
| Green | NIAFC | 107 |
| Hallows Eve | NIAFC | 31 |
| Harbour | RT | 30 |
| Harpsichord (You Are) | NIAFC | 56-57 |
| Harvests | SLTS | 61 |
| Hearing | RT | 12 |
| Heifetz | S&S | 75 |
| Heifetz | RT | 42 |
| Herr Johannes | S&S | 146 |
| Hey diddle-diddle | RR | 16 |
| Hickory, Dickory, Dock | RR | 22 |
| Horn | OBC | 21 |
| Horror Country | SLTS | 34-36 |
| Hostelry | S&S | 70 |
| Hostelry | RT | 34-37 |
| Hours of Sun and Shade | RT | 132-134 |
| Hours Secular | S&S | 97 |
| Hours Secular | RT | 148-155 |
| How Was That Again, Hercules | WYS | 45 |
| Humorist | RT | 104 |
| Humorist | S&S | 87 |

| Poem | Book | Page |
|---|-------|---------|
| Humpty Dumpty | RR | 28 |
| Hurriedly Through a Secret Door | RT | 128 |
| Hymn to the Sun | RT | 33 |
| I am Lost, Content | RT | 122 |
| I Came Too Late | OBC | 55 |
| I Come Back Always | NIAFC | 94 |
| I Know You and I am Troubled | NIAFC | 95 |
| I Like the Way Your Body | MM | 12 |
| I Pen a Frag Meant in Decipher | OBC | 34 |
| I Run From What I Have Written | RT | 98-99 |
| I Study the Moons in my Nails | RT | 103 |
| I Taste the Summer Winds | SLTS | 69 |
| I Think of You As | SLTS | 75 |
| I Wake from a Dream of Prophets | S&S | 132 |
| I Wouldn't be Surprised If | WYS | 42 |
| If You Wish | RT | 123 |
| In Depths Where Nets Struggle with Fish | RT | 63 |
| In Memoriam | S&S | 155 |
| In My Wood | NIAFC | 48-49 |
| In November's Mist | NIAFC | 50 |
| In the Library | SLTS | 25 |
| In the Sea of Tranquility | SLTS | 81 |
| Incantation | MM | 28 |
| Incongruities | F&S | 9-12 |
| Innumerable Cages of Nightingales | WYS | 52 |
| Interludes | MM | 42-45 |
| It | RT | 111 |
| It Needs Still Water | S&S | 74 |
| It Needs Still Water | RT | 22 |
| It Will Be Lonely In This House | SLTS | 42 |
| Ita Poema Est | MM | 61 |
| IX | RT | 84 |
| J.S.B. | S&S | 148 |
| Jack be nimble | RR | 15 |
| Jack Spratt | RR | 14 |
| Journeys | WYS | 50 |
| July | S&S | 83 |
| July | RT | 57 |
| Kareol | WYS | 30 |
| Keep Quite Still | SLTS | 101 |
| Keep Quite Still | NIAFC | 108-109 |
| Kiss of Death | RT | 24 |

| Poem | Book | Page |
|---|-------|-------|
| Lane Fragment: Good Friday | SLTS | 62 |
| Last Praise | SLTS | 93 |
| Last Rite | WYS | 85 |
| Legend: The Stones | OBC | 22-23 |
| Lenetif | S&S | 111 |
| Letter to Paris | RT | 60 |
| Light in Motion Turns the World | WYS | 70 |
| Like Olives, Like | S&S | 126 |
| Little Boy Blue | RR | 33 |
| Little Gallery | S&S | 30 |
| Little Gallery | WYS | 17-20 |
| Little Jack Horner | RR | 8 |
| Little Miss Muffet | RR | 25 |
| Little Mouse | OBC | 75 |
| Little Tommy Tucker | RR | 21 |
| Long Recall | WYS | 84 |
| Long Return | NIAFC | 110 |
| Look Through My Body | RT | 64 |
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