

# A Memory

Thursday 10 April 2025

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Thesis Statement	In this poem Hughes presents an evocative yet conflicted portrait of his father-in-law as he expertly shears a sheep single handily. Hughes creates a palpable sense of the old man's strength and skill, clearly built up over years of farming. There is a sense of nostalgia, not only for the individual man but perhaps also in Hughes's acknowledgment that his own path as a writer has distanced him from the simplicity of this connection with the natural world.
Paragraph 1 - Speaker's connection to farmer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opening word of 'your' - establishes clear and intimate relationship with his subject, sustained through repetition of 'you'</li><li>• The title of the poem itself suggests the power and poignancy of this specific memory</li><li>• Juxtaposition of 'bony white bowed back' emphasises the farmer's fragility yet use of the simile 'powerful as a horse' emphasises his physical strength - reveals speaker's admiration and love</li><li>• Barn is 'cave-dark' - metaphor hints at something ancient and primeval about shearer, work places him in a millennia old tradition that Hughes clearly admires</li><li>• 'Attached cigarette' - extension of farmer, permanent fixture in his routine, part of farmer's identity and habit, symbol of ritual and comfort</li><li>• 'Bent at its glow' - mirrors farmer's own bent posture, even inanimate object admire farmer</li><li>• 'Preserving its pride of ash' - farmer seen as a torch bearer for skill and tradition he is demonstrating in this poem, symbolic of continuity of his labours</li><li>• 'Lit another at it' - lack of full stop, chain-smoking represents continuity of his physically demanding labours, hunger for small 'comforts' in an arduous life</li><li>• Continuous enjambment emphasises ceaseless nature of his work, sense of admiration for manual labour from Hughes</li></ul>
Paragraph 2 - Harsh physical conditions and difficulty of sheep shearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of 'bony white bowed back' - symbolic of strenuous efforts</li><li>• Repetition of 'bowed' - stressing humble and strenuous efforts, connotations of reverence</li><li>• Asyndetic listing of 'oversize, overweight, spilling' - emphasises sheep's bulkiness and restlessness and the strength needed to contain it</li><li>• Contrasting descriptions of 'sweating and freezing' - mix of heat and cold is jarring and difficult</li><li>• 'Flame-crimson face' - intensifies description of heat, harsh alliteration and assonance add intensity</li><li>• Descriptions of the farmer's sounds as 'drum guttural African curses' - curses are rhythmic in a sense suggesting frequent struggle, sounds become foreign as frustration takes hold</li><li>• Simile of 'collier' - like a miner the farmer is performing difficult and stressful work in a dark, isolated environment</li></ul>
Paragraph 3 - Humanity vs nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• While the natural world presented in this poem may be seen as more domesticated than in other Hughes poems, it is clear farmer has to work to subdue sheep to his will</li><li>• Throughout the poem language reflects the skill and strength needed to shear sheep and animal's desire for escape</li><li>• Assonance of the 'peeled sheep leap free' - desire of sheep for freedom, celebrating skill of farmers who has shorn sheep like one might peel an apple</li><li>• 'Bald arch-wrinkled' - shows the toll of his work</li><li>• Head described as a 'weathered dome' - language suggests vulnerability and age in contrast to brute strength of sheep</li><li>• Juxtaposition of 'suddenly savage, suddenly gentle' - highlights precise control farmer</li></ul>