Ted Hughes and the Literal:
A study of the relationship between Ted Hughes's translations of János Pilinszky and his poetic intentions for *Crow*.

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Abstract

Even those well acquainted with Ted Hughes's poetry may be unaware of the impact that his work in translation had on his creative practice. Particularly relevant is Hughes's enthusiasm for what he referred to as 'the literal,' a rough text used as a mid-way stage in the co-translation process by poets who have no knowledge of the original language. At one point, Hughes's co-translator János Csokits advised him: "I think one thing you should explain is your concept of literals which is rather personal and has to be grasped by the ordinary reader – even some of the literary gentlemen may misunderstand what happened to the poems."[1]

In Chapter One of this thesis I examine this concept, concentrating on Hughes's attraction to the broken, slightly foreign sound of translated texts. In Chapter Two, I show how literalness had become a standard by which Hughes was judging the work of a wide range of writers, and suggest that this can be seen as part of a wider literary tradition of seeking an authentic sounding voice. In Chapter Three, I look at the working process of Hughes's translations of Pilinszky, outlining the similarities between his metaphorical interpretation of literalness, and the poetic stance originally taken by the Hungarian poet – what Pilinszky called his "linguistic poverty." Finally, in Chapter Four, I argue that *Crow* serves as a prime example of Hughes's interest in the literal as a poetic ideal, and discuss the ways in which it can be seen to engage with the stylistic effects of poetry in translation.

Using *Crow* and his translations of János Pilinszky as key sources of data, this thesis illustrates how Hughes's approach to translation corresponds to his desire, as a poet, to write the "songs of a crow" – in other words, "songs with no music whatsoever."[2]

[1] János Csokits to Ted Hughes, 29 November 1974. The Ted Hughes Archive, British Library.
[2] Ted Hughes, expressing his intention for *Crow* in his interview with Ekbert Faas, *London Magazine* 10:10 (1971), 5-20 (p. 20).

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Names

JC	János Csokits
TH	Ted Hughes
JP	János Pilinszky
DW	Daniel Weissbort

Books

Letters	Ted Hughes, *Selected Letters* (London: Faber, 2007).
ST	Ted Hughes, *Selected Translations* (London: Faber, 2006).
WP	Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, US: Picador USA (1994, 1995).
DoL	János Pilinszky, *Desert of Love*, trans. János Csokits and Ted Hughes (London: Anvil, 1989).

Archive Material

Emory	'The Ted Hughes Papers,' held at the Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta.
Emory [Restricted]	Letters from János Csokits to Ted Hughes, held at the Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta. These letters required written permission from the copyright holder prior to consultation.

Introduction

My Thesis

The 2006 Oxford University Press publication, *Translation Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, states that Ted Hughes must be regarded "as among the major poetry translators in the English tradition."[1] It is a statement which might surprise those who know Hughes only as a poet. Even more perplexing might be the fact that such a claim can be made about a poet who was not fluent in any language other than his own. Certainly, many of us would be confused about the idea that someone who has no knowledge of the source language can translate anything: it seems deeply antithetical not only to the principles of the study of language, but to the whole notion of translation itself, a demanding and highly professionalized business for which it is surely essential to know the language very well indeed.

One must ask, therefore, whether it is appropriate to refer to Hughes as a translator at all. Even if we are more specific, and stress that Hughes's role was that of *co-translator* (Hughes's translations of Pilinszky are in fact the result of a close collaboration with another Hungarian writer and poet, János Csokits), we don't necessarily remove it from suspicion. There is still the possibility that some kind of fraudulent activity has taken place – or at least, some kind of masked creative intervention; a tampering with the process of direct language-to-language conversion. And while the distinctiveness of Hughes's own poetic voice could be used as evidence in his favour (he was clearly proficient in the host-language), it could also be used against him. The questions remain, therefore: what exactly was Hughes doing, and why? Did he add anything of himself to his translated versions? Did he take anything away to use in his own poems?

These are questions which I aim to answer in this thesis, where I examine the nature of Hughes's approach to translation and its relationship to his own poetic development, by using his Pilinszky translations and *Crow* as key sources of data. Hughes worked on both texts at the same time. By studying the former, it is possible

[1] Astradur Eysteinsson and Daniel Weissbort (eds.), *Translation Theory and Practice: a Historical Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 521.

to ascertain the idiosyncratic set of principles he developed regarding translation. By studying the latter, it is possible determine the connection between these principles and Hughes's personal, creative desire to develop a particular and distinct mode of expression in his own writing.[2]

Regarding the composition of *Crow*, it is clear that there is a spectrum of influences and cross currents at work in the poet's imagination. Likely source material ranges from Bushmen Folklore, Celtic myth, archaic literary legends, nursery rhymes, contemporary images, and Hughes's own studies in anthropology. In its form and style it may have been shaped by his relationship with Sylvia Plath and the effects of her suicide. It was also determined by Hughes's desire to put aside the poetic conventions and niceties that he perceived in poet-war British poetry.

Crow can be regarded as many things, therefore: an idiosyncratic response to confessional poetry; a collection of war poetry; a response to the absurd, and to the black humour of Beckett (though Hughes denies this outright);[3] a commentary on man's destruction of his natural environment. This thesis represents a concentrated attempt to isolate and examine just one of the possible contributing factors: Hughes's interest in the sound of poetry in translation, and his search, both in his translations and his own writing, for a vocabulary which would be as immediate, and as authentic sounding, as possible.

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Most of Hughes's translations – starting with a version he made of Homer in 1961 and ending with one of Pushkin in 1998 – are 'co-translations,' and nearly all required a collaborative process similar to the one he embarked on with János Csokits. Thus, while over a period of almost forty years Hughes converted texts from the Portuguese, Hungarian, French, Hebrew, Latin, Romanian, Italian, German, Greek, Spanish, Bosnian and Russian, for all but the French and possibly the Latin texts, he relied on English versions made by a native speaker. These he would then re-work into his decided poetic shape in English.

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[2] Hughes first heard of JP around 1964; he began receiving literals of JP's poetry in the late 1960s. His work on *Crow* began in 1966. See Chapter One of this thesis for more details.
[3] See Ekbert Faas, 'An interview with Ted Hughes,' *London Magazine* 10: 10 (1971), 5-20 (p. 19). [Hereafter: Faas interview].

Hughes referred to the English versions he received from his co-translators as 'word-for-word' versions, or 'literals.' Their main aim was to convey roughly but accurately the surface semantics of the original poem, paying little attention within the English text itself to the poem's original sound (its metrics, rhyme etc.). This initial translation might even be syntactically literal, though this is a feature more commonly found in an interlinear translation, which follows the syntax of the source language, often resulting in unnatural target-language output. In contrast, a literal translation usually uses the conventional vocabulary-structure and syntax of the target language, whilst otherwise reproducing the source text's semantics as closely as possible. Occasionally, Csokits's literals of Pilinszky had features of both; something which increased their attraction to Hughes.

Most desirable for Hughes was a literal version which had been prepared by someone whose mother tongue was not English; to put it crudely, he liked literals which spoke with a foreign accent.[4] Sometimes, as with his translations of the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, he could work with the poet directly. Other times, as with Pilinszky – who couldn't speak any English at all – he worked with an intermediary such as Csokits, who could speak both source and target languages and who could provide him with the all-important literals that Hughes needed, and that he found so valuable.

Hughes was not the first nor the last poet to embark on translation work of this kind. Yeats, Pound, Lowell, and Heaney are all examples of other major English-speaking poets who have become involved in translating from languages which they cannot understand in the original. Co-translation remains a popular and vibrant part of contemporary poetry. As George Steiner noted in his 1970 introduction to *Poem into Poem*, "with several interesting examples" (such as Dylan Thomas and Wallace Stevens), "there is scarcely an important English or American poet since the Victorians who has not been a translator as well."[5]

Interestingly, for Hungary in particular, co-translation has become a necessary by-product of what George Szirtes calls the country's "linguistic isolation." Very few non-Hungarians read the Hungarian language, and it is one of the few non-Indo-European languages in Europe. Understanding this isolation,

[4] "we found the closest thing to it in translations made by poets whose first language was not English […]." TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p.206.
[5] George Steiner (ed.), *Poem into Poem* (London: Penguin, 1966) p. 31. [Hereafter: Steiner, *PP*].

suggests Szirtes, is "central to any understanding of Hungary's literature and its place in the European tradition."[6] In his overview of Hungarian literature in English translation, Szirtes explains that "most notable translators have worked with Hungarian collaborators." As an example of how the process works, he refers to an essay written by Frederick Turner, which describes this collaborative process.[7]

Here, Turner describes the process as having three key stages. In the first stage the source-language speaker reads the poem aloud twice in its original, to give a sense of the sound and intricacies of rhythm and meter and so on. In the second, the source-language speaker, who can also speak English, provides a word-for-word English translation in order to establish the syntactic order and idiom of the original, "even when they make very strange sentences in English."[8] In the third stage, the two translators make a very close reading of the poem, "as it is situated in its own language and culture."[9] An English draft is then prepared, which the two translators discuss and re-draft together. "This account describes a particularly thorough process," Szirtes observes, "but it is essentially the same as others have followed for both poetry and prose."[10]

It is certainly similar to the process followed by Csokits and Hughes, though there is one very important aspect of Hughes's method which distinguishes him from many other co-translators. This is his interest in the second stage of the process described above, the provision of word-for-word versions, with their "very strange sentences in English." It was Hughes's fascination with, and idiosyncratic interpretation of, this mid-way stage of translation which would inform much of his decision-making as a co-translator. In this thesis I suggest that it is chiefly by

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[6] George Szirtes, 'Hungarian' in Peter France (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 202. [Hereafter: *Oxford Guide to Translation*].

[7] See Frederick Turner, 'The Journey of Orpheus: On Translation,' which forms part of his introduction to *Foamy Sky: The Major Poems of Miklós Radnóti*, selected and trans. Zsuzsanna Ozsvath and Frederick Turner (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[8] ibid.

[9] ibid.

[10] ibid. See also the procedure described by 'Alan' in Francis Jones, *Poetry Translating as Expert Action* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), p. 92. [Hereafter: Jones (2011)]. Jones highlights other similar co-translating procedures, including those described in Clayton Eshleman, 'At the locks of the void: cotranslating Aimé Césaire,' in *Companion Spider: Essays* (US: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), and Stanley Kunitz and Daniel Weissbort, 'Translating Anna Akhmatova: a conversation with Stanley Kunitz,' in Daniel Weissbort (ed.), *Translating Poetry: The Double Labyrinth* (London: MacMillan, 1989). See also the Feinstein / Livingstone translation partnership, discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

increasing our understanding of this, that we can begin to understand the true relationship between his work with translation and his own poetic aims for *Crow*.

The Structure of the Thesis

In a review of Hughes's *Selected Translations*, edited and introduced by Daniel Weissbort, Martin Dodsworth observes that throughout the book, "Weissbort pushes the idea of 'literalness' as Hughes's ideal, and, indeed, as an ideal in translation altogether."[11] Dodsworth goes on to point out that 'literalness' in translation "is not the uncomplicated thing it represents itself to be," and suggests that 'literalism' for Hughes "is not quite what literalism might be for other people."[12]

Chapter One of this thesis sets out to explore Hughes's personal definition of literalism, focusing in particular on the appeal of the sound of the literal to Hughes's poetic ear. Frustrated by the "trotting harnesses" that he felt his contemporary English poets performed in,[13] Hughes seems to have been, from an early stage in his writing career, drawn to the possibilities inherent in the very process of translation itself – in particular to the necessary loss, or at least loosening, of these formal constraints that literal translation necessitated.

Hughes was deeply attracted to the idea of what he described as a "Universal language of understanding, coherent behind the many languages, in which we can all hope to meet."[14] As Weissbort points out, this carries strong echoes of Walter Benjamin's "*Ursprache*." In 'The Task of the Translator,' Benjamin talks of the "kinship of languages" which can be the result of literary translation, and sees the act of translation as an uncovering or releasing of the common poetic experience that underlies individual languages.[15] Hughes's literalism comes directly out of such a belief, to such an extent that he sees certain cultural aspects of a language – the implications of its formal qualities, for instance – as a hindrance to the whole process of this release. I consider the implications of this, looking especially at Hughes's

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[11] Martin Dodsworth, 'The God of Details,' *Agenda* 43: 1 (2007), 26-39 (p. 27). [Hereafter: Dodsworth].
[12] ibid. p. 28.
[13] See TH's letter to Olwyn Hughes [1961], quoted by DW in TH, *ST*, p. 43.
[14] TH, 'Programme Note' to 'Poetry International 1967' (poetry festival held in London, directed by Hughes and Patrick Garland). See TH, *ST*, p. 199.
[15] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator,' in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1968), p. 73. [Hereafter: Benjamin]. See also DW, 'Ted Hughes: Unpublished Translations' in *MPT* 21 (2003), 9-30 (p. 10).

apparent refusal to 'domesticate' – a process he once described as "the claustrophobic feeling of locking up foreign uniqueness in home-grown common-place."[16]

Translation should be seen, writes W.N. Herbert, "as an act of dialogue,"[17] and Hughes and Csokits's working relationship serves as a good example of this. Chapter One provides a timeline of the activities which led to Hughes's friendship and collaboration with Csokits, confirming, for instance, the date that Csokits first mentioned Pilinszky's name to Hughes (September 1964). They worked together on the Pilinszky book for nine years, discussing the translations in letters, phone-calls and, less often, personal visits to each other's homes. It is of great advantage to the scholar that Hughes retained most of his correspondence with Csokits, including the initial literals of Pilinszky that Csokits sent him in the late 1960s, and his own typed, re-worked drafts. Csokits, in turn, was an excellent record-keeper, also retaining all of the letters Hughes sent to him, as well as making extensive notes to the information contained therein. Together, these papers form an invaluable representation of the role that communication plays in such a collaborative procedure.

We learn from these letters that while Hughes was unswerving in his belief that Pilinszky's poems should be translated as literally as possible, he was far less confident about preparing the introduction to his Pilinszky translations. The seven-and-a-half page essay that he finally managed to write divided critical opinion, and has been described variously as "illuminating"[18] and "absurdly portentous."[19] In the final section of Chapter One, I discuss the political and personal reasons behind Hughes's difficulty, focusing on the emphasis that Hughes placed on obeying instinct, rather than academic convention in his writing methods. The subtitle of this section is 'Introducing Pilinszky,' a phrase which can suggest a less than neutral presentation of the facts. In this regard I like to think of Hughes as a kind of compère, or ringmaster, whose dramatic, enthralling roll-up call will contribute

[16] TH, introduction to JP, *Selected Poems*, trans. Ted Hughes and János Csokits (Manchester: Carcanet, 1976), p. 14. [Hereafter: JP, *SP*]. The paragraph in which this description appeared was cut out of the 1989 publication.
[17] W.N. Herbert, preface to *Jade Ladder: Contemporary Chinese Poetry*, eds. W.N. Herbert and Yang Lian, trans. Brian Holton and Qin Xiaoyu (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 2012), p. 25. [Hereafter: W.H. *JL*].
[18] Saradha Soobrayen, in a review of Pilinszky's selected poems in English trans. Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri (2011). See 'Further Reviews' in *MPT* 3: 17 (2012), 207-213 (p. 210).
[19] Clive Wilmer, 'A Net of Stars,' *PN Review* 3 (1977), 34-36 (p. 34). [Hereafter: Wilmer, *PNR*].

greatly to the way that we, the crowd, receive the next performer. Hughes's introduction, in other words, is another kind of 'translation,' shaping our understanding of the poems we are about to read.

Chapter Two widens the focus of Hughes's literalistic aesthetic. Using as a starting point his introduction to the Pilinszky translations, the first part of this chapter highlights the emphasis that Hughes placed on certain aspects of Pilinszky's poetry: its "nakedness," for example, or its "elliptical, home-made" quality. I suggest that Hughes's interest in these qualities gives us an insight into his own poetic sensibility, one which makes him particularly susceptible to the style of poetry in literal translation. I compare his descriptions of Pilinszky to his descriptions of the literals that Csokits had sent him, and then compare these comments to those he made about the work of a range of other writers such as Keith Douglas and Vasko Popa. My aim here is to show how and where these descriptions overlap: highlighting the recurrence of certain key terms, and suggesting that the characteristics Hughes praised in the literal were very much aligned with what he found attractive in poetry in general.

In the second part of Chapter Two, I attempt to place this sensibility of translation within a wider literary context, by looking at Augusta Gregory's version of the Irish folk song 'Donal Og.' I chose this piece because Hughes once described it as his favourite poem; its relevance to my research into Hughes's translations initially became apparent during my research visit to the States, where I was examining a selection of the Ted Hughes Papers held at Emory University. There, I came across a letter sent by Hughes to the Irish poet John Montague, in which he wrote the following: "I am constantly startled by my reaction to – my positive reaction, my gratitude for – any revelation, by any poet, of what some little event in their lives actually felt like. As if they were standing there on a stage, not reciting a poem but trying to tell me.[20]

This short summary by Hughes of his poetic 'standard' was of interest to me for two reasons. Firstly, Hughes demonstrates here his preference for a particular poetic style and content. The personal account ("some little event in their lives"); the drama ("as if they were standing there on a stage") and the authenticity implied by a certain *non-poetic* urgency of expression ("not reciting a poem but trying to tell

[20] TH to John Montague, 9 September 1991, Emory.

me"), are all characteristics both of the literally translated post-war poetry Hughes found so attractive, and of his own poetry in *Crow*.

The second reason that this letter was of interest was a note Hughes included at the end, with reference to his statement above: "Donal Og," he writes, is "still the great model." Already aware that Hughes had read the Irish poem 'Donal Og' in Augusta Gregory's English translation,[21] I became curious as to whether there was a tenable connection between his praise of it here, and his praise elsewhere of Csokits's translations of Pilinszky. If so, Hughes's brief postscript to Montague would serve as further evidence not only of Hughes's attraction a particular kind of poem in translation, but also his inclination to equate a particular translation-style with, as he puts it, poetry for which he felt most "gratitude."

In my examination of the poem, I discuss the dramatic effect that Gregory's use of 'Hiberno-English' had on the sound of the English text, and look at the influence that such a style had on the poetry of Douglas Hyde, Synge and, most importantly, Yeats. I suggest that this can be compared to the influence of translation on Hughes's poetry, especially the development of Hughes's so-called poetry of violence, whose aim for ugliness and crudeness seems to have come out of a similar desire to remove poetry from its learned formalities, and return it to its roots "among the clay and worms."[22]

Making this kind of comparison allows me, in Chapter Three, to suggest that Hughes's apparently hands-off approach to translating Pilinszky was highly selective, and that it is in fact his insistence on wanting a kind of neutrality as Pilinszky's translator that ultimately gives his partiality away. As it happens, this would turn out to be highly suited to Pilinszky's own poetics. Even if his translations were not wholly faithful to the original, Hughes's removal of rhyme and his aim to remain as close as possible to the literal without making superficial improvements, reflects in many ways Pilinszky's own "linguistic poverty,"[23] and his wish to "write as if I had remained silent."[24] It is interesting, for example, that Pilinszky began to change his poetic style after being translated by Hughes, rhyming less and producing very short, elliptical, fragmented verses. "Most of his poems since 1970, and all the

[21] Gregory's version is included in *The Rattle Bag*, the poetry anthology edited by TH and Seamus Heaney (London: Faber, 1982).
[22] J.M. Synge, Preface to *Plays, Poems and Prose* (London: Everyman, 1941 & 1964), p. 219. [Hereafter: Synge].
[23] JP, quoted in TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 8.
[24] ibid. p. 10.

poems in *Crater*, are written in open, unrhymed forms," writes Peter Jay in the preface to his own translations of Pilinszky. "Pilinszky says that he has been attempting to write a plainer kind of poetry, stripped of the traditional elements of his earlier style."[25] It's as if Hughes's pared-back, unrhyming versions of Pilinszky allowed Pilinszky to renew himself in his own language.[26]

I conclude Chapter Three by arguing that Hughes's literalism was always a poetic ideal, and that his work on the final Pilinszky versions shows the ways in which he was locating a style of language which would express this ideal. As supporting evidence, I discuss Hughes's use of Wilhelm Bleek as a model of the style of translation he was seeking as editor of *MPT*, before going on to look more closely at the actual process of converting Csokits's literals of Pilinszky into their final English format. This examination will show that Hughes was in pursuit of what he had come to perceive as the sound of 'the literal,' even if this meant that he had to alter the literal itself, in order to achieve that sound.

In Chapter Four I turn to *Crow*, Hughes's 1970 poetic sequence about man's destructive relationship with the earth. When it was first published, Anne Sexton instructed her Creative Writing class to read it, writing in her assignment: "*Crow* is all persona."[27] It is certainly a striking alter ego for Hughes to have chosen. Highly symbolic yet making use of ordinary details and turns of phrase, *Crow* represents the poet who is both in crisis, and going through a process of healing.

I begin this chapter by looking briefly at the source most widely accepted as the initial inspiration for the collection, namely Hughes's interest in the art of Leonard Baskin, and examine the critical response to Hughes's new, crude, "ugly" style. I go on to discuss Hughes's aim for a "super-simple" language, and compare it to the post-war Central and Eastern European poetry that he was reading and publishing at the time. In particular, I look at the similarities between the anti-poetics of these poets – sometimes discussed in terms of its "literalness" – and Hughes's aims for creating a rough and illiterate central figure in *Crow*. I go on to compare *Crow* with *The Desert of Love* (the later title of Hughes and Csokits's selection of

[25] Peter Jay, preface to JP, *Crater*, trans. Peter Jay (London: Anvil, 1978), p. 7.
[26] See also W.H. *JL*, where Herbert discusses the ironic influence of Pound's translations on modern Chinese poetry. (p. 16).
[27] Anne Sexton, "Lecture Materials for Colgate University Course," Ransom Centre, University of Texas. See Amanda Golden, 'Ted Hughes and the Midcentury Academy,' paper delivered at the Ted Hughes Conference. Cambridge (2010). Forthcoming in the Ted Hughes Society Journal (2012).

Pilinszky translations), highlighting their shared themes of silence and estrangement, and their apparent striving towards a kind of basic form of utterance.

Yet these initially apparent thematic and stylistic similarities may not be the only, or most revealing, points of connection between the two texts, as I argue in the final stage of this chapter. Here, I turn my attention to the possible link between the style of *Crow*, and the style of translation itself. Most importantly, I look at the similarities between Hughes's aims, when writing *Crow*, to produce "songs with no music whatsoever," and his attraction to translations which had "cancelled the poetic texture of the verbal code." Looking at a selection of individual poems from *Crow*, I suggest that they may even provide us with more evidence than any of Hughes's actual translations, of his interest in the poetic power of the literal.

Literal Translation

The term 'literal translation' is commonly understood in Translation Studies to mean a semantically precise translation which adheres to the normal grammar of the language into which it is being translated; it is produced by a strategy or technique which involves: "a choice of target language equivalents that stay close to the form of the original while ensuring grammaticality in the target language."[28]

For Hughes, however, the term had a more complex meaning. We know roughly what Hughes's interpretation of 'literal' translation was, because of the editorials that he prepared for *Modern Poetry in Translation* [*MPT*], the journal he founded in 1965 with his old university friend Daniel Weissbort. *MPT* was a landmark publication, a vibrant, non-academic arena in which a vast range of poets and translators could find a voice. As can be seen from figure 1 (overleaf), the format of *MPT* was designed to present poetry largely without a frame, without self-justification and without frills: it was a bare design, without cover graphics, and based on the appearance of a broadsheet. "It will be noted," explains the editorial, "that in our first issue there is a minimum of comment. Indeed, there is virtually no comment […]."[29] This was to be, as Hughes wrote: "a flimsy newspaper (the first

[28] Guisppe Palumbo, *Key Terms in Translation Studies* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 70.
[29] TH, editorial to *MPT* 1 (1965), 1.

issue was on rice paper) that would never seem to demand more than a cursory scanning, and wouldn't much resist being thrown away."[30]

Modern Poetry in Translation No.1

editors Ted Hughes and Daniel Weissbort advisory editors A. Alvarez, George MacBeth, Peter Redgrove, Alan Sillitoe, Charles Tomlinson.

Our policy is to concentrate on a limited number of poets in each issue and to represent each one by a larger sampling of his work than is usually possible in less specialized magazines, rather than to include many poets each with one or two pieces. The type of translations we are seeking can be described as literal, though not literal in a strict or pedantic sense. Though this may seem at first suspect, it is more apposite to define our criteria negatively, as literalness can only be a deliberate tendency, not a dogma. We feel that as soon as devices extraneous to the original are employed for the purpose of recreating its 'spirit', the value of the whole enterprise is called in question. Also 'Imitations' like Robert Lowell's, while undeniably beautiful, are the record of the effect of one poet's imagination on another's. They may help in the appreciation of the original, they may simply obscure it. In any case, the original becomes strangely irrelevant. Poetry inevitably loses hugely in translation, but those purists who claim that it is precisely 'the poetry' which is lost are speaking as though 'the poetry' were some separable ingredient, some additive like the whitening agent in a detergent. We feel that enough of the whole is preservable in some, though by no means in all, poetry.

It will be noted that in our first issue there is a minimum of comment. Indeed there is virtually no comment, simply bare biographical and bibliographical data. This is to some extent the result of our embarrassment at the amount of material we had. As it is we have had to leave out much we should like to have included. We were reluctant to have to leave out still more to make room for critical surveys. Furthermore we are convinced that experience should, in any case, come before judgment, that it is more important to be somewhere than simply to have the illusion that one knows where one is. There has been little attempt to impose any unity on this first issue, but the unity, such as it is, has imposed itself on us. While we had material coming from many other areas of the world, it was that which came from Eastern Europe, which was somehow the most insistent. It is this region which has been at the centre of cataclysm.

One of the most remarkable features of the poetry printed in this first issue is its sense of purpose, its confidence in the social as well as private value of poetry, its confidence that it is being heard. This poetry is more universal than ours. It deals in issues, universally comprehensible. It does not fight shy of philosophy. It does not hide behind perverse imagery. As compared with our poetry it comes out into the open. We feel then that this magazine, could it but reach a wider audience than poetry magazines generally do, could not fail to engage that audience. But it is not our aim to disparage English poetry by invidious comparison. We feel, on the contrary, that closer acquaintance with what is being written elsewhere can only stimulate poetry-making in this country.

Thus briefly of our aims and methods. And now our plans for future issues. A Scandinavian issue is at present being planned by a leading young Swedish critic and poet. Invitations have been issued to translators of German poetry and help has been generously offered. We have already collected considerable interesting material from Latin America, a region which could well absorb many issues of our journal. Material for an Israeli issue is also being collected. A fairly comprehensive number on Russia, dealing not only with the younger contemporary poets who have excited such interest lately, but with some of the major figures of the twenties and thirties, as well as of the immediately pre-revolutionary period, is also being prepared.

Finally, no reader must take away the impression that there is only one poet of note in each country. In this issue, we have concentrated on the ones we could get most of, and these need not necessarily be the best available. We hope to devote entire issues to each of the countries represented here.

Yehuda Amichai

Israel

Born in Germany in 1924, he came to Israel in 1934. His first book (a volume of poetry) appeared in 1955. Since then he has published four other volumes of poetry and one of short stories. His Collected Poems was published by Schocken Books in 1963, and in the same year his novel, Not Now, Not Here, **came out. His play,** Journey to Nineveh, **was produced by Habimah in 1964.**

Amichai has been awarded the Shlonsky Prize and two Acum Prizes (for poetry and prose respectively.) His play Bells and Trains **won the first prize in Kol Israel's competition for original radio scripts. Amichai, who is a teacher by profession, lives in Jerusalem. He is married and has a son.**

Yosef ben Matityahu (Josephus Flavius) was a field-commander of the Judaean Army in Galilee that fought Vespasian and Titus. He went over to the Romans, and wrote the history of the campaign he had fought. He chose to write about what he had been involved in. I agree with Josephus. I want to be involved and avoid writing, and then to be detached and write. The debate continues as to whether Josephus was, or was not, a traitor.

Yehuda Amichai

A Room by the Sea

Will like the fingers of an empty glove.
A table weighed with silence like a parting.
The sea outside. And a shoe filled with
nothing,
Looking for a foot that took its leave.

A fortress of restraint moved by two feet.
Almost books. And a glass without a use.
A bit of old air: two years, perhaps, since it
Refused to go out, and stayed here for always.

And suddenly a seawind feels me
As women feel the cloth in a store;
Is he good, will he wash well in the laundry ?

Later I wove a flag of doubt once more.
I hung it up, and looked outside to find
How it clatters, moving in the wind.

translation **Dom Moraes**

When I was a Boy

When I was a boy
Grasses and masts stood beside the shore,
And I, lying there,
Couldn't distinguish between them,
For they all rose up to the sky above me.
Only the words of my mother stayed with me
Like a slice of bread wrapped in
rustling tissue
And I did not know when my father
would return,
For there was another forest beyond
the clearing.

Everything held out a hand,
A bull tossed the sun on its horns,
And in the nights the streetlights stroked
My cheeks with the walls,
And the moon, like a great jar, tilted itself
And watered my thirsty sleep.

translation **M. Benaya**

High Heels

The earth answered several times: come in !
When you walked upon it with high heels,
Crossing the road with a tap. Come in !
It said. But you couldn't hear.

translation **Arieh Sachs**

My Mother Baked the Whole World For Me

My mother baked the whole world for me
In little sweet cakes.
My love filled my window
With raisins of stars.
I enclose longings within me like air
Pockets in a loaf of bread.
Outside I am smooth and quiet and brown.
The world loves me.
But my hair is sad like the reeds in a drying marsh–
All birds of rare and beautiful plumage
Fly from me.

translation **Arieh Sachs**

The U.N. Command in Jerusalem

The mediators, the peace-makers, the compromisers,
the conciliators
Live in the white house,
And receive their nourishment from afar,
Through oblique channels, through dark veins, like
an embryo.
And their secretaries are lipsticked and laughing,
And their diplomatically-immune chauffeurs wait
below like stalled horses,
And the trees which shade them are rooted in no-
man's land,
And the delusions are children who go out into the
field to pick cyclamen
And do not return.
And thoughts hover above, unquiet, like scout planes
And photograph and return and develop the pictures
In dim and sorrowful rooms
And I know that they have their heavy chandeliers,
And the boy that I was sits on them and swings
Out and back, until he does not come back.
And later the night will reach
Rusty and twisted conclusions from our old lives,
And above the houses the tune will gather the scat-
tered words
As a hand gathers crumbs from the table
After the meal, when the conversation goes on
And the children have already gone to bed.
And hopes come to me like daring seafarers,
Like discoverers of continents to an island
Where they stay a day or two
And rest . . .
And later sail away.

translation **Margalit Benaya**

When Three or Four are Gathered in a Room

When three or four are gathered in a room
there's always one who's standing by a window.
And he must see injustice among the thorns,
fires devouring the hill,
and see how men who went forth whole
are returned to their homes at nightfall like small
change.

When three or four are gathered in a room
there's always one who's standing by a window:
dark hair above his thoughts,
behind him words;
before him voices wandering without a knapsack,
waterless prophecies, hearts without provisions,
large stones returned,
unread, like letters with
no address and no one to receive them.

translation **Robert Friend**

The First Battles

The first battles bore
scary love-flowers
with almost-finishing kisses like shells.
Boy-soldiers in our elegant town-buses
Number Twelve, Number Eight,
Number
drive to the front.

translation **Dennis Silk**

Fig. 1. The first issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation*. Published 1965.

[30] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 204.

So disposable was this format intended to be, explains Daniel Weissbort, that one idea was to print it "on table napkins, so that it became available in cafés and restaurants ensuring that it was at least glanced at by people as they wiped their mouths."[31] Richard Hollis, who was responsible for designing and printing *MPT,* recalls that he had at that time just returned from South America where "the notion was that you could just hand out poems in the street, and it was free." This too influenced Hughes's decisions about *MPT*.[32]

As it happened, the rice-paper used for the first issue of *MPT* turned out to be unexpectedly expensive. "The cost sounds terribly steep," wrote Hughes to Weissbort. "I've been thinking all along of a fairly scrappy looking thing."[33] Later, they switched to thin "bible-paper," so that the tabloid-style publication could be cheaply air-mailed, and priced at two shillings and six pence. As Ann Skea suggests, "even if it did not fulfil all Ted's dreams, he never gave up his efforts to make poetry more widely available to everyone."[34]

MPT remains an important and thriving poetry publication to this day. Chosen to be the official magazine partner of Southbank Centre's 'Poetry Parnassus' in 2012, it has recently been described as an "anthology of many voices, a medley, and ensemble, and intrinsically an act of faith in human coexistence in variety."[35] Hughes's energetic enthusiasm and dominant presence during the first six years of *MPT*'s publication (he ceased being editor in 1971) exerted much influence, and still has bearing on the practices being followed and developed by poet-translators now.

It was in these very first issues of *MPT* where Hughes laid down his criteria for the type of translations he was interested in publishing. "The type of translations we are seeking," he wrote in the first editorial in 1965, "can be described as literal, though not literal in a strict or pedantic way."[36]

In 1967, he expanded on this. "We feel more strongly than ever," he writes:

> that the first ideal is literalness, insofar as the original is what we are curious about. The very oddity and struggling dumbness of word for word version is what makes our own imagination jump. A man who has something really serious to say in a

[33] TH to DW, 12 February 1964, *Letters*, p. 231.
[34] Skea, 'TH & Small Press.'
[35] David and Helen Constantine, editorial for *MPT* 3: 17 (2012), 7-9 (p. 8).
[36] TH, editorial for *MPT* 1 (1965), 1.

> language of which he knows only a few words, manages to say it far more convincingly and effectively than any interpreter, and in translated poetry it is the first-hand contact – however fumbled and broken – with that man and his seriousness which we want.[37]

Here, Hughes defines literalness in very particular, and extreme terms, and seems especially interested in the idea that the foreign or irregular English of a word-for-word version (its "oddity and struggling dumbness"; "however fumbled and broken") might contain a sense of truth and energy.[38] Most importantly, this un-worked state seems to suggest a neutrality on the part of the translator, allowing the translated poem to maintain what Hughes refers to as "first-hand contact" with the source poet. "The minute we gloss his words," he goes on to state in this editorial, "we have more or less what he said but we have lost him."[39] This sense of neutrality or passivity on the part of the translator was of great importance to Hughes, and in the case of his work on the Pilinszky poems, led to his aim to produce a translation which "settled for literalness as a first principle."[40]

Anti-scholarship

As mentioned above, Hughes was not a linguist; he did not engage with the learning of languages and was even less concerned with academic theories of translation.[41] Throughout his letters and essays, he expresses an intense distrust of academia and academic institutions, and seems to prefer – though not exclusively of course[42] – instinct over intellect.

These feelings had established themselves at an early age: at twenty-three, while studying for his exams at Cambridge, Hughes wrote in a letter home to his parents: "I despise myself for having allowed myself into such a position that such

[37] TH, editorial for *MPT* 3 (1967), 1-2 (p. 1).
[38] This implies a partially interlinear approach. See also Venuti's famous attack on stylistically "domesticated" and "fluent" translations, and his favouring of "foreignized" translations, in Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 20-24. [Hereafter: Venuti].
[39] TH, editorial for *MPT* 3 (1967), 1-2 (p. 1).
[40] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 13.
[41] In reality, probably few working poetry translators are, though many will no doubt have their own theory of translation, and will follow their own set of principles (as Hughes did, of course).
[42] In a letter to Anne Stevenson about her use of the term "instinctive primitivism" to describe Hughes's writing, TH writes: "I feel you concede too much to the crude image of me set up by my earliest reviewers of my first book, and purveyed ever since by all those who find it convenient to use a sensationalised sort of logo for me." [Autumn 1986]. *Letters*, p. 520.

an exam is the concern of my time and attention. This is really fiddling while Rome burns. The men that walk out of University are invariably the strongest minded most intelligent ones."[43] He would continue to hold such views throughout his life. In a letter to Nick Gammage in 1992, he talks of one of his earliest poems, 'Song,' describing it as a piece of verse which "I got hold of before I stepped into the actual psychological space of contemporary literature, smogged as that is by the critical exhalations and toxic smokestacks and power stations of Academe."[44]

He refers to 'Song' as a poem which "came to me literally out of the air,"[45] and this indicates his belief in the value of an immediate, instinctive method of creating. The texts on which this thesis concentrates, his Pilinszky translations and *Crow*, are both particularly strong examples of this. "Mostly they wrote themselves quite rapidly," he said in an interview about *Crow* in 1971, "several of them that seem ordinary enough now arrived with a sense of having done something… taboo."[46]

Similarly in 1998, again to Nick Gammage, he explained the process of writing 'Littleblood,' the poem which ends his *Crow* sequence:

> 'Littleblood' came in the first flush of confident Crow pieces, about 1967. Interesting to me. Only a page or two of manuscript. First part is just a free-fall flip-flapping effort to find I'm not quite sure what. Then I made the deliberate conscious decision to 'listen' instead of to 'invent'. Without any change in the speed of the writing – but with a noticeable change in the form of handwriting – I then wrote out the whole poem exactly as it is.[47]

Apart from the speed (his translations of Pilinszky were often drafted many times), this kind of method is entirely in keeping with Hughes's personal approach to translation, as well as his non-academic standpoint in general. The idea that he has "listened" rather than "invented" is particularly relevant to his translations of Pilinszky, in which he claimed, somewhat surprisingly as we shall see, to have resisted calling on his own poetic word-hoard, as it were.

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[43] TH to Edith and William Hughes, [May 1954], *Letters*, p. 25.
[44] TH to Nick Gammage, 15 December 1992, *Letters*, p. 617.
[45] ibid.
[46] TH, Faas interview, p. 18.
[47] TH to Nick Gammage, 10 October 1998, *Letters*, p. 736.

As an individual, Hughes was involved in astrology, shamanism, ouija boards and the occult; he believed in inspiration, in prophecy and in the power of the direct message. For him, poets such as Popa and Pilinszky, whose work responds directly to their experiences of the war, and which reached Hughes in the form of elemental, unrhyming word-for-word 'cribs,' embodied these things. Indeed, Hughes described them as "prophets,"[48] and wrote with admiration of their ability not only to survive and take full account of the war, "but to have created a new moral being out of the experience."[49] Of particular significance was how in literal translation, "their work made English poems of great freshness, force and truth."[50]

There is something similarly self-generating about *Crow*, something urgent and new and positive, in a creative sense at least. It serves as a striking illustration of Hughes's engagement with the whole notion of 'truth' in poetic expression, whereby he allows himself the freedom to explore fully, and with great energy, those aspects of translated poetry that so occupied his thinking at the time.

Use of Archives

In this thesis I draw on a range of archival sources, most extensively from the Ted Hughes Papers held at Emory University, Atlanta, where I studied Hughes's notebooks, correspondence and working drafts, written during the time he composed *Crow* and translated Pilinszky.[51] Two years after my initial visit to Emory, I received permission from János Csokits to access a selection of his letters to Hughes, held at Emory but which are marked "restricted." These manuscripts contain a range of details rarely mentioned in discussions of Hughes's work, such as the fact that Csokits first suggested to Hughes that Thom Gunn would be the best translator of Pilinszky. The letters also tell us something about Pilinszky, including details about his writing technique: "Pilinszky is very clear in Hungarian," Csokits writes for example in 1967. My permission to consult these documents came from Csokits himself, in a hand-written letter sent in May 2010. As a postscript, Csokits

[48] TH, introduction to Vasko Popa, *Collected Poems*, trans. Anne Pennington and Francis Jones (London: Anvil, 1996), p. xxii. [Hereafter: Popa].
[49] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 206.
[50] ibid.
[51] My notes and findings from this study visit to Emory formed part of a collaborative exhibition entitled *The Evolution of Crow*, with text by me and prints and collages by Alan Turnbull. Shown at the Schatten Gallery, Emory University, Atlanta (14 October 2009 to 29 January 2010).

mentioned to me that Hughes used to call his style of language "your odd English" – a phrase which is of particular relevance to my thesis.[52]

Other key resources include the *Modern Poetry in Translation* archive at King's College London, and the Ted Hughes Archive at the British Library. The British Library's newly acquired Hughes archive was officially opened to the public in June 2010; I had interviewed Helen Broderick, the curator of the collection, in October 2009, so I was aware of its scope and potential for new discoveries. During my first visit to see the new collection in June, I focused primarily on one folder, entitled "János Pilinszky." This contained two letters from János Csokits which were of particular interest: one where Csokits advises Hughes to explain his unusual translation approach, and one where Csokits mentions Hughes's "Pilinszky performance Friday night." This led me to track down a 1976 BBC broadcast held in the British Library Sound Archive, in which Hughes introduces and reads his Pilinszky translations, and I have quoted from this spoken introduction in my thesis.[53]

Interviews

Behind this thesis lies translation as it is practiced by a poet, and a key part of my primary research has been conducting a series of interviews with published poet-translators, most of whom have been involved in a collaborative process similar to that experienced by Hughes when translating Pilinszky. The series of interviews, which is appended to this thesis, begins with Daniel Weissbort, editor of Hughes's *Selected Translations* (2006) and the leading expert on Hughes's work in this area. Weissbort's close friendship with Hughes, and his work with him on setting up the first issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, meant that he had a unique insight into the development of Hughes's translation aesthetic. Our conversation serves as a concise and informative introduction to Hughes's overall methods and beliefs.

This interview is followed by interviews with George Szirtes (poet, critic and translator from Hungarian), Desmond Graham (poet, translator, biographer of Keith Douglas, and editor of the Chatto anthology *Poetry of the Second World War*),

[52] JC to Tara Bergin, 9 May 2010. Sadly, János Csokits passed away the year after I received the letter. He died on 4 August 2011 in Tata, near Budapest.
[53] The reading was broadcast on 6 Feb 1976, BBC Radio 3.

Francis Jones (translation scholar and translator from Serbo-Croat and Hungarian), and Elaine Feinstein (Hughes biographer, poet and translator from Russian).[54] In each case, I explore translation backgrounds and methods, and ask opinions on Hughes's interest in the literal as a poetic text.

My final interview is with Keith Sagar, author of the first full-length study of Hughes's poetry, *The Art of Ted Hughes*.[55] In this book (which he has since followed with several other in-depth studies of Hughes's work), Sagar devotes a chapter to each of Hughes's five major collections published by that time, concentrating on analysing individual poems. The longest chapter is on *Crow*, in which Sagar makes the point that Hughes, having found his bearing and standards in his earlier work, "has come more and more to concern himself in his poems with the failure of English intelligence and sensibility in the modern world, the causes and results of that alienation from the sources of life which characterizes our civilization, and the mass neurosis of our urban society."[56]

Sagar not only studied Hughes, but empathized with him, and Hughes responded favourably to his insightful readings of his work. The two were friends for thirty years, during which time Sagar received 144 letters from Hughes.[57] As an interviewee therefore, Keith Sagar offered a rare and invaluable understanding of Hughes's entire development. His passion and commitment to the work came across clearly in our conversation – one which was both informative (he showed me some unpublished typescripts of Hughes's poems, for example), and inspiring.

Co-translation is essentially an oral process and I argue at the outset of my thesis that it was the *sound* of the literal which most appealed to Hughes. As a poet, Hughes was particularly attracted to the spoken word; Tom Paulin goes as far as to suggest that spoken language "informs everything Ted Hughes wrote."[58] The spontaneity and immediacy of the interview format is therefore especially well-placed here, underpinning the importance and vitality of conversation: "the informal

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[54] My interview with Elaine Feinstein was conducted as part of my MLitt research, and was submitted then for assessment. However, as I quote from its content in the body of this thesis, it seemed useful to include it here, in the appendix.
[55] Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975). [Hereafter: KS, *ATH*].
[56] ibid. p. 143.
[57] These letters are held at The British Library. They have recently been published for the first time in their entirety. See Keith Sagar (ed.), *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes* (London: The British Library, 2012). [Hereafter: Sagar, *Poet and Critic*].
[58] Tom Paulin, 'Your Roundy Face,' in Nick Gammage (ed.), *An Epic Poise* (London: Faber, 1999), p. 148. [Hereafter: *Epic Poise*].

exchange of ideas by spoken words."[59] The enthusiasm and diversity of the voices speaking in these interviews provides exciting "first-hand contact" (to use Hughes's phrase) with the practitioners themselves, and offers essential insights into the whole idea of the creative process which lies behind poetic translation. This is highly relevant to my thesis, whose main aim is to develop an understanding of process in order to relate Hughes's translation practice to his poetic practice.

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Whatever the approach, the key to success for a translator who has no access to the source language is the working relationship between the collaborators, along with the poetic skill of the target-language poet. In Hughes's case, he was lucky to have found János Csokits, a poet and writer who left Budapest in the spring of 1949 when Hungary was thrust into a communist dictatorship. Living in Paris and then Munich, Csokits moved to London in the early 1970s, where he served on the Hungarian desk at the BBC from 1974 until his retirement in 1986. Csokits was not only a great admirer of Pilinszky but was as keen as Hughes was on making a literal and accurate representation of his poems. In turn, Pilinszky and Csokits were clearly delighted to have such a skilled and well-known English poet to make up the team. The amiability of this working relationship is particularly evident in a "Round Table" discussion, for which the three men gathered together in a BBC recording studio in 1976, to promote the publication of Pilinszky's *Selected Poems* in English translation. Hosted by László Jotischky, then head of the Hungarian section of the BBC World Service at Bush House, the discussion between Csokits, Pilinszky and Jotischky was conducted in Hungarian, with their comments translated into English by Jotischky for Hughes's benefit.[60] In the extract below, Jotischky asks Pilinszky about his reaction to the new publication:

> **JOTISCHKY**: János, when you take this book, with its attractive blue and yellow cover into your hands, how can you be sure that it is really you in English, that it does not distort your poetry?

[59] Definition of 'conversation' given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.
[60] See Daniel Weissbort, *Ted Hughes and Translation* (London: Richard Hollis, 2010), p. 44. [Hereafter: DW, *TH&Tr.*]. DW transcribes parts of the discussion, which is available in full at the Ted Hughes Archive, British Library.

> **PILINSZKY**: […] Obviously there has been a meeting of the minds, via poetry. First with János Csokits and then with Ted Hughes. János became a link between us, because, I think, of the thoroughness and accuracy of his translation of my poems, in which Ted Hughes, amazingly, found himself at home. […] Well, Ted Hughes questioned me with the confidence of a guide in a labyrinth, who already knows the way.[61]

Pilinszky's comments here reveal the key traits of this particular relationship, which combined Csokits's linguistic meticulousness with Hughes's poetic instinct. Despite its initially perplexing premise, therefore, this was clearly a process of translating which very much suited all three participants. "Dear Ted!" wrote Pilinszky (in French), in a letter of April, 1975. "I am deeply touched by the translation of my poems. With what have I deserved so much effort and intuition on your part?"[62]

As well as pleasing Pilinszky and his co-translators, Hughes and Csokits's collaboration marked the first publication in book form of Pilinszky's poems in English, and they remain a key text in translated modern poetry. Used in countless anthologies of Hungarian literature, and reissued in 1989 by Anvil as *The Desert of Love*, these versions will always form an essential part of how English language readers approach and understand a major figure in twentieth century Hungarian poetry. The aim of this thesis is to illustrate how they can play an important role in how we understand a major figure in twentieth century British poetry too, by demonstrating the important, if intricate, relationship between Hughes's translations of Pilinszky – his desire for literalism in particular – and his own poetic practice and intentions.

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[61] ibid. p. 45.

[62] JP to TH, 18 April 1975 [from Boston, included at the end of a letter from Lajos Koncz], Emory. My trans. The original French reads: *Cher Ted! Je suis absolument touché concernant la traduction de mes poems. Avec quoi j'ai mérité tant d'efforts et d'intuition de ton part?*"

Chapter One: Beginnings

In this chapter I will explore the development of Hughes's interest in the literal, and examine the aesthetic position that he formed towards translation during his early experiences as editor and co-translator. I will begin by looking at Hughes's first encounter with literal translation, focusing on the appeal, to him, of its rough, spontaneous sound and the resulting effect that it had on English. I will argue that Hughes embraced the literal not simply as a means of connecting with another culture or language, but as a powerful means of expression in English: to Hughes, literal versions sounded modern and new and urgent, while at the same time appearing to maintain contact with their source and origin. Particularly influential in this was Hughes's trip to the Spoleto poetry festival in 1965, an experience which had a direct impact on the content and layout of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, the magazine that he and Daniel Weissbort founded that same year. Examining the editorials that he wrote for *MPT*, I will outline the key elements of Hughes's translation approach, one which would now be termed foreignization.[1] Finally, I will turn to Hughes's work with János Csokits, when together they translated the poetry of János Pilinszky. I will draw on their correspondence in order to illustrate Hughes's passionate enthusiasm for the "rawness" and "strangeness" of Csokits's literal cribs of Pilinszky's original, and his desire to maintain something of their unfinished state in his final versions.

The Early Stages

Exhibit number thirty-six in the 2005 Grolier Club exhibition *No Other Appetite: Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and the Blood Jet of Poetry*, was Plath's copy of *Märchen der Brüder Grimm*. A Christmas present from her mother in 1954, Plath showed this book to Hughes in Cambridge two years later. As the exhibition catalogue informs

[1] See Venuti, p. 20.

us, they discovered then "the mutual interest she and Hughes shared in Grimm's fairy tales."[2] Plath describes the experience in a letter to her mother in May 1956:

> Our minds are just enraptured with words, ideas, languages. I took out my Rilke poems and my dear *Märchen der Brüder Grimm* to read aloud my favourite German pieces to him (he doesn't know German) and translated on the spot, getting very excited. I've definitely decided to take German all next year, concentrating on Rilke and Kafka, and some Thomas Mann. Ted likes hearing it, gets intrigued by my rough impromptu translations.[3]

This letter was written just one month before Hughes and Plath were due to be married, and it is clearly a useful record of their shared literary interests. But the letter demonstrates something else of importance about Hughes: it is one of the earliest direct pieces of evidence of Hughes's attraction to 'the literal.'

When Plath writes that "Ted likes hearing it, gets intrigued by my rough impromptu translations," she is providing us with a valuable image of the young Hughes (he was twenty-five at the time); an image which captures a key element of Hughes's interest in translation. Her phrase, "Ted likes hearing it" shows that it was not the German original *per se* that interested him, but the sound of her English version; the rough, improvised, excited English which made an impact on his ear. What he responded to was the "homely spur-of-the-moment improvisation," as he later wrote about Shakespeare, "out of whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying around."[4]

Over the following ten years, Hughes would develop an aesthetic position concerning the literal, a position which in part had its roots in this initial attraction to the sound of Plath's "on the spot" translation. The main criteria of the Hughesian version of the literal were as follows: it would have no strict rhyme or meter super-imposed onto it (the main focus being on conveying semantic meaning, rather than on reproducing the original rhyme or metric schemes); it would appear to be "word-for-word" (and preferably be made by someone for whom English was not their mother-tongue), translated as if directly from the page spontaneously and

[2] Stephen C. Enniss and Karen V. Kukil, exhibition catalogue for *No Other Appetite: Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and the Blood Jet of Poetry* (New York: The Grolier Club, 2005), p. 11.
[3] Sylvia Plath to Aurelia Plath, 26 May 1956, *Letters Home* (London: Faber, 1975), p. 256.
[4] TH, 'The Great Theme: Notes on Shakespeare,' in *WP*, p. 105.

instantaneously. The result would be a simple vocabulary, and even a slightly "broken" English which would convey the struggle, on the part of the poet or poet-translator, to convey as accurately as possible the original text that they had before them. In turn, this would create a poem which seemed in some way pared down and essential, lending it a sense of urgency and directness of utterance. The literal would have semantic accuracy as its main aim, and would attempt at all costs to convey the original meaning. These 'costs' were meter, rhyme, form, any polished or literary 'flair,' sometimes syntactical fluency: all things Hughes was happy to lose, as their loss would confirm the authenticity of the whole process; the tearing away of "cultural supports."[5] Finally, the power of the literal would be in some ways bound up with its content: the more vital and urgent the content of the original (the strange brutal folk stories of the Grimm brothers are a good example), the more powerful they will sound in their fragmented, oral-based literal English versions.

Hughes would make his interpretations of literal translation known both directly and indirectly during his career as editor and co-translator. His leanings towards a raw, primitive form of expression would also become discernable in his personal development as a poet. The various ways in which we can detect his obsession with the literal version, and his tendency to, paradoxically, make it his own, will be explored throughout this thesis, but Plath's letter shows that even as early as 1956, Hughes was responding positively to the sound of a translated text.

Around the same time that Plath was reading aloud to Hughes her translations of the Brothers Grimm, Hughes wrote a letter to his sister Olwyn who was living in Paris, and who had become friends with a circle of Hungarian émigrés. Hughes begins the letter by asking about the cost of living in Hungary ("It would be a better place to live than Spain"), going on later to express his interest in translating the Hungarian poet Attila József, and to praise a newly published book by the

[5] As I shall discuss further on in the thesis, this downplaying of 'culture' and the communicative power of metrical form and rhyme was something which Hughes not only admired in literal translation, but which re-surfaced as a general standard by which he judged and admired Pilinszky's poetry in general. He writes in the introduction to JP, *DoL* that Pilinszky's poems "reveal a place where every cultural support has been torn away […]." (p. 11). This in turn became a personal objective for his own poetry in *Crow*: "my main concern was to produce something with the minimum cultural accretions of the museum sort, something autochthonous & complete in itself, as it might be invented after the holocaust & demolition of all libraries […]." TH to Keith Sagar [October 1973], Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, pp. 27-8. See Chapters Two and Four.

Hungarian-born author Christine Arnothy, *I am Fifteen – and I Don't Want to Die*.[6] This active interest in all things Hungarian was not at this stage anything to do with Hughes's work with Pilinszky, of whom he had not yet heard, but Hughes's queries and apparent restlessness do directly relate to his emerging interest in literature which was being written outside of England. Describing further on in this letter to Olwyn the progress of his own work, Hughes explains: "If I could write whole poems as good as odd little bits I'm sure I really would have something, and something quite different from the meanness and deadness of almost all modern English verse – with which I feel not the slightest affinity."[7]

Hughes's feelings of alienation here, from "all modern English verse" and his confidence that his own poetry could be "something quite different" from it, as well as his thoughts about leaving England itself, suggest that he was already more than ready to look towards other countries and other literatures for inspiration and a sense of identity. No wonder then that translation, and in particular translation which retained a sense of its own foreignness, would offer itself to Hughes as the potential for a new style of language.

Hughes did have the opportunity to leave England the following year, when he and Plath travelled to America in the June of 1957. Yet the effect of this move on his creative work was not straightforward. Instead of embracing another culture, as he had seemed so eager to do in his letter to Olwyn, and using what he found there as direct source material for new poems, Hughes spent much of his time in America writing *Lupercal*, a book, as Neil Roberts argues, "that reveals no imaginative response whatever to the new country in which its author was living."[8] In fact, while living in Boston, Hughes went as far as to cover the windows of his writing room with brown paper, and used earplugs when he was composing new work.[9] The England with which *Lupercal* is saturated seems to be very much, therefore, the

[6] TH to Olwyn Hughes, [Early 1956], *Letters,* p. 34. This letter closely predates the Hungarian revolution: "voices from Budapest pleading for help from the West could be heard on the radio." Elaine Feinstein, *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001), p. 66.
[7] TH to Olwyn Hughes, [Early 1956], *Letters,* p. 34.
[8] Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 43. [Hereafter: Roberts].
[9] TH in an interview with Drue Heinz, 'Ted Hughes: The art of poetry,' *Paris Review* 37:134 (1995), 54-94. On-line at: http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk [Accessed 22.10.09]. [Hereafter: *Paris Review* interview].

"England of the mind" that Seamus Heaney described in 1976, when discussing Hughes's work.[10]

The important point here is that this England was not simply a personal concept of a visual landscape, but an idea of a particular sound, a particular type of English. Heaney uses the term "Englands of the Mind" in the context of Eliot's notion of "the auditory imagination," and he argues that Hughes's poetic language displayed an awareness of "Englishness" that could also be found in "poets of other nations who were not themselves natives of England but who spoke the English language."[11] Such an observation is highly relevant to Hughes's attraction to the literal, because it was (in Hughes's definition), similar to what Heaney is describing above: a poem in English, yet spoken or written by someone whose accent was not 'English.' Hughes's apparent refusal, in other words, to engage with the actual foreign landscape surrounding him in America, and instead to create poems from inside his auditory imagination, does not necessarily mean he wasn't responding to his absence from England itself. Nor does it stand in opposition to his interest in translation. The point is that translation for Hughes was not really ever a way into understanding another language or culture. It was rather a way of making English sound somehow outside of conventional, modern, literary 'Englishness,' a way of making it appear to engage directly with some kind of 'source,' some form of original, primitive, inner speech: "sinking to the most primitive and forgotten," as Eliot wrote (quoted by Heaney), "returning to the origin and bringing something back."[12] Looking at Heaney's comparison we can see that Hughes's poetic sensibility was responding to the raw language of translation, and to the idea that a roughness and immediacy of expression could convey a sense of truthfulness and faithfulness to the original self.

One direct influence that his trip to America did have on his work in translation was the friendships he formed with Robert Bly and W.S. Merwin. Bly had travelled to Norway in the late fifties to translate Norwegian poetry into English, and had discovered while away a whole range of poets who were not yet well known in the States, including Pablo Neruda and Cesar Vallejo. On his return, Bly started a literary magazine for poetry in translation, successively entitled *The Fifties*, *The*

[10] Seamus Heaney, 'Englands of the Mind,' in *Preoccupations* (London: Faber, 1980), p. 150. [Hereafter: Heaney, *Preoccupations*].
[11] ibid.
[12] T.S. Eliot, quoted by Heaney in ibid.

Sixties and *The Seventies*; a precursor, no doubt, for Hughes and Weissbort's *Modern Poetry in Translation*, which would be the first magazine of modern translated poetry in England.

W.S. Merwin also travelled through Europe translating poetry and working as a tutor. Like Bly, Merwin would become an accomplished and prolific translator of poetry, winning high praise for his versions of Dante and of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (a poem Hughes would later translate), and also for his versions of Osip Mandelstam and Pablo Neruda. "Bly was one of the earliest and most gifted transmitters sure enough," Hughes wrote in a letter to Anne Stevenson, "but so was Bill Merwin."[13] He goes on to suggest that Merwin's translations of Neruda were a particular influence on Sylvia Plath:

> One of the hidden supply lines behind *Ariel* was the set of Neruda translations that Bill did for the BBC at that time and I still have her copy. It wasn't just Neruda that helped her. It was the way she saw how Bill used Neruda.[14]

Hughes's emphasis on the word "used" here highlights the creative possibilities that he felt were inherent in translation. The sentence, "It was the way she saw how Bill used Neruda," suggests that translation for a poet might mean something different to what it means for a linguist; as well as involving the transference of one language into another, the very processes of translation and its varying results can present itself to the poet as rich poetic source-material.

Merwin and Bly's work seems to have helped Hughes in the same way it helped Plath. What they showed him was that translation could open up worlds for poets, not just outside of themselves, but also within their own imaginations: it was an entirely legitimate part of a poet's creative contribution. Writing in 1982, Hughes suggests that Bly and Merwin "were forerunners in a way," and he describes a sudden explosion of interest in the 1960s and 70s, in the translation of poetry of other languages: "Everything happened then at heady speed. And it was curious to watch those somewhat war-time utility, old-fashioned personalities […] immersing in the headlong element of joyful freedoms that had snatched up their translations

[13] TH to Anne Stevenson [Autumn 1986], *Letters* p. 516.
[14] TH, *Paris Review* interview.

(and everybody felt the pull)."[15] For Hughes, translation not only involved the conversion of poetry from one language into another, but was also something which could have a transformative effect on the translators themselves.

An early opportunity for Hughes to experience such an effect came during his stay at Yaddo in the autumn of 1959, when he agreed to collaborate with the Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-chung on an adaptation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.[16] The project involved considerable interaction between the two artists, and Hughes worked for six months on his text.[17] Although the piece never came to fruition and has never been published in full,[18] the work fed into Hughes's own writings, and its influence can be clearly detected, according to Hughes, in his radio play *The Wound*. Speaking in an interview about *The Wound*, Hughes explains its genesis:

> Well, it was a freak production really. At the time I was writing a scenario of the *Bardo Thödol – Tibetan Book of the Dead* […] and at the end of it I had a dream, which was the dream of "The Wound." […] I interpreted it first of all as a sort of Celtic *Bardo Thödol* – because in fact it's full of all the stock imagery of a journey to the Celtic underworld."[19]

Here, Hughes's confessed "use" of this early translation experience – when he translates into his own poetry what he had been translating into English – marks the start of a two-way relationship between poet and translated text. Hughes would be drawn to texts which already held some appeal to him, and which engaged his own poetic curiosity, while in turn his own poetry would grow and develop through his experience of foreign texts. Hughes would also make use of his first translation project when writing *Crow*, as Ekbert Faas pointed out in his interview with Hughes: an expression like 'womb door,' Faas suggests at one point in this interview, "seems to be lifted straight out of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*."[20] Hughes, however, was

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[15] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983)/ TH, *ST*, p. 206.
[16] Hughes and Plath had already been translating poetry for themselves from French, German and Spanish. See TH to Anne Stevenson, Autumn 1986, *Letters*, p. 516.
[17] See DW, introduction to 'Bardo Thödol,' in TH, *ST*, pp. 1-2.
[18] See TH, *ST*, pp. 3-13 for excerpts.
[19] TH in a radio interview at the Adelaide Festival in March 1976 (transcribed by Ann Skea). On-line at: http://ann.skea.com/Adelaide2.htm [Accessed 25.10.11]. See also DW, introduction to 'Bardo Thödol', in TH, *ST*, p. 2.
[20] Faas interview, p. 16.

much less forthcoming about connecting this work with *Crow*, and his answer evades the question entirely.

In 1960, back in England, another opportunity for translation arose, when Anthony Thwaite proposed that Hughes prepare a version of Homer's 'The Storm' (Book V, lines 382-493 of the *Odyssey*), for a special programme of verse translations of Homer made by contemporary poets.[21] "This particular passage," suggests Weissbort, "fitted in well enough with the latter's preoccupations,"[22] pointing again to the mutual attraction which would continue to characterise Hughes's translation work. Questioned about his own "poetry of violence" for example, Hughes would cite Homer as an example of one of the great poets of "violence," while Hughes's version of Homer contains certain images and styles that seem particularly Hughesian: "the maws of ravenous fish"; "the sea's gape"; "bone-chill."[23]

In 1961 Hughes embarked on another translation project, this time working on his own to translate from the French of Paul Eluard (1895-1952). At the time there had been talk of Hughes's versions being published in the Penguin Modern European Poets series, edited by Nikos Stangos, but like the plan for *Bardo Thödol* the publication never materialized.[24] Hughes made about forty versions of Eluard, which remain as drafts in manuscript, notebooks, and in letters to his sister Olwyn. Also like the *Bardo Thödol* project however, this work was not wasted. Translating Eluard provided Hughes with that all important "contact with *otherness*," that Weissbort described, which would both revitalize and confirm his own poetic tendencies.[25]

Hughes explained in a letter to Olwyn the effect that translating the French poet had on his own writing: "He's done me a tremendous amount of good – really shown me how to get beyond my last stage, at which I was a bit stuck and shown me how to shake off the English trotting harness in which every single poet in England

[21] Hughes's translation was transmitted on 10 November 1960 by the BBC's Third Programme. See DW, introduction to 'Homer' in TH, *ST*, p. 14.
[22] ibid. DW cites Hughes's early poem 'Everyman's Odyssey,' first published in a pamphlet anthology, *Landmarks and Voyages* (1957), and later included in *Lupercal* (London: Faber, 1960).
[23] Homer's *Odyssey*: Book V, lines 350-450, trans. TH, in TH, *ST*, pp. 16-18. For similar word usage in Hughes see *Crow*, e.g. "opened wide her maw" in 'Song for a Phallus'; "Crow gaped" in 'Crow's First Lesson' and "death-chill" in 'Crow Improvises.'
[24] See DW, introduction to 'Paul Eluard', in TH, *ST*, p. 44.
[25] DW, *TH&Tr.* p. 10.

performs."[26] Again, the process of translation was confirming Hughes's already latent desires, while at the same time presenting him with new ideas and opportunities. Here in particular, translation serves Hughes as a means to escape what he perceived as the constraints of meter. In its conclusion, Hughes's letter also hints at something else: his leanings, as a practicing translator, towards a rough, more literal style. "I find it very easy to make quite close versions," he writes, "quite good poetry […]. I've read most of the CHOIX [Choice] now, and roughly translated many of them."[27]

If Hughes's positive reaction to literalism had begun spontaneously when first hearing Sylvia Plath's rough versions of German in 1956, it was now starting to become more conscious. His recognition in the above comment that "quite close versions" make "quite good poetry," not only suggests his future preference as a translator to remain faithful, where possible, to literal versions, but crucially, it also demonstrates the value that he would perceive in the roughly translated text as an effective and powerful English poem in its own right.

Spoleto 1965

There was one event in particular that corroborated Hughes's leanings towards literalism. This was the Spoleto *Festival dei Due Mondi* (the Festival of Two Worlds) in 1965, one of the first such international literary occasions. Hughes had been invited to attend at the suggestion of Stephen Spender, and he travelled to Italy to take part that summer. Other guests included Pablo Neruda, Ingeborg Bachmann, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and Ezra Pound, and Hughes also heard readings by the Czech poet Miroslav Holub, and the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert.[28] These Central and Eastern European writers were of particular interest to Hughes. In a letter to a friend written after his return from Italy, Hughes describes Holub as a "truly marvellous poet,"[29] and in the first issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, published later that year, he included fifteen poems by Holub, and three poems and a long extract of a radio play by Herbert.

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[26] TH to Olwyn Hughes (1961), quoted by DW, introduction to 'Paul Eluard', in TH, *ST*, p. 43.
[27] ibid. For those familiar with original Eluard, a surrealist free-verse poet, literal versions can succeed in recreating the original well in both semantic and poetic terms.
[28] See editor's note in TH, *Letters*, p. 246.
[29] TH to Ben Sonnenberg [Summer, 1965], *Letters*, p. 245.

Hughes found inspiration in these poets, who combined imaginative playfulness – verging on surrealism – with a forthright, "free and clearsighted" descriptiveness.[30] Holub's poetry, for example, was coming out of the so called 'Poetry-of-Everyday-Life' group, formed in Prague after the Second World War, of which Holub described himself as "an outside member."[31] His poem 'The Fly,' published in *MPT*, exemplifies the style that Hughes would develop in his own writing in *Crow*; importantly, it uses a crude and common creature, a fly, as the central symbol from which History, unfolding in all its drama and tragedy, can be viewed:

The Fly

She sat on a willow trunk
watching
part of the battle of Crécy,
the shouts,
the gasps,
the groans,
the trampling and the tumbling.

[…]

When silence settled
and only the whisper of decay
softly circled the bodies

and only
a few arms and legs
still twitched jerkily under the trees,

she began to lay her eggs
on the single eye
of Johann Uhr,
The Royal Armourer.

[30] Daniel Weissbort, *Poetry of Survival* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 166. [Hereafter DW, *PoS*].
[31] Holub, quoted in ibid. p. 165.

And thus it was
that she was eaten by a swift
fleeing
from the fires of Estrées.

(trans. George Theiner)

This poetry, said Holub, did not need words, "or it needed them only as the simplest way of revealing the images and the message. It was a naked poetry stripped of words."[32] This was one of its main attractions for Hughes: not only would he come to make use in *Crow* of the ironic humour, narrative drive and fable-type structure found in poems like Holub's 'The Fly,' but he would adopt in his own poetry the unrhyming, sparely punctuated layout that he was seeing in the translations of these European poets. For Hughes, these English versions with their flatness and roughness of sound, their lack of rhyme and meter, appropriately reflected what he saw to be the deeper implications of the original poems themselves, and the situation in which they had been composed. He seemed to connect, in other words, the effect of translation with their original, central message and argued that because of this, these poets could be translated into English almost word for word with relatively little loss: "Whatever the verbal texture of the originals might be," he would later reflect, "evidently their real centre of gravity was in something else, within the images and the pattern of ideas and attitudes."[33]

Holub was first and foremost a scientist, and his search for an exactitude in description is similar to Zbigniew Herbert's, one of the other Eastern European poets Hughes was so impressed by at Spoleto. Unable to publish his first collection until after Stalin's death, Herbert's "toughness," and ability to describe "in striking detail what is presented to him,"[34] can be seen clearly in a poem such as 'I Would Like to Describe,' where he employs a series of evocative metaphors and similes to demonstrate his longing for a plainly spoken poem:

to put it another way

[32] ibid.
[33] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 206.
[34] DW, *PoS*, p. 138.

> I would give all metaphors
> in return for one word
> drawn out of my breast like a rib
> for one word contained within the boundaries
> of my skin
>
> (trans. Czesław Miłosz)

Herbert is making a skilful play on imagery here, using the loaded metaphor of the rib to express his desire to be rid of all metaphors. It is again the kind of sophisticated primitivism that we will find in *Crow*, the making use of a rich literary and cultural knowledge in the search for simplicity and plainness. It is interesting too that Herbert, again like Hughes in *Crow*, is using the image of the body to emphasize immediacy and authenticity: the true word is drawn from the centre of the physical body (the heart) – not from the mind.

For the likes of Herbert writing in a communist state, this use of metaphor represents what Hughes described as "the attempt these poets have made to record man's awareness of what is being done to him, by his own institutions and by history, and to record along with the suffering their inner creative transcendence of it."[35] This view was reinforced by the effect that translation had on the look and sound of the poem in English: in its stripped-back form it became for him the perfect representation of a poetry which had been reduced, as he writes, "to such precisions, discriminations and humilities that it is a new thing."[36] Hughes's 1983 retrospective essay about *MPT*, in which he describes this group of poets, "who seemed to us revelatory," reveals the extent to which he saw their work very much in terms of their translation:

> That group of poets all belonged to the 1920 generation, the generation that came of age during the war, and they belonged together in an obvious way. They seemed to us to be the serious voice of that historical moment. It was common in those days to hear how all poetry had died in Auschwitz, but theirs seemed not only to have taken full account of it and survived it, but to have created a new moral being out of the experience, already adapted to the worst imaginable future. And all those poets

[35] TH, introduction to Popa, p. xxi.
[36] ibid.

> shared another characteristic: in literal translation their work made English poems of great freshness, force and truth.[37]

Clearly, it was not just the content, but also the translated style of these poems which had grabbed Hughes's interest while he listened at the Spoleto festival. Hughes was impressed by the make-shift, functional English versions of the poems that had been handed out to the audience to facilitate listening. These versions were fairly literal renderings, made in much the same rough and impromptu style as Plath's renderings of the Brothers Grimm, and had been printed on cheap, throwaway sheets of paper. Hughes responded with the same intrigue and excitement with which he had responded to Plath nine years previously. "Even from the handouts that were not proper translations," recalls Daniel Huws, one of Hughes's friends at the time, "he recognised something in it."[38]

Modern Poetry in Translation

Hughes had already approached Weissbort in 1964 with the idea of starting a magazine of translations, but the Spoleto experience had proved to him the power of a certain literal approach. He brought the festival handouts back with him to England, and used them as inspiration for the format and ethos of his new translation periodical. "They had been intended to facilitate listening to the foreign poetry," writes Daniel Weissbort about the Spoleto 'roughs,' "but also inspired Hughes with the idea that a magazine featuring unpretentious translations of this sort was a viable project."[39] Thus the content list of the first issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation* was compiled. It strongly reflected Hughes's positive experience in Spoleto, and was made up almost entirely of post-war Central and Eastern European poets. These included Vasko Popa (former Yugoslavia), Czeslaw Miłosz (Poland), Ivan V. Lalić (former Yugoslavia), and Andrei Voznesensky (Russia), as well as Holub and Herbert. More striking perhaps was that the style and format also took the Spoleto throwaway handouts as direct inspiration. Printed on large thin, fold-over sheets of

[37] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 206.
[38] Daniel Huws, Panel Discussion, TH Conference, 2010.
[39] DW, *TH&Tr*. p. 15.

paper,[40] with no pictures, it resembled a sort of free sheet: "Functional, current, disposable," were their key words as founders.[41]

The editorial for the first issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation* was unsigned, but it expressed, according to Weissbort, the views and intentions of Hughes specifically.[42] Its main subject was a request for a particular type of literal translation:

> Though this may seem at first suspect, it is more apposite to define our criteria negatively, as literalness can only be a deliberate tendency, not a dogma. We feel that as soon as devices extraneous to the original are employed for the purpose of recreating its 'spirit', the value of the whole enterprise is called in question. Also 'imitations' like Robert Lowell's, while undeniably beautiful, are the record of the effect of one poet's imagination on another's. They may help in the appreciation of the original, they may simply obscure it. In any case, the original becomes strangely irrelevant.

Although in this editorial he sets himself against Lowell's subjectivism, Hughes's advocacy of literalism was surely very much "the record of one poet's imagination on another," and Hughes's aim for 'literalism,' as Weissbort suggests, was expressed "just as forcefully as Lowell had expressed his point of view in his Preface to *Imitations*."[43]

The point is that while there is an obvious central difference between the two approaches – Lowell said that his aim was to "do what my authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America,"[44] whereas Hughes's aim was to maintain and emphasize the foreignness of the poets – there was clearly a similarity in the affinity that both translators felt with their source-material. As Hughes's editorial for the third issue of *MPT* (1967) shows, this kind of literal version (and its resulting "oddity and struggling dumbness"), very much excited his own imagination.

Writing about this personal excitement expressed by Hughes, Daniel Weissbort suggests that such attraction to the broken, foreign quality of word-for-

[40] See Skea, 'TH & Small Press.'
[41] DW, *TH&Tr*. p. 15.
[42] See DW's note to the editorials in TH, *ST*, p. 200.
[43] DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 43.
[44] Robert Lowell, introduction to *Imitations* (London: Faber, 1962), p. xi.

word versions places Hughes's technique in a specific category: "Although he took no part in the discussions," explains Weissbort in his introduction to Hughes's *Selected Translations*, "he may fairly be said to have subscribed to a foreignizing tendency, a renewed readiness to allow translation of foreign texts to alter English itself […]."[45]

Here, Weissbort is using a term most famously promoted by Lawrence Venuti in his 1995 study *The Translator's Invisibility*. "Foreignizing," explains Venuti, is the placing of "an ethnodirect pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad."[46] By registering its differences in this way, argues Venuti, the translator and the foreign origin of his source text becomes much more visible. For Venuti this is by far a preferable option to "domesticating" the translation, a method by which the translation appears to be an original, and the translator's presence becomes nullified. This attempt to make the translator invisible, he suggests, "is symptomatic of a complacency in Anglo-American relations with cultural others, a complacency that can be described – without too much exaggeration – as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home."[47]

Such a method comes with its own risks, however, and translation theorists have recognised limitations to Venuti's theory of foreignisation. Tarek Shamma, for instance, published a paper in 2005 entitled 'The Exotic Dimension of Foreignizing Strategies,' in which he analysed Richard F. Burton's translation of the Arabian Nights. Here, Shamma argues that while Burton's text serves as an example of all that Venuti recommends, "its 'estrangement' of the Arabic text and culture only confirmed the stereotypes and Orientalist images that its readers had of the source culture, thereby acquiescing (often consciously) in the discourse of colonialism."[48]

Hughes's enthusiasm for texts which retained a strong sense of their own translatedness certainly corresponds with Venuti's controversial ideas, in the sense that Hughes was clearly opposed to the notion that a 'good' translation was one which appeared to readers to have been written in English originally. But also like Venuti, Hughes's beliefs about foreignization have been perceived by some as

[45] DW, introduction to TH, *ST*, p. viii.
[46] Venuti, p. 20. Although for Venuti, stylistic faithfulness is crucial here, a point on which he differs from Hughes.
[47] ibid. p. 17.
[48] Tarek Shamma, 'The Exotic Dimension of Foreignizing Strategies,' *The Translator* 11: 1 (2005), 51-67 (p. 51).

verging on "exoticism." This is a topic which is raised in my interview with George Szirtes (appended to this thesis), when I ask about Hughes's obsession with capturing a foreign, broken English. Szirtes comments: "I don't like it, it is an act, at worst, of exoticising." He adds: "What Hughes did was very successful but that was because he was a marvellous poet himself: he transferred Pilinszky into his own idiom."[49] Asking the same question in my interview with Desmond Graham, I got a similarly strong response:

> What an oddity he is, what a bizarre, weird, baroque sort of writer. He could never be mainstream and thank goodness. I find what he says about the awkwardness and the difficulty of the literals wonderful and completely alien. Faced with that I would sit down with my co-translator and say, 'what can we do about this?'[50]

While Hughes may have been involved in developing a practice of translation which emphasized the otherness of the source texts, therefore, such emphasis also points towards an aesthetic which is being fostered in the target culture. In this way, the rawness of the English version does not simply illuminate for English readers the poetics of certain European post-war poetry; it also sheds light on the translator's (Hughes's) own poetic aspirations and preoccupations at the time.[51]

In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti talks of the "violence that resides in the very purpose and activity of translation."[52] While Venuti may have seen this as carrying a negative charge, it seems to me that a large part of Hughes's excitement about literal translation is due to this violence: the damage that such direct translation does to the English poetic form. Indeed, it seems to have become for Hughes a way of escaping that "meanness and deadness of all modern English verse," that he described in 1956. As Weissbort argues, Hughes was aware "that there might be something to be learnt from a foreign poet's [such as Amichai's or Csokits's] apparent "abuse" of the target language,"[53] and it was as if, for Hughes,

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[49] Interview with George Szirtes. See 'Appendix: Six interviews.'
[50] Interview with Desmond Graham. See 'Appendix: Six interviews.'
[51] As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this foreignizing technique will become part of Hughes's own poetic style in *Crow*. See also the article by Jerzy Jarniewicz, 'After Babel: Translation and Mistranslation in Contemporary Poetry,' in which he discusses a "modern 'translation sensibility'," and argues that "this unprecedented wave of translations by poets is not a coincidence, but a *signum temporis*." *European Journal of English Studies* 6:1 (2002), 87-104 (p. 88). [Hereafter: Jarniewicz].
[52] Venuti, p. 18.
[53] DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 10.

the limitations of the literally translated poem became a means of accessing "what is alive and real."[54] The "violence of translation" became, in this way, a positive, creative release of the poem's inner self.[55]

This notion of linguistic liberation, whereby language is freed from its own boundaries, was clearly an important part of Hughes's interpretation of the role of translation. "However rootedly national in detail it may be," Hughes said at the 1967 'Poetry International' festival in London:

> poetry is less and less the prisoner of its own language. It is beginning to represent, as an ambassador, something far greater than itself. Or perhaps it is only now being heard for what, among other things, it is – a Universal language of understanding in which we can all hope to meet.[56]

Weissbort points out that the position Hughes is taking here is similar to that of Walter Benjamin, as outlined in the 1923 introduction to his translations of Baudelaire. In this essay, which Weissbort claims Hughes had read,[57] Benjamin talks of a "kinship of languages" and writes that it is the task of the translator, "to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work."[58] The very act of translation, Benjamin argues, will allow a translator to break through the "decayed barriers of his own language,"[59] and arrive at a kind of third, "pure" language which will "shine upon the original all the more fully."[60]

Hughes's ideas about a "Universal language" clearly embrace Benjamin's idea of an *Ursprache*, or Ur-language, and it is noteworthy in the context of Hughes and the literal, that Benjamin concludes his essay by praising what he calls the "interlinear version." By literally placing the meaning in between the lines, argues Benjamin, the interlinear version becomes an actual manifestation of the central aim

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[54] TH, editorial to *MPT* 3 (1967), 1-2, p. 1.
[55] The connection between this "violence of translation" and Hughes's "poetry of violence" is discussed further in Chapter Three.
[56] Programme, 'Poetry International,' Arts Council of Great Britain, 1967. See TH, *ST*, pp. 199-200.
[57] In his discussion of Hughes's translation approach, DW writes: "One should also invoke the work of Walter Benjamin, in particular his essay "The Task of the Translator" […]. This was an essay that Hughes read, as it appeared in1968 in the second issue of the translation journal *Delos* […]." DW, *TH&Tr.* p. 22.
[58] Benjamin, pp. 73 & 80.
[59] ibid. p. 80.
[60] ibid. p. 79.

of all great texts. In Hughes's practice, the literal carried a similar significance, in the sense that he saw it as a new, third mode of expression, and one in which both the source poem and the target language could find a true voice. In Hughes's literal, as in Benjamin's interlinear, "literalness and freedom" could thus become "united."[61]

This hope of influencing the target language is evident in Hughes's stated intention with *MPT*, to introduce English-speaking readers to "a range of contemporary possibilities in poetry."[62] His ideal readership included practicing poets, in the hope that they would be influenced by the magazine's foreign content, and he had even thought at one stage that they should send a free copy of the journal to every poet in England. Funding limitations meant that this plan could not be fulfilled, but the very fact that he had such a plan shows how Hughes himself recognised the creative potential in reading a translated text: "Acquaintance with the diverse poetries of the modern world, we felt, couldn't be bad," he later wrote, "even if it only helped to confirm home-grown virtues."[63]

Overall, Hughes's editorship of *MPT* marked the start of a lifelong involvement with modern international poetry, and with translation in general. Hughes had, in this regard, what Weissbort calls a "conviction and a clarity of vision."[64] Many of the Central and Eastern European post-war poets who were featured in the first *MPT*, such as Vasko Popa and Zbigniew Herbert, were not known in Britain at the time but have since become widely read in English translation. His translations of Pilinszky would mark an equally exciting event.[65] Accordingly, while Hughes's contact with these translated poets was confirming key aspects of his forming poetic and translation aesthetic, his activity in bringing these poets to English-language readers was also immensely valuable, and his work represents a significant contribution to the accessibility of international poetry in English.

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[61] ibid. p. 82
[62] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 204.
[63] ibid.
[64] DW, *TH&Tr*. p. 9.
[65] Clive Wilmer writes in his review of the book: "I find it hard to overestimate the importance of this, the first English translation of Pilinszky in book form." Wilmer, *PNR*, p. 36.

Collaboration

"The solitude of Hughes's verse has sometimes been remarked upon," writes Paul Keegan in the preface to Hughes's *Collected Poems*, "but much of his writing involved collaboration."[66] As examples, Keegan notes Hughes's private press publications, his work with visual artists such as Leonard Baskin and Fay Godwin, his stage collaborations with Peter Brook, and his "verbal collaborations as a translator of poetry."[67]

As discussed previously, there were often three people involved in these "verbal collaborations": the original poet, his source-language translator, and the target-language translating poet. The role played by the source-language translator – the provider of the literals – was an especially vital element of this process, first-and-foremost of course because a target-language translating poet such as Hughes was unable to understand the original. The role becomes even more pronounced once we realize the extent to which a poet such as Hughes may have been influenced by those initial versions. In this sense, a collaborator such as Csokits arguably deserves as much a mention as do artists such as Baskin and Godwin, as an example of a contributor who "set in motion" or "confirmed" some of Hughes's "most individual sequences and utterances."[68]

Daniel Weissbort highlights the importance to Hughes of this collaborative process of translation by including, in the appendices to Hughes's *Selected Translations*, excerpts from letters that Hughes wrote to his co-translators, requesting very literal versions of the poems. Reading this correspondence, says Weissbort, one is reminded "of the extent to which Hughes hoped for and needed literal versions to activate his own poetic imagination."[69]

Consider for example his letter to Helder and Suzette Macedo, in which he asks them to translate, "roughly but as literally as possible," about a dozen of Helder Macedo's poems: "The rougher & more literal the translations are the more

[66] Paul Keegan, preface to TH, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 2003), p. x.
[67] ibid.
[68] ibid.
[69] DW, introduction to TH, *ST*, p. viii.

suggestive to me they are."[70] In a later letter, Hughes explains his translation technique:

> I'm afraid I distorted your originals somewhat. Your poetry includes or indicates meanings that can't be nailed down with words, whereas the great characteristic (and great limitation) of my language is to nail things down […] I feel I've spoiled the original to make a more concrete but less suggestive poem. […] The last verse is a remote & mutilated paraphrase of your meaning, but it is a sort of metaphorical version of it. Anyway that gives you some idea of what I did. As you see, I kept mainly, Suzette, your translation – which was often felicitous."[71]

Here, Hughes is clearly unhappy that he hasn't quite succeeded in conveying the ineffable in the source poem, and it is noteworthy that he feels that being faithful to the original is beyond his skill, even though he has kept to Suzette's literal translation, "which was often felicitous." By his own admission, Hughes's decision to keep close to the literal has resulted in "a sort of metaphorical version of it," and one which has "spoiled" the original's poetics.

Of course such spoiling was ultimately extremely appealing to Hughes. In a letter to Yehuda Amichai, the Israeli poet and friend whose poetry he was translating by using versions prepared by Amichai himself, Hughes openly displays his appreciation of the "strange" quality which can be the result of translation, and, in an interesting reversal of his previous statement, describes Amichai's lack of literary sophistication as an "unspoiled" English:

> My problem is – that your translation has an idiom, and a tone, which is exactly you & which is very powerful poetry in itself, but which is just slightly strange in English […] The English of your translation is more like the English of somebody – some English body – with no literary education. Unspoiled, whole, life-size, natural etc. And with the oddity which is really you; so I want to keep that.[72]

Weissbort calls the versions that Amichai made of his own poetry "auto-translations," and explains that Hughes was impressed by the way they "conveyed

[70] TH to Helder and Suzette Macedo [no date], TH, *ST*, p. 208.
[71] TH to Helder Macedo, c. 1962, ibid, p. 209.
[72] TH to Yehuda Amichai, November 1975 in TH, *ST*, p. 211.

the urgency of the original vision, which for him seemed often to be dissipated in more polished or, as we might now say, 'domesticated' versions."[73] Crucial here is the fact that the literal, to which Hughes wished to remain faithful, has been prepared by someone whose English is not native, producing in its "powerful," non-literary tone the same style of English that Heaney would recognize in Hughes's own English / non-English poetic voice.[74]

Hughes's attraction to the literal can also be illustrated by contrasting his approach with that of another co-translator, and to do so I would like to look briefly at the translation practice of Elaine Feinstein, whose translations from the Russian of the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva was the subject of my Masters dissertation. Like Hughes, Feinstein was already a well-known poet in her own right when she embarked on translation, and like Hughes, she worked from English versions prepared for her by a native speaker of the source language. However, during my study of the Hughes archive I was struck by one difference in particular between Hughes's manuscripts for his Pilinszky translations, and Feinstein's manuscripts for her Tsvetaeva translations.[75]

Feinstein, like Hughes, wanted literal translations, but she was also extremely interested in the shape and the sound of the original Russian text. For example, among her translation drafts is a note from her co-translator, Angela Livingstone: "Shall I send you the original […] and word-for-word versions?" writes Livingstone. Feinstein's reply is scrawled underneath: "Yes – but need literal versions and some idea of noise."[76]

I interviewed Elaine Feinstein in 2006, and inquired then about this need for an impression of the "noise" in the original.[77] Feinstein explained to me that she would regularly phone up Angela Livingstone, asking her to pronounce this Russian word and that Russian sentence to gain a sense of the original poem. Eventually, she said, the phone calls began to exasperate her co-translator. Here is an extract from a letter Livingstone sent suggesting a better way of communicating Tsvetaeva's Russian, and emphasising the importance of the source language:

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[73] DW, introduction to TH, *ST*, p. vii.
[74] Heaney, *Preoccupations*, p. 150
[75] See The Papers of Elaine Feinstein, The John Rylands Library, Manchester University [TJRL].
[76] ibid. 'Selected Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva – literals, drafts, final versions.'
[77] Interview with Elaine Feinstein. See 'Appendix: Six interviews.'

> I shall go to the university […] and find a tape-recorder and record for you a lot of poems translated […] I hope you are learning some more Russian, I need you to very much […] it will be immensely useful to you; that is the point. [78]

In marked contrast, there are no examples at all of Pilinszky's original Hungarian poetry in Hughes's archive. Among all the literals and corrected literals, all the drafts and re-drafts of the translations, there is not one photocopy of a Pilinszky poem in its original form, and not one request from Hughes to hear the poems spoken or to have a written description of their sound, nor any hint of frustration at not having access to the source texts. Csokits's initial concern that due to the regime's repression it might be difficult for him to get Hughes one of Pilinszky's books in its original Hungarian ("it is nearly impossible to get a copy") was never again mentioned in their correspondence.[79] There is certainly never any mention of Ted Hughes learning Hungarian. Csokits does include in his word-for-word versions the original number of syllables to each line as well as the original titles, and refers to certain words in Hungarian and their meanings (and once Hughes copies out the title in Hungarian),[80] but there is not much else to indicate an interest in the rhythm, beat, or visual shape of Pilinszky's poetry on the page. More than that though: according to Csokits, Hughes specifically requested that he receive literal versions "without metrics and rhyme schemes."[81]

This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is the native source-language speaker (Csokits), who is in charge of the practical work, leaving the poet-translator (Hughes) to focus on his ability to intuit the poem, and to re-make it using his poetic skills. In this way the poet is free to capture what Csokits calls "the inner core" of the original poetry, "and its mode of expression."[82] Hughes thus chooses an instinctive, non-academic approach. Secondly, Hughes is aiming for a particular

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[78] The Papers of Elaine Feinstein, [TJRL].
[79] JC to TH, 6 September 1964, Emory [Restricted].
[80] On Hughes's manuscript draft of his translation of 'Cold World,' he copies out the Hungarian title, '*Kihült Világ*' from the literal version. See 'János Pilinszky, Selected Poems, "Cold World" MS&TS.' Emory.
[81] János Csokits, 'János Pilinszky's 'Desert of Love',' in DW, *TP*, p. 10. Here, Csokits acknowledges the difficulty of such a demand: "[…] how much of the original stanza structure and line arrangement was I to keep? How far could I stray from poetic language without turning the text into flat prose? And what about the style and the tone?"
[82] ibid, p. 11. This is akin to Keats's Negative Capability: "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." See John Keats to George and Thomas Keats, 21 or 27 Dec. 1817, in John Keats, *Collected Poems and Selected Letters* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), p. 492.

style of poetry which appears 'literal,' and it is a style he pursues actively. This is not simply a desire for exactitude, but is bound up with a preference for poetry which is formally unsophisticated, and which sounds different to the ear. This sound was for Hughes much more than a by-product: it was something that he consciously sought as a poet. As I will argue in later chapters, such an active pursuit ultimately undermines his view that literalism equals neutrality on the part of the translator.

Hughes was indebted to his co-translators for providing these literal, non-standard English texts. They were demanding to prepare, and as Weissbort points out, Hughes's appreciation of this fact can be seen in the tact with which he requested them. Indeed one reason that Hughes so valued the partnership with Csokits, suggests Weissbort, was that Csokits "understood this need and provided Hughes with what he wanted: word-for-word or interlinear cribs […]."[83]

Hughes and Csokits

By the late 1950s, around the time that Plath was writing to her mother about Hughes's intrigue at her rough translations of German fairy tales, and Hughes was writing to his sister Olwyn about his ability to write poems which were different to all modern English verse, János Csokits, a young Hungarian writer, had settled in Paris, and become part of the set of Hungarian émigrés that Olwyn Hughes was friends with. In 1960 Olwyn gave Csokits a copy of *Lupercal*, the book Hughes had worked on in his brown-papered room in Boston.

Csokits was extremely impressed by Hughes's work, and he wrote to Hughes expressing his admiration. Hughes's reply suggested that they meet during Csokits's planned visit to London, which they did, going for walks on Primrose Hill and Hampstead Heath to discuss English and Hungarian poetry.[84] On his return, Csokits sent Hughes literal English versions of his own poems, and a play he had written, *The House of the Pillar of Salt*, which Hughes was to re-work, turning them into finished English versions. In June 1961, Hughes responds by saying that he found it better to leave his translations of Csokits "rather rough."[85] This was because: "The more I tried to approximate your metrical patterns and rhymes, the more my own

[83] DW, introduction to TH, *ST*, p. viii.
[84] János Csokits, 'Annotations to the Letters,' Emory. [Hereafter: JC, Annotations, Emory].
[85] TH to JC, 12 June 1961, Emory.

technical habits (which I try to evade in writing my own poems) intruded."[86] His approach lays the ground for the approach he would take with his Pilinszky translations in the future, when in order to adhere to a literal, hands off method he would also consciously evade "technical habits" and deliberately leave the versions "rough."

Csokits's literals of Pilinszky were central not only to Hughes's style of translation, but to his entire conception of the original poetry. Hughes states in the introduction to his Pilinszky translations that it was an "air of simple helpless accuracy" which first attracted him to Pilinszky's poetry, and he suggests that this simplicity and accuracy is perfectly captured in Csokits's word-for-word cribs.[87] Csokits's non-native, "odd" English,[88] combined with his conscientious insistence on faithfulness to the ideas behind the original, created a text which was primitive in appearance, but deeply intense and sophisticated in meaning.

It was in August 1964, that Hughes wrote to tell Csokits about his new venture with Daniel Weissbort, the beginning of *Modern Poetry in Translation*. He asks for the names of any translators in London who would prepare "literals cribs," and mentions some of the poets in translation he has come across so far, putting in brackets, for example, the brief comment "I like Vasko Popa." He also mentions Ferenc Juhász's poem 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets,' writing that it is "a staggeringly good poem, really tremendous" (Hughes went on to make his own version of this poem, based on that translation he had seen by Kenneth McRobbie).[89]

János Csokits replied in the September of that year, stressing the importance to Hughes of trust in any co-translation partnership: "as you do not speak Hungarian and therefore cannot judge the quality of the original texts," writes Csokits, "it would be preferable that you have a completely reliable translator at least."[90] Advising Hughes as to the best Hungarian poets to feature in *MPT*, Csokits mentions the name of another poet who he would like to recommend: János Pilinszky. "He is burning

[86] ibid.
[87] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 13.
[88] In 1974, Csokits wrote to Hughes: "when you are ready with the work of making good English texts out of my foreign ravings I should like to see your poems […] just in order too avoid misunderstandings due to my "odd English" as you politely put it." JC to TH, 2 May 1974, Emory [Restricted].
[89] Quote from TH to JC, August 1964, Emory. For Hughes's translation of the Juhász poem see TH, *ST*, p. 24.
[90] JC to TH, 6 September 1964. Emory [Restricted].

with a white-flame," says Csokits, "dry, intellectual, powerful and his poetry has the clarity I have rarely met in lyric poets." This is the date, then, 6 September 1964, when Csokits first mentioned Pilinszky's name to Hughes.[91]

Csokits went on to describe Pilinszky as a Christian Existentialist, saying that he reminded him of Thom Gunn.[92] "I am certain," he writes to Hughes, "Gunn could very well translate Pilinszky, if he wanted to."[93] Thom Gunn either didn't want to, or was never asked, but the idea that Hughes might become Pilinszky's translator had not yet been put forward. In the letters that followed, the main topic of discussion was the Hungarian issue of *MPT*, and Csokits continues to suggest other Hungarian poets who could be included. When Csokits visited Hughes in Devon, in early January 1967, he was asked by Hughes to be the guest editor of the issue.[94] Csokits agreed and over the next few months set to work on gathering a range of Hungarian poetry. The issue never materialised, however, largely due to "infighting within the Hungarian émigré community."[95]

The idea of a book of Pilinszky's poems in English translation had by this stage also been proposed. When Pilinszky visited London in 1967, he met with Hughes's sister, Olwyn, who then became his literary agent in England. Csokits wrote to Hughes saying that he would like to help Pilinszky with the project.[96] In this letter Csokits expresses his wariness of what he calls "the London Hungarians" and the "Hungarian literary vultures."[97] Even at this early stage in the process, it is clear that Csokits's aim is accuracy: in September 1967, for example, Csokits writes to Hughes to asks how much Pilinszky material he has for the magazine, and says that

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[91] George Gömöri argues that Hughes had heard about Pilinszky long before co-operating with Csokits, writing that Csokits was "not the only one who got him interested in translating the poet of "The Desert of Love"." Gömöri points out that he had published a short essay on Pilinszky and a few English translations of the poems in 1965, which TH was sure to have read. However, this letter from Csokits pre-dates that publication. See George Gömöri, 'Ted Hughes: Hungarian Connections' in *The Hungarian Quarterly* 49 (2008), 167-171. [Hereafter: Gömöri, *HQ* (2008)].

[92] This comparison to Gunn, who makes extensive use of form in his own poetry, raises certain questions about Hughes's decision to ignore much of the formal qualities of Pilinszky's verse. If Gunn had become Pilinszky's translator instead of Hughes, no doubt we would have a very different book.

[93] JC to TH, 6 September 1964, Emory [Restricted].

[94] See JC to TH, Feb 21 1967 Emory [Restricted] "Six weeks since I saw you in Devon."

[95] George Gömöri, János Csokits obituary, *The Guardian*, Thursday 22 September 2011. On-line at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/sep/22/janos-csokits-obituary/print. [Accessed 6.10.11]. [Hereafter: Gömöri, János Csokits obituary].

[96] JC to TH, 17 August 1967, Emory [Restricted].

[97] ibid.

he "promised Pilinszky to have a look at his English texts and see that they are faithful to the original."[98]

In October 1967, Csokits flew to Paris to meet Pilinszky personally for the first time. "Pilinszky seems to be in financial trouble," he wrote to Hughes, "he asked me for money." Csokits adds: "It is very exciting to think that I shall be able to meet Pilinszky personally – I am an admirer of his poems since 20 years."[99] His comment again reveals his own position as a translator: to serve a poet whose work he holds in high esteem.

On 19 December 1967, Csokits sent Olwyn a "Christmas present": a selection of Pilinszky's poems in English translation. Seven were versions that Csokits had translated directly from the Hungarian. Ten were versions by Peter Siklós, re-written by Csokits.[100] Yet his fury at the inaccuracy of the English versions of Pilinszky which had been made available up until then, is expressed in a letter written on the same day, to Hughes:

> Had I not lost a month over them, you would have a perfectly useless and falsified Pilinszky, and so would have Olwyn, who, by the way, handed out these unchecked texts to a number of English poets for translations! It's sheer luck they didn't bite at the bait because, as you will see, these texts are just for the dustbin.[101]

Further on he writes: "My English is not good, but I never pretended to be an English poet or even a translator. All I hope is that someone can use my literals for a proper translation or that the literals can be mended – if you prefer to publish literals."[102]

This is evidence of the strong affinity between Csokits and Hughes regarding their esteem of the literal; if the "bait," as Csokits describes it, had not been bitten before now, surely it would be after this letter, and by Hughes himself. Csokits's admission that his English was not good, his lack of "pretence" regarding his literary

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[98] JC to TH, 29 September 1967, Emory [Restricted].
[99] JC to TH, 13 October 1967, Emory [Restricted].
[100] See JC to TH, 8 May 1972, Emory [Restricted]. There was some confusion as to whether it was Peter Siklós or his brother István who had made the translations. Csokits believed that it was the former, due to the inadequacies of the texts: István was a poet who worked at the BBC World Service, while his younger brother, Csokits writes, "had nothing to do with poetry except his pathetic "literals", full of factual errors." (See JC, Annotations). Certainly, Peter Siklós was the name given as Pilinszky's co-translator in *MPT* 7 (1970).
[101] JC to TH, 19 Dec. 1967, Emory [Restricted].
[102] ibid.

status, his use of the word "mended" – implying that the literals are in some way broken or injured – would no doubt have greatly appealed to Hughes, satisfying on several levels the criteria he personally set for the translation of poetry. Also noteworthy is that in this letter, Csokits asks Hughes about compound words, (he gives as examples "this is my go-out night" and "worked-upon passages"). He says that in Hungarian this sort of structure is common, and asks Hughes for advice on how to translate them into English. As I shall discuss further on in the thesis, these kinds of compound words will become something that Hughes makes notable use of in *Crow*.

Hughes did respond, and in a letter of 30 January 1969, we have the first mention of Hughes's own contribution to the Pilinszky translations. They were clearly very much appreciated by Csokits: "I have here six Pilinszky poems corrected by you," writes Csokits. "I wish the others were as good as these!"[103] Four of the six Csokits considers ready for publication; the others need some alteration and he spends the next few pages outlining what these should be.

Yet in May 1972, Csokits writes an angry letter, which begins by reminding Hughes of all the work he has put in to correcting the Pilinszky translations. Then he says: "At the poetry Festival in July 196[9][104] Patrick Garland – introducing Pilinszky's poems and your translations – said to the public that these texts are based on literals made by Siklós." Csokits knew of this only because he read an interview with Pilinszky, in which he too said that Siklós and Hughes had been his translators. "Personally I am against mentioning the names of people who had done the literals," he writes, "but I think if names are mentioned at all: this should be the right names. I don't mind make a present to a friend or to someone I like and respect. But Siklós is an idiot, a bloody dilettant and I am not ready to make a present to him."[105]

A long reply by Hughes, written the very next day, tries to provide explanations to Csokits's irate questions, and it seems that the casualness that Hughes so admired about rough translations had been taken a step too far. What it comes down to is that Hughes had often omitted to sign any of his versions of Pilinszky, therefore also forgetting to put down the other translator's name. "I don't think Olwyn and Danny are to blame," writes Hughes. "What is to blame,

[103] JC to TH, 30 Jan 1969, Emory [Restricted].
[104] Csokits, usually so exacting, got the date wrong here, but further on in his letter correctly refers to the event being held in 1969.
[105] JC to TH 8 May 1972 Emory [Restricted].

fundamentally, is my omission in not putting my name plus yours at the bottom of every copy of every draft of every poem I typed out at one time or another. Which left it to others to fill in the blank with guesswork."[106] Hughes goes on to say that Csokits's letter was timely, because "I promised Pilinszky that I would finish a volume of translations of his poems into English." In order to do so, Hughes would needed a reliable provider of literals, and in this letter he asks Csokits if he would agree to be the main one:

> So for the volume of Pilinszky translation I would like to have the main body of work based on originals by you, or so much rewritten by you that they are originals by you. It would be easier, if you are willing, and also — I feel — better for the final project, if the whole thing were based on originals by you. But that would be too insulting to Siklos: he has done a lot of work (though I have never asked him to — Danny may well have done, Pilinszky may have done) and it can be used, in part, if I use a number of his poems and get them corrected by some Hungarian scholar. If you corrected them, they would inevitably become your originals.
> [...]
> The final book will be a definite record clear to all of just what a great part yours is — each poem will have the name of the translator.

In his final paragraph, Hughes gives a sense of his own feelings about Pilinszky, and how he sees his own role as Pilinszky's translator:

> I'm knocking on with this book. He's not easy to translate, because his poems seem to reach a certain bleak temper — which is their most essential and characteristic quality. And without that, in translation there is nothing. Also, I am not a good translator in that I have a horror of adding anything.[107]

In fact, this final sentence is a rare example of out-and-out false modesty on Hughes's part. However often, and however questionably, he might claim to have resisted 're-inventing' Pilinszky, he usually makes it clear that such resistance – the "horror of adding anything" is for him the mark of a good translator. Here he puts himself down for doing precisely the thing he advocates. The comment is also

[106] TH to JC, 9 May 1972, Emory.
[107] ibid.

indicative of the position that he assumes as translator: to have captured the "most essential and characteristic quality" of Pilinszky's poems. According to him, this is the "bleak temper" that he has found by reading the poems in Csokits's literal versions. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, even Csokits admits that it is largely Hughes's individual translation practice (his preference for a starkness of vocabulary and avoidance of strong end rhymes, for example) that makes the poems appear more grim than they may have been in their original language.

Csokits was aware of the importance, in any co-translation project, of face-to-face discussion, and he encouraged Hughes to visit him in Munich: "I think it would be really important that we do these Pilinszky texts together," he wrote in July 1972, "because, as we have seen, one cannot expect to correspond about so many nuances."[108] A meeting was finally set up in London, in the summer of 1972, when it was agreed that Hughes would only use Csokits for the literals of Pilinszky's poems.[109] Most of the work, however, would continue to be done by letter. Csokits supplied Hughes with literals of Pilinszky over the next two years, along with his handwritten notes about the poems. Hughes would then send his versions of the Pilinszky poems back to Csokits asking him to "mark in the correct literal meaning."[110] There was no doubt as to what Hughes has in mind for the final translated poems: "I'd like them to be as literal as possible," he writes to Csokits in February 1974. "Some of those we did long ago seem to me very fine English poems – and they are almost entirely your words."[111]

Hughes's comment here is important, especially when we consider that Csokits's English was good, but not fluent: "I was not proud of my English," Csokits explains, "to write, even a simple letter in any other language than my native Hungarian, was and still is a problem for me."[112] Yet this lack of fluency was clearly a vital part of the poetic power of this work for Hughes.

Over a period of fifteen years of correspondence, nine of which were spent working directly on the Pilinszky translations,[113] Hughes received from Csokits over sixty poems by Pilinszky in rough literal versions. During this time, Csokits had become aware of the significance that the literal itself held for Hughes, and of the

[108] JC to TH, 23 July 1972, Emory [Restricted].
[109] JC, Annotations, Emory.
[110] TH to JC, 25 February 1974, Emory.
[111] ibid.
[112] JC, Annotations, Emory.
[113] János Csokits refers to "our nine years' labour," in DW, *TP*, p. 11.

nature of Hughes's enthusiasm for it. Reflecting in an essay in 1989 about their work together, Csokits writes:

> […] my role in the rendering of the *Selected Poems* consisted exclusively in linguistic mediation; that is, furnishing Ted Hughes with word-for-word translations and suitable notes. It was clear from the beginning that he wanted literal versions without metrics and rhyme schemes […] Hughes did not want smooth and polished renderings of what he called 'magazine English' […]. Fragments and chunks of the original poetry survived in the literals, just enough to feed the curiosity of Ted Hughes. By sticking to the original, the English text inevitably becomes odd, but this oddity seemed to appeal to the translator.[114]

For his part, Hughes made no secret of his attraction to Csokits's word for word versions. In his own 1989 'note' about his collaboration with Csokits, Hughes explains:

> When I go back through the whole poem in his literal version I see once more that the most effective lines in my final version have come through unaltered. Or very little altered, from his crib. He produced, in other words, a mass of pure finds. […] I hung onto these windfalls to the end.[115]

The importance of Csokits's role in supplying Hughes with literals is clear. "I am certain I never would have become as interested in Pilinszky as I eventually did," he adds, "if my curiosity had not been caught in the first place by Csokits' swift word-for-word translations from the page at odd times during our long friendship."[116] This is a striking admission: Csokits's versions may have been highly successful evocations of Pilinszky's poetic world, but they were also highly successful examples for Hughes of good, effective poetry in English.

In the November of 1974, although still working on his translation of Pilinszky's major poem 'Apocrypha,' Hughes announced to Csokits that he was sending a copy of his finished versions of Pilinszky to Carcanet, "but I'll hold up any printing until we're satisfied about the last details which you are going to sniff out

[114] JC in DW, *TP*, pp. 10-11.
[115] TH, 'Postscript to János Csokits' Note,' in DW, *TP*, p. 17.
[116] ibid. p. 18.

I'm sure."[117] On the whole, he continues, "they are extremely literal versions. Which pleases me particularly because I feel some of them are really very good English poems. I cannot imagine how some eight or nine of them could be made better as poems – yet they are quite literal."[118]

Hughes is thus unswerving in his opinion that the approach he has taken is the best option, where his main ambition, it seems, was to maintain an impression of literalism, avoiding wherever possible any sense of his own input. Some small liberties may have been taken, he says, such as some sentence order being switched, but generally, "one can see how they must be in the original, and I absolutely refuse to try to pep them up by any force-feeding."[119]

In 1975, Hughes posted a parcel of twenty-two finished poems in English to Pilinszky, who was staying in America at the time. The poems were accompanied by a long letter from Hughes to Pilinszky's host, Lajos Koncz, explaining, the "labour and love" that was behind the translations.[120] The letter also documented what an important role János Csokits had played:

> As you will see, they are pretty literal. In fact my co-translator, János Csokits, has let me get away with very little. He insisted on the closest verbal accuracy. This was very much to my own taste. We have tinkered with most of them for nearly eight years. Quite a few of them now satisfy me completely as English poems.[121]

Introducing Pilinszky

Much less satisfactory for Hughes would be the next task at hand, which was to write an introduction to the book of Pilinszky translations. Even without the difficulty of obtaining clear, uncensored information about the reception of Pilinszky's poetry in communist Hungary, preparing this kind of text was not a comfortable process for Hughes, and his communication with Csokits on the subject demonstrates his uneasiness. Hughes needed to acquire and assimilate exact factual information about the poems, and his anxiety about this is in direct contrast with his

[117] TH to JC, 14 November 1974, Emory.
[118] ibid.
[119] ibid.
[120] Lajos Koncz, 'Ted Hughes and János Pilinszky', *The Hungarian Quarterly* XLIV: 171 (2003), online at http://www.hungarianquarterly.com [Accessed 18.07.2005], 1-4, p. 2.
[121] TH to Lajos Koncz, 2 April 1975 [op. cit.], pp. 2-3.

heretofore assuredness about his approach to translating the poems. While it may seem surprising, as one scholar, John Clegg, observes, that Hughes had waited until now to ask Csokits direct questions about Pilinszky's style, tone, background and so on,[122] it is in fact indicative of his particular, personal method of translation. Hughes was happiest when Csokits was taking care of the intellectual, critical side, leaving him to "sense" the temper and tone in a more intuitive, non-academic way. As soon as the problem of writing an introduction to the Pilinszky translations is raised, his letters to Csokits begin to express an indecision and frustration not present in their previous correspondence.

Initially suggesting to Csokits that they ask an American expert on modern Hungarian literature to contribute ("there are certain to be some),"[123] Hughes then writes that it might be better after all if the introduction was written by a well-known poet, rather than by scholars: "all scholars have impure motives," he says, "and inevitably load a book with their museum deathliness."[124]

The task eventually falls on Hughes himself, and he begins to ask Csokits direct questions about Pilinszky's life. On 28 May 1974, Hughes writes: "What I need for my introduction is more knowledge." He sends a list:

> 1. The atmosphere & temper, the texture, of his Hungarian. What's distinctive about its physical qualities.
> 2. Oddities or special bias of his vocabulary, his grammatical usage, his inventions – if any.
> 3. Any traceable antecedents in Hungarian literature – in style, in subject matter.
> 4. His Catholicism.
> 5. His biography – how much would he permit us to use. He told an extraordinary story of his upbringing in a convent – a nunnery for redeemed prostitutes. Things of that sort add great weight to his poems, I think. But are they proper to mention – what does he think?
> 6. His relationship to other Hungarian writers of his generation – & slightly before & after.
> 7. Account of any other writings.

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[122] See John Clegg, ' 'You have made this yours absolutely': the shared concerns of János Pilinszky and Ted Hughes.' On-line at: http://www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/Issue%2021/CLEGG(Pilinszky%20+%20Hughes).html. [Accessed 16.10.11]. [Hereafter: Clegg].
[123] TH to JC, 28 May 1974, Emory.
[124] TH to JC, 17 June 1974, Emory.

8. What is said about him in Hungary. Any quotations from articles about him that shows how Hungarians regard him.
9. A general description of each of his books (plus their titles & date) – of their contents, and how they were received.
10. How he first became known.
11. What other languages has he been translated into.
12. Anything else connected with him no matter how remotely.[125]

"Simply jot down notes," Hughes asks Csokits, but Csokits, for reasons which he would later explain, did not. Having received none of the requested information, Hughes writes suggesting that Csokits do half of the introduction, in which he could describe Pilinszky's place in Hungarian poetry. Without Hungarian reinforcement, Hughes writes, "my statements can only be impressionistic or hearsay."[126] Again, Csokits could not fulfil Hughes's request, and two weeks later Hughes writes again, this time asking for "a few anonymous paragraphs" about the texture of Pilinszky's verse and "its place in the lineage of Hungarian poets." At the end of this letter, he asks: "Perhaps you can tell me exactly what he did during the war."[127]

This final attempt to get some kind of clear answer to what appears to him to be a simple question, and the failure in the end to receive it is indicative of Hughes's lack of awareness regarding the complexity of the task. Hughes's question, "Perhaps you can tell me exactly what he did during the war," was never answered properly for him, and his decision to write about it obliquely, stating that Pilinszky's "last year of the war was spent moving from prison camp to prison camp,"[128] became a point of contention for readers and critics. Anthony Rowland for example, in his book on Holocaust Poetry, argues that the statement obscures the fact that Pilinszky "was enrolled, rather than interned, by the retreating Nazis."[129] Clive Wilmer's review of the Pilinszky book similarly struggles with Hughes's phrasing, suggesting

[125] TH to JC, 28 May 1974, Emory.
[126] TH to JC, 8 November 1974, Emory.
[127] TH to JC, 22 November 1974, Emory.
[128] TH, introduction to JP, *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1976), p. 9. [Hereafter: JP, *SP*].
[129] Anthony Rowland, introduction to *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2005), p. 7 [Hereafter: Rowland].

that it is misleading: "Pilinszky's war experience was that of a teenage soldier in the retreating Axis armies."[130]

But supplying Hughes with answers to his questions about Pilinszky was not straightforward, as Csokits explains:

> His undated three pages handwritten letter […] with his twelve questions, would have been impossible to answer in detail without writing an essay. […] To write to Pilinszky, then in Hungary, and ask him to give informations [sic] about his life and work or to contribute, was out of the question. The secret police and informers watched him all the time, his letters were checked by censors.[131]

Csokits's fear of endangering Pilinszky was acute. When Hughes suggested that Csokits write part of the introduction, Csokits told him that it was out of the question: "I had to decline the honour because it would have harmed Pilinszky in communist Hungary."[132] Yet in an article about Hughes's translations of Pilinszky, George Gömöri suggests that Csokits's fear was unfounded, writing that it indicated "only Csokits's extreme shyness and / or fairly advanced mania of persecution." He adds: "To my best knowledge the post-1956 Communist State always regarded Pilinszky as a harmless and totally apolitical poet who was able to get a passport (i.e. an exit visa) every time he was invited to foreign festivals."[133]

Whether Csokits's suspicion was due to paranoia or not, the fact remains that he only sent to Hughes what he felt he could: some quotations from interviews and a few sentences from reviews of Pilinszky's poems. Also, as mentioned above, Csokits had included notes about Pilinszky's poetry on the rough translations he sent to Hughes. On the back of a draft-translation of Pilinszky's poem 'Apocrypha' for instance, Csokits has written out the following list:

> Meaning of war and concentration camp – restyled silence into poetic credo
> "I would like to write as if in reality I would keep silent"
> Struggles against keeping silent
> Unredeemed – search (a personal salvation – some ease if not redemption)

[130] Wilmer, *PNR*, p. 34.
[131] JC, Annotations, Emory.
[132] ibid.
[133] Gömöri, *HQ* (2008), p. 169.

New syntax and semantics

Spiritual mythology out of silence

Loneliness – preparation for death

Consciousness of being useless ∴ anxiety

Spiritual and sensual love speaks up in *Splinters* but only briefly

State of being lost – declarative style

Static – movement to emphasise immobile

His landscape – his environment

Poverty and numbing vastness

Certainty of grace and redemption absent – everything long ago decided.[134]

This list, along with Csokits's concerns, is a good demonstration of the way in which Hughes was receiving information about Pilinszky: rough, unreferenced, and incomplete. Csokits's unexplained fragments and the air of real danger surrounding them added a sense of urgency to the whole endeavour, and would be in keeping with the already established impression of post-war poetry from Eastern and Central Europe, who "have had to live out, in actuality," as Hughes wrote, "a vision which for artists elsewhere is a prevailing shape of things but only brokenly glimpsed […]."[135]

In addition to this, even the direct contact that Hughes had with Pilinszky himself was conducted through several layers of translation: not only did Hughes have no Hungarian, but Pilinszky had no English, and so they communicated through the only language they had in common, which was French.[136] The result of all of this was that based around the various disjointed or coded pieces of information provided by Csokits, and written without the confidence Hughes had displayed in his translation approach, the introduction readily succumbs to the very pepping up and "force-feeding," that Hughes had supposedly refused to apply to his translations of the poems. In it he talks of how the concentration camps "opened the seventh seal for Pilinszky,"[137] and of Pilinszky's "mystically intense feeling for the

[134] See 'János Pilinszky, Selected Poems, "Apocrypha" MS and TS' in The Ted Hughes Papers, Emory.
[135] TH, introduction to Popa, pp. xxi-xxii.
[136] Hughes's French was not very good: once mentioning to Csokits that he was reading, in the original, the poetry of Yves Bonnefoy, Hughes confesses: "I criticise only so much of his work as gets through my very inadequate translation. I miss his tone, his language – in other words 95% of his poetry." TH to JC, August 1964, Emory.
[137] TH, introduction to JP, *SP*, p. 9.

pathos of the sensual world."[138] He writes about a "stillness of affliction, a passivity of transfiguration"[139] and of Pilinszky's "few poor objects, his gigantic empty vistas."[140] Csokits's point about Pilinszky's "Certainty of grace and redemption absent," Hughes rewrites as:

> The poems are nothing if not an appeal to God, but it is a God who seems not to exist. Or who exists, if at all, only as he exists for the stones. Not Godlessness, but the immanence of a God altogether different from what dogmatic Christianity has ever imagined. A God of absences and negative attributes, quite comfortless. A God in whose creation the camps and modern physics are equally at home.[141]

Here, Hughes may have taken Csokits's views about Pilinszky's contempt for the label "catholic poet" too far. Even Pilinszky himself couldn't quite agree with this final statement. In an interview for the *New Hungarian Quarterly* in 1980, the above section of Hughes's introduction is quoted by the interviewer, who then asks Pilinszky: "Does God exist for you then?" Pilinszky replies: "Yes, very much. […] To me God is the reality behind the manifested world. He is perfect peace and tranquillity; He is not belligerent; He is good and He exists."[142]

It may be that the inflated style of writing was largely due to Hughes's acute awareness of the sensitivity of the project, as he had come to understand it through Csokits's anxieties. Hughes's reply to Clive Wilmer's scathing comments about his introductory essay to the Pilinszky translations suggests as much. In a letter sent to the editor of the journal where Wilmer's review appeared, Hughes refers to Wilmer's irritation at his use of the phrase "silence soon descended," which Hughes used to describe the ten years that Pilinszky didn't publish any poems. "Can you tell him," writes Hughes in his letter to Michael Schmidt:

> that Pilinszky's long silence – between his first book and his second – had nothing to do with my portentousness, but everything to do with the fact that the state

[138] ibid. p. 13.
[139] ibid.
[140] ibid. p. 12.
[141] ibid. p. 11.
[142] János Szilágyi, 'János Pilinszky: A Tormented Mystic Poet,' *New Hungarian Quarterly* 21:77 (1980), 114-119, pp. 117-8. [Hereafter: Szilágyi interview].

> wouldn't let him publish anything at all – and that if I hadn't said this, the state is still capable of being offended.[143]

Indeed, Hughes was so wary of getting Pilinszky into trouble that he soon followed this letter with another, asking Schmidt to disguise the word "state" of his previous comment. "That lets Pilinszky off the suspicion of having complained," he writes, though he adds that he regrets weakening the letter "which is to be blunt and forthright to the point of startling Wilmer."[144]

Despite these remarks in defence of his introduction, Hughes had not been completely oblivious to its faults. Enclosing the final draft in a letter to Csokits on 5 September 1975, Hughes explained that he had "tried to define my essential impression of what seems to be his essential quality – in so far as in translation I can be aware of it." But he expressed worry about the accuracy of what he has said – "no doubt I've vastly oversimplified and vulgarised much." Hughes asked Csokits if he should send a copy to Pilinszky, so that he could point out where he has "too grossly oversimplified, too crudely and tastelessly encroached on his private domain." He ends the letter acknowledging the solemnity of his introduction, adding: "but talking about Pilinszky one becomes solemn."[145]

According to Csokits, it wasn't practical to get a copy to Pilinszky at that time, and the introduction was submitted to Carcanet as it stood. Yet Hughes was never wholly satisfied by it. "I dislike my introduction," he would write many years later. "It's a pity he can't have a simple table of events in Pilinszky's life, then the poems."[146]

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Whatever doubts Hughes may have had about his introduction however, he never seems to doubt that he has been faithful to the essential qualities of the thing in hand, remaining certain even in his uncertainty that any inaccuracies will be due not to an attempt at creative improvement on his part, but rather to an "oversimplification," or

[143] TH to Michael [Schmidt], [July 1977], Emory.
[144] TH to Michael [Schmidt], 18 August 1977, Emory.
[145] TH to JC, 5 September 1975, Emory.
[146] TH to JC, 6 January 1987, *Letters*, p. 528. The "he" in this sentence refers to Peter Jay at Anvil, who was publishing a revised and extended version of their Pilinszky *Selected Poems* as *The Desert of Love* (1989).

a "vulgarity," or a "crudeness." This would be in line with his views about his translation methods in general, which he repeatedly saw as the production of a plain and simplified version of the original – one which would surely, therefore, be 'truer' than a re-poeticised ('falser') version. Above all, Hughes remains confident that his decision to stick as close as possible to Csokits's literal versions was the right and only one. For Hughes, Csokits's literal cribs captured the true essence of Pilinszky's tone and vision, much more effectively than more polished versions could. "Your version is exceedingly powerful," Hughes wrote in a letter to Csokits about his literal version of 'Apocrypha,' "in its unfinished approximations (its alternative words etc.) it gives a very clear idea of what original Pilinszky must be like. It suggests more than any finished-looking translation ever can."[147]

[147] TH to JC, 9 February 1975, Emory.

Chapter Two: Ted Hughes's Sensibility of Translation

In this chapter I will argue that the act of translation can be seen as a central part of Hughes's aesthetic. In the first half, I will look at a selection of Hughes's prose, discussing the ways in which he tended to describe other poets in a manner which strongly reflected his own creative preoccupations. I will also point out that the qualities he was highlighting and admiring in his essays were often the same qualities that we have seen him praise with regard to texts in literal translation. Literalism, in other words, had become a standard by which Hughes was judging a whole range of other poets and writers.

With this in mind, in the second half of the chapter I will consider the poem that Hughes once said was his favourite: the traditional Irish love-song 'Donal Og,' in an English translation by Lady Augusta Gregory. Hughes's preference for Gregory's version, with its controversial use of Hiberno-English, puts his enthusiasm for the literal in a wider literary context, and by so doing allows me to draw parallels between the effect of translation, and what Seamus Heaney calls Hughes's "rebellion against a certain kind of demeaned, mannerly voice."

Acts of Translation

In the introduction to Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri's new English translations of János Pilinszky (2011), Wilmer looks back to the time when the Hughes and Csokits *Selected Poems* of Pilinszky first appeared, in 1976. "I have to say, I reviewed it unfavourably," he admits now. "It means more to me today than it did then, but I remain not quite content with it."[1] The reason, he says, was Hughes's abandonment of rhyme and meter; formal qualities which, in his view, are crucial to the meaning of Pilinszky's poetry.[2] But there was another reason for Wilmer's dissatisfaction, not mentioned in this more recent commentary: the uncomfortably Hughesian tone of the introductory essay.

[1] Clive Wilmer, introduction to JP, *Passio*, trans. Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri (Tonbridge: Worple Press, 2011), p. 2. [Hereafter: JP, *Passio*].
[2] ibid.

Despite the fact that, for Hughes, this essay was written "mainly to explain why my translation was as literal as it could possibly be made,"[3] for Wilmer it merely demonstrated Hughes's "inability to depict the poets he admires in terms which do more than reflect his own preoccupations."[4] In fact, argued Wilmer in his early review, Hughes's introductory essay seemed "little more than a commentary on *Crow*."[5]

In the context of this thesis, such an observation is particularly interesting, because it suggests that there is an instantly recognizable correlative between Hughes's thoughts on translating Pilinszky, and his own poetics. Furthermore, while many writers reveal their creative sensibilities through their critical prose, the discrepancy between Hughes's intention and Wilmer's perception illustrates the especially paradoxical nature of Hughes's relationship with translation. The point is that it was precisely the manner in which Hughes extolled the virtues of literalism (a vital part of which was his own neutrality in the process), which exposed his own aesthetic at the time.

Such a slippage on Hughes's part is not confined to his work with Pilinszky, and it is common to find critics showing how Hughes, in his prose writings, tends to cast his subjects in a light which illuminates his own creative achievements or desires. As a recent example, in *The Grief of Influence* (2011), Heather Clark looks at Hughes's tendency to "author" Plath's life in his prose writings about her – though Clark stresses that Hughes's habit of describing Plath in the same terms that he describes himself should not be seen as evidence of his male chauvinism, as it has previously been viewed. Rather, it should be regarded as "an extension of the poets' intertextual relationship."[6] As proof, she points out that Hughes described the creative processes of Coleridge and Shakespeare in terms similar to those he used for Plath. As she puts it, Hughes was, in his critical writings, regularly "reasserting his own aesthetic prerogatives," and co-opting a whole range of literary figures "back into his own poetic "system"."[7]

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[3] TH to DW, quoted [without date] in DW, 'Ted Hughes and Truth', *Irish Pages* 3:1 (2005), 177-192, pp. 184-5. [Hereafter: DW, *Irish Pages* (2005)]. The full quote is: "I wrote a longish introduction mainly to explain why my translation was as literal as it could possibly be made."
[4] Wilmer, *PNR*, p. 34.
[5] ibid.
[6] Heather Clark, *The Grief of Influence* (Oxford: O.U.P, 2011), p. 177. [Hereafter: Clark].
[7] ibid. p. 171.

He even went so far, Clark notes, as to call T.S. Eliot a "shamanic healer,"[8] and she includes quotes from reviews of Hughes's *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* to support her point. "The Shakespeare who emerges from this book is uncannily familiar," wrote Terry Eagleton for *The Guardian*. "He is a poet of primitive violence, animal energies, dark irrational forces and incessant sexual strife. In fact he is, by a remarkable coincidence, a mirror image of the Laureate himself."[9] Similarly, Frank Kermode for the *Sunday Telegraph* suggests that a librarian would be "tempted to catalogue this book under 'Hughes' rather than 'Shakespeare'."[10]

What these reviews suggest is that Hughes has re-made these writers in his own image. For Clark, he has also re-made himself in Plath's. In both cases, the act of translation for Hughes seems to have gone beyond his work as the co-translator of foreign poets, and become a core aspect of his whole approach to reading and writing in general.

Standards

There is another connection to be made between Hughes's role as translator, and his critical writings, and this is to do with the fact that he repeatedly locates and highlights in these critical essays the same qualities which he associated with the effects of translation. Any sense of intense urgency; any kind of jolting, dramatic simplicity, seemed to indicate a text's authenticity – that it was 'direct from the source.' Literalism (as he interpreted that term) had become a standard by which he was judging these texts, whether he was reading them in translation or not. In this sense, not only is Hughes translating these poets into his own idiom, but the *idiom itself* is drawing on what he sees as the positive effects that the process of translation can have on English: the "jagged oddness" and the "foreignness and strangeness."[11]

See, for example, his introduction to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (a selection which includes a great deal of Shakespeare's prose), where Hughes describes Shakespeare's language as "homemade," "improvised," with a

[8] Editor's note in TH, *Letters*, p. 617. See also Clark, p. 177.
[9] Terry Eagleton, 'Will and Ted's Bogus Journey,' *Guardian* (2 April 1992).
[10] Frank Kermode, 'Ted Hughes Charges at Shakespeare,' *Sunday Telegraph* (5 April 1992).
[11] See TH to JC, 9 February 1975, Emory, and TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 13.

"ramshackle air"; "a prodigiously virtuoso pidgin."[12] Hughes also uses here terms and phrases such as "hybridization", "cross-breeding", "exotic half-caste beauty", "a barbarous offence against gentility."[13]

At one point, Hughes explains that in Shakespeare's work we are often presented with two versions of a word or phrase, one occurring immediately after the other, as if the second line is a translation of the first: first we get the difficult words, which many of us might not understand, followed immediately by the monosyllabic, prosaic, cruder version. This method greatly interested and excited Hughes, and was described by Anthony Burgess, in a review of Hughes's *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, as the "the dualism of Shakespeare's art." As an example, Burgess quotes the following lines from Macbeth:

> This my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.[14]

"One line is for the intellectuals on stage stools," Burgess explains, "the other for the groundlings."[15] Hughes, in his own discussions of Shakespeare, places great emphasis on this "dualism," though in the note to his *Choice* he calls it Shakespeare's "little translation machine."[16]

In my interview with Keith Sagar, I asked about the connection between Hughes's interpretation of Shakespeare's language and his own language in *Crow*. As a reply, Sagar quoted the same three lines from Macbeth. Like Burgess, he was using them as an example of Shakespeare's ability to follow-up his scholarly, Latinate expressions with monosyllabic, colloquial words. "Suddenly it becomes real," Sagar explains, "part of everybody's immediate experience." When I asked if it is in this use of the colloquial, immediate language that we can find a connection between Shakespeare and *Crow*, Sagar replied: "It's to do with getting rid of anything that can be got rid of."[17]

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[12] TH, 'A Note' in *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (London: Faber, 2007), p. 192. [Hereafter: TH, 'A Note'.]
[13] ibid. p. 184.
[14] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 2, sc. 2, l. 61.
[15] Anthony Burgess, 'Exit, chased by a boar,' *The Observer*, 12 April, 1992, p. 60.
[16] TH, 'A Note,' p. 188.
[17] Interview with Keith Sagar. See 'Appendix: Six interviews.'

As Heather Clark showed in her study of Hughes and Plath, the opinions expressed in Hughes's introduction to Shakespeare have often been linked back to his own personal aesthetic. Alice Oswald points out, for example, that the phrase "top-pressure poetry" used by Hughes in his discussion of Shakespeare is similar to one that he later uses, in 1992, to describe his stylistic aims for *Crow*.[18] Indeed, Hughes also recycled his descriptions of Shakespeare for himself elsewhere, most notably in his 1971 *London Magazine* interview with Ekbert Faas, where on page thirteen he uses the terms "super-easy" and "super-crude" to describe Shakespeare's language, only to say on page twenty that he had wanted the language in *Crow* to be "super-simple" and "super-ugly."[19] An extract from this interview is reproduced below, in which Hughes describes the anti-literary, crude and broken sound, that he heard in Shakespeare when reading him in school:

> I remember the point in Lear where I suddenly recognized this. It was very early in my reading, we were going through Lear in School […]. I can't remember what I thought of Shakespeare before that but at one particular mutilated and mistaken looking phrase I suddenly recognized what Shakespearean language was…it was not super-difficult language at all…it was super-easy. It wasn't a super-processed super-removed super-arcane language like Milton…it was super-crude. It was backyard improvisation. It was dialect taken to the limit. That was it…it was inspired dialect. The whole crash and cramming throwaway expressiveness of it was right at the heart of dialect. So immediately I felt he was much closer to me than all those scholars and commentators at the bottom of the page who I assumed hadn't grown up in some dialect. […] It's as if he were too idle to be anything but utterly direct and utterly simple.[20]

This quote seems to me especially indicative of Hughes's interest in the sound of translated texts, from his curiosity about the "mutilated and mistaken looking phrase," to his delight in what he perceived as its non-scholarly "throwaway" aesthetic. In this way, as well as showing the poetic direction that he was taking in *Crow*, his positive response to the directness and the simplicity that he finds in

[18] Alice Oswald, introduction to *The Spoken Word: Ted Hughes, Poems and Stories* (London: British Library / BBC, 2008). [Hereafter: Oswald, introduction to TH, Audio (2008)]. Oswald is presumably referring to TH's letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, 16 December 1992, where he describes his aim, in *Crow*, to achieve a "top pressure simplicity." *Letters*, p. 632.
[19] TH, Faas interview, pp. 13 & 20.
[20] ibid. pp. 12-13.

Shakespeare can be seen as part of his personal and instinctive attraction to the sound of poetry which had in some way become down-graded, more spoken, twisted around a little bit.

There are countless other examples, throughout his critical writings, of Hughes's attraction to this roughness and spontaneity in poetic texts. In his long tribute to Eliot, Hughes praises "that special urgency" and "notable distinction" of the verse which makes it stand slightly outside "what we think of as 'literary'."[21] Hughes compares these effects to the effect of translation on the bible – the King James version; a prosaic, non-rhyming translation. Similarly, the success of Plath's *Ariel* is seen to be due to the sense of urgency and lack of literary caution inherent in the collection: the poems were written, Hughes argues, "for the most part at great speed, as she might take dictation, where she ignores meter and rhyme for rhythm and momentum, the flight of her ideas and music."[22] Plath's verses are "odd-looking", charged with "heat" and "pressure."[23]

See also his 1968 introduction to Emily Dickinson, where he describes her poems as "odd" and "eccentric", saturated with the "homeliest imagery and experience," but filled with a "freakish blood-and-nerve vitality."[24] Or his introduction to Keith Sagar's poems, where he makes use of similar terminology to compare the work to Stephen Crane's "rough," "hand-made," "anti-aesthetic."[25] Or his article about Attila József, in which Hughes writes of the power of the "primitive" style of poetry, which has an admirable sense of "urgency" and represents a personality "unified by a crisis."[26]

When we turn back to Hughes's introductory essay to his and Csokits's translations of Pilinszky, it is possible to see how strongly Hughes's analysis of poetry reflects his bias towards a particular sound of roughly converted text. In the case of Pilinszky, Hughes seems to have decided that the qualities he found so appealing in Csokits's initial English renderings of the Hungarian poems, were also

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[21] TH, 'The Poetic Self: A Centenary Tribute to T.S. Eliot', in *WP*, p. 287.
[22] TH, 'Sylvia Plath: Ariel,' Poetry Book Society Bulletin, 1965, in *WP*, p. 161. The concentration on the "flight of ideas and music," was something Hughes strongly associated with translation. In a discussion about his translations of Pilinszky, for example, Hughes suggests that the most translatable part of a poem is its "music of the progression of ideas." See DW, *TH&Tr.* p. 45.
[23] TH, 'Sylvia Plath: Ariel,' in *WP*, p. 161. As mentioned in Chapter One, Hughes also suggests that translation had been a key source of inspiration for *Ariel*.
[24] TH, introduction to *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse* (London: Faber, 1968), p. 14.
[25] TH, introduction to Keith Sagar, *The Reef* (Ilkley: Proem Pamphlets, 1980). See Appendix VI in Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, pp. 301-2.
[26] TH, 'On Attila József,' *Hungarian Quarterly* (1994), 3.

the main qualities of the source texts themselves, and his praise of Csokits's literality becomes at times interchangeable with his description of the original's power and force.

Discussing Pilinszky's "idiosyncratic syntax" for instance, Hughes writes: "This can be felt clearly in a word-for-word crib – though it is less easy to translate further."[27] When describing Pilinszky's "simple, helpless accuracy," Hughes suggests that "Nothing conveys that so well as the most literal crib."[28] Pilinszky's greatness, Hughes says, is "not a greatness of imaginative and linguistic abundance," but has a "spiritual distinction." It is "an essence," "from the heart of his vision," "direct, simple, even 'impoverished'," it is a "unique vision" which has "urgency and depth and complexity,"[29] yet which is also "naked and helpless."[30] Pilinszky's words, writes Hughes, escape "only with great effort," and all words seem "obsolete or inadequate. Yet out of this apparently final reality rise the poems whose language seems to redeem it […]." The poetry is, he says, a "feat of homely consecration; a provisional, last-ditch 'miracle' […]. "[31]

Here, Hughes could not only be describing his impression of any of the poets mentioned above, but also the effect of his own preferred translation technique. As a result, his lengthy analysis of the qualities of Pilinszky's poetry begins to reveal his passion for the qualities that he had come to associate with texts that had been roughly translated from one language into another. His enthusiastic praise for Pilinszky's naked, simple, yet urgent style, for example, clearly echoes those early editorial manifestoes printed in *MPT*. In addition, as Wilmer first suggested in his early review of Hughes's Pilinszky, Hughes's energetic appreciation of the provisional, make-shift style of poetry he was describing, clearly suggests that these are effects to which he as a poet is personally drawn.

Keith Douglas

One of the earliest introductory essays Hughes wrote was his 1964 introduction to Keith Douglas, the British poet killed in the Second World War, and whose work

[27] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 8.
[28] ibid. p. 13.
[29] All quotes in this list so far from ibid. p. 7.
[30] ibid. p. 10.
[31] All quotes in this list from ibid. p. 12.

Hughes and Plath had excitedly discovered for themselves in the late 1950s. Because of its modern style, Hughes places Douglas's poetry firmly outside "the terrible, suffocating, maternal octopus of English poetic tradition," suggesting that in spite of the influence of Auden, Douglas empties his language "of its intellectual concerns."[32] Douglas's triumph, says Hughes, is in his use of simple, ordinary talk, infused with a "burning exploratory freshness."[33] His poetry has an "air of improvisation," vital and pure; personal and rough enough to be a diary note, yet at the same time managing to be "unsurpassable" as a poem.[34] There is, says Hughes, an urgency in his observations, a "colloquial prose readiness," which combines with a "poetic breadth."[35] Hughes also talks about the "naked activism of a very essential, irreducible self," in Douglas, which "bears the tones of private anguish."[36] He describes Douglas's work as "urgent," "simple," "rough and ready."[37] At one point Hughes describes a poem by Douglas as "jagged and disturbing."[38]

In my interview with Douglas's biographer, Desmond Graham, I asked about the accuracy of Hughes's analysis of Douglas. Because of the dubious reaction that Hughes's introductions sometimes incur, it was somewhat to my surprise that Graham replied enthusiastically:

> Those things that Hughes says about the burning exploratory freshness of Douglas, what he says about getting into what Shakespeare gets into is just such a wonderful understanding of the fire of Douglas's creativity. Where Hughes is absolutely right and where he understands Douglas is where he says that Douglas is concerned with death: he is a poet of wounds, of being wounded, and a poet of death. His subject is observed vitality, energy, life force. So in this area I think Hughes is absolutely smack bang on target.[39]

It is perhaps important to note that Graham, as well as being Douglas's biographer, is a poet and translator in his own right, and that his positive reaction to Hughes's

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[32] TH, introduction to Keith Douglas, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1964). In *WP*, p. 213. [Hereafter: TH, introduction to KD/*WP*].
[33] ibid.
[34] ibid. p. 214
[35] ibid. p. 215
[36] TH to William Scammell, 2 February 1988, reprinted in *WP*, p. 216.
[37] TH, introduction to Keith Douglas, *The Complete Poems* (London, Faber, 1987), pp. xix & xxxi.
[38] TH to William Scammell, 8 May 1988, reprinted in *WP*, p. 219.
[39] Interview with Desmond Graham. See 'Appendix: Six interviews.'

essay may be due to the fact that he himself has an "understanding of the fire" of Hughes's creativity. It may also be due to the fact that it was Hughes who brought Douglas's work to Graham's attention in the first place. In his preface to Douglas's *Complete Poems*, Graham names Hughes as Douglas's "finest champion and the poet who single-handed brought about the re-discovery of Douglas's work in the early-sixties."[40]

Hughes's essay on Douglas has not always been so well received. Elsewhere, critics have suggested that, like his introduction to Pilinszky, it could be described more accurately as a reflection of his own poetic concerns. In a 2006 study of modern English war poetry, Tim Kendall argues that "Douglas goes unreported in discussions of the influences on Hughes's work,"[41] and his main concern is that Hughes is in some way guilty of trying to succeed Douglas under the guise of promotion. Kendall acknowledges that Edna Longley, Seamus Heaney, Paul Bentley, Terry Gifford, Neil Roberts and Ekbert Faas have all referred to the fact that Hughes's comments on Douglas shed light on his own practice, but he laments that these are "throw-away remarks which give the impression of a happy coincidence: not one of the critics stopping to wonder why Hughes should sound like he is discussing his own poetry when he discusses Douglas's."[42]

When Kendall himself stops to wonder why, he finds that Hughes's analysis, for example, of Douglas's 'How to Kill,' perfectly captures "the essence of his own killer" in 'Hawk Roosting.' "Hughes's selective interpretation," argues Kendall, "applies more satisfactorily to the narrower tonal range of his own."[43] Kendall concludes that Hughes's aim was not solely to promote Douglas, but also to promote himself. Quite how far he believes Hughes is aware of his own behaviour is not altogether clear, but it is likely that Hughes's renunciation of academicism is also, in part, a rejection of the distance necessary for self-reflection of this sort. Either way, quoting the final sentence of Hughes's introduction to Douglas ("after producing a few examples of what could be done with [his style], he died and left it to others"),

[40] Desmond Graham, 'Preface to the Third Edition,' in Keith Douglas, *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber, 1999), p. v. [Hereafter: KD, *CP*].
[41] Tim Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 205.
[42] ibid.
[43] ibid. p. 206.

Kendall suggests that for Hughes, "This is as much a signing up as a signing off […]. Hughes adds his own name as first in the list of Douglas's successors."[44]

Kendall, understandably, makes no connection between Hughes's description of Douglas and his descriptions elsewhere of translation, yet to make such a link could provide at least part of the answer to his question, because Hughes's attraction to specific qualities of Douglas – his urgency, or his anti-lyricism – highlights another aspect of Hughes's poetic aesthetic. If a large element of this is Hughes's tendency to translate the intentions of other writers into his own, it is also his tendency to locate within them the same qualities that he found so compelling in poetry that had been translated. His "selective interpretation" of Douglas could, in other words, also be taken as further evidence of Hughes's ideal of literalness, not only as he applied it to his translation methods, but also as he applied it to everything he was reading too, even if he was reading it in the original. The point is that what appealed to him most was this sense that something had, by necessity, been removed. Not the poetry, but some false layer of lyricism. As Keith Douglas wrote in his letter to J.C. Hall: "You say I fail as a poet, when you mean I fail as a lyricist."[45]

Geoffrey Hill wrote briefly about Hughes's introduction to Keith Douglas in his review of Douglas's *Selected Poems* for *Stand*, in 1964. He interprets Hughes's promotion of Douglas in a different way to Kendall. For Hill, Hughes's desire "to establish the consistent brilliance of Douglas's efforts to form his own style," is not evidence of his intentions to make use of Douglas in order to further his own career, but rather as evidence of his extreme wariness of critics who will make those kind of assumptions. Commenting on Hughes's original argument that "to treat Douglas as a "war poet" has become an increasingly-lame excuse for not giving him his proper due as a writer," Hill suggests that Hughes has tended to swing his assessment too far the other way. His reason for doing so, however, Hill gives as the following:

> he is really glaring out of the page at some hypothetical straw-man, some model cretinous reader or oafish reviewer who can think only in terms of periods, trends and influences. One would assert, and Mr. Hughes would doubtless agree, that the crux of Douglas's achievement is to be found in those poems whose subject is war and the environment of war; and that he himself saw his own development as a poet

[44] ibid. p. 199.
[45] Keith Douglas to J.C. Hall, 10 August 1943. See extract in KD, *CP*, p. 134.

> to be bound up with his success, or failure, in creating an idiom capable of the most direct transmission of his experience in that war.[46]

It is noteworthy that Hill, another poet, seems to see Hughes's essay about Douglas not as a suspiciously masked act of self-promotion, but as an intentionally overprotective exploration of Douglas's talents as a poet. Despite the fact that Hughes gets it slightly wrong, his intentions are, for Hill, proof of a kind of integrity – though it is of course, as Hill suggests, an integrity based on his own, rather than Douglas's, frustrations. Hill himself makes no secret of his own partiality: the title of his review, "I in another place: Homage to Keith Douglas," makes his personal involvement and identification with Douglas's poetry clear.

Vasko Popa

There is another introduction in particular in which Hughes seems unconsciously, but overtly, to conflate the poetic power of the original poetry with the effect of its conversion into English: his essay on the Serbian poet Vasko Popa. Hughes's translations of Popa were recently praised in an article in *PN Review*, but in fact he never actually translated Popa's work.[47] Perhaps such a mistake is indicative of the enthusiasm with which Hughes promoted Popa's poetry. Perhaps it is also indicative of the fact that Popa's influence on Hughes's *Crow* is alarmingly and immediately apparent. Popa's habit of writing in cycles, his lack of punctuation, his use of religious and traditional imagery, his nursery story-telling style – what Hughes calls the "little fable of visionary anecdote"[48] – his sense of humour about the relationship between God, nature and humans (see for example the wink at the end of Popa's 'The Heart of the Quartz Pebble'), can all be found in some form or other in Hughes's *Crow*. Popa's "Black be your tongue black your noon black your hope" (from poem number 10 in the cycle *Give Me Back My Rags*), instantly recalls the opening lines of the first poem in *Crow*: "Black was the without eye / Black the within tongue / Black was the heart / Black the liver, black the lungs." Echoes of Popa's "dumb wind dumb water dumb flowers," (from the same poem) can be also

[46] Geoffrey Hill, 'I in Another Place: Homage to Keith Douglas,' *Stand* (1964), 6:4, 6-13, p. 8.
[47] See Fiona Sampson, 'Everything Returns,' *PN Review* 197 (2011), 80-81, p. 80.
[48] TH, introduction to Popa, p. xxvi

be found in Hughes's 'Owl's Song': "The air gave up appearances / Water went deliberately numb / The rock surrendered its last hope." In some ways, Hughes's *Crow* comes very close to being an entirely unofficial English 'translation' of Popa's work.

Be that as it may, Hughes was never officially involved in translating Popa. Popa's main English translator was Anne Pennington, and she worked directly from the source text; there was no need, therefore, for the kind of co-translation processes that Hughes's translation of Pilinszky required, and thus no need for the preparation of the kind of rough versions with which Hughes had been provided by Csokits when translating Pilinszky. Even so, as is made clear in her translator's preface, Pennington's method did veer more towards the kind of translation that Hughes favoured, in that it concentrated more on conveying semantic meaning than sound or shape: "In this poetry it is essential to bring out the exact meaning of words," she writes, "and so there has been no attempt to imitate the sound patterns of the original […]."[49]

Popa's close relationship with his translator and his admiration of her linguistic skill can be ascertained by the inclusion, in his *Collected Poems*, of a poem which he dedicates to her: "She polishes the corner-stones / Until their Anglo-Saxon shine / Begins to sing" ('Anne Pennington').[50]

After Pennington's death, on Popa's request, Francis Jones continued this careful work, completing for publication her draft translation of Popa's latest work, *The Cut*.[51] This was followed by Jones's extended and updated version of the *Collected Poems* in 1997 and, most recently in 2011, the *Complete Poems*. Here, Jones also discusses the difficulty of rendering into English Popa's subtle use of the Serbian language and his deep exploration of its folk imagery. While trying to move away from "that old cliché that you've got to choose between the semantics or the sound – I think you should be greedy and go for them both,"[52] Jones retains an awareness that with Popa, achieving a faithfulness to the imagery is more important than trying to find a phonic equivalence: "I have tried to reproduce Popa's phonic

[49] Anne Pennington, Translator's Preface, Popa, p. xxxi.
[50] Trans. Peter Jay, Anthony Rudolf and Daniel Weissbort.
[51] See Francis Jones, Editor's Preface, Vasko Popa, *Complete Poems* (London: Anvil 2011), p. xxii.
[52] See Tara Bergin, 'Necessary Humility: in conversation with Francis Jones,' *PNR* 205 38:5 (2012). 62-64, p. 64. [Hereafter: Jones interview]. See also 'Appendix: Six interviews.'

texture where possible in my own translations, although I have given higher priority to an exact rendering of his images and of his easy, colloquial style."[53]

Hughes was reading Popa, therefore, in a style of translation which was generally in accordance with his own techniques, and the spareness of the style of the translations was something that clearly appealed to him. Certainly, the rawness and directness of this English text was to become central to Hughes's appraisal of it.

Hughes included four of Popa's poems in his 1967 anthology *Poetry in the Making*, with the poem 'The Small Box' (since re-translated as 'The Little Box') serving as a frontispiece to the main book. In the same year, he wrote an essay about Popa's poetry which was published in *TriQuarterly*.[54] This essay became the introduction to Popa's *Selected Poems*, and it has since been reproduced in all subsequent reissues of Popa's work published in England.

The continued re-printing of the essay is as advantageous to Hughes scholars as it is to readers interested in Popa, if not more so. This is because it serves as a very interesting example of Hughes's tendency to praise the poetry he admires in the same, recurring, specific terms. When he links Popa's experience in the war with the development of his poetic language, he also seems to be linking the effect of this crisis with the effect of translation. His suggestion, for instance, in the opening paragraph to his introduction to Popa that "The attempt these poets have made to record man's awareness of what is being done to him […] has brought their poetry down to such precisions, discriminations and humilities that it is a new thing,"[55] later evolves into the belief that part of their advantage was that in literal versions these poems could become forceful, fresh and 'real' poems in English.[56] Describing the generation of East European poets "who were caught in mid-adolescence by the war," Hughes observes that these poets "have had to live out, in actuality, a vision which for artists elsewhere is a prevailing shape of things but only brokenly glimpsed, through the clutter of our civilized liberal confusion."[57] The result of this is that "they have gone back to the simple animal courage of accepting the odds."[58] For Hughes this is an admirable state for a poet to be in – achieving the same sense

[53] Francis Jones, Translator's Afterword, Popa, p. 395.
[54] See JC to TH, 19 December 1967. "I have read your essay on Popa in the Triquarterly – and liked it very much." Emory [Restricted].
[55] TH, introduction to Popa, p. xxi.
[56] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 206.
[57] TH, introduction to Popa, p. xxi.
[58] ibid. p. xxii.

of inevitability and reality is something that he himself strove towards. Most significantly, Hughes perceived that a necessary stripping away of poetic superfluities (rhyme, meter, even punctuation) had occurred, resulting in the revelation of the central meaning of the poem. The point is that such "helplessness in the circumstances," as Hughes writes, "has purged them of rhetoric. They cannot falsify their experience […]."[59]

Hughes's attraction to Popa's "air of trial and error exploration," his "improvised language," and his "attempt to get near something for which he is almost having to invent the words in a total disregard for poetry or the normal conventions of discourse,"[60] entirely corresponds to his attraction to the sound of translated poetry. Even the casualness, discussed in Chapter One, that Hughes so admired about the Spoleto handouts, forms part of the qualities he detects in Popa: while Popa might be in the same literary league as David's *Psalms*, suggests Hughes, "the motive, and the serious weight of the work, is by the way."[61]

The connection becomes particularly clear when half way through his essay Hughes refers briefly (the comment is placed in brackets) to the fact that we are reading Popa in translation. Explaining that the language of Popa's poems is the "Universal Language behind language," he goes on to suggest:

> and when the poetic texture of the verbal code has been cancelled (as it must be in translation, though throughout this volume the translations seem to me to be extraordinary in poetic rightness and freshness) we are left with solid hieroglyphic objects and events, meaningful in a direct way, simultaneously earthen and spiritual, plain statement and visionary.[62]

What is revealing about this statement is how Hughes moves from praising Popa's poetry in general ("it is the Universal Language behind language"); to praising the work of the translators (they achieve "freshness" and "rightness"); to finally praising the effect of the translation itself. Ultimately, it is what is left after translation (the "solid hieroglyphic objects and events") which becomes the most praiseworthy thing of all. Hughes's statement also hits on a clue to his own technique: while he relies

[59] ibid. xxiii.
[60] ibid. p. xxvii.
[61] ibid. p. xxviii.
[62] ibid. p. xxiv.

on, and foregrounds, the literal, he also makes careful, poetic choices of his own. As I will illustrate in Chapter Three, like the translators he praises here for finding "poetic rightness and freshness," Hughes will himself regularly make use of his own skill, in order to find the best version possible.

Hughes's open and longstanding public advocacy of Popa's work did not stop his appreciation being seen by some as a typical form of Hughesian appropriation. As with his other essays, his introduction to Popa has over the years been criticised for its sometimes over-dramatic, over-subjective descriptions. Edwin Morgan said that while Hughes was obviously an admirer of Popa's work, "his introduction is less than helpful, if you are looking for objective and specific pointers to what Popa is doing."[63] John Bayley, in a review for *The New York Review of Books*, expressed similar doubts. Referring to the introduction's opening paragraph, in which Hughes suggests that Popa's poetry is "equipped for life in a world where people actually do die,"[64] Bayley writes: "Popa's poetry is emphatically not "equipped" in the sense Hughes means, and I think Hughes, naturally enough, is reading his own fantasies and preoccupations into it."[65]

Like Wilmer, Bayley is perhaps thinking of Hughes's aim with *Crow*, to produce a collection which, in its use of myth and persona, and with all its crudeness and ugliness, would be able to stand its ground in a way that he sees Popa's poetry doing: the search for what he once referred to as the right style for a crisis.[66] Bayley's comment also hints at something else: that Hughes had a fanatic obsession with the whole notion of crisis as a means for poetic rehabilitation. His admiration of Popa may reflect his own "romantic hankering after East European conditions."[67]

Reading the Passion

In the early 1990s, Hughes discovered among a pile of unanswered correspondence, a request which had been sent to him by the editors of a Dublin-based poetry

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[63] Edwin Morgan, 'East European Poets,' *Open University 20th Century Poetry, Unit 32* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1976), p. 18.
[64] TH, introduction to Popa, p. xxi.
[65] John Bayley, 'Life Studies,' *New York Review of Books* (8 November 1979), 29-31 (p. 30).
[66] In a letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, Hughes explains: "My whole writing career sometimes presents itself as a search for not one style in particular, but the style for this crisis or that." 16 December 1992, *Letters*, p. 629.
[67] George Szirtes, 'Learning from Brezhnev,' *Poetry Review* 81:3 (1991), 20-22 (p. 22).

anthology called *Lifelines: Letters from Famous People about their Favourite Poem*. Hughes replied to the request, explaining first that, "Since I let my mail grow in a corner, like a mutant mushroom that I daren't eat, often I don't see for a long time what comes when I'm away. Forgive me this delay in answering your letter."[68] He continues: "My favourite poem is 'Donal Og' in Lady Gregory's translation. Why is this my favourite? I think no short poem has ever hit me so hard, or stayed with me so closely. That's my reason why."[69]

The poem, as it appeared in *Lifelines* along with Hughes's letter, is reproduced below. As I will be referring to several verses of the poem in the following section, it is reproduced here in its entirety:

Donal Og

It is late last night the dog was speaking of you;
the snipe was speaking of you in her deep marsh.
It is you are the lonely bird through the woods;
and that you may be without a mate until you find me.

You promised me, and you said a lie to me,
that you would be before me where the sheep are flocked;
I gave a whistle and three hundred cries to you,
and I found nothing there but a bleating lamb.

You promised me a thing that was hard for you,
a ship of gold under a silver mast;
twelve towns with a market in all of them,
and a fine white court by the side of the sea.

You promised me a thing that is not possible,
that you would give me gloves of the skin of a fish;
that you would give me shoes of the skin of a bird;
and a suit of the dearest silk in Ireland.

[68] See Niall MacMonagle (ed.), *Lifelines 2* (Dublin: Townhouse, 1994), p. 91.
[69] ibid.

When I go by myself to the Well of Loneliness,
I sit down and I go through my trouble;
when I see the world and do not see my boy,
he that has an amber shade in his hair.

It was on that Sunday I gave my love to you;
the Sunday that is last before Easter Sunday
and myself on my knees reading the Passion;
and my two eyes giving love to you for ever.

My mother has said to me not to be talking with you today,
or tomorrow, or on the Sunday;
it was a bad time she took for telling me that;
it was shutting the door after the house was robbed.

My heart is as black as the blackness of the sloe,
or as the black coal that is on the smith's forge;
or as the sole of a shoe left in white halls;
it was you put that darkness over my life.

You have taken the east from me, you have taken the west from me;
you have taken what is before me and what is behind me;
you have taken the moon, you have taken the sun from me;
and my fear is great that you have taken God from me!

(trans. Lady Augusta Gregory)

Hughes's comments, in his belated reply to the editors of *Lifelines*, forms the theme of the second half of this chapter: namely the implications of Hughes's attraction to Gregory's style of translation in her version of 'Donal Og.' By citing this as his favourite poem, Hughes is demonstrating again his attraction to a particular kind of non-English, urgent sound, when there is less concern for conveying a sense of rhyme or form, than there is for conveying semantic meaning and an impression of

an oral-based power and force: "translations made by poets," as he put it, "whose first language was not English."[70]

English versions of 'Donal Og' date back to the late 19th century, and the message of the poem varies from cocky and resilient to despairing and suicidal, depending on which translation of the song you hear. Yet while its content may be changeable, what has remained steadfast is the praise and admiration 'Donal Og' has received, from translators, scholars, musicians and poets alike. All comment on its eloquence, but also on its directness, its sincerity and its realism. "Note the excellent imagery mixed with stark realism of this lover's lament," writes Peter Kennedy in *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland*. "This is one of the most intense love songs in the Irish language."[71] "Employing with great effect the varied imagery of the Irish countryside and seaside," writes P.L. Henry in his introduction to the poem, "it convinces by its note of sincerity […]."[72] Similarly, discussing the characteristics of Irish folk poetry in their anthology *Poems of the Dispossessed*, Séan Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella explain: "It is the dramatic or story-telling voice that is most frequently and effectively heard. […] And while much of the verse reaches a high level of eloquence, there is a bluntness of attitude at its core."[73] Accordingly, in the 1991 *Treasury of Irish Poetry*, 'Donal Og' has been placed in the category, "*Filíocht na nDaoine*" – Poetry of the People.

In all of these descriptions we can find a resonance with Hughes's own summary of 'Donal Og,' when he wrote that, "no short poem has ever hit me so hard, or stayed with me so closely." Both the lyricism and the "bluntness" of the poem, as well as its oral nature, its ability to connect with the listener, even its changeability (characteristics which embed it firmly in the folk tradition), are clearly qualities which Hughes recognised in it and found appealing. Certainly, it is possible to draw comparisons between them and the qualities of his own translations, as well as his own poetry. The poems in *Crow* for example, superficially so different to 'Donal Og,' contain that same mixture of bluntness, and verbal power; they too are, according to Hughes, 'songs,' dominated, so he said, by "the kind of melody that

[70] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 206.
[71] Peter Kennedy (ed.), *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (London: Cassell, 1975), p. 75; p. 117.
[72] P.L. Henry, *Dánta Ban: Poems of Irish Women, Selected and Translated by P.L Henry* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1990), p. 113.
[73] Séan Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella (eds.), introduction to *An Dunanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (Portlaoise: Dolmen Press, 1981), p. xxxiii.

will carry a legend."[74] And they too are concerned, so Hughes suggested in his letter to Sagar, with personal events.[75]

Even the darkness and blackness so synonymous with *Crow* (the word "black" is repeated fifteen times in the first poem alone), can be found in 'Donal Og', especially in the famous[76] penultimate stanza:

> My heart is as black as the blackness of the sloe,
> or as the black coal that is on the smith's forge;
> or as the sole of a shoe left in white halls;
> it was you put that darkness over my life.

Here in Gregory's version, the traditional use of simile is emphasised and made more dramatic by its repetition. By creating a list (a device Hughes frequently makes effective use of in *Crow* and his translations of Pilinszky), and using the same words repeatedly in close succession ("as black as the blackness … or the black coal…" – something we will also find in *Crow* and Pilinszky), the poem conveys a sense of urgency and directness; again, the same urgency and directness we will find in *Crow* and Pilinszky.

Adding to the intensity of the penultimate stanza of 'Donal Og' is that slightly non-standard use of syntax, noticeable in the last line: "it was you put that darkness over my life." It gives the line a non-English accent, suggesting that it has been reproduced, unaltered, from a direct translation of the original made by a non-native-English speaker. Although there is a strong underlying sense of form in this version, in the parallelism in particular, Gregory's deliberate retention of the Irish accent in this line has resulted in the creation of a sound which very much meets with Hughes's own preferences as a translator.

If we look at other versions of 'Donal Og,' we find that this particular line has sometimes been rendered very differently. Indeed, despite the literalistic effect of Gregory's 'accented' version, we can see that it has often been rendered more 'literally.' In its original Irish, this line reads as: *Agus tá lionn dubh mór os cionn mo*

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[74] TH, 'Crow on the Beach' in *WP*, p. 242.
[75] I am referring here to TH's letter to Keith Sagar, 18-19 July 1998, Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, p. 269. See Chapter Four for further discussion.
[76] This stanza not only appears in translations of 'Donal Og', but crops up in other traditional Irish poems too, such as "If I Travelled West."

ghàire, which word-for-word means : "and there is a melancholy big at the head of my laughter" [*lionn* is humour; *dubh* is black; *lionn dubh* is the Irish term for melancholy]. Thomas Kinsella's version of this line is therefore much more literal than Gregory's: "and a black mood is above my laughter," as is this nineteenth century version: "And my grief is very great above my mirth." In *A Treasury of Irish Poems*, Seán Mac Mathghamhna renders the line as: "And a black cloud of sorrow hangs over my laughter," while Seán Lucy translates it as: "and 'twas you who turned my life so black and bitter." Frank O'Connor, in his rhyming version, gives the line as: "And 'twas you that blackened it ever and always."[77]

All versions sound mysterious, dramatic and even beautiful, but only Gregory decides to use a slightly incorrect grammatical structure by omitting the "who" or "that" after "you". This will become her trademark in fact, the touch which gives her version its "almost unbearable pitch."[78] But why exactly does her version reach such intense heights? What is it about the relatively simple line, "It was you put that darkness over my life," that makes it so appealing? The answer lies of course precisely in its simplicity, and its seemingly accurate 'inaccuracy.' Comparing it to its counter-parts, we can see clearly that Gregory's version sounds much less 'poetic' than Kinsella's, or Mac Mathghamhna's, or even O'Connor's; her line doesn't sound like a line from an ancient poem, it sounds like something someone says – its mode of expression emulates speech, rather than literature. This is surely the reason for its appeal, to Hughes at least: not because of its actual linguistic exactitude, but because of its impression of exactitude, its sense of being a spontaneous, spoken, true utterance, rather than an educated, refined, poetic declaration.

Thus the big attraction of 'Donal Og', not only for Lady Gregory and her literary peers, but also for Hughes, was its folk quality; it appeared to come from somewhere other than the libraries or drawing rooms of the educated classes. Yeats, for instance, in his 1901 essay, 'What is Popular Poetry?' used Gregory's prose translation of 'Donal Og' (he refers to it as a song sung by an "Aran fisher-girl"),[79]

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[77] Frank O'Connor, *Kings, Lords and Commons* (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1959), p. 127. [Hereafter: O'Connor].
[78] See Carol Rumens, "Poem of the Week," *The Guardian Online:* http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2010/apr/19/poem-of-the-week-lady-augusta-gregory [accessed 20.9.10]. [Hereafter: Rumens].
[79] W.B. Yeats, 'What is Popular Poetry?' *Essays and Introductions* (London: MacMillan, 1961), p. 9.

as an example of "the true poetry of the people,"[80] and Gregory emphasises something similar in an essay of the same year, where she predicts the poetic possibilities inherent in these "half-articulate" laments:

> The very *naïveté*, the simplicity of these ballads, make one feel that the peasants who make them and sing them may be trembling on the edge of a great discovery; and that some day – perhaps very soon – one born among them will put their half-articulate, eternal sorrows and laments and yearnings into words that will be their expression for ever […].[81]

Refusing to improve upon the roughness of a prose translation was a crucial way of preserving such a quality in the English. As Gregory suggests below, even in a prose translation of 'Donal Og' (she might have said "especially"), the impression of truth and reality is palpable:

> I have one ballad at least to give, that shows, even in my prose translation, how near that day may be, if the language that holds the soul of our West Irish people can be saved from the 'West Briton' destroyer. There are some verses in it that attain to the intensity of great poetry, though I think less by the creation of one than by the selection of many minds; the peasants who have sung or recited their songs from one generation to another, having instinctively sifted away by degrees what was trivial, and kept only what was real, for it is in this way the foundations of literature are laid.[82]

Reading this, it is no wonder that 'Donal Og,' the ballad that Gregory will give as an example of such an instinctual sifting, would appeal to Hughes, himself constantly searching for a way to rid poetry of false layers, to "keep only what was real." Such a desire underpins his entire translation policy: writing in his 1965 editorial for *MPT*, Hughes argues that non-literal versions fail to reach through "to what we have not experienced before, which is alive and real."[83] Similarly, in 1982, Hughes recalls that: "we favoured the translations that best revealed the individuality and

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[80] ibid. p. 8.
[81] Lady Augusta Gregory (ed.), introduction to *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish* [originally published Dublin: Hodges Figis, 1903] (Middlesex: The Echo Library, 2006), pp. 32-3.
[82] ibid.
[83] TH, editorial for *MPT* 1 (1965), p. 1.

strangeness of the original. […] We were happily resigned, that is, to all the losses sustained by the most literal translation of the verbal sense."[84] Hughes, like Gregory, was wary of the corrections that an English translator might make to the raw crib, and recognised the value in maintaining a sense of the oral, "primitive" quality of the rough translation.

Syntactical literalness was one way of achieving this, and of constructing a sense of fidelity to the original text. In a lengthy and personal introduction to her selected translations, *The Kiltartan Poetry Book*, dated 1918, Gregory mentions the founding of the Gaelic League, by Douglas Hyde. This "disclosure of the folk learning, the folk poetry," she writes, "was an upsetting of the table of values, an astonishing excitement."[85] Her imagination was greatly aroused by such a disclosure, she says, and she realised that poetic emotion was not to be found in the newspapers or with the street singers, but "among farmers and potato diggers and old men in workhouses and beggars at my own door."[86] Gregory knew that the folklore of these people must be translated "in the speech of the thatched houses where I have gathered them."[87] The result was what Gregory termed, a "Gaelic construction,"[88] whose effect in English, "touches us at almost every turn."[89]

Augusta Gregory's use of this Gaelic construction in English – a major part of her translation style – remains central to discussions of 'Donal Og.' In April 2010, the poet Carol Rumens featured Lady Gregory's translation of 'Donal Og' as the 'Poem of the Week,' in her *Guardian* blog. The cover article opened with the following paragraph:

> Rarely does a translation so stunningly refresh the language it enters as this week's poem, "Donal Og" ("Young Donal") by Lady Augusta Gregory. It owes its power to a variety of attributes. One is its lyric economy. […] Then there's the strong but non-metrical rhythm, borne on incantatory psalm-like repetitions. Most importantly of

[84] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 205
[85] Lady Augusta Gregory (ed.), introduction to *The Kiltartan Poetry Book*, in *The Kiltartan Books Comprising the Kiltartan Poetry, History and Wonder Books* (London: Colin Smythe, 1971), p. 19. [Hereafter: Gregory, *Kiltartan*].
[86] Gregory, *Kiltartan*, p. 20. Gregory is referring to a newspaper cutting of Katherine Tynan's lament for Parnell, and the listings of the noble dead that are characteristic of songs sung by street-singers.
[87] ibid. p. 22.
[88] ibid.
[89] Rumens.

> all, the Hiberno-English grammatical structures have been allowed to remain intact.[90]

In fact, Rumens's last sentence is slightly unclear, as the "Hiberno-English grammatical structures" to which she refers have of course been put in, rather than "allowed to remain intact." Once we remember that this is a translation from Gaelic, it is possible to see how it is Gregory's decision to emphasize the poem's 'Irishness' – always foregrounding the fact that it is a translation – which gives it such a strong air of authenticity.

As an example of the poem's Hiberno-English grammatical structures, Carol Rumens quotes the line, "It is late last night the dog was speaking of you."[91] Here, she explains, present tense combines with past tense, "to create a kind of double vision. What must be a memory is pulled right into the present moment. And that heightening of perception mimics the effects of love, there in front of the reader's mind."[92]

This line is the one remembered by many readers of the poem, and it clearly made impression on one reader in particular. In a letter to his old university friend Terence McCaughey in 1978, Hughes quotes the line to describe the poem when he couldn't remember its title: "is there any supply of poems etc anything resembling the piece Yeats and Lady Gregory did together: "It is late last night the dog was speaking of you" etc – ending "you have taken the moon, you have taken the sun from me, and you have taken God from me." "[93] Hughes does the same almost twenty years later, in his *Paris Review* interview, though here he doesn't keep the Hiberno-English grammar: "my exciting new discoveries in poetry had been things like the first act of *Two Noble Kinsmen* […], or Lady Gregory's translation of the Aran song: "It was late last night the dog was speaking of you." "[94] Likewise, when Hughes and Seamus Heaney included Gregory's translation of 'Donal Og' in *The Rattle Bag* (1982), they cut the first verse of Gregory's original *Kiltartan Poetry Book* version, beginning the extract instead with the line: "It is late last night the dog was speaking of you."

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[90] ibid.
[91] In this case, Gregory's version is indeed a very direct translation. In Irish the phrase is: "*Is déanach aréir*," which word-for-word translates as: "It-is late last-night."
[92] Rumens.
[93] TH to Terence McCaughey [Summer 1978], *Letters*, p. 394.
[94] TH, *Paris Review* interview.

We could guess that by starting with this line, Hughes and Heaney were making a statement, consciously or not, about their leanings towards a certain style of translation, and perhaps they were, although the decision to include a shorter version of the poem was most likely to do with a question of space. Rather, it is in their choosing Gregory's version in the first place that we find a real indication of their shared appreciation for poetry which, to use Csokits's phrase, appeared more "literal" than "literary."[95] Certainly it is in Gregory's method of syntactic-literalness that we can recognise much of Hughes's own translation and poetic preferences. The terms Hughes uses in the introduction to his translations of Pilinszky for example, would not be out of place in a discussion of Lady Gregory's 'Donal Og': "His syntax, for all its classical finish, is quite idiosyncratic. This can be felt clearly in a word-for-word crib – though it is less easy to translate further. Something elliptical in the connections, freakishly home-made, abrupt."[96]

In Gregory's case, she attributes her translation approach first and foremost to Douglas Hyde, whose translations of traditional Irish songs and poems, *The Love Songs of Connacht*, was published to great critical interest in 1904. Hyde's book was a turning point of sorts: James Joyce has his character Haines in *Ulysses* rush off to buy a copy, while the others make fun of its Irish brogue. Later, Buck Mulligan owns up to the prank of pissing against J.M. Synge's front door – Synge being another notable proponent of this form of Irish-English. Reflecting on the recent literary curiosity surrounding Irish folklore, Mulligan cynically remarks: "We are becoming important it seems."[97] The point is that literary figures such as Gregory, Hyde, Synge and Yeats, were making the Irish "important" not only by translating their folk literature into English, but also by insisting on keeping a certain Irish accent or turn of phrase in the English version: the stage-Irish diction that is mocked by Joyce.

In all of this we can recognise Hughes's own situation half a century later: his eagerness to promote the work of foreign poets in English; his insistence that they retain their own identity; but also his tendency, as discussed in the previous chapter, towards exoticism. Buck Mulligan's – or Joyces's – cynicism points us towards this danger, which is inherent in the translation methods favoured by

[95] JC to TH, quoted in DW, *TH&Tr.* p. 49.
[96] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 8.
[97] See James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1960), p. 198 & 193.

Gregory and Yeats, and later by Hughes. This is something which I will discuss in more detail below.

Translation and Violence

It was Yeats who wrote the preface to Douglas Hyde's *The Love Songs of Connacht*, in which he expressed the following opinion:

> Dr. Hyde's prose translations, printed at the end of this book, are I think even better than his verse ones; for even he cannot always escape from the influence of his predecessors when he rhymes in English. His imagination is indeed at its best when he writes in Irish or in that beautiful English of the country people who remember too much Irish to talk like a newspaper […]."[98]

What Yeats is praising here is, ostensibly, literal translation, in the sense that literalism appears to be more to do with the way country people "talk," than how English poets write. His ear is excited by the same oral qualities that Hughes would himself strive to retain in his translations of Pilinszky and that he repeatedly identified and admired in his favourite poets. In this way, Yeats's preference for Hyde's non-literary versions shows Hughes to be fitting into a tradition of subversive literalness, where the spoken style of a rough translation becomes a literary style in itself, going beyond one poet's engagement with another (e.g. Hughes and Pilinszky) to acquire an important literary status. Yeats's own practice as the translator of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1913) may also have set a president for Hughes to promote literalism in the way that he did. As Yeats's biographer Roy Foster points out, Tagore's poems were in the original intricately rhymed; in Yeats's translation, "they appeared as gnomic prose-poetry."[99]

Yeats's concern in his preface to Hyde's *Love Songs* that the use of rhyme associates the poet too strongly with his English "predecessors" – from whom escape is apparently strongly desired – certainly connects with one particular aspect of Hughes's active interest in the effect of literal translation: the emphasis on spoken language. If we contrast Hyde's verse with his prose versions, we find characteristics

[98] W.B. Yeats, Preface to Douglas Hyde, *The Love Songs of Connacht* (Dublin: Dun Emer Press, 1904) [no page numbers]. [Hereafter: Hyde].
[99] Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 470.

in the latter which bear much resemblance both to Augusta Gregory's syntactic-literalness in 'Donal Og' and Hughes's own relatively free-verse renderings of Pilinszky's rhyming originals. As an example, reproduced below is Hyde's verse translation of 'My Grief on the Sea,' once described by Frank O'Connor as "the perfect translation of a great poem from one language into another."[100]

My grief on the sea,
How the waves of it roll!
For they heave between me
And the love of my soul!

Abandoned, forsaken,
To grief and to care,
Will the sea ever waken
Relief from despair?

My grief, and my trouble!
Would he and I were
In the province of Leinster,
Or county of Clare.

Were I and my darling –
Oh, heart-bitter wound! –
On board of the ship
For America bound.

On a green bed of rushes
All last night I lay,
And I flung it abroad
With the heat of the day.

And my love came behind me –
He came from the South;
His breast to my bosom,

[100] O'Connor, p. viii.

His mouth to my mouth.[101]

Now, here is the poem in its prose version:

> My grief on the sea, it is it that is big. It is it that is going between me and my thousand treasures. I was left at home making grief, without any hope of going over sea with me, for ever or for aye. My grief that I am not, and my white múirnín, in the province of Leinster or County of Clare. My sorrow I am not, and my thousand loves, on board of a ship voyaging to America. A bed of rushes was under me last night, and I threw it out with the heat of the day. My love came to my side, shoulder to shoulder and mouth to mouth.[102]

What was it about this short, prose, unrhyming version that made Yeats feel it was so superior to the rhyming verse translation? If we examine it in contrast to its rhyming counterpart, we find the same qualities that we find in Augusta Gregory's version of 'Donal Og' (which, I should reiterate, was also first printed as a prose translation). These qualities include certain devices of folk rhetoric and bardic memory, such as repetition, and the use of apparent tropes (the thousand treasures and thousand loves in Hyde; the gloves of the skin of a fish; the shoes of the skin of a bird, etc. in Gregory).These outlandish specifications have the double advantage of reinforcing the desperation of the speaker's situation, while at the same time increasing their rhetorical power.

In addition, the sentence structure in the prose version of 'My Grief on the Sea' is similarly idiosyncratic to that in Gregory's 'Donal Og.' In the third and fourth lines, the speaker talks of how she was "making grief" (rather than being "abandoned to grief" as she is in the verse translation), and of going "over sea with me," (rather than "Were I and my darling […] On board of the ship"). This reminds us of Gregory's decision in 'Donal Og' to maintain the Irish syntax in the line "It is late last night…". The result, in both poems, is that they sound Irish, even when they

[101] Hyde, pp. 20-21.
[102] ibid. pp. 107-108.

are written in English. In one sense, the translators are making the speaker sound slightly inept at speaking English, but the point is, no doubt, that if these verses were to be perceived as poems of the people, then they must sound as such. "It is evident," says Hyde of the language in one of his translations, "that she was a country girl."[103]

This kind of romanticising, and emphasising of folklore traditions, is arguably parallel to what Hughes was doing as a translator. His desire, for example, to avoid the metrics of Pilinszky's original, or to "spoil" the original, as he said in his letter to Helder Macedo, in order to make a "more concrete" poem,[104] shows how he was exerting a similar kind of power over the target text as were Gregory and Yeats. Despite the appearance of non-intervention, such prose translations can represent what translation scholar Maria Tymoczko has described as "a form of intellectual construction and creation, a metonym in the exercise of cultural strength." As Tymoczko argues: "it is a matter of power."[105]

Hyde, in his prose translation, keeps an Irish word, "*múirnín,*" meaning "darling." Augusta Gregory made a similar decision in her translation of 'Donal Og,' in a longer version of the poem which appears in *The Kiltartan Poetry Book*. Here, stanza seven begins with the phrase "O, ochone": "O, ochone, and it's not with hunger or with wanting food, or drink, or sleep, that I'm growing thin, and my life is shortened."[106] In the Irish version of 'Donal Og', this exclamation appears as "*Och ochón*," meaning something like "Ah misery," or "Alas." Gregory's decision not to use either of these equivalents, or indeed any other English equivalent, implies that she felt the word "*ochón*" would be understood by the people reading her poem. It also implies that she felt it was untranslatable; that the English language had nothing to express such a feeling. As one Irish scholar, Paul Delaney, has argued, the retention of this Irish word in an English version of 'Donal Og,' means it "almost bears the weight of another culture – it is not translated perhaps because it can't be."[107] In other words, by keeping the Irish word in her translation (but, interestingly,

[103] ibid. p. 2.
[104] TH to Helder Macedo, c. 1962, TH, *ST*, p. 209.
[105] Maria Tymoczko, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1999), p. 298.
[106] The stanza in which the Irish word appears is not often included in re-printed versions of Donal Og, which tend to stick to the shorter version, first published by Yeats in 1901 in his essay 'What is Popular Poetry?" (See op. cit.). It is not included, for example, in the version re-printed in *Lifelines*, nor does it appear in Hughes and Heaney's *The Rattle Bag*.
[107] Paul Delaney speaking on *Adventures in Poetry*, BBC Radio 4 (broadcast 16 November 2010).

in a spelling which instructs an English speaker how to pronounce it), Gregory is accentuating its Irish-ness, yet in so doing she is also accentuating its 'foreignness.'

"In all great poetry," wrote Frank O'Connor, "particularly in folk poetry, there is an element of ingenuousness, even of clumsiness, which the academic translator in his laudable desire to attach his poem to the corpus of accepted poetry tends to gloss over."[108] Hughes, like Yeats, was totally opposed to the idea of this kind of "academic translator." Their aim was to maintain – perpetuate even – the "ingenuousness" and "clumsiness" of folk literature. The very flaws of a literal translation – the "impromptu" sound, the fragmentation, the repetitions, the collaging together of languages, the high-pitched urgency, the apparently non-intellectual finish, the sense of authenticity – were not disadvantages. On the contrary, these results were of central interest

J.M. Synge, who was greatly influenced by Gregory's Irish-English constructs, was particularly interested in what he called the "brutal" effect that literal translation could achieve, and his own involvement with literal translation creates a useful parallel with Hughes's. In the preface to his *Collected Poems* (1908), Synge declared that "before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal," and goes on to say that in his translations, the method he used was either "free" or "almost literal, according as seemed most fitting with the form of language I have used."[109] As Augusta Gregory points out in her introduction to *The Kiltartan Poetry Book*, it was from her that Synge first learnt this form of language, discovering in the Gaelic constructions of her translations, she says, the dialect "of which he afterwards made such splendid use."[110] The jagged, accented, literality of Gregory's translations then, was to be the model for a style of poetry which must, as Synge described, have "strong roots among the clay and worms."[111]

In turn, Synge's insistence that violence and poetry went hand in hand, was, claims writer and historian Declan Kiberd, an important part of his "extraordinary influence in the middle period of Yeats's poetry."[112] The declaration that poetry must

[108] O'Connor, p. viii.
[109] J.M. Synge, preface to Synge, p. 219.
[110] Gregory, *Kiltartan*, p. 22.
[111] J.M. Synge, preface to Synge, p. 219.
[112] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1995), p. 169. [Hereafter: Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*].

become brutal, Kiberd explains, "voiced his revolt against the artificial poetic diction which had so emasculated English poetry in the later nineteenth century."[113]

Writing of Synge, Kiberd states:

> The dialect in which he finally found his desired medium was the bilingual weave, the language of his innermost being, what George Steiner has called "the poet's dream of an absolute idiolect.' […] This English is an instantaneous and literal translation from Irish."[114]

Here again we can see a parallel with Hughes's own linguistic revolt in the mid twentieth century. Compare Synge's description of a "brutal" poetry, for example, with Sylvia Plath's description in 1957, of Hughes: "a large part of Ted's voice […] is raised against the snide, sneaking, coy weekend-review poets whose sex is in their head, & the prissy abstract poets who don't care to talk about love in anything but mile-distant abstractions."[115] Compare it also to Edwin Muir's now infamous description of Hughes's "admirable violence" in *The Hawk in the Rain*, or to Alvarez's praise of his "anti-poetical toughness."[116]

Yet the connection made by Kiberd, between literal translation and Synge's development of this new violent style of poetry, is one which is rarely made with regard to Hughes's own poetic violence. This is surely a missed opportunity; one which is especially marked when we recall what Lawrence Venuti describes as the "violence that resides in the purpose and activity of translation."[117] Hughes's excitement about the effect that translation had on English corresponds closely to Synge's. The fact that Synge, inspired by Gregory's methods of translation, went on to influence Yeats, who went on to influence Hughes, makes the link particularly appropriate. Knowing as we do that Gregory's 'Donal Og' was Hughes's favourite short poem, the literalness and brutality of style explored by these Irish poets and playwrights begins to reveal a tenable connection between them and Hughes's own translation aesthetic.

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[113] ibid.
[114] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 626.
[115] Sylvia Plath to Aurelia Plath, March 15, 1957. Quoted in Clark, p. 18.
[116] Edwin Muir, 'Kinds of Poetry,' *New Statesman* 54 (28 September 1957); Al Alvarez, 'Tough Young Poet,' *Observer* (6 October 1957).
[117] Venuti, p. 18.

Shifts of Value

Not everyone would agree that this rough, prosaic style of translation was the best representation of Irish folklore in English. After all, translation into English, as Mary-Ann Constantine points out, "meant translation into the language of a dominant ruling culture,"[118] and certainly, critics of Lady Augusta Gregory recognised in her work a "neo-colonial" position. Her "view of poetry as compensation for poverty," says Declan Kiberd, was taken as a "tell-tale instance."[119]

The issue here is again translation technique, specifically the risk involved in foreignization. As discussed in Chapter One, while foreignization may allow the poem to retain a certain verve and originality, it also runs the risk of exoticizing the text in a way that it had not done in its original language or in the context of its source culture. In an essay entitled 'The Limits of Translation', Douglas Robinson deals with such difficulties, outlining the relationship between foreignization and the type of literal translation which we have seen being used by Gregory in 'Donal Og':

> Foreignism, the insistence upon retaining in the translation some feel of the foreign original, remains technically a moderate form of literalism; but rhetorically, ethically, pedagogically, politically, it becomes something quite different, concerned less with protecting the sanctity of a worshipped text, as literalism often has been, and more with opening the target culture up to the transformative influence of the foreign.[120]

If we apply this argument to our examination of 'Donal Og,' we see that in the case of Augusta Gregory, it is hard to judge whether it was the first, traditional form of literalism (preserving the sanctity of a worshipped text) which concerned her most, or the second (opening the target culture up to the transformative influence of the foreign). On the one hand, Augusta Gregory was born in Ireland, did indeed speak the Irish language, and was a strong advocate of Irish literature. This would imply that she was using literalism in the more traditional way, to protect and promote a

[118] Mary-Ann Constantine, in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English Volume 4*, ed. Peter France and Kenneth Haynes (OUP, 2006), pp. 294-5.
[119] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 623.
[120] Douglas Robinson, 'The Limits of Translation," *Oxford Guide to Translation*, p. 18.

national literary treasure. "Both the Irish language movement," argues Maria Tymoczko, "and Gregory's choice of a non-standard Hiberno-English dialect must be understood as strategies for countering the dominance of power relations coded into the very language of the colonizers."[121]

On the other hand, Irish was not Lady Gregory's mother tongue, she was a member of the aristocracy, and her true understanding of the workers and peasants of Ireland – into whose accents she wished to translate traditional verses such as 'Donal Og' – was limited: she was to them a wealthier, better educated, outsider. Remembering that Gregory was herself a writer, who admitted to using the "Gaelic construction" in her creative work,[122] her translation methods start to appear more as the second form described above – predominantly concerned with using the effects of translation to make powerful English poems. In addition to all of this we could ask the larger question, whether translation can save the life of a language which might otherwise die out, or, on the contrary, aid its demise – as the Italians say: *Il traduttore traditore*: the translator is a traitor. The answer depends on which view of Gregory you take; her Hiberno-English versions can be seen either as the empowering, or as the colonizing, of the Irish language and its speakers. In Maria Tymoczko's opinion:

> On the level of language, the use of an Anglo-Irish idiom in a literary text suggests that the work is a translation from Irish; like twentieth-century postcolonial writings from other parts of the world, such a literary text becomes, so to speak, a translation of itself, a translation for which there is no source text. A literary work of this sort is marked implicitly as a pseudo-translation, and a translation using an Anglo-Irish idiom avoids the problems of fluency and domestication, always foregrounding the fact that it is a translation per se and that it represents an *other* language and culture.[123]

Particularly striking in this passage is the fact that Tymoczko's description of "pseudo-translation" – the text that becomes "a translation of itself, a translation for which there is no source text" – could serve as a direct description not only of Hughes's aims for Pilinszky ("always foregrounding the fact that it is a translation

[121] Tymoczko, p. 138.
[122] Gregory, *Kiltartan*, p. 22.
[123] Tymoczko, p. 138.

per se and that it represents an *other* language and culture") but also, and especially, of his own poetry, in *Crow*. For Hughes and Pilinszky there was not such an overtly political agenda as there was with Gregory, although in post-war Hungary, translation into English could be perceived as having a political advantage. Yet while Hughes tended to describe his motivation for literal translation more in terms of faithfulness to the original poet (and a desire for his own neutrality), rather than as inspiration for his creative work, it is clear that he was very interested in what Douglas Robinson described as "opening the target culture up to the transformative influence of the foreign." This was already evident at the start of Hughes's editorship of *MPT*: "we weren't beyond the hope of influencing our own writers in a productive way."[124]

Of course Hughes's endeavours in translation were immensely successful in fulfilling both aims. His editorship of *MPT* and his collaborative project with Pilinszky marked the start of a practice of co-translation central to the development of British poetry since the 1970s. At the same time, his work in translation had a direct and pivotal influence on his own creative practice. As with Yeats and Gregory, translation became a means by which he could attempt to "challenge and shift the English literary system – including English literary values, English poetics, and the English language."[125]

When we talk about Hughes's literalism therefore, we are having to think beyond a particular translation technique as it might be defined in a Translation Studies text book, or as it might be practiced by a professional translator who is deeply engaged with the linguistic challenges of converting from one language to another. The very concept of literalism has been translated by Hughes; he was interested in it as a means of expression, a style of writing, which would appear less concerned with aesthetics than with semantic meaning.

It is possible, therefore, to argue that Hughes's appreciation of the style of Gregory's 'Donal Og,' like his approach to translating Pilinszky, connects to an already deep-seated desire to locate a poetic style which would be suited both to his own personal 'material' and his personal 'voice.' Seamus Heaney describes it very well in an interview in 1979:

[124] TH, *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 204.
[125] Tymoczko, p. 135.

> Hughes's voice, I think, is in rebellion against a certain kind of demeaned, mannerly voice. It's a voice that has no truck with irony because his dialect is not like that…I mean, the voice of a generation – the Larkin voice, the Movement voice, even the Eliot voice, the Auden voice – the manners of that speech, the original voices behind that poetic voice, are those of literate, English middle-class culture, and I think that Hughes's great cry and call and bawl is that English language and English poetry is longer and deeper and rougher than that. That's of a piece with his interest in Middle English, the dialect, his insisting upon foxes and bulls and violence. It's a form of calling out for more, that life is more. And of course he gets back from that middle-class school the enmity he implicitly offers. Ted may be accused of violence, of grotesquerie, but there is tenderness and reverence and seriousness at the centre of the thing.[126]

It is noteworthy that Heaney's description, coming as it does (as did Desmond Graham's and Geoffrey Hill's) from another poet and poet-translator, is exceptionally forthright and clear.[127] Heaney has the ability to express freely, yet concisely, the poetic position that Hughes had taken. By putting his stress on Hughes's stylistic energy, Heaney manages to emphasise the positive aspects of the approach as it was perceived by Hughes himself. What might appear to be a "violation"; "a rape of some kind" (to use Hughes's terms) against poetry itself, turns out to be, for Hughes, an "assertion," which "demolishes, in some abrupt way, a force that oppressed and *violated* it."[128]

Indeed, looking at Heaney's description of Hughes's interests in Middle English, dialect, foxes, bulls and violence, its possible to see that 'literal translation' would not be out of place in his list. Hughes's pursuit of the sound of direct, unmediated renditions of foreign texts was also of a piece with what Heaney called his cry that "English poetry is longer and deeper and rougher than that." This is why 'Donal Og' in Augusta Gregory's version was picked by Hughes as his favourite poem, and why, in his words, "no short poem has ever hit me so hard, or stayed with me so closely" – because it seemed to make English rougher, while at the same time allowing it to remain serious and tender. In other words, the awkwardness of

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[126] Seamus Heaney, in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber, 1981), pp. 73-4. Quoted by William Scammell in his introduction to TH, *WP*, p. ix.
[127] Heaney also sets himself outside the 'English' mainstream whist plumbing the roots of the English language, in his translation of *Beowulf* especially.
[128] TH, 'Poetry and Violence,' in *WP*, p. 254.

Gregory's Hiberno-English, the dialectic twist, its 'violence' on English grammar, the resulting oral directness of it, and the intense emotion portrayed by it, captured precisely what Hughes had long desired and aspired towards in his own work.

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Drawing parallels can, in itself, be suspect; running the risk, as Heather Clark said about Hughes, of co-opting all subjects into one's own theoretical system. In any academic study the scholar makes a forensic scrutiny, pinpoints specific events, isolates words or phrases, makes comparisons, finds evidence of influences, all in an attempt to locate meaning. To carry out such an exercise with regard to Hughes's idiosyncratic view of translation can seem especially at odds with the subject matter, because the poetic act for Hughes – be it translating or composing his own verse – was always aiming away from the intellect, almost at times in opposition to the intellect. This is an essential element of his attraction to literalism. As a poet, Hughes didn't need to speak Hungarian; he didn't need to own up to being influenced by Keith Douglas or Popa; or to remember the *title* of Lady Gregory's 'Donal Og': these poems, and these translations, in their freshness, in their strangeness, in all their "jagged oddness," were memorable to Hughes as a poetic force, as a poetic direction. Yet at the same time, Hughes's insistence on using the same set of terms to describe what he found most gratifying in poetry as he used to describe the effects of translation, seems to provide a reasonable opportunity to discover what lay behind his own poetic decision-making, and to explore his intense attraction towards the sound and appearance of literal English versions.

Chapter Three: Notions of Literalness

In this chapter I will look in more detail at the paradoxical nature of Hughes's translation technique, questioning an approach which on the one hand seems to be subservient to the original (and therefore relatively passive), and on the other hand recognisably Hughesian (and therefore relatively active).

In the first half of the chapter I will re-examine Hughes's suggestion that Csokits's initial, rough, unrhyming renderings were well suited to Pilinszky's original poetry, and ask why he might have thought this to be the case. My findings will highlight the connection between Pilinszky's poetics and Hughes's translation methods. Central to my discussion will be their attraction to a certain type of basic utterance, and the belief that this gave truth and authenticity to the text. For Pilinszky, as a poet, this was expressed in terms of what he called "some sort of lack of language, a sort of linguistic poverty."[1] For Hughes, as his translator, it resulted in a tendency to strive towards a particular effect in his final versions: a more direct, cruder, less literary sound.

How Hughes set about achieving this sound is the topic of the second half of the chapter, where I will look at what Weissbort termed Hughes's "notion of literalness," as it manifested itself in his various approaches to translating – whether these versions were categorised as "literal transcriptions" or "free adaptations." Hughes's interest in Wilhelm Bleek's supposedly direct transcriptions of Bushmen lore, as well as Hughes's actual work on the Pilinszky poems, will serve to illustrate my argument.

The New Original

In the conclusion to his 2011 publication, *Ted Hughes and Translation*, Daniel Weissbort reflects on the fact that such a sophisticated poet as Hughes should have dedicated so much time "to making translations which were attacked as reeking of

[1] JP, quoted in TH, introduction to *DoL*, p. 8.

the original and were likely to bring him little credit as an independent artist."[2] Even though Hughes frequently insisted that he got a lot from translation, says Weissbort, he forged for himself a method which seemed in opposition to other poet-translators (such as Lowell), resisting inventiveness and insisting instead on exactness, for which he "followed the original verbally and lineally."[3] In this way, Weissbort suggests, translation was for Hughes a mental discipline, his translations of Pilinszky, for example, seen by Hughes "as an act that aligned him with the original author's piety."[4]

As we have seen, this supposed non-interventionist procedure has not always been taken at face value, and for Weissbort, the topic of Hughes's approach to translation is not one on which agreement is likely to be reached. He quotes, as an example, Neil Roberts's queries about Hughes's so-called "principle of literalness": "Where Hughes is working from a literal translation of a poem in a language he does not know," writes Roberts, "this principle seems paradoxical – what can Hughes contribute?"[5] Searching for an answer, Roberts turns to Hughes's work with Pilinszky, examining the archival evidence. Comparing Csokits's literals to Hughes's versions, he concludes the following: "Hughes is genuinely subservient to Pilinszky: there are few occasions on which he can be detected imposing a 'Hughesian' note."[6] Even when he does make changes, Roberts goes on to say, it is often to restore the more literal renderings that Csokits had initially provided, usually "less stalely literary" than his alternatives. These contributions by Hughes "undoubtedly enhance the texts as English versions," but even so, Roberts concludes, "there are far more of Csokits's words than of Hughes's in the published text."[7]

Elsewhere, however, we see what appears to be the opposite argument, namely that Hughes, by being so faithful to Csokits's versions, has not been subservient to Pilinszky at all, in the sense that by doing so he has ignored important aspects of Pilinszky's formal qualities. "You would never guess that any formal structure or lyrical impulse lay behind most of the poems," writes Wilmer in his 1977 review of Hughes's Pilinszky translations, "though Pilinszky is technically a

[2] DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 114.
[3] ibid.
[4] ibid.
[5] Neil Roberts quoted in DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 38.
[6] Roberts, p. 186.
[7] ibid.

very traditional poet."[8] "Whatever he gained in intensity in sticking closely to the meaning of Pilinszky's words," notes George Gömöri in a later review, "he lost in his unwillingness to recreate the richness of the poet's form."[9] Gömöri goes on to say: "while one welcomes the 'Hughesian' Pilinszky of 1977, there is a case for re-translating Pilinszky's major poems into English in a manner more faithful to the form of the original."[10]

Even Csokits, after listening to a radio broadcast of Hughes reading his Pilinszky versions, admits to detecting a Hughesian influence: "It was so strange to listen to your reading," he wrote in a letter to Hughes the day after the broadcast. "The poems sometimes became more and more Hughes-like and less and less Pilinszky – but that is because you read them as your own poems. It was quite an experience and very revealing."[11]

Also revealing, though in an apparently opposite way, was the reaction of Hughes's American publishers Farrar and Strauss. When Hughes submitted his book of Pilinszky translations to them, they employed a Hungarian consultant to advise them. To Hughes's disappointment, they decided to reject the book. Hughes wrote about the incident to Weissbort:

> He [the Hungarian consultant] said he could not see anything in my translations. Says I'd let myself be strait-jacketed by my co-translator, tied up in literal word for word renderings of the Hungarian inspirations. Where were Pilinszky's exciting rhythms? None of my versions 'takes off' from the literal.[12]

This reaction, as stated here by Hughes, suggests that by remaining so faithful to Csokits, Hughes has ignored important aspects of Pilinszky. In other words Hughes is being accused of being unfaithful to the original by being too faithful to the literal.

Weissbort's reaction to Farrar and Strauss's rejection further illustrates the difficulty: "Wrongly, in Hughes's view," Weissbort writes, "it was assumed that the

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[8] Wilmer, *PNR*, p. 36.
[9] Gömöri, *HQ* (2008), p. 171.
[10] ibid. George Gömöri has gone on to do just that, collaborating with Clive Wilmer to produce versions of Pilinszky which make a very clear use of rhyme and form. See for example 'János Pilinszky: Poems,' trans. Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri, in *The Hungarian Quarterly* 49 (2008), 15-17. See also JP, *Passio*, where, as Saradha Soobrayen explains: "For Wilmer and Gömöri a chief preoccupation was to reinstate rhyme and metre into the mix […]." *MPT* 3: 17 (2012) [op. cit.].
[11] JC to TH, 8 February 1976, The Ted Hughes Archive, British Library.
[12] TH to DW [no date given], quoted in DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 21.

desired transformation could occur only if the translator was inspired and free, unconstrained by his source." Here, Weissbort's sympathy with Hughes allows him to overlook the actual recommendations suggested by Farrar and Strauss, who argue not so much for freedom, as Weissbort says, but for the more modern-day norm that a translation should be faithful to the whole poetic experience of the source, which entails also paying attention to form.[13] Hughes's faithfulness to Csokits's rough texts meant that, in their opinion, this had not happened.

Yet this is not to say that Hughes was misleading readers by suggesting that certain qualities in Csokits's version offered a suitable representation of Pilinszky's poetics. On the contrary, Hughes's focus on their irregular, stripped-back effect was in some ways extremely relevant to the original, and arguably offered a highly appropriate metaphor for Pilinszky's poetry. Weissbort's suggestion, then, that Hughes saw his translation methods "as an act that aligned him with the original author's piety," is in this sense by no means wholly far fetched, if only in the fact that by ignoring the original's rhyme and avoiding a more literary quality, Hughes's poetic language had, as Pilinszky claimed to have done in his own language, renounced its riches; become linguistically poorer, less concerned with outer appearances and more concerned with truths of meaning. While Csokits recognised therefore, that there was something Hughes-like in the Pilinszky translations, he also recognised that there was, in its very style of alteration, something highly appropriate to Pilinszky's original poetics. Hughes's translation had in one way become more Pilinszky than Pilinszky himself:

> Without the softening effect of the original meter and rhyme scheme the impact of some of these poems can be painful; they sound harsher and Pilinszky's view of the world appears grimmer than in Hungarian. These X-ray versions, then, are evidently not for the reader in need of a verbal soporific or a musical therapy against life. There is no translation without some loss of the original, but by sticking to the 'linguistic poverty' of Pilinszky's poetry we remained faithful to the inner core of

[13] See for example the view expressed by George Szirtes: "To put it simply I don't believe that form is decoration […] it is structural in the development of the poem and is an essential part of the voice. Not that forms replicate each other in different languages; they seek echoes, no more." 'Introduction to Six Translations (with Veronika Krasnova) of Anna Akhmatova,' in *MPT* 3 (2005), p. 27.

> his message and its mode of expression: the unadorned language of the dispossessed.[14]

Hughes talked of similar qualities in his Radio Three broadcast of the translations, when he described Pilinszky's language as "unadjusted" and "unembellished" – words which he might have used to describe his own translations of the work. He talked also of a post-war "silence," which in Pilinszky's poetry "unites itself with the dumbness,"[15] recalling his own enthusiasm, in his *MPT* editorial, for the "struggling dumbness" of word-for-word versions. Thus the effects of translation to which Hughes was most drawn fitted very well with the qualities he found in Csokits's version of Pilinszky, making Csokits's text, in all its poetic failings and lack of finish, the best and final version. And while critics such as Wilmer and Gömöri lamented the loss of certain rhythmic, metric and formal qualities, others expressed approval of Hughes's technique. Most importantly, Pilinszky was himself more than satisfied with the results. Although unable to read the English directly,[16] he felt that Hughes had managed to provide "the first valid analysis of my 'poor' poetry," and expressed delight over Hughes's versions of his poems.[17]

Pilinszky and the Literal

In the introduction to his Pilinszky translations, Hughes quotes the following statement, made by Pilinszky, about the genesis of his poetic diction:

> Should someone ask, what after all is my poetic language, in truth I should have to answer: it is some sort of lack of language, a sort of linguistic poverty. I have learned our mother-tongue from my mother's elder sister, who met with an accident, was ill, and got barely beyond the stage of childlike stammering. This is not much. No doubt the world has added this and that, completely at random, accidentally, from very different workshops. This I *received*. And because the nice thing about our mother-tongue is exactly this fact, that we receive it, we do not want to add

[14] JC in DW, *TP*, p. 11.
[15] 'Ted Hughes reads his translations of János Pilinszky,' broadcast BBC Radio 3, 6 February 1976.
[16] Not speaking English, Pilinszky clearly can't be a reliable witness to the success of Hughes's versions as translations, and his approval was no doubt largely due to the fact that he was flattered that a major poet from the 'free world' had taken such a deep interest in him.
[17] JP to TH, 5 August 1976, Emory. My trans. The original French reads: "*Ton préface est le premier analyse valable jusqu'ici concernont ma "pauvre" poesie.*"

> anything to it. We would feel it detrimental to do so. It would be as if we tried to improve our origin. But in art even such a poor language – and I must say this with the pride of the poor – can be redeemed. In art the deaf can hear, the blind can see, the cripple can walk, each deficiency may become a creative force of high quality.[18]

Pilinszky's description here contains several important points about his poetics, all of which can be seen to relate in some way to Hughes's translation of it. The first is Pilinszky's "linguistic poverty" (and his "lack of language"). This is a similar sort of poetic renunciation, and asceticism, which Hughes seemed to be seeking in his methods as a translator, in particular in his decision to ignore any formal sophistication that may have been present in the original, but also in his tendency, as noted by Roberts, to choose Csokits's more literal, rather than his literary, renditions of various words. As we know, Hughes liked to stay, where possible, as close as he could to Csokits's English, which was less fluent than his own, eager in this way to maintain a sense of the limitations Pilinszky had put on his own poetic diction. Hughes was engaged by the language, explains Weissbort, "as deployed by someone whose knowledge of it was necessarily limited, and believed that its authenticity must be safeguarded."[19] Hughes in this sense consciously lowered the poetry, as it were, seeking the sound of the ordinary voice where possible and reluctant, therefore, to improve on Csokits's prosaic renditions. The plain, but also at times irregular, uneven and "jagged" quality of Csokits's versions conveyed a certain "poverty," therefore, or at least limitation of language, and became in this way the ideal vehicle for a translation of Pilinszky.

The second relevant point in Pilinszky's statement is his attribution of his linguistic poverty to the circumstances of his early language acquisition. This is significant in a variety of ways, but in particular in the way that it implies a certain inevitability, and passivity on the part of the poet. As we have seen, this is something that Hughes also implies in his discussions of his Pilinszky translations, where he regularly states that Csokits's versions needed very little intervention from him: "Very many lines of his [Csokits's] rough draft," he writes in his introduction, "have been impossible to improve."[20] In the same way, Pilinszky stresses the fact that his mother-tongue was "received," that "we do not want to add anything to it," that it

[18] JP in an interview, 1969, quoted in TH, introduction to *DoL*, p.8.
[19] DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 29.
[20] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 13.

would be "detrimental to do so." Pilinszky's wording is particularly evocative of the process of translation when he suggests that to make any such improvements "would be as if we tried to improve our origin." Hughes makes a similar point in his essay about his Pilinszky translations: "The sense of selfless, courageous testimony pushed to a near-saintly pitch is very strong in Pilinszky. It puts a translator under exacting obligations. There is no question of introducing anything from the translator's own medicine bag."[21] Here, Hughes, like Pilinszky, is emphasizing his own passivity in the project: like a shaman (with his "medicine bag"), his role was merely that of a medium through which another body speaks – though of course his very use of shamanistic imagery demonstrates the Hughesian nature of his interpretation of the whole process. "Literalness," as he writes in his introduction to the translations, becomes not merely a stepping stone to the final product, but rather, "the first principle."[22]

Thus both Pilinszky as the poet, and Hughes as his translator, saw themselves as striving to remain close to the sound that had first inspired them: the awkward, limited, urgent, stammering sound of a language struggling to come into existence. Neither wished to impose any unnecessary additions of their own, but preferred to aim for a sense of anonymity. In Pilinszky's case, by naming his aunt as his linguistic inspiration, the Hungarian poet avoids affiliation with more expected outside sources; he avoids – as Hughes once wished it were possible to do – any literary influences at all.[23]

We glimpse this elsewhere in an interview Pilinszky gave in 1971. Once asked what poets had influenced him most, Pilinszky replied:

> Many, many, and yet – without wishing to sound immodest – no one. Everybody's uniqueness, 'onceness,' seems to declare itself in a certain sense of shame, which everyone bears with a certain modesty, throughout his life. At the same time, I wrote recently that a perfect poem would be one whose author could not be detected, but which made everybody feel that it was written about him, or that he too could have written it.[24]

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[21] TH in DW, *TP*, p. 19
[22] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 13.
[23] In his Faas interview, Hughes says: "Maybe it would be best of all to have no influences. Impossible of course. But what good are they as a rule?" (p. 14).
[24] JP in 'János Pilinszky: On the Edge of the World: A radio interview with Éva Toth' (1971), trans. Judith Balogh, in DW, *PoS*, p. 341. [Hereafter: JP, Toth interview].

Pilinszky's idea here, of a poem authored by no one but also by many, in fact recalls Hughes's own approach to translation, especially in the early stages when he forgot, much to Csokits's frustration, to sign any of his translated texts. Although Hughes was apologetic to Csokits at the time, his own enthusiasm for the impromptu 'onceness' of literal versions suggests that he too felt the ideal poem was one written in a kind of anonymous, Benjamin-type "third language," a universal vocabulary to which we all had access but no one owned. For Hughes and Pilinszky, their neutrality signalled purity, a directness of contact with the origin that proved the poem's, or the translation of the poem's, authenticity.

This desire in both Hughes and Pilinszky to maintain close and unmediated contact with their origin, is something that Nicholas Bishop explores in his PhD thesis on Hughes, *The Dynamics of the Self in Ted Hughes's Adult Poetry* (1988). Here, Bishop discusses the declaration made by Pilinszky about his linguistic poverty, and suggests that what Pilinszky refers to as his lack of language, "is a way of keeping in touch with our origins, of checking the hubris of a conscious addition, or the possible inflations of style."[25] It is part of what Bishop calls an ironic process, a "creative silencing of false conscious attitudes or false personality."[26] In Hughes's own work too, argues Bishop, we see an increasingly "systematic silencing of false consciousness."[27] So much is this the case, Bishop suggests, that the task which Hughes claims as Pilinszky's, "is also his own."[28]

Particularly important for Bishop is Pilinszky's attitude to creativity. Commenting on a lecture given by Pilinszky in 1970 called 'Creative Imagination in Our Time,'[29] Bishop looks at Pilinszky's analysis of the "mirror existence" of imagination, "striving to experience in the certainty of style that which should be attainable only in the self-forgetfulness of obedience, only "with eyes downcast." "[30] Pilinszky laments this situation; his wish is that we could turn away from the narcissistic ego-centric nature of art: "would that we were blind and alive," he says

[25] Nicholas Bishop, *Poetry and Grace: The Dynamics of the Self in Ted Hughes's Adult Poetry* (PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, 1988), p. 79. [Hereafter: Bishop].
[26] ibid. p. 78.
[27] ibid. p. 79.
[28] ibid. p. 85.
[29] This lecture was published in *MPT* 11 (1971), 13-14 (trans. John Batki). My quotes are taken from the extract in Bishop's thesis, whose wording differs slightly from the Batki version. Translator not specified.
[30] JP in above mentioned lecture, Bishop. p. 86.

in the lecture, "with our backs to the mirror."[31] Bishop argues that the view Pilinszky expresses here is central also to Hughes's own development: "It is possible to use Pilinszky's paradigm," he writes, "as one conclusive description of Hughes' entire development, from the aesthetics of the mirror to the submissive 'incarnating of the world.' "[32]

Bishop makes no direct reference to Hughes's translation aesthetics here, yet "Pilinszky's paradigm" as expressed in his anti-mirror theory bears a striking resemblance to Hughes's interpretation of the process of translation. Hughes's expressed reluctance to "re-invent" or "re-align" Csokits's literal versions of Pilinszky,[33] and his stated wariness of employing "devices extraneous to the original,"[34] adheres to Pilinszky's own disdain of the "narcissistic elements" of art, which place "the stylistic certainty of appearances before the self-forgetful incarnation of the world."[35] Hughes's praise of the rawness of literal versions, and his desire to maintain their sense of "first-hand contact" with the original poet, "no matter how fumbled and broken," clearly resonates with Pilinszky's own refusal to "improve" on his mother-tongue, which although "poor" is at least authentic, in that it is true to its own beginnings.

Hughes's aim as Pilinszky's translator, in other words, provides a useful example of his attempt to carry out the "task" that Bishop saw as synonymous to Pilinszky's. Both in Hughes's translation methods, and in the poet he is translating, we find the aim which, according to Bishop, unites the two poets: to strike "down false selves,"[36] and to present the reader with a text which comes as directly as possible from its source of inspiration, even if this source is – as it invariably is – in some way damaged or unfinished; a poorer, plainer thing than might be expected in what we think of as poetry.

In avoiding the topic of Hughes's methods of translating Pilinszky, Bishop must also side-step another key resemblance between the aims of the two poets: what he briefly refers to as the "irony" of their creative silencing. The point here is that the impossibility of Pilinszky's "silent" poetry echoes the impossibility of what

[31] ibid.
[32] Bishop, p. 86.
[33] TH, introduction to JP, *SP*, p. 14.
[34] TH, Editorial for *MPT* 1 (1965), p. 1.
[35] JP, 'Creative Imagination in Our Time,' *MPT* 11 (1971). Op. Cit. (p. 13).
[36] Bishop, p. 76.

Weissbort describes as Hughes's "hands-off," translation of it.[37] If, by naming his aunt as linguistic inspiration, Pilinszky was making a conscious decision to rid himself of a certain poetic sophistication, then the similarity between the source and target texts can be found not so much in their actual un-touched neutrality, but rather in their desire to create the *impression* of an un-touched neutrality. In this sense we can say that just as Pilinszky was active in his creation of a "poor," passive poetry, so too was Hughes active in his "hands-off" translation. Both Hughes and Pilinszky were making stylistic choices, in other words, and revealing their desires and aims while doing so.

In this way at least, Hughes's translation aesthetic can be said to be highly suitable to Pilinszky's poetry aesthetic, in the sense that both poets consciously simplified their language to make it appear rough, unfinished, plain anonymous, and so on. As Pilinszky once explained: "I have always expressed my ideas on a lower plane. That is to say I have always made my verse simpler than my original thoughts."[38] In turn, Hughes's own enthusiasm for Csokits's versions of Pilinszky demonstrates a similarly active input into their final appearance.

In an interview that I conducted with the translator Francis Jones, I asked about Pilinszky's claim regarding the origin of his poetic language. Jones's reply supports the notion that Pilinszky's statement about his linguistic poverty can be seen as part of his conscious move towards a particular poetic style:

> […] what's very telling about his poetry is that if asked for a linguistic model he chooses an aunt who has aphasia, whereas reading people like Attila József, Miklós Radnóti, people like that are almost certainly the bigger influences on his actual poetic diction. But there are also personal circumstances which will have led him to choose this kind of stripped-down imagery, elective affinities, choosing to follow these things. It's modernist, or post-modern, this fractured sense of self and reality you get in poets, from Popa, Pilinszky, Hughes, and other people writing in English or French or whatever, at that time.[39]

The phrasing here is very revealing. If Pilinszky "chooses" his aunt as a "linguistic model", if his choice is due to "personal circumstances" and "elective affinities", if it

[37] DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 10
[38] JP, Szilágyi interview, p. 114.
[39] Francis Jones in Jones interview (2012), pp. 63-4.

is "modernist" and part of a "fractured self of self" being used by other writers "at that time," then the provenance that Pilinszky provides of his poetic language should encourage us not to regard him as literally mute and passive, but rather, and crucially, metaphorically so: his aunt's aphasia was an appropriate metaphor for the type of poetry Pilinszky needed to write at the time.

For more evidence of this we can turn to another account provided by Pilinszky of his relationship with his aunt, where we again see how Pilinszky's passivity becomes reversed. In his autobiographical novel *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*, Pilinszky describes a time when as a child he tried to teach his aunt some new words. At first, Pilinszky remembers, he got nowhere. "Then once, weeks later, holding my face in her hands she uttered for the first time the word practised for days in vain; "tree"."[40] The result, he explains, was that for him the value of each solitary word took on a talismanic quality: "The few words that she did employ," said Pilinszky, "were uttered with a fearful intensity."[41]

Here it is the young boy and not the aunt who is doing the teaching; Pilinszky is fully in control. Not only is he able to instruct his aunt how to speak, but he can also recognise in her efforts a highly effective sound: the power of the single, simple, urgent utterance. It is a reversal in which we can recognise again a similarity with Hughes's translation methods, whereby Hughes, as Pilinszky's translator, seems to experience an almost identical revelation. Hughes's desire to maintain the unmediated appearance of Csokits's versions meant that he too simultaneously gave and received a language, recognising in their "fumbled and broken" style a language that he could adapt not only for Pilinszky, but for himself too.[42]

When we compare Pilinszky's original poetics with Hughes's translation aesthetic, therefore, it is not only possible to discuss their similarities in terms of their search for an authentic, truthful representation, but also in terms of the paradoxically metaphorical nature of this search – the way in which their desire for anonymity and simplicity reveals, ironically, their desire to forge a specific poetic sound which is unique to them. To suggest this is not to downplay their ideals, or their output. Rather it is to find a way to understand them and respect them. Mostly, it is to suggest that the use of metaphor is fundamental to their work as poets.

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[40] JP, *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton* (Manchester / Budapest: Carcanet / Corvina, 1992), p. 23. [Hereafter: *CWSS*].
[41] JP, Szilágyi interview, p.115.
[42] The ways in which this manifests itself in Hughes's own poetry is discussed in Chapter Four.

"Odd that a thing is most like itself when likened," wrote the American poet Richard Wilbur in his poem 'Lying,' a line, and a title, which highlights the strange double-task of the metaphor, which is to conceal the original in order to reveal it most clearly. The word 'metaphor,' from the Greek meaning to "carry from one place to another," is an exact parallel to the word 'translation.' Surely an essential part of both is the creative necessity "to lie" in order to tell the truth. Thus Hughes's statement that his translations "in the sense of being word for word are close to the originals," makes perfect sense. The lie of their literality forms a large part of their truth, because in their apparent exactness and sparseness and harshness, they do appear to resemble Pilinszky's own aims, while at the same time denying important aspects of his actual original.

While it is clear, therefore, that Hughes's Pilinszky often ended up sounding to others very much like Hughes himself, this may not be because Hughes simply converted Pilinszky into his own idiom. It may also be because there was a certain affinity between the two poets' underlying poetic intentions; what we could call, in the context of this thesis at least, their shared desire for a certain standard; a certain kind of *metaphorical* literalism.

Crisis and Creativity

Pilinszky may have singled out his aunt as his linguistic inspiration, but elsewhere he freely admitted to the powerful influence that the Second World War had on the development of his poetic language. "It gave me the words of poverty and the touch of the anonymous poets," he wrote in *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*.[43] Because of this, he says: "After Auschwitz poetry is possible again."[44]

What is interesting here is that Pilinszky appears to be reversing the famous quote from Adorno's 1949 essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society,' where he states: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." In fact, Pilinszky is not reversing it, but extending it: to write a barbaric poetry is all that is possible now. Indeed, Adorno's argument that critical intelligence will not be able to resist total "reification" of the mind, as long as it "confines itself to self-satisfied

[43] JP, *CWSS*, p. 23.
[44] ibid. p. 66.

contemplation," is in complete accordance with Pilinszky's own standpoint.[45] Pilinszky recognises that the "silence of artistic integrity 'after Auschwitz'" (Hughes's phrase),[46] suggested a new way of writing, one which would accommodate the subject of the war without degenerating, as Adorno put it, "into idle chatter."[47] Through the loss of one kind of poetry, Pilinszky found a different and more appropriate poetic direction.

In this we again find a parallel with Hughes, who discovered in the losses incurred by the translation of poetry a highly desirable poetic form and style. Whichever one of Pilinszky's sources we choose to focus on, therefore – his aunt, the war, or even his difficult relationship with Catholicism (a third point Hughes raises in his introduction) – there is one important factor in all of them which presents a link with Hughes's approach to translation. This relates to the importance that both Pilinszky and Hughes place on the role of crisis in creative production. "Each deficiency may become a creative force of high quality,"[48] claimed Pilinszky in 1969, while Hughes, in the introduction to his Pilinszky translations, observes that: "the moment closest to extinction turns out to be *the* creative moment."[49]

The connection between the personal experience of a crisis and true artistic expression forms an essential part of Hughes's interpretation of, and attraction to, the effect that translation could have on a poetic text. Hughes believed that all good art was the result of a crisis, and was drawn to art which seemed to embody it.[50] It followed, therefore, that a poem which had been translated word-for-word became, for Hughes, the ideal poetic form. This is because it was in essence a poem in crisis – a poem at a turning point, and even, in some instances, a poem written at a moment of actual danger. Its irregularities, its "oddness", its staggered "dumbness", its loss of form and rhyme and punctuation, but also its sense of accuracy and directness, all reflected this state of crisis. Particularly in terms of post-war poetry, therefore, a poem in the initial stages of translation became a realistic representation of "the

[45] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society' in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p. 34.
[46] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 10.
[47] Adorno [op. cit].
[48] JP, quoted in TH, introduction to *DoL*, p. 8.
[49] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 12.
[50] See TH to Lisa and Leonard Baskin, 6 May 1984: "Almost all art is an attempt by somebody unusually badly hit [etc.]." *Letters*, p. 484.

post-war move away from literary language," a poetry which is "less distinctly 'poetic,' more free and colloquial."[51]

Making such a link between the actual crisis of the war, and the appearance of these poems in a literal English translation, captures the image of Eastern European poetry as it was perceived by British and American writers in the 1960s and 70s. In an article entitled 'Translation and Mistranslation in Contemporary British Poetry,' Jerzy Jarniewicz discusses the impact that translations of poets such as Herbert, Holub and Różewicz had on contemporary British writers. "One could only mention Ted Hughes," he writes, "who radically changed his poetics under the influence of these Eastern European poets."[52]

In fact, Hughes had, for several years, been revealing his interest in the effect that the experience of a crisis could have on poetic expression. Of particular interest in this regard is an article he wrote on *Orghast*, the experimental performance piece he made in collaboration with Peter Brook in 1971, for which he invented a language of grunts, hums, glottal noises and exclamations. In December 1971, this article (entitled 'Talking Without Words') was published in *Vogue* magazine – as inappropriate a place as any to find a piece of writing wholly concerned with the falseness of superficial surfaces. Nonetheless, the piece is a very useful introduction to Hughes's 'literal' aesthetic, and to his attraction to a language which had in some way been broken-down by experience.

One section in particular is of special significance, in which Hughes is not talking directly about his work on *Orghast* at all. Instead, he tells a story about his preparation for writing a poem on Gallipoli. He explains that although he read many memoires and historical accounts, the most enlightening part of his research was his experience of meeting two of the survivors of the attack. He describes them as follows:

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[51] Desmond Graham, introduction to *Poetry of the Second World War* (London: Chatto, 1995), pp. xvi & xvii.

[52] Jarniewicz, p. 95. For further discussion, Jarniewicz directs readers to Jerzy Jarniewicz, 'Christopher Reid's Eastern European Poems,' *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Litteraria Anglica* 1, 1997. Jarniewicz highlights the attraction of an "idiom clearly recognizable as foreign, different from what was commonly regarded as the English tradition." What he doesn't point out is that Hughes, as editor and co-translator, was partly responsible for the style in which these poets were being re-produced in English. The influence, in other words, may well have been double-sided, so that the authentic-style voice of the Eastern European post-Holocaust writer to which Hughes was aligning himself, could be said to be in part engineered directly by himself, or at least to reflect his already established interest in achieving such authenticity in his own poetry and in the translations he was publishing.

> one eloquent, one taciturn, both unsophisticated serious men, and they talked about the war in general. The eloquent one had been badly wounded, the other one only slightly. Yet from the eloquent one I seemed to get very little, merely anecdotes. From his monosyllabic friend something so frightening and terrible came over, that even now I remember that man's memories with caution. Both had lived through and registered the same terrific events. Yet words and natural, narrative, dramatic skill concealed everything in the one. While in the other, exclamations, hesitating vague words, I don't know what, just something about his half movements and very dumbness released a world of shocking force and vividness.[53]

Hughes's interest in the monosyllabic Gallipoli survivor helps to contextualise his translation technique. Traumatised and almost made dumb by war, the Gallipoli survivor communicates to Hughes, through his lack of skill, something far greater and far truer than his more fluent and practiced counterpart can ever hope to. The story is placed within the article as an example of how truth "is reluctant to use words," and how, "at every point, a man's deeper sufferings and experiences are almost impossible for him to express by deliberate means."[54] It is an example, therefore, of Hughes's recurring fascination with the effect that a crisis can have on language, and the poetic power he felt was inherent in the resulting struggle with words.

Hughes never names the survivors, and it appears from his telling of the story that they were merely unknown participants ("the eloquent one" and his "monosyllabic friend") who were taking part in his research. Yet in 2011, as part of a BBC Radio Four programme on Hughes, Melvyn Bragg asked the poet's widow, Carol Hughes, to explain what Hughes's father had meant to him, in particular the effect that his father's experience in Gallipoli may have had on Hughes's writing. The question, and ensuing answer, suddenly revealed the identity of the two men in Hughes's *Orghast* article:

> I think what he would say about his father was that his father kept everything inside himself. In the poems about his father, he talks about his father waking in the night from his dreams and shouting, as if re-living the First World War experiences. Ted's

[53] TH, 'Orghast: Talking Without Words', in *WP*, p. 123.
[54] ibid. pp. 122 & 123.

> maternal uncle, Walter, could talk very eloquently and passionately about experiences of the First World War. Ted's father would sit at the table, gripping the arms of the chair, and not really saying anything.[55]

What this suggests is that Hughes's tormented, mute Gallipoli survivor, the one he most revered, may have been based on his own father, and that his longstanding attraction to this muteness, this "struggling dumbness," may therefore have been part of an attempt to understand the intensity and reality of his father's experience in the war. It is a connection which illustrates the depth of Hughes's desire to possess this sound, suggesting that his aims as a translator may stem in part from a natural, and touching need on the part of the son, to imitate the father, and to try to come to terms with the impressions he received of his father while still a child.

It also illustrates something else, namely Hughes's reluctance to reveal the personal connection between the development of his own writing and his attraction to the "half-movements and very dumbness" of the wounded speaker – be it his taciturn father, or Pilinszky, or Sylvia Plath, or Keith Douglas, or Shakespeare. Perhaps such unwillingness helps to further our understanding of the importance that the act of co-translation had for Hughes. Not only did it provide him with the opportunity, as a poet, to remove himself from his own work (to get him "off my own rails," as he once put it),[56] but it represented the ultimate act of an almost neutral, and very instinctual, creative production.

On the One Hand Free

In the article 'Ted Hughes and Truth,' Daniel Weissbort suggests that in Hughes's very literal renderings of poets such as Yehuda Amichai and János Pilinszky, "an apprenticeship of sorts was being served which led to the later "free" adaptations."[57] He mentions as examples Hughes's versions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1994), Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (1995), and Racine's *Phèdre* (1998). The overlap can be seen,

[55] Transcription of 'Archive on Four: Ted Hughes: Memorial Tones,' broadcast BBC Radio 4, 10 December 2011.
[56] TH to Leonard Baskin, 13 October 1996, *Letters*, p. 687.
[57] DW, *Irish Pages* (2005), p. 188.

Weissbort argues, in the fact that there is a "literalistic component in these later works of Hughes […]."[58]

By "literalistic" Weissbort means Hughes's desire to reveal only what appeared to him to be the most essential elements of the text and he cites, as evidence of this, Hughes's preference for a much shortened version of the original. This seemed to demonstrate, as far as Weissbort could see, Hughes's refusal to re-invent: "True to his "literalistic" ideals," writes Weissbort about Hughes's version of the *Oresteia*, "when he takes liberties these are in the form of deletion rather than addition or invention."[59]

Weissbort expands on the overlap of Hughes's approach in his notes to the *Selected Translations*. Providing a brief summary of Hughes's methods as a translator, Weissbort suggests that broadly speaking, translation for Hughes:

> could either be what might be described as adaptation, based on a prolonged engagement with a major text, or a kind of literalism, as aimed at for instance, in his translations of János Pilinszky and Yehuda Amichai, where his model, if he can be said to have had one, is Bleek's transcriptions and English versions of Bushmen folklore […]. These apparently divergent aims, on the one hand free adaptation and on the other literal transcription, converge or are combined in his later adaptations of classical Greek drama (the *Oresteia* and *Alcestis*).[60]

The point Weissbort makes here about the converging of Hughes's two approaches is extremely relevant to my own understanding of Hughes's translation methods, but I think it is important to make even more of a distinction than Weissbort does between Hughes's "notion of literalness,"[61] and the "literal transcriptions"[62] that Hughes received when co-translating certain foreign poets such as Pilinszky. Or perhaps I should say that it is important to make much less of a distinction, because it seems to me that Hughes's "notion of literalness" was always part of his "literal transcriptions," just as much as it was part of the later "freer" adaptations. Both were notions, in other words; both were connected more to Hughes's poetic judgement and desires, than they were to simply being literal in translation terms. Again, this is

[58] ibid.
[59] DW, in *TH&Tr.* pp. 68-9.
[60] DW, note to 'Bardo Thödol' in TH, *ST*, p. 2.
[61] DW, introduction to TH, *ST*, p. x.
[62] DW, note to 'Bardo Thödol' in TH, *ST*, p. 2.

not to suggest that Hughes's versions of Pilinszky were inaccurate – their actual closeness to the original is not relevant here at all. It is rather to reinforce the idea that the literal, as Hughes perceived it, always held a special *poetic*, rather than merely *strategic*, significance.

Bleek and the Literal

Weissbort's use, in the above quote, of Wilhelm Bleek's *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore* as a model for Hughes's approach to translation helps to illustrate this further. Hughes revealed his interest in this book in the introductory essay he wrote for the 1983 publication of *MPT*, in which he looks back over the early issues of the magazine. In this essay he comments on his and Weissbort's preference, as editors, for "the most literal translation of the verbal sense,"[63] admitting first that:

> 'the most literal' covers a wide range between denotative and connotative extremes. Ideally we would have liked to see at least some poems translated with the concern for both extremes served as meticulously and flexibly as in Bleek's translation of Bushman lore – though we understand the limited appeal of anything so raw and strange. […] What we were looking for, naturally, was the best of both worlds, and as in the Bushman lore of Bleek we occasionally found it in the work of very modest poets. Most often, oddly enough, though perhaps inevitably, we found the closest thing to it in translations made by poets whose first language was not English, or by scholars who did not regard themselves as poets.[64]

Even before looking at the relevance of Hughes's reference to Bleek, it is possible to see how Hughes's comments help shed light on his personal interpretation of translation. This includes his suggestion, for instance, that "literal" covers a "wide range between denotative and connotative extremes;" that it is meticulous but also flexible; that it is "raw and strange," "modest" in its poetic aspirations, and that it is spoken in a non-native English, or by a non-poet. Most of these qualities fit with the qualities Hughes admired in the versions he received from Csokits. Although Csokits was a poet, his translations of Pilinszky clearly offered him no personal reward as such, so he was in this regard a "very modest poet." His literals, as described by

[63] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, p. 205.
[64] ibid. pp. 205-6.

Hughes, were both denotative, in that they provided the exact word-for-word meaning, but also connotative in that they included those "unfinished approximations" and "alternative words etc." that Hughes so admired.[65] In this way they were also both meticulous and flexible, conveying Pilinszky's "simple helpless accuracy," while at the same time remaining poetically evocative and providing opportunities for change and alteration.[66] Similarly, where Hughes talks of Bleek's versions as "raw and strange," we find echoes of his description of Csokits's translations of Pilinszky as having a "rawness," and a "strangeness."[67] This all confirms what we have already discovered: Csokits's versions of Pilinszky were entirely suited to Hughes's personal interpretation of "literal translation."

Yet once we do take into account the actual text by which Hughes is setting his literalistic standards – "Bleek's translation of Bushman lore" – then we find still further evidence to suggest that these standards evolve from, and depend on, his desire for a particular poetic effect in English, rather than his desire to achieve an understanding of the original language.

It is likely that Hughes came across this book while at Cambridge, when during his final year as an undergraduate he read Archaeology and Anthropology. Published in 1911, it constitutes five years of research conducted by Dr. Wilhelm H. I. Bleek, from approximately 1870 to 1875, and the continuation of this work, after his death, by his sister-in-law Lucy C. Lloyd. Born in Berlin in 1827 and educated at the universities of Bonn and Berlin, Wilhelm Bleek was a philologist who had since the late 1850s been interested in the language of the ancient indigenous /Xam people of southern Africa, the 'Bushmen.' In 1870, as the 1911 introduction puts it, "fortunately for science, unfortunately for the wretched creatures themselves," two Bushmen were retained in the convict station near Cape Town, where Bleek was working.[68]

Imprisoned for killing livestock for food, the men were allowed to be moved to Bleek's residence, where they were eventually joined by more of their group, to be observed by Bleek and his family. Bleek and Lloyd thus set about mastering the clicks and sounds of the /Xam language, developing for the first time a system of

[65] TH to JC, 9 February 1975, Emory.
[66] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 13.
[67] ibid.
[68] George McCall Theal, introduction to W. H. I. Bleek and L. C. Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore* (Switzerland: Daimon, 2001), p. xxxiv. [Hereafter: *Specimens*].

written symbols with which to record their findings: an exclamation mark indicated the cerebral click, for example; a circle with a dot in the centre was the labial click; a reversed 'y' was "a strong croaking sound in the throat"; a double curved line, a "gentle croaking sound in the throat."[69] All of this is described in the preface to Bleek's *Specimens*.

In order to undertake this work, Bleek had to abandon his other ongoing projects, the results of which had included his publication of *A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages*, "a work in which fame had been gained, and which offered still further celebrity in its prosecution."[70] His sacrifice, suggests George McCall Theal in the introduction, demonstrates Bleek's "utter devotion to science" and an "entire forgetfulness of self," which should be lauded.[71]

McCall Theal suggests that Bleek's *Specimens* will be most valuable to the philologist, because the original Bushman text is printed side by side with the English translation. His descriptions of the findings now sound very dated. He states that "the myths indicate a people in the condition of early childhood," their vocabulary limited, with no word for a numeral higher than three, and their plurals formed mainly by reduplication, but nevertheless "ample for their needs."[72] While their "unreasoning belief in many things" may seem ridiculous to an adult European, he suggests the Bushmen represent our own far remote ancestors. "We may therefore pity the ignorant pygmy," he writes, "but we are not justified in despising him."[73]

A more recent foreword by Megan Biesele – one which Hughes won't have seen as it was written in 2000 – seems to stand somewhat in opposition to these impressions and concentrates less on the value of the book to English-speaking linguists, and more on what it can offer to the modern indigenous tribes. For them, suggests Biesele, this is an opportunity to become scholars in their own past, and to use their knowledge to educate outsiders: "The /Xam and other San of southern Africa belong to a group of people whose past and present, to outsiders, have become quintessentially conflated under the rubric of primitive simplicity," she writes.[74] Bleek's writings offer the key to unlocking this "false and frozen equation," because they "come directly from the transcribed and painstakingly annotated words

[69] See Lucy C. Lloyd, preface to *Specimens*, p. viii.
[70] George McCall Theal, introduction to *Specimens*. p. xxxiv.
[71] ibid.
[72] ibid. p. xl.
[73] ibid. p. xxxix.
[74] Megan Biesele, foreword to *Specimens*, p. I.

of /Xam San ('Bushmen') individuals of the nineteenth century."[75] For Biesele, one of the most exciting results of such a study is an ongoing project involving present-day San people, "who see it as a way to reclaim some of the lost roots and identity of their people."[76]

Neither the introduction, nor the more recent foreword, mentions the style of Bleek's and Lloyd's English translation. To provide an example here, included below is an extract from their translation of a Bushman poem called 'The Songs of the Blue Crane.' It includes notes by the "narrator" (one of the Bushmen):

> It is the Blue Crane's story which it sings; it
> sings (about) its shoulder, namely, that the "krieboom"
> berries are upon its shoulder; it goes along singing –
>
> "The berries are upon my shoulder,
> The berries are upon my shoulder,
> The berry it † is upon my shoulder,
> The berries are upon my shoulder.
> ( ) The berries are here (on its shoulder),
> Rrrú are here;
> The berries are up here,
> Rrrú are up here,
> Are up here;
> The berries rrrú are put away (upon) it (its shoulder)."
>
> † Its name is one; they (the berries) are numerous; its name is (still) one. The "krieboom" berries are many; the name of the berries is one. It appears as if its berry were one, (but) they are many.[77]

Even seen out of context, and without the presence of the parallel original text, it is very clear that this is a translation. Yet this overt translated-ness – what you might call extreme literalism, or foreignism, or exoticism – is not mentioned at all either in the 1911 introduction or in the 2000 foreword. Perhaps the reasons for this lie in the apprehension of the text as having entirely philological or linguistic uses.

[75] ibid.
[76] ibid. p. III.
[77] Extract from 'The Songs of the Blue Crane,' trans. Bleek / Lloyd in *Specimens*, p. 225.

As far as Hughes is concerned however, his interest seems to have been solely related to the style of the translation, and the appeal, as he says, of something "so raw and strange." Certainly, looking again at the extract above, it is possible to recognise in it several key characteristics which might have appealed to Hughes. This includes its title ('The Songs of the Blue Crane' sounding very like 'Songs of the Crow'); its rough, broken-English ("The berry it is upon my shoulder"), and its awkward syntax ("It is the Blue Crane's story which it sings"). The Bushman poem also contains those alternatives and bracketed variants that Hughes admired in Csokits ("The berries rrrú are put away (upon) it (its shoulder)"), and in addition we find the oral-style, very simple, song-like repetitions ("The berries are upon my shoulder, / The berries are upon my shoulder, / the berry it is upon my shoulder"). All of these qualities help to increase the sense that this is a direct translation, that nothing has been added, that it is almost scientifically 'literal.' There is also another similarity between Bleek's translation and the sort of translations Hughes was seeking in his *MPT* editorials: Bleek was German. Could this have influenced the slightly odd English of his Bushman translations? It is not made clear in the book itself whether or not this is the case. What is made clear is Bleek's "entire forgetfulness of self" which allowed him to forsake his personal fame in order to persevere with his transcriptions of Bushman lore; he had the humility, therefore, the "modesty" that Hughes had found in the poet-translators he most admired.

There is a twist to the tale. In a letter to the *Mail and Guardian* in November 2005, Gus Ferguson of Cape Town revealed that the "hallowed Bleek records, housed at the University of Cape Town, could be an elaborate hoax perpetrated by the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek, aided and abetted by his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd, and his daughter, Dorothea." [78] According to Ferguson, Bleek's great-grandson Hans-Dieter Kepler, told members of a conference on marginalised languages that his great-grandfather had an "odd, almost post-modern sense of humour."[79] While Bleek and Lucy Lloyd did spend time with the San prisoners, he said, it was "only as a front to their constructing a fictional language to intrigue and

[78] Gus Ferguson, 'Revealed: Bleek Hoax', *Mail and Guardian*, 24 November 2005. See on-line at: http://www.mg.co.za/article/2005-11-25-march-31-april-6 [Accessed 31.8.10]. An interesting fact, adds Ferguson, is that the only person now able to speak the language is Alvin J Klingman at the University of Arkansas, currently rendering Hughes's *Birthday Letters* into /Xam.
[79] ibid.

fool future generations of academics."[80] Letters from Lucy Lloyd to her sister support the suggestion of a hoax, says Ferguson.

If Gus Ferguson of Cape Town (a comic poet who, according to some, cannot be trusted)[81] is correct in his supposition, then we should ask what kind of effect this has on Hughes's citing of Bleek's "meticulous" methods, as his model for "literal translation." The answer is that, in fact, it has quite a positive effect. The point is that it is helpful chiefly because of how little it matters: in terms of Hughes's individual interpretation and use of translation, the actual scientific authenticity of Bleek's research is as irrelevant as is the actual closeness of Hughes's translations of Pilinszky to the original poems. What is important is the fact that Hughes regarded Bleek's text – the English text – as an ideal style of translation, without any need or desire to understand its actual closeness to the original language. What he found agreeable was its appearance of accuracy and faithfulness.

Bleek's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* is in this way a wholly genuine source regarding Hughes's literalism, hoax or not, because it demonstrates the extent to which it was the sound in English – the sound of a language spoken rather than written down; something which seemed "raw," direct and real – that excited his imagination.

Hughes the 'Revelator'

Hughes follows on from his reference to Bleek, in his 1983 essay, by describing the sort of translators he and Weissbort, as editors of *MPT*, tried to avoid, specifically those who:

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[80] ibid.

[81] In a critical essay about transculturation, Dan Wylie quotes Ferguson's letter, and suggests "The only sly prankster here, of course, is the letter-writer, Cape Town's comic poet Gus Ferguson." He suggests: "Ferguson's prank effectively asks this: Why shouldn't we laugh? Why take the Bushman presence in our history and literature so seriously? One could propose many answers: most would centre on the great autochthonous longevity of the Bushmen; their ubiquitous and extraordinary rock art; the self-evident richness of their oral lore; the urge to expiate their all-but-total genocide; and the fact that there are surviving groups of self-styled Bushmen or Khoisan who take their own identity very seriously. They are an inescapable part of our history (not to mention our advertising) which needs to be recognised." Dan Wylie, '//Kabbo's challenge: transculturation and the question of a South African ecocriticism,' *Journal of Literary Studies* (Sept 2007). Available on-line at: http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-172168074.html [accessed 8. 2. 12].

> claimed to produce a 'parallel equivalent' of some original's unique verbal texture. It seemed to us, in our purism, that a 'parallel equivalent' in the way of imagery, evocative effects, rhyme schemes etc., had to be a new thing, quite different from what we were after. However fine it might be in itself, in relation to the original it could only be the crudest of analogies, with the added crime that it seduced honest curiosity with a charming counterfeit.[82]

Here Hughes echoes a discourse very common at the time and since: that a translated poem which tries to replicate the source-poem's texture inevitably betrays the source-poem's semantic content.[83] He probably had Lowell in mind again, against whose free translation approach he tended to contrast his own methods. This was particularly clear in his 1965 editorial when he wrote that Lowell's *Imitations*, "while undeniably beautiful, are the record of the effect of one poet's imagination on another's."[84]

Such a contrast is of course extraordinary, because, as we have seen, although Hughes may be correct about Lowell, he is surely incorrect to suggest that his own translations are not a record of the effect of the source poet on his own imagination. What complicates it is simply the fact that the "imaginative effect" in Hughes's case is all to do with literality, which is aligned with a notion of authenticity. Indeed, we already know that Hughes's translation methods were influenced by his personal attraction to (and interest in creating) a basic, plain version of a poem, because in his letter to Helder Macedo, quoted previously, he admits to "spoiling" the original in order to make his own version "more concrete" and "less suggestive."

He seems to have been willing to do the same in his other translation work too, and Hughes's skill as a translator often seems to lie in this ability to re-invent and re-create the source text while all the time appearing to be driving closer and harder into its core essence. His refusal to poeticise his English – or rather his insistence on de-poeticising it – allows his versions to have the appearance of being literal, while incorporating a great deal of his own invention and interpretation. As Marija Bergam suggests in a recent paper about Hughes's translation of *Phèdre*,

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[82] TH, introduction to *MPT* (1983) / TH, *ST*, pp. 205-6.
[83] Francis Jones summarises the debate in Jones (2011), but also takes issue with its simplistic, either/or presumption. See also Jones interview (2012).
[84] TH, Editorial for *MPT* 1 (1965), p. 1.

once the "stylistic adaptation, which renders Racine's language more stripped down and colloquial," is accepted, the most significant translation shifts remain those that partially contradict the supposed faithfulness of Hughes's approach. These shifts, Bergam argues, are "amplification, particularisation and addition, resulting in a degree of stylistic reinforcement. This is precisely where Hughes's own poetic voice emerges."[85]

Such shifts have been noted by other scholars investigating Hughes's translation technique. At the 2010 Hughes Conference at Cambridge, papers were delivered on Hughes's translations of Wedekind, Racine and Aeschylus, and all three speakers agreed that Hughes had a tendency to intensify his versions, to make them visceral, and more direct.[86] Carol Bere, who delivered her conference-paper on Hughes's version of Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, developed her point in a letter to me:

> Regarding my reference to Hughes's "intensification" of certain passages of *Spring Awakening*, I think I probably made a similar comment in my writing on Hughes's translation of Lorca's *Blood Wedding.* I had read all of the available translations of *Spring Awakening* in English (as I had of Lorca's play), and while I realized that Hughes had made some changes / revisions, as far as I could tell, his sentences in critical moments generally tended to be spare, stripped down, occasionally creating an effective silence between sentences – all of which had the overall effect of intensifying meaning. Hughes contributes to this feeling further by using dashes selectively at a few important moments in *Spring Awakening*.[87]

These are revealing observations, especially as the changes that Hughes seems to be making – stripping down, creating silences, intensifying meaning, using dashes – all emulate to a certain degree the urgent, fragmented, spare appearance that we have seen him admire in a wide range of writers, elsewhere. It is as if he is re-creating a literal-style version, without actually being literal at all. Also interesting is Bere's slight concession in her explanation: she writes that "while" Hughes had made

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[85] Marija Bergam, 'The Monster in the Riddle: Translation Analysis of Hughes's *Phèdre.*' Paper delivered at the Ted Hughes Conference. Cambridge (2010). Unpublished.
[86] The papers included Marija Bergam (above citation); Carol Bere, '*Spring Awakening*: Sex, Repression, and Rock 'N' Roll,' and Stuart Hirschberg, 'The shaman, Trickster and Scapegoat Motif in Hughes's *Oresteia.*'
[87] Carol Bere, e-mail correspondence, 13 October 2010.

changes and revisions, these resulted in more "spare, stripped down" sentences. The implication is that by making deletions and reductions, Hughes's input was less intrusive than if he had made additions and expansions.

This is of course in line with Hughes's own opinion, whereby he seemed to regard his translation methods as brutal but necessary 'revelations' of the inner, essential meaning of the text. See for instance his description of his methods in translating Seneca's *Oedipus*, where he openly admits to shortening and simplifying the text, while at the same time pointing out that he didn't actually add anything – the point being, no doubt, that he saw his role not as creator, as such, but as revelator:

> it was my idea in the translation to redo that – to find some way of discarding the ornateness and the stateliness […] and to bring out some quite thin but raw presentation of the real core of the play. And in doing that, I shed every mythological reference, which shortened the play by about a third. I shortened every sentence. In fact, I discarded sentence structure […] I didn't have to imagine a whole new dramatic dialogue […] And I stripped it again, and I stripped it … and this process went on and on and on. I went through many, many drafts until, finally I was down to about 250 words – that's what it felt like – and a rigid, sort of ugly language, which somehow seemed to come out of this central situation that we were driving towards. But I didn't add anything. I just drew what there was out of the original text or out of the original – the implications of the original text. And ended up, finally, with a very short play which just was … just a play about this central situation, this little naked knot.[88]

Here Hughes's descriptions of his final version – words such as "naked", "raw", "essential", "stripped", "presentation of the real core" – chime clearly with the descriptions we have seen him use elsewhere about his search for literalism. Certainly, despite his extensive re-working of the text, Hughes still saw his final version of Seneca's *Oedipus* as something un-worked, un-corrected, crude, and above all, un-free ("I didn't add anything.").

[88] TH, in an interview by Stan Correy and Robyn Ravlich, broadcast March 1982, Radio National and the ABC, Australia (transcribed by Ann Skea). http://ann.skea.com/ABC1.htm [Accessed 6.5.08]. pp. 2-3 of 7. [Hereafter: ABC interview].

This simply proves Weissbort's original point: that in Hughes's so-called free adaptations, he displays the same "notion of literalness" that he first developed when making his more "literal transcriptions." My point, however, is that Hughes was capable of implementing exactly the same kind of revisions and alterations, the same amplifications, particularisations and additions, in those "literal transcriptions" too, so that even in his translations of Pilinszky, we can find the same tendency to alter the initial version, in order to make it sound more authentic – perhaps even to make it appear as though it had hardly been altered at all.

Hughes's Pilinszky: Verbal Adjustments

As an initial example of this, it is useful to look again at Carol Bere's comment above about Hughes's use of dashes, which she said had the effect, in *Spring Awakening*, of intensifying the meaning. In his Pilinszky translations, Hughes regularly swapped Csokits's commas and full stops for dashes, and in some instances inserted dashes where there was no other punctuation-mark at all. In his re-working of the poem 'Frankfurt,' for example, Hughes repeatedly makes such alterations. In the extracts below, we can see what happens when Hughes inserts dashes, and also when he makes some other "intensifying" changes. Csokits's literal version is given first in bold, followed by Hughes's version in italics:

There was an empty sand-pit on the river bank,
In the river bank, an empty sandpit –

Among the bulging sacks and overturned buckets,
Among the spilling buckets and the bursting sacks –

forced out of the harrowed dirt.
out of the gouged mush –

No matter where, just to be freed /get away/ from here!
Only to get away – no matter where!"

and over us abruptly afflicted loneliness.
Then all at once – the shock of loneliness!

In these extracts, Hughes's dashes and his removal of grammatical fillers such as "there was" and "where" heighten the drama of the story, making it sound more urgent, as if the moment is really present in the speaker's mind. In the first example, Hughes starts directly, abruptly and quickly, by cutting off the explanatory "There was." He also changes the order of the phrases, so that the scene is quickly and clearly set; now the river bank and the empty sandpit are the key words in this line. The dash at the end suspends the image and holds it still for a moment. Crucially, the memory is recalled as it would be in a spoken recollection, as a series of isolated moments, rather than a smoothly flowing sequence.

In the next example, Hughes increases the intensity of the moment by making the images more active: the buckets are not simply "overturned" (past-tense) but "spilling" (happening now). Likewise, the sacks are not just "bulging" but "bursting" (actually getting out, like the characters want to do in the poem). In the next line, the expected phrase "harrowed dirt" gets changed to a much more evocative and physical suggestion of refuse: "gouged mush." Here, by using a combination of the visceral "gouge" with the ordinary childish word "mush," the image becomes much more resonant, and more directly felt. In the next line, Hughes reverses the phrases and shortens the more gentle "just to be freed from here" to the more desperate (more bursting) "Only to get away."

In the final example, we see Hughes opting for the short and expressive "shock of loneliness" instead of Csokits's convoluted and literary "abruptly afflicted loneliness." By shortening his line it becomes, as Carol Bere writes, "spare, stripped down." It also becomes incredibly accurate. The "shock" of loneliness conveys an internal, violent, sudden impact; an acute state of prostration following the over-stimulation of nerves. The insertion of an exclamation here is also a potent sign of the intensity of the moment: the writer is crying out to the reader: This is it! Make this important!

These examples show that despite his suggestion to the contrary, Hughes was perfectly capable of making alterations to the original literal. At the same time, they show that his choices were governed by an intense desire for literality: often his changes seem to be based on the literal definitions one might find in an English dictionary, rather than on 'creative descriptiveness.' In general, as a translator, Hughes seems highly reluctant to settle for anything less than the most literal

definition. Or rather, to settle for anything more. Where his aim is repeatedly to heighten the drama and intensity, it is also always to lower the language to its most basic, most abrupt, most direct meaning.

For further evidence of this, I will now look at some more examples of Hughes's translation procedure, focusing in particular on a range of specific word-choices and alterations made when he converted Csokits's literal of Pilinszky's 'Apocrypha' into its final English form.

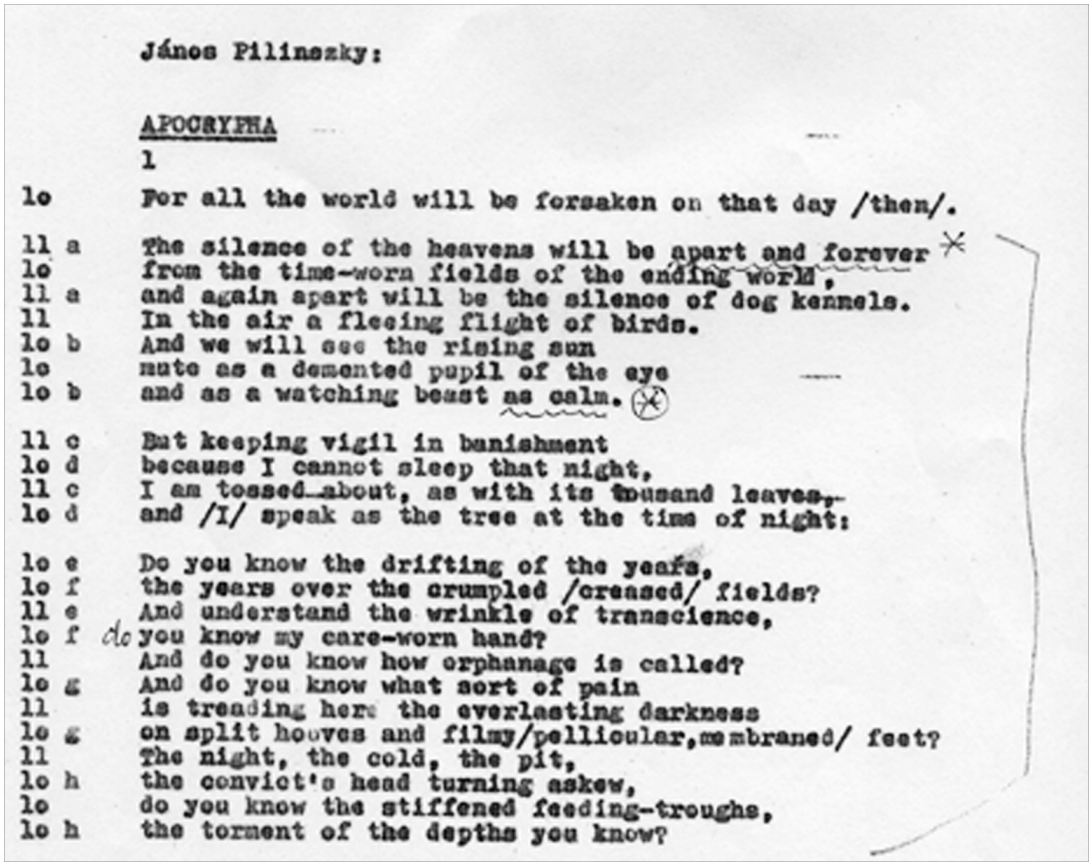
Hughes's 'Apocrypha'

It is clear from a letter Hughes wrote to Csokits in 1975, that Hughes had at one stage hoped to include Csokits's word-for-word version of Pilinszky's major poem 'Apocrypha' in his introduction to the Pilinszky translations. This was because, as he says in the letter, "it will make everyone see how much my version owes to you," and also because, as he suggests in the published introduction, he felt that his own version had failed to capture the "atmosphere and power" of the original poem, as vividly.[89] His eventual decision not to include it was, as he explained to readers, due to the fact that: "my version inched itself so close to his that there would be no point now in printing two almost identical texts."[90]

By making this statement, Hughes is presumably doing what he had thought the inclusion of Csokits's literal would have done: demonstrating the effectiveness of Csokits's literal as a vehicle for Pilinszky's poetics, and, more importantly, re-emphasizing his own loyalty to it. It follows, it seems, that when we read his version of 'Apocrypha' in the final published collection, we could just as well be reading a word-for-word rendition of it. Formally and metrically equivalent it will not be – no literal is – but it will at least, suggests Hughes, be faithful to the "atmosphere" inherent in the source text, and strongly conveyed by Csokits. So good is Csokits's "roughest literal" of 'Apocrypha, argues Hughes, "any solution seems tame."[91]

A copy of Csokits's literal of 'Apocrypha' is stored in Hughes's archive at Emory University, and an extract from the first page of this document can be seen overleaf.

[89] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, pp. 13-14.
[90] TH, introduction to JP, *SP*, p. 14.
[91] ibid. p. 14. Also in TH, introduction to JP *DoL*, p. 13.



János Pilinszky:

APOCRYPHA

1

10 For all the world will be forsaken on that day /then/.

11 a The silence of the heavens will be apart and forever
10 from the time-worn fields of the ending world,
11 a and again apart will be the silence of dog kennels.
11 In the air a fleeing flight of birds.
10 b And we will see the rising sun
10 mute as a demented pupil of the eye
10 b and as a watching beast as calm.

11 c But keeping vigil in banishment
10 d because I cannot sleep that night,
11 c I am tossed about, as with its thousand leaves,
10 d and /I/ speak as the tree at the time of night:

10 e Do you know the drifting of the years,
10 f the years over the crumpled /creased/ fields?
11 e And understand the wrinkle of transcience,
10 f do you know my care-worn hand?
11 And do you know how orphanage is called?
10 g And do you know what sort of pain
11 is treading here the everlasting darkness
10 g on split hooves and filmy/pellicular,membraned/ feet?
11 The night, the cold, the pit,
10 h the convict's head turning askew,
10 do you know the stiffened feeding-troughs,
10 h the torment of the depths you know?

Fig. 2. Extract from typescript (carbon copy) of Csokits's literal of Pilinszky's '*Apokrif*' sent to Hughes from Munich in the late 1960s. [Emory].

For comparison, included below is the corresponding part of the poem in Hughes's final version, as it appears in *The Desert of Love*. Having the two versions close together like this means that we can see exactly what Hughes's "verbal adjustments" entailed, and judge the real nature of his engagement with Csokits's initial version:

> Everything will be forsaken then
>
> The silence of the heavens will be set apart
> and forever apart
> the broken-down fields of the finished world,
> and apart
> the silence of dog-kennels.
> In the air a fleeing host of birds.
> And we shall see the rising sun

dumb as a demented eye-pupil
and calm as a watching beast.

But keeping vigil in banishment
because that night
I cannot sleep I toss
as the tree with its thousand leaves
and at dead of night I speak as the tree:

Do you know the drifting of the years
the years over the crumpled fields?
Do you understand the wrinkle
of transience? Do you comprehend
my care-gnarled hands? Do you know
the name of orphanage? Do you know
what pain treads the unlifting darkness
with cleft hooves, with webbed feet?
The night, the cold, the pit. Do you know
the convict's head twisted askew?
Do you know the caked troughs, the tortures
of the abyss?

The two versions are certainly superficially fairly similar. The stanza-breaks correspond, the line count is almost the same, and many of the actual words remain unchanged in Hughes's version. Csokits's handwritten suggestions, which were inserted at the foot of the document, have been implemented by Hughes, and there has been no overt experimentation or extreme creative re-writing by Hughes. While he has clearly ignored the syllabic count and rhyme scheme indicated by Csokits along the left-hand side of his literal, Hughes has otherwise seemingly stayed very close to Csokits's literal version.

Of course, as Hughes himself suggested, the two texts are only "almost" identical. Hughes has realigned some of the syntax, partly clarified layout and tidied away the slashes, the alternative words, and the brackets in Csokits's literal version. But other changes have been made too – alterations of vocabulary and deletions of punctuation – and it is here where we find the most interesting evidence of Hughes's

activities when translating Pilinszky, in particular his desire to be literalistic even when it means moving away from the actual initial wording provided by Csokits.

The first change we notice is, like a lot of the changes here, a minor one, yet it indicates a central aspect of Hughes's methods. In the opening line, Hughes changes Csokits's rather literary and distant phrase 'For all the world' to the single, and much less literary, though still powerful, "Everything." He does the same when replacing Csokits's longer and more theatrical "on that day," with "then." In so doing, the somewhat less plain, and biblical-sounding "forsaken" can remain, and even gain strength by being placed between these two ordinary, casual words: "Everything will be forsaken then." The message becomes incredibly direct and startling, fresh and surprising, while maintaining its Apocalyptic associations. Hughes's solution has created a powerfully immediate, oral, declamatory opening to the poem.

The next obvious alteration is a series of new line breaks: stanza two goes from being seven lines in Csokits's version, to nine lines in Hughes's. The newly isolated phrases ("and forever apart / […] / and apart") create very short lines, so that visually speaking, the stanza opens out, gains space around itself, and appears less dense; cleaner and clearer, though more abrupt. Also, it allows Hughes to make use of the repetition of the word "apart," by using it at the end of his new lines. The three-times repeated word grows in intensity each time we read it, while the subtle enjambment that Hughes has introduced reinforces the whole sense of "apartness" between the various images: "The silence of the heavens will be set apart / and forever apart / the broken-down fields of the finished world, / and apart / the silence of dog-kennels." In this way the word gains a highly appropriate emphasis and intensity.

Within this stanza, Hughes has also changed various words and phrases. For example, "ending world" becomes "finished world," a more final, more concrete description. Csokits's "fleeing flight of birds" becomes a "fleeing host of birds," a phrase which not only feels better on the tongue than Csokits's clumsily consonantal "fleeing flight," but which introduces an exciting new collective for birds. Here, "host" seems especially apt, alluding as it does to the themes of war ("host" as in army) and Catholicism ("host" as in bread consecrated for the Eucharist), both of which are prevalent in Pilinszky's writing. Here we see Hughes re-inventing, utilizing his poetic skill in order to find a word which will capture the meaning of the

whole image, while also looking beyond it to the whole poem, and even the whole collection of poems.

Next, "mute" becomes "dumb," another example of Hughes's literalistic – or realistic – style of language, a sort of hard-line determination to weed out false description (regardless of whether the 'falseness' was there in Csokits's version). Here, "mute" ('silent; not emitting articulate sound') is not nearly as accurate as "dumb" ('unable, abnormally or normally, to speak'). In this case, speechlessness, not soundlessness, is for Hughes a much more accurate description of nature, but it also, crucially, connects with the theme of the whole poem. As the protagonist exclaims in a later stanza: "I do not understand the human speech, / and I do not speak your language."

The other alterations in this stanza, where Hughes changes "pupil of the eye" to "eye-pupil," or "as a watching beast as calm" to "calm as a watching beast" are merely corrections of syntax, yet his decision to make these corrections are not uninteresting, remembering that at one stage he says Pilinszky's idiosyncratic syntax was a central characteristic of his poetic style. As a translator therefore, his choices here are also being influenced by the fact that the changes allow for stronger, and much more concrete line endings. In Hughes's version, the lines end with their main, central subjects, and they are pleasingly evocative, definite words too: "eye-pupil" and "beast." These alterations, in other words, seem to be as much based on an attempt to achieve that poetic "rightness and freshness" that Hughes described in his Popa introduction, as they are on an attempt to remain close to the original literal, as it was prepared by Csokits.

In the next stanza, Hughes's work revolves around trying to render the irregular and slightly confusing English of Csokits's phrase: "I am tossed about, as with its thousand leaves, / and I speak as the tree at the time of night." In one of Hughes's early handwritten drafts, he corrects the grammar and inserts an extra "tree", making the meaning clearer: "I am tossed, as the tree with its thousand leaves, / And I speak as the tree at night."[92] He does not stick with this rendition however. In a later typed draft he removes the extra "tree," breaks up the second line and rearranges the order.[93] Eventually, he reverts to the awkward syntax of Csokits's literal, but decides to remove his punctuation, and significantly re-writes Csokits's

[92] See TH's rough drafts of his translation of 'Apocrypha,' Emory.
[93] ibid.

rather strange sounding “I speak as the tree at night,” to a much more known English phrase: “at dead of night I speak as the tree”. The introduction of the idiomatic “dead of night” is a stroke of poetic dexterity. This is a phrase which we know from childhood adventure stories; it appears simple, yet is highly resonant, and this forcefulness greatly improves the power of the statement as a whole. In addition, the re-ordering of words allows “tree” to end the line, not only placing stress on it, but improving the spoken sound of this line. To speak is to breathe out and the line in Hughes’s rendition (“and at dead of night I speak as the tree) breathes itself out towards the end – much more so than Csokits’s “I speak as the tree at the time of night,” which ends more firmly and sharply. Also, “Tree” rhymes with “speak” and the two words can now form an end-rhyme with the “leaves” of the previous line, rounding the stanza off effectively.

By his final version, Hughes has made several key changes. He has gone back to inserting an extra “tree” to make the meaning clearer but kept to his decision to re-arrange and split the second line, remove some of the punctuation, and re-write the phrase in the final line. He has ensured that a forthright, immediate style, and a directness of meaning is maintained: “I toss / as the tree with its thousand leaves / and at dead of night I speak as the tree”. These three lines take on a rhythm which is both natural and heightened, managing to sound urgent, yet softly spoken.

In stanza three, Hughes again decides to break up Csokits’s lines in new places, though in this instance doing so does not make the stanza longer. As in stanza two however, his breaks create enjambments, placing new stress on certain words such as “wrinkle,” “comprehend,” and “darkness,” and forming repetitions (know / know / know), as well as creating a lovely range of internal rhymes (treads / cleft / webbed / head). In addition, changing one of Csokits’s “know”s to “comprehend” creates a rhythmic rhyme with “orphanage” and also brings in some assonance (comprehend / care-worn).

This is a verse which clearly caused Hughes some difficulty, especially rendering Csokits’s unusual phrase, “Do you know how orphanage is called.” Particularly interesting about this line is that Csokits had in fact made an error in his English translation of the Hungarian word *árvaság*: this word means orphanhood, *not* “orphanage,” as he gives it in his literal version. Of course no one without Hungarian, including a reader such as me, or a co-translator such as Hughes, could possibly know this without the advice of someone who is fluent in both the source

and the target language (Csokits, as both Hughes and Csokits were well aware, was not entirely fluent in English). It is arguable that the oddness of the phrase in English should have caused concern and prompted further questioning on Hughes's part, but he was clearly happy to rely solely on Csokits's rendering. Furthermore, as I demonstrate below, he set about directly incorporating the oddness of the line into his final English version. When we examine Hughes's work on this phrase, we can see that its strange and slightly wrong sound becomes an essential part of the final version, reinforcing as it does the perception of Pilinszky's poetics that Hughes had been building up through his readings of Csokits's literal renditions.

Early drafts of Hughes's version show him converting Csokits's wording to "do you know how to name orphan." In subsequent drafts he changes back to "how orphanage is called," perhaps liking its foreign, 'accented' word-for-word sound.[94] Eventually, he settles for, "Do you know the name of orphanage." This is arguably the best rendition so far, not just because "orphanage" creates that nice syllabic relationship with "comprehend", but also because it is a strikingly evocative poetic phrase in its own right. In this instance, therefore, Hughes's lack of Hungarian gives him creative advantage; "the name of orphanage," in its wrongness, capturing something different than the correct, but less pleasing, "the name of orphanhood." By remaining faithful to the estranged and mistaken English of Csokits's literal, Hughes manages to capture the sense of the estranged and abandoned protagonist, whose outsidedness is defined by his inarticulateness.[95]

In addition, Hughes's phrase allows him to take this important word out of the middle of the sentence, where it appears in Csokits's rendition, and place it firmly and decisively at the end of the question. This mirrors, in part, the word-order of the original poem as it appears in Hungarian (which Hughes, however, doesn't appear to have consulted), even though Pilinszky's phrasing of the question is not as "incorrect" sounding to Hungarian ears as Hughes's is to English ones. In fact, if we compare Hughes's version of this section with the corresponding section in

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[94] ibid.

[95] Hughes and Csokits's translation of Pilinszky's 'Apocrypha' appears in the bilingual anthology of Hungarian verse, *The Lost Rider* (Hungary: Corvina, 1997). Interestingly, the line being discussed here appears in this book with a typographical error: the printers have corrected Hughes's "incorrect" phrase, re-printing it in their volume as: "Do you know the name of *the* orphanage" [my italics]. Such a correction changes the poetic force of the line, and in so doing helps to highlight the significance of Hughes's decision.

Hungarian, it is possible to see what other kinds of shifts have occurred during the co-translation process:

from Pilinszky's '*Apokrif*':	*from* Hughes's 'Apocrypha':
Ismeritek az évek vonulását,	Do you know the drifting of the years
az évekét a gyűrött földeken?	the years over the crumpled fields?
És értitek a mulandóság ráncát,	Do you understand the wrinkle
ismeritek törődött kézfejem?	of transience? Do you comprehend
És tudjátok nevét az árvaságnak?	my care-gnarled hands? Do you know
	the name of orphanage? […]

As well as being one line longer in English, the most apparent difference between the two, even to those who don't speak Hungarian, is the perfection of Pilinszky's version, both in its visual appearance – each line ending with a punctuation-mark – and in its sound: there is a clear a/b/a/b rhyme scheme being obeyed. Only the final question "*És tudjátok nevét az árvaságnak?*" ("Do you know the name of orphanage?") doesn't quite follow this scheme, yet by its absence of rhyme it also has a strong formal function: attracting attention because of what it lacks. In this sense, it is possible to suggest that Hughes is replacing the original with something which fits English versification. His splitting up of lines, for example, so that the sentences sound like inversion, gives the poem a powerful, declamatory, poetic feel, while also infusing it with doubt and longing; something which is strongly present in the original. Similarly, by foreignizing a phrase such as "the name of orphanage," Hughes is making it work in English; its strangeness alerting us to its importance in the stanza, and making it stand out as something poetic, but unique. In other words, Hughes's tendency to foreground the translated-ness of the poem by stripping away form, heightening repetition and foreignizing phrases, paradoxically manages to reinforce the sense of personal crisis and separation that is so fundamental to the poem in its original Hungarian.

To further understand the impact of Hughes's alterations, it is useful to contrast his version of these two lines ("Do you comprehend / my care-gnarled hands? Do you know / the name of orphanage?") with other English translations. The American poet and translator Jascha Kessler, for example, translated the same

lines (in 1988) as: "Do you know my horny hand? / and what it means to be orphaned?"[96] Here, Kessler's "horny" sounds misplaced and almost comical, and although his "what it means to be orphaned" is more self-explanatory than Hughes's "the name of orphanage," it entirely misses that whole complex, unsaid connection between naming and knowing, and the intense, all-encompassing sense of becoming the state of "orphanage." Most importantly, precisely because of Kessler's normalization of the English, we lose the poetic power and significance of Csokits and Hughes's more unusual, odd-sounding rendition.[97]

It so happens that Kessler entirely disapproved of Hughes's translations of Pilinszky, claiming that he was "too often incapable of hearing his original's voice, so very loud, so often coarse or clumsy was his own."[98] In this instance however, it was perhaps by utilizing his "coarse and clumsy" style that Hughes has retained a poetic suggestiveness and strength which has not been retained by the more linguistically accurate Kessler. As Hughes once observed about his own work: "To hear it called crude, clumsy etc (all of which it is) means that the reader hasn't understood why I took so much trouble to make it that way."[99]

To turn to another translation of 'Apocrypha,' this time by Peter Zollman, we find the same line rendered as: "And do you know the name of loneliness?"[100] Here, even though Zollman uses Hughes's phrase "do you know the name of," and even though "loneliness" is an accurate translation from the original Hungarian, his line is far less successful than Hughes's rendition, and highlights even further, I think, the distinctiveness of Hughes's translation in this case.

Other adjustments that Hughes makes to Csokits's version of this stanza include changing "what sort of pain" to "what pain" (more concentrated, more focused); "is treading" to "treads" (more immediate, more continually present); and "everlasting darkness" to "unlifting darkness" (less literary and more realistic). He

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[96] Jascha Kessler, *The Face of Creation: Contemporary Hungarian Poetry* (US: Coffeehouse Press, 1988), p. 111. Kessler also included his version in his on-line in response to Clive Wilmer's article, 'Ted Hughes and Translation.' *Times online* http://tls.timesonline.co.uk [Accessed 27. 09. 07].

[97] See also 'Session 2: Normalization – A Constant Threat,' in Sture Allén (ed.), *Translation of Poetry and Poetic Prose: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 110* (Singapore: World Scientific, 1999). For example, Françoise Wuilmart states, in 'Normalization and the Translation of Poetry,' that: "Normalization is at the very core of the problem of all literary translation." p. 31. [Hereafter: Allén].

[98] Kessler [op. cit.].

[99] TH to Keith Sagar [1 August 1977], Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, p. 63. Hughes was discussing his recently published *Gaudete*. Appropriately in the context of this thesis, Hughes continues: "I'm confident it's the genuine article – however mutilated, fragmentary, awkward etc."

[100] Peter Zollman, 'The Audit is Done: An Anthology of 20th Century Hungarian Poetry', *European Cultural Review* 14. http://www.C3.hu [Accessed 2.07.08].

also swaps “split hooves” with “cleft hooves” and “filmy/ pellicular/ membraned feet” for “webbed feet,” both choices showing again his preference for realistic, literalistic, plain descriptions. His “caked troughs” in place of “stiffened troughs” shows a similar preference. Indeed, so too does his “tortures of the abyss,” which he uses in place of Csokits’s much vaguer “torments of the depths.” Both lines are dramatic, but Hughes is again choosing words which are appropriate to the experiences being suggested in the poem. In the context, “tortures” connects, in an actual, real sense, with the previous “convict’s head twisted askew,” while “abyss,” is a more concrete and arguably more realistic description of the state of despair being expressed in the poem, than Csokits’s less definite and less absolute “depths.” Also, “abyss” sounds biblical, and in this way echoes the dramatic opening line of the poem, “Everything will be forsaken then.” Finally, the minor change from “turning head” to “twisted head” makes a very important distinction. The event is very firmly placed in the past, it is a memory. Yet it is a painful and physical memory, and one which is constantly present, as a kind of “torture” for the one who witnessed it.

In the last stanza of this section, we can see the same sort of alterations being made. “Rod-like trees” gets changed to the simpler “sticks of trees”; “gloaming/ glooming” gets changed to the less literary “blackening”; “thus” gets changes to the more colloquial “so”; and “in front of” changes to “facing”, possibly more correct sounding, but which also rhymes nicely with “devastation.” Also, the verb gets changed from the continual “is walking” to the more definite, shorter “walks,” while “sound” is changed to the more specific “word.” An extra full stop is also inserted. The result is a more specific and more definite statement overall: by isolating and confirming these items, the man described comes to be completely defined by them: “He has his shadow. / And his stick. And his prison garb.”

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Though he was reluctant to admit it, Hughes’s renderings of Pilinszky demonstrate his own poetic skill and ambition, just as much as, if not more than, they demonstrate his reluctance to interfere with Csokits’s versions. Where he saw himself as passive, he was in fact active; the point being that the act of removal is as creative as the act of addition. Yet this is not so far from what Pilinszky himself was

doing, in the sense that he too was actively choosing a certain passive stance in his own poetics. Despite the paradox, therefore, Hughes's literalism was aptly metaphorical: part of a personal poetic notion perhaps, yet one which had much in common with that of his Hungarian counterpart.

In this sense, Hughes's translations of Pilinszky do not simply demonstrate, as Hughes might have hoped, his own disinterested, almost neutral role in the whole project.[101] Rather, they demonstrate his very personal desire and ability, as a poet and a translator, to locate a particular kind of English which would get closer to some inner core of meaning – closer to the "real thing," which he felt was constantly threatened by what he referred to as our "detached cerebration," which removes us from it.[102] When Clive Wilmer suggests, therefore, in his recent discussion of Hughes's versions of Pilinszky, that Hughes managed to convey much of the visionary quality of Pilinszky's images, but at the cost "of abandoning the cultural halo,"[103] he is hitting on a central aspect of Hughes's entire ambition as a translator. What Wilmer sees in a negative light, Hughes saw as wholly positive and desirable: a method of capturing something of the original's fundamental aesthetic – a poetry which, for him, revealed "a place where every cultural support has been torn away."[104]

[101] I should stress that by "disinterested" I do not mean "without interest or concern." Hughes was clearly extremely interested and concerned about his work with Pilinszky. I mean rather "not influenced by his own advantage; impartial."
[102] TH to Molewyn Merchant, 29 June 1990, *Letters*, p. 580
[103] Clive Wilmer, introduction to JP, *Passio*, p. 2.
[104] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 11.

Chapter Four: Nearly Illiterate Crow

My aim in this chapter is to examine the relationship between *Crow* and Hughes's work as Pilinszky's co-translator. I will begin by identifying Hughes's main aspirations for *Crow* as he expressed them in letters and interviews, and discuss its critical reception. I will go on to look at the similarities between the poetic direction taken in *Crow*, and that of certain post-war poets from Eastern and Central Europe whom Hughes was reading, publishing and translating at the time. Ultimately focusing on the connection between Hughes and Pilinszky, I will draw comparisons between the "post-apocalyptic" landscape that can be found in both poets' work, but will go on to suggest that *Crow* also strongly reflects Hughes's enthusiastic response to the literal style of Csokits's conversions of the Hungarian text.

While it is not uncommon to find comparisons being made between *Crow* and Hughes's versions of Pilinszky, the impact that the actual process of translating may have had on the writing of *Crow* is an area which is often overlooked in academic discussions of the two texts. Yet, as I will argue, in many ways *Crow* serves as a prime example of Hughes's engagement with the literal as a poetic ideal. The rough, home-made, elliptical quality that Hughes found so appealing in Csokits's word-for-word versions of Pilinszky, the rawness and strangeness that he admired in Bleek's versions of Bushmen lore, the intensely direct, slightly foreignized sound that he found in Gregory's Donal Og, the crude, spontaneous English of the Spoleto handouts, the "rough and impromptu" sound of Plath's translations from German: all of these stylistic effects are present in one form or another in the poems in *Crow*.

Even the title, *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*, suggests that these poems are in themselves translations, unfinished fragments "rescued from a shattered masterpiece," as one correspondent wrote, whose "brokenness makes it more authentic than if it were more shapely or complete."[1] Like the "pseudo-translation" discussed in Chapter Two, *Crow* appears at times like a translation for which there is no actual source text, but in which translation is being used as a means

[1] Richard Murphy to TH, 19 October 1970, Emory.

of challenging and shifting English literary values. "*Crow* is a further realization of Hughes's deconstruction and dismantling of Western poetic norms," states scholar Edward Hadley; an act of "decomposition" which indicates a leaning, in general, towards the "deconstruction of poetry."[2]

On a biographical level, *Crow* also represents Hughes's attempt to deal poetically with a personal crisis: the suicide of Sylvia Plath and the strain that this placed on his private and writing life. This, he felt at the time, could not be done directly. Writing to Keith Sagar nearly thirty years after *Crow* was published, Hughes explains: "In poetry, I believed, if the experience was to be dealt with creatively, it would have to emerge obliquely, through a symbol, inadvertently." He goes on to say: "And in fact, with me, in retrospect, I can see that it began to emerge in exactly this fashion in Crow […]."[3]

Composed spontaneously ("Most of them appeared as I wrote them")[4] and with what Hughes later called a "free energy,"[5] *Crow* represented for Hughes a return to his own origins, poetically at least. As he said in 1977: "the actual way of writing was really the way I wrote for a while when I was about nineteen. In other words, it's the way I should have written all along."[6]

In writing *Crow*, therefore, Hughes aimed for authenticity and self-expression on the one hand, while distancing himself from his work by using symbolism and invented myth on the other. In his view this would set his writing apart from his English-speaking contemporaries. "I wanted to rid my language of the penumbra of abstractions that to my way of thinking cluttered the writing of all other poetry being written by post-auden [sic] poets," recalls Hughes in a letter in 1992. "[…] they seemed to me, in those days, second hand, rancid – unexamined, inauthentic in the experience to which they laid claim. So I squirmed and weaseled a way towards a language that would be wholly my own."[7]

This language was connected to something more prior – a primitive, non-literary culture of song, oral verse, nursery rhymes, and folklore. At the same time, it would secure Hughes's affiliation with the modern world: popular phenomena such

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[2] Edward Hadley, *The Elegies of Ted Hughes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 45.
[3] TH to Keith Sagar, 18-19 July 1998, Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, p. 269.
[4] Faas interview, p. 18.
[5] TH to Keith Sagar, 18-19 July 1988 [op. cit.].
[6] TH, in another interview with Ekbert Faas, conducted in 1977. See Ekbert Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe* (US: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 212. [Hereafter: Faas, *UU*].
[7] TH to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, 16 December 1992, *Letters*, p. 630.

as pop-art, Disney, psychedelia, ecology, and, of course, the new post-Holocaust poetry coming out of Eastern and Central Europe.

Origins of Crow

The idea for *Crow* began back in the early 1960s, in a coffee-house in Upper Brook Street, London. There, the American artist Leonard Baskin talked to a young Ted Hughes about making an 'Anatomy' of a crow.[8] The plan was that Baskin, whom Hughes had met during his stay in Boston in the 1950s, would make a series of engravings, with the accompanying text written by Hughes. It would be a sort of Emblem Book, printed by Baskin on his independent 'Gehenna' Press. Hughes, it seems, took-up the offer, though it wasn't until 1970 that the book was finally published – by Faber, and in an edition which did not contain any illustrations by Baskin. Nonetheless, as Neil Roberts explains in his literary biography of Hughes: "The connection of *Crow* with Baskin was certainly very strongly impressed on readers of early editions of the book, since a very striking image by Baskin, of a crow with closed wings, disproportionately thick, tree-truck legs, and male human genitals, appeared on the cover."[9] Hughes himself was happy to reiterate the link with Baskin, stating in an interview in 1970: "I simply wrote texts to accompany his engravings."[10]

Roberts also points out, however, that there is little evidence to prove that the two men actually collaborated on the collection. Referring to a letter sent from Hughes to Baskin in 1968, Roberts notes that in it, Hughes points out that two years have passed since he last wrote to Baskin, and that he tells a version of the Crow story with which Baskin is apparently unfamiliar. "This letter does propose a joint book," concedes Roberts, and later Hughes sent Baskin nearly forty extra poems for a limited edition. It never appeared, however. While Baskin contributed twelve illustrations to a Faber limited edition in 1973, Roberts concludes: "these were

[8] In May 1968, Baskin wrote in a letter to Hughes: "Your news of the Crow and its massive putting out of branches is great news indeed and I am very anxious, terrifically anxious, to see what you have done thus far […] for I so vividly remember the moment in the little coffee house on Upper Brook Street when I proposed the idea to you." Leonard Baskin to TH, 9 May 1968, Emory.
[9] Roberts, p. 81
[10] TH in an interview with George Macbeth for BBC's 'Poetry Now,' broadcast 6 July 1970. See TH, Audio (2008).

evidently done after the poems, and it seems fair to say that he was not significantly involved in the project after first suggesting it.[11]

Even if the project did not proceed as Hughes and Baskin originally envisioned it, there are clear reasons why Baskin's work caught Hughes's imagination. As a sculptor and a graphic artist, Baskin's aim was always to isolate the image. He did not depict scenes, he depicted individual forms. As a sculptor there was a tangible quality to the work he made: carved, simplified, primitive, forceful; while as a printmaker he produced black-and-white imagery which was inevitably stark, decisive and arresting. The milieu in which Baskin worked in the 1950s was a post-war view of man and nature, where aspects of the world had become darker: "I depict bruised and brutalized man," said Baskin, "alone, naked, middle-aged, and defenceless."[12] Intrinsic to his work was an adherence to a certain aspect of primitivism (his carved forms were bold, essential, robust), and there is a degree of anthropomorphism in his imagery. It is an imagery which involves looking at nature, but interpreting it in a subjective and sometimes distorted, fragmentary form. His depictions of owls and crows, for example, while showing his "infatuation with the formal allure of birds," are also metaphors; allegories ambiguously symbolizing wisdom and tyranny.[13]

Many of these attributes would find their way into Hughes's writing. This is not a matter of direct influence, rather one of mutual interest between artist and poet. The fact that Hughes knew Baskin and owned some of his work meant that Baskin was part of Hughes's everyday life. A print hanging on the wall of Frieda's nursery, for instance, would surely keep certain ideas alive in Hughes's imagination.[14]

Interestingly, Hughes's reaction to Baskin's work was uncritical. Having agreed to write the introduction to a catalogue of Baskin's work in 1962, Hughes admits in a letter to Baskin: "I said what I felt, rather than what might be suitable in the general style of such pieces."[15] The same goes for 'The Hanged Man and the Dragonfly,' a much longer essay published in 1984 as an introduction to the

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[11] Roberts, p. 81.
[12] Leonard Baskin, quoted in *Baskin: Sculpture Drawings and Prints* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), p. 15.
[13] ibid. p. 16.
[14] In 1961, when Baskin offered Hughes a print for the nursery of his newborn daughter Frieda, Hughes replied: 'Let it be the raving dog or the beautiful dead crow.' TH to Leonard and Esther Baskin [January 1961]. The Hughes-Baskin Papers, British Library.
[15] This note from TH was written on the verso of a letter from Sylvia Plath to LB, 16 April 1962. The Hughes-Baskin Papers, British Library.

Collected Prints of Leonard Baskin, and a piece of writing that Hughes always disliked. "It's the last prose I'll write," he said in a letter to Weissbort. "I don't know who it is writes that stuff, but it surely to God isn't me."[16] In another letter, to Karl Miller, Hughes writes: "The trouble is, I detest it – the Baskin Introd. – and yet put so much of my real belief (in various things) into it that I can't rubbish it."[17]

In this essay on Baskin, Hughes's intense enthusiasm results in a somewhat chaotic, over-zealous appreciation of the work. As William Scammell comments: "The worry here is that in his desire to seize the ineffable Hughes may be left brandishing a fistful of resonant but opaque abstractions, to which the resounding proper names give only an illusory glow of substance."[18] Hughes leaps from comparison to comparison in this essay: Baskin's art is not so much religious, he says, as "rather something that survives in the afterglow of collapsed religion."[19] He writes about its "power to disturb," and its "weird beauty"; a beauty created "openly and directly out of pain."[20] Baskin's 'Hanged Man,' a woodcut measuring 171cm in height, is like a crucified Jesus, and his figures generally seem to represent the individual in a crisis, at an extreme moment, in a "dead man last ditch helplessness."[21] This notion was accentuated for Hughes by Baskin's medium, so that the 'Hanged Man' woodcut became for him the portrait of a "total wound."[22] Baskin's ideal image, Hughes states, is one which would appear "to have lain in the earth for generations, re-emerging now with all its temporary cultural superficies corroded away, so that only some core of elemental substance remains."[23] At the same time, the 'Hanged Man' is "the whole new thing itself, like a tightly wrapped seed."[24]

There are certainly many similarities here with *Crow*: the single, suffering figure, the collapsed, or collapsing religion, the weird beauty, the power to disturb, the art created "directly out of pain," the sense of crisis and breakdown but also of healing. Even Hughes's term for describing Baskin's work as a "dead man last ditch helplessness," echoes a description used in an early review of *Crow*, in which

[16] TH to DW, 21 November 1983, *Letters*, p. 473.
[17] TH to Karl Miller, 17 March 1984, ibid. p. 480.
[18] William Scammell, introduction to TH, *WP*, p. xiii.
[19] TH, *WP*, p. 84.
[20] ibid. p. 86; 89.
[21] ibid. p. 92.
[22] ibid. p. 96.
[23] ibid. pp. 89-90.
[24] ibid. p. 90.

Stephen Spender writes: "What Crow really represents is consciousness in a Last Ditch situation."[25] But perhaps most significant is Hughes's description of Baskin's ideal image; the flayed form which re-emerges "with all its temporary cultural superficies corroded away, so that only some core of elemental substance remains." This is highly resonant with Hughes's own aims for *Crow*. In a letter to Keith Sagar in 1973, Hughes explains: "my main concern was to produce something with the minimum cultural accretions of the museum sort, something autochthonous & complete in itself, as it might be invented after the holocaust & demolition of all libraries, where essential things spring again – if at all – only from their seeds in nature […]."[26] Indeed, despite his later habit of introducing the *Crow* poems as extracts from a larger, invented "legend,"[27] Hughes's main aim at the time of writing focused predominantly on his own development of a similarly flayed and "corroded" poetic style.

Hughes wrote several letters in which he describes this intention for a new, rougher and cruder style. Writing to his old university friend Daniel Huws in 1966, he explains: "I've been writing lots in the history, songs, discourses, bedtime stories & general doggerel of one, Crow. Crow is very crude, nearly illiterate, very rough, & has not heard of most things, but he's a relief."[28]

Hughes makes a similar comment in a letter of the following year to the Irish poet Richard Murphy: "I got writing some new things – very plain ballad fables which will be O.K., I think, if I don't write more than about 40. They are the various Songs, bed-time stories, parables & visions of The Crow – who sings on one base, brutish note."[29]

To Leonard Baskin, in 1968, he describes his new collection as: "a folk epic which will be the length of a novel – Bushmen prose but more poems than prose […]

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[25] Stephen Spender, 'The Last Ditch', *New York Review of Books*, 22 July 1971, 3-4 (p. 3). [Hereafter: Spender].
[26] TH to Keith Sagar [October 1973], Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, pp. 27-8.
[27] In the introdution to his audio recording of *Crow* Hughes states: "The poems that I'm going to read belong to the life story of a character that I call Crow […] Nobody was quite sure how Crow was born. Differents stories are told. Here are 'Two Legends.'" Ted Hughes, *Crow*, Faber/Penguin Audio Books, 1997. See also 'The Story of Crow' in Keith Sagar's *The Laughter of Foxes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 170-180. [Hereafter: Sagar, *LF*).
[28] TH to Daniel Huws, 27 October 1966, *Letters*, p. 261
[29] TH to Richard Murphy, 20 January 1967, ibid. p. 267.

his songs are all in crowtalk – which is as base and crude and plain and ugly a talk as I can devise though I haven't yet quite hit what I shall get."[30]

All of Hughes's descriptions here are concerned with his writing style, and specifically with the development of what Neil Roberts calls an "aesthetic of ugliness."[31] Hughes found this stylistic development exciting and daring. In 1969, he expresses this excitement to his brother: "Either I've done something unusual and got beyond everybody (in England & the U.S. at any rate, where most good writers are a bit deadlocked at the moment) or I've followed a personal peculiarity and merely produced a Heath-Robinson monstrosity. Only time will tell."[32] Two months later, in another letter to Baskin, his sense of determination remains strong: "Whether people like them or not, they are my masterpiece."[33]

This notion of creating a brutal and exposed style – a "whole new thing," as he said of Baskin's prints – was clearly all consuming for Hughes. In his interview with Ekbert Faas for *London Magazine* in 1971, he is completely taken up with promoting the stylistic, rather than the thematic, implications of his new book. Indeed, he is noticeably reticent when it comes to interpreting the meaning of the poems. For instance, he answers Faas's long question about the symbolic use in *Crow* of the notions of Laughter and Grinning quite curtly: "I'm not quite sure what they signify."[34] To Faas's next question, about the recurrent theme of Eating, Hughes replies: "It's easy enough to give interpretations I think and draw possibilities out of them but whether they'd be the real explanations I don't know."[35] When Faas pushes further with his enquiry, asking again "So in your poem about Laughter you don't seem to have had Samuel Beckett and his notion of the absurd in mind?" Hughes answers simply: "No."[36]

To Faas's final question, "Which poems in *Crow* do you like best?" Hughes responds in more detail, but only indirectly, and only by concentrating again on his stylistic intentions:

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[30] TH to Leonard Baskin, 2 March 1968, ibid. p. 280.
[31] Roberts, p. 67.
[32] TH to Gerald Hughes and family, 27 October 1969, ibid. p. 296.
[33] TH to Leonard Baskin, 15 December 1969, ibid. p. 300.
[34] TH, Faas interview, p. 18.
[35] ibid.
[36] ibid. p. 19.

> The first idea of *Crow* was really an idea of a style. In folktales the prince going on an adventure comes to the stable full of beautiful horses and he needs a horse for the next stage and the king's daughter advises him to take none of the beautiful horses that he'll be offered but to choose the dirty, scabby little foal. You see, I throw out the eagles and choose the Crow. The idea was originally just to write his songs, the songs that a Crow would sing. In other words, songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say without any other consideration and that's the basis of the style of the whole thing. I get near it in a few poems. There I really begin to get what I was after.[37]

On its release, *Crow* caused quite a stir. Reviews suggest that Hughes's desire to create a "super-simple and a super-ugly language," had been fully achieved, with Tony Harrison in the *London Magazine* describing its: "grim, stabbing parallelism, an Hebraic lyricism that chokes on itself, but sustains its syntactical monotony by cumulative accretion."[38] Alvarez, in the *Observer*, placed Hughes among the post-war "survivor poets." "The tone is harsh, but sardonic and utterly controlled," he writes, adding that Hughes's work "is adequate to the destructive reality we inhabit."[39] Richard Holmes in *The Times* discusses, less happily, Hughes's childish and obsessively violent language, and what he called the "brutish metamorphosis coming over Hughes's linguistic skill."[40] In the *New York Times*, Thomas Lask makes the observation that "The language is violent,"[41] while Stephen Spender in the *New York Review of Books* refers to Hughes as an "anti-poet."[42] Ian Hamilton, in the *TLS* writes with disdain of the book's "eager pursuit of blood and thunder." Using as an example the poem 'Lovesong,' Hamilton raises concerns over the way it "piles blackness upon blackness, the way it seems – after the first dozen lines or so – to have moved far beyond any real gravity or wisdom into a horror-comic realm of barely controllable fascination with its own subject-matter."[43]

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[37] ibid. p. 20.
[38] Tony Harrison, 'Crow Magnon,' *London Magazine* 10:10 (January 1971), 86-89 (p. 89).
[39] A. Alvarez, 'Black bird,' *The Observer*, 11 October 1970, p. 33. [Hereafter: Alvarez, 'Black bird'].
[40] Richard Holmes, 'Ted Hughes, a brutish metamorphosis,' *The Times*, 17 December 1970, p. 15. [Hereafter: Holmes].
[41] Thomas Lask, 'The Old Heaven, the Old Earth,' *New York Times Review of Books*, 18 March 1971.
[42] Spender, pp. 3-4.
[43] Ian Hamilton, 'A mouthful of blood,' *TLS*, 8 January 1971, p. 30.

Positive or negative, however, the initial critical reception of *Crow* was, in general, entirely concerned with the deliberate undoing or "re-making"[44] of poetry which seemed central to Hughes's new poetic task. This has remained an important aspect of discussions of *Crow*. In Alice Oswald's recent blurb on the cover of a Hughes CD, she writes about the "winter clean simplicity" of *Crow*,[45] while the Poetry Archive website explains that: "*Crow*, with its greedy, violent protagonist, is written in a slangy vernacular […]."[46] Simon Armitage, in his 1997 introduction to a new selection of Hughes's poems, writes that in *Crow*, "Hughes was at his most robust, uncompromising and apocalyptic," though he stresses that this is not so much a "simplicity" or a "superficiality" of language, as an "immediacy."[47] Nicholas Bishop writes of the "comfortless language of *Crow*," a "return of language to its most primitive, functional origins,"[48] while Anthony Rowland, in his 2005 study, writes about the "plain and ugly language of the Crow poems." He describes its anti-rhetorical style as representative of a "barbaric" aesthetics; a "poetic of extremity."[49] For Seamus Heaney, talking in 2008, Hughes's *Crow* "showed that side of him running with the wounded side, and producing work which had an inexorable wildness about it."[50]

The more academic explorations of *Crow* have also been concerned with its overt violence of content and style, but they have at the same time been understandably unwilling to accept the idea that as a collection of poems it contains no more hidden agendas. As Ekbert Faas predicts: "*Crow*, like *The Waste Land*, is bound to send critics on a wild goose chase after crows and the Holy Grail,"[51] and sure enough ever since its publication, scholars have worked hard to trace Hughes's sequence of "crow-songs" back to some identifiable source or other.

Of especial relevance has been the voracious, sexually charged, but childish 'Trickster,' a character found in the indigenous tales of native America.[52] As Keith

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[44] This is a reference to the title of Nicholas Bishop's book, *Re-Making Poetry: Ted Hughes and a New Critical Psychology* (London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf, 1991). [Hereafter: Bishop, *Re-Making Poetry*].
[45] Oswald, introduction to TH, Audio (2008).
[46] 'Ted Hughes' in the Poetry Archive on-line. http://www.poetryarchive.org [Accessed 20.08.09].
[47] Simon Armitage, introduction to Ted Hughes, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1997), p. xiii.
[48] Bishop, *Re-Making Poetry*, p. 120.
[49] Rowland, pp. 12; 164.
[50] Seamus Heaney in Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones* (London: Faber, 2008), p. 394.
[51] Faas, *UU*, p. 102.
[52] See for example Bishop, *Re-Making Poetry*; Faas, *UU*; Sagar, *ATH*; Ann Skea, 'Ted Hughes and Crow' (1998), published on-line at: http://www.zeta.org.au [Accessed 4. 10. 07].

Sagar suggests: "The strange combination of roles we find in *Crow* – all suffering Everyman, Culture hero, clown-devil – links in with one of the oldest figures in all mythology, Trickster."[53] Likewise, Jarold Ramsey, in an essay entitled 'Crow, or the Trickster Transformed,' suggests that it is worth noting "the kind of crow-lore in world folk-literature that the poet may have assimilated when he was reading Anthropology and Archaeology in Cambridge."[54] "Rude" in style, "colloquially primitive," casual and flat, these poems are, says Ramsey, highly appropriate as "crow songs," and the true source of the action, he suggests, "is Hughes's meditations on aboriginal narratives."[55]

These scholars had plenty to go on in this respect; Hughes was, as we have seen, happy to associate the whole inspiration of the work with Leonard Baskin, whose art was strongly referencing similarly mythic, primitive sources. Hughes had also long been passionately, and publically, interested in the subjects of myth and the primitive arts. He wrote in a letter to John Lehmann, for instance, that Paul Radin's *Trickster Cycle of the Winnebago Indians* was "one of the most interesting literary events, for me, of the fifties,"[56] and in 1962 he reviewed, very favourably, C.M. Bowra's *Primitive Song*. Here, he praised in particular the laments: "where the poem's work is simply the humane relief of strong feeling." There is enough in this book, concludes Hughes, "to make one want to see whatever there is of the same family elsewhere. The main body of civilized verse is a great deal duller."[57]

The connection between Bowra's *Primitive Song* and *Crow* is discussed by Ekbert Faas in his 1990 study of Hughes, *The Unaccommodated Universe*. Here, Faas re-prints lines from one of Bowra's examples, and draws a comparison between its characteristic use of repetition and variation, and Hughes's own style of writing.

> Ostrich, rising and flying,
> Long-necked and big-toed,
> Belly full of rock-flint, great bird,
> Wide-mouthed male ostrich,

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[53] Sagar, *ATH*, p. 114.
[54] Jarold Ramsey, 'Crow, or the Trickster Transformed,' in Keith Sagar, ed. *The Achievement of Ted Hughes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 175. [Hereafter: Sagar (ed), *Achievement TH*.
[55] ibid. p. 177.
[56] TH to John Lehmann, 9 April 1960, *Letters*, p. 157.
[57] TH, 'Strong Feelings,' in *WP*, pp. 34-35. First published in *The Listener*, 3 May 1962.

Flying, running, great bird,
Give me one of your grey feathers.

[…]

Male ostrich, looking up,
Belly that says *khari*, *khari*,
Ostrich, whose bowels alone are not fit to eat,
Give me one of your leg bones, ostrich!

He who has two bones, which say *hui*, *hui*,
Male ostrich, who has wonderful marrow,
Who with his face says *gou-gou*,
Might I possess you, my ostrich!

The structure of this poem, writes Faas, vividly recalls Hughes's 'Littleblood,' the final poem in *Crow*. Particularly familiar are the requests: "Give me one of your grey feathers," or "Give me one of your leg bones, ostrich." These strongly recall Hughes's own request at the end of 'Littleblood,' in which the speaker asks his tiny, wounded little muse: "Sit on my finger, sing in my ear, O Littleblood."

At the same time, Faas wonders whether this kind of non-Western primitive poetry did indeed exert the greatest influence over *Crow*. Faas suggests that what was probably more influential was native European primitive poetry. Quoting as evidence his 1977 interview with Hughes, Faas suggests that the main model for *Crow* was in fact Alexander Carmichael's collection of *Carmina Cadelicia*. "It's a long time since I saw it," said Hughes in his interview with Faas, "but that really is the source as much as anything."[58]

To illustrate their similarities, Faas reprints the following poem from the Carmichael collection, entitled 'Little Bird,' and argues that this, much more than the Bowra extract, seems to have been the model for 'Littleblood':

Little Bird! O Little Bird!
  I wonder at what thou doest,
Thou singing merry far from me,

[58] TH, quoted in Fass, *UU*, p. 103.

I in sadness all alone!

Little Bird! O Little Bird!
I wonder at how thou art,
Thou on the tips of branching boughs,
I on the ground a-creeping!

Little Bird! O Little Bird!
Thou are music far away,
Like the tender croon of the mother loved
In the kindly sleep of death.[59]

The opening refrain of this poem is almost exactly reproduced in Hughes's 'version,' which begins its first three stanzas with the similar-sounding phrase "O littleblood." Yet it is also noteworthy that if Hughes did indeed use Carmichael as an example, he has dramatically 'de-poeticised' it in his version. Hughes has named his creature with a lower-case letter, for example, exchanged "Bird" for "blood," and has removed all of the excited, celebratory exclamation marks. He has also oddly merged the two words "little" and "blood" together, creating an invented, crudely-jointed name for his creature. In addition, his poem has stripped back punctuation, and rejected the niceties of the descriptive language. The bird that is described in the *Carmina Cadelicia* verses as "music far away […] In the kindly death of sleep," becomes in *Crow* a creature "Grown so wise grown so terrible / Sucking death's mouldy tits." Nothing could be further away in effect, although the meaning is arguably the same. Thus what Hughes copies with one hand, he changes with the other, and the fact that he has pointed Faas definitively in one direction does not necessarily mean that it is the only or correct one.

There were other reasons for the scholarly focus on the primitivism of *Crow*, apart from its obvious closeness to Hughes's own aesthetic. As Heather Clark has pointed out, Hughes himself was "largely responsible for this critical bias, since he asked scholars to avoid any mention of his personal life in their work and pleaded for a hermetic, New Critical approach."[60] Clark, for her part, feels that *Crow* could be

[59] ibid. pp. 103-4. Taken from Alexander Carmichael, ed. *Carmena Gadelica. Hyms and Incantations* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1941), IV, 365.
[60] Clark, p. 188.

interpreted better as an example of the influence that Hughes and Plath had on each other's work, and expresses exasperation at the almost wilful refusal by Hughes critics to examine *Crow* in this way. "While it would be reductive to claim that the only way to read *Crow* is in dialogue with Plath," she writes, "the focus thus far on the Trickster tale and shamanism has occluded analysis that considers the role of Plath's influence and rivalry."[61]

Clark manages in her study to penetrate extremely skilfully the dense history of Hughes scholarship in such a way as to free *Crow* from its complex mythic back-story, and which allows us to approach it instead as an important example of poetic decision-making; one which offers exciting scope for understanding the creative process. Perhaps one of the most insightful comments made about *Crow* when it was first released was by Anne Cluysenaar, who argued in her review of *Crow* for *Stand* that, "These poems call for more than interpretation – they call for an understanding of the creative direction they represent."[62] Hughes himself said something similar in a letter to Keith Sagar in 1973, when he described the book as "mostly blueprints, route-maps, reconnaissance's, etc. — so it needs creative as well as sympathetic imagination, not just critical attention."[63]

For some, *Crow* did point in one, very particular creative direction: Hughes's engagement with post-war Eastern and Central European poetry. Alvarez was probably one of the first to make the connection, noting in his review of *Crow*: "The crucial influence, I think, is that of the Yugoslav poet Vasco Popa."[64] As discussed earlier, Popa's poetry had appeared in English translation in the first issue of *MPT*, and its spare, unpunctuated layout, its simple vocabulary, its allegorical-style narrative, and its "deadpan playful" [65] effects are all qualities which readers would find, five years later, in Hughes's *Crow*.

As an example of Popa's style, see the poem 'The wedding,' below. It was written as part of a longer cycle entitled 'Games' (the use of the cycle being another connection between the two poets' work), and was included in the selection of Popa's work published by Hughes and Weissbort in *MPT*, in 1965:

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[61] ibid. pp. 187-8.
[62] Anne Cluysenaar, 'New Poetry,' *Stand*, 12:12 (1971), 63-71 (pp. 70-1).
[63] TH to Keith Sagar [October 1973], Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, p. 27.
[64] Alvarez, 'Black bird.'
[65] TH, introduction to Popa, p. xxviii.

The wedding

Each sheds his skin
Each uncovers his constellation
Which has never seen the night

Each fills his skin with stones
Using it as a dancing partner
To dance with by his own star's light

He who goes on till dawn
He who doesn't nod doesn't drop
He has earned his skin

(This game is rarely played)[66]

This last line, placed as it is in brackets, is particularly reminiscent of *Crow*, where Hughes similarly makes use of a kind of casual, ordinary tone. Compare it, for example, to his bracketed line in the poem 'Crow Communes': "(That was the first jest)," or to the final lines of 'Crow's Undersong':

She has come amorous it is all she has come for

If there had been no hope she would not have come

And there would have been no crying in the city

(There would have been no city)

Yet despite the throw-away tone, Popa's poem, like many of the poems in *Crow*, clearly aims to tell a universal truth of sorts, about man, about human nature. "A game is that to which the whole cosmic movement can be reduced," stated the introductory blurb to Popa's poems in that first issue of *MPT*. "Everything is subject to a single eternal arbitration, a subconscious agreement about movement, the

[66] trans. Anne Pennington

articles of which man gradually penetrates."[67] In Popa's cycle 'Games,' a collection of these articles is given in the form of a book of rules for the game, and in *Crow* we get a similar sense that there is a set of moves, or rules, which are governing the contest, but which often remain unclear and un-grasped by the central player.

Identifying the link between *Crow* and the poets that Hughes translated or published in the early issues of *Modern Poetry in Translation* has remained an important point for many Hughes scholars. Twenty years after its publication, Keith Sagar wrote that to truly understand the poetic direction of *Crow*: "We must look beyond England to the poetry of Eastern Europe after the Second World War."[68] In a more recent study, Sagar further develops this point: "he admired a generation of East European poets such as Popa and Pilinszky whose work was purged of rhetoric, deliberately impoverished, 'a strategy of making audible meanings without disturbing the silence.'" Sagar continues: "He sought a simplicity not of retreat or exclusion but on the far side of experience and complexity,"[69] and suggests that in order to understand Hughes's need in *Crow* for a "stylistic asceticism," it is necessary to "turn to his writings on the East European poets who seemed to Hughes to have discovered a universal poetic language, independent of surface sound and texture and therefore translatable, an ABC of what counts."[70] Sagar quotes from Hughes's introduction to his Pilinszky translations, and concludes: "Pilinszky has taken the route Hughes started out in *Crow*."[71]

Michael Parker, in an essay entitled 'Hughes and the Poets of Eastern Europe,' makes a similar comparison. He points out that the poems in Hughes's *Crow* and *Wodwo* are "expressed and energised in the stark, laconic, brutally poignant style that characterises these authors."[72] Asking why Hughes was so attracted to these poets, Parker suggests that they "extended and intensified his already acute consciousness of war."[73] Parker also draws attention to the fact that Hughes began *Crow* in 1966, after experiencing several years of extreme difficulty in writing, following Plath's death. Pointing out that this was the year after he began

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[67] *MPT* 1 (1965), p. 9.
[68] Keith Sagar, introduction to *The Challenge of Ted Hughes* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. xiii.
[69] Sagar, *LF*, p. 21.
[70] ibid. p. 128.
[71] ibid.
[72] Michael Parker, 'Ted Hughes and the Poets of Eastern Europe,' in Sagar (ed.) *Achievement TH*, p. 38.
[73] ibid. p. 38.

editing *Modern Poetry in Translation*, Parker sees a connection between Hughes's encounter with certain post-Holocaust Eastern and Central European writers, and the poet's own personal loss and ensuing creative release. He goes as far as to claim: "it is my contention that her [Plath's] death became Hughes's Auschwitz, the apocalyptic experience that to a major extent determined his poetic development."[74] Comparing Hughes's desire to create a kind of "Ur-language" with the poetry of Popa and others, Parker writes: "In this post-apocalyptic world created by Hughes and the Eastern European poetry, only the most primitive life-forms seem fated to survive."[75] Through *Wodwo* and *Crow*, he concludes, "the poetry of Hughes, like that of Herbert, Holub, Popa and Pilinszky, 'strains' to the final silence of Auschwitz."[76]

The questionable nature of such comparisons notwithstanding, what these comments highlight above all is the development of a strategy: the art of using words in such a way as to impose upon the reader the urgency, and the authenticity, of the material being presented. Whatever their differences in background, language, or content, this is clearly a key similarity between Hughes and the Central and Eastern European poets under discussion here: the management of their craft; the location of a mode of expression which would be "adequate," as Alvarez put it, to their realities.[77]

In this sense, *Crow* was following the same direction as these writers: "compelled to break new ground […] as if the whole language of poetry had to be broken down and reinvented."[78] The straining towards "silence" that Parker sees as common to *Crow* and poets such as Holub, Popa and Pilinszky, is really the silencing, therefore, of a certain poetic aspect of poetry (the use of romantic language for its own sake etc.); the straining, as discussed previously with regard to Pilinszky's work, towards a new poetic style which would be proportionate to the ugly events which had preceded it. As Nicholas Bishop explains, Hughes, like the Polish poet Tadeusz Różewicz, "consciously began to give up the aesthetic privileges enjoyed by poetry, and the beauties and formalities of language, in favour

[74] ibid. p. 44.
[75] ibid. p. 48.
[76] ibid. p. 49.
[77] Alvarez, 'Black bird.'
[78] Hugh Haughton (ed.), introduction to *Second World War Poems* (London: Faber, 2004), p. xxix.

of the truth of language really used by men."[79] This a central link between *Crow* and the anti-poetic aspects of post-war writing: the preference for poetry "shorn of all prettifying devices." [80]

It also important to note here that the work of these poets, to which *Crow* is being compared, has occasionally been discussed in terms of its "literalness." See, for example, Michael Hamburger's comment in *The Truth of Poetry*:

> The severe literalness of this new anti-poetry does make it truly international in so far as its matter and assumptions are shared. Both personal idiosyncrasy and the national idiosyncrasies of language, are subordinated to a bareness of utterance always close to the silence from which its minimal stock of words has been salvaged.[81]

The result of this, explains Hamburger, is that such anti-poems, "can be translated with relatively little loss."[82] It is a point that Daniel Weissbort also makes, in *The Poetry of Survival*. Here, Weissbort argues that "a remarkable fact about the writing of the first post-war generation of Central European poets represented here is precisely its translatability."[83] Subtle as it is, he explains:

> this writing is also particularly direct; it is visionary, while remaining securely attached to actual situations. It makes great demands on its translator yet at the same time firmly guides him or her, so that the range of possible choices (while remaining formidable enough) is also quite precisely circumscribed; translating this work may be, more than usually, like participating in a single process that began with its creation, joining forces with the author, as it were, rather than seeking objectively to transfer meanings and effects that already exist. It seems *de rigueur* not to paraphrase or transcribe into a more familiar idiom.[84]

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[79] Nicholas Bishop (talking about Tadeusz Różewicz), in *Re-Making Poetry*, p. 42 [cf. William Wordsworth, "the real language of men," in 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)]. According to translator Adam Czerniawski, only Różewicz "succeeded in forging a poetry to which the epithet 'anti-poetry' could legitimately be applied." See Adam Czerniawski, introduction to Tadeusz Różewicz, *They Came to See a Poet* (London: Anvil, 2004), p. 17.
[80] Adam Czerniawski, ibid. p. 16.
[81] Michael Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 276.
[82] ibid.
[83] DW, *PoS*, pp. 23-4.
[84] ibid. p. 25.

What is particularly revealing about this statement, and Hamburger's, is that their descriptions not only tally with Hughes's desire to produce a literal and non-domesticated version of Pilinszky's poetry, but that they could also be used as accurate descriptions of Hughes's desires for *Crow* – for which he too wished to "subordinate" his language "to a bareness of utterance"; when he too seemed to draw only on a "minimal stock of words"; and when he too aimed to create something "direct," "visionary," yet "securely attached to actual situations." The literality that Hamburger and Weissbort are describing as a central quality of post-war Eastern and Central European poetry could, in this sense, also be said to be one of the central qualities in *Crow*. This is something which I will be discussing in more detail below.

Crow and *The Desert of Love*

Because of this connection with a post-war poetic "silence," the Central European poet to whom Hughes's poetic development in *Crow* is most commonly compared, apart from Popa, is Pilinszky. This is partly due to the fact that Hughes was, as we know, beginning to receive Csokits's versions of Pilinszky around the time of embarking on *Crow*. But it is also due to the close affinity that seems to exist between the two poets' work. As Weissbort suggests, it is clear that in writing *Crow*, Hughes "was in a way replicating the development of certain European poets of the first post-war generation." Of these, he argues, János Pilinszky seemed closest to him. It was Pilinszky's linguistic poverty in particular which was "surely a factor in Hughes's search for an elemental language, apparent in his translation, for instance, of Seneca's *Oedipus*, or the broken cycle of poems which make up the saga of *Crow*."[85]

If we compare the two texts – *Crow* and Hughes's translations of Pilinszky in *The Desert of Love* – it is possible to see the ways in which they both go about utilizing and expressing this idea of silence. Mostly, it is expressed in terms of a severe distrust of language – in particular a distrust of language which is unplain; a facing towards simplicity and truth. As Hughes writes in 'Crow Tries the Media':

> He didn't want comparisons with the earth or anything to
> do with it

[85] DW, introduction to TH, *ST*, p. ix.

Oversold like detergents
He did not even want words
Waving their long tails in public
With their prostitute's exclamations

He wanted to sing very clear

In this poem, Hughes states a desire which is very much part of the Pilinszky translations too. This is not only to do with their plainness of layout and their almost flatness of style, but is something which also seems central to the meaning of their message:

Not the respiration. The gasping.
Not the wedding table. The falling
scraps, the chill, the shadows.
Not the gesture. Not the hysteria.
The silence of the hook is what you must note.

(from Pilinszky's 'Exhortation,' trans. Hughes / Csokits)

Indeed, when we compare the two texts, it is particularly interesting how the character Crow, in his stammering, "nearly illiterate" baseness, can at times appear to be an exaggerated version of the central character in the Pilinszky poems. The dazed, guilty creature in Hughes's 'Crow's Nerve Fails,' for instance, whose "prison is the earth" and who asks himself: "Who murdered all these?" strongly recalls the protagonist in *The Desert of Love*, who asks himself, "Would I be the one who killed her?" and whose world is "a world grown cold […] as I worm, like a maggot, / deeper and deeper into its bowels." ('World Grown Cold').

Even more familiar is the apparent struggle of the speaker in the Pilinszky translations to string two sentences together. The "dumbness" of poems such as 'Apocrypha,' for example, conveys the same mistrust and suspicion of poetic language that we find throughout *Crow*, where words are also consistently described in negative terms. In the Pilinszky translations, words are alienating and foreign: "My voice is more homeless than the word! / I have no words," while in *Crow* they are dirty and elusive: prostitutes, murderers, brutal armies:

There came news of a word.
Crow saw it killing men. He ate well.
He saw it bulldozing
Whole cities to rubble. Again he ate well.
He saw its excreta poisoning seas.
He became watchful.
He saw its breath burning whole lands
To dusty char.
He flew clear and peered.

(from Hughes's 'A Disaster')

Indeed, if we make a note of each time we come across a reference to the struggle to speak, or to silence, either in *The Desert of Love* or in *Crow*, we find that there are innumerable references to such topics. In *The Desert of Love*, we find words and phrases such as: Mouths snapping dry void; I cannot even cry out; My orphaned lips; In my mouth I taste the dirt; Do you hear my dumbness; The ecstatic barriers of silence; Dumb as a demented eye-pupil; I do not understand the human speech; My voice is more homeless than the word; In a glass-cased silence; Speechless he sits – and so on. In *Crow* we find words and phrases which deal with very similar images: The huge stammer; Could not pronounce; Cannot manage words; Did not even want words; Words retreated; Wordless; Speechless; Dumb-faced; She comes dumb; Their mouths deformed; Mouthless; Gaping his mouth; The putrid mouth; He makes a silence; Silence my knowledge; To reign over silence.

In all instances, of course, the speaker is using his poetic "dumbness" as a powerful means of expression, where speechlessness – and the ensuing struggle to speak plainly – becomes a central part of the aesthetic. The result in Hughes's Pilinszky is what Hughes describes as a "post-apocalyptic silence."[86] The result for Hughes, so Michael Parker would suggest, is the same. Either way, while in both works all words "seem obsolete and inadequate,"[87] it is directly out of this

[86] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 11.
[87] ibid.

inadequacy that they make their poetic language: "a language in which the symbols of the horror become the sacred symbols of a kind of worship."[88]

As well as speechlessness, we find other common themes: guilt, trauma, imprisonment, physical pain. The violence, the physicality, and the urgency that *Crow* became instantly renowned for, can also be found in Hughes's translations of Pilinszky, and in both texts, the words and images which recur most often are very physically expressive. In *Crow*'s opening poem, 'Two Legends,' we find the following verbs: striving, pull, swelling, lifted, plunging, lying. The image is one of something trapped and striving to be released. The verbs in 'Fish in the Net' (the first poem in *The Desert of Love*), create a similar effect: tossing, gasping, snapping, gagging, suffering, stifles, convulse, maims, battle, kill.

Reading on, we find that there are a number of identical, or almost identical, words being used in both texts, always to suggest a harsh and often painful world. Verbs such as: hit, rip, bleed, strangles, buried, kill, trembling, dragging, scorching, bursting, crush, topple, stumbling, burning, pulsates – all of these can be found in some form or another in both *Crow* and *The Desert of Love*. Nouns and adjectives also show how emphasis, in both texts, has been placed on physical pain, and on portraying an atmosphere of rottenness and decay. Again, these same words can be found in both texts: murderer, electric chair, pain, fear, shame, wounds, refuse (garbage, in *Crow*), filth, dust, dung (ordure, in *Crow*).

The physical intensity indicated by these words is emphasised by the recurrent use in both texts of words which describe physical consuming. For Hughes's trickster-inspired 'Crow,' this is not surprising: one of the trickster's main characteristics is a voracious appetite. Words such as: eating, crammed, swallowed, bit, guzzling, sucking – all occur regularly throughout *Crow*. In his versions of Pilinszky there is an almost identical selection, this time evoking not the trickster, but the gnawing effect of some inner torment: eating, crammed, swallowed, biting, savaging, sating.

The central figures in both appear, in this way, base, and crude, and rough. But they are also suffering, and this is another important aspect of the two texts. Hughes wrote about Pilinszky: "It is impossible not to feel that the spirit of his poetry aspires to the most naked and helpless of all confrontations: a Christ-like

[88] ibid. p. 12.

posture of crucifixion."[89] His central character in *Crow* would assume a similar posture: "He turned his back and he marched away from the sea // As a crucified man cannot move." ('Crow and the Sea'). Lost, abandoned, and naked, these lone, troubled creatures exist in a world which is large yet confining; a landscape which is described, in both texts, as immense and gigantic, dry and burning, ruthless and empty. These words create the underlying sense of bleakness and urgency which so memorably links the two texts. Although Hughes's translations of Pilinszky display none of the mocking, bawdy tone of *Crow* ("His way of thinking is a bit more mythological," Pilinszky once said of Hughes, "while mine is rather more metaphysical),"[90] their worlds are similarly bleak, war-torn and desolate. Readers will find there a God who no longer offers comfort, and a love which, as Hughes wrote about Pilinszky, "becomes a howl, or a dumbness groping for somebody – anybody – in the dazzling emptiness."[91]

The texts portray, in their individual ways, a sense of crisis, and here we can locate a real common intensity and brutality: "What underground struggle / what blood / is this which reddens my eye corner / from dawn?" asks the protagonist in one of Hughes's translations of Pilinszky.[92] "What could be hurting so much?" asks Crow.[93] Man has become trapped outside himself, traumatized, staring at himself from without. In *Crow*, this is most apparent in the poems 'Crow's Account of St. George' and 'Criminal Ballad,' in which a man commits acts of brutality in a blind, unconscious state, only to realise at the end that something shocking has happened: "And now he ran from the children and ran through the house / Holding his bloody hands clear of everything". In Hughes's Pilinszky we find a similar nightmare-like intertwining of domesticity and savagery, when the speaker seems fearful of his possible involvement in some murderous act: "Have I maybe / strangled you with my bare hands," he asks in 'What Underground Struggle.'

Indeed, the protagonist in the Pilinszky poems regularly views himself coldly, from a distance, struggling to comprehend his own self: "Is this my face? This face? / The light, the silence, and the judgement are shattered / as this stone, my face, hurtles towards me." ('Epilogue'). Compare this to Hughes's image in 'Crow

[89] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 10.
[90] JP, speaking in the Jotischky interview. See DW, *TH&Tr*, p. 46.
[91] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 11.
[92] From JP's poem, 'What Underground Struggle' trans. Hughes / Csokits.
[93] From TH's poem, 'Crow on the Beach.'

and Stone': "Stone, champion of the globe, lumbered towards him." Hughes's men are not quite men (they have a "rubber eye," a "clockwork ear," "watch-chain guts," a "broken window-pane head"). Similarly, the men in the Pilinszky poems are somehow lacking some vital part: outsiders who are unable to take part in ordinary, everyday life:

> As I was at the start
> so, all along, I have remained.
> The way I began, so I will go on to the end.
> Like the convict who, returning
> to his village, goes on being silent.
> Speechless he sits in front of his glass of wine.
>
> ('As I Was')

Again, we return to the image of silence, used here as a striking evocation of the guilt and isolation suffered by a narrator who is, like the creature in Hughes's poem 'King of Carrion,' "Returning, shrunk, silent."

The "lack of language," which Pilinszky claimed to be at the heart of his poems, then, can also be seen to be a central motif in *Crow*. More relentless in its violence, more fast-paced and colloquial and humorous in its language, Hughes's *Crow* nonetheless embraces the same poetic power of "dumbness" which he would discover, and embrace, during his translations of the Hungarian poet. Accordingly, the wounded, self-disgusted creature at the centre of *Crow* will discover that the truest, and most authentic means of expression is to be found within a certain primal, basic, form of utterance: "A cry / Wordless / As the newborn baby's grieving / On the steely scales." ('Dawn's Rose'). At the same time, we find the protagonist in Hughes's translations of Pilinszky recognizing that there is a resonant poetic force to be found in total silence:

> And this is all.
> The rest –
> the rest was simply
> that he forgot to cry out
> before he collapsed.

('Passion of Ravensbrück')

Crow and the Effect of Translation

This emphasis that both texts place on the loss of poetic language is the subject of John Clegg's on-line paper, 'You have made this yours absolutely: the shared concerns of János Pilinszky and Ted Hughes.' Here, Clegg argues that as Hughes engages with Pilinszky's work, it is the vision of "a linguistic nihilism containing an implicit possibility of transcendence," that Hughes is moving closer towards. While "this shift cannot be attributed straightforwardly to the influence of Pilinszky," Clegg concedes, "this influence deserves to be recognised as one factor among others, and any examination of the development of Hughes' worldview must take the shared concerns of the two poets into account."[94]

One reason for the un-straightforwardness of directly attributing Hughes's poetic development to the influence of Pilinszky is that Hughes had been experimenting with an anti-poetic style even before he began translating Pilinszky in earnest. This can be seen in poems such as 'The Rat's Dance,' part of a short cycle of poems entitled *Song of a Rat*, which appeared in *Wodwo* in 1967. "The rat is in the trap, it is in the trap," this poem begins, "And attacking heaven and earth with a mouthful of screeches / like torn tin, // An effective gag." The bleak imagery and direct language used here, and in several other poems in *Wodwo*, strongly anticipate the "nihilistic" language that we find in *Crow*, and that Clegg identifies as a key part of Hughes's relationship with Pilinszky.

Another reason is surely the fact that the Pilinszky to whom we are comparing Hughes, and by whom we are suggesting Hughes was influenced, is received (by us and by Hughes) only through translation, so the comparison is always, by necessity, filtered through Hughes's mediation of the original poetry in the first place. How do we know, for example, that Pilinszky was prone to using an intensified, bleak vocabulary similar to Hughes's, when the words could in fact be (and indeed sometimes were, as we have seen) Hughes's own additions and alterations? Clegg makes it clear that he is aware of these limitations, and the title of

[94] Clegg.

his essay frames his argument in such a way that shows he need not cross these limits in order to develop his point.

Other scholars discussing Pilinszky's influence have also been careful about this. As Anthony Rowland writes: "Pilinszky's poems appear to have sharpened Hughes's conception of the poetry of extremity."[95] Here, Rowland manages to stress the fact that the relationship between Pilinszky and Hughes was more one of confirmation and extension, rather than one of what Seamus Heaney might call "creative stealing" on the part of the translator.[96]

Yet despite this awareness in Hughes scholarship of the 'translatedness' of the text by which Hughes may or may not have been influenced, and despite the fact that these scholars all recognized a link between *Crow* and the post-war poetry of Eastern and Central Europe that Hughes was reading in translation or translating himself, strikingly few have focused their discussions on the actual procedure that Hughes was following while making the translations of Pilinszky, or on the possibility that it was in fact this particular process of conversion and its effects on the final English text which exerted the key influence on – or which most "sharpened" – Hughes's style of writing in *Crow*.

In other words, while there are clearly important correspondences to be found between Hughes's translations of Pilinszky and *Crow*, as outlined in the previous section, it may well be that the more relevant comparisons are those to be found between Hughes's approach to translating the former, and his intentions for writing the latter. As Neil Roberts so crucially emphasizes in his discussion of *Crow*'s relationship with Eastern and Central European poetry: "The flatness of the language and enervation of rhythm that belong to the anti-rhetorical effect may be present in the Czech of Holub (and in the Serbo-Croat of Popa and, to a lesser extent, the Polish of Herbert), but they are also an effect of poetry in translation."[97]

In the case of Hughes's translations of Pilinszky, we have already seen that this "effect" of translation was central to the entire project. As Hughes himself explained: "I am certain I would never have become as interested in Pilinszky as I eventually did, if my curiosity had not been caught in the first place by Csokits's

[95] Rowland, p, 150.
[96] See Seamus Heaney's 'Report on Session 7' in Allén. In summing up, Heaney suggests that "the task of the translator – or of the creative stealer […] is to make something of the given, to move it through a certain imaginative and linguistic distance." (p. 331).
[97] Roberts, p. 83.

swift word-for-word translations […]."[98] Perhaps it was the "linguistic nihilism" and "implicit possibility of transcendence" of these initial versions made by Csokits – even more than that of Pilinszky's original – which was the real factor in the development of his elemental language in *Crow*. Certainly, the two were clearly intimately connected in Hughes's mind.

Making such a connection allows us to consider the possibility that Csokits's English literals of Pilinszky had an important, and often overlooked, role in the development of Hughes's poetic style in *Crow*. This is a key point: Hughes's preoccupation, while composing *Crow*, with writing "songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say,"[99] seems to have a great deal in common with his intention, when translating Pilinszky, to convey the "simple, helpless accuracy" of Pilinszky's original, by "settling for literalness as a first principle."[100]

Crow and the Literal

There are several stylistic devices in *Crow* which mirror those which we have already seen Hughes use in his approach to translation. Particularly interesting in this regard is the way that Hughes is composing by negative acts, where he uses gaps and absences to create the sense of urgency and irregularity so characteristic of both his Pilinszky translations, and the poems in *Crow*. The oddly phrased opening lines of *Crow*, "Black was the without eye / Black the within tongue," immediately demonstrates his preference for a Germanic, basic, elemental lexis, rather than a more formal, distant, Latinate structure ("external eye"; "internal tongue"). These lines place readers, at the outset, in rough and uneven territory, where a smoothness of sound and form is nearly always avoided by the poet, as if in order to reach a more elemental, and therefore uncompounded – less 'compromised' – depiction.

Hughes deliberately seeks such roughness and unevenness throughout *Crow*. He isolates words, uses brackets, inserts long gaps in between words, removes punctuation, strings sentences together without pauses, makes poems in the form of

[98] TH in DW, *TP*, p. 18.
[99] TH, Faas interview, p. 20.
[100] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 13.

lists, or notes, or questions and answers, or fragments from a larger text. See, for example, 'Fragment of an Ancient Tablet,' where a description of the image of a female body becomes broken up within the poem. The result is a de-composition: rather than looking like a finished piece, the poem appears more like an inventory; a description of the details found on an old, broken piece of stone:

> Above – the well-known lips, delicately downed.
> Below – beard between thighs.
>
> Above – her brow, the notable casket of gems.
> Below – the belly with its blood-knot.
>
> Above – many a painful frown.
> Below – the ticking bomb of the future.
>
> Above – her perfect teeth, with the hint of a fang at the corner.
> Below – the millstones of two worlds.
>
> Above – a word and a sigh.
> Below – gouts of blood and babies.
>
> Above – the face, shaped like a perfect heart.
> Below – the heart's torn face.

Here, as well as the highly effective use of mirroring and repetition, the use of dashes is noteworthy. Hughes makes extensive use of the dash throughout *Crow*, a method which we have already seen him use in his translation work elsewhere.[101] In his own poems, as we see in the above extract, he uses it to fragment his text, so that the poem appears more as a set of unaltered notes, jotted down at the scene of discovery, or at the moment of inspiration. This device is also used, for example, in 'Notes for a Little Play,' a title which points towards Hughes's interest in combining the dramatic, spoken word with the appearance of an un-worked text: "First – the sun

[101] This also recalls the dash in Emily Dickinson's work, of which Hughes (as we have seen) was a great admirer.

coming closer, growing by the minute. / Next – clothes torn off." Again, the dash here conveys a sense of the spontaneously written, or verbalised, utterance.

In *Crow*, as in his version of Pilinszky's 'Apocrypha,' the emphasis is often placed on the poetic power of inversion and repetition, as well as the intense need – the urgency – to express oneself clearly. See, for example, the repetition which occurs in the following lines from 'Crow Blacker than ever' (an effect which is reinforced by Hughes's lack of commas): "But Crow Crow / Crow nailed them together." Here, the three-times repeated "Crow" recalls the repetition of "apart" in Hughes's version of 'Apocrypha,' when we saw how Hughes's decision to insert line-breaks between sentences appropriately intensified the meaning of the whole poem. In 'Crow Blacker than ever,' especially towards the end of the poem, Hughes has his sentences break up (and thus break down) completely, so that the speaker appears to be faltering slightly, or pausing, or holding back. Particularly striking about Hughes's lines in this poem is the way he introduces a rhyme ("Crying" and "Flying"), which has the effect of making the unrhyming conclusion sound even more stark and final:

> The agony did not diminish.
>
> Man could not be man nor God God.
>
> The agony
>
> Grew.
>
> Crow
>
> Grinned
>
> Crying: 'This is my Creation,'
>
> Flying the black flag of himself.

This is a good illustration of the deliberate music-less music of *Crow*, and Hughes's preference therein for forms which originate in the oral tradition.

There is only one poem in *Crow*, 'Song for a Phallus,' which contains clear end-rhymes, and this is only employed in order to create a poem which is bawdy, and in bad-taste. As Sophie Pollard argues, the simple language of 'Song for a Phallus' mimics a nursery rhyme, while Hughes treats his poem merely "as an opportunity to mock the lineage of texts exploring the Oedipus myth."[102]

There was a boy was Oedipus
    Stuck in his Mammy's belly
His Daddy'd walled the exit up
    He was a horrible fella[103]

In fact, even the rhyme here is childishly inept; spontaneous and cheap, made as if only to prompt a laugh. Here we can see Hughes translating the classic story into a crude, undisciplined, colloquial, off-hand idiom: the syntax is odd, the words are slangy, and the whole tragic tale has been lowered, generally, into common, non-literary usage.

This poem shows how Hughes set about fulfilling his aim for *Crow*, to create a narrator who was "very crude, nearly illiterate, very rough […]."[104] It is an example of how he sought to express himself through a character who, as he writes in the poem 'Crow's Undersong,' "cannot manage words." The result was often a peculiar, staccato effect, similar to that which Hughes admired, and aspired to, in his translation work. He achieves it in *Crow* by his tendency to appear as if he himself is unsure of how to write correctly. In 'Crow's Undersong,' for example, there are no full-stops or commas; the syntax is off-beat, and unconventional:

She cannot come all the way

She comes as far as water no further

She comes with the birth push

[102] Sophie Pollard, 'The Oedipus Myth in *Crow*,' *Earth Moon* http://www.ted-hughesinfo/criticism/online-article-html [Accessed June 2011].
[103] Hughes plays with other canonical texts in this way in other poems in *Crow*, most memorably perhaps in poems such as 'Lineage,' 'A Childish Prank' and 'Apple Tragedy,' where he mockingly reinterprets stories from the Old Testament: "The serpent had a good drink / And curled up into a questionmark. Adam drank and said: 'Be my god.' / Eve drank and opened her legs."
[104] TH, letter to Daniel Huws, 27 October 1966, *Letters* , p. 261.

Into eyelashes into nipples the fingertips
She comes as far as blood and to the tips of hair
She comes to the fringe of voice
She stays
Even after life even among the bones

In this poem, the language is again almost childlike in its spontaneous and improvised quality. The oddly placed "the fingertips", and the unusual structure of "the fringe of voice" creates an un-English, foreign sound, as if Hughes is attempting a type of self-foreignization. The fragmented nature of these lines creates a strong, verbal drama, and a certain primitiveness, yet Hughes's poem is also sophisticated – something he noted in Pilinszky too.[105] In one way, Hughes is contending here, as Weissbort observed, "with his own talent," constantly attempting "to transcend [his] verbal brilliance and dexterity, in his quest for something more basic, a regenerative form of words."[106]

This kind of contention is apparent in many of the *Crow* poems. See for example 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song,' where the line-breaks create an initial confusion: "Ours is the land / Of loveliness and beautiful / Is the putrid mouth of the leopard." This is a slightly twisted, inverted English which recalls the Hiberno-English of Augusta Gregory's 'Donal Og,' and which we saw Hughes utilise to a small degree in his translations of Pilinszky ("Do you know / the name of orphanage? / Do you know"). See also 'Crow Frowns,' where the lack of punctuation is combined with jumbled descriptions, enjambment, and casual language, to convey the spontaneity of the spoken utterance: "He is the long waiting for something / To use him for some everything / Having so carefully made him // of nothing." Here, Hughes blends together the vagueness of everyday speech with stark imagery, using a throwaway tone to say something complex and desolate.

The impromptu, regenerative sound of *Crow* is increased by another device of Hughes's, namely his use of compound words, when he shoves incongruous and often graphic words together to make surprising combinations: "earth-bowel," "fright-glare," "sump-outlet," "blood-knot," "wall-face," "corpse-dust." Richard Holmes referred to these as Hughes's "apparently deliberate resort to primitive

[105] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 8.
[106] DW, introduction to TH, *ST*, p. ix.

hamfisted adjectives,"[107] and the intention is clearly to create that kind of fumbled, stumbling "home-made" style that we have seen Hughes admire in some many other writers and translations. In 'Crow on the Beach,' adjectives come together to form a childlike, foreign-sounding description: "Seeing sea-grey mash a mountain of itself / Crow tightened his goose-pimples," while in 'Crow Improvises' the combinations add a colloquial, improvised quality: "So he took the humane-killed skull of a horse in one hand / And a baby's fairy-bait molar in the other – / The spark that banged burned out his weeper." These are playful inventions which show Hughes creating his own version of English, making new combinations of words in order to revitalize and energize his language.

Tom Paulin, in an essay on Hughes's poetry, focuses on this particular habit of Hughes's, which he sees as highly characteristic of Hughes's work in general, even in the earlier poetry before *Crow*. Quoting the compound adjective, "hour-before-dawn," from the poem 'The Horses' (published in *The Hawk in the Rain* in 1956), Paulin argues that this early use of the composite structure anticipates "the improvised vernacular of Hughes's mature style."[108] Paulin connects this to the fact that, in his view, Hughes is an intensely uncomfortable writer: "the sense of strain that underpins his lunging, extempore lines is a type of homelessness, a hungry sense of not belonging anywhere."[109]

It is a most unusual statement to make about Hughes, especially considering the fact that some critics might say that Hughes's poetry represents a hungry sense of belonging everywhere; a tendency to appropriate and re-write (and "re-right," as Heather Clark puts it), the voices and experiences of all other poets who he admires or feels to be attuned to. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider the possibility that the sense of "homelessness" Paulin hears in Hughes's poetry might point towards Hughes's involvement with translation, and in particular, towards his attraction to the sound of poetry which was still in its initial, temporary stage of conversion. Seen in these terms, the foreignizing technique which Hughes employed as a translator, and his technique of self-foreignization in *Crow*, could act as evidence in support of Paulin's argument, in that it could illustrate how Hughes was identifying with a

[107] Holmes.
[108] Tom Paulin, 'Laureate of the Free Market,' in *Minotaur Poetry and the Nation State* (London: Faber, 1992), p. 254.
[109] ibid.

language which was consciously not domesticated, and which thus flaunted its own apartness.

Alternatively however, Hughes's composite improvisations could confirm the opposite: that it isn't homelessness at all which we are hearing in Hughes's poetry, but rather Hughes's feeling that the refined and reserved English of the academic elite was no place for him to lay his true poetic hat. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the poem 'The Horses' to which Paulin refers above as an example of the poet's "homelessness" and future "improvised vernacular," contains another line which initiated, elsewhere, a discussion of Hughes's non-standard Englishness. In a letter to Craig Raine, written 16 May 1982, Hughes recalls:

> Roy Fuller quoted my romantic line 'Hearing the horizons endure' [the final line of 'The Horses'] as an example of my metrical imbecility, and called it (I think) 'unsayable'. On the other hand, I was specially proud of it. In fact, it still seems to me that if you're going to say it at all, you can only say it as I want it said. It's just that Roy Fuller refuses to surrender his officer's moustache, even provisionally.[110]

Here, Hughes not only demonstrates his awareness and protection of his distinctive poetic diction, but also shows his perception of the difference between his own (common-ranking) accent, and that of the (higher ranking) English "officer" such as Fuller. Clearly, Hughes was determined to keep true to the sound of his own awkward music. As he says in the same letter, his main pleasure in using meter eventually became giving the meters "a twist – and setting some other meter, inside them, against them."[111]

Daniel Weissbort is one of the few scholars to connect this aspect of Hughes's writing with his interest in translated poetry. In the introduction to his recent study *Ted Hughes and Translation*, he suggests that Hughes's involvement in translation was not only due to his conviction and clarity of vision, "but also perhaps owed something to his marginal status in what was still a class-bound society."[112]

His comment implies that translated poetry offered Hughes the potential for developing a poetic diction which was more suited to his own way of speaking; one which was untamed, unrefined, un-literary; yet one which remained securely

[110] TH to Craig Raine, 16 May 1982, *Letters*, p. 454.
[111] ibid.
[112] DW. *TH&Tr*. p. 9.

attached to its poetic origins. This was precisely what Hughes, like many others involved in the popular and literary arts at the time, was trying to develop and aspire towards in his own poetry, and in *Crow* especially we can see him embracing the de-formalising, foreignizing effects that he found so enthralling in translated poems.

Hughes did feel that some of the poems in *Crow* had worked better than others, although, as mentioned earlier, he wouldn't directly admit which ones in his *London Magazine* interview. In fact, he had two favourites, and in a letter to John and Nancy Fisher, sent the month *Crow* was published, he writes, "I wish I had more like page 74 and 79." On these pages were the poems 'Lovesong,' and 'How Water Began to Play.'[113]

In 'Lovesong' (the poem so disliked by Ian Hamilton, but once described enthusiastically by Edna O'Brien as resembling a "3 act play"),[114] lack of punctuation, simplicity of language and physicality of imagery results in a dramatic, fast-moving piece. A startling subversion of its title – it is not at all what we expect a love song to be – this poem makes for compelling reading. First published as 'Second Bedtime Story' in 1968, it makes no direct reference to the character Crow:[115]

> He loved her and she loved him
> His kisses sucked out her whole past and future or tried to
> He had no appetite
> She bit him she gnawed him she sucked
> She wanted him complete inside her
> Safe and sure forever and ever
> Their little cries fluttered into the curtains

It is a powerful, frightening beginning to the story of a couple's destructive love affair. At one point in the tale, Hughes includes several alternative words: "nothing or everlasting or whatever there was," an almost off-hand list, making the poet appear to be searching for the right word, and which highlights the desperate irony of

[113] TH to John and Nancy Fisher [September 1970], *Letters*, p. 307.
[114] Edna O'Brien to TH [undated, but probably around the time of *Crow*'s first publication in 1970], Emory.
[115] Yet the early title suggests that Hughes had always intended it as part of his sequence of what he once referred to as "the bed-time stories" of a crow. 'Lovesong' appeared as 'Second Bedtime Story' in *Word in the Desert*, the 1968 tenth anniversary edition of *Critical Quarterly*.

this ‘Lovesong.’ Such listing also carries echoes of Csokits’s provision of alternative words, when he was not quite sure which one sounded best in English. It also gives the text that sense of an oral tradition – an effect which recurs throughout *Crow*, where often Hughes starts a poem as if he were telling a story (“There was this terrible battle”; “There was this hidden grin”; “There was a man and when he was born”). The usually incongruous simplicity works to heighten the confusion and drama being conveyed.

Similarly, in ‘Lovesong’, we have lines such as: “Safe and sure forever and ever,” a phrase emulating familiar fairytales, but which in this instance portrays no happy ending; only the unrelenting possessiveness of the lovers. By the end of Hughes’s story, the protagonists have lost something vital: their own sense of self. This is particularly interesting in the context of this thesis, because in ‘Lovesong,’ the act of exchange is depicted as a kind of physical and painful deconstruction and reassembly; one which is deeply damaging to both of the individuals involved:

> His promises were the surgeon’s gag
> Her promises took the top off his skull
> She would get a brooch made of it
> His vows pulled out all her sinews
> He showed her how to make a love-knot
> Her vows put his eyes in formalin
> At the back of her secret drawer
> Their screams stuck in the wall
>
> Their heads fell apart into sleep like the two halves
> Of a lopped melon, but love is hard to stop
>
> In their entwined sleep they exchanged arms and legs
> In their dreams their brains took each other hostage
>
> In the morning they wore each other’s face

It is possible to detect the influence of both Pilinszky and Popa here, in whose poems the theme of painful love and exchange is very strong. In Hughes’s translation of Pilinszky’s ‘Trapeze and Parallel Bars,’ for example, we find two lovers running and

fighting mid-air, plunging and rising "above the flutter of reality." Like in Hughes's 'Lovesong,' Pilinszky's figures finally come to lie together, one asking the other "when did this hunt begin?" The "hostages" that appear at the close of Hughes's poem appear at the close of Pilinszky's as prisoners: "We crouch / on the sky's parallel bars – / like convict's condemned." For a similar theme in Popa, we could turn to the cycle 'Give me Back My Rags' in *Unrest-Field* (1956): "I'll burn your eyebrows / You won't be invisible to me forever // I'll mix day and night in your mind / You'll come beating your head on my door // I'll cut off your singing nails / So you can't hopscotch through my brain."[116]

Indeed, the action of Hughes's poem is centrally engaged with the whole notion of taking: its final line, "in the morning they wore each other's face," was singled out by Heather Clark as evidence of Hughes's complicity in the colonization of the woman writer.[117] Clark explains that it registers Plath's secret and early fear that she would "become" Hughes and that he would "remake" her.[118]

Yet in Hughes's poem, he is surely becoming her, as much as she is turning into him ("they wore *each other's* face"). Perhaps, this line could be read not so much as Hughes's admission of complicity, but as a wry nod to the media's depiction of him since Plath's death. His line "His whispers were whips and jackboots," may even borrow from Plath's image of the male fascist figure in 'Daddy.' If so, Hughes is making it clear that he is aware that he has already been translated, and responds by incorporating the notion into the subject of his poem. Either way, it is noteworthy that this notion of translation or transition as a theme is very prevalent in *Crow*. Birth, death and healing preoccupy the content, while the stylistic rawness and nakedness – coupled as they are with metaphor and symbolism – represent the poetic death, and re-birth, of the poet's voice:

> Only there is a doorway in the wall –
> A black doorway:
> The eye's pupil.

[116] From Popa's poem no. 7, in 'Give Me Back My Rags', *Unrest Field* (1956), trans. Anne Pennington / Francis Jones.
[117] Clark quotes this line twice and both times the quote includes the same misprint of the last word, so that it reads: "In the morning they wore each other's faces." Perhaps this reveals Clark's own interpretation of the situation, whereby Hughes and Plath each have more than one 'face.'
[118] Clark, p. 201.

Through that doorway came Crow.

Hughes's other favourite poem in *Crow*, 'How Water Began to Play,' is even more immediately suggestive of his interest in the sound and appearance of translated poetry.[119] Printed as the penultimate poem in the book, it appears as part two of what Hughes calls 'Two Eskimo Songs.' Its strange premise ("Water wanted to live / It went to the sun it came weeping back") combines with a lack of punctuation, oddly jolting repetitions, irregular grammar and disturbing imagery, to create a rough and brutal poem; one which sounds almost like a working-translation of an ancient text:

Water wanted to live
It went to the flowers they crumpled it came weeping back
It wanted to live
It went to the womb it met blood
It came weeping back
It went to the womb it met knife
It came weeping back
It went to the womb it met maggot and rottenness
It came weeping back it wanted to die

Hughes can here again be seen to utilize the "surrealism of folklore" and the stylistic effects of poetry in translation that he described in his introduction to Popa, when he wrote that "the poetic texture of the verbal code has been cancelled," leaving only "hieroglyphic objects and events."[120] The disturbing sequencing of images: the dead flowers with the womb, the womb with the knife, the womb with the maggots and the rot, suggests, step-by-step, the horror of this game that Water is learning. As in much Eastern and Central European poetry, the 'playing' carries a sinister edge. The final lines of the poem, with its image of water lying "at the bottom of all things / Utterly worn out utterly clear," in turn become a fitting closure to a sequence in which language seems to be experiencing a similar journey. The merging of lines, the repetition, and the awkward almost accented foreignness of this poem makes it

[119] When Hughes made an audio recording of *Crow*, he rearranged the order so that 'How Water Began to Play' ends the reading, possibly indicating his preference for it.
[120] TH, introduction to Popa, pp. xxvi & xxiv.

sound both unique and familiar – as if it too is following a set of rules, yet ones long ago drawn up.

This poem, like *Crow* as a whole, seems to be offered to readers as a translation from a remote culture. It appears, in its bare and unadorned layout, and its simple repetitive vocabulary, to be aiming for clarity, accuracy and authenticity; its brokenness and plainness emulating a text which exists at a mid-way stage of transition before it has been improved and re-worked into a formally complete piece. These qualities, and states, of translation are being used by Hughes to achieve a truthfulness, and forcefulness, of expression:

> He sang
> How everything had nothing more to lose
>
> Then sat still with fear
>
> Seeing the clawtrack of star
> Hearing the wingbeat of rock
>
> And his own singing

*

Crow marks a liberated and liberating point of creativity, where the entire endeavour, in all its weird celebration of a simplified and broken language, symbolizes the potential of poetry, and what Hughes saw as the most important part of the writing process: the "headlong, concentrated improvisation on a set theme."[121] The ideal result of this kind of writing would be, he said in 1967, "a free poem of sorts where grammar, sentence structure etc., are all sacrificed in an attempt to break fresh and accurate perceptions and words out of the reality of the subject chosen."[122]

Despite its bleakness and crudeness, *Crow*'s energetic seizure of language in this way seems to demonstrate what is possible in poetry, that same act of "extending

[121] TH, *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber, 1967), p. 23.
[122] ibid. Hughes's description here is remarkably similar to Vladimir Nabokov's extreme position on literal translation: "To my ideal translation I sacrificed everything (elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage, and even grammar) that the dainty mimics prize higher than the truth." Quoted in DW, *TH&Tr*. p. 114.

and releasing" that also characterised Hughes's initial work in translation.[123] It is this innate sense of energy and possibility that we find in *Crow* – from a creative point of view – which links it most strongly to the discoveries that Hughes made during his work as a translator. The point is, that the actual inventive, revitalizing, liberating act, which was for Hughes literal translation, encouraged and nourished the free and productive act which was writing *Crow*. As he said when asked if translating Seneca's *Oedipus* had influenced the writing of *Crow*: "Main influence was the stylistic release of finding a simple language and tone for a supercharged theme."[124]

Hughes's work on the Pilinszky translations clearly led to a similar sort of discovery. His fascination during that process with Csokits's simplicity and rawness, and his attempts during his re-writes to eradicate any elevated literary tropes – all of which has been examined in detail in this thesis – are clear for all to see in *Crow*. Whatever he found while working on the Pilinszky poems – a method of writing which involved a special kind of striving towards the source – we can find him adapting, extending and utilising in *Crow*.

At the same time, whatever he was aiming for in *Crow* – the development of a rough and "nearly illiterate" poetic persona – we can find him achieving in his role as Pilinszky's translator, through his insistence on maintaining a certain poetic asceticism, and adhering to the roughness of the literal text. When Hughes was responding to the broken language of Csokits's versions, in other words, he was responding to a particular kind of music; a sound which he as a poet found deeply conducive and exciting.

[123] In the editorial of *MPT* 3:12 (2009), Helen and David Constantine describe the first issue of *MPT* as "an act of extending and releasing. Publishing Herbert, Holub, Miłosz, Popa and Voznesensky in English, Hughes and Weissbort enlarged them into a wider territory." (p. 1).
[124] TH to Nick Gammage, 15 December 1992, *Letters*, p. 618.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to study the relationship between Hughes's translations of Pilinszky and his own poetic intentions for *Crow*; its main objective being to locate, where possible, some sort of central key to understanding how the two works may have corresponded or become aligned to one another.

There was a founding question to my research: was *Crow* a direct response to the poet's work with Pilinszky? When I first read Hughes's versions of Pilinszky I felt certain that it was, so strongly did the Pilinszky remind me of *Crow*. Particularly striking were the poems about the Nazi labour camps: 'Harbach 1944,' 'On the Wall of a KZ-Lager,' 'Passion of Ravensbrück,' and others. These seemed incredibly close to what Hughes was achieving, or trying to achieve, in *Crow*: a plain, almost simplistic depiction of earth-shattering events; shocking in their content and implications, as well as in their style and use of language.

Hughes's introduction to *The Desert of Love* appeared to confirm the influence. Not only did his idiosyncratic descriptions in this essay focus on the relevance of Pilinszky's engagement with the subject of war (he writes: "the world of the camps became the world of his deepest, most private poetic knowledge"),[1] but his praise of the Hungarian poet in general tended to centre around those qualities that he himself aspired to in *Crow*: the abrupt syntax, the linguistic poverty, the emergence "at the heart of his poems," of a creature who was: "savaged by primal hungers, among the odds and ends of a destroyed culture […]."[2] The comparison appeared to me then, at the initial stages of my doctoral research, to be clear, obvious and straight-forwardly definable.

There was one immediate difficulty, however. This was the likelihood that Hughes had in fact simply made his English versions of Pilinszky to sound rather like his own poetry. As I began to read the Pilinszky poems elsewhere, both in their original Hungarian, and in English versions made by other translators, this

[1] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 9.
[2] ibid.

possibility suddenly also seemed clear and obvious, casting the whole proposition in a new and confusing light.[3]

The point of clarification came with further investigation into the translation process. This placed a third person, János Csokits, into the equation; more importantly it placed a third text: Csokits's literal. Once I had established the importance of this, I was able to recognize that the value of the comparison lay in the similarities I was locating between Hughes's so-called "literal" approach to translating Pilinszky, and his aims for the so-called "super-simple" *Crow*. My task then became directed towards analysing the correspondences between Hughes's aims for the two projects, rather than just between the published poems themselves.

Findings

I will now outline the key findings of my research.

In Chapter One I found that Hughes's translations of Pilinszky were the result of a collaborative project, and that his versions were based heavily on literals provided by János Csokits. I found that in comparison with other co-translators, Hughes's method was distinct in that he appeared to have little interest in the sound of the poems in their original Hungarian; indeed, further investigation showed that he directly avoided, when possible, any knowledge of the original rhyme and meter. In addition, I found evidence to suggest that Hughes had, even before embarking on his co-translations of other poets, expressed an interest in the sound of poetry in literal translation; intrigued, as Plath wrote in the 1950s, by its rough and impromptu effects. This all pointed towards the possibility that the literal had a poetic, as well as a strategic, function for Hughes. This was compounded by my examination of Hughes's written definitions of literal translation, both as they appeared in the early *MPT* editorials, and in his Pilinszky introduction. I found that in the former he ascribed very particular, poetically symbolic traits to the literal, while in the latter he conflated these traits with those he identified in the original poetry.

[3] Pilinszky's complete poems in Hungarian can be accessed on-line at the Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum website: http://dia.pool.pim.hu/html/muvek/PILINSZKY/pilinszky00001kv.html.
I also referred to a hardback publication entitled *Összes versei* (Hungary: Osiris Kiadó, 2003). The most recent English translation of Pilinszky in book form is JP, *Passio*. See also *Crater*, trans. Peter Jay (Anvil, 1978) and *Metropolitan Icons*, trans. Emery George (Edwin Mellen, 1995).

In conclusion, I found that the literal had achieved a metaphorical status for Hughes, representing for him "first-hand contact" with the poet and the poem, as well as a more general return of poetry to its raw, naked origins. Most importantly, it marked a move away from the refined English of intellectuals who had forgotten how to speak like real people. When Hughes admired 'the literal' he was admiring its immediacy, its spontaneity, its almost folk-quality – it was a magical thing, handed from person to person, owned by everyone and by no one. Above all, he was admiring its urgency and vitality, its ability to revitalise, but at the same time exist outside of the bonds of a British literary tradition that he himself felt no part of. As Martin Dodsworth writes: "Hughes' praise of 'literalism' is part of the anti-intellectualism of his poetic practice,"[4] and it is clear that the sound of poetry in literal translation offered Hughes the potential for a new poetic language, one which he himself was developing and evolving in his own poetry at that time.

In Chapter Two I found that Hughes had a tendency to translate a wide range of writers and poets into his own idiom – not in the sense that he was converting them from one language into another however, but rather in the sense that he was interpreting them (in his prose writings) in such a way that they began to resemble himself. More importantly, I found that the traits he was locating and praising in poets such as Pilinszky, Popa, Plath, Douglas, Shakespeare and Eliot, not only resembled each other (which is to say they all resembled aspects of Hughes's poetry), but that they also recalled the traits that he had admired in literal translation. Literalism, it seems, had become a standard by which Hughes was judging the work of all creative enterprises, no matter how diverse, and regardless of whether he was reading them in translation, or in the original. This is particularly relevant if we are trying to ascertain the extent to which Hughes's poetics had become aligned to his translations of Pilinszky, or the other way around. Clearly, the two actions were happening almost simultaneously: whatever Hughes was responding to in the new, foreign, un-Englishness of Csokits's literals, he was, at the same time, recognising in the work of others and developing in his own poetry. The point is that the very literalness that Hughes had applied to his translations of Pilinszky was also central to his own poetic desires and preoccupations at the time.

[4] Dodsworth, p. 27.

Taking such a personal poetic interest in the authentic effect of an accented English was not entirely unique to Hughes, as I demonstrated in my discussion, further on in Chapter Two, of Augusta Gregory's translation of the Irish poem 'Donal Og.' Having discovered that Hughes once claimed that this version was his "favourite short poem," I investigated the similarities between Gregory's controversial use of Hiberno-English in her translations from the Irish, and Hughes's use of Csokits's literals in his translations from the Hungarian. I found that the chief goal of both methods was to capture the real voice of the speaker, and that it was often by emphasizing the translated quality of their texts that they managed to achieve this goal.

At the close of this chapter, I looked at how Gregory's dramatic, almost brutalizing employment of Hiberno-English had made a significant impact on the language of her contemporaries, including that of Yeats. Particularly relevant was how the apparent reluctance on the part of the translators to improve or regularise their Irish-sounding versions became in turn a means of rebellion and revolt against the literary manners of the educated elite of the day. Hughes's own interest in translation, over half a century later, echoes their enthusiasm. I concluded, therefore, that his overt attraction to the violating effects of the literal and its liberating results places him in the company of a group of writers who were all in search of the same authenticity of expression, and that in this sense it is possible to see his activities in translation in a wider literary context.

By Chapter Three I was in a position to re-apply my findings to Hughes's translation of the Pilinszky poems. The key argument here was that although Hughes's literalism was less faithful than it might first appear, it is still possible to see it as a highly appropriate method of representing the source text. To demonstrate this I outlined three main points of comparison between Hughes's translation methods and Pilinszky's own poetics. Firstly, I showed that both poet and translator had expressed a desire to remain close to their sources, and a reluctance to improve on these valued origins. For Pilinszky this meant that his aphasic aunt remained the source for his poetic language. For Hughes, it was the "struggling dumbness" of the literal versions.

This suggested a second point of comparison, which was the two poets' use of "deficiency" (to use Pilinszky's word) as a creative tool. Pilinszky's claims to

"lowering" and "simplifying" his thoughts when writing his poems, and his attraction to subject-matter which fell outside of what is generally considered suitable poetic material, clearly corresponded to Hughes's enthusiasm for the broken, crude, unpoetic appearance of the poems in literal translation.[5] I concluded that regardless of their actual closeness to the original in linguistic terms, therefore, Hughes's versions of Pilinszky were reproducing certain aspects of their source very accurately, in metaphorical terms.

This conclusion brought me to my third and final point of comparison, which was between the metaphorical status of Hughes's literalism, and the metaphorical status of Pilinszky's "poor poetry." Here I found that despite their claims to neutrality and passivity, both poet and translator were actively engaged in making definite stylistic decisions; performing a poetic transfer of one kind or another. Most significant was the fact that they were both speaking metaphorically about a language which, they implied, had little recourse to metaphor. The interesting point here was the aim for revelation by concealment; an aim which is, of course, central to most creative arts. "Look for the right masks," Hughes told his daughter Frieda in 1995. "A feeling is always looking for a metaphor of itself in which it can reveal itself unrecognised."[6]

In terms of Hughes's translation methods, this becomes what I referred to as the lie of his literality: the replacement of certain aspects of the literal with something which seems to be more 'literal.' This is not meant negatively, however, and my main conclusion here is that even in their discrepancies it is possible to recognize a correspondence between the poet's original creative intentions, and those of his translator.

In the second part of Chapter Three I made a closer investigation into the effect that Hughes's metaphorical interpretation of literal translation had on the final Pilinszky versions. For this I referred to archival resources, specifically Hughes's working drafts of his translations of Pilinszky and the typescripts of the original literals sent to Hughes from Csokits in the late 1960s. Comparing these sets of texts

[5] Pilinszky says, for example, "From my earliest days I was particularly interested in what seemed to get left outside. For instance, a beautiful ocean at dawn hardly needs affirming. But a discarded piece of newspaper does. It was really these objects that interested me, the beings, the objects, the things squeezed to the edge of the world, and I felt that if somehow I were able to move these things into the centre, I would have achieved something more important than if I had been celebrating or affirming proven things." See JP, Toth interview, p. 338.
[6] TH to Frieda Hughes, 12 February 1995, *Letters*, p. 678.

with the final published translations, I found that Hughes did make alterations to the literal versions, but that his alterations were – paradoxically – always based on a desire to achieve a greater *sense* of literality; a sense, that is, of accuracy of meaning in accordance with Hughes's interpretation of what that might be, rather than what the original Hungarian might have suggested.

From this I drew one main conclusion: Hughes was changing Csokits's literal version of Pilinszky in order to create a version which agreed more with his *idea* of a literal version (it would be basic, direct, urgent and so on). Almost without fail, his replacement-words were less literary than the original literal, less vague and less removed from real, actual sensation. They were, instead, words that might be used in speech, words which were more accurate and specific to their subject-matter, words which were more physical, more visceral and direct. The images often became slightly uglier, slightly harsher and more striking to the English-speaking reader. At times, Hughes utilised the inaccuracies and simplicity of Csokits's English in order to re-emphasize their "foreignness and strangeness," while at other times he made expert use of his own poetic insight in order to create poems which appeared incredibly "plain and open."[7]

These discoveries helped me to define the real meaning, for Hughes, of literal translation. Clearly, it did not merely mean staying faithful to the rough, word-for-word translation of a foreign text, though of course this is where the source of its inspiration would always lie. Rather it meant finding the best, plainest, truest set of words – words which would, in terms of the poem itself, reveal their meaning most dramatically and most *literally*, regardless of their actual closeness to the literal itself.

With this definition in mind, in Chapter Four I argued that *Crow* is a prime example of Hughes's interest in the literal. This chapter could only have come here, in the wake of the three previous chapters, because the proposition could only properly be made once I had outlined in some detail what I think the literal meant to Hughes.

Starting with Baskin's influence, and moving on to Hughes's own aspirations for this now well-known, well-studied collection, I illustrated the ways in which *Crow* represents the same creative desires that we can find in Hughes's work on his

[7] TH, introduction to JP, *Dol*, p. 13.

Pilinszky's translations – from his attraction to the spontaneous and almost casual style of the literal, to his interest in the connection between a personal crisis and creativity. *Crow*'s use of direct, often childish language; its violent and physical imagery; its irregular syntax and punctuation; its unmusical 'song;' its freedom and its energy and its vitality, are all characteristics to link it with Hughes's work as a translator, and in particular with his desire to maintain the raw quality of Csokits's versions of Pilinszky.

The main point here, was that the poems in *Crow* are similar to Hughes's versions of Pilinszky's poems in the sense that they are representative of the whole idea of literality as liberation, the idea that by simplifying or even violating the language you will release it from its literary confines; reunite it with itself, but in a fresher, realer, more authentic form.

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"Hughes's poetry," writes Seamus Heaney, "is as redolent of the lair as it is of the library."[8] His comment implies the breadth of the work, but it also implies the struggle inherent in it – what Sean O'Brien describes as the "fundamental dualism" of a poet who was "as much a bookman as a naturalist."[9] The deep empathy that Hughes so infamously felt with nature, therefore, is at the same time always connected with a kind of struggle to return to it in poetic terms; to simplify his language and to return to a more instinctive, basic method of expression whereby the force of necessity – not the achievement of aesthetic beauty – becomes the driving force. Literal translation, in the sense that it too wished to return to the 'original' by embracing the spontaneity, plainness and limitations of the 'literal,' is clearly one aspect of this larger, most central aspect of his poetic sensibility.

Crow represents both elements of the struggle: man's disastrous separation from nature, and the poet's yearning to return to it by finding a means of expression less removed from his own beginnings. Its publication was clearly regarded publically as an important literary occasion. Around the time of its initial release, individual poems from *Crow* were featured in *The New Yorker* (in five separate

[8] Heaney, *Preoccupations*, p. 153.
[9] Sean O'Brien, 'As Deep as England' in *Journeys into the Interior: Ideas of England in contemporary poetry* (Newcastle: Newcastle University / Bloodaxe Books, 2012), p. 18.

issues), *The New Statesman*, *Listener*, *London Magazine*, *Vogue* and *The Critical Quarterly*. Extracts also appeared in anthologies such as *The Journal of Creative Behaviour*, *Word in the Desert*, *Poetry Gala*, *Poetry* (both the 1969 and 1970 editions), *Twelve to Twelve*, *British Poetry Since 1945*, and *Works in Progress 2* (published in the U.S).

The book itself appeared in bookshops on 12 October 1970, at the price of twenty shillings; four thousand copies were printed, followed by two reprints in the same year. BBC Radio broadcast readings from the collection, the first on Radio 3 in July 1970, followed by two more, broadcast in October and December. *Crow* was reviewed in fifty-eight journals and newspapers, often by well-known contemporaries of Hughes, such as Douglas Dunn for *Encounter*, Peter Porter for *The Guardian*, Eavan Boland for *The Irish Times*, Tony Harrison for *London Magazine*, Stephen Spender for *The New York Review of Books* and, of course, Alvarez for *The Observer*. Interestingly, reviews also appeared in periodicals such as *Christian Science Monitor*, *Church Times* and *Human World*, as well as in *English*, *English Studies*, and *Use of English* – indicating the contentious nature of some of the issues raised by *Crow*'s dramatic use of style and content.

Hughes made two studio recordings of the text, including a double-album of the collection in its entirety, released by Claddagh in 1973, and a shorter selected version recorded at CBS in 1979. Within ten years of its publication, large sections of *Crow* had been translated into Danish, French, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, and Spanish. The first translation of the complete book appeared in Swedish in 1979, under the title *Kråka*.[10] Pilinszky himself had at one point planned to make a complete Hungarian version.[11]

As well as marking an important moment in the history of twentieth century British poetry, *Crow* also marked a pivotal moment in Hughes's personal writing life. He saw this collection as representing one of the few occasions on which he had made contact with, and felt free to use, his true poetic voice. As Alice Oswald put it in 2008: "*Crow* is an instruction manual for the rest of Hughes's poetry. If you aren't

[10] All information taken from Keith Sagar and Stephen Tabor*, Ted Hughes: a bibliography 1946-1980* (London: Mansell, 1983).

[11] In a letter to TH on 8 December 1976, JP writes: "*J'aimerais faire un livre (Poèmes Choisis) en hongrais de Toi. Pourrais-ta m'envoyé un choix, ou tu préférerois la traduction intégrale de Crow?*" ["I would like to make a book (Selected Poems) in Hungarian of you. Could you send me a selection, or would you prefer an entire translation of Crow?"]. Emory. [My trans.]. Whether or not he embarked on this work is unclear – there are no surviving papers to confirm it.

responding to its 'top pressure simplicity,' then you are only visiting the outskirts of meaning."[12] For this reason, *Crow* serves as an ideal model against which to judge Hughes's poetic sensibility in general. As far as his work in translation is concerned, Hughes's versions of Pilinszky also serve as a kind of "instruction manual" to his overall translation approach, and I would argue that if you aren't responding to *their* simplicity, you are also missing out on a vital part of their meaning.

In writing this thesis I have remained aware of the fact that the impetus behind any creative act cannot be fixed with certainty. Whether a work of poetry, or of poet-to-poet translation, the process may not always represent a course of action which has moved forward in a series of clearly discernable operations. "Poems are not written in the service of theoretical justifications," suggests Sean O'Brien in the introduction to his version of Dante's *Inferno*; "nor, it seems, are translations."[13] For Hughes, who was notoriously wary of having his work pinned down to theories devised by scholars or critics, this is particularly applicable. "What I actually do think and feel is little enough known to myself, I fancy," he writes in a letter to the scholar Leonard Scigaj, "let alone to anyone else."[14]

The task of this thesis, therefore, has been to understand the ways in which Hughes's approach to translating Pilinszky helps to explain one particular aspect of the creative direction he followed in *Crow*; to use his approach to translating the one, as an illumination of the creative approach being undertaken in the other.[15] To do so I have focused my attention on superimposing, as it were, Hughes's translations of Pilinszky on to *Crow*, in an attempt to demonstrate where the two most clearly match up.

I have concluded that the real overlap is to be found within the area of Hughes's unremitting search for the literal; his desire to locate what Elizabeth Bishop once described (when talking of Hopkins's poetry) as "the general effect of intense, unpremeditated unrevised emotion."[16] Hughes described it as "the feeling that you can get closer to that living nerve."[17] It is this *feeling* above all which lies at

[12] Oswald, introduction to TH, Audio (2008).
[13] Sean O'Brien, introduction to Dante's *Inferno*, trans. Sean O'Brien (London: Picador, 2006), p. vii
[14] TH to Leonard [Scigaj], 14 June 1981, Emory.
[15] Cf. George Steiner: "The circle he traces around the original illuminates not only the text he is translating but his own art and person." Introduction to Steiner, *PP*, p. 29.
[16] Elizabeth Bishop on Gerald Manley Hopkins (1934) in *Prose* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), pp. 473-4.
[17] TH writing about his poetic development in a letter says: "there's always the feeling that you can get closer to that living nerve." To Anne-Lorraine Bujon, 16 December 1992, *Letters*, p. 636.

the centre of the relationship between his translations of Pilinszky and his own poetic intentions for *Crow*.

Appendix: Six interviews

Interview One: Daniel Weissbort

London, 1 February 2007

Daniel Weissbort is the leading expert on Ted Hughes's translations. His introduction and editorial notes to the *Selected Translations* of Ted Hughes (2006) serve as an invaluable and first-hand resource for scholars or students wishing to trace the origins and methodology behind Hughes's immense body of translation work, which includes versions of Homer made in the 1960s, Pilinszky in the 1970s and Pushkin, just before his death in the 1990s.

Weissbort first met Hughes as an undergraduate at Cambridge, and together they founded the journal *Modern Poetry in Translation*, in 1965. It was during their preparation for compiling poems for this journal that Hughes first came across the poems of Pilinszky.

Weissbort supported Hughes's belief in literalism, though he suggests in his introduction to the *Selected Translations* that it was Hughes's feelings which are expressed in the *MPT* editorials.[1] In his turn, Hughes made it clear that Weissbort was the one who did all the work in bringing *MPT* to fruition, and in realising their ambition to create a magazine of great freshness, energy and inspiration.[2]

Weissbort spent the early 1970s directing translation workshops at the University of Iowa, where he was professor of English and Comparative Literature, and he later became a member of numerous committees, including the PEN American Centre Translation Committee. On his return to England, Weissbort continued to work as a translator, and to lecture and publish books on translation studies. He is particularly well known for his translations of Russian and Eastern European poetry. His most recent publication, *Ted Hughes and Translation*, was published in 2011.

The following interview took place in February 2007, when I visited Daniel Weissbort at his home in London. I was just preparing my application for my doctoral research into Ted Hughes's translations of János Pilinszky. Mr. Weissbort's

[1] See DW's note to the extract of the editorial for *MPT* 1 (1965), in TH, *ST*. He writes: "The views and intentions expressed are those of Hughes." p. 200.
[2] TH explains that he withdrew from the co-editorship of the magazine "so there should be no embarrassing mistake about who was doing all the hard work." ibid. p. 205.

partner, Valentina Polukhina, served coffee and small Russian cakes, while he showed me his battered copy of Wilhelm Bleek's *Bushmen Lore*, the book that Hughes was so enamoured of. On finishing the interview, Daniel Weissbort wished me luck with my project. When I nervously admitted that I was just hoping no one else wrote it before I got the chance, he smiled and said, "I doubt it: far too esoteric."

I place this short interview as the first of six which I am appending to my thesis. It takes prominent position for several reasons: firstly, because Weissbort is the 'oldest and wisest' source of information about Hughes as a translator; secondly, because it serves as a useful introduction to Hughes's methods and beliefs about translation; and thirdly, because I am indebted to Weissbort for much of the content of my study.

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TB: Do you speak Hungarian?

DW: No, neither did Ted. It is a very difficult language. Ted got the literals from János Csokits. Ted's sister Olwyn introduced Hughes to Csokits. Csokits was a very great fan of Pilinszky, and it is his versions that Ted had to use as the 'true' Pilinszky. It was very difficult working with Hungarians. They all had strong views about each other, they all hate each other. Csokits was very touchy, very anxious all the time about talking. Now, when I am trying to find some trace of Pilinszky's plan to work on translating *Crow* into Hungarian, Csokits says he doesn't know anything. They don't like to talk about 'that' time in the past and they have a kind of amnesia when you ask them anything. Ted and I wanted to do a Hungarian issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation* and we were almost finished it, but Csokits just wouldn't do it, he was so nervous about it all and hated everyone. We abandoned it. He hated Ferenc Juhász, who supported the communist regime – his 'Boy Changed into a Stag' was a kind of mini epic based on this. At an international conference in India, Juhász was there and he asked me to read Hughes's translation of this poem. It got a huge round of applause. But if you want to know anything about Pilinszky, Peter Jay would be someone to contact. He has translated him and also knew him well.

TB: What about Hughes's interest in literals?

DW: Hughes was looking for a language beyond English, which is very unusual for an English poet. Maybe it's common for Northern Irish poets to look beyond English, but Hughes was so immersed in the English world – he went to Cambridge, became the poet laureate. But he very much liked the foreign sound. When he translated Yehuda Amichai, he got the literals done by Amichai himself, and they were not perfect English. This was the sound that Hughes kept in his translations, so that they sounded like Amichai speaking English. For the poem by Pilinszky called 'Apocrypha' Hughes wanted to publish Csokits's literal crib, because he thought that was as good as anything he could do, to get across the atmosphere. This was what he was interested in, the atmosphere of suffering and of the survivor. He wanted the East European, post-war sound. For Hughes the war was very important to his writing. The First and the Second World Wars happened so close together that they were really just one war, the first a preparation for the second. They were so catastrophic there has not been another war in Europe since. Such horror, such destruction. Hughes's father went to the First World War and talked a lot about it. This plays a big part in Hughes's poems. He wanted to represent that atmosphere of *horror.* The East European poets such as Popa and Holub and Amichai really influenced him. He didn't translate them himself but he read them, and their 'pared down' poetry probably influenced *Crow*. If you look carefully at the poems in *Crow* there is a limited vocabulary. Regarding Ted Hughes's interest in literals, he was very fond of *Bushmen Folklore*, translated by W.H. I. Bleek – this was a kind of model for him.

TB: What do you think of poets such as Don Paterson who make 'free' versions?

DW: I don't have much sympathy for him. He speaks very naively about translation, as if he knew nothing about it.

TB: Some say that the best translator is a poet.

DW: Hughes probably wouldn't have agreed. He wanted to keep himself out as much as possible. This might seem surprising now, as quite a lot of the Pilinszky poems that he translated are 'Hughesian'.

TB: Did you meet Pilinszky?

DW: Yes, once or twice. A very angelic looking man. But he was obviously quite strong. In the photograph at the back of *Crater* he looks a bit like Hughes. He went to stay with Hughes down in Devon and they got on well. They conversed in French. Hughes liked him.

TB: What about the poet as co-translator? I am thinking of the early translations of Marina Tsvetaeva by the English poet Elaine Feinstein, which first appeared in Modern Poetry in Translation, *as well as Hughes's co-translations. Was this a new idea in Britain at the time?*

DW: Well, we didn't really know very much about translation then. Ted Hughes was very imaginative. He worked with children in schools and said that poetry by children under the age of ten was very good and after that it got terrible, because they lost the ability to describe things plainly. They started to add things and make it much longer and this made the poetry worse. As for Elaine Feinstein translating Tsvetaeva, I started that. I was editing a collection of Russian poetry chosen by Yevtushenko. We came to Tsvetaeva and he recited for me 'Readers of Newspapers' in Russian. It had a very strong beat and rhythm, and a repetition of sounds through it. When he finished he said, "Now! That is untranslatable!" So I thought, who are we going to get to do Tsvetaeva? Then I said, how about Elaine Feinstein? We found Angela Livingstone to do the literals. Livingstone has since translated some of Tsvetaeva's long poems, such as 'The Ratcatcher' very well. Ted Hughes didn't translate any of Tsvetaeva. He liked her essay 'Art in the Light of Conscience.' He found many things in her prose. Regarding looking at literals, Emory University has a huge archive and it would be important to go there if you are studying Hughes. They have all the letters and literals exchanged between Csokits and Hughes.

TB: Sometimes it feels like prying, looking at the letters.

DW: Ted Hughes knew that his letters might be seen. He was very careful, very ordered. He kept everything, every scrap of paper. He would write out a letter first in rough then rewrite it. Not many people do that.

TB: Hughes's translations of Pilinszky seem to have been very successful.

DW: Interestingly, they were rejected by Harper in America. The editor went looking for advice from a Hungarian speaker and scholar who said that Hughes's versions had destroyed Pilinszky, taken away all the sound, and so on. So they said no. Ted Hughes just didn't think it was possible to recreate the sound. He never tried to do this. Rather, he wanted to convey Pilinszky's vision, and the atmosphere of the survivor.

TB: Do you think that a lot of Hughes's own poetry is concerned with something similar? That he was trying to uncover the thing itself, and let it speak?

DW: Yes, that's what he wanted to do, though it's not the image people have of him.

TB: What are your own feelings about the translation of poetry?

DW: It is a strange thing with translation. The ideal is really to have access to many different translations of the one thing. It is said that there will not be any one translation that is the same, even though the source text is the same. Ted Hughes looked at many different translations of something before he made his own translation, to try and get as many different interpretations of it. He was trying to find out the truth about its meaning. One would think that translation should be final: if a book has been translated that's it translated. But it doesn't work like that. There are many translations of Homer and we go for the most recent, as the others seem dated. Translations do date, unless they are particularly excellent or definitive. But generally speaking, no one would read Dryden's Homer now, unless they were interested in Dryden or, like Hughes, to get an idea of the history of translation.

Interview Two: George Szirtes

Newcastle upon Tyne, 19 March 2009

George Szirtes was born in Budapest in 1948, and came to England as a refugee following the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. He has published over fifteen volumes of poetry, and in 2005 won the T.S. Eliot Prize for his collection *Reel*. In the mid-1980s, Szirtes began to make return visits to Hungary, which resulted in a stream of translations into English, including work by Ottó Orbán and Ágnes Nemes Nagy. Szirtes is now one of Britain's leading translators.

Described as one of the most consummate formalists of our age, Szirtes's poetry combines a mastery of poetic construction and arrangement with what Sean O'Brien once called "a genuine strangeness." (*The Sunday Times*). Having originally trained as a painter in Leeds and London, Szirtes regularly makes use of his knowledge of the art world in his poems, yet always by converting it thoroughly into the world of his own poetic language:

> My horses are braced in their cool rooms,
> framed and gazed at, hearing the crack
> of dawn like whips, dreaming of courses
> where thunder builds. I build myself into
> their hooves and fetlocks.
>
> (Horse Painter)

In March 2009, George Szirtes delivered the Bloodaxe Lectures on Poetry at Newcastle University, and it was during his visit to Newcastle that I conducted this interview.[3] We met in the Tyneside Cinema Café, some hours before his poetry reading that evening. His willingness to give over this time, and his attention to the detail of my questions, both during our talk and afterwards by e-mail, is indicative

[3] See George Szirtes, *Fortinbras at the Fishhouses: Responsibility, the Iron Curtain and the Sense of History as Knowledge* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 2010).

not only of his kindness and professionalism, but also of his commitment to discussions of poetry and poetry in translation.

Szirtes's three Bloodaxe lectures were set around the theme of the 'historical consciousness' of poetry, and in his second lecture, 'Life is Elsewhere,' he referred directly to the reception in Britain of post-war poetry from Eastern Europe. It was a mistake, he suggested, for poets here to try to appropriate the situation over there. This was a point highly relevant to my own study of Hughes's translation of Pilinszky, and is something which I bring up in the interview below. Szirtes's reaction to Hughes's translations of Pilinszky is tantalising: on the one hand, he praises them but on the other hand he is openly wary of Hughes's interest in foreignizing technique. Perhaps most revealing is Szirtes's view that the voice Hughes gives Pilinszky in English is unmistakeably Hughes's voice. This is significant in that it suggests a discrepancy between what Hughes said he wanted to do with his translations of Pilinszky, and what he actually did. Most encouraging, is Szirtes's enthusiasm for trying out a whole manner of translation techniques, and for the creative possibilities this can offer a poet.

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TB: The translator Francis Jones recently showed me a translation he made of János Pilinszky's 'Ravensbrück Passion,' in which the central figure was not a man, as in Ted Hughes's version, but a woman.[4]

GSz: Oh the famous 'Ravensbrück Passion.' Yes Ravensbrück was a woman's camp. My mother went there. "*She* steps out from the others. / *She* stands in the square silence…". Yes, it could certainly be that.

TB: Can the lack of gender in the Hungarian language cause problems for translators?

GSz: I was translating the poems of András Gerevich. They were love poems. After a certain amount of time, when I learned a little more about this poet's life, it became

[4] See Interview Four, below, where I discuss this translation with Francis Jones.

clear that he was gay, and that the love poems were to a man. Then I did have to go back and change some things in my translations.

TB: I was told that János Pilinszky was gay, and that he died not from a heart attack as is commonly thought, but by committing suicide. Is this true?

GSz: Pilinszky was gay, yes, but suicide? No.

TB: Could the lack of gender in Hungarian help a poet such as Pilinszky hide his sexuality do you think? To what extent could we re-write all the Pilinszky poems translated by Hughes, replacing 'her' with 'his' etc.? For example, in the poem 'Epilogue' ('Utószó') there is a verse about undressing and I wondered if it could be a man instead of a woman:

Lélekzet nélkül vetkezel	Catching your breath, you undress
éjszakáján a puszta háznak.	in the dark of the bare house.
Inged, ruhád leengeded.	You let down your skirt, and take off your blouse.
Mezítelen sírkő a hátad.	Your back is a bare tombstone.[5]

GSz: This is a very interesting question. It depends chiefly on two words: *inged* and *ruhád. Ing* means primarily, ungendered, *shirt* but can also mean *chemise*; *ruha* means generally, ungendered *clothes*, but it can also mean the specifically female *dress*. It does not mean *skirt* for which there is another word: *szoknya.* In terms of the poem, the verb *leengeded*, does mean *you lower* or *let down* or *allow to drop*. We could imagine a man taking off a shirt and letting trousers drop, but the delicate element in Pilinszky would probably not talk in terms of dropping one's trousers. It's not surprising that Hughes opted for *skirt*, as even letting a dress drop is a slightly fussier business than dropping a *skirt*. But skirt is distinctly not the word here. And yet would one wear a dress *and* a blouse? The ambiguity is left in so we can read either.

[5] trans. János Csokits / Ted Hughes

TB: In your introduction to An Island of Sound (Harvill, 2004)*, you talk about the isolation of the Hungarian language. Does this have any impact on Hungarian poetry and its translation?*

GSz: This feeling of isolation seems to make Hungarian writers very prolific; I myself seem to be prolific, as was another Hungarian émigré writer, one much older than I am, the late Victor Határ. It may have something to do with the sheer pressure of what is outside. When I first returned to Hungary, I felt a very strong obligation to translate from the Hungarian, partly because there were so few capable of doing it. And that is a product of the isolation of the language.

TB: A moral obligation?

GSz: Yes. That's when I gave up painting. One hardly ever has a very clearly defined moment of decision-making, but I remember consciously realising that I would have to give something up in order to continue translating and so I stopped painting. I am a better poet than a painter anyway. I do enjoy translating very much, but it is also a serious duty. Regarding Hughes's translations of Pilinszky, Hughes gave Pilinszky a voice, but it is very much Hughes's own voice. All translators are present in their translated poems, but Hughes is especially present in his of Pilinszky's. Pilinszky's poem '*Apokrif*,' for example, is written in strict, generally rhyming pentameter, but you get no sense of this in the translation. You know, Pilinszky was a great reader of poetry. There are quite a few records of his readings, I think I probably have some somewhere. He was very keen on this, he was almost the Hungarian equivalent of Dylan Thomas in that sense. Hungarians consider him to be one of their finest poets.

TB: Have you ever translated Pilinszky?

GSz: Yes, but only one or two poems. I tried to translate *Apokrif*, but kept hearing Hughes. That was when Hughes was still alive. Then I had so many other things to translate that I was actually commissioned to translate, the idea was abandoned. For all English purposes at the moment, Pilinszky is Hughes. Maybe, now that Ted

Hughes is dead and Pilinszky less often referred to, it might be worth returning to the idea.

TB: Might the Hungarian language be appealing to a writer like Hughes, because it's so distant from the norm, and the originals would be relatively inaccessible to most English readers? In other words, is this ever a consideration for a translator?

GSz: I don't know about answering for Hughes. I doubt whether it was a major factor. It might be a small factor for others but I doubt whether it is a major one.

TB: What are your feelings about the kind of translation that Ted Hughes was looking for in the 60s and 70s, which was a kind of literal translation that captured a foreign, broken English?

GSz: I don't like it, it is an act, at worst, of exoticizing. What Hughes did was very successful but that was because he was a marvellous poet himself: he transferred Pilinszky into his own idiom. In the hands of others the act of transfer resulted in something far less distinguished. Pilinszky was a very fine poet. Only his later poems were 'broken.' They were broken the way glass is broken.

TB: How do you feel about poet-translators or co-translators, who don't speak the language from which they translate, but work from literals prepared by others?

GSz: It's perfectly fine. All translation of poetry is an interpretation, just as reading poetry is. In the case of previously untranslated work there is an obligation to stick as close as you can to what you hear of the original, but with those who are already in the public realm there is a chance to experiment, to take the roads less travelled. You can have fun, productively playing when you are translating. I was once asked to translate Mandelstam's 4-line poem 'Voronezh,' and I did eight different versions. Then I took a 2-line poem by Akhmatova, and made 16 different versions. I also translated a Paul Celan poem by doing a 'Felstiner' version and a 'Michael Hamburger' version. So a lot can be discovered by playing. This is the other side to writing original poetry too of course, and that's what I tell my students. You should try to play, to have pleasure.

TB: You suggested in your Bloodaxe lectures that English poets sometimes seemed to have envied and patronised the Eastern European poets for having something 'real' to write about. You also referred to Yeats's poem 'The Fisherman' and Elizabeth Bishop's 'At the Fishhouses', and I can't help but wonder if Eastern Europe is the new fisherman?

GSz: It was, not any more. Eastern Europe is not news now.

TB: Do you think that fashion or news determines a poet's subject matter then, and can help a poet get published?

GSz: There's nothing wrong with writing to demand, in fact it can be very good to do this. As with the case of fidelity in translation, the burden of fidelity to something unknown can be dreadfully limiting. The proposition that there is a store of specific feeling that needs only to be written down is not always true, or not wholly true. The poet can just as well discover what he or she feels by entering the arena of poetics where the arena presents a number of givens as a material force. I tend more and more to believe that unless there are certain givens outside ourselves we fail to enter the arena, or at least don't get very far in it. As concerns news, the news is part of one's arena. It occupies an important place in our thinking, imagination and feeling, so it is natural that it should work its way through to subject matter. But there is, I suspect, a proper process of working through. Some situations, particularly the great dramatic events of the world that come complete with a tidal wave of quickly processed feeling through the press and other media don't need a poet's reaction straight away. Too quick a reaction can, for me, be almost physically sickening, like a betrayal. During the war in Bosnia I was angry about the poems that were being commissioned and published by the *Independent* about Sarajevo. It seemed to me to invite an intrusion into an arena that belonged to others, to those in Sarajevo. Their condition should not, I felt, be immediately processed according to the state of our safe distant feelings. I wrote a kind of reply to the idea of the commission in the form of a verse, that was not published as a poem but, where it was intended, in the correspondence section [see 'Letter: Scribbling while Sarajevo burns,' Tuesday 27 July 1993]. Sometimes the worst thing is to say "I feel your pain." Imagination is not

capable of doing so without action first where action is appropriate. When a man is dying of thirst the natural thing should be to find him something to drink, not to write a verse about how you feel about his thirst. You can never know everything about anybody else, not a loved one or anyone. Especially not when they are in a crisis. If you think you do, you stop respecting them. You don't know them fully and should always remember this.

TB: In what way do you think that Bishop avoided envying or patronising the fisherman?

GSz: Bishop does not put words in the fisherman's mouth nor does she turn him into a symbol or an archetype. In other words she does not 'use' him. He is part of a field of work that includes the Christmas trees and the fishhouses but he has no allegorical role to play. The work itself is not elevated to a pastoral ideal or presented as a form of oppression. It has no function as propaganda. The fisherman's silveriness and his knife are observed as from a child's point of view – such as we get in the marvellous story, 'In the Village' – as part of a field of comprehension that retains its own distinct, authoritative presence. She envies him neither his silveriness nor his knife. She registers it as part of a cold dark deep and absolutely clear whole.

TB: In your lecture, you brought up the notion of song. Some poems which are especially song-like, you said, are difficult to translate, and some songs are frightening. What do you mean by this?

GSz: Certain songs, traditional songs, have a sense of community. They are powerful as such, carrying powerful emotions, referring to common assumptions about experience. They are about experience turned into myth. The song resolves complexities in one great act of partisanship. It is, in effect, a way of proclaiming that God is on your side. I am very wary of the phrase 'with God on our side.' In anything as intoxicating as singing along, it is good to remember that there is always something else outside the closed circle of the singers, that there are circles everywhere else, a great complexity of song that a poet might do well to hear. Furthermore, that singing is not always about community, but also about solitude.

Interview Three: Desmond Graham

Newcastle upon Tyne, 30 October 2009

Desmond Graham's poetry and critical writings have been widely published, broadcast and anthologized. His sixth collection, *Heart work*, published by Flambard in 2007, was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. In 2009 he published *The Green Parakeet*, a book in two sections: the first a set of elegiac, autobiographical poems about the poet's relationship with his older brother; the second a series of short, freely imaginative pieces called 'Postcards from Germany.' The collection is unified, as Andrew McCullough in the *TLS* pointed out, by "Graham's concern to capture the quiddity of the loved thing, the essential genius of person and place." [6]

The postcard form is well suited to what has been described as Graham's "openness of mind and feeling."[7] It reflects a heightened sense of the outside living world, combined with a desire to communicate it, however briefly, to others. "Poems draw on life," Graham says, "How else could the poet write them?"[8] The excitement, though, is also how poems "twist and lie, how they change and confuse things lived, sometimes literally and, most commonly, beyond the point which even the poets themselves would expect or recognize."[9]

I was an undergraduate at Newcastle University during Desmond Graham's professorship there and attended his lectures and seminars on war poetry. Graham is the leading authority on the Second World War poet Keith Douglas, and has written extensively on poets of both World Wars. The core text for his classes was Chatto's *Poetry of the Second World War: An International Anthology*, the monumental collection which he edited in 1995. Desmond Graham has also worked for many years a poet-translator; his publications include the collection of poems by the Polish poet Anna Kamieńska, *Two Darknesses* (1994). The influence of this work on his own writing is especially apparent in *The Green Parakeet*, where Graham uses little punctuation, allowing the emphasis to fall on internal rhymes, half rhymes, rhythm

[6] Andrew McCullough, *TLS*, March 26, 2010, p. 28.
[7] Blurb on the back page of Desmond Graham's *The Green Parakeet* (Newcastle: Flambard, 2009).
[8] Desmond Graham, *Making Poems and Their Meanings* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 2007), p. 25.
[9] ibid.

and line endings instead. Graham has said that it was his lack of knowledge, as a co-translator, of the source language which helped his poetry develop. By attending to the ways in which word order and lineation impact on the overall sense of the English version, he became even more aware of these effects in his own poems.

Such a revelation is extremely significant when considering Ted Hughes as a co-translator, and I began this interview by asking Desmond Graham about the role of translation in his own life and work. His answer describes his struggle with twentieth century poetry in England during the 60s and 70s, and his need to separate himself from the "gods" of tradition.[10] This puts into context Hughes's observation that "you were aware that this tradition was distinctly not-continental and distinctly not-American,"[11] and allows us to draw parallels with Hughes's own initial attraction to poetry in translation.

At the same time, Desmond Graham's delighted outrage at Hughes's preference for literal-sounding translations, and the desire to maintain a sense of awkwardness in the final version, highlights just how idiosyncratic Hughes's practice as a co-translator was. In so doing, it supports the idea that by examining this practice we can learn much about Hughes's attitude to poetry in general.

Halfway through the interview I ask Desmond Graham about the *Collected Poems* of Keith Douglas, which he edited and wrote a preface for (the introduction was written by Ted Hughes). Graham did his PhD on Douglas, and has been editing his poems, memoirs and letters for the last thirty years. His unreserved approval of Hughes's writings on Douglas was particularly interesting, suggesting that despite suggestions elsewhere to the contrary, Hughes was capable of serving the reader, and the writer, well.

The interview ends with a short discussion of *Crow*. Graham's spontaneously succinct explanation of the poems in *Crow* as highly formal and traditional yet in an oral, non-literary way, brings together with ease two key characteristics of *Crow* which can sometimes seem to contradict each other. Desmond Graham's final remark about *Crow* in particular displays an openness and energetic positivity towards creative writing in general.

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[10] Ted Hughes said: "The tradition had its gods […] they policed the behaviour of young poets […]". See TH, *Paris Review* interview, p. 19.
[11] ibid.

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TB: Why did you first become involved in co-translation?

DG: As a reader I've depended on translation from the start. I always considered myself incompetent at languages, and at the same time when I was a student at Leeds one of the things we studied was Ibsen. I hated English novels, thinking they were novels of manners, but I read the whole of Dostoevsky and Turgenev. Work in translation has been a profound part of my literary reading life.

TB: Were you aware that these were works in translation?

DG: Yes I was. Part of the excitement was this awareness of foreignness and continental Europe. In terms of poetry in translation, I felt antagonistic towards contemporary English poetry as not being serious enough and being too concerned with social things. Finding continental poetry was an enormous discovery. I felt more at home with it, but as I say, in no way as someone confident in languages. So I started as a translator being dependent on native language speakers to tell me about their work. In terms of the act of translation, the first translations I did were with Trude Schwab, my partner, through hours and hours of her sharing with me contemporary German poetry, and me saying "what does that mean?" And I looked at other people's translations. So it was the whole process of co-translating, sharing with a native speaker, that opened up poetry in a way I'd never known before. It was better than any book of criticism. To me the crux of all my interest in translating, and in reading and writing, is listening. It's only now I've got a more elaborate and complicated view of this, which is that being a native English speaker, I am very lucky that people in other cultures can generally use my language and that enables me to do what I prefer, which is to listen always to the horse's mouth and not to think that I can understand or intervene. Co-translating felt to me that I could listen and look on. I don't like to imagine that I can own, that I can belong or occupy. Some time later, the same thing happened in Poland, with Polish people telling me all about poems I couldn't read in the original. I then found out that the Polish poet Anna Kamieńska was not translated and so I began co-translating what was not available in English, to make it available. This work was all done one-to-one, in a

room, not from prose drafts or prose texts. It was all based upon a literal dialogue, a conversational process.

TB: So how do you feel now about co-translating being done by e-mail?

DG: I think that it is a necessary part of the process but it takes away – to me – the whole fundamental justification for co-translating. That's if we're talking about translation. If we're talking about a poet turning to sources, turning to inspiration, turning to material, then you can use anything. I used Shakespeare. But if we're talking about translating, if we're talking about getting Rilke to readers who cannot read German, or Kamieńska to readers without Polish – however adventurous the translation, the justification of co-translation is that it makes conscious and questionable all the silent processes which go on in the mind of the translator.

TB: Does this justify the fact that as a poet-translator you cannot speak the source language? Is this why co-translation counts, because it's a poet being in a room with another poet?

DG: It's a poet being in a room with a master of the other language, who has a command of English too. I have found lexicographers excellent to work with; simultaneous translators can be too used to functionality and mastery, whereas I want uncertainty and time and space. Of course your co-translator needs to be sensitive to poetry.

TB: In your postgraduate lectures on Translation and Creative Writing, you mention the importance of asking questions when translating.

DG: Yes, it's all through questions, all through questions. It's not that you can't do this through e-mails or drafts, but the creativity of it comes from each person having to listen three ways. You have to listen to the original text – the poem – and you have to listen to each other. There are three people in that room.

TB: Do you believe that it's a worthwhile exercise for poets to become involved in co-translation?

DG: I think that any poet can only write what they can write and there's no point in trying to be something else. What you write will be greatly affected by what you read, what you've read and what you've had around you, so I can't be prescriptive about this. The most important thing about any translation of any sort is how it reads in the target language. That's the most important thing, because it exists for people who do not know the source language. But I feel strict about terminology. If someone translates me, I want to go as far as possible as me, and not as them. And I want to have the trust that this is being designated in the appropriate way. So if it's designated as a translation which I am reading to read, let's say Rilke, I want to know that that person has either got a mastery of German and German literature, or has consulted with and tested out a German person's knowledge. I'm not interested in anything without the participation of a native speaker or a person expert in the two languages, if it's going to be called a translation. The question is, who am I reading.

TB: What about when a well-known poet such as Seamus Heaney translates Robert Henryson and it sounds, in some parts, like Seamus Heaney?

DG: This is the important – in a way the unmentionable – point, that it of course depends on how great a poet the translator is. I have no problem with Ted Hughes mucking about with Pilinszky. I have a problem with how it should be designated, but I don't mind what he does. Whereas someone who is a mediocre English poet turning Pilinszky into mediocre English poems, and losing Pilinszky, that holds no interest for me. There's a large element of vanity and prestige in it. Heaney can get away with turning something into Heaney or part-Heaney, but I'm not sure that a lesser poet than Heaney can. When it's got Heaney's name on it, you will read it for Heaney, you won't read it for Henryson. Beowulf sold so many copies because it was Seamus Heaney. I don't find that a marketing ploy, I find that quite acceptable, it was Heaney's Beowulf. But if I wasn't going to Heaney's Beowulf, I'd want to go to Beowulf's Beowulf, via a translator expert in the original text.

TB: You teach translation as part of a Creative Writing degree. How has translation affected your own writing, for example your most recent publication The Green

Parakeet*? I am thinking in particular about the lack of punctuation in that book. Is that a result of your work in translation?*

DG: Yes. Being involved in the process of co-translation has taught me enormously about English. It's as simple as discovering the quiddities of a language, the distinctness, the difference, and everything becoming relative and open. And so, in terms of my own work, I came to unpunctuated lines directly through translating the Polish poet Anna Kamieńska. Polish is a highly inflected language and English isn't. Therefore, in English, word order has an enormous syntactic function. Also, in translating unpunctuated work you become increasingly aware of the syntactical impact of line endings. You learn the hard way about the implicit, syntactical consequences of where you end a line. Obviously you can get over that by adding a comma or a semi-colon, but as soon as you take the punctuation away your line ending is exposed and has to have a validity. To me, the two things came together. By having no punctuation I had to learn much more about the word order and its implications, ambiguities, connections and so on, and about the weight of line endings.

TB: What about the fact that you are getting rid of something that English offers, and that poetry offers. Did this come from your reading of Eastern European post-war poetry and its rejection of poetic devices?

DG: I would say that it's part of a much bigger struggle. To me, English poetry of the twentieth century has had an unfortunate conflict between an imported American and to some extent continental version of Modernism, which somewhere left behind what they managed to keep going in Eastern Europe and in Germany, and writing which was perceived as late-Romantic, conventional lyrical writing. As an English writer growing up in the late 1950s, early 60s, that was what drove me towards continental writing in translation. I didn't want to write like T.S. Eliot because I thought he was destructive and he fragmented everything, but I was aware that I didn't want to write like Wilfred Owen because he was the climax of English Romanticism. So where do you go? The answer to this is you go the way that everyone went in the 60s, 70s and 80s, where Heaney went, where Hughes went. You go to half rhyme, you go to near rhyme, you go to assonance, you go to all these

variants of rhyme so that you're keeping a lyrical echo, a lyrical shadow. And of course you use a much more colloquial language and, coming from Eastern Europe writing, a much more confused, open and varied notion of narrative. In my book *The Green Parakeet*, the poem 'Wiesbaden', about a Russian church which is a Russian doll which is a mother's face… this a simple example of that. I could never have written that poem without having read Eastern European writing, and the poem does draw on the Russian-German artist, Jawlensky.

TB: With his publication of the magazine Modern Poetry in Translation*, Hughes was also looking beyond English poetic tradition. Do you remember when the first issue came out in 1965, were you aware of it?*

DG: No, but this is a lacuna on my behalf. Firstly, I was in Africa from 1962-66. But the source for me was the Penguin *Modern Poets in Translation* series – that series was a key to life. Like many people, I bought them both as they came out and hunted them out in second-hand bookshops. After that my source was anthologies, and publications from Bloodaxe, particularly of Miroslav Holub. And prior to all this was *Stand* with its international dimension, from the late fifties. I discovered *Modern Poetry in Translation* much later. It was something I read in libraries in the eighties.

TB: I would like to ask you, especially after your comment about the importance of the target language in translations, about an editorial of MPT *where Hughes wrote that it was the "oddity and struggling dumbness" of literal translations that he liked.*[12] *This ties in with Hughes's obsession with poetry that seems to him 'wounded' or to have been written in some kind of emergency or at a time of great urgency. This is something he found in literal translation, but also in poets like Keith Douglas. Is it something that you found in translation and in Douglas, is it something you understand?*

DG: I completely understand this, and what you say puts together things I know about Hughes. I think it is a very painful gift to have but it's exactly the gift Hughes had. My whole temperament, my whole activity as a writer is just completely

[12] TH, editorial *MPT* 3 (1967), 3, 1-2 (p. 1)

different from this, and it's simply, ordinarily, plain Wordsworthian! When the heat is on, I'm not writing and can't write. For me, everything is recollected in tranquillity. So I'm writing nearly always months, years behind whatever has taken place in my life.

TB: So you need calm, in a room?

DG: Yes, on my own. This might be what I find so attractive and so alien about Hughes, because I've always been an enormous admirer of Hughes, and always felt that he was an eccentric. What an oddity he is, what a bizarre, weird, baroque sort of writer. He could never be mainstream and thank goodness. I find what he says about the awkwardness and the difficulty of the literals wonderful and completely alien. Faced with that I would sit down with my co-translator and say, 'what can we do about this?'

TB: Hughes wrote that Keith Douglas had a "general, all-purpose style, stripped to the functional minimum," yet also that he had beauty and lyricism.[13] *He says something similar about Shakespeare, describing a phrase in King Lear as "mutilated," which made him realise that Shakespeare was "backyard improvisation" and "dialect."*[14] *What do you think of that?*

DG: The connecting point for me is when Hughes says that Douglas had no difficulty with the "terrible, suffocating, maternal octopus of English poetic tradition."[15] For me –what I was trying to talk about earlier – I was trying to escape that octopus. If elegance, if formality, if grace are all occupied by the dead ruling class, I want nothing to do with them. But when I read in translation Horace, or Zbigniew Herbert, it is elegance, it is grace, it is formality that I love. In my experience of English writing, that grace, formality, measure and style was owned by the enemy and they were dead. However, the whole excitement and thrill of Keith Douglas was that he had it both ways. I love what Hughes wrote about Douglas, along with what Geoffrey Hill wrote: this is what introduced me to Douglas. Those

[13] TH, introduction to KD, *CP*, p. xxxiii.
[14] TH, Faas interview, p. 13.
[15] See TH introduction to KD, *SP* in *WP*, p. 213.

things that Hughes says about the burning exploratory freshness of Douglas, what he says about getting into what Shakespeare gets into is just such a wonderful understanding of the fire of Douglas's creativity. Where Hughes is absolutely right and where he understands Douglas is where he says that Douglas is concerned with death: he is a poet of wounds, of being wounded, and a poet of death. His subject is observed vitality, energy, life force. So in this area I think Hughes is absolutely smack bang on target. Of course what Douglas is also doing at the age of twenty-three or twenty-four, is writing poems that are effortless. All the energy is invisible in the poem. They are completely shaped and designed and formal, and works of great beauty and aesthetic repose. The main example of this is the poem 'Mersa.'[16] Douglas the classicist (he could translate Latin and Greek) is at the centre of what he was doing. Without that he would probably have exploded. I was of roughly the same generation – I was born in 1940 – and it was still compulsory to study Latin. My whole alienation from languages was that I was useless at that, and it was only when I became proud of being useless at Latin that I found my way. Douglas loved these things and would have regarded me as uneducated: how could you understand poetry without Latin and Greek?

TB: In your introduction to the letters of Keith Douglas, you say that his writing had something in common with the survivor poets of Eastern Europe.[17] Which poets exactly?

DG: In this comment I am thinking first and obviously of Douglas's letter of 1943 where he describes what he's aiming for in his writing.[18] I am thinking of his predicament and his sense that everything has changed, the sense of a catastrophe, the sense of all the old things not being valid any more. When faced with absolute literal catastrophe, you turn to the most formal, the most remote. Catastrophe with open eyes turns to real literary form and harmony, not false rhetoric. The book that

[16] See Douglas's poem 'Mersa': "I see my feet like stones / underwater. The logical little fish / converge and nip the flesh / imagining I am one of the dead."
[17] See Desmond Graham, introduction to KD, *The Letters* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000). "To find early echoes of his words we must look in places he did not know but which would not have surprised him: in the writings of the survivor poets of post-war Eastern Europe." (p. xii).
[18] See KD to J.C. Hall, 10 August 1943: "My object (and I don't give a damn about my duty as a poet) is to write true things, significant things in words each of which works for its place in a line." ibid. p. 295.

Douglas most cherished when he was in the Middle East was Rilke. The poet he specifically wrote about liking when he returned to England was Aragon. He read them both in the original and in translation. There was a sense, in other words, of what I suffer from terribly, and what Douglas suffered from: that profound sense of the embarrassment and difficulty of being English. Douglas saw everything continental as more up to date, more modern. This was a whole move away from an English ruling class. That's where he connects with Eastern Europe.

TB: When you say that in catastrophe you turn to the most formal and most remote, I think of Hughes's Crow*, because it is a book based on catastrophe but also on the idea, according to Hughes, of a language that "shed everything."*[19] *Yet it doesn't shed everything.*

DG: *Crow* had a great impact on me and the attraction of it, first of all, was the humour – and humour is the way of dealing with the upper classes, the poetry police – and secondly, out of all the Hughes I've read, it was the collection that most used literary form. The form of the list, the form of the litany, the form of the dialogue, it was *Crow* that opened all these forms up to so many younger English writers. Suddenly there was a whole set of non-classical forms, pagan forms, biblical forms. I loved the poems in *Crow* because they were so formal and also because they so used cartoon.

TB: Would you say that your own poems in The Green Parakeet *have a strong sense of the formal, despite a lack of punctuation, because of their use of repetition?*

DG: All form is repetition; repetition of image, of syntax, of rhetoric. In *The Green Parakeet* poems, with the short lines, I have allowed myself far more internal rhyme, full rhyme, assonance. In other words by speaking in phrases, by making the end of the line a syntactic point or a breath, every line ending becomes a little sense unit. Having recovered the line ending for that, I then felt liberated to use all the oral patterning in the midst of the lines. This is something that automatically comes out

[19] TH, Faas interview, p. 20.

of the 'listing' forms. The litany, repetitive form in *Crow* is an oral form still heard in our speech.

TB: You said at the start of our conversation that translating is to do with listening. Do you think then that another impact translating has had on your own writing is your ability to listen, in this case to yourself?

DG: Totally. It is crucial.

TB: What led you to compile the Chatto anthology Poetry of the Second World War*, published in 1995?*

DG: That was simply a matter of finding poems in a variety of different places that were available in translation but had never been brought together. The political motive was that the discussion of the Second World War in England had remained largely chauvinistic and it seemed by the 1990s that it was time to realise it was a *world* war.

TB: How did it affect you, reading through all of those poems about the war?

DG: It would be foolish of anyone who was born in 1940 to say that their involvement in writing about or studying work related to the Second World War was not emotional. It was an emotional and personal journey. But my whole attempt was to keep alive the sense that whatever we read is barely a shadow of a shadow of what human experience is. For me growing up, there was a sense of being very much possessed by the fact that you were not in the war, that you didn't know it and you've escaped, even though you happened to be five! And in all of my writing and editing and teaching about poetry of the world wars, my attempt has been to show that built into the work is the notion "don't mistake this for what the experience was." You will only ever learn from a book if you realise that it's telling you only a tiny bit of what's possible. So to me, poetry needs to have within itself a sense of its own inadequacy and limitation. I suppose this is easier writing, as I do, after the event, with some distance. There's not a confusion in my mind between what's happened and what I'm writing. With Hughes, coming hot to the poem and trying to

get all the edges of the thing within it, there must be a sense that what your trying to get onto that page is the thing itself.

TB: Hughes talks a lot about the thing itself – "the real thing."[20] *It seems that he felt particularly in* Crow *and in* Birthday Letters *that he got something close to that.*[21]

DG: Yes. They are the only two books by Hughes that I really value.

TB: And yet they both have flaws.

DG: They're not there every minute of every line but because they are sequences, the real thing is inhabiting an area of space within which even the weaker bits can be accommodated. In a way this comes back to what I was saying about wanting art to have built into it not a self-destructive sense of its own inadequacy but a sense that there is much more than there is here. The thing with *Crow* in particular is that it retains a restlessness. There is no completion, there is a restlessness continuing.

[20] See especially TH to Moelwyn Merchant, 29 June 1990, in TH, *Letters*, p. 580.
[21] In a letter to Keith Sagar, 18 July 1998, Hughes wrote about *Birthday Letters*: 'I suddenly had free energy I hadn't known since Crow.' See Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, p. 271.

Interview Four: Francis Jones[22]

Newcastle upon Tyne, 19 February 2010

Francis Jones is recognized as one of Europe's foremost translators, having twice won the European Poetry Translation Prize for his translations from the Serbo-Croat of works by Ivan V. Lalić, as well as other prestigious translation awards. He works largely from Dutch and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, though also from German, Hungarian, Russian, and Caribbean creoles. He is currently Senior Lecturer at Newcastle University, where his research focuses on poetry translation: especially translating processes and strategies, and how translators work with others within a social-political context.

In 1998, Francis Jones held the position of Chair at the biennial Nobel Seminar in Stockholm, where the theme was the translating of poetry and poetic prose. Seamus Heaney was among those attending, and in summing up one session entitled 'Several Translations of the Same Text,' said that all in all, "the task of the translator […] is to make something of the given, to move it through a certain imaginative and linguistic distance."[23] This is something Francis Jones succeeds in doing to an exceptional standard, combining a deep knowledge and understanding of the original text, with an open and fresh mind towards the possibilities that may lie in the newly translated version.

In an earlier and much briefer interview that I held with Francis Jones in 2005, I asked him about the Hungarian language. Hungarian grammar, he told me, is different to any other European language, except perhaps Finnish. The verbs change their form depending on the noun, and there is a string of endings that can be attached to the end of a word. "And is their language poetic?" I asked. "Any language is," was the reply.

As a student, I first came across the name Francis Jones when I read his translations of Miklós Radnóti's *Camp Notebook*, a collection of poems which has been described as one of the greatest pieces of literature to emerge from the

[22] A version of this interview was published as 'Necessary Humility: In Conversation with Francis Jones,' *PN Review* 205 38:5 (2012), 62-64.
[23] Seamus Heaney, 'Report on Session 7: 'Several Translations of the Same Text,' in Allén, p. 331.

Holocaust. Born twelve years before Pilinszky, Radnóti was a talented young poet in 1930s Hungary, but by the 1940s, as the Nazi power spread, he was taken to serve three periods of forced labour, the last in a slave camp in northern Serbia. In November 1944 (the same year that Pilinszky witnessed the horrors of the German work camps which would be described in his poem 'Harbach 1944'), Radnóti was shot dead on a forced march towards Germany. After the war, his body was discovered in a ditch with the notebook of poems found in his overcoat pocket.

Francis Jones, whose translation of Radnóti's *Bori notesz* was published by Arc in 2000, worked from a facsimile of this notebook. He describes it as "the most moving book I own,"[24] and his translation of it has ensured that readers in English can understand why. In his introduction to the book, George Szirtes writes of "the clarity, directness and formal skill of Francis Jones's translations."[25] They will, says Szirtes, "ensure that *Camp Notebook* joins and extends the best of the Radnóti canon in English."[26]

Radnóti is just one of the subjects of the interview below, during which I had the opportunity to ask about the other side of the Hughes-Pilinszky translations. Francis Jones's answers provide illuminating insights into the work of both poets; insights which would remain hidden to anyone without his remarkable skills in foreign languages, and the language of poetry.

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TB: You have said that you started translating poetry in 1970, when you became very taken with two poets, one Serbian, one Bosnian. Who were the poets?

FJ: The Serbian was Ivan V. Lalić, whose books *The Works of Love* and *The Passionate Measure* I have translated and published with Anvil. The Bosnian was Mak Dizdar. My translations of Mak Dizdar's *Stone Sleeper* have just been published, also by Anvil.

TB: Did you ever have to take sides between Serbia and Bosnia?

[24] Francis Jones, Acknowledgements in Miklós Radnóti, *Camp Notebook*, trans. Francis Jones (Lancashire: Arc, 2000), p. 11. [Hereafter Radnóti].
[25] George Szirtes, introduction to ibid, p. 16.
[26] ibid.

FJ: I think especially during the wars of the 90s it was very hard. You are dealing with emotional stuff yourself, it's very, very distressing. There's almost a three-way tension. On the one hand there's the question of which side do you take in a vicious conflict? Bearing in mind the fact that staying neutral means taking a side, and if you see that it's weaker against stronger, or aggressor against victim…at least that's the way I saw it. So there's Serbia versus Bosnia. The third pole is do you try and stay faithful to some sort of Yugoslav ideal? Should you be combating the fact that a vicious civil war is influencing outsiders' views of the region? Should you be sticking up for an idea of Yugoslav literature, showing that we can all be civilised, that Bosnians aren't all head-scarved refugees and Serbs aren't all homicidal aggressors – just normal people in normal countries.

TB: During that time did you have to decide whose book covers you were prepared to have your name on, as the translator?

FJ: I felt that with the people I was translating, like Ivan V. Lalić who died in the mid-nineties, that I should try and be true to what first appealed to me in his work, which is that this is world-class poetry. So maybe, when I was publishing the Lalić translations during the war, the introductions I was writing were very much trying to say something about this sense of place, that this is a European poet, and also a Serbian poet who shouldn't be ashamed of being Serbian, but shouldn't be confused with the nationalists.

TB: I would like to ask you more about the idea of the translator as promoter. What about poet-translators such as Ted Hughes who, unlike you, have no knowledge of the source language of the poems they are translating, and therefore cannot have developed the same relationship with the poetry in its original form? Are you ever suspicious, or concerned, or surprised, about their involvement in translation?

FJ: I think the more translations there are the better, as long as they seem to be viable poetic translations that people are reading. I think that translations by poets who don't read the source language should always be seen as joint translations. So in Hungarian, you have Gömöri and Wilmer, who very much put themselves as a team

on the cover of the book. And if you read Hughes and Csokits's essays in the book *The Double Labyrinth*, they are very much saying that they are a team. I think that when we've got a culture where relatively few poets, relatively few people, read foreign languages, then there aren't enough linguists with the ability or the willingness to translate poetry from places like Hungary or former Yugoslavia. If a poet and source-language linguist team can do it, great. Of course it's a fact that if you've got a linguist who reads both languages, the risk is that the poetry's going to be awful. If you've got a poet and linguist team the risk is that maybe the poet might want to be laying their own poetic agenda on the translation. Or not so much their poetic agenda as their poetic style, and without having what I would regard as the necessary humility.

TB: It has been suggested that Hughes had an ability to "sense the original." This was said in connection with a version he made of Ferenc Juhász's 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets.' Hughes's version was actually a re-working of another English version of the poem. What do you, as a lecturer and researcher in translation studies, say to that?

FJ: I would say it's an editing job. I don't know Hughes's version, but I'd say in any genre that that you get editors editing a translator's raw output for style, coherence or just plain correcting language errors. If you've got a poet who hasn't got a Hungarian language informant but is just going on the English output and saying, yes, that definitely can be improved, that's what you're doing, you're improving.

TB: It's interesting, isn't it, that he did it? That he saw the English poem as a working draft.

FJ: Well, it's maybe not only improving an English poem. There's a certain cognitive idea of what a translation is. If you know that the source poet is a great poet, a major poet and you read a poem by him which seems pretty okay but there are bits that don't work – if that were an English language poet you would just wonder is that poet really that good? But if there's the idea that there's a great poem beneath, the editing is actually an act of releasing.

TB: In other words, this idea of "sensing" is not as impossible as it sounds. It's a sort of faith in the original.

FJ: Yes. But I mean, on the other hand it's an illusion. Because in the end, if you've got an imperfect poem written by an English writer, or one written by a translator, you're doing the same thing. You're sharpening up language, you're maybe getting the imagery more vivid, but there's absolutely no way of telling if your editing is taking you away from the source or towards the source.

TB: Vladimir Nabokov said: "To my ideal of literalness I sacrificed everything." Do you think that a lot has been sacrificed in the "literal" English translations of Central and Eastern European post-war poetry, published in the UK in the 1960s and 70s, and is that why this poetry is often described as "stark" and "bare" poetry?

FJ: I don't know which comes first really. Is it the poetry – which is very big on imagery and metaphor, and where maybe poetic language is not so important, is that what gets translated? Or is it that you're getting quite a scholarly generation of translators who are putting out translations which capture the semantics but not the sound? Which comes first? Jerzy Jarniewicz has written about this. I think you can get a tradition starting, and this Eastern European poetry did appeal as a genre. I think for somebody who reads the source language, in the first generation of Vasko Popa translations for example, the sound maybe doesn't come through as much,

TB: Yet in many of the translations in the journal Modern Poetry in Translation *for example, the impression is more that this is poetry which is all broken up, which is no longer doing what poetry is expected to do. Is that the opposite then to the original poems?*

FJ: It varies of course, from poet to poet. With early Vasko Popa the assonance is quite subtle. What might have gone missing is just a little bit of alliteration and vowel rhyme.

TB: So if I imagine a seminar room where the students are discussing these poets in their original language, would they be coming to similar conclusions that Hughes came to, that this poetry is fragmented, that it represents the world after the Holocaust, that it's coming from what he called an "unaccommodated universe"? What I mean is, have the translations succeeded in transmitting the most important qualities?

FJ: Yes. We're talking about poets who went through the formative years of the Second World War, an unimaginable trauma for European society, apart from islands on the edge like ourselves. Maybe the best comparison is the impact that the First World War had on English, or Irish or Scottish poetry. What they're saying about it few would argue.

TB: In an article about publishing poetry in translation in the UK, Fiona Sampson writes that until 1989, the reception of Central and Eastern European literatures in the UK was "sometimes mediated through ideas of the heroic oppositional writer." Do you think that in the 1960s and 70s there may have been a feeling of envy among English poets, towards the poets from Eastern Europe?

FJ: I guess to a certain extent, especially for the more oppressive regimes like the Soviet Union, it might well have conditioned that. My own particular take on it is that I think that any receptor-culture, unless it's so totally open to translations that everything is getting translated, is going to filter things, by what publishers think will sell, by what appeals to translators. But it's perhaps not so much the heroic oppositional writer, because not all dissident poetry is good poetry, but I think the metaphor – the power of the metaphor, the force of the image – there's perhaps an envy that the poetry in repressive regimes has to be metaphorical. When you're getting into the level of social comment rather than personal experience, you've got to use metaphors. I think there is quite a conventional idea regarding what is conceived as Eastern Europe, that the actual constraints produced a lot of poetry which made very powerful use of metaphor, or of image which seemed somehow autonomous.

TB: What about Tadeusz Różewicz's anti-poetry, which appears to describe things and people very plainly and clearly?

FJ: Most of these poets were teenagers or young people during those absolutely appalling six or seven years, the formative years of the war. The things we take for granted, like growing up in one country, travelling where you want, going back to your home place, the fact that your family die when they're old or ill – every foundation that we take as commonplace had been shaken up, destroyed and set down again. And the people in the late 1940s had to pick up the pieces. I think for poets, that is going to give you a rather different take on poetry.

TB: János Pilinszky's poetry in Hughes's translation mirrors this world of broken foundations. Yet when asked about his poetic language, Pilinszky ascribes it not to the war but to the fact that he learned his mother tongue from an aunt who'd had an accident when young and spoke only a limited amount of words. Even so, his poems about the war in particular seem to make extremely effective use of this "poor language." As someone who has read Pilinszky in the original Hungarian, what would you say to this idea of a broken language?

FJ: I think we're talking about the Modernist project, the big mainstream in world poetry from the West Coast of America to the coast of Japan. It's not just physical circumstances, it's not just political circumstances. It's the belief that maybe if language is to reconnect with the fractured, confusing, modern condition, then it has to reconnect in different ways. So you've got these poets who are writing in this tradition. Pilinszky is very much part of the Hungarian twentieth century tradition of very powerful poets, from the 1920s through to the 60s. What's very telling about his poetry is that if asked for a linguistic model he chooses an aunt who has aphasia. Whereas reading people like Attila József, Miklós Radnóti, people like that are almost certainly the bigger influences on his actual poetic diction. But there are also personal circumstances which will have led him to choose this kind of stripped-down imagery, elective affinities, choosing to follow these things. It's modernist, or postmodern, this fractured sense of self and reality you get in poets; from Popa, Pilinszky, Hughes, and other people writing in English or French or whatever, at that time.

TB: Talking of Miklós Radnóti, one of the most striking differences between the poetry of Radnóti and Pilinszky seems to lie in the sense of Radnóti being "despite all the circumstances, a free man,"[27] whereas Pilinszky – also despite the circumstances – appears to be an imprisoned man. There is this feeling, which comes through in the translations of Pilinszky, of cramped spaces, the world turned upside down, the ground as the sky, the sky as mud. And the sense of guilt, of watching and of being watched all the time. Do you ever feel hostile towards Pilinszky for writing so much about the war and the camps when as a Catholic he was not even a prisoner, while Radnóti because he was Jewish ended up being shot by Hungarian fascists during the Nazi evacuation of the Balkans in 1944?

FJ: I think that they were all as much caught up in the diabolical madness, from whatever side. Have you heard about this effect of the second generation survivor trauma? Children of Holocaust survivors who need counselling, but also the children of local fascist collaborators too – in other words, it's now becoming recognised that they're as much caught up in it as everybody else. I think especially in places like Hungary there were a lot of difficult consequences for individuals, caused by being Germany's allies as well as Nazi Germany's victims.

TB: What's your impression of Pilinszky's poetry generally?

FJ: Quite stark. Quite grim, but there is a grain of hope in the small things, somehow. Sometimes there isn't. The poem that I re-translated recently, 'Passion of Ravensbrück' is a horrible scene of an execution, yet somehow the prisoner achieves a sort of serenity, I don't quite know how.

TB: In this translation of 'Passion of Ravensbrück', not only the form of the poem but also the gender of the central character is different to that of the version by Csokits and Hughes, first published by Carcanet in 1976. Can you explain Pilinszky's use of form in the original poem, and its relationship to the content? In

[27] George Szirtes, introduction to Radnóti, pp. 15-16.

what ways has this, and the gender issue, been overlooked in previous translations of this poem?

FJ: What strikes me as central in this poem is Pilinszky's classical form. Even the half-rhyme is traditional, unlike in English, where it's bending away from tradition, and the way it's wedded to a brutally modern content. It's very similar to English and German First World War poetry in this. The effect of the form on me, plus the repetitions, is to give a sense of enclosure, but also of an unreal serenity that encloses the violence. This underscores the transcendent meaning of the title: *Passió* is 'passion' in the sense of Christ's death, not of strong feeling. Hughes's free verse I found too harsh – the serenity of the form was missing. But, to my mind, if you're going for form, you shouldn't take half-measures: Gömöri and Wilmer's version was slightly inconsistent here, to my mind, and felt a bit flat. In my version, the best-fit English form turned out to be the iambic ballad meter, alternating 4 plus 3 beats, though with some off-beat accents to stop the iambs getting too jingly. As for the "she," Hungarian has no grammatical gender, so the prisoner could be either a man or a woman. Ravensbrück was mainly a woman's camp, though Pilinszky would presumably have been in a men's compound. But read alongside Hughes's "he" and Gömöri-Wilmer's rather distant "one," I meant my version to open up the other possibility.[28]

TB: Pilinszky once wrote about a longing he had in his youth, to find a solution in a place where everything was united: "the materials and the form, the physical world and the spirit." Do you feel when you're translating poetry that the "materials and the form" should be intimately linked?

FJ: That's my own philosophy. That old cliché that you've got to choose between the semantics or the sound – I think you should be greedy and go for them both. Okay, you've got to make compromises, and the danger is that the compromise you make doesn't work as poetry. And it's by far the hardest way. It's perhaps also a generational thing. I get the impression that for translators of my generation and

[28] For the Hughes / Csokits version of 'Passion of Ravensbrück' see JP, *DoL*. For the Wilmer / Gömöri version see JP, *Passio*. Francis Jones's version has not been published, but is reproduced here at the end of this interview.

younger it's very much a principle that form is integral to a poem. Whereas I think with high modernism still reigning, the translators translating in the 1950s, 60s and 70s were saying much more that if you can't get them both across, you abandon form.

TB: I would like to ask you about Vasko Popa. In your preface to the Complete Poems of Vasko Popa (Anvil, 2011), you point out that Serbian nationalism exploits the same cultural heritage that Popa so sensitively explores. But, you say, "let the two not be confused."[29] How do we know that Popa is not to be confused with extreme nationalism?

FJ: I think historical context, if nothing else. He's writing these poems in the late 1960s or early 70s where, in late Tito's Yugoslavia, there's a freedom of expression in literature. Local culture became something which was very much celebrated. Popa is using Serbian iconography, and in retrospect it could all be slightly unsettling, but I remember when I first read it I thought this is brilliant, he's got a new take on the Kosovo Cycle. Hindsight is so easy. Now, ten or fifteen years later, there are people using this iconography for very sinister reasons.

TB: I have a simple query about Popa's 1975 cycle of poems, 'The Blackbird's Field.' In the original, is the bird actually a blackbird?

FJ: Yes.

TB: So it's definitely a blackbird? Not a black bird, like a crow or a raven?

FJ: It's Kosovo, the battle of Kosovo. *Kos* is Serbo-Croat for blackbird. The battle of Kosovo, which took place on the Blackbird's field – *Kosovo polje* – was the last time the Christian armies of the Balkans decided to settle their differences and stand up to the Ottoman Turks.

TB: Is it still a field?

[29] Francis Jones, Translator's Preface in Vasko Popa, *Complete Poems*, trans. Anne Pennington and Francis Jones (London: Anvil 2011), p. xxxviv.

FJ: It's actually a plateau or a plain, about ten or fifteen miles across. You've got various difficult mountain passes coming up from Macedonia and Turkey and then there's this open space in Kosovo and then the hills close in again and if you want to get up into Serbia or Hungary it's really the only route, and there's suddenly this place that opens out.

TB: In his poem 'The Blackbird's Mission,' Popa writes: "The blackbird dries his blood-drenched wings / At the fire of red peonies." Are there still peonies in Kosovo polje*?*

FJ: Yes, there are peonies. The peonies sprung up from the blood of the dead heroes who fell in the battle, in the legends. You're a bit stuck as a translator there, because peony is a pretty garden flower, rather than something with atavistic symbolism.

TB: That's good though, surely, because it's unexpected.

FJ: Yes, but it also shows how when you translate a poem you change it, even if you translate it literally. Because what's maybe appealing to someone like you is the novelty of this, whereas what would appeal to Serbo-Croat readers is the familiarity of it.

*

The Ravensbrück Passion
by János Pilinszky, trans. Francis Jones (2010)

She steps out from between the others,
stops in the block of silence,
her convict's head, her prison clothing
flickering like a slideshow.

She is hideously herself,
visible to her pores,

and all about her is so huge
and all of her's so small.

There's nothing else. As for the rest,
here's what the rest was worth:
that she forgot to give a cry
before she fell to earth.

Interview Five: Elaine Feinstein

London, 6 October 2006

Elaine Feinstein is a highly acclaimed poet, novelist, critic and translator. Ted Hughes described her as "an extremely fine poet. […] Reading her poems one feels cleansed and sharpened."[30] Winner of numerous awards, Feinstein was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1980. She has written fifteen novels, many radio plays and television dramas. Her first novel, *The Circle* (1970) was long listed for the 'lost' Man Booker prize in 2010. Her five biographies include *A Captive Lion: the Life of Marina Tsvetaeva* (1987), and *Pushkin* (1998). *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet* (2001) was shortlisted for the biennial Marsh Biography Prize. Her biography of Anna Akhmatova, *Anna of all the Russias* (2005) has been translated into twelve languages, including Russian. In 2002 Carcanet published her *Collected Poems and Translations*, and her new collection, *Cities*, was published in 2010.

I contacted Elaine Feinstein in 2006 as part of my research into the English translations of the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva – the subject of my MLitt. My focus was on the connection between poetry-in-translation and the creative mind, and I was particularly interested in the effect that the whole process of translation might have had on Feinstein's own work. In an interview with *Poetry Review*, in 2006, Feinstein said that translating Tsvetaeva had transformed her writing style: "The violence of her emotions and the ferocity of her expression of them released me from English defensive caution," she explained. "She taught me to see irony as a way of keeping deep feeling at a distance."[31]

Feinstein directly addresses the Russian poet in her poem 'Debts to Marina Tsvetaeva,' in which she writes: "I have often turned to you in thought as if / your certainties could teach me how to bear / the littleness of what we are on our own." I mention this poem in the interview below, and ask Feinstein to tell me more about

[30] TH, quoted on the back cover of Elaine Feinstein's *Collected Poems and Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006).
[31] Elaine Feinstein in an interview with *Poetry Review* 52, Summer 2006. On-line at: //https:www.poetrysociety.org.uk/review/pr96-2/feinstei.htm [Accessed 7.9.06]

her role as a translator. Feinstein makes it clear that though she can speak some Russian, she has never seen herself as a linguist. Her work in translation, like her work in biography, has always been undertaken from the position of the writer.

I had not yet embarked on my research into Hughes's work with Pilinszky when I first met Elaine Feinstein, though their names did come up, off the record as it were. Feinstein had met both men: she wrote a well-received biography of Hughes in 2001, and in her latest collection of poems, *Cities*, she includes a poem entitled 'Budapest' in which she remembers "the messy flat of János Pilinszky" and describes "his parchment face" as "bloodless, / lit like a lamp from within."[32]

Elaine Feinstein kindly suggested that I come to her house in London to conduct my interview. She showed me into a room with a large window at the end overlooking a small patio. I sat in a comfortable green armchair. The clock on the video machine said 6.15: over three hours fast. There were framed pictures on the opposite wall. One looked like a Hokusai, another was also possibly a Japanese print of some kind, showing a woman with a parasol. The third was a dark, romantic painting. The room was warm and quiet. Elaine Feinstein had gone into the kitchen to make herself something to eat. After a short time she returned and sat on the sofa with her plate of fish, a large spoon, and the list of questions I had e-mailed to her the week before. I had the same list before me on my lap, and so began by asking the first question.

*

TB: Is it important that the translator is a poet?

EF: Crucial. The only person who can make it a poem is a poet. Linguists can make sure the words are correct, but to get the poem is the thing. In translating you have to take risks, and you have to trust the translator you are working with.

TB: Tsvetaeva wrote, in 'A Hero of Labour', that the three words which reveal Briusov are: will, ox and wolf. Since I read that, I've been wondering what three words reveal Tsvetaeva. What do you think?

[32] Elaine Feinstein, 'Budapest' in *Cities* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2010), p. 29.

EF: Oh, I will have to think about that and e-mail you my answer! Yes, maybe an ox too – she once described herself as an ox regarding how she did so much for her family. Simeon Lipkin, one of the few people who met with her at that dangerous time in Moscow just before her death, gave an account of their meeting. He portrays her kindly, but as quite mad. She was certainly a great genius of her time. The one thing against her was her daughter Irina's death. She may have thought that the orphanage into which she placed Irina would have helped her but … it's difficult, she doesn't seem to have been able to give love to both her daughters, only to one.

TB: Do you think that Tsvetaeva's rhythm comes from her early piano training? Do you know of any studies that have mapped her poems onto the music her mother might have played?

EF: No, I don't. Her mother will have played High Romantic music – Chopin, Rachmaninov. But as for the rhythm, no, I don't think her rhythm comes from this. It goes all the way through. There is no counterpoint, no harmony. Well, the counterpoint she uses is like the one we use against the expected.

TB: Do you research your own poems, as you might with a translation?

EF: Yes, of course. Writing poetry is trying to capture words for your own experience – it has to be right, as precise as possible. I don't work with dictionaries very much. I find the word myself that fits the experience. At first, a translation is very difficult work. It is a struggle. But then you get the feeling, it becomes more like writing one's own poem. It starts to capture your own emotions, for example, Tsvetaeva's poem 'An Attempt at Jealousy,' for me. I am not a bad ventriloquist – Yevtushenko told me that. I can take on the voice of the poet I am translating.

TB: Do you write your own poems while translating? More or less?

EF: I didn't while translating Tsvetaeva. But I wrote a novel – two novels actually. It uses different parts of you. The whole book I did for OUP and Penguin took two years. After that I mainly wrote my own poetry. Now I only do translations because I

think I should. It is now definitely a question of 'should.' Translation is very hard work, and I don't like it. I want to write my own work.

TB: Reading your Collected Poems*, I have found no evidence of 'Tsvetaeva Style.' Have you ever found yourself writing a pastiche of Tsvetaeva?*

EF: I have never tried to imitate. I have tried to learn, that it's about experience, what you feel must be said.

TB: What are your thoughts about poetry that is not directly about the self, but about observing the external, something Tsvetaeva said she could never do. She said everything became internal with her.

EF: That can be effective too, taking external images that stand for feelings – such as in Louse Glück's *The Wild Iris*.

TB: I was asked recently, what are Tsvetaeva's poems about? It was not easy to answer straight away, I began to talk about the revolution and the war, but that didn't explain it.

EF: She did write about the civil war. Her poems about the White Guards in *Camp of the Swans* were very powerful, though very misinformed. She writes about love, loss, exaltation. For example the poems to Mayakovsky; 'Poems to Blok,' her 'A New Year's Greetings' – not joy, but exaltation. The sense that poetry makes the world more magnificent.

TB: What is your favourite poem?

EF: 'Poem of the End.' I met him you know [the man whom this poem is about, Konstantin Rodzevitch]. He was still very charming, a real lady's man. He talked to me when his wife was out, because apparently she is very jealous of the affair he had with Tsvetaeva. He talked about the great love they shared but I wondered whether he was telling the truth. I wanted to ask him, if it was so great, why did you leave. I did ask him actually. I don't remember what he said.

TB: So it seems to you that she was telling the truth in that poem, how he calmly says we'll go to the cinema while her world is falling apart?

EF: Oh yes, that rings true all right, he was that character.

TB: Were you reluctant to share the Tsvetaeva poems? Especially at the beginning, in 1975 when you began translating her?

EF: I began in 1969 by the way. And no, I just wanted to know about them, and to know a poem you have to work with it.

*TB: You said in our phone conversation that Russian is a difficult language and that "it goes away from you." Is there something in this that makes it appealing? Tsvetaeva described "distance" as "hand luggage"; as "stylish" ('Attempt at a Room'). Pasternak said being abroad was "entertainment without rules...There was nobody you knew, nobody to lay down the law to you." (*An Essay in Biography*). Do you think there is a similar feeling in the reader / translator who cannot speak the source language. And if so, what does this say about them?*

EF: Well, I've got a complicated relationship with Russia. My grandfather ran away from it. And of course it's not foreign to me so that doesn't work. Some of the greatest literature came from there. I have many, many great friends from Russia. By the way, you mention 'Attempt at a Room' here. That is a very difficult poem. I'm not sure I like it.

TB: Do you like literals?

EF: They can't be the finished poem. But yes, they are exciting. You must have them. Also, you have to have the sound. Angela Livingstone taped herself reading the poems in Russian because I kept ringing her up to hear certain sounds! And when I write my own poetry I always read it aloud to hear it. I know some of the Russian versions by heart. That sound is different to anything else, you could never reproduce that in English.

TB: I wonder does English ever sound as beautiful as that, to someone who doesn't understand it?

EF: No, never like that. And that's if you could fine someone who doesn't speak English. Well, English is most powerful when used with monosyllables – Ted Hughes or Shakespeare for example. And then after the monosyllables, a long multisyllabic line.

TB: Have you always been interested in biography?

EF: No. I really didn't want to do the biography on Tsvetaeva. Not at all. When I was studying at university we were told to 'stick to the text' and were discouraged from reading biographies. I think that was very bad. Biography can be very interesting and help in understanding a writer's work. When I started the Tsvetaeva biography, eventually, I found it most fascinating. In Russia, everything happened to me – I was introduced to Margarita Aliger and Vika Schweitzer. I also met Pavel Antokolsky, who was once a lover of Tsvetaeva – though he is actually homosexual.

TB: If I went to Moscow to try to understand Tsvetaeva, would she say "don't go there, go to Prague, or go to Paris to find me?"

EF: No, she said that she was always from Moscow, that was her place.

TB: What did you mean when you wrote, in the introduction to your Tsvetaeva translations, "When the transformation altogether refused to happen"?[33]

EF: Well, Lyric 11 of 'Poem of the End' which I left out, depends very much on a play of words – it doesn't really say much, it is really like one whole pun. David McDuff did translate it, and pointed out that he was the first to translate the whole poem.

[33] Elaine Feinstein, introduction to Marina Tsvetaeva, *Selected Poems*, trans. Elaine Feinstein (London: Oxford Poets, 1999), p. xvii.

TB: Jamey Gambrell, translator of Tsvetaeva's Earthly Signs *(Yale Univ. Press, 2002) said that the dash in Russian is "an equal sign standing in for the unwritten verb "to be"." (p. xxx). Is this taken into consideration in your translations?*

EF: Yes, I translate the dash as the words 'to be'. I tidy up her dashes. Some other dashes in her work are about the rhythm, some others are used in the way that Emily Dickinson uses them.

TB: Is there a similarity between Tsvetaeva and Emily Dickinson, or even Christina Rossetti?

EF: Not with Rossetti. Tsvetaeva was religious but she didn't have that protestant anguish thing like Rossetti. And sex was totally accepted by Tsvetaeva. There would be more similarity with Dickinson. She recognised a different kind of passion.

TB: In your 1997 PN Review *interview, you replied to a question about doing "piggy-back translations" with the statement, "we opened doors but we all made for a rather dangerous translatorese."*[34] *What did you mean by this?*

EF: After a while, I was worried that the poems coming out in the Penguin *Modern Poets in Translation* series all sounded the same. It is a shame though, that it's all over, that exciting time of translating. Yes, there are a lot of translation projects around now, but they're to do with poets of the past, not new poets. It was such an exciting time, with the international events organised by Hughes and others.

TB: In your poem 'Debts to Marina Tsvetaeva' (City Music, 1990), you write: "but I can never learn from you, Marina / Since poetry is always a question of language" Is it impossible for a non-Russian speaker to talk about Russian literature?

EF: Translations are never totally successful. But it is okay to read a poem in translation, despite this, if it's the only way of getting to it. Tsvetaeva's language is

[34] See Michèle Roberts, 'In conversation with Elaine Feinstein,' *PN Review* 101 21:3 (1995), 45-47.

much more difficult to translate than Akhmatova, who you could translate just with the aid of a dictionary. Tsvetaeva is more like Hopkins – you can imagine a non-English speaker trying to read Hopkins with only the help of a dictionary. I wrote that poem, 'Debts to Marina' a long time ago, when I was feeling very vulnerable about not speaking Russian well enough. I felt that if I met Tsvetaeva, she would have been cross with me claiming to be like her. Her grasp of languages was so good – she spoke three languages.

TB: But I suppose you could say that you are both speaking the language of poetry?

EF: Yes, that's exactly it. And in Russia, all is forgiven if you are a poet.

Interview Six: Keith Sagar

Lancashire, 23 November 2009

Keith Sagar has published over twenty books, most of them on D.H. Lawrence or Ted Hughes. Formerly Reader in Literature at Manchester University, he is now an Honorary Professor at Nottingham University. He has also published his own poetry: in the introduction to his 1980 collection *The Reef*, Ted Hughes wrote that his writing "touched a place in my imagination where some folk-rhymes, some archaic and some modern pieces of art, certain tribal sacred objects […] live together on the other side of personality and fashion."[35]

Sagar's *The Art of Ted Hughes*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1975, was the first full-length study of Hughes, though Sagar has never wholly submitted to the role of objective literary critic. "I am advancing no dogmas about what poetry should be," he writes his introduction, "But it is surely necessary to have in every generation at least one poet who is at the limit […]."[36] In that early publication, Sagar made no bones about his partiality to Hughes's poetry, and stated outright that after the publication of *Crow*, he began to think of Hughes as "a major poet of the first rank, a worthy successor to the great English poets of the first half of the century, Yeats, Lawrence and Eliot."[37] To have followed his development step by step over seventeen years, he writes, "has been one of the richest experiences literature has yet given me."[38]

I interviewed Keith Sagar in his home in Clitheroe, Lancashire. We had postponed our first meeting due to severe floods in Cumbria the week before. It was still raining when I travelled across the dales, and I could see swollen rivers and fields full of water. This seemed an apt setting for a meeting about Ted Hughes, whose 1983 collection *River* contains lines such as: "And the river / Silences everything in a leaf-mouldering hush / where sun rolls bare, and earth rolls."[39]

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[35] TH, introduction to Keith Sagar, *The Reef* (Ilkley: Proem Pamphlets, 1980). See Appendix VI in Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, p. 302.
[36] Keith Sagar, introduction to *ATH*, p. 5.
[37] ibid, p. 1.
[38] ibid.
[39] Ted Hughes, 'Salmon Eggs' in *River* (London: Faber, 1983).

We conducted the interview upstairs in the study, the walls crammed with books, the window over-looking a quiet cul-de-sac. At one point, Sagar took out a batch of loose pages from a filing cabinet – typed, unpublished *Orts* poems, sent to him by Hughes – and read one aloud. His reading voice is not unlike the recordings of Hughes; his northern accent soft yet dramatic, and full of feeling. The poem he read, as an answer to one of my questions, is reproduced in the interview below.

Ted Hughes wrote 144 letters to Keith Sagar, all of which are held at the British Library, and which have recently been published for the first time in their entirety. Such a large volume of letters suggests that the honesty and thoroughness with which Sagar approached his study of Hughes's work was reciprocated. Sagar's intense and personal response to his subject-matter seems to have inspired trust and respect in Hughes, and the resulting correspondence, published under the title *Poet and Critic* (2012), will be an invaluable contribution to Hughes scholarship.

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TB: When you lecture on Ted Hughes, what is the general response from your students?

KS: I have rarely lectured on Ted, but have taught him a lot to university students and adults – in seminars. The former usually get pretty excited by him, the latter are occasionally resistant on the grounds that he is too bleak or too removed from their own experience. One difficulty is that it takes so long to discuss almost any poem that one never has time to get onto the later, better, work, and give a sense of his scope and development. Like so many other modern poets, he asks too much of his readers, takes for granted too much common ground – a knowledge of myths, for example. I tackled him about this, and he admitted it, and started providing introductions and notes in his later books. People often feel inadequate reading him alone. Being in a group where ideas and responses can be shared is particularly productive.

TB: Was it difficult writing about an author who was alive, and with whom you corresponded?

KS: I wrote the British Council booklet on Hughes, and *The Art of Ted Hughes*, in the early seventies, partly because I thought I could help ordinary readers with often difficult poems; but also because I wanted to correct the whole battalion of hostile professional critics who, at that time, under cover of supposed 'objectivity,' but in fact through a combination of incompetence and malice, were getting Hughes spectacularly wrong. Hughes himself had by that time already written several critical essays, on Keith Douglas, Emily Dickinson, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Sylvia Plath, Vasko Popa, Shakespeare, and János Pilinszky, from which one could deduce his own concept of criticism. In a later essay on Eliot he described his critical approach:

> I have suspended scholarly disbelief, and adopted the attitude of an interpretive musician. As he reads the score, the musician imagines he finds the living spirit of the music, the inmost vital being of a stranger, reproduced spontaneously, inside himself.[40]

That was very much my own approach to Hughes' work, an attempt to get as close as I could to the living heart of it. Hughes must have sensed this when I sent him, in 1969, the first essay I wrote on him. Despite his hostility to academic criticism, and the tragedy which had befallen him in the day or two before receiving my letter – the death of Assia Wevill and their daughter Shura – he replied:

> It's difficult to say anything about an article about one's own work. What I have actually got down on paper seems such a small part, up to now, of what I concern myself with, that it is disturbing to have my intentions divined as generously as you divine them in your paper. But it is a great change to read an article that concerns itself with the imaginative and vital interior of poetry, rather than the verbal surface exclusively, and yours seems to me both bold and sensitive in that respect, keeping the surface qualities just in the right perspective.[41]

This was all the confirmation I needed that I was on the right track, not only with my criticism of Hughes, and I have not subsequently wavered from it.

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[40] TH, 'The Poetic Self: A Centenary Tribute to T. S. Eliot, in *WP*, p. 291.
[41] TH to Keith Sagar [Early April 1969], Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, p. 22.

TB: My PhD research is mostly concerned with the relationship between Hughes's Crow *and his interest in the literal translations of János Pilinszky. Did you ever meet Pilinszky?*

KS: I had a funny experience with Pilinszky. He came to Manchester, when Carcanet published his poems. He and Ted came together and he read his poems in Hungarian and Ted read his translations. Pilinszky's readings were most odd: full of clicks. I didn't realise Hungarian sounded like that. It was only much later I found out that the clicking sound was entirely his false teeth. He was very frail and gaunt looking then – he died shortly afterwards I think.

TB: I have heard that when Pilinszky read his poetry, he appeared almost saintly, as if he would rise up from where he stood.

KS: He did look otherworldly, yes.

TB: I have also heard that he read very theatrically.

KS: I don't have a very clear recollection of it, but I certainly didn't come away with the impression of him being histrionic. I got him to sign my copy of the book – I think I have it here somewhere. I sold my entire Hughes collection – this is just the rump of it, a working library. But I had everything, everything. When I finished the Hughes Bibliography in 1997, 1998 [published by Mansell, with Stephen Tabor], I realised that most of that stuff I would never open again, I would never take off the shelf. And we needed money at the time. I sold the entire collection to a Japanese collector, Professor Ohtake. Ted died as soon as I sold it and of course the price of everything connected to him went through the ceiling. But it turned out very well. I didn't know it at the time but Professor Ohtake did his postgraduate work at Hughes Hall, Cambridge, which is a postgraduate college at the University. He donated his entire book collection to Hughes Hall about two years ago, including all the stuff he bought from me. That it should be in Cambridge at Hughes Hall is very pleasing. It's being catalogued now and will eventually be available to scholars.

TB: Does it include all your signed copies?

KS: Well, I thought I had kept most of my inscribed books, certainly everything that's inscribed by Ted, which is quite a lot, but I can't see the Pilinszky here so it must be at Hughes Hall now.

TB: You went to Cambridge, is that right?

KS: Yes, I overlapped with Ted there. He went up in 1950, I went up in 1952.

TB: Did you read English Literature?

KS: Yes.

TB: What did you think of the course there? Did you experience any of the stifling feelings Hughes experienced?

KS: I loved it, I loved every aspect of it, and it wasn't getting in the way of any creative impulses in my case. Although, I had been writing a bit of poetry before I went to Cambridge – a couple of rubbish things published in the school magazine, and I had a poem published in the Cambridge magazine in my first term there – even worse than the ones in the school magazine when I look back on it now. But I never wrote another poem for sixteen years. I think that was partly because of the effect of the way English was taught at Cambridge at that time. Ted discusses it in relation to Leavis particularly, in one of the published letters.[42] It fostered in you the idea that there was this pantheon of great writers who were scarcely human, who were giants, and the idea that one might oneself actually write poems and get them published, seemed extraordinarily arrogant. You weren't there to write poems, you were there to study the great poems that had already been written, of which there were plenty, an extremely rich heritage. Ted described it as the "maternal octopus."[43] He said it's

[42] See TH to Keith Sagar, 16 July 1979. Hughes describes his "fox-dream story," and says he connects it to "the effect of the Cambridge blend of pseudo-critical terminology & social rancour on creative sprit […]." Sagar, *Poet and Critic*, pp. 74-5.
[43] Hughes writes of Douglas: "he seems to have no difficulty with the terrible, suffocating, maternal octopus of English poetic tradition." See *WP*, p. 213.

impossible to make your own voice heard "against that choir."[44] I never thought about it at the time. I only thought about it sixteen years later when I started writing poetry. I started writing quite a lot then, under Ted's influence. He had sent me an advance copy of *Gaudete*, and it was spring. I had finished teaching for the year and I wanted to study it with my students and friends who were interested in Ted. So I organised free weekly seminars at my house and we went through it page by page. This was when I wrote the chapter on *Gaudete* for *The Art of Ted Hughes*. Then we started on *Cave Birds*. It was when I was really into *Gaudete* that I started having very vivid dreams. Before that I had never been able to make use of my dreams, and not only was I having vivid dreams but I was remembering them, and making poems out of them. I don't think they were in any way a pastiche of *Gaudete*, but it was just as though I had been given a dose of fertiliser for my imagination. So I asked myself then why had I gone for sixteen years without writing, and I realised in retrospect what Cambridge had done. Although at the time, I loved it.

TB: Is there anything else about scholarly work, something about the actual act of writing essays – apart from the awareness of all the great poets – that makes it difficult to then write your own poem?

KS: You don't think of a poem as something just to be read. You think of it as something that needs to be capable of being analysed in the way that was at that time fashionable, not only with Leavis at Cambridge but with all the American New Critics, doing that kind of close analysis. Certainly the poetry that got written about was the sort of poetry that lent itself to that kind of analysis.

TB: How do you feel about the teaching of Creative Writing at universities, which has now become very popular?

KS: I've always been sceptical about whether it's possible. Ted certainly thought it was because he got highly involved with the Arvon foundation. He believed that there weren't poets or non-poets, that everybody had a poet within him or herself, we

[44] TH, Faas interview, p. 20.

just happened to live in a culture which for most people kept it under. But that it was possible to release it.

TB: I would like to ask you about a phrase used by Ted Hughes, "the real thing." What is this, do you think? Is it primitive man? Is it animal? What do you think he meant by that?

KS: Do you know Hughes's essay 'Orghast: Talking without Words'? I think that's as near as he comes defining that. And there's an unpublished *Orts* poem about the real thing, though it doesn't actually use that phrase. It's called 'The Horse.' It's never been printed but Hughes sent me a carbon copy of the typescript. Here is it:

> The Horse
>
> Is not interested
> Until it has somewhere to go.
>
> It will not get up
> For a frolic, it will not saunter on a trek,
>
> It will not let any rider demonstrate.
> It lies there, looking like a big stone.
>
> It will only move
> For a destination, for a rider
>
> Who would prefer it to have wings,
> Who would prefer it to be the destination itself.
>
> A rider
> Who does not want a ride but only to get there.
>
> Then it will move.
> Till then
>
> It looks like a big lumpy stone.
> You would not say there was a horse in sight.

TB: You have written many books and essays on D.H. Lawrence. I wanted to ask you about a line from The Rainbow*, where Lawrence writes of Will Brangwen, "He preferred things he could not understand with the mind." Do you think that this is similar to Hughes's notion of the real thing? That it was something to be understood not with the mind but with the blood, or the body, something physical?*

KS: Yes. Most of the *Orghast* essay is all about that.

TB: What do you think of that idea, not understanding with the mind?

KS: Most of our understanding is picking up clues which are not strictly linguistic. There are all sorts of things going on subliminally in any kind of communication. Eliot said something about that. He thought that the demand that one should be able to understand a poem was not really relevant. Most of his favourite poems were poems that he never understood. The thing is that a great poet, a genuine poet – the real thing – has to get into a very odd mood to be able to write at his best, a state of intense concentration. You couldn't live your whole life at that pitch; you have to exclude everything else to clear a pathway for it. You don't know where it's coming from, because it's not something you've had any intention to produce, or any conscious intention. This is why, when people ask poets what did you mean by this or that, the poet will very often say, "what do you think it means? Your idea of what it means is as good as mine". I used to think that that was an affectation, an evasion on their part – of course they knew what it meant. But I found when I went back to my own poems some time after writing them, I would think, did I write that? I once sent Ted a short story of mine called 'The Beast.' He sent me back a long analysis of it, interpreting it in a way that never occurred to me, and never would have occurred to me. But after I read it I could see that what he found was in there, but I didn't deliberately put it there, or even recognise it as being there without his prompting. Similarly, I sent him my commentary on *Prometheus on His Crag*. He said, "your reading of the poems surprised me, but always into agreement."

TB: Daniel Weissbort wrote that as a translator Hughes could "sense" the original.[45] *Do you think that this is possible?*

KS: Of course. We have countless senses beyond the gross five – as Blake spent a lot of time explaining.

TB: Yet this sort of reasoning is problematic when it comes to academic writing, isn't it?

KS: It is, yes. I don't worry any more about what people say about my writing, if they say I'm not using language objectively or analytically. So long as I'm writing in a way that people reading me can understand, that's all I'm bothered about. People know what you mean when you say that he sensed something. That phrase wouldn't have come into the language if it wasn't needed. Lawrence said how does my cat recognise me in the dark? How do you know when someone enters the room when you've got your back to the door?

TB: Would you describe Hughes as a primitivist poet?

KS: That's a difficult question. The opening sections of *Tales from Ovid*, when Hughes describes the age of gold and the age of silver and the age of brass and the age of iron and so on – the early stages of human evolution and the evolution of human culture – suggests this idea that there was once a golden age, an arcadia when man and nature were completely at one, and that civilization has gradually dismantled and separated these. But I'm sure Ted realised that this is not an attempt by Ovid or by himself to describe an actual historical process, that if one could travel back in time you would find that there really was such a time. Clearly there were times when certain aspects of man's relationship with nature were more as he would like them to be, but I think he feels that it's more a matter of the individual's experience of the natural world. I say in my new book that I don't want to give the

[45] See DW's introductory note to TH's translation of Ferenc Juhász's 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets,' in TH, *ST*, p. 24.

impression that Hughes is suggesting we should all become steelhead fishermen.[46] There are all kinds of activities in nature that are extremely popular, and the more secular and technological and urbanised life becomes, the more treasured and valuable these experiences are. They are all attempts to re-establish bonds with the natural world. When Hughes read Lawrence's collection *Phoenix II*, published in 1968, he said it was like "straight oxygen."[47] That's what he feels when he's on the Dean River fishing for steelhead – literally in that case. That's "the real thing."

TB: At your talk for the Elmet Trust in Mytholmroyd this year, you said that after fishing, Hughes felt as though he had come from a place that was almost pre-language, that he almost couldn't form words.[48] This is similar to the way he talks about literal translations, when he describes the "struggling dumbness" of word-for-word versions.[49] For example, he praises Csokits's word-for-word cribs of Pilinszky for portraying "something elliptical in the connections, freakishly home-made, abrupt." He says there's something primitive in it.[50] It's as if he felt that this awkward way of speaking was true poetry, because it was primal, something from deep within.

KS: Yes, I think this is what impressed him about the Border Ballads. In his review of Matthew Hodgart's anthology *The Faber Book of Ballads*, he wrote that they were written in a language that "cannot be outflanked by experience."[51] I have recently discovered that around 7000 BC, there was a common language throughout nearly all European countries, and countries in the Near East, called Indo-European. It's possible to reconstruct it by studying what all modern languages have in common. If Ted had known Indo-European he probably would have written in that. With *Orghast*, he was of course faced with a situation at Persepolis, at the Shiraz festival, where he was writing a play to be acted by a company of actors who didn't have a common language, in front of an audience from all over the world who also didn't

[46] Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: Terror and Exultation* (2009). Published on-line at: http://www.KeithSagar.co.uk.
[47] See TH to Keith Sagar, 28 August 1984, Sagar, *Poet and Critic* p. 138.
[48] In an interview in 1990, TH said: "When I am fishing alone, as I come out of it, if I have to speak to somebody, I find I can't speak properly. I can't form words." See Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature* [op. cit.], p. 188.
[49] See TH, *MPT* 3 (1967), 1-2 (p. 1).
[50] TH, introduction to JP, *DoL*, p. 8.
[51] See TH, 'Music of Humanity' in *WP*, p. 68.

have a common language. So he made up a language using roots which he felt were common to many of the languages he knew. This is exactly the way the linguists are now recreating Indo-European.

TB: May I ask you where does Shakespeare come into all this? In the Ekbert Faas interview on Crow*, while discussing his influences, Hughes talks about the "super-crude" language of Shakespeare.*[52] *Elsewhere he says that he set his writing against the "primitive literatures."*[53] *Can Shakespeare be considered primitive?*

KS: In Shakespeare's day, language had become very sophisticated, very elegant and courtly, especially in the circles he was moving in when he left Stratford. But if you compare his blank verse with other verse that was being written at the time it does seem to have an incredible freedom, a colloquial immediacy. I suppose people don't know any more exactly what kind of language was being spoken in Stratford in Shakespeare's youth, but I imagine that he incorporates a great deal of the dialect and the colloquial quality of that language into his plays. A great many of his best lines are monosyllabic – absolutely basic. They're not Latinate, they're not Frenchified: "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all?" Monosyllables. "Multitudinous seas incarnadine" – that's the scholarly, Latinate language – "making the green one red." Suddenly it becomes real, part of everybody's immediate experience.

TB: So it's in this use of the colloquial, immediate language that we can find a connection between Shakespeare and Crow*?*

KS: It's to do with getting rid of anything that can be got rid of. It's like Lear's nakedness. He sheds all the appurtenances of Kingship, and pretty well all the appurtenances of civilization, almost all the appurtenances of being human. What's left when all that has been shed is the true Lear, the Lear who loves Cordelia, the Lear for whom she is everything.

TB: And this connects with Cordelia's silence, which sheds words for the truth.

[52] TH, Faas interview, p. 13.
[53] See TH to Gerald Hughes, 27 October 1969, *Letters*, p. 296.

KS: Yes. That story about King Lear and his three daughters exists in almost every folklore in the world and is very, very old. I heard a programme on the radio, part of a series, where they read folk tales. One day they read a folk story from Czechoslovakia. There was a king who had three daughters, and he wanted to divide his kingdom. In order to decide how to divide it he gave them a test to see which of them loved him best. So he said to the eldest daughter, "how much do you love me?" She said, "I love you like sugar." The King was pleased with that. He asked the second daughter, "how much do you love me?" and she said, "I love you like honey." The king was pleased with that. Then he asked his third daughter, who he loved the best, "how much do you love me?" and she said, "I love you like salt." He was so angered he sent her away in disgrace, and divided his kingdom between the other two. But while you can live perfectly well without honey and sugar, you can't live without salt.

TB: Edwin Morgan, in an Open University course about Eastern European poetry, discusses Ted Hughes's introduction to the poems of Vasko Popa, saying Hughes could just as well be talking about his own poetry. Do you see much similarity between Hughes and Popa, or Eastern European poets in general?

KS: Oh yes, definitely. There is an excellent essay on the subject by Michael Parker in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*. Ted gave a lecture on some of the poets from Eastern Europe which I attended at the Cheltenham Literature Festival. It was never published. The most memorable thing he said was that they wrote a poetry which had stripped itself down to the point where it became possibly the first poetry ever written which lost nothing in translation. The theme of Pilinszky's influence on Ted has been dealt with at length by Nick Bishop in his book *Re-making Poetry: Ted Hughes and a New Critical Psychology.* This is essential reading for you.

TB: Edwin Morgan also quoted Hughes as saying that since all the norms have gone, one must work at the extremes. Would you say that Hughes was the sort of poet who worked at the extremes?

KS: Yes, I think he is pushing towards extremes. He thought that the tendency of modern life is to flatten everything out, to glorify the average, to repress energy. It's like Blake again: "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

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