Departure At Dusk:
The Airport Corridors, The Late Autumn Plane

Goodbye friends in your hiding places
wearing your coats of skins and looking to the sky.
Autumn has disappeared to the south and you
are settled into hawthorn thickets growing smaller
holding hands with your sexy girlfriend the night.

Over the ridge, over your eyes caged in branches
enormous black flights of birds are coming in low
crossing the stream just north of you
where the dead sheep fade into the soil —
fade away to bones and thick white coats
and sink into the layers of earth beneath them
where the slow hearts of moles beat
in controlled death down the long corridors of sleep.

Ha! Already I can hear you walking away in my memory
like the echo of a lost watch.
The delicate trail fades and disappears
like a vapor path across the night sky.
You migrate, you hibernate or you die —
how can I love you so much when you can’t even
understand nature’s simplest laws?
No — Don’t you dare wave to me! Goodbye
you ridiculous fast-breathing padded bones
I can no longer bear saying goodbye to.

David Porter is finishing a book on Ralph Waldo Emerson’s aesthetics. He is the
author of The Art of Emily Dickinson’s Early Poetry (Harvard) and teaches at the
University of Massachusetts.

In the poetry of Ted Hughes we are witnessing the death of a
familiar but now increasingly
irrelevant aesthetic. Simulta-
neously we see emerging in the
work of this English poet a new
idea of poetry involving an
enor-
mous acceleration of intake —
myth, epic, folk cycle, comics, ad-
vertising, TV, the other pop dispo-
sibles — aggressively
reconciled to the consciousness of
a post-literate culture. His ob-
jective is poetry that is equipped
for life.

The old aesthetic, dominated by the Americans Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, seems in this new
light to have been static, an
elegant urn, or simply diffuse
and self-consciously erudite (“the rose
in the steel dust”): “medallions
/to forge Achaia”). Theirs was a
passive, vulnerable aesthetic, its
frailty the subject of much of
their poetry. Robert Lowell ex-
tends their assumptions in his laboriously balanced meditations.

Forty years ago Hart Crane distilled the preceding idea in
gloss on the poem “Chaplin-
esque”: “Poetry, the human
feelings, ‘the kitten’, is so
crowded out of the humidum,
mechanized scramble of today
that the man who would preserve
them must duck and camouflage
for dear life to keep them or him-
self from annihilation.”

The new poet of Ted Hughes conceives poems as hard and
predatory, like killer sharks. The
sea pulls everything to pieces, he
has written, “except its killers,
alert and shapely. Thus poems
instinctively must be about the
business, Hughes says, of
managing the practical dif-
ficulties of survival. This radical
conception means two basic
things: poems inhabit the same
world as assassinations and must
not allow themselves to be made
trivial by comparison; poems
make the essential thing happen,
they rescue us from inanition.

This is their totemic value as the
main regenerative acts of the
human psyche.

Hughes’s mode is no sweet new
style, but rather wily, elemen-
tary, and attacking like an
animal. It is not the twitches and
rustles of “confessional” poets
out of university writing classes.

Least of all is it like that of his
generation of writers in England,
whose poems someone has called
mournful moundings over pints of beer,
sold sheeats, and garden
implements. Hughes’s style is
conglomerate, ravenous, drawing
in everything from Old English
to shamanism to pop. His imagined
poet is a scavenger over all the
mishmash of the global junkyard,
hardly the archetypal figure
Hughes Joyce saw as the God of
creation, indifferent, paring his
g fingerprints.

The crucial objective in our
wasting culture, according to
Hughes, is immediate: to keep all
the sensibilities intact. How, af-
ter all, could the studied moder-
nist styles of Eliot and Auden and
their followers perceive today the
unaneous meaning of Disney
World, tiger cages, and
thalidomide except precentiously
from a great distance and
through the spectacles of books?

“When he lay in a doorway and
watched the bulets lifting the
coffles out of the street beside
him,” so Hughes has written of
the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz,
“he realized that most poetry is
not equipped for life in a world
where people actually do die.”

In Ted Hughes’s work, ac-
cordingly, are early signs of a
deep geologic shift under way in
English language poetry. The
slide is away from poetry that is
predominantly isolated, in-
dividual, inward-turning, and
self-indulgently hallucinatory.

Thus Hughes conceives an ex-
compiling counter-thrusting
poetry which, hawk-like, attains the powerfully
balanced exertion Hopkins called
mastersy. Animals and other
creatures are equipped by
sinew and instinct for such life.
This happens in poetry it is a mat-
ter of language. Though in-
consistently attained, that is
Hughes’s considerable goal; a
poetic language resourceful
enough to assert itself amid the

Ted Hughes

Excerpt from the poetry of Ted Hughes have been reprinted by permission of Harper
& Row, Publishers, Inc.

September/October 1975

J. The Present Age

The dominant fact of our age, according to Hughes, is that
Western men have lost contact
with the raw dream of their
origins. They are partial men, in-
capable of mastering the brute
beauty of their lives. Thus
Hughes conceives an exemplary
counter-thrusting poetry which,
hawk-like, attains the powerfully
balanced exertion Hopkins called
mastersy. Animals and other
creatures are equipped by
sinew and instinct for such life.
When this happens in poetry it is a mat-
ter of language. Though in-
consistently attained, that is
Hughes’s considerable goal; a
poetic language resourceful
enough to assert itself amid the

This content downloaded from 198.91.37.2 on Sat, 02 Jan 2016 07:18:57 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions
crushing banality and terror which are the terms of our times. His own language at times achieves, as he says of Shakespeare’s, the aspect of being invented in a state of crisis, for that horrifying job. Poems from the cycle Crow (1970), for example, range from lyric to devotion to street curse, captioned as in an indiction “A Horrible Religious Error”: When the serpent emerged, earth—bowl brow From an reached chest With its albif self twined around it Lifting a long neck And balancing that dead and mineralized The sphynx of the final act And flexing on that double flamboyant tongue A syllable like the pulsating of the spheres God’s grimace urinated, a leaf in the furnace And man’s and woman’s knees melted, they collapsed Their neck-muscles melted, their brains Consumed the ground Their tears evaporated visibly They whispered “Your will is our peace.” But Crow only pooped. Then took a step or two forward. Grabbed this creature by the slackened nape. Beat the hell out of it, and ate it. (Crow, 34)

Magnificent images seem casually expunged: “dull gunshot and / the afterglow / Among confiners, in rainy twilight.” Excruciating junctures of sensibility: “Trembling featherless elbows in the nest’s flight.” Sundered profundities open out: “crow, a black rainbow/Bent in emptines/to emptiness/But flying”: “stars, fuming away into the black, mushrooms of the nothing forest, clouding their spores, the virus of God."

The earth shrunk to the size of a hand grenade And he held it The earth shrunk to the size of a hand grenade And he held it and held it and BA | Y | K | S. He was blasted to nothing. (Crow, 71)

Hughes offers a radical liberation — in substance, viewpoint, and voice — from the subject, place and profession of his contemporaries and their tin-pot counterparts. Hughes perceives a tougher instrument adequate to the creative realities of our age. Consequently, like Brecht a generation earlier, he transmits an audacity that is breathing through an age otherwise blanched to indifference by impoverishment and brutality.

The chronicle of this stubbornly honest engagement is scattered in his drama of writing, fiction and criticism in various periodicals. The major poetry of it is in five important books: The Hawk in the Rain (1957), Lager- cal (1960), Wadsworth (1967), Crow (1970), and Selected Poems 1957-1972 (1976).

II. The East European Poets

When Hughes reads his poetry in public he lean slightly, as if in to the’ cylindrical Yorkshire wall, or better, as if away from the sensed overhang of a cliff. He once described the rock face looming over his Yorkshire birthplace this way: “Something about the clouds and light, the inclination of the season, our eyes, and strengthening of the earth, has reared it right over you, and you feel to be in the mouth of a vast dripping cave, in some hopeless age.” He bends to his reading, head tilted, as if the light were a slight glare or as if he were in that Yorkshire valley where there shone as he says, “a slightly disorienting, crummy gray light, sunless and yet too clear, like a still from the documentary film of a prehistoric ingredient.”

The Yorkshire cliff of Hughes’s childhood looms for him as the emblem of our present age. It seems to have raised against the passage to the south and symbolic of the life: “while thinking distractedly out to east and west, we valley-dwellers were stuck looking into the dark hair wall of Scout Rock, as it was called, and the final sensation of being having been distracted.” The linking phrases come from that supposed Yorkshire entrapment to Hughes’s intuitive understanding of the political entrapment enforced since the war, particularly in East Europe, of the sort Solzhenitsyn has since disclosed in The Gulag Archipelago. With the poets of East Europe — Popa, Holub, Herbert, Milose, among others — Hughes has located explicit temporal and human situation in our age: “They have had to live out, in actuality, a vision which for artists elsewhere is a world of things but only brokenly glimpsed through the clutter of our civilized libelous confusion. They must be reckoned to as the most and most wide awake of living poets.”

Long before it was fashionable, Hughes saw the inescapable prospect: “The Soviet vision of the future,” he wrote in the 60’s, “does not differ fundamentally from the American one — both are solipsistic and are now increasingly seen to be so.” To Hughes, authoritarian suppression has their bloodless parallels in the withering inanities of Western society. Like D. H. Lawrence, he loathes civilized abstracting at the price of bloated nature. For Hughes, “the oppressive deadness of civilization, the spiritless materialism of it, the stupidity of TV, movies and TV gave it constant but unacknowledged read-outs of our morally vacant familiarity with the monstrous: She has got somebody through the muddle Was too like striking a match Too like poiting a snooker ball.

Hughes’s condemnation of civilized stupor brushed even Shakespeare’s, whose moral equations and formal finish seem to him not to reveal but to hide the bloody root of Oedipus’s suffering. It is, he believes, by grooping in those pits opened beneath the rhetoric that we grasp our basic fable and concern to devise our salvation.

But words from the old lexicon no longer draw blood. They are no match for Crow in Hughes’s sensation: Words attacked him with the gollot bomb He was listening. Words surrounded and overran him with light sparks — He was thinking. Words infiltrated guerilla labials — Crow clapped his beak, scratched it. Words secreted him with consonantal masses — Crow took a sip of water and thanked heaven. (Crow, 22)

East European poets are examples for us particularly in their report of poverty and their scrupulously fine monitoring of faint signals. Their helplessness in the circumstances, Hughes says, “has preserved them of rhetoric. They cannot falsify their experience by any hopeful effort to change it. Their poetry is a strategy of making — audible, meaningful without disturbing the silence, an art of homing in tentatively on vital scarcely perceptible signals, their poetry does nor mistake but with no hope of finality, continuing to explore. Finally, with delicate maneuvers, they precipitate the world of possibilities negatively a happy positive.”

The deadly serious caricature of that commitment is Hughes’s folk hero Crow, who is poet of our age. After an ordinary murder in the adjoining parking lot, when for someone the trees closed forever

And the streets crossed forever
And the body lay on the gravel Of the abandoned world Among abandoned utilities Exposed to infinity forever Crow had to start searching for something to eat. (Crow, 10)

Survival breeds beauty, adversity has its revelations. In Hughes’s world one wants to go on existing. The scramble to survive is a kind of street fighting and it yields human definition: “It is the only precious thing, and designed in accord with the whole Universe, Design, meaning the whole Universe. They (the East European poets) are not the spoiled brats of civilization disappointed of impossible exalted expectations and deprived of the revelations of necessity ... They have managed to grow up to a vision of the unaccommodated Universe, but it has not made them cynical, they still like it and keep all their sympathies intact. They have had to back the simple animal courage of accepting the odds and have rediscovered the frontier.”

He has little patience with contemporary who retreat into fashions. He calls his fellow poets to a more difficult role for which the East Europeans are his paradigm. “They refuse to sell out... in order to escape with some fragmentary sense, some elaborate but self-deceiving, into a popular membership safety.” Every man, whether he likes it, Hughes says Hughes has an East-European model of his nation but it is the poet who must find the streets where the shooting is going on. “He imagines,” he has said, “that it is only those poets whose make-up somehow coincides with the vital impulses of their times who are able to come to real stature — when poets apparently more naturally gifted simply wither away.”

III. Poetry Must Seek Blood Roots

Poetry equipped for life means not moralizing poetry but rather poetry equal by the breadth of its own sense, not being (running) and integrity to what A. Alvarez has called the destructive realities we inhabit. It means a poetry fully instructed in experience from Olympic murders in Munich to Miss America TV pageants. It is a poetry wary of scares, able to sniff despair, and wise to the sell-out. Hughes describes the Yugoslav poet Vasko Popa’s poetry as spare, stripped of false ideas and safe

John Keats’s Porridge

Victoria McCabe, editor

What are the favorite recipes of Marge Perry, Charles Wright, Richard Dicker, Carolyn Kizer, and Donald Justice?

John Keats’s Porridge presents the favorite recipes of 11 contemporary American poets including Hardcase Survival Pinto Bean Sludge and Gainsful Pit. This collection is a celebration of the happy activity of cooking and an expression of the kinship between the creation of a good meal and the making of a poem. The recipes for soups, stews, and desserts were all tested by the poets and the editor. Over half of these were chosen by the poets into the poet full for a long time at little cost.

“This good anthology of recipes is as satisfying to this reader as a good anthology of poems, for after all, all recipes are poems to the human order.”- George Kizer, September, 120 pages, 50 c x 8. Paper, $2.95.

University of Iowa Press
Order Department
17 West College Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

The American Poetry Review
dispositions. "No poetry is more difficult to outline, yet it is in no sense defensive. His poems are trying to find out what does exist, and what the conditions really are," he says. He refers to the desert ingenuity of "that is his way of hanging on to his human wholeness."

Wholeness demands poetry alert to all the encounters beneath the shell of rational performance. "To live removed from this inner universe of experience," Hughes says, "is also to live removed from ourselves, banished from ourselves and real life. The struggle truly to possess his own experience, in other words to regain his genuine self, has been man's principal occupation wherever he could find leisure for it, since he first grew this enormous surplus of brain." If the English mind's agreement and ceremony interested Eliot, it is primordial England when sturgeons cut the Thames and were "labeled more" than Hughes summons. These are far starker realities than Wallace Stevens cast for when he said: "Nothing illustrates the importance of poetry better than the possibility that within it there may yet be found a reality adequate to the profound necessities of life today or for that matter any day."

Hughes would have poems send their words to feel the pressure that levels mountains and to clutch the life that escapes out of dead pigs and skinned weasels and the grey tones of photographs of soldiers long since buried.

What humbles those hills has raised
The arrogance of blood and bone.
And thrown the broken mind, And lit the fox in the dripping ground. (Lupercal, 14)

Whatever falsifies where as does rhetoric, blocks visitations from the elemental world. The deepest loss is the loss of our underworld. Hughes's poems deploy words around those lost ones.

Now the mind's wandering elements,
Ousted from the traveller-told
Unapproachable islands,
From their heavens and their burning underworld.
Wait daily at the traffic crossing,
Or lean over headlines, taking nothing in. (Lupercal, 29)

Reviewers, minds congested by decorative banalities, react with critical paralysis, grasping for what is in his poems of that murderous churning world under us all. Yet whole populations sit slumped in front of TV sets, feeding their hidden dreams of Gomorrah. His rapt paralysis, Hughes says, "We are dreaming a perpetual massacre. And when that leaks out into what ought to be morally responsible art ... then the critics pounce, and convert it to evidence in a sociological study."

"The poet, his sucking truth will weasel upon somewhere else:"

They nailed to a door
The stout shut the sun in its belly,
But its red unmanageable life
Has ticked the stylist out of their skulls.
Has sucked that age up as egg and gone off.

Along ditches where flies and leaves
Drain over our tongues, get into some grave —
Not a dog to follow it down —
Remorseful, throbbing, in far Asia, in Brotix. (Lupercal, 16)

The blood-roots of our lives where the myth-stone in his passage can sustain us in our state of civilized depletion, and no amount of civilized litter will cut out their vitality.

To Hughes's mind, Dylan Thomas had set out to reach that deep realm: of sustenance beneath the small worlds.

"Thomas's half-conscious attempt to take on all the underground life that the upper-crust, militant, colonial-suppressive cast of the English intelligence excludes."

Hughes has sought to recover this lost life which death subdues. It is the vital force that haunts the photographs that turn up repeatedly in the poems. His poem of the dead pig stalks the absent life-force that had heaved beneath the factual hide:

Its eyes closed, pink white eyelashes.
Its trotters stuck straight out.

Such weight and thick pink bulk.
Set the depth seemed not just pain.
It was less than lifeless, farther off.

A remembrance of a greased-pig show at a fair begins to restore to the carcase the lost furnance of life:

Its equal was the rending of metal.
Pigs must have hot blood, they feel like ore.
Their bite is worse than a horse's —
They chop a half-moon clean out.
They eat cinders, dead cats. (Lupercal, 41)

The same gorge of life, what is now cleaned up, mentalized, abstraced, and labeled sus, is what's missing behind the present English exterior, killed finally, Hughes believes, by the Puritan slaughter of the instincts in the Seventeenth Century.

He felt the restorative mythic through his Yorkshire surroundings, particularly as the dialect transmitted energies of the primitive doyens, as he calls them, out of "an instinct and ancestral memory. Renewal of the language will come as it penetrates again to those origins."

"One has only to look at our vocabulary," says Hughes, "to see where our real mental life has its roots, where the paths to and from our genuine imaginations run, clearly enough."

The Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic gods are not obsolete: "they are the better part of our patrimony still locked up. Poetry alert to the old dialects and sounds of life opens paths back and down to our beginnings, to the primal sources of brute being uncrippled by monumentalizing.

The passage to that dark renewing realm must go indirectly and by imagination through the wilds of the mythic or through poetry.
The much acclaimed poem "Pike" is Hughes's quintessential enactment of that adventure. After the boldly terrifying description of the pike's "submarine delicacy and horror," the poem concludes:

A pond I fished, fifty yards across,
Whose illies and massive tench
Held overlooked every visible stone.
Of the monastery that planted them —

Stilled legendary depth
It was as deep as England. It held
Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old.
That past nightfall I dared not cast
But silently cast and fished
With the hair frozen on my head
For what might move, for what eye might move.
The darkness latches on the dark pond,
Ours flashing the flowing woods
Praed on my ear against the dream.
Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed
That rose slowly towards me, watching. (Lupercal, 57)

The poet in our day must, as here in Hughes's poem, call up the counterforce to civilized debilitation and savageness. His job takes a tough witness. The survivor poet, withstanding the open and inevitable destruc-

October 1975

Page 15

The NEW MOON
A Magazine of Poetry

Editors: Michael LeFrere and David Whisbual
David M. Marcovich, Associate Editor


AUTUMN 1975 features Mark McCluskey, Robert Vander Molen, Albert Goldblair; also Don Stap, M. R. Doty, Bond, Cooley, Novak, Le Moss, LeFrere, many others.

Published twice a year. $3.00 a copy. Subscription for one year: $6.00. Manuscripts—poems, short prose, translations and moon-poems—are welcome.

2347 Oakland Drive; Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008

This content downloaded from 198.91.37.2 on Sat, 02 Jan 2016 07:18:57 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions
Hughes's describes between Shakespeare, whose poetry he sees as a microcosm of the momentous counterforces warring within Queen Elizabeth and in her times: a transcendent druidic and heavenly aspirations. The balance rests in sexual terms, and finally, as Hughes's, the central fable engages the mystery of integrating man's psychic wholeness. A similar balance between the spiritual and secular sides constitutes Hughes's own central uronic fable.

V. Shamanism

The primary analogue of Hughes's enterprise is shamanism. It is a basic allegory, the dream of two worlds. 'What an exciting age!' boasted the poet, "Wodwo," its title an Old English word he translates as "a sort of half-man half-animal spirit." Defining a man's whole nature, the enigma Hughes describes as the powerhouse at the center of Shakespeare's mind, is his also. It is the sphinctic riddle, and inspection of the vast lower realms is thus thrust upon the poet, as upon the shaman. Hughes's observations from Shakespeare, (1971), extracted from their contexts, reveal that central fable: the confrontation between the horse and the sow, that is, between the hidden and the rational. In that selection, Hughes says, 'We see quite new things ... a new teasing of possibilities, as we look through them into our own darkness.' The dark revelation re-creates the shamanistic flight to the demon world, the monomythic entry and return on the heroic quest. 'You see very well,' Hughes tells the interpreter, 'where Nietzsche got his Dionysius. It was a genuine vision of something on its way back to the whole man—through the rough beast in Yeats's poem.' All that energy and violence in Hughes's first book of poetry seem now in this light to have been the insistent way to the demons of life.

The shamanic experience lurks in the primordial realm of the caged animals, and the other creature-confrontations. His animals locate our beginnings, the irreducible being, and the stubbornness of life. The hawk, the fox, the otter, the pike, and the crow, are part of what we are when they are hawking bars, bars, and slag pens. The coming-out parties are substracted. It is anything but a faddish romanticism in Hughes's part. Rather, shamanism provides him with a model for the original poetic act. It also explains the kinship between the fable, folklore, epic, plays and his children's verse and stories. Hughes wrote in 1964: 'The idea of a realm, a general schema of the shamanistic flight, and the figures and adventures they encounter, are not a shamanistic experience, but they are Hughesian and a basic experience of the poetic temperament we call 'romantic.'" In a shamanizing society, he continued, "'Venus and Adonis,' some of Keats's longer poems, 'The Wanderings of Oisin,' 'Ash Wednesday,' would all qualify their authors for the shamanic vision (of the shaman); while the actual flight lies perceptibly behind many of the best fairy tales, and the experiments such as that of Bligh and Herakles, and behind the epics of Gilgamesh and Odyssey. It is the outline, in Hughes's view, of the Heroic Quest. The shaman seems to undergo, at will and at phenomenal intensity, and with practical results, one of the man-regenerating dramas of the human psyche: the fundamental poetic event.'

We note particularly the idea of displacement. For Hughes it is a mystic, but rather a man making the most practical sort of claims for poetry. 'Shamanism,' he said, 'is not a religion, but a technique for moving in a state of ecstasy among the various spiritual realms, and for generally dealing with souls and the world.' In the more practical way, in some practical crisis. 'This is a shamanism of useful transport, treating real situations.

Hughes had his own practical crisis early, according to W. S. Merwin, whose account of it puts it this way: 'I was working on the poem, "Lemuel's Blessing,"' Hughes wrote to his mother, "I am not a poet, but I am the only one who has called the realm between our ordinary minds and our deepest life. The data field, consisting of the signal-laden air and the image-cluttered landscape of experience, surrounds the poet. Reality everywhere gives me lessons: It is through scripture and physics.

Hughes has written on Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Yeats, Keith Douglas, Dylan Thomas, S. S. Plath, locating in each the deep-diving, conjuring, soul-restoring shamanic power. He finds them all "in the glum," the "species" parallels between the psychotic state and the shaman's plunge, both being breaches in the human drum, which lead to conclusions of terrifying disclosure. The poet's craft is to make words enact those disclosures. Of Sylvia Plath, he has said, she "had free and controlled access to depths formerly reserved to the primitive ecstatic priest," and "in her case, and increasingly, and more recently flung open to tourists with the passport of such hallucinogens as LSD." Dylan Thomas's death of alcohol poisoning in New York, Hughes interprets as a final shamanist summoning by Thomas of the center of the out of his own brain stem. 'What he was really waiting for, and approving with alcohol,' wrote Hughes, 'was the delicate cerebral discharge that demolishes the old self for good, with all its crushing for- tifications, and leaves the atman a cheerful wanderer.'

Shakespeare stands in Hughes's mind pre-eminently as the poet enacting the shamanic experience of Shakespeare's central obsession with the body-mind antagonism in "Venus and Adonis," Hughes says, 'is a perceptive glimpse of the shamanistic dream of the call to the poetic or holy life... It embodies the biological polarity of the life of the body and archaic nervous system and the life of the reflexive cortex. In more concrete form, the fable contains bits of atavistic memories from earlier times, resurfacings of rituals and symbols of which Shakespeare cannot have heard or read.'

VI. The Poet-Shaman

The procedures of that discovery in poetry today demand a broad-sensing creative-poet, able to test the true facts and to have called the realm between our ordinary minds and our deepest life.

The data field, consisting of the signal-laden air and the image-cluttered landscape of experience, surrounds the poet. Reality everywhere gives me lessons: It is through scripture and physics. With here, brains in hands, for exzm.

And there, legs in a trestep. (Crow, 14)

The field of data includes London and King Kong and John Milton and everywhere, Hughes says, 'Where the function is purposeful; no experience is outside the poet's territory. Indeed, Hughes conceives himself as a sort of cosmic detective who can take up his post in the beach bunker after the armistice papers have been signed. He is the member of World War II soldiers: "All they wanted was to get back into civies and get home to the wife and kids for the rest of their lives, and they'd had enough sleeping experience. Now I came a bit later. I hadn't had enough. I was all for opening negotiations with whatever happened to come there. Thus Hughes's encounters are with creatures quite unlike London clerks."

A great deal, of the sea darkens, A depth darkness, mistering from the gulf

It is like a shaman's badlands, To the sea's edge. To begin with It looks like rocks uncovering,Gradually the laboring of the tide Falls back from its productions. It is possible to get back from glistening mazes, and they are crabs.

Giant crabs, under flat skulls, starting inland Like a packed trench of helmets. (Nodwo, 21)

Creatures and human merge in Hughes's vision, as do creature and poem. The obsession attends his remarks on Pope, whose words, he writes, "test their way forward with a certain inherent errors, dramatically and intemately alive, like the antennae of some rock-shore creatures feeling the presence of the sea and the huge powers in it... There is a primitive pre-creation atmosphere about his work, as if he were writing all the dynamisms and formulae were ready and charged, but nothing created — or only a few fragments.

Probes to the underworld must, in our post-literate culture, be fashioned from a vast field of cluttered, cluttered experience. To Hughes the contemporary poet is thus a serious scavenger. The litter of his world includes dreams, nightmares, madness, terror, bestiality, automatism. We come upon Hughes himself ransacking the movies, animated cartoons, birthday card greetings, folk songs, montages overlaying, children's fables, whatever selection from, shall it be a wasting culture where advertising has replaced literature as the imagination's image-pool and the mass media as the models of intellect. Hughes's scavenging of the languages of all these media produces a boggling mixture of tangential literary forms: heroic epics, folk epic, myth, cycles, lyrics, chants, in-cantations.

In this way, Hughes leaves the radio receiver turned on and dutifully makes all the visits, standing 'respectfully, hat in hand, before this existence, exceedingly alert for a new word.' We see this new type picking over the debris, turning up the dismembered corpse in the garbage can. We see him crouch for cover in the doorway. Or we see him emerging on the ridiculous in that extraordinary fact of the poet Crow. The figure is hardly decorous. Crow, a survivor, seated in his usual bar, methodical cartoon pub, launches his pop-Homer epic: 'There was this terrific battle... and so on.

But the portrait of Hughes's new poet also takes form in those
magnificent lines of Jocasta (from his translation of Seneca's Oedipus), as the bloody knot in the bessemer furnace of the world's body:

The animal figure together with Hughes's idea of the reach of dialect merge in his description of the style of Keith Douglas (1920-1944). It could deal, he said in an early essay, "with whatever it came up against, a versatile, ruthless, direct style not limited to certain subjects in certain moods. It is a utility general-purpose style, as for instance Shakespeare's was; a style that combines a colloquial readiness and variety with a poetic breadth; a ritual intensity and music of an exceedingly high order with a clear wholehearted passion."

Hughes's regard for directness and versatility is rooted in his appreciation of Shakespeare's language. Unlike the atrophied system of bleats Hears cries in contemporary England, Shakespeare's language, he says, "has the air of being invented in a state of crisis, for a terribly urgent job, a homely spur-of-the-moment improvisation out of whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying around, and this is exactly what real speech is." He finds a similar colloquial seavanging in Emily Dickinson's language, a "Shakespearean texture ... solid with metaphor, saturated with the homeliest imagery and experience." What Hughes develops in Crow is this same language 'super-crude': "the whole crush and cramming throw away expressiveness of it was right at the heart of its dialect."

Hughes has reconnotered the arcadias and alleys of our available language. For Crow to articulate the ache of love, the Crow-Bard has available the lexicons of deterrent ads, the military, government releases, King Kong movies, industry board rooms, and urban politics. Hughes scoured his language of the early accretions: Yeats, Joyce, Lawrence, and Dylan Thomas ('we ran out, in our pockets and straw in our hair./Into the darkness that was avalanching to horses/And a quack of hooves' (Luperca! 21)). The Crow poems chronicle Crow's survival and give us the stripped language of that survival, rough and ready, equal to life, knowing all the angles, leering, a con-man's way, yet singing, library to street, in the contemporary rhythms we recognize as our lives.

There are in Crow, too, moments of the ritual conjuring language we associate with the shaman's preparation. Some of it begins the book:

Black was the without eye
Black the within tongue
Black was the heart
Black the liver, black the lungs
Unable to such in light.

(Crow, 1)

In his adaptation of Oedipus from Seneca, Hughes had already raised this incantatory language (part of the utility) to its fullest power. There are in that play passages simultaneously ordinary and ruthless, sounding (to use Hughes's terms) a ritual intensity and a full passion. Jocasta's lines reach with simple directness to the dark mysteries:

when I carried my sons
I carried them for death I carried them for the final
disaster when I carried
my first son
did I know what was coming did I know
what ropes of blood were twisting/ altogether what bloody footprints
were hurrying together in my body
(Oedipus, 22)

Perhaps nowhere else in contemporary poetry is there language to surpass the brute strength of some of the recitations in Hughes's Oedipus. Creon describes how the priest called up the creatures of the underworld: death and hellish dogs, Tiresias — until King Laius rises to the surface, a specter summoned from the world under the world (the passage has direct ties to the poem "Pike", more than a decade earlier):

it lifted its face and I recognized Laius
Our King Laius he pulled himself up it was
him his whole body was plastered his
hair beard face all one terrible wound a mask of

Donald Davie, one of today's most distinguished poets and critics, draws on personal memories of his country's land, history, and society in a series of poems. He has described this collection—a poem for each county of England—as "mostly amiable and nostalgic."

THE SHIRES
Donald Davie
illustrated. $7.95
This is utility language doing a rough job, one that thrives on the starkly delicate moods. Jocasta, mad- dened by her look into truth’socket, steps to Oedipus after he has good enough.

what can I call you now what shall I call you you’re my son shall I call you son are you ashamed you are my son I lost you you’re my son I’ve found you speak to me show me your face turn your head toward me show me your face

All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions