Beyond the Burning Centre of Cataclysm

Reception of Eastern Europe in Poetry and Criticism of mid-1960s Britain



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Abbreviations

Throughout this thesis I use the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) referencing system based on the third edition guidelines. However, for the most frequently referenced sources I will use the following abbreviations inserted in the main body of the text followed by the page number. I abbreviate 'university press' to UP.

UP	Alvarez, Al, *Under Pressure: The Writer in Society: Eastern Europe and the U.S.A* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)
NP	*The New Poetry: an anthology*, ed. by Al Alvarez (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)
PS	*The Poetry of Survival: Post-War Poets of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Daniel Weissbort (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1991)
CC	*Centres of Cataclysm: Celebrating Fifty Years of Modern Poetry in Translation*, ed. by Sasha Dugdale, David Constantine, and Helen Constantine (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2016)
ST	Hughes, Ted, and Daniel Weissbort, *Selected Translations* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006)
MPT	*Modern Poetry in Translation* magazine followed by the issue number. The detailed bibliography entry of each issue can be found in the bibliography section pp. 260-76
CP	Hughes, Ted, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Paul Keegan (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)
WP	Hughes, Ted, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995)
L	Hughes, Ted, *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)
P	Plath, Sylvia, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1981)
L I	Plath, Sylvia, *The Letters of Sylvia Plath*. *Volume I, 1940-1956*, ed. by Peter Steinberg and Karen Kukil (London: Faber and Faber, 2017)
L II	Plath, Sylvia, *The Letters of Sylvia Plath. Volume II, 1956–1963*, ed. by Peter Steinberg and Karen Kukil (London: Faber and Faber, 2019)
JP	Plath, Sylvia, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams and Other Prose Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991)
OP, Interview	Plath Sylvia, Interview with Peter Orr, in *The Poet Speaks: Interviews with Contemporary Poets* (London: Routledge, 1966)
TPR	Interview with Ted Hughes for *The Paris* Review, in Philip Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007)

Abstract

This doctoral thesis explores how, from the mid-1960s, the influx of Eastern European poetry in translation galvanised specific developments in the Anglophone lyric and literary criticism of late modernism. Its emphasis falls on the British literary landscape, while the time frame in which I set my discussion extends from the Thaw of 1956 (the period characterised by lessening Soviet censorship and limited political and cultural liberalisation following Joseph Stalin's death) to the mid-1970s. On many occasions, critics have noted that the mid-1960s saw the first explicit and intensified interest in poetry from beyond the Iron Curtain, but little attempt has been made to detect how this specific type of resonance manifested itself in the action, collaborations, and new initiatives characteristic of this time of stark political divisions and the impact these divisions had on the perception of Eastern Europe as cultural periphery. Drawing on archival research and using tools borrowed from translation studies, I argue that the boom of translations from Eastern Europe coincided with and contributed to changes in the printing market, while what used to be known as literary 'influence' begun to happen beyond the written page. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the role of poets and critics started to change and this period saw an exceptional number of collaborative efforts, such as the establishment of new magazines; small presses; producing broadcasts; the commissioning of translations for new anthologies, and the organisation of the first international literary festivals. All of these initiatives had a transformative effect on post-war British poetry. Drawing connections between otherwise scattered points on the map of literary history, I trace the affinities which English-speaking authors felt towards writing from Eastern Europe and explore the role and function (often abstract and symbolic) that the region, too often presented as homogenous entity, played or was hoped to play or was hoped to play in the formation of the new poetic and critical idiom that – as critic, impresario and editor Al Alvarez

put it – would offer a 'new kind of seriousness' and galvanise British poetry to go beyond 'the gentility principle'.[1]

This type of inquiry is as much about literary history as it is about the methodology of discussing literary resonance, global modernisms, and comparative criticism. It is important to highlight that cultural transfer, circulation, and mediation can often be indirect, vague, and imprecise. I therefore approach my materials and the commentaries of English-speaking critics and poets on Eastern Europe as narratives constructed in a given time and responding to specific needs, rather than as comprehensive introductions or reliable sources. It, therefore, important to highlight that excerpts from literary criticism from the 1960s are not endorsements of the visions critics projected on Eastern Europe in the past, but the very *subject* of my analysis and curiosity. This upfront clarification is crucial as throughout this thesis I will show that despite whilst the early reception of newly translated poets was immensely enthusiastic, it has left the English-speaking audience with a 'flattened' image of Eastern Europe.

The first chapter explores matters such as resonance, circulation, and imagining in early commentaries on Eastern Europe, sketching out the general background and seeking patterns in the representation of Eastern Europe in the 1960s. The second chapter looks at the role of *Modern Poetry in Translation* magazine (*MPT*), ideas of 'translatability' in the Cold War era, and the time-specific, little discussed issue of striving for 'literalness' as a mode of translation that would allow a deeper emotional connection with the historical drama of post-war Europe. The third chapter moves on to examine proxy-witnessing and nuclear criticism in Sylvia Plath's poetry, linking her fascination with the impossibility of voicing to survivalist narratives and characteristic of the 1960s' interest in Holocaust poetry. The last chapter focuses on editorial fluidity, brokenness, and the fascination with translation in the absence of a source text in Ted Hughes' *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow* cycle. The selection and contextualisation of the

[1] See Al Alvarez, 'Beyond the Gentility Principle', in *The New Poetry: an anthology*, ed. by Al Alvarez, revised edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 21-33.

poets and critics in my corpus centres around Alvarez, Daniel Weissbort, and Hughes and clearly does not exhaust the subject. Rather, it invites us to examine broader literary-historical issues such as brokenness, deconstruction, the ethics of speech and silence, and revision, all of which can be seen in the nexus of transcultural connections and reflected in creative works that evince shared sensitivities. By asking what happened in the world of mid-1960s English poetry that meant that the translation of unfamiliar lyric from Eastern Europe could suddenly be expected to fill the gap of seriousness, this thesis hopes to enlarge our understanding of the dialogue between the divided halves of Europe in the mid-1960s; the limits of language and translatability; and the paradoxically reintegrative return of the modernist, broken, and 'literal' idiom.

Introduction

In 2018, when I began my doctoral research, writing about the way that Eastern European poetry has been both presented and constructed on the English literary scene of the mid-1960s struck me as a fascinating and important issue. Excited by the prospect, I would come to define the importance of this study by examining the words of the poets who wrote about Eastern Europe; learning from what has been written to date but also locating gaps in the existing scholarship, and borrowing from a corpus of critical theory that I deemed refreshing for discussing the specificity of this cultural transfer. Reading letters from the period, spending time in the archives, and getting hold of often scattered and uncollected material moved the words, once spoken with such urgency, of critics and poets from the past towards the domain of literary history. In other words, alongside a fascination with the topic, I also felt a distance between my position as a critic born after 1989, and the story I was about to tell. Some critics would consider this distance a blessing and would, perhaps, extend it to the style of their academic writing. However, as Rita Felski has proposed in her thought-provoking book *The Limits of Critique* (2015), in contemporary literary criticism performing modes of critical detachment does not guarantee critical insight, and detachment is not the absence of mood, but simply one of its possible manifestations.[1] Allowing ourselves to say that research affects us may only, I believe, complicate and nuance our interpretation, encouraging us to see the text and poetry as something that – to both allude to and reverse W. H. Auden's words from 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' – makes something happen.[2]

We respond not just to what we read but to the times and circumstances in which we read. Submitting this thesis in 2022 makes it impossible not to acknowledge the Russian invasion of Ukraine. And though this research is about the engagement of Anglophone poets and critics with

[1] See Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 14-51.
[2] Wystan Hugh Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 248. See also W. H. Auden's 1939 essay from *Partisan Review* 'The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats' re-printed in W. H. Auden, *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse: The Complete Works of W. H. Auden*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), pp. 3-7.

the poetry of Eastern Europe in the mid-1960s, its final revisions were made at a time when we are, if indirectly, affected by military conflict. Drawing parallels between the contemporary situation and the Cold War is an oversimplification, one which some might term inappropriate, inaccurate, or sentimental. However, there is no one way of addressing this problem and no one way to comment on our possible impulse to draw such comparisons. As the editors of *Words for War* (2017), the collection of Ukrainian poetry which reacted to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, observed, in the West our knowledge of the war is usually indirect and therefore requires inference.[3] According to editors, the anthology testifies that if anything is possible after the war it is poetry. Even a brief look at these semantics and the reference editors make to Theodor Adorno's words highlights the tension between what both post-colonial criticism and translation studies largely conceptualised as center and periphery, target and receiving culture. The editors suggest that to be understood in 'our' Western world, the experience of war must be *translated* into the language of 'our' dominant, receiving culture, while the poetic form is considered capable of not just linguistic but most of all emotional transmissions.

In the preface to another anthology – *Writing from Ukraine: Fiction, Poetry and Essays since 1965* (2022), recently published by Penguin – the editor states that the newfound interest in Ukraine since February 2022 is unprecedented. Though this attention has been appreciated by Ukrainians as a gesture of support, it is bittersweet in demonstrating that this culture, historically 'banned by colonizing powers' and yet made accessible after 1991, still remains largely exotic to the West.[4] Despite the distance in time between 2022 and the 1960s, I was struck by the relevance of this distortion to this thesis, in what it tells us about the expectations of the Western printing market. Even more recently, when working on corrections to this dissertation, I happened to attend

[3] Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky, 'Preface' in *Words for War. New Poems from Ukraine*, ed. by Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017), pp. xiii-xix (p. xiii).
[4] Mark Andryczyk, 'Preface', in *Writing from Ukraine: Fiction, Poetry and Essays since 1965*, ed. by Mark Andryczyk (London: Penguin, 2022), pp. ix-xi (p. vi). This anthology is theoretically a re-print of *The White Chalk of Days* anthology published in the USA in 2017 by Borderlines Foundation for Academic Sciences and Academic Studies Press as a result of a series of events about contemporary Ukrainian writers hosted in 2008 by Columbia University. The current, Penguin version of the book is re-titled, expanded, and heavily re-contextualised with its preface addressing the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

a lecture by Ukrainian writer and activist – Oksana Zabuzhko. In a largely digressive and interventionist talk, the writer addressed the visibility of Ukrainian literature in the West.[5] Zabuzhko ironized about the translation of allegedly 'minor' Ukrainian literature to the Anglophone world, criticising the latter's continuous indifference to this transfer, with the only notable exception being moments of political crisis. Her talk suggested that though we might *think* we live in an era of world literature, in practice any interest in Ukrainian literature among Anglophone audiences still owes its existence to purely political rather than literary concerns. The tone of the writer's talk curiously resembled one she gave over twenty years ago and could be aptly described by what Siobhan Brownlie termed the 'committed approach'.[6] It was April 1992, only a year after the establishment of the Ukrainian state, when Zabuzhko addressed an audience of the 'Intellectuals and Social Change in Central and Eastern Europe' conference at Rutgers University. Speaking on the same panel as Czesław Miłosz and Josef Brodsky, Zabuzhko alluded to T. S. Eliot's 1945 remarks that no art is so stubbornly national than poetry, as the feeling happens in the language.[7] Simultaneously receptive and polemical to Eliot's claim, she highlighted that the feeling that defines and underlies Ukrainian culture is one of uncertainty and the constant threat of one's own potential disappearance. She concludes: 'after all, when you return to consciousness after a prolonged coma, you need desperately to be recognized by other people—in order to be sure that you do exist'.[8]

Thinking about similarities between Zabuzhko's 1992 and 2023 interventionist talks and re-reading revised introductions to both anthologies leaves me uneasy; the distance from which

[5] I am referring to the Ilchester lecture 'Ukrainian Story: Getting out of the shadow in the spotlight of war' hosted by Oxford Medieval and Modern Languages Faculty that happened on 16 February 2023.
[6] See Siobhan Brownlie, 'Descriptive and Committed Approaches to Translation Research', in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 77-81.
[7] Eliot says: '[…] no art is more stubbornly national than poetry. A people may have its language taken away from it, suppressed, and an- other language compelled upon the schools; but unless you teach that people to feel in a new language, you have not eradicated the old one, and it will reappear in poetry, which is the vehicle of feeling.' See T. S. Eliot's 'The Social Function of Poetry', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot. Volume 6: The War Years, 1940-1946* ed. by David Chinitz and Ronald Schuchard. (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins UP; Faber and Faber, 2017), 647.
[8] Quoted in Vitaly Chernetsky, 'Silences and Displacements: Revisiting the Debate on Central European Literature from a Ukrainian Perspective', *Zeitschrift Für Slavische Philologie*, 72.1 (2016), 69-84 (p. 74).

I commented on the dialogue between literary criticism and poetry from Eastern Europe somehow shortened, while the outbreak of war added not just a new emotional dimension to the research but a humbling feeling and recognition of my own privilege. It, moreover, encourages me to ask: to what extent is the current reception of poetry coming from Ukraine still defined by the suprageographic sphere of reference? Does the experience of reading these poems involve the deconstruction of pre-existing expectations, some of which reflect a Cold War mentality? I wished to address this historical and emotional situatedness not as a footnote to an academic dissertation but as an important layer that – against my initial distance – gave the experience of researching the past dialogue between the Anglophone world and Eastern Europe new sensitivity, urgency, and force.

Over the last half-century, and especially in the wake of the collapse of Communism (1989-1991), much has been written about Eastern Europe. The cultural and geopolitical boundaries of the region frequently described as 'semi-peripheral' have been constantly debated and re-drawn through an exchange drawing on a corpus of post-colonial theories, translation studies, and texts on word literature, and benefiting from the enlargement of the international literary market and increased academic mobility. One such consideration is whether the struggle of countries formerly dominated by the Soviets should be seen through the lens of global colonialism. As the co-authors of *Socialism Goes Global* (2022) summarise, recent years have seen numerous attempts 'to shift the focus of Cold War history away from superpower conflict, taking it beyond a bipolar account that relegates the rest of the world to the status of "proxies" or "peripheries".'[9] However, these processes of re-thinking cultural borders and deconstructing the power mechanisms that defined the very process of mapping these borders take time. 'Eastern European' was already, in English literature, much more a set of stylistic descriptors than it was a specific reference to the content of particular writers' works, especially in a literary context. There is no doubt that Anglophone criticism of the Cold War era cultivated a homogenous, if not phantasmic, image of Eastern

[9] *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, ed. by James Mark and Paul Betts (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2022), p. 4.

European literature as – according to John Redmond – either sentimental writing or as a political statement.[10] In many cases this comment proved to be true but, given the rich scholarship available to us in 2023, one should make a distinction between the imagining of Eastern Europe through and in commentaries made by poets and critics in the 1960s, and current academic research in comparative and global literature. Growing scepticism for a historical or linear understanding of literary history, complexities of the interliterary processes, and the emphasis on shifting boundaries of 'national' borders or possibilities of 'national' literature has equipped us with new vocabulary which could not have been available to the poets and critics involved in the promotion of poetry from Eastern Europe in the mid-1960s. On the one hand, writing about the 1960s calls for hospitable and reconstructionist reading sensitive to the reality and context of that time. On the other, it calls for a revisionist approach in a spirit of post-deconstructionist critical interventions, especially if such interventions give the opportunity to reflect not just on how literature travels across borders but on who drew the borders and lines of these travelogues in the first place, and to what criteria.

Negotiating my critical position between these two modes of reading – reconstructive and deconstructive – the central question I ask in this thesis is: why, in the mid-1960s, would poetry written, as Alverez put it, 'under pressure'[11] and so little known in the English context, suddenly be in a position to broaden the thematic scope and expressive potential of modern British verse? Looking closely at the resonance Eastern European poets found among Anglophone critics active in the 1960s contributes to our understanding of the domestic literary market and literary history. It also pushes us to re-think the concept of reception, moving from traditional dichotomies of 'source' and 'influence' to looking at the act of reception as a creative endeavour; one that is shaped, mediated, and established in response to needs, longings, and internal debates of receiving

[10] John Redmond 'Lyric Adaptations: James Fenton, Craig Raine, Christopher Reid, Simon Armitage, Carol Ann Duffy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry*, ed. by Neil Corcoran (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), pp. 245–58.
[11] See Alvarez, *Under Pressure: The Writer in Society: Eastern Europe and the U.S.A* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965). Hereafter abbreviated to *UP* followed by the page number. For the complete list of abbreviations see page vi.

culture. In that spirit I hope to show that the influx of translations from Eastern Europe happened in a matrix of historical events, social and cultural changes, as well as anxieties. Examples of these changes include the enlargement of the literary market, new channels for artistic expression, critiques of the cultural malaise and creative inertia of 1960s Britain, the expansion of post-structuralist theories, and a democratising confluence of high and popular culture. One of the main reasons for the boom of translations from Eastern Europe was, as John Clegg rightly observes in his unpublished dissertation about Eastern European influences in the poetry after the 1950s, that this poetry was 'particularly to the taste of Hughes, Weissbort and Alvarez, who were particularly well-placed to promote it and publish it'.[12] In the 1960s the literary industry started to expand and re-shape itself, with a growing expectation that writers become – as Randall Stevenson has noticed in his suggestively entitled literary historical book *The Last of England?* (2004) – public figures and, subsequently, performers of their own work.[13] In an interview celebrating the seventy-fifth birthday of Daniel Weissbort (the translator, critic, and co-founder of *MPT* magazine) Anthony Rudolf mentions just a few initiatives, all of which were established around the mid-1960s. In conversation with Weissbort, the interviewer summarises:

> You co-founded *MPT* with Ted Hughes in 1965, the same year as Indica Bookshop opened and around the time when Cape Goliard and Fulcrum Press were founded. These years saw a suggestive number of independent but associated initiatives: George Steiner's *Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation* came out in 1966. Cape Editions edited by Nathaniel Tarn – in which you and I both appeared as translators – started in 1967, as did Poetry International, founded again by Ted Hughes, in which we both participated on more than one occasion. Like *Time Out*, Compendium Bookshop and Carcanet Press and Anvil Press started in 1968, Menard Press in January 1969, Paul Buck's *Curtains* a little later, in 1971. Al Alvarez (whose *Under Pressure* of 1965 was a key book) and Nikos Stangos brought Penguin into this territory.[14]

Once we get to know one of the enterprises mentioned by Rudolf, the rest follow with double force. Sources, texts, and reviews that all feel relevant multiply and expand, making the work of critics into an exciting but potentially infinite exploration of connections, dialogues,

[12] John Clegg, 'The Eastern European Context of Poetry in English after 1950' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2012), p. 12.
[13] Randall Stevenson, *The Last of England?* The Oxford English Literary History: Volume 12 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 184.
[14] Anthony Rudolf, 'Boychiks and Girliw[h]Igs: A 75th-Birthday Conversation with Daniel Weissbort', *PN Review*, 37.1 (2010), 38-41 (p. 39).

collaborations. Though this list of names, publishing houses, small magazines, and anthologies may at first mean little to the reader, these 'independent but associated initiatives' reflect two important characteristics of the period. First, they link poetry translated in the remarkably short period following the Thaw of 1956 to contemporary changes in the British 'translationscape'.[15] Second, they bring our attention to the often-marginalised issue of how texts are mediated by individuals, institutions, and publishing houses. For me, researching these links and interconnections between 'independent but associated initiatives' brought with it the excitement of making sense of material that would otherwise remain scattered, and reflections on how to write literary criticism that would not limit itself to – in Jonathan Culler's words – 'an infinite source hunting', but could challenge understanding of how texts circulate in translation and how we could see them in a global and comparative context.[16]

To give a sense of the domino effect of those resonances and affinities, we might think of Rudolf's mention of *MPT* magazine. This magazine, as I will show in the second chapter, not only shaped the early reception of poetry from Eastern Europe but provoked the debate necessary for British poets and critics to push the limits of their own artistic practice. Not coincidentally, the magazine was brought to life soon after the publication of the anthology *The New Poetry* (1962, revised version 1966), in which Al Alvarez urged British poetry to transgress the gentility principle. His collection soon became influential. Under the impact of Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Yugoslavian literatures and cultures – which Alvarez had experienced first-hand travelling across the Eastern Bloc preparing a series of BBC broadcasts later printed as *Under Pressure* (1965) – he hoped for a 'new kind of seriousness' that would have the power to reorient the literary interests of a wide readership. In juxtaposing the restrained poetic idiom of the 1950s with the reality of the Cold War that felt incongruent with its literary representations, Alvarez's manifesto mirrored a desire for poetry to confront what is unpleasant and emotionally repressed, what exists

[15] See Jordan Smith, 'Translationscapes: On the Legibility of Transnational Ideologies in World Literary Systems', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 54.4 (2017), 749–70.
[16] Jonathan Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), p. 112.

on the border of silence and speech, and what both causes and alleviates psychological perturbations. 'I am not suggesting that modern English poetry, to be really modern must be concerned with psychoanalysis or with the concentration camps or with any other of the modern horrors', wrote Alvarez, adding, 'I am suggesting, in fact, that it *must* be anything' (*NP* 27). The critic's battling introduction turned against – as Sean O'Brien summarises – 'the polite English evasiveness' that Alvarez found represented in Philip Larkin and, by extension, in the 1950s poetry.[17] Belonging to the same circle and desperate to break out from the confinement of 'small poems' – to allude to Donald Davie's poem 'Ars Poetica' – of the Movement, Ted Hughes and Daniel Weissbort followed this 'extremist' strand of thought.[18] Under the direct influence of Alvarez, in translation, they sought poetry that would be more capable of dealing with extremes of experience. The first editorial to their magazine reads:

> 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. (*MPT* 1)

Hughes and Weissbort hoped – in line with Alvarez's essay – that the qualities they believed to be characteristic of what they called 'Eastern European expression' would become a catalyst for the renewal of the British poetic idiom. One of the possible ways of discussing the excerpt from the first *MPT* is to conceptualise it in the framework of reception theories developed by translation studies. Through that lens, we can look at the way the poetry conforms to what Hans Robert Jauss called readers' aesthetic 'horizon of expectations'[19] and notice that the passage above tells us more about the editors' hopes, projections, and perception of foreign poetry than it does tell us about distinct literary histories of 'this region which has been at the centre of cataclysm' (*MPT* 1). Even a quick look at the editorial shows that the transfer of poems from Eastern Europe to the Anglophone literary market is not neutral. Quite the opposite: editorials, leaflets, advertisements,

[17] Sean O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998), p. 23.
[18] Donald Davie, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), p. 284.
[19] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 24.

and introductions are all *ideologically positioned*, to borrow Maria Tymoczko's term, and are dependent on the editors' cultural and ideological affiliations as well as on the specific time and needs of the dominant, receiving culture.[20] In reading poets from beyond the Iron Curtain, Anglophone critics, poets, and editors paid particular attention to what they saw as uncompromising, direct treatment of themes of survival, witnessing, and testimony. Similar projections of Eastern European poets as witnesses to twentieth-century history were used by critics of the time as a convenient rhetorical figure that enabled them to speak about a redefinition of authorship and how reading foreign writers encouraged 'their' poets to explore form more congruent with the still-fresh collective memory of the extermination camps, and the reality of the Cold War. In this way, simple (and one may argue manipulative) juxtapositions and overgeneralisations were drawn; principally, you either appreciate poets from Eastern Europe or you are, perhaps, indifferent to the condition of today's lyric. Examples of the simultaneously hospitable and troubling tendency in presentation of poetry from Eastern Europe as coming from an abstracted 'centre of cataclysm' (*MPT* 1) appear virtually, through a whole gamut of paratexts, each time Eastern Europe is mentioned. These paratexts could, following Gérard Genette's distinction, be divided into peritexts and epitexts.[21] Peritexts are provided by the author or publisher and could include forewords, prefaces, or framing elements like cover, and blurbs. Epitexts in turn are 'not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space'.[22] Both have the power of shaping the reception of translated work and are likely repeated, re-contextualised and re-published. Repetitive descriptions of poets as witnesses to the troubled history of distant Eastern Europe could be found in editorials to magazines and anthologies, individual essays written by poets and critics, and private correspondence exchanged between those who, in the mid-1960s, enjoyed enough intellectual authority that their recommendations had a real impact on the printing

[20] Maria Tymoczko, 'Ideology and the position of the translator. In what sense is a translator in between', in Maria Calzada Perez, *Apropos of Ideology: Translation Studies on Ideology – Ideologies in Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 181-201 (p. 183).
[21] See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, transl. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).
[22] Ibid., p. 344.

market and public taste. This position within their domestic literary system allowed individuals, such as Alvarez, Hughes, or Weissbort, to take patronage (as theorized by André Lefèvre) over lesser-known and – from the point of view of the dominant Anglophone market – peripheral authors.[23] In light of this, the question of how literature travels across borders moves away from ascribing the authority of influence to a single author to exploring the role of institutional factors as well as individuals, literary festivals, publishing and distribution, reviewing, advertising, anthologising, and broadcasts. This shift in emphasis challenges some of the lasting notions of influence, taking – as Rebecca Beasley and Philip Bullock point out, writing about the transformative effects Russian culture had on British intellectual life from the 1880s onwards – the discussion about cultural exchange into new territory.[24] It is the territory which invites me to move away from the authority ascribed to source-texts toward the connections and resonances within – to borrow Dionýz Ďurišin's term – interliterary processes.[25]

As I briefly signalled, over the last thirty years much has been written about the construction, location and decolonialisation, and re-writing histories of Eastern Europe. But unlike the discussion of post-colonial approaches to semi-peripheral regions formerly dominated by the Soviets, academic enquiries into the *impact* the early reception of Eastern European *poetry* had on the British literary scene of the 1960s are virtually non-existent. There are many reasons for this. One of them being – as Marina MacKay, William Wootten, and Randall Stevenson all observe – that this period in the 1960s and 1970s with its uncertain status of 'late modernism', vague references to the mid-century, and gradual fragmentation of 'British' identity addressed in works of the time does not enjoy much attention among scholars. It is, one might say with a hint of exaggeration, a limbo period between the end of high modernism and the 1980s explosion of critical theories and new debates initiated by post-structuralists. As Clare Cavanagh points out,

[23] André Lefèvre, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 15.
[24] See Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock, *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940. From Melodrama to Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 1-18.
[25] See Dionýz Ďurišin, 'World Literature as a Target Literary-historical Category', in *World Literature: A Reader*, ed. by Theo D'Haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 150-59.

the critics who wrote with a theoretical inflection have often overlooked the Cold War period, even though dynamics between Eastern Europe and the West could have complicated theoretical models, shedding new light on as Cavanagh subtitle goes 'lyric poetry and modern politics'.[26] Another issue with researching the period that comes immediately 'after' modernism is that critics lack the vocabulary to handle it. In her chapter entitled 'Cold War modernism?', MacKay observes that while modernism was becoming 'ever monumental in the critical imagination', speaking about 'late modernism' reflected 'any number of positions and assumptions', risking vagueness and imprecisions.[27] The relatively minor interest in this period is also due to other, more practical and less conceptual reasons. Namely, not enough time had passed for critics to gain some distance from the fairly recent literary history. After all, in the mid- and late-1990s, poets like Hughes or Davie were 'contemporary' (that is, living) poets and only after their death were their archives made available to researchers, leading to the publication of private letters or new volumes of collected poems glossed with critical commentaries. For all of these reasons and yet more, few scholarly works tried to ask why translations from Eastern Europe found such fertile ground in 1960s Britain – although this attempt did undoubtedly deserve credit.

The works that come closest to the topic of my dissertation are those of Wootten, Stevenson, Quinn, Jerzy Jarniewicz, Antony Rowland, Tara Bergin, and John Clegg. In the early stages of my research, when I was exploring changes of mood, shifts, and ambitions of 1960s criticism, *The Alvarez Generation* (2015) by Wootten proved helpful. Its introductory chapters about gentility, seriousness and anthology-making in particular allowed me to establish a connection between what Robert Lowell in 'Memories of West Street and Lepke' called 'the tranquilized fifties' and critics' call for a greater emotional engagement.[28] Wootten's book is the first to focus on Alvarez's criticism and the role *The New Poetry* anthology played in re-orienting literary tastes of the titular 'generation' that, according to the author, includes Thom Gunn, Geoffrey Hill,

[26] Clare Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland, and the West* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), p. 6.
[27] Marina MacKay, *Modernism, War, and Violence* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 132, 134.
[28] Robert Lowell, *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), p. 129.

Hughes, Plath, and Porter. Wootten's emphasis remains on the domestic literary scene and though he mentions poetry in translation as a source of inspiration for British poets, he does not elaborate on this idea. Neither does Wooten offer any theoretical framework that would locate patterns and motivations for such unprecedented interest in 'new seriousness' among the titular generation. In my chapter on Plath, I will carry on from where Wooten left off. I will argue for the importance of re-inserting Plath into literary history and how her poetry both participates in and shapes debates about seriousness and gentility. Another work that deserves credit is Stevenson's *The Last of England?*, volume 12 in the Oxford English Literary History series. The book encompasses the period from 1960 to 2000 and the growing popularity of Eastern European poetry is discussed in the chapters on language, form, and audience. Stevenson rightly observes that, through looking abroad and initiating collaborations via anthologies, festivals, or broadcasts, British critics indirectly decided to re-evaluate their own position, priorities, and hopes for the development of British contemporary poetry.[29] Since the profile of this summative volume of literary history comes from the British context I use it mostly for contextualising works of the Alvarez Generation in a domestic perspective. Another critic interested in a dialogue between Eastern European and Western literatures during the Cold War is Justin Quinn. The reader may find an informed summary of the early reception of Eastern European authors in his 'Outsourcing Politics: Alvarez, Miroslav Holub and Cold War Poetry' from 2015, which Quinn published in the *Times Literary Supplement*.[30] This article in *TLS* is only a fraction of the argument from Quinn's *Between Two Fires* published the same year. The book offers a fresh look at the transnational movement of poetry during the Cold War when, the critic argues, lyric was embedded in and affected by political pressures moving 'across borders in a time of trouble'.[31] Quinn focuses on an array of mostly American and Czechoslovak poets and borrows from classic theoretical works in world literature (such as those by Pascale Casanova, Christopher Prendergast, David Damrosch, Emily Apter, or Jahan Ramazani). The critic begins his book by asking 'what happens when a poem, or

[29] See Stevenson, pp. 238-70.
[30] Justin Quinn, 'Outsourcing Politics: Alvarez, Miroslav Holub and Cold War Poetry', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 August 2015, pp. 12-23 (pp. 12–13).
[31] Quinn, *Between Two Fires: Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), p. 61.

poet, travels *across* the divide?'.[32] Speaking of the construction of the non-existent Eastern European idiom, I should also credit the brief essay 'Eastern European poem and its translators' by Jarniewicz from his *Tłumacz między innymi* [*Translator among others*] (2018). The Polish critic and translation theorist starts by saying that, in translating from Eastern Europe, translators are also indirectly writing the history of the region. In the context of a disagreement between Alvarez and Davie (which I describe in later parts of this thesis), Jarniewicz ponders what the exemplary 'Eastern European poem' would be. Jarniewicz concludes his article by saying that the 'Eastern European poem' was, for Anglophone critics, nothing but a handy construct. Whilst the actual poetry in translation played a marginal role, speaking about its function and seriousness gave critics credibility they needed for battles playing out on the domestic front. Still, it seems surprising that the argument from such a short article would give Jarniewicz confidence to, in the last paragraph, announce that the Eastern European poem died without splendour or honour, in the dim shadow of history as no more than a product of the Cold War politics.[33] The transfer, appropriation, and construction of the 'Eastern European' poem seem to me more complex (and much less dead) than that. Another critic interested specifically in Hughes' co-translations from Hungarian is Tara Bergin. Though I was aware of her contribution to recent scholarship on Hughes as a translator, I came across Bergin's unpublished doctoral dissertation recently, long after I myself (in much less detail) had explored the idea of literalness in Hughes' writing.[34] Bergin's excellent thesis (from 2018) gathers impressive archival materials, including restricted letters from the Emory University archive, as part of her efforts to isolate and examine Hughes' involvement in 'literals'. Bergin focuses on Hughes' affinity with Pilinszky, and not so much on the bigger picture of 1960s criticism. Her informed thesis (including six interviews with Weissbort, George Szirtes, Desmond Graham, Francis Jones, Elaine Feinstein, and Keith Sagar) analyses comments Hughes made about translation alongside specific translation-related (or

[32] Ibid., p. 4.
[33] Jerzy Jarniewicz, *Tłumacz między innymi: szkice o przekładach, językach i literaturze* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, 2018), p. 310.
[34] Tara Bergin, 'Ted Hughes and the Literal: A study of the relationship between Ted Hughes's translations of János Pilinszky and his poetic intentions for C*row*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Newcastle University, 2013). See also Tara Bergin 'Hughes as Translator' and 'Hughes and Eastern Europeans', in *Ted Hughes in Context*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018), pp. 72-82, 113-23.

rather co-translation-related) decisions and looks at the idea of 'literals' close to the argument of my second chapter. Bergin's parallel readings of *Crow* and Pilinszky's poems (noting the significance of the fact that Hughes worked on both at the same time) are ambivalent and the lack of definite answers reflects problematic aspects of Hughes' engagement with Eastern Europe. Hughes, Bergin convincingly argues, might have had good intentions with co-translating and promoting the works of the Hungarian poet, but their versions sound rather like Hughes' own poetry. Bergin's conclusions are not limited to tracing the appropriative aspects of Hughes' works, but constitute an admirable effort to understand the author's obsessions with 'literal' translation. It is an idiosyncratic and entirely intuitive method, founded on the belief that the rough, unpolished, mid-point stage of translation had the most potential to give Anglophone readers the authentic experience of Eastern European poetry. Another unpublished dissertation (from 2012) which contributes to this topic comes from John Clegg. The author shared the ambition to 'investigate some developments in English poetry brought about by the rapid influx of translated work from Eastern and Central Europe'.[35] Clegg decided to take broad perspective and make frequent reference to theories from translation studies. His thesis consists of seven chapters and includes eleven poets: perhaps it is precisely because of the spatial constraints that the picture of 'some development' Clegg wished to offer appears to be rather flat and over-simplistic. The structure of his chapters pairs poets and critics, moving between basic introductory remarks and sudden close readings of passages from poems and translations we learn little more about. Nevertheless, some observations about the role of individuals and the book trade are illuminating and deepen our understanding of the 1960s translation boom. Another valuable book that I am indebted to is Antony Rowland's *Holocaust Poetry. Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (2005). The author looks at a selection of this poetry and discusses post-Holocaust poetics in a broader context of post-war Britain, arguing that the 'aesthetics of awkwardness' in the works of British authors evidence a shared urgency in which they question how to be a witness to the witness. Rowland proposes that these poets'

[35] See John Clegg, 'The Eastern European Context of Poetry in English after 1950'.

confrontations with the traumatic past and collective memory of the atrocity they encountered mostly by proxy, through news and media, 'can encompass self-conscious recognitions of their non-participation in atrocity, registering their mediated reception of the event.' In that context, what Rowland calls 'awkward poetics' may provide a 'self-reflexive counterpoint to the rise of memory-envy and the fake memoir, as Holocaust synecdoche become so widely circulated that they risk exploitation'.[36] Undoubtedly, this issue attracted surprisingly little attention and many responses to British authors' rendering of the Holocaust were limited to a critique of potentially appropriative poetics and the possibility of aesthetic larceny.

This short summary does not include all the critics who wrote about select aspects of constructing Eastern Europe in Anglophone criticism. There are many less direct but no less important texts and arguments that both challenged me and helped me to formulate my own. These texts range from a recent book by art historian and critic Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius about imagining Eastern Europe through interviews and editorials written by Dugdale to theoretical works about literary criticism, translation studies, and word literature. None of them, however, looked at the influx of Eastern European poetry in the specific configuration that would link Alvarez's criticism, *MPT* enterprise, visions of literalness and rough poetic idiom, and the impact the same circle of critics and poets had on the early translation market.

The title of this dissertation – 'Beyond the Burning Centre of Cataclysm' – alludes to a few sources that will become more familiar over the course of the thesis. Firstly, the title references a description of Eastern Europe from *MPT*'s inaugural editorial. Secondly, it refers to the words of poet, critic, and former editor of *MPT* Sasha Dugdale, in the *Centres of Cataclysm* (2016) anthology celebrating fifty years of *MPT*: '[t]he burning heart of cataclysm at the centre of the anthology is drawn out; through translation, migration and exile, it is transplanted into another soil' (*CC* 19). Finally, the title grasps a sense of transgression characteristic of 1960s criticism

[36] Antony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2022), p. 177.

(evoking the titles of Alvarez's essays 'Beyond All This Fiddle' or 'Beyond the Gentility Principle') pointing out the tensions between centre and periphery; inside and outside; participation and withdrawal.

It must be said that in this type of work – often concerned with what is implicit, indirect, suggested, or traced – claims of objectivity could be dangerous and limiting. Here, a note on my choice of methodologies is appropriate, especially since writing this dissertation was as much about its research topic as it was about the language and frameworks that I found most relevant to tell this story. Beyond literary-historical study, the combination of methodologies I use challenges notions of single, verifiable, and easily detectable 'influence'. I draw on ideas from a corpus of critical theory which ranges from methods of close reading, through textual criticism, postcolonial theory, translation studies, and interpretations inspired by gender studies, to post-colonial criticism, and post-critique. Though the earlier version of this work favoured a post-critical (if not anti-theory) approach, in the revised version I expand my methodological horizons.[37] I borrow primarily from a translation theorist who, since the 1970s, has continued to challenge the dogma of equivalence in favour of posing methodologically diverse questions about what translation does and how it impacts its receiving culture. Selected tools from translation theory enable me to identify and discuss the complex patterns visible in the translation of poetry from Eastern Europe to the Anglophone literary market in the 1960s. The reader will notice that throughout this thesis I prefer to move away from establishing direct lines between sources and their influence and speak instead of the resonance one literature may have on another. Borrowing Wai Chee Dimock's concept, I see resonance as a more useful term for speaking about a kind of engagement which proves to be so partial and so fragmentary that it refuses frameworks of linear causality.[38] While the notion of influence narrows down, focuses, and centralizes, resonance opens up, blurs, and maps circles of overlapping connections, by highlighting not just patterns but also lack of them. Though it felt counter-intuitive to me at first, in this research examples of

[37] See *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. by Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski (Durham: Duke UP, 2017).
[38] Wai Chee Dimock, 'A Theory of Resonance', *PMLA*, 112.5 (1997), 1060–71.

Anglophone critics' uncertainties, ignorance, or misrepresentation of poetry from Eastern Europe are as valuable as commentaries which we would today credit as more insightful or accurate.

There is no right or objective way to write the literary history of past dialogue between Anglophone world and poetry from Eastern Europe. Perhaps one of the less optimistic findings of this thesis (especially in the current context of Zabuzhko's reservations) is that despite numerous efforts, Anglophone criticism in the 1960s failed to provide its English-speaking audience with a deepened introduction to poetry from a region stubbornly described as the 'center of cataclysm'. If the subject of my study is criticism that often proved to be uncritical, too readily presenting individual poets as representative of a whole region, how do I negotiate my position between historical accuracy and recent criticism, reconstructive and deconstructive reading, and give justice to initiatives which may have seemed 'right' at the time but would today be rightly scrutinised for all they neglected, omitted, under or misrepresented? From the 1980s onward, array of post-structuralist critical theories had a massive influence on the direction of literary scholarship, moving it toward a more inclusive domain of cultural studies. We must remember that critics engaged in the transfer of poetry from 1960s Eastern Europe were not part of this shift. For instance, in archival material pertaining to the inaugural edition of *MPT*, we do not find any evidence of the editors entertaining any doubts that presenting poetry from Eastern Europe as belonging to exclusively male and middle-aged authors might not be adequately representative of its people and culture. Of course, the methodological challenge of this literary-historical research is not remediated merely by nothing that Alvarez, Hughes, or Weissbort could not possibly know the language of critical theory or borrow methods from translation studies, both of which I can use today. The topic of this thesis requires a certain critical distance, as well as an acknowledgment that our impulse to retrospectively correct and revise would not contribute to our understanding but rather erase part of the material which, no matter how uncomfortable or appropriative, should invite contextual interpretation, not our judgment. Much of this research encourages hospitable and immersive reading and, at moments, suspending my judgments to let this largely untold story unfold. Therefore, the position I often take is to see measures of potential

resonance not just as data that may be verified, but as narratives constructed in a specific time and therefore responsive to the specific needs of the mid-1960s.

The first chapter sketches the general background to the influx of the poetry in broad strokes, identifying common traits in editorial notes, reviews, and prefaces to anthologies written between 1956 and 1970. The commentaries to which I will refer to do not tell a coherent story of the reception and construction of 'Eastern Europeanness' among English-speaking audiences, but are fascinating material in their own right, revealing what critics and writers hoped to gain from their encounter with foreign authors. Though initially well-intended, many early endorsements of Eastern Europe become a standardised way of speaking about *the whole* region. I locate some of the changes in the rhetoric of literary criticism, the participative role of the reader, and new forms of media, all of which – I argue – contributed to the democratization of readership and growing popularity of Eastern European poetry. In my discussion, I ask what critics such as Alvarez understood (and partially *imagined*) 'Eastern European poetry' to be in the first place. The second, parallel issue I will explore throughout the first chapter is methodological as I will continue to discuss dis/locations of Eastern Europe, envy, resonance, emotional transferences, polysystem theories and the projective aspect of constructing criticism in response to what is felt to be lacking on the domestic scene. Borrowing from translation studies theories, I argue that commentaries on Eastern Europe made by a specific circle of Anglophone critics enlarge our understanding of the condition of Anglophone criticism of the time.

Linking those broader, literary-historical explorations and the active role translation played in shaping the printing market of the time, the second chapter offers a close look at the pioneering *MPT* magazine. This magazine was the first such initiative to publish lyric written by contemporary, living, foreign-born poets only, established with the belief that 'what is being written elsewhere can only stimulate poetry-making in this country' (*MPT* 1). My attention in this chapter falls on how the magazine came into being; what type of criticism and promotion it proposed; and how the editors and advisory board of *MPT* built a network of connections that

initiated further collaborations with poets from Eastern Europe. Drawing on archival material and borrowing frameworks from translation studies, I also focus on the historically situated debate between phenomenological interpretations of what it means to translate and another, highly idiosyncratic vision of translation striving for what the editors of *MPT* called 'literalness'.

Seeking authenticity in broken, often violent or deformed language narrows down my focus and brings me to a third chapter, in which I revisit topics of proxy-witnessing and Holocaust testimonial fiction in the context of Sylvia Plath's work. The chapter takes the reader back to 1950s America. Plath's American upbringing exemplifies not just the principles of gentility Alvarez battled against but also the socio-political dichotomies of the Cold War era. Though Plath's poetry continues to be a mainstay of curricula in English literature courses, the poet is often portrayed in a rather oversimplified manner and with little (if any) emphasis on connections between her poetry and what MacKay termed 'Cold War modernism'[39]. As frequently emerges in interpretations hyper-focusing on literary genius and suicidal death, Plath's works have too often been presented as separate from the literary reality of her time. Plath's poems and commentaries, however, show a strong interest in debates about the role of poetry after 1945 while her lesser-known early poetry evinces a creative interplay with Cold War dichotomies; namely, the domesticity of 1950s America and the distant abstraction of Eastern Europe. Looking at Plath's search for a rougher poetic as both responding to and shaping interest in literary criticism of the 1960s, this chapter re-inscribes Plath into the history of poets who wished to 'go beyond the gentility principle'.

In the fourth chapter, the link between Eastern Europe is more direct as I explore and reconstruct the little-known story behind the poetics of Hughes' *Crow* cycle. I look at how the cycle has its roots in Hughes' imaginative projections of poetry from Eastern Europe, his urge for constant revisions, and finally, his obsessions with a literal translation that Hughes constructed and promoted as being most able to articulate the drama of post-war Europe. Engaging in the works

[39] Marina MacKay, p. 132.

of poets like János Pilinszky, Vasco Popa, Miroslav Holub, or Zbigniew Herbert allowed Hughes to create a cycle that, as he said, could 'be invented after the Holocaust and demolition of all libraries'.[40] Looking at the context of Hughes' editorial activity, co-translations from Hungarian, and essays he wrote on selected poets from Eastern Europe invites discussion on whether the creation of *Crow* allowed Hughes to conceptually join the group of survivor-poets.

This thesis may be divided into two separate yet intertwined and complementary parts. The first consists of the two literary-historical chapters while the second part may be viewed as having a greater focus on a single author. The connection here is evident as chapters on Plath and Hughes look at the fascination with brokenness, representation, testimony, and translatability shared by the same circle of friends and critics. My aim is not to perform a close reading of poetry from Eastern Europe printed in the 1960s (which would limit our reading to arbitrarily selected authors), but rather to identify what motives and hopes drove Anglophone critics to act as mediators, impresarios, co-translators, and editors who hoped to bring poetry from the abstract 'center of cataclysm' to 'their' Western world. Examining poets' imaginative engagement in the larger drama of post-war Eastern Europe, I hope to show how the early reception and meta-textual use of Eastern European poetry were shaped not simply by readers' curiosity, but most of all by the cultural transferences and emotional projections which saturated literary criticism of the 1960s. The subsequent pages do not claim to be exhaustive, nor do they provide a comprehensive account or reconstructive reading of Eastern Europe as seen by the Anglo-American audience in the 1960s. Such an ambition would be far beyond the scope and possibility of this doctoral research. Instead, it proposes a selection of intertwining topics that hope to complicate the reader's view of the way Eastern European poetry has been both presented and constructed by the English literary scene of the mid-1960s.

[40] Letter from Ted Hughes to Keith Sagar, October 1973. Quoted in Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar, *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar* (London: British Library, 2012), pp. 27-8.

Chapter 1: Beyond the Gentility Principle: Literary Criticism and Imaginings of Eastern Europe

> *I think that one of the greatest problems in the general cultural life is self-interpretation. Since the artistic deed is already a self-interpretation, self-interpretation of the group, secondary self-interpretation, may be misleading, a double error, a compound error.*
>
> – Miroslav Holub in conversation with Daniel Weissbort (*PS* 313-314)

The Anglophone literary scene of the mid-1960s was bedevilled by fervent debates and conflicted visions of 'what poetry ought to be'. The – not just one-season – repertoire included different approaches to the legacy of high modernism; anthologies that hoped to shape the taste of the wider audience; the expansion of theoretical thinking activated by the rise of post-structuralism; and finally a sudden influx of poetry in translation. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the last would soon come to be understood not just literally, but metaphorically while translation of living, contemporary poets started to be abstracted as an exercise in empathy; a medium that would acknowledge human connection beyond – as Hughes said in 1967 during the first Poetry International Festival in London the divisions so dramatically symbolised by the Berlin Wall (*ST* 199-200). The translations which most caught readers' attention, entering the bloodstream of the 1960s critical debates, happened to arrive from Eastern Europe; the region that editors of the pioneering *MPT* magazine introduced to the English-speaking audience as coming from a 'centre of cataclysm', where verse was written 'under pressure' and with a sense of purpose much greater than that of their Western counterparts (*MPT* 1). In that regard, the transfer of poems was seen as an 'important, almost political business', and an act of finding shared humanity (*CC* 202). But even if such phenomenologically understood translatability is an indispensable part of our reading experience, why in the mid-1960s would poetry written 'under pressure' and so little known in the English context, suddenly be in a position to broaden the thematic scope and expressive

potential of modern British verse? To answer this question is not only to think about which books from Eastern Europe were read but, more importantly, what critics were *reading into* them.

Against the grain of societal changes, the phenomenon of the 'translation boom' from Eastern Europe developed so rapidly and was surrounded by such rhetorically powerful, even forceful, commentaries that British author Peter Porter once ironized the impossibility of calling himself a poet, saying 'nor am I yet well-fledged | in the Eastern European Translation Market […] | despite this I make my claim to be a poet'.[1] In the 1960s, poetry in translation fulfilled a locally desired function, giving Western authors a chance to – as Susan Sontag wrote, recalling her reading of Miłosz's *The Captive Mind* [*Zniewolony Umysł*] – 'rethink our own position'.[2] On the one hand, the incoming poetry was regarded by Anglophone critics as 'more modern' (in terms of its accommodation of the realities of post-Auschwitz art) and 'less modern' (in terms of its belief in the role of the poet as saviour and witness to what is unspeakable). In 2005, in her polemical review for the *Chicago Tribune*, American poet and academic Maureen McLane asked rhetorically: '[w]hat would American poets and critics do without the Central Europeans and the Russians to browbeat themselves with?'[3] The context for this comment is William Logan's book *The Undiscovered Country* and though McLane's question is partially ironic and enjoys – as we all do – the benefit of hindsight, her commentary on how the author of the book 'can't but admire the high seriousness and massive achievement' of poets from Eastern Europe strikes me as a provocative point of departure for this chapter. In the context of literary criticism, McLane's use of the word 'browbeat' is particularly striking. It reverses the logic of the transitive verb that according to *OED* means 'intimidation of someone or something' into an act of self-judgment and self-aggression. Here, the specific chastising is directed *inwards*, not outwards. But what is the academic alluding to exactly? Why would American poets need to use Eastern European

[1] Peter Porter, *Collected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 242.
[2] 'Susan Sontag Provokes Debate on Communism', *The New York Times*, 27 February 1982, p. 27. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/12/specials/sontag-communism.html> [accessed 13 Jun 2022].
[3] Maureen McLane, 'A dirty job', *Chicago Tribune*, 11 Dec 2005 <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-12-11-0512100221-story.html> [accessed 14 Jun 2022].

writers as a juxtaposition with their poetic practice? And where, in the realm of literary history, is the snappy irony of this statement coming from?

This chapter does not claim exhaustiveness by providing one strand of interpretation, a summative explanation, or 'correct' answers to those questions. Instead, it hopes to invite a broader debate about the shape of Anglophone literary criticism in the mid-1960s, seen in the context of incoming translations from Eastern Europe and discussed vis-à-vis contemporary theoretical reflection on the influence of translation studies and revival of academic interest in world literature. Both are hard to define and the matter of decentralizing and indirect resonance is likely to be an open-ended question allowing renegotiations of a hierarchy of valuation of literature and galvanizing a whole gamut of approaches. Today's definition of world literature has shifted from seeing it as an object of study to, as the editors of the Routledge *World Literature* (2012) anthology suggest, 'a paradigm for approaching texts from, or within, diverse contexts and making connections between them'.[4] By looking at a selection of commentaries and archival materials, I trace affinities English-speaking authors felt towards writing from Eastern Europe. The first section serves as an introductory and methodological note, signaling topics which will return throughout the rest of the chapter and thesis. Its focus falls on the mutual envy and admiration Western and Eastern European writers felt, as well as the problem of how to talk about the type of resonance that resists easy definitions and it is better understood through systems theories. I then move to focus on dis/location of Eastern Europe; an important issue since the terms 'Eastern Europe' or 'Central Europe' are both prone to oversimplifications. Even at the level of language and discourse, the risk of repeating how my research is focused on the resonance of Eastern Europe is to potentially exaggerate its presence and (though my perspective is literary-historical) could be misinterpreted as solidifying divisions characteristic of the Cold War. To take my discussion beyond strictly theoretical boundaries, in this section I examine the dis/location of Eastern Europe. Looking at the mapping of Eastern Europe on the eve of its political transformation, I take Milan

[4] *World Literature: A Reader*, ed. by Theo D'Haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), p. xi.

Kundera's essay, 1988 Lisbon conference, and Malcolm Branbury's novel as case studies. The issue addressed in the second part of the first chapter makes me question how to situate cultures previously considered marginal, peripheral, or minor in comparative and global perspectives. Linking the theme of geo-politics and imaginary spaces with real encounters, I then explore how early contact with Eastern Europe silently inspired one of the most influential, if controversial, manifestos of the 1960s – Alvarez's 'Beyond the Gentility Principle'. If we accept that Alvarez's combative introduction to *The New Poetry* anthology influenced, as critics repeatedly claim, a generation of poets whom Alvarez earlier (after Harold Rosenberg's 1959 work on abstract expressionism) called 'extremists' (and who are better known as 'confessional' poets), then the mediated resonance of Eastern Europe becomes more than just a footnote to the literary history.[5] The question follows: 'but who writes literary history in the first place?' How do we measure the literary resonance having material that is scattered and exists across many media, in magazines, broadcasts, advertising, or private correspondence? Focusing on selected initiatives, collaborations, and comments, all of which share an enthusiasm and belief in poetry as a resuscitative medium, a subsequent part of this chapter analyses reoccurring problems concerning the tone and rhetoric Anglophone critics of the mid-1960s adopt while talking about Eastern Europe.

Imaginative connections between Eastern Europe and West: translation theories and the matter of poetic resonance

Charles Tomlinson, the editor of the *Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* (1980) and once advisory editor of *MPT*, once suggested that a 'translation boom' dates back to 1966 when George Steiner edited *Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*. Undoubtedly, this date is only an approximation; however influential it was, it would be an oversimplification to give full credit to a single anthology for the rising popularity of translation. In that spirit, in the essay entitled 'The Impact of Translation', Heaney proclaimed that, since the early 1960s, the locus of poetic

[5] See Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959).

greatness was shifting away from the English language toward the poetry of Eastern Europe.[6] Nevertheless, how the poetry is heard depends as much on who is listening as on what it is that readers wish to hear. Receptive to this boom of poetry in translation, 1960s criticism was ready to establish the value of poetry from Eastern Europe on the English literary ground not only through appreciative reviews and promotion, but also by opposing, as Heaney puts it, 'a kind of cultural and spiritual debilitation' of the West with the allegedly unshakable morality of the newly translated poets.[7] On many occasions Anglophone critics drew links between the 'translation boom' and poetry from Eastern Europe, constructing generous images of poetic resonance typically full of contrasts and exaggerations of the postlapsarian condition of Western poetry and its 'cultural and spiritual debilitation'. On publication, poets like Pilinszky of Hungary, Lalić and Popa of Yugoslavia, Holub of Czechoslovakia, or Herbert and Miłosz of Poland, were notoriously grouped together and introduced to the English reader as a generation of East European poets, as if their work belonged to some single movement or represented a *specific way* of writing. Examples of this at once hospitable and appropriative rhetoric are countless and, curiously, not limited to early 1960s. Over the years (and, as we shall see, even in the 1990s) the same commentaries are repeated, often taken out from their original context and reprinted decades later as if, for Eastern Europe, time was non-existent and political reality unchanging — not coincidentally, since one of numerous Cold War representations of Eastern Europe depicts the region as an imagined space in which Western 'historical' time is presented against the suspended and mythic time of, for instance, Eastern European folklore. This blurred chronology is also one problematic aspect of this dissertation. One could ask, for instance: 'Why would the critic quote the letters from the late 1980s to make her point about the poetry of the mid-1960s? Surely much has changed in twenty years.' As Zabuzhko pointed out in her 2023 lecture, how 'minor' literature could still be presented in the dominant publishing market shows that this change is slower than we might have wished. If taken out of their context or presented without dates, many of these

[6] Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London; New York: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 38.
[7] Heaney, *A Poet's Europe. European Poetry Festival* (Leuven, 1991), pp. 159–60.

commentaries on Eastern European poetry made by Anglophone critics in the 1960s, mid-1970s, or late 1980s are practically impossible to distinguish as functioning somehow beyond the gravitational pull of history. In speaking about the reception of Eastern European authors or the printing market in the mid-1960s, I often refer to retrospective comments made in the 1970s, 1980s, or even 1990s by poets who were involved in early initiatives and facilitating the first international exchanges and translations.

To give the reader sense of this continuous problem, we can think of how in 1986 Tom Paulin was ready to explain in his introduction to one of the poetry anthologies how 'in Eastern Europe, the poet has a responsibility both to art and society'. In his brief commentary on Pasternak, Herbert, and Holub's shared fascination with Shakespeare's Hamlet, Paulin concludes that 'the dissident Hamlet becomes an honorary citizen of the "Eastern Bloc"'.[8] Over thirteen years earlier, Jon Silkin, an editor of *Stand* magazine, maintained that writers from the Eastern Bloc were the ones who allowed the reader to imagine 'what the sensuous powers and moral entrapments feel like'.[9] Stephen Spender in turn recalled how Robert Lowell once admitted to Andrei Voznesensky that he envied Russian poets because, although they could only work under circumstances of terrible persecution, their audience could be measured in thousands. Spender's and Lowell's voices harmonized in their articulations of *an envy of resonance*: 'we poets in the West have freedom – but only our fellow poets read us'.[10] Around the same time, in 1975, a letter to Michael Schmidt – the founder of Carcarnet Press – Hughes maintained that 'any appreciation in the West has immediate and real influence on the freedom of an Iron Curtain writer'.[11]

[8] Tom Paulin, 'Introduction', in *The Faber Book of Political Verse*, ed. by Tom Paulin (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp. 15-52 (pp. 17-18). Paulin writes: 'In the Western democracies it is still possible for many readers, students and teachers of literature to share the view that poems exist in a timeless vacuum or soundproof museum, and that poets are gifted with an ability to hold themselves above history […]. However, in some societies –particularly totalitarian ones – history is a more or less inescapable condition. In those cold, closed societies a liberal belief in the separation of the public from the private life is not possible'.
[9] Jon Silkin, *Poetry of the Committed Individual: A Stand Anthology of Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 21.
[10] Stephen Spender, *New Selected Journals, 1939-1995*, ed. by Lara Feigel and John Sutherland (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p. 714.
[11] Letter from Hughes to Michael Schmidt, 22 September 1975, Manchester, Carcanet Archives, John Rylands Library.

This 'immediate and real' influence was, however, more complex than Hughes might have realised in the course of establishing *MPT* in 1965 and continuing to engage in poetry in translation throughout 1970s and 1980s. Statements of this sort exemplify a problem similar to what Amanda Anderson referred to as 'aggrandized agency' – a tendency to retrospectively assign revolutionary power to a single event, book, or introduction.[12] Increased interest in translation as well as in the region of Eastern Europe was definitely a cause, but scholarly treatment of this subject fails to synthesise this issue and ask, 'what must have happened on the literary scene of the 1960s Britain to make poetry by Eastern European authors resonate with the audience?' One possible answer to this question is given by Stevenson in *The Last of England?* (the book's title borrowed from Peter Porter's poem) where the critic points out that a lack of creative response to the atrocities of the twentieth century galvanised English writers to look abroad for innovations and 'reworking of technique' otherwise suppressed by the poetic idiom of the Movement.[13]

While the sudden interest in foreign poems is certainly new in the 1960s, reflection on the practice of translation was not; the history of thinking about translation is as long as the history of language. One useful framework for describing the dynamics of Anglophone critics 'looking abroad' comes from translation studies. And though discussions around translation date back to antiquity, translation studies as a new academic field – that looks at translation as a cultural rather than merely literary or linguistic fact – emerged only in the early 1970s. It is then salient to highlight that frameworks or concepts I will refer to in my analysis of the mid-1960s post-date the time periods I am writing about. Historically, the first and primary writers of translation have been translators themselves which, perhaps paradoxically, made the theory work for practitioners. Many of the most famous texts in translation studies are, as Peter France observes, 'not so much academic treatises as short personal statements' which have potentially complicated our understanding and blurred the line between traditionally disengaged and synthetical theory, and

[12] See Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006).
[13] Stevenson, p. 208.

engaged and particular practice.[14] Since the 1970s, many scholars have attempted to theorise and complicate our understanding of processes involved in translation, which is never a simple or transparent act of transfer. In the chapter on *MPT*, I will further contextualize the emergence of translation studies, its relationship with the end of high modernism, changes within the British education system, and political and ideological entanglements. For the sake of clarity I must, however, highlight that *MPT* never developed any consistent theory of translation and though it later provided a platform for theoretical discussion (by printing the first translation studies essays in the 1981 in 41/42 issue of *MPT*) it did not straightforwardly contribute to development of translation studies as an academic discipline. The term 'translation studies' was coined by James Holmes in the 1972 paper 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies'; presented during the conference in Leuven, the paper delineated the contours of the emerging field. It mapped different aspects of and possibilities for translatory reflection, expressing the scholar's personal preference for descriptive translation studies (DTS, as the term would later be adapted by Gideon Toury).[15] In the years to come and against a long-standing tradition of speaking of poetry (or text at large) as 'lost' in translation, more questions followed: what effect does translation have on audience in a given time and language; what relationship does it form with notions of equivalence, autonomy, and function; what exists between an instrumental and a hermeneutic approach. None of these questions yielded conclusive answers, and the corpus of twentieth-century translation theories (especially those after what we call the 'cultural turn') mirror the complexity of the phenomenon itself, giving us new tools to analyse reception of translation both synchronically and diachronically.

In the context of Hughes' engagement in translation, Susan Bassnett – a comparative literature scholar and translation theorist, speaks of the empathy that exists between writer and translator

[14] Peter France, 'Translation Studies and Translation Criticism', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. by Peter France (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 3-10 (p. 4).
[15] James Holmes, 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 172-85. See also Gideon Toury's 'The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 198-212.

and how this emotion makes the act of translating into next step in that writer's literary development. She summarises this translation-inspired creativity in motion: 'research in the newly established discipline of translation studies has shown that translation is one of the greatest shaping forces in the history of literature, and periods of great literary activity are usually preceded by periods of intensive translation'.[16] However, one of the key discoveries was that in welcoming foreign poetry, the receiving culture always has its own subjective interest. Theories that look at patterns of what might drive those interests range from Itaman Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, through Hans J. Vermeer's writing about skopos and commission in translational action, André Lefèvre's ideas of refraction, translation as re-writing, and patronage, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak ideas of 'translates', to Lawrence Venuti's writing about translation as a mirror in which the reader recognises their own particular domestic situation.[17] Theories which I consider a good starting point for my discussion come down from the end of the 1970s and 1980s and belong largely to the polysystem theories group.

Whilst the concepts from which I borrow are now fairly canonical, a succinct summary of these ideas might prove helpful for grounding further discussion and establishing the language of the theory I continue to both use and refer to. The beginning of the polysystem approach in translation studies dates back to the 1970s when Israeli scholar Itamar Even-Zohar published a paper on 'The position of translated literature within the literary polysystem' (1979, revised version 1990).[18] Inspired by the late works of Russian Formalists as well as these of Czech Structuralists of the 1940s, Even-Zohar approached literature as a part of a larger cultural, social, and literary system. Speculating about the possibilities of considering translation as the most active force within a system in the opening of his essay, he asked: '[w]hat kind of relations might there be among translated works, which are presented as completed facts, imported from other literatures, detached from their home contexts and consequently neutralized from the point of view of center-

[16] Susan Bassnett, *Ted Hughes* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2009), pp. 82-98 (p. 83).
[17] See Lawrence Venuti, 'Translation, Community, Utopia', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 467-88.
[18] Itaman Even-Zohar, 'The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 191-7.

and-periphery struggles?[19] Even-Zohar argued that translated works correlate one culture with another in two ways. First, in the way source texts are being selected by receiving culture. Second, in the way translated works start to function in the receiving culture, adopting its norms, behaviours, and policies. Especially in moments when new literary trends are emerging, when literature is considered 'peripheral' or when – as Even-Zohar puts it – 'they are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature', translation plays a vital role in re-organising the system.[20] In that light, the principles of selection are also determined by the situation on the domestic front. In other words, 'the texts are chosen according to their compatibility with the new approaches and the supposedly innovatory role they may assume within the target literature.' [21] As we shall see in my analysis of the Anglophone 1960s polysystem, dynamic hierarchies between primary and secondary polysystem determined what was translated (partially in order to fill the gap or 'literary vacuum' on the domestic front).

It is no coincidence that virtually all the texts that established translation studies as a new academic discipline accorded with the gradual marginalization of the Anglophone modernism observed by Esty: an anticlimactic end to high modernism, collapsing into the welcoming arms of cosy domesticity. Think of the line from Davie's poem in which the speaker declares: '[w]hen I read the British | contemporaries I | admire, I am abashed | by the levelness of their tone', ending significantly with a statement, 'I have a reading knowledge of English'.[22] This frustration, leading the British poet to distance himself from the language in which he writes, had built up over time as a response to what was starting to feel like the unfulfilled promises and lost opportunities of modernism. In an article about the reception of Herbert's poem 'Elegy for Fortinbras' [*Tren Fortynbrasa*], Hungarian translator and critic – George Szirtes touches on the problem of this specific jealousy that Western authors seemed to express while comparing the seriousness of their work to that of fellow poets:

[19] Ibid., p. 192.
[20] Ibid., p. 194.
[21] Ibid., p. 193.
[22] Davie, *Collected Poems,* p. 180.

> Reading the poems of my British contemporaries in the late 70s and 80s, I sometimes got the impression that there was a longing in them to live in hard times so that they could become better, more appreciated poets.[23]

While Szirtes spoke of the late 1970s and 1980s, a similar search for an external impulse that would have the power to shake up a domestic system was also seen in the mid-1960s, and this topic will return in much greater detail in further parts of my thesis. Other critics associated with the early development of system theories would come to include Israeli scholar Gideon Toury (descriptive translation studies, idea of norm and valuation, universals), Andrew Chesterman (writing about product and expectancy norms), or polemical Manipulation School (including of Jose Lambert, Hendrik van Gorp, and Theo Hermans).

System theories in translations are not without limitations. Already in the late 1990s, the Manipulation School warned that system theories and DTS would need to start considering new movements, including gender studies, postcolonial, and cultural studies. One of the main limitations of system theories is that, while presenting little evidence, the framework almost encourages overgeneralisations; it tends to focus on abstract models that will often provide too little attention to specific translatory reality. The danger of an 'uncritical' use of 1970s system theories would, therefore, be to shift our attention from texts themselves to focus exclusively on the social and political circumstances which they enter, and such a framework could, paradoxically, re-affirm the power hierarchies that the method initially claimed to diagnose and stand against. There are many other recent concepts in translation studies which I find relevant for this thesis including ideas on patronage, translation as re-writing, gender criticism, and post-colonial translation theories – particularly what Spivak, in the context of renderings of 'Third World' feminist writing into English, called 'translatese'. [24] As the editors of *Moving Boundaries*

[23] This excerpt comes Piotr Mierzwa's translation of George Szirtes' article written for the 2010 book *Język Dalekosiężny: Przekłady i Międzynarodowa Recepcja Twórczości Zbigniewa Herberta*, ed. by Magda Heydel, Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese, and Monika Woźniak, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010). I present the excerpt in my re-translation since I could not get hold of the English (unpublished) version. [Czytając wiersze moich brytyjskich rówieśników w późnych latach 70. i 80., odnosiłem czasem wrażenie, że jest w nich tęsknota za życiem w ciężkich czasach, dzięki którym mogliby stać się lepszymi, bardziej docenianymi poetami].

[24] In her seminal 1993 essay 'The Politics of Translation', Spivak writes about the power relation between gender, coloniality, and translation. Focusing largely on the translations of non-European feminist texts, she shows how the allure of Western feminist solidarity manifested by the transfer of feminist writing from the 'Third World language'

in Translation Studies (2018) argue, the external boundaries of translation studies are expanding, while its internal boundaries are blurring.[25] Those changes and processes, however, seem to me a distinct subject deserving of separate theoretical discussion.

Whilst poetry from Eastern Europe initially attracted very little attention and did not exist in English translations until around the nineteenth century, it started to become particularly popular in the 1950s and mid-1960s, and especially after 1956 – the year of the Thaw and the consequent lessening of Soviet censorship. The exception is, of course, the presence of Russian literature in the turn of century England where – as Rebecca West put it – 'Russia [was] to young intellectuals of today what Italy was to the Victorians'.[26] The prominence of Russian literature is a separate subject which will make a brief return in the next chapter. Following Nikita Khrushchev's 'secret speech' delivered at the Congress of the Communist Party in February 1956, the policies of de-Stalinization started to allow for relative liberalisation of freedom of speech, publication of uncensored works of some émigré authors, permissions for organising and participating in literary festivals, publications of poets and writers whose works would not be printed before 1956. However, the enthusiasm for newly acquired (yet still limited) freedom did not last long; soon, Anglophone critics were shocked by Russian repressions of the Hungarian revolt of 1956 as well as the events of the Prague Spring of 1968, and the Polish revolts of 1968.

In the post-Thaw period, interest in Eastern European poetry increased slowly but steadily, partially thanks to the institutional support of Slavonic or sub-Slavonic faculties at leading universities, most of them (usually due to the initiative and charisma of individuals) established between 1945 and 1957.[27] Often, the academics and critics who first wrote about interconnections

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into dominant English erases the identity of the speaker and too readily assumes the existence of an abstracted female solidarity and naïve believe that all Third Word feminist writing is good. Those predicaments flatten the image and prevent critical evaluation in favour of fulfilling ex-colonisers' need to 'give the voice'. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 312-30.

[25] See *Moving Boundaries in Translation Studies*, ed. by Helle V. Dam, Matilde Nisbeth Brøgger, and Karen Korning Zethsen (London; New York: Routledge, 2019).

[26] Rebecca West, 'The Barbarians', *New Republic*, 9 January 1915, p. 20.

[27] To give examples from American universities, at Yale, under the influence of Rene Wellek, the Slavonic Faculty was established in 1945. At Columbia, thanks to a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Department of Slavic

and dialogues between East and West also happened to be translators and were involved in the transfer they wrote about. Therefore, their investment tended to add a hint of legitimacy to their academic inquiry, legitimacy that would not be of concern to English literature scholars. Many of these critics were in their formative years during and immediately after the collapse of the Communist regime (1989-1991) and are now established academics and translators in their sixties. We might think of the description given by Justin Quinn in the opening of his book *Between Two Fires: Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry* (2015) as an example: 'I arrived in Czechoslovakia to teach English as a foreign language in 1991', writes the critic, adding, 'I was twenty-three and not alone in my curiosity about this post-revolutionary country: large numbers of recent graduates from the United States and United Kingdom had the same idea'.[28] Indeed, Quinn was not alone in his curiosity. When writing about poetry from Eastern Europe, we tend to focus on how it has reached the English-speaking world through émigré communities. Activity, patronage, and network of connections initiated or fostered by immigrants is a long-established contributor to the travel of literature across borders. However, less attention is given to individuals on the front lines of the receiving culture. Those who re-write and refract (terms borrowed from Lefevere) target text by taking on patronage of incoming translations. Lines of division between both are, of course, arbitrary as émigré writers could belong to both systems; I will return to this topic in the following part about dis/locations of Eastern Europe, in which I shall also dwell on problems related to double belonging.

One of the rhetorical methods for establishing the value of foreign poetry in the English language was to draw opposition. As Heaney suggested in one of his lectures delivered as Oxford Professor of Poetry, in writing, placing 'a counter-reality in the scales' may act as a powerful source for imagination as it is 'pressing back against the pressure of reality'.[29] It is this constant push and

Languages embarked on its present trajectory in 1946. At Harvard, the official year of establishment for the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures is 1948. At Princeton, a Slavonic programme (almost exclusively focused on Russian) existed from the late 1940s but new courses were, not coincidentally, launched until 1957, when the Soviets launched Sputnik. The same year, the Center for Slavic and East European Studies was founded at Berkeley.

[28] Quinn, p. 10.

[29] Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, pp. 1-16.

pull between reality and creative response that creates, in Heaney's mind, an effect of redress; a matter of setting up again, re-establishing, and re-connecting, or 'finding a course for inner breakaway of innate capacity'.[30] In the same lecture, Heaney's extensive references to poets dear to him (Osip Mandelstam, Joseph Brodsky, Herbert, and Miłosz) as well as his 'redressing' model of poetic dialogue seem to define his method. To imagine the quasi-romantic ambience around poetry from Eastern Europe, let us consider an excerpt from a 1991 speech Heaney delivered during the European Poetry Festival:

> It seems to me that the ultimately powerful thing about the major poets of Russia and Eastern Europe in our time is not their courageous, necessary and fiercely local work of resistance to a totalitarian ideology but their verification of words which poets in the west have become almost too embarrassed to utter: words like faith, hope, justice, spirit, love, words which were abandoned as a precaution against falsity and inflation but whose abandonment has resulted in a kind of cultural and spiritual debilitation. Admittedly, the ways in which they got spoken in the poetry of Eastern Europe were usually elaborate and fiercely guarded, but the economy and strictness of the expression by no means diminished the reality of the things expressed. In our situation, in a politicized context where the word 'humanist' is spoken with venom and employed as a term of abuse, where the unmasking of covert forms of oppression within the language has rendered the majority of academic critics incapable of making the canonical poetry of their own cultures valuable to the young, there is something hugely encouraging about the poetry in translation which one has been reading with such respect and gratitude for decades now.[31]

Delivered with the ease and elegance characteristic of Heaney's essays, the speech further reflects on his encounters and imaginative connections with what he describes as Eastern Europe. Moreover, it envisages a relationship between Anglophone poetry and Eastern European poetry based not on the traditionally antagonistic model of influence but – to borrow Christopher Ricks' phrase – 'appreciation and gratitude'.[32] Here, the moral innocence and purity of foreign poetry is contrasted with the disturbing state of abandonment embodied by the Western world. The contextual use of the transitive noun 'abandonment' is significant, for it suggests an important emotional connection with the words that have been given up on. Moreover, by this logic, abandonment is always relative, whereas the first association of the contemporary reader is with psychoanalysis: abandonment as an invisible imprint of trauma. If so, translation could also be

[30] Ibid., pp. 3-4.
[31] Heaney, *A Poet's Europe*, pp. 159–60.
[32] See Christopher Ricks, *True Friendship: Geoffrey Hill, Anthony Hecht, and Robert Lowell under the Sign of Eliot and Pound* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010).

conceptualised as process of re-writing. In 1991 Heaney hopes 'the major poets of Russia and Eastern Europe' to stimulate Anglophone poets to re-thinking of long-forgotten ideas; ideas with which the poets of modernism engaged, though only with the safe assistance of quotation marks, signaling distance, irony, detachment.[33] The tendency to look at translation as a metaphor of connection and communication is nothing new. Perhaps the oldest and most enduring symbolic association with translation and explaining the origins of different languages, at least in Western culture, is the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. The myth can be seen from two diametrically opposed perspectives. In one, the narrative of Babel is a story of sin, decline, and the forever-lost unity of mankind. In another, one might see creative liberation and the birth of the opportunity to find a certain autonomy in one's own voice. Looking at the Biblical story of Babel in such symbolic terms, the paradox here is that the pre-condition for the existence of translation is not a language but a sudden lack of language. The emergence of translation studies in the 1960s, after global war and genocide had left their mark on the collective psyche, may be conceptualized as a similar collapse. In other words, certain languages, meanings and sensitivities that previously connected readers were, at least on a symbolic level, lost.

Heaney's passage could invite the opposite interpretation, especially since Heaney addresses his audience, not as Hughes and Weissbort did in the mid-1960s, but in 1991, two years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Against the grain of changing reality, the words of the poet could be seen as deliberately solidifying his position as a Western author who groups together unnamed 'major poets' and, from a position of economic and political privilege, suggests a specific type of envy of resonance. This imagined Western writer is 'almost too embarrassed to utter' words like 'faith, hope, justice, spirit, love' and while Eastern authors are presented as superior, such endorsements are –and we might think again of the 2022 introduction to the anthology of Ukrainian writing – bittersweet. For they suggest that dealing with abstracted suffering legitimizes their position as true 'humanists' and 'witnesses'. Heaney at once recognises the limitations of juxtaposing poetic

[33] See Marjorie Garber, *Quotation Marks* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

idioms of East and West and continues to adhere to that simplistic framework. This incongruence is what made one of the reviewers of another of Heaney's essay collections – *The Government of Tongue* (1989) accuse the poet of an 'imperialism of thought'.[34] The problematic implications of a link between greatness and suffering will return in a later chapter.

The poets from Eastern Europe were not just translated into the English language but translated with a whole range of extra-textual expectations. In his text about translation, community, and utopia, translation studies critic Lawrence Venuti observes:

> The very impulse to seek a community abroad suggests that the translator wishes to extend or complete a particular domestic situation, to compensate for a defect in the translating language and literature, in the translating culture.[35]

Venuti's comment proves useful in describing how the reception of poetry from Eastern Europe was a response to the shortcomings of internal debates about the direction of American and British poetry. To illustrate this issue with another example partially linked to Heaney's comment we might, for instance, think of American poet W. S. Merwin's endorsements of *The Post-war Polish Poetry* (1965) anthology. The poet signals the impact the anthology, edited by Miłosz, had on a whole generation of young American writers. Merwin located the gravitas of this resonance in the circumstances in which the volume appeared, 'at the height of the timely, but noisy controversy over the difference, real and concocted, between "academic" and the "Beat" poets'.[36] The anthology was therefore appreciated not only for its content but for the resonance it had among young poets. In that regard, the translated writers – and here we see how Merwin's statement turns into what we may indeed call 'critical browbeating' – 'ma[de] the most audible of the poetic doctrines in English seem frivolous and silly'.[37]. In the 1960s, the exchange of ideas and poetic inspirations seemed to be more complex than divisions between the 'frivolous' West

[34] Thomas Docherty, 'The Sign of the Cross: Review of The Government of the Tongue', in *Seamus Heaney*, ed. by Michael Allen (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 147-54 (p. 150).
[35] Venuti, 'Translation, Community, Utopia', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 467-88 (p. 469).
[36] W. S. Merwin 'Remembering Czesław Miłosz', in *An Invisible Rope: Portraits of Czesław Miłosz*, ed. by Cynthia Haven (Athens: Ohio UP, 2011), pp. 74-80 (p. 75).
[37] Ibid.

and morally superior, always suffering Eastern Europe. Indeed, in his article 'Looking for a Center: On the Poetry of Central Europe', Miłosz complicates Merwin's vision, recalling:

> When in the 1960s I translated a number of poems from Polish and published them under the title *Postwar Polish Poetry*, I had a very vivid response, especially among young American poets many of whom told me later that poems from my anthology influenced their own writings. They sensed in those poems something different from what they had found in Western European poets read in translation, perhaps more vigor, clarity, and sensitivity to historical situations. Yet poets whom I translated, whether Herbert or Różewicz or others, were still in the phase of bitter accounts with Western Europe because of its failure to continue to exist as a *subject*, not an *object* of history.[38]

This retrospective comment seems more balanced, distanced, and humble about the potential resonance the anthology enjoyed among Anglophone readers. Miłosz speculates about the vigour, clarity, and historical situatedness of Polish lyric, while at the same time pointing out that the perspective of the translated poets differs. Especially if this outlook is of an émigré writer whose position reveals paradoxes. On the one hand, the critic feels an obligation to represent, explain, or 'decode' (as Vaclav Havel put it in 1966) their home literature.[39] On the other, the critic hopes for the 'domestication' of their home literature in a Western context so that interpretations would not be limited to political diagnosis or simple comparisons.

Already in 1956, in the paper that has become a cornerstone of the American School of comparative literature (ironically entitled 'The Crisis of Comparative Literature'), Czech-born American critic René Wellek discussed difficulties faced by critics in the Cold War. Wellek showed the absurdity of limiting comparative literature to a study of the 'foreign trade' of two literatures. He took issue with the nineteenth-century positivistic factualism of Paul Van Tieghem's 1931 distinction between the 'comparative' and 'general' components, a dichotomy that not only re-affirms hierarchies between peripheral and central literature but also encourages

[38] Czesław Miłosz, 'Looking for a Center: On the Poetry of Central Europe', in *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture 1,* ed. by Ladislav Matejka and Benjamin Stolz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), 1-11 (p. 10).

[39] In 1966 interview Vaclav Havel says: 'The habit of "decoding" texts, when applied to literature and art, necessarily leads to an over politicized approach. For that reason, many émigrés no longer consider it important whether a work of art is good or bad, they no longer examine it with the criteria of art, but regard it solely from the viewpoint of how it affects our political life or what it has to say about political events' See Antonin Liehm, *The Politics of Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 387.

a simplistic understanding in suggesting a causative relationship between them. According to Wellek, new methods are needed to add depth and complexity to our understanding of non-linear trajectories of literary 'influence'. Beyond plain fact, it should also include 'study of national illusions, of fixed ideas which nations have of each other.'[40] One of the important issues the critic addressed is meta-critical. Namely, patriotism of some literary critics has led to, as Wellek puts it, 'strange situation of cultural bookkeeping, a desire to accumulate credits for one's nation by proving as many influences as possible on other nations'.[41] This observation, presented as early as 1956, rejects a simplistic line of literary influence in favour of cosmopolitan humanism. With an allusion to cultural divisions of Cold War era, the article concludes with a powerful, political message, with Wellek writing: 'literary scholarship becomes an act of the imagination, like art itself, and thus a preserver and creator of the highest values of mankind.' [42]

As with any type of poetic borrowing or circulation of resonance, what is at stake is not simply textual change but the conceptual attribution that causes the other change to occur. In other words, by bringing foreign voices into motion we are likely to make space for new expressions and transference of meaning. In talking about the relationship between Anglophone criticism and Eastern Europe, rather than influence we should perhaps describe this type of fluctuation as *resonance*, as proposed in 1997 by Wai Chee Dimock in her *PMLA* article, 'A Theory of Resonance'. Dimock's theoretical article scrutinizes extra-textual relationships between a text once written and then re-read, and speaks of 'the traveling frequencies of literary texts'. These are 'received and amplified across time, moving farther and farther from their points of origin, causing unexpected vibrations in unexpected places'.[43] In 2016, the editors of the *Centres of Cataclysm* anthology, Dugdale and David and Helen Constantine use a similar metaphor, that of

[40] René Wellek, 'The Crisis of Comparative Literature', in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: from the European enlightenment to the global present*, ed. by David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton; New York; Oxford: Princeton UP, 2009), pp. 161-72 (p. 164). Wellek summarizes his concerns, writing: 'an artificial demarcation of subject matter and methodology, a mechanistic concept of sources and influences, a motivation by cultural nationalism, however generous—these seem to me the symptoms of the long-drawn-out crisis of comparative literature.' p. 167.
[41] Ibid., p. 167.
[42] Ibid., p. 171.
[43] See Dimock, 1060–71.

the ripple effect (decentralising, destabilising, and disturbing the system) to describe the type of resonance and spread of ideas that *MPT* has offered since Hughes and Weissbort founded the magazine in 1965. The matter of decentralising 'influence' is an underlying part of this chapter's inquiry, even though — as Holub's words from my epigraph to this chapter have suggested – it is a vexed and ephemeral one. In her book about Heaney and Eastern Europe – *In Gratitude for All the Gifts* (2012), Magdalena Kay asserts that the topic of literary influence becomes controversial 'when we cease to deal with direct allusions and quotations and when we attune ourselves to echoes, discern formal borrowings, or detect an alignment of voice with that of another writer'.[44] It certainly does become trickier, but the first question to ask is why we would want to give 'direct allusions and quotations' a status superior to those more scattered evidences of resonance and engagement. And how could allusion possibly be direct in the first place? There is no objective solution to this methodological problem. If there was, the comparative study of literature would be – as Culler has warned – tantamount to an infinite source-hunting.[45]

As the communicative patterns of trees, intertextuality happens 'underneath' through complex chain of connections and share of strength.[46] Such understood transfer gives the ability to see texts as a constellation of meanings and dialogues with other texts as they continue to allude to, prolong, complete, debate, and transform each other. This is not limited to the reality *within* the artwork, volume, or book. As Lawrence Rainey observed in the context of modernism, scholars and critics 'have tried to define modernism through a unilateral focus on formal devices or ideological constellations' typically skipping the social and institutional factors. But a shift of attention to those factors may allow us to 'view modernism as more than a series of texts or the ideas that found expression in them'. In other words, as 'a social reality, a configuration of agents and practices that converge in the production, marketing, and publicization of an idiom, a sharable

[44] Magdalena Kay, *In Gratitude for All the Gifts: Seamus Heaney and Eastern Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 4.
[45] Culler, *The Literary in Theory,* p. 112.
[46] See Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. by Jane Billinghurst (London: William Collins, 2017).

language in the family of twentieth-century tongues'.[47] In practice, however, such as in conversations with the poet instead of academic discourse, the theoretical and academic views on influence differs. We can take Holub's comment as an example. When asked about his influence on the generation of post-war poets and the significance of anthologized poetry, the poet amusingly replied:

> […] Sometimes – it's interesting – sometimes *you* perceive it [anthology and influence] – I've seen it in *MPT* 1983 – you perceive it as a sort of moment in the post-war movement. And it may be, of course. My coming into poetry was to find out if it was poetry, if what I was doing was poetry at all! I didn't find any correspondences, I just discovered that I might be another kind. Which I was very doubtful about. So, I was always – I'm not joking – very reserved and very modest about any personal role I played in national or international poetry. There are many types of poets and many types of poetry, just as there are different types of dogs. (*PS* 313-14)

The point Holub makes while comparing types of poetry and types of dog is significant and humorous. It encourages us to approach the subject of resonance, influence, and impact with a greater sense of distance, acknowledging that much literary history is driven by the hope to synthesize and, potentially, give poetry from the past a causative power to which that poetry has never aspired.

The influx of translations from Eastern Europe can be inscribed in an open-ended model of reading where, as Felski has proposed, 'to interpret is to feel oneself addressed by the text as if by a message or a proclamation, to defer to a presence rather than diagnose an absence'.[48] But what if the presence is caused by a certain absence, by all that is felt to be missing within a literary tradition but cannot be reduced to mere compensatory projection? What if we are looking at texts which are not just describing, but deliberately activating a certain 'not-thereness', perhaps wishing for a reader to re-live the experience that is not their own? These questions about presence and absence might at first seem too abstract or even peripheral to the theme of cultural imaginings of Eastern Europe, but the paradox of its sudden presence in the English literary landscape does indeed lie in a shared feeling of absence. The first and, perhaps, most literal one is an absence of

[47] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), p. 5.
[48] Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p. 32.

clarity in defining where we locate Eastern; Central; East Central; or Central Eastern Europe. I therefore now move to a brief discussion of issues related to the problem of the shifting borders and geographies of Eastern Europe often presented as an idealized topographical construct rather than a real place.

Dis/locating Eastern Europe: shifting borders and political geographies

The editorial of the inaugural edition of *MPT* hints at imagining of Eastern Europe as the 'center of cataclysm' existing in the realm of universal ideas. 'While we had material coming from many other areas of the world' – Hughes and Weissbort were ready to explain – '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' (*MPT* 1). The specificity of the geo-political situation of countries under former Soviet occupation is erased in favour of the greater moral resonance the poetry from the 'centre of cataclysm' has for its English-speaking audience. This approach speaks of the dominant narrative of Eastern Europe as a lost and conquered land where individual stories are subordinate to the burden of history. Therefore, material coming from the semi-periphery of Eastern Europe is 'most insistent' not only because of centuries of territorial conquest (first by Prussia, Habsburgs, Ottoman and the Russian Empire, followed by political submission to the Soviet Union) but also because editors wished to present it with a specific rhetoric. After the Great War, East Central Europe was transformed into a terrain of small and weak states and – as Milan Kundera notes in his seminal essay – it is perhaps for this reason that 'in the European memory these countries always seem to be the source of dangerous trouble'.[49] Our perception of countries formerly under Soviet domination is now diametrically different from the one available to the authors and critics in the 1960s while, in a globalised world, terms such as 'Eastern European poetry' might sound not just vague but outdated. The term 'Central Europe' is no less problematic.

[49] Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', transl. by Edmund White, *New York Review of Books,* 26 April 1984, pp. 33-8 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1984/04/26/the-tragedy-of-central-europe/> [accessed 17 Jun 2022].

For many years its use as a political term has been debated, especially around and after 1989. As Susan Sontag put it in her comment during the Lisbon Conference, Central Europe was an anti-Soviet concept 'invented for the West, for consumption by Western intellectuals.'[50]

In writing about cultural resonance and the potentially transformative effect Eastern European poetry might have had on Anglophone lyric and literary criticism, one of the first and most obvious difficulties we encounter is which nomenclate we use to refer to Eastern Europe. The problem is not simply the term, but rather the image it evokes and the effect it continues to have on our perception of the region that is far from homogeneous yet still bears the nomenclatorial imprint of former Soviet domination. In the opening pages of her book, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe* (2013), Anne Applebaum addresses a similar difficulty. Writing about the historical relevance of the term, she explains how Western Europeans come to see the nations of communist-dominated but non-Soviet Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Eastern Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Yugoslavia) as a block, which eventually become known as 'Eastern Europe':

> In the years following Stalin's death – since 1989 in particular – the eight nations of Eastern Europe took very different paths, and it has become routine to observe that they never really had much in common in the first place. This is absolutely true: before 1945, they had never previously been unified in any way, and they have startlingly little in common now, aside from a common historical memory of communism. Yet for a time between 1945 and 1989, the eight nations of Eastern Europe did share a great deal. For a sake of simplicity, familiarity and historical accuracy I will therefore use the term 'Eastern Europe' to describe them throughout this book.[51]

Despite her partial disagreement with the term, which introduced distinct countries as a homogenous entity, Applebaum still decides in favour for the sake of familiarity and historical accuracy. This seem to be an interesting and paradoxical stance which, given the historical nature

[50] Lisbon Conference. 1990. 'The Lisbon Conference on Literature: A Round Table of Central European and Russian Writers', in *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture 9,* ed. by Ladislav Matejka (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990), pp. 75-127 (p. 119). Hereafter, I am abbreviating the Lisbon Conference transcript as LC followed by the page number.
[51] Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-56* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. xxvii.

of the work, is a justified (if still methodologically conservative) choice. Applebaum's comment about the simplicity and familiarity of largely ambiguous nomenclature invites a broader question: 'how should we refer to the region of former Soviet domination without the self-inflicted fear of repeating the gesture of colonialization?'

There are no easy answers to that question. 'Throughout the twentieth century, the region's [Eastern Europe's] boundaries both kept changing and kept being fixed', Murawska-Muthesius observes, explaining the defining impermanence of the region that 'was reaffirmed by the equally unstable lexicon of exonyms, the names given to it by non-natives'.[52] Apart from the standard term of Eastern Europe, the region was given numerous names including Central Europe, East Central Europe, Slavic Europe, Other Europe, Communist Bloc, post-communist Europe, or – in Kundera's seminal essay – even 'kidnapped west'.[53] An article which coins the term 'kidnapped west' (and is often credited for galvanizing Western critics to rethink the politics of mapping Eastern Europe) is Kundera's 1984 essay 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', featured in the *New York Review of Books* (Fig. 1). On the eve of the beginning of the end of Communist regime, his text sought to challenge Anglophone critics' perception of the East-West dichotomy and, in popular discourse of the time, became one of most widely commented essays on the topic. The original title of the essay, first published in *Le Débat* (Fig. 2) in 1983 was 'Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe Centrale'.[54] The decision to cut half of the title and translate into English only what Kundera gives his French-speaking readers as a subtitle, is telling. In the process of translation, the main – that is, 'western' – component is erased (or should we perhaps say 'kidnapped'?). One might wonder if the decision to replace the original title with a subtitle was a conscious editorial strategy. If translated in full, the English title would read: 'A Kidnapped West or the Tragedy of Central Europe'. If the version from the *New York Review of Books* skipped the first half of the original title, the cover page of *Le Débat* omitted the second. Of

[52] Murawska-Muthesius, p. 16.
[53] Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1984/04/26/the-tragedy-of-central-europe/> [accessed 17 Jun 2022].
[54] Milan Kundera, 'Un Occident kidnappé: ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale', *Le Débat*, 27 Nov 1983, pp. 3-23.

course, this brief comparison does not inform the reception of the essay and the erasure of the main title may well be read only as an ironic anecdote – especially in light of Kundera commenting on his own situation: 'practically speaking I no longer have the Czech audience, translations are everything.'[55] The publishing history of this single essay and problems related to émigré writers' adjustments for Anglophone audience is another subject.



The Tragedy of Central Europe

Milan Kundera



Fig. 1: 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' printed in *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984
Fig. 2: The cover of *Le Débat* magazine including Kundera's article 'Un Occident kidnappé', 27 November 1983

The essay at once restores and deconstructs the idea of Central Europe, which Kundera claims 'is not a state: it is a culture or a fate'. It therefore cannot be defined and determined by political frontiers, which are 'inauthentic, always imposed by invasions, conquests, and occupations'. As he puts it:

> Après 1945, la frontière entre ces deux Europes se déplaça de quelques centaines de kilomètres vers l'Ouest, et quelques nations qui s'étaient toujours considérées comme occidentales se réveillèrent un beau jour et constatèrent qu'elles se trouvaient à l'Est. Par

[55] Milan Kundera, 'Key Words, Problem Words, Words I Love', *The New York Times Book Review*, 6 March 1988, p. 1.

> suite, se sont formées après la guerre trois situations fondamentales en Europe : celle de l'Europe occidentale, celle de l'Europe orientale et celle, la plus compliquée, de cette partie de l'Europe située géographiquement au Centre, culturellement à l'Ouest et politiquement à l'Est.[56]
>
> After 1945, the border between the two Europes shifted several hundred kilometres to the west, and several nations that had always considered themselves to be Western woke up to discover that they were now in the East. As a result, three fundamental situations developed in Europe after the war: that of Western Europe, that of Eastern Europe, and, most complicated, that of the part of Europe situated geographically in the center—culturally in the West and politically in the East.[57]

According to Timothy Garton Ash, until Kundera's voice was heard by a wide readership nobody 'spoke of Central Europe in the present tense' for at least three decades.[58] The historian remarks that if Kundera's essay convinced American and British students that East Berlin, Prague, and Budapest are 'not in the same position as Kiev or Vladivostok', and that the region was more than a 'footnote to Sovietology', then we should count it as an educational success.[59] Kundera, however, is more subtle in suggesting cultural and geographical separateness from Russia and ridiculing the discourse of the 'Slavic soul' aimed to evoke a sense of Eastern unity juxtaposed with the spiritual disintegration of Western society. Garton Ash's rhetorical statement that 'nobody spoke about Central Europe in the present tense' is an obvious generalisation and Kundera's essay cannot be credited for singlehandedly restoring a concept of Central Europe as an area that is culturally distinct from Russian culture. However, to some extent, the essay succeeded in its broader cultural aim, and we may, for instance, think of the 1991 preface to *The Poetry of Survival* anthology in which Weissbort speaks about editors' 'earlier ignorance' and warns against reading the poets published in the 1960s as representing *the region* or the region's style of writing (*PS* 19). To support greater awareness of the fact that Eastern European poets come from different and distinct countries and cannot be seen just as one entity, Weissbort goes on to recommend texts like Vaclav Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* (1979) and Kundera's essay. What Weissbort fails to tell his readers, however, is how since 1968, Kundera and Havel's

[56] Kundera, 'Un Occident kidnappé', p. 3.
[57] Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe'.
[58] Timothy Garton Ash, 'Does Central Europe Exist?', *The New York Review*, 9 October 1986, pp. 45-52 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1986/10/09/does-central-europe-exist/> [accessed 9 April 2023].
[59] Ibid.

visions differed dramatically on the role they considered 'small nations' (or to repeat after Goethe 'minor' literatures) to be 'destined' to play in the global conflict of empires. Reacting to the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Kundera published an article entitled 'Czech Destiny'. The essay provoked a heated debate among Czech and Slovak intellectuals and in his polemical response Havel criticized Kundera's fatalistic attitude to 'the great mission of the small nations' and their role in resisting 'the Great Powers'. According to Havel, what the readers needed was not illusions about some historical significance of 'the small nations' sandwiched between Americans and Soviets but clarity and courage to face the uneasy political reality. In his response to Havel's response, Kundera, in turn, accused Havel of 'pure moralistic exhibitionism'.[60] None of those tensions and important disagreements on the domestic scene of Czech literature were noted by Weissbort.

The topic of the increased centrality of Central Europe and its intertwining with the problem of power distribution and imaginary geography brings to mind Herbert's poem 'MITTELEUROPA'. The poem appeared in the 1992 volume *Rovigo* and is dedicated to his German-speaking friend of Polish-Jewish descent, the Yale professor of linguistics Alexander Schenker. In German, the word *Mitteleuropa* functions as a term for Central Europe as well as the word denoting the past political ambition of the German Empire to impose cultural and economic hegemony and annexe neighbouring lands. The term has been used in various political contexts, but the one I refer to here is that of late-nineteenth-century Prussia. *Mitteleuropa*, as Jörg Brechtefeld analysed, has never been merely a geographical term; it is also a political one.[61] Herbert's poem opens with the following lines.

> Nie wiadomo czy z mięsa czy z pierza
> ku czemu to wszystko zmierza
> Mitteleuropa
> niby świeci i gaśnie

[60] Quoted in Ladislav Matejka, 'Milan Kundera's Central Europe', in *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture 9*, 127-134.
[61] See Jörg Brechtefeld, *Mitteleuropa and German Politics: 1848 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996)

zupełnie jakby z baśni
Ezopa[62]

It's neither fish nor fowl
and has no obvious goal
Central Europe
jumps out and flails
like one of the tales
of Aesop[63]

The poem reflects on the shifting and partially imaginary nature of borders, bringing together some of the issues I have touched on in this section. Its ironic tone and performative uncertainty as seen in the line 'It's neither fish nor fowl | and has no obvious goal' also somewhat ridicules the notion. In both the original and the translation, the idiomatic line '*ni z mięsa ni z pierza*' and 'neither fish nor fowl' stands for something which is not easily categorised. Beyond the clear political allusion of the title and reference to Aesop's fables (a trope of evasive speech characteristic for Eastern European writers dealing with Soviet censorship) one more issue calls our attention. Even without knowledge of Polish, the reader quickly notices the translator's decision to replace the German word *Mitteleuropa* (as it appears in the third line of the original text) with 'Central Europe'. Given that the titular word *Mitteleuropa* was presented to Polish readers in a foreign (that is German) language instead of 'Europa Centralna', why would the English translator shift (or 'over-translate'?) it to 'Central Europe'? And more importantly, what effect does this translational decision have on the projected reader? Does the translator suggest that the English reader would not recognise that the title of the poem refers to a German word? And if so, is she perhaps domesticising a term that, for the Polish reader, would remain foreign? There is no 'correct' answer to the motivations behind the translator's decision.

Over the last thirty years, the topic of dis/locating Eastern Europe has been discussed not only by Western critics fascinated with the 'cruel geography' of the region but also by émigré writers. I will take the roundtable discussion of Central European and Russian Writers during the 1988

[62] Zbigniew Herbert, *Wiersze zebrane*, ed. by Ryszard Krynicki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo 'a5', 2008), p. 604.
[63] Zbigniew Herbert, *The Collected Poems, 1956-1998*, trans. by Alissa Valles (New York: Ecco, 2007), p. 485.

Lisbon Conference on Literature as an example; the transcript of the discussion offer rich material for a discussion of dis/locations of Central or Eastern Europe. One of the major communication problems during this conference involved the relationship of language with, as Indian-born American-British novelist Salman Rushdie pointed out during the Lisbon panel, patterns of colonial power. This discussion (printed two years later in the last volume of *Cross Currents. A Yearbook of Central European Culture*) gives a sense of the conceptual challenges involved in re-drawing boundaries of an Eastern Europe on the verge of political transformation.



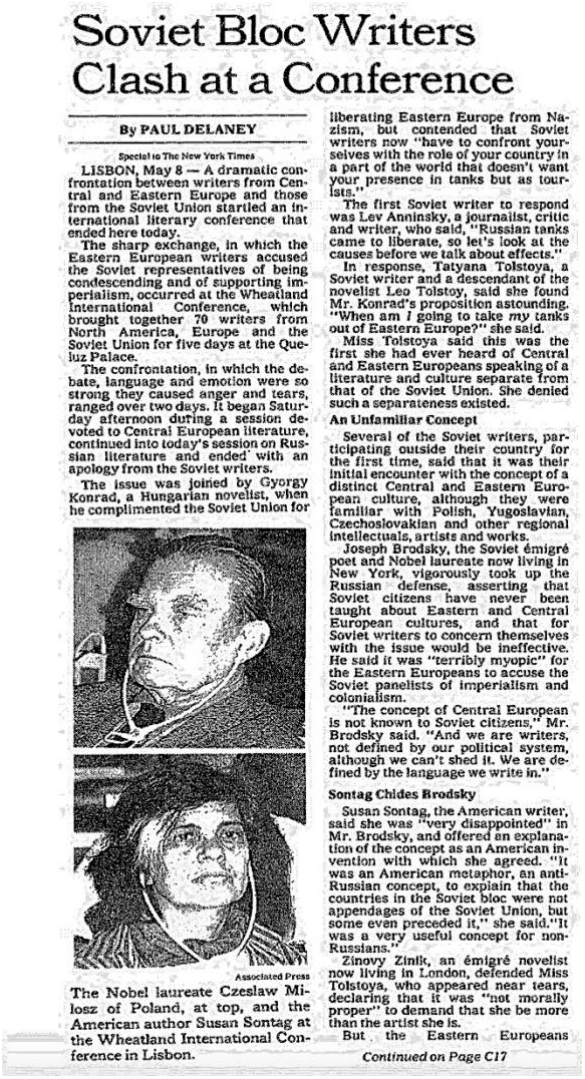
Fig. 3: Map of Eastern Europe in 1991 according to *Eastern Europe: Transformation and Revolution 1945-1991: Documents and Analyses*, ed. by Lyman Howard Legters (Lexington: Heath, 1992)

Almost as soon as after the borders were discussed by writers in 1988, they would change (Fig. 3); already by 1989 and 1990 the world saw events such as the student protests of the Velvet Revolution, resulting in the resignation of the top leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and appointment of Václav Havel for president, the Romanian Revolution of December

1989, the end of Communism in Bulgaria in early 1990, the Lithuanian declaration of independence from the Soviet Union known as Act of March 11, and finally German reunification on 3 October 1990.

Organized in 1988 by the Wheatland Foundation of New York, the roundtable of the Central European and Russian Writers Conference hoped to 'break down the walls of national chauvinism' and 'encourage more translations of literary works' (LC 75). One soon realises the idealism of this goal. The transcript of the conference has all the dramatic potential of a page-turning, literary-infused murder mystery drama. The further the conversation moves into the perilous territory of panellists (as well as the audience) pressing Russian or Soviet writers to speak about the idea of Central Europe, the more the reader wonders how this will all end. In literary scholarship, this confrontational debate attracted surprisingly little attention and still remains a largely unknown source of literary history. An exception is Dariusz Skórczewski's 2016 article which looked at some asymmetries and conflicts central to the Lisbon debate through the lens of post-colonial discourse. [64] Though it remained virtually unknown in the Eastern Europe of the time, in 1988, the debate even made it to the debate even made it to the *New York Times* (Fig. 2) with Paul Delaney's article 'Soviet Bloc Writers Clash at a Conference'.[65] It is ironic given that the subject of this disagreement was precisely the cultural separateness of Central Europe from Soviet Russia and the refusals of Central European writers to be seen as part of the 'Soviet Bloc'.

[64] Dariusz Skórczewski, 'The Location of Literature: Thoughts on the Lisbon Conference and Its Aftermath from an East-Central European Perspective', *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologi*e, 72.1 (2016), 85-99.
[65] Paul Delaney, 'Soviet Bloc Writers Clash at a Conference', *The New York Times*, 10 May 1988, pp. 13, 17.



Soviet Bloc Writers Clash at a Conference

By PAUL DELANEY

Special to The New York Times

LISBON, May 8 — A dramatic confrontation between writers from Central and Eastern Europe and those from the Soviet Union startled an international literary conference that ended here today.

The sharp exchange, in which the Eastern European writers accused the Soviet representatives of being condescending and of supporting imperialism, occurred at the Wheatland International Conference, which brought together 70 writers from North America, Europe and the Soviet Union for five days at the Queluz Palace.

The confrontation, in which the debate, language and emotion were so strong they caused anger and tears, ranged over two days. It began Saturday afternoon during a session devoted to Central European literature, continued into today's session on Russian literature and ended with an apology from the Soviet writers.

The issue was joined by Gyorgy Konrad, a Hungarian novelist, when he complimented the Soviet Union for liberating Eastern Europe from Nazism, but contended that Soviet writers now "have to confront yourselves with the role of your country in a part of the world that doesn't want your presence in tanks but as tourists."

The first Soviet writer to respond was Lev Anninsky, a journalist, critic and writer, who said, "Russian tanks came to liberate, so let's look at the causes before we talk about effects."

In response, Tatyana Tolstoya, a Soviet writer and a descendant of the novelist Leo Tolstoy, said she found Mr. Konrad's proposition astounding. "When am *I* going to take *my* tanks out of Eastern Europe?" she said.

Miss Tolstoya said this was the first she had ever heard of Central and Eastern Europeans speaking of a literature and culture separate from that of the Soviet Union. She denied such a separateness existed.

An Unfamiliar Concept

Several of the Soviet writers, participating outside their country for the first time, said that it was their initial encounter with the concept of a distinct Central and Eastern European culture, although they were familiar with Polish, Yugoslavian, Czechoslovakian and other regional intellectuals, artists and works.

Joseph Brodsky, the Soviet émigré poet and Nobel laureate now living in New York, vigorously took up the Russian defense, asserting that Soviet citizens have never been taught about Eastern and Central European cultures, and that for Soviet writers to concern themselves with the issue would be ineffective. He said it was "terribly myopic" for the Eastern Europeans to accuse the Soviet panelists of imperialism and colonialism.

"The concept of Central European is not known to Soviet citizens," Mr. Brodsky said. "And we are writers, not defined by our political system, although we can't shed it. We are defined by the language we write in."

Sontag Chides Brodsky

Susan Sontag, the American writer, said she was "very disappointed" in Mr. Brodsky, and offered an explanation of the concept as an American invention with which she agreed. "It was an American metaphor, an anti-Russian concept, to explain that the countries in the Soviet bloc were not appendages of the Soviet Union, but some even preceded it," she said."It was a very useful concept for non-Russians."

Zinovy Zinik, an émigré novelist now living in London, defended Miss Tolstoya, who appeared near tears, declaring that it was "not morally proper" to demand that she be more than the artist she is.

But the Eastern Europeans

Continued on Page C17

Associated Press

The Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz of Poland, at top, and the American author Susan Sontag at the Wheatland International Conference in Lisbon.

Fig. 2: Paul Delaney, Soviet Bloc Writers Clash at a Conference

The New York Times, 10 May 1988

The writers who spoke during the session included Jan Błoński of Poland, Péter Esterházy of Hungary, Danilo Kiš of Yugoslavia, György Konrád of Hungary, Ivan Lalić of Yugoslavia, Czesław Miłosz of Poland, Josef Škvorecký of Czechoslovakia, Adam Zagajewski of Poland, Joseph Brodsky of USSR, and Tatiana Tolstaya of USSR. It was an impressive delegation of, inevitably, almost exclusively male authors who simultaneously spoke on behalf of their national literature whilst trying to distance themselves from it. Others who contributed to the discussion and gave particularly insightful (one may even say 'outsider') comments were Roberto Calasso, Ian McEwan, Rushdie, Susan Sontag, and Derek Walcott.

The summary of the debate does not give justice to the tone and dense atmosphere of the dialogue. If the first session was devoted to the concept of Central Europe, the second attempted to discuss the diversity of the Soviet and Russian scene. The first panel opened with the chair – Michael Scammel stating: 'one of interesting aspects of this session is that one isn't even sure what to call it … indeed, one of arguments we'll have today is what we should be calling this part of our continent' (LC 75). Panellists did not seem certain either and their comments strongly evoke this core difficulty with the concept of Central Europe. Hungarian writer – Konrád, spoke of the adequacy of words such as 'cataclysm' and 'catastrophe' to the literature of Eastern Europe. He suggested that the goal of literature is to make the Western reader 'a little bit afraid' and give them 'some anxiety' (LC 79), a comment that seems eerily similar in its timbre to those made by Anglophone critics in mid-1960s introducing Eastern European poets for the first time. Another Hungarian writer, Esterházy opposed this by saying he did not feel the pathos of this duty and that literary problems are existential, not political ones (LC 81). Kiš soon joined the debate and confessed that since he has much experience with this type of conference he is, as he put it, 'a little exhausted by this kind of dialogue' as it tends to talk about 'politics and literature in the same breath' (LC 83). In calling for a more revisionist approach, Veno Taufer stated that 'in East Central European areas, the writer of the present day is fighting against false myths' (LC 84). Jan Szczepański in turn highlighted that totalitarian regimes pay very close attention to literature and asked if, in light of censorship, literature has a mission to fulfil (LC 84). Jan Błoński's contribution was more nuanced and literary focused; the critic stated: 'we are letting ourselves be influenced too much by the ideas that others have on Central Europe' (LC 88). Błoński alluded to Witold Gombrowicz's idea of *gęba* from the writer's *Ferdydurke* and warned against the ready-made Form that can 'create a face for us'. Interestingly, Błoński's comment was likely the only substantial and specific reference of this length to any literary work throughout the entire panel. 'At this conference, the word 'crisis' has been used quite frequently' – observed Lalić of Yugoslavia. He continued with apparent irony: '[...] there was so much talk about crisis that I got the uneasy feeling that crisis itself is in a serious crisis!' (LC 90). Veno Taufer contributed by pointing out that one cannot talk about Yugoslav literature as one single literature since there

cannot be literature from a non-existent language (LC 91). Another contributor, Krzysztof Michalski, reminded attendees that it was the Red Army who turned this part of Europe into what is today called Eastern Europe. Hence, making the mere fact that writers of different nations sit together at this conference in supposed representation of cultural unity is a political confection in the first place (LC 86).

Decoding potentially colonial undertones of the Lisbon conference could make a separate chapter. In 2016 article, Skórzewski realised this potential and applied ready-made tools to explain how the conference revealed the colonial mentality of semi-peripheral Central and Eastern Europe. Skórzewski gives the reader a summary of themes present at the conference, listing:

> 1) the continuous external threat affecting the political and cultural existence of East-Central European societies; 2) the physical, and metaphysical, presence of the occupying power 3) engagement in anti-communist opposition as a form of anticolonial struggle; 4) the obsession with history as an instrument protecting the remnants of national sovereignty; 5) an inferiority complex vis-ä-vis the Western opinionated center; and yet at the same time; 6) powerful bonds of attachment and identification of East-Central European writers with that center, motivating them to play the role of 'public intellectuals' and spokesmen for a 'Western' rather than 'Eastern' affiliation of their respective national culture.[66]

In reading the conference transcript, we do certainly notice the issues listed above. However, Skórzewski's compilation and selection (presented in the numerical form which undoubtedly adds 'objectivity' to this summary) is an interpretation, not a description, of its themes. Skórzewski argues that the axis of power disappeared with the withdrawal of the Red Army it only to be replaced with a new vector of challenges and the 'colonised' position of Central Europe. I cannot help but notice that the interpreter reads the transcript of the conference already knowing what he is looking for, cherry-picking examples from it show how the debate could support his intended argument. This is especially clear when he argues that asymmetries of power in Western intellectuals' comments on Eastern Europe led to the type of 'orientalization' first described by Edward Said in relation to the Middle East; this framework is a tempting proposition but the critic's rushed argument and presentation of interpretative possibility as fact is not convincing.

[66] Skórczewski, p. 89.

One of the patterns among Central or Eastern European writers was a tendency to look up to their Western colleagues. Konräd went as far as to say: '[w]e cannot be real Western writers. We cannot transplant this confused reality which defines us' (LC 80). My question here is who are 'we' and why would Hungarian writer present collective envy as a general condition for Central European writer? The status of émigrée writers and the feeling of belonging to both Central Europe and the West seemed more complicated than that. This and similar statements may point to a style of inferiority complex and a sense of provinciality, both of which could be seen through the lens of, for instance, Ewa Thompson's controversial and conservative idea of a 'surrogate hegemon'.[67] In the context of the Polish scene, Thompson uses Homi Bhabha's concepts of 'mimicry' and 'hybridity' and argues that orientalised and belittled culture mimics the patterns of its colonizers.[68] As a result, post-communist Polish elites were so used to taking orders from colonizing countries that their idealisation of the West unconsciously filled this void as they continued the search for a 'surrogate hegemon'. With the Berlin Wall in mind, we are used to thinking of 'the West' as comprising specifically non-communist countries, though that does not take into account the fact that the conference also included Soviet writers whose perception of 'the West' differed. It is easy to forget that 'the West', at least understood conceptually as a metonym for freedom, was never restrained to linguistic or national borders. Brodsky once recollected the emancipatory role Polish language played in reaching out culturally beyond the constraints of the Stalinist regime.

> In those days the bulk of Western literature, and of news about cultural events in the West, was not available in the Soviet Union. Poland was even at that point the happiest and most cheerful barrack in the Soviet camp. People there were much better informed, and they were publishing all sorts of magazines, and everything was translated into Polish. I remember I was reading Malcolm Lowry, some of Proust, some of Faulkner, and also Joyce I first read in Polish. So that was the practical consideration. We needed a window onto Europe, and the Polish language provided it.[69]

Where 'the West' is depends on your place of departure and, as Polish playwright Sławomir Mrożek once said, Poland has been 'east of the West and west of the East.' Tomas Venclova, the

[67] Ewa Thompson, 'A jednak kolonializm: Uwagi epistemologiczne', *Teksty Drugie*, 6 (2011), 289-302.
[68] See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).
[69] Anna Husarska and Joseph Brodsky, 'I Was Simply A-Soviet: A Talk with Joseph Brodsky', *New Leader*, 14 December 1987, pp. 8-14 (p. 14).

poet, translator, and professor of Slavic literature at Yale, speaks of a similar pattern of seeking freedom in through language. He recollects how from 1959 on Polish newspapers become 'a window to the West'. He hoped that the language he learnt during his student days in his native Lithuania will bring him the freedom of thought offered by encountering the Western authors in their Polish translation. It would be an error to assume that for all speakers present at conference it was only the modern *lingua franca* of the English language that could offer Central or Eastern European writers' recognition in the West.

Given that the conference on re-mapping Central and Eastern Europe took place in Portugal and was organised by an American foundation, it may be little wonder that the discussion (with writers often speaking in a learned language, not their mother tongue or – as émigrée Russians – refraining from use of their language) was somehow 'adjusted' to Anglophone listeners. Whilst the conference hoped to bridge the gaps and divisions of the Cold War East-West dichotomy, the panel ultimately rather reaffirmed patterns characteristic of a centre-periphery dynamics. The suggestive title of 'Soviet Bloc Writers Clash at a Conference' is very telling in itself. The issue of Central Europeans self-positioning their cultures in periphery to the West is not just my reading of the conference but also feedback panellists received from writers such as Calasso, with whom they had made friends over the days of the conference, Walcott gave frank and honest feedback in saying that the panellists' positions seemed to him limited to either Priests or Conquistadores. He concluded by saying that if such a myopic and divisive vision of culture came from contemporary writers, it only deepened his conviction about the provinciality of Europe and Russia. In fact, many of panellists felt the same. On the one hand, they identified (if not 'defended') the cultural region of Central Europe. On the other, they desired to be read as more than representatives of the nation. The fascinating and yet highly repetitive debate continued. Nevertheless, the real conflict began after Tatiana Tolstaya voiced her opinions. Her response to the question about Central Europe's cultural separateness from Russia reads:

> If I understand you correctly countries territorially located in the so-called central Europe see themselves as a cultural unity, but I don't necessarily see them in the same way. […] As to

> the cultural situation, as I see it, each of the countries of Central Europe has its own language – which is the most important tool for the writer – therefore, it is odd when a writer discusses the question of Central Europe is a cultural sense. Hungarian, after all, is a language not known to anybody outside Hungary. Everybody studies English, not Hungarian. Even though I don't know a word of Hungarian, I think it would be a terrible misfortune if Hungarians stopped using their language or didn't love their language and started to adopt another language. […] In the linguistic context, Central Europe is so varied, it is so hard to see it as a single entity. This is why I protest against it. I feel that the writers of Central Europe see something which is not really there. (LC 110)

This convoluted passage represented a typical avoidant strategy for the writer. Confronted with the question of Central Europe, she first talked about the internal diversity of Russian literature, moved to focus on the importance of language as, in her view, defining national literature, and then finally (hiding behind 'linguistic context) concluded Central Europe to be an imaginary space. Later in the conference, Tolstaya also claimed the question over Central Europe to be 'totally artificial' because, and here the writer drew an analogy, nobody talks about 'Western Literature'. The analogy was, of course, inadequate to a peripheral position of Central Europe versus a central position of Western Literature in 1988 augmented by the political situation, and the reason nobody talked about 'Western Literature' is precisely because nobody needed to. These (and similar) comments were soon confronted by Rushdie, who observed:

> Since much of what was being said sounded very colonialist, let me offer this: that one of great powers of colonialism is the power to describe the colonized. Now, the Russians have said over and over again, 'We don't believe in the existence of Central Europe.' The point is, if the Central Europeans believe in the existence of Central Europe, simply saying that, because you don't believe in it, you don't need to talk about I, is exactly a colonial act. (LC 118)

Rushdie's observation made an important contribution to the heated debate. The writer enunciated something that could be felt in the air yet was not verbalized. Following his comment (almost as if Central European and Russian writers needed an 'external' mediator who would give them vocabulary to discuss colonial power) one could notice a certain shift in the discussion. Conversation turned into more explicit discussions about imperialistic power and drew lines between the geo-political situation of Central and Eastern Europe and the colonial struggle for independence from Soviet Russia. The second panel in particular, which was supposed to concern the internal diversity of Russian and Soviet literature, turned into a veritable catfight about

whether it is the writer's individual responsibility to remove Russian tanks from Central Europe. Consider, for instance, an exchange between Miłosz and Brodsky:

JOSEPH BRODSKY: In the name of literature, there is no such a thing as a "Central Europe," either. Well, we've been over this ground. There is Polish literature, Czech literature, Slovak literature, Serbo-Croatian literature, Hungarian and so forth. Well, it's impossible to speak about this concept even in the name of literature. It's an oxymoron, if you will.

CZESLAW MILOSZ: *Divide et impera*. This is a colonial principle and you are for that.

JOSEPH BRODSKY: *Divide et impera*. In what way, Czeslaw? I don't understand you. Could you specify?

CZESLAW MILOSZ: The concept of Central Europe is not an invention of Kundera. You have an obsession that it is an invention of Kundera. Not at all. Central Europe, as Susan Sontag said, is an anti-Soviet concept provoked by the occupation of those countries. It's an obviously anti-Soviet concept and how can you, as Soviet writers, accept that concept? It's a very hostile concept to the Soviet Union!

JOSEPH BRODSKY: No, no, I accept it fully, but ...

CZESLAW MILOSZ: And I should add that the conscience of a writer, for instance of a Russian writer, should cope with such facts, as for instance the pact between Hitler and Stalin and the occupation of the Baltic countries of which I am a native. And I am afraid that there is a certain taboo in Russian literature and this taboo is empire.

JOSEPH BRODSKY: All I'm trying to say is that I would be all for this anti-Soviet concept were that concept effective. It's simply not terribly effective. That's one thing. The second thing: the taboo of the Russian empire. Indeed, in the Soviet press, until this day, you don't encounter this concept. Well, it's never stated that the Soviet Union is an empire.

CZESLAW MILOSZ: I would like to add that my friend, Joseph Brodsky, was one of the first, if not the first, to introduce the term "empire" in his poetry.

JOSEPH BRODSKY: Yeah, I know that.

Fig. 5: An excerpt from transcript of the Lisbon Conference

Though Eastern Europe has never been an implicit concern of theoreticians or concepts such as Spivak's voicelessness, Said's writing on orientalism, or Bhabha's hybridity, in the last few decades a record number of critics have debated and explored the possible linkage between the post-colonial and the post-Soviet.[70] Expanding the 'postcolonial' framework to include regions

[70] Among the notable publications on Eastern Europe that draw on post-colonial readings, one should mention Maria Janion's 'Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem', *Teksty Drugie*, 6 (2003), 131-49; David Chioni Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique', *PMLA*, 116.1 (2001), 111–28; Cristina Șandru, *Worlds Apart: A Postcolonial Reading of Post-1945 East-Central European Culture* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); Stanley Bill, 'Seeking the Authentic: Polish Culture and the Nature of Postcolonial Theory', *Nonsite.org*, 12 August 2014 < https://nonsite.org/seeking-the-authentic-polish-culture-and-the-nature-of-postcolonial-theory/> [accessed 6 Sep 2023]; Jan Sowa, 'Forget Postcolonialism, There's a Class War Ahead', *Nonsite.org,* 12 August 2014 < https://nonsite.org/forget-postcolonialism-theres-a-class-war-ahead/> [accessed 6 Sept 2023]; Dorota Kołodziejczyk, 'Post-Colonial Transfer to Central-and-Eastern Europe', *Teksty Drugie*, 1 (2014), 124-42.

which were not of concern to early decolonial writing is still debated. Opening her book *Imagining and Mapping Eastern Europe* (2021), art historian and critic Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius observes that there is still no consensus 'regarding the suitability of the postcolonial interpretive categories to Eastern Europe'.[71] On the one hand, the postcolonial turn in studies of Eastern Europe shed light on Western Europe-centrism and orientalising discourses surrounding the region. On the other, many publications on Eastern Europe that draw on post-colonial readings failed to offer the reader anything beyond repetitive preliminary remarks or ready-made analysis of brief or little-known case studies (which seem to be of secondary importance to the critics' focus on framework itself). As Cristina Şandru observes, using a colonial framework to talk about Eastern Europe may also relate to the problem of self-colonisation and, indeed, self-reflexivity. The Romanian scholar writes:

> There is an evident postcolonial sensibility in the way East Central Europe articulates both its recent past and its embattled present: how it places itself at the heart of the European project yet at the same time ... seeks to articulate and manifest its separateness; how it struggles to rememorize, rewrite and reinterpret its history, both more distant and more recent; and how it negotiates its continued semi-peripheral status in the European Union. The advantages of imagining Eastern Europe and the former colonial world within the same intellectual paradigm would thus be reciprocal.[72]

Since this passage shifts its focus from British imaginings of Eastern Europe to Eastern European imaginings of itself, it would require separate and longer discussion. Still, it is worth bearing in mind how Şandru touches on the ambivalent if paradoxical, nature of self-presentation, identity-building, and perhaps the strategic reluctance of some critics to integrate 'Eastern European' into a transnational or global perspective.

But what about imaginary geographies, inaccurate descriptions, and purposeful de-familiarizations characteristic of the Cold War representations of Eastern Europe? Whilst in this section I have so far focused on the discussions of Central and Eastern Europe through the lens

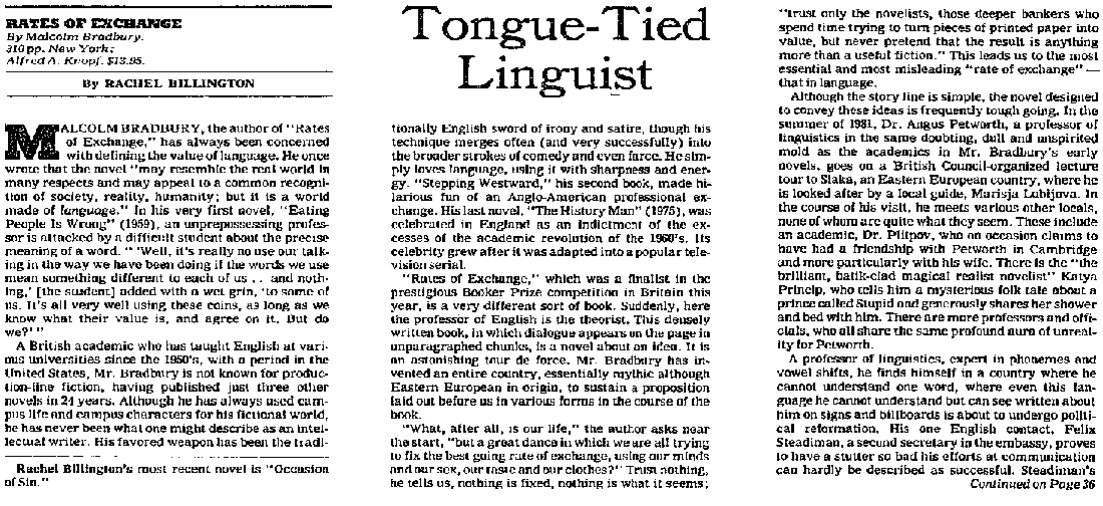
[71] Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, *Imaging and Mapping Eastern Europe. Sarmatia Europea to Post-Communist Bloc* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 4.
[72] Cristina Sandru, *Worlds Apart?: A Postcolonial Reading of Post-1945 East-Central European Culture* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), p. 281.

of 1980s debates, it is also worth exploring a notable example of Cold War representations of Eastern Europe in fiction from around the same time period. Murawska-Muthesius opens her book with a suggestively entitled introduction: 'welcome to Slaka'. And though we might well feel welcomed, the country of Slaka does not exist on any map. Slaka is 'a Cold War simulacrum of the other Europe behind the Iron Curtain'.[73] The non-existent country of Slaka comes from Malcolm Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange* (1987) novel, shortlisted for the 1983 Booker Prize. Partially satirical, the story follows Dr Angus Petworth, a middle-aged professor of linguistics, as he journeys through the Iron Curtain and meets foreign intellectuals, delivering a series of lectures organized by the British Council about the transformation of English as a medium of international communication.[74] Drawing on Cold War fascination with the otherness of the 'Other Europe', Bradbury's book dwells on issues such as linguistic crisis, translatability, and the position of an intellectual living 'under pressure'. In a 1989 interview, the author recalled how through the novel he tried to look 'at the images both of Englishness and of Eastern Europe that existed in contemporary fiction'.[75] Of course, he was not alone. One might, for instance, think of Christopher Reid's *Katerina Brac* (1985), a collection of pseudo-translations of the eponymous writer from an unidentified Eastern European country. Through the collection of this foreignized, fictional lyric, Reid experiments with what translation studies academic Kasia Szymańska calls 'critical autoexoticism'.[76]

Bradbury's travesty – especially the follow-up publication of a tourist guide for visiting the imaginary country, *Why come to Slaka?* (1986) – makes use of Cold War era clichés. The novelist acknowledges what Larry Wolff described as 'the employment of nonsense in the rendering of Eastern Europe'. From the late 1950s it constituted 'one of [the] ways of dealing with its disorienting geography and history, as well as with the incomprehensibility of its languages

[73] Murawska-Muthesius, p. 1.
[74] See Malcolm Bradbury, *Rates of Exchange* (London: Arena, 1987).
[75] István D. Rácz and Malcolm Bradbury, 'A Writer is Sceptical, Questioning, Dialogic (An Interview with Malcolm Bradbury)', *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok*, 21 (1990), 99-102 (p. 102).
[76] Kasia Szymanska, 'Can Mirrors Be Said to Have Memories? A Polish Katerina Brac Looks Back at Her English Reflection', *PMLA*, 132.2 (2017), 427–33.

roundly perceived as hilarious'.[77] In 1983, Bradbury's novel was warmly received, but prized more for its original dealing with the matter of language than for the plot, which failed to surprise the critics. *The New York Times* review by Rachel Billington appreciated the sharpness and energy of Bradbury's prose (Fig. 6). It drew attention to the author's fascination with language, commenting that 'a professor of linguistics, expert in phonemes and vowel shifts, […] finds himself in a country, where even this language he cannot understand but can see written about him on signs and billboards is about to undergo political reformation'.[78] Another review published in *The Spectator* by Francis King highlighted how what is best in this novel 'is not the plot, which is essentially thin, nor the characters, who are essentially stereotypes derived from other Iron Curtain novels, but the exhilarating vigour of its author's intellect and style'.[79] Both commentaries suggest that in the early 1980s the motif of exotic 'Eastern Europeanness' was not altogether novel.



RATES OF EXCHANGE
By Malcolm Bradbury.
310 pp. New York:
Alfred A. Knopf. $13.95.

By RACHEL BILLINGTON

Tongue-Tied Linguist

MALCOLM BRADBURY, the author of "Rates of Exchange," has always been concerned with defining the value of language. He once wrote that the novel "may resemble the real world in many respects and may appeal to a common recognition of society, reality, humanity; but it is a world made of *language*." In his very first novel, "Eating People Is Wrong" (1959), an unprepossessing professor is attacked by a difficult student about the precise meaning of a word. " 'Well, it's really no use our talking in the way we have been doing if the words we use mean something different to each of us . . and nothing,' [the student] added with a wet grin, 'to some of us. It's all very well using these coins, as long as we know what their value is, and agree on it. But do we?' "

A British academic who has taught English at various universities since the 1950's, with a period in the United States, Mr. Bradbury is not known for production-line fiction, having published just three other novels in 24 years. Although he has always used campus life and campus characters for his fictional world, he has never been what one might describe as an intellectual writer. His favored weapon has been the traditionally English sword of irony and satire, though his technique merges often (and very successfully) into the broader strokes of comedy and even farce. He simply loves language, using it with sharpness and energy. "Stepping Westward," his second book, made hilarious fun of an Anglo-American professional exchange. His last novel, "The History Man" (1975), was celebrated in England as an indictment of the excesses of the academic revolution of the 1960's. Its celebrity grew after it was adapted into a popular television serial.

"Rates of Exchange," which was a finalist in the prestigious Booker Prize competition in Britain this year, is a very different sort of book. Suddenly, here the professor of English is the theorist. This densely written book, in which dialogue appears on the page in unparagraphed chunks, is a novel about an idea. It is an astonishing tour de force. Mr. Bradbury has invented an entire country, essentially mythic although Eastern European in origin, to sustain a proposition laid out before us in various forms in the course of the book.

"What, after all, is our life," the author asks near the start, "but a great dance in which we are all trying to fix the best going rate of exchange, using our minds and our sex, our taste and our clothes?" Trust nothing, he tells us, nothing is fixed, nothing is what it seems; "trust only the novelists, those deeper bankers who spend time trying to turn pieces of printed paper into value, but never pretend that the result is anything more than a useful fiction." This leads us to the most essential and most misleading "rate of exchange" — that in language.

Although the story line is simple, the novel designed to convey these ideas is frequently tough going. In the summer of 1981, Dr. Angus Petworth, a professor of linguistics in the same doubting, dull and unspirited mold as the academics in Mr. Bradbury's early novels, goes on a British Council-organized lecture tour to Slaka, an Eastern European country, where he is looked after by a local guide, Marisja Lubljova. In the course of his visit, he meets various other locals, none of whom are quite what they seem. These include an academic, Dr. Plitpov, who on occasion claims to have had a friendship with Petworth in Cambridge and more particularly with his wife. There is the "the brilliant, batik-clad magical realist novelist" Katya Princip, who tells him a mysterious folk tale about a prince called Stupid and generously shares her shower and bed with him. There are more professors and officials, who all share the same profound aura of unreality for Petworth.

A professor of linguistics, expert in phonemes and vowel shifts, he finds himself in a country where he cannot understand one word, where even this language he cannot understand but can see written about him on signs and billboards is about to undergo political reformation. His one English contact, Felix Steadiman, a second secretary in the embassy, proves to have a stutter so bad his efforts at communication can hardly be described as successful. Steadiman's

Continued on Page 36

Rachel Billington's most recent novel is "Occasion of Sin."

Fig 6: Rachel Billington's review 'Tongue-Tied Linguist: Review', *The New York Times*, 20 Nov 1983

In 1989, when asked whether the images of Englishness and Eastern Europe are still stereotypes, Bradbury responded in detail:

> I think it has changed somewhat. There have been so many good programmes on television shot in Eastern Europe in recent years that I think they have changed people's attitude. But

[77] Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), pp. 106-11.
[78] Rachel Billington 'Tongue-Tied Linguist', *The New York Times*, 20 Nov 1983, p. 36.
[79] Francis King, 'Rates of Exchange Malcolm Bradbury', *The Spectator*, 9 April 1983, p. 26.

> at one time Eastern Europe was just one block. There was no difference in the British mind, I think, between Poland and Czechoslovakia, or Hungary and Bulgaria; they were the same. They were identical in political life, for the ordinary Englishman all sense of Eastern European history was lost. It just became a flat stereotypic image laid right across the great land from the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea and the Baltic Sea.[80]

This debate appears exactly around the time of the Kundera article and the Lisbon Conference, demonstrating that this dialogue on re-mapping the boundaries of Eastern Europe was very much present and prescient in this moment, in fiction and metaphor as well as in reality. Another pertinent question seems to be what must have happened on the domestic scene of Anglophone criticism that drew the authors' attention to the troubled lands of Eastern Europe. Western authors' fascination with the 'cruel geography' of the region of Eastern Europe may be seen in the matrix of the situation on Western domestic front; imperialistic resentments aggravated by the embarrassment of the Suez Crisis (1956), Britain's minimal contribution to the development of nuclear technologies and a tense relationship with the US. With apparent irony, Donald Davie comments on the decline in his lines from 'From the New World': 'British is what we are | Once an imperial nation', adding with bitterness, 'Our hands are clean now, empty, | Cause for congratulation'.[81] The reference to Pilate's gesture of washing his hands from moral responsibility is obvious, yet it is a reversed allusion. Here, the ultimate line expresses an ironic congratulation. The colonial mindset also left its mark and, as we shall see in later parts of this thesis, 1960s poetry evinces the struggle of how to deal with evil that has happened so close and can be neither mentally nor symbolically contained. Mike Phillips observes how 'there are generic similarities between the period when former British colonies achieved independence and the successful struggle to break free of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe'.[82] In some interpretations, this displacement and lack of access to the language embodies Anglophone, and especially English, writers with the potential to represent the darkness that was previously sent away to former colonies – symbolized, perhaps, by the famous words of Kurtz ending Joseph Conrad's *Heart of*

[80] 'A Writer is Sceptical, Questioning, Dialogic', p. 102.
[81] Davie, *Collected Poems*, p. 147.
[82] Mike Phillips, 'Narratives of Desire. A Writer's Statement', in *Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture*, ed. by Barbara Korte, Eva Ulrike Pirker, and Sissy Helff (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 43-7.

Darkness (1899): 'The horror! The horror!'[83] It was, as Nigel Aldreman summarises, a 'crisis' of 'Englishness' that amounted to 'the loss of England, or rather the loss of the British Empire, which required England to define itself in its own terms when previously it could define "Englishness" in opposition to something else.'[84] In the introduction to *The New Poetry* anthology Alvarez writes:

> Once upon a time, the English could safely believe that Evil was something that happened on the Continent, or farther off, in the Empire where soldiers were paid to take care of it. To believe this now requires at best extraordinary single-mindedness, at worst stupidity. (*NP* 26-27)

Read in the context of the whole introduction, this passage speaks of a certain isolationism represented by Alvarez's projection of 'the English' who 'once upon a time' could 'safely' believe that the Evil exists far away. However, what Alvarez describes as 'the forces of disintegration' ('two world wars, […] concentration camps, […] genocide, and the threat of nuclear disaster' [*NP* 26]) put this imperial mindset into question.

Even a quick glance at titles released in the early 1960s gives a hint of a general ambience of cultural malaise and post-imperial resentment. In *The Stagnant Society* (1961), Michael Shanks used the term a 'British disease'; Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain* (1962) spoke of 'a loss of dynamic and purpose, and a general bewilderment' while Penguin initiated a publishing series suggestively entitled, *What's Wrong with Britain?* Murawska-Muthesius discusses this issue in the first chapter of her book on mapping Eastern Europe, finding a fascinating and surprisingly straightforward illustration of this analogy in 1958 satirical *Punch* (Fig. 7). Published at the peak of the Cold War and soon after the suppression of Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Leslie Illingworth's cartoon depicts infantilized Harold Macmillan (representing the Commonwealth) and Nikita Khrushchev (representing Communist Block) holding balloons labelled for 'colonized' countries. In Illingworth's bitter satire, Macmillan addresses Khrushchev with the words 'Now

[83] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Open Road Media, 2014), p. 107.
[84] See Nigel Alderman, 'The life with a hole in it: Philip Larkin and the Condition of England', *Textual Practice*, 8.2 (1994), 279-301.

Let One of Yours Go – I Dare You!'. The cartoon opposes Britain's decolonialisation politics to Russia's 'colonial' oppression, but not only that, it also – as Murawska-Muthesius points out – speaks of Western representations of such dichotomies. The art critic observes '[w]hile the preferred reading of the cartoon reduces communism to colonialism, the oppositional reading prompts an inquiry into the neo-colonial regimes of truth disseminated by the western media'.[85]

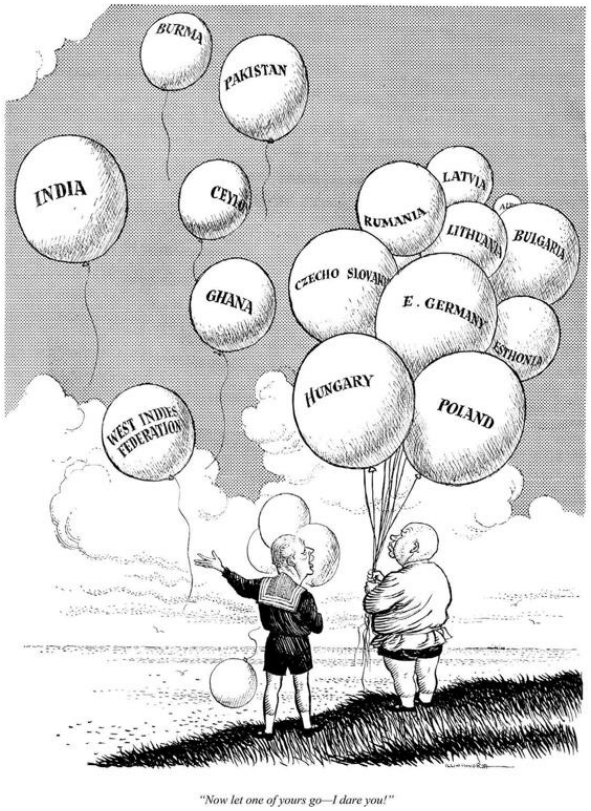


Fig. 7: Leslie G. Illingworth, 'Now Let One of Yours Go – I Dare You!', *Punch*, 30 April 1958.

In the arena of literary criticism, one of the more important and compelling arguments on intertwining of imperialism and late modernist form is given by Jed Esty who identifies a 'kind of generational fatigue' that contributed to a creative decline and marginalisation of post-1940 poetry. In *A Shrinking Island* (2004) he analyses the major tradition captured in a moment of becoming minor when the most influential English modernists 'seemed to enter into dogmatic middle age (Eliot, Pound, Lewis) or to expire (Yeats, Joyce, Woolf) with remarkable consistency

[85] Murawska-Muthesius, p. 4.

sometime around 1940'.[86] Overlapping topics of geopolitics, situatedness and self-reflexivity bring to mind Virginia Woolf's last novel *Between the Acts* (1941). Written on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War, the novel depicts life in a small English village as it prepares to stage a play celebrating British history. The seemingly idyllic scenery of the English countryside becomes a microcosm for reflection on a split between idealised history and self-reflection. This is because, at the end of the fictional play, the cast shocks the audience by holding and turning mirrors onto them. It is the reflection of the audience that turns into the most terrifying realisation; the mirror bearers described as 'malicious; observant; expectant; expository'.[87] The context of the diminishing importance of British literature on the international literary scene will return in much greater detail in my second chapter. For now, it is important to remember that in the case of Eastern Europe, nomenclature and its relationship with postcolonial criticism is a problematic methodological (and partially meta-critical) matter. It is not only a matter of reflection but, to return to Woolf's image, the question of who is holding the mirror, what they wish to expose, and why. Bearing in mind this open-ended question, I now move to explore the earliest reception of Eastern Europe, discussed in the context of Alvarez's criticism.

'Beyond all this fiddle': first encounters, transmission, and extremist poetry

In the mid-1960s the works of Eastern European poets resonated with their English-speaking audience. They provoked debates, encouraged international collaborations, gave birth to new publishing series, and energized the newly established international poetry festival scene. One of these visionary initiatives was Alvarez's BBC Third Programme broadcasts, produced by Christopher Holme. The series of recordings on Eastern Europe, later published as *Under Pressure* (1965), ran between 1961 and 1964 and many poets, listeners, and intellectuals would later recall how their first contact with the cultural landscape of that region was mediated through

[86] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), p. 4.
[87] Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 115.

Alvarez's reportage. Based on first-hand experience of visiting the Eastern Bloc in a time of cultural transformation (indeed, the very scenario of Bradbury's creation of Slaka), the series can be regarded as one of the first attempts to understand the poetry of each country in its cultural and political context. Equipped with a reel-to-reel tape recorder, from early spring 1961 Alvarez travelled through Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to ask local artists about the pressures they felt themselves to be under. In the preface to *Under Pressure*, Alvarez confesses that he held no illusions that he analysed 'any of this in depth' (*UP* 13). Instead, his main intention was 'to give an outsider's impression of what the conditions are like for the artist in communist countries, and to do so with as little prejudice as possible' (*UP* 13). Though Alvarez made an admirable effort in reaching out to artists, his criteria for selection and inclusion seemed either reliant on either a subjective search for 'rough' poetic idiom or following the recommendations of émigré writers Alvarez knew before he travelled to Eastern Europe. The first broadcast focused on Poland, the second on Hungary, the third on Czechoslovakia, while the final broadcast focused on Yugoslavia. The difficulty, writes Alvarez, 'was to give a sense of each country and its specialness, and to express personal, often idiosyncratic ideas about it largely through the mouths of other people' (*UP* 12).

The BBC's Audience Research Reports offers insight into the early reception of these broadcasts. One common theme in this feedback was educational value, as listeners continued to express appreciation for new insights into cultures they knew, as one listener put it, 'frighteningly little about'.[88] Following the second broadcast on Hungary from July 1962, one listener admitted: 'on listening to Mr. Alvarez I felt that I knew so little about Hungary that he might have been talking about a country on the moon'.[89] Another individual wrote: 'it was not at all the picture I had imagined of present-day Budapest – as Alvarez presented it, it was at once more reassuring and more depressing […] Alvarez's commentary was exemplary in tone and content and he drew much splendidly pungent and articulate comment from his contributors'.[90] Indeed, at once

[88] BBC Audience Research Report, British Library, MS 88509.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

reassuring and depressing, Alvarez's experience provided him with inspiration in formulating his later views on the condition of the British literary scene. This need to 'go beyond' (and perhaps look back on the centre from the outside) makes one wonder to what extent his experience of Eastern Europe informed the language of his criticism, which proved so influential for poets of the mid-1960s, as well as readers.

The critic reflects on the months he spent immersing himself in the intellectual life of Eastern Europe by alluding to a poem by Marianne Moore, saying: 'it turned out there was a poetic world elsewhere what was truly beyond all this fiddle, but I had to go behind the Iron Curtain to find it'.[91] This excerpt comes from the essay 'Beyond all this fiddle', first published in March 1967 and taking over four pages of the *Times Literary Supplement*, including the cover. Earlier drafts of this article reveal that its title was initially followed by the subtitle 'whatever happened to modernism', but in galley proofs the subtitle is crossed out, in all likelihood by the editors of *TLS*.[92] Whilst this subtitle did not ultimately make its way to the print, its use in this context by Alvarez underlines that the connection between changes of idiom in the British poetry of the 1960s, the re-evaluation of legacy of modernists, and poetry from Eastern Europe is stronger than we might think. The essay focuses on 'extremist art' and 'extremist style', and though the context of this essay is more precise than the 'Beyond the Gentility Principle' introduction it discusses similar problems. In 1967 Alvarez argued that 'a major test of originality is not a question of form but of psychic exploration, not of artifact but of the artist's identity'.[93]

So – to repeat Alvarez's deleted subtitle – 'what happened to modernism', can the' psychic exploration' add seriousness to contemporary poetry, and what does it all have to do with Anglophone critics' interest in Eastern Europe?' As Esty proposed, from around the mid-1940s we can see a gradual decline in the central position of British literature. If we were to look for the most representative example of this phenomenon of marginalization, the change we can observe

[91] Alvarez, *Where Did It All Go Right?* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1999), p. 212.
[92] Alvarez Papers. British Library, MS 88499.
[93] Alvarez, *Beyond All This Fiddle: Essays 1955–1967* (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 5-6.

in Eliot's poetics comes to mind. It is a shift from the 1920s ambition to give justice to the turbulences and totality of human experience represented by his early poems and *The Waste Land,* toward the particularity and search for harmony in *Four Quartets*. This trajectory from disentangled fragments 'shored against my ruins' to metaphysical certainty symbolised by the image of a rose garden from 'Burnt Norton' disappointed not just some Anglophone critics but also poets such as Tadeusz Różewicz or Miłosz. In one of his poems, Różewicz declares affinity with the modernist saying: 'both of us journeyed | through The Waste Land' [obaj wędrowaliśmy | przez Ziemię jałową']. And yet Eliot's late works failed the Polish poet with their painful separateness from the reality of post-war Europe. Years later, in the poem 'Szkoda' ['Too bad] Różewicz would juxtapose the figure of Pound described as a 'lunatic genius | and a martyr' with Eliot who 'wrote lovely poems about cats' and 'won a Nobel Prize for it'[94] Somewhat similar questions about ethics of participation versus withdrawal were raised in the Anglophone scene by George Steiner. In his 1971 book *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture* Steiner criticised Eliot's essays from his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). The critic asked:

> How, only three years after the event [Holocaust], after the publication to the world of facts and pictures that have, surely, altered our sense of the limits of human behaviour, was it possible to write a book on culture and say nothing? How was it possible to detail and plead for a Christian order when the Holocaust had put in question the very nature of Christianity and its role in European history?[95]

Steiner's questions point to the responsibility of the poet to bear witness to their century. In 1971, in the context of a record number of publications of Holocaust testimonial fiction which were read in an environment of Cold War anxieties and the threat of nuclear disaster, the question was particularly salient. It can be read not just as an accusation against Eliot, but as provoking a larger debate about the direction of Anglophone literature and, according to Steiner at least, its aversion to engaging in the post-war reality. However, debates about the 'role' of the poets are always –

[94] Tadeusz Różewicz, *Sobbing superpower: Selected poems of Tadeusz Różewicz,* transl. by Joanna Trzeciak (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 258.
[95] George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1971), p. 34.

as reading dispatches from the Lisbon conference has already shown – a slippery slope, especially when used by writers to strengthen an argument or back up a polemical vision. It often reduces creativity to political responsibility that, on the wave of affective identifications is expected by certain audiences in certain times. This topic will return in further parts of this thesis, first in my discussion of Plath's early engagement with the collective trauma of the Holocaust and second, in my discussion of a disagreement between Weissbort and Davie. For now, let us focus on Alvarez's early engagement with Eastern Europe and its plausible links with the 'Beyond the Gentility Principle' essay.

If Alvarez is largely responsible for instigating interest in Eastern Europe, he was certainly not alone. To sketch the background for different types of cultural transmission it is worth quoting at length from a summary by Weissbort. In his 1991 *The Poetry of Survival* anthology, he looks back to the early engagement with Eastern Europe and its ambitions to expand the literary market of the mid-1960s:

> A thoughtful general introduction is provided by A. Alvarez in his 1965 Penguin volume *Under Pressure*, based on a series of feature broadcasts on the BBC Third Programme between 1961 and 1964, in which a number of East European intellectuals were interviewed. This together with the *Penguin Modern European Poets* series edited by Alvarez, which first made the works of significant East European poets available to us in book form, represented a pioneering effort, just as the more recent American Penguin series *Writers from the Other Europe* edited by Philip Roth, focuses exclusively, for the first time, on fiction writers from the region. Edwin Morgan, a notable translator of Russian and Hungarian poetry, in his Open University course East European Poets […], supplies a sensible and succinct account of the work of Zbigniew Herbert, Miroslav Holub and Vasco Popa. With the limited easing of the so-called Thaw that followed Stalin's death in 1953, cultural exchange between Eastern Europe and the West increased, permitting contacts between writers on both sides. Among other manifestations of this trend in England was the establishment in 1967 of Poetry International, a series of annual readings under the auspices of the Poetry Book Society, which gave the public its first opportunity to hear some of these remarkable poets in person. The dialogue continues. In recent years, the growing number of emigres has made us increasingly aware of an evolving reality of which, only a short while ago, we were more or less ignorant. (*PS* 19)

This evaluation of the initiatives that made poetry from Eastern Europe visible on the British literary scene is impressive. The copious examples from contemporary publications, coupled with the general atmosphere of enthusiasm and genuine belief in poetry's ability to mediate between

divided halves of Europe, demonstrate that, indeed, the effort to 'go beyond …' was being made around that time. Also Stevenson, discussing the challenges faced by 1960s poetry, particularly the changing demands of audiences, offers a short summary of the appearance of translation in 1960s England, mis-dating the launch of *MPT* by two years:

> […] That first issue of *The Review* in 1962, in which Alvarez and Davie's debate appeared, opened with a set of translations from Zbigniew Herbert. The following year [sic!], Daniel Weissbort and Ted Hughes established a new journal of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and Penguin initiated a Modern European Poets series to match their promotion of contemporary writers in English. Hughes also organized a 'Poetry International 1967' festival on a scale matching the Albert Hall event two years previously.[96]

Stevenson puts emphasis on events and initiatives that were likely to engage a larger audience. Reading retrospective commentaries and academic criticism we get the sense of overall enthusiasm. The publishing houses were busy commissioning new translations (such as Penguin Modern European Poets series); the Arts Council of Great Britain, established in 1946 supported the launch of *MPT*; the first International Poetry Festival took place in London in 1967, filling the whole auditorium and broadcast live by BBC. The popularity of the festival surpassed the expectations of the organizers. It matched the popularity of International Poetry Incarnation that happened in June 1965 and attracted an audience of seven thousand. According to Elaine Feinstein's biography of Hughes, the 1967 festival enjoyed similar popularity and there were long queues for return tickets. She says that though much has been written about the 1960s, 'the sudden and widespread love of poetry read aloud, which lasted for about a decade, has not been much analysed'.[97] However, archival materials on those early festivals are limited to brochures and programmes, our knowledge about them often based on subjective accounts of poets who either organised or participated in them, which potentially obscures important aspects of this pivotal literary history. To enable a clearer orientation amid the projects undertaken in the decade following 1960, selected (but by no means all) publications and initiatives are presented below (Table 1):

[96] Stevenson, pp. 253-4.
[97] Elaine Feinstein, *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet* (New York: Norton, 2003), p. 159.

DATE	ANTHOLOGY / BROADCAST / MAGAZINE / EVENT	EDITOR / PRODUCER
1958-1959	Martha Gellhorn' articles on Eastern Europe published in *Collier* and *The Atlantic Monthly.* Later collected in *The View from the Ground* and *The Face of War*	Martha Gellhorn
1960	*Five Centuries of Polish Poetry: 1450-1950* published by Secker & and Warburg	Jerzy Peterkiewic Burns Singer
1960	First International Poetry Incarnation at Royal Albert Hall	Barbara Rubin
1961-1964	BBC Third Programme podcasts on Eastern Europe	Al Alvarez Christopher Holme
1962	First issue of *The Review* opening with Zbigniew Herbert poems and featuring debate between Alvarez and Davie about the directions of modern poetry	Ian Hamilton
1962	*The New Poetry* published by Penguin	Al Alvarez
1963	Radio broadcast produced by George MacBeth for BBC Third Programme	George MacBeth Al Alvarez Ted Hughes
1963	*A Group anthology* published by Oxford University Press	Edward Lucie-Smith Philip Hobsbaum
1965	*Under Pressure* based on BBC Third Programme podcasts on Eastern Europe produced by Christopher Holme is printed by Penguin	Al Alvarez
1965	The first issue of the *Modern Poetry in Translation* magazine	Ted Hughes Daniel Weissbort
1965	*Postwar Polish Poetry Anthology* published by University of California Press, printed in the USA and upon previous correspondence sent to Hughes by Miłosz	Czesław Miłosz
1966	*The New Poetry*. Revised version of 1962 anthology published by Penguin	Al Alvarez
1967	First Poetry International Festival in London	Ted Hughes
1967	'Beyond All This Fiddle' essay, surveying the state of British and American poetry is published in the *Times Literary Supplement*	Al Alvarez
1968	*Zbigniew Herbert: Selected poems*. Translated by Czesław Milosz and Peter Dale Scott. Introduced by Al Alvarez	Penguin Modern European Poets

1969	*The History of Polish Literature* published by The Macmillan Company	Czesław Miłosz
1969	*Children of Albion: Poets of the Underground Britain* published by Penguin	Michael Horovitz
1969	*The Journals of Pierre Menard*	Anthony Rudof
1969	*New Writing in Czechoslovakia* anthology published by Penguin	George Theiner
1969	*Vasco Popa: Selected Poems* translated by Anne Pennington. Introduced by Ted Hughes	Penguin Modern European Poets
1970	*Post-Wat Polish Poetry* edited and translated by Czesław Miłosz	Penguin Modern European Poets
1970	Radio broadcast 'While We're On the Subject: Poetry and Verse' produced by Leslie Megahey for BBC Third Programme	John Tusa asks Peter Porter, Al Alvarez, Patrick Garland
1970	Second Poetry International Festival in London	Ted Hughes
1970	*British Poetry since 1945* with an introduction by Edward Lucie-Smith	Penguin
1970	*Selected Poems*: Sándor Weöres and Ferenc Juhász translated and introduced by Edwin Morgan and David Wevill	Penguin Modern European Poets
1970	*Poem into Poem: Poetry in Modern Verse Translation* edited by George Steiner	Penguin
1976-1983	'Writers from the Other Europe' American Penguin series Seventeen positions of both fiction and non-fiction by following authors: Ludvík Vaculík, Witold Gombrowicz, Milan Kundera, George Konrád, Tadeusz Konwicki, Danilo Kiš, Jerzy Andrzewjewski, Bohumil Hrabal, Tadeusz Borowski, Bruno Schulz, and Géza Csáth	Philip Roth
1971	*Three Czech Poets (Vitězlau Nezval, Antonin Bartušek, Josef Hanzlik pu*	Ewald Osers, George Theiner
1971	*Yehuda Amichai: Selected Poems* translated by Ted Hughes, introduced by Michael Hamburger	Penguin Modern European Poets

Table 1: Selected initiatives related to cultural exchange between the Eastern Europe and Anglophone literary worlds between 1958 and 1971.

Little research has been done into the role individuals played in establishing this type of cultural exchange. The next chapter will look at those informal affiliations and moments when the literary

history was being written 'behind the scenes' of events, drinks, and informal meetings in more detail. One of the limitations of this approach is that it reduces the complex chain of affiliations and trends of the time to the characteristic tastes of the same critics, who all happened to be among the same circle of friends and tended to reference each other. One explanation for such a dynamic would be the change of public and how reading of poetry, as Alvarez writes in 1958, 'is now almost wholly professional'. He continued by saying that the tiny proportion of people reading literary reviews was made up of 'first, the poets immediately involved and then friends and relations; second, those who hope, sooner or later, to be involved – that is, other poets; and third, specialists whose business is with English literature – that is critics and teachers'.[98] Between 1955 and 1957, Alvarez attempted to change this dynamic by sending a wave of letters and manifestos to various magazines, leading newspapers, and foundations. In his characteristically zealous tone, the critic tried to convince editors that 'although there are still a few literary periodicals in London, there is no properly responsible, hard-hitting critical review', adding, 'obviously, there is always a need for this kind of magazine – purely for the health and vitality of literature'.[99] Reading those words from a distance gives two different impressions. First, that Alvarez hoped for a greater inclusivity and montage of critical voices which would debate and challenge each other. Second, the critic perhaps wished to establish a magazine that would best fit his own reviews and his own vision of what 'properly responsible, hard-hitting' criticism should be. The number of initiatives in the decade following the Thaw of 1956, force one to be selective in detailed discussion. Hence I would like to return in much more detail to Alvarez's broadcast and argue that the experience of visiting Eastern Europe had a strong impact on what would later become his essay, 'Beyond the Gentility Principle'.

In 1961, the journey Alvarez made as a correspondent for the BBC Third Programme was not common. It would not be common even years later, in the early 1980s, when the academic, translator, and critic Michael Parker first went to Poland. When asked what attracted him to this

[98] BBC Audience Research Report, British Library, MS 88499.
[99] Ibid.

region, he recalled how before the transformation making such a journey was not an obvious choice for a young graduate. This element of the unknown gave his trip a spark of adventure.[100] For Alvarez years earlier, the business trip commissioned by the BBC had another emotional undertone, which likely (and understandably) coloured his interpretation of foreign poetry through the lens of his emotional state. As Andrzej Franaszek summarises in his biography of Herbert, in 1960, Alvarez went through a mental breakdown, suicide attempt, and divorce. Looking for an occupation that would keep him busy, provide a sense of direction or mission, and enable him to free himself from personal demons, he suggested the series of broadcasts to the BBC and made his way to countries beyond the Iron Curtain.[101] Not really knowing what to expect, Alvarez was astounded by the intensity of the underground cultural life of Eastern Europe. Therefore, the prevailing narrative of *Under Pressure* was that of intellectual resistance and the liberating liveliness of thought. Compared to his later writing on Eastern Europe, the highly selective broadcasts were still surprisingly succinct and concise. We may say that, in the early 1960s, Alvarez's ignorance 'allowed' for a fresh look at distinct cultures, visions, and modes of writing. These were empathetically represented, rather than appropriated for Alvarez's battle against the detrimental pleasantness of 1960s England, on display in his combative introduction to 1962 and 1966 anthology. In his later collection of essays, Alvarez looked back on his early recordings about Eastern Europe and how the interactive medium of a radio broadcast shaped its later, written form:

> […] Out of this mass of material I put together seven radio features, and features are in no way the same as talks. They are not one person saying his say but a medley of voices, all of them different – different accents, different intensities, different priorities – arranged on a tape so that they seem to be arguing together, constantly interrupting and contradicting each other. And because I organized the material in such a way that they also seemed to be arguing with me, my own running commentary had to be similarly offhand. If I was going to join in – which I emphatically did – I couldn't lay down the law or pronounce *ex cathedra*, like a nervous lecturer reading from a text. I had to sound as casual and involved as everyone else. And that continual obligation to keep the tone easy stayed with me when I turned the broadcast into a book.[102]

[100] I am referring to the discussion held during Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation Discussion Group about co-translating Polish Literature. The event hosted Aleksandra Parker and Michael Parker and happened on 6 June 2022.
[101] Andrzej Franaszek, *Pan Cogito*, *Herbert, Biografia*. Tom 2 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2018), p. 23.
[102] Alvarez, *The Writer's Voice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 28.

The role of the critic is to arrange the space in a way that allows poets whose voices have been silenced to come forward and speak for themselves. This empathy was appreciated and listeners prized the broadcast for treating its subject with 'immediacy not possible in any other way'.[103] It was for good reason that in the preface to the later, printed version of *Under Pressure* Alvarez described the hybrid genre of his book as 'kind of intellectual travelogue' (*UP* 11). The book's blurb hoped to capture the polyphony and vibrancy of Alvarez's narrative, advertising it as a 'novel attempt to give an outsider's impression of what conditions are in fact like for the artists and intellectuals in Communist countries' (Fig. 8). This, however, only constitutes about half of Alvarez's book as *Under Pressure* is divided into two parts, the first on Eastern Europe and the second on the USA. In light of my earlier discussions of dis/locating Eastern Europe, one cannot help but notice the immediate Cold War association, and seeing such a title anticipates juxtapositions between free 'West' and Eastern Europe suffering under the titular pressure.

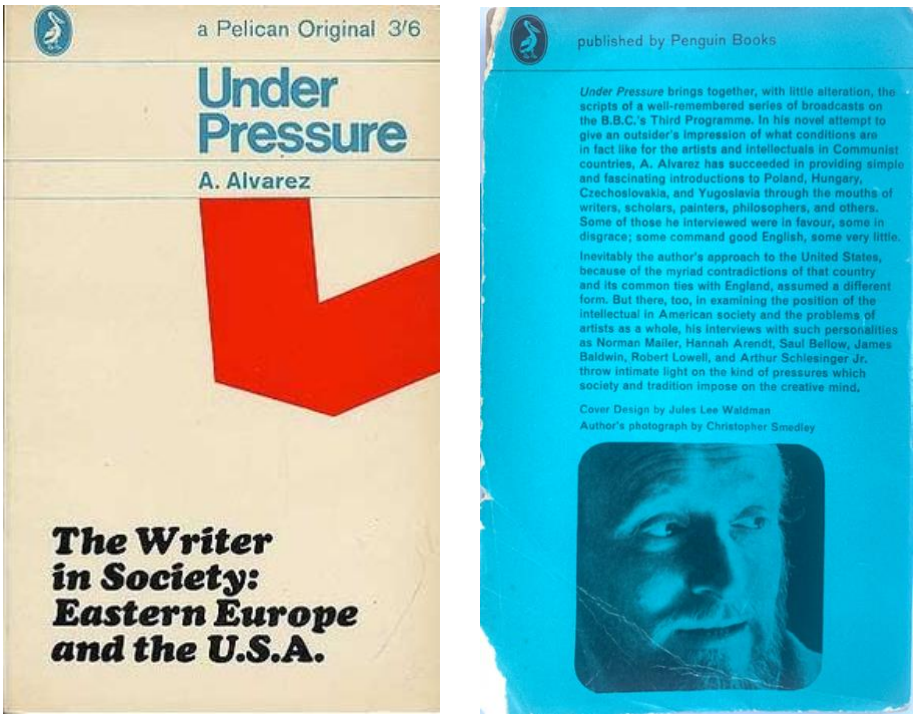


Fig 8: Front and back cover of Al Alvarez's 1965 *Under Pressure*

[103] BBC Audience Research Report. British Library, MS 88509.

However, this is not part of Alvarez's narrative and links between the American scene and Eastern Europe remain surprisingly absent from his discussion. The only exception is introduction in which Alvarez explains how the book is divided into 'two distinct halves, not only in theme but in approach' (*UP* 12). This difference, however, is explained only through an autobiographical lens. In communist countries, Alvarez confesses, he knew almost nobody (hence broadcasts were rather introductory) while in working with American contributors he knew most of them before travelling to the USA (*UP* 13-14).

The network of contacts Alvarez made throughout his stay would be impressive even for a journalist fluent in Slavonic languages. Alvarez knew no one, but as a critic, editor, and impresario, he was recognized for his charisma – charisma that was sometimes viewed as notorious and, especially after the publication of *The Savage God* (1971), his study of suicide, expedient to his literary criticism.[104] In a letter from February 1963, following the broadcast on Czechoslovakia, Cecil Parrott of the British Embassy in Prague wrote to Alvarez: 'I think it was remarkable what you managed to achieve in such a short visit'.[105] Other letters from Hungarian intellectuals highlighted how they were 'impressed by [Alvarez's] evident effort for objectivity. The script has been written by a man who is sympathetic, tries to understand, not to refuse a priori and twist'.[106] In the case of a Western critic visiting and recording interviews with Eastern European intellectuals, however, objectivity is an illusion. If all communication was in either English or French, it meant that the people Alvarez interviewed were likely to be much less representative of a 'real' 1960s Eastern Europe than the critic had presented them. Even though *Under Pressure* received overwhelmingly positive feedback, a small segment of the audience raised similar, important doubts. Following its broadcast in Hungary, one of listeners pointed out that 'many of the recordings of Hungarian writers seemed to be of Hungarians who have lived in

[104] See Alexandra Pringle, 'Al Alvarez: in praise of a literary cowboy', *The Guardian*, 28 September 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/28/al-alvarez-poet-in-praise-of-literary-cowboy> [accessed 11 Aug 2022].
[105] Letter from Cecil Parrott to Alvarez, 7 February 1963, Alvarez Papers. British Library, MS88487.
[106] BBC Audience Research Report. British Library, MS 88509.

London since the 1956 rising', gently raising doubts on the authenticity of the programme's content.[107] Another response to the same broadcast criticised Alvarez for presenting little evidence for the claims he was making, indicating they 'sometimes felt that he [Alvarez] was seeing what he wanted to see rather than exactly what was there'.[108] None of these issues escaped the attention of Andrew Sinclair who, in his review suggestively entitled 'East-West Al' printed in 1965 in the August issue of *The Spectator*, ironized Alvarez's obsession with the idea that Marx dominates the Eastern world and Freud the Western one. To back this claim, Alvarez – says Sinclair – 'has enough of an intelligent sympathy with his talking documentation to allow his victims to appear as inconsistent humans as well as supporting evidence'.[109] If the review appeared in August 1965, it also indirectly exposed Sinclair's skepticism about Alvarez's pugnacious introduction to the first edition of *The New Poetry* anthology (the first edition was published in April 1962). Criticizing how Alvarez hides an incomplete script, 'already patterned according to his preconceptions and prejudices [about Eastern Europe]', Sinclair foregrounds the paradoxes of Alvarez's enterprise. Soon the early interest in the particularities of the foreign poetry would dissolve, overshadowed by projective criticism and poets' internal struggle to reflect on the condition of their own poetry. I will return to the introduction to *The New Poetry* and its links with Eastern Europe shortly.

Even though Alvarez's broadcasts were undoubtedly pioneering, and with each episode the BBC Audience Research Report recorded an increase in what they called the 'appreciation index' (measured on a six-point Likert scale among a sample of around one hundred listeners), the aura of excitement around the conspiracy of an underground, intellectual life of Eastern Europe was felt in the air even earlier than 1961. In some cases – Frank Tuohy's novel *The Ice Saints* (1964) comes to mind – authors did not offer much insight beyond setting the action of their book in foreign societies and distant political realities which filled the 'oriental' gap after the loss of the

[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Andrew Sinclair, 'Under Pressure. The Writer in Society: Eastern Europe and the U.S.A. By A. Alvarez', *The Spectator*, 27 Aug 1965, p. 266.

British empire. Despite popular opinion, Alvarez was not the first person to travel and reflect on the cultural climate from beyond Iron Curtain post-1956. It was Martha Gellhorn, an American journalist and war correspondent for *Collier* magazine. It is surprising, especially now when much is written about the interlinking of gender, representation, biography, and modernism, how articles written by Gellhorn are virtually absent from the discussion. There are two explicit links between the Eastern European experiences of Alvarez and Gellhorn: first, their narratives on how the visits changed their writing and even a conception of what writing 'ought to do' in terms of its moral responsibility and seriousness (a word used frequently by both journalists) second, the connection between intellectual life beyond the Iron Curtain and the diagnosis of a certain cultural malaise in Britain. As Gellhorn's biographer – Caroline Moorhead explains:

> Britain, [Gellhorn] wrote, was suffering from the fact that it had not been invaded for a thousand years and 'there is no terror to claim back into in the memory of her people'. British phlegm, a grotesque misplaced sense of calm, was effectively crushing all instincts for realistic self-preservation. 'It rose from England like mist: it was as real as London fog: everything's going to be all right – somehow. And at last, I thought well, they certainly believe it, so maybe it's true: the Lord will provide for England'.[110]

Known for a style of storytelling that pushed the envelope of twentieth century reportage and anticipated what would come to be called 'New Journalism' in the 1960s and 1970s, Gellhorn never published her volume of essays on Eastern Europe. Collections of journalistic texts, such as *The View from the Ground* or *The Face of War*, grouped her pieces by decade and were revised roughly every ten years with new prefaces and conclusions. The need for regular updates to *The Face of War* (first published in 1959) is striking, not just from an editorial standpoint. Between 1936 and 1990 Gellhorn covered virtually every major military conflict across the globe. For obvious reasons, her technique is distinct from the 'battles' that were yet to happen on the pages of literary criticism. To give a sense of the atmosphere of her prose, we might briefly look at her article about her first visit to a communist country. The text begins with a seemingly disconnected reflection on McCarthyism and 'the American way of life' that, Gellhorn claims, is powered by 'the American fear neurosis'. Gellhorn's move from the Western politics of the Cold War and

[110] Caroline Moorehead, *Martha Gellhorn* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 178.

critique of American hysteria to her impressions of the cultural life of the first communist country she had ever visited, is sudden. The connection is somehow never verbalized, but assumed:

> For my first visit to a communist country in the late winter of 1958, I prepared by buying gifts for the natives, a big jar of Nescafé and *Doctor Zhivago*, then famous and forbidden behind the Iron Curtain, and felt quite daring when my suitcase was prodded at Warsaw airport. I had no introductions, could not speak a word of Polish, and stood on the street in front of my Warsaw hotel wondering whether I was a certifiable nutcase. How did I expect to do this job I had assigned myself? For want of a better idea, I walked down the street and saw an art gallery with a window displayed of paintings like sweet derivations of Chagall. The young painfully thin artist, who happened to be in a gallery at the time, had never heard of Chagall. We talked, he invited me to his attic home. I met everyone like that; one handed me on to another. This chain reaction produced 'Home of the Brave'. All these young people became instant old friends, I doted on them, there was no strangeness between us and no feeling of age difference perhaps because their experience of life was much harder than mine.[111]

The directness of this passage differs from typical accounts of Poland at the time. Perhaps most importantly, this brief, yet attentive, description does not pre-emptively glorify abstract bravery, nor does it fetishize suffering. This approach can also be found in Gellhorn's little-known novel, *A Stricken Field* (1940), where the narrative follows a journalist who returns to Prague after its annexation and tries to make sense of a rather senseless new reality. In the excerpt above, the author guides the reader between her alienating arrival and 'feeling at home', as the writer sits among friends who are, objectively, still strangers. The text which Gellhorn refers to as 'Home of the Brave' was an article printed in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1959. In this article Gellhorn replicated the intensity of conversations she enjoyed with young Poles who, in Gellhorn's narrative, are equally as inquisitive about the Western literature and cultural life as the journalist herself is about Eastern Europe. The feeling of connection with young students and artists Gellhorn met in Kraków was certainly real, but in writing for the Western audience the focus solely on intellectual debates about literature and politics that happened in the attic room of one of the artists, with some assistance from cheap wine, solidifies some of the standing clichés of the Cold War era. Nevertheless, if anything summative could be said about Gellhorn's technique, it is that she shifts from a comprehensive presentation of facts to subjective descriptions of standing

[111] Ibid., p. 175.

at the epicentre of conflict, while listening to people's stories. Known for her sharp tongue, Gellhorn despised the conventions of writing from a distance, referring to it bluntly as 'that objectivity shit'.[112] This, of course, bears some resemblance to the works of Rebecca West, especially her monumental and personal history of Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). Against the backdrop of a turbulent century, reporting means witnessing – integrating oneself into the situation and writing about the experience with honesty and compassion, hoping to provoke a sense of activism in the reader. Though composed with a different aim and in a less skillful and journalistic style, Alvarez's broadcasts on Eastern Europe did a similar job. However, the critic was right when he said that such a broadcast, occupying the liminal space between the BBC Talks and Drama sections, would become increasingly rare (*UP* 12). Yet, at the time, it enjoyed brief popularity and hugely contributed to the democratization of the literary market.

The circumstances in which Alvarez started to think about a 'new kind of seriousness' might, at first, seem peripheral. Yet the fact that Alvarez spent this time in Eastern Europe is less so. In his autobiography, Alvarez recalls: '*The New Poetry* was published in the spring of 1962, but I had written the introduction 15 months earlier'.[113] That means that the introduction to the anthology that (with all of its internal paradoxes and illogical criteria for selection) would become influential in its 1966 form, selling in record numbers, was written soon after his arrival in Eastern Europe. Alvarez's essay 'Beyond the Gentility Principle' was first published in *Commentary*, then in the *Observer* and made its way to the anthology in April 1962. Its earlier or drafted versions appear to have been shared among poets and critics. In March 1959, Robert Lowell, having perhaps read the earliest press versions of Alvarez's critique of gentility, wrote to him saying that he could imagine how 'hard it is to write criticism that changes things and is reread'.[114] Lowell's consolations proved to be redundant, however, with the anthology selling ten thousand copies in its first month, prompting Hughes to comment to his sister Olwyn that 'there must be a poetry

[112] Moorehead, pp. 5, 144, 171. See also Hermione Lee, 'One of the chaps', *The Guardian*, 1 Nov 2003 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/nov/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview8> [accessed 20 Aug 2022].
[113] Alvarez, *Where Did It All Go Right?*, p. 212.
[114] Letter from Lowell to Alvarez, March 1959, Alvarez Papers. British Library, MS 88594.

boom' (*L* 200). The anthology was widely discussed and, as Daniel Huws said, it 'changed the general climate a lot'.[115] Porter thought that 'one of the reasons Alvarez was influential was that he codified what a lot of people had been thinking anyway'. [116] Asked about the influence the anthology exerted on writers of his generation, Heaney recalled the volume was regarded as having been 'a big stimulus' (although Heaney also insisted the 'manifesto element in the introduction didn't matter all that much' to him personally, declaring that being 'on this side of the Irish Sea' gave him a 'sense of distance and stand-off from English gentility' quite independent of Alvarez). [117] But what were Alvarez's ideas exactly?

The critic begins his 'The New Poetry or Beyond the Gentility Principle' essay with the statement that Eliot and Pound had brought about a significant reorientation within literature. Thirty years on from their first intervention, however, their influence had waned significantly, in parallel with Eliot's decision to proclaim himself 'Anglo-Catholic in religion, royalist in politics, and classicist in literature', by which, as Alvarez argued, Eliot 'removed himself into another, remote sphere of influence' (*NP* 17). Eliot's departure from the central to the peripheral 'sphere of influence' was not as straightforward as Alvarez suggests. In *Four Quartets* Eliot often meta-poetically alludes and re-contextualises his early poetry in an attempt to adjust its meaning to a self-image congruent with his 1928 religious proclamation. Though we cannot blame Eliot's religious conversion for the condition of poetry in the 1960s, the shift in his poetic diction is no doubt symbolic. Taking this symbolic 'turn against' precursor as a departure point Alvarez goes on to claim that since around 1930 'the machinery of modern English poetry seems to have been controlled by a series of negative feed-backs' (*NP* 17). Three major flaws in English poetry that he identifies include the fake light-heartedness of poetry, a desire for the verse to sound impressive, and contemporary poetry's abstinence from authentic emotions. The essay combines Alvarez's take on the

[115] Quoted in Heather Clark, *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2020), p. 756.
[116] Peter Porter, 'The Poet in the Sixties: Vices and Virtue: A Recorded Conversation with Peter Porter', in *British Poetry since 1960s: A Critical survey*, ed. by Michael Schmidt and Grevel Lindop (Manchaster: Carcanet, 1972), pp. 202-12 (p. 205).
[117] Heaney, *Stepping Stones*, p. 64.

development of twentieth-century poetry with snap judgments about Auden, Dylan Thomas, Larkin, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy and others, all loosely worked into an overarching argument that literature in 1962 faces a serious moral dilemma. However, pronunciations from Alvarez's introduction have surprisingly little in common with the actual selection of poets printed in his volume. Influenced by the experience of intellectual life behind the Iron Curtain, the introduction attempted to restore the writer to a position of moral responsibility, echoing the views of F. R. Leavis, the influential literary critic and academic of 1950s Cambridge who will reappear in my second chapter. Nevertheless, Alvarez's rhetoric is controversial. Alluding to the principles of the Movement he, for instance, says: 'I am wholly in favour of restoring poetry to the realm of common sense. But there is always the delicate question of how common common sense should be' (*NP* 25). He goes on to attack what he calls 'academic-administrative verse' of the Movement, explaining how their gentle poetry was written by six 'university teachers, two librarians, and ... a Civil Servant' (*NP* 23). Borrowing a line from Larkin's poem 'Church-Going', Alvarez projects an image of a stereotypical Movement poet as 'the image of the post-war Welfare State Englishman', someone who is 'just like the man next door – in fact, he probably is the man next door' (*NP* 24-25). This bitter critique does not stop Alvarez from including Larkin and other poets loosely associated with the Movement in the anthology, however — as if Alvarez had forgotten that their poetry does not transgress gentility. Another example of similar rhetoric: 'I am not suggesting that modern English poetry, to be really modern, must be concerned with psychoanalysis or with the concentration camps or with hydrogen bomb or with any other of the modern horrors' – explains Alvarez, adding – 'I am not suggesting, in fact, that it must be anything. For poetry that feels it has to cope with pre-determined subjects ceases to be poetry and becomes propaganda' (*NP* 27). At once charismatic and oddly predictable, Alvarez repeatedly relies on 'suspension of voice' to connect his thoughts, and to argue that what contemporary poetry needs above all is 'a new seriousness' that would fight against 'disease so often found in English culture: gentility' (*NP* 32).

Yet, although 'seriousness' certainly is cited with increasing frequency between 1958 and 1980, Alvarez's resistance to Eliot's cloistered attitude continues a long-established critique of British isolationism.[118] Indeed, over forty years earlier Eliot *himself* complained of the 'thoroughly British […] avoidance of comparison with foreign literatures', ending his essay with the insistence that 'we must learn to take literature *seriously*'.[119] As such, Alvarez's 'new seriousness' was by no means 'new' (unless by 'old seriousness' Alvarez had in mind a reference to Aristotelian 'higher seriousness', rather than any modern comparison). Reading Alvarez's manifesto today, it is hard to guess what the 'new seriousness' was meant to be, and his position is generally defined negatively, in opposition to what he sees as 'negative feed-backs' in post-war British poetry. In his rejection of gentility and call for seriousness, Alvarez not only criticised a certain provincialism or isolationism in British verse, but also called for authenticity – for emotions that could according to the critic only be conveyed by presenting them, as he says elsewhere, 'without formulae and without avoidance, in all their newness, disturbances and ugliness'.[120]

> What, I suggest, happened in the last half century is that we are gradually being made to realize that all our lives, even those of the most genteel and enislanded, are influenced profoundly by forces which have nothing to do with gentility, decency, and politeness. Theologians would call these forces evil, psychologists, perhaps, libido. Either way, they are the forces of disintegration which destroy old standards of civilisation. Their public faces are those of two world wars, of the concentration camps, of genocide, and the threat of nuclear disaster. (*NP* 26-27)

In this passage, the neologism 'enislanded' catches the readers' attention. This verb derived from the noun 'island' describes the isolationism or perhaps even self-sufficiency felt by those living 'enislanded' lives. Elsewhere, in a 1962 debate from *The Review*, Alvarez put it more bluntly: 'let us, for Christ's sake face the fact that we live in a pretty complicated thing called Europe and not just a rather less complicated thing called the British Isles'. Measuring the complexity of his country in contrast to the 'thing called Europe' is a sarcastic hyperbole, making important tensions sound, paradoxically, uncomplicated and jejune. The arbitrariness of Alvarez's contrast and

[118] Google Books Ngram Viewer Database <https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=seriousness&year_start=1600&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3> [accessed 27 Aug 2022].
[119] Eliot, 'Professional, or …', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot. Volume 1,* 701.
[120] Alvarez, *Where Did It All Go Right?*, p. 61.

overgeneralisations were quickly spotted by critics who, while they voiced appreciation for the content of the anthology, would often speak about the incongruence between what Alvarez declared in the introduction and the perspectives of poets that he included in the anthology. Nevertheless, on the first page of the introduction Alvarez warns us that this is a 'personal anthology' (*NP* 17). The revised version of the volume included a total of twenty-eight poets whom, as the editor puts it, '[he] most liked from the period' (*NP* 17). In the 1965 preface to the revised edition of the anthology, Alvarez writes:

> When The New Poetry first appeared a number of reviewers commented on the discrepancy between the generally rather sober verse and the inflammatory introduction. Certainly, the gap was there and perhaps inevitable. The anthology was a collection of the poems I most liked from the period, whilst the introduction was, at least in part, an attempt to read the entrails and prophesy the direction poetry might soon take. (*NP* 17)

The revised edition opened with four American poets followed by twenty-four British, many of whom we now know little about. Not featured in the first edition of the anthology (1962), the only women poets present were Plath and Sexton. It is now unimaginable that in 1962 Alvarez published an anthology that aspired to change the climate of modern poetry, pushing it — at least in theory — toward rougher poetic idiom and seeking a 'new seriousness', but omitting to represent half of the population in any respect. This complete omission of women poets does not add any 'seriousness' to Alvarez's ambitions. This same issue of gender representation can also be seen in the first editorial of *MPT*, where again, the complete exclusion of women poets does not stop editors from making bold claims to represent the whole region of Eastern Europe. In his insightful article 'Beyond All This Fiddle: Hughes, Hill, Tomlinson and Fisher', Eric Falaci revisits Alvarez' introduction, hoping to rebuff and disrupt 'a narrow literary history that presents the period as merely toggling between two versions of the mainstream, most readily emblematized by the figures of Larkin and Hughes.'[121] Falaci hopes to add depth and complexity to this image, measuring Alvarez's claims about 'going beyond' against the actual representation of poets published in the anthology.

[121] Eric Falci, 'Beyond All This Fiddle: Hughes, Hill, Tomlinson and Fisher', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Poetry, 1945-2010*, ed. by Edward Larrissy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), pp. 54-67 (p. 66).

> It isn't the case that *The New Poetry* gathered a substantively new or different version of British poetry than what had been on offer for the previous decade. His own anthological feedback loop was not entirely negative. It picks up much of the most celebrated poetry of the 1950s even as its polemical introduction positions itself against it: the 'fiddle' that Alvarez means to get beyond is everywhere present in his selection.[122]

In light of Alvarez's essay, it is indeed difficult to explain what authors such as Larkin, Davie, Enright, or Amis, with whom Alvarez disagreed so fervently, were doing in *The New Poetry*. The letter from Larkin from December 1961 could not represent the clash of visions better. The poet enclosed corrected proofs of his poems to be included in *The New Poetry,* yet requests Alvarez to 'cut out any reference' to where he lives and works. Alluding to Eliot he explains: 'as far as possible I try to separate the man who suffers from the man who creates' – precisely what Alvarez (and to some extent Eliot) held to be inseparable.[123] As a result, the note on Larkin included in the anthology consists of thirteen words in which Alvarez informs the readers that Larkin 'has written a novel (*A Girl in Winter*) and two books of poetry' (*NP* 9). The question remains: why were poets associated with the Movement included in an anthology introduced by a manifesto *against* the values of the Movement? The second issue of *The Review* opened with Colin Falck's review of Alvarez's volume. The fact that Falck's text was two pages longer than the introduction to the anthology itself suggests that the publication was important, widely discussed, and worth commenting on. Falck writes:

> We should salute Alvarez for his seriousness, but I don't think his Introduction really comes over as the piece of propaganda he wants it to be. It throws up ideas about verse-forms, emotion, evil, gentility and much else, but in the end does very little to distinguish or relate them all.[124]

This is a fair observation, and though Alvarez makes many important remarks and succeeds in morally engaging the reader, a careful rereading of the introduction invites a more sceptical approach. After all, we might ask whether Alvarez was talking about the condition of British poetry in the 1960s, or whether he instead had in mind a literary history focused on the end of the high modernism and its relationship with isolationism and an 'enislanded' mindset? Perhaps the

[122] Ibid, p. 56.
[123] Letter from Larkin to Alvarez, December 1961, Alvarez Papers. British Library, MS 88486.
[124] Colin Falck, 'Dreams and Responsibilities', *The Review*, June/July 1962, pp. 3-18.

Holocaust, evil, survivors' guilt, post-Holocaust poetry and the responsibility of witnessing? Or the changes in poetic style necessary for all of the above?

In comparison to the contemporary state of the printing market it may be hard to believe that, in the 1960s, much-discussed disputes on the role of poetry once took place on the pages of poetry anthologies. In his 'Movement or Revival' chapter, Stevenson reminds the reader of this phenomenon, stating that poetry 'was divided more complicatedly than contemporary fiction or drama into movements and counter-movements, each attempting through poetic practice and critical discussion to establish what the true priorities of poetry should be'.[125] In his book *Poetry Today* (1996), Anthony Thwaite too suggested that 'the programmatic and polemical anthology' was the most established form of polemic and 'the most conspicuous instrument of change, or attempted change'.[126] The introduction to *The New Poetry* caused controversy and Wootten provides a more detailed summary of the essay's reception.[127] To give just one example, responding to Alvarez's critique of *New Line* poets, Robert Conquest wrote about what he saw as a dangerous connection between lyric and 'arousing feelings of violence':

> For there are those who treat verse as no more than a means of whipping up their emotions. […] Some justify this on the grounds that verse should match the age. It is maintained, rather dubiously, yet at least arguably, that our present situation is the most extreme, the most appalling that has ever existed. But even granting this, there is no reason whatever to draw from it the conclusion commonly seen, that poetry should 'reflect' it, or 'cope with' it by falling into violence and disproportion.[128]

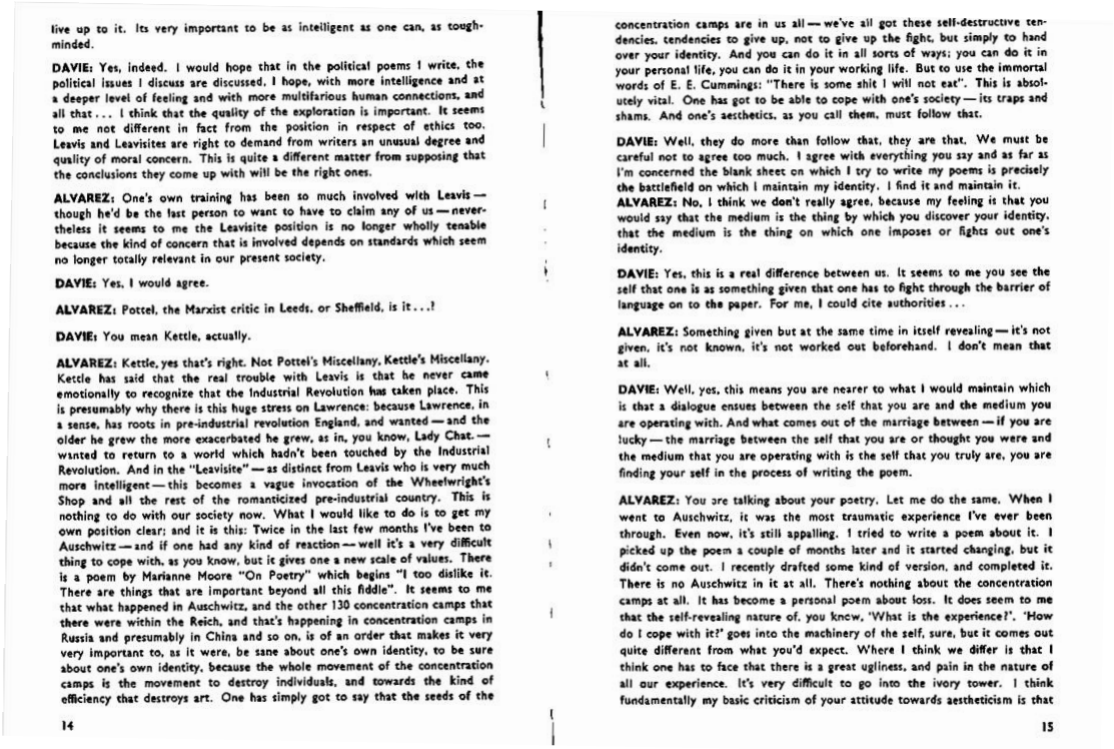
The point Conquest makes is valid and brings our attention to the question of how the emotional tone of Alvarez's introduction potentially overshadowed the importance of the message he hoped to pass on to his readers. Speaking about the role sympathies and friendships played in the writing of literary history, Conquest's review responded not just to the anthology but to Alvarez's words on Conquest's 1959 anthology *New Lines*. In the pages of 'Beyond the Gentility Principle' Alvarez used Conquest's anthology as a whipping boy. With painful irony, Alvarez wrote: 'of the

[125] Stevenson, p. 166. See also David Hopkins, 'On Anthologies', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 37.3 (2008), 285-304.
[126] Anthony Thwaite, *Poetry Today: A Critical Guide to British Poetry, 1960-1984* (London: Longman, 1985), p. 1.
[127] See Wootten, pp. 91-8.
[128] Robert Conquest, *New Lines II* (London: Macmillan, 1963), pp. xxii-xxiii.

nine poets in Mr Conquest's anthology, *New Lines*, six are university teachers. Two are librarians and one, I believe, a Civil Servant. [...] It is, in fact, verse written by the academic-administrative class, polite, knowledgeable, efficient, and in its quiet way, intelligent' (*NP* 19). Much of the emotional tone of Alvarez's preface might seem, as O'Brien suggests, 'barely comprehensible at the moment', but at the time it was felt that writing needed to be proven capable of moral action. It also – as Wootten suggests – reflected the mood and obsessions of the time.[129] The above block-quotation excerpt is perhaps the most belligerent part, while Alvarez's usual style was less radical, or to use his own terminology, we might perhaps say 'extremist'.

The link between seriousness and Alvarez's recent visit to Eastern Europe was also drawn by Alvarez in the debate with Davie featured in the first (1962) issue of *The Review* magazine. The editors' introduction to the issue informs us that Alvarez and Davie 'have both, in recent months, been urging what have seemed to be mutually exclusive new approaches to contemporary poetry'. The editors go on to explain that 'Alvarez has called for "a new seriousness" and Davie for "a new aestheticism". The discussion that follows was organised so that these concepts might be clarified and tested against each other and their broader implications revealed'.[130] Except the discussion does little to clarify those concepts. The tone of the interview is set early on, when Alvarez refers to Davie's 'Toward a New Aestheticism', and while he expresses his theoretical appreciation of Davie's ideas he questions the direction of the book's argument, asking Davie to 'explain [himself] just a bit'. Alvarez rapidly dominated the conversation, and Davie's hesitantly qualifying 'it seems to be' stands in stark contrast to Alvarez's decisive 'one must'. Alvarez referred to his journeys across the Eastern Bloc, linking it with how a new type of directness is needed in order for English poetry to survive. The word 'survive' was not coincidental, as the critic repeatedly digressed to discuss his trip to Auschwitz, mentioning it no less than seven times. Consider the following excerpt from Alvarez, starting on the bottom of page fourteen and continuing towards the next page (Fig. 9).

[129] O'Brien, p. 35.
[130] Al Alvarez and Donald Davie, 'A Discussion', *The Review* 1, April/May 1962, pp. 10-25 (p. 10).



live up to it. Its very important to be as inteiligent as one can, as tough-minded.

DAVIE: Yes, indeed. I would hope that in the political poems I write, the political issues I discuss are discussed, I hope, with more intelligence and at a deeper level of feeling and with more multifarious human connections, and all that . . . I think that the quality of the exploration is important. It seems to me not different in fact from the position in respect of ethics too. Leavis and Leavisites are right to demand from writers an unusual degree and quality of moral concern. This is quite a different matter from supposing that the conclusions they come up with will be the right ones.

ALVAREZ: One's own training has been so much involved with Leavis — though he'd be the last person to want to have to claim any of us — nevertheless it seems to me the Leavisite position is no longer wholly tenable because the kind of concern that is involved depends on standards which seem no longer totally relevant in our present society.

DAVIE: Yes, I would agree.

ALVAREZ: Pottel, the Marxist critic in Leeds, or Sheffield, is it . . .?

DAVIE: You mean Kettle, actually.

ALVAREZ: Kettle, yes that's right. Not Pottel's Miscellany, Kettle's Miscellany. Kettle has said that the real trouble with Leavis is that he never came emotionally to recognize that the Industrial Revolution has taken place. This is presumably why there is this huge stress on Lawrence: because Lawrence, in a sense, has roots in pre-industrial revolution England, and wanted — and the older he grew the more exacerbated he grew, as in, you know, Lady Chat. — wanted to return to a world which hadn't been touched by the Industrial Revolution. And in the "Leavisite" — as distinct from Leavis who is very much more intelligent — this becomes a vague invocation of the Wheelwright's Shop and all the rest of the romanticized pre-industrial country. This is nothing to do with our society now. What I would like to do is to get my own position clear; and it is this: Twice in the last few months I've been to Auschwitz — and if one had any kind of reaction — well it's a very difficult thing to cope with, as you know, but it gives one a new scale of values. There is a poem by Marianne Moore "On Poetry" which begins "I too dislike it. There are things that are important beyond all this fiddle". It seems to me that what happened in Auschwitz, and the other 130 concentration camps that there were within the Reich, and that's happening in concentration camps in Russia and presumably in China and so on, is of an order that makes it very very important to, as it were, be sane about one's own identity, to be sure about one's own identity, because the whole movement of the concentration camps is the movement to destroy individuals, and towards the kind of efficiency that destroys art. One has simply got to say that the seeds of the

concentration camps are in us all — we've all got these self-destructive tendencies, tendencies to give up, not to give up the fight, but simply to hand over your identity. And you can do it in all sorts of ways; you can do it in your personal life, you can do it in your working life. But to use the immortal words of E. E. Cummings: "There is some shit I will not eat". This is absolutely vital. One has got to be able to cope with one's society — its traps and shams. And one's aesthetics, as you call them, must follow that.

DAVIE: Well, they do more than follow that, they are that. We must be careful not to agree too much. I agree with everything you say and as far as I'm concerned the blank sheet on which I try to write my poems is precisely the battlefield on which I maintain my identity. I find it and maintain it.

ALVAREZ: No, I think we don't really agree, because my feeling is that you would say that the medium is the thing by which you discover your identity, that the medium is the thing on which one imposes or fights out one's identity.

DAVIE: Yes, this is a real difference between us. It seems to me you see the self that one is as something given that one has to fight through the barrier of language on to the paper. For me, I could cite authorities . . .

ALVAREZ: Something given but at the same time in itself revealing — it's not given, it's not known, it's not worked out beforehand. I don't mean that at all.

DAVIE: Well, yes, this means you are nearer to what I would maintain which is that a dialogue ensues between the self that you are and the medium you are operating with. And what comes out of the marriage between — if you are lucky — the marriage between the self that you are or thought you were and the medium that you are operating with is the self that you truly are, you are finding your self in the process of writing the poem.

ALVAREZ: You are talking about your poetry. Let me do the same. When I went to Auschwitz, it was the most traumatic experience I've ever been through. Even now, it's still appalling. I tried to write a poem about it. I picked up the poem a couple of months later and it started changing, but it didn't come out. I recently drafted some kind of version, and completed it. There is no Auschwitz in it at all. There's nothing about the concentration camps at all. It has become a personal poem about loss. It does seem to me that the self-revealing nature of, you know, 'What is the experience?', 'How do I cope with it?' goes into the machinery of the self, sure, but it comes out quite different from what you'd expect. Where I think we differ is that I think one has to face that there is a great ugliness, and pain in the nature of all our experience. It's very difficult to go into the ivory tower. I think fundamentally my basic criticism of your attitude towards aestheticism is that

Fig. 9: Excerpt from the first issue of *The Review* magazine, April/May 1962

Here, Alvarez's emphasis is on identity and destruction. His reference to Moore's 1919 self-referential poem directs attention to ethical responsibility and, again, 'seriousness', bringing to mind the end of Moore's most revised poem : '[…] the raw material of poetry in | all its rawness, and | that which is on the other hand, | genuine, then you are interested in poetry'.[131] In the context of a discussion of two different visions of the role of contemporary poetry, Alvarez perhaps goes too far – as when he claims that 'the whole movement of the concentration camps is the movement to destroy individuals, and towards the kind of efficiency that destroys art'. He persists in this line of argument: 'one has simply got to say that the seeds of the concentration camps are in us all – we've all got these self-destructive tendencies to give up, not to give up the fights, but simply to hand over your identity'.[132] Reading this passage, I cannot help but think that Alvarez makes Auschwitz sound like 'a state of mind', too readily turning the horror of the extermination camp

[131] Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems of Marianne Moore*, ed. by Heather Cass White (London: Faber and Faber, 2017), p. 27.
[132] Alvarez and Davie, pp. 14-15.

into a symbol of evil that the critic quickly extends to 'self-destructive tendencies' that undermine individual identity. The vagueness of these claims makes us ask to whom Alvarez's 'we' and 'us' really refers. On the one hand, he was likely alluding to his own Jewish origins. On the other, he excludes himself from those who gave up and, so the suggestion goes, handed over their identities. The conclusion about Auschwitz being a symbol of self-destruction and destruction of art and identity is both irrelevant and oversimplistic. Reading the 1962 debate, one cannot escape the feeling that Davie's attempts to make his points about 'new aestheticism' are repeatedly silenced with Alvarez's yet another 'last time I went to Auschwitz…'

If the conflict between Davie and Alvarez intensified over the years, especially given Davie's later accusations that Alvarez was commercialising suffering, in 1962 both critics still agreed on the need for change. This reinvigoration demanded action and programmatic rebellion against the poetics of the Movement that Davie summarised in his poem 'Remembering the Thirties' saying; 'a neutral tone is nowadays preferred'.[133] Ironically, the assertion, often quoted as representative of the certain self-containment, narrowness, and reluctance to foreign influences, is itself an allusion to Thomas Hardy's 'Neutral Tones'. Allusive or not, in literary criticism the line from 'Remembering the Thirties' is far from neutral as it came to represent regress and inertia. In his long poem 'England' from *Los Angeles Poems* (1968 –1969), Davie alluded to both his old poem and to the slogan, re-stating:

> A neutral
> tone was (Note the passive
> voice) preferred by no one
> really, no one at all[134]

For Davie, this 'passive voice' epitomises moral and artistic passivity. Given his complicated position as a poet and critic both associated with yet distant from the Movement, Davie takes

[133] Davie, *Collected Poems*, p. 34.
[134] Ibid., p. 173.

a clear stand against what he sees as the poetic limbo of 1950s Britain, the reality in which lyric from Eastern Europe came to matter.

No matter how much Alvarez's comments from *The Review* oversimplify the issue, these claims about the inertia of the domestic poetic scene inform our understanding of how projections of moral responsibility through references to the Holocaust were an inseparable part of poetic debates of the 1960s. Jean-François Lyotard once argued that the effect of the Holocaust on Western consciousness can be compared to that of an earthquake that 'destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly.'[135] For Adorno, the Holocaust marked the end of Western critical discourse. In *Negative Dialectics*, he writes: 'after Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate'[136]. There are many more such examples of similar proclamations on the impact the Holocaust has had on Western culture. Until around 1961, the memories of the Holocaust were not fully grasped in Britain and the 1961 trail of Eichmann in Jerusalem marks, as Deborah Nelson summarises in her thought-provoking book *Tough Enough* (2017), 'a turning point in the public acknowledgment of Jewish suffering under the Nazi regime' adding that 'Eichmann's trial did not alone cause but rather coincided with and accelerated the insertion of the Holocaust into the collective memory of the twentieth century'.[137] Between April 1961 and June 1962, no fewer than 146 articles about trial of Eichmann appeared in *The Times* of London while William Shirer's book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* was a bestseller throughout 1959 and 1960. [138] From around 1961, the discussion about the impossibility of writing returned with a double force, as originally and most famously expressed by Adorno's query from his *Cultural Criticism and Society* (1949): 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this

[135] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. by G. Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 56.
[136] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 361.
[137] Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough. Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 46.
[138] See Steven Axelrod, 'Plath and torture: cultural contexts for Plath's imagery of the Holocaust', in *Representing Sylvia Plath*. ed. by Sally Bayley and Tracy Brain (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), pp. 67-88 (p. 78).

corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today'.[139] Against the grain of this oft-quoted question, harmlessness, gentility, and a belief that, as Alvarez put it, 'life is always more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions and habits more or less decent and more or less controllable; that God, in short, is more or less good' (*NP* 21) started to feel like a burden. In my chapter on Plath, I will look more closely at how the tension between domestic life and the creative 'unfaithful' re-working of a collective trauma left its mark on the literary criticism of the mid-1960s. In many ways, her pioneering representation of the Holocaust forges a new path towards confronting the readers with their own role in representing suffering.

At the time of Eichmann trial, reading poetry written in the shadow of the gas chambers must have felt especially salient. Especially after Hannah Arendt published one of the most thought-provoking books in the political thought with its famous concepts of the 'banality of evil' and 'thoughtlessness', her style and account on the trial attracting record attention and international debate. The group of poets cantered around Alvarez were, as Susan Gubar observes, particularly interested in an exploration of the ways the Holocaust '[can be] felt in the present.'[140] Drawing on earlier poems from his 1959 *For the Unfallen*, in his second collection *King Log* (1968), Geoffrey Hill, for instance, projects an artistic guilt onto those who survived, while the speaker of his poem apprehends the tranquil landscape of Britain with only 'the smoke | Of harmless fires'.[141] Eichmann's trial necessitated new translations of poetry and essays which 'witnessed' the drama of extermination camps. Critics such as Wooten, Gubar, Stevenson, and Rowland all highlighted that before the readers encountered a style typically associated with the narratives of survival, a certain distance existed between the smoke of 'the harmless fire' and evil of extermination camps. Through newly translated authors, the British poets confronted the 'unspeakable'. This contact enabled some of the Anglophone authors to – as Antony Rowland put

[139] Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 34.
[140] Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003), p. 7.
[141] Geoffrey Hill, *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), p. 44.

it – engage in the epistemological question of how their work not directly involved in the Holocaust could 'gain access to its historical reality'.[142] It is precisely this gap between 'legitimate' and first-hand witnessing and 'imaginative' and empathetic engagements that has traditionally differentiated Holocaust poetry from post-Holocaust renderings forming the main axis of the controversy on who has the right to speak about the atrocity. For many critics, the poets who wrote in response to the Holocaust without experiencing the horror of the camps have raised suspicions. Consider, for instance, Szirtes' words from his introduction to the translation of Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti's *Camp Notebook* [*Bori notesz*]:

> Another major Hungarian poet of the century, János Pilinszky, thought that Sylvia Plath would have been the ideal translator of Radnóti, the case being that Plath, a non-Jew, was best placed to interpret the work of a victim of the holocaust. But it's an odd view at best, for what distinguishes Radnóti's last poems is a turning away from the aestheticized or mythologized self to the brute world outside that he records with remarkable steady-eyed clarity.[143]

The translator's comment makes some connections that I am yet to discuss in the chapter on Plath; her poetics of 'translating' the Holocaust to the Anglophone reader is, I will argue, a pioneering effort in blurring the line and destabilising the relationship between lyric, authenticity, spectacle, and the fetishization of suffering. One of the conceptual ideas which structures the chapter on Plath comes from gender translation studies criticism (specifically Lori Chamberlain) and I intend to show how tensions between 'unfaithful' translation of the 'original' experience of the Holocaust play out in the context of Plath's creative engagement with the drama of extermination camps. Interestingly, in 1965 Steiner was among the first to criticize Plath for her use of Holocaust imagery, extending her poetics to the larger question of whether authors who did not experience the camps commit 'a subtle larceny when they invoke the echoes and trappings of Auschwitz and appropriate an enormity of ready emotion to their own private design?'[144]

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[142] Rowland, p. 1.
[143] George Szirtes, 'Introduction', in Miklos Radnóti, *Camp Notebook*, trans. by Francis Jones (Todmorden: Arc, 2000), pp. 13-18 (p. 14).
[144] George Steiner, 'Dying is an Art', in *Language and Silence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp. 324-34 (p. 330).

If we link these comments by Szirtes and Steiner we can see how the major axis of controversy about authenticity and creative rendering of the Holocaust may also be seen through metaphors of 'original' and 'translation'. It is worth pausing for a moment to revisit the excerpt from Szirtes' critique asking what made Pilinszky speculate about Plath as 'the ideal translator' of Radnóti (Pilinszky surely did not mean it in a linguistic sense, as Plath had no reading knowledge of Hungarian). To sketch the broader context, Radnóti was a Hungarian Jew and his popularity as a poet grew after his tragic death in 1944, following the discovery of his last poems. If anything summative can be said about Radnóti's complex poetics, his works are at once modern in their expression of the anxiety of his age and classical in their traditional use of metre and adapting classical myths to 'this age' that – as the poet writes in his 1941 'The Third Eclogue' – 'must murder its poets.'[145] In May 1944 Radnóti was deported from Hungary to Yugoslavia. It was during this forced march of Hungarian Jews that, due to physical exhaustion, the poet and other prisoners were shot by Royal Hungarian Army and buried in a mass grave. Twenty months later, Radnóti's body was exhumed and his last poems were found in the pocket of his raincoat.[146] This history is perhaps the most literal example of poetry rising from death, and one cannot help but draw a connection between Plath's figure of Lazarus and Radnóti's poems being physically recovered from mass grave. In her introduction to the English translation of Radnóti, Zsuzsanna Ozsvath says that his practice is organised by the poet's compulsion to 'give testimony to an existence at the edge of, and at last engulfed by, the Holocaust'.[147] The dramatic extra-textual effect of excavated poems is only strengthened by Radnóti's deployment of the myth of Orpheus. He frequently situates the speaker in a liminal space between the land of life and death. This meta-textual journey to the underworld is, of course, a tempting and organising trope of reading Radnóti's poems, some of which we will return to in further discussion.

[145] Miklós Radnóti, *Foamy Sky: The Major Poems of Miklós Radnóti*, trans. by Zsuzsanna Ozsvath and Frederick Turner (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), p. 61. See also Edward Hirsch, 'The Poetry of Heartbreak: Miklós Radnóti's The Fifth Eclogue', *World Literature Today*, 93.4 (2019), 18-20. See also Miklós Radnóti, *The Complete Poetry*, transl. by Emery Edward George (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980).
[146] See Zsuzsanna Ozsvath, 'Introduction', in Miklós Radnóti, *Foamy Sky*, pp. i-xxxv. See also Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's book *In the Footsteps of Orpheus: The Life and Times of Miklós Radnóti* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000).
[147] Ibid., p. xiii.

The survey of the reception of Holocaust testimonial fiction and poetry in post-war England is far beyond the scope and competence of this thesis. However, a summary of the themes most frequently commented upon by Anglophone critics and poets in the 1960s might prove helpful for grounding further discussion. I have already suggested that early translations of Eastern European poetry in the English language owed their existence to political reality. It also so happened that many poets from Eastern Europe who first entered the Anglophone literary market satisfied the need for more translations of Holocaust testimonies. One common affective response to poems about atrocity is an impulse to first identify with the victim-perpetrator position and then to assign the poem a universal value. As a result of this quick globalisation of Holocaust poetry, the language or even style of the original often seemed secondary to the 'testimony' the poem carried beyond linguistic or geographic borders. Literary histories of different countries represented by selected Eastern European poets remained blurred and subordinate to transnational attempts to re-think how (and if) writing poetry after Auschwitz is possible. The label 'witnesses' quickly displaced the poets from their domestic context into a global canon of Holocaust poetry. For example, the Anglophone audience would become familiar with Primo Levi or Tadeusz Borowski almost exclusively in their role as Holocaust writers. Both Levi's *If This is a Man* and Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* were translated into English in 1959, clearly marking the turn of interest toward Holocaust testimonies. Read out of their original context and with little knowledge of authors' contribution to Italian and Polish literature respectively, Levi and Borowski played the role of 'emblematic survivors' even though their writings resisted stereotypical representations of the Holocaust. After 1961, more translations followed. A translation of Paul Celan by Christopher Middleton appeared in 1962, the first translations of Pilinszky were featured in *MPT* in 1965, Radnóti's poems were first printed in 1963, and Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry (and meta-textual struggled with the possibility of writing poetry) gained popularity with the first English renderings made by Miłosz, ultimately published in his 1965 anthology of Polish poetry.

Among many overlapping themes, we can discern a few fascinations in Holocaust poetry shared by Alvarez's circle. The first relates to the problem of 'direct' witnessing (traditionally presented as authenticating the experience) versus 'indirect' re-workings of the Holocaust, an epistemological trope which was often a starting point for poets asking who has the right and legitimacy to speak as a survivor. The second is a tension between silence and speech, often seen as an organising trope of Holocaust poetry. Frequent self-referentiality and meta-textuality of the Holocaust poetry encouraged authors to ask: 'since the event is principally *un*poetic, how could the poet represent it in poetic form?' Among the poets translated in the 1960s, we would see this trope in works of Pilinszky, for instance, who once said he wished to write 'as if he had remained silent' (*WP* 232) and Różewicz, whose deconstructions, fervent revisions, and self-contradiction at once restore and devalue belief in the poetic endeavour. The third issue that seemed to appeal to the Anglophone audience was the economy of prosaic, essayistic, or poetic form. One such form typically seen as most suitable was that of documentary and autobiographical mode; the expectation for the genre to 'authenticate' the experience also left its mark on translatory decisions and, by extension, on the early reception of Eastern European authors. Fourth is a conviction that Holocaust poetry invents a new type of impoverished and 'broken' language. Whilst interpreting some poets like Różewicz through a lens of anti-aestheticizing 'broken' language is certainly justified, it may not be useful for evaluating the works of Radnóti. Even if selected Eastern European authors experimented with the 'broken' style, many comments made by Anglophone critics about 'brokenness' ignored an obvious self-referential and performative aspect of this trope. This problem relates to another, fifth, aspect of Holocaust poetry that seemed particularly resonant at the time – seeing the process of translation into English as natural and transparent. An examination of this conviction that the directness and literariness of the original translate well into English will return in much greater detail in the following discussion, especially in the context of *MPT*'s politics of literariness and Hughes' belief that, for instance, nothing conveys the 'air of simple, helpless accuracy' of Pilinszky poems better than 'the most literal crib' (*WP* 235). This and numerous other comments, however, had more to do with emotional identifications than with linguistic reality. The sixth and last aspect is meta-critical. In reading poetry from 'the centre of

cataclysm' Anglophone poets were confronted with the question of this transmission impacted their domestic conversations about the role of poetry. This summary only briefly enlists several interpretative tropes characteristic of early readings of the Holocaust poetry from Eastern Europe as it entered the British literary scene of the early 1960s; the scene that Porter once ironically described as dominated by the 'Eastern European Translation Market'.

The 'Eastern European Translation Market': emotional transferences and the beginning of an end

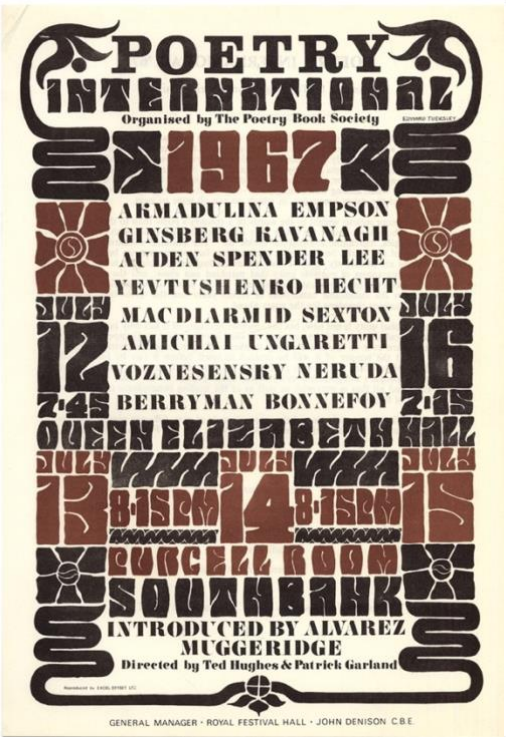
Some of my remarks about reviews, anthologies, and printing markets have already hinted that the critics most influential in establishing the position of Eastern European poetry were situated in Hughes', Weissbort's, and Alvarez's circles. In the following years, the circle of poets surrounding these individuals would expand. Especially after the first Poetry International Festival, new friendships were made and new projects begun. The first ever event of its kind, the festival lasted five days, attracted a large audience; and contributed to a re-shaping of the literary industry. Despite initial resistance to inviting foreign poets to a British poetry festival, the Arts Council agreed to Hughes' idea. Many authors involved or those who attended the festival hoped for poetry to be more widely available. In fact, the initial idea was to connect *MPT* magazine with the emerging international poetry festival scene. We know that from Weissbort who, in 2009 in correspondence with Ann Skea, admits:

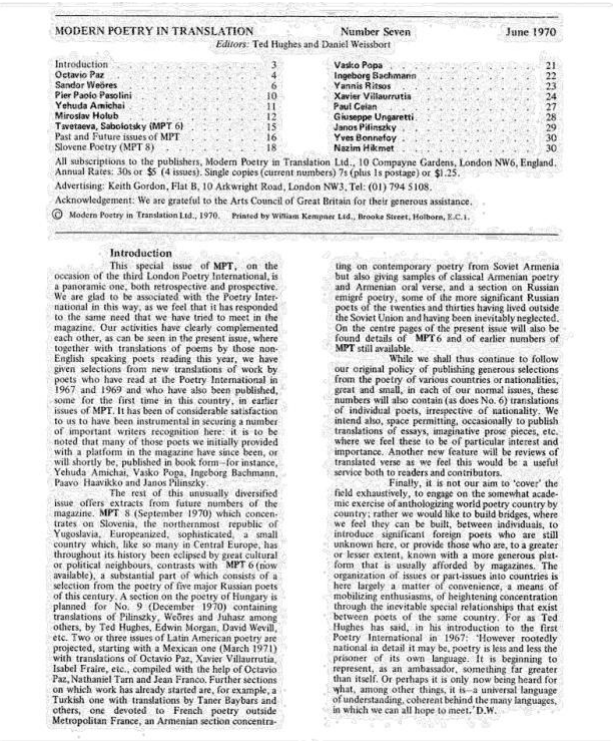
> The first idea was to tie [*MPT*] in to the international poetry festivals and persuade the festival committee, of which Ted was a key member, to allot money to purchase lots of copies including the programme for 'free' distribution. i.e. to budget for this in the cost of the ticket![148]

The pioneering festival took place at the South Bank Centre in London, facilitating intellectual exchange between authors and establishing friendships vital for cultural transfer. This is where Sandor Weöres of Hungary got to know his future translator, Edwin Morgan, while Charles Simic

[148] Quoted in Ann Skea, 'Ted Hughes and Small Press Publication', 2015 <https://ann.skea.com/RainbowPress.htm> [accessed 9 Jul 2023].

met Popa and Alexander Ristović, both of whom he would later bring to the English-speaking audience. In the letter to Richard Murphy, Hughes detailed how, due to financial constraints, the festival could only afford to invite representation of 'five foreigners, five Americans, and five English'. He concluded bluntly: 'it was those five English I was trying to avoid' (*L* 266). Given Hughes' keenness on the poets he and Weissbort promoted in *MPT*, this avoidance was not so much aimed against English poets as it was wishing for fewer Anglophone voices. Although short of budget, the festival still brought together an impressive array of writers, including John Berryman, Allen Ginsberg, Anne Sexton, and Anthony Hecht from America; Pablo Neruda from Chile; Bella Akhmadulina from Russia; Zbigniew Herbert from Poland; Hans Enzensberg from Germany; Yves Bonnefoy from Paris; Giuseppe Ungaretti from Italy; Yehuda Amichai from Israel; Hugh MacDiarmid from Scotland; Patrick Kavanagh from Ireland; and finally W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender and Robert Graves from England (Fig. 10)





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Introduction

This special issue of **MPT**, on the occasion of the third London Poetry International, is a panoramic one, both retrospective and prospective. We are glad to be associated with the Poetry International in this way, as we feel that it has responded to the same need that we have tried to meet in the magazine. Our activities have clearly complemented each other, as can be seen in the present issue, where together with translations of poems by those non-English speaking poets reading this year, we have given selections from new translations of work by poets who have read at the Poetry International in 1967 and 1969 and who have also been published, some for the first time in this country, in earlier issues of MPT. It has been of considerable satisfaction to us to have been instrumental in securing a number of important writers recognition here: it is to be noted that many of those poets we initially provided with a platform in the magazine have since been, or will shortly be, published in book form—for instance, Yehuda Amichai, Vasko Popa, Ingeborg Bachmann, Paavo Haavikko and Janos Pilinszky.

The rest of this unusually diversified issue offers extracts from future numbers of the magazine. **MPT** 8 (September 1970) which concentrates on Slovenia, the northernmost republic of Yugoslavia, Europeanized, sophisticated, a small country which, like so many in Central Europe, has throughout its history been eclipsed by great cultural or political neighbours, contrasts with **MPT** 6 (now available), a substantial part of which consists of a selection from the poetry of five major Russian poets of this century. A section on the poetry of Hungary is planned for No. 9 (December 1970) containing translations of Pilinszky, Weöres and Juhasz among others, by Ted Hughes, Edwin Morgan, David Wevill, etc. Two or three issues of Latin American poetry are projected, starting with a Mexican one (March 1971) with translations of Octavio Paz, Xavier Villaurrutia, Isabel Fraire, etc., compiled with the help of Octavio Paz, Nathaniel Tarn and Jean Franco. Further sections on which work has already started are, for example, a Turkish one with translations by Taner Baybars and others, one devoted to French poetry outside Metropolitan France, an Armenian section concentrating on contemporary poetry from Soviet Armenia but also giving samples of classical Armenian poetry and Armenian oral verse, and a section on Russian emigré poetry, some of the more significant Russian poets of the twenties and thirties having lived outside the Soviet Union and having been inevitably neglected. On the centre pages of the present issue will also be found details of **MPT** 6 and of earlier numbers of **MPT** still available.

While we shall thus continue to follow our original policy of publishing generous selections from the poetry of various countries or nationalities, great and small, in each of our normal issues, these numbers will also contain (as does No. 6) translations of individual poets, irrespective of nationality. We intend also, space permitting, occasionally to publish translations of essays, imaginative prose pieces, etc. where we feel these to be of particular interest and importance. Another new feature will be reviews of translated verse as we feel this would be a useful service both to readers and contributors.

Finally, it is not our aim to 'cover' the field exhaustively, to engage on the somewhat academic exercise of anthologizing world poetry country by country; rather we would like to build bridges, where we feel they can be built, between individuals, to introduce significant foreign poets who are still unknown here, or provide those who are, to a greater or lesser extent, known with a more generous platform that is usually afforded by magazines. The organization of issues or part-issues into countries is here largely a matter of convenience, a means of mobilizing enthusiasms, of heightening concentration through the inevitable special relationships that exist between poets of the same country. For as Ted Hughes has said, in his introduction to the first Poetry International in 1967: 'However rootedly national in detail it may be, 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, coherent behind the many languages, in which we can all hope to meet.' **D.W.**

Fig. 10: Broadside of the Poetry International 1967 Festival. Published by The Poetry Book Society (left)

Fig. 11: Introduction to the sixth issue of *MPT*, June 1970 (right)

During both the first (1967) and following editions of the festival, this polyphonic 'get-together' of poets was an extension of *MPT*'s ambitions, a continuation of those valued proudly announced from its first issue. And while it is hard to speculate, it may well be the case that it would never have taken place without the magazine and, most importantly, the contacts it fostered, collaborations it inspired, friendships it enabled. A speech Hughes gave during the festival mirrors this idealistic belief in the dialogue poetry can form in and beyond translation. He writes: 'however rootedly national in details it may be, poetry is less and less the prisoner of its own language. It is beginning to represent, as an ambassador, something far greater than itself', adding, 'or perhaps it is only now being heard for what, among other things, it is – a universal language of understanding, coherent behind the many languages, in which we can all hope to meet' (*CC* 81). The idea of poetry representing 'something far greater than itself' has an obvious romantic undertone and I will look at the phenomenological aspect of translation in the following chapter. In the interview for *The Paris Review,* Hughes recalled the role the festival played in the translation market, setting it in the context of *MPT* and specifying:

> Penguin stepped up their output of new titles; every publisher seemed to be commissioning new translations of foreign poets. Those fans brought huge number of the books. They were packed in at the first of the Art Council's big International Poetry Festival in 1966, which I helped to organize. Our programme was based on an issue of Daniel Weissbort's new magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation*, which I think was the first such magazine in Britain. It was an amazing occasion. Almost every big figure I invited accepted and came. And by chance, on the day of the festival, London happened to be full of poets from all over the place. (*TPR* 299)

Though Hughes would later on quit his editorial work for *MPT* explaining that he didn't want to be a poetry exchange telephone operator, given that *MPT* was as much Weissbort's initiative as it was Hughes' it seems strange that Hughes would ascribe all responsibility to Weissbort. Many of these ponderings over cultural transfer come down to the individual's interest, contacts, and sensitivities. The transcript of a 1986 conversation between the Amichai and Weissbort serves as an example:

> WEISSBORT: *You said that you, in fact, got to know about poets like Popa, Holub and Różewicz partly through the [MPT] magazine?*

AMICHAI: And later through those international meetings. But especially it was the first number of the magazine. It triggered off, really, a lot of international activity.

WEISSBORT: *I suppose that it's precisely the first issue of any magazine where the essence is to be found, because you want to make …*

AMICHAI: It expresses a certain cultural tendency, not just a magazine (*PS* 305-12).

What was this cultural tendency? When considering how the idea of publishing, promoting, and bringing Eastern European poets to English-speaking readers came to be, one could draw, as I have showed, connections between Alvarez's trip and the later development of what Porter ironically called 'Eastern European Translation Market'. Even the idea of establishing *MPT* came about during a New Year's Eve party, not long after Alvarez returned from his journeys and battled against the provincialism of British verse.

> What finally overwhelmed us into publishing our first issue was the translated work of a group of poets who seemed to us revelatory. A little earlier, Al Alvarez had brought back from Eastern Europe poems by Miroslav Holub (Czechoslovakia) and Zbigniew Herbert (Poland). About the same time, Daniel Weissbort found poems by Vasko Popa (Serbia) and Yehuda Amichai (Israel). I came across poems by János Pilinszky (Hungary). (*ST* 205)

My second chapter will look at the magazine's enterprise and criteria for inclusion in detail. After around 1965, the fascination with the exoticism of Eastern European poetry intensified, while contact with Eastern European authors brought the enjoyment of reading poetry 'which did things forbidden'.[149] Many of the commentaries made by the same British critics commenting on the same critics and writers showed a strange willingness for Western poetry to be heard with the same moral resonance as Eastern European verse. This specific envy reminds one of the later 1987 poem 'In the Craft Museum' by Carol Rumens. The opening of the poem reads:

> Some nations lock up their poets. Ours have the key
> to a high, clean room labelled Sensibility.
>
> They have sat there now for a very long time,
> and are clearly no threat to a democratic regime.[150]

[149] Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue,* p. 38.
[150] Carol Rumens, *Selected Poems* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), p. 130.

This juxtaposition between the repression 'some nations' impose on their poets and 'our' access to art 'clean' of political pressure denotes a conventional Cold War representation. To give another example, in the editorial to the Czech issue of *MPT* we read that 'the Western poet perhaps envies his brother in the East, for while he sings of comparative comfort, comparative freedom, comparative despair, the reality of the thread is not his' (*MPT* 3). This statement is then followed by the erroneous diagnosis that Western verse has a tendency to turn inwards, 'whereas the poet of East is in tune with the rhythms of his people in a much more direct and dynamic way' (*MPT* 3). Clearly, the editors' understanding of political reality and of what exactly stands behind the moral resonance they envy in their 'brother in the East' seems limited. Hughes and Weissbort admire the alleged 'sincerity' of 'Eastern' lyric without offering the reader any explanation of why, in the reality of the post-Yalta dichotomy between East and West, the poetry of the personal 'I' is likely to be read as transgressive. Counter-intuitively for many Anglophone readers, by its engagement in what is private, the intimate 'I' becomes political in opposition to the 'we' of the new proletarian 'comradeship'.[151] In his article that ironically reconstructs the model 'Eastern European poem' as seen by the Anglophone critic in the 1960s, Jarniewicz notices that authors needed a certain model of poetry which could be used to protest against everything that bothered them in their own verse at the time. The critic summarises the problem saying:

> Rozumowanie Alvareza oparte było na założeniu, że istnieje sprzeczność między jałowym wierszem brytyjskim a radykalną, historycznie świadomą poezją wschodnioeuropejską. To założenie zrobiło wielką, choć niejednoznaczną w skutkach karierę. W perspektywie krótkoterminowej pomogło wypromować poezję zza żelaznej kurtyny jako nazwijmy to, idiom alternatywny. […] Na dłuższą metę zaszkodziła jej interesom. Dostrzegała bowiem jeden tylko wzorzec wiersza, definiowany przez stylistyczne i tematyczne zainteresowania krytyków poezji brytyjskiej. Do angielszczyzny wprowadzono więc tylko te utwory, które, zgodnie ze słowami Alvareza, dawały wyraz „siłom dezintegracji" działającym we współczesnej historii a konkretnie: opisywały mechanizmy dwudziestowiecznych totalitaryzmów oraz ich społeczne i etyczne pokłosie.[152]
>
> Alvarez' reasoning was based on the assumption that there was a contradiction between sterile British verse and radical, historically-informed Eastern European poetry. This assumption has had a great, if ambiguous, career. In the short term, it helped promote poetry from behind the Iron Curtain as, let's call it, an alternative idiom. [...] In the long run, it did

[151] Cavanagh, p. 13.
[152] Jarniewicz, *Tłumacz między innymi*, pp. 297-8. [my translation].

> not help [Eastern European] interests. For it saw no more than one pattern of verse, defined only by the stylistic and thematic interests of British critics. Thus, only those works were introduced into English which, in Alvarez's words, gave expression to the 'forces of disintegration' operating in contemporary history. More specifically, those which described the mechanisms of twentieth-century totalitarianisms and their social and ethical aftermath.

Of course, Jarniewicz's point is valid. Nevertheless, it would be facile to criticise commentaries on Eastern Europe by referring to what those commentators could not have known, particularly when contact with pre-1950s Eastern Europe was limited. However, from around the early 1960s, many Anglophone critics become – as Polish émigré translator and critic Adam Czerniawski reminds us – 'mesmerised by the courage of intellectuals and writers behind the Iron Curtain'.[153] But even if poetry from Eastern Europe added a new sense of urgency and, allegedly, had an impact on the style, tonality, and thematic scope of Anglophone lyrics, the strategies for representing this fascination are still deemed problematic, self-contradictory, or even appropriative. Drawing on comments from Weissbort, Alvarez, Hughes, and Heaney, it is astounding how much self-deprecation was needed to express appreciation for Eastern European poetry. The persistence of their claims, often vague and repetitive, about the reinvigorating quality of foreign verse dangerously simplifies this matter, potentially undermining the validity of the claim itself.

As a result, one might say that early critical discourses surrounding Eastern Europe mimic, albeit unconsciously, sentiments from the region's Romantic period. But in reverse, the West came to the rescue in the fight against communist oppression. It would be an oversimplification to extend such a comment to the whole of Eastern Europe, but many canonical works from Polish literature, for instance, show that in the Romantic era the poet was treated like a prophet, soothsayer or bard while poetry was read seriously; seriously enough that it become a burden and caused a certain outburst of creative sarcasm, Gombrowicz's *Trans-Atlantyk* (1939) being one explicit example. In the unpublished lecture about the influence of British and American literatures in Poland that

[153] Adam Czerniawski, 'Polish Poetry', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, pp. 206-9 (p. 206).

Herbert delivered in Paris in March 1967, the poet elaborated on the idea of authorship that wants to liberate itself from Romantic myth:

> Je n'ai pas l'intention de suggérer par là que la poésie polonaise était entièrement désemparée devant ce « danger de néo-romanticisme », comme on l'appelait dans des polémiques, qu'elle ne faisait qu'attendre des modes et des secours qui allaient venir de l'extérieur.[154]
>
> It is not my intention to suggest that the Polish poetry was entirely helpless faced with the 'danger of neo-romanticism' as it was called in polemical debates; that it was just waiting for new fashions and assistance that would come from the outside.

This conviction about the 'helplessness of neo-romanticism' has also saturated Western literary criticism. 'The notion of the individual is underdeveloped in my part of Europe,' summarised Miłosz in a 1982 interview, adding that, 'there is such an aura around the individual in the West'.[155] Perhaps the fact that for a long time poetry in Eastern Europe was written against the grain of failed uprisings, buried hopes, and tragic defeats meant that poets in the mid-1960s were reserved, or felt conflicted, about the early reception of their work. For instance, having read Alvarez's review on his work entitled 'Witness', Miłosz accuses Alvarez of provincialism and asks, 'why should even continental Europe remain for an Englishman an area full of white spots marked "ubi leones"? And why is it so difficult to approach one of those exotic writers who were born a few hundred miles east of Greenwich?'. In the same text the poet protests against what he felt to be a labelling reductionism, saying:

> Perhaps some Western writers are longing for subject provided by spasms of historical violent change, but I can assure Mr. Alvarez that we, i.e. natives of hazy Eastern regions, perceive History as curse and prefer to restore to literature its autonomy, dignity and independence from social pressures.[156]

This response surprised the editors of the *New York Review of Books* who dutifully informed Alvarez, forwarding a copy of Miłosz's letter with their own comment: 'a quite unexpected letter of dissent from Miłosz. I would have thought he would have been delighted by your piece, and

[154] The typescript of the lecture received as a courtesy of Henryk Citko from Zbigniew Herbert's archive in the National Library in Warsaw [my translation].
[155] Miłosz and Haven, *Conversations*, p. 41.
[156] Letter from Miłosz's to the *New York Review of Books*'s editors, 21 July 1988, British Library MS 88551. Also available online Al Alvarez, 'Witness', *The New York Review*, 2 June 1988 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1988/06/02/witness/> [accessed 11 Aug 2022].

have difficulty understanding what caused him to write as he does. We'll have to run it'.[157] It is ironic that the poet whose Norton Lectures, delivered between 1981 and 1982 at Harvard, are entitled *The Witness of Poetry* would send the editor of *London Review of Books* an open letter in which he speaks on behalf of 'natives of hazy Eastern regions', expressing a hope to restore literature to 'its autonomy, dignity, and independence of social pressures'. The complexities of this politics of witnessing bring to mind Stephen Owen's observation from his article 'The Anxiety of Global Influence'. As Owen put it: 'tactical value is a kind of crisis value' and Alvarez, Hughes, Weissbort, and Davie knew that all too well. Davie went so far as to claim that Hughes and Alvarez made their careers on the back of the lyric from Eastern Europe.[158] In his article entitled 'Their Witness?' from February 1962, the critic imagines a conversation between a translator and a poet from Eastern Europe: 'You know what happened to you, but you don't understand it. We'll supply the understanding, if you'll give us the happening'.[159] Following the publication of the spiteful review in which Davie claims that Alvarez's circles made careers on their promotion of literatures that proved easy to translate and handy at the time, the editors of the *LRB* received a pile of letters. The debate about the tone of Davie's review continued on the pages of *LRB* for almost a year, attracting much attention and defences from Alvarez's circles. In March 1992, the *LRB* published Weissbort's response in which he admitted that it was hard for him to answer Donald Davie's 'splenetic review' of his anthology *The Poetry of Survival* (*LRB*, 27 February). He [Alvarez] set up a number of straw men, which he then demolishes. To such an extent does he do this, that I feel almost embarrassed to join in what appears to be a purely private affair.' Peter Jay from Anvill Press addresses the editors: 'I am astonished that Donald Davie

[157] Alvarez Papers. British Library MS 88551.
[158] Stephen Owen, 'The Anxiety of Global Influence: What is World Poetry?', *New Republic,* 19 November 1990, pp. 28-32 (p. 28).
[159] Davie, 'Their Witness', *London Review of Books,* 27 Feb 1992, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v14/n04/donald-davie/their-witness> [accessed 11 Aug 2022]. Davie writes: '[t]his is no way to start reviewing a book of poetry. But the truth is that this isn't a book of poetry at all, except incidentally: it is the tombstone, partly aggrieved, partly defiant, on a career-ploy practised, through some years with great success, by British literary careerists from the Sixties on. The ploy was at bottom a familiar one: since the British poetry they inherited in the Sixties required of them a longer apprenticeship than they could contemplate, and since readers wouldn't appreciate the fruits of that apprenticeship in any case, there was every reason for the careerists (who included A. Alvarez and Ted Hughes, along with Daniel Weissbort) to look for, and claim to and, a short cut Philip Larkin's art, not to speak of Basil Bunting's or Norman MacCaig's, was too intricate for them to master. There must be a simpler way! And, brilliantly, they found that there was indeed one such simpler model on offer: in translation, poetry from the Soviet Union's satrapies in Europe'.

should write, and you should print, a defamation principally of Daniel Weissbort, but also of Ted Hughes and A. Alvarez, masquerading as a review of *The Poetry of Survival*'. Another letter from David Craig expresses his shock that Davie would attack the whole industry of creative writing workshops speculating that perhaps it is Davie himself who 'wants to be one of a few; he feels threatened when the few begin to grow'. Donald Rayfield adds to the correspondence how he 'was bewildered by Donald Davie's vituperative review of Danny Weissbort's anthology of East European poetry in translation' provocatively suggesting that perhaps it is Davie who is making his career at the expense of fellow translators and critics. [160]

But beyond the debate in the *LRB*, the specific, if exaggerated, popularity of the 'Eastern European Translation Market' as well as the tone of criticism that backed it did not escape the attention of Porter. In a verse which revises an epigram by the classical poet Martial, Porter ironized the rhetoric surrounding the incoming translations:

> … nor am I yet well-fledged
> in the Eastern European Translation Market,
> whose bloody fables tickle liberal tongues;
> despite this I make my claim to be a poet.[161]

The poet's dispute with the mainstream popularity of the Eastern European lyric is telling. He refuses the notion that his poetry should be assessed in relation to works which would soon be made into a synecdoche of art written 'under pressure', where only a model of moral participation is seen as a successful means of engagement. Such invisible pressures generated by criticism are often hard to pin down; their claims are charismatic enough to turn critical engagement into what Jürgen Habermas termed 'cryptonormativism'.[162] Through valorising foreign poetry over its western counterpart, standards and trends were established on the literary market, especially when the subject matter of those 'bloody fables' was – as I have suggested in earlier part of this chapter – witnessing, survival, and testimony. Put simply, the range of critical reaction to the question of

[160] All of the quotations in this paragraph are taken from the same review see Davie's 'Their Witness' (1992).
[161] Peter Porter, *Collected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 242.
[162] See Amanda Anderson, 'Cryptonormativism and Double Gestures: The Politics of Post-Structuralism', *Cultural Critique*, 21 (1992), 63–95.

silence is limited. Moreover, moral judgments hidden between the lines of prefaces, commentaries and brief reviews that glorify suffering themselves silence the reader. The potentially stultifying, rather than inspirational, effect which this 'survivalist mode' had on poets and critics will return in detail in later chapters.

The excerpt from Porter's poem seems to reflect on that danger; the refusal to partake in what he sees as a mainstream moralistic criticism becomes in itself nothing less than a moral decision. The poet admits that he is 'not yet well-fledged | in the Eastern European Translation Market' and his use of the adverb preceded by the negative situates the stanza in the present time. Foreseeing the future developments of the market makes the line into an ironic promise of self-improvement. The little-used adjective 'well-fledged' is not coincidental either, its literal meaning referring specifically to birds feathers that are sufficiently developed for a bird to fly while in the figurative sense denoting something well-established. The infant bird's unfulfilled flight makes the animal into a dependent and helpless creature no more noticeable than the Icarus from Bruegel's painting. The innocence and ignorance of the bird are opposed in the following lines. Here, the epithet 'bloody fables' is especially evocative. On the one hand, 'bloody', used as an expletive, corresponds with the author's annoyance about simplifying narratives surrounding poetry in translation. On the other, it brings to mind, albeit through ironic reversal, blood as an obvious symbol of suffering and redemption. The animal imagery is suggestive of the fable tradition, most strongly associated with Aesop, of stories conveying an often camouflaged, yet clear, moral image. Again, Porter's association with Aesopian (and later Orwellian) speech frequently mentioned in introductions to the poetry from Eastern Europe is apparent. Morality would become, as Porter rightly sensed, a dominant narrative about Eastern European resonance. As the writers' discussion during the 1988 Lisbon conference showed, the links between political reality and the expectations projected on literature too often prove to be detrimental to the literature. Kundera commented on this in an interview from 1985, saying:

> Political oppression presents yet another danger, which – especially for the novel – is even worse than censorship and the police. I mean moralism. Oppression creates an all too clear

> boundary between good and evil, and the writer easily gives it to the temptation of preaching. From a human point of view, this may be quite appealing, but for literature it is deadly.[163]

On top of this 'deadly' moralism, many commentaries on Eastern European literature made in the 1960s tended to look less at the literature itself than at the troubled historical circumstances and vague ethical intentions that commentators projected onto it, based on their own impressions of Eastern Europe.

When Weissbort edited *The Poetry of Survival* (1991), the golden age of anthologized poetry had already moved into the realm of literary history. Of course, collaborations on poetry anthologies continue, and still do, but the form itself has lost its credential power. This is also when the 'Eastern European Translation Market' faded away. In fact, already in the mid 1970s in a letter to Michael Schmidt, Hughes noted how he was 'feeling the boom has past – the market isn't there anymore according to my oracle at Harper's'.[164] As James Naughton observed writing about English translations of Czech and Slovak literature, after the Velvet revolution of 1989 'dissident' literature has now lost its Iron Curtain mystique.[165] Adam Czerniawski also ironized that if anthologies of Eastern European poetry of survival would continue to be published or re-published then 'the future of Polish poetry in English translation looks bleak, unless another Cold War saves the day'[166]. While writing his largely retrospective introduction in 1991, Weissbort knew that these times were over, and in his interview with Amichai ironically lamented the 'good-old-days anthology' (*PS* 306). And yet Davie was quick to coldly comment: 'those good old days were the worst and most wretched days for writers under Stalinist tyranny'.[167] Of course, the participatory model of criticism as moral action is not without dangers. There can be no apoliticism, even when speaking against politics. The real problem, closely aligned with my considerations, occurs when, as Felski has noticed, 'critics try to force an equivalence of textual

[163] Olga Carlisle, 'A Talk with Milan Kundera', *The New York Times*, 19 May 1985, pp. 72-85 (p. 85).
[164] Letter from Hughes to Schmidt, 12 May 1976, Carcanet Archives, John Rylands Library, Manchester, CPA/2/1/39.
[165] James Naughton, 'Czech and Slovak', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, pp. 196-200 (p. 199).
[166] Czerniawski, 'Polish Poetry', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, pp. 206-9 (p. 209).
[167] Davie, 'Their Witness' (1992).

structures with social structures, to assert a necessary causality between literary forms and larger political effects'.[168] In her book on understanding critical distance and the limits of identity theories, Anderson speaks of a similar error as 'an aggrandized agency'.[169] Anderson shows that the power of the text as a premise for insurrectionary action is not a property inherent to it, but is rather constructed in the process of interpretation.

The resonance that Eastern European authors enjoyed among fellow critics and poets belonging to Alvarez's circle was unprecedented. By looking at selected, intertwining issues such as 'envy of resonance', dis/locations of Eastern Europe; impact of Alvarez's criticism, presence of survival poetry, first international collaborations; and common traits and rhetoric characteristic for Western critics writing about Eastern Europe, I have argued that in the early 1960s the poetry in translation was received with unparalleled enthusiasm. Many editorials, comments, and correspondences depict the process of bringing the Eastern European authors to Anglophone readers as a matter of life and death. This enthusiasm for poetry in translation (evidenced in number of attendees of the first literary festivals, response to broadcasts, and the explosion of small press publishing) was an indispensable part of 'going beyond …', transgressing, questioning, re-defining, and taking issue with the status quo. The escalating dissatisfaction with the poetry of the 1950s proved to be a useful contrast to a reality that felt more jagged and problematic than its somewhat incongruent literary representations. The formation of a new tone in literary criticism of the 1960s was a practice of disagreement and a certain break with fashions of reading established by New Criticism that felt incongruent with post-Holocaust reality. The role of dialogue, and engagement with poetry from Eastern Europe was an important but indirect part of this formation.

[168] Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 8.
[169] See Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006).

Chapter 2: Beyond a burning 'centre of cataclysm': *Modern Poetry in Translation* and the politics of transfer

The aim of this chapter is to tell the little-known story of the early days of the *Modern Poetry in Translation* (*MPT*) magazine, established in 1965 by Weissbort and Hughes who shared a passionate belief in translation as a mutually enlivening exchange. From the beginning, the editors thought of the periodical as a vehicle for discovering new foreign poets, those who were established writers in their home countries but whose work had not yet been widely recognised in an English context. It was the selection of poetry written behind the Iron Curtain that struck the editors as the most 'insistent', prompting a critical evaluation of their own literary tradition and, subsequently, imposing some (though now highly questionable) degree of thematic coherence on the first *MPT*. Printed on bible-thin pages in a limited print run of 500, the magazine (which is still publishing today) was the first journal in England to publish poetry in translation written by living and foreign poets only. The first issue of *MPT* featured the works of poets such as Herbert and Miłosz of Poland, Ivan V. Lalić and Vasko Popa of Yugoslavia, Holub of Czechoslovakia, Andrei Voznesensky of Russia, and German-Israeli Amichai exclusively in translation and with the explicit hope that – as we learn from the first editorial – 'what is being written elsewhere can only stimulate poetry-making in this country' (*MPT* 1).

'Since our only real motive in publishing [the magazine]', we read in the 1982 introduction reflecting on the origins of *MPT*, 'was our own curiosity in contemporary foreign poetry, we favoured the translations that best revealed the individuality and strangeness of the original' (*ST* 201). The word 'strangeness' is not incidental and throughout this chapter, we shall see how the choice of poems aligned with the editors' policy, taste and preference for what they called 'rough'

or 'literal' translation.[1] These are two different but mutually conditioned things. Both evidence the editors' attraction to, in Bergin's words, 'a certain type of basic utterance, and the belief that this gave truth and authenticity to the text'.[2] This is because 'literalism' for Hughes and Weissbort was, as Martin Dodsworth observes, 'not quite what literalism might be for other people'.[3] *MPT*'s early editorials showed an unexpected affinity for non-ideal translations, largely shaped by Hughes' influences and pressures. In 1974 letter János Csokits even advised Hughes, saying: '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'.[4]

In the editorial to the Czech issue of *MPT* we read: 'after our experience as editors of this paper, we feel more strongly than ever that the first ideal is literalness, insofar as the original is what we are curious about. The very oddity and struggling dumbness of a word-for-word version is what makes our own imagination jump' (*MPT* 3). This preference for publishing rough and unpolished versions of the original poems (sometimes against the intentions and even direct wishes of the author) was an idiosyncratic and historically specific tactic. Such translation hoped to meta-textually reveal its own imperfection, almost as if the emotional intensity of the very process of translating (or co-translating) could leave a physical mark on the body of translated, printed text. To feel this text is to feel and touch the imperfections of its texture. It is also to, as in Herbert's poem 'I would like to describe', strive for a plain, clear, and somewhat unmediated poem. In a series of similes, Herbert declares how he 'would like to describe courage | without dragging behind me a dusty lion | and also anxiety | without shaking a glass full of water'. In the most

[1] After modernism, the 'individuality and strangeness of the original' policy of 'literalness' is not the first thing that comes to mind. Instead, it is the V-effekt (in English translation, usually known as either the alienation or distancing effect). Inspired by the Russian Formalists, the idea was central to the dramatic theory of Bertolt Brecht and consisted of the use of techniques aiming to distance the audience from involvement in the fictional word within a play by transgressing conventions of the fourth wall. Techniques such as the exposure of behind-the scenes scenography, having actors step out of their role to comment on the plot and keeping spectators aware that they were in the theatre were revolutionary, introducing meta-theatrical commentaries that hoped to assign the audience an active role in the *production* of meaning.
[2] Bergin, 'Ted Hughes and the Literal', p. 93.
[3] Martin Dodsworth, 'The God of Details', *Agenda*, 43.1 (2007), 27.
[4] János Csokits to Ted Hughes, 29 November 1974. The Ted Hughes Archive, British Library.

salient line of the meta-textual poem, the author declares he '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'.[5] Such unmediated access to 'one word', that would be so authentic and so powerful that it would need to be 'drawn out' of the poet's breast 'like a rib', is not possible. This lack of full access to 'the word', evinced through the creative violence of tearing flesh, leaves the poet with an even greater need for self-translation to bridge the gap between original emotional experience and its translated aesthetic representation. On theoretical grounds, the metaphors of translation as a violence to the original are not new. In his *The Translator's Invisibility* Venuti talks about 'the violence that resides in the very purpose and activity of translation'. This purpose is to reconstitute the foreign text 'in accordance with values, beliefs, and representations that pre-exist it in the translating language and culture' which as Venuti argues, is 'always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts'.[6]

Even today, a flick through the inaugural issue of *MPT* suggests that translated poems were treated by the editors with utter seriousness and the ambition, as Weissbort put it in one of his letters to the secretary of the Arts Council of Great Britain, to 'overcome the conditioned negative response to literary magazines'.[7] In a daring yet brief editorial, narrow columns of tightly packed poems leave virtually no blank space, minimal bibliographical commentary, and assert the primacy of texts over critical surveys. Though Weissbort and Hughes reported that the material for their process of selection and inclusion came from all over the world, it was work from a region 'which has been at the centre of cataclysm' that struck them as 'the most insistent' (*MPT* 1). If genuine, this sense of resuscitative urgency and conviction that 'the translation of poetry become important, almost political business' was as much polemical as it was appreciative (*ST* 202). It was a reaction to a model of poetry associated with the Movement, perhaps best

[5] Herbert, *The Collected Poems,* p. 65.
[6] Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 14.
[7] Letter from Weissbort to Eric White, 16 June 1965, King's College London MPT Archives.

summarised by Larkin's alleged response to the question of whether he read foreign poets: 'Foreign poetry? No!'[8]

Translation always bears an imprint of the receiving culture which, as Venuti has shown, mirrors its values and expectations. The establishment of *MPT* both coincided with and contributed to an increased interest in the popularization and promotion of foreign, contemporary authors, and a new visibility of translated poetry that was often, if simplistically, presented as being able to bridge the gap between political realities. Even if geopolitical tensions, the bifurcation of the world into West and East, and a certain stagnation felt by authors of the 1950s all contributed to a feeling of urgency, the idea of reading poetry from outside one's linguistic circle was nothing novel. While I will continue to set *MPT* in its relevant academic and literary-historical contexts, it is salient to emphasise that the magazine was a collaborative effort of poets and translators and not of theoreticians and academics. It never developed, nor intended to develop, a consistent or recognized theory of translation and it would be erroneous to retrospectively judge the validity of its initiative against the grain of translation theory that came afterwards, or according to today's standards of impact, inclusivity, and the decolonization of reading. Still, if any specific vision or method can be extracted from the early issues of *MPT*, it would indeed be a proclivity to literalness and interest in 'literals'. In reading the early editorials of *MPT* we will see a paradoxical reversal of the traditional meaning of 'literal', where it will no longer signify a translation which is 'accurate' or 'precise'. Instead, it comes to denote a kind of *meta-translatory urgency* felt by the editors in the mid-1960s. For Hughes co-translating Pilinszky from Hungarian, a translation could be 'an act that aligns [the translator] with the original author's piety'.[9] 'Literals' in that light are the means of identifying with the image that prompted the original poem to exist, with the ultimate aim of gaining greater authenticity from this largely *imaginary encounter*. For many reasons, chief amongst them the demand for more post-Holocaust poetry, anxieties of the Cold War, and frustration with the domestic literary market, Eastern European poetry was believed to

[8] Ian Hamilton, 'A Conversation with Ian Hamilton', in Philip Larkin, *Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp. 19-26 (p. 25).
[9] Daniel Weissbort, *Ted Hughes and Translation* (London: Richard Hollis, 2010), p. 114.

be so simple, urgent and rough, perhaps so *unliterary*, that it demanded near-immediate translation into English. This illusion of direct transfer prompts some of Maria Tymoczko's ideas about translation being always partial, operating through metonymies. On the subject of early Irish literature in English translation, the critic specifies:

> Such metonymies are to be found in the way that translation is always a partial process, whereby some but not all of the source text is transposed, and in the way that translations represent source texts by highlighting specific segments or parts, or by allowing specific attributes of the source texts to dominate and, hence, to represent the entirety of the work.[10]

Similarly in our case, by making only the part represent the whole, poetry from Eastern Europe became refracted. Moreover, early editorials of *MPT* hoped to make readers believe that the brokenness and 'struggling dumbness of a word-for-word version' would allow a deeper emotional connection with the traumatic historical experiences they, perhaps paradoxically, deemed 'untranslatable'. Tracing some of these shifts and breaks informs our understanding of 'literals' as an idiosyncratic strive toward meta-translatory authenticity. It also allows us to ask what the editors' criteria for inclusion were, what 'specific segments or parts' of the source text were exposed, and why.

Whilst in my introductory chapter I sketched the context that allowed initiatives like *MPT* to be revolutionary, we should be aware of the risk of focusing on only one side of this story. The line of argument characteristic of *MPT*'s self-commentaries is that poets from Eastern Europe galvanised British critics to reflect on the condition of their literary scene, equipping English-speaking poets with an alternative idiom. In the limited literature on *MPT*, critics tend to endorse translated poetry not by looking closely at what has been published and said about the incoming poetry but by simply repeating a selection of the editors' comments (*ST* 204). I would like to acknowledge this difficulty, given that such an approach would not just silence Eastern European poets but might also reduce English-speaking poets' fascination with new poetry to a postcolonial sense of guilt and desire to offer redress. Through reading *MPT*'s editorials we can see how the

[10] Maria Tymoczko, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1999), p. 282.

magazine negotiates its position between two opposing tendencies, described first by Schleiermacher and then by translation theorist Lawrence Venuti as domestication and foreignization.[11]

Among the numerous miscellaneous ideas and references present in the commentaries surrounding *MPT*, some patterns emerge, and I will demonstrate that these mirror, to some extent, larger and often self-contradictory concerns which can shed new light on our understanding of late modernism and the role that the reception of Eastern European poetry played in it. Combining literary-historical approach with archival research, I will show that the periodical gathered together enthusiasts of poetry who believed in the moral and political significance of printing and popularising translations from Eastern Europe and who were important figures in the British literary scene, and that ultimately, they have had a direct impact on a changing readership. Focusing primarily on the earliest issues of the magazine, I argue that *MPT* not only brought foreign poetry to an English-speaking audience, but also facilitated contact between authors, their translators, editors, and publishing houses which had a direct and measurable impact on the British 'translationscape' and cultural exchange during a time of significant political division.[12] To delineate the background for the establishment of *MPT* I will first address a few overlapping issues such as education policy, class division, and generational clash. What where the specific circumstances of the 1950s and 1960s that led to translations from Eastern Europe being described as something new, refreshing, resuscitative in the first place? Before moving to a more detailed discussion of the early days of *MPT*, in this brief section my emphasis falls on the educational context of 1950s Oxford and Cambridge and its formative effect on virtually all the poets and critics who would later be associated with the magazine. It was this environment that led the future editors of *MPT* to position their journal as at once a continuation of and polemic with the modernist tradition of 'little magazines'.

[11] See *Translation: Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, ed. by Daniel Weissbort and Ástráður Eysteinsson (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 205-09, 546-57.
[12] Jordan Smith, 'Translationscapes: On the Legibility of Transnational Ideologies in World Literary Systems', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 54.4 (2017), 749–70.

1950s education, different visions, and the beginning of *MPT*

When examining the social context for the increased interest in translation and the foundation of *MPT*, an issue that seems to demand closer attention is how the rise of translation studies relates to the problem of language-learning and education in mid-twentieth-century England. Already in his 1929 essay on Dante, Eliot commented on how modern languages 'tend to separate abstract thought' while 'medieval Latin tended to concentrate on what men of various races and lands could think together'.[13] Though for Eliot 'men of various races and lands' is practically synonymous with the white, male, and European canon, the consequences of the change of emphasis from Latin to national languages is undeniable. Amongst other consequences, this shift in language-learning brought about a reduction of broad humanist education, formerly satisfied by the traditional study of Classics, resulting in changes in our understanding of the canon. Here, the domesticity of English life and the preference of the Movement poets for 'a neutral tone' is relevant in further thinking of why, despite its deep roots in classical education, translation studies was welcomed with such enthusiasm that it almost appeared as if translation were a novel invention of the 1960s.

From the 1930s onwards, Stevenson notices, the 'academic study of English expanded enormously in scale […], and in its concern with critical theory, especially in the late 1970s and 1980s – often with direct effects on contemporary authors'.[14] To give context to this statement; an English Tripos was only established as an independent discipline in Cambridge in 1917, whilst the separate Faculty of English was founded in 1926. So-called 'Cambridge English' was not just a new academic discipline but a historical phenomenon that would change the dynamics of the study of literature at university level, becoming arguably one of the most popular courses for poets to study. The founding principles of Cambridge English were of course established in contrast to the prior conservatism and rigorously humanist education best represented by Classics.

[13] Eliot, 'Dante', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot. Volume 3, Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929*, ed. by Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2015), 701.
[14] Stevenson, p. 8.

On the one hand, the new field allowed for greater diversity and egalitarianism, responded to new strands of literary criticism, and celebrated the achievements of canonical writers, building the distinction of national literature from its larger European heritage. On the other, the study of English, with its mildly nationalistic emphasis, separated the study of literature from knowledge of linguistics, and removed the necessity of learning even the basics of philology, replacing it with the study of Old and Middle English, sometimes even Old Norse. Knowledge of Latin and Greek was soon to become a relic and, most importantly, a clear sign of social class and of a private education. In his thought-provoking article published in 1983 in the *London Review of Books*, Raymond Williams discusses the origins and limits of English as an academic discipline. He observes how behind the new field was 'the late 18th-century sense of English Literature, a national literature, as distinct from the earlier Classical and European emphases'.[15] His argument moves from sketching the context that allowed academic English to come into being through exploring the dissatisfaction with Practical Criticism characteristic of the 1960s, to reflecting on the future of the field; pondering whether the interdisciplinary approach might suppress students' critical thinking. In discussing the dynamics of the English Tripos, he notes:

> Richards's theory of language and of reading was based on a notion of trainable individual competence which had the desirable effect of ordering and harmonising mental impulses. The version of Literature which he shared with others was in terms not only of a 'storehouse of recorded values' but of these as especially indicating 'when habitual narrowness of interests or confused bewilderment are replaced by an intricately wrought composure'.[16]

This reference to Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929) evinces Williams' reservations about the critic's methods, particularly – at least to Williams' mind – making the reading of literature into a trainable competency, categorising works into identifiable styles, and treating close reading with scientific-minded scrutiny. Though this argument is individual and simplifies Richard's methods, the undeniable popularity of close reading was at least partly due to strategic considerations. Namely, the method is ideally suited to the seminar, discussion group, or conference format. Of

[15] Raymond Williams, 'Cambridge English and Beyond', *London Review of Books* 5.12, 7 Jul 1983 < https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v05/n12/raymond-williams/cambridge-english-and-beyond> [accessed 15 Jan 2022].
[16] Ibid.

course, some of the critic's ideas were an obvious continuation of an Eliotic tradition, but the New Criticism started to treat these propositions as dogma, partially explaining the ferocity of the rebellion ignited amongst the next generation of scholars. The major paradoxes of New Criticism as taught in university were that even if the idea of close reading hoped to free the lyric from the chains of context, it overly mechanized the interpretation of texts by, albeit implicitly, making them representatives of each period. In other words, the close reading of the text is valid only if we assume that the text is worth reading in the first place. Such a pattern shows a problem similar to one described by Tymoczko in her writing about translation and coloniality. Namely, the selection of texts always aligns with the policy and agenda of the person who selects.

Here, Eliot's comment from his 1956 essay 'The Frontiers of Criticism' is useful for thinking about the tension between critical theory and poetic practice. Eliot writes that he sometimes thought about getting rid of the extensive notes to *The Waste Land* as 'they have had almost greater popularity than the poem itself'.[17] While Eliot's self-fashioning rhetoric should be taken with a pinch of salt, his comment on the position of the poet-critic still captures the difficulty faced by mid-century academia (so a formative environment for poets and critics who would later be involved in *MPT*). Eliot observes that 'the increasing attention given to the study of English and American literature in our universities […] has led to a situation in which many critics are teachers, and many teachers are critics'. As a result of those changes 'most of the really interesting criticism to-day is the work of men of letters who have found their way into universities, and of scholars whose critical activity has been first exercised in the classroom'.[18] Theoretically, Eliot does not diminish the importance of such critics-teachers and yet in the same essay, he draws a link between the evolution of literary criticism and generational change, suggesting how the quality of criticism is both mirrored and dependent on the quality of education:

> Many years ago I pointed out that every generation must provide its own literary criticism; for, as I said, 'each generation brings to the contemplation of art its own categories of

[17] Eliot, 'The Frontiers of Criticism', in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 8, Still and Still Moving, 1954-1965*, ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber and Faber, 2019), 127.
[18] Ibid., p. 122.

> appreciation, makes its own demands upon art, and has its own uses for art.' When I made this statement I am sure that I had in mind a good deal more than the changes of taste and fashion: I had in mind at least the fact that each generation, looking at masterpieces of the past in a different perspective, is affected in its attitude by a greater number of influences than those which bore upon the generation previous. But I doubt whether I had in mind the fact that an important work of literary criticism can alter and expand the content of the term 'literary criticism' itself. Some years ago I drew attention to the steady change in meaning of the word education from the sixteenth century to the present day, a change which had taken place owing to the fact that education not only comprised more and more subjects, but was being supplied for or imposed upon more and more of the population.[19]

In the self-quotation from his earlier essay on Matthew Arnold (1933), Eliot points out that each generation brings something new to art, responding to its own needs and shared expectations for the role of art. In this essay, written over two decades later (1956), the poet revisits his old claim but with specific emphasis on how the new generation writes in response to a much larger body of criticism and how the new generation of critics is affected by changes in education, increasing interdisciplinarity, and more accessible, thus less rigorous, education.

The words of the critic bring to mind Hughes' comment from his 1982 introduction to *MPT* where he writes: 'probably one's own generation always seems to have played a key role of some sort, so I may be wrong in my impression that the main work of translating poetry was done – was certainly initiated – by the generation born five years or so either side of 1930' (*ST* 203). It is noteworthy that Hughes (born in 1930) refers not so much to modernists but to his own generation. Indeed, the poets born 'five years or so either side of 1930' would enter adulthood in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. On first reading, the tone of the comment, at once confident and hesitant, gives the impression of distance, as if Hughes' words were external to his involvement. Nevertheless, the specificity of his dates and reference to how poets born in the 1930s took the initiative in translating poetry turns the note into a self-endorsement which confirms Eliot's diagnosis about the urgency of each generation to set its demands upon art.

[19] Ibid., pp. 121-2.

To consider the relationship between education and translation in the mid-century England is also to consider the dynamics of class division. With few exceptions, the background of most of the young undergraduates who would later establish *MPT* magazine was quite different from the privately educated students and literary critics that Eliot envisions in his essays. Hughes was from a humble background, Weissbort made his entry into university coming from an emigrant family of Polish Jews and grew up speaking French, English and Yiddish. Lucas Myers, a good friend of Hughes and Plath, was an American from a mixed background (his father was dean of the cathedral in Havana and his mother was a civil rights activist and later sponsor of an educational charity). George MacBeth in turn was the son of a mining engineer and grew up in South Yorkshire. In order to pursue his education, he won an Open Scholarship to study Classics at New College, Oxford. By the early 1950s, many of the poets and critics who would later be associated with *MPT* arrived at Cambridge to study English, the Practical Criticism was at its zenith and one generation of scholars was already trained according to the tool-centred, logically organised, and emotionally suppressive methods favoured by formalist reading. Unsurprisingly, it was a scenario ripe for a quasi-Oedipal conflict over the role of poetry, methods of reading, and the freedom of going beyond the national, if not nationalistic, canon. At Oxford, a group of undergraduates who hoped to challenge the existing method of reading established a Critical Society, and first published in *Oxford Poetry* (printed in 1952 by Fantasy Press). The group included, amongst others, Alvarez, David Thompson, Graham Martin, MacBeth, Edward Lucie-Smith, and Geoffrey Hill. At Cambridge, the formation of likeminded rebels centred around Hughes, Weissbort, Philip Hobsbaum, Thom Gunn, Myers, and Peter Redgrove. Years later, in his memoir, Meyers recalled how one of Hughes' early ideas was to 'encouraging someone to found a poetry magazine that would be issued in tabloid format and sold for threepence a copy'[20]. Many of those Oxford and Cambridge-educated poets would later form the reading group known as 'The Group' – an early form of today's literary workshops and creative writing gatherings – and would also go on to join the advisory board of *MPT*. Curiously, as the following short passage from Lucie-Smith's

[20] Lucas Myers, *Crow Steered Bergs Appeared* (Sewanee: Proctor's Hall, 2001), p. 57.

autobiography suggests, each group seemed to envy the other, and rivalry and debate continued to rage on the pages of literary magazines:

> We Oxford poets had an inferiority complex about our Cambridge contemporaries. The chief cause was Thom Gunn. Though his first collection, *Fighting Terms*, did not appear until 1954, the poems Gunn was publishing in magazines were already much discussed, and were causing ripples in the literary world well beyond our own student environment.[21]

Even years later, the poets' narratives of their creative endeavours during their university years read like a romantic, self-mythologised quest to free poetry from the constraints of academic discourse. Hughes' change of degree from English to anthropology, considered alongside his well-known poetic narrative about a fox who stalked him in a dream in order to communicate that literary criticism kills poetry, is a fine example.[22] As Gunn suggested in the opening line of 'A Mirror for Poets' from 1954, 'It was a violent time | Wheels, racks, and fires | In every writer's mouth, and not mere rant', when the ventriloquized poet cries 'I am myself, but part of something greater'.[23] Indeed, the historical moment and need to be 'part of something greater' served young poets as a mirror in which they constructed the image of themselves as poets.

They were not alone and the early 1950s were too problematic a time for education at Cambridge to centre merely on Practical Criticism. The academic on the opposite side of this interpretative horizon to Richards is Frank Raymond Leavis. His break away from context-free reading had a great influence on poets educated in 1950s Cambridge and, albeit indirectly, set an emotional tone for future manifestos. In a conversation with James Campbell, Gunn recalled how Leavis 'had a very interesting view of literature, seeing it as a part of life'.[24] In his *New Bearings in English Poetry*, first published in 1932 and later revised with a new chapter 'Retrospect 1950', Leavis spoke of the poet as someone who is 'more alive in his own age', bringing in an obvious

[21] Edward Lucie-Smith, *The Burnt Child: An Autobiography* (London: Gollancz, 1975), p. 163.
[22] For further the discussion about significance of Hughes' fox-dream see Danny O'Connor, *Ted Hughes and Trauma. Burning the Foxes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1-22.
[23] Thom Gunn, *Collected Poems* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999), pp. 24-5.
[24] James Campbell and Thom Gunn, *Thom Gunn in Conversation with James Campbell* (London: BTL, 2000), p. 22.

neo-Romantic undertone and adding: '[the poet] is unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be'.[25]

In his book on the poets whom he calls the 'Alvarez Generation', Wootten discusses this clash of visions and the schism between the academic curriculum and the ideas that circulated at 1950s Oxford and Cambridge. Tellingly, Wootten remarks: 'the contributors list to *Oxford Poetry* of 1953, edited by Donald Hall and Geoffrey Hill, reads like that of a broad-minded poetry magazine of the 1960s'.[26] Given the role magazines, anthologies, and pamphlets played in the literary scene of the 1960s, Wootten's point is valid. As well as discussing foreign/domestic dichotomies specific to the 1960s, *MPT* was also situating itself in the modernist tradition of 'little magazines' and their western European emphasis. Following this tradition, both periodicals and forewords to the 1960s anthologies acted – as Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible put it – 'as open, heterogeneous social settings in which writers of various races, nationalities, and classes read and responded to each other's work'.[27]

Though we could now question how inclusive modernist magazines really were, they undoubtedly pulsed with the excitement of their times, setting the stage for collaborative efforts. In the first chapter I mentioned that in the late 1950s Alvarez persistently sent out proposals for a new magazine that would fill the gap of 'seriousness' and would provide a space for reviews and discussion about contemporary literature. In 1965, the editorial ambitions of both Alvarez and *MPT* can be seen as an indirect response to Eliot's 'last editorial' to *The Criterion*; the famous magazine the poet edited and ran between 1922 to 1939. In his last editorial Eliot admitted that '[he] no longer feel[s] the enthusiasm necessary to make a literary review what it should be' and diagnosed rancorous tendencies in literary industry.[28] The editorial read like a prophecy of the

[25] Frank Raymond Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932).
[26] Wootten, p. 3.
[27] Churchill, Suzanne and Adam McKible, 'Little Magazines and Modernism: An Introduction', *American Periodicals*, 15.1 (2005), 1-5.
[28] Eliot, 'Last Words', in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 5, Tradition and Orthodoxy, 1934-1939*, ed. by Iman Javadi, Ronald Schuchard, and Jayme Stayer (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2017), 663.

cultural decline of literary criticism, whose future is uncertain and perhaps destined to turn into 'the small and obscure papers and reviews, those which hardly are read by anyone but their own contributors'.[29] In the end, Eliot's last editorial did not just close the magazine but symbolised, in 1939, the end of a certain era and marked the disappearance of what Eliot called 'the European mind'. This pessimistic diagnosis seemed to resonate strongly with Alvarez while the 1960s initiatives were at once continuation and polemic to the earlier modernist tradition of 'little magazines'.

In the 1960s, these were not just little magazines but little presses and publishing houses. In his peculiarly translation-focused speech made at the funeral of Weissbort in 2013, Anthony Rudolf honoured his friend's editorial activity. He drew attention to the emergence of small publishing houses: 'following and overlapping with another pioneering magazine, *Your Environment*, which Danny edited with David Ross, *MPT*, founded in 1965, was a vocational inspiration to a generation of small publishing houses, including my own Menard Press, Anvil, Carcanet and Bloodaxe, all founded a few years later'.[30] Wootten's comment about the 1960s magazines allows the reader to link the youthful enthusiasm of low-key student initiatives I mentioned with the later developments of criticism. We might, of course, take issue with this comparison of debuting poetry and broad-minded magazines. After all, Wootten's book was published in 2015 and the rhetoric of the chapter about the 1950s is one of retrospective anticipation. In other words, the author already knew the end of this story and it is precisely this knowledge that informs his reconstructive interpretation, granting him the benefit of hindsight. This question is not an accusation against Wootten's propositions but a larger methodological problem that Margaret Cohen described, following reflexive criticism, as 'archaeological contextualization'.[31] How often do we, as critics, look at the source material with preconceptions, already knowing what we wish it to prove? She explains how what has recently been called the 'mimetic' approach in

[29] Ibid.
[30] Anthony Rudolf, 'Daniel, What Have You Done With Your Lions?' A revised and expanded version of a speech made at the funeral of Daniel Weissbort on 29 November 2013, Brompton Cemetery, London, printed in *PN Review*, March/April 2014, pp. 51-3.
[31] Margaret Cohen, 'Narratology in the Archive of Literature', *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), 51–75.

literary criticism is another way to encourage consideration of the implicit situatedness of theory. It is worth bearing in mind the methodological problem of historical confirmation bias – writing literary history by 'working backwards' – as I move to the next sections of the chapter, which sketches the background to the establishment of *MPT*, focusing specifically on the politics of inclusion in the first edition, advertisement and self-commentaries, and the visual format of the broadsheet.

Behind the scenes of the first issue

Despite popular understanding, *MPT* was not the first periodical to publish post-war poetry from Eastern Europe; this was *The Observer*. This was no coincidence, given that Alvarez began work for *The Observer* in autumn 1956 and remained there for ten years as a poetry critic and editor, with his personal preferences having an obvious and direct impact on the paper's published content. In his autobiography, Alvarez stressed how *The Observer* was the first journal in Britain to feature groups of poems in translation. Alvarez brought translations of a number of Eastern European poets to England around 1961, following the months he spent there whilst travelling and preparing for BBC broadcast *Under Pressure*. If fellow poets were to read the works of Eastern Europeans, they were more likely to first read them in *The Review*, *Encounter*, *Observer*, or in the first volumes of the Penguin series than they were to read them in *MPT*. The main impulse for gathering more translations came after Hughes returned from the Festival of Two Worlds in the Spoleto in 1965, where he first heard readings of both the Czech poet Holub and the Polish poet Herbert. In 1965, establishing *MPT* symbolized – thinking back to the conversation between Weissbort and Amichai quoted in the first chapter – 'a certain cultural tendency' (*PS* 305-312). Of course, the editors would later admit, as Hughes did in the 1982 introduction, that 'even though the boom in the popular sales of translated modern poetry was without precedent', their initiative 'certainly lacked market research' (*ST* 201-207).

Bearing in mind some of the difficulties related to dis/locating Eastern Europe, I must clarify that Alvarez (and poets belonging to his circle) tended to present the influx of translations from Eastern Europe as a novel and unprecedented phenomenon. By this logic, in speaking about 'poetry from Eastern Europe' they not only narrow down this otherwise broad term to post-war contemporary poets but also intentionally exclude Soviet Russia. This distinction is important not just for political reasons, but also for literary and historical accuracy. Russian literature has, for instance, been present in the Anglophone market since much earlier, around the eighteenth century. The period between 1885 and 1925 in particular saw unprecedented interest in the transfer of Russian prose fiction into English, thanks to the translation work of Constance Garnett. Even though this dissertation is about the influx of non-Russian Eastern European post-war poetry into English in the 1960s, Garnett's conviction that 'Tolstoy's simple style goes straight into English without any trouble'.[32] shows a relatable pattern of moral/spiritual identification achieved through linguistic domestication. In an article suggestively entitled (following Venuti's idea of 'symptomatic' readings) 'The Illusion of Transparency', Beasley and Bullock look behind the scenes of the mid-century transfer of Russian literature into English in much more detail, nuancing the widely shared and repeated convictions about, for instance, the straightforward realism of the Russian novel and its allegedly transparent English renderings.[33] The role individuals and institutions played in facilitating those transfers are not transparent and both Garnett's domesticizing comments on Russian fiction travelling to the English language without 'any trouble' and Alvarez's promotion of Eastern European poetry in the 1960s (shown as a counterbalance to the inertia of the domestic literary front) can be read as oriented towards the British target culture and aiming for a very specific response.

[32] Constance Garnett, 'The Art of Translation', *The Listener*, 30 January 1947, p. 195.
[33] See Beasley and Bullock, 'Introduction: The Illusion of Transparency', *Translation and Literature*, 20.3 (2011), 283-300.

In 1965, after almost two years of corresponding with translators and seeking recommendations of established Eastern European poets, Hughes and Weissbort launched the *MPT* magazine. The first editorial to *MPT* opens with a convoluted passage pertaining to the problem of translatability.

> 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. (*MPT* 1)

Against a long-standing tradition of speaking of poetry as 'lost' in translation, the proverbial truth being that the translator is a traitor (*traduttore traditore*), we would expect editors to introduce the magazine in a more affirmative tone. For a journal founded on a belief in translation and enthusiasm for cultural transfer, this opening statement may seem incongruous at first glance, suggesting that part of poetry is lost in the impossible process of linguistic transfer. However, a closer reading of this intricate passage may give its readers the opposite impression. Referring to the whitening agent in a detergent, the editors point out that 'the poetry' as something abstracted is nothing but an illusion and cannot be distant from the realm of the language. However, they are quick to retreat from this suggestion by hoping, in the very next line, 'that enough of the whole is preservable in some, though by no means in all, poetry'. But how could the poetry possibly preserve itself from itself. How are we to judge which works pass the trying test of translation, and what would 'enough' really entail in the first place? The poetry coming out of Eastern Europe seemed to be the editors' answer. The same editorial note asserted, with what we would now see as transparent hyperbole, that the foreign poetry Hughes and Weissbort intended to introduce to their English-speaking audience was 'more universal than ours'.

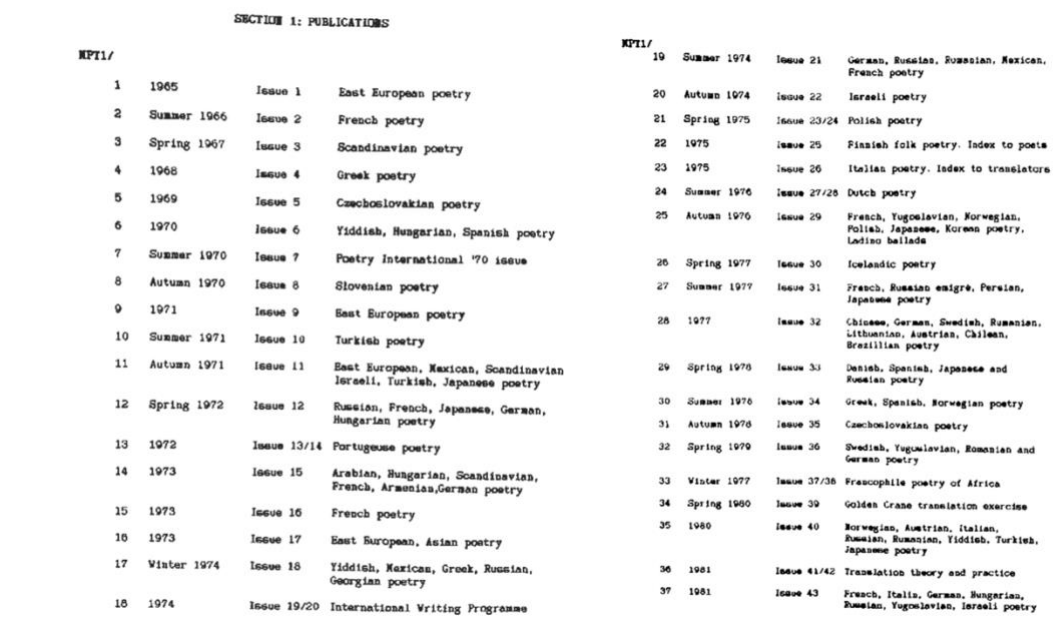
> There has been little attempt to impose any unity on this first issue, but the unity, such as it is, has imposed itself on us. While we had material coming from many other areas of the world, it was that which came from Eastern Europe, which was somehow the most insistent. […] This poetry is more universal 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. (*MPT* 1)

The first editorial for *MPT* can now be read as a specific manifesto, espousing a vision of engaged readership. Despite claiming that it is not their aim to 'disparage English poetry by invidious comparison', the rhetoric they employ while speaking about the poetic diction of 'the whole' Eastern Europe does precisely that. To some extent, it was a codified model of engagement that Porter would come to satirize in his poem referencing the 'Eastern European Translation Market'. In addition, the editors' readiness to compare the imaginary audience of *MPT* to the audience of some unidentified poetry magazines is an obvious rhetorical move. It was not necessarily intended to describe reality but primarily to articulate the editors' aspirations, projecting their specific visions of a morally engaged readership.

According to the editors' narrative, the early encounter with foreign lyric was a catalyst not just for founding the magazine but for further reflection on the condition of British poetry at large. Against the assertions of the first editorial (note the passage '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'), none of this transfer happened immediately. Whilst the published work might imply the kind of textual authority that often quashes any debate over editorial demands and revisions, the thematic unity surely did not just 'imposed itself' on editors. This subtle externalization of agency resembles some of the Romantic strategies of composition as a recollection of text that appears in a fixed form as opposed to the modernist idea of writing from scratch. The tension between both self-fashioning composition practices is, I argue elsewhere, also one of lesser-known and organising tropes of Hughes' poetic vocation.[34] While the rhetoric of poetry 'pressing itself upon us' might well express a certain urgency, a review of archival materials from *MPT* clearly demonstrates a long process of searching first for both poets and then for their translators, followed by strenuous revising, re-organizing, and re-arranging of the limited space the editors had available in order to squeeze in all of the material they wished to include. Weissbort's correspondence with the secretary of the Arts Council of Great Britain reveals that the magazine could not officially afford

[34] See Aleksandra Majak, 'The Editorial Fluidity of Ted Hughes' Crow. From the Life and Songs of the Crow', *Notes and Queries*, 67.1 (2020), 141–45.

to hire contributors; as such, the entire project became the product of voluntary labour and shared idealism. In a subsequent letter Weissbort admits that since they were unable to offer remuneration for contributors' efforts it felt like 'exploiting people's generosity'.[35] Despite those financial constraints, everyone whom Hughes and Weissbort contacted seemed enthusiastic about the prospect; Miłosz sent Weissbort a warm letter promising his translations of Herbert and adding 'of course, I am very interested in your periodical. An excellent idea'.[36] He also assured him that he would send a spare copy of the American edition of the freshly printed *Postwar Polish Poetry* (1965) anthology which he had edited. In an undated letter Victor Contoski wrote to Hughes in a similar tone: 'the idea behind the magazine seems excellent'; in a short reply to Hughes from March 1965, Herbert offered help with recommendations of Czechoslovak and Serbian poets, while Alex Kurczaba added enthusiastically, 'I feel *MPT* fills the gaping need for the conduit through which significant poetry written in language other than English reaches the English-speaking world'.[37]



SECTION 1: PUBLICATIONS

MPT1/			
1	1965	Issue 1	East European poetry
2	Summer 1966	Issue 2	French poetry
3	Spring 1967	Issue 3	Scandinavian poetry
4	1968	Issue 4	Greek poetry
5	1969	Issue 5	Czechoslovakian poetry
6	1970	Issue 6	Yiddish, Hungarian, Spanish poetry
7	Summer 1970	Issue 7	Poetry International '70 issue
8	Autumn 1970	Issue 8	Slovenian poetry
9	1971	Issue 9	East European poetry
10	Summer 1971	Issue 10	Turkish poetry
11	Autumn 1971	Issue 11	East European, Mexican, Scandinavian Israeli, Turkish, Japanese poetry
12	Spring 1972	Issue 12	Russian, French, Japanese, German, Hungarian poetry
13	1972	Issue 13/14	Portuguese poetry
14	1973	Issue 15	Arabian, Hungarian, Scandinavian, French, Armenian,German poetry
15	1973	Issue 16	French poetry
16	1973	Issue 17	East European, Asian poetry
17	Winter 1974	Issue 18	Yiddish, Mexican, Greek, Russian, Georgian poetry
18	1974	Issue 19/20	International Writing Programme

MPT1/			
19	Summer 1974	Issue 21	German, Russian, Rumanian, Mexican, French poetry
20	Autumn 1974	Issue 22	Israeli poetry
21	Spring 1975	Issue 23/24	Polish poetry
22	1975	Issue 25	Finnish folk poetry. Index to poets
23	1975	Issue 26	Italian poetry. Index to translators
24	Summer 1976	Issue 27/28	Dutch poetry
25	Autumn 1976	Issue 29	French, Yugoslavian, Norwegian, Polish, Japanese, Korean poetry, Ladino ballads
26	Spring 1977	Issue 30	Icelandic poetry
27	Summer 1977	Issue 31	French, Russian emigré, Persian, Japanese poetry
28	1977	Issue 32	Chinese, German, Swedish, Rumanian, Lithuanian, Austrian, Chilean, Brazilian poetry
29	Spring 1978	Issue 33	Danish, Spanish, Japanese and Russian poetry
30	Summer 1978	Issue 34	Greek, Spanish, Norwegian poetry
31	Autumn 1978	Issue 35	Czechoslovakian poetry
32	Spring 1979	Issue 36	Swedish, Yugoslavian, Romanian and German poetry
33	Winter 1977	Issue 37/38	Francophile poetry of Africa
34	Spring 1980	Issue 39	Golden Crane translation exercise
35	1980	Issue 40	Norwegian, Austrian, Italian, Russian, Rumanian, Yiddish, Turkish, Japanese poetry
36	1981	Issue 41/42	Translation theory and practice
37	1981	Issue 43	French, Italia, German, Hungarian, Russian, Yugoslavian, Israeli poetry

Fig. 1: The index of MPT issues published between 1965 and 1981. Courtesy of *MPT*, King's College Archive

[35] Letter from Weissbort to White, 18 August 1968, King's College London MPT Archives.
[36] Letter from Miłosz to Weissbort, 8 April 1965, King's College London MPT Archives.
[37] Letters mentioned in this paragraph all come from unpaginated folder 'Poland 1965/1967' to be found in King's College London MPT Archives.

My focus in this chapter is on the early issues of *MPT,* not on the history of the whole magazine. The first issue gave a spark to many more initiatives that followed, all with a strong focus on Eastern European poetry, featuring in number of issues (Fig. 1). These would come to include issue 5 on Czechoslovak poetry from 1969, issue 6 showcasing Yiddish, Hungarian, and Spanish poetry from 1970, and issue 7 bringing together poets featured at the Poetry International festival in 1970. Issues 8 and 9, printed in 1970 and 1971, focused on Slovenian poetry and East European poetry respectively. Other, mixed editions, such as issues 11 (1971), 12 (1972), 15 (1973) and 17 (1973), started to group together voices from all over the world, sometimes going as far as issue 17 devoted to, in its own words, 'East European, and Asian poetry'. Following editions, such as issue 18 (printed in 1974), introduced Georgian poetry, and issues 23-24 (also from 1974) were entirely focused on Polish poetry. Then, again, a period of mixed editions followed, making distinctions between Russian poetry and Eastern European poetry. A few years later, in 1976, issue 35 showcased Czechoslovak poetry. This enumeration gives a sense not just of the editors' preferences but also the poetic geography they were mapping on the pages of their magazine.

The first issue of *MPT* was published in 1965. It sold 500 copies and quickly went to re-print. The price of the magazine was 2s 6d, roughly equivalent to around £2.20 today. *MPT*'s advisory board, listed on the first page of the magazine, came to include Alvarez, George MacBeth, Peter Redgrove, Allan Sillitoe, and Charles Tomlinson – all of whom were interested in the limits of poetic expression in the post-war years. If the editors' ambition and enthusiasm were impressive, the actual shape of the first issue did not reflect the grandiosity of their project. Printed in the form of a broadsheet, the magazine nonetheless more closely resembled a free flyer than a serious newspaper. This format was both deliberate and intentional, foreseen at the foundation of the publication; according to Weissbort's recollection Hughes had hoped to make the magazine 'functional, current, disposable'. According to Weissbort's unpublished memoir, as quoted by Ann Skea, Hughes even fantasized about printing *MPT* '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.[38] Even a close look at the digital scan of the first page evinces the fragility of the broadsheet design by Hollis (Fig. 2).



2s 6d

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 Five–
drive to the front.

translation **Dennis Silk**

Fig. 2: Front cover of the inaugural 1965 issue of *MPT*

Shades of a mirrored text, printed on the other side of the titular page, break through a quasi-pellucid sheet. Pages were not just tightly packed with text, leaving virtually no white space, but were also divided into narrow columns so that the original layout of the poems they published

[38] Quoted in Ann Skea, 'Ted Hughes and Small Press Publication' (2015) <https://ann.skea.com/RainbowPress.htm> [accessed 9 Jul 2023].

was ultimately deformed. Moreover, the first page shows that in order to fit the poems into the layout, the editors opted to use a range of different font sizes. As a result, Amichai's poem 'When I was a Boy' located in the central column is printed with a font several sizes larger than his other, following poem 'When Three or Four are Gathered in a Room' (Fig. 2). Whilst in prose taking such liberties to squeeze text and change its original setting might not make such a drastic difference, in poetry – as Christopher Ricks argues in his *Along Heroic Lines* (2021) – 'the line endings are significant, and they effect their significance'.[39] Despite the frugal and chaotic format of the first edition, on many occasions the editors continued to express their conviction that *MPT* had almost immediately become 'an airport for incoming translations' (*ST* 204).

Reflecting on the early days of *MPT*, Hughes spoke about the transformative potential of translation, highlighting how incoming poems could introduce English readers to the broader possibilities of contemporary poetry and yet pointing out how this idealism 'evaporated with the first bills':

> From the start we saw our editorship as something like an airport for incoming translations, an agency for discovering new foreign poets, and new translators, who then, if their qualifications were right, might pass inland to more permanent residences in published books. We had a general notion of making familiar to English readers the whole range of contemporary possibilities in poetry – in so far as translation can convey any idea of such things. We weren't beyond the fantasy of sending to every known poet – offering to their curiosity – a free copy of each issue. Acquaintance with the diverse poetries of the modern world, we felt, couldn't be bad, even if it only helped to confirm home-grown virtues. That fantasy evaporated with the first bills, but it was partly responsible for our format – a flimsy newspaper (the first issue was on ricepaper) that would never seem to demand more than a cursory scanning, and wouldn't much resist being thrown away. Functional, current, disposable – such were our key words. (*ST* 204)

In the inaugural issue, designed to be 'functional, current, disposable' (*ST* 204), each poet was introduced by a biographical note, with translators acknowledged beneath the relevant poem or section. In total, it included fifty poems, many of which had never before been published in English translation. Five authors were translated by fifteen different translators while Lalić and Miłosz decided to translate their own poems. The exact content of the first issue comprised 48

[39] Christopher Ricks, *Along Heroic Lines* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2021), p. 9.

poems, representing seven male poets, fourteen translators (four female), and five different countries. For a clearer orientation, the table below specifies the poets published, their translators, country of origin, poems included, and original language:

Poet	Translator	Country	Poems included	Language
Yehuda Amichai	Dennis Silk Abraham Birman Rachel Sauer Robert Friend Margalit Benaya Arieh Sachs Dom Moraes	Germany/Israel	Summer or its Ending From 'The Visit of the Queen of Sheba' King Saul and I The First Battles When Three or Four are Gathered in a Room The U.N. Command in Jerusalem My Mother Baked the Whole World for Me High Heels When I was a Boy A Room by the Sea	Gernan and Hebrew
Zbigniew Herbert	Czesław Miłosz Magdalena Czajkowska	Poland	Reconstruction of a Poet Poem Period The Longobards	Polish
Miroslav Holub	George Theiner	Czech	A dog in the quarry Five minutes after the air raid Žito the magician A helping hand Model of a man On the Building Site of a Hostel How to paint a perfect Christmas Riders Great and Strong The Wind in Winter Wings Death in the evening Reality The Fly And what's new	Czech
Ivan V. Lalić	self-translated	Serbian	An Inventory of Moonlight Love	Serbian

Czesław Miłosz	self-translated	Polish	Song of a Citizen The Poor Poet Not More That which was Great	Polish
Vasko Popa	Anne Pennington	Serbian	The Little Box Heaven's Ring Yawn of Yawns Bone to Bone Games The Quartz Pebble	Serbian
Andrei Voznesensky	Daniel Weissbort Edwin Morgan Max Hayward	Soviet Russia	Poem Lettish Saga Italian Garage Poem A Dissertation in the Form of a Ballad Rublyov Road Roman Holiday	Russian

Table 2: The poets published in the inaugural issue of *MPT*

From today's perspective, one should question whether the arbitrary choice of exclusively male writers was in any way representative of an area which was both linguistically and culturally diverse. This selection should perhaps now be seen merely, Dugdale suggests in *Centres of Cataclysm*, as a 'partial snapshot' from the region that just happened to be in line with the editors' interests 'and favoured few European male voices, a new canon in place of the old' (*CC* 14). In a letter replying to Rudolf from March 1965, Hughes explains: 'we hope to concentrate mainly on poetry of the last 50 years, but we'd include anything, from anytime, if we liked it'.[40] Clearly, the list of issues I discussed (Fig. 1) reflected those, to some extent, random criteria for the inclusion of, as we read, 'anything, from anytime' depending on whether editors 'liked it'. The excerpt from a conversation with Amichai, during which Weissbort looked back on the early days of the magazine may also serve as an example:

> I was starting a magazine, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, with Ted. The reason I started it was because Ted ... had come across these examples of their [poets'] work, and these rough translations – they were really quite good translations, I think – impressed us both a great

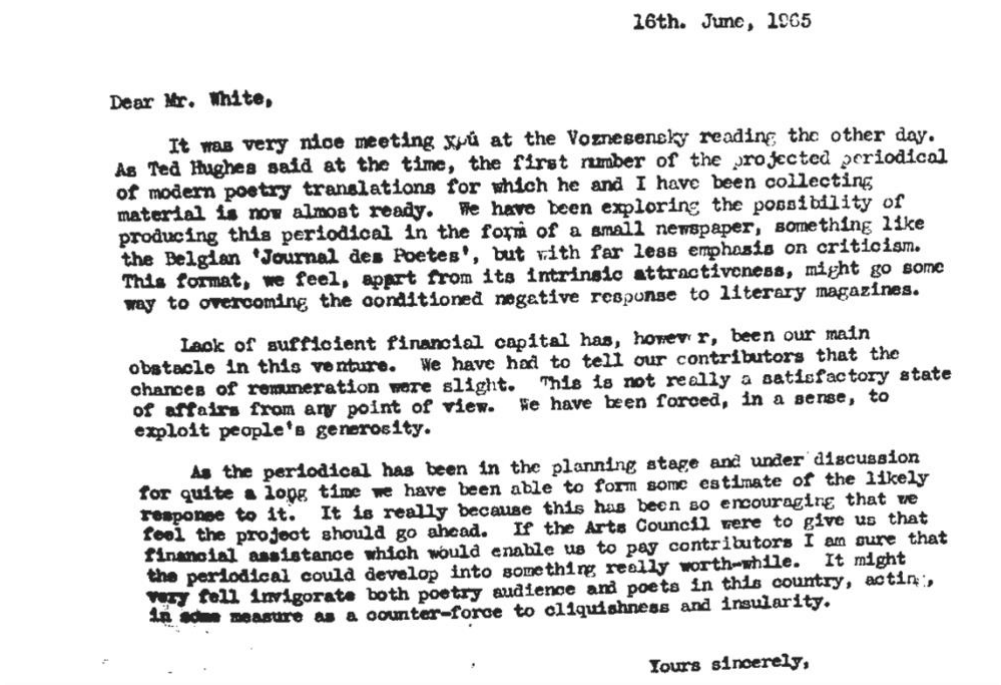
[40] Rudolf, 'Daniel, What Have You Done with Your Lions?', p. 51.

> deal. So, it was really coming across this wealth of poetry, about which we knew nothing before, and particularly in view of the inertness of the English scene at the time, and the American scene too, as it seemed to us, that we felt a need to start a magazine. (*PS* 305)

Given the confident tone characteristic of their editorials (typically wishful thinking about the future importance of *MPT*), the passage recollecting how *MPT* came into being lacks force. The reader immediately notes a hesitant tone, with awkward additions such as 'I think' at the end of the sentence. Moreover, one cannot help but note the comment that 'these rough translations' of the poets of which editors 'knew nothing before' were 'really quite good'. Or at least Weissbort thinks they were. Most of all, the passage suggests arbitrariness in their choices and criteria for inclusion while the focus falls on the intertia of the domestic literary scene. Think back to Even-Zohar's ideas about how peripheral literature tends to enter the bloodstream of dominant literature in specific moments of crisis, turning points, or literary vacuums. In such moments translated literature is looked to in order to re-organise the system.[41] This role of 'mover and shaker' is, of course, problematic as it can limit the reception of 'peripheral' literature to reading (or 'using' it) it merely as a juxtaposition and counterexample for receiving/dominant culture. As suggested in the passage above, the editor's take on 'rough' translations too is problematic. After all, we do not know the criteria behind Weissbort's evaluation of 'rough', unfinished, literal, and unpolished translation as 'really quite good' and makes us wonder if this semi-mythologized story of the roughness of foreign verse simply fitted with Hughes' and Weissbort's marketing of the magazine. The editors' recollection of how the first edition came together – Alvarez' enthusiastic but slightly chaotic correspondence with translators, scant knowledge of the political situation of the region, idealistic notions like sending a copy to every living poet – gives the impression of a collage of unknown poets printed on the thin paper of a school magazine, rather than a periodical that would become influential in shaping the reception of many lesser-known literatures into English literary culture. Since first impressions are often, no doubt, visual it is then worth commenting on the broadsheet form and physical presentation of the first issue.

[41] Even-Zohar, pp. 191-7.

In a letter from July 1965, Weissbort informs Richard Hollis that they have applied for a grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain and it is rumoured that their application is being considered sympathetically. Their first inquiry about the possibility of applying for an Arts Council grant was sent to the Council's secretary Eric White on 16 June 1965 but this, again, seemed to be a subject of earlier, less formal conversations. The opening of the letter provides information about the editors' vision and how they hoped to distinguish *MPT* from what Weissbort calls 'the conditioned negative responses to literary magazines'.[42] In the first paragraph of the letter Weissbort admits that they 'have been exploring the possibility of producing this periodical in the form of a small newspaper, something like the Belgian *Journal des Poètes*, but with far less emphasis on criticism' (Fig. 3).



16th. June, 1965

Dear Mr. White,

It was very nice meeting you at the Voznesensky reading the other day. As Ted Hughes said at the time, the first number of the projected periodical of modern poetry translations for which he and I have been collecting material is now almost ready. We have been exploring the possibility of producing this periodical in the form of a small newspaper, something like the Belgian 'Journal des Poetes', but with far less emphasis on criticism. This format, we feel, apart from its intrinsic attractiveness, might go some way to overcoming the conditioned negative response to literary magazines.

Lack of sufficient financial capital has, however, been our main obstacle in this venture. We have had to tell our contributors that the chances of remuneration were slight. This is not really a satisfactory state of affairs from any point of view. We have been forced, in a sense, to exploit people's generosity.

As the periodical has been in the planning stage and under discussion for quite a long time we have been able to form some estimate of the likely response to it. It is really because this has been so encouraging that we feel the project should go ahead. If the Arts Council were to give us that financial assistance which would enable us to pay contributors I am sure that the periodical could develop into something really worth-while. It might very well invigorate both poetry audience and poets in this country, acting, in some measure as a counter-force to cliquishness and insularity.

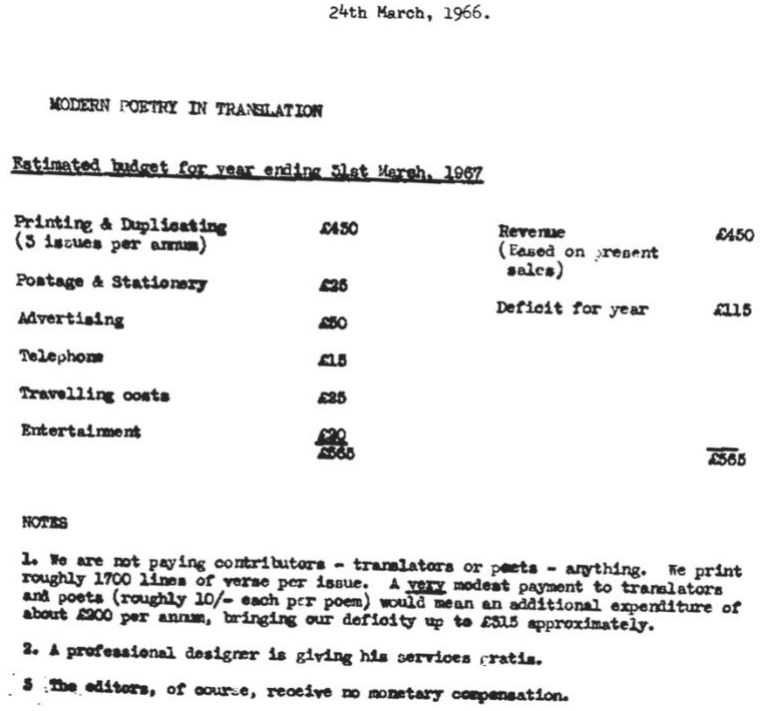
Yours sincerely,

Fig 3: Letter from Weissbort to White ,16 June 1965 London, King's College Archives, MPT 3/1/2.

Another letter from Weissbort to Hollis, from 19 August 1965, is more specific about the content of the first issue, and evinces the magazine's financial constraints. The editors were seeking advertisers to support the publication but reported that two possible leads, whilst initially

[42] Letter from Weissbort to Hollis, 19 August 1965, King's College London MPT Archives.

interested, now seemed doubtful; Weissbort hoped that writing to the publishers might assist in finding new options. Money was clearly an issue and lack of finances not only forced editors to omit a lot of the material they had gathered but made them decide against including photographs that would go alongside a short biographical note, despite Hollis' advice. 'I think we had better not have photos as these would take up still more room,' explains Weissbort, adding, 'I had wanted to include an article on Popa too (approx. 1369 words), but this, I suppose, is definitely out, unless we cut even more drastically'.[43] Perhaps the first *MPT* issue would have looked very different, if the positive response from the Arts Council to grant *MPT* 50 pounds had arrived earlier.



24th March, 1966.

MODERN POETRY IN TRANSLATION

Estimated budget for year ending 31st March, 1967

Printing & Duplicating (3 issues per annum)	£450	Revenue (Based on present sales)	£450
Postage & Stationery	£25		
Advertising	£50	Deficit for year	£115
Telephone	£15		
Travelling costs	£25		
Entertainment	£20		
	£565		£565

NOTES

1. We are not paying contributors - translators or poets - anything. We print roughly 1700 lines of verse per issue. A very modest payment to translators and poets (roughly 10/- each per poem) would mean an additional expenditure of about £200 per annum, bringing our deficity up to £315 approximately.

2. A professional designer is giving his services gratis.

3. The editors, of course, receive no monetary compensation.

Fig. 4: Letter from Weissbort to White, 24 March 1966 London, King's College Archives MPT 3/1/2

The inaugural issue was designed by Hollis, who would later go on to become one of the key theoreticians of graphic design and visual culture. Passionate about typography as a means to give voice to text, Hollis begins his book on the history of the graphic design with the following statement: 'graphic design is the business of making or choosing marks and arranging them on

[43] Letter from Weissbort to Hollis, 19 August 1965, King's College London MPT Archives.

a surface to convey an idea'.[44] In the same book, Hollis argues that the graphic design of the 1960s was seen as a way to resolve problems in communication. The appearance of the first *MPT* might not reflect these values due to the magazine's financial constraints but, according to Hollis, the way in which the text is presented is always a meaningful choice. To borrow Marshall McLuhan's words from 1958: 'the medium is the message'.[45] In a recent interview, Dugdale spoke about the appearance of the early issues of *MPT*, highlighting how the distribution of the text on the page gave an impression of translation being 'street literature and popular currency':

> The look of the early *MPT* issues was revolutionary, it was the vision of Richard Hollis, who also designed John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* – the breaching of the fourth wall of book design, with its viscera spilling onto the front cover. For the first *MPT*, Hollis suggested a broadsheet format with the poems in long columns to illustrate the way that poetry in translation was street literature and popular currency.[46]

Indeed, despite our initial reservations, the volume of poetry packed onto the pages of the first edition was unprecedented. It is worth specifying that the broadsheet format of the inaugural issue was completely different from *MPT*'s later, book-format design. It then remains unclear whether the 'breaching of the fourth wall of book design' refers to these early issues of *MPT* or primarily to Berger's seminal *Ways of Seeing* (1972). Even if graphic design is an act of communication that hopes to affect the viewer/reader, the contemporary reader familiar with how the magazine actually looked in 1965 might still not be convinced by Dugdale's claim about the 'revolutionary' vision of the early issues. Asked about details of this claim, Dugdale elaborates, commenting that design 'was also political by association as *MPT* in its earliest incarnation was published by the printers of *Peace News*. By giving the first issue a broadsheet style (like the popular ballad sheets of 18 and 19 century) Hollis indicated that the magazine was for popular and street use'.[47]

While this is certainly true, the broadsheet format soon proved problematic. In a letter to Hollis from February 1966, Weissbort reports that around 2000 copies of *MPT* sold. He writes at length

[44] Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design: A Concise History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002), p. 7.
[45] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2013), p. 14.
[46] Deryn Rees-Jones, 'An Interview with Poet and Translator Sasha Dugdale', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 32.2 (2021), 198–212 (p. 201).
[47] Private correspondence.

about the design and fragile structure of the page, wishing to change the format into something resembling that of an *Observer* colour supplement. He openly yearns for soft-cover volumes of translated poetry which would be presented in 'more imaginative format and with more aesthetically pleasing typography'.[48] The change was also important for promotional reasons since the fragile magazine would not have been exhibited in bookshops. Hollis also volunteered to design a poster (Fig. 5) that editors hoped to distribute to bookshops.

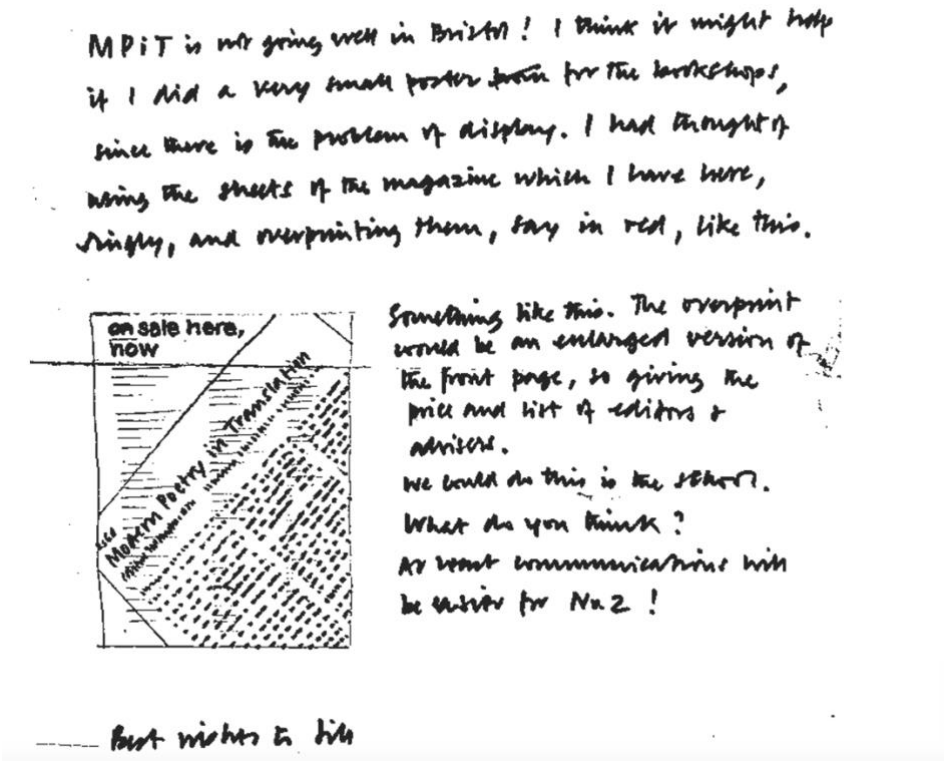


Fig. 5: Letter from Hollis to Weissbort London, King's College Archives MPT 3/1/15

The impractical design of the fragile broadsheet would soon be changed, especially since editors received positive feedback on the inaugural edition and secured financial assistance from the Arts Council. From the second issue onwards, they changed publisher from Goodwin Press to The Lavenham Press and switched to a more practical A4 format.

[48] Letter from Weissbort to Hollis, 5 April 1966, King's College London MPT Archives.

In the second issue of *MPT*, published in 1966, the editors opted to place the names of translators just below the authors, on the front cover (Fig. 6). We may notice how the last page (inside side of the back cover) of the second issue provided a short note on how the popularity of translations may result in 'duplication of effort' and how in the future, *MPT* will acknowledge copyright promptly. This note refers to the conflict of interest with Penguin that I will address towards the end of this section. Still, in 1966 printing the names of translators (even in a less conspicuous font) was a novel and conscious move likely against widespread ignorance about and exclusion of the translator from covers, advertisements, and acknowledgements. As Venuti has noted, historically, the melodrama of the translator's invisibility happened on two fronts, one textual or aesthetic, the other socioeconomic.[49]

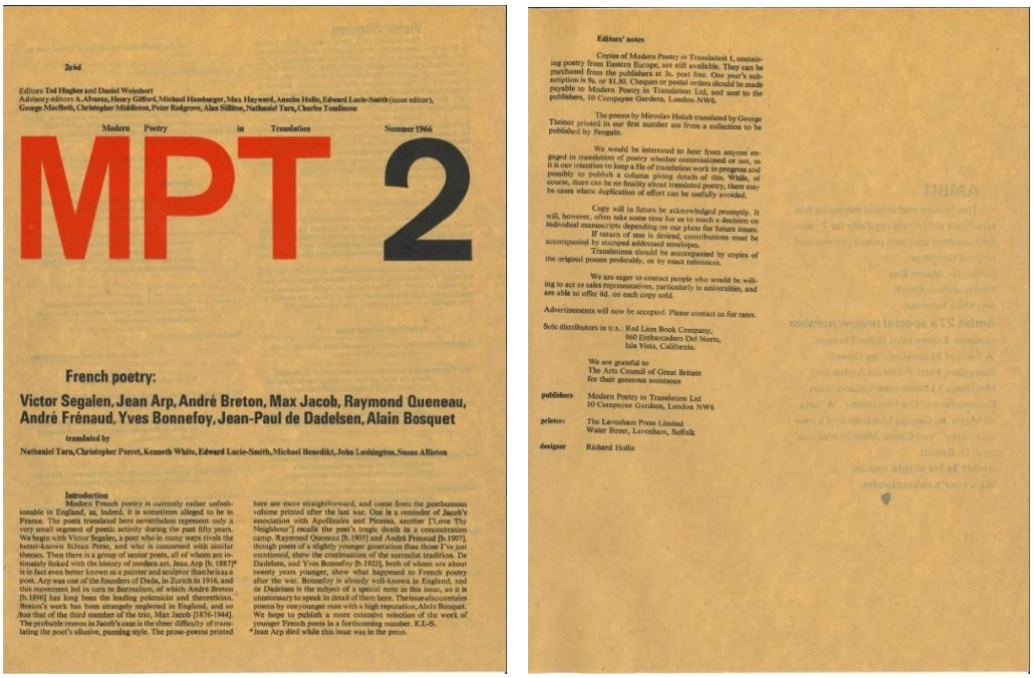


Fig. 6: Front cover and last page of the second issue of *MPT*, Summer 1966

MPT's approach, as evinced by the 1966 cover, was pioneering, especially given that even in the mid-1980s, as Ronald Christ has noted, 'many newspapers, such as *The Los Angeles Times*, do not even list the translators in headnotes to reviews, reviewers often fail to mention that a book is

[49] Lawrence Venuti, 'The Translator's Invisibility', *Criticism*, 28.2 (1986), 179-212 (p. 181).

a translation (while quoting from the texts as though it were written in English), and publishers almost uniformly exclude translators from book covers and advertisements'.[50] This erasure of the presence of translators was symptomatic of what Venuti called, in his classic work on translation studies *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), the 'regime of fluency'.[51] Though much has changed since Venuti published his seminal book, even today translators must still fight for rightful acknowledgements. As merely a recent example of what is still not an uncommon practice, in July 2023 the translator Yilin Wang failed to receive credit for her renderings of the work of Qiu Jin in the British Museum's China's Hidden Century exhibition. Given the controversial history of the British Museum, this neglectful omission of credits is especially painful and perhaps even a surprising failure on the part of the modern cultural institution to pay necessary dues to its contributors. Commenting on the situation for *The Guardian*, Wang reminded readers of the importance of 'respect[ing] the labour of translators, who are often erased in publishing and academia.[52]

Returning for a moment to Dugdale's comment (see page 131) about the link between the design choices and political sympathies of the publisher, the reference to the 'breaching of the fourth wall of book design' is worth commenting on. Berger was an art critic, novelist and broadcaster; *Ways of Seeing* was a book adapted from his thought-provoking four-part 1972 BBC television series, directed by Mike Dibb. The broadcast not only became extremely influential on the popular perception of art, but also destabilised assumptions about visual art by discussing how 'the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled'.[53] Even if the cover of the Penguin-published paperback *Ways of Seeing* corresponded to and strengthened the book's message, it did not suddenly revolutionise the shape of book design industry as a whole. It was

[50] Ronald Christ, 'Translation Watch' PEN American Center Newsletter, 53 (1984), p. 8.
[51] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility,* p. 1.
[52] Nadia Khomami, 'Translation is an art', *The Guardian*, 3 Jul 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/jul/03/translation-is-an-art-why-translators-are-battling-for-recognition> [accessed 9 Jul 2023]. Ironically, *The Guardian* article discussing the translator's invisibility does not care to include a reference to Venuti. The translation theorist who most famously defined the concept of translators' invisibility remains invisible in the modern non-academic text.
[53] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series with John Berger* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972), p. 7.

the broadcast itself that made a new generation of art critics more suspicious, sensitive, and attentive to the entanglement of art with politics and power, to a greater extent than we ever previously dared to imagine. Undoubtedly, Hollis' involvement in Berger's seminal publication is a statement of its own – an endorsement of the idea that art is not just passively seen but is born from what we are 'seeing into' it and that, as the title suggests, there are many ways of seeing. There is a strong link between *MPT* and *Ways of Seeing.* Both started as low-budget enterprises, targeting a small audience with little chance of commercial success, and yet both went on to resonate deeply with a wider readership/viewership. It was the individual's vision of bringing art to the viewer, a phenomenon somewhat characteristic of the 1960s, especially in its transformation of the reader's sensitivity and, as Laing suggests, call for moral engagement. In a letter to the producers of the broadcast adaptation of *Ways of Seeing*, Berger proposes that each of their programmes should end with a series of questions. An excerpt from his letter reads: 'we should not aim in each programme at coming to any definitive conclusion. This will ensure the structural difference between our programmes and most other art broadcasts'.[54] This attentiveness to detail and structure which anticipates what the reader's reception might be are further linking elements between Berger's programme and the earlier establishment of *MPT* or, perhaps, between the cultural initiatives of the awakening decade in general.

Still, the first issues of *MPT* were designed seven years before Berger's series aired on BBC Two, late on Sunday evenings in January 1972. Hollis was a friend of Weissbort and the correspondence they exchanged between July and October 1965 showed a mutual involvement in and shared enthusiasm about the magazine. The first letter in the archival file on Hollis comes from 23 July 1965 and suggests that Weissbort and Hollis must have discussed the idea of the magazine earlier, perhaps in person. From the letter we learn that Weissbort was planning on visiting Hollis in Bristol, together with Hughes, but only once they had compiled all of the content for the first issue. 'This week I hope that Ted will appear on my doorstep so that we can go over

[54] Quoted in Jonathan Conlin, 'Lost in Transmission? John Berger and the Origins of Ways of Seeing (1972)', *History Workshop Journal*, 90 (2021), 142–63.

our material for the first issue', writes Weissbort, continuing, 'he brought back some interesting stuff from Spoleto, in particular some marvellous Czech poet – Miroslav Holub. So the contents of the first issue have altered a little. But anyway as soon as I have anything definite I should like to come to see you with it'.[55] Judging from the editors' self-commentaries, the content of the first issue seemed to alter all the time, not just after the literary festival that happened in June 1965 in the Italian town of Spoleto and which Hughes joined upon Spender's invitation. Hughes wrote about the festival and the magazine in his letter to Ben Sonnenberg:

> Just after your last letter I went to Italy to this Festival at Spoleto. Good entertainment. Neruda read very memorably. Ingeborg Bachmann, the Austrian, was memorably present. Evtushenko appeared for 1 hour, & performed, which I did not like. Not nearly so impressive as Voznesensky, that boy. Miroslav Holub, the Czech, was there – truly marvellous poet. We've got about 15 of his pieces in the Magazine. Pound appeared – under a vow of silence, evidently. He listened to questions, but said nothing. He read – but I missed that. The first issue of the Magazine is primed – except for a small detail or two. It will be good. All the poetry is good – one of the best collections you will have opened for some months (*L* 247).

For the editors, especially Hughes, almost every encounter with a previously unknown translation from Eastern Europe resulted in further hope that *MPT* would provide a much-needed space for new poetic discoveries. However valuable, some of those personal and informal contacts caused trouble for the editors, albeit unintentionally. For instance, the editors failed to check on the necessary translation copyrights with George Theiner and *MPT*'s publication of fifteen poems by Holub came as quite a surprise to the Penguin publishing house. In a letter from 7 January 1966, Penguin contacts Weissbort to demand an explanation:

> While we were of course delighted to see that so many of George Theiner's translations of Holub figure in the first issue of your new magazine, we are at the same time rather distressed that not only was no acknowledgment made to the fact that these translations were specifically commissioned by Penguin but that apparently our permission to reproduce was never obtained.[56]

Weissbort replies to the letter immediately, apologising for the misunderstanding and explaining that translations were given to Hughes as a courtesy of Theiner. '[Hughes] tells me that he met Holub in Spoleto last year and that Holub gave him a batch of poems – 6 or 7 – in George

[55] Letter from Weissbort to Hollis, 23 July 1965, King's College London MPT Archives.
[56] Letter from Anthony Richards to Weissbort, 7 January 1966, King's College London MPT Archives.

Theiner's translations and was very pleased that we were going to publish them', explains Weissbort, adding, 'Hughes says that he was not aware Penguin had finalized arrangements for producing a volume of Holub.' Due to these licensing concerns they did not publish more of Herbert's work, thinking that 'Penguin's plans for producing a volume of Herbert were fairly definite and near completion'.[57] However, this miscommunication was not entirely *MPT*'s fault and in his letter to Alvarez from June 1966 Miłosz complains that he has already been waiting three months for any reply from Penguin about Herbert's poems. He gives his opinion rather bluntly, saying: 'I ask myself whether I deal with a British publisher or one from Mongolia's People Republic'.[58] This misunderstanding between *MPT* and Penguin is not the only example of Hughes not paying much attention to issues such as copyright or authorising the final version of the translated poems. As Rudolf recalled in his memorial speech, Weissbort may have been a quiet man, and may not have had the alleged charisma and eloquence of Hughes, but he did have administrative skills that made it possible to 'put Ted's idea for a translation magazine into practice'.[59] On that observation I shall now move to address issues of building readership, my specific emphasis falling on the issue of rhetoric and editorials about Eastern Europe.

Readership: rhetoric, and early editorials

Soon after its 1965 launch, the *MPT* periodical became known not only for the poets it published but for its conceptualization of translation as a cultural bridge between the divided halves of Europe. In 1968, Weissbort informs the Art Council secretary that he has 'recently had occasion to travel a little in E. Europe and elsewhere and has found to [his] surprise that the magazine is well known and regarded in many places.' He concludes on an optimistic note: 'I am sure it has and can continue to have a not inconsiderable part to play in promoting good cultural relations'.[60] As the current *MPT* website reminds its readers, the magazine was a product of its time and

[57] Letter from Weissbort to Richards, 9 January 1965, King's College London MPT Archives.
[58] Letter from Miłosz to Alvarez, 1 June 1966, Alvarez Papers. British Library, MS 88488.
[59] Rudolf, 'Daniel, What Have You Done With Your Lions?', p. 52.
[60] Letter from Weissbort to White, 18 August 1968, King's College London MPT Archives.

'understanding the hopes and anxieties of the postwar and Cold War generation is key to understanding the importance of these poems and their reception in English-speaking countries'.[61] Even the briefest review of the first editorial clearly shows a specific focus on poetry from Eastern Europe. In the editorial to the fifth issue of *MPT*, we read that 'the poetry from Eastern and Central Europe displays a quality which it is perhaps impossible for English and American poetry to possess – that of political knowledge become direct poetic knowledge' (*MPT* 5). Elsewhere, Hughes reflects further, saying of the first editions of *MPT* that 'it was common in those days to hear how all poetry had died in Auschwitz, but theirs [authors published in *MPT*] 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' (*ST* 206). Although exaggerated to generate interest and discussion, the idea of giving voice to the voiceless and hearing poetry that would, in the editors' minds, otherwise remain absent from the English-speaking landscape was not just a passing phase to promote the magazine. On the contrary, it became an explicit trademark of the journal.

If the comment from *MPT*'s website implies critical distance and highlights how the magazine's origins should now be seen in the larger context of Cold War politics, the reality of magazine trademarking is somehow different. The suggestive title of *Centres of Cataclysm* (2016), an anthology published in celebration of fifty years of *MPT*, could not attest better to the continuity of *MPT*'s early style. It would, of course, be oversimplistic to put judgment over analysis and go on to describe *MPT*'s rhetoric as being inscribed in a post-colonial context in which translation and the domination of one language over another reflects political power. Even a quick scroll through the *MPT*'s website shows that the magazine often focuses on poetic responses to different types of crises or empowering poetic voices that are, for instance, representative of minorities.[62] One question to consider is how the legacy of early editorials impacted *MPT*'s vision of

[61] Modern Poetry in Translation Website, 'Inside the Issues: Modern Poetry in Translation No. 1' <https://modernpoetryintranslation.com/magazine/modern-poetry-in-translation-no-1/> [accessed 9 Jul 2023].
[62] These include, for instance, the 2021 spring issue 'Focus on the Pandemic in Europe', the 2020 autumn issue on 'Dead [Women] poets, the 2019 autumn issue entitled 'I have not known a grief like this: Focus on Extinction', and the 2018 summer issue with a focus on LBGTQ+ poetry.

translation. In a recent interview, Dugdale speaks of her work for *MPT*, where she was an editor from 2012–17. When she took the position, she was 'very excited by the magazine and its radical history, and [she] wanted to make it as visible and striking as it had been under Ted Hughes and Danny Weissbort in the 1960s'.[63] Dugdale was attracted to what she calls 'radical history' of the magazine and, through her editorial work, wished to highlight, even continue, the tradition inaugurated by Hughes and Weissbort. This link with the 1960s might be surprising, especially if continued until 2017. But Dugdale's vision was to expose the reader to the notion that the poem is not static but a living relationship: a patchwork of our relationships and affiliations with others. In her preface to the 2016 anthology, she explains the editors' choice of title, recalling how Hughes and Weissbort used the phrase a 'center of cataclysm' in their first editorial and how this phrase struck editors in 2016, mostly as a visual form.



Fig. 7: The cover of the *Centres of Cataclysm* anthology, ed. by Sasha Dugdale, David Constantine, and Helen Constantine (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2016)

[63] Deryn Rees-Jones, 'An Interview with Poet and Translator Sasha Dugdale', 198-212.

The cover of the anthology (Fig. 7) was designed by Katy Mawhood. Complimentary with the title, intersecting circles dominated by green, yellow, and blue colors bring to mind the image of a ripple effect that, albeit indirectly, may describe the type of resonance and spread of ideas that *MPT* has offered since Hughes and Weissbort founded the magazine in 1965. The title itself is an allusion to the editors' words from their first editorial on poetry coming from Eastern Europe region 'which has been at the centre of cataclysm' (*MPT* 1). It is noteworthy that here the title of the anthology has moved from singular 'centre of cataclysm' to plural 'centres of cataclysm' aiming for greater inclusion of poetry inspired or necessitated by different types of crisis. This form of overlapping circles, or centres, and their potential to destabilize and disturb the system is mirrored in the cover of the anthology. Dugdale goes on to explain the idea behind the title:

> Applied to an anthology of poetry this form can only be the loosest sort of organization: poems shoot like sparks away from a central fire and where we had chosen to present them is conditional, a matter of personal imagination. Nonetheless, the zoning of poems and prose around a core was a satisfying concept: dynamic in intent, the outwards movement seemed to represent the trajectory of a translated poem out into a new world. […] So the burning heart of cataclysm at the center of the anthology is drawn out; through translation, migration and exile, it is transplanted into another soil. The word spoken under duress becomes a word of affirmation: a protection and stating of our own humanity (*CC* 18-19).

Indicative of a serious commitment and written in the specific context of the anniversary, the passage's register may still come as a surprise. It carries the message like the 1965 title itself, it seeks what Weissbort elsewhere nostalgically called the 'good-old-days anthology' (*PS* 306), one that shares the idealistic hope of doing justice to the entirety of human experience. It also touches upon the relationship between intensity as poetry's driving force, and intensity as a potential effect that the writer manages to achieve. In equating these two forms of intensity and favouring a maximum concentration of emotions located in 'a burning heart of cataclysm,' the comment already positions translation in a very specific, political realm where reading is, again, elevated to an ethical choice while interpretation becomes a necessarily moral act.

The motif of translation as a metaphor of communication is not novel. In his book *Translation as Metaphor* (2016), Rayner Guldin looks at overlapping theoretical territories and discusses not just

metaphors surrounding translation, which Guldin claims 'has become one of the essential metaphors, if not *the metaphor*, of our globalized world', but also the role metaphor played in the metalanguage of translation.[64] In the 1970s, the discipline of translation studies developed rapidly, attracting so much attention that even comparing forewords to anthologies and monographs, such as Steiner's seminal book, reveals changes in the status of translation from a marginalized issue to a central concern of critics. Steiner begins the preface to the third edition by stating that both the philosophy and practice of translation are in constant motion and debate. He writes:

> The new status of eastern Europe has occasioned a veritable tide of translations both into English and into the relevant languages. Czech, Polish, Hungarian, and Romanian literature are beginning to reach the Anglo-American world-audience. In turn, Western texts, long forbidden, are being imported. […] By salutary paradox, moreover, Anglo-American masters, notably among the poets, are themselves turning more and more to translation. It is as if the planetary dominion of their privileged world-speech entails growing responsibilities towards the genius of more constricted national traditions and sensibilities.[65]

His comment points to several overlapping problems characteristic of early writing on translation: cultural domination, the prevalence of the idea of untranslatability, linguistic and socio-economic privilege, and the question of what the criteria for interlingual transfer are in the first place. Especially noteworthy is the notion of 'planetary dominion' in which central (that is, linguistically privileged) cultures have a 'responsibility' toward peripheral literatures. Steiner's book did not develop any consistent methodology of translation, but his four-beat model of the hermeneutic motion (that he himself defensively calls not a theory but 'a narrative of process') was an influential for the generation of poets and critics. Also, his ideas were known to Alvarez' circles much before the publication of *After Babel*. Steiner, in short, proposed that an act of translation progresses through four distinct stages: trust, aggression, incorporation, and finally reciprocity or restitution. The first stage is of initial trust, where the translator assumes that there is 'something there' to be understood which derives from 'a sequence of phenomenological assumptions about the coherence of the world, about the presence of meaning […]'. The translator's next move is aggression, when understanding proceeds into a quasi-Heideggerian conflict in which

[64] Rainer Guldin, *Translation as Metaphor* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 1.
[65] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. vii.

comprehending assumes appropriation of the thought or reflection that is not of our own. The third stage consists of incorporation, wherein different variations on how the work can be brought into a new language potentially dislocate the original. The last stage is one of reciprocity, where the translator must restore an abstracted balance between the original and its translated form that, potentially, enriches the receiving culture. Of course, Steiner's model borrows hugely from philosophy and psychoanalysis, abstracting the phenomenological act of translation so far from the context in which translation happens that his model could well describe *every* act of reading that re-enacts the model of understanding and comprehension based more on rivalry than on appreciation.

Still, this model was hugely popular in the 1970s, offering a phenomenological and psychoanalytically infused framework for making sense of translation and transfer. These concepts found especially fertile ground in the Cold War era when translation started to denote something greater than itself. Here, a speech Hughes gave in 1967 during the first Poetry International Festival in London may serve as an example, as it mirrors idealistic belief in the dialogue poetry can form in and beyond translation. Hughes addressed guests, saying that however nationally rooted it may seem, 'poetry is less and less the prisoner of its own language'. His comment suggested that as long as we can create the space for hearing new voices, the 'original' becomes – at least phenomenologically – strangely irrelevant (*ST* 199-200). In the same note to the programme, Hughes expressed a wish for poetry to be a 'universal language of understanding, coherent behind the many languages, in which we can all hope to meet' (*ST* 199). This phenomenological approach projects the vision of translation as a chance of 'lost' linguistic 'harmony'. Hughes' conceptualisation of translation as a meeting point echoes Walter Benjamin's ideas of 'Ursprache', 'pure language, and 'kindship of languages' from his seminal 'The Task of the Translator' (1923). For Benjamin, who re-theorized the redemptive role of translation, translation does not just participate in the 'afterlife' of the original but also raises the original up

'into a higher and purer linguistic air'.[66] Benjamin's texts proved influential for generations of critics, some of whom - Jacques Derrida, for example - took their precursor's essay as a departure point for a revisionist theory of translation, subverting the idea of 'difference' and demolishing the concept of single authorship and originality. This topic will return in greater detail in chapter four in which, in the context of Hughes' *Crow*, I will look at the purposefully blurred boundaries between author, translator, co-translator, and trickster.

At this juncture in my thesis, the salient point is that in the mid-1960s, the question 'what does it mean to translate?' was not simply about transferring meaning from one language into another, but about much a larger phenomenological query. Literary festivals, increased collaborations, and new friendships also contributed to the perception of the translator taking the role of initiating dialogue and facilitating the most tender and charitable possible reading of the original work. In that context, one might think of an excerpt from Herbert's poem as he addresses his Yugoslav translator Piotr Vujičić:

> W gruncie rzeczy nie ma czego żałować
> wiesz o tym dobrze Piotrze
> nie mówię tego do Ciebie ale przez Ciebie do innych
>
> przez pół wieku znałeś lepiej moje myśli
> niż ja sam
> tłumaczyłeś je cierpliwie[67]
>
> Fundamentally there is nothing to be sorry about
> you know that well Piotr
> I'm not speaking to you but through you to others
>
> for half a century you knew my thought better
> than I did
> you translated them patiently[68]

The poet addresses his translator with both distance and gratitude, expressed in a moving line: 'you knew my thought better | than I did'. Here, translation is equal to understanding and the

[66] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 15-25 (p. 19).
[67] Herbert, p. 606.
[68] Herbert, *The Collected Poems,* p. 486.

Yugoslavian poet's translator stands in for a larger phenomenon wherein translators are often the most tender, careful readers of poetry. The trust Herbert puts in his translator in this poem, even though he cannot possibly know the quality of the translation, brings to mind a telling anecdote recounted by Rudolf in his memorial speech for Weissbort about Vasco Popa's poem 'overnight, dated 5 June 1981', after his acclaimed translator into English Anne Pennington died. The poem is presented only in its English translation, the death of a friend and translator compared to 'a short breath-stop'. The poem opens with the lines: 'until her last breath she enlarges | Her Oxford house | Built in Slavonic | Vowels and consonants' as Rudolf recalls the personal and shared effort of translating Popa's poem, in the moment of grief when the person most competent to carry the meaning between languages is no more. He says:

> The next day Peter Jay, Daniel and I co-translated it in a hostelry near the Corn Exchange. My fondness for this poem, my nostalgia for the circumstances of its creation, my pleasure in the brief work of co-translation by three friends, with help from Popa in French, our work and play fuelled by sadness, love and wine, all speak to a dream of fellowship in or through poetry translation, as incarnated in *MPT*, that revolution in literary magazines and indeed literature, born of a profound vision shared by Ted and Danny. I remember Popa asking Daniel: 'Qu'as tu fait de tes lions?', what have you done with your lions, perhaps referring to Brodsky and earlier great Russians, but more likely making a biblical joke.[69]

The excerpt brings our attention to translation as fellowship and act of tenderness shared among a circle of friends, mourning not only a death but also a symbolic end to the possibility of communication and the shared fondness for what they saw as the 'revolution' of the publishing scene of the 1960s, in the face of which translation becomes, in Weissbort's words, 'an attempt at an appreciation'.[70]

This model will prove especially important in understanding the collaborative process of co-translations which was known to modernists but became especially popular during the 1960s. Historically, the post-war period saw a rise in dual-translator volumes and the relinquishment of crib versions. Clegg synthesises this change, suggesting that the disappearance of crib versions

[69] Rudolf, 'Daniel, What Have You Done With Your Lions?', p. 51.
[70] Quoted in Bassnett, *Ted Hughes*, p. 98.

'seems to represent a shift in the intended audience for these books: after 1950, a volume of Eastern European poetry which also included the originals was extremely rare, suggesting the market had moved from expatriate speakers of the original language towards a wider, monolingual native English audience'.[71] In the process of co-translating, the Anglophone poet would work with an intermediary who could provide them with a literal or 'word-for-word' version. Usually, a native speaker of the language being translated produced a verbatim, literal version of the poem while another, English-speaking writer took over for the stylistic, figurative, and 'poetic' part of the poem, producing the publishable version of the co-translated text. As Bergin observes, though this may sound paradoxical at first, many major English-speaking poets such as Yeats, Pound, Lowell, and Heaney 'have become involved in translating from languages which they cannot understand in the original'.[72] Szirtes also highlighted this practice in the context of Hungarian literature where, due to the linguistic isolation of Hungarian, co-translation became a very common practice and a means of redressing cultural/linguistic imbalance.[73]

In his preface to selected poems of Radnoti, Turner describes the method of co-translation in three stages, linking the whole endeavour to the myth of Orpheus (a common theme in Radnoti's work) and *ur*-language. The first stage consists of a Hungarian translator reading the original poem aloud. Even if the English co-translator does not know Hungarian, during the first stage their focus is 'on meter, tone, cadence, and often the emotional colour of the original.[74] The second stage of collaborative co-translation consists of the translator providing an oral version word by word, while the co-translator transcribes the literal version. In this way, both translators establish the syntactic order and idiom of the original, even when 'they make very strange sentences in English'.[75] The third stage, we read in Turner's essay, consists of a close analysis of 'the connotations, derivations, cognates, and synonyms of the words of the poem, together with an

[71] Clegg, p. 6.
[72] Bergin, p. 3.
[73] Szirtes, 'Hungarian', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, pp. 202-5 (p. 202).
[74] Frederick Turner, 'The Journey of Orpheus: On Translation', in *Foamy Sky: The Major Poems of Miklós Radnóti*, trans. by Zsuzsanna Ozsvath and Frederick Turner (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), pp. xxxv-xlviii (p. xxxv).
[75] Ibid., p. xxxvi.

analysis of its lexical and syntactical peculiarities – archaisms, neologisms, compound words, slang, folk language, dialect, and foreign words'.[76] At this stage, translators also discuss any biographical or historical references that the original refers to and if any further contextualisation is needed for English-speaking readers. Turner's three-stage process of collaborative co-translation between himself and Zsuzsanna Ozsvath was described in 1992 and does not necessarily speak to the practice of co-translations in the mid-1960s. It is, however, 'significant example of the way in which linguistic isolationism feeds into the collaborative model of transfer. Hughes' and Weissbort's vision of 'literals' was certainly much less attentive, especially to what Turner describes as a third stage of the co-translation process. Hughes' fascination with 'the very oddity and struggling dumbness of a word for word version' (*MPT* 3) led him to deliberately avoid delving too deeply into biographical and historical references. Instead, he embraced a preference for de-familiarizing, unconventional, and intentionally imperfect translations. Many of his commentaries on Eastern European literatures tended to look less at the literature itself than at the troubled historical circumstances and vague ethical intentions that commentators projected onto it, based on their own impressions of Eastern Europe.

Before the 'translation boom' of the 1960s the influx of poetry from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, for example, lacked any consistency and almost every new translation needed to stand alone, owing its existence to political pressures. In the 1960s, reading poets from beyond the Iron Curtain, the editors' emphasis was on their uncompromising, direct treatment of themes of survival and testimony that encouraged a re-definition of authorship and an exploration of form that would be more congruent with the still-fresh collective memory of the extermination camps, and the reality of the Cold War. An attempt to quantify the themes of the poems published in the first issue (see Table 2 on page 125-6) would, undeniably, be oversimplifying. It is, however, curious that in comparison to the rhetoric of the editorial and its emphasis on how the poems are coming from the 'centre of cataclysm', reading all 48 poems is

[76] Ibid.

a surprisingly gentle experience far removed from Alvarez's demands for a violent imagery and rough poetic idiom. If *any* thematic pattern emerges from the first issue, it is the poets' emphasis on auto-referentiality. Many of the poems reflect on the limits of expression; moments of writing; the suspension of voice; or (most explicitly in the title of Herbert's poetic radio play printed in the issue) 'Reconstruction of a Poet'. The second possible motif seen in some of those poems is one known from Virgil: *Et in Arcadia ego*. An indirect evocation of evil is placed against imagery of childhood's forests, fields, planets, and birds while a subtle self-referentiality at once deconstructs and re-constructs the possibility of artistic expression. To take Amichai's poem 'When I was a Boy' as an example, the image of suffering is rarely invoked directly. Rather, the scenery of the poem is a recollection of childhood longing for the father as the speaker says: '[…] And I did not know when my father | would return, | For there was another forest beyond | the clearing' (*MPT* 1). The evocative absence of the father is set against 'a bull' that 'tossed the sun on its horns'; nights during which 'streetlights stroked | my cheeks with the wall' while the whole poem concludes with a line about imagination's ability to 'water my thirsty sleep' (*MPT* 1). The poems that make more direct reference to war are perhaps Amichai's 'When I was a Boy'; Holub's 'A Sense of Reality' and 'Big and Strong'; Miłosz's 'The Poor Poet'; and Popa's 'The Quartz Pebble'. Curiously, the only two poems to be followed by the date of composition (thus setting the work in history) are by Miłosz; both 'Not More' and 'The Poor Poem' were written in 1943. However, no bibliographical or literary-historical context is given to events such as the impact of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 on the poetic development of post-war Poland.

Even though the poems printed in the first issue do not seem as representative of the editors' later fascination with roughness, urgency, literalness, and cataclysm, we know that the poems were selected from scattered and fragmentary materials provided mostly by emigré writers within Weissbort and Hughes' social and professional sphere. We also know (as evidenced by correspondence with Hollis) that the editors struggled with decisions on which works to include; their vision of the first *MPT* wavered opportunistically, depending on which materials they

happened to receive. This excerpt from a conversation between Weissbort and Amichai illustrates the problem with their criteria for inclusion, as the editor reflects back on the launch of *MPT*:

> There seemed at the time to be something, which I couldn't define and I'm not sure whether I could define it even now, but there seemed to be something, nevertheless, linking these poets more than just the fact they belong to roughly the same generation, born in the mid-to-late twenties. So the anthology focuses on this group. It springs from some sort of conviction, an irrational conviction perhaps, of the existence of a connecting thread. Anyway, what does link them, at least in my mind, is that they are all terribly good, terribly interesting, and terribly bright! I mean bright not just in the sense of intelligent, but that their poetry is bright. (*PS* 306)

In reading this retrospective (and 'terribly' repetitive) passage, I cannot help but think about the thin line between what we could describe as an informal and conversational tone, and what we could scrutinize for incompetence and 'irrational' criteria for selection and inclusion. If 'there seemed to be something' that connects the various poets printed in the first issue of *MPT*, we are still left unsure as to what precisely that is - unless, of course, the reader is convinced by Weissbort's view that the criterion for selection truly was that poems were 'terribly good, terribly interesting, and terribly bright' (*PS* 306). That, however, seems to me a terribly vague, terribly uninteresting, and terribly simplistic characterisation. One other criterion for selection was personal preference. Poets who happened to be published in the first *MPT* were particularly to the taste of Hughes, Weissbort, and their editorial board of old university friends - including, as we know, Alvarez, MacBeth, Redgrove, Sillitoe, and Tomlinson. Virtually every poet printed in the first edition of *MPT* was either an émigré author (hence, functioning in at least two literary polysystems and acting as 'disseminator' of their native literature in the West) or was known to editors through one of the first literary festivals or poetry readings. Following the Thaw of 1956, the cultural mobility of poets from Eastern Europe increased. From the letter exchange with White, we know that Weissbort attended Andrei Voznesensky's poetry reading in London in June 1965; Hughes listened to poems by Holub and Herbert for the first time in 1965 in Spoleto (where he also received a pile of 'rough' translations); Weissbort's friend Max Hayward put him in touch with Aleksandr Stefanović, a Yugoslavian critic who sent Weissbort some of the poems of Vasco Popa; the Czech poet Miroslav Holub in turn was interviewed by Alvarez for his earlier *Under*

Pressure broadcasts. The first issue of *MPT* was undoubtedly a pioneering effort but it is important to bear in mind that it was ultimately the opportunism of personal preference and familiarity that defined the central criteria for selection.

Recalling the magazine's early days, Hughes and Weissbort were open about their embarrassment and limited knowledge of the context surrounding the poems that first struck them as 'the most insistent' (*MPT* 1). Therefore, their vague moral engagement also hoped to camouflage a lack of experience with poetry in translation and masked an incomplete and inconsistent understanding of what was being written beyond the editors' linguistic and cultural circles. An excerpt from the first editorial, again, exemplifies this problem:

> 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. […] 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. (*MPT* 1)

Looking at this from today's distance, our immediate observation might be that the editors put the text first precisely because of this self-admitted ignorance. Hoping for the experience of the poem to come before critical surveys would, then, be no more than a cynical camouflage of the editors' ignorance. But the context for those editorial statements is richer than that. It invites us to go beyond our initial reservations and ask what modes of engagement early editions of the *MPT* stand for, and what traditions of reading they refer to: the increased politicization of art; resumption of theoretical thinking; determination felt by poets and critics to look beyond the constraints of their own idiom, to list just a few of the ideas contending for attention. Of course, art was not just reactive to the anxieties of the Cold War; the pressure for interpretation to be politically divisive and speak for 'a right side' was stronger than ever. Against the grain of this political engagement, the passage from *MPT* about how the 'experience [of the poem] should, in any case, come before judgment' might seem surprising. The editors explained their view on putting the text first in terms of the idea that it is 'more important to be somewhere than simply

to have the illusion that one knows where one is' (*MPT* 1). The passage favours the initial, affective mode of reading the poem over the critical surveys and comments that surround it. Curiously, as for the editorial, the latter are presented almost like Platonic shadows from the metaphorical Cave, where literary criticism is a myopic illusion of reality instead of reality itself. This conviction, that we might call anti-academic, was characteristic of Hughes' approach - once described by Anne Stevenson as governed not by intellectual meditation, but by 'instinctive primitivism'.[77] Many of Hughes' letters show an inherent distrust of academia, ridiculing academic institutions that he once, in a much later letter to Nick Gammage, called 'power stations of Academe' (*L* 617). We know that this distrust propelled Hughes from the intellectual sphere further into the sphere of intuition, nature, and instinct which characterized his approach much earlier, already demonstrable during his university years. Over the years, there seemed to be little development in Hughes' interest in the academic study of literature and even ten years after the establishment of *MPT*, when Hughes was co-translating the poems of Pilinszky with Csokits, he suggested that the introduction to the Hungarian poet's works was better written by a well-known poet than by scholars. In a letter to Csokits, Hughes writes: 'all scholars have impure motives and inevitably load a book with their museum deathliness.[78] Hughes' aversion toward academia undoubtedly shaped *MPT*'s intellectual profile and the magazine might well have been more careful and nuanced in its early editorials if Hughes had cared to consult academics.

In their first editorial, the editors suggested that critical surveys would have been a potential obstacle to an untamed reading of the poem, endangering the experience of reading with, as they put it, 'illusion of knowing when one is' instead of simply 'being'. Though contradictory, the editorial note to the *MPT* brings to mind some of Eliot's ideas from his 1929 essay on Dante. Speaking of Dante's allegorical method, the modernist suggested that 'it is not necessary to understand the meaning first to enjoy the poetry, but our enjoyment of the poetry makes us want

[77] See letter from Hughes to Stevenson from Autumn 1986, in Hughes' *Letters*, p. 520.
[78] Letter from Hughes to Csokits, 17 June 1974, The Ted Hughes Papers. Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

to understand the meaning'.[79] The first reading of this line may be misleading - Eliot exaggeratedly dissects the act of reading into first, the innocence of the initial aesthetic enjoyment, and second, experience brought by understanding the abstracted meaning of the poem. However, Eliot is far from stating the obvious here. He asks whether we allow ourselves to feel those sparks of aesthetic enjoyment without conditioning our appreciation and response to the poetry by sharing the beliefs of its author. In his note to the first part of the essay, a polemic over early ideas about pseudo-statements put forward by Richards in his *Practical Criticism*, Eliot is explicit: 'I deny, in short, that the reader must share the beliefs of the poet in order to enjoy the poetry fully'. In the latter part of the same note he adds:

> If you deny the theory that full poetic appreciation is possible without belief in what the poet believed, you deny the existence of 'poetry' as well as 'criticism'; and if you push this denial to its conclusions, you will be forced to admit that there is very little poetry that you can appreciate, and that your appreciation of it will be a function of your philosophy or theology or something else.[80]

Following this thought, the existence of both poetry and criticism is founded on the faith that we are able to relate to the work of art without an immediate need to identify with the context of its origins. Of course, this otherwise open, integrative view becomes problematic after 1945 when the relationship between poetry, ethics, and authenticity is called into question while the translation (at least in the phenomenological view popular at the time) was deemed to hold the power to re-integrate and bring prelapsarian unity to a broken world. Though Eliot's thought on Dante is rooted in his earlier essays on objective correlative, the dissociation of sensibility, and the relationship between tradition and authorship, Eliot does not give us definite answers. Instead, he challenges his own argument and simultaneously proves and disproves the statements he is making. In a typically Eliotian turn of phrase, he says, 'it is better to be spurred to acquire scholarship because you enjoy the poetry, than to suppose that you enjoy the poetry because you have acquired the scholarship'.[81] This idea is similar to what Hughes and Weissbort suggest in

[79] Eliot, 'Dante', in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 3, Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929*, ed. by Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2015), 727.
[80] Ibid., 727-8.
[81] Ibid., 700.

their editorial. Curiously, the point of Eliot's argument is represented even through the very structure of the essay, as he introduces long passages from Dante in order to make the reader experience the poem before they read about it. As the essay unfolds, Eliot presents us with his ideas about an integrative quality of Dante's narrative, his theory of poetic belief, and the affective enjoyment of poetry epitomized in the essay's oft-quoted line that 'genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood'.[82]

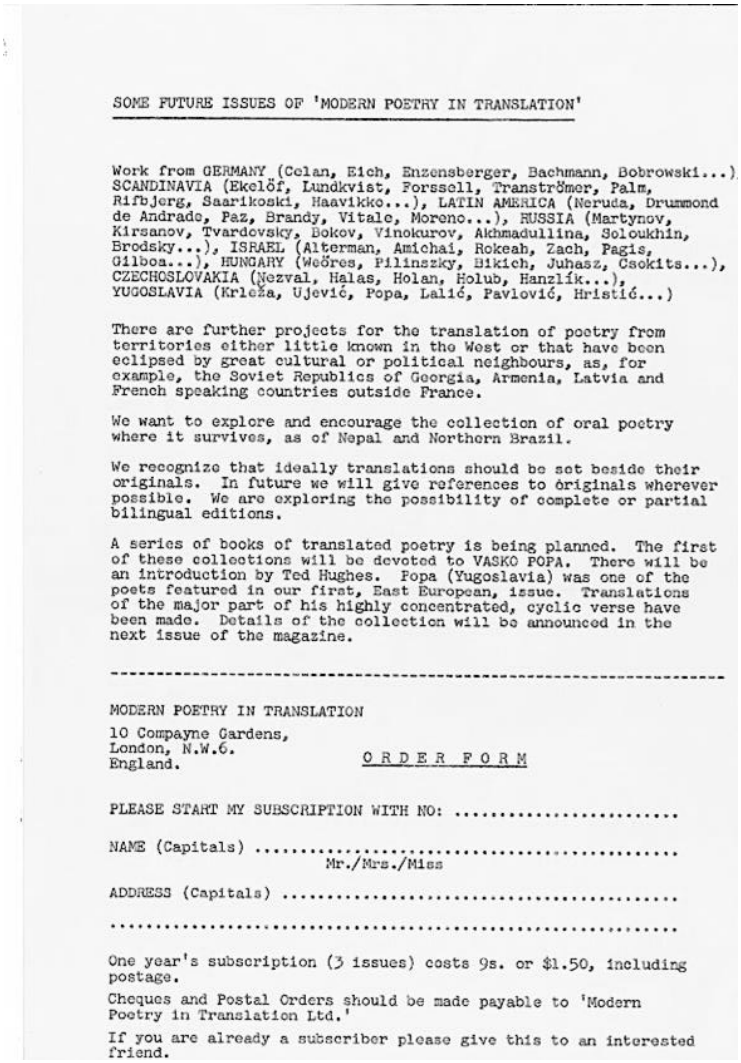
For an editorial that so confidently placed poets from Eastern Europe into a time-specific context and hoped for newly introduced translations to have an impact on the audience, this discrepancy between poetry and commentary is a curious thing to suggest. But perhaps, it is exactly what needed to be said in order for the poetry in translation to carry the *authentic* message that Hughes and Weissbort advertised. That authenticity, however, is so strongly bound up with an issue of construction that it brings to mind the creation of a readership; a consideration that did not occur to Hughes and Weissbort. When asked who the intended audience of such a magazine was, Dugdale drew my attention to the idealism and drive that gave rise to *MPT*. Elaborating on the topic of popularity and audience, she says:

> The editors chose to print the magazine on a very lightweight 'airmail' paper, and said (or perhaps joked) that this was to enable it to be sent to every poet in the world. Of course, all of this was to some extent bravura. But there was a very real and large audience for the magazine and I believe the first issue was reprinted, which indicates a very large number of sales (or perhaps donations, it's hard to say), far in excess of the magazine's subscribers today. I suspect the early issues were mostly sold to a fairly tightknit literary and poetry society, via its large board and its well-wishers. It strikes me that neither Ted nor Danny were particularly business-minded and probably never considered 'audience' in any realistic way. But I assume that they believed there was a large readership desperate for poetry from outside the anglophone world.[83]

The readership grew fast, each edition of the magazine came with a separate leaflet for subscribers, and in that regard, it is interesting to note how Dugdale compared sales from the 1960s to current ones, which suggest a decrease in number of subscribers. Consider the message from the following subscription leaflet (Fig. 8):

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[82] Ibid.,701.
[83] Private correspondence.



SOME FUTURE ISSUES OF 'MODERN POETRY IN TRANSLATION'

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We recognize that ideally translations should be set beside their originals. In future we will give references to originals wherever possible. We are exploring the possibility of complete or partial bilingual editions.

A series of books of translated poetry is being planned. The first of these collections will be devoted to VASKO POPA. There will be an introduction by Ted Hughes. Popa (Yugoslavia) was one of the poets featured in our first, East European, issue. Translations of the major part of his highly concentrated, cyclic verse have been made. Details of the collection will be announced in the next issue of the magazine.

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Fig. 8: Advertising and subscription leaflet attached to the second issue of *MPT*, Summer 1966

The leaflet informs readers that ideally, translations should be set beside their originals, and that in the future *MPT* will provide references to the original wherever possible. The editors add that they are 'also exploring the possibility of complete or partial bilingual editions' (*MPT* 2). What they seem to be referring to when suggesting that translations should be 'set beside their originals' is the crib version of the translation, presented to the reader in smaller font alongside the original. However, in the 1950s, with a changing print market in which translation was no longer a signature of classical education but a means of opening up to a wider range of readers, this method was vanishing. While Penguin continued to publish many of their poetry volumes in crib-type translations, the ones coming from Eastern Europe were presented only in their English

versions. As I have briefly discussed, the 1950s also saw a rise in dual translations or co-translations which were essentially a collaborative effort where the process of transfer happened as much in language as in the relationship between people. Allowing non-native speaker poets to work as translators with no knowledge of the original might at first sound counter-intuitive, but from the 1950s onwards it allowed greater opening up and promotion of works that were little known in English. It also hinted at a changing market and intended readership. Against their declarations, the editors of *MPT* did not publish crib translations of the originals. At the same time, in translating poets from eastern Europe they continued to promote the idea of 'literal' translation as most able to convey the dramatic *extra-textual* circumstances in which poems were written. Bearing in mind intended readership and literalness as modes of engagement, I now move to a final discussion of time-specific and idiosyncratic ideas about translation and literalness.

'Literalness can only be a deliberate tendency, not a dogma': a radical vision

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the *MPT* project was its preference for what editors called 'literals'. Introducing poetry from Eastern Europe, *MPT*'s editors hoped that literal translation would be more capable of exposing real or imagined struggles for expression, as if the literal translation could convey not just meaning but the *sense of urgency* that prompted the original into existence. John Talbot is among the few who have noticed how this strange fascination with rough and literal versions seems to be a time-specific and largely under-researched topic. His argument focuses not on Eastern Europe but on Hughes' adaptations of classical texts, which evince the author's fascination with a roughness of idiom and modernisation of style. The conclusions Talbot draws in his close reading of Hughes' translation decisions and use of 'stripped down English' are as applicable to the classics as they are to Eastern European poets. The critic summarises Hughes' dialogue with the classics by saying (in the context of Ovid) that Hughes did not use his sensibility as a lens through which to read Ovid, but Ovid's as a lens through which to read, to clarify concerns of his poetry. Accordingly, the classical author does not inform or challenge his

views but 'serves to confirm views he already holds'.[84] In her unpublished dissertation, Bergin analyses the phenomenon of literals in much greater detail, drawing on fascinating, restricted material from archives at Emory University as well as interviews with individuals who were involved in this transfer (including Weissbort, Szirtes, Francis Jones, and Elaine Feinstein). The critic's emphasis is on Hughes and Csokits' co-translations from Hungarian as she examines the nature of Hughes' approach to foreign lyric and the impact it had on his own development as a poet.

I must clarify that Hughes' understanding of 'literal' is completely divorce from the eternal debate on accuracy, fidelity, or faithfulness that has been part of discussions on translation since antiquity, and debated especially during Reformation when the Bible was translated into the European vernacular languages. The initiative of *MPT* was a collaborative effort by Hughes and Weissbort but we know that the insistence on literalness came from Hughes. His vision of 'literals' reverses the traditional dogma and hope for equivalence, and though 'Hughesians' 'literals' purport to represent the most 'accurate' translations they do not at all aim for accuracy or 'closeness' to the original in the common sense of the word. In a 1967 issue of *MPT*, we read how the editors 'feel more strongly than ever that the first ideal is literalness, insofar as the original is what [they] are curious about', while 'the very oddity and struggling dumbness of a word for word version' makes their 'imagination jump' (*MPT* 1). The whole passage from the editorial reads:

> […] after our experience as editors of this paper, we feel more strongly than ever 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 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. The minute we gloss his words, we have more or less what he said but we have lost him. We are ringing changes – amusing though they may be –

[84] John Talbot, 'I Had Set Myself against Latin: Ted Hughes and the Classics', *Arion*, ed. by Paul Keegan, 13.3 (2006), 131-62 (p. 143).

> on our familiar abstractions, and are no longer reaching through to what we have not experienced before, which is alive and real. (*MPT* 3)

There are similarities between this passage from the third issue of *MPT* and Alvarez's earlier ideas about poetry's role in the search for a new kind of seriousness. Of course, there is also another similarity in its use of gendered language. There is a noticeable absence of any effort or inclination to challenge the language of male-centric domination in the editors' references. The choice to describe a man who has 'something really serious to say' perpetuates the attribution of creativity and significance solely to male pronouns, without questioning or subverting this pattern. This rich and hilariously confusing excerpt from the editorial presents us with few overlapping ideas. First, literalness as an ideal mode or method of translation. Second, that syntactical oddities and the 'broken' language of mid-stage drafts might be more appealing in poetry than its more polished forms - at least to the editors, making their 'imagination jump'. Third, that the artist who has 'something really serious to say' can say it with no regard to linguistic boundaries, because the original authenticity of a 'serious' message is more convincing than even the most polished translation done by an 'interpreter'. Fourth, that any addition or gloss to the original words of the serious artist necessitates some 'loss'. Fifth, a translation that distances readers from 'familiar abstractions' allows them to encounter something new and previously unexperienced (through translation), infusing authenticity and vitality into immersive reading. The number of self-contradictions and illogical statements the editors managed to convey in just the five sentences above is impressive. If indirectly, the passage belittles translations presented to the reader as endangering the seriousness of the original. By this logic, it is better to let the foreign poetry speak through direct, word-for-word versions (described with adjectives such as 'odd', 'broken', and 'fumbled) than to give the reader any 'interpretation' adjusted to their 'familiar abstractions', hence detracting from the authenticity of the original message. If the statement in the first sentence of this excerpt is applied to the poetry presented not only in the third issue (which centered on the Scandinavian context) but across *MPT* as a whole, it obscures and misrepresents different poetic idioms, specific styles characteristic of individual poets, very different political contexts surrounding foreign poetry, distinct national traditions, and the non-linear trajectories of poetic

development and internal influences shaping dynamics of each literature presented in *MPT* before the 1960s. The major confusion here is that the English language reader is made to believe that the most authentic version of foreign poetry can only be achieved through exposing its meta-translatory struggle, as presented in a literal word-for-word version. In that light, we can question if the reader is even presented with 'translations' of foreign poetry, but rather with deliberately deconstructive mistranslations that aim to unravel the very process of translating, achieved first by making the behind-the-scenes difficulties of translation and search for authenticity visible, and second by hoping to (similarly to Brecht's method) engage the reader on a deeper, deconstructionist level. However, given Hughes' anti-academic leanings, this interpretation of the editors' motives might well ascribe more literary-historical justification and academic context to the whole enterprise than *MPT* ever aimed for.

In her preface to the celebratory anthology, Dugdale quotes this excerpt from *MPT*'s third editorial, commenting that Hughes' instinct to cleave to literalness marked his 'desire to seek out something authentic and strange for his own purpose as a poet' (*CC* 15). Years later, Weissbort explains that 'Hughes was struck by the way these [literal] versions powerfully conveyed material of great urgency, which was apparently dissipated in more polished or, as we might now say, "domesticated" versions'.[85] This matter will return in a much more detailed discussion in my fourth chapter as we shall see how, under the influence of the poets from Eastern Europe, Hughes' creative energies 'turned into a process of more and more simplifying, or in a way limiting the language'.[86] Even if the idea was entirely Hughes' invention and Weissbort thought that 'Ted took the approach too far' the reader still encountered it as representing the magazine's attitude.[87] Nonetheless, this imprecise approach to translation methodology (coupled with the pursuit of emotionally authentic rather than strictly accurate translations) cannot be easily categorized within either Venuti's domesticizing or foreignizing tendencies. In the first chapter of his book on

[85] *Translation: Theory and Practice,* p. 521.
[86] Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 212.
[87] Rudolf, 'Daniel, What Have You Done With Your Lions?', p. 51.

the invisibility of the translator, the critic discusses how translated text in the Anglophone market is judged by the criteria of fluency; if the foreign text is made adhere to modern and plain English, then the role of a translator is limited to ensuring 'easy readability'. Venuti explains this self-erasure of the translator: 'the translator works to make his or her work "invisible," producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems "natural," that is, not translated.'[88] Arguing that such domestication leads to the cultural assimilation of foreign text, Venuti advocates for the strategy of foreignization which, though this may at first seem paradoxical, he sees as a form of resistance against cultural narcissism and the imperialism of English dominance. Venuti explains the construction of foreignness in these terms:

> The 'foreign' in foreignizing translation is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current situation in the receiving culture. Foreignizing translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the translating language. In its effort to do right abroad, this translation practice must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience – choosing to translate a foreign text excluded by literary canons in the receiving culture, for instance, or using a marginal discourse to translate it.[89]

If we apply Venuti's framework to *MPT*'s enterprise then its strategy appears, at least at first glance, closer to this foreignizing tendency, aiming to shake up and reinvigorate the Anglophone poetry market of the mid-1960s through rough-sounding poetry from Eastern Europe, providing Anglophone readers with new and alternative idioms. However, excerpts from these early editorials blur and obfuscate these radical intentions. Essentially, they make the reader believe that what we would call 'foreignizing' translation, in Venuti's language, is in fact the most authentic, relatable, and real, regardless of whether the poetry sounds odd or whether it resonates with English audiences on the level of 'a universal language of understanding' (*CC* 81). The true essence of the original can only be captured through 'the very oddity and struggling dumbness of a word for word version' (*MPT* 3). In a sense, this particular approach represents the most radical

[88] Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 5.
[89] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

strategy of domesticating the foreign poem. This illogical reversal, occurring at the level of an emotional identification with the work, suggests that the best and most serious poets from Eastern Europe do not need translation as the message of this poetry is so powerful and universal that the original becomes, as Hughes once put it, 'strangely irrelevant' (*MPT* 1).

Further anecdotal evidence that the preference for literals as seeking universal language and authenticity was more Hughes' vision than a coherent argument comes from the same text by Rudolf. Weissbort's friend remembers their disagreements about method and debates held between Brodsky and Amichai recalling Hughes reading of the Russian poet: 'it was not the happiest of moments for Danny when his friend [Hughes] changed the words of a translation without prior agreement during a reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1981. Dan kept quiet but his face spoke volumes'.[90] Though the preference given to literal versions was originally well-intended and could be seen as an act of empathising with experiences that British critics did not share, it also proved problematic as it created a flattening image of Eastern European poetic diction.

It suggested that the most authentic poetry is one that struggles to express itself, which links the notion of impossible translation to the topic of the Holocaust and the poetry of the 'unspeakable'. Hughes elaborates on this notion in his introduction to Pilinszky's poems, saying how 'very many lines of his [Csokits's] rough draft have been impossible to improve, as far as I could judge' and arguing that such crib-version 'retained naturally an unspoiled sense of the favour and the tone of the originals—that very intriguing quality which is the translator's will-o'-the-wisp, the foreignness and strangeness' (*WP* 235). Though there are many examples of this at once fascinating and baffling phenomenon, one should highlight that there is no single, programmatic text that would straightforwardly propose literalness as a theory or method. Instead, commentaries are scattered, incoherent, and to be found in private correspondence or drafts shared between

[90] Ibid.

editors, poets, and contributors. Introducing the poetry of Pilinszky, Hughes asserts that nothing conveys the 'air of simple, helpless accuracy' of the poems better than 'the most literal crib' and that this, according to Hughes, gives the publisher the audacity to 'settle for literalness as a first principle' (*WP* 235). On the eve of the publication of the first issue of *MPT*, a letter to Hollis from Weissbort mentions a long poem by the Hungarian poet Ferenc Juhász. He reports: 'a new literal version is being made by a Hungarian in London, and Ted is going to produce the new version of that. This will really be our piece *de resistance* – a poem, which Auden called one of the greatest poems written in our time, in an English version by Ted Hughes'.[91] The 'long poem' Weissbort refers to comes from Juhász's volume *Struggle with The White Lamb* [*Harc a fehér báránnyal*] and is a moving ode about a mother longing for her son, who has been transformed into a stag. The boy 'cries with a stag voice' since he cannot see his mother (afraid would have hurt her) and 'only the green forest can hold [him].'[92] In Kenneth McRobbie's 1963 English translation the poem title reads 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets' while in David Wevill's 1969 translation (published in Penguin anthology) 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Clamours at the Gate of Secrets'. Interestingly, in his correspondence with Hollis, Weissbort fails to mention that the 1963 translation of Juhász's poem appeared in the anthology of Hungarian 'Populist' writing. This anthology, entitled *The Plough and the Pen* and edited by Ilona Duczynska and Karl Polanyi, presented a one-sided Marxist reading of Hungarian literature. Auden had no knowledge of the original Hungarian and in writing the introduction to this anthology he seemed unaware that the selection it presented was a product of communist censorship. Hence, Weissbort's avowal of Juhász's poem as 'our piece *de resistance*' yet followed by quoting Auden's words from an anthology born out of the polar *opposite* of 'resistance' illustrates a certain pattern within the reception of Eastern European poetry - an over-reliance on fragmentary and uncontextualized comments, as long as they originated from major figures within

[91] Richard Hollis folder, King's College London MPT Archives.
[92] Ferenc Juhász: 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Clamors at the Gate of Secrets', trans. by David Wevill, *Arion*, Winter 1969, 572-584.

the domestic literary scene. That pattern could, of course, be theorized to demonstrate a type of patronage reflecting entrenched power hierarchies and linguistic privilege.

In contrast to the censored version of his work, the 1970 translations of Juhász commissioned by Penguin paired his works with those of another Hungarian poet – Sándor Weöres. As I mentioned in the first chapter, in 1967 Weöres was one of the guests at the inaugural International Poetry Festival and it was during this festival that he met his future translator into English. Weöres' poems – alongside these of Agnes Nemes Nagy, Pilinszky, and Iván Mándy – were associated with the Urban group. In the first phase of the Communist system in Hungary, poets of the Urban group were regarded as 'bourgeois individuals' and their magazines, such as *Ujhold*, were banned in 1948. Needless to say, none of these poets were mentioned in the *Plough and the Pen* anthology to which Auden wrote his introduction.

In their introduction to *Retracing the History of Literary Translation in Poland* (2022), Magda Heydel and Zofia Ziemann remind us that translation 'has always been considered dangerous, and regimes, particularly totalitarian ones, have introduced various policies to minimalize the danger'.[93] Even a cursory exploration of publishing history clearly shows how the same poem by Juhász might easily have been presented in two radically different contexts. Though in this dissertation I tend to speak of translation as *enabling* cultural dialogue, the comparison between the two very different contexts in which a reader might have encountered Juhász's poem starkly reveals the darker side of transfer as a space for manipulation. It is likely that by placing Juhász's works side-by-side with Weöres's poems the editors of the Penguin series aimed to re-contextualise the early reception of his works overshadowed by censorship. It remains uncertain if Hughes' enthusiasm about producing a new, literal version of Juhász's poem was inspired by this publishing history and censorship. It also remains unclear who the 'Hungarian' who provides

[93] Magda Heydel and Zofia Ziemann, 'Introduction', in *Retracing the History of Literary Translation in Poland: People, Politics, Poetics*, ed. by Magda Heydel and Zofia Ziemann (New York London: Routledge, 2022), e-book, unpaginated.

Hughes with the draft, word-to-word version of Juhász's poem is, but Weissbort adds: 'I know that Ted won't be long doing it once he gets the literal version' (*WP* 235).

In correspondence with Suzette Macedo, in turn, Hughes requests a crib of the translated poems: 'the rougher & more literal the translations are the more suggestive to me they are' explaining how 'just word by word transcription would be ideal' (*ST* 208-209). Follow-up correspondence reveals Macedo's uneasiness with the 'literal' version Hughes produced based on the word-to-word form. In a letter to Weissbort, Macedo reflects on how Hughes' draft translation was 'very different, with some odd departures and additions' (*ST* 208-209). Curiously, in the correspondence with the poet, Hughes defends his method and goes so far as to explain to the poet the resonance her poems have in English. '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', he writes (*ST* 209). Since Macedo was not pleased with the distortion of the meaning and unconvinced by 'nailing things down' against the ambience and intention behind her original, Hughes went on to defend his translatory decisions. His version, Hughes states, addressing the poet, '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' (*ST* 209). Macedo's reservations about 'remote paraphrase' and a 'metaphorical version' of her poem being presented as a translation are more than understandable. After reading the exchanges between the poets, I cannot help but wonder about the implications and dynamics of gender power. It might not have been intended but the paradoxical pattern of 'silencing' the translator and using crib versions as fuel for Hughes' imagination seems problematic, especially since it is not the only instance when Hughes' interventions influenced the reception of the poetry as rougher, more violent, and more unpolished than the original was.

Striving for a rough and unpolished version that would expose the paradoxical impossibility of linguistic transfer is not a recognised method among modern translation theories. It is rather an

allusion to the crib versions produced as drafts for translating classical texts. For *MPT*'s editors, literalness was a specific mode of translation, which would ensure deeper and more authentic engagement with poetry from Eastern Europe. Taking a step back, we may ask what the exact context for Hughes and Weissbort's first use of the word 'literal' is, when was the idea first introduced, and how the editors defined the principles of literal translation. Starting with the magazine, editors declared:

> 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 purposes of recreating its 'spirit', the value of the whole enterprise is called into 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. (*MPT* 1)

The editorial juxtaposes literal translation and imitations, the latter described as 'the record of the effect of one poet's imagination on another'. Given that the editorial for the inaugural issue was no longer than 700 words and was aimed at a popular audience, this passage (almost a quarter of the whole editorial) seems confusing. I cannot help but think that the words that best summarise these introductory remarks come when the editors say that their statement about literal translation 'may seem at first suspect'. This primacy of adaptation, re-making, and rendering from one medium to another explains the reversed logic of Hughes and Weissbort's explanation on what it means to translate. Read in the context of the whole editorial and poetry from Eastern Europe, the passage suggests that literal translation, unlike free adaptation, enables greater appreciation of the original and a more authentic connection with the original context. If the foreword to the first issue was supposed to be succinct and approachable, its argument got carried away with the debate about the method of literalness, as opposed to a recreation of what the editors called the 'spirit of the original'. It is worth noting the quotation marks surrounding the word 'spirit' as they seem to mark the editors' distance from the figurative and romanticised vision of authorship (or rather 'translatorship'). Here, the translation that recreates the atmosphere of the original is presented as less valuable than the one which seeks a literal (though, we are assured 'not literal in a strict or

pedantic sense') version. It remains uncertain why the translatory focus on the atmosphere of the original rather than the verbatim sense would call the enterprise of translation into question.

The potentially problematic aspect of this short passage is that it presents *MPT*'s methods as innovative and juxtaposes literal translation with thinking about translation as 'imitation', artistic re-making, or an exploration of creativity that only alludes to the original work. In this context, Matthew Reynolds' review of the *Translation: Theory and Practice* anthology, summarises the dynamics of creativity and translation. Reynolds observes that the 'texts which most demand translation are those which most challenge the translator', adding that 'the challenge is not only technical and scholarly but requires the translator to be prompted by the source to a further creativity'.[94] As I mentioned in earlier parts of this thesis, the liberty to experiment with the method of *translatorese* was relatively novel and reached back to the Poundian tradition of 'creative translation'.[95] In such translation, boundaries between the original, paraphrase, adaptation, and authorship are intentionally blurred. Similar creativity (unlocked by play with the idea of what translation could be) constitutes Lowell's *Imitations* (1961) – the influential collection in which the American poet produced a free version of translations of European poets from Homer, Charles Baudelaire, François Villon, Rainer Maria Rilke, Victor Hugo, to Boris Pasternak. The publication of the volume also marks – in Weissbort and Eysteinsson's words – 'a significant moment in the history of post-war poetry translation, with its radically domesticating approach. Lowell's career itself seems to reflect a turn from academic verse to the freer approach of Whitman or the spoken-voice rhythms of William Carlos Williams, as well as to more self-exposure'.[96] It is due to this 'freer approach' and creativity that the *Imitations* are called imitations, not translations as they are, indeed, 'the record of the effect of one poet's imagination on another's', consciously attempting to re-make foreign authors in a radical gesture of domesticizing their voices and adapting them into the English language. The idea would not

[94] Matthew Reynolds, 'Translation: Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader', *Translation and Literature*, 17.1 (2008), 85-93 (p. 85).
[95] J. P Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
[96] *Translation: Theory and Practice*, p. 352.

have been possible if not for a modernist's use of intertextuality, contributing to sketching the limits of what translation is. Against the grain of classical education, experiments with translation and mistranslation changed the perception of linguistic transfer, making it into a channel for communication and the co-creation of meaning, rather than merely staying as close as possible to the verbatim crib beneath the foreign text.

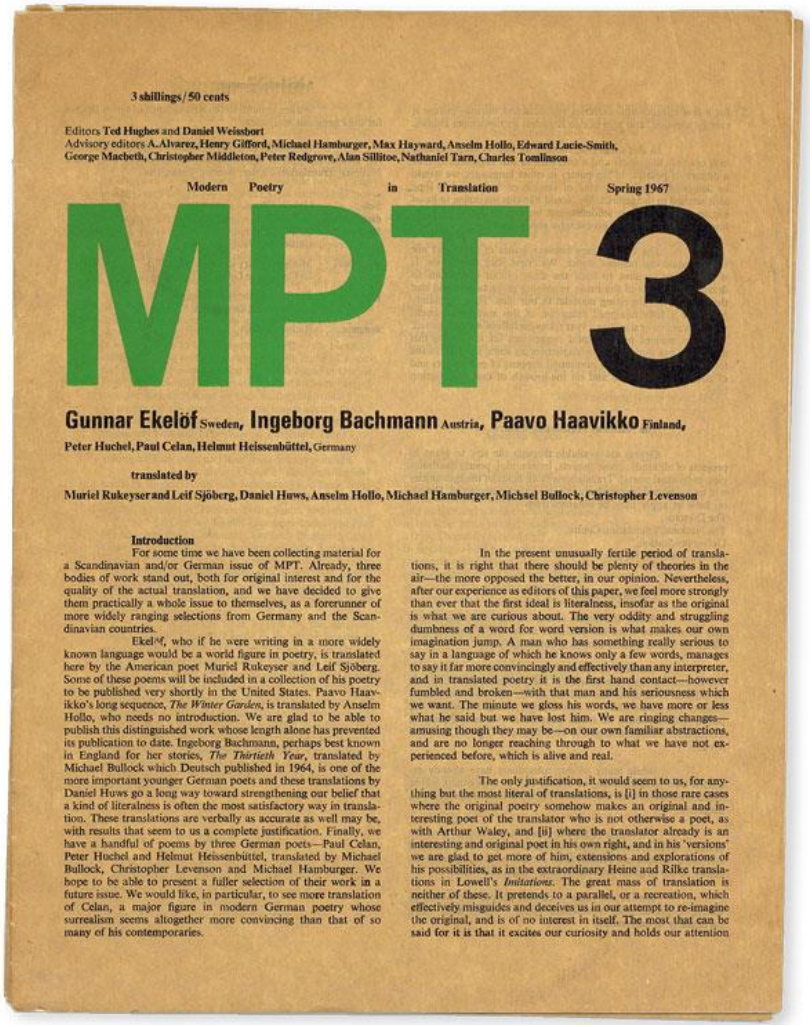
Both Pound and Lowell were, in different ways, weighing the dogmatic assumptions of scrutinising translations against a demand for equivalence, translatory transparency, and faithfulness. While the energy of the method of *translatorese* plays deliberately with oppositions of translation and adaptation, inaccuracy and faithfulness, the original and its representation, the introduction to *MPT* suggests that while adaptations 'may help in the appreciation of the original, they may simply obscure it' (*MPT* 1). The editors conclude this issue by saying that, 'in any case, the original becomes strangely irrelevant' (*MPT* 1).

But neither Pound nor Lowell nor Reid ever hoped for the original to be relevant and their experimentations with the idea of the translation do not establish any method. In re-inserting the notion of literalness as a guarantee of the authenticity of adaptation and creative translation, *MPT* does exactly what modernist poets challenged and wished to steer away from. Moreover, it is difficult to debate the method if it is presented in such proximity to poetry coming from a 'centre of cataclysm' (*MPT* 1) and responding to the question about the possibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz. We might think again of Owen's words: 'tactical value is a kind of crisis value'.[97] Following the analysis of the passage, we see how the first editorial to *MPT* draws on a substantive error. Hughes and Weissbort present literal translation as a novel and alternative method to imitations, in which the 'original becomes strangely irrelevant' while imitations such as Lowell's were a conscious artistic move set in the context of modernist *translatorese*. *MPT*

[97] Owen, 'The Anxiety of Global Influence', p. 28.

acknowledges this more clearly in the third editorial, in which we learn about two exceptions for translations other than the literal translation:

> The only justification, it would seem to us, for anything but the most literal of translations, is [i] in those rare cases where the original poetry somehow makes an original and interesting poet of the translator who is not otherwise a poet […], and [ii] where the translator already is an interesting and original poet in his own right, and in his 'versions' we are glad to get more of him, extensions and explorations of his possibilities, as in extraordinary Heine and Rilke translations in Lowell's *Imitations*. The great mass of translation is neither of this. (*ST* 201)



3 shillings / 50 cents

Editors Ted Hughes and Daniel Weissbort
Advisory editors A. Alvarez, Henry Gifford, Michael Hamburger, Max Hayward, Anselm Hollo, Edward Lucie-Smith, George Macbeth, Christopher Middleton, Peter Redgrove, Alan Sillitoe, Nathaniel Tarn, Charles Tomlinson

Modern Poetry in Translation Spring 1967

MPT 3

Gunnar Ekelöf Sweden, Ingeborg Bachmann Austria, Paavo Haavikko Finland,
Peter Huchel, Paul Celan, Helmut Heissenbüttel, Germany

translated by

Muriel Rukeyser and Leif Sjöberg, Daniel Huws, Anselm Hollo, Michael Hamburger, Michael Bullock, Christopher Levenson

Introduction

For some time we have been collecting material for a Scandinavian and/or German issue of MPT. Already, three bodies of work stand out, both for original interest and for the quality of the actual translation, and we have decided to give them practically a whole issue to themselves, as a forerunner of more widely ranging selections from Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

Ekelöf, who if he were writing in a more widely known language would be a world figure in poetry, is translated here by the American poet Muriel Rukeyser and Leif Sjöberg. Some of these poems will be included in a collection of his poetry to be published very shortly in the United States. Paavo Haavikko's long sequence, *The Winter Garden*, is translated by Anselm Hollo, who needs no introduction. We are glad to be able to publish this distinguished work whose length alone has prevented its publication to date. Ingeborg Bachmann, perhaps best known in England for her stories, *The Thirtieth Year*, translated by Michael Bullock which Deutsch published in 1964, is one of the more important younger German poets and these translations by Daniel Huws go a long way toward strengthening our belief that a kind of literalness is often the most satisfactory way in translation. These translations are verbally as accurate as well may be, with results that seem to us a complete justification. Finally, we have a handful of poems by three German poets—Paul Celan, Peter Huchel and Helmut Heissenbüttel, translated by Michael Bullock, Christopher Levenson and Michael Hamburger. We hope to be able to present a fuller selection of their work in a future issue. We would like, in particular, to see more translation of Celan, a major figure in modern German poetry whose surrealism seems altogether more convincing than that of so many of his contemporaries.

In the present unusually fertile period of translations, it is right that there should be plenty of theories in the air—the more opposed the better, in our opinion. Nevertheless, after our experience as editors of this paper, we feel more strongly than ever that the first ideal is literalness, insofar as the original is what we are curious about. The very oddity and struggling dumbness of a word for word version is what makes our own imagination jump. A man who has something really serious to say in a 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. The minute we gloss his words, we have more or less what he said but we have lost him. We are ringing changes—amusing though they may be—on our own familiar abstractions, and are no longer reaching through to what we have not experienced before, which is alive and real.

The only justification, it would seem to us, for anything but the most literal of translations, is [i] in those rare cases where the original poetry somehow makes an original and interesting poet of the translator who is not otherwise a poet, as with Arthur Waley, and [ii] where the translator already is an interesting and original poet in his own right, and in his 'versions' we are glad to get more of him, extensions and explorations of his possibilities, as in the extraordinary Heine and Rilke translations in Lowell's *Imitations*. The great mass of translation is neither of these. It pretends to a parallel, or a recreation, which effectively misguides and deceives us in our attempt to re-imagine the original, and is of no interest in itself. The most that can be said for it is that it excites our curiosity and holds our attention

Fig. 9: The cover of the third issue of *MPT*, Spring 1967

There is nothing particularly innovative in the editors' preference for a verbatim version of the foreign text but the tone, the context of the incoming translations, and the fact that they argue that

draft and rough versions are best placed to represent their complexity is unforeseen and fascinating. As a part of her doctorate project, Bergin interviewed Elaine Feinstein, asking:

> *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'. 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.[98]

The critic and translator is correct in pointing out that the methods favoured by *MPT* resulted in a flattened image of poetry in which all the work started to sound the same after strenuous adjustment to its target-audience. Asked about the distortion of the original intention, the 'literal', and the tone of *MPT*'s early editorials, which reflected on how a 'man who has something really serious to say in the language of which he knows only a few words' (*MPT* 3), Dugdale commented:

> The issue as I see it is that Hughes has become so iconic his words are taken as being more important and grave than he perhaps intended them to be. He spoke with assurance, it was perhaps the era that gave him that apparent confidence in his own powers. The other issue is that Hughes in this quote presents the work of a number of sophisticated poets as odd, struggling stuff, that sums up humanity inadvertently, a bit like a cave painting, perhaps – and this is a huge distortion at a crucial early point for their reception. Later in his career he focusses on the classics (Ovid, for example) and there the issue is much less present as his versions stand alongside others.[99]

Dugdale's words about how the *MPT* editorials were taken more seriously than the editors intended at the time is refreshing. This fact, along with her point that the confidence of their tone can be justified by the era are important for a better understanding of the history of the magazine.

This early perception of translation can, to some extent, be seen as a part of the magazine's marketing strategy. The largely idiosyncratic sympathy of *MPT* for literal translation promoted

[98] Bergin, p. 223.
[99] Private correspondence.

a method whose brokenness would (especially in the context of Eastern Europe) ensure the best connection with the brokenness of the post-Holocaust poetry. Curiously then, in such a vision of translation, the two aforementioned meanings of the word 'literal' combine. On the one hand, 'literarlness' is a radical desire to stay close to the original meaning and retain exactly the verbal and figural sense by giving up on metaphor and allusion. On the other, in the translation this desire for one-to-one representation is, by the logic of language and transfer, an illusion, and thus striving for 'literarlness' as a method of reading the text leads to the second meaning of the word: an error, the error of the 'overly literal approach'. On a metalevel, one may say that this specific desire for closeness to the original and verbatim representation lacks 'trust'. Aiming for the most literal representation makes translation into an impossible and broken act. Understood thus, 'literalness' has contributed to the reception of Eastern European poetry and was an unprecedented and time-specific mode of reflecting (as well as refracting) original texts.

Chapter 3: (In)sincere survivor: Sylvia Plath and the post-Holocaust lyric

How far it is? I shall count and bury the dead

– Sylvia Plath, 'Getting There' (*P* 249)

In a 1962 BBC interview with Peter Orr, Sylvia Plath talks about her most controversial poems and says that she is 'rather a political person', lately finding herself 'reading more and more about history' (OR Interview). This political statement coming from a poet most commonly known to be what American critic M. L. Rosenthal called 'confessional' might seem surprising. How after all can the poet whose work, and its complicated intertwining with biography, turned her into a myth, call herself a political person, thus leaving the domain that, often misleadingly, is thought to be reserved for poetry of and about the self? Since her death in February 1963, and the posthumous publication of *Ariel* (1965) two years later, Plath's work has been lionized by readers, scholars, and poets, making her into a recognisable figure of public, including pop cultural, discourse. While it is questionable whether criticism has appreciated the complexity of Plath's poetry, her words on her political interest do justice to her artistic, moral, and psychological engagement with the troubled history of the second half of the twentieth century which Zygmunt Bauman described grimly as 'The Age of Camps'.[1]

Since 1965, Plath's *Ariel* collection has sparked much of the debate about the ethics of self-writing, the appropriation of collective trauma through inscribing oneself in the position of the victim one is not, and the question of who has the right to write what Michael Hamburger termed the 'poetry of survival'.[2] In this chapter the connection between the American author and Eastern

[1] Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), p. 192.
[2] See Michael Hamburger, 'Introduction', in Paul Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2007), pp. 23-40.

European poetry might appear to some readers to be less direct than in my earlier discussion, as the focus falls on larger, conceptual issues instead of Plath's engagement with individual poets about which we know fairly little. The reasons for including Plath in this dissertation might, then, at first appear obscure. Especially given how much has been written about the poetics of *Ariel* and its relationship with witnessing and testimony, one may question what, if anything, we can add to the discussion.

Plath's works are among the few of the late 1950s that share an ambition of 'going beyond …' the comfort zone of the literary scene. In the 1960s, the geopolitical situation of the Cold War, and a growing consciousness of Nazi atrocities made Plath seek a rougher poetic idiom. In a letter from August 1962, responding to *The Penguin Book of Sick Verse* (1963) Plath sends MacBeth her new poems informing him they may 'strike [him] as being darker than [her] other dark darks, sicker than [her] other sicks (*L* II 809). Plath, however, was hardly alone in her use of the Holocaust and her poetics benefit from seeing it in the larger literary-historical context. In the first chapter of this thesis, I sketched the historical background such as the Eichmann trial of 1961 that contextualises the fascination of Anglophone poets with Holocaust writing in translation. I argued that the trial was a necessary framework for understanding poetic debates of the time, and distinguished several tropes which seemed to engage Anglophone critics. These came to include topics such as direct versus indirect witnessing, silence versus speech, economy of form, broken language, and the conviction that – due to its global salience – Holocaust poetry translates readily into English.

The motif of the Holocaust appeared in poems such as 'Annotations to Auschwitz' and 'Soliloquy at Potsdam' by Porter; 'The Disciple' or 'The Crucifix' by MacBeth; 'More Light! More Light!' by Anthony Hecht; or 'Ovid in the Third Reich' by Hill. However, reactions to those poems were nowhere near the levels of the controversy when a similar metaphor comes from a female writer. Plath's works have often been limited to biographical readings, as if the anxieties she touched on in her poems were remote from those of the Cold War era. The reality was somewhat different

and this chapter hopes to complicate our reading of Plath by showing how her work and fascinations speak for a larger process that happened on the Anglophone literary scene of the early 1960s, inspiring debates about the relationship between witnessing and autobiography; suffering and spectatorship; provocation and appropriation.

Since the literary environment of the early 1960s was a male-dominated world, one of the fascinating layers of the controversy over Plath's most daring poems such as 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Daddy' also had to do with the fact that it is *Lady* Lazarus speaking, not Lazarus. If alluding to the Holocaust in a poetic style redolent with carnivalesque spectacle was not sufficiently controversial on its own, the presence of a female speaker only added fuel to the fire. The biographical context and Plath's suicide have also given extra-textual dramatism to interpretations of her poetry that was frequently seen as authenticating its message.[3] The book that initiated readings of Plath's suicide as authenticating the sincerity of her poems was Alvarez's *The Savage God. The Study of Suicide* (1971), which Suzan Van Dyne emblematically called 'demonic teleology'.[4] After Plath's death, Alvarez's victimising fantasy that suicide was a fulfilment of Plath's poetry became one of the standing myths of interpretation, echoing the romantic vision of a poetic sacrifice, and setting the tone for much of what has been written about Plath since. Plath's suicide attempt in adolescence, the performative character of her epistolary voice, the story of her late journal suspiciously destroyed by Hughes – all of these invite the reader to psychologically adopt the position of not merely a reader but a quasi-saviour who, at least partially, wishes to puzzle out the troubled psychology of the poet, whose work remains so intrinsically linked with the cult around her life, work, and death. It is precisely this link between experience, authenticity, and poetic representation that would later make Hungarian translator and critic George Szirtes comment that Plath would have been the best translator of Radnóti's *Camp Notebook*. Hence, the questions about authenticity and creative rendering of the Holocaust can also be fruitfully analysed through metaphors of 'original' and 'translation'.

[3] See Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002)
[4] Ibid., p. 5.

In this chapter, I focus on Plath's autobiografictive textual representations as inscribed in the tradition of the post-Holocaust lyric. More specifically, I analyse Plath's interest in stylistic brokenness, roughness, repetition, and the ferocity of poetic language as a return to the modernist idiom, reflecting a deep ambivalence about the efficiency of artistic expression and signification. I start my discussion with exploring the poetic personality, setting it against the grain of the formalist tradition alongside Plath's properties of traumatized speech. I then move on to look at Plath's early, niche and unobvious interests in history against the backdrop of the American politics of domesticity in the shadow of the US nuclear welfare. Finally, I interpret some of Plath's most controversial works from *Ariel* in relation to the post-Holocaust lyric; its ontological untranslatability, the struggle of authors for articulation, and the sexual discourses surrounding the Holocaust and femininity.

One of the continuous themes of this dissertation is the borrowing of ideas from different strands of translation studies and theories. Here, while discussing the wider problem of historical consciousness, and the relationship between the post-war mediated lyric and biography, I will, when relevant, look at Plath's oeuvre through the prism of the cultural and gendered expectations that translation is not autonomous but rather 'faithful' to the superior original. I suggest that many of Plath's late works test the possibilities of creative 'unfaithfulness', not simply through Holocaust metaphors but through recurring alienation from language, which is presented as disjointed, foreignized, and untranslatable with the moment of voicing suspended – as the persona of 'Daddy' would say – and 'stuck in my jaw' (*P* 223). We should speak instead about the female author who dares to offer her 'unfaithful' re-makings, alternations, and free translations of the 'original' experience that did not belong to her.[5] In other words, the experiences Plath never 'authored'. This interpretative proposition is not just a topic in its own right but also links the

[5] See Lori Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Metaphors of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 314-31.

present discussion to my next chapter about Hughes' cycle of poems, connections with Eastern Europe, and experimentations with translation without the original source text.

Including Plath in this thesis is driven by my conviction that her post-Holocaust poetry played an enormous role in shaping the direction and interest of the poetry market of the mid-1960s. Even today, in discussion of Holocaust poetry many readers and critics would first refer to Plath's works instead of those of survivor-writers who directly experienced the atrocity of concentration camps first-hand. To some extent, Plath acted as a 'disseminator' of Holocaust poetry for the Anglophone audience and I argue for the importance of re-inserting Plath into literary history and regarding her as a writer whose poetic provocations were well aware of, and pioneering for, 1960s debates about seriousness and gentility.

Representation, authorship, and the poetics of proxy-witnessing

To write about Plath is, inevitably, to confront ethical issues of representation, and to find a language for criticism that is not limited to acceptance or resistance of a biographical reading. In her meta-critical book on Plath as a cultural fantasy (one of the first to re-define studies on Plath and propose novel interpretative possibilities), Jacqueline Rose writes about an anxiety generated by Plath's writing that could be productive if we only allowed ourselves to accept how uncertain the truth can be, without insisting on finding resolution.[6] Deborah Nelson, too, advises against separating Plath's aesthetic achievement, psychological extremity and biographical scandal as it is precisely the fusion of these three that 'struck a nerve with the postwar reader'.[7] Yet some of the scholarly discussions of Plath's associatively powerful Holocaust metaphors reveal a tendency that Rose suggestively described using an analogy to Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Namely, by trying to answer what happens to the governess, critics have simply repeated the drama of the governess herself, entering into the argument that the writing is

[6] See Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago Press, 2013), p. 21.
[7] Deborah Nelson, 'Plath, history and politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*, ed. by Jo Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 21-35 (p. 21).

having with itself.[8] Indeed, this habit of repeating the question posed by Plath's poems ignores the poet's conscious self-referential provocations. Moreover, while endlessly questioning whether Plath had the right to write the poetry of survival we – as critics and readers – are suggesting our own fitness to adopt the role of the expert in morality, entering into debates and disagreements similar to those between Levi and Wiesel.[9] In interpreting Plath's poetry, an idea that strikes me as potentially fruitful approach is to think of her imagination as a specific fantasy. By fantasy, I refer to Renata Salecl's definition from her *Spoils of Freedom* (2002): 'the way people structure their desire around some traumatic element that cannot be symbolised'.[10] Fantasy gives consistency to what we call 'reality'. By this logic, fantasy cannot be judged or verified according to existing criteria of truth and accuracy, neither can it be reduced to psychoanalytical associations; it is a means of compensation for whatever 'breaks' in reality one encounters. Whether or not judgments on the sincerity of witnessing and fantasies of victimhood would go beyond the boundaries of literary criticism is less important than considering how the style, language, and mood of critique established a climate that allowed Plath to be seen less as an author and more of a cultural commodity. Here, a few words about the paradoxes of witnessing and testimony will prove useful for grounding my future discussion.

Though the rich body of his works exceeds his reputation as a Holocaust survivor, Levi once said that 'we survivors are not true witnesses', for the true witnesses of the Holocaust 'have not returned to tell about it'.[11] Known for his unease about stereotypical representations of the Holocaust, Levi wished to see himself as a modernist writer and somehow avoided the label in the reception of his work, saying 'I don't like labels. Germans do'.[12] In his writing and expansion of representation and identifications beyond the victim/victimizer dichotomy, he could not differ

[8] Rose, p. 13.
[9] It is, in passing, interesting to note how the American reception of Levi distorted the modernist quality of his work in favour of creating the image of the writer as a survivor and moralist, whose reconciliation through the medium of language eventually brings solace and forgiveness. See Bryan Cheyette, 'Appropriating Primo Levi', in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. by Robert Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), pp. 67–86.
[10] Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[11] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus 2013), pp. 83-4.
[12] Carole Angier, *The Double Bond: Primo Levi; A Biography* (London: Viking, 2002), p. 645.

more from Wiesel, who was suspicious of those who represented the Holocaust in anything other than a documentary mode. Paul Celan, too, famously wrote that 'No one | bears witness for the | witness.' [*Niemand* | *zeugt für den* | *Zeugen*].[13] In their different poetics, authors expressed the impossibility of 'possessing' a full knowledge, and the fundamental division between witnessing and survival. Lyotard also spoke about the perplexing logic of witnessing in *The Differend* (1988), writing that 'in order for a place to be identified as a gas chamber, the only eyewitness I will accept would be a victim of this gas chamber; now... there is no victim that is not dead; otherwise, this gas chamber would not be what he or she claims it to be'.[14] Touching on the same paradox of absent eyewitness, in her book on testimony and crises of witnessing, Dori Laub analyses patterns in survivor testimonies, focusing on their conflicted feelings of guilt, voicing, and need to tell the story. She observes:

> I would like to suggest a certain way of looking at the Holocaust that would reside in the following theoretical perspective: that what precisely made a Holocaust out of the event is the unique way in which, during its historical occurrence, the event produced no witnesses. Not only, in effect, did the Nazis try to exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims.[15]

This distressing realization means that the survivor-narratives always accommodate an element of *creative projection* into the 'imaginary' authorship on behalf of the ones who cannot speak. Think, for instance, about the excerpt from the poem 'Baszert' by the Yiddish-American-Polish author Irena Klepfisz in which she would write 'these words are dedicated to those who died' repeating the line, over and over again, as if repetition had a restorative power equal to prayer.[16]

As a result, the act of speech reveals a paradoxical diversion between the poet's faith in the power of the lyric, and their rejection of lyric, which leads to the fundamental crisis concerning the

[13] Quoted in Rachel Zolf, *No One's Witness* (Duke: Duke UP, 2021), pp. 130-1. Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstering (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 141.
[14] Lyotard, *The Differend*, pp. 3-4.
[15] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 80.
[16] Irena Klepfisz. *Dreams of an Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches, and Diatribes* (Portland: Eighth Mountain, 1990), p. 183.

possibility of poetic, or in fact any, expression. The merging of both, most typically, enhances the poet's urge to re-invent a style that would meta-poetically and through apophatic breakdowns comment on its own impossibility of voicing. This crisis 'propelled poets in two diametrically opposed directions: on the one hand, toward ellipses, fragmentation, in short poems that exhibit their inadequacy by shutting down with a sort of premature closure' – says Susan Gubar – 'on the other, toward verbosity in long poems that register futility by reiterating an exhausted failure to achieve closure'.[17] Plath's late poems encode such a drama of self-mythologised survival, linguistic exile, and the impossibility of verbalising trauma intertwined with the poet's provocative interaction with the audience. The vehement representations of the Holocaust in Plath's work animate a specific kind of moral anxiety in the reader who, as Nelson says, feels the need to re-read the history they believed they knew.[18] After reading poems such as 'Daddy', 'Mary's Song', 'The Fearful', or 'Getting There' some readers could repeat after Steiner, why after all would any of us have license to locate our personal disaster, raw as this might be, in Auschwitz?[19]

From around 1960, following Eichmann's capture and trial, Plath asked herself the same question and her interest in 'going beyond …' the thematic restraints of Anglophone poetry were far more complicated than mere provocation, being in fact one of the first contributions to later theoretical debates about the evils of spectatorship. The violence of the gaze is discussed in numerous, including recent, works, for instance, of Sontag's *Regarding the pain of others* (2003), Deborah Nelson's *Tough Enough* (2017) exploring women's unsentimental writing on horror in the post-war era, or Rose's *On Violence and on Violence against Women* (2021).[20] The reader remembers how Plath's oft-quoted poem 'Daddy' interpenetrates the speaker's Electra complex emotions toward a father-figure with the imagery of extermination camps. 'Dying | Is an art' (*P* 245)

[17] Susan Gubar, 'The Long and Short of Holocaust Verse,' *New Literary History*, 35.3 (2004), 443-468 (p. 443).
[18] See Deborah Nelson, pp. 21-35.
[19] See Steiner, 'Dying is an Art', pp. 324-34.
[20] See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), and Jacqueline Rose, *On Violence and on Violence against Women* (London: Faber and Faber, 2021).

declares the ventriloquist persona of 'Lady Lazarus', re-enacting the fantasy of her own grotesque and theatrical death. While regaining the agency of voicing Plath's speaker strategically dices with the idea of being the survivor. In the lesser known 'Mary's Song', in a rather repulsive tone, Plath shifts the domesticity of cooking Sunday's lamb cracking 'in its fat' (*P* 257) to the mass-murdering of Jews.

Though it remains uncertain whether Plath read much post-Holocaust poetry, she must have encountered the challenge Adorno set for poets, when he evoked the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz, at the very least, as it was alluded to in Alvarez's preface to the first edition of *The New Poetry* and in the debate between Alvarez and Davie that opened the first issue of *The Review*. Though there is no proof of such in Plath's journals, she might have encountered Celan's poems in the *Modern German Poetry 1910-60* (1962) anthology edited by Hamburger and Middleton. Brian Murdoch was the first critic who, in his 1974 article 'Transformations of the Holocaust: Auschwitz in Modern Lyric Poetry', argues that Plath has read Celan's 'Todesfuge'.[21] A similar suggestion is also made by Janice Markey and Steven Axelrod.[22] From Alvarez's autobiography, we know that, though he was invested in the subject much earlier, in 1961 he and Plath shared an obsession with concentration camps and they 'would talk about them continually'.[23] However, when Rowland questioned Alvarez about this, the editor and critic stated that he and Plath never discussed Celan's works.[24] We know that Plath got her inscribed copy of *The New Poetry* from Hughes immediately after its publication in April 1962 but was, as Alvarez put it in the interview with Clark, 'pissed off not to be in it'.[25] And indeed, from the feminist perspective, she had good reason to be angry.

[21] Brian Murdoch, 'Transformations of the Holocaust: Auschwitz in Modern Lyric Poetry', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 11. 2 (1974), 123-50.
[22] See Janice Markey, *A Journey into the Red Eye: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath: A Critique* (London: The Women's Press, 1993), p. 94 and Steven Axelrod, *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins UP, 1992), pp. 215, 159.
[23] Alvarez, *Where Did It All Go Right?*, p. 212.
[24] Rowland, p. 48.
[25] Quoted in Clark, p. 759.

In the new biography of Plath, Clark reports that the poet's copy of *The New Poetry* included some glosses and that Plath underlined as many as twenty passages from Alvarez's introduction. Her highlights specifically included passages that talked about 'the poet's ability and willingness to face the full range of his experience with full intelligence; not to take the easy exits' (*NP* 24). Today, comparing two editions of the anthology makes one consider whether the representation of the poets from the first edition really challenged, as Alvarez wished, the Gentility Principle if this ambitious task was in fact given to Lowell and Hughes. How, in 1962, could those two poets hope to single-handedly change the direction of poetry and initiate a 'new' more 'serious' mode of writing? The 1962 version did not include Plath or Sexton, even though these two poets were perhaps the best representation of what Alvarez wished to promote as the 'extremist' idiom. In April 1962, what are now the best known and most provocative of Plath's poems were not yet written but pieces such as 'Tulips' with its hospital settings and unusual metaphors depicting the feeling of dissociation, threat, and emotional suffocation (*P* 160), soliloquy from 'In Plaster' where we witness the speaker's dramatic split into two selves (*P* 158), or striking apostrophes from 'Lorelei' poem where we read: 'Sisters, your song | Bears a burden too weighty | For the whorled ear's listening' (*P* 76) would make a perfect entry in Alvarez's anthology. Even some of Plath's poems printed in 1960 in *The Colossus* would also fit the critic's line of argument.

According to Alvarez, Plath spoke about the 'Beyond the Gentility Principle' manifesto 'often and with approval' but did not hide her disappointment of not being included in the influential anthology.[26] As I discussed in the first chapter, the second edition of *The New Poetry* would be published after Plath's death with an expanded note informing the reader that the previous selection excluded authors who were more American than they were British. But if so, why did Lowell and Berryman still make their way into the 1962 edition? In his review of *The New Poetry* Falck asked: 'if England stayed genteel by missing the war and the concentration camps (as Alvarez suggests), how come the Americans are so good?'[27] The fact that Lowell and Berryman

[26] Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 40.
[27] Falck, p. 4.

were included in the first edition proves that Alvarez's criteria for inclusion were not so much based on the poets being or not being Americans as they were, again, on the poets' gender. Only later Alvarez would admit that not including Plath in the first edition was a 'terrible mistake. Stupid'.[28] Despite this gender prejudice, Alvarez's ideas resonated with Plath and views from his essay inspired the bolder, more daring, and uncompromising tone of her *Ariel* collection. In October 1962, in correspondence with her brother Warren, Plath reports that the critic of the *Observer* agreed to hear her read her new poems. She adds: 'He is the opinion-maker in poetry over here, A. Alvarez & says I'm the first woman poet he's taken seriously since Emily Dickinson! Needless to say, I'm delighted' (*L* II 893). In an interview with Orr, Plath refers to Alvarez's anthology saying:

> There was an essay by Alvarez, the British critic: his arguments about the dangers of gentility in England are very pertinent, very true. I must say that I am not very genteel and I feel that gentility has a stranglehold: the neatness, the wonderful tidiness, which is so evident everywhere in England is perhaps more dangerous than it would appear on the surface. [...] I think the whole emphasis in England, in universities, on practical criticism (but not that so much as on historical criticism, knowing what period a line comes from) this is almost paralysing. (OP, Interview)

Plath disagrees with the methods of ahistorical reading popular at the time and goes on to describe a lack of historical context as 'almost paralysing'. Though, as discussed earlier, Alvarez's criticism might now seem barely comprehensible in its hysterically apocalyptic tone, in 1962 it reflected the mood and obsessions of the time.[29] Consider, for instance, following excerpt from Alvarez's introduction:

> […] The forceable recognition of mass evil outside us has developed precisely parallel with psychoanalysis; that is, with our recognition of the ways in which the same forces are at work within us. One of the therapeutic purposes, for example of Bruno Bettelheim's secret psychoanalytic observations when he was in Dachau and Buchenwald was to educate himself into realizing how much of what went on around him expressed what went on inside him. (*NP* 27)

[28] Quoted in Clark, p. 757.
[29] Wootten, p. xii.

It would be redundant to ascribe Plath's interest in the dangers of gentility merely to the influence of Alvarez's celebrated preface. Her explorations of creative responses to 'the world's hardest things' pre-date the critic's polemical introduction. Four years before Alvarez published his essay, in a letter to a friend from Smith College, Plath describes Hughes' poetry as exploring 'really jolting experiences like birth, sex, war'. For Plath, 'for various reasons of deadness, sterility & incredible intellectual corruption' (*L* II 136), this excludes her husband from the English literary establishment. This early counter-identification with gentility intensifies in the early 1960s under the influence of personal torments, the introspection of therapy, the geo-political situation, her interest in reading about psychoanalysis, and the broader inscription of her poetry into the – characteristic for the 1960s – recovery of a modernist style. In November 1962, she replies to Michael Carey's letter attaching her 'Mary's Song' and advises him to allow 'the world [to] blow in more roughly' in his writing, alongside recommending that he read more Eliot and Pound. Significantly, she instructs him: 'speak straight out. You should give yourself exercises in roughness, not lyrical neatness', and adds, 'I think I will send you the poem of my own, very rough, but about the Christ-ness in all martyrs, and written by a mother of a son' (*L* II 917). The reader familiar with the deconstructive and perpetually revised lyric of Różewicz; the play of silences in Pilinszky's work, the cross-linguistic search for meaning in Klepfisz's poetry, or the economy of expression in Charlotte Delbo's narrative prose would know that such an 'exercise in roughness' and auto-referentiality are all characteristic tropes in the post-Holocaust European lyric. But for now, my question is not whether the Holocaust is appropriated or abused by Plath's metaphors, but rather what in the realm of the literary and critical moods of the time made her turn to the exploration of extreme idiom in the first place.

In October 1962, Plath says in a letter to her mother, 'I'm writing the best poems of my life', and adds, 'they will make my name' (*L* II 469). They certainly did. For over fifty years, the controversies of her *Ariel* have been much discussed. However, when Plath committed suicide in 1963, she was neither an influential nor a well-known writer. Her choice to publish her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, under a pseudonym in 1963 did not help. Its initial anonymity played off the

confessionalism, which seemed ironic given the reception of the book. Overshadowed by the proximity of its publication to the author's death, it offered – as Ellen McGrath Smith points out – very few 'innocent reading[s]'.[30] Plath's debut collection *The Colossus* received little press attention and the brief reviews that appeared in 1960 were divided, if not sceptical. Thomas Blackburn criticised 'the rather baffling obliqueness of some of Miss Plath's work'; Richard Kell saw *The Colossus* as a desperate merging of 'landscape and mindscape' that left the reader equally desperate; Alvarez looked on the collection favourably, evoking a 'sense of threat, as though she were continually menaced by something she could see only out of the corners of her eyes' while Bernard Bergonzi prized Plath's work for the 'virtuoso qualities of its style' alongside its 'highly personal tone and way of looking at the world'.[31]

Following the wave of new publications, including Plath's letters to her therapist discovered in 2018, the last five years saw an increased interest in this poet's life and works. Responses to new material were quick and, as two recent biographies, firstly by Carl Rollyson and secondly by Heather Clark, show, their quality could differ radically.[32] *Red Comet: The Short and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* by Clark, is the first such comprehensive and multi-layered account on Plath life and work enriched with new material and written with sensitivity and insight. The problem of biography has become the recognizable thread in the scholarship on Plath. Her work is read over and over again through the 'irrevocable, ineradicable and finally enigmatic fact of [her] suicide'.[33]

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[30] Janet McCann, *Critical Insights. The Bell Jar* (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2012).

[31] Lauren Niland, 'Sylvia Plath - reviews from the archive', *The Guardian*, 27 Oct 2012 <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/from-the-archive-blog/2012/oct/27/sylvia-plath-reviews-archive> [accessed 20 Feb 2020]. Most of these reviews were, again, written by male critics who prized the 'un-feminine' character of Plath's technical skills and felt it necessary to inform the readers whose wife she was. Though we would now regard such information as inappropriate for a literary review, in the 1960s Plath was indeed the wife of Hughes and someone to whom marriage mattered deeply, as she perceived it to be linked to her creative fertility.

[32] See Carl Rollyson, *The Last Days of Sylvia Plath* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020) and Heather L. Clark, *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2020). We may say that the first biography, *The Last Days of Sylvia Plath* by Rollyson, represents every possible cliché in writing about Plath (this includes the discussion of the actual works of the writer for the most detailed discussion of sensational material; using de-contextualised excerpts from the poems as a direct illustration of the mental health struggles of the author, or re-affirming interpretations that take the suicide of the poet as an authentication of the sincere and dramatic element of her writing).

[33] Susan Van Dyne, 'The problem of biography', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*, ed. by J. Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 3-21 (p. 3). Several reading fallacies have affected the reception of Plath work and constructed an image of her in popular culture as a self-indulgent and narcissistic poetess who exposed herself in a tragic quest for self-understanding. The pop-cultural representations include but are not limited to the movie *Sylvia*

The trouble with any confession is that it requires viewership, readership; in other words, someone to whom I can confess and construct myself. Therefore, the genre is likely to fictionalise one's own life beyond the restraints of whatever we used to imagine to be sincerity.

Even though Plath did not live to see the rise of second wave feminism or read influential publications such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1964), her work invites revision of an idea of traumatized womanhood and its relationship with the male-dominant domain of history. Here, the creative turn in translation studies and feminist critique offers reflections on assumptions about faithfulness and authenticity, women's writing, and its complex place in history. In the 1980s, Lori Chamberlain was the first to examine representations of translation as a gendered struggle for authority and the politics of originality. Her point of departure was simple – through the years, translation was viewed as qualitatively different from the peerless original, a sentiment reflected in the adage *les belles infidèles*. The proverb coined in the seventeenth century suggests that translation, like women, should be either beautiful or faithful. The power of the original is, therefore, ascribed solely to the author (as father, husband). Such a cultural contract, Chamberlain explains, reveals a gendered double-standard, which makes it impossible for the original to be 'guilty of infidelity.' Chamberlain writes:

> It should by now be obvious that this metaphorics of translation reveals both an anxiety about the myths of paternity (or authorship and authority) and a profound ambivalence about the role of maternity—ranging from the condemnation of *les belles infidèles* to the adulation accorded to the 'mother tongue'. [34]

The struggle for the authority of being the author and thus the creator of the original work happens not merely in the realm of the family but also in the state-governed language of colonization where – as Friedrich Nietzsche says in the context of the Roman Empire – 'translation [is] a form

(2003) that advertised on its cover how Gwyneth Paltrow as Plath 'is sexy and willful, boiling over with literary and erotic hunger'. A more recent and striking example is the issue of Spanish *Glamour* magazine from 2017 that advises on how to dress like Sylvia Plath, including a chequered knee-length coat, black moccasins, and a pink oven. For more cultural and visual after-lives of Plath see *Representing Sylvia Plath* ed. by Sally Bayley and Tracy Brain (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

[34] Chamberlain, pp. 315, 319.

of conquest'.[35] Chamberlain gives the example of the interchangeability of German *übersetzen* and *verdeutschen* the first meaning 'to translate', the second 'to germanise'.[36] Even though translation theory was never of explicit interest to Plath, the link between both the intimate and the political struggles for 'authoring' experience is clear. 'My writing is my writing is my writing'– she would obsessively write in intimate notes from therapy sessions in fear of a phallic mother (and, perhaps, 'mother tongue') – a constant threat to Plath's artistic autonomy.[37] It was not just this mother who seems to present a danger to Plath's 'authoring' of her work; in her book *The Grief of Influence* (2011), Clark looked at Hughes' tendency to 'author' Plath life as seen through the lenses of his essays and prose writing on Plath.

One of important layers of Plath's late poetry is its performativity. The turn towards the confessional mode in the late 1950s should be seen in the matrix of social changes. Under the influence of mass media, the boundary between private and public lives became blurred and exposure to mass culture contributed to the change in readers' and critics' expectations. As I showed in the first chapter, the period represented an unprecedented number of initiatives that put the poet in the position of performer of their poetry. Writers become visible; their work associated with a concrete tone, voice, face, style, or even posture. Plath notices this shift toward performativity and its effect on the style and reception of one's own work:

> I feel that this development of recording poems, of speaking poems at readings, of having records of poets, I think this is a wonderful thing. I'm very excited by it. In a sense, there's a return, isn't there, to the old role of the poet, which was to speak to a group of people, to come across. (OP, Interview)

This comes back to what she slightly sentimentally calls 'the old role of the poet', which is to narrate the stories that would be important enough to give rise to debates. Plath expands her thought, talking about the relation between actual experience and its textual representation:

[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 90.
[36] Chamberlain, p. 318.
[37] Sylvia Plath, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950 – 1962,* ed. by Karen Kukil (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 449.

> I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have, but I must say I cannot sympathise with these cries from the heart that are informed by nothing except a needle or a knife, or whatever it is. I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrific. [...] But certainly it shouldn't be a kind of shut-box and mirror looking, narcissistic experience. I believe it should be relevant, and relevant to the larger things, the bigger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on. (OP, Interview)

The initial impulse for writing is sensuous and personal yet the actual process requires one to keep these emotions in control, clearly echoing Eliot's influential claim about how the progress of an artist is a 'continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality'.[38] Plath is reluctant to write a poetry of 'sensuous and emotional experience' yet she finds no need to hide the personal impulse preceding a creative act. Beyond the obvious moral concern of Plath's passage (and its focus on what she finds 'relevant') the syntax is unfortunate. The enumeration 'Hiroshima and Dachau and so on' at the end might strike the reader as vilifying in tone, or naïve about the scale of these atrocities. It is not just Plath's own naïveté, however, as a similar problem can be noted in many other commentaries on Holocaust poetry, especially those in translation. Even in the mid-1970s, when Hughes co-translated Pilinszky's poetry with Csokits, Carcanet published an introduction in which Hughes obscures the biography of the Hungarian poet by writing that Pilinszky's 'last year of the war was spent moving from prison camp to prison camp'.[39] Such factual uncertainties and blurring of literary history were typical at the time. From 1961 onwards, the transformation of the survivalist mode into the language of the subjective became a more insistent theme in Plath's pioneering representations of – as Peel says – 'two holocausts – the holocaust of Hiroshima and the holocaust of the camps'.[40] On that note I will now move to a discussion of Plath's early interest in history and the anxieties of the Cold War era, set against the grain of 'American way of life' and interpreted in the context of nuclear criticism.

[38] Eliot, 'Tradition and The Individual Talent', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot. Volume 2*, 108.
[39] Hughes, 'Introduction', in Janosz Pilinszky, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Ted Hughes and Janos Csokits (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1976), p. 9.
[40] Robin Peel, *Writing Back. Sylvia Plath and the Cold War Politics* (London: Associated UP 2002), p. 186.

Against the 1950s 'American way of life'

Robin Peel, the author of *Writing Back: Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics* (2002), claims that the historical moment and international events that happened when Plath's children were born were a catalyst for her writing. The essence of this period of time can be described as 'nuclear criticism', as theorized by Jacques Derrida's 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)'. In this 1984 paper, the critic argues that the manner in which the literature of the Cold War era dealt with the threat of nuclear disaster has no precedent in any earlier, modernist anxieties. The nuclear war, Derrida writes, 'has never occurred itself; it is a non-event' and as such its representations are always places in the realm of the imagination.[41] Marina MacKay also explains that representations of nuclear disaster 'can only be thought about in anticipation for it would leave no witness to record it as an event'.[42]

Plath's expression of her anxiety about the atomic bomb and often psychosomatic reactions to reading newspaper articles or listening to the radio updates are frequent across her diary entries, notes, and letters. For instance, *The Bell Jar* opens with the anxiety of Plath's alter-ego – Esther Greenwood – about the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were convicted in 1951 of espionage for the Soviet Union.

> It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there to read about in the papers.[43]

The parallel to Esther's later experience of electroconvulsive therapy is not coincidental. The passage brings to mind a line from Allen Ginsberg's poem contrasting 'peaceful couch' with 'poor spies' trail: 'a big electrocution in every paper and mass medium, | Television was a baby crawling toward that deathchamber'.[44] The merging of private and public in Plath's text shows how the

[41] Jacques Derrida 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives), *Diacritics* 14, 2 (1984), 20–31. See also Richard Klein's, 'The Future of Nuclear Criticism', *Yale French Studies*, 77 (1990), 76–100.
[42] Marina MacKay, p. 140.
[43] Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 1.
[44] Allen Ginsberg, *Television Was a Baby Crawling towards That Death Chamber* (London: Penguin, 2018), p. 26.

intensity of experiencing recent history parallels the intensity of a bodily sensation. In November 1956, in correspondence with her mother Aurelia, Plath writes how she felt 'almost physically sick' when she heard of the failure of the Hungarian revolt (*L* II 9). In one of her short stories, after watching a movie about the torture of Japanese prisoners, Plath's character vomits up cake and ice cream; contrasting American middle-class domesticity with the savagery of torture. In one of the first typescript versions of 'Lady Lazarus' which Plath sent to Alvarez, in place of the 'I might well be Jew' of the final version of the poem, we find the line 'I may be Japanese'.[45] In a 1960 letter, moved by two articles she has read, she questions the sense of bringing up children in 'such a violent, self destructive world' (*L* II 696); in 'Fever 103°' she would write about the bodies of adulterers comparing them to 'Hiroshima ash [...] eating in. | The sin. The sin' (*P* 231); in correspondence from 1960, she merges motherhood with the threat of nuclear disaster, saying oddly 'Frieda is my answer to the H-bomb' (*L* II 520). In another letter from the end of October 1962, Plath gives vent to her anger, telling her mother not to speak about the world needing 'cheerful stuff' and adding:

> what the person out of Belsen --- physical or psychological --- wants is nobody saying the birdies still go tweet-tweet but the full knowledge that somebody else has been there & knows the worst just what it is like. (*L* II 874-875)

These examples, among others, of her engagement with history and the situation of the 1950s are reflected in her writing in which – as Elizabeth Hardwick put it – Plath is 'never a nice person'.[46] But why should she be? Janet Malcolm's book *The Silent Woman* (1994) offers some socio-cultural answers to that question, showing how Plath's work opposed the conventions of a woman's upbringing in mid-century America. 'What was expected from Plath' – says Malcolm – 'was the obedient A-student's genteel achievements of the 1950s; what was exacted was the dire poetry of *Ariel*'.[47] Unlike her audacious lyric, the tone of Plath's correspondence with her

[45] Alvarez Papers. British Library, MS 88589.
[46] Elizabeth Hardwick, 'On Sylvia Plath', *The New York Review*, 12 Aug 1971. Also available https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/08/12/on-sylvia-plath/> [accessed 6 Sept 2023].
[47] Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman*. *Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Granta Books, 1995), p. 63.

mother that – as Plath once said – enabled mother and daughter to 'verbalize their desire image of each other' does adhere to an expectation of niceness.[48]

> Stop trying to get me to write about "decent courageous people" --- read the *Ladies Home Journal* for those! It's too bad my poems frighten you --- but you've always been afraid of reading or seeing the world's hardest things --- like Hiroshima, the Inquisition or Belsen. I believe in going through & facing the worst, not hiding from it. (*L* II 888)

I argue that, in writing about 'the world's hardest things' through a residue of subjectivity, Plath is reassessing her place as a female writer in history, beyond the polarities of domestic versus public, sincere versus constructed, emotion versus objectivity. Given the background of the domestic policies of America during the Cold War, as promoted by the 1959 'kitchen debate' between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev, the affluence of the chiefly private sphere faced with the threat of the nuclear disaster was presented as 'the American way of life'.[49] In her new book, *Homemaking for the Apocalypse* (2021), Jill Anderson elaborates on this problem. She looks at the patterns of Atomic Age conformity which controlled Americans' domestic life by analysing the connections between horror and domesticity in memoirs, Civil Defence literature, adverts, comics and science fiction.[50] Caroline Hellman points out, the kitchen thus came to epitomize 'conflicting philosophies of democracy vs. communism, choice vs. conformity, and their inversions'.[51] This alleged freedom and choice were, however, bittersweet. In 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (1972), Adrienne Rich speaks of the lack of female authors in this period and, with justifiably resentful irony, reflects on this domesticity: 'people were moving out to the suburbs, technology was going to be the answer to everything, even sex; the family was in its glory'.[52] However, the politics of domesticity and ready-made ideations of

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[48] Plath, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 449.
[49] For more about the domestic policies of the Cold War see 'The postwar generation and the paradox of home', in Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle, *A History of Twentieth Century British Women's Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2005) and Elaine Tyler May, 'Women Stayed Home in the Cold War', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Sept 1988 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-09-18-op-3106-story.html> [accessed 31 March 2020].
[50] In a chapter entitled 'Madonna of the Suburbs', Anderson summarises how much of this debate and Nixon's vision of consumption as a happy and convenient choice for the American housewife were, in fact, directed against USSR policies. The enemy's politics were typically contrasted with capitalistic desires for electric goods and unlimited supplies of pastel-coloured food products that would ease women's domestic duties. See Jill Anderson, *Homemaking for the Apocalypse: Domesticating Horror in Atomic Age Literature & Media*, Routledge (New York: Routledge, 2021).
[51] Caroline Hellman, 'The Other American Kitchen: Alternative Domesticity in 1950s Design, Politics, and Fiction', *Americana*, 3.2 (2004), unpaginated.
[52] Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', *College English*, 34.1, 18-30 (p. 22).

suburban happiness necessitated darker fantasies and mildly perverse narratives that would otherwise remain repressed. The harsh tone Plath adopts in some of her correspondence with her mother ('too bad my poems frighten you') is an example of rebellion against stultifying domesticity and its avoidance of the acknowledgement of terror. Plath's poems provide an instance of the inseparability of history and subjectivity, with the acknowledgment that history does not exist beyond our subjective realisations of it. Plath herself expressed enthusiasm for the subjective turn in poetry in these terms:

> I've been very excited by what I feel is the new breakthrough that came with, say, Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, this intense breakthrough into very serious, very personal, emotional experience which I feel has been partly taboo. Robert Lowell's poems about his experience in a mental hospital, for example, interested me very much. These peculiar, private and taboo subjects, I feel, have been explored in recent American poetry. (OP, Interview)

Though implicit, the excerpt makes a distinction between the aliveness of recent American poetry and, as Plath says elsewhere, the 'deadness' and 'sterility' of the British literary scene. Beyond the bittersweet, somewhat ironic, reference to MacLean Hospital, known to Plath from her own admission, the emphasis of these lines is on the merging of seriousness with one's own privacy. The trailblazing poetry of Lowell is, therefore, transforming personal experiences, often taboo ones, into a poetry of 'emotional and psychological depth'. Plath would later learn from Lowell, following his creative writing course at Boston University together with Sexton. Curiously, one of the poems entitled 'My Friend, My Friend', which Sexton wrote for the class, read:

> Who will forgive me for the things I do?
> With no special legend or God to refer to,
> With my calm white pedigree, my yankee kin.
> I think it would be better to be a Jew.[53]

The topical and prosodic similarity to later verses such as 'I began to talk like a Jew. | I think I may well be a Jew' or 'I may be a bit of a Jew' (*P* 223) from Plath's 'Daddy' is obvious. Unlike Sexton's lines, Plath's stanzas eerily emphasise chance ('I may well be a Jew'), thus shifting the moral responsibility onto the reader who, by the poem's logic, might too 'be a Jew'. Nelson sees

[53] Anne Sexton, *Selected Poems of Anne Sexton* (Boston: A Mariner Book, 2000), p. 5.

Plath's technique of public confession as 'deliberately intense because [Plath] understood the meaning and the effect of these choices on her readers'.[54] If seen in a historical context, the interest first American and latterly British poets took in exposing their private selves has a clear political dimension. Against the backdrop of communist ideology, creative stories of the self provided the opportunity for public disagreement with the propaganda forced on countries behind the Iron Curtain. Let us, then, first look at how the creative process of composing both early works and *Ariel* became Plath's response to the Cold War and to what, in the 1950s, was referred to as 'nuclear holocaust'.

Plath's political consciousness and interest in the world beyond the constraints of the self can be discerned in her writing and correspondence much earlier than criticism on Plath tends to suggest. In September 1948, while still at Smith College, she exchanged letters with the West German student Hans-Joachim Neupert and wrote about her inability to comprehend the atrocities of the war she had heard about but never experienced. 'The newspaper and the radio bring the urgent matters of today to my attention' – Plath explains – 'but since I do not see them or experience them, they are not real' (*L* I 135). Later, the search for the feeling of a 'real' would re-appear in *The Bell Jar* when Esther Greenwood says: 'I knew what the trouble was. I needed experience. How could I write about life when I'd never had a love affair or a baby or even seen anybody die?'[55] The ventriloquial persona of 'Lady Lazarus', too, speaks about her death and self-resurrection: 'I do it so it feels real' (*P* 245). The motif of real and unreal are reiterated in the 1957 poem 'The Thin People'. Consider the opening passage:

> They are always with us, the thin people
> Meager of dimension as the gray people
>
> On a movie-screen. They
> are unreal, we say:
>
> It was only in a movie, it was only
> In the war making evil headlines when we

[54] Nelson, 'Plath, history and politics', p. 22.
[55] Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 121.

Were small [...] (*P* 64)

In the given excerpt, 'they' – the titular 'thin people' who resemble photographs of the starved Holocaust survivors – are juxtaposed with a retrospective 'we', who are perhaps the children brought up in the safe American heaven, silently overshadowed by the adults' memory of the war.[56] However, the 'thin people', like the entire experience of war, seem to this collective 'we' to be unreal, mediated through a distancing movie-screen. The analogous metaphor of the scrawny body and war will reappear in the 'Jailer', where the speaker asks herself 'my ribs show. What have I eaten?' and sees herself 'hung, starved, burned, hooked' while imagining her oppressor 'impotent as distant thunder, | In whose shadow I have eaten my ghost ration' (*P* 227). Such a spectacle of death and hunger happens to the subject under sadistic yet emotionally withdrawn dominance. In Plath's poem, the syntactical repetition 'it was only' exacerbates the desperation of the subject to, through repetition, erase the memories of the war from her own childhood. The proximity of an archetypal joyous childhood and the newspaper's 'evil headlines' appear, too, in Plath's juvenilia. Even if Plath's early works lack the technical skill and incandescence of her late work, some of them evince the writer's concern about the geo-political reality.

Her first published poem to express an anxiety about the Cold War was initially titled 'Swords into Plowshares', and later changed to 'Bitter Strawberries'. The original title, taken from Isaiah 2:4, provided a clear pacifist context. The passage from the Bible reads 'and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore'. The idiom coined from these lines means that military weapons are transformed for peaceful civilian applications. Here, we might think of Amichai's 'An Appendix to the Vision of Peace' where the poet writes about making musical

[56] In the short story 'America! America!' Plath writes: 'We weren't depressed, of course. We left that to our parents, who eked out one child or two, and slumped dumbly after work and frugal suppers over their radios to listen to news of the 'home country' and a black-moustached man named Hitler' (*JP* 34) In the short story 'The Shadow': 'At home, my parents sat a great deal by the radio, listening, with serious faces, to the staccato briefs of the newscasters. And there were the sudden, unexplained silences when I came within hearing, the habit of gloom, relieved only by a false cheer worse than the gloom itself (*JP* 336).

instruments out of swords, saying: 'whoever wants to make war again | will have to turn them into plowshares first' [*Nicht aufhören nach dem Umschmieden der Schwerter | in Pflugscharen, nicht aufhören*].[57] The narration of Plath's early poem progresses from a morning in the strawberry field, where workers 'talked about Russians', to the child's helplessness in comprehending the politics of the Cold War. The poem first appeared in the 'Christian Science Monitor' in August 1950. In the first lines, the speaker hears an adult woman talking about 'bombing off the map' the former USSR:

> We heard the head woman say,
> 'Bomb them off the map.'
>
> Horseflies buzzed, paused and stung.
> And the taste of strawberries
> Turned thick and sour. (*P* 299)

Disquiet caused by the woman's words freezes the scene, and changes the taste of the strawberries. The latter part of the poem turns into a dialogue between the little girl pleading for peace and the woman who cuts her short. While in the published version of the poem the girl's spontaneous protest finds no sympathy, the earlier typescript offered a sharper, though formally foreseeable, ending. Plath's deletion of the final lines veils the text's political message:

> But it was no good to talk about other things.
> Already the fear was there.
> Naked and glittering in the noon air,
> Congealing under the merciless sun,
> Hastening to fruit in the blood-red berries.
>
> And when we got home
> The newspapers
> were waiting.[58]

The similar motif of newspapers, or other mass media, perceived as a threat permeates Plath's correspondence and short stories. Many of them evidence the process of Plath forming her

[57] Yehuda Amichai, *Tosefet Lahazon Hashalom*, trans. by Glanda Abramson and Tudor Parfitt (Wyncote: The Reconstructionist Press, 1996), p. 777.
[58] Olwyn Hughes Collection, Poetry and prose drafts by Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, British Library, MS 88948/3/2.

political, pacifist views. Even if some of those anxieties were present in Plath's juvenilia, the transformation of her style came only around 1961. In one letter, Plath apologies to her mother for not having written for several days and explains that she got 'awfully depressed' after reading two articles. According to the editors of Plath's letters, one of these was Roger Hagan's 'When the Holocaust Comes' which appeared in *The Nation* on 4 November 1961. She would write to MacBeth, 'I see you have a concentration camp in mind, too' (*L* II 809). In November 1962, after advising Carey to try out poetic roughness, she says 'I see two poets in you. The first is what I would call lyrical-traditional, a bit too much given to whimsy and the fay. The second, the much more interesting one, to my mind, is the one who produces meticulously-observed phrases [...]' (*L* II 917). In her own discoveries she would, too, navigate between a similar doubling of style, with her *Ariel* representing a shift toward such meticulously-observed phrases, and both topical and stylistic roughness.

In her introduction to the restored edition of *Ariel* (2004), Frieda Hughes, Plath's and Hughes' daughter and an artist herself, locates the gravity of the *Ariel* change in urgency, freedom, and a force of concentrated energy new to her mother's work.[59] Most of Plath's best poems, like Keats's, were written and re-written during the outbursts of creativity in the last months and days of her life. Her correspondence and diaries give an account of the intensity of the creative process. In the letter from October 1962, Plath tells her mother 'every morning [...] I am up about 5, in my study with coffee, writing like mad – have managed a poem a day before breakfast' (*L* II 856); in another from mid-October in the same year she says 'I am writing the best poems of my life' (*L* II 869); from December 1962 'by writing from 4 am to 8 am I have finished my second book of poems!' (*L* II 937), and in a letter from 4 February 1963, the last letter in the second volume, addressed to her psychotherapist, she describes her new poems as 'very good but, I feel written on the edge of madness' (*L* II 968). Around September 1960, she started to date typescripts and revisit drafts of each poem, saving manuscripts of her work that, according to Hughes, she would

[59] Frieda Hughes, 'Foreword', in Sylvia Plath, *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), pp. ix-xvii (p. xi).

previously have destroyed. One might ask how the decision to save manuscripts, allowing oneself to trace and preserve the evolution of the text, influenced Plath's late writing. To what extent do the roughness and boldness of these poems have anything to do with previously destroyed first drafts, initial impulses, and lines scattered across the manuscript or drafted typescript? It was Hughes who first collocated Plath's method of writing *The Colossus* 'very slowly, with her Thesaurus open on her knee... as if working out a mathematical problem' with her later poems that came straight from the heart and 'at top speed, as one might write an urgent letter'.[60] In their work on Plath's poetic revision, critics like Van Dyne and Rose debunked Hughes' 1966 statement, showing instead the extensiveness of Plath's re-makings, and the patterns behind the evolution of her texts.

Plath's manuscripts, and following typescripts, tend to move from initial impulses, registered and almost always sustained in their initial form, through numerous erasures and alterations to the development of a symbolic system. Plath's second novel was to be called *Doubletake* or *Double Exposure*, its title indicating that the second look might reveal a deeper and new understanding of what once was. Rich talks about revision as the act of 'coming back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' that she sees as something much more than a chapter in cultural history. Revision is – Rich says significantly – 'an act of survival'.[61] Though I do not agree with Rich's conclusion that the expression of female anger is the only fruitful way of establishing authorship against the grain of objectifying, universal (meaning male-oriented) tradition, she does voice an important frustration behind women's creative process in the late 1950s.

Plath's *Ariel*, to my mind, is an attempt not only to seek a language suitable for writing about the 'world's hardest things' but to use it to re-gain agency in the male-dominated politics of originality and power. Until at least the 1980s, the emergence of the new poetic idiom of *Ariel*

[60] Ted Hughes, 'Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems', reprinted in *The Art of Sylvia Plath*, ed. by Charles Newman (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1977), pp. 187-193 (pp. 188, 193).
[61] Rich, pp. 18–30.

was commonly seen in the context of Plath's personal life: on-going depression, the death of her father, her ambivalent, resentment-fuelled and troubling relationship with her mother, and finally the separation from her husband. The dominant narrative across much of Plath scholarship is one of a sudden 'breakthrough' after the separation from Hughes. The division is problematic, for it is based on a gendered assumption that locates the gravitas of Plath's expression in the ahistorical sphere of domestic torment, so that her creative process unmediatedly, 'faithfully' translates her emotions onto her lyrical persona. Van Dyne, too, is polemical:

> Perhaps because as a culture we subscribe so exclusively to paradigms in which personality is fixed by good or bad parenting, early trauma or brain chemistry, biography underestimates Plath's habits of conscious reinvention and the lucid artistic control of her poetry, even in her final days. Rather than assume that Plath is an unusually autobiographical writer, we need to understand that she experienced her life in unusually textual ways.[62]

While talking about Plath's identity as relegated to the text, critics often quote the passage from Plath's journal where she describes her writing as ordering the lived experience. In many of Plath's comments, the page is literalized as a body, often through metaphors suggesting self-inflicted harm, violence, or disintegration. In 1957, she writes about the white, virginal page and speaks of the beginning of composition as 'the painful, botched rape of the first page'.[63] As reflected in 'Burning Letters' and correspondence with her therapist, Plath conceptualizes punishment in a textual way, showing the friction between the intimate emotions of rage and the fragile materiality of the manuscript. She speaks about the obviously problematic, physical violence at the hand of Hughes: 'I thought of this an aberration, & felt I had given him some cause, I had torn up some of his papers in half, so they could be taped together, not lost' (*L* II 830). Though Plath's comments on the 'textual' reality might first strike us as peripheral to the narratives of survivals, they do inform our readings of her most provocative poems and the way they enter into a meta-textual debate on the limits of poetry itself.

[62] Van Dyne, 'The Problem of Biography', p. 5.
[63] See Chamberlain, p. 316. Chamberlain writes: 'as the translator becomes the author, he incurs certain paternal duties in relation to the text, to protect and instruct—or perhaps structure—it. The language used echoes the language of conduct books and reflects attitudes about the proper differences in educating males and females'.

The subplot of 'Daddy', non-existent language, and poetic persona

Even though allusions to the war in Plath's stories are episodic, many of them convey the atmosphere of her formative years spent in 1950s New England. In 'Ocean 1212-W', written in the characteristic third-person interior monologue, she recalls the landscape of a childhood spent by the shores of the Atlantic. Symptomatically, her final memory of the sea 'is of violence – a still, unhealthily yellow day in 1939 [...]' (*JP* 123-124). In another autobiographical story, entitled 'Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit', the outbreak of the war is processed by adults and their memory of Plath's father who would re-appear in the poem 'Daddy' as a controversial synecdoche for a Nazis:

> In the same winter, war was declared, and I remember sitting by the radio with Mother and Uncle Frank and feeling a queer foreboding in the air. Their voices were low and serious, and their talk was of planes and German bombs. Uncle Frank said something about Germans in America being put in prison for the duration, and Mother kept saying over and over again about Daddy: 'I'm only glad Otto didn't live to see this; I'm only glad Otto didn't live to see it come to this. (*JP* 162)

If the oft-quoted poem 'Daddy' was alluding to Otto Plath's origins, the story 'The Shadow' is even more explicit, with the father's honour 'defended' by a child speaker. The story begins when the Plathian character bites the boy in self-defence. Yet the real tension of the story moves from the childhood scene to a historical perspective resembling Plath's later generalizing metaphor, 'I thought every German was you' (*P* 223). The school friend approaches young Plath saying how biting the boy was understandable since the girl's father is German. 'I was astounded.' – Plath narrates the event – 'My father is not German!' I restored when I had my breath back. 'He's... he's from the Polish Corridor.' The geographical distinction was lost on Maureen' (*JP* 337). But it is also lost on the reader. For centuries, Poland faced territorial and political conquest and after the successive partitions (1772, 1793, 1795) of Poland between neighbouring Russia, Austria, and Prussia, the country spent 123 years under occupation. After the Tehran Conference of 1943 followed by the Postdam Conference two years later, the borders of Poland moved 'westwards', leaving terrains east of the Curzon Line as well as the city of Białystok to be annexed by the USSR. On the other side of the border, Poland gained territory east of the Oder-Neisse line

that formerly belonged to Germany and these lands, including Gdańsk and Szczecin, are in Polish historiography known as 'The Recovered Territories'. Therefore, in 1885, when Otto was born, the village of Grabów in the Mecklenburg part of Germany could not have belonged to Poland which, due to 1772-1918 partitions, did not even exist on the map of Europe. Nonetheless, as a result of The Second Peace of Thorn (1466), that put an end to the Thirteen Years' War, Royal Prussia (*Polnisch-Preußen* in German) was, for over three centuries, a fief of Poland. Though the region retained part of its autonomy and governed itself, it was still dependent on the King of Poland, which explains why the village's name sounds Slavonic rather than Germanic, its literal translation meaning 'the place of the hornbeam tree'. Moreover, until Prussia's power began to grow in the eighteenth century, Grabow spoke Polabian – an extinct West Slavic language that originated from Dravénopolabski and was later superseded by Low German. Though none of Plath's critics have ever noticed this interpretative trace behind Plath's 'Polish Corridor' and the process of 'language death', the poet seemed to [64] this complex linguistic history. In Plath's 'Little Fugue', the speaker mentions the father in the apostrophe:

> Great silence of another order.
> I was seven, I knew nothing.
> The world occurred.
> You had one leg, and a Prussian mind.
>
> Now similar clouds
> Are spreading their vacuous sheets.
> Do you say nothing?
> I am lame in the memory (*P* 188)

The connection between the amputation of the father's leg and the daughter's dire statement that 'I am lame in the memory' suggests both physical and psychological mutilation. In psychiatry, fugue is a dissociative state, comprising a complete break from one's own identity and, according to the OED, travel to some unconsciously desired locality. The poem splits into the distinct perspectives of the daughter seeking a language with which to express grief, and voice her

[64] In Polish, hornbeam tree is *grab*; in Slovenian *gaber*, modern Slovak *hrab*, Bosnian *graba*, Serbian граба (transcribed *graba*). For the linguistic analysis of Palabian, see Kazimierz Polański, 'Polabian', *The Slavonic Languages*, ed. by Greville Corbett and Bernard Comrie (London: Routledge, 2002).

accusation of the absent father. Here, the poetics also bring to mind Celan's 'Death Fugue' where the troubling repetition of 'black milk of dawn' that the collective 'we' subject drinks at night keeps returning through the metaphors of oppression, in opposition to the comfort that the milk was supposed to designate:

> Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus
> Deutschland
> er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch
> in die Luft
> dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng. [65]
> He calls out more sweetly play death death is a master from
> Germany
> he calls out more darkly now stroke your strings then as
> smoke you will rise into air
> Then a grave you will have in the clouds there one lies
> unconfined[66]

Plath may have been aware of the rise of Nazism that relates its origins back to elements of Prussian politics and ideology. In this way, she draws a link between the 'Prussian mind' of the father and his alleged support for Nazi Germany. The poem's unanswered question, 'do you say nothing', followed by the daughter's impaired, incomplete memory, echoes Eliot's dramatic stanzas from the second part of *The Waste Land*. In an excerpt from 'A Game of Chess', the female speaker urges the male to 'stay with me. | Speak to me' in a series of syntactic parallelisms asking – 'Do you know nothing | Do you see nothing | Do you remember nothing?'[67] Paradoxically, it is the speech, and the moments of the silence which follow the questions, that convey the communicative impasse between two people who might well speak but do not talk to each other. In Plath's 'Little Fugue', the unanswered question is followed by the threat of not remembering and a kind of blame which the subject seems to take on herself. Earlier in the poem, she addresses the father: 'I see your voice | Black and leafy, as in my childhood'. But both sight and speech are impaired for they are threatened by the lame, and thus debilitated, memory. The end of the poem reads:

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[65] Paul Celan, *Poems. A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and transl. by Michael Hamburger (Manchester: Carcarnet, 1980), p. 50.
[66] Ibid., p. 51.
[67] Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, p. 59.

I remember a blue eye,
A briefcase of tangerines.
This was a man, then!
Death opened, like a black tree, blackly.

I survive the while,
Arranging my morning.
These are my fingers, this my baby.
The clouds are a marriage dress, of that pallor. (*P* 188-189)

The final stanzas end with the self-declared survival of the persona who controls her experience through obsessive naming. Another fragment from Plath's prose provides more detail about the provenance of her father. In *The Bell Jar*, Plath writes: 'my mother spoke German during her childhood in America and was stoned for it during the First World War by the children at school' – and adds – 'my German-speaking father, dead since I was nine, came from some manic-depressive hamlet in the black heart of Prussia' (*BJ* 33). The alienating violence, provoked by the foreign language, is tied up with the mother's childhood during the Great War while the father's 'manic-depressive' village seems intentionally foreignized. Plath juxtaposes the unspecified hamlet, described with an indefinite pronoun, with the paradoxically concretized but still hazy 'black heart' of Prussia. Otto's homeland becomes the epicentre of the metaphorical unspeakable. In Plath's 'Daddy', one of the moments of communicative impasse reads:

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.
But the name of the town is common.
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,
I never could talk to you,
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich,
I could hardly speak.
I thought every German was you. (*P* 223)

In the light of the extinct language once spoken in Grabow, the rootlessness and linguistic exile expressed by 'so I never could tell where you | Put your foot, your root', can be understood literally. The language of the father is not merely foreign. It is irreversibly lost, thus turning communication into an impossible, utterly helpless act. Neither the prayer attempted in the line 'I used to pray to recover you' nor the repetition of 'ich, ich, ich, ich' help the speaker in her psychobiographical quest for her father's roots. Even the prayer is an empty speech that has lost its incantatory power and hurts 'as the world hurts God' (*P* 232). In her interpretation focused on oral fixations and the Oedipal complex, Britzolakis claims that the organizing trope in Plath's poems is the return of the repressed, acted out through an interplay of metaphor and sound.[68] Serge Gavronsky, too, in the context of translation studies, writes of the Oedipal triangle: '[t]he translator considers himself as the child of the father-creator, his rival, while the text becomes the object of desire, that which has been completely defined by the paternal figure'.[69] The impossibility of voicing, repetitions resembling nursery rhymes, incantatory language, internal rhymes, and jabbing phrases are all yoked with historical trauma, re-inscribed onto the language of family drama. Many of these repetitions become a way of alleviating personal and collective trauma by re-experiencing it in language and re-gaining control over the past – a pattern frequent across literature confronted with shell shock after the Great War. Plath's expression of repressed rage, manifested through the daring self-victimization of the speaker who declares that she 'might well be a Jew', is placed within the sphere of the domestic in a kind of pastiche of autobiography, psychoanalysis, and the restorative potential of lyric. According to Van Dyne, the narrative of 'Daddy' dramatizes a woman writer's powerlessness, and through regressive language deconstructs the cultural allegation of woman as a silenced child. One of Plath's comments on her political interest gives us insight into her method of representation:

> The issues of our time which preoccupy me at the moment are the incalculable genetic effects of fallout and... the terrifying, mad, omnipotent marriage of big business and the military in America... Does this influence the kind of poetry I write? Yes, but in a sidelong fashion. My

[68] Christina Britzolakis, *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 108.
[69] Serge Gavronsky, 'The Translation: From Piety to Cannibalism', *SubStance*, 16 (1977), 52-62 (p. 55).

> poems do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark. (*JP* 64)

The technique of expressing 'the world's hardest things' focalized through the child not only adds drama to the poems, but also establishes a Blake-like opposition between the innocence of the child and the experience of the terrifying reality where the abandoned child forms itself in the metaphorical, somewhat exaggerated darkness. In 'Daddy', the subject's tongue was imprisoned by the dead father in the metaphorical 'barb wire snare'. As Britzolakis put it, Plath's 'Daddy' is 'organized around a lost moment of origin, which, though endlessly reconstructed, can never be recovered'.[70] The same is true of the extinct language of 'the Polish corridor' of Prussia. Having looked at an early representation of Plath's political interest that led us to her search for a rooting language, we will now move to the selected poems from Plath's *Ariel*, placing them in the matrix of the post-Holocaust poetic tradition and its withdrawn prosopopoeic representations. Might it be possible to see Lady Lazarus as a survivor after all?

In her insightful article about Anglophone Holocaust poetry, Gubar looks at post-war prosopopoeia, the tradition of impersonation of the absent speaker that – especially in Eastern European lyric – was hardly surprising among authors who imaginatively projected the voices of the dead.[71] In 1969, Steiner speculated about whether Plath was in fact familiar with the European poets who felt that language itself had been damaged by the politics of terror and mass-murder. 'Here was an act of extremity personal and formal, obliging one to try and re-think the whole question of the poet's condition and of the condition of language after modernism and war,' he said, adding, 'some of the poetry of the Polish writer Herbert, and Celan's *Fugue of Death* is probably all one can set beside the *Ten Poems*'.[72] If Celan's poem with its striking, recrudescing line 'black milk of daybreak we drink you at night' is a discernible example, the reference to Herbert might seem surprising. Though Herbert's works gained in popularity in the early 1960s, his poetry denudes the violence of totalitarianisms by veiling it behind the complex mythical

[70] Britzolakis, p. 40.
[71] Susan Gubar, 'The Long and the Short of Holocaust Verse', *New Literary History*, 35.3 (2004), 443-68.
[72] Steiner, 'In Extremis', *Cambridge Review*, February 1969, pp. 247-49.

structure of classical tradition, all embedded in the language of irony, which makes him a rather unusual example of post-Holocaust lyric. Though Plath never mentions Herbert she – according to Anne Stevenson – regarded the Polish author as more domestic than any English poet of her time.[73] Herbert, as we know, also happened to be a good friend of Alvarez and Hughes, and he would be one of the first to translate Plath's late poems into Polish. Though his translations of Plath's best-known poems generally convey the atmosphere of the original, his decisions in translating 'Lady Lazarus' would sound odd to the contemporary reader. Herbert's translation reflects the gendered reality of the early 1960s, titled 'Pani Łazarzowa'. The first word signifies 'lady' yet the second is a form of substantival epithet with the old-fashioned suffix *–owa* indicating the gendered dependence of Lady Lazarus on the husband Lazarus. With this in mind, the reader of Plath's daring and gendered-transgressive poem quickly realises the bittersweet irony of Herbert's failed attempt. Despite this error, Herbert spoke highly of the work of confessional poets. He would write to his fellow poet and translator Stanisław Barańczak defending the 'confessional' mode of writing 'I hold a personal grudge for what you've written about Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Sylvia Plath. They're marvellous poets, and their works don't only bear the stamp of personal suffering ... Promise not to do it again, or I'll go hang myself'. In the unfinished poem 'Generation' drafted in 1980s he would say:

> był między nami pakt tajemny jak niewyznana miłość
> sąsiedztwo narodzin wspólne kalectwo doświadczeń
> niepodobna wyjaśnić tego racjonalnie
>
> there was a pact between us secret like an unconfessed love
> proximity of births common lameness of experience
> impossible to explain this rationally[74]

What might have attracted Plath to Herbert's poetry is that – as he said – above all he wanted to know 'how to tell the good from what's evil', the indirect creation of a lyrical persona, and unobvious changes of poetic register. From Herbert's pre-1963 work, Plath read the soliloquist 'Elegy of Fortinbras' alongside some of the poems of the auto-fictive persona of Mr Cogito, and

[73] Anne Stevenson, *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), p. 183.
[74] Quoted in Franaszek, p. 29. [my translation]

the radio play suggestively entitled 'Reconstruction of a Poet'. Though the post-war context of this re-making is clear, the act of reconstruction assumes the poet's faith in the lyric. However, the writer's faith in the lyric scrutinizes the limits of figurative language and authorial representation in relation to what is now known as post-memory. Plath was not alone in her interest; as Heaney writes, her late poems 'are serenely of their age, in that the conventions of modernism and the insights of psychology are related in an idiom intensely personal, yet completely available.[75] Other Anglophone examples of a similar idiom include, for example, Porter, Hill, Rich's 'Eastern War Time', or Irena Klepfisz's poems.

Performative violence and re-writing collective trauma

As suggested by Heaney, much of Plath's work intriguingly envisions her negotiations between romanticised concentrated energy, the self-mythologised subjectivity of outpouring feeling and the modern tradition of re-visiting, choreographing, and revising one's own work. A passage from her diary reads: 'be stoic when necessary & write [...] your problems are universal enough to be made meaningful'.[76] Thus for Plath, the act of writing, as we have seen before, means keeping emotions and poetic idiom under control. Critics such as Howe critique Plath's first-person-speaker's experiments with allusions to the Holocaust calling them 'illegitimate', 'disproportionate' and castigating Plath's furious lyric for degrading the legacy of Eliotic impersonality, and overstepping the boundaries of good taste by violating poetic decorum, whatever that might entail. An important part of the modernist legacy which these critics seem to ignore is the idea of a creative doubling, an imaginary authorship. This stylistic feature which Davie, in the context of Pound's *Cantos*, called *in propria persona*, distances the author from the mask of dramatised and fictionalised authorship. Characters like Eliot's Prufrock, Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, or Joyce's Stephen Dedalus spring to mind. In her notes in preparation for a BBC recording of her poems, Plath explains the idea behind 'Daddy':

[75] Heaney, *Finders Keepers*, p. 224.
[76] Plath, *The Journals*, p. 696.

> [H]ere is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter of the two strains marry and paralyse each other – she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it. (*P* 293)

Plath's distance from the speaker of the poem is evident. Why, despite the theatrical rhetoric of both 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Daddy', have critics so often ignored this imaginative split between the person of the author and the subject in cultivating their narrative of a romanticising pathology of Plath's poems? The cathartic killing of the father 'Daddy, I have had to kill you. | You died before I had time' (*P* 222) is disabled by his death and, as we have seen, the subject's puzzlement about how to find her own roots, in the sense of both language and identity. The stanzas that are Plath's most explicit reference to the genocide read:

> And the language obscene
>
> An engine, an engine
> Chuffing me off like a Jew.
> A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
> I began to talk like a Jew.
> I think I may well be a Jew (*P* 223)

These jabbing, internally rhymed lines are, Feinstein writes, Plath's assertion that there is something obscene about the German language itself, making her enter the 'landscape of the Nazi concentration camps as a victim'.[77] In Plath's 1962 reading of the poem, the last line sees a slight change in her theatrical tone in comparison to the penultimate one, putting an emphasis on the auxiliary verb 'may well'. The tradition of the post-Holocaust memoir is culturally expected to focus on truth, accuracy, and witnessing. It does not account for Plath's contradictory cultural script of fantasizing the Holocaust. However, none of the subject's words state that she is a Jew. Instead she uses the Holocaust as a metaphor, coined by comparing words 'like a Jew' and the modal verbs 'I think I may well be a Jew'. Much of the debate about whether Plath has the right to speak as a survivor strikes me as simply irrelevant to the actual question posed by these lines. They are not about being or nor being a Jew, but about the (im)possibility of speech itself. Could

[77] Elaine Feinstein, 'A close reading of 'Daddy', 25 May 2016, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/a-close-reading-of-daddy> [accessed 30 Jun 2022].

one risk the hypothesis that part of the controversy around Plath's use of imagined authorship can be explained by the fact that she is a female author, speaking through a female persona who confronts both her personal story and the atrocities of the twentieth century? For much of the disapproving response to the poem's tone focused on retrieving a female author's permission for, even metaphorical, sexual and emotional rage. In the fourth version of Plath's draft of 'Daddy', we see the line 'I made a model of you, | A man in black, with a sexy look', later replaced by 'with a Mein Kampf look'. The revision erases the sexual metaphor of making a model of the 'sexy' original in favour of the historical allusion. Beyond that, the excerpt plays with the doubling of the daughter's failed suicide as she addresses the father in traumatic, regressive repetition: 'at twenty I tried to die | And get back, back, back to you. | I thought even the bones would do' (*P* 224).

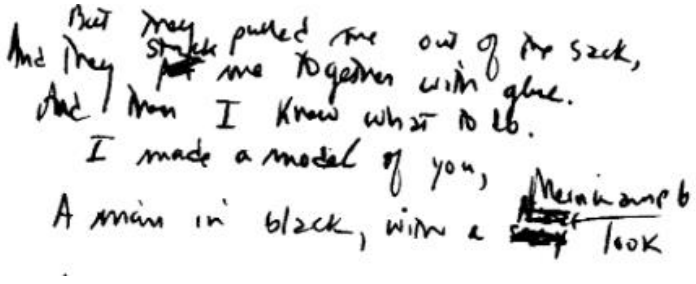


Fig 1: The manuscript of 'Daddy', adapted from Van Dyne's *Revising Life: Sylvia Plath's Ariel Poems*

In light of the subject of forbidden attraction and repulsion, the replacement of 'sexy' with 'Mein Kampf' potentially suggests the sadistic fetishization of violence, humiliation, and survival through the sexually controlled death-drive. The idea of imperfect mirroring, and textual representation of dualities interested Plath from her early twenties. Impersonal in tone, her well-written senior thesis at Smith College explored the idea of 'doubles' in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's prose. In a close-reading, and virtually context-free analysis, Plath chose to focus on role distortion and identity puzzlements in Dostoyevsky's characters who are driven by, she argues, certain simultaneous attractions and repulsions. Reading Dostoyevsky against the grain of the usual association of the doubles as disjointed and scattered, Plath hopes for the readers'

recognition and reconciliation with inner dualities and mirror images that – she says – 'will save us from disintegration'.[78] But, following the logic of Plath's hope, why would we need to be 'saved' from such disintegration if it forestalls the desired acceptance of inner dualities?

One of the most controversial parts of Plath's dualities as seen in her Holocaust poems, is the split between the child-like speaker and the victimized woman charged with a bizarre sexual tension. As discussed earlier, the child-speaker seeks at once a protective and punishing father-figure who, in addition to an emotional layer, symbolizes a rooting language. Yet the shifts between the language stylized for a child and the obvious sexualisation of traumatized womanhood makes it difficult for the reader to empathise with Plath's subject. How should we then explain these ironies in which historical traumas are played out in controversial sexual fantasies? Examples of this troubling transgression of victimhood and masochism are frequent across Plath's poems, varying from the woman 'drugged and raped' in 'The Jailer', through the thrill of self-harm in 'Cut', to her most well-known self-victimization in 'Daddy' with its stanza claiming how 'every woman adores a fascist'. Perhaps especially in the early 1960s, the suggestion of the persona's interest in pleasing pain may have been seen as transgressive. One of Klepfisz's poems, entitled 'herr captain' would make an interesting comparison with Plath's 'Daddy'. The speaker, a Jewish prisoner, suffers and intertwines the events from her past in a palimpsest of a sexual abuses expressed through poignant scenes of male brutality:

> he was hard so hard forcing behind me
> till I could not breathe slamming against me
> my mouth filled with terror.[79]

Writing about Plath through the lens of generic criticism, Van Dyne shows how revised manuscripts evolve from violent fantasies through re-working of aggressive imagery towards the development of a symbol system. If so, one could suggest that the process of revision is

[78] Sylvia Path, *The Magic Mirror, A Study of Double in Two of Dostoyevsky's Novels* (Rhiwargor; Llanwddyn; Powys: Embers Handpress, 1989), p. 51.
[79] Klepfisz, p. 45.

intertwined with the therapeutic need for voicing experience and re-gaining poetic and personal integrity. Similarly, Plath's child-like repetitions such as 'you do not do, you do not do'; 'back, back, back to you', or 'and I said I do, I do' seem to epitomize the subject's despair over her identity. Both devices bring to mind the baffling psychological pattern of victims' need to replay, retell, and emotionally return to the trauma they want to forget. The lines where the Plathian Lady Lazarus performs her self-resurrection read, 'There is a charge | For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge | For the hearing of my heart' (*P* 246). The first draft of these lines as composed by the end of October 1962 can be seen in Fig 2. The first draft's 'there is a price for fingering my scars' suggests a penetrative sexualisation of the wounded body. Another example of how Plath's revisions are yoked with scars is how in 'Mary's Song' she replaces the initial line 'over the scoured Poland' with 'over the cicatrix of Poland' (*P* 208), augmenting the dramatic metaphor of wounding and healing. The manuscript version of 'Lady Lazarus' – beyond the penetrative play with the woman's scars – might be read otherwise as an allusion to the sacrifice of Christ and Thomas' doubt in the excerpt from John 20:27, where Jesus comes back from the dead and responds to doubting Thomas by saying 'put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe'. Jesus concludes that 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'. The sexually provocative re-making of Thomas' doubt shifts part of the moral responsibility and ambivalent if not perverse guilt onto Lady Lazarus' audience, in other words, Plath's readers. Intra-poetically in the process of reading we, even unwillingly, are fingering the scars of the one who survived death.

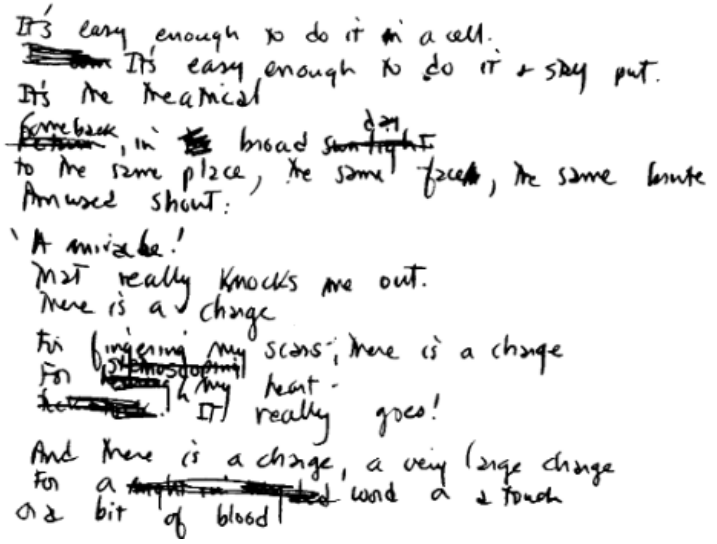


Fig 2: The manuscript of 'Lady Lazarus', adapted from Van Dyne's *Revising Life: Sylvia Plath's Ariel Poems*

Of course, the biblical reference to resurrection accords with Plath's interest in regenerative cycles of birth and death, present in her earlier works, and the biographical story of her suicide attempt. However, the Canadian poet Anne Carson claims that the inspiration behind Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' was a real story and, moreover, the story of Carson's father. He was a professor of renaissance art called Lazar and Plath happened to meet him in 1962 at the Courtauld Institute. During the War, after being shot down in an RCAF plane over southern France, Lazar was mistakenly classified as killed in action and – Carson narrates – Plath became very interested in the autobiographical story of Carson's father and the imaginary of Lazarus in art. They allegedly met five or six times to discuss the figure of Lazarus and Lazar saw first drafts of 'Lady Lazarus' that struck him.[80] Even if this inspiration behind 'Lady Lazarus' were true, the reader could not possibly tell this from the poem itself, as its narration is focused on traumatized womanhood and the theatricality of death. The poem opens with a simile comparing skin to the brightness of a Nazi lampshade, alluding, most likely, to Mauthausen's Pathological Museum, which exhibited over two hundred organs, developmental anomalies and items of furniture made from human skin. In 'Lady Lazarus', the word, touch, blood, and hair all become the subject of a terrifying capitalistic exchange that violates the integrity of Lady Lazarus' resurrected body:

[80] British Library MS 88918/137.

And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch
Or a bit of blood

Or my piece of my hair or my clothes. (*P* 246)

The uneasiness of this sexualised and objectifying description is nothing new in post-Holocaust poetry and visual art. Sexualisation of victimhood was often meant to strengthen the reader's moral reaction. In his poetry volume *The Professor's Knife* [*Nożyk Profesora*], Różewicz, for instance, includes the photograph of a naked woman lying on the white ground. Only in the process of reading his ekphrasis do we find out that the photograph is not an aesthetic representation of the female nude but a photograph version of a shot from a movie recording the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945. The original photograph belongs to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and was edited for inclusion in Różewicz's work (trimming the original ratio, changing of colour, and manipulating the level of brightness). Through the visual 'invasion' of the decontextualized source text, the readers realise their own, affective, feelings of guilt and shame, exposing some of the mechanisms embedded in the collective consciousness of post-trauma.

Though for many readers the paroxysm of sex and death, and metaphors of the sexual 'thrill' of violence are problematic, they were not uncommon in dealings with collective trauma in the early 1960s. Particularly during the Eichmann trial when survivors, often for the first time, talked about their experience, Israel saw the bombastic popularity of a short-lived genre called Stalag fiction (סטאלג). Strangely, it appeared to be influenced by the first Holocaust memoir published in Israel in 1953 – *House of Dolls* written by Yehiel Feiner De-Nurand, which told the story of survival and prostitution. The book gained in popularity mostly among survivors' teenage children, and sold around 80,000 copies before it was banned by the government of Israel in 1963.[81] In the light

[81] See Von Peter Praschl, 'Israels posttraumatisches Pornografiesyndrom', *Welt*, 30 Dec 2010 <https://www.welt.de/kultur/kino/article11849991/Israels-posttraumatisches-Pornografiesyndrom.html> [accessed 15 Jun 2022] and Isabel Kershner, 'Israel's Unexpected Spinoff From a Holocaust Trial', *The New York Times*, 6 Sept 2007 <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/06/world/middleeast/06stalags.html> [accessed 31 Aug 2022].

of the extensive clinical literature on second-generation survivals and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the mechanism of dealing emotionally with the collective trauma and the silence surrounding their parents' past, the popularity of the comics is hardly surprising. By reading pulp fiction, young generation, according to Amit Pinchevsky and Roy Brand, negotiated issues of power, identity, and sexuality vis-à-vis the parents' generation on the one hand, and Zionist ideology, on the other'.[82] The typical Stalag narrative focused on captured British or American pilots in endless masochistic play with female oppressors in SS uniforms, equipped with discipline accessories. Though much less explicit, Plath's circus-like exhibitionistic performance in front of the peanut-crunching crowd bears resemblance to the sexual perversion and voyeurism of Stalag fiction.

> The peanut-crunching crowd
> Shoves in to see
>
> Them unwrap me hand and foot –
> The big strip tease.
> Gentleman, ladies
>
> These are my hands
> My knees.
> I may be skin and bone,
>
> Nevertheless, I am the same identical woman. (*P* 245)

According to Gubar, the poem offers a chilling warning about the fetishization of suffering with which the figure of the prosopopoeia flirts. The persona is equated with the author in the meta-textual sense of her audacious performance of survival. According to Toni Saldivar's apt summary: 'Plath's poetry is confessional, not because it is an out-pouring of intimate, painful and shameful detail, but because it bears witness in language to the death of the self when the self denies relation and thus finds no adequate metaphor to make it believable as a living soul'.[83] This imaginative conflict between biographical allusions and the exploration of the post-Holocaust

[82] Amit Pinchevski and Roy Brand, 'Holocaust Perversions: The Stalags Pulp Fiction and the Eichmann Trial', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24.5 (2007), 387-407 (p. 388).
[83] Toni Saldivar, *Sylvia Plath. Confessing the Fictive Self* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 189.

lyric in style, form, and theme allows Plath's reader to engage with a question: how is it not possible to write poetry after Auschwitz? Throughout her last poems, Plath is not only developing a symbol system that could be read in a wider context of resurrection but she is also challenging the conventions of Practical Criticism, proving the impossibility of not knowing the context in which the work occurs.

The way we speak about the Holocaust is always embedded in the ethical question of how to express trauma in language. The part of the conflict which we see in Plath's prose is an attempt to revive a memory blurred with the threat of another war, in which the origins of the father and personal loss symbolize nostalgia and the search for the world that was lost. Instead of a sudden breakthrough in Plath's interest in history, much of her work shows a gradual maturing leading to the ice-breaking performative witnessing. More importantly, through her daring lyric, Plath asks whether it is possible to understand any aspect of modern history without imaginatively translating it into the subjective language of emotion. In her early interest in the Cold War, transgression of gentility, and exploration of the 'world's hardest things', she remodels some of the cultural and gendered assumptions concerning the romantic sameness of the speaker and author, and the 'faithfulness' of poetry and experience. The stylistic change of *Ariel* is – as Britzolakis observes – the result of Plath's conscious and confident remodelling of the postwar empirical-formalist lyric, as institutionalized by the New Critics.[84]

Like much of the Eastern European lyric, even its geographical proximity made it impossible not to write about the Holocaust – reconciling it with one's own, as Plath says elsewhere, inner duality. It is, as Plath's work shows, a simultaneous need for suspension of the voice and a desperation of speech, if not a scream. The impossibility of voicing in the most literal sense results in a search for the form that would accommodate provocative transgressions of the conventional voice of elegy. Such a conflict might lead the writer, as Rich says in 'Eastern War Time', to mourn the untranslatability of the Shoah into figurative language: 'I am standing here

[84] Britzolakis, p. 110.

in your poem unsatisfied | lifting my smoky mirror'.[85] In this poetry of proxy-witnessing, the insufficiency of lyric becomes one of the leading tropes that leads the author's writing in the early 1960s to proximity with the modernist idiom, ellipses, fragmentation, and disturbing, repetitions and re-makings envisioning paradox within the lyric itself – the simultaneous need to respond to the worlds' atrocities in a creative way, and to realize the impossibility of one's own voicing.

[85] Adrienne Rich, 'Eastern War Time', *Bridges*, Fall 1991, pp. 124-28.

Chapter 4: 'Under the shadow of his horrible little wing': Ted Hughes' *Crow* and the poetics of Eastern Europe

> *Like men come back from the dead they [Eastern European poets] have an improved perception, an unerring sense of what really counts in being alive.*
>
> – Ted Hughes in the essay on Vasko Popa (*WP* 222)

Throughout his entire literary career, Ted Hughes revised, rewrote, and returned to poems he had already written and published with an eagerness and commitment that reveal his belief in poetry as a work 'in the making'. In his early (and indeed heavily revised) poem 'The Thought-Fox' he drew a vivid analogy between writing a poem and capturing an animal; the steps of the fox in the snowbound forest are simultaneous with the creative gesture of the author who is both imagining and choreographing the scene. Hughes describes his experience of re-reading his own poem in *Poetry in the Making* (1967): 'as I read the poem I see it [the fox] move, I see it setting its prints. [...] every time I read the poem the fox comes up again out of darkness and steps into my head'.[1] However, unlike the imaginary steps of the fox from the poem, Hughes' practice of poetic composition, extensive textual revisions, and post-publication re-arrangements of poems within a volume, as well as the poetics of the authors from whom he borrowed, all left very real ink-traces, in the form of thousands of manuscripts, glossed typescripts, correspondence, and notes. All of them evince how, for Hughes, poetry was a matter of movement and dynamism and his work as a poet, editor, reader, and co-translator also developed over time leaving permanent traces on the British literary scene and its interest in the poetry in translation.

[1] Hughes, *Poetry in the Making. A Handbook for Writing and Teaching* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 20.

Taking the dates of Plath's suicide in February 1963; the establishment of *MPT* in 1965; and the publication of the revised *The New Poetry* anthology featuring Hughes' poems in 1966 as turning points, we might say that Hughes' poetic imagery shifted away from a 'fox mode', epitomising wildness and creative force, towards a 'crow mode' – an animal whose darkness and imaginative presence haunted the poet for the following decade, moving Hughes' poetics toward exploration of the 'unspeakable'. Much of this examination remained under the strong influence of Eastern European authors whose treatment of what Plath called 'the world's hardest things' (*L* II 888) animated Hughes' poetic imagination. As Parker observes, Hughes' discovery of these writers was crucial at this time in providing a model of survival.[2] As a result of this encounter, Hughes' personal mythology moved towards the ambition of acquiring greater historical consciousness, setting his poetry in a transnational context and joining the debates of the post-Auschwitz world. However, drawing a clear boundary between the 'fox' and 'crow' eras of Hughes' work, whose characterisations bring to mind Freudian ideas about life and death drives, is far from straightforward. Hughes' activities do not present us with a consistent picture of his oeuvre, but rather with a collage of voices and visions as the poet continued to negotiate his conflicted position as an artist, often using foreign poets in a manner which we might now deem appropriative. In that light, his 1967 recollection of the intensity of re-experiencing the fox poem might appear to stem not from Wordsworthian tranquillity, but from a growing anxiety that becomes the driving force for the poem not to be forgotten, akin to the animalistic drive for survival.

From 1965 onwards, this and other anxieties concerning language, survival, and testimony intensified under the influence of poetry that Hughes not only read but, as we have seen in Chapter Two, published and promoted. In the introduction to the volume of Popa's poetry, written in 1969, Hughes recalls what seems to be one of the scenes from either Miłosz's *The Captive Mind* [*Zniewolony Umysł*] or his *Native Realm* [*Rodzinna Europa*]. 'I think it was Milosz, the Polish

[2] Michael Parker, 'Hughes and the poets of Eastern Europe', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), pp. 37-52 (pp. 38, 51).

poet, who when he lay in a doorway and watched the bullets lifting the cobbles out of the street beside him realized that most poetry is not equipped for life in a world where people actually do die' – Hughes writes, adding – 'but some is. And the poets of whom Popa is one seem to have put their poetry to a similar test' (*WP* 221). Given the gravity of the topic, the fact that Hughes does not give his (and Popa's) readers a precise reference to what he thinks are Miłosz's words strikes one as incongruent; in an academic text, he would immediately be scrutinised for his incomplete citation. The scene to which Hughes alludes is likely one in which the Polish writer recalls his encounter with Eliot's poetry. Miłosz translated Eliot's seminal poem about World War I during the winter of 1943-1944, in Warsaw, with a view of 'the glow from the burning ghetto' where Eliot's poem made 'a somehow weird reading'.[3] In a few broad strokes Miłosz sketches the dramatic scenery in which he, for the first time, came to read Eliot:

> Ogień był silny, rozpętywał się za każdym naszym skokiem […]. Mimo to nie wypuściłem z ręki książki. Po pierwsze tak nakazywał szacunek dla własności społecznej, ponieważ książka nosiła numer Biblioteki Uniwersyteckiej. Po drugie była mi potrzebna, choć mogła przestać być potrzebna. Jej tytuł: *Collected Poems* T. S. Eliota w wydaniu Faber and Faber.[4]

> Heavy fire broke loose at our every leap […]. In spite of this I never let go of my book – first of all out of respect for social ownership, since the book bore a call number of the University Library; secondly I needed it (although I could stop needing it). Its title: *The Collected Poems of T. S. Eliot* in the Faber and Faber edition.[5]

In those apocalyptic circumstances, the symbolic meaning of *The Waste Land* acquires a new drama, its image of a disentangled world and pieces 'shored against my ruins' corresponding to the ruins of the invaded city. If the cinematic description of saving a library-owned volume of poetry may strike us as self-mythologising or even sentimental, it still invites reflection on how the poet-hero does not simply save the book but symbolically saves the entire literary tradition on which Eliot's poetry is built. Especially that in the early 1940s Miłosz's critical engagement with Eliot's work was linked to a wider search for 'a more spacious form | that would be free from the

[3] Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, trans. by Catherine S. Leach (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), pp. 238-39.
[4] Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011), p. 281.
[5] Miłosz, *Native Realm*, pp. 238-39.

claims of poetry or prose'[6], in which expressive potential and linguistic aliveness would be more congruent with – as Magda Heydel aptly suggests – 'the historical situation and emerging poetic idioms'.[7]

Curiously, a loose parallel can be drawn between Miłosz's description and symbolic rescuing of the book and the biographical story of Hughes' father. He was among seventeen survivors in his regiment, which was massacred during the 1915 Gallipoli campaign. He narrowly escaped death when a piece of shrapnel was deflected by a book hidden inside his breast pocket.[8] Later, Hughes would allude to this story in 'Crow's Account of the Battle' in the lines enumerating how 'bullets pursued their courses' through 'clods of stone, earth, and skin, | Through intestines pocket-books, brains, hair, teeth'. The poem ends with lines: '[s]o the survivors stayed. | And the earth and the sky stayed' (*CP* 223). There are many reasons why Hughes would have been attracted to the works of Eastern Europeans. Opening this chapter with this short passage from Miłosz brings our attention to the type of drama which was precisely what Hughes felt to be lacking in British poetry of the time, and envied. For instance, in a note dedicated to Czech poetry we read that 'the Western poet perhaps envies his brother in the East, for while he sings of comparative comfort, comparative freedom, comparative despair, the reality of the thread is not his' (*MPT* 3). This and similar comments were precisely what led Davie to accuse Weissbort and Hughes of using the political situation as an opportunity for careerism and unfair simplification of Eastern European literatures.[9]

One striking project that, from around 1965, grounded Hughes' poetry deeper in post-war reality and became a crossway where Hughes' engagement with *MPT*; contact with Eastern European poets; reading of Popa's *Wolf Salt* [*Vučja So*] cycle; and co-translations of the work of Pilinszky all came together is the poetic cycle known as *Crow.* In the broadest interpretative sense, *Crow* is

[6] Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2001* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 240.
[7] Magda Heydel, 'Somewhat Weird Reading: Czesław Miłosz and T.S. Eliot', in *The International Reception of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Elisabeth Däumer and Shyamal Bagchee (London: Continuum, 2007), pp. 226-42 (p. 227).
[8] Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2016), p. 33.
[9] Davie, 'Their Witness' (1992).

a catastrophic mythology that, among other inspirations, uses translational metaphors vis-à-vis post-Holocaust European writing. It is the song of creation after the apocalypse has happened, and the work that becomes the subject of Hughes' restless artistic and personal exploration throughout the turbulent decade of 1963–1973. 'I'm very glad to be rid of it [Crow]' – writes Hughes in the correspondence from October 1970 to Murphy, adding – 'I hope it means I now come from under the shadow of his horrible little wing' (*L* 307). In a letter to Sagar, Hughes described his cycle as 'unthinkable – so raw, so vulnerable, so unprocessed, so naive, so self-exposing & unguarded' (*L* 720). The cycle's subtitle, *From the Life and Songs of the Crow* (added in 1970), suggests a state of incompleteness, fragmentation, or an excerpt taken from a greater, and unfortunately lost, manuscript. The cycle generated much controversy upon its publication and critics' opinions on the violence and deconstructive poetics of the volume might be considered as diverse as their various relationships to the standing legacy of 'high' modernism. Porter, for instance, asserted that 'English Poetry has found a new hero and nobody will be able to read or write verse now without the black shape of Crow falling across the page'.[10] Even the syntax of this sentence makes Porter's allusion to Adorno's dictum obvious.

Drawing on unpublished archival materials, correspondence, and Hughes' own conflicted self-commentaries on his cycle, this chapter reconstructs the troubled flight of *Crow*, in the context of Hughes' relationship with certain aspects of the poetry of Eastern Europe. Critics and writers like Parker, Heaney, Hirsch, Cavanagh, and Bergin have pointed out the pivotal role poetry from Eastern Europe played in the formation of *Crow*'s tonality and complicated aesthetics, yet the questions of what exactly constitutes the alleged 'eastern-ness' of the cycle remains unexplored. Filling this gap in our understanding of *Crow*, I start my discussion on Hughes and Eastern Europe somewhat in reverse, beginning with the little-known story of the cycle's publications and revisions and asking what (if anything) the poet erased during his composition of *Crow*. Upon their publication in the first trade edition in 1970 or the second, most well-known, edition of 1972,

[10] Faber and Faber Website <https://www.faber.co.uk/product/9780571099153-crow/> [accessed 19 Aug 2022].

many of the *Crow* poems were already the subject of revision, but this unprecedented textual fluidity has not enjoyed much critical attention. I, however, see the fragmentation of poetic composition and unstable notion of text (deliberately presented as incomplete and lost) as complementary to the whole concept of *Crow*, a collection about finding language after the apocalypse. Alongside my focus on textual fluidity, the first parts of this chapter will explore the 'infernal and purgatorial circumstances' (*WP* 100) in which the *Crow* cycle was born. What interests me, in short, is how Hughes' experience of reading poetry in translation, his fascination with 'literals', and his obsessions with the topic of post-Holocaust silence influenced the language, tonality, and concept behind the *Crow* cycle. In engaging with these ideas, my discussion will bring together the overlapping themes that have appeared in greater detail in earlier chapters: firstly, imaginative projections of Eastern European lyric; secondly, the question of translatability and *MPT*'s proclivity for literals as a striving for authenticity; and finally, poetry and the ethics of proxy-witnessing.

Grief and mythmaking: self-commentaries

Paul Keegan, an editor of Hughes' *Collected Poems* (2003), observes that Hughes was one of the poets who engaged in constant revisionary activity, a practice that developed to such an extent that 'on their first publication [...] many poems were already subject to post-publication revision' (*CP* vi). He highlights that *Crow* 'is both a single work and a loose grouping of texts [...] ranging from individual periodical poems to broadsides, pamphlets and limited editions' (*CP* 1254). Those remarks come from the recently published collection. However, for many years the most recognisable edition, from 1972, made interpretations of *Crow* fixed, its dark wings gummed up in a homogeneous understanding of *Crow*'s mythopoesis. Yet, as with any mythical, biblical, oral, or quasi-sacral tradition, what keeps it most alive is alteration, fluidity, and the possibility of re-telling the same story in a different edition, tone, wording, medium, or context. The method is, moreover, characteristic of the traumatic re-telling of Holocaust testimonial fiction which, as

noted by the Hungarian writer and 2002 Nobel Winner Imre Kertész in his essay 'Language in Exile', cannot be written except in 'an accidental language', rendering the whole testimony a conceptual translation without an original.[11] In the light of *Crow*'s 1972 edition, readers almost forgot about the ten other editorial variations, some of which are not only fine pieces of editorial and typographical work in their own right, but also extrapolate the emotional turbulence in the face of which writing becomes a double-agent; both art, and a tool that allows psychological re-working of personal experience.

Commentaries Hughes made on the cycle exemplify the tension between emotional involvement and estrangement which the poet felt towards the creative act; they oscillate between frustration and a readiness to abandon the project to satisfaction and a willingness to expand his saga. For instance, in 1970, almost immediately after the first publication of *Crow*, in a letter to Redgrove, the poet expresses a willingness to re-visit the cycle but adds a reservation: 'I am not sure I shall be able to get back to there again. There were moments when I really felt my bones open' (*L* 306). In another letter from January 1970 to Merchant, he reflects on his own dissatisfaction, sparked by what he felt to be the shameful incompleteness of the first edition of *Crow*.[12] 'The trouble with the series' – he continues – 'is that the last third is missing – the whole section where Crow, having touched the bottom, climbs to the top' (*L* 302). If, in another letter to Sagar, Hughes described the cycle as both 'self-exposing' and 'unguarded', we know that in his composition practice Hughes was very much 'on guard'. In order to achieve the effect of vulnerability, stylistic rawness, and self-foreignization, Hughes not only re-visited his *Crow* poems but also made imaginative use of the very idea of revision and open-endedness, employing them as both intra- and extra-textual elements of *Crow*'s poetics. In mid-1960s British poetry, such a practice was

[11] Imre Kertész, *Jezyk Na Wygnaniu*, trans. by Elżbieta Sobolewska and Elżbieta Cygielska-Guttman (Warszawa: WAB, 2004), p. 196.

[12] Examples of such revisionary engagement are frequent across Hughes' letters, essays, interviews, or broadcasts. In 1956, the year before the publication of his debut collection *Hawk in the Rain*, Hughes writes to Sylvia Plath, 'I will not attempt to explain or defend any of it [poems], until I've thoroughly revised it' (*L* 69). In a 1960 letter to Plath's mother, he briefly mentions a draft of a story about London, adding 'I shall rewrite it as it deserves' (*L* 173). In a candid latter to Keith Sagar, he states: '[...] I took a refuge in prose. Oh yes, & the Coleridge essays & revisions of the *Winter Pollen* pieces' (*L* 719). Elsewhere, in his correspondence with Nick Gammage, he says of *Crow*, 'I'm sending you a page of MS. It's a piece I rewrite about every four years' (*L* 620).

unusual and Hughes' re-makings are a unique example of the author playing with the idea of the unstable text that presents itself as not being 'good enough' for the publication, thereby undermining the very notion of the trust which the author puts in their creation. The meta-poetic failure of *Crow* is most fully realised in a radical move of the author who composes his work and surreptitiously loses, as the letter to Merchant suggests, part of his own creation. By 'losing' part of his cycle, Hughes makes us question the idea of authorship, understood as owning, controlling, and authoring one's own narrative, written in language that never feels native to the helpless author. What he describes as 'lost' is the quasi-resurrective section, in which the bird rises after touching the bottom, and still in the closing line of the sequence 'sit[s] on my finger, sing[s] in my ear, O littleblood' (*CP* 258).

By the time of this publication, Hughes, as the author of *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960), was already established as an outstanding young poet. As I have already discussed, his works featured in the bestselling *The New Poetry* anthology, which contrasted Hughes' work with the poetic idiom of the Movement. To better understand the 'survivalist' mode of *Crow*, let us first look at the actual geneses of the cycle. In his 'The Story of Crow' appendix to *The Laughter of Foxes* (2006), Sagar misdates the origins of *Crow* by four years, stating that 'about 1967, Hughes' friend Baskin invited him to write a few little poems to accompany some engraving of crows'.[13] The 1967 date could not have been possible, not only because one of the *Crow* poems was published in 1965 but also because Hughes offered numerous commentaries on *Crow* in pre-1967 correspondence.[14] In the late summer of 1964, Hughes had already started to imagine – and presumably conceptually arrange – the poems as part of a bigger volume. Referring to the collaboration between Hughes and Baskin, Sagar alludes to the only gloss Hughes made on the cycle: the essay 'The Crow on the Beach', published in a 1985 book gathering contributions of contemporary poets about their creative process. The gloss was, as Hughes put it, offered to

[13] Sagar, *The Laughter Of Foxes*, p. 170.
[14] The earliest note that mentions Hughes working on *Crow* is a little postcard of a greyhound which Hughes sent to Leonard Baskin on 14 August 1964, adding that 'the Book of Crow is in the Appendix' Hughes-Baskin Papers. British Library MS 83684.

the reader merely as 'an observation' (*WP* 242) on the saga that, however, already lived a life of its own. 'Perhaps it should be said that Crow grew out of an invitation by Leonard Baskin to make a book with him simply about crows. He wanted an occasion to add more crows to all the crows that flock through his sculptures, drawings, and engravings in their various transformations' – explains Hughes, adding that in any author's hands crow would become symbolic – 'and a symbolic crow lives a legendary life. That is how *Crow* took off' (*WP* 243). The motivations for writing *Crow* were, however, far from simple and Hughes' note attributing much of the responsibility for *Crow*'s genesis to Baskin, who 'wanted an occasion to add more crows to all the crows', should be taken with a pinch of salt. Hughes' short essay focuses on the importance of Trickster Tales for a deeper understanding of his saga that, he claims, takes no influence from contemporary poetics and has nothing to do with nihilism or sarcasm. We read:

> Any reader who is unfamiliar with the Trickster Tales of early and primitive literatures, or who doesn't think those 'folk' productions have any place in the canon of serious literary forms, will probably try to relate to *Crow* to something more familiar within the Western modern tradition. What usually comes up is Black Comedy of the sort that became fashionable for a while in post-war western Europe. But to make this relationship is misleading. […] Black Comedy is the end of a cultural process, Trickster literature is the beginning. Black Comedy draws its effects from the animal despair and suicidal nihilism that afflict society or an individual when the supportive metaphysical beliefs degenerate. Trickster literature supports a society or individual whose world is not yet fully created, and whose metaphysical beliefs are only just struggling out of the dream stage. (*WP* 239)

The gloss re-directs our attention from *Crow*'s 'super ugly' and 'super simple' language, contextualised with regard to Black Comedy and the literature of post-war Europe, to encourage us to see the progression of *Crow* as a mythic, liminal and, most importantly, a-historical Trickster narrative.[15] In passing, it is worth comparing the excerpt to the 'Creative Imagination in our times' lecture Pilinszky delivered at an international conference in Poigny in October 1970. The Hungarian poet writes: '[…] the theatre of absurd sought a way out of this totally horizontal drama. Its failure, however, is clear. If, in a desecralised and deincarnated world, I choose the verticality of the verb, this event will coincide with the moment of suicide and assassination, with its dimensionless abyss […]' (*CC* 234). On the one hand, readers might consider Hughes'

[15] 'Ted Hughes and Crow. An Interview with Egbert Faas', *London Magazine*, January 1971, pp. 5-20 (p. 20).

statement in 'The Crow on the Beach' misleading in its erasure of 'Western modern tradition', the way it seeks 'optimism and creative joy' (*WP* 289) in Trickster Tales, and the instructive tone Hughes takes to convince us of the appropriate interpretation of the cycle. After all, why would Hughes elaborate in detail on what *Crow* is *not*, unless these indicated influences or private motivations that the author would rather keep hidden? On the other, we know that half-created communication through myth was characteristic of Hughes' poetics. In the same text, Hughes insists that Trickster literature expresses 'the renewing, sacred spirit, searching its depths for new resources and directiveness, exploring towards new emergence and growth' – and concludes – '[…] this is how the worst moment comes closest to the best opportunity' (*WP* 240). But what opportunity would that be? Years later, on the eve of the publication of *Birthday Letters* (1998), Hughes reflected on this potentially regenerative link between trauma, symbol, and creativity in a letter to his son Nicholas. He recalls how, through the poetic cycle, he began to deal with 'what had happened' but approached it 'indirectly, through other symbols, which is the best and most natural way' (*L* 711-12). However, before publishing 'Crow on the Beach' and stating how the connection between post-war western Europe, biographical reading, and the bird might be 'misleading' (*WP* 239), Hughes admitted that the idea behind the sequence was somewhat different. Through writing *Crow*, he hoped to create something

> with the minimum cultural accretions of the museum sort, something autonomous and complete in itself, as it might be invented after the Holocaust and demolition of all libraries, where essential things spring again – if at all – only from their seeds in nature.[16]

This short passage strikes me as the single most important comment Hughes made on his cycle. The author knew that commenting on the desired 'autonomy' of the sequence and mentioning the Holocaust in the same line ineluctably disqualified the idealistic concept of the poems' separateness from both history and literary tradition. Indeed, in later interviews Hughes was explicit about his fascination with, for instance, Pilinszky's ambition to write 'as if he had remained silent' (*WP* 232) and on many occasions stated that 'the silence of artistic integrity "after

[16] Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes*, p. 27.

Auschwitz" is a real thing' (*WP* 232). Moreover, depicting the text as if its genesis lay in the fertile yet wounded land resembles the image of the blossoming corpse from Eliot's *The Waste Land* that Hughes considered the major achievement of the twentieth century. In his 1988 tribute to Eliot entitled 'The Poetic Self', Hughes observed that the type of 'desacralized landscape' constructed in *The Waste Land* 'had never been seen before' (*WP* 270). In the same essay, Hughes notes the relationship between personal experience, artistic re-creation, and the shift from metaphysic to what he, intriguingly, calls living 'in the translation':

> We have no problem nowadays in seeing that the God-centred metaphysical universe of the religions suffered not so much an evaporation as a translocation. It was interiorized. And translated. We live in the translation, where what had been religious and centred on God is psychological and centred on an idea of the self – albeit a self that remains a measureless if not infinite question mark. (*WP* 274)

Following this statement on Eliot, we may ask what experience Hughes 'translated', and thus mediated and transferred into the language of his cycle? Here, a short biography-focused summary might prove helpful. The time that preceded the first trade publication of *Crow* in 1970 was marked by tragic events in Hughes' life that would later be incorporated by readers, critics, and Hughes himself into his self-mythology. These are the suicide of Plath in February 1963, the suicide of Hughes' second wife Assia Wevill and daughter Shura in March 1969, and the death of his mother in August 1969. Much of Hughes' correspondence after the spring of 1969 that reopened old wounds reveals his state of creative paralysis and growing conviction that poetry might heal, but would not bring back to life the people he loved.[17] However, some *Crow* poems were written before 1969, and in an interview for *The Paris Review*, Hughes details how he wrote several of his favourite works from *Crow* while 'traveling up and down Germany with a woman and small child', adding, 'I just went on with writing wherever we were' (*TPR* 276).[18] The very

[17] Until the late 2000s, when the *Letters of Ted Hughes* edited by Christopher Reid in 2007 revealed details of the poet's private life and motivations for writing, and the British Library made a large addition to the Ted Hughes archive (consisting of 118 boxes of manuscripts, letters, and drafts) available in 2010, an interpretation of *Crow* in light of the poet's biography was almost impossible.

[18] Here, Hughes' odd use of the indefinite pronoun immediately draws our attention. Though its reference to his biography is very clear in context, the poet chooses not to identify Assia, Shura or their relationship to him, leading to the impression that he is distancing himself from this past or objectifying the woman and small child in his recollection, presenting their travels across Germany as the blurred background to his poetic calling.

idea of writing a few poems about crows was suggested to Hughes only three weeks after Plath's suicide, by his close friend, the artist Leonard Baskin.[19]

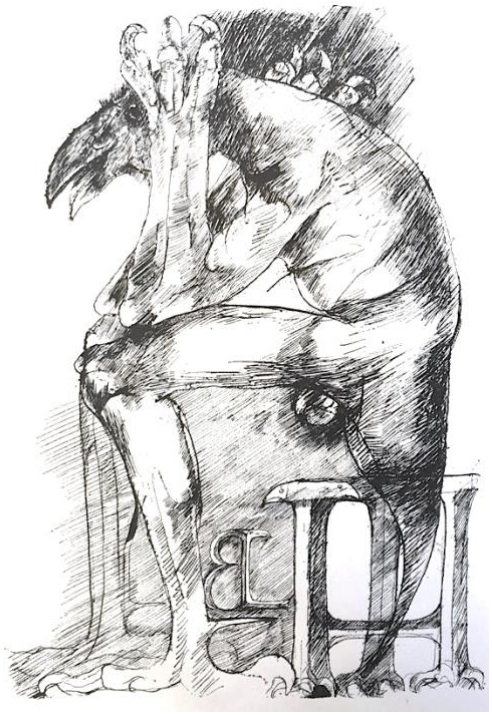


Fig. 1: One of ten illustrations of crows by Leonard Baskin from the Faber and Faber limited 1973 edition of *Crow*

Knowing of Hughes' in-depth interest in anthropology, the lives of animals, mythology, and folk tales, Baskin hoped that writing poems about crows would galvanise Hughes 'from despair to activity', ultimately enabling him to break out from his emotional and poetic impasse.[20] Baskin also hoped that 'The Anatomy of Crow' (the title he first suggested to Hughes) would eventually accompany drawings of birds for the trade publication he was working on at the time, all of which depicted a hybrid form of masculine man and bird. However, the first time Hughes saw the actual sketches of Baskin's crows was most likely in 1971, when Hughes replies to his friend with

[19] Hughes met Leonard and Lisa Baskin in Boston, in 1958, while Plath had a teaching position at Smith College. From then on, their friendship deepened, resulting in a decidedly prolific artistic collaboration. This collaboration started with the 1958 pamphlet engravings of 'Pike', printed privately by the Gehenna Press and continued through *Season Songs*, *Cave Birds*, *Under the North Star*, *Capriccio* until the 1998 limited edition of *Howls and Whispers* – the sequence of poems about Hughes' relationship with Plath that was not previously included in *Birthday Letters*.
[20] Quoted in Leonard Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Form and Imagination* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986), p. 144.

commendation, adding 'I'm working my way back & this time I'll get further. Your drawings make it absolutely inevitable'.[21] This belated visual form to which Hughes' text was, in theory, supposed to be an ekphrastic response shows that Baskin's intention in suggesting the idea for writing was therapeutic instead of publication-oriented. Hughes' remarks from his 1984 introduction to *The Collected Prints of Leonard Baskin* provide some insight into this paradox of authorship, and the idea of a Creator whose creation goes awry, as we read in the poem 'Crow Alights': '[a]nd he [Crow] shivered with the horror of Creation' (*CP* 220). Hughes' anthropomorphised Crow saw that this darkness was no good.

Writing about Baskin's sculptures; their power to disturb; kinship with *The Book of Job*; and 'perpetual flux of transmogrification' (*WP* 87), Hughes evokes the shaman's dream of his flight as a prototype. His claims that his friend's sculptures are born in 'infernal and purgatorial circumstances' (*WP* 100) might well be extended to the poetics of *Crow.* In another comment, this time from the essay on Pilinszky, Hughes reflects on the evolution of the Hungarian poet and his comment, again, mirrors Hughes' creative processes in his *Crow*. Hughes says that the mood and imagery of Pilinszky's earlier work 'survived through an inner transformation which seemed uncompleted until, in 1975, he published *Space and Relationship*, a catalogue and collection of poems interspersed with photographs of the sculptures of Erzsébet Schaár' (*WP* 231). It remains uncertain how familiar Hughes would have been with Schaár's work and Hughes' biographer never mentions the artist's surname, but the connection is surprisingly relevant to the poetics of *Crow* and the Hughes/Baskin collaboration. Prolific from the 1930s to the mid-1970s, the Hungarian artist's works, first composed in a realist style, evolved into minimalist and symbolic expressions. In the 1960s, with sculptures like *Choeur* (1963), *Dead Soldiers* (1965), and later *Street* installation (1974), Schaár 'turned towards slender forms similar to those of Giacometti'.[22] One of the characteristic features of Schaár's art, and the one that most interested Pilinszky, was

[21] The Hughes-Baskin Papers. British Library, MS 83684.
[22] Judith Faludy, 'Erzsébet Schaár', transl. by Katia Porro (2013) <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/erzsebet-schaar/> [accessed 3 Aug 2022].

experimentation with space and material. Combined with interior spaces (full of windows and doors) that became homes for 'anthropomorphic objects, which became the main motifs in her art', her sculptures create a paradoxical effect of alienating domesticity (Fig. 2).[23] In 2013, the Antal–Lusztig Collection (the biggest private art collection in Hungary based in MODEM art centre) augmented their Schaár exhibition with sketches that had never before been displayed. They consist of photographs taken in the artist's studio, inviting the viewer behind the scenes of the creative process. The photographs furnished the idea for a 'studio that never was' to be built, as the MODEM's website puts it.[24] This little-known parallel between Hughes/Pilinszky and Schaár/Baskin allows us not only to see a pattern in the 1960s turn towards an exploration of the interior and the intimate that was often juxtaposed with rough and anti-aesthetic symbolism, but also to acknowledge the growing importance of collaborations between text and visual media. In both cases, the written word does not exist separately but is prompted or completed by a physical object of sculptures or drawings.



Fig 2: Erzsébet Schaár, *Street* exhibition, 1974 (left), *Before the Wall and Behind the Wall I*, 1965-66 (right)

[23] Lajos Németh, 'Schaár, Erzsébet' *Oxford Art Online* (2003) <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T076352>
[24] Modem Webite <https://www.modemart.hu/en/kiallitas/latrokkent-ter-es-ido-keresztjere-verve/> [accessed 4 August 2022].

In a world where the post-Nietzschean question of how to live after the death of God can be replaced by that of how to read after the death of the author, Hughes consciously – as selected commentaries from this section suggest – complicates the matter of authorship, even as 'despite his efforts to mask it, the poems are a response to Hughes's personal life'.[25] As the drama of *Crow* progresses, we see the bird's helpless attempts to understand (and correct) the creator's evil universe. A similar 'correction' is in fact happening meta-textually, in Hughes' commentaries and editorial gestures of re-arranging, excluding, including, and re-contextualizing some of *Crow*'s poems by choreographing many 'apocryphal' versions of 'the sacred texts' and making the saga live a life of its own. The cycle's subtitle suggests the authorial gesture of selecting songs from a greater collection, while the motif of voicing and voicelessness makes frequent appearances across the whole cycle. As a result, one can say that the author indirectly places himself in the position not so much of the creator but of the translator of the 'holy' text. The success of this mediation is, as Hughes' comment on Eliot suggested, doubtful. The translator-author can, therefore, be seen as a trickster himself – the alternative-goddess who acknowledges that, in the modern world, the very attempt to translate and understand creation is a joke, and who mistranslates the world with the pre-existing knowledge of its inevitable moral, but also post-apocalyptic, linguistic disintegration. In *Crow*'s psycho-dramatic post-Auschwitz cycle, this meta-textual gesture enables Hughes to use the anthropomorphised persona of the Crow-redeemer to play with a fantasy of becoming the author of 'survivalist poetry'. The following section will give a sense of this revisionary practice, linking the open composition of *Crow* with the subsequent discussion of the Eastern European 'mode' of writing.

The poet of revision

[25] Patrick Jackson, 'The Narrative of Grief in Ted Hughes's Crow', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 42.3 (2019), 74-91 (p. 75).

The first 'Crow' poem was published in July 1965, when one poem entitled 'X' appeared in *Encounter* magazine, the same magazine that published Plath's 'Daddy' and self-dramatising 'The Jailer' (excluded by Hughes in his selection for publication of Plath's posthumous *Ariel*).The publishing history of Hughes' 'X' shows that the poem was re-contextualised from Hughes' little-known play *Eat Crow*, which he wrote in 1964 but published only in 1971, in a limited run of 150 copies. *Eat Crow* is a short play in which the character of Morgan goes through a Kafkaesque trial, without really knowing why he is being prosecuted. As the play's central plot device, we see Morgan performing a dialogue with his alternative self which explores the theme of emotional disintegration and the feeling of losing control over reality. He is (or they are) discussing how many times something that has been torn up or broken can be 'glued together', concluding that 'you can't stick the same break twice. Not properly. You always lose little crumbs. And the old glue spoils the perfect fit'.[26] Syntactically, Hughes' line 'you can't stick the same break twice' echoes the popular English translation of Heraclitus, but metaphorically it also seems to allude to, if not re-enact, a personal reference point. Namely, it is hard not to draw a parallel between the line from the play and Plath's incipit line from her titular poem 'The Colossus': 'I shall never get you put together entirely, | Pieced, glued, and properly jointed' (*P* 129). or from 'Daddy' 'they stuck me together with glue' (*P* 224), which we know Hughes read in the 1962 typescript.

In the subsequent part of *Eat Crow*, Morgan imagines himself as a producer who meta-theatrically forces his other self to act out the apocalyptic, depressing vortex scene of 'falling, falling away, you know, falling, failing [...] losing the world'.[27] The self-imposed state of disintegration provokes the monologue that will be re-contextualized as 'X' or 'Crow Wakes'. In the process of revision, the line 'I thought I was dreaming, but I was not dreaming' that opened Morgan's monologue was erased. The omission of the opening line shifts the atmosphere away from disillusionment with reality and the inadequacy felt by the character of either Morgan or the bird. The removal of the first line can be seen as a mere aesthetic cut, especially since towards the end

[26] Ted Hughes and Leonard Baskin, *Eat Crow* (London: Rainbow Press, 1971), p. 13.
[27] Ibid., p. 15.

of the monologue Hughes reduced the number of repetitions, perhaps aiming for a more concentrated poem with the only alteration being the change from high-pitched, bird-like 'shrieking' to wolf-like 'howling', resembling Popa's poetic cycle. Curiously, the final scene in the play is the *deus ex machina* appearance of a feminine Creator (enigmatically called 'She') who reassures Morgan that 'Crow is a sign of life. Even though it sits motionless [...] The crow watches the man'.[28]

Around 1966, Hughes started to type manuscripts of *Crow* into typescripts. According to his letters, he was reluctant to see *Crow* typed, supposedly out of fear of the alienating effect that reading one's own work in print often creates. In October 1966, in a letter to Daniel Huws, he explained the general concept of *Crow*'s mythology, promising: 'I'll send you some of his [Crow's] primitive attempts when I get the courage to see them in type' (*L* 261). In another letter from this time he continues: 'I'll send you some [Crows] when I [start] typing them'. When discussing Hughes' 1966 resistance to seeing his *Crow* in typescript, it is important to realise that *Crow* was not the only artistic endeavour occupying him at the time. From 1969, the poet was also engaged in the critical book on Shakespeare which, according to Robert McCrum's recent introduction, allowed the poet to face darkness and look at the 'crisis of excruciating experience' through the lenses of Shakespeare's plays.[29] Upon its publication, Hughes' critical prose in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992) was most often scrutinised for its narrow and idiosyncratic perspective. Terry Eagleton's review for *The Times* summarises critics' concerns, saying: 'the Shakespeare who emerges from this book is uncannily familiar. He is a poet of primitive violence, animal energies, dark irrational forces and incessant sexual strife – a mirror image of the poet laureate'.[30] This is not the only comment that points out how Hughes' method of referring to other authors often limited their work to precisely what Hughes was searching for, the best example of this being Hughes' translations of the classics discussed in Chapter Two. In

[28] Ibid., p. 19.
[29] Robert McCrum, 'Foreword', in Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 2021), pp. v-x (p. vi).
[30] Ibid., p. x.

many of Hughes' re-makings, one might get the impression that the author is in dialogue, not with the author he is reading, but with himself and his own poetics. Even Weissbort, a great defender of Hughes' unusual methods of co-translating, observed that many of the poet's translations are 'paradoxically unmistakeably "Hughesian" (*ST* vii). This is what, perhaps, inspired Weissbort to say in poem entitled 'Translation' from his *Letters to Ted* (the 2002 collection of poems written in memory of Hughes) about his friend proclivity to 'literal' translation: '. . . As for your 'X-ray vision'. . . | You were attacked on account of it, | for being too literal'.[31] An anecdote about how Hughes and Larkin were both asked to contribute a short poem to commemorate the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 would serve as a good example. Larkin's pastiche of what he imagined Hughes' response would be hints at the sometimes narrowminded quality of Hughes' poetics. Alongside his own official lines, Larkin contributed an allegedly celebratory Hughes-style poem: 'The sky split apart in malice | Stars rattled like pans on a shelf | Crow shat on Buckingham Palace | God pissed himself –'[32]

In May 1967, Faber also published Hughes' *Wodwo* volume, most of which was written before Plath's death. Even if the *Wodwo* collection does not allude to any of the early *Crow* attempts, Hughes' commentaries on the collection do give an important insight into the new 'subjective' voice that – according to Hughes – almost involuntarily haunted him and made him restlessly re-order his own poems. Reflecting on the volume soon after its publication, Hughes says that the poems he included, such as 'Fool Moon and Little Frieda' and 'The Howling of Wolves', were far too subjective with an 'awful lot of me in it' (*L* 274). He worried that the subjective, unmediated 'I' dominated the second part of the volume, making him 'incapable of real detachment' (*L* 274). The larger problem of the 'confessional' turn in Hughes' work and the ways in which the poet choreographs his self-image are topics which lie beyond the scope of this chapter. In particular, Hughes' strategy of revealing – or at least suggesting – the possibility of

[31] Weissbort, *Letters to Ted* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2002), p. 96.
[32] 'Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Elizabeth II', *The Guardian*, 11 Feb 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/11/this-be-the-verse-for-the-queens-jubilee-philip-larkin-ted-hughes-and-elizabeth-ii> [accessed 7 August 2022].

a biographical reading of *Crow*, years before the publication of his *Birthday Letters*, would be a fruitful direction of research with the potential to interpret many of Hughes' editorial moves as either artistic provocation or a marketing strategy targeting readers of deluxe editions and making the fine editions 'desirable' by distinguishing them from the popular, widely available printing market. Despite his avowed resistance to the confessional mode, in the limited editions, Hughes continued to release poems that disclosed a potentially intimate voice.

In August 1967, in a letter to the Hungarian poet and translator Csokits, Hughes explains his strategy for re-ordering poems in the collection; changing the order would ensure that the poems would not follow the chronology of their actual composition (*L* 273). This desire to avoid the association between the personal poems and the real chronology seems logical, yet Hughes still manages to complicate this intuitive connection. In the same letter, he made his short story 'The Rain Horse' into the emotional climax of the volume with its symbolic mental collapse after the death of Plath. He continued to speak about how the story about the horse builds a symbolic line that separates the first, second and third parts of the volume, with the third being a necessary emotional response to the drama. Nevertheless, as we know from the *London Magazine*, 'The Rain Horse' had already been published seven years earlier in February 1960 and incorporated into *Wodwo* in completely unchanged form. Here, re-contextualising the origins of the story as an artistic response to Plath's death is nothing but an example of Hughes' self-mythologising strategies, which would become more evident over the next decade. Hughes hoped that ordering the poems would 'lead him back to the objective world where his talent really belonged' (*L* 274) – a peculiar statement after three pages which therapeutically explore and explain the strategies of hiding the 'real' intimacy of one's own writing. That question becomes more problematic if we compare the authorial declarations to the actual order of poems in the volume, which creates exactly the opposite effect. In all of the editions and re-printings, the poems that Hughes felt to be 'too personal' are placed at the very end of the volume thereby not only preserving the chronology of their actual composition but also creating structural tension within a volume based on the pre-1963 and post-1963 division. To enable a clear orientation in the labyrinth of *Crow's*

trade and limited editions, a summary of its printing history is presented in the table below (Table 3). This summary, however, excludes press publications other than Crow's debut in *Encounter*, since between 1965–1972 Hughes published many 'Crow' poems in magazines ranging from the *Listener*, *Observer*, *New American Review*, *New Yorker*, *Times Literary Supplement* to the *Halifax Evening Courier*, *Northwest Review* and *Scotsman*.

DATE	EDITION	NOTES
July 1964	'X' poem in *Encounter*	Taken and re-contextualised from the monologic short drama *Eat Crow* (written in 1964, published in 1971). 'X' is later re-published as 'Crow Wakes', the first poem in the 1971 volume *Crow Wakes*.
1970	* *A Crow Hymn.*	Pamphlet of 1 poem. The Sceptre Press Fresham Farnham Surrey. Limited edition printed in 100 copies. Never reprinted.
October 1970	* *A Few Crow*	Illustrated by Reiner Burger. Exeter: Rougemont Press. Limited edition printed in 150 copies in the square, black form. 'Crow's First Lesson', 'A Kill', 'Notes for a Little Play', 'A Grin', 'The Battle of Osfrontalis', 'Crow Tyrannosaurus', 'A Childish Prank', Carnival'. '~~Carnival'~~ poem is the only one omitted in all further editions and will never be reprinted. Edition includes 6 drawings by Burger.
25 August 1970	* *Four Crow Poems*	Limited edition. Unspecified number of copies. Poems: included: That Moment', 'King of Carrion', 'Crow and the Birds', 'Last Stand'. All four poems will also be included in the main Faber and Faber edition.
12 October 1970	*Crow. From the Life and Songs of the Crow* First Faber and Faber Edition	First trade edition. Original black cloth, spine lettered in gilt. Dust jacket illustrated with one drawing by Leonard Baskin. For the full list of contents, see appendix in the Ted Hughes *Collected Poems* (ed.) P. Keegan, Appendix Three.
April 1971	* *Crow Wakes*	Essex: Woodford Green: Poet and Printer. Limited edition printed in 200 copies. Comprises 12 poems: 'Crow Wakes', 'Bonus', 'Amulet', 'Crow's Table Talk', 'In the Land of Lion', 'I See a Bear', 'Anecdote', 'Song against the White Owl', 'The Ship', 'Lullaby', 'Snow Song', 'The Contender'. Excluded from the main collection due to 'personal reasons'.
April 1971	* *Poems.* Ruth Fainlight, Ted Hughes, Alan Sillitoe.	London: Rainbow Press. Limited edition printed in 300 copies. Contains six Crow poems un-reprinted elsewhere (with the exception of 'Crow Rambles'): 'Crow Rambles', 'Genesis of Evil'. 'Crow's Song About England', 'Crow's Courtship', 'Crow's Song About God', 'Crow the Just'.
1971	* *Eat Crow*	Short dramatic play written in 1964. Limited edition printed in 150 copies, numbered and signed by the author. Printed in 1971 by Olwyn Hughes' private Rainbow Press.

1971	*Crow* American edition	Trade American edition published by Harper and Row Yellow paper, cloth back, dust jacket. First American edition. First printing differs from British counterpart in 8 poems
December 1972	*Crow. From the Life and Songs of the Crow* Second Faber and Faber edition	Second trade edition. This printing adds seven poems to the collection: 'Crow Hers Fate Known the Door', 'Crow's Fall', 'The Contender', 'Crow Tries the Media', 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song', 'Crowcolour', 'Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural'.
1973	* *Crow* Faber and Faber Limited edition	Expanded, limited edition. Printed in 400 copies. Includes three additional poems: 'Crow Rambles', 'Crow Courtship', 'Crow's Song about Prospero and Sycorax'. Very fine, large (123 pages, 34 cm) black cover, printed on T.H. Saunders mould-made paper. Includes 10 drawings by Leonard Baskin depicting the hybrid form of masculine man and bird.
1973	*Cave Birds*	Printed by Faber and Faber (London: Boston). Includes 29 poems that Hughes hoped would be the end of Crow's adventures. Illustrated by Leonard Baskin.

Table 3: Summary of trade and limited editions of *Crow*

Between the publication of 'X' in *Encounter* and the 1970 trade publication, Hughes had 'been on and off battling with crow', allowing the confrontation with emotional torments and moving away from the discourse of the nature-poet towards the discovery of a subjective and elegiac voice that would become both evident and suspicious in his late works and – most of all – limited editions.[33] While much of *Crow*'s psycho-drama remains hidden under the layers of conflicted auto-commentaries and its veiled editorial history, *Capriccio* (1990, printed in 50 large-format copies) much more openly negotiates, even transgresses, the limits of the representation of trauma and violence. In fetishizing fantasies, the speaker of *Capriccio* re-imagines the death of a woman in a 'long-cold oven | Locked with a swastika' (*CP* 784) while performing an unequal domination and submission play, to which the reader – through the process of interpreting the text – becomes an uncomfortable witness. In one of the poems, the oppressed woman regains her secret 'demonic' power to 'smile and gently bite the locket' in an attempt to sexually please her oppressor. The subordinate, male-gaze oriented, quasi-oral play of holding up the locket continues while the man

[33] Letter to Leonard Baskin written on 15 May 1967, The Ted Hughes Archive, British Library, MS 83684. In the same letter Hughes adds 'few poems have turned into a Bushman Epic. *The Life and Songs of the Crow* which will be as long as a novel. I'll send you some when I [start] typing them.

'juggle[s] our future' (*CP* 784) until the poem ends with a whispered *fait accompli.* With this act, the woman – the rather perverse implication goes – completes her 'work' with the failed promise that she would 'free' herself from the long-cold oven. [34]

Contrary to Hughes' own declaration, the author never intended to finish his saga. The open composition, revisionary practice, and endless re-arrangements he performed on his work point to the traumatic re-telling of the story, with the inner progression of the cycle being the anti-hero's inability to speak from 'That Moment' to re-gaining agency over his own creation in 'Littleblood'. Many years after publishing *Crow*, when asked if writing had ever become impossible, Hughes would talk about how he had started to draft a short novel simply to overcome his inertia and get himself into shape before writing what he envisioned to be 'the real thing':

> […] One whole book arrived like that, not a very long book, but one which I felt I need to galvanize my inertia, break through the huge sloth I was up against. On the spur I invented a little plot: nine birds come to the fallen Adam urging him to get up and be birdlike. I wrote the whole as a bagatelle to sweat myself out of that inertia – and to conjure myself to be a bit more birdlike. Then, suddenly there it was, a sort of book. *Adam and the Sacred Nine* (*TPR* 284).

Hughes' answer suggests that this 'real thing' would become the *Crow* cycle. Once drafted, *Crow* left permanent traces in its creator's psyche, while excerpts from Hughes' correspondence and revisionary activity reveal the author – as Jackson observes in his article – creating Crow as if creating a figure for his grief.[35] On the meta-poetical level, *Crow*'s flight is a journey from an inability to speak to acquiring the position of a singer of his own songs, as suggested by the cycle's subtitle. In the ninth poem of the sequence, 'Crow's First Lesson', we find God attempting to teach Crow speech, making the bird repeat the word 'love'. His 'first lesson' fails, and instead of finding his voice we see Crow convulsing as he struggles with language. The personality and referentiality of *Crow* is, nevertheless, complex. With worrying certainty, Hughes' biographer instructs us that 'in the trade edition, Crow is always "he", not an "I". He should not be mistaken

[34] For more about *Capriccio* poems see Lynda Bunzdten**, '**Traumatic Repetition in *Capriccio*', in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Mark Wormald, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 130-43.
[35] Patrick Jackson, 'The Narrative of Grief in Ted Hughes's Crow', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 42.3 (2019), 74–91.

for Ted Hughes'.[36] Such a conclusion is wrong in the first place, as in all versions of the 1970 and 1972 editions *Crow* alternates between 'I' and the third person singular form, or very often appears in indefinite pronouns, impersonal verbs, or as an expletive subject within a clause. But after the play of mimicry and masking strategies of self-representation seen in modernism, even if Hughes had decided to shift the perspective of Crow to 'I', it would not necessarily denote a sudden change in the emotionality of the verse as understood in a strictly biographical, authorial context.

To some extent, Hughes engages in the trope of fictionalised authorship; introducing *Crow* as the vulnerable hero of the sequence stylistically allows Hughes to give authority to something external, adhering 'to a sort of mythical decorum' without taking responsibility for Crow's actions or failures.[37] This stylistic feature which Davie, in the context of Pound's *Cantos*, terms *in propria persona*, distances the author from the mask of dramatised and fictionalised authorship. As Max Saunders has shown in *Self-Impression* (2010), many modernist works are exercises in auto/biography in which we can see the emergence of creativity in the form of projection onto a fictional author or character. Hughes, however, makes it difficult for the reader to empathize with *Crow*, who weeps uncontrollably over the lost world; learns how God's love is conditional; and, having failed to return to the ark with the dove in the Hebrew version of the Flood, gets slightly too consumed in eating carrion. The conflict of subjectivity takes a surprising turn, with Crow being in fact the embodiment of a failed author, unable to use words and connect with the world made carefully – as we read in 'Crow Frowns' – from nothing. The reality of *Crow* is, however, not made of nothing but comes from a very specific set of influences. In the next section of this chapter, I will extend the notions of failed authorship, the open-endedness of poetic composition, and Hughes' experiments with impoverished language to the context of Eastern European poetry, and the identification that made the process of writing *Crow* into an exercise in

[36] Bate., p. 295.
[37] Jarold Ramsey, 'Crow, or the trickster transformed, in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, pp. 171-86 (p. 176).

overcoming creative impasse after having experienced, as Parker provocatively put it, 'his own personal Auschwitz and Hiroshima'.[38]

Crow the Survivor: language, speech, and silence

From 1965 onwards, Hughes' enthusiasm about Eastern Europe developed rapidly. It involved extensive correspondence with authors, co-translating from Hungarian, and writing and publishing essays on authors from Eastern Europe, some of whom would later be included in his *Winter Pollen*. With the publication of *Crow*, Hughes seems to have positioned his own work in the same sphere of 'universal language' in which he had already located Popa, Pilinszky, Herbert, and Miłosz. The structure of the *Crow* poems is almost identical to the organisation of Popa's *Wolf Salt*. The language and pulse of the poems resembles those of Pilinszky, dealing with what Hughes calls '[a] God of absences' (*WP* 233), while the economy of the verse combined with moments of sharp irony brings to mind Herbert's *Mr Cogito* [*Pan Cogito*] series. Parker is among the few critics who locates those influences, summarising:

> A crucial influence on Hughes' poetic development has been the poets of eastern Europe, writers such as Holub, Pilinszky, Popa and Zbigniew Herbert of Poland, poets who explore themes of profound immediacy to Hughes – survival, death, war, futility, endurance, the cruel ironies of existence. […] Learning from their uncompromising honest and 'unembellished language', he was able not only to articulate more precisely the anguish and epiphanies of his own personal experience during these years, but also to reflect in his verse a sense of the whole European historical and cultural experience, and in so doing joined the mainstream of modernist literature.[39]

This comment is helpful as an introductory note but falls into common tropes in describing standardised descriptions of Eastern European diction, suggesting that the moral superiority of the poems comes straightforwardly from an experience of 'survival, death, war, futility'. Upon *Crow*'s publication, the most direct example of its connection to Eastern Europeans is an advertisement for the *Crow* cycle from September 1970, placed in the third issue of *MPT*. Given

[38] Parker, 'Hughes and the poets of Eastern Europe', p. 51.
[39] Ibid., p. 38.

the history of the magazine and its emphasis on Eastern European writing, this promotional strategy does not seem coincidental. The positioning of the advertisement alongside the poems of the Slovak writer Edward Koch may exemplify Hughes' desire to be read beyond the boundaries of the English tradition. Writing about the English reception of Popa, Marija Bergam reminds us that the introduction to Popa's poetry from 1969 represents the fascination of British poets with its 'fresh formal possibilities and the subject matter'.[40] In other words, this is a strange desire for a type of seriousness that adds a 'superior dimension' to Eastern European poetry. In hoping that *Crow* would be the type of poetry that 'might be invented after the Holocaust and demolition of all libraries', Hughes put himself in the paradoxical position of a survival poet.[41] In this sense, *Crow*'s poetics make an otherwise impossible encounter possible. In the interview with Bergin, Weissbort elaborated on this 'survivalist' mode:

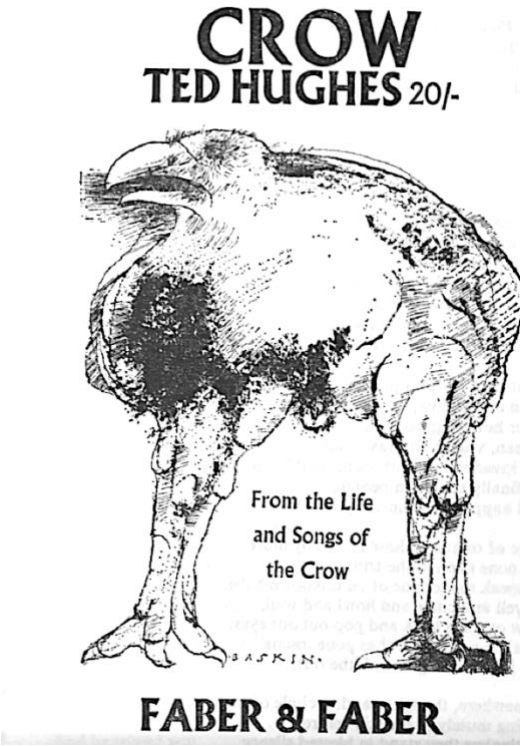


Fig. 3: The cover of the second trade edition of *Crow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972)

[40] Marija Bergam, 'Vasko Popa's Poetry in English: The Reception and Uses of Literary Translation', *Translation Studies*, 6.2 (2013), 232–48.
[41] Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes*, p. 27.

I want to suggest that the reader of the cycle can identify three simultaneous layers of Eastern European influence. The first is the variety of enthusiastic but often conflicting commentaries the poet made on the sequence in connection with the cultural context of Eastern Europe, most noticeably in the retrospective glossed commentary 'Crow on the Beach', and private letters to friends and editors, some of which I have already explored. Together with Hughes' literary criticism and editorial work for *MPT*, many of these established the 'nature-violent-the Holocaust-psychic-crisis' subplot of Hughes' writing, emphasising, if not mythologising, a merging of personal and historical trauma.[42] Such a method resembles the controversial convergence of personal loss and global tragedy in Plath's 'Daddy'. The second layer is the survivalist style of the cycle, manifested most explicitly in the 'super-simple' and 'super-ugly language' of *Crow*.[43] This deconstructive poetics—stripping words to the bare bone and seeing if what remains in the form of broken syntax, insistent *staccato*, and general cacophony can still designate anything – was fervently attacked by critics on *Crow*'s publication. The third layer is the broader problem of the projective usage of translatability and the choreographed porosity of textual boundaries as performed in a variety of inter-generic publications and re-publications of *Crow*. According to Bergin, much of *Crow*'s brokenness 'emulates a text which exists at a mid-way stage of transition before it has been improved and re-worked into a formally complete piece'.[44] She also suggests that *Crow* might be read as a translation for which there is no source text, a recurrent motif across Holocaust testimonial fiction, as Kertész has indicated. This concept of re-defining and re-contextualising the absent 'original' seems to me to be at the core of Hughes' method, where brokenness, incompleteness, and the 'textual fluidity' of the volume become part of what Hughes re-imagines as Eastern European poetics. None of these connections are, however, obvious upon first reading *Crow*. The former British poet laureate Andrew Motion is

[42] O'Brien, p. 35.
[43] Hughes in interview with Faas, p. 20.
[44] Tara Bergin, 'Translating the passion of Ravensbruck: Ted Hughes and Janosz Pilinszky', in *Translating Holocaust Literature*, ed. by Peter Arnds (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2016), pp. 23-32 (pp. 29-30).

one of several critics (along with Parker, Bargain, Wootten, O'Connor and Mathews) to have discussed Hughes' connection with Eastern European poetics, observing:

> You cannot understand where Ted Hughes's poem *Crow* is coming from, formally, unless you understand its deep roots in middle-European writing. Milosz was a part of that. Everyone said when *Crow* came out that it was new, but, of course, it wasn't. It is idiomatically and, in terms of its symbolic life, extremely influenced by middle-European poetry which has a different way of advertising its existence as symbolic writing or allegory.[45]

This brief comment draws our attention to the problem of originality and a certain distortion between what readers in 1970 might have perceived as novel and the reality of Hughes' borrowing, adaptations, and appropriations. The question of the value we ascribe to originality is, as Andrew Goldstone has shown in his suggestively entitled *Fictions of Autonomy* (2013), a complex matter, especially since the artist's aspiration to autonomy (by, for instance, refraining from politics, referentiality, or foregrounding the artist's personality, all of which we see in Hughes' commentaries) is indispensable to our understanding of modernism.[46] However, both Motion's comment and Goldstone's book are written at a time when our understanding of literature can no longer share the modernists' belief in the complete freshness of artistic invention (or, one may say with caution, our imagining of what modernists thought originality to be). If *Crow* is a story of creation after the apocalypse has happened, the extent to which Hughes' is – to allude to Pound's oft-quoted line – 're-making everything new' becomes not only problematic but also strikingly relevant. Still, the real question in confronting this passage from Motion is this: why would critics in the early 1970s find *Crow*'s idiom and symbolic life so novel in the first place? And what precisely might those 'deep roots in middle-European writing' be? And how was the search for re-birth Hughes discussed in 'Crow on the Beach' linked specifically to survivalist poetry?

[45] Nicholas Wroe, 'A century's witness', *The Guardian*, 10 Nov 2001 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/nov/10/poetry.artsandhumanities> [accessed 3 Jun 2019].
[46] See Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2013).

The main argument of Hughes' essay on *Crow* is that, unlike contemporary works, Trickster Tales are founded on a belief in a primal creativity capable of 'exploring towards new emergence and growth' and building 'a renewed world' out of what Hughes' calls 'the spirit of the sperm'. He describes this primal creative force as 'repetitive and indestructible' (*WP* 241), while many of *Crow*'s poems expose this animalistic need for survival. Oddly enough, Hughes uses identical adjectives to introduce the poetry of Popa, published in 1969 by Penguin in Pennington's translation. In his introduction, the poet positions the Yugoslavian writer among 'a generation of Mid-European poets' whose 'inner creative transcendence' is, according to Hughes, conditioned by suffering. And yet their works show 'the positive, creative response to a national experience of disaster' (*WP* 221), and though the poets share 'no hope of finality', they still 'continue to explore'. This description of the poetics of 'Mid-European' writers could serve well as a description of *Crow*'s poetics, particularly when Hughes defines the 'primitive pre-creation atmosphere' (*WP* 223) of Popa's poems by suggesting that it is 'as if [the author] were present where all the dynamism and formulae were ready and charged, but nothing created – or only a few fragments' (*WP* 223). It is worth quoting in greater length an excerpt in which Hughes both contextualises and confuses the early reception of Popa:

> They [Eastern European poets] are not the spoiled brats of civilization disappointed of impossible and unreal expectations and deprived of the revelations of necessity. In this they are prophets speaking somewhat against their times, though in an undertone, and not looking for listeners. They have managed to grow up to a view of the unaccommodated universe, but it has not made them cynical, they still like it and keep all their sympathies intact. They have got back to the simple animal courage of accepting the odds. In another way, their world reminds one of the world of modern physics. Only theirs is more useful to us, in that while it is the same gulf of unknowable laws and unknowable particles, the centre of gravity is not within some postulate deep in space, or leaking away down the drill-shaft of mathematics, but inside man's sense of himself, inside his body and his essential human subjectivity. They refuse to sell out their arms, legs, hair, ears, body and soul and all it has suffered with them, in order to escape with some fragmentary sense, some abstract badge of self-estrangement, into a popular membership safety. In their very poetic technique - the infinitely flexible, tentative, pragmatic freedom with which they handle their Explorations - we read a code of wide-openness to what is happening, within or without, a careful refusal to seal themselves off from what hurts and carries the essential information, a careful refusal to surrender themselves to any mechanical progression imposed on them by the tyranny of their own words or images, an endless scrupulous alertness on the frontiers of false and true. In effect, it is an intensely bracing moral vigilance. They accept in a sense what the prisoner must accept, who cannot pretend that any finger is at large. Like men come back from the dead

> they have an improved perception, an unerring sense of what really counts in being alive. (*WP* 222)

Reading such notes in 1969, Hughes' reader is left unsure about which works, which disaster, and which authors are under discussion. While the beginning of the essay specifically mentions Popa and his appearance in *MPT*, here Eastern European poets are grouped together. Moreover, the British poet sees their works as driven by the most literal, animalistic instincts of survival, while their poetry envisions resurrection raising the speaker-author from the dead and back to life. His words bring to mind Eliot's line from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* when the speaker (or one of them) declares: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead, Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'.[47]

One of the inspirations for *Crow*'s language was Hughes' co-translation of Pilinszky's poems, whose elegiac energy and idiomatic simplicity astounded Hughes with their 'air of simple, helpless accuracy' (*WP* 235), and the theme of re-imagining God as comfortless and absent. According to Frederick Turner, Hungarian poetry is especially interested in personifications which have the power to turn poem into ode, 'an address to its subject as to one who might speak back'.[48] The prominence of the genre can also be explained through the influence that Mihaly Babits's works had on Hungarian poetry's turn towards a metrical form which, as Turner puts it, 'compresses the poet's voice into a form that survives the text'.[49] The critic further explains that while Western authors forgot how meter 'enables print to speak and sing', the Hungarians re-discovered meter and used it to connect with poets from the past and, in more modernist fashion, reflect on the meta-textual possibilities of poetic form.

Similarly to the views he expressed regarding translated poetry, in the extreme simplification of language, Hughes sees a chance for a deeper connection with overcoming not just personal but collective trauma. Connecting the dots, in his review of *Crow* Alvarez announced, with obvious

[47] Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, p. 8.
[48] Frederick Turner, 'The Thou of Hungarian Poetry', in *Light within the Shade: Eight Hundred Years of Hungarian Poetry*, ed. by Ozsváth, Zsuzsanna, and Frederick Turner (Syracuse; New York; Syracuse UP, 2014), pp. 252-72 (p. 252).
[49] Ibid., p. 264.

exaggeration, that such a turn to post-1945 poetic idioms elevated Hughes to the select band of survivor-poets – perhaps because Hughes himself dramatised his position as an artist as being that of a survivor.[50] It is worth reading closely the comment in which Hughes reflects on the poetics of Pilinszky, whose works became a catalyst for writing *Crow*:

> 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 posture of crucifixion. His silence is the silence of that moment on the cross, after the cry. In all that he writes, we hear a question: what speech is adequate for this moment, when the iron nails remain fixed in the wounds, with an eternal iron fixity, and neither hands nor feet can move? The silence of artistic integrity 'after Auschwitz' is a real thing. The mass of the human evidence of the camps, and of similar situations since, has raised the price of 'truth' and 'reality' and 'understanding' beyond what common words seem able to pay. The European poets who have been formed by this circumstance are well known. They have only continued to write, when at all, with a seasoned despair, a minimal, much-examined hope, a special irony. […] [Pilinszky's] poems are nothing if not part of an appeal to God, but it is a God who seems not to exist. (*WP* 232)

There could be no better introduction to the opening *Crow* poems in which the end-of-the-word-condition becomes a paradoxical departure-point than this comment. The motif is also characteristic of some of Pilinszky's poems. In the opening lines of his 'Revelations VIII.7.' we read, 'and God sees the burning heaven | and against it birds flying' while the poem ends with the exclamation: '[…] God sees there is no way | or road or hope to break from this vision!'[51] The imaginary Creator in Pilinszky's poetic world is one who makes the author lament in 'Under the Winter Sky': '[s]uffering cannot redeem me. | No god will protect me.' The drama of this condition in which God 'seems not to exist' (*WP* 232) is stressed by deliberately de-capitalising the word 'God' and using full stops at the end of each stanza to highlight the conceptual finality of the statement. The poem ends with the lines, '[t]he biblical monsters | start slowly towards me.'[52] Hughes saw in Pilinszky's poem 'the epiphany of […] bleak and pitiless God', the God whom Hughes describes as '[a] God of absences' (*WP* 233). The Hungarian writer often exhibits a longing for human connection set against the horror of history by contrasting the cyclicality of

[50] Alvarez, 'Black Bird', *Observer*, 11 October 1970, p. 33.
[51] Pilinszky, *Selected Poems*, p. 37.
[52] Ibid., p. 19.

nature's rebirth with the sudden, unexpected, and traumatic imaginary. Consider the excerpt from the poem 'By the Time You Come' [*Mire megjössz*]:

> Egyedül vagyok, mire megjössz,
> az egyetlen élő leszek,
> csak tollpihék az üres ólban,
> csak csillagok az ég helyett.
>
> A temetetlen árvaságban,
> mint téli szeméttelepen,
> a hulladék közt kapirgálva
> szemelgetem az életem.[53]
>
> I am alone. And by the time you come
> I shall be the only one still alive.
> Just feathers in an empty roost.
> Stars instead of a sky.
>
> In my orphanage, unburied,
> As on a wintry dump
> Picking among the rubbish
> I kept finding scraps of my life.[54]

The lines evoke the image of Orphic longing as the speaker awaits the arrival of the loved one, promising that he will be 'the only one still alive', re-constructing his life from scraps found among the rubbish. In a letter from February 1974, Hughes discusses Pilinszky's poems with his friend and co-translator Csokits. 'I feel I've somehow made "Frankfurt 1945" too smooth' writes Hughes, specifying that, 'the types that come over best are the bleak simple ones – like "Under the Winter Sky"' (*L* 346). The excerpt from the poem bears a resemblance to the first lines from Hughes' 'Crow's Account of the Battle' when '[…] the survivors stayed | And the earth and the sky stayed' (*CP* 223). It is also similar to stanzas from 'Crow Tries the Media'; the poem added to the 1972 edition of *Crow* in which we read that Crow 'wanted to sing about her' but 'this tank had been parked on his voice'. The ending of the latter poem captures the disappearance of 'she' – a supposed addressee of the poem as we read:

> He touched the smiling corner of her mouth

[53] Pilinszky János, 'Osszegyűjtött Cersei' <http://mek.niif.hu/01000/01016/01016.htm> [accessed 5 August 2022].
[54] Pilinszky, p. 28.

> His voice reverberated like a slow millstone of London
> Raising a filthy haze,
> her shape dimmed. (*CP* 232)

Following these lines, we may say that Hughes' ongoing interest in Eastern European poetry can also be seen beyond the context of translation as a form of orphic lament and sublimation of loss, and an attempt to re-connect with the themes that fascinated Plath in the last year of her life. Seeing Hughes' *Crow* as the heir to Plath's 'Daddy' subplot opens up provocative and broader, conceptual questions. Can emotional access to tragedy ever be realized, if it is not translated into the language of something that is intimate enough to hurt because we do care about it, because we do feel something? Hughes' retrospective commentary from 1998 reflects on the emotional torments that both prompted and repressed *Crow*:

> Two things kept me stuck on the autobiographical level. One – a moral reluctance to deal with the episode directly, as material for an artistic work. As I might – or as one might – and a close metaphor in some dramatic action & make a play of it or bury the main features of it in the plot of a novel. [...] That seemed to me reprehensible, not truly poetry, I believed, if the experience was to be dealt with creativity, it would have to emerge obliquely, through a symbol, inadvertently [...] And in fact with me, in retrospect, I can see that I began to emerge in exactly this fashion in *Crow* – which I started in 1965, just after coming from Ireland, where I found a way out of a 3 year impasse, with Skylarks. But I was still too close to the experience, maybe, to deal with it quickly enough. (*L* 718-19)

Beyond Hughes' views on how personal experience should only make its way into poetry 'obliquely, through a symbol', the way in which Hughes both speaks about the trauma and yet avoids naming it in this passage is notable. Plath's suicide is referred to as either 'the episode' or 'the experience', perhaps reflecting the author's words proclaimed on his inability to deal directly with the death of his wife. Even if Hughes seems to speak frankly, alluding to the death of Plath, the subtext of the debatable separation of 'the man who suffers and mind that creates' is evident. Elsewhere, in an interview for *The Paris Review*, Hughes gives his view on confessional poetry, saying how in poetry 'living as a public persona […] is maybe even more crippling. Once you've contracted to write only the truth about yourself […] then you can too easily limit yourself to what you imagine are the truths of the ego that claims your conscious biography' (*TPR* 282).

In *Death in Life: The Survivors of Hiroshima*, Robert Lifton points out that in the 1960s, end-of-the-world imagery was frequent, reflecting 'a tendency to assert mastery over death (and assuage guilt) by repeating the process of dying in imaginative form so that its outcome is a miraculous survival'.[55] In British literature, this condition was explored even before *Crow*. For instance, Hill's first collection *For the Unfallen* (1959) opens with the poem 'Genesis', divided into six parts re-making every day of God's creation of the world. The precondition for this creative rebirth after both literal and metaphorical trauma is a deconstruction of language, as we see *Crow* struggle for articulation in poems like 'Crow and Mama', 'Crow Communes', 'Crow's Theology', 'Crow Tries the Media', or more straightforwardly in 'Crow Goes Hunting'. In Hughes' reading of Pilinszky, the moment 'closest to extinction turns out to be *the* creative moment' while the exploration of, in Pilinszky's words, 'some sort of lack of language, a sort of linguistic poverty' transforms the poet, bringing hope for creative rebirth' (*WP* 235). Like Pilinszky's 'By the Time You Come', each of *Crow*'s versions begins with a vision of the speaker finding themselves in a post-apocalyptic world. The 1970 limited edition of the *Four Crow Poems* started with the poem 'That Moment', depicting the broken, abandoned world to which Crow arrives too late.

> 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. (*CP* 209)

In this ethological vision, the world is born not from light but from darkness with a prevailing drama of abandonment, emptiness and quasi-cannibalistic hunger. This poem would not be included in the trade edition of *Crow* published the same year. Instead, his 1970 edition of *Crow* begins with the scene of creation but, unlike Genesis, the world is born from blackness and not from light. Against the despair of a universe in which 'Blackness was the without eye | Black the

[55] See Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

within tongue | Black was the heart | Black the liver, black the lungs' (*CP* 217), Crow is born. The poem ends:

> Where sun and moon alternate their weathers
>
> To hatch a crow, a black rainbow
> Bent in emptiness
> Over emptiness
>
> But flying (*CP* 217)

The ending, where despite 'emptiness over emptiness' Crow is still flying, suggests a more hopeful interpretation. Crow might be seen as a creative spirit attending the catastrophe of civilisation which turns him into a survivor morally obliged to re-tell his story. Though counterintuitive, Hughes explains his idea again with concepts from trickster literature, where 'the optimism and creative joy are fundamental' while 'the attempts to live and to enlarge and intensify life, however, mismanaged, fill up at every point with self-sufficient meaning' (*WP* 239). In both opening poems, Hughes fulfils a quasi-demiurgic desire for 'newness' but *à rebours*; acknowledging the impossibility of a blank page, not-so-new-beginnings, and paralyptically mocking the ontological idea of creation *ex nihilo*, which undermines the alleged 'self-sufficiency' of *Crow*'s meaning. The harsh scenery of the two opening poems I have briefly looked at – 'That Moment' and 'Two Legends' – contrasts with Hughes' unpublished poem 'Crowquill' from late 1969. The poem begins in a more delicate tone than most of the *Crow* pieces. The opening lines introduce the motif of the bird's feathers falling: 'Where there is nothing | The crow's feather falls spinning' (*CP* 193). The description of nature striving for rebirth intertwines with the returning lines: 'still the feathers fall', 'still the crowfeather goes on falling', 'and that feather goes on falling', or 'the feather is falling and falling'. The little-known poem ends:

> The feather is falling and falling
>
> And people clasp each other close
> With their frog like hands, inside houses

> And look out of the windows at
>
> The emptiness through which the feather falls
>
> Like a wand
>
> That has swallowed its wizard. (*CP* 199)

The spinning of Crow's feathers is one of the rare gentle motifs in *Crow* and, perhaps not coincidentally, 'Crowquill' is excluded from the trade edition. As the feather falls, our perspective shifts and the scene becomes mediated; people inside the house are intimate witnesses of the ephemeral moment. Their gaze follows the dance of the feather against abstracted emptiness, bringing to mind an image of snow falling against the darkness. Whilst the intriguing ending corresponds with the overall mythopoetic of *Crow*, the vision of the wand swallowing the creator is offered to the reader with surprising delicacy. Quite unlike what we see in 'Crowquill', the poems of Pilinszky resonated with Hughes more deeply when presented in rough, word-for-word crib form. In his introductory essay on the Hungarian poet, Hughes writes:

> János Csokits's word-for-words version, in all its rawness and bracketed shades of meaning, conveyed a vivid sense of this atmosphere and power. In the end I let it rest as printed here, with only the slightest verbal adjustments. [...] These translations, then, in the sense of being word for word are close to the originals, and will have served their purpose if they serve as pointers, to help a reader re-imagine what those originals must be. (*ST* 236)

Hughes' palpable emphasis is placed not on the 'final version' but on the translation that is literal, unfinished, and syntactically broken. We may wonder: if the work of Csokits captures what Hughes terms the 'broken spirit' of the original, why then is it Hughes who is known as the translator of Pilinszky's poems? How slight are the slight verbal adjustments he made? And, finally, why would the translation complicate rather than inform what the 'originals must be'?

Weissbort observed that some of Hughes' translations of Pilinszky; his omission of rhymes in poems like 'On the Wall of a KZ-Lager'; and tendency to choose rougher and simpler vocabulary result in a distortion of the original. 'The impact of some of these poems van be very painful,' writes Weissbort, specifying that 'they [the poems] sound harsher and Pilinszky's view on the

world appears grimmer than in Hungarian'.[56] For Hughes, the translation of Pilinszky becomes a re-invention of the original, in which the visibility of the translator and his decisions make the reader re-imagine what the original (ironically 'lost' in translation) must have been. It is worth recalling the belief that Eastern European poetry is more 'alive and real', reflected in Hughes' fascination with literal and rough translation. In the editorial for the third issue of *MPT* we read that 'a man who has something really serious to say' manages to say it far more convincingly and effectively in 'fumbled and broken' language (*MPT* 3). Though the tone of this criticism is barely comprehensible now, at the time it was perhaps seen as expressing empathy and connection with Eastern European poets. In commenting on this fragment, we may refer back to Chapter Two and the introduction to *MPT*'s anthology *Centres of Cataclysm*. Dugdale noted how we can also see Hughes' method of working as capturing 'fumbled and broken' language in a 'desire to seek out something authentic and strange for his own purpose as a poet' (*CC* 21-22). When I asked Dugdale to elaborate on her view on Hughes' attraction to brokenness, seriousness, and literariness, she replied:

> As a practising translator and someone who speaks several European languages, I find Hughes's ideas fascinating but limited as an approach to translation in general. They are the words of a monolingual poet, who nonetheless constantly sought to break out of his linguistic sphere, and they may reflect a sort of rebellion against inwardness and parochialism in British literary and poetic circles in the 1950s. After all, Hughes, in identifying the 'dumbness' and 'brokenness' of the literal as useful to him, was simply looking for new ways to channel his own poetics and experiences. We, all of us who write, read in a predatory way, using the texts we read to inform our own writing, and Hughes was doing the same thing – feeding his own need. But professional translators, crucially, do not loot a text for its raw materials, they attempt to recreate the architecture in another place with those materials.[57]

This comment on how we all read in 'a predatory way' is important not just to better understand the motives behind Hughes' reading but to acknowledge the impossibility of our own objective reading and perhaps reflect on our motivations and choices of books with which we are more likely to identify. Hughes used the experience of co-translating from Hungarian as the fuel for inventing the anti-language of *Crow*.

[56] Weissbort, *Translating Poetry: The Double Labyrinth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 11.
[57] Private correspondence.

On the topic of borrowings and re-makings, another little-known connection between *Crow* and Holocaust testimonial fiction is worth mentioning. Though it remains uncertain if Hughes read Levi's work, there is a resemblance between Hughes' *Crow* and Levi's 'Song of the Crow I' [*II canto del* corvo] written in January 1946 and 'Song of the Crow II' [*II canto del corvo II*] from August 1953. The second poem by Levi comes with an authorial footnote, in which Levi refers his readers to Eliot's words from 'The Hollow Men': 'this is the way the worlds end | Not with a bang but a whimper'; it is hard to believe that Hughes was not aware of the connection.[58] The first translation of Levi was the English version of *If This Is a Man* by the British historian Stuart Woolf, published in 1959 by Orion Press. Whilst Hughes' letters from the mid-1960s do not mention Levi, given his interest in Holocaust testimonial fiction he must nevertheless have encountered the Jewish-Italian author in translation. He does reference Levi briefly in a 1995 interview, though opts to place him in the context of a traditional lyrical form which, in reality, poorly describes Levi's modernist poetics (*TPR* 304).In the context of Hughes' likely unacknowledged borrowing, his statements about revision as appropriation and as a strategy of hiding the original impulses for writing behind subsequent versions of the poems become more problematic. In 1946, Levi opens his first crow poem with the line 'I've come from very far away | To bring bad news' [*Sono venuto di molto lontano* | *Per portare mala novella*] while Hughes repeats a similar motif of the bird arriving to learn 'bad news' – in this case, that the creation has gone wrong – in his own *Crow* poems over two decades later.[59] *Crow* also references the idea of the unheard prayer from Levi's 'Shema' poem, which eventually became an epigraph to his *If This is a Man*. Written during the Nuremberg trials, the title of Levi's poem is the Hebrew word for 'hear'. It is, as Levi's footnote informs us, 'the first word of the basic prayer of Judaism, which affirms the unity of God.' In Hughes' sequence, however, there is no God, no language, and no prayer to begin with. Analysing Hughes' cycle allows us to look at survivalist writing as

[58] Levi, *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, ed. by Toni Morrison, Ann Goldstein, Ernesto Ferrero, S. J Woolf, Jenny McPhee, and others (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), p. 1903.
[59] Ibid., p. 1886.

a metaphor for mediating acts that, often transgressively, make up Holocaust literary testimony and its attempts to emotionally re-imagine the moments when, to follow Levi's preface to *If This is the Man*, our language lacks words.

If the juxtaposition of silence and speech organizes much of the *Crow* cycle, this motif of the speaker attempting to sing about '[h]ow everything had nothing more to lose' (*CP* 237) alludes to the larger problem of silence in post-war poetry. Hughes and Pilinszky were not the only poets in the early and mid-1960s to explore the tension between searching for voice and falling into silence. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to list works and authors who joined this debate from 1945 onwards, but one attempt to invent an anti-poetry is particularly apparent in the deconstructive yet playfully ironical works of Różewicz, whom Hughes read in 1967. There are several interesting similarities between Pilinszky's search for a lack of language and a sort of linguistic poverty and Różewicz's experiments with anti-poetry, which he extended to his self-image as a poet who distrusted his own ability to write or to accept the text in its final, fixed form. The method and motif of poetic revision is explored by the poet with an intensity beyond even Hughes' most fervent re-makings and editorial alterations.[60] In one poem, Różewicz dramatises the need for re-naming by alluding to the opening of Dante's *Inferno* yet setting the scene in the scenery: 'after the end of the world | after death' where the speaker confesses: 'I found myself in the midst of life | creating myself | building life | people animals landscapes | this is table I said | this is a table' [*znalazłem się w środku życia | stwarzałem siebie |budowałem życie | ludzi zwierzęta krajobrazy | to jest stół mówiłem | to jest stół*].[61] Elsewhere, in his prose, he writes how 'sometime [he] think[s] that man's suffering is becoming darker, heavier, that it is hopeless and as heavy as the nothingness is'. This realization makes the poet conclude that the burden of history is unspeakable so that the 'poet [must] melt into silence'.[62] Statements like these were not

[60] I am writing about Różewicz's poetics of revision in more detail in the short article for *The Modernist Review* <https://modernistreviewcouk.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/insufficiency-of-lyric-tadeusz-rozewiczs-revision/#_ftnref4> [accessed 5 Aug 2022].
[61] Tadeusz Różewicz, *Poezje Wybrane: Selected Poems*, trans. by Adam Czerniawski, Richard Sokoloski, Barbara Bogoczek, and Tony Howard (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008), pp. 50-1.
[62] Różewicz, *Proza*. *Utwory Zebrane* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2003), p. 159 [my translation].

uncommon and would often have a silencing effect on the reader, disabling any critical or questioning reception of works touching on the topic of trauma. The moral authority of poems by Eastern European authors has led to simplifying conceptions of their poetry as a transparent medium in which the notion of authenticity dominates discourse, leaving many of its other stylistic or structural features out of the picture. In his essay 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', Hill points out the paradox of this moral dilemma by scrutinizing an excerpt from Miłosz's *The Captive Mind* [*Zniewolony Umysł*] in which the Polish poet instructs us:

> […] dzieło ludzkiej myśli powinno wytrzymać próbę brutalnej, nagiej rzeczywistości. Jeżeli nie zdoła wytrzymać, nie jest nic warte. Prawdopodobnie to tylko jest naprawdę coś warte, co zdolne jest istnieć dla człowieka w chwili, kiedy jest zagrożony natychmiastową śmiercią.[63]

> […] The work of human thought should withstand the test of brutal, naked reality. If it cannot, it is worthless. Probably only those things are worth while which can preserve in the eyes of a man threatened with instant death.[64]

In his article tracing the motif of silence as resistance in the English language, Hill picks up on this passage, providing a critical reading. He shows how, by referring to the general redemption of imagination Miłosz 'gestures toward the inclusive', on the one hand, and on the other how he, in fact, does exactly the opposite of what he declares. 'What the quoted passage actually communicates is something different,' writes Hill, adding that '[it is] the elitism of the man-of-the-moment. It excludes from aesthetic regeneration those works unbaptized by an arbitrary extreme experience of 'brutal, naked reality'.[65] In a way, Hughes' *Crow* is an indirect contribution to the debate against this type of 'elitism of suffering', showing that the exploration of poetic idioms unfamiliar to his native tradition can only expand its poetic repertoire. In this way, in the early 1970s, *Crow*'s dark counter-theology was received with a whole range of reactions, from disgust and accusations of violence, misogyny, and pointless demonic nihilism, to claims that

[63] Miłosz, *Zniewolony Umysł* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), p. 62.
[64] Miłosz, *The Captive Mind,* trans. by Jane Zielonko (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 41.
[65] Geoffrey Hill, 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', *Literary Imagination*, 1.2 (1999), 240–55 (p. 251).

Crow was a work of genius, 'a seminal book which will change the direction of English poetry, a new *Waste Land* for the 1970s'.[66]

According to Heaney in a 1981 interview, Hughes' poetry embodied a 'great cry and call and bawl that English language and English poetry is longer and deeper and rougher' than the mannerly, tamed, and self-censored works of the poets from the 1950s.[67] This is precisely what Hughes aimed for, transgressing the gentility principle by 'turning Eastwards' to poets who felt the need to experiment with 'impoverished' language as a way of voicing the trauma of witnessing, for which no pre-existing poetic forms would suffice. The reality of *Crow*'s appearance and transformations lie in Hughes' inability to write and his personal crisis that led him to explore, if not identify with, a poetry of 'survival' and to compose a dark mythology that extrapolates personal turbulences onto the larger drama of post-war Europe – one which, as Wootten convincingly shows in his book *Alvarez Generation*, 'pointedly seeks to outstrip the imagery of Plath'.[68] Crow is a survivor who, against all odds and the initial impossibility of speech, fights against an absent God and meta-poetically translates and re-imagines what the song of creation 'after the Holocaust and demolition of all libraries' could be.

Having looked at the cycle in the context of its performed incompleteness, the authorial choreographing of a 'correct' interpretation of Crow's mythopoesis, and direct links with poets whom Hughes read from around the mid-1960s, we may say that the trajectory of *Crow*'s flight begins at the abstracted 'burning centre of cataclysm' and moves towards England in the mid-1960s. The fervent revisions Hughes performed on his saga and the purposeful deconstruction of the poems to their bare bones would not have been possible without the inverse logic of some underlying belief in unity, albeit a hidden one. Hughes' engagement with revisions is as vital to the disintegrated poetics of *Crow* as it is to his pursuit of an abstracted wholeness via the endless

[66] Bate, p. 293
[67] John Haffenden, ed., *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 73-4.
[68] Wootten, p. 161.

exercise of re-making and re-establishing order. A similar logic governs his commentaries, glosses, and essays about Eastern European authors. The story of *Crow* is the story of the type of artistic and theoretical projection discussed in my first chapter, in which, from the safe position of the outsider, the author decides to ask himself what it would feel like to write poetry from 'a burning centre of cataclysm' (*MPT* 1).

Conclusions: Beyond and Within

The British poets and critics of the mid-1960s believed in the resuscitative quality of Eastern European poetry. On many occasions, they would express their admiration for the poetry coming from the 'centre of cataclysm' (*MPT* 1) for its technical simplicity, formal discipline, and astute reflection on the condition of existence against all odds. The many commentaries that proposed Eastern European poetry would 'stimulate the poetry-making in this country' could easily form an anthology all by themselves. The general picture of Eastern Europe that emerged from those commentaries is one of the capital-A Artist who, as Davie put it in his 1962 debate with Alvarez, 'speak[s] with all the less embarrassment, all the more confidence about the creativity of the human imagination, about its indestructibility, its inexhaustibility'.[1] Poets and critics hoped that the lyrics coming from the former Soviet bloc would become a catalyst for the renewal of the British poetic idiom. In this sense, translation was not just the literal activity of carrying meaning from one language to another, but a larger phenomenon both embedded in and responding to the world beyond the written page.

Through initiatives such as *MPT*, broadcasts on Eastern Europe, the establishment of new publishing houses and international poetry festivals, as well as commissioning translations and supporting poets and writers they encountered, the group of individuals centred around Alvarez, Hughes and Weissbort challenged fellow poets and critics to look beyond their own cultural circles. This pioneering effort, as Weissbort called it, also points out a change of emphasis from the impact of single-authored books to a more nebulous model of resonance. In this new paradigm, literary history is located in the deed; it seeks to take its strength from collaboration and makes an effort to reach out to a new readership. It accords with Jonathan Galassi's diagnosis of how poetry from Eastern Europe enabled Western authors to 'exit from the labyrinth of the self and

[1] Alvarez and Davie. 'A Discussion', p. 25.

begin to grapple again with the larger problems of being in the world'.[2] Indeed, reading texts is always relational; it calls for dependency, involvement, and interaction often telling us more about who is reading than what is being read. In the introduction to the *Poetry of Survival* anthology, Weissbort touches on a problem similar to that discussed by Holub in his commentary about poetry and dogs. Discussing the impact of Eastern European poetry, Weissbort summarises:

> […] these effects are themselves a matter of speculation: there is rarely a direct observable causal relationship. What seems to be happening internationally may be a measure of the success of writers such as Popa, Różewicz, Holub, Pilinszky, Hebert and Amichai, or it may not. We cannot tell. But whatever the case, the timeliness, as I put it, but also the timelessness of their message and their art is undiminished. (*PS* 22)

If it had been written two decades earlier, Weissbort's comment would have ended with an enthusiastic endorsement, projective fantasies, and vague claims about the unabashed sincerity and moral superiority of Eastern Europeans. However, temporal distance creates room for fresh attitudes: in this case, an acknowledgment that the effect Eastern European poetry may or may not have had on its audience is itself a matter of speculation based on narratives we construct or hopes we share. The evolution of this reception from forcefully moralistic editorials to retrospective commentary finally gave Weissbort's readers a space to breathe, reflect, and appreciate the poets in translation for their poetry and not just for the circumstances in which they were translated.

This dissertation has explored the role (often abstract and symbolic) Eastern Europe played, or was hoped to play, in the formation of the new poetic and critical idiom in the 1960s in Britain, as well as the shift in mood and ambition. It has looked at the matters of transfer, resonance, and identification and asked what precisely allowed all this 'going beyond …' to happen. I argued that from their earliest commentaries, Alvarez and others used Eastern European poets as a counterbalance to what he would describe in 1962 as 'negative feedbacks' in contemporary Anglophone poetry, ascribing them a role they never asked for. The intensity of enthusiasm amongst Anglophone critics of the 1960s was unprecedented for many reasons, but most relevant

[2] Quoted in Cavanagh, p. 243.

to the 'translation boom' of the 1960s was that the poetry from Eastern Europe represented a kind of fantasy object and so has the structure of their desire. Much commentary on Eastern European poetry in the 1960s mirrored larger tendencies within Anglophone criticism, particularly its methods for establishing the value of foreign poetry on the English literary ground, in which aesthetic value intertwines with what Charles Taylor calls 'social imagination', the type of pre-existing affective and background knowledge incorporating conceptions, fantasies and images shared across communities.[3] This seems awkwardly to locate the influence of Eastern European poetry on British writers somewhere between a culturally appropriative, self-serving use of a foreign tradition and a genuine identification and empathy that allowed British poets to imaginatively engage in the drama of post-war Europe. But to oppose these two positions is a gesture itself indicative, perhaps, of a Cold War mentality; what this dissertation instead has shown is that it is when these interpretations clash, contradict, and countermand one another that the history is at its most compelling. Reckoning with this underappreciated part of literary history is not just to come to a refined understanding of the role of Eastern Europe, the translation boom, or the reiteration of the modernist idiom in the 1960s. Rather, it prompts us to re-evaluate models of literary resonance and 'go beyond …' the binary opposition of appropriation and appreciation. It encourages us to speak openly about cultural transfer, not as threatening autonomy and originality, but as enriching both through connectedness, flux, exchange, and various types of emotional and aesthetic identification.

Breaking, to some extent, with critical traditions established by the New Criticism, the poets involved in the cultural transfer believed in change, action, deed and, at times, a vision of the poet as saviour and sense-maker. Moreover, this imagined poet of the 1960s was also a survivor, and by the very logic of witnessing soon faced dilemmas related to the impossibility of possessing full knowledge. This paradigm shift and hope to go 'beyond the gentility principle', as provoked by Alvarez's take on Eastern Europe, re-invigorated the literary scene. The decade saw rapid

[3] See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

change in the publishing market, the establishment of literary festivals and a growing expectation for the poet to be a performer of their own work, a return of interest in high modernism (most notably work on Eliot and Pound), and animated debate about idiom, style, and historical consciousness. The world beyond the written page has changed immensely since then. The pile of letters received by the editors of the *London Review of Books* in 1992 after publishing Davie's 'polemical' – to put it lightly – review of Weissbort's *The Poetry of Survival* anthology could not be a better example. The tone Davie adopted in his review is spiteful and bitter. It explicitly accused Alvarez, Weissbort, and Hughes of exploiting the Eastern European context for the sake of careerist ambition. It is difficult to explain the extremity of his position, although it might be attributed, at least in part, to old tensions between him and Alvarez.

The passion with which those critics spoke about Eastern Europe in the 1960s is now a part of literary history; a more fruitful approach is to comment upon, reconstruct, and come to understand more or less empathetically what allowed this shift to happen. It is obvious that the first thing I would now ask, if someone would refer to 'Eastern European poetry' or 'Eastern European poetics', would be to question: 'but what poetry and what poetics would that be?' When I asked Sasha Dugdale about the problematic vision that Hughes promoted with his 'literal' co-translations (and I should add that in asking this question I was guilty of suggesting my own interpretation of what I consider to be 'problematic' in the first place) she wisely replied that we all, no doubt, read in a predatory way, but the choices we make as readers cannot be judged as any more or less valid. This brings to mind Eliot's words: 'you cannot effectively "borrow" an image unless you borrow also, or have spontaneously, something like the feeling which prompted the original image'.[4] Looking at the early reception of Eastern Europe, the pioneering initiative of *MPT* magazine that facilitated many future collaborations, the poetry of proxy-witnessing in Plath, and poetry 'after the Holocaust and demolition of all libraries' in Hughes' *Crow* cycle, I argued that by translating Eastern Europe, British critics hoped to 'translate', comprehend, and

[4] Eliot, 'The Bible as Scripture and as Literature', in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 4, English Lion, 1930-1933*, ed. by Ronald Schuchard, and Jason Harding (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 701.

emotionally identify with the extreme experiences that would otherwise remain unrepresented, if not 'unfelt', in post-war British poetry. But in this little-known part of literary history 'going beyond' was located as much outside the British poetic scene of the 1960s as it was within. Poetry from what the Anglophone critics imagine to be the burning centre of cataclysm played an essential yet far from obvious part in the literary scene of the mid-1960s Britain; as in Woolf's last novel, it was a role of being at once present in the scene yet also acting as a mirror turned towards the audience, and it allowed the moment of shock and paralysis to galvanise the new movement.

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