which are themselves steeped in the poet's own reading, reviews, and correspondence. These interpretative nuances and interconnecting ideas are one of the study's great strengths, and Troupes's deep familiarity with his subject matter is wholly evident. There is a great deal to pique the interest of Hughes readers in this judiciously argued and elegantly written work, which makes a substantial and important contribution to Hughes scholarship on a subject that should be, as Troupes ably demonstrates, anything but closed.

Hughes is again the subject in Patrick Jackson's 'The Narrative of Grief in Ted Hughes's *Crow*' (*JML* 42:iii[2019] 74–91), which arrives independently at certain conclusions suggested by Troupes's monograph. Jackson's engaging essay turns back to the poet's most masterful and controversial of volumes, reading the 1970 publication of *Crow* in light of Hughes's late admission to Keith Sagar that the poems were 'to a large degree shaped by the deaths of the women in his life in the 1960s' (p. 75). The essay, which relies partly on archival material, also considers an unpublished narrative outline Hughes drew up in 1967 while composing his *Crow* sequence. With additional reference to Hughes's letters, Jackson shows that the poet had planned an upward, reconciliatory movement in the final third of the sequence, until the deaths of Assia and Shura Weevil led him to stop short. Through these two 'missing contexts'—Hughes's underlying narrative frame and the grief-stricken process of composition—the essay reads the blackly comic *Crow* poems as 'a *Bildung*, a story of formation and maturation', in which Crow develops a conscience and learns certain lessons as the narrative unfolds, so that 'any reading of the poems that pronounces them nihilistic' cannot be fully endorsed (p. 79).

In a refreshing departure from the usual fare, Greg Thomas's *Border Blurs: Concrete Poetry in England and Scotland* provides a fascinating and timely re-evaluation of a modern poetic practice that has typically been received, in Britain at least, with a measure of critical indifference. The originality of the mid-century concrete poetry movement is easy enough to impugn—one needn't look hard to find much earlier precedents in the works of George Herbert, Apollinaire, or Lewis Carroll, to name a few. But the aims and contexts of concrete poetry as defined in *Border Blurs* are far removed from these visual verse-forms and enter new stylistic territory. Rising from the heady cultural foment of the post-war period, concrete poetry developed first in South America under the influence of mid-century modernist and avant-garde movements across a range of art forms. By the late 1960s, at the height of its cultural prominence in England and Scotland, concrete poetry had cemented a place in the artistic and political counterculture. Greg Thomas's study focuses on four poets, two Scottish (Ian Hamilton Finlay, Edwin Morgan) and two English (Bob Cobbing, Dom Sylvester Houédard), who positioned themselves at the forefront of the practice in Britain. At the outset, Thomas usefully distinguishes between two primary strands in concrete poetry: the first, typical of Finlay, combines a 'minimalism of linguistic and visual expression' to streamline the functionality of language; the second, exemplified by Cobbing, was designed to undermine semantic sense while playing up the possibilities for performance and 'connection[s] to a range of contemporary intermedia art-forms', particularly music and architecture (pp. 7, 10). This first 'classical' style is set against the iconoclastic second that developed later and brought with it a fresh set of political and aesthetic connotations that divided its

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followers. *Borders Blurs* is well stocked with photographic reproductions and archival titbits, which help illustrate the sheer range and developments in style that typified the movement. The 'borders' of the book's title refer to more than the contested boundaries of the poem, as Thomas traces the national (and nationalist) vectors that made the production of concrete poetry, in Scotland especially, 'a talisman for assertions of an independent national tradition of avant-garde literature and art' (p. 5). But as the study examines the role of concrete poetry in prevailing debates about national literary cultures, it also keeps in mind a bigger picture, framing the practice within a set of international coordinates and affinities to which the poets themselves were responding, favourably or otherwise. After Thomas locates his subject within a mesh of global influences, the remainder of the book offers a chronological survey of each poet's engagement with concrete forms, in which the scale of experimentation is gradually ramped up. Finlay, 'the first publisher of concrete poetry and the first published concrete poet in England or Scotland' in 1963, would stridently dissociate himself from the movement only five years later (p. 65). Edwin Morgan's self-styled practice of 'off-concrete' verse pokes fun at the style, but also acts as a polemical vehicle for the poet's engagement with the question of Scottish cultural identity. Dom Sylvester Houédard used the letters and diacritics from a typewriter to construct geometrical forms in his notorious 'typestracts', and left behind a concrete oeuvre that is closer in many ways to visual art than literature. Finally, Bob Cobbing's concrete works sought, like Houédard's, to transcend language and 'often radically reduced the role of semantic sense' (p. 204), though unlike his contemporaries he fully embraced the medium's potential for performance.

From Thomas's study of the mid-century avant-garde, we turn now to the poetry of Donald Davie, subject of William Davies's 'Donald Davie and Englishness' (*RES* 70[2019] 332–53). This article considers the Movement poet's search for a new sense of 'Englishness' in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the nation was increasingly uncertain of itself and its reduced role on the global stage. Against poets such as Larkin harking back forlornly to an 'England gone', the essay looks to separate Davie from the reactionary conceptions of national identity typically attributed to the Movement. Turning first to Davie's critical engagements with Larkin, T.S. Eliot, and W.H. Auden, Davies then considers Davie's poetic representations of England and its regions as 'an intersection of geographical, historical and imagined spaces' (p. 334). Detailed examination of Davie's poetry and critical prose is elegantly sustained throughout, and Davies provides a highly sensitive and attentive reading of the nuances of the poet's positions across his career. In the end we are shown a poet who, despite his ambivalence about the 'moral legacy of imperial expansion', nevertheless 'resists native entrenchment and exclusionary patriotism' and asserts instead a variety of Englands, 'emphatically multiple in nature' (pp. 352, 353).

National identity of a different kind is at stake in Christine Regan's essay, 'A Republican Poet in the White Queen's Africa: Reading Harrison's "The Railroad Heroides"' (*ES* 100:i[2019] 63–74), which follows *The Rimbaud of Leeds* [2016] as Regan's latest contribution to a growing series of well-researched explorations into Tony Harrison's work. This piece unpacks the strong republican, anti-colonial critique in 'The Railroad Heroides', the second poem in 'The White Queen' sequence from Harrison's *The Loiners* [1970]. The fictional author of these

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