

Margaret Dickie: On "Black Rook in Rainy Weather"

The rook in Plath's poem, arranging and rearranging its feathers, seems like the fastidious spinster in comparison with Hughes's hawk. It is an object set out on the landscape for no particular purpose, because Plath's real desire is "some backtalk/ From the mute sky." Neither rook nor sky speaks, but the walker is very wordy, full of parenthetical phrases ("Although, I admit, I desire," "At any rate, I now walk"), concerned not with the actual landscape but with her own thoughts. She finally reattaches these thoughts to the landscape by saying,

I only know that a rook

Ordering its black feathers can so shine

As to seize my senses, haul

My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear

Of total neutrality.

The rook, then, is just a ploy, a common bird which serves only as the focus of a vision. No master-fulcrum of violence in this landscape will ever compare to "that rare, random descent" of radiance that hallows "an interval / Otherwise inconsequent."

[. . . .]

[Yet] "Miracles occur," she suggests hopefully. The fear of total neutrality can be relieved by poetic vision

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