Hughes, Ted (Edward James)
From Chambers Biographical Dictionary

1930-98

English poet, Poet Laureate from 1984

Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd, a mill town in West Yorkshire. When he was seven his family moved to Mexborough, Yorkshire, where his parents opened a stationery and tobacco shop. At Mexborough Grammar School he began to write poetry, usually bloodcurdling verses about Zulus and cowboys. He won a scholarship to Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he read English literature, but switched to archaeology and anthropology, subjects which were to become a major influence on his poetry. After graduating he had a number of colourful jobs, including zookeeper, gardener and nightwatchman, and occasionally published poems in university poetry magazines.

He married the US writer Sylvia Plath in 1956 and after two years in the USA they settled in Cambridge, where Hughes taught while Plath studied. That same year he won an American poetry competition, judged by W H Auden, Sir Stephen Spender and Marianne Moore, with the poems that were to form *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957); they displayed a striking treatment of animal subjects and a vivid sense of nature. For the next few years he lived again in America, where he taught and was supported by a Guggenheim Foundation grant. *Lupercal* (1960), his second collection, won the Somerset Maugham award and the Hawthornden prize. In 1963 Sylvia Plath committed suicide and for the next few years Hughes published no new adult poetry, although he did complete books of prose and poetry for children. *Wodwo* (1967) was his next major work, and among later volumes are *Crow* (1970), *Cave Birds* (1975), *Season Songs* (1976), *Gaudete* (a long prose poem on the theme of fertility rites, 1977), *Moortown* (1979, revised edition 1989), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), on which he collaborated with the photographer Fay Godwin, *River* (1983), *Wolf Watching* (1989) and *Tales from Ovid* (1997). The retrospective volume *New Selected Poems: 1957-1994* was published in 1995. He edited Plath's collected poems in 1981 and in 1998 published *Birthday Letters*, poems about his relationship with her.

Of his books for children, the most remarkable is *The Iron Man* (1968, published in the USA as *The Iron Giant*), a fantasy story about a huge iron man who comes from nowhere and eats machines; this was followed later by a complementary volume, *The Iron Woman* (1993). His verse for children includes *Meet my Folks* (1961), a series of comic family portraits, *Season Songs* (1975) and *Ffangs the Vampire Bat and the Kiss of Truth* (1986). He also wrote plays for children, including the collection *The Coming of the King* (1970).

Drawn magnetically towards the primitive, he was a writer at one with nature, mesmerized by its beauty but not blind to its cruelty and violence. Much acclaimed and imitated, he was appointed Poet Laureate in 1984. He published the collection *Rain-Charm for the Duchy and other Laureate Poems* in 1992 and in 1995 wrote an admiring poem about Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, on her 95th birthday, comparing her to a six-rooted tree. He was appointed to the Order of Merit in 1998.

Hughes also wrote reviews and essays; some of these have been collected in *Shakespeare and the...*


"The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff.
How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where had he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows.
Taller than a house, the Iron Man stood at the top of the cliff, on the very brink, in the darkness."
- From The Iron Man, ch.1, "The Coming of the Iron Man."

"But Oedipus he had the luck
For when he hit the ground
He bounced up like a jackinabox
And knocked his Daddy down."
- From "Song for a Phallus" (1970).

"Black village of gravestones."
- From "Hepstonstall" (1979).
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA