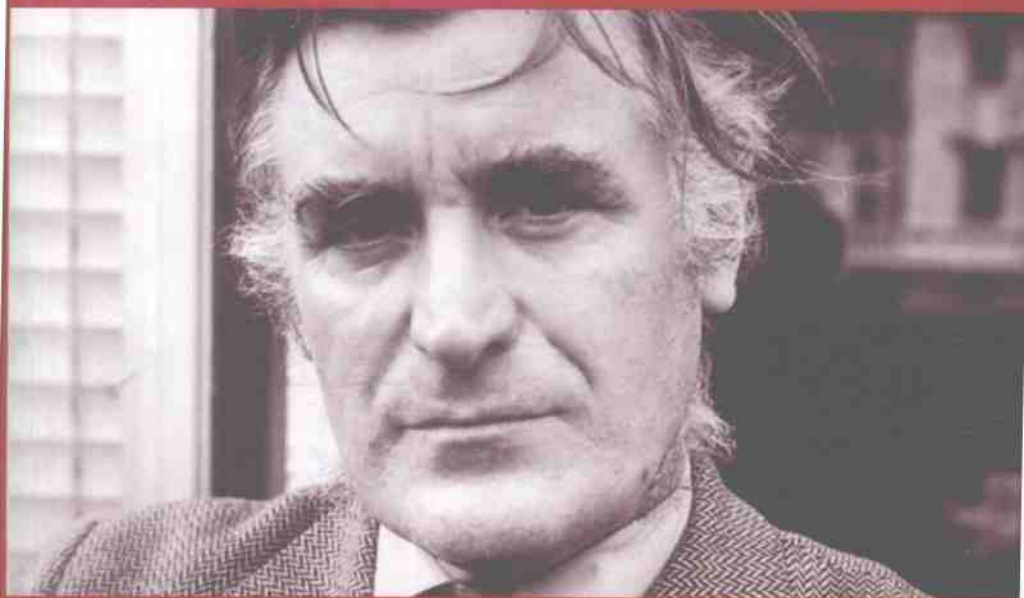


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THE SENSE OF HUMANITY  
IN TED HUGHES' POETRY



泰德·休斯诗歌中的人类关怀

李子丹◎著

吉林出版集团有限责任公司 外语教育出版社  
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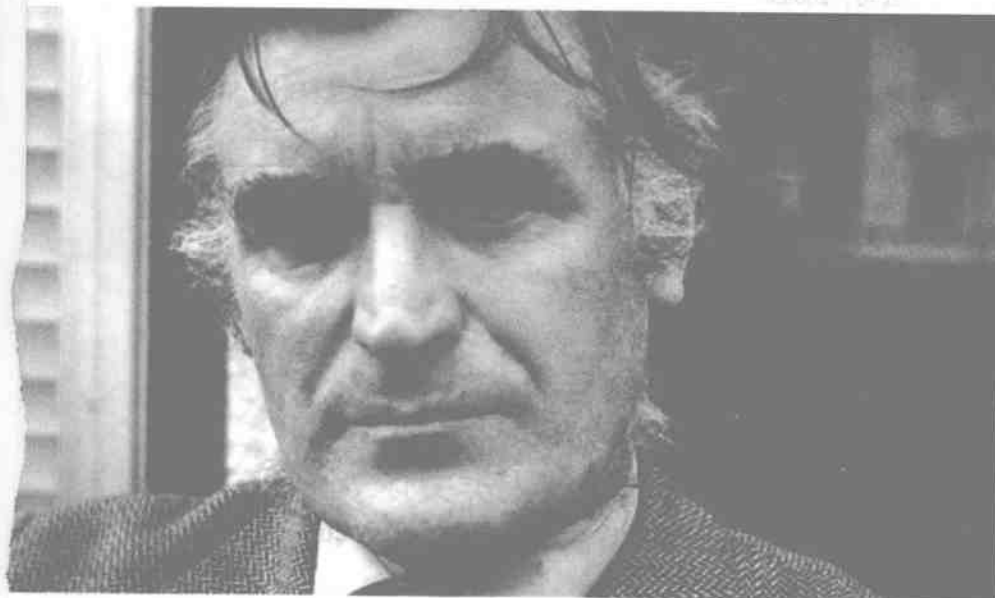
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## Preface

Firstly, my greatest thanks will go to my Ph.D supervisor, Professor Ou Hong for his professional advice, rare patience and vast tolerance during the three years in Sun Yat-sen University. I am much honored to have the privilege to study under his guidance. He is the epitome of Seamus Heaney's comment on Ted Hughes: a great man, a great poet. To me, Professor Ou is a great man, a great scholar. I benefit much from both his immense erudition and noble personality. Many thanks to him for creating a big family — EPSI (English Poetry Study Institute) which is our spiritual and academic paradise.

I am deeply indebted to Lao Pu (Jeremy Prynne) who delivered some very valuable first-hand Ted Hughes material to EPSI and offered me constructive suggestions. I would not have completed the rewarding research smoothly without his generous offers.

I am grateful to the following co-fellow students: Li Chengjian, Li Chunchang, Chen Xiaohong, Chen Shangzhen, Xiao Xiaojun, Hu Anjiang, Luo Bin, Chen Yao and all the rest of EPSI members. It is fortunate to be in this big family in which I enjoy the team spirit and brotherly love which empower me to solve various academic and psychological problems.

My heartfelt thanks are also owed to Professor Yan Xuejun from whom I learned much while cooperating with him to complete a scientific project about modern English poetry which is closely related to the topic of my dissertation.

Special thanks will go to my dear American friend, Dr. John Pinar for his patient effort to improve my English expressions in my dissertation.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents and

husband who willingly bear the burden of taking care of my son, give me love and rebuild my confidence to finish my Ph.D study. I especially thank my son who brings happiness, innocence and sunshine to my life and study.

## A Timeline of Hughes' Life and Work

- 1930 Born 17 August, Mytholmrod, Yorkshire, to William Henry and Edith Farrar.
- Family moves to Mexborough, South Yorkshire. Own a newspaper and tobacco shop.
- 1943 Begins at Mexborough Grammar School.
- 1945 First poems written.
- 1946 First poems and prose pieces published in school magazine, *The Don and Dearn*. An essay, "Harvesting", contains seeds of later story, "The Harvesting".
- 1947 Wins open exhibition to Pembroke College, Cambridge.
- 1948 Writes "Song". Begins two years of national (military) service.
- 1951 Enters Pembroke to read English.
- 1952 Family returns to West Yorkshire to live at the Beacon, Heptonstall Slack.
- 1953 Fox dream. Drop English to study archaeology and anthropology.
- 1954 Graduates from Cambridge in June. From 1954 through 1956 continues to publish poems in Cambridge poetry magazines while working in London or Cambridge in various minor jobs. Parents move in 1954 to the Beacon, a ridgetop home near Heptonstall.
- 1955 Publishes four poems in the first and only issues of *St. Botolph's Review*, a poetry magazine edited by David Ross. Meets Sylvia Plath at the first issue party, 25 February. Marries Plath on Bloomsday, 16 June, with a honeymoon at Benidorm, Spain. Poetry publishes "Bawdry Embraced" in August — his first nonacademic publication — and *Nation* publishes poems in August, November, and December issues.

- 1957 Teaches English at a secondary school near Cambridge while Plath completes her M.A. in English. On 18 September Hughes' first poetry volume, *The Hawk in the Rain*, is published as first prize over 286 other entries in a contest sponsored by the Poetry Centre of the Young Women's Hebrew Association. Judges are W.H Aden, Marianne Moore, and Stephen Spender.
- 1958 Teaches spring-term English and creative writing classes at Amherst campus of the University of Massachusetts. Poetry reading at Harvard in April. Meets Smith faculty sculptor and graphic artist Leonard Baskin. Moves with Plath to Boston in the fall for a year of writing. Guinness Poetry awarded.
- 1959 Resides in Boston until a summer cross-country camping tour. At Yaddo in the fall, Hughes begins a year work on an (unpublished) oratorio on the *Bardo Thödol*, the Tibetan Book of Dead. Sails with Plath to England in mid-December. Guggenheim Fellow 1959-1960.
- 1960 *Lupercal* published in March. Resides in London, where Fredia Rebecca Hughes is born 1 April. Begins BBC radio talks and book reviewing. Somerset Maugham Award for *The Hawk in the Rain*.
- 1961 *Meet My Folks!* Published in April. Hawthornden Prize for *Lupercal*. Moves to Devon home 31 August.
- 1962 Nicolas Farra Hughes born 17 January. *Selected Poems with Thom Gunn* published. First recordings of poetry, for Jupiter Records and British Council, Moves to London after separation from Plath at end of September.
- 1963 Suicide of Sylvia Plath 11 February. With family help Hughes cares for Freda and Nicholas and Yorkshire. *How the Whale Became* and *The Earth-Owel and Other Moon-People* Published.
- 1964 *Nessie the Mannerless Monster* Published in April. Works on film version of *Gaudete*.

- 1965 Begins coediting and writing editorials for *Modern Poetry in Translation* with Daniel Weissbort. Continues work for first 10 issues. Begins yearly work as judge for the Daily Mirror National Children's Poetry Composition, which has become W.H. Smith National Literary Composition.
- 1966 Moves to Ireland with children (January-May); returns to Devon. Writes most of the *Wodow* poems and other essays.
- 1967 *Wdow* and *Poetry in the Making*, a selection of BBC radio talks for schools, published. First Crow poem, "A Disaster," appears in the 22 July Scotsman. Principal organizer of the first Arts Council International Poetry Festival at Queen Elizabeth Hall. In late fall begins work with Peter Brook on script for *Seneca's Oedipus*.
- 1968 *The Iron Man* published in January. Edits *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse*.
- 1969 *Seneca's Oedipus* published. Assia Wevill and her daughter Shura dies in March. Mother, Edith Farra Hughes, dies 13 May. City of Florence International Poetry Prize for *Wodow*. Buys Lumb Bank; Later refurbishes it and leases it to the Arvon Foundation to employ writer to tutor creative writing course. Purchased by Arvon Foundation 31 July 1989. Moves several times back and forth to Ireland in 1969-70; finally decides to remain in Devon.
- 1970 Marries Carol Orchard in August. *The Coming of Kings and Other Plays* published in September and *Crow* published in October.
1971. Completed the script (unpublished) of *Orgast*. Edits *With Fairest Flowers While Summer Lasts*.
- 1972 *Selected Poems: 1957-1967* published. Buys Devon Farm Moortown. Publishes last book review 5 March in *Observer*, Second, augmented, edition of *Crow* published.
- 1973 Awarded Premio Internazionale Taormina Prize. *Prometheus on his Crag* published.

- 1974 Queen's medal for Poetry.
- 1975 *Season Songs* published. Reads *Crow* and *Cave Birds* poems at Ilkley Literature Festival in May.
- 1976 *Moon-Whale and Other Moon Poems* published.
- 1977 *Guadete* published in May. Edits Plath's *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. Named to Order of the English Empire.
- 1978 *Moon-Bells and other Poems* published. Signal Award. *Cave Bird* Published.
- 1979 *Remains of Elmet* and *Moortown* published.
- 1980 Heinemann Bequest of the Royal Society.
- 1981 *Under the North Star* published. Signal Award. Edits Sylvia Plath's *Collected Poems*. Father dies in February.
- 1982 *Selected Poems: 1957-1981* published. With Seamus Heaney edits *The Rattle Bag*.
- 1983 *River* published.
- 1984 *What is the Truth?* published. Named poet Laureate England on 19 December.
- 1985 Guardian Children's Fiction Award for *What Is the Truth?*
- 1986 *Ffangs the Vampire Bat and the Kiss of Truth and Flowers and Insects* Published.
- 1988 *Tales of Early World* published.
- 1989 *Moortown Diary* and *Wolfwatching* published in September. Visits Bangladesh for the Asia Poetry Festival.
- 1990 Second International Hughes Conference in Manchester in July.
- 1991 *Winning words* published.
- 1992 *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Beings* published in March. Rain Charm for the Duchy published in July.
- 1993 *Three Books: Elemt, Cave Birds* and *River* published in June. *The Iron Man* published in September.

- 1994 *Winter Pollen* published in March. Goes to the Macedonia Poetry Festival.
- 1995 *New Selected Poems* published in March. *Difficulties of a Bridegroom* published in October. Reads at Bath Literature. BBC poetry Readings.
- 1996 *Blood Wedding* and *A Choice of Coleridge's Verse* (ed.) published.
- 1997 *Tales from Ovid* published. Begins treatment for cancer. Moortown Farm sold in September. Decides to publish *Birthday Letters*.
- 1998 *Birthday Letters* published in January and tops best seller list. *Tales from Ovid* wins the Whitbread Book of the Year prize in March. *Birthday Letters* wins Forward for Poetry; appointed member of the Queen's Order of Merit. Ted Hughes dies 28 October.
- 1999 *Birthday Letters* wins T.S Eliot Prize for Poetry, the South Bank Award for Literature, the Whitbread Prize for Poetry and the Book of the Year prize in January. Ted Hughes Memorial Service at Westminster Abbey on 13 May.

## Abbreviations

For convenience the following works are referred to in the text by the initials shown, followed by the relevant page number (see Bibliography):

- CP *Ted Hughes: Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2003.
- TTC *Tao Te Ching*. BeiJing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1998.
- SS *Season Songs*. London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985.

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## Introduction

Before Ted Hughes' emergence, Movement poets were a dominant group in English literary circle during the 1950s. Their preference was for light satire and irony, witty and skeptical urbanity, circumvented with a demand for rational structure and comprehensive language combined in a background of camera-eye realism. Ted Hughes distinguished himself from his Movement contemporaries through his verbal energy, vivid metaphors, fascination with animals and nature, and willingness to involve himself deeply in his poetry expressing his empathy for humanity. Hughes' poetry caught the attention of more and more critics abroad and at home for its unique charms and profound connotation. The principal American Ted Hughes scholar Leonard M. Scigaj spoke highly of Hughes, "Hughes has been a mainstay of the British literary scenes since the early sixties."<sup>1</sup> The famous Chinese scholar of English literature, Wang Zuoliang (王佐良) also commented upon Ted Hughes, "Hughes' emergence was regarded as a favorable turn of English poetry by some critics."<sup>2</sup>

Hughes completed a degree in anthropology at Cambridge University in 1954, and throughout his poetic career, he articulated his apprehension regarding the past, present and future of humanity. Even in his celebrated animal poetry which stands at the pinnacle of his achievements, Hughes displays his concern regarding humans, human nature and human situation in general. As Hughes himself said in a 1960 BBC radio talk, "Usually, in a poem that seems to be about a bird, animal

<sup>1</sup> Scigaj, Leonard M. *Ted Hughes*. Boston: Twayne Publishing House, 1991. p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Zuoliang 王佐良, ed. *A History of English Poetry* 《英国诗史》. Nanjing: Yi Lin Publishing House, 1997. p.476.

or fish, it is evident that the poet is in fact writing about some element of human nature in the guise of a creature."<sup>3</sup>

Ted Hughes was born on 17 August, 1930 in Mytholmroyd which lies deep in a sodden valley of the Yorkshire Pennines, near the Brönte country, which is notorious for its wildness and bleakness. From his childhood, Hughes had been infatuated with the natural world in Yorkshire. The primitive and dreary landscape in West Yorkshire shaped Hughes and influenced his poetical creation. The nature Hughes presented in his early poetry was flooded with the brutality, cruelty and primordial aggression of animals evident in his Yorkshire foundation. Many of his poems describe animals or have animals in their titles, hence many Movement-oriented critics and academicians in Britain categorized Hughes as an Animal Poet or Zoo Laureate who openly advocated aggression and violence. In actuality, Hughes had been confronted with this condescension throughout his life.

With a thorough evaluation of Ted Hughes and his poetry, we can sense he is not simply an "Animal Poet" who merely exhibits brutal scenes, conversely, he is a serious and profound artist expressing genuine affection for humans and the condition of human beings in general through exhibitions of nature and animals. Hughes is far from a simple, sentimental animal lover since he never forgets to keep an eye attuned to the human condition in his verse. "But for all the sympathetic clarity with which his animals, birds or fishes are imagined, the poems have ultimately to do with human sufferings, creativity and survival."<sup>4</sup> The animals are not there for their own sake, but serve as metaphors for a particular human vision.

Hughes studies in the Western literary world cover a wide scope.

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<sup>3</sup> Scigaj, Leonard M. *Ted Hughes*. Boston: Twayne Publishing House, 1991. p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Walder, Dennis. *Ted Hughes*. Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire: Open University Press, 1987. p. 91.

Academically, by searching the American database — Gale: Literature Resource Centre, all related topics about Hughes are book reviews which deal with the issues of violence, ecology, myth, death and sex etc. in Hughes' poetry, but no monographies or articles systematically address his compassion for humanity. The representative studies of some principal Ted Hughes' specialists could be generalized as follows:

The first full-length study dealing with Hughes as a major poet, Sargar Keith's 1975 volume: *The Art of Ted Hughes* (revised 1978) is a patient work of exposition and a valuable source for Ted Hughes erudition. More recent work is treated in the essays by various hands that make up Keith's collection in 1994: *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*.

In *The Unaccommodated Universe, with Selected Writings by Ted Hughes and Two Interviews*. Ekbert Faas makes extensive use of Hughes' prose, and includes valuable interview material. He provides an especially helpful assessment of Hughes' use of Trickster legends in Hughes' work *Crow*.

Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts in *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* pay much attention to the originality of Hughes' language, especially its intensely physical and metaphorical expressions; but their main focus is on the anthropological and religious dimension of his work, in particular his debt to Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* and his use of shamanism. This remains a valuable study by virtue of its thoughtful combination of exegesis with critical judgement.

Thomas West's *Ted Hughes* works on the techniques of literary exorcism by means of which Hughes seeks to heal the split he sees in the modern psyche.

Leonard M. Scigaj in his *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Form and Imagination* discerns Hughes' debt to Jungian psychology and oriental philosophy is widely recognized, he is the most informative commentator on these aspects of his work. Scigaj treats three stages in Hughes' poetic

development (up to 1986): 1. the New-Critical formalist, whose emphasis is on the dense, compact craft of poetry; 2. the 1960s' poet of mythic surrealism; 3. the influence from Blake and Taoism in the 1970s and 1980s. This is a valuable source book for the understanding of Hughes' work.

Dennis Wader's short study in *Ted Hughes* is an introduction to Hughes' poetry written for Open University students in Britain. It concentrates on discussion of specific poems which represent the different stages of Hughes' poetic composition; it also contains general themes such as the ambiguously potent natural energies evoked by the poetry, and Hughes' affinity with Romantic tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Anne Skea's *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest* is a great effort to trace Hughes' life journey and his quest for wholeness and renewal. Hughes' close affinities with Nature and belief in the powerful energies which are the source and the essence of this world have been demonstrated in this book.

As a Poet Laureate who enjoyed international fame from the 1960s through the 1990s, Ted Hughes received far less than the treatment he deserves in China in spite of his increasing popularity. More and more Chinese scholars realize Hughes' importance in English poetry. By searching CAJ Full-text Database<sup>6</sup> with key words and titles from 1994 to 2004 when I began my research on Hughes, only twelve academic articles are found, five of which are written by Associate Professor Li Chengjian (李成坚) from XiangTan Normal University, Hunan Province. Nevertheless all of them primarily deal with the themes and characteristics of Hughes' early poems, while his later works have not

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Hawkins-Dady, Mark. ed. *Reader's guide to Literature in English*. London & Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> The Electric Database of China Academic Journal.

been evaluated by her or others. No scholar has previously considered the topic I have chosen until now. Importantly, those scholars only center on Hughes' one or two works and fail to examine the whole span of his poetic career. Furthermore, Chinese readers and poets have only been aware of the existence of Ted Hughes as an English poet since the 1990s. Whereas in Britain, Ted Hughes has been systematically studied since the 1970s when he was nearly at the height of his reputation. So, Ted Hughes studies in China are still at an early stage. This situation leaves enormous room for future research and convinces me that it will be a significant job to make Ted Hughes well known and treated by more Chinese critics and scholars in the future.

This book including 7 chapters can be roughly divided into three main parts. The source of Hughes' poetic creation: Hughes the poet and his Yorkshire Origin. Hughes' sense of humanity in his poetry: Hughes' Promotion of Celtic culture; Hughes' trepidation about ecology; Hughes' dedication of Children; Hughes' concern over wars and Hughes' exploration of the Spiritual life of the English. Hughes' developing poetics enriches his poetic expression: his learning from the New Criticism in his early career; his tendency of surrealism in his middle career; his acceptability of Taoism in his late career. The second part containing 5 chapters will be the focus of the dissertation where each chapter involves a discussion of a different aspect of Hughes, based upon a small group of individual poems analyzed in some detail.

The originality of this dissertation lies in the following argumentations in this part.

1. Hughes' roots are in English culture and tradition although he is an open-minded artist who is receptive to alien influences. Chapter 2 in this dissertation presents Hughes' endeavors to promote his inherited Celtic culture. It is an eloquent and convincing argument of Hughes' close affinity with Celtic culture, which has never been systematically touched