Editor

Dr Mark Wormald  Pembroke College Cambridge

Reviews Editor

Prof. Terry Gifford  Bath Spa University

Editorial Board

Prof. Terry Gifford  Bath Spa University
Dr Yvonne Reddick  University of Preston
Prof. Neil Roberts  University of Sheffield
Dr James Robinson  Durham University
Dr Carrie Smith  Cardiff University

This Journal is copyright of the Ted Hughes Society but copyright of the articles is the property of their authors. Written consent should be requested from the copyright holder before reproducing content for personal and/or educational use; requests for permission should be addressed to the Editor. Commercial copying is prohibited without written consent.

Cover image of Ted Hughes by Peter Edwards, 1993, is copyright of Pembroke College Cambridge.
Dedicated to the memory of
Olwyn Hughes

(1928-2016)
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Wormald</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering Olwyn</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Skea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting the Primitive in Primitive Methodism</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Troupes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Hughes and the Environmental Imagination: Brought to you by the Letter R</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lissa Paul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of Edna Whooley to the poetic development of Ted Hughes</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Ely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Hughes and David Hockney’s Alphabet</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Skea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capturing Animal Souls in Two Children’s Collections by Ted Hughes</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Shahwan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crow and the Golden Section</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Turnbull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond Rachel Carson’s ‘sense of wonder’: advocating environmental awareness in Ted Hughes’s writing for children</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine Kerslake Young</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Reviews


- **Ted Hughes’s South Yorkshire: Made in Mexborough**, by Steve Ely, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, xi + 231 pp., £55.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-137-49934-9 ....... 77


**Grief is the Thing with Feathers**, by Max Porter, London, Faber and Faber, 2015, 114 pp., £10.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780571323760 ................................................... 85


**Contributors** .................................................................................................................. 94
Beyond Rachel Carson’s ‘sense of wonder’: advocating environmental awareness in Ted Hughes’s writing for children

Lorraine Kerslake Young

If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of childhood are the time to prepare the soil.¹

As Carson informs us, environmental education and awareness begin during the early years of childhood, and the stories that we read as children influence the way we respect and value nature later in our lives. Echoing Rachel Carson’s words, Ted Hughes also put forth the claim that the solution to our environmental crisis might lie in the child’s imagination, when declaring that ‘Every new child is nature’s chance to correct culture’s error’ (WP 149).

Both Hughes and Carson were of course environmental writers ahead of their time. Both understood the value of bonding with nature in those early years of wonder and shared a strong belief in the importance of instilling environmental awareness in young children, and indeed for both writers, their deep love of nature was far more than just a source of inspiration; it was both their avocation and vocation.

That Hughes was influenced by Carson and that his work touches on matters of political and ethical concerns related to environmental issues has of course been well documented by many critics: Leonard M. Scigai (Ted Hughes, 1991) and Terry Gifford (Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry, 1995) were the first to make a proper case for Hughes as an ecological poet and offer an ecocritical reading of his work. However the link underlying these concerns and his writing for children appears to have received little attention to date. By exploring the impact that Carson’s work had on Hughes in both his environmental work as well as in the sphere of his children’s writing, this essay will reveal interconnections between these two fields, showing how Hughes’s children’s writing goes beyond Carson’s initial ‘sense of wonder’ to attempt a more ambitious environmental awareness in his readers, especially in Hughes’s most notable healing myth, The Iron Woman (1993) read here from an ecocritical perspective.

As has been well documented, Hughes was profoundly influenced by Carson’s work. Both Sylvia Plath and Hughes had already read Carson’s first book Under the Sea Wind (1941) as well as The Sea Around Us (1951) whilst in America years before her seminal work, Silent Spring, had been published. In a letter dated 22 August 1957, only a couple of months after having moved with Plath to her home in Massachusetts, Hughes wrote to his sister Olwyn criticising the ‘American way of life’ together with its excess packaging and excessive food miles:

What a place America is. Everything is in cellophane. Everything is 10,000 miles from where it was plucked or made. The bread is in cellophane that is covered with such slogans as de-crapularised, re-energised, multi-cramulated, bleached, double-bleached, rebrowned, unsanforised, guaranteed no blasphemin. There is no such thing as bread [...] most of America is a boundless suburbia (LTH 108-107).

Almost a year later, in a letter to his brother Gerald, Hughes comments that ‘Our year in Northampton is almost over, thank God. Of all plastic cellophane wrapped places on earth, this is the prototype’ (LTH 131). Indeed whilst everyone else was referring to the ‘progress’ behind the modernisation of retail sectors in American food industry Hughes seemed aware that it is often small changes that carry the potential for harm through everyday products that surround us. Already as a young man, he was conscious of the degradation of what we now call the environment, and the social change that was beginning to take place in the late 1950s. Hughes’s version of America anticipates the fall from grace for America’s suburbia that was picked up by Carson in Silent Spring (1962), often considered as ‘the founding text of modern environmentalism’ and which in Hughes’s words ‘revealed the whole of America as a poisoned land’.

The first chapter opens onto a peaceful fairytale:

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields.

However this soon becomes one of the most haunting images in environmental literature when:

a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death [...] only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh.

Carson’s fable of doom is compounded by a bitter irony, for ‘No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves’. If Carson’s spring is a ‘spring without

---

5 Carson, _Silent Spring_, p. 2.
6 Carson, _Silent Spring_, p. 3.
voices', then the eerie silence depicted in *The Iron Woman* with birds and fish dying from the chemical poisoning of the river seems indebted to her.\(^7\)

Alerting us to the dangers of manipulating natural resources and destroying the environment was, of course, Carson's life-long concern. Hailed by scientists and condemned by chemical companies, *Silent Spring* demonstrated the horrific effects that a single chemical, like DDT, could have on the whole food chain. Carson's most powerful message came through her concept of nature's balance and the notion that 'the earth's vegetation is part of a web of life in which there are intimate and essential relations between plants and the earth';\(^8\) laying the foundations for an ecological and more holistic view of Nature. Years before the term 'ecofeminism' was coined, Carson embodied the movement through her work and writings, endorsing the notion that while humans are but a small part of nature, they, and especially women scientists and writers, hold the ability to alter it. As Carson's biographer Linda Lear puts it:

> I don't think Rachel should be or would want to be credited with starting the environmental movement or banning pesticides. I think what she was hoping to do is raise the American consciousness about the natural world and our interconnection to it, instead of thinking we can control nature.\(^9\)

It was, however, Carson's last book, published in 1965, a year after her death, that left an even greater legacy than the immediate impact of *Silent Spring*, and one that offers a solution, for it is in *The Sense of Wonder* that one realizes that the path to building an ecological consciousness lies in responding to the awe of nature expressed by children.

Like Carson, Ted Hughes also believed that humans and nature were part of the same web of life and that you could not harm a part of nature without harming the whole. As ecocritic Glen Love claims, 'The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world'.\(^10\) Raising environmental awareness and instilling in the reader a sense of connection and a deeper understanding of the natural world was what Hughes thought all poets should do. However, from the very beginning of his career, Hughes went a step further, by making his environmental thinking public, and by taking on a more active and 'practical' role than Carson.

Indeed during the early period of Hughes's writing for children and throughout his life, his own convictions together with his ecological concerns not only underlined the thinking behind his poetic voice but also led to his active involvement in helping charities and advocating for educational projects throughout schools in Britain. One of such projects was, of course, 'Farms for City Children', set up by Clare and Michael Morpurgo in 1976, and of which

---

\(^7\) Carson, *Silent Spring*, p. 2.

\(^8\) Carson, *Silent Spring*, p. 64.


Hughes became president whilst actively involved helping with fundraising and reading to the children. Other examples of Hughes’s ongoing environmental projects throughout the following decades can be found in his wish to set up a tree planting scheme with schools in Devon,11 or his concern for the Atlantic Salmon Trust in the mid-1980s,12 and the Sacred Earth Drama Trust in the 1990s, which aimed to make children spokespeople for the environment.13

Already then, back in the mid-70s, Hughes’s belief that the river was a ‘vein’ of the earth engaged directly with our ecological crisis, alerting us not only to the dangers of manipulating natural resources and destroying the environment, but in his depiction of the river as an indicator of human water pollution. The fact that the rivers of England were becoming so polluted that they contained few fish was something that Hughes had already written about in Season Songs (1976) in poems such as ‘The River in March’ where the river ‘has lost all her fish. And she shivers’ (CP 197) or ‘December River’ where ‘This vein from the sky is the sea-spirit’s pathway’, and one in which the poet finds: ‘only endlessly empty water’ and ‘backwater mills rubbish (CP 241). Hughes wrote in Poetry in the Making that he thought of his poems as living creatures, and throughout his poetry Hughes reads the environment as a living being whilst dissolving the barriers that separate humans from nature. As he later stated in a letter to Terry Gifford ‘these fish are simply indicators of what is happening to us’.14 Hughes himself claims that ‘his revelation of what was happening’ dates to 1959, back in America and shortly after reading Carson, when he became concerned with the effects of industrial pollution whilst fishing on Cape Cod and discovering that the mackerel there were radioactive.15 However, the development of Hughes’s environmental consciousness is also clearly linked to the affective sense of topophilia related to his own childhood experiences fishing in the local rivers of Yorkshire.16

Later in the mid-1980s, after witnessing the decline in trout and salmon in the Devon rivers the Taw and the Torridge, Hughes wrote a campaign statement for a public enquiry to clean up the River Torridge. As well as being an active campaigner concerned about the water quality in rivers, he also sat on a committee for the National Rivers Authority and helped set up the Westcountry Rivers Trust in 1993.

Hughes’s love of the natural world, and in particular the therapeutic function of healing that he ascribes to nature, should be read as part of a major professional project which he embraced throughout his entire career.

---

11 See Hughes’s article in the Times Educational Supplement ‘Children plant trees for tomorrow’, 25 Oct 1972. Further documentation referring to this project can be found in correspondence between Hughes and the Times Educational Supplement, and letters from Trees for People and the Devon Tree Bank.
12 Hughes was a friend and supporter of the AST, to which he dedicated the poem, ‘The Best Worker in Europe’, in 1985.
13 Hughes founded The Sacred Earth Drama Trust in the 1990s to foster environmental awareness through creativity in the form of a play-writing competition for young children.
14 Hughes in Gifford, Green Voices, p. 148. The letter acted as a footnote to an interview with Nigel Forde. The original interview can be found in Bookshelf, BBC Radio 4, 20 March. 1992.
15 Hughes in Gifford, Green Voices, p. 148.
16 In a note on the River poems in Three Books (1993) Hughes makes the point that it was whilst fishing in the canal of the River Calder and in the oxbow lake beside the River Don in Mexborough that he became aware of pollution.
Keith Sagar argued that the vital function of literature is to heal the wound that culture has inflicted upon nature, so that ‘Imagination seeks to respiritualize Nature, to heal the split in the human psyche’. Hughes himself once said of The Iron Man that he had written it as a ‘blueprint imaginative story’, one ‘intended to cure the mentally sick, & to put people in contact with their real nature’ (LTH 284). Following this, both The Iron Man and its sequel The Iron Woman can be considered as Hughes’s clearest depiction of ecological healing. Both books draw strongly on Carson’s seminal work and engage the reader directly with our ecological crisis, not only alerting us to the dangers of manipulating natural resources and destroying the environment, but also serving as an indicator of pollution of water by humans. Although they both run similar themes, their main difference lies in their intended audience. Whilst The Iron Man serves as a healing myth on a more personal scale, for Hughes himself, and is addressed to his children, The Iron Woman draws on the centrality of Carson’s Silent Spring as well as The Sense of Wonder, and can be read as a redemptive story for a society that has cut itself off from ‘being human’ and from being part of the larger web of life. Written as an intervention on behalf of water quality and public health, The Iron Woman also has a much stronger and active environmental agenda. Following a similar plot to that of The Iron Man, the Iron Woman first appears rising from a black polluted swamp and speaks to Lucy, the young female protagonist, in the name of the creatures that live in the river, vowing to destroy those who have dumped toxins and poisoned the river and marshlands. The fact that the Iron Woman emerges from mud is also significant, and recalls Hughes’s poem ‘Bride and Groom Lie Hidden for Three Days’ (Cave Birds, 1978), which was originally intended to provide the culmination of Crow’s efforts to understand the world in which he finds himself, and where ‘two gods of mud [...] bring each other to perfection’ (CB 56). However, in the case of the Iron Woman, she brings news of the dire imperfection in the river.

The book also begins with Hughes’s critique of a birdwatcher who, having spent an entire day staring through his binoculars, fails to notice that the bird is actually dead. The birdwatcher embodies the detachment of human culture from nature and recalls Master, the central character in Hughes’s children’s play The Tiger’s Bones (1970), who mistakes a lump of mould in his telescope for a meteor that is about the hit the earth. The fact that both characters see the world through a narrow scientific lens prevents them from seeing what really lies before them. Hughes genuinely believed that adults had a lot to learn from children. In his essay ‘Concealed Energies’ he refers to the ‘visors’ that adults wear, observing that:

Children’s sensibility, and children’s writing, have much to teach adults. Something in the way of a corrective, a reminder. [...] Preconceptions are already pressing, but they have not yet closed down, like a space helmet, over the entire head and face (WP 29).

---

Hughes held that these preconceptions, together with the ‘space helmet’ of science and technology, were, like a visor, responsible for making adults lose the ability to embrace new ideas and connect with their inner selves. For this reason, and as in *The Iron Man*, Hughes chooses a child as the first to identify and empathize with the problem in order to bring about a resolution. Lucy is the first to realize that something is wrong with the fish in the river. Accompanied by Hogarth, she tells the factory manager:

‘Your factory has poisoned the river. It’s killed all the fish. It’s poisoning all the creatures. It’s poisoning the marsh. You have to stop it. Today. Now [...] You’re poisoning all the creatures and you’re also poisoning me’ (*IW*41).

However the children’s pleas are ignored, so the Iron Woman decides to teach the men a lesson by turning them into fish. They then have to be taken to water by the women in order to survive, and experience in this way the pain of the poisoned creatures who live in the polluted river.

Along these lines, and by looking at the way in which the Iron Woman directs her revenge on a male community (that of the workers at the waste disposal factory) for polluting water resources, an ecofeminist reading of the novel can offer insight into the close relation that Hughes depicts between the Iron Woman and nature, as well as looking at how the duality of nature/culture is depicted. Furthermore, the novel also explores how Hughes depicts the male/female duality: whilst the male factory workers and greedy managers are responsible for poisoning the river, the women are depicted as the goodies. Blake Morrison even put forth the claim that had the book been written by a woman, it would have been called feminist. For Hughes the image of the female as nature plays an important symbolic role in constructing his view of human identity and in reconstructing maleness, one that becomes complete in *The Iron Woman*.

Although it was published in 1993, Hughes had begun writing it as early as 1988, at the same time as *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. Speaking to Morrison about this Hughes claimed that:

I began writing the story in the mid-80s, and at one point I was scared by it and had to back off. The image of that scream in particular alarmed me. I wasn’t sure what I was pushing myself into, so I left it alone for a bit and turned to Shakespeare instead while I got used to it.18

Indeed, the most memorable thing about the Iron Woman is her contagious Macbeth-like scream – what she tells Lucy is ‘the cry of the marsh’:

‘It is the cry of the insects, the leeches, the worms, the shrimps, the water skeeters, the beetles, the bream, the perch, the carp, the pike, the eels.’ ‘They’re crying’, whispered Lucy. ‘The cry of the ditches and the ponds,’ the voice went on. ‘Of the frogs, the toads, the newts. The cry of the rivers and the lakes. Of all the

---

creatures under the water, on top of the water, and all that go between (IW/20).

In one sense, the Iron Woman’s cry can be seen as a response to Hughes’s own ‘voice of pain’ (LTH 458). Morrison even goes as far as suggesting the possibility of linking ‘the central image of the scream to the noise Hughes has endured in his own life for more than twenty years’.19

Emerging from the earth, she symbolizes for Hughes the Goddess of Complete Being in her clearest form, crossing the borders between human and nature, and mediating between both. The fact that she transcends the boundaries between the artificial and the natural makes the narrative in the words of Zoe Jacques ‘a cybernetic complication’.20 Drawing on ecofeminist Donna Haraway’s term ‘natureculture’21 as a single word for the dissolved duality, it can also be seen as unifying. Perhaps, as Nina Lykke suggests, if we compare the cyborg and the goddess they have more in common than first meets the eye:

Both are, so to speak, designed to transgress the borders between human and non-human. Both challenge the ways in which the modern scientific world-view is rooted in a long tradition that casts the non-human in the role of a mere object and exploitable resource for the human.22

Lykke, together with other more spiritually orientated ecofeminists, would appear to argue that a feminist reclaiming of the great goddess of nature may help to redirect society. In line with Hughes’s own healing quest, the Iron Woman, as half goddess/ half cyborg, appears to embody a similar redemptive idea, and can be read as a potential healer of broken bonds between humans and nature.

When things turn into a national disaster and get out of hand, the children beg the Iron Woman to stop, but she insists that the people of the earth still haven’t learned their lesson and that there must be a ‘deep change’ (IW 85). Hughes himself advocated the need for that same deep cultural change to transform what he called ‘the soul-state of our civilization’ (WP 130). As Richard Kerridge puts it, Hughes’s view is that a ‘deep cultural change is required, to rescue Westernized humanity from terminal ecological catastrophe and also from that insatiable exiled quest’.23

After coming up with a solution in the form of a healing miracle to save nature and humankind, the novel’s closing picture is one of hope, that of Lucy and Hogarth on a hilltop next to the Iron Woman and the Iron Man, looking up to the sky and listening to the reassuring sound of the music of the spheres of}

---

19 Hughes in Morrison, p.169.
21 The ecofeminist use of the cyborg derives from Donna Harraway who coined the term ‘natureculture’ in her ground-breaking ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s’, 1985.
the universe. It is also an image full of symbolism, when the Iron Woman puts a garland of foxgloves round the neck of the Iron Man, and one of snowdrops around her own. That Hughes chooses a foxglove is also significant, bearing in mind that the foxglove, universally accepted for treatment of heart disease, is a plant that heals the heart, and is used by Hughes as a symbol of reconciliation and healing, appearing at the beginning of the novel when the Iron Woman visits Lucy for the first time and gives her both flowers as a present, and again at the end. Indeed the redemptive aspect underlying the story is closely linked to Hughes's own concern to heal the rift between culture and nature. As Hughes stated:

Most people I talk to seem to defend or rationalize the pollution of water. They think you're defending fish or insects or flowers. But the effects on otters and so on are indicators of what's happening to us. It isn't a problem of looking after the birds and bees, but of how to ferry human beings through the next generation. We don't really know what bomb has already been implanted in the human system.

Of course Hughes, like Carson, was well aware that the irreversible effects from the widespread use of pesticides and pollution on the environment were largely of our own making. The major problem was how to get this message across to the rest of society. In a letter Hughes wrote to his editor, Christopher Reid, at Faber referring to The Iron Woman, he made the following proposal: 'We could send John Major a gold-backed copy. Present all the chieftains with one maybe... And all the cabinet.'

In his healing myth, and following Carson's steps, Hughes points to modern capitalism as the culprit of human's exploitation of the earth and as the cause behind today's environmental crisis. Hughes had faith in the power of nature to restore itself and believed that if humans were willing to change they also had the power to renew themselves. However, unlike Carson's cautionary tale, The Iron Woman is optimistic, (perhaps too optimistic, if we look at how slowly society is responding to global warming), since in it Hughes shows that not only can nature be saved but that humanity can change if it is willing to rethink its attitudes towards its place in the web of life. Hughes himself made the claim that:

The Iron Woman began by my thinking: how does nature feel about being destroyed? Presumably it's enraged, and the obvious response is an aggressive one, to remove the destroyer. Here there's a happy ending – a single human brainwave. You can't turn back the technology of the world, but you can learn to handle it much faster than we're doing.

---

24 Curiously both flowers appear out of season in the novel: the foxglove flowers in August and is months too early (appearing in the novel in April) whilst the snowdrop, typically belonging to winter, is months too late.
25 Hughes in Morrison, p.165.
27 Hughes in Morrison, p.166.
Hughes's political and intellectual ideologies were closely linked to his own inner world, requiring him to speak not only as a voice for nature, but through nature itself. Like Carson, he was concerned that children were becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural world. That same concern has, in fact, been voiced more recently by authors such as Richard Louv (*Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, 2005) who claims that today's generation of children are growing up detached from the earth and Jay Griffiths (*A Country Called Childhood: Children and the Exuberant World*, 2014) who also refers to the lost paradise of childhood freedom in nature.

Hughes aspired throughout his life to teach children to respect the natural world through a positive connection to nature. His children's writing not only questions where we are today in our understanding about the sense of wonder in young children, but like Carson it urges us to use all our senses and explore nature with our feelings and emotions. Perhaps our real problem is that we have become so detached from that sense of wonder that we no longer value its importance in children. As Hughes reminds us it if there is any hope it lies in the children, for 'Our real selves lie down there. Down there, mixed up among all the madness, is everything that once made life worth living' (*WP* 149).