

**“Poetry in the Making”:
Ted Hughes and the Art of Writing**

Submitted by Carrie Rachael Smith to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
in April 2013

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Abstract

This study takes as its focus Ted Hughes's composition techniques throughout his career, arguing that his self-conscious experimentation with the processes by which he wrote affected the style and subject matter of his work. Hughes's poetry has lent itself to a number of familiar critical approaches, focusing on his preoccupation with mythology, his interaction with the natural world and his creative partnership with his first wife, Sylvia Plath. Yet no study, until now, has looked systematically at his literary drafts and the extent to which Hughes's method of composition radically altered during his writing career.

Archive material at Emory University, accessible since 2000, and new archive materials held at the British Library and made available for study for the first time in 2010, have opened up possibilities for much greater depth of research into Hughes's writing processes and the birth and evolution of individual poems. By engaging with these materials, my research complements new studies which are tackling under-examined areas of Hughes's work, whilst contributing more broadly to an increased awareness of the central importance of archival work in the study of literature.

Literary manuscript drafts have often been used to study writers whose writing methods consciously foreground the drafting process. Whilst Hughes has not previously been considered in this light, my original investigations into his archival materials reveal a poet for whom the nature of the compositional process was a central concern which defines and redefines his poetry across his career.

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