

Abstract

Astrid Appels, "'Singing Together in the Dark': Intermediality and Reciprocity of Influence in the Poetry of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath"

This study analyses intermediality and the reciprocity of influence in the poetry of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. The critical assessments of literary collaborations tend to be lopsided or polarized but a more balanced deeper connection between Plath and Hughes can be uncovered. Plath's professional poetic career spans only seven years from 1956 to her untimely death in 1963, while Hughes's command over Plath's texts, the editing and publication of her work, deeply immersed him in her poetry until his death in 1998. Their cross-cultural backgrounds, Plath's multi-media art work, and their poetry are deeply influenced by visual art and independent artistic collaborations. Plath and Hughes displayed a heightened sensitivity for their era's technological and political developments and their detrimental effects on nature and society in a poetry conspicuously driven by an environmental concern. Their contrasting background in nationality, education, and upbringing merged when they married and their poetry became marked by a spatial, linguistic, and personal disorientation. Plath's drawings and paintings exemplify her visual sensitivity. Her poetry is endowed with a special colouring and perspective which enhanced its visual and oral dimensions and broadened the scope of her style and images. Plath's active engagement with Hughes's poetry on an intertextual level resulted in a poetic echoing of style, themes, and metaphors. Hughes responded equally to Plath's poems so that the couple created an artistic dialogue in a call and response sequence. The pair also generated a special intratextuality when staying within the verbal medium but allowing their creations to condition each other by composing separate poems on one and the same page. By himself Hughes also experimented with different art forms and maintained artistic collaborations with visual artists throughout his life. Ultimately Hughes's and Plath's collaboration resulted not so much in a deadly competition but in a fertile cross-pollination which was inspiring and innovating.