

The Iron Man

SECTION

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About the book

The Iron Man has become a classic children's story since Ted Hughes first wrote it as a bedtime tale for his own children in 1968. With its gargantuan characters and fabulous plot, the story has been called 'a modern fairy tale'. It has echoes of legend and fable from 'David and Goliath' to 'Beauty and the Beast', as a small boy takes on might and strength, single-handedly and bravely befriending – and so humanising – an iron giant.

In the nature of fairy tale and fable, the story is related in a matter of fact narrative style, and many questions remain unanswered: where does the Iron Man come from? How does the boy Hogarth come to be carrying a nail and a knife, just when he needs them?

The story begins with a mysterious iron giant toppling over a cliff edge and breaking into pieces. In a surreal sequence, and with a prophetic show of character and resilience, the pieces reassemble themselves and the Iron Man returns.

He goes on a hungry rampage, devouring farm machinery and fencing, provoking the farmers, whose livelihoods he threatens, into a warlike response. It is the farmer's son, Hogarth, who saves him *and* the farmers, by finding a clever solution for both.

When the people of the world face a greater threat, from the colossal space-bat-angel-dragon, the Iron Man becomes their saviour, and a trial of strength by fire brings the story to a fairy-tale happy ending. Within the simple narrative is a weighty theme: the superiority of dialogue and negotiation over futile conflict and war.

About the author

Ted Hughes was born in Yorkshire in 1930. He spent much of his childhood fishing for pike and shooting with his elder brother on the Yorkshire Moors and once said, 'My first six years shaped everything'. He was encouraged to write by his English teacher and wrote comical verse to amuse his classmates when he was 11.

After Cambridge University, he did a number of jobs, including rose gardener, night watchman, zoo attendant and school teacher before his first major success with the poems published as *The Hawk in the Rain* in 1957.

In 1961, Hughes moved to Devon, where he lived for the rest of his life, farming, writing, walking on Dartmoor, and driving round in his old Morris car. He married twice. His first wife, the poet Sylvia Plath, died tragically in 1963. He later married again, and his second wife, Carol Orchard, outlived him.

Hughes said he wrote about the things he was most fond of – 'birds, beasts, fish and the rest.'

He was awarded an OBE in 1977 and was Poet Laureate from 1984 until his death in 1998.

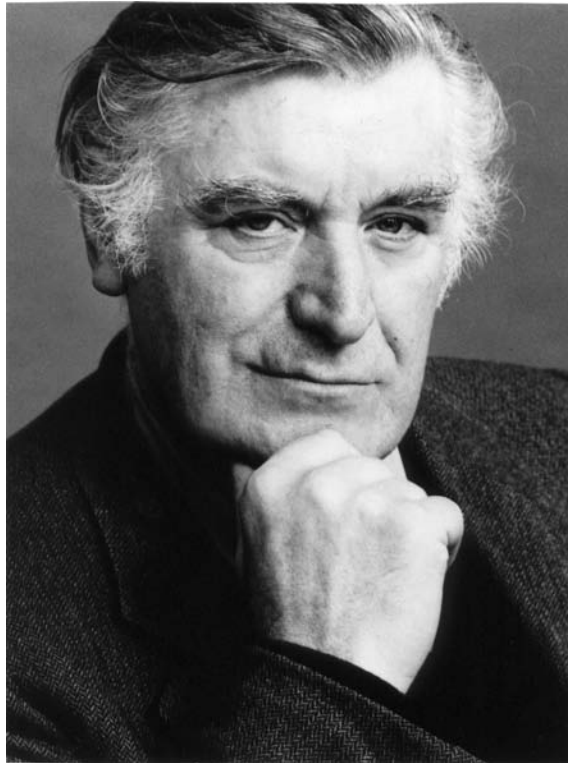


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Facts and figures

The Iron Man

First published in 1968

Over a million copies sold

Featured on television's *Jackanory* in 1986

Adapted into a rock musical composed by Pete Townshend of The Who in 1989

Made into an animated film, *The Iron Giant* (Warner Bros) in 1999

A sequel to the book, *The Iron Woman*, was published in 1993.

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