

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Hugh Sykes Davies**

**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2012

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## **Hugh Sykes Davies (1909-1984)**

Hugh Sykes Davies was an English poet, novelist and communist who was one of a small group of 1930s British surrealists.

Davies was born in Yorkshire to a Methodist minister and his wife. He went to Kingswood School, Bath and studied at Cambridge University, where he co-edited a student magazine called Experiment with William Empson. He spent some time in Paris during the 1930s. He was to stand as a communist candidate in the 1940 general election, but the vote was cancelled because of World War II. He was one of the organisers of the London International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936.

He had a talent for friendship, and as well as Empson, he numbered [T. S. Eliot](http://www.poemhunter.com/thomas-stearns-eliot/), I. A. Richards, Anthony Blunt, [Wittgenstein](http://www.poemhunter.com/ludwig-wittgenstein/) and Salvador Dalí amongst his circle. At one stage he had [Malcolm Lowry](http://www.poemhunter.com/malcolm-lowry/) declared his ward in an attempt to stop Lowry's drinking.

Davies' poems were mostly published in avant garde magazines and were not collected during his lifetime. His novels include Full Fathom Five (1956) and The Papers of Andrew Melmoth (1960). He also wrote Petron (1935).

He was a University Lecturer and Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge.

Works:

Full Fathom Five (1956)  
The Papers of Andrew Melmoth (1960)  
Petron (1935)

## Decline of Phæthon

i 40-Phæthon's  
leash more suns  
for caravan  
with your body's-span  
more zodiac's bears  
than eye unbars  
show-crabs and goats  
than telescopes  
yet must decline  
in rounded time  
of 40 suns  
I, — Phæthon's!

and suffer this preferment  
because you pierce dreams  
because you overhang  
night's snarl with body's-fang  
see where my blood  
streams  
in the firmament

Experiment, No. 3 (May 1929), 39.

Hugh Sykes Davies

## Music in an Empty House

The house was empty and  
the people of the house  
gone many months

Months for the weevil  
for the patient worm  
timber-mole softly tunnelling  
for the parliament of rats

Footsteps slink past  
damp walls  
down  
long  
corridors

Slow feet  
warily scuff  
bare boards  
The much-bitten  
tapestry  
holds  
many  
moths

In a certain curtain'd room  
the halting steps evade  
chairs white shrouded

To twitch the winding-sheet  
around a grand piano  
thin phalanx of sound  
sharp rat's teeth edge yellow  
with decay

The much-bitten  
tapestry  
holds  
many  
moths

On rat's teeth-edge  
fingers preparate  
hesitate

Then falling send  
as tenantry  
darnp-muffied chords  
rusting strings  
a still-born song

<table cellpadding=0 cellspacing=0> <tr><td align=left>Their fortissimo</td><td  
width=20></td><td align=left>The tattered</td></tr> <tr><td align=left>

```
scarce</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>tapestry</td></tr> <tr><td
align=left> stirs</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>holds</td></tr> <tr><td
align=left> near</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>many</td></tr> <tr><td
align=left> cobwebs</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>moths</td></tr>
</table>
```

Hugh Sykes Davies

## Poem ('In The Stump of The Old Tree...')

In the stump of the old tree, where the heart has rotted out, there is a hole the length of a man's arm, and a dank pool at the bottom of it where the rain gathers, and the old leaves turn into lacy skeletons. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees, where the hearts have rotted out, there are holes the length of a man's arm, and dank pools at the bottom where the rain gathers and old leaves turn to lace, and the beak of a dead bird gapes like a trap. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees with rotten hearts, where the rain gathers and the laced leaves and the dead bird like a trap, there are holes the length of a man's arm, and in every crevice of the rotten wood grow weasel's eyes like molluscs, their lids open and shut with the tide. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees where the rain gathers and the trapped leaves and the beak and the laced weasel's eyes, there are holes the length of a man's arm, and at the bottom a sodden bible written in the language of rooks. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees where the hearts have rotted out there are holes the length of a man's arm where the weasels are trapped and the letters of the rook language are laced on the sodden leaves, and at the bottom there is a man's arm. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees where the hearts have rotted out there are deep holes and dank pools where the rain gathers, and if you ever put your hand down to see, you can wipe it in the sharp grass till it bleeds, but you'll never want to eat with it again.

Contemporary Poetry and Prose, 7 (Nov. 1936), 129.

Hugh Sykes Davies



## Sententiæ

If the father's bankrupt, and the sons fail,  
Blaming it on their own bad start,  
Say the father should have gone to gaol,  
Forgetting their grandfather's part.

So with all centuries of blame  
Fathers by their children cursed,  
Say that all the trouble came  
From Eve and Adam first.

Both wrong: are wronged. But we are wronged  
the most.  
Their life was deep, but only deep, immersed.  
We fathom further, deep enough to boast  
We know a worse beneath our father's worst.

Cambridge Review, 52/1290 (10 June 1931), 493.

Hugh Sykes Davies