

M.A (English)

Semester - III

Paper - C.C-10

Unit - IV :- Ted Hughes

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Animal Imagery in Ted Hughes's Poem

Ted Hughes, one of the most prolific poets of the 20th century English poetry, has written a very large number of poetry collections. He was born on the 17th August 1930 in the little town of Mytholmroyd, in the west Riding region of Yorkshire (in England). His father, William Hughes, had been a carpenter but had subsequently enlisted in the army in the course of world war I, and had fought on the Gallipoli Peninsula in April 1915. He had seriously been wounded in the fighting, and Ted Hughes has enshrined a memory of William Hughes's suffering in one of his poems, entitled 'Out'.

Ted Hughes is known for the use of animal imagery in his poems. He uses animal imagery to represent the inner life of human beings on the basis of his adequate use of animal imagery in his poetry, he is also called an animal poet. The theme of violence is also there along with animal imagery in most of his animal poems. He has given English literature more than a dozen of poetry collections. In the whole treasure of his poetry, his animal poems have always been regarded as his best poems. He shows a very vivid picture of the physical features of the animals in his poems. His poetry is marked by harsh language. Most of his animal poems are collected

in his collections "The Hawk in the Rain" (1957) and Luperical (1960).

The poem entitled 'The Jaguar' is one of his best animal poems. It is included in his collection 'The Hawk in the Rain'. In this poem the poet describes the scene of a zoo. Here the poet attempts to convey his own views about human behaviour by relating it to animals. He gives a vivid description of animals in the zoo and contrasts the Jaguar an animal which is full of energy, with the other animals such as apes, tiger, lion, and a boa constrictor. The poet writes :-

"The apes yawn and adore their flees in the sun
The parrots shriek as if they were on fire, or strut
Like cheap tarts to attract the stroller with the nut.
Fatigued with indolence; tiger and lion
Lie still as the sun."

All the animals, except Jaguar, are extremely lazy. The Jaguar is looking full of energy. All other animals look as if they are painted on a wall. The bars of cage can not restraint the monstrous spirit of the Jaguar. The inner spirit of the Jaguar is as if he were in the jungle. The bars of cage can't restraint the imagination of the Jaguar. The poem is not just a poem of observation but also of longing and affirmation. The Jaguar in this poem symbolises all the visionaries of the world who kept alive the desire for freedom.

The poem entitled 'Thrushes' also focuses upon animal imagery. Here the poet tries to convey the violence of the small birds. Thrushes are described as very energetic.

They attack on worms very quickly. The poet wonders what gives these small birds such a lightning quickness. The graphical animal images used by Hughes in 'Hawk Roosting' are highly functional and is imbued with multilayered symbolic significance.

The image of a hawk created in this poem is wild and ferocious. This poem is a sort of an internal monologue. The poem begins with a depiction of the hawk sitting at the top of a tall tree with its hooked head and hooked feet and with closed eyes. The hawk thinks about its power, its arrogance and its superiority. The beginning of the poem with first person 'I' is a sign of supreme ego of the hawk. It is not the basic necessity of killing and eating that concerns him, but the style of doing so. Most of the critics have labelled this poem as a symbol of violence and the hawk represents an egoistic dictator. The poet has defended this charge of glorifying violence -

"The poem of mine is usually cited for violence is the one about the hawk roosting, this drowsy hawk sitting in a wood and talking to itself. That bird is accused of being a fascist... the symbol of some horrible genocidal dictator. Actually what I had in my mind was that in this hawk Nature was thinking simply Nature. It is not simple because maybe Nature is no longer simple."

So, the poet Ted Hughes denied this poem to be a poem of violence. According to the poet this poem highlights the enormous power of nature. Hawk is used as a metaphor for nature. 'The Hawk in the Rain' is another important poem of Ted Hughes. The Hawk shown in this poem is not as ferocious as the Hawk of the

poem 'Hawk Roosting'. The Hawk is sitting on a tree and the speaker is walking on the ground. The speaker is dragging himself through the mud in the heavy rain. The hawk, on the other hand, is sitting effortlessly. The weather has a negative effect on the speaker. But the Hawk is not shaken by this harsh weather and sitting comfortably on a tree. Then the speaker imagines that one day the storm will force the Hawk downwards to the earth and the Hawk will be killed. Thus Ted Hughes puts a human being at a disadvantage by a comparison with a bird. Hughes shows in this poem that animals are not vitiated by spurious mortality or incapacitated by doubt.

The symbolic significance of animal imagery in Hughes poem 'The Thought-fox' can not be ignored. This poem is partly an animal poem. In this poem, the poet's inspiration of writing poetry is compared to a fox making a sudden and silent entry in to his mind. The movements of the fox are metaphor for the stages that are followed by a poet in writing a poem. The opening line contains the image of the forest as the poet imagines that he is sitting in a forest at midnight. Then follows the images of the lonely clock, the blank page and the feeling that something else is also alive around the poet. There are no stars in the sky and the poet perceives something intruding upon his solitude. Next a fox's nose touches a twig and then a leaf. The two eyes of the fox seem to be moving forward and finally it enters in to the dark hole of the hearth. The window is starless still, the clock ticks even now but

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The page is no longer blank rather carries a poem written by the poet. The animal imagery of the fox which is popularly associated with Cummings embodies the thought which the poet expresses in the poem.

Thus, Ted Hughes has used animal imagery to express his ideas before readers. They act as symbols to present the tendency of nature. Hughes locates in the animals certain qualities which link them to human. The symbolic animal imagery thus yields a significance which enhances our understanding of ourselves. Hughes through this function animal imagery tries to distinguish between the behavioural patterns of the animals and man. Human beings try to nip his inborn animal instincts by inculcating a false sophistry but animals celebrate their natural vitality. Ted Hughes animal poetry is appreciated universally. He always abhorred man's interference in the world of nature and animals. Hughes excessive use of animal imagery in his poetry shows his devotion for nature and animals.