

Ted Hughes And His Animal World: A Study Of Ted Hughes' Animal Poem

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Abstract: *In the second half of twentieth century some of the poets get a special position. Ted Hughes is one of the prominent person of that era. His chief merit lies in the creation of a poetic world with the central interest in wild animals and birds. The hawk, the wolf, the fox, the owl are his protagonist. The book Lupercal (1960) has earned Ted Hughes 'Somerset Maugham Award' in 1960 and 'Hawthornden prize' in 1961. Hughes's animal poems are often described as "a modern bestiary". In the poem "Pike" Ted Hughes's Crow poems provide a voice which can defy all the violence, malice and dominance. Ted Hughes in an efficient manner portrays the violence in animals only to reveal the very violence rooted deep beneath the human nature and some times, he glorifies this violence only to lead humans to understand the impulsive, instinctive psyche of their endemic race.*

Keyword: *creation, hawk, protagonist, modern bestiary, killer, violence, psyche*

Edward James Hughes(1930-1998), popularly known as Ted Hughes is the greatest British writer of the second half of twentieth century who obtained the fame of Poet Laureate in 1984. In the writings of Ted Hughes, we find certain different aspects, but his popularity rests on his 'war' and 'animal' subject matters. Among his major collections, it is the series of 'Animal Poems' that established his fame of 'animal poet' or 'natural poet' in the history of English Literature. His special subject matter and bold style made his poems quite different from the contemporary poets. As a perspective and thoughtful poet, he not only vividly presents the animal world in his poems, but also revealed his philosophical thoughts. Between human beings and animals, there are several complex and profound relationship. Supposedly, Hughes was observing animal in wild nature, but by deeper reasoning of the relationship between animals and human beings, we can understand that actually he was expressing his mystical beliefs on human beings in the guise those animals.

This paper is an attempt to declare the animals of Ted Hughes as human beings. The impulsive and care-free animals should not only be measured with human nature but also they present as human. Ted Hughes preliminary shows human cruelty through metaphors with the erotic description of

animals. Hence, this paper attempts to measure the exotic animals of Ted Hughes with human beings through the study of some of his animal poems.

Hughes's poetry marks a tremendous departure from the prevailing modes of the period. Unlike R.S Thomas and Tom Gunn who extensively wrote on the bleak beauty of the British Landscape, Ted Hughes elected to differ by choosing the focus his poetic works to root in nature, particularly the meek coarseness of animals. Though Lawrence was his own recognized master in his choice of subject, Hughes was his own guide in his treatment of animal world. Human subjects being exhausted and exhausting he sought in Nature the non-human spring of energy which could recharge the devitalized, urban, human world.

For the purpose of elaborate discussion I have taken Ted Hughes's "*Hawk_Roosting*" and "*Pike*" from the volume *Lupercal* (1960) and his *Crow* poems (1970).

The book *Lupercal* (1960) has earned Ted Hughes 'Somerset Maugham Award' in 1960 and 'Hawthornden prize' in 1961. The poem "*Hawk_Roosting*" from this volume bears the trace of the Roman "Feast of Lupercal". Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar* refers to the belief that if the priest or their assistant strikes a barren woman with their whips, she would

be blessed with fertility. Hughes implies that similarly his poems may restore a new life to the effete modern civilization which is detached from natural roots. The poem written in first person as a dramatic monologue creates a comparison in the readers mind, between the hawk and an egoistic dictator. Prof. Anupama Shekhawat points out "In this poem Ted Hughes portrays the thought process that goes in the mind of the Hawk and relates it with the mind of every megalomaniac who considers others people around him as little importance" [Shekhawat, 2012]. The hawk lives according to the rules designed by him and "No arguments assert" his "right". The poems implicitly enjoins that this is a world where might is right. The Hawk says violently- "I kill where I please because it is all mine". The massive egotism which underlies the poem is again, telling in its implications for the human world. "I" in the poem is a sign of supreme ego of the hawk as he sits on "top of the wood" that stands for his kingdom. This idea gets much more stability in the line "Now I hold creation in my foot". The capitalization of the word 'creation' implies that the hawk playing the role of a God. The hawk's final declaration "I am going to keep things like this" leads a number of critics to interpret this attitude of the hawk as 'Fascism'. Critics like A.E. Dyson, Giefford consider the hawk as an allegorical icon of a fascist like Hitler or a merciless dictator like Stalin whose allotment for mankind is dead. But Ted Hughes himself in his BBC interview dated 23 June, 1963 asserted that he had no conscious political design while writing "*Hawk Roosting*". The hawk's blood thirstiness suggests that the hawk is cruel and savage. Keith Sagar has commented:

"Hughes knew that the honor with which we view nature "red in tooth and claw" is in part a product of our own preconception what you find in the outside world is what has escaped from in your own inner world-[The Laughter of Foxes]"

Hughes's animal poems are often described as "a modern bestiary". In the poem "*Pike*" Hughes introduces the characteristic of superficial dimensions of the pike. He begins the poem by depicting different type of pike fish. The poet defines the perfection of the pike in the first stanza -"Pike, three inches long, perfect". The life of pike is defined by its physical design; it is "subdued to its instrument". Pike has the killer-instinct that exists right from the hatching of the egg. According to the poet this violent nature of pike is hereditary-"the malevolent aged grin". Later the poet speaks of three pike quickly become one "with a sag belly and the grain it was born with". The fish-bowl that keeps pike behind glass is symbolic partition that effectively hurdles the interference of human in the natural world. The poet also provides the revengeful nature of pike that is allegorically referred with some persons who cannot tolerate the competition and believe in demising off the competitor. In order to come in closer contact with the pike and appreciate the ultimate dimension of the violence it symbolizes, Hughes intensifies the degree of our involvement through the act of fishing. The poem symbolizes sublime violence that cannot be studied. The killer instinct of the pike shows as a metaphor for the revolutionary hunch of England. Keith Sagar rightly observed, "It was both a pike and a thought -pike or a nightmare pike. It reveals the terror the humans feel every day, in their every action, in their every step of life" [Ted Hughes]

Ted Hughes's *Crow* poems provide a voice which can defy all the violence, malice and dominance. The crow first appears in the poem "*Examination at the Womb-Door*" where it observes the mighty death everywhere in the human society -"Who owns these scrawny little feet? Death. / Who own this bristly scorched-looking face? Death". Probably, Hughes here attempts to show the inevitable power of Death. But Hughes forms a entire turnaround in the last three lines-"But who is stronger than death? / Me, evidently. / Pass, crow". This majestic entry of the crow with the blood assertion that it is stronger than even death, paves the way for the readers to seek symbolism. Walder points out, "crow is just a cocky, humorous, tough, surviving voice that defeat even death. Amazing, absurdly, crow (and therefore humanity) can survive everything" (Walder, 1987)

A *Childish Prank*, another crow poem by Ted Hughes also brilliantly represents the voice of humanity through the crow. The poem is probably a satire on christianity. The poet here points out the failure of God to create a satisfactory universe.

After evaluating the crow poems and studying the researchers' over view about it, one hypothesis can easily be formed that the 'crow' is a new soul offered to human beings. Thus, the entity of the 'crow' is a free human presented to the regular chained human of modern world.

Ted Hughes was often criticized for his apparently deliberate bloody adjectives and trudging phrases that remind the readers the characters of dictators or Fascists. In fact, Hughes' view has always been wider than the simple labeling of him as "violent poet" or "shaman poet". For him, animal represents vitality. Hughes himself stated his artistic credo thus- "What excited my imagination is the war between vitality and death". Infact, What seems violence to others, is vitality to Hughes. For Hughes violence is a mere source of energy, a power-house, a 'condition of being'.

The 'pike', the 'crow', the 'hawk' all are different types of humans. If one represents the cruelty of human, the other urges for the break free spirit missed in the ordinary human attitude. Ted Hughes's animals represent a world of humans without any moral or religious bindings where restrictions of human expression, emotion and wishes do not exist. As Walder says that Hughes appeals "to our yearning for a wild freedom which, in our highly complex, industrialized, mass society we feel we have lost...". Ted Hughes in an efficient manner portrays the violence in animals only to reveal the very violence rooted deep beneath the human nature and some times, he glorifies this violence only to lead humans to understand the impulsive, instinctive psyche of their own race.

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