

Romantic Traits in Ted Hughes's poetry

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Abstract- Although many of the twentieth century English modern poets announce their breaking with the nineteenth century English Romanticism, there still remain romantic traditions in some of the modern poets, such as Ted Hughes. The introduction of Ted Hughes in contemporary literary criticism noted that he is a poet of nature in the raw, of primitivism, pessimism and natural destruction. In his poetry, Hughes is preoccupied with writing of nature, animal life and the elemental forces of non-human life. In Ted Hughes, Romanticism is not an acquired trait but emerged from within. Whether it is the same Romanticism that is observed in the poetry of great romantics or a manifestation of different kind of Romanticism?

Keywords- Romanticism, imagination, mysticism, animal images, myth, individuality, sensory perception, nature

Man, greatest creation of the Creator, has been creating such influential poetry that it transcends the barriers of time and space and is 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever.' Words serve as an effective medium for conveying one's thoughts in the most convenient manner although there are many words said beyond the actual words which would form the subject matter of yet another paper. Wordsworth referred to poetry as the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility.' It flows naturally from the fancy and imagination of the poet as he experiences life and goes through it just like any other mortal being. He is sensitive to the world around and is able to catch the minute things which otherwise are not noticed by a man struggling to meet the challenges of life. The poet is overwhelmed by feelings and pens them down in the form of a piece which is not only a purgation of his feelings but also a source of delight and food for thought for many.

Hughes has some very definite ideas about poetry and its functions, and about his own role as a poet. He has written and spoken a great deal about these ideas and, as might be expected, he deplors the sentimental, artificial approach to poetry, likening it to

*The manner of a dear, sweet lady telling the
vicar's
six-month old baby girl about the doings of
her little
pussy cat.*

Poetry, for him, is to do with the world of imagination, He calls it “a journey into the inner universe”, and “an exploration of the genuine self”. Poetry (he once wrote) is one way to

*unlock the doors of those many mansions
inside the head
and express something - perhaps not much,
just something - of
the crush of information that presses in on
us... Something
of the deep complexity that makes us
precisely the way we are...
Something of the inaudible music that moves
us along in our
bodies from moment to moment like water in a
river...*

Hughes believes that poetry is a magical and powerful way of reaching our feelings and emotions – our subconscious, natural energies. He believes that these energies have been repressed by an emphasis on the scientific approach to life and teaching. We are taught, he says, that emotions are dangerous, can distort our judgment, should not be relied upon when we have decisions to make, and that they have nothing to do with truth.

Nearly all schooling makes this kind of division: regarding the rational skills needed for maths and science, for example, as somehow superior to the skills needed for art and music.

Hughes sees this as wrong. He believes that it leads to inflexibility and dead-ends: to the sort of thinking that leads to war and destruction. Time and again, in his poetry, Hughes celebrates the natural energies, shows how they exist in mankind, and makes the point that human wholeness depends on an acceptance of all aspects of our nature. In particular, he believes that we must recognise ourselves as part of the natural world, subject to the same forces of nature as all other living things.

The poem 'Egg Head' presents this point of view by showing a man whose brain shuts out the beauty and the wonders of nature with "wide eyed deafness of prudence", "juggleries of benumbing", and "Braggart-browed complacency". The man tries to set himself apart from nature, but the irony of his egotism – his "staturing 'I am' " – is his "dewdrop frailty" in the face of nature's power. No amount of self-deception can overcome the reality of death – "the looming mouth of the earth" which waits for all living things. No amount of "sophistry" can finally resist "the flash of the sun, the bolt of the moon".

Creativity is necessary for survival and it requires both imagination and logic. Hughes sees it as the job of any kind of artist to help release our suppressed creative energies, and he believes that poetry is particularly effective for this purpose. Often, he sees himself as a shaman, a kind of tribal medicine man who makes symbolic journeys to the underworld of the subconscious to bring back lost souls and to cure sick people. The words, the symbols, the images and the musical rhythms of the poetry, are, for him, like the shaman's magic drum which helps him on his journey. It is these which stir our imagination, and the effect is a magical release of emotional energy.

In his poetry, Hughes is torn between the mythic vision of Coleridge and the elegiac authenticity of Wordsworth. A keen observer of the natural world, an eco-warrior in later life, he moved from work steeped in myth, claw and cage, a harsh, monosyllabic world of hawk, pike and crow, to poetry of a more reflective nature.

To conclude, Hughes cannot be determined a neo-romantic. While Hughes poetry incorporates the epistemology, symbolism and myth of the

Romantic movement, it does so in a highly dynamic manner. In this sense, it should not be studied as an echo of Romanticism, but rather as coextensive with it.

References:

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