



A STUDY OF ANIMAL KINGDOM IN TED HUGHES POETRY

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Abstract

Ted Hughes is widely acknowledged as one of the major literary figures of the twentieth century. He is called a nature poet as well as an animal poet. Hughes's portrayal of animals is full of energy and zeal for life. He portrayed animal violence as the semblance of man's hidden nature. Hughes animal symbols have a powerful individual reality. He facilitates a harmonious bond between humans and all the natural resources. His nature poetry predominantly deals with the problem of modern man's alienation from nature. Ted Hughes propounds that the natures of animals and humans are intensely inter-related. This paper tries to explicate the physical imagery of animal symbols used in Ted Hughes poems to indicate the mental pulse of humans. By using animals, Ted Hughes imagery has given vivid descriptions of inherent power absence from the human beings.

Key words: Instinct, violence, metaphor, nature, animalia

Introduction

“Edward James Hughes, the third child of William and Edith Hughes, was born on 17th August 1930 in Mytholmroyd, a village of the Yorkshire Pennines” (CP5). Ted Hughes showed an interest in animals at a very early age in his life. His family soon came to know about this on his fourth birthday. Ted was gifted a book of animal photographs along with descriptions of their natural history. At this early age he enjoyed catching fishes in the pond and collecting living animal creatures. Ted would put them in his pockets from where they later found by his parents. When he started writing about animal images, Hughes main concern was to portray not mere animals, but a hidden inherent power of human beings. Hughes focuses on the natural world, writing of animals rather than motionless landscapes. He strongly believes that nature should be guarded and restrained so as to prevent dangerous hazards producing calamities. Ted used the animal world as a vehicle to express human concerns. People who are interested in literature look at Ted Hughes' poetry as an object of critical interest and violent controversy. He has pictured the violent nature

of animals widely in his poems. He also glorified images of the brutal traits of creatures. He displayed a crude intimacy with animals which was not shown by his contemporary fellows. Through the pictures of animals, he shows to the world the passive nature of the young generation. He has concentrated on the creative and instinctive aspects of the animal images rather than on their violent nature. Animals are projected as unparalleled embodiment of enormous strength and unity. Hughes symbols also have a strengthened individual reality. They are more powerful than their descriptions. They show the stubbornness of life in various colors. Hughes's animal poems hints at modern man's present perilous existence and on the other attempt to redeem man from his own predicament. However Hughes attributes modern man's alienation from nature to his self-consciousness or his rational consciousness.

Animal world in literature

For thousands of years animals have held an important place in literature. Animal representation in literature has a prolonged and hallowed history. By Hughes writing about animals, human characters are described in detail. These descriptions enhance the perception of people towards animals. It is a creative approach to the portrayal of the animal-human relationship. It intensifies the perception of people using animals. In literature animal imagery is held to define the characteristics of a human using animal instincts and behaviors. The Panchatantra stories of India and the Sufi literature of Arabia depict moral stories using animals as characters. Moral stories describing animal characters like Aesop's fables are the childhood memories of most adults. Stories in the Old and New Testaments also use animals in these narratives to depict the human as well as the Godly characteristics. Household stories of Egypt, India, America and Africa incorporate animal characters in many popular stories. Real world animals and mythological animals are both included in these stories. And prior to the development of written languages, ancient people told animal stories by drawing symbolic visual narratives on the walls of their cave homes. These early examples of animals in literary history usually were imbued with strong religious and allegorical significance. Composed around the sixth century B.C., Aesop's Fables continue to serve as standards of moral didacticism using animals as examples for humans to abide. Animal characters are a defining feature of the fable, one of the oldest and most famous narrative genres and continue to figure prominently in contemporary fantastic literature. Western poetry is unthinkable without animal metaphors and animal imagery. Even realistic fiction carries on animals to achieve a wide range of rhetorical effects, ranging from pathos to bathos and including the common place. In truth it is perhaps this pervasiveness and familiarity that is responsible for the dearth of scholarship on the representation of animals in literature. In the ancient times from the Egyptian and Greek civilizations, animals like bulls and lions, as well as hybrid creatures like the griffin and the sphinx carried important roles in the development of complex mythological systems that influenced everything from the stories told to the study of stars. The Judeo-Christian tradition introduced other symbolic animal figures into literature. The Old and New Testaments of Bible have provided vivid and lasting images of animals that represent various human and Godly attributes, including the snake, the swine and the lamb. Our native Indian cultures have used stories of animals to help explain the mysteries of life and the universe. In the Age of Enlightenment moral allegories gave way to satire, which served not so much to teach lessons as to ridicule human foibles and political corruption. Repeatedly angry and cynical about the state of the world, satirists such as Jonathan Swift used some of the less desirable features of animals and humans. Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Keats wrote about the freedom of animals in their natural wild state and the capacity of humans to release their creativity by emulating that wildness. Modern day authors are also using these animal imageries to describe their characters.

Perception of Animal Imagery

Through cruel and instinctually driven animals Hughes presents the vitality and vigor of the poetic metaphor. Among poets his use of passionate animal imagery stands out. John Lucas, a well-known critic, is of the opinion that violence is integral to the poet's ideological orientation. Alfred Alvarez in an introduction to his anthology, *The New Poetry* (1962), attacks the critics who deride Hughes' poetry on "the gentility principle" and charge him of "nihilism". (qtd. in Sciraj, 10). He depicts the violent nature of man through the similar nature in creatures in the animal kingdom, making use of irony, satire and super conscious insights. His innovative techniques visualize the man-nature dichotomy. Ted Hughes is highly critical of the modern vision of the earth as a "closed space", as the 'other' of human culture or as a

“physical fact”. (Haila, 48). He gives the most important message about nature through the following lines:

There was a person
 Could not get rid of his mother
 As if he were her topmost twig
 So he pounded and hacked at her
 With numbers and equations and laws
 Which he invented and called truth
 He investigated, incriminated
 And penalized her, like Tolstoy...
 Obliterating her with disgusts
 Bulldozers and detergents
 Requisitions and central heating
 Rifles and whisky and bored sleep.
 With all her babes in her arms, in ghostly weeping,
 She died.

His head fell like a leaf. (C.P.,244-245)

Hughes found deep human realities in his animal images. The hawk, the fox, the otter, the pike and the crow are having totemic significance in Hughes' poems. Psychological picturization of human nature and hidden urges are done through the animals and their natures. Poems like “Thought Fox”, “The Horses”, “Bull Moses” and “The Jaguar” expose the inadequacies of rationality and humanism, and also expressing the increasing difference between human and animal in contemporary society. These images show the inner personality of human beings. These poems try to create an altruistic nature in man through an earth-centric sensibility. He describes the violent and inhuman nature of today's society to the fellow beings and strongly advocates for the achievement of humanistic nature for everybody. The poems like “The Jaguar”, “Thrushes” and “Hawk Roosting” show the violent nature in the nonhuman world. The terror in those poems is liberating in nature. Destruction of the ego is the sole theme in those poems. The crude nature of animals is depicted in these poems which serves to describe the primitive urge in human beings towards society and nature. According to Hughes the spiritual enlightenment which can be achieved through the life obeying nature seen in animals and this can also be achieved by human beings if they observe sharply the animal behaviors and follow them. Ted Hughes explains this in his talk to Ekbert Faas:

It is human, of course, but it is also everything else that lives....Some animals and birds express it pure and without effort, and then you hear the whole desolate, final actuality of existence in a voice, a tone... For beyond human words. And the startling quality of this “truth” is that it is terrible. (Vogue, 1971).

In the poem “Hawk Roosting”, Hughes presents man's rejections of nature, both ‘within’ and ‘without’. Nature's vision through the Hawk's eye indicates man's violence and human arrogance. The Hawk's image noted as a weapon to express the sophisticated civilized modern man and subvert the whole moral order of the contemporary civilization.

“An Otter” indicates with a naturalistic description the legend of the animal, “Of neither water nor land”, “Neither fish nor beast in the otter” (CP,80),culminates with an implied critique of the extreme apathy towards animal world. The fact that the Otter is not killed for any “functional reason” but for making a “trophy for his mate”, brings out the follies of the rationalist modern man whose “gratuitous act of violence”(Bold,64)reflects the general indifference towards the need to preserve the diversity of species in the world.

In “Second Glance at a Jaguar” the jaguar is not merely a diplomat from the primeval world, he is a world in himself. There is violence and ferocity displayed in the Jaguar's behavior, but he is also shown with a “belly like butterfly” and like a “cat going along under thrown stones”(CP,152),and is scared of human surroundings. Hughes draws on the traditional concept that Jaguar calls up his rage to wear himself out from within the condition of enslavement.

Ted Hughes invites his readers to the world of crude nature of animals through his poems on animals. The conflict between human ego and superego are described using animal imagery by describing animal characteristics of humans which can be compared to the similar psychological aspects of nonhuman creatures. According to Hughes modern man is insulated against the intricacies of Mother Nature through long generations and he must destroy his cocoon to enter the real world to reveal his genuine character. Hughes's animals are not mere representations of creatures but are intended as comments on aspects of human life.

Conclusion

Apart from the presentation of animal images through his poems, Ted Hughes is a practical man who can be considered as a naturalist and wildlife conservationist. He was actively involved in many projects on protection and wild life conservation. By portraying the violent nature of animals, he never glorified the cruel nature of wild beasts, but warned human kind against the deviated direction of vital energy for the destruction of his fellow beings. Ted's concept of human society is not a pack of violent individuals but also not a group of dull idols not responding to the immorality of social stigmas. Hughes's animals are endowed with certain significant qualities. They are distinctly non-rational in power, single mindedness in their action, self-centered, devoid of fantasy, and act instinctually so as to contempt duality in man. Animals can be used as the ideal beings to depict these conflicting images. Hughes' animal images are the picturization of modern man who has deviated a lot from his Mother Nature because of his advancement in science and technology which he thinks that brought him above the holds of Mother Nature.

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