



Edward James Ted Hughes and his Animal Kingdom

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Abstract— *This study explores the focus on the animal world in Ted Hughes' poetry. It argues that Hughes uses animals as vivid symbols of pure instinct and strength in addition to using them as symbolic figures. In analyzing poems such as "Hawk Roosting," "Pike," and "The Thought Fox," the article shows how these animals serve as mirrors, reflecting the darkness and violence that are part of human nature. Hughes' depiction of the natural environment also emphasizes the severe ecological realities and the continuous struggle for survival. As the speaker in poems like "The Thought Fox" longs to get back in touch with nature, the poet's sorrow over humanity's estrangement from nature is highlighted in the study's last section. Ultimately, Hughes's animal kingdom offers an effective frame through which we can examine the natural world ourselves, and the complex relationships among the three.*



Keywords— *Animal Kingdom, Ted's Animal World, Natural world, Ferocity and violence, Ted Hughes' Poetry*

INTRODUCTION

The greatest poet of the 20th century, Edward James Ted Hughes, has been called an animal poet by many critics and reviewers. His literary legacy has left an indelible stamp on a world that continues to pulse with life. Hughes' universe flows with the unspoiled strength and primal needs of the animal kingdom, in direct opposition to the peaceful meadows and soft animals that are often found in poetry about the natural world. Hughes undoubtedly has a great number of poems of animals but his other poems, dealing with other facets of human life in both personal and impersonal are equally powerful and evoke responses similar to those of the animal poems. Yet it is true that Hughes' popularity as a poet hinges on the fact that he comes out best in his animal poems.

This study examines this untamed environment and the vivid metaphors and representations of a power that is both exhilarating and horrible that Hughes employs with these animals. The poems that explore the spirit of the

predator—like 'Hawk in the Rain' and Hawk Roosting, where the title bird personifies an extreme kind of violence—will be the focus of research. The cruel ballet of survival that takes place in the natural world will then be the focus of attention. Poems such as "Pike" illustrate this relentless pursuit of life, often at the expense of others.

Hughes' portrayal of the animal kingdom, however, goes beyond a graphic play. It also provides a perceptive analysis of how people are growing more and more removed from nature. Poetry like "The Thought Fox" has a speaker who yearns for the unadulterated freedom that the cunning fox symbolizes. This need for connection is reflected in poetry.

With his rich and intense use of animal imagery, Ted Hughes—a massive of English literature of the 20th century—carved a special place for himself. Through his poetry, he explores a universe full of creatures who aren't too much friendly furry friends as wild, instinctive forces of nature. In order to better understand Hughes' use of

animals to shed light on the human condition and our nuanced relationship with the natural world, this article explores the animal kingdom.

Animal Kingdom

His passionate obsession with the animal kingdom began in the Childhood he spent on the bleak wilds & Yorkshire. Most of his animal-themed poetry stem from his belief that humans, in contrast to animals, are limited by their logical, introspective methods of problem-solving. A pantheon of various animals is easily located when once scans his entire poetic output. Those animals have a purpose built into their bones, where a man has yet to find one has been the recurring motif of his poetry. Hughes, however, believes that the attitude of the Western man is not natural, but rather the result of a lengthy history of Judeo-Christen suppression of man's innate tendencies combined with the advancement of contemporary science toward a purpose-driven aim.

The animal poems also share the same pattern of progress. In the initial phase, Hughes' animals are posited against human beings and distinction is drawn between them. The animals existent term of themselves only. In the phase that spans for around a decade from the late sixties the late seventies, the animals become surrealistic and symbolic in nature suggesting one or the other aspects of human life. Finally in the nature recent animal poems, the animals are both real and symbolic.

Behind this pattern lies Hughes 'perpetual fight with the dualisms perpetuated by the western culture and spirit, outer and inner world, emotion and reason. Hughes not only does identity this dualism but also offers resolutions for their unification. The animals like the serpent and birds help Hughes in accomplishing this mystic task.

One of the first poems to be written with animal as the protagonist is 'The Jaguar'. The Jaguar, wild as it is, is known for its ferocity and violence and it thus considered dangerous for man. One rarely appreciates the beauty of its violent dispositions. But Hughes encounter with the Jaguar in the zoo is different. He describes the Jaguar, imprisoned inside the cage and watched upon by a mesmerized crowd, 'As a child at a dream'. Hughes, meanwhile, sees nothing more than the crowd's sense of a powerful natural force that they are not in direct contact with—that is, the incarceration of the Jaguar. Being outside, they interpret the Jaguar stare and its movement inside the cage in terms of their own state of existence. The animals transcend the idea of what man calls imprison. It's stare a refusal to accept or to be imprisoned by at the external surface of the world at all. The last six lines convey the idea that the Jaguar's movement inside the cage is not because of its

boredom but, because he spins from the bars as there is no cage for him.

"His stride is wideness of freedom.

Over the cage floor the horizons cone." (Hughes Ted, Hawk in the Rain, 1957)

What is emphasized is the undeviating thrust of the Jaguar's being: the drill of his eyes on a short fierce fuse.' The Jaguar is objectively caged, that is, it is in prison in terms of the crowd, but in terms of itself, it is free as it cannot formulate the notion of imprisonment; man is not only conscious Hughes seems to say, of his prison, but his unconsciousness forms the very bars of this cell. The poem exhibits, like most of Hughes early poems, the contrast between man and the animal world. Hughes believed that man is unable to participate in the natural processes of the world because of his consciousness, which is shaped and conditioned by civilizing factors like religion and the idea of progress. In the last line of the poem 'horizon' is an example of the Jaguar's indifference to his imprisonment. He does not see the bars of the cage dividing his world from the far horizon. The Jaguar is not a symbol of man's imprisoned as some critics have tried to argue. To read it in this manner is to give a many interpretation twist in the poem which is hardly justified.

In 'The Horses', Hughes presented the unwavering nature of Horses as the face of a crisis. They are described as 'megalith-sill':

"The forest showed its fire. But still they made no sound

Not one snorted a stamped,

Their hung heads patient as horizons... "(Hughes, Ted, New Selected Poems- 1957-1994, 2010)

Similarly in Ghost Crab, the crabs:

" Stalk each other, the fasten on to each other,

They mount each other; they tear each other to pieces,

They utterly exhaust each other,

They are the powers of the world."(Hughes, Ted, New Selected Poems- 1957-1994, 2010)

This must not lead us to think that Hughes considers anarchy and destruction as virtues. Rather what we want to

establish that every creature should live according to its self-nature. By not living fully according his true self, man, in fact, has become more destructive. Whereas ‘the crabs are the power of the world... we are their bacteria’, ‘Dying their lives and living their deaths’ Man Jerk (s) awake to the world of [his] possessions with a grasp, in a sweet burst, brains Jamming blind into the bulb light.

The poem reminds us of ‘Hawk Roosting’ where was no separation between reason and instinct in the Hawk’s being. So is the case with the crabs that is why they are able to ‘fasten to each other... tear each other to pieces’ where as a ‘Staring Thickness of silence/presses between us consequently. Those crabs own this world.

The poem ‘Pike’ is close to both the hawk poems, ‘The Hawk in the Rain’ and ‘Hawk Roosting’ anal is about netting the various fresh water fish, pike. The early stanzas describe the predatory nature of the Pike: ‘Killers from the eggs: The malevolent aged again.

However, the pike exhibits two seemingly contradictory elements with unification. The pike owe the hands of submarine delicacy and yet evokes horror and though apparently small to the eyes, three inches long, they are ‘A hundred feet long in their world’. Like the hawk who does not rationalize his action and whose one path of... fight is direct/ Thought the bones of the living; the pike too is ‘A life subdued to instrument’. The later part of the poem describes the angler’s quest for the fish. But here the questions are revised. The angler becomes the victim of the pike’s stare:

“...I dare not cast
But suddenly cast and fished
With the hair frozen on my head
For what might move for what eye
might move...”
(Hughes, Ted, New Selected
Poems- 1957-1994, 2010)

There emerges a constant struggle bêtises the mesmerized stare of the victim, which like that of the stare of the crowd in the Jaguar, belonged to the superficial world, and the fixed, unwavering stare of the pike Finally, the poem ends with the blurring of all distinction between the subject and the object, the fisherman and the fish.

One is able to identify a distinct pattern in the development of Hughes’s animal poems. Hughes moves from the mere citing of the distinction between man and animal towards resolving this distinction by the end of his second volume, Luperca. Hughes’s belief in the success of the Western model of cultural growth had not yet wavered at this early period of his poetic career. Thus in spite of

ridiculing, satirizing, and criticizing certain aspect of the western cultural milieu, like its emphasis on reason, scientificity, objectivity and so on, he does not completely abandon it. The Hawk in the Rain, thus Concludes with an approval of martyrdom and Luperca with the affirmation of faith in the ritual which tries to be-empower man ‘age to age while the body hood.’

However with the waning of the sixties, this faith in the western man’s historical enterprise of progress vanishes. The poems of Wodwo, Crow and some parts of Cavebirds⁰ reflect this attitude Hughes’s disenchantment with man’s involvement in goal-seeking activity resulting in the destruction of nature finds expressions in the poems like ‘Thistles’, ‘Scapegoat’ and ‘Rabies’, ‘Cadenza’, ‘The Rescue’ and many other. In these poems, Hughes many regresses into surrealism a panacea for agitated tormented psyche. Hughes’s studies in the anthropology at Cambridge exposed him to alternative cultures round the globe. This inspired and enabled him to look at contemporary culture more critically. Hughes during the late stories and the early seventies is able to locate new powers in oriental thought in order to counteract the western cultural degeneration. He offers these new powers as survival strategies to the Contemporary Western man

Hughes’s poetry is the abandoning of the Western Analytic ego and recognizing the self as the generator of one’s own perception of reality. This process, I according to Hughes, unifies the perceiving consciousness with external reality. In other words, the duality between the external and the internal world is resolved through this process. ‘The Mishmash of scripture and physics’ which has left brains in hands, and blown of legs in tree top has led to the subject-object dualism, the divorce of mind from instinct and a-cultural schizophrenia. Leaving instinct to its normal, comforting environment, and abandoning the analytic ego would lead not only to the resolving of this dualistic thinking but also to a state of complete personality dissolution. This would result in a fresh, direct perception of reality in its suchness leading to a fashion of self-as creator and the perceived world”. (Leonard N Sciagj, 1985).

The two Important animal poems in Wodow are ‘The green wall and the Bear’ both the animals are symbolic in character as an analysis of the poems would show. They do not exist in reality. The poems talk about the annihilation of the odd self as prerequisite to recognizing the slumbering self in us. In The green wolf, images of violence, like the dark blood clot moves in, are used to express the idea of a violet with drawl from the old self.

Even the external World helps in this process of annihilation of the self. In *The Green Wolf*, He says,

The punctual evening
star,
Worse, the warm hawthorn
blossoms, their foam,
Their palls of deathly
perfume,
Worst of the entire bean flower
Badged with jet like the ear of the
tiger,
Unmake and remake me. (Hughes,
Ted, *New Selected Poems- 1957-
1994*, 2010)

. But Scijag is overzealous in reading Buddhist and the dissolution of the self in the 'Brahman' at the same time in the poems of the collection. This is hardly the case. Finally there is: One smoldering annihilation of old brain old bowels, old bodies in the scarves of dew...

The word 'dew' apart from signifying freshness also connotes the regenerative water essential for the renewal of life. In other poems, Hughes spoke of shedding one's rationally, ego centricity and prompted instinctual response to the environmental in order to renew the psyche, hereto, the annihilation would lead to a similar Effect. But here the annihilation is brought about by external violence, unlike the serpent where the process was more peaceful.

In the other poem, 'The bear' Hughes draws heavily upon the figure of the bear which in primitive cultures is a symbol of regeneration. The bear's hibernation was seen by the primitive people as symbolizing old age which would be followed by their resurrection. In contrast, in the Christian symbolize, the bear, because of its enormous strength, becomes an embodiment of the devil's power. The young David's fight with the bear mentioned in the Bible, is a prototype of the triumph of Christ over the forces of darkness.

In the poem, the bear is described as the 'gleam in the pupil Ready to awake land instantly' focus. One gets the picture of a bear in a state of absolute death but there is a very hope of its waking up. It is clear Hughes is not just referring to a sleeping bear. He, in fact, is not talking about a bear at all as is evidence from the rest of the poem. The bear here is nothing but man's self which is in a state of slumber but 'Ready to Awake'. But the process of this reawakening is not a simple one. One has to recognize death for his because one has to pay does not remain unreciprocated. The bear offers the reward of not only

comprehending the Knowledge of the self and the world, which are not incidentally distinct, but also knowledge deeper than a well and wider than a Universe. He states,

The bear gluing.
Beginning to end
With glue from people's bones
In this sleep
The bear is digging
In his sleep
Through the wall of the universe
With a man's femur.
The bear is well
Too deep to glitter
Where your shout
Is being digested.
(Hughes, Ted, *New Selected
Poems- 1957-1994*, 2010)

But the bear is not the symbol of regeneration alone. It also shows the door to death which is essential for further process: He is the ferryman, /to the dead land.

The importance of the self in comprehending the fullness of the universe is emphasized in the poem. Hughes has moved towards a certain type of subjective non dualism which advocates that it the self which is responsible in comprehending and even constructing the reality, there is no distinction between inner and the outer world. The western man, plagued by this dualism between these two worlds, and confusedly failing to relate himself to nature has turned more destructive. The only way to stop his carnage would be to annihilate the Old brains and reawaken the slumbering bear in us, ready to awaken.

This unwavering faith in the powers of the self culminates in the final poem of the collection 'Woodwo,' a poem about wood – spirit who passes a Confidence in the limited best satisfying powers a his own perceiving conscious as the generator y experience He prefers an eclectic questioning freedom to sitting still and developing any roots or belief system.

With the passage of the seventies, Hughes emerges out of the exiled world of the psyche and the self and we identify a renewed attempt at reconciliation with the reality of the external world. Not that he starts believing in the distinction between the world of the individual self and the outer world but where as in the previous phase he had just relegated the external world list some dark corners the self, now both the worlds exist in their suchness simultaneously, the external world being just a projection

of the individual self. Interestingly Hughes becomes less overtly interested in predators and more occupied with domestic animals such as cows, sheep and so on. This certainly masks a milestone in his Career because he is able to shed his preoccupation with excessive violence characteristic of his early poems. Even the occasional predators like the Tiger of 'Tiger Psalm' from *Earth Numb* (1979) is bereft of the blood thirsty violence of the early poems.

In 'Tiger Psalms,' Hughes redefines the relationship between the prey and predator which according to him is not just a matter of struggle and scream Like Blake's tiger. Hughes's tiger is not cast in role of a villain. The tiger is one more embodiment of Robert Greens 'white Goddess'. The poem, as reported by Hughes himself to Keith Sagar in a letter was originally conceived as a dialogue between Socrates and Buddha. Gradually Buddha's sided the argument was resolved into a tiger and Socrates discourse into the machine guns. Hughes considers the victim of the tiger more fortunate than the machine gun's prey. Hughes, in fact, refuses to acknowledge that the tiger's action is murder at all. The tiger 'Does not kill the tiger blesses with a fang...' He is described as the 'beast in Blossom.'

'The tiger kills expertly, with
anesthetic hand The machine guns
Carry on arguing is heaven
Where numbers have no cars,
Where, there, is no blood
The Machine guns ... go on
chattering statistics
The tiger... God of his own
salvation
The Machine Guns
Proclaim the Absolute, according
to Morse
In a code of bangs and holes that
makes men frown
The tiger Kills with beautiful
colours in his face
Like a flower painted one banner.
The machine - Guns
Are not interested
The Tiger
Kill and licks his
victim all over
carefully
The machine guns

Leave a crust of blood
hanging on the nails

In an orchard of scrap
iron."

(Ted Hughes,
*Selected Poems 1957-
1981*, 1982)

Hughes, of course, draws the figure of the tiger from much primitive folklore where highly referred as a natural power. But the method of the treatment of the symbol is entirely his own. Move over his appropriation of the style used in Psalm to suit his purpose is unique in itself. 'Little whale song' from *wolf watching* (1988) also presents the gigantic sea creature in a very Soft and benevolent light.

We are beautiful, we stir
Our self-colour serum in pot of
colours
Which is the world? At each
Tail-stroke we deepen
Our being into the world's lit
substance,
And our joy into the world's
Spinning bliss, and our peace.
The whales, says Hughes,
Amplify the whisper
Of currents and airs, If sea
peoples
And planetary man oeuvres,
Of seasons, of shores, and of their
own
Moon-lifted incantation....
Hughes concludes the poems,
The loftiest, super mist
Passions, the most exquisite
pleasures,
The noblest characters, the most
gods-like
Oceanic presence and
poise
The most terrible fall. (Hughes,
Ted. "New Selected Poems- 1957-
1994, 2010)

Hughes's whale emerges from the mystic depth and unfilled world to sing their ancient song of bliss and desire. The poem conveys the idea that whales live at one

nature in an unfilled state. It emphasizes the whale's sensitivity and feeling in contrast to reason and sees them as living together peacefully; procreating in bliss. The bliss is conveyed through the description of their movements.

And planetary man oevours
Of seasons, of shores, and of their
own
Moon lifted incantation, as they
dance
Through the origin Earth-
drama... (Sagar, Keith, 1983)

The Whales are both real and symbolic As Real creatures they are moving and convincing and as symbols of the last primitive world, they are massive and impressive. The last line of the poem refers to their terrible fall! This suggests what Hughes's forthcoming poems on animals would be like.

CONCLUSION

Hughes's recent poetry on animals, I feel, has lost its vitality. He sacrifices his poetic consciousness in favour of certain environmental agenda. Poems like 'wolf watching and Black Rhino' deal more with the issue like animal right and concern for the vanishing fauna. He tends to sentimentalize his animal which robs the poems of their powers. His animals, like that of Lawrence's, have become political animals. Though the tendency is not abominable by itself Hughes's new experiments do certainly deprive his readers of the experience of the power and strength of his earlier verse.

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