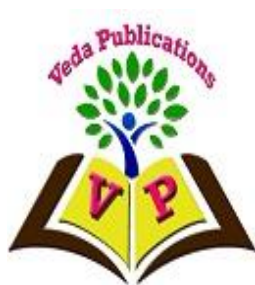


**VEDA'S****JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (JOELL)***An International Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal*

Impact Factor (SJIF) 6.12

<http://www.joell.in>**Vol.9 Issue 4****(Oct.-Dec.)****2022****RESEARCH ARTICLE****The Regnum Animalia of Ted Hughes****Altaf Ahmad Bhat***(Asst. Professor (English Studies), Govt. Degree College Shopian- 192303 (J&K-India))*Email: hussainaltaf125@gmail.comDOI: <http://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9404>**ABSTRACT**

Ted Hughes is a prolific and versatile poet on the 20th Century poetic scene. His poetry, particularly animal verification, is multidimensional. He employs terrestrial, aerial, and aquatic animal symbols and images with eloquence and felicity. His empathy is acclaimed one. Through these miscellaneous animals as vehicle of expression, he poetizes various aspects of existence: human nature and behaviour, Nature along with its turmoil and quietude, animal tolerance and resistance, ascendancy of some species over others, human egomania, and the mythical and legendary value of animals. Hughes shows the external clash between tenderness and violence in the Natural world. Even the poetic art is expatiated in terms of animal activities. Moreover, the poet also demystifies the universal and perpetual bond behind the whole God's creation. This study tries to overview all these dimensions and portrays Hughes as a new force and a fresh talent in English poetry.

Keywords: *Animal, Nature, Life, Poetry.**Author(s) retain the copyright of this article*

Copyright© 2022 VEDAPublications

Author(s) agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons

Attribution License 4.0 International License

**INTRODUCTION**

Poetry is a flame which sets ablaze the ambit of literature. It is such an asset without which one cannot even imagine the literary art. Since inception, poetry has witnessed countless ups and downs, but it has always sustained its glamour and grandeur. Different genres have been evolved and developed, but none has amused and instructed the readers in the manner poetry does. It would not be an exaggeration to say that with the birth of poetry, the wonderful world of literature has started its expedition which is still tireless and exuberant. A galaxy of poets has come and gone, and have contributed to the poetic tradition as per their competence and the need of the hour. Among them, some have carved in the hearts of readers an indelible image, and have become legends and prototypes for the posterity.

Ted Hughes (1930-98) one of the greatest and the latest contributor to the elongated lineage of the Western English Literary tradition which encompasses Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, Hopkins, Lawrence, Yeats, Eliot and other numerous luminaries. T.S.Eliot in his well-acclaimed essay "Tradition and Individual Talent", expresses that every fresh talent adds to the already established literary tradition with his/her innovative tactics. Ted Hughes has undoubtedly adapted a deviated path and contributed which is all fresh and new.

The main domain of Hughes's poetry is the utilization of animal imagery. These images serve him several purposes successfully and superbly, and he substantiates different aspects of human life in correspondence to animal world. Basically, Hughes's

awareness and allurement of this "other creation" is associated with his individual expedition from an innocent child to the experienced man. William Wordsworth, in his childhood used to spend the maximum time in the calm and quiet lap of benign Nature. It opened his inner eye to grasp exactly her underlying spirit and vitality. He perceives her caring intention harbouring for the entire living world. He transforms the same by dint of his acute imagination in the marvelous creation of art unparalleled in the whole gamut of English literature.

So far as Hughes is concerned, he has also grown up in the company of natural animals, especially with his elder brother, Gerald. Gerald was well adept in entrapping and hunting animals of diverse kinds. Such a direct and personal involvement of the poet has a paramount bearing in his understanding and delineation of animals. It provides his depiction reliability. Regarding his fascination for animals, he once told Ekbert Faas that all forms of natural life were "emissaries from the underworld" (*The language of foxes* 39). Moreover, he discloses, his heartily nexus with animals in like manner:

I suppose, because they were there in the beginning, like parents. Since I spent my first seventeen years constantly thinking about them more or less, they became a language a symbolic language which is also the language of my whole life. It was . . . part of the machinery of my mind from the beginning. They are a way of connecting all my deepest feelings together. So, when I look for, or get hold a feeling of that kind, it tends to bring up the image of an animal or animals simply because that's the deepest,



earliest language that any imagination learns. (40)

Like S.T. Coleridge and R.S. Thomas, Hughes deems a poem as an organic even before it becomes a conscious piece of art. This concept of a poem by the poet is based on the fact that the process of composing poetry is just like fishing and hunting animals. As he asserts: "In a way I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have a life of their own, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them (*Poetry in the Making* 15).

This concept of poem has an animal like organic and vital unity which develops naturally and spontaneously to its accomplishment. The poem "The Thought fox" describes the process by which a poem is written. The poem commences with an exposition of the protagonist's imagined picture in the forest at midnight. He personifies rather animalizes poetic inspiration as a 'fox'. The poet successfully perceives the fox coming to him through the forest and leaving its footprints in the snow between trees, and then enters into the dark hole of the poet's head. Ultimately the page is printed. In this way, Hughes uses 'fox' as a poetic mask and leave his readers in a conjurer's wonderland. Pertaining to such concretization of the idea of poem, the poet says: "You see, in some ways my fox is better than an ordinary fox. It will live forever, it will never suffer hunger or wounds. I have it with me wherever I go. And I made it all through imagining it clearly enough and finding the living words" (21).

The first and foremost subject which occupies the maximum fabric of his poetic output is violence in the external Nature, or what he himself names as "Vehement activity". The poems with such concern are genuine artistic achievements, though there is much cruelty and brutality for a reader to feel. Nature as an autonomous theme came into prominence in the works of the Romantics particularly Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Every poet treats Nature in a distinctive and individualistic mode, and brings out her different facts with masterly strokes of poetic art. Wordsworth, the most stupendous of all Nature poets, discerns in her existence a ubiquitous spirit and at the same time has a strong belief in the educative and ethical value of Nature. On the whole, he looks upon Nature as a benevolent and blessed entity that nurtures and nourishes man with her motherly care and cosiness. Later in the annals of English literature, it is Alfred Lord Tennyson who under the sway of evolutionary science deviated and demonstrated the malevolent and malicious intention of Nature. Nature speaks through Tennyson very awfully, "red in tooth and claw", a loveless, careless and ravenous:

She cares 'A thousand types are gone:

I care for nothing, all shall go

Thou makest thine to me:

I bring to life, I bring to death

The spirit does not but mean the breath:

I know no more'. (*The art of Ted Hughes* 47)

Although, Hughes is also an advanced Nature poet, yet he neither harps on the admirable



vignettes of Romantics, nor on the agonized treatment of Victorian Tennyson. He portrays both sides of Nature and views it partly as you product of our own conceptions: "What find in the outside world is what has escaped from your own inner world" (*The laughter of foxes* 15). This he does successfully by employing the imagery of various animals, and these animals serve as metaphors for the most typical stresses and contradictions of human nature as well.

The hawk in "Hawk Roosting" connotes the violence in Nature as well as man in a very striking way. The bird is proud of its power to pounce upon its prey. All the callousness and cruelty of creature has been summed up in a few words: "I kill where I please because it is all mine" (*Lupercal* 18). It further avers confidently that its method is only "Tearing of heads" of its victims. It claims to be the dispenser of death to those animals that fall a prey to its hunger. The bird leaps at its target like a cloudburst and pierces its bayoneted bill through its target. All this shows the brutality which is the rule rather than an exception in the world of Nature. The hawk represents might without mercy and right without responsibility. It hovers over the earth like a conqueror, and a legitimate owner to kill whatever, whenever and whoever it pleases. The presentation of the bird is ambivalent due to the probability of multifarious interpretations and therefore it is better to consider the poets own view in this regard:

The bird is accused of being a fascist. . . the symbol of some horrible totalitarian genocidal dictator. Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking. Simply Nature. It is not a simple,

may be because Nature is no longer so simple. I intended some creature like Jehovah In Job but more feminine. When Christianity pricked to the devil out of the Job what they actually kicked was Nature and Nature became the devil. He does not sound like Isis, mother of the gods, which he is. He sounds like Hitler's familiar spirit. There is a line in the poem almost verbatim from Job. (*The art of Ted Hughes* 48)

Thus, the image of the bird represents Nature full of horror. The egotistical hawk defies Darwin's theory of evolution which asserts that human being, the Homo sapiens, is the crown of creation. The hawk is portrayed as instinctively superior to man who does not acknowledge Nature for what it is, and tries to modulate her by pretending to give different philosophical reasons. The man's emasculating logical mind is sharply contrasted with the hawk's fervent instinct. The bird's egoism and solipsism is boundless and infinite. The world and its creatures do exist only for its convenient survival and it believes to be God's superior and supreme creation:

It took the whole of creation

To produce my foot, my each feather:

Now I had creation in only foot. (*Lupercal* 18)

The hawk has been given a voice of Nature and it reminds Walt Whitman who also permits Nature to speak through him:

I know I am solid and sound.

To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow.



I know I am deathless. (*The art of Ted Hughes* 47)

Similar to hawk is the image of jaguar that has evoked a lot of commentary from the readers. The jaguar is depicted like Blake's "Tyger" with astounding linguistic authority. The jaguar "hurrying engaged through prison darkness" does not feel fed up. Its eyes are blind and ears deaf due to the "bang of blood in the brain". The savagery of the animal is presented by such well composed phrases, as "hurrying enraged", "The drills of his eyes/ On a short fierce fuse" (*The Hawk in the Rain* 4). The most thought provoking line in the poem: "His stride is wilderness of freedom" and "The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel" (4). In this way, we can visualize a beast in a terrible posture through prison darkness, not in depressive and repressive boredom, but with a stride which suggests boundless freedom and carefree nature.

While pursuing the poem "The Jaguar" profoundly, two things become obvious. One is the self which the jaguar sustains successfully even in the confinement, and second is the selfishness of man who puts it behind the bars to maintain his reign over the freed natural animal world. All these ideas are supported by Hughes's opinion.

A jaguar after all can be received in several different aspects. He is a beautiful, powerful nature spirit, he is homicidal mania, he is a super charged piece of cosmic machinery, he is symbol of man's baser nature shoved down into the id and growing cannibal murderous with deprivation, he is an ancient symbol of Dionysus. . . . A lamp of astral energy. The symbol opens all the things . . .

it is the reader's own nature that selects. (*The art of Ted Hughes* 18)

Moreover, the image of thrush also shows ferocious and murderous concern. The poet projects the thrushes as horrifying creatures that are embodiment of "bounce and stab" without "any indolent procrastination". The swift movements of thrush recollect the poet of a bullet and of the shark's mouth: "That hungers down the blood smell even to the leak of its own/ Side and devouring of itself" (*Lupercal* 44). The poet fundamentally, tries to convey the indomitable power of Nature vis-a-vis man's fragility by using the imagery of thrushes. Keith Sagar asserts that a man neither defines nor defies him nor even man crushes straight through doubts, obstructions, temptations, sins, guilt and despair: "Furious spaces of fire do the distracting devils/ Orgy and hosanna, under what wilderness/ Of black silent waters weep (*Lupercal* 44).

Thus, the violent image of thrush manifests the thirst for supremacy and hegemony which is a part and parcel of twentieth century in particular and probably of all human beings always in general.

"Esther's Tomcat" is another metaphorically written animal poem and it is Hughes's real spectacular procurement. The concept of 'Tomcat' has stimulated an enormous debate on the literary scene. The impression of the animal on the readers is indubitably horrible as well as indelible. In the poem a tomcat pounces at a knight on his horse back and assassinates him in cold-blood, although he fights back vehemently and dauntlessly. The streaks of the knight's blood may be seen on the rock where he fell even after a long period of time, but the tomcat goes



on with callous attitude unchanged towards its vulnerable victims:

A tomcat sprang at a mounted knight,

Locked round his neck like a trap of hooks

While the knight rode fighting its clawing
and bite

After hundreds of years the stains there

On the stones where he fell, . . . (*Lupercal*
15)

This blood mindedness shown in the image of the tomcat has dual connotation: on the one hand, Hughes as usual conveys the perilous intend of Nature; and on the other hand, he obliquely tries to trace the effects of the historical events of the twentieth century like that of the Blitz, the Bomb. It above all alludes to the solipsist approach of the patrons of the Nazism and Fascism who fanatically tried to establish their dominance over other nations.

It is not only aerial and terrestrial creatures that motivated the poet to immortalize them in his verses, but his deep fascination for his dumb creation helps him to get intimacy of oceanic or aquatic animals as well. Among these animals, the poetic sketch of pike fish is a unique achievement. The pike is/are distinguished by their "jaws hooked clamp and fangs". The terrible portrait of pike is hit upon with masterly use of language: "Green tigering the gold", "Killers from their eggs", "The malevolent aged grin", "Stunned by their own grandeur", "submarine delicacy and horror", and "And Indeed they spare nobody" (*Lupercal* 48). In the poem, the poet expatiates two marvellously economical anecdotes which manage to accelerate the comprehension of

the readers. One anecdote pertains to the strong pike fish swallowing the impaired ones, and the other concerns to one powerful fish piercing its fangs through the other's gullet. Symbolically Hughes wants to convey the modern bestiary where everyone specially power holder strangulates the powerless and grubs their positions and possessions.

The poem was composed at a time when Hughes was not able to undertake his most favourable activity of fishing. Philip Larkin said that such a deprivation was to the poet what daffodils were to Wordsworth. In visualizing a fish at the bottom of the pond "as deep as English", he stirs up psychic depth of atavism. Apparently, there is no allegorical undercurrent, yet the poem about unspeakable invisible terror seems suitable for an era leading up to the Cuban missile crisis. Furthermore, fishing in deep water at night is the perfect image for the kind of poetry, the poet yearns to compose because it brings out the most naked and unconditional part of the self. The fear dramatized by the poet, is simply no fear arising from the angler's ignorance of what is rousing towards him out of the "Darkness beneath nights darkness". Gaston Bachelard's view has the matching relevance here:

Night alone would give a less fear. Water alone would give clearer obsession. Water at night gives a penetrating fear. . . . If the fear that comes at night beside a pond is a special fear, it is because it is a fear that enjoys a certain range. It is very different from the fear experience in a grotto or forest. It is not so near, so concentrated or so localized, it is more flowing. Shadows that



fall on water are more mobile than shadows on earth. (101-02)

Hughes's interest in the animal world is multi-meaning. He incorporates in this imaginative universe even those creatures that are unknown and unheard to a common reader. He exploits to the full his awareness of such animals that are free in the lap of Nature. But unfortunately, man's indulgence in their carefree surroundings has created havoc and disturbance for them. This predicament is crystal clear in the poem "An Otter". Otter is an amphibian, and through this image, the poet kills two birds with one stone. He in an astonishing, but artistic manner provides a glimpse of otter's nature and also reveals man's selfishness to destroy natural environment for the mean objectives. The otter has to kill the trout fish in order to feed itself for its sustenance: "blood is the belly of logic" (*Lupercal* 39), yet for that power and tussle, it cannot outflank human predators and has to become human consumer item.

The otter searches for its indigenous world which it had lost when first plunged into the water. It has made strenuous efforts to regain it, but all in vain. This suggests the poet's colonial preoccupation and the dispersion of the people in the different corners of the world, who craves for the retrieval to their homeland: "Seeking/ Some world lost when he first dived, that he cannot come since" (38). The presentation of the otter is contradictory to that of the hawk, as mentioned earlier. The latter with absolute command, reigns its element, and is the real dictator of the dukedom of daylight, while as the otter is also predator, the human presence on the spot turns it into a prey. Moreover, the otter's wailing for the lost Eden without receiving a

response, is an affirmed image of the dualistic disposition of man who is neither a mere substance nor a soul, and neither an animal nor an angel, always longs for the paradise home where there is no death.

Among other works, the poems "Song of Rat" and "The Howling of Wolves", shows the barbarity of human beings rather than animals. Through the images of rat and wolves, the poet uncovers the cruelty of so called compassionate man. The plight of wolves that are entrapped by men is poignant and heart-rending. The rat in pernicious condition stands in-between space of the two worlds- the world of traps, dogs and a vulnerable body (living and dying) and the world of invisible spirits and powers which know nothing of space and time, life and consciousness:

The rat is in the trap. . .

Iron jaws strong as the whole earth

Are stealing its backbone. (*The art of Ted Hughes* 85)

The rat cannot contend itself with pains and sufferings like man who rationalizes some transcendental causes for his pangs: "No answer is also an answer" and "This has no face, it must be God" (86). In this way, we find a crippled consciousness endured or harboured by various animals. Both the poems under consideration, metaphorically express the excesses of the communist autocracy dictating during and after the Second World War, a number of the European nations.

It is not only atrocious side of animals and man's inhuman attitude which enticed Hughes, but



his use of animal imagery also displays the gentleness and meekness of certain creatures. The exemplary instance can be seen in the pictorial description of horses in the poem of the same little. The horses in the midst of biting and nearly condensing chill do not agitate, but exhibit grandeur and patience. The closing portion of the poem echoes Wordsworthian considerate conduct of animal creation. The team of ten horses presents a collective huge picture absolutely calm and content:

Huge in the dense grey ten together

Megalith still. They breathed, making no move,

With draped manes, and titled hind hooves,

Making no sound. (*The Hawk in the Rain* 8)

Through such lurid elucidation, the poet intends to demonstrate the horses as an incarnation of perseverance and tolerance. They suggest the mild and humane trait of the non-human world that has been generally overlooked. The calm and quietude of the horses is reminiscent of the ferocious natures of the jaguar and the hawk brimming with fear and terror for other fellow creatures. Besides, the poem reminds Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" which also opens with natural description of the sunrise in a pleasant breezy and bright dawn. At this moment, the prophet of Nature approaches to leech gatherer on the moor, who like the horses appears to the poet a huge stone, "Couch'd on the bald top of an eminence". He feels as though, he were dreaming and closes his poem as " 'God' said, I 'be my help and stay secure/ I'll think of the leech gatherer on the lonely moor' " (*The Art of Ted Hughes* 21). Hughes also winds up in like manner:

"May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place/
Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing
curls,/ Hearing the horizons endure (*The Hawk* 9).

CONCLUSION

All these statements and illustrations endorse the fact that Ted Hughes's versification is a sort of initiation into a world explicitly alien characterized by what seems to be a magical closeness to poems as a new force and the emergence of new talent in English poetry. This imagery indeed connotes that one thing can be better understood by reference to another. It also underlies the fact that there is a kind of natural perpetuation and a universal bond behind the whole creation. Critics generally the natural world. Reviewers like Robert skelton have recognized Hughes's harp on the concept of "voyeurism of violence" in his animal poems. But the poet's intention is to create a tinge of perception in mankind to identify themselves with slayers or with destroyers because such things do occur only due to man's presence. Moreover, man's selfish nature and power hunger tendency are also conveyed through usage of animals. Another purpose of the poet is to vindicate the fact that this dumb creation occupies an indispensable place in the God's holistic creation, and each species has its own unique identity and its own distinguished role to play. The poet also obliquely or figuratively entails in the animal philosophy, the clash and sometimes likeness between human beings and animals. In this way by communicating all these ideas through appropriate use of images, the poet shows the sweet as well as bitter temperament of Nature.



WORKS CITED

Bachelard, Gaston. *Water and Dreams*. (NP) Dells Press, 1983.

Print.

Greening, John. *Focus on the Poetry of Ted Hughes*. London:

Greenwich Exchange, 2007. Print

Hackett, Joenetta Daphne. "Animal Imagery in the Poetry of Ted Hughes".web.15Oct.2010

<http://www.circle.ube.ea.handle/2429/21642>>.

Hughes, Ted. *Lupercal*. London: Faber and Faber Press, 1970. Print

-- -- --. *Poetry in the Making*. London: Faber and Faber press, 1967.

Print.

-- -- --. *The Hawk in the Rain*. London: Faber and Faber press,

1968. Print.

Sagar, Keith. *The Art of Ted Hughes*. 2nd ed. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1975. Print.

-- -- --. *The laughter of Foxes: A study of Ted Hughes*. 2nd ed.

Liverpool: Liverpool University, Press 2006. Print.
