



An Exploration Of The Imagery Of Violent Aspects Of Nature In The Select Poems Of Ted Hughes

Dr. Kapil Mahadeo Kulkarni

J. S. M. College, Alibag-Raigad

Dr. Nagraj Dasmayya Kharade

Shri Omkarnath Maalpani Law College, Sangamner, Ahilyanagar

Abstract: - Edward James Hughes, popularly known as Ted Hughes, is one of the prominent poets of 20th century England who rose to become the Poet Laureate of the nation in 1984. Throughout his poetic career, he has shown a deep interest in the world of birds and animals as the elements of the natural phenomena. The very titles of his poetry collections *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), *Crow* (1970), *Cave Birds* (1978) and *The River* (1983) clearly reflect his deeply rooted connections with the biological world around him. Through his vivid and sensuous description of the living creatures, Hughes attempts to underline the inevitable co-existence of man and nature and throws light on the need to adapt and adopt as the birds and animals. Most of his animal poems highlight the brutal aspects of nature which can prove to be disastrous to the human life. Exploring the eternal relationship between man and nature, Hughes' poetry generates a sense of awe and fear as a result of man's indiscreet exploitation of the natural resources. The present paper proposes to analyse the various aspects of man-nature relationship as depicted in the verses penned by Hughes and the imagery of violence and devastation pertaining to nature as a result of man's failure to understand and adapt to nature.

Keywords: - birds and animals, natural phenomena, biological world, awe and fear, brutal aspects

Introduction: -

Edward James Hughes, popularly known as Ted Hughes, was one of the leading poets of England of the latter 20th century. The two shaping influences of Hughes' poetry are his father William Hughes' military background and his own birthplace- the Calder valley. As a result, most of his poems deal with the disastrous nature of war and the awe-inspiring magnitude of the natural phenomena. Hughes' keen interest in birds and animals resulted in the saga of a vivid description of these creatures as representatives of the environmental world. Almost all his poetry collections incorporate Hughes' symbolism and the treatment of nature as a breathing and living entity. Following is an attempt to analyse some popular poems by Hughes to explore the depiction of nature-human relationship and the triviality of human existence as opposed to the vastness of nature with all its violent and disastrous elements.

The poem *The Hawk in the Rain* that features as the main poem in the volume of poems with the same title describes a speaker walking through a muddy street in the heavy rain. The laborious act of walking through the sticky ground is contrasted with the ease with which the hawk sits patiently and determinedly. The fragility and susceptibility of the speaker is shown against the strong and unshakable will power of the hawk which is a representative of the nature. The speaker has a clear impression that while he is vulnerable to the cruel and violent elements in nature, the hawk is far beyond this bending power as it is part of the same phenomenon and holds the shares the same qualities. An afterthought, however, convinces the speaker that the hawk too is weak and one day may fall prey to the devastating powers of the almighty nature. The poem, thus, asserts the ultimate power of the nature that can sustain and even destroy its own creations. The susceptibility of the hawk, itself a symbol of violence, to the forces of nature, puts nature as a composite phenomenon above all its elements. The image of the hawk as a victim, otherwise a killer, is a striking one and induces a feeling of triviality as contrasted with the vastness of the 'killer' nature.

Another poem from the same volume titled *The Thought Fox* speaks about the generation of poetic ideas in the mind of the speaker. The speaker imagines himself as sitting in the forest, though he is in his room with a blank paper in his possession. The speaker is surrounded with utter darkness without any sign of life around him except for the clock and the paper. However, all of a sudden, the speaker feels the approach of a fox towards him through the darkness of the forest. The fox is nothing but a poetic idea that enters the head of the poet. The sudden outbreak of a poetic thought is equated by the poet with the entry of a fox into the still of a quiet, dark night. The metaphor *The Thought Fox* is very striking, as the poetic creation is always treated as something to be 'recollected in tranquillity'. Hughes, however, in an iconoclastic manner, compares the germination of the poetic thought with the entry of the ferocious animal. The fox symbolises not only the suddenness of the poetic expression, but also its pointed fierceness. The poem is replete with the imagery of darkness which suggests the lack of poetic creation by the poet for about a year and the entry of the fox suggests the resurgence of the poetic creation with a vigorous flow.

One more striking poem from the collection is *The Jaguar*, which describes the sense of freedom flaunted by the jaguar kept in a cage in a zoo. The poet contrasts the jaguar with the other animals and birds in the zoo-apes, tigers, lions, boa-constrictor, which look lethargic and tamed. Though the jaguar too is kept in a cage, it is far beyond any sign of confinement. On the other hand, the jaguar thinks of himself as a free entity. The poet compares the confinement of the jaguar with the imprisonment of a revolutionary, whose feelings after being kept in the prison are a thing to be proud of, not to regret. The jaguar repudiates to display any sense of being controlled and behaves like a master, though in a cage. The jaguar is depicted as enraged and as carrying fire in the eyes. The imagery employed by the poet is mostly visual and auditory which leads to an audio-visual like effect that the reader can feel for a very long time. On the symbolic plane, the poem asserts the human nature with all its rage against any kind of caging and the mental unrest and ferocity against imprisonment, through the character of the jaguar. In another way it can be safely said that the jaguar represents the inherent ferocity and rage in human beings, that cannot be controlled by external forces.

The poem *The Horses* reminds one of Robert Frost's legendary poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. The speaker, however, shares his experience at a chilling dawn. The poem contrasts the world of human beings as full of unrest and commotion with the world of nature, with all its serenity, stillness, indifference and calmness. The speaker describes the world as wrapped in the frost-making stillness, even without the movement of a leaf or a bird. The world is clad in the darkness except for the moor line which is brightening. During his walk, the poet comes across the group of horses-ten in number-which are describes as still as stone carvings. The horses breathe, but they do not make any movement or make any sound. The poet describes the horses as 'grey silent fragments of the grey silent world'. After some time, as the poet returns and the sun rises, there is one more encounter between the poet and the horses. The horses only change their colours, but still there is no movement or sound. Years after this

experience, the poet wishes to refresh his memory of the still horses, when he is surrounded by the crowd and troubled by the din around him. The poem, in this way, compares and contrasts the calmness and peace of the world of nature with the hubbub of the manmade world of noise, commotion and rapid change.

The poem *Hawk Roosting*, taken from the anthology “Lupercal” depicts a hawk as expressing his view of the world and his philosophy of life. A sense of satisfaction and complacency pervades the entire poem where the hawk considers the whole world as a creation under his feet. The hawk is delineated as inactive and without any false dreams between his ‘hooked head and hooked feet’. In sleep also the hawk practices killing and eating other birds and animals. As the hawk always rests on high trees, it can experience the lightness of the air and feel the touch of the warm rays of the sun. Sitting on the high tree, the hawk can inspect the earth. The hawk is very proud of his sturdy feet and his robust feathers, which he considers the most powerful creation of the nature, the nature that now he holds under his feet. The hawk thinks that it can revolve the entire creation, kill whatever pleases him because it all belongs to him. There is no fallaciousness in his manners, as he knows just how to kill with precision. He says that his path just goes through the bones of the living and no one can oppose to his right to kill. For the hawk, the sun is behind him and nothing has changed since he began to live. The hawk has determined not to allow any change to take place. The poem, in this way, comments on the volatility of the human world as compared to the unchangeable world of nature, through the hawk as an onlooker and critic of the human world.

Conclusion:

The poems penned by Hughes, published in various anthologies over a large period of time, are replete with the imagery pertaining to the animal world. Most of the times, the animals chosen by Hughes are the wild animals like the jaguar and the fox and the birds of prey like the hawk. The treatment and description of the agents of nature by Hughes inspire a sense of awe in the mind of the readers. The magnitude of the nature is depicted through its vastness and the potential to devastate. The delineation of violence serves the purpose of conveying the might and unaffectedness of nature in contrast with the triviality and vulnerability of man.

References

Hughes, Ted. “The Hawk in the Rain”. 1957. Genius, <https://genius.com/Ted-hughes-the-hawk-in-the-rain-annotated/> Accessed 8th January 2026.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/200/feb/18/poetry.tedhughes>. Accessed 9th January 2026.

---. “The Horses”. 1957. Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/161873/the-horses>, Accessed 9th January 2026.

---. “The Thought Fox”. The Poetry Archive, <https://poetryarchive.org/poem/thought-fox/> Accessed 9th January 2026.

---. “Hawk Roosting”. 1957. The Guardian,

---. “The Jaguar”. 1957. Poeticious, <https://www.poeticious.com/ted-hughes/the-jaguar/>, Accessed 8th January 2026.

Shanvas T. and Amit Dhawan. “Subverting the Idea of Human Exceptionalism in the Poems of Ted Hughes”. *Journal of Novel Research and Innovative Development*. Vol.3, Issue 8. August 2025. pp. 123-130

Singh, Hardeep. “Exploring eco-centric poetry of Ted Hughes: Nature, humanity and environmental consciousness”. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies*. Vol. 3, Issue 4. 2011. pp. 273-275