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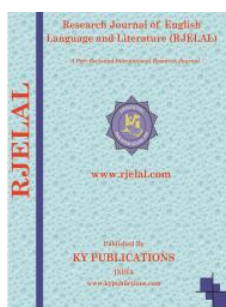
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TED HUGHES' POEMS AS THE PESSIMISTIC MIRROR OF NATURE

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ABSTRACT

Generally, Hughes doesn't make room for romantic ideas in his writing. It rather discloses the underlying raw-rough practice of nature. His style of imagination is also led that way. He tends to be attached to wildness more than wilderness. He portrays the nature that spins its own offspring on its finger instead of adoring in its lap. It is indifferent to any kind of appeal. Thus, shifting of autocratic power is depicted in his workings. However, the dog-eat-dog situation of nature is justified because the elements are simply the subject of food chain. The violence of nature cannot be subdued by external imprisonment as it is something innate. It seems Hughes himself is aware of how adversely he presents nature to us, which is evident when he dreams a fox on behalf of nature, laying a bleeding hand on the blank page of his desk, pleading to stop destroying them.

Key Words: Autocracy, Annihilation, Indifferent Nature, Shift of power, Law of Existence.

Introduction

Ted Hughes is such a figure of the 20th century poets, whose paramount concern is environment. He has been raised in the midst of raw and rough realities of valley and moors which shaped rest of his life. In an interview in 1961, he admits that first seven years seem almost half of his life.

External world results in the internal world of mind which is evident in his poetries. His fascination for animals grew from the very early stage and occupied most of his literary works. In fact, he used to compare his infant daughter, Freida, with a cat and wife, Sylvia, with a pig mentioned in the same interview.

However, he is suitable to deal with the hard pastoral rather than soft pastoral (Bate, 2015);

and it gives his poems the essence of harsh pessimistic effect. Notorious nature would be far more prominent and overpowering in his poems than the nurturing nature.

Literature Review

Blake Morrison (1994) says that Ted Hughes is the finest poet of the natural world since Lawrence. According to Sagar (1978) "He deals with hard facts of things".

"It is a basic contact that Hughes can make with the external world which influences his poetic creativity about animal and nature." (Tongsukkaeng, *Question*, 55)

The need to engage with the wild is central to Hughes' poetry. (Tongsukkaeng, *Question*, 57) Morrison says that an American poet found Hughes'

poem about wren meaningless as he has never seen it. So Hughes can no longer takes for granted in readers a familiarity with the birds, beasts and flowers to which he has devoted himself throughout the life. Yet he has not ceased writing poems on animals.

The old O-level worry about Hughes was that his poetic universe was too brutal and nihilistic. His self defense here is that their energy affirms the divine law that created them as they are. (Morrison, 1994)

Argument

How Hughes deals with nature can be shown explicitly through analyzing some of the most read poems of his. Such as the poem "Wind" (Keegan, 2012) carries destructive essence not only through the incidents described there but also through the images it offers. The booming, banging, drumming sound of hills [auditory], crashing sound of woods [auditory], sun beam as sharp as blade light and terrifying like lens of mad eye [visual], strong wind which seems to drill eye balls [tactile], grinning face of sky at people's misery [visual], outcry of stones from outside [auditory], shattering note of house [auditory], leaving black astride, heart drooping footprints [visual] are the instances that give us the feeling of fury of nature. This is another face of the same nature that used to adore human in its lap. It can spin its own offspring on its finger as well ["The wind flung a magpie away"]; compel them to tremble and plead in front of own guardian ["The fields quivering"], ["A black-back gull bent like an iron bar slowly"] and people are utterly helpless in its tyrannical hands but to endure and wait to stop ["Now deep in chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip our hearts"]. Sometimes, it can be vain or endless waiting till being washed away. Nature will remain indifferent while swallowing.

Here, 'tent' is used not conventionally as the means of protection or shelter, rather has been treated as the symbol of annihilation, in other words, the measurement of vast cyclone, allegorically harbor shaped hazard ["The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope"]. The poet intentionally used "Blade light, luminous black and emerald" to make us realize the intensity of the

darkness that the nature had endowed itself with. The more profound the darkness is, the more flash of light seems scorching or irritating for eye. By the verse ["The house rang like some fine green goblet in the note that any second would shatter it], we can guess how high the frequency of the wind is which can shatter the house like glass with its shriek noise. By this description, we can assume how powerfully it is whirling with numerous orbits. Thus, by one hint we can reach to other apprehensions.

The poem "Relic" (Keegan, 2012) may apparently lead us to nostalgic feeling suggested by the title before going through the very poem, but later it appears pathetic, shows us the reality of crude nature. The relics are the last evidence or synecdoche of the extinguished entities that evoke pain as well as fear. Like, the jawbone mentioned in the poem is itself an object of shock, shiver. At the same time it reminds us of the owner who once used to be active in eating, gripping; subsequently has been finished or eaten up, which is undoubtedly a matter of pity. Again, it can be seen as poetic justice. Who used to devour other creatures, ended up being devoured as the result of karma. Nevertheless, there should be another concern that none of these creatures are meant to harm others. Rather they are simply the subject of the food chain. Preying, hunting are not acts of heinous deeds. It is the thrive of surviving. Struggle for living is the ultimate truth of life. According to Hughes, sea feeds on this survival game to fulfill the appetite of entertainment. Just like the movie "The Hunger Games" (2012) – A fictional televised event where the capitol of nation forcefully sends teenagers to tribute fight where only one can outlive. So they keep killing each other. When time comes, swallowing the creatures and throwing away the indigestible body parts [shells, verterbrae, claws, carapaces, skulls, jawbone etc] regardless of whom it fostered all this times, are considered as the achievement of the sea. It is the dark intestine, lustrous nature of nature where "nothing touches but clutches, devours". At this point, one thing is clear. Time is strict to everyone. It doesn't pay heed to entreat, incomplete purpose or desire. The creation is once again helpless in the autocratic rules and regulations of nature. Then traditionally ocean

is accepted as wealthy. But Hughes here declares "None grow rich in the sea". This is how Hughes' mentality differs from other's predictable mindset which consequences in bringing dark and unexpected side of the nature into light.

His way of thinking is like: if a tired-hungry passerby sitting under a tree finds a fruit suddenly fallen down the tree, this incident is likely to be comprehended as the divine blessing on the passerby or simply a result of ripeness or else nothing important to consider anything. But Hughes may explain, the tree has abandoned one of its kids. Eating fruit by that passerby is not at all worthy of noticing. But Hughes may observe it intolerable for the tree to see its own child being consumed.

In the poem named "The Thought-Fox" (Keegan, 2012), it's quite unusual that a poet doesn't make himself find or imagine stars as inspiration for writing. Rather, his ideas haunt like fox; commonly known as cunning-crafty animal. His thought reflects that he is more attached to wildness than wilderness, prefers sly-vulgar nature over mild-soothing one. In the poem, "the dark hole" of the head can be compared to "black hole" of the universe. It is believed that nothing comes out from the black hole ever. Poet's present hollow state of mind also doesn't let any idea come out from the brain. However, the latest discovery of Stephen Hawking shows that even black hole is able to radiate. A piece of advice from him in relation with this insight:

"Things can get out of a black hole... So if you feel you are in a black hole, don't give up – There's a way out" (Resnick, 2018)

The same did happen with Hughes. Finally, he could trace the outlet of his mind through which ideas were revealed as the printed form in the paper.

Another day, he encountered a fox in a different way in dream. This time, the fox walked into his room, came up to desk, laying a bleeding hand on the blank page said:

"stop this – you are destroying us." (Morrison, 1994). Maybe the nature pleads to him not to present them violently and

not to highlight the ugly side. Analyzing the settings of "The thought-Fox", the fox's claim is clear. He chooses a fear prompting period of time- that is midnight, deep darkness, loneliness, horrifying widening green gaze of fox, its sharp hot stink, barbarous tendency of approaching to prey depicted through the art of fox etc. Jonathan Bate (2015) admits that Hughes does not idealize nature.

The poem "Theology" (Keegan, 2012) suggests human is part of nature, while Satan is part of human. That means one of the attributes of nature is satanic. Obviously, when nature grabs power, it is prone to become tyrannical. We've already found this theme in "Wind". "Theology" also demonstrates the misusing power of the serpent through inducing Eve to violate forbidden rule of the heaven. Then it smiles at the fuss of the wrathful God. Here, the nature became superior to God. It's called the shift of power.

This shifting of power is also evident in "Hawk Roosting" (Keegan, 2012). Here the hawk boastfully proclaims,

"It took the whole of creation to produce my foot, my each feather: Now I hold Creation in my foot"

The hawk is "an extension of nature's immanent power". (Tongsukkaeng, *Wilderness* 33). It places itself on the top of the wood which gives a feeling of sublime position in nature. The face of earth is upward to its inspection as if showing reverence. According to its point of view, Sun [as the God, Helios, in Greek mythology] is in fact behind it to support, follow and treat it as the leader. So, the hawk is very much engrossed with its fancy of power that it thinks it possesses and for it, killing is just a matter of a desire, regardless of any hearing of argument as it claims "it is all mine" and "my right". "God in fact has crafted me to kill other birds for my sake" (Sharma, *Hawk*, 2014)

Again, it justifies its act of killing. [There is no sophistry in my body]. It tears off the head and gives immediate death to its prey, not a long lasting pain like hyena does. It directly goes through the

bones of its prey, doesn't attack in coward or conspiring style. It has no other motif in taking their lives.

"Its urge to kill and eat is not motivated through conscious reason." (Armitage, 2016)

Another significant trait of the hawk is its practices killing even in the sleeping mode. "Dreaming is an extension of waking consciousness, reflecting the experience of waking life" (Breus, 2015). It's not surprising if the hawk becomes habituated to destructive attitude in inactive state also. It is used to prey so often that now it's hard to distinct awaken self from slumber.

But it's not less shocking that pikes are not only killers from antenatal stage but also kill own species as denoted in Hughes' poem "Pike" (Keegan, 2012). [Killers from the egg]. Somewhat like spiders, who consume their conceiver mother for growth. New born pikes even don't seem innocent. They are as terrible as the grown up with "malevolent aged grin". They themselves are astonished to see own giant figure. It seems they dance on the surface among the flies. But there's possibility that they're actually trying to eat them. Even when body is motionless, jaws keep active because of its inborn destructive instinct. (Sharma, *Pike*, 2014) Pike is that kind of natural element which leaves horror impression on the spectator. While fishing, it is the poet who is the intruder and scared. The pike rather comes up to the surface to give a tough look for being disturbed. (Sharma, *Pike*, 2013) This is another example of shifting of power.

Pikes generally dwell in deep pond [culvert end] "as deep as England". Perhaps Hughes made this comparison to state that England also consists of pikelike people. This natural element has been used as the metaphor of a particular category of human being.

In "Jaguar" (Keegan, 2012), it is seen that the ferocious nature is the centre of attraction. Hughes has given a picture of zoo where a jaguar is acting restless to get free from the cage. Even in captive state, its haughty nature cannot be subdued but reaches to culminate point just like Venellope from the movie "Wreck it Ralph" (2012). Her code of racing was locked deceptively and the memory was

erased. Yet, her passion and skill of racing didn't disappear but retained as always used to be. Both of their characteristics are something innate. Hughes signifies the animal's mode of freedom as inseparable from the mode of being wild (Tongsukkaen, *Wilderness* 41). Similarly, Xerri claims that nature's malevolent characteristic is constituted by the animal's independence and violent force. (Tongsukkaen, *Wilderness* 34).

"Thrushes" (Keegan, 2012) is another poem of Hughes, where ruthless nature has been noted explicitly. The way of living of the bird, thrush, is nothing but to bounce, stab, drag and ravaging its hunt. Now the poet comes to the second thought that what drives it to do so. Are they designed thus? Is it another name of fostering breed? Then Hughes talks about shark in this poem that it becomes mad at the smell of its own blood as well. "and the shark's mouth that hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own side and devouring of itself"

In "*The hawk in the Rain*" (1957), the ploughed land is portrayed as grave.

"I drown in the drumming ploughland, I drag up Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth's mouth, From clay that clutches my each step to the ankle With the habit of the dogged grave,"

According to Hughes, "Crow is another word, of course, for the entrails, lungs, heart, electra- everything extracted from a beast when it is gutted". (Armitage, 2016)

All these animals are actually the manifestation of metamorphosis of the white goddess [The White Goddess, 1948], who is analogous to vixen, serpent, owl, tigress etc. (Bate, 2015).

Hughes considers civilization as a threat to nature. Civilization, that results in pollution, contamination, toxic elements, chemicals, pesticide in fields, human infertility and so on. After being conferred with the honor, Poet Laureate, he effectively used the platform to hit these issues and trying to reform them. In the burning question of ecology Vs economy, Hughes stands against harmful civilization which is the culprit of nature.

Theoretical Framework

Ted Hughes used to believe in Darwinian optimism and determinism. Darwinian determinism says that one's strength determines another's fate. Only victimizer can survive, who is the fittest one. (Sharma, Pike, 2014) It can also be named Existential Theory or law of existence which is the crude universal truth.

Conclusion

Ted Hughes is not prone to romanticism. He doesn't confine his outlook merely in superficial level. "His own first gift as a poet is a man who notices things" (Morrison, 1994). He scans nature, scrambles its items, deconstructs, and doesn't hesitate to unfold the underneath gruesome facts disguised in positive appearance. He owns a sort of prism mindset. [Prism is a transparent glass that can absorb all the colors of light but their directions are refracted; none of them are reflected except the colorless white.] Similarly, Hughes also picks diverse regular objects which may generally be accepted inoffensive, yet presents them all in cold manner. Friendly input is processed in fiendish outcome. We are about to acquire a good feeling but eventually, it changes track. Actually it's not the question of bliss or bitter feeling of the poems. It is about how much one allows him to get better understanding and acceptance of the naked face of nature. Though it can't be denied either that perception depends on perspective.

His poems are that kind of mirror to which if we ask, "Mirror mirror, on the mirror! What is the most savage creation?" The poems are likely to answer, "Nothing but nature".

Bell (2002) comments on Hughes, "He wrote frequently the mixture of beauty and violence in the natural world which can be understood by the term innocent savagery of animals"

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