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GRT **DEPICTION OF THE VIOLENT SIDE OF NATURE IN TED HUGHES'S *HAWK ROOSTING* AND *PIKE***

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Abstract:- Ted Hughes is one of the major nature poets in English Literature. However, he is different from other poets in terms of his attitude towards nature and its depiction in his poetry. He puts focus on the violent, destructive aspect of nature in his poetry. He had a wide knowledge of nature and its inhabitants. Hence there is realistic description of birds and beast in his poetry. He is more interested in the ruthless, destructive side of nature. Therefore, we find the depiction of this side of nature in his poetry. The present paper aims at bringing out the depiction of the violent side of nature in Ted Hughes's poetry with reference to two of his major poems 'Hawk Roosting' and 'Pike'.

Keywords: nature, violent, ruthless, predatory, killing, prey.

INTRODUCTION

Ted Hughes is one of the major English poets of the 20th century. He was born in 1930 in Mytholmroyd of Yorkshire County. He studied in the world famous Cambridge University. He is a versatile, prolific writer; he is a poet, translator, editor and children's book author. He wrote his first poem when he was just fifteen; and his poem was first published in 1954, the year he graduated from Cambridge. His major works are: *Lupercal* (1960), *Crow* (1970), *The Hawk in the Rain* (1975/57), *Selected Poems* 1957-1981 (1982), *Wolfwatching* (1989), *The Birthday Letters* (1998) and *The Iron Man* (1968). The last one is a children's book. He shot to fame with the publication of *The Hawk in the Rain* (1975). With Seamus Heaney he also worked as the editor of the popular anthologies *The Rattle Bag* (1982) and *The School Bag* (1997). He also translated works from Classical authors. He became a Poet Laureate in 1984 and remained so till his death. He was honoured with many prestigious awards including the Order of Merit, one of Britain's highest honors. He married a famous American poet Sylvia Plath.

Yorkshire, the place where he was born and brought up, left a lasting impression on him and therefore prominently features in his works. Nature plays a pivotal role in his works. In fact, nature is a protagonist of his works. It is said that his love for nature, especially animals is instrumental in his becoming a poet. Hughes is said to have once confessed that he took to writing poetry due to his love for animals. He wanted 'to capture not just live animals, but the aliveness of animals in their natural state: their wildness, their quiddity, the fox-ness of the fox and the crow-ness of the crow'. He was also influenced by folklore of primitive societies. It is seen in his celebration of primitive energy and power in his poetry. He paints powerful pictures of birds and beasts in his poetry. He uses them for their own sake as well as symbols. They become mythological figures in his poetry. The present paper aims to reveal the portrayal of the violent, primitive side of nature in Ted Hughes's poetry with special reference to his poems *Hawk Roosting* and *Pike*.

NATURE IN *HAWK ROOSTING*:

Hawk Roosting is one of the most famous poems by Ted Hughes. It is included in Hughes's second book *Lupercal* which was published in 1960. As its title suggests the poem is about hawk, the bird known for its hunting skills. The bird stands for might, power, aggression, even violence. The bird is very mighty and is also proud of his might and hunting skills. This pride is reflected in the very first line: 'I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed'. His roosting signifies his aggression. He is no-nonsense living being, not at all sentimental. On the other hand, he is very

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practical, matter of fact. When he closes his eyes for a while during a day, he does not see a dream. He is not a day dreamer. He does not believe in dreaming, but action. For him, dreams are false, the privilege of the lazy. Sitting on the topmost branch of a tree with eyes closed is just an inaction, not at all laziness or dreaming. Even in his sleep he practices his hunting skills:

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in a sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

It seems that he kills not to satiate his hunger, but just for pleasure. He seems to relish the act of killing. The hawk is a realist, a positive thinker. He knows very well as to how to take odds in his stride. Therefore, the high trees are not a nuisance, but convenience for him. He oozes confidence when he says:

The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upwards for my inspection.

He believes that the whole world has been created for him. He has been created with great care and skill. He is the special creation. Therefore, 'the earth's face' is towards him so that he could easily inspect it, keep watch on it. He thinks that he has complete control over the world. It is in his hand whether to keep the earth static sitting on the highest branch of a tree or let it revolve for a while by flying up for some time. He is the king of the whole world; all the land belongs to him. Therefore, he can hunt anywhere he pleases. Nobody can stop him from doing it.

The bird is not a sentimental fool. He knows no emotion – sympathy, empathy or whatever. He is born with savagery and killing is his religion. He says:

There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing of heads - -
The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.

Killing is his birth right and nobody can snatch it from him. Nobody can dissuade him from killing his prey so cruelly. He does not have an iota of mercy for his prey.

Thus, hawk stands for the wild, violent side of nature. The bird stands for the primitive energy and power. Here one does not help remembering Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem *The Eagle: A fragment*. However, the bird in Tennyson's poem is not as violent as hawk in this poem by Ted Hughes. Many people have tried to read many things in the poem. However, Ted Hughes in the interview taken in the year 1971 said: "Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking. Simply Nature. It's not so simple because may be Nature is no longer so simple." Hughes's own words confirm that he intended it to be a nature poem. He brings to light the violent side of nature through his depiction of hawk in the poem.

NATURE IN *PIKE*:

Another major poem by Ted Hughes was included in *Selected Poems 1957-1981* (1982). Nature is part and parcel of this poem too. It is about pike and hence the title. Like *Hawk Roosting*, this poem too celebrates the violent, ruthless aspect of nature. The word tigering used in the beginning lines of the poem signifies the ferocious nature of pike like that of tiger. Like tigers, they are born killers. They are 'killers from the egg'. Their 'malevolent aged grin' suggests their ruthless, predatory nature. They wait quietly looking upward for a prey; and once a prey comes within their reach it can never escape. Its death is inevitable. The awe-inspiring description of pike is found in the following stanza:

The jaws' hooked clamp and fangs
Not to be changed at this date:
A life subdued to its instrument;
The gills kneading quietly, and the pectorals.

The words 'jaw, clamp and fangs' signify the fierce, brutal nature of pike. These three words remind us of wild cats, crocodiles/alligators and snakes respectively, which all are known for their merciless preying. To bring out the brutal nature of pike, the poet narrates an incident related to them. Once he had kept three pikes captive in a glass

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aquarium in his home. He saw them trying to eat one another. At last the strongest, the fittest of them devoured the other two. Thus the poet narrates this incident:

Three we kept behind glass,
Jungled in weed: three inches, four,
And four and a half: fed fry to them-
Suddenly there were two. Finally one
With a sag belly and the grin it was born with.
And indeed they spare nobody.

This stanza beautifully brings out the cruel, merciless predatory nature of pike. The eyes of a dead pike also are steely. They arouse fear in one's mind. The last line is also important as it talks about their unsparing, merciless nature. At the end, the surviving pike rises up with a horror inspiring stare towards the already terrified speaker. Its stare is enough to make shiver go down the speaker's spine. Thus, Ted Hughes very successfully presents the violent, brutal side of the nature through his portrayal of pike in the poem.

Conclusion: Ted Hughes, more than anybody else, has very beautifully and realistically brought out the violent side of nature in his nature poetry, especially *Hawk Roosting* and *Pike*. If we compare these poems by Ted Hughes, for example, with William Blake's 'Tiger' or Emily Dickinson's 'A Bird, Came Down the Walk', we will realize this. Blake has presented the ferocious picture of tiger in his poem of the same name. However, tiger as represented in this poem does not cause as much fear in the reader's mind as the representations of hawk and pike do. The bird's killing of an Angle Worm in Dickinson's poem is not as brutal as hawk's and pike's killing of their prey in Ted Hughes' poem. Moreover, the bird's killing of the worm in Dickinson's poem is to satiate its hunger. This is why, the bird hops 'sidewise to the wall to let a beetle pass'. On the contrary, hawk's and pike's killing of their prey is for the sake of killing. This shows how Ted Hughes brings forth the violent side of nature while representing it and its inhabitants.

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