Ted Hughes: A Laureate of Animals

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Ted Hughes was a poet of first importance and most relevant to modern times. The Anthropological figures have appeared in the poetry of Ted Hughes. This variety of anthroplogy is concerned chiefly with human life. Myth about animal Fauna is drawn from the world of anthropology. It is a way to negotiate with the powers through rituals. Another figure crow is chosen from animal world where God was created by crow. There is a certain cluster of animals which high lightened Ted’s special love, involvement and interests for animal life. His animal are not simple one but are the heroes of his world and is full of mythic vision. Most of the books are named after mythical character of birds and animals as “The Hawk in the rain”, “The Wodwo and The Crow” etc.

Hughes did not show much interest in consistency. He made no attempt to formulate a philosophy of fixed attitudes towards life. The fact is that Hughes, frequently, does not honour his animal subjects. His poems sometimes seem like an invasion of their subjects beings. Hughes animals are unmistakably others’ in that they present a shock and a challenge to the poet. Hughes would not say like Lawrence. I did not know his God (fish) on the contrary Hughes poems are inspired by conviction that he does not know the God of the Hawk, Jaguar or Pike. For him the animal is not merely a figure or emblem of the human vision with the energies powers of the invisible reality on which all life is founded and there is an interdependence of creating and destruction in which the relationship of consciousness to natural processes is of paramount importance. Ted’s imaginative process was triggered by the observation of something in external nature, usually the animal. Hughes believed that the strength of animal lies in their instincts. According to him “Animals are not violent. They are much more controlled than man and adapted to their environment.”

So while the poet was almost swallowed up by mud and mastered by the earthly element, the Hawk ‘effortlessly at the height hangs his still eye’ while the ferocious mind:

“Thumb my eyes, throws my breath,
Trackle my Heart.
and rain hacks my hand to the bone
The hawk hangs.
The diamond point of will that Polestars
The sea drowner’s endurance.”

Hughes, however, deliberately put man at a disadvantage compared with animals. Here, he exists on a lower earth than the hawk. For Hughes animals are mere embodiment of function. They are not like men, vitiated by spurious morality or incapacitated by doubt. A Hawk is a hawk, whereas a man has ambitions to be god like is thus permanently frustrated. The hawk is forever in its own element even when it dies an elemental death as it meets the weather coming the wrong way.

From an animal in its own element, Hughes turned to an animal caged by man. To him zoos are prisons where animals are condemned to solitary confinement for the crime of being non-human. This also proves man’s dominance over them. However, Ted’s poem ‘Jaguar’ suggests that man can’t cage animal energy and instinct. Its instinct can’t be extinguished. Due to its genetic inheritance the animal remains true to itself:

“On a short fierce fuse, Not in boredom-
The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,
By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear-
He spins from the bars, but there is no cage to let in
More than to the visionary his cell.
His stride is wildnesses of Freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel
Over the cage floor the horizons come.”

Furthermore, Hughes had taken the anti-thesis between human frustrations and distinctive animal energy in his poetry. In his poem ‘Macaw and Little Miss’ there is maximum contrast between the pathetic frustration of a
civilized old lady and the primitive uncageable burning energy of a bird. The point is more subtle and illustrates that humans are more caged in their domestic environment than the animals in the cage. Whereas the point is not lost in the case of lady’s grand daughter who had not succumbed to the domestic dust. She still has her dreams:

“Who is stronger than will? Death
Who is stronger than hope? Death
Because of the compulsion of instinct, the crow of Hughes’s volume crow basically has two characters — the noble and the uncomprehending. It is a vital yet fantastic being at once animal and human. In Hughes’ crossing the animal’s organs represent purity. According to him, more terrible the best, more admirable it is:

“There is no sophistry in my body,
My manners are tearing off heads.”

The wolf, hawk and pig etc., are the heroes of his world. To him, in comparison to animals man is like a one-legged being in the race. In a ‘Fars Interview’ Hughes said, “Though the fox does come it is coming about its own business functioning as a fox-and is welcomed into the vacuum in the human head, the vacuum created when Ted said:

“Fill, with a sudden sharp hot stink of Fox.
It enters the dark hole of the head.”

This reveals how consistently Hughes dismissed the physical seat of learning. In this case instinct replaces intellect.

Thus is Hughes’ poems the animals remerged not as play things but as the lord of death and life. To him in memory and imagination they are gods. It seems that he is inspired by the conviction that he knows the god of the hawk. Their superiority to man consists in nothing so much as their lack of consciousness. To quote from a poem “No hesitation no remorse, a mind all reflex, streamlined as a trigger-it began to look like the state before the fall.”

Hughes seemed to be worshipper of everything of an animal. To him an animal’s organs represent purity. According to him, more terrible the best, more admirable it is:

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The wolf, hawk and pig etc., are the heroes of his world. To him, in comparison to animals man is like a one-legged being in the race. In a ‘Fars Interview’ Hughes said, “Just how the forces of the universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error.”

Because of the compulsion of instinct, the crow of Hughes is stronger than death:
Who is stronger than hope? Death
Who is stronger than will? Death
Stronger than love? Death
Stronger than life? Death
But who is stronger than Death?
Me evidently.

Evidently, it is unthinkable animal-energy and its reflexive quality. As a blaze of animal egotism, he is the only creature in the world and without losing his features, embodies empty human, consciousness.

The will to live does not appear in consequences of the world but the world is a consequence of the will to live and perhaps that is echoed in lonely crow created the gods for playmates:

“Lonely crow created the gods he becomes the emptiness of the knower as against the fullness of the known.

In ‘Lupercal’ the animals of Hughes crossed the inapprehensible are metaphysical shock has broken their minds. It makes them ‘dance giving their bodies to be burnt’. In ‘Crow’ the little is mythological in the sense that it is a vital yet fantastic being at once animal and human.

To Hughes sex is the passion common with the animals. The ‘Dove Breeder’ looks sex as a force capable of unmanning a mild mannered man, making him all animal. Here everything shattered when love struck into his life like a hawk.

According to Ted, crow and man are signs of life, because life is neither stone nor light, neither spirit nor matter; it is that which must struggle to preserve itself at the expense of others. The most fundamental lenet of existentialism is that existence precedes essence. Therefore, a man is what he freely chooses to become and there is no such things as fate.

Ted’s volume crow basically has two characters-Crow himself and God. Crow is resilient, resourceful, evasive, built to survive every kind of disaster. But God is sometimes his partner, sometimes his adversary of rival. Often a passive presence who goes on sleeping while crow gets up to his gruesome tricks. But crow can survive the holocaust because having seen man in action, he finally gives up humanity as a dead loss and reverts to his predatory nature in ‘king of carrion.’

Hughes closes the sequence with crow’s hollow triumph. He has learned the nature of man but it is a destructive power. It is certainly to understand why Hughes is criticized for violence. But the fact is that is not really violence he celebrates but energy too strong for death. The truth is that Hughes can’t avoid violence because life to him is a violent conception and he wants to be on the winning side. His weakness is not violence, but the absolute egotism of survival. It is the victory he loves, not war.

Thus, Hughes is a nihilist on the scuffling muscular side of nothingness. He is in the middle of the battle, relishing its proof of the will not to die, the correct name of the will to live.
References

[6] This emphasis of Ted on instinct. However it appears that in this regard he is more influenced by surrealist and D.H. Lawrence.
[7] Lupercal, Hawk Roosting, p.16.