

# 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 anthropology 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 inner self but a part with itself, of an indivisible whole.

The first of Hughes animal poems to be published was 'The Jaguar'. The readers are introduced and acquainted with the strength of Hawk, Pike, Jaguar, Bull, Wind and sea. Obviously, therefore the emphasis is on animal life, since each one is living.

From the very beginning, Hughes had been searching for a way of reconciling human vision with the energies powers and presence of the non-human cosmos. His main concern was to identify these energies and describe them in the nascent form. This has to be not only in human terms but also in their own and in terms of nature so that it may help clarify the discrepancies, if any, existing among them. Hughes was also concerned to discover whether negotiations are possible between man and nature. i.e., between man and his creator and so, to ponder over as to why they have collapsed in our time and what are its possible consequences. The destructiveness of nature and its alienation is clearly seen and this bears testimony to the fact that, perhaps, no negotiation whatsoever is possible between man and nature.

But in some of the poems there are rays of hopes and intimations and also a determination to go on trying ceaselessly. After delineating destruction all around, the poet proceeds step by step-though slowly but resolutely, towards a sort of transformation and revelation and the imaginative Endeavour begins to yield positive results

providing renewed insight and vision. Thus, neither beyond the scope of man. In fact through his great works Hughes had amply demonstrated the crucial characteristics 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."<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup>

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 wildernesses of Freedom:  
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel  
Over the cage floor the horizons come."<sup>3</sup>

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:

“The dream where the warrior comes.  
Lightening the smashing,  
And burning and sending towards he Loin  
Deep into pillow her silence pleads.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in Hughes' world, the only way to come to terms with the animals is not to tame them but to become possessed by them and this happens in the poem “The Thought Fox.” Here Hughes did not stand in judgment of the animal but wanted its essence to enter into him. Though the fox is an animal of the poet's imagination yet it represents a solid reality and instinct had to a vacate place for excessive celebrations. When 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.”<sup>5</sup>

This reveals how consistently Hughes dismissed the physical seat of learning. In this case instinct replaces intellect.”<sup>6</sup>

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.”<sup>7</sup>

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:

“There is no sophistry in my body,  
My manners are tearing off heads.”<sup>8</sup>

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,  
Poetry is nothing if not the record of  
Just how the forces of the universe try to redress  
Some balance disturbed by human error.”<sup>9</sup>

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.

Pass, Crow. <sup>10</sup>

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 unmaning 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 tenet 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 scuffing muscled 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

- [1] The Guardian, March 23, 1985, p.9.
- [2] Ted Hughes, The Hawk in the Rain (the Faber and Faber, London, 1956) p. 11.
- [3] The Hawk in the Rain, 'Jaguar' p.12.
- [4] The Hawk in the Rain, Mecaw & Little Miss, p.13.
- [5] The Hawk in the Rain, The Thought Fox' p.14.
- [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] Luperca, Hawk Roosting, p.16.
- [8] Luperca, Hawk Roosting, p. 26.
- [9] London Magazine, Jan., 1977.
- [10] Crow, "Examination at the Womb Doss" p. 15.
- [11] Crow, "Coroe's Playmates", p.60.