

Eco-Critical Approaches in the Poem of Ted Hughes

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Abstract

Poets are not born but they are made because of nature. Poets have been embracing nature to share their innermost emotions and feelings. Ted Hughes is also one of the ecocritic poets who have shared his inner pang and anguish through nature particularly using animal images and its attitudes. Ted Hughes observation or estimation of humankind has been reflected in his poems as well in his works. His works speak a lot about the nature or character of human beings. He widely used animal imagery notably to insist the cruelty of humans. He has compared animals with man to show that human lost his humane and as animals longing or waiting for it prey; humans waiting for bloodthirsty. The poet has exposed this incredible cold-blooded of human in the greenery environment, which means he had a desire or wanting that humans must be changed from red to green not only about/in the environment but also at heart. Indeed, the poet has insisted that human kind has lost or forgotten about his quality and step backwards and behave as an animal.

KEYWORDS: Nature, eco-critic, environment, emotions, feelings.

Introduction

The great Greek Athenian philosopher Plato defined that poetry is the father of all lies. In reply to this statement, Philip Sydney stated in Apologie for poetry that poetry is the mother of all knowledge. Poetry can be either father or mother, but its forefather or great grandfather is nature. Nature is the part and parcel of all poets and their poems. Poems of nature and about nature are long-lasting. These nature poems are termed in recent days as eco criticism or green studies. Eco criticism is the study of literature and environment. Cheryll Glotfelty is known as the pioneer of eco criticism. In Western Literature Association conference she has attempted and initiated the term to be used for the study of nature in literature. On account of her attempt the term is known and used widely nowadays. Eco criticism has been changing nowadays according to the situation and environment. In recent days eco criticism is divided into three waves. The first wave is about plain 'nature writing', the second wave is about ecological dimensions such as plants, animals, gender, race and imperialistic attitude and the third wave is about global understanding of eco practice like global warming and ice melting. This article concentrates particularly on the second wave. Animal images and imperialistic attitude in the poems are discussed in detail. Ted Hughes is popularly renowned and recognized poet who uses animal imagery in his poems. The poet first published this poem in 1960 in the book named as Lupercal and also it has been a popular poem in his time it is published in several anthologies. His poems embrace the aggressive life chiefly epitomize animals and birds.

Eco-critical Approaches in Hawk Roosting

Kate Dunning (2013) argues that eco-poetry 'has consciously been influenced by sensitivity to ecological thinking, especially in the area of energy flow/retention, cyclical renewal, bioregionalism, and the interdependency of all organisms with an ecosystem'. This article profoundly discusses the animal imagery in Hawk Roosting. Ted Hughes widely used animals to depict the character of human. It consists of six stanzas and each stanza carries four lines. This poem is written in first person narration and also it is personified. The attitude and behavior of hawk is representing human character. The literal meaning of the poem Hawk Roosting is about the expression of a bird hawk, which is sitting on the top of the tree and feels pride about its power to destroy, its ability to catch its prey and it feels that it is superior and powerful to control the entire world. The inner meaning of this poem lucidly portrays that the hawk is the representation of human character and attributes. Hughes's (2000) environmental consciousness is then developed through his sensitivity to, and imagination of, external nature in a very different environment. River opens a new way of perceiving an aquatic sphere through the poet's personal relationship with rivers and fishing. Deakin claims that water is the most inspiring and poetic element in cultural activities. Moreover it could be said that this ferocious bird is the symbol of human unwanted evil attitude of arrogance, pride, devastation, conceited, egotistical behavior, obsession of power and position and so on. On the whole, the hawk, bird of prey is the symbol of heartlessness.

Scigaj (2000) The poet's biocentrism as seen in the animalhuman relationship (Moortown Diary) is an example of co-operation, care, and stewardship in rearing livestock under the food-chain. The poet uses compatible words to expresses the crucial nature of the bird. The poet used words like 'I sit', 'I hold', 'I kill', 'I am going', 'My eye', 'my manners', and 'My feet'. This pinpoints that 'I' usage is largely used which means human is egotistical. The poet exhibits the thoughts and inner ideas of humanity, through the words of hawk, the crucial and fierce bird. This mankind is also always thinking about 'I', speaking about 'I', living for 'I' and growing for 'I'. He is very much like and fond to live for this 'I, me, mine, my'.

"I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
In action, no falsifying dream"
Between my hooked head and hooked feet;
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat. (1-4)

The first line has begun with the word 'I sit'. The poet consciously used 'I' to indicate how the living beings are living in this mortal world with eternal pride and arrogance. The bird is sitting at the top and closing its eyes to take rest, but its mind is awake and waiting for the prey to fill its tummy. The bird is very perfect to kill and eat its prey because its eyes are sharp and feet are strong. Obviously, it gets pride of its attitude. This made an impression of the spirit of the bird. Even though this bird is attained its goal with the help of nature, this bird alone has taken the victory and ignore the part of nature. This same attitude can be seen in the behavior of human.

In the second stanza, the bird blow its trumpet to show that it is the best and it is the best leader or boss to lead the world. The following lines are showing that how this

hawk living with nature and ignore its goodness. The bird gets from the nature and forgets to return, as humans did. This exposes vividly how human behaves like this crucial hawk. Humans are using, living, growing with nature and because of nature, but not thinking to give or grow to this aesthetic sense. Indeed, this human goes beyond the limit and thinks that he is the creation of all and he is the boss of this entire globe. Without this tree, air or sun how this hawk can sit in the high. The same, without this beautiful nature, how this man gets food, water, air, or live or to grow.

‘The convenience of the high trees!
The air’s buoyancy and the sun’s ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth’s face upward for my inspection. (5-8)

This bird is expressing its inner joy by saying that I am sitting comfortably in the tree which is greatly helpful for me to get my prey and also this high sitting gives fresh breeze and sun’s red red rays. The bird says that these are all advantages for me to face high and upward to search for my prey. If sitting at the top, it makes the bird to be cautious and watchful to get its prey. The bird is saying that the Almighty has taken much more care and energy to create me. This shows that the bird mentions that my presence and my creation are unique. This hawk is describing about its creation in a narcissistic manner. It takes much pleasure and dignity to explicit that it is the best and great creation of all. This dominant and dictator mind-set is prominently depicts the birds self-esteem. In the third stanza, it is clearly manifest the words of bird from the heart of poet about the nature of mankind.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather”
Now I hold Creation in my foot (9-12)

The poet is used the word, ‘Creation’ but not ‘creation’. Ted Hughes intentionally used capital ‘C’ to denote the importance and significance of this creation. This bird feels pride about its ‘Creation’ which means it is superior to all. Its pride reaches the tip or top of Mount Everest and utters that all other creatures are created by God is for its prey. In The Animal That Therefore I am (2008) Derrida’s consciousness of his existence is driven by his cat’s powerful gaze that invokes a question of sexuality and the human/animal divide. The female animal’s gaze escapes categorisation within the role of language while the mode of looking allows one to see and be seen through the eyes of the other.

The Almighty make this hawk to eat, enjoy and subjugate the rest creations, it adds. The words used are in peak of arrogance and superciliousness. This bird is totally thinking in domineering stance. This same situation and attitude could be easily compared to the dictator Hitler and his character. This bird has the mind-set that it will kill when it is need or where it can as it wish. Hitler’s strong and will towards the country and his hard and fast rule could be remembered the attitude of this cruel hawk. There is no deviation and deception. This hawk’s mind and Hitler’s mind are focused with clear vision. Both are sailing in the same ship to reach their destination they can do whatever they want. The fourth stanza words are the edge of the sharp sword. These words are tearing off the hearts of the passive human or any other living beings.

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads (Hughes 13-16)

This merciless hawk stabs its authority by revealing that it has the power to kill and give death to any living when it is need. It adds that there is no argument, negotiation and concession for the prey. When it catches the prey, it will die. Death alone can be given without any discussion or conciliation. The cruelty and hardhearted could be seen in the eyes and words of this harmful hawk.

No arguments assert my right:
The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this. (21-24)

The last stanza has written with high notion and perception of the coldblooded attitude of this bird hawk. The poet extremely imbibed the root of human nature and accurately framed the sketch with sharp edged words. The attitude of mankind is initially they understand that Almighty is there for creation but gradually that attitude has been changing and at last the man himself feels and thinks that 'He is God', 'He is the Creator', 'He is the Almighty', 'He is Everything', 'He is the Destructor' and 'He is the All'. This arrogant nature stresses that this present situation will last long and no change so far happened and in future also never happen. This emphasis the power and victory is the most indispensable to lead and control this entire planet. This heartless bird again and again insists that this situation never be changed and 'I' never make this situation to be changed. This hawk speaks with confidence and over confidence without any shaking in its mind and words. The words and perspective of the poem are extremely violent but it only depicts the natural behavior and attitude of the human beings, nothing is exaggerated. Ted Hughes himself remarked:

'The poem of mine usually cited for violence is Hawk Roosting, this drowsy hawk sitting in a wood and talking to itself. That bird is accused of being a fascist, the symbol of some horrible genocidal dictator. Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature was thinking.

The poet exposed the actual setting of the world. From this, the readers could be understood and changed their attitude. This poem makes the reader to realize the importance of living with magnanimous and benign attribute. The great Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson quoted in his poem 'The Brook' that 'For men may come and men may go But I go on forever.'

Conclusion

Tennyson says that mankind is immortal but men are mortal. Men are not going to live like nature. Nature will be there ever but men must go to grave. This arrogance, dominance, power, tyranny and victory are all have been changing it never goes long or long lasting. But nature remains. The hawk will die one day even though it gives death to someday today, yet the tree where it sits will be remaining and who knows another

bird can come and sit after this hawk disappear. The poet vent out his inner distress about human character is outburst in this poem with sharp words.

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