

## IMAGES AND MYTHS IN TED HUGHES' RAIN, NOVEMBER AND THEOLOGY

*Dr. Munthir M. Habib, Professor, Department of English, College of Arts, Zarqa University, Jordan*

**Abstract:**

*The present research paper deeply scrutinizes the select poems Rain and November to explore the use of nature and animal imagery in the poems. The poet succeeds in creating vivid picture of the nature by exhibiting exceptional mastery over the phraseology. Use of different literary devices enhances the quality of poem aesthetically. Apt imagery creates mental picture in readers mind. The present research paper also throws light on the use of different types of imagery that ultimately fulfills communicates sensory experiences in powerful way. It also focuses on the use of myths in the poems of Ted Hughes. The poem Theology clearly suggests the shift in attitude where poets are reconstructing old myths in a new way. Such kind of reconstruction is a significant feature of modern literature. Myths having atavistic potential appeals to the human psyche knowingly or unknowingly. The striking quality of Ted Hughes use of mythology is that he is not interpreting myth in a new way rather he is providing alternative version of myth to destabilize the perception which is common in society and theology.*

**Key Words:** *imagery, kinaesthetic, visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, gustatory.*

Ted Hughes poetic career started in 1957 with the publication of *The Hawk in the Rain*. The collection marked his rise on the horizons of international poetry. His later collection of poetry entitled as *Crow* (1970) gained much appreciation from the critics. The collection is highly significant for the poems oven around the Crow; a character created by Hughes derived from mythologies particularly taken from the insight from 'Tibetan theology'. The flight of poetic imagination allows Hughes to detect the life of birds and animals from inside which is the major subject of his poetry. Hughes' poetry is the mingling of myths and traditional stories from diverse culture with the careful observation of birds and animals life in their Natural Habitat with all its brutality and violence keeping all human emotion aside. Ted Hughes died on 28 October 1998. He held prestigious post of poet laureate since 1984. He served the *Muse* with several collections of poetry as well as translations but particularly his final collection *Birthday Letters* (1998) is considered as masterpiece in British poetry.

Ted Hughes poetry is also marked with war imagery. The scarcity of bread and butter in his childhood is replaced by the war stories and quenched his intellectual thirst and hunger. He breathed the air polluted by war stories mostly describing the violence, brutality and death. His animal poems are just a kind of projection of human feelings. Ted Hughes stands apart among modern British poets for unique presentation of animal world. His fluid imagination is at its best when he describes animals in their natural habitat. His graphic presentation of nature and animals provides a kind of cinematic visual treat with the help of apt imagery and symbolism. Hughes fascination regarding animals is an inseparable part of his personality. Hughes mind is occupied with animals and he explains his fascination with the words 'interest in animals began when I began'. For him there is no difference between capturing animals and writing poetry.

In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them and taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them. And they have certain wisdom. They know something

special. ....something perhaps which we are very curious to learn. Maybe my concern has been to capture not animals particularly and not poems, but simply things have a vivid life of their own, outside mine. (Ted Hughes, 1967, 15)

The poem *Rain* is taken from the collection of poetry entitled as *Moortown* (1979). The poem can be cited as the best example of cinematic visual treat. As the title suggest the poem is a nature poem describing heavy rain. The poet uses minimum words to communicate the speed and impact of continuous rain. His concern for different animals and their mute suffering speaks volumes regarding his sensitive nature. The content of the poem is not pleasant but the imageries used by the poet are vivid and graphical.

Rain. Floods. Frost. And after frost, rain.  
 Dull roof-drumming. Wraith -rain pulsing across purple-bare woods  
 Like light across heaved water. Sleet in it.  
 And the poor fields, miserable tents of their hedges.  
 Mist-rain off-world. Hills wallowing  
 In and out of a grey or silvery dissolution. A farm gleaming,  
 Then all dull in the near drumming. At fields corners  
 Brown water backing and brimming in grass.  
 Toads hop across rain-hammered roads. Every mutilated leaf there.  
 (Ted Hughes, *Moortown Diary*, 3)

The series of pictures described in minimum words achieves maximum effect only because of graphic imagery. It has cinematic quality as if camera is moving slowly from one scene to another scene. The poem seems like a description of nature painting. The poet avoids human world by not mentioning human beings directly or indirectly. The poet feels empathy with animals for their mute suffering in the heavy rain. The reference of different types of birds including raven, snipe and magpie as well as the pathetic description of cows, mouse, toads, fox and calves also exhibit the poet's concern for different types of animals and his vast the range of observation.

The fox corpses lie beaten to their bare bones,  
 Skin beaten off, brains and bowls beaten out.  
 Nothing but their blueprint bones last in the rain,  
 Sodden soft. Round their hey racks, calves  
 Stand in the shine of mud. The gateways  
 Are deep obstacles for mud. The calves look up,  
 through plastered forelocks,  
 Without moving (Ted Hughes, *Moortown Diary*, 3).

Ted Hughes through these lines describes the dark and violent side of nature which certainly not surprising because in general in many poems present the violence brutality fierceness in animal world that is completely natural, as we cannot judge it from human beings perspective.

The term image and imagery are difficult to explain because of its many connotations and meanings. In limited sense imagery is a picture in words. The authors or poets success is largely depend on the ability to communicate such sensory experiences and force readers to travel without leaving the place. Using fresh images, symbols, literary devices and creating associations with remote things writer try to bring freshness in their work.

Imagery as a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, state of mind and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. An 'image' does not necessarily mean a mental picture. Many images are conveyed by figurative language,

as in metaphor, simile, synecdoche, onomatopoeia and metonymy. An image may be visual (pertaining to the eye), olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste) abstract (in which case it will appeal to what may be described as the intellect) and kinesthetic (pertaining to the sense of movement and bodily efforts). It is often the case that an image is not exclusively one thing or another. They overlap, intermingle, and combine, thus the kinesthetic may also be visual.

(*The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 413-414)

The poem *Rain* exhibit almost all types of images mentioned in the above paragraph.

Visual imagery	1) Like light across heaved water
Olfactory imagery	1) Sniff the wire, sniff the tractor. 2) Then hang their noses to the mud
Tactile imagery	1) In the rain that goes on and on, and gets colder. 2) Nothing but their blueprint bones last in the rain, Sodden soft 3) The oak stake-head dry.
Auditory imagery	1) Dull roof –drumming 2) Brown water backing and brimming in grass. 3) Toads hop across rain- hammered roads
Kinaesthetic Imagery	1) The calves look up, through plastered forelocks. 2) Cows roar then hang their noses to the mud.

The poet has liberty to use more images to share to communicate his experience exactly with the reader. The line 'Cows roar then hang their noses to the mud' contains three types of imageries. The word 'roar' deals with auditory imagery, the words 'noses to the mud' suggests olfactory imagery where the bodily movement described in the line suggests kinaesthetic imagery

The lines prove Hughes mastery over vivid graphic description of nature and animal world. Hughes tries to satisfy five senses by creating association with remote things is one of the striking features of his poetry. The poet uses apt imagery to communicate more particularly to show graphically what the poet observes. The poem is a single stanza containing --- lines without any kind of break which is very similar to its subject matter that describes the continuous heavy rain.

Ted Hughes stands apart from romantic poets due to his attitude and perception of nature. His poetry deals with nature and wildlife but he is not a romantic poet. He is modern poet because of his attitude and treatment to nature. The presentation of nature as a serene, calm and soothing entity was general and the impact of romanticism was not completely eradicated until the World War II compelled to reassess the old things from new perspective. Mysticism and the feeling of wonder while writing about nature do not fascinate Hughes. On the contrary, he focuses the dark and cruel side of nature. He describes nature from third man point of view without any kind of human emotional attachment. His nature is untamed and brutal which works by her own laws. In nature and particularly in animal world human sympathy seems extraterrestrial and borrowed. This can be explained in the light of his masterpiece *The Hawk Roosting*. Hughes is unparalleled in the finding apt phraseology to describe nature that seems nature fresh and alive.

The poem *November* taken from the collection entitled as *Lupercal* (1960) also share the same tone like the *Rain*. The *November* also deals with the destructive power of nature describing the heavy rain and the drowned dog. There is a striking contrast between the poem *Rain* and the *November*. The *Rain* describes animal and bird life devastated by the heavy rain on the contrary; the *November* is also deals with heavy rain but does not describe animal and bird life to the larger extent. The poem is a perfect blending of

nature and human life. Along with nature, it also deals with an unknown tramp that miraculously saved form rain and cold in that night. Ted Hughes arouses sympathy for homeless tramp. His apt choice of words creates a chain of moving picture in front of mental eye. The poet describes the drenched land and trees stands like stiff and hard like iron.

The month of the drowned dog. After long rain  
the land  
Was sodden as the bed of an ancient lake.  
Treed with iron and was bird less. In the sunk  
lane  
the ditch- a seep silent all summer-

Made brown foam with a big voice: that, and my  
Boots  
On the lanes scrubbed stones, in the gulleyed  
Leaves  
Against the hill's hanging silence;  
Mist silvering the droplets on the bare thorns  
Slower than the change of daylight (Ted Hughes, *Lupercal*, 32).

Along with nature imagery, the poet also describes the homeless tramp with equal vivid imagery. He compares the beard of tramp with the small animal hedgehog. The poet discriminates between the stillness of living things and the stillness of dead things. The tramp is alive in spite of chilly wind and to save himself from rough weather he bundled his body.

Slower than the change of daylight.  
In a let of the ditch a tramp was bundled asleep.  
Face tucked down into beard, drown in  
Under his hair like a hedgehog's. I took him for  
Dead,  
But his stillness separated from the death  
From the rotting grass and the ground. The wind  
Chilled,  
And a fresh comfort tightened through him,  
Each hand stuffed deeper into the other sleeve (Ted Hughes, *Lupercal*, 32).

The chart explains different types of imageries used in the poem.

Visual imagery	1)Made brown foam with a big voice 2)Mist silvering the droplets on the bare thorns
Olfactory imagery	1)From the rotting grass and the ground
Tactile imagery	1) Was sodden as the bed of an ancient lake. 2)On the lanes scrubbed stones, in the gull eyedleaves 3)The wind chilled
Auditory imagery	1)The ditch- a seep silent all summer- 2)Like hammered lead
Gustatory imagery	1) The fields were jumping and smoking.
Kinaesthetic Imagery	1) In a let of the ditch a tramp was bundled asleep. 2)The fields were jumping and smoking

The poet's fascination regarding animals is easily recognized by taking into consideration his comparison of tramp's beard with the animal hedgehog. The poet also compares the stillness of the tramp with the stillness of grass and ground. At the end of the poem, the poet observes the dead animals hanged upon the game keepers gibbet.

Some still had their shape,  
Had their pride with it; hung, chins on chest... (Ted Hughes, *Lupercal*, 32).

It is clear from the above-mentioned lines that even dead animals are not the subject of sympathy but the skeletons remind him the free and unrestricted life of animals in their natural habitat.

The poem *Theology* throws light on Ted Hughes deconstruction of biblical myth of Forbidden fruit. The original myth appears in the *Book of Genesis*. The *Bible* is a store house for Ted Hughes. He draws myths and images from the store house. His largely focuses on the myths related to Adam, Eve, serpent etc. But his tone is satirical and his intention is to make parody because the poet is unhappy with the sterile world without kindness and sympathy. and The Almighty God blesses the Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The God allows them free roaming in the garden and they can eat different types of fruits available there except the one from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil"(Forbidden fruit). The Serpent driven them eat the fruit from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil". The Eve eats the forbidden fruit and gives its share to Adam. The act resulted in gaining knowledge of good and evil and nakedness this turn a disaster for all of them. The God expels them from the Garden of Eden and curses them with the mortal life.

There is an age old debate regarding the fruit as well as there are numerous interpretations put forth by critics. The thing which separates Ted Hughes from different critics is that he is not interpreting the myth. On the contrary, he is reconstructing it by providing altogether different narrative.

No, the Serpent did not  
Seduce Eve to the Apple.  
All that's simply  
Corruption of the facts

Adam ate the Apple  
Eve at Adam  
The Serpent Eve  
This is the dark intestine.

The Serpent meanwhile,  
Sleeps his meal off in paradise-  
Smiling to hear  
God's querulous calling (Ted Hughes, *Wadwo*, 75).

According to Ted Hughes the biblical myth is a kind of corruption of facts. He provides the alternate version of the story in which Adam ate the apple and then Eve ate Adam. Lastly the Serpent ate Eve. There numerous interpretations of the new myth created by Hughes. The poet's tone is a satirical while challenging the original myth by providing the alternative version of myth. The poem also creates controversy by challenging theology and age old belief of Christianity. The poem also denies the victory of good over evil. The serpent achieves victory over the Gods command by tempting Adam and Eve.

Images and symbols have wider appeal which helps to transcend cultural boundaries. In Hinduism the role of Shehanaga; the king of all serpents is pivotal in the expansion and shrinking of the universe. According to ancient Hindu, mythology the earth rests on the hood of Sheshnaga. He is depicted as multi



headed serpent having the bliss of immortality. Lord Vishnu; the Protector of the universe is resting on the Sheshnaga.

The poem *Theology* can be interpreted from psychological point of view. In Freudian psychology, objects like serpent, towers, ladders, sticks, poles etc. indicates symbolic representation of phallus and objects like cupboard, boxes, pockets etc. indicates symbolic representation of women's genital organs. The poem symbolically suggests that The Serpent is ultimately responsible for the tragedy. It means that male genital organ is ultimately responsible for the further consequences happened in the myth. The poem directly expressed it boldly stating that

Adam ate the Apple  
Eve ate Adam  
The Serpent eat Eve (Ted Hughes, *Wadwo*, 75).

In the poem, Apple is a symbol for Eve's breast, the second line from above stanza indicates towards the oral sex, and the third line indicates the intercourse between Adam and Eve. The pleasure after sexual satisfaction is described in the third stanza where The Serpent sleeps in paradise after the act. The poem deals with the sex and reproduction in human life without stating it directly. It symbolically indicates the biological process of reproduction.

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#### Endnote:-

1. Snipe- a kind of bird. Hear the word 'snipe' has been used as a plural noun just as the word 'fish' is sometimes used.
2. Hedgehog- a small nocturnal Old World mammal with a spiny coat and short legs, able to roll itself into a ball for defense.
3. Gibbet a wooden structure from which criminals were hanged, in the past, as a form of execution. But here the word means a tall pole with a long arm on which dead animals are hung.
4. Bark- The skin of tree.