

Imagination and the Mythopoeic Vision in the Works of Ted Hughes

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Abstract – The nature and genesis of imagination has been a subject of serious concern with the philosophers, poets and literary scholars since the advent of poetics and still continues. But for T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and their few followers almost all of the modern literary scholars acknowledge imagination as the faculty essential to creativity. In Romanticism, imagination is the distinctive element which contributes to romantic vision.

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Ted Hughes, although, not in the context of Romanticism, asserts the necessity of imagination like his romantic precursors. He expounds its importance for it is the faculty that enables an individual to react in a way that leads to attain a wholeness of being. In his celebrated *Myth and Education* (1970) he argues for imagination and seems to agree with Blake's Fourfold vision which perceives human in all things, by implication it means that the objective world is the imaginative projection of the subject. Imagination thus, gains the status of living power and prime agent of all human perception. It becomes a primary creative act, a willed activity of spirit, a self-conscious, a I fourfold vision in other words, is where the Wonders Divine/of Human Imagination restore an ability to see the vast array of isolated phenomenon as distinct entities yet as comprising a unified totality which is wholly relevant to human self. (Alexander Davis, *Romanticism, Existentialism etc. The Challenge of Ted Hughes* sagar, 1986:71) "self-realizing intuition" as W.K. Wimsatt and Brooks (1964:392) states. Imagination is the faculty that mediates between the subject and object. Ted Hughes conceives this view of imagination. He feels that the modern man has become habitual of neglecting this power and depends upon what physical eye tells, which limits his ability to mere objective perception. Human body, a store house of immense energy, has been reduced to no more than a somewhat stupid vehicle, all the inner-world sounds to him like a blank or at the best occasional grant or a twinge, because he lacks equipment to receive the inner-world sounds and to decode it. He further explains that "the body, it's spirit serve as the antennae of all his perceptions but human being is disconnected". Devoid of the power of imagination, dependent on the object eye, human being has turned the very "strength and brilliance of his objective intelligence into stupidity of the most rigid and suicidal kind". (1970. 87). Hughes maintains that it is only the imagination that gives order and meaning to human

surroundings, but the physical eye perceiving the objective world makes the seer (self) slavishly dependent upon it leading him to believe a "Lie/When you see with, not thro' the eye". (Blake quoted by Alexander Davis: 72) Consequently the world of object is perceived as a series of disconnected aspect, by a consciousness both alienated the outer-world and ignorant of the inner-world. He claims imagination to be the faculty that peers into outer as well as the inner-world. Stressing the point he mentions:

So what we need, evidently, is a faculty that embraces both worlds simultaneously. A large flexible grasp, an inner vision which holds wide open, like a great theatre, the arena of contention, and which pays equal respect to both sides, which keeps faith, as Goethe said with the world of things and the world of spirit equally. (1976:90)

The faculty referred to is what Hughes calls imagination and it is this which is perceived in the works of great artists. Frye (1963) indicates the importance of the concept of "within" and that of the "world as the reflection of the subject" in the context of Romanic vision. Ted Hughes seems to employ "inner world" for "within" and equivocally pleads for the necessity of imagination. His theory of the process involved in the creation of poetry, symbol and imagery emerges from his concept of imagination.

He finds the experiences of the poet rooted in the external world of objects as well as in the inner field, and argues that poetry grows in the mind of the poet, it is the imagination that initiates the process. The poet "feels the special kind of excitement, the slightly mesmerized and quite involuntary concentration with which he makes out the stirring of a new poem in his mind, then the outline, the mass and colour and clear

final form of the poem". (1967:17). Evidently, concentration in the poetic process, rendering of mass and colour are the functions of imagination. The experiences of the poet, alright are rooted in the external world of object, but in the process of creation it is by his imagination he recreates them imagines them, the process starts with imagination. He explains: Imagine what you are writing about, see it and live it just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it. When you do this the words look after themselves, like magic. (1967:18)

The word "imagine" is central indicating the importance as the initiating agent of creativity. Hughes, in his concept, seems very near to Indian theoreticians (Anandvardhhan) when he speaks about the spirit and part of the poem. Anandvardhan the exponent of Dhvani Siddhanta propounds meaning as the spirit (Atma) and words as the body (Sharira) of the poem, the spirit (Atma) is life which inhabits them both contribute to the life of the poem. The words of a poem are not random they are sponsored by the imagination. The poet has to choose only such words which suit the image existing in the mind of the poet. Word, which along with its meaning evokes sense experience, according to Hughes, is a living word. It is the imagination that helps to realize the correct choice of the evocative word. Hughes (1967:17) considers those words living which we hear, like click or chuckle or which we see, like 'freckled' or veined' or which we taste like vinegar or sugar. It is obvious that the eclectic process referred to by Ted Hughes involves the power of imagination. Words do not evoke single sense impact necessarily, they belong to several of the senses at once, as if each one had eyes ears and tongue. Hughes recognizes the word with such a character as a little goblin. The poet I Anandvardhan (855-883 A.D.) in Dhvanyalok propounds that suggested meaning is the soul of the Kavya (Poetry)-Kavyasya Atma Dhvani", it is achieved through the words, the body of poem. (Dhvanyalok,) has to have under control this goblin which he can do only by his imaginative power. Similary symbol which acquires the central role in the poem, is the construct of imagination. Imagination endows it the qualities of being Electrically Charged', Concreteness and of being Operational. It acts directly upon the mind of the reader and the reader according to own imagination receives its significance.

Does it not look strange that a contemporary poet speaks for imagination, imagery and symbol in terms of Romanticism, especially in the atmosphere of dry statement poetry. Hughes trend of imagery can be traced in the romantic cult of English poetry. Northrop Frye (1963:ii) characterizes romantic imagery by its essential emphasis on the constructive power of mind where reality is brought into being by experience and model of image emerges from within. Evidently Frye intends the role of visionary imagination in the creation of the image. The notion that poetic imagery is a construct of imagination as C. Day Lewis in *The Poetic Image* (1947) points out emerges only with Romanticism. The importance of an image lies in the

fact that it should convey to our imagination adding more than the accurate reflection of an external reality.

All the major Romantic poets exhibit the above said Romantic features of imagery according to their own perceptions. Wordsworth chose incidents and situations from common life, imparted them a certain colouring of imagination and put them in the human context. In Coleridge's poetry images are like chemical compounds in which the ingredients lose their separate identities in a new substance. Sea, tide, breeze, boat and tempest are inter-connected entitles in his poetry expressing symbolic effect. "The Ancient Mariner" is a brilliant construct of his imagery. Shelley's imagery and figurative language make his poetic expression indefinite, but he speaks language of pure emotion where definite perception are melted in a mood they generate. R.A. Foakes in his work *Romantic Assertion*, (1958:111) views that Shelley did not care to fix viewless and invisible consequences in a concrete thing. so his poetry seems strength less. It may be true, yet his imagery exhibits the romantic ideal stated above. Sound, colour and visual effects are very artistically interwoven in his imagery. Aesthetic evocation, surprising revelation and an urge for a unity with greater power render his imagery in accordance of his romantic imagery. Keats imagery is sensuous with emotional universality. His perception of external world is minute but limited. He views tender, beautiful and insinuating aspect of things. "Endymion" contains number of such images which express his poetic sensibility.

Romantic imagery differs from the pre-romantic on the ground that it is created by intuitive imagination. This trend of imagery continued in post-romantic poets and it can be identifiably traced in some of the poets of twentieth century. Uniformity of tone and mood in Hardy's descriptions are so minute that they acquire the value of an image. In the poetry of Yeats, image and symbols serve as the devices of expression and unfold an evocative vision The underlying fibre of his imagery has its root in within. Ambivalence is yet another notable feature of yeats' imagery.

D.H. Lawrence's *Bavarian Gentians* "The Mountain Lion", "little Fish", "The Snake" are powerful examples of romantic imagery. Minute and keen observation, projection of the poet's self, evocative freshness and uniformity of impulse and expression endow an aesthetic value to these images.

The romantic image is a mode of exploring reality which reveals to the poet the meaning of his own experience. Dylan Thomas follows the same way, he too, creates image to find meaning of his experience. He tries to picturize an ecstasy which cannot be told otherwise. (Cox and Dyson, *Modern Poetry*, 1967:124) His imagery, observes Bayley (RS. 1960:199), exhibits the absorption and single mindedness of the great Romantics.

Ted Hughes' imagery, as his poems reveal, is the construct of his visionary imagination. He portrays his subjects not only in their visual appearance but also suggests their inherent characteristics he condenses the various aspects of the things into an compact image. His imagery includes predatory animals as well as domestic ones, nature in its incursive appearance as well as in its creative stance. Hughes seems most powerful when he portrays, predatory animals. The poem 'Hawk Roosting' (Lupercal) is an excellent exhibit. The poem opens as:

I sit in the top of wood, my eyes closed

Inaction, no falsifying dream

Between my hooked head and hooked feet

Or in sleep rehearses perfect kills and eat

(Lupercal: 26)

In association with the word 'hawk' in the title, the I of the poem transforms into the hawk, and immediately a big hawk with its most powerful predatory temperament which even in its sleep rehearses a perfect kills and eat emerges, there is no falsifying dream whatsoever between his head and his feet. The Head and feet are in consonance with each other, governed only by the predatory instinct, i.e. of killing and eating nothing else. The image of a hawk holding the kill in its hooked feet' and tearing by its sharp beak' becomes a visual reality. My manner are tearing off heads' reinforces the image. Hawk's every feather, strength of his feet (that can lock the rough bark of the tree), toughness of his body is rendered visual. As the poem progresses the hawk turns to be a symbol. There are hawks in the world, but no such hawk is ever heard that may claim, I kill where I please, the allotment of death, for the one path of my flight is direct, through the bones of livings and I am I am going to keep things like this. Then the hawk of this poem transforms into the symbol of might without mercy, conquest without effort, privilege without responsibility, energy without consciousness of end. It symbolizes predator ness or dictatorship with predatory attitude. The image does not present only the physicality of the hawk but also evokes a thought. The reader feels stunned at the attitude revealed by the hawk. In this respect M.L. Rosenthal acknowledges Hughes's gift of presenting image and thought in a context of violently crashing action (125). The hawk in this poem may be perceived as the symbol of Hitler by someone and spokesman of nature's violence and that of unflinching stoicism by other as Hughes indicates.

Ted Hughes expresses his themes in contrastive images. Initially, he describes dragging, fatigue,

sluggish' and then in its contrast foregrounds energy, power and the instinctive activeness. The poem, "The Jaguar" (HIR.12) exhibits this technique in its excellence. The first two stanzas of the poem 'The Jaguar' present the scene of a zoo. The animals in the cages symbolize laziness: yawning apes', shrieking parrots,' fatigued tigers', ' coiled boa constrictor' look like a painting on a nursery wall, still and lifeless. Epithets yawning,' coiled,' fatigued set a background of inaction and slumbry dullness. Then appear the lines.

But who runs like the rest past these arrives

At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized

(HIR:12)

The word 'who' induces a surprise and eagerness and the verb runs in contrast to the verbs used in first stanza suddenly changes the setting and the mood of the poem. The subject noun of who has still not appeared, whom the crowd looks at and feels mesmerized like a child at a dream. It is the hurrying jaguar, an epitome of arrogant power and energy. He is hurrying enraged through the prison darkness after the drills of his eyes, suggesting the fiery looks of the jaguar. He like a short fierce fuse which can blast anything. The fierce bang of blood in his brain makes him appear deaf, he spins from the bars of the cage. The metaphor on a short fierce fuse' gains its meaning from the phrases bang of blood and spins from the bars.' His long and measured steps indicate his wild freedom. The verbs and the metaphor conform to the violent mood of the jaguar and mesmerized presents the standstill condition of the spectators. The jaguar with all its characteristic features and the mesmerized spectators become visual in this image. He by his wild look overpowers the consciousness of the spectator as well as that of the reader.

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