

# Romanticism in the Works of Ted Hughes

**Monika\***

V.P.O.-Kanina, Distt.-M. Garh, Haryana

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Romanticism, controversial since its beginning is now a clearly marked vision. Modern scholars- W.K. Wimsatt (1947), M.H. Abrams (1957), Frank Kermode (1957), R.A. Foakes (1958), Rene Wellek and Northrop Frye (1963) have almost resolved the confusion regarding the philosophy of Romanticism with the result that it comes out as the vision comprising of the fusion of the emotive sensibility and the imagination.

L.R. Furst (1969) counts individualism as one of the key features of Romanticism which leads to the consideration of the individuality factor. It is to be remembered that mere individuality does not contribute to romantic notion, it is the particular (emotive) sensibility that contributes to the romantic vision. Individuality in itself is distinct from the sensibility in the respect that it is the characteristic which makes a person definite, unique being different from the other. Individuals sharing a common sensibility are recognized as a group. Sensibility includes the power to receive physical sensation, a special susceptibility or sensitiveness to outside influence or mental expression. It is an awareness of and ability to respond to something- an emotion or moral value. Sensibility leading to romantic vision is fundamentally sensitive, responsive and susceptible to emotion, coupled with imagination it gives rise to the concentration or meditative quality, intuitive response identified as The concept of Romanticism, as revealed in Frye's (1963) frame work establishes that it is a vision that stresses "within", accepts that the external world is a reflection of what is "within", maintains imagination to be the faculty responsible to the creative activity.

Ted Hughes a strong spokesman of imagination, asserts that the unified totality can only be perceived through imagination. It is the faculty that enables the individual to perceive a strand of unity pervading through the isolated distinct entities of the universe. Accordingly, imagination is the faculty that embraces both worlds-inner and outer-simultaneously. Ted Hughes does not agree with Sartre who says that imagination necessarily negates reality, because to imagine something means to accept its non-existence as an object of perception. Sartre (1972) argues that the object of imagination exists in reality while in the process of imagination it destroys itself. The image

may be lively but it presents its object as not being, thus imagination turns to a subjective creation of nothing. Sartre calls this process an intentional imagination. Hughes maintains that imagination does not destroy the reality of the object but transforms it rendering a visionary characteristic to it. Visionary imagination is a revelatory experience, it neither destroys the physical reality nor is dependent upon it. Commenting on Sartre's notion of alienation, Hughes argues that consciousness is not alienated only from outer nature, instead from inner nature too and the inner nature is essence which is given, not existential. In order to realize the essence imagination is essential (Myth and Education :90)

Hughes' (1967 : 20) concept of poetry, poetic process and poetic language projects his faith in romantic philosophy. His theory that poetry grows in the mind of the poet, that the theme induces a kind of excitement, the poet feels the stirrings of a new poem and poem's outline emerges and then by his imaginative power the poet renders it to appear as an organic entity and that it radiates poet's message like a lamp indicates his leanings for the romantic vision. Ted Hughes does not use the words romantic or Romanticism but the romantic concept of imagination is been described as Roosting and his thought process goes on in imagination indicating that sensory perception is of small value than the visionary one. Thomas west correctly indicates "for Hughes, ordinary sensory perceptions are of small value compared say to vision of the hawk as revealed in roosting hawks drowsy meditation (1985:41). The poem "Egg-Head" brings out the view that egg heads wide eyed objective perception vision of the universe. It can be concluded that Ted Hughes' concept of visionary imagination reveals his strong belief in Romantic ideology of the same. In his poetry in the Making (1968) and Myth and Education (1970) he advances the thought content of Coleridge and Wordsworth with great skill; and he may be considered the contemporary poet who in his philosophy of poetry exhibits the continuance of romantic tradition. But Ted Hughes' sensibility, obviously, is not the same as that of the great romantic poets and in fact it cannot be. His sensibility is a construct which draws upon numerous sources. He has been a student of English literature, archaeology, anthropology and mythology which

equipped him with a deep insight for literature and human nature. He inherits a deep rooted interest in nature from the natural environment of Calder Valley where he was born and brought up. He was a world wanderer, a poet with numerous experience and broad make up of mind could never follow any tradition blindly; his attitude, his response, i.e. the sensibility gives a new look to the tradition. In Ted Hughes the fusion of sensibility and imagination appears but in a different form than that of romantic tradition. In Yeats, Bayley (1959) observes a strand of newness in Romantic traditions. In Ted Hughes it is still newer, his poems are the evidence. Romantic features exist in his poems but with a difference. The belief in within leads to the notion of distaste for Romanticism. Subjectivity is conceived as opposed to objectivity. Since it belongs to that which is within the mind and cannot be verified independently while objectivity is related to a presentation from external point of view and can be physically verified. It is the view of the seer that manifests in the subjective presentation. All the metaphysical philosophies stand to the testimony to the fact that the reality, the truth of an external object is not single directional; it has various facets and it is not possible to locate all the aspects of the object. Eliot conceives of evening as an etherized patient lying on the stretcher while to another poet the golden coloured evening appears like a fairy descending from the clouds. Eliot feels the stillness and gloomy aspect of evening which is as much true as the pleasing and beautiful aspect perceived by the another poet. A poet may appreciate mackerel's amour, the other may sing for its big blurred eye. To one spring may appear bursting, to other it may appear a damsel, both are true to their experience. Without a seer the existence of an external object is unimportant. It is the man who feels the presence of an object and gives it meaning. The names of the objects are arbitrary, given by the man according to his own perception and feeling. When the whole external creation is understood in relation to man-the seer, how can the subjectivity be deplored. Though an object exists on its own but in relation to human being it is also an action, a character, passion and an experience forming an inner reality. The fact that the words of a language are symbols of something. they constitute an inter-subjectivity universal and a reliable set of values, indicates the subject-object relationship. In this context Wimsatt refers Coleridge who points out this character of the words indicating that the objects of outer world function as the objects of inner realm of spirit:

Be it observed .... that I include in the meaning of a word not only its correspondent object but likewise all the associations which it recalls. For language is framed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it.

Wimsatt's view seems valid when he points out that poetic communication requires inter subjective viability therefore the conflict of subjectivity objectivity is illusory. The perception depends upon the seer's own outlook: A jaguar is an external reality with various aspects. It may be perceived as an object of fear, besides, it may be seen as an emblem of power and appreciated for its fiery looks. The only difference between subjectivity and objectivity to be realized is that the centre of subjectivity lies within the man, the seer, while that of objectivity lies outside. It is the seer who reveals the various aspects of the object, which are complementary to each other. Subjectivity is not the characteristic exclusively of Romanticism, it is the essence of creativity. The bare description of an object is not the poetry, the object subjected to the creative power of the poet becomes the subject of poetry. Ted Hughes describes the bird thrush, he observes its instant bounce and attack upon some writhing object, now if these things are put in bare words, it does not acquire the status of the poem, the reader gets nothing to feed his feeling and emotions. On the other hand if the poet says that the bounce of the bird is automatic like a bullet, the reader not only looks a visual image of an instant bounce but feels. A poem, lives it, the only it becomes an organic whole. Subjectivity does not mean an illusory presentation of the reality nor it means the manifestation of personal pleasure and sorrow of the poet. Even if the poet expresses his personal feeling in the poetry, he does so in the way that appeals the reader. The concept that beauty lies in the eyes of the seer attests the point of subjectivity. Is not the comparison of the evening with etherized patient subjective? To reject subjectivity is to negate the very reality of human nature.

The emphasis on within and to see the external world as a reflection of what is within is the principle of internalization. Primitivism is the by-product of the process of internalization of creative activity and according to Michael Bell (Primitivism, 1972:7) accounts for the primitive animism, propitiatory feature and natural piety, i.e., devoutness to nature, which are the identifying characteristics of romantic vision. Frye connects primitivism with the revolutionary character observed in Romanticism and concludes that it is for the revolutionary spirit associated with the primitivism that a revolutionary romantic poet appreciates the raw aspects of nature more than the sophisticated so much so that a violence seems to imbue his attitude.

In the context of Ted Hughes's poetry violence has been a point of much concern to the critics. It is worthwhile to consider Hughes' concept of violence. The word violence denotes an intentional use of force to injure, kill or destroy (Skolnick, *The Politics of protest*, 1969) indicating thereby that it is the intention that makes the use of force to be identified as

violence. It may also be regarded as the capacity to impose or the act of imposition one's will upon another where the position is held to illegitimate when the position is legitimate the imposition of will is not violence. It also consists in techniques of inflicting harm by mental or emotional means (Walter, *Terror or Resistance: A Study of political violence*, 1969). Thus violence lies in the intention behind the act and it can lead to physical, mental or even emotional harm.

In the light of these concepts of violence. Hughes nature poems do not contain any violence. Behind the nature's tumult there is no intention to harm. Nature goes its own way its manifestation follows its own rule; obviously they are not intended to harm anyone. Ted Hughes in his nature-poems describes various aspects of rain, cold or wind; their very reality. If human beings fear or feel disturbed, it is on account of their own inability to accommodate nature.

Animals in Hughes poems do not manifest violence ; simply follow their own instinct 'will to live'. They kill other creatures just to keep themselves alive, may it be thrush, pike, jaguar. In contrast to animals man is violent who kills for the sake of pleasure. For Ted Hughes violence means any energy, energetic activity. He feels an energy circuit pervading under the universe. The nature manifests it, the animals feel but human beings do not they neglect it knowingly and suffer. For Hughes violence is a form of vehement activity and it invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the universe. The modern man who feels pride in posing himself as a rationalist, a humanist, has suppressed the inner self and does not realize the presence of the energy circuit. Hughes writes. "force of any kind frightens our rationalist, humanist style of outlook (1990 : 103). Violence, in the poems of Ted Hughes should be seen in this context."

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## Corresponding Author

**Monika\***

V.P.O.-Kanina, Distt.-M. Garh, Haryana

E-Mail – [gdsharma12@yahoo.com](mailto:gdsharma12@yahoo.com)