

## **Crisis in Human Civilization: Abrogation of the Anthropocene in the Poems of Ted Hughes**

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### **Abstract:**

The human and the non-human solidarity have been afflicted not only in the anthropocene that is connected with the dominant interference of human activity and the rapid Industrial Revolution, influencing the climate and the environment to a great extent but it also found a smouldering influence relating to the sense of speciesism that extended deep rooted anthropocentric view in the human mind since times past.

The objective of this research paper is to find how recent trends have been set to explore the lost ancient relationship between human and nature that have been broken in the modern consumer age. The existence of animals has got marginalized and reduced to a minimum in the human consciousness. This paper seeks to explore how gradual transformations about human being's way of looking at animals are being affected. The paper also attempts to trace and locate the unprecedented geological crises that shake the present civilization. The present paper seeks to find the conceptual frameworks and geopolitical interventions undertaken by pioneers, visionaries and radical realists in order to remove the obstacle on the path of human and non-human solidarity. This study uses a content analysis method and the study reveals that human beings affect animals and nature directly and indirectly, and also nature and animals affect human beings differently, under varied circumstances and situations. The study also reveals that nature and animals take revenge and express their mockery over human beings and show a rebellious attitude towards human beings. This study concludes that the actions, reactions and responses of animals, nature and environment towards human beings confirms the theoretical relevance of Posthumanism and pleads for biocentrism, with respect to the selected poems of Ted Hughes.

**Key Words:** Speciesism, Anthropocene, Post-anthropocentrism, Postmodernism, Climate change

### **Introduction:**

The Anthropocene relates to the current geological age which witnesses the dominant influence and intervention of human activity that have affected the climate and the environment. This proposed geological epoch denoting commencement of significant human impact and impingement on earth's geology and ecosystem, inclusive of anthropogenic

climate change is not only an outcome of the contemporary scenario but, it can be stretched back to the age of Industrial revolution and also further back to the days of the use of insecticides and pesticides and further back to the times when human beings began cultivation and farming. Before the beginning of the process of cultivation all human beings shared the sustenance provided by nature's bounty but as the concept of cultivation sprang up people began to hoard and accumulate corns, grains and wealth for their own utilization and the practice of selfishness and the spirit of division began to take birth in the gradual course of time.

**Background:**

Selfish intent and the spirit of division and separation from other human beings inflicted its vicious effects towards other species as well, and human beings began to control nature, non-human species and its effect impacted the climate and the environment inclusive of the human beings. The American biologist, writer and ecologist, Rachel Carson (1907-1964) in her book "Silent Spring" (1962) recorded the harmful impact of the use of pesticides in agriculture and cited how it adversely affected other species and brought ecological imbalance by poisoning the water sources, lands and other creatures that involuntarily ingested the chemically poisoned insects.

**Need of the hour:**

Abrogation of the anthropocene is the need of the hour. In the age of postmodernism, the blurring of the concept of boundaries, not only with respect to the boundaries of the nations and the states but also with the boundaries between the human beings and the animals along with the non-living entities of the environment, extend a holistic approach towards abrogating anthropocentric nihilism that rejects fundamental aspects of speciesism and encourages post anthropocentric holistic attitude towards nature and the human to re-establish human and non-human solidarity.

**Role of literature:**

Literary presentations of nature and non-human beings like animals and birds of nature and the place of human beings in our planet to promote ecological balance are being brought into consciousness regarding human and non-human solidarity. In this regard, literature, like other arts forms, seeks to strike an elegiac and an apologetic attitude over the damage done by

human beings. Lamentation, being one of the most dominant tones of climate change poetry and the use of satire to criticize human beings for their mistreatment of the world, have been brought to the focus. The concept of climate change, dealing with human being's failure to recognize their impact on non-human species, a tone of regret and lament over the mistreatment of nonhuman species and a protest against human intervention on climate change have been brought under discussion.

Not only the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the machine age have impacted nature and environment but the birth of Renaissance humanism witnessed the upsurge of anthropocentrism and the dominance of human beings. The ideas of Renaissance humanism that flourished the full dominance of human beings set the bedrock of the human dominated world, marginalizing everything excluding the human to the minimal. Plurality, as understood to occur within the pre-established zones of racism, class, gender and ethnicity have been underscored along with beauty, place, family, biodiversity and other elements considered byproducts of capitalism. Ethology has been submerged under infrahumanism and ecocide, as a result of parochial human domination and unauthorized control over nature. The crisis in contemporary human civilization with regard to interspecies relations, climate crisis, landscape ecology, ecosystem ecology, speciesism and others gazed through the political and literary binocular world find its genesis from the rise of Renaissance humanism in and after the Renaissance in the Western World. The last century and the present anthropocene age have been immensely busy with diagnosing and developing political, economic, social, commercial and literary life of the human being that Renaissance humanism upheld and it has been only in the few recent years that the sections of human beings have stumbled on the idea that in upholding human individuality at the centre, the animals have been marginalized. Plants and the environment have been pushed to the periphery and that human beings are encroaching upon the liberty ordained to the non-human world by nature.

The animals and birds have been depicted to assert their rights and bring about environmental awareness in Ted Hughes's selected poems, "Theology", "A Childish Prank", "The Howling of the Wolves" and "Crow's Fall". The post-fifties British Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes, represented in his work the birds, animals and nature that have appeared in rebellious forms

and questioned the authority of human beings. Anthropocentrism is questioned with a marked shift towards post-anthropocentrism.

The postcolonial ecosphere needs to be liberated from the shackles of infrahumanism and saved from ecocide which began its slow death in the western world most derogatorily after the world wars. Jonathan Bate in *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* has observed with respect to Ted Hughes and the young people, ‘The war haunted Ted and his father because it had decimated a generation of the Calder Valley’s young men. The sorrow in the air of the valley came more from the war than from the decline of industry.’ (Bate, 40)

The split between natural history and human history explains also the climate changes and its effects due to human intervention and at this nature and human intersection, ecocriticism as a reaction to climate change due to human activity becomes vital and significant. Adorno has discussed the role of art as ecocriticism and this becomes significant with respect to man’s relation and estrangement with nature. As per Adorno, human beings have lost access to nature. Apollo has estranged the human beings to the first nature called, Nietzschean Dionysus. Only art can bridge this gap that can contain both the memory of something lost and a promise of something new, yet to be born.

### **Relevant poems of Ted Hughes in discussion:**

Thomas West in *Ted Hughes: Contemporary Writers* observes of the poem *The Jaguar*, “The stare of the jaguar that hurries ‘enraged/ Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes’ is the outer observer’s or the crowd’s perception of a great natural force with which they have no direct contact. This is indicated in the analogy between a child following his dream and a mesmerized crowd following the jaguar” (West, 20). The fearful gaze of the jaguar refuses submission to yield to the four walls of the cage. The two eyes of the beast burning like balls of fire, representing violent gaze wages a power struggle with the onlookers who cloister themselves in shells of protection by imprisoning the jaguar and limiting the freedom of the jaguar.

The power does not remain intact or controlled in one place rather it moves from the crowd of the people to the animal in the cage raging in its instinctual ferocity and finally to Nature, since Nature brought about life in the world. Just like the flow of power in all directions, the

gaze also changes its course in varied courses depending upon the objects and the related observers.

Art connects human beings to the environmental concerns by foregrounding in it the backdrop of destruction and horrors caused by the two world wars. The wars have influenced both human lives and nature. Only by striking a proper balance of the scientific (Apollonian) and the human element (Dionysian) can the pessimistic tone to the destruction of nature be alleviated. The optimism contained therein can be brought into materialization only if a radical change in the attitudes against exploitation of nature be adopted. Chen Hong in “Hughes and animals” aptly observes ‘As far as the poem is concerned, Hughes’ acceptance of primitivism has indeed presented itself in the honour and respect he pays to the Jaguar as the totem animal, which is basically a primitive attitude, as well as in his criticism of humans – childlike consumers of caged displays – who are much inferior to the Jaguar in terms of energy and completeness of being.’ (Gifford, 42). A return to the primitive times where Nature and the Environment existed in its own individual pristine stage without anthropogenic interventions is the need of the hour to save the human beings as it is the planet can exist without human beings but human beings cannot survive without its congenial environment.

The speaker in the poem “The Bull Moses” from *Lupercal* reminds the readers of the bull’s dangerous power lurking unawaken in the beast itself. The hidden force ‘in the locked black of his powers’ are strong enough to destroy his master with one sudden revolt against him. On the other way round, the ‘black’ and dark image of the bull suggests the dark psyche within the human mind:

Blackness is depth

Beyond star. But, the warm weight of his breathing,

The ammoniac reek of his litter, the hotly-tongues

Mash of his cud, steamed against me. (C P, 74)

About the ‘darkness’ Uroff also suggests, “It belongs to an undefined dream world: “dream / Darkness,” something from the gulf, not between man and the animal, but between rational man and terrors submerged in his head. It inspires not only fear but also fascination as both man and boy conjure its power. It attaches them to some ancient time, legendary depths, ages

of the bull's fathers when perhaps their dreams were founded." (Uroff, 99) Nature and environment, if misused, exploited and ruined beyond retrieval, can inflict horrific consequences and disasters that can wipe out human civilization if not all together but by parts and across many centuries. The dark human psychology of this anthropocene epoch requires to be curbed only to set free the colonial imprints of human beings on the natural and environmental domain.

In Ted Hughes's poem "Six Young Men" that reveals memories of pre-war period, as captured from a photograph, the lowered eyes revealed a 'bashful' gaze of one of the soldiers. The gaze of the readers explores the natures of the photographed soldiers. The background and the landscape where the photograph was taken also attract the attention of the readers towards a gaze which reveals a naturalness and changelessness against the backdrop of the annihilation of those people after 40 years. The readers begin to cast a gaze into the land of reality and enter into the conflict of power struggle between the world of the past and the world of the present. Sagar in *The Art of Ted Hughes*, rightly observed:

" 'Exposure' is a perfectly chosen word. The camera which cannot lie exposed them as forever alive and young. Six month later they were exposed to the horrors of war which exposed their bones. And one's own vivid life, for all its bulk and weight, is equally flimsy. We are no more alive than they were, than, here in this photograph, they still are, as by a bilberried bank, a thick tree, a black wall 'which are there yet and not changed' they listen to the waterfall that roars yet in that valley. Yet we know that they are as dead as dinosaur or dodo, dead and rotten. If I have my photograph taken today, someone will look at it forty years hence and be looking at the photograph of a dead man. It is like seeing one's own tombstone, like becoming aware of one's own skeleton which will one day shrug off its flesh." (Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, 31)

### **Conclusion:**

Theoretical concept of ecocriticism, used in this study has examined the combined roles of human beings, animals and the natural environment.

Ecomaterialism and ecologist approach would explore the interconnectedness of nature, material culture of human beings, and posthumanism would discover the multifaceted nature in the post anthropocene epoch. The last decade of the millennium has witnessed a proliferation of multiple efforts towards restoring the lost bond of humans with nature. Multiple disciplinary book series, edited volumes, monographs, scholarly journal articles, symposia, reels and cinemas have been proliferated towards holistic presentation of animality in species relationship along with the multiple voices of bio fiction, climate change perspectives and biodiversity tropes that all have merged and metamorphosed into a single voice of global environmentalism. The multidisciplinary approaches towards environmental concern that locate the interfaces of critical, theoretical social, religious and biological idioms and tropes erase and melt the discipline specific boundaries in the wake of an unprecedented and unrestricted planetary crisis that include human civilization.

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