

Animal's Death by Fear: An Ecological Perspective

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Abstract

The objective of this research paper is to find out how the concept of Ecology of fear is embedded in the poems of Ted Hughes. An attempt has been made to explore how the ecology of fear in selected poems of Ted Hughes tend to pose a resistance towards environmental degradation and ecological disruption for bringing about peace and sustainable development. The ecology of fear, implying the psychological impact that the predator-induced stress experienced by animals are forced to face and that the predators have a substantial impact on the individuals that they predate by reducing the survival and population size in the ecosystem have been extensively focused in this research paper with respect of the poems of Ted Hughes. The modes of employing anti-predator defences adopted by the individuals in order to avoid being killed by the predator have been analysed with ecological imperatives for establishing peace and promoting sustainable development in the poems under consideration. The study investigated how the anti-defence mechanisms adapted by the individuals with the changing survival strategies have paved the path towards the realisation of sustainable development and ensuring of peace in consonance with the ecological balance of the globe. A random sampling technique was followed. A qualitative data collection method has been followed with random sampling where the analysis is based on primary sources. Finding the ecology of fear inclusive of the ecological crisis and the quest for peace and for securing sustainable development has been extended to not only the animal kingdom but it includes the vegetative and avian world as well. Findings revealed that the ecology of fear has lead the individuals to adapt respective defence mechanisms in order to evade the predation as well as to ensure living both by the predated individual and the predators in order to maintain sustainable living conditions and help to restore peace and pertain to the perfect ecological equilibrium which is in the threshold of disruption.

Key Words: Animals, Environment, Fear, Ecology, Plants, Human beings

The concept of “ecology of fear” was coined by Michael Clinchy et al in the paper “The Ecology of Fear: Optimal Foraging, Game Theory and Trophic Interactions” and published in the journal “Behavioral Ecology”, Volume 27, Issue 6, 01 in the year 2016, July 19th. The idea of fear, relating to predators, gained emphasis in environmental studies since 2010 and before. With respect to Alfred Crosby’s term, “Ecological imperialism” Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in the book, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals and Environment* observes, “European imports to the newly settled colonies- humans, animals, plants- were regarded on the other hand as necessary and ‘natural’ impositions on, or substitutes for, the

local bush or wilderness; and even if these invading species were initially difficult to establish or acclimatise, they soon prospered in lands where their control predators were absent” (Huggan 7-8). Animal’s death by fear is not only a direct outcome of the fear from their predators, but it also includes the alien, unfavourable and unaccustomed environment that they are forced to live in due to the influence of varied anthropogenic effects. Fear inflicts such tremendous psychological impacts on animals that they begin to shrug their instinctive habits and nature of their individual wildness and even reduces their breeding capability that ultimately leads to a reduction of the number of species and finally goes to the extent of extinction.

Ecology of fear, inclusive of the whole impact that the predator species induce on the prey species, the entire population and the communities, is an overt extension of the traditional ecological view that limits the scope of sustainable living concerns of the prey species being killed by the predator and in this way their population is reduced. Keeping aside direct killing by the predators, the fear of being killed by them impacts on the prey population and affects it more than the direct killing itself.

The unconscious fear of being killed and being wiped out from the world takes up a conscious deep seated fear in the prey on witnessing predation on other animals of same species or of different species and perceiving the sense of loss and reduction of kindred community company, shared in a particular herd of community among animals and birds. The fear of getting lost and being predated intensify the horror and instil fear that directly poses threat to the lives of the prey.

That the prey seeks to flee and escape from the clutches of the predator is itself proof of the fear faced by the prey species. This fear acts on the prey species both on the conscious and unconscious levels. The conscious fear is more detrimental than the unconscious one since a conscious fear keeps on haunting a species throughout the span of its breath-taking period. This fear of predators spreads among other species as well and takes up a massive contour and directly associates with the “ecology of fear”. Animals like rabbits often meet death due to sudden fright of the predators even if it is just after viewing the predator itself.

Psychological, behavioural, biochemical and neurobiological factors contribute to the “ecology of fear”, very often in a much more tremendous way and leave its imprint leading to more severe impact than direct killing by the predator. Fear of the predator imposes a resistance on the prey species to roam about freely in their natural surroundings. There is insufficient food consumption due to the fear of the predator. The prey species are bound to hide themselves in their hidden shelters in the fear of predation. These are the instincts that keep themselves from being predated and this nature is common for all animals. Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection* defined instinct as, “An action, which we ourselves should require experience to enable us to perform, when performed by an animal, more specifically by a very young one, without any experience, and when performed by many individuals in the same way, without their knowing for what purpose it is performed, is usually said to be instinctive.” (Darwin 186-87) The psychological and behavioural changes due to the impact of fear of predation lead to biochemical and neurobiological alterations that affect the prey species since the above factors indirectly affect the general health, natural living and reproduction of the prey species and directly lead to the imbalance in the ecosystem of the universe.

William Rueckert in “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” observes, “Every poem is an action which comes from a finely developed and refined ecological

conscience and consciousness.” (Glotfelty and Fromm 116) A close reading of Ted Hughes’ poems reveals the lurking fear in the prey species, making the discerning reader reconsider the genuine crisis encountered by the prey species. The ‘ecology of fear’ embedded in the poems of Ted Hughes brings to the surface the malign outcome of such terror that hinders the spontaneous living atmosphere of the prey species. The hindrance on the spontaneous living of different prey species reduces its population due to the death caused by fear of the predator. In the poems of Ted Hughes, human beings have been depicted as the super predator who pertains to the execution of “ecology of fear” the most.

The baby wolf in Ted Hughes’ poems, “The Howling of Wolves” from the volume *Wodwo* (1967), trapped in the steel trap laid down by forest hunters, shivers in chilly cold and night-long starvation has rendered the animal being weak and incomprehensive of the lurking dangers in the trapped steel nets. The innocent trapped animal, crying like a baby in the midst of the forest becomes conscious of the existential fear and crisis, and becomes engulfed by the utter darkness of the night which is symbolic of the dark human dominated world since the animal is already trapped in the clutches of human power control. The howling of the trapped prey breaks through the silence of the night air in the forest and invites other animals surrounding the locale of the brutal scenario to witness the destructive impulse of the actions of human beings, the super predators. In this way, the human beings, the super predators induce the “fear of ecology” since they break the normal environmental etiquette and encroach upon the liberty of wild animals and usurp their natural movement and turn their natural habitat into an abode of horror and terror.

The clashing and slaving of the steel traps, employed for trapping wild animals by tricking them is a heinous act on the part of the human super predators that keeps the animals frightened all the time. This fright from the predator affects not only the trapped animal in consideration and the surrounding animals of the same species but this fear of the predator percolates among other animals of different species as well. Turns may be shifted and today’s witness can become tomorrow’s victim. The poem, “The Howling of Wolves” from the volume *Wodwo* (1967) aptly creates a strong ambiance of the “fear of ecology” in which the whole forest environment mourns and the animals and birds empathize with one another, putting up a pitiful revolt against the human super-predator. Wendy Woodward in her book, *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectives in Southern African Narratives* observes:

What is indisputable in the representations of human-animal relationships in southern

African writing is that the two species often share discourses which have their own vocabulary and conventions without recourse, necessarily, to human language.

(Woodward 7)

Though the human predators are unsympathetic towards the trapped baby wolf, other animals surrounding the trapped animal are seen to empathize with the pitiable plight of the trapped animal and keep on running around in utter helplessness.

Owls cry, other animals keep running in fright, the forest wind sweeps through, animating the death-stricken environment as the wolf trails its haunches and whimpers horribly. The night snow falls and fills the gap with more wilderness and the earth creaks out of the agony of inhumanity inflicted by the human super-predator:

Then crying of a baby, in this forest of starving silences,
 Brings the wolves running.

(CP 180)

The impending death of the trapped wolf will surely create an ecological imbalance and indulge “fear of the predator” in the whole animal kingdom. It disrupts the food chain and the ecosystem of nature. Though the trapped wolf is also a predator of other animals since the wolf has to sustain its life at the cost of other animal’s lives, the natural process must continue but the interference of human super- predator must be checked and resisted by all possible means to sustain peace and promote sustainable development of the wild life in a hindrance- free inculcation of healthy living.

The prey in Ted Hughes’ poem, “The Owl Flower” from the volume *Cave Birds* (1978) hides itself in the bush, under the leaves and the flowers in order to avoid predation by the ‘Big terror’ (CP 438). It gets wet in nectar and changes its colour by colouring itself with the yellow pollen covering its full head and adopts an anti-predation defence mechanism to avoid predators. As the prey comes out of its hidden shelter to find sustenance at night and adopts anti-predation defence in order to shun the view of its predators, it actually becomes prey of another predator. The prey is predated by a predator, higher in the food chain. The prey clothed in the colour of the pollen, coming up for the sparkling grain of food, hidden amidst the bunch of floral petals becomes predated by another “Big terror” (CP 438), an owl which had adopted anti-predation defence mechanism by puffing its woolly feathers in the form of a flower with its eyes burning like a filament. The owl predator adopts defence mechanism in the shape of an owl- flower and pertains to the dual function where the first one being protecting itself against its predators and the second one being acting as a camouflage against hidden preys so as to elude their protective anti-predation skill in being able to safeguard them from the predators. However, the defence mechanism of the owl -flower triumphs over the anti-predation defence mechanism of the prey and the owl succeeds in pouncing on its prey and takes full control over the prey. The predator owl pierces the prey with its sharp claws and ‘wounds flush with sap’ (CP 439):

A coffin spins in the torque.
 Wounds flush with sap, headful of pollen,
 Wet with nectar
 The dead one stirs.

(CP 439)

Ted Hughes’s poem, “Crow Tyrannosaurus” from the volume titled *Crow* (1970) reminds the readers of the evolutionary process where the crow gains a body structure similar to that of a tyrannosaurus with its two frontal legs lopped off through degeneration across time and age in an evolutionary process. The crow and the tyrannosaurus resemble in their omnivorous nature as well. The similar features of the crow and the tyrannosaurus have been traced in the poem. The poem also records a list of creatures whose dead bodies pass in a long procession of funeral with mourning and lamentation. “The ecology of fear” is well expressed through the mourning and lamentation found in the poem itself:

Creation quaked voices-

It was a cortege
Of mourning and lament
Crow could hear and he looked around fearfully.

(CP 214)

A number of predators have been introduced in the poem, *Crow Tyrannosaurus*. The predator, swift preyed on the insects and has reduced the population of the prey:

The swift's body fled past
Pulsating
With insects
And their anguish, all it had eaten.

(CP 214)

The cat also predated and led to the 'death-struggle, sorrow on sorrow' (CP 215). The dog also preyed on many prey for their flesh and the bones and took the lives of many. But the mention of the super- predator, that is man, strikes the key note of sarcasm since man predated on the innocence of the living:

Even man he was a walking
Abattoir
Of innocents-
His brain incinerating their outcry.

(CP 215)

The killing for the purpose of sustenance keeps up the food chain but the purposeless killing of human -predators augment the "ecology of fear". The crow in the poem is an inspector who criticizes the works of the human- predators. Dr. Pawan Kumar Sharma in his book, *Ted Hughes: An Ecocritical Study* observes the function of the crow as:

Ted Hughes's crow, as an epic hero, fixes its gaze on the total constellation of the universe in all its spatial and temporal dimensions and tries to comprehend sympathetically the struggle and the suffering of the universe as its own.

(Sharma 218)

Plant's response to external stimuli has been proved scientifically by the Darwins since a long time ago. Oozing out of sap due to external rapture on any part of the vegetative plants also provides ample proof of the disruption and injury to any part of the plant and the vegetative world. Herbivorous animals pose a great threat to the vegetative world since their main sustenance depends on the vegetative world which unlike animals lacks the power of protecting themselves by taking recourse to safe shelter due to its fixity on the ground and the nature of immobility. Unlike the animals who bear the ability to hide themselves in safe shelter and avoid the grasp of the predators, the plants remain immovable, fixed in one place, grounded in the firm soil as their main sustenance comes from the sunlight and the sucked water and minerals from the soil. In this way, the vegetative world always remains exposed to

the herbivorous animals who chew and eat up the leaves of the plants, known to be their food producing parts. This sensitive issue has been highlighted by Ted Hughes' poem, "A Vegetarian" in the volume *Wodwo* (1967). In the poem, the grass is fearful of the hare that eats it up. The grass is fearful of the "bull's tongue" and the "sheep's jaw". The sow and the boar also crush the grass and the meadow when they lie down over the ground filled with grass and take rest in a leisurely manner:

Fearful of the hare with the manner of a lady
Of the sow's loaded side and the boar's brown fang,

Fearful of the bull's tongue snaring and rending,
And of the sheep's jaw moving without mercy,
Tripped on Eternity's stone threshold.

Staring into the emptiness,
Unable to move, he hears the hounds of the grass.

(CP 154)

Not only the animal world but the plant and the vegetative world are affected by the fear of the predator that adversely affects the ecosystem and directly induces the "fear of ecology". The pests also add to the destruction of the vegetative world and destroy the crops of the farmers thereby reducing the production output of crops. Low crop production affects the economy of a society and leads to the poor consumption rate among the under-developed population. Deforestation has been contributing to the reduction of the oxygen level and massive pollution of air has clubbed to its malefic effects on the blue planet. There is an utter need of increasing plantation and increasing greenery all around to promote sustenance, well being and ensuring all round presence of peace in the world. Vegetation and the green nature affect the climate and provide shelter to many avian creatures. Disruption in the vegetation and green nature directly affects the avian creatures as well, which contribute to the disruption of the balance of the natural world and the whole ecosystem.

Plantation of more trees and augmenting the space of the vegetative world can help promote the growing sense of wilderness and increase the habitable space of the wild creatures to flourish in the luxury of a natural wildlife- environment and also increase the density of plant population. Wild animals thrive well in the dense and wild environment that is their original habitat. Hiding from predators and securing lives from the predators lessen the fear of death of animals. Massive deforestation and destruction of wild habitats increase the fear of death in the animals. Fear of death in animals can be reduced when the animals can employ their defence mechanisms in the correct environmental condition that guarantees a sense of security in their natural and wild habitat. In this way the sustainable living conditions need to be improved to ensure peace by reducing "the fear of predators" and increasing the population of the wild life so as to defeat the "fear of ecology" and make the world a better place to live in for all.

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