

Language Usages in Ted Hughes' Animal Poetry

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Abstract: Ted Hughes is a British writer and poet laureate of the 20th century, who is famous for writing animal poetry based on his meticulous observation on animals since childhood. Poetry in Hughes' eyes is as an organic whole, which is just like the animals, or even beyond animals, and become a more eternal art that can be created by words. Ted Hughes is well versed in the use of language in his works. He advocates the accuracy of words in his animal poetry, because the right words can best convey the meaning; he advocates the unique use of grammar, which could give the seemingly thin text the power to travel through time and space; he advocates the musicality of animal poetry, because the aesthetic of rhyme can evoke the resonance of the reader's multiple senses. Therefore, this article will focus on a few of Ted Hughes' Animal poetry to analyze his unique writing style and intentions from the perspective of language usages.

Keywords: Ted Hughes, animal poetry, language usage

1. Introduction

Animals are fascinating in their own right, and as symbols of meaning, people project animals onto themselves because people need these meanings to be clearly visible in the world, which is the root of all animal representations in poetry. Poets use these animal images, for instance, to express choices between good and evil and symbolize human passions, political organization and social order, fully expressing their desire for universal harmony in the universe.

The intensity of archaic energies and mystery in the animal world is explored by Ted Hughes, a leading contemporary British poet, through his creative and poetic imagination. Because of his good number of significant animal poems, he is commonly known as an 'animal poet', expressing his strong interest and careful observation on animal life. While his contemporary writer keep articulating angst, anger, negation, narcissism, morbidity, and frustration in their verses, Hughes' poems are expressive of archetypal energy and spontaneous vitality though he is sometimes accused of composing verses of "violence" [1], which will be analyzed in the latter section of the article. For Hughes, poetry is like an animal, and writing poetry is like hunting. In the process of writing animal poetry, he links poetry to a new kind of creature, calling it "a new specimen of life outside yourself." Each animal poem is a different creature, looking at its author and each reader in a unique way, telling about an existence different from any other poems or any other type of text.

In the history of English literature, there are many excellent poem about animals, such as Blake's *Tiger* [2], Tennyson's *Eagle* [3], and Lawrence's *Snake* [4]. Each animal image conveys the poet's thinking on a certain problem at that time, such as the relationship with the creator, the relationship

with civilization, and the relationship with humans. Hughes' poetry, too, continues this thinking, but in a different way. His many animal figures have faded from grace and glory, returning to nature and being not moral. In the face of human civilization, his animal poetry become a more direct and cold mockery to the "civilized" society.

From the years when Hughes ascended the poetry world to the present, there are roughly the following studies at home and abroad. The first is a discussion of the theme of violence in Hughes's poetry, which came with the publication of Hughes's first collection of poetry, *The Hawk in Rain*. W.I. Carr points out that there is a kind of violence in the poem that lacks moral evaluation, while Alan John Brown believes that the "hawk" is a crude sugar, sexual, and violent mixture of imagery [5]. Calvin Bedient, one of the most vocal opponents of Ted Hughes's "violence," compares Hughes' *the Hawk in Rain* to an absolutely "voyeur of violence" work [6]. The second hot topic discussed in the research field is the poetical intertextuality between Hughes and Plath. In 1983, Keith Seg selected and compiled the paper sets *Hughes' Achievement*, which includes the German scholar Eckbert Fass's paper entitled *A Chapter Points on Myths: Silvia Plath and Ted Hughes*. This paper shows how Plath and Hughes built their poetic kingdoms together [7]. The third one is the study of nature and ecology in Hughes' poems. Leonardo M. Scigaj's paper "*Ted Hughes and Ecosystem: A Biological Center— from the ecological perspective*" said Hughes calls for respect for human love for nature and the harmonic relation between reconstruction and nature. He argues that three of Hughes's early works, *The Hawk in Rain*, *Lupercal*, and *Wodwo* describe a wild world with the original violent force as the hand segment and the predatory nature of animals as the main body so that Hughes tries to explain the distortion of human nature and eulogize the greatness of nature [8]. Finally, the exploration of myths and cultural sources in Hughes's poems is also a common concern of scholars. The book *Ted Hughes: A Planet That Could Not Feed Humanity*, written by Eckbet Fass, is an analysis of the mythology of *the Crow*, which is a hot spot in the study of the cultural factors in Hughes' poems [9].

Through the reviews of past research, people can find that although Hughes's research results are quite rich, there are few studies on the analysis of the charm of language in animal poetry from the perspective of language use. Therefore, different from the previous studies, this article will study Ted Hughes's poetry from the perspective of its language usage technique, which includes the choice of words, the use of grammar, and the application of rhythm.

2. Language Usage Technics of Ted Hughes

Poetry stands as a unique literary genre, diverging markedly from other forms of literature due to its distinctive use of language. This distinctiveness lies in its ability to portray the world indirectly, not by directly referencing observable phenomena, but by employing language in unconventional ways. This unconventional language usage not only encourages but at times even invites readers to conjure up an imaginative alternate reality [10]. Ted Hughes was a great poet whose language was a very powerful instrument of communication.

According to Culler, he suggests that the most effective way to begin explaining poetry involves a thorough exploration of its literary impact, along with a demonstration of how specific language elements play a crucial role in shaping this impact. The rationale for embracing this approach to analysis stems from the varied linguistic structures that poems can employ and the manner in which they can challenge conventional linguistic expectations [11].

2.1. The Choice of Words

Ted Hughes is highly concerned about language. Mikhail Bakhtin, a prominent Russian philosopher and literary critic, praised Rabelais' bold use of billing door elements in his works in *Language Rabelais's Market*. Bakhtin believes that informal speech elements like profanity, curses, and curses

are not in line with custom, etiquette, courtesy, and decency. Breaking the official order and official ideology, they release language from the constraints of the conventions and restrictions, and create an atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity. In Hughes's poetry, he deliberately challenges traditional etiquette and aesthetics with vulgar, ugly language to create a free and free carnival atmosphere, as we can see. In the meanwhile, in order to express Bakhtin's discourse on 'foreign languages' and dispel the unity of official languages, Hughes utilizes various forms of language and cultural references.

For example, the word "please" used in Ted Hughes' poem *Hawk Roosting* can refer to the inherent human nature of wanting to have things, and it is also used to personify the spirit of the eagle, who does whatever he wants and has everything. The use of non-sophistication further demonstrates the fascist nature of the eagle. The eagle is described in the poem as heading in a brutal manner, not adhering to any given rules and thinking above moral and social customs.

Moreover, poetry acquires a rhetorical impact through unconventional structures and word combinations, which are typically restricted in ordinary communication. By deliberately opting for choices outside the accepted linguistic norms, the poet expands and surpasses the conventional means of expression in their language. Terms like 'inaction,' 'falsifying,' 'rehearse,' 'inspection,' 'tearing off,' 'revolving,' and 'permitted' serve to portray the malevolent creature as relentlessly violent through the formality and abstraction of language. To convey the hawk's authoritarian and resolute demeanor, the poet employs brief and direct sentences. The hawk's harsh nature is evident in his choice of words. For instance, in the opening line where he declares, "I sit on the top of the wood," the poet opts for "sit" instead of "perch" to anthropomorphize the bird, endowing it with a sense of dominion. In the third stanza, Hughes uses "my feet are locked" instead of "my claws," personifying the hawk and evoking an image in the reader's mind about the interplay between the human and the hawk. This portrayal of the feet as strong or ascribing human characteristics to them is achieved by employing an unconventional feature of inanimate elements, such as "feet". The use of the verb "locked" also conveys a mechanical aspect. While "seized" or "caught" are more typical verbs for this context, "locked," although unusual, conveys the impression that the hawk possesses unwavering stability, impervious to any external force attempting to dislodge it against its will.

2.2. The Use of Grammar

Although poetry is a specially ordered symbol system, it is written in language, so the mandatory role of grammar naturally plays a decisive role in the construction of poetry. Roman Jakobson was the first to study the language of poetry in the grammatical system. He tried to explain "why poetry is poetry" from the structure and function of language through the grammatical analysis of poetry [12].

2.2.1. The Pronoun "I" in Ted Hughes' Poetry

In Freud's psychological theory, he believes that the use of pronouns creates a structural theory. He considered personal pronouns -- I, me, myself, and you -- to be very special words. [13] They are the only words for emotional conversation, the only words for human communication and love, and the only words for subjective self-discovery. They don't have synonyms. No words carry more emotion than "I", "me" and "you". People do live, love, and die "in pronouns," or as Salinas puts it: "what a joy to live in pronouns!"

In Hughes' poem *Hawk Roosting*, the poet portrays the savage attributes of the eagle by employing various poetic images, metaphors, rhetorical patterns, and other non-human characteristics. Hughes employs the raptor as a metaphor to depict the eagle as a destructive, arrogant, and supremely powerful creature. Notably, he employs a distinctive linguistic device throughout the poem, prominently featuring the first-person pronoun "I" and its derivatives such as "we" and "my," which

illuminate the eagle's spiritual and psychological thought processes. These pronouns are used both at the beginning and end of the poem, totaling 21 instances. The frequent repetition of possessive pronouns like "my" underscores the eagle's selfish and controlling power to the nature, as the narrator attempts to assert the eagle's dominance and position amidst other elements of nature. The consistent use of first-person pronouns conveys that nature and everything surrounding the eagle exists primarily for its benefit.

2.2.2. The Tense in Ted Hughes' Poetry

As a grammatical marker of time, tense has a very important value in poetry, especially in lyric poetry. Critics such as Susanne K. Langer, George T. Wright and Susan Hunt Nelson have conducted in-depth discussions on the meaning of tense in lyric poetry. Reading Hughes Teide's poems also makes people pay attention to the poet's swimming in various tenses, and his works seem to constitute a symphony of tenses, thus rendering a grand atmosphere. Combined with the pronoun "I" mentioned in the previous part, this unique narrative perspective combined with different tenses gives the narrator the ability to travel in different time and space, thus reflecting the grand tension of Ted Hughes' works.

When examining the entirety of the poem *Hawk Roosting* by Hughes, the simple present tense is employed by Hughes. This choice of tense not only mirrors the eagle's current state but also underscores the role of language in constructing meaning. The entire poem consistently uses the present tense, with all verbs except the last three action words, like "sit," "fly," and "assert," also being in the present tense. These verbs depict the eagle's typical behaviors and emphasize the eagle's resistance to change over time. Consequently, readers are deeply immersed in the notion that, since the dawn of creation, the world and its conditions remain unaltered, and the eagle steadfastly opposes any alteration. Within the lines of the text, an image of the eagle as a ruler reigning over the unchanging earth is expertly crafted.

2.2.3. The Article in Ted Hughes' Poetry

In another poem *the Thought-Fox*, the poet uses the word "the" in the title to relate two seemingly unrelated things: "thought" (an abstract noun) and "fox" (a concrete noun). Stylistically, when the definite article is used, it indicates that a concept is not alien to the poet or reader. Using the article "the" here not only shows that poets are very familiar with the formation of ideas, but also shows that Hughes thinks that readers should too. By putting two different categories of words together, Ted Hughes convinces the reader that there must be something special between the lines. Thus, thematic metaphors are introduced step by step.

2.3. The Application of Rhythm

Hughes believes that the third component of the organic whole of poetry is the rhythm, so he attaches great importance to keeping the rhythm of poetry alive. In terms of the relationship between the music and the content of poetry, most poets and critics in the West have put "music" and "meaning and meaning" together. Even Alexander Pope, a classical English poet who emphasized the importance of "meaning" in literary works, believed that sound must be the echo of meaning. French symbolist poets want to overthrow the clarity of language and poetry logic, attach importance to the musicality of poetry, and think that only through the mysterious meaning of sound can we penetrate into the essence of things.

Hughes's artistic approach is different from that of current British and American poets. He did not use the traditional metrical body, nor the irregular free body, but used a mixture of half-metrical and half-free. In terms of the rhyme rules of poetry, Hughes often decided the form of poetry according

to the content of the poem and the outburst of emotion. Therefore, his poems were of varying length, the number of lines in each stanza was uneven, and the rhythm was extremely unstable. In order to create a mental union to work with the hidden, Hughes's nine-line poem almost completely maintains the regular pattern of three, five and four stressed syllables [14]. In *the Thought--Fox*, for example, he not only makes extensive use of alliteration such as sudden sharp hot stink, but also good at using the repetition of stanzas such as "widening deepening greenness" to enhance the musical effect in the poem.

3. Conclusions

Poetry is a transformative endeavor and a skillful form of transformation, as it constantly explores the potential of language and communication to convey the narratives that shape our lives, both within and amidst us. Ted Hughes' life is close to nature and he loves animals, which has been on full display in his animal poetry. Hunter-like, the poet stalks language: his aim is to capture living rhythms and expressions; to arrest, in words, a "new species of creature". Although Hughes believes deeply in the "divine nature of the poet's identity," he does not deny the use of poetry in the craft of language.

Ted Hughes wrote many famous animal poems, but in a sense, these poems are not animals themselves. Through the analysis from the perspective of language use, it is obvious to find that these poems, like animals, between the lines not only embody the vitality of depicting animals, but also show the vitality of poetry itself, because language itself is a way of living, an important tool of human communication, and also an important way to understand each other.

This research delves into the linguistic attributes of Ted Hughes' animal poems to investigate the shared poetic elements between poetry and the animal kingdom, focusing on language usage, such as the choices between various words, the usages of grammar and the musical effects. Language essentially serves as the raw material for any poet's craft and plays a crucial role in evaluating the excellence of their work. Ted Hughes is known for his preference for employing coarse language, colloquial expressions, and unconventional word pairings to enhance his portrayal of the wildness of animals, the primal power of nature, and the enigmatic aspects of mythology.

All in all, animal poetry is beyond the animals themselves because language as an art form, can compete with time and get eternity. The vivid language and words, together with the respect for life and the eternal understanding of poetry, Ted Hughes's animal poetry is definitely a shining pearl in the history of poetry.

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