



By Ted Hughes

Page No: 122

Understanding the Poem

1. Comment on the physical features of the hawk highlighted in the poem and their significance.

Answer: Hawk Roosting signifies self-esteem or self-assertion of a Hawk that is so alienated from the human world. The poem is a dramatic monologue in a non-human voice; i.e., of the Hawk, who carries the false belief of himself being the most superior living being. The Hawk brandishes its supreme ego by boasting of its physical features. The outrageous fashion in which he brands his physiology insinuates his arrogance. The much vaunted self-praise has criticised as an instance of fascism. The poet has brought out savagery by describing the unsophisticated physiology of the Hawk. In the first stanza of the poem, the Hawk claims to limit the whole of the world between his “hooked head” and “hooked feet”. The Hawk insinuates himself to embody the whole of creation and even while he is asleep he “rehearses perfect kills and eats” in his dream. In the third stanza, we see the Hawk challenging the God. He flatters himself that “it took the whole of Creation” to design him, his foot, his each and every feather. Now the roles are reversed and he possesses and exercises his power over the whole world.

2. How does the poem emphasise the physical prowess of the Hawk?

Answer: Ted Hughes’ poetry is known for its intense and obsessive fascination with the world of birds and animals. His poems shock us with unusual phrases and violent images. The poet, in the poem Hawk Roosting, presents the reader a grotesque image of a Hawk whose physical prowess, from the perspective of the hawk itself, is emphasised. The Hawk sits on the top most branch of a tree in wood. The egocentric Hawk sees itself at the top of the world. It expresses its superiority through its physiology. The savage features of the Hawk make it appear ferocious and superior to the rest of the living beings. It talks of its “perfect kills and eats” even in its dreams. The fascist Hawk believes that it took the whole of Creation to make it. And now that the roles are reversed, it takes just one flight of it and it can revolve it all round slowly. The fashion in which it exercises its authority by calling the whole of the world its own, it gives itself the solemn right to kill where it pleases. There is no sophistication about the Hawk. He is arrogant and swaggers. His demeanour is not appreciable as he slanders the Sun, showing that even the Sun follows the Hawk. He talks of his eyes as the final authority and that they haven’t “permitted no change” since it began. And the Hawk plans to keep it all like this.

3. ‘There is no sophistry in my body’ – this statement expresses the brutal frankness of the Hawk. Does the poet suggest something through this statement?

Answer: Ted Hughes in the poem Hawk Roosting portrays the Hawk as arrogant and fallaciously authoritative. The poet apprises Hawk’s savage and grotesque image to the reader. The fashion in which it is personified, belittling God and Creation is condemned as

fascism by many critics. The direct way it beholds itself as the highest authority shows its audacity to challenge all the social and moral laws of this world. When it says that “there is no sophistry in my body”, the Hawk is ruthless and brutally frank about its physiology. It is disdainful and its narcissism is much apparent by its insolence and impudence as it does not pay heed to the laws of nature or even the social laws. It lacks mannerism and is gall; only knows killing and ripping the heads off as and when it pleases the Hawk, as it all (the whole Creation) is subservient to him and it. In the fifth stanza, the Hawk declares itself inscrutable and that its ways of killing are not to be questioned. It is the Hawk who decides the allotment of death and there is no other supreme authority to challenge its flight, which is “through the bones of the living”.

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