

PURSUIT OF AESTHETIC PULCHRITUDE: A DELVE INTO TED HUGHES' "SALMON-TAKING TIMES" AND "LOW WATER"

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Abstract:

"Pursuit of Aesthetic Pulchritude: A Delve into Ted Hughes' "Salmon-taking Times" and "Low Water"" surfaces the aesthetic pulchritude of nature that the poet has perceived in his scenic world. The present research paper analyses "Salmon-taking Times" and "Low Water" from *River*, a dexterous and passionate chronicle of nature, to discover the facets of aesthetic beauty. The principles of Aestheticism have been employed to discover the pulchritude that Hughes has relished in the natural world. This research paper has applied the tenets of Immanuel Kant's Aestheticism to analyse the selected poems. Ted Hughes, ranked as one of the best poets of 20th century British literature, is an ardent lover of nature who has vindicated the notion of the eminent Aesthetic critic Theodor W. Adorno.

Key words: Aesthetic, scenic, nature, beauty and disgust

Introduction:

Ted Hughes, lived between 1930-1998, is an ardent lover of nature who often substantiates the words of the Aesthetic critic Theodor W. Adorno: "Art is not the imitation of nature but the imitation of natural beauty" (97). He is an original modern British poet, short story writer, dramatist and critic; frequently wrote about human life and non-human life, in addition focusing on the inner turbulence of modern man who is seen as a cut off from his instinctual world as a predominating motif which has labelled him as a nature poet. He began composing poetry at the teenage of fifteen and published his first volume of poetical work in his 27. The world in which Hughes grew up has a strong impact on his poetic sensibility. His poetry endeavours to re-establish the instinctive lifestyle which is an aspect of nature. He has portrayed nature with an irrational, nihilistic and surrealistic force. His unique fertility of imagination marks him different from his contemporaries. On the other hand, Hughes is a conscious craftsman, has fine ears and his poetry

is rhythmical. His treatment of poetry is a celebration of Nature in her unrestrained wildness and turbulence. His poetry expresses strong feelings and draws emotion and brilliant images in the minds of readers. He was sometimes concerned about the violent forces of nature, but he has also written with great power of imagination to admire the pulchritude of nature. Perhaps, his intention was to offer an alternative metaphysics. In this connection, the poems of *River* uncover the maturity of Hughes as a nature poet and it also contemplates river as an image of continuity of life. His nature poems reveal the concept: 'humanity is a part of nature'. For centuries, scholars and critics have failed to look at the aesthetic portraits of Hughes. Therefore, the present research aims to explore the latent naturalistic images that scents the aesthetic fragrance.

Objectives:

The objects of this research paper are:

- To discover the aesthetic pulchritude in Ted Hughes's portrayal of nature
- To sense the aesthetic fragrance in the foul landscape
- To explore the aesthetic beauty in the scenic scenery

Methodology:

The present research has been accomplished by applying the tenet of Aestheticism. In English literature, the term 'beauty' is consistently allied with the Romantic Age and the Aesthetic Movement; they both have resembling values and their function is parallel. The Romantic Age and its values have influenced many writers and it stresses on the continuity of the ages in the light of its approximating features. In the introduction to *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, Keith Sagar has registered that "there is a real continuity from the Romantic Poets through Hopkins and Yeats and Dylan Thomas to Hughes" (xii). Aesthetic critics and writers perceive beauty as an abstract quality, but Walter Pater rejects it through his proclamation that beauty is useless in its abstract proportion. The critical text, *Perspectives on Criticism* gives reference to the remark of Walter Pater on beauty as:

Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness. To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find not its universal formal, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics. Ray (11)

Walter Pater demands the practitioners of aesthetics to define beauty in the most concrete manner so that it can pave a logical path to appreciate beauty. This delineates Pater as a scientific judge of beauty in art and thus his principle of beauty contradicts with other aesthetes. However, the sole motto of aesthetics is art for art's sake and it absolutely deals with art, beauty and taste in addition to the creation and appreciation of beauty. Thereupon, it is technically explicated as the study of sensory or sensori-emotional value, and at times called as judgement of sentiment and taste.

Immanuel Kant's Aesthetics is used as the theoretical framework to analyse the selected poems. His notion of Aesthetics is of high stature and unconfined; therefore, the present research has chosen the two keys values of his theory: 'appreciation of nature' and utilization of

'imaginative faculty'. Kant has formulated the theory of judging beauty and has defined that beauty is objective and universal; therefore, certain objects are beautiful to everyone. He generalizes the beauty of certain objects which are perceived as beautiful, but his *Aesthetics and Teleology* insists that it is the reader's faculty of judgment that assists him to experience beauty, thus beauty is subjective. His arguments on distinguishing beauty as subjective and objective stand conflicting many a time. However, beauty cannot be measured using any parametric scale is the most widely approved tenet of Kant's theory. The present research employs this notion of Kant to examine the aesthetic pulchritude that Ted Hughes has sketched in "Salmon-taking Times" and "Low Water".

Analysis:

The poem "Salmon-taking Times" bears the aesthetic pictures of river and its creatures. The poet has keenly observed nature and has charmingly expressed the similarities through the lines "[...] 'Swine / Bees and Women cannot be turned.'" "Salmon-taking Times" (7-8). The beauty of the flying bees in their way without any turning back is similar to that of the character of a woman and it is also equivalent to that of a swine searching for food. The poem reminds that it is a triple bond comparison of the objects of nature to stress their quality of living. Thus, it lightens the fact that the keen monitoring ability of the poet on the objects of nature has enabled him to trace out the aesthetic appearance of the objects.

Hughes is ecstatic in discovering beauty in the minor objects of nature. The poem "Salmon-taking Times" delineates that his quest for aesthetic fragrance in nature is incessant and majestic. He says that not only the cold shower of the wind amuses the objects of nature such as plants and flower but also the warm shower makes them energetic and fresh. The warm shower has hazed the daffodils and has mutated their buds to become soft. The poetry of the daffodils and their soft buds which are beautified by the warm shower of the wind are apparent as an enthralling scene in the poem. It is obvious that the softened buds and the daffodils have granted pleasure to the poet, hence it is revealed in his composition. The primroses regaling the poet with an aesthetic fragrance is immensely an artistic scene which has undoubtedly enchanted him. The elegant and amusing image has widely fascinated him to sketch out a fantastic picture out of them.

"Salmon-taking Times" has multiple aesthetic scenes of nature and the grandeur of salmon is one among them. Surfacing the nuptial fragrance of the poetic work is the supreme aesthetic idea of the poet. Hughes has added the nuptial scene as a solemn mood of the poem. It is recurrently explicit that the poet explores poetry in every aspect of nature and as an extreme degree even in the silence of a solemn occasion. The poem hints at a wedding delicacy, in addition to it, he pictures an aesthetic scene wherein the poet touches salmon. He touches the salmon and recognizes it as a weak and delicate creature of the aquatic world, yet it has not failed to entertain the poet with an aesthetic appeal and the poem divulges the limpid aesthetic portrait of nature:

In glistening, and gossamer, bridal veils,
And hovers over itself-there is a wedding
Delicacy-

So delicate

I touch it and its beauty – frailty crumples
To a smear of wet, a strengthless wreckage
Of dissolving membranes- and the air is ringing.

It is like a religious moment, slightly dazing.

It is like a shower of petals of eglantine.

“Salmon-taking Times” (15-23)

The above-mentioned poetic lines express the nuptial bliss thereby bringing in the elegance and tangible beauty of salmon. Hughes seeks beauty in the delicate body of salmon and its glistening feature is unveiled through its bridal veil; this idea throws light on the imaginative power and the aesthetic sense of the poet. He substantiates that his imaginative faculty is boundless that it has enabled him to visualize the gossamer of the salmon. The raiment perhaps appears delicate and filmy, yet the poet finds it to be pleasing and discovers beauty out of it. He describes the salmon as ‘too delicate’ and its delicacy has tended him to sense the aesthetic fragrance of the nuptial occasion. The salmon in its bridal gossamer appears profusely graceful and tender which grants a wedding fragrance to it. Hughes says that he has touched the beauty of the salmon and therefore it has crumpled. The poem discloses that the poet has experienced the frailty of the salmon in addition to the aesthetic refrain.

Corresponding to the nuptial mood, the poet hears the ringing sound of air, which is a realistic idea blended with imagination. The poem transparently depicts the overlap of the aesthetic mood and the romantic mood that inspired the poet profusely. The wedding mood is romantic and imaginative, whereas the ringing sound heard out of the air is absolutely aesthetic and realistic. Hughes is greatly amused by the graced wedding phenomenon of the salmon. Universally during the wedding ceremony, the church bell rings and the well-wishers, friends and relatives of the bridegroom and the bride shower nuptial benediction over the couple by showering flowers upon them. The poet communicates that he is enthralled by the same mood as soon as he touches the salmon. In Hughes’ perception, the graceful picture of the eglantine showering its petals signifies the showering of nuptial bliss over the salmon, but in reality, it elevates the grandeur of the poem. Sensing the aesthetic fragrance of nature in the nature poems of Hughes is enormous and the aesthetic fragrance in “Low Water” is bountifully expressive. The poem is enriched with the wonderful aesthetic images of the fluvial milieu and reaches the pinnacle of imagination in the majestic portrayal of the river. The river has been sketched as a lovely woman with the feminine personification and the poem is richly beautified by the feminine qualities. The river is depicted as a beautiful idle woman, which naturally raises the artistic beauty of the river. Painting the river with the qualities of a woman has elevated the aesthetic style and taste.

As a passionate observer of nature, the poet has discovered beauty in the flowing water of August. Hughes has watched the mere movements of the river and has approached the river in a feminine slant, and it has enabled him to perceive the river in a womanly aesthetic stature. He has recorded his perception as: the river flows stealthily without many ripples and goes on to say that

the stature of it is like a drunkard; this shows that the poet has viewed her alluring splendor and beauty in her sleep. The river lolls as if she is lying on her couch, which clues that the poet has had a watch over the river vigilantly to extract an aesthetic appeal out of her picture. The feminine portrayal of the river has amused his aesthetic sense profusely, therefore he strives to discover the artistic beauty even in the minor movements of the river and the continuing poetic lines elucidate it:

The river is a beautiful idle woman.
The day's August burn-out has distilled
A heady sundowner.
She lies back, bored and tipsy.
She lolls on her deep couch. And a long thigh
Lifts from the flash of her silks.
Adoring trees, kneeling, [...]
Comb out her spread hair, massage her fingers.

She stretches – and an ecstasy tightens
Over her skin, and deep in her gold body “Low Water” (2-11)

Hughes extends his imagination claiming that the river lounges because she is intoxicated and he endeavours to sketch out the lovely appeal of her drowsy aura. The poet goes on to admire her elegance, and the trees adore her beauty by kneeling down and this is aesthetically evident in the poem. This signifies the inferred function of hyperbole to render an aesthetic appeal; in addition, it indicates the extent of poet's utilization of the power of imagination to create an artistic image of nature. The poem shares the extreme creativity of Hughes that is alluring and the line “Comb out her spread hair, massage her fingers.” “Low Water” (9) substantiates it. The trees combing her spread hair and massaging with her fingers exhibit that the aesthetic picture of nature has entertained the poet's eyes and spirit making him excited.

Hughes adds that the river stretches her golden body to relax herself, which consequently arouses her beauty. She is painted as an attractive figure and specifically as with a ‘gold body’, which immensely explodes the aesthetic tone of the poem. In general, humans stretch and twist their body to relax, but the poet portrays that the river indulges in such human activity. Thus, it strengthens the truth that his fictitious perception has driven him to expose his imaginative faculty by drawing the aesthetic beauty of nature. “Low Water” highlights the human qualities ascribed to the river, which has gradually raised the aesthetic fragrance of the poem. In order to explore the covert poetry of the river, the poet has bridged nature and human with hyperbole thereby rendering human aura and description to the river which has mightily elevated her sublime appearance.

The poet nestles his fictitious pictures about the river as an alcoholic in the poem by artistically explicating the river as if light-minded because of her drowsy mood. The poem exhibits the imaginary scene of the river preparing her love potion out of the ooze of the balsam. Her love potion has enthralled the poet immensely and he is prompted to identify her aesthetic image. Thus, the idea has divulged the alluring sense of the poet:

[...] she drowns.

Her half-dreams lift out of her, light-minded

She stirs her love-potion-ooze of balsam

Thickened with fish-mucus and algae. "Low Water" (12-13, 14-16)

These lines of the poem highlight that the poet is entertained by the love potion that the river stirs. The river stirs up the love potion which is prepared out of the ooze of the balsam and the line "Thickened with fish-mucus and algae." "Low Water" (16) substantiates the idea. Although the process of preparing love potion does not appear appealing, Hughes being an aesthetic poet has attempted to discover beauty in it. For him, the disgusting image has changed into a jubilant picture because he has relished its pulchritude. Like "Salmon-taking Times", "Low Water" also throws light upon the hidden artistic idea of the poet and defines that the naturalistic appearance of the fluvial landscape has enhanced its poetry and has nurtured the aesthetic strains of the poem. Thus, the artistic potential of the poet in identifying beauty in ugliness is distinctly explicit in "Low Water".

Conclusion:

Hughes has admired and appreciated the beauty of nature profusely and it is explicitly revealed in his poetic works. The present study has found that Ted Hughes has attempted to explore pulchritude in the beautiful and ugly objects of nature. The selected poems have substantiated the poet's aesthetic portraits which have been sketched to entertain the readers. His aesthetic depiction brings forth beauty in all the scenery of the poems. It is explicitly evident that Hughes has endeavored to discover poetry in every single movement of the objects of nature. In "After Moonless Midnight", his watch over the movement of the gills of the fish is manifested in the line "Their gills moved [...]" (5). Even out of the single minor jerk, he traces the aesthetic fragrance that he is able to sense. Comparatively, his river poems scent the aesthetic fragrance of nature adequately and at times the aesthetic appeal is amplified. He admires the beauty of nature and beautifies his viewpoint by employing alluring and flowery words which naturally intensifies the aesthetic scenes. His compositions also disclose that his admiration and exaggeration of nature's beauty is to entertain his reader's aesthetic sense. His poems substantiate the notion that a poet is appreciated to seek beauty in ugliness and splendour in terror.

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