Poetry - 7.

Hawk Roosting

UNDERSTANDING THE POEM

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

Answer:

Ted Hughes' "Hawk Roosting" is a dramatic monologue in a non-human voice that narrates the self-assertiveness of a hawk that is secluded from the world. The hawk is seen to be flaunting its self-ego and establishing itself as the most supreme and indispensable entity in the world. Hughes has critically exposed the rusticity and savageness of the hawk by focusing on the uncouth and raw temptation of the hawk in its self-validation. In the first stanza of the poem, we find the hawk proclaiming that he contains the whole world between his "hooked head" and "hooked feet". He "rehearses perfect kills and eats" even while sleeping. He subverts the power relation of the world by positioning himself as the supreme holder of force. Once, it was God who had created him. But now it's he himself who shall operate his authority over God.

Q. 2 How does the poem emphasize the physical prowess of the hawk?

Answer:

Hughes' "Hawk Roosting" portrays the self-authoritative proclamation of the hawk who is in a crisis of existentialism and tries to usurp the interrogating position of God. The savagery and arrogance of the hawk are exposed in its dogmatic assertion of its ferocity and superiority. It dreams of "perfect kills and eats", signifying its thirst for violent power. The hawk is symbolic of Fascist ideology that forcefully tries to adopt the centrality of power all within itself. It even denies the invincibility of God's power and tries to establish itself as the sole container of power and control. The hawk even goes to the extent of thinking that it just takes

only a flight to reverse the situation and it will make it happen slowly. It enjoys the absolute right to kill itself where it pleases, thereby positioning itself as the victorious holder of authority. He slanders the sun, to evoke the idea that even the sun follows it all throughout. It talks of its eyes as a constant presence which "haven't permitted no change" and which it plans to keep intact.

Q. 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' "Hawk Roosting" is a dramatic monologue in a non-human voice that narrates the self-assertiveness of a hawk that is secluded from the world. Hughes has critically exposed the rusticity and savageness of the hawk by focusing on the uncouth and raw temptation of the hawk in its self-validation. The hawk is symbolic of Fascist ideology that forcefully tries to adopt the centrality of power all within itself. It even denies the invincibility of God's power and tries to establish itself as the sole container of power and control. The fascist elements in the hawk become more prominent when it says, "There is no sophistry in my body", thereby subverting and negating the social laws and mores. The ruthless narcissism in the hawk is evident when it boasts of its supreme power to kill and sport wherever and whenever it feels like. It declares itself as inscrutable whose actions to kill and sport cannot be put to interrogation. It is the Hawk itself, who decides the time, space and death of beings and the sole propeller of all forces in the world.

Q. 4 'Now I hold Creation in my foot'—explain the centrality of this assertion in the poem. What makes the hawk's assertion of its invincibility so categorical?

Answer:

Hughes' "Hawk Roosting" portrays the self-authoritative proclamation of the hawk who is in a crisis of existentialism and tries to usurp the interrogating position of God. The savagery and arrogance of the hawk are exposed in its dogmatic assertion of its ferocity and superiority. The hawk is symbolic of Fascist ideology that forcefully tries to adopt the centrality of power all within itself. It even denies the invincibility of God's power and tries to establish itself as the sole container of power and control. The hawk sits on a top most bark of a tree and tries to see the world from its perspective. The miniature view of the world that he gets from that position makes it assert itself as the supreme holder of power and force. It denies the very natural power of the sun and believes that the sun follows it all throughout. The insolent narcissistic attitude of the hawk is evident when it proclaims itself as the singular manipulator and controller of worldly forces and exclaims, "Now I hold creation in my foot." It believes that that the world actually rotates under its influence only. It also negates the possibility of the existence of anything that is beyond the permissible parameter of its sight.

Q. 5 Why is the poem entitled 'Hawk Roosting'?

Answer:

Ted Hughes' "Hawk Roosting" narrates the internal power struggle of a hawk perceived through the technique of dramatic monologue. The hawk is shown to be sitting at the top most point of the woods and it is looking down below from where it is roosting. The situation of the hawk is similar to the condition of human beings who do not tend to illuminate on ideas or boundaries beyond the prescribed boundaries imposed by the society. The hawk suggests itself as the central container of power and authority. Narrated from the perspective of the hawk, Ted Hughes tries to capture his own vision of the world and the worldly impositions and counter impositions and tries to portray them through the violent imagery of the hawk, which is a bird of prey. In many of Hughes' poems, he employs animals to serve as his substituted voice against the worldly phenomena.

His views are extremely carnal and violent that points out the existential survival of man against the forces of nature. In “Hawk Roosting”, the hawk boasts of its imagined supremacy and power and celebrates it in absolute bliss of ultimate ignorance.

Q. 6 Bring out the parallel suggested between the predatory instincts of the bird and human behavior.

Answer:

Ted Hughes’ “Hawk Roosting” narrates the internal power struggle of a hawk perceived through the technique of dramatic monologue. The situation of the hawk is similar with the condition of human beings who do not tend to illuminate on ideas or boundaries beyond the prescribed boundaries imposed by the society. Like humans, the animal world too, tends to gain authority. We all want to create a minuscule perspective of the world through our little vision and tend to formulate personal laws to perceive the large world. The hawk assumes the world from the position of where it is roosting and tries to uphold the authority of supreme upon himself, in absolute ignorance of the larger fallacies o the world. Similarly, it is with the humans as well, who try to usurp the dogmas of the world and manipulate them accordingly. Humans tend to assert themselves as the sole inheritor of power, just like the hawk does. The constant struggle for survival has made humans design themselves as the usurper of ultimate power. Humans believe themselves as the actual mediators of the world despite the little truth contained in this thought. The predatory, narcissistic and dogmatic instincts are very much present in humans, in a very similar line as the hawk suggests itself to be. Humans, like Hughes’s hawk, are foolish creatures who weave their own graves in their dreamy conjectures.

TRY THIS OUT

Q. 1 Consult a dictionary or an encyclopedia to differentiate between the following birds

Eagle, hawk, kite, vulture

Answer:

Eagles are the largest amongst the following birds, followed by kites. Eagles belong to the species group of Aquila. They are steppe, Indian spotted, greater spotted. They are majestic birds and can lift heavy preys. Hawks are Accipiter (bird eater). Their eye-sights and hunting sills are incomparable. Kites are black winged and non-Accipiter and are common raptors. Whereas vultures rarely attack healthy animals but may kill the wounded or sick.

Q. 2 To what aspects of human behavior do the following adjectives apply

eagle-eyed, hawkish

Answer:

The term “eagle-eyed” is used to express observant nature of a person, especially someone who is quick to observe or catch things. Hawkish literally means to resemble a hawk in nature or appearance. However, to be hawkish is to advocate a warlike or aggressive policy, especially in foreign affairs.