

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi - Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

June 2014 Vol. 5, Issue-3

5th Year of Open Access

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Title of the Book: *Ted Hughes: An Ecocritical Study*

Author: Pawan Kumar Sharma

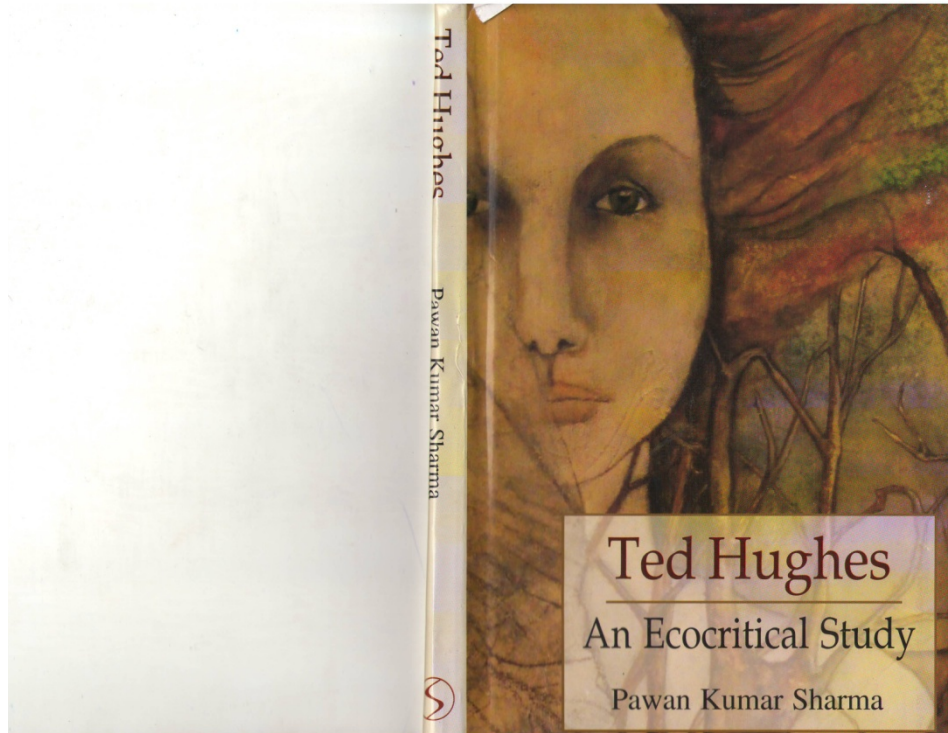
Publisher: Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd New Delhi

Pages: 235+14

Price: Rs. 750/-

ISBN: 978-81-7625-793-0

First Published: 2012



Reviewed by:
Sanjeev Gandhi

Eco-criticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. Eco-criticism is an intentionally broad genre that is known by a number of names: "green cultural studies", "eco-poetics", and "environmental literary criticism" are also popular monikers for this relatively new branch of literary criticism. This approach offers a deeper cultural critique of the postmodern industrial and technological age that unfolds before us as an inescapable reality fraught with immense consequences. The present book is Pawan Kumar Sharma's attempt to look the poems of Ted Hughes as eco-critical point of view.

Sharma finds that the poetry of Ted Hughes has brought mankind closer to the nature and its complete working. Throughout the vast panorama of his poetry there is only one story – a single vision. Standing apart from both nature and man, the poet experiences intense realities of mortality, social enlargement and violent and threatening world where the collapse

of civilization seems an immediate reality. This estrangement and alienation become the obsessive concern and gradually broadens the cultural concerns of Hughes' 'measured verse'.

Ted Hughes constantly deplors modern man's broken bond with nature and strives to assimilate them to each other. But his poetic vision places him on the other side of the Romantic- modern consciousness in poetry. In his case nature is neither moral nor benevolent, but it is malevolent and demonic. For Hughes this malevolent is merely nature's otherness and must be welcomed, not fought against. Thus, in man – nature dichotomy Hughes' poetry marks a major shift by tipping the balance in favour of nature in the relentless war of attrition and supremacy between the two.

What Sharma points out is that for Hughes the humankind has broken the umbilical cord with Mother Nature and it is the suicidal act of man emanating from his ignorance and arrogance and that has brought spiraling violence and destruction in the universe. Hughes fully justifies the claim of nature to regain the lost space and perhaps to displace man. His poetic journey unhesitatingly reflects this dilemma in the form of a congruence of environmental themes and apocalyptic rhetoric. His deep ecological sense sees man as part of an organic universe, living best by acknowledging its wonder and rejecting the temptation to force his will upon it.

In the chapter "Encountering the Egocentric Ethics" Sharma discusses Ted Hughes' first three collections, *The Hawk in the Rain*, *Lupercal* and *Wodwo*. Here the effort has been made to present the primary contention that Ted Hughes is opposed to the fundamental character of anthropocentric and egocentric ethics of modern civilization. The dichotomy between the instinctual and rational mode of existence presented throughout these collections is mainly an expression of poet's firm conviction that man in the industrialized world is completely devoid of vitality and vigour of a genuine life force which, in the present day world, is typified in the world of animals. The writer underlines various tactics used by Hughes to serve admirably his eco-critical perspective to relegate the civilized human world to a level of insignificance in comparison with the grace and self assurance of the primitive world of animals. The anthropocentric and egocentric self here comes face to face with those forces in the nature which are outside the range of moral choice and rational control, forces man has to live and die with.

The chapter "Confronting the Demonic in Nature" has been focused on single volume *Crow*. While high-lighting the poet's strategy of subverting the Enlightenment heritage of the Christian world by putting aside the entire positives of his immediate cultural surroundings, the chapter focuses on Hughes' attempt to foreground the existential dichotomy of the Heideggerian eco-philosophy through the tortuous journey of crow's struggle and survival. Hughes, according to Sharma, here succeeds in establishing the centrality of the demonic will of nature as the basis of everything in existence.

Chapter "Locating Alternative Horizons" mainly deals with *Gaudete*. Ted Hughes by adopting the mode of an eco-feminist offers alternative existence through a transformation of the state of consciousness. The poet makes an egocentric male consciousness go through a ritualistic process of transformation, finally to change into a superior and sacred egocentric feminine consciousness.

"Rediscovering Ecological Spirituality" is focused on the protagonist's psychological journey towards transformation and regeneration. Here Sharma finds Ted Hughes finally

achieving reconciliation and reintegration with nature. This he does by threading the path shown by eco-friendly Oriental philosophies which profess the essential oneness and sacredness of life as reflected in various forms of life.

Through this book Sharma provokes readers to explore: Do man and nature form a continuum, echoing each other? Does consciousness heightened by Cartesian presumption estrange man from nature? Is history – man shaped and shaping man – a disruption of nature? Is not the version of Eden myth a yearning for an impossible reintegration with nature? Is not the contemplation of nature by turning away from history an intensification of subjectivity which can never anyway heal the intrinsic breach between man and nature?

The book is an attempt to make an assessment of the poetry of Ted Hughes from eco-critical perspective centered in the dynamics and dialectics of man's relationship with nature in the contemporary form of life.