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The Surreal Paintings and Ted Hughes's Poems in "Cave Birds": An Ecocritical Perspective

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Abstract:

The objective of this research paper is to identify and find the intricate working out of the surreal features contained in the sketches by Leonard Baskin in the collection, "Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama" by the British Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes (1930- 1998). This paper seeks to identify the relationship of human beings with animals, trees, the vegetation and the green environment as represented in surreal art forms. The limits extend and include analysis, comparisons and contrasts to the basic elements of surreal arts with that of the works of the American Sculptor and painter, Leonard Baskin as found in "Cave Birds". The study also includes the historical origin of Surrealistic arts. The development of hybrid Surrealism has been considered from the sense of environmental responsibility that helps retain its sustainability. The selected paintings and sketches allow the observer to consider and analyze the significance of cross cultural variation that finds an ever growing environmental consciousness along the line of their own development in general. The selected paintings and sketches, intensely associated with Surrealism, show a way out for those who have alienated themselves from Nature. A close working out of the selected visual arts reveal an intrinsic view where all the experiences of the world are found to be, not isolated from the experiences of Nature but, to seek a way of human development that

includes a post-humanist outlook that can maintain a harmony and uphold a balance of human-nature relationship without which none can thrive.

Keywords: Visual art, Surrealism, Environment, Sustainability, Ecocriticism.

Originated in France in the 1920s, the movement called Surrealism was a development of the Art Movement Dada or Dadaism which was an Anti-art movement of the European avant-garde in the beginning of twentieth century. Gradually the movement began to spread in Zurich (Switzerland), New York (USA), Paris (France) and had its lasting impacts till the 1920s. The root of Dadaism can be traced back to pre-war anti-art concept (1913) that challenged the existing accepted definitions of art. The term anti-art, coined by Marcel Duchamp who was a French painter, sculptor, chess player, and writer and commonly placed along the line of artists like Pablo, Picasso and Henri Matisse, denoted an art form that rejected traditional forms of arts and questioned the conventional standards of arts. It was a breakthrough in the concept of art that outrightly rejected the idea that art is based on conventional artistic standards. Besides Marcel Duchamp, the exponents of Dadaism included Tristan Tzara, Man Ray and Max Ernest. Though Dadaism, as a forerunner left a significant impact on the artistic field, the other movements under the umbrella of the Anti-art movement included Constructivism, Surrealism, Cubism, Letterism and Neo-Dadaism. All these expanded and widened the perception and conception of art and delimited it beyond its traditional boundary.

Dadaism and Surrealism, both originated out of the disgust with the brutality and destructiveness of the First World War, tried to foster a negative art, culture and literature so that the false values of modern bourgeois society and its illusory concept of rationality imposed on art, culture and literature could be destroyed. Coined by the French Avant-garde

poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917, the term Surrealism came to mean something that was beyond reality and the word also appeared in his own play *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* (1947). Andre Breton, the founder of the Surrealist movement defined the term, 'Surreal' which can be put as a pure psychic automatism that expresses the real process of anyone's thought unhindered by the control of reason, aesthetic or moral preoccupation. The surrealists like Andre Breton and Louis Aragon revolted against all restraints on free creativity be it visual art or literature. The followers of Surrealism were against logical reason, standard morality, socio-cultural norms and artistic traditional conventions that laid control over the artistic process by forethought and intention. The followers also regarded the operation of the free flowing unfathomed mind to be the only source of valid knowledge in art. They relied on the works developed by the promptings of the unconscious mind. They relied on the materials secured from dreams, in-between states of sleep and awakening, and induced hallucinations for their Surreal arts.

The Surrealists were particularly influenced by Sigmund Freud and his ideas in the iconic book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). They were also instrumental in surfacing his theories and ideas to the public eye through their arts. Through the use of surreal techniques of automatic drawing, spontaneous and uncensored recording of irregular and chaotic images that floods over the consciousness of both the artist and the observer, the surreal artists seek to flout the social conventions and opened the path of exploring the subconscious. The surreal artists often relied on the creation of collective composition where parts of any artistic work were passed onto different artists for its making.

Although the Surreal artists followed no definite or unified style of representation in their work, one can trace on one hand the following of a path where the observer is confronted by a defined world that makes no rational sense at all. These artistic works included realistic paintings removed from their normal contexts and repositioned or reassembled in a shocking,

paradoxical and ambiguous framework. Such artists included Rene Magritte and Salvador Dali. On the other hand, the other group followed absolute Surrealism where the viewer or the observer is confronted with abstract biomorphic images, suggesting indefiniteness. Artists like Jean Arp (French), Max Ernest (German), and Joan Miro (Spanish) followed this absolute type.

Besides painting, Surrealism as a revolutionary movement also found reflection in sculpture and other arts including literature. It also touched upon briefly on the political and social forefronts. Literary artists ventured in new experiment with free association, broken syntaxes, irrational representations, non-logical and non-chronological order, representation of dreamlike, nightmarish experiences, juxtaposition of bizarre, shocking, fanciful, hallucinatory, incoherent and apparently non-associated images and symbols. Literary artists like Dylan Thomas (England) and Henry Miller (American), William Burroughs (American) and Thomas Pynchon (America) experimented with this new art form. Other surreal innovations in literary arts included the use of the absurd, anti-novel, magic realism among others. The works of two female Surrealists like Unica Zurn (German) and Leonora Carrington (British) were analysed by Katharine Conley (United States) and her influential work *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Women in Surrealism* (1996) that critiques the obsessive and complex concern of male surrealists with the female body, often represented in distorted manner.

In *Cave Birds* (1978), Leonard Baskin has practiced the Surreal automatism in his art works that represented the unbridled imagination of the subconscious. The main focus on these Surreal arts were to extract immediate response from the observers. The immediate responses of the observers, devoid of preconceived rationality revealed the spontaneous and unconscious mind or the mind's immediate state of thought process. The purpose of the

Surreal artist becomes successful as the Surreal art evokes the thoughts of the unconscious mind of the observer.

The corresponding poems to the sketches by Leonard Baskin in *Cave Birds* (1978) were composed by Ted Hughes from the responses evoked by gazing at the sketches drawn by Baskin. Baskin had shown Hughes his sketches and Hughes was so inspired that he wrote the corresponding poems to the sketches and advised Baskin to draw more like them. Just like the Surrealist artists who rejected existing artistic conventions and explored a wide variety of literary experiments. The sketches of Leonard Baskin bear similar features of prominent Surrealist painters like Andre Masson, Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, Andre Breton and Paul Eluard. Rosi Braidotti in *More Posthuman Glossary* (2022) observed, “Convergences is the process by which posthuman know ledge practices – the Posthumanities – intersect, intermingle, split and recombine in a transversal and transdisciplinary manner within and across the academic Humanities. This process blurs disciplinary and other categorical distinctions” (27).

Like the Surrealist artists, Ted Hughes has tried to illustrate the workings of the unconscious mind in his artistic and literary creation named, “Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama”. The sketches by Baskin in *Cave Birds* (1978)” served the functions of those that the dreams and hallucinations do as the Surreal art objects. The representations and interpretations of those dream-like objects were of special interests to the Surrealists. A close analysis of these dream-like sketches by Baskin that originated in the unconscious took Ted Hughes, the observer beyond the real and into the realm of the super-real. One of the three manifestos of Surrealism in the 1924 was an emphasis on the importance of freeing the mind from the tyranny of logic and reason. This particular manifesto laying emphasis on the importance of freeing the mind from the shackles of reason has been particularly revealed in both the sketches and the corresponding poems in *Cave Birds* (1978). Harold Fromm has aptly

observed that, "man's sublime mind, while it may wander at will through the universe and be connected to the heavens at one end, is connected at the other to the earth" (Fromm 38). The sketches are manifestations of nature or the earth Goddess whom Ted Hughes considered as the White Goddess. "Once contiguity is granted, animals may be understood in human terms (anthropomorphism) or humans in animal terms (zoomorphism), and each of these appears in both crude and sophisticated, critical forms" (Garrard 154). The sketches of Baskin appears in anthropomorphic representations to the gazers and drags out and helps reading the mind and psychic state of the gazers. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin also observed, "the genre of natural history also stress differences between ourselves and other animal groups, although they are sometimes deliberately anthropomorphic" (152).

The poem, "The Accused" from the volume *Cave Birds* (1978) by Ted Hughes begins with the word 'confess' and this makes the motive of the speaker clear and at the same time makes the readers aware of his guilt-ridden soul of the speaker. The speaker is now ready to receive redemption by the process of confession. The speaker says that his whole body is filled with daggers which are in actuality his faults. He confesses at the very outset that his body is fully contaminated with guilts symbolized by daggers:

Confess his body –

The gripful of daggers.

(*Cave Birds* 24)

On the other way round, the daggers are instruments of murder. The draggers are the cause of the end of somebody's life. The speaker acknowledges that the whole body of the protagonist in this tragic poem is filled with death – causing instruments. It is evident that the speaker makes the protagonist fully responsible for some heinous crime in the past. The

daggers also symbolic of the daggers of the mind in the speaker of the poem find direct correspondence in the external projection of dagger- like feathers of the bird-like creature pointing towards the bird itself in the visual art of Baskin.

The next comparison is with that of his skin which is compared to that of a “bedaubed, begauded Eagle -dancer” (*Cave Birds* 24). Eagle dance is a ceremonial war-dance that was used to prepare for battle. It also symbolizes the commitment of the warrior to their people. War leads to bloodshed and death. War is a means to ensure legitimised murder and legalized murder. It is a licensed slaughter house where licensed murders are committed. The soldiers are aware of the possible life-threats in the war but still they undertake it in the name of glory. The speaker says that the protagonist is like an eagle-dancer who ensured death to somebody in the past that he is now confessing it:

And confess his skin-the bedaubed, begauded

Eagle – dancer.

(*Cave Birds* 24)

Then his heart is compared to the “soul-stuffed despot” (*Cave Birds* 24). Despot is a ruler or a person who holds absolute power and exercises it typically in a cruel or oppressive way. The speaker says that the protagonist confessed that he had dealt in the past in a ruthless and despotic manner. He too, like a tyrant did not show any mercy to the victim and dominated the victim on all grounds. The protagonist also equates his ruthlessness to a corpse eating god who fills his stomach with evil stuff. His hunger has been compared to an animalistic hunger that does not discriminate between the dead and the living. His stomach was so hungry that it could consume all and everything. The lust of the protagonist has been compared to that of a blind swan’s insemination. The protagonist thus makes it clear through his confession that he

had a lust that led him blindly to many irrespective of his judgement. He was blind to his passion and lost the faculty of sound judgement. The protagonist also makes it clear that he had a hard brain. He confesses that his hard brain pushed the victim towards a gradual end of life. The use of the words "sacred assassin" signifies a self sarcasm on the part of the confessor. He makes himself responsible for the crime concerned for which he is accusing himself. After confessing all his guilt the protagonist wishes to heap them all up on a mountain top which is set aflame by the rays of the sun. He heaps up his confessed guilt for judgement. He wants to annihilate himself and undergo an ordeal or an initiation:

On a flame-horned mountain-stone, in the sun's disc,

He heap them all up, for the judgement.

So there his atoms are annealed, as in X-rays,

Of their blood-aberration-

(Cave Birds 24)

The speaker in Ted Hughes's poem, "The Accused" wishes his guilt to be gazed by some powerful healing authority who could purge his mind. Herbrechter observed, "The one constant in humanist attempts to carve out an "exceptional" position for the human in this world is, on the one hand, to emphasize the differences between humans and their others" (13). The work of the human is to rediscover himself through interconnectedness and entanglements. Just as metals or glasses are "annealed, as in x-rays" (*Cave Birds 24*) to remove their internal stress and toughness, the speaker in the poem also wishes his guilt to be removed by some external agency. The terms, "annealed" (*Cave Birds 24*), "blood-aberration" (*Cave Birds 24*) and "x-rays" (*Cave Birds 24*) used in the poem reiterates the

urgency of the external agency to gaze into his inner conflicts and guilts as an x-ray and liberate them leaving him in a blessed state of existence.



Fig.1. Leonard Baskin. "The Accused". *Cave Birds* by Ted Hughes, Faber and Faber, 1978, 23.

The above sketch by Leonard Baskin that had been the source of the corresponding poem by Ted Hughes in *Cave Birds* (1978) was indeed evocative of the Surreal traits in the way that the dream-like sketch ensured free creativity. The Surreal sketch went against the traditional norms of conventional art and produced the sense of disgust or accusation that was strong enough to allow an uncontrolled exploration of the unconscious mind of the gazer who was somehow or the other disgusted or accused inwardly. "The posthumanist perspective rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crisis of Man. It works instead towards elaborating alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject (Braidotti 37). The human subject acquires self-identification through the refraction of the objectified portrait of Baskin. The human unleashes his restricted boundary and becomes one with the portrait and thus moves a step forward towards posthumanism.

Terry Gifford has rightly observed that "we respond to atmospheric pressure, natural electricity, the seasons, and phases of the moon in our sensuous apprehension of the world, but it is in our dreams that we often formulate our understanding of this relationship" (59). The present paper seeks to find the lost connection between human and his true self. The poem, "After the First Fright" from the volume *Cave Birds* (1978) represents the speaker as a victim of split personality whose first self strives to convince the other which has become conscious of its guilt and becomes self-annihilating. One self tries to convince the other and seeks to pacify the guilt consciousness within. The speaker i.e. the primary- self reconsiders his past actions and seeks justification. He begins to take stock of his opinions and ideas and ransacks out every justification available to pacify his confused soul so that he can safeguard himself by preserving the other -self in safe custody of an embalmed mind, previously affected by massive psychic trauma. But the other- self is not ready to accept the benevolence and good wishes of the other- self. The speaker looks for every possible way out for redemption but everything turns out futile. His arguments fail to subside the crisis in his mind. The argument is circled like a "Catherine wheel" (*Cave Birds* 10) in his whole body and he becomes more extremely troubled and disturbed in his mind. The ongoing argument, controversy and disruption in the mind of the speaker cross limits soon and the speaker reaches the extreme boundary of self-resistance. The other- self was inconceivable. When the speaker uttered the word "Civilisation" to bring about some good changes in the other- self, he began to "chop off his fingers and mourn" (*Cave Birds* 10). The other- self began initiation and self-annihilation. It was as if only dismemberment and destroying himself would bring solace to him. The drawing by Baskin depicts a dismembered figure of the bird-like creature. At the same time, the posture of the bird with its outstretched wings and legs and head tilted sideways brings to the mind the image of Christ whose sacrifice strived to bring peace in the world. The physical gaze on the dismembered image of the bird-like object

in Baskin's drawing and the cognition embedded in the words "Catherine wheel" (*Cave Birds* 10) in Ted Hughes's poem adequately express the aim of Surrealism which was to revolt against restraints and control on free creativity, inclusive of logical reason, morality, social and artistic conventions, and "control over the artistic process by forethought and intention" (Abrams 310).

The speaker-self felt guilty of himself as he failed to recover the other-self from his hellish psychic trouble. The speaker-self turned cold to recognize the gradual death to the other self, burning in the hellish fire of irrecoverable psychic trauma. Keith Sagar in *The Art of Ted Hughes* (1978) also writes:

The theme of psychic split, guilt, suffering, ego-death and rebirth, is so important and central for Hughes; and certain elements such as the use of marriage as a primary image of rebirth, are so new and crucial for his development, that, given the initial stimulus of the drawings, Hughes then needed all the freedom possible for his imagination to find its own framework without such exigencies as the need to write a poem to fit every Baskin drawing. (Sagar 184-85).

The drawing that is sketched in Baskin's *Cave Birds* would bring to the mind of a discerned gazer the image of a Christ-like figure in crucifixion. The nails in the toes, the knees, the outstretched hands like outstretched wings and the head of the figure hanging sideways give the impression of crucified Christ on the cross. The drawings of Baskin quite conform to the works of twentieth century philosophic and cultural art movement called surrealism. Kroker observed, "Sometimes, the complex struggle between salvation, order, and freedom bursts out of the realm of ontological affect and takes up residence in the politics of a bitterly contested, highly symbolic city square" (65).

Like the art forms in surrealism, produced from dreams and the workings of the subconscious mind, Baskin's drawings in *Cave Birds* (1978) express the inner working of the mind, depicted through strange images and bizarre juxtapositions of illogical, distorted figures and biomorphic shapes of primitive origin. These higher forms of truths might be found in the subconscious as per Freudian interpretations. Surrealist visual artists were no doubt influenced by Freud and his ideas. The extensive use of dream imagery and drawings of Baskin in *Cave Birds* finds similarity with the visual arts of surreal visual artists like Salvador Dali (1904-1989) and Rene Magritte, predominantly by virtue of the attempts to find ways to liberate the psyche and unleash hidden reservoirs of creativity. Jackson observed, "the postcolonial and its requirements to decolonise (a more active and, perhaps, more radical imperative than simple textual reflexivity) are largely motivated by ethical and political concerns to differentiate social and cultural accounts of individual and collective human possibility" (7).



Fig.2. Leonard Baskin. "After the first fright". *Cave Birds* by Ted Hughes, Faber and Faber, 1978, 9

One significant characteristic, found in the visual arts of Baskin in *Cave Birds* (1978), is that the drawings represent the primitive forms of creature with reflections of trauma violence and

submission. Though the surreal drawings of Baskin in *Cave Birds* also represent non-human creatures in wild and primitive form, the drawings differ from the paintings of post-impressionist French painter, Henri Rousseau (1844- 1910) by the fact that they are bold in their representation of the bold pictures of jungle filled with flowers and vegetation surrounding France only. The surreal visual drawings of Baskin in *Cave Birds* (1978) differs from the surreal visual arts of the Swiss-born German, Paul Klee (1879-1940) in the way that while Baskin's drawings are pencil sketches representing a traumatic psychic condition represented through bizarre figures of non-human creatures, that of Paul Klee's are paintings that depicts extensive colour theory expressing dry humour and childlike perspectives. The drawings of Baskin in *Cave Birds* (1978) makes significant deviation from the paintings of the Spanish surrealist artist, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) by that fact that while Picasso depicts the dreamy and bizarre figures of human beings, the drawings of Baskin depicts non-human figures in the surreal form.

The poem, "The Guide" from the volume *Cave Birds* (1978) is an allegorical one. The speaker in this poem describes a journey in which he gets guidance to show his path. He illustrates the journey through the use of imagery and metaphor which conform to the allegorical mode of the poem. The speaker says that when the whole world falls asleep, the only thing that remains awake is his "headway" (*Cave Birds* 50). Despite the snow glare, he was able to make for the journey because of the guide's assistance:

Where the snow glare blinded you

I start.

(*Cave Birds* 50)

Moreover, it seemed to the speaker that everything was tumbling. But the guide showed him the path of his journey across the snow-covered land. The speaker here mentioned two types of winds – the red wind and the black wind. The speaker probably compares the red wind with daylight and the black wind with the dark night. The speaker may have followed the magnetic needle or the pole star which show direction to travellers.

The line, "When everything that can fall has fallen" (*Cave Birds* 50) – suggests that nothing in the world is eternal and constant. There is always a change and a flux. Every beginning has an end and all endings give way to a new beginning. This may be parallel to the sunrise and sunset. The sun has to set in order to give space to the nocturnal stars and moon to shine in the sky. The setting of the sun gives rise to stars and the moon. The speaker may also represent the guide as a pole-star which sets assistance with proper direction for long distant travellers. When the sun sets, the pole star rises along with all other stars and the moon. When the snow-covered path distracts the traveller's path, the pole-star assists with its directions.

The protagonist is masking himself under the indication of a magnetic needle. He is a tremor, he is vibrant, he is Heaven where everyone can reside. He is a searcher, a finder who always finds his way through his child. He is a searcher who searches for all problems and solves them with all possible solutions. He is the saviour who is there to save his creation. He is the peace of those depressed souls. The protagonist in the disguise of the Almighty is the exhibitor of our eternal peace.

In the introductory passage to *The Challenge of Ted Hughes* (1994), Keith Sagar writes:

There is often the kind of difficulty we anticipate from modern poetry, with its complex symbolism and its lack of a rational or grammatical structure. But there is also, and increasingly with the later poems, a less familiar difficulty which

arises from an extreme linguistic simplicity, an absence of what we have come to expect from almost all poetry, and yet the charge is clearly there, all the stronger for the lack of those verbal tricks the critic is trained to put his finger on. These poems are sources of great psychic or spiritual power if we can tap them; but our standard critical equipment seems obsolete. Perhaps part of the difficulty is that we bring inappropriate expectations to the poems, expecting lyrical beauty, crafted shapeliness or kinds of rational, paraphrasable meaning that the poems do not in fact offer. We tend to demand a continuance of the rich verbal surface and strong stylistic signature which got so many of the early poems into the analogies, poems which are all many readers know of Hughes. (Sagar, *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, xii)

The poem is obscure as is the visual art of Baskin. The symbolic meaning of the visual art of Baskin is suggestive of a pair of compass used in locating directions and hence the title of the poem, "The Guide" is equally evocative of the sense of the bird-like object with its outstretched wings on both sides acting as the guiding force behind locating direction.

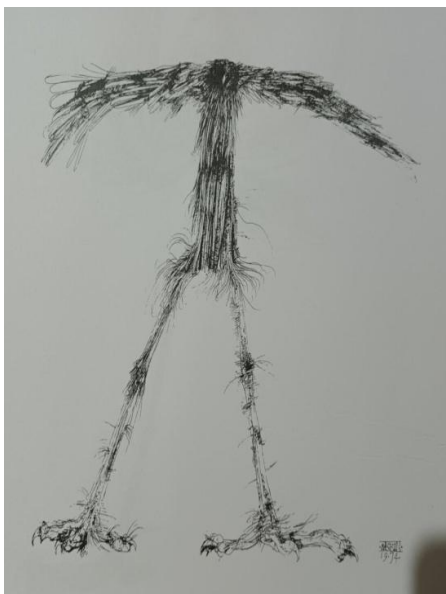


Fig.3. Leonard Baskin. "The Guide". *Cave Birds* by Ted Hughes, Faber and Faber, 1978, 49.

In the poem, "The Knight" from Ted Hughes's *Cave Birds* the speaker is talking about a knight who has conquered so many achievements, but now he is dead. Here, the speaker has magnificently put up a picture of a hero who is a submissive individual. The Knight has conquered all battles of this cosmos gracefully, but at last is ready to surrender his every egoism, his every power to the creatures of this world. This is due to his death and finality. As he is dead he has surrendered all his achievements of his life and confessed it by kneeling down which actually symbolizes his death by surrendering the victory of his life. His victory or achievement is compared to the steel or his sword which is a symbol of victory owned through a tough way. As he is lying on the ground there are wild stones of the earth which are so common in comparison with his achievements. But he has sacrificed all his achievements on these stones, because he is dead now. The speaker also says that this act is obviously right because he has won the name of the earth by giving these achievements to the natural elements like small roots, minerals, stasis and rain. There is also a reference to the fact that nothing is greater than surrendering all the achievements to nature. Then an unearthly cry is heard which is the squabbling of the universe over him. He has given his bones and his rags, that is, his flesh to the earth by embracing death. His sacrifice is perfect since he has given his all to the earth. Now, skylines, winds and earth altogether use him in their own way as he is dead and has nothing to do. Skylines tug him apart, winds drink him and earth unravels him from beneath. So, his sacrifice and submission are flawless. He does not have any power to resist these. Though he has conquered the world, the blueflies hampered and destroyed his beauty and beetles and ants harm his position by offering him all these irritating stuff but he has nothing to do as he has surrendered himself to the earth. But the speaker shows him that he has so much patience. It seems that his eyes become bolder because of their vigil:

His eyes darken bolder in their vigil

As the chapel crumbles.

(Cave Birds 28)

He has a strong spine that can survive this situation. But he has nothing to retain but his weapons remain which are actually his achievements. His gaze, his sword, the blades, shafts all bow down at his death:

And his gaze.

Blades, shafts, unstrung bows- and the skull's beauty

Wrapped in the rags of his banner.

He is himself his banner and its rags.

While hour by hour the sun

Strengthens its revelation.

(Cave Birds 28)

The beauty of his skill now remains enfolded and wrapped by his banners and trophies. But actually he himself is his banner and its rag because, without him, there is no identity of his achievements. The sun is one of the most universal elements and it will strengthen its revelation by shining on it.

Daniel Xerri in *Ted Hughes' Art of Healing* (1978) opines:

The poem's thirteenth stanza tells us that 'His eyes darken bolder in their vigil / As the chapel crumbles'. This is an allusion to the Grail legend and to those works by such artists as Richard Wagner, Paul Verlaine and Eliot that utilise the story in one way or another. The knight's death is part of his quest for the spiritual regeneration of the wasteland and in the stanzas that follow we learn that 'Nothing remains of the warrior but his weapons // And his gaze' The knight's 'gaze' is that of someone who has attained a mystical piousness and humility, suffering and self-sacrifice.

This is what is accentuated by the poem's final three lines:

He is himself the banner and its rags.

While hour by hour the sun

Strengthens its revelation.

(Daniel, Xerri. *Ted Hughes' Art of Healing* 103)

The surrendering of the ego has led the speaker to open up to the world. And this opening up has made him gaze at the world with a widened outlook which has brought him to oneness with the universe. The gaze of oneness has unveiled the mystery of the mystical world and rendered his path of beatitude.

And Keith Sagar in *The Art of Ted Hughes* (1978) also observes:

‘The Knight’ is the first poem in this sequence where it seems to me that the genius of Baskin has drawn out of the genius of Hughes, has released it rather than restricted it. In Baskin’s drawing the frail eyeless skeleton stands totally exposed to a wind which blows through it, flapping a few last ribbons of flesh. There is a tragic nobility in that high balanced skull. This knight’s conquest is over himself. He lowers his spoils, his Engrossment, all his accumulated debts, onto ‘the common wild Stones of the earth’.

(Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* 177).

The final mingling of the knight with the elements of the earth dissolves all his negative traits that he possessed. His death has renewed him and enriched his achievement. The boast of power, authority, materiality and heraldry all crumble down after meeting death and this is exposed in the poem “The Knight” by Ted Hughes which was inspired by his gaze at the drawing of Baskin. Death makes everyone equal and mingling with Nature equates everyone with the Nature.



Fig.4. Leonard Baskin. “The Knight”. *Cave Birds* by Ted Hughes, Faber and Faber, 1978, 27.

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