

Chapter 15

Hawk Roosting

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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 thought 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”.

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

As posed in the poem, the Hawk appears to be absolute and

indomitable. It ascribes itself the summit of the jungle. The highest of all the social ladder, it sits on the highest point from where it can see it all beneath and small. The Hawk exaggerates that it took the whole of the Creation to design it. It sits on a bark that is rough and it at the highest point of the tree. The perspective of the Hawk is bounded by its vision. The little of the wood that it sees from its seat it takes it to be the whole of the world and presumes itself as its God. The little bird's petty egocentricity is amusing as when it flies it believes itself to be the one rotating the planet and moving the whole of the life. So now that the roles are reversed, the Hawk exclaims, "Now I hold Creation in my foot." The Hawk declaring its assertion as invincibly categorical. It is the Hawk who is in the control of the whole creation, even the Sun abides by it. Nothing that its eyes do not permit can flourish or even exist.

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

Answer

The poem is about the speaker, the Hawk, who is looking down from where it is roosting, the highest point in the woods. It is a dramatic monologue in a non-human voice. The Hawk boasts of its superiority and is self-assertive. It is symbolic of we humans who tend do not think beyond what has been defined to us by the society our beyond our perspective. Our ignorance is our bliss as in the case of the Hawk. The Hawk, who narrates its story of how it perceives the world, is personified incarnating it as the most superior of all the beings. The Hawk believes itself to be the centre of the cosmos. The whole poem is from the perspective of the Hawk, the bird of prey. The poem is from Hughes' second book, *Lupercal*, published in 1960. Once in an interview he explained, "Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking. Simply Nature. It's not so simple because maybe Nature is no longer so simple." in many of Huges poems animals serve as a metaphor. He takes their help to describe his perspective on life. Ted is known for evoking violent imagery and his description of the ultimate battle of survival. In *Hawk Roosting*, the Hawk goes on blathering about its inherited supremacy and its ignorance is its bliss, which it celebrates.

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

Answer

Ted Hughes has always known to have cited examples of animals or birds or even fishes in his poems to draw a parallelism between the animal world and human behaviour. We humans are social animals; however, the animal instinct is still seated within us. Hughes explores this proclivity of humans, when the predatory instinct takes over. In the poem the Hawk hungers for the power and authority, similarly humans lust for power and exercise their supremacy. The Hawk's perspective is blinded or limited by its vision and even with humans, their ignorance is their bliss. There is a constant battle, the survival of the fittest. It is a jungle raj. The Hawk talks of its inherited power from the roost it resides in. It blathers its pride and self-assertion. The way any other human does. It matters little of whether there is an element of truth in it or not, but whether the Hawk or a human, they proclaim their supremacy over the rest of the world. They believe themselves to be the rulers of the Creation and mock God, thankless beings who weave their own fall.