

Fantasy of Nature in *River*: A Tread into the Aesthetic Landscape of Ted Hughes



A. Fredrick Ruban, Helen Unius Backiavathy

Abstract: *Aesthetics studies the principles of beauty and examines the reader's affective domain response to an object. As a philosophical approach to art and life, aesthetics has adoration for beauty as its chief value. Thus, aesthetics and beauty correspond to beget a real aesthetic resonance in poetry. Poetry and fantasy are interwoven to disseminate pulchritude in all the feasible ways through language and content. Poets have their own landscape to exhibit their alluring portraits; likewise, Ted Hughes has his own style of expressing aesthetic fantasies which have mesmerized millions of readers. The present research paper aims to explore the fantasies of Ted Hughes with reference to the poems of River. The objective of the present research paper is to elicit the alluring landscapes sketched in the selected poems of Ted Hughes' River. Hughes is popularly designated as a nature poet and is appreciated for depicting multiple faces of nature. This research paper makes an aesthetic analysis of the selected poems of River to unveil the imbibed values of aestheticism such as 'appreciation of nature' and employing 'imaginative faculty'. The selected poems for the present research are "Salmon Eggs", "Japanese River Tales", "Whiteness", "Ophelia" and "Dee".*

Keywords: Aesthetic, Nature, Poetry, Landscape And Imagination

I. INTRODUCTION

Aesthetics, a branch of Philosophy, is succinctly defined as a system of rules to judge beauty; whereas aestheticism is characterized as the doctrine of beauty from which all other principles have been derived. Aestheticism is an intellectual Art and Philosophical Movement of nineteenth-century, which emphasized on the aesthetic principles in literature, fine art, music and other arts. It was launched by the twentieth-century European art and literary critic, Walter Pater in Britain with a broad sense of devotion to beauty in art and life. Primarily, aestheticism as an approach to art and life, lies on the philosophy of art for art's sake and stresses the significance of art and beauty. Therefore, it is transparent that aestheticism and art for art's sake have identical objective and sole function as to serve art.

Aestheticism treats art as above everything and deems the pleasure catered by beautiful things as over esteemed.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present research is carried out by applying Aesthetics as a methodology. Kant's Aesthetics is used as theory to analyse the selected poems of Ted Hughes. His views on Aesthetics is lofty and borderless, therefore the present research has adopted the two key values of Aesthetics: 'appreciation of nature' and employing 'imaginative faculty'; that has been emphasized by R. V. Johnson. Immanuel Kant has formulated the theory of judging beauty and has articulated that beauty is objective and universal; thus, certain things 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 enables him to experience the beauty, thus beauty is subjective. Kant advocates that aesthetic judgments or judgments of taste must have four distinguishing features. Firstly, judgment of taste is disinterested which means that someone takes pleasure in something because he judges its beauty, rather than judging its beauty because he finds it as pleasurable. Secondly and thirdly, such judgments are both universal and necessary. Fourthly, he formulates that through aesthetic judgments, beautiful objects appear to be 'purposiveness without purpose'. His 'purposiveness' indicates the way in which nature appears to be adapted to one's cognitive power.

III. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research paper is to:

- elicit the aesthetic beauty of nature
- explore the avenues where the imaginative faculty of Hughes has assisted him to enrich the aesthetic landscape with an overwhelming delight and pulchritude.

IV. ANALYSIS

The poet begins "Salmon Eggs" by describing the shivering salmon and the dazzling season. As it is winter, the Sun has no role and the poet has mentioned it as 'a veined yolk of sun'. In Europe, the winter season is the coldest and it lasts from December to February, which is known for decomposition and sterility, but the poet describes such a season with an aesthetic appeal by exploring its exclusive beauty. The poet renders an aesthetic appeal to the natural scene by correlating the shivering salmon touching each other in the icy season. The people of Britain generally treat winter as a curse, but Hughes extracts beauty out of it.

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He watches the scene profoundly until he becomes unconscious out of the fascinating pulchritude of nature. He confesses that he has witnessed the water flow and has listened to it which has eventually mesmerized him. The lines of “Salmon Eggs” delineate the manner in which the poet has become unconscious by the pleasant appeal of nature:

With a veined yolk of sun. In bone-damped cold
I lean and watch the water, listening to water
Till my eyes forget me
And the plied flow supplants me, the mud-blooms
All this ponderous light of everlasting (7-11)

These lines implicate the extent to which the poet has been mesmerized by the poetry of river and salmon. Beauty of the catkins wriggling at their mother’s abundance is transparent because he has keenly noticed the movement of the catkins. They appear as if they have twisted and turned by touching their mother. The aesthetic scene of the catkins communicates him that they are merry and rejoicing in the presence of their mother. The poet’s love for nature has led him to discover human qualities in nature such as motherly affection and protection. The presence of abundant motherly affection elevates the style and taste of the poem thereby highlighting his avid observation of the river. Since he recognizes the elegance of the flowing water, he explodes describing the same emotion that he has experienced out of the fancy portrait. The poet depicts the young salmon coming out of their shell delicately, and he gazes at the beauty of the offspring with all admiration. As he watches the scene, he is relished by the aesthetic sense and therefore it is an admitting fact that the lovely scene of nature has amused his spirit and soul with a realistic tone. The tactile scene of salmon breaking their shells is sensual and ugly but Hughes has strove to bring out only the sense of beauty out of the scene.

In “Japanese River Tales”, Hughes has unleashed his zenith of imagination and has disseminated his loftiness in admiring the pulchritude of nature. The poem is embellished by the beautiful appearance of gull, a sea bird, and is predominated by the feminine explication of the gull in addition to her weird feminine beauty. Her feminine beauty dominates the poem with an awe-inspiring aesthetic appeal. It is portrayed that snow is hurrying over her hair and raiment. The poet has used his power of imagination to describe the bird and the snow touching her throat and apparel. He has aesthetically picturized the snow wrapping the body of the gull and has provided a supreme description of a woman. The snow was hurrying to descend over her and to cover her from her skull to dorsal; this highlights the poet’s ardent love for nature and its objects. The following lines of the poem affirm the poet’s admiration of the gull:

To the tryst, is touching
At her hair, at her raiment
Glint-slippered
Over the stubble,
naked under
Her light robe, jewels
In her hair, in her ears, at her bare throat
Dark eye-flash “Japanese River Tales” (4-11)

The poet says that the filmy robe of the gull has been covered by snow. Her robe refers to her delicate appearance, glistening beauty and her whitish body. The poet is inspired by the white glistening beauty of the gull and therefore he clues that her beauty is complemented by snow. The bird has dark eyes and the poet pens it as a “Dark eye-flash” “Japanese

River Tales” (11). This signifies the poet is obsessed and influenced by the beauty of nature thereby magnifying her beauty supremely.

Furthermore, the poet sketches the rejoicing beauty of lithe river: “The lithe river rejoices all morning” “Japanese River Tales” (18); this delineates the mirthful mood of the river and validates the artistic capability of Hughes. He has observed the lithe moment of the river and has beautified the context by naming it as a lithe river. Water is shapeless and the poet has visualized it thereby employing the term ‘lithe’ to mention its elegant flexible trait. The lithe river has amused the poet with its fascinating qualities. As a nature poet, he has explored beauty in the course of water, and it is an indubitable fact that the poet has perceived the magnificence of the river.

In general, nature poets dignify and adore the beauty of nature; similarly and Hughes has dignified and admired the elegance of nature and its objects from multiple dimensions. This is explicit through the line: “In his juicy bride- the snow princess” “Japanese River Tales” (19). The poet has personified the snow as ‘snow princess’ and the river as ‘he’ which suggests that he has impartially distributed the masculine and feminine descriptions blended with a universality to the objects of nature. He communicates his imaginary thought and exposes his height of imagination in seeking the aesthetic beauty by portraying the fanciful appeal of the snow peeping from the cloud and descending over the lithe river. It revives the idea that the poet has desired to beautify the lithe river and the snow, thus embellishing the scene by incorporating the fanciful pictures of nature. However, the aesthetic portrait - snow descending over the lithe river has complemented the aesthetic harmony of the scene.

Portrayal of a gull is vivid in the lines of the poem: “And languor of suppled shoulders / Bedded in her ermine.” “Japanese River Tales” (27- 28). These lines underline that the feminine depiction of the gull has rendered her a supreme beauty. In addition, the poetic lines artistically portray that the gull bends her shoulders and makes her ermine as her bed. Hughes has sketched the splendour of her appearance in her state of languor, which implies that the poet has identified beauty not only in the vibrant state of the bird but also in her drowsy state. Furthermore, the poet has been aesthetically entertained by the spotless white beauty of the gull, and he conveys that the beautiful snow raiment begins from her skull and ends only at her dorsal. The poem projects that her talons are enlarged by the moonlight, and the poet energetically watches her beauty from her skull to her talons in order to beautify her appearance sketching out an aesthetic image of hers. The aesthetic picture is immensely depicted in the bird spills which glitter as she flies up deliberately by exhibiting a grand appeal. The poem evidently explicates the white beauty of the gull and the glistening effect of the glittering spills. Since the poet has intensely watched the scene, he is kindled to render an aesthetic feel and colour to the picture. The poem thoroughly sketches the beautiful scenes of the bird from one step to another. The poet has delicately described the elegance of the female gull which is intensely artistic and fabulous.

Hughes’ “Whiteness” is fragranced by the fleshy perfume of a thorn-tree. The poem brings out the aesthetic appearance of the dawn and the thorny tree.

He has penned that the thorn-tree hides its thorns and scents fragrance, which is addressed as 'too fleshy perfume. The line "With too much and too fleshy perfume" "Whiteness" (3) highlights the aesthetic fragrance that the poet has sensed. Though it is a thorny tree, it diffuses the pleasant fragrance to attract the passer-by. As an aesthete, Hughes does not stress on the thorn of the tree rather highlights its magnetic smell displaying his trait of quest for beauty even from the merely pleasant objects of nature.

It is often evident that Hughes seeks beauty in terror and ugliness. Seeking beauty in a flying bird is typical and the poet too has minted it in his "Whiteness". In addition, he tries to sketch out the aesthetic beauty of a heron preying a snake:

Heron. Clang
Coiling its snake in heavy hurry
Hoists away, yanked away
Ceases to ponder the cuneiform
Under glass "Whiteness" (8-12)

The above-mentioned lines delineate the creatures of nature which have appeared pleasing to him. He recognizes beauty in the brutish scene of a heron preying a snake. Although the realistic scene is completely unconventional, the poet has taken an aesthetic approach to locate beauty in the unattractive picture. He has recorded that the bird has yanked the snake and has hoisted it. In order to describe the flight of the bird, he has employed the word 'hoists', which has enhanced the beauty of the portrayal.

Identifying the pictorial representation of the beauty of nature is often common in Hughes' *River* poems and "Ophelia" too claims it. "Ophelia" reveals the imaginative faculty of the poet and his admiration for the poetry of the fluvial landscape, and "[...] the pool unfurls its under cloud-" "Ophelia" (1) makes the delicacy of the scene. The line reveals that the pool is transparent therefore he finds a dark fish moving, which is the feminine major character of the scene. Her beauty has fascinated the poet deliriously and her role as a female character has nurtured the idea and the aesthetic view of the picture. In "Ophelia", the line "There she goes" (2, 11) is repeated twice and this reiteration upgrades the aesthetic implication thereby elevating the grandeur of the poem. Through her each move the dark fish renders a romantic tone to the context. She swims in the pool and her appearance reinforces the aesthetic beauty of the scene. It also reveals that the artistic feature of the fluvial image is intensified through her feminine role, thus her fanciful appearance signifies her as a symbol of elegance.

Aesthetic resonance of the spring season is apparent in "Dee". The poet visualizes the aesthetic scene of the hills being swaddled by the white snow with its delicacy. Hughes witnesses the beauty of the snow descending over and covering the hills completely thus addressing it as the 'hills have been locked in the snow'. The poem adds that the beauty of the river is enhanced by the snow therefore it beautifies the river to surface the aesthetic beauty. The poet says that the snow not only has locked the hills but also the North Star, which seems to be an incredible idea. Though the idea appears to be impossible, the poet has achieved it availing his imaginative calibre. The line "And the North Star is frozen in its lock." "Dee" (5) discloses the inventive faculty of the poet. This proves that as a nature poet, Hughes is vigilant enough to discover naturalistic appeal in the minor and major objects of nature.

In "Dee", the poet has ventured to sketch out the alluring spring season richly through snowdrops. The poem pictures the gorgeous scenery of the snow falling on the earth and getting parted in each fall, which is a mere image to visualize but the poet has recognized it and traced its elegance. He finds the reflection of light over the snow fall, and the snow has covered the entire river and it appeared as a steely procession in the poet's lens. The elegance of the river has been beautified by the snow fall; thus it displays the river as a white portrait. It is substantiated that the poet has deftly called the snow as the 'queenliness' of the snow. The poet has explored an unfathomable pulchritude in the snow covered scenery and thus "Dee" highlights the snow as a predominating character. The poet adds that the river wears a high and frozen bosom as its peculiar fine jewel.

It is frequently explicit that Hughes explores aesthetic beauty even in the tiny objects of nature. In this connection, "Dee" picturizes the significant features of nature and it has raised him as an extraordinarily dexterous poet. Hughes has delved and experienced the artistic grandeur of nature with the assistance of his imaginative capability. He often justifies that his creative power is far beyond the faculty of an ordinary human and the following lines serve as a paradigm:

Pilfer from the shrunk, steely procession.
Nevertheless, the lit queenliness of snow hills,
The high, frozen bosom, wears this river
Like a peculiarly fine jewel. "Dee" (19-22)

These lines of the poem "Dee" disclose his artistic skill by throwing light upon the aesthetic appeal of the snow and the river. His aesthetic illustration has beautified his thought and context to grant an aesthetic appeal. For Hughes, the frozen snow is a fine jewel of the river and it has been decorated by the snow jewel which has elevated the grandeur of the landscape. Thus, Hughes has bestowed the richness of jewel to the snow and has hailed it as a peculiar fine jewel.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

As an aesthete, Hughes has incessantly endeavored to accumulate the aesthetic pictures from frailty and filth to validate that he does not confine his imagination at any instance to recognize the aesthetic beauty and experience the pleasure out of it. Power of imagination is the primary and pivotal value of aesthetics and it has embellished and promoted the aesthetic appeal of the poet's idea. The present research paper has discovered that the poet has depicted the objects of nature with regard to its surrounding which gradually raises the aesthetic appeal of the scene. This research validates that Hughes has been profusely influenced and magnetized by nature and his compositions are standing evidence. Considering nature as his sole companion, the poet has admired nature from different and multiple standpoints and has defined his perception with grandeur and eloquence. The selected poems have also disclosed his sole objective as to admire, seek and draw beauty through all feasible lenses. Therefore, it is vivid that the poet's admiration for nature has inspired readers to tread into his aesthetic landscape using imaginative faculty and having void prejudice.

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The selected poetic compositions have validated the sole motto of aestheticism: 'Art for art's sake' and the tenets of aesthetics: 'power of imagination' and 'seeking beauty'. This research paper has found that Ted Hughes has explored beauty in diverse scenes and the selected poems have exhibited it.

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