

Research Article

Mimicking Humanity: The Use of Anthropomorphism in Ted Hughes' Nature Poetry

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This article explores the use of anthropomorphism in Ted Hughes' nature poetry, focusing on its contribution to the blurring of boundaries between humans and animals. Through a detailed analysis of specific anthropomorphic characters and their significance in the broader themes of Hughes' poetry, this article argues that Hughes' use of anthropomorphism challenges traditional Western cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals and contributes to a more holistic and interconnected view of the natural world. The article also discusses the significance of Hughes' use of anthropomorphism in the context of contemporary debates about humanity's relationship with the natural world and reflects on the lasting impact of his nature poetry.

Introduction

Ted Hughes (1930-1998), a British poet and writer, is widely regarded as one of the most significant poets of the 20th century. Born in Yorkshire, England, Hughes' early years were shaped by his love for the natural world and his deep connection to the countryside. These themes are evident throughout his poetry, which often explores the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Hughes' poetry is marked by its vivid imagery, raw emotion, and stark realism. His work is characterised by a sense of deep ecological awareness, and he frequently uses animals and the natural world as metaphors to explore the human experience. Throughout his career, Hughes was known for his willingness to tackle difficult subjects, such as death, violence, and the darker aspects of human nature.

Some of Hughes' most famous works include *Hawk Roosting*, *The Jaguar*, *Pike*, and *Crow*. He was awarded numerous literary prizes during his lifetime, including the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and the T. S. Eliot Prize. Despite his acclaim, Hughes' legacy has been somewhat complicated by his personal life, particularly his tumultuous relationship with the American poet Sylvia Plath, whom he married in 1956.

Today, Hughes' poetry remains widely read and studied, and his impact on the world of literature continues to be felt. His work is celebrated for its originality, power, and its ability to capture the essence of the natural world in all its beauty and brutality. By reading his poetry, it is observed that the poetry exhibits the traits of Anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism is a literary technique that involves attributing human-like qualities, emotions, or behaviours to non-human entities such as animals, plants, or inanimate objects. This technique has been used in literature for centuries and is often employed as a way to make abstract concepts more tangible or to create a sense of familiarity or empathy with non-human characters.

In literature, anthropomorphism can serve a variety of purposes. It can be used to create humorous or whimsical effects, as in children's literature where animals are often depicted as talking and behaving like humans. It can also be used to explore complex philosophical or ethical questions, such as the relationship between humans and animals, or to challenge traditional cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over nature.

Anthropomorphism has a long history in literature, dating back to ancient mythologies and folktales, where gods and animals were often depicted with human-like qualities. In more recent times, anthropomorphism has been used in a wide variety of literary genres, from fables and fairy tales to science fiction and fantasy.

Overall, anthropomorphism is a powerful literary tool that can be used to evoke strong emotions and to explore complex themes and ideas. When used effectively, it can help to bridge the gap between the human and non-human worlds, encouraging readers to see the world around them in a new and transformative way.

Through his use of anthropomorphism, Ted Hughes transforms the natural world into a mirror of human experience, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings and challenging traditional hierarchies between humans and nature. By examining specific examples of

anthropomorphism in Hughes' poetry, this article will explore how the poet's unique approach to the natural world sheds light on the complex relationships between humans and the environment.

Anthropomorphism in Ted Hughes' Poetry

Ted Hughes' nature poetry is characterised by his masterful use of anthropomorphism, where he attributes human-like qualities, emotions, and behaviours to animals and other elements of the natural world. Hughes' anthropomorphic representations of nature are essential to his work, allowing him to explore the complexities of the human experience through the lens of the natural world.

In many of his poems, Hughes depicts animals as mimicking human behaviour, thereby highlighting the similarities between humans and the natural world. For example, in *Hawk Roosting*, Hughes portrays the hawk as a ruthless dictator, asserting its dominance over the other creatures in the natural world. Similarly, in *The Jaguar*, he depicts the titular animal as a symbol of power and freedom, as it prowls around its enclosure in a zoo, observing the humans who come to watch it.

In addition to depicting animals as mimicking human behaviour, Hughes also uses anthropomorphism to explore the emotional lives of animals. For example, in *Pike*, he describes the titular fish as a "monster" with an insatiable hunger, capable of devouring anything in its path. In doing so, Hughes not only creates a vivid and powerful image of the fish but also suggests that animals are capable of experiencing complex emotions such as hunger, desire, and even rage.

Hughes' use of anthropomorphism is not limited to animals alone, as he also depicts other elements of the natural world as having human-like qualities. For example, in *Wind*, he describes the wind as a "great broom" that sweeps through the landscape, shaping the land and leaving its mark on the world. Similarly, in *Thistles*, he portrays the titular plant as a "spiky-headed" creature that thrives in even the harshest of environments.

Overall, Hughes' use of anthropomorphism in his nature poetry is a powerful tool for exploring the interconnectedness of all living things and challenging traditional hierarchies between humans and nature. Through his use of vivid and evocative imagery, Hughes brings the natural world to life, inviting readers to see the world around them in a new and transformative way.

In this poem of *Hawk Roosting*, Hughes depicts the hawk as a dictator, asserting its dominance over the natural world. The hawk is portrayed as having a human-like desire for power and control, declaring itself "the top of the wood" and "the allotment holder." The hawk's predatory nature is also

likened to human aggression, as it boasts that it "kills where it wishes." By anthropomorphizing the hawk in this way, Hughes creates a powerful symbol for the darker aspects of human nature, while also emphasising the connection between humans and the natural world.

In this poem of *Pike*, Hughes describes the pike as a monster, capable of devouring anything in its path. The fish is portrayed as having a human-like hunger, constantly searching for its next meal. The use of anthropomorphism in this poem allows Hughes to explore the emotional lives of animals, suggesting that creatures like the pike are capable of experiencing complex emotions such as hunger, desire, and even rage.

In this poem of *The Jaguar*, Hughes depicts the titular animal as a symbol of power and freedom. The jaguar is portrayed as a creature of the wild, roaming freely through the jungle and observing the humans who come to watch it in the zoo. The use of anthropomorphism in this poem allows Hughes to explore the tension between civilization and the natural world, as well as the desire for freedom that is inherent in all living creatures.

In this poem of *Wind*, Hughes describes the wind as a powerful force of nature, capable of shaping the landscape and leaving its mark on the world. The wind is anthropomorphized as a "great broom" that sweeps through the countryside, changing everything in its path. By portraying the wind in this way, Hughes emphasises the interconnectedness of all living things, as well as the power of nature to transform the world around us.

In this poem of *Thistles*, Hughes portrays the titular plant as a "spiky-headed" creature that thrives in even the harshest of environments. The thistle is anthropomorphized as a resilient and tough creature, capable of surviving in even the most inhospitable conditions. By using anthropomorphism in this poem, Hughes suggests that even the smallest and seemingly insignificant elements of the natural world have a unique and important role to play in the ecosystem.

In this poem of *The Thought-Fox*, Hughes uses anthropomorphism to depict the act of creation itself. The fox is portrayed as a symbol for the creative process, as the poet waits for its arrival in the darkness of night. The fox's movements are likened to the act of writing, as it leaves its footprints in the snow, which become the words on the page. By using anthropomorphism in this way, Hughes suggests that creativity is a natural and essential part of the world around us.

In this poem of *The Horses*, Hughes describes the return of horses to a post-apocalyptic landscape, where they symbolise the possibility of rebirth and renewal. The horses are anthropomorphized as

"strange" and "newly powerful" creatures, who possess a kind of otherworldly grace and beauty. By using anthropomorphism in this poem, Hughes suggests that the natural world has a capacity for regeneration and healing that transcends human understanding.

In this poem of *The Owl*, Hughes depicts the owl as a symbol of mystery and darkness. The bird is anthropomorphized as a creature of the night, possessing a kind of supernatural wisdom that is beyond human comprehension. The use of anthropomorphism in this poem allows Hughes to explore the idea of the unknown and the unknowable, suggesting that there are aspects of the natural world that are beyond our understanding.

In this poem *The Moth*, Hughes uses anthropomorphism to depict the moth as a symbol of transcendence and transformation. The moth is portrayed as a creature of the night, drawn to the light of the moon and the stars. The use of anthropomorphism in this poem allows Hughes to explore the idea of metamorphosis and change, suggesting that all living things have the capacity for transformation.

In this poem of *Pibroch*, Hughes describes the bagpipes as an instrument that mimics the sound of human speech. The use of anthropomorphism in this poem allows Hughes to explore the idea of language and communication, suggesting that even non-human objects have a kind of voice and agency in the world.

Overall, the use of anthropomorphism in Ted Hughes' nature poetry allows the poet to explore complex themes such as power, freedom, transformation, and regeneration. By portraying animals and other natural elements as possessing human-like qualities, Hughes suggests that there is a deep connection between humanity and the natural world, and that our understanding of the world around us is always mediated by our own experiences and perceptions.

The use of anthropomorphism in Ted Hughes' nature poetry serves several functions, including highlighting the similarities between humans and animals and challenging traditional distinctions between humans and nature. Anthropomorphism allows Hughes to blur the boundaries between the human and natural worlds, suggesting that there is a deep connection between humanity and the environment in which we live.

One of the key functions of anthropomorphism in Hughes' poetry is to highlight the similarities between humans and animals. By depicting animals as possessing human-like qualities, such as emotions, intelligence, and agency, Hughes suggests that the gap between humans and the natural

world is not as wide as we might imagine. This is particularly evident in poems such as *Hawk Roosting*, where the hawk is portrayed as a brutal and ruthless predator who embodies human qualities such as pride and ambition. Through the use of anthropomorphism, Hughes suggests that humans and animals share a common capacity for power and domination, and that the boundaries between the two are often blurred.

At the same time, anthropomorphism in Hughes' poetry also challenges traditional distinctions between humans and nature. By portraying animals and other natural elements as possessing human-like qualities, Hughes suggests that the natural world is not simply a backdrop or a resource for human use, but rather an active and dynamic force that is intimately connected with human life. This is evident in poems such as *The Horses*, where the return of horses to a post-apocalyptic landscape is seen as a symbol of hope and regeneration. Through the use of anthropomorphism, Hughes suggests that the natural world has a kind of agency and autonomy that is often overlooked or ignored by human beings.

Anthropomorphism also allows Hughes to explore complex themes such as power, freedom, and transformation. By depicting animals and other natural elements as possessing human-like qualities, Hughes suggests that these themes are not exclusively human, but are rather fundamental aspects of the natural world. For example, in *Pibroch*, the bagpipes are portrayed as an instrument that mimics the sound of human speech, suggesting that even non-human objects have a kind of voice and agency in the world. Through the use of anthropomorphism, Hughes suggests that the natural world is not a passive or inert force, but rather an active and dynamic force that is constantly in motion.

Overall, the use of anthropomorphism in Hughes' poetry serves to challenge traditional distinctions between humans and nature, highlighting the similarities between the two and suggesting that the natural world is not a passive or inert force, but rather an active and dynamic force that is intimately connected with human life. Through the use of anthropomorphism, Hughes invites us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world, and to see ourselves as part of a larger ecological system that is constantly in motion.

The Blurring of Human and Animal in Hughes' Poetry

Anthropomorphism in Hughes' poetry is a powerful tool for blurring the boundaries between humans and animals, suggesting that the gap between the two is not as wide as we might imagine. By depicting animals as possessing human-like qualities, Hughes highlights the shared capacity for emotions,

intelligence, and agency between humans and animals. Through this blurring of boundaries, Hughes challenges the idea that humans are separate from the natural world, and suggests that we are in fact intimately connected to it.

One way in which anthropomorphism contributes to the blurring of boundaries between humans and animals is by emphasising the similarities between the two. In *Hawk Roosting*, for example, the hawk is portrayed as possessing qualities of pride, ambition, and domination that are typically associated with humans. Similarly, in *The Jaguar*, the jaguar is depicted as a powerful and exotic creature, possessing a kind of wildness and freedom that is often associated with human beings. By portraying animals in this way, Hughes suggests that humans and animals are not fundamentally different from one another, but rather share common traits and qualities.

Anthropomorphism also contributes to the blurring of boundaries by suggesting that animals have a kind of agency and autonomy that is often overlooked or ignored by humans. In *The Horses*, for example, the return of horses to a post-apocalyptic landscape is seen as a symbol of hope and regeneration. Through the use of anthropomorphism, Hughes suggests that the horses have a kind of agency and power that is independent of human beings, and that they are capable of shaping the world in their own way. This challenges the idea that animals are passive or subordinate to human beings, and suggests that they have a kind of power and agency that is often overlooked or ignored.

Overall, the use of anthropomorphism in Hughes' poetry contributes to the blurring of boundaries between humans and animals by emphasising the shared qualities and traits between the two, and by suggesting that animals have a kind of agency and autonomy that is often overlooked or ignored. Through this blurring of boundaries, Hughes challenges traditional distinctions between humans and nature, and invites us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world.

The blurring of boundaries between humans and animals in Hughes' poetry challenges traditional Western cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals. For centuries, Western culture has held the belief that humans are separate from and superior to the natural world, and that animals are passive, irrational, and devoid of agency. This belief has been used to justify the exploitation and domination of animals for human purposes, and has contributed to the degradation of the natural world.

However, through the use of anthropomorphism in his poetry, Hughes challenges this belief and suggests that the gap between humans and animals is not as wide as we might imagine. By portraying animals as possessing human-like qualities such as emotions, intelligence, and agency, Hughes

emphasises the similarities between humans and animals, and suggests that they are not fundamentally different from one another.

This blurring of boundaries challenges the assumption that humans are superior to animals, and suggests that we are in fact intimately connected to the natural world. By depicting animals as possessing a kind of agency and autonomy that is independent of human beings, Hughes challenges the idea that animals are passive or subordinate to human beings, and suggests that they have a kind of power and influence in the world that is often overlooked or ignored.

Overall, the blurring of boundaries between humans and animals in Hughes' poetry challenges traditional Western cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals, and invites us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world. Through the use of anthropomorphism, Hughes encourages us to see animals not as passive objects for human use, but as living beings with their own agency and power.

The blurring of boundaries between humans and animals in Hughes' poetry contributes to a more holistic and interconnected view of the natural world. By suggesting that humans and animals are not fundamentally different from each other, Hughes encourages us to view the natural world as a complex and interconnected web of life, where all living beings are interdependent and connected.

Through the use of anthropomorphism, Hughes highlights the complex and nuanced relationships that exist between humans and animals, and emphasises the importance of understanding these relationships in order to better appreciate the natural world. By portraying animals as possessing human-like qualities such as emotions and agency, Hughes encourages us to see them not as passive objects for human use, but as living beings with their own individuality and importance.

This more holistic and interconnected view of the natural world has important implications for how we think about the environment and our relationship with it. By emphasising the interconnectedness of all living beings, Hughes challenges the idea that humans can dominate or exploit the natural world without consequences. Instead, he suggests that our actions have a direct impact on the natural world and that we must take responsibility for our role in the larger ecological system.

In this way, the blurring of boundaries between humans and animals in Hughes' poetry contributes to a more profound and nuanced understanding of the natural world, one that emphasises the importance of interconnectedness and interdependence. By inviting us to see the natural world as a

complex and interconnected web of life, Hughes encourages us to recognize the importance of respecting and protecting the natural world for the benefit of all living beings.

Hughes' Anthropomorphic Characters

One example of an anthropomorphic character in Hughes' poetry is the fox in his poem *The Thought Fox*. In this poem, the fox is depicted as a metaphor for the creative process, as the speaker waits for the appearance of the fox in his mind. The fox is given a human-like quality of thought and intention, and its appearance is described as a "neat fox/With a bright eye." The poem explores the idea that creativity and inspiration can be found in the natural world, and that the boundaries between the human and natural worlds are not as fixed as we might imagine. The fox is not simply a passive animal but is given a human-like quality of agency and intentionality. The fox is portrayed as a clever and cunning creature that is able to navigate the world with a sense of purpose and determination.

Another example of an anthropomorphic character in Hughes' poetry is the hawk in his poem *Hawk Roosting*. In this poem, the hawk is portrayed as a dominant and powerful creature that sees itself as the centre of the natural world. The hawk is given a sense of agency and intentionality, as it surveys the world with a sense of superiority and control. By giving the hawk these human-like qualities, Hughes invites us to see the natural world from the hawk's perspective, and to understand the world as a place where all living beings are interconnected and interdependent.

In both of these examples, Hughes uses anthropomorphism to explore the complex relationships between humans and animals, and to challenge traditional distinctions between humans and nature. By portraying animals as possessing human-like qualities, Hughes invites us to see them not as passive objects for human use, but as living beings with their own individuality and importance. This blurring of boundaries between humans and animals contributes to a more holistic and interconnected view of the natural world, one that emphasises the importance of interconnectedness and interdependence.

Another example of an anthropomorphic character in Hughes' poetry is the crow in his collection of poems titled *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*. In this collection, the crow is given a human-like persona and is portrayed as a trickster figure that challenges the traditional Western view of nature as something that is passive and predictable. The crow is often portrayed as being in conflict with humans and is depicted as a symbol of chaos and unpredictability.

Similarly, in the poem *Pike*, the titular fish is portrayed as a powerful and dominant creature that is able to exert its will over the natural world. The pike is given a sense of agency and intentionality, as it is described as a "great Pike" that "lurks" in the water and "takes everything." The poem explores the idea that humans are not the only creatures that are able to shape the natural world, and that the power of the natural world can be found in creatures like the pike.

Overall, Hughes' use of anthropomorphism in his poetry is a powerful tool for exploring the relationships between humans and the natural world. By blurring the boundaries between humans and animals, Hughes invites us to see the natural world as a place of interconnectedness and interdependence, where all living beings are equally important and deserving of respect.

In the poem *The Jaguar*, Hughes uses anthropomorphism to depict the jaguar as a creature that is in a state of constant rebellion against the confines of captivity. The jaguar is given a human-like quality of restlessness and discontent, as it is described as "spinning on a smile" and "flickering its tongue." The poem challenges the idea that humans have the right to capture and confine animals, and suggests that the jaguar's natural state is one of wildness and freedom.

Finally, in *Hawk Roosting*, Hughes presents the hawk as a powerful and dominant figure that is in control of its environment. The hawk is given a sense of agency and intentionality, as it is described as "hooked head" and "feet locked" on its perch. The poem explores the idea that the natural world is not a passive and predictable place, but rather one in which power and control are constantly being contested.

Overall, Hughes' use of anthropomorphism in his poetry allows him to explore complex ideas about the relationship between humans and the natural world. By blurring the boundaries between humans and animals, he invites us to see the natural world as a place of interconnectedness and interdependence, where all living beings are equally important and deserving of respect.

The anthropomorphic characters in Hughes' poetry are significant in that they contribute to the overall themes of his work, as well as to our understanding of the complex relationship between humans and the natural world.

One important aspect of these characters is the way in which they challenge traditional Western cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals. By depicting animals as having human-like qualities, Hughes blurs the boundaries between the human and natural worlds, inviting us to see animals not as inferior beings, but as fellow inhabitants of the planet with their own unique

perspectives and ways of experiencing the world. This challenges the idea that humans have the right to dominate and exploit the natural world, and suggests that we have much to learn from the other species with whom we share the planet.

At the same time, the anthropomorphic characters in Hughes' poetry also serve to highlight the similarities between humans and animals. By depicting animals as having thoughts, feelings, and intentions that are similar to our own, he emphasises our shared experiences of the world and invites us to see ourselves as part of a larger ecological community. This has the potential to foster a greater sense of empathy and connectedness with the natural world, encouraging us to treat other species with the same respect and consideration that we would want for ourselves.

Individually, each of these characters also has its own significance in terms of the themes and ideas explored in Hughes' poetry. For example, the crow in "Crow's First Lesson" embodies the idea of destruction and renewal, as it destroys the speaker's garden only to later help it grow again. This reflects Hughes' interest in the cycles of nature and the idea that destruction and creation are often intertwined.

Similarly, the fox in *The Thought-Fox* serves as a metaphor for the creative process, inviting us to see the act of writing as a form of communion with the natural world. The jaguar in *The Jaguar*, on the other hand, represents the idea of wildness and freedom, challenging the idea that humans have the right to control and dominate the natural world.

Overall, the significance of these anthropomorphic characters lies in their ability to challenge traditional cultural assumptions about the relationship between humans and animals, while also inviting us to see ourselves as part of a larger ecological community. Through their individual portrayals and contributions to the overall themes of Hughes' poetry, they offer a powerful reminder of the importance of respecting and protecting the natural world.

The relationship between the anthropomorphic characters in Hughes' poetry and the broader themes of anthropomorphism and the blurring of boundaries between humans and animals is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, these characters serve as specific examples of how Hughes employs anthropomorphism to explore the similarities between humans and animals, and to challenge traditional Western cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals. By depicting animals with human characteristics and emotions, Hughes blurs the boundaries between humans and animals and invites readers to question the distinctions between the two.

At the same time, however, these characters also contribute to the larger themes of Hughes' poetry by embodying the interconnectedness of all living beings. By portraying animals with human-like qualities, Hughes highlights the ways in which all living beings are linked by their shared experiences of pain, joy, love, and death. This interconnectedness is a recurring theme in Hughes' poetry, and one that speaks to his larger ecological concerns.

Overall, the anthropomorphic characters in Hughes' poetry serve both as specific examples of his use of anthropomorphism, and as part of a larger exploration of the interconnectedness of all living beings. By blurring the boundaries between humans and animals, and by highlighting the ways in which all living beings are linked by their shared experiences, Hughes challenges readers to think more deeply about their relationship to the natural world and to the other creatures that share it with them.

Conclusion

In this article, I tried to explore the use of anthropomorphism in Hughes' poetry and its role in blurring the boundaries between humans and animals. Hughes' use of anthropomorphism serves to highlight the similarities between humans and animals, and to challenge traditional Western cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals. The blurring of boundaries between humans and animals in Hughes' poetry contributes to a more holistic and interconnected view of the natural world. Anthropomorphic characters in Hughes' poetry serve as specific examples of how he employs anthropomorphism to explore the similarities between humans and animals, and to challenge traditional assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals. These characters also contribute to the larger themes of Hughes' poetry by embodying the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Overall, the article argues that Hughes' use of anthropomorphism serves to blur the boundaries between humans and animals, challenging traditional Western cultural assumptions and contributing to a more holistic and interconnected view of the natural world. The specific examples discussed in the article illustrate how Hughes employs anthropomorphism to explore the similarities between humans and animals, and to highlight the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Hughes' use of anthropomorphism in his nature poetry is significant in the context of contemporary debates about humanity's relationship with the natural world. With the ongoing environmental crisis, there has been an increased awareness of the need to shift our perspective on the natural world from

one of exploitation to one of respect and understanding. Hughes' poetry, with its blurring of boundaries between humans and animals, offers a powerful message about the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Moreover, Hughes' use of anthropomorphism challenges traditional Western cultural assumptions about the superiority of humans over animals. By portraying animals as having human-like qualities and emotions, Hughes highlights the similarities between humans and animals, emphasising that we are all part of the same natural world.

In terms of the lasting impact of Hughes' nature poetry, his use of anthropomorphism has had a significant influence on contemporary ecocritical discourse. His work has inspired numerous writers and scholars to explore the relationship between humans and the natural world through a lens of interconnectedness and mutual dependence.

In conclusion, Hughes' use of anthropomorphism in his nature poetry is a powerful tool for challenging traditional distinctions between humans and nature, highlighting the similarities between all living beings, and contributing to a more holistic and interconnected view of the natural world. His work remains relevant and influential in the contemporary discourse on the environment and the relationship between humans and the natural world.

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Declarations

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.