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Ecocriticism and the works of ted Hughes

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Abstract

Eco criticism provides a valuable framework for examining and interpreting the ways in which literature and culture engage with environmental concerns, fostering a deeper understanding of our relationship with the natural world and the urgent need for environmental consciousness and action. Ecocriticism has influenced various literary genres, including poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and drama. It has also expanded its scope to analyse film, art, architecture, and other forms of cultural expression. Ted Hughes' works can be seen as an important contribution to the field of ecocriticism. His poetry offers profound insights into the relationship between humans and nature, highlighting our responsibilities as stewards of the environment and exploring the consequences of our actions on the natural world.

Keywords: Film, art, architecture, genres, including poetry

Introduction

Ecocriticism is a literary and cultural theory that emerged in the late 20th century, focusing on the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment. It examines how literature and other forms of cultural expression shape and reflect our understanding of nature, ecology, and environmental issues. At its core, ecocriticism seeks to analyze the representation of nature in literary and cultural texts, exploring how authors and artists depict the natural world, environmental crises, and humanity's place within the ecosystem. It examines the ways in which literature and cultural narratives influence our perceptions of the environment, shape our attitudes toward nature, and impact our behaviours regarding ecological matters. Ecocriticism draws on various interdisciplinary fields, including literature, environmental science, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and ecology. It recognizes that the environment is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the stories we tell, influencing and being influenced by human activities and narratives.

Semantic concepts included within ecocriticism are

- **Nature and Culture:** Ecocriticism explores the complex relationship between nature and culture, challenging the traditional separation of humans and the environment. It examines how cultural beliefs, ideologies, and practices shape our understanding of the natural world.
- **Environmental Justice:** Ecocriticism highlights issues of environmental justice and social equity, examining how power structures, race, class, and gender intersect with environmental concerns. It calls for a more inclusive and equitable approach to environmentalism.
- **Place and Landscape:** Ecocriticism emphasizes the importance of place and landscape in literature and culture. It explores how specific locations and environments influence human experiences, identities, and narratives.
- **Ecological Imagination:** Ecocriticism encourages the development of an ecological imagination, which involves envisioning and promoting sustainable and harmonious relationships between humans and the environment. It calls for creative and transformative responses to ecological challenges.
- **Environmental Ethics:** Ecocriticism raises ethical questions about our responsibilities towards the natural world and advocates for environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Ecocriticism and Ted Huges

Ecocriticism is a literary and cultural theory that examines the relationship between literature and the natural world, emphasizing environmental issues and concerns.

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It explores how literature represents nature, interprets human interactions with the environment, and reflects on ecological crises. One prominent figure associated with ecocriticism is Ted Hughes, a British poet and writer who is known for his deep connection with nature and his powerful exploration of the natural world in his works.

Ted Hughes (1930-1998) is considered one of the most important poets of the 20th century. His poetry often delves into the intricate connections between humans, animals, and the environment. Hughes' ecological awareness and his concern for the natural world are evident in his vivid descriptions of landscapes, animals, and the elemental forces of nature. In many of his poems, Hughes portrays the natural world as a powerful and often uncontrollable force, emphasizing the interplay between nature's beauty and its inherent brutality. His work often reflects the tension between human beings and the natural world, highlighting our impact on the environment and the consequences of our actions.

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive,
Beside the clock's loneliness,
And this blank page where my fingers move.

('The Thought-Fox', 1-4, p.21)

Ted Hughes, as a poet deeply connected to nature, can be seen as expressing ecocriticism through his works. His poetry often reflects ecological themes, exploring the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world. Hughes' writing demonstrates a profound understanding of the environment, emphasizing the power, beauty, and sometimes destructive aspects of nature. One of the key ways Hughes expresses ecocriticism is through his vivid and evocative descriptions of the natural world. His poetry often captures the essence of landscapes, animals, and natural phenomena, presenting them in a way that highlights their significance and impact. By portraying nature in such detail, Hughes encourages readers to develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of the environment. Furthermore, Hughes explores the interplay between human beings and nature, recognizing the influence that the natural world has on our lives and the consequences of our actions on the environment. He portrays nature as both a source of inspiration and a force that can be both nurturing and destructive. Through his poems, Hughes invites readers to reflect on their relationship with the natural world, urging them to consider their role as stewards of the environment.

Hughes's poetic creativity and environmental imagination

Ted Hughes's poetic creativity and environmental imagination were integral to his work as a poet. His ability to blend vivid imagery, emotional intensity, and a deep understanding of the natural world allowed him to explore ecological themes and express a unique perspective on the environment. One of Hughes's notable strengths was his ability to capture the essence of nature through his evocative and sensory language. His poems are filled with rich descriptions that bring landscapes, animals, and natural phenomena to life. Whether it's the movement of a bird, the power of a river, or the intricate details of a specific ecosystem, Hughes's poetry immerses readers in the natural world, inviting them to experience it with heightened

sensitivity. Ted Hughes's poetic creativity and environmental imagination allowed him to craft poems that not only celebrated the beauty of the natural world but also examined its complexities and challenges. His work invited readers to engage with nature on a deeper level, encouraging them to develop a heightened environmental consciousness and a sense of responsibility towards the environment. Hughes's unique perspective and ability to merge the poetic and the ecological made him a significant voice in both the realms of literature and environmental thought.

Hughes's environmental imagination can be seen in his capacity to perceive the interconnectedness of all living beings and the larger ecological systems. He often portrayed nature as a dynamic and complex network, where every creature and element had a role to play. His poems emphasized the interdependency and interplay between humans, animals, and the environment, highlighting the ways in which our actions can impact the delicate balance of ecosystems. Furthermore, Hughes's environmental imagination extended beyond a mere appreciation of the natural world. He delved into the darker and more unsettling aspects of nature, acknowledging its capacity for violence, destruction, and chaos. By exploring the raw and primal forces of the environment, Hughes challenged romanticized notions of nature and presented a more nuanced understanding of its power. In addition to his individual poems, Hughes's collections as a whole often exhibited a thematic unity related to the environment. For instance, in works like "Moortown" and "River," he explored specific landscapes and their significance, chronicling the relationship between humans and the natural world in those particular settings.

One of Hughes's most famous works, "Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow," is a collection of poems that features the character Crow as a symbol of nature's destructive and creative powers. Through the character of Crow, Hughes explores themes of death, rebirth, and the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. This notable work can be seen as an embodiment of ecocriticism. The character Crow serves as a symbol of nature's primal and untamed power, representing the ecological forces that shape the world. The collection explores themes of death, rebirth, and the cycles of nature, reflecting on humanity's place within the larger ecological context.

Another notable work by Hughes is "Remains of Elmet," a collaboration with photographer Fay Godwin. This book combines Hughes' poetry with Godwin's photographs, presenting a powerful and evocative exploration of the Yorkshire landscape. The work showcases the beauty of the natural world while also addressing issues of industrialization, environmental degradation, and the loss of traditional rural life. The combination of Hughes' poetry and Godwin's photographs offers a multidimensional exploration of the Yorkshire landscape, capturing both its beauty and the impact of industrialization on the region. This collaboration exemplifies Hughes' concern for the environment and his desire to shed light on ecological issues through artistic expression.

Significance of ecological wholeness in the interactions between other creatures and their habitats of Huges imagination

Ted Hughes recognized the significance of ecological

wholeness and the intricate interactions between creatures and their habitats. His poetry often delved into the interconnectedness of all living beings within their respective ecosystems, emphasizing the importance of maintaining balance and harmony in the natural world. Hughes acknowledged that each organism, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, plays a vital role in the larger ecological tapestry. His poems often depicted the interdependence of species, showcasing how disruptions or imbalances in one aspect of the ecosystem can have far-reaching consequences for others.

In his exploration of creatures and their habitats, Hughes highlighted the intimate relationship between an organism and its environment. He recognized that habitats are not merely physical spaces but dynamic ecosystems that provide sustenance, shelter, and a sense of belonging for the creatures that inhabit them. Hughes's poetry often portrayed the intricate ways in which creatures are adapted to their specific environments, highlighting the delicate and intricate bonds that exist between an organism and its habitat. Furthermore, Hughes's poems often addressed the impact of human activities on the natural world, shedding light on the potential disruptions and destruction caused by human intervention. He was deeply aware of the consequences of environmental degradation and the loss of habitats for both wildlife and humans. Hughes's environmental consciousness urged readers to reflect on their own roles within ecosystems and consider the implications of their actions on the interconnected web of life.

By emphasizing the significance of ecological wholeness and the interactions between creatures and their habitats, Hughes's poetry conveyed a sense of reverence for the natural world and the need for ecological preservation. His works serve as a reminder of the delicate balance that exists in ecosystems and the importance of nurturing and protecting the intricate relationships that sustain life on Earth.

Environmental justice in Huges writings

While Ted Hughes's primary focus was on the natural world and the interactions between humans and nature, his writings also touch upon the concept of environmental justice. Environmental justice refers to the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, advocating for equal access to a clean and healthy environment for all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

In some of Hughes's works, he indirectly addresses environmental justice by drawing attention to the impact of industrialization, human exploitation of natural resources, and the consequences of environmental degradation. His poems often reflect a concern for the well-being of both human and non-human inhabitants of the environment, emphasizing the need for balance and sustainable practices. One example of this can be found in Hughes's exploration of landscapes affected by human activities. In "Remains of Elmet," his collaboration with photographer Fay Godwin, Hughes portrays the transformation of the Yorkshire landscape due to industrialization. The poems and photographs shed light on the social and environmental impacts of industrial development, giving voice to the communities affected by these changes. This work draws attention to the unequal distribution of environmental burdens and highlights the importance of considering the

rights and well-being of marginalized communities in relation to environmental issues.

Hughes's concern for environmental justice can also be seen in his depictions of the natural world as a source of solace, healing, and connection for individuals. His poems often convey a sense of longing for a deeper connection with nature, suggesting that access to the healing and restorative power of the environment should be available to all, regardless of social or economic status. While Hughes may not have explicitly used the term "environmental justice" in his writings, his exploration of the impact of human actions on the natural world and his call for a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment reflect an underlying concern for the equitable treatment of both people and nature.

Hughes critiques ethical questions about nature invasion

Ted Hughes indeed raises ethical questions about the invasion of nature in his poetry. He reflects on the consequences of human actions that disrupt and invade natural environments, highlighting the ethical implications of our treatment of the natural world. In many of his poems, Hughes portrays nature as a powerful and autonomous force that exists independently of human control. He critiques the arrogance and hubris of humans who believe they have dominion over the environment. He questions the ethical implications of our actions when they result in the destruction or intrusion upon natural habitats and the disturbance of delicate ecological balances.

One example of Hughes critiquing the invasion of nature is found in his poem "Pike." In this poem, he explores the predatory nature of the pike, a freshwater fish, and the consequences of human intrusion into its habitat. The poem raises ethical questions about our intervention in the natural order, suggesting that humans may face retribution for their interference.

Another example can be seen in Hughes's collection "Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow." Through the character of Crow, Hughes explores the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. Crow, as a symbol of nature's raw power, challenges human assumptions of dominance and highlights the ethical implications of our actions when they disrupt the natural order.

Hughes's critiques of nature invasion can also be seen in his observations of environmental degradation and the impact of human activities on ecosystems. He highlights the loss of habitats, the extinction of species, and the degradation of landscapes, urging readers to consider the ethical responsibilities we bear towards the natural world.

Ecocritical perspective of Huges poetries

The Howling of Wolves

In "The Howling of Wolves," Hughes vividly portrays the natural world, particularly the intense and primal nature of wolves. The poem captures the raw power and wildness of these creatures, emphasizing their essential place in the natural order. From an ecocritical perspective, Hughes highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting the inherent value of non-human species and the significance of their roles within ecosystems.

The poem can also be seen as a critique of human encroachment and the disruption of natural habitats. Hughes describes the wolves' response to human disturbance,

expressing their primal howling as a reaction to encroachment on their territory. This raises questions about human actions and the ethical considerations of invading and disturbing natural environments. The poem invites readers to consider the interconnections between humans and the natural world. Hughes portrays a sense of primal kinship between humans and wolves, suggesting a shared heritage and a common bond rooted in the natural world. This perspective aligns with ecocritical ideals of recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings and fostering a sense of ecological solidarity.

In "The Howling of Wolves," Hughes's evocative language and imagery create an immersive experience of the natural environment. The poem encourages readers to engage with the beauty and power of the natural world while also reflecting on our responsibilities as stewards of the environment. "The Howling of Wolves" can be analyzed through an ecocritical lens, highlighting the themes of human-nature relationships, environmental disturbance, and ecological interconnectedness. Hughes's poem invites readers to contemplate their place within the natural world and the ethical implications of our actions towards other species and their habitats.

February

In analyzing the poem "February" by Ted Hughes from an ecocritical perspective, we can explore its depiction of nature, its portrayal of seasonal change, and its underlying environmental themes. "February" presents a stark portrayal of the winter month, highlighting the harshness and desolation of the natural world. Hughes employs vivid imagery to depict the cold, barren landscape and the struggles faced by both humans and animals in this harsh season. From an ecocritical standpoint, the poem draws attention to the vulnerability and resilience of nature in the face of challenging environmental conditions.

The poem also explores the cyclical nature of seasons, emphasizing the inevitable transition from winter to spring. Hughes portrays the tension between the dying remnants of winter and the potential for rebirth and renewal that comes with the approaching spring. This cyclical perspective reflects an ecological understanding of the natural world, where seasonal changes play a crucial role in the balance and sustainability of ecosystems. "February" indirectly raises environmental concerns through its portrayal of human impact on the natural world. The poem mentions "cars" and "plastic" as elements of human presence within the winter landscape. These references suggest the intrusion of human-made objects and materials into the natural environment, hinting at the ecological consequences of human activities and the potential disruption of the natural balance.

"February" evokes a sense of isolation and separation from nature. The poem's somber tone and bleak imagery highlight the distance between humans and the natural world during the winter months. This can be seen as a reflection of the disconnection and alienation that can arise from an exploitative or indifferent attitude towards the environment. It prompts readers to reflect on their relationship with nature and the need for a more harmonious and sustainable coexistence. "February" invites an ecocritical reading by emphasizing the harshness of winter, the cyclical nature of seasons, and the implications of human presence in the natural world. Through its portrayal of the winter landscape

and its underlying environmental themes, the poem encourages readers to consider their role in the broader ecological web and to contemplate the importance of environmental consciousness and stewardship.

The Black Rhino

"The Black Rhino" by Ted Hughes, a poem dedicated to the majestic yet endangered animal, can be analyzed from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and the environment, focusing on themes of nature, ecology, and environmental ethics. In "The Black Rhino," Hughes brings attention to the plight of the endangered rhinoceros, particularly the black rhino, which is on the brink of extinction due to human activities such as poaching and habitat destruction. The poem serves as a powerful plea for the preservation of this magnificent creature and raises broader ecological concerns. From an ecocritical standpoint, the poem emphasizes the intrinsic value of non-human species and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Hughes portrays the black rhino as an embodiment of wildness and resilience, symbolizing the richness and diversity of the natural world. By shedding light on the struggles faced by the rhino, the poem invites readers to reflect on the ethical implications of our actions on the environment and the urgent need for conservation efforts.

Hughes employs vivid and evocative imagery to describe the rhino and its natural habitat, painting a picture of the rhino's power, grace, and uniqueness. The poem highlights the beauty and significance of the natural world, urging readers to appreciate and protect the fragile ecosystems that sustain life. "The Black Rhino" touches on the destructive impact of human intervention and encroachment on the natural environment. Hughes addresses the consequences of habitat loss, illegal hunting, and the commodification of nature. The poem serves as a critique of the human-centric perspective that often disregards the rights and welfare of other species.

Additionally, the poem invites readers to consider their own responsibility and role in environmental conservation. By raising awareness about the black rhino's precarious existence, Hughes encourages readers to reflect on their own choices and actions, emphasizing the need for environmental stewardship and collective efforts to preserve biodiversity. "The Black Rhino" can be approached from an ecocritical perspective as a poem that advocates for the preservation of endangered species and raises broader ecological concerns. Hughes's portrayal of the rhino and its struggles serves as a call to action, urging readers to recognize the value of nature, the interconnectedness of all living beings, and the ethical imperative of environmental conservation.

Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow

"Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow" by Ted Hughes is a collection of poems that can be explored from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism examines the representation of nature and the environment in literature, emphasizing themes of human-nature relationships, ecological concerns, and environmental ethics. In "Crow," Hughes presents the character of Crow as a complex symbol of nature's raw power and as a voice that challenges human assumptions and behaviors. From an ecocritical standpoint, Crow can be seen as an embodiment of the natural world,

serving as a reminder of the primal and untamed aspects of nature that exist outside of human control. Through Crow's perspective, Hughes questions human arrogance and the anthropocentric worldview that often disregards the rights and value of non-human species.

The collection delves into the interplay between humans and nature, exploring the tensions and conflicts that arise from this relationship. Hughes examines the destructive impact of human actions on the environment, highlighting themes of pollution, loss of habitat, and the degradation of ecosystems. By giving voice to Crow, Hughes expresses the consequences of human intervention and the need to confront the ecological crises caused by human activities. "Crow" challenges conventional literary and cultural representations of nature. Hughes presents a darker and more ambiguous portrayal of the natural world, resisting romanticized notions of harmony and beauty. The collection confronts the harsh realities of the natural world, acknowledging the violence, struggle, and death inherent in the cycle of life. This perspective encourages readers to grapple with the complexities of nature and to question idealized visions of the environment.

"Crow" invites readers to reconsider their place within the natural world and to acknowledge their responsibility towards the environment. The collection prompts reflection on human agency, accountability, and the potential for ecological transformation. Through the character of Crow, Hughes invites readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the impact of human actions on the environment and to consider alternative ways of relating to nature.

Pike

"Pike" by Ted Hughes can be analyzed from an ecocritical perspective, examining its representation of nature, human-nature relationships, and ecological themes. In "Pike," Hughes vividly portrays the predatory nature of the pike, a freshwater fish, and its interactions with its environment. From an ecocritical standpoint, the poem explores the intricate web of life within aquatic ecosystems and raises questions about the ethical dimensions of human intervention in natural habitats.

Hughes presents the pike as a powerful and primal creature, emphasizing its role as a top predator in its habitat. The poem delves into the pike's predatory instincts, its ability to stalk and strike its prey, and its dominance within its aquatic realm. By depicting the pike's natural behavior, Hughes invites readers to appreciate the inherent value and complexity of non-human species within their ecosystems. The poem also examines the relationship between humans and the natural world. Hughes describes the encounter with a pike in childhood, highlighting the sense of awe and fear experienced by the speaker. This encounter reflects the profound impact that nature can have on human consciousness and invites readers to reflect on their own interactions with the natural environment. "Pike" indirectly raises ecological concerns by drawing attention to the potential consequences of human intervention in natural habitats. Hughes portrays the pike's habitat as a realm untouched by human interference, a place where the laws of nature reign. The poem hints at the destructive consequences that can arise when humans disrupt or exploit natural environments for their own purposes.

"Pike" prompts readers to consider the ethical dimensions of our relationship with the natural world. The poem reflects

on the complex power dynamics between humans and non-human species, highlighting the need for humility and respect in our interactions with the environment. It challenges the anthropocentric worldview that often prioritizes human needs and desires above the well-being of other species and ecosystems. "Pike" can be approached from an ecocritical perspective as a poem that explores the dynamics of aquatic ecosystems, human-nature relationships, and ecological ethics. Hughes's depiction of the pike and its habitat raises awareness of the inherent value of non-human species and invites readers to consider their responsibilities as custodians of the natural world. The poem encourages a deeper understanding of the interconnections and interdependencies that shape our relationship with nature.

Remains of Elmet

"Remains of Elmet" by Ted Hughes, a collaborative work with photographer Fay Godwin, can be analyzed from an ecocritical perspective. This collection of poems and photographs explores the landscapes of Yorkshire and examines the complex interactions between humans and the natural environment. From an ecocritical standpoint, "Remains of Elmet" reflects on the impact of human activities on the natural world. Hughes and Godwin document the transformation of the Yorkshire landscape due to industrialization, urbanization, and the changing agricultural practices of modern society. The collection draws attention to the environmental consequences of human intervention, including the loss of natural habitats, the degradation of landscapes, and the displacement of both human and non-human inhabitants.

The poems and photographs in "Remains of Elmet" also capture the resilience and vitality of nature in the face of human-induced changes. They emphasize the enduring presence of the natural world, even in the midst of human alteration. This perspective invites readers to reflect on the inherent value of the environment and the need for sustainable practices that respect the interdependence of humans and nature. "Remains of Elmet" explores the social and cultural dimensions of the landscape, shedding light on the lives of the communities living in these transformed environments. The collection delves into the relationships between people and their surroundings, their struggles, and their connection to the land. By presenting the human experience within the context of the changing natural world, the work invites readers to consider the social and environmental justice issues that arise from such transformations.

"Remains of Elmet" evokes a sense of nostalgia for a lost or vanishing landscape, urging readers to reflect on the importance of preserving and honoring the natural and cultural heritage of a place. The collection prompts a deeper engagement with the landscapes depicted and encourages a reevaluation of our relationship with the environment. "Remains of Elmet" can be approached from an ecocritical perspective as a collection that explores the environmental consequences of human activities, the resilience of nature, and the social and cultural dimensions of landscapes. The collaboration between Hughes and Godwin prompts reflection on our responsibilities as stewards of the environment and advocates for a more balanced and sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world.

Conclusion

Ecocriticism provides a valuable framework for analyzing Ted Hughes's poetry, as it allows for a deeper exploration of his depictions of nature, human-nature relationships, ecological concerns, and the ethical implications of our interactions with the environment.

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