

## SPIRIT AND ANIMAL IMAGES IN HUGHES' TWO SHORT STORIES :

### *THE HARVESTING and THE RAIN HORSE*

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#### ZET

Bu alıřmada, aędař İngiliz yazarı Ted Hughes'un *The Harvesting* ve *The Rain Horse* adlı yklerinde hayvanlarla ilgili imgeler incelenerek metin iindeki iřlevleri ortaya konulmaya alıřılmıřtır. Bilim ve teknolojinin insanı kendi i dnyasına yabancılařtırdıęına inanan Hughes, yklerinde hayvanlara iliřkin imgeler kullanarak, insanın i dnyasıyla dıř dnya arasında bir denge kurmakta zorlandıęını gstermektedir. *The Harvesting*'de 'tavřan' imgesi yk kiřisinin yařadıęı kiřilik zlmesini ve egonun baskın hale geliřini vurgularken, *The Rain Horse* adlı ykde ise, bu kez, kullanılan 'at' imgesi kiřinin bastırılmıř i dnyasını sergiler. Sonu olarak, Ted Hughes'un incelenen iki yksnde de kiřilerin i dnyalarına ulařmak iin aba harcamamaları yznden uęrařlarında bařarısızlıęa uęramalarının imge kullanımıyla okura iletildięi sylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kiřilik zlmesi, Ego, İmge

#### INTRODUCTION

Ted Hughes is one of the most outstanding figures of contemporary English literature. Hughes as a poet, short story writer and the husband of Sylvia Plath, has collected special interest of the literary public. In his works, he deals with man's troubled relationship with his inner and outer worlds. He believes that the progress of civilization undermines spiritual values of people. Today science and technology glorify the analytical powers of the human, in other words, the rational portion of the ego, and ignore his emotional and instinctual needs. As a result, rational analysis gives shape to human life. Therefore, people can feel secure only when they

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receive logical explanations for events. Hughes underlines that people are to think of emotions as dangerous and that they could distort their judgements. From his Cambridge education in Anthropology, he knows that religion embraced and humanized the energies of instinct. But in the twentieth-century Western culture, religion ceased to play a vital role and this has been the cause of a separation between the two worlds. In a way, while the inner world becomes a place of demons, the outer world becomes a place of meaningless objects and machines. The relation between religion and inner world is stated as “Without religion, the energies of instinct and feeling have become dehumanised. The whole inner world has become elemental, chaotic, continually more primitive and beyond our control” (Faas,1980:97). This uncontrolled and dehumanised inner energy brings a rationalistic outlook. It is difficult to control the inner energies which are suppressed by science and the dictates of the society. Hughes believes that the outer and inner worlds are interdependent; if the inner world remains undeveloped, it becomes demonized and finally ends in explosion. In his stories, as Scigaj states, “the characters exhibit varying stages of neurotic behaviour and personality breakdown based upon the repression of instinct” (Scigaj,1983:138). Hughes thinks that the repressed inner energy emerges with dangerous consequences. For instance, the hero of *The Harvesting*, Mr. Grooby, ignores his inner world and gets angry in his struggle against the pressure of heat. As a result he becomes the victim of nature.

The two stories in the collection of *Difficulties of a Bridegroom* deal with the survival of the spirit and the integrated psyche. As Scigaj suggests, he focuses on a “therapeutic return to the wonders, mysteries and healing powers of the natural world, after a satiric analysis of the misdirected Western rational/technological bias that alienates humans from nature” (Scigaj,1991:6). In *The Rain Horse* the young man trusts his mind and rational thought for his survival. Such a dependance relies on technology and rationalism. But he ignores to deal with his inner world. Whereas by the help of art, people may recognize and organize their energies and reconcile their repressed desires with the outer world. In other words, world of art must replace religion and provide an organizing centre for the things that fall apart. Hughes believes that individuals can maintain harmony between their inner and outer worlds with imagination. His stories display a force of integration. As he explains the power of story he claims that “When we tell a child a story, he enters a completely imaginative world.... If in a story he is put through a humiliating defeat, the effects on him are real defeat. If he is put through some sort of victory, the effects on him are of real victory” (Sweeting, 1983: 74). He underlines the positive effect of stories when he says, “it comes about that once we recognise their terms, these works seem to heal us” (ibid). It is true that, an idle reading of a fairy tale activates the imagination and enables the reader to have a richer perception of values of inner energies. Pollen (1994:153) also supports this view with the function of a simple tale. He claims that if it is told at the right moment, it can transform a person’s life with the order its pattern brings to incoherent energies.

One can conclude that, Hughes uses the story as a healing power and does not hesitate to deal with different cultures' myth and folklore when they serve his aim. His art is enriched as he skillfully unites his Yorkshire nurture and his Cambridge education in anthropology. His interest in Oriental philosophy- alchemy, shamanism and tribal societies- displays itself in his maintaining harmony among the unmatched. He is especially interested in Oriental philosophy and regards it as an alternative to Western rationalism and utilitarian egocentricity. He accepts shamanism and alchemy as the most important ancient ancestors of spiritual release. Both of them have the same patterns and similar spiritual purposes. The alchemist/the shaman must enter the dangerous underworld in order to bring back some healing energies to our world. Hughes uses shamanistic rites to gain access to the inner world of the spirit to achieve enlightenment and wholeness. He calls the shamanistic flight "one of the main regeneration dramas of the human psyche," and regards it as the basic theme of many folktales and myths (Sweeting, 1983:72). Through this regenerative power, he tries to counter the divisions which he sees in the world.

According to Freud, person's instinct and real desires which are repressed by tradition and moral rules lie in the subconscious. Hughes thinks that personality will grow into wholeness when this repressed energy comes to surface. In this sense, he allows his characters to make symbolic journeys to the underworld of the subconscious, like a shaman, to cure split personalities. Hirschberg states that "the dissociation of personality that is so characteristic of Hughes' protagonists is answered by the shaman's ability to reintegrate split personalities, although primitives would put the case in terms of possession by evil spirits" (Hirschberg,1981:19). Hughes re-establishes touch with the inner world in terms of animal imagery and symbolism derived from ancient mythologies. The significance of shamanism is the fusion with the mythical life of certain animals, which offers the sense of power and communion with cosmic life. In *The Rain Horse*, 'the horse' is a typical animal of shamanism which represents an entrance to the other world. Animal figures function as shamanistic costumes. In the tradition of shamanism, animals are regarded as masks that the shaman uses to get into a superhuman mode of being in order to undertake his journey. The characters in Hughes' stories, like the shaman, make a spiritual journey to achieve psychic health through animal masks. The animals symbolize the liberated forces which give access to the power habitually held in check by society. He believes that animals are living "the redeemed life of joy. They are continually in a state of energy which men only have when they've gone mad" as it is displayed in *The Rain Horse* (Hirschberg, 1981:11). He prefers to use animal images in this sense. The initiation and regeneration are no longer possible for man who is held back by rationality and taboos. Hughes underlines that the energies in humans that could lead to personal satisfaction and spiritual growth are locked in chaotic vision. The characters have journeys beyond the rational to the primitive depths of experience to liberate the repressed energies. In this way they move from a shamanistic identification with powerful, violent and

destructive predators through the poetry of the suffering victim. In fact, Hughes deals with human suffering and survival by using animal images.

This study examines how Hughes achieves to reflect his attitude to life by the help of such a rich combination of myth and folklore of ancient tribal societies in his short stories, *The Harvesting* and *The Rain Horse*. In these short stories, he seeks, as ancient shamans did, an alignment with the inner energies. In the symbolic journeys, there exists an access to the inner world of the characters through animal imagery which results in neurotic behaviour and psychic dissolution. The animal images reflect his reaction to the rationalistic demand of society. Through these images he tries to resurrect the characters' spiritual and instinctual energies.

### **THE HARE IMAGE IN *THE HARVESTING***

In the story *The Harvesting* Hughes deals with the dissolution of ego by using an animal figure, hare. In the beginning of the story, he portrays the protagonist, Mr. Grooby, as a person who acts under the influence of his ego. He wants to be a hero in the harvest by shooting hares. However, he faces unexpected events in the field such as the scorching heat and the din of the tractor. As he is vulnerable to the blistering heat, withstanding the sun a few hours can be considered as an ordeal. But this situation does not affect the defense of his ego. He develops strategies such as “*standing perfectly still*” and “*dreaming to drink beer in his car*” to motivate himself (Hughes, 1995:80). He is not a person who can accept his weakness. He decides to do his best to achieve his aim. For instance, most of the time he loses control of his body but he does not want the stokers to see him in this situation, “*He sat down hastily, adjusting his pose to look as natural as possible...*” (ibid.:82). As he is a hero, what matters is the impression he leaves on others. With the defensive function of his ego, he tries to control his acts and behave as if nothing has happened to him.

At this moment, the author identifies Mr. Grooby with the hare to underline the fact that they are going to share the same fate in the harvest field as both of them are in a desperate situation. The dogs who try to chase the hare are also the rivals of Mr. Grooby and distract him during the process of hunting. The roar of the tractor does not allow him to concentrate completely on his aim. The tractor also functions as a threat to his existence, because most of the time he is on the edge of losing his consciousness and finds himself in front of it. On the other hand, the tractor threatens the hare as well; it has to run from one side of the field to the other to prevent itself from the threat of its reaper. The use of the word ‘crack’ in the sentence “*...the hare's nerves had finally cracked...*” implies the state of the hare and the state of Mr. Grooby (ibid.:83). The term ‘crack’ is used in the context of “shattered human identity” as Hirschberg suggests. The author implies that all the events he has experienced in the harvest field make Mr. Grooby feel exhausted. He

is shocked and upset as he does not expect to experience such negative conditions in the field. He just wants to enjoy the last harvest of wheat. Also his nerves are shaken because of his psychic vulnerability. As a result he is "*completely nonplussed*" (ibid.). He is not able to decide the necessary movement. The hare is also perplexed by the "*sudden revelation of surrounding enemies*" (ibid.). It acts unconsciously and sits without any intention to run away from the danger in the field. In other words, it is unable to make the vital decision in this desperate situation.

After this identification the author immediately foregrounds the desire of Mr. Grooby's ego with a short sentence, "*Grooby aimed mercilessly*" (ibid.). He does not want to give this chance to his rivals and acts without evaluating his situation, "*He forgot all about swing and squeeze and follow through*" (ibid.:84). Ironically, at the end of his attempt he is the one who faints. He is off his balance because the existence of the dogs and the blistering heat that distract him. He ignores these outside effects which shatters his psychology and now he is within a "*hair's breadth*" of losing his control and close to destruction (ibid.:85). The author underlines his dangerous state as "*... Grooby sank into a shocked stupor. His mind whirled around like a fly that dared not alight. A black vacancy held him*" (Hughes,1995:87).

Mr. Grooby's similar situation with the hare is foregrounded by the loss of his consciousness after shooting. As a target, the hare is "*close and move[s] slowly*" (ibid.:84). It seems there is no other chance for the hare than being hunted. The author also supports this thought by ending the paragraph with the sentence "*The hare somersaulted, as if tossed into the air by the hind legs, came down in a flash of dust and streaked back into the wheat*" (ibid.). But immediately after he opens a new paragraph with the sentence, "*For a second, Grooby thought he must have fainted*" he underlines that it is Mr. Grooby who becomes the hunted one (ibid.).

Throughout the story he ignores the merciless pressure of time and heat. He does not realise that unless he gains balance with his inner and outer worlds he cannot achieve his aim in the harvest. He cannot grasp that "*Something important was going on*" (ibid.:87). As a person who is not aware of the needs of the inner world, he follows the desire of his ego. In a short time the work in the field will end and it would be possible that he will miss the joy of being a hero in the harvest. His strong desire "*includes him once more in events*" although he is in a desperate situation (ibid.). In his second attempt he hesitates to shoot the hare because of an unknown reason. It is a strange behaviour for Mr. Grooby who wants to be a hero by shooting hares. With this illogical decision the author underlines the close relation between Mr. Grooby and the hare, "*Grooby felt more like shooting it away to safety than shooting it dead*" (ibid.:88). Like Mr. Grooby the hare is ready to surrender to his enemies. Most of the time it is not easy for him to withstand the dogs and the blistering heat. He is exhausted and terrified, but due to the influence of his ego he does not give up. He does not have any chance *but* to struggle against the pressures like the hare who "*launch[es] itself up the hill like a dart*", as it realises that the idea of surrender is pointless (ibid.). In this way he misses his target again, but he

does not forgo his claim on the hare. With the yelling of the dogs he “sets off at a lumbering run” without thinking how to shoot the hare (ibid.). This attempt also results in Mr. Grooby’s blackout because he holds the gun too loose. He uses his last chance but he does not want to accept this fact as is implied by, “*The wild realization that he had done it again, the blasted gun had hit him again, was swallowed up*” (ibid.:89). It is a fact that he becomes a victim in life. Indeed, the reaper and greyhound pursue Mr. Grooby, not the hare. Then, suddenly “*the enormous white dog’s head opened beside him, and he felt as if he had been picked up and flung...*” (Hughes,1995:89). So the pursuer becomes the pursued and this can be regarded as an evidence of transformation. As the epigraph of the story says, and as Scigaj states, “He has gone into a hare” (Scigaj,1991:62). The hunter becomes the hunted in the story.

The harvest custom personifies the spirit of wheat/corn under the name of Wheat/Corn mother. She is believed to be present in the last stalk of wheat/corn and ensures a good crop. With the cutting of the last handful wheat/corn, she is caught, driven away or killed. The expelled wheat/corn spirit may take an animal form as a hare, a cat, a goose, etc. and people often stand round the last patch of wheat/corn armed with their sticks or guns to kill it. A stranger/visitor passing the harvest field is also regarded as the manifestation of the corn/wheat spirit escaping from the cut or threshed wheat/corn. Hirschberg quotes from Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* that,

The wheat/corn spirit is supposed to lurk as long as he can in the wheat/corn, retreating before the reapers, the binders, and the threshers at their work. But when he is forcibly expelled from his refuge in the last wheat/corn cut or the last sheaf bound or the last grain threshed, he necessarily assumes some other form than that of the wheat/corn stalks, which had hitherto been his garment or body (Hirschberg,1981:43).

In *The Harvesting*, Mr. Grooby is eager to shoot the hare who represents the wheat/corn spirit according to the folk custom. He does not give it a chance to escape from the harvest field. But as a visitor who stands nearest to the last sheaf of wheat/corn, Mr. Grooby becomes the spirit of a hare that has rushed out from the remaining patch of wheat/corn. He experiences “a disintegration and a flight of soul; he and the hare exchange personalities”(ibid.). In fact, throughout the story the identification of Mr. Grooby with the hare implies such a transformation.

In the story, Hughes uses ‘hare’ image to imply psychic dissolution of Mr.Grooby and foreground the dominance of ego in his behaviour. Throughout the story Mr. Grooby ignores his psychic vulnerability and acts under the influence of his ego. The most important thing for him is to be a hero in the harvest. He does not take his vulnerability into account and insists on struggling against the unexpected situations in the field. This insistence causes him to experience his predicament again and again. As he cannot maintain harmony between his inner and outer world, he becomes unsuccessful in his ordeal.

### THE HORSE IMAGE IN *THE RAIN HORSE*

In *The Rain Horse* Hughes deals with the neurotic behaviour of a young man who visits his hometown on a rainy day after twelve years' absence. He hopes to make connection with his land, "... *he had expected something, some pleasure, some meaningful sensation...*" (Hughes, 1995:67). But he has realized his alienation from his town-village, because he feels "*nothing but the dullness of feeling nothing*" (ibid.:68). He accepts that a lot of things have changed during this long period of his absence and it is not possible to have the same feelings again. He feels a stranger in his homeland and looks around 'coldly' without any familiar feeling. This disappointment is followed by the threat of a horse which appears suddenly and pursues him malevolently throughout the story. Although the young man knows that it is common to see horses in the countryside, he becomes restless because of the strange impression it makes: "*As he watched it, the horse ran up to that crest, showed against the sky-for a moment like a nightmare leopard- and disappeared over the other side*" (ibid.:69). He realizes that the horse is watching him intently. He cannot make sense of its behaviour. Being watched becomes "*more and more unsettling*" and he is frightened as the question "*What was he to do?*" indicates (ibid.:71). But in a short time he calms down and feels able to struggle against his fear, because it is ridiculous to run away from the wood because of a horse; he "*take[s] control of himself and turn[s] back deliberately and determine[s] not to give the horse one more thought*" (ibid.). He decides not to pay attention to its presence. But at this moment, the horse becomes malevolent. It attacks him in a terrifying way, "*Like lightning his legs bounded him upright and about face*" (ibid.). The young man is frightened and cannot decide what to do in order to protect himself from the threat of the horse. But all of a sudden the horse disappears. In this way the author creates a nightmarish atmosphere that makes the reader feel that the young man might have had an illusion, because the wood is in silence as if nothing has happened, "*The wood was empty except for the drumming, slant grey rain, dancing the bracken and glittering from the branches*" (ibid.:72).

He does not expect such a violent behaviour and tries to find logical explanations for its strange behaviour: "*The horse was evidently mad, had an abscess on its brain or something of the sort. Or maybe it was just spiteful*" (ibid.). He knows there is no reason for the horse to attack him because he is not disturbing the horse or threatening its existence. He thinks it might have an abscess on its brain or the rain may be affecting its psychology and putting it "*into a queer state*" (Hughes, 1995:72). He does not want to accept that it might have violent intention. The horse might be "*feint[ing] at him in passing- as much out of curiosity or playfulness as anything*" (ibid.). He compares its behaviour with other horses in a paddock to support his thought. This strange situation makes him to think of other possibilities such as magical powers, "*Was it a clairvoyant? Maybe a mad animal can be a clairvoyant*" (ibid.). He is restless and tries to keep out of sight of the horse. He is confused and tries to control himself by imagining other people's responses: "*He tried to imagine how anybody in their senses would just walk off home*" (ibid.). In a

short time, his confidence is restored and he decides to leave the wood quietly. He does not want to venture out into the open field, because he is not sure about the intention of the horse and does not want to experience another attack. He searches the place, *“The grey field and the whole slope [are] empty”* (ibid.:73). At the point of thinking that the horse may forget him, it suddenly catches him, *“The black shape was above him, right across the light”* (ibid.). But it suddenly disappears making its existence doubtful once again.

After this attack he is conscious of its intention; it is *“definetly after him”* (ibid.:74). He accepts that he is making a mistake about his attempt to figure out its behaviour. *“He need no longer act like a fool out of mere uncertainty as to whether the horse was simply being playful or not”* (ibid.). He has to protect himself from his enemy. He arms himself as if for a battle, *“... he picked up two stones about the size of goose eggs”* (ibid.). He uses the environment as a trench, *“There were deep hollows in the river-bank, shoaled with pebbles, as he remembered, perfect places to defend himself from if the horse followed him out there”* (ibid.). As it comes straight for him, he begins to throw stones with a *“tearing roar”* (ibid.:75). This time he is in a ‘queer state’, because he wants to kill the horse at that moment. When he feels the danger he acts violently as the sentence indicates, *“The encounter had set the blood beating in his head and given him a savage energy”* (ibid.). He continues throwing stones without being conscious of what he is doing. Despite these violent attacks, the horse remains calm: *“Throughout the performance the horse watched him fixedly”* (ibid.:76).

It is interesting that the horse leaves the battlefield without any reaction. It climbs till it is level with him as if it wants to have contact with the young man. But it seems that he does not have any such intention. He sees the calmness of the horse as a sign of defeat and feels himself a hero. He warns the horse to keep its distance, if not he will not hesitate to throw stones. In this way the author wants to underline the fact that the young man is behaving like a brute to protect himself from the threat of the nightmarish figure. But when he feels secure he has difficulty in accepting he could have behaved in such a violent way and wants to purify himself from brutality with the *“healing drops”* of the rain (Hughes, 1995:77).

In the story Hughes underlines that violent behaviour is seen when people are under a threat of existence. Freud defines this situation as ‘thanatos’ which is related with survival instinct. In other words, this destructive instinct is related to the instinctive violent urges of the human being. And these repressed libidinal energies may explode into violence as we see in the young man’s behaviour in *The Rain Horse*.

The horse image represents the repressed total life energy of the young man. Throughout the story the young man struggles against the horse which symbolizes his inner world. Also according to shamanism, the horse represents a link between the spiritual and material worlds. In the story, he has a chance to deal with his inner world by means of the horse. But he is not aware of its meaning and



importance in his life and tries to repress what the horse stands for. As he does so, the horse becomes malevolent. Hughes connects the behaviour of this nightmarish figure with Dionysus (Scigaj, 1991:62). Dionysus was good and gentle to those who honored him but he brought madness and destruction upon those who spurned him. In the story, the horse begins to act violently when the young man decides to give up dealing with it. As Euripedes points out, to resist Dionysus is to deny the irrational within one's own self; and in *The Rain Horse* the young man also denies his inner world by ignoring what the horse signifies.

During his ordeal with the horse the young man tries to find logical explanations for events, because only in this way he feels secure. With the progress in science people's rational aspect come to fore. But rationalism is not a suitable instrument to deal with what the horse signifies. Pollen states the same point that people try to approach their inner world with objective interpretations which apply well to the outer world. But in this way the inner world becomes incomprehensible, absurd and invisible (Pollen, 1994:148). The young man does not know how to cope with his inner world and prefers to repress it. According to Jung, self-development occurs only when "the conscious mind assimilates unconscious material that the psyche has wrestled with successfully" (Scigaj,1991:92). But in *The Rain Horse* the young man does not allow the repressed energies to come to surface and loses the chance to maintain harmony between his inner and outer worlds. At the end of the story he feels lobotomised, "as if some important part had been cut out of his brain" (Hughes,1995:78). In fact he is not aware that the cause of this feeling is refusing the chance of psychological integration.

## CONCLUSION

In *The Harvesting* and *The Rain Horse* Hughes focuses on the repressed aggression and psychic dissolution of the characters. Both of them ignore the needs of their inner world and fail to create harmony in their life. But this ignorance brings destruction. In *The Harvesting* Mr. Grooby does not achieve his aim. Most of the time he is on the edge of losing his consciousness. His ego prevents him from having contact with his inner world and being aware of his psychic vulnerability. In *The Rain Horse* the young man is helpless in his struggle against the threat of the horse. He does not have any intention of achieving a balance between his inner and outer worlds. In fact such a harmony could have given both characters power to be successful in their ordeal. They refuse to reintegrate their psychic energies and fail to gain psychological wholeness.

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