

# Poetry Across Time



# Conflict



# Hawk Roosting

By Ted Hughes



Why a hawk?



Is the position of the hawk important?

How does this link with the theme of 'conflict'?

# Hawk Roosting

By Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes was born in 1930 and died in 1998. He was an English poet and children's writer. Critics routinely rank him as one of the best poets of his generation. Hughes was British Poet Laureate from 1984 until his death. Born in West Yorkshire, he studied at Pembroke College, Cambridge, later spending most of his life in Devon. He was aware of the violent forces of nature. As a child, he gained an interest in the natural world and the violence required to survive in harsh environments. His poems emphasise the scheming and savagery of animal life.



"The poem of mine usually cited for violence is the one about the Hawk Roosting, this drowsy hawk sitting in a wood and talking to itself. That bird is accused of being a fascist... the symbol of some horrible genocidal dictator. Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature was thinking. Simply Nature."

Ted Hughes, London Magazine, January 1971

"This is the universe that the bird inhabits when it's got its eyes closed... it's what it thinks about, what it dreams about. The type of magic that Ted Hughes is interested in would allow some people in certain civilisations to actually become certain animals, to take on the spirit of an animal... and I think this is part of his magical practice - he's becoming the animal and seeing what occurs to him. What does it feel like to think like a hawk?"

You get a lot of blood and guts in a Ted Hughes poem and a lot of violence, because nature is violent and he doesn't close his eyes to that... I think he would say that violence is one thing that reminds us of the real world and what it is to be alive in this world. When the hawk is given language... when it's given the ability to explain itself... it becomes quite a terrifying prospect."

Simon Armitage, Passwords (Channel 4), 1998

## **Hawk Roosting**

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.  
Inaction, no falsifying dream  
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:  
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!  
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray  
Are of advantage to me;  
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.  
It took the whole of Creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -  
I kill where I please because it is all mine.  
There is no sophistry in my body:  
My manners are tearing off heads -

The allotment of death.  
For the one path of my flight is direct  
Through the bones of the living.  
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.  
Nothing has changed since I began.  
My eye has permitted no change.  
I am going to keep things like this.

TED HUGHES

## Hawk a metaphor for?

### Hawk Roosting

I sit in the **top of the wood**, my eyes closed.  
Inaction, **no falsifying dream**  
Between my **hooked** head and **hooked** feet:  
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

Repetition emphasises?

Physical position reflects?

No time for imagination or fantasy.

The hawk imagines itself to be the only important being.

The convenience of the high trees!  
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray  
Are of advantage to me;  
And the **earth's face upward for my inspection.** Example of?

Tone?

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.  
It took the whole of Creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
**Now I hold Creation in my foot**

Hawk carries the earth rather than being supported by it.  
Image?

Or fly up, and **revolve it all slowly -**  
I kill where I please because **it is all mine.** What is the hawk thinking?

There is no sophistry in my body:  
My manners are tearing off heads -

Reminds us of?  
Vocabulary brutal

Violent image of the hawk swooping on prey.

The allotment of death.  
For the one path of my flight is direct  
Through the bones of the living.  
No arguments assert **my** right:

Pronoun use throughout emphasises?

Sun is supporting the hawk as well as it being literally behind it.  
Significance?

**The sun is behind me.**  
Nothing has changed since I began.  
My eye has permitted no change.  
**I am going to keep things like this.**

The hawk likes to feel?

TED HUGHES

Perspective of 'I':



Identify

## Interpreting the text:



### Imagery

What extended metaphor is used in the poem?



### Structure

Look closely at each stanza .  
What do you notice? What does this link to?



### Punctuation

Track the use of punctuation.  
Why are there so many end stopped lines?





## Endings:

The sun is behind me.

Nothing has changed since I began.

My eyes have permitted no change.

I am going to keep things like this.



### Reflection...

- \* What is the tone of the end of this poem?
- \* Why is the word 'permitted' used?
- \* What are things like?  
Explain your ideas.



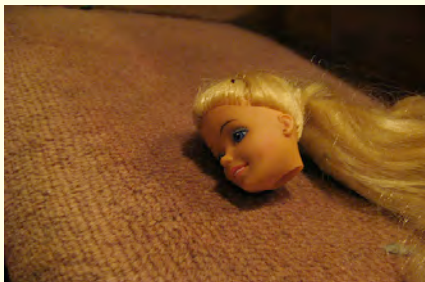
## Agree or Disagree!

Refer to the poem to help explain your ideas.



1. Ted Hughes is trying to show a life-force that is clearly non-human, the wildness and brutality of a creature in its natural state.
2. The hawk represents the way power and wealth preys on the weak and poor in this world.
3. Because of Hughes' respect for nature, it is highly unlikely that he would use a hawk to describe humans.
4. Using human language, the poet tries to explore how alien the hawk's view of life is to our own.
5. Hughes makes use of the hawk to mock mankind.

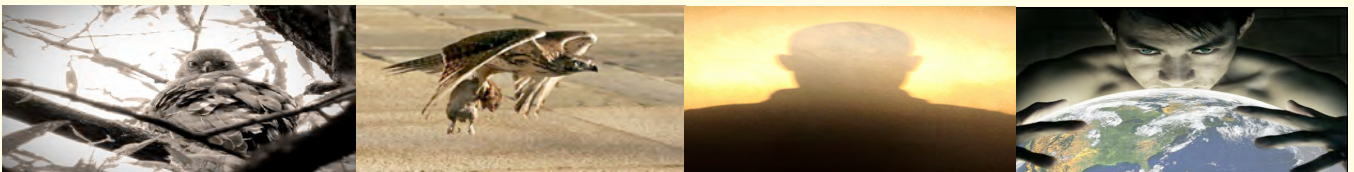
Look at the images below:



Can you find the quotation/idea that they refer to?

## Question Time!

1. How does the poet create a sense of the hawk's superiority?
2. Why do you think the poet is written in present tense?
3. Could this poem be linked to the government and political leaders?
4. Is the reader supposed to agree with the hawk's opinion of itself?
5. Why do you think the poet has chosen a hawk to convey his opinions?



## Links:

Biography of poet:

<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=7078>

Analysis of poem:

<http://www.s-cool.co.uk/gcse/english/poetry-of-ted-hughes/revise-it/hawk-roosting>

<http://www.brighthub.com/arts/books/articles/68268.aspx>

<http://www.english-e-corner.com/comparativeCulture/core/introduction/frameset/hawkbody.html>

Questions on the Poem:

<http://knowledge4africa.com/english/poetry/hawk-roosting-c.jsp>

(Channel 4's clipbank contains video clips of poet reading poem and an analysis of poem - subscription needed)

