

Rhetorical figures as embellishing faculties of Ted Hughes' compositions

¹A. Fredrick Ruban, ² Dr. Helen Unius Backiavathy

¹ M.Phil., Research Scholar, Department of English, Karunya University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Karunya University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

The research paper titled "Rhetorical Figures as Embellishing Faculties of Ted Hughes' Compositions" has its dual objective as to draw out the beauty of nature and its object with an exceptional reference to the functions of the rhetorical figures such as metaphor, personification and simile. It strives to scrutinize the absolute functions of the rhetorical figures in the select poems of Ted Hughes' *River* which was published in 1983. The select poems for the study are as follow: "Salmon-taking Times", "Low Water", "Japanese River Tales", "Ophelia", "Performance", "The Morning Before Christmas", "Dee" and "In the Dark Violin of the Valley". Being a renowned British poet of the late century, he has discovered many aspects of nature and has explored a load of innovative literary ideas through his travel and close relationship with nature which are vivid in his poetry collection - *River*.

Keywords: nature, beauty, metaphor, personification and simile

Introduction

The derivational word Rhetoric is of Greek origin – 'rhetorike' which means the art of oratory. Therefore, the term rhetoric is explicated as 'the art of speaking or writing effectively' and 'the principles and rules of composition and the study of them'. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, rhetoric is emphasized as the art of using language in an impressive way. Therefore, Aristotle has declared, the style of prose is distinct from that of poetry. Employing Rhetoric figures in poetry is a technique of employing language effectively and persuasively. It is generally believed that rhetorical figures or devices are used to achieve particular emphasis and effect of the user.

Hailed as a nature poet and bestowed as a poet laureate of Britain from 1984 to 1998 is Ted Hughes, the prominent and prolific writer of 20th century British literature. Edward James Hughes is commonly referred as Ted Hughes was born in West Yorkshire and lived between August 17, 1930 and October 28, 1998. His enthusiasm in poetry began in his adolescence and he was motivated by his English master, John Fisher. His works are the evidences of his obsessed soul with animals; in addition to his admiration for the beauty and the violence of nature. His esteemed behaviour towards nature and beautifying the context with the help of rhetorical figures are apparent in his poetry collection - *River*. The rhetorical figures serve as a device to carry out his perception about nature and its beauty.

Metaphor

Quintilian, Roman rhetorician, has professed metaphor as 'the supreme ornament of style'. The Poets and Orators often make use of metaphor in order to strengthen their style and technique, and also to capture the attention of the audience. The metaphor is a word or phrase, employed to an object or action to which it is hardly applicable. "In a metaphor, a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting

a comparison." M. H. Abrams (97). Ted Hughes has employed metaphor as a rhetorical figure in his poetic compositions to the least degree.

The poetic line, "I touch it and its beauty-frailty crumples" of "Salmon-taking Times" (19) underlines the hidden metaphor. The poet says that he is touching a fish and adoring its beauty which means the extraordinary splendour of the fish. Beauty is abstract which cannot be felt by touching but he adds that he has touched its beauty. It indicates the poet has employed the metaphorical meaning in the context rather a literal meaning. In "Low Water", the poet has personified the river and calls her as a beautiful ideal woman, and the line validates it: "The river is a beautiful idle woman." (2). He has covertly compared the river with a woman and this perception is explicit when he calls the river as a beautiful ideal woman. He beautifies the river in his portrayal by metaphorically mentioning her as a beautiful woman and also she is pictured as a perfect figure in Hughes' perception. The beauty of the river is exaggerated and explicated by the metaphorical statement: "The river is a beautiful idle woman." "Low Water" (2). The poet has desired to elevate the beauty of the river through his words; hence, he has given an image of a woman to the river. Thus, the metaphorical treatment of the poet is apparent with regard to his elevated style which naturally stirs the intense emotion of the readers.

Personification:

In art, personification represents an inanimate thing as if it were human. As a rhetorical figure, personification gives human qualities to animals, objects or ideas. It is commonly prevalent in poetry to enhance the poet's idea, feeling and emotion, and to amuse the readers. Personification at times creates suspicion and confusion to the readers in the case of interpretation. Sometimes unfocused reading of personified content leads to misinterpretation of the text.

Ted Hughes has employed personification to describe fish, insect and bird in a few poems of *River*. "Japanese River

Tales”, “Ophelia”, “Performance” and “The Morning Before Christmas” are the poetic works emphasize the prevalence of personification. Using such technique also indicates the respect of the poet towards the non-human creatures which also automatically increase the beauty of the poetic lines. The poetic work, “Japanese River Tales” has got the special reference because of the function of personification in it. The poem marks the function of both ‘he’ and ‘she’, third person singular pronouns with extreme regard to splendour. It portrays a sea bird named gull and throughout the poem the bird gets a feminine description. Ted Hughes depicts her beauty gradually to bring aesthetic stress in the poem. The following lines of “Japanese River Tales” highlight the functions of ‘she’ and ‘he’ as personifying devices, in addition to the aesthetic picturization of the gull and the river:

I
 At her hair, at her raiment
 Glint-slippered
 Over the stubble,
 naked under
 Her light robe, jewels
 In her hair, in her ears, at her bare throat

II
 The lithe river rejoices all morning
 In his juicy bride-the snow princess
 Who peeped from clouds, and chose him,
 and descended.

 The beauty from her skull. The socket, in fact,
 Are root-arches-empty
 To ashes of stars. Her kiss

 Her talons
 Lengthened by moonlight, numb open (5-16, 18-20, 31-33, 36-37)

The poem has two parts; the first part exclusively describes the beauty of the gull and the second part gives lesser emphasis to the bird. The feminine description of the first part creates no doubt about the personification but the second part of the poem clues the identity of ‘she’. In addition, the second part gives mention to a masculine character and the identity is soon marked as the river. Usually, Ted Hughes personifies river with the pronoun ‘she’ but in “Japanese River Tales” he has used it unusually to differentiate the gull and the river. The pronoun, ‘she’ is paid more attention in the poem by describing her in both stanzas of the poem. The poetic lines elevate the beauty of the gull to a woman and the dignity of the river as same as of a gentleman. The poet calls the snow princess by which the function of personification is vivid, in addition to the aesthetic stress. Admiring the beauty of nature and its objects are commonly found in Hughes’ composition but “Japanese River Tales” stand high because of the skilled style that is being utilized. The way Ted Hughes admires the gull is clear through “The beauty from her skull ...” “Japanese River Tales” (31), besides, it also clues at the aesthetic beauty of the gull. Although the personification instigates perplexion at the initial reading, the idea is confirmed and validated by reading “... High gulls / Her talons / Lengthened by moonlight, numb open” “Japanese River

Tales” (25, 36, 37); thus the lines confirm that the poet describes a bird, gull. The poet reaches the height of aesthetic depiction of the bird through his poetic language in the following lines:

A spill of glitters

 dangling from her grasp
 As she flies
 Through the shatter of space and
 Out of being. “Japanese River Tales” (40-44)

The poet portrays the splendorous scenery of the bird spilling glitters as she flies up. Her glistening flying beauty induces an aesthetic appeal. Moreover, personifying the bird has raised the aesthetic splendour of the poetic language in addition to his idea and feeling. Above all the poetic lines mark the imaginative power of Ted Hughes with regard to his admiration of nature and its objects. From the explication, it is clear that the poet desires and loves to respect and admire nature and its components, to disclose them he has personified the objects of nature in his poetic composition. The poem vividly shows that the poet has raised the bird to a dignified status of a feminine beautiful personality.

Like “Japanese River Tales”, “Ophelia” is also beautified with a feminine description of a darkfish. “Ophelia” is noteworthy for the sophisticated description and obscured personification. However, the obscured personification acts to fragrance the poetic work with an aesthetic appeal. The darkfish is personified and stated as “There she goes” “Ophelia” (12) by giving much place to obscurity. Towards the end of the poem, the obscurity is being clarified by the poet by claiming that ‘she’ is a darkfish. Though the concealment of the identity of the personification adds obscurity and perplexion to the readers, it does not prolong instead, it is cleared at the end of the poem. This indicates the dexterous and smart style of the poet.

“Performance” is another poetic work which is styled as “Japanese River Tales” is. The poem personifies a damselfly overtly in the content and lightens the aesthetic appearance of the insect with respect to the feminine portrayal. The feminine beauty of the damselfly is apparent:

The damselfly, with offstage, inaudible shriek
 Reappears, weightless.

Hover-poised, in her snake-skin leotards,
 Her violet-dark elegance.

Eyelash-delicate, a Dracula beauty,
 In her acetylene jewels.

Her mascara smudged, her veils shimmer-fresh-
 “Performance” (2-8)

The poet aesthetically depicts the damselfly pretty good and lines have delineated it. It appears as if the poet is picturing a woman, especially, the words; ‘elegance, eyelash-delicate, beauty, mascara and smudged’ instigates the doubtful mind about the description. Generally, those terms are associated with women and they are being commonly used to describe women. Using feminine explication makes the physical appearance and beauty of the damselfly vivid. Metaphorically, her beauty is mentioned as a ‘Dracula beauty’, it is all because of her threatening appearance. As Judith Wright, an Australian

poetess asserted, seek beauty in ugliness and splendour in terror, Ted Hughes has attempted seeking beauty in ugliness and splendour in terror, and "Performance" is a paradigm of it. The poem divulges the truth that personification embellishes the poetic context with the function and assistance of poetic language.

Personification is employed to the minimum degree in "The Morning Before Christmas". The personified character is identified as a hen fish by the overt composition of the following poetic lines:

Then a hen fish-ten pounds-lurching alive.
Rough grip and her head in an armpit.
Now the thumb and finger kneading her belly.
The frost-smoking sun embellishes her beauty,
Her red-black love-paints, her helpless noble mask.

"The Morning Before Christmas" (23-27)

The identity of 'her' is disclosed at the beginning which leads to no confusion and doubt. The hen fish gets a feminine delineation and the use of 'sun embellishes her beauty' adds more beauty to the context. It also reveals the cause for the embellishment of the hen fish and also clue that she is beautiful because of the sun. This displays that personifying the hen fish has beautified the context and the poetic language much vividly to a great extent.

Simile:

The rhetorical figure, simile compares apparently by displaying the sameness between two different things. It makes, at least, a similarity between two dissimilar objects vividly with the assistance of 'like' or 'as'. As it is a device used to compare it is called as a rhetorical analogy. Comparing with other genres of literature, the stylistic, simile is prevalent in poetry. Poets employ it to add beauty to different things and mark the peculiar identities. It also adds beauty to the language and content considerably with its varied comparisons and precise note. As a poet, Ted Hughes too has employed simile in his poetry to render an aesthetic tone. Actually, its function is found in mere degree and it is challenging to trace out the function of simile in his composition.

In "Whiteness" the presence of simile is apparent: "Trout, like a hidden man's cough, / Slash under dripping roots." (6, 7). Trout seems to slash the dripping roots and the cutting noise sounds similar to that of a hidden man's cough. The poet compares two different sounds to show the sameness found in them. The poetic work, "Dee" throws light on the aesthetic function of the simile. The lines "The high, frozen bosom, wears this river / Like a peculiar fine jewel." "Dee" (21, 22) highlights the presence of simile and also the fragrance of aestheticism. The poetic lines reveal that the frozen snow has covered the river and decorated it like a peculiar jewel. Jewel refers to precious stone such as a diamond, ruby, etc..., the poet says that the frozen snow wears the river like a peculiar jewel. It unfolds the glistening and beautifying ability of the frozen snow. The poet gives the fragrance of aestheticism by describing the realistic beauty of the snowy scenery that he has witnessed. In order to explicate the snowy scenery, he has used the terms such as 'jewel' and 'glistening' which have aesthetically beautified the scenery. And the description has demanded to make avail of the stylistic device, simile. Thus, employing simile in the context has embellished the poetic language as well as the content of the poem.

Ted Hughes has used simile in "Salmon-taking Times" and the lines, "It is like a religious moment, slightly dazzling. / It is like a shower of petals of eglantine" (23, 23) validate it with regards to its function. The function of the simile is identified as to cater aesthetic feel. The poetic lines have an appealing and celebrating mood in the light of the stylistic device, simile. The context explains that the poet hears a ringing sound and the mood of the context is interpreted as nuptial bliss. From the poet's idea, the tone of aestheticism is vivid in addition to his power of imagination. Moreover, the context marks the assumption capability of the poet. The poem pictures that the poet touches a fish and observes its apparel beauty but it is in the state of frailty and it is mentioned as weak wreckage. He hears the ringing sound of the air which blows to his ears and the poet confesses that it is like a religious moment. The calm atmosphere has enhanced the wedding fragrance and he concludes that the moment was like showering the petals of eglantine, a variety of wild rose. The poet has employed simile to depict the atmosphere that he was in. And it is a calm and nuptial mood where he feels the shower of the petals of eglantine. Thus, the poem picturizes the beautiful scenery with regard to its grandeur.

The poetic work titled "In the Dark Violin of the Valley" deals with sweet music. The poet has styled simile extraordinarily while depicting the music that echoed to his ears. The poetic work elevates the texture and aesthetic tone through various vivid comparisons of the poet. The presence of simile in the context shows the interconnectedness of his idea:

All night a music
Like a needle sewing body
And soul together, and sewing soul
And sky together and sky and earth
Together and sewing the river to the sea.

"In the Dark Violin of the Valley" (1-5)

The poet tries delineating the music that he has heard and it has demanded to employ simile. Though the context underlines the presence of simile merely in one line, it seems the ideas are intertwined and a single simile functions to describe the entire idea that is the music. The music is like a needle which sewed a body and a soul, soul and sky, sky and earth, and eventually the river and sea. The words try revealing the exact music that the poet has heard but, unfortunately, the words have failed to describe the specified music. Hughes has given only clues and proximity of the sound that has been audible to him. The poem underlines the presence of simile and its function in producing aesthetic tone both through language and content.

Conclusion:

The poems of *River* are being beautified by the rhetorical figures in order to cater the aesthetic sense to the readers. As a nature poet, Ted Hughes has paid vigilance to both the form and content of poetry to earn fame and reputation. He has employed the rhetorical figures such as metaphor, personification and simile to enhance his style and the beauty of his compositions. It is explicit that he has been inspired and influenced by the filmy pulchritude of nature; therefore, he has made avail of the rhetorical figures to embellish his perception. His select poems of *River* have exclusively portrayed the aesthetic appeal of nature and its object with an exceptional reference to the functions of the rhetorical figures. His composition has illustrated and substantiated that he has

made avail of the rhetorical figures to promote his views and perception about nature at an esteemed degree. It also reminds that the aesthetic appeal of nature and the function of rhetorical figures move parallel.

Reference:

1. Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Bangalore: Prism, 1999. Print.
2. Bassnett, Susan. *Ted Hughes*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2009. Print.
3. Choudhary, Hira Lal. *UGC-NET/JEF/SET English Literature*. Agra: Upkar, 2013. Print.
4. Harris, A. eds. *A Handbook of Rhetorical Devices*. Virtualsalt, 19 Nov. 2013. Web. 20 Feb. 2016.
5. Hughes, Ted. *River*. London: Faber and Faber, 2011. Print.
6. Peck, John., and Martin Coyle. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Print.