

A review of the work and play poem by ted hughes

[Business](#), [Work](#)



This poem is about a comparison between a swallow and human beings that are on a day trip. The swallow is at work in the poem and is feeling content. The humans, however, are supposed to be relaxing and having fun, but they feel miserable instead. With this, there is irony here with the title, as the swallow is working but having fun. The writer, I feel, is being biased in his poem. He tends to be in favour of the swallow. The poem is describing the people as 'polluting' the environment. The message of the poem is that we shouldn't destroy our environment and our health by 'baking' ourselves under the sun.

The poem talks about the tourists arriving and then leaving unhappily. The writer is also describing the swallow's day, what it does to entertain itself and returning to its home at night. The poem is split into four, unequal stanzas. The first three stanzas, start off with a description of the swallow and then humans. The last stanza, however, starts off with a description of the humans and then the swallow. This makes us stop, think and more eager to finish the poem, as it's a change of pattern. The writer, perhaps wants to leave the reader with a positive and happy image rather than a negative and discomfoting image.

In the first three stanzas, the end of the two longest lines rhyme, forming a sort of rhyming couplet, e. g. "... dust" and "... bust" in the first stanza. In the first stanza, the writer, uses alliteration in the first phrase, " The swallow of summer, she toils all the summer" the use of 's' words. This gives the line a sort of rhythm to it. The metaphor, " A blue-dark knot of glittering voltage,"

gives us this impression of a bright, powerful and energetic image of the swallow.

The word, 'glittering' also gives us an image of the swallow's shiny feathers. A whiplash swimmer... " gives us a sense of the swallow's speed, rapid. Then the poet writes, " But... " which is used at the beginning of each of the human's description in the first three stanzas, a form of repetition. The poem gives us a happy, positive image, when describing the swallow, at the start of the first three stanzas. Then, he uses 'But' when starting to describe the humans, which start to give us a miserable and gloomy feel towards the humans. The writer, uses the metaphor 'Serpent' to describe the long line of cars trying to get through traffic.

This is a good metaphor to use because, if you are looking from a birds-eye view, the roof of the cars, looks like the scales of a snake. There is also, how the cars move along the swerving roads, like how a snake moves. "... that crawls through the dust" this metaphor, gives us an image of the slow-moving cars. A serpent, is a venomous creature, a sign of evil, the devil, which is a sign, that the writer is being biased in his poem. The phrases " shimmering exhaust" and " its fever in ocean" are telling us that they've already polluted the water before they, the humans, have even arrived there.

In the second stanza, the writer uses a metaphor, "... the barbed harpoon" in the first line, to describe the swallow. This gives us an impression of the swallow's impact and body shape, as she dives in. The writer uses alliteration

in the second line, "... flings from the furnace" and the word 'flings' creates a sense of movement, it makes the reader read with expression. The metaphor, "... a rainbow of purples" creates an attractive image for the reader.

In the third line, he uses alliteration again, "... he pond and is perfect" and this is creating a positive image. In the description of the humans, he uses repetition, " But the serpent of cars... " to make you remember it, so it stays in your head that negative feeling. Another metaphor used is, " Disgorges its organs" which is referring to the people, making their way out of the cars, like a snake, shedding its skin, this is giving us another unpleasant image.

The two similes used, " Which roll like tomatoes" and " Nude as tomatoes" gives us a negative image of these large, lazy, sunburnt people, lying on the beach. With sand in their creases" gives us an uncomfortable feeling. The word 'cringe' in the last line gives this embarrassed feeling, a negative feeling. The writer, is clearly using a lot of negative images to bring out his message. The onomatopoeic word 'screech' is used to give us an image of the negative sounds on the beach, the people's discomfort. In the third stanza, the writer uses a lot of alliteration in the first two lines. The use of the 's' words, 'swallow', 'summer' is a bit onomatopoeic, producing a sense of the bird's movement.

He uses the word 'seamstress' to describe the swallow, meaning a dressmaker. This metaphor is used to show how she sews something using the sky and water as her material, which makes it now an extended

metaphor. In the third line, it is describing its movement, the twists and swerves. The word 'draws' provide a long sound and the word 'knots' provide an abrupt, short sound, perhaps showing the swallow's movement, gliding and then halting abruptly.

The writer then uses 'But' again and brings back the negative image. The humans are described as " ... laid out like wounded" the metaphor is showing their pain in sunburn, laid out in rows, endangering themselves, like a line of wounded soldiers. The metaphors, " Flat as in ovens" and " Roasting and basting" gives us the impression they are being cooked. They're being compared to cooking meat. The word 'basting' is describing the humans putting on sun cream and there's a bit of irony between the way we cook meat. The word 'torment' shows us their agony and the word 'blue' gives us an impression of the heat, as hot as a blue flame and the sun's harmful rays.

The lack of language in the description of the humans makes the reader read with one breath, leaving them in discomfort, to perhaps experience how the humans are actually feeling. The line " Their heads are transistors" is describing their heads as being heat damaged and they're like robots, moving a limited amount. " Their teeth grit on sand grains" is sort of a repetition of the line " with sand in their creases" in the second stanza, to remind us of the humans agony. The hyperbole and metaphor, " Man eating flies" shows us their annoyance and pain with the insects.

Their 'electric shock needles' make conditions worse, more pain, the physical horror of it all and it gives us a diseased image, another negative image. In

the last stanza, there is use of alliteration, " They can climb in their cars... " The word 'climb' is used to describe how the humans get into their cars, showing their tiredness. The repetition with, "... raw bodies, raw faces" provides us with an image of these sunburnt people, the colour of raw meat, blood red and the repetition 'hammers' this image into our heads. The line, " And headache it homeward" gives us an impression of these tired and hot people returning home.

The metaphor and hyperbole " a car full of squabbles" and the line, " And sobbing and stickiness" shows us this negative image of how the children in the car, are moaning and throwing tantrums. Then, the writer is using repetition again, " With sand in their crannies" a similar description is used in the previous two stanzas. It shows us that even though they are going home, they still feel uncomfortable. The line " Inhaling petroleum" brings us back to the message of the poem, with the humans polluting the planet. The writer describes it as pouring out from the 'foxgloves'. Foxgloves are poisonous flowers.

The writer here is perhaps comparing the exhaust to these flowers. The flowers produce a poison, venom, which a serpent produces also, one damages your health and the other damages the environment, they are both dangerous. The poem then moves on to describing how the swallow returns home. Alliteration is used again, " The swallow of summer, cartwheeling through the crimson," to give the line a rhythm. The word 'cartwheeling' gives us this image of the bird flying home with happiness, through 'crimson',

this is describing the wonderful sunset, the orange, yellow and red background.

Touches the honey-slow river and turning" the word 'honey' gives us a sweet image. The river is a honey colour, due to the sun's crimson rays reflecting onto the water. The writer wants to leave us with a pleasant image at the end of the poem. The swallow is described as 'hand stretched' when returning to its home. The words are showing us that the swallow is welcomed back, it is also perhaps referring to God's hands reaching out to this wonderful creature he has created. The humans, however, "... headache it homeward" Nobody welcomed them home, their journey home, was destroying the environment.

The last line of the poem, " A boomerang of rejoicing shadow. " leaves the reader in content but also thinking about the whole message of the poem. The metaphor used, 'boomerang' is a good metaphor to use because a boomerang always returns when it's thrown. The writer has used three different, but similar and powerful metaphors to describe the swallow. The three metaphors he has used, has provided us with a powerful image of the swallow. The swallow is rejoicing because, everyone has left, her day is over and now she can relax with happiness.

I think, this poem has really made me think, that a day out can really cause so much danger to us and to our planet. The irony of the poem, makes you think that a swallow who works hard can still be so happy with its life and there's us, who laze about and is feeling unhappy, so why do we do it? The

writer has used a lot of good descriptive metaphors and similes in his poem. I liked the metaphors he used when describing the humans on the beach, "Are laid out like wounded", "Flat as in ovens" and "Roasting and Basting".

It really emphasises the whole idea of the humans endangering their lives for some pleasure but they still feel unhappy at the same time. Ted Hughes has really shown his point of view about the situation. He has done this by showing such negative images when describing the humans, making out that the humans have been put on this planet just to destroy it and the animals are living how God would like the humans to live. The way, how the poem is structured to how the writer wants the reader to feel, is a good effect. This brings some realism to the poem and it involves the reader more.