

The jaguar by ted hughes commentary



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The poem “ The Jaguar” is written by the former British Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes. It is written in the third person perspective, describing the animal’s attitudes in the zoo. The speaker of the poem is unknown, but one could assume that Ted Hughes is the speaker himself. The poem describes the lifestyle of animals at the zoo and their different attitudes towards their entrapment in their cage, and tributes the majesty of the Jaguar.

It compares the bored and lazy moods of animals, to the energetic, lively and adventurous mood of the Jaguar, which does not see his entrapped life, as anything which could stop him from behaving as if it were in his natural environment. This creates a rather reflective mood, and shows that the speaker feels the animals should not be kept in captivity. “ The Jaguar” is a free verse poem, which is structured on five stanzas with four lines. The basic rhyme pattern that it follows is A-B-B-A except for the last stanza which follows C-D-C-D.

This makes the poem sound more pleasant and rhythmic, because rhymes make a poem easier to read, and create a certain rhythm in it. Another factor that makes the poem rhythmic is the effective use of enjambment that the author has made to accelerate the speed of the poem in certain places for example, between the first and second stanza, where the technique is used to match the rhythm and tension of the poem, making it sound as if the Jaguar is running.

The poem’s clever use of techniques such as similes and metaphors clearly puts an image in the reader’s mind of the actions of animals and their ways of life. The quote “ the parrots shriek as if they are on fire” gives us an

accurate suggestion of what we would normally see at a day in the zoo, suggesting that the parrots are very loud, and may be annoyed by each other. The poet uses the quote “ fatigued with indolence, tiger and lion lie still as the sun” to describe how bored and static the tiger and lion are, and compares them to the lively Jaguar “ But who runs like the rest past these arrives”.

The author has not used a lot of personification, but an example of it is “ breathing straw” which suggests that, as a result of the animals sleeping, the straw which lays on top of them seems as if it is breathing, projecting an image of the scene in our minds. The poem is rich in sensory imagery, which is used to describe the environment, behavior and atmosphere of the zoo and the animals.

An example of sensory imagery is “ prison darkness”, which is used to explain the condition of the cage in which the Jaguar is kept, which is compared to a prison, and suggests that the writer is quite cynical about animals in captivity. The effect of the poet’s use of imagery is that it gives more detail of what is happening and therefore, it drives the reader more involved and expands their understanding of the poem. There is a certain choice of words which the author has used in order to describe the behavior of the animals in the zoo.

He tends to select words which portrait the animals as very “ lazy”, “ bored”, and tired of their encaged life, so that they are “ fatigued with indolence” which suggest that they spend most of the time sleeping and that they are bored to a point which exhausts them. He also uses this word

selection to put down the other animals and project the Jaguar as the most lively of them. For example he uses the expression “ strut like cheap tarts” to describe the way of how the parrots try to attract passers by, and to try to get some food from them, “ attract the stroller with the nut”.

Repetition and consonance are also frequently used in the poem. The author uses repetition saying “ cage after cage seems empty” in order to make the zoo seem very large having a variety of animals and many cages but even so, the cages seem empty because of the motionless animals, and later projects the Jaguar as the most energetic one. The poet has also used consonance to make the poem more pleasant and interesting, because repetition of certain sounds makes the message more effective for the reader.

An example of it's use is “ short fierce fuse” which repeats the sounds of “ s” and “ f”. This quote suggests that the Jaguar is short tempered and aggressive, ready to explode any moment. The technique could also be described as alliteration. Overall , “ The Jaguar” has a strong meaning and carries a thoughtful message. It is mainly written to describe how the encaged life in a zoo changes an animal's behavior and their entire style of living, transforming it into a monotonous lifestyle, comparing their bizarre lifestyles to the undomesticated Jaguar's.

The message that the author is trying to pass through this poem is that the entrapment of animals is not healthy nor is it ethical for the animals, and therefore their behavior becomes abnormal. Ted Hughes has made the poem very effective for the reader as a result of his accessional use of similes,

metaphors, and his imaginative use of imagery, which make the reader visualize and imagine what the caged animals feel, and what they go through in a daily basis. It makes the reader wonder if animal entrapment is right, or not, and makes them wonder if the Jaguar is truly such a magical animal.