

# [A commentary of ted hughes’s "swifts”](https://assignbuster.com/a-commentary-of-ted-hughess-swifts/)

A Commentary on ‘ Swifts’ by Ted Hughes The poem ‘ Swifts’ by Ted Hughes states its topic -birds – in the title. The entire poem is laden with bright, exciting imagery, and appears to have little hidden meaning- it merely illustrates the behaviour and movement of the swifts. The first line of the poem sets the atmosphere by stating the date: “ fifteenth of May,” and a prominent observation of the environment- “ cherry blossom.

” Hughes sets the scene at the beginning of summer. Automatically, bright colours and lazy summer images come to mind. This is the period in which nature is the most alive- when the birds return North to breed in the heat. The poem is probably set in England, considering that Hughes is an English poet. It appears from the third line that the speaker is probably Ted Hughes.

It is written in first person, but it seems that Hughes is not alone. The words “ Look! They’re back! Look! ” are probably spoken to a companion. The speaker is seemingly fascinated by the birds. Throughout the poem, swifts are depicted as both ethereal beings and fragile creatures.

Line two has them “ materialising” from the “ tip of a long scream of needle”. This needle indicates the pinpoint accuracy with which the birds are flying, seemingly with a preconceived destination. The line “‘ Look! They’re back! Look! ‘ And they’re gone,” shows that the birds seem to disappear and reappear at will, like angels. The poem continues this pattern of God-depiction with references to power, such as “ erupting across yard stones,” and “ leaden velocity,” contrasted by “ butterfly lightness” which shows omnipotence in relevance to physical mass. In the third stanza, Hughes centres the birds’ arrival as the sole indication that summer is returning, and that nature is in good working order. In stark contrast, Hughes also speaks of the swifts’ vulnerability.

He talks of how their nests were destroyed by rats. The swifts seem to shun the poet, as if blaming him for their offspring’s deaths. The poet shows that despite the swifts’ godlike strength, perhaps they are also aware of their transience. They are not arrogant, and feel taken advantage of.

In the eighth stanza, Hughes mentions a young bird that falls into his yard. He “ bat-crawls” with his “ tiny useless feet,” like a “ broken toy. ” The speaker then goes on to talk of how the bird requires constant tending, when “ fiery hospital hours in a kitchen” follow. The bird is described as a “ goblin savage,” suggesting mischief and waywardness, but in the ninth stanza, this is contrasted, when he is again portrayed as an ethereal being, “ blind, like an angel. ” He is compared to the Greek God of Youth when Hughes refers to him as “ My little Apollo.

This shows that, despite his vulnerability, the poet still holds great respect for the fledgling. The form is fairly free, but there are a total of seven four-line stanzas. The poem is brimming with enjambments, bizarre punctuation and caesuras. The structure emulates the movement of a flock of swifts: seemingly inconsistent – but perhaps bearing careful deliberation behind the formation.

Just as one cannot know what is in the mind of a swift, one cannot know what was on the mind of Hughes when he arranged the poem. Birds may fly in whatever direction they like, or they may have a plan as to where they are heading. The poem’s sequence could purely be improvised, although Hughes could also have planned and restructured the poem several times. The use of the word ‘ scream’ is an extended figure throughout the poem. The word may indicate that the birds are faster than the sound that they leave behind them, but it is also possible that it has been employed as a trope.

The word may not describe a sound, but rather a tangible object or physical shape; perhaps a jet stream. The language used to describe the flock is often applied to jets and racing horses (e. g. ‘ jockeying across each other,’ ‘ racing their discords,’ ‘ speedway goggles,’ ‘ speed-burned’).

Through the diction, one also envisions a warlike atmosphere. Words like ‘ shrapnel-scatter terror,’ ‘ bolas,’ ‘ whirling blades’ and ‘ arrow-thwack’ articulates the violence and the aggression of the birds. However, the swifts are also depicted as delicate and fragile. They ‘ sparkle,’ ‘ tremble for balance.

’ They ‘ hover-search’ and are ‘ gnat-whisp frail. They are in possession of the aforementioned ‘ butterfly lightness. ’ The fledgling tangles ‘ his flails’ and ‘ shrieks thinly,’ drawing attention to his weakness. For the most part, the poem is written with a broken, hasty quality. The speaker is deeply enlivened by the life that these birds lead.

However, on the eighth stanza forward, there is a turning point in the poem’s tone. The speaker mourns for the death of his ‘ little Apollo. ’ His deep admiration for the fledgling is apparent in these last lines.