

# The jaguar by ted hughes



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Ted Hughes' poem 'The Jaguar' describes the animals in a zoo and their lifestyles. It also compares them to the jaguar, which is an animal that lives very differently to the others because of the way it views its life. Yet how does the poem depict the jaguar as a powerful and free animal? The first stanza of Hughes' poem the jaguar is:

' The apes yawn and adore their fleas in the sun.

' The parrots shriek as if they were on fire, or strut

Like cheap tarts to attract the stroller with the nut.'

' Fatigued with indolence, tiger and lion'

From the very first three words it is clear that the apes are tired. The fact that they are in the sun adds to the sleepy air and the dull feeling of relaxation that was deliberately used to convey the monotonous, boring lives of the animals in the zoo. In the second line the imagery of the parrots being on fire could represent their brightly coloured feathers or their shrieks of boredom. Continuing onto the third line with the parrots 'strutting like cheap tarts' to find a mate and fight with each other proves that their lives are quite repetitive and tamed. It is said in the final line that most of the animals in the zoo are "fatigued with indolence", yet however the jaguar still rages and runs in his cage. That shows his power over the other animals because of his will to act like a wild animal where as the other animals compared to the jaguar have tamed themselves down to fit into their caged lives. The second stanza of Ted Hughes' poem is:

' Lie still as the sun. The boa-constrictor's coil

Is a fossil. Cage after cage seems empty, or

Stinks of sleepers from the breathing straw.

It might be painted on a nursery wall.'

In this stanza Hughes suggests the immobility of this scene by comparing the boa-constrictor to a fossil and the zoo to a nursery wall painting. This in all shows how the zoo has constricted and forced the animals to change their lives to fit the zoo lifestyle. With the repetition used in 'Cage after cage' he in fact proves that most of the animals in the zoo are doing nothing, making their cages uninteresting to look at; almost as if there is nothing in them. It is also said that the cage 'stinks of sleepers from the breathing straw' which shows that the air is stale and that there is not the slightest bit of rage in any of these animals who appear to have given up on any form of freedom in life.

The poem is based on uneven rhymes; the first two stanzas have regular beats suggesting the monotony of the zoo life. Then, the beats become very irregular with no rhythmic pattern proving the wild fury and effervescence of the beast. The numerous cuts in the rhythm show the movement of the animal, switching direction furiously at any moment. The first two stanzas put the jaguar into context; all the animals of the zoo are bored and in a lethargic state. In the last three stanzas Hughes starts to describe the jaguar and the differences between him and the other animals. The third stanza of Hughes' poem is:

'But who runs like the rest past these arrives

At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,

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As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged

Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes'

The third stanza describes how the jaguar intrigues the crowd with his powerful image and fury in his eyes. The crowd are being controlled almost hypnotised by the jaguar's running back and forth within his cage. For the mesmerised faces of the crowd the jaguar finds his fury and unleashes it to his 'fans'. Seeing an animal that angry and that close up surprises the crowd and that's why they keep walking past him and stopping in their tracks to watch him. With the lazy almost boring attitudes of the other animals in the zoo the jaguar rises up to be the main attraction in this 'prison'. This attitude towards the powerful jaguar is also carried on through Stanza four which is:

' On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom

The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,

By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear

He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him'

The fourth stanza shows even more clearly the realisation how the jaguar feels there is 'no cage to him' and that there are no restrictions to what he does inside that same cage. The jaguar has also been depicted as powerful in comparison to the other animals, which have let the cage become their way of living. The jaguar instead is totally ignorant of the cage and instead still believes himself to be in his old environment, and since he is by himself

he is automatically the ruler of his environment. The crowd see how he still has the hunter in his eyes and a 'short fierce fuse' that could erupt at any moment. In the final stanza his power is even more evident and you see his want for freedom. The final stanza is:

' More than to the visionary in his cell:

His stride is wildernesses of freedom:

The world rolls under the long thrust of his paw.

Over the cage his horizons come.'

This final stanza discusses the jaguar's sense of freedom and power over the people. The world is controlled by 'the long thrust of his paw' and enticed by his wild heart and free spirit in his mind. Despite the fact that he is behind bars his nature cannot be held in check. The bars stop him, but they do not 'cage' his spirit. The wildness is in his blood. He is powerful in the way he moves, which is with refinement and at some points rage, because he moves in a way that illustrates power. He believes himself to be powerful and therefore he is.

The poet with the help of such vivid expressions successfully depicts the characteristics of the jaguar and his symbol of power. Overall, the Hughes successfully conveys the jaguar as the most powerful being in every respect addressed and shows that in comparison to all the other animals the jaguar with the fury in his eyes and the wilderness in his heart is the best symbol of power.