The Function of Animal Imagery in Edwin Muir Poet

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ملخص البحث:

يزخر الشعر الحديث بصور الحيوان التي توظف كعنصر فاعل في إخراج القصيدة بأبهى حُلة. وتنوع استخدام هذه الصور حتى كأنك تستطيع التميز ونسب الصور لشعراء مختلفين. وقليل هم الشعراء الذين ميزوا أنفسهم أو بالأحرى عرفوا حصرا لإستخدامهم هذه الصور الحيوانية لاسيما الشاعر أدوين ميور فيكون الحيوان لديه أكثر تفوقا في بعض الأحيان من البشر وله الفضل بالأحتفاظ ب"الشرارة الألهية" إذا ماستخدما إصطلحاً إفلاطونياً .يتطرف الشاعر ميور وهو يتخذ موقفا رومانطيقياً حين يعتقد أن الفوضى المعاصرة منسوبة الى الصلة المقطوعة بين الأنسان والطبيعة لاسيما بين الأنسان والحيوان الذي يمثل جزءا مهما من تلك الطبيعة يحاول البحث هاهنا أن يسبر أغوار بعض الرموز للصورة الحيوانية التي ينطوي عليها شعرميور وكيف تعمل حسب فلسفته0

الكلمات المفتاحية: خيول والد الشاعر ادوين ميور, االجرر التي ترعرع وتعلم فيها الشاعر،حقبة او فترة، السيرة الذاتية0

Abstract

Modern poetry abounds in animal imagery which serves as a functional element in the modern poem. The imagery is so varied that one can distinguish what features of these images could be ascribed to a certain poet. Few poets have distinguished themselves or rather better known for their use of animal imagery namely Edwin Muir. Animals are at times even superior to man and given a credit of keeping " the spark of divinity" if one can use a neo-platonic metaphor. Muir pushes things to extremes by adopting a Romantic view which holds that modern chaos is ascribable to the loss of the link between man and nature and notably animals as an intrinsic aspect of that nature. The paper probes into the meanings of how these animal images are employed by the poet and how they function according to his philosophy.

Key Words: Horses Edwins father horses.orkney Islands in the north of Scotland where the poet is experienced. Covenant Era.AutobiographyThe life story by the writer himself.

Animal Imagery in Edwin Muir Poetry:

Edwin Muir did not write any line of poetry until he was thirty five; and among the first words he wrote are the following:

Those lumbering horses in the steady plough,
On the bare field –I wonder why, just now,
They seemed terrible, so wild and strange,
Like magic powers on the stony grange, 1

Those are his father's horses, which he used to watch and delight in their company on the farm .That was in his happy childhood in his native Orkney islands in the north of Scotland, where he experienced " that feeling of complete security and union"(2) in the universe and among the farmers .He felt those farmers had "intrinsic feelings for the earth; their life was an order, and a good order." (3) But that order was achieved mainly because of the union and harmony between man and animal: "for at the heart of human civilization is the byre, the barn, and the midden."(4) When Edwin Muir was fourteen, this Eden –like world was shattered, and he had to face the fallen world of the modern city:"the decisive event in Muir's life was the enforced removal of his

family from the Orkneys to Glasgow the prelude to the death of his father and one of his brothers."(5) In Glasgow life seemed meaningless, and the severe poverty and degradation destroyed that order and harmony in Muir's life : "Glasgow depressed Muir ,and the deaths of his father ,two brothers and his mother in rapid succession intensified his distress as he moved through various menial jobs to a beer-bottling factory and thence to a factory at Fairport for reducing bones to charcoal ."(6)

In 1918 ,after seventeen years of suffering and wandering , he met Willa Anderson ,and married her the following year .This marriage proved ,as Muir described it in his Autobiography ,"the most fortunate event in …{his} life."(7) Love and happy domestic life gradually restored some kind of security and a glimpse of order to Muir's life ,and suddenly he realized his real vocation :he became a poet .The first thing which came to his mind ,and provided material for his poetry ,was his childhood on the farms of the Wyre (on of the Orkney islands) .He looked at the stages of his life ,his happy childhood , then the hard life in a big industrial city ,then the salvation of his marriage ,and saw them "as Eden ,the fall in to the labyrinth ,and paradise Regained .He increasingly strove to return to Eden via the imagination and live there with an informed innocence as a result of experience . " (8)

This is the essence of Muir's vision .In his imagination he saw the stages of his journey as the journey of man through time,"from Adam –and before Adam –to return to Eden at the end of the journey." (9) The imaginary vision of man's life before the fall he calls the Fable, while the real life as lived by men is the story . In the Fable there is order and harmony, where man and animal lived together , but in the story there is only chaos :"it may be that modern man's sense of chaos comes in part from his loss of that pattern of which his necessarily fragmentary individual life is a part ." (10) Muir's fable is in his childhood, where he enjoyed "a sense of fulfillment and perfection outside of time." (11) In one of his early poems,"Variation on a Time Theme (x)", Muir introduces the animal to illustrate his idea of the destruction of order and the loss of glory:

Who curbed the lion long ago
And penned him in this towering field
And reared him wingless in the sky?
And quenched the dragon's burning eye,
Chaining him here to make a show,
The faithful guardian of the shield?

Raymond Tschumi believes that this poem expresses the dichotomy of time and eternity:"the lion declares war on time … {and this revolt} lasts as long as there is time ; two opposite forces are still struggling ,and mock at each other ."(36) This argument is developed by Elizabeth Huberman, who sees the images of the lion and dragon as symbols of flags and shields .The lion is that which appears on the Scottish banner, that represents a lost heritage and a broken kingdom .Another image is found in the book of Daniel, where the prophet saw, in a dream, four beasts, " the first was like a lion and had eagle's wings .Then as I looked its wings were plucked." (12) This lion, for Muir, may represent "an emblem of the original, eternal order .The plucking of the lion's wing's, in turn, must have represented the destruction of the original order." (13)

Furthermore ,these animals ,the lion and the dragon belong to that legendary age where animals were worshipped ,and their hunting was a ritual act .They were protagonists in that battle ,but now their meaning and origin are forgotten .They remain only sings on flags and shields .But

"they live ...in an eternal present without a past .In our world ,the world of man ,on the other hand ,dreadful things have happened ;long years of history have passed which have drained dragon and lion of the significance they had in that legendary age before history began "(14).

Here now heraldic watch them ride
This path far up the mountain-side
And backward never cast a look;
Ignorant that the dragon died
Long since and that the mountain shook
When the great lion was crucified.

This lost legendary age is recalled in another poem,"the Covenant", in which Muir regrets the destruction of the prelapsarian harmony among God, man and animal:

The Covenant of god and animal,
The frieze of fabulous creatures winged and crowned
And in the midst the woman and man.

It is the age Muir describes in his Autobiography, when, he believes,"animal and man and god lived densely together in the same world: the timeless, crowded age of organic heraldry."(15)

But the creator betrayed his covenant and destroyed that Eden he erected :"to have created innocence ,surely ,was to have undertaken the obligation to protect it ,but this unnamed creator repudiated that obligation ,broke his covenant with the golden lion and lamb he made and …stands convicted of perfidy ."(16)

What jealousy, what rage could overwhelm
The golden lion and lamb and vault a grave
For innocence, innocence past defense or cost?

Man can see this world in his dreams, the "sleep-walled night" , but when sleep is over ,"the weariless wave /Roofs with its sliding horror all that realm ". Dream played an important role in Muir's life and poetry ,since he underwent a course of psychoanalysis and was advised to record his dreams. One of his important dream-poems is "The Combat", which presents a horrible, ever-continuous "unequal battle" between two beasts. These animals are not those unspoiled innocent animals which lived in harmony with god and man before the fall, but rather representatives of evil. They do not have the ordinary shapes of animals: the first, strongest one possessed.

Body of leopard, eagle's head
And whetted beak, and lion's mane,
And frost –grey hedge of feathers spread
Behind-he seemed of all thins bred.
As for his enemy, there came in
A soft round beast as brown as clay;
All rent and patched his wretched skin.

The strong, fierce animal always beats the other weak, soft one ,but the latter endures till "the killing beast that cannot kill/Swells in his fury till/You'd almost think it was despair

This battle is a symbol of the existence of evil in the life of man after the fall ,and man's stoic acceptance and endurance of this evil ,which annihilates the effect of evil .It is the world of Glasgow with which Muir had to put up with .Muir's poetry tackles "themes that arose naturally from the stark contrast between the vision awakened in the Arcadian childhood and the

pressures of contemporary industrialism that Glasgow life first imposed upon him ."(17) this poem is based on a dream which Muir relates in his Autobiography :

In a dream I was walking with some people I the country,
When I saw a shining grey bird in the field ….we
Went towards it, but as we came nearer it spread its tail
Like a peacock, so that we could see nothing else .As the
Tail grew I saw that is was not round, but square, an
Impenetrable grey hedge of feathers; and at once I knew
That its body was not a bird's body now, but an animal,
And that behind the gleaming hedge it was walking away
From us on four feet padded like a leopard's or Tiger's.
Then, confronting it in the field, there appeared an
Ancient, dirty – coloured animal with a head like that
Of an old sheep or a mangy dog. Its eyes were soft and
Brown; it was alone against the splendid beast….(18)

The dream and the poem present a horrible experience,"but in this horror a last a single grain of hope endures ….However minimal, however far from any affirmation of joy, the acceptance of paradox characteristic of Muir ….is….evident."(19) In "the Animals" this paradox is enacted in terms of contrast between man and animal .The whole poem ,except the last line ,is a bout the world of animals .Muir makes use of the biblical story of creation ,but with some modification .In Genesis ,it is said that on the fifth day of creation "God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves ,with which the waters swarm ,according to their kinds ,and every winged bird according to its kind ,"(20) and on the sixth day he created both the beasts of the earth and man :"And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds ,and every thing that creeps upon the ground according to its kind …. So God created man in his own image , in the image of God he created him ."(21) Muir ,on the other hand ,implies that all animals were created on the fifth day ,while man was created on the sixth day .This reflects and emphasizes the wide gap between man and animal .The world of the animals is pure and innocent ,since "They do not live in the world ,/ Are not in time and space ," whereas man ,who is conscious of his existence inside time and space does not enjoy this innocence .The animals seem to be living in the fifth day of creation ,for they are not aware of the passage of time .there distinctive feature is what Muir calls the "hiatus":the lack of memory. This creates a sense of timelessness, all time for them is present, there is no past, no future:

But these have never trod
Twice the familiar track,
Never never turned back,
Into the memoried day.
All is new and near
In the unchanging here
Of the fifth great day of God,
That shall remain the same,
Never shall pass away.

The gap between man and animal is made the wider and the more unbridgeable because there is no communication between the creatures of different days. The animals do not have language:

No word do thy have, not one
To plant a foot upon,
Were never in any place.

Language is essential for creation and civilization, but it makes people conscious of time and mortality:

For with names the world was called
Out of the empty air,
With names was built and walled,
Line and circle and square,
Dust and emerald,
Snatched from deceiving death
By the articulate breath.

Language gives memory, tradition and meaning, which the animals lack. The animals possess a single inestimable virtue: innocence. The animals:

Preserve intact into our corrupted present the
Uncorrupted good of Eden .They are living witnesses
Of that residual glory of the unfallen world ….As
Representatives and envoys of that unfallen world ,
Moreover, they bear the promise of redemption man
Himself has forfeited .(22)

To emphasize the gap between man and animal, Muir, after describing the world of animals in twenty –two lines, in one final line he simply says:"On the sixth day we came." The rest is left for the imagination of the reader.

The promise of redemption which the animals bear is more strongly emphasized and enacted in "The Horses " .This poem also makes use of the story of creation: God created the universe in seven days, and here in seven days it has been undone .Muir puts us in an imaginary situation in the future, after a "seven days war that put the world to sleep." The style parodies the Bible:" on the second day/the radios failed …./on the third day a warship passed …./on the sixth day /A plane plunged over us in to the sea " . The 'we' of the poem are a group of people who have survived the destruction of the world ,to whom a number of horses ,"new as if they had come from their own Eden " , come unexpectedly .Man has caused this destruction by his thirst for knowledge which shattered his innocence and led to the invention of destructive weapons ,like the warship ,the planes and ,above all , the atom bomb ,which made the world devour "its children quick /At one gulp ." The survivors live in a strange silence :" in the first few days it was so still /we listened to our breathing and were afraid ." The products of modern civilization have lost their functions :the radios are "dumb" and the tractors "lie about our fields …./we leave them where they are and let them rust ." It seems that Muir implies that the tractors are the source of evil in the mechanized modern life .In one simple statement he summarizes his attitude:

We had sold our horses in our father's time
To buy new tractors.

In the past there was a strong natural relationship between man and animal ; the horses "pulled our ploughs and borne our loads ." The gap between the fifth and sixth days was imperceptible .But after the introduction of tractors the link between man and animal was shattered ,and the gap was widened .Man , consequently ,lost the source of innocence . People have even forgotten the shape of horses:

Now they were strange to us
As fabulous steeds on an ancient shield
Or illustrations in a book of knights.
We did not dare go near them.

The coming of these horses breaks the silence and disturbs the life of the survivors:

And then, that evening
Late in the summer the strange horses came.
We heard a distant tapping on the road,
A deepening drumming; it stopped, went on again
And at the corner changed to hollow thunder.
We saw the heads.
Like a wild wave charging and were afraid.

The survivors realize that the horses are their saviours: they have come to re- establish the former unity that existed between man and animal, for the benefit of man. They bring redemption and create the image of Eden, from which they never felt far away:

Yet they waited,
Stubborn and shy, as if they had been sent
By an old command to find our whereabouts
And that long-lost archaic relationship.
In the first moment we had never a thought
That they were creatures to be owned and used.
Among them were some half-a-dozen colts
Dropped in some wilderness of the broken world,
Yet new as if they had come from their own Eden.

They have come to offer the "free servitude" which they used to give to man before the manufacture of tractors .The relation between man and animal is emotional; the service of the animals "still can pierce our hearts." They even resemble Christ: "The behaviour of the horses exemplifies the new way of life. They are stubborn, determined to have their way, and yet also humble .They have come freely to serve, to bear our loads, and at the and we are reminded of Christ ,whose sacrifice still can pierce our heart ."(23)

They change man's life ; with their coming man is born :" our life is changed ; their coming our beginning ."

Muir's relationship with animals , especially horses , goes back to his childhood on the farm ,when he saw his father's horses ' pull the ploughs and bear the loads' . It was Eden for him , and the removal to the city of Glasgow meant expulsion from Eden .He was able , with the unique power of his imagination , to turn this personal experience into a universal myth .He creates a strange and new imaginary world , but his " imaginary and created world has illuminated …our real one ."(24

Notes:

1-" Horses ", 11 .1-4 .All quotations from Muir's poetry are from Edwin Muir: Collected Poems 1921-1958, edited by Willa Muir and J.C. Hall (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

2-" Edwin Muir, An Autobiography (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p.26.
3- Ibid., p.63.
4- Ibid., p.36.
5-John Press ,A map of Modern English Verse (Oxford :Oxford Univ .press ,1969) , p.170.
6-Harry Blamires (ed.) , A Guide to Twentieth –century Literature in English (London :Methuen ,19830,p.188.
7-p.154.
8-Alan Bold (ed.) , Cambridge Book of English Verse 1939-1975 (Cambridge :Cambridge Univ. press ,1976),p.168.
9-Kathleen Raine,"Edwin Muir" , in Defending Ancient Springs (London :Oxford Univ. press ,1967), p.10.
10-Ibid., p.12
11-Daniel Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge: Myth in the Poetry of Yeats, Graves, and Muir (New York: Oxford Univ. press,1967), p. 231
12-Thought in Twentieth –century English Poetry (London :Rutledge and Kegan Paul ,1951) ,pp.83 -4.
13-The Bible,"The Book of Daniel ' , 7:4.
14-Elizabeth Huberman The Poetry of Edwin Muir (New York :Oxford Univ. press ,1971), p.77.
15-Ibid., p.78.
16-p.46.
17-Huberman ,p.146.
18-Blamires, p.189.
19-p.65.
20-Huberman, p.171.
21-The Bible,"Genesis", 1:21.
22-Ibid., 1:25, 27.
23-Huberman, p.20.
24-C.B.Cox and A.E.Dyson, Modern Poetry :Studies in Practical Criticism (London :Edward Arnold ,1963), p.132.
25-Jhon Holloway ,"The Modernity of Edwin Muir " in The Colours of Clarity (London :Routledge and Kegan Paul , 1964),p.99.

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