**Ted Hughes' poem "The Jaguar"?**

Okay, lets take this step by step.  Here's one way to look at it:

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

Lie still as the sun.

In this first stanza we are shown a group of very different animals.  The apes are lounging around, the parrots are squawking, trying to get nuts from passers-by, and the lion and tiger are tired from being lazy.  These are not animals that are naturally found together...parrots, lions, and tigers all come from different continents. And none of these habitats have "strollers."  These facts let us know that the animals are probably part of some kind of zoo.

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

There is not a lot of "life" going on here (about as much as a painting)...the critters are lethargic and most seem to be sleeping and the snake is so still it might as well be dead stone!  The only way you know they are alive is because the place has a stink to it.

But who runs like the rest past these arrives

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

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

Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes On a short fierce fuse.

People aren't much interested in seeing these sluggy animals, either.  They hurry past the cages indifferently.  There is a crowd, though, around the jaguar enclosure.  The jaguar is more interesting to watch...

By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear—

He spins from the bars, but there’s no cage to him More than to the visionary his cell:

Despite the fact that the jaguar is physically in a cage, it is not in one mentally or "spiritually."  It's nature cannot be held in check.  The bars stop him, but they do not "cage" his spirt.  The wildness is in his blood.  He is no more tamed by the cage than a great human thinker's mind would be in jail.

His stride is wildernesses of freedom:

The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.

Over the cage floor the horizons come.

His walk is the essence of wildness and freedom.  The world is compelled by his powerful paws and the inner freedom of the Jaguar is not diluted.

So what does it mean?  You would have to decide for yourself.  It might be about the stoic nature of the jaguar, or about the spirit-breaking that goes on in zoos.  It might be about humanity's interest in observing the wild (something largely driven out of ourselves) or about never giving up or giving in.  Or maybe it is about all of these things.  That's the beauty of poetry!

As in all of Hughes's animal-poems, in Jaguar too, he deals with the raw and savage power of the beasts--the hawk, the crow and the wolf. He himself associates these images of power to the tropes of the magical shaman; poetry, in his words, is a transformative mask. Though in most of his animal poems, Hughes's persona is located within the animal-self, in this poem, it seems to be an external observer, watching the Jaguar's movement from the imprisonment into a human world of civilization to its veritable liberation in a world of absolute power and energy, the ethico-political import of which remains equivocal, however.

In his typically anti-Romantic declination of an innocent animal world, Hughes sees the parrots as cheap tarts--a stark counter-anthropomorphism that sheds light on his fallen world of animals. The predominant setting of the poem seems to be a cage where the human will of mastery over the animal world is exhibitted. The animals in the cages are sterile, even the lion and the tiger are as still as the sun. The impotent animals in the cages look like painted prisons where an illusory image is at work.  But the jaguar is introduced in the 3rd stanza as a counterpoint--a ball of fire, commanding massive spectatorial attention. the analogy between the gazing zoo-visitor and a child is reductive. In the fourth stanza, Hughes pays a Hughesian homage to the physicality of the jaguar's strength. it is seen as a Messiah, a leader, a visionary inspirer. As the opening line of the final stanza confirms, the jaguar is also seen as a poetic prototype--a visionary who makes the prison house his own cell of creativity, finding the much needed isolation in it. He destroys the encapsulation of the cage by making a metaphor out of it. The jaguar's cage is just a symbolic one where massive expanses of time and space merge and the cage-floor gets overshadowed by the infinity of the horizon.

The Jaguar thus shows an animal resistance to the human trope of mastery but Hughes, like a true visionary is able to see the underlying paradox of this subversively progressive move as the sheer savagery of the emancipatory power is laced with some irony, nevertheless.

**Poetry Analysis:**

Ted Hughes’ “The Jaguar” is a tribute to the majesty of the animal. The eminence of the jaguar is contrasted against the insignificance of other animals. The apes yawn at their humdrum existence. Their only point of adoration is aimed at the fleas that surround them. The parrots have to screech to invite attention to themselves, as though one gets the impression that they are on fire. These shrieks are particularly aimed at the stroller with nuts. The tiger and lion appear lethargic and overcome with lassitude. Through the mechanical routine of the animals’ life, the poet seems to make a statement on the current mechanized human condition where people relegate the true meaning of life to basic biological functions.

The Boa constrictor (Boa constrictor) is a large, heavy-bodied species of snake. Its color pattern is highly variable yet distinctive. It is one of its kind. Yet, its static nature gives the impression of it being a fossil, an archeological remnant. It appears as though it has no utility value. The animals though supposed to be a source of amusement in the zoo, fail to make their presence felt. Cage after cage appears to be empty as all the animals lie in indolence. The only evidence of their being alive seems to be the stink emanating from the cages. The picture of the animals in sluggishness appear as static as a painting on a nursery wall.

People, however, do not hold any fascination for these sort of animals. They just rush past these animals like the rest. The cage that holds the onlookers spell-bound is the cage of the Jaguar. The jaguar holds the crowd mesmerized as a child in a trance. The atmosphere in the cell seems to pale into darkness as compared to the fierce-gleam in the jaguar’s eye.

This temporary darkening of his cell is not owing to boredom on part of the onlooker. People prefer to be blinded by the splendor of this fire. The wildness in the tiger’s blood is ‘bang on’ to the human brain. The grandiose roar falls on deaf ears. As he traverses distances within the cage, there are no bars for him, for nothi

ng can imprison his magnificent spirit. The jaguar is beyond cages and taming. It is just as the imprisoning of a visionary cannot incarcerate his profound thoughts, or freedom of expression. His instinctive attitude and wildness of spirit is implicit in each stride of his. The world is encompassed in the stride of his paw as he enamors humanity with his innate elegance. He does not have to look outside the cage to look beyond the horizon. Rather, the cage floor traces horizons over it, owing to the immense presence of the jaguar.

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