

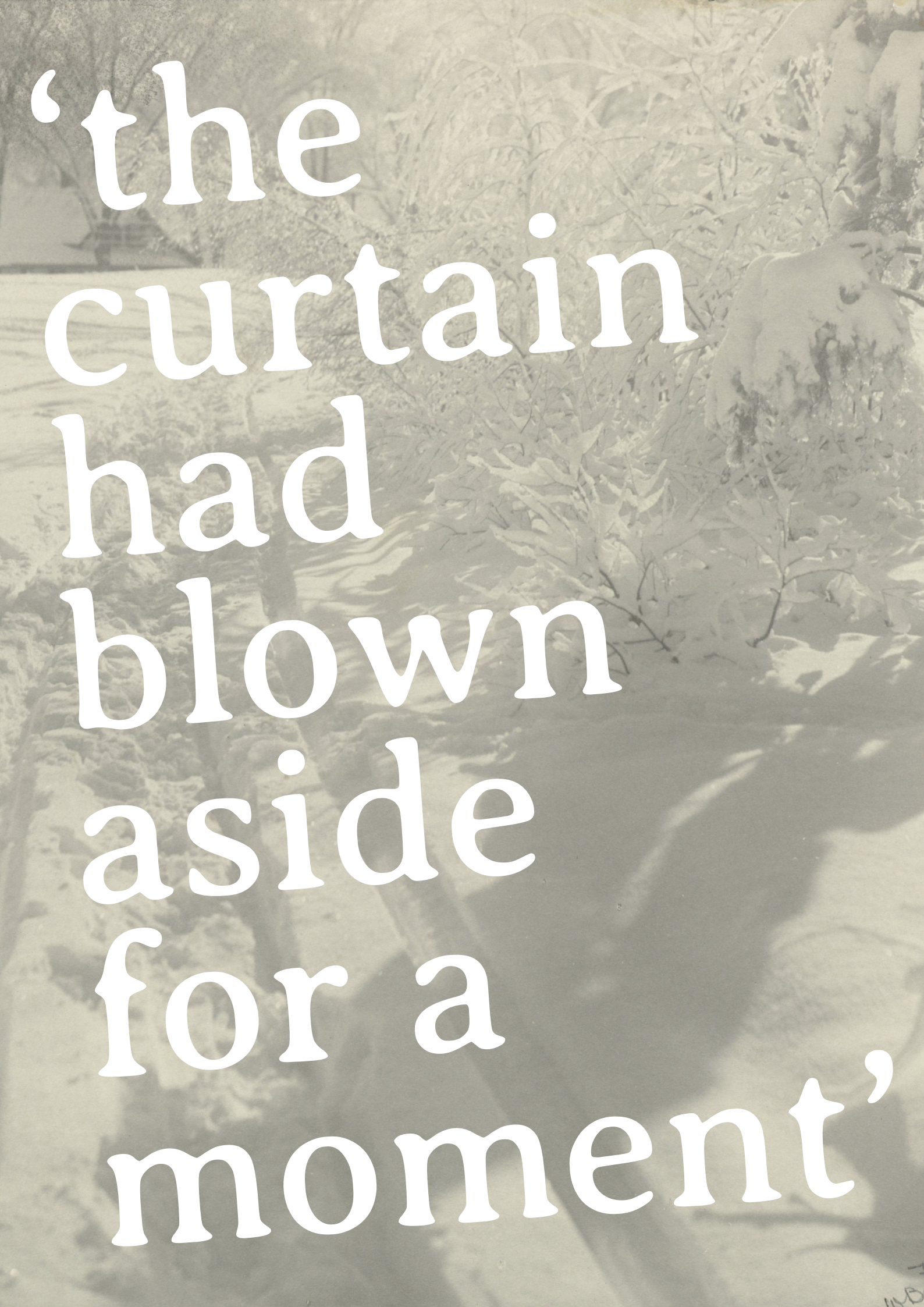


Revision Guide

Roe Deer

Ted Hughes

Scrbblj.



‘the
curtain
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Roe Deer

Ted Hughes

'In the dawn's early light, in the biggest snow of the year
Two blue-dark deer stood in the road, alerted.

They had happened into my dimension
The moment I was arriving just there.'

(Full poem unable to be reproduced due to copyright restrictions)

VOCABULARY

Eddy: A swirling movement that goes in a circle, usually of water or air. It often looks reversed compared to the rest of the flow

Snow-Screen: A retro term for the white noise static on an old analogue TV screen

Disintegration: The process of breaking into pieces or falling apart



STORY + SUMMARY

In the dirty morning light, during the biggest snow of the year, I saw two deer looking at me, their silhouettes were dark blue and they stood in the road, alert.

It was as if they appeared in front of me, the moment I arrived just there. The two or three years of their deer life were a secret to me, but now their figures were planted clearly right in front of me. Even though the snow was a screen that warped them and made them look strange, as if they were on an old TV screen.

The two deer hesitated as our two worlds fell apart. For some lasting seconds, I thought they were waiting for me to give a secret password or sign to them.

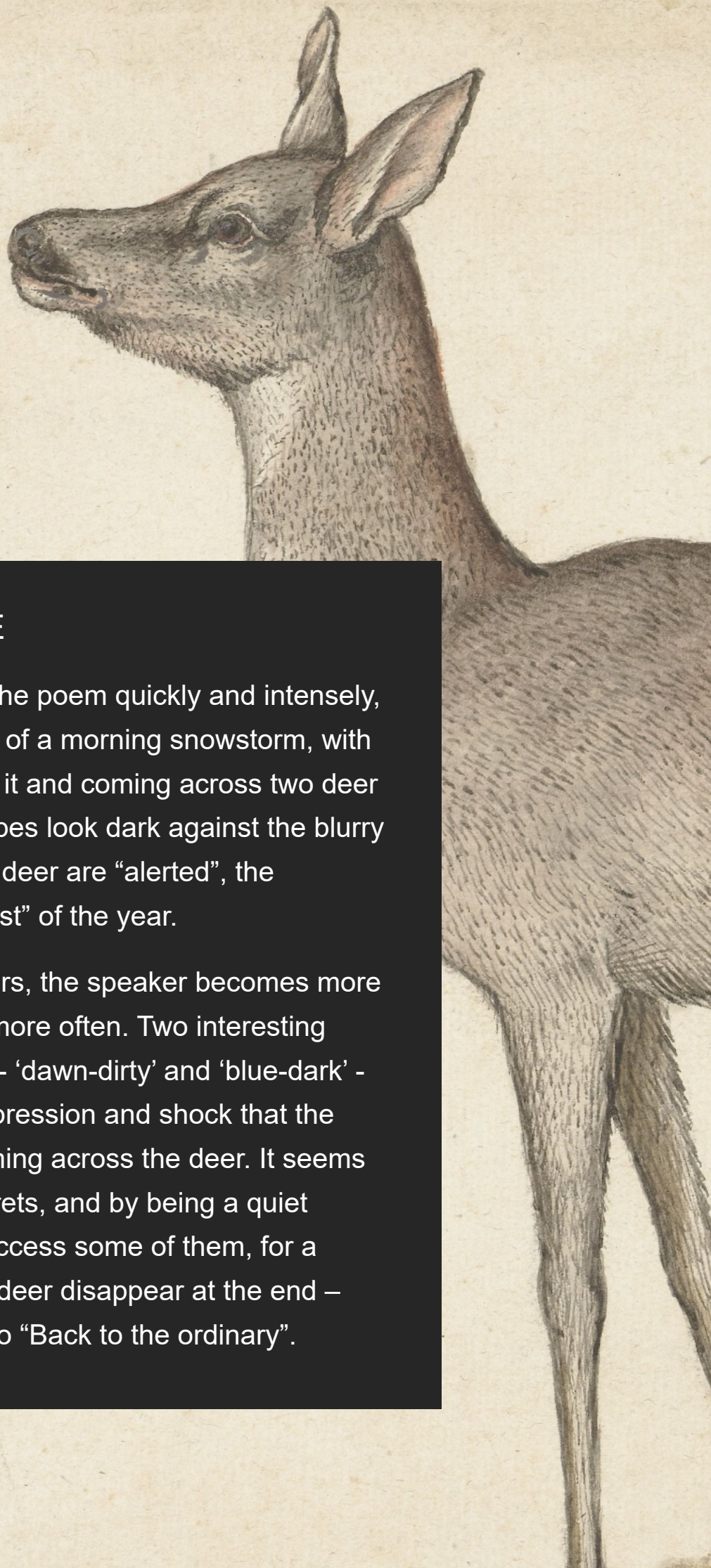
It was like a curtain, that hides the world of wild animals from our daily life, had blown aside for a moment. Where before I had seen trees and a road, now I saw the deer and their names from a different perspective.

I felt like the deer had come for me.

Then they disappeared through a hedge and ran off downhill, over a lonely, snowy field.

They headed towards the darkness of nearby trees and finally, as if they were flying, they disappeared into boiling flakes of the snowstorm. And then, the snow covered their hoofprints as well.

That moment of morning inspiration was now gone. So I turned back to the ordinary day ahead.



SPEAKER + VOICE

The speaker starts out the poem quickly and intensely, establishing the **setting** of a morning snowstorm, with himself walking through it and coming across two deer on the path, whose shapes look dark against the blurry white behind them. The deer are “alerted”, the snowstorm is the “biggest” of the year.

Then as the deer appears, the speaker becomes more thoughtful and pauses more often. Two interesting **compound adjectives** - ‘dawn-dirty’ and ‘blue-dark’ - convey a sense of compression and shock that the speaker feels when coming across the deer. It seems that nature is full of secrets, and by being a quiet observer he is able to access some of them, for a while at least - until the deer disappear at the end – and the speaker must go “Back to the ordinary”.

LANGUAGE

Inversion: Hughes uses several instances of **inversion** in this poem. For example, instead of “dark blue” he says “blue-dark”, and instead of “lonely, snowy field” he says, “snow-lonely”. This gives us an interesting perspective on these images, which makes them more poetic and surreal. In *Roe Deer*, Hughes uses **inversion** to add a **strange and otherworldly atmosphere** to the poem. The inverted phrases don't seem quite right to the reader at first look. This mirrors what the speaker feels when he sees the deer on the snowy road.

Antithesis: “the boil of big flakes”. Snowflakes don't generally boil, as they are frozen, but this image conveys a deeper kind of truth about the behaviour of the snowflakes. Visually, we can almost see the boiling snow being blown about as we read the line - as if the flakes in motion in the air are swirling so vigorously, it looks like they are boiling.

Repetition: Most notably, **repetition** is used when the speaker says, “there where the trees were no longer trees, nor the road a road”. This demonstrates that the speaker has almost lost the meaning of words, because he was so caught up in the world of the deer and is disoriented from the blurriness of the storm. This also has elements of **semantic satiation** – which we all know as that feeling when you repeat a word so much it starts to lose meaning.

The speaker also uses **repetition** of the word “dawn” at the beginning and end of the poem. This brings the poem full circle, creating a **cyclical structure**. The dawn's inspiration is revised, and he must turn “Back to the ordinary” everyday routines of life.

Lyrical vs Colloquial Style - the poem shifts back and forth between using **lyrical (poetic) language**, and a more **colloquial register**. For example the lines “planted their two or three years of secret deerhood / Clear on my snow-screen vision” uses multiple **metaphors**. The term ‘snow-screen vision’, for instance, refers literally to the blurry scene in front of the speaker, but also metaphorically to the idea that his understanding and perception of the natural world and its inner workings is limited and often fuzzy or hazy, where neither he nor any other human being is provided with clear, complete insight into the spiritual and natural principles upon which the world operates. However, the last line “Back to the ordinary”, and the single line stanza (a **monostich**) “the deer had come for me”, are both very simplistic and plainly written, in contrast to the complex poetic lines which depict the deer in the snowstorm. This is perhaps to convey the simplicity of the human world in the face of the infinitely complex and mysterious mechanisms of nature.



TASK

Write down some of your own experiences with wild animals. Have you ever had an unusual or magical encounter with a creature? Try to describe the situation in detail, using poetic language.

STRUCTURE + FORM

'Roe Deer' is written in **free verse**. This means there is no set rhyme pattern, line length or stanza length. As the poem's subject is the free lives of wild animals, and the infinite variations and complexities that can be found in nature, the organic structure of the poem reflects this chaos and randomness.

The longest stanza is the middle one, representing how long the moment feels to the speaker as they stare at the deer. The shortest stanzas come at the end, as the speaker returns to the "ordinary". This shows us how quickly moments of wonder at nature can pass us by, and how our sense of time is distorted when we experience a magical encounter.

Enjambment: Hughes also regularly uses **enjambment** in this poem. For instance, the lines: "for some lasting seconds // I could think the deer were waiting for me" contain a stanza break which continues the flow of thought, conveying the space of time ('lasting seconds') that the speaker pauses to consider the deer.

Caesura: - "And stared at me. And so for some lasting seconds" - The preceding line uses **caesura** - a break in the line created by the **full stop** - to convey a strange, **arrhythmic** feeling along with the fluid **enjambment** that follows. This pause matches the long, thoughtful pause as the speaker and the two deer stare at each other.

CONTEXT

Roe Deer was first published in 1978. It was part of Ted Hughes' collection *Moon-Bells and Other Poems*.

Roe Deer is typical of Hughes' early work, before he became the British Poet Laureate. Hughes lived in the countryside for most of his life, moving between Devon and West Yorkshire, though he also resided in Cambridge, London and Boston, USA, for a time. Many of his poems focus on wild animals and the beauty, mystery and violence of their lives, as well as wider observations on the workings of nature and the universe as a whole.



ATTITUDES

Nature is mysterious and strange: Hughes describes the deer in surprising, unexpected ways - they are blue silhouettes against the snow, they appear mysteriously and seem to communicate some mysterious knowledge to him, from nature itself. This highlights the wonder of even the most common wild animals, making us realise how beautiful nature is all around us.

The world carries on without you present: Hughes' deer had "secret deerhood" lives before the speaker saw them. And they will continue to, after they disappear into the snow. Even though "the curtain had blown aside for a moment", it soon settles back between them. Then both lives carry on as before, as the speaker must return "Back to the ordinary".

TASK

Read 'The Buck in the Snow' by Edna St Vincent Millay. What are the similarities and differences between this poem and Millay's rendition of deer? Try to focus specifically on the interaction between humans and nature in both poems.



THEMES

Nature

Wild Animals

Snow

Perceptions

Secrets and Mystery

Chance Encounters

Time

Perception

TASK

Pick two of these themes, make a mind map and add four separate quotations from the story that relate to it. Make short notes of analysis, explaining how and why each one relates to your theme. What, in your opinion, is the author's final message or statement about each theme that you chose?

EXERCISES

1. “and hesitated in the all-way disintegration

And stared at me. For some lasting seconds”

What do you think the poet meant was disintegrating here? Try to find more than one possible answer to this question.

2. Imagine you are the speaker in this poem. What do you think you would do for the rest of your “ordinary” day after encountering the deer? What kind of person are you? Why were you on a forest road in a snowstorm? Write a diary entry, describing your day in detail.

3. What do you think is the most important message that we can learn from the poem? Explain your answer using evidence.

4. How and why does Hughes use visual imagery in this poem? Find three examples, and analyse each one in detail.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. How does the poet create an atmosphere of mystery and wonder in *Roe Deer*? Use references from the poem in your answer.

2. *Roe Deer* is neither a happy nor a sad poem. Do you agree? Explain your thoughts.

3. Compare the way nature and animals are presented in *Roe Deer*, and one other poem you have studied.

4. Examine the way in which Hughes presents his thoughts on the interactions between humans and the wilderness in the poem.

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