

Patterns of Cosmic  
Energy and Violence  
in the Poetry  
of Ted Hughes



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By

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The study of poetry in an age that is increasingly influenced and conditioned by technological progress and scientific patterns of thinking entails a re-examination of the functional value of poetry in human life. It is true that the large-scale invasion of technology in human life has marginalized the role and significance of poetry in the life of modern man. In a world of “technological sensibility”, poetic pre-occupations may appear tantamount to idleness and detrimental to progress in society.

The technological patterns of human life progressively devalue the poetic mode of truth seeking. In the process of prioritization, poetry may have gone down on the agenda of modern man, who seeks, more than anything else, economic fulfilment of the highest kind. He is unmindful of the ecological imbalances which technology creates for the sake of progress and is innocent of the imminent extinction of human life owing to the onslaughts of technology over-used and misused. Actually, what goes on in the name of progress is a systematic retrogression from Nature accompanied by ruthless exploitation of Natural resources.

Ted Hughes talks elaborately about the cultural crisis of western man in his interview with Ekbert Faas (1980). According to Hughes, the story of the mind exiled from Nature is the story of Western Man. It is the story of his progressive and desperate search for mechanical and rational securities that has substituted for the spirit-confidence of the Nature he has lost. Faas (1980) quotes Hughes’s essay on environmental revolution to establish that western man’s story of spiritual romanticism and heroic technological progress is a story of decline. He further says that when something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator. The condition of having no connection with the creator can be rightly explained as an evolutionary dead-end. The western man is faced now with this grave crisis of existence.

In short, Hughes believes that our civilization is an evolutionary error. From an ecological perspective, Hughes’s poetry has a function and significance

beyond the tangible achievements of science and technology. According to Hughes, the laws of science, based on a logical processing of empirical reality can never open the doors of perception to the essence of reality. In the creation of a poem, what comes into play is not the cold logic of material reality, but a creative functioning of the visionary imagination. Therefore, it can be said that genuine poetry transcends human reason and its egocentric perceptions based on empirical reality.

The positivistic materialism which forms the mainstay of science and related disciplines confines truth to phenomenological patterns of experience totally eclipsing the significance of intuitive revelations on which genuine poetry is based. Hughes specifically echoed the view that science has become a Great Dictator in our days to whom the spiritual republics of religion and poetry are yielding up their autonomy in a bloodless defeat (Wheelright, 1974). Numerous other utterances of Hughes establish that science has gained supremacy over religion and poetry. Therefore, he believed that poetry should fill the gap of religion through prophetic revelations. Moreover, such revelations should emanate from the flickers of metaphysical perceptions. The visionary imagination of Hughes resulted in the creation of numerous biocentric poems that could naturally function as agents of regeneration and renewal by promoting reverence for all forms of life.

Poetry has become more valid and relevant than ever before to our age of science and technology that questions the validity of the positive assertions of religious dogmas. According to Matthew Arnold, genuine poetry encroaches upon the territory of religion by exploring and exposing the mystique of life with its various nuances. The myopic vision of science, which brings within its purview, rational and empirical aspects of the phenomenal world is unfortunately incomplete and inadequate to contain life in all its multifarious implications. It is in such contexts that poetry steps in and speaks of the varied aspects of man's non-rational, emotional and intuitive experiences with or without emphasis on values that sustain human life. Therefore, poetry brings perfection to human life, much more artistically than religion could ever do.

The Greek wisdom of assigning the role of a prophet to the poet has come to have a special significance in our times. The poet being a seer can "look before and after" and can prophesy the direction in which the world is moving. The Greek people believed that the prophet was a vital link between the supernatural world and the humdrum world of human existence. Equipped with intuition, the latter-day poet foresees, prepares and warns the



reading populace, pointing to the eventualities near and far. Poetry with an ecological significance as produced and displayed by Hughes and other poets in our times can be considered as powerful testimonies that uphold the Hellenic wisdom of assigning the role of the prophet to the poet. Having observed man's past thoroughly and having mastered the here and now conditions, the poet is appropriately poised to work as a prophet in our times. Their remarks and assessments of the human situations become a veritable record of evaluations and prophetic warnings that prompt men to act on suggested lines. This suggestiveness of poetry works the magic of persuasion as far as the future of mankind is concerned. Therefore, the prophet's mantle is something that has grown naturally as a second nature of the poet.

According to Hughes, there is a fundamental difference between the functions of religion and poetry. Unlike religion that is based on positive assertions and dogmas, poetry functions as an agent of regeneration and renewal. In a variety of ways, it shows what is beneficial to mankind and points out what is harmful to their welfare. This religious function of poetry is accentuated by the fact that Christianity has taken man away from Nature by promoting the assumption that "the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use" (Faas,1980). Such anthropocentric perceptions promoted by religion will invite environmental disasters that can threaten the very existence of this planet.

It is a universal truth that all great literature is born out of a direct interaction between the inner world of vision and the outer world of reality. An author cannot be understood and appreciated fully in isolation from the social, cultural and historical forces of his immediate surroundings. It is only when he relates himself meaningfully with the outer reality that his work becomes great and transcends the confines of time and space. Ted Hughes amplifies this truth through his concept of visionary imagination formulated in detail in his essay on "Myth and Education". According to Hughes, what we need today is a faculty that embraces the inner world of vision and the outer world of reality simultaneously. Such visionary imagination can always surpass the logic of science and philosophy. Hence, any genuine work of art is a reflective analysis of the cultural milieu of a race that operates beyond the cold terrains of human reason. It can often fill the gap that science creates by working only on the rational aspects of human existence.

The English poetic tradition beginning with Chaucer and culminating in Eliot is a veritable document of human history moulded in poetic imagination. Each age in turn has supplied an adequate poetic idiom to meet

the exigencies of the period. These works contain the wisdom of ages and often function like effective antidotes that can cure the ill effects that a society faces at that particular point of time. In this sense, Chaucer's poetry is a virulent attack on the hypocrisy practiced in social life which consequently resulted in curbing the rampant corruptions of his time. This is true to a great extent in the lives of more recent poets like Arnold, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Yeats and Eliot. It is impossible to view them in isolation from their immediate surroundings and the prominent issues of their time.

The poetry of Arnold and Tennyson grew chiefly out of the Victorian dilemma of the conflict between science and religion. Arnold looks for sustenance in real love, while Tennyson considers change as a natural phenomenon of life. Wordsworth and the other Romantic poets had the bigger problem of the dehumanization of man in the new-found culture of consumerism begotten by rapid industrialization and the resultant urbanization. When Wordsworth lamented that the world was too much with him, he was trying to come to terms with the harsh reality of reconciling the outer and inner realities.

In comparison with the Victorians and the Romantics, the outer reality which the moderns like Eliot and Yeats faced was more complex. The onset of industrial revolution and the consequent mechanization of human life resulted in the disintegration of modern man's personality. Eliot's masterpiece "The Wasteland" came as a response to this grave problem and it ushered in a new era of poetic tradition. Eliot's vision rises beyond England and passes through Greek mythology and Indian Vedas. His prophetic utterance Datta, Dayadvam, Damyata, (give, sympathize and control) could be rightly considered as an effective antidote to most of the problems of his time.

The examples of these immediate predecessors demonstrate that great poetry is always born out of a meaningful interaction between the inner world of vision and the outer world of reality. If this is to be accepted, any serious poet wanting to write poetry, would certainly recognize the critical issues of his time. Immediately after Eliot's period, poetry gravitated around a group of budding poets whose leading spirit was Auden's political poetry. They were popularly known as the "Macspaunday" group. The poetic idiom of this group was shaped by the rise of international fascism and the impact of the great economic depression. In short, the Marxian ideology and the Freudian psychology formed the theoretical foundations of the poetry of the thirties.

The emergence of Dylan Thomas in the forties supplied a new poetic idiom which matched the violent social reality of the war-time England. Death, destruction and decay, a necessary concomitant of the war, made Dylan and his group base their foundation on the mythical “anima” or the indestructible “spirit” that was dealt with elaborately in Jungian psychology. Hence, their poetry was characterized by visionary intensity coupled with an apocalyptic mode of expression. It suited the temper of their disintegrating world. After the war people yearned for a peaceful social life. The general tendency was for poetry which maintained decorum and moderation.

The political climate provided by the labour party contributed towards the literary movement in the fifties with its impulse to build a new society based on democratic socialism. According to Mohan Ramanan (1989), the “Movement Poetry was inimical to the irresponsible bohemianism and the lush loose emotionalism of the 40s and the political pre-occupations of the Marxist 30’s. It demanded from people civic sense, politically responsible behaviour and the avoidance of extreme attitudes” (p.4). The group of poets who promoted a new sensibility in post-war England could not sustain it longer as they developed their own individual idioms in the years following the publication of two collected anthologies namely, D. J Enright’s *Poets of the 1950s* and Robert Conquest’s *New Lines* (1956).

The publication of these two anthologies gave rise to the “Movement Poetry” characterized by a new sensibility, but it was viewed with suspicion by many critics as an advertisement hoax. However, it was an undeniable development in the poetic scene of England. The “Movement” tradition is chiefly carried on by D.J Enright and Philip Larkin. Yet, one cannot ignore the other distinct voices in contemporary English poetry. One such insular and distinct voice was that of Ted Hughes which flourished even when Movement Poetry was reigning high: “Ted Hughes is, in a sense, the most important contemporary poet to emerge at about the time the Movement was being formed in the 1950” (Ramanan, 1989, p.225). His voice is still resonant with fresh nuances of contemporary life.

The importance of Ted Hughes can be highlighted in this context. His poetic response to contemporary life is formulated in his concept of visionary imagination that undermines the supremacy of human reason which was responsible for all scientific and technological developments. This visionary imagination is a unified synthesis of the mutually contradictory inner world of vision and the outer world of reality. Through this mode of poetic perception, Hughes is trying to reinstate the primary function of poetry as a renewal of life. The concept of Hughes’s visionary imagination took shape

through his personal world of experience by observing closely the life of animals that live in harmony with Nature. Therefore, his visionary imagination embodies the violence of creation and destruction as a natural process in the external world. Above all, this concept of visionary imagination promotes ecological harmony as it is based on a belief of the inner spiritual unity of Nature:

The idea of Nature as a single organism is not new. It was man's first great thought, the basic intuition of most primitive theologies. Now it has suddenly re-emerged, within the last few years, presenting respectable scientific credentials through the voice of the computer. Science, it has often been said, which began by deposing every primitive idea, will end by reinstating them as the essential conditions for life and as true descriptions of the universe (Faas, 1980, p. 187).

Since the greatest danger of today is an environmental disaster resulting from technological exploitation of Nature, Hughes's concept of ecology can function as an effective antidote to the ills of the present-day civilization. However, the bio-centric vision in Hughes was only a gradual evolution in a slow and steady manner throughout his poetic career starting with the publication of *Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and culminating in *Wolfwatching* (1989). The ecological significance of Hughes's poetry is testified by Yvonne Reddick (2017) in her latest study on Hughes as an ecopoet. According to Reddick, Hughes's primary concern was to deal with environmental issues through a subtle exploration of the connection between man and nature.

The word violence has wide implications and has become rather amorphous in modern times. Hughes consistently employs it in the sense of natural life-giving force, energy, vigour and vitality as manifested in Nature in contrast to the marginalized life of modern man. Hence, throughout this work, the terms energy and violence are used interchangeably to signify the same aspect of life. The poetry of Ted Hughes stands apart from the general currents of contemporary British poetry. Hughes is so unique and distinct that he has ushered in new trends in poetry compelling us to revalue life from an ecological perspective in our scientific era of technological progress.

The ecological overtones in his poetry coupled with his concept of visionary imagination renders his poetic art significant in a variety of ways, making him a prominent poetic voice in modern times. His position of the Poet Laureate of Britain was certainly an official testimony to his poetic genius. Above all, Hughes merits our attention singularly for offering a prophetic

insight into the subject of violence or cosmic energy. Hughes appeared on the poetic scene of England at a time when most of the post-war British poets took upon themselves the task of exploring the world of war-related violence. Their endeavour culminated in the birth of the genteel verses of *New Lines* which upheld the need for negotiations in society for peaceful co-existence.

The few poets who still wrote about violence could understand it only in the narrow sense of war related violence. It is at such a time that Ted Hughes emerged with his vibrant and dynamic verses, and came into prominence with the publication of *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960). The dominant impression of his poems is a sense of vigour, vitality, energy and stamina. It is extremely relevant to the mechanical conditions of modern man's life. Hughes deals with the subject of cosmic energy or violence in such a way that it ultimately achieves the grandeur of a timeless myth and archetype. According to Hughes, life is an endless "war between vitality and death". When Hughes began writing poetry, rapid urbanization was taking place in England. This resulted in an experience of emptiness and consequently a general lifelessness. In the words of Stan Smith (1983), the poetry of Hughes "broke upon a dead decade and brought a breath of provincial fresh air into an increasingly drab metropolitan culture and proved to be an order beyond the bland superficialities of affluence and consumerism" (p.233). In short, his poetry offered a welcome change for the industrial population fed with stereotyped poetry which lacked perceptions of vigour and vitality.

Hughes is often charged with painting a dark view of life. It is true that his depiction of violence is mostly gruesome with its vivid physical details. This is partly due to his childhood experience. He grew up hearing his father's stories of the horrors of the First World War and he spent part of his childhood in the middle of the Second World War. Since Hughes employs biological parameters to explore reality, the physical and psychological aspects of violence take precedence over its moral and social implications which are later evolutions or superstructure imposed by human reason. Therefore, the poet's excessive concern with cosmic energy or violence is actually an invitation to modern man to turn to the primary world of energy and vitality. According to King (1979) "Hughes's apparent concern with violence is not an admiration for a life of violence; it is part of that exploration of the battle field of man's experience of war between life and death" (p. 122). Hughes's poetic preoccupation is closely linked with modern life because we live in a period of rapid urbanization and

competitive consumerism that make us alien to the world of commanding energies symbolized in Nature and in the life of animals.

Though Hughes is known chiefly as a poet, his works are not confined to the realm of poetry alone. He is a “restless writer hurrying from verse to short stories, preparing libretti, translations, experiment with ‘orghast’ or talking without words” (Schmidt, 1979, p. 383). However, he stands out as a poet of the first order. The poetic experiments of Hughes remind us of Blake and Yeats because he is a genuine poet gifted with the faculty of visionary imagination as Sagar (1975) testifies: “I believe Hughes to be a great poet because he possesses the kind of imagination which issues in the purest poetry, charged poetry, visionary revelatory poetry, that sees into the life of things, that takes over where all other modes of apprehending reality falter” (p.3).

The above observation of Keith Sagar can be validated and justified by Hughes’s own total absorption in shamanism and his interest in other oriental cults and his belief in the efficacy of the ritual death and regeneration seen universally in all vegetation myths. Similar to Blake and Yeats, Hughes too, is fascinated by dreams and occult symbolism and is drawn to the whole body of magical literature inspired by his deep study of Robert Graves’s “The White Goddess” and James Fraser’s “The Golden Bough”. A close study of Hughes’s poems reveals that his obsession with violence is merely his desire to affirm life and existence amidst lethargy and general lifelessness seen commonly among the general public. Most of his poems vibrate with life-energy because of the pronounced quality of onomatopoeic words used in his poems. As a result, they produce tangible psychological impacts on the readers.

Hughes’s oeuvre necessitates and calls for fresh and unconventional modes of perception because his concept of violence is far superior to the common notion generally held by people. Although, there is no terminal point at which one may stop the enquiry to draw definite and final conclusions, the impression of violence one gets from Hughes’s poems is inseparable from the indestructible life-energy in Nature. Therefore, Hughes’s concept of violence is based on a belief of the inner spiritual unity of Nature. As a result, in the poetry of Ted Hughes, Nature emerges as a radiant principle of energy embodying an organic vision of life as portrayed in his later collection of poems in *River* (1983). The poet’s use of primitive ritual forms, his apocalyptic mode of expression and his concern with cosmic energy make his poems great and he stands justified in offering his own view of life.

Hughes merits our attention singularly for offering a prophetic insight into the subject of cosmic energy perceived as violence by many critics. Although most of the critics identify violence as an integral part of the poetic vision of Hughes, no serious or comprehensive study on theme of violence in his poetry has been undertaken until now. Since the topic is of great contemporary appeal and is directly related to the life of modern man, it would be rewarding to examine this unexplored area of his poetry. The bulk of critical materials available on Hughes invariably touches upon the aspect of violence in his poetry. Yet, no single work has captured the graph of violence or cosmic energy at work in his poetry in a systematic manner. Therefore, embarking on a detailed study on the topic is relevant in our times. In this context, it is apt to recall the observation of Keith Sagar who is a prominent scholar on Hughes. In his book, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, Keith Sagar (1975) declares that Hughes's central concern was to reconcile human vision with the energies and powers, of the nonhuman cosmos. He wanted to identify these energies and to describe them, not only in human terms but in Nature's own terms.

The above observation of Keith Sagar unlocks the inner secret of the poetic quest of Hughes. A closer examination of Hughes's major poetic collections will reveal that cosmic energy is the connecting link or the central idea that is displayed throughout his poetic career. Similarly, John Press (1963) discovers the primary role of cosmic energy in the poems of Hughes. According to him, "Hughes contemplates with a steady mind and saturnine humour, the nature and function of violence in the universe" (p. 185). Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts (1981) in their study on Hughes frequently mention the importance of violence for a fuller comprehension of Hughes's poetry. They believe that the reason for the problem about violence in Hughes's work is his determination to acknowledge the predatory and destructive character of animals and certain elemental forces in Nature. Moreover, human beings are only a part that constitute the entire spectrum of an objective biological reality.

According to Walder Dennis (1987) violence is inextricable in the poetic fabric of Hughes. He says: "the animals are not there for their own sake, however brilliantly defined they seem to be but they serve as metaphors for a particular human vision" (p. 3). Dennis further elaborates that "this vision is many-sided, but can be reduced to two fundamental and opposing qualities. They are a celebration of energy, spontaneity and instinctual drive on the one hand, and a fearful admission of the deadly abiding predatoriness of life on the other hand" (p.3). Margaret Dickie Uroff (1980) also holds similar opinion. In her comparative study of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes,

she says: “Throughout his career, Hughes’s imagination has been engaged by what he imagines to be violent energies in man and nature. In his efforts to describe these energies, to explore their connections, to explain their short circuits, Hughes has been drawn into submerged areas of the psyche” (p.14).

Lawrence Kramer (1987) goes to the extent of declaring that “violence is to Ted Hughes, what obscurity is to Mallarme, the source of poetic identity, the mark of authentic vision and the consequent shaper of language” (p.15). Endorsing the primacy of cosmic energy or violence in the poetry of Hughes, this work aims at an exegesis of the totality of forces working behind violence, showing itself in a pattern of growth. Since the word violence has wide ranging implications, Hughes’s major poetic collections are taken up for analysis in a chronological order to detect the patterns of cosmic energy embodied in them.

The meaning of a text can be fully understood only by linking them to specific cultural contexts through the medium of language that is encoded within the cultural consciousness of the perceiver. As a result, a text can be decoded in a variety of ways depending on the cultural unit that assigns the function of a sign. In this context, a variety of readings have become possible and theoretically valid for a single text. This study is an attempt to delve deep into the fabric of the poetic creations of Hughes and to understand the psyche of the cosmic force or violence embodied in them. It is an investigation geared towards a detailed and in-depth examination of his poetical works in a chronological order to discover the patterns of the cosmic energy embodied in them. One of the special objectives is to assess the impact of his poetry on common readers, especially in relation to modern life. The analytical strategies employed in this study also include a semiotic reading of the text from an ecological perspective, thereby unlocking the great psychic and spiritual power these poems embody.

The ecological perspectives in Hughes are a gradual evolution of his poetic growth, emanating from a deep awareness of the basic function of genuine poetry as a renewal of life. Hughes’s idea of ecology is based on the belief of the wholeness and inner spiritual unity of Nature. He views Nature from an ecological point of view and indicts man for his ruthless destruction of the environment. Hughes employs biological parameters to show the inevitability of doom or holocaust, unless man moves away from his crimes against Nature. As a result, his later poems have become testaments of his biocentric vision of life. Hughes’s concern for ecology is explicitly voiced by portraying the fate of animals that face extinction due to human wilfulness and cruelty. As Hughes would write only obliquely about



contemporary issues to avoid getting caught up in the excitement of the times, his indictment of man is subtle as it never falls into propagandist mode of expression.

The two archetypal images that Hughes employs consistently to voice his protest against man's exploitation of Nature are the wolf and the hawk. In his earlier collections, they are portrayed as embodiments of energy capable of activating human imagination, but in his later volumes they enter human consciousness not by their compelling energetic presence but as remnants of human crimes against ecology. The consistent endeavour of Hughes in his poetry has been to offer a viable alternative to prevent the disintegration of life ushered in by an excessive anthropocentric vision of development that has reduced Nature to a subset of human activity. In his eagerness to master the environment, man has denied integrity to animals and has given rise to serious ecological problems that threaten the existence of this planet.

Hughes's distrust of man stems from his belief that cerebral activity deprives man of his integrity and makes him diabolical and destructive. Hughes believes that all great dangers that threaten humanity with extinction are the direct consequences of conceptual thought and verbal speech. Initially, Hughes accepted only the biological reality of existence as ultimate and considered human concepts of religion and morality as evolutions or superstructure built up by human reason. According to Konrad Lorenz (1963), the deepest strata of human personality are in their dynamics, not essentially different from the instinct of animals, but on their basis human culture has erected all the enormous superstructure of social norms and rites. This accounts for Hughes's sustained interest in animals that live according to biological laws of necessity, enhancing harmony in themselves and in ecology.

Hughes, from his earlier impressions of anthropocentric perception of the universe, through stages, develops a biocentric vision of life. He believes that only a biocentric approach alone can save man from ultimate destruction. A detailed examination of Hughes's poetic output reveals that his approach to violence is highly scientific and systematic. He believes that violence is an affirmation of life and Nature is a source of creative energy. According to P.R. King (1979), if man cuts himself off from the source of creative energy in Nature, his instinctual energies will be perverted into destructive paths. In short, the contours of cosmic energy or violence embodied in Hughes's poetry is synonymous with the energy of life. Moreover, if man is cut off from this primal source of energy in Nature, it is suicidal to his own very existence. This primal explosive energy in Nature

is the sap of man's life. Just as plants need the sap for their sustenance, human beings should be charged by the elemental power circuit of the world. It is this elemental power that a common reader perceives as violence in the narrow sense of the term in the poetry of Hughes. This necessitates a clarification of Hughes's concept of violence.

Lexically violence means use of force or energy. Hughes goes much beyond this simple definition of violence as visible manifestation of primal forces or energy in Nature. His consistent endeavour is to trace the source of this elemental power circuit in Nature. As a result, he grapples with the basic source of indestructible energy which is inherent in all living beings. In common parlance, it is difficult to dissociate the term from its derogatory implications. Violence as commonly understood is an undesirable element in human society. Often, it is understood as indiscriminate release of mechanical energy for destruction as employed in war and in the purposeless infliction of pain by man against his fellow beings.

The term "violence" has become rather amorphous in modern times because the twentieth century has witnessed extensive violence in the form of world wars. Moreover, the news media, the sociologists, the historians and the psychologists have made man so conscious of the destructive potentiality of violence by highlighting primarily its destructive aspect. After witnessing two world wars and their cruelties, people have come to realize that violence is undoubtedly the biggest problem confronted by today's world. The destructive connotation of violence has infiltrated into the very fabric of our society which we can no longer afford to ignore. It is in this context that the contribution of Hughes becomes relevant. He dares to deal with the reality of violence and to explore its essence through his poetic art when most of his contemporaries were afraid to approach the subject due to its dangerous potentiality.

Since violence is an amorphous term with wide-ranging implications, the first task is to define violence and to show how Hughes uses it in his poetry. Talking about violence in contemporary poetry, Lawrence Ries (1977) highlights two types of violence. The first kind of violence is injury whether physical or psychological which man inflicts upon his fellow man. The second type of violence is the spontaneous powerful energy which belongs to the animals and Nature. Sometimes, it can be terrible and dangerous, but it is also a source of life. The first kind of violence described above is destructive and is a crime against Nature because the injury which modern man inflicts on his fellow man doesn't usually arise from an inner need of

the instinct. On the other hand, it is based on the concepts and is mostly executed by mechanical energy.

According to Hughes, mechanical energy is impersonal or external and it is basically destructive as it deprives man of his intimate personal expression. Therefore, what Hughes advocates is the spontaneous and powerful energy which belongs to the Natural order, which is inherent in all living beings. Since, this energy is the source of life embedded in all living beings, nobody can afford to ignore this Natural expression of energy, though it may appear terrible and dangerous at times. However, the violence resulting from physical and psychological injury which man inflicts on his fellow beings is the cultural and social by-product of society. Therefore, human violence which grows out of a particular social condition is only a faint and distorted version of the primal explosive forces of Natural violence which is universal.

Most of the poetry that was written immediately after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war dealt with violence, received its impetus from the perception of human violence. The bulk of literature that dealt with violence at that time was essentially the by-products of those immediate historical conditions that weighed upon the artist's sensitivity. A realistic analysis shows that most of the post-war British poets busied themselves with human violence. However, Ted Hughes could transcend the spatial-temporal dimensions of human violence to explore the elemental cosmic energy in the biological cycles of Natural violence in the eco-system.

Hughes accepts violence as an indestructible principle in Nature partaken by all the creatures in the form of pure energy. Biologists call it the "elan vital" or the sap of life. Hughes describes it as the elemental power circuit of the world. The theoretical assumption that violence or cosmic energy is central to the poetic art of Hughes is further highlighted by Ries (1977). He says that Hughes is the only British poet who has consistently explored and examined the problem of violence. The thematic concern of Hughes forms the mainstay of violence in his poetic fabric. In his endeavour to drive home his concept of cosmic energy, he employs unusual linguistic craftsmanship in the creation of his poems. In most cases the text of the poems usually becomes a literal explication of the semiotics of violence.

In Short, Hughes conceives of violence as an inner source of energy seen universally in Nature. He considers it as an affirmation of life on this earth. The hypothesis that violence is synonymous with life and energy and to be cut off from this primary source of energy is suicidal to human existence

stands on the solid foundation of science and philosophy. To a great extent, religious rituals symbolize energy, vitality and regeneration. Hughes too, makes use of these religious rituals in a symbolic way. The text and the meaning in many of his poems are so intertwined or embedded in themselves that they ultimately become semiotic expressions of energy. As a result, the meaning of the text often becomes indistinguishable from the linguistic event of the poem.

The poetry of Hughes is essentially built upon the concept of cosmic energy supported by the acceptable theories of science and philosophy. Since his poetry is closely related to the life of modern man, it is viable to examine the psychological validity of his poetic concepts in the cultural context of human social set-up. Hughes sees the nature of man as a small thread in the huge tapestry of Nature. As man is part of this primal source of cosmic energy, his instinctual expression of violence is quite natural. It is suicidal for him to be cut off from the elemental power circuit of this world. According to Hughes, man, by his conceptualization, makes violence destructive, while animals, by their instinctive responses, uphold the law of Nature.

Konrad Lorenz (1963) who made a scientific study of aggression verifies the contention of Hughes. According to Lorenz, what directly threatens the existence of an animal species is never the eating enemy but the competitor. Violence resulting from competition arises out of cerebral activity and is seen only in the human world, whereas violence in the animal world is instinctual and is basically oriented towards promotion and preservation of the species. Therefore, Lorenz opines that aggression far from being the diabolical and destructive principle that classical psychoanalysis makes it out to be, is really an essential part of the life-preserving organization of instincts.

Hughes builds up his poetic edifice on the above premise and upholds only instinctual violence arising out of an inner need embedded within the core of every living being. Energetic activity seen in the animal world is the finest examples of such violence. This accounts for Hughes's sustained interest in the world of animals. In the human context, violence rarely springs from an inner need of urgency. Mostly it is a depersonalized act expressed through mechanical devices which deprives man of his wholeness and integrity. Therefore, Hughes wants to bring back that "old heroic bang" into the lives of man. As a result, he admires the ancient warriors who "thinned down their fat fulsome blood" but despises the modern bomber

pilots who bring about the destruction of large cities, but whose “hearts are small and cold”.

Hughes sees human beings who kill each other for any purpose as an aberration of Nature. It is to be noted that mass killings that take place in today's world do not spring from the instinctual needs of man. They are chiefly accomplished by machines and invariably based on concepts and ideology. Such impersonal expressions of violence not only deprive men of their essential integrity, but make them diabolical and destructive. Therefore, Hughes's concept of violence is essentially based on cosmic energy that is present in every biological organism. It is the source of power embedded within the physical nature of all living beings.

Hughes's endeavour as a visionary poet is to arrive at the ultimate experience of truth. Therefore, initially, he accepts only the biological reality of existence as ultimate. Human beings at the most basic level do have an instinctual existence that can accommodate violence or aggression as an integral part of their physical constitution. Hannah Arendt (1969) who made a comprehensive study of violence in human society from a social and ethical point of view admits that violence deprived of social connotation has an essential biological function. She argues that in non-political and biological terms violence is necessary for the sustenance and preservation of any species because it is an undeniable fact that in the household of Nature destruction and creation are but two sides of the natural process. According to Arendt, violence in political context is generally detrimental to society at large, but she upholds its importance biologically as a manifestation of life and creativity.

Long before Konrad Lorenz discovered the life promoting function of aggression in the animal kingdom, violence was practiced as a manifestation of life, specifically for its role in creativity. Sorel, inspired by Bergson's “elan vital” aimed at constructing the philosophy of creativity based on the indestructible nature of cosmic energy. Therefore, Hughes's concept of violence is founded on the time-tested observations of many great thinkers. Hughes's concept of violence as an inner principle of energy seen in the organic Nature of this universe is analogous to Einstein's concept of indestructible energy scientifically formulated as  $E=mc^2$ . In short, Bergson has called it the “elan vital” and Sorel considered it as the principle of creativity or the vital moving principle that charges the whole of Nature and manifested fully in the dynamic life of animals.

The pronouncements which Hughes makes about his concept of cosmic energy or violence as an indestructible force of life in Nature is direct and obvious. However, it is also an authentic trade mark of great poetry because he declares that poetry is nothing if it is not a record of how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error. Hughes had always kept the two types of violence distinct and apart. His concept of violence is pure natural energy which springs from a genuine inner instinct that has its root in the elemental power circuit of all living organisms. Therefore, Hughes argues that any form of violence or vehement activity invokes the elemental power circuit present in Nature.

Discounting the derogatory implications that the term has acquired in modern times, violence is seminal to the hermeneutical aspect of Hughes's poetry. The cosmic force or energy that is vibrant in his poetry cannot be simplified as mere violence. The terminology has wider implications in Hughes because what is taken as mere violence in his poems is actually the life sustaining force which no one can afford to ignore. He argues that if you refuse energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept energy, it destroys you. He believes that the only alternative is to accept energy and find methods of turning it to good or keeping it under control.

Hughes equates violence with the life energy in Nature and draws the fundamental axioms of his poetics with syllogistic precision. According to him, violence or cosmic energy is the biological foundation of life and the ultimate truth of existence. His poetry is an on-going exploration into the working of this cosmic force that governs life. Consequently, one can perceive a consistent pattern of growth in his approach to violence. In order to decipher the patterns of violence or cosmic energy in the poetry of Hughes, it is necessary to examine his major poetic collections from his first volume *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) to *Wolfwatching* (1989) which can be considered as the completion of a circle in terms of his consistent exploration of cosmic energy.

The three decades of poetic activities mark the closing of a circle with regard to the gradual evolution of his quest to unravel the essence of violence. It is significant that the consistent endeavour of Hughes has been to offer a viable alternative to Christianity which upholds an all-powerful or immanent creator. It has also prompted Hughes to invert some of the well-established beliefs of Christianity and to declare with audacity that Christianity is only a provisional myth like any other religion which may pass with the destruction of a race. Therefore, his endeavour is to create the body of a myth that can survive the worst kind of destruction.

The patterns of cosmic energy emerging from his three decade long poetic activity can be understood only through a chronological analysis of his major poetic collections. The ecological perspectives in the poems require critical analysis to highlight their contemporary appeal. The hermeneutical stratagems employed in the analysis will focus special attention on the linguistic peculiarities of the poems in the larger context of semiotics. Since Hughes considers violence as an indestructible principle, he employs it consistently in his poetry. On a deeper level of perception, one can detect the patterns of an organic growth in his treatment of violence. It is to be noted that many critics who have emerged with positive assertions about the presence of violence in Hughes's poetry failed to conceive its significance in the larger context of his creative output.

According to John Press (1963), Ted Hughes plots with notable skill the curve of violence in the cosmos, but makes scarcely any attempt to elucidate the significance of his graph. Hughes seems to equate violence with vehement activity. Hughes's concept of violence rejects the human social set-up as a super structure having no solid foundation. In the natural order of things destruction is part of the reality, yet there is a reverence for life that allows integrity to all living organisms which human society lacks very much. This accounts for Hughes's sustained interest in the world of animals. His attempts to capture the dynamic life of animals can be traced back to his obsession with the fullness of life at the most basic level. Hughes believes that writing poetry is like capturing animals. The metaphoric description of poetic creativity is amplified in great detail in his book *Poetry in the Making*. He says:

In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them (Hughes, 1967, p.15).

The cerebral pre-occupations of men deprive them of a meaningful and wholesome existence enjoyed by animals in this world. A detailed study of Hughes's major poetic collections demonstrates that there is an unbreakable chain of cosmic energy connecting most of his poems. On closer examination, it is possible to decipher the gradual emergence of a clear pattern of cosmic energy running throughout his major poetic collections. The patterns of the cosmic energy that unfolds progressively from his poems can be categorized into five distinct classes from a chronological perspective.

1. Cosmic energy: An affirmation of life. Hawk in the rain (1957) & Lupercal (1960)
2. Cosmic energy: A ritualistic primitivism. Wodwo (1967)
3. Cosmic energy: A paradox of creation and destruction. Crow (1970)
4. Cosmic energy: An apocalyptic ceremony. Gaudete (1977)
5. Cosmic energy: A timeless myth and archetype. River (1983) & Wolf watching (1989)

This categorization is based on a chronological analysis of Hughes's major collections of poetry. The first section of this study takes up his first two volumes namely *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960). They can be considered together for a variety of reasons such as thematic unity and stylistic concerns. Both these books celebrate the spontaneity and energetic existence of animals. The animals in these collections appear as tangible witnesses of Nature's elemental power. Human beings are deprived of this elemental energy due to their excessive cerebral pre-occupations. Therefore, Hughes believes that all instinctual expressions of energy finally transform themselves into indestructible cosmic energy that fuels and sustains the never-ending cycle of life and death. This theoretical assumption gains currency when life is viewed from an ecological perspective

Every single living organism in this universe ultimately merges with cosmic energy by losing its individual specificity through the cyclical process of death and regeneration in Nature. It is this biological reality that initiates Hughes into a philosophic enquiry into the essence of this reality. Following the footsteps of the rational philosopher Descartes, Hughes begins with the logical step of proving the existence of "self" first. The majority of the poems in the first two volumes consistently repeat the words "I" and "eye" which echo the Cartesian dictum "I think therefore I exist". The excessive physical energy displayed in the poems can also be attributed to the Cartesian influence, as Descartes claimed that the active animal is always up and doing.

Hughes, in his desperate desire to affirm life by proving the existence of self, believes energy to be the solid foundation of life because energy is indestructible as proved by science. Therefore, the poems in the first two collections explode with physical energy which many critics perceive as violence in the narrow sense of physical brutality. In fact, the sheer physical energy displayed as vitality in the animals is a challenge and an invitation to the apathetic modern man towards an energetic existence. According to John Lucas (1986), violence in Hughes is an assertion of identity which forms the mainstay of much of his poetry. The vitality of the animal



existence, in effect challenges the cerebral man into a fully realized existence of animal-like efficiency. As a result, violence becomes an affirmation of life in Hughes's first two volumes.

His next major work *Wodwo* (1967) employs violence or cosmic energy as ritualistic primitivism. Assurance of self and existence of an external world prompt a person to look into oneself and decipher the meaning of one's existence. Along the lines of Cartesian logic, Hughes sets out to explore the nature of this world and man's relation to it in "*Wodwo*". It may be noted that the poetic persona or the already proved "I" searches for dreams and visions like the shaman, but most often, he confronts darkness and silence. Therefore, Hughes employs primitive rituals as well as imaginary creatures in *Wodwo* and makes use of the shamanic mode of operation to discover reality. Hughes believes that the empirical reality can be fully understood by the mind only through a shamanic process of flight, purgation and transcendence.

In "*Wodwo*", Hughes employs surrealistic images obliterating the fine thread of distinction that demarcates the day-to-day world from the supernatural world of the shamans. In the height of surrealistic fantasy, the human co-ordinates of time and space become irrelevant for the shaman who moves in and out of time at his own will and transcends this empirical reality in the process. Since the shaman has to pass through the ordeal of shamanic rituals to gain access to the supernatural world, the violence in *Wodwo* becomes a ritualistic primitivism.

The publication of *Crow* series of poems (1970) can be considered as the culmination of Hughes's quest along the lines of Cartesian logic. After exploring the essence of the self and the world in the first two volumes, the question of the creator figures prominently in the *Crow* series of poems. It employs a pseudo-Biblical mode of narration and inverts many of the well-established beliefs of Christianity. Through his protagonist crow, Hughes demonstrates that violence which is essentially an expression of cosmic energy, becomes a paradox of creation and destruction. The intertextual dimensions of the work, especially with regard to the Bible and the mythical dimensions of the bird crow, lend greater significance to violence. The elements of religion and mythology bring in parallels of contemporaneity and antiquity. Therefore, the endeavour of the poet can be considered as an experimental attempt to understand the question of God.

The Nature of violence in Crow series of poems is crystallized in the scientific dictum "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". In this sense all the actions of Crow follow the basic law of Nature. As a result, Crow can encounter pain and suffering with laughter. In the world of Crow, the violence of death and destruction is counterbalanced by the violence of creation. The creative and destructive capacities in crow are related to the creative-destructive nature of the universe. The inevitability of a moral awareness revealed in crow is closely related to the inevitability of metaphysical questioning. Ultimately, this is a matter of the concept of self in relation to the larger process of the universe. Hence, violence in "Crow" is a biological necessity based on the law of Nature which functions as a paradox of creation and destruction.

Gaudete (1977) treats violence as an apocalyptic ceremony as unfolded in the life of the Anglican priest Reverend Nicholas Lumb. He is seen waging a psychic battle which reaches a crisis point by splitting his psyche into two separate selves. By an apocalyptic ceremony of violence, he emerges as a healed and wholesome man at the end of the narrative. Since Lumb is the central character in the narrative and his experience of life is enveloped in violence that is apocalyptic, the whole book examines violence as an apocalyptic ceremony.

The publication of *River* (1983) and *Wolfwatching* (1989) can be considered as the culmination of a significant phase in the poetic career of Hughes because violence or cosmic energy ultimately becomes a timeless myth and archetype in these two collections. Moreover, these works proclaim a biocentric vision of life that promotes the integrity of all living organisms in this world. In *River*, Hughes portrays Nature as a radiant principle that embodies an organic vision of life and in *Wolfwatching*, the wolf becomes an animal archetype that embodies the cosmic energy. In this sense, these two collections become veritable testaments of Hughes's biocentric vision of life. In short, the poetic vision of cosmic energy or violence in Hughes is certainly far superior to our common notion of violence. He sees violence or cosmic energy as an affirmation of life and goes on to establish that it finds its fullest expression in ritualistic primitivism. He builds up his edifice on the paradox of creation and destruction and finds in it the greatness of an apocalyptic ceremony. Finally, Hughes's concept of cosmic energy or violence achieves the grandeur of a timeless myth and archetype.

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## CHAPTER II

### COSMIC ENERGY: AN AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

The instant critical acclaim, which Hughes's first volume *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) received reiterates the perennial romantic notion of poetry as something instinctual and spontaneous. The poems in this volume with their wrenched syntax and extraordinary yoking of vocabulary and images, with a harsh abrasive tone suggest the recalcitrance of a turbulent energetic world reluctant to be constrained by considerations of decorum and moderation dear to the 'Movement' poetry. His second collection *Lupercal* (1960) also maintained its insularity and distinctiveness from the general trends of the Movement Poetry. Both these collections largely have similar themes and concerns centring on the instinctual life of animals and the elemental powers of Nature. This led most critics to identify Hughes as a "poet of violence". It is true that the dominant impression one gets from these poems is a sense of vigour, vitality and violence.

Hughes displays an obsession with vigorous and violent images mostly drawn from the instinctual world of animals. The abundance of such images and the poet's concern with the world of animals prompted some critics to brand Hughes as an animal poet or a poet of violence. The vivid descriptions of animals and their grit for survival in a hostile world of elemental powers, together with the vigour and vitality displayed in his verses may justify the above labels. However, the primary concern of Hughes is undoubtedly man's life and its quality. Introducing his first book in the Poetry Book Society Bulletin for September 1957, he declared that his imagination is excited by witnessing the war between vitality and death. As a result, his poems are literary innovations that celebrate the exploits of warriors on both sides of life and death. According to Hughes, life is a continual struggle against the odds. What is commonly seen as violence is essentially an expression of intense vitality embodied in animals and in Nature. This principle of vitality is reinforced even by the style and structure of the verses.

The poet's obsession with violent images is only his desperate desire to affirm life and vitality. Therefore, Hughes's concern has always been wider than simplistic labelling of him as "animal poet" implies. It is true that he began in the first two books by exploring the primal energies of the animal and Natural world. According to King (1979), Hughes was primarily concerned with human life. Therefore, the poet wanted to express a sense of sterility and nihilism in modern man's response to life, a response which he connects with the dominance of man's rational objective intellect at the expense of a life of emotion and imagination. The life of modern man is characterized by boredom and apathy. In his world of ennui, an imaginative recreation of the instinctual life of animals can revitalize his dormant sensibility. Therefore, violence depicted by Hughes is essentially an expression of the cosmic principle of life in Nature. Sadly, modern man has distanced himself from this vital source of energy. Since Hughes sees animals as embodiments of energy, his poetic landscape is peopled with animals of various attributes that appear as effective metaphors for a particular human vision.

The manifestation of energy in Nature is best exemplified in the life of animals. Man, on the other hand, refuses this vital source of energy as something dangerous. Since the poet feels that his generation is deprived of the vital source of energy in Nature, he is all for opening up negotiations with whatever happens to be out there in Nature. It is these negotiations which resulted in powerful animal poems like "The Hawk in the Rain" and "The Jaguar". The violence in Hughes is therefore an expression of energy without any moral implications as envisaged in the normal human context. As a result, it is distinctly different from the meaning assigned to it in common parlance as violence. In Nature, we see an abundance of this energy and animals share this great source of strength. Sadly, the rationalist outlook of our civilization has distanced modern man from this primal source of energy. According to Hughes, we have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination because people believe that uncontrollable cosmic energy manifested in the world causes problems and the demons get hold of it. Hughes thinks that such attitude has resulted from the psychological stupidity or the ineptitude of the rigidly rationalist outlook that if you accept energy, it will destroy you. On the hand, Hughes believes that if you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death.

Hughes unequivocally establishes his sustained interest in the violent energies of this world. He believes that human life becomes meaningful only when man accepts this energy and channels it for creative purposes. Therefore, his consistent endeavour is to create an awareness in man of the

magnitude of an external energy which forms the basis of meaningful existence. To generate an awareness of this energy, Hughes not only uses such themes and concerns to his advantage, but also employs a skilful manipulation of the language. According to Keith Sagar (1975), the language of Hughes consistently relishes metaphors of experiences seen in Nature, even if it is unpleasant or horrifying. Most distinctively, Hughes's language can reproduce and even cope with the great primary energies of the world. Hughes's ideas can be better discovered by a direct analysis of his poetic craftsmanship and a critical study of the themes contained in his poems. In most of his poems one can perceive a dual thrust. Initially, it is an intense and detailed description of an external scene followed by an internalization of that spectacular external scene. As a result, what comes into play in the creation of a poem is basically the visionary imagination of the poet.

The stylistic and thematic affinity of the two early volumes such as *Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960) distinctly proclaim the poet's keen endeavour to establish contact with a deeper reality than that we normally inhabit. Hence, the poems in these two early collections explore the dimensions of existence where life is not insulated against the vast currents of energy that flow and drive everywhere in the non-human world. All the poems in these collections invariably capture the poet's pre-occupation with the elemental world of Nature and the energetic world of animals. The cosmic energy as an affirmation of life is evident in most of the poems of the first two collections, owing to the directness of approach and treatment. Later on, there is an obvious growth thematically. However, the presentation is subdued, complex and allusive. The thematic continuity sustained through decades of poetic composition very clearly points to the poet's magnificent obsession with the beauty of "elan vital" and his undiminished interest in the subject of cosmic energy.

The interest of the poet in exploring the "elan vital" or the cosmic principle of life seen in the animal world consistently develops into a magnificent obsession. The major poems in "The Hawk in the Rain" and "Lupercal" deal with infinite energy, agility and the violent activeness of animals like the hawk, the jaguar, the fox and the horse. This is at the expense of civilized humanity, who owing to the tendencies towards leisurely life can manage with the minimal quantity of energy. This is as much an indictment of human life as it is a celebration of animal life. The admiration for and kinship with a primitive and barbaric strain in the animal world has led Hughes to a contempt for mere civilization of values and attitudes that has strangled man's native energy and perverted his cosmic life force.