

## **Violence – A Thematic Interpretation In The Poetry Of Ted Hughes**

**Arun Punyani**

Department of English, HCTM Technical Campus, Kaithal (Haryana), India

Email: [arun.punyani@gmail.com](mailto:arun.punyani@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Violence is essentially one of the obsessive themes in the poetry of Ted Hughes. He has written a large number of poems which depict violence, violence chiefly of savage animals, but violence also in human nature. Hughes himself equated the word “violence” with what he called “Vehement activity” or with what he also called energy” although different critics have different views regarding the theme of violence in the poetry of Ted Hughes but according to him “Any form of violence, any form of vehement activity invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe”.

**Key words:** 1. Ted Hughes 2. Violence 3. Energy 4. Vehement activity 5. Nature

Ted Hughes may be called a poet of violence in a limited sense. The theme of violence finds a vivid expression in the animal and war poems of Ted Hughes. Ted Hughes is above all a poet of nature. In this time Nature is no longer a simple, guiding, moral force like that of Wordsworth. The ecological disasters have awakened the poet to a suffering nature. But this Nature in Hughes’s poetry is not a passive sufferer. It retaliates and has the capacity to unsettle our civilized outlooks and modern world. Hence, his celebration of animals is not an endorsement of crude violence as taken by many critics. It is a protest against what we have made of ourselves and this universe which belongs to all the creatures. Ted Hughes is a poet of violence only because violence is an unavailable factor in explaining the atrocities

that rationally and humanism have inflicted upon Nature. He wants to rescue Nature as well as mankind.

His animal poems depict the cruelty, the fierceness and the violence which are inseparable from the world of Nature. Ted Hughes's poems of violence are certainly genuine and we enjoy reading them. Even the normal reader can find a certain degree of pleasure in them, especially because they are perfectly realistic in their depiction of the distinct life form of animal world. Hughes shows great interest in the animal world. A number of poems are about animals and about the ferocity of those animals. The poem "The Hawk in the Rain" presents the contrast between the steadiness, the stability and strength of a hawk and the unsteadiness and sense of danger of a human being. We find the most vivid picture of the hawk being hurled down by a furious dream, and dashing against the earth, to be killed instantly. "The Hawk in the Rain" illustrates Hughes's vision of power and energy.

The earth poetry of Ted Hughes is obsessed with violence in animal world. He (Ted Hughes) generally dwells on a simple dichotomy between the instinctual way of living of the animals and the civilized man's response to it. Then there are a few poems of a different kind in which it is not the violence and ferocity of the animals but their submission and suffering which are emphasized. In the most of his animal poems Hughes depicts the wildness and the brutality of the animals. In "The Horses" we find the passivity and gentleness of a group of ten horses. A horse can also be wild, and even fierce. But the ten horses in this poem stand silent, still and without even snorting or jerking their heads. It is passivity of the horses which is the focus of the poet's attention.

Hughes has not only brought the physical reality of the pike before our eyes in a vivid manner but also found philosophical meaning in the pike and in the pond. In "Thrushes" we read that the birds move with 'a bounce and a stab' to catch hold of some insects in the grass. The thrushes possess 'bullet and automatic purpose' which makes them brutal. In 'Hawk Roosting' a hawk is imagined as speaking and expressing his own thoughts. Even more striking than the hawk's egoism and his sense of power is the imaginary of violence and brutality in his poem.

Many a time the simple dichotomy between the civilized men and primitively instinctual animal is not presented merely in the form of two contrasted polarities existing side by side. But it takes an intense form, and the poet, through a direct confrontation of the civilized with the primitive, attempts to denigrate the civilized man and subvert the whole moral order of the modern behaviour of the birds is treated in eulogistic terms. The hawk and the thrushes by virtue of their readiness to “tear off heads” become unequalled symbols of functional life force. “The Hawk in the Rain”, “Esther’s Tomcat” and “Meeting” dwell mainly on a direct confrontation of the animal with the person of some human character who is always representative of the civilized human order dominated by intellect. In “Meeting” the hawk’s powerful image works to strip off all intellect. “Esther’s Tomcat” mocks at the human code of chivalry and exposes the futility of all human attempts to kill the “Unkillable” tomcat. While projecting the animals as unkillable or utterly superior to the human beings the governing intention is to humiliate the modern man. Thus, animal imagery in these poems reveals the poet’s deviation from dominant moral and his anti-humanish stance. His aggressive attitude towards the civilized world is also expressed.

Animal imagery in these poems mostly functions to build up a polarity which can serve as a point of reference for the person who, at the face of the instinctual behavior of the animals, becomes aware of a lack in his own being. These poems mark an underlying criticism of the civilized man’s tendency to prefer intellect to his instincts. However, the treatment of animals in these poems indicates that the poet’s sympathy is always with the violent and assertive animals. However, there is a romantic streak in his disposition, as a result of comparatively mild and strictly indirected.

The imagery in his animal poems is at once graphic and realistic. The animal imagery, with its emphasis on the destructive powers of certain animals, has largely contributed to Hughes’s reputation or notoriety as a poet specializing in the poetry of violence. Through the images of the ruthlessness of thrushes, hawks, pikes, Hughes seems to be saying that there is no alternative to this violence. But he appears to believe that mankind can pacify these forces of Nature.

The ferocity of the animals of “The Hawk in the Rain” and “Lupercal” show that they are in communion with the power of the universe. Hughes makes these animals his helping spirits and tries to participate in the animal way of life a way that is based on a direct connection with the elemental power circuit of the the universe. The shaman by using animals as his tutelary spirits tries to establish contact with that situation which existed in primordial times when the divorce between man and nature had not occurred. The animals that Hughes contemplates also symbolize a similar effort by the poet to confront those dark, unknown and irrationals forces which inhabit not just the endless universe but also the human consciousness. That is why scene of violence which form an important part of his poetry is nothing but manifestations of that violence which is inherent in nature, animals and man. The difference is that the natural world accepts violence as a part of the dark forces of the cosmos. Man, on the other hand, repress all violence and in the process, intellectualize it by embellishing it with reason and logic.

There are many war poems decrying violence and cruelty. Infect war as a theme, is an obsession with him. In his war poems, Hughes takes cognizance of the dark and tragic aspects of war. In his view, war makes man live in the shadow of death. In “Bayonet Charge” the fear of being killed in fighting has been depicted in telling words and in an emphatic manner. It teaches us that the reality of death is understood or realized only by those who find themselves face to face with it. “The Casualty” shows that his war poems are not lachrymose; it merely reveals to us the reality of death and the significance of life. Dying in a war may be commendable act but living describes three kinds of grief. In “Grief’s for Dead Soldiers” and “Six Young Men” our pity and grief are aroused. But the guilt and violence are kept in the forefront. In some poems Hughes is very skillful in handling the theme of violence. His treatment of violence appears to be oversimplified in many poems. It becomes more reactionary when the poet conveys through animal imagery his belief that all human attempts to surpass the violent animals are doomed to be self-destructive. Ted Hughes is not blind to the urgencies of wild life preservation. He knows the actual condition of animals. His treatment of violence is a part of his general outlook towards the value-system of a highly industrialized Western world.

Violence, and brutal violence at that, is certainly one of the dominant themes in the poetry of Ted Hughes. This poet is fascinated by violence; he is fascinated by all kinds of violence. Violence in love as well as in hatred, violence in jungles, violence in the arena, violence in a battle and violence in the form of murder and sudden death. But in Hughes's eyes, violence through painful and very often fatal is also a guarantee of energy and of life.

Ted Hughes has mythopoetic imagination. Ted Hughes unlike his contemporaries, draws sustenance from ancient myths and in the process creates new myths which both a reinterpretation of the old ancient myths and a comment on them. At the same time, these new myths are highly relevant to the present time. The first version of 'Myth and Educations', Hughes refers to the use of stories by the Sufis. His "**Iron Man**", a story for children created a modern myth about how to handle the vast reservoirs of scientific energy. Keith Sagar observes in the part of Ted Hughes, "Gandte" has a quality common in all genuine myths; it can be interpreted equally well as applying to a supernatural cosmos of spirits and powers, to the natural world, or to the psychic world.

## Conclusion

Thus, we find that poetry of Ted Hughes has an element of violence. For him, power and violence go together; his own dark gods are makers of the tiger, not the pamb. Critics have generally referred the presence of violence in the poetry to Ted Hughes. This study mainly takes up poems from his two collections the "Hawk in the Rain" and "Lupercal". It is an attempt to understand the inter connection between animal imagery and violence. In fact, the early poetry of Ted Hughes is the poetry of animal world. Violence is often implicated in his celebration of the energy symbolized by animals.

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