Edward James Hughes is undoubtedly a great poet in the post-war literary scene. A prolific poet with several volumes of poems to his credit he has shown characteristic virtues that are marks of a talented poet. Born on 17 August 1930 in Mythommroid, in the valley of the Yorkshire Pennines, the youngest of three children, Hughes's imagination was filled with animals. His childhood and boyhood was spent in the dark valley of Yorkshire. If his life in the valley bred strong values—dignity and decency, cleanliness and honesty, hardwork and thrift, good neighbourliness and solidarity he had also developed respectibility, a self righteousness and self-denying puritanism. It was as a child that he realized all intellectual and artistic activities were less important than work and muck and brass. When Hughes was seven he moved to Maxborough in South Yorkshire. He was obliged to lead a double life, one with the town boys and the other with woods and a lake. At fifteen he wrote his first poem and won an open Exhibition in Cambridge in 1948. At Cambridge he joined the English course but shifted to Archaeology and Anthropology. During his stay in Cambridge he published a handful of poems in the Cambridge poetry magazines. In 1956 Hughes and some of his friends decided to start a poetry
magazine and at the inauguration of St. Botolph's Review he met Sylvia Plath whom he married later. The marriage proved positive and creative because she had already published poems and was his guide to American poetry. In 1957 Hughes and Sylvia Plath left for the United States which also saw the beginning of the creative career for Hughes. Unlike the poets of the Movement who had written on limited themes and whose handling of language is traditional, Hughes's work shows variety of themes and experimentation with language. In the words of Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, "He is a poet who has developed - from an early reliance on external Nature to a greater metaphysical assurance and the creation of a distinctive imaginative word". There are critics who have regretted this movement from reliance on external nature to the metaphysical world. There are others who regard this movement as significant. For the latter Ted Hughes's movement has not entailed a radical reorientation or a rejection of the imaginative heart of the earlier work. Those critics who have spoken of Hughes's greatness and of a consistent inspiration quote the following interview in which Hughes said.

Any form of voilence - any form of vehement activity - invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the universe. Once the contact has
been made - it becomes difficult to control. Something from beyond ordinary human activity enters, when the wisemen know how to create rituals and dogma have lost credit and disintegrated, and no new ones have been formed, the energy cannot be contained, and so its effect is destructive - and that is the position with us. And that is why force of any kind frightens our rationalist, humanist style of outlook. In the old world God and Divine power were invoked at any cost-life seemed worthless without them. In the present world we dare not invoke them - we wouldn't know how to use them or stop them destroying us. We have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination - anything bigger introduces problems, the demons get hold of it. That is the psychological stupidity, the ineptitude, of the rigidly rationalists outlook - it's a form of hubris, and we are paying the traditional price. If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accepts the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control - rituals,
the machinery of religion. The old methods is the only one.

The above passage maps out the territory of Hughes's work - his themes and the spirit, the inspiration behind it.

For Keith Sagar, Hughes is "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." Commenting on his imagination, the critic suggests that it is rooted in his "unconscious, on the racial unconscious, on his sixth sense and perhaps innumerable further senses." Drawing the analogy between his inspiration and a function performed in primitive cultures Sagar says that Hughes is a bard in the traditional sense and a shaman of primitive cultures.

Throughout his career Hughes has been searching for a way of reconciling man with nature, human vision with the energies, powers, presences of the non-human cosmos. He identifies the energies and describes them, in human terms as well as in Nature's terms. He explores the possibility of not only relations between man and nature, he is also concerned to discover whether negotiations are possible between man and his Creator. Further, he would account for
the collapse and analyse the consequences. In the poems in *Wodwo* and *Crow* Ted Hughes describes the destructiveness of Nature and suggests that reconciliation is impossible. However, in some poems there are hopes and intimations but in most of them there is a determination to go on trying.

The majority of poems in Hughes's work deal with animals and it is not difficult to see why? He said "my interest in animals began when I began ... my memory goes back pretty clearly to my third year, and by then I had so many of the toy lead animals you could buy in shops that they went right round our flattopped fireplace fender, nose to tail..." Later the love for animals was replaced by partisanship and envy and curiosity, possessiveness and adventure by respect. Therefore, "the animals reemerged not as playthings but as the lords of death and life". Hughes's imagination was filled with the memory of animals. It appeared that they looked superior as much by their lack of self-consciousness as by the sickness of mind. In animals there is no hesitation and no remorse. Their minds are all reflex streamlined as a trigger. The different organs of animals are so made that they are effective instruments to confer death. The only philosopher that Ted Hughes read Schopenhauer had said that an animal's organs represent purely the will to live in its particular circumstances.
Quick eyes, the trap jaw, the noose of the talon are all forms of vital genius. Whatever the creature it is a wire that will destroy. He has said that the universal desire for life is a thing both driven and terrible. His poems and animals are so grim and airless that they are sometimes remote from joy, he seems to say that it is better to fight than die. The title poem of "The Hawk in the Rain" exemplifies his belief that the bird is superior to man.

It is not only that Ted Hughes describes the various organs of animals and their purposeful role in their lives. He shows the animals in action, their each organ discharging its function. Bedient summarizes the poet's focus on different animals and their organs in the following passage: To Hughes, the more terrible the beast the more admirable. The stabbing thrush, the slavering wolf, the meat-eating dragonfly that 'stands in space to take aim', the Hawk whose 'manners are tearing off heads', the pig whose 'bite is worse than a horse's, the jaguar waddling 'like a thick Aztec disemboweller', the rat with 'inscisors bared to the night spaces threatening the constellations', the tom that 'will take the head clean off your simple pullet', the stoat 'Dirnking the staring hare dry', the 'Carrion-eating skate' with 'cupid lips in its deathly belly' - these are the heroes of his world, his fierce bulwark against
nothingness.

His description of the birds and his perception of their energies are the subjects in his first two volumes - *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*. They show the poet's power of observation and a keenness of his eyes. Keith Sagar comments.

No poet has observed animals more accurately, never taking his eyes from the object, capturing every characteristic up to the limits of language. So vivid is his rendering, so startling and true his insights, that the way one looks at a hawk, a thrush or a pike (or, in later poems, a Jaguar, a skylark or a swarm of gnats) is permanently altered. But the description generates metaphors, and the metaphors relate the creature to all other creatures and to human experience and concepts.

It is inevitable that Ted Hughes has been compared with Lawrence who too has a number of poems on animals. In his *Collected letters* Lawrence says that it is not killing that he considers mad and obscene: "The tiger, the hawk, the weasel, are beautiful things to me: and as they strike the dove and the hare, that is the will of God, its a consummation, a brining together of two extremes, a making
perfect one from the duality". This position of Lawrence comes very close to Ted Hughes's. Although both have written about animals Ted Hughes sounds very authentic because he seems to have lived through fear and pain and sorrow whereas Lawrence has not.

Ted Hughes has been criticized for violence, for celebrating violence in the natural world. It may be argued that it is not violence that he was interested in but in what it stands for. For him violence symbolizes energy, an energy too strong for death. In the words of Bedient

"The truth is that Hughes cannot avoid violence because life to him is a violent conception. And he wants to be on the winning side. His weakness is not violence but the absolute egotism of survival. It is the victor he loves, not war. He thrills to strength with all the envy, the trembling of mortal man."

As though to counter the criticism that he is a voyeur of violence, he wrote the poem "Wilfred Owen's Photographs" against violence. In his admiration for Nature and the animals he has implied the effeminate nature of man without "a diamond point of will". To him man has nothing whatever to qualify him for it. To be human is to precede the
animals like a one legged man in a race. The human mind is a kind of missing leg. The intellect in Lawrence is not so repulsive as in Hughes's. His poems on Sartre, Kafka and Einstein show in Hughes's words "the record of just how the forces of universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error. So, in Hughes if mind takes the sting out of man, woman incapacitates him. They are formidable and so Hughes fears and hates them. Only two types of men, the He Man and the artiste survive. The example for the first type are "Bull Moses" "Dick-Straight up." The poem on Mozart is an example for the second type, the artiste.

It has been claimed for Ted Hughes that he is rooted in the English poetic tradition - its themes, its preoccupations and its values. Now it may be pointed out that his use of language is traditional. What strikes a reader about Hughes's poetry is its reliance on auditory imagination. Eliot had defined the auditory imagination as that in which "the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word, sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, and fusing the most ancient and the most civilized mentally". If Eliot's definition of auditory imagination is accepted then we may describe Ted Hughes
poetry as an example. In his poetry latent in certain words and rhythms are to be found cultural depth-charges. The whole self of man, the ear, the mind and the body become aware of the secret which binds words, and the energy which beats in and between words. For Hughes the word as pure vocable, as articulate noise, as etymological occurrence is related or symptom of human history, memory and attachments.

Ted Hughes like Geoffrey Hill and Philip Larkin return to the roots and bring something back suggesting a continuity with another England. They are aware of their Englishness, their literary and historical past. Seamus Heaney commenting on the rootedness of Hughes, Hill and Larkin says

A desire to preserve indigenous traditions, to keep open the imagination's supply lines to the past, to receive from the stations of Anglo-Saxon confirmations of ancestry, to perceive in the rituals of show Saturdays and race-meetings and seaside outings, of Church-going and marriages at Whitsun and in the necessities that crave expression after the ritual of church-going has passed away, to perceive in these a continuity of communal ways, and a confirmation of an identity which is threatened — all this is signified by the
Elaborating on what he has said about Hughes’s relationship to tradition Heaney remarks that Hughes relies on the northern deposits, the pagan Anglo-Saxon and Norse elements, and draws energy from primitive myths and world views. His language has the vitality of Anglo-Saxon, the alliteration of middle English, and the elements of folk poetry, the ballads, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans.

There is in Hughes a primeval landscape where stones cry out, where the elements inhabit the mind, where the pebble dreams “it is the foetus of God”, “where the staring angels go through etc.” There are voices of God in the wind. Demonic, protean crow shapes and the poet is the wanderer. He is like a pagan and the choice of titles for his poetry suggest his heathen sensibility. *Lupercal*, takes us to Roman myth. *Wodwo* with its epigraph from *Gawain and the Green Knight* takes us to the medieval times. It is not difficult to see a clear outline and an inner richness which relate Hughes’s art to the medieval poet. Heaney remarks, “his diction is consonantial, and it sneaks through the air like an efficient blade, marking and carving out fast definite shapes; but within those shapes, mysteries and rituals are hinted at. They are circles within which he
conjures up presences".

It's not only that his diction is consonantal, he seems to have been influenced by Shakespeare, John Webster, Hopkins and Lawrence in the art of stress. The finest example of the use of stress is the "Thought-Fox". In "Fern" there is the wooing of the vowles rather than discipling of consonants. In "Thistles" Hughes uses guttoral of dialect and connect them with the Nordic stratum of English speech. Therefore the so called originality of Hughes is only chip of the odd block and his work need not be considered a new planting but a new bud on the old bough. In summary it might be said he has inherited much from the tradition and he is the rightful heir to the alliterative tradition.

The Cambridge critics obsessed with positive values failed to admire Hughes's poetry for they did not find self-denigration and integrity in his poetry. He was neither interested in irony nor was he aware of integrity. Probably Hughes believed that a poet obsessed with showing his awareness of his own intellectual transgression and a poet who saw the unease cannot create anything of significance. Geoffrey Thurley accounting for the academic disapproval says "the effect of power in Hughes's verse originated,
clearly, in the poet's confrontation with experience of a far deeper and more intense order than was generally evident in contemporary poetry. There are many poems in Hughes which rank with Hopkins, which speak of his strength and power and fineness. Hughes is also rated above his contemporaries, Thom Gunn and Geoffrey Hill because while the latter give up the struggle in their poems after a handful of verbal victories, Hughes harnesses the huge energy and continues a serious struggle. It is this courage that marks him off from his contemporaries.

Reading Hughes's poetry the reader cannot forget Blake, D.H.Lawrence, Hopkins, Edmund Blunden and James Stephens. His "Jaguar" bears relation to Rilke's "Jardandes, Plantes", and Blake's "Tiger" and to Hopkins's "Windhover". It is not by reacting against the native English tradition but by a deeper immersion in it that Hughes achieved his superiority. The influence of Lawrence was strong. They were similar, "Hughes so powerful, so much the forger of well made poems, the wielder of a verbal pneumatic drill, Lawrence so finely intuitive, telepathically attentive to the movements of natural life, the diviner of unique free-verse organisms". Through his poetry therefore Hughes suggests the need for a new kind of man, a kind of mentality superior to the self-doubt of the liberal tradition, one which will
extricate man before he is boxed up and herded by totalitarianism.

Hughes's relationship with the Movement poets is peripheral because the Movement poets were concerned with reacting against the poetic trends of the 1940's, and repudiating the new apocalytics and a rejection of the excesses of the neo-romantics. Consequently the poetry became empirical and objective. In spite of claiming to anchor itself in the real world and the real event it failed to reflect the real events of its age. For example, Donald Davie failed to look upon Hiroshima as a manifestation of forces within the human psyche. Interestingly it was Ted Hughes who probed the forces operating within human psyche. The poetry of the Movement exhibits symptoms of psychic numbing which results in death-in-life, diminished vitality, chronic depression and constricted life-space. But Hughes probes into the malaise and suggests that Nature is superior to man because it has the vitality and the energy. Hence his importance.
CHAPTER - I

References:


2. Ibid. p.12


4. Ibid


6. Ibid

7. Ibid p.98


10. Keith Sagar, The Achievement of Ted Hughes (Manchester, 1983) p.15

11. Ibid p.17
