CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion
The Absentist poetry of Kinsella, Hill, Graham, and Hughes share a common ground in high-lighting the need to represent the underlying reality - the terror revealed most crushingly in the man-made world of violence and wars. They also share the counter need to resist the irresistible despair and to contrive ways of reversing the absence. The quintessence of Absentists goes beyond disappointment; it is a realm where human being cares neither himself nor nature. It is a realm which is ruled by nothingness and Absence.

The meaning of Absence is explicated in the main body of the thesis covering the poetry of Kinsella, Hill, Graham, and Hughes. The introductory Chapter clarifies the terms of reference. Absentism shares some features with Existentialist philosophers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger. Existentialism is the philosophy of “Being” and “Existence”. These two are in close connection with “Absence” which stands in contrast with “Existence”. Absentism has meaning only in contrast with Existence, at the same time it is in direct relationship with Existence. What does exist is present and what does not exist, is absent. Then the question arises as how one can be sure about the absence of something which does not exist? To answer this question one has no choice except to refer to Heidegger. Heidegger introduces human beings as “worldish”- meaning “being in the world”, and then he establishes “Time” as a dimension of being in the world and being involved in the world. Thus from “Being” we shift to “Existence”. “Absence” and “Existence” both are under the authority of “time” and “place”. But “being” is beyond the limitation of time and place.

The human being, because of his anxiety, angst, and alienation in the world, starts to be an inauthentic being by destroying values, religion and even language. Unaware of this fact, man destroys himself. Chapter one is a survey on Heidegger’s
book *Poetry, Language, Thought*, explains the relation between poetry as the essence of language and the authentic existence of the human being.

Martin Heidegger’s theory of Dasein, deals with the rootlessness of the human beings. Man is “thrown there”; such a being has “anxiety” and “angst”. Man realising his situation as a mortal being, feels alienated. The themes of anxiety, angst and alienation belong to an inauthentic man. The language of inauthentic man is “Technological Language”. Technological language is a language in the frame and the chain of technology. Heidegger introduces another language for the authentic being; “Traditional language”. It is a language that deals with creation of poetry. He also introduces poetry as the essence of being. The identity of human beings comes through their ability to think and to speak. On the other hand language is the ability of Saying and Showing, which Heidegger names as logos. There he explains that the ability of human being to think comes through language and words. Thus the human being is under the influence of language. The essence of being is in the essence of language. In his book, *Poetry, Language, Thought*; Heidegger shows that the essence of language is poetry because it deals with the origin of truth. Poetry is the pure act of imagination, completely free from the will of human being. He even introduces the poet- a person who stands between man and God. Thus Absentist poetry has extended the possibility of poetry with an aim to make the reader aware of how far poetry can be dealt with the essence and the meaning of human’s life.

The lack of self-knowledge and the crisis of identity is a universal problem that Absentist poets write about. There are two types of lack of identity; one is at the national level, which is related to the post-colonial societies. The other, is at the universal level, which all human beings suffer from. The lack of identity which the absentist poets deal with is of the second kind.
With regard to the crisis of identity, Thomas Kinsella, the Irish poet is more significant than the other Absentist poets. His poetry at first glance deals with the crisis of identity in a post-colonial society, yet it never stays at this level but gradually extends the issue to a universal question. The absence of identity and the struggle of the individuals with the dual tradition and dual identity are among the main problems which all post-colonial societies suffer from. Thomas Kinsella’s “Nightwalker” and “Phoenix Park” are the manifesto of anxiety of a being who suffers from cultural alienation and struggles to establish a self and identity. For Kinsella as a poet even writing poetry can not console his anxiety, writing is a matter of exile: “Versing, like an exile, makes / A virtuoso of the heart”. Kinsella’s poetry mainly deals with the terrifying account of the horrors of war which not only had a devastating influence on the land but also on the families which were ripped apart. War had such an impact on people that it altered their lives and their attitude permanently. There was loss of faith in God, religion, values that once kept them together; passion and humanity are erased from the face of the earth. War is a sad song sung to the crumbling mankind. Kinsella through the elements involving the Absentist movement seeks to focus on those issues which are absent from the mankind resisting the completion of the complex whole. Every man has his own journey to fulfill and by pointing out the absent elements, Kinsella seems to enlighten people to realize what is missing in order to actualize each one’s personal journey.

Graham in “The Nightfishing” and “Malcolm Mooney’s Land” portrays a wanderer as a being who leaves the comfort of home and society behind and goes on a quest of the true self. Graham extends this mission into the wonderland of language in *Implements in Their Places*. 
Ted Hughes’s *Wodwo* is another source of the Absentist identity. It is “a burst of Absentist anguish” (Bedient, “Absentist,” 23). The violent instincts “deserve better than death” but “death is empty” and “life is death” (“Absentist,” 23). The Wodwo’s poems deal with human wanderer in the quest of lost identity. Wodwo a “wood-demon” is a collage creature “half-man half-animal, spirit of the forests”. The magnetic inner self and the animo-anthropo of Wodwo, both suffer from absence. “Gog” another being with lack of identity, finds himself disconnected from the world, finally turns into darkness and permanent absence.

Geoffrey Hill and Ted Hughes have dealt with the absence of faith. The absence of the ultimate almighty of God is a significant element in their poetry. Geoffrey Hill in *For the Unfallen* revitalises the myth of creation in an absentist poetic study rather than Christian faith. The book is full of macabre and cruel images of human faithlessness. The Godless book of *Mercian Hymns* is the masterpiece of laments for the lost faith.

Ted Hughes brings this motive in his profane collection *Crow: from the Life and Songs of the Crow*, where Crow stands in the place of God.

The other similarity of these four poets is the theater of violence as its worst feature. All themes bring the same shameful fact of violence and cruelty in their poetry. Violence becomes an inseparable concept of life, an unanswered dilemma of man’s will to power. In this study Absentist poetry covers variety of themes such as the horror of war, the possession of man with power, violence, which depict humanity of mankind in the falling state of the civilization. Absentist poetry portrays the senseless age of human being in its worst condition.

Kinsella’s attribution to war is from provincial war poem such as “Butcher Dozen” to the universal level in “The Good Fight”. Kinsella still has faith on human being’s
progress in future; he believes that “hope and history might rhyme”. Geoffrey Hill writes about history and war in an artistic point of view. He believes that art can not and should not compromise with power; in that case it turns to egotist and the untrustworthiness. In *King Log*, he writes about war in poems such as “September Song”, “Four Poems Regarding the Endurance of Poets” and “Funeral Music”. For him art of poetry has to make history out of the pieces of past and poetry should never be the ‘subject-matter of history, it should stand out of history.

Hughes attribution to history and war is different; his poems are explosion of cynical tendency and pessimism towards war. “Bayonet Charge”, “Six Young Men”, “The Casualty”, “The Wound”, “Out”, and “Crow” are his famous war poems. Hughes’s war poems depict the over power of will to life rather than death. In “Bayonet Charge”, it is not the nationalistic soldier who fights for his country rather the power of instinct which runs for life.

The Absentist poetry of 1960s is a reaction to the whole history of poetry from Romanticism to classicism and Modernism. It is the poetry of a tired and a completely disappointed human being. Absentist poetry is the poetry of the angry and the frustrated generation who has been played with by politics, history, religion and nationality. Absentist poetry wants to be free from all the boundaries which ideologists make for it, because it is not only pessimistic poetry but it is drowned in disappointment. When the absentist poet talks about religion, one just makes fun of it because man suffers from the incapacitated faith. Faith and religion are paralyzed and unable to give hope and future to the hollow man. When the Absentist poets write about mythology, one writes about the hero who is not the hero any more, rather a Crow, a cartoonish black bird. The disappointments of the absentist hero have the ability to destroy everything. The absentist hero represents God; a disabled god who
does not know what to do with human beings. The common element in all the poems is the absence of light, life, happiness, hope, faith and in reverse the absentist poetry is stifled with the horror of death, blood, violence and darkness. *Mercian Hymns* is a microcosm modeled on the macrocosm world. Whatever the society of human being deals with, is presented there; the idea of power, the empowerment, and the powerlessness of people, the idea of war from the ancient war to the Great Wars, the idea of faith and the faithless people as the whole book is of a godless hymns, the idea of history and the corrupted history of Britain and the whole human civilization.

Absentist poetry in the work of these four poets is not similar completely, there are contrasts among them. While Kinsella’s interests and involvements in political situation in Ireland shows his commitment to his nation and history, Geoffrey Hill is exhausted from the current history of England and European, he prefers to write about the remote history of ancient England in *Mercian Hymens*. W.S. Graham’s interest in language and meta-language poetry and communication affirm his preoccupation with the essence of human being which is in the hazard of Absentist language. The Absentism of Ted Hughes affirms his commitment to ancient and religion mythology. The mytho-absentist poems of *Crow* portray the modern myth of crow which suffers from the absence of hero, the absence God and the lack of faith. Although the Absentist school of poetry will be understood in the different dimensions of the poetry of these four poets, yet they individually develop their own distinctive approaches to Absentism. The difference between Kinsella and Hughes in regard to the scattered identity of the absentist man related to their point of view towards the problem. Kinsella always start with regional issues of Ireland and extend it to a general level but Hughes directly tackles the issue of identity in a universal level. The poetry of Ted Hughes portrays the universality of absentist poetry when he
crosses the border of the national identity in the collection such as Wodwo. Hughes is the only Absentist poet who writes about the absence of human beings when concentrates on Ecosystem and Environment. Therefore according to the diversity of themes in this type of poetry, Absentism can be defined as a cosmopolitan movement in the modern poetry.

My exploration of these four Absentist poets and the idea of Absentism as a school of modern poetry is significant: I found this movement as one of the most interesting and thoughtful poetic movements of the twentieth century. Absentism is applicable to our modern life, a life which is no more complete and absolute but scattered and fragmented, as the modern family in western society and now across the world. Human beings themselves are broken and fragmented. The broken men for Kinsella are dream walkers as the characters of his poem “Nightwalker” are, in Geoffrey Hill the broken men are empowered men like King Offa in Mercian Hymns, in W.S Graham he is a night fisher man as the narrator of “The Nightfisher”, and finally in Ted Hughes he is a Crow-man in Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow. The problem for these Absentist poets is that they find life barely livable, because many things are horribly wrong with the very nature of existence. Life in modern time gives no credence to joy and pleasure of man. They write about the lack of the significant principle values, which human society is thirsting for. They are the real social voice of the voiceless people. The absentist poets start with “forlorn” as a mode of intoxication. Disappointment is the temperamental reaction of the Absentist poet.

The fascinating aspect of the Absentist poetry is that they investigate not what is written and what is on the page but it goes further and search for what is not there, what is hidden and what is implicitly expressed and blatantly missing. What is conspicuously absent has more value than what is present. Its purpose goes beyond
the text’s content. Absentist study of modern poetry helps the reader to read the unwritten lines of the poem. It increases the creative imagination of the reader.

The research undertaken in the area of Absentist poetry sheds light on the current problems prevailing within the family unit and among nations. The poems of the four poets in question transcend time and space. These four poets are not the only Absentist poets, but their work established a new point of view in modern poetry form 1960s onwards.

The Absentist study of modern poetry requires a deeper look at each of these four poets. My study examined these four poets, but paves the way for further investigation, and seeks greater insights into modern poetry.