CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the light of critical theories like Post-Modernism and Deconstruction, deducing final and definite conclusions from a study may appear to be a logical fallacy. It is argued that a text can offer a variety of equally valid readings. Thus, any single strategy adopted for the analysis of a text falls short of a complete comprehension by leaving out other options. Whatever be the usefulness of this approach, the Hughesian concept of violence, analysed from any angle, invariably presents a consistent pattern of growth. It is basically built upon the theoretical foundations of Cartesian philosophy which professes that pure reason, rightly applied yields all truths to man as clear and indubitable as the truth of an arithmetical sum. The absolute certainty of inquiry starting with the self, demolishing everything else as fiction to be validated by pure reason, held sway over and accelerated the development of Hughesian poetics.

Hughes, influenced by the conceptual validity of the Cartesian method in relation to empirical phenomena, builds up his poetic structure along that line. Later he realizes its limitations and denounces it in favour of a unified synthesis effected from the Cartesian bifurcation of the self and the world. Hence, in his later volumes, the philosophical dualism is replaced by a unified and organic self inseparable from the world of Nature. Such a self relies on the intuitive mystical mode of perception rather than the deductions of reason based on empirical reality. The rationalist, to achieve syllogistic precision to his findings, detaches the self from its subjective and organic associations with Nature. The poetic career of Hughes, developing through changing perceptions and constant revaluations, exhibits consistency, as far as violence or indestructible energy is concerned. This central
concept of violence, modulated through his major works, emerges as an organic system embodying five distinct patterns. This thesis is an explication of these basic patterns of violence detected in the poetry of Hughes.

The inferences drawn from this study, explicated in detail in the preceding sections, comprising five main chapters are presented here to have a better insight into the Hughesian concept of violence. The basic assumption of violence as the equivalent of energy stands justified in Hughes's application of it in his poetic context. Since Hughes equates it with the archetypal primal energy in Nature, it is divorced from the social and moral implication of the term. A recapitulation of the main ideas from the foregoing chapters vindicates amply enough that Hughes's vision of violence, through stages of perceptive analysis, achieves the status of an Organic Nature, transcending the human co-ordinates of time and space. As a result, the perceptive physical violence in his early poetry gradually grows into a timeless myth and archetype in his later volumes.

Hughes reinforces his thematic concerns through a carefully built up craftsmanship supported by viable scientific and philosophical axioms. Taken separately, the individual poems may yield a variety of readings, yet all of them encompass within themselves a general direction towards an organic unity based on violence which is indestructible energy. The mode of approach adopted for this study is basically a thematic analysis of the poems. Yet the tools of semiotics and linguistics are effectively employed in the analysis, as they reinforce the thematic concerns of Hughes. In the critical assessment of the poems, due emphasis is given to the parameters of science and philosophy which render greater credibility to the poetic mode of truth-seeking. The
influence of Jungian psychology on Hughes, amplified in the later chapters, gives further depth and significance to his poetic endeavour. The validity of the findings is measured in the light of the prominent issues of contemporary life. Hence the significance of ecology becomes the focal point in the analysis of his later volumes like *River* (1983) and *Wolfwatching* (1989).

The poetic techniques of parallelism, contrast and onomatopoeia find extensive application in the thematic analysis of the individual poems in the early volumes. More than linguistics, semiotics is applied as a major tool in amplifying the poetic concerns of Hughes. In Chapter Three and in Chapter Six, the semiotic analysis of certain prominent individual poems is undertaken to explicate the consistency with which the poet holds on to the central concept of violence. In Chapter Three, the poem "Skylarks" is dealt with elaborately as a specific case in context. It becomes a semiotic expression of Hughesian poetics based on the paradigm of energy.

In Chapter Six, a number of individual poems are subjected to detailed semiotic analysis to highlight their role and significance as ecologically conscious artifacts that promote harmony in human life. These poems also function as semiotics of contemporary life, in which Hughes indicts man for his ruthless exploitation of Nature. Hence these poems become effective metaphors capable of averting environmental disaster by functioning as proper danger signals. The basic patterns of violence emerging from a detailed study of the major volumes of Hughes's poetry published till 1990, in a chronological order may be outlined thus:


This pattern of violence embodies the different stages of development in the poetic career of Hughes. In his first two volumes, namely The Hawk in the Rain (1957) and Lupercal (1960) violence functions as an affirmation of life. Hence the poems in these collections explode with physical energy. In this early stage, Hughes perceives the cosmic force of energy as tangible violence manifested in the life of animals and in the elemental world of Nature. Two major inferences are derived from a study of these early volumes. One of these is scientific and the other philosophical. The scientific axiom forms the mainstay of this study. It may be described thus:

1. Hughes considers energy as the indestructible and solid basis of everything in this world. Deprived of this pure energy no matter can exist in this world. This takes its inspiration from Einstein's scientific theory of the indestructibility of energy formulated in $E = mc^2$. As Hughes equates energy with violence, it becomes the solid foundation of this empirical reality on the one hand and a valid philosophical concept central to Hughesian poetics on the other.

2. In this world of energy what man needs is the affirmation of his "self". He should prove the reality of his existence. This is achieved through the route of the rational philosopher Descartes who declared "I think, therefore I exist." Hughes also adopts this affirmation of life as the starting point of his inquiry. This is highlighted by the poet's conscious repetition of the word "I" in the majority of the poems in his first two volumes. Statistically these poems form more than seventy five percent of the total bulk. The sheer physical energy displayed in the poems of these collections is manifested through the vitality of animals. It
operates as a challenge as well as an invitation to the apathetic modern man for a meaningful existence. It thus challenges the cerebral man into a fully realized existence of animal like efficiency. There is reliable evidence in Hughes’s thinking pattern to vindicate this belief. Reviewing Louis MacNeice’s book on Astrology he says: "The person with the lower potential absorbs current from the one with higher, along with highly charged thought-forms, moods, colourings and so on as modifying waves." Thus the animals in these volumes function as effective metaphors that energize the dormant lives of man.

Hughes’s next major work Wodwo (1967) marks a significant stage in his poetic development. In it Hughes’s vision undergoes a radical transformation. His inquiry based on rational analysis gives way to an intuitive mystical mode of perception. This is made possible by employing the shamanic mode of operation practised by the primitives. By virtue of this shamanic implication violence becomes ritualistic primitivism throughout the volume. Thus Hughes employs primitive rituals as well as imaginary creatures in Wodwo and makes use of the shamanic rituals to discover reality. Hence the violence in this volume is permeated by this mystical mode of perception which may be termed as ritualistic primitivism. Here too, the Cartesian method of logical progression is applied. After proving the existence of the "self" Hughes sets out to ascertain the reality of the world and man’s relation to it in Wodwo.

The relevance and the practical possibility of applying the shamanic mode of truth-seeking in contemporary social set-up are questionable. This may confine the value of Hughes’s idea to an artistic level impotent to be translated into real

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life situations. Such considerations certainly tarnish the
efficacy and practical wisdom of Hughesian poetics. Hughes
himself saw this practical problem and has voiced his concern
about it in his interview with Ekbert Faas. He has acknowl-
edged the practical impossibility of the poet becoming a
shaman in our present-day set-up. Yet the cathartic function
of the shamanic rituals cannot be ignored. These rituals
strike the cords of modern man's primitive consciousness and
bring harmony in his divided self. This is certainly a
positive achievement. reviewing Mircea Eliades book on
shamanism, Hughes outlines the importance of shamanism thus:
"Whereas religion may differ fundamentally, the inner experi-
ences and techniques and application of shamanism spring into
shape everywhere similar, as if the whole activity were
something closer to biological inevitability than to any
merely cultural tradition--though obviously cultural tradi-
tions influence it a good deal too, in detail."  

In the general scheme of things, Hughes's nostalgic craze
for atavistic conditions of existence results from his
aversion to modern man's excessive reliance on rationality at
the expense of his instinctive and emotional life. Modern man
who builds up his life essentially on the strength of reason
believes that he can achieve Godhood by dethroning the
physical body and its workings. This results from his belief
that the physical body is an impediment in his flight into the
ethereal regions of the light of reason. Hughes exposes the
falsity of this notion by holding up to ridicule the activi-
ties of such votaries of reason as Sartre, Kafka and Einstein.
The ineffectives of the wings of flight invented by them with
the aid of reason is given elaborate treatment in the poem
"Wings".

2 Ted Hughes, "Review of Mircea Eliade's Shamanism", 
Listener 72, (October 1964), p. 77
The relevance of Hughes's idea cannot be fully grasped by the present generation that substitutes knowledge for vision and places total reliance on their reasoning power. The deep-rooted influence of primitivism in modern man's life is undeniable as Hughes declares in his Review of John Greenway's, *Literature Among the Primitives*. "Primitive music has altered our world, may be radically. Primitive sculpture has been one of the chief sources of modern sculpture; it certainly led the way out of the impasse."\(^3\) Hughes explicates the ineffectiveness of rationality which attempts to reduce the mysteries of this universe to intellectual concepts. Thus, when the mystical vision of this universe is sacrificed at the altar of rational consciousness based on cold facts of material reality, life becomes a continuous procession of futile activity.

On a practical level, Hughes's approach may not yield tangible results, yet it enhances his poetic creativity by opening up new vistas of aesthetic and artistic achievement. Thus, *Wodwo* marks a distinct stage and an integral part of Hughes's development. Since it is apparently far removed from contemporary reality, one may be tempted to regard it as irrelevant and unrelated to human life. This assumption is untenable because the work seeks to tackle basic existential queries of man. In this sense, *Wodwo* enhances the poetic prowess of Hughes rather than diminish it.

The clubbing of the prose medium with that of poetry in *Wodwo* can be seen as a unified effort to achieve a harmonious fusion of seemingly contradictory elements in life. This is in consonance with the nature of the quest. *Wodwo*, being a primitive wild creature, untainted by human logic, begins its

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enquiry from basic existential problems. In this context, the sophisticated distinction of language into prose and poetry is irrelevant and immaterial. This apparent drawback has a positive value, because this wild man Wodwo, with his uncertainty of status and by his instinctive mode of approach may be able to provide better insights into human life than the rational logic of modern man. Hence the mystical vision of life in Wodwo passes beyond the peripheral layers of this empirical reality.

In Crow (1970) violence becomes the paradox of creation and destruction in the process of ascertaining the question of God through experiments. This volume also is basically built upon the Cartesian method of inquiry. The central question of Crow is the question of God or the creator. After tackling the problems of the "self" and the "world", Hughes sets out to tackle the Question of God in Crow. In this endeavour, he consciously casts away the Christian influence which is so ingrained in his psyche. To materialize his objective, Hughes chooses the Crow as his protagonist. The mythological significance of the bird coupled with its peculiar physical characteristics makes it an apt symbol for exploring the mystery of God:

I throw out eagles and choose the Crow. The idea was originally, just to write his songs, the songs that a Crow would sing. In other words, songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple, super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say without any other consideration.

Through this protagonist Hughes tries to invert the long-held Biblical beliefs with sardonic humour. As Crow can encounter pain and suffering with laughter, the violence of

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death and destruction is counter-balanced by the violence of creation. In this sense violence in Crow is a biological necessity based on the law of Nature that functions like a paradox of creation and destruction. As Crow takes up the theological question of the creator, it has wider implication than that of a purely literary work. The religious overtone so explicit in the volume has invited a lot of critical attention. The strength and short-comings of this religious implication are evaluated in detail at the end of this chapter.

Crow, as a volume of poetry occupies a position of central importance in Hughes's poetic achievement by the paradoxical nature of violence it embodies. This paradoxical dimension of violence consistently bespeaks a theological dimension that radically differs from that of the Christian concept. In Christian terminology, God is depicted as all good and no evil. This concept brings in the question of the source and origin of what is termed as evil. Crow, through its actions, seems to answer this query. Its actions are paradoxical in nature, combining in itself both the creative and destructive aspects of life. Hence, violence in the volume becomes a paradox of creation and destruction. Crow as a volume, distinct in style and content, has close structural affinity with the Bible. Though it seems to devalue the artistic merit of the work, a deep analysis proves that the work is an essential component constituting the poetic vision of Hughes.

The charge that scenes of grim physical violence in Crow tarnishes the artistic merit of the work is to be viewed in the light of the Hughesian concept of violence. Since violence is a universal reality, when it gets modulated into poetic truth, paradoxically it becomes untenable in an anthropocentric world order. Hughes, being a genuine poet,
accepts the reality of violence and tries to decipher its contours through his volume *Crow*. Thus, the book not only presents the paradoxical nature of violence as an essential biological reality of life but also shows the repercussions of this natural force when it is misused for narrow human ends. In this sense, *Crow* is a vital document of contemporary significance regarding human life.

*Gaudete*, published in 1977 shows yet another stage of clearly marked development in the poetic career of Hughes. It presents a new perspective in Hughes's mode of inquiry and his perception of violence. So far he has been exploring the nature of truth with an almost arithmetical precision by employing the logical methods of the rational philosopher Descartes. In *Gaudete*, Hughes views reality from a different perspective. The tension arising out of the dichotomy of the soul and the body has to be resolved not by repressing or divorcing one from the other but by a meaningful fusion and co-existence. Hence in *Gaudete*, the protagonist Reverend Nicholas Lumb, the Anglican priest is seen waging a psychic battle which reaches a crisis point splitting his psyche into two separate selves. By an apocalyptic ceremony of violence a meaningful fusion of the separate selves is effected and he emerges a wholesome man at the end of the narrative.

The dramatic narrative of *Gaudete* becomes a supreme poetic achievement as it resolves a vital theological problem. Conceived purely on an imaginative level, it may not have the efficacy of a theological treatise. Yet it fulfils the poetic function of catharsis in the divided psyche of man, establishing its merit as an ongoing theological quest. Lumb's problem in the narrative is the universal problem of every man. The tension arising out of the bifurcation of body and soul is basically a by-product of Christian theology magnified further
by rational philosophers. Poetic creativity of a high order marked by precise judgement is necessary to demolish this well-established concept. Hughes accomplishes this task successfully in *Gaudete*.

The synthesis of body and soul into a unified organism that complements each other is in consonance with the concept of an organic vision of the universe having an inner spiritual unity. In this process of unification, the Hughesian concept of violence becomes an apocalyptic ceremony. The organic development of violence through stages of poetic growth points to the vital role of this basic concept in Hughesian poetics. Offering solutions to questions of theological nature by revaluing well-established and existing theories through poetic activity may not be always acceptable and convincing. Yet, *Gaudete* by its faithfulness and adherence to empirical proof of a high order becomes convincing by its self-sustained validations. It is like the functional Mother Nature with her archetypal feminine energy.

The role and importance of violence is amplified in the volume by the ceremonial function of personal apocalypse necessary to become one with the archetypal energy in Nature. The organic growth of violence as an apocalyptic ceremony is thus the natural outcome and the unavoidable result of the poetic growth in Hughes. The concept of a violent personal apocalypse necessary to achieve oneness with Nature may be compared to the Christian concept of the "dark-night of the soul." This nightmarish experience of the soul envisioned in Christian theology radically differs from the Hughesian apocalypse. In Hughes, the individual specificity characterized by the "self" undergoes total annihilation as a necessary concomitant of the apocalyptic ceremony, while in Christian context, the principle of individuation becomes a new adjusted "self".
Thus, for Hughes, the dichotomy is completely done away with, while in the Christian context the "self" as a principle of individuation, distinct and separate from Nature, is preserved as such. Thus, Lumb in the epilogue of *Gaudete* is not his old self but a newly created vocable of Nature resulting from the synthesis of an apocalyptic ceremony of violence. As such, he is able to exist in complete harmony with the archetypal feminine Nature. He can whistle an otter out of the lough with the very same ease with which God whistled out this universe from the Waters of chaos.

Finally, violence becomes a timeless myth in *River* (1983) and an archetype in *Wolfwatching* (1989). Thus there is a clear pattern of growth, comprising five distinct stages in Hughes's perception of violence. This consistent vision of violence in the world as an expression of energy or the vital power circuit of the archetypal feminine Nature compels the poet to view life itself as an expression of this "elan vital" in individual organisms. This biocentric vision of the poet makes violence a timeless myth and archetype. Thus, Hughes offers a comprehensive world view through his poetic endeavour. When this view is accepted, the problem of violence can be given a satisfactory explanation. Instead of denouncing it as unnatural, what is required is the channeling of this vital source of energy for creative purposes. This same energy can become harmful and dangerous when misused for narrow human ends as employed in war and in purposeless destruction of Natural resources.

The bane of contemporary life is certainly the misappropriation of this vital energy in Nature. It results in dangers of such magnitude that man usually thinks of it with repulsion. As a result he is unable to comprehend the indestructible archetypal energy in Nature. Hughes's poetic endeavour is largely centred around offering a proper perspec
tive of violence in this world, which is basically an expression of the "elan vital" or the sap of life in Nature. When this is accepted, the misappropriation of this energy for narrow personal gains will cease and a reverence for Nature will gradually develop. Thus, the permanent reality of violence as a timeless myth and archetype propagates poetry of an ecological nature designed to bring harmony between the self and the world.

The five distinct patterns of violence get further strengthened by an assessment of Hughes's other works during this period. A cursory glance at these works reveals that Hughes's vision of violence has an organic pattern as detected in his major works. Hence, before the concluding remarks, it is necessary to have a brief analysis of his other volumes of poetry.

1. Prometheus On his Crag (1973)

This small collection of twenty one poems following the publication of Crow further amplifies the significance of violence as a paradox of creation and destruction. Soon after the publication of Crow, Hughes took upon himself a theatrical assignment that led him to experiment with "Orghast". "Orghast" is the name of the play as well as the language it employs. This language is an invented one based on pure sounds. This play which intervenes between Crow (1970) and Prometheus on his Crag (1973) accentuates the role and significance of Prometheus as a symbol of the paradox of creation and destruction.

The suffering, pain and destruction enacted in the body of Prometheus is different from that of Crow. Prometheus with his foresight knows of his re-birth while for Crow, the whole process of suffering is just an empty drama of Natural law. The magnitude of his suffering blinds Prometheus momentarily
about its regenerative power. "He did not foresee, blinded by pain, his own re-birth, with the splitting open of the fig and mountain, the tearing of the shell by the vulture. The rough outer shell or husk of the chestnut must split open to release the gleaming kernel within."

Finally his paramount suffering changes into a blissful numbness, from which issues forth a new understanding of his suffering. The cost of the gift of fire should be paid through suffering just as the natural law of creation is inseparable from destruction. It is amplified by the circular

nuclear process in the sun—a central image in Hughes:

The holy fire is the creative energy of the sun. But the sun derives its energy from nuclear processes which consume mass and convert it into energy. Various natural processes (wombs) convert the energy back into mass. But the system is circular. The scales are always balanced between creation and destruction.  

In his new-found perception, Prometheus sees the vulture not as an instrument of torture but as a helper. Thus he attributes a symbolic significance of regeneration to suffering as opposed to the nihilistic perception of suffering as the enactment of an empty natural law by Crow.

The difference between Prometheus and Crow is primarily a difference of perception. Prometheus not only perceives the meaning of suffering but "he is the very prototype of the human condition. His body is at the centre of every acorn, like the grit at the centre of every pearl. Without the grit which is suffering, there would be no pearl—the priceless recognition which can be won only from suffering." 7 In Crow, on the other hand, even the noblest of suffering like the

6 Ibid., p. 150.
7 Ibid., p. 151.
crucifixion of Christ becomes a senseless trial of strength. Though both these works portray violence as a paradox of creation and destruction, Prometheus On his Crag, establishes regeneration as the inevitable outcome of suffering.

2. Season Songs (1975)

This collection primarily meant for young readers is not a respite from Hughes's basic concerns. The poems offer a fresh look at Nature from a unified self through the eyes of a child. All the poems in the collection reflect the vital aspect of Nature in its seasonal cycles. Violence as a paradox of creation and destruction as seen in Crow and Prometheus On his Crag is also extended to Season Songs:

Death is ever-present in season songs. There are poems about the death of a lamb and of a fledgling swift. Foxes and stags are hunted to death. A pheasant hangs from a hook with its head in a bog. A cranefly is going through with its slow death; the poet is a watching giant who knows she cannot be helped in anyway. But death doesn't cancel vitality, for all the deep compassion it evokes.

The changed perception of life by the unified self is fully embodied in the last poem. Accepting the reality of death as part of the Natural process of life, the poem becomes a virtual celebration of existence, the joy of being. The uninterrupted flow of life in these poems results from an awareness of life as a paradox of creation and destruction.

3. Cave Birds (1978)

This volume of poetry, published immediately after Gaudete, depicts violence as an apocalyptic ceremony operating in the world of animals. If Gaudete demonstrates the apocalyptic nature of violence in the human world through the life of Reverend Nicholas Lumb, Cave Birds explicates it in

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8 Ibid., p. 163.
the animal world through an alchemical bird drama. Cave Birds is thus a close parallel of Gaudete in every sense. The protagonist is a cockerel who suffers a psychic split. Like Lumb, he too is carried away into the under world. Similar to Lumb’s ritual death and regeneration in the underworld, bringing him a fresh awareness of the meaning of life, the cockerel also passes through a ritual ceremony of apocalyptic violence. He passes through various initiation ordeals, supervised by owls and eagles, culminating in a marriage (he is by now almost human) with an earthly woman (who is assumed to have been undergoing a parallel death), which is also his rebirth as a falcon."

The literal enactment of the Gaudete episodes in the animal context makes the whole experience a genuine process of Nature that is unavoidable. It thus establishes Hughes’s contention that the alchemical process in Nature is the human equivalent of suffering. As suffering transforms the base elements of human instincts into a radiant awareness of life the discarded elements of the material world become imperishable objects through the alchemical process in Nature. "Hughes’s use of the word refers to the aspect of alchemy explored by C.G. Jung in his numerous writings on the subject, the mythical transformation or rebirth, that occurred within the alchemist in the course of the outward operation."

This apocalyptic transformation is literally explicated in the concluding poem, "The Risen":

Where he alights
A skin sloughs from a leafless apocalypse.
On his lense
Each atom engraves with a diamond.
In the wind fondled crucible of his splendour

9 Ibid., p. 172.

The dirt becomes God.
But when will he land
On a man's wrist. 11

This apocalyptic transformation thus prepares the ground for the emergence of a universal "self" in which the conflict of dualism is resolved and the resultant radical self exults in the joy of existence. "The discovery of the universal in the self is the basis of Cave Birds. The authenticity of this celebration is the fruit of the rigours of Hughes's earlier adventure." 12 All the poems in the collection are oriented towards a regeneration of life achieved through the route of suffering. The protagonist, like Lumb in Gaudete, achieves purification through stages of suffering and psychic awareness. His resurrection has a symbolic correspondence to the alchemical process such as flaying, dismemberment and the symbolic union of opposites, bringing with it the triumph of resurrection.

The opening poem presents the complacency of the protagonist. His cocksure pronouncements appear like omniscient revelations. His complacent ego disowns the physical nature of its accumulated guilt. He even boasts about platonic idealism on seeing the sufferings of others. Though he rejects his essential material nature in his solipsistic blindness, he confronts his own "innermost self" as a victim. This spectacle frightens him out of his wits:

When I said: 'civilisation'
He began to chop off his fingers and mourn.
when I said: 'sanity and again sanity and above all sanity',

12 Terry Gifford, op. cit., p. 199.
He disembowelled himself with a cross-shaped cut. 13

The purification of his ego is achieved by stages of suffering which brings forth an understanding of the sequence of cause and effect. The protagonist's platonic conceptions are "shattered by the visitations of various terrifying bird-beings who confront him with the evidence of his material nature." 14 These bird-beings appear before him as the summoner, the interrogator, the judge, the plaintiff, the executioner, the accused, the knight, the gate-keeper, the baptist, the scapegoat and finally the guide who enables him to achieve an alchemical transformation as exemplified in the "Owl Flower" and "The Risen". These last poems testify that Cave Birds is based on Hughes's central theme of violence as the thermodynamics of energy diffused by the sun. "The Owl Flower" is permeated with the ripples of this indestructible energy:

Big terror descends.
A drumming glare, a flickering face of flames.

....And a staggering thing
Fired with rainbows, row with cringing heat,
Blinks at the source 15

The eternal renewal that takes place in the sun is transferred to the earth and its inhabitants. So, in the alchemical process of the bird-drama, the falcon re-born from the sun is associated with traditional theriomorphic images of ressurrection such as the phoenix and the snake. It makes him a redeemer just as Reverend Lumb in the epilogue of Gaudete achieves a unified self capable of living in harmony with Nature. The indestructible energy transferred from the sun brings about an apocalyptic change in the falcon. Thus, violence depicted in Cave Birds is an apocalyptic ceremony in the

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13 Ted Hughes, Cave Birds, p. 10.
14 Terry Gifford, op. cit., p. 203.
15 Ted Hughes, Cave Birds p. 58.
animal context, just as *Gaudete* presents the same aspect in human context. As a new order of existence emerges after the experience, the essential function of violence in both the contexts is redemptive.  

The redemptive function of violence in *Cave Birds* is depicted by Sagar thus: "The image of the shell of earth, followed by earthquakes, a burning and 'a leafless apocalypse' suggests that the falcon is somehow redeeming a ruined, devastated world. The risen falcon can apparently create a new Holy Ground." 16 The concluding lines of the volume work to extend Hughes's concern for man. The human context of Lumb's story offers only a personal apocalypse, but the animal context of the falcon's story redeems the whole earth. Thus, *Cave Birds* offers an integral vision of the apocalypse of violence through Nature's eye symbolized in the falcon.


In his earlier volumes of poetry from *The Hawk in the Rain* to *Crow*, Hughes deals with the concept of philosophical dualism of the dichotomy between matter and spirit inherent in this universe. Hughes himself once declared that what excites his imagination is the war between vitality and death. In his later volumes like *Gaudete*, the attention is shifted to the apocalyptic effect of suffering. It brings about unity in the split psyche of the protagonists as is evident in *Gaudete, Cave Birds, Remains of Elmet* and *Moortown*.  

In *Remains of Elmet* and *Moortown* landscape poetry dominates to such an extent that it becomes the metaphor for a universal vision embodying violence as an apocalyptic ceremony gradually evolving into an archetypal reality of timeless significance. "For Hughes, landscape has always been the

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material reality in which he has rooted his metaphysical adventure. It provides in his poems the measure of man's unity with and separation from the natural world." 17 Thus, these two collections published in the same year mark a transitional phase in Hughes's perception of violence. It has prepared the ground for the culmination of his poetic vision of violence in a timeless myth and archetype realized fully in *River* (1983) and *Wolfwatching* (1989).

The landscape poetry in *Remains of Elmet* is completely different from the unpeopled landscapes explored in his earlier volumes like *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*. In *Remains of Elmet* Hughes, consistently explores the relationship between man and Nature. In them human beings are seen to be in a process of integration, accepting the natural law of the cycles of death and regeneration. "So here is a peopled landscape of personal significance to the writer, through which he can continue with unique directness his interest in the relationship between human beings and the elemental process." 18 Thus, the social history of the ancient Celtic kingdom of Elmet becomes the biological process of Natural history for Hughes, seen through the kaleidoscopic vision of the landscape.

5. *Moortown* (1979)

*Moortown* is an anthology of unrelated poems collected into a single volume with four main sections. The first section from which the volume takes its title recounts Hughes's experiences as a farmer at Devon. These poems, autobiographical in tone, celebrate the life of Jack Orchard, the poet's father-in-law who is "a rough-and-ready farmer and

17 Terry Gifford, op. cit., p. 232.
18 Ibid., p. 233.
an obedient servant of the Goddess." 19 In the final poem of the section, the poet's perception of Nature as a midwife or a mother gradually becomes an all pervading presence of a radiant principle.

Your hands lie folded, estranged from all they have done
And as they have never been, end starting-
So slender, so taper, so white
Your mother's hands suddenly in your hands.
In that final strangeness of elegance. 20

The second section, "Prometheus On his Crag" was earlier published in limited edition in 1973. In it violence becomes a paradox of creation and destruction. It is different from the world of Crow, where this paradox of creation and destruction appears as an empty drama of natural law. But in Prometheus, this process becomes an essential concomitant of his re-birth which invests his suffering with a new meaning and significance.

The third section "Earth Numb" consists of poems taken mostly from "Orts" published in 1978. These poems too explore violence as a paradox of creation and destruction as explicat-ed in the sequence of "Seven Dungeon Songs" that is fashioned along the model of Crow series of poems. The logocentric perception of the protagonist causes the murder and disintegration of the Nature-goddess. His ego-centric self-consciousness makes him consider the earth as a prison. His attempts at re-integration in his own body by rejecting the earthliness of his physicality ultimately leads him "to be re-created as an unmediated vocable of the natural world freed

19 Thomas West, op. cit., p. 105.
20 Ted Hughes, Moortown (London: Faber, 1979), p. 68.
from the tyranny of mind or rather of the mind's destructive fictionalizations of the body." 21

The elaborate process of the reintegration of the body with that of the earth's vocable is presented by Hughes in a sequence of seven songs. The first poem in the sequence traces man's "diseased relationship with the mother and the building matter of the cosmos. As the wolf scatters her milk in the heavens, man is left behind to cry among the precipices of a world where the mother element is first sick, then dead." 22 The image of the sickly and dying wolf carrying a "soft-brained" child to the stars, and providing her nutrient milk for its sustenance implies the systematic degradation of Nature by human forces.

The ecological overtone gets further accentuated in the poems by depicting the development of this child who disowns his own mother in a systematic and progressive manner. Thus the second poem in the sequence presents the development of the child into a fully grown being whose brain waves "Reckless of blood" sucks life out of Nature. He then becomes the rising God of the motherless world. Though risen out of mud, he disowns the mother earth, in his eagerness to reshape and reanimate his basic essence that is mud. The third poem presents this futile cerebral activity of the protagonist. The vital spark of Nature cleverly kept hidden from man by the brain god can at certain moments spring a leak. This would cause him to be "caught unawares by some spontaneous spirituality some joy or elan, which may help him throw off the chain-mail system of thought that separates him from the natural world." 23 This momentary revelation would make the

21 Thomas West, op. cit., p. 98.
22 Ibid., p. 98.
23 Ibid., p. 100.
brain God all the more careful in stopping the entry of this vital spark into man by keeping the duality of body and spirit strictly separated. The fourth poem in the sequence is an elaboration of this idea. As the protagonist has denounced progressively the vitalizing spark of Nature with singular consistency he finds himself helpless when the revelation dawns on him about the importance of Nature's vital aspect.

The fifth and sixth poems in the sequence thus deal with the plight of the protagonist. When revelation finally dawns on him, he finds himself with a nervous system so attuned to the cerebral concepts. This prevents him from grasping the message that his own body is the earth's vocable as Thomas West says:

> At all events, what 'Seven Dungeon Songs' acts out and tries subjectively to induce is simply the mythic coupla 'I am'-which uttered by the world, couples man and world like Prometheus's first transitive active gesture or Adam's foot pressed to earth rock, in the perfect continuum (both linguistic and existential) 'World is am I'.

Thus the last of the dungeon song is a prayer which seeks to exorcise the old self which is a virtual slave of the new brain God. Hughes thus amplifies the dangers of a logocentric orientation that stifles the natural and the normal. This is evident in sharp clarity when viewed in the larger context of his poetic endeavour. The new state of mind untarnished by anthropocentric delusions, longed for by the protagonist is thus a mind that is freed from the bondage of the brain God. Hughes materializes this wish in his prominent volume Gaudete, through the risen Lumb.

The final section of Moortown, "Adam and the Sacred Nine" also explores violence as a paradox of creation and

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24 Ibid., p. 102.
destruction. Adam has to destroy his old self and emerge a new being in order to be fully alive. The necessity of a baptismal rebirth made possible through an apocalyptic ceremony of violence is central to Hughes's poetry. In this sense, "Adam and the Sacred Nine" goes along with Hughes's other major volumes. Thus, the problem of Adam is similar to that of the problem of Crow, Lumb and the protagonist in "Seven Dungeon Songs." The re-birth of the hero in them entails the conditional phase of an apocalyptic ceremony of violence. "'Adam and the Sacred Nine' is closely related in theme to 'Seven Dungeon Songs'. It tells the story of Adam, reluctant to awake and arise, being called upon by nine birds--each living. Like the phoenix which summarizes them, in the blaze--to follow their example of being fully alive." 25 This sequence of twelve poems also has appeared in limited edition earlier. The final poem in the sequence celebrates Adam's new-found identity as the vocable of Nature.

Evaluation

The detailed study of Hughes's major works of poetry and a brief consideration of his minor collections invariably establishes that there is a clear and definite pattern of violence in the poetic structure of Hughes. It is the result of the gradual evolution of his poetic sensibility. This pattern of violence has a consistent and organic growth. It begins as an affirmation of life in his early volumes like The Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal. As this study has shown in detail, it can be inferred with precision that Hughes has

built up his poetic structure on the firm foundation of indestructible energy manifested externally and perceived generally as violence in the material world.

The poetic vision of violence in Hughes is far superior to our common notion of it. The stages of its organic growth seen in his poetry has a visionary significance. This is evident from the poet's perception of its various stages. Basically, violence is seen as an affirmation of life finding its fullest expression in ritualistic primitivism. The poet builds up his edifice on the paradox of creation and destruction and sees in it the greatness of an apocalyptic ceremony. Thus, it achieves the grandeur of a timeless myth and archetype that touches the bottom of all things. As Hughes's basic venture is to provide satisfying solutions to the theological quest of man, the following inferences can be drawn from the study of his poetry:

1. Hughes's poetry basically operates as an artistic product capable of activating human imagination and producing a distinct feel for life by its stylistic devices in consonance with its thematic content. As a result it opens up fresh channels of awareness emanating from an experimental analysis of the basic quest of man.

2. From a social angle, his poetry fulfils the prophetic function of communal regeneration by locating the most pressing problems of contemporary life. The problem of violence which has a timeless significance and the contemporary problem of ecological imbalance leading to an environmental disaster become focal points in his poetry. In the early part of his poetic career the problem of violence occupied his central concerns.
In the course of his development, it proved to be a decisive force in shaping his poetic talent. Later, his poetry became more ecologically oriented, making us aware of the dangers of the indiscreet application of technology. As conscientization is an effective mode of prevention his poetry can be seen as proper danger-signals trying to avert environmental disaster—the greatest threat to contemporary life.

3. Hughes's uniqueness lies in his distinction of building up his poetic corpus on a valid scientific premise and an equally viable philosophic dictum. They are respectively the Einsteinian equation of $E = mc^2$ and the Cartesian method of logical analysis. The choice of energy or violence as an imperishable substance in this ephemeral world of destructive matter and the Cartesian affirmation of the "self" or the vedantic concept of "Atman" as a cosmic reality in the flux of existence render scientific precision and philosophical validity to the poetic quest of Hughes.

Against these primary qualities and strength of Hughes as a poet of significance, one may rightly point out certain drawbacks in him which may devalue his achievements. It can be rightly said that Hughes's poetry may be said to have the following deficiencies:

1. By compressing the complexity of human life into a couple of syllogistic arguments of scientific precision, his poetry may be said to suffer from a reductionist philosophy. David Holbrook says: "Once we unravel the trick of inverting every value and every positive assumption from a philosophical formula based on an absurd mis-use of science and inhilistic ("Old") existentialism, Crow appears rather as a foolish paranoid blague, than a genuine poetic exploration of experi
ence.... The blague is simply to invert every value on the basis of reductionism." 26 The attempt to capture the infinite variety and texture of life in a philosophic axiom results chiefly from an inadequate comprehension of life.

2. The Crow series of poems, often hailed to be a major achievement of the poet, attempt to provide a fresh manifesto of life different from that of the one provided by Christianity. Though, it has attracted a great deal of critical attention and a variety of responses, it can be seen just as a mimetic inversion of Biblical episodes or as a satiric parody minus creativity.

These charges cannot be easily dispensed with. The reductionist tendency explicity evident in his early volumes certainly suffers from narrowness of comprehension. It results from the poet's eagerness to render scientific precision to the complex nature of life by subjecting it to the experimental process of scientific analysis. Hughes himself becomes aware of this drawback in the course of his development necessitating a radical revaluation of his modus operandi. Thus, his consistent loyalty to Cartesian logic based on pure reason is denounced in favour of an intuitive mystical mode of perception asserting the complex nature of this cosmic reality. The scientific method of experimental process, though novel in approach for ascertaining transempirical truths, entails error and proves inadequate as it is basically oriented towards an empirical order. This limitation, in fact becomes the strength of the poet when he denounces it in favour of an

intuitive mystical mode of perception acknowledging the organic and complex nature of this universe, explicitly evident from Gaudete (1977) onwards.

The problem of violence in this universe, its origin, nature and implication in human as well as animal life occupies the best portion of the poetic activity in the early Hughes. Later, he has directed his attention to immediate and pressing problems of contemporary society pertaining to ecology and environment.

The charge that Crow is a mimetic parody minus creativity has an element of truth in it. Since it is a volume distinct in tone and style, implying an experimental process, it is bound to suffer from certain drawbacks. Hughes's declaration that Crow series of poems undertake to provide a fresh insight into life is justified on the basis of its style and thematic concerns. "It is utility--general purpose style, as for instance Shakespeare's was; a style that combines a colloquial prose readiness and variety with a poetic breadth; a ritual intensity and music of an exceedingly high order with a clear whole-hearted passion." 27 This pronouncement of Hughes regarding the style of Keith Douglas is equally applicable to his own volume Crow. This particular style, to a great extent salvages the work from the charge that it is a parody minus creativity. To be free from the Christian tradition which is so ingrained in the European Psyche, Hughes attempts to break fresh grounds by providing another account of creation myth grounded in a totally different ideology and perception.

Hughes's adoption of the account of creation from the book of Genesis, and the umpteen references from the Bible, such as the mimetic parody of the lineage of Christ, the baptismal rite and the equation of God with the word as depicted in the gospel of St. John become subjects of elaborate treatment in *Crow*. All this can rightly prompt us to consider the work as a satiric parody of the Bible. On an analytic level, it is to be conceded that Hughes succeeds only in demolishing the patterns of the edifice of Christianity. Strangely, the contours of its structure remain intact. In fact, Hughes builds up his own edifice on the very same structure of Christianity.

This drawback is more than compensated for by the thematic variety of the work. To a great extent, the thematic freshness obliterates the structural affinity with the Bible by providing an aesthetic freshness completely alien to the familiar Biblical episodes. Since the whole work is oriented towards an experimental process of understanding the question of God, the Biblical sacredness of faith is overwhelmed by a secular sense of artistic achievement. In other words, the poetic genius of Hughes compensates for the structural indebtedness to the Bible and lifts the poems from the rut of mere satiric parody. In fact, each poem in the volume becomes an active agent in explicating the Hughesian concept of violence as a paradox of creation and destruction.

As Hughes is a living writer with a fertile mind, it is fallacious to attempt a total evaluation by deducting final and definite conclusions about his poetic art. However, the logical inferences drawn from this study pertains to an already produced bulk of poetry. Since the patterns of violence
detected in his work spanning over three decades bespeak a consistent and organic pattern, it cannot be dismissed as the result of an evanescent burst of poetic inspiration. It is, in fact, the product of an in-depth belief finding expression in poetry that is supported by valid scientific and philosophical axioms.

Evaluated against contemporary life situations, Hughes's endeavour reveals "the creation of a poetic myth that will stand for our twentieth century experience." 28 Since the conscious endeavour of Hughes is to provide a valid document of our times his poetry transcends this empirical reality and functions like a religious metaphor destined to survive the worst kind of destruction. This is very much evident even in his latest prose volume Winter Pollen (1994). Sean O' Brian, reviewing the book rightly claims that Hughes is a "totalizing writer." 29 This can be substantiated in a variety of ways.

The thirty-two-year period of Hughes's poetic activity beginning in 1957 and ending in 1989 marks the culmination of a poetic phase or the closing of a circle in terms of poetic growth. Christianity has been a decisive force in shaping the present day Western culture. For Hughes Christianity is only a provisional myth like any other which may perish with the destruction of a race. Thus, his endeavour is to create the body of a myth in poetic structure that can survive the worst kind of destruction. In this attempt, he inverts some of the well established beliefs of Christianity and employs a

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psuedo-Biblical mode of narration. Hughes has given an elaborate statement regarding it in one of his interviews:

What Eliot and Joyce and I suppose Beckett are portraying is the state of belonging spiritually to the last phase of Christian civilization. They suffer its disintegration. But there are now quite a few writers about who do not seem to belong spiritually to the Christian civilization at all. In their world, Christianity is just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit. Their world is a continuation or a re-emergence of the pre-Christian world. It is the world of the little pagan religions and cults, the primitive religions, from which of course Christianity itself grew.  

Hughes's unqualified admiration for the pre-Christian world stems from his earnestness to get rid of the philosophical dualism that is ingrained in his consciousness. The East-European writers who are divested of this by-product of Christianity seem more realistic to Hughes. So he too wants to arrive at the ultimate experience of truth by accepting the material world of biological reality. Hughes, therefore experiments by shifting his foundation to a "completely new Holy ground, a new divinity, one that won't be under the rubble when the churches collapse." Hughes builds up his poetic structure by accepting the biological reality of existence as ultimate and by considering violence or indestructible energy as the solid foundation of all the Natural processes in this universe.

The chief protagonist of Hughes, the Crow, is built on this principle, as Hughes himself declares: "A complete abolition of everything that has been up to this point and

30 Quoted in Ekbert Faas, op. cit., p. 205.
31 Ibid., p. 207.
Crow is what manages to drag himself out of it in fairly good morale. By accepting the "elan vital" of the biologist as the elemental power circuit or the moving principle in this universe, Hughes provides his poetry with a significance that can translate contemporary life experience into the meaningful process of the Natural cycles. It shows man the reward of allowing integrity to all the living organisms in this universe. In the modern context, where even human beings are treated as mere objects, life gets invested with a new dignity by such unconditional reverence for life. Hughes's poetic endeavour thereby confirms the Aristotelian doctrine that "imitative art in its highest form, namely, poetry, is an expression of the universal element in human life." The Hughesian impact is a lively presence in contemporary literature with poetry receiving the largest share. The silent revolution that has been let loose by the artist-oracle has been two-fold—the themes of poetry have been prioritized on new lines and poetry itself has been metamorphosed into a powerful tool of social engineering. Hughes has had his followers with abiding faith in the power of poetry to recast life and literature on ecological lines as well as in terms of a latter-day spirituality in which violence in Nature stops being violence and becomes a semiotic figure of the spirit of man undying even in the direst of circumstances. It is in this way that Hughes fittingly fits into the mantle of a latter-day prophet, cherished by thousands across the continent.

32 Ibid., p. 207.
Hughes's contribution to the English Language is original and distinct. His handling of anomatopoeic words and plosive verbs recreates the vibrant presence of the life-energy in unique manner. This is evident most explicitly in the animal poems of his early collections like *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*.

Hughes's conflation of contemporary life with primitive culture effectively articulates his ecological concerns. Hence his poetry reaches down to the vital question of survival in our nuclear age. As Hughes advocates a fully realized life of re-integration with Nature, his poetry becomes "a beacon directing us towards ecological and spiritual renewal, vitally important for the survival of our planet." Thus the hypothesis of this study that violence is synonymous with life-energy and to be cut off from this primal source of archetypal energy is suicidal to human existence get validated in the light of Hughes's ecological concerns.

The validity of this hypothesis is further substantiated by the Hughesian concept of violence elicited from this study. The patterns of violence emerging from his poetry have a progressive dimension based on the organic principle of growth seen in the cyclical process of Nature. Hughes begins by exploring the contours of the archetypal energy in the individualized organisms of this world. He sees it as an affirmation of life. It becomes a ritualistic primitivism when he employs the mystical mode of shamanism to decipher the nature of this material reality. Through stages of development, this

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same violence becomes a paradox of creation and destruction and achieves the greatness of an apocalyptic ceremony which culminates in a timeless myth and archetype that touches the bottom of all things. Hence, violence in Hughes embodies a biocentric vision of this universe, driving home the truth that when we violate ecology, we bring down doom on ourselves and our children. Thus, his poetry becomes a series of effective signs signalling the inevitability of an environmental disaster which can be averted only if man turns away from his crimes against Nature. Hence, from an ecological perspective, Hughes's poems operate as valuable documents capable of sustaining and preserving life on this planet despite the technological invasions that threaten the ecological integrity of this world.