CHAPTER II

VIOLENCE : AN AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

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

Hughes displays an obsession with vigorous and violent images mostly drawn from the instinctual world of animals. The abundance of such images and the poet's concern with the world of animals prompt some critics to brand him an "animal poet". The vivid descriptions of animals and their grit for survival in a hostile world of elemental powers, together with the vigour and vitality displayed in his verses may prompt us
to accept the above labels. The primary concern of Hughes is undoubtedly man's life and its quality. Introducing his first book in the Poetry Book Society Bulletin for September 1957 he declared: "What excites my imagination is the war between vitality and death, and my poems may be said to celebrate the exploits of warriors on either side." For Hughes, life is a continual struggle against odds. What is commonly seen as violence becomes an expression of vitality in Hughes. This principle of vitality is reinforced even by the style and structure of the verses.

The poet's obsession with violent images is only a desperate desire to affirm life and vitality. "Hughes's concern therefore, has always been wider than simplistic labelling of him as "animal poet" implies. It is true that he began in the first two books by exploring the primal energies of the animal and Natural world. Since then he has moved on to express a sense of sterility and nihilism in modern man's response to life, a response which he connects with the dominance of man's rational objective intellect at the expense of the life of emotion and imagination." The life of modern man is characterized by boredom and apathy. In his world of ennui, an imaginative recreation of the instinctual life of animals can vitalize his dormant sensibility. Violence as depicted by Hughes is the principle of life in Nature. Sadly, modern man has distanced himself from this vital source of energy. Since Hughes sees animals as embodiments of energy,

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his poetic landscape is peopled with animals of various attributes that appear as effective metaphors for a particular human vision. The manifestation of energy in Nature is best exemplified in the life of animals. Man, on the other hand, refuses this vital source of energy as something dangerous. Since the poet feels that his generation is deprived of the vital source of energy in Nature, he is all for opening up negotiations with whatever happens to be out there in Nature. It is these negotiations which resulted in powerful animal poems like "The Hawk in the Rain" and "The Jaguar".

The Hughesian terminology of violence is essentially equated with an expression of energy divorced from moral implications. Hence it is distinctly different from the meaning assigned to it in common parlance. In Nature we see an abundance of this energy. Animals share this great source of strength. Sadly, the rationalist outlook of our civilization has distanced modern man from this primal source of energy and it is suicidal according to Hughes:

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 rationalist 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 accept 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 method is the only one.  

In this interview with Ekbert Faas, Hughes unequivocally establishes his sustained interest in the violent energies of the world. Hughes believes that human life becomes meaningful only when man accepts this energy and channels it for creative purposes. Thus, his consistent endeavour is to create an awareness in man of the magnitude of an external energy which forms the basis of meaningful existence. To generate an awareness of this energy, Hughes not only uses such themes and concerns to his advantage but also employs a skilful manipulation of the language. "It is a language spiced with great relish for experience, even when that experience is unpleasant or horrifying. Most distinctively, it is a language able to cope with the biggest things, it can generate energies equal to the great primary energies of the world."4

Hughes's ideas can be better discovered by a direct analysis of his poetic craftsmanship and a critical thematic study of his poems. In most of his poems one can perceive a dual thrust. First, it is the detailed description of an external scene. Secondly, it is the internalization of that spectacular external scene. Thus what comes into play in the creation of a poem is basically the visionary imagination of the poet. "The poems in Lupercal do not represent a significant advance beyond The Hawk in the Rain, but they do reveal some important refinement on Hughes's earlier style."5 Since these two volumes are similar in tone, they constitute the

first phase of Hughes's poetic development. The stylistic and thematic affinity of these early volumes distinctly proclaim that his poetic quest is to establish contact with a deeper reality than that we normally inhabit. Hence the poems in these two collections explore the dimensions of existence where life is not insulated against the vast currents of energy that flow and drive everywhere in the non-human world.

Uniqueness of the Theme

The thematic unity evolving from an analysis of the poems in the first two collections, namely, *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal* can be located in the poet's pre-occupation with the elemental world of Nature and the energetic world of animals. Violence as an affirmation of life is evident in most of the poems of these two collections, owing to the directness of approach and treatment. Later on, there is an obvious growth thematically and yet the presentation is subdued complex and allusive. The thematic continuity sustained through decades of poetic composition very clearly points to the poet's magnificent obsession with it. The steady focussing on the beauty of "elan vital" is an index of the poet's undiminished interest in his subject.

The interest of the poet in exploring the "elan vital" seen in the animal world is consistent. The major poems in *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal* deal with the infinite energy, agility and the violent activeness of animals like the hawk, the jaguar, the fox and the horse. This is at the expense of civilized humanity, who owing to the tendencies towards leisurely life can manage with the minimal quantity of the same. This is as much an indictment of human life as it is a celebration of animal life. "The admiration for and
kinship with a primitive and barbaric strain in the animal world has led Hughes to a contempt for 'mere' civilization of values and attitudes that has strangled man's native energy and perverted his force. On the Thematic level, Hughes's poetic territory is broadly constituted by the world of animals, the world of elemental energy and the world of man. Through his poetic art Hughes demonstrates that in the organic system of the universe violence operates basically as an affirmation of life. It is manifested in various degrees in the essential components that constitute the organic system of this universe. Thus on the thematic level, the poems in the first two collections fall into three distinct divisions:

1. The world of animals.
2. The world of elemental energy.
3. The world of man.

This chapter intends to explore the function of violence as an affirmation of life in these three distinct worlds as graphed in the poetic landscape of Hughes's first two volumes. The concluding section of the chapter will also take into consideration the stylistic peculiarities that contribute significantly to a unified vision of violence reinforcing its role as an affirmation of life in the larger context of semiotics.

1. The World of Animals

The poems that fall into this category invariably employ theriomorphic images of such feral energy and mineral fury that the human onlooker feels over-awed and mesmerized by such presences that he begins to experience a distinct feel for

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life. Hence what appears as violence for a casual reader operates as an energizer that activates the dormant faculties of a man. Even a person who considers the poem as a mere artifact of language too, may find it difficult to escape the hypnotic power and vitality that these poems display. Hence these poems which appear basically as descriptions of animals and their vigorous world, become effective metaphors that create an awareness in man of the magnitude of an external energy that he is deprived of, that he longs for. In this sense these images are objective co-relatives that channel the flow of a cosmic energy into man. Walder Dennis thinks that the metaphorical function of animal images in Hughes is vital for an understanding of his poems. "It is impossible to understand his work without recognizing that the animals are not there for their own sake, however brilliantly defined they seem to be; but they serve as metaphors for a particular human vision." The title poem of the first collection proves the validity of this inference. The opening lines of the first poem generate images that contextualise the hawk as a "master-fulcrum of violence". Its blind solipsistic outbursts further accentuate its role as an embodiment of energy. The programmed efficiency of the hawk in weathering the elements of Nature invites an immediate comparison to man. The fury of the elements of Nature and the hawk's poised centrality and ease contrasted with the struggle of insignificant man heightens in him a sense of vitality outside himself. This vitality or violence in the animal world against the background of the elemental fury of Nature becomes an affirmation.

of life for man. " The poem seems to be about life as a condition of struggle - a vain struggle to escape those elemental forces which like the weather are always with us. It is an astonishing breath taking enactment of power and energy."

The hyperbolic metaphor of the man moving through the mud in rain and trying to escape from the predators mouth - "swallowing of the earth's mouth"--is an exact replica of modern man's futile search for meaning in life. The vulnerability of the speaker and the images of invulnerability associated with the hawk such as diamond point, master fulcrum and the round angelic eye are distinct symbols of power and vitality which the speaker yearns for. The description of violence in Nature and that of the hawk is basically the poet's desire to affirm life. This is substantiated by Sagar. "It seems to me that he has succeeded in making a thoroughly Hughes poem, an expression of his distinct feel for life." 9

Thus, the primary concern of Hughes is to infuse this feel for life into the enervated lives of man. The vitality of animals remains intact because they live according to the law of Nature, enhancing harmony in themselves and in ecology.

Another much anthologized poem in the first collection is the "Thought-Fox". It begins with the description of a fox prowling at midnight through the snow. What strikes us immediately is the vividness of expression coupled with the peculiar charm of language. The urgency of the mood, the stark imagery and the incantatory, hypnotic repetition of

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8 Ibid., p. 10.
9 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 7
certain words evoke a sense of wonder in us. The force and power of life come alive in our consciousness like "a widening deepening greenness". In a flash, we become aware of the same principle of life dormant within us, which can be activated and perfected to achieve the efficiency of the fox. This poem also embodies an essential human vision as Walder Dennis suggests. "The title alone suggests as much; moreover, the poem begins 'I imagine', which implies a speaker, a consciousness which the fox can inhabit as metaphor."10

A close reading of the poem raises the energy level of the reader who stops being a mere observer and starts experiencing tendencies towards participation. This realization is sudden and irresistible like the appearance of the fox itself:

Brilliantly concentratedly
Coming about its own business
Till with a sudden sharp hot stink of a fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.11

After this brief sojourn in the amazing world of the fox and our identification with it, we are shot back into the world of reality at the end of the poem. "The window is starless, the clock ticks / The page is printed".12 Keith Sagar is of the opinion that the whole poem is about writing a poem, about poetic inspiration and not about a fox at all. Even after accepting this interpretation, one cannot ignore the role of the poem as an agent of affirmation of life.

10 Walder Dennis, op.cit., p.5.
12 Ibid., p.15.
Throughout the poem we see words that live in the same dimension as life at its most severe, words that cannot be outflanked by experience. In the words of Keith Sagar the whole poem is "a simple trick like pulling a kicking rabbit from a hat, but only a true poet can do it."\(^{13}\) In simple words, Sagar means that a close reading of the poem entails an experience of energy and the intense vitality and otherness of life outside. The words, the images and the rhythms of the poem jump to life, and suddenly out of the unknown, the object appears with all the characteristics of a living thing. In effect, the poem virtually becomes a semiotic expression of energy that affirms life through the poetic artifact of language.

This vision of "elan vital" manifesting as life gets sharpened as we explore his other poems in the same collection. The Jaguar whose "stride is wildernesses of freedom" can carry the world in its stride because it is the embodiment of primal energy:

> But who runs like the rest past these arrives  
> At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,  
> As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged  
> Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes  
> On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom—  
> The eye satisfied to be blind in fire.\(^{14}\)

The enraged jaguar hurrying through the prison darkness and the fury in the drills of its eyes is the reflection of the elemental energy which can mesmerize the human onlooker as he is incapable of comprehending the magnitude of this energy. So the crowd can only stand and stare like a mesmerized child.

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\(^{13}\) Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p.19.  
The energetic world of the jaguar exploding beyond the cage creates an awareness of the magnitude of life in the already mesmerized man. The violence in the jaguar becomes a literal manifestation of life energy by prompting the perceptive understanding of human beings. This unexpected contact with a deep reality makes man realize that the animal cannot be fettered because its energy exists beyond the bars of the cage. It flows and drives everywhere in the cosmos, ultimately invading the awareness of the human onlooker. Since the jaguar is an emblem of energy embodying a life-promoting function in the human world, Hughes has left open his options to the reader's own nature:

A jaguar after all can be received in several different aspects...he is a beautiful powerful nature spirit, he is a homicidal maniac, he is a super-charged piece of cosmic machinery, he is a symbol of man's baser nature shoved down into the id and growing cannibal murderous with deprivation, he is an ancient symbol of Dionysus since he is a leopard raised to the ninth power, he is a precise historical symbol to the bloody-minded Aztecs and so on. Or he is simply a demon... a lump of ectoplasm. A lump of astral energy. The symbol opens up all these things... It is the reader's own nature that selects.15

From a simple analysis of the text of this poem, the following valid inferences can be elicited.

1. The jaguar is basically an embodiment of energy.
2. Its energetic existence mesmerizes the human onlooker.

The logical progression of the thought pattern in this poem establishes the significance of the jaguar as an agent that activates human physical organism. In this sense, even on a rational plane it can be assumed validly that the jaguar

15 Quoted in Ekbert Faas, op. cit., p. 199.
functions as an agent that affirms life in man. It becomes all the more significant when the mythical configuration of the animal is taken into consideration. "The stupefaction of the zoo goers, hypnotized by the jaguar, testifies to their yearning for forces that may have been controlled in the modern world but cannot be denied."\(^\text{16}\)

The human fascination for the jaguar's world stems from a consideration of the beauty of the "elán vital" with which the animal is invested. It is so great that the human onlooker positively begins to experience its mesmerizing effect. Hence in this poem violence becomes an affirmation of life in the most explicit manner. "The Horses" is another poem which explicates violence as an affirmation of life most effectively through an apocalyptic mode of vision. Horses are traditional symbols of energy and strength. This might be the reason why Hughes included another poem on horses, "A Dream of Horses" in his second collection \textit{Lupercal}. In the present poem, the horses are portrayed against the faint light of the early dawn. They offer a scene of totally frozen energy:

\begin{quote}
... And I saw the horses:
Huge in the dense grey, ten together-
Megalith-still. They breathed, making no moves,
With draped manes and tilted hind-hooves,
Making no sound.
I passed: not one snorted or jerked its head
Grey silent fragments
Of a grey silent world.\(^\text{17}\)
\end{quote}

The dense and impenetrable world of silent horses where everything is mysterious and motionless suddenly emerges from the darkness into a cataclysmic dawn. When the sun erupts

\(^{16}\) Margaret Dickie Uroff, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 54.
\(^{17}\) Ted Hughes, \textit{The Hawk in the Rain}, p. 16
with its mighty rays, the horses frozen into the stillness of huge stones begin to steam and glisten under the flow of light, indicating apparently the infinite energies embedded within them.

The sun which is an embodiment of infinite and indestructible energy is of great significance to Hughes. It is the emergence of this burning globe, where infinite energy is eternally cycled and re-cycled by fusion and fission that helps the onlooker in realizing the magnitude of energy in the horses. Here too, the human onlooker is over-awed as in "Jaguar", by an energy that is external to him. The sudden explosion of energy in the horses together with the eruption of the sun over-charges his senses so much that he stumbles in the "fever of a dream". Like the poem "Jaguar", the basic function of this poem too is an affirmation of life for the insignificant human onlooker who should draw lessons from the horses as Wordsworth hoped to draw lessons from Nature. There is a distinct Wordsworthian echo in the poem as Sagar opines:

Hughes speaks for mortal man all too aware of the lack of anything in himself to set against the sun-rise. In him is no fire, but only a fever... He hopes that the patient, all-suffering horses will sustain him, teach him patience, as he finds himself again caught up in the busy time conscious world of men. The poem is Hughes's most Wordsworthian. 'Resolution and independence' is its model. The poem too begins with the evocation of sunrise and of all creatures which seem to be at one with it.  

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18 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p.20.
Even while developing this affinity, the poem's role of affirming life gets only sharpened because Wordsworth also was concerned with the problem of ennui and boredom which a consumeristic society forced on him.

More Oriented Towards Animals

Animals as effective metaphors of a human vision that affirm the life-principle gets sharpened in Hughes's second volume *Lupercal*. It abounds in images of vital energy drawn more particularly from the world of animals:

Hughes moves in this volume to a deeper exploration of the violence he is certain civilized man must accept, and in identifying it frequently with dreams he creates a subject that he will develop in *Wodwo*. More clearly than his first book, *Lupercal* deals with magic, myths and folklore in order to locate the dark spirit of Hughes's imagination.

Hughes's orientation towards animals gets reinforced and intensified in the crop of poems in *Lupercal*. The poet seems to have realized that his search is a never-ending process.

The quest of Hughes for the vital source of life leads him to creatures of "streamlined efficiency" with "bullet and automatic purpose" like thrushes and pikes. The very descriptions of them create a sense of power and intense physical activity together with a tone of urgency and command. This is achieved by the poet's single-minded concentration on the movements and activity of animals. For example, the thrushes appear before us "with a start, a bounce, a stab". The pike "dances on the surface among the flies". The otter "gallops along land he no longer belongs to". The world of animals is a world of activity and life. The violent focus of energy

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19 Margaret Dickie Uroff, op. cit., p.126.
seen particularly in animals and birds awakens man into deep realities about his potentials as yet unrealized as well as his unenviable situation juxtaposed with that of the animal world.

In the second volume, Hughes's application of the myth of Lupercalia in exploring the reality lends an added dimension to his endeavour. "Hughes obviously found the ritual of Lupercalia an important means of contacting the powers that control the life force". The rituals of Lupercalia are celebrated on the fifteenth of February. The purpose of the ritual is to restore fertility to barren women. Significantly, Hughes was thinking of modern man's barrenness of life. Goats and dogs are sacrificed and young men, athletes, are touched with their blood and milk by the priests. Then they race through the streets, striking the waiting women as they pass with whips of goat skin.

This myth is fully exploited by Hughes in his endeavour to bestow fertility to the barren wasteland of modern man's life. The poet's desire to affirm man's life is achieved by describing the intensity and volume of activity seen in the world of animals. From the beginning to the end, the descriptions of animals and the images used in describing their intense life evoke in us pleasant and unpleasant surprises, admiration and even awe. This frenzied sanguineness makes us aware of an active life principle outside ourselves which puts us to shame.

20 Ibid., p.89.
Hughes manages to take us deep into this reality. Often it is more frightening and charged with uncontrollable energy as the description of the wolf in the poem "February" shows:

The wolf with its belly stitched full of big pebbles; Nibelung wolves barbed like black pine forest Against a red sky, over blue snow; or that long grin Above the tacked coverlet—none suffice.\(^{21}\)

It is when we see such energetic and predatory animals that we are really over-awed. It is the similar kind of humbling fear that strikes us when we see the horses in the poem "A Dream of Horses". The horses shake their hooves as if to displace the brimming energy and batter their stalls with it. Man finds himself totally marginalised in front of such vitality:

And we ran out, mice in our pocket and straw in our hair,
into darkness that was avalanching to the horses. 
And a quake of hooves. Our lanterns little orange
Made a round mark of each sleep-dazed face, flare Bodiless, or else bodied by horses.
That whinnied and bit and cannoned the world from its place.\(^{22}\)

The horses and their awesome vitality generate an unfulfilled longing in man. A longing for death "trampled by such horses". This death wish is parallel to the death wish which the magi had as outlined in Eliot's poem "The Journey of the Magi". On coming into contact with the splendour of new born Christ, the Magi had perceived a lasting reality and longed for death as an unmistakable mode of liberation. Similarly, in the glare of the brimming energy of the horses, the human onlooker wishes for liberation, through the escape route of death provided by the horses.


\(^{22}\) Ibid., p.21.
The marked desire for a fullness of life gets accentuated in other poems of the collection like "Thrushes", "Pike" and "An Otter". Here the vitality is displayed in their predatory nature marked by existential compulsions. In their primary function, these creatures display unequalled energy. Their streamlined efficiency and unwavering purpose make them effective metaphors of meaningful existence. This admirable efficiency at times becomes too horrifying and automatic. According to Keith Sagar, these poems get "their characteristic tension from an attempt to fuse into a unified response both admiration and horror."23 The life affirming function of the poem in fact emanates from the admirable fusion of these opposing elements.

The role of the human onlooker in the poems of The Hawk in the Rain is of a subdued nature. While in Lupercal it becomes more pronounced like that of a consciousness bordering on active participation in the process of its perception of reality. For instance, in the poem "Bull Moses", the boy is fascinated by the bull's dangerous potencies that remain subdued in the "locked black of his powers". Though the poem is full of vital descriptions of the animal, the boy is actively present throughout the poem. He notices the very presence of the animal as an affirmation of the life-principle on earth. His frenzied shouting and waving is nothing to the bull. The boy feels humbled by the bull's attitude and at the same time over-awed by the magnitude of energy which the animal has and is not aware of. The presence of a conscious onlooker who participates in the violent

23 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p.48.
vitality of the animal in the first part of the poem is completely over-awed by it at the end: for he realizes that the bull is an embodiment of primal energy and it is dangerous to confront him:

Blackness is depth
Beyond star. The warm weight of his breathing,
The amoniac reek of his litter, the hotly-tongued
Mash of his cud, steamed against me.\(^{24}\)

Though the bull is a "locked black of powers", he is unaware of it. Human beings, on the other hand perceiving the powers of the bull becomes participants in its energy.

In the poem "Pike" too we confront such an onlooker who is over-awed by the energetic world of pikes. Though the poem is predominantly a description of the ferocious nature of pikes, the human onlooker assumes greater importance in the concluding section of the poem. His presence becomes so pronounced that we begin to feel that it is not the pike that matters but the conscious presence of the man, who still goes on fishing, though overtaken by some dark and nameless horror.

Even the pond had a "stilled legendary depth":

It was as deep as England. It held
Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old
That past night fall I dared not cast.
But silently cast and fished
With the hair frozen on my head.\(^{25}\)

Mathew D. Fisher explicates the progressive dimension of violence explored in the poem culminating in an awareness that blurs the victim-victimizer distinction between the fish and the fisherman. He says:

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p.57.
Hughes manipulates our kinesthetic awareness of violence by guiding us, in carefully constructed stages, into closer contact with the pike. And with each of these progressive stages, we are introduced to violence of increasing magnitude and significance. Throughout the poem, as the pike has grown larger, our degree of intimacy with the violence it symbolizes has likewise grown. Now at the end of our submarine journey to the world of the pike, Hughes introduces us to the ultimate dimension of pike's violence. It is a transcendent, archetypal violence that we cannot study, cannot observe "behind glass", cannot analyze from a conscious frame of reference. The final terror of the pike is that we recognize in its "malevolent aged grin" the violent energy that permeates its world and our own.

The above observation of Fisher underlines the importance of the onlooker by exploring the dimensions of violence which his perceptive analysis yields. This is not the case with the animal poems in The Hawk in the Rain. In them, the animals appear supreme. What matters for the poet is the incessant and energetic activity of the animals. The role of the human onlooker is minimal. Now Hughes is more directly man-oriented. His concern is man. The animals and their activities are treated mainly as means to achieve this end.

In the poem "Thrushes" too we see this yearning for an exploration of the violent energy submerged in the human psyche that permeates the organic world of Nature. The poet is struck by the beauty and vigour of the physical activity of the thrush. The world of thrushes is contrasted with the world of man. Only exceptional human beings like Mozart can hope to achieve the streamlined efficiency of thrushes. Ordinary man can only stand awe-struck by seeing this terrify-

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ing sleek creatures with "dark deadly eyes" and their efficiency which is "bullet like and automatic". As the poem ends, the role of the onlooker assumes greater significance. The energetic world of the thrushes is focussed against the world of man which is full of "indolent procrastinations and yawning stares". This is further amplified by drawing a detailed contrast of both the worlds. The poem progresses effectively on the technique of contrast:

With a man it is otherwise. Heroisms on horseback, Outstripping his desk-diary at a broad desk, Carving at a tiny ivory ornament For years; his act worships itself-while for him Though he bends to be bent in prayer, how loud and above what Furious spaces of fire do the distracting devils Orgy and hosannah, under what wilderness Of black silent waters weep.  

This elaboration of human world against the efficient world of activity which the thrushes embody bespeaks the poet's desire for an existence that is fully vital as seen in the world of thrushes. Hence the basic function of the poem is that of an affirmation of life.

To Hughes, the otter, too, is simply indescribable in terms of energetic existence. The words themselves breathe and stand up for the description. The otter's ability to exist in land and water is effectively employed by Hughes as a metaphor for affirmation of life:

Under water eyes, an eel's Oil of water body, neither fish nor beast is the otter: Four-legged yet water-gifted, to outfish fish; With webbed feet and long ruddering tail And a round head like an old tomcat.  

28 Ibid., p.46.
The characteristic strength of the otter lies in this apparent contradiction. The description of the otter is believed to be a symbolic representation of human condition. As Margaret Dickie Uroff says: "Hughes's average man stands somewhere between these kingdoms, like the otter tormented by both". And yet the symbolism marginally crumbles because of the fact that there is no serious crisis facing the otter unlike the distracting and even destructive effect of soul-body dichotomy in man.

In the poem "Hawk Roosting" we see no human onlooker as in many other animal poems. The poem offers a hawk's eye-view of himself and of the world emanating from his solipsistic ego. The narrator hawk himself gives us the impression of a dictator in his soliloquy. The pace of narration is marked by singular consistency and force exposing the violent activity in the world of the hawk. "My manners are tearing off heads/The allotment of death". The sheer abundance of violent images in the poem may prompt us to consider the bird to be a fascist or the symbol of some horrible genocidal dictator. Though the poem is basically an exposure of the aggressiveness of a bird of prey which invites comparison with power hungry dictators preying upon their helpless subjects, it has a life promoting function emanating from the magnificent vitality of the bird:

By attributing to the hawk a consciousness which can express itself in our language and concepts, the poem also invites us, though we envy the hawk, his centrality, his freedom from the falsifying dreams, sophistries and arguments which distract

29 Margaret Dickie Uroff, op.cit., p.105.
and deflect men, to count the cost of letting such energies loose in a man.\(^{30}\)

Since man longs for such primal vitality, though constrained by considerations of society, the poem can also be viewed as an oblique lamentation of his inability to let his energies loose in contrast with the bird's celebration of its energetic self.

Violence as an affirmation of life so far explored through the lives of animals assumes a mythic significance in the concluding poem "Lupercalia". Hughes has chosen this ancient Roman myth as a symbolic remedy to the most pressing problem of contemporary man. In this technological world, man's life has become a meaningless repetition of a set of robotic activities. In the original myth, the world of animals and the world of man meet in a ritualistic environment to bring about the renewal of the world and that of human life. Through this ritual the barren women are bestowed fertility when touched by the blood-dripping whip of the racers. In the larger context, Hughes wishes to reinstate the lethargic barren and inactive modern man into the "wheel of the living" by touching them with the whips of his poetry.

Keith Sagar captures the effectiveness of this ritual thus:

> The racers in their blessed fury achieve an unearthly access of power and become conductors of energy between earth and sky. Through the ritual they are blessed by dog and goat, caught upon the intercourse of earth and sky, and as they strike a woman they draw her into their pattern, the divine circuit.\(^{31}\)

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\(^{30}\) Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp.49-50

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p.60.
Invariably, all the poems from the animal world speak of the poet's concern with the quality of the vitality and energy seen in the animal world. They operate as effective metaphors capable of a life-promoting function. Contemporary man, having lost contact with such vitality and energy as seen in the organic world of Nature and in the dynamic life of animals is greatly in need of the fertilising touch of the divinely charged racers of lupercalia. Hughes hopes to achieve this function through the medium of his poetry. So he ends the volume with a prayer:

Maker of the world
Hurrying the lit ghost of man
Age to age while the body hold
Touch this frozen one.32

2. The World Of Elemental Energy

Nature or the world of elemental energy also becomes an affirmation of life in the poetic landscape of Hughes. Though it is most palpably and effectively manifested in the energetic lives of the animals, it is captured in equal measure in poems like "Wind", "October Dawn" and "November", where the elemental energy of Nature forms the subject matter.

As tokens of the violent manifestation of energy one could see mesmerized and awed on-lookers in poems like "Jaguar" and "Bull Moses". Contrastively, in "Egg-head", the poet presents a complacent character who pretends to be ignorant of the great forces of Nature such as "the flash of the sun and the bolt of the earth". He sets himself up as the master of this world and thinks of daring even the "looming mouth of the earth" in his solipsistic blindness. Instead of

recognizing and accepting the great powers of Nature, man poses himself as the master of the universe. Hughes tries to impress on man that he cannot ignore the great forces of Nature by his blind complacency. His inactivity and excessive introspection compel him to shut out from his life the elemental world of energy. According to Margaret Dickie Uroff, the negative action of denying the magnitude and otherness of this elemental energy has the positive function of an affirmation of life. "This crafty but stupid intellectual affirms himself by denying the world's otherness." 33

In the poem "Meeting" Hughes presents another solipsist who thinks that he is omniscient like Faustus. He thinks that the great and mysterious forces of Nature are nothing compared to the "rise of his eye". This self-styled latter-day Faustus considers the whole "sun-swung zodiac of light" to be a "trinket shape". He happens to confront Nature in the shape of a goat. Its "square-pupiled yellow-eyed look" awakens in him his real insignificance. Finally, from the safety of a palm tree, he understands, for once, the magnitude of the elemental energy in Nature:

And watched his blood's gleam with a ray
Slow and cold and ferocious as a star
Till the goat clattered away. 34

Here, the awareness of the elemental energy in Nature, though emanating from a negative experience, fulfills the positive function of the affirmation of life.

The human counterparts in the poems that deal with the world of animals are mostly mesmerized or stupefied onlookers.

33 Margaret Dickie Uroff, op.cit., p.44.
But they become positive presences in the poems that deal with elemental energy such as "Egg-head", "Meeting" and "Man Seeking Experience Enquires His Way of a Drop of Water". They are arrogant solipsists in the first two instances, but in the third we meet a man humble enough to approach the elemental world to gain a deep knowledge of reality. We see this man positively approaching the water droplet—a basic element in Nature—which sustains life on this planet and has been here in one form or other since the inception of this universe. Hence the man thinks that the accumulated experience of the droplet can solve any problem. So he asks:

Venerable elder! Let us learn of you
Read us a lesson, a plain lesson how
Experience has worn or made you anew. 35

The answer of the droplet is a message for modern man who blunders in a world of lost identity. This droplet, even after many transformations is "clear simple water still". Man's problem is the disintegration of his personality which results in a confusion of identity. The ending of the poem invites man to preserve his identity and affirm his life. In the march of civilization, man has lost his distinctive traits and his genuine instinctual life. Such a tragedy has not occurred in the case of this droplet which is an element of Nature.

The world of elemental energy can be seen in all its splendour in poems like "Wind" and "October Dawn". In "Wind" we see men who are secure in their cozy homes finding themselves completely shaken and gripped by an atavistic fear with

35 Ibid., P. 25
the coming of the wind. The wind comes like an irresistible current of energy "crashing through darkness and stampeding the fields". It appears to shatter even the house, the place of man's so called civilized activities. Hughes captures the stasis of fear effectively in contrast to the ever-moving currents of the elemental energy of the wind:

... Now deep
in chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,
Or each other. We watch fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons. 36

In "October Dawn" too, we see such powerful display of elemental forces. The coming of winter rudely awakens the complacent man into the grim reality of the season:

Reunion while a fist of cold
Squeezes the fire at the core of the heart,
And now it is about to start. 37

The lawn and the "Whistling shrubbery" are over-trodden by ice and timidly, man tries to shut out of his life such great forces of Nature. Commenting on the poem Keith Sagar says: "It expresses a vital awareness of the continuum outside human life of the mystery embodied in the created universe". 38 By exposing the vital and violent aspects of Nature, Hughes wants to impress on man that a life of vitality or violence is the law of Nature as exemplified in the life of animals and in the fury of the elements of Nature. Thus violence seen in the

36 Ibid., p. 28.
37 Ibid., p. 29.
38 Keith Sagar op. cit., p. 27.
world of elemental energy ultimately becomes an affirmation of life.

In "May Day On Holderness" Hughes presents a frightening picture of the elements of Nature. The North-sea is depicted as an incinerator swallowing everything. There are distinct images in the poem showing the destructive and creative powers of Nature. The whole of Nature presents a view of intense life amidst the fear of destruction.

What a length of gut is growing and breathing
This mute eater, biting through the mind's
Nursery floor, with eel and hyena and vulture,
With creepy crawly and the root,
With sea-worm, entering its birth right.39

Hughes depicts this scene of incessant activity in the elemental world by calling into command, a craftsmanship which is rarely achieved by other poets. As Lawrence Kramer observes:

Sometimes, to break through the integral terror and radiance underlying a form or force of Nature, Hughes will make his poem stammer, describing and re-describing the same thing, or extending his description of one thing by minute variations, in the hope that insistent resignification will batter down the doors of perception". 40

The perception which Hughes wishes to open up is an awareness of the principle of life which the elements of Nature embody and which man is deprived of.

The poems "Crow Hill" and "November" also explore the fury and vitality of the elements of Nature. The poet endows

39 Ted Hughes, Lupercal, p.11.
Nature with a peculiar vitality that one may notice in the most unlikely places.

The farms are oozing craters in Sheer sides under the sodden moors:
When it is not the wind it is rain,
Neither of which will stop at doors:
One will damp beds and the other shake. 41

When Nature unleashes its elemental energy, both animals and men try to escape from its onslaught in their own timid ways.
This vital aspect of Nature which transcends human understanding is metaphorically depicted in the poem "November":

...In a moment
The fields were jumping and smoking; the thorns Quivered, riddled with glassy verticals.
I stayed on under the welding cold
Watching the tramps face glisten and the drop on his coat
Flash and darken 42

Both these poems though basically are about the vitality and the elemental energy in Nature, their real functions are to create an awareness in man of the superiority of this unfathomable force. This is achieved even by using verbs and participles in continuous succession variously signifying movement, force and vitality.

The poems that deal with the world of elemental energy are mainly concerned with Nature. The world of animals and the world of men are trivial when compared to the elemental world of energy. By witnessing the vitality and energy in the world of animals man becomes an awed and stupefied onlooker.
When he confronts the world of elemental energy, either he

42 Ibid., pp. 49-50
pretends ignorance like a solipsist or he tries to escape from this indomitable energy which can shatter him completely. Thus the singular aim of Hughes in depicting the violence in Nature is to create an awareness in man about the need of this life force for a fully realized existence. For Hughes it is the most effective means of an affirmation of life.

3. The World of Man

The majority of the poems in *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal* are from the world of animals and of Nature where the elemental force of life is actively present. In these poems man appears as an awed onlooker totally stupefied by the magnitude of this force of life. Poems about the world of man are comparatively few in these collections. Even when Hughes portrays the world of man, he rarely shows the world of modern man, who is cut off from the elemental power circuit of the world. This stems from Hughes's belief that life cannot have its pristine beauty and meaning once it is away from its contact with the elemental forces of life in Nature:

His desire is to free himself from that tradition and to unburden himself of the repressive forces in modern civilization by stripping the industrial landscape of native Yorkshire to its bare elements may be regarded as an attempt to restore in his own life and work the conditions where that instinctual life may flourish. Man face to face with the elements may experience a primordial thrill and fear, that Hughes feels, is the basis of poetry.43

This strange thrill and fear may be apparently intriguing. Yet it gets demystified by the realization that thrill and fear, the human responses are to be found in alternation,

beginning in delight and ending in fear emanating from the outlookers inferiority. This has been verified by Hughes himself through many poems in which animals are juxtaposed with human observers.

Hughes's world of man is inhabited by warriors, martyrs and lovers. He also portrays such characters like Dick Straightup and 'rag Jack who can "survive among the hills nourished by stone and height". Though they do not belong to the heroic class of warriors, martyrs and lovers they are true children of Nature. Hughes also registers his admiration for exceptional men like the acrobats. These are men who have found an "unearthly access of grace into a freer firmer world", which is a hundred feet above the ground, by being perfectly in tune with Nature. Hughes prefers the huge-chested ancient heroes who "thinned down their fat fulsome blood in war" to the modern bomber pilots "whose heart is cold and small", though they bring about the destruction of large cities. The poet's admiration for martyrs is crystallised in "The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar." Farrar's words, tongued with fire activates even the sullen Welsh-townsmen who witness his martyrdom. Compared to such heroic figures as warriors and martyrs, the conquest of lovers' like Falgrief seems insignificant as is always the preference of Hughes since love has a low priority on his poetic scale.

Hughes explores the energetic world of the young warriors through his reminiscences of their photograph in the poem "Six Young Men". The photograph was taken 40 years before, when they were young, full of zest and vitality. The vast currents of energy that flow in Nature and the vivacious life of these young people become a permanent reality by their single
exposure to the celluloid of a photograph. Though, all of them died long ago, the photograph still betrays their vitality in full measure. It is so life-like that the poet says they are as alive as anyone we meet in everyday life. The people in real life are not more alive than these dead men who are now reduced to celluloid existence:

That man's not more alive whom you confront
And shake by the hand, see hale, hear speak loud
Than any of these six celluloid smiles are,
Nor pre-historic or fabulous beast more dead;
No thought so vivid as their smoking blood. 44

The familiar images of war in the poem may prompt us to classify it as a war poem. On closer scrutiny the poem can be seen basically functioning as an affirmation of life by heightening our awareness about the reality of death. The device of contrast is effectively employed by the poet in highlighting the conflict between life and death. The permanence and vitality of the bilberried bank, the thick tree and the black wall is contrasted with the grim reality of the death of the young men. If the single exposure of the young men to the celluloid gave them permanence, their single exposure to war deprived them of their youth, beauty and energy. By juxtaposing the past and the present in the poem, Hughes effectively brings out the contrast between vitality and death. More than a spectacle of war and death, the poem envisions in full measure the Hughesian configuration of violence as an affirmation of life as Walder Dennis points out: "If we have responded fully to the immediacy of the poem's exposure of death, we feel for an instant as if that is

more vivid, the dead more alive. than ourselves in our own lives today."\textsuperscript{45}

In "Fallgrief's Girl Friends", the poet presents a hero who holds everything, even his own existence to utter contempt. He is unable to see anything noble even in love. Like Iago he too thinks of love as "making backs with two beasts". Knowing fully his fate, he settles down for the "muck of a woman:"

\begin{quote}
Whilst I am this muck of man in this
Muck of existence, I shall not seek more
Than a muck of woman.
... he chance changed him:
He has found a woman with such wit and looks
He can brag of her in every company.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

The distance between imaginative boasting and lived reality not only brings in humour but highlights the ineffectiveness of this hero who is a representative of modern man. Though love has had a marginal influence on him Fallgrief comes nowhere near the great heroes of Hughes's human world like Bishop Farrar or Crag Jack.

Bishop Farrar approximates a pre-eminent position in the list of Hughes's human heroes. In the poem "The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar" we see another dimension of the elemental forces working in a man supported by faith. Farrar's words, while alive, which the ignorant Welsh townsmen could "dumbly spare" become all of a sudden "words tongued with fire" when he undergoes the violent sufferings of martyrdom.

\textsuperscript{45} Walder Dennis, op. cit., p.30.

\textsuperscript{46} Ted Hughes, Selected Poems 1957-1981 (London: Faber, 1982), pp. 21-22
Farrar's endurance in his promethean sufferings reminds us of the endurance of the hawk thrown into the skies by the fury of the elements. The violent sufferings of Farrar become an affirmation of life, of the principles of life he stood for. Paradoxically his death brings about a radical transformation in the lives of the sullen Welsh townspeople:

His body's cold-kept miserdom of shrieks
He gave uncounted, while out of his eyes,
Out of his mouth, fire like a glory broke,
And smoke burned his sermon into the skies. 47

The heroism of a martyr crystallized in his violent death is an ennobling force which they rarely achieve while alive. The unheard sermon of the bishop all of a sudden becomes an agent of transformation for the ignorant people.

Dick Straightup is a rare romantic discovery of Hughes, embodying his vision of elemental man who can affirm life by bravely weathering the violence of Nature. Dick is a true child of Nature, for he "survives among the hills, nourished by stone and height. " His belly is "strong as a treebole" and time has only stiffened him. He speaks less and his language is as primitive as the creatures of Nature. It is like those of the thrush - "stirrings beyond sense", having a deep unfathomable meaning:

...To be understood
His words must tug up the bottom-most stones of this village,
This clutter of black-stone gulleys, peeping curtains,
And a graveyard bigger and deeper than the village
That sways in the tide of wind and rain some fifty Miles off the Irish Sea 48

47 Ibid., p. 34
48 Ted Hughes, Lupercal, p. 18
Since Hughes always admires the elemental man whose life and vitality is untarnished by the veneer of civilization, Dick Straight up approximates a place of eminence in Hughes's list of heroes as Keith Sagar notes: "In Lupercal, Hughes gives us a few figures who escape the destructive extremes. There is Dick Straightup strong as the earth, a living legend because he is impervious to those forces to which Hughes feels himself most vulnerable". 49

The Retired Colonel is a character like Dick Straightup. He has bravely weathered the ravages of time. Since his species has become remnants of the past, the poet laments with indignation:

And what if his sort should vanish?
The rabble starlings roar upon
Trafalgar. The man-eating British lion
By a pimply age brought down 50

Such figures from the world of action can create a primordial thrill and nostalgia in the modern reader for the vital force of life these ancient heroes displayed. In this sense they become effective metaphors of a symbolic affirmation of life.

Crag Jack is yet another character who stands out in the human world of Hughes. He is a wolfish man fully aware of the damage which "the dark churches" can do. So he denounces organized religion which is an integral part of any social set-up.

The churches, Lord, all the dark churches
Stood over my cradle once.
I came clear, but my god's down.
Under the weight of all that stone.
Both my power and luck since

49 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 51
50 Ted Hughes, Lupercal, p. 42
Have ticked at the world and slept in ditches.51

This coming clear of the dark churches which Crag Jack accomplishes through an "animal's dreamed head" widens his perceptive horizons necessitating a conscious affirmation of the animality in him. Sagar also points out the life affirming function which the poem embodies: "Exposed as he is to life at its most severe, his imagination can find no appropriate image for the forces which control life other than that of a wolf's head or eagle's feet."52 The violent life of Crag Jack is a positive affirmation of animality manifesting itself in preference for a primitive life style and at the same time a refutation of the usefulness of organized structures, particularly organized religion.

The poem "Acrobats" marked by its transcendental overtones is the realization as well as the culmination of the poetic quest which characterized Hughes's early poetry. This quest which appears as an affirmation of life becomes an invulnerable reality of transcendence typified in the acrobatic feats of the trapeze artist. They fling out on to nothing, and "flash above earth's ancient inertia", transcending the limitations imposed by Nature:

The acrobats flashed
Above the earth's ancient inertia,
Faltering of the will,
And the dullness of flesh-
in the dream's orbit, shone, soared,
Mocking vigil and ordeal 53

51 Ibid., p. 55
52 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 54
53 Ted Hughes, Lupercal, p. 35.
The supremacy of the acrobats emanates from a conscious effort to transcend the primary laws of the earth. The hawk that is a master fulcrum of violence finds it impossible to survive the fury of the wind. Similarly the man who appears helpless in the rainy mud is unable to overcome the gravitational pull of the earth. But the acrobats are not constrained by the primary laws of this earth:

Bodily out on space,
Gibboning bird-vaulting
Of all sedentary belief,
With an unearthly access of grace,
Of ease; freer firmer world found.
A hundred feet above the ground. 54

The perfect equilibrium and energized existence assigned to the acrobats are exceptional phenomena in the human world in contrast with birds and animals flying off at tangent or moving out at great risk in the world of fauna where acrobat-like mid-air balance is matter of course and easy making reinforced by an in-built store of energy. Unlike the modern man who is unsure of himself, the acrobats inhabit a surer, firmer world—"a hundred feet above the ground". It takes us straight to the ferocious world of pikes. In their world of "submarine delicacy and horror", they are "a hundred feet long in their world". In both instances the "hundred feet" stands for fullness or perfection. Thus, in the human world, Hughes can think of no better example than the acrobats to signify perfection. The acrobats by their violent activity defying even the law of gravity are the finest examples of affirmation of life. This affirmation of life is accentuated by a stylistic manipulation of language that mimics the acrobatic

54 Ibid., p. 34
feats. The linguistic units of the poem encoded with this acrobatic function in effect turn out to be semiotic expressions that affirm life:

The verbs themselves launch out into space with heavily stressed first syllables. And that parenthesis achingly arrests the somersault in the mid-air. Such defiance of natural laws is unearthly, miraculous. But the watching crowd have no share in it. It makes them only the more conscious of their insecurity, vulnerability and mortality. 55

This perception, valid as it may be, remains incomplete, in so far as it is not able to comprehend the possible positive outcome of the three negatives namely, insecurity, vulnerability and mortality. The cumulative effect of these negatives is appended with a positive virtue—the conscientized decision of the onlookers to overcome the negatives and to emulate or partake of the energy of the performance whether they be acrobats or pikes. Hence the basic function of the poem is an affirmation of life for ordinary mortals who live in this world of uncertainties—a hundred feet below the surer firmer world of the acrobats.

The Significance of the Hughesian Style

Thematically, the supreme consideration of Hughes in The Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal is an affirmation of life achieved by the effective application of the objective correlates drawn from the dynamic world of animals and the elemental world of Nature. When the linguistic unit of a poem is meticulously shaped and designed by a conscious endeavour to reinforce the thematic concerns, the literary artifact

55 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 51.
becomes the semiotic expression of that particular situation resulting from this unified synthesis. The validity of this observation can be elicited from an analysis of the Hughesian style.

The basic function of the major poems in The Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal is an affirmation of life both thematically and stylistically. This is evident most in his much anthologized poems like "The Hawk in the Rain" and "Thrushes". The consistent endeavour of the poet with regard to style is to create an awareness of energetic life by using language that is powerful and symptomatic of violence. This is achieved mainly by using monosyllabic plosive verbs, onomatopoeic words and by employing devices like hyperbole, parallelism and contrast. Speaking about the language of Hughes, Lawrence Kramer observes:

The palpably explosive quality of Hughes’s poetry derives primarily from his violence against its language, which he typically evolves from an urgent, unstable effort to wring a sufficiency of meditation out of its recalcitrant, implacably limited words. Sometimes he tries to energize them with pure cacophony or tortuous syntax, but that is just arguing with them. The real point is to make them transcend.56

Plosives

The immediate stylistic device that distinguishes Hughes’s style, among other things, is the recurrent application of powerful plosive sounds like /p/b/t/d/ which create an atmosphere of violent energy resulting in an affirmation of

life. The poem "Thrushes" provides a fine example of the skilful manipulation of the plosive sounds. Terror in the poem is partly created by the effective employment of the powerful plosives /t/d/ in a brilliant manner:

Terrifying are the attent sleek thrushes on the lawn,  
More coiled steel than living--a poised  
Dark deadly eye, those delicate legs  
Triggered to stirrings beyond sense--with a start,  
a bounce, a stab.57

Other examples include the effective use of /d/ in the opening line of the poem "The Hawk in the Rain": "I drawn in the drumming plough land, I drag up ". The application of the letter /b/ is effectively manipulated in the poem "The Jaguar" to create an impression of violent energy that affirms life:

... Not in boredom  
The eyes satisfied to be blind in fire.  
By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear-  
He spins from bars but there is no cage to him 58

The employment of plosive sounds can be said to evoke an immediate and tangible experience of the feel of energy through its mimetic mode of the release of energy. Hughes employs this technique in most of his poems in the first two collections with an explicit view of evoking such responses from the reader as to bring about an affirmation of life.

Onomatopoeic Words

Onomatopoeia is a common poetic technique usually employed by poets who are conscious of their craft. It is

57 Ted Hughes, Lupercal, p. 52.  
58 Ted Hughes, The Hawk in the Rain, p. 12.
very helpful in evoking certain emotions in the reader. Hence its function is more effective than ordinary words. What distinguishes Hughes is that, he employs such words consistently to enhance his particular poetic vision contained in the theme of the poem. Hence, there is an uninterrupted flow of onomatopoeic words in the poems of the first two collections. The singular function of these words is an affirmation of life through sonic effects. Thus, the onomatopoeic words in "Thrushes", like triggered, stirring, and bounce explicitly enhance the energy content of the poem. The words that appear in "The Hawk in the Rain" like drown, drumming, streaming and banging and those of shriek, strut, bang and thrust from the poem "The Jaguar" are only a few examples. Hughes makes an extensive application of this technique to reinforce his poetic vision of violence as an affirmation of life.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole or exaggeration is yet another poetic device which Hughes employs extensively and effectively to promote the life-affirming function of his poetic artifact. This in turn brings with it an intensified awareness of the life principle in human psyche. Thus, for the poet "the thrushes are more coiled steel than living", and the hawk's wings "hold all creation in a weightless quiet". It is this hyperbole that makes the Jaguar's eyes "a short fierce fuse" and the horse's head the "patient horizon". Keith Sagar outlines the stylistic value and function of hyperbole in Hughes thus:

Here was no deficiency of force, rather a super abundance. The poems crackle with surplus energy. The words leap off the page to strike or grapple the reader. Even the most grotesquely exaggerated
poems are inordinately there and alive. Hughes is a master of hyperbole. Hyperbole is deliberate exaggeration not intended to be taken literally, to express strong feeling or make a strong impression.\(^{59}\)

Hughes's implicit antipathy towards the ironic understatements of modern poetry could be found positively shining forth in his deft use of exaggeration prompted by his instinctive adulation of non-human creatures who burst with super-charged energy. The life-affirming function of the Hughesian style is further amplified by T.E. Hulme's analysis of the linguistic peculiarities in Hughes:

Language can be vital and arresting without being in any sense literal, concrete, visual or sensual. There are many sources of poetic energy capable of energizing abstractions and ideas. We can follow the dynamics of "The Hawk in the Rain" in its verbs. What nature does is expressed in a succession (like hammer blows) of violent monosyllabic verbs. The weather "drowns" the man "drums" the sodden land under his feet "bangs" and "kills" the hedges (his bearings and moorings) "thumbs" his eyes "throws" his breath, "tackles" his heart, "hacks" his head. Meanwhile the earth also takes part in the "drowning" and "drumming" "swallows" him (or tries to) clutches his feet "grabs" and "dazes" him. He suffers the effect of twelve violent verbs, six from above, six from below, in so far as in all that turmoil, they can be separated.\(^{60}\)

The poetic pre-occupation of Hughes, shaped by visionary imagination, is based on his belief in the indestructible nature of energy. Since energy exists in one form or other in this world and the highest expression of pure energy is equated with violence in Hughes, it functions basically as an affirmation of life. The conscious acceptance and the


\(^{60}\) Quoted in Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* p. 226.
reinforcement of the idea of energy as an indestructible entity which keeps life going is the focal point of Hughesian style. It can be further elicited from the example of the linguistic analysis provided by Lawrence Kramer. Kramer speaks of the application of verbs in the poem. The verbs ultimately become semiotic expressions of energy proving their life-affirming function:

And again the rains' dragging grey columns
Smudged the farms. In a moment
The fields were jumping and smoking; the thorns
Quivered, riddled with the glassy verticils.
I stayed on under the welding cold
Watching the tramp's face glisten and the drops on his coat
Flash and darken.\(^{61}\)

The mimetic quality of Hughes's language emanates from a skilful application of the verbs. The impression of violence created through yoking the verbs in succession stems from the poet's undiminished interest in violence as Lawrence Kramer says:

Take any phrase cut of these lines, and its language is both visually evocative and richly suggestive of the violent side of Nature....Hughes weighs down his lines with verbs and participles variously signifying force, movement, suffering, piercing, so that the signification of the object is altogether obscured. His poem thus mentions, but doesn't really speak of, the smudging of farms, or the quivering of thorns; its true speech centers on a wild vortex of dragging, smudging, jumping, smoking, quivering, riddling, welding, glistening, flashing and darkening.\(^{62}\)

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Hughes captures and represents reality evocatively by a careful ordering and arrangement of plosive words. He charges the atmosphere with the energy of such words especially verbs and participles which signify action. This is done with the explicit aim of activating the life of modern man who has become an insecure being by distancing himself from the elemental power circuit of the world which accounts for the splendour of animal life. Thus man becomes "mesmerized as a child at a dream" when he sees the energetic jaguar or becomes terrified at the ravenous activity of the thrushes. The specific aim of the poet in consistently portraying the violent world of animals and the violence in the elements of Nature are to show the magnificence of an energetic existence to man.

**Style as Thematic Reinforcement**

The most important poetic technique which Hughes employs to heighten the effect of violence which results in an affirmation of life is the device of contrast. This can be demonstrated by providing the analysis of certain poems representing the world of animals, the world of elemental energy and the world of man. Violence as an affirmation of life manifested in the poem "Thrushes" originates mostly from the effective application of the poetic device of contrast. The terrifying world of thrushes together with their stream-lined efficiency, their bullet-like and automatic purpose is contrasted with the world of man which is full of indolent procrastination, yawning stares, sighs and head-scratchings. This contrast heightens our awareness of the intensity of life in the outside world.
The poem "Wind" from the world of elemental energy also employs the device of contrast effectively. The violence of the wind is contrasted with the insecurity of the people in the house. When the wind comes crashing through darkness, stampeding the fields, the people in the house sit motionless, "deep in chair", gripping their hearts, unable to do anything. This contrast between activity and inertia positively heightens our awareness of life.

This device of contrast further explicates its role of affirmation of life in the context of the "Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar" which is a poem from the world of man. In this instance, an exceptional human being postured against and contrasted with the vast majority, functions as an effective metaphor of a heightened awareness of life. The poet achieves it by juxtaposing the sullen and ignorant life of the Welsh townspeople with that of the fiery life of the Bishop who laid down his life for his faith.

The patterns and usages of certain recurrent words become effective tools in Hughesian poetics that reinforce the thematic concerns. The recurrent use of the words "I" and "eye" is a specific case in context which requires a detailed analysis. Statistically 38 poems out of the total 40 in The Hawk in the Rain employ "I" or "eye" in them and in Lupercal 26 poems out of the total 41 make use of this device.

The use of "eye" is elaborately dwelt upon by Thomas West in his book on Ted Hughes. West recalls three different passages each from Ted Hughes, Edgar Allan Poe and Wordsworth. In discussing this idea West points out that Hughes writes about Calder Valley and its "evil eye" of the rock. The same
feeling relating to a brooding eye is projected in Poe's essay "The Imp of the Perverse". In Wordsworth it is the "eye" which keeps watch over man's morality as described in "Prelude I". Thomas West says:

Hughes's cliff differs from Poe's abyss and from Wordsworth's rocky steep by the nature of the evil eye that is attributed to it. This eye is felt as an inquiring accusatory presence. What is distinctive about it is the pressure of division which weighs upon the human psyche. This is more complicated than just an opposition between man and nature.63

Making a distinction between the "eye" and the "I" West further says "The dramatic encounter of the dazed "I" and the hawk's "still eye" includes a switch of voices. One senses this not only in the changing tone of the poem but also in the extreme ambiguity of the syntax and punctuation".64 It is evident from this observation that Hughes uses both these terms interchangeably. Keith Sagar also agrees with this premise. Sagar says:

The poet's eyes are his most vulnerable part, thumbed by wind and rain, but the hawk's eye seems as impervious as immortal diamond. It is always the eye at which Hughes stares, from this hawk right through to Crow. The jaguar hurries after the drills of his eyes; the macaw suffers 'the stoking devils of his eyes'; the thought-fox is 'an eye'...the eye is the 'I', the window of the soul, the outward expression of the hawk's innermost being, its unquestionable identity, its concentrated inflexible purpose.65

When Sagar says the "eye" is the "I" he implies that Hughes invests his animals with a soul, a high purpose and an

64 ibid., p. 19.
65 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, pp. 15-16.
unquestionable identity. In most of his poems where man meets animals he feels marginalized in front of them. Their single-minded and inflexible purpose makes them superior to human beings who are very often unsure of themselves and their identity.

While agreeing with Keith Sagar and Thomas West that the "eye" is a central image in Hughes and that the "eye" and the "I" are one and the same thing, it may be added that this "I" has a greater function in the larger context of Hughes's poetic vision. Human beings can achieve the fullness of life that animals enjoy only after establishing their identity and sureness of existence. In an effort to prove the existence of the "self" or the "I", the poet uses this word continually in his first two volumes. If man is to go forward with any enquiry, first he has to prove his own existence. In this sense the repetition of the "I" implies an affirmation of life. The stylistic peculiarities already discussed and the thematic concern of Hughes which go hand in glove with them clearly reveal that violence for him is an affirmation of life.

The Hughesian concept of violence has a dual foundation, one scientific, the other philosophical. Since violence is scientifically explained as the visible and powerful expression of energy, it is indistinguishable from energy which is imperishable. This indestructible nature of energy is formulated by Einstein in his scientific equation $E = mc^2$. Thus Hughes bases his poetic foundation on a valid truth of science. The philosophical aspect pertains to the reality of existence. Philosophically all enquiry should begin from the individual self. Hence first the enquirer has to prove his
own existence. Thus, as much as he proves the existence of Nature as manifestation of indestructible energy, he proves his own existence. This fact supports, reinforces and heightens the effect of both mutually.

Any philosophical enquiry meant to flush out the truth of existence should begin with the self or the "I". It is only after proving one's existence can one grapple with other problems. So this continual repetition of the "I" and the "eye" is clearly an indication of the poet's desperate desire for self-assertion. In other words, it is an affirmation of his own existence. By the consistent repetition of this "I", the poet like the philosopher Descartes wants to tell us "I think, therefore I exist". Even if this "I" and "eye" are taken as separate entities, a convincing explanation can be given as follows: I exist, I am alive, because I see with my eyes the indestructible energy which manifests itself as violent activities in Nature and in the world of animals. Hughes's fascination for the world of animals stems from the fact that animal energy is not used up for excessive ratiocination. Its energy has a superior quality and perfection compared with human energy which is dissipated by his distractions. Thus the repetition of the "I" is Hughes's way of affirming life.

This Cartesian concept of "I" as an indestructible reality and as the first logical axiom of certainty in the philosophical process finds further explication in the Vedantic philosophy of the Upanishads. Adi Shankara who is the chief exponent of Vedanta builds up his philosophy on the basic concept of "Aham Brahma Asmi" (Brhadaranyaka Upanishads) which says "I am the universal self". As it
equates the self and the phenomenal world of reality this is solipsism at its height of which Hughes often speaks. Hughes improves upon Vedantic solipsism by illustrating his article of faith that the phenomenal or empirical world is as valid as the observant self of the poet-persona.

The validity of the inferences drawn from this study is enhanced by its scientific and philosophical dimensions. The affirmation of "self" proved philosophically and the indestructibility of energy resting on the solid foundation of science together provide contemporary appeal and personal significance of a spiritual nature that transcends the insular mode of truth-seeking employed in normal poetic activity. The concluding poem of the second volume amplifies that Hughesian poetic vision is basically a philosophic enquiry structured on a valid scientific premise. The indestructible energy should primarily function as self assertion first, extending to a vision of life. The repetition of certain words in many of the poems is a faint reflection of this longing. Words like dream, darkness, vision and silence recur in a number of poems. Thus it may be inferred. The eye of the "I" (the poet) searches for visions and dreams, like the shaman but, he is confronted by darkness and silence—This is substantiated in the poem "Lupercalia".

The racers in the poem "Lupercalia" are conductors of great energy. A mere touch from their whips can shake off the sterile curse in a woman. Hughes too wishes to jolt the lethargic modern man into an awareness of the beauty of life by the whip of his poetry. Human as he is, he is fully aware of his limitations. Though he wishes to be like the racers, he can only grope in darkness. So he ends the volume with a
fervent prayer, hoping for the fertilizing touch of the maker of the world.

As energy is the biological foundation of life, at its most basic level it is divorced of its moral and social implications. Hence Calvin Bedient's charge that Hughes is a "voyeur of violence" is unsustainable. According to Bedient the problem with Hughes is "one of a sniggering voyeurism--a voyeurism of various forms of sensational extravagance."66 Hughes's consistent regard for the biological aspects of violence effectively invalidates this charge. For Hughes, its singular function is confined to that of an affirmation of life as C.J. Rawson points out:

"The hawk's impressiveness resides in his enormous energy, in life and in the moment of death. The force of this is imaginative not moral or metaphysical, and it is not impaired by the hawk's violent death."67 The effectiveness of animal images not only affirms the life principle but challenges the human onlooker by the grandeur of their lives as exemplified in the activities of the thrushes, jaguars and pikes. Michael Hamburger goes to the extent of declaring that "Hughes's poems about human beings are 'zoomorphic', and comparisons, implicit or explicit, between human and non-human behaviour have come to favour the non-human orders."68

As the ruthless efficiency of the thrushes sometimes manifests itself in exceptional human beings like Mozart, the

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vitality of animal existence in effect, challenges the cerebral man into a fully realized existence of animal-like efficiency.

The affirmation of 'self' proved philosophically and the indestructibility of energy resting on the solid foundation of science are the chief inferences drawn from the study of *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*. This, in effect, proves the validity of the observation delineated in the introduction that "violence is to Ted Hughes what obscurity is to Mallarme, the source of poetic identity, the mark of authentic vision and the consequent shaper of language".69

The thematic concern and the stylistic peculiarities together contribute to signify violence as an affirmation of life in these two early volumes. According to E.L. Black violence for Hughes "is the occasion not for reflection but for being. It is the guarantee of energy, of life."70 The strength of this observation emanates from the logical nature of the inferences and their scientific credibility. Thus it can be pointed out that the singular aim of the poems in *The Hawk in the rain* and *Lupercal* is to paint the splendour of biological life pulsating with its own joy of existence. Such vibrations of life produces challenging psychological impact on the human onlookers propelling them into channels of self actualisation and the resultant fulfilment of a rich life marked by high levels of motivation and surges of energy as yet untapped.

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