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## Violence in the Poetry of Ted Hughes

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### **Abstract:**

Violence is the most prominent theme of Ted Hughes's poetry that draws mediocre readers' consideration. In simple words, violence is an unjust, unwarranted, or unlawful extend of force. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines violence as: "The exercise of physical force so as to cause injury or damage to a person, property, etc., physically violent behaviour or treatment" (3535). Ted Hughes has written a large number of poems which delineate violence. There are many different and noticeable forms of violence in Hughes' poems. Hughes is charmed by violence; he is charmed by all kinds of violence – violence in love as well as in hatred, violence in the jungle, violence in the arena, violence in a battle, and violence in the form of murder and sudden death. But Hughes' eyes, violence though painful and very often deadly is also the guarantee of energy and life. The present paper is an attempt to analyzes Hughes' select poems which is fascinated with the theme of violence.

**Keywords:** Ted Hughes, violence, animal, vitality, energy.

Ted Hughes(17 August 1930- 28 October 1998) by name of Edward James Hughes was an English poet, dramatist, critic, and children's writer. Critics acclaimed him as one of the gifted poets of his generation. Hughes was British poet Laureate from 1984 until his death. In 1956 he met and married the American poet Sylvia Plath. She committed suicide in 1963 at the age of 30. In 2008 The Times ranked Hughes forth on their list of "The fifty greatest British writers since 1945".

Hughes's creative career comprised over a dozen books of poetry, non-fiction and children's books, such as the celebrated *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957). His other poetry collections include: *Wolf-watching* (1990), *Selected Poems 1957-1981* (1982), *Flowers and Insects* (1986), *Moortown* (1980), *Cave Birds* (1979), *Crow* (1971), *Wodwo* (1967), and *Lupercal* (1960). His last collection, *The Birthday Letters* (1998), published the year of his death, which explored their complex relationship with his wife Sylvia Plath.

Ted Hughes' youth in Yorkshire( rural landscape) exerted a lasting impression on his work. To read Hughes poetry is to enter a world dominated by nature, especially by animals. Hughes's love of animals was one of the impetus in his decision to become a poet. According to London Time contributor Thomas Nye, Hughes once confessed "that he began writing poems in adolescence, when it dawned upon him that his earlier passion for hunting animals in his native Yorkshire ended

either in the possession of a dead animal, or at best a trapped one. He wanted to capture not just live animals, but the aliveness of animals in their natural state: their wildness, their quiddity, the fox-ness of the fox and crow-ness of the crow”(12).

Hughes' animal poems are the central focus on the cruelty, the fierceness and the violence which are connected from the world of Nature. The theme of violence finds a vivid expression in the animals poems of Hughes. “The Jaguar”, “Hawk Roosting”, “Pike”, “View of a Pig”, “Thrushes”, “Bayonet Charge”, and “crow”, these are all poems depicting the cruelty, horror, and inseparable from the world of nature. “Hawk Roosting” Hughes establishes himself as a great poet in the world of animal. The poem details a bird's eye view of the world. The Hawk thinks that the sun, the trees and the earth have been created for his convenience; and that all other beings exist only as his prey. This egotistical Hawk says:

It took the whole of creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
Now I hold creation in my foot

Thus, the poem elucidate to us the hawk's own distinct point of view and his personal consciousness. The language of the poem is especially violent, “I kill where I please” and “ My manners are tearing off heads”. The most violent and savages segment of the poem is the last stanza. The Hawk speaks with a sense of authority, with ego, and with self-centeredness. This poem shows Hughes interest in the violence and brutality which are the rule, not the exception, in the world of nature. Hughes imprisons human features into animals. In fact, Anthony Thwaite observes: “Many of the poem can be seen as parables of human life, but generally expressed in such spurts of energy that the tamed and untamed worlds blur” (538).

In “The Jaguar”, he describes the animal in a zoo and their lifestyle. It liken to the apes, tiger, lion, parrots and a boa constrictor to the jaguar, which is a beast that lives differently to the others in the way that view its life. When Hughes looks at the caged jaguar, hurrying enraged through prison darkness, he find victory in the animal untamed will in the “The Jaguar”:

More than to the visionary his cell:  
His stride is wilderness of freedom  
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.

The cage is more a cage to this animal that a prison cell is to a visionary or an idealistic dreamer. Jaguar and visionary are linked together by Hughes because the will of both of them victory over the circumstances in which they exist. Gifford and Roberts say:

It is not a poem just of about observation but of longing and affirmation. . . to suggest a human possibility but one that entails preserving intact the predatory ferocity, rage, blindness and deafness of our own animal nature. . . The fact that it caged is a natural representation of a person's imprisoned animal energies. He is objectively caged but subjectively free, since he cannot formulate the concept of imprisonment. He is an example to the man who longs to live fully in those energies. (63)

His another poem "The Thought Fox", there is an interesting incident behind Hughes making of poem. The poem is the clear expression of his imagination that writing poetry is a kind of hunting, an attempt to capture the unique essence of an experience. P. R. King remarks, ". . . about the mind creation of an imaginary for which is also about used to symbolize the creative faculty of the artist" (116). In the final stanza of the poem the fox and the multitalented writer are together:

Till with a sudden sharp hot sink of fox  
It enters the dark hole of the head.  
The window is starless still; the clock ticks  
The page is printed.

His equally important poem "Pike" from the *Lupercal*, celebrate the violence and vitality of the animal world. He begins the poem by illustrating different kind of fishes. The speaker describes pike are so destructive and fierce nature. The Pike are "Killer from the egg" means that their killer instinct is the basic to their nature. The Pike fish would kill and eat up of its own species if it can get nothing else to satisfy their hunger. Here, there is an implication that the pike is in man, too. It could be the emblem for man's desire to survive and to dominate and this desire seems insatiable. The pike are one of the most vicious and voracious as an assertion of identity. In this connection, the closing lines of the poem "Pike" are significant:

Stilled legendary depth:

It was as deep as England. It held  
Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old  
That past nightfall dared not cast

In this poem the narrator tells us one of his experiences of fishing. In the above lines, the darkness is pointed through the pike. The speaker dream is the dream of violence. Hughes certainly seems to be supporting the violence. John Lucas in his *Modern English Poetry*, has expressed the opinion that poetry should take risks because poetry is a "murderous art". The poem "Thrushes" begins with a picture of terrifying thrushes on the lawn. It describes the lust for power and violence which is the part of society of twentieth century experience, and perhaps of all human experience. And Hughes has adroit in handling this theme because the very style of these poems suits the subject.

Hughes poems not only delineate the violence in animals but also depict the violence in war and battle. For instance. In "Bayonet Charge", ". . . a green hedge That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing Bullets Smacking the belly out of the air" (89). In this poem the soldier become aware of the danger menacing him. He was in no position to fire the gun which he held in his hands because his fear of being killed had numbed him. The soldiers eyes had been filled with tears of patriotism in his heart. The "Six Young Men" which is about an old picture of six young men who went to war where all have been killed, sudden unexpected and violent death. Hughes' in all his war poems describes the death as heroic as well as tragic; and arouses our pity and grief. But the cruelty and the violence are kept in the forefront. Hughes's depiction of the most violent death-toll in hair-raising:

This one was shot in an attack and lay  
 Calling in the wire, then this one, his best friend,  
 Went out to bring him in and was shot too;  
 And this one, the very moment he was warned  
 From potting at tin-cans in no man's land,  
 Fell back dead with his rifle-sights shot away.

Indeed, violence is one of the predominant themes in Hughes' poetry; and for this reason he has often been considered as one of the best poet of violence. However, Hughes cannot be described principally as "at poet of violence". Generally, the readers of his poems regard violence as a main concern in his poetry as something abnormal and undesirable. But Hughes himself equated the word "violence" with what he called "vehement activity" or also called "energy". In an interview with a magazine editor, he is reported to have said, "Any form of violence- any form of vehement activity-invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power-circuits of the universe. Once the contact has been made, it becomes difficult to control. 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 (229).

### Conclusion

From the premise of violence in Ted Hughes poetry it becomes clear that there are ways in his treatment of the types of violence. This research paper envisages not only about violence but vitality. Animals are not aggressive: they are so much more completely controlled than men. We must admit the fact that Hughes does delineate in number of his poems. Significantly, the violence Hughes' projects in his poems is "a greater kind of violence, a violence of the great work" (101 Dyson).

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