

## Ted Hughes as a Post Modern Poet

Dr Shalini Prakash

Assistant Professor ,Dept of English,Ramgarh College Ramgarh (V.B.U)

### Abstract

The present study highlights the contribution of Ted Hughes as a Post Modern Poet. Ted Hughes, unlike some modern poets, is profoundly concerned with the subject matter of his poetry. War and Violence are dominant themes in the poetry of Ted Hughes. The poet is fascinated by all kinds of violence— violence in love as well as in hatred, violence in a battle and violence in the form of murder and sudden death. His description of war and violence is very vivid and effective. There are many of Ted Hughes's poems in which the theme of war and violence find a vivid expression. The Jaguar, Second Glance at a Jaguar; Pike; Hawk Roosting; View of a Pig; Esther's Tomcat; Cat and Mouse; Thrushes, Six Young Men, The Casualty, Out, Grief for Dead Soldiers, The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar and Bayonet Change, are his prominent poems in which the cruelty, the fierceness and the violence which are inseparable from the world of Nature, have been depicted in a very decent manner.

**Keywords:** War, Violence, Wounded, Deaths, Poignant, Brutality, Calamity.

### Introduction:

Edward James Hughes, known as Ted Hughes, was a great English poet, dramatist, critic and short story writer, was born on August 17, 1930, in Mytholmroyd in the valley of one of England's first industrialized rivers, the Calder, in the Yorkshire Pennines. He became poet-laureate of England in 1984. War as a theme for the writing of poems fascinated Hughes and was quite an obsession with him. It was World War-I that made the most powerful impact on his

mind.

Hughes was a child of only four years when World War-I was almost nearing its end. His father had fought at Gallipoli in the course of World War-I and had narrowly escaped death. Hughes's father had been hit by an enemy bullet, but the bullet had failed to pierce his chest because he happened to have his paybook inside his breast pocket which absorbed the impact of the bullet. He was wounded critically and was admitted to a hospital. His survival was a miracle. He had to remain in the hospital for a long time and when he returned home after recovery, he developed a habit of describing his war experiences to anybody who cared to listen to him. Hughes at the age of four could not have understood much of what his father used to say, but the sheer repetitiveness of his father's accounts of the war made a deep impression upon the child's mind. Consequently, Hughes began to think of war only in terms of wounds, suffering, pain, admission to a hospital, convalescence, and so on. The net result of this was that Hughes did not regard war as something grand or something splendid. He did not treat war as an opportunity for the display of one's bravery and heroism. Therefore, in his poems, Hughes takes cognizance only of the dark and tragic aspects of war and violence.

Resultantly, the poetry of Hughes is a reflection of personal and autobiographical experiences. Hughes's poetry, both at its best and worst, shows a preoccupation with war and violence. Hughes certainly seems to be endorsing the themes of war and violence in his poetry. Through his pictures of the ruthless predator nets of the thrushes, the hawk, and the pike, Hughes seems to say that there is no alternative to this violence. Hughes is very skill full in depicting his themes because the very style of his poems suits the subjects.

This article reevaluates Ted Hughes's poetry within the context of postmodernism. Challenging traditional notions of meaning, language, and reality, Hughes's work exhibits significant postmodern characteristics. This study explores Hughes's use of imagery, symbolism, and myth

to subvert anthropocentric views of the world. By examining his poetry through a postmodern lens, this article reveals Hughes's complex and nuanced exploration of the human condition.

Ted Hughes, a prominent British poet, is often associated with the Movement poetry of the 1950s and 1960s. However, his work also displays characteristics of postmodernism, a literary movement that questions traditional notions of meaning and reality. This article seeks to recontextualize Hughes's poetry within the postmodern canon, examining his use of imagery, symbolism, and myth to challenge anthropocentric views of the world. Hughes's poetry is marked by its intense focus on the natural world, exploring themes of ecology, conservation, and the human condition. His work challenges readers to reevaluate their relationship with the environment, embracing a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds.

### **Main Thrust:**

When Ted Hughes started writing poetry in the nineteen fifties, the aftermath of the Second World War still lengthened its shadow on most of British poetry. The War had created a psychic numbness. This tendency is clearly reflected in what is known as the poetry of the Movement. Hughes's poetry often defies clear interpretation, embracing ambiguity and complexity. Poems like "The Thought-Fox" and "Hawk Roosting" resist fixed meanings, inviting readers to engage with multiple layers of significance. It was in a way an attempt to discard the so-called excesses of the Neo-Romantics and the visionary poetry of the kind that Blake wrote in the eighteenth century and Eliot in his *Wasteland*. The result of this shutting off from all visions, philosophies and myths was a limited Augustinism, urbanity, prosaic simplicity and refusal to deal with anything except the commonplace. Ted Hughes was clearly against this voluntary psychic

closing.

What made Hughes revolt against this post-war mood was the feeling that people had not learnt their lesson from the war and were being evasive in their response to the new situation. Ted Hughes, whose father had a narrow escape from a shrapnel which could have killed him but for the pocket pay-book which deflected it, realized that shutting one's eyes from the horrible reality outside was at best an evasive technique. He decided to express the holocaust, the nightmare that confronted the world in a post-Hiroshima period. Several poems dealing with the War, *Six Young Men*, *The Casualty*, *bayonet Charge*, *Out*, and many poems in *Widow* and *Crow* paint the nightmarish world War had created and the psychic numbness it had brought about among the survivors. In *Crow*'s *Account of the Battle*, Hughes writes, it is for this reason that Hughes invokes the inner world of man because he believes that nothing can be gained dismissing it as either a fantasy or something evil; the best way to tackle it lies in facing it and harnessing it. This article provides a key to Ted Hughes' own poetry which is an attempt to synthesize the inner and outer worlds of man. Hughes therefore returns to primeval sources of poetry: pagan and oriental mythology, experience of shamanism, of imagination and vision. And to this he adds a modernist outlook and style to call a spade a spade.

Hughes's language is characterized by its richness, density, and musicality. He employs metaphor, alliteration, and assonance to create a distinctive, expressive voice. Ted Hughes' second main reaction against the contemporary British poetry was in the form of an exploration of the inner world of man, something which the movement poetry had deliberately avoided. Hughes thinks that the unconscious, irrational and the primitive in man cannot be ignored. For they are not the creations of the human fantasy; they are rather the things man tries to keep suppressed and yet cannot. Ghost Crabs<sup>11</sup> begin to stalk at night and invade not only the seashore but the inland, the comfortable bedrooms and laws. Being the manifestations of a repressed

psyche, they roam about freely at night: Our walls, our bodies, are no problem to them. Their hungers are homing elsewhere. We cannot see them or turn our minds from them.

Ted Hughes is a very important modern British poet. As a poet, he commands full individual technical superiority over most of his contemporaries. He understands modern sensibility and contemporary issues; but writes in his own perspective. He creates before us worlds which delight and instruct us and elevate us emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically. Unlike some modern poets so believe that a poem should not mean but be, Ted Hughes is profoundly concerned with the subject matter of his poetry.

The major theme of his poetry is of course man, that is, the question of human existence, man 's relation with the universe, with the natural world and with his own inner self. He is awfully serious about this last aspect of the problem of being, namely, the problem of human consciousness. His subjects range from animals, landscapes, war; the problem posed by the inner world of modern man, to the philosophical and metaphysical queries about the status of man in this universe. His moods and methods of presentation reveal a similar variety.

The main theme in his poetry is this energy which has to be turned into a positive force. Violence is misunderstood in his poetry. Most of Hughes 's poetry can be said to be an attempt to negotiate with these energies as we see his argument in the case of Hawk. This poem is often criticized on the ground that the hawk is a mouthpiece of fascism. What is forgotten, however, is Hughes 's assertion that the Hawk symbolizes —Nature thinking. Secondly, the point of view in this poem is the hawks; that is to say, the hawk is as mortal and part of creation as any other creature, violent or timid. Right from his childhood, Ted Hughes has been interested in animals. When his parents lived in the Calder valley, Ted Hughes had a chance to see the world of the animals from close quarters. Hughes learnt the first lesson that animals were by and large victims. The wild world of the animals was at the mercy of the ordered human world. He

writes violence chiefly of savage animals, but violence also in human nature. Indeed, violence is one of the dominant themes in Hughes 's poetry; and for this reason, he has often been regarded as a poet of violence. But these poems of violence by Hughes are certainly genuine poetry; and we certainly enjoy reading them. And it is not only the sadistic persons among us who would appreciate these poems. Even the normal reader can find a certain degree of pleasure in them, especially because they are perfectly realistic, and very vivid, in their depiction of brutality and cruelty. One of the causes underlying Hughes 's greatness as a modern poet is his maturity and originality of style. Hughes has experiment-ed with several different styles, ranging from the Wordsworthian and \_their metaphysical to that of the modern East European poets.

He can convey his meaning and tone through the use of diction. As in the above extract, as soon as the thought-fox springs into action, the vowels are short: —brilliantly, concentratedly. The action reaches its climax in the last line which is virtually monosyllabic: And the page is printed. | The poem thus shows a fine blending of vowels and consonants so as to provide a fusion of sense and sound. At other times, he uses animals as symbols. In each case, there is a remarkable mastery over the medium, whether it is to depict a scene, portray an animal, tell a story, or present a one-sided vision as that of Hawk. Even the theme of violence is handled with the lexical entities.

Instead of shutting his eyes to the metaphysical and spiritual questions about life, Hughes tries to go to their bottom. He brings round that blood can be spilled as mercilessly as milk and water. The reality is depicted in the boulders 'troubles of life. Like Blake he shows a fourfold vision which progresses from knowledge of the surfaces seen from a singular and therefore one-sided perspectives to the mature philosophic perspective which goes to the heart of the matter. He finds a close kinship between the ambivalent but powerful forces within man and the inscrutable and terrible working of the world of Nature. Equally remarkable is the fact that Hughes has

treated of many modern concerns, like war and violence, with an awareness which is lacking in many of his contemporary poets. His poetry evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in a specific emotional response through language that he chooses and arranges for its meaning, sound, rhythm and a purpose.

The response of people to the crash is elaborated upon in the subsequent paragraph. They saw fall, it was not only the fall of the plane, but the Fall of Man as well, where Nature won over science yet again. They peer just as they would look for a snake or a rare flower. Note how both are potent symbols of death. Even the grave of the dead leaves heaves as a man drops out from the air alive.

People listen to him now as he tries to regain his senses, and gropes for help. They rip apart the slum of weeds, barbed coils and leaves to raise a body. As the breeze touches the body it glows: gets slightly refreshed and oxygenated. They brand their hands onto his bones. Now that his spine has collapsed, sheaves (pulleys) are lined up to take away the dead bodies in the background, as he is propped up for support. It may also imply that the people who prop him up act as heaped sheaves.

They arrange his legs in order, *open* his eyes; and then the people stand helpless like ghosts. The term ghosts 'is used in keeping with the popular conception of ghosts who want to help the living but cannot be of any practical value. The man here is a mere metaphor for people in general afflicted by such catastrophes as he tries to support himself on his legs yet again, and tries to open his eyes. August is the hottest English month, and people were literally and spiritually melting there as they encountered a major blow. They behold the flesh and blood of the bulky person in question as a heartbeat shakes the body. Eyes widen in a childish way; people seem like children in that they are worried, but do not do anything much about it. Sympathies seem to fasten to his blood like flies; nothing much but parasites feeding on the tragedy.

The heart is no more open than a clenched fist and extremely controlled in its emotions. It lies complacent, unscathed by the incident like an unscratched diamond. Their tears are too tender to let go and break. They pose as mourners. They are greedy in that, instead of helping them, their voyeuristic nature attaches more preference to knowing the juicy details of the horrific experience that the victims have gone through-grimace, gasp, gesture of death. All this prevails, till they encounter his frigid-eyed stare at the handkerchief above him.

## Conclusion

Ted Hughes's poetry exhibits significant postmodern characteristics, challenging traditional notions of meaning, language, and reality. His use of imagery, symbolism, and myth creates a complex, ambiguous, and expressive body of work. By recontextualizing Hughes's poetry within the postmodern canon, this article demonstrates the poet's nuanced exploration of the human condition. Ted Hughes outgrows the influences and produces something daringly original, and daringly rebellious. This is why any talk of his being influenced by others must at best be tentative. In the alchemy of his poetic genius all these influences act as ingredients but the end product is something more complex, deeper and more profound. Hughes's work continues to resonate with readers, offering a profound examination of our relationship with the natural world. As we face increasing environmental challenges, Hughes's poetry provides a timely reminder of the importance of reevaluating our place within the world. In order to re-create the harmonious relationship between man and nature, Ted Hughes constantly explores new perspectives in his creation. In each poem, he deeply integrates his deep concern for war and nature. Strongly condemned humans who conquer nature Centralism calls for everyone to cherish nature and



strive to create a harmonious relationship with nature.

### **Work Cited:**

- Bergin, Tara. *Ted Hughes and the literal : a study of the relationship between Ted*

*Hughes's translations of János Polansky and his poetic intentions for Crow University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2013.*

- Dyson, A.E. *Case Book Series: Poetry of The First World War*. Macmillan. 1981
- Geoffery, Summerfield. *Ted Hughes Writes*. Poetry Book Society Bulletin 15, 1957. Penguin Harmondsworth.
- Ted, Hughes., *Tom, Gunn. Selected Poems*. Faber and Faber: London. 1962.
- Keith, Sagar. *The Achievements of Ted Hughes*. Manchester University Press: Landon. 1983.
- Keith Sagar: *The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes*. The Cambridge Quarterly, 2001.
- Ted, Hughes. *Selected Poems*. Faber and Faber: Landon. 1972
- Thornton R K R, Kendall T. *Modern English War Poetry*. The Modern Language Review, 2008.