

TED HUGHES'S VISION OF POWER AND ENERGY: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO "THE HAWK IN THE RAIN"

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ABSTRACT

Ted Hughes is a versatile genius. He is one of the foremost poets in English literature. The violence is present in Hughes's poetry as a desperate wish to be out of the human altogether. Hughes is a poet who finds the human condition too much to take." The poetry of Ted Hughes has an element of violence. For him violence and power go together. The Hawk in the Rain is the first collection of poems by Ted Hughes. The Hawk in the Rain "pitches us into the thick of a battle between vitality and death, which Hughes claimed was his only subject. It is, in this poem as in many, a one-sided battle. The poem The Hawk in the Rain" presents a contrast between the steadiness, stability and strength of a hawk and the unsteadiness and sense of danger of a human being. We find the most vivid picture of the hawk being hurled down by a furious dream, and dashing against the earth, to be killed that instant. The Hawk in the Rain" illustrates Hughes's vision of power and energy.

Keywords: violence, desperate, instinctual energy, hawk, vitality, anxiety-ridden, persona, combatant, predator, hurled down, atrocities, rationality, humanism.

INTRODUCTION:

Ted Hughes is a versatile genius. He is one of the foremost poets in English literature. Hughes contends that the western civilization has overvalued science and intellect which has led to a breakdown of communication between human beings on the one hand and the world of nature and instinctual urges on the other. Ted Hughes may be called a poet of violence in a limited sense. The theme of violence finds a vivid expression in his poetry especially in his war and animal poems. Ted Hughes is, above all, a poet of nature. In his times, nature is no longer a simple, guiding, moral force like that of Wordsworth. The poetry of Ted Hughes has an element of violence. For him violence and power go together.

According to (*Martin Dodsworth, 1983*), the violence is present in Hughes's poetry "as a desperate wish to be out of the human altogether. Hughes is a poet who finds the human condition too much to take."¹ "It was a violent time" Thom Gunn's description of the Elizabethan age could equally be applied to the 1950s. Again and again the poets of this decade returned to the central theme of violence, yet, constantly shrank back from engaging with it. In 1957, the poetic career of Ted Hughes began with the publication with *The Hawk in the Rain*. This volume brought him recognition and much critical acclaim.

The Hawk in the Rain is the first collection of poems by Ted Hughes. Its immediate success in literary circles was mainly because of the celebration of instinctual energy in several of its poems. But one of the prominent features of this collection is the poet's ambivalent attitude towards violence. This volume announces the major theme man in relation to the animals, the earth, the weather, time and morality. Ted Hughes's commitment to the way of living where the instincts predominate is artistically suggested through many of his poems.

The Hawk in the Rain is a volume of poems which also contains a poem "The Hawk in the Rain", the title of which is then used by Ted Hughes as the title of the whole volume. It is one of the most famous poems in this volume. In this poem the speaker is a man walking laboriously, when it is raining heavily. This man looks at a hawk in the distant sky; and he watches the bird which symbolizes violence; and we are made to feel that the hawk may one day view the earth from a victim's stand point and feel "the ponderous shires crash on him." The speaker feels that he would be swallowed by the mud or the earth. He is acutely conscious of the violence of Nature at this time, while the hawk sits still and at ease. But then it occurs to the speaker that a day would come when this hawk, taking a wrong direction in the course of a furious storm, would be forced downwards and flung down to the earth, to be killed instantly. Thus the hawk's blood would mingle with the mud on the ground. The very first stanza suggests that this is not just a walk across a field but a "lifelong condition" and a "war between vitality and death."

*Drown in the drumming plough land, I drag up
Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth's mouth
From clay that clutches my each step to the amble
With the habit of the dogged grave..... (HR-I)*

In his anxiety-ridden state of mind, the persona gets a glimpse of the hawk whose seeming effortless defiance of the violent elements, instead of infusing in him the will to struggle, further incapacitates him. Quite unlike his legs which are at the mercy of the beastly earth, according to (*R. Ries, December 1974*), the hawk's "Wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet."² When a man struggles through the mud on the ground, the hawk shows his strong will against the rain and against the violence of the wind. So, while in the case of the persona, there is a desperate struggle for survival, there is on the side of the hawk a comfortable and confident assertion of the existence.

The persona's predicament has no end because he lacks the concentrated and pointed assertion of the energy symbolized by the hawk's eye. He is thus incapable of responding with hawk-like confidence and ease to violent nature. As a participant in the "war between vitality and death", he lacks determination and coherence. Being devoid of any meaningful assertion of vitality, he is helpless before the life devouring elements. The hawk exists at a high and superior level than the persona. The hawk's "still eye" finds its "other equivalents" in the poem in "the diamond point of will" that "polestars/ the sea drowner's endurance" and "the master - fulcrum of violence." The hawk possesses what is lacking in those, like the persona, who are the products of the modern civilized world. As (*R. Ries, December 1974*) observes, "... man is seldom capable of such comprehension, but at rare times achieves one of these qualities, as when he abandons consciousness in a purely instinctual attempt to hold on life."³ Certainly the hawk is in complete harmony with the elements while man is not. But we should not lose sight of the fact that serious doubts have been raised in the second stanza about the mystery of

the hawk over elements. It is, as per (R. Ries, December 1974), "steady as a hallucination in the streaming air."⁴ Its mastery is not permanent :

... The ponderous shires crash on him,
The horizon traps him; the round angelic eye
Smashed, mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land. (HR-I)

According to (Keith Sagar., 1978) the poem obviously recognizes that "both man and hawk shall die."⁵ Man's death is determined by the external circumstances while, says (Calvin Bedient., 1974) "the hawk's time is up only by an internal clock."⁶ The difference between the two is not that the hawk has permanent mastery over elements or it is immortal, rather it lies in the fact, according to (Keith Sagar., 1978), that the hawk "can accommodate itself to those forces that threaten its survival."⁷ Man's consciousness has burdened him with the fear of death and this makes his efforts at survival look more clumsy and awkward. Both, the hawk and man have to die, but the former through its instinctual inner harmony and self-possession lives its brief existence with dignity, the latter drags on clumsily in his prosaic existence.

"The Hawk in the Rain" pitches us into the thick of a battle between vitality and death, which Hughes claimed was his only subject. It is, in this poem as in many, a one-sided battle. Three of the four elements seem to be in alliance with death. Earth, even the earth of plough land, is not fertile but to convert earth to down-dragging mud and to hack to the bone any head that presumes to raise itself. Air manifests itself only as wind that kills any stubborn attempts at life.

In this poem the hawk is as close to the inviolability of an angel as a living creature can be, but he too is domed at last to "mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land." Yet the effect of the poem on the reader is far from depressing. If the man trying to cross a ploughed field in a cloud burst cannot be the "master- Fulcrum of violence", the same man later sitting at his desk making a poem of the experience can. (Ekbert Fass, 1980) comments "I turn every combatant into a bit of music, then resolve the whole uproar into as formal and balanced a figure of melody and rhythm as I can. When all the words are hearing each other clearly and even stress is feeling every other stress, and all are contended - the poem is finished."⁸

The poem also shows hawk's superiority over man in terms of will power and the power of endurance. It also shows that hawk is not immortal or invulnerable. To a man, the hawk appears as an absolute inviolable. We know that like man the hawk will enter the same grave as the man 'the mire of the land.' But the modes of death in the two cases are different. In the former it is meaningful sacrifice while in the latter case it is sheer dissipation and exhaustion. The hawk does what he programmed to do. Even as he plummets to a last suicidal case, he believes that by relaxing his will, he has let the earth fall upon his head. In this poem "The Hawk in the Rain" Hughes sees human beings as predatory not so much when they fight or kill as when they love. The poem moves straight from animals to lovers. This kind of love is hard to be distinguished from hate. But another critic, Geoffrey Thorley is of the view that "The Hawk in the Rain" illustrates Hughes's penetrating power and energy. Commenting on The Hawk In The Rain (1957) Sylvia Plath in a letter written home states that Ted Hughes in his poetry combines intellect and grace of complex form, with lyrical music, male vigor and vitality, and moral commitment and love and awe of the world.

Hughes himself has explained in his interview to The London Magazine (January 1971) that he thinks of the hawk as a symbol of nature, the Darwinian nature, "red in tooth and claw", and blind to everything else except its own purpose. Were it not so, the claims of the hawk would sound rather magniloquent and purely out of place; for the hawk, despite its predatory nature, is after all a creature subject to change and death. But as Hughes made it clear, it is nature speaking through the hawk. This fact makes the hawk describe itself as the centre and the sole concern of all creation, as if the earth, the sky, the water, and all the creatures were made for the hawk. There is, however, an irony underlying the hawk's self-centredness as well as its belief that everything is for its convenience. Nature and hawk think in the same terms but to different effects. The hawk itself is a part of the ruthless nature it claims to symbolize. Commenting on this aspect of the poem, (Terry Gifford & Neil Roberts, 1981) write:

Thus while 'Nature' in the last three lines is speaking in the simple certainly that it services only itself, the hawk is rehearsing its own necessary blindness: what the hawk sees as a straight line with himself intact at each end of it is really, of course, a cycle, that includes his own death.⁹

The hawk's victorious moment of triumph - might without mercy, conquest without effort, privilege without responsibility, energy without consciousness of end - remains the embodiment of one possible mode of being.

*I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body;
My manners are tearing off heads - The allotment of death.*

"The inside of the hawk is a perfect replica of the outer, active predator,"¹⁰ says (Thomas West, 1985). But it is an interesting paradox to observe that Hughes endows Hawk, the anti-human creature, with a kind of human consciousness. The poem is full of violence. But different critics held different opinions regarding the theme of violence. A.E.Dyson says that in this poem the poet also enters imaginatively into the hawk's victory, this time as it rides "effortlessly at height" above the storm. But here, he remains conscious also of the "habit of the dogged grave" which keeps him earth-bound, and which in the end will smash the bird to submit to its fate, and so snatch a martyr's triumph in destruction. This poem shows an agitation in the poet as well as in the protagonist.

The ecological disasters have awakened the poet to a suffering nature. But this nature in Hughes's poetry is not a passive sufferer. It retaliates and has the capacity to unsettle our civilized outlooks and modern world. Hence, his celebration of animals is not an endorsement of crude violence as taken by many critics. It is a protest against what we have made of ourselves and this universe which belongs to all the creatures, flora and fauna. Ted Hughes is a poet of violence only because violence is an unavoidable factor in explaining the atrocities that rationality and humanism have inflicted upon nature. He wants to rescue nature as well as mankind.

His animal poems depict the cruelty, the fierceness and the violence which are inseparable from the world of nature. Ted Hughes's poems of violence are certainly genuine and we enjoy reading them. Even the normal reader can find a certain degree of pleasure in them, especially because they are perfectly realistic in their depiction of the distinct life form of animal world. Hughes shows great interest in the animal world. Hughes's a number of the poems are about animals and about the ferocity of those animals. The poem "The Hawk in the Rain" presents a contrast between the steadiness, stability and strength of a hawk and the unsteadiness and sense of danger of a human being. We find the most vivid picture of the hawk being hurled down by a furious dream, and dashing against the earth, to be killed that instant. "The Hawk in the Rain" illustrates Hughes's vision of power and energy.

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