

The Concept of Violence in Modern English Poetry: A Study of Selected Poems by Wilfred Owen, Dylan Thomas, and Ted Hughes^(*)

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the concept of violence, thematically and technically, in the poetry of Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), and Ted Hughes (1930-1998). It shows that the obsession of modern poets with the concept of violence was a natural outcome of the Victorian crisis of faith; a crisis which was instigated not only by the industrial and scientific revolutionary spirit of the age, but also by the social, political, and materialistic theories. This all led to the devastation of moral and religious values, which, in turn, caused the outburst of violence in the modern world, and forced new ingredients into the poetry of the period. As it is hazardous to attempt to trace retrospectively the upsurging amount of violence in the modern world without reconsidering the significant changes which erupted during the closing years of the late Victorian era, the paper sheds light on some of the poetry of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), as two prominent poets of the period who employed such ingredients of violence in their writings. The paper shows that their revolutionary poetry, and more particularly its stylistic and thematic violence and intensity, is not only carried on by the modern poets, but also revealed in signs of regeneration and diversity, thematically and technically. The paper explains that though violence reaches its peak at the outset of the First and Second World Wars, the chosen poets endeavor to employ it for positive ends. The paper first examines the violence of the First World War by exploring the physical and psychological violations of the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, which reveals his truthful account of the bestiality and devastation of that War; an account that abandons the romantic and idealistic view of the pre-war time. It demonstrates some aspects of the war's intolerable violence not only in the physical aspects, in terms of deaths and bodily mutilations, but also in the psychological ones, in terms of neurotic cracks, weariness, hallucination, madness, and other disabled psychological symptoms which appeared in the

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mentally stable soldiers. It shows that Owen's aim is to reflect the impact of violence on the indelible physical and psychological wounds of the young soldiers, and, hence, warn the reader of war. Second, it shows that the concept of violence in Dylan Thomas's poetry is a style or, more particularly, a linguistic weapon that he uses to release his agony against the cosmic realities of existence, and its inevitable cycle of birth, copulation and death. Through the vibrancy, intensity, and violence of his poetic language, Thomas urges his reader to violently rebel against this cycle, and, thus, escape the existential agony. Third, it shows that Ted Hughes offers a wider conception of violence, where his poetry distinguishes two types of it: negative and positive ones. Whereas Hughes echoes the first with the violence of the over-civilized man, he equates the second with the violence of the natural world. Whereas the first is immoral, demonic, dark, and destructive, the second is natural, instinctive, and irrational. Whereas the first involves the idea of violation or blasphemy, the second is biological and leads to progress. To create awareness in man of the magnitude of violence in nature, Hughes exposes the "raw energy" underlying violence, which he equates with what he calls "vehement activity" or with the release of global energy in the raw stratum of animal life or the elemental world of nature. It is an affirmation of life and all the forces that govern the universe, from which modern man has alienated himself. As a shamanic twentieth century poet, Hughes strives to revitalize the link between mankind and nature. Finally, the paper seeks to prove that the concept of violence, in modern English poetry, is a multi-dimensional one. It takes different shapes and serves a variety of dissimilar purposes. Whereas poets, such as Owen and Hughes expose its ugly, germ, and demonic face, others, such as Thomas and Hughes, use it to shock the reader at its density, and then revitalize him, to awake him into a new awareness, or to activate him, and drag him out of his stagnation or his spiritual death.

Keywords: violence, victorian poetry, thomas hardy, gerard manley hopkins, modern poetry, war poetry, wilfred owen, dylan thomas, ted hughes

الملخص:

تستهدف هذه الورقة البحثية استطلاع مفهوم العنف — موضوعياً وفنياً — في شعر ويلفرد أوين (1893-1918م)، وديلان توماس (1914-1953م)، وتيد هيوز (1930-1998م). كما تُظهر أن انشغال شعراء العصر الحديث بمفهوم العنف قد نبع أصلاً من أزمة الإيمان التي عاثت في العصر الفيكتوري؛ الأزمة التي لم تكن روح الثورة الصناعية والعلمية فقط، بل جل النظريات الاجتماعية والسياسية والمادية. أدى هذا إلى تفسخ القيم الأخلاقية والدينية، وهو ما سبب اندلاعاً للعنف في العالم الحديث، وأقحم عناصر جديدة في شعر تلك الفترة. ولما كان من الخطورة محاولة تعقب التصاعد المفاجئ لحجم العنف في العالم الحديث — بأثر رجعي — بدون إعادة النظر في التغيرات البارزة التي شهدتها محاق العصر الفيكتوري الأخير، فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تسلط الضوء على بعض أشعار توماس

هاردي (١٨٤٠-١٩٢٨م) وجيرارد مانلي هويكينز (١٨٤٤-١٨٨٩م) بوصفهما شاعرين بارزين إبان تلك الفترة، ونظراً لأنهما طبّقا عناصر العنف في كتاباتهما. كما تبرز الورقة البحثية أن الشعر الثوري، وعلى الأخص عنفه وتركيزه الأسلوبي والموضوعي، لا يحمله على عاتقهم شعراء العصر الحديث فقط، بل بان في أمارات التجدد والتنوع، موضوعياً وفنياً.

كما توضح الورقة البحثية أنه على الرغم من بلوغ العنف ذروته إبان إندلاع الحريين العالميتين، إلا أن الشعراء المختارين سعوا كل السعي لتوظيفه لأغراض إيجابية. وعليه، تستكشف الورقة البحثية أولاً العنف في الحرب العالمية الأولى من خلال استعراض الانتهاكات الجسدية والنفسية للحرب في شعر ولفريد أوين، وهو الأمر الذي يعكس وصفه الصادق للوحشية والدمار اللذان تسببهما الحرب؛ وصف يهمل الرؤية الرومانسية والمثالية لزمان ما قبل الحرب. كما يفسر بعض أوجه العنف المفرط في الحرب، لا من الناحية الجسدية المتمثلة في الموت والتشوهات الجسدية فقط، ولكن من الناحية النفسية المتمثلة في التمزقات النفسية، واللوثات، والهلاوس، والجنون، والأعراض النفسية المعوقة الأخرى التي أصابت الجنود الأصحاء عقلياً. كما تبين أن أوين كان يستهدف التعبير عن أثر العنف على الإصابات الجسدية والنفسية التي لا تنمحي من أجسام وأنفس الجنود الشباب، ومن ثم يحذّر القارئ من ويلات الحروب. تبرز الورقة البحثية ثانياً أن مفهوم العنف في شعر ديLAN توماس هو أسلوب، أو بالأصح سلاحٌ لغوي، يستعين به للتعبير عن مدى نغمته على الواقع الكوني للوجود، وكذلك الدائرة الحتمية التي يعيش فيها الإنسان بين ميلادٍ وحياءٍ وممات. فمن خلال حيوية وشدة وعنفة لغته الشعرية يحث توماس القارئ على الانقلاب بعنف على تلك الدائرة ويهرب من ذلك العذاب الوجودي. تظهر الورقة البحثية ثالثاً كم أبرز تيد هيوز مفهوماً أشمل للعنف، حيث عرف شعره صنفين من العنف: عنف سلبي وآخر إيجابي. أما السلبي فمتعلق أساساً بالإنسان الغارق في الحداثة، والإيجابي مرتبطٌ فعلاً بالعالم الطبيعي. وبينما يمتاز الأول بطبيعته اللاأخلاقية الشيطانية السوداء الحارقة لكل شيء، فإن الثاني طبيعي غريزي لاعقلاني. وفي حين أن الأول ينطوي على فكرة الانتهاك أو التجديف، فالثاني بيولوجي أكثر يؤدي إلى التقدم. وبهدف إقناع الإنسان بجسامة العنف أصلاً فإن هيوز يعرض "الباعث الأصيل" الذي ينطوي عليه العنف، والذي يعادله بمصطلح "النشاط المتقد"، أو بإطلاق طاقةٍ كونية في إطارٍ خام من الحياة الحيوانية أو العالم العنصري للطبيعة. إنه تأكيدٌ للحياة وكل القوى التي تحكم الكون الذي نأى الإنسان بنفسه بعيداً عنه. ولأنه شاعرٌ شاماني جاد به القرن العشرون فإن هيوز يكدح لإحياء الرابطة بين البشرية والطبيعة. وأخيراً، فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تسعى لإثبات أن مفهوم العنف في الشعر الإنجليزي الحديث متعدد الأبعاد. هذا لأنه يأخذ أشكالاً مختلفة ويخدم أغراضاً مختلفة كثيرة. وفي حين أن قصائد أوين وهيوز ترسم ذلك

المفهوم قبيحاً جرثومياً شيطانياً، تستخدمه قصائد توماس وهيوز لصدمة القارئ بعنفوانه، ومن ثم توقظه على وعي جديد، أو تفيقه وتنقذه من ركوده أو مواته الروحي.

الكلمات الدالة : العنفن الشعر الفيكتوري، توماس هادي، جيرارد مانلى هوبكنز،

الشعر الحديث، شعر الحرب، ويلفريد أدين، ديLAN توماس، تيدهيوز.

Introduction

Twentieth-century, whose early years marked the beginning of the modern age, was “a period of terrible violence, instability, and fragmentation” (qtd. in Bloxham and Gerwarth 4). Niall Ferguson states this exceptional violence, saying that “[t]he hundred years after 1900 were without question the bloodiest century in modern history, far more violent in relative as well as absolute terms than any previous era . . . There was not a single year . . . that did not see large-scale violence in one part of the world or another” (xxxiv). Thus, the modern world was passing through an unprecedented crisis which Arapura Ghevarghese George describes as a “crisis in the theoretical approach to life, confusion in intellectual matters, and the absence of a sustaining faith” (15).

This instability and disturbing nature of the century was early recognized by Alfred Charles Ward, who reflected, in *Twentieth-Century Literature 1901-1950*, the rise of a new questioning spirit based on the premise that the old order of beliefs and values gave its place to new ideas: “[t]he old certainties were certainties no longer. Everything was held to be open to question: everything—from the nature of Deity to the construction of verse-forms” (2). Indeed, these uncertainties and suspicions had their roots in the preceding era, the Victorian period; a period characterized by the loss of religious and moral values. The focus shifted from God being the centre of the universe to the desperate pursuit of worldly concerns which sublimated man’s religious and spiritual values. In fact, the loss of these values, perceived by Charles Selengut as the world’s forces “of peace and reconciliation” (29), gave rise to their opposite force, violence, which works in a “jarring” (vii) relation with religion and spirituality. Thus, much of the violence and brutality of the twentieth century could be hanged upon the lack

of having a firm faith in God and the loss of moral values; a loss that was instigated by the unprecedented amount of anxiety and uncertainty, which cast its shadow on the opening years of the century.

Therefore, violence as a concept has a strong presence in modern English poetry, both in form and content. Yet, this violence is never an entirely modern literary trend in English poetry. Rather, it has developed out of the violence which started both on the historical and literary scenes of the preceding era, the Victorian era, and more specifically its last portion. Thus, it is hazardous to attempt to trace retrospectively the upsurging amount of violence in the modern world without reconsidering the significant changes which erupted during the closing years of the late Victorian era. Such period, in fact, witnessed drastic changes and upheavals on all circles. Many rapid socio-economic and political changes were in progress at that time; mainly as a response to the excessive faith in industrialism, urbanization, the so-called technological progress, and the explosion of scientific knowledge.

Evidently, the industrial progress disturbed human relations, widened the gap between the social groups and led to intense violent conflicts of power and existence. Likewise, the unprecedented geological approaches of James Hutton and Charles Lyell, the scientific approaches of Charles Darwin, the social and political theories of Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx, all together prompted a sense of disillusionment, skepticism and devastated the old verities that had given the Victorian period an air of stability. Correspondingly, materialism and the new scientific theories led to the devastation of moral and religious values, and caused the outburst of violence in the modern world, and forced new ingredients into the poetry of the period. Violence, in terms of theme and language, was one of these ingredients. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) were among the period's prominent poets who employed such ingredient into their writings. Thus, it is hazardous to attempt to trace retrospectively the upsurging amount of violence in the modern world without reconsidering the significant changes which erupted during the closing years of the late Victorian era.

1.1 Historical Background

Historically, the closing years of the Victorian era witnessed the spread of violence into the Victorians' life. This was actually a natural outcome of the Victorian crisis of faith, a crisis which was instigated by the industrial and scientific revolutionary spirit of the age. The accelerated developments of technology and their applications to the industry of England resulted in massive economic, social, political, and ideological alterations. By all means, "[t]he impact of the industrial revolution on the way people lived, thought and felt," according to Asa Briggs, "was greater than that of most political revolutions, and there never was—nor could have been—one single response to it" (212).

Despite all the benefits the revolution brought, human suffering was high, and the working conditions were undoubtedly severe. The increment of industrialization led to the matrix of social classes. It ruined the traditional way of life of the laboring poor and turned them into working class and proletariat. Industry, Asa Briggs states, had made "a large class of 'working men' who were often doomed to severe suffering" (*Victorian Cities* 88). As many might starve, and many more would die of disease, workers organized themselves into unions, arranged public protestations, used national strike and violence to force change. Additionally, industrialization progress, as Hans Haferkamp and Neil J. Smelser maintain, weakened the social relationships, and led to the spread of individualism in the society (11). Individualism, which was a key ideological component of the industrial capitalism, stressed competition, and led to the rise of, what Frederick Turner calls, "the dog-eat-dog strategy" (63) that dominated the behavior of the competitors and led to the exploitation of the innocent public. The doctrine of Adam Smith's *laissez-faire* expanded from economy to the whole society, mainly, as Philip Kozel puts it, because of the replacement of social considerations by economic ones, which was called "capitalist socialism" (49). As a result, morals and human morality were questioned during the time of the industrial revolution. The notorious proposition of Hegel, "the end justifies the means" (120), was adapted, in favor of materialism and material life, above all the social values and human principles. As morality was conventionally linked to the religious belief, moral deterioration in industrialized England was a natural outcome of the decline of the role of

religion, which pushes man to act violently. Thus, moral anarchy, during the industrial revolution, caused by “a general retreat from faith” threatened to “remove all moral standards and reveal the beast in man” (Chapman 36).

Moreover, the rise of the scientific or rational world view, the outcome of the material gain provided in the Victorian era, led to the death of spirituality, the growth of skepticism and materialism among the intellectual thinkers of the period, and, as Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart note, the creation of doubts about religion in the mind of the Victorians (7). Unmistakably, the shifts brought by the industrial revolution were the transitional causes of ideas and thoughts from religious to scientific ones. Daniel Brown asserts this point by pointing out that: “Doctrines of positivism, which maintain that the information which science extracts from sense-perception is the only nonanalytic knowledge possible . . . led science to break its traditional ties to philosophy and religion and to emerge as the paradigmatic form of knowledge” (137). Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who also affirmed this point, “argued that human society and inquiry should be based only on positive, verified knowledge obtained through science” (Nelson 57). In fact, this “Positivism,” in James Nelson’s view, “marked a shift to hard versions of naturalism, materialism, and scientism that went beyond separation and advocated the overthrow of religion” (57).

In this way, the established and settled Victorian’s faith was flustered by these unprecedented scientific approaches which prompted a sense of disillusionment, skepticism and devastated the old verities that had given the Victorian period an air of stability. The old verities were replaced by new scientific verities, which were the grounds of the spiritual conflict through which many Victorians passed. Thus, the struggle between science and religion was undesirable, but was made unavoidable by the progressively limited beliefs of both parts and “their insistence that their own mode of knowledge was the only valid one” (Chapman 272).

The conflict between science and religion arose with the outburst of the Scientific Revolution, which was the prime agent of the intellectual change, known as the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment movement led the church to lose its control over the matter of knowledge, since it adopted two philosophical approaches; namely: Rationalism and Empiricism. The former

approach saw that the essential mastery of the truth is logic and rationality, so any kind of knowledge, involving religious one, was discredited if it did not fit for the test of rigorous reasoning. Whereas the latter approach posed a more serious challenge, as it demonstrated, as Brent Slife remarks, that “the primary authority for truth lies in observation or sensory experience” (211) of the world. This philosophy disturbed the authority of religion, since, Slife notes, “many aspects of religion are not directly observable, and hence cannot be used as initial premises for rational systems of thought” (211). The Rationalism and Empiricism of the Enlightenment became the landmarks of the new scientific age. The later Victorian rationalism attracted the attention of the major intellectual thinkers, “who most prominently and systematically adopted the scientific attitude toward matters of religion and morality” (Altick 234).

The preference of the scientific way of life over the religious one changed the whole lifestyle of people. Humanity began advancing with an attitude of questioning towards everything. All the deep-rooted beliefs and customs were called into question. Anything, without any genuine proof, was rejected. Even religion that depends not on the standards of investigation and certification, but on the ideology of submission to God’s will was announced to be outdated. This frame of mind made the European Man more daring; he began to trust more firmly his own emotions and impulses. This justifies Man’s attraction towards the materialistic concerns rather than the spiritual and religious ethics. Moreover, scientific thinking, in Richard Daniel’s view, enabled Man to stand against the restraints of the society and declare his scorn for the contemporary principles of the society which hindered the natural instincts of humanity (234). Thus, it was recognized that the new scientific discoveries defied and “shook to its depth the old cosmogony,” and stifled the Victorian’s spiritual beliefs, leading to a “general spiritual unrest” (Compton-Rickett 406).

Most startling were those discoveries made by the geologists James Hutton (1726-1797) and Charles Lyell (1797-1865), whose new scientific findings were sensed to be one of the controversies of the Victorian crisis of faith. In *Theory of the Earth* (1788), Hutton claimed that in his examination of the earth’s evolution, he discovered, “no vestige of a beginning,—no

prospect of an end” (304). Thus, a new impression of a limitless time eventually displaced the Bible’s constraining narrative of time, which sets very precise beginning and no less undisturbed end. Similarly, Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830) destroyed the Christian model of creation and fundamentally changed humanity’s worldview. The fossil proof Lyell displayed “made untenable the view that all existing species were present at the beginning, created by God, the master craftsman in one divine and marvelous moment” (Warrick 106). Creation, Lyell stated, “is perpetually new: it has been in the making since God first began the process eons ago, and it will go on being made and remade forever” (Worster 138). “The implication that ‘creation’ had not been a complete act inevitably challenged the theological definition of the Creator” (Mansour 2).

More radical were those scientific progresses made by the English naturalist Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882) whose theory of evolution by natural selection did not only develop Lyell’s theory of change but brought about a revolution in human thought. Truly, Darwin’s theory challenged the traditional Christian belief of man’s privileged place in God’s apex of creation by proposing that man is not separated from the natural world, but instead subject to the same influences and instincts that other animal species are, moving the center of focus away from man to the natural world. This shift of thinking called into question many assumptions of Darwin’s era, most notably, and radically, the basic foundations of religion since it challenged both the existence and character of God. Thus, man was removed from the centre of the universe. He was no longer the lord of creation. Moreover, Darwin’s assumption, that all species involving humanity comes from a long and complicated process of biologic evolution, threatened the traditional religious notion which, which in Alister McGrath’s words, “regarded humanity as being set apart from the rest of nature, created as the height of God’s creation, and alone endowed with the ‘image of God’ “ (37). Darwin’s theory suggests that there is no intrinsic biologic differentiation between human being and animals in relation to their origins and developments. In this respect, Richard Altick points out that “the long-cherished providential theory, that God had created man, in all his pristine perfection, as a special favor, and tailored the universe to his special needs” was devastated (228).

For Darwin, man shares with the lower living things the grim determination to survive: sex and hunger. In fact, Darwin's notion of competition within nature for survival, which is accomplished by an eternal and violent struggle for existence in which survival will be for the fittest, seems to have a certain appeal to the violent nature of the age. It influenced not only biological sciences, but all branches of knowledge, including the humanities, politics, and social sciences. I.e., Darwin's slogan "Struggle for Existence" was a severe shock to religion, which became not only an assertion of man's animal origin and his violent disposition, but it also served as the core idea of many violent revolutionary ideologies, in which the strong overthrow the weak.

Thus, Darwinism, by abandoning the reality that God created humanity and advocating the idea that human beings are another species of animal, "has made the world a battleground for dialectic," as Harun Yahya notes (22). Having devastated religious faith and moral values, right-wing Darwinists presented callous capitalism that led to Fascism, a movement whose leaders believe that violence, revolution, and war are the only means of advancement. Contrary to this group, the left-wing Darwinists unified themselves; both parties became involved in a constant state of struggle with each other. Yet, Darwin's dialectics of pain, torture, and blood became essential for many twentieth-century movements, thinkers, and parties, particularly the way they explain the world's war and violence.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was among those thinkers who, after reading Darwin's theory of evolution, invented the phrase "survival of the fittest" as a justification for violence in human society. He compared moral, mental, and social improvements to that evolution in Darwin's theory. For him, evolution is the progress which results from competition. Spencer, who supported capitalism, described the competition, which happens within the industrial social groups, as a necessity for survival. In effect, "Survival of the fittest" was considered as "an ethical precept that sanctioned" economic violence or "cutthroat economic competition" (qtd. in Gutierrez 20). It sounds clear that the determinism of biological evolution lent authority to the determinism of political economy. Both depend upon the assumption of violent conflict and iron-bound laws, which man was powerless to breach.

The outcome of such a view, certainly, was that the whole array of Victorian religious and moral standards was called into doubts. These doubts were further increased by Karl Marx (1818-1883), whose political ideology nurtured a great hatred of religion, violence, and harm to mankind. In fact, Marx was one of the greatest nineteenth-century leaders of the communist movement, which caused so much blood in the world.

As a communist, Marx looks at religion from a historical perspective. Everything to Marx was a matter of society which, in turn, was a reflection of economics. According to him, oppression, poverty, fear, and desperation caused mankind to clutch to religion and so, Marx always yearned for a world where such comfort was unnecessary. For Marx, religion was an unneeded social establishment. He believed that, “the abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is required for their *real* happiness” (Marx and Engels 42; emphasis in original). To him, politics, alike religion, is a demonstration of economics and the substantial world. Based on his belief that, the struggle, throughout history, has always been between the “bourgeoisie” and the “proletariat,” he called for real, violent action against owners and the political systems that aided them. what would spring after violence, he believed, is an administration and economy governed entirely by the workers themselves. In fact, in order to appeal to a wider public, Marx gave his violent revolutionary ideology a scientific outlook. This is best achieved in the alliance he made with Darwin’s theory of evolution and his claim that living things emerged because of the “struggle for survival” or “dialectical conflict,” a notion due to which much of the twentieth-century pain, violence, disorder, mass murders, and autonomy could be attributed.

After all, the previously mentioned progresses made during the closing years of the nineteenth century, in industry, technology, and science, though brought incalculable benefits, shook humanity to its depth. Thinkers, scientists, and philosophers in different fields of knowledge acknowledged man’s violent dispositions, and rushed to offer scientific justifications for them. As a result, the old established and settled Victorians faith in the way of life was shaken by these new scientific approaches which fostered a sense of disillusionment, skepticism and destroyed the old verities that had given the fifties and sixties an air of stability. Thus, modern man grew more daring,

and, violence, the darker side of the modern age, was a natural outcome.

1.2 Literary Background

The literary scene during the late Victorian period was not isolated from the massive transformations that were in progress at the historical one. The historical transformations, with their intense impact, drove English poetry to make corresponding transformations, both in form and content, to fit in with these new revolutionary transformations; i.e. the ill effects of the industrial and scientific revolutions, the loss of religious faith, and the devastation of human and moral values, along with the large scale of violence they instigated, find echoes in the poetry of the period. Thus, violence as a literary concept, either as a theme or a language, was sensed in the literary air of the period to reflect the responses made by poets of that period to express their attitudes toward the era's changes and its ensuing crises.

Most prominent in this direction are the two late Victorian poets: Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), whose poetry celebrates the use of violence, in terms of theme and language, in an attempt to explore the crises of their era, especially that of faith. Useful for exploring the poetic violence of the poetry of these two transitional poets is to state that the period in which these poets wrote was not only a period of break with the past, in terms of religious faith and human values, but it was also a time of confusion about the present and pessimistic predictions for the future. Thus, their poetry, in most cases, addresses the spiritual deterioration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to identify the outbreak of the ensuing philosophical crises, and the massive scale of violence, cruelty, and brutality, that would transform the world in the twentieth century.

Hardy, the most controversial poet of the late Victorian period, was considered by literary historians to be the most important transitional figure in modern British poetry, "with one foot in the Victorian era, beset by post-Darwinian anxieties," as O'Neill and Callaghan remark, "and the other in the troubled first quarter of the twentieth century" (11). Thus, by all measures, Hardy, in the view of Vivian De Sola Pinto, was "a poet of the crisis that followed the collapse of the Victorian compromise" (43). Living through an age, where the materialized culture occupied almost every part of the

Victorian life, Hardy was religiously, socially, and intellectually isolated from the mainstream of the late Victorians. However, Hardy observed the rising advance of industrialism, in a background of uncertainty, and the effect of the new belief in scientific progress on the old beliefs.

Under these pressures, Hardy, “[b]y the age of 27,” as David Daiches reports, “had already lost his faith” (1066), and he “began to grapple earnestly with the difficulty of reconciling religious belief with the modern outlook as a result of the new scientific discoveries” (Kalla 139). His profound reading in scientific and philosophical thoughts of his time enflamed his doubts in the existence of God and reinforced his belief that the “supernaturalism of theological doctrines was an outdated relic hindering development of more rational views of the world” (Schweik 59). Hence, science has dispelled Hardy’s comforting thoughts of an afterlife and a peaceful universe governed by religion. Furthermore, he held the view “that life is brutal, haphazardly ordered, and oriented toward human suffering” (Steinberg 106).

No doubt, such views, in Hardy’s poetry, were enraged by the writings of the social meliorists of the era, such as Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin, which posited emphasis on the predominance of violence, cruelty and pain in this universe, which is loaded with struggles for existence; the view which, notes Geoffrey Harvey, “chimed with Hardy’s fatalistic temperament, and undermined his religious faith” (12). Thus, Hardy loses his belief in everything even in the pitiful force of God that governs the universe. He gives up his psyche in a grave suspicion. In other words, as an agnostic, Hardy believes in the existence of a just and caring force which governs the whole world. For him, it would be so catastrophic to accept such force due to the awful agony and the fierce cruelty it would bring to mankind. Under the mercy of this force, man is no longer the controller of his own fate, but rather the victim of what Hardy lables, “The Immanent Will.” This “Will” is unclearly explained as an impulse in the universe which drives things on. It is unconscious and, as Emily Hardy writes in *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*, is, therefore, “neither moral nor immoral . . . ‘loveless and hatless’ . . . ‘which neither good nor evil knows’ ” (217). Nature, for Hardy, is cold to human values; chance is sighless and time is ruthless and avid.

The violence and cruelty of such force are presented in many of Hardy's poems. For instance, the notably titled "Hap" advocates his controversy from this inceptive word—it is chance that controls our lives, not God." The poet claims that: "If but some vengeful god would call to me / From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing, / Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy, / That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!" (*Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy* lines 1-4).¹ The word "if" suggests the assumed unfeasibility of this deity's presence, and "some . . . god" proposes his entire rejection of the affirmation of a single, just and caring deity. Hardy proposes that even a "vengeful" god would be favored to no god, but ends that a world controlled by chance only is the desperate actuality.

The speaker's attitude is, however, slightly changed in the poem "The Convergence of the Twain." In this poem, which is about the sinking of the Titanic and his era's failed dreams, Hardy refers to an external power that controls the world, naming it, in the sixth tercet, "The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything" (6.3), and, in the eleventh tercet, "the Spinner of the Years" (11.1). In the poem, Hardy advocates his naturalistic hypotheses of determinism, though this disclosing is nearer to accepting the Fates of Greek mythology (often called "the clever spinner" in relation with destiny) than acknowledging the existence of a deity with a sovereign plan for the world. And in "Channel Firing," Hardy examines the existence of God from another perspective. The poem, which is oddly related by the dead in their tombs, refers to the single Christian God, who sent the dead under in the past centuries and talks with them now to assure them that Judgment Day is not imminent. However, the God of this poem is nearer to the "vengeful god" of Hardy's poem, "Hap," as He speaks, "It will be warmer when / I blow the trumpet (if indeed / I ever do . . .)" (22-23). This portrays an irresponsible God who probably has the capacity to aid humanity, but alternatively leaves them to their own wickedness, for God declares: "The world is as it used to be: / "All nations striving strong to make / Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters . . ." (12-14). Accordingly, Hardy seems to be saying that even if God were to be existent, he would either be versus mankind, or detached from them, for Hardy cannot believe that a kind God could be accountable for such evil beings as humans.

This means that Hardy's agnosticism and loss of faith in the orthodox Christianity was a reaction to the trials of his own age, the expanding threat of war, and the increasing scale of violence and atrocities he perceived both in the world of nature, as he presented in his later natural poetry, and human world, as he pointed out in his war poetry. Whereas "Hardy's earlier poems are chiefly nature poems where Nature is depicted as a companion of human beings" (Patil 41), his later poems represent the coldness of nature to man's existence and his suffering. In other words, Hardy emphasizes the dual aspects of nature: the beautiful and the abundant, and the malicious and the wicked. In fact, Hardy hangs man's loss of peace in, and tranquility with, nature upon the dawn of Science, Technology and industry, which have commercialized life, mechanized man, deprived him of his central attachment to the natural environment, and pushed him to exploit it violently. A closer study of some of Hardy's later nature poems would uncover his exploration of man's suffering in defiance of the disasters of nature; a suffering primarily generated by man's own materialistic lifestyle, and his violent destructive tendencies which lead to the devastation of nature's wealth.

Hardy reflects his dark vision of the violence and cruelty, which has dominated the world since the wake of the Industrial Revolution, by choosing an urban milieu, where everything seems to be artificial, discordant, and irregular. He sets his vision on the belief that man's excessive dependence on machines is tragic as it leads to a disintegration of man's harmonious association with the environment. The scientific inventions and discoveries have led man to abuse nature violently for his self-centered interests. Man's knowledge and supremacy over the natural environment has increased this approach of violent abuse of natural surroundings, both in its animate and inanimate forms. In "A Backward Spring," Hardy demonstrates man's act of cruelty toward nature by depicting his own indifference to it in the exploitation of the beauty and bounty of the natural environment. Thus, Hardy, in the opening lines, demonstrates that it is because of man's exploitation, nature is agitated by human disturbance and man's scientific invasion. Hardy writes:

The trees are afraid to put forth buds,
And there is timidity in the grass;

The plots lie gray where gouged by spuds,
And whether next week will pass
Free of sly sour winds is the fret of each bush
Of barberry waiting to bloom. (1-6)

Similarly, "Logs on the Hearth" emphasizes man's self-centered exploitation of the natural surrounding, ignoring his own benefit: "The fire advances along the log / Of the tree we felled, / Sawn, sapless, darkening with soot" (1-8). The poem further explains that man's brutal exploitation of the natural environment has finally led to the contamination of all aspects of genial atmosphere, such as weather, water, soil, and sound. Though his poem "Genoa and the Mediterranean" examines the dilemma of the sea pollution, Hardy asks the sea to endure man's cruelty: "O Epic - Famed, god-haunted Central Sea, / Heave careless of the deep wrong done to thee. / When from Torino's track I saw thy face first flash on me" (1-3). Moreover, "The Bird-Catcher's Boy" is another poem which describes man's brutality in hunting birds: "Larks bruise and bleed in jail / Trying to rise; / Every caged nightingale / Soon pines and dies" (1-4).² In his poem, "Compassion," which Mallikarjun Patil describes as "a hearty response to the cries still heard in all the secret corners of the world getting no compassionate response from human hearts" (46), Hardy writes:

But still those innocents are thralls.
To throbless hearts, near for that hear no calls
Of honour towards their too-dependent frail,

How helplessness breeds tyranny
In power above assail. (14-19)

It seems that Hardy wants to say that when nature is only dealt with for man's selfish materialistic aims, and when she is violently abused and regarded as a tool, man can never get peace, calmness, and spiritual solace from her. It is true that Hardy sees such violence and exploitation as a kind of impoverishment of the human soul and an absolute debasement of human values. He believes that the debasing materialism provides man with more pain than pleasure. He holds the view that man may have knowledge and supremacy over the wealthy natural environment, but he must not exploit

them. Hardy assumes that if man is to get what he needs from nature, he should treat her as a fellow human being, as a friend and a companion.

However, Hardy goes further throughout his poetry to demonstrate that modern man is incapable of getting peace not only with nature and its creatures, but also with his own fellowship as well. This is evident in his strong worries about warfare, which often appear in his war poetry. In other words, Caitlin Washburn maintains that in the “poems inspired by the Boer War at the end of the nineteenth century and by World War I in the twentieth century, Hardy rejects the nationalism often prominent during war-time, focusing on the reality of warfare as man’s slaughter of man” (8-9). In “The Man He Killed,” for example, Hardy portrays the violent nature of warfare, as one man, who has chosen to recruit “off-hand like” ruminates about the man he killed: “I shot him dead because— / Because he was my foe” (9-10). The soldier ends his rumination saying that: “quaint and curious war is! / You shoot a fellow down / You’d treat if met where any bar is, / Or help to half-a-crown” (17-20).

The accidental and heartless projection of the cost in human lives of winning a war is an example of what is under attack in the poem. And people who ponder such atrocities have cause to question their insights of “self-identity” and “otherness” during a war. The individual human soldiers who struggle against one another in the warfare have nothing personal against one another. Hardy attacks the callousness of the military as it rids individuals of their identities, prompting them to commit extreme acts of violence against each other for no sound personal reasons. Additionally, Hardy disapproves of the war’s violence and depersonalized bloodshed in “Departure,” focusing, this time on the nation as a whole and not on the individual humans:

While the far farewell music thins and fails,
And the broad bottoms rip the bearing brine—
All smalling slowly to the gray sea-line—
And each significant red smoke-shaft pales,

Keen sense of severance everywhere prevails,
Which shapes the late long tramp of mounting men

To seeming words that ask and ask again:

‘How long, O striving Teutons, Slavs, and Gaels (1-8)

In the above lines, the long-established beliefs of nationalistic patriotism weaken and disappear along with the music in the first line, as Hardy emphasizes the absurdity of resuming warfare in a world which has recognized the “severance” and disillusionment caused by war. The final lines of the poem aptly stress some apparent flaws of warfare:

Must your wroth reasonings trade on lives like these,

That are as puppets in a playing hand?—

When shall the saner softer polities

Whereof we dream, have sway in each proud land

And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand

Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?’(9-14)

In fact, the flaws of warfare are: the soldiers act, as in “The Man He Killed,” as finger-puppets, the political powers lack reason, and nationalism fails to consider humanity as a single race. Since the soldiers are consciously aware of the flaws of the war, Washburn argues that “there is no excuse to continue to support jingoistic patriotism, because a greater form of patriotism—one that is universal, enabling humans to recognize their common kinship—is now conceivable” (10). Thus, Hardy succeeds in reflecting the immoral cruelty of warfare which is mostly active in the natural world. Indeed, Hardy’s interest in showing the effect of industrialization on either nature or war is less than his interest in emphasizing the dire consequences of industrialization and the violence in which the war causes to nature, animals, and humans who suffer from such violence. Accordingly, Hardy’s nature and war poems, such as “Hap,” “The Convergence of the Twain,” “A Backward Spring,” “Logs on the Hearth,” “The Man He Killed,” and “Departure,” not only show the utter degradation of human values in modern man’s violence, but also the violent nature of warfare.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, as well, was the other late Victorian poet, whose poetry incorporated violence as a response to the challenges beset against religious faith in his radically changing and challenging society. To illustrate, there is no escaping the fact that Hopkins, like Hardy, lived particularly in the period of religious decay, advanced secularization, and

moral and ethical degradation. Yet, unlike Hardy, whose faith was shaken under the pressure of these changes and challenges, Hopkins was not troubled by the doubts and discouragement that came with Victorian thinkers like Spencer, Freud, and Darwin. Rather, he continued to maintain faith throughout his life and writings. To a large extent, Hopkins's passionate devotion to the writing of religious poetry, which was marked by his violent poetic style, was an answer to the skeptical spirit of his age. Simply put, Hopkins was not only painfully aware of the more somber side of Victorian England, but he was also intensely perturbed by political tendencies, and acutely sensitive to the moral and theological speculations of his contemporaries. On a more distributing level, Hopkins was at one with his contemporaries, in his preoccupation with the ugliness, injustice, evil, and suffering, he had seen in the late Victorian England, due to the industrial system. Besides, he had also developed a sense of the brutal defacement of the English landscape and the deformation of the image of man by industrialization. In his remarkable sonnet "God's Grandeur," Hopkins, according to Vivian De Sola Pinto, "embodies his vision of the drabness and dullness of the industrial age in four lines which contain a searching criticism of a whole civilization" (82):

Generation have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. (Selected Poems 5-8)³

That is to say, as a Catholic priest, Hopkins clearly perceived that the England of his day was suffering from a serious social and spiritual malady. It is true that he, more than any writer of his age, clearly understood the real nature of this malady and the means to overcome and heal it. In Hopkins's eyes, religion was the only alternative to cure the world's malady. For this cause, Hopkins used his poetry to convey his religious devotion and to urge the Victorians to go back to the religious beliefs before the advent of the Industrial Revolution. His method toward such urge is presented in his use of violent and forceful language that has the capacity to revitalize man out of his spiritual dryness, and, hence, revive his lost religious faith. As a result, Hopkins's poetic language became masculine, energetic, and intense in its

qualities. It has kinship with the metaphysical poetry of John Donne and Herbert Spencer in its spiritual devotion, sensual violence, and intense feelings. His “creative violence” was a natural outcome of his constant obsession, as Elaine Murphy notes, “with purging language to regain its freshness and vitality.” In this context, Hopkins, in a letter to his youngest brother, Everard, on 5 November 1885, writes:

I am sweetly soothed by your saying that you cd make anyone understand my poem by reciting it well. This is what I always hoped, thought, and said; it is my precise aim. . . . As poetry is emphatically speech, speech purged of dross like gold in the furnace, so it must have emphatically the essential elements of speech. Now emphasis itself, stress, is one of these: sprung rhythm makes verse stressy; it purges it to an emphasis as much brighter, livelier, more lustrous than the regular but commonplace emphasis of common rhythm as poetry in general is brighter than common speech. (*Delphi Complete Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* 244-45)

The previous extract clarifies the fact that part of Hopkins’s linguistic violence was embodied in the new meter and rhythm he employs to his verse. In other words, Hopkins violently broke up with the conventional anarchic diction of the nineteenth century, which was inadequate in putting into words what came straight from his heart. “The poetical language of an age,” Hopkins wrote in a letter to Robert Bridges on 14 August 1879, “should be the current language heightened” for the purpose of poetry (*Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins* 89). The metrical pattern that Hopkins adopted was the now known “sprung rhythm,” which Paul Kiparsky defines as a meter based on counting of stresses instead of syllables in which feet could consist of a single stressed syllable or a stressed syllable with any number of unstressed or ‘slack’ syllables (306-07). In other words, this new kind of meter for poetry, consists of lines with a greater number of stresses than are common in English verse. He explains to Robert Bridges in his letter on 25 February 1878, that he used it, “[b]ecause it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech . . . the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms” (*Letters* 46). In short, it was a principle of

gaining liberty and concentrated energy as it lends intensity, vibrancy, and flexibility to the lines of poems, and allows greater possibility for Hopkins's bold violence in handling his poetic language.

As earlier explained, Hopkins used violent language to create his violent images, which were mostly taken from nature, not only to evoke the grandeur of God, but to revive man's lost religious faith in God. "The Windhover: To Christ our Lord" is a highly experimental Petrarchan sonnet which represents the artistry of Gerard Manley Hopkins at its most exhilarating and strange. It is not only a demonstration of Hopkins's metrical pattern, "sprung rhythm," but an evidence of Hopkins's use of the beauty and majesty of nature and its creatures, which he reveals through the violence of his poetic language, to praise and worship God. In other words, the poem expresses, what Yvor Winters refers to as, Hopkins's "attempt to express violent emotion through violent meter" (119). Note, for example, the phrase which begins on line 9 of "The Windhover": "Brute beauty and valor and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here / Buckle!" Every word receives emphasis, except for the two occurrences of "and." The effect of this overstressed rhythm is to give the poem a powerful, emotionally charged sense of forward motion. Hopkins coined the word "instress" to describe the energy he wanted his poems to create; he believed that such energy would allow the poet and reader to see into the unique spirit, or "inscape," of creatures and objects in the natural world. Ultimately, this spiritual communion with the outside world might bring human beings closer to Christ.

In the first eight lines, the speaker praises the windhover, a bird of nature—a kind of falcon—in flight, describing the bird in language befitting both a royal being and a supernatural phenomenon. The speaker records how he "caught" this falcon in the middle of its flying. "I caught this morning morning's minion, king- / dom of daylight's dauphin" (1-2), he begins: the bird is the sweetheart of the morning and the prince of day, tinted by the speckled colors of dawn. The verb "caught" alerts us to the excitement the speaker feels and to the significance of his act of observation. The speaker is no daydreamer, idly watching a bird fly overhead; he wants passionately to "catch" the essence of this creature by noting every detail of its motion, and to describe this motion so as to "catch" in vivid language its psychological

effect upon him. Look, for example, at the remarkable string of adjective phrases modifying “air” in line 3: “the rolling level underneath him steady air.” Hopkins removes all unnecessary connecting words in order to represent the full immediacy of the mind in action.

After describing the falcon’s rare and violent capacity in flying onward in the air, mainly hovering in place while it skims through the ground seeking a prey, he describes how the falcon spins from his straight flying: “how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing” (4). The falcon dangles around from his onward flight to curve in a circle much as the trainer who makes a young horse gallop around him in a big circle. Notably, the poet gives religious overtones to the falcon’s maneuver through “Wimpling,” which means that his wings, to execute this maneuver, keeps swaying into a curve that is like a nun’s folded veil on headdress. We feel the intensity with which the speaker is drawn out of himself by the bird’s majestic flight: “My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!” (7-8).

The next three lines suppose that the bird’s flight is like the awesome force and grace of Christ:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier! (9-11)

These lines suggest that a “fire” might “break from” the windhover, due to the concentration of energy the speaker sees in the “brute beauty,” “valour,” and “pride” of this “chevalier” (knight) of the air, displaying the skill and “ecstasy” of flight. The word “buckle” in line 10 has three possible meanings: “prepare for action,” “fasten together,” or “collapse.” Hopkins seems to be saying that this intense energy manifests itself both as a unifying force, permitting the bird to execute skillful acrobatic feats in harmony with the elements, and as a disruptive power—the very intensity such a performance requires seems to threaten the self-control both of the bird and of its observer. It could be, too, that the speaker’s emotional involvement with the windhover is so great that the spiritual distance between them comes

close to “buckling” or collapsing; this would be a demonstration of the process discussed above, by which the energy of instress leads to an understanding of another being’s inscape.

The sonnet closes with an abrupt shift of attention from the air to the earth:

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion. (12-14)

the speaker compares the majesty of the windhover’s flight to the “shine” of a plow working the soil (a “sillion” is a ridge between plowed furrows), and to the embers from a fire which had seemed dead, “galling” themselves (breaking open) in order to reveal the “gold-vermilion” flame still burning inside. What is the relation of these images to the subject of the poem? A clue can be found in the similarity between the embers, with their hidden flame, and the fire that seems about to “break from” the windhover in line 10: both images suggest that beneath the sometimes-nondescript surface of the objects and creatures in our lives lies a divine spirit, which we may see only in moments of deep contemplation.

Many critics have suggested that the windhover is a symbol for Christ: the bird is the “dauphin” of the daylight kingdom, just as Christ is called the Prince of Peace and the Son of God, and it is by means of the windhover that the speaker seems to achieve a spiritual transformation. The true symbolic significance of the bird is probably more complex than this, however: it is not itself a manifestation of deity but rather a means by which the speaker can learn to appreciate the divinity of all life. The last lines of the poem suggest that any intense appreciation of nature can serve the same purpose.

Another representation of this evocation of the grandeur of God can be found in his sonnet “God’s Grandeur,” in which Hopkins evokes, through the force of his language, violent nature images to explore the manifestation of God in every natural object. According to Hopkins, the acknowledgement of a nature object’s distinctive identity, which was conferred upon that object by God, brings man closer to God. Thus, in the opening lines of the sonnet, Hopkins, through a series of nature images, advocates the greatness of God. Hopkins writes:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod? (1-4)

This view is wonderfully expressed in Hopkins's hymn "Pied Beauty," which violently opens with:

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stripple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings; (1-4)

The realization of the unusual beauty that exists in the natural world, which Hopkins reveals through the intensity of his expressions, enables his readers to get deeper into their meaning and realize that they are testimonies of God's existence in nature. Hence, he concludes his hymn with a "praise" that should be paid to God who is responsible for "the world's splendour and wonder" ("The Wreck of the Deutschland" 38). He writes:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him. (7-11)

Ultimately, the seeds of violence that were planted in the poetry of both Hardy and Hopkins had been carried forward by the poetry of the modern age. That is to say, the poetic violence which fostered the poetry of these poets, either thematically or stylistically, had influenced and ignited much of the poetic violence of modern times. Representative figures in this direction are Wilfred Owen, Dylan Thomas, and Ted Hughes.

2.1 The First World War

Eric Hobsbawm's history of the world since 1914, *The Age of Extremes*, opens with array of twelve quotations which characterise the twentieth century as "an Age of Catastrophe" (6). Of the "twelve people look at the 20th century" is Isaiah Berlin, who views it as "the most terrible century in Western history," William Golding, who describes it as "the most

violent century in human history,” and Rene Dumont, who calls it “a century of massacres and wars” (qtd. in Hobsbawm 1). In fact, these quotations sum up a century which had witnessed bloodletting and barbarity on a large scale, which “brought an estimated 187 million violent deaths” (Nieraad 1023), and, according to Hobsbawm, “was without doubt the most murderous century of which we have record, both by the scale, frequency and length of the warfare which filled it, barely ceasing for a moment in the 1920s, but also by the unparalleled scale of the human catastrophes it produced, from the greatest famines in history to systematic genocide” (13).

These catastrophes and unprecedented levels of mass violence and brutality, which poisoned the twentieth century, were, mainly, due to its horrific wars, namely: the First World War, the Second World War and the Cold War. World War I, which started on 28 July 1914 and ended on 11 November 1918, remains one of the most violent and costly conflicts of the 20th century. It was a worldwide war that “involved the world’s leading powers, assembled in two opposing alliances: the allies (based on the Triple entente of the United Kingdom, France, . . . Russia [Italy and the United States]) and the central Powers (. . . the Triple alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and [the Ottoman Empire])” (Eckman 291). Thus, World War I was by far the most violent militaristic conflict that had ever taken place.

The actual eruption of war was welcomed with a surge of enthusiasm which transcended all bounds of class and party and was unlike any other war in previous English history in that the war, at its outset at any rate, was an affair of the whole nation, passionately convinced that it was embarking on a crusade for a righteous cause. In essence, Peter Childs notes that “[b]y the time of World War I, to fight for England was a patriotic duty and even a privilege” (46). Side of the enthusiasm of those youngsters was certainly due to the sense of relief from the excruciating strain of the years instantly preceding the war and from the drabness and the humdrum of the commercialized civilization, and their desire to break down the barriers of the British insularity and re-assert their unity with the other European countries. Side of it also was a product of the moral sense, derived from the English puritan convention, which had been spoiled in a world of competitive commerce and which seemed, in Childs’s words, to have found an outlet in

such heroic action (46). Moreover, the war was portrayed as a chance for young men to protect their lands and raise its banner high in the battlefields.

The hostile regimes used wartime propaganda to provide general support of the war and manipulate popular opinion. “The purpose of propaganda,” according to Eric Leed, “is to place the act of violence within a moral universe by identifying the enemy as something that lies on the boundaries between the inhuman and the human, as something without a ‘soul,’ and thus the proper object of hostility” (105). Thus, propaganda strategies were exploited by the modern governments to orchestrate violence and justify “killing on the battlefield” (Nagler 487). Poetry was among these strategies. That is, many attempts were made by poets to express the enthusiasm of the first month of the war and to celebrate its glories in terms of conventional patriotism. Such poetry employs, as Ted Bogaz writes, “an extraordinary language filled with abstract euphemistic spiritualized words and phrases under which were buried the realities of modern mechanized war” (643).

Along with this patriotic poetry, religion was a convenient instrument of propaganda for the authoritative leaders to affirm that they were fighting for a sacred just cause; an idea that appealed to Bertrand Russell, who asserted that “[t]he First World War was wholly Christian in origin” (220). “[R]eligion,” Clinton Bennett remarks, “was certainly recruited to legitimize and drum up support for the war” (4)

Nevertheless, as the months and years went by, the war proved to be different from what most men had expected. The brutality of the War wiped out virtually a whole generation of young men and was a severe shock to the world that shattered so many conventions, illusions, morals, and ideals. This sense of disillusionment was responsive to the violence, with which this war, with its intense trench warfare and chemical weapons like mustard gas, was conducted and resulted in the death of millions. As a result, every one suffered immensely from the violence of the war, which, in fact, was not restricted to the physical violation, but extended to the psychological damage, as well, causing irreparable mental wounds to those who experienced it.

The war also generated one of the strongest poetic responses, in

quality and quantity, of all this century's wars. Many of the war period's prominent poets, mainly referred to as "soldier-poets" or "trench-poets," were, in fact, themselves soldiers on the battlefield. Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and Siegfried Sassoon all had personal experience as a source for poetic subject matter—and their powerful imagery and unflinching points of view often reflect the horror of what they witnessed for themselves on the battlefield. Their "writings," John Pearson maintains, "all reflect a first-hand vision of this holocaust, and it was this, and the nearness and constancy of death, the comradeship of the trenches, the revelation of a crucified humanity, that filled their minds" (104). Above all, these poets attempted to convey to their readers, who had been seduced into believing the tales of honor and glory of the Great War, their first-hand experiences of the violence of the war experience by delineating the horrors of life in the trenches and on the battlefield. Thus, war poets were able to bring the violence and terror of World War I to life. Wilfred Owen was the most prominent anti-war poet.

2.2 Violence in Wilfred Owen's War Poetry

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (1893-1918), killed shortly before the First World War ended, was foremost among the English poets who sought in their poetry to expose the falsity of attempts to justify this particularly brutal conflict. As a commissioned officer leading a platoon at the front, Wilfred Owen experienced the madness of trench warfare first hand—his first tour of duty found him lodged in a hole with the decaying corpse of an officer, an event that catapulted him into severe shell shock. The carnage in the trenches quickly convinced him that all war transformed the landscape into something "unnatural, broken, blasted" as he pointed, in his letter on 4 February 1917, to "the distortion of the dead, whose unburiable bodies sit outside the dug-outs all day, all night, the most execrable sights on earth" (*Collected Poems* 22). Along with fellow officer Siegfried Sassoon, Owen waged a literary attack against the war.

Owen's Preface to his first poetry collection, which was published two years after his death, effectively reflects that the obsessive thematic concern of his poetry is the shocking and inhuman violence of modern warfare. He writes: "This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak

of them. Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War. Above all I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity” (*Collected Poems* 31). These words stand for the truth that Owen’s interest with war, throughout his poetry, was due to his desire to highlight “the pity of War,” though unstated in his quoted words, “into a language that was powerful and musical, shocking yet, intricately crafted at the same time” (Whitfield). Thus, Owen’s prime concern was to reflect the impact of violence on the indelible physical and psychological wounds of the young soldiers.

2.3 Physical Violence

In his war poems, Owen dwells upon new forms of slaughtering, violence, and deep inflicted physical scars on the soldiers’ bodies, which were mainly produced by the advent of modern industrialized weapons, such as the machine gun, trench mortar, and mustard gas. The huge number of ruined bodies, casualties, and ordeals of the young soldiers left many remarks in the poetry of Owen, who pointed either straightly or by means of a metaphor and synecdoche to the combatants’ bodily pain under the pressure of the war’s violence. In essence, Owen uses symbolic, visual, and stylistic devices to communicate alive-experience of the war’s violence, and depict the physical violation it brought upon its participants. Believing in its efficacy, Owen gives the priority for the visual and expressive devices, among other literary devices, to delineate an riveted vision of the war’s violence in terms of the physical waste it causes. Elaine Scarry affirms this point when she writes that “within the scarcity of literary representations of pain, writers consistently rely on visibility and descriptive devices” (11). Additionally, sound patterns, including Owen’s Para-rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and onomatopoeia, are also employed to evoke an aestheticisation of violence and as methods to make war seem more brutal, violent and cruel.

His poem “Dulce Et Decorum Est” is an enduring example of this view. In a shocking tone, Owen here writes about the victimization of the soldiers and how they have lost both their physical and social stature, reduced by their violent war’s experience. He introduces his reader with a violent

graphic description of an able-bodied battalion of military men who have been physically inactivated by the violence of trench warfare. These descriptions give a real picture of the soldiers' poor physical condition which supplies the reader, as James Campbell maintains, with the "unvarnished and unpopular truth of military action that has heretofore been hidden from civilian experience" (265). The poem opens, in visual vividness, with the soldiers, who are honestly depicted, not as the epitome of upright masculinity, but as exhausted figures under the strain of the war's excess of violence which is beyond their physical limitations. At the beginning, shocking physical conditions of those infantry are conveyed through a number of similes and metaphors that show how horribly twisted and deformed the bodies of the soldiers are:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind. (Collected Poems 1-8)⁴

These lines convey a realistic picture of the soldiers' physical condition in an endless war. Owen employs images of bodily privation and retrogression, mostly linked with old age and poverty. The young soldiers are compared to old women, hags, in their coughs and bent backs, as if they are Macbeth's witches. Their elegant military uniforms are no more than the sacks of old beggars. Against the readers expectation of looking at strong and healthy-looking men, Owen provides them with a picture of shabby-looking and bodily deformed soldiers. With this antithetical view, the soldiers, as stated by Owen, "are making a mockery of civilian concepts of love and beauty and sacrifice" (qtd. in Bartel 205). His apt visual image, "Men marched asleep," is an oxymoron which not only visualizes the soldiers as exhausted but as dead alive. They are marching bare naked-feet; they do not take care of their own health. What calls to mind that they are still alive is that they limp on covered with their blood. "Drunk with fatigue" is also an image which

suggests the unsteady walk of the soldiers because of fatigue. This gives the impression that the war is a violent world peopled by the walking dead. The “distant rest” may refer to the secure shelter they are attempting hopelessly to attain or may emphasize the physical comfort they dream of but never find. So that, these sleepy, dirty, bare-footed, lame, blind, and deaf soldiers continue to march, not with military discipline and dignity in the fancy of achieving some noble end, but rather simply towards some brief relief from physical exhaustion. Clearly, Owen seeks to engrave these images in the reader’s memory indelibly.

In the second stanza, Owen demonstrates the extreme soldier’s agony and the violent physical death caused by the use of mustard gas. The poem’s speaker, a soldier, first describes the scene of a mustard gas attack, which one among his group does not survive, using the most disturbing imagery he can muster:

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound’ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning. (9-16)

The intent of this scene is to evoke horror in the reader, to suggest that the true horror of the gas attack, as experienced by the soldiers, is so horrible as to make any attempts at justification ineffective.

Once again Owen uses the sound patterns to evoke a live-experience of the war’s violence and the physical pain it causes to its participant. Santanu Das suggests that one should draw great attention to the sound patterns in the second part of the poem because the sibilance and labials of verbs “fumbling / stumbling / drowning,” creat “a sonic realm that obscenely mimes, if not aestheticizes, the spectral space created around the charred body through its own jerky, erratic movements” (153). Moreover, Owen

employs onomatopoeia in “guttering, choking, drowning”—words which convey the nature of soldier’s physical pain—to reveal the sublime terror of the poisoned gas assault. Thereby, Owen supplies his reader with a set of unattractive violent images of tormented soldiers within a harmonious rhythm to evoke, in the reader, what Das calls, a “visceral thrill” (154).

In the final stanza, Owen does not spare any shocking image to transmit, as vividly as possible, the soldier’s physical torture and the violent nature of his death. The disgusting image of “white eyes writhing” in the “hanging face” (19) of the dead soldier is not only a symbol of the appalling violence of the war, but also an antithetical view to the sentimentalized propaganda spread by the civilians. Overall, the accumulation of these images helps the reader to feel the bodily suffering and pain inflicted on the soldiers during war, and realize the ironic sentiment in the title. They are precise descriptions of the physical impacts of being gassed confronting “the old lie” of the nobility of death in war and also reflecting his serious need to transfer an understanding of what the war’s violence was doing to its participants. Therefore, the speaker, in the final stanza, addresses the reader directly, attacking the particular justification “you” would offer young men going off to war and seeking heroism on the battlefield—the lie that it is glorious to die for one’s country on the battlefield (a loose translation of the poem’s final lines, written in Latin):

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori. (17-28)

By the end of the poem, Owen is successful in his purpose of shocking those

at home at the war's violence and its gruesome physical effects. The rhyme, in "glory" and "mori," is an ironic agreement in sound which reveals the artificiality of propaganda which could identify the violent physical death by mustard gas with nobility. War is a breeding ground of violence and brutality. Consequently, an effect of addressing the reader as "you" while continuing to use disturbing imagery is to heighten the experience, to personalize the horror of war, thereby making it less prone to justification by abstract, less personal ideas like patriotism and honor. Another is to create a sense of shame among his audience, as if to say, "How, after I've described this horrible event, could you with all good conscience tell 'the old Lie' to the 'children' your country is sending off to war?"

The poem is an affecting piece precisely because of these strategies. It assumes a position against "the old Lie" and seeks support for that position by creating an intense experience of specific emotions (shame and horror) in the individual reader. "Dulce Et Decorum Est" is also an effective foray into the larger theme of war as it relates to human nature, for it suggests that each of us, through our systems of justification and rationalization, is in part responsible for the brutality the poet describes; in broader terms, it implies that something about us, an aspect of our inner nature rather than external ideas of war, is responsible for the conditions of our existence.

"Disabled" is another poem which deals with the war's violence and the pain, the young soldiers undergo, due to physical disfigurement. The poem is not only an acute cry against the futility of the war but a depiction of the dire consequences of it on the survivor. Owen reflects upon the condition of one of the survivors before and after the war to highlight the effects of the war on him. He uses the story of an unnamed ex-soldier, who returned from the war with severe and tragic injuries, to inform people about the nature of war, its gruesome violence, and the kind of torture, the soldiers undergo during times of conflict. Thus, the disfigured soldier in "Disabled" becomes a symbolical figure—one who demonstrates the terrible physical cost of war.

The opening lines of this poem set the stage, visually and aurally, to understanding the nature of the persona's disability, the fact that he no longer has his legs:

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him. (1-6)

In these lines, Owen paints a depressing picture of a crippled man, seated in a wheelchair, who is incapable of walking or even indulging in any physical activity around him. The immediate series of “hissing sounds,” in “Legless, sewn short at elbow,” notes Santanu Das, affect us bodily so that we wince and tighten” (157). This sonic repetition in the lines make the reader recognize that the soldier is not only deformed in his legs but also in his arms. The stanza, like the six remaining stanzas, keeps shifting between present and past, where To deepen the disparity between the present and the past, Owen juxtaposes the soldier’s life pre-war, which involves being physically attractive and popular, with females and footballers, amongst his peers, and his post-war life, where he is physically deformed to a great extent.

Much like “Disabled,” “A Terre (Being the philosophy of many Soldiers)” offers a similar portrayal of the physical damage suffered by an officer entrapped in his injured body. Here, in the form of a dramatic monologue, Owen allows a war-disabled officer, who lies in bed dying of his war wounds, to address the reader directly. The dying officer describes to the reader the physical effects of the war that have dehumanized him, and caused him to lose his sight and his limbs. The officer feels that he is dying organ by organ. Owen manipulates strong imagery to describe the failure of control felt by a dying officer, wounded by war:

Sit on the bed; I’m blind, and three parts shell,
Be careful; can’t shake hands now; never shall.
Both arms have mutinied against me—brutes.
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.
I tried to peg out soldierly—no use!
One dies of war like any old disease.
This bandage feels like pennies on my eyes.

I have my medals?—Discs to make eyes close.
My glorious ribbons?—Ripped from my own back
In scarlet shreds. . . . (1-10)

To echo the soldier's physical weakness and deterioration, Owen, Stylistically, uses broken forms and structure throughout the poem. As a young man, the orator scorned the design of growing old, but now as he is about to be deprived of his life, is ready to exchange places with those whose bodies are complete. In other words, this gravely injured officer longs for life, any life; like a "muck man," a rat, a microbe, or a flower, as these creatures can live out a peaceful life whereas he is about to lose his life, while he is still young. He is even envious of his servant who, despite his disability, has, at least, a pair of lungs to live with, and of the rodent, which, unlike him, has the capacity to move and see, owing more freedom than his damaged deteriorating body. Then, in a series of natural imagery, Owen shows the officer's desire to become one with nature:

O Life, Life, let me breathe,—a dug-out rat!
Not worse than ours the lives rats lead—
Nosing along at night down some safe rut,
They find a shell-proof home before they rot.
Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,
And subdivide, and never come to death,
Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.
"I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone,"
Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned:
The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now. (36-46)

Thus, Owen, in this poem, exposes the awful violence of the war, and the damage it brings to the soldiers' bodies, to mock the British propaganda. He allows the dying officer to talk about the irony of being patriotic "Yet now ... I'd willingly be puffy, bald, / And patriotic" (13-14). This irony is a strong beat to the British propaganda, as the soldiers' experience of war is the total antithesis to the romanticized propaganda they once read, altering his patriotism into bitterness due to their daily anarchic atmosphere and the bestial physical violation they faced. Violence, as in the case of this officer, is

all that he will be able to teach his son, as that is all what he learned during his service in the army.

However, in his process of communicating the immensity of the war's violence and the physical damage it brought upon the soldiers' bodies, Owen does not rely merely on portraying the soldiers' bodily scars and their physical disabilities, but he adapts the images of the modern mechanized weapons as a media to transmit the intensity of the soldiers' physical distress. In this respect, it is apt to quote Elaine Scarry, who realises the instinctive association of weapons with bodily pain. She maintains that physical pain "can be apprehended in the image of the weapon (or wound) but that it almost cannot be apprehended without it" (16). Thus, Owen recognizes that weapons represent external agents that cause the soldiers' injures and bodily damages. Consequently, he, throughout his poetry, urges the reader to perceive mentally this kind of association between wounds and weapons.

Some of these weaponry images were visual, but the majority of them were auditory ones, highlighting the violent noises of the war's weapons. In relation to this, one cannot ignore the fact that Owen was a ravening reader of John Keats' romantic poetry and his early poems echo the musical effects and sensuous imagery of Keats. Additionally, his war experiences further emphasized his perception of the importance of sound. So that, his poetry is rife with the violent sound of explosions and gunfire, which Owen describes, in a letter to his mother, as "a sound not without certain sublimity" (*Collected Poems* 157), to give his readers a taste of war's violence and its destructive capacity.

Evidence of this can be found in Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth". In this sonnet, Owen refers indirectly to the unparalleled scale of violence and physical pain in war. I.e., Owen highlights the violence of war and the senseless slaughtering of a generation young men on the battlefield through a series of poetic imageries which skillfully depicts the brutality of the modern mechanized weapons and their abnormal, fierce, and unprecedented noises. The poem starts with a powerful oratorical question which effectively conveys Owen's outrage at the violent deaths of young men on the battlefield who decease as cattle in an undignified mass:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
—Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires. (1-8)

In these lines, Owen argues that the violent and horrible conditions of the battlefield do not only cause the violent deaths of the young soldiers, but also offer no decent funerals, the holy rites of the deceased; the deceased are offered “[o]nly the monstrous anger of the guns.” Owen thus succeeds in bringing the images of horror and physical pain in war in a series of auditory imagery, which reproduces the sounds of the war’s weapons, enacted by the “monstrous” and “demented” noise of guns, rifles, and “wailing shells.” He masterfully employs traditional poetic devices in satiric fashion. Instead of creating a passage resounding with open vowel sounds, echoing the “passing-bells” of the church, he instead mirrors the “monstrous anger of the guns” by repeating harsh alliterative syllables with the intensity of enemy crossfire: “Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle / Can patter out their hasty orisons.”

The peace and majesty of church rites for the dead are juxtaposed with the demented cacophony of mortar shells and bugle-calls. That is to say, Owen juxtaposes a set of violent imagery, featuring the weapons and harsh noises of war, with peaceful images of the church funeral to highlight, more emphatically, the cruelty of these weapons, which violently stripes these soldiers’ from their life in the blink of an eye. Thus, the constant use of auditory imagery enables the reader to imagine the brute cruelty and violence of these weapons. This brute cruelty is further emphasized in the use of personification, in “only the monstrous anger of the guns,” to underline the the brutal nature of the young soldiers’ deaths. Owen, here, aims at highlighting the fact that the soldiers, who had died in the battlefield, were not buried, but were laid instead in the midst of an endless violent deadly war, to emphasize the war’s physical loss, epitomized in the continuous human annihilation.

The tone of the second stanza shifts considerably, adopting a sentimental language that on the surface seems to lend a dreamy emotion to the young soldiers' sacrifice:

What candles may be held to speed them all?

Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes

Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall; (9-12)

The language of martyrdom and religiosity is full-blown: candles that "may be held to speed them all" to a final resting place become the "holy glimmers of goodbyes" of comrades in the trenches, and death-shrouds become the "pallor of girl's brows." While Owen would certainly celebrate the camaraderie of soldiers in death, the passage's language seems too ornate not to be somewhat ironic.

The final couplet of the sonnet strikes out with an unmistakable, venomous irony. When the funeral wreaths become the "tenderness of patient minds" (13), Owen seems to be parodying such sentiments, for patience is only granted to those not on the front lines, those not being bombarded by mortar shells and pinned by enemy fire. The patience of bureaucrats and citizens in fact reveals an unwillingness to realize the true horrors of war—for how could they so patiently wait for the war's conclusion, the return home of loved ones, if they understood the war's brutal realities. Thus, Owen's final line strikes with a ferocity all the more powerful for its delicacy: "And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds" (14). For Owen, the common act of closing the curtains in mourning becomes not a sad gesture of personal loss, but a symbol of the public shutting out the realities of war.

In "The Last Laugh," Owen, once again, uses the shocking images of war machinery to display the violent conditions and the physical pain of the war, and to make the readers sense the pain and sympathize with the soldiers' state. As Owen was aware of the fact that the weapons of war are tougher and more forceful than the soldiers, as they are violent and murderous when attacking, he structures the poem in three stanzas, highlighting different responses and clamors by three different soldiers when they are blasted by weapons while in the battle. In each stanza of this poem, Owen personifies

the weapons of war, including the guns, gas, shells and shrapnel, as debased indifferent creatures that ridicule the victim with its sound. Moreover, he relies heavily on the use onomatopoeia to show what these disdainful beings, weapons, have to sound to silence its victims.

In the first stanza, Owen delineates an assault on the battleground. The soldier is shouting out “Oh! Jesus Christ!” which can be either the soldier swearing as he is about to be shot, or it could be that this soldier is actually crying out to Jesus and God to help him. Owen admits that: “Whether he vainly cursed, or prayed indeed, / The Bullets chirped—In vain! vain! vain! / Machine-guns chuckled,—Tut-tut! Tut-tut! / And the Big Gun guffawed” (2-5). In the second stanza, Owen introduces another soldier shouting out for his mum and dad as he is about to be murdered: “Another sighed,—’O Mother,—mother!—Dad!’ / Then smiled, at nothing, childlike, being dead. / And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud / Leisurely gestured,—Fool!” (6-10).

Owen closes his poem with a soldier calling out for his beloved. He ends up kissing the mud as he is murdered and falls face first onto the earth. Owen uses violent language here as the soldier manages to kiss his beloved, but he ends up kissing the mud, and the bullet goes through his body as he does not lower to kiss his beloved, but lowers to die. In this stanza, Owen adopts the same structure of the first two stanzas; where the soldier, this time, is crying out for aid while he is murdered by the violent opposition of the war machinery: “And the Bayonets’ long teeth grinned; / Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned; / And the Gas hissed” (12-14).

In this way, weaponry images which Owen exploits throughout many of his poems to crystallize the violent nature of the military equipments, like the bayonet, the bullets and gas bombs, are, to a large extent, parts of Owen’s strategies to evoke in the mind of his reader the associative images of crippled soldiers, missing limbs, and hence the war’s violence and the physical pain it causes to the youngster.

2.4 Psychological Violence

No one can ignore the fact that the prolonged exposure to the violence

of WWI took its expense, not only on the physical constitution, but also on the psychological constitution of its participants. That is, trench warfare only expanded the death and bodily injury tolls, but it also introduced, as Daniel Hipp points out, “the medical and psychological phenomena of shell shock . . . , a response to trauma that manifested itself upon the soldier’s body and psyche in various ways . . . [such as] mutism, an inability to speak” (2).

According to Eric Leeds, combatants were almost immediately compelled into a “climate of fear and anxiety” by their incapacity to process and orchestrate “the sheer scale of technologically administered violence” (128). Thus, “the intensity of the essentially artillery battles fought along these war fronts . . . often caused neurotic cracks to appear in otherwise mentally stable soldiers” (qtd. in Baltutis 6). To operate in such an incoherently violent environment, many of these soldiers degenerated, as Leeds contends, “to forms of thought and action that were magical, irrational, and mythic” (128). These men were often observed as having had all levels of coherence substituted by “irrational thoughts and unbidden associations” (Leeds 129) to cope with what their worlds had become.

As they experienced the violence of war and battle, these shell-shocked soldiers had to struggle with many emotions which incapacitated their bodily abilities to function properly. I.e., the sight of a fellow soldier murdered right in front of them or of the graves and bodies of many other soldiers evokes the feeling of shock and remorse over the soldiers mind and body. “The shock and fear of seeing death all around them and seemingly no escape, causes uncontrollable and involuntary movements and actions by soldiers” (qtd. in Livengood). Along with the mental symptoms of shell-shock, there were physical symptoms of this psychological phenomenon. Lord Moran writes: “It was not only the mind that was hurt, exposure left the soldier weaker in body so weaker in purpose, his will had been sapped” (88).

Owen, who himself “clearly suffered from shell shock” (Bryant 8), uses the experiences of war and shell shock to write poetry and shed light on what it was like during World War I. Throughout his poetry, Owen captures the damage brought upon the soldiers’ minds as a result of the violence of war, allowing the public to be more conscious of the epidemic of shell shock

and neurosis that was being concealed beyond locked doors at the armed hospitals. In his descriptions, he touches upon the soldiers' mental breakdown under the intolerable distress of the violence of WWI. He is direct and bitter in his representation of war and its violent scenes which leave on its participants deep mental scars as deadly as the bodily ones.

In "Mental Cases," as the title suggests, Owen focuses on the psychological unseen scars caused by the violence of WWI. His aim is to shock and to describe in stark detail the ghastly mental torment that the violence of trench warfare caused to thousands of young men during WWI. Owen based this poem, as he records the occasion in his *Collected Poems*, on his personal experience of being a mental case, at Craiglockhart Military Hospital, near Edinburgh, where he was treated for shell shock in 1917 (68-69). The narrator of the poem offers a psychological study of a group of neurotic soldiers who suffer from what at the time of WWI was called "shell shock, or what is now called post-traumatic stress disorder" (Crouthamel 1).

To establish the mental effects of war and to shock the reader about the violent harsh realities of WWI, Owen, in the first stanza, reduces the whole issue to three oratorical queries: who these psychological cases are, why they wobbling from side to side in a purgatorial rite, and why they are so tortured by fear and grief? The poem's inquiring attitude instantly captures the readers' awareness and implicates him in these soldiers' dilemma of psychological disorder and the ruin of their rational abilities due to the violence of WWI. Owen starts his poem with:

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,—but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
Ever from their hair and through their hand palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish? (1-9)

Owen describes the soldiers as "purgatorial shadows," rocking quietly in a

darkened corner between heaven and hell during twilight. The “purgatorial shadows” implies that those shell-shocked men are trapped in an active inferno. Though they are alive, they are haunted by their painful memories. They have retreated into an inner infernal region which overpowers everything else. It also symbolizes the lack of physical control of those soldiers which is an inevitable result their psychological damage; they are awaiting in a maimed and shaaby, “drooping tongue from jaws” and “fretted sockets.”

Owen uses strong animalistic images to show the dehumanization of the soldiers and how mentally disturbing for these unspecified “hellish” creatures the war was. Most notable is the one in which Owen aptly compares the afflicted soldier with a brutalized animal protecting itself with “baring teeth,” which indicates that the soldiers are always vigilant, with “bare” teeth, without taking any rest. The idea that the soldiers are always alert is not only brutal and unhuman but psychologically disturbing.

The second stanza proceeds to explain the soldiers’ feelings and how their memories are loaded with death scenes of people killed, during the war, by their own hands and by others. Owen describes these soldiers as “men whose minds the Dead have ravished” (10), emphasizing the fact that the people, whom he describes, are not deceased men, but are men whose frame of mind, or rather psychological state, has been overpowered by the reminiscence of the fierce death of their friends: “Memory fingers in their hair of murders / Multitudinous murders they once witnessed” (11-12). The apt use of personification, in “memory fingers,” is traumatic as it supports the idea that the soldiers’ appalling recollections of war’s violence continuously “fingers” in their minds to remind them of how devilish their lives are.

Owen continues to utilize this dreadful mental devastation in vivid visual and aural terms. i.e., the “Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,/ Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter,” (13-14) along with the rhymed onomatopoeic phrases: “batter of guns” (16) and the “shatter of flying muscle” (16) not only emphasise the violent sights and sounds of war, but they affirm the that these helpless sufferers “Always must see these things and hear” (15) the sounds of the guns and bloodshed; therefore

“memory fingers in their hair of murders” and “human squander rucked too thick for these men’s extrication,”(17-18) showing that this waste of life is appalling, but these memories are something that they can never escape from.

In the third stanza, Owen portrays the plight of those plagued by shell-shock, by presenting the ongoing psychological effects of war as “a wound that bleed fresh” (22) each day. It breaks fresh daily, as if it had just been formed. This suggests that these men are being trapped in a cyclical maze of constant bleeding “fresh” blood every day, making the soldiers’ experience at war official and eternal.

The idea that the violence of the war creates a constant traumatic haunting effect on the soldier’s mind, through memories of war, in this poem, recurs in many other poems. For example, in “Dulce et Decorum Est,” Owen describes a recurring dream after seeing a fellow soldier drown in gas “like a man in fire or lime” by saying: “In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / he plunges at me, guttering, choking, and drowning” (15-16). Though the poet did not experience the physical pain of being gassed himself, he is always haunted by the nightmare of this excruciating experience, which he can never escape. The “guttering, choking, drowning” of the moribund soldier confuses the poet’s dreams and scares him; it turns the memory into a dreadful nightmare, which does not only bring back his fear, but his helplessness and impotence in looking at a man, who is beyond anyone’s reach.

Captured in the remembrance of a gas-assault, the speaker of the poem, like the poet, keeps wavering between the painful feeling he felt in the past, during war, and the aching one he feels at the present time, and hence, he is unable to remove the image of his deceased friend out of his memory. “The contrast between this dream-like setting and the violent graphic images and sounds of death,” as Harold Bloom emphasizes, “allow Owen to further underscore the gap between the reality and fantasy of war, a gap that is epitomized for him by the facile use of the old lie ‘Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori’ “ (16).

This idea recurs in “Strange Meeting,” which its final lines move from religious grandiosity to dark memories and guilt of war. “Strange Meeting”

was written while Wilfred Owen was fighting with the Manchester Regiment on the Western Front during World War I. The narrative of the poem derives partly from Dante's descent into hell in the *Inferno*; however, Owen's vision contains a more urgent feeling because it was composed in the quiet between battles. The poem begins: "It seemed that out of battle I escaped / Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped / Through granites which titanic wars had groined" (1-3). "It seemed," the poet begins, preparing us for something perhaps less-than-real, as he descends down a tunnel so deep it has "long since scooped" (2) through the lower strata of granite. By saying the granite were "groined" by "titanic wars," Owen is comparing pilings of rock sometimes used along river shores (called "groins") to the built-up trenches and embankments of World War I. Because the granite boulders are so large, the wars would have to be "titanic," thus evoking the Titans who were the giant race of Greek mythology.

Among these granites the speaker finds "sleepers" (4) in the thralls of "thought or death" (5). Searching among them, he finds one not yet dead, who rises and "stared / With piteous recognition in fixed eyes" (6-7). By now the reader suspects that we have entered a dream landscape or other fantastic setting. The speaker says, "And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,— / By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell" (9-10). The lines are nearly the same, with important variations, the second illuminating the first; this is the first of two such refrain-like lines in the poem.

Seeing that the "vision's face" is marred by "a thousand pains" (11), the speaker tells him, "'here is no cause to mourn' " (14), for they are away from the shelling above. This "strange friend" replies by listing the many reasons he has to mourn, the many pleasures he enjoyed in life "[w]hich must die now" (24). He further fears that with his death, the truth of war will go "untold" (24), the truth being "[t]he pity of war, the pity war distilled" (25). This notion closely echoes Owen's own Preface to his poems, in which he wrote: "My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity" (*Collected Poems* 31). The spirit fears, in other words, that men will not know the ravages of war and will therefore repeat them; they "will go content with what we spoiled" (26), not thinking to fear the wars ahead.

The second refrain encapsulates this notion: “Courage was mine, and I had mystery”—that is, I was courageous because I didn’t know what I would encounter,—followed by “Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery”—that is, he understood only upon seeing the horrors of war for himself (30-31). Now he knows that he would have done anything to avert this war, and—as if to startle the poet-speaker into the same recognition—he reveals: “I am the enemy you killed, my friend” (40). In the brief moment when they met as enemies on the dark battlefield, he says, “I knew you [...] for so you frowned / Yesterday” (41-42). He tried to fight back, the ghost says, “but [his] hands were loath and cold” (l. 43), underscoring his humanity, then hastily he turns away, bidding the speaker “Let us sleep now . . .” (44). Thus concludes the poem, but the ellipsis and the suddenness of the closure leave both speaker and reader to contemplate the meaning of this “strange meeting.” Obviously, Owen, desperately suggests no hope for those shell-shocked soldiers to get away out of the war’s spiritual inferno.

Similarly, “The Sentry,” which is based on a particular memory of a soldier, who is terribly mutilated and blinded by a German bomb, is not only concerned with the soldier’s pathetic reaction toward his wounds, but also on the poet’s own obsessed memory of them. In the poem, Owen relates a nightmarish image of the soldier’s blinded eyes. He shows how the whites of the soldier’s eyeballs protrude alike squids’ eyes:

We dredged him up, for killed, until he whined
“O sir, my eyes—I’m blind—I’m blind, I’m blind!”
Coaxing, I held a flame against his lids
And said if he could see the least blurred light
He was not blind; in time he’d get all right.
“I can’t,” he sobbed. Eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids
Watch my dreams still ... (18-24)

The nightmarish image of the watery whites of the soldier’s eyes: “Eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids,” persuasively depicted, is what revisits the poet in his dreams. “The poet,” notes David Welch, “tried ‘not to see these things now’; however, the suffering of this soldier clearly haunted him” (49). While this sentry has physically gone blind, the poet feels as though he himself has become blind, in another, more intuitive manner. He has lost all semblances

of secure orientation and feels trapped by the remembrance of this incident.

As a consequence of this stifled sense of mental discomfort, the poem sheds a great deal of light on the metaphysical state the war left the poet in. And while the poet may not have lived to see the end of the war, this poem depicts the soul of a man, who will never forget what he witnessed and will always be tormented by it. He, just like the sentry around whom the story takes place, will forever be blind. His blindness, however, will be exclusive to all that is sane and happy, never to break from his experiences within the trenches. In recollection, the psychological violence of wartime was intolerable for many soldiers, leading to, what Shelby Livengood calls, “self-inflicted wounds.” She adds that “[t]hese self-inflicted wounds were considered a serious wartime offense. For the majority of cases, this consisted of shooting oneself in the hand or foot. The main goal of this act was to remove oneself from the ability to participate in front line service. . . . One reason behind many soldiers’ acts of self-inflicting wounds was the physical and emotional stress of the war.”

Owen deals with this subject in “S.I.W.,” an official abbreviation for self-inflicted wounds in the British army during WWI, indicating that the soldier in the poem shot himself. The poem is a report of how an ordinary young boy-soldier commits suicide as a result of the intolerable psychological exertion on the western fronts. It seems that under continual shelling, the boy’s nerve is ruined, and he begins to waste his courage. Neither injures nor shell shock leave him free from the pressure of the trenches. Even death averts aiding him to escape the agony of being under fire. Owen lays naked the interior conflict of a soldier who cannot cope with the war’s violence, but still does not wish to betray his father who “would sooner him dead than in disgrace” (3), saying:

He’d seen men shoot their hands, on night patrol,
Their people never knew. Yet they were vile.
“Death sooner than dishonour, that’s the style!”
So Father said. (20-23)

After all, the man could stand the pressure no longer. The action of the poem develops till it reaches a point in which Owen highlights the soldier’s

“reasoned crisis of his soul” and the abovementioned pressures which conclude with the soldier’s suicidal act:

It was the reasoned crisis of his soul.
Against more days of inescapable thrall,
Against infrangibly wired and blind trench wall
Curtained with fire, roofed in with creeping fire,
Slow grazing fire, that would not burn him whole
But kept him for death’s promises and scoff,
And life’s half-promising, and both their riling. (29-35)

This lad, as Owen calls him, psychologically recognizes how incapable he is of enduring the war and its violence. He resolves that the only way out he can find is to commit suicide. His corpse is found by a group of soldiers out checking the barbed wire. The soldier is dead. At the beginning, they think his rifle may have gone off accidentally or he might have been shot by a German sniper. However, they later find an English bullet in his body and recognize he has put his rifle to his teeth and shot himself in the head, and,”With him they buried the muzzle his teeth had kissed, / And truthfully wrote the Mother ‘Tim died smiling’ “ (36-37). Thus, the soldier “died smiling,” because he sees suicide as an escape from the even worse fate of continuing to fight and live in such a psychological hell, sensing its violence and bestiality.

Even nature, because of war’s violence, has turned into a ruthless and violent enemy that seems to intensify the soldiers’ emotional distress instead of being a spiritual outlet for them. This idea is prevalent nowhere more than within “Spring Offensive,” where Owen depicts the soldiers resting in a field before the outbreak of a fresh violent attack:

Marvelling they stood, and watched the long grass swirled
By the May breeze, murmurous with wasp and midge,
For though the summer oozed into their veins
Like the injected drug for their bones’ pains,
Sharp on their souls hung the imminent line of grass,
Fearfully flashed the sky’s mysterious glass. (8-13)

Owen shows the soldiers’ inability to relax mentally amidst the beauty of

their natural surroundings. This is due to the fact that, in taking part in war's carnage, these men have spent their humanity and sinned against "the peaceful moral aura of nature." It seems particularly apt here to quote Gertrude White, who argues that "[i]n violating their own human nature, in reversing by violence the natural order, men alienate themselves from Nature herself" (62). In light of this, nature functions no longer as a spiritual solace for the soldiers' tormented souls, and, in return, the soldiers not only negate nature but also alienate themselves from it; and hence, they deny all human aspects of nature.

Here, Owen contrasts the beauty of nature, embodied in the cool and peaceful air of spring, with the soldiers' mental agony. Their mental agony impedes their realization of the existence of such beauty amidst their feelings of utter loss and the painful horrors of war. Warmth and spring are found inspiring home memories. Yet, these memories are like "injected drug," which suggests that they are under great pressure and the reality that the soldiers' mental anguish is dragging down. They are deeply shaken by the war's violence they have just witnessed. Unable to speak of the violence they have just witnessed, these soldiers enter a sort of catatonic state and refuse to do anything except sit there and allow themselves to be swept away by their thoughts. This inability to actively cope continued well beyond the years of the war for most.

All in all, throughout the aforementioned poems, Owen shows the fact that the psychological effects of the war's deluge of violence and strain are no less destructive than the physical ones. Thus, soldiers, who escaped the aggregation of war's violence and physical wounds—who were not severely injured, mercilessly killed, or taken prisoners—were haunted by the trauma of mental illnesses, which appeared in the form of madness, shell-shock, hallucination, and the like.

3.1 Dylan Thomas's Violent Poetry

The Welsh poet, Dylan Marlais Thomas (1914–1953), whose enormous capacity for self-destruction have formed a vision of the poet as a doomed, romantic figure raging against the horrors of modern society and seeking any means to shape language into meaning, was poetically violent.

His poetry is overloaded with images of violence though he “himself was a pacifist who evaded conscription” (Piette 15), and “[t]he whole notion of war was ridiculous to him” (Thomas and Tremlett 72). Many of his war poems, “A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London,” “Ceremony after a Fire Raid,” and “Among Those Killed in the Down Raid Was a Man Aged a Hundred,” were implicitly pacifist, which “chant hymns to the dead . . . victims of the war as sacrifices offered to war’s violence” (Piette 15). To a large extent, the creation of these images signifies Thomas’s vision of the cosmic scheme or his existential agonies for grasping, what D. S. Savage calls, the “proto-philosophical, impassioned questioning of the ultimates—origins and ends—of existence,” which are “the essential or fundamental ‘existential’ human state” (142). In other words, the images of violence in Thomas’s poetry are associated with his major poetic themes, focusing on the cycle of “womb and tomb, life and death, or the natural and supernatural process of creation and destruction” (Tindall 15). This “obsession with death,” as John Press points out, “went back to his childhood and became intensified in adolescence. His fascinated preoccupation with the process of birth and the monstrous excitement of sex are by-products of his horror death. . . . Birth and copulation were for Thomas merely stages on the way to death” (7).

However, Thomas’s violent images not only expose the existential agonies but, as “the fallen blood,”⁵ they both soothe and heal the agonizing wounds as they emerge from the unconscious. To a large extent, the act of creating such images echoes Thomas’s view of the act of writing as a kind of “catharsis” as these images, much like the Freudian and Aristotlian terms, both arouse and purge the tainting fear of death and the intense anguish of existence. This is best illustrated in Thomas’s “Replies to An Enquiry,” in which he expounds his view of his poetry, saying: “Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision that depends in its intensity on the strength of the labour put into the creation of the poetry. . . . My poetry is . . . the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light” (119). He goes further to say: “Poetry, recording the stripping of the individual darkness, must inevitably cast light upon what has been hidden for too long and by so

doing, make clean the naked exposure. . . Benefiting by the sight of the light and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag further into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realize” (120).

So, the cathartic effect of Thomas’s violent images springs from his absorption of Freud’s theory which claims that if the patient is helped by his psychiatrist to disclose the repressed memories in his subconscious, he would recover his serenity. Moreover, these images have much to do with the Surrealists’ belief in the free association of images and words which would help the poet to produce a work of art that would have a healing effect on himself and his readers. In fact, most of Thomas’s violent imagery is articulated by free association, and, hence, generates [evokes / engenders / produces] such therapeutic effect.

In a dramatic term, Thomas’s violent imagery can be approached in light of Aristotle’s theory of tragedy. That is to say, in their effects, these images, like most images in Thomas’s poetry, are capable of creating an overwhelmingly shocking, reverberating effect on the reader’s consciousness. As a result, it is hard for the reader to ignore the impact of such images as “brambles in the wringing brains” (“Before I Knocked” 24), “shrapnel / Rammed in the marching heart” (“I Dreamed My Genesis” 13-14), or “Morning smack of the spade that wakes up the sleep, / Shakes a desolate boy who slits his throat / In the dark of the coffin...” (“After The Funeral: *In Memory of Ann Jones*” 6-8). Consequently, these images both arouse and purge the tainting fear of death and the intense anguish of existence.

Thomas’s poetic language is thus one of assertion; it is “a language of natural organic forms, vibrant twisting rhythm, and high violent rhetoric” (Piette 15). It is rich and resonant, powerfully dense and compelling. Thomas achieves this effect by the verbal play of alliterative and figurative devices, and the use of words of emphatic action and words of “sonorous and musical qualities, where rhythms and timbre is uppermost in the impact of the work” (Marshall and Laing 204). Besides, like Gerald Manley Hopkins and James Joyce, Thomas was a linguistic deviant, employing words in ways which violated grammatical laws. He forged a unique style full of mannerisms, and

his glittering poetry improvised upon his standard themes of longing for death as a kind of release from a difficult life, and the tragic nature of human existence. Through his powerful metaphors and driving rhythms, and through his focus not on meaning but on words themselves, these themes acquired a new rhetorical force; as he wrote in a letter to Charles Fisher (early 1935), “I think [poetry] should work from words, from the substance of words and the rhythm of substantial words set together, not towards words” (*Collected Letters* 208). While individually his lines often resist paraphrase, his dense clusters of imagery seem to communicate emotion directly through highly patterned imagistic and musical effects. Thomas describes this more accurately his letter to Henry Treece in 1938:

A poem by myself *needs* a host of images, because its centre is a host of images. . . . I let . . . an image be ‘made’ emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess—let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict. Each image holds within it the seed of its own destruction, and my dialectical method . . . is a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time. (*Collected Letters* 114; emphasis in original)

However, Thomas’s most desire is to make out of “the inevitable conflict of images—inevitable, because of the creative, recreative, destructive and contradictory nature of the motivating centre, the womb of war, . . . to make that contradictory peace which is a poem” (*Collected Letters* 114).

In fact, the violent struggle of these images represents the struggle of the poet’s creative imagination attempting to name the unnamable—that is, the agonizing mysteries of existence. In other words, these violent conflicting images are useful for Thomas’s poetry because they contain his vision of life, encapsulated in the cycle of birth, copulation, and death. In more accurate terms, Thomas’s view of man could be similar to T. E. Hulme’s view in “Romanticism and Classicism,” a lecture given in 1911, in his declaration that

“man is an extraordinary fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant (Hulme 61). Arguably, in many of his poems, Thomas reflects his agony upon man’s restrictive and bounded existence. Indeed, Thomas hangs the “fixed” and “limited” nature of human’s existence on the immense power of death that all humans must encounter. For him, death represents the hindrance that prohibits man from flying, according to Hulme, off “into the circumambient gas” (Hulme 62), and, hence, from recognizing his limitless potential beyond the physical world. In fact, Thomas strives, throughout his poetry, to break this inevitable cycle of human life through the vibrancy, intensity, and violence of verbal expression.

Thomas’s “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night” not only explores the poet’s central concern with death and its impact on his life but also offers ways of coping with this inescapable human reality. Death for Thomas, as earlier explained, was in essence paradoxical, entwined with and inextricable from life. From his Welsh Catholic background, he was steeped in religious imagery of resurrection, and death was often in his poetry associated with rebirth, just as conception and birth were linked with dying. The occasion which lends Thomas’ meditation upon death’s immediacy was his father’s first illness in 1945. Ten years before his father had been diagnosed with throat cancer, which transformed him from an awe-inspiring headmaster to an old man timidly awaiting death.

The contrast between the attitude of this poem and the attitude one might expect of a poem by a poet who views death as a kind of escape is striking. Thomas, in fact, takes an almost mocking tone, in the poem, toward that kind of thinking about death. His response possesses an elegant simplicity—instead of succumbing to an easy death, one should struggle against its inevitability with heroic pride and affirm life itself: “Do not go gentle into that good night, / Old age should burn and rave at close of day; / Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (1-3). One might ask, if the night, the “close of day,” here representing the darkness of eternal sleep, is “good,” why should one “not go gentle into it?” Perhaps the answer is that it is not so “good,” after all, that it offers neither escape nor paradise, but is the tragic end of a life, the end of all opportunities for an individual to satisfy longings, to achieve goals, to resolve emotional conflicts with loved ones. When

considered in this light, death is certainly something to “burn and rave” against.

Thomas anticipates some of the arguments against his position, and incorporates them into his poem, addressing them and then essentially dismissing them, holding firm to his stance. One such argument might be that, after a long life, those of “old age” should know death is near and calmly accept its inevitability. Thomas addresses this issue in the following lines: “Though wise men at their end know dark is right, / Because their words had forked no lightning they / Do not go gentle into that good night” (3-6). Here, Thomas acknowledges that, while it may be considered “wise” to know that at the “end . . . dark is right,” and accept what is coming, that does not change the fact that the “wise” have earthly considerations, relationships, unfinished business—“their words” had yet to “fork . . . lightning”—that will forever remain unattended to after they make their tragic exit from life. He suggests that, no matter what your philosophical stance, no matter how calmly you anticipate your ultimate end, the proper way to go is to resist tumbling into eternal darkness, to “rage against the dying of the light.” The poem is, thus, a violent rebellion against death which Thomas voices through the violence of his linguistic devices, represented in the use of a great amount of repetition, to achieve a kind of lyrical quality, and to reinforce the emotional impact of his lines

To embody the powerful emotions, he felt at his father’s illness, Thomas chose one of the most complex and artificial poetic forms, the villanelle, which in its refrains creates an aura of intensity. Thus, his own rage is deftly controlled and given shape by the form itself. He proceeds to examine ways in which imminent death leads one to succumb to self-pity and weakness: a powerful sense of incompleteness to the expression of life (“their words had forked no lightning”) and the unsatisfied desire for glory, as the dying men lament their meager deeds: “Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright / Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay.” As an antidote to this spiritual lethargy, Thomas offers a triumphant sense of tragic affirmation. In death, there is a glory which transcends life: “Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight / Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay, / Rage, rage against the dying of the light.” The final stanza finds

Thomas denying any distinction between his father's curse and his blessing—"Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray"—as he desires most of all an inheritance of tragic grandeur that is capable of transcending death itself.

It is worth noting that, within the villanelle, Thomas uses strong masculine rhyme scheme and violent diction not only to convey the impact of death on one's life but to show that one cannot escape this inevitable human reality: "Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight / Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay, / Rage, rage against the dying of the light" (13-15). Similarly, Thomas's use of violent diction, such as "burn," "rave," and "rage," which connote struggle, resistance, and violence, not only demonstrates the poignant troubling and melancholic impact of death, but shows the position of resistance one takes—the fighting stance—toward "the dying of the light." Thus, violence, as Thomas expresses through the images and words of this poem, is a very important human component. It represents man's instinctual challenges to keep life against the finite nature of human existence. It is this survival instinctual impulse that endows our species with the ability to survive severe environs, and allows human beings to survive dangerous situations today. It is biological, then, for the poet to be scared by his father's resignation and betrayal of his instinctual drive to fight for life.

"And Death Shall Have No Dominion" is another poem which expresses Thomas's vision of the universal realities of life and death in a raw, violent style, and liberated rhetoric. The idea of this poem is that although people die, they will eventually be redeemed at the end of time. The poem which supports the prophesies of the Bible, the Book of Revelations, implies that people should not let the fear of death control their lives. They have nothing to fear because, at the end, God will redeem those who were good. In line with this, William Christie notes that the poem with its "highly declamatory style . . . [derives] from its origins in the New Testament—'Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him' (Romans 6:9)" (65). Thus, the poem, in Christie's view, "masks an uneasiness about death behind the poem's biblical assurance" (65). Commenting on this, Paul Ferris maintains that "the poem is an attempt by Thomas to be optimistic, to defy the forces of death and

decadence, in order to keep his sanity” (83). Consequently, Thomas uses a variety of poetic devices to convince his reader to defy death and to resist its destructive presence.

In this three-stanza piece, the title phrase, as in “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night,” is repeated six times, at regular intervals; an effect which gives the poem both violent and musical qualities. The first stanza, as Gladir da Silva Cabral notes, “seems to declare that after death the individual plunges and dissolves into nature, being integrated into the natural process of life in the cosmos” (85). The stanza reads:

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion. (1-9)

Thomas explains that though the the deceased men’s bones are bare, they they will be dressed in immortal grandeur and will have stars at their elbows and feet. Thomas goes on to say that though men will go crazy they will gain reason. Those who have sunk in the sea of human grief shall emerge once more and feel happiness. Moreover, he maintains that though lovers will be lost, love will win, and a sort of an infinite spirit is able to overcoming even the inevitability of death. In other words, Thomas articulates hope in the triumph of life and love against the devastating power of death.

In the second stanza, Thomas entangles his readers in the snare of a violent image of pain and torture when he takes them to a graveyard, located in the sea floor, where one can find the souls of the sailors or the others who lost their lives in the sea:

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily;

Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion. (10-18)

In the above lines, Thomas uses a horrific image of those who perished under torture and violence, perhaps under the rebelling and destructive forces of Inquisition, possibly the death of the martyrs, “[t]wisting on racks” or “[s]trapped to a wheel.” In fact, the “rack” implies an allusion to the “rack,” a Medieval torture device, which is “a table, bench, or ladder on which a person is tied and is pulled by all limbs until they are dismembered” (Spikes 96). “Strapped to a wheel” is another violent allusion to the “breaking wheel,” a Medieval “instrument of torture that involved shattering the living victim’s bones and whose spokes were filled with burning coals” (Krug 142). Yet, Thomas argues that even with these machines of torture, the ligaments will not break, and the individual’s suffering will not be permanent or absolute, but temporary. The body resists the violence of death dominion, in a way which recalls the position of resistance he takes, in “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night,” toward “the dying of the light.” This is the idea that Thomas tries to impose upon his reader by terminating the stanza with the title phrase “And death shall have no dominion.”

For some critics thomas’s violent poetry could be attributed to its oddity. In *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Under the Spelling Wall* John Goodby writes:

Among anglophone critics, ‘violence’ is a mark of excess and oddity, and it is a sign of the difference between anglophone poetic practice and that of most other Western literatures that, for Roman Jakobson, all literature, and poetry in particular, is necessarily ‘a kind of organized violence committed on ordinary speech.’ (22)

Such oddity is evident in the titles of his two poems, “Do not Go Gentle into That Good Night” and “And Death Shall Have no Dominion,” where he

rebels against the grammatical norms. In “Do not Go Gentle into That Good Night,” he jumbles the syntax through the linguistic deviation of using a noun “gentle” instead of an adverb “gently,” which is more correct. Similarly, he deviates from the grammatical norm in “And death shall have no dominion,” where he places the conjunction, “and,” at the beginning of the poem though it is irregular to begin a poem text this way. In fact, these poems’ somewhat chaotic grammar seems to be intended to get the maximum effect from their dense and complex structure.

Much like “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” and “And Death Shall Have No Dominion” is “Now,” a poem in which Thomas uses intense violent language, represented in his effective use of repetition, gloomy diction, and consonance, to reveal that man must resist death, as death simply controls man and drives man into darkness. The poem is mainly composed of five stanzas, with the phrase “Now, say nay” recurring at the beginning of each stanza. In the opening stanza, Thomas writes:

Now
Say nay,
Man dry man,
Dry lover mine
The deadrock base and blow the flowered anchor,
Should he, for centre sake, hop in the dust,
Forsake, the fool, the hardness of anger. (1-7)

In this stanza, Thomas talks about his beloved. It seems that she has caused him pain, and he is thinking whether he puts an end to his life or not. However, Thomas ends the stanza by saying: “Forsake, the fool, the hardness of anger.” Here, Thomas is pointing out that it would be foolish to yield to pain and die. Thus, man should turn his pain to anger, which simply means that man should aggressively resist his pain and, ultimately, death.

In the next four stanzas, Thomas calls for similar acts of resistance, which he evokes linguistically, through his repeated phrase “Now / Say nay.” The repetition of this phrase, at the beginning of each stanza, not only demonstrates the despairing immense power of death, but also shows that man can only resist death if man constantly fights it off. Thomas also uses

dark diction to convey the everlasting sadness and violence that will define man's destiny if man yields to death. His diction choices, such as "dust" (6), "handsaw" (14), and "ruin" (20), which connote death, demonstrate the certainty of man's gloomy and unescapable fate; however, Thomas believes that if man rejects to die, man has the power to escape his death. Throughout the poem, Thomas provides a dark, despairing, and threatening tone with his frequent use of consonant and cacophonous sounds, as exemplified in the above quoted lines, not only to bring man's difficulty in facing death to light, but also to explain the doomed annihilation of man if man fails to resist death's temptation.

"The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drive the Flower" is another example, which illustrates Thomas's use of violent language to paint his complex, powerful, and explosive images about the existential realities. Thematically, the poem is a mediation on the paradox of life and death, noting that creation and destruction are parts of the same process for man and for nature. In fact, this idea is part of Thomas's obsessive belief in the existence of a wicked, unruly force in the universe. This force is omnipotent; it exists in all things, yet cannot be controlled. It results in a process that makes changes in the individual and the external world of nature; changes which are responsible for the initiation and cessation of life, or rather the cycle of life and death. Though the entity of this force is not clear, it can be the sexual urge because, being intense and uncontrolled, it is creative and constructive, but when suppressed it becomes disruptive and destructive. Yet, Thomas does not precisely tell us any of these things, or even use the words life, death, sex, or time, instead, he only asserts one true thing about this force; that it is an explosive and violent force. Thus, throughout this poem, Thomas throws his readers upon piles of images, which are mostly violent and explosive, to enact the intense activity of this force.

"The Force That through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower" seems almost like a living organism. The diction here is emotional, violent, hortatory, and inspired, illustrating the poet's view that poetry should always present language in its intense, elevated form. What is the poem about? It is a hymn to life, which in Thomas's case means it is also a hymn to death. The energy that makes flowers bloom is the same energy that makes Thomas

wake up every day. Fine, we would say, except the poet immediately adds a stipulation—that same energy also “blasts the roots of trees” (2) and is therefore the poet’s “destroyer” (3). Life, it transpires, is a kind of double-edged sword. Water flows through the rocks, but it dries at the mouthing streams; blood moves through the poet’s veins, but it also eventually congeals. The poet also addresses the impossibility of fully communicating with nature and his fellow human beings, as the poet constantly finds himself mute in front of the crooked rose, or his own veins, or the hanging man, or a weather’s wind. For some reason, he cannot tell them that he is affected by those same forces. There is no escape from this double aspect of existence; there is no hope of even expressing one’s sentiment about it, communicating with other creatures or fellow human beings. The vision of the world presented in this poem is somber, pessimistic, and desperate.

Thomas was influenced by Surrealist art; indeed some of his images, like the final two-liner—“And I am dumb to tell the lover’s tomb / How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm” (21-22)—seem to have their source in the subconscious. The tone of the poem is highly melodious and incantatory. “The Force...” is also rife with Thomas’s characteristic poetic tricks: first, it is based on the principle of repetition, with the phrase “And I am dumb” recurring in each stanza and the overall sentence pattern being repeated throughout to reveal the speaker’s failure in justifying the mystifying explosive nature of this force. We also find many alliterations, as in “How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks” in line 10 and “lips” and “leech” and “weather’s wind” in line 16. Furthermore, the careful choice of strong and forceful words emphasizes the explosive nature of the constructive and destructive forces that surround man, such as, the word “fuse,” for example, which conveys the idea that the “force” is quite powerful and is to ignite an explosion, such as with dynamite. Besides, the use of “green” with “fuse” is to prove the fuse’s energy, and, hence, stress its explosive power, which drives the flower to exist. At all times, the poem is a living expression.

In fact, Thomas uses violent diction to contrast man’s weakness. In other words, Thomas uses strong violent and energetic verbs with forceful active connotations, such as “drives” (1, 3, 6, 7), “blasts” (2), “whirls” (11),

and “hauls” (13), to reveal the strength of “[t]he force” of life. These diction choices emphasize the effect of nature on man’s acts. Thomas juxtaposes the strong diction which depicts the power of nature, as in “green,” with the weak diction that portrays the powerlessness and weakness of man, as in “dumb,” to illustrate the inability of man to withstand the power of nature; the force that runs time also sends man to his demise: for example, the force that makes flowers bloom is the same force that destroys the roots of trees. Thus, Thomas’s diction choice merges man with nature to prove that man is a captive of the innate force of nature. Thomas also employs violent words, such as “destroyer” (3) and “red blood” (7), which suggest ruin and mortality, to show that man is annihilated by nature’s power. Thomas’s diction choices echoes the duality of nature’s force; the force which gives life is the force which, drives man to evil, and, ultimately, sends man to his demise.

Dylan Thomas’s sensibility was essentially apocalyptic, viewing the world as the perversion of innocence and anticipating the cessation of being. After hearing of the bombing of Hiroshima, he wrote that “The Earth has killed itself. It is black, petrified, wizened, poisoned, burst; insanity has blown it rotten; and no creatures at all, joyful, despairing, cruel, kind, dumb, afire, loving, dull, shortly and brutishly hunt their days down like enemies on that corrupted face” (*Dylan Thomas Selected Poems* 198).

In “This Bread I Break,” Thomas once again uses violent language to reveal his violent thematic concern. In contrast to “The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower,” where man is presented as helpless against the violent powers of nature, this poem deals with man’s violent destructive nature against the natural world. In other words, the poem concentrates on the tension existing between the life of nature and the life of man: nature and man are fused in a cycle of life and death or construction and destruction. contrasting past and present, Thomas regrets the destruction of nature due to man’s interference. In the past, man and nature used to coexist in a joyous cycle of natural life, but man has disrupted the natural bond, “broke the grape’s joy” (5). Besides, the oat and grave used to live “merry in the wind,” but man’s violence “broke the sun, pulled the wind down” (10). Nature suffers because of man, but nevertheless as nature spares man, then man must also offer a sacrifice for the recovery of nature: “This flesh you

break, this blood you let / / Were oat and grape / / My wine you drink, my bread you snap” (11-15).

In reality, the poem has multiple levels of interpretation. On one level, the poem is about nature. It is the voice of nature reminding humans that they, because of their violent destructive nature, are consuming and ruining her. On another level, it is the voice of the poet, the imaginative artist, or the philosopher, communicating his concerns about human beings consumption, enjoyment, and destruction of the products of their toil and struggle. On both levels, Thomas’s overall concern is to point out the violence that is hidden even behind the simplest of man’s gestures, breaking the bread. To communicate this violence, Thomas uses violent language or, to be more accurate, he employs the poem’s lexical, semantic, and phonological devices.

Notably, Thomas uses verbs which connote violence and destruction, such as “break” (1, 11), “broke” (5, 10), and “snap” (15). In addition, the use of verb phrases, such as in “plunged in its fruit” (3), “laid the crops low” (5), “knocked in the flesh” (7), and “pulled the wind down” (10) more strongly connotes violence and destruction. as in “plunged in its fruit” (3), “laid the crops low” (5), “knocked in the flesh” (7), and “pulled the wind down” (10). Besides, Thomas’s use of the third person adds more intensity to his violent verbs: the poem mostly uses uses the third person, as the first person speaker explains what is done to to the other third person nouns, intensely collocating with the verbs suggesting violence.

Thomas also aptly uses the nouns to highlight the theme of creation and destruction, life and death. The nouns, in the poem, can be categorized into three groups: the first group is the “bread” group which contains, “oat” (1, 9, 13), “bread” (1, 8, 15), and “crops” (5); the second group is the “wine” group, which contains, “tree” (2), “fruit” (3), “grape” (5, 13), “wine” (2, 4, 6, 15), and “vine” (7); and the human group, which contains “man” (4, 10), “flesh” (7, 11), “vein” (12), and “blood” (6, 11). Indeed, all of these three noun groups are attributed to verb forms of violence, which sound more violent in their association with delightful and optimistic adjectives, like “summer” (6), “merry” (9), and “sensual” (14). These adjectives stand in sharpe contrast to the violence of the verb forms and the violence related to

the medium of the word “man,” which explains Thomas’s view that the act of creation involves destruction as well.

It is also worth noting that Thomas’s use of sound patterns reinforces the grammatical/thematic structures in the poem as well. For example, he uses stop and affricate sounds, such as /p/, /b/, /d/, /t/, /k/, /g/, and /dʒ/, in expressing the actions which are swift, quick, final, and unalterable violence in verbs such as “snap” (15), “break” (1, 11), and “plunged” (3). In a similar vein, Thomas also packs the poem with fricatives, such as in /f/, /v/, /ʃ/, /θ/, /s/, /z/, to suggest anger and fear. In fact, much of the linguistic urgency and violence in the poem seems to be instigated by the poet’s existential agony. In other words, as the narrator is unpleasant with his own thoughts which attack him, concerning the origin of the food he is eating, he uses powerful verbs, which suggest violent and destructive connotations, because he realizes that he, much like the natural world, is destroyed, or is going to be betrayed, and die a gruesome death.

Thus, violence, in Thomas’s poetry, is a style or, more particularly, a linguistic weapon that Thomas uses to release his agony upon man’s tragedies, which is mainly deiven by the cycle of life and death. Through the vibrancy, intensity, and violence of his poetic language, Thomas urges his reader to violently rebel against this cycle, and, thus, escape his existential agony.

4.1 Ted Hughes’s Poetry of Violence

Finally, the poetry of Edward James Hughes, popularly known as Ted Hughes (1930–1998), with its use of archetypes and myths, its groping attempts to find a style suitable to its content, and its emphasis on instinctual forces and on the non-rational elements in the human psyche, provides a wider concept of violence. Hughes is widely perceived, accroding to John Ezard’s headline in *The Guardian*, as “[t]he Poetic Voice of Blood and Guts” (qtd. in Barnie 114). Whereas Ben Howard suggests that Hughes “has often seemed the celebrant, if not the proponent of violence and destruction” (253), John Press claims that he “is a bruiser who pummels his readers with the harshest, most solid words in order to batter them into submission” (182). Similarly, A. E. Dyson believes that Hughes “is fascinated by violence of all

kinds, in love and in hatred, in the jungle and in the arena, in battle, murder and sudden death. Violence, for him, is not the occasion for reflection, but for being” (“Ted Hughes” 222; emphasis in original).

Thus, from the beginning, much of the controversy over Hughes has centered on the element of violence in his poetry. His defenders claim that he is simply facing the amount of violence in the world, and that until people recognize their instincts, many of which are violent, and learn how to deal with them, horrors such as World War II and the holocaust can and will be repeated. His detractors claim that Hughes revels in blood and guts for their own sake, that he has almost a schoolboyish fascination with the very idea of violence. Hughes is obviously committed to the task of analyzing modern man by probing the unconscious and revealing the substratum of primitive fears and desires hidden there.

In fact, without indulging in any kind of controversy, we must admit the fact that violence is not only essentially a pervasive but a dominant recurring theme in Hughes’s poetry, and he does depict it in its most cruel and blatant shape. In response to the critical appraisal of his “poetry of violence,” Hughes, in his prose book *Winter Pollen* (1994), distinguishes between two types of violence. Whereas the first type, he writes, is “negative” and echoes it with the violence of the over-civilized man, the second type is “positive” and equates it with the violence of the natural world. Whereas the first is immoral, demonic, dark, and destructive, he argues, the second is natural, instinctive, and irrational. Whereas the first is a violation of the sacred, the second is “a life-bringing assertion of sacred law which demolishes, in some abrupt way, a force that oppressed and *violated* it” (254; emphasis in original). Whereas the first involves the idea of violation or blasphemy, best represented in Hitler, the second, he explains, is biological and leads to progress.

Therefore, one can recognize two types of violence in Hughes’s poems, namely: poems that depict violence positively, which are best represented in the poems that deal with the rampant violence in the world of nature, and poems that depict violence negatively, which find vivid expressions in the war poems and some of the animal poems which reflect

the obsessive violence and brutality of the modern–civilized man.

4.2 Violence in The World of Nature

In a discussion of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes argued that “Every poem is an attempt to sign up the whole heavenly vision, from one point of vantage or other, in a static constellation of verbal prisms. It is this fixed intent, and not a rhetorical inflation of ordinary ideas, that gives his language its exaltation and reach” (Faas 182). Hughes’s art also attempts to encompass the universe in visionary states, seeking to merge with the spiritual forces of nature. His poems are atavistic yearnings for union with the spirit-world, the irrational forces of the unconscious that pulse with primordial energy. Distrusting the intellect—early on he railed against the “egg-heads,” the scarecrows of civilization—Hughes employed archetypal imagery in shattering the boundaries of the ego. Animal totems, ogres, witches, knight-errants—his imagination would dramatize in mythic terms a fundamental healing violence. By destroying the self through regenerative violence, he would restore the primordial, animal powers that humankind had lost. He thus adopts a Blakean position, finding reason to be enslaving and desire to be liberating in a series of Promethean gestures.

Therefore, Hughes’s vision of violence is universal; he is more concerned with the violence of nature than with the violence caused by the external military conflicts, power struggles, or political clashes. That is to say, the violence, which Hughes represents in his poetry, is, as Hughes reflects in an interview with Ekbert Faas in 1970, “a greater kind of violence, the violence of the great works” (198), which is deep-rooted in nature and, specifically, the innocent violence of animals. So, nature, in Hughes’s poetry, is not only a lovely vital force, but a fierce and rapacious energy, which contains the nonsensical and innate forces that govern life. That is to say, Hughes’s obsession with nature is not restricted to the simple depiction of him as an “nature poet,” who only expresses the brutal savagery that lies in the laws of nature, but goes deeper, as P. R. King argues, “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” (110).

Indeed, Hughes's poetry, which depicts his interest in the violent activities rampant in nature, was set against the ecological disasters of the twentieth century. In other words, it was the post-war age that was marked by the loss of faith, despair, anguish of nothingness and aimlessness, along with the socio-economic, and the socio-cultural changes in Britain which resulted in, what Binda Sah calls, man's "absolute intellectual deadness, . . . loss of human values . . . [and] the negligence of human emotions," which inspired Hughes "to seek his poetic muse in the world of violence and animality" (1). In light of this, Hughes assumes for himself the poetic vocation of introducing his readers to the violent life of nature that maintains itself away from man. It is, as Obilișteanu Georgeta notes, "as if the physical vitality of nature, unchecked by the doubts and burdens of self-consciousness, is admired for its instinctive poise and unquestioning right to life and action" (62). Conversely, human beings, due to the power of their consciousness, can withdraw from confrontations and do not just react instinctively. Hughes seems to be implying that the gap between modern man's consciousness and his instinctive response to his condition has not only broadened but has resulted in the creation of a serious weakness.

Actually, the violence of nature in Hughes's poetry is part of a single process of a twentieth-century western shamanistic-poet seeking to restore the balance and harmony between mankind and Nature. Hughes is entirely aware of modern man's isolation from nature, which he ascribes to modern man's self and rational consciousnesses, loss of faith, and the enslavement of science. In a review of *The Environmental Revolution*, Hughes maintains that: "[w]hen something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator, and is called an evolutionary dead-end" (*Winter Pollen* 129). Consequently, Hughes attempts to revitalize man by urging him to return to nature in all its primeval energy and release the repressed instincts.

To create awareness in man of the magnitude of violence in nature, Hughes exposes the "raw energy" underlying violence, which he equates with what he calls "vehement activity" or with the release of global energy in the raw stratum of animal life or the elemental world of nature. In his interview with Faas, Hughes accounts for the violence which flows through nature,

saying: “Any form of violence—any form of vehement activity—invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power-circuit of the universe” (Fass 68). So, Hughes, according to J. M. Newton, views “the power and violence of the universe” as “the essential and universal condition of life” (9), or, as Dyson puts it, “a guarantee of the energy of life” (“Ted Hughes” 220). He equates this energy with the life force by which humanity maintains its survival, for without it nothing remains but a kind of death.

Thus, most of Hughes’s nature poetry is a manifestation of his admiration for the violent instinctual energies of the natural world of animals and elements, “as an alternative,” in Neil Corcoran’s words “to what he appears to read as a debased contemporary culture” (117). The most obvious poetic device, which Hughes employs in his nature poetry, to stress the effect of violence that results in the affirmation of the vital cosmic energy that lays in the law of nature, is the device of contrast. That is to say, Hughes contrasts the violent creative energies of the natural world, which are associated with the mythic pattern of the primitive Goddess, with the creative energies of man, which are restrained in his unconscious mind. The manifestation of these violent energies in nature are best exemplified in Hughes’s first two volumes, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1956) and *Lupercal* (1960).

In “The Hawk in the Rain,” the title poem of Hughes’s first collection of poetry *The Hawk in the Rain*, Hughes accounts for his vision of the violent power and primal energies of the natural world as opposed to man’s world. The opening lines of the poem present an image of the speaker drowning in the rain and an image of the earth personified in the form of a monster that gulps its human victims. The earth is portrayed as an open grave that ‘dogs’ the human lives, tracing them step by step, further implying that this is not an occasional walk across a farmland, but a lifelong condition:

I drown in the drumming ploughland, I drag up
Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth’s mouth,
From clay that clutches my each step to the ankle
With the habit of the dogged grave... (*Collected Poems* 1-4)⁶

These lines emphasize the speaker’s, and by implication, human, frailty and

anguish with the use of the verbal alliterative series, “drown,” “drumming,” “drag,” “dogged,” whereas the assonance, in “I” and “my,” prompts the idea that man’s status is consciously presumed.

The coming lines draw images that examine the hawk as a “master-Fulcrum of violence” (14-15). The hawk is presented up in the air, detached from, and careless about, the struggle the speaker is caught up in. As an embodiment of the violent energy, and vitality and power in nature, the hawk flies higher and higher. He is carefree and energetic, as if he is defying the hacking rain:

.....but the hawk
Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye.
His wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet,
Steady as a hallucination in the streaming air
While banging wind kills stubborn hedges, (4-8)

Again, the assonance in “height” and “eye” connotes a semantic association, which is designed as an opposition to the pitiless defeat of man in the earlier stanza. Man’s hopeless and doubtful struggle for life against forces of nature looks restricted, pathetic, and fated in contrast to the hawk’s notable serenity. Unquestionably, Man’s energetic and physical limitations contrast intensely with the hawk’s fixed poise on the wind and his controlling view involving “all creation.” In fact, the Hawk’s enduring power in the abundant rain and the violence of the elements of nature represent man being outwitted by the natural system:

Thumbs my eyes, throws my breath, tackles my heart,
And rain hacks my head to the bone, the hawk hangs
The diamond point of will that polestars
The sea drowner’s endurance: ... (9-12)

Hughes juxtaposes the weakness of the speaker with the images of energy, power, and vitality, which are linked with the hawk, such as “diamond point,” “master-fulcrum” (14-15) and the round angelic eye, to convey what the speaker longs for. This means that the energy or violence in the instinctive world of animals along with the ferocity of the natural elements calls for an

instant comparison with man.

According to Hughes, who writes in “The Rock,” “Animals are not violent, they are so much more completely controlled than men. So much more adapted to their environment” (126). Hughes, thus, assumes that the force of animals, like the hawk in the poem, is in their instinct and strict function. The hawk is an element of the natural elements in the sense that man cannot be. The disparity between hawk and man is not because the hawk can evade ultimate devastation but because it can adapt itself to whatever threatens its survival. It is a living being that is driven by instinct whose will is in line with nature, not in a contest with it.

Thus, what Hughes signalizes in this poem is the fundamental violence and vitality, the life energy or “the diamond point of will” that gives the hawk a better force of permanence than human beings. The poem, according to M. L. Rosenthal, “reflects better than any other (poem) in the book, the obsession of the poet with one aspect of nature—the power and the gift of animals to make the kill, and behind that the intransigent force of being itself that is so indifferent to suffering and weakness” (124).

“The Jaguar” is another poem, in the first volume, which mediates between the original violent energy in the animals’ world and the suppressed violent human nature. In this poem, Hughes, as a watchman, is enthralled with the violent tread of the jaguar, though confined in a zoo cage. The poem is an imitation of William “Blake’s ‘The Tyger’ as the big cat is elevated—with the aid of the speaker’s awed imagination—to universal proportions” (Bentley 16). Hughes enacts the intense primal energy of the jaguar, showing his hypnotic impact on the onlookers in the zoo:

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 (13-16)

Whereas the other animals look sluggish and tired, the jaguar treads grandly in the cage with an astonishing energy, quickness, and fierceness. The gathering crowd around the jaguar’s cage get mesmerized while gazing at his

appalling beauty as kids scribble on their dreams. The jaguar, usually in haste and infuriated with infinite energy, neither experiences “boredom” (13) nor fears blindness while staring at a glowing fire. His violent nature is visible in these lines:

On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom—
The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,
By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear—
He spins from the bars, but there’s no cage to him (17-20)

These lines suggest the jaguar’s matchless boldness and undisputed violence, which echo in the striking alliterative phrase, “the bang of blood in the brain.” The jaguar cannot be confined inside any barriers or cages. He, like Alfred Lord Tennyson’s Ulysses who aims “[t]o sail beyond the sunset, and the baths / Of all the western stars, until I die” (“Ulysses” 60-61), will go beyond the horizons, infusing glamorous light of his eyes on remote edges of the cosmos. As a visionary, the jaguar cannot be imprisoned in a small crate as his liberty exceeds the limit of this sluggish world into a infinite space of the celestial and spiritual world: “More than to the visionary his cell: / His stride is wildernesses of freedom” (21-22). In addition, the forceful cadence and punctuation of “The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel. / Over the cage floor the horizons come” (21-24) characterize him as an incredible unruly life force with unusual violent energy, vigour and ferocity, and romantic faculties.

The jaguar represents an ideal symbol of the unrestricted liberty and infinite energy, which is latent in man but cannot be expressed due to the spirit of modernity and civilization that has restrained his prime instinctive behavior deep-down. The fierce and rapacious nature of the jaguar is equalized with his visionary power as a mystic that empowers him with vital energy and will. Generally, the jaguar is an incarnation of the repressed energy and devilish violence subdued in man. In his interview with Faas, Hughes demonstrates some conceivable symbols of the jaguar. He says:

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 supercharged piece of cosmic machinery, he is a symbol of man's baser nature shoved down into the id and growing cannibal murderous with deprivation . . . Or he is simply a demon . . . a lump of ectoplasm. A lump of astral energy. The symbol opens all these things . . . it is the reader's own nature that selects. (199)

Overall, the violence of the jaguar is the literal display of the repressed animal spirit existing in in the centre of human unconscious and gets liberated in dream.

Hughes's "The Thought-Fox" is another example of both his fascination with the primeval natural violence and his desire to identify with animals. The poem describes the infiltration of an animal presence into the consciousness of a poet. The first stanza dramatizes the failure of Hughes's self to construct a poem—his will is impotent, and he is keenly aware of the passage of time due to his inability to put words on paper: "I imagine this midnight's moment's forest: / Something else is alive / Beside the clock's loneliness / And this blank page where my fingers move" (1-4). His focus on the clock suggests that he is constrained by ordinary conceptions of time, and he is throughout the poem drawn into the "eternal present," the eruption of mythical time into ordinary waking consciousness. His mind is not drawn upward toward heaven—there are no stars in the midnight sky—but gravitates toward the snow-covered ground and descends "deeper within darkness."

Suddenly he merges with a fox scavenging outside. His eyes start flickering with the erratic motion of the fox, as Hughes deliberately confuses the ownership of that pair of eyes: "Two eyes serve a movement, that now / And again now, and now, and now / Sets neat prints in the snow" (11-13) His language acquires an elemental simplicity, suggesting an animal's sense of the pure moment, unencumbered by thoughts of the future or the past. As the fox crosses the clearing, Hughes's merging with the fox assumes near-mystical proportions. His self, his "eye," is totally submerged with the natural world: "an eye, / A widening deepening greenness, / Brilliant, concentratedly" (17-19). Finally, Hughes's vision becomes incarnate. He

embodies the raw animal vitality that is both sensual and repulsive, and the fox enters his mind as if entering his den: “Till, with a sudden sharp hot sink of fox, / It enters the dark hole of the head” (21-22). As he is enraptured by the fox, Hughes forgets his desire to write; instead he is overwhelmed by his vision, only to find that his poem had been completed as if in a trance: “The window is starless still; the clock ticks, / The page is printed” (23-24). Like a shaman, Hughes returns from a soul-flight full of knowledge of realms beyond waking consciousness.

In the words of Keith Sagar, the poem is “[a] simple trick like pulling a kicking rabbit from a hat, but only a true poet can do it” (19). In this instance, it seems that Sagar wants to say that a careful reading of the poem evokes a sense of energy, excessive vitality, and otherness of life outside. Certainly, there is a powerful element in the images, the words, and the rhythm of the poem which make it suddenly pounce to life and emerge as a living thing. In effect, the poem virtually turns into a semiotic expression of energy that asserts life through the poetic artifact of language.

Hughes’s view of the violent energy that runs through the constitutional world of Nature, as a metaphor for the violent energy that is immersed in human nature, is further intensified in his second collection of poetry, *Lupercal*. In this respect, Margaret Dickie Uroff notes that: “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 . . . *Lupercal* deals with magic, myths and folklore in order to locate the dark spirit of Hughes’s imagination” (126). So, poems of this collection are crowded with images of violent natural energies which Hughes generates, mainly, through the description of these animals and the concentricity on their movements and activities and surroundings.

In “Thrushes,” for instance, Hughes declares his fascination with the delicate and violent physical capacities of the thrushes that he observes on his lawn. Poignantly, he depicts the fierce and terrifying physical attributes of these sleek voracious birds, their “dark deadly eye[s]” and their “delicate legs” (3). They are the embodiment of “bounce and stab” (8) without “indolent procrastinations” (7). Their avid, fierce nature is demonstrated in

their awful attack on the prey:

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
Overtake the instant and drag out some writhing thing.
No indolent procrastinations and no yawning states,
No sighs or head-scratchings. Nothing but bounce and stab
And a ravening second. (1-9)

These lines depict the bird as an effective killing device. The thrush is quick and sharp in its attack, automatic in its purpose, and no less full of energy than “Mozart’s brain” (13). The instant The thrush detects a pest or insect, it attacks it and pierces in less than a second. It is scary, violent, and manic in its drive to eat and survive. It is slight but deadly and firm in work. The bird’s quick motion looks like a “bullet” or a “shark’s mouth” that “hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own / Side and devouring of itself” (14-15). It is a symbol of the underlying violence and energy of nature.

The final lines of the poem contrast the energetic violence and quick instinctual act in the world of birds with the world of human beings, which is full of “indolent procrastinations and yawning stares.” Hughes writes:

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 blent in the 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. (18-26)

This description of human world against the effectual world of energy which the thrushes incarnate foretells the Hughes's aspiration for a world that is perfectly vital as perceived in the world of thrushes.

However, Hughes's poetic vision of the natural violence is not limited to the animal life alone, but extends to the energetic violence of the inanimate natural or geological elements of the universe. "October Dawn," from *The Hawk in the Rain*, is a good example, where the elemental energy of Nature forms the subject matter. In "October Dawn" Hughes, presents the violent forces of nature in term of its natural elements. Hughes, in this poem, demonstrates that the outset of winter violently absorbs its self-contented man into the energetic actuality of the season:

Reunion while a fist of cold
Squeeses the fire at the core of the world
Squeeses the fire at the core of the heart,
And now it is about to start. (17-20)

The lawn and the "whistling green / Shrubbery" (8-9) are over-ridden by ice and man, awkwardly, attempts to block out of his life such tremendous violence of Nature. In his comment on the poem, Keith Sagar claims: "it expresses a vital awareness of the continuum outside human life of the mystery embodied in the created universe" (27). By exposing the energetic and fierce aspects of Nature, Hughes wants to emphasize to man that a life of energy or ferocity is the law of Nature as demonstrated in the life of animals and in the ferocity of the elements of Nature. Thus, violence, which is observed in the world of elemental energy eventually turn out to be a confirmation of life.

4.3 Violence in Human World

Despite his Schopenhaurian vision of the natural world characterized by "positive violence" (*Winter Pollen* 255), Hughes emerges as a champion of pacifism or an apostle against the negative thrust of violence modern man demonstrates. Thus, throughout his poetry, Hughes presents rare stances that lend themselves to a strong criticism of what Hughes finds offensive in modern man's expression of violence.

Indeed, Hughes's aversion to human violence is not absolute. He does

not object to man's violent acts in which he releases his energy in genuine and personal display of anger which essentially resembles the chastity of violence in the natural world. That is to say, Hughes presents violence of the natural world virtuously, and he views man as a little fiber in the giant lap of nature. As a part of this primal source of cosmic energy, man's intuitional expression of violence, as Hughes perceives, is quite normal. Therefore, violence, according to Hughes, is positive, but it is man's intellectuality, which is ruled by logic and reason, that spoiled it and turned it into something destructive. It is destructive in that it is built upon man's will to overpower others, aggressive desires to torment others, and power-hunger that discloses the bold nature of man, denying all the religious and social morals. Put differently, Hughes approves violence as an assurance of the normal, individual being in his wholeness, but he damns mechanized violence of the modern civilized society which reduces man to a small segment.

To assert the negativity of human violence, Hughes's draws his readers' attention to the contrast between man's violence and that of animals. Violence in the animal world is instinctual and is essentially directed towards advancement and preservation of the species. It is biological and emerges out of an inner need, whereas in the human condition, violence seldom arises from an inner need of necessity. Animals, Hughes proposes, only murder to safeguard themselves and their breed, while man kills for any sort of award. Additionally, as man has the knowledge of good and evil, his violence is aberrant; it goes against nature. An animal never over-kills as man does. Animal's violence is instinctive and natural; it means self-preservation, love, and life. Violence of over-civilized man, however, is a blood-lust, a desire to kill for immoral reasons. Thus, Hughes views human violence as a deviation from Nature as it does not spring from the instinctual needs of man.

In fact, Hughes's treatment of human violence is as early as the 1970s. Keith Sagar maintains that "[b]y the early 1970s Hughes was able to write essays arguing that eruptions of mass violence in our culture are caused by the complete alienation of mind from nature by our inert scientific empiricism and the total repression of instinct in Reformed Christianity" (131). Thus, Hughes was over conscious of the cultural privation, moral

depravity, and psychic disturbance of the twentieth century. In his essay "Poetry and Violence," Hughes asserts that "it was our customary social and humanitarian [or indeed humanist] values" that caused the worse types of violence (260). In other words, Hughes states that violence is an intrinsic element of all beings. Furthermore, Hughes criticizes human civilization and, more specifically, the human system of values and attitudes that has strangled man's native energy and perverted his force. "Like other elements of life," Lawrence Ries notes, "violence *in vacuo* is morally neutral and only takes on qualities of good and evil from its social and historical environment" (93; emphasis in original). Therefore, Hughes does not only present human violence as a dark, demonic, and destructive power but equates it with the violation of the sacred. It does not promise bright future but only annihilation.

Hughes's negative attitude toward human violence finds vivid expression in his war poems and some of his nature poems. In the first group, Hughes infuses war as a theme to uncover the decrying cruelty and violence of mankind, whereas in the second group, he depicts the victimization of the geological elements of nature and its animals through man's selfish impulses.

4.4 War Poetry

Certainly, Hughes's vision concerning human violence was affected by the destructiveness of the most conspicuous historical events of the twentieth century: the First World War and the Second. These events made Hughes profoundly mindful of humanity's loss of faith, loss of spiritual holdings, suppression of old human values of selflessness, alternate trust, honesty and love, and their substitution by selfishness, uncertainty, corruption, sexual-lust, and the replacement of emotionalism by automatism which increased the negativity of Hughes's vision toward man's violence.

However, in fact, Hughes war poems are not about the catastrophic and disastrous effects of World War II, as might be expected from a poet whose boyhood was spent in that period, but of World War I. According to Michael Parker, Hughes's "acute consciousness of war . . . had first been stimulated by his father's anecdotes of the First World War, by Wilfred Owen's poetry, and later, in 1962, by his fascination for the poems of Keith

Douglas, who fought in the Western Desert and died in Normandy during the Second World War (38). Keith Sagar adds, “[i]n a radio interview Hughes said that the First World War was more part of his imagination than the second because ‘It was right there from the beginning, so it was going on in us for eight years before the Second World War came along . . . The First World War was our sort of fairy-story world - certainly was mine’ “ (*Achievements of Ted Hughes* 10).

Indeed, Hughes manipulates his war experience to conduct his fierce campaign against human violence. He portrays the guilty effects of the war on its traumatic survivors as well as the wastage of life caused by it. Moreover, Hughes endows his soldiers, as Jeffrey Meyers contends, with “the feral primitivism of his hunting and hunted beasts” (30) or his predatory animals. His war poems assert that it is man’s scientific and technological approach to life that results in a sense of disconnectedness among people, and an increasing tendency toward aggressive violence. In his essay “Poetry and Violence,” Hughes presents inextricable linking of human’s negative violence with technology. He reveals that technological advancement produces violence of “desensitized sensibility” which “allows for instances of mechanised slaughter because technological distancing has separated the human from its corporeal being and its capacity to acknowledge pain and death. These stances of industrialized slaughter, in both abattoir and battlefield, are called violations, as in a violation of the sacred” (*Winter Pollen* 260). Thus, human violence during the war, as Hughes perceives, is a depersonalized act, chiefly accomplished by machines. and is invariably based on concepts and ideology. It not only dispossesses man of his essential uprightness but makes him demoniac and harmful, and this was what Hughes abhorrs in human expression of violence.

Hughes’s first war poem “The Causality,” from *The Hawk in the Rain*, as Iris Ralph puts it “confront[s] interhuman violence, especially two interhuman conflicts which had tremendous impact on Hughes and his generation, the two world wars” (165). The poem, as Jeffrey Meyers points out, selects an incident of many that were common in the daily news account of fighting, a single English airman smashes and burns on native soil. (31). In fact, the violent death of the pilot at the beginning of the poem, as A. E.

Dyson observes, illustrates Hughes's view of the war's vicious violence and the death it causes (*Three Contemporary Poets* 69). For him, war, caused by human's violent tendencies, "makes man live in the shadow of death where there is no room for essentials, and no room for trivialities" (69).

This sudden violent event disturbs and frightens the animals, where the hare tears away and the wren warns its kind. Whereas the farmers and the housewives respond to the airman's horrific death with apathy and indifference, some "wait with interest for the evening news" (5), where the details will be given along with the cricket scores, and some, the hearts of whom, are "more / Open or large than a fist clenched, and in there / Holding close complacency its most dear / Uncatchable diamond" (27-30) "jostle" (11) for closer view, "Greedy to share all that is undergone, / Grimace, gasp, gesture of death" (33-34).

Above all, the theme of war, in this poem, serves as a metaphor for Hughes's abhorrence for human's planned violence. The violence of war enters the poem in the shape of a burning aircraft that invades a sleepy town and disturbs the vividness of its natural world. Hughes satirizes mankind's apathy towards this spectacle of violence. In other words, Hughes juxtaposes the disturbance of the natural world with the human apathy and the intense destruction of human warfare.

"Bayonet Charge" is another war poem which widely uses war imagery to emphasize the bestiality of human violence. As earlier indicated, Hughes was deeply indebted to Wilfred Owen's war poems because of his consciousness of war and "Bayonet Charge," as Neil Roberts remarks, "is a good imitation of Owen" (155). The poem is a portrayal of a battlefield and a severe criticism of human pretenses. The dramatic opening of the poem depicts the chaos and disorder of a war in which a soldier is struggling to survive:

Suddenly he awoke and was running—raw
In raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,
Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge
That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing
Bullets smacking the belly out of the air—

He lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm; (1-6)

Thus, the soldier, here, overpowered by the abruptness of enemy strike, flees from the fire area to save his life “with his bayonet towards the green hedge. His reason is nearly disintegrated because of his hopeless struggle to save his life. The soldier in this poem is firstly overpowered by chauvinistic feelings:

The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye

Sweating like molten iron from the center of his chest— (7-8)

However, in a state of bewilderment and wonder all the abstract and transience of false values:

King, honour, human dignity, etcetera

Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm.

To get out of that blue crackling air

His terror’s touchy dynamite. (CP., p.43, 20- 23)

Much like “Bayonet Charge” is Hughes’s poem, “The Ancient Heroes and the Bomber Pilot,” in which he expounds the guilt of human violence and his interest in warfare. Hughes deplores the development in the technological devices and the deadly weapons which cause violent wounds and terrible death. In the poem, the modern airman is the persona of the poem who plays the role of the modern fighter whose mind keeps hanging on pretensions or rather recollections of a heroic glorifying past. The “Bomber Pilot,” notes Jeffrey Meyers, “admires the barbaric exploits—massive beheadings, flowing blood, sacks full of decapitated heads—of the ancient heroes, which take up two-thirds of the poem” (32). The “Bombers,” here, is a symbol of man’s rationalized violence. The pilot knows the devastating power of the bombs he can release from on high with a touch:

Even though I can boast

The enemy capital will jump to a fume

At a turn of my wrist

And the huge earth be shaken in its frame— (19-22)

Regarding this, Meyers aptly writes, “[t]hough the pilot is certainly in danger of being shot down and burned to death, he knows he’s remote from those he’s attacking” (32). Thus, Hughes, here, criticizes modern man’s technological approach toward life which gives rise to violence, earlier

discussed in Hughes's essay "Poetry and Violence," of "desensitized sensibility" which "allows for instances of mechanised slaughter because technological distancing has separated the human from its corporeal being and its capacity to acknowledge pain and death" (*Winter Pollen* 260).

"Out" is another war poem which depicts the psychological trauma of war's violence in the human world. In fact, the poem represents Hughes's awareness of the war's bestiality through his father's involvement in the First World War. The poem falls into three sections. The first section, titled "The Dream Time," displays an autobiographical characterization of Hughes' father sitting on a seat and grieving over his past experiences in field of battle. His exhausted spirit has yet not restored:

From the four-year mastication by gunfire and mud,
Body buffeted wordless, estranged by long soaking
In the colours of mutilation. (2-4)

Though physically he is fine, spiritually he is still obsessed by "[t]he mortised four-year strata of dead Englishmen / He belonged with" (12-13). Hughes, who is "small and four" (14) setting "on the carpet" (15), assumes himself as his father's "luckless double" (15) since he unavoidably shares his father's reminiscences "buried" as an "immovable anchor, / Among jawbones and blown-off boots, tree-stumps, shellcases and craters" (16-17).

In the untitled second section, the setting shifts from a familial one to a "cave" which represents a womb. This section renders Hughes's conception of the dead fighters being resurrected:

The dead man in his cave beginning to sweat;
The melting bronze visor of flesh
Of the mother in the baby-furnace –
Nobody believes, it
Could be nothing, all
Undergo smiling at
The lulling of blood in
Their ears, their ears, their ears, their eyes
Are only drops of water and even the dead man suddenly

Sits up and sneezes—Atishoo!
Then the nurse wraps him up, smiling,
And, though faintly, the mother is smiling,
And it's just another baby. (21-33)

In fact, Hughes in this section, according to Dennis Walder, “goes on to imagine birth as no more than the production of cannon-fodder, a nightmare vision of ‘reassembled’ infantry men tottering out of the womb” (33-34). It seems that Hughes’s boyhood recollection of the war’s violence is such an underlying pattern in his consciousness which drives him to portray the processes of birth and death through the war’s metaphor. The dead soldier, coming back through the blood tainted womb of the mother, is simply a resurrection of life or a rebirth.

To assert the demonist consequences of the violence of modern man’s war, Hughes starts his third section, titled “Remembrance Day,” with an image of death and demolition:

The poppy is a wound, the poppy is the mouth
Of the grave, maybe of the womb searching—
A canvas-beauty puppet on a wire
Today whoring everywhere... (38-41)

The poppy, a sort of flower customarily dressed on Remembrance Day, is figuratively described as “the mouth / Of the grave” or as “the womb searching” and “whoring everywhere.” This is an allusion to the appearance of the Goddess of the Underworld during the acts of death and destruction. At the poem’s end, Hughes suggests an escape from war, violence, and death; however, it is not an escape from reality, but instead, it is an escape from a morbid dreadful past which stands as an impediment in the soldiers’ survival. These morbid recollections of an ominous past succeeded in controlling the minds of these soldiers and prevented them from living a normal life. Hughes writes:

So goodbye to that bloody-minded flower.
You dead bury your dead.

Goodbye to the cenotaphs on my mother's breasts.

Goodbye to all the remaindered charms of my father's survival.

Let England close. Let the green sea-anemone close. (50-54)

Relating to this, Derwent May remarks:

‘Out’, in *Wodwo*, while full of bitterness at the mutilations of body and spirit that men suffered in the First World War, ends with a violent resolution by the speaker not to let memories of it go on ‘gripping’ him: he repudiates the whole of that history, the grief as well as the misplaced heroism. (159)

In this way, Hughes's life between the two world wars, with a mind fed up with the tales of the First World War that were recounted to him by his father, and as an eye-witness of the catastrophic impacts of the Second World War, such as nuclear weapons, competition for material and social gains, and the violation of human's sanctity, on the world, had unanimously shaped his view of the negativity of human violence in the time of wars.

4.5 Nature Abuse

“All the urgent information coming towards us from the inner world sounds to us like a blank, or at best the occasional grunt, or twinge,” argued Ted Hughes, in his essay “Myth and Education,” of the despotic nature of the “objective intelligence” (163). He added, “[b]ecause we have no equipment to receive it and decode it. The body, with its spirits, is the antennae of all our perceptions. The receiving aerial for all our wavelengths. But we are disconnected” (163). Hughes' poetry seeks to reconnect to those deep springs of the inner world and to translate its messages into prophetic utterance. Inner world and outer world collapse—animals become dream-beasts, while dreams become projected upon the landscape—in his archetypal patterns. Like an alchemist, Hughes seeks to break down the sun-lit world of rationality, setting the universe ablaze in the hopes that he could transmute it to spiritual gold. To achieve that transformation, he must “liquefy” the meanings of words. He must wrap himself in the shape-shifting form of Proteus, the Egyptian god who would change shape at will to avoid capture. In “An Otter,” Hughes finds an emblem for his Protean self. A fitting totem

for Hughes, the otter eludes rational categories, “neither fish nor beast” (2), and his perceptions are strange and mysterious: “Underwater eyes, an eel’s / Oil of water body” (1-2). He also symbolizes exile from paradise—he “Does not take root like the badger” (8) and seeks “Some world lost when first he dived” (12)—and a mystical immersion in Being, as he “Re-enters the water by melting” (10).

As his highly sensual imagery suggests, the otter also represents a physical union. In accord with the psychology of Sigmund Freud, Hughes presents his otter as desiring to return to the mother’s womb, to return blindly to the devouring earth: “Takes his changed body into the holes of lakes; / As if blind, cleaves the stream’s push till he licks / The pebbles of the source” (13-15). Spiritual intensity must for Hughes be incarnate in physical intensity. But the otter—and poet—cannot rest in that physical consummation, for they are hunted (suggested earlier by the “hounds and vermin-poles” [7]) and must flee “like a king in hiding” (17). The second section finds the otter surfaced in the stream, having eluded his pursuers: “The hunt’s lost him” (21). Here Hughes elaborates on the archetypal meaning of the otter, repeating his sense of the animal as an affront to reason: “The otter belongs / In double robbery and concealment” (28-29). (Within him merges water and land, passivity and aggressiveness, in what the psychologist Carl Jung called the marriage of the *anima* and *animus*, the masculine and feminine principles: “From water that nourishes and drowns, and from land / That gave him his length and the mouth of the hound” (30-31). After recapitulating his image of the otter as a phallic god—“Big trout muscle out of the dead cold; / Blood is the belly of logic” (34-35)—he indulges in a masculine fantasy of conquest, dreaming of raping a “bitch otter in a field full / Of nervous horses” (37-38). Yet quickly Hughes’ violent dream is shattered: the hunters arrive to pull the otter out of the stream and destroy its nature: “Yanked above hounds, reverts to nothing at all, / To this long pelt over the back of a chair” (39-40). Thus, his poem ends with a reference to the destructive and repressive power of civilization, converting wildness into just another element of interior decorating.

So, in the group of poems, which deal with nature abuse, Hughes severely criticizes man, who has not only detached himself from Nature, but

destroyed it as well. Hughes's aim is to show that modern man, in the present ecological crisis, violates nature's sanctity by brutally slaughtering its creatures and destroying its natural elements. For modern civilized man, elemental nature and its creatures are no more than ornamental segments or decorative pieces. Thus, in these poems, Hughes emphasizes that the predicament of animals and elements of nature is not because they are often victims of their surroundings but because they are always victims of man, who destroys them to satisfy his ego. In others words, Hughes depicts animals as neither predators nor heroes but as small animals of prey for the civilized modern man.

In "Macaw and Little Miss," a poem from his first book, *The Hawk in the Rain*, "Hughes implicitly comments on one of the worst kinds of speciesism, humans' imprisonment of nonhuman animals for use as diversion or entertainment and human's 'reduction' of nonhuman animals" (Ralph 173). In other words, the animal energy or natural instincts are portrayed as imprisoned, restrained and subdued by humans. Man has not only repressed his own innate drives, but has also suppressed that of animals, which is clearly stated in the old lady and her grandchild's confinement of the macaw. Being imprisoned, the macaw is not able to enjoy the sexual experience:

In a cage of wire-ribs
The size of a man's head, the macaw bristles in a staring
Combustion, suffers the stoking devils of his eyes.
In the old lady's parlour, where an aspidistra succumbs
To the musk of faded velvet, he hangs as in clear flames,
Like a torturer's iron instrument preparing
With dense slow shudderings of greens, yellows, blues,
Crimsoning into the barbs:

Or like the smouldering head that hung
In Killdevil's brass kitchen, in irons, who had been
Volcano swearing to vomit the world away in black ash, (1-11)

"In the daytime," Leonard Scigaj notes, the girl "pokes fun at the caged bird" (39) and its natural desires. Hughes writes: "The old lady who feeds him

seeds / Has a grand-daughter. The girl calls him ‘Poor Polly’, pokes fun. / ‘Jolly Mop’ ” (17-19). In fact, in this poem, Hughes perceives that sexuality is a drive to propagate, and, hence, it should not be detained. But human beings have neglected its significance due to the enforced social and rational constraints. The confined macaw figuratively depicts the suppression of this energy or life-force.

At the end, Hughes grows more direct in his criticism of human destructive violence. He remarks that though human beings have immensely repressed the life of their violent instinctual energies, it is not entirely dead. It emerges creating disorder in the natural world and the human society; a fact that Hughes highlights through the image of the confined macaw which serves as an alloy—prey—of both the instinctual drive and the rational practice of human society.

“Bullfrog,” a poem from his second volume *Lupercal*, is an ideal instance of man’s cruelty to animals. In the poem, the frog is depicted as an honest animal, or innocent animal, trapped by humans. To emphasize the victimization of the bullfrog, Hughes portrays the qualities of the bullfrog with skill and immensity. The voice of the frog sounds like a siren on a ship. The sound is so grand that it creates an image of a god in Hughes’s mind. However, Hughes distorts the depicted image of the bullfrog’s grandeur by implying that it is “a wounded god”:

But you, bullfrog, you pump out
Whole fogs full of horn—a threat
As of a liner looming. True
That, first hearing you
Disgorging your gouts of darkness like
a wounded god. (5-10)

The closing lines of the next stanza compare the bullfrog to a disabled bull sinking in the mud and vomiting mud and saliva at the same time:

Not utterly fantastical, I expected
(As in some antique tale depicted)
A broken-down bull up to its belly in mud,
Sucking black swamp up, belching out black cloud

And a squall of gudgeon and lilies. (11-15)

In this way, Hughes removes entirely the grandeur of the bullfrog. He explains that the destruction of such a magnificent bullfrog does not need more than a small man or rather a boy. This is obvious in the way the boy, a human urban dweller, sees the bullfrog as “No bigger than a rat” (18) and he compares the frog’s forefront feet to an old woman’s hand, gnarled and boney. Thus, the poem suggests the bestiality of human violence, which results in the deprivation of the bullfrog of its natural freedom.

Once again in the poem “Fourth of July” Hughes demonstrates the negativity of man’s violence in that modern civilized man has not only isolated himself from nature, but destroyed it as well. According to Derwent May, this poem “mocks contemporary America” (145):

The hot shallows and seas we bring our blood from
Slowly dwindled; cooled
To sewage estuary, to trout-stocked tarn.
Even the Amazon’s taxed and patrolled (1-4)

Hughes recounts the story of the discovery of America by Columbus. He asserts that this story has been a story of polluting the land, the lakes, and the rivers, and destroying wild life. He depicts civilized man as a monster-slayer and regrets the fact that animals, such as the “Piranha,” the “jaguar,” and the “mammoths,” have been killed to make way for a mechanized society, where men live isolated from each other:

Unapproachable islands,
From their heavens and their burning underworld,
Wait dully at the traffic crossing,
Or lean over headlines, taking nothing in. (13-16)

Apparently, throughout these poems, one can conclude that Hughes presents the immorality of human violence by depicting how man has victimized the natural environment, murdered its animals, for either his selfish ends or for the sake of sports and entertainment, and disturbed the normal structure of its elements by the use of nuclear and chemical warfare and the erosion of forests.

Conclusion

Violence as a concept has a strong presence in modern English poetry, both in form and content. Yet, this violence is never an entirely modern literary trend in English poetry. Rather, it has developed out of the violence which started both on the historical and literary scenes of the preceding era, the Victorian era, and, more specifically, its last portion.

Historically, the closing years of the Victorian era witnessed the spread of violence into the Victorians' life. This was in fact a natural outcome of the Victorian crisis of faith; a crisis which was instigated by the industrial and scientific revolutionary spirit of the age. Materialism and the new scientific theories led to the devastation of moral and religious values, and caused the outburst of violence in the modern world, and forced new ingredients into the poetry of the period. Violence, in terms of theme and language, was one of these ingredients. Thomas Hardy and Gerard Manley Hopkins were among the period's prominent poets who employed such an ingredient into their writings.

The obsession of the modern poets with the concept of violence was a natural response to the increase in the level

Notes

- (1) Unless stated differently, all textual references to Hardy's poems are to *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Michael Irwin, Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2002. They are indicated by the title of the poem and the line numbers; Pagination is not stated in the parenthetical reference.
- (2) Florence Hardy emphasizes Hardy's sympathy and sensitivity towards birds, animals, and nature creatures. She writes that in a correspondence with Mr. W. T. Stead, Hardy wrote "As a preliminary, all civilized nations might at least show their humanity by covenanting that no horse should be employed in battle except for transport. Soldiers, at worst, know what they are doing, but these animals are denied even the poor possibilities of glory and reward as a compensation for their sufferings" (81).
- (3) Unless stated differently, all textual references to Hopkins's poems are to *Selected Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Bob Blaisdell, Dover Publications Inc., 2011. They are indicated by the title of the poem and the line numbers; Pagination is not stated in the parenthetical reference.
- (4) Unless stated differently, all textual references to Owen's poems are to *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, edited by C. Day Lewis, New Directions Publishing, 1965. They are indicated by the title of the poem and the line numbers; Pagination is not stated in the parenthetical reference.
- (5) Unless stated differently, all textual references to Thomas's poems are to *Dylan Thomas Selected Poems, 1934-1952*, New Directions Publishing, 2003. They are indicated by the title of the poem and the line numbers; Pagination is not stated in the parenthetical reference. The above quoted words are from Thomas's poem "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower" (7).
- (6) Unless stated differently, all textual references to Hughes's poems are to *Ted Hughes, Collected Poems*, edited by Paul Keegan, Faber and Faber, 2012. They are indicated by the title of the poem and the line numbers; Pagination is not stated in the parenthetical reference.

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