

Ecocritical Reading in the Poetry of Ted Hughes

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Abstract

This thesis explores Ted Hughes's poetry between the 1950s and 1980s, focusing on an emergent eco-poetics and environmental consciousness in his representations of animals, environments, and natural phenomena. Whereas Hughes's work has been studied in terms of animals, myths, and history, reading his poetry ecocritically brings rigorous focus to refine the idea of 'nature' and address questions of ecological interconnectedness and environmentalism.

Engaging with wilderness/wildness in nature, this thesis discusses how poetic language appeals to the unknowability of other-than-human creatures through Hughes's fascination with creative-destructive forces. His poetry addresses issues of animal subjectivity and environmental ethics in relation to endangered species and wildlife extinction. This study also investigates Hughes's reinvention of the georgic and elegy through examinations of farm labour and animal husbandry, through which poetic imagination memorialises the deceased farm custodian in the earth. Furthermore, this thesis examines the earth's natural history and cultural memory to demonstrate Hughes's eco-poetics of the Yorkshire bioregion in light of Heidegger's notions of poetic 'dwelling' and in relation to the Industrial Revolution, Methodism, and experiences of war. Hughes's environmental imagination of stones and mill ruins reveal nature as a 'standing reserve' and implicate natural history in human history. Finally, Hughes investigates the fluvial environment as the chief muse of poetic creativity and the dynamic 'riverscape' where the activity of fishing reveals human contemplation of selfhood, beyond anthropocentrism. Hughes's poetry bears witness to an environmental consciousness which finds a language of the unknown world of external nature, as a site of ecological integrity.

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Ecocritical Reading in the Poetry of Ted Hughes

Introduction

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

(‘The Thought-Fox’, 1-4, p. 21)¹

This thesis considers how Ted Hughes’s writing process and poetic imagination are influenced by his external environment. In these lines from ‘The Thought-Fox’, the temporality of night creates an immediate environment of which the poetic speaker is conscious. Revealing clues about poetic creativity and its relation to the natural world, ‘The Thought-Fox’ brings together the act of writing with an idea of wilderness and indirectly reflects the poet’s environmental awareness. Here, literature and the environment are brought into focus at the point when poetic imagining and external nature merge.

Hughes’s work explores the interactions of other creatures, plants, and natural elements in relation to human intervention, construction, and destruction of external environments. This thesis sheds light on the distinction between, and the integration of, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism which reveal Hughes’s poetic creativity and environmental imagination; Hughes’s examination of the nature-culture dichotomy will be debated within an anthropocentric framework that will bridge the divide between the two ideas. Whereas some critics discuss Hughes’s poetry in terms of the pastoral and

¹ Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Paul Keegan (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 21. The poems quoted in this thesis are derived from this book.

wilderness,² this thesis argues that Hughes re-evaluates the idea of wilderness in distinctive environments which include other-than-human creatures, both wild and domesticated, and rural landscapes such as farmlands and human communities, through an ecological approach.

Through the lens of ecocriticism, therefore, this thesis deals with Hughes's poetic creativity and environmental imagination, through a consideration of his conception of 'nature', which, at different times, both excludes and includes the human. Animals are significantly re-imagined in Hughes's poetry as having independent and often problematic agency in relation to human subjects. Intertwined with the idea of uncontrollable forces and causal processes in the natural world, this thesis re-interprets the idea of wilderness in the earth's mechanisms (*the working* of physical processes and natural phenomena) which can be read as 'wildness' in particular contexts (being wild and free). Natural mechanisms are not only defined by the *physical phenomena* (such as wind, rain, glaciations, aquatic cycles, and land formation) but are also exemplified in Hughes's poetic imagination of *biological working* in the animal bodies such as life cycles of wild animals, aquatic creatures, their survival instinct and predatory behaviours. Attention will be paid here to human communities, and in particular, agricultural landscapes and fluvial environments, which are represented as interdependent and interconnected. In addition, natural phenomena such as causal processes and the physical mechanisms of the body of the earth are revealed as pivotal elements of Hughes's poetic examination of natural history, external forces, which shape and influence human culture.

In considering Hughes's poetic creativity and environmental consciousness, the nature/culture distinction should be carefully considered. Human culture both constructs

² Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

and destructs external nature in ways that can devalue its interconnection with flora and fauna, and natural resources in the external landscape. Thus, Hughes's awareness of human culture (cultivation and growth) is manifested in relation to the idea of care for the environment. The idea of care (*cura* in Latin), for example in the Georgic, is a human intervention that combines the thoughtful and the wearisome.³ Human care for nature is invoked in Hughes's poetry in ways that the poet observes, paid attention to, understands, and invests labour in the appropriation of the external environment (as it will be seen in Chapter II, III, and IV). For example, animal husbandry reveals humans' attempt to use nature and signifies mastery over challenge and difficulty in farm cultivation. In other environments, fishing invokes care and attention that an angler-poet invests in his contemplation of the rivescape. The most obvious and systematic use of external nature is manifested through the idea of industrialism which influences humanity's ways of perceiving the environment to serve our needs and utility.

However, with ethical responsibility, the use of poetry to raise readers' awareness of how human culture transforms the environment should be noted as a social function of Hughes's work. This interrelatedness of culture and nature, particularly in relation to the imperative of care, the network of life and human environments, is prominent in Hughes's eco-poesis. Hughes creates the eco-poetics as a philosophical home making – an exploration of the environment's influence on the poet's imagination in shaping an ethical vision.

This thesis comprises four chapters. As Hughes is highly acclaimed for his powerful representations of animals and the environment, Chapter I attempts to redefine and reconceptualise the poet's idea of nature with reference to *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), *Lupercal* (1960), *Wodwo* (1967), and *Wolfwatching* (1989). Distinguishing

³ David Fairer, 'Introduction: "All manag'd for the best": Ecology and the Dynamics of Adaptation', in *Citizens of the World: Adapting in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Kevin L. Cope and Samara Anne Cahill (Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2015), pp. xxv-xlvi (p. xxxiv).

‘wilderness’ and ‘wildness’, this chapter investigates Hughes’s imagination of the powerful, uncontrollable, and independent agency of animals and landscapes in relation to Kate Soper’s writing on the concept of ‘nature’. In this context, ‘wilderness’ in connection with the pristine environment is not perceived but ‘wildness’ (the independent force in nature) is apparent in Hughes’s examination of wild animals and uncontrollable natural phenomena. Following Timothy Morton’s work on ‘ambient poetics’, I read Hughes’s poems as constituting an ecology or an environment which signifies the cultural construction of the ‘wild’. In this chapter, ‘wildness’ is interpreted as a dynamic force, an indicator of uncontrollability and the agency of natural environment. Wild and domesticated creatures’ survival instinct and predatory behaviour will be considered as their independence and being ‘wild’.

Focusing on the unknowability of other-than-human creatures, Chapter I examines how Hughes’s poetry de-romanticises the representations of the hawk in harsh conditions, the jaguar spinning in confinement, and the thrushes and skylarks killing, screaming, and struggling to survive in wild environments. Invoking the notion of environmental justice, I explore Hughes’s environmental consciousness in relation to wildlife extinction and ecological ethics in his depictions of disappearing wolves and a black rhinoceros. To emphasise his anti-pastoral mode, the second part of Chapter I examines the idea of ‘wildness’ in natural phenomena including wind (or storm), rain, climatic processes (in the freezing weather), and the sea’s hydrological cycle. These instances of natural powers and causal processes are created by Hughes’s eco-poetics which re-interprets natural mechanisms, animals, plants, and external nature as being ‘wild’, beyond human control.

Chapter II examines the relationship between farm labour and the domestication of animals in *Moortown Diary* (1979) which is Hughes’s reinvention of the georgic; it investigates the cultivation of nature through farming culture and the interaction

between human work and livestock within seasonal cycles. By examining the ethic of care, I argue that Hughes does not depict the relationship between man and animal on the farm as one of master and subject. Instead, they are collaborators; the farmer is constructed as a guardian who eases pain and suffering, assists births and deaths, and cultivates the land by using human labour with and without technology while livestock are living commodities that constitute farm productivity. The farmer-poet is seen as a cultivator of poetic language and environmental imagination while his modern georgic work is the re-interpretation of human care for, and attention to, external nature.

Chapter II analyses Hughes's development of an elegiac tradition. As the collection is a dedication to his father-in-law Jack Orchard, *Moortown Diary* distinctively represents and emphasises the importance of human labour in cultivating the land, mastering the machine, and rearing livestock. This chapter centrally analyses poems in relation to mortality, memory, human and animal bodies, the earth's body, and seasonal transformations. The tension between life and death in Hughes's imagining reflects hardship in agriculture that yields crops and farm animals, yet requires cooperation and care (the thoughtful consideration and appropriation of nature). In addition, this chapter demonstrates how the poet memorialises the deceased and illustrates his powerful feelings for animals on the farm locus.

Chapter III explores Hughes's geographical memory of his childhood landscape in West Yorkshire and its cultural significance in *Remains of Elmet* (1979). Developing a discussion which connects cultural memory and literary geography, I argue that the Elmet poems integrate social, cultural, and ecological values such as geological history, the Great War, the Industrial Revolution, local Methodist culture, and environmental transformation. I expand the idea of ecological, cultural, and economic value by invoking Freya Mathews, Martin Heidegger, and Val Plumwood.

This chapter demonstrates how Hughes incorporates a sense of the intertwined cultural and natural histories arguably informed by Lawrence Buell's work. Hughes's eco-poetics 'of' Yorkshire is created by examining the earth and its utility; 'nature' both informs and is transformed by culture. The animated rocks and stones, the haunting and crying Calder Valley, and 'heathered' moorlands are imagined in a vibrant and interconnected manner. Reflecting the bioregionalist perspective, Chapter III promotes Hughes's awareness of living-in-place, regeneration, and renewal in the post-industrial environment. Hughes re-interprets and critiques the Yorkshire bioregion through representations of cenotaphs, derelict mills, rocks, and plants understood in terms of ecological processes; his poetry and concern about the place reclaim nature's agency.

Chapter IV investigates the poet's profound ecological consciousness and environmental politics in the context of fluvial 'landscapes' in *River* (1983). With reference to Roger Deakin's notion of water as a poetic inspiration and Tricia Cusak's notion of 'riverscape', Chapter IV engages with Hughes's integration of riverine ecology and aquatic life with a poetic vision. The poet is conscious of the ecological 'oneness' of the hydrological cycle depicted in the interdependence of fish, birds, eels, otters, insects, and other creatures in fluvial ecology. It is clearly seen that Hughes's commanding authority of aquatic biology is significant in his poetic imagining of the fluvial environment where an angler-poet is fascinated with its appealing biological mechanisms.

Following the salmon's journey along the river from its source to the sea, this chapter shows how Hughes's poetry represents water as an essential element in creating biodiversity, one that is inseparable from other creatures' life cycles as well as human communities. Hughes's poetic language reaches out to the unknown (which in fact is his 'known') world of rivers; for example, the imagining of salmon alongside war experiences and religious vocabulary reflects the poet's integration of culture and

nature. Hughes uses fishing experiences to contemplate his writing process and the internal self and to integrate his knowledge of natural sciences and the riverine environment with his cultural creativity of river writing. Ultimately, his environmental advocacy is apparent in poems that critique water pollution particularly *River* and ‘Rain Charm for the Duchy’. This chapter demonstrates the cultural significance of water as a vein of the earth, a prime source of cultural value, and a ‘muse’ of poetic imagination that contributes nevertheless to the conservation of fluvial environments.

Hughes’s contexts: poetic responses to socio-cultural change

Hughes’s poetry after the 1950s reflects anxiety in literary culture during the post-war period. His representations of animals’ aggression and environmental forms of violence (*The Hawk in the Rain*, *Lupercal*, and *Wodwo*,) epitomises his scrutiny of cultural (dis)integrity. In these collections, the poet engages with imagery of nihilism and destruction in details of social history and the experience of war. In *Crow* (1970), Hughes addresses cultural anxiety by using myth⁴ to critique the decline of Christianity; the poet considers the role of religion as a means to revitalise faith in human communities. In *English Poetry Since 1940*, Neil Corcoran argues that Hughes’s re-creation of myth articulates the decline of religion:

Hughes is impelled in much of his work towards the creation or discovery of some provisionally sustaining myth as an alternative to what he reads as the irretrievable corruption and barrenness of English Christianity, and this myth tends to catch up into itself transformatively, or possibly to elide, actual historical circumstance and event.⁵

⁴ See the latest study of Hughes (‘Ecotrickster’, *Crow*) in Susanna Lidstrom, *Nature, Environment and Poetry: Ecocriticism and the poetics of Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁵ Neil Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 114

This argument clarifies the degree of anxiety in Hughes's work which responds to the transformations of religion within social history. Along with cultural corruption and religious barrenness, political nihilism is also explored through representations of war remnants in *Crow*. Hughes depicts wild animals with aggression, violence, and an innate survival instinct in order to reflect on how 'wilderness' (cultural construction) crosses between the human and the natural world.

Keith Sagar argues that Hughes, influenced by Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, draws on myth to critique man's alienation from nature in order to heal a wound in the western world embedded since Creation. For Sagar, Hughes's poetry functions as a means to regenerate the natural environment:

The image of stone returning to the earth is one of many images in Hughes for the restoration to Nature of its own, the healing and rededication of the holy elements before man can approach them again with clean hands, with respect and humility.⁶

As Sagar observes, Hughes's use of nature to critique cultural anxiety reveals the poet's orientation towards external nature. The image of stone returning to the earth is tantamount to the concept of ecological interconnectedness that has arisen from the ecocritical perspective.

This thesis will shift the critical focus from Hughes's mythic imagination to questions of ecological consciousness and environmentalism. Corcoran observes that Hughes 'has a still, quiet intensity of scrutiny, reverential and amazed before the recognition of otherness'.⁷ I argue that a particular approach to anthropocentrism which sees humanity as the centre of the world and a mode of rationality that perceives

⁶ Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation'* (Peterborough: Fastprint, 2009), p. 246. See the idea of human culture and the disruption of nature in Sagar, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature: From Homer to Hughes* (London: Chaucer, 2005)

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

external nature as alienated and subject of exploitation characterises Hughes's work and provides a new perspective in relation to the environment. Corcoran asks us to notice 'the way Hughes's celebration of natural vitality is crossed with his appalled, fascinated, occasionally apparently near-fetishistic sense of mortality'.⁸ The contemplation of these opposites, 'vitality' and 'mortality', is everywhere present in Hughes's representations of wild creatures and the management of their domesticated kin. We are familiar with Hughes's depictions of natural forces (creative-destructive) and wild animals driven by their biological instincts. In this context, I will demonstrate that Hughes's theme of animal violence is juxtaposed against dynamic depictions of wild creatures' physicality and characterised by a sense of ecological interconnectedness with other creatures, habitats, environmental history, and natural phenomena.

In this thesis, wildlife is both described as an 'other' (wild and independent) and an object of appreciation and utility (anthropocentric orientation). When animals are brought into domestication, Hughes invokes human sympathy for them, particularly in relation to handling livestock (*Moortown Diary*). The farmer is portrayed as a custodian and carer who accommodates animals for both economic purposes and because of an innate ethical responsibility. In Chapter II, human sympathy for farm creatures affects the farmer-poet's decision to kill and save livestock in poetic language. In addition, Hughes's working with the farmland reflects his consciousness of the earth as a 'womb' that procreates lives as well as yields agricultural crops.

Equally important to animal subjectivity, Hughes's interest in the biosphere is significantly influenced by social and political configurations: memories of war, the Methodist Church as a regional culture, and the effects of industrialism. His poetry reaches out beyond the confines of representations of violence in animals, and a highly personal form of myth towards bioregional dynamism, social and natural histories, and

⁸ Ibid.

environmental politics. The Elmet poems are preoccupied with the poet's sense of the earth's history; Hughes imagines the evolution of stone, for instance, alongside human history, which is influenced by war, religion, and industrialism.

This thesis therefore explores the interface between humans and natural histories at key points in Hughes's work. Paul Shepard argues that an approach towards nature that is centred on anthropocentric rationalism signifies a break between humanity and the external environment in relation to history. '[I]t is a declaration of independence from the deep past (prehistory) and its peoples, from primal tribes today or ancestors long dead. History denies the earth as our true home and regards nonhuman life as incidental to human destiny'.⁹ From Shepard's perspective, anthropocentric history 'denies' natural history and alienates humans from the external world. However, in my analysis of the Elmet poems, I will draw on Buell's notion of histories (human culture and nature as co-evolution) to reveal Hughes's integration of anthropocentric and ecocentric views through an examination of stones and rocks.

Hughes's interest in the earth as the 'biological self' constitutes a response to, rather than a denial of, or 'escape' from, history. The representations of geological time as a framing concept in the Calder Valley and the history of places in the Yorkshire bioregion are integrated with the processes of industrialism. Rand Brandes argues that '[b]iological and organic processes are carelessly conflated with economic and political processes' in Hughes's poetry.¹⁰ This informs my argument and will be critically explicated in a discussion of human and natural histories in *Remains of Elmet*. Hughes, in my view, re-defines our relationship with the planet in ways which allow us to

⁹ Quoted in Annette L. Rathmell, "'A cry into the green world': Nature and Ethics in the Poetry of R.S. Thomas, Ted Hughes, Charles Tomlinson and Jon Silkin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2013), p. 17.

¹⁰ Rand Brandes, 'Hughes, History and the World in Which We live', in *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 142-59 (p.147).

consider value (economic, ecological, and cultural) and which situates anthropocentrism within an ecocritical framework.

Ecocriticism and Anthropocentrism

Ecocriticism is a ‘study in the relationship between the literature and the physical environment’.¹¹ By depicting animals and rural landscapes with a sensitivity to changes in human and non-human environments, Hughes’s poetry can be understood in relation to ecocriticism, particularly when humans use nature for utilitarian purposes. His poetry often critiques anthropocentric ideology which transforms external nature in forms of ecological disintegration and probes the categories of man and nature. Hughes’s work, as Louise Westling suggests of ecocriticism, ‘turns toward the life sciences to restore literary culture to the fabric of biological being’.¹² His representations of species’ extinction and industrial ruin reveal the poet’s environmental consciousness as centrally informing his poetic creativity. The poet’s cultural act for other creatures and the environment contributes to the social function of poetry in the extent to which it raises environmental awareness.

In a poetic space, Hughes depicts human culture’s detrimental impact on the environment in order to re-evaluate humans’ potential to create and destroy ‘nature’. In so doing, environmentalism and literary creativity become interwoven as ‘ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory’.¹³ Examining Hughes’s conception of a human relationship with ‘external nature’ through the examination of poetic language, this thesis will show how the environmental imagination can suggest social responsibility to readers. In his writing,

¹¹ Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, ed., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. xviii.

¹² Louise Westling, ‘Introduction’, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Environment*, ed. by Louise Westling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 1-13 (p. 2).

¹³ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 3.

Hughes integrates an anthropocentric perspective into an ecocentric one to address environmental crises as urgent issues.

Hughes's poetry about transformed environments (*Remains of Elmet*) critiques an anthropocentric culture that sometimes unjustly conceptualises nature as a commodity for human exploitation. Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood acknowledges a crisis of rationality and argues that anthropocentrism 'others' non-human nature as a resource for humans' end.¹⁴ Anthropocentrism 'names any stance, perception or conception that takes human as centre or norm'.¹⁵ It sees the natural world as a homogenised entity and economic resource, or as an expression of cultural values that humans can make use of. In other words, anthropocentrism alienates non-human nature so that it is always 'out there' as relevant to human utility. Human-centred thinking creates the premise that 'nature', as 'wilderness' (a term I will redefine in Hughes' poetry), can be antagonistic, threatening, and uncontrollable; thus nature should be tamed. This dualistic perspective of 'nature' nurtured by anthropocentrism does not develop a mutual understanding between nature and culture but drives the former further away. Hughes's poetry shows how environmental culture (his eco-poiesis) can inform human rationality of nature by focusing on intrinsic values in the external environment.

Plumwood urges a focus on environmental culture (a creative anthropocentric discourse) which helps situate our 'ecological embeddedness' instead of separating humanity from nature.¹⁶ The emphasis on the cultural value of external nature informs my reading of Hughes's representations of wildlife in Chapter I. The poet challenges the dualistic conception of 'nature' (in relation to 'wildness') as constructive and

¹⁴ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

¹⁵ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 3.

¹⁶ Plumwood, p. 3.

destructive by examining wild creatures such as the hawk, the jaguar, thrushes, skylarks, wolves, and a black rhino in their own habitats and in relation to cultural references. Hughes's poetic creativity critiques anthropocentric ideology that often forgets or ignores the diversity of non-human creatures and ecological elements such as rivers, wind, rain, moorlands, stones and rocks by restoring cultural, economic, and ecological values into these observable features. This thesis suggests that Hughes sees anthropocentric culture through poetic creativity as a means to revitalise the mutual and sustainable relationship between nature and culture, particularly through literary imagination.

Hughes's combination of anthropocentric and ecocentric approaches to nature is presented in *Moortown Diary* which reveals co-operation and care in farm management through the seasonal cycles. I will draw on Virginia Held's notion of an ethic of care to discuss Hughes's contemplation of human attention, sympathy and responsibility for other-than-human creatures in context of domestication. By memorialising the human body and the earth's body in conjunction with the georgic, Hughes revitalises the natural world as a habitat, a worked space, and dwelling for human beings shared with farm animals. The farm is an ecological site in which a farmer has to understand, adapt, and exploit nature (both the earth and animals) in a sustainable way. Retelling stories of the deceased farmer working the earth, the poet demonstrates the close relationship between human labour and the external environment. Even when death proclaims its place, Hughes imagines and memorialises Jack Orchard as a guardian and protector of the earth, alongside animal mortality.

Kate Rigby asserts that ecocriticism 'remembers the earth by rendering an account of the indebtedness of culture to nature. While acknowledging the role of language in shaping our view of the world, ecocritics seek to restore significance to the

world beyond the page'.¹⁷ Hughes's 'ambient poetics',¹⁸ for instance, in *Moortown Diary*, allows the poet to imagine the environment where humans attempt to benefit from nature through care, control, and cultivation. His refashioning of georgic poetry reveals an environmental and ecological consciousness in the hope of contributing to positive change in the reciprocal relationship between the earth, other-human-creatures, and literary imagination.

Hughes's idea of Nature

In his poetry, Hughes re-evaluates, contests, and re-defines the idea of 'nature'. This thesis explores nature through his representations of wilderness, the pastoral, industrialism, environmental problems, ecological disintegration, and the interactions between the human and the environment. The poet's contemplation of the earth, its living and non-living elements in particular landscapes and regions such as Yorkshire and Devon, addresses his green focus and environmental sensitivity.

'Nature' in Hughes's poetic creativity is complex in relation to the philosophical human-nature relationship. Kate Soper in *What is Nature?* (1995) questions this concept as a cultural construction based on anthropocentrism. Her ecological concept of nature is threefold (comprising metaphysical, realist, and 'surface concepts'), and will be analysed here in terms of Hughes's contact with wild nature in Chapter I.¹⁹ As Soper argues, the cultural constructions of nature include the observable features of physical landscapes, animals, wilderness, and rurality. Hughes's exploration of 'wilderness' in his childhood environments (agricultural landscapes and the countryside) reflects a close relationship to the natural world. I argue that Soper's notion of 'wilderness' can be

¹⁷ Kate Rigby, 'Ecocriticism' in *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002), pp. 151-78 (pp. 154-55).

¹⁸ Timothy Morton, *Nature without Ecology: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (London: Blackwell, 1995).

explicated and re-interpreted as 'wildness' in Hughes's poetry in relation to animal subjectivity and the physical processes of the earth understood as independent 'nature'.

In Chapter I, nature, as wild creatures and natural phenomena, is perceived as wild, independent, and beyond domestication. I will discuss key critics of 'wilderness' such as Gary Snyder and Wallace Stegner to examine Hughes's version of 'wildness' in the depictions of untamed animals in rural contexts. Animal subjectivity is important in redefining humans' relationship with other creatures in contexts of wild habitats and shared landscapes such as farmlands and villages. Throughout the thesis, analyses of wild creatures including the hawk, the jaguar, skylarks, thrushes, wolves, fish, a cormorant, a damselfly, an eel, and an otter, all contribute to my interpretation of being 'wild' (or wild Being) and unknown. In this context, I explore the ethical ambiguity of Hughes's approach to hunting which is imbued with violence and a human desire to control external nature.

In addition to the exploration of animal Being, other natural phenomena such as the causal processes of the earth are central to Hughes's conception of 'wildness' as opposed to 'wilderness'. The integration of social culture and natural history in his poetic realm provides access to the unknowability, and 'otherness' of nature. For instance, climatic processes such as wind, rain, glaciation, seasonal cycles, and the presence of the earth's fundamental elements – such as stones and rocks – are triggers for Hughes's environmental imagination. These natural/physical mechanisms in the environment powerfully influence human communities, agriculture, the transformations of external nature, and ultimately poetic creativity.

Hughes's environmental imagination is a reaction against the pastoral tradition as seen in his depictions of wild, independent animals and hostile, powerful elements radically created in an unsentimental manner. His poetry demonstrates the development of ecological discourse and the human-nature relationship and emphasises the

interdependence of creative and destructive forces in the external world. Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts argue that ‘animal vitality is seen to be part of the same cycle of conflicting forces at work in the landscape’.²⁰ The animals’ creative and destructive power is a natural part of the larger cycle of forces in the universe.

Gifford defines the anti-pastoral and post-pastoral in poetry to show that the exploitation of natural environments is embedded in human culture.²¹ The relationship between humans and nature is not merely two-dimensional but is, instead, a multi-faceted interconnection. In Hughes’s poetry, human alienation from nature is present in the context of ‘denatured culture’²² which emphasises environmental decay (*Remains of Elmet*). In addition, Hughes as Poet Laureate and angler-poet advocates environmental issues as social ethics: advocacy of animal subjectivity and wildlife extinction.²³ The poet calls for attention to social injustice in the human exploitation of nature, which ignores ecological interconnectedness and the need for interdependence between humans and other creatures.²⁴ Therefore, Hughes’s poetry creates a response to environmental transformations and stimulates readers’ ecological consciousness and ethical value.

Although writings on nature and the environment have been debated within ecocriticism, many of these debates are theoretical and limited to the binary opposition of the country (nature) and the city (culture).²⁵ This thesis attempts to examine

²⁰ Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber, 1981), p. 75.

²¹ Gifford, *Green Voices*.

²² ‘God of Mud: Hughes and the Post-pastoral’, in *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, pp. 129-41 (p. 129). See Gifford, ‘Dead Farms, Dead Leaves:’ Culture as Nature in *Remains of Elmet & Elmet*, in *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 39-47.

²³ Terry Gifford, ‘Rivers and Water Quality in the Work of Brian Clarke and Ted Hughes’, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 34 (2008), 75-91. Also see Gifford, ‘Hughes’ Social Ecology’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 81-93.

²⁴ Gifford, ‘Hughes’ Social Ecology’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 81-93.

²⁵ See the transformed idea of nature from pastoralism to the post-industrial in Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Hughes's integration of nature and culture in poetry, particularly ecology and the environment, by showing that both are shaped by, and influence, each other.

The complex notion of 'nature' should be reconsidered in relation to the earth's history and its network of life. Greg Garrard argues that '[i]t is true that what we call "nature" is often a forgotten or pastoralized remnant of human culture, but equally there can be no exclusively human history in the first place – just as all evolution is coevolution (sic), all history is environmental'.²⁶ Hughes explores the earth in *Remains of Elmet* to reveal that natural history is entwined with human history as 'co-evolution'. Buell argues that the environment is depicted not only as 'a framing device' but also as a 'presence' which suggests that 'human history is implicated in natural history'.²⁷ Furthermore, nature writing should address 'human accountability to the environment' as part of the text's ethical orientation; the environment is a process rather than 'a constant or a given' implicit in the text.²⁸ These characteristics of environmental writing contribute to my ecocritical reading of Hughes's work. 'Nature' as a causal process and the interrelatedness of natural and human histories are particularly discussed in Chapters I and III respectively. Humans see the external world in terms of utility, value, and aesthetics, all of which contribute to social and cultural progress.

Hughes engages with the idea of nature in relation to value and utilitarianism. This thesis demonstrates the integral relationship between human and nature by focusing on a philosophy of values, including the economic, ecological, and cultural. Freya Mathews' *The Ecological Self* (1991) offers the idea of ecological interconnectedness through her discussion of intrinsic values in nature. The Elmet poems about stones and rocks (mill stones and 'animated rocks') reveal how Hughes

²⁶ Greg Garrard, 'Introduction' in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-24 (p.5).

²⁷ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 7-8

²⁸ Ibid.

imagines economic, ecological, and cultural value of objects in relation to bioregionalism.²⁹

Remains of Elmet considers human rationality as informed by an instrumentalist view of nature's value through the examination of industrial dereliction. I will invoke Heidegger's notion of poetic language as revealing humans' dwelling on earth and the idea of nature as a 'standing reserve', particularly in industrial thinking which is prominent in Yorkshire landscapes. The economic value of a natural resource, including stones and rocks, is re-interpreted in Hughes's imagining of mills and animated landscapes to highlight the impact of technology in 'thinking' nature. Hughes's work represents the eco-poetics of re-making his 'home', an immediate environment in a highly metaphorical register. His environmental imagining re-creates a physical 'home' (the landscape) and an imaginative 'home' (that of cultural memory).

This thesis is distinctive from other studies of Hughes's poetry because central to it is a bioregionalist perspective which is seen to inform the poet's environmental consciousness. A bioregion is not defined by political or geographical boundaries but instead is characterised by biological diversity and networks of interconnected ecosystems that have significant echoes in language. Reading Hughes's imagined landscapes, I consider the idea of 'living-in-place' to describe living with necessities and pleasures as uniquely presented by a particular site. The concept of 're-inhabitation' also proposes living in a place that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation. In *Remains of Elmet*, I will demonstrate Hughes's eco-poetics and the relationship between language, imagination, bioregionalism, local culture, and environmentalism in his poetry of place.

²⁹ See Doug Aberley, 'Interpreting bioregionalism', in *Bioregionalism*, ed. by Michael Vincent McGinnis (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 13-42 (p. 22).

Hughes's Eco-poesis as Home Making

In poetry, Hughes re-imagines the earth as a network of living processes, a place where other beings dwell in specific environments. The poet represents animals in relation to 'wildness', which is problematically constructed in his childhood landscape. Hughes revitalises cultural memory in connection with social history to reveal the interrelations between Yorkshire geography and human communities. Through both domestic and wild environments, Hughes's poetry seeks to reveal a sense of nature that shapes our culture and metaphorically re-fashions readers' experience of landscapes. Hughes's eco-poetic oeuvre from the 1950s to 1980s signifies an attempt to build a 'home' or a 'dwelling' from his environmental imagination and memory. His poetry re-imagines and metaphorically invokes the physicality of Yorkshire landscapes on the page.

In relation to Martin Heidegger, Jonathan Bate argues that '[e]copoetics asks in what respect a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place; the prefix eco- is derived from Greek *oikos*, "the home or place of dwelling"'.³⁰ Bate's conception of poetry – as metaphorically making (a home) – points out the poet's social role or function to call for environmental awareness in the public. Likewise, Leonard Scigaj observes that '[e]copoets distill ecological processes into aesthetic techniques to restore our lost sense of connectedness to the planet that bore and sustains us'.³¹ In this way, poetry can aesthetically invoke the readers' environmental experience and advocate social and environmental ethics.³² These explications of ecological poetry combine the aesthetic mode and social responsibility. Thus, nature/environmental poets, including Hughes, contribute to the sustainability of the human-nature relationship.

³⁰ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 75.

³¹ Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Eco-poets* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), p. 11.

³² J. Scott Bryson, ed., *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2012), p. 5.

Scigaj's biocentric vision of poetry becomes central in my ecocritical reading of Hughes's 'home making'. Alluding to ecological processes such as decomposition and renewal, Scigaj sees 'Hughes's rootedness in the ecology of nature (that) transforms endlessly according to the dictates of an extremely healthy, agile, feather-touch imagination to become the spirit beacon of his verse'.³³ Hughes connects industrial decline with decomposition, energy transfer, and renewal as ecological interconnectedness in the Elmet poems. The poet's biocentrism as seen in the animal-human relationship (*Moortown Diary*) is an example of co-operation, care, and stewardship in rearing livestock under the food-chain.³⁴ This thesis will develop a discussion of Hughes's examination of ecological interrelatedness manifested in his eco-poetics and environmental thoughts.

Hughes's ecological poetry or ecopoetry makes the unconventional gesture of depicting physical processes including seasonal cycles and landscape transformations as dynamic entities. For example, Yorkshire moorlands are seen as powerful, hostile, and unfamiliar. Such a depiction of 'nature' does not follow a pastoral version of nature as a place of refuge and retreat but instead demonstrates a contradiction between the 'rural' and the 'urban'.³⁵ In Chapter I, 'nature' is not idealised as a 'benign and reliable backdrop for (the) human quest for authentic voice'.³⁶ In fact, the rural landscapes are depicted and scrutinised in relation to powerful nature; the poet's farm experience (Chapter II) reveals the human attempt to control and manage nature to serve our utility.

Hughes's environmental consciousness is then developed through his sensitivity to, and imagination of, external nature in a very different environment. *River* opens a new way of perceiving an aquatic sphere through the poet's personal relationship with

³³ Leonard M. Scigaj, *Ted Hughes* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 7.

³⁴ Scigaj, 'Ted Hughes and Ecology: A Biocentric Vision', in *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, pp. 160-81 (p. 170).

³⁵ Gifford, *Green Voices*, p. 11.

³⁶ Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry*, p. 5.

rivers and fishing. Deakin claims that water is the most inspiring and poetic element in cultural activities.³⁷ By examining the agency of water currents and aquatic creatures in relation to foundational elements such as light, earth, and air, Hughes pursues ecological integration enriched by his eco-poetics.

Through fishing, the poet-angler has a chance to explore multiple properties of water which give him a sense of unity with external nature. Sensitivity to sound, smell, and vision is a key element in Hughes's poetic response to the immediate environment. Nevertheless, fishing, which allows the poet to make 'primitive' contact with other animals in a river, invokes ethical concerns about human violence and the question of killing. Most types of hunting, including fishing, are surrounded by, or characterised by, certain expectations, practises and even rituals. Fishing is a form of direct, non-verbal, contact with the wild which seems unmediated by social formulas. The depiction of the salmon's journey from the sea to the river epitomises the fluvial ecology in relation to seasonal cycles. Thus, *River* is shaped by knowledge of aquatic biology as seen in the imagination of water creatures' biological behaviour which informs Hughes's eco-poetics.

Kate Dunning argues that ecopoetry 'has consciously been influenced by a sensitivity to ecological thinking, especially in the area of energy flow/retention, cyclical renewal, bioregionalism, and the interdependency of all organisms with an ecosystem'.³⁸ Hughes's poetry about the environment and ecology has a phenomenological dimension in that 'it can recreate the experience of living in the world' but 'this does not prevent it from changing attitudes about the environment'.³⁹ I argue that Hughes's eco-poetics can 'heighten individual readers' awareness of their

³⁷ Roger Deakin, 'Forward', in *The River's Voice: An Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Angela King and Susan Clifford (Devon: Green Books, 2000), pp. 15-18

³⁸ Kate Dunning, 'From Environmental Poetry to Ecopoetry: W.S. Merwin's Poetic Forest', *Merwin Studies: Poetry / Poetics / Ecology*, 1(2013), 67-96 (p. 69).

³⁹ Stuart Pickford, 'The Dialogue between the Discourses of Ecocriticism and Environmental Poetry' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2009), p. 122.

natural surroundings'.⁴⁰ Scott Knickerbocker notes that poetic language powerfully makes nature matter to us precisely through the defamiliarisation of figurative language and rhetorical devices:

Ecological poetry posits a relationship between ethics and aesthetics. Poems best succeed at awakening one to the natural world through the emotive and rhetorical power they have over readers, and this power derives from the particular form that content takes.⁴¹

Hughes responds to environmental transformations in his imagining of animals and natural processes without losing poetic complexity and ecological subtlety. The representations of endangered species in Chapter I ('The Howling of Wolves', 'February', and 'The Black Rhino') suggest his integration of ethics and aesthetics by revaluing other creatures and their habitats affected by human culture. In addition, Hughes's imagining of fishing experiences represents the unfamiliar world and invokes emotive and rhetorical power in his poetry. His examination of aquatic lives reflects the combination of culture and nature through fishing experiences and the use of religious and historical terms. Even though Hughes's ambiguous, anthropocentric relationship with fishing is debatable from an ethical standpoint (that of anti-hunting), his environmental campaign for water quality in rivers (which is ecologically oriented for humanity) constitutes a position of ethical responsibility for nature.

Thus, in defining Hughes's eco-poetics, I argue that anthropocentrism and ecocentrism can be complementary since both are human cultural constructions. Robert Kern contends that both concepts 'offer us the opportunity to redefine ourselves as beings on the earth, which supports us, along countless (but dwindling) other species

⁴⁰ Susanna Lidstrom and Greg Garrard, "Images adequate to our predicament": Ecology, Environment and Eco-poetics', *Environmental Humanities*, 5 (2014), 35-53 (p. 37).

⁴¹ Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), pp. 171-72.

and life-forms'.⁴² Hughes's ecopoetry contributes to a rich and complex relationship between human culture and external nature. During the course of this thesis, I believe that an anthropocentric approach should not be eliminated but can be married to an ecocentric stance.

Hughes's focus on humans' responsibility for external nature in animal poems and *Remains of Elmet* recalls Buell's emphasis on human accountability and an ethical orientation towards the environment. Often, environmental poetry is created with a particular political ideology in order to change readers' behaviour and consciousness towards the environment. However, there is a dilemma with which environmental poets are confronted. Environmental writing might awaken readers' green thoughts but it can lose poetic integrity in this awkward drive to force poetry and environmental policy together.⁴³ Hughes's poetry about external nature, I argue, can both heighten individual readers' awareness of surroundings and constitute changes in their environmental conception without any loss of poetic integrity.

This thesis examines Hughes's invocation of animal subjectivity (Chapter I) and an ethic of care (Chapter II) in poetry to raise awareness of environmental justice for other-than-human creatures. Representations of wildlife endangerment and extinction (of wolves and the black rhino) suggest the poet's engagement with environmental responsibility for humanity's actions and consequent transformation of wild habitats. Hughes's eco-poetics not only re-evaluates external nature in relation to benefits for human beings, but also considers what is beyond humanity.

Hughes's work has clearly influenced a generation of nature poets, and for the purposes of this thesis, I intend to draw attention, briefly, to the work of Alice Oswald to show the development of eco-poetics in contemporary British poetry. Like Hughes,

⁴² Quoted in Knickerbocker, p. 178

⁴³ Isabel Galleymore, 'Nurturing the "Right" Nature: Environmental Poetics and Pedagogies' *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 4.1 (2012), 46-56 (p. 47).

Oswald perceives the undeniable impact on the wild environment by humanity. Oswald creates a response to change in a dynamic and lively technique by writing a song of the river in *Dart* (2002). Like Hughes, Oswald stimulates readers' senses of human communities informed by the rivers and natural phenomena. Unlike Hughes, Oswald incorporates a self-conscious critique of environmental crises in a way that accepts human disruption of nature. Ultimately, an environmental consciousness is prominent in both poets as they develop poetry to raise public awareness of nature, without loss of artistic or aesthetic integrity. Both poets promote poetic creativity which appeals to our feelings and experience as well as our ethical responsibility to 'nature'. Therefore, this thesis, through ecocriticism, examines the ways in which external nature is conceptualised and understood in Hughes's eco-poetics.

**Chapter I Contact with the Wild: Redefining Nature and Poetic Creativity
in Representations of Animals and Environments**

This chapter examines Hughes's environmental consciousness, considering the discourse of 'nature'. It also re-interprets and redefines the idea of 'wilderness'/'wildness' in the poet's representations of animals in human communities and wild environments in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), *Lupercal* (1960), *Wodwo* (1967), and *Wolfwatching* (1989). In Hughes's poetry, the idea of 'wildness' is distinctively created in English environments where 'wilderness' is scrutinised. The idea of 'wildness' will be discussed in connection with ethical questions raised by hunting or trapping, animal subjectivity, and wildlife conservation. Secondly, it will be argued that the environment in Hughes's poems creates a textual space in which the interconnections between external nature and human culture are considered. I examine the representation of natural phenomena such as seasonal cycles, weather, and physical and ecological elements including air, earth, light, and water, which essentially constitute and inform the poet's environmental thoughts. Towards the end of this chapter, I contend that childhood experience and Yorkshire landscapes are significant influences on Hughes's development of a sense of ecological interconnectedness and poetic creativity.

The idea of Nature and wilderness/wildness

'Nature' is an anthropocentric discourse which defines both the external nature and humanity itself. It signifies 'otherness' in animals, plants, water, air, earth, rocks, and other entities in particular environments; a discourse of nature obliquely conveys utility, aesthetics, or perhaps hostility (wherever wild creatures' predation upon, and threat to other species, particularly humans, is considered). When 'otherness' is constructed by

human culture, animals and other living and non-living elements are categorised as one nature that defines surroundings and environments. To a certain extent, in many assessments of the nature/culture dichotomy, nature is excluded from human conception. Hughes's poetry develops an interconnection between creatures and an ecosystem and reveals his environmental consciousness through metaphorical language. The poet sees the intertwined relationship between wild creatures and natural phenomena apparent in the countryside, farmlands, moorlands, woodlands, rains, and storms, in which 'wilderness' might be clearly perceived but can also be investigated in the name of 'wildness'. In his poetry, Hughes refers to 'wilderness' not as a space-oriented construction, yet I would reinterpret 'wildness' as an independent power (animality translates into vital presence) in animals and natural phenomena.

As I have indicated, in *What is Nature?* (1995) Kate Soper defines 'nature' as an ecological discourse in the form of three conceptions. Firstly, she discusses a metaphysical conception which refers to the non-human and its difference from humanity (nature/culture). Secondly, she notes a realist conception which draws on the causal power that operates within the physical world. Thirdly, she introduces a 'lay' or 'surface' conception that defines nature as the world's ordinarily observable features (environment, landscape, wilderness, countryside, rurality, animals).¹ This last notion of nature in connection with an environment and 'wilderness' comes close to representations of animals, and wild as well as cultivated landscapes in Hughes's poetic creativity. For Hughes, nature means, first, an environment that the poet has experienced: the landscapes that Hughes dwelt in and explored as well as the wild animals that he hunted as a young boy and the flora that inspired his poetic imagination.

¹ Soper, pp. 155-56.

The definition of 'wild' nature can thus be distinguished into two concepts: 'wilderness' and 'wildness'. The idea of 'wilderness' is discussed in ways which invoke uncontrollable forces in the natural environment; in physical landscapes and in terms of elemental power, the wild is seen in external/natural phenomena in which human beings have no obvious intervention. Wallace Stegner argues that 'wilderness' is a conceptual construction of a spiritual resource that shapes the identity of a nation (in the context of America), its history, and its people. Stegner views the wild as a physical space in connection with a mode of independence. To Stegner, if American people lose the idea of wilderness in the form of virgin forests, clear streams, and wild species, then they cannot be psychologically free in their own country.² Wilderness in this definition, therefore, is associated with a mode of freedom and its spiritual affinity in constructing a national and ecological identity. Greg Garrard also notes that 'wilderness' signifies nature in 'a state uncontaminated by civilisation'.³ It implies 'untamed landscapes and the sharp distinction between the forces of culture and nature'.⁴ As Gary Snyder explores the terminology, 'wilderness' refers to untamed animals, uncultivated plants, uninhabited lands, and violent and destructive characteristics.⁵ Since these definitions of 'wilderness' are largely defined by excluding the human, the argument can be turned the other way around. In other words, what is 'wild' becomes the space of the free agency of animals, self-propagating plants, pristine lands, and unrestrained behaviours which fiercely resist any oppression.⁶ This way of interpreting 'wild' nature allows Snyder, in particular, to see animals, natural phenomena, and environments as having agency. In this light, 'wilderness' is a constructed *myth* of a pristine ecosystem, associated with place, while 'wildness' refers to a particular mode of Being with freedom and power

² Wallace Stegner, 'Wilderness Letter', 3 December 1960, *The Wilderness Society*, <<http://wilderness.org/bios/former-council-members/wallace-stegner>>, [accessed 19 April 2014].

³ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵ Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

deliberately developed and manifested in violent and untameable environments. Wilderness is read as a space where natural/physical phenomena claim independence from the human and is often discussed in relation to the New World contexts. Hughes incorporates the idea of ‘wildness’ as a force in his poetry to show that, although there is minimal virgin forest or pristine landscape in English contexts, the notion of wild nature is still dynamically alive in his representations of animals, environments, and natural processes, drawn, at least, from his experience of the Calder Valley, in the West Yorkshire region.

Before moving on to specific examples in Hughes’s poetry, it is important to understand a text as an environment in an ecological context. A text informed by the operations of language, reference, and context becomes a sample unit of ‘environment’ for analysis. Timothy Morton compares reading a text to understanding ecology in that ‘[a]ll poems are environmental, because they include the spaces in which they are written and read – blank space around and between words, silence within the sound’.⁷ The environment which the text describes is as important as the content appearing in the text. To understand the interconnections of space and perception in poetry, Morton refers to *ambient poetics*. To Morton, text is similar to ecology in that elements in the text constitute an environment and are important for interpretation.

In ‘The Art of Environmental Language’, Morton proposes the idea of ‘ambient poetics’ in Ecomimesis or Nature Writing as ‘a sense of circumambient, or surrounding *world*’.⁸ The emphasis lies in the significance of surroundings in art works in relation to the physical space of the literary material. Influenced by Leo Spitzer’s sense of

⁷ Timothy Morton, ‘Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology’ *The Oxford Literary Review* 32 (2010), 1-17 (p. 11).

⁸ Morton, *Nature without Ecology*, p. 33. In this book, Morton refers back to the Latin word of ‘ambience’ or *ambo* which means ‘on both sides’. Ambient poetics can be applied to a study of music, art as well as literature in that readers focus on the surroundings or environments in that piece of writing to see interconnections between the foreground messages and the environments which contribute to readers’ interpretation.

‘ambience’, Morton examines six main elements of ambient poetics which constitute nature writing: 1) rendering, 2) the medial, 3) the timbral, 4) the Aeolian, 5) tone, and 6) the *re-mark*.⁹ Rendering reflects the reality created by art, while the medial foregrounds one of the parts of communication and in this light, contact becomes content. Thirdly, the timbral, in music, is about a symbolic meaning. The fourth element is the Aeolian which is defined by the sound (-scape) that creates a conscious subject. The idea of tone is its intensity, which refers both to the body and the environment as the last element; and finally, *re-mark*, is important in its treatment of background as a foreground. In this study, reading Hughes’s poetry by considering the Aeolian and the *re-mark* distinguishes ‘wildness’ and ‘wilderness’, space and temporality. I will develop important distinctions between them, and examine the notion of the page as the environment.

Wilderness as wildness: independence and violent power

Being aware of the surroundings in Hughes’s poetry is essential to understand the poet’s powerful and influential environmental consciousness. When animals are evoked in the contexts, wildness is central to my analysis of Hughes’s animal poems. In *The Hawk in the Rain*, *Lupercal*, and *Wodwo*, ‘nature’ can be defined by representations of ‘wilderness’, ‘landscapes’, ‘countryside’, and ‘animals’ as a ‘surface’ concept in Soper’s definition. The observable features of woodlands and farming environments reflects Hughes’s conception of ‘nature’ in which wildlife and country people, for instance, encounter each other.

As a boy living in a valley in the Pennines, Hughes was influenced by activities led by his brother, Gerald: hunting rabbits, shooting birds, and fishing. The agricultural

⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

and moorland environments of his youth fostered in him a perception of nature and produced a developing awareness of the connectivity of landscapes, animals, trees, and country-dwellers. The independence of, and the energy within, nature can be seen in animal poems such as ‘The Hawk in the Rain’, and ‘The Jaguar’ in the collection *The Hawk in the Rain*, which represent the poet’s problematic and ambiguous idea of ‘wildness’ in animals and their environments. Hughes’s concept of the wild, developed in these poems, is a way of re-assessing the independence of nature in distinction from the human, as a mode of freedom, and reaching out towards ‘unknowability’ in non-human nature.

Hughes endorses an idea of nature as ‘wildness’ (untameable and violent) that is independent of human control in representations of a vigorous hawk, a jaguar, thrushes, skylarks, and their environments. The depiction of these non-human creatures in a dynamic and stimulating manner offers a means of constructing a concept of ‘wild’ nature as a free agent. ‘The Hawk in the Rain’ in the first collection represents ‘wildness’ in the wild creature struggling with the uncontrollable and powerful weather through the human observer’s eyes. The opening stanza connects the power of ‘natural’ landscapes and the narrator who, while included in the natural surroundings, positions himself in this wild environment. Hughes invokes a human perspective in which his environmental consciousness is linked with the struggling hawk as a locus and a ‘fulcrum’. The emphasis is on the ‘wild’ and what lies beyond human control. The poetic language transforms the farm into the magnetic, devouring earth where the storm powerfully orchestrates the air:

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, [...]

(1-4, p. 19)

By focusing on the anthropomorphised earth, the language of the body reveals the ploughed land as a 'grave' (death). The linguistic register of 'drumming' addresses the articulation of sound as a natural phenomenon's power; the wind creates rhythms and beats. The alliteration of 'drumming' and 'drown' constitutes a sense of hostile environment where the poetic speaker is exposed to sound and touch. Here, the word 'drown' signifies the figuratively transformed landscape as water and earth are integrated, pulling or drowning the speaker ('clay that clutches my each step to the ankle'). In this particular time and place, the land becomes a devouring mouth that can swallow and drown the poetic speaker.

The language of the body reflects Hughes's perception of the earth as wild and autonomous. The free agency of the 'earth's mouth' suggests an idea of consumption, pulling the human subject towards the 'grave'. Sagar argues that the extinguishing of the hawk's life and the mingling of mud and blood at the end of the poem can be compared to the experiences of trenches and bomb-craters during the First World War, 'which his uncles by their stories and his father by his aching silence had made the landscape of the young Hughes' mind'. It is 'what death wants and invariably gets in Hughes's poetry in the fifties and sixties'.¹⁰ In an ecological context, the 'grave' symbolises death, and so the ploughed land is defamiliarised, yet made enigmatic as an independent entity. In a pastoral mode, farmland is represented as a nurturing earth that fosters living creatures and crops, yet in this context it is unexpectedly seen as a wild, devouring environment. Oxymoronically, the metaphorical language of *nurturing* land and *devouring* earth invokes 'wildness' in external nature that 'others' human culture in the worked environment.

¹⁰ Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 106.

Hughes develops the idea of ‘wildness’ further through the powerful imagery of the creature maintaining its equilibrium in the harsh elements: ‘[...], but the hawk/ Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye’ (4-5, p. 19). The poet emphasises unreflective endurance in the animal by creating a contrast between the stillness of the hawk’s eye and the violence of the elements – the ‘banging wind’. To demonstrate its control, the hawk is not depicted at first as a vulnerable creature but is seen in balanced stasis against the merciless, weather-beaten environment, in comparison with a man who seems to lack the hawk’s agency. Although the rain ‘hacks’ the speaker’s ‘head to bone’, the hawk still hangs so that ‘His wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet’ (6, p. 19). The hawk is integrated at this point with the wind’s power and appears paradoxically to resist the physical mechanism of nature.

The poem emphasises the point of balance (‘fulcrum’) in the storm and the resistance in the hawk to show impersonal environmental violence. As the speaker observes the conflict between the bird and the wind, there is a sense of awe in nature emanating from the poetic ‘I’. Scigaj makes an interesting point that in ‘The Hawk in the Rain’ ‘[n]ature seems to attain an ecological balance effortlessly, without reflection. Humans must attain this same balance through conscious reflection and goal-directed action’.¹¹ The point of balance represented by the hawk’s position is indicative of the non-human’s control and appropriation of the elements. The violence does not appear in the hawk but it comes from the ‘banging wind’ that kills ‘these stubborn hedges’ (8, p. 19). Hughes makes use of the words ‘drumming’ (ploughed land) and ‘banging’ (wind) to invoke the aural dimension of poetic language and to connect the earth and the air to give a sense of ecological interconnectedness. The struggle and contact between the hawk, the storm, and the speaker are a manifestation of contradiction. Daniel Xerri contends that the speaker is at fault because he is trying to cut himself off from nature,

¹¹ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 29.

‘creating a polarity between himself and the energy outside and within him’ which is too powerful for a human being to deny.¹² The hawk is ‘an extension of nature’s immanent power’.¹³ For Hughes, I argue, this is not a denial of nature but an acceptance of it, and a sign of respect for nature’s immensity and integration with the human environment where a poetic speaker is located as an observer.

Hughes integrates environmental phenomena in the poem to represent a battle between natural elements in the landscape, including the speaker who struggles on the ploughed land, the hawk that balances itself (and fails) against the harsh weather, and the ‘stubborn hedges’ that resist the forceful wind and rain. ‘The Hawk in the Rain’ demonstrates both difference and unity: the unity of the animal (non-human) and the landscape (ploughed, cultivated). The final vision is, nevertheless, one of disintegration; the hawk ‘mix (es) his heart’s blood with the mire of the land’ and this embeds nature’s ‘wildness’ in the farm. The hawk is shaped by the habitat; yet, it is fragmented by the environment in which dynamic force is positioned as uncontrollable.

The metaphor of the wild and perspectives in ‘The Hawk in the Rain’ significantly contribute to a sense of interconnectedness between the speaker, the hawk, and the farm environment. Hughes portrays the earth as a magnetic and harrowing entity in ways which anthropocentric language animates the environment. Nature is perceived as ‘wildness’, as a dynamic force, instead of ‘wilderness’ that is associated with place in a conventional sense (wilderness as a pristine and uninhabited environment). The landscape is hostile to the speaker and the hawk; they are ‘invested’, therefore, with an equal status by the elemental power of wind and rain.

As the poem ends, the interconnection of the natural elements, including the human being, depends on a perception – ‘The horizon traps him [...]’ (19, p. 19). The

¹² Daniel Xerri, *Ted Hughes’ Art of Healing* (Palo Alto: Academica Press, 2010), p. 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

speaker's perception is fused with the hawk's 'horizon', radically illuminated by the uncontrollable element (both the human and the animal). As the bird turns upside down and smashes into 'the mire of the land', the speaker's perception changes from a participant to an observer. Notably, 'wildness' is not merely fixed within the animal and the landscape but is also incorporated into the environment that the human experiences ('Thumbs my eyes, throw my breath, tackles my heart' (9, p. 19).

For Hughes, animal poems depict violence consciously constructed in human culture as a way of alienating the wild from humanity. Xerri examines Hughes's poetry with the rationale that poetic creativity can be a form of healing. He also notes on subjectivity, sacredness, and power in the external environment:

In Hughes' early collections nature is described as being somewhat malevolent, but this intrinsically is a perception projected by a human consciousness that seeks a means of justifying its exploitation of nature. This human consciousness is terrified of nature's admirable violence, judging it in terms of its own destructive violence. [...] Humanity, through the holistic acts of detaching itself from the patterns of nature and of refusing to acknowledge the latter's sacredness, has lamed itself and it can never regain its health unless reconciliation is effected with the true cosmic forces it cannot hope to eclipse.¹⁴

What Xerri claims is nature's malevolent characteristic which is constituted by the animal's independence and violent force, and as a result of humanity's detachment from the wild. Reconciliation in terms of ideology (a conception of nature as free agency that shares the environment with human beings) only happens when there is a sense of sacredness in, or admiration for, the power of nature. However, Hughes's poetry

¹⁴ Xerri, pp. 18-19.

examines whether sacredness in nature can be ethically scrutinised in relation to the idea of power and ecology.

Hughes not only observes the wild-cultivated space (here, of the shires) to examine 'wildness' in animals, but also addresses concepts of violence and bestiality in the built environment of a zoo. While Hughes represents both control and vulnerability in the hawk and 'wildness' in an open and managed space, he emphasises a culturally-constructed idea of violence in the representation of a wild animal confined in a cage. 'The Jaguar' fascinatingly depicts a different mode of freedom, in which the politics of power and space in the human-animal relationship is central. The idea of poetic space and the environment of the text in nature writing is important in re-reading 'The Jaguar'.

Through poetic imagination, Hughes's ideas of wildness and the interpretation of unknowability in non-human nature are interfused as he conceptualises animality. To define 'unknowability' in nature, it is important to understand the differences between the human and the animal which bring back the anthropocentric and ecocentric dichotomy as explained in the introduction of this thesis. Understanding wild creatures in relation to their environments, whether open, wild, domesticated, or confined, reveals the otherness of individual species. I argue that in Hughes's poetry, the 'unknowability' of non-human nature (wild creatures and natural phenomena) is present in his representations of the independent characteristics, untamed actions, biological behaviours, and physical mechanisms of the earth and its Beings. Hughes's poetics of animals in relation to their habitats as well as human environments is prevalent in his examination of space, interdependence, and violence or aggression perceived in human culture. For instance, a particular creature's reaction to its environment, whether transformed by human interventions or natural processes, can be opened up and explored through poetic language.

In 'The Jaguar', Hughes reinforces the idea of 'wildness' and unknowability even in a human environment; the zoo animals such as apes, parrots, and snakes, confined in cages, react to their surroundings in various ways including yawning, shrieking, lying down, and running behind the bars. These wild creatures are, more or less, institutionalised. While these animals interact with one another, or ignore, apparently, their environment, visitors see them as *exotic* within a *confined space*: 'At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,/ As a child at a dream,[...]'(10-11, p. 19). The poem links the action of viewing the wild animals with 'dream' to address human psychology and unknowability in nature. The 'otherness' of wild creatures becomes a pivotal focus of the poetic language, 'mesmerized'. Though the creatures are confined, they have a particular power (that of wildness) to capture the child's imagination as if in a 'dream'. In these two lines, the question of space and perception is intertwined with 'wildness' as other 'over there'. The animals attract the stares of the crowd and they connotatively 'mesmerise' the watchers.

The representation of the jaguar embodies the idea of space in which the domesticated animals are placed as the background while the jaguar is distinctively positioned as a foreground (*re-mark*) to highlight its 'wild' nature. Greg Garrard argues that we alienate wild animals and consequently define them as a source of violence, aggression, and threat. He critiques John Berger's 'Why Look at Animals?' (1980) in which zoo animals are ambivalently positioned between wild and domesticated animals because they are objects of the politics of power – understood as imperial or neo-colonial.¹⁵ In 'The Jaguar', zoo animals are objectified by visitors who cast the coloniser's gaze and, in turn, dissociate themselves from the wildness they represent.

The idea of animal subjectivity in the relationship between the human and nature can be explained by Jacques Derrida's discussion of how experience and perspective

¹⁵ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 150.

construct a Being's identity. In *The Animal That Therefore I am* (2008) Derrida's consciousness of his existence is driven by his cat's powerful gaze that invokes a question of sexuality and the human/animal divide. The female animal's gaze escapes categorisation within the role of language while the mode of looking allows one to *see* and *be seen* through the eyes of the other.¹⁶ This discussion of subjectivity and the act of seeing or gazing informs the conception of human existence and the construction of self (from critiquing animals to understanding humans). Animal subjectivity is also central to Hughes's depiction of the jaguar mesmerising the crowd and being gazed upon. 'The Jaguar' embodies the politics of human power and casts animality in relation to subjectivity and anthropocentric authority.

Referring to Berger, Sarah E. MacFarland comments that 'modern industrial societies have extinguished the possibility of shared looks between humans and other animals by imprisoning animals' bodies within the degrading walls of zoo enclosures and otherwise transforming their images into spectacles'.¹⁷ The relationship between humans and animals is therefore constructed out of alienation and actions which reinforce animals' otherness. Assumptions are based on the anthropocentric stance that human culture takes, in defining animality as a means to better understand humanity. To adopt Morton's perspective, in 'The Jaguar', the cage as a *re-mark* of wild nature is subjected to human power in the depiction of the crowd staring at the jaguar.¹⁸ Hughes considers the ambiguous 'wilderness' (18, p. 20) of the place where the jaguar comes from and the cage, the imitated space of 'nature'.

By focusing on modes of freedom and captivity, Hughes tries to comprehend the jaguar's thoughts as he observes its energetic movement in the cage in contrast to less

¹⁶ Discussed in Sarah E. MacFarland, 'Animals Studies, Literary Animals, and Yann Martel's Life of Pi', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Environment*, pp. 152-65 (p. 158).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, p. 47.

vivid zoo animals who yawn, shriek, or lie still in the sun. The domesticated apes, parrots, and snakes, are positioned at the beginning of the poem to develop a sense of animality which can be tamed, and made banal, by human culture. The more energetic and violent creatures such as the tiger and the lion are not depicted to be as animated as the jaguar. In fact, they constitute ‘Fatigue with indolence, [...]’ (4, p. 19). Confined, the jaguar is restless, vigorous, enraged, and turning in the limited space: ‘[...] a jaguar hurrying enraged/ Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes’ (11-12, p. 19). Hughes’s emphasis on ‘prison darkness’ suggests a human perception that is incomprehensible to the creature. The ‘drills of his eyes’ convey violence through the language of mechanics here associated with the animal’s body. What the poem argues is that the cage cannot capture the jaguar, which does not conceive of confinement: ‘He spins from the bars, but there’s no cage to him/ More than to the visionary his cell:/ His stride is wildernesses of freedom:’ (16-18, p. 20). The last lines focus on the animal’s refusal of confinement; his movement in the cage is the manifestation of freedom; the poet’s association of freedom in the animal as ‘wildernesses’, I argue, can be interpreted as ‘wildness’. To signify perception, Hughes creates the phrase ‘to be blind in fire’ to suggest a quality of unknown animality towards which language must reach. The metaphors of ‘fire’ and ‘the bang of blood’ address dynamic force and ‘violence’ in the jaguar as a result of ‘repression’ at human hands and in the construction of animality. By depicting the restless jaguar, Hughes attempts to understand its ‘wildness’, ontologically different from the other institutionalised animals, and from the human spectators. This ‘wildness’ beyond human understanding is invoked by the form: ‘The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel./ Over the cage floor the horizons come’ (19-20, p. 20). The reference to ‘visionary’ ambiguously implies a mystical tone in Hughes’s creation of the beast’s origin. The jaguar is both exotic and special in its place in the world as well as its power to ‘mesmerise’ spectators. This nature’s violence is ‘a

manifestation of the energy human beings have alienated themselves from and thus have grown to fear and loath'¹⁹ when it is considered aggressive and dangerous from an anthropocentric stance.

The poet deploys the animal to explore the unknowability of nature; the jaguar expresses a quality of freedom that transcends the zoo environment. Hughes concentrates on an idea of freedom contrastively represented by the cage in comparison to other animals. Like the 'visionary' in his cell, the zoo is not a confinement upon the jaguar's mind or spirit, even while it restrains its body. Xerri argues that Hughes's animals are 'the embodiment of primordial energies that cannot be appropriated by human consciousness and language in the sense that they cannot be properly represented by the symbolic order'; they are seen as 'hallucinatory, dream-like, larger-than-life'.²⁰ The animality created in this vision cannot be captured by the domesticated environment or through containment, but we are allowed access into the unknown by metaphor.

In *The Lives of Animals*, J.M. Coetzee intertextually links the idea of animal consciousness with the power of poetic imagination through Elizabeth Costello's lecture on 'The Jaguar'. Coetzee argues that embodying the animal is a way to engage with poetry in order to examine the external world. As his spokesperson, Costello notes that:

By bodying forth the jaguar, Hughes shows us that we too can embody animals – by the process called poetic invention that mingles breath and sense in a way that no one has explained and no one ever will. He shows us how to bring the living body into being within ourselves. When we read the jaguar

¹⁹ Xerri, p. 30.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

poem, when we recollect it afterwards in tranquillity, we are for a brief while the jaguar. He ripples within us, he takes over our body, he is us.²¹

Coetzee's idea of embodying the animal recalls Hughes's notion of hunting in which a hunter has to learn the habitat and the animal's behaviour, and to interpret its interconnectedness with an ecosystem or a bioregion. Coetzee argues that the power of poetic language permits a poet and the readers to gain access to the jaguar's unknown world. Poetic imagination creates imagery, sound, and sense in the reading process and develops the readers' consciousness of their relation to the external world. Thus, Hughes's imagined jaguar allows the readers to be aware of the limitations of the human animal.

In this poem, a certain kind of animality is emphasised in the context of space. The conventional concept of 'wilderness' is associated with the idea of untamed space, free from human intervention. The poem situates the animal in a zoo, where wildlife is brought in for research and recreation (subject to the human gaze). Yet the animal manifests wild nature in its demeanour. In the jaguar, 'wildness' is imbued with a sense of uncontrollable 'nature' that is unknown to a human conception in this limited space. In the name of 'wildness', the jaguar can be compared to 'a bomb' 'on a short fierce fuse' (13, p. 20), 'threatening to blow away the cage and the crowd' and 'disrupt the inane tranquillity of the zoo to which it does not belong'.²² In the cage, subjected to human control, the jaguar manifests its 'wildness' as a form of dynamic force by transcending the bars. 'Wildness' in this animal indicates the origin of 'wild' place, where it comes from, and informs a politics of space tied up with the animal-nature and animal-human relationships.

²¹ J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* ed. by Amy Gutmann (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 53.

²² Xerri., p. 40

A shift of perspective distinguishes the meaning of ‘wilderness’ in connection with place, inseparable from the mode of Being (wildness) embodied in the jaguar. The ‘horizon’ significantly implies the ‘World’ since it is not the crowd’s horizon, but the jaguar’s viewpoint. In this light, an anthropocentric, and institutionalised, view of ‘wildness’ is challenged by the animal’s subjectivity. Hughes uses the word ‘horizon’ in ‘The Hawk in the Rain’ to describe the fall of the hawk (‘The horizon traps him’) and suggest a way of reading the powerful and destructive end of the creature in the environment. However, in ‘The Jaguar’, the redefined ‘wilderness’ as ‘wildness’ informs the shift of perspective to ‘horizons’; Hughes signifies the animal’s mode of being free as inseparable from a mode of being wild. ‘The Jaguar’ demonstrates an unconventional perspective, offering an interpretation of the background (other creatures) in relation to the foreground (the jaguar) – the *re-mark*, one of the ambient poetics – in a built environment.

The concept of wildness in the animal can be critiqued by drawing on the idea of energy in totemic culture. Discussing Hughes’s animal poems in relation to Shamanism and manifestations of energy in nature, Chen Hong observes that external nature interacts with the poet’s internal world, represented in creaturely power. Hong writes:

But Hughes’s reservation about the power of the hawk and the jaguar must also indicate some defence inside him against an unobstructed flow of such energy between the human and the animal, for when the jaguar works as a totem of unbounded energy, isn’t there the danger of the poet’s being blinded, just as the animal is, by the intensity of that energy? ²³

Hong’s observation about energy is synonymous to what I read in ‘freedom’ and ‘wildness’ as violence and independence in non-human life. To see this energy in a

²³ Chen Hong, ‘Hughes and Animals’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, pp. 40-52 (p. 43).

context without human intervention, open and wild spaces are examined in the following section.

Unknowability and Otherness in the non-human

In his poetry, Hughes addresses the unknowability of the natural world and the cultural conception of ‘wildness’ and ‘wilderness’ in connection with human aesthetics. ‘Thrushes’ in *Lupercal* (1960) challenges a romanticised or sentimental notion of the non-human animal; Hughes critiques the biological behaviour, seen as wild and destructive, of these ‘garden’ birds. The poet introduces us to a counter-intuitive representation of the terrifying birds on the ‘lawn’ to indicate a blurred line of otherness between nature and culture. The surroundings signify domestic human territory but the birds’ behaviour reflects their predatory and wild instincts. Hughes famously defamiliarises the birds through the raw power of poetry that reaches out to the non-exotic creature’s mystery. His thrushes are killing machines, with:

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 stares.
 No sighs or head-scratchings. Nothing but bounce and stab
 And a ravening second.

(3-8, p. 82)

The wild thrushes are not presented as indolent, inanimate, and objectified in comparison to the zoo animals (‘The Jaguar’) because they are free on the lawn. They represent a mode of ‘wildness’ in the domestic and familiar environment of, say, the suburb. Hughes presents a non-sentimental depiction of these birds, as an unexpected stimulus to poetic creativity, in part to address the ruthlessness of human genius

(‘Mozart’s brain had it’, 12, p. 82). The repetition of ‘bounce’ and ‘stab’ emphasises violence and energy in the animals’ body combined with agility and strength, and contrasted with the ‘delicate legs’. Hughes’s mechanical metaphors (‘killing machines’) address the uncontrollability and autonomy of the birds. The birds’ ‘single-mind-sized skulls’, the ‘trained body’, the ‘nestful of brats’ (9-11, p. 82) give them a determined instinct to kill. Notably, the words ‘bullet and automatic’ makes readers aware of the creatures, counter-intuitively, as mechanisms.

Comparing Mozart’s brain with the murderously triggered thrush, A.E. Dyson suggests that the great artist’s sureness of method and insight is a more sophisticated functioning of the same process as is involved in the killing²⁴. As Dyson acknowledges Mozart’s sureness and insight, he also suggests the sophisticated function in the thrushes’ brains; the birds are created with ‘violence’ and an ‘animal instinct’ which ‘naturally’ constitutes killing for survival. The image of a shark ready to devour prey, and the image of blood leaking suggest the animal’s biological instinct when hunger reigns. Throughout the poem, ‘Thrushes’ depicts the birds’ predatory behaviour and violence, redefining ‘wildness’ in the animal world as a quality that human beings cannot gain access to – except perhaps in poetry, or genius. ‘Thrushes’ reveals Hughes’s precise use of language to emphasise the intense concentration of the birds’ behaviour. In as much as the poem considers genius, it also, therefore, considers the human. Although the ‘wilderness’ of place is not present on the cultivated lawn, the ‘wildness’ in the birds’ instinctive behaviour is profound. Hughes makes a remarkable note on ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ violence in relation to the birds’ demeanour and human culture:

²⁴ A.E. Dyson, *Three Contemporary Poets: Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes, and R.S. Thomas* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 126.

The Thrush finding and killing its worm, Mozart's composing brain, and the Shark, at their incredible, superhuman speeds, are 'at rest in the law'. Their agile velocity is a kind of stillness. At peace with essential being. Only we humans – 'terrified' by what our debilitated sense of reality sees as negative 'violence' in the activity of the Thrush and the Shark, and renouncing any possibility of sharing Mozart's 'divine' facility – cannot attain that peace. We cannot attain it because we are divided within ourselves against such spontaneous allegiance to the 'divine' law.²⁵

The dichotomy between culture and nature can be exemplified in consideration of humanity and animality. Hughes's comparison of Mozart as a genius with the birds as efficient killers reveals his interest in the shared characteristics of the human and the animal. By using 'velocity' and 'stillness' oxymoronically, the poet pushes the words to emphasise the birds' behaviour which can be both agile and calm when predation takes place. Hughes points out the human's limited experience and inability to understand the 'reality' of violence and a degree of power in these creatures. The biological characteristics of both thrushes and the shark are examined along with Hughes's consideration of the 'divine law' of nature. Thus, 'Thrushes' represents the dichotomy between high culture, the intensity of language, and the animals' predatory behaviours and instinctive faculty, which are beyond human understanding.

In the second half of the poem, Hughes explores the intersection of masculinity and animality. The last stanza of 'Thrushes' examines this problematic point again by drawing on a question of violence. In contradiction to imagery of mechanical birds driven by survival instincts and destructive potential, human masculinity is presented as 'Heroisms on horseback' (17, p. 83). However, Hughes depicts the task of carving a

²⁵ Ted Hughes, 'Poetry and Violence' in *Winter Pollen* ed. by William Scammell, 2nd edn. (London: Faber, 1994), pp. 251-67 (p. 260).

tiny ivory ornament for years, for example, to signify a transformed notion of masculinity and heroism; the poem concentrates on art and detailed, prolonged efforts of creativity. Masculinity is redefined by craft, skill, and patience – endurance of a new kind. This opposes the notion of the ‘wild’ spirit, aggression, and predatory behaviour manifested by the birds’ survival instinct and redolent of different kinds of human genius. The delicacy of a thrush’s legs, the softness of sleek feathers, and beautiful songs, are re-cast as masculine, even as manly, due to their association with force and violence, and ruthless focus.

At one point, the poet considers a definition of ‘culture’ in connection with art and religion in language suffused with complex meanings. For Gifford, the use of religious language in this poem, ‘hosannah’ juxtaposed with a ‘wild’ discourse (‘orgy’), results in ‘the distorting, distracting, dangerous forms’.²⁶ This complex metaphor extensively signifies a wild bird’s instinctual drive, which is mysterious. For Xerri, the third stanza focuses on ‘the aberration of human consciousness in feeling itself unable to be in harmony with divine law’ constituted by the wild creatures disregarding human subjectivity.²⁷ Hughes’s critique of masculinity, heroism, artistic passion, and religious belief in ‘Thrushes’ addresses the preconception of ‘wildness’. The emphasis on masculinity is invoked to underline a point about humanity as opposed to the efficient, machine-like hunters (thrushes).

The last two lines, ‘[...], under what wilderness/ Of black silent waters weep’ (23-24, p. 83) are presented with almost Biblical language; the examination of the birds’ surroundings plays an important role in shaping levels of environmental consciousness in the poem. The birds’ ‘wildness’ is palpable in their behaviour, while ‘wilderness’ of place in the black, silent water is imbued with or indicative of otherness. This poem

²⁶ Terry Gifford, *Ted Hughes* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 35.

²⁷ Xerri, p. 64.

begins with the lawn and ends with the ‘wilderness’ of an unattributed open space – while in ‘The Jaguar’, a play with ideas of space invokes the ontological idea of freedom located in the beast. Both ‘The Jaguar’ and ‘Thrushes’ develop an idea of ‘wildness’ in animals that is unknown to, and independent of, human culture in different environments. Only ‘Thrushes’ returns to the questions of imaginative, creative, human endeavour

The manifestation of human qualities in animals corresponds to Soper’s assertion that humans are prone to anthropomorphise animals in two obvious respects – to endow animals with human personality and to use them to dissociate their own animality.²⁸ Anthropomorphism can be seen as a challenge in the context of poetic creativity. Timothy Clark importantly raises a question of how to represent animal lives in human language and culture without illusion or injustice. Clark furthers his observation that:

The issue of anthropomorphism poses the question of animal experience in all its power and ambivalence. It can be at once a mode of understanding non-human animals, a profound barrier to such understanding, a mode of appropriating of animal otherness or a term that rebounds into the open question of what the human actually is. Finally, in the tension between these views, anthropomorphism in literary texts may enact an ethical and cognitive challenge to re-evaluate the bases of modern society. The non-human effects both a defamiliarisation of human perception, an undermining of ‘speciesism’ and a potentially revolutionary ethical appeal against the brutal human tyranny over the animal kingdom.²⁹

²⁸ Soper, pp. 83-84.

²⁹ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 198-99.

Anthropomorphic creativity in Hughes's representation of animals, I argue, opens a channel to understand, to re-evaluate our relationship with, and to distinguish 'otherness' in the non-human. Reading a bird's song as music, for instance, serves an idea of cultural aesthetics through, at the simplest level, rhythms and tones. Nevertheless, anthropomorphism can be culturally ambiguous, as Clark asserts, since the appropriation of other creatures through defamiliarised, metaphorical language raises ethical questions. Hughes integrates the realistic, biological behaviours of animals with his literary imagination. The language of his poetry attempts to reach out to 'otherness' and animality by powerful poetic strategies of representation, not as undermining or promoting 'speciesism', but rather as attempting to bridge the gap between anthropocentrism and biocentrism. In the following section, I consider 'Skylarks' in *Wodwo* (1967), which also deploys birds to create a distinction between poetic creativity and the wild instinct in the birds.

While 'Thrushes' represents ideas of human creativity in relation to ideas of 'wildness', 'Skylarks' embodies and reaffirms the independence of animality in an equally radical way. The poem describes the birds' biological behaviour and their flight with powerfully visual and auditory imagery. Hughes creates the skylark poem by focusing on a biological act (ascending) in a powerful and unsentimental manner. The form, the shape of the print on the page, suggests the rising of the skylarks (in a tall, narrow column):

Crueller than owl or eagle

A towered bird, shot through the crested head

With the command, Not die

But climb

Climb

Sing

Obedient as to death a dead thing.

(II, 1-7, p. 173)

In relation to the ambient poetics and the notion of text as ecology, the above stanza presented with wide spaces between lines signifies the birds' slow but monumental movement climbing into the sky. The visual dimension of the flight reinforces the rising against the pulling earth and reflects the fact that Hughes's creativity is radical, resistant, and dynamic. Reading the stanza with a pause between the lines suggests the bird's labour and struggle. The poem visually represents the trajectory of the skylark's flight, the text in its printed form. To highlight the vivid contrast between the birds' vigorous ascending and the background environment, the poet uses a phrase 'shot through' to distinguish the skylarks 'towered' in the air. This foregrounding is a *re-mark* showing the subject's physical act of ascending. In addition, the 'command' of its biological instinct to rise indicates Hughes's careful examination of 'endurance' in the wild creature and its unknowability.

Leonard Lutwack links this unconventional depiction of birds to poetic creativity. Lutwack observes that '[i]n Ted Hughes's "Skylarks" the bird is still the symbol of the poet, but its ascent toward the sun is not joyful but terribly painful, the implication being that poets harm themselves in the pursuit of their art'.³⁰ Lutwack's comment is informed both by the bird's flight and his consideration of the poet's personal life with Sylvia Plath. However, the symbolic meaning of the skylark informs Hughes's environmental consciousness. In the natural environment, the poet invokes the birds' biological struggle, their flights and songs that humans cannot comprehend. Hughes's imagination of 'Skylarks' conveys pain in the bird's song as an aesthetic representation of poetry that challenges the readers' expectation.

³⁰ Leonard Lutwack, *Birds in Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 60.

In section III, 'Skylarks' considers contradictory notions of 'wildness' in the bird's reaction against gravity and 'singing'. We never know whether it is painful or joyful because it is 'incomprehensibly both ways' (III, 7, p. 174). The auditory imagery is powerful since the poem creates a chaotic environment, incomprehensible to human understanding. Sound plays a significant role in emphasising the speaker's feeling when s/he is ambiguously positioned as an outsider, excluded from the birds. Hughes creates what Morton calls 'The Aeolian' which is a sound disembodied from an environment.³¹ The birds' crying/singing is incorporated with the 'wild' and uncontrollable environment where the speaker observes, yet cannot understand the unknowability of external nature in relation to sound.

To clarify the importance of sound in the skylarks' cry, it is essential to consider the ideas of animal subjectivity and language in relation to a human experience. The centre of the experience is not limited to the poetic observer in 'Skylarks' but is instead informed by the wild creatures' interaction with their environment. The distance between our understanding of the world and the birds' lies in a continuum that ultimately transcends the imagination. The concept of subjectivity in relation to anthropocentrism is explained by Evelyn Fox Keller who suggests that:

We need a language that enables us to conceptually and perceptually negotiate our way between sameness and opposition, that permits the recognition of kinship in difference, and of difference among kin; a language that encodes respect for difference, particularity, alterity without repudiating the underlying affinity that is the first prerequisite for knowledge.³²

In this thesis, poetic language becomes vital in negotiating the differences between humanity and animality and in bridging the gap between anthropocentrism and

³¹ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, p. 41.

³² Quoted in MacFarland, p. 154.

ecocentrism. The otherness that the human imposes on the non-human can be articulated, in Hughes's poetry, in the name of 'wildness' that allows for the subjectivity of other creatures. With this reasoning it is possible to argue that poetic language affirms the existence of the non-human by representing the jaguar, thrushes, and skylarks in relation to the 'voice' or sound. This relationship opens up access to the unknown territory of animals.

Cary Wolfe critiques the role of language in manifesting animal subjectivity by drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion that '[i]f a lion could talk, we could not understand them'.³³ Wolfe emphasises the centrality of language as an aspect of culture exposed to other-than-human creatures in the unattainable, imaginary communication with a human being. As Wittgenstein says, to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life; animal subjectivity cannot be articulated without the dissolution of anthropocentric vision.³⁴ Through poetic language, Hughes can speculate about wild creatures to raise an ethical question in the relationship between humanity and animality. In 'The Jaguar', 'Thrushes', 'Skylarks', and 'The Howling of Wolves' (which will be analysed presently), Hughes addresses 'otherness' and animality to inform wild creatures' vitality and existence. The cry (perceived as a song) that the poet considers in 'Thrushes' and 'Skylarks' epitomises the unknown external nature. By emphasising the sound or 'voices', the poet allows the skylarks to *exist* in a philosophical way, beyond human knowledge, informed by our culture. Animal language in poetry is individual and unique as metaphor and symbol play vital roles in shaping the readers' imagination. The idea of animal subjectivity in relation to humanity is developed in Hughes's consciousness of the environment.

³³ Wittgenstein quoted in Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 44.

³⁴ Ibid.

Throughout 'Skylarks', Hughes highlights the significance of chaos in the ambience or surroundings that emphasises the bird's act of singing. First, the earth is represented as a magnetic field attracting the bird like a grave: 'The cruel earth's offerings/ The mad earth's missionaries' (VI, 8-9, p. 175) reminiscent of 'The Hawk in the Rain'. To emphasise the significance of sound in the scene, Hughes considers the skylarks' singing, 'Squealing and gibbering and cursing' (VI, 4, p. 175), to suggest anthropomorphic language in the uncontrollable environment. The setting sun, in the poetic speaker's view point, indicates the passage of time: 'Only the sun goes silently and endlessly on with the lark's song' (V, 15, p. 175).

In section VI, Hughes constructs an environment that makes the readers aware of chaotic nature which refers back to 'wildness' in the line 'Heaven is a madhouse' (VI, 2, p. 175). It is a Hughesian technique to create an image of a deadly and turbulent environment that suggests the poet's attempt to reach out to the mystery in wild creatures. The surroundings, where the skylarks are screaming, represent the poet's environmental consciousness enlivened by independent force in the non-human. In this poem, the metaphor of the bird's heart in flight (ascending) 'drumming like a motor' (V, 6, p. 174), and the birds 'Like those flailing flames/ The lift from the fling of a bonfire' (VII, 1-2, p. 175), accelerate a sense of the skylark's performance before its descent. The reference to the heartbeat like drumming and the flames of a bonfire create senses of sound and touch in the readers' imagination. Hughes's creation of surroundings including the earth, the sky, and the sun constitute the birds' untypical ascending/descending.

In the end, 'Skylarks' intensifies the idea of wildness in the birds singing, screaming, and plummeting to the ground. The environment manifests the agency of nature. It is the background – the sun and the earth – that highlights the struggle of the birds. The poem continues, '[w]hen they've had enough, when they're burned out/ And

the sun's sucked them empty/ And the earth gives them the O.K' (VII, 7-9, p. 175). The sun metaphorically consumes the bird's energy as it struggles in flight and the earth awaits its descent. The frenzy of screaming larks is incorporated into the sunset. While the powerful sun is going down slowly, a cool breeze and the grassy ground embrace the bird's return. Distinctively, Hughes juxtaposes the unheard 'sound' in the air with the 'long cutting screams buckling like razors' (V, 15, p. 175) to show the reaction between the environment and wild creatures.

The tension in the environment is catalysed by the skylarks' screaming while their descent is illustrated with the sudden change in tone and the act of gliding: 'But just before they plunge into the earth/ They flare and glide off low over grass, then up/ To land on a wall-top, crest up,' (16-18, p. 175). Hughes's depiction of the birds gliding on the lawn is 'performed' without any difficulty but they are 'Weightless/ Paid-up,/ Alert' (19-21, p. 176). The poem depicts the birds gliding on the earth to challenge the readers' expectation of the creatures' catastrophe and their struggle against gravity. The skylarks, landing on the grass with 'Conscience perfect' (22, p. 176), represents the birds' bodily mechanism and that of the flight which is positioned with force and unknown determination. In addition, Hughes plays with anthropocentric language since the word 'Conscience' signifies a human ethical characteristic applied to the birds' biological demeanour in this context.

The last section (VIII) alludes to the Cuchulain myth to examine the distinction between human violence, heroism, and the skylark's powerful force. Cuchulain, an Irish mythological hero, who killed a fierce guard-dog, is described with a tragic fall, 'Manacled with blood' (VIII, 1, p. 176) and listening. The poetic speaker is imagined 'Hearing the far crow/ Guiding the near lark nearer/ With its blind song' (VIII, 4-6, p. 176). The crying crow slows down the movement from previous sections after the rise and fall of skylarks to demarcate the performative act of sacrifice – the majestic death of

the hero, the powerful ascent, and the perfect descent with 'conscience'. This reference to the heroic myth associates the bird's flight with the idea of masculinity, vehement force, and 'wildness' (in the 'blind song' that the poetic speaker never comprehends). Hughes uses the word 'blind' in 'The Jaguar' and 'Skylarks' to challenge anthropocentric preconceptions of seeing. The idea of blindness in other-than-human creatures is ambivalently constructed by human culture. Therefore, Hughes seeks to imagine the act of seeing in the eyes of the jaguar and the skylarks. In 'Thrushes' and 'Skylarks', the poet transforms the birds perceived as delicate, aesthetic, and inspiring muses into physical beings. This examination connects the idea of wildness with ideas of violence, heroism, and independence in relation to the binary opposition of humanity and animality.

The question of hunting

In this section, I will connect capturing animals and poetic creativity which constitutes how Hughes perceives the non-human and contemporary issues of animality and environmental justice. For Hughes closeness to what is 'wild' as theorised in relation to poetic creativity is imaginatively expressed in hunting. The mystery of the hunt is revealed in Hughes's childhood account of hunting with his brother in the Calder Valley. To catch an animal, a hunter has to learn its nature and the environment. A poet and a hunter share some characteristics including care, accuracy, and instinct which fundamentally contribute to creative processes. In *Poetry in the Making* (1969), Hughes compares writing poetry with capturing an animal:

In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them. And they have a

certain wisdom. They know something special...something perhaps which we are very curious to learn. Maybe my concern has been to capture not animals particularly and not poems, but simply things which have a vivid life of their own, outside mine.³⁵

In relation to hunting, poetry and animals are similar in that they are independent and yet interconnected with their environment. As poems are multilayered and metaphorical, animals are free and wild. It is significant that Hughes sees the knowledge in creating poetry and hunting animals in relation to 'wisdom'. Non-human creatures have their own independence and ecological systems into which humans cannot gain access. Hughes's poetic language opens a special channel to reach out to that unknowability in the animal world, not to capture but to understand it. 'Wildness' of animals incorporates the process of dwelling in, and interacting with the natural environment. The particular quality of capturing an animal does not emerge from the creature itself but arises from the hunting process in its habitat, under the rule of nature.

Hughes notes on his psychological reaction towards hunting in ways that invoke the energy within himself and vitality in the environment of the hunt. For him, hunting stimulates the animality in his human body and leads him to ecological interconnectedness as he uses the gun in hunting:

As soon as I got hold of that gun my heart began to pound. Suddenly I was wildly excited. So I spent that day shooting. And I realized that what I had completely lost since I stopped shooting was that automatic seeing everything in the landscape. It was quite a shock. The moment I got hold of that gun, suddenly I could see everything again. It was as though all my senses had

³⁵ Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 15.

been restored to me – by the gun. I came awake in some weird way. Suddenly I was aware. It was enormously exciting.³⁶

From this note, it is clearly seen that Hughes emphasises the moment of hunting as if his body was connected to the animal via the use of the gun. Shooting other animals allows him, I argue, to be ‘animal’ again, surviving in the environment. His invocation of senses is made through shooting or harming other creatures that leads a sense of excitement. Thus, hunting for Hughes relates to the primitive contact with other creatures under the rule of survival in nature though hunting is ethically ambiguous in relation to violence and brutality. However, from his point of view, it is a basic contact that he can make with the external world which influences his poetic creativity about animal and nature.

In a letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, referring back to his boyhood in the north of England, Hughes recounts the motivation for his hunting experience. Going hunting is constructed as a physical interaction between human and external nature, ‘like a kind of ecstasy’, as he claimed.³⁷ The word ‘ecstasy’ connotes a religious meaning such as spiritual transport. The poet contemplates other-than-human lives in hunting or fishing in a similar way that one experiences spiritual detachment. In an article ‘Why We Hunt’, Randell L. Eaton argues that hunting links a physical contact with nature to the spiritual because ‘it submerges us in nature, and that experience teaches us that we are participants in something far greater than man’.³⁸ Hughes’s ecstatic activity allows the young poet to understand himself and the environment that informs his poetic imagination. Eaton also comments on hunting and human psychology:

³⁶ Thomas Pero, ‘So Quickly it’s Over’ in *Wild Steelhead and Salmon*, 5:2 (1999), pp. 50-57 (p. 55).

³⁷ ‘Letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, 16 December 1992’, in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Christopher Reid, pp. 621-37 (p. 623). Bujon, a French MA student at Oxford working a thesis with the title, ‘An Eye for an I: Visions and Voices in Ted Hughes’ Poetry’, sent Hughes some questions about his life and his poetry and inspiration.

³⁸ Randell L. Eaton, ‘Why We Hunt’ *International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation*, <<https://www.conservationforce.org/roletwo.html>> [accessed 2 September 2012]

Hunting is a model of living. When we hunt, we discover that we are more than the ego. That our life consists of our ego in a mutually interdependent and transcendent relationship with nature. We keep returning to the field because for us hunting is a dynamic ritual that honors the animals and the earth on which we depend both physically and spiritually.³⁹

Regarding this claim, there is a sense of awe ('honour') towards, or respect for, the animals and the environment that a hunter experiences. Because the relationship between human and nature is mutually interdependent and transcendent, hunting, for Hughes, is fundamentally associated with dynamic creativity.

Axel Goodbody describes hunting as a manifestation of 'primitive' contact with nature. He claims that in the past, '[h]unting satisfied a growing need for contact with a "wild" sphere of unregimented existence, combining the encounter with "unspoiled" wilderness and the wild animal with a supposedly "authentic" way of life'.⁴⁰ The relationship between the hunter and the hunted is complex because hunting is ambiguous in ways that involve ethical questions. To validate the close relationship between hunting and ecology, Goodbody furthers his argument that:

[T]here are many more supporters of hunting who seek to justify it in terms of its 'naturalness'. Hunting today is, they claim, a disalienating activity. The hunter gains a knowledge of and develops a respect for his prey which is missing in ordinary life relations with animals as a result of the industrialisation of modern food production and its invisibility to the consumer. By giving expression to the 'animal' or 'predator' within us,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Axel Goodbody, *Nature, Technology and Cultural Change in Twentieth-Century German Literature: The Challenge of Ecocriticism* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 174.

tracking, stalking and shooting are also ‘original’ ways of being human, in which normally suppressed instincts are united with reason.⁴¹

Goodbody’s explanation of the relationship between human psychology and hunting evokes the attempt to return to ‘wilderness’. Hunting is an escape from industrialisation and modernity. However, I argue that it is the exploitation of that myth which should be examined in relation to ecology. Goodbody’s critique of hunting is informed by ethical questions of conservation. Both Eaton and Goodbody agree that, to some, hunting is a spiritual experience and their views are based on a coherent rationale which is problematic for others; a return to nature leads to conservation. The need to engage with the wild is central to Hughes’s poetry, through which he acknowledges how memory of actual experience reflects his sense of what is ‘wild’.

In relation to the idea of hunting, Val Plumwood notes elements of respect and sacredness in animals and the external environment which should be treated responsibly as an individual species in the chain of life. Plumwood refers to the relationship between death and sacredness in hunting which is applicable to Hughes’s contemplation of wild creatures. She states:

The ‘sensitive hunter’ relies not only on his or her communicative skills and knowledge but also on understanding of and rapport with the animals that are being hunted. The hunter will often be effective by adopting an ‘intentional’ stance, that is conceiving the hunted animals as another mindful, communicative and intentional being, and combining this rapport with the imperative of hunting food needed for the survival of self and loved ones.⁴²

Hunting is about knowledge and understanding animals’ behaviours as much as their interconnectedness with habitats. The rapport with the environment and sensitivity to

⁴¹ Goodbody, *Nature, Technology and Cultural Change*, p. 179.

⁴² Discussed in Goodbody, *Nature, Technology and Cultural Change*, p. 181.

the relationship between humans and wild creatures are central in reading Hughes's examination of external nature. Hunting is influential in a poet's development of environmental consciousness, poetic imagination, and politics of conservation.

Hughes's consciousness of wild creatures and their habitats is inseparable from his sense of place in the Calder Valley. This childhood environment fosters in the young poet ecological awareness and a particular conception of external nature. Hughes reveals that:

In those first six years of consciousness, in which I shared in my brother's Eden, we never met one other soul walking out there – except the farmers, who had adopted my brother anyway. So you can see, it was not only real, but – as far as our ordinary home and school life was concerned – secret and internalised. Naturally, I extended that feeling of private possession to the entire natural world and all the creatures in it. Nobody else seemed to have the faintest interest in it. And I should mention – that stretch of country, which climbed to empty moorland – was within an hour of several million people. It was the geographical middle of the Northern industrial belt between Hull and Liverpool.⁴³

Hughes internalises the environment and creates a sense of belonging to place that he could interact with, and possess. The idea of *possession* is internalised in Hughes's perception of nature as the creatures in the woodland are subjected to hunting. Since the poet claims that he had 'a feeling of private possession' of the wood in the valley, he unequivocally implies that he could take benefit from it. In other words, this sense of ownership fosters in the poet a deep connection, a sense of belonging and possessing that leads, in maturity, to conservation.

⁴³ 'Letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon', p. 623.

Like a little ‘Eden’, the woodland is not as pristine as an Edenic garden but is in fact a worked environment, within a modern economy, where farmlands are the meeting point, a bridge between the possible ‘wild’ environment and human communities. After Hughes moved from the Calder Valley to Mexborough, South Yorkshire, his ‘little Eden’ is physically lost because he lost the appropriation of the environment with which he was familiar.

The Yorkshire moorland was perceived by the juvenile Hughes as a world of exploration and a non-commercial source of food, as Hughes’s biographer Elaine Feinstein writes:

As school children, Ted and Olwyn would have been able to supplement home rations with school dinners, but it has to be said that in the context of wartime Britain, fishing, trapping rabbits or shooting birds for the pot was the most natural human activity.⁴⁴

Hunting serves a clear and direct purpose (for food) and is considered as ‘the most natural human activity’ in a context of austerity. When Hughes was fifteen, he reached a point of critical self-reflection and began to look at wild creatures from their point of view.⁴⁵

At this point, a concept of non-human nature derived from the poems is not merely defined by ‘wildness’ in animals but is also attached to particular local environments through hunting. The Calder Valley was embedded in the poet’s childhood for the first seven years before he moved to South Yorkshire. The term ‘wilderness’, therefore, becomes problematic in the discussion of hunting in the woods and his earliest familiar, native, landscapes. Hughes’s childhood experience is recorded in his poetry while an idea of environment is connected with ‘wildness’ in weathers,

⁴⁴ Elaine Feinstein, *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

seasonal cycles, and other physical and natural elements. It is a sense of ‘wildness’ which is internalised and signifies the *possession* of nature in the young poet’s view. The woodland is, in this context, compared to a reserve in which wildlife and outsiders – human beings – meet. At this stage, Hughes views nature as an independent entity that he can interact with through predatory behaviour.

Wildlife habitats, environmental justice, and endangered species

Through poetic language, Hughes sees the significance of ecological wholeness in the interactions between other creatures and their habitats. Hughes’s poetry reveals his consciousness of human intervention in wild creatures’ space; for instance, agricultural areas are problematic in representations of environmental transformations, the effects on ecological disintegration, and endangered species or wildlife extinction. In this light, I argue that Hughes is conscious of human disruption in nature; his poetry often engages with environmental justice which is forgotten in the ethical relationship between the human and other-human-creatures that possess an integrity to be felt and expressed. Animal poems, which illustrate a mode of access to the unknowability of wild creatures, conjoin the poet’s environmental consciousness and a drive for ecological justice for animals. In the following section, I will draw on poems about the effects of human disruption of wild environments through critiques of trapping, hunting, and poaching in ‘The Howling of Wolves’, ‘February’, and ‘The Black Rhino’ respectively.

Hughes critiques ethical questions of (agri-)culture and the transformed landscapes where wildlife shares space with human beings. ‘The Howling of Wolves’, in *Wodwo*, addresses the idea of environmental (in)justice made by humans towards animals as Hughes draws attention to the limited understanding that human culture has

about animality/species in the wild ('world'). In relation to wildlife extinction, trapping a wolf in a forest raises the question of human domination over 'wildness'.

'The Howling of Wolves' presents a pack of wolves hunting in the cold night and being caught in a steel trap. By representing the beasts' plight, Hughes addresses questions of environmental justice in capturing the wolves. Capturing animals (trapping in this context) determines the existence of other-than-human creatures and justifies advantages for humans' end. Hughes scrutinises the animals' ecological value in the transformed habitat, particularly an agricultural landscape. Given the setting of the sweeping wind, hunger drives the beasts in the cold forest to the crying of a baby:

Then crying of a baby, in this forest of starving silences,
Brings the wolves running.

Tuning of a viola, in this forest delicate as an owl's ear,
Brings the wolves running — brings the steel traps clashing
and slavering,

[...]

The wind sweeps through and the hunched wolf shivers.

It howls you cannot say whether out of agony or joy.

(4-7:13-14, p. 180)

The poem is rich in its metaphor of crying (of a baby and the wolves) which is juxtaposed with the tuning of a viola. Hughes compares the silence in the landscape with the forest as 'delicate as an owl's ear' to create the still background. The use of 'crying', 'tuning of a viola', 'traps crashing', and the wolves howling constitute distinctive audio imagery. In this way, Hughes creates an eco-poetics by drawing a connection between the animal, nature, and metaphor. Readers might sense the wolf in agony, with the dark landscape reinforcing the animal's unknowability in the poem. These lines create what R. Murray Schafer terms 'soundscape', a sound in 'acoustic

ecology'.⁴⁶ The idea of 'soundscape' is in line with Morton's 'The Aeolian' of ambient poetics; sound in the environment contributes to tone and movement of ideas in art. In this poem, the howling of wolves is juxtaposed with the crashing steel trap, causing agony, and ultimately suggestive of power that humans impose on nature. The howling also implies the communication to the pack of a need for rescue, and thereby invokes a sense of belonging to and in the habitat. The animal's 'wildness' and affinity with 'wilderness' – belonging to non-human ecology – is depicted with the wolves' suffering that addresses 'otherness' in wild animals.

Hughes examines the wild creatures' sound to question trapping animals and human conceptions of the wolves and their habitat. With sympathy for the wolves, the crucial line 'It howls you cannot say whether out of agony or joy' (14, p. 180) reminds the readers of the frenzied sounds of the birds in 'Skylarks'. In 'The Howling of Wolves', the sound in the cold night emphasises the idea of being 'wild' and unknown. Hughes creates the subjective nature of experience for the readers to scrutinise how humans understand wild creatures by speculating about the incomprehensible cry. The howling of wolves, in poetry, allows humans to conceptually and perceptually negotiate our sameness and opposition with other creatures. In this light, poetry opens a way to the wolves' world intervened by trapping. Human culture alienates the animals regarding its inherent value, not its ecological one.

In 'The Howling of Wolves', Hughes attempts to understand and sympathise with the wolf suffering from being trapped in the cold forest, and 'whimpering horribly' (20, p. 180). In these lines, 'The earth is under its tongue,/ A dead weight of darkness, trying to see through its eyes' (15-16, p. 180), the poet represents his environmental consciousness by suggesting the wolves' ecological integrity devalued by human environmental (in)justice. In this way, Hughes represents the transformed environment

⁴⁶ Discussed in Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, p. 42.

(by human intervention). By attempting to see the world through ‘its eyes’, the poet imagines what the wolf sees as a way to understand its relation to the environment and a human community.

In the representation of the vulnerable wild creatures, Chen Hong claims that Hughes’s use of Shamanism seems to stop working after the first three books. As we can see, the animals are ‘deprived of all powers’, especially in ‘The Howling of Wolves’ because ‘the animals become a pitied victim rather than a totem guide’.⁴⁷ However, I see the depiction of the trapped wolf from an environmentalist perspective; the wolves are not a totem guide but instead other co-inhabitants of which the speaker is aware. In this poem, Hughes is concerned with the non-human’s ecological value in a habitat that it shares with a human community. The emphasis on wild species’ plight interrupted by humans informs Hughes’s engagement with ecological justice and the otherness of non-human nature in an ecosystem. His examination of the wolves’ value reflects his ethical stance and conception of ecological interconnectedness; agricultural areas are the shared environment between wild creatures and humans.

The dual anthropocentric ideology that other creatures can be cherished by, alienated from, or exploited by human beings becomes heightened in the context of trapping animals. In ‘The Howling of Wolves’, trapping signifies a certain kind of harming other species for humanity’s end. Trapping animals shares violence and destruction with hunting in which the former is considered as removing vermin in agriculture, while the latter incorporates a game and ritual in relation to class, leisure, and tradition. In this light, trapping and hunting indicate a form of violent contact between humans and animals that engages with ethical questions in Hughes’s poetry.

Goodbody asserts that through hunting ‘we are left with the paradox that hunters are among those who care most about, know most intimately and practise the most

⁴⁷ Hong, p. 49

effective stewardship of our wild animals but are motivated by the desire to kill – for pleasure rather than for food'.⁴⁸ Since trapping, like hunting, is a form of violence designed to harm or destroy other species, I argue that the wild animal is exposed to cruelty. The destruction of the wolf condones the anthropocentric ideology of the stronger species and the management of the environment. Hughes speculates on the feeling of the creature with reference to that of the human through words such as 'starving', 'cracking', and 'shivers'. The poet emotively addresses environmental injustice in the later part of the poem as he says: 'The wolf is living for the earth./ But the wolf is small, it comprehends little' (17-18, p. 180). Hughes expresses his sensitivity to the relationship between wild creatures and humanity in relation to the interconnectedness of animal, habitat, and ecology. Once humanity is positioned at the centre of our discussion, the wolf is too 'small' for this world. The environmental consciousness shown in Hughes's poetry is not limited to a human community but must be developed in consideration of other-than-human species. The first line, 'Without world', suggests the environmental consciousness that Hughes tries to perceive in the wolf by speculating about the dual worlds in which it dwells and the 'world' in which human beings share the environment with it.

The idea of value (ecological or economic) is problematic in the case of the wolf; the creature itself is a predator (especially when it appears to be killing cattle and damaging crops). It is anthropocentrically perceived as a pest to farmers, for instance. Yet, in an ecological context, it balances an ecosystem by hunting other small prey as a way of controlling an animal population. Therefore, the wolf lives for the earth and the forest is a habitat for it. Ironically, the claim that the wolf is small and that 'it comprehends little' invokes ecological (in)justice that human culture imposes onto other

⁴⁸ Goodbody, p. 181.

species, especially those that have little economic value in a human perspective. The question that Hughes raises is ecological; he asks about the ‘value’ of the wolf.

Gifford makes a note about the place of Hughes’s social ecology in ecocriticism. With reference to *Wolfwatching* (1989), Gifford claims that environmental responsibility comes with ‘environmental justice’ which draws attention to environmental issues as social issues, ‘just as issues of human rights are often implicated in concerns about exploitation of natural “resources”’.⁴⁹ That is, other species have a right to inhabit an environment or an ecosystem in a similar way that human beings claim their rights to the farmland, or exploit forests and hunt wildlife. As a nature poet and environmentally engaged thinker, Hughes attempts, in poetry, to elevate animal agency as a social and ethical issue. If Peter Singer’s rational advocacy for animal rights is based on an animal’s suffering and its inability to gain access to ‘voice’, ‘The Howling of Wolves’ affirms that campaign; Hughes gives voice to the animal as a collective entity in external nature.

Alongside the question of trapping animals, Hughes also emphasises the idea of animality in relation to ‘wildness’, wildlife extinction, and its cultural value. In ‘February’ (*Lupercal*), Hughes acknowledges his concern for the extinction of wolves by introducing its cultural reference. The animals are associated with the western myth of wilderness and storytelling (*Little Red Riding Hood*). In ‘February’, a folk tale merges with environmental ethics in Hughes’s poetic creativity. The poet opens the first stanza with an image of wild and primitive wolves that disappear from the scene: ‘Nibelung wolves barbed like black pineforest/ Against a red sky, over blue snow; or that long grin/ Above the tucked coverlet – none suffice’ (2-4, p. 61). The word ‘Nibelung’ brings back the old Germanic myth of the wild north which relates to a

⁴⁹ The idea of environmental justice is derived from Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans and Rachel Stein, *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001): Gifford, ‘Hughes’ Social Ecology’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, p. 83.

western cultural landscape while ‘the tucked coverlet’ suggests the disguised wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*. The poem plays with this cultural reference to show that poetry about the wolf can engage with the idea of ‘wilderness’ and storytelling in relation to the transformed environment. Hughes creates a simile of animal physicality and its ecology; the wolves are associated with a ‘black pineforest’ which is constructed (‘barbed’) out of the landscape. Here, the environment is inseparable from the wolf’s body as the poet underlines its connection to habitat. In the poem, the scene is depicted as bleak and cold in the northern territory which contrasts with the present location where the speaker is making a wolf mask.

The poem moves on to show ‘A photograph: the hairless, knuckled feet/ Of the last wolf killed in Britain spoiled him for wolves’ (5-6, p. 61) which invokes a loss of the wild creature that is closely connected to English culture. The wolf is a representative of wildlife and the Western *myth* of woodlands. Its cultural dynamism is interwoven in storytelling. In addition, Hughes compares wildlife extinction with the domesticated animal – the Alsatian – signifying environmental transformation and the domestication of wild animals as human companions. The wolf’s cry and its footprint on the moonlit doorstep and in parkland are memory of the *myth* of this wild species that needs to be reconsidered in terms of cultural and ecological preservation.

By comparing wild wolves with domesticated animals, Hughes considers craftsmanship (mask making) to highlight the intimate relationship between the canine family and a human community. To advocate the preservation of wild animals, the poem juxtaposes engravings of a caged Spanish wolf with artistic activity. This comparison of the dream-wolf, the art work, and the companion animal as subjected to human culture extensively centres on the significance of wildlife in the past (the *myth* of ‘wilderness’) and the present (the symbolic value of wolves and a domesticated species as human companions). In relation to ‘wilderness’, the Spanish wolf is tamed and

controlled; thus its 'wild' and 'natural' instinct is subdued. In this way, 'February' represents disappearing wild wolves to address the idea of space and temporality:

A ball to be thrown. These feet, deprived,
 Disdaining all that are caged, or storied, or pictured,
 Through and throughout the true world search
 For their vanished head, for the world

Vanished with the head, the teeth, the quick eyes –

(17-21, p. 61)

The poem acknowledges the disappearing species and the importance of passing on stories; Hughes's poetry re-imagines the wilderness by considering the wolf mask. The deprivation of the wolf's existence and the disdain that human beings impose on this wild creature epitomise ecological injustice. It is debatable whether it is 'the true world' which the species shares with human beings, or the world in which only humans are eligible to determine which species should be preserved or eliminated. Hughes examines the wolves' 'feet' and 'head' which illustrate the 'wild' spirit in the sense that the wolf's feet are connected to the earth (ecological interconnectedness). The poet describes the wolf running 'Through the hush of parkland' (10, p. 61) while its head becomes a model for art work – a wolf mask.

To examine wilderness as cultural construction, Hughes considers a mask to exemplify the intertwined relationship between the human and the animal. A mask, according to Shamanism, is worn during a ritual in a primitive tribe to bring in a spirit of 'wildness'; it empowers a tribesman to make a connection with the forest in the face of an enigmatic Nature. The significance of making a wolf-mask lies in its artistic element, its spiritual aspect, and conservational motivation. Therefore, the act of making a wolf-mask significantly indicates 'knowing' and keeping/passing its cultural

dimension in relation to the environment. Xerri reads the wolf mask as ‘a door leading into the world from which that aesthetic creation derives its force, the world to which it recognises its origin’ [...] ‘February’ seems to prod us to use art as a means for spirit-invigorating activity, a means by which we become like the wolf and pursue that which we truly require’.⁵⁰ The wolves’ feet and heads are imagined in relation to the interdependence of wild creatures and their bond with the earth. Hughes’s poetry, I argue, can connect oral culture with handicraft and ecological significance. To connect the primitive belief with environmental awareness, Ann Skea notes that:

‘February’ and other poems in *Lupercalia*, celebrate the sort of wild, primitive energies that Hughes’s dream-wolf represents, but they show them as energies which have been caged, suppressed or modified by our society until they only appear in an indirect, sterile form in ‘stories’ or ‘pictures’.⁵¹

Indeed, both Xerri and Skea agree that the idea of power or wild spirit in animals is developed in relation to the idea of space: in a frame, a zoo or a domestic interior. The mode of freedom is not perceived in ‘February’ but it is figuratively ‘framed’ and ‘preserved’ in cultural forms such as stories, pictures, or masks. Hughes’s representation of the wolves is infused with his environmental concerns about wildlife extinction. ‘February’ signifies how poetry can draw attention to the *myth* of ‘wilderness’ and animal subjectivity. While preserving the wolf in the form of a mask is an aesthetic operation, revitalising ‘wilderness’ in storytelling and poetry can be viewed as preserving literary culture in relation to nature. In so doing, ‘February’ succeeds in demonstrating Hughes’s environmental consciousness in poetic language.

⁵⁰ Xerri, p. 69.

⁵¹ Ann Skea, ‘Wolf-Masks: From *Hawk* to *Wolfwatching*’ <<http://ann.skea.com/Wolves.htm>> [accessed 7 November 2012].

In these examples, Hughes's poetry can be seen as environmental, offering advocacy for endangered species; it sees other-than-human creatures as important in the context of ecological interconnectedness and wildlife extinction. By seeing the interconnections between a particular environment and wild creatures, Hughes critically examines the animals in an ecosystem to consider the network of lives. The role of wildlife in human culture is prominently embedded in his animal poetry. As I have shown, the poet focuses on individual species, addressing his environmental thoughts on wildlife and its cultural references in myths, stories, and poetry. In this case, 'February' can be viewed as an environmental and animal poem which addresses the role of art in preserving wild species.

At this point, it is significant to consider the distinctions between, and integration of, environmental literature and literature of animal advocacy in my examination of Hughes's animal poems. Rebecca Raglan and Marian Scholtmeijer argue that environmental literature looks for the whole picture of ecosystems, including the extinction of species, 'for the sake of biodiversity, for aesthetic or spiritual reasons, or for potential future human interests'.⁵² Animal advocacy in literature reflects the impact of humanity on the rights of other species, especially when it comes to extinction and exploitation. This distinction helps to explain 'February' which is both environmental literature and, to a certain extent, poetry of animal advocacy.

According to Raglan and Scholtmeijer, '[a]nimal rights advocates see such exploitation as a failure to acknowledge the similarities between our own and other species'.⁵³ The focus of the wolf in both 'The Howling of Wolves' and 'February' is represented within a bleak environment that reflects the poet's concern for its

⁵² Rebecca Raglan and Marian Scholtmeijer, "'Animals are not believers in ecology': Mapping Critical Differences between Environmental and Animal Advocacy Literatures", *ISLE*, 14 (2007), 121-40 (p. 132).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

extinction, the human/cultural disruption of nature, and the exploitation of wildlife. Hughes's environmental politics is not limited to advocacy for animal subjectivity or the humane treatment of animals, as Raglan and Scholtmeijer define 'animal literature'. Instead, his poetry succeeds in the philosophical consideration of the ecological relationship between the construction of animality and humanity. The poetic treatment and theme of endangered species in relation to Hughes's politics of wildlife conservation will be further discussed in 'The Black Rhino'.

While 'February' discreetly critiques the disappearance of a species, reductively significant in terms of economic value, 'The Black Rhino' directly attacks the rhinoceros horn trade in Africa where the number of wild creatures is dramatically decreasing. Hughes highlights the exploitation of the animal's natural resources, to invoke the distinction between utility and environmental justice. He articulates his concern for endangered species by giving voice to the creature in 'The Black Rhino' and by creating a dialogue between the animal and the poetic speaker. In the note on publication of *Wolfwatching*, Hughes claims that 'The Black Rhino' was written to help raise funds for the campaign to save this species which had diminished in Africa by 1980.⁵⁴

By dividing the poem sequence into three sections, Hughes introduces readers, first, to the physicality of the black rhinoceros. This section refers to the rhinoceros as the 'elastic boulder' and the 'animal missile' (I, 1-2, p. 763) to show how the creature is closely connected to its ecology. Hughes uses the language of material to suggest the animal's physicality. As the word 'elastic' signifies a material's flexibility, so it conveys the black rhino's skin and body. Comparing the beast to the 'boulder', the poem suggests its weight and connects an inanimate element (a rock) to the living creature while the metaphor of a 'missile' attracts readers to its rapid movement and

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Collected Poems*, ed. Paul Keegan, p. 1213.

strength. Also, the ‘missile’ implies the destructive power of technology compared with the non-human creature’s force and vitality.

The poet makes use of a performative discourse to invite the reader – as a voyeur – to watch the rhinoceros, ‘Quick, now’, ‘Get a shot’, ‘Zoom in’ (13, 15, 16, p. 763) in the same way a wildlife documentary is described. As the watchers attain a view of the beasts in the mud and record it drinking, they will see ‘the lava peephole where prehistory peers from the roots of his horn’ (I, 16, p. 763). Hughes subtly enhances voyeurism and interest in the rhino’s origin and a linkage with the habitat; the animal’s natural history is associated with geological time. Significantly, the rhinoceros horn, prized for trading (in some cultures, it is regarded as a traditional source of medicine on the Eastern markets), is presented as the root or origin of the animal’s tragic plight. Hughes invokes the archaeological language to highlight the rhino’s association with the environment; ‘At a horn-down gallop, the hieroglyph of amazement’ (I, 21, p. 763). The word ‘hieroglyph’ suggests an Egyptian sacred writing which is compared to the creature’s footprints, the pictorial movement. In this context, an image, word, and metaphor are incorporated in the representation of the wild species.

By creating the dialogue between the black rhino and the observant speaker, the second section considers the root of extinction and the illusive construction of medicinal culture and spiritual belief. Importantly, the horn is used as a decorative item that is believed to be a totem to protect humans from danger. Hughes creates a dreamlike vision in a dialogue between the sleeper and the animal which reflects misunderstanding. Although similar to a mythic creature – the unicorn – the rhino is a resource:

To be sacrificed –

That opiate beast

Worshipped by

The humbly addicted

Bodily ills

And misery

Of the whole East:

(II, 18-24, p. 764)

Hughes produces rhythm to reinforce a human being's mystical vision by elaborating on how humans use the creature to cure illness and serve their totemic beliefs. The medicinal attributes lie in the black rhino's flesh while the horn is essentially used as an adornment: 'The dagger that stands/ His touchy pride's/ Totem pole –' (II, 40-42, p. 765). The horn as a totem to fight in battle implicates the belief in animality which is associated with bravery and heroism that humans would like to possess in a specific battle. As mentioned earlier, wild animals are anthropomorphised in human culture, particularly in metaphors of violence and aggression; this negatively informs the culture/nature divide. Therefore, the dagger decorated with the horn reflects the paradoxical relationship between humans and animals: killing the beast to possess its 'wildness'.

Hughes alliterates to enrich the sounds and reinforce meanings: 'drug', 'divides' and 'small', 'strips', and scraps'. The horn is conceived as a 'drug' which is falsely constructed while the 'small' 'strips' of the rhino's body are turned into 'scraps' of disillusionment. The paradoxical notion of 'relic' recurs in the poem suggesting the irony of wildlife extinction that will never be restored. On the one hand, there is a sense of respect for the properties of the horn in the word 'relic'; on the other, it is seen as an object to be possessed in order to overcome fear and danger. The 'relic' of the rhinoceros in this context signifies, in fact, its deprived value as a remainder of the past biodiversity.

In the dialogue, the speaker 'I' who describes the utility of the creature argues with the rhinoceros as 'You', and blames its valuable horn as a major cause of its extinction. However, the perspective is reversed when the speaker is accused of the crime by hunting/poaching the victimised beast:

What can you know
 Of wrong or right
 Of evil or good?
 You are the crime.

(II, 61-64, p. 765)

'You' is, in fact, a direct address to the reader and the general public who clearly see the rhinoceros's predicament but fail to protect the species. Hughes uses the poetic dialogue to address the ethical question of hunting and the moral issue highlighted in the destruction of other creatures. At the end of the poem, Hughes leaves the image of the creature 'As a silhouette/ Writ in soot' (II, 86-87, p. 766) to develop a sense of loss in the natural world. The question of who is to be blamed for the black rhinoceros's extinction informs Hughes's environmental ethics, since it is economic value and totemic culture that decimate the endangered species. The image of wildlife watchers at the beginning is replaced by the disappearance of the wild creature. Hughes's contemplation of the rising sun in section II is symbolic: 'And horn of light –/ Be other than black' (II, 75-76, p. 766). Ironically, it is the light (of the East) of a healing power and a totemic belief that turns the rhinoceros's predicament into (deadly) black.

In section III, Hughes directly attacks horn trading which creates economic value; a middle man is 'counting the notes in the wallets and the purses' (III, 19, p. 767) and the youths are 'gripping a dagger by the hilt of rhino horn at eight or nine thousand dollars a handful' (III, 16, p. 767). To what extent is totemic belief commercialised at the expense of the wild creature? Here, Hughes critically presents the value of

rhinoceros horn inflected with ‘the delusions of man’ (III, 4, p. 766) to develop his theme of a malady of humans’ obsession with the object. The rhinoceros’s healing quality and totemic value are ironically inscribed on the creature. Ironically, the poet uses the physical and psychological symptoms such as ‘hallucination’, ‘phantasmagoria’ (III, 7, p. 766), and ‘waves of nausea ripples of mirage’ (III, 13, p. 766) projected onto the black rhino to create a sense of ‘delusion’ in humans. In addition, the poet raises the ethical issue in his critique of endangered species at the international level as he refers to the rhino’s horn being purchased in ‘night-bazaars of Japan and Indo-China’ (III, 12, p. 766). In so doing, the poem responds to wildlife extinction and addresses environmental injustice towards other species.

Causal processes and mechanisms in nature

In addition to issues of unknowability in relation to wild creatures and species extinction, physical environments and natural phenomena are often invoked in Hughes’s poetry to suggest ‘wildness’ in external nature (in contexts of uncontrollable forces in non-living elements). As a cultural construction, ‘nature’, understood as environment and ecology, is cultivated, shaped, and distinguished by values that serve humanity. What human beings do to their environments can be interpreted as constructive or destructive. It is within an ecological discourse that ideas of exploitation or conservation are formed. Soper discusses the idea of wilderness and the independence of nature (independent from human intervention) as follows:

In fact a distinction of this [*whether there is nature, not humanly created, entirely free of the impact of human management*] seems equally applicable in the case of wilderness, which differs from the cultivated landscape not in virtue of the greater independence of the natural processes that have gone

into its making, but in virtue of the fact that humanity had no hand in shaping their outcome. But if it is nature at this level – nature conceived as causal process – that the ecologists have in mind when they speak of the ‘independence’ of nature, then it is not clear that this is the kind of thing we can be said to ‘destroy’ or can be called upon to value and conserve.⁵⁵

The concept of nature, as Soper addresses it, is ambiguous, especially when it is associated with ‘wilderness’ and causal processes which reveal ‘wildness’ in my interpretation. For Soper, nature, in the name of ‘wilderness’, is independent; humanity has had no hand in shaping its outcome. I argue then, that in Hughes’s poetry, physical nature regarded as causal processes can signify ‘wildness’. Independence, understood in relation to natural phenomena, seasonal cycles, and elemental forces, is made apparent in Hughes’s poetry.

Instead of focusing on ‘wilderness’ as pristine, Hughes identifies the power of physical phenomena (in relation to animals) in diverse landscapes to signify what is ‘wildness’. For example, ‘Wind’ in *The Hawk in the Rain* represents the power of physical environments, especially the moorland; natural forces are personified as outraged, violent, and destructive. ‘Wind’ is forceful in its graphic description of the storm, sweeping and shaking the landscapes where the human subject can only observe its power and the impact it has on his environment: ‘The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,/ Winds stampeding the fields under the window/ Floundering black astride and blinding wet’ (2-4, p. 36). Hughes uses many action verbs including ‘crashing’, ‘booming’, and ‘floundering’, to highlight the wind’s force. The primary stress of each word constitutes the prosodic movement as much as the physical reverberation of sound in the air. Hughes imagines the wind as an outraged being, out of control, threatening to the persona ‘I’; the environmental element is

⁵⁵ Soper, p. 154.

elevated to the status of a violent warrior, '[...] wielded/ Blade-light, luminous and emerald' (6-7, p 36). As the speaker contemplates the wind, he is inevitably conscious of that causal power in nature:

The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope,

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,

At any second to bang and vanish with a flap:

The wind flung a magpie away and a black-

Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. [...]

(12-16, p. 36)

In this section, anthropomorphism is deployed to represent human characteristics in the natural phenomenon. The wind sweeps through the 'quivering' fields, and causes intense and rapid movement in the sky; Hughes uses 'quivering' and 'grimace' to intensify imagery and emotion. In so doing, the poet imagines the wind by using the language of the body which is affected by natural power with a degree of violence. This anthropomorphism invokes the power of language to refashion the natural elements in a dynamic manner. The use of 'drummed', 'bang', and 'flap' indicates the wind's power to create auditory effects. The images and simile in this stanza are significantly imagined to be heard when the hills are compared to a tent 'drummed' by the wind that bangs and strains its guyrope. In this way, Hughes's language of elemental power extends beyond the natural phenomena or causal processes towards a phonetic effect.

In the last two stanzas, the poet focuses on human realisation: '[...], we grip/ Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,' (19-20, p. 37). In this instance, the security of our cultural constructions, as seen in the 'book', is lost to nature's power. Scigaj argues that Hughes's language is 'distinctively muscular and kinetic', and in this poem, the register 'matches it with the power of nature to convey how the psyche strains to

adjust to extraordinary experiences'.⁵⁶ The poem moves from the wider landscape to the room in the house where the human figure senses elemental movement. At the end of the poem, the narrator hears 'the stones cry out under the horizons' (24, p. 37) which is a powerfully distinctive personification of the wind interwoven with stones and sky. Hughes effectively highlights nature's power, as an independent agent. The last line graphically suggests the unity of the landscape as Hughes integrates the elements including air (wind), fire (fire place), water (rain storm), and earth (stones). The poet anthropomorphises these natural/physical elements to highlight the excessive power of external nature and reconsider the idea of wildness through poetic language.

'Wind', as 'wildness' in a managed landscape, shows human beings as vulnerable and insignificant in relation to the environment. The wind in this poem could be neither good nor bad but is free from the domain of ethical judgment. Hughes's linguistic registers (personification) can reveal the other radical perspective towards, and the dual conception of, nature that might be seen as hostile and picturesque.

Causal processes in nature such as the effects of wind, flood, land transformation, or even climate change, represent the power of environments as being out of human management or control. What human beings think to be constructive to environments might lead to either negative or positive change, while the causal processes, in nature, operate in response to those modifications in ways that are detrimental to human culture and habitation ('The Howling of Wolves', 'Wind', 'Crow Hill', and 'Heptonstall'). The conceptualisation of physical phenomena having a degree of independent agency is central to Hughes's idea of nature, developed in his poetry. Human beings are part of the environment, not as a maker, who claims ownership, but as an inhabitant.

⁵⁶ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 6.

In 'Crow Hill' (*Lupercal*), the poet describes a particular 'ecology' and a degree of interconnectedness between humans, wild creatures, and the local environment. On the moors, a human subject is not a central presence but a passerby who observes the interaction between wind, water, light – the natural elements – and other creatures that constitute the ecological system. Given that the farmland is constantly transformed by human beings and natural phenomena, 'Crow Hill' draws attention to the causal processes which shape a cultivated environment. With an image of farmers working in wind and rain, the poem develops its main theme:

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

(1-6, p. 62)

'Crow Hill' represents the vulnerability of the human habitations and suggests the weather's both constructive and destructive qualities that shape the environment. The word 'oozing' creates an image of liquid flowing out of the earth which can be seen as nourishing the farm ('craters'). However, the rain's relentlessness (which can be considered destructive) disturbs an individual. Hughes indicates the locality of the farm ('the sodden moor') to draw on the power of landscape that shapes his poetic imagination. Indeed, this powerful wind and rain shapes the way he conceptualises 'wildness' in causal processes. Hughes uses the phrase to 'shake/ Dreams beneath sleep' to suggest the influence of the external environment in interrupting the individual's consciousness. As the poem moves from inside the house to the open landscape, the

farmland is visualised with a farmer walking along the stone ridges in the rain storm; the stones represent the influence of causal process in the manmade landscape:

Buttoned from the blowing mist
 Walk the ridges of ruined stone.
 What humbles these hills has raised
 The arrogance of blood and bone,
 And thrown the hawk upon the wind,
 And lit the fox in the dripping ground.

(13-18, p. 62)

The wind and light that has ‘thrown the hawk’ and ‘lit the fox’ intensifies the anti-romantic power of independent nature as discussed already in ‘The Hawk in the Rain’ and ‘Wind’. ‘Crow Hill’ is similar to ‘Wind’ in representing nature as a causal force that shapes a specific environment. The depiction of these poems mirrors the poet’s consciousness of his surroundings which is informed by the physical mechanisms of nature. With the same landscape, Hughes envisages the moor beaten by a storm, in which physical power is manifested to underline the interconnectedness of all creatures and other non-living elements, as the stones ‘awaken’ and the hawk and the fox are minimised by the violent wind. ‘Crow Hill’ offers the interaction between the earth and the storm that sweeps the hills and brings these creatures to the ground in language which suggests Hughes’s consciousness of the human ecology. The storm’s elemental power is demonstrated with light(ning) that is anthropomorphised in the phrase ‘The arrogance of blood and bone’. In other words, ‘arrogance’ implies the uncontrollable quality or ‘wildness’ of wind and rain that throws the hawk and fox. Here, Hughes’s poetic language creates the battle between the elemental/causal power and the living creature in its struggle to survive.

The representation of the ‘weather-beaten’ moorland constitutes an examination of the other-than-human environment, which, although cultivated and managed, offers an insight into nature’s ‘wildness’ in poetry. For Hughes, the moorland, at a particular time, is not only a pastoral environment in which sheep and cows thrive, but is capable, too of exercising an independent power beyond human control. The conceptualisation of nature has been developed by ecocritics in relation to the landscapes of nature poetry and the pastoral tradition. In *Pastoral* (1999), Gifford scrutinises the concept of pastoral as a return to ‘idealised descriptions’ of the countryside.⁵⁷ He then points out an anti-pastoral perspective in which we see the countryside differently by focusing on hard agricultural labour and the decline of rural communities. Gifford proceeds to develop a concept of the ‘post-pastoral’ with characteristics which are summarised as follows: first, there is awe in the attention to the natural world where an anthropocentric stance is shifted to an ecocentric one. Second, there is recognition of a creative-destructive process in the universe in birth, death, growth, decay, ecstasy, and dissolution. Third, there is an inevitable separation and (re)connection between nature and culture.

A respect for nature as culture is heightened in Hughes’s poetry since nature is conceptualised in relation to various and powerful forms including violent animals, vibrant landscapes such as moorlands, rivers, rocks, earth, and forests, and independent physical phenomena such as wind and rain. The representation of a dynamic environment in ‘Crow Hill’ is not passive but powerfully active. At this point, in weather-beaten landscapes, Hughes’s poetry primarily contemplates and reflects awe in the causal power of nature in ways which are redolent of Gifford’s representation of post-pastoral. The poet’s encounters with natural landscapes constitute a sense of place and develop the poetic voice.

⁵⁷ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 1.

Hughes's representation of Yorkshire landscapes is shaped by harsh weather; the depiction of natural elements in anti-pastoral and post-pastoral modes is significant in 'Heptonstall', (*Wodwo*). Hughes's poetry becomes more serious and complex than in the earlier collections. Nature cannot be separated from culture and vice versa; Hughes subtly sets the village as a background to draw attention to human culture in the depiction of gravestones that suggest the presence of the spirit on otherwise secular ways of life. With local specificity, Hughes creates the anti-pastoral environment of 'Heptonstall' in relation to the causal processes in a human community:

Black village of gravestones.

Skull of an idiot

Whose dreams die back

Where they were born.

(1-4, p. 170)

[...]

Life tries.

Death tries.

The stone tries.

Only the rain never tires.

(13-16, p. 171)

Locally unique, gravestones are a palpable, symbolic signifier of the dead. Environmentally conscious, Hughes imagines the skulls of 'an idiot', 'a sheep' (5, p. 170), and 'a bird' (9, p. 171) to emphasise the natural cycles of decomposition. The poet plays with the word 'tries' three times, 'Life tries/ Death tries/ The stone tries' to signify continual processes. As the technique of repetition works, Hughes's deployment of 'tries' suggests an enduring and continuous transformation of the human environment; his consciousness is made by sensitivity to causal processes, such as rain, which 'never tires' in the final line. In so doing, Hughes incorporates the aural dimension (repetition

of ‘tries’) with the environmental phenomenon (the constant rain). I argue that Hughes’s play with ‘tries’ and ‘tires’ represents the dichotomy of human endeavour and the natural processes. The rain has agency to change the landscape as well as the human way of life. The significance of the gravestones eroded by the constant rain is associated with the local landscape of Heptonstall where the history of industrialism is inseparable from the influence of the Methodist church (which will be discussed in Chapter III).

By depicting the gravestones in relation to constant rain, Hughes invokes natural forces, constructive or destructive, to consider how external environments influence human adaptation to place. Heptonstall, located on the top of a hill and exposed to extreme weather conditions, is described in a powerful language of environmental change. Along with the physical transformations of place, humans and other species survive and thrive while non-human nature (including rocks) continues to alter according to the seasonal cycle. Hughes is interested in the concurrence of historical and environmental changes, from the old kingdom of Elmet, to the industrial mining community, to the quiet village in the present. His representation of cultural monuments to change, such as the gravestones, and the natural elements – rain, rock, and the life cycle – suggests human culture in a highly specific form. ‘Heptonstall’ not only addresses a sense of place and belonging, but also engages with the alternating constructive and destructive forces of nature in human culture, in a particular, personal, and dynamic way.

Hughes’s poetry develops his consideration of observable, physical environments through representations of animals and landscapes, making an appeal to an idea of ‘nature’ in an idiosyncratic, powerful poetic language. Mountains, trees, rivers, birds, wolves, and other creatures are interdependent elements within diverse ecosystems that interact and constitute the evolution of nature’s network. As Sagar notes, the language of poetry (metaphor) seeks to avoid the consequences of dualism

which contains the dichotomy of human-nature, ‘creative and destructive, beautiful and ugly, human and non-human, male and female, inner and outer’.⁵⁸ ‘Heptonstall’ shows that nature is beyond human control, to a certain extent, and embodies a vital force that can be reconsidered as ‘wildness’ (a survival instinct in animals and elemental force in causal processes and natural phenomena). This ‘wildness’ consistently transforms the poet’s world and environmental awareness. Hughes’s poetic imagination details the changes in environments and examines the interconnections of humans and other creatures. ‘Wind’, ‘Crow Hill’, and ‘Heptonstall’ reflect his sophisticated and environmental consciousness and importantly raise questions about the relationship between man and nature as a proper subject for poetry.

While ‘Heptonstall’ creates a vibrant and complex environment in relation to human communities, ‘October Dawn’ in *The Hawk in the Rain* manifests the causal power of nature as a physical process and examines environmental temporality. The poet approaches physical forces of natural phenomena in a poetic language that critiques the independence of external nature in a human domain. ‘October Dawn’ refashions the domestic environment using animate imagery. The ice age brings back ‘wilderness’ in the metaphor of nature reclaiming its territory through the power of ice. Although the poem begins with the inception of Autumn, ‘October is marigold’ (1, p. 37), a transition of time from night to dawn makes possible the imagining of the encroaching ice. The ‘marigold’ symbolises time moving from summer to autumn; as these flowers bloom in autumn, the relative decline of physical fecundity defines the local environment in which the seasonal cycle dominates the earth. Hughes deploys a marigold to picture the dawn’s resilient and outlasting qualities as well as to make a distinction between the fecundity of warm summer and the coming cold winter. With this temporal transition,

⁵⁸ Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature*, p. 41.

the image of a glass of wine left outside overnight blurs the familiar boundaries between human culture and the natural landscape:

A glass half full of wine left out

To the dark heaven all night, by dawn

Has dreamed a premonition

Of ice across its eye as if

The ice-age had begun its heave.

(2-6, p. 37)

The poem demonstrates the human domain proclaimed by ice on the lawn where humans have ‘overtrodden’ (7, p. 37), and even the ‘whistling green/ Shrubbery are doomed’ (8-9, p. 37). Hughes highlights the power of ice to fix the environment and take control over the mobility of lands and rivers. In particular, its penetrating quality into places like a ‘spearhead’ (10, p. 37) suggests the energy to transform liquid and break through a hard surface. This ‘spearheading ice’ recalls Hughes’s metaphorical treatment of wild creatures as weapons and machines in other poems. Here is nature, animated:

First a skin, delicately here

Restraining a ripple from the air;

Soon plate and rivet on pond and brook;

Then tons of chain and massive lock

To hold rivers. [...]

(11-15, p. 37)

The description of the freezing pond and rivers epitomises the physical process which gradually transforms the surface of water into ice, compared to a 'skin'; Hughes's language of the body is incorporated with the mechanism of the earth. In this process, 'October Dawn' shows the interaction between natural elements – air and water. Hughes elevates the causal power in nature to a superior level by using 'heave', 'restrain', 'rivet', 'tons', and 'massive' to signify control, weight, and energy. The following lines surprisingly produce an image of a lost world by the invocation of pre-historic wild creatures: '[...], Then, sound by sight/ Will Mammoth and Sabre-tooth celebrate/ Reunion [...]' (15-17, p. 37). The resurrection of Mammoth and Sabre-tooth cat visually and theoretically reveals Hughes's projection of 'wild' nature and its temporality onto scenes of domestic human habitation. The return of the Mammoth and Sabre-tooth cat suggests the return of 'wilderness' in the natural history of this place via the causal process; the place is ecologically revived by a fantasy of time in the context of the present environment.

The dichotomy of fire and ice in the last lines is re-imagined to forge imagery of glaciations. With the reinforcement of low temperature, the relatively heavy weight increased by the freezing process is beyond human perception. Hughes demonstrates it grasping the earth as if '[...] a fist of cold/ Squeezes the fire at the core of the world' (17-18, p. 37). The metaphor of 'a fist' recalls the physical power of the 'invisible hand' that acts as a natural mechanism in the earth. Hughes intensifies the force of ice with 'fist' and 'squeeze' to show that the power of words can penetrate into the unknowability of nature in the same way ice pierces into the core of the earth. In this light, the geological dimension of 'October Dawn' is connected with human environments and the causal processes of nature, imagined in poetry.

Although most of Hughes's dominant imagined landscapes are based on moorlands, valleys, rivers, and farm environments, his interest in the vast and variable

mechanism of the sea is also significant in his constructions of wild nature. In connection with the power of 'wildness', Hughes creates the distinctive imagery of violent animals and an uncontrollable, mysterious environment through the phenomenon of the seascape. His presentation of seascape is as complex as the moorlands and rivers in relation to 'wildness'. 'Relic' (*Lupercal*) manifests Hughes's contemplation of an aquatic 'landscape' that represents decomposition/renewal as a physical process drawing on the remains of creatures.

The poet's contemplation of a jawbone at the sea's edge outlines his conception of 'wildness' manifested in the sea's physical processes (the ebb and flow of tides). Hughes's demonstration of the sea's dynamism shows the development of his environmental consciousness and eco-poetics; the sea creates lives at the beginning of a cycle, destroys them at the end, and continuously regenerates the materials of life as a planetary mechanism. As Sagar notes, the dominant theme in *Lupercal* is that nature is a 'devourer, the brainless mouth and gut'.⁵⁹ The sea for Hughes is simultaneously a constructive and destructive environment: 'There, crabs, dogfish, broken by the breakers or tossed/ To flap for half an hour and turn to a crust/ Continue the beginning [...]' (2-4, p. 78). The poem draws attention to the dead creatures, to depict the sea as a vast tank carrying both living and non-living creatures. These remains are transformed by the earth's never-ending natural processes since they essentially sustain the earth's mechanism, to 'Continue the beginning'. The idea of cyclical temporality is palpably figured in this phrase because the sea devours water creatures, returns them to the land, and consequently creates organisms to fulfil the cycle. In this context, Hughes demonstrates the power of language to imagine the earth's causal processes and reveal the temporality of the sea.

⁵⁹ Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature*, p. 83.

In 'Relic', time is not a linear process but instead folds the present and uncurls the past before the beginning of the future. Given that the three realms of temporality are inseparable from the decomposition process, the sea transforms and 'digests' the creatures into remains. These relics will be turned into basic elements (earth, water, air, and light) by natural processes to form a living organism that eventually evolves and interacts with its environment. Hughes makes time central to his poetic endeavours, revealing 'wildness' in relation to the causal processes in nature: 'Time in the sea eats its tail [...]' (12, p. 78). The marine environment is philosophically integrated with the idea of time and 'wildness', in this context excluded from humanity. It does not take only 'half an hour' to shift the bones of crabs and dogfish and transform them, but it takes the whole process of decomposition to 'digest' them before renewal begins.

'Relic' then returns 'wildness' to an image of destructive forces in the marine environment. Graphically, it is the sea that consumes:

[...] The deeps are cold:

In that darkness camaraderie does not hold:

Nothing touches but, clutching, devours. And the jaws,

Before they are satisfied or their stretched purpose

Slacken, go down jaws; go gnawn bare. [...]

(4-8, p. 78)

Hughes focuses on consumption in nature which signifies decomposition through the language of the body. 'Jaws' seems to be a key image that connotes grinding and consuming. With words such as 'clutching' and 'devours', 'Relic' vigorously embodies 'wildness' in the representation of violent forces, constructed in symbolic remains (jaws) of the creatures and natural power at work. In this light, Ann Skea notes that '[t]he sea, too, destroys, breaks down and returns all things to their bare essentials –

their origins'.⁶⁰ The origins are described as bones, shells, skulls, of which the jaw bone represents the process of creation and decomposition. Thus, the metaphor of jaws 'going down' is a figure of impersonal environmental violence.

The visualised description of jaws devouring one another signifies the violence of nature represented in the sea. 'Relic' indicates Hughes's powerful imagination of the sea where nature's primitive savagery is exemplified in the cycle of creation and de-creation: 'This is the sea's achievement; with shells,/ Vertebrae, claws, carapaces, skulls' (10-11, p. 78). The process of decomposition and renewal comes full circle when Hughes claims the return of the jaws and other remains from the sea to the beach as an 'achievement'. With an emphasis on renewal, the sea's achievement is seen in its creativity, as one of the origins of evolution. All creatures are washed down the rivers and accumulated before being cleansed, as seen in 'shells', 'vertebrae', 'claws', 'carapaces', and 'skulls' until the regeneration begins. Hughes's language of the body continues to reach out to his imaginative grasp of impersonal causal processes.

'Relic' ends with what is now a very familiar image: 'In the sea. This curved jawbone did not laugh/ But gripped, gripped and is now a cenotaph' (15-16, p. 78). This image reflects biological transformation as much as cultural association; the jaw bone is fossilised in natural science while the 'cenotaph' symbolises human culture (and a religious affinity with death, loss, and memory) figured in the remains in ways which embody its ecological significance. Craig Robinson sees nature's power in the sea by claiming that awe remains an appropriate emotion which includes 'horror'.⁶¹ The macabre tone of a gripping jawbone, then turned to a cenotaph, is highly complex because the 'cenotaph' symbolises a monument for the dead in a battle or war (which

⁶⁰ Skea, 'Note on Teaching and Understanding a Ted Hughes Poem' (2008) <<http://ann.skea.com/NQ4analysis.htm>> [accessed 7 February 2013].

⁶¹ Craig Robinson, *Ted Hughes as Shepherd Being* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 24.

will be detailed in Chapter III). However, Hughes deploys a sense of loss embodied in a memorial to honour the dead (of the animal) in relation to the jawbone that has been through killing to prevail (in another form). The conjunction of heroism in human culture is ecologically represented as ‘wildness’ in relation to other creatures.

The link between a cenotaph and heroism in human culture can be explained through the examination of death in nature. The poet depicts the sea’s ecological cycle in relation to wildlife, in the metaphor of *remains*, to reflect his environmental consciousness and address his awe in external nature. As Hughes considers the bone in the sea, he identifies its implication in relation to ecosystems in the same way as the relic is revered in religious contexts. The transformation of natural elements, in contact with violent forces and natural mechanisms (the sea), can be viewed as memorialisation in human culture. Hughes’s choice of title implies sacredness in nature and ‘wildness’ in the hunt of creatures.

‘Relic’ operates in a discourse of spiritual ‘memory’/memorial which is associated with sanctification. The cenotaph at the end of the poem suggests that reverence in the natural remains. However, the word relic signifies something remaindered, forgotten, and useless. ‘Relic’, which suggests Hughes’s awe in nature, imagines the decomposition process through the representation of the jaws and non-human creatures’ remains. It reveals the poet’s conception of ‘wildness’ and manifests his ecological consciousness in the renewal process.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined representations of animals and environments through which Hughes develops an environmental consciousness in poetry. He does so by focusing on the development of an eco-poetics which reaches out to the unknowability of nature. I

make a distinction between ‘wildness’ and ‘wilderness’, by examining animal poems which represent the radical differences of other-than-human species in relation to human knowledge. Hughes contests the notion of anthropomorphic animality by deploying a highly metaphorical, poetic language to investigate how human culture attempts to define wildlife and external nature in the ambiguous act of hunting and trapping. I draw on Soper’s ecological discourse of nature, and Morton’s ambient poetics, considering the environments in which animals are poetically situated to emphasise the independence, yet also the interconnectedness of wild creatures, their habitats, and man-made environments.

Alongside his environmental concerns, Hughes advocates the acquisition of environmental justice and a sense of animal subjectivity by pointing out the impact of species extinction and the centrality of wildlife in art and literature. Hughes emphasises the importance of external nature and human communities, spaces which inform his ecological awareness, the development of his environmental consciousness, and his eco-poetics (the language of the body, metaphors of nature, and the integration of ecological elements in his poems). Towards the end, I illustrate nature’s ‘wildness’ in relation to an anti- or post-pastoral mode, borrowed from Gifford, which describes Hughes’s dynamic and imaginary landscapes of moorlands, valleys, and the sea, as well as worked landscapes. Chapter II will explore *Moortown Diary*, in which the poet records his first-hand experience of handling livestock and managing the land, as a dedication to the deceased farmer. I will demonstrate Hughes’s eco-poetics and a modern refashioning of the georgic and elegy in the context of day-to-day farming. His examination of animal subjectivity, the human body and the earth’s body continues to be central in my reading of *Moortown Diary*.

Chapter II *Moortown Diary: The Modern Georgic; the Ethic of Care in the Human-Animal Relationship; Elegy*

Chapter I argues that Hughes's conceptualisation of external nature is defined by the concept of 'wild' forces, distinct from that of 'wilderness'. The concept of nature developed by Hughes is not confined to unpeopled landscapes, or animals and their habitats, but is intertwined with human communities. This chapter will explore *Moortown Diary* (1979) which exemplifies the poetic imagination of farm life and reconnects humans with domesticated creatures in relation to labour. As Craig Robinson remarks, Hughes as the farmer-poet is a good shepherd: 'man as custodian and helper of nature'.¹ His poetry of farming is characterised with hard work in the georgic mode incorporated with elegiac sentiments.

The first section of this chapter demonstrates Hughes's reinvention of the georgic tradition in *Moortown Diary*. Farming practice requires hard labour as seen in animal husbandry and the cultivation of the land which constitute Hughes's environmental awareness. I argue that *Moortown Diary* is engaged with birth and death, growth and decay, success and failure, the interactions between the human and the animal along the changing seasons, and with the necessity of human labour and custodianship.² The practice of shepherding and harnessing of livestock reflects co-operation and attentiveness between the human and the animal and reveals Hughes's ecological consciousness; the farming environment is a 'working laboratory' where humans meet nature.³ This chapter considers Hughes's writing process as capturing the first-hand experience of farming and investigates the fresh capacity of free verse to follow animals and human beings' interactions with their environments in 'full rawness

¹ Craig Robinson, 'The good shepherd: Moortown Elegies', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 257-84 (p. 267).

² See the concept of georgic poetry in David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 2003), p. 91.

³ Robinson, 'The good shepherd: *Moortown Elegies*', p. 262.

and immediacy'.⁴ As an observer, Hughes reproduces direct experiences in prose-like form to represent working landscapes, animals, and the seasons.

The second section analyses poems about birth and death in relation to animal husbandry and an ethic of care. Virginia Held notes that in a human relationship, the ethic of care focuses on the need of the 'cared for' and values emotions such as sympathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness that need to be cultivated in human relationships.⁵ This approach could be considered in relation to the treatment of farm animals, as the 'cared for' need attentiveness and sensitivity from the farmer, specifically in coping with pain and illness or, conversely, preparation for the market. An ethic of care can explain the interdependence between man and animal via humane treatment and the morality of custodianship that incorporates Hughes's sympathetic imagination and sense of environmental responsibility to sustain human-animal relationships in poetry.

The last section of this chapter examines poems that were dedicated to Hughes's father-in-law Jack Orchard, to consider the elegiac mode and human death in conjunction with animal death in *Moortown Diary*. Building on Edward Hadley's *The Elegies of Ted Hughes* (2010), I explore Hughes's contemplation of farm work as a form of memorial in the elegiac convention to remember and mourn the deceased farming figure.⁶ I argue that Moortown farm is a mourning landscape that memorialises the dead; Hughes represents Orchard's heroic and physical labour in working with the earth, machine, and animal. At the same time, lamentation in the external environment unfolds the presence/absence of the land steward and the bond with his subjects

⁴ David Whitley, 'The Fox is a jolly farmer and we farm the same land': Ted Hughes and Farming,' in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Mark Wormald, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 96-111 (pp. 98-99).

⁵ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 10-12.

⁶ Edward Hadley, *The Elegies of Ted Hughes* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2010).

(animals and the farmland). The last six poems in the collection will be analysed in relation to farm guardianship, the human body, memory, place, and hard labour.

Modern Georgic: the reinvention of Pastoral

Moortown Diary is, I argue, a reinvention of modern nature poetry which combines georgic sentiment and key elements of the pastoral tradition. Drawing on the central ecocritical ideas of David Fairer's work,⁷ this chapter analyses Hughes's interest in the ecological relationship between poetry, agricultural practice, and rural life. *Moortown Diary* focuses on the interdependence between domesticated animals as the subject of care and the farm steward; it emphasises the key ideas of practicality and attentiveness in the environment. I establish the distinctions between pastoral and anti-/post-pastoral in Chapter I with an analysis of 'Heptonstall' in which dead sheep are depicted in relation to the hostile local weather. Chapter II focuses on Hughes's engagement with human labour and passion in farming which, as I will show, can be regarded as the modern georgic.

The pastoral and georgic are closely interconnected while co-operation and the reality of hard rural work are particularly highlighted in the latter. John Goodridge argues that the pastoral is limited to its idealisation of nature while the georgic centrally considers the practicality of labour in rural life: '[p]astoral is a manifestation of an apparently universal, pre-conscious, human desire to an ideal and simple world. Because this desire cannot usually be fulfilled in the "real" world it is the natural territory of art and literature'.⁸ In comparison to romanticised peace and harmony, '[I]labour is a characteristic theme of the English georgic, in contrast to the pastoral, in

⁷ David Fairer, "'Where fuming trees refresh the thirsty air": The World of Eco-Georgic', *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 40 (2011), 201-18. The idea of georgic mode in *Moortown Diary* is also mentioned in Whitley, 2013, p. 97; Gifford, 2004, p. 41; Gifford, 2009, p. 53.

⁸ John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 3.

which labour is normally hidden. The georgic presents a positive, and even a heroic view of labour as a pleasurable and a socially progressive activity'.⁹ For Fairer, '[i]f pastoral evoked the temperate poise and innocence of the Golden Age, or its Christian equivalent the Garden of Eden, the georgic is located in the fallen world of corruption and death, the changing seasons, and the necessity of human labour'.¹⁰ I read *Moortown Diary* as a combination of both the pastoral and the georgic by focusing on the integration of human labour in the farming environment.

Georgic writing can be traced back to Hesiod's *Works and Days* (eighth century BC) as a founding text,¹¹ while eighteenth-century georgic poetry is modelled after Virgil's *Georgics* (36-29 BC): a didactic poem on cultivation and animal husbandry.¹² The georgic tradition became popular through James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726-44) which considers the natural elements in agriculture, John Philips's *Cyder* (1708) which examines the cultivation of the apple orchard and cider production, and John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757) which is written to instruct in shepherding practice and textile economy.¹³ These georgic texts are created to be didactic and instructive for farmers. They send out, too, an environmental message of control, management, and an ethic of care to the readers.

In relation to ecocriticism, Fairer argues that georgic poetry – which is often viewed by modern ecocritics as peripheral and antagonistic to green rhetoric due to its desire to harness nature – can, in fact, 'supply a contrastive language that helps the ecocritical to define itself'.¹⁴ The perception that the georgic is fascinated by the mastery of nature and exploitation of natural resources for human ends is limited and

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰ Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789*, p. 91.

¹¹ Fairer, 'The World of Eco-Georgic', p. 202.

¹² Juan Christian Pellicer, 'The Georgic', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Christine Gerrard (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 403-16 (p. 403).

¹³ Goodridge, 1995; Fairer, 2003; Pellicer, 2014.

¹⁴ Fairer, 'The World of Eco-Georgic', p. 203.

reductive. As Fairer writes, georgic work is represented as ‘uncertain, challenging and occasionally frustrating’.¹⁵ Nature can be seen as recalcitrant. Fairer suggests that the georgic is concerned with co-operation and care between humans and nature, which will recover mutual respect between the two domains. Hughes’s depiction of *Moortown Diary* highlights the integration of attentiveness in the pastoral and the representation of toil, misery, and co-operation in the georgic.

The georgic’s dominant characteristic is its recognition of the complexity of life and nature. The world’s fertility and abundance are ‘the result of hard work, effective implements, foresight and expertise’.¹⁶ Fairer claims that it is care in practice which is represented in relation to interdependence and co-operation between man and nature:

It is georgic that really struggles with nature, recognises diversity, tries to understand how an interdependent system can be *sustained* and properly *exploited* (and knows how the two go together). Its practicality is a key feature, and its recognition of issues like excess, waste, process; its reading of the signs, its temporal responsibility, its shifts of emphasis from leisured consumption in favour of practical production. The world of georgic is a stringent and often uncomfortable place, but one in which thoughtfully directed activity will bear fruit. The human and the natural are caught up in the same rewarding struggle.¹⁷

Fairer highlights the importance of balance and exploitation in the human-nature relationship. The georgic is interested in biodiversity of plants and animals for cultivation and productivity. To sustain the environment for utility, a farmer must be aware of nature’s diversity, complexity, and contrast. Thus, human labour will bear fruit in agricultural practice. Following this line of thought, I argue that *Moortown Diary*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-13.

reveals the georgic principle in farming practice, the harvest of crops, and animal husbandry. A relationship between the farmer and livestock in relation to co-operation and care is paramount in didactic poetry of the farming environment. Hughes's record of a fresh and original farm experience contributes to the recovery of mutual respect and reconnectedness between man and nature. As Gifford and Roberts contend:

These actions represent, in fact, not unusual qualities of character (of the farmer) but the necessities of a particular way of life, and our admiration of the poet's capacity to act leads to our admiration of the uniquely human engagement in the creative-destructive processes of nature that farmers undertake in their daily work.¹⁸

Hughes develops highly original organic imagery to represent non-human animals, seasonal changes, earth, air, light, rain, and vegetation in contexts of ecological dynamism that connect fundamental worldly elements to poetic imagination. The record of care in animal husbandry illustrates his interest in the farm; rearing livestock in poetry reveals animals' physicality as much as environmental interconnectedness through life and death along the seasonal cycles. The emphasis on animals' suffering and pain reflects Hughes's sympathetic imagination that creates the eco-poetics of *Moortown Diary*.

The representation of birth and death in livestock through hard labour addresses uncertainty, challenge, and even frustration in the mastery of the animal driven by natural forces (the survival instinct). Hughes's depiction of births of the lambs and calves, signifies the farmer's fruitful labour in the human economy of which the domesticated creatures are a part. However, failure in the aforementioned activities reveals the limit upon human ability to intervene in natural processes. In this study, the management of a farm including animal husbandry, assisting newborns, nursing ill

¹⁸ Gifford and Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 251.

animals, erecting fences, haymaking, shearing sheep, and handling machines will be centrally and critically analysed to explain my reading of Hughes's georgic reinvention. In the following section, I will demonstrate Hughes's interest in the management of the land in relation to care and control by focusing on the hunt that removes foxes as vermin from the farmland.

Managing the farmland

'Foxhunt' depicts the management of agricultural landscapes by controlling non-human creatures which are perceived as vermin; Hughes considers hunting foxes as harnessing nature in ways redolent of the georgic. The hunting of foxes is a historical practice of rural culture, in part because keeping down vermin (foxes) is necessary for farm management. This suggests attentiveness and care for farm productivity and mastery over the environment. 'Foxhunt' represents Hughes's immediate response to the intersected environment of urban and rural where the hunt takes place. The poem imagines the manifestation of animal instinct in the poet's perspective, as foxes are controlled. During the course of the poem, Hughes is conscious of immediacy, and the connection between poetic creativity and the occurring chaotic event. 'Foxhunt' begins with the noisy hounds chasing after the fox in the village to show the wild animal's condition in the human community. The village is a site where the hunt is practised, where the natural condition is interrupted by human culture. As the hunt proceeds, the poet speculates about the victimised animal's plight in the poem. The semi-natural environment is a catalyst for the fox's survival:

Two days after Xmas, near noon, as I listen
The hounds behind the hill
Are changing ground, a cloud of excitements,

Their voices like rusty, reluctant
 Rolling stock being shunted. The hunt
 Has tripped over a fox
 At the threshold of the village.[...]

(1-7, p. 507)

The poet is conscious of the movement as he imagines the fox's struggle in the shared environment. Notably, the poem is rich in its alliteration ('hounds', 'hill', 'has': 'rusty', 'reluctant', 'Rolling') and assonance ('hound', 'ground', 'cloud'), verbally dynamic forms which illustrate the hunt. Hughes uses 'A cloud of excitements' to suggest the chaotic moment, in which the 'wild' and tamed animals interact under human control and manipulation.

The hunt is controlled by the hunter who creates conditions for predation in the shared domain. Hughes considers the significance of noises that the hunt creates to reveal 'wildness' in the form of aggression and violence. The comparison of the hounds' voices to the 'rusty, reluctant/ Rolling stock being shunted' suggests a mechanical language and the wild creature's power (push and pull of the firing machine) driven by a survival instinct. 'Foxhunt' enacts in language a contact with the wild (in forms of control and management of the land) in which the creature's life is put at risk. In addition, it provides a point of concentration for human endeavour in what appears to be a shared purpose.

Hughes notes that the hunt was historically introduced to Devon by the Reverend Jack Russell who revived the fox population for the game. In nineteenth-century England, local farmers initially perceived foxes as vermin, so controlling them is necessary to care and control in farm management. However, the establishment of the hunt is justified as a conservation measure. Hughes writes:

Every fox glimpsed in this territory was instantly reported, like a man-eater, and dug out and killed, by the farmers or by a commando of villagers. Jack Russell managed to interest two or three farmers in forming a hunt, and persuaded them to set down foxes in artificial dens and generally to protect them. More farmers became interested, and began to half-protect foxes.¹⁹

Controversially for a great many 'green' activists, the note presents the activity as a form of wildlife protection despite entailing what many regard as gratuitous violence and destruction. In the counter-view, the hunt (as a method of controlling the fox population) contributes to the protection of crops and cattle; it is practised in contexts where man creates a managed ecological system. The hunt is seen as a ritual as the hunter performs a certain act in conjunction with the horse (which is not perceived here). The hunting spirit is manifested in the interaction between humans and wild animals (predator and prey). Thus, the hunt predominantly combines predation and performance: the fox, the hounds, the horse, the hunter, and the villagers. In this traditional practice, Hughes contends that villagers also play a responsive part in the game as a ritual:

Presumably they found themselves stirred by the ritual and ceremony of the hunt. Even after horses had passed out of common use, and that atavistic fear of what a man becomes when he gets up into the saddle had revived again, country folk still remained involved in the horse cult [...] The whole business is mysterious, but one consequence has been that the foxes of North Devon flourish in the most extraordinary way.²⁰

Although in 'Foxhunt' the horse is not represented, the mystery of hunting and wildness is considered; the hunt might be seen, therefore, as a representation of wild nature

¹⁹ Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p. 1206.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

developed by culture. When humans tame and manipulate the hounds to eliminate foxes in agriculture, they create controlled ‘wild’ conditions by establishing the rules of the game and shaping the environment where predation takes place.

Hughes’s representation of wildness in ‘Foxhunt’ shows the human creation of nature in culture. The poem explores animal behaviour – aggression and violence – by focusing on noise:

[...] The fox
 Is flying, taking his first lesson
 From the idiot pack-noise, the puppyish whine-yelps
 Curling up like hounds’ tails, and the gruff military barkers:
 A machine with only two products:
 Dog-shit and dead foxes. [...]

(13-18, p. 507)

The fox’s striving to survive reveals the conception of hunting and animal instinct. As I discuss in Chapter I, Axel Goodbody and Randall L. Eton argue that hunting is a means for primitive, human life to make direct contact with wildlife. Created as a game, the hunt, for Hughes, is an impersonal ‘machine’ which causes violence in human culture through threatening imagery. The dead foxes are successful evidence of controlling vermin in a farming community where man initiates the hunt to balance the ecological system through intervention. The metaphor of ‘the gruff military barkers’ culturally suggests violence in the hounds; they are systematic in training and killing.

As mentioned earlier, Hughes is interested in the environment of the hunt in which crossing the boundary between nature and culture is central. The description of the farms, animals, and plants during winter is inseparable from descriptions of the human community:

[...] Lorry engines

As usual modulating on the main street hill
 Complicate the air, and the fox runs in a suburb
 Of indifferent civilized noises. [...]

(18-21, p. 507)

The depiction of the engines on the street enhances the tension ('Complicate') of the struggle that the fox undergoes, while the weather reinforces its survival. Lines 20-21 suggest the chaotic condition of the animal in the human context where violence imposed on the fox is ignored ('indifferent'). As the yelping and barking continue, the lorry's noise and other interruptions on the street follow. The poem reinforces the hostile weather in the depiction of orchards and hedges in 'coma' (winter); domesticated and wild creatures struggle to survive. Hughes demonstrates the hunt's movement: 'Now the yelpings/ Enrich their brocade, thickening closer/ In the maze of wind-currents' (21-23). Hughes creates the chaotic image in which the wind sends out the fox's scent that the hounds are after. His poetry reveals the 'body' of metaphor (the fox is arrested and petrified) and the working of the animal's body in relation to the hunt. In this context, the hound's noise becomes the catalyst of the hunt and suggests the violent contact between the two species under human control. The sound metaphorically 'enriches' the hunt elevated as 'brocade' in relation to the 'maze of wind-currents'. While the 'brocade' and the 'maze' symbolise complicated patterns in art works and landscape design, 'Foxhunt' suggests the complicated relationship between human culture and the animal in shaping an ethic of care; the management of the farm/village environment is a locus as the fox is removed.

Throughout the poem, Hughes contemplates the hunt in relation to his writing. As an observer, the poet develops the scene of pursuit with immediacy and freshness. The speaker's speculation about the fox's mind shows his uncertainty about the

animal's destiny. In the last section, the fox's suffering and struggling in the hunt is powerfully demonstrated:

[...] The fox

Hangs his silver tongue in the world of noise
 Over his spattering paws. Will he run
 Till his muscles suddenly turn to iron,
 Till blood froths his mouth as his lungs tatter,
 Till his feet are raw blood-sticks and his tail
 Trails thin as a rat's? Or will he
 Make a mistake, jump the wrong way, jump right
 Into the hound's mouth? As I write this down
 He runs still fresh, with all his chances before him.

(28-37, p. 507)

The fox conceives of the world which is made of the hounds' noise and interrupted by the roaring engines while the village is the site of interconnection between the wild struggle and human culture. Hughes imagines the fox's body as a living 'machine'. Its striving is highly visualised; the 'muscles' turn into 'iron'; the 'blood' froths the 'mouth'; 'the lungs tatter'; the 'feet' are 'raw blood-sticks'; and 'the tail' is thin as a rat's tail. This examination of the fox's body endorses Hughes's interest in the animal's form. The questions as to whether the beast will become the hounds' victim or escape death at the end epitomises Hughes's attempt to comprehend the wild creature or the nature of the hunt.

Hughes combines reflectiveness with the immediate depiction of the environment dramatically enhanced by action; the poem represents a human-animal relationship in which 'wildness' is merged with culture. As importantly, the poet's immediate experience articulates the creative process and imagination. The poem does

not impose the creature's plight in a romanticised way but instead depicts the complex relation between environment, culture, and beings. The next section will look at another form of care and mastery, the challenge in handling animals and technology as farming practice.

Hard labour: controlling animals and mastering a machine

In addition to managing farmland by the hunt, Hughes's poetry demonstrates human labour, pain, and suffering in controlling animals as required in rearing cattle and reminiscent of the georgic. To minimise the potential for aggression in cows and prevent harm that might occur to the herd (or herders), farmers have to eliminate the livestock's 'wildness'. 'Dehorning' captures the process of removing the cows' horns and anticipates the animals' pain through graphic imagery. Seen as inflicting pain on cows, dehorning is considered as an effective method of minimising aggression in livestock. However, there is ethical ambiguity in the treatment of the animals in this way.

By describing the dehorning process, Hughes carefully captures suffering and pain through sound. The farmer-poet observes this mundane work and elevates it to a dynamic imagery with metaphors of animals in different environments. The cows being pushed in the cage and crying after being anaesthetised is powerfully presented:

The pick of the bullies, churning each other
 Like thick fish in a bucket, churning their mud.
 One by one, into the cage of the crush: the needle,
 A roar not like a cow – more like a tiger,
 Blast of air down a cavern, and long, long
 Beginning in pain and ending in terror – then the next.

The simile of 'fish in the bucket' creates a sense of muscular and dynamic movement in the frightened herd as the beasts are depicted in a state of unrest. The repetition of 'churning' suggests a language of physical motion and power in the cows' bodies; the animals' 'wildness' is suppressed in confinement. As Hughes imagines the animal's sound, the pain is manifested in the injection of anaesthetic meant to minimise the cows' suffering. Being dehorned, the cows metaphorically express pain in a 'roar', a sound which unexpectedly suggests the animals' 'wildness' controlled by human beings. Also, the 'Blast of air down a cavern' indicates the cows' expression of a loud noise to cope with pain. This aural effect is incorporated with the metaphor to represent the livestock's vitality and physical power. Although dehorning is marked by pain and aggression, the poet addresses the necessity of the process practically considered humane to the animals.

Hughes's sympathy for the animals is revealed through a metaphor of the cow's body when the speaker shares the pain for the beasts. As the horn is removed, the cow's reaction to pain is obvious: '[...] the eye/ Like a live eye caught in a pan, like the eye of a fish/ Imprisoned in air [...]' (22-24, p. 504). The metaphor of fish imprisoned in an alien and hostile environment powerfully represents confinement and stunned deprivation. In addition, Hughes's emphasis on the cows' breathlessness (as fish in the air) recalls the initial image of the fish in a bucket. This imagery suggests pain in the process that the cow has to endure and the farmer inevitably observes, even when 'Your gut squirms for the eyeball twisting' (17, p. 504). This description of the cow shows the farmer's speculation about the animal's feeling as the farmer-poet details the expression on his face: '[...] Our faces/ Grimace like faces in the dentist's chair [...]' (32-33, p. 504). In this way, the simile of dental experience is linked to dehorning as creating pain and fear at a profound level, and creates kinship between the human and the animal.

Hughes uses the language of technology to examine the animal's body. Blood flowing from the horn after it is cut is graphically metaphorised in a mechanical vocabulary: 'And a water-pistol jet of blood/ Rains over the one who holds it – a needle jet/ From the white-rasped and bloody skull-crater [...]' (36-38, p. 505). The presentation of blood is shocking and suggests both violence and vitality. Hughes's imagining shows the damage to the cow's body, seen in the 'bloody skull-crater'. By dehorning, wildness and energy in the animals are essentially removed or minimised. His use of technological language then highlights the tension between hard work and pain in the animal's body which are redolent of the georgic.

'Dehorning' juxtaposes 'wildness' and domestication in animal farming. At the end of the poem, the cow is, I argue, *denatured*, to the point that farming practice has successfully transformed and domesticated the animal: '[...] What she's lost/ In weapons, she'll have to make up for in tits' (50-51, p. 505). Being *dehorned*, the beast's wild attribute is minimised and eliminated in order to improve the effectiveness of livestock productivity. Hughes emphasises human control over the animal by harnessing and eliminating its 'wildness' as a 'weapon' is removed. Therefore, 'Dehorning' demonstrates violence and aggression when animal 'wildness' is suppressed, removed, and viscerally represented as essential management in animal husbandry. Hughes's poetic language addresses the idea of animality in relation to farm management and human control of 'wildness' in non-human nature.

In addition to controlling animals, Hughes's interest in farm labour is illustrated in his treatment of technology within the powerful hostile natural environment. In 'Tractor', Hughes examines the important aspect of farm labour involving the necessity of technology to cope with a hostile environment; his eco-poetics is manifested in the integration of the object and the human body. 'Tractor' captures the critical struggle between human endeavour in operating the machine and harsh and uncontrollable

nature in winter. The poet imagines the antagonistic snow to create hardship for the personified tractor; in so doing, the inanimate becomes alive. Recalling the georgic form, Hughes investigates the theme of labour.

‘Tractor’ firstly examines the machine fallen under the powerful influence of snow. The cold wind ceases all the operations of the engine: ‘The tractor stands frozen – an agony/ To think of’ (1-2, p. 511). Hughes is conscious of nature’s uncompromising power as he represents the hostile weather that obstructs the machine’s mechanism:

Snow packed its open entrails. Now a head-pincering gale,
A spill of molten ice, smoking snow,
Pours into its steel.
At white heat of numbness it stands
In the aimed hosing of ground-level fieriness.

(3-7, p. 511)

These compound words/phrases suggest nature’s power which frustrates human attempts to harness the environment. The word ‘entrails’, as a language of the body, is associated with the effect of winter constituting ‘numbness’ in the farmer’s body and causing an unresponsive reaction from the machine. By referring to the body (of both the tractor and the man) Hughes points out that external nature overwhelms human agricultural activity. The poem considers the tension and confrontation between the human and the machine as the speaker focuses on the weather. Here, the language of the body is central. ‘Tractor’ defines the farmer’s adaptability and mastery over the environment by using technology; however, the machine is an obdurate unresponsive lump of metal:

It defies flesh and won’t start.
Hands are like wounds already
Inside armour gloves, and feet are unbelievable

As if the toe-nails were all just torn off.
 I stare at it in hatred. Beyond it
 The copse hisses – capitulates miserably
 In the fleeing, failing light. Starlings,
 A dirtier sleetier snow, blow smokily, unendingly, over
 Towards plantations eastward.

(8-16, p. 511)

The reference to military terms such as ‘armour gloves’ and capitulation suggests the human struggle against nature by deploying technology. The human body is made incapable of functioning due to climatic processes. Following the georgic characteristics, Hughes examines the body (‘flesh’, ‘Hands’, and ‘feet’) to reveal hardship under the weather that powerfully influences both man and non-human nature including the birds (‘Starlings’) and plants. Not only does the farmer surrender to the snow’s destructive power, but so do the vegetation (‘copse’) and natural elements (‘light’). Hughes concentrates on the extremity of the live experience through his representation of the human body (wounded hands and numb feet). The extreme language highlights the impact of snow on the speaker; as the poem progresses, the tractor is sinking into the low temperature, into the ‘hell of ice’ (19, p. 512).

Imagining the object as animated, Hughes creates the metaphor of an animal to address human endeavour in mastering the machine. At this stage, the use of technical terms is prevalent in the tractor’s operation. For example, the battery is the essence of the engine in the same way that the lamb is the ultimate source of productivity in the farm:

The starter lever
 Cracks its action, like a snapping knuckle.
 The battery is alive – but like a lamb

Trying to nudge its solid-frozen mother –
 While the seat claims my buttock-bones, bites
 With the space-cold of earth, which it has joined
 In one solid lump.

(20-26, p. 512)

Hughes imagines the tractor's vital part (the 'battery') as a lamb. The poem is reminiscent of the georgic feature that nature is challenging and can be frustrating to the farmer; his devotion to labour and technology helps overcome this challenge and yields a reward at the end of the poem. 'Tractor' integrates the human, the machine, and the earth to engage with the powerful, unyielding, natural environment that the farmer attempts to master. The georgic characteristic of 'Tractor' bears fruit in the tractor's operation. In so doing, Hughes's effort in the task is not futile but productive in operating the tractor after the speaker puts fuel in the machine:

I squirt commercial sure-fire
 Down the black throat – it just coughs.
 It ridicules me – a trap of iron stupidity
 I've stepped into. I drive the battery
 As if I were hammering and hammering
 The frozen arrangement to pieces with a hammer
 And it jabbars laughing pain-crying mockingly
 Into happy life.

(27-34, p. 512)

This image of the tractor being fuelled suggests a sense of irony ('ridicules') in the human attempt to overcome the antagonistic environment. In this context, the machine is illustrated coughing, ridiculing the speaker, jabbering and laughing while Hughes doubts the technological effectiveness to overcome non-human nature (snow). The word

‘stupidity’ reveals a farmer’s scrutiny in the use of technology and inability to master the object. The speaker ‘I’ is conscious of his effort in nursing and forcing the tractor to work as if he was ‘hammering’ the engine. Hughes raises the question of technology in agriculture through the farmer’s mastery over the tractor. As the personified tractor ironically articulates the voice in both ‘pain’ and happiness, the engine’s successful restoration testifies to the farmer’s endless labour.

The following stanzas assure the machine’s power to assist the human figure in the simile of ‘a demon demonstrating/ A more-than-usually-complete materialisation’ (37-38, p. 512). This ‘demon’, destructive and constructive (‘superhuman’, 41, p. 512) in this circumstance, signifies an ambiguous language that depicts the problematic machine which implies assistance and difficulty. The elements of ‘misery’, ‘agony’, and ‘numbness’ result from coldness while the machine is augmented by ‘solidarity’ (39), ‘the concrete’ (40), and ‘a stanchion’ (40) which suggest energy release. In this light, Hughes examines farming technology through personification of the machine as being in battle with the hostile climate.

The last section of ‘Tractor’ examines the auto parts, unfettered from the cold. Raymond Briggs remarks that ‘[t]he animalistic qualities of the vehicle are expressed by Hughes’s use of binary oppositions: cold becomes heat, bone becomes iron, the inanimate becomes animate and, ultimately, dead frozen iron becomes life’.²¹ This juxtaposition of the inanimate and the animate highlights the machine’s power to restore life from death. Hughes uses mechanical language to address the dichotomy of heat and cold influenced by an elemental power. Thus, the manifestation of the ‘animate’ machine enriches the paradox (stasis/mobility) of the working engine:

Worse iron is waiting. Power-lift kneels,

²¹ Quoted in Edward Hadley, ‘The Elegies of Ted Hughes’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2008), p. 170.

Levers awake imprisoned deadweight,
 Shackle-pins bedded in cast-iron cow-shit.
 The blind and vibrating condemned obedience
 Of iron to the cruelty of iron,
 Wheels screeched out of their night-locks –

(43-48, p.512)

The emphatic ‘iron’ endorses the engine’s power while the references to ‘Power-lift’, ‘Levers’, and ‘Shackle-pins’ contribute to the language of impersonal technological mechanisms. This imagery of ‘iron’ brings back Fairer’s notion of the georgic attributes in which the natural world is the world of human labour and changing seasons. Learning contrasts and complexities in non-human nature can help the farmer to overcome and develop agricultural work with an insightful knowledge of the environment. Hughes concludes ‘Tractor’ with the juxtaposition of the human body and the animate machine to show that the human attempt to harness nature has been achieved; thus georgic labour is rewarded. The final image of the tractor significantly evokes technological mastery over the hostile environment. In so doing, Hughes personifies the machine to scrutinise the engine’s complex mechanism. As the farm requires devotion and labour, Hughes deploys the metaphor of technology to harness and manage the land and demonstrates rural work as cruel and disturbing. ‘Tractor’ shows the integration of human labour with the use of technology which leads to success in Hughes’s creation of the modern georgic.

Animal husbandry and the ethic of care

Extending ideas of control (vermin) and management (livestock and technology) in the context of farming, Hughes’s georgic poetry associates animal domestication with care. In *Moortown Diary*, Hughes demonstrates animal husbandry defined by a human and

animal relationship that requires mutual co-operation and a high degree of attentiveness from the farmer. In redolent of the georgic, agricultural practice, however, often addresses the failures of human intervention in critical situations. In this context, the birth of cattle and sheep in the calving/lambing season represents the animal's life and death over which humans have some control. As we have seen, Hughes's consciousness of the animal is invoked in his representation of pain, suffering, and death. Animal husbandry should be considered in relation to two issues: the idea of the ethic of care residing in the figure of the farmer, and animal subjectivity itself.

The poetry of *Moortown Diary* represents the mediated experience of livestock with imaginative sympathy; the poet's contact with them demonstrates the cycles of life and death. In the following section, the human subject is an animal's custodian, who is devoted, caring, and sympathetic towards the newborn in 'Surprise' and the dead lambs in 'February 17th' and 'Ravens'. In 'Struggle', and 'Orf', Hughes raises questions about the human relationship with livestock by examining suffering, pain, death, subjectivity, and the ethical treatment of the animal. In relation to labour and co-operation reminiscent of the georgic mode, I will examine the ethic of care, central to the human relationship, to conceptualise the treatment of domesticated animals and explain the centrality of Hughes's representation of farming practice. Before moving on to the poetic analysis, it is worth considering in detail the ethic of care developed from human rights and the ethic of justice as discussed by Virginia Held, because of the centrality of the notion to this thesis.

The ethic of care is a moral imperative based on the relationship between the carer and the cared-for by ways in which a person advocates both practice and value. There are five features of the caring ethic which should be considered in this context. First, the care ethic focuses on the compelling moral importance of attending to and meeting others' needs, particularly in relation to another for whom a person is

responsible.²² Second, in relation to morality, the ethic of care values emotions such as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness, cultivated in human relations. Third, the ethic of care challenges dominant moral theories which value abstract reasoning, seek to avoid bias and arbitrariness, and achieve impartiality. It prioritises the actual relationship rather than universal rules, especially in certain domains such as law which involve justice. Fourth, as a part of feminist thought, the care ethic reconceptualises traditional notions of public and private. As Held notes, the ethic of care ‘addresses rather than neglects moral issues arising in relations among the unequal and dependent’.²³ The fifth characteristic is the conception of persons or individuals as relational and interdependent rather than self-sufficient and independent.

The first, second, and fifth features centrally inform my reading of Hughes’s poetic treatment of his subjects, particularly in the context of farm animals. I will consider how the poet’s responsiveness to the needs of cows and sheep enhances his perception of the non-human world. The poet-farmer’s care for animals in critical situations such as dying or illness addresses the idea of human sympathy for animals in his poetry. More importantly, I question to what extent the poet can engage with handling a particular animal’s life, as in ‘February 17th’.

The idea of care can be discussed in relation to the georgic in terms of labour. For Sara Ruddick, care is an act of labour and defines a relationship.²⁴ Care is both a practice and a value which should be fostered in human communities. As a practice, care involves the work of caring or care-giving which requires effectiveness and evaluation. The recipient’s responsiveness is a product of caring labour. Held argues that the ethic of care should not be naturalised but cultivated as a value in moral theory.

²² Held, pp. 10-12.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁴ Discussed in Held, p. 33.

As Held notes, the caring ethic requires ‘mutual concern and connectedness’ between individuals.²⁵ Hughes’s *Moortown Diary* demonstrates farming practice and co-operation between farmers and livestock. It addresses the link between commerce and morality in ways which highlight the relationship between the human and the non-human. The depiction of animal husbandry, shepherding, and the practice of ensuring the well-being of sheep and cows (to make a living) is an imperative.

To begin with, ‘Surprise’ engages with the farmer’s care and first-hand experience of the calf’s unexpected birth in free verse. Hughes integrates poetic and journalistic forms to highlight the vitality of animal’s birth and the farmer’s sense of care. The speaker introduces readers to his active observation of the external environment; ‘Looking at cows’ in lines 1 and 9 indicates the speaker’s consciousness of farm animals in the calving season. The depiction of the cows offers pastoral imagery in which ‘The peace of cattle’ (7, p. 515) is imagined ‘Sharing their trance’ (9, p. 515). The word ‘trance’ seems to draw the poet’s attention to stillness and inactivity. However, what the poet notices changes his perception in a single moment of the animal’s physicality driven by the birth force. Hughes contemplates the unfamiliar image, the cow’s internal organs and then creates the metaphor of objects and the animal’s body:

[...], it was an anomalous

Blue plastic apron I noticed

Hitched under the tail of one cow

That went on munching, with angling ears. A glistening

Hanging sheet of blue-black. I thought

Of aprons over ewes’ back-ends

To keep the ram out till it’s timely. I thought

²⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

Of surgical aprons to keep cleanliness
 Under the shit-fall. Crazy far thoughts
 Proposed themselves as natural, and I almost
 Looked away. [...]

(10-20, p. 515)

The emphasis on the ‘apron’, which is in fact the calf’s body part, signifies how Hughes defamiliarises pastoral imagery of the body during the ongoing birth. His imaginative recall of the animal’s organs is associated with human culture (an apron in surgical operation), but the cow becomes the locus of the poet’s meditation. The long free verse indicates the poet’s fresh experience and serves the continuing process of birth. Hughes considers the imaginative power (‘Crazy far thoughts’) to elevate mundane life in the farm context to the excitement of birth that reflects vitality in the newborn and the environment. As the moment of life awaits, ‘Surprise’ moves on to its climax:

[...] Suddenly

The apron slithered, and a whole calf’s
 Buttocks and hind-legs – whose head and forefeet
 Had been hidden from me by another cow –
 Toppled out of its mother, and collapsed on the ground.
 Leisurely, as she might be leisurely curious,
 She turned, pulling her streamers of blood-tissue
 Away from this lumpish jetsam. [...]

(20-27, p. 515)

The poet captures the moment of birth with surprise and excitement to reveal the animal’s bodily mechanism like a live-documentary presentation. Hughes’s repetition of ‘leisurely’ offers the dénouement of birth encapsulated with the risk of death in both the cow and calf; ‘leisurely’, the cow’s suffering ends. Hughes creates the metaphor of the

‘streamers’ to elevate our visceral consciousness of the internal organs (‘blood-tissue’) while the ‘lumpish jetsam’ represents the calf defamiliarised in its physical process. ‘Surprise’ might position the farmer-poet as an observer having no intervention in the cattle’s predicament. However, there is an implication of care in his observation which conveys the immediate moment of life, prevalent throughout the whole collection. Hence, in ‘Surprise’, birth is depicted as an event under the farmer’s care, which signifies human labour to manage animals with attentiveness.

Farm animals are domesticated livestock, subjected to human economy. The cattle, therefore, should be accounted for within the ethic of care to promote productivity seen in the farmer’s decision to save the ewe’s life while giving birth in ‘February 17th’. Hughes considers the farmer’s act of killing the lamb as being contradictory in relation to an ethic of care but arguably justified in farming practice. The poem can be seen as a case study of how Hughes’s affinity with animal subjectivity, combined with the farmer’s role, plays a crucial part in his poetic creativity.

‘February 17th’ represents human sympathy for the suffering animal in relation to the necessity of killing in a particular circumstance. Using poetic language to mediate the critical condition of the animal’s life, Hughes imaginatively integrates the animal body with the earth’s body as an eco-poetics. The beginning lines depict the intimate contact between the farmer and the sheep:

[...] A blood-ball swollen

Tight in its black felt, its mouth gap

Squashed crooked, tongue stuck out, black-purple,

Strangled by its mother, I felt inside,

Past the noose of mother-flesh, into the slippery

Muscled tunnel, fingering for a hoof,

Right back to the port-hole of the pelvis.

(9-15, p. 518)

Hughes's use of alliteration ('blood-ball', 'black'; 'swollen', 'Squashed', 'Strangled') suggests the difficult movement in the birth canal while the anatomical imagery highlights pain and suffering in both the ewe and the lamb during birth. The half-born lamb 'Strangled by its mother' indicates the struggle between the ewe and its physicality (the bodily malfunctioning) in which the carer-farmer has to intervene. The farmer searching for a hoof inside the womb offers an image of contact in which the complex human-animal relationship is revealed. Here, the creature's flesh and blood is depicted in tactile language to reinforce the carer's devotion to animal husbandry. Assisting the lamb's birth (precisely death) in 'February 17th' involves both hard labour and ambivalent killing in the human relationship with domesticated animals.

In the second part of the poem, Hughes examines the tension between birth and death in relation to livestock and the farmer's ethic of care, controversially manifested as killing. Here, the speaker's role is combined with his caring obligation. In the rhythms of prose, the poem describes the event:

[...] I went

Two miles for the injection and a razor.

Sliced the lamb's throat-strings, levered with a knife

Between the vertebrae and brought the head off

To stare at its mother, its pipes sitting in the mud

With all earth for a body. [...]

(25-30, p. 519)

The poem's direct diction creates a grim tone and suggests practical decisiveness in the act of slicing the creature's throat. 'February 17th' depicts the macabre and disturbing detail of placing the dead animal's head on the earth, while the decisive act of removing

the lamb's body reflects the farmer's consciousness of the ewe's risk of death. The physical description of the lamb's 'vertebrae', 'throat-strings', and 'pipes' demonstrates the scene of the body, anatomised, and hard 'labour' in the lambing process. Metaphorically, the lamb becomes a macabre musical instrument played by the speaker. Hughes's anatomical imagination reflects the language of the body as an expression of violence. Killing the lamb to save the ewe is demonstrated in such a way that readers can examine details and the realistic portrayal of the animal's organs. It is a facet of Hughes's eco-poetics that the earth is figuratively placed as the lamb's body to suggest ecological integrity between the earth and the non-human creature.

Gifford argues that 'February 17th' represents a 'forceful and primeval image' that connects birth to the cycles of the earth, the natural environment itself.²⁶ Gifford's comment is ecologically oriented while Hadley contends that the image of the lamb's body metaphorically in the earth 'stresses the wider elegiac belief of an ecological consolation and transferral of energy into the natural world'.²⁷ However, Hadley's emphasis on the elegiac tone does not register the poem's complexity. Hughes's examination of the rescue of the ewe and killing of the lamb is not made to mourn the animal's death but to imagine instead the relationship between survival, the earth, and ecology. Hadley is right in that Hughes sees the transferral of energy from the lamb and the ewe to the earth, and the farmer's stewardship is not futile but successful. As I demonstrate, Hughes sees the struggle at birth as a natural process; yet, the farmer's intervention is required in the farming practice that justifies the animal's death.

²⁶ Gifford, *Ted Hughes*, p. 52.

²⁷ Hadley, 'The Elegies of Ted Hughes', p. 171.

Hughes calls this ‘February 17th’ a ‘record of disaster’ that captures the failure of birth in which the ewe’s life is, however, saved.²⁸ The poet mentions one reader’s ‘rebuke’ to this art of horror:

Once I [Hughes] read this in a hall full of university students, and one member of the audience rebuked me for reading what he called a disgusting piece of horror writing. Well, we either have a will to examine what happens, or we have a will to evade it. [...] Throughout [the piece], I might say, I was concerned not at all with the style of writing, simply to get the details and steps of the event of the record.²⁹

Hughes emphasises the immediate experience in the poem to suggest excitement in the rescue. In this context, the poet addresses co-operation between the farmer and the sheep to signify the interdependence between nature and culture; the farmer becomes a steward or a nurse and the sheep, a patient in need of husbandry. As the speaker pushes the headless body inside the womb, the ewe powerfully pushes back the force to meet the birth’s mechanism.

[...] Then pushed
 The neck-stump right back in, and as I pushed
 She pushed. She pushed crying and I pushed gasping.
 And the strength
 Of the birth push and the push of my thumb
 Against that wobbly vertebra were deadlock,
 A to-fro futility. [...]

(30-36, p. 519)

²⁸ Nicholas Bishop, *Re-making Poetry: Ted Hughes and a New Critical Psychology* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 222.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

The repetition of 'push' creates physical language in the interaction between the ewe and the speaker. Hughes conveys a dynamic force and movement in this continuous process and the resistance in the bodily contact from which, though futile in this section, the dead body finally comes out. As the poem demonstrates, 'the strength/ Of the birth push' powerfully creates the tension between, and the meaning of, life and death. The life force in the ewe wins over the bodily deadlock resulting from the farmer's assistance; and so the decision to dissect the lamb is not futile in economic or compassionate terms. I argue that this intersection between human interference and the natural process of life and death contributes to the caring practice made by the farmer to which animal husbandry adheres. The push and pull between the human and the animal is meant to alleviate the ewe's suffering, although the 'deadlock' and 'futility' signify the unknown mechanism of the animal's body.

In relation to the ethic of care, the direct contact between the farmer's hands and the ewe's birth canal suggests a point of ecological contact between the human custodian and the animal in this context. As Robinson notes, the farm is a meeting place of the two worlds (the human and the animal) which is not confrontational but cooperative as a working laboratory with the farmer's interest in practical utility.³⁰ However, as I argue, killing the lamb to save the ewe is economic as well as ethical. The physical contact in 'February 17th' represents a high degree of realism in terms of agricultural life, but the ewe becomes the subject of Hughes's meditation on birth and death in human-animal relationships and the economic and ethical imperatives of animal husbandry.

At the end of 'February 17th', after the headless body comes out, Hughes depicts the sheep's internal organs with graphic imagery to suggest the reality of animal

³⁰ Robinson, 'The Good Shepherd: *Moortown Diary*', p. 262.

husbandry and agricultural life as in 'Surprise'. In 'February 17th', this realistic presentation of the unpleasant or abject placenta after birth failure can be regarded as anti-pastoral. In the following section, Hughes highlights the sensory description of the animal's internal organs.

And after it the long, sudden, yolk-yellow
Parcel of life
In a smoking slither of oils and soups and syrups –
And the body lay born, beside the hacked-off head.

(42-45, p. 519)

The reference to 'oils', 'soups', and 'syrups' breaks down the metaphor of food in human culture while it can be interpreted as 'food' for the newborn that fails to survive. Hughes's depiction of the lamb's head located on the earth reflects his eco-poetics in ways which metaphorical language mediates the relationship between the animal and the environment. To elaborate on the ethic of care and the idea of suffering in animals, I will also read 'Ravens' as an anti-pastoral imagining of death at birth in the farm environment.

Similar to 'February 17th', Hughes invokes care and suffering in the non-human life cycle and further discusses human sympathy in 'Ravens'. The poet depicts pastoral imagery at the beginning and anti-pastoral at the end to emphasise the tension between life and death and seasonal transition through a three-year-old child's perspective whose questions about animal suffering are addressed. 'Ravens' opens with the celebration of birth appealing to the young companion as the speaker indicates the vitality of the lambing season. For Hughes, successful birth reflects the vital process of regeneration. He writes: 'As she nibbles the sugar coating off it/ While the tattered banners of her triumph swing and drip from her rear-end' (9-10, p. 517). The internal organs coming out after the newborn are compared to the banners of 'triumph' to emphasise the power

of birth and struggle over death in the process. While the child's interest in the young lamb relates to the amazement of birth through sound ('new spark of voice'), Hughes directs his interest to the terror of death in the ravaged newborn.

In 'Ravens', Hughes re-imagines the dead lamb scavenged by the ravens to examine suffering and death. The abject and repulsive description of the mutilated carcass embodies one aspect of the poet's farming experience. Here, the corpse is consumed by birds of prey and undergoes the process of decay:

[...] Born dead,
 Twisted like a scarf, a lamb of an hour or two,
 Its insides, the various jellies and crimsons and transparencies
 And threads and tissues pulled out
 In straight lines, like tent ropes
 From its upward belly opened like a lamb-wool slipper,
 The fine anatomy of silvery ribs on display and the cavity,
 The head also emptied through the eye-sockets,
 The woolly limbs swathed in birth-yolk and impossible
 To tell now which in all this field of quietly nibbling sheep
 Was its mother. [...]

(18-28, p. 517)

The anatomical description turns the abject repulsive image of the dead lamb into a sign of beauty in nature, while the simile and metaphor of the body as 'a scarf', 'the threads and tissues', 'tent ropes', and 'a lamb-wool slipper' suggest the utility of animals in human culture. Hughes displays the body to reveal an unexpected closeness to the farm creature suddenly and shockingly defamiliarised. 'Ravens' creates visual and tactile imagery through words such as 'jellies', 'crimsons', 'transparencies', and 'tissues' to

illustrate the fresh experience through human senses. The empty head and eye-sockets powerfully constitute the inevitable death inscribed on the animal's body.

Hughes further considers the child's question as to whether the lamb cries (30, p. 517) before it dies to invoke suffering in the non-human. The persona's suggestion that 'We should have been here, to help it' (29, p. 517) reflects an ethical responsibility to prevent pain and misery in the lamb. The dialogue with the child signifies the farmer's role as a carer or a guardian who provides for the lamb's well-being during this critical season. With this question, the child's perception of death is limited due to his age and innocence. In this context, sheep are located as property in agriculture and shepherding allows the farmer's close contact to his asset. Even so, co-operative working between the farmer and animals forms a special relationship that reveals sensitivity. The child's question regarding the lamb's crying, therefore, indicates fundamental human sympathy for the farm animals imagined in poetry.

'Ravens' incorporates pastoral elements in this tragic birth; the tension between death and birth in farm animals is replaced by the presentation of wildlife in the environment. In contrast to the previous depiction of the ravaged lamb, Hughes moves on to the celebration of life in the environment. Exultation is palpable in spring, the season of resurrection after death in the newborn:

Though this one was lucky insofar
 As it made the attempt into a warm wind
 And its first day of death was blue and warm
 And magpies gone quiet with domestic happiness
 And skylarks not worrying about anything
 And the blackthorn budding confidently
 And the skyline of hills, after millions of hard years,
 Sitting soft.

Hughes's ecological language suggests the interconnectedness of the flora and fauna. Farm animals' regeneration is part of an idea of ecological wholeness that manifests its relation to the birds, growing plants, sky, and hills in the season of birth. Both 'February 17th' and 'Ravens' epitomise the significance of life in birth as much as death in radical, imaginative language; both poems highlight the ethic of care in the human relationship with farm animals. Distinctively, the former centrally engages with human care for dependent animals because the farmer's custodianship also involves the ethic of killing while the latter conveys survival in nature in which the farmer fails to intervene.

In modern farm poetry, Hughes emphasises the significance of care and custodianship by representing animals in critical conditions including birth (malfunction), illness, and dying which reveal his imaginative eco-poesis. Following the georgic model, 'Struggle' shows the failure of an animal's birth and of human endeavour to cope with it in relation to the practice of care. By explaining the principles of animal husbandry in assisting birth, Hughes uses ongoing lines of free verse to follow the process:

[...] Then bending him down,
 Between her legs, and sliding a hand
 Into the hot tunnel, trying to ease
 His sharp hip-bones past her pelvis,
 Then twisting him down, so you expected
 His spine to slip its sockets,
 And one hauling his legs, and one embracing his wet waist
 Like pulling somebody anyhow from a bog,
 And one with hands easing his hips past the corners
 Of his tunnel mother, till something gave.

The hands sliding into the 'hot tunnel' presents an invasive image as the speaker attempts to help the birth. This resonates with 'February 17th' in which the human hand is depicted as penetrating the animal's body. Hughes often represents the physical contact with the cow or sheep in a radical way by defamiliarising the potentially pastoral image with a violent depiction. The co-operative push-and-pull reaction produces a powerful movement and contributes to the calf's birth in a vulnerable condition. In this context, the human's physical labour is responsive to the force in the struggling cow and the emerging calf. Hughes's description of birth's physical power in 'His (the calf's) spine to slip its sockets' produces a junction between an object ('sockets') and the animal ('the cow's tunnel'). Assisting the half-born calf requires co-operation or intervention from the human figure to facilitate animal productivity. As farming needs farm hands to operate the business, it also needs collaboration from participants in the life-and-death struggle. The literal 'hands' suggests contact and assistance, in line with caring practice, to alleviate the cow's suffering; the human has become one with the animal.

In 'Struggle', Hughes creates a tension between life and death in organic imagery by using the environment as a source of metaphor. Pulling the calf from its mother is compared to 'pulling somebody anyhow from a bog'. The bog is ecologically significant in relation to the earth which consumes an entity and nurtures growth in vegetation and other life forms. Its sucking and sticky quality appeals to Hughes's poetic imagination. While the animal's body is related to the earth's body, the latter suggests its symbolic association with a nurturing quality and the origin of life. This ecological reference reflects Hughes's eco-poetics and his conceptualisation of the animal and its integration with the environment. Here, Hughes emphasises the forceful birth through a martial metaphor. The cow and its calf are juxtaposed; 'They lay face to

face like two mortally wounded duellists' (41, p. 509). This line indicates the risk involved in having gone through the challenge of 'mortality'.

Apart from the illustration of the animal's graphic physicality at birth, Hughes imagines this renewal of nature through religious imagery in relation to suffering. The calf is depicted sliding from its mother but fails to survive. This vulnerable non-human creature is portrayed and associated with Christian beliefs in struggle, salvation, and sacrifice:

From the loose red flapping sack-mouth
 Followed by a gush of colours, a mess
 Of puddled tissues and jellies.
 He moored feebly and lay like a pieta Christ
 In the cold easterly day light. [...]

(34-38, p. 509)

The depiction of the cow's organs and placenta ornamented with 'tissues and jellies' creates tactile imagery and invokes an empirical experience, freshness, and intimacy. 'Struggle' is embodied with sight, sound, smell, and touch that might well evoke repulsion from readers. However, Hughes's imagination of horror in the animal's birth is enriched with the cultural reference to Christian imagery. This connection between the farm animal and the religious figure of Christ generates the interrelated cultural dimension of corporeality and the myth of death which constitutes hope and salvation. The dead calf can be read as sacrifice in that the farm animal is produced as a commodity in agricultural business. This radical imagery and religious reference to the saviour's death also offers the idea of sacrifice in the animal's life and death. Suffering in the cow and calf is alleviated by the farmer to permit its dwelling. Nevertheless, at the end of the poem the calf does not survive its 'gruelling journey' (49, p. 509) but instead 'He died called Struggle/ Son of Patience' (56-57, p. 510). The calf's death,

after being nursed by the farmer, cannot be seen as renewal in nature; the vulnerable cannot survive due to the physical malfunction occurring at birth. As ‘Son of Patience’, which might refer to Christ, the calf has struggled but failed to survive. Hughes boldly uses the religious figure to associate human vulnerability with the animal’s dying condition that opens various interpretations.

In ‘Struggle’ and other poems about newborns, Hughes addresses the success or failure of birth; however, in ‘Orf’ the poet integrates the farmer’s role to end the lamb’s life with humane treatment according to farming practice. The question of killing becomes central to Hughes’s examination of suffering and death in the animal when disease transmission is involved. Hughes conceptualises killing as being necessary to prevent the spread of disease on the farm; however, the ethical question of killing and animal suffering should be considered in relation to the treatment of farm animals.

In ‘February 17th’, the farmer decides to kill the lamb to save the ewe after the bodily malfunction at birth, and his examination of pain in both creatures leads to a successful rescue. However, in ‘Ravens’ and ‘Orf’, the poet cannot save any of them. In ‘Ravens’, the child’s question as to whether the lamb cries before it dies is pivotal in relation to Peter Singer’s idea of suffering.³¹ The lamb’s death is beyond any rescue because the farmer could not save it. However, in ‘Orf’ the poet has to make a crucial decision to kill the vulnerable lamb to alleviate its suffering from its declining condition and prevent the spread of disease. These poems constitute an ethical response to the

³¹ In *Animal Liberation* (1975), Singer raises a question of equality which should be implemented in the treatment of non-human animals. Although Singer emphasises that animals are not equal to humans in terms of rights, other non-human animals should be treated equally based on the capacity of suffering. The idea of ‘speciesism’ – a prejudice towards the interest of particular species, human beings in this context, over other species – should be reconsidered (pp. 7-9). Referring to Jeremy Bentham, Singer argues that animals can suffer pain in the same way other species do regardless of the principle of rights or equality, race or gender. Instead, we should not ignore ‘the extent to which other species exhibit a complex social life, recognizing and relating to other members of their species as individuals’ (p. 223). See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd edn (London: Pimlico, 1995). This invocation of suffering and individual species in non-human animals is central to my reading of Hughes’s animal poems such as ‘The Howling of Wolves’ in Chapter I, ‘February 17th’, ‘Ravens’, and ‘Orf’ in this chapter.

question of humane treatment, which is contradictory in certain contexts. To eliminate suffering in livestock, Hughes has justified killing them as necessary farming practice in agricultural business. In the following section, I will examine how poetry engages with the farmer's ethical responsibility and animal husbandry in 'Orf'.

Orf is the outbreak of an ulcerous infection in animals which affects livestock productivity.³² Hughes's sympathy for the ill lamb is presented in the killing and the burial of the creature after the poet has nursed it but failed to keep it alive. His decision to shoot the lamb can be read as a morally ambiguous act according to the ethic of care which focuses on the care for the vulnerable. On the one hand, killing the ill lamb is justified with regard to farming practice and preventing the spread of disease. On the other hand, it raises ethical questions of animal suffering. If the farmer has the right to kill in order to maintain a healthy flock, then he ignores the dependent value of a creature's life. The decision to kill the creature engages with the ethic of care versus the theme of animal productivity. Moreover, to eliminate pain in the suffering subject, the farmer ends the lamb's life, fulfilling his obligation to the farm, and rendering death as a humane treatment. The art of killing in relation to the ethic of care seems contradictory on one level, but is practically justified here: 'Because his sickness was converting his growth/ Simply to strengthening sickness' (5-6, p. 522). The inversion of health and 'sickness' and the use of 'strengthening' problematise the meaning of 'growth' in order to highlight its weakness. The metaphor of 'a mask of flies' (7, p. 522) creates a sense of concealing and suffering as the lamb is unable to breathe properly. In addition, the flies suggest the decaying process in the animal's living body as the farmer-poet asserts his obligation to end the lamb's life.

³² In his note on 'Orf', Hughes contends that he had sympathetic imagination for the dying lamb. After it was shot, it was buried with a significant meaning: '[t]hat should be there. And maybe the stony grave in the wood that I dug for him, and the little oak sapling that I planted on it (an extraordinary sort of funeral for any livestock casualty)', *Collected Poems*, p. 1208.

‘Orf’ addresses the shepherd’s ethical responsibility to the lamb. The decision to shoot the animal invokes a context in which killing might be defended. Is it not cruel if the farmer leaves the animal suffering without intervening in its declining condition? These questions are not articulated directly in ‘Orf’, but I believe human obligation toward the animal is pointed out in the justification of killing. The farmer decides to shoot the lamb between its ears while it looks the other way (9-11, p. 523).

When the poet examines the lamb’s body, he suggests the meaning of life or Being in the animal. After the lamb is shot: ‘He lay down./ His machinery adjusted itself/ And his blood escaped, without loyalty.’ (12-14, p. 523). The focus on the lamb’s body essentially informs ideas of animality and its agency. The bodily mechanism reveals the agency of animal Being: not as a living machine in Descartes’s sense that the animal’s existence is machinery.³³ Rather, Hughes views the lamb’s body working, adjusting itself, and decaying in relation to the temporal transition and the environment. By referring to blood escaping from the body, Hughes derives the meaning of Being from the act of dying. The ‘loyalty’ to the body is not resistant to the pull of death.

Hughes considers the act of killing in poetic language to rhetorically discuss the relationship between stewardship and responsibility for the animal’s death. The poem focuses on the physical working of the dying lamb:

But the lamb-life in my care
Left him where he lay, and stood up in front of me

Asking to be banished,
Asking for permission to be extinct,
For permission to wait, at least,

Inside my head
In the radioactive space

³³ W.J.T. Mitchell, ‘Forward: The Rights of Things’ in Cary Wolfe’s *Animal Rites*, pp. ix-xiv (p. ix).

From which the meteorite had removed his body.

(15-22, p. 523)

In relation to custodianship, the farmer's responsibility to nurse and end the animal's life is implied in the phrase 'Asking for permission to be extinct'. The poet's idea of 'permission', that the animal's body might wait, 'to be banished', to 'be extinct', and to 'wait', signifies his consciousness of the morality of killing. The idea behind waiting is that the period of 'corpsehood' and physical decomposition is 'an interim between lives, between being a lamb and having the flesh reabsorbed by nature and reused'.³⁴ The lamb's body might decay in the meantime, but it 'waits' or embeds in the space of the poet's 'thought', a 'radioactive space' which suggests the working of memory and personal experience. Hughes's head absorbs the lamb's dying as his poetic imagination finds expression in the writing process. From these examples, it is clearly seen that Hughes's poetry engages with the ethic of care at a profound level in relation to farming practice. His eco-poetics of the animal's body, the human's body, and the environment reflects how poetic imagination mediates the experiences of farm labour that requires interactions between humans and animals. Hughes's examination of these births and deaths in animal husbandry addresses the role of culture (domestication) in shaping the human-animal relationship which asks for sustainability and ethical responsibility.

Elegy and the natural environment

Another pre-eminent theme in *Moortown Diary*, one that is as important as care and management, is Hughes's reinterpretation of elegy through the representation of rural farm life, human labour, and the shepherd's death. Developing the elegiac mode, Hughes re-imagines the farmer working the land and handling animals. The collection was originally entitled *Moortown Elegies* (1978) as a dedication to Jack Orchard,

³⁴ Robinson, (1983), p. 273; Hadley, (2008), p. 173.

Hughes's father-in-law who cultivated the land and reared cattle and sheep. Unlike the elegiac tradition that laments the departed beloved or a tragic event, Hughes rewrites elegy to distinctively memorialise death in the landscape and in relation to labour which relates to georgic conventions. These Orchard poems are memorials of the deceased and, as Gifford notes, 'icons of value in Hughes's larger project of asking how our species might live at home on its home planet'.³⁵ The ecological value of the relationship and interdependence between the farmer as custodian and domesticated animals as subjects of care are central to my ecocritical reading of agricultural work in this chapter.

Recurring elegiac themes and imagery are palpable in the Orchard poems in the last section of *Moortown Diary* that imagines the mourning landscape, and this reflects the poet's respect for a heroic farming figure. As Hadley points out, 'Hughes confounds the expectation that *Moortown Elegies* is to be a series of laments, instead presenting a world and a landscape which is both brutal and unforgiving, and tranquil and inspirational for the poet'.³⁶ The external farm environment, as Hadley contends, is not as yielding and romantic as pastoral poetry represents it. In this last section, I will consider Hughes's evocation of elegiac elements which is redolent of the georgic. Here, hard labour is emphasised and memorialised in relation to the human body as much as the earth's body. I explore 'The day he died', 'A monument', 'Last Load', 'A memory', 'Now you have to push', and 'Hands' to demonstrate the creative integration of the two approaches.

Although the animal poems discussed in the previous chapter represent examples of death and violence explored in relation to wildlife, the significant sentiment of elegy is not as prevalent as in *Moortown Diary*. Hughes's interest in the death of

³⁵ Gifford, *Ted Hughes*, p. 53.

³⁶ Hadley, 'The Elegies of Ted Hughes', p. 188.

animals involves questions of environmental interconnectedness and informs the poet's re-interpretation of the elegiac tradition. Elegy is a poetic response to loss and death and, as Hadley notes, its function is 'to preserve the dead as long as possible so they may co-exist with the living or be embalmed immortally in the print of the written word'.³⁷ Elegiac sentiment includes mourning the dead in conjunction with the presentation of natural elements in the pastoral tradition; '[i]nvocations of nature are true to the topography of the pastoral idyll'.³⁸ Pastoral and elegy become important facets of nature poetry which expresses loss and mourning since human beings are influenced by their environments, and Hughes is certainly aware of this convention.

Pastoral elegy is the oldest and most influential genre which considers a movement from expression of sorrow to consolation in nature. Hughes reinvents the pastoral elegy by including non-human beings such as plants and farm animals suffering from pain and cold in winter. His contemplation of natural imagery, including rain, water, vegetation, and light, significantly contributes to Hughesean interpretations of ecological renewal. In the following analyses, I emphasise the power of physical labour through the images of the farmer working with the earth and animals through the seasonal cycles. The representation of harvest – of both vegetation (haymaking) and the farm animals (shearing) – suggests actual and emotional rewards in the farming process, in addition to Hughes's examination of the birth of cattle and sheep as identifying a key point of regeneration.

As Peter Sacks suggests, the symbolic environments of the elegy and the pastoral integrated with decomposition and renewal can 'intensify their grief or gratitude regarding an otherwise manifold and ungraspable world of nature'.³⁹ In my

³⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 10.

³⁹ Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spencer to Yeats* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 22.

reading, *Moortown Diary* is a combination of the elegiac convention and the georgic in the representation of the farming figure as a shepherd or a land steward. Jack Orchard's labour in animal husbandry and the cultivation of the earth will be critically considered as memorialisation in poetry.

Hughes here approaches elegy by incorporating the hardships of farm labour and the representation of the deceased farmer as a guardian of the land and of animals. The poem 'The day he died' can be read in relation to the ethic of care already discussed, and the toil of farming in which the cattle rely on the mastery of Orchard. 'The day he died' makes a distinction between the environments influenced by the seasonal cycles and the management of livestock. The transition from winter to spring offers a contrast between the symbols of death and rebirth in the animals, the plants, and the human figure. As Hadley argues, death is 'described in relation to a sympathetic earth; nature is a part of death and mourns it'.⁴⁰ Thus, Hughes focuses on the farmer's death by considering the harsh remnants of winter to make a transition from loss to renewal. This constitutes the elegiac tone; however, it is counterbalanced by spring's liveliness.

'The day he died' opens with the 'silkiest day of the young year,' and the 'first reconnaissance of the real spring' (1-2, p. 533) to make a contrasting image of death in winter and to emphasise hope and resurrection in the landscape. The description of the light and climate which results in the 'confidence of the sun' (3) creates the distinctive, vital environment where there is hope after loss. In this section, the vitality of nature is interrupted by the farmer's death:

Earth toast-crisp. The snowdrops battered.
 Thrushes spluttering. Pigeons gingerly
 Rubbing their voices together, in stinging cold.
 Crows creaking, and clumsily

⁴⁰ Hadley, 'The Elegies of Ted Hughes', p. 184.

Cracking loose.

(9-13, p. 533)

The pastoral scene is disarrayed and interrupted by the cold weather resulting in the 'battered', delicate snowdrops and crows creaking. The use of 'toast-crisp', 'batter', and 'gingerly' suggests a sense of touch made by winter through culinary language. Though enlivened by light in spring, the land is dry and deprived of its proprietor and this signifies emptiness. Hadley contends that, after Orchard's death, 'nature recoils as if it has lost an integral mechanism to its working'.⁴¹ However, I argue that the environment in 'The day he died' is not perceived as disintegrated after losing the farmer but, rather as thriving along the seasonal cycle. Although the battered snowdrops suggest oppression, spluttering thrushes and singing pigeons indicate resurrection from death in winter.

Through the diversity of birds, Hughes depicts the restoration of lives in the farm environment by invoking sound, breaking the gloomy atmosphere of the elegiac model. The seasonal change from winter to spring indicates growth and rebirth: a familiar trope. Hughes refers to Orchard's death on the day before Valentine's Day which is popularly associated with love, unification, and continuity.

Furthermore, 'The day he died' indicates the ethic of care implicit in the toil of farm work. As the animals wait for hay and 'Stand in a new emptiness' (20), they wait for warmth and attentiveness. Hughes offers the interpretation of 'warmth' in the literal meaning when harsh winter is replaced by warm spring. The cattle stand with frost on their backs while the 'confidence of the sun' seems to interrupt that gloomy scenario. As the poet points out, the farm animals are 'trustful cattle' (18); they are yearning for the steward to feed them with care. The sense of emptiness, or loss, is apparent in the

⁴¹ Hadley, 'The Elegies of Ted Hughes', p. 177.

landscape as the season transforms the whole environment; however, a sense of unity and resilience is depicted in the animals and the earth. In so doing, Hughes's imagination of the empty farmland reveals his environmental consciousness in relation to the farming figure who fosters care in livestock.

Hughes creates the empty land to emphasise human absence from the co-operative working environment. The personified land (without mastery) is infused with the other natural elements; the farmland is metaphorised into a naked child in the sun. This image of the child symbolically suggests human absence (custodianship) in the landscape:

From now on the land
 Will have to manage without him.
 But it hesitates, in this slow realisation of light,
 Childlike, too naked, in a frail sun,
 With roots cut
 And a great blank in its memory.

(21-26, p. 533)

Hughes highlights Orchard's absence by considering disconnection; the *root* symbolises the *tie* that the farmer has fostered in cultivation, broken by loss. The empty landscape suggests absence; however, it also identifies resilience in the animals and the earth. The reference to 'roots cut' invokes discontinuity in the landscape and its foundation in which the farmer has shaped and cultivated growth and fertility. Now what the poet represents is 'a great blank in its memory'. In this context, Hughes uses the word 'blank' to imply the farmer's absence from the land; the psychological space is incorporated with the physical space.

As 'The day he died' represents seasonal transformation in the constitution of the mode of elegy in this context, agricultural labour is memorialised in the landscape as

much as the human body. Hughes is fascinated by farm work embedded in the land through struggle and harshness; the physical labour and effort that Orchard puts in the earth can be interpreted as a *monument*. As itself ‘A monument’, the poem shifts mourning away from loss to focus on the farmer’s practicality and determination in his task as an ‘appropriate means of remembrance’.⁴² Hughes examines human labour in relation to the elegiac convention.

Traditionally, there are three functions of the elegy: to lament, praise, and console.⁴³ These respond to the experience of loss. First, elegy laments over the death by expressing grief and deprivation. Second, it praises and idealises the deceased and preserves his memory among the living. Third, it consoles a reader, by finding solace in meditation on natural continuances or on moral, metaphysical, and religious values. Elegy often involves questions of initiation and continuity, inheritance and vocation.

Rather than a lament, ‘A monument’ is written to praise the deceased farmer’s practicality. The attempt to manage external nature is acknowledged in Orchard’s working with the earth and hedges. Certainly, the poem illustrates the continuity and essence of farming techniques by passing on a sense of physical skills to the poet as well as to the readers. ‘A monument’ captures Jack Orchard’s hard work under the hedge and the rain in winter. Setting wires for a boundary is an act of marking a landscape to prevent the cattle from roaming out of the farm territory. To do so requires strength and attentiveness. In life, the farmer’s body is integrated with the soil while the stubborn bushes testify to effort and strength in the human figure.

In this way, Hughes represents Orchard as a heroic figure whose work symbolises a contest between man and nature: ‘Your burrowing, gasping struggle/ In the knee-deep mud of the copse ditch’ (1-2, p. 534). The farmer working against the pull

⁴² Hadley, ‘The Elegies of Ted Hughes’, p. 180.

⁴³ *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 324.

of mud and plants can be characterised as the modern georgic by investing labour in the earth. As Fairer suggests, the georgic is likely to be ‘uncertain, changing, and occasionally frustrating’.⁴⁴ Human beings never cease from toil and hard work; thus fencing can be regarded as a heroic act of devotion. The earth and the hedges are a challenge for Orchard and an index of his control over nature.

Nevertheless, there is a sense of Edenic labour in ‘A monument’. The cattle farm requires devotion from the farmer’s hard labour and so Orchard reaps from what he invests in the land through fencing. Hughes emphasises growth, abundance, and fertility in working the earth to show that the practical work on the fence will yield its fruits after the farmer has gone. The fence:

Will remain as a monument, hidden
 Under tightening undergrowth
 Deep under the roadside’s car-glimpsed May beauty,
 To be discovered by some future owner

(13-16, p. 534)

Hughes’s engagement with ‘a monument’ is both literal and metaphorical; first, the fence is a literal monument that marks the earth as property, territory. Here, the object becomes a locus of human labour invested in land. Second, the fence is also a metaphorical monument of the human relationship with the environment: human management and mastery over nature. Notably, a cenotaph, which more usually occurs in Hughes’s contemplation of death, loss, and mourning, is not perceived in this anti-pastoral poem but is replaced by the fence.⁴⁵ Man is rewarded by his struggle once the task is completed. In this light, the elegiac mode is expressed in the memorialised fence

⁴⁴ Fairer, ‘The World of Eco-Georgic’, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Hadley, ‘The Elegies of Ted Hughes’, p. 179.

to which the farmer devotes his life. Orchard builds his own monument and Hughes memorialises his devotion to the farm in this poem.

The last section of 'A monument' represents hard work inscribed in Orchard's body and his *land-mark*. Here, life means devotion to a particular kind of labour. In ways reminiscent of the georgic, human knowledge of the natural environment is fundamental in farming because to cultivate or exploit the land, a farmer has to learn its complexity, diversity, and contrast in relation to the weather and other ecological elements (for example, vermin as in 'Foxhunt'). Fencing becomes a monument and the task establishes the heroic act of cultivating the earth:

And that is where I remember you,
 Skullraked with thorns, sodden, tireless,
 Hauling bedded feet free, floundering away
 To check alignments, returning, hammering the staple
 Into the soaked stake-oak, a careful tattoo
 Precise to the tenth of an inch,
 Under December downpour, mid-afternoon
 Dark as twilight, using your life up.

(21-28, p. 534)

Orchard's moment of struggle through the thicket is memorialised when he is tattered by thorns and sucked down by the muddy swamp. There is a degree of manliness in the farmer's body in relation to the unyielding environment which the farmer has to master through physical power. Hughes uses the word 'skullraked' to emphatically connect the mark on the earth and the mark on the human body made by plants. The 'careful tattoo' on the staple or the border is indicative of Hughes's view toward fencing as an art, agricultural work in which the farmer has to be 'Precise to the tenth of an inch'. The poet suggests the georgic in managing the earth and the farmer's familiarity with his

external environment such as the hedges and the weather. Hughes focuses on the farmer's instinctive skill and hints of a strong bond between the poem's interlocutors. Therefore, 'A monument' can be regarded as a pastoral elegy that praises or idealises Orchard's devotion to farm work. The poem emphasises physical labour in the phrase 'using your life up' to suggest the farmer's physical and spiritual investment in agriculture.

Hughes celebrates Orchard's manliness in relation to strength and skills as he compares the farmer with a soldier. In the note to 'A monument', he writes about his admiration and respect for the farmer as a heroic figure:

Farmers make especially valuable soldiers, I have read, because they are skilled in so many different ways. Jack Orchard belonged to that tradition of farmers who seem equal to any job, any crisis, using the most primitive means, adapting and improvising with any old bit of metal, and the more massive the physical demand, the more novel the engineering problem, the more intricate the mechanical difficulty, the better; and preferably the whole operation should be submerged under the worst possible weather. The concentration with which he transformed himself into these tasks, and the rapt sort of delight, the inner freedom, they seemed to bring him – all without a word spoken – gave me a new meaning for the phrase 'meditation on matter'. He made me understand how Stonehenge was hauled into place and set up as a matter of course, even if the great bluestones had to come from Limerick.⁴⁶

As Hughes writes, the farmer has his own 'inner freedom' to improvise the task, and to adjust the ways to solve problems according to, as already emphasised, essential skills in farm management. The farmer's devotion to farm work can be seen as a sacrifice and

⁴⁶ Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p. 1210.

his skills, like those of soldiers, are transferable to any circumstances. The word 'primitive' in this context suggests direct tasks in primordial time: instinct. Hughes admires Orchard's adaptability in improvising various tasks, including setting the fence. Importantly, the poet sees the farmer's physical skills and adaptability to the environment in that 'the whole operation should be submerged under the worst possible weather'. This claim signifies the interrelatedness of a farmer as superbly skilled in the context of his environment. The analogy lies in Hughes's comparison between Orchard's completion of his hard tasks and the construction of Stonehenge in pre-history. 'A monument' is also Hughes's 'meditation on matter' (like Orchard's concentration on farming) and can be read as having a georgic emphasis on how labour is adapted and managed to harness and understand nature

In relation to human labour and the use of technology (a tractor) in farming, I will move to 'Last Load' which represents the georgic elements with elegiac tone in the distinction between man and the environment. Hughes highlights the language of the machine and the significance of the weather which informs haymaking, necessary in an animal farm. At the beginning, the metaphor, 'heavens of dazzling iron' (5, p. 528), creates the image of light in the sky integrated with hard work in the natural elements through the linguistic register, 'iron' resonating with the poem 'Tractor' discussed earlier. The second and third stanzas are powerful in the evocation of the machine and labour; the rain animates and breaks through 'stillness'. Importantly, the machine facilitates the activity while the rain reinvigorates the environment:

Now, tractor bounding along lanes, among echoes,
 The trailer bouncing, all its iron shouting
 Under sag-heavy leaves
 That seem ready to drip with stillness.
 Cheek in the air alert for the first speck.

You feel sure the rain's already started –
 But for the tractor's din you'd hear it hushing
 In all the leaves. But still not one drop
 On your face or arm. You can't believe it.
 Then hoicking bales, as if at a contest. Leaping
 On and off the tractor as at a rodeo.

(7-17, p. 528)

The 'tractor's din' manifests mechanical power in contrast to the pastoral emphasis on peace and stillness. Hughes creates an organic image of the rain in relation to the machine ('drip with stillness' and 'iron') which is georgic and anti-pastoral; it is the juxtaposition of culture (agriculture and machine) and idealised nature. Hughes personifies the trailer with its 'iron shouting' to demonstrate the disruptive power of the machine in the landscape. In the poem, Hughes is conscious of the weather's influence on haymaking/loading since it can damage the bales and waste the labour invested in the harvest. The vigilant contemplation of the falling rain is imagined in a graphic way to invoke the farmer's relationship with his environment, even though the rain is not felt. 'Cheek in the air alert for the first speck' and 'You feel sure the rain's already started' reflect the poet's and farmers' awareness of the rain as a powerful resource in farming.

In 'Last Load', Hughes's consciousness of the pressing weather represents the importance of co-operation and teamwork to meet urgent demands on the farm. Haymaking requires aid, speed, and strength as seen in the farm hands loading the bales of hay on top of the trailer. The speaker's awareness of the rain reflects the environment's influence on agricultural work, and humans' heavily reliance on nature is

highly emphasised in Hughes's imagery. Here, co-operation of farm hands is noted with the pressure of the coming rain:

Then fast as you dare, watching the sky
 And watching the load, and feeling the air darken
 With wet electricity,
 The load foaming through leaves, and wallowing
 Like a tug-boat meeting in the open sea –
 The tractor's front wheels rearing up, as you race,
 And pawing the air. Then all hands
 Pitching the bales off, in under a roof,
 Anyhow, then back for the last load.

(24-32, p. 529)

The simile of 'a tug-boat meeting the open sea' powerfully represents the georgic imagining of the landscape: the farmland as the sea of hay and the trailer as a boat. In this unexpectedly figurative language, rural work is re-presented as a hard, collective effort of will. The position of the 'tractor's front wheels rearing up' in connection with the 'tug-boat' emphasises the deployment of technology in farming. The reference to 'all hands' and 'race' to complete the task highlights unity and co-operation among the farm workers before resuming the last mission.

'Last Load' manifests Hughes's environmental imagination in the description of colours in the farm: the 'green light' (33), the 'dark trees' (34), the 'emerald hills' (35), and the 'blue cloud' (36). The natural elements in diverse colours reinforce the transition of time from day till dusk and the movement of human labour from outside to inside. Hughes emphasises hard labour by invoking 'desperate loading' (36) to illustrate the complexity of the human-nature relationship and their interdependence. In the following stanza, the body is linked to the natural entity during work:

Your sweat tracks through your dust, your shirt flaps chill,
 And bales multiply out of each other
 All down the shorn field ahead.
 The faster you fling them up, the more there are of them –
 Till suddenly the field's grey empty. It's finished.

(37-41, p. 529)

The falling sweat suggests the union of the human body and the earth. This imagery offers the Biblical allusion to the Edenic fall which meant that humans had to till the soil in order to reap from it (which reminds us of Fairer's notion of the georgic characteristics in relation to the challenges and complexities of the natural world). In other words, the loading scene proposes a reward for the finished process of haymaking; 'the bales multiply out of each other' and 'the faster you fling them up, the more there are of them'. Loading bales of hay can be considered in line with haymaking and harvesting as 'peak-time' activities which require co-operation from farm hands.⁴⁷ The completion of the task becomes a reward and the urgency of the rain is the catalyst that signifies the transition of time and the seasonal cycles. Importantly, the 'shorn field' suggests a metaphorical connection with other aspects of farming; 'shorn' (shear) links the act of mowing the field with shearing sheep. Both processes inform the implications of custodianship already discussed. Hughes's depiction of the pressing weather paves the way for an engagement with nature manifested in the rain. The tone is celebratory and rewarding as the task is completed. In so doing, the poet imagines rain imagery to celebrate and highlight the successful harvest:

As the rain begins
 Softly and vertically silver, the whole sky softly
 Falling into the stubble all round you

⁴⁷ Goodridge, p. 29.

The trees shake out their masses, joyful,
 Drinking the downpour.
 The hills pearled, the whole distance drinking
 And the earth-smell warm and thick as smoke

And you go, and over the whole land
 Like singing heard across evening water
 The tall loads are swaying towards their barns
 Down the deep lanes.

(43-53, p. 529)

The last section of 'Last Load' shows how rain transforms the scene. Hughes's description of the silver rain softly falling on the earth and around the farmers articulates the harmony of nature. The recurring image of the 'heavy leaves' suggests that the pressing rain lifts the farmer's burden. Hughes's personification of trees drinking the downpour in a joyful manner is elevated to the metaphor of the 'pearled hills'. The interactions between natural elements including rain, sky, earth, and trees are ecologically oriented. The poem creates a sense of touch in the soft rain, a sense of smell in the tobacco reek through the farmer's nostril and the 'earth-smell' that is 'warm and thick as smoke'. In addition, the rainfall is heard as 'singing' across evening water. This ecological poetics intensifies Hughes's environmental imagination to celebrate farm labour in the georgic sentiment. Importantly, Hughes praises the deceased through his labour as consolation in nature is implicated in the title. As the poem concludes, the rejuvenation of rain on the earth is a solution to the scorching heat at the beginning. 'Last Load' focuses on the landscape as a site of memorialising the figure of the farmer. Hughes invokes the natural elements to highlight the man-nature relationship through the interdependence between farming as a practice and its conditions; my georgic

reading illuminates the aesthetic of rural poetry as the title ‘Last Load’ suggests Orchard’s farewell to farm labour.

Extending from making hay to harvesting the animal, Hughes examines farm work by focusing on the interaction between human and farm creatures. ‘A memory’ captures the ordinary work of shearing sheep and shows that attentiveness to livestock becomes the memory of hard labour. The farmer’s patience is examined in managing the animals influenced by the environment. Given the image of Orchard’s physical posture handling the shearer and the sheep, ‘A memory’ invokes mastery and care through physical contact with farm animals. The depiction of the farmer’s body reflects his manliness and passion in the task memorialised in the poem.

In ‘A memory’, Hughes addresses devotion to hard farm work in his examination of the man’s body. The direct address to the farmer as ‘You’ suggests a close relationship between the poet and the shepherd in a realistic and up-close viewpoint. The poet’s observation of Orchard’s posture reveals his admiration for the particular man and embeds that ‘memory’ within the poem. With the simile of the man being ‘Powerful as a horse’ (2, p. 535), the poem, as we have come to expect, portrays Orchard with energy and strength, and characterised by a passion in his work. The emphasis on ‘bowing’ or being ‘bowed’ creates resistance to the earth’s pulling force in shearing and this reveals the human strength devoted to the task and the power of language to create that tension between the human and the animal. Orchard is initially perceived with his ‘bony white bowed back’ (1) exposed to cold and heat:

Bowed over an upturned sheep
 Shearing under the East chill through-door draught
 In the cave-dark barn, sweating and freezing –
 Flame-crimson face, drum-guttural African curses

(3-6, p. 535)

Working in the barn requires strength and endurance to handle the sheep as the farmer is exposed to heat and cold. The presentation of his body ('bony white') is contradictory to the 'Flame-crimson face' that suggests the body in struggle, resulting in curses. Hughes uses 'drum-guttural African curses' to signify the aural sense which is generated by the body; thus, the farmer's physicality is integrated with the metaphor of a drum. Generally, a drum is associated with music, steady rhythm, and repetition; however, it signifies an articulation of sound through hard labour in this context. The hyphenated phrase, 'cave-dark barn' constitutes hardship in sheering resulting in the body, the 'Flame-crimson face'. In this light, Hughes depicts the human body influenced by heat in the dark barn to suggest the power of poetry and environmental imagination.

In 'A memory', Hughes develops an organic metaphor of the farmer handling the animal. The sheep is imagined as a bale of straw: 'As you bundled the sheep/ Like tying some oversize, overweight, spilling bale/ Through its adjustments of position' (7-9, p. 535). The comparison between the sheep and the bale produces an ecological connection between the animal (an object of shearing) and the bale (an object of haymaking). Mastering domesticated animals and tying the bale become a metaphor of work which connects the farmer to the poet's memory. Another important point is the shepherd's relationship with the animal. Orchard's handling of the sheep is a complex combination of care to harness the creature as a commodity: 'Through all your suddenly savage, suddenly gentle/ Masterings of the animal' (12-13, p. 535). Hughes's play on the opposite meanings here ('savage' versus 'gentle') is based on the linguistic dichotomy which reveals the farmer's attentiveness and farming practice that requires the animal's well-being as well as control over its wild behaviour.

In addition to mastering the sheep, Hughes compares the barn with the industrial environment. 'A memory' considers the human attempt to harness nature both in handling animals and exploiting the earth's resources. The simile of the third stanza

powerfully describes difficult shearing in the dark barn; the collier's work in the mine requires similar patience and strength:

You were like a collier, a face-worker
 In a dark hole of obstacle
 Heedless of your own surfaces
 Inching by main strength into the solid hour,
 Bald, arch-wrinkled, weathered dome bowed
 Over your cigarette comfort

(14-19, pp. 535-36)

The distinctive metaphor of the barn and the mine pit places the farmer in a difficult environment. His endurance in shearing can be compared to the collier's working in the dark, 'solid hour'. The description of his body significantly suggests the signs of long and hard work in farm life. When the farmer is heedless of his 'own surfaces', he is removed from his body as a result of his labour. As the poem shows, the weather has certainly transformed the farmer's body: 'Bald, arch-wrinkled, weathered dome bowed'. Hughes's poetry imagines the physical body to suggest strength and endurance of the farming figure. Being bald and having wrinkles are signs of aging as well as evidence of hard work. The repetition of 'bow' emphasises human strength in the physical structure through the use of architectural language, the 'dome'. In this context, the shepherd's body is influenced by nature; Jack Orchard is depicted as resistant to, and shaped by the hostile weather in the barn environment. In fact, the farmer becomes one with external nature. Hughes connects the cigarette in 'A memory' with the metaphor of the collier working in the dark mine in which the glowing light becomes a sign of time. For the shepherd, shearing seems to be timed by the banal and ordinary temporality of smoking.

Hughes's fascination with the body contributes to his development of an environmental consciousness. The farmer, as I have said, becomes memorialised in

poetry as being at one with the earth. 'Now you have to push' further examines the farmer's body, hands, and face to reveal the close interconnection between the man and his environment. The title suggests the use of force in farm work and the act of moving forward with physical energy that humans put into the task against natural forces. Through all his toil and animal husbandry, Orchard's devotion to Moortown farm inspires Hughes's contemplation of his hands that symbolise creation and mastery of work. Equally important, the examination of Orchard's face reflects the enduring experience and perception in both the man and farm life. 'Now you have to push' introduces the readers to Orchard's hands by connecting them to the environment:

Your hands
 Lumpish roots of earth cunning
 So wrinkle-scarred, such tomes
 Of what has been collecting centuries
 At the bottom of so many lanes
 Where roofs huddle smoking, and cattle
 Trample the ripeness

(1-7, p. 536)

The hands that cultivate the land are represented as the earth's 'roots' to draw on the fundamental integrity of the human body and the environment. In 'The day he died', Hughes refers to 'roots' as a tie between the farmer and the cattle to associate death with the land cut off from its organic foundation. Here in 'Now you have to push', the metaphor of hands as 'roots of the earth' importantly suggests Hughes's poetics of the human body, as not being apart from the landscape. The hands symbolise creation and a record of experience as seen in the metaphor of books ('tomes').

As evidence of experience, hands maintain knowledge through time. 'Now you have to push' links the human body with the earth by showing that Orchard's devotion

to the farm engages with working the soil: man inseparable from external nature. The reference to the bottom lanes, where the shelters are located and the cattle wander, indicates the vital position of hands in constructing the physical environment. By linking the hands as ‘roots of earth’ and hands that build the road on which the cattle ‘Trample the ripeness’, Hughes signifies the physical contribution made by the farmer in enriching the earth. Thus, the metaphor of hands and the earth develops a sense of ecological language, ecological connectedness, with a focus on the creative function of the human body, and the human-animal relationship in farm ecology.

In the second stanza, Hughes contemplates the face as an embodiment of experience through the seasonal mechanism. The detailed description of Orchard’s face, moustache, body, and strength results in the power of the word ‘push’. The face on which the poet focuses is ‘So tool-worn, so land-weathered,/ This patch of ancient, familiar locale’ (9-10, p. 536). As the hands are compared to the ‘roots of earth’, the face becomes a ‘locale’ which is associated with manual labour in the ‘tool-worn’ description and is imbued with external nature through the ‘land-weathered’ metaphor. The face is metaphorised in both mechanical language and ecological language. Hughes’s use of both registers reflects his interest in the language of technology, farm labour, and the environmental imagination of the human body. ‘This patch of ancient, familiar locale’ represents the farm guardian’s endurance, attentiveness to the place and animals, knowledge of farming and the land’s history.

Comparing the ‘Masai figure’ (12, p. 536) with Orchard’s appearance, Hughes suggests the man’s down-to-earth attributes constructed out of vitality in the body and spirit. This physical description of the indigenous tribesman reflects Hughes’s consciousness of Orchard’s North African roots.⁴⁸ Lines 12 and 13 create a sense of

⁴⁸ Hughes notes in ‘A memory’ that Jack Orchard has his origin from African Moorish ancestors. Hughes writes: ‘He spoke the broadest Devonshire with a very deep African sort of timbre. Unlike

cheerfulness when Hughes refers to the farmer's body ('Masai figure') and recreation ('dances'). This imagery lessens the elegiac tone as it brings back the poet's memory of the deceased's vitality through the association of the human body, labour, and relaxation.

The last part of the second stanza returns to the theme of mastery: 'Your hawser and lever strength/ Which you used, so recklessly,/ Like a tractor, guaranteed unbreakable' (14-16, p. 536). The idea of heavy equipment is incorporated with ideas of human strength, reminiscent of 'Tractor'. For Scigaj, '[h]ands are levers with which to maintain the farm's ecological balance, but more importantly hands-on experience is a much surer way of immersing oneself in nature than relying on words'.⁴⁹ In 'Now you have to push', Hughes sees the man's physical power in managing his tasks as having the certainty of human strength elevated to the rigid operation of a powerful machine; this correspondence can be described as a combination of industrial culture and the imagination of a human body. In this light, the title 'Now you have to push' elaborates the poet's attitude towards the farmer in two ways; first, he is devoted to working the earth and second, he is engaged with using technology to master external nature.

Hughes's representation of the human body in these poems indicates his implication of farm labour articulated in elegy. As established earlier, *Moortown Diary* is in part a reinvention of modern georgic poetry; Hughes develops a sense of adaptation and co-operation between man and non-human nature including farm animals, seasonal cycles, the landscape, and the environment. In 'Hands', the last poem in the collection, the poet uses synecdoche of the human body to represent the key idea of hard work. The re-creation of the georgic is infused with a sense of loss and memory

the indigenous Devonians who seem to be usually short, and often thick-set, he was very tall, broad and gangly, with immense hands. His line of Orchards came via Hartland, opposite the Isle of Lundy, which at one time was held by Moorish seafarers (hence the Moriscoes), and blood-group factors evidently do reveal pockets of North African genes here and there along the North and South Cornwall and Devon coasts'. *Collected Poems*, p. 1211.

⁴⁹ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 122.

in the elegiac tradition. The hands are a source of creation and a record of experience as seen in the farmer working the soil, tightening the wires to set the farm's boundary, and handling the cattle. 'Hands' epitomises the practicality of the human body in relation to the environment: 'You used them with as little regard/ As old iron tools – as if their creased, glossed, crocodile leather/ Were nerveless, like an African's footsoles' (3-5, p. 537). The metaphor of hands as 'old iron tools' significantly suggests the utility of the body. Also, the 'crocodile leather' and 'African's footsoles' link the farmer's hands to pre-industrial characteristics such as adaptability, endurance, and strength in relation to the harsh seasons and hostile environment. In fact, the farmer's body is formed by the environment. Hughes's imagination of the farmer's body in 'Hands' constitutes an ecological connection between the farmer's supposed genealogy, his physical energy and practicality, and the environment's influence.

Given the practicality of hands, the depiction of the farmer's handling of animals powerfully embodies physical contact with the animal that is different from the traditional pastoral elegy. Grasping the bullocks and widening their mouths, the farmer harnesses the beasts through his strength and the practice of care. The georgic attentiveness to farming practice is invoked in the interaction between the human figure and non-human creatures; 'I understood again/ How the world of half-ton hooves, and horns,/ And hides heedless as oaken-boarding, comes to be manageable' (13-15, p. 537). Hughes points out the virtue of animal husbandry (control and care) to reveal the ambiguous relationship between the farmer and domesticated creatures.

In this context, it is seen that the cattle are necessarily domesticated and bred to serve an economic purpose; however, they are partly wild animals that are managed, controlled, and ultimately utilised or consumed as commodity. The contact during animal husbandry forms a strong bond between the human and the animal, as already seen in the metaphor of cattle in 'The day he died'. Hence, hands become the pivotal

part through which contact and mastery are mediated. Hughes promotes the ecological connection between animals' body parts and the farmer's hands in the same way as these animals' organs connect with the earth. The emphasis on those 'hands', 'hooves', 'horns', and 'hides' creates an eco-poetics of the body (both in man and animal) in conjunction with the farm environment.

In addition, the association of hands with the machine links the creativity of the body with the tractor's autonomy and effectiveness. The hands are 'more of a piece with your tractor/ Than with their own nerves' (16-17, p. 537). This metonymy of hands indicates Hughes's interest in, and development of, the language of technology in modern farming. The poet redefines the georgic tradition by focusing on humans' adaptation of culture to benefit from nature. Moreover, as hands are heavily used in hard work, the repetition of disregarded 'nerves' brings in the close connection between the earth and the hands as 'dung forks' (18, p. 537). As the poem moves forward, the focus on technology and the body is replaced by contact with animals in lambing imagery; the hands are 'suave as warm oil inside the wombs of ewes,/ And monkey delicate' (19-20, p. 537). Hughes's association of hands, soil, and the animals constitutes the interdependence between the human and the external environment in modern georgic poetry.

In the last two stanzas, 'Hands' considers labour and strength in the farmer's body to critique smoking. The cigarette which glows through hard work ironically 'nurses' the lung. Hughes is critical of smoking that shortens the life of the strong and healthy man; the cigarette 'squeezed your strength to water/ And stopped you' (24-25, p. 537). The burning cigarette in both 'A memory' and 'Hands' symbolises the passage of time and the decay of the human body in which labour is encapsulated and yet consequently destroyed.

Given that hands are important in creating the farm, cultivating the earth, mastering the machine, and handling the animals, 'Hands' ends with an image of death in the depiction of the deceased farmer. The sense of loss and mourning prevails over the whole stanza:

Your hands lie folded, estranged from all they have done
 And as they have never been, and startling –
 So slender, so taper, so white,
 Your mother's hands suddenly in your hands –
 In that final strangeness of elegance.

(26-30, p. 537)

The presentation of the folded hands 'estranged' from farm labour signifies the last retreat of a human life – death. Here, the language of the body and the experience of loss become an event of lamentation in my view. Hughes's contemplation of Orchard's hands can be regarded as the 'work of mourning'⁵⁰ in which praising the heroic farmer leads to consolation in the natural environment. Death ceases all hard labour and transforms masculine physicality into delicateness reinforced by the presence of the mother figure. The 'slender', 'taper', and 'white' hands invoke the loss of vitality and masculinity; they are depicted in contrast to the 'lumpish', rough, and 'bloody' great hands at the beginning of the poem. The hands that master the machine, work the soil, and handle the animals, in this context, are deprived of vitality and contact with the farm environment.

The presence of Orchard's mother's hands (not father's) is suggestive of the return to nurturing quality. Whereas toil and misery in mastering the farm represents the hands' masculine experience with the earth, Hughes shows that protectiveness in the mother's hands signifies a return to death and retreat to nature in a traditional pastoral

⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, quoted in Sacks, p. 1.

sense. This image of folded hands epitomises a farewell to hard labour and the power of creation in the landscape. Scigaj argues that ‘the master farmer and his assistant fulfil in their husbandry the laudable ecological goal of stewardship, assisting nature with hands that function equally well in heavy labour and in the delicate midwifery of reaching into animals wombs to assist lambings’.⁵¹ The final image of ‘strangeness of elegance’ articulates the elegiac tone in ‘Hands’ that elaborates a sense of loss and the absence of the deceased; this presentation enriches Hughes’s lamentation for the farming hero.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Hughes’s depiction of agricultural labour in *Moortown Diary* informs his reinvention of the georgic and elegy. The figure of the farmer is postulated as a guardian or custodian of the land. Orchard’s devotion to the farm, for instance, is invested in the earth in which his labour and energy are connected with the environments that define him. Hughes’s georgic poetry represents working with external nature by emphasising the farmer’s connection with the landscape, the machine, and the animal. Through the examination of births and deaths and human-animal relationships in the farm environment, I have exposed an ethic of care in Hughes’s poetry. Hughes develops pastoral elegy to praise Jack Orchard for his heroic management of the natural environment based not on sorrow but instead on devotion to labour and consolation derived from the natural environment. As David Kennedy notes, ‘[...] writing about the dead may spring from deep personal emotion, making mourning into a text inevitably makes mourning into cultural performance and cultural work’.⁵² In this light, Hughes’s poetry creates the cultural work of rural life and poetic imagination. *Moortown Diary* shows the power of poetic language to imagine the regeneration of the

⁵¹ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 123.

⁵² David Kennedy, *Elegy* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 121.

farm after the loss of the farming figure. It depicts a resilient human nature that progresses achievements which are both modest and heroic under the seasonal cycles.

As Susan Bassnett notes without making the connection with a modern georgic:

Now he [Hughes] shows how man can act alongside Nature, as a custodian and as a kind of partner. Farming is all about man collaborating with the natural world, with animals, the soil, landscape and the elements [...]⁵³

My discussion has examined Hughes's reinterpretation of rural poetry into a mode that refashions the contemporary georgic and elegiac convention as a means to re-value the natural environment in relation to an ethic of care. The next chapter will examine the role of Hughes's poetry in revitalising geographical memory in the Yorkshire bioregion, particularly in relation to history, and the use of technology in the landscape.

⁵³ Susan Bassnett, *Ted Hughes* (Devon: Northcote, 2009), p. 28.

**Chapter III Geographical Memory, Machine Technology and Bioregionalism:
Rewriting the Environment in *Remains of Elmet***

Chapter I explored ideas of ‘wildness’ and ‘wilderness’ in relation to wildlife and natural phenomena while Chapter II investigated the georgic and elegiac elements in human-animal relationships. This third chapter builds on my earlier consideration of ‘wildness’ and domestication by developing the central idea of a distinctive poetics formed in relation to specific environments. Hughes’s accounts of his childhood environments give an indication of how his poetry aligns memory, cultural geography, social dynamism, and natural history. Drawing on autobiographical experiences in *Remains of Elmet* (1979), Hughes develops a poetics upon oblique revivals of childhood memory in his depiction of Yorkshire environments.

Remains of Elmet was published in an artistic partnership with photographer Fay Godwin. The Calder Valley in which Hughes grew up is invoked with familial memory, memories of hunting, and echoes of social and political transformations through time. Hughes’s poetry re-creates the stories of places inseparable from the present conditions of the environment, shaped by the legacy of industrialisation and local culture.¹ In uniting poetic space and cultural memory, Hughes rewrites geography and critiques the transformations of place through the language of metaphor. Emphasising non-human values, the poet augments the actual landscapes by imagining the history of place and representing the ecological interconnectedness of the post-industrial Yorkshire bioregion.

¹ Hughes’s Yorkshire environment, as Seamus Heaney argues, is ‘a primeval landscape where stones cry out and horizons endure, where the elements inhabit the mind with religious force [...]’. Seamus Heaney, ‘Englands of the Mind’, in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 150-69 (p. 151).

This chapter examines the reconstruction of poetic space through the agency of social memory and locates geographical significance in relation to ecology. I will draw on Axel Goodbody's study of cultural memory and Andrew Thacker's critique of critical literary geography to analyse Hughes's poetic creativity, the idea of dwelling, and his sense of place. I will also consider the manifestation of machine culture in the remains of buildings and derelict industrial sites invoked in Hughes's poetry in order to examine his sense of industrial impact on the external environment and the effects of machine technology on human consciousness.

By discussing Martin Heidegger's question of technology and his claim that nature is a 'standing reserve' for humanity's end, I will examine objects, such as stone and mill ruins, and their connection with place. Focusing on values, I incorporate my reading of Freya Mathews's concept of 'ecological values'² and Val Plumwood's exploration of the cultural value of 'resource' material, such as stones.³ With reference to ideas of 'bioregionalism' theorised by Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann, I will analyse how Hughes's poetry offers not only a critique of a particular environment but also establishes connections between a sense of belonging and inhabitants in the larger ecological scale of a region.⁴ Towards the end of this chapter, I argue that his poetry has deliberately 'revealed' and reshaped landscapes in ways that promote an understanding of external nature in relation to human culture and the regeneration of the earth. Hughes develops what we might today think of as an ecocritical perspective.

² Freya Mathews, *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 118-21.

³ Val Plumwood, 'Journey to the Heart of Stones', in *Culture, Creativity and Environment*, ed. by Fiona Becket and Terry Gifford (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 17-36.

⁴ Doug Aberly, 'Interpreting bioregionalism', in *Bioregionalism*, ed. by Michael Vincent McGinnis (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 13-42 (p. 22).

Cultural memory and literary geography

Hughes deploys the idea of cultural memory in order to revive childhood landscapes and re-evaluate the significance of geography. The poet sees his childhood landscape as a source of poetic creativity; as I will show, he develops an environmental consciousness and explores a politics of space. Geological, social, and technological transformations in the Calder Valley all interest him.

Remains of Elmet connects the poet's imaginary landscapes with an actual place. As Simon Armitage observes, this collection reveals the poet's deep memory of place. Hughes's recalling of the experience of his childhood environment is compared to 'burrowing into the past'.⁵ Although not all of what the poet imaginatively describes in *Remains of Elmet* can be taken as fact, Hughes must not be accused of falsifying the past because he re-creates memory and history through poetic imagination. In fact, as Armitage notes, Hughes's 'portrayal of that part of the world is always graphic and never without significance, but his role as poet should not be confused with that of the fastidious chronicler or the scrupulous local historian'.⁶ The significance of ecology is integrated with social history in the imaginative process of writing which metaphorically revives the concept of place. Hughes's personal memory is intertwined with collective memory as seen in the representation of war memorials, the industrial valley, and the Yorkshire moorlands. His birthplace is embedded within social and geological history and his eco-poetics can be described as grounded in 'the cultural and textual construction of places'.⁷

⁵ Simon Armitage, 'The Ascent of Ted Hughes: Conquering the Calder Valley', in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Mark Wormald, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 6-16 (p. 7).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Axel Goodbody, 'Sense of Place and Lieu de Memoire: A Cultural Memory Approach to Environmental Texts', in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, ed. by Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (London: The University of Virginia Press, 2011), pp. 55-67 (p. 55).

Axel Goodbody points out the differences between ecocriticism and cultural memory studies, suggesting that ecocriticism relates to nature, space and cultural constructions of the environment, while cultural memory studies are oriented toward history and time in ways that implicate the individual and collective culture. He considers the Holocaust and collective memory in Germany as connected to ‘literary remembering’.⁸ The emphasis of his point lies in the term ‘figurations of memory’ (Aleida Assman’s phrase) which is a ‘process of intertextual revisiting and reconfiguring of tropes, narratives and images’ in the ‘reshaping of public perceptions of nature and the environment’, particularly with a focus on place.⁹ This means a literary work can reconstruct a sense of belonging to place through the revival of personal and social memory in the form of narrative or poetry. To ‘re-member’ the history of these places or to re-imagine the myths of place will create a poetics which consciously exploits intertextuality.

The idea of cultural memory in relation to a sense of place recalls Andrew Thacker’s description of ‘critical literary geography’ that emphasises the reading process and considers texts as spaces. Thacker traces ‘the textuality of space’ or the ‘spatiality of texts’ to theorise his critical literary geography from Fredric Jameson’s postmodern space to Edward Said’s imperial space. To the point where Derek Gregory’s notion of ‘textualisation of landscape’ is invoked, Thacker argues that a critical literary geography is ‘a process of reading and interpreting literary texts by reference to geographical concepts such as space and place, social space, time-space compression, and spatial history’.¹⁰ Poetic textuality can reinterpret a physical landscape in connection with socio-political and cultural dimensions. As Thacker notes, to think geographically and environmentally about literary and cultural texts, one has to

⁸ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁰ Andrew Thacker, ‘The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography’ *New Formations*, 57(2005), 56-73 (p. 60).

understand them in ‘material locations’ that should be examined historically to see ‘how diverse spaces can reflect, produce or resist forms of power’.¹¹

Hughes’s spatial poetry, as I coin the term, creates an imaginary space that represents and scrutinises the social landscapes of industrialisation and the political history of the Great War. Hughes incorporates personal memory with collective memory to construct cultural identity as symbolically seen in the environments of his childhood (for example, the cenotaphs and mill ruin will be discussed in this chapter). Goodbody’s approach to cultural memory and Thacker’s theory of the textualisation of space inform my discussion of Hughes’s work as the poet rewrites the landscapes of the Calder Valley and the recent environmental history of Yorkshire as a bioregion. I will examine the material locations of *Remains of Elmet* in response to the critical literary ecology and cultural memory.

The Calder Valley: the body of ecology and ‘dwelling’

The first poem of *Remains of Elmet*, ‘The Dark River’, reconstructs the landscape of the Calder Valley through personal memory. The interconnections between ecological space and collective memory, industrialisation and war, produce social and historical continuity. Hughes re-imagines the landscape of memory through a dedication to his mother; he recalls the childhood experiences from his uncle in the symbolic title – ‘The Dark River’ – to signal the flow of familial memory and environmental history. The River Calder runs through the Pennines that contribute to Yorkshire’s unique ecology. The Calder fosters an ecological awareness and a sense of place in the poet whose later relocation to the south allows him to reveal the diverse social and cultural dimensions of his Yorkshire birthplace in poetry. On one hand, he was the Calder dweller; on the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

other, he is a poet who revives this geography through personal memory. In ‘The Dark River’, the language of the body is significantly created to highlight the valley from a social and ecological perspective:

And the smoky valley never closes,
 The womb that bore him, chimney behind chimney,
 Horizons herded – behind encircling horizons,
 A happy hell, the arguing, immortal dead,
 The hymns rising past farms.

(15-19, p. 455)

The image of a valley ceaselessly producing smoke suggests the vitality of the local community in which industrial enterprise became vibrantly progressive. Hughes makes use of metonymy – the ‘chimney’ – to represent the whole mill industry that developed the region of West Yorkshire where wool and cotton trading gave rise to prosperity. Metaphorically, the Calder Valley is compared to a ‘womb’, which indicates the ecology of the body that bears and nurtures lives.

According to Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993), the ‘body’ is the text of culture.¹² In her argument, the body, especially of a woman, is a metaphor of culture. As I read it, a woman’s body reflects social constructions that are manifested in language, often the language of the female body. Thus, to connect Bordo’s notion of the body as a cultural text with my reading of Hughes’s perception of his childhood ecology, the linguistic register of ‘womb’ signifies the reproductive process of the ‘body’ of the natural landscape. The ‘womb’ valley is by implication a source of fertility or infertility which defines the natural environment. Thus, the imagined landscape as a womb that nurtures lives in the Calder reflects Hughes’s combination of poetic register and ecology. Significantly, the third

¹² Quoted in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, et. al., 2nd edn (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), p. 2240.

line creates a poetic landscape with a graphic image of hills encircling one another, as seen in 'Horizons herded', that implies plurality. In addition, the horizon suggests a 'perspective' that the moorlands offer the poet: a never-ending poetic space.

With respect to the physical landscape, the word 'herd' is used to produce an intimate connection between the external environment (a herd of hills) and a human community. There is a pun in the word 'herd' which can be interpreted as 'heard' in that sound is integrated with vision. Hence, 'Horizons herded' suggests both visual imagery of the moors and the sound of the environment (wind) articulated in the word. Also, the word 'herded' represents the language of cultivation in animal farming because it indicates the management of landscape (hills) through horizons. Concentrating on the register of the body, Hughes suggests that the moorlands are hills of perspectives and memory; they formulate his conception and incorporation of external nature and a human environment.

Paradoxically, the valley is both a positive and negative place since it is 'A happy hell'. The dichotomy of 'heaven and hell', suggests a problematic environment where industrial enterprise has progressed; yet, industry also constitutes the causes of the degraded landscape. Hughes's criticism of industrialisation and its effects on external nature draws on the legacy of the Romantic movement which reacts against science and the rationalisation of nature. William Blake, for example, saw the Industrial Revolution as 'a mill with complicated wheels' which displaced 'subjects from labour, helped to alienate them from nature, and sought to shape those subjects in its own image, giving rise to the Satanic mills that despoil England's green and pleasant land'.¹³ For Hughes, the smoky valley is not seen as 'a mill with complicated wheels' but instead a 'hell' which enslaves the local people to work.

¹³ Mark Lussier, 'Blake and Science Studies', in *William Blake Studies*, ed. by Nicholas M. Williams (London: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 186-213 (p. 189).

In contrast to hell, the Calder Valley is a happy 'home' which fosters in its inhabitants a degree of economic prosperity related to the textile industry and farming. The death of the industrial valley leaves palpable remains in the environment. The 'hymns rising past farms' links farming space, which is nature understood as culture, to religion – the Methodist church that is central to the working-class community. In this poem, Hughes observes the influence of religion on the environment compared with that of the established industry, and the change from traditional agriculture to commercial production.

The Calder Valley in 'The Dark River' is a 'material location' and a 'textual space' which produces a form of resistance against industrial culture; Hughes critiques the problematic transformation of use in the landscape. In this light, although his poetry scrutinises the power of technological progress, the reshaped landscape is not a total rejection of industrialisation but instead a critical reflection of its effects on the environment and local population. In the preface to *Elmet* (1994), Hughes acknowledges the significance of the Calder Valley in relation to Industrial Revolution:

The region's early prosperity was based on wool, and the household industry had shaped architectural features in the old farms and cottages. So, when the time came, the spirit of the place was ready to take advantage of mass-production, and wherever water ran mills sprang up. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Calder was called 'the hardest worked river in England'.¹⁴

The changed landscape suggests anxieties about environmental transformation in the context of industrial modernity. This 'hardest worked' valley constitutes the poet's complex perception of technology and industrialism in his poetry. The chimney in 'The Dark River' brings back the history of industrial progress in nineteenth-century

¹⁴ Hughes, 'A preface to *Elmet*' in *Collected Poems*, p. 1201.

England; yet, it can also be seen as alienated dereliction in the present landscape. Moreover, the representation of space should be considered in relation to spatial histories and spaces of consumption. The literary trend after the 1960s, broadly speaking, emphasises the significance of ecological awareness and environmental transformation. Therefore, *Remains of Elmet* and many later collections are products of social and historical dimensions and the politics of nature. Hughes's poetry creates a form of resistance against complacency regarding the influence of industrial culture on the 'natural' environment.

In 'The Dark River', the Calder Valley can be seen as an ecological 'house' which reveals the dynamic environment encapsulated by social and historical complexity. The word ecology is derived from 'eco' (Greek *oikos*) which refers to 'the home or place of dwelling'.¹⁵ In representing his 'home' land, Hughes's poetry (*poiesis* as making) undergoes a process of re-imagining the landscape in metaphorical language. His oeuvre can be called eco-poetics: the making of 'home' for dwelling. For Simon Armitage, the Calder Valley in Hughes's poetry reflects the poet 'ascending' to his literary achievement from a locale of contradictions that shape his poetic identity. These contradictions include environmental transformations influenced by industrialisation, the local culture, palpable in religion and memorials of historical disruptions by war. Armitage contends:

[T]he valley becomes a kind of trap, a narrow funnel of darkness and fumes.

In his memory, and with the poet cranking up the rhetoric, it then becomes a gorge, ditch, a trough, a pit and ultimately (and perhaps inevitably) a trench. It is a place to be avoided or escaped, and the only escape route is up. Above the confines of the valley lie illumination and reprieve – a fleeting but nonetheless

¹⁵ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 75.

worthwhile sense of enlightenment and hope. And Hughes's means of escape is not crampons or ladders or ropes, but language. Words.¹⁶

A 'trap' metaphor of the valley is created with 'darkness' and 'fumes' to suggest a rapport with the environment. Through his imagination, Hughes uses 'words' to 'escape' from this 'trap' in search of poetic identity and with the hope of seeing the place in a new perspective so that his psyche is not fettered by the bleak landscape. The imaginary valley as a 'trench' will be seen in poems which highlight the legacy of conflict in nature, creatively depicted in relation to mourning and memorialisation. Armitage's suggestion of Hughes's 'ascending' to poetic identity is formulated through his contemplation of the poet's dwelling.

In 'The Dark River', a sense of place is inseparable from the idea of dwelling. The Calder Valley fostered in Hughes an idea of environment that allows him to perceive nature as a 'wild' space as much as a managed landscape. It is an ecosystem – a dwelling place which includes human community, farmlands, and woodlands. Hughes's childhood memory and sense of place can be illuminated by Martin Heidegger's idea of 'dwelling' in relation to poetry *and* the notion of 'building' (Hughes's environmental consciousness). For Heidegger, 'dwelling' is a state that human beings achieve on earth, in a space or at a location made present, palpably, in poetry (thus dwelling is a function of poetry). In poetry, a sense of belonging to an environment can be created; Heidegger borrows Friedrich Holderlin's phrase, 'poetically, man dwells'.¹⁷ While 'building' as a construction is not defined as 'dwelling' due to its lack of 'presencing' or a sense of belonging to place, ecological

¹⁶ Armitage, p. 9.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), p. 211.

dwelling then becomes the significant concept of building one's place and identity. It is dwelling in poetic language that mortals (humans) are on the earth.¹⁸

Heidegger makes a further proposition that '[t]he relation between location and space lies in the nature of these things *qua* locations, but so does the relation of the location to the man who lives at that location'.¹⁹ The interactions between the location and its dwellers are highlighted in the idea of 'dwelling', and Heidegger emphasises the role of poetic language in creating human dwelling and its meaning:

But dwelling occurs only when poetry comes to pass and is present, and indeed in the way whose nature we now have some idea of, as taking a measure for all measuring. The measure-making is itself an authentic measure-making, no mere gauging with ready-made measuring rods for the making of maps. Nor is poetry building in the sense of raising and fitting buildings. But poetry, as the authentic gauging of the dimension of dwelling, is the primal form of building. Poetry first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presencing being. Poetry is the original admission of dwelling.²⁰

This sums up Heidegger's emphasis on the power of language, particularly poetry, to constitute human dwelling on earth. Metaphorically, poetry allows man's existence, not in the way of physical building or mapping the land, but in the way of inhabiting the environment through language. In this respect, Hughes's poetic space and a physical landscape can be repositioned to embody a sense of place by drawing on the importance of human dwelling. Dwelling (living, hunting, and exploring) in the Calder Valley creates a mode of belonging to place and memory in 'The Dark River'.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 148-49

¹⁹ Ibid., p.152.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 224-25. Also quoted in Jonathan Bate, 'Poetry and Biodiversity', in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammels (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp.53-70.

Through retelling stories, ‘The Dark River’ actively develops a connection between personal memory and the significance of landscape. The poem acknowledges the crucial legacy of oral tradition and familial history. Centring on personal memory, ‘The Dark River’ evokes the idea of ‘home’ as a physical built space *and* as an ecological space of the valley. To pass on familial stories is a process of ‘re-membering’ the relationships between people in their homes and the place; retelling stories of the natural environment actively produces a sense of belonging. Hughes, listening to a story about his mother and its connection with the region from his uncle, has consciously derived a poetics of *dwelling* from the past (or ‘burrowing’ in Armitage’s word), which he has vigorously recorded:

So he has brought me my last inheritance:

Archeology of the mouth: the home fire’s embers,

Fluff, breath-frail, from under the looms of Egypt.

Funeral treasures that crumble at the touch of the day –

(20-23, p.455)

‘Archaeology of the mouth’ emphasises the genealogy of stories, places, and people. In this light, the ‘Archaeology of the mouth’ is a valuable, familial ‘inheritance’. This oral tradition can be endlessly excavated to retell the (his)-stories of places (local culture) which are similar to the collective civilisation apparent in the metaphor ‘the looms of Egypt’. The ‘looms’ also suggests collective memory of the industrial, Methodist community as a heritage to be passed on while ‘Egypt’ refers to antiquity. Hughes values the significance of ‘home’ (‘home fire’s embers’) as a relational, ‘built’ space; the hearth signifies a home. The idea of dwelling ‘poetically’, therefore, lies in the oral tradition as much as inhabiting the Calder environment.

The image of the hearth suggests warmth; a personal memory of the domestic space is located within the environmental sphere. With this prominent phrase, the

‘Archaeology of the mouth’, Ann Skea argues that Hughes invokes the Celtic Bardic tradition of shamanism, myth, and a settlement. She claims that:

[I]t is also his Bardic record of the tribal history of Elmet. His prefatory poem tells of the ‘Archaeology of the mouth’, the ‘last inheritance’ of the tribal dream which is brought to him by his elderly uncle’s reminiscences.²¹

The archaeology of stories in these places is the inheritance of the past; it indicates the rich and valuable culture which connects the old kingdom of Elmet to the present. The intertextual landscape is recorded in storytelling: the spatial textuality of the geographical space, the text, and history. In so doing, ‘The Dark River’ is subtly created through individual memory, a sense of belonging, and the social and ecological identity of the valley.

There is a tone of nostalgia and mourning in the poet’s familial relationships. The poet sees the story as a valuable inheritance from the uncle, the embodiment of a living legacy; his fragile body might ‘crumble at the touch of the day’. Significantly, the story that Hughes learns is compared to ‘Funeral treasures’ that might disappear when the inheritance (the memory) is not passed on and ‘treasured’. ‘Funeral treasures’ also implies the transience of material objects as well as of memory, and entails the idea of death and (dis)continuity. The river will fold away the fish and its stories in relation to the landscape that might reveal its significance in poetry. ‘The Dark River’ epitomises the continuity of familial memory and re-evaluates the significance of the oral tradition.

In ‘The Dark River’, ecological regeneration is metaphorically related to a restoration of memory in a human body. At the end of the poem, the uncle figure is compared to ‘The huge fish, a prize of a lifetime’ (24, p. 455) which is exhausted due to a long journey in life. The river can be interpreted metaphorically as the passage of

²¹ Ann Skea, ‘Ted Hughes and the British Bardic Tradition’ (unpublished Symposium Paper: University of Cairo, 1994) <<http://ann.skea.com/cairo.htm>>, [accessed 13 February 2013]

time. The poem suggests an association between a prize fish and the uncle who is dying: '[e]xhausted at the surface, the eye staring up' (25, p. 455). Here, the image of the fish 'folded away' by the dark river develops the revival of memory that is 'still intact, still good/ Under his baldness' (4-5, p. 455). In this way, the physicality of a human being is expressed in relation to the idea of renewal: 'And now he restores his prime/ Exercising everything that happened,/ As his body tries to renew its cells –' (10-12, p. 455). The restoration of the old man's 'prime' reflects the revitalisation of the past to exercise memory and make it alive in the poetic space. Referring to the body renewing its cells is a shift from the contemplation of the landscape to the human being who is a living source of familial, social, and political history; in this way, 'genealogy' can be read in relation to 'ecology'.

The renewal of the body is not different from the regenerative ecology that reclaims its vitality in manifestations of flora and fauna, the fertile farmland, and the resurrection of communities in the valley. Hughes's memory of his mother and the stories retold by his uncle are equally vivid with 'strange depths', 'alive', and 'attached' (8-9, p. 455). 'The Dark River' offers an optimistic view that the restoration of a personal history can flourish in the same way as a landscape. In this light, 'The Dark River' can be called a textual space of 're-membering' and an exploration of dwelling.

When Hughes's poetry draws readers into his imaginary landscapes, it invokes the actual environment in a context of social and cultural transformations. His poetic dwelling in 'Elmet', 'Crow Hill', 'Hardcastle Craggs', and 'Heptonstall', reveals the importance of place in the formation of an ecological consciousness. As poetry is self-consciously metaphorical, the power of poetic language allows the readers to imagine a particular site or space where the line between external nature and culture is blurred. When Heidegger traces back the origin of the clipped phrase, Hölderlin addresses the

ecological point, 'Full of merit, yet poetically, man/ Dwells on this earth'.²² Poetic creativity is directly connected with nature as a human being produces a language 'on the earth' (to live in). In this light, Hughes's 'The Dark River' epitomises poetic dwelling as the poet engages with memory and a sense of place to reconstruct the living geography of the Calder Valley.

In reading Heidegger's idea of dwelling and Hughes's ecology, the poetic landscape becomes a form of resistance to history (as Thacker notes). In this context, I will primarily explore industrial history and the memory of war in Hughes's depiction of mill ruins, cenotaphs, and cemeteries. The importance of dwelling is not physically fixed to human habitation but imaginatively encapsulated and even contested with the power of language to challenge the 'cost of dwelling'.²³ When poetry utters man's dwelling on earth, it challenges social and political power. In 'Remains of Elmet' and 'Hardcastle Crag' which will be analysed next, the notion of dwelling in poetic language is highlighted with reference to historical and social complexities, as the poet addresses the clash between human culture (industry, war, and religion) and nature ('wildness' in the weather and landscape).

To become a dweller of the Yorkshire region, Hughes, as Kirkpatrick Sale urges, has 'to know the earth fully and honestly, the crucial and perhaps only all-encompassing task is to understand *place*, the immediate specific place where we live'.²⁴ Hughes has thoroughly examined the Calder Valley in place-name poems ('Remains of Elmet', 'Hardcastle Crag', 'Wadsworth Moor', 'Alcomden', and 'Heptonstall') to reveal how these places are historically preserved by naming. The poetics of dwelling is imaginatively formulated in these place-name poems and infused with the

²² Heidegger, p. 216.

²³ Greg Garrard, 'Heidegger, Heaney and the Problem of Dwelling', in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, pp.167-81 (p. 169).

²⁴ Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*, 2nd edn. (London: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), p. 42.

representation of physical landscapes as a legacy of industrialism and the memory of war.

Remains of Elmet rewrites a specific environment by making connections between an actual landscape and its socio-cultural history. It includes geological history, the remnants of the ancient Kingdom of Elmet, and the industrial history of the region in ways which reflect the poet's environmental consciousness. In a letter to his artist-collaborator, the photographer Fay Godwin, Hughes described his motivation in writing poems about his homeland with its long history stretching back to the forgotten kingdom of Elmet. The Calder Valley and moorland communities were once central to the mining industry and textile manufacturing and Hughes, as we know, was alert to great changes in this environment. From the old Celtic kingdom to the industrial town, and now the quiet village and tourist spot, 'Elmet' has gone through multi-dimensional transformations. Hughes confesses that:

What grips me about the place, I think, is the weird collision of that terrible life of slavery – to work, cash, Methodism – which was an heroic life really, and developed heroic virtues – inside those black buildings, with that wilderness, which is really a desert, more or less uninhabitable. The collision of the pathos of the early industrial revolution – that valley was the cradle of it – with the wilderness of the place. The terribleness of it was sealed by the First World War – when the whole lot were carted off and slaughtered, as a sort of ultimate humiliation and helplessness. So I grew up with the feeling that all those buildings were monuments of a great age and a great generation which was somehow in the past, and the people round me, my parents etc, were just

survivors, toiling on and being religious and the rest of it, but really just hanging around, stupefied by what had happened.²⁵

Hughes's emphasis on the idea of 'wilderness' in the region can be explained with reference to Wallace Stegner's note on the *myth of the wild* in constructing environmental and cultural identity (Chapter I). Yorkshire is not pristine and wild ('uninhabitable') in the sense that man has had no intervention in its condition. The Calder Valley is shaped by the uncontrollable forces of nature that constitute Hughes's ecological consciousness. Thus, the reference to the 'wilderness' of place is formulated out of his perception of powerful external nature, which I interpret as 'wildness', in the transition from the industrial revolution to the disruption of war. In particular, the catastrophe of war in human consciousness is palpable in Hughes's depiction of the dark buildings and alienating environments. The Calder environment additionally reflects and redefines the meaning of being 'wild' in relation to brutality and the loss of human culture in nature. In Hughes's poetry, these physical and mental attributes of 'wilderness' are seen as 'wildness' in the reconstruction of regional, environmental identity.

Hughes's sense of place is associated with differences and changes in the valley. The Industrial Revolution brought in a new paradigm of economy (Hughes's word 'slavery') and human consciousness. The consequences of industry are seen in working practices which 'enslave' the workforce. The Methodist inheritance is implicated with the 'collision of the pathos'; the 'heroic virtues', of a robust faith, and the work ethics. Equally important are the associations of landscape and memory. Hughes consistently emphasises the effects of the Great War that remain palpable in the local environments and inscribed in village memorials. As a result of social history, mourning is incorporated into the bleak landscapes with its black buildings.

²⁵ 'Letter to Fay Godwin, 4 July 1976' in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Christopher Reid, p. 379.

The geological and the socio-cultural history of Elmet

If Hughes's poetry re-presents geography as an index of personal and social memory, to what extent can it re-create the natural history of a landscape in ways that acknowledge the immense influence of technological advancement on human consciousness and the environment? The poem with the same title of the collection 'Remains of Elmet' invokes the significance of geological history, social changes, modernity, and the immense effects of machinery on human communities and natural environments. Through imagery of the body, 'Remains of Elmet' precisely refigures the natural history – the geology and geography – of the Calder Valley: 'Death-struggle of the glacier/ Enlarged the long gullet of Calder/ Down which its corpse vanished' (1-3, p. 468). These lines trace the Palaeolithic geology of the valley since glaciation. The reference to the Ice Age reveals the place's pre-historic significance in relation to climate change, the earth's history, and 'wild' nature.

Through a human settlement, the poet focuses on agriculture, then industry. The word 'gullet', with the implication of the land consuming itself, recalls the 'womb' ('The Dark River') that procreates lives. However, the word 'corpse' implies death in the geography that resonates with 'death-struggle'. These words convey how human culture is shaped by geographical transformations and the landscape. The anthropomorphic language of the landscape creates the interconnection between the impersonal environment and humanity. In this light, the valley can be read as a 'spatial metaphor' that shapes Hughes's green poetics in a historical, temporal, and textual space.

As the poem progresses the Calder's natural history, there is a tension between continuity and change in the phases of landscape formation interrelated with human history. Hughes refers to early agriculture and moves on to the mill towns to situate the development of modern technology. The topographical description of landscape in

'Remains of Elmet' is interwoven with references to social history – the Industrial Revolution. The Calder Valley is imaginatively re-created in terms of geological time and human time. The poem positions the landscape in relation to industrial remains: 'The sunk mill-towns were cemeteries/ Digesting utterly/ All with whom they swelled' (7-9, p. 468). The imagery of the consuming earth is palpable in the decomposing materials signified by the word 'sunk' and the cultural symbol of 'cemeteries'. Here, the metaphor of cemeteries illustrates environmental degeneration which is embodied in the earth consuming its elements. Emphasising what remains in the human community, Hughes introduces the environmental process of decomposition. With reference to 'stony masticators' (4, p. 468) and 'Digesting', the poem indicates the transformation of place through processes; the stones erode and are digested by natural phenomena such as wind and rain while human culture (industry) declines.

Scigaj argues that the earth, in decomposition, is a storage facility for nutrients as much as the capacitor for energy transfer.²⁶ In this energy transfer, decomposition is a vital process in which the earth is centrally depicted as a consuming agent digesting what industry left behind. This consuming earth symbolises death and loss in human culture encapsulated by the cemeteries. The swelling landscape of the valley, therefore, is a product of Hughes's ecological imagination which addresses the activity of the elements. To connect external nature with culture, 'Remains of Elmet' re-imagines the changed environment to engage individuals with communities and landscape. Metaphorically, the communities in the valley, as well as the valley itself, are environmentally exhausted and bereft of fellowship.

By contemplating the Elmet landscapes, Hughes critically considers the relationship between geological and human temporalities. The present landscape is defined by tourism and so becomes essential to the local economy while the derelict

²⁶ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 109.

sites reflect human interest in industrial history and its impact on the environment. Focusing on the social and historical identity of place, Brian Dillon comments that visitors to decaying sites have ‘the taste of heroic destruction’. Dillon argues that these buildings and landscapes have ‘survived the demolition of past dreams of the future’.²⁷ The physical state of the ruins ‘entices the observers to contemplate on [*sic*] the lives of the people who are long gone, displaced for political, cultural, or unknown reasons of the bygone era’.²⁸ Hughes’s consideration of the ruins – ‘[...] crumbling, loose molar/ And empty sockets’ (14-15, p.469) – reflects his interest in the language of the body. These remnants of the mills embody environmental intertextuality which reveals historical and social intervention. The ruins are a location to revisit and to contemplate industrial history. As such, Hughes’s poetry reconstructs environmental imagination and significant changes.

In connection with natural phenomena, ‘Remains of Elmet’, like many other poems highlighted so far, brings in the agency of weather: the wind, which suggests temporality, continuity, and transient materiality. The wind plays an important role in the appeal which Hughes’s poetry makes to the idea of ‘wildness’ discussed in Chapter I. In the following section, the wind is invoked in relation to loss:

Now, coil behind coil,
 A wind-parched ache,
 An absence, famished and staring,
 Admits tourists

To pick among crumbling, loose molars

²⁷ Brian Dillon, ‘Ruin Lust: Our Love Affair with Decaying Buildings’ *The Guardian*, 17 February 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/feb/17/ruins-love-affair-decayed-buildings>>, [accessed 3 July 2013]

²⁸ Rumiko Handa, ‘Ruins in Nineteenth-Century Romanticism: A Case of Hermeneutical Distanciation’, in *Copenhagen Working Papers on Design*, (CEPHAD), 1 (2010), 1-8 (p. 1).

And empty sockets.

(10-15, p. 469)

Through emptiness and abandonment, the worked landscape has reverted to a form of 'wildness' which produces the current particularity of the landscape. The emphasis on 'now' reinforces the present moment while the degradation of the landscape is felt in the phrase 'An absence, famished and staring'. The poem depicts the physical space in human consciousness, and through the oxymoronic dynamism between 'absence', 'famished', and 'staring' that create contradictions. In so doing, Hughes uses powerful words to destabilise meanings of social and environmental history.

Hughes re-imagines local geography by drawing attention to a combination of problematic forces, both natural and socio-cultural. Regarding the category of the 'divine' or spirit, the poet mentions in his letter to Godwin that there is a 'collision' between industry and religion. The reference to being 'famished' (the hunger for food is equivalent to yearning for faith) implies the need, it might be argued, for spiritual fulfilment. As 'Remains of Elmet' shows, working-class culture is inseparably bound up with religion. Hughes addresses the presence of Methodist inheritance in his preface to *Elmet* (1994) by referring to 'Parson Grimshaw, the hell-fire Methodist preacher of Haworth'. The letter, with literary allusion, manifests the relationship between religious culture and the environment: 'His [Grimshaw's] heavenly fire, straight out of Blake's *Prophetic Books*, shattered the terrain into biblical landmarks: quarries burst open like craters, and chapels – the bedrock transfigured – materialized standing in them'.²⁹ Hughes is drawing attention here to the continuity of Non-conformist (Protestant) rhetoric and a sense of the physical world as constantly imbued with God's dramatic presence. The interrelatedness of religion (chapels) and industry (quarries) in the environment is considered as he points out the decline of both influences:

²⁹ Hughes, 'A preface to *Elmet*' in *Collected Poems*, p. 1202.

The men who built the chapels were the same who were building the mills. They perfected the art of perching their towering, massive, stone, prison-like structures on drop-offs where now you would only just graze sheep. When the local regimes (and combined operation) of Industry and Religion started to collapse in the 1930s, this architecture emerged into spectacular desolation – a grim sort of beauty. Ruin followed swiftly, as the mills began to close, the chapels to empty, and the high farms under the moor-edge, along the spring line, were one by one abandoned.³⁰

This integration of religion and industry demonstrates how both forces had enigmatically transformed the environment and human consciousness. To compare the mills with ‘prison-like structures’ suggests the psychological effect of industrialism on the people. The working space and the valley are forms of confinement as Armitage comments in the early section. Hughes is alert to these industrial changes and examines the decay of physical structures in poems which depict mill ruins and the ‘collapse’ of religion, such as ‘Mount Zion’.

The influence of Methodist inheritance on the Calder community is re-created in the natural landscape in conjunction with man-made structures. Hughes draws on Biblical allusion to project the power of spiritual imagination. In ‘Mount Zion’, the poet is critical of the oppressive religion and its first community in the form of a chapel. While ‘Mount Zion’ reflects the role of local culture in the poet’s perception of his environment, the poem suggests that religion obstructs one’s understanding of the world through dogma and conformity:

Blackness

Was a building blocking the moon.

³⁰ Ibid.

Its wall – my first world-direction –
 Mount Zion's gravestone slab.

Above the kitchen window, that uplifted mass
 Was a deadfall –
 Darkening the sun of every day
 Right to the eleventh hour.

(1-8, p. 480)

The enjambment and reversion of 'a deadfall – / Darkening the sun of everyday' powerfully creates a language of concealment and obstruction. 'A deadfall-darkening' not only implies industrial decay but also suggests the spiritual decline in Methodist practice after the community is abandoned. The built structure of Mount Zion entraps the young poet's perspective towards the outside world. Hughes sees the Methodist church as an influential institution that drives the local community to conform to its teaching. As the poem continues, the 'convicting holy eyes' (in the following quotation) suggests the interconnection of social judgment and religious belief. Also, the repetition of 'terrified' suggests the poet's attitude toward religion as an authoritarian agency in the industrial, working-class community. The poet's examination of religious establishment, in the context of the chapel, arguably signifies the 'escape' to create an eco-poetics which responds to the spiritual influence on the local environment. Hughes conveys a strong sense of weariness in the Methodist congregation:

The convicting holy eyes, the convulsed Moses mouthings –

(12, p. 480)

[...]

They were terrified too.

A mesmerized commissariat,

They terrified me, but they terrified each other.

(14-16, p. 481)

There is a tension between the words ‘convicting’ and ‘holy’ in ways which both pull the meanings in different directions – one to punishment and the other to sacredness. In addition, the word ‘commissariat’ which refers to the military department that supplies food and equipment is used to describe the congregation ‘mesmerized’ by the preaching. Hughes creates anxiety in language and religion that homogenise the working-class community. Not far from Mount Zion in Mythomroyd, Hughes’s birthplace, Heptonstall is regarded as one of the cradles of West Yorkshire Methodism in the eighteenth century. Its church, with a foundation stone laid by John Wesley and an octagonal chapel constructed in 1764, is claimed as the oldest Wesleyan chapel in continuous use.³¹ The spiritual value of hard work linked to virtue is depicted in men and women ‘Exercising their cowed, shaven souls’ (22, p. 481) and ‘Riving at the religious stonework/ With their furious chisels and screwdrivers’ (35-36, p. 481). ‘Mount Zion’ can be seen as ‘a man-made obstacle’ which creates anxiety in the poet’s view of the world.³²

The Methodist church influences Hughes’s conception of the local culture that informs his poetic identity in association with the environment. Considering Hughes’s ‘ascending’ from the Calder Valley to his literary success, Armitage imagines himself in the actual place and argues that the Methodist inheritance, to a certain extent, constitutes Hughes’s perception of the world:

Once again, we find ourselves near the very bottom of the slope, looking upwards, but what obscures our view this time, barricading us against

³¹ Scigaj, p. 116.

³² Armitage, p. 11.

attainment, is religion itself. Orthodox religion that is, in the shape of buildings, dogma, conformity and a rather scary-sounding congregation.³³

The attainment that Armitage refers to might be read as the quest for identity and self-actualisation. At the end of the poem, Hughes makes use of an insect to disrupt the bleakness of the man-made structure:

A cricket had rigged up its music
 In a crack of Mount Zion wall.
 A cricket! The news awful, the shouts awful, at dusk –
 Like the bear-alarm, at dusk, among smoky tents –
 What was a cricket? How big is a cricket?

(28-32, p. 481)

The cricket's crying, perceived by the poet as music, seems to unravel the darkness and sacredness of religion which physically and spiritually pervades the community. As I explained in Chapter I with reference to 'Skylarks' the bird's cry is perceived as music in the cultural construction of aesthetics. Here, the cricket's cry is juxtaposed with the awful 'news' and 'shouts' made by human beings. Thus, the anthropomorphised cricket's cry is contrasted with a human being's utterance; human culture is juxtaposed with the natural world. Hughes's description of the crack in the wall suggests the transformed space of the man-made environment from which the wild insect emerges and claims its place when the dusk comes.

'Mount Zion' opens with the structure's immensity and blackness, and ends with questions about a cricket that suggests a shift in the poet's vision from religion to nature. Hughes makes use of the rhetorical questions, 'What was a cricket? How big is a cricket?' to address the ontological question of Otherness. The cricket symbolises the poet's philosophical exploration and perception of nature in the context of the cultural

³³ Ibid.

space. The cricket's cry is incomprehensible to the speaker. However, Hughes's consideration of this insignificant creature in relation to the religious building (culture) articulates a human attempt to understand otherness in external nature.

Hughes's rhetorical questions about the cricket reflect the creature's subjectivity, regardless of its size, which resonates with the poet's rapport with the external environment. Armitage observes that '[t]he church is a physical manifestation of man's desire to impose order on the world, and the sound of the cricket is the heretical erosion of that order'.³⁴ Hughes's emphasis on the cricket is not mainly against religion. In fact, the depiction of the insect situates the poet's ecological thought and rather offers the idea of human culture and thriving nature living in harmony. Both Armitage and Hughes see the creature interrupting the imposition of religion in the natural environment as ecological interconnectedness. As a living entity sharing the ecology of 'Mount Zion' with the poet, the cricket informs Hughes's environmental consciousness to focus on the 'wild' sound and represent it in poetry.

In *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes prominently re-creates actual places by referencing local as well as natural history. The poet imagines these landscapes such as 'Heptonstall', 'Hardcastle Crag', 'Wadsworth Moor', 'Alcomden', 'Top Withens', 'Shackleton Hills', and 'Haworth', through which Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* signals a particular moorland geography in readers' imaginations. Hughes contemplates these places through geographical identities, social and historical dimensions, and environmental transformations both by natural processes and human intervention.

By assigning place names, the poet revives the ecological significance of those places. In *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) Jonathan Bate points out the significance of naming to reconnect poetry and landscape.

³⁴Armitage, p. 11.

Comparing a poet to a geographer, Bate claims that a poet plays an important role in forming poetic identity in relation to locality. In an analysis of Wordsworth's Lake District poems, Bate contends that poetry derives from specific places:

[T]here is the poet's rootedness, his *knowing* of place; his localness, his *naming* of places', by which I mean not only the registering of received names but also a broader sense of naming that involves defining a place through its character; his specificity, his *recording* of 'times and places of composition'.³⁵

As with Wordsworth, so the rootedness of Hughes in the Yorkshire region is fundamental to the shaping of his eco-poetics. Hughes's sense of belonging in relation to places in the Calder Valley is characterised by his love-hate relationship with its dynamism and capacity to transform.

As I previously noted, Hughes is a dweller in the Calder as much as an outsider who considers its phases of social and environmental transformations. His role as a poet, who uses metaphorical language and imagination, re-creates the aesthetic of place. Bate argues that poetry, more than other art forms, has a distinctive language that reveals the meanings of the world. The constructive power of poetry allows the poet to manifest language as the 'house of being'.³⁶ The poet's sacred role allows Hughes to see the transformed environment and critique local culture, particularly industrialism and Methodist inheritance, as influential factors that shape the identity of places in Elmet. In this insider-outsider position, Hughes's poetry creates an imagination of places in West Yorkshire, as John Greening notes:

He [Hughes] evokes a chilly, haunted environment, steeped in melancholy and claustrophobia, childhood nostalgia, religious frustrations and

³⁵ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 87.

³⁶ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 258.

prohibitions, memories of the First World War, glimpses of earlier civilisations, literary ghosts, family ghosts and the inescapable drip of decay.³⁷

The ‘family ghosts’ (‘The Dark River’) imply memory about his mother while the Calder with its ‘drip of decay’ suffuses forms of industrial ruins and war memorials such as cenotaphs and cemeteries. The ‘haunted environment, steeped in melancholy and claustrophobia’ can be read in relation to Armitage’s comment on Hughes’s ascending from the ‘trap’ and ‘happy hell’. Hughes’s local affinity with the Calder Valley is made through an eco-poetics that negotiates between socio-cultural inheritance in the landscape and his poetic creativity.

Even though Hughes invokes those names in his works, he distances himself from the places and lets the landscapes tell their own stories. The poet is conscious of the powerful act of naming, stepping back from the actual locations and re-imagining them. Writing poetry gives voices to, or imposes meanings on, non-human nature; the invocation of place names is ecologically oriented. The naming of places, then, is a process of thought that permits dwelling (in a Heideggerian sense). Hughes’s re-imagined landscapes are engaged with ideas of belonging; they are reshaped with reference to memory, including the trauma of distinct social events and political changes.

Hughes’s poetry gives voice to, and re-evaluates, a particular location to reveal its geological and social history. ‘Hardcastle Crag’ generates a tension between connectivity, resistance, and the interrelatedness of landscape and the memory of war. The idea of mourning and collective memory is characterised in the cenotaph and cemetery; the symbolic spaces can have a powerful effect on readers’ cultural memory. To clarify the conjunction of place and memory, Axel Goodbody claims that:

³⁷ John Greening, *Focus on the Poetry of Ted Hughes* (London: Greenwich Exchange, 2007), p. 23.

Places are special symbols of events and associated values, because they possess an indexical relationship with their meaning. Not only do they bridge the gap between mental constructions and reality with a unique degree of physical validity and longevity, they are also typically sites where individual and collective memories reinforce each other.³⁸

Individual and collective memories are universally prevalent in the form of war memorials. In Hughes's poetry, 'real', familiar landscapes and places are reshaped to highlight different levels of meaning. Memorials in specific places can promote a certain value such as patriotism, and can embody a criticism of the negative impact of war on human communities. In Hughes's Elmet poems, these stone memorials bridge the divide between the community and the environment. The Calder Valley is a contested site where individual and collective memory is interwoven with social history. The actual place becomes a textual space of ecological 'becoming'. In 'Hardcastle Crag', the ecological space of nature is emphasised and juxtaposed with the human environment:

In a deep gorge under palaeolithic moorland
 Meditation of conifers, a hide-out of elation,
 Is a grave of echoes.
 Name-lists off cenotaphs tangle here to mystify
 The voice of the dilapidated river
 And picnickers who paddle in the fringes of fear.
 Far above, mown fields escape like wings.

(8-14, p. 456)

Social history, as seen in the cenotaphs, is palpably integrated with the landscape alongside the natural elements – the animals and plants, including ants, pine trees, the

³⁸ Goodbody, p. 60.

river, and fields. Hughes's ecological awareness is deliberately located in his study of the earth as a network of connections between living creatures and human communities. 'Hardcastle Crag', with its emphasis on geological identity (palaeolithic moorland), recalls 'Remains of Elmet' and the metaphor of 'gullet' and glaciation. Hughes explores the dichotomy of silence and sound to represent the environment in relation to social history as a 'grave of echoes'. The cenotaph, mourning, and the 'voice of the dilapidated river' suggest decay and melancholia.

'Hardcastle Crag' addresses loss and the remnants of war symbolically embodied within the cenotaph that signifies names and places. Hughes uses the cenotaph, which lists names of soldiers who died in the war, to emphasise the process of embedding the individuals in local memory. A cenotaph not only provides a focus for national and official mourning, but also highlights sacrifices made by local families. Therefore, the cenotaph combines official, public mourning, and private grief. It embodies an expectation of permanence as a monument and also represents the ongoing debt owed by society to the fallen. Individuality is connected with locality, although the passing of time gradually renders these 'names' anonymous. The process of listing names connects human consciousness to the place as a site of memory. However, while the progression of time continues, the significance of names fades away as an index of social transformation. The cenotaph gives meaning to the valley in a particular period and beyond. To highlight the incorporation into the earth of individual subjectivity and national politics, the symbolic act of naming on a cenotaph re-creates a process of memorialisation in the environment.

Discussing the reflection of death and grief in an external environment, Hadley argues that '[t]he reverberations of death and grief are acutely felt by nature, but nature absorbs grief, reacting to it in an ordered, indeed, orchestrated fashion; this is one aspect

which marks the pastoral mode of elegy'.³⁹ Hughes creates pastoral elegy precisely by focusing on loss and mourning in nature; however, he reinvents his natural landscape by shifting away from the pastoral elements such as an idyllic rural life to incorporate a problematic and realistic social environment. In Chapter II, I elaborated on the pastoral elegy in *Moortown Diary* to show that external nature represents the poet's mourning for the deceased farmer. In 'Hardcastle Crag', the cenotaphs and cemeteries become war memorials, a cultural symbol of death and loss as collective memory integrated into the environment. There are neither expressions of the shepherd or poet, nor representations of death as a reunion with nature. 'Hardcastle Crag' is written in an elegiac environmental fashion. Hadley also notes that in the previous collections, Hughes uses the recurring motif of the cenotaph to reveal mourning in the landscape, such as in 'Grief for Dead Soldiers' in *The Hawk in the Rain* and 'Out' in *Wodwo*. Thus, the landscape reflects mourning and spiritual recuperation in the cenotaphs and cemeteries.

The Elmet poems re-create post-war memorialisation which produces the reality of the present and the nostalgic rapport with non-human nature. 'Hardcastle Crag' identifies the cenotaph with war, loss, and the landscape. Sound (for instance in the 'grave of echoes') constitutes an elegiac tone and shapes the environment where death sits alongside signifiers of social and natural history. Hughes creates an image of an absent and mystified landscape in the use of 'voice' that problematises silence with remembered sound: aural traces of activity. The sound-silence dichotomy is placed within the industrial remnant as a metaphor: 'But here the leaf-loam silence/ Is old siftings of sewing machines and shuttles' (2-3, p. 456). In so doing, Hughes associates non-living nature with collective memory and the external environment; war remnants and textile industry are combined by the poetic language.

³⁹ Hadley, *The Elegies of Ted Hughes*, p. 2.

Remains of Elmet examines loss and memory of war in the landscape by critiquing the attempt by human culture to harness external nature. In ‘First, Mills’, Hughes begins the poem with a meditation on environmental and social transformation in the symbol of ‘cenotaphs’ (2, p. 462) and the imagery of ‘gravemounds’. There are changes in the landscape; mills, cobbles, football pitches, and crown greens give way to the drained land, the ‘gravemounds’, ‘sacked’ towns, and villages:

The whole land was quietly drained.

Everything became very quiet.

Then the hills were requisitioned

For gravemounds.

The towns and the villages were sacked

(8-12, p. 463)

‘First, Mills’ addresses the influence of industry in forms of environmental transformations. The metaphorical language of mourning is understood extensively in relation to the Calder Valley, graphically imagined alongside the battle field. The valley is metaphorically compared to a trench and the sky to a helmet: ‘Over this trench/ A sky like an empty helmet/ With a hole in it’ (16-18, p. 463). Hughes deploys the imagery of conflict to re-imagine the landscape and to subject implicit political events to scrutiny; the Great War left scars on the environment and traumatised human subjects.

The valley is implicitly and destructively inscribed by the brutality of war. At the end of the poem, time is considered in relation to ecological and human frames of reference: ‘And now – two minutes silence/ In the childhood of earth’ (19-20, p. 463). Human temporality (‘childhood’), therefore, is linked with ecological temporality (‘earth’), whereas the social sign of mourning (the ‘two minutes silence’) is fused with

the bleak landscape. In this context, the elegiac tone of 'First, Mills' resonates with memorialisation and collective memory in the landscape of 'Hardcastle Crag'.

Human (Local/National) Stories and Natural History

Hughes's poetry reveals the ecological complexity of specific places by integrating human history with natural history. In his poems, ecological significance is juxtaposed with memorialisation of death as seen in 'The Dark River' and 'Hardcastle Crag' to represent the environment informed by personal memory and social history. Laurence Buell argues that '[t]he nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history'.⁴⁰ In Hughes's work, the 'presence' of the environment is depicted in relation to human history and is constituted by the fundamentals of poetic imagination. His poetry of places addresses natural transformations, the construction of ecological consciousness, and collective memory of the landscape.

'Churn-Milk Joan' and 'The Ancient Briton Lay under His Rock' scrutinise the connections between memory, death, and human history in the natural landscape. By exploring local folklore and the notion of history (human and natural), Hughes represents memorialisation (local and national) through the agency of stones and rocks. To begin with, 'Churn-Milk Joan' provides a tale of an ordinary human death in a locale in Luddenden, West Yorkshire, to signify the interrelation between cultural memory and the landscape. Focusing on the stone, the poem opens with emptiness before remembering local stories. Initially, the speaker keeps repeating 'Foxes killed her' (2, 4, 8, p. 470) to suggest the ambiguous tale of Joan's death. In this context, wild creatures play a crucial part in relation to the complex landscape (whether or not the foxes

⁴⁰ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 7.

actually killed Joan): ‘Foxes killed her, and her milk spilled./ Or they did not. And it did not’ (9-10, p. 470).

Here, the poet makes reference to the foxes as agents of killing to explore human death in opposition to antagonistic wilderness. Though the creatures are imagined as predators, the origin of Joan’s death is not as important as the inseparable story and the landscape. In this light, the spillage of milk (which might not have happened) is interpreted as a metaphor for the precariousness of life and the ambiguity and significance of an ordinary, local story. Joan’s death is vitally associated with the specificity of place, the imagining of wild animals, and how the local community passes on the story. To keep the memory alive, Hughes emphasises the practice of memorialisation by contemplating the stone. As the speaker moves forward to human history, the readers are invited to remember death: ‘You take the coins out of the hollow in the top of it./ Put your own in. [...]’ (4-5, p. 470). Then, the poet points out the cultural practice of remembering the story:

Farmers brought their milk this far, and cottagers

From the top of Luddenden valley left cash

In the stone’s crown, probably in vinegar,

And the farmers left their change. Relic of The Plague.

(11-14, p. 471)

By leaving coins on the stone, local farmers contribute to the process of remembering and passing on Joan’s tale, and so Hughes passes on her story through the poem and readers do so in the reading process. The stone is a site of memory in a locale which informs and suggests the cultural construction of the relation between a community and the external environment. Hughes’s invocation of remembering the human death in place can be read in the light of Kirkpatrick Sale’s notion of ‘learning the lore’ of a

place.⁴¹ Sale, like Buell, claims that every place has a history and ‘a record of how both the human and natural possibilities of the region have been explored’.⁴² Hughes’s representation of the stone where the tale of Joan’s death is embedded emphasises the poet’s role as a cultural preserver in relation to the environment. Joan’s death is memorialised in the stone as a cultural practice that gives meanings to nature. Leaving coins is the active, cultural practice in which the stone becomes Hughes’s environmental locus and its association with the human.

In this poem, Hughes refers to ‘Relic of The Plague’ in order to historicise the landscape and human history, particularly human death as collective memory. Joan’s death can be critically read in both metaphorical and historical ways; the ‘spilled milk’ suggests the insignificance of personal death while ‘Relic of The Plague’ connotes collective human history. Luddenden valley becomes a pivotal site of human history where a natural catastrophe (the Plague) swept across human communities in the region. Therefore, the ‘Relic’ is embedded in the landscape and its deadly significance prevails over Joan’s tale. Whether Joan was killed by the foxes or by the epidemic, she is memorialised in the environment through the stone retelling her story. Contemplating the practice of leaving *change* on the stone, Hughes emphatically uses a pun to offer a *change* of perspective in the localised folklore. Leaving change also suggests the shift of temporality in the *changed* story that might alternate the causes of her death. The truth becomes subject to interpretation as the poem progresses:

Churn-milk *jamb*. And Joan did not come trudging
 Through the long swoon of moorland
 With her sodden feet, her nipped face.
 Neither snow nor foxes made her lie down

⁴¹ Sale, p. 45.

⁴² Ibid.

(15-18, p. 471)

The stanza above reveals the possibility that Joan's death was caused neither by the wild animals nor by the harsh weather. In fact, her ambiguous death does not constitute the actuality of the tale, but instead permits readers to interpret how we value and memorialise the local stories in the landscape. For Scigaj, there is linguistic deformation over time in Hughes's consideration of Joan and 'jamb'. The sound transformation turns 'the *jamb* of a simple dairy farmer's payment stone into a *Joan*'.⁴³ This linguistic deformation produces a form of imagination in Joan's tale and the specific landscape. As Hughes writes in the poem, 'Only a word wrenched' (21, p.471); this addresses the tension between retelling and passing on the story.

Hughes's consideration of language (the 'wrenching' effect of words) interacting with the actual environment suggests again the interconnectedness of poetry and the history of place. The stone where people place coins is a site of memory that reveals the effects of human history upon a particular, local environment. Hughes's environmental consciousness in 'Churn-Milk Joan' makes manifest a process of reinterpreting the landscape and symbolising a given history of place. At the end of the poem, Hughes invokes collective memory by indicating public responsibility; readers are urged to pass on stories of local significance. With his emphasis on the stone, the poet conveys the power of poetry to valorise the local tale:

[...] And now all of us,
 Even this stone, have to be memorials
 Of her futile stumbling and screams
 And awful little death.

(22-25, p. 471)

⁴³ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 118.

Hughes significantly ends the poem by memorialising a common death in external nature, to address the close interconnectedness between a local community and natural history. The phrase ‘Even this stone’ conceptually suggests the use of nature in culture; this stone figuratively constitutes a gravestone in which dead matter gives meaning to human death. By referring to Joan’s ‘awful little death’, the poem addresses the precariousness of life in relation to the stone as a site of cultural memory. Temporally, stones exist in a time span much greater than human lives. In so doing, Hughes emphasises the stone as bearing witness to events of relatively fleeting human life (and death) across time.

‘Churn-Milk Joan’ functions as a means of preserving a local story and of engaging with the transition from collective memory (‘all of us’ leaving change on the stone) to a cultural practice. In other words, the landscape behind the tale is celebrated and memorialised by the local community in which farmers and other residents travel to ‘remember’ the story. By opening the poem with the empty stone retelling Joan’s story, Hughes suggests that it is also the readers’ responsibility (‘all of us’) to pass on knowledge with place specificity in the end. The temporality of local place is encapsulated within a human tale, as a cultural memory and human history.

As ‘Churn-Milk Joan’ recounts the organic agency of stone by retelling the story of a common death, ‘The Ancient Briton Lay under His Rock’ moves further to examine human history intertwined with natural history. Hughes’s interpretation of external nature informs our cultural construction, insofar as the poem reconfigures the earth as a source of the myth of wilderness and as evidence for pre-industrial English settlement. As the poem suggests, ‘The Ancient Briton’ scrutinises the nature-culture divide by examining an object; the stone represents the Romans and Anglo-Saxons who occupied England in its early settlement. Hughes deploys an archaeological framework to consider the interrelatedness of natural history and human history revealed through

excavation. Here, Hughes's poetry explores the past to scrutinise the present; the stone of the primitive man reflects the poet's interpretation of nature in culture. Introducing readers to his examination of the subject, the poet speculates on death and evaluates the role of history that shapes the past in the educational system. The Ancient Briton is imagined:

He was happy no longer existing
 Happy being nursery school history
 A few vague words
 A stump of local folk-lore.

 A whorl in our ignorance.

(2-6, p. 481)

Here, the foundation of human history is inseparable from the environment when the natural object tells its story (knowledge). Hughes shows that human history is evasive and created out of local stories such as 'A stump of local-folk-lore'. The organic symbol of the 'stump' suggests the reshaped/reconstructed history of a human community as nature re-tells the past. This evasive history – established in the educational system at a very early stage of learning – can formulate the conception of human history at a larger scale; the process of making history or historiography is viewed as 'vague'. The poet raises a truth-value of history to deconstruct our 'ignorance' over what we adopt as knowledge. Hughes's notable choice of word, 'A whorl', emphasises our complex and uncertain knowledge in conjunction with natural history. The 'Ancient Briton' signifies the myth of wilderness in relation to historical narratives.

However, while Hughes suggests that natural history shapes our perception of human history, he also develops an environmental dynamism by invoking wilderness in the making of human/natural history. The interconnectedness between natural history

and human history is delineated in the primitive, human settlement offered up as a means of evaluating the significance of the wild environment:

That valley needed him, dead in his cave-mouth,
 Bedded on bones of cave-bear, sabre-tooth.
 We needed him. The Mighty Hunter.

We dug for him. We dug to be sure.

(7-10, p. 481)

The above stanza informs the role of 'The Mighty Hunter' in the myth of wilderness while the 'Ancient Briton' (the folklore) shapes our understanding of nature (which preceded both the Romans and the Anglo-Saxons) as the foundation of human history. Humans, as acknowledged in much ecocritical theory, are also 'nature'. The depiction of the 'bones of cave-bear' and sabre-tooth cat hints at the interconnectedness of humans and animals, particularly in pre-history. For Hughes, 'digging' for 'The Ancient Briton' seems to question whether natural history can assure human history. In the digging process, there is a gap between the acquisition of knowledge and the interpretation of folklore (the myth of the Ancient Briton). Imagining the excavation for 'The Mighty Hunter', the poem expands Hughes's environmental consciousness to include archaeology and show the interdependence of man and nature: 'We needed that waft from the cave/ The dawn dew-chilling of emergence,/ The hunting grounds untouched all around us' (13-15, p. 482). As a historical narrative, the imagined cave testifies to human settlement history; 'The Mighty Hunter' suggests the human's domination over nature. However, the more the speaker needs the Ancient Briton, the further this exploration leads to the illusive, anthropocentric conception of history in which man dominates the natural world.

Hughes articulates the interpretation of natural history through the anthropocentric framework of archaeology; the poem focuses on the human settlement. As the speaker ‘digs’ for the ancient man, he comes closer to the material that might confirm the myth. At this point, human temporality in relation to the earth’s transformation is brought into focus as the poem repeats the notion of ‘existence’. Hughes depicts the crude ‘pig-headed rock’ to show the existence of nature not transformed by ‘A slab of time’ (16-17, p. 482), but staying in place. Human temporality and the non-human’s history are separately considered and in need of affirmation by the archaeological process: ‘We needed him. The Mighty Hunter./ We dug for him. We dug to be sure’ (9-10, p. 481).

By repeating the idea of ‘existence’, Hughes is sceptical about historical knowledge in relation to the natural environment. The existing Mighty Hunter seems to acknowledge human history as the stone is ‘Loyal to the day’. In fact, natural temporality is significantly established in the construction of a human history that offers multiple interpretations, both socially and ecologically. In this light, the stone might not verify what Hughes describes as ‘nursery school history’ – one which is institutionalised in the process of digging. Human history is still a *myth* in relation to natural history.

‘The Ancient Briton’ indicates the slipperiness of historical narratives in the archaeological process. Although the stone, as a cultural reference to the Ancient Briton, is excavated and thereby evidences its existence in response to our folklore of human settlement, it seems to defy human history as the speaker notes it (literally) slipping down in the ground:

As we dug it waddled and squirmed deeper.

As we dug, slowly, a good half ton,

It escaped us, taking its treasure down.

And lay beyond us, looking up at us
 Labouring in the prison
 Of our eyes, our sun, our Sunday bells.

(19-24, p. 482)

Hughes makes use of morphological description in terms of weight ('a good half ton') and size to show the nature of the stone that is counted for human history. The description of the stone as it 'waddled and squirmed deeper' suggests the situatedness of the natural object in the environment. These quoted lines acknowledge an attempt to use nature to confirm culture. While we expect natural evidence to affirm the existence of human settlement, it instead seems to move away from our knowledge (due to its weight). The stone of the Ancient Briton is metaphorical in that it is an organic agency which is counted in our history. However, its situation in the ground confirms both its natural dwelling in the earth and its imagined affinity with human culture. To dig deeper is to conceptualise humanity in the distinctive but inseparable relationship with the environment. Hughes highlights the stone as a 'treasure', although the folk story or the cultural reference escapes deeper into the earth.

As 'The Ancient Briton Lay under His Rock' indicates, human history relies on the agency of the non-human (stone) written as natural history. Nevertheless, human history is prone to define natural history within its own purview, due to anthropocentric methodology and rationality. The phrase 'Labouring in prison' evokes the confinement of nature in culture that, as I argue, should be broken down by reinterpreting and understanding the interdependence of ecological elements. 'The Ancient Briton' functions as both human folklore and natural history to address the significant relationship between the human and the natural world. Hughes's poetic imagining of the

external environment through the excavation of the stone reveals the interconnectedness of myth, metaphor, and the landscape.

Both 'Churn-Milk Joan' and 'The Ancient Briton Lay under His Rock' offer critical interpretations of human (hi)story in ways which invoke the natural environment. As Buell suggests, human history is implicated in natural history. While the first poem elaborates memorialisation of human death in a local landscape, it shows humanity's responsibility to preserve a place's story through the locus of the stone. In the same way, the stone embodies folklore constructed by human culture; a human story is remembered through a local, cultural practice. Hughes's poetry here works as environmental and cultural preservation by rereading the natural sign and investigating its relation to humanity. By considering a stone in a particular landscape, 'Churn-Milk Joan' significantly examines human death and the environment on a local scale.

On a larger scale, in 'The Ancient Britain Lay under His Rock', Hughes reinterprets the myth of wilderness and natural history to conceptualise human history. The poem begins with a discussion of how natural agency is signified in our culture through education and archaeology. As the stone (the Ancient Briton) is excavated to scrutinise historical narratives, Hughes articulates the earth's temporality by showing the stone slipping (physically) in the ground in the same way that human history is evasive and can be re-interpreted. In this light, the poem shows that human history has been separated from the earth and this separation leads to the reductive nature/culture divide. Hughes acknowledges uncertainty in history which is constructed from the folkloric story of the stone and should be reconsidered within an ecocentric perspective. 'Churn-Milk Joan' and 'The Ancient Briton Lay under His Rock' investigate place specificity to critique human/nature relationships and to reveal Hughes's distinctive environmental consciousness. For Hughes, the stones in both poems are not to be understood in exclusively 'local' or 'national' contexts because they address the objects

transcending beyond, and within the conceptual boundaries of time, space, knowledge, and cultural practice. In fact, the stones have a natural temporality apart from human culture.

Technology, Nature as a ‘Standing Reserve’, and industrialism

Remains of Elmet is mainly a product of Hughes’s childhood memory and reflections on industrial relics in the regional landscape. In the poems discussed so far, Hughes combines a sense of geographical and human temporalities with the development of a green poetics. His concentration on objects such as cenotaphs and mill ruins always addresses the instrumentality of technology. The examination of the industrial remains reflects the poet’s interest in cultural and economic values in the transformed environment. Thus, the use of technology in the landscape to benefit from the natural resources of Yorkshire is highly emphasised. Martin Heidegger’s *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954) clarifies an anthropocentric conception of nature as a means to an end, a utility. Hence, reading Hughes’s work with reference to Heidegger’s philosophy of technology bridges the gap between poetic imagination as culture, and the environment as physical nature that is exploited through industrialism and technology.

For Heidegger, technology is a means to an end and a human activity.⁴⁴ The instrumental conception of humanity is to maintain or master technology with the rationale that technology can disclose or ‘reveal’ the origins of things; it is ‘enframing’, an essence of bringing forth (*poiesis*) their true qualities. In the nature-technology relationship, ‘[t]he revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*. trans. by William Lovitt (London: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 4.

that can be extracted and stored as such'.⁴⁵ In Heidegger's argument, humanity sees nature as a 'standing reserve' that will be 'unconcealed' and utilised in a way that challenges the use and instrumental function of things.

Nature is ecologically connected with modern technology in that an instrumentalist thought is set upon to exploit nature. The idea of utility comes hand in hand with exploitation when technology is set upon anthropocentrism, which focuses on the values of external nature to serve human ends. Thus, a relative value in non-living nature is 'revealed' for humanity's progress. For example, a tree in the wood is seen as a resource for the paper industry. Heidegger's notion of technology is that it reveals the economic value of external nature for humanity's purposes. This informs my reading of Hughes's consideration of industrialism in his environmental imagination. The representation of mill ruins, dereliction, and the transformation of the landscape in Hughes, constitutes an implicit criticism of technological effects on the Yorkshire environment, the local economy, and human consciousness.

'First, Mills' delineates the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the Calder environment as the progress of industry, transportation, and community expansion is outlined: 'First, football pitches, crown greens/ Then the bottomless wound of the railway station/ That bled this valley to death' (3-5, p. 462). Hughes invokes the power of machinery by *writing the landscape as a wounded body*. Vividly, the coming of the railway has 'injured' the landscape, caused 'the bottomless wound', and 'bled this valley to death'. As Heidegger warns; '[t]he will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control'.⁴⁶ The railway brought efficient transportation into the region as well as its side effects on the environment. For instance, the phrases 'bottomless wound' and 'death' signify the

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, p. 5.

negative impact of technological advancements on the valley. Historically, the textile industry needed a modern system of transportation to get wool and cotton supplies to market, and so the railway was introduced in 1840. The representation of the railway station implies Hughes's environmental thought about technological contribution to the disintegration of the Calder ecology.

Leo Marx notes the influence of industrialisation on human consciousness by referring to Thomas Carlyle's critique of machinery in 'Signs of the Times', in the *Edinburgh Review* (1829). Carlyle argues that there are two senses of machine technology. The outward characteristic of machinery refers to industrialism⁴⁷ while the inward sense suggests the spiritual.⁴⁸ The outward sense includes mills and production, materials and products, while the inward sense suggests ways of thinking about natural resources as defined by economic value. As seen in 'First Mills', the railway signifies infrastructure development and economic prosperity in the local community, and therefore makes possible the exploitation of natural resources. When technology replaces human labour, there is a sense of alienation from the natural environment in human consciousness. Marx argues that:

To see a powerful, efficient machine in the landscape is to know the superiority of the present to the past. If the landscape happens to be wild or uncultivated, and if the observer is a man who knows what it means to live by physical labour, the effect will be even more dramatic and the meaning more obvious.⁴⁹

Much of Hughes's poetry shows a landscape modernised by the introduction of the railway and the development of the textile industry; it is a visible sign of industrial culture taking over the agrarian. Powerful machinery has dramatically elevated

⁴⁷ Discussed in Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 170.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

transportation to its utmost efficiency and transformed the environment into a ‘built’ manufacturing space.

While ‘First, Mills’ marks the beginning of industrial temporality, ‘Mill Ruins’ emphasises the decline of a textile industry that embeds what I call ‘machine mentality’ in human consciousness. ‘[S]huttle’ and ‘loom’ symbolise machine technology that promotes a ‘spirit’ of production in ‘Mill Ruins’. When the demand for textiles is low, the mills become derelict. The local community is connected to the global economy, which is evident in the reference to Japan. ‘Mill Ruins’ represents the great changes in the community when industry is not productive:

One morning

The shuttle’s spirit failed to come back

(Japan had trapped it

In a reconstructed loom

Cribbed from smiling fools in Todmorden).

(1-5, p. 464)

The opening lines point out the ‘spirit’ as a ghost of the weaving industry; the death of the enterprise is seen in the remnants – the ‘shuttle’ which symbolises dead textile manufacture. Once it is ‘trapped’, the continuity of textile manufacturing is halted and the mills cease to operate. The loss of production leads to inevitable unemployment in the following period, which will be seen in the second section of ‘Mill Ruins’. Lines three to five in parentheses satirically locate the industrial enterprise in Todmorden that lost its manufacturing power to Japan, constructed as predatory: ‘trapped it’. Todmorden represents the regional geography of West Yorkshire and the generality of wool and cotton manufacturing towns such as Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, and Heptonstall.

The metaphor of a shuttle and loom not only embodies the decline of the textile industry and mills, but also suggests the ‘spirit’ or consciousness of individual loom

workers and local communities. Connecting a symbolic object of production with the individual and social consciousness is a familiar trope in Hughes's poetry. The looms are seen in 'Lumb Chimneys' as a body dumped into a hole in the old mill; figuratively the dumped looms signify the death of the textile industry. In 'Mill Ruins', the manufactured cloth is left unattended, its value nullified. The language of death and mourning is deployed to address the decline of the community: 'Its great humming abbeys became tombs' (7, p. 464). The recurring image of the tomb reminds the readers of the cenotaph as a memorial. Notably, the industrial mills are presented as 'abbeys'; the language of the secular is described in terms of the ecclesiastical to show the cultural centrality of the industrial community. Therefore, the death of the machine is implicated in the death of human culture in the way that mills are remembered in the Calder environment.

In the second section of 'Mill, Ruins', Hughes uses the language of violent destruction to address the social consequences of declining industry. In this respect, humans are shown as being closely connected with the environment, as 'the children/ Of rock and water' (8-9, p. 464), yet, alienated from their environment and livelihood. In the loss of their manufacturing power they respond viscerally to the machine: 'What would not smash they burned/ What would not burn/ They levered loose and toppled down hillsides' (13-15, p. 464). The image of smashing, burning, and toppling reflects a specific sense of loss, both economic and personal. Hughes addresses the failure of industrial enterprise in the depiction of neutralised human beings 'aimlessly' (16, p. 464) returning home, comparable to the homeless 'Norsemen' (18, p. 464) of the past. The present as a consequence is fused with the past. The destruction of the mills is implicitly similar to the damage caused by methodical, systematic modes of violence associated with martial conquest. Thus, the title, 'Mill Ruins' reflects the loss of economic power,

human consciousness, and environmental dereliction in the context of changed economic conditions.

In the previous poems including ‘Churn-Milk Joan’, ‘The Ancient Briton’, ‘Hardcastle Craggs’, and ‘First, Mills’, Hughes challenges cultural values (myths, tales, memories of war, and death in relation to the stones). I now wish to emphasise the fundamental value of the object as an economic resource, particularly stones in the latter poems, to demonstrate Hughes’s nature poetics. In a specific landscape, Hughes imagines external nature with an economic value when it is utilised and exploited as a ‘standing reserve’, to invoke Heidegger. However, its ecological value should not be ignored in relation to highly particular ecosystems. Hughes develops metaphorical language to re-imagine objects as ‘wild’ (ecologically) in contrast to its utility in human culture (economically). Before looking at ‘Hill-Stone was Content’, I will consider the idea of ecological value as fundamental to understanding nature in relation to humanity.

Ecological, economic, and cultural Values

The idea of ecological value is illuminated by Freya Mathews who endows natural elements, both living and non-living, with intrinsic value, regardless of a human definition of utility. Mathews, in *The Ecological Self* (1994), discusses the interconnectedness of natural elements in ecosystems and elaborates three levels of value in nature: background value, intrinsic value, and relative value. Mathews argues that background value is attached to things as particulars in a general sense in the physical world. Background value does not constitute the relations between things. However, the two significant values, in this study, are ‘intrinsic value’, the objective value that is inherent in the things which possess it, unrelated to the needs of external

agents; and ‘relative value’, which is utilitarian value.⁵⁰ Both values reside in an ‘autonomous’ or ‘self-maintaining system’ in which an intrinsic value is found in an object, but its relative identity is defined by interactions with other elements in a particular environment. In ‘Hill-Stone was Content’, Hughes represents stone, as a natural resource for exploitation; it changes through time in a geological sense and has economic value in the mill industry. The stone is imagined as animated to manifest its autonomy in industrial processes. In Hughes’s poetic language, stones and rocks undergo a process of animation. Ecological poetry, for Hughes, is a means of revealing the immanent value (a combination of economic and ecological value) of the external environment.

Re-presenting stones in a highly metaphorical register, Hughes critiques the influence of technological machinery through a certain kind of labour. Industrial culture does not only develop economic growth in the region, but also exploits natural resources as a ‘standing reserve’. In Hughes’s poetry, machinery is often physically and spiritually dehumanising since human beings are illustrated as ‘working machines’ while the stones are seen as a natural resource being processed. For example, ‘Hill-Stone was Content’ depicts a process in which the stone is being cut and utilised. The poet anthropomorphises the stone as if it was possessed of agency or, in Mathews’ word, ‘autonomy’:

It let itself be conscripted
 Into mills. And it stayed in position
 Defending this slavery against all.

It forgot its wild roots
 Its earth-song

⁵⁰ Mathews, pp. 118-21.

In cement and the drum-song of looms.

(3-8, p. 463)

The first two lines ‘To be cut, to be carted/ And fixed in its new place’ (1-2, p. 463) do not signify agency in the stone but instead depict it in a passive mode to be exploited in the manufacturing process. However, in the stanzas above, Hughes celebrates the timeless solidity of the stone transformed into a commodity, with a specific use-value. The pronoun ‘It’ in this sense is encapsulated with the ‘autonomy’ to be conscripted at its will. The speech act of ‘let’ reveals the performative language that the poet develops in order to address the stone’s agency. While the stone is being cut and moulded, its tie to its origin – the earth – is broken up by the manufacturing process. In this context, technology interrupts the connections of ‘wild’ nature; the stone appears to be alienated from the organic condition. Thus, industrialisation turns rocks, the earth’s body, into objects with economic value and eventually materialises them in contexts of commodification and production.

In ‘Hill-Stone was Content’, the earth-song and the drum-song of the loom oppose each other. The ‘drum-song of looms’ recalls ‘humming abbeys’ in ‘Mill Ruins’. In contrast, the drum-song of the loom in ‘Hill-Stone was Content’ is re-imagined in relation to production with aesthetic value (in the song) that Hughes highlights. The poet suggests the stone’s ‘autonomy’ and resistance in these lines: ‘it stayed in position/ Defending this slavery against all’. The poem represents nature in an anthropomorphic language by invoking an ‘earth-song’ that connects the stone with geology and human culture. The aesthetic element of the earth-song is juxtaposed with the manufacturing process which endows the natural resource with a different kind of utility.

Hughes’s representation of cutting and conscripting the stone in relation to Heidegger’s question concerning technology signify a process of ‘unconcealing’ the

object's economic value. What Hughes writes in 'Hill-Stone was Content' can be seen as a mode of revealing; poetry brings out the stone's economic value in industry and acknowledges the stone's cultural value in the 'earth-song'. In so doing, the earth is manifested in its forms. The poet invokes interconnectedness between machine culture and human aesthetics with a sense of belonging (the stone belongs to the earth) and dwelling (in the earth, the stone dwells and in the mills, it dwells in human consciousness). Bate considers the poet's role as one of saving the world, which is arguable, through 'revealing' it, especially in environmental poetry. By referring to Heidegger's idea of 'dwelling', Bate believes that, more than other arts, poetry as a form of 'language is the house of being; it is through language that unconcealment takes place for human beings'.⁵¹ In Hughes, the 'earth-song' is transferred to the 'drum-song of looms' to suggest a link between external nature and human culture via the instrumentality of weaving machinery.

Here, Hughes reveals the interconnectedness between man and nature. In his ecological poetics, an object is elevated, aestheticised and given consciousness. The idea of 'dwelling' transcends a notion of 'building' as a physical structure which defines, say, the space of the mill. 'Hill-Stone was Content' represents a 'presencing' (as developed in the discussion of Heidegger's concept of dwelling) of the stone, re-imagined in Hughes's poem. The relocation of the stone from the earth to the mill suggests a transformed mode of dwelling, contingent on human industry.

Nevertheless, and counter-intuitively, a resistant force in the stone signifies autonomy. 'Hill-Stone was Content' reaches out to the embodiment of technology in stone. The poem invokes specific qualities of stone to critique dehumanisation through labour in which humanity is objectified by technology:

And inside the mills mankind

⁵¹ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 258.

With bodies that came and went
 Stayed in position, fixed, like the stones
 Trembling in the song of the looms.

And they too became four-cornered, stony

(9-13, p. 463)

Like the conscripted stone, human beings ‘stayed in position’, ‘fixed’, and were ‘trembling’. However, there is no resistance against this manipulation from the mill workers, in contrast to the stones that protest against this ‘slavery’. Although technology accommodates the industrial enterprise, it dehumanises and objectifies human beings, who become ‘stony’ in the process. Human consciousness is cut from external nature, which is the earth, and subsumed to the machine. Simon James argues that Heidegger’s notion of technological instrumentality describes an ‘estrangement from the world, an existential sense of homelessness’.⁵² Technological man has lost a connection with the earth (*oikos*) and his rootedness with the world. In ‘Hill-Stone was Content’, human beings are turned into living objects, not vital living beings, as they work in the mills. The effect of industrialisation is embedded in the human psyche as well as in the ‘body’ because, eventually and metaphorically, ‘they too became four-cornered, stony’.

Hughes’s poetry is metaphorically rich in its examination of machine technology. Textile manufacturing relies on the greater efficiency and productivity of weaving machines, more than individual loom workers. To my thinking, this recalls Carlyle’s notion of inward and outward senses of machine technology. Carlyle makes a graphic analogy of a handloom weaver who is replaced by a machine: ‘On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate

⁵² Simon James, ‘Heidegger and the Role of the Body in Environmental Virtue’, *The Trumpeter*, 18 (2002), 1-9 (p. 2).

one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster'.⁵³ The 'human finger' transformed into an 'iron finger' is a powerful metaphor used to describe the physical body being replaced by a machine. In 'Hill-Stone was Content', the reference to the song of the loom aestheticises Carlyle's notion of a shuttle, and brings back its association with productivity as seen in the 'shuttle's spirit' trapped by Japan in 'Mill Ruins'. In this way, Carlyle's emphasis on the speed of change highlights the essence of production in the Industrial Revolution; the faster machines can manufacture, the more prosperous the mill-owners.

If poetry 'unconceals' these distinctions (the body, labour, and the machine), then it powerfully reveals and scrutinises the influence of technology on human consciousness. The stone in 'Wild Rock' is transformed into 'Millstone-grit – a soul-grinding sandstone' (2, p. 464). Mechanical materiality is embedded in the production of commodities and human consciousness; 'soul-grinding' could be soul-fashioning. In addition to rocks as a natural resource for the mills, fleeces are examined as a resource for wool industry. Human consciousness is informed by industrial production. Hughes represents the interconnections between the human subject and the raw materials for manufacturing:

A people fixed
 Staring at fleeces, blown like blown flames.
 A people converting their stony ideas
 To woolen weave, thick worsteds, dense fustians

(10-13, pp. 464-65)

In 'Wild Rock', the human body is 'fixed'; what man sees in the fleeces is a 'material' to feed production. Creativity is embodied in weaving and the manufacture of objects. By using figurative language, Hughes suggests the mechanised dullness of the textile

⁵³ Quoted in Marx, p. 170.

workers and the production line. They are, then, objectified: ‘Between their bones and the four trembling quarters’ (14, p. 465). In this way, Hughes scrutinises the effects of machinery on the human body and consciousness.

When machinery takes over the human body in the manufacturing process, it transforms modes of thinking and Being. Carlyle affirms that ‘the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand’.⁵⁴ The intertwined metaphor of ‘head’ and ‘hand’ is evident in the handloom weavers while the ‘heart’ is figuratively associated with artistic creativity which has lost its significance to machinery. The ‘hand’ is literally associated with the mode of production.

A loss of connection between humanity and nature is examined in ‘Hill-Stone was Content’. On the one hand, the poem celebrates the organic integrity of the stone but, on the other, it connects machine technology to dehumanisation. The concentration on the economic value of stone is embedded in human thought; yet, the poem stylistically re-creates its ecological value in connection with the earth. The final lines of the poem return to the agency of nature: ‘In their long, darkening, dwindling stand/ Against the guerilla patience/ Of the soft hill-water’ (14-16, p. 463). Hughes’s examination of technology in the mills is manifested in the manufacturing process of the stone and mill labourers; the poet makes use of the language of the body to dehumanise mill workers. Human patience is juxtaposed with the natural resource (‘the soft hill-water’) to show the economic value in the stone mill and human labour.

Hughes’s eco-poetics of the mill industry sometimes engages with the human body, human consciousness, and the Yorkshire environment. ‘Wadsworth Moor’ uses the language of industrial process in the open landscape to describe the shaping of the moor environment – its forms, flora, and fauna. Whereas ‘Hill-Stone Was Content’

⁵⁴ Marx, p. 174.

depicts the mill industry as dehumanising the workers, ‘Wadsworth Moor’ imagines it as traumatising the landscape. Hughes invokes resilience in nature at the beginning of the poem:

Where the millstone of sky
Grinds light and shadow so purple-fine

And has ground it so long

Grinding the skin off earth
Earth bleeds her raw true darkness

A land naked now as a wound

That the sun swabs and dabs

Where the miles of agony are numbness

And harebell and heather a euphoria

(1-9, p. 474)

In ‘Wadsworth Moor’, the poet uses the mill industry as a framework to imagine the moor landscape where purple heathers thrive. The earth is metaphorically depicted as injured or ground down by natural mechanisms (rain, wind, and light in the seasonal cycle). In so doing, social history is infused with local ecology in Hughes’s environmental imagination. Scigaj suggests that ‘[l]ight on the moors is enhancing, elevating, and gradually in *Elmet* comes to symbolize a grasp of the spiritual dimensions of the environment, illuminated by the poet’s visionary presence of mind’.⁵⁵ In this light, industrialisation crafts or informs Hughes’s poetics as he re-writes the

⁵⁵ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 114.

imagined landscapes, fully cognizant of the historical, regional identity. Bleeding here recalls the image of the valley being 'bled to death' by the introduction of the railway in 'First, Mills'. The environment in 'Wadsworth Moor' functions as a body to be understood in terms of human activity. Nature offers the possibility of healing: 'the sun swabs and dabs'. The corporeal metaphors of 'skin', 'bleeds', 'raw', and 'wound' suggest the interconnectedness between the body and the environment. Even though the landscape is humanised into a vulnerable, exploited, and 'naked' object, there is an optimistic note in the regeneration of the growing plants, 'harebell and heather a euphoria'. The celebration of rebirth and particularly re-inhabitation (after the industrial exploitation of the landscape) in nature suggests the continuity of natural processes in the flowering plants that thrive.

Hughes's ecological consideration of stone and its relative value is inseparable from his contemplation of industrial economy. His imagining of non-living matter having roots in the earth can be discussed as having both an ecological and a cultural value. The ecocritic and environmental philosopher Val Plumwood sees the problematic nature/culture dualism as hierarchical, divided by anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. In 'Journey to the Heart of the Stone', she enhances our understanding of this organic material with a focus on its cultural value. In order to emphasise the agency of external nature and to discredit the logic of anthropocentrism which sees human beings as the first term, even in environmental discourses, Plumwood develops her sense of nature's value through her discovery of a 'heart stone' in the rock formations of Australia.

Plumwood demands that humans re-assess the cultural value of stone in contrast to its resource value. She re-prioritises the culture/nature dichotomy by arguing that '[i]f stone is the skeleton of our planet, and the dirt its flesh, humanity is an insignificant piece of the biota, a microscopic flea in the jungle of flora and fauna that lives upon its

body'.⁵⁶ This claim is fundamentally ecological. The language of the body, 'flesh and bone' in her account, reinforces the planet as a finite living entity. In this context, the cultural and ecological value of stone is elevated. Plumwood intends to destabilise the hierarchy of traditional value systems that see human beings at the top of the pyramid, creatures in the middle, and objects at the base.

To connect Plumwood's perception of stone's cultural value and Hughes's imaginative invocation of rocks is to draw attention to objects as having agency in poetry. In 'First, Mills', 'Mill Ruins', and 'Hill-Stone was Content', Hughes represents the use value of stone in relation to mill industry. Stones are dug out, conscripted, and turned into a commodity whereas workers are dehumanised in the mill. Here, I will demonstrate how Hughes's eco-poetics considers an intrinsic value in stone as an active and vital agent in poetry, unlike the anthropocentric preconception of stone as a silent and static object to be exploited in industry. In the following section, I examine the counter-intuitive metaphorisation of stones or rocks as animals in relation to a history of place.

Hughes's environmental poetics re-imagines the idea of 'wildness' in stones and rocks through metaphors of animality. This reflects his shift from an anthropocentric standpoint to an ecocentric one. The ways in which inanimate objects are referenced in relation to animate ones are based on anthropomorphisation. 'The Big Animal of Rock' reveals the ecological interconnectedness that we encounter elsewhere in Hughes's poetry that animates objects. Rocks or stones are poetically metamorphosed into forms of 'life'; ecologically and geologically, they have evolved and fossilised to become part of the landscape as the earth's fundamental structure. For instance, 'The Big Animal of Rock', 'Wild Rock', and 'In April' reconstruct stones or rocks as wild and native. Here, rocks and stones are the foundation of geology that defines place. In 'The Big Animal

⁵⁶ Plumwood, p. 17.

of Rock', the rock is personified, kneeling in the 'cemetery of its ancestors' (2, p. 466), in its 'home' (3, p. 466) and 'homeland' (6, p. 466). The poem rewrites a natural history of the earth through an image of rock that is 'alive' with a sense of 'place', an origin, and dwelling.

As an object, the rock is anthropomorphically connected to the history of place in a 'familial' relationship which is similar to a personal history; the landscape is compared to the homeland of the rock where it originates. The poem emphasises intimate connections through familial terms including 'ancestors', 'offspring' (4, p. 466), 'kin' (7, p. 466), 'Mother' (12, p. 466), and 'children' (13, p. 466). By linking objects in the environment with imagined stories, Hughes uses familial terms to signify the origin and regeneration of the earth; the 'Animal of Rock' is an active agent in conjunction with dwelling and a sense of being at home.

Notably, words such as 'pious' (4), 'solemn' (7), and 'faith' (11), suggest some characteristics of spirituality: a religion of nature that sees all creatures and objects as interrelated in an ecosystem. The image of 'root and leaf' (5) supports this eco-centric view in which rocks and organic elements are parts of a whole system. Hughes coins the phrase 'the Festival of Unending' (10) invoking a pagan sensibility. The mourning mother can be interpreted as the earth in which its offspring – humanity – loses its rootedness in her. At the end of 'The Big Animal of Rock', 'The rock,/ Sings' (15-16, p. 466) to celebrate nature, recalling the earth-song in 'Hill-Stone was Content'.

When a stone is 'animated' metaphorically, the history of the landscape is rewritten and geography is imaginatively reshaped. 'In April' describes the black stones as a creature having evolved and adjusted to its environment for millions of years. The inanimate object is represented as an 'animal of peace' (3, p. 489), 'With shoulders of pre-dawn/ And shaggy belly' (5-6, p. 489). Referring to its geological origin, the stone:

Has got up from under the glacier
 And now lies openly sunning
 Huge bones and space-weathered hide

Healing and sweetening
 Stretched out full-length for miles —
 With eyes half-closed, in a quiet cat-ecstasy.

(7-12, p. 489)

The language of the body, here of a big cat, invokes the tangible physicality of this landscape and geological history ('the glacier') as in 'Remains of Elmet'. In 'Wadsworth Moor', Hughes imagines the industrial process of the mill grinding on the moor which causes a wounded (in a corporeal metaphor) landscape, but the sun dabbing and swabbing it suggests the healing process in nature. However, in 'In April', Hughes sees glaciation as causing the wound in the earth and the mass of stones being exposed in the sun is palpably 'healing'. 'In April' considers the natural phenomenon/process in geological description and enlivens the objects by creating 'wildness' in rocks and stones.

Sagar suggests that Hughes sees the Pennine landscape itself as a huge animal to be tamed.⁵⁷ To harness the landscape and reconstruct it in poetry is, then, a challenge. For Hughes, human history is relativised by reference to vast geological chronologies, as seen in 'October Dawn' in Chapter I and 'Remains of Elmet' in this chapter. Nature, in this respect, refers to 'the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world', as Soper notes.⁵⁸ This, in some ways, resonates with Plumwood's notion of stone as a 'skeleton' of the earth. Hughes's poems about

⁵⁷ Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature*, p. 235.

⁵⁸ Soper, p. 155.

rock formation, therefore, demonstrate the transformations of the earth made by natural phenomena. The regeneration of rocks represents one gesture in Hughes's poetry of ecological interconnectedness that cuts the human down to size.

As Scigaj argues, Hughes's poetry marks 'a shift in perception away from anthropocentrism and towards a biocentric view that recognises the intrinsic value of all components of Earth's ecosystem and treats humans as but one of the millions of organisms interacting to ensure planetary survival'.⁵⁹ This position echoes Mathews' approach to ecological value (at an atomic level of matter) and casts biocentrism as an alternative to anthropocentrism. Scigaj might agree with Plumwood's notion that elements such as rocks are as central to an ecosystem as life forms. In Hughes's work, the imagery of rocks uttering phrases and singing, integrated at many different levels with human activity and implicated in the transformation of ecosystems, creates the basis of an eco-poetics, especially in the Yorkshire region.

Bioregionalism and Yorkshire

Hughes's poetry does not only reflect upon the interconnectedness of environmental degradation and machine culture, but also re-imagines regeneration on a larger ecological scale, such as a region. The closely related interaction between human communities and the external environment can be examined in relation to the concept of bioregionalism. Bioregionalism is one of many categories in ecocriticism that shares an ultimate purpose with environmentalism and ecological studies. It focuses on the distinctions and interconnections between human culture and the natural environment. Although ecocriticism is preoccupied with the relationship between literature and the

⁵⁹ Scigaj, 'Ted Hughes and Ecology: A Biocentric Vision', in *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, pp.160-81 (p. 162). In Scigaj's comparison, Elmet is 'a naturally-evolved local organism, like a giant protozoa, which is made up of all the earlier deposits and histories, animated in a single glance, an attitude, and inflection of speech' (p. 171).

physical environment, ecological interconnectedness between humans and the environment in relation to bioregionalism is not widely explored in the English context. Thus, the connection between an ecocritical reading and a bioregional approach can fully integrate human communities into the realm of non-human nature.

‘Bioregion’ refers to the integration of habitats and dwellers, physical boundaries and social features. Bioregionalism concentrates on the harmony between, and the mutual sustainability of, humans and nature. The social and environmental movements of the 1960s produced debates on how human beings could dwell in particular places without disrupting or destroying environments. The term ‘bioregion’ was coined by Allen Van Newkirk to define ‘biogeographically interpreted culture areas’.⁶⁰ The concept of bioregionalism became more significant when Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann emphasised the ideas of ‘living-in-place’ and ‘reinhabitation’; the former describes living with necessities as uniquely presented by a particular site, while the latter consequently proposes living in an environment that has been disrupted and damaged through human exploitation.

Berg and Dasmann note that ‘[a] society which practices living-in-place keeps a balance with its region of support through links between human lives, other living things, and the processes of the planet – seasons, weather, water cycles – as revealed by the place itself.’⁶¹ For example, Freeman House’s essay, ‘Totem Salmon’ attempts to draw a connection between the native North American local knowledge of salmon, its habitat, and its migration patterns.⁶² The representation of indigenous people living in a non-exploitative way with their environment contributes to the understanding of a bioregionalist perspective which emphasises a sustainable mode of living-in-place.

⁶⁰ Aberly, p. 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Bioregionalism is based on the attempt to understand nature and live with it in harmony and for sustainable environments. A particular landscape or environment in a certain region is the primary focus, beyond the limitation of political and national paradigms: for instance, a river or a mountain range can be identified as a state's or a county's boundary but its ecological identity cannot be defined by this political territory. Thus, a bioregion is constructed by the relationship between flora and fauna, rivers, valleys, mountains, forests, or even human beings.

While the idea of bioregionalism has been widely studied in scientific disciplines in the USA, more work is needed in terms of understanding the concept of regionalism or 'local colour' in which characters, vernaculars and particular settings are represented in literature. The depiction of regional details such as dialects, history, customs, and geographical landscapes often shows regions in non-modern cultural settings. Gary Snyder's poetry, for example, offers a critique of social problems including waste and chemical pollution, capitalism, and overconsumption as well as global environmental crises such as deforestation and species extinction. His environmental stance in poetry can be said to critically acknowledge bioregionalism.

In British contexts, regionalism is evident in the fictional works of nationally and locally distinctive writers: for example, Thomas Hardy, the Brontë sisters, and D.H. Lawrence. Hardy represents the decline of rural communities in 'Wessex'; the Brontë sisters depict the often bleak, 'psychological' moorlands of Haworth while Lawrence locates the effects of modernity and industrialisation in the Nottingham/Derby coal fields. In poetry, Wordsworth's nature poems can be said to create a particular landscape in Cumbria. For Hughes, living-in-place and reinhabitation are key elements in a bioregionalist reading of the Calder Valley, through the invocation of prominent features of the local landscapes and socio-cultural contexts as already discussed with reference to 'The Dark River', 'Remains of Elmet', 'Hardcastle Crags', and other poems. Hughes's

bioregion is characterised by the moorlands, valleys, rivers, and settlements, against a background of cultivated land and managed forests. Also, the references to harsh winds and dark stone buildings standing against the elements draw attention to natural phenomena and the adaptation of human culture in relation to specific environments.

In Hughes's poetry, the idea of living-in-place and reinhabitation can be interpreted in the renewal of environments after industrial decline. 'Hardcastle Crag' deals with the restoration of physical nature which is represented as a dynamic interaction between animals and plants. Although the poem starts with the image of 'Palaeolithic moorland' and the disruption of social history, the primary focus is on physical transformation and ecological and spiritual regeneration at the end. The bioregionalist idea of living-in-place and reinhabitation is examined in relation to dwelling after the transformation wrought by an industrial economy. The repetition of 'silence' subtly emphasises dwelling or presencing in a place where there is resistance in non-human nature.

In 'Hardcastle Crag', the silence of 'ant-warfare' and 'beech-tree' implies 'alive' movement, reinhabitation, and regeneration. These wild creatures thriving on 'pine-needles' are, in some way, elaborately connected to 'sewing machines and shuttles'. The silent 'sound' (paradoxically) from the landscape is all about the interactions between the inhabitants in the environment. Hughes's consideration of 'silence' leads to the unheard but powerful 'sound' from the landscape, 'quietness, solemnities/ muffle much cordite' (6-7, p. 456). This concentration on sound and silence suggests a powerful poetics of dwelling at the intersection of wildlife habitat and a human community, albeit one subject to continual transformation. At the end of the poem, the poet creates a sense of reinhabitation and continuity in the image of a red squirrel on a tree, a fox, and a badger. The repopulation of wildlife is located in the valley as nature regenerates:

But happiness is now broken water at the bottom of a precipice
 Where the red squirrel drops shavings from a branch-end of survival
 And beech-roots repair a population
 Of fox and badger. [...]

(15-17, p. 456)

Hughes depicts ecological integrity in 'Hardcastle Crag' by showing the regeneration and restoration of flora and fauna. The atmosphere of 'happiness' is described through images of a red squirrel on a beech tree and the population of a fox and a badger. The poem demonstrates balance in an ecosystem where inhabitants regenerate and the tree is a home – a refuge for wildlife. By referring to the movement of the wind, Hughes reminds readers of war history in which men lost their lives. However, the air subtly implies reconciliation between past and present: 'And the air-stir releases/ The love-murmurs of a generation of slaves/ Whose bones melted in Asia Minor' (18-20, p. 456). Although Hughes often recounts the story of the past, and mourning, he engages with a sense of renewal in 'love' that sustains people in the environment. In this context, social history is opaquely portrayed when ecological integrity is examined; the restoration of living nature in poetry 'unconceals' the continuity of the Calder bioregion.

Hughes represents ecological reinhabitation and 'wildness' in the return 'to', and the return 'of' nature, as negotiated in 'Lumb Chimneys' and 'Rhododendrons'. The poet imagines an old chimney penetrated and covered by vegetation as a foreground and an environment where industrial remains are depicted as a dead background. 'Lumb Chimneys' emphasises the idea of reterritorialisation: of 'wildness' reclaiming its territory. In the past, trees and other plants were cut down to clear a landscape for mill construction; when industry declined, nature returned. In the poem, stone mills are abandoned and in time are covered with moss and vines which climb and penetrate the buildings. Hughes reflects on the fragility of materiality that 'Great yesterdays are left

lying' (3, p. 456) and 'Brave dreams and their mortgaged walls are let rot in the rain' (6, p. 457). It is time for wild plants to return after being cleared for the mill construction.

When considering the transformation of place, Hughes reverses the idea of time in relation to 'wildness' when 'Days are chucked out at night/ The huge labour of leaf is simply thrown away' (1-2, p. 456). Plants spread over the building at night, as if darkness endows them with agency. Also, nature 'simply' springs up when human culture is gone. Here, night is associated with the temporality of 'wildness'. In the same way that the Ice Age reclaims its land in 'October Dawn' (Chapter I), the wild plants in this poem manifest their existence in 'darkness'. 'Lumb Chimneys' emphasises industrial decline which leaves only the remains of old buildings and wall ruins as traces of environmental degradation.

The price that people pay for 'dreams' is depicted in the 'mortgaged walls' left rotten in the rain. These mortgaged walls convey an economic value which is abandoned once the mills are halted, while the language of the body crucially constitutes, to recall Sagar, a 'crime against nature'⁶³: 'The dear flesh is finally too much./ Heirloom bones are dumped into wet holes./ And spirit does what it can to save itself alone' (7-9, p. 457). Hughes uses the language of industrial production (in the waste) to address a strong, environmental message. The metaphor of 'dear flesh' connects the materiality of the abandoned looms with the language of the body.

In this context, the remains or 'bones' of the wool industry are buried in the holes, while the 'heirlooms dumped into wet holes' suggests a language of destruction as in 'Mill Ruins'. This vivid metaphor suggests the remains of old technology deprived of importance. Like murderous burial, the 'flesh' – wool, looms or walls – is abandoned to rot in the rain; the remains are dumped in the dying landscape where natural processes will cause decomposition. As Gifford notes, the dead landscapes are 'the dead

⁶³ Sagar, *Literature and Crime Against Nature*.

leaves of human culture'.⁶⁴ The fall of the chimney signifies 'the conflation of culture and nature' due to social disruptions or 'cataclysms' including the Industrial Revolution and the First World War.⁶⁵ Hughes claims that the valley was subordinate to the 'life of slavery – to work, cash, Methodism'.⁶⁶ When the mills declined, the 'spirit does what it can to save itself alone' (9, p. 457).

In 'Lumb Chimneys', the reterritorialisation by wild plants is communicated with a sense of harm and danger in the environment. While the first part of the poem introduces the derelict backdrops of industrial decline in human culture, the later part moves on to the recuperation of non-human nature that reclaims its domain. The line break, 'Nothing really cares. But soil deepens' (10, p. 457) positions the return of nature in terms of crucially basic elements – the earth where plants and micro-organisms grow. In a reciprocal process, the soil is fed by the old leaves and fallen elements, including bricks and organic substances to nourish the plants. Hughes develops a movement of organic elements from the earth to the air – the flora sprawling over the space in predatory fashion:

And the nettle venoms into place
 Like a cynical old woman in the food-queue.
 The bramble grabs for the air
 Like a baby burrowing into the breast.
 And the sycamore, cut through at the neck,
 Grows five or six heads, depraved with life.

(11-16, p. 457)

⁶⁴ Gifford, *Ted Hughes*, p. 49.

⁶⁵ -----, 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves: Culture as Nature in *Remains of Elmet & Elmet*' in *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 39-47 (p. 42).

⁶⁶ 'Letter to Fay Godwin, 4 July 1976' in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, pp. 378-80 (p. 379).

The word 'venom' normally functions as a noun; however, it is transformed into a verb to suggest a destructive quality in this context. Before the mills are constructed, the plant is cut down. Thus, the nettle returns to destroy what replaces it. While the thorny bramble sprawling in the air is compared to a baby seeking nourishment, the sycamore rapidly growing along the old structure is hydra-like. The significance of 'grabbing' lies in the metonymy of the vine as the 'hand' that reaches out into the air like a baby reaching out for attention. 'Nature' manifests its untamed entity in the bramble. Although 'cut through at the neck', the sycamore still 'grows five or six heads'. The phrase 'depraved with life' epitomises the resistance in the wild plant to constrain the environment. The language of the body such as 'grabs', 'burrowing', 'breast', 'neck', and 'heads' paradoxically produces both nurture and danger. Hughes heightens 'wildness' in the tenacity of nature regaining its place.

In 'Lumb Chimneys', Hughes offers an unorthodox way of viewing plants as reterritorialisers of disrupted space. The poem shows that the return of wild nature to its habitat naturally aligns with a bioregionalist concept of 'living-in-place' after the decay of a built environment. The bioregionalist concept of 'reinhabitation' is present in the return of the plants to the ruins. Although the words deployed in the description of flourishing plants are connected to negative characteristics such as 'venom', a 'cynical old woman', and the hydra's heads, this powerful language dramatically addresses 'wildness' in external nature.

Similarly with the bioregionalist perspective and ecological regeneration, 'Rhododendrons' defies the traditional view of 'alienation' and questions the boundary between 'native' plants and 'non-native' species. It imaginatively illustrates monstrous nature through a personified description of rhododendrons in a way which recalls the nettle, the bramble, and the sycamore in the previous poem: 'Dripped a chill virulence/ Into my nape –/ Rubberized prison-wear of suppression!' (1-3, p. 482). Considered as a

non-native species in Britain, the rhododendrons are demonised by poetic language as a plant that spreads a ‘virus’ to the speaker: ‘chill virulence’. The extent of its alienation is perceived in proportion to its invasive characteristics. Hughes critiques the idea of being native in a particular environment where adaptation in nature and control in human culture are juxtaposed and in conflict. As an invasive species, rhododendrons are both ‘guarding and guarded’ (4, p. 482) by the authority of the management because of the danger that they might threaten the habitats of native plants. The confined space of black ‘[f]orbidding forbidden stones’ (6, p. 482) suggests ambiguity in the condition of rhododendrons as humans keep them in place for ornament. But, to prevent their invasion and reterritorialisation of the ecosystem, they are kept separately, since particular kinds of rhododendrons are toxic.

In ‘Rhododendrons’, the Council and the policemen are representatives of human authority that suppresses and exploits these plants based on a contradictory ideology of ‘wildness’. The plants are hated and ultimately sterile in the sense that they are not useful for the environment. This anthropomorphic embodiment of monstrosity in wild plants indicates a problematic boundary between culture and nature that Hughes’s poetic language tries to point out. In ‘Lumb Chimneys’, the wild nettle is not as monstrous as the cultivated rhododendrons. Even though rhododendrons are evergreen, the background of ‘dead acid gardens’ suggests finality – a mourning mode, especially when the poet deliberately refers to aging and death with reference to ‘cenotaphs’ again: ‘Cenotaphs and the moor-silence! / Rhododendrons and rain!’ (14-15, p. 482). The problematic relationship between human beings and external nature is examined through a critique of religion in connection with a social space – the church. The poet juxtaposes the image of the old widows and clockwork to suggest impotency and sterility in human beings.

In this context, the language of the body is infused with the idea of time while the depiction of human beings who have ‘shrank to arthritic clockwork’ indicates stagnation (growth is interrupted by aging). As the decline of Methodism is addressed in the ‘shrined’ (10) Sunday church assembly where doorways are ‘Vast and black and proper as museums’ (13), the recurring image of old black church buildings reinforces the bleak atmosphere uniquely characterised by built environments in many of Hughes’s poems. Notably, the connection between rhododendrons and the church suggests a dichotomy between nature and culture. The poem concludes as the rain pours down, becomes one with rhododendrons, and ‘It is over’ (16, p.482). This line ambiguously shows both the end and the beginning since rain is a valuable resource for regeneration and growth. Rhododendrons, though confined, are seen growing and flourishing due to successful adaptation to a non-native environment.

Regeneration and reterritorialisation after a phase of industrial and spiritual decline is in line with the bioregionalist idea of ‘living-in-place’ and ‘reinhabitation’ in both poems. At the end of ‘Lumb Chimneys’, non-human nature becomes the primary focus: ‘Before these chimneys can flower again/ They must fall into the only future, into earth’ (17-18, p. 47). Hughes highlights a sense of rebirth, and regeneration. The word ‘flower’ suggests the literal flowers that might bud after the fall of the chimneys and a process of growing and blooming. Intriguingly, Hughes’s manoeuvre starts in the night and concentrates on the hopeless remains of the chimney ‘buried alive’ in the derelict site, and finally manages to revive the environment by focusing on the hopeful regeneration of the earth. The return of the plants suggests a bioregionalist logic: a positive approach to ‘reinhabitation’ and ‘living-in-place’, in which the post-industrial environment becomes an important locus of interconnectedness between a human community and the realm of nature.

Conclusion

Remains of Elmet is constructed out of personal memory, the poetic reconfiguration of geographical and literary culture, and the social and political transformation of space. Hughes's eco-poetics is recreated with reference to the poet's childhood landscapes and through a dynamic play of metaphor and, often, the powerful language of the body. His poetry scrutinises human culture, focusing on machine technology and its transformative effects on a particular environment. Hughes re-imagines the values – economic, ecological, and cultural – that for human beings reside in living and non-living nature. Writing a poem for him is not only a depiction of his environment, but also a process of remembering the past, redefining the present, and recreating a textual-ecological space through the agency of imagination. Hughes represents the valley and moorlands through celebratory images, critiques the idea of dwelling and memory, and retells socio-cultural history of a place, as a means to poetically appeal to 'the song of the earth' (in Bate's sense).

Hughes fulfils his role as a poet who defines as central the development of environmental consciousness which emerges out of the complexity of his spatial poetry. The images of animated rocks and stones in relation to 'wilderness' and 'wildness' subtly reflect relative, ecological values set against economic values. Different temporalities are explored in these poems to challenge anthropocentric modes of knowledge and experience. In *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes shows that literary works are representative of how the imaginative arts 'can reflect, develop, celebrate and protect the unique character of the bioregions that produce them'.⁶⁷ The Yorkshire bioregion is depicted with the cultural and ecological complexity that characterises Hughes's

⁶⁷ Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty and Karla Armbruster, 'Introduction', in *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*, ed. by Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty and Karla Armbruster (London: University of Georgia Press, 2012), pp. 1-29 (p. 12).

imagination. In the next chapter, I will examine a different ecological territory – ‘riverscape’ – to consider Hughes’s creation and conception of fluvial environments in relation to other creatures and human communities. *River* will be read as a dynamic realm (of the page and of aquatic environment) that poetically explores the mechanisms of natural phenomena and the life-cycles of water creatures. I will also consider aspects of the culture-nature dynamism in another environmental poet, Alice Oswald who, like Hughes, creates an environmental debate in the poetic space.

Chapter IV A Poetics of *River*: Riverscapes and Environmental Politics

In previous chapters, writing about landscapes addresses the significance of particular places such as moorlands, a livestock farm, human communities, mill ruins, rocks, and valleys. In this chapter, by representing aquatic ecology and the lives of other creatures in poetry, Hughes creates *River* (1983) to explore the essential place of water in relation to human culture. For Hughes, the river flow and live dynamisms of fluvial landscapes reflect the flow of poetic imagination. As Scigaj contends, '*River* celebrates nature's powers to refresh one's perceptions and promote psychological renewal'.¹ An individual's experience in rivers is depicted in relation to ecological elements and imbued with Hughes's own mental reinvigoration. Roger Deakin claims that, '[w]ater is the most poetical of elements'²; the river can 'exert hydraulic power and with the same subtlety', I argue, poetry can manifest its richness.³ The hydraulic power that Deakin mentions implies the fluidity and complexity of language which creates sounds, meanings, and distinctive imagery in Hughes's representations of rivers and the fluvial environments.

The water's creative and destructive powers significantly shape Hughes's poetic identity in connection with fluvial ecology. In *River* Hughes investigates the ecological interrelatedness of water, earth, air, light, humans, and aquatic creatures. *River*, using highly metaphorical language, follows the life cycle of water over the course of seasons to celebrate marine life and critique the politics of watery environment. The description of environmental problems is prominent in his invocation of water pollution.

This chapter studies Hughes's eco-poetics through representations of water and fluvial mechanisms such as currents, flood, and other creatures' interactions following

¹ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 136.

² Roger Deakin, 'Forward', in *The River's Voice: An Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Angela King and Susan Clifford (Devon: Green Books, 2000), pp. 15-18 (p. 16).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

seasonal cycles. First, I explore the poetry sequence ‘Four March Watercolours’ to consider the poet’s environmental awareness, demonstrated via his imagination of the current, flora and fauna along the river banks. The flowing river produces visual and auditory imagery that addresses the interconnectedness between water creatures and physical phenomena in an ecosystem. Hughes’s poetry engages with the cultural values of rivers and the intertextuality of river writing which considers nature an essential power with ‘unknowability’ and ‘wonder’ palpable in riverine ecology. Writing a river reveals the poet’s knowledge of aquatic biodiversity in relation to seasonal influence and environmental mechanisms.

I also investigate Hughes’s poetics of ecology as it represents transformative boundaries between water and earth, the internal and the external worlds in relation to humans and other creatures. My examination of ‘Go Fishing’ reflects Hughes’s understanding of selfhood in connection with the ‘otherness’ of the external environment. Through fishing experiences, the poet invokes water’s healing power and physical dynamisms that are linked to poetic creativity (the torrential process). With reference to the lives of fish, birds, insects, otters, and other creatures, I demonstrate how the boundaries between water, air, and land constitute the rivers as a dynamic and vital domain in poems such as ‘Performance’, ‘A Cormorant’, ‘An Eel’, and ‘An Otter’. This section also considers fishing as crossing the boundaries from land to water and from human consciousness to external nature.

In the course of this chapter, I explore the transitory quality of rivers, how they make ambiguous the idea of ‘dwelling’, and a sense of belonging in the water-land territories. Following the journeys of fish from the river, to its mouth, and, finally, the sea, *River* represents the salmon’s life cycle and other creatures which are deliberately interwoven with a poetic tradition of a heroic quest (a biological journey for reproduction). This collection also reveals the poet-angler’s commanding authority of

his fishing experiences and knowledge of aquatic biology which informs his imagination of the fish and their dynamisms in rivers. Hughes's conception of aquatic creatures indicates the combination of culture and nature in metaphor and symbols of the 'riverscapes'. In this light, a poetics of water reveals his ecological stance and an interest in environmental conservation, which are present everywhere in his work.

Towards the end of the chapter, I look at Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002) alongside Hughes's *River* to consider their dual perceptions of rivers as a source of tales, and a stage for environmental politics. Both poets create different and distinctive forms of river writing which interrelates a human community, poetic imagination, and the rivers' reality. In connection to human culture, imaginative stories from river-dwellers contribute to debates about ecological awareness and environmental pollution palpable in Hughes's 'Rain-Charms for the Duchy' and Oswald's *Dart*. The comparative study of *Dart* and *River* will shed light on the development and integration of poetic language and environmental thoughts which germinate in Hughes's works and bloom in Oswald's poetry.

Ecological interconnectedness and environmental conservation

River reveals Hughes's personal experiences, his ecological consciousness of fluvial ecology, and the social context of the period. As an angler, Hughes sees fishing as a meditative process that allows a human subject to contemplate the riverine environment. Through depictions of water and aquatic lives, the poet identifies a specific kind of ecological interconnectedness, to which poetry makes its distinctive appeal. In a note to *Three Books* (1993), Hughes writes:

It is not easy to separate the fascination of rivers from the fascination of fish. Making dams, waterfalls, water-gardens, water-courses, is deeply absorbing play, for most of us, but the results have to be a home for something. When

the water is wild, inhabitants are even more important. Streams, rivers, ponds, lakes *without fish* communicate to me one of the ultimate horrors – the poisoning of the wells, death at the source of all that is meant by water.⁴

Aquatic lives, water mechanism, and the cultural activities on rivers inspire the poet's creativity. Those transformations of the fluvial environments both construct and destroy the water domains and affect human communities at large. Ultimately, Hughes's interest in rivers in relation to 'wildness' is central to my examination of his poetry through fishing which is a form of contact with aquatic lives. Hughes wrote to Gifford that: '[a]fter sixty years of experience it seems to me that rod and line fishing in fairly wild places is a perfect hold-all substitute for every other kind of aberrant primitive impulse'.⁵ Fishing connects the poet to the primitive 'intuitions'; by fishing, the angler examines the lives of fish, other creatures, and vegetation. This allows him to meditate on his internal consciousness and external nature in the same way hunting wildlife brings him back to 'wilderness' (Chapter I).

Hughes imagines rivers to engage with an environmental politics that reflects his ecological awareness in the 1960s. This was an era of social and political changes in which Hughes saw, and was part of the advocacy for environmental transformations. He argues:

And it [the Sixties] produced the whole idea of our ecological responsibility, fully developed – maybe the crucial awakening. And the idea of *ecological interconnectedness*, which is the fundamental assumption now of children under 18, is only the material aspect of the interconnectedness of everything in spirit (my italics).⁶

⁴ Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p. 1211.

⁵ 'Letter to Terry Gifford, 16 January 1994', in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, pp. 658-60 (p. 658).

⁶ 'Letter to Keith Sagar, 30 August 1979', in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, pp. 425-26 (p. 426).

Again, ‘*ecological interconnectedness*’ becomes Hughes’s primary focus since he sees environmental changes as an effect of human creation. Later on in his life, Hughes raised the argument for ecological responsibility to the level of a manifesto when he moved to Devon as his environmental concern is not purely local but national and universal. Just as Alice Oswald has promoted the conservation of rivers in Devon through literary campaigns in schools, Hughes uses a poetic space to constitute ecological and environmental awareness in the public. The rivers that have particularly shaped his childhood experience are the River Calder in West Yorkshire and the Don in South Yorkshire. When Hughes relocated to Devon, where he spent most of his adult life, the Taw and the Torridge inspired his ecological consciousness.⁷ In *River*, ‘The River Barrow’ set in Ireland and ‘That Morning’ in Alaska signify Hughes’s environmental awareness on an international level. Mark Wormald argues that in 1988 what Hughes called ‘the voice of the fishery’ would never be recognised unless it was ‘camouflaged’ in social or political issues; then the poet was ready to use his own testimony, particularly when Poet Laureate, to ‘advocate on behalf of the fishery and its less eloquent community’.⁸ His devotion to environmental conservation appears in his review of Max Nicholson’s *The Environmental Revolution* (1970) in which he argues that:

The time for Conservation has certainly come. But Conservation, our sudden alertness to the wholeness of nature, and the lateness of the hour, is only the crest of a deeper excitement and readiness. The idea of nature as a single organisation is not new. It was man’s first great thought, the basic intuition

By the time of the publication of *Remains of Elmet* and *Moortown Diary*, Hughes wrote a letter to Sagar on Auden’s article about Yeats that Auden dismissed some ideas about Eastern mysticism and philosophy in comparison with the Sixties. However, Hughes sees the significant point of the Sixties that it constitutes environmental concern as seen in the quotation.

⁷ Gifford, ‘Rivers and Water Quality in the Work of Brian Clarke and Ted Hughes’, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 34 (2008), 75-91 (p. 82).

⁸ Mark Wormald, ‘Fishing for Ted’, in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Mark Wormald, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 112-29 (p. 125).

of most primitive theologies ... [And] this is what we are seeing: something that was unthinkable only ten years ago, except as a poetic dream: the re-emergence of Nature as the Great Goddess of mankind, and the Mother of all life.⁹

For Hughes, nature seen as rivers is ecologically perceived and conceptualised in a primitive relationship with the earth. A holistic understanding of nature in ecological sciences calls for environmental conservation in ways that human beings acknowledge the value of their surroundings. As single units of the food chain, human beings and other species are interconnected with other elements such as forests, land-forms, rivers, and other resources to serve a multiplicity of needs. In this chapter, I show how Hughes subtly integrates environmental issues into his poetic creativity through depictions of water and rivers.

Aquatic mechanism: the ‘muse’ of the torrent

Hughes’s contemplation of the river is like looking into the world’s mechanism, the earth’s veins, developed in highly dynamic imagery; his symbolic register represents the aesthetics of water and its ecology. Pamela J. Mittlefehldt argues, in the same manner as Deakin, that water can be seen as a muse, a source of inspiration, a focus of reflection, and a metaphor.¹⁰ She further argues, ‘[t]he lexicon of water itself invites clear connections between water and creativity: fluidity, reflectivity, mutability’.¹¹ Hughes’s poetry reflects his fascination in the complexity of water as mechanism, inspiration, and reflection of the self. ‘Four March Watercolours’ is depicted as a fluvial landscape which connects a seasonal cycle, water, air, light, land, aquatic creatures, and an

⁹ Craig Robinson, *Ted Hughes as Shepherd of Being* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989), p. 199. Hughes reviews Max Nicholson’s *The Environmental Revolution in Your Environment* in 1970.

¹⁰ Pamela J. Mittlefehldt, ‘Writing the Waves, Sounding the Depths: Water as Metaphor and Muse’, *ISLE*, 10 (2003), 137-42 (p. 137).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

ecosystem at large. With an ecocentric stance, the poem sequence narrates the ‘riverscape’ with an emphasis, physically and symbolically, on its biodiversity.

To define ‘riverscape’, Tricia Cusack contends that it is ‘a water system with intakes and outlets, or historically as a stream that may have changed course over the years, or culturally as a source of myth’.¹² According to Cusack, ‘riverscape’ includes the course of rivers and streams running through lands, forests, mountains, etc. It is also a river’s mechanism, its flow, the working of its current and physical forces. The riverscape can be regarded as a ‘perspective construction’ and how the river is viewed and the meanings are attributed to it in relation to specific cultural groups at certain historical junctures.¹³ Therefore, it combines both the distinct symbolic potential of the flowing river and the qualities of the fixed images. In *River*, Hughes’s riverscape is created with his imagination of aquatic mechanisms, through childhood memory and an environmentalist perspective.

‘Four March Watercolours’ re-imagines the river as a point of life’s origin that nurtures aquatic creatures and plants; the river carries its body to the sea to fulfil a hydrological cycle. The opening stanza in spring, which describes the wet earth moistened by floodwater, is highly visual. The scenery produces the dispersal of water in the air and over the earth; ‘Earth is just unsettling/ Her first faint scents’ (I, 1-2, p. 644). The poem describes the interconnectedness between the earth and the river and shows how the two fundamental elements are interlocked in an imaginative description (‘scents’). Hughes uses water to highlight an interaction with the air and its integration with the earth through rich alliteration:

[...] The blue

¹² Tricia Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), p. 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Is a daze of bubbly fire – naked

Ushering and nursing of electricity

With caressings of air. Earth,

Mud-stained, sands in sparkling beggary.

(I, 4-9, p. 644)

Here, Hughes evokes the floodwater as a natural process and integrates the river with other ecological elements including the earth, plants and wild creatures. By focusing on the interaction between water and air, the poem imagines light that produces energy in the metaphor of ‘bubbly fire’ and ‘electricity’. Scigaj states that ‘[l]ight imagery coalesces with river water regularly to imbue riverscapes with a numinous aura, a sense of the sacredness of the hydrological cycle’.¹⁴ However, I argue that the river’s sacredness is not perceived in this poem but instead that ecological dynamism is apparent in the rebirth of baby nettle and wild daffodils during a transitory period in relation to light, from winter to spring. In terms of linguistic register, the alliteration of /s/ sounds: ‘stained’ (8), ‘stands’(8), ‘sparkling’(8), ‘snow’(8), ‘still’(9), and ‘stubborn’(9) in the previous lines, creates a sense of absorption and integration. Water is fused with earth and air, glittering with light and reinvigorating plants with energy. The emphatic unity of water and earth reveals the ‘riverscape’ as an ecological unit; its power is inseparable from the landscape, apparent in the wet forest.

As the seasonal cycle turns towards spring, ‘Four March Watercolours’ considers the resurrection of other creatures when the climate allows them to reclaim ecological liveliness. Seasonal change influences and transforms plants and animals; they are rejuvenated by the river in spring. Hughes demonstrates his interest in biodiversity on lands alongside the river’s course:

¹⁴Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, pp. 136-37.

[...] Spring is over there.

Tits exciting the dour oak. Cows soften their calls

Into the far, crumble-soft calling

Of ewes. The land hangs tremulous.

It pays full attention to each crow-caw,

Turning full-face to the entering, widening,

Flame-cored, burrowing havoc of a jet. [...]

(16-22, p. 645)

The interactions among other-than-human creatures including cows, ewes, tits, and a crow suggest vigour and dynamism on the riverside where a human community is disrupted by technology (the jet in the sky). The tits in the oak and the crying crow enliven ecological vibrancy. Notably, Hughes presents the land and the river as interactive entities; the earth hangs ‘tremulous’ after being recharged by floodwater and from the light in the air. In this context, the earth is full of vitality, enriched by the river, and caressed by the air; the harmony of air, earth, water, and interactive creatures reflects a network of lives.

In section I, Hughes’s mechanical language addresses the river’s driving force as the earth’s mechanism. The metaphor of the blue river as ‘a daze of bubbly fire – naked/ Ushering and nursing of electricity’ (I, 5-6, p. 644) produces physical force in the current and suggests movement and direction. Here, the river’s physical movement is reinvigorated, fully occupied with ‘callisthenics’ in ‘twistings and self-wrestlings’ (I, 11-12, p. 644). The reference to ‘callisthenics’ (a system of bodily exercise) implies the physicality of water as a powerful and independent entity. Throughout the poem, the river is essential force (power) which reflects Hughes’s interest in language as

‘revealing’ in a Heideggerian sense, particularly when the current is part of the greater aquatic mechanism. The river is an ecological ‘engine’:

[...] The pool by the concrete buttress

Has just repaired its intricate engine,

Now revs it full-bore, underground,

Under my footsole. Tries to split the foundations,

Running in, testing and testing.

(I, 12-16, pp. 644-45)

The representation of the hydrological cycle is radical in the use of mechanical terms such as ‘engine’, ‘revs’, and ‘testing’, to manifest the independence and mobility of the organic ‘riverscape’. In this way, Hughes’s ecological poetics is developed through language of machinery as a way to consider the river’s mechanism and the causal process in the fluvial environment.

In section II, Hughes personifies spring to offer a sense of rebirth in the ecosystem. Spring is depicted as inactive in that ‘She’s numb and pale’ (II, 8, p. 645) after winter; later, liveliness in flora and fauna is restored. By focusing on the seasonal cycle, Hughes draws on the causal process of the weather that transforms flora and fauna in the environment. As the poem depicts the ‘resilient’ field full of new lambs, influenced by the harsh climate, the trees are represented as survivors of harsh winter:

[...] We trees,

We tall ones, sunning, somewhat mutilated,

Inured by one more winter

To this muddy, heedless earth, and to our scaly

Provisional bodies, relax,

Enjoy the fraternity of survival,

Even a hope of new leaf.

(II, 22-28, pp. 645-46)

Hughes creates the personified trees as ecologically unified ('We') to show the earth's resurrection in the integrity of vegetation. The earth is a location of healing while the trees being 'inured' by winter indicate the plants' resilience and familiarity with the harsh season. Through anthropomorphic vocabulary including 'fraternity', the poem suggests ecological integrity. With optimism, the metaphor of 'a new leaf' signals rebirth in the seasonal cycles.

Hughes's depiction of the river in section I with the blue current and the metaphorical engine creates ecological vitality. In section II, the current's dynamic force is imagined as a carrier of life and death in a primordial sense. While the 'riverscape' nurtures life along the banks, it cleanses all remains of death in renewal. The river is the earth's mechanism:

[...] The river's hard at it,

Tries and tries to wash and revive

A bedraggle of dirty bones. Primitive, radical

Engine of earth's renewal. A solution

Of all dead ends – an all-out evacuation

To the sea. All debts

Of wings and fronds, of eyes, nectar, roots, hearts

Returning cancelled, to solvency –

Back to the sea's re-think. [...]

(II, 10-15, p. 645)

The metaphorical river as ‘A bedraggle of dirty bones’ reveals an ecological message in its renewal process. Hughes plays with the river-bed and ‘bedraggle’ (normally an adjective) to emphasise the hydrological complexity and its relation to the planet’s mechanism – cleaning the ‘dirty bones’. In the repetition of ‘tries’, the river washes all remains on earth to the sea to fulfil its continuous hydrological cycle, suggesting decomposition and renewal as seen in ‘Relic’ (Chapter I). As ‘Relic’ concentrates on the ‘wildness’ of creatures in the sea, section II goes further to include humans in the river.

Hughes engages with a natural process of ecological harmony as seen in the return of all living and dead beings to the sea. The term ‘evacuation’ suggests a sense of emptying. The use of synecdoche reveals rich biodiversity in the fluvial landscape; ‘All debts of wings and fronds, of eyes, nectar, roots, hearts’ (II, 15-16, p. 645) represents plants, animals, and human beings who belong to the earth and are indebted to the river. The poem articulates the river’s holistic renewal; ecological elements are carried, decomposed, and will be re-created in the natural cycle. The reference to the sea powerfully invokes a sense of ecological interconnectedness in which humans are inseparable from the river in the hydrological cycle.

In section III, as lambing is introduced into the ‘scene’ with its full seasonal cycle, water goes high to its full strength. The churning *wheel* prominently symbolises the river’s mechanism as a physical phenomenon and suggests physical power in the fluvial environment:

The river

Concentrates its work. Its wheels churn.

Foam at the pool-tail blazes tawny – thrashing

Tight blown flames.

Bleeding the valley older. [...]

(III, 1-5, p. 646)

Here, Hughes represents water as a hydraulic wheel to create force and agency in the movement. The language of labour, palpable in words such as ‘thrashing’ and ‘churn’, indicates the current’s energy production in the ‘Tight blown flames’. The very last line of this stanza implies the river’s constructive and destructive power since the word ‘Bleeding’ creates ambiguity in the ‘riverscape’. With reference to the earth’s veins, the bleeding river signifies the constructive force used to empower ecology in the regenerative process. Deakin’s view that water is a poetic element is seen in the ‘hydraulic’ process when language and nature are combined in this mechanical imagery. Nevertheless, the representation of water as an engine conveys death in the remains of all creatures to be emptied into the sea. Symbolically, the river in spring establishes a transformative power, a sense of ecological integrity and renewal, under the influence of the seasons.

‘Four March Watercolours’ creates the poetics of the fluvial biosphere by depicting the rejuvenated landscape after snow. In section III, snow is highly emphasised with visual imagery which ‘Whitened last night’ (III, 6, p. 646) and ‘Fledged all complexities of trees/ And perfected fields [...]’ (III, 9-10, p. 646). Hughes is aware of macro-ecology as seen in his depiction of the transitory period from autumn to spring which reflects the poet’s holistic view of nature and literary ecology. Alongside the earth and snow, other creatures are made alive while the farm’s vitality is restored.

The following lines locate ecological complexity when the river revitalises the power in the landscape. Considering the ewe going down the river, Hughes informs the relation between farming and water ecology. The metaphor of ‘the power-coils/ Of the river’s bulge’ (III, 13-14, p. 646) emphasises the physicality of river and energy in nature’s creative process. The poem depicts the buzzards in a pastoral mode to celebrate

spring's scenery. In this light, the river's vitality is distinctive through ways in which animals and plants are represented in a mode of resurrection.

Towards the end of 'Four March Watercolours', Hughes re-imagines the exuberance and grandeur of the fluvial environment. The river's greatness is defined by the current's physical beauty and a powerful force in a detailed artistic description. Here, the 'riverscape' is ecologically reinvigorated by its inhabitants such as salmon, trout, and other creatures. Hughes's poetic language in section IV highlights the aesthetic beauty of the river's ebb and flow:

The river-epic

Rehearses itself. Embellishes afresh and afresh

Each detail. Baroque superabundance.

Earth-mouth brimming. But the snow-melt

Is an invisible restraint. [...]

(IV, 1-5, p. 646)

The river is compared to an epic, not in the traditional concept of heroism but, I argue, in its powerful mechanism and contribution to ecology. Referring to 'Baroque' art, Hughes imagines the river as a painting embellished with decorative motifs and details in its movement. 'Earth-mouth brimming' demonstrates the details of the earth and the river in the language of the body. As the river is enriched, 'brimming' with water along the banks, the poem suggests Hughes's ecological consciousness in relation to artwork; the 'superabundance' of natural elements is distinctively constructed in poetic language. James Kilner argues that 'Four March Watercolours' bears the influence of visual art as a painting which is palpable at the beginning of the sequence when the I-speaker focuses on his shadow as a 'silent self-portrait' – 'My shadow, soft-edged' (I, 2-4, p.

644).¹⁵ Indeed, the reference to Baroque art connects the embellishment of river with emotion and movement as Hughes implies Classical form, light, and the dramatic intensity in the current. In addition, the phrase ‘Earth-mouth’ addresses the ‘riverscape’ as a source of fertility, similar to the river Calder as a ‘womb’ in *Remains of Elmet*. Ultimately, the river and its mechanism are seen as a source of grandeur and beauty.

The last image of ‘Four March Watercolours’ sums up the entire sequence which details the interconnectedness of the river, water creatures, and its dynamic ecology. Through the riverine inhabitants, the poet reveals the tension between life and death. During the renewal process, the aquatic creatures resume their liveliness in the critical, transitory climate. After the snow melts, the salmon are compared to objects suffering from harsh conditions. The focus is shifted from the river banks to the river-bed where salmon struggle in the cold water; ‘Lodged’ and ‘sealed’ like ‘fossils’ when the season changes, ‘they are in coma’ and ‘Under the grained pressure’ (IV, 6-8, p.646). By depicting the tension between life and death in the river, plants, and the earth with the language of the body, Hughes employs the natural elements to address ecological integrity and interdependence. The ‘melted chocolate’ (IV, 9, p. 646) in the silt, the ‘mountain of water’ (IV, 15, p. 647) in the river-bed, and ‘the sweating, speechless labour of trees’ (IV, 22, p. 646) on the bank all constitute the poetics of the riverscape.

The last part of section IV depicts the water’s course as ‘the river’s cargo/ The oldest commerce’ (IV, 24-25, p. 647). This imagery reveals Hughes’s poetic imagination and conception of human culture and nature. The river is seen as an extensive carrier of physical power for the landscape while light is depicted as pulling

¹⁵ James Kilner, ‘Hearing the Horizons Endure: Silences in the Poetry of Ted Hughes’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds and York St. John University, 2009), p. 163.

the river cargo. This beam of light is crafted to haul the river as the ‘oldest commerce’ linking human culture to the river’s course and the earth’s mechanism.

In ‘Four March Watercolours’, the muddy river bank and the river-bed are represented as habitats for wildlife, humans, farm animals, and plants. By concentrating on the current, Hughes visualises the river’s powerful mechanism as a causal process. The poem is created as an artwork with decorative details to shape poetic imagining of fluvial landscape revealing the poet’s environmental consciousness. The eco-poetics of rivers represents the interactions between land and air creatures as much as aquatic lives in the ‘riverscape’ which enrich biodiversity. The imagination of air and light, in relation to water and earth, the influence of the seasonal cycles, constitutes the poet’s conception of ecological wholeness. Therefore, ‘Four March Watercolours’ is a product of Hughes’s green language in light of renewal and regeneration. Imagined aesthetically appealing, with decorative and embellished features, the river is a muse and poetry is an artwork which reflects the majestic imagery of ‘Nature’.

Fishing in the ‘Riverscape’ and contemplating the Self

In *River*, Hughes’s poetry reveals his ecological consciousness of the riverine environment through fishing and concentrating on the torrent’s physical movement and his selfhood. ‘River Barrow’ explores the poet’s environmental consciousness in his contemplation of the surroundings: the setting sun, light and shadow, the current, trees, flies, and fish. In ‘River Barrow’, the sun is set within a still atmosphere of dim light that allows the angler-speaker to depict vivid imagery and the temporality of the river’s movement. In this context, the sun is depicted as a ‘Red-molten glass-blob’, which transforms into ‘green ember crumble/ Of hill trees’ (2-3, p. 656). ‘River Barrow’ offers peaceful imagery of retreat from the busy city. Scigaj claims that for Hughes ‘[e]xperiencing the ecological relatedness of nature can cleanse the self of the surface

clutter of schedules and objectives that complicates one's life'.¹⁶ Here, fishing as inhabiting the watery environment offers healing for an individual in external nature.

'River Barrow' makes use of mechanical image to intensify the river's immensity, its physical movement, and appeals to the mystery at dusk. Words signifying movement are employed to highlight the dynamic body of water:

[...] The current

Hauls its foam-line feed-lane

Along under the far bank – a furrow

Driving through heavy wealth,

Dragging a syrupy strength, a down-roping

Of the living honey. [...]

(7-12, p. 657)

The alliteration of 'foam-line feed-lane' produces a forward motion; the torrential energy 'feeds' the river along the banks. Also, the metaphor of 'furrow' suggests the current's dynamism that forcefully pulls the river's body forward. This connection between the current and its flowing power, 'heavy wealth', is indicated in the 'syrupy strength' and a 'down-roping of the living honey' (11-12, p. 657). In so doing, Hughes addresses the river's transformative power and mobility through a vocabulary of hard labour: 'Driving', 'Dragging' and 'roping'. The liquid image of honey suggests slow movement and thickness that comes up against 'strength' in the current.

Hughes creates a still and haunting atmosphere in the Barrow's 'riverscape'. Here, the river is compared to 'an ancient thirst' (12, p. 657) and a 'craving mouth' (15, p. 657) to create a mystery. Yet, the metaphor of a haunted ghost drinking the river (15-16, p. 657) implies the unknown environment. In the relationship between nature and

¹⁶ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 139.

culture, the River Barrow nurtures human landscapes, manifests its aquatic mechanism, and sustains the natural ecology in haunting imagery:

[...] Trees inverted

Even in this sliding place are perfect.

All evil suspended. Flies

Teem over my hands, twanging their codes

In and out of my ear's beam. Future, past,

Reading each other in the water mirror

Barely tremble the thick nerve. [...]

(18-24, p. 657)

The above stanza suggests the interactions between the river's temporality, the physical environment, and other-than-human creatures, while the angler contemplates his own consciousness. Describing plants and flies buzzing around his ears, the speaker raises the idea of time in relation to the current's movement. The external world is drawn into the internal through an examination of the angler's thought. By focusing on the water surface, the angler can reflect his own mental process which is deep down beyond the interference of natural movement. His environmental imagination of the river is stimulated by the fishing activity.

Hughes contemplates stillness and peace in the fishing process to imagine the fluvial landscape with 'the thick nerve' that slowly moves on. The poet creates the river and natural objects as a 'signature' to reveal spiritual truths; the river is 'both the stream of moment-to-moment consciousness and a conduit for the spiritually healing energy of nature'.¹⁷ The speaker reinvigorates the deep water where aquatic creatures dwell, in the 'solid mystery/ With a living vein' (25-26, p. 657). The trout seems to 'Flash-plop,

¹⁷ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 16.

curdle the molten,/ Rive a wound in the smooth healing' (27-28, p. 657). The poem examines the interrelatedness and mystery between the trout and the river, focusing on the water's healing power. Hughes uses the language of the body, 'thick nerve' and 'living vein', to suggest that the ecological system functions in a similar way to the human body.

'River Barrow' considers fishing as a way to comprehend one's psychological position in conjunction with the external environment. The river is represented as a 'Great weight/ Resting effortless on the weightless' (36, p. 657); this invokes a philosophical meditation of the angler's connection with water. What is paradoxically perceived as the 'Great weight' of the physical energy in the current transcends to the 'weightless' entity in a metaphorical sense. Hughes's contemplation of the flowing river mirrors his internal consciousness, which is at rest in stillness, leaving other worldly concerns behind as the speaker says '[...] I lie here,/ Half-unearthed, an old sword in its scabbard,/ Happy to moulder. Only the river moves' (39-41, p. 657). The symbolic sword in its scabbard is powerfully depicted as stored energy in the same way the speaker's movement is at pause while meditating the river. This imagery indicates the reinvigoration of a human's physical and spiritual power by water.

At the end of the poem, the poet is awakened by the big fish crashing the crater and making the river widen. Hughes's examination of the River Barrow creates a contemplation of the physical environment as much as the human psyche; the river flow reflects the poet-angler's imagination of the interactions between light and shadow, flies and trees, fish and current, and a bird and a cow. By creating the still, watery landscape in fishing, 'River Barrow' reveals Hughes's ecological awareness and concentrates on the interconnectedness of all creatures as much as the elements in focus.

By observing the 'riverscape' while fishing, Hughes gradually sees external nature as a reflection of human consciousness. Having a great passion for fishing, the

poet is aware of the fluvial environment that allows the angler to examine the relation between body and mind, and the external and the internal. The shift from land to water is oriented towards poetic imagination, meditation on selfhood, and the natural surroundings. Like ‘River Barrow’, ‘Go Fishing’ particularly examines human perception of the river through senses. The act of wading into the river is depicted as human absorption of external nature.

Sagar claims that fishing for Hughes shares a similarity with writing poems; it is ‘[e]scaping from the usual toils of the ego, reaching out to the other, whether in the form of “a new specimen of the life outside your own” or a new insight dragged up from your own mysterious depths’.¹⁸ Sagar is right that Hughes attempts to explore otherness and mystery of external nature in the river. However, fishing, as meditation on the river, is not seen as a way to escape from his ego, but instead as a path to understand the integrity of oneself and the riverine environment.

‘Go Fishing’ depicts the poet’s contemplation of fishing and focuses on an affinity with material objects and one’s own psyche. It reflects the understanding of one’s mind which Sagar calls an ‘insight’. The process of focusing on water, in anticipation of creatures which live in it, becomes a form of contemplation and meditation. Hughes fuses the psychological awareness of the persona, who tells readers to ‘Join water, wade in underbeing/ Let brain mist into moist earth’ (1-2, p. 652). To wade in water is to create a physical contact with the river, to sense the wet earth, and allow the brain to exercise its poetic imagination. Being in water leads to the persona’s contact with his environment and inspires Hughes’s verbal and non-verbal communication with external nature.

¹⁸ Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature*, p. 251.

As part of a fishing experience, getting into the water represents a union of body and mind. 'Go Fishing' creates a transitory movement from land to water with a heightened awareness of natural elements; mud and water are at the point of contact between the angler and his consciousness of the environment. In this light, the river has a transcendental power that integrates the internal and the external as the persona invites readers to refrain from verbal communication:

Lose words

Cease

Be assumed into glistenings of lymph

As if creation were a wound

As if this flow were all plasm healing

(5-9, p. 652)

Hughes captures the psychological process of becoming deeply united with, and absorbed in, external nature through the act of fishing. The poet loses himself away from the busy world and thus his absorption in water addresses non-verbal communication in isolation. Here, verbal communication is problematic because it fails to reach out to the transition between man and nature. In fact, if one keeps silent and feels the environment through his senses, he might be able to gain a transcendental state of mind. Particularly in the river, water has a special quality to absorb and disperse into materials, 'As if this flow were all plasm healing'. Thus, fishing is recuperation from the 'public' world and allows the poet to understand his body and mind as a form of meditation in the serene environment.

In an interview with Thomas Pero (*Wild Steelhead and Salmon*, 1999) Hughes comments on fishing as a meditating process and as leading to ecological interconnectedness that:

[A]ny kind of fishing provides that connection with the whole living world. It gives you the opportunity of being totally immersed, turning back into yourself in a good way. A form of meditation, some form of communication with levels of yourself that are deeper than the ordinary self. When I'm fishing alone – I don't know whether it's your experience, but when I fish alone for hours – as I come out of it, if I have to speak to somebody, I find I can't speak properly. I can't form words. The words sort of come out backwards, tumbled. It takes time to readjust, as if I'd been into some part of myself that pre-dates language. It doesn't happen when I'm fishing with people. But when I am fishing alone, it happens.¹⁹

The role of communication, particularly verbal language is not perceived in fishing but a psychological contact with the river is presumably expected. There is a sense of expectation in the unseen which manifests its existence through the rod and line. As Hughes said, his connection with the external world through fishing signifies his ecological interconnectedness as this activity 'pre-dates' human language. Fishing is a primitive way of sensing the environment when angler positions himself in solitude and this activity opens a channel to self-actualisation. Hughes furthers his observation of fishing that:

'It's an extension of your whole organism into the whole environment that's created you... that's created us. We're just the sort of animal tip of it, aren't we? And so to be still actively engaged in the system of interaction that's created us... is just like keeping contact with your own organs in your own body... If I were deprived of that kind of live, intimate interactive existence – allowing myself to be possessed by and possessing this sort of world through fishing, through that whole... umm... corridor, back into the world that's

¹⁹ Pero, 'So Quickly it's Over', p. 56.

made us as we are, turned us into what we are – it would be as though I'd had some great, vital part of me amputated.²⁰

It is the external world beyond an anthropocentric framework that allows Hughes to contemplate his own psyche in relation to fishing, verbal communication, and the ontological meaning of humanity, inseparable from a sense of animality. This passage clearly clarifies Hughes's green vision which emphasises the *ecological interconnectedness* through a fishing experience.

With a degree of idealism, Gifford gives examples of how people who live beside nature, animals or trees, or tend a garden, gain some renewed sense of themselves. They learn their own 'cycles of growth and decay and of their emotional ebbs and flows' through living with nature.²¹ The working of one's mind with nature is in line with Buddhist meditation in which a practitioner meditates on his consciousness and the external environment. Hughes contemplates water during the act of fishing, where his mind is unfettered from worldly busy-ness. The working of the inner self responds to the external environment which, in this context, is the river and its ecology. As Sagar notes, getting into water is the moment when one loses his ego to comprehend the environment and gain new insight into his own psyche.²² For Scigaj, fishing releases nature's soothing and healing quality and reveals the 'worldless states of feeling and contact with natural rhythms essential to psychic health'.²³ Though slightly different from Sagar in terms of healing, Scigaj sees contact with water through human senses including sight, sound, and touch as unfettering the human psyche from worldly matters.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 156.

²² Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature*, p. 251.

²³ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 21.

Although fishing is similar to Buddhist meditation in some words, it is partially and contradictorily located with disregard to the religious principle. Buddhism is a non-violent-based religion; refraining from killing or harming other creatures is considered the key teaching. Fishing is undeniably regarded as a form of hunting and brutal violence whether or not it is practiced for food or as sport. To cause pain and suffering in animals is considered as threat to other species which is against the Buddhist non-violent principle. Although in Chapter I, Eaton and Goodbody claim that hunting is a form of reconnection with wilderness, it is an anthropocentric approach that hunting other creatures is defined by revaluing the external world to serve our culture. Therefore, fishing, though it contributes to the calm, mental state of the angler, is paradoxical in terms of environmental ethics.

Hughes's contemplation of the river is different from verbal concentration as the poet says, 'Lose words/ Cease'. The linguistic register as a performative act directs readers to the union between a human being and the fluvial world; 'join', 'mist', 'supplanted', 'dissolved', and 'melt' show the transformation of substance from one state to another (vapour to liquid or solid to liquid) or from one place to another ('dissolve'). Hughes uses language of physical motion to invoke the problem of verbal communication during fishing. In fact, his sensitivity to the fluvial environment enhances his unity with the riverscape as the poet notes:

[A]ny kind of fishing provides that connection with the whole living world. It gives you the opportunity of being totally immersed, turning back into yourself in a good way. A form of meditation, some form of communication with levels of yourself that are deeper than the ordinary self. When I'm fishing alone – I don't know whether it's your experience, but when I fish alone for hours – as I come out of it, if I have to speak to somebody, I find I can't speak properly. I can't form words. The words sort of come out backwards, tumbled.

It takes time to readjust, as if I'd been into some part of myself that pre-dates language. It doesn't happen when I'm fishing with people. But when I am fishing alone, it happens.²⁴

Here, verbal language becomes problematic in communication between the self and external nature. The poet-angler is conscious of words that inform his poetic creativity; yet, those 'words' bar him from connecting with the environment. From his note, it implies that fishing allows Hughes a sense of peace and links him to water and the creatures that he is expecting in the river. Notably, wading in water is a transcendental state of body and mind, a transition from land to water. The physical-natural parts unite with the psychological dimension as the speaker invites the readers to let the brain fuse with the moist earth and loosen the spirit away downstream. The visual metaphor of the 'creation' – an injury which leaves a 'wound' on the earth's body – constitutes the river's healing power. In this context, water ecologically serves two functions: nurturing and healing; it unites the earth, lands, forests, and all territories. Hughes's meditation on spiritual and psychological states leads to the development of his ecological awareness.

Scigaj suggests that 'by at least temporarily divesting oneself of the mean ego and opening the self to the river's cleansing action, one can let the mud and river-water dissolve and then heal the self'.²⁵ Connecting one's consciousness of the self and the environment can be interpreted as spiritual cleansing in which water becomes a means to reach unity. Although Scigaj emphasises the intimate connection between one's ego and his environment, he suggests that the loss of ego is indicative of selflessness. Scigaj's and Sagar's contemplation of nature and selflessness is in line with Kilner's analysis of 'samadhi', the ultimate purpose of meditation when one focuses his mind and gains insight.

²⁴ Pero, p. 56.

²⁵ Scigaj, 'Ted Hughes and Ecology', p. 175.

In 'Go Fishing', solitude and the contemplation of water answer the meaning of fishing that transcends materiality to shape a mental state. While the fisherman enters water, he lets himself 'Be supplanted by mud and leaves and pebbles' (10, p. 652). The physical environment is likely to 'dematerialize under pressure of the eye' (13, p. 652). The state of mind in water is enhanced by a transformative register and influenced by the riverine environment: 'Dissolved in earth-wave, the soft sun-shock,/ Dismembered in sun-melt/ Become translucent – [...]' (16-18, p. 652). To be displaced in light and shadow (line 5) suggests the loss of oneself, dissolved into the earth and the sun.

Hughes invokes 'dismembering' (a violent metaphor in relation to fishing) when the body and mind are stripped of busy-ness and integrated with external nature. The word 'dismembering' implies a pun in the loss of memory or forgetting worldly concerns. In other words, 'dismembering' can be read as the brutal act of fishing, wounding, and dissecting the creature. To become one with water, the angler has to metaphorically 'dismember' himself and join the 'bodiless' (continuous) flow of water. Hence, dismembering suggests the casting off of the body – the physical form of both the human and the animal.

Furthermore, the poet emphasises the river's 'healing' power twice when he interprets the fluvial entity as nature's causal process. The poet imagines the creation of Beings and nature as a 'wound' and the flow of water: 'plasm healing' (8-9, p. 652). At the end of the poem, when the world is compared to 'a white hospital/ Busy with urgency words' (24-25, p. 652), the need to communicate offers 'healing'. However, there is an attempt to produce verbal communication to bridge the gap between the mind and external nature which 'nearly succeed (s)' (26, p. 652). If the busy world is perceived as illness or a 'wound' from the creation in need of healing, water might be a source of cure that disregards the verbal. Since the agency of language fails in fishing, it

is the physical contact with external nature that would 'heal' the crisis of subjectivity, transformed into poetry.

Protean riverine environments

Hughes's representation of fishing as a retreat from the busy world enhances his meditative state of mind, reveals the imagination of mystery in external nature, and signifies the poet's knowledge of aquatic biology through fishing experiences. 'Strangers' differs from 'Go Fishing' in the poet's contemplation of external nature, particularly water creatures whose '(un)knowability' is made 'strange' in this context. The poem leaves one open to the mystery and 'otherness' of the riverine environment as Hughes concentrates on the sea-trout that travel a long way from the sea to the river. Here, the sea-trout are compared to 'a salt flotilla' (5, p.658), a metaphor of marine battle that suggests a destructive meaning and invasion in the wild creatures.

Describing the 'riverscape' with trees, insects, birds, and farm animals, Hughes draws attention to the biosphere on lands and describes the fluvial community as a diverse ecosystem where the sea-trout, the new comers, arrive. 'Strangers' depicts the plants in decay during the seasonal transition: 'the strafed hogweed sentry skeletons' and 'Thistle-floss' (21 and 23, p. 659). Hughes moves on to develop the idea of 'otherness' in the creatures by showing the fish in anthropomorphic terms; his contemplation of the tranquil river is central here:

The sea-trout, upstaring, in trance,

Absorb everything and forget it

Into a blank of bliss.

And this is the real samadhi – worldless, levitated.

(25-28, p. 659)

The sea-trout, in still water, are depicted as staring up at the speaker, who is alienated from the river but observes the fish with curiosity. The reference to ‘trance’ recalls the influence of Shamanism in which a medium can contact spirits in an unconscious state. However, being entranced in ‘Strangers’ is associated with the poet’s imagination of the sea-trout while he is fishing. Hughes alludes to ‘samadhi’, the Buddhist meditative state in which one enters into a carefree condition and oneness between self and the external nature. The term ‘samadhi’ itself consciously refers to a state of deep concentration when one is able to observe and gain insight from a sensory experience.

In a letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, Hughes mentions his experience in the wood, hunting and fishing. He claims that hunting is ‘a physical reaction: like a kind of *ecstasy*’ that he could sense from the external nature (my emphasis).²⁶ The *ecstasy* in his contact with the natural world, particularly animals, can be compared to spiritual awareness in religion. This ecstatic feeling and the condition of blissful ‘samadhi’ in the environment indicate a realm of ‘worldless’ materiality. However, this idea of bliss or ecstasy at the non-human creature’s death in hunting and fishing is ethically contradictory. Kilner considers the worldless state, or selflessness, that ‘samadhi’ requires not only ‘a willingness to lose one’s sense of ego, but also demands a heroic sense of devotion to the workings of the universe, regardless of one’s own survival’.²⁷ Therefore, in ‘Strangers’, the sea-trout in their journey of reproduction can be anthropomorphically regarded as unselfconscious in a way that man cannot be – at least not without the meditation of a practice in relation to fishing in the earlier poem.

²⁶ ‘Letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, 16 December 1992’, in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, pp. 621-37, (p. 623).

²⁷ Kilner, p. 167.

Hughes develops a poetics of river to reflect his contemplative state of mind, the environment, and marine life.

Hughes's environmental consciousness is manifested in the unity of, and distinction between, land and water. The shift in focus of territories, physically and metaphorically, embodies the transformative power of poetic imagination, ecological interrelatedness, and knowledge of natural science. Hughes uses biological vocabulary in connection with literary terms to create an integration of eco-poetics which manifests nature in culture. His interest in fluvial creatures and their life cycles are depicted in 'Performance', 'A Cormorant', and 'An Eel' that signify the integration of biological knowledge and metaphorical language. Yvonne Reddick argues that scientific discourse plays an inspiring role in Hughes's ecopoetry. Examining Hughes's drafts of *River*, which contains references to scientific language, for example the word 'ichthyologue' (the study of fish), Reddick contends that the poet derives his knowledge of freshwater biology and might be been informed by information from his marine biologist son Nicholas.²⁸

In 'Performance', Hughes uses the air-water domain to consider the river as a 'magical' territory in relation to the damselfly's life cycle. The poem highlights the distinction between creative and destructive forces in the water boundary by illustrating the damselfly's metamorphosis as a dramatic performance in a theatrical setting. The reference to the 'dracula beauty' reveals the insect's mystery (biologically and figuratively) as a 'dainty assassin' (14, p. 672) to imply 'wildness' in the creature. The poem highlights the damselfly's metamorphosis as it is 'Masked, archaic, mute, insect mystery/ Out of the sun's crypt' (15-16, pp.672-73). Again, Hughes reveals the mystery

²⁸ Yvonne Reddick, "'Ichthyologue': Freshwater Biology in the Poetry of Ted Hughes" *ISLE* 22 (2014), 1-20 (p.4).

of this wild creature by producing a metaphor to signify natural history ('archaic') and to create a boundary that invokes birth and death.

In the riverine ecology, Hughes points out the insect's temporality and its habitat to address the seasonal influence. The approaching summer allows wild plants to shed their leaves and birds to produce songs through celebratory imagery in response to the description of the elegant damselfly:

Late August. Some sycamore leaves
 Already in their museum, eaten to lace.
 Robin song bronze-touching the stillness
 Over posthumous nettles. The swifts, as one,
 Whipcracked, gone, Blackberries.

(9-13, p. 672)

Hughes addresses biodiversity through various species of birds and a variety of plants to emphasise the transitory period. The 'eaten' leaves suggest the ecological process (decomposition) and beauty in nature while the use of 'posthumous' gives a sense of death in plants once summer is over. This depiction of high summer indicates the damselfly's temporality near the completion of its life cycle when the performance ends. The transformation of the sycamore's leaves and the death of nettle foreshadow the tension between the damselfly's birth and death.

By referring to the insect, 'Phaedra Titania', Hughes draws attention to the damselfly's performance with its inevitable, natural tragedy. 'Phaedra' was the daughter of Minos and the wife of Theseus in Greek mythology while 'Titania' refers to a fairy queen character in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which is presumably derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. These literary and mythological allusions signify the comic-tragic elements in the damselfly's life-cycle in which

physical transformation takes place and the shift of territories (water to air) is highlighted. As the poem progresses, the damselfly is described with theatrical terms; the creature is seen as a ‘Tragidienne of the ultra-violet’ (21, p. 673). The word ‘Tragidienne’ suggests Hughes’s poetic imagination of the creature as a tragic actress in theatrical culture.

‘Performance’ illustrates the territorial shift from the water to the air where the insect manifests its physical grandeur. When the damselfly moves from the water surface, it seems to be ‘Stepping so magnetically to her doom!/ Lifted out of the river with tweezers/ Dripping the sun’s incandescence – [...]’(23-25, p. 673). These lines represent water’s transformative power and the damselfly’s metamorphosis that develops and ends its life cycle between the water surface and the air. The sun or light plays an important role in the metamorphosis: ‘Out of the sun’s crypt’ (17, p. 673) and ‘the sun’s incandescence’ (25, p. 673). Hughes’s poetics of the damselfly reveals the biological ‘crypt’ which is separated from human understanding. Significantly, the insect’s swift movement from the water into the air is similar to the change of setting in the theatre. At the end of the poem, by referring to the damselfly that will ‘Find him later’ (27, p. 673), Hughes suggests regeneration in that the insect will mate, reproduce offspring, and die. His eco-poetics of an insect creates mystery in nature by invoking the dramatic performance of human culture.

In describing a transition from water to air, ‘Performance’ can be compared to ‘Go Fishing’ in the movement between the natural elements or domains. While the fisherman on the river bank wades into the water in ‘Go Fishing’, the damselfly moves from water into the air to perform the majestic scene of hunting in ‘Performance’. The predatory creature ‘performs’ its mystery on the stage of nature as if crossing the boundaries allows the shift of life into death. ‘However, ‘Go Fishing’ blurs the lines between those two boundaries, particularly the speaker’s subjectivity, as an angler fuses

himself into the river. Hughes contemplates his mind in, and becomes one with, the external for a particular period of time when consciousness is meditated. The unity of body and mind with nature in 'Go Fishing' permits the abandonment of selfhood in the material, whereas 'Performance' highlights the physical metamorphosis in the insect's biological temporality.

In *River*, water has a transformative power and rivers are prominently depicted as interactive ecology. In 'A Cormorant', Hughes creates metaphorical language out of the transcendental body by examining the bird's biological behaviour; it hunts fish in a visual metamorphosis. 'A Cormorant' suggests Hughes's imagining of water as transforming its inhabitants and addressing ecological adaptability. The poem opens with an equipped angler wading into the river and observing the cormorant diving into the river to catch fish. The bird is depicted as 'Body snake-low – sea-serpentish' (24, p. 651); its physical attributes suggests biological adaptability to dive into water. Considering the cormorant's action, the poem illustrates the bird figuratively transforming into a fish:

He sheds everything from his tail end

Except fish-action, becomes fish,

Disappears from bird,

Dissolving himself

Into fish, so dissolving fish naturally

Into himself. Re-emerges, gorged,

Himself as he was, and escapes me.

Hughes, particularly interested in the creature's environmental adaptability, locates the angler in the cormorant's position and is aware of the riverscape's fluidity and of the bird's physicality. Centering on the bird figuratively 'becoming' fish to catch a fish, the speaker addresses disappearance and dissolution. Water is depicted as a fluid boundary which makes possible metamorphoses of extraordinary nature. In this context, Hughes's linguistic faculty engages our attention with ecological adaptation. The biological instinct (to hunt) results in the act of transformation. In comparison, 'A Cormorant' reveals the poet's observation of natural science, while 'Go Fishing' explores the loss of self in the environment. In this light, the 'riverscape' in 'A Cormorant' is a boundary between land and air where creatures and humans travel from one 'world' to the other. The poem represents different modes of ecological interconnectedness, environmental adaptability, and the imagining of a transcendental body developed in a highly metaphorical and effective language.

The representations of the river as a transformative domain can be read in relation to aquatic biology and the mystery of natural creatures. Hughes uses aquatic or marine science to enrich his poetic language and environmental imagination. In 'An Eel', Hughes examines the eel's physical appearance and presents it in a mysterious and interesting way in association with water. Biologically, the creature exists between the visible and the uncanny, life and death, predator and prey in the river. 'An Eel' begins with a close examination of the eel by pointing out its unknown physicality:

The strange part is his head. Her head. The strangely ripened

Domes over the brain, swollen nacelles

For some large containment. Lobed glands

Of some large awareness. Eerie the eel's head.

This full, plum-sleeked fruit of evolution.

(I, 1-5, p. 675)

The repetition of strangeness in the eel – ‘strange’, ‘strangely’, ‘Eerie’, and ‘Strangest’ (line 21) – emphasises the creature’s biological mystery that lives its invisible life in the river. Hughes examines the eel’s physical appearance and anatomical components; the ‘Domes’ of the eel’s head, metaphorically seen as ‘swollen nacelle’, refers to the language of architecture and indicates the creature’s physical structure. The ‘glands’ of ‘awareness’ suggest the poet’s consciousness of the eel’s existence and its biological sensitivity to the fluvial environment. In this light, Hughes’s examination of the eel’s body reveals its biological components as a ‘fruit of evolution’ which signifies how contemplating the marine creature can highlight natural science in poetic language. Describing the eel’s head, mouth, skin, and eyes, the poet carefully pays attention to the idea of vision:

[...] And ringed larger

With a vaguer vision, an earlier eye

Behind her eye, paler, blinder,

Inward. [...]

(I, 11-14, p. 675)

Hughes focuses on the significance of sight in relation to the eel’s biological elements to show that its visibility is limited to human understanding. What the poet describes as ‘an earlier eye/ Behind her eye’ is natural creation. However, visibility in a human understanding might be interpreted as being ‘blind’ in the eel’s physical appearance. The eel is a fish that lives a ‘fish-life – secrets itself’ in a ‘concealing suit’ (I, 17-18, p. 675); its mystery is emphatically illustrated as it is ‘Damascened with identity’ (I, 23, p.675). The reference to ‘Damascened’ (a moment of insight that leads to a dramatic transformation such as the Damascened conversion of St. Paul) suggests the eel’s

unfamiliar, fluvial domain. The poet makes the eel's identity mysterious as it 'Suspends the Sargasso' (I, 24, p. 675).

The reference to the sea creates the 'unknown' habitat in which Hughes describes the eel's biological identity; in natural science, an eel travels a long journey from Europe to spawn eggs in the Sargasso Sea. 'An Eel' is possibly inflected by scientific theories and vocabulary after there was Nicholas's work on sex changes in fish as effects of surfactants. Reddick notes that:

[S]ignificantly, Hughes's eel starts off as male and becomes female in the first line. This is a transformation at once Protean and meticulous, and also scientifically verifiable. A metamorphosis is at work within the poem: it begins by being strongly influenced by science, and ends by channeling mythologies and metaphors.²⁹

In this context, the cultural reference of the Sargasso Sea as a mysterious place is ecologically linked to the migration of marine life. The eel is both 'nun of water' and 'the moon's pilgrim' (I, 30-31, p. 675). Through this religious vocabulary (which might align with the Damascened conversion), Hughes's metaphor of the eel signifies the migratory journey and the transient status in relation to the environment (the ebb and flow of the moon). In this way, the religious register is integrated with the biological dynamism and aquatic mechanism which influence the creature's life cycle.

In the second section, the eel's physical appearance is intertwined with the fluvial environment. The eel, as a water dweller, is considered as part of the river in its body and ecology. To develop the integrity between the eel and its fluvial environment, Hughes asks:

Where does the river come from?

²⁹ Reddick, p. 12.

And the eel, the night-mind of water –

The river within the river and opposite –

The night-nerve of water?

(II, 1-4, p. 676)

Section II investigates the origin of water in relation to the eel's body and its environment because water has a great influence in defining the eel's identity as if it is the 'night-mind' or the 'night-nerve' of water. The metaphors of 'mind' and 'nerve' suggest two interpretations. First, the eel is conscious of its being and, second, the eel as the body ('the nerve') possesses senses of the marine environment. By invoking the temporality of night, Hughes addresses the idea of visibility, light, and the natural phenomena as discussed in the metaphor of 'the moon's pilgrim'. The rhetorical question about the origin of water contributes to Hughes's development of environmental consciousness. His holistic conception of river is not limited to the 'riverscape' as a physical space but instead is interwoven with water as the earth's mechanism, aquatic creatures, temporality, natural adaptability and evolution.

The eel's uncanny dwelling in the riverine territories and the metamorphoses of the cormorant and the damselfly can be extensively analysed alongside 'An Otter' (*Lupercal*) in relation to Hughes's dualistic approach and spatial significance. On one level, an otter is neither a land nor a water animal; it is a predator which is hunted by other creatures. Hughes creates a myth³⁰ of the water-land boundary to reveal the otter's life; physically, the animal is 'four legged', 'water-gifted', with 'webbed feet' since it is 'neither fish nor beast' (I, 1-4, p. 79). The myth of the otter is noted as a 'legend'; the animal 'Gallops along land he no longer belongs to;/ Re-enters the water by melting' (I, 9, p. 79). This act of 'melting' into water connects the otter's disappearance with the

³⁰ Myth in this context is defined by the mystery in the non-human, its biological creation, and the ecological dwelling that signifies 'otherness' to humans. The unknowability in nature can be read as a *myth* in this chapter.

transformative domain. 'An Otter' thus brings in an image of 'dissolving' into water as already seen in 'Go Fishing' and 'A Cormorant'.

For Gifford and Roberts, Hughes's interest in the otter is found in the difficulty of defining its dwelling space (land or water). The otter's quality to 'melt' into the river suggests that it 'has been displaced from the material world to survive by some mysterious, supernatural force'.³¹ As the poem reveals, water, with its apparent quality of dissolving forms, allows the otter to escape from the hunt, and permits it to catch fish for food. The 'lost' world that the otter seeks is its problematic habitat to which it does not fully belong. 'An Otter' invokes a shift in land-water domain to highlight the animal's biological adaptability and the riverscape's mystery: 'In double robbery and concealment –/ From water that nourishes and drowns, and from land/ That gave him his length and the mouth of the hound' (II, 9-11, p. 80). Both domains offer creative and destructive powers to the otter. Hughes's emphasis on concealment in 'An Otter' reminds the readers of 'An Eel' because both poems suggest myths and biology of fluvial creatures. The otter can be identified with both land and water; however, the eel is only located in the riverine environment.

Both 'An Eel' and 'An Otter' represent the mystery in the aquatic world (its adaptability to the environment) in relation to the land-water distinction. In crossing the two domains, 'A Cormorant' and 'Performance' move from air to water and vice versa as part of their ecological interdependence. Hughes acknowledges water's constructive and destructive qualities to 'nourish and drown' (as in the otter's worlds) to point out the interconnectedness of the river and its inhabitants. Hughes's depiction of the riverine creatures reflects his mediation of biological sciences in the poetic realm.

Further to the idea of shifting worlds, between land and water, Hughes considers fluvial landscapes as protean environments in relation to the change of perspectives.

³¹ Gifford and Roberts, p. 73.

The poet uses his fishing experience to imagine the river as a living, powerful entity. In an uncanny manner, 'After Moonless Midnight' addresses otherness of aquatic creatures by alienating the speaker in the riverine environment where the fish's agency is exerted. Here, the speaker's reversing role, observed and objectified by the river and the fish, contrasts to that of the speaker in 'Go Fishing'. The poem opens with the moonless midnight when perception can be distorted; as the angler-poet wading in the river, he is aware that he is 'listened' to and 'watched':

I waded, deepening, and the fish
 Listened for me. They watched my each move
 Through their magical skins. In the stillness
 Their eyes waited, furious with gold brightness,
 Their gills moved. And in their thick sides
 The power waited. And in their torpedo
 Concentration, their mouth-aimed intent,
 Their savagery waited, and their explosion.

(1-8, p. 659)

'After Moonless Midnight' depicts marine life with sensory imagery to highlight its qualities of 'otherness' (in relation to human paradigms). The poem defamiliarises a fishing experience by making the angler an outsider in the fluvial environment; the use of sensory terms such as 'listen', 'watch', 'skin', 'thick side', 'gill', and 'mouth' constitute contact with 'wildness' ('savagery'). Hughes personifies the riverine habitat to imagine the interactions between the human and the fish and suggest an experience of the unfamiliar environment and time. In relation to the temporality of night and darkness, Sagar argues that:

Fishing in deep water at night is the perfect image for the kind of poetry Hughes really wants to write, poetry which projects the most naked and unconditional part of the self into the nightmare darkness, not with the intention of bringing back trophies into the daylight world, but of confronting, being, if necessary, supplanted by, whatever happens to be out there.³²

It is the 'most naked and unconditional' darkness that the angler has to confront alongside poetic creativity, his own psyche, and his perception of the unknown environment. Fishing in the moonless night allows the speaker to explore the unexpected world of aquatic creatures and his consciousness of the unfamiliar river. By observing the fish in the river which 'Listened' to and 'watched' the angler, Hughes depicts them as protean beings. In this mysterious environment, the speaker's identity is subjugated to other creatures' power. Notably, the repetition of 'waiting' three times constitutes the river's emphatic agency in the unfamiliar context: 'Their eyes waited', 'The power waited', and 'Their savagery waited'. Hughes's consideration of the fish, regarding its 'wildness' or savagery, illuminates the river's power in a metaphorical sense; the personified river enhances the sinister tone in the poem.

In this context, the fish 'view' the human figure who enters their domain through 'magical skins', 'gills', 'thick sides', and 'mouth-aimed intent'. The temporality of night and darkness allows the fish to sense the new comer as they 'waited' with a furious power. In addition, the metaphor of fish as a 'torpedo' waiting for explosion is linked with the destructive power created by mechanic vocabulary in the wild creatures. 'After Moonless Midnight' depicts the fish with repressed violence according to the 'savagery' they are born with; thus, Hughes views the riverine environment as a unity of 'wild' fish and the current:

³² Sagar, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature*, p. 338.

They waited for me. The whole river
 Listened to me, and, blind,
 Invisibly watched me. And held me deeper
 With its blind, invisible hands.
 'We've got him,' it whispered, 'We've got him.'

(9-13, p. 660)

Hughes reverses the speaker's perspective by focusing on the river's thoughts that alienates and captures the human. At the beginning, the speaker 'waded' in the water but at the end the river 'got' him, holding him deeper. The angler, initially in control of his movement, is subjected to external nature's control later on; 'the hunter becomes the hunted'.³³ Significantly, the pronoun 'We' suggests the unity of the water habitat; fish and other creatures become one agency to hold the human interloper.

Hughes's imagination of the moonless night invokes the idea of visibility and implies the unfamiliar temporality that reveals 'wildness'. The repetition of blindness and invisibility emphasises the paradoxical perspective applicable to other-than-human creatures; the fish are not blind but they experience their environment through other senses such as touch and smell. Like in 'An Eel', the poet critiques the notion of blindness which falls into an anthropocentric understanding of 'visibility'. In fact, the fish and the river have 'senses' beyond 'sight' in darkness that humans might not 'know'. Visibility or invisibility is tied with Hughes's imagination of the riverine environment which creates a powerful metaphor in his poetry. 'After Moonless Midnight' offers a particular 'riverscape' differently interpreted by a human being; the angler is an interloper who experiences the fluvial world's mystery.

³³Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 140.

Often, Hughes's poetry opens a new channel of senses to explore the idea of otherness of wild nature. 'Salmon-taking Times' highlights listening with insight and articulates external nature by focusing on the sound of the flowing water. The flood is defamiliarised in an 'unknown' environment with wild inhabitants. 'Salmon-taking Times' describes the moment when the flood is powerfully chaotic:

After a routing flood-storm, the river
 Was a sounder of loud muddy pigs
 Flushed out of hillsides. Tumbling hooligans
 They jammed the old bends. Diabolical muscle,
 Piglets, tusky boars, possessed, huge sows
 Piling in the narrows.

(1-6, pp. 648-49)

The sounds made by the flood are compared to the pigs' noise, being flushed out of the hillsides; Hughes offers the readers a new way of 'listening' to nature. In a radical manner, the flood are represented as 'hooligans', aggressive, chaotically climbing up the stream. Hughes depicts the current as 'Diabolical muscle,/ Piglets, tusky boars, possessed' to suggest the metaphor of the body in ways which the water is seen as vibrant, violent, and 'possessed' (uncontrolled) by 'wildness'. Moreover, the speaker alludes to a saying that 'Swine, bees and women cannot be turned' (6-7, p. 649) to imply the uncontrollability of the physical phenomenon (a flood). In this context, without any urge to be 'turned', the salmon's predetermined biological need for reproduction drives them to spawn eggs at the river pool. Kilner remarks that 'Salmon-taking Times' communicates 'the theme of intense listening'³⁴ to the natural world which is defamiliarised by poetic language. This act of attentive listening (replicated in

³⁴ Kilner, p. 164.

the readers) considers one's awareness of the external environment, not just in terms of sight but also paradoxically beyond sound and silence.

In the second half of 'Salmon-taking Times', Hughes celebrates the river's beauty with an emphasis on the power of water. The 'wildness' and violence in the current and the 'hooligan' fish are replaced by water's gentleness: 'The warm shower/ That just hazed and softened the daffodil buds/ And clotted the primroses' (9-11, p. 649). The contrast between the flood-storm and warm shower prominently creates 'wildness' and a sense of resurrection in the aquatic ecology; the river is rejuvenated by different linguistic registers. In relation to flora, softness of daffodils and primroses suggests water's vitality. In this context, Hughes makes use of religious, matrimonial imagery to enhance his imagination of nature's beauty:

[...], a gauze

Struggles tenderly in the delighted current –

Clambers wetly on stones, and the river emerges

In glistenings, and gossamer, bridal veils,

And hovers over itself – there is a wedding

Delicacy – [...]

(11-16, p. 649)

As the shower restores vitality and liveliness to the earth, water is personified as climbing on stones. Hughes's refashioning of the river with 'bridal veils' celebrates the matrimony between the rain and the river delicately depicted as 'beauty-frailty' and 'a smear of wet, a strengthless wreckage' (17-18, p. 649). Hughes engages with the cultural experience of water like 'a religious moment' and 'a shower of petals of eglantine' (20-21, p. 649) to defamiliarise the natural elements that constitute Hughes's ecological consciousness and poetic language.

In a different perspective, the riverine domain is represented as terrifying and menacing to a human figure when the fish becomes the subject of observation and imagination. In 'Last Night', the fluvial creatures become 'evil' as Hughes considers a human's subjectivity in the riverscape. The poem opens the setting on the full moon night when visibility is not obstructed by darkness as seen in 'After Moonless Midnight'. In 'Last Night', the river is depicted as a deadly environment when 'the summer night/ Turned on its pillow' (3-4, p. 665). This personification invokes seasonal transition and the temporality of night when summer permits a sense of clarity in the sky as much as on land. Yet, the river is estranged, and described with 'evilness':

[...] But down in the tree-cavern river,

The waded river, the river level with my knees,

The river under hangings of hemlock and nettle, and alder and oak,

Lay dark and grew darker. An evil mood

Darkened in it. [...]

(5-8, p. 665)

Hughes reveals ecological complexity in the river where plants are diversified and contribute to the wild, sinister, and alienated landscape. By wading in the dark river, the human figure is conscious of the 'depth' and 'mystery' in the fluvial environment. The angler is kept aware of the imaginary 'riverscape' that other-than-human creatures share and might even threaten him. Hughes's emphasis on the words 'evil' and 'dark' signifies human scrutiny and 'otherness' in the external environment. Although visibility of the water surface is perceived, the creatures underneath it are unpredictable. In 'Last Night', the intensity of darkness in the unfamiliar river constitutes 'otherness' in the external environment:

[...] Evil came up

Out of its stillest holes, and uncoiled

In the sick river, the drought river of slimes —

Like a sick man lying in the dark with his death.

(8-11, p. 665)

Like the dying man, the river is seen as dead, with ‘Rusty peaty blood-dark, old-blood dark’ (14, p. 665) imagery to reinforce a sense of decay. Imagining this degraded environment, the I-speaker becomes an object while the ‘Deep fish listening to me/ In the dying river’ (18-19, p. 665) become a subject. Hughes describes the fish as antagonistic to the speaker in their ‘sick’ river-bed and it is ‘The strange evil/ Of unknown fish-minds’ (17-18, p. 665). Hughes refers to the dark river as ‘blood’ due to the fact about the river’s physical condition during the flood. The River Taw manifests the dark red colour at night as a result of ‘the famous dark belt of red land south of Lapford’.³⁵ So, the Taw can look like blood in this context. Hughes’s poetic imagination of the riverscape evokes mystery in external nature which destabilises the speaker’s internal subjectivity. The persona ‘I’ is trapped by the dark, dying river and the fish’s mysterious life at night. Kilner argues that there is fear associated both with ‘the unknowable creatures that are concealed by the river’s surface and with the equally mysterious unconscious elements of the human psyche’.³⁶ Hughes often imagines human consciousness in the riverine environment to critique the limitation of our knowledge of external nature. This scene recalls ‘Pike’ in *Lupercal*, the ‘Stilled legendary depth:/ It was as deep as England’ (33-34, p. 85). The association of darkness constructs the river as a territory of ‘otherness’ explored in poetry.

³⁵ Ted Hughes, ‘Taw and Torridge’, in *West Country Fly Fishing*, ed. by Anne Voss Bark (London: Robert Hale, 1983), pp. 25-39 (pp. 30-31).

³⁶ Kilner, p. 168.

The relationship between darkness and water engenders a response to fear in the human psyche. To explain the psychoanalysis of water and night time, Gaston Bachelard argues that:

Night alone would give a less physical fear. Water alone would give clearer obsessions. Water at night gives a penetrating fear... If the fear that comes at night beside a pond is a special fear, it is because it is a fear that enjoys a certain range. It is very different from the fear experienced in a grotto or a forest. It is not so near, so concentrated, or so localized; it is more flowing. Shadows that fall on water are more mobile than shadows on earth.³⁷

Bachelard's analysis of water and night explains how a human being experiences fear and unknowability. Particularly in the dark river, invisibility is central to human expectation of the uncanny or the unseen creature in the unfamiliar domain. The flowing current invokes uncertainty and insecurity when one is alienated from a human environment. In this light, 'Last Night' challenges the readers' expectation of the river by othering and anthropomorphising the fish as evil and antagonistic.

As 'Salmon-taking Times' makes the sound of the storm-flood as 'muddy pigs' and 'hooligans', 'In the Dark Violin of the Valley' gives voice to the valley with haunting imagery. The flowing water is imagined as music that connects the natural elements from a source to the sea. However, the 'music' at night is seen figuratively sewing body and soul, sky and earth, and river to the sea. Hughes creates the deadly imagery to imagine the valley as a haunting body:

In the dark skull of the valley

A lancing, fathoming music

³⁷ Quoted in Sagar, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature*, p. 338

Searching the bones, engraving

On the glassy limits of ghost

In an entanglement of stars.

(6-10, p. 669)

The poet personifies the valley as a dead body to alienate human perception. The repetition of darkness invokes the mystery of night-time while the river's sound suggests listening to an unfamiliar or uncanny environment. By describing the flowing current as 'a lancing, fathoming music', the poem represents the river with the destructive power *to pierce and penetrate* the imagined landscape and to stimulate an act of hearing and listening in readers. The penetrating sound from the river can be heard in 'Cutting the bedrock deeper/ To earth-nerve, a scalpel of music' (13-14, p. 669).

'In the Dark Violin of the Valley' develops the metaphor of the 'earth-nerve' to suggest the valley's powerful sound. The river's 'music' is compared to a 'nerve' in a way the human experiences the material through senses as seen in 'River Barrow'. Also, the 'scalpel of music' is an example of the effective use of poetic language in reaching out to strange natural elements. Hughes recreates what Morton calls a 'soundscape' – a geography of place, an aspect of ecological poetics, as considered in 'The Howling of Wolves' in Chapter I and 'Hardcastle Crags' in Chapter III. Here, the river's sound is compared to a dark violin producing a haunting cry for its dwellers; the aesthetic and powerful metaphor of the sound creates a sinister atmosphere:

[...], the river

Crying a violin in a grave

All the dead singing in the river

The river throbbing, the river the aorta

And the hills unconscious with listening.

(17-21, pp. 669-70)

By personifying the river, Hughes considers the act of listening to the environment where the sound inspires our imagination. The representation of the river 'Crying' and 'singing' addresses the creation of culture in the landscape. Hughes creates a grim atmosphere through the image of a 'grave' that constitutes a mysterious environment.

Buell argues that:

[M]etaphor works both for and against this poem's representation of riveriness. The violin's 'dead singing' imaginatively conjoins the sound of the valley's 'aorta' with familiar associations of river with time, mortality, and perhaps also environmental endangerment; and the interactions that constitute this sad music are sensitively rendered, as in the 'needle sewing' metaphor's delicately fateful rendering of the ecological web of life.³⁸

Buell's observation of Hughes's powerful metaphor is made in relation to the poet's manifestation of defamiliarised language and imagery. 'In the Dark Violin of the Valley' draws the readers' imagination to the ghost singing in the river; the sound of haunting music orchestrates the valley's ecology. Buell's implication of the deadly river can be interpreted as the river in danger of 'mortality'; however, the poem does not clearly associate this haunting imagery with any ecological disintegration or environmental problem. I argue that Hughes's creation of the haunting valley signifies the power of poetry to defamiliarise the environment.

³⁸ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (London: Belknap, 2001), pp. 250-51.

In addition, the image of the ‘throbbing river’ evokes the current’s rhythm and its movement while the metaphor of the ‘aorta’ (a river in an ecosystem as a vein in a human being’s heart) emphasises the essential place of the river to feed and nurture humans and the external environment. In fact, ‘the hills unconscious of listening’ poetically reflects human consciousness of the immediate surroundings and the sound made by nature. The personified river and the metaphorical body in the poem suggest Hughes’s environmental consciousness and his eco-poetics defamiliarised by auditory imagery. Hughes highlights the ecological interrelatedness of elements including the valley, the hills, the earth, the sky, the river, and light as signs in nature that informs cultural creativity. As the main source of poetic imagination, the river plays a vital role in enriching the protean landscape manifested in the form of sound, sight, movement, and the distinctive metaphor.

The salmon’s journey for reproduction: the ecological cycle

Apart from the dualities between land and water, body and mind, internal and external, otherness and mystery, sound and silence, Hughes explores the dichotomy of life and death of water creatures and their life cycles in salmon poems. The angler-poet celebrates and critiques the fish’s struggle, birth, and death through the regenerative journey in ‘An August Salmon’, ‘September Salmon’, ‘October Salmon’, ‘New Year’, and ‘Salmon Eggs’. Hughes develops his eco-poetics of the river by examining the salmon’s biological behaviour and their habitats. Through the remnants of war experience and religious vocabulary, salmon poems represent Hughes’s knowledge of fishing and multiple interpretations of the fluvial landscape and creatures in relation to human culture, environmental transformations, and writing about rivers.

To begin with, 'An August Salmon' unconventionally introduces the salmon as a male figure thriving throughout his deathward journey. The first stanza reveals the seasonal influences on the fish's temporality: 'A sunken calendar unfurls,/ Fruit ripening as the petals rot' (3-4, p. 660). The metaphor of the ripening fruit and rotting petals indicates the salmon's temporality in which death is approaching. In addition, 'A sunken calendar' refers to the reproductive period and the tension between death and birth as the salmon is 'Waiting for time to run out on him' (8, p.660).

Hughes's use of matrimonial terms for the salmon's regeneration reflects the combination of human culture in the creature's natural process. 'An August Salmon' creates a metaphor of mating in a playful way that personifies the fish as a male figure in a wedding ceremony:

The bridegroom, mortally wounded

By love and destiny,

Features deforming with deferment.

His beauty bleeding invisibly

From every lift of his gills.

(10-14, p. 660)

Biologically, the wounded 'groom' is destined by his genes and the survival instinct as he struggles against the current upstream that figuratively testifies to his 'love'. The word 'destiny' signifies his biological processes while 'deforming' and 'deferment' suggest slow decay and a (mock) tragedy of the fish perceived as the 'bridegroom'-hero. Hughes subtly reveals the salmon's behavioural journey by imagining the mystery of love and destiny, in reference to a human condition. In so doing, the act of swimming is elevated as a sacrifice ('beauty bleeding') for reproduction.

Between lines 34 and 48, the salmon's struggle is represented as a run-on process (a long, continuous sentence) that captures the dying moment and highlights the continuity/transition from life to death. This form of free verse allows the poet to contemplate death in relation to time which is gradually running out as the season progresses. Here, Hughes combines 'Dusk' with the complex metaphor of the body's pulling force; the approaching night symbolises the fish's creeping, imminent death. Enjambment is also deployed to emphasise the fish's reactions against the elemental force:

[...] Manic-depressive

Unspent, poltergeist anti-gravity

Spins him in his pit, levitates him

Through a fountain of plate glass,

(34-37, p. 661)

The above stanza describes the salmon's restless condition driven by its biological instinct in a dramatic manner. Hughes imagines the fluvial landscape as 'a fountain of plate glass' which reveals the fish's physical appearance: 'dragonised head' (38, p. 661) and 'a muddy net of bruise' (40, p.661). The salmon-bridegroom's struggle in the last stage of life reflects the natural process encapsulated with death:

He drops back, helpless with weight,

Tries to shake loose the riveted skull

And its ghoulish décor –

sinks to the bed

Of his wedding cell, the coma waiting

For execution and death

In the skirts of his bride.

(43-48, p. 661)

The salmon's waiting under 'the skirts of his bride' reveals the fish's biological complexity while the reference to 'the riveted skull' reinforces the inevitable death in a grim tone and a graphic metaphor, 'ghoul décor'. Hughes makes use of 'riveted' and 'sinks' to create a tension between both words in relation to the fish's physical mechanism. In this light, 'An August Salmon' shows that nature balances the renewal process by shortening the salmon's life while giving birth to its eggs.

Again, Hughes refashions the matrimonial vocabulary by imagining the river-bed as the 'wedding cell'. Paradoxically, the medical metaphor of 'coma' is embedded in the creature's dying body (deprived of vitality). The reference to the 'bride' significantly indicates the female salmon's regenerative power in this renewal. Without sentimentality, the end of the bridegroom fish's journey is not presented as majestic or heroic but instead as a point of surrender to his fate under his bride's protection. Hughes considers the mating between the male and female salmon as 'execution and death': a contrast to the idea of a 'god' who is biologically preoccupied 'With the clock of love and death in his body' (18-19, p. 660). Referring to dying throughout the collection, Hughes epitomises his fascination with survival instinct, death, time, and renewal in external nature.

Hughes considers the relationship between the linguistic faculty and religion in his celebration of the biological processes. In 'September Salmon', the aquatic environment is compared to a religious space. The river-bed is compared to a 'chapel' and 'altar' (16-17, p. 673) while the fish is presented as 'A soul/ Hovering in the incantation and the incense.' (18-19, p. 674). The fusion of religious terms in the salmon's life demonstrates the poet's engagement with nature that informs culture in relation to mythic consciousness in external nature.

Joanny Moulin argues that Hughes's poetry uses an anti-mythic method to recreate his own version of myths. For Moulin, Hughes's use of religious terms is anti-mythic and can be called 'New-Age neo-paganism' as 'a strategy of brinkmanship and subliminal influence'.³⁹ Moulin's term 'neo-paganism' responds to Hughes's remaking of myths in the re-creation of salmon as a 'god' in animism. However, I argue that the idea of an anti-mythic method cannot articulate the combination of religious terms and the mating of the fish that is both contradictorily and biologically complex. Hughes's writing about the salmon is oriented toward an ecological interrelatedness.

For Sagar, Hughes's use of religious terms in relation to the salmon's deathward journey is considered as a 'sacrifice'; the fish can be read as a hero. Sagar sees the salmon poems as a heroic journey in paganism as he contends:

The spent salmon is the defeated, torn and sacrificed hero whose acquiescence is a form of worship. The salmon poems are all hymns to the goddess, tributes to the mythic heroism of the salmon, dying in the cause of the goddess. The sacrifice is also a sacrament, the consummation of being reborn from their own eggs and sperm.⁴⁰

The fish's heroic journey is interpreted as a sacrifice, in ways which the poems are written to celebrate divine nature. On the one hand, Sagar's association of salmon poems as hymns might be oriented toward Christianity, since he sees the salmon's journey as a sacramental sacrifice. On the other hand, the salmon is a 'god' of paganism and animism. In contrast to Sagar, Neil Roberts argues that the salmon's death as 'a form of worship' might be distorted because worship 'presupposes a distinction and separation

³⁹ Joanny Moulin, 'Ted Hughes's Anti-Mythic Method' in *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, pp. 94-101 (pp. 98-99).

⁴⁰ Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 165.

between the worshipper and the deity'.⁴¹ Sagar's notion of the divine is anthropocentric because it associates the creature's life cycle with a religious register. Roberts's argument, although it weighs on the distinction and relationship between humans and the deity, slightly explains Hughes's use of religious language in relation to 'wild' nature. Moulin's 'New-Age neo-paganism' can, I believe, explain the mythic elements in Hughes's ecological and environmental scheme in connection with the notion of natural religion.

The representation of salmon as a sacred entity – a god – reveals the power of primitive impulse. Hughes's imagination of the fish as a 'deity' is defined by its biological destiny: 'A god, on earth for the first time' ('An August Salmon', 18, p. 660). This line depicts the salmon's natural behaviours (mating and spawning eggs before dying) with an emphasis on the clock, a symbol of the fish's temporality from birth to death. 'September Salmon' demonstrates the relation between a pagan god and the salmon; the fish is elevated as 'a god,/ A tree of sexual death, sacred with the lichens' (12-13, p. 673). In this way, the salmon as a 'god' of a tree suggests an intimate connection between ecology (the plant, earth, water, and air) and reproduction whereas the sexual act is linked to death and therefore can be regarded as 'sacredness' in Moulin's neo-pagan framework. Hughes's use of religious terms and the associations with paganism in the salmon's journey reflects the poet's environmental affinity and the link between nature and culture.

In addition to the use of religious vocabulary, Hughes's poetry deploys the experience of war in his imagination of the aquatic creature's biological journey. 'October Salmon' describes the dying fish after its copulation to convey the tension between death and birth in nature; the poet makes use of a military metaphor to conceptualise heroism in the fish's reproductive process. As winter is approaching, the

⁴¹ Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 143.

salmon loses its energy and is depicted as a tragic figure – ‘a veteran’ and ‘a death-patched hero’ at six pounds and four years of age (7-10, p. 677). Hughes’s imagining of the salmon-hero is derived from his experience of war recreated in the riverine creature; the use of ‘graveyard pool’ (6, p. 677) signifies the inevitable death intensified in the fish as a soldier after the war. Hughes refers to his father, who is a veteran (like a salmon after spawning) and his inspiration:

I had gone to visit my father who was very ill at the time and I stopped by a nearby salmon river. This was in the autumn, in the early 1980s. And from a bridge I saw this one fish, a little cock salmon, lying motionless in [sic] the clear shallow water – the only fish in a long pool that in October 1961, when I first walked there and counted the fish waiting to spawn in the gravels above and below, had held more than 100. I don’t know if he’s spawned but, anyway, this was about him.⁴²

The salmon is imagined in relation to his father who had gone through a heroic journey in the war. This connection between a personal life and the imagination of the fluvial creature reflects the social mentality of the post-war period as well as the biological knowledge from Hughes’s observation of the salmon. ‘October Salmon’ celebrates the salmon’s struggle as the war hero’s last quest:

So briefly he roamed the gallery of marvels!

Such sweet months, so richly embroidered into earth’s beauty-dress,

Her life-robe –

Now worn out with her tirelessness, her insatiable quest,

Hangs in the flow, a frayed scarf –

⁴² Pero, p. 56.

(11-15, p. 678)

The salmon's struggle against the harsh and cold current is metaphorically compared to a veteran roaming 'the gallery of marvels'; however, that 'gallery' is regarded as a 'grave'. As the poem demonstrates, Hughes examines the micro-level of ecological interconnectedness; the metaphor of the earth's beauty is found in the animal's death. The representation of the dying salmon is contradictory and indicative of the aquatic species' life. Hughes addresses death at the end of the journey by considering the river's 'tirelessness' and an 'insatiable quest'. In this light, the poet imagines environmental interactions between the seasonal cycle and the river where the fish degenerates in its final stage.

In the following part of 'October Salmon', the salmon's decaying stage is imaginatively juxtaposed with seasonal changes and vegetation. By describing the 'Aurora Borealis' (18, p. 678) over the sea, Hughes invokes the fish's vitality in spring when light is associated with the season's energy. However, as the season changes to autumn, the fish is deprived of power as seen in transformation of the plants: 'The primrose and violet of that first upfling in the estuary –/ Ripened to muddy dregs' (20-21, p. 678). The seasonal change and the metaphor of flowers in decay suggest the salmon's deterioration of vitality. The contradictory image of the salmon as a 'war hero' suggests the tension between life and death:

Death has already dressed him

In her clownish regimentals, her badges and decorations,

Mapping the completion of his service,

His face a ghoul-mask, a dinosaur of senility, and his whole body

A fungoid anemone of canker –

(25-29, p. 678)

The physicality of the salmon is made decorative as if it was honoured by its ‘heroic’ act. Although ‘regimentals’, ‘badges’, and ‘service’ suggest a battle and reward (a journey to reach a pre-destined, ‘insatiable quest’), the heroic meaning is undermined by ‘clownish’ which ironically indicates absurdity, meaninglessness, and precariousness of life in nature. ‘Death’ is personified in the struggle. The fish’s appearance degenerated by the long journey is seen in ‘a ghoul-mask’; Hughes defamiliarises the life-beaten salmon as evil devouring dead bodies to draw on the creature’s mystery and approaching death. Using the metaphor of ‘A fungoid anemone of canker’, the poet revitalises ecological interconnectedness between the creature and marine ecology.⁴³ Referring to ‘a dinosaur of senility’, the poem considers both the natural science of evolution as well as the link to bodily decay. Hughes’s representation of the fish’s biological appearance, the dichotomy of the flower and the disease, and the connection between the ancient creature and aging, contribute to the profound sign of death. This poetics of the salmon signifies the creature’s strange and estranging life and reveals the social and cultural value in it.

‘October Salmon’ indicates the fish’s strangeness as it is equipped with ‘sea-freedom’ (47, p. 678.). Hughes examines the marine environment that shapes the salmon’s ecology and poetic imagination. The whole regenerative process is ultimately driven by the force that defines the salmon’s dwelling and independent agency. Although the salmon becomes lifeless after it spawns eggs, it is depicted with strangeness or mystery. In this context, Hughes invokes a paradox between the fish’s ‘wildness’ and its journey to examine natural sciences with poetic language. Through

⁴³ In an introduction to *River*, in *Three Books* (1993), Hughes notes the biological knowledge of the salmon that ‘the cock fish in particular go through a physical transformation: their colouring – reds and blacks – can become almost violent, like warpaint. As the same time, their heads and especially their jaws change, the tip of their underjaw hooks up in a ‘kipe’, sometimes grotesque, like a rhino horn on the chin instead of the nose-end...many will have developed patches of fungus – if not the full-blown Ulcerative Dermal Necrosis...’, *Collected Poems*, p. 1212.

‘the savage amazement of life’ (47, p. 678), the poet creates a path of ‘knowing’ the ‘unknowable’. In the following stanza, ‘October Salmon’ examines death in nature:

What a death-in-life – to be his own spectre!

His living body become death’s puppet,

Dolled by death in her crude paints and drapes

He haunts his own staring vigil

And suffers the subjection, and the dumbness,

And the humiliation of the role!

(34-39, p. 678)

Hughes’s investigation of the dying salmon articulates the concept of death in its physicality (‘the body’) which is compared to a ‘puppet’; the salmon is manipulated by a predetermined force in nature. The poet is conscious of the salmon’s dying condition when he engages with the fish ‘suffering the subjection’. The word ‘dumbness’ implies mockery of the fish’s death seen as ‘amazement’; death paves the way for birth that engenders the reproductive process in the creature.

The salmon’s death is not only limited to absurdity in the physical description, but is also invoked by its interconnectedness with ecology. In this context, the sea is depicted as a powerful source of energy. ‘October Salmon’ indicates the ecological interrelatedness between the salmon’s life and the marine environment which reveals nature’s complexity. Hughes considers the power of the sea in relation to its mechanism:

That is what the splendor of the sea has come down to,

And the eye of ravenous joy – king of infinite liberty

In the flashing expanse, the bloom of sea-life,

On the surge-ride of energy, weightless,
 Body simply the armature of energy
 In that earliest sea-freedom, the savage amazement of life,
 The salt mouthful of actual existence
 With strength like light –

(42-49, pp. 678-79)

Hughes imagines the salmon's journey as 'the splendour' of the sea to suggest nature's regenerative power through the unfamiliar environment; the destructive act of dying reveals the constructive 'energy' in the salmon's birth. In this light, Hughes critically offers the idea of 'freedom' and 'energy' in external nature which I interpret as 'wildness' in Chapter I; thus the sea is a source of independence for, and rebirth embodied in, the aquatic creatures.

In 'Relic' (Chapter I), the sea can be read in relation to its 'wildness' and the uncontrollable force ('savage'). Here, Hughes demonstrates the salmon's deathward journey as an inevitable end; its 'amazement' is embedded within the marine mechanism, predation, and torrential processes. Hughes's ecological consciousness regarding the sea is repeated in the words 'energy', 'liberty', and 'freedom' that reveal the salmon's interdependence on the environment. 'October Salmon' depicts the interactions between aquatic creatures and evokes the independence of 'wildness' embedded in death and birth.

Hughes's eco-poetics of the marine environment is conceptually developed in the regenerative process; the salmon's *behavioural mechanisms* in the sea are responsive to its genetic transmission. Here, the meaning of death is imagined in relation to the fish's habitat; 'This was inscribed in his egg/ This chamber of horrors is

also home/ He was probably hatched in this very pool' (50-52, p. 679). The genealogical discourse of the salmon reflects the poet's ecological consciousness in relation to habitation whereas the 'chamber of horrors' creates the backdrop of death and suggests the salmon's origin. The pool where it dies might be the place where it was born. At the end of the poem, Hughes contemplates the meaning of death in the dying fish that seems to accept its biological condition without sentimentality:

All this, too, is stitched into the torn richness,

The epic poise

That holds him so steady in his wounds, so loyal to his doom,

so patient

In the machinery of heaven.

(58-61, p. 679)

The last depiction of the fish reflects the predetermined biological process after spawning. Hughes elevates this death as the 'epic poise' to engage with renewal in the creature; the language of the body ('stiched' and 'wounds') signifies human culture. The salmon seems to be 'loyal to his doom' and 'patient' for death which is biologically encapsulated in his body. Thus, the 'machinery of heaven' centrally addresses Hughes's ecological consciousness of the fish's bodily mechanism and the sea's causal processes.

As 'September Salmon' and 'October Salmon' concentrate on the tension between life and death in the river and the sea, 'Salmon Eggs' furthers the theme of birth with the regenerative process by positioning the growing eggs in the bedrock. The poem is engaged with birth and ecological interconnectedness in the 'riverscape', where salmon's eggs hatch and fundamental elements such as water, light, mud, and air reveal its wonder and mystery. In relation to time, January is depicted with 'a veined yolk of sun' to suggest vitality of light (6, p. 680). Hughes explores the holistic image of the

environment with senses while the speaker seems to ‘lean’, ‘watch’, and listen to the watery domain (7, p. 680). His reaction to external nature is pivotally invoked in the same way that ‘Go Fishing’ describes the angler’s contact with water:

And the piled flow supplant me, the mud-blooms

All this ponderous light of everlasting

Collapsing away under its own weight

Mastodon ephemera

(9-12, p. 680)

Hughes celebrates the riverscape and indicates physical contact with water (‘supplants’) to show the unity between the human’s body and the environment; the mud that ‘blooms’ suggests water absorption and elemental integration as seen in the ‘ponderous light’. The perpetual nature of light manifests its entirety in the ‘weight’ created with grandeur (‘Mastodon ephemera’) and reflects the angler’s consciousness of environmental immensity. In this context, the sun represents the influence of seasonal cycles and acknowledges the transition from death to birth.

‘Salmon Eggs’ depicts the interrelatedness of water, light, and earth in the following lines: ‘Mud-curdling, bull-dozing, hem twinkling/ Caesarean of Heaven and Earth, unfelt/ With exhumations and delirious advents –’ (13-15, p. 680). Here, light is integrated with the mud, prominently imagined in a medical term ‘Caesarean’ that combines sky and earth. However, ‘Caesarean’ is a violent metaphor (such as a caesarean birth in which a woman’s womb is cut open to allow a baby to be born), suggesting the immanent power of nature in death and birth. Hughes’s reference to ‘exhumations and delirious advents’ signifies resurrection and confusion after death proclaims the fluvial environment. Towards the end of ‘Salmon Eggs’, birth is vigorous and vibrant in the river where the salmon gives birth:

Something else is going on in the river
 More vital than death – death here seems a superficiality
 Of small scaly limbs, parasitical. More grave than life
 Whose reflex jaws and famished crystals
 Seem incidental
 To this telling – these tidings of plasm –
 The melt of mouthing silence, the charge of light
 Dumb with immensity.

(18-25, p. 680)

The newly hatched salmon is depicted with physical details through the language of the body, while the ‘immensity’ suggests growth in the fish’s life as Hughes notes it is ‘More vital than death’. Indeed, death is palpable at the beginning; however, in this stanza it is dominated by birth in the ‘scaly limbs’ that ‘reflex jaws’ in the ‘tidings of plasm’. The use of ‘plasm’, which symbolises birth and life in ‘Salmon Eggs’, recalls the movement of water in ‘Go Fishing’. The powerful imagery of ‘the charge of light’ associates the salmon with vitality in the fluvial environment that nurtures them.

‘Salmon Eggs’ reveals Hughes’s use of religious vocabulary in the salmon’s regenerative process; the speaker transcends the river’s physical boundary to contemplate death as a religious rite. In this context, the bed rock is depicted as a ‘dislocated crypt’ in which the salmon are buried and an ‘altar’ hewn and riven by ‘Time’. ‘Salmon Eggs’ depicts the salmon’s temporality (28-29, p. 681) to relate death in nature to death in human culture (‘liturgy’). In addition, the dying fish gathering in the river is seen as ‘Perpetual mass’ with its physical force ‘harrowing’ the bed rock and

the fish as ‘a travail/ Of raptures and rendings’ (30-31, p. 681). These religious terms are contradictory to violence in water as Hughes creates culture in the natural elements.

The last section of ‘Salmon Eggs’ situates the ecological interconnectedness of the riverine environment in relation to birth. Hughes again goes back to religious imagery to connect the creatures with the habitat at both a micro level and a planetary level. The river is ‘the swollen vent/ Of the nameless/ Teeming inside atoms – and inside the haze/ And inside the sun and inside the earth’ (34-36, p. 681). The integration of water, air, earth, and light at the micro level (‘inside atoms’) generates holistic imagery of the riverine ecosystem in which ‘*Only birth matters*’ (38, p. 681). The word ‘font’ (a stone container of water for baptism) represents the salmon’s habitat which enlivens vitality in the living beings and implies a cultural reference to birth. The hatched salmon are depicted ‘brimming with touch and whisper’ in the water (37, p. 681). Hughes’s environmental consciousness is inseparable from his self-consciousness (his Being):

[...] And the river

Silences everything in a leaf-mouldering hush

Where sun rolls bare, and earth rolls,

And mind condenses on old haws.

(39-42, p. 681)

The depiction of a human figure, in silence, contemplating the river, the sun, and the earth reflects the poet’s environmental consciousness; the ‘mind’ that ‘condenses’ on the surroundings informs the natural continuing process. Thus, ‘Salmon Eggs’ emphasises the significance of movement (‘the sun rolls’ and ‘the earth rolls’) to invoke the planetary mechanism and ecology of which other creatures and the angler-poet are parts.

Hughes creates the riverine environment with radical imagery to imagine the urgency and mystery of death and birth in the fish. Through a visceral metaphor,

'New Year' depicts the salmon with the image of caesarean delivery. The poem pulls in several directions: the nature of the river in winter, the salmon's struggle, and the human observer. Here, the speaker 'I' imagines the cold river as 'The wound's hapless mouth' (4, p. 643) that devours and creates life and death. While the 'Snow falls on the salmon redds' (1, p. 643), it is 'Painful' for the human observer who speculates about the river 'suffering' from the harsh weather. The poet creates anxiety in this risky operation through urgent medical vocabulary:

The silent to-fro hurrying of nurses,
 The bowed stillness of surgeons,
 A trickling in the hush. The intent steel
 Stitching the frothing womb, in its raw hole.

(6-9, p. 643)

The imagination of the caesarean operation is depicted with busy nurses and surgeons to emphasise the dichotomy of death and birth in nature through a human perspective. Hughes uses the language of the body, the 'Caesarian' operation to invoke anxiety in the power of birth; the 'womb' is crucially brought into focus to reveal pain in the mating process. In so doing, the word 'womb' suggests the mystery and rawness of the fish's life in the critical condition. Thus, 'New Year' contests the limit of language by defamiliarising the salmon's biological process and creating a medical setting in the river to represent birth challenged by death.

At the end of 'New Year', Hughes focuses on the human's perception of the riverine landscape and anxiety of birth and death. The river is imagined as a hospital that allows the speaker 'I' to experience that play of nature/culture distinction. 'I shall feel' and 'I shall see' (11-12, p. 643) indicate the poet's sensory perception of his environment as imagination is transferred to poetic language. The reference to 'the

blue glare of the ward', 'the anaesthetic', 'the stiff gauze', 'the congealments' (10-12, p. 643), constitutes the narrative of hospitalisation. Hughes addresses a sense of violence in birth (the Caesarean operation) by showing the salmon as the 'gouged patient sunk in her trough of coma' (13, p. 643). Although the fish, after spawning eggs, is seen as 'lank' and 'dying' (14, p. 643), there is hope apparent in the 'ticking egg' that reveals the power of birth in 'New Year'. Notably, the symbolic 'ticking egg' suggests vitality in water where natural elements feed and nurture the newborn. Hughes's examination of the salmon hanging between life and death reflects his poetic imagination articulated in the play of culture and nature.

In the salmon poems discussed so far, Hughes powerfully creates an eco-poetics by integrating the biological processes of birth and death in the 'riverscape' and its interconnectedness with water, earth, air, light, and aquatic creatures. The representation of salmon and seasonal cycles manifests the *mechanism of nature* and its continuity in that web of life. Hughes's observation of the fish's death and birth under seasonal influence is an attempt to explore the unfamiliar fluvial territories through cultural imagination, natural biodiversity, and ecological consciousness.

Hughes's environmental politics and a question of influence

Throughout his life, Hughes significantly developed his understanding of nature through a relationship with rivers; he poetically 'dwells' in rivers by fishing for food, rewriting aquatic myths, and developing an environmental discourse in a politics of conservation. With the same interest in the complexity of rivers, culturally and ecologically, Hughes's imagination of the fluvial environment can be explored in the work of a younger poet, Alice Oswald, who creates imaginative stories and ethical situations of rivers. Oswald critically connects the riverine landscapes with wild creatures and human communities

to reflect a cultural complexity and the current environmental situations. She has been described as ‘Hughe’s rightful heir’ whose poetry is a ‘celebration of difference – the great variety of the natural world, and the escapes of the human spirit’.⁴⁴ While Hughes writes about rivers in Yorkshire, Devon, Ireland, and America, Oswald gives voices to the River Dart and its tributaries in Devon to produce a ‘river-map of voices’ like ‘an aboriginal songline’.⁴⁵ The reference to ‘aboriginal’ signifies the river’s primitive, organic, and fundamental relationship with a human community. Oswald’s *Dart* as the primitive ‘songline’ explores the interdependence of human culture and external nature.

After recording the voices of river workers and stream dwellers for several years, in *Dart*, Oswald initiates a new form of poetry by linking their voices in ‘a sound-map of the rivers, a songline from the source to the sea’.⁴⁶ While in *River* Hughes uses free verse, enriched with compound words, rhythm, alliteration, and enjambment, Oswald’s poetic distinctiveness in *Dart* lies in the flow of lyrical narratives in which the voices of people and water creatures should be read as the ‘river’s mutterings’.⁴⁷ More importantly, Oswald shares some concerns with Hughes regarding ecology and the environment. Her work could be said to participate in the poetic development of fluvial landscape:

One of the aims of this poem (*Dart*) would be to reconnect the Local Imagination of its environment – in particular, in these years of water shortages and floods, to increase people’s awareness of water as a natural resource. But I’m also interested, for its own sake, in the idea of a many-

⁴⁴ Jeanette Winterson, ‘Alice Oswald’, *The Times*, 27 July 2002, <http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/journalism_01/journalism_01_item.asp?journalism_01ID=95> [accessed 27 May 2013].

⁴⁵ Alice Oswald, ‘Note to The Poetry Society, May 1999’, *The Poetry Society*, <<http://www.poetrysoc.com/content/archives/places/dart/>>, [accessed 15 June 2013].

⁴⁶ Oswald, ‘Acknowledgements’, in *Dart* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), no page number. The poems in this chapter are quoted from this edition. The quotation is derived from the introduction of *Dart*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

voiced poem, a poem that benefits from the freshness and expertise of ordinary people.⁴⁸

Oswald reinvents the local imagination and explores biodiversity in the River Dart, drawn from her interactions with local people. In a different manner to Hughes's metaphor of rivers, Oswald focuses on narratives of dwellers in their habitats.

While Hughes uses metaphorical language to explore ways in which fish exist, representing his ecological consciousness mainly through the angler-poet's point of view, *Dart* uses multiple voices to move the collection forward. *Dart* opens with a direct question, 'Who's this moving alive over the moor?' (1, p. 1), reversing the poetic narrative of a river when the object is turned into a subject, questioning an old man who is looking at a map for directions. In some ways, Oswald reinterprets the river with a new approach, seeing it as an independent and vibrant entity. The river is capable of a dialogue with the speaker 'I'; it has its own flow, redolent of water and speech, and creative power. Oswald asks a question of origins of rivers: 'Who's this issuing from the earth?/ The Dart, lying low in darkness calls out Who is it?/ trying to summon itself by speaking [...]'(14-16, p. 1). The river's power to summon the human figure can be regarded as dramatic. Trying to comprehend a human being, the river is personified as a living entity and allowed to speak. Oswald and Hughes appear to share the same idea that the river's flowing through natural landscapes and human communities represents experiences in life; by imagining a dialogue between the personified river and the river-watcher, both poets emphasise the notion of history and the passage of time.

The river-walker's life experience in *Dart* can be compared with the river-watcher in 'Eighty, and Still Fishing for Salmon' (*River*); in both contexts, natural

⁴⁸ Oswald, 'Note to The Poetry Society, May 1999', *The Poetry Society*, <<http://www.poetrysoc.com/content/archives/places/dart/>>, [accessed 15 June 2013].

ecology is infused with personal history. Hughes presents the river-watcher keeping records of social history in that ‘He holds/ The loom of many rivers’ (1-2, p. 674). This reminds readers of the uncle figure in ‘The Dark River’ (*Remains of Elmet*) and brings back memories of industrial history. The old man’s aging body reflects personal and social history passing on through fishing since ‘He’s a trophy/ of the Great Days’ (7-8, p. 674). Both the river-walkers in Oswald’s *Dart* and Hughes’s ‘Eighty, and Still Fishing for Salmon’ invoke a sense of loss in time and space. The map that the old man searches for in Oswald’s poem can be critically interpreted as loss in geographical situatedness. In this light, *Dart* re-imagines the fluvial landscape but cannot capture its social memory and cultural depth while the body of the old fisherman, in Hughes’s perspective, can tell its own history of the landscape.

One of the ways that the poetics of *Dart* is distinctive from Hughes’s is in the dialect of rivers. The location of place is embedded in the riverscape as a part of the regional landscapes. In this way, the rivers are unique because they ‘speak’ different dialects which are informed by geography in the south: ‘the East Dart speaks Whiteslade and Babeny/ the West Dart speaks a wonderful dark fall/ from Cut Hill through Wysteman’s Wood’ (22-24, p. 10). Oswald interweaves the regional geography with the watercourse, creating a rhapsody of rhythms and beat. The dialect of water, ‘this jabber of pidgin-river/ drilling these rhythmic cells and trails of scales’ (26-27, p. 15) produces a unique location, particularly in Devon. There, the river is the ‘Queen of Dart’ which is ‘sing-calling something definitely human’ and asks if somebody can ‘sing this riffle perfectly as the invisible river’ (12-13, p. 16). Oswald’s consideration of dialects evokes the importance of sound in defining geography and meanings. Hugh Haughton argues that ‘the river is both score and map, and the poem(s) primarily “sound” and sounded, with those “mutterings” suggesting the place where semantics

meet acoustics'.⁴⁹ The sound of the current addresses the Dart's geography flowing across human communities and woodlands.

When Oswald tells the story of the water nymph, she articulates the significance of voice through alliteration and rhythms:

when the lithe water turns

Dart is old Devonian for oak

And its tongue flatters the ferns

do you speak this kind of sound:

whirlpool whisking round?

(19-22, p. 11)

The assonance of 'turn' / 'fern' / 'sound' / 'round' suggests the mobility of water as well as the rhythm of the poetic structure. The flowing current creates a mode of articulating sounds; it is figuratively equipped with 'tongue' that 'flatters the ferns'. Oswald uses the language of the body to give voice to and reinforce the current that contributes to the movement in plants along the landscape. In so doing, the sounds that the poet hears in nature are transferred into poetry, thus the whirlpool can produce a sound as if it could 'speak'. Oswald's note in the margin is associated with a particular place by referring to the Dart as an 'old Devonian'; this links the local river as a living entity with a long natural history.

Likewise, Oswald's music of the river is 'the repertoire of murmurs' (15, p. 16). It is drawn from the real people living close to it and can be compared with Hughes's depiction of 'In the Dark Violin of the Valley' (*River*). The flowing river is metaphorically depicted as the dark violin playing haunting music. Oswald's river 'voices' an energetic articulation of the aquatic realm while Hughes's music operates differently. 'In the Dark Violin of the Valley' creates a soundscape that appeals to a

⁴⁹ Hugh Haughton, 'Water Worlds: Poets' Rivers from Thomas Warton to Alice Oswald', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 24 May 2013, 13-15 (p. 13).

mystery of death in the landscape. The river's night music is deep and penetrating as the poet repeats the 'dark' skull and belly to emphasise its 'lancing and fathoming' note. The valley's haunting music figuratively cuts the bedrock deeper. While the erosion of the rock is suggestive of the powerful river since the flowing water represents nature's constructive-destructive force, the current is staging its claim on the land. Hughes imagines the river's mechanism by creating the haunting valley with a technique that, via auditory imagery, produces the landscape as a living body.

While Oswald's flowing river produces 'the repertoire of mutterings', Hughes imagines a dark music of the valley to reveal a sense of loss and antagonism in external nature. Both Hughes and Oswald construct rivers as living entities but both see rivers in different views. Andrew Shotts claims that Oswald creates a river as 'a Protean creature – bountiful, treacherous, vulnerable and sometimes malevolent'.⁵⁰ This suggests a powerful fluvial landscape as a living being. The river, in Shotts's words, is a vast domain imagined by Oswald and Hughes in ways which differ radically from previous models of picturesque, or pastoral, 'mute' 'riverscape'.

In relation to the oral tradition and environmental specificity, Oswald introduces the tale of a man who is drowned and interpreted as a sacrificial rite in the river. Jan Coo's story reflects the power of imagination and riverine ecology through the river-walker's voice; the man is 'the groom of the Dart'. Humans portrayed as a bride and a bridegroom become subjugated to the power of 'unknown' nature. Ecologically, Oswald creates the metamorphosis of the man into natural elements as a way to write his story into the environment:

Now he's the groom of the Dart – I've seen him

taking the shape of the sky, a bird, a blade,

⁵⁰ Andrew Shotts, 'Dart by Alice Oswald' 11 March 2011, < <http://prezi.com/igpxcirdxokm/dart-by-alice-oswald/>>, [accessed on 27 May 2013].

a fallen leaf, a stone – may he lie long
 in the inexplicable knot of the river's body

(23-26, p. 4)

The unity of the drowned man and the river and the transformation of a human body into the sky, a bird, a blade of grass or a stone, reflect the relationship between poetic imagination and external nature. Oswald's tale is passed on in the course of river and in the poetic space. As the death of Jan Coo implies the return to natural elements, the local story of an ordinary man is integrated with the myth of the river.

From the local story to the national myth, Oswald re-creates the legend of Brutus to mythologise England as a heroic landscape in relation to the marine domain. While the myth of Jan Coo is embedded in the Dart, the heroic legend of Brutus, who is a mythical founder of England, is unusually incorporated in the sewage worker's report. With the introduction to the hero Brutus, a grandson of Aeneas in the Trojan War, Oswald produces a nostalgic mode and romanticises England as 'An island of undisturbed woods/ rises in the waves' (9-10, p. 31). This pastoralised England not only constitutes the fertile Dart as a destination, but also re-creates the journey itself:

Where salmon swim with many a glittering
 and herons flare and fold,
 look for a race of freshwater
 filling the sea with gold.

(17-20, p. 31)

The romanticised description of 'the green island England' (32, p. 31) reflects the creative connection between the power of water and its richness from the classical legacy. Oswald's mythologised 'riverscape' of the Dart informs the nostalgic moment in

the grand narrative. However, the description of water pollution is problematically reported by the sewage worker who manages the current environmental situation.

Oswald and Hughes both write ecologically-conscious poetry which explicitly makes reference to environmental problems, particularly in relation to rivers. In *Dart*, Oswald directly criticises the effect of human consumption and the way it changes the river; the sewage worker witnesses the draining of rivers and keeps a balance between nature and human communities (to save nature for culture):

It's a rush, a sploosh of sewage, twenty thousand cubic metres being pumped in, stirred and settled out and wasted off, looped back, macerated, digested, clarified and returned to the river. I'm used to the idea. I fork the screenings out – a stink-mass of looppaper and whathaveyou, rags cottonbuds, you name it. I measure the intake through a flume and if there's too much, I waste it off down the stormflow, it's not my problem.⁵¹

The description of the sewage produces rhythms in the movement of dirty water, for example, 'splooosh of sewage', 'pumped', 'stirred and settled', 'wasted', 'looped back', and 'digested'. The inclusion of the readers as 'you' accentuates the point that everyone is a cause of – and so should be responsible for – the environmental problem. The graphic description of the sewage draws attention to water pollution and the river is seen as a tank. As seen in Hughes's 'Four March Watercolours', the river washes all 'deaths' to the sea. The reference to water pollution in Oswald's *Dart* also recalls Hughes's awareness of water quality in 'October Salmon', which depicts the river pool: 'Under the mill-wall, with bicycle wheels, car-tyres, bottles/ And sunk sheets of corrugated iron.' (54-55, p. 679).⁵² The poetic imagination of rivers in *Dart* and *River* powerfully

⁵¹ Oswald, *Dart*, p. 30.

⁵² Scigaj refers to a fisherman in 'October Salmon' as 'an interloper whose species has polluted the river' in *Ted Hughes*, pp. 139-40.

informs both poets' critique of environmental problems and their politics of conservation.

In terms of fishing experience, the fluvial landscapes shape Hughes's environmental consciousness that constitutes his eco-poetics. The river and the pond that Hughes used to fish when he was young have been dramatically changed in time due to the use of chemicals in agriculture and the garbage from the city which, when not properly regulated, pollutes the water supply. When Gerald came back from Australia to visit his family, Hughes and his brother revisited the woods and the pond where he was disappointed to see the extent of water pollution. In a letter to his second wife, Assia Wevill, Hughes refers to his disappointment in the pond:

We went down to the pond, and it had shrunk to an oily puddle about twenty feet across in a black basin of mud, with oil cans & rubbish. Nicky had brought the fishing rod and he made a few casts into the poisoned looking water among the rubbish. It was horribly depressing. My name carved on the trees.⁵³

The black basin of mud with oil cans and rubbish results from the use of chemicals in agriculture and the waste from factories and communities. Hughes's environmental concern is evident here and fishing is one way which enables him to observe changes in rivers.

In the above letter, although environmental degradation is palpable when considering the effect of synthetic chemicals in the pond, there is a subtle notion of pollution in the 'carved trees'. The significance of Hughes's inscription on the tree appears as a scar to remind readers that a pristine environment has been lost in time. Therefore, the inscription could be seen as a sign of early 'pollution' made on the

⁵³ 'Letter to Assia Wevill, late December 1968' in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, pp. 286-87 (p. 287).

surface of nature by the young poet. However, taken metaphorically, this scar on the tree also draws the readers' attention to the act of *writing*. The multi-layeredness of cutting a word (a name) into the tree bark signifies a nostalgic mode of making an environment in a way that calls on memory (scar). That event is embedded in the *letter* as the poet stresses his concerns about the state of the pond. The return to Hughes's childhood environment brings about a concentration on literary creativity and the carving on the tree is pivotal in that it suggests the idea of *writing nature* (physically) and *writing environment* (poetically). In short, it is a graphic mode of inscribing nature.

As seen in *River*, Hughes demonstrates the life-cycles of water creatures in relation to seasonal cycles and habitats that reveal his ecological consciousness. Any river can be seen as a 'womb' (Hughes's metaphor) of biocentric diversity which breeds and nurtures all living creatures and diverse species in connected ecosystems. Not only salmon, eels and other fish, but also land and air creatures such as a cormorant, a damselfly, an otter and the poet himself share and constitute the same network of ecosystems. Thus, fishing for the poet is a pleasurable and profound activity. When asked how he justifies the ethics of fishing, Hughes offers the defence that fishing for him serves a purpose (obtaining food). He claims that the most actively concerned person about the environmental condition of the river is not the water authority but an angler who lives on, and observes, the water.⁵⁴

As Gifford notes, Hughes linked his reading of Rachel Carson's seminal work, *Silent Spring* (1962), with his childhood experiences of rivers. His understanding of Carson's ground-breaking advocacy for environmental conservation paves the way for his water preservation campaign. A comprehensive understanding of the relation between rivers, humans, and other creatures, is evident in Hughes's interview with Blake Morrison:

⁵⁴ Gifford, 'Rivers and Water Quality', p. 84.

Most people I talk to seem to defend or rationalise the pollution of water. They think you're defending fish or insects or flowers. But the effects on otters and so on are indicators of what's happening to *us*. It isn't a problem of looking after the birds and bees, but of how to ferry human beings through the next century. The danger is multiplied through each generation.⁵⁵

The transformations of rivers as a result of human culture therefore impacts upon all in an ecosystem. Hughes's suggestion for the Taw Fishery Cooperative and his campaign for the foundation of West Country Rivers Trust in Devon are evidence of his active environmental politics supported by his public role as a poet. In this respect, Hughes has raised the significance of environmental awareness through the representation of rivers which is as vital as the woods in the valley and the moors in Yorkshire.

As Soper argues, '[t]he nature that the ecologists are concerned to conserve is also the nature that has been dominated and destroyed in the name of the "naturalness" of a certain order of human relations, needs, rights of ownership and forms of exploitation'.⁵⁶ What we, as readers, must be aware of in Hughes's poetry is the development of an overt ecological stand-point, from possession and exploitation of nature to environmental conservation notwithstanding human need. As Poet Laureate, Hughes demonstrates a commitment to environmentalism and advocate river conservation. His laureateship confirms, and advances a public role as a spokesman with a serious concern for the environmental crisis.

In 'Rain-Charm for the Duchy', Hughes wrote a poem in honour of the christening of Prince Harry in 1984.⁵⁷ The description of coming storms and the

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

⁵⁶ Soper, pp. 250-51.

⁵⁷ 'Rain Charm for the Duchy: A Blessed, Devout Drench for the Christening of His Royal Highness Prince Harry' presented on the 21th December 1984 was supposed to be included in *River* (1983) but eventually appeared in *Rain-Charm for the Duchy and other Laureate Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

condition of the rivers after a ‘five-month drought’ paves the way for the celebration of rain in the end. This is in line with the tradition of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) in which rain comes to resurrect lives on earth after an apocalyptic vision of the city. The drought before, and fertility after, the rain serves the purpose of the christening in relation to birth; however, the underlying message is the environmental change. According to Gifford, this poem had some effect on politicians. As Hughes wrote to Sagar: ‘[t]he line [in ‘Rain-Charms for the Duchy’] about the pollution (quite mild and domestic) of the Okement caused great agitation in Okehamton (responsible for the refuse) – might even affect the Council’s *laissez faire*. These are the perks’.⁵⁸ It is the case that the poem details many important rivers in Devon including the Mole, the Taw, the Torridge, and the Tavy, polluted by chemicals, garbage, and other wastes. In ‘Rain-Charms for the Duchy’, Hughes writes:

And the Okement, nudging her detergent bottles, tugging at her
nylon stockings, starting to trundle her Pepsi-Cola cans,

(63, p. 804)

And the Tavy, jarred from her quartz rock-heap, feeling the
moor shift

Rinsing her stale mouth, tasting tin, copper, ozone,

(67-68, p. 805)

The imagery of water polluted by chemicals and wastage (detergent bottles and Pepsi-Cola cans) is environmentally engaging as the poet crucially raises a question of environmental problem instead of praising royal prosperity alone. Indeed, Hughes’s criticism of water pollution responds to the sewage worker’s observation of the river in Oswald’s *Dart* as discussed earlier. This advocacy of environmental awareness is

⁵⁸ Gifford, ‘Rivers and Water Quality’, p. 83.

Hughes's distinctive feature on rivers. The rivers in 'Rain-Charms for the Duchy' are created with resistance against the torrential transformation; the coming storm brings back the river's mechanism by dragging all the garbage and remains from the land to the sea. The river Dart in Hughes's myth of resurrection is seen to be forceful:

And the Dart, her shaggy horde coming down
 Astride bareback ponies, with a cry,
 Loosening sheepskin banners, bumping the granite,
 Flattening rowans and frightening oaks,

(70-73, p. 805)

The reaction of the Dart against the storm is visualised in the current forcefully bumping the banks. As the overflowing water manifests its destructive force, this stanza produces a dynamic rhythm and movement in the current, 'flattening' and 'frightening'. At the end of the poem, the salmon's awakening brings in the river's resurrection, again recalling *The Waste Land*, when the storm revives the land from drought. As I established earlier, the river is significant as marking the boundary of life and death. Hughes enriches the celebration of the fluvial landscape and aquatic lives with an eco-poetics.

Conclusion

Hughes's representations of rivers manifest the exuberant language of water as muse and the environmental imagination of the fluvial landscape refashions his eco-poetics. As Scigaj concludes, 'Hughes has constructed a cathedral of ecological vision to show his readers how to enliven their imaginations and save our planet'.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁹ Scigaj, *Ted Hughes*, p. 144.

aesthetic of riverine ecology is infused with environmental politics in Hughes's oeuvre. *River*, whether it can save the planet or not as Scigaj suggests, reveals Hughes's environmental awareness of water as a vital mechanism of the earth and fluvial landscapes as a cradle of biodiversity. Moreover, the river of imagination is made a dynamic territory through the creatures' life cycles along the riverscape. The flowing current and lives of fish such as salmon and trout are examined to radicalise the ordinary riverine domain with highly metaphorical language. The salmon poems develop the tensions between life and death through an anthropomorphic discourse in relation to social and religious influences in Hughes's understanding. As I have demonstrated, the salmon's deathwards journey to reproduction represents the powerful influence of seasonal cycles and the significance of watery habitats in a particular ecosystem that reflects the development of Hughes's ecological thought.

While fishing explores the distinction between a subject and an object, Hughes's contemplation of aquatic creatures defamiliarises the life of the river as much as uncovers his meditation of external nature to understand a human psyche. Hughes's poetic legacy of writing a river is passed on to Alice Oswald who creates the riverine lyrics and tales along the banks. This chapter has shown that Oswald creates voices of rivers in *Dart*, in a distinctive manner from Hughes's fluvial environments in *River*. She invokes a sense of awe in the aquatic world through local myths and folk stories. By critiquing the transformation in rivers through water pollution, both poets are aware of human influence on nature in terms of environmental degradation; the politics of conservation is, therefore, powerfully addressed in poetic creativity.

Conclusion

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox

It enters the dark hole of the head.

The window is starless still; the clock ticks,

The page is printed.

(‘The Thought-Fox’, 21-24, p. 21.)

This thesis opens with the introduction of Hughes’s poetic imagination in relation to the external environment and its link to the writing process. Here it concludes with the ultimate product of environmental imagination, the animal, and the poet’s consciousness of time and space. ‘[A] sudden sharp hot stink of fox’ in the context of writing suggests the power of metaphorical language to invoke senses, emotion, and thoughts that the speaker perceives in the ‘othered’ animal. It is poetry that is created (‘printed’) out of green thought which includes the environment and human beings through a contemplation of the nature-culture distinction.

Hughes’s awareness of external nature vitalises the significance of other-than-human beings both in his imagination and in contemporary, transformed environments. Within an ecocritical framework, I have demonstrated that Hughes’s literary representations are inseparable from environmental considerations such as animal subjectivity and a sense of place, so the result is a poetics derived from ecological consciousness as opposed to nature writing based on verisimilitude. Hughes’s poetry explores the idea of dwelling, natural history, social memory, the question of technology, and examinations of cultural, ecological, and economic values of the non-human (fauna and flora, as well as objects). His reconsideration of the animal-human relationship reveals a holistic view of humanity and the ethic of care in understanding other species that share the planet with us. In this last section, I will draw together the

central observations in this thesis stimulated by Hughes's poetry: first, his eco-poetics of earth, water, and animals established in relation to human culture, and second, his environmentalism more broadly.

Hughes's eco-poetics: earth, water, and animals

This thesis has demonstrated how Hughes's *eco-poesis* engages with a sense of ecological interconnectedness between the environment, human beings, animals, plants, and natural phenomena which are homogenised as one 'nature' informed or shaped by human culture. It argues that Hughes's poetic examination of the environment draws on the interactive relations between past and present through memory, history, and redefinitions of nature in pastoral, georgics, and elegy. These explorations of poetic creativity open channels through which readers can access unknowability across physical boundaries, spaces, and temporalities. The idea of nature is re-defined in relation to contemporary ecological and environmental contexts

First, this thesis argues that Hughes is sensitive to the poetic potential of natural causal processes as much as human intervention and allows this sensitivity to inform his nature poetry. *Remains of Elmet*, particularly, represents the metaphor of the earth in both imaginary landscapes and a realistic, industrialised environment. The landscape of the Calder valley is imagined as both generating biological diversity and engaging with tensions between the Industrial Revolution, Methodist culture, and war. As part of the unique Yorkshire landscape, the Calder Valley, in poetry, is imagined as nourishing the bioregion; the earth is invested with cultural memory. In relation to human culture that transforms the natural environment, poems about mill stones invoke ecological and economic value and critique the industrial process that dehumanises mill workers. Hughes examines the collision between the earth as economic commodity and the stone

as an essential component of the planet and evidence of nature being exploited by culture. These depictions of the earth inform the technological, instrumentalist thought – which significantly influences human mentality in seeing, ‘revealing’, and ‘revaluing’ the earth in Heidegger’s notion – and are prevalent in contemporary green thought, as natural resources and commodities for humanity’s end.

The earth, in Hughes’s poetry, is often seen as manipulated, exploited, and abandoned. Carlyle’s warning of humanity’s limitless desire to exploit nature is evident in the remains of industrial enterprise, deprived of economic value. Beyond the human economy of natural resources, Hughes’s poetic imagining of the Yorkshire moorlands makes possible a critique of machine culture at the level of language. Focusing on the earth as the foundation of ecology, Hughes deploys poetry as a means to destabilise the anthropocentric view of non-human nature for utility alone. As this thesis demonstrates, his poetry demands that we see the earth (external nature) as having its own integrity.

I argue that Hughes emphasises the interrelatedness between the human body and the earth. *Moortown Diary* shows that the human body and its connection with the farmland are imaginatively operated as the poet focuses on human labour. Through the reinvention of the georgic and elegy, the earth becomes the embodiment of dwelling for humans and cattle; working with the earth informs man’s dependence on external nature, especially in farming contexts. Hughes emphasises the significance and complexity of the human body (for instance, hands) in cultivating the earth, physically connecting with the animals, and managing technology through labour. The human body is poetically integrated with the ecological elements (earth, air, light, and water) in the depiction of the farmer working the earth, reaping and harvesting crops and farm animals. Often, by developing the language of the body, Hughes imagines the ecological integrity of animals’ physicality, and the earth’s ‘body’ to address his green thought in relation to care and management. The manifestation of the earth as a

productive agent in the context of farming, for instance, intensifies the interrelatedness between non-human nature and culture: care, control, management, and productivity.

For Hughes, as we have seen, human history is implicated in the natural history of the earth. In his eco-poesis, human temporality and the earth's temporality are interlocked; time is not a linear process, but is evolving around the objects, the human, and other creatures through environmental transformations. In relation to geology, for example, the poems about climatic processes and geographical transformations inform Hughes's deployment of natural sciences in literary culture. If poetry constitutes the poet's 're-imagining' of the earth's stories, then his consideration of geological temporality signifies the idea of 'wilderness' as predating human history through the language of archaeology and natural history.

Similarly, Hughes highlights a sense of place, an idea of time, memory, and history of landscape at the local and national levels to reflect our relationship with the environment. Stone signifies the cultural value of the object and the passage of time to scrutinise human history. For example, Hughes addresses the collective process of passing on local stories in a particular landscape and emphasises the earth's (hi)story interwoven in human history at the larger, national level. By examining non-living nature, Hughes reveals the idea of time and reassesses objects to acknowledge natural history as both beyond, and within, human history.

In this thesis, Hughes's eco-poetics extends from earth to water. As I demonstrate, the poet's interest in aquatic agency greatly contributes to his environmental imagination. The depictions of rain and storms, as independent agency ('wildness'), invoke the powerful influence of natural phenomena on human communities, particularly in agriculture. Hughes addresses ecological integrity and hydrological processes as a physical mechanism in external nature that informs human communities (for example, 'Wind', 'Crow Hill', and 'Heptonstall'). The representations

of human landscapes shaped by natural mechanisms in the form of rain and storm reiterate the interdependence between humans and causal processes in nature.

Beyond human domains, Hughes critically explores worlds shaped by fluvial mechanisms, rivers, and marine ecosystems in order to engage with the unfamiliar. His poetry powerfully invokes hydrological processes to re-create 'wilderness' and, in other contexts, 'wildness' through fishing experience. The poet-angler demonstrates how humans can empirically experience the riverine ecology by observing, listening to, and reflecting on the external environment. The 'riverscape' in his poetry is a transformative boundary in which other creatures share their habitats with human beings including river dwellers and anglers. Hughes's examination of the watery landscape acknowledges biodiversity and the natural sciences. Here, the idea of nature is not defined by the pastoralised tradition but examined through ecological sciences; this relates to Morton's idea that ecology, in ecocriticism, can be read without the idea of 'nature', particularly in rivers.

Through the riverscape, Hughes re-creates natural history in relation to cultural references, artistic activities, memories of war, and religion. This thesis shows the importance of Hughes's environmental imagination and ecological consciousness which produces 'wonder' in his poetry. Hughes deploys aquatic creatures to represent a human quest for identity positioned on the blurred lines between culture and nature. His re-imagining of the fish's reproductive journeys follows the seasonal cycles that transform their biological behaviours and the fluvial environments. Salmon poems inform the poet's consciousness of climatic elements such as the wind, rain, torrents, tides, floods, water plants, land forms, and other-than-human creatures that cross over landscapes. This examination of non-human nature extends Hughes's poetic imagination beyond physical boundaries, across times through the language of religion and history. In so doing, the poet uses fishing experiences and examinations of rivers to

interpret human culture and its interconnection between history, selfhood, unknowability, and metaphorical language.

Finally, with regard to eco-poetics, this thesis considers Hughes's interest in animal subjectivity and the environment that established his reputation as a nature poet. I argue that his representation of animals is not confined to pastoralised imagery or objects of appreciation. Instead, his examinations of wild animals show that these creatures are considered with reference to animal subjectivity (individual species), and cultural constructions of animality. For Hughes, animals, as I consider them in relation to a Hughesian concept of 'wildness', are examined in their own condition, often displaying aggression or subjected to violence according to their predatory instinct and biological behaviours. Hence, wild animals in Hughes's poetry are a product of anti-pastoral imagination, instead of a romanticised cultural construction, in relation to the external world.

For Hughes, in addition to the importance of 'wildness', the idea of animality is explored through domestication which reveals human contact with other creatures in the farm context. *Moortown Diary* engages with an ethic of care and domestication in the human-animal relationship to bridge the gap between the dualistic perceptions of animality and humanity. The particular context of animal husbandry allows Hughes to privilege questions of environmental ethics that will sustain our relationship with other creatures through the farmer-poet's emphasis on responsibility and custodianship.

Hughes's environmentalism

This thesis has elaborated Hughes's eco-poetics through his metaphorical language of the earth and water, animals and humans, the domesticated, 'wildness' and 'wilderness', showing that his interest in, and responsibility for, environmental issues are as

prominent as his poetics. I have demonstrated that animal subjectivity and the idea of 'wildness' are inseparable from the other-than-human creatures. Hughes's invocation of animal subjectivity reveals his commitment to environmental ethics and a sense of responsibility for other species subtly embedded in his poetry.

While it might not be his primary concern, Hughes's poetry addresses the power of poetic imagination to raise public concern about environmental ethics in representations of endangered species and wildlife extinction. At times, the poet questions human interventions in the wild habitat and critiques environmental transformations. The significant point lies in the poet's subtle message which destabilises our position in the human-animal ecology as wild creatures are affected by human culture (agriculture and urbanisation). The representations of animals being trapped, hunted, or poached reveal a desire to voice the creatures' ecological value. Furthermore, the idea of environmental (in)justice extends beyond the wild habitat to the legacy of nature in human culture which invokes a sense of loss in the myth of 'wilderness'.

Hughes's poetry engages with the environmental awareness that should be fostered in readers. The representations of disappearing wolves and the extinct black rhinoceros are examples of Hughes's direct critique of human disruption of natural balance. Engaging with poetic imagination and animal subjectivity in poetry, Hughes raises the public consciousness of the importance of social actions toward the conservation of wildlife at the local level and the global stage (as seen in 'The Black Rhino'). The poet promotes animal subjectivity and calls for ethical responsibility; in so doing, his environmental consciousness is invoked in poetic creativity.

As a responsible country man, the poet particularly extends his environmental advocacy to the conservation of the rivers. Hughes's direct criticism of human exploitation of non-human nature is shifted from a personal level to a collective culture

that has tremendous effects on the fluvial environment. Hughes's personal experience with river trusts in Devon reflects his social responsibility, as a poet, to advocate environmental awareness and promote conservation of human and non-human ecologies. In so doing, his poetry constitutes sensitivity to the sustainable relationship between nature and culture.

Environmental issues are apparent in Hughes's representations of rivers as a source of life interrupted by consumerist culture. The poet's critique of the environmental crisis is addressed in his poetry in relation to fishing experiences. Hughes depicts environmental problems in different contexts to point out human disruption in nature. The depiction of water pollution is both the product of his imagination and an examination of reality in the contemporary fluvial landscape. The myth and grandeur of rivers is not only seen as celebratory in *River* and 'Rain-Charms for the Duchy', Hughes also addresses the problem of water pollution in relation to aquatic lives and the habitat that humans share with other creatures within agriculture and communities.

My reading of Oswald's *Dart* addresses Hughes's influence in this regard and sheds light on the role of eco-poetics which invokes environmental awareness in the readers as both poets' engagement with nature is powerfully imagined through representations of (transformed) riverine ecology. Oswald interweaves the contemporary issue of water management with the legend of England to portray myth as committed to the reality of riverscape informed, disrupted, and transformed by culture and technology. The condition of rivers and water quality in *Dart* restates Oswald's environmental message. Unlike Oswald, Hughes considers aquatic creatures' life cycle as reflective of human activities that disrupt the natural cycle of the fish. Both poets create the 'songs' of rivers in their own unique ways.

This thesis argues that Hughes's eco-poetics stimulates the readers' consciousness of the transformed environment in relation to other creatures and natural

elements. His poetry tends to re-evaluate meanings of nature in human culture. However, Hughes does not object to human culture utilising the resources of external nature. Instead, he addresses humans' appropriation of resources and highlights relationships with nature which are accountable according to ideas of ethical responsibility. Hughes's ecopoetry about animals (both wild and domesticated) and the landscapes shaped by human culture (for instance industrialism) demonstrates his ecological consciousness and green commitment. For Hughes, the 'world' can be redeemed through poetic language and environmental sensitivity.

The future of ecocriticism and Hughes

This thesis concentrates on the wild and agricultural environments in Hughes's poetry, which challenge and respond to the unknowability of 'nature' and the exploitation of the rural landscape. However, the city landscape has not yet been explored in relation to the transformations of human communities influenced by urbanisation. For example, 'Wolfwatching' (*Wolfwatching*, 1989) demonstrates the poet's contemplation of the wild creature and its survival in London. The familiar depiction of the hunter and wildlife in Hughes's poems is replaced by the park keeper and the wolf as vermin in the city. In this light, Hughes's environmental consciousness is not limited to his perspective of the country but extends to the urban habitat, the myth and reality of 'wilderness' as the poem suggests:

To be in the middle of London, of all
 Futile, hopeless things. Do Arctics
 Whisper on their wave-lengths – fantasy-draughts
 Of escape and freedom?

(5-8, p. 756)

Hughes considers the imagination of the animal's 'escape' from the urban environment to the habitat where 'freedom' or, I argue, 'wilderness' awaits. In this way, Hughes's poetic creativity is defined by his revaluation of the external environment, informed by his development of aesthetic tropes and genres, and enriched by his reconsideration of human intervention in nature. The reconfiguration of the idea of nature in this thesis has revealed the power of poetic imagination, in addressing environmental complexity, wildlife diversity, and the sophistication of natural history, inseparable from human histories, that the poet subtly and explicitly represents in his poetics of the environment.

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