

# The Ecological Value of Georgic Ethic and Its Contemporary Adaptations: A Case Study of Ted Hughes's Georgic Poetry

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**Abstract:** The georgic that originates from the great Roman poet Virgil and has become a special stream of tradition both within and apart from the pastoral tends to be regarded with suspicion or neglected altogether by ecocritics due to its positioning of human beings in what Ken Hiltner describes as “an active, aggressive posture toward the earth.” But other critics such as David Fairer strongly argue for georgic’s “green credentials” by emphasizing its recognition of natural laws and its commitment to the cooperation principle in human relationship with nature. To the author of this paper, this commitment is basically a moral attitude and a yet-to-be-recognized part of georgic ethic. The present paper therefore is to start from where Fairer has left off to stress the ecological value of georgic ethic and, with the example of contemporary English farmer-poet Ted Hughes’s georgic *Moortown Diary*, to show what changes the environmentally-conscious poet has brought to ethics derived from classical georgics.

**Key words:** georgic; georgic ethic; agricultural modernization; Ted Hughes

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**标题:** 农事伦理的生态价值及其当代变化: 以特德·休斯的农事诗为例

**摘要:** 农事诗是源自伟大的古罗马诗人维吉尔的一个特殊的文学传统, 常被归于田园诗而实际又有别于它。由于农事诗被认为是把人类置于“一个与土地积极对抗的姿态”当中, 一直受到生态批评学者的批评和轻视, 但另有一些学者如大卫·费尔罗基于农事诗中所表达的对于自然规律的接受以及人与自然之间合作关系的坚持, 提出农事诗的“绿色证书”这一观点。在本文作者看来, 农事诗坚持人与自然合作, 即是坚持以一种道德的态度与自然相处,

实际构成农事伦理中有待被认可的生态维度。因此本文将以费尔罗对于农事诗的生态维度的发现为基础,进一步探讨农事伦理的生态意义,并以英国当代诗人特德·休斯的农事诗《摩尔镇日记》为例,展现诗人如何以其现代环境意识给古老的农事伦理注入新的力量。

**关键词:** 农事诗; 农事伦理; 农业现代化; 特德·休斯

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The georgic as poetry that deals with agriculture in general, and teaches farming skills or describes farming practices in particular, is regarded with suspicion by critics who observe it from environmental perspectives due to its positioning of human beings in “an active, aggressive posture toward the earth” (Hiltner 162). Indeed, agriculture itself viewed this way is an exploitation of the earth’s resources for human ends and therefore seems to run counter to ecological principles. But this way of viewing agriculture and the georgic has a purist insistence on the value of an uncultivated nature at its roots. It explains a general preference of pastoral to georgic among ecocritics who cherish much the “myth of [the] ‘unspoiled’” generated by the former’s representation of a simple and “natural” state of existence, a so-called “pastoral hedonism,” that is more likely to be experienced by a shepherd than a farmer (Buell 52, 41). But as David Fairer has rightly pointed out in the wake of Daniel Botkin in *Disordant Harmonies* and Timothy Morton in *Ecology without Nature* among others, “the image of a constant, normative Nature” is an idealization of nature actually involved in an endlessly changing process, and therefore the Romantics’ invention of nature as a transcendental and spiritual entity should be discarded in order to embrace a truly ecological thinking about man’s “proper relationship with the earth and its life forms”<sup>1</sup>. Through his examination of the eighteenth-century English georgics, Fairer strongly argues for georgic’s commitment to ecology on the ground of its recognition of time and flux inherent in nature, its respect for natural forces that are not always knowable or supportive to humans, and its readiness to work with the forces in a most empirical manner on a local basis.

Fairer’s observation of georgic’s “green credentials” is also applicable to the much-biased georgic ethics (215), though he does not link up georgic’s ecological

1 The first quotation in this sentence is from David Fairer, p.207. The second quotation is originally from Timothy Morton, p.2 and quoted by David Fairer on p.207.

and ethical dimensions in his study. This paper is to start from where Fairer has left off to stress the ecological value of georgic ethic and, with the example of contemporary English farmer-poet Ted Hughes's georgic, *Moortown Diary*, to show what changes the environmentally-conscious poet has brought to ethics derived from classical georgics. An examination of the connection and distinction between georgic ethic, agriculture ethic and ecological ethic is to be carried out in the first place before the paper uses the concepts to analyze Hughes's case.

### **Georgic Ethic, Agriculture Ethic, and Ecological Ethic**

The earliest expressions of ethics concerning agricultural practices appeared in Greece of the 8<sup>th</sup> B. C. in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. A collection of miscellaneous poems on subjects of farming, morality and country life, it emphasizes repeatedly the moral correctness of being industrious rather than being idle, as is explicit in the following lines: "Through work men grow rich in flocks and substance, and working they are much better loved by the immortals. Work is no disgrace: it is idleness which is a disgrace"<sup>1</sup>. Later, the great Roman poet Virgil wrote *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, establishing the genre of both pastoral and georgic, in the latter of which he continued Hesiod's moral appraisal of hard working. In fact, both Hesiod and Virgil attributed man's obliged toil to his fall from the Golden Age into the Iron Age, an ill fate ordained by gods which the ancient poets accepted with graceful doggedness. Since then hard work has remained a key element in georgics, whether praised, often by the gentleman-poet or gentleman-farmer-poet, or grudgingly, understandably by the laborer-poet who began to write between the end of the seventeenth century and the middle eighteenth century. Attitude towards labor is one class-specific dimension of the georgic ethic, which has yet another, more general dimension: the ecological dimension.

Conceptions of nature that might have influenced georgic ethic change over time and are too broad a topic to deal with in this paper. As far as ancient georgic is concerned, nature manifests its power in incessant changes and often unpredictable outbreaks of disasters. Therefore, Hesiod teaches the importance of observing seasonal changes and doing farm work accordingly, and Virgil stresses even more forcefully the obligation of respecting nature, which has laid the "laws and eternal covenants on certain lands"<sup>2</sup>. Yet Virgil's attention to particulars of farm skills,

1 The quotation is from a prose translation of the collection by H. G. Evelyn-White, Book Six "On Justice and Good Conduct", Section 294. Refer to <<https://www.theoi.com/Text/Hesiod-WorksDays.html>>.

2 The quotation is from a prose translation of *Georgics* by H. R. Fairclough, Book 1, Section 43. Refer to <<https://www.theoi.com/Text/VirgilGeorgics1.html>>.

especially his urge to “husbandman” to “doff [the] wild spirit” of “native forces” by putting them “under constant tillage”<sup>1</sup>, often seems to reveal to critics including John Barrell his conception of nature as “hostile to [human beings], and so needing to be subdued by work” (qtd in Fairer 217). But I would agree with Fairer to argue that the recognition made by Virgil and his eighteenth-century followers of the uncertainty of natural forces only leads them to the most important principle, the “Co-operation” principle, in human’s dealing with nature (Fairer 205). In other words, georgic does not distinguish itself from pastoral by being oppositional to nature, but by “challeng[ing] the binaries” between human and nature, or nature and culture (Fairer 209). “To work with the forces of nature” is not only a piece of practical advice offered by Virgil and his imitators for farming, though georgic is marked indeed by its practicability (Fairer 210), but also, in my opinion, a moral requirement for all those involved in agriculture.

The georgic ethic derived from Virgil rests on a compromised working relationship between human and nature and is thus in conflict with the idealistic or radical ecological ethic that tends to propose “let the earth be.” Wendell Berry once cautioned against such an attitude typically taken in wilderness conservation. He said:

The conservationist congratulated himself, on the one hand, for his awareness of the severity of human influence on the natural world. On the other hand, in his own contact with that world, he can think of nothing but to efface himself—to leave it *just* the way it is. (29)

While acknowledging the ecological and cultural value of wilderness conservation, Berry didn’t think it right to exclude human from nature. To him, that “leave it *just* the way it is” mentality covers a deep misanthropy, or what Berry describes as “self-deprecation,” that is of no use to improve either the human condition or nature’s (30). When Nie Zhenzhao, founder of Chinese ethical literary criticism, points out that the proposal of nature-centrism to replace anthropocentrism actually implies a refusal to recognize human responsibility towards nature, he is sharing with Berry an explicit criticism of human-nature demarcation, as well as a deep concern about the ethical and moral obligation of human beings as the caretaker of nature.

Berry proposed “kindly use” of the land to “dissolve the boundaries that

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from a prose translation of *Georgics* by H. R. Fairclough, Book 2, Section 47. Refer to <<https://www.theoi.com/Text/VirgilGeorgics1.html>>.

divide people from the land and its care” (30). Berry as a farmer was deeply concerned about agriculture as one most widespread kind of land use, and his moral consideration about “kindly use” is his version of georgic ethic that accords with Aldo Leopold’s land ethic. When Berry said “We can only have agriculture within nature,” he meant the same as Leopold who, upon accepting “the alteration, management, and use of [natural] ‘resources’” within land ethic, also claimed for “their right to continued existence, and at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state” (312). Both Leopold’s vision of an inclusive land-community and Berry’s idea of a “durable” and “unified” agricultural system share with Virgilian georgic an important moral attitude that “encourages an awareness of how natural needs and human ones are interdependent” (Berry 46; Fairer 210).

Writing in the post-war years in America, Leopold expressed deep moral concern over various modern ills of agriculture, which he diagnosed to be rooted in the farmer’s deliberate choice to place his own economic interests above interests of the land-community (318). Berry’s indignation towards the so-called agricultural “progress” is even more obvious as he explicitly attributed it to a “moral ignorance” (48). It was owing to the persistent pleas for moral consideration within modern agriculture made by Leopold, Berry, and many others that agricultural ethic came into being in the midst of the environmental movement triggered by Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring*. From the very beginning, agricultural ethic as a modern invention differs from ancient georgic ethic for it arose out of “value conflicts and lack of social responsibility in agricultural practices, as well as frequent outbreaks of public events concerning environmental pollution and food security” (Qi & Ren 110). According to Qi Wentao and Ren Jizhou, agricultural ethic covers a wide range of topics including “human’s relation to the land in agriculture, security and health of agricultural products, welfare of farm animals, agricultural resources and environmental ethics, and living quality and social status of farmers (Qi & Ren 109). This conception of agricultural ethic contains georgic ethic as an indispensable part, which focuses on the value and proper ways of farming, while at the same time putting a much stronger emphasis than georgic ethic on human responsibility towards the environment or, rather, expressing a more urgent need to curb modern agriculture’s tendency to destroy the environment. From an ecological point of view, agricultural ethic seems a better moral equipment than georgic ethic to guide agricultural practices of the present. While accepting this view, the present paper is to show with the example of Ted Hughes that georgic ethic, either on its own or as part of agricultural ethic, is especially important as a moral principle for individuals involved in agricultural production.

### The Ethical World within *Moortown Diary*

Hughes's *Moortown Diary* was written during 1973 and 1976, in the middle of the late Poet Laureate's long literary career, and published separately with the present title in 1989. Poems in this collection are supposed to be "casual journal notes" of interesting things happening on Moortown, a farm in North Devon which the poet bought in 1973 and where he started raising cattle with his wife Carol and his father-in-law Jack Orchard until the latter's death in 1976 (Hughes, *Moortown* xi). Of the total thirty four poems that cover various aspects of farm life, more than three quarters, twenty six poems to be exact, directly deal with farm work, with another three poems about the weather, which is also an important concern in doing farm work. Reading these twenty nine georgic poems of Hughes against the Virgilian tradition reveals an obvious difference in thematic concern, that there is far more attention paid to the nonhuman elements, especially animals, by Hughes than by Virgil and his imitators. In fact, Hughes's georgic poems comprise two groups with different focuses on cattle and on farmer respectively. In terms of the number of poems involved, the former group with a total of twenty one poems is predominant and thus forms a distinctive contrast with Virgilian georgics in which animals are always peripheral. But Hughes's attention to farm animals, especially their sufferings, brings out an underlying theme also often found in Virgil and his likes: the theme of "working with the forces of nature."

In Hughes's poems, nature is an irresistible power that all animals have to abide by in order to live or to die, with much difficulty or even great ordeal. Therefore, we see a not-yet-born lamb beheaded by the farmer-poet in order to save its mother in the poem "February 17<sup>th</sup>," and the deaths of newborns in "Struggle," "Sheep, I-II," and "Orf." Moreover, the poet regards nature as a power that works on humans, animals, and the land all alike, a power that farmers have to accept just like their cattle do. A typical expression of such a deep awareness of human limitation in the face of nature is found in the poem "Little Red Twin," where a newborn calf bearing the name in the title is found nearly dead after getting stuck between bars and being exposed to the sun for eight hours when she is still sick from drinking too much milk. Having fed her some glucose water, "We leave her / To her ancestors, who should have prepared her / For worse than this" (Hughes, *Moortown* 44). The poet knows well that in a case like this, there is nothing better to do than leave the calf at the mercy of nature. A similar attitude is expressed in another poem "Birth of Rainbow" by the poet, who, having seen a calf being born in the biting cold wind which then turned suddenly into a hail, decided to "[get] to

cover. / Left to God the calf and his mother” (Hughes, *Moortown* 36). In these two poems, the forces of nature take the form of natural instincts that each natural being inherits from its ancestry or the form of severe weather ordained by God. In abiding by the predominant and yet ever changing natural forces in what Fairer describes as an “endlessly varied process” (209), humans and animals in Hughes’s poems share fate with each other. So like Virgil, Hughes’s respect for nature is reflected in his willingness to compromise with the natural forces in a most practical manner on a daily basis. But unlike Virgil, his compromise, which is also his effort to break down the binaries between man and nature or nature and culture, is achieved through his recognition of a shared fate between humans and animals.

If “to work with the forces of nature” is more than a practical lesson for the ancients, that it is also a moral requirement for those who believed in the power of deities behind the mysterious natural forces, it has become a moral constraint for modern people who have gradually lost their nature-inspired awe till it is finally replaced by a confidence in human technology to control nature. This is a situation that Hughes was facing in the second half of the twentieth century. Apparently the poet chose to follow the ancients by trusting nature.

Beside those cattle poems, *Moortown* has another group of poems, eight in number, about humans in work. Of this group, the final six poems are all descriptions of Jack Orchard, who had been a farmer himself long before he took up the day-to-day administration of his son-in-law’s farm. Hughes loved the man for “his unique archaic personality” (Hughes, *Letters* 376), which, as the poems show, is a praise of him who followed traditional values of an agrarian society such as hard-working, and who insisted stubbornly on using old farming skills and hand labor as an honest and reliable way of running the farm. In Hughes’s remembrance of the working moments of the old farmer, he marvels again and again at the man’s “reckless” use of his strength, “with as little regard / As old iron tools,” as if he was “using [his] life up” (*Moortown* 58, 59, 55). A deep appreciation of the man’s devotion to work underlies the remorseful and mournful tone of the poems.

Different from the other five, the first poem of the group, “The Day He Died,” presents an imaginary picture of the farm land and animals in reaction to the old man’s death, as follows:

The trustful cattle, with frost on their backs,  
Waiting for hay, waiting for warmth,  
Stand in a new emptiness.

From now on the land  
 Will have to manage without him.  
 But it hesitates, in this slow realization of light,  
 Childlike, too naked, in a frail sun,  
 With roots cut  
 And a great blank in its memory. (*Moortown* 54)

The use of anthropomorphism makes this poem distinct from the rest of the book highly realistic in language, yet it brings out most effectively the affectionate bond between the man and the land and whatever on it that is in his care. Edward Hadley associates Jack Orchard with “the shepherd figure” in pastoral, “[whose] oneness with nature ensures his return to the fold when he dies” (76). Hadley has grasped Hughes’s vision of human as part of nature, which not only legitimizes his working with the land, but also obligates his taking care of it. Terry Gifford’s appreciative remark of the book as “a remarkable work of personal responsibility for livestock and land that is infused with a deep understanding of living with birth and death, with weather and landscape, with the forces of the seasons in poetry that has a deceptive ease of expression” also stresses a moral attitude which the book expresses mainly through the figure of Orchard and which shares a lot with Virgilian georgic ethic (51). But how to explain Hughes’s insistence on traditional farming and its ethics in his supposedly realistic record of his own farming practices despite the inevitable modern changes in agriculture and the rural world as a whole? Yvonne Reddick’s comment on *Moortown Diary*, that the poems “celebrate environmentally conscious agricultural labour, while lamenting the decline of such farming practices” (185), seems to offer a clue to the question that is worth investigating.

#### **Ethical Deficiency outside *Moortown Diary***

*Moortown Diary* was written in a time when agricultural modernization, which had begun since the outbreak of the Second World War, reached its peak in Britain. Small-scale farming that relied heavily on hand labor soon lost its footing in this unprecedented campaign featured by the government’s forceful intervention with policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), by a wide use of machines, chemicals and other “advanced” technology in farming, and, most importantly, by a profit-oriented value judgment based on the sole criterion of efficiency. In his book *The Countryside in Question* published in 1988, Howard Newby asserted that British farming had, within four decades after the war, “moved decisively from agriculture to agribusiness” (6). He mentioned a number of mod-



ern technological inventions related to animal farming in this book and an earlier one, *Social Change in Rural England* published in 1979, including battery farming, zero grazing and artificial insemination (*Social* 19). All these measures taken for the purpose of “intensive livestock production” had come into use in animal farms throughout Britain in the early and middle seventieth when Hughes was running his farm, and had remained in application well into the ninetieth (*Countryside* 10). In fact, the industrialization of agriculture had caused not only severe damage to the environment, which Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring* exposes, but also serious harm to animals in animal farms, which Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* testifies. Laments about the loss of traditional rural community make it clear that victims of this mindless campaign for “progress” include humans as well as the non-humans<sup>1</sup>. It was under these circumstances that agricultural ethics came into being. It was also against this general background that Hughes composed his farm poems. The difference between the world inside Hughes’s poems and the one outside is more than obvious and makes one wonder about the practical and artistic choices the poet must have made and their significance.

In the preface to the 1989 edition of *Moortown Diary*, Hughes described the appalling changes he had observed happening to “the ancient farming community” in North Devon, where his farm was, between the years of his farming and the year the book was published (vii). Looking back at what he had gone through as one of the younger generation “who were plunged into the financial nightmares, the technological revolutions and international market madness that have devastated farmers, farms and farming ever since,” Hughes confessed his own initial excitement about “some of the novelties” under the influence of *Farmer’s Weekly* propagating “for new chemicals, new machinery, more chemicals, new methods, different chemicals, new gimmicks, new short-cuts, every possible new way of wringing that critical extra per cent out of the acreage and the animals” (viii-ix). The poet had obviously fully grasped the disastrous effect of the on-going, profit-oriented agricultural revolution on the English countryside and its farming tradition by the time he wrote the preface. But in fact this realization had come to him much earlier when he was still running the farm, as we see in the following:

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1 Newby discussed various changes of the English rural community in his major works including the two aforementioned books. Other works that cover the topic include W. E. Tate’s *The English Village Community* (Gollancz, 1967), Rowland Parker’s *The Common Stream* (Paladin, 1976), John Bowers and Paul Cheshire’s *Agriculture, the Countryside and Land Use* (Methuen, 1983), and John Blunden and Nigel Curry’s edited book titled *The Changing Countryside* (Croom Helm, 1985), to mention a few.

Within a very short time the last vestige of grandeur in the real work had vanished, the product itself had become a weirdly scandalous, unwanted surplus, the livestock a danger to public health (and nobody knew better than the farmer what he pumped into them), the very soil a kind of poison, the rivers sewers. [. . .]. A sharp nose for these things soon enlightened us, and we settled into the old-fashioned routine of running a suckler herd of beef cows, a flock of breeding ewes, and keeping everything going on bailer twine. (*Moortown* ix)

As a faithful reader of Rachael Carson in as early as the late 1950s and one of the earliest proponents of environmentalism in some of his own early poems, Hughes soon came to realize the environmental consequences and food security problems caused by indiscriminate and irresponsible use of chemicals in animal farming. Reddick's research into the writing process of *Moortown Diary* confirms that the poet at certain point "opted for a traditional way of farming: a herd of beef cattle and a flock of sheep" and that "[the] livestock were free range and the land was free from damaging chemicals" (189-190). From Hughes's own experience as an individual farmer, he knew simply too well that the choice every farmer had to make between the relatively harder and less efficient traditional way of farming and modern, high-efficiency and high-profit farming was more of a moral choice than an economic one. To Hughes, the choice of the latter, which he described as "a jittery, demoralized, industrial servitude" (*Moortown* ix), means a deliberate abandonment of the sense of safety that traditional farming and its products tend to give to its customers, as well as that of an important sense of respect from "the real work" of the once self-reliant farmers. It is obvious here that doing "the real work" is considered by Hughes as one necessary way to contribute positively to public health and the environment.

Hughes had made his own moral choice in the end, but why didn't he share this part of his farming experiences with the reader through his farming poetry? He only told the reader that the modernization of farming he had observed and participated in once himself was "no part of what [he] recorded" in *Moortown Diary*, or it was "only a small, indirect part" of it (*Moortown* viii-ix), but gave no explanation for this artistic choice of his except that, in setting down the "improvised verses," he was trying to "[exclude] everything else that might be pressing to interfere with the watching eye" (*Moortown* x). The poet attempted to show the peculiarity of his farming poems which were supposed to be a faithful and timely record of what he was seeing with his naked eyes only, but ended up revealing the partiality of his

writing materials exclusive of both visible and invisible changes of the North Devon countryside under the pressure of agricultural modernization. To figure out the reason behind the poet's exclusion or evasion, one must know exactly what he had evaded. This task is made possible by the existence of another farming diary titled *All around the Year*. Written by an agriculture educator named Michael Morpurgo probably during 1973 and 1976<sup>1</sup>, the same period as Hughes was running his farm, the book records his daily observation of a family farm owned by John Walter, who was actually a neighbor of Hughes at Moortown. There is even an episode in the book about Hughes's offer of help to the Walter's in need of hay. The book as such makes possible a close examination of the gap between the inner and outer worlds of *Moortown Diary*.

As a daily record of the work routine of Walter's farm, *All around the Year* mentions some new technologies used to increase production, often at the cost of the animal's natural needs and health, such as the use of various kinds of artificial synthetic feed to increase milk yields or to increase the frequency of "coming to season" and that of calving, and the predominant use of artificial insemination for selective breeding under the strong push of the market. Other practices that are harmful to the land and the environment are mentioned as well, such as spreading nitrogen to bring on the grass in the pasture and spraying, and emptying the slurry pit to an unidentified somewhere. None of these technologies or practices that were common at the time and were likely to be adopted by Hughes as well in his early period of farming are traceable in *Moortown Diary*.

Hughes's evasion of various economic pressures that each farmer of his time had to face is often subtle, which we can see through the different ways of referring to the cattle in the two books. By only using general and common terms, such as "sheep," "lamb," "ram," "ewe," "cow," "calf," "bull," "bullock," "cattle," and terms showing genetic relationship such as "mother," "baby," "sister" and "twin," Hughes made it clear that he had no intention to show either his professionalism or his economic consideration as farmer in his poems. In contrast, Morpurgo often used names for individual animals and mentioned their breeds. There are also detailed explanations about the characteristics of different breeds as well as their uses and market value. Foreign breeds are said to be popular because of their high yields of milk or beef. Though Hughes confessed in the preface that he and his wife once "lusted after the exotic, foreign breeds that poured into England during the

<sup>1</sup> *All around the Year* was published in 1979. The author did not give any clue to the exact year when he kept the diary. But judged from the author's mentioning of the contact between the Walter's and the Hughes's, the year must fall between 1973 and 1976 when Hughes was running his farm.

1970s” (*Moortown* ix), he didn’t express such profit-driven interest in any of his poems. And though Hughes’s farm mainly reared beef cattle and sheep, neither the phase “beef cattle” nor its synonym “steer,” the latter of which is found in Morpurgo’s book and defined as “castrated males reared for beef” (*All* 99), appears once in *Moortown Diary*.

While Hughes’s conscientious turn to traditional farming, probably taking place before May of 1974, is recognized<sup>1</sup>, his evasion of much of the reality in his farming practices, including his early foolish attempts to catch up with the new wave and the difficulties he must have encountered later in sticking to farming traditions, remains an indisputable fact that still awaits explanation.

### Hughes’s Georgic as His Ethical Choice

Hughes’s resistance against the agricultural modernization campaign of Britain was mainly a result of his ethical concern about the environment. Hughes first became aware of ecological issues and conservations during his visit to America between 1957 and 1959. His reading of Rachael Carson’s books about sea pollution ended up in his writing poems such as “Fourth of July” and “Mayday on Holderness” in this period to expose water pollution caused by domestic and industrial refuse and nuclear waste. When he began “talking of the perils of factory farming and of additives to foods” to his friends upon returning from America, he was one of the first few persons in U. K. of the time who had such an environmental consciousness<sup>2</sup>. In the opinion of Keith Sagar, his review of Max Nicholson’s *The Environmental Revolution* in 1970 marks a turning point in his life and career in terms of his environmental engagement, as “environmental and ecological concerns came to figure more and more centrally both in his poems and in his life” (qtd. in Gifford, *Ted Hughes* 142).

Sagar’s observation about Hughes’s increased environmental engagement since 1970 is correct, though it does not apply to the poet in composing *Moortown Diary*. As an individual farmer at the time, Hughes felt powerless in the face of the almost unstoppable move towards agricultural modernization, which was basically run on principles opposite of agricultural ethics. Therefore, as he chose to stick to

1 Neither the poet nor any Hughes scholar has given a specific date for the change. One clue comes from a note for the poem “She Has Come to Pass” written on May 30, 1974, in which Hughes explained that he and his wife had “recoiled from the charms of foreign cattle breeds” at the time (*Moortown* 63). We may then assume that Hughes’s change or at least partial change must have taken place before the date.

2 His old university friend Daniel Huws remembers Hughes as one of the earliest environmentalists in U. K. in an unpublished essay, “Memories of Ted Hughes 1952-63”, written in 2007 (qtd. in Gifford, 14). The quotation is also from this essay.

traditional farming by following georgic ethic that emphasizes the value of honest work and hard labor, or “the real work” as Hughes calls it, and the importance of following nature, he described farming practices adhering to the same ethic in his farming poetry. Instead of using his poetry as a mirror of the outside reality, Hughes is actually expressing “a new pastoral ideal” that rests on a deep faith in the power of nature as well as in the mutual, working relationship between human and nature<sup>1</sup>.

Hughes’s pastoral ideal is traceable in the aforementioned review he wrote for Nicholson’s *The Environmental Revolution*. After showing admiration for Nicholson, who remained optimistic about the future of Conservation despite the many oppositions and failures it had encountered, Hughes expressed his confidence in “the re-emergence of Nature as the Great Goddess of mankind, and Mother of all life” (*Winter Pollen* 133). Moreover, he ended the essay with the conviction: “If Westernized civilized man, the evolutionary error, is still open to correction, presumably she will correct him. If he is not open enough, she will still make the attempt” (*Winter Pollen* 135). It is clear that Hughes trusted the power of the Goddess of Nature to nurture and guide all life, just as he trusted human capability to re-establish a balanced relationship with nature through their own effort. It is also clear that the poet regarded it as a moral obligation on both sides for humans to correct themselves and for nature to guide them through.

Hughes’s trustful and hopeful attitude expressed in the Nicholson review grew out of his unrelenting and life-long exploration into the power of nature since the beginning of his writing career in the 1950s. Nature in Hughes’s conception exists inside as well as outside the human. In his early period, he was both admirable for and skeptical about the force of nature, which often appears in his poetry in the form of wild predatory animals in opposition to humans or human rationality. Seeing these animals as driven by an irrational life impulse that could be both creative and destructive, the poet at the time could not fully accept its free flow in either the outer nature or inner human nature. This impulse is the Goddess of Nature, who is, as Hughes describes it, “the goddess of natural law and of love [and] the goddess of all sensation and organic life” (*Winter Pollen* 110). With this inner confusion, the poet began his psychological explorations or “adventures” into the mystical world of nature in a series of his mythical poetry written in the 60s and 70s (Hughes, *Wodwo* 9), hoping that he could eventually drop his inner defense against the nat-

<sup>1</sup> I propose the argument in my paper “The Post-Pastoral Vision in *Moortown Diary*”, that Hughes held a “pastoral ideal” that is “new” if considered in the context of English pastoral tradition. And the tradition I examine in that paper includes georgic as one sub-genre under the general category of pastoral poetry dealing with the subject of rural life.

ural impulse to embrace the goddess. Works such as *Gaudete*, *Crow*, and *Cave Birds* are all parts of the attempts he made for that purpose. By the time he wrote the essay “Myth and Education” in 1976, in which he analyzed the split of the inner and outer worlds of humans, or “the story of the mind exiled from Nature,” in the course of western civilization and saw the use of myths and folklores in literature as the best way to link up the two worlds (*Winter Pollen* 129), he seemed to have achieved his desired reconciliation with the goddess. Moreover, he thought it important to teach in schools, again best through myths and folklores, “a proper knowledge of the sacred wholeness of Nature, and a proper alignment of our behaviour within her laws” (*Winter Pollen* 131). Sagar understands that knowledge as something essential that Hughes’s Adam in *Adam and the Sacred Nine* has to learn after the fall about “how to live” and “how to relate to ‘all this’—the elements and flora and fauna of his given world.” In fact, Sagar observes *Adam and the Sacred Nine*, which was published in 1979 as part of *Moortown* together with the poems later collected into *Moortown Diary*, as Hughes’s attempt “to universalize by turning into myth what Hughes had learnt as a farmer” (197).

Hughes’s pastoral ideal expresses an abstract state of harmony between human and nature that may exist independent of the countryside or even independent of the outside nature. With the Goddess of Nature as its central tenet, it implies an ethic larger than and yet fundamental to agricultural ethic and georgic ethic. Though abstract, Hughes’s pastoral ideal provided him with a vision and spiritual strength that eventually brought him onto the right path in doing his actual farm work. It was owing to his faith in the Goddess that Hughes was able to see a deeper truth about the laws of nature underneath the surface of the reality of agricultural modernization. This is the truth that ancient Greeks and Romans had learnt and shared in their georgics, and the truth whose real significance was grasped by Hughes the modern farmer after overcoming his own initial confusion. Hughes saw modern agriculture as basically an attempt to disrupt natural laws, which, as he realized through his reading and farming, had brought severe harm to farm animals and irreversible damage to the environment. He knew that punishment from the Goddess was inevitable and due to come soon. Therefore he asserted the power of nature in his georgics in a way that outdid Virgil and his early followers who had never experienced what he did. And his assertion has both a moral implication and an ecological significance, for not only humans are obliged to respect nature and to obey her laws, they can also alleviate their burden on the planet by taking up their responsibility towards the land, animals, and the whole of the environment.

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