CHAPTER IV

THE ANIMAL WORLD: PREDATORY

The animal world of Hughes's poems has always been the object of much critical interest and violent controversy. He has been accused of nurturing an unhealthy and obsessive concern with the natural world, of glorifying the violence of the animals and projecting and accentuating the terrifying and brutal traits of the creatures. Although at the outset, Ted Hughes's poems might tend to give the impression of the poet being but a mere "terror's ambassador," a closer inspection is bound to reveal deeper evocations that underlie the surface textures: the animal world is boldly exploited as a foil to project human concerns. Yet Hughes, like D. H. Lawrence, takes special care to retain the "otherness" of the animals he presents.

The majesty and mystery of animals have always been a source of inspiration for the creative mind irrespective of cultural background or geographic terrain. The Panchatantra of the East and The Aesop's Fables of the West are vast repositories of folktales illustrating moral and ethical codes through the figurative use of animals and their activities. In both cases, the story-teller obviously felt that the animals would provide the perfect medium for communicating his ideals for, not only were they habitually familiar to the reader but
also well-suited for expressing the varied aspects of human behaviour. Similarly, the mystic literature of the Sufis abounds in animal imagery drawn from the domestic world and the wild alike, which have been creatively employed in communicating mystical truths. Farid-ud-din Attar, the twelfth century Sufi mystic poet, in his Conference of the Birds\(^2\) gives his reader, a bird's eye view of the travails and pitfalls that await a traveller seeking Divine Union. In this poem, a large assemblage of birds undertake a perilous journey to attend the mysterious court of Simurg, the King of Birds. In Sufi language, Simurg is the type of Divine embracing all plurality. Attar's work is only one instance of the use of natural creatures to represent their human counterparts. It was not merely the aesthetic grace of animals or man's religious devotion or any particular scientific interest alone that drew him to identify himself closely with the world of animals.

Among other experiences, an intimate awareness of the world of nature was considered one of the primary pre-requisites for a poet. To quote the Austrian-born German poet Rainer Maria Rilke:

> Verses are not as people imagine, simply feelings; they are experiences. In order to write a single verse, one must see many cities, and men and things. One must get to know animals and the flight of birds, and the gestures that the little flowers make when they open out to the morning.\(^3\)

The awareness intended by the poet was not a superficial one of the world surrounding him but a clear understanding of it accompanied by genuine insight and a capacity to identify with it wholly.
Ted Hughes displays an absorbing intimacy with animals, an uncommon occurrence in contemporary poets. Careful observation and study of their behavioural patterns and habitual activities have enabled him to present them as they are, vividly alive and realistic. But to him, they represent a greater power present in the universe, intangible but felt deeply. Margaret Dickie Uroff notes this depth in Hughes's poetry:

Hughes's animals may inhabit the world beyond the human, but as they come into his poems they are creatures made of words, carrying the burden of Hughes's vision, and what he sees in them is what he sees of his own deepest nature. Animals talk and think and dream only in poems, and when they do so, they express their own world only as it is refracted through the human eyes of the poet.⁴

Realistically portrayed, the animals are more than exact verbal pictures and signify the "elemental power circuit of the Universe,"⁵ which had, of late, been draining away from normal Western social life. Theodore Roszak, the American sociologist even warns of the disturbing possibility of their taking over the whole world:

There are dragons buried beneath our cities primordial energies greater than the power of our bombs. Two thousand years of Judeo-Christian soul-shaping and three centuries of crusading scientific intellect have gone into their interment. We had assumed them dead, forgotten their presence, constructed our social order atop their graves. But now they awake and stir.⁶

It is these potentially dangerous primordial forces that Hughes sees reflected in the animal world. By portraying the submerged power through pictures from the natural world, he hopes to violently shake the contemporary generation of people out of their complacent passivity; Hughes is keenly conscious of the
divine force behind the terrifying aspect which is not acceptable in an orthodox Christian sense:

When Christianity kicked the devil out of Job what they actually kicked out was Nature . . . and Nature became the devil.  

Therefore Hughes presents a pre-Christian view of nature which is savage and barbaric. It represents the Dionysian force, once allied to human life, but now alienated from it and hostilely destructive. Other contemporary poets, having suffered from an onslaught of violence during the war; steered clear of any semblance of ferocity or brutality. But Hughes, having little direct personal experience of the war, was neither tired nor fearful of it, and was prepared to take several dangerous risks:

Now I came a bit later. I hadn't had enough, I was all for opening negotiations with whatever happened to be out there. It's just as with the hawk, where I conjured up a jaguar, they smelt a storm trooper. Where I saw elementals and forces of Nature they saw motorcyclists with machine guns on the handlebars. At least that was a tendency.  

It was not the empty violence or needless brutality of war that Hughes tried to evoke through his poetry, but the natural energy and vitality symbolically represented as a female power gradually fading out of man's sphere of existence. Hughes considers it the poet's task to locate and expose the force "which Shakespeare called Venus in his first poems and Sycorax in his last." This vital creative force, once regarded an essential part of the Christian faith, is now neglected and abandoned as wanton by Protestant countries like England:
The presence of the great goddess of the primaeval world, which Catholic countries have managed to retain in the figure of Mary, is precisely what England seems to have lacked, since the Civil War... where negotiations were finally broken off. Is Mary violent? Yet Venus in Shakespeare's poem if one reads between the lines eventually murdered Adonis... she murdered him because he rejected her. He was so desensitized, stupified and brutalized by his rational scepticism, he didn't know what to make of her. He thought she was an ethical peril. He was a sort of modern critic in the larval phase... a modern English critic. A typical modern English man.10

The rigorous suppression of this creative and emotional feminine energy in the contemporary world has resulted in dire consequences, for the repressed energy finds expression in several undesirable and waywardly destructive activity in people. Awareness of such tendencies is evident in critics like G. Wilson Knight who notes Western man is becoming more and more keenly aware of his own more dangerous compulsions. Pope in his Essay on Man did much towards the acceptance and softening of instinct, without denial of its primacy. Drawing nearer, we have the supreme doctrine of sublimation in Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra and the all important teaching of John Cowper Powys as to the handling of dangerous sexually located thrills and fantasies.11

Hughes's concern is more with the creative and instinctive aspects of this energy than the brutal and violent, though he shows his familiarity with these aspects also in his poems. He stresses the need to counter the ferocious with the gentle as he feels. Blake did by using both the tiger and the lamb to denote the Creator.12

Like Blake, Hughes is not merely a poet of nature alone, but also a "sophisticated philosopher" and a "primitive gnomic
spellmaker. To him, the poet's function is that of a shaman—to travel to the world of the divine and bring back some spiritual solution to an emotionally stultified humanity. Animal masks and the skins of animals are part of the habitual attire of the shaman, for he is believed to have a special affinity with the animal world and have helping spirits with animal forms. Therefore it is only natural for Hughes to enlist the aid of animal characters in his poetry.

Apart from this, there is clearly a very practical side to Hughes's concern with animals and the natural world. He was actively involved with several projects for the protection of wildlife and environmental conservation. He wrote the poem "The Last Migration" for a book whose royalties were donated to the Fauna Preservation Society. He has also written a knowledgeable review of Max Nicolson's The Environmental Revolution and a letter to The Times Educational Supplement suggesting that schools encourage children to plant trees. He obviously took his role as a poet seriously and tried to fulfil his social duties with care and diligence.

Hughes's interest in animals can be traced from a very early period in his life. By the age of three, he had quite a large collection of toy lead animals and by his fourth year, he had started drawing and modelling them. This passion for animals was handed down to him by his elder brother whose "one interest in life was creeping about on the hillsides with a rifle." The little boy who grew up to be Ted Hughes the poet, went along
with him as retriever, collecting the birds and animals he shot down. Hughes also started fishing in the canal and developed a passion for angling, which is evident in the River (1984) poems. But such close interaction with nature came to an abrupt end when Hughes was about eight, when the family moved to an industrial town in south Yorkshire. In a rather humorous vein, he records the immediate consequences of that transfer of residence:

Our cat went upstairs and moped in my bedroom for a week, it hated the place so much, and my brother for the same reason left home and became a game keeper.17

Hughes, on the contrary, was able to find solace in a nearby farm, and later in a private estate with woods and lakes.

By the age of fifteen, Hughes's attitude towards animals changed considerably and he began to see that by capturing them or hunting them out, he was only destroying them. He speaks about the maturing of his outlook thus:

... at about fifteen my life grew more complicated and my attitude to animals changed. I accused myself of disturbing their lives, I began to look at them, you see, from their own point of view.18

In his maturing view, they developed from mere objects of amusement to individuals with inherent worth and he started appreciating not just their physical beauty or vitality but also their innate good sense. He discovered that

... they have a certain wisdom. They know something special ... something perhaps which we are very curious to learn.19

With this new-found knowledge of the intuitive wisdom of animals, Hughes discovered a novel approach to the whole animal kingdom.
He improvised a new way of catching animals without doing any harm to either their body or spirit--by capturing them in his poems. But he was constantly on the guard for the forces that impelled him to devitalize the animal or render him insensitive to the inner instinctive core of the universe. Hughes narrates an episode that occurred during his second year at Cambridge. Unable to complete an essay he was struggling with, he went to bed and dreamed he was still writing at the desk, when the door opened and "a creature came in with the head and body of a fox, but erect, man-sized, and with human hands." He seemed to have escaped from a fire for his skin was charred, cracked and bleeding. And this creature in the dream walked across the room, left his blood-print on the page and said, "Stop this, you are destroying us." Hughes connected this episode with his own doubts about what he was doing. He interpreted the dream as the fox's command to keep away from the stultifying influence of academic criticism which served only to obstruct his creative spirit. This experience caused him to make a change in his choice of subjects from English to Archaeology and Anthropology.

Hughes obviously identified the fox with the intuitive force that lay at the depths of the creative power. This is probably the reason why he immortalized this animal in what he calls his first "animal" poem as the physical counterpart of the abstract idea which helps to give the spirit of the creative imagination a concrete form. Initially, the lonely writer at his desk becomes conscious of a vague presence beside him--"something
else is alive" (Thought-Fox", HR). This feeling develops into an awareness of "Something more near/Through deeper." Then his other senses begin to acknowledge its presence. It's cold and delicate touch upon the leaves, a slight cautious movement and its jerky yet agile motion betwixt the trees can be detected as it moves forward.

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now . . . The wary and hesitant progress of the creature which is frightened yet bold is captured vividly in this poem. Gradually the fox provides concrete evidence in the form of neat prints on the snow and a shadow that develops into "a body that is bold to come/Across clearings." Then the reader gets a magnified view of its eye which is

A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business . . . The colour of the eyes, its intent expression with its sense of purpose and the keenness and agility associated with its animal cunning and the wild animal's natural wariness are all captured in that single glimpse. Then with a quick unexpected assault on the olfactory nerves through the "sudden sharp hot stink of fox," it enters "the dark hole of the head" and becomes one with the poet's creative psych. It is no longer alien to him but has completely merged itself with his creative spirit. This fusion gives birth to a beautiful and complete poem created out
of brilliant but individual and separate visual and sensory impressions united together by the force of inspired writing. Though the fox is not described in its totality at any point in the poem the carefully selected fragments create an effect far more illuminating and impressive than any detailed account. The creature makes its brief dramatic impact on the reader's imagination for one quick instant before disappearing as suddenly as it appeared and leaving corresponding but lasting prints on the blank page in place of the ones on the snow in the clearing, in the forest. In this portrait of the fox, Hughes has managed to skilfully capture not only the physical presence of the animal, but also the very essence of its nimble alert and agile nature—the spirit of the creature.

As a wild life enthusiast Hughes has studied the movements, the characteristic actions and the behaviour patterns of the animal and employed some of the minor details in the reconstruction of the creature with remarkable effect. Hughes explains his reasons for the choice of this animal as a subject and the nature of the circumstances that led him to write about it thus:

An animal I never succeeded in keeping alive is the fox. I was always frustrated: twice by a farmer, who killed cubs I had caught before I could get to them, and once by a poultry keeper who freed my cub while his dog waited. Years after those events I was sitting up late one snowy night in dreary lodgings in London. I had written nothing for a year or so but that night I got the idea I might write something and I wrote in a few minutes the . . . poem: the first "animal" poem I ever wrote.^{22}

By writing the poem Hughes was obviously trying by his own admission to capture a real fox which had always eluded him.
But the animal he managed to catch was not merely an ordinary fox. It was the real animal with some extra dimensions which made it something far more than an ordinary fox. Elsewhere Hughes explains the uniqueness of the creature he had created and the greatness of the poem's achievement:

It is about a fox, obviously enough, but a fox that is both a fox and not a fox. What sort of a fox is it that can step right into my head where presumably it still sits . . . smiling to itself when the dogs bark. It is both a fox and a spirit. It is a real fox. . . . As it is, every time I read the poem the fox comes up again out of the darkness and steps into my head. And I suppose that long after I am gone, as long as a copy of the poems exists, everytime anyone reads it the fox will get up somewhere out in the darkness and come walking towards them.

So, you see, in some ways my fox is better than an ordinary fox. It will live for ever, it will never suffer from hunger or hounds. I have it with me wherever I go.23

Hughes' "Thought-fox" is obviously not a mere fox. It represents the creative spirit in man now submerged and covered up by his conscious self. To Keith Sagar, it represents "the life we keep trying to kill, but which somehow survives"24 somewhere beyond the surface of one's consciousness. In What is the Truth?, the School teacher, the most intellectual and rational being in the group, goes hunting in the forest and shoots down the fox. Once the deed is done, the primitive thrill of the hunt dissolves and the utter meaninglessness of his act haunts him as he makes a futile attempt to rid himself of the evidence of his cruelty:
We chop his tail off
Thick and long as a forearm, and black.
Then bundle him and his velvet legs
His bag of useless jewels,
The phenomenal technology inside his head,
Into a hole, under a bull dozed stump,
Like picnic rubbish. There the memory ends. (WT, p. 118)

The fox seems to represent the creative vitality wiped out by
the contemporary rational man. Since man has permitted this
instinctive energy to be annihilated by severe mechanization
and technology, its beauty has gone to ruin and its inherent
genius and phenomenal wonder has to be buried away like waste.

But despite all man's efforts to overpower or destroy the
creative force of nature, it is not completely annihilated from
the face of the earth. It can be seen in birds and animals
vibrantly surviving even in captivity. To Hughes, the jaguar
is an epitome of this suppressed power, and he explains its
possibilities as a symbol:

A jaguar after all can be received in several
different aspects... he is a beautiful, powerful
nature spirit, he is a homicidal maniac, he is
a supercharged piece of cosmic machinery, he is
a symbol of man's baser nature shoved down into
the id and growing cannibal, murderous with
deprivation, he is an ancient symbol of Dionysus
since he is a leopard raised to the ninth power,
he is a precise historical symbol to the bloody-minded
Aztecs and so on. Or he is simply a demon...a
lump of ectoplasm. A lump of astral energy.25

Therefore the jaguar is easily the representative of the dark
submerged primitive force that gave the natural world its vital
energy. It is the primitive elemental force, now forced to be
confined within a cage. Hughes has written two poems on this
animal, the second of which takes another look at the creature.
He speaks of his multilayered intentions with regard to writing the poems:

I prefer to think of them as first, descriptions of a jaguar, second . . . invocations of the goddess, third . . . invocations of a jaguar-like body of elemental force, demonic force. 26

As an animal, the jaguar is clearly ideally suited to represent the elemental demonic force. It is a creature of the wilderness and possesses the inherent powerful energy of the truly wild beast. In the earlier poem, "The Jaguar" (HR), the animal, though caged, is full of primaeval energy which impresses the sterile and ineffective crowd gazing at it. It renders the other animals and birds in cages insignificant by the force of its compelling presence and actions. The impact of its explosive look, the blinding fire in its gaze, and the pounding force of its blood make the awe-struck crowd look more insignificant. The cage is no limitation for the beast, for, it's freedom is beyond the scope of such physical limitations. His communion with the primaeval energies puts him across the concrete bonds of the bars of the cage. Like a visionary, he cannot be limited for his freedom is spiritual and therefore beyond human control:

He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him
More than to the visionary his cell:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.
Over the cage floor the horizons come. ("Jaguar", HR)

There can be no bounds for this kind of freedom and energy which is beyond human control or even understanding.

The poem bears a remarkable likeness to Rainer Maria Rilke's "The Panther" 27 which is often cited as a striking example of
the Austrian poet's objective poetry, an obvious outcome of his
associateship with Auguste Rodin, the French sculptor. The
vague memory of glorious freedom which still lingers in the soul
and body of Hughes's encaged jaguar and its restless activity
and subdued inner intensity bears a marked resemblance to the
imprisoned panther in Rilke's poem.

But by the second poem "Second Glance at a Jaguar" (WooWoo)
there is clearly a change in approach. Though the jaguar in
this poem is still energetic and even beautiful in its display
of power, the very freedom of its energy is seen as a limitation.
The jaguar seems to be battling within itself as it tries to
"wear his skin out," and the energy displayed is only a reflection
of this release of force. The beast appears to be rather unsure
of its objectives and mechanical in its activity. Though still
graceful in its stride and powerful in its movements, it seems
confused, for

At every stride he has to turn a corner
In himself and correct it. His head
Is like the worn down stump of another whole jaguar,
His body is just the engine shoving it forward,
Lifting the air up and shoving on under,
The weight of his fangs hanging the mouth open,
Bottom jaw combing the ground.

Its restless activity now seems merely a monotonous and meaninglessly
repetitive routine, rather like a schedule it is forced to adhere
to than a violent assertion of its freedom. The animal seems
constrained within the bounds of its own nature for its murderous
rage is devoid of force and can effect no dramatic change or
release from the sterile atmosphere. Hughes invokes the animal
in true shamanistic tradition for ritualistic participation and then makes a sudden shift to Buddhist practices. The jaguar's movements are seen to be like that of a "prayer-wheel," the motion invoked by a mantric force. W. Y. Evans-Wentz in his interpretation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* explains the power of the mantrah thus:

if the adept be . . . a black magician he can by mantras call up and command elementals . . . because to each belongs a particular rate of vibration and this being known and formulated as sound in a mantra gives the magician power even to annihilate by dissolution the particular elemental or spirit to whom it belongs.28

The jaguar mutters the mantra to keep his rage burning and even increase his fury. His anger seems toward such additional assistance, for there is no longer much spirit in the creature:

Muttering some mantra, some drum-song of murder To keep his rage brightening, making his skin Intolerable, spurred by the rosettes, the cain-brands, Wearing the spots off from the inside, Rounding some revenge.

While in the earlier poem, the revenge would have been directed outwards, against the world, in the second version of the animal it is clearly directed inward, against itself or even at an aimless or abstract target. Like the rest of the world it has also become polluted with a lack of firm purpose or direction.

Egbert Faas has another interpretation of the jaguar's rage based on the framework of Indian mysticism. In his words Hughes' shift within the poem away from Aztec mythology into Indian mysticism is extraordinary since the Aztec culture had no concept of release from bloody-minded sacrifices through inner liberation using the power of rage against rage itself. Only
in the Indian tradition of mysticism do we see the insatiable hunger and ravenous all-consuming rage of "Vishnu in his incarnation as man lion" turned against itself as an image of liberation, an image implicit in Hughes's description of the jaguar "going like a prayer wheel." 29

Using this gross misreading of Hindu mythology as his basis, Faas attributes the jaguar with human aspirations of emotional and spiritual freedom from itself and from the world. But to me, the poem merely reads as an alteration of the previous jaguar poem that permits a change in viewpoint and admits to the failure of the animal world to provide examples of fulfilment and vitality at present lacking in the human world. In this poem which seems to be an extension of the earlier jaguar poem, the animal, once full of vital energy and potential power is presented as a fallen idol, ritualistically following the action patterns of the former animal but lacking in its glory and spirited vitality. It represents the incapability of the animal world to provide lasting inspiration through creative exemplification.

The jaguar is not the only animal Hughes has immortalized in such a manner. For him, one of the major emblems of the vital energy in the natural world is the hawk, almost the most significant creature among Hughes's early creations. It is given great prominence by Hughes for it appears in the title of his very first collection The Hawk in the Rain which begins with a poem of the same name. It reappears later in his next collection--Lupercal in another powerful poem "Hawk Roosting". To Hughes, the bird is the very epitome of the vital powers of nature and he expresses his views thus:
That bird is accused of being a fascist . . . the symbol of some horrible totalitarian genocidal dictator. Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking. Simply Nature. It's not so simple may be because Nature is no longer so simple. I intended some creator like the Jehovah in Job but more feminine. When Christianity kicked the devil out of Job what they actually kicked out was Nature . . . and Nature became the devil. He doesn't sound like Isis, mother of the gods, which he is. He sounds like Hitler's familiar spirit. There is a line in the poem almost verbatim from Job. 30

So Hughes's version of the second coming would be the coming of a ferocious nature spirit like the hawk. The bird's normal powers of flight and capacity to brave the nature's hostile powers appear doubly majestic and glorious when compared to the weak and ineffective struggles of mankind. While the protagonist grovels in the mud at every step despite his desperate efforts to escape the sticky clutches of the earth, which has its relations to the "dogged grave," the hawk can, without any sort of painstaking exertion, hang still in mid air. The fury of the wind which renders the man ravaged and disrupted is unable to even shake the calm poise of the bird:

Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye.
His wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet,
Steady as a hallucination in the streaming air.
("Hawk in the Rain", H2)

The bird is so still in the midst of all the violent activity around him that it seems to be a hallucination. But all this show of strength and power is nullified at the end of the poem when the hawk's sudden death is envisaged. Even as the suffering, mortal human being strains towards the powerful hawk in worshipful admiration, the bird meets with a violent and unexpected death.
prompted by a slight miscalculation on his part:

Coming the wrong way, suffers the air, hurled upside down,
Fall from his eye, the ponderous shires crash on him,
The horizon trap him; the round angelic eye
Smashed, mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land.

Nature's hostility towards itself and the need for constant surveillance and vigilance in the struggle for survival is brought prominently to the reader's attention. The human being is clearly incapable of coping with the elements that can destroy even the apparently all-powerful hawk and is therefore badly in need of some revitalizing power. When even the hawk who seemed to belong to a heavenly order and live above the normal human being, is trapped and annihilated by a careless action, the man obviously has no chance at all in the race for survival.

The second poem "Hawk Roosting" (Lupercal) is written in the first person with the hawk, or Nature herself, as the protagonist. The hawk has obviously no fears of his destruction for he is supremely confident of his superior powers. He is indifferent to all the pretty pleasures and pains experienced by others consequent to his actions, for cruelty is one of the main ingredients necessary for his survival:

My manners are tearing off heads—
The allotment of death,
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

He has no doubts, no fears, no regrets. He is quite decided in his actions and self-assured unlike the rational Apollonian man. He is the spirit of Nature personified. He includes both the
laudatory and derogatory aspects of Nature within himself. He is the absolute egotist, so concerned with himself that he considers the world to be a body meant to serve his whims:

- The sun is behind me.
  Nothing has changed since I began.
  My eye has permitted no change.
  I am going to keep things like this.

He believes the world follows his orders and that he has ultimate powers over it. He is the spirit of the Dionysian goddess with his irrational and violent tendencies intermingled with uncontrolled power and even cruelty.

It is this same powerful energy that makes the thrushes so terrifying in Hughes's poetic frame. They act on impulse instigated by the primitive urges of hunger and do not stop to think like the rational man. They are beautiful but deadly and thereby frightening:

Terrifying are the attent sleek thrushes on the lawn,
More coiled steel than living--a poised
Dark deadly eye, those delicate legs
Triggered to stirrings beyond sense--with a start,
  a bounce, a stab
Overtake the instant and drag out some writhing thing.
No indolent procrastinations and no yawning stares.
No sighs or head-scratchings. Nothing but bounce and stab
And a ravening second. ("Thrushes", Lupercal)

What is most horriorsome about these birds in Hughes's view is the complete absence of any forethought and the deliberate intensity of their actions. He dwells upon their streamlined efficiency and the single-minded aim with which they go about their natural inclinations, which are quite unlike man who is not always purposeful in his actions. Bravery on the battlefront or dedication to an art are not instinctive or deliberate. In such
cases man's act "worships itself" and he is led on by a devilish and furious power. The birds, on the other hand, are instigated to violence by natural instincts and not "refined" sensibilities.

When Hughes discusses animals in his poems he chooses to write about only those characteristic actions of the creatures that serve his purpose. For instance, when he speaks of thrushes, he points out their singleminded predatory tendencies, but makes no mention of their singing qualities. Hughes highlights the aspects that serve to enhance his arguments and ignores the others and so his versions of the creatures tend to be rather distorted despite their verisimilitude and his affinity for even minor details. Michael Schmidt makes a note of this unusual feature of Hughes's poetry in his study of the poems:

His animals, sometimes accurately portrayed are usually out of focus, or rather, refocused to illuminate some specific metaphorical rather than complex natural truth. They are emblems, analogues, images, the quintessence of poetic fallacy. . . . It is his subtle infidelity to fact or the incompleteness of the facts he gives that makes the animals particular and affective.31

This peculiarity is envisaged not as a drawback, but as part of the strength and uniqueness of his animal poems. The creatures represent an instinctive creative natural power, once possessed by mankind but now concealed beneath the vestiges of civilization. By repeatedly providing instances indicating the existence of such power, he tries to prod mankind out of its dull stupor and sterile labour into creative activity. At the same time, he warns against the violent ferocity and meaningless brutality
that can result from the blind worship of the White Goddess by using the same creatures as illustrations of terror and thoughtless damage.

The bear, though presented as being more mysterious than the other creatures, is nevertheless seen to have a great potential for violence. In Hughes poem "The Bear" (Wodwo), the huge beast described is in a state of hibernation. Yet despite its unconscious state it is dangerous and potentially harmful:

The bear is glueing
Beginning to end
With glue from people's bones
In his sleep.

The bear is digging
In his sleep
Through the wall of the Universe
With a man's femur.

The poet reminds the reader of its infinite capacity for destruction and devastation, for it is alert even in its sleep, ready to wake up and "instantly focus" and take immediate action. It is the representation of a Universe alien and hostile to man for no reason apart from natural animosity

The bear is a river
Where people bending to drink
See their dead selves.

He is the ferryman
To dead land.

His price is everything.

In this poem the bear comes to represent a natural world enmical to the modern civilized man, and ever alert to man's intrusions.
Taking a similar view, George Macbeth in *Poetry 1900 to 1965* describes this poem as "a reworking of the legend of St. George and the Dragon in modern psychological terms. The bear is perhaps an image for our animal nature, or more precisely the emotion of fear, which can only be controlled by the ruthless cruelty of the will."  

Such primitive animosity and unconscious brutality are not limited to the surface of land alone. Even fishes like the pike, apparently beautiful and harmless, are not exempt from this adherence to "mindless" violence and cruelty. The fishes in Hughes poem "Pike" (*Lupercal*) are perfect in their beauty but terrifying in their brutality. Instinctively murderous, they are "killers from the egg," with a "malevolent aged grin" that gives away the truth of their real nature. While moving across the waters, their appearance seems ethereal and grand, but they are also horrifying in their motionless quietness and steady stillness, which seem devilish and inhuman:

They dance on the surface among the flies.

Or move, stunned by their own grandeur,
Over a bed of emerald, silhouette
Of submarine delicacy and horror,
A hundred feet long in their world

There is an unpleasant aura about them and wherever they spread gloom for their's is "a life subdued to its instrument" which consist of "The jaws' hooked clamp and fangs." As the poem proceeds, Hughes piles horror upon horror narrating instances of their cannibalistic tendencies and cold meaningless brutality, until finally they grow into a legend of terror. The power of
his own suggestion is so stimulated while looking at the "stilled legendary depths" in the pond nearby which was "as deep as England" that he dared not fish after dark without seeing nightmarish visions of pike slowly moving towards him:

That past nightfall I dared not cast

But silently cast and fished
With the hair frozen on my head
For what might move, for what eye might move.
The still splashes on the dark pond,

Owls hushing the floating woods
Frail on my ear against the dream
Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,
That rose slowly towards me, watching.

The primitive haunted feeling of being observed by hidden eyes and singled out for attack persisted in the protagonist while he pursued his pleasant and peaceful occupation of angling, giving rise to a supernatural horror.

In Crow (1970), Hughes has carefully synthesized the qualities of the predator and the victim. The bird has the traits of a real crow, but is not one. It experiences human sufferings, but brings an alienness to it that makes it appear strange and distant. It is the survivor in a barren, destroyed land. Its views are distorted but at certain times strangely logical and sane. It is mischievous and often even wicked like the Trickster in the Red Indian folk mythology. It is quite insensible and even brutal in its responses to persons and situations. But sometimes, it even displays some semblance of a human conscience.

Hughes's mythology of the Crow was created out of various
legends gleaned from different peoples. Hughes gives this account of the story of the creation Crow at one of his poetry reading sessions:

After having created the world God has a nightmare in the form of a Voice and a Hand which ridicules the creation and particularly God's masterpiece, Man. God claims that his creation has been a complete success and a debate ensues which is interrupted by a message from the world that Man wants God to take life back. God challenges the Nightmare to do better and the Nightmare's response is to create Crow. God, who regards Crow as a poor competitor for his creation, shows him round the universe and sets him various challenges and ordeals, in the course of which Crow becomes more intelligent and resourceful. This universe is one in which all history is happening simultaneously, so Crow is able to move freely from one era to another, from the beginning of the world to the end. He observes and is occasionally implicated in various aspects of the Creation. During his adventures he begins to wonder who his own creator is and he encounters various female figures who are avatars of his creator, but he never recognizes her and always bungles the situation.33

This is the story based on which the Crow poems were written. But Hughes's poems by themselves do not strictly adhere to the narration. He admits to the lack of correspondence between the story and the poems in a personal interview to Egbert Faas:

The story is not really relevant to the poems as they stand. Maybe I'll finish the story some day and publish it separately. I think the poems have a life a little aside from it. The story brought me to the poems, and it was of course the story of Crow, created by God's nightmare's attempt to improve on man.34

The protagonist of Hughes's Crow poems is fully equipped to survive in a world that is harsh and barren, devoid of all material comfort or positive responses. The Crow seems to be
the only living being that possesses any vitality or interest in life. He is a new kind of antihero.

Physically the bird is ugly. He is awkward in his movements and clumsy looking. Compared to the other birds he appears mean and despicable. But in this case, this appearance is apparently deceptive, for the Crow's actions are not far worse than that of other birds. Despite all outward appearances, the other birds are as guilty of criminal actions as the Crow is. The swift's quick motion may be equalled to a "breath of violet" ("Crow and the Birds"), but as it moves, its body is

Pulsating
With insects
And their anguish, all it had eaten.
("Crow Tyrannosaurus")

The crow, on the other hand, does not hide under the covers of romantic worth and poetic beauty as the others do. While the other birds soar high in brilliant glory and rise far above the mediocrity of routine labour, the Crow is not ashamed to be "spraddled head-down in the beach-garbage, guzzling a dropped ice-cream" ("Crow and the Birds"). Unlike the other birds, he is the only creature that adapts to human habitation. He can survive in a most un-natural background and even relish the most vulgar and destestable of surroundings.

Hughes draws attention to several ugly aspects of the crow indirectly in "Examination at the Womb-door" (Crow). "scrawny little feet," the "bristly scorched-looking face," the "utility coat of muscles," the "unspeakable guts" the "questionable brains," the "minimum-efficiency eyes," the "wicked little tongue"
and the "occasional wakefulness" are all qualities possessed by the Crow. He is not only ugly but also tougher and more deadly than Death.

And above all he is black. Hughes makes repeated references to the dark colour of the bird. In the poem "The Black Beast," Crow goes all over the Universe seeking the black beast. He searches everywhere rending apart both his enemy and his brother, studying space and the vacuum, but cannot find anything for he fails to look within him. The extent of Crow's blackness is made clear in another poem "Two Legends" when he says,

Black was the without eye
Black the within tongue
Black was the heart
Black the liver, black the lungs
Unable to suck in light
Black the blood in its loud tunnel
Black the bowels packed in furnace
Black too the muscles
Striving to pull out into the light
Black the nerves, black the brain
With its tombed visions
Black also the soul, the huge stammer
Of the cry that, swelling, could not
Pronounce its sun.

But to explain the depth and intensity of the black colour, Hughes wrote another poem "Crow Colour":

Crow was so much blacker
Than the moon's shadow
He had stars.

He was as much blacker
Than any negro
As a negro's eye-pupil.

The black colour relates him to the primordial dark—the dark that pervaded earth before light came into being. It also
associates him with the dark, Satanic powers full of evil and mischief, black being the companion of evil as opposed to light and goodness in religious terminology particularly that of Manichaenism. It also related to ignorance and the dark unknown forces of the Jungian unconscious.

The complex nature of the Crow takes its origins from a variety of sources ranging from the Bible and various scriptures of the East including Buddhism and Manichaeanism to the mythologies and folklore of the American Indians and the Japanese. The Manichaean idea of the state of opposition between darkness and light, good and evil, spirit and matter recurs in the poems. But Hughes carries these ideas beyond their scope when he conceives of the black intensifying so much that it becomes light or vice versa. In "Crowcolour", the light of the sun is pictured to be so brilliant that it is blinding and therefore creating a complete loss of vision as in the state of darkness:

Even like the sun
Blacker
Than any blindness.

If the Crow is like the sun, it is not merely black in colour. It has the brilliance and splendour of the sun which renders it dark to the eyes of a careful observer. The idea of excess of light being blinding to the viewer by its dazzling splendour is present in the Upanishadic sayings such as

hiranmayena pātrena satyasyapithem mukham
tat tvam pūsan apāvrṇu satyadharmaya drṣṭaye.
(The face of truth is covered with a golden disc. Unveil it, O Pusan, so that I who love the truth may see it.)
The Crow of Hughes's poems is a powerful creature. He is alert and intelligent and quick to act. Like other birds, he has the instinctive capacity to fend for himself and survive. He has the patience and persistence to outwait his prey calmly. In "That Moment," when "the only face left in the world" is separated from life for infinity, Crow does not stop to mourn for he knows that he has to start searching for something to eat if he is not to share the same fate. But despite the tough, matter-of-fact exterior, he is not completely without guilt. He has the rudiments of a conscience which bring him closer to being human. Crow's doubts and vacillations are recorded by Hughes in "Crow Tyrannosaurus."

Crow thought 'Alas
Alas ought I
To stop eating
And try to become the light?

But he cannot hesitate for long. The minute his eyes rest upon a grub, he reverts to his usual self. Though he hears weeping of the worm he learns to ignore it, for he must survive. Earlier he had seen how the swift, the cat, the dog and even man had turned murderous. Now, with the instinctive act of stabbing a worm, he has joined the retinue of deaf survivors, who had learned to steel themselves against the sorrows of the prey

And he heard
Sweeping

Grubs grubs He stabbed he stabbed
Seeping
Weeping

Weeping he walked and stabbed
Thus came the eye's roundness, the ear's deafness.

The newly-found conscience is not able to make him go against his nature. It can only bring a new awareness of suffering and a resultant indifference whether affected or otherwise.

Crow is portrayed as an intelligent and resourceful bird. He does not place undue faith in religion and theology as revealed in his attitude to God. He begins by dutifully asking God about the necessity and relevance of his functions in "Crow Communes". But God, tired after the heavy labour of Creation is fast asleep and therefore beyond the range of his communication. Childlike, Crow "tore off a mouthful and swallowed." But what began as a jest now becomes a serious matter and Crow is appalled at the little drops of knowledge he has gleaned through his casual actions. But, Crow's behaviour serves to exemplify the adage--a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing--for his new found illumination makes him feel strange and he proceeds to fool around with God's creations and create unimaginable problems for the innocent. He dives forward to find solutions to complex problems that puzzle God and render Him incapacitated. In "A Childish Prank," when Crow finds Man's and Woman's bodies lying inert without souls, he attempts a simplistic solution by creating sexuality, when the negative consequences of his actions come to light Crow avoids the issue by laughing it away. The results of his acts are not
only dangerous but also lastingly painful—for mankind who are completely unaware of the turn of events:

Man awoke being dragged across the grass. 
Woman awoke to see him coming. 
Neither knew what had happened.

The innocent have thus to bear the consequence of Crow's light hearted actions and Crow enjoys the effects of the prank he has played on them. Like the Trickster of American Indian folklore, Crow is both intelligent and foolish. Though he has great powers and super human capabilities he is incapable of employing them in fruitful endeavour. What seems like a major and insoluble problem for God is like child's play for him. In "A Horrible Religious Error," when the serpent arrives God's calm visage is shaken and man and woman collapse into a state of servile subjection. Crow alone is quite normal and unperturbed in his reactions. He is quite confident of his superior power and mastery of all other beings as evidenced from his behaviour:

But Crow only peered. 
Then took a step or two forward, 
Grabbed this creature by the slackskin nape, 
Beat the hell out of it, and ate it.

He is not intimidated by either the serpent's fearful presence or the awed responses of God or man. And subsequent events prove the superiority of his talents over the other beings. When God awakens out of his weary slumber and attempts to direct Crow along the right path, His efforts take him along strange unexpected routes. In "Crow's First Lesson," God's desperate efforts to teach him to talk and employ the language of gentle
emotions and Christian virtues only produce hazardly and unwelcome results. Crow's attempts to utter the word "Love" produce first a white shark, then a bluefly, a tse tse, a mosquito and finally a restricting and miserable form of perverse sexuality.

Crow convulsed, gaped, retched and Man's bodiless prodigious head Bulbed out into the earth, with swivelling eyes Jabbering protest--

And Crow retched again, before God could stop him. And women's vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened. The two struggled together on the grass.

The consequences of Crow's efforts proved disastrous and not even an omnipresent all powerful God could undo the harm done.

Crow's sometimes serious and more often playful initiatives invariably lead to unpleasant and irredeemable circumstances. But Crow neither repents nor attempts to remedy the situations of his making. On several occasions, he succeeds in the act of unifying. But the kinds of unity he achieves are not essentially the traditionally accepted or desired ones. In "Crow Blacker than ever," the situation is a gloomy one in which "Things looked like falling apart," for Man and God are disgusted with each other and appear to be moving towards a state of permanent separation by putting as much distance between them as possible. So Crow intervenes and attempts to solve the problem at hand.

But Crow Crow
Crow nailed them together, Nailing Heaven and earth together--

So man cried, but with God's voice. And God bled, but with man's blood.
Then heaven and earth creaked at the joint
Which became gangrenous and stank--
A horror beyond redemption.

The agony did not diminish.
Man could not be man nor God God.
The solution brought into effect by Crow is obviously not the required one. In fact, it only serves to worsen the situation.

But Crow is not consciously irreligious or irreverent in his attitude towards God. In "Crow's Theology," for instance, Crow makes clear his rather simplistic views of God and His love. He is childlike in his trust in God's love. The simple fact of his continuing existence is enough proof of this love for himself.

Crow realized God loved him--
Otherwise, he would have dropped dead.
So that was proved.
Crow reclined, marvelling, on his heart-beat.

And he realized that God spoke Crow--
Just existing was His revelation.

This insignificant gospel is enough assurance for Crow of God's affection for him. But the existence of his enemies remains a puzzle. So Crow arrives at a simple though naive conclusion:

Crow realized there were two Gods--

One of them much bigger than the other
Loving his enemies
And having all the weapons.

Obviously this is no solution. But Crow accepts it without any hesitation for it appears reasonable and logical.

But God does not accept the prevailing situation and his relations with Crow with so much smooth facile ease. Though His efforts at moulding him to traditional patterns of morality
have already met with no success, He tries again to create something of worth out of the Crow. He takes recourse to several violent and torturesome methods to create something new out of the Crow for Crow has the potential for improved living. Though His attempts meet with partial success, God is not satisfied. This dubious progress provokes God to give up His efforts in disgust. Crow, alone, is unperturbed:

When God went off in despair.
Crow stropped his beak and started in on the two thieves. ("Crow's Song of Himself")

The Crow of these poems is not really evil or immoral. He belongs to a pre-moral phase of civilization. Therefore his morality is different from the traditional Christian notions of virtue and decency. He is very much like the Trickster that appears in the stories of the Winnebago Indians as described by Paul Radin in The Trickster. This creature has several human characteristics, but is clearly not a fully developed human being. Primitive instincts such as hunger and sex are the primary motivating forces in its life. The Crow is likewise led by his ravenous appetite. Due to this propensity, he is constrained to cover up a guilty conscience in order to give in to the demands of a voracious, insatiable appetite. Like the Trickster, Crow also takes an obsessive interest in sex, but unlike the Trickster, he does not cherish personal involvement or direct participation. He manipulates others into difficult situations and enjoys their discomfiture and travails from a distance. But his ability to scheme and play pranks does not
always hold him in good stead. He is as foolish as he is intelligent. Being full of contradictions, he fails to unravel his own problems or resolve the riddles or puzzling situations in which he is placed. He is not even capable of recognizing the presence of the Black Beast within him as mentioned earlier. Radin's explanation of the significance of the Trickster myth can be equally applied to Crow:

It embodies the vague memories of an archaic and primordial past, where there as yet existed no clear cut differentiation between the divine and the non-divine. For this period Trickster is the symbol. His hunger, his sex, his wandering, these appertain neither to the gods nor to man. They belong to another realm, materially and spiritually, and that is why neither the gods nor man knows precisely what to do with them.

The symbol which Trickster embodies is not a static one. It contains within itself the promise of differentiation, the promise of god and man... he represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual. This constitutes his universal and persistent attraction. And so he became and remained everything to every man--God, animal, human being, hero, buffoon, he who was before good and evil, denier, affirmer, destroyer and creator. If we laugh at him he grins at us. What happens to him happens to us.37

It is clear from the above account that Crow holds elements of the Trickster. Like the Trickster he is an intelligent being which can be at times foolish, often loveably innocent, but irritatingly mischievous, sometimes more powerful than even God, at other times completely helpless and ineffectual. Like the Trickster, he accepts absurd challenges and unequal contests. At times he loses the battle as in "Crow's Fall" where he returns
from his foolhardy contention with the sun charred black. But Crow does not accept the ignominy of defeat. Egoistical and pretentious as ever, despite his humiliation, he defends himself quite rationally and manfully:

He opened his mouth but what came out was charred black. 'Up there,' he managed, 'Where white is black and black is white, I won.'

In other cases, his valiant efforts are completely nullified by his opponent. In "Crow Goes Hunting," all his efforts to capture words are in vain for they elude him every time till he is finally rendered "speechless with admiration."

Though Hughes's Crow is composed of several elements of the Winnebago Indian trickster, it would not be fair to relate him entirely to it. Hughes's intentions regarding its creation were made clear in a letter to Keith Sagar:

My main concern was to produce something with the minimum cultural accretions of the museum sort—something autochthonous and complete in itself, as it might be invented after the holocaust and demolition of all libraries, where essential things spring again—if at all—only from their seeds in nature—and are not lugged around or hoarded as preserved harvests from the past. So the comparative religion/mythology background was irrelevant to me, except as I could forget it. If I couldn't find it again original in Crow, I wasn't interested to make a trophy of it. 38

Hughes's claims to originality have been acclaimed and applauded by critics like Jarold Ramsey who attribute absolute uniqueness and singularity to Hughes's Crow:

In exploring his roots in world folklore, I want to insist that first and last, Crow is Ted Hughes' own astonishing invention, for his own purposes: one might say, admiringly, that he is an addition to folk-literature, not merely something borrowed from it. 39
There is obviously some truth in this adulatory comment, for Hughes's Crow is indeed a unique creature. But to endow it with unimaginable singularity would be taking the praise too far, for the bird is a common sight in folk literature everywhere. Its presence in and around human habitation has made it a popular character in poetry the world over. For instance, the Crow is an integral part of Indian mythopoetic imagination and it has found its place in the puranic legends and folk literature alike. Thus for an Indian reader Hughes's Crow might only enhance the vividness of the Crow image rather than sculpt new idols.

In Hughes, the bird's colour and ugliness are regarded as its negative traits. Yet, it is for these very same qualities that Hughes chooses to write about the Crow rather than any other bird. Hughes makes this idea clear in an interview with the *London Magazine*, after the publication of Crow:

> The first idea of Crow was really an idea of a style. In folktales the prince going on the adventure comes to the stable full of beautiful horses and he needs a horse for the next stage and the King's daughter advises him to take none of the beautiful horses that he'll be offered but to choose the dirty, scabby little foal. You see, I throw out the eagles and choose the Crow.40

The ugliness of the bird, its ungainly appearance, its clumsy movements and its unmusical voice were some of the factors that inspired Hughes to make it his hero in a whole cycle of poems. The various anthropological and other influences followed as a natural sequence.
The eagle mentioned above, which Hughes threw out in order to create the Crow had appeared previously in the guise of hawk in his early poems. In *Prometheus on His Crag*, it reappears once again as a symbol of freedom and exultation. When Prometheus, the epitome of human suffering, regains consciousness, he recognizes an altered sensation and imagines he is weightless and flying like an eagle. He experiences a sense of release and freedom rather than imprisonment. He exults in the vastness of the space and the approach of new "dawn" as an eagle would. All the other birds are insignificant and appear only briefly in their role as emissaries, their sole purpose being to awaken the vulture and bring it into the scene.

The vulture, on the other hand, is of primary importance. Like the hawk, it is all-powerful and goes directly to its unsavoury task. Prometheus, the epitome of strength, is helpless under its harsh and cruel force. Like the hawk, it performs its function unhesitatingly and unflinchingly tears him open "from breast bone to crotch." At times, he is resentful of the bird calling it "filthy-gleeful emissary" for it knows his secret but tells nothing. But he cannot help admiring it for it is every­thing he is not, now. It comes directly from the sun which is "plundered and furious," for its fire has been stolen by Prometheus for mankind. So it "plants" the vulture as an act of revenge. Prometheus respects the vulture for it can live entirely in the present fully conscious of its actions and yet free from the consequences of the act:
It knew what it was doing
It went on doing it
Swallowing not only his liver
But managing also to digest its guilt
And hang itself again just under the sun
Like a heavenly weighing scales
Balancing the gift of life
And the cost of the gift
Without a tremor
As if both were nothing.

It was not plagued with doubts and hesitations as the human Prometheus was. It is simple-minded and concerned only with itself and its immediate actions. It does not have to bear the prolonged existential anguish of a man like Prometheus does or suffer his complex problems. The stolen fire is now within him causing untold suffering. The vulture gradually becomes for him the epitome of both the present and the past, everything he had been and ever wished to be. It is to him the complex symbol of both his freedom and bondage to earthly life, to untold suffering.

Hughes probably felt the need to further explore the possibilities of the vulture, the eagle and even the crow for these birds appear once again along with a whole collection of other birds in Cave Birds. Subtitled "An Alchemical Cave Drama," Cave Birds narrates the tale of a human protagonist tried at a bird court for his crime of rationality. He tries to argue and reason out his innocence at the trial but by virtue of his selfsame actions, he is found guilty. The word "alchemy" seems to be used in Jungian sense to mean the mystical transformation or rebirth occurring within the alchemist during the outward
drama and "cave" suggests the interior inward nature of the course of events.

The poems were inspired by a set of drawings by Leonard Baskin that Hughes saw in 1974. The pictures were sketches of a variety of birds, often distorted and anthropomorphic. After seeing them, Hughes initially wrote a set of nine poems which inspired Baskin to do another ten sketches. Hughes then wrote more poems to go with them, after which Baskin made eight more illustrations to match them. The 31 poems published in 1975 is thus the result of an unusual and remarkable creative partnership.

Baskin explains his interest in birds thus:

Beyond all anthropomorphic, atavistic, and symbolic meanings, one confesses to an infatuation with the formal allure of birds: the obsidian-like surface of the beaks, the crabbed fretwork of the legs and feet with their beak-like claws, the flutter of wings, feather, and down, and the bird's familial disorganization into a plethora of shapes and sizes, and in my favourites, their tessera-like, single-minded devotion to their ways of death. My pleasure has been to swell up owls, bloating them and fashioning them tun-like; surmounting their pneumatic bodies with small heads, with feet gross, monstrous and with hooks beclawed; covering their breasts with a forest of bosses like a great Spanish door. My owls of night and ignorance, genitaled and sexless, hulking, brooding, wailing and screeching, distorted into my vision of aggressive predatory tyranny.41

The grotesque and often intimidating birds in the drawings with their unspoken message and the accompanying titles give ample visual suggestiveness to the poems even though they do not always correspond with the dramatic action in the poems. The sketches are in tune with the pre-Christian ethos embraced by the poems.
The human protagonist of the poems who is the accused at the bird court is seen in terms of different birds as he undergoes transformations in his inner spiritual self. He begins by being a strutting cockerel, which is depicted by Baskin as a Socratic cock, a confident rational being, full of the pride of life. Being an intelligent person, he defends himself logically and argues with the bird court. He does not understand that his arguments are only accentuating his crime of rationality. This realization and his inner transformation are seen in terms of physical death at the hands of the Executioner. The accused protagonist then recognizes his crime and

Confesses his body--
The gripful of daggers.

And confesses his skin--the bedaubed, begauded
Eagle-dancer.

His heart--
The soul-stuffed despot.

His stomach--
The corpse-eating god.

And his hard life-lust--the blind
Swan of insemination.

And his hard brain--the sacred assassin. ("The Accused")

This enlightenment comes about only after his execution, when he is swallowed by a raven. His psychic death is expressed in positive terms--as a filling up rather than an emptiness:

He fills up the mirror, he fills up the cup
He fills up your thoughts to the brims of your eyes

You just see he is filling the eyes of your friends
And now lifting your hand you touch at your eyes

Which he has completely filled up. ("The Executioner")
After this ritualistic death, he is reborn as a Crow and now subjected to fresh trials and adventures. His death is also a rebirth into a new kind of life:

You have no idea what has happened
To what is no longer yours

It feels like the world
Before your eyes opened. ("The Executioner")

With this new life, he has a new knowledge of his true inner self and its shortcomings. He understands his crime of denying the Dionysian aspects of his self. He must now reconcile himself with the repressed and therefore threatening forces of his unconscious. This requires total subjugation of the sceptical intellectual self and this is what he surrenders to as the Knight:

The Knight
Has conquered. He has surrendered everything.

Now he kneels. He is offering up his victory
And unlacing his steel.

. . . . . . .

His sacrifice is perfect. He reserves nothing.

Skylines tug him apart, winds drink him,
Earth itself unravels him from beneath--

His submission is flawless. ("The Knight")

This perfect and complete submission puts him in an ideal situation for reformation. New ordeals and tribulations await him in the hall of judgement:

A blot has knocked me down. It clogs me.
A globe of blot, a drop of unbeing.

Nothingness came close and breathed on me--a frost

A shawl of annihilation has curled me up like a new foetus.

("A flayed crow in the hall of judgement"
But now such torments—either physical or mental—are not capable of torturing him. His patience and capacity for tolerance have led him beyond the scope of such tortures. He is quite resigned to his new role as the guilty:

A great fear rests
On the thing I am, as a feather on a hand.

I shall not fight
Against whatever is allotted to me.

My soul skinned, and the soul-skin laid out
A mat for my judges. ("A flayed crow in the hall of judgement")

This new, purified individual, who has conquered even fear and is the soul of acceptance goes through several initiation ordeals supervised by several owls and eagles, until he finds his ideal female counterpart. The union with his female principle is expressed in physical terms. The woman, who might have also undergone a similar death and series of trials helps him find his true self and he reciprocates her actions. Expressed in physical terms

He oils the delicate cogs of her mouth
She inlays with deep-cut scrolls the nape of his neck
He sinks into place the inside of her thighs

So, gasping with joy, with cries of wonderment
Like two gods of mud
Sprawling in the dirt, but with infinite care

They bring each other to perfection.

In this poem "Bride and groom lie hidden for three days," perhaps one of the most striking of Hughes's poems in this collection, Hughes communicates the very essence of his ideals. The need for the existence of man's Dionysian self along with the Apollonian
has been one of his major concerns from the very beginning. Here the rational self unites completely with the instinctive and the emotional to find perfection in itself. But before this becomes possible, total surrender is a necessary pre-requisite. He has also to undergo much stress and strain.

The protagonist changed from cockerel to Crow, now rises through another transformation to become a falcon. He is released from his earlier convictions which were his bondages. Hughes describes the metamorphosis in superb poetic language in "The risen":

His each wingbeat—a convict's release.
What he carried will be plenty.

He slips behind the world's brow
As music escapes its skull, its clock and its skyline.

Under his sudden shadow, flames cry out among thickets.
When he soars, his shape

Is a cross, eaten by light
On the Creator's face.

... ... ...
Where he alights
A skin sloughs from a leafless apocalypse.

On his lens
Each atom engraves with a diamond.

In the wind-fondled crucible of his splendour
The dirt becomes God. ("The risen")

He is beyond the clutches of ordinary religion and its conventional constraints. By denying beauty and other orthodox possessions, he has gained an unmatched splendour by which even the trite and commonplace can be converted into something glorious and magnificent.
But the shining glory of the moment is dimmed by a serious shortcoming. The transformed individual is not human. In Hughes's vision, the human being has to undergo a similarly splendid transformation if the modern condition is to be improved. Such a conversion has not yet been achieved even in the poem as evident from the ending:

But when will he land
On a man's wrist. ("The risen")

This is the drawback that deprives the grand finale of its lustrous glory. The natural outcome of the strange sequence of events does not in any way touch mankind or affect any change in his circumstances. The whole ritual becomes meaningless unless it comes within the scope of human endeavour. Hughes speaks of the possibility of such a shortcoming in an earlier interview with Egbert Faas:

We go on writing poems because one poem never gets the whole account right. There is always something missed. At the end of the ritual up comes a goblin. Anyway within a week the whole thing has changed, one needs a fresh bulletin. And works go dead, fishing has to be abandoned, the shoal has moved on. While we struggle with a fragmentary Orestes some complete Bacchae moves past too deep down to hear. We get news of it later . . . too late. In the end, one's poems are ragged dirty undated letters from remote battles and weddings and one thing and another. 42

The use of the same words by Hughes in the last poem "Finale" probably indicates Hughes's awareness of such a failing in these set of poems.

The protagonist is not the only character in this "alchemical cave drama." He is invaded by a host of spectral
birds who, in fact, determine the course of events in this internal drama. The psychic split in the rational being's consciousness and his subsequent transformations and tribulations are in fact engineered by these creatures.

The accused is, at the very beginning, interrogated by a vultureess. She is relentless in her questioning of him. Like the sun, she has an acute and all encompassing vision which lets her miss nothing. She studies him carefully and thoroughly with the aid of barbed and righteous questions some of which irritate her considerably. Hughes describes her thus:

This bird is the sun's key-hole.
The sun spies through her. Through her
He ransacks the camouflage of hunger.

Investigation
By grapnel. ("The Interrogator")

After studying him carefully with her "olfactory x-ray", and gathering all the necessary proof she collects a "dripping bagful of evidence" and sweeps away into the "courts of the after life."

The judge is depicted by Baskin as a plump and well-fed creature which he calls "an Oven-Ready Pirhana-Bird," a title suggestive of its voracious, cannibalistic nature. The picture Hughes presents is both comical and repulsive. The bird is

The garbage-sack of everything that is not
The Absolute onto whose throne he lowers his buttocks.

Clowning, half-imbecile,
A Nero of the unalterable

His gluttony
Is a strange one--his leavings are guilt and sentence. ("The judge")
He is a unusual combination of the comic and the foolish, extreme heartless cruelty and greed. He appears to be eating constantly, gobbling up "the substance of those who have fouled" and digesting them silently as he squats listening in the bird court.

The Plaintiff or the complainant is obviously an owl. Clearly a wise and knowledgeable creature, she is described by Hughes as "the bird of light." She is clearly the protagonist's other self, his shadow, which is now accusing him of neglecting her.

This is your moon of pain—and the wise night-bird
Your smile's shadow.

This bird
Is the life-divining bush of your desert. ("The Plaintiff")

Being his shadow, her presence determines his existence, his survival. Hughes gives a prose account of the clash between the plaintiff who is his other self and the protagonist, which his commentary on the action:

He is confronted in court with his victim. It is his own demon whom he now sees for the first time. The hero realizes he is out of his depth. He protests as an honourable platonist, thereby reenacting his crime in front of his judges. He still cannot understand his guilt. He cannot understand the sequence of cause and effect.

It is only as a consequence of the plaintiff's wise and timely action that the protagonist is able to recognize his folly and rectify the inner directions of his life.

The Executioner is a raven typically black and awe-inspiring. But unusually enough he is not destructive or murderous. His manner of execution is described in positive terminology. Instead
of taking away from the living, he fills up the universe as seen by the protagonist with darkness:

He fills up the mirror, he fills up the cup
He fills up your thoughts to the brims of your eyes

You just see he is filling the eyes of your friends
And now lifting your hand you touch at your eyes
Which he has completely filled up

But it is with hemlock that the executor is filling up his senses that his vision is darkened and enclosed. Clearly this death is not a complete termination of his personality for it leads to a new birth, a few awareness of himself and the world outside, a new vision.

After his death and rebirth, he is baptised by a pelican, a motherly bird with a pouch below its beak for carrying food. The baptism incorporates a reviving and renewing of the protagonist's self since

The baptist
Enfolds you
In winding waters, a swathing of balm
A mummy bandaging
Of all your body's puckering hurts
In the circulation of sea. ("The baptist")

While the action of the baptist resembles the bandaging of a dead man to make a mummy out of him, it is also a soothing gesture that helps revive the circulation of blood in a sick or dying man.

In the travails that befall him after his rebirth, the protagonist is watched over by first an owl, the loyal Mother and then an eagle. But they are not the true guides to the
right path. It is a "Scarecrow Swift" who directs him to the route he should choose by the following words:

    When everything that can fall has fallen
    Something rises.
    And leaving here, and evading there
    And that and this, is my headway. ("The guide")

It is only when he has completely given himself up and surrendered his soul that he can find succour, in her opinion. For,

    Then the non-wind, a least breath
    Fills you from easy sources. ("The guide")

And that would be the simple means of his redemption.

Thus the presence of these spectral birds make the bird drama more lively and animated. Apart from participating in the action, the birds are most of the agents of action who manipulate the course of events and the psychic changes within the protagonist. They represent the innumerable, nameless factors that can engender such a psychic split within an individual and change his entire outlook.

In the Crow poems and even in some of the poems leading to the Crow, the serpent is used as a significant character. In "Logos" and "Reveille"—poems from Wodwo—when all the characters meant to figure in Crow put in an appearance, the Snake is also present. The serpent arrives to destroy the contented calm of Adam and Eve and the peaceful beauty of the Garden of Eden. Being the principle character in "Reveille," he brings in a fearful presence into the sacred land. He was obviously not "One of God's ordinary creatures," but the epitome of the strong powers of evil and hatred with
The black, thickening river of his body
Glittered in giant loops
Around desert mountains and away
Over the ashes of the future.

It attempts to destroy not the present alone with its gigantic Satanic presence, but also to effect the total annihilation of the future. In Keith Sagar's words:

The serpent is also the great dragon which holds the world in its coils, poisoning, crushing, burning, the principle of corruption in all things.\(^4\)

In the Crow poems, the snake is clearly the Biblical serpent. When his presence is first noticed, God and Adam and Eve are reduced to a state of terror and awe. Hughes's description of the reptile is very accurate yet suggestive of hidden nuances:

When the serpent emerged, earth-bowel brown,
From the hatched atom
With its alibi self twisted around it

Lifting a long neck
And balancing that deaf and mineral stare
The sphynx of the final fact
And flexing on that double flame flicker tongue
A syllable like the rusting of the spheres

Hughes has employed images from various sources to create the desired effect of fear and pain which only Crow remains unaffected. He finds an easy solution to the unpleasant situation by beating up the creature and eating it up. In one sense, by this action, the Crow has rid the world of a menace and therefore remedied the horrible religious error. In another sense, he has internalized the evil and therefore only served to intensify the strength of the Satanic forces.
In "Apple Tragedy," on the other hand, God and the serpent seem to have exchanged places for it is the serpent who is religiously resting himself on the seventh day after creation. interloper" arrives with a new invention--cider. This new finding creates utter chaos with Adam, Eve and the Serpent getting their codes of morality and decency, confused. The serpent is gentleman-like and reserved in his reactions, like an average upright English man. But God contrives to get them all into a confused state when

Adam drank and said: 'Be my god.'
Eve drank and opened her legs
And called to the cockeyed serpent
And gave him a wild time.

Things would not have taken a violently dramatic turn unless God had intervened. And it was by his provocation, that Adam, Eve and the serpent regained consciousness and the present condition of hatred between the human and the reptile came into being.

In another poem "Snake Hymn", the Snake is interpreted to be the blood of Adam. It provoked Adam into action and under the guise of love inaugurated the sexual act which continued in Eve to produce their inheritors.

The snake has not merely been interpreted as the object of evil as the Biblical serpent in the Garden of Eden. As in D. H. Lawrence, it assumes mysterious power as the symbol of sexuality.

Joseph Campbell, after making a study of the myths and rites connected with the serpents all over the world, remarks:
Wherever nature is revered as self-moving, and so inherently divine, the serpent is revered as symbolic of its divine life.45

This attitude toward the snake appears to be the one taken by Hughes in "Apple Tragedy." In the pre-Christian state, the snake occupied the place of God and was worship by all mankind. But with the advent of Christianity, the serpent lost its pride of place. As Campbell continues:

... in the book of Genesis, where the Serpent is cursed, all nature is devaluated and its power of life regarded as nothing in itself; nature is here self-moving indeed, self-willed, but only by virtue of the life given it by a superior being, its creator.

In Christian mythology, supplementing the Old Testament, the serpent is normally identified with Satan, and the words addressed by Yahweh to the serpent in the Garden ("I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel") are taken to refer to the crucified son of Mary, by whose wounds Satan's force was to be broken.46

This Christian view of the tale of the serpent is what Hughes has depicted in the latter half of "Apple Tragedy." Though he tells the story in his own unique manner, the major ingredients of the tale are Biblical.

Like the Crow, the serpent also alternates between its role as an agent of evil and that of a helpless victim. Hughes's attitude towards the violent and brutal agents of nature is gradually transformed from awe-struck wonder and terror-filled admiration to sympathy for the creature permanently caught within the trap of its vital necessities. In Under the North Star (1981),
Hughes describes a variety of American wild animals. The predatory tendencies of the animals and their complete absence of emotional qualms are the aspects given greater importance by the poet. The mindless cruelty with which the carnivorous mammal in Hughes's "The Wolverine" (UNS) goes about filling his stomach and enjoying himself is shocking even to the bear who on hearing of its activities "feels the skull creak under his skull/And his smile fails." But the Wolverine is quite unaffected and goes about his business as usual joyfully:

The gleeful evil Wolverine
Belly full of song
Sings: "I am coming to swallow you all, hiya!"
Loping along.

Though the animal is quite happy at its natural pursuits, Hughes is not very pleased with its actions. In "The Muskellunge" (UNS), he creates a myth out of the large gamefish belonging to the pike family. He stresses the cruel and continuous hunger of the fish which has no scruples and hides far deep inside the water in order to hide this drawback:

Muskellunge hid his soul, where it's safe,
In the middle of the earth.
Then took a job with the lake
As jaws
For the hunger of sunk bedrock.

When the heavens fell, this old witch doctor
Rescued all the gods in one bag
And swallowed it. He has them safe in his belly.
Now he eats only for them.

Hughes has nothing but contempt for the creature who runs away from the light to hide its guilty conscience and then tries to
find justification for its actions. But Hughes is not always merely contemptuous of these creatures that are trapped into brutality by the summons of their instinctive nature. In "Woodpecker" (UNS), Hughes is full of pity for the blind and mindless behaviour of the bird. Though initially derisive at the bird's mindless activity, Hughes later takes a more sympathetic stance:

When Woodpecker's jack-hammer head
   Starts up its dreadful din,
Knocking the dead bough double dead
   How do his eyes stay in?

Pity the poor dead oak that cries
   In terrors and in pains.
But pity more Woodpecker's eyes
   And bouncing rubber brains.

It seems to be more as an extension of the pity Hughes feels towards the inanimate tree that leads him to sympathize with the bird than real grief. Nevertheless, the admiration for the creatures of the wild seemed to have undergone a sea change giving place to a new balanced outlook toward life.

A similar attitude prevails in the poems of Flowers and Insects (1986). In these poems the human protagonist feels very close to the world of animals and birds, appreciating their beauty and vitality and at the same time feeling guilty for his own evil and anti-natural activities. In "Where I Sit Writing My Letter" (F & I), the protagonist feels alienated from the natural world and its tremendous vitality, especially the baby starlings on a quiet day:
Now they all rise
Flutter-floating, oddly eddying,
Squalling their dry gargles. Then mad, they
Hurl off, on a new wrench of excitement,
Leaving me out.

He can only be disturbed from his intellectual preoccupations by their excited activity leaving him "fevered" and "addled" and glorying in the wonder of the activity.

Hughes choice of wild animals and creatures with an aggressive nature as subjects for his poetry has led critics like Michael Schmidt to criticise him strongly:

It is not only that he chooses single-minded animals, nor that the chosen animals—like the men he admires—breathe a different air from the general, that from time to time worries the reader; it is the particular quality of single-mindedness he is drawn to: not the bee, for instance, but the blood beasts.47

By the same token he has been called a "Zoo Laureate"48 and a poet of violence. Though Hughes has portrayed a large number of wild animals and predators with naturally violent tendencies, it was not merely to glorify violence but rather to warn mankind against the consequences of excessive energy that he did so.

Hughes's ideal notion of a society was of one fortified against excessive violence on the one hand, and yet not regressing into dull sterility and barren unproductivity on the other. Animals provided the ideal counters to highlight the merits as well as the defects of such a perfect situation.
NOTES

1 Titles of reviews and articles on Hughes's work such as Ben Howard's "Terror's Ambassador," Ian Hamilton's "A Mouthful of Blood," Karl Miller's "Fear and Fang," are themselves indicative of the general critical trend.


7 Egbert Faas, Ted Hughes, p. 191.

8 Ibid., p. 201.

9 Ibid., p. 197.

10 Ibid., pp. 197-98.


12 Egbert Faas, p. 200.


15 Spectator, 21 March 1970


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., p. 15.


22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., pp. 20-21.

24 Keith Sagar, The Achievement of Ted Hughes, p. 8.

25 Egbert Faas, Ted Hughes, p. 199.

26 Ibid.

27 Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Panther," Requiem and Other Poems.


29 Egbert Faas, Ted Hughes, p. 34.

30 Ibid., p. 199.


32 George Macbeth, Poetry 1500 to 1965


37 Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes*, p. 120.


41 Ibid., p. 184.

42 Ibid., p. 173.

43 Ibid., p. 73.


45 Ibid.


47 Dennis Walder, *Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath* (Milton Keynes: Open Univ. Press, 1976),