CHAPTER IV

VIOLENCE: A PARADOX OF CREATION AND DESTRUCTION

When basic existential queries of man get progressively modulated into poetic artifacts, they become vital documents, imparting deep insights into life. This, in turn, makes them effective signs that can be decoded into valid inferences in the cultural context of human social set-up. The poetic endeavour of Hughes can be analyzed effectively in the light of this observation as he is centrally pre-occupied with the questions of the self, the world, and God. Hughes's much debated book *Crow* (1970) is an experimental attempt to explore the question of God or the creator. The religious concept of God as all good and all powerful undergoes a radical re-definition in the Hughesian scheme of things. This is made possible by choosing a protagonist who tries to understand the question of God through experiments. Hughes finds Crow an apt instrument for this experimental process. In this experimental process Crow becomes an iconoclast, a figurative mouthpiece of the poet. Geoffry Thurley, rightly outlines the significance of the volume thus: "The importance, of Crow in Western literature in the mid-twentieth century cannot be overestimated: it annihilates—and transcends in annihilating, a whole phase of European consciousness".

The Crow sequence of poems with their consistent depiction of binary opposites such as matter and spirit, light and darkness, instinct and intellect seem to testify that Hughes's poetry is built upon the traditionally accepted concept of philosophical dualism even as it maintains an antagonistic attitude towards it. It is generally felt that Crow poems with their excessive display of physical violence show Hughes's protest against modern man's rational and

---

passionless quest for truth at the expense of his emotion and instinct. Despite this, consistently in his poetry, Hughes employs the Cartesian mode of analysis based on the Christian concept of the dichotomy of body and soul as a perennial reality.

The composition of this universe based on a concept of diametrically opposed principles such as light and darkness and matter and spirit can be traced back to the very origin and essence of Christian religion. The Bible says God created man from mud and breathed into him an immortal soul. The concept of an immortal soul in a mortal body thus gives rise to the basic concept of dualism in man extending to the created universe. In Christian terminology, the entire system of this universe is thus reduced to a conglomeration of diametrically opposed principles. Through logically developed arguments, Christianity establishes the sway of spirit over matter and proves the superiority of intellect and reason over instinct and emotion. The entire fabric of Western philosophy and literature is an off-shoot of this basic premise of Christian theology. This has led to an excessive degradation and desecration of Nature which is basically an organic system of matter.

The Christian concept of God as pure good and pure reason is elongated into man who is a faint reflection of God. This is evident from the Biblical statement that man is created in the likeness and image of God (Genesis). The antagonist posture of Christianity towards the material world is further accentuated by propagating the idea that matter prevents the flow of the light of reason into man. Hence, according to Christian concept the body of man as well as the organic principle of Nature composed of gross matter, where the light of reason cannot penetrate, should be discarded in order to achieve liberation or the salvation of the soul. Hence, the
concept of the body and soul as mutually contradictory and warring principle in man has become the solid foundation of Western thought. It has been consistently advocating total subjugation and enslavement of the body by the superior guiding principle of reason. The Christian concept of God is thus the highest form of this guiding principle which is pure good and pure reason that has established complete sway over the grossness of matter, or the building material of this cosmos. Graham Bradshaw, in a critical study of the corpus of Hughes's poetry, clearly outlines that Hughes's chief concern in Crow is a "diagnostic concern with the course of modern civilization ... the effect of dualism and of the revolution of thought in the 17th century England."²

Hughes's philosophical inquiries are always backed by viable scientific theories. This is evident from his preoccupations in his early major volumes like The Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal. In them, he proves violence as indestructible energy. This scientifically viable premise not only initiates his philosophical quest but also renders logical exactness and rational credibility to his poetic endeavour. Crow takes up the most important question of God. Hence, Charu Sheel Singh describes the poetic process of Hughes "in terms of perceiving analogues and discovering the archetypal significance of things. The principle of vitality in life already discovered, Hughes's perception, as it works upon the objects outside, reduces things into gyrating currents; he draws out things from their vital essence."³

Thus Ted Hughes's perception of objects as currents of energy or violence forms the stable foundation of his poetics.

The intertextual dimension of the work, especially its affinity to Biblical narratives together with the mythical associations of the bird Crow renders great significance to violence. The elements of religion and mythology bring in a parallel of contemporaneity and antiquity. The endeavour of the poet can be considered to be an experimental attempt to understand the question of God. It is a new and different way of looking at reality as Hughes claims it in his interview with Ekbert Faas:

I throw out eagles and choose the Crow. The idea was originally, just to write his songs, the songs that a Crow would sing. In other words, songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple, super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say without any other consideration and that's the basis of the style of the whole thing.

The question of violence in Crow series of poems, together with scenes of physical mutilations invites unfavourable criticism. Violence is obvious and even apocalyptic in the whole sequence. "Crow suffers violence at the hands of some metaphysical entity, or is the more or less helpless agent of violence, or tells some apocalyptic story. They tend to be repetitive in form and their language varies between gangster - movie crudity and surrealism." Such a charge is justifiable, because Hughes explores the universe through Crow who inhabits a reality which is far from the humanly understood concept of the universe. The truth of Crow is violent, grim and unmelodic like his own song. It is far removed from the human analysis of empirical reality. The

---

excessive cerebral pre-occupation in man has undone his essential instinctual and genetic characteristics. The violence in Crow embodies this contemporary reality in full measure as A.K. Weatherhead says:

In Crow, the sense of human order and human feeling has atrophied; and the fulgurations of its after-shine illuminate only a barren scenario in which pain, abundant enough, is without a context and not to be understood, a desert which no nightingale fills with inviolable voice. The formlessness of most of the verse may be attributed to the loss of faith in the efficacy of the human power of order: Crow responds to the pain of an amoral universe with raucous laughter.

The scientific dictum "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" is the basic structure of the Crow sequence of poems. Thus the progression of events in them follow the Blakean concept of contraries as an essential condition of life. Hughes pushes this scientific idiom to such an extent that it becomes the very basis of Crow's existence. Crow's actions are patterned to suit this basic premise. Thus Crow can encounter pain and suffering with laughter. All his actions follow this basic law of Nature. Hence the violence of death and destruction is counterbalanced by the violence of creation. True to its nature, Crow thus becomes an agent in this process of creation and destruction:

The creative and destructive capacities in Crow are related to the creative - destructive nature of the universe. The inevitability of a moral awareness revealed in Crow is closely related to the inevitability of metaphysical questioning. Ultimately this is a matter of the concept of a self, both in relation to other creatures and in relation to the larger process of the universe.  

6 Ibid., p. 108.
7 Ibid., p. 145.
In this sense, violence in *Crow* achieves the status of biological necessity functioning as a paradox of creation and destruction.

Through *Crow*, Hughes attempts to uncover another tranche of existence. This is evident from the character of Crow, which is no longer the objectification of a social, political or moral antelechy, but something amorphous and contingent. Drawing a comparison between Blake's Tyger and Hughes's Crow, David Lodge says both creatures "symbolise some kind of non-ethical energy or principle in the universe which is not satisfactorily accounted for by the orthodox religion." The amorphous nature of Crow eludes the grasp of our normal comprehension. The indeterminacy of Crow's actions is made all the more acute by its intertextual affinities. The book may be read in relation to a host of precursor texts. According to Julia Kristeva intertextuality is "the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position." Thus intertextuality is basically a permutation of texts, a space where several utterances from other texts intersect creating fresh impressions. When one text is super-imposed on another, and when the two correspond, the former text becomes obliterated in the newly created situation. This implies that literary texts contain umpteen echoes from other sources which can be located within the totality of the newly created text.

---

8 David Lodge, "Crow and the Cartoons", *Critical Quarterly* 13, spring 1971, p. 41.

Keith Sagar successfully locates such echoes in *Crow* exposing the mythic significance of the protagonist:

Crow has a distinguished lineage in mythology. The God of healing known variously as Kronos, Saturn, Aesculapius and Apollo was a Crow-god. A celtic name for him was Bran. Crow is a totem of England because Bran, when he knew himself to be dying, ordered his head to be severed and buried on the 'White Hill' (now Tower Hill) as a charm to protect England from invasion.... The celtic death-goddess Morrigu was a Crow. She is the underground form of the original life-goddess. The Crow is prominent in many other mythologies from America to China and in Alchemy. All these are ancestors of Hughes's Crow. 10

Hughes has chosen Crow as the protagonist for other reasons as well. The uniqueness of the bird renders it an apt instrument in exploring the question of God which has a significance far beyond the comprehension of normal minds. Crow is equipped with such characteristics that it can penetrate efficiently into the dark layers of the empirical reality to flush out the nature of the creator behind this material world. Thus, Sagar finds Crow to be unique and outlines its universal significance:

The Crow is the most intelligent of birds, the most widely distributed (being common on every continent) and the most omnivorous (no carrion will eat a Crow). Crows are of course black all over, solitary almost indestructible and the largest and least musical of song birds. It is to be expected that the songs of the Crow will be harsh and grating. He kills a little himself, and as carrion eater, is dependent on the killing of others and first on the scene at many disasters. 11

The account of Crow's life and activities beginning with its lineage as given by Hughes bespeaks of a messianic parallel. The pseudo-Biblical narrative is further strengthened by the obvious reference to Adam, Eve and the serpent.

11 Ibid., p. 105.
"At first sight the mythological allusiveness of Crow seems to belie Hughes's claim that there was no planning in the poems themselves. The protagonist, in a variety of apocryphal narratives, shares the stage with the Biblical creator, the serpent or Adam and Eve." 12 Even the structure of the whole work has an affinity with the Bible. The book's indebtedness to Bible is so evident that Hahn Claire declares:

Crow presents a synoptic account of the continuous historical action of the old and new Testaments from beginning to apocalyptic end. Hughes reinterprets the central mythic pattern of the Bible; his narratives deal with the creation of man and woman, the fall in the garden, the importance of language, art and science, the suffering of the son of God, and the ultimate destruction of the world. 13

The books begins by tracing the genesis of Crow. The poems in the collection chiefly deal with the observation and experiments of Crow. Thus, they may be categorized into three distinct divisions.

1. The Genesis of Crow
2. Crow's Observations
3. The Experiments of Crow

1. The Genesis of Crow

Hughes, in his attempt to make Crow unique divests it of all traditional elements. The creation of Crow results not from the pure God "logos" but from a principle that even "logos" is unable to comprehend. So God is compelled to put Crow through a series of tests before allowing him existence. The uniqueness of Crow stems from the fact that he eludes the

12 Ekbert Faas, op. cit., p. 98.
comprehension of God himself. This in turn makes him a contender and a superior force in the realm of created universe.

The opening poem in the sequence "Two Legends" is a literal description of the creation of Crow. Crow comes into existence out of blackness and emptiness. It is a flying negative from the realm of emptiness. This doesn't mean that Crow has no place in the universe. Eskimo legends tell us that in the beginning raven was the only creature and the world was black like him. Though there are many such legends, the central account of Crow which Hughes makes use of can be described thus:

God, having created the world, has a recurring nightmare.... The nightmare appears to be independent of the creation, and God cannot understand it. The nightmare is full of mockery of the creation, especially of man. God challenges the nightmare to do better. This is just what the nightmare has been waiting for. It plunges down into matter and creates Crow. God tests Crow by putting him through a series of trials and ordeals which sometimes result in Crow being dismembered, transformed or obliterated, but Crow survives them all little changed.  

Crow's resemblance to the trickster figure described in the winnebago Indian cycle of stories is undeniable. This trickster figure is common to all primitive societies. No generation understands him fully and no generation can do without him. He is indispensable for every society. His nature is paradoxical because he was before good and evil, a denier and affirmer, a destroyer and creator. Paul Radin outlines his function thus: "Trickster is at one and at the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is always duped by himself .... He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions.

16 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 106.
and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being." 15

The trickster nature of Crow sees him through all his adventures. It renders his actions a paradoxical dimension of creation as well as destruction. Hence violence in the volume is primarily qualified by this paradoxical nature. As Crow is the most unmusical of birds, the absence of "music" in the work is in consonance with the tone of the entire sequence. It is built upon a combination of mutually contradictory elements that yield paradoxical results. Thus, the very existence of Crow results from a total negation of life by holding on to darkness.

Crow's vehement resistance to light doesn't prevent him from coming into existence, though light is an essential condition for the soul to come into being.

Black was the without eye
Black the within tongue
Black was the heart
Black the liver, Black the lungs
Unable to suck in light. 16

These opening lines emphatically declare the paradoxical nature of Crow. Though Crow is completely given over to the realm of darkness, negation and death, paradoxically at the end he finds himself alive as a flying darkness. He flies over a black rainbow bent in emptiness. Even the rainbow which is a beautiful combination of all the colours becomes black when it is related to Crow. He is energy itself in its primal form and is hence indestructible: "Crow's flying is at least a sign of life and self-hood.... He is the unkillable urge to keep trying inspite of everything. He is energy itself, infinitely corruptible, infinitely educable and

transformable. In that sense he is stronger than death."¹⁷ Since the very existence of Crow bespeaks the paradoxical dimension of energy, his actions necessarily embody this aspect. As a result violence in the entire volume becomes a paradox of creation and destruction.

This paradoxical nature of violence is elucidated in the second poem "Lineage" which is modelled on the pattern of the Biblical account of creation in a mock-serious tone. Thus, the creation of Crow along Biblical lines paradoxically and by necessity entails the destruction of the Biblical account of creation as Stuart Hirschberg says: "The long series of negations that extend from the most elemental instincts of self-preservation to exalted concepts of Divinity not only produce Crow but make God a relatively late arrival on the evolutionary scene. "Lineage" in effect is an existential reversal of the creation myth as related in Genesis."¹⁸ The creation of Crow thus necessarily begets a distinct tranche of existence compelling us to revalue the already existing corpus of creation account provided by Christianity.

In order to create his universe, Crow demolishes one by one the Christian concept of the universe outlined in the Bible. Thus, the third poem, "Examination at Womb-door is a re-structuring of the baptismal rites of Christianity. The poem is a series of questions aimed at proving the superiority of death. In the baptismal rite, the candidate denounces death and its hold on life by affirming his faith in Christ who has conquered death by his resurrection. Thus, it is a rite in which the candidate renounces death and affirms eternal life through Christ.


The questions which Crow faces and the answers he gives reveal that death is stronger than hope and love. This is an outright rejection of the Christian concept of redemption. If death is stronger than hope and love, then the Christian concept of redemption becomes meaningless and ineffective as hope and love are the foundations of Christian faith. Crow builds up the basis of his existence on blackness and death and emerges stronger than death.

Who is stronger than hope? Death
Who is stronger than the will? Death
Stronger than love? Death
Stronger than life? Death
But who is stronger than death? Me, evidently
Pass, Crow. 19

The poem is a confrontation between existence and non-existence at the most elemental level. Life, even if for the briefest moment, is a triumph over death. In this sense, Crow's existence is a triumph over death as Hirschberg observes:

In folklore myth and legend, Crow is a scavenger who derives his strength and nourishment from assimilating what death is incapable of ingesting, what death leaves behind. Thus, Crow is stronger than death since he feeds off death itself. The conclusion is both paradoxical and inescapable; for Crow the only secure basis on which to build a life is not hope, will or love but death. 20

The creation of Crow's universe simultaneously accomplishes the demolition of the basic concepts of Christian belief. Thus, the universe of Crow is patterned on the basic assumption of violence as a paradox of creation and destruction. The creation of a new thing invariably entails the destruction of certain other things. All the poems in the sequence are built upon this basic law of Nature.

19 Ted Hughes, Crow, p. 15.
The paradox of Crow's existence is meaningfully brought out in the next poem, "A Kill", which is in fact the birth of Crow. Since Crow embodies the negatives of life, birth is described paradoxically as death. The violence of Crow's birth and the consequent physical torture associated with it becomes a paradox because "Crow comes to earth, sliding out, falling to the rubbish—a marvellous touch for the scavenger Crow's beginning. So, on the occasion of life's most vibrant moment, Crow is flogged, shot, nailed, strangled, clubbed and smashed." The torture mentioned at the birth of Crow such as balled-brains" and nailed down by his own ribs" has close parallels in Celtic and Norse mythology. Usually such physical mutilations result in psychic positives. But in the case of Crow everything goes black. So, at the moment of birth he experiences pangs of death, rendering violence into a paradox of creation and destruction.

Finding himself alive, the first thing Crow does is to break free of his mother. "Crow and Mamma" is an explicit attempt in this direction. Paradoxically all his attempt to break free of his mother strangely end up in deep realization of his dependence on her. In his urge to escape the dependency of the womb of his mother, Crow is ready to go to any extent. He employs such mechanical devices as cars, planes and even rockets which drill clear through the heart of mother earth in his bid to escape this pull of gravity. For a while, he relaxes in the cosy comfort of the rocket, but when he peers out at the universe, he crashlands at the moon and finds himself still "under his mother's buttocks." Hughes, thus

21 Ibid., pp. 73-74.
shows that even technology cannot ensure man's independence from his environment. It provides him with temporary relief only to intensify the reality of his dependence on it. In his bid to escape, he may violate the earth or cause ecological imbalance which is self-damaging in the ultimate analysis. Thus, he can never escape from the constraints imposed on him by Nature even with the aid of most sophisticated technology like that of a rocket.

In Crow's development as a trickster, the influence of the mother has to be got rid of, because the trickster's birth always entails the death of the mother in most trickster myths. Crow's first attempt at independence turns out to be disastrous. The violence of Crow's attempt to break free of his mother's influence is paradoxical in nature because when he laughs she weeps. Finally Crow enters this world through the dark door way as described in the poem, "The Door."

Only there is a doorway in the wall-
A black doorway:
The eye's pupil.
Through that doorway came Crow.
Flying from sun to sun he found his home. 22

Crow can be identified here with Satan, who exiled from heaven—the region of light, travels the infinite chasm of emptiness, blackness and chaos and decides to play on God's creations. Much in the same way Crow finds the world's earthen wall and enters it through the black doorway and makes it his home. His very first action shows him to be a trickster. After the creation of Adam and Eve, God fell into a slumber, thinking of the great task of infusing them with a soul. The poem "A Childish Prank" presents this comic situation. The intervention of Crow at this juncture creates

22 Ted Hughes, Crow, p. 18.
further complications. Crow solves the problem by bestowing sexuality on man in his crude mischievous manner.

Crow laughed
He bit the worm, God's only son,
Into two writhing halves.
He stuffed into man the tail-half
With the wounded end hanging out.
He stuffed the head-half head first into woman
And it crept in deeper and up.
To peer out through her eyes
Calling its tail-half join up quickly, quickly
Because it was painful. 23

Thus, Crow's very first action though mischievous, is similar to God's act of creation. As a trickster, Crow doesn't feel any guilt and is quite oblivious of the implications of his action. But, the nature and implication of his act necessarily make him a creator who simultaneously accomplishes the destruction of God's purpose and design on man. Crow is amused to play such a prank on man and sincerely believes that he has improved upon God's creation. It is this evasive nature of Crow as a trickster that makes violence a paradox of creation and destruction. According to Hirschberg Crow's prank makes him an equal and even a superior force when compared with God:

By infusing man with sexuality instead of a soul,
Crow plays a trick on God who is not only presented as indecisive and sleepy but incompetent as well, since the problem of infusing a soul was so great it dragged him to sleep. This is clearly a parody of Genesis chapter 2 verse 7, where Adam is formed from the earth's dust and has immortal soul breathed into him. 24

Crow is so attenuated to his physicality that God's attempt to teach him about love generates further problems. "Each of Crow's attempt to say 'love' produces evil, first in the form of the 'white shark', then a bluefly, a tsetse, a mosquito--disease carrying insects and finally an agonized urgent sexual drive. Despite God's attempt to teach Crow to

23 Ibid., p. 19.
24 Stuart Hirschberg, op. cit., p. 75.
speak the word 'love' what results is destruction, disease and desire. Thus God's effort to teach Crow about love ends up in bestowing stifling sexuality upon man. Whatever be the wish of God, Crow can't be made to go against his nature. He can create only according to his paradoxical nature which reflects the philosophical dualism perpetuated by Christian theology. The uneasy co-existence of an immortal soul in a mortal body is further complicated by Crow's action of bestowing stifling sexuality on man as Michael Crafton observes:

After the vulva "loves" man's neck, he strives for air against it. The joke here is that since love is impossible without strife, attraction meaningless without repulsion, and since the sentimental goal of love is unity, Crow provides the logical extension of that goal, love and strife bound together in immobile suffocation.

The poems that come under this section, categorized as Crow's genesis may be viewed as a mimetic inversion of Biblical episodes or a satiric parody minus creativity. This criticism gains currency when viewed from the stylistic angle of the book. It may appear to be a clever re-arrangement and re-ordering of Biblical episodes in a haphazard manner primarily meant to shock the faith of a simple believer. Yet on each reading the text continues to present fresh aporias that make the reader's interpretative options diverge innumerable. The charge thus becomes invalid as the text is arcane enough to occlude multiple interpretations.

The messianic role of Crow against the background of his chaotic universe ruled by instincts and the bravado of his irresponsible acts bespeak an entirely different world order. Beneath this apparent contradiction, one may detect the basic

---

25 Ibid., p. 76.

structure of the Bible in the progression of events in Crow. The literal adoption of the account of creation from the book of Genesis and its distortion become subjects of elaborate treatment. The almost verbatim reproduction of the baptismal rite as seen in the poem "Examination at the Womb-Door" betrays Hughes's indebtedness to a borrowed form. It also damages his professed aim in writing Crow.

Crow is conceived to be a myth that is destined to survive the worst kind of destruction. Yet it is built on the very same basis of Christianity. In effect, it becomes an indirect acknowledgement of the efficacy and validity of the Biblical structure of the creation account. What Hughes does is only to change the content of the narrative to suit his ideas. He is unable to invent a new structure for his purpose or to effect changes in the basic structure of the Bible. At the most, what Hughes accomplishes is only a partial demolition of the external patterns of the enormous structure of Christian faith as detailed in the Bible. In fact, Hughes builds up his new edifice on the very same structure provided by Christianity. The patterns of his edifice rightly offer novelty, yet the basic contours of the structure remain the same.

The thematic variety of the poems compensates for the deficiency of structural indebtedness to a great extent by providing an aesthetic quality entirely alien to the familiar Biblical episodes. Thus, Crow's action of providing sexuality to man, instead of a soul is the faithful reflection of the life style and attitude of contemporary man. Since the whole work is oriented towards an experimental process of understanding the question of God, the Biblical sacredness of faith is overwhelmed by a secular sense of artistic achievement.

The feeling of guilt in Crow is made possible by the awareness of his ability to create both good and evil. It
marks another step in his development. After his first lesson Crow has learned to observe the world. So a number of poems that follow can be grouped under this title.

2 Crow’s Observations

As scientific truths result from observation and experiment based on empirical reality, Crow too tries to construct his world through observation and experiment on human condition. This can be confirmed from Hughes’s unqualified admiration for the East European poets who adopt this mode of writing. Hughes, in his introduction to Vasko Popa’s Selected Poems praises Popa’s style of writing: "The air of trial and error exploration, of an improvised language, the attempt to get near something for which he is almost having to invent the words in a total disregard for poetry or the normal conventions of discourse, goes with his habit of working in cycles of poems." It is this method that Hughes adopts in his Crow cycle of poems. As man is supposed to be the supreme achievement of God’s creation, Crow makes man’s life the object of his experiments. The primary truth about creation detected by Crow is the presence of the element of death in all created things. What Crow attempts to postulate through his observation is the essential nature of life as an embodiment of the principle of death.

Since Crow’s actions emanate from a heightened awareness of the paradoxical nature of existence, they signify violence as a paradox of creation and destruction. Crow’s observation leads him to three basic facts viz. the element of death in created things, the problem of suffering among men and the

power of words. In fact, these are the problems that essentially constitute the fabric of a religion. Religion can provide readymade answers based on its basic tenets. Since Crow tries to answer these questions through experiments, his perception has practical value as well as credibility.

a. The Element of Death in God's Creations.

As Crow bases his existence on death, his observation yields death as the only permanent reality of life. In Crow's comprehension, no created thing is free from the "virus of God" or the element of death. This paradoxical dimension of life is basically a secular adaptation of the religious concept of death as the necessary pre-requisite for immortal life. For Crow, this clear bifurcation of the principle of death and life converges to render a paradoxical dimension to life by incorporating the principle of death as an integral condition of the created universe. The poem "Crow Alights" is the first in the series. It depicts Crow's personal encounter with death. The nihilistic universe which Crow encounters frightens him at first.

Crow's realization that he will have to exist in an alien world tainted with the 'virus of God' frightens him so much that he tries to think of it as a hallucination. However he tries, he is unable to escape the violence of creation. Nothing escapes the scrutiny of Crow. When he observes the creations of God, he detects in them the principle of death. Seemingly indestructible creations like the mountain, the sea and the stars have the "virus of God" or the element of decay in them. Crow thus becomes a detailed observer whose eye-view captures everything in the right perspective.
The poem "That Moment" is an extension of the same theme of the futility and horror that is inherent in creation. Crow learns to look at violence of such extremity as suicide with an air of casualness. This casualness is not genuine, it is only a method of accommodating the incomprehensible violence in creation. Crow tries to unburden this problem by attending to his most immediate physical need of "searching for something to eat." So, violence in the poem becomes paradoxical in the literal sense as Crow's spiritual hunger is expressed through the instinctive reflex of the need for something to eat.

The next poem "Crow Hears Fate Knock on the Door" is yet another piece explicating the paradoxical nature of violence inherent in creation. Crow tries to accommodate himself to the horror of creation by his detached observations and tries to become the master of this universe where death reigns supreme. In order to be the master, he has to grasp the significance of death fully and completely. So he examines thoroughly the dead things such as a stone, a dead mole and the translucent starry spaces. He examines them typically like a trickster by getting inside it. Crow's mode of operation essentially embodies a paradoxical dimension as Hirschberg observes:

Crow's awareness in this poem is twofold. First he begins to realize how intricate the world is just at the point where he falls victim to his own feeling of insignificance. In that second before he falls to join masses of grass, stones and dead moles the prophecy latent inside of him unwinds and he knows that someday he is to be the master.  

Crow's actions, thought patterns, and even the very basis of his existence are consistently oriented towards an order of

---

existence that is essentially paradoxical in nature. In such an order, definite margins and clear-cut bifurcation converge incessantly creating fresh impressions of existence that embody life as an on-going process of creation and destruction. This is evident most when Crow takes up the problem of suffering in this world.

b. The Problem of Suffering

The basic existential problem of suffering occupies the central position in almost all prominent religions. Most of them seem to provide theologically satisfactory solutions by assigning the redemptive value of purification to the problem of suffering. In the Christian context it is best exemplified in the life of Christ. Even the Indian concept of karma embodies this aspect of purification. Buddhism traces the cause of suffering and its roots in desires. Crow analyses the problem from an empirical dimension and reduces the whole mystery into a struggle between predators and victims, successfully obliterating the spiritual connotation of suffering. Crow’s concept of ingestion as a metaphor of the assimilation of the meaning of suffering is based on the essential nature of all living organisms. It is universal and differs radically from the theological explanation emanating from the narrow cerebral pre-occupations of man.

Since the observations of Crow emanate from an empirical order, it faithfully represents the material reality of this universe. Crow’s solution of ingestion as a method of the assimilation of suffering is experimentally valid at the most basic level of human instincts. The theological explanation of assigning a redemptive value to suffering is basically of
a transempirical nature completely unrelated to real life situations. Crow perceives it as a clever human attempt to provide justification for his mindless acts of cruelty.

The poem "Crow Tyrannosaurus", exposes Crow's perception of suffering in this world. Crow perceives the universe as a battle ground and sees a panoramic vision of struggle between predators and victims, ranging from the animal's instinctive need to man's mindless act of cruelty. In human world it emanates from abstractions and dogma. Stuart Hirschberg traces the symbolic significance of the poem thus:

The Tyrannosaurus Rex was the most destructive flesh-eater ever to live on earth and Hughes plays on the theme of ingestion as a metaphor of the assimilation of the meaning of suffering ironically, the closer one gets to the human condition, the more deaf, dumb and blind man becomes to the agony of those upon whom he feeds.

Crow's exploration of the question of suffering finds further application in the poem "Crow's Account of the Battle." War is the greatest agent of destruction and suffering. Crow observes that man becomes insensitive to the suffering and pain of others by blaming it on ideology and science. By providing a panoramic vision of the unnatural violence practised in war, Crow exposes the futility of the redemptive value of suffering. By assigning a transempirical dimension to suffering, actually man seeks to justify his mindless act of cruelty as Hirschberg says:

The ability to repress feelings that might arise at the death of others means that man can kill through science, disassociate himself from the act of murder and in the process transform war into a merely haphazard concomitant of existence (sudden traps of a calculus/Theorems wrenched men in two). The blood of innumerable victims drains into the space between the stars.

29 ibid., p. 80.
30 ibid., p. 81.
Crow, thus exposes human duplicitly with regard to violence by a graphic presentation of the massacre he indulges in through war. By assigning a redemptive value to suffering man fulfils his urge for destruction through the archetypal battle that has been waged by him from time immemorial, causing great suffering. Hence Crow's observation yields that man himself is instrumental in bringing suffering into his life.

The next poem "Black Beast" is a direct outcome of Crow's observation about the question of suffering. In order to prevent man's urge for such massacre, Crow decides to find out the force behind it. His search for this black beast entails a series of adventures which bespeak the universal nature of the quest. The black beast or the agent of destruction as described in the Bible is an unseen creature, thus unknowable. Crow searches for him everywhere except within himself and challenges him to come out in the open by telling "loud lies" against him. The violence of this quest finally assumes the dimension of a paradox as Crow destroys everything that he wanted to save from the beast. This is an indirect yet effective criticism of the damaging concept of philosophical dualism that devalues the material body as an impediment in spiritual enlightenment. The outright criticism of this basic tenet in most established religions that moulded the consequent development of philosophy shows the genuine nature of Crow's experiments.

Violence as a paradox of creation and destruction is best exemplified in the poem "Grin". The grin is an apt symbol that erases the distinction between life and death agony and ecstasy. Thus it operates basically as a harmonious synthesis of mutually contradictory elements. The ever-fading margins of the principle of dualism is effectively depicted in the poem "Grin" as Hirschberg observes: "It appears in the
ecstasy of lovers, the contorted face of grief, in transcendent happiness and murderous madness... It intertwines motifs of death with those of laugh and smile." 31 Though the permanent home of grin is the skull, it tries to reach beyond the fixity of death into the flow of life, explicating its paradoxical nature. It appears only at extreme moments when all pretenses fall away and one is at a purely elemental level of existence amplifying its permanent nature.

Crow's observation on the problem of suffering culminates effectively by rendering multiple reading options to the familiar legend of St. George. Thus, in "Crow's Account of St. George", the well-established doctrine of philosophical dualism becomes susceptible to criticism by showing the dangers of modern man's passionless quest for truth based on reason at the expense of his instinctual and emotional life. This is exemplified in the traditional concept of knighthood as shown in the life St. George. The strength of the knight emanates from an adherence to the principle of pure reason at the expense of his emotional and instinctive life. His quest is to conquer the forces that constitute objects of material nature that are opposed to the workings of pure reason. The black beast in the poem is depicted as such a force. Hughes, believes that the seemingly opposing forces must be seen as manifestations of one's own deepest fears such as the fear of death.

The poem is filled with scenes of physical violence, mutilation and dismemberment. In the process even the ceremonious Japanese decapitator is used to hack and scatter the enemy. Thus, the text offers multiple reading options underlying the timeless significance of violence, especially its contemporary nature:

31 Ibid., p. 83.
Hughes is here bringing up-to-date not only the story of St. George but the whole repetitive history of the militant ethos.... and the madness behind it—unacknowledged because it contains everything rejected and ignored. The immediate source was a Japanese folk tale about a samurai whose professional pride and militancy ossifies into a madness in which he kills his wife and children. 32

The hunting down and killing of the dragon is paradoxical as Nature is indivisible. The destruction of the dragon entails the destruction of Nature herself. Similarly the rational quest of knighthood in the middle ages and the scientific temper of modern times, that discard the material aspect of life are equally dangerous and harmful. "Kill the red dragon of destruction and you kill the green dragon of creation. Kill the powers of the non-human world and you kill the earth-mother, the tree upon which humanity is a leaf."33 Thus, violence in the poem becomes a paradox of creation and destruction in the literal sense.

c. The Power of Words

Crow's observations on this world finally take him to a central concept in the Bible. It is about the power of words. Crow's understanding of the word is a literal parody of the opening passage of the gospel of St. John where the word is equated with God. Strangely, Crow sees words killing men and eating them. He watches the scene of disaster from a safe distance:

There came news of a word.
Crow saw it killing men. He ate well.
He saw it bulldozing
Whole cities to rubble. Again he ate well.
He saw its breath burning whole lands.

32 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 122.
33 Ibid., p. 123.
To dusty char.
He flew clear and peered. 34

The word here takes the signification of religious or political ideology even slogans of technological progress which usually invite massive destruction and merciless massacre. Despite such holocaust, Crow can stay clear and function efficiently as it relies on the elemental biological necessity of eating.

After watching the disaster, which words bring, Crow is confronted with the enticements of words. Crow is fully aware that osfrontalis, the section of brain where the thought process takes place can only offer words or ideas empty in themselves. So he takes up the skull of a dead jester which reflects death's empty silence. Crow is keen to measure the efficacy of words which control human life so completely. His pretended madness shields him from being tainted by the power of words. The word has fooled men en masse into believing of salvation after death by providing a redemptive value to suffering. "Crow's reaction throughout remains ingenious yet disdainful and blase, a perfect answer to the super-cerebral bombardment of words." 35

Whatever be the seduction of words, Crow refuses to be drawn into the trap. As words can be used to hide one's real feeling, it is basically opposed to the design of Nature. The sound of animals performs the pure function of reflecting real emotions. But words, as employed in human context do have a mutually exclusive dual function. Thus Crow exposes the duplicity of the much-glorified function of words in human context. "A world given over to the pseudo-life of words

34 Ted Hughes, Crow, p. 33.
might as well be inside the skull of a dead jester where ghostly words reverberate without meaning. Crow long ago learned what Hamlet so belatedly learns, the absurdity of words." Though words have drawn men into destructive furies, Crow is untouched by their enticements which appeal directly to his greed, sensuality and fear of death.

The Word which is equated with God in Christian theology is found lacking by Crow. Crow's perception of God is crystallized in the poem "Crow's Theology." Though words control the destiny of man by their enticements, Crow is not duped by such enticements. So finally Crow's observation is directed towards God himself. The keenness of Crow's observation ushers in a new knowledge which contradicts the concept of God in the Bible.

Crow realized that there were two Gods-
One of them much bigger than the other
Loving his enemies
And having all the weapons.

Crow's observation thus brings in a new theology which displaces the traditional concept of God. Having realized that there are two Gods, Crow wants to ascertain which is the real God. "Paradoxically, even though Crow is sustained by the God of love (an indirect reference to the sparrow fallen by God's edict in Hamlet) he feels more at home with the God of stone, silence and shot-pellets." Thus, the basic paradoxical dimension of Crow's perception is finally extended to the concept of God too. Having realized that there are two Gods, Crow wants to ascertain which is the real God, he begins

36 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 124.
37 Ted Hughes, Crow, p. 35.
a series of experiments to arrive at the truth. Hence the poems that follow can be grouped under the title--Crow's Experiments.

Crow's observation is basically oriented towards discovering the unknown side of things which religion conveniently ignores. What Crow does is to bring into the main stream, all that is repressed, marginalised and consistently discarded. The unacknowledged God which is the power of Nature or the dragon of destruction is seen by Crow as an integral part of the universe. This regeneration of the discarded principle naturally shakes the concept of the supremacy of a God that is all good and all powerful having nothing to do with the powers of destruction. By opening up a reality that depicts both sides of the same coin, Crow exposes the essential paradoxical nature of the concept of the self, the world and finally of God. Instead of a unified synthesis of this mutually contradictory principles, they are depicted as constantly warring principles which are damaging in the ultimate analysis. Thus, as Richard Webster observes, the paradoxical dimension of violence in Crow originates "from within a poetic sensibility which is itself profoundly intellectual and deeply marked by that very puritanical rationalism which he so frequently and I believe justifiably attacks." Since Crow depicts the dangers of this philosophical dualism which needs to transform itself into a unified principle of organic Nature, the violence in the poems achieves the paradoxical dimension of creation and destruction.

2. Crows's Experiments

The scientific mode of ascertaining truth through experiment finds elaborate application in the final section of poems in Crow. The attempts of Crow in ascertaining the veracity of the real God lead him to a series of experiments. The nature of the experiments reminds us of the Biblical progression of events. The experiments emanate from Crow's egoistic pride and end in his downfall. In this experimental process Crow passes through three distinct stages.

a. Crow's Fall

Crow series of poems achieves a sort of sacredness of religion by its continuous allusion to Biblical narratives in content and style. The fall of Adam and Eve was caused by pride. Similarly, Crow's egoistic self leads him to challenge the sun. Legends say that Crow was white like the sun before Apollo's curse fell on him. Hughes says that Crow returned black and charred after his encounter with the sun. Still, the egocentric Crow refuses to accept defeat by declaring that there is really no difference between opposites like black and white or victory and defeat. Though it can be viewed as Crow's act of evasion, it explicates the basic nature of violence in the poem as a paradox of creation and destruction. It also functions as an effective tool that opens up a new dimension of reality. The convergence of opposites usually conceived to be an impossibility becomes a possible reality in Crow's philosophy. Just as Adam and Eve were punished after their fall, Crow too is punished by ostracizing him from the company of other birds and by assigning him to the realm of death dominated by garbage and waste.
Apart from this Biblical overtone, Crow's fall can be traced back to Greek myths as Hirschberg points out:

'Crow's Fall' draws upon two Hellenic myths. Both involve Apollo the God of the sun whose spiritual significance in mythology is identified with light which displaces darkness.' In one story, during the war against the giants, Apollo transforms himself into a white Crow. A second tale presents the Crow as being originally white; Apollo, however becomes angry at the bird for bearing the news of adultery committed by princess Koronis and turned Crow black. 

Hughes amplifies the mythical significance of Crow's fall by showing its uniqueness in keeping away from other birds and its dependence on the garbage of human products for its survival. While other birds inhabit desirable spheres, each fulfilling themselves in a variety of ways, Crow is banished to the undesirable realm of the earthly reality of garbage. All other birds steer clear of man but Crow cannot dissociate himself from man and his products. Crow is seen guzzling a dropped ice-cream in the garbage. Still, Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts believe that "Hughes's celebration of Crow is hearty and genuinely admiring, not at all sneering, grim or, really reductive." All these contribute to Hughes's selection of Crow as the apt instrument that can effectively explicate the human condition and the nature of this empirical reality.

Crow being a trickster, his actions always entail a paradoxical dimension. Violence in the poem "Criminal Ballad" becomes a paradox of creation and destruction in the most effective manner by equating the birth of man with the death of his mother. Man, like the Crow, is a trickster, always

40 Stuart Hirschberg, op. cit., p. 89.
trying to escape the consequences of his actions. Crow shows with consistency that things become indistinguishable from their opposites in the extremity of violence. Thus, for Crow, death and birth and laughter and pain are basically of the same nature. This paradoxical nature of violence is the basic thread of unity that runs through all the poems in Crow sequence.

Crow's experiences make him muse on the immensity of the sea. He feels that amidst such mysteries, his experience is of minimal importance in this universe. This feeling of insignificance is further accentuated by a realization that the universe is absolutely indifferent to his existence. This is a marked stage in Crow's progress. He looks for meaning in life and his gaze finally falls on Christ as a contender. Once again Crow moves forward by playing on a significant aspect of Christian faith.

In the poem "Contender" Crow takes up the theme of the crucifixion of Christ and perceives it as a senseless trial of strength. As Christ is the central figure on which the Christian faith of redemption is built up, he is an embodiment of self-sacrifice, humility and compassion. In Crow's analysis, Christ is self-assertive, obstinate and self-centred. He is pure indestructible energy because he "grits his teeth like a cliff" and refuses to die but lives into the ringing nothing. The death of Christ is marked by the paradoxical dimension of violence as it converges life and death into an elongation of existence as Hirschberg point out:

Christ, like Oedipus, Prometheus and several other Hughes's larger-than-life protagonists, seems incapable of death. He nails himself to the cross voluntarily not as an act of salvation but as a
trial of strength that is admitted to be senseless. Yet, strangely, throughout his trial Christ is grinning. There is no mention of his death or resurrection; he just extends his death into life and life into death.”

The redemption of man by the self-sacrificing death of Christ is the central theme of the Bible. Hughes alters this Christian belief to build up the basic concept of his poetics. Thus, Crow perceives the suffering of Christ as a "senseless trial of strength." The reduction of Christ's redemptive suffering into pure currents of indestructible energy is basically an empirical adaptation of a sacred religious belief. In short, Hughes modifies a basic tenet of Christianity and makes it the central concept of his poetics. The paradoxical dimension of violence in Christ's suffering gives further credibility to Hughes's notion. Thus the crucifixion of Christ is of timeless significance as it extends into creation and destruction, into life and death. It exists beyond time and space in the form of indestructible currents of pure energy.

The dictum "pride goes before the fall" is materialised in the poem "Oedipus Crow". Crow suffers from the tendency of pride like that of Oedipus. Through a series of violent actions like that of Oedipus, Crow tries to extricate himself from the forces that oppress him--first from the influence of his mother which is like a death-trap, secondly from the influence of tradition and finally from the enticing traps of love. "One after another he rejects the forces which guide his life as soon as he perceives them to be threatening to his freedom. But all anyone has, as Crow is reminded of is the earth, a mother, the chance to love and death itself, so that

---

42 Stuart Hirschberg, op. cit., p. 93.
to flee from these elements is to mutilate oneself." 43 This balancing of the mutually contradictory forces is the basis of Crow's existence. Subsequently it contributes to his fall as well. Yet, strangely enough, in all situations, this trickster nature sees him through all dangers and makes him virtually indestructible.

The destructive function of Crow is further elaborated in "Crow's Vanity". The element of self-delusion yields only visions of man-made things to Crow. His desperate attempts at ceaseless reasoning never provide him with self-knowledge but it is infested with "the mistings of civilization." The irresistible force of illusion which Hughes equates with self-deluding vanity keeps projecting new images, making self-knowledge impossible. 44 Crow's empirical analysis of reality brings in a vortex of images from the material world blinding his vision of the real self.

Crow's instinctive urge for ingestion always forces on him destruction as the possible solution of hindrances. This myopic vision is invariably accompanied by blind errors. "A Horrible Religious Error" tries to provide such an example. The whole poem is structured on the Biblical episode of the serpent's seduction of woman and man and his consequent hoodwinking of God by his alibi self. Crow decides to dispose of the serpent before whom God finds himself impotent and man and woman helpless. So he beats the "hell out of it" and eats it. Such a solution is destructive in the ultimate analysis as Keith Sagar points out. "Crow blames the serpent for the deplorable condition of fallen man and woman, and thinks he

43 Ibid., p. 94.
44 Ibid., p. 95.
has saved them by eating it. He thinks he is swallowing death, but he is swallowing something much bigger (creation itself mother of all)."45 Crow's solution is a by-product of his own nature as seen in the next poem.

Crow's attempts to sing like the nightingale make him aware of his real nature. In "Crow's Nerve Fails" Crow muses on his Crowness and understands the folly of rejecting his own nature. The poem is a graphic description of the Crow as an agent of violence. "He has eaten so much of the earth's crime and misery as a scavenger that he discovers in his every feather a fossil of murder. Crow, we remember, is alive because he has lived on the death of others, death is necessary for his life."46 As Crow draws his sustenance and his very existence on the death of others violence in him is formed on the basic paradox of creation and destruction.

Hughes explores the significance of Crow's fall by providing fresh interpretations to "Laughter" and "Frown" which are visible manifestations of pride that causes one's fall. Though Crow's fall is caused by pride, Hughes discovers the essential paradoxical dimension of violence in these permanent aspects of human existence. If laughter is a deliberate mask beneath which violence breeds, frown is a permanent reality in the flux of life. In Crow's analysis they both boil down to pure energy beneath the mask of their evanescent existence. This is so evident in "Laughter" because it is able to contain the worst of human tragedies. Similarly, "Frown" proves its permanence by eating the wind

45 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 118
and its patient power of appeal. It assails infinity with its footprint.

The paradoxical nature of Crow compels him to become a creator from the role of a destroyer. Hence, from nihilistic intensity, Crow begins to feel positively as a creator. "He begins to make the transition from Crow eating to Crow creating. The tragic frown after the comic laugh signals this longing." Since Crow feels that ingestion can never solve the problem of suffering, he begins to try his hands at creation. It emanates from Crow's desire to create a new order of existence that can effectively counter the drawbacks of God's creation.

b. Crow as Creator.

As Crow is basically an agent of violence, death and destruction, his attempts at creation reflect the paradoxical dimension of destruction as well. All his attempts at creation catapult him with dangerous consequences. "Magical Dangers" explicates this reality in uninterrupted succession:

Crow thought of a palace—
its lintel crashed on him, his bones were found
Crow thought of a fast car—
It plucked his spine out, and left him empty and armless.  

The reason for the failure of Crow's attempts at creation despite repeated efforts can be traced back to his origin. " Conjuring in Heaven" shows that Crow is created form

---

47 Ibid., p. 97.
48 Ted Hughes, Crow, p. 51.
"nothings". Thus, the positive aspect of Crow's existence itself is paradoxically based on a conglomeration of negatives:

So finally there was nothing.  
It was put inside nothing.  
Nothing was added to it  
And to prove it didn't exist  
Squashed flat as nothing with nothing  
... It hit the ground and broke open  
There lay Crow, cataleptic 49

In a world where suffering and mutilation are an inescapable fact of life, Crow wants to shield his creations against such impediments. So he chooses words for his creations. In the beginning words seem to fulfill Crow's objective but later they begin to elude his grasp simultaneously manifesting their destructive potentiality.

Crow, being an assemblage of negatives, originating from nothing, his creations can function only as agents of destruction. "Owl's Song" is a reminder of the dangers and limitations of the concept of nihilism. Owl's nihilistic philosophy, emanating from his reason is self-defeating as it frightens him in the end. Thus Crow's attempts at creation based on the nothingness of words end up paradoxically in a vortex of destruction. Crow's repeated failure in achieving the purpose of creation compels him to revalue his actions. It leads him to the realization that the powers of creation and destruction are basically the same and inseparable.

The dichotomy between soul and body variously perceived as light and darkness, intellect and instinct, creation and destruction finds its full expression in "Crow's Undersong" and "Crow's Elephant Totem Song". The female principle in Nature embodies in herself both the powers of creation and the elements of destruction. She is like Pandora, a giver of

49 Ibid., p. 53.
death but responsible for bringing hope too, which sustains life. "Perhaps under all the Crow's songs with their bleakness runs this undersong, this counter song of love, hope, bounty and all the varied colours and relationships of the created world." Thus, "Crow's Undersong" results from this new found awareness in Crow. It thus explicates violence as a paradox of creation and destruction, and as an essential concomitant of existence very much similar to the Bhramo-shaiva concept of creation and destruction in Indian philosophy.

Each experiment teaches Crow that he can never be other than himself. He may try his hands at creation as in "Crow's Playmates", only to find that eventually his creations desert him, leaving him lonelier than ever. In "Crow Ego", Crow tries to transform himself into legendary heroes like Hercules, Beowulf and Ulysses, who symbolize great strength and energy. By feeding on their ego projections Crow tries to emulate the strength of these heroes by literally eating them in various manners. Here too, Crow employs his typical method of the assimilation of the material body to imbibe the physical quality.

Even after repeated failures, Crow doesn't give up his attempts at creation. The violence of Crow's creation invariably brings with it destruction as a necessary condition of his basic nature. In all instances, creations of Crow reflect the destructive aspects of material nature. The maimed and mutilated figure waiting to be healed in a number of poems bespeaks the paradoxical nature of violence in them. The sacrificial death necessary for regeneration in the vegetable world becomes an unavoidable concomitant of well-being in human context. Crow traces the reason for man's

---

50 Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes, p. 130.
ailment to his rigid bifurcation of the soul and body into mutually contradictory principles.

Crow's consistent endeavour is to show the dangers of the enslavement of the body to the superior powers of reason. In "Crow's Battle Fury" the mutilated figure is re-created by Crow. As usual, the result is opposite of what he expects. Instead of emerging stronger, happier and in harmony with Nature, the victim becomes blind, crippled and mentally incapacitated. He drags himself step by step in great agony, but Crow only laughs at the disaster which he has wrought upon the man. Thus the creation of Crow embodies the essential aspects of destruction as well.

Gradually Crow understands that the widening conflict between the soul and the body in man or the suffering self and the understanding self in him results directly from the split that is inherent in Nature. This realization compels Crow to join the contradictory elements in his typical crude manner. In "Crow Blacker than Ever" Hughes shows that Crow has finally realized that he "can not rid himself of the mother because she is an aspect of him; like male and female, man and nature are interdependent not only ecologically but spiritually." 51 Crow's experience finally leads him to take up the role of Christ to wedge the gap between God and men. In his typical way, Crow undertakes this messianic function only to prove that his actions reflect his essential nature.

When God deserted his creatures and man turned towards eve, Crow joins heaven and earth by nailing them together. Instead of grafting one into another as a possible process of re-integration, Crow nails heaven and earth together which can

---

lead only to putrefaction. Thus, Hughes effectively shows the dangers of the philosophical dualism perpetuated by the pure God Logos. No other poem exposes so fully the identity and function of Crow as a trickster. Thus, all his attempts at creation and his final attempt to join heaven and earth end up in a violent yoking of opposites, It thus results in a violent pandemonium—a horror beyond redemption:

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 agony
Grew
Crow
Grinned
Crying: 'This is my creation' 52

This final act of creation makes Crow a trickster who evades the responsibility of his actions, yet for ever trying to improve on God's creations.

c. **Crow as Trickster**

Crow series of poems basically elaborate the dangers of objective detachment from Nature. On the basis of cold reasoning and logical analysis man undermines his instinctual and emotional life. Paradoxically, by such attitude he destroys the very same thing he wants to preserve. Since Crow competes with the creator, his actions entail dangerous consequences. Yet he evades responsibility typically like a trickster. This trickster nature invests Crow with a sense of superiority. Crow proves invincible and indestructible as he bases his very existence on death. In S.N. Prasad's view, Crow is indestructible because it is the ultimate principle of

---

52 Ted Hughes, *Crow*, p. 89.
the mutation of matter. So he says: "Death is stronger than many things, but not Crow, man's first antecedent in animal life.... This life which is stronger than death and whose embodiment Crow is, is the ultimate principle of mutation of matter." 53 This indestructible nature of Crow makes God helpless as all his attempts at obliterating Crow, fail miserably. Finally, it necessitates the birth of the redeemer. Thus. "Crow's song of Himself" can be compared to the Sermon on the Mount for various reasons. The spiritual dimension of the Sermon on the Mount is replaced by a secular adaptation of this material reality emanating from objective rationalism. While the Sermon summarizes the spiritual mission of Christ, Crow's song explicates the nature of violence as indestructible and a paradox of creation and destruction. In both instances, the ideas are expressed in a scientific pattern of logical progression based on cause and effect. While the Sermon on the Mount has a spiritual dimension of transempirical significance, "Crow's Song of Himself" proves the indestructible nature of violence resulting in destructive matter:

When God hammered Crow  
He made gold  
When God roasted Crow in the sun  
He made diamond  
When crushed Crow under weight  
He made alcohol  
When God tore Crow to pieces  
He made money  
When God blew Crow up  
He made day  
When God hung Crow on a tree  
He made fruit  
When God buried Crow in the earth  
He made man  
When God tried to chop Crow in two

He made woman
When God said: 'you win Crow'
He made the Redeemer. 54

The Bible, in essence, is an extension and amplification of the Sermon on the Mount. Similarly, "Crow's Song of Himself" is elongated into other poems of the sequence. It brings out the idea that nothing in this world can be free from the essential element of Crowness—even the Redeemer. Violence of the extreme kind such as hammering, roasting, crushing, tearing, hanging and burying as shown in the poem indicates Hughes's belief of energy or violence as an indestructible principle in this world. Since God wants to get rid of Crow, he tries various methods of extermination. Paradoxically each attempt at destruction results in the creation of something undesirable. Finally Crow becomes victorious when God's last attempt to destroy him culminates in the birth of the Redeemer.

The trickster nature of Crow indeed equips him to be a principle in the universe—a principle that is inherent in the created order of empirical reality. To amplify this truth, Crow encounters the essential elements of nature such as fire, water and earth. These are represented by the sun, the sea and the stone. Thus, in "Crow's Last Stand." Crow encounters the sun. "Crow evidently, cannot be finally extinguished although burned to his very essence and rendered as one renders metal; he endures every effort to destroy him and survives." 55 Crow's survival renders a paradoxical dimension because the blackness of his eye-pupil remains immune from the fury of the sun.

54 Ted Hughes, Crow., p. 73.
Violence as a paradox of creation and destruction is vindicated again in "Crow and the Sea", Crow's encounter with the sea, which is larger than life and death, still finds him alive but completely immobile like a crucified man. Finally Crow encounters the element of the earth in "Crow and Stone". In the epic struggle that ensues stone is pulverized into dust and Crow holds the earth in terror. Crow's strength emanates from his paradoxical nature as Hisrchberg points out. "The paradox of the poem centers around Crow as both invincible, ageless, deathless unafraid and monstrous while being as completely helpless as a newborn infant." 56

The duality of created things which embody in themselves diametrically opposed principles like creation and destruction is further elaborated in the poem "Fragments of an Ancient Tablet". Crow's role as a trickster shapes the tone and vision of the whole book. Crow's quest for ultimate truth leads him to self-knowledge which blasts him to nothing. In Greek mythology Proteus is a sea-deity who has the gift of prophecy as well as the power to assume different shapes. He knows everything about life, the past, present and future. In order to avoid being questioned he can assume various shapes and elude the grasp of the questioner. In "Truth Kills Everybody", Crow endures all the metamorphoses of Proteus. The series of shapes that Proteus takes present aspects of great violence and horror. This shows that Crow is unique and is not satisfied with the relative truths of human perception as Hirschberg points out.

As the relative truths of mythology, the Bible, technology and divinity itself metamorphosize into each other. Crow hangs on ironically, the ultimate truth he meets is the 'nothingness' which spawned him in 'Lineage'; the ruthless discarding of self-

56 Ibid., p. 121.
deception, the stripping away of illusion after illusion is Crow's ultimate meaning. He remains outside of all relative human truth.57

The nature of violence in Crow poems basically originates from the nature of the protagonist Crow himself. The extremities of violence in his attempts at creation clearly proclaim that Crow embodies in himself the indestructible element of energy. It unfolds itself as violence through his actions. Crow's affinity with the trickster, who is a destroyer as well as a creator, makes his actions paradoxical. Crow's search for truth leads him to the revelation that man is moving towards self-destruction because he is duped by such forces as the lust for power, technology, sex and his self-projected religions. In contrast, Crow's truth is the result of his various experiments. It is utterly simple and clear like the indestructible droplet.

Crow, as a volume of poetry, is distinct in style and content. It has close structural affinities with the Bible. Though, it seems to devalue the artistic merit of the work, a deep analysis yields the integral nature of the book as an essential component constituting the poetic vision of Hughes. The charge that scenes of grim physical violence in Crow tarnish the artistic merit of the work is to be viewed in the light of the Hughesian concept of violence. Since violence is a universal reality, when it gets modulated into poetic truth, paradoxically it becomes untenable in an anthropocentric world order. The work basically attempts to postulate the paradoxical nature of violence. It not only shows violence as an essential biological reality of life but also presents the

57 Ibid., p. 120.
repercussions of this natural force when channelled for narrow human ends. In this sense, *Crow* is a vital document of contemporary significance regarding human life.

It is often said that *Crow* is a satiric parody minus creativity. This criticism gains currency in the light of the stylistic peculiarities of the book. The messianic role of the protagonist against the background of a chaotic universe ruled by instincts and the bravado of irresponsible acts bespeak an entirely different world order. Beneath this apparent contradiction, one can detect the basic structure of the Bible in the progression of events in *Crow*.

On a peripheral level, *Crow* appears to be an original work of art. On deep analysis, it yields that *Crow* has little that is original. It is, in effect, a clever re-arrangement and re-shaping of Biblical episodes in a haphazard manner, primarily meant to shock the faith of a simple believer. Hence, there is some justification in viewing the work as a mimetic inversion of Biblical episodes or as a satiric parody minus creativity. This criticism gains currency in the light of the stylistic peculiarities of the book. The messianic role of the protagonist against the background of a chaotic universe ruled by instincts and the bravado of irresponsible acts bespeak an entirely different world order. It is like the world of the primitives where the elemental and the basic instincts rule supreme. Hence the verses display qualities of primitive songs as described by Hughes himself in his review of C M Bowra's book *Primitive Song*. Hence the songs in *Crow* are like "Power charms, tools and practical agents in the business of gaining desired ends, deflecting the spirit of
misfortune from planting their larve in the psyche."\textsuperscript{58} Beneath this apparent contradiction, one can detect the basic structure of the Bible in the progression of events in \textit{Crow}.

Hughes's adoption of the account of creation from the book of Genesis, and the umpteen references from the Bible, including the literal imitation of the lineage of Christ, the baptismal rite and the equation of God with the Word as depicted in the gospel of St. John become subjects of elaborate treatment in \textit{Crow}. All this can rightly prompt us to consider the work as a satiric parody of the Bible. On an analytic level, it is to be conceded that Hughes succeeds only in demolishing the patterns of the edifice of Christianity. Strangely enough, the contours of its structure remain intact. In fact, Hughes builds up his own edifice on this very same structure. The patterns of his edifice rightly offer novelty, yet the basic contours of the structure remain the same. Hence, this observation seems partially justifiable as far as the basic style of the work is concerned.

The charge that \textit{Crow} is a mimetic parody of the Bible becomes further unsustainable in the light of the theory of semiotics. Michael Riffaterre shows that the semiotic process involves two levels or stages of reading. The first is a "heuristic reading" where meaning is apprehended by a bilinear deciphering of the single, linear text. So he says it is at the first stage of reading that mimesis is fully apprehended, which subsequently involves a realization that the mimesis is based upon the referential fallacy. Thus, the second stage of reading is "retroactive reading" or the truly hermeneutical.

reading. This reading renders the differing successive statements of mere mimesis noticed in the first reading as variants of the same structural matrix. Thus, the charge that Crow is a mimetic inversion of the Bible minus creativity is an untenable premise in the light of Riffaterre's theory of semiotics. He says:

The maximal effect of retroactive reading, the climax of its function as generator of significance, naturally comes at the end of the poem; poeticalness is thus a function coextensive with the text, linked to a limited realization of discourse.... This is why, whereas units of meaning may be words or phrases or sentences, the unit of significance is the text. To discover the significance at last, the reader must surmount the mimesis hurdle.  

Riffaterre's theory thus renders this charge ineffective by showing that a proper understanding of the text makes it an independent original unit through the process of integration of signs. "Any sign within the text will therefore be relevant to its poetic quality, which expresses or reflects a continuing modification of the mimesis. Only thus can unity be discerned behind the multiplicity of representations."  

The thematic variety of the work further verifies Riffaterre's theory. Since the functional shift of a sign is the proper realm of semiotics, to a great extent, the thematic freshness of Crow obliterates its structural affinity with the Bible. It provides an aesthetic freshness completely alien to the familiar Biblical episodes. Since the whole work is oriented towards an experimental process of understanding the

60 Ibid., p. 3.
question of God, the Biblical sacredness of faith is over-
whelmed by a secular sense of artistic achievement. In other
words, the poetic genius of Hughes more than compensates for
the structural indebtedness to Bible and lifts the poems from
the rut of mere satiric parody. In fact, each poem becomes an
active agent in explicating the Hughesian concept of violence
as a paradox of creation and destruction.