



Research Paper

## The Hamartia of Mythological Crow in Ted Hughes' 'Crow's Fall'

ARUNAVA ROY

English Hons. M.A (1<sup>st</sup> Class)  
UGC NET & SLET Qualified

---

**Abstract:**

The volume "Crow" (1970), a series of sixty poems represents crow not just as a bird but as a symbol. Ted Hughes has combined various ancient myths and legends and formed a distinguished philosophical framework of his own. Hughes, the myth-maker has fabricated the character "Crow" so skillfully with the amalgamation of ancient Myths, legends folklores and tales. In the poem "Crow's Fall", Ted Hughes, a prolific poet upholds the hamartia of mythological crow for his act of presumption. At the outset of the poem, the poet depicts not an ordinary crow, but a mythological crow of white feathers representing his innocence and purity. One day, crow thought that the sun was blazing brighter than him. The arrogant crow challenged the sun in a battle of luminosity and lustre. Sun, the source of elemental energy could not be defeated. Crow's cramped arrogance paved his way towards destruction. When the crow transgressed his limit cawing towards the centre of the sun, his white feathers smothered to burnt feather. But his bigoted mentality remained the same. He still thought that he had defeated the sun. He was not used to failure. His egoist self was reluctant to accept the defeat. Though his white feathers got burnt, his high-vaulting ambition remained unchanged.

**Key-words:** Darkness, beat, conviction, ignorant, bigotry.

Received 22 Aug., 2024; Revised 01 Sep., 2024; Accepted 03 Sep., 2024 © The author(s) 2024.

Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

### I. Introduction:

The volume entitled "Crow: From the life and songs of the Crow" (1970), a series of sixty poems is one of the most marvelous work in Ted Hughes' poetic oeuvre. The protagonist crow is not figured just as a bird but as a symbol. Ted Hughes, a prolific poet has combined various ancient myths and legends and formed a distinguished philosophical framework of his own. Hughes, the myth-maker has fabricated the character of 'crow' diligently. He has amalgamated myths of some very ancient traditions, myths and tales of the Eskimos, the Japanese, the North-American Indian tribes, the Persians, and the lore of the Talmud and the Koran. Through this poetry collection, Hughes ridicules and satirizes the omnipotent God, or the creator of this universe. The poet has exposed the falsehood of man's biased beliefs. According to Ekbert Faas, an American critic- "in these poems, the protagonist ( who is a bird) shares the stage with the Biblical creator, the serpent, and Adam and Eve; and he encounters such famous mythological personages as Proteus, Ulysses, Hercules, and Beowulf". In course of the volume, the character of the crow passes through a gradual transformation. He begins as a devil—opponent spirit to God; turns Trickster and ultimately approaches to human status. In a BBC interview, when Hughes was asked about the formation of crow, he replied that a certain argumentation between the creator and his rational nightmare about the adequacy of man as a creation helped him in formation the creature "crow". "God is very defensive of man. Man is a very good and successful invention and given the materials and situation he's quite adequate". That nightmare thought back to "ferment and gestate in matter" and "a little embryo" created.

Ted Hughes' famous poetry collection "Crow" (1970) is a brilliant parody of orthodox Christianity. In "Crow's Fall", Hughes, a brilliant myth-maker presents the hamartia of mythological crow for his act of presumption. Though the depiction of such mytho-poetic poetry based on his self-fabricated philosophy, he forms the quasi-human figure of crow. His journey of exploration into the human psyche as well as his handling of the death/ rebirth theme is vividly portrayed in all of his poems. Ted Hughes was greatly influenced by folktales, myths and legends. To him, a myth is a shamanic journey to the under-world, conjuring world of

trickster and the loop of the transformation. Most of Hughes' poems are basically prophetic in nature and eschatological in tone. Crow is the simulacra of darkness, evil and bad omen sometimes emblem of trickster, breaker of taboos, destroyer of pious sense, antagonist of God, shrewd bricoleur and raucous villain.

At the outset of the poem, the poet depicts not an ordinary but a mythological crow of white feathers representing innocence and purity. One day crow thought that the sun was blazing brighter than him. The Frustrated crow challenged the sun in a battle of luminosity and lustre. Here we get a Biblical Allusion. Sun is signified here as Almighty or the Super power of the creation. Just as Satan challenged against God's Throne, crow, the symbol of satanic spirit defied the limits and tried to be as omnipotent as the sun. The egoist crow was full of resolution that he could defeat the sun.

"He got his strength up flush and in full glitter  
He clawed and fluffed his rage up".

Hughes, the master of black comedy through his brilliant use of slant humor and bitter irony exaggerated this section in a hyperbolic manner. The arrogance of the crow is depicted in majestic hollowness. His inner arrogance had turned him ignorant of the fact that the sun could not be eclipsed. In Hughes' humorous vision, the sun seemed smaller than the crow the egoist of all egoists, hard-core solipsist, selfish.

The Crow is lost in the dead pool of arrogance. He is not aware of his hypocrite extravaganza. He gets overwhelmed by the upsurge of high-vaulting ambition. Aiming his beak towards the sun's dazzling centre, he cawed his battle cry.

"He aimed his beak direct at the sun's centre.  
He laughed himself to the centre of himself and attacked".

Hughes is on the acme of perfection in blending biting satire and sharp irony while the crow's body temporarily hid the blazing sun leaving the trees shadowed.

"At his battle cry trees grew suddenly old,  
Shadows flattened".

At the fag-end of the poem, the poet upholds the aftermath of transgressing one's limit. This reminds us the incident myth of Icarus. Again, the sun shinned but the crow lost his vibrant splendor.

"But the sun brightened—  
It brightened, and crow returned charred black".

"He opened his mouth but what came out was charred".

His blind, inscrutable ambition burnt his colour. But his arrogance knew no bound. Finally the crow asserted – **"where white is black and black is white, I won"**. (Chiasmus)

This line sums up the thematic tone of the poem. Though his outer-appearance had changed into charred black for his arrogance, his egoistic rationality remained same. Still he believed that he had triumphed over the sun. He was not used to such failure, he could accept only victory. Here Hughes ascribes his bigoted mentality. Here we can recapitulate Satan's expulsion from Paradise to bottomless perdition. Even in Hell's "fiery deluge", Satan the Unheroic Hero could not accept that defeat. Instead he spirited the fallen angels with vigorous potentiality.

In deeper perspective, the 'Crow' is nothing but the external manifestation of our sub-conscious arrogant self. That 'self' always tries to overpower others; wants to rule the whole world; doesn't acknowledge the obedience or subjugation. Even being failed, that Self tries to proclaim the victory. In Freudian term we call it "Ego". In Hughes' diabolic interpretation, we can analyze the "Crow" as the resonance of human being's boost up arrogance.

#### References:

- [1]. Hughes, Ted. "Collected Poems", Faber and Faber, 2012.
- [2]. Hughes, Ted. "Crow: From the life and songs of the Crow", Faber and Faber, 2001.
- [3]. Hughes, Ted. "Selected poems" Ed. Ramji Lall, Rama Brothers, 2011.