

*Sherman Alexie- 'Crow Testament*

**3<sup>rd</sup> Semester: CORE 5: American Literature: Group A Poetry**



# Outline of the Lecture:

- Biography
- Symbol, Allusions, Imagery
- Title
- Analysis of the Poem



# Biography:



- **Sherman Joseph Alexie Jr.** (born October 7, 1966) is an American novelist, short story writer, poet, and filmmaker.
- His writings draw on his experiences as an **Indigenous American** with ancestry from several tribes.
- He grew up on the **Spokane Indian Reservation** and now lives in **Seattle, Washington**.
- His best-known book is *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), a collection of short stories.



# Awards:

- Sherman Alexie has won many awards including:
- National Book Award for Young People's Literature
- PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction: 2001
- American Book Award:1996
- Dos Passos Prize:2013



# To be continued:

- His mother was a quilt maker and social worker while his dad drifted from job to job.
- His father was an alcoholic as well as some other members of his family.
- He had a tormented childhood. During his young life, he suffered from seizures which he described as he would “**rise out of my body and fly anywhere [he] wanted.**”
- He felt like an outsider at school and in some of that time loved to read.



Text:

## Crow Testament

By Sherman Alexie

1  
Cain lifts Crow, that heavy  
black bird  
and strikes down Abel.

Damn, says Crow, I guess  
this is just the beginning.

2  
The white man, disguised  
as a falcon, swoops in  
and yet again steals a salmon  
from Crow's talons.

Damn, says Crow, if I could  
swim  
I would have fled this country  
years ago.

3  
The Crow God as depicted  
in all of the reliable Crow  
bibles looks exactly like a  
Crow.

Damn, says Crow, this makes  
it so much easier to worship  
myself.

4  
Among the ashes of Jericho,  
Crow sacrifices his firstborn  
son.

Damn, says Crow, a million  
nests are soaked with blood.



## First Stanza:

- The poem "Crows Testament" by Sherman Alexie begins by connecting the Biblical story of two brothers **Cain and Abel**.
- Cain murders his brother Abel. He uses Crow to symbolize a weapon used by Cain to kill Abel.
- A white man is introduced disguised as a, "**falcon swooping in to steal a salmon from Crows talons**" (Alexie 5-7) this references an event that involves a unlike presence from Crow as they decides to take something important from the community as a whole.

5  
When Crows fight Crows  
the sky fills with beaks  
and talons.

Damn, says Crow, it's  
raining feathers.

6  
Crow flies around the  
reservation and collects  
empty beer bottles

but they are so heavy  
he can only carry one at a  
time.

So, one by one, he returns  
them but gets only five cents a  
bottle.

Damn, says Crow, redemption  
is not easy.

7  
Crow rides a pale horse  
into a crowded powwow  
but none of the Indian panic.

Damn, says Crow, I guess  
they already live near the end  
of  
the world.

While talking about Crow and the dislike of his country, Alexie lets Crow state, "**if I could swim I would have fled this country years ago**" (Alexie 8-9). This creates a desire for freedom, Crow expanding this contemplative feeling of breaking away from Crows community due to the hardships presented.

### Sherman Alexie's use of Imagery, symbolism and allusion:

#### Stanza 2:

"The white man, Disguised  
as a falcon, swoops in  
and yet again steals a salmon from crow's talons.  
Damn, says Crow, if I could swim  
I would have fled this country years ago."

- Since Sherman Alexie is from an Indian reservation this gives clues to some other force maybe taking from him or a community as a whole.
- It also shows a sense of wanting to escape when he says that if he could swim he would've fled his country years ago.

## Third Stanza

The Crow God as depicted  
in all of the reliable Crow bibles  
looks exactly like a Crow.  
Damn, says Crow, this makes it  
so much easier to worship myself.

The Crow says, "He makes it so much easier to worship myself." Instead of following the path of a traditional Crow deity, the Crow God is an allusion to the Christian God. The Crow God is a white man who has assimilated into the Crow community.

- The third stanza of the poem states, "The Crow God as depicted in all of the reliable Crow bibles looks exactly like a Crow."
- In this stanza, Alexie continues utilizing Christian **imagery** and the personification and symbolism of the Crow God.
- The Native Americans are demonstrating the same patterns as the white missionaries who have tried to assimilate them and erase Native American religion and culture.

# First Stanza:

- The poem “Crows Testament” by Sherman Alexie begins by connecting the Biblical story of two brothers **Cain and Abel**.
- Cain murders his brother Abel. He uses Crow to symbolize a weapon used by Cain to kill Abel.
- A white man is introduced disguised as a, “**falcon swooping in to steal a salmon from Crows talons**”(Alexie 5-7) this references an event that involves a unlike presence from Crow as they decides to take something important from the community as a whole.





While talking about Crow and the dislike of his country, Alexie lets Crow state, **“if I could swim I would have fled this country years ago”**(Alexie 8-9). This creates a desire for freedom, Crow expanding this contemplative feeling of breaking away from Crow's community due to the hardships presented.



## Sherman Alexie's use of Imagery, symbolism and allusion:

### Stanza 2:

“The white man, Disguised  
as a falcon, swoops in  
and yet again steals a salmon from crow's talons.  
Damn, says Crow, if I could swim  
I would have fled this country years ago.”

- Since Sherman Alexie is from a Indian reservation this gives clues to some other force maybe taking from him or a community as a whole.
- It also shows a sense of wanting to escape when he says that if he could swim he would've fled his country years ago.



# Third Stanza

The Crow God as depicted in all of the reliable Crow bibles looks exactly like a Crow. Damn, says Crow, this makes it so much easier to worship myself.

The Crow says, "this makes it so much easier to worship myself." Instead of following the religious tradition of their ancestors, the Native Americans are following the patterns set for them by the white missionaries.

They have reworked their traditions to fit a specific view that makes it easier for them to be self-centered, instead of selfless. This shift in focus from the community to the individual is a lasting effect of Christianity.

- The third stanza of the poem states, "The Crow God as depicted in all of the reliable Crow bibles looks exactly like a Crow."
- In this stanza, Alexie continues utilizing Christian [imagery](#) and the [personification](#) and symbolism of the Crow.
- The Native Americans are demonstrating the same patterns as the white missionaries who have tried to assimilate them and erase Native American religion and culture.



The Crow says, “this makes it so much easier to worship myself.” Instead of following the religious tradition of their ancestors, the Native Americans are following the patterns set for them by the white missionaries.

They have reworked their traditions to fit a specific view that makes it easier for them to be self-centered, instead of selfless. This shift in focus from the community to the individual is a lasting effect of Christianity.



## *Biblical Allusion: Stanza 4*

“ Among the ashes of Jericho,  
Crow sacrifices his firstborn son.  
Damn says Crow, a million nests  
are soaked with blood.”

- Sherman Alexie references the biblical term, "**The Battle of Jericho**", which had taken place in **the middle east, Joshua, the ruler of Jericho** described how the walls of Jericho had fallen and blood was spilled.
- This shows that Alexie has a correspondence to the Bible and a intrinsic meaning.



# Form

- The poem is divided into 7 stanzas. Each has The numbers above each stanza clearly divide the poem, suggesting temporal value in the order of lines.
- The placement of the numbers provides organization to the sections. There number of lines in each stanza varies.



# Analysis of the Poem:

- Alexie brings forwards a strong shift by stating “The crow god as depicted...looks exactly like crow. Damn, says crow, this makes it so much easier to worship myself” (Alexie 10-15).
- This guides the readers to think about the worship of a god. Alexie mentions the “ashes of Jericho”(Alexie 18).
- In doing so he references the sacrifice of a “first born son... and a million nests are soaked in blood”(Alexie 16-18).
- Nests meaning people and blood meaning awareness of this topics abuse, conflict, worship, and sacrifice.



# To be continued:

- In Alexie's words “When **crow** **fight** crows the sky fills with beaks and talons... its raining feathers” (19-21).
- There is **conflict with close or related people** leading to a **downfall** of friendships and family members. (“Crow” as a symbol representing native Americans).
- Bigger shifts arise when he states, “**Crow flies around the reservation and collects empty beer bottles but they are so heavy he can only carry one at a time.**”
- So one by one he returns them but gets only 5 cents a bottle. Damn says crow redemption is not easy.” (Alexie 22-25).
- As in his book "**The Absolute True Diary of a Part Time Indian**" he states the alcohol abuse within his family, he references that topic in this poem. He puts effort into fixing things while others don't give back.





*Thank You.*

