



Realism and Fancy Drifting to Creative Imagination in “To a Skylark” by P.B. Shelley

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ABSTRACT

Realism and fancy drifting to creative imagination in “To a Skylark” by P.B. Shelley: Realism depicts subjects related to secular, empirical rules and it begins from the place where truth can be discovered by the individual through the senses. But the inner thought of human mind windows through the vision of fantasy and finds exuberance. Poetry is a mixture of both realism and fancy. Mature poetry goes beyond and touches the boundaries of creative imagination. Poetry is a form of literary art in which language is used for its aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition. Poetry may be written independently, as discrete poems. It is also used as a medium in poetic drama, hymns or lyrics.

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Introduction

“To a Skylark” one of the most remarkable poems of Shelley, written in 1820, describes the flight of the skylark that soars high in the sky always pouring forth a most delightful song. Shelley is impressed by the swiftness of the bird, its sweet music and its carefree nature. In contrast to it, he himself is bound hand and foot, as all humanity is and all the time moaning and feeling miserable. The spontaneous action of the bird, its flight and singing, are given in apt expressions in this soul enchanting lyric, which is one of the best Shelley ever wrote. Here the poet has immortalized himself along with the bird.

Shelley gives a beautiful description of the music of Skylark, which does not look like a bird, but seems to be a spirit of heaven, which has never been touched by the sorrows of the world. Shelley believes it to be a spirit that is seldom seen on earth, but is all the time flying very high in the sky, its spontaneous music is so touching that it seems to be coming from the depth of its heart. The notes of music produced by the Skylark are so profuse; the whole atmosphere begins to resound with them. But the bird is invisible.

“Pourest thy full – heart

In Profane strains of unpremeditated art”.

In several stanzas in the beginning, Shelley compares the skylark to some natural things, flying higher in the sky. Under the bright sunshine its wings become transparent and it looks like a cloud of fire. In this manner it flies upward through the blue atmosphere, and is continuously singing and rising higher in the sky.

“Like a cloud of fire;

The blue deep thou wingest”,

At the time of sunset, with the flight of the skylark, the sky becomes extraordinarily enchanting. While the sun is setting in the west, and shedding its golden light in the west, the skylark seems to be floating and running in the sky so gleefully and merrily, that it seems to be a body-less spirit of joy, which has just started its flight.

“Thou dost float and run;

Like an unbody's joy whose race is just begun;

Skylark is invisible like the heavenly stars which on account of the bright light of the sun cannot be seen during the day. But in spite of being invisible, its presence is felt by the poet somewhere high up in the sky on account of sweet music that is coming from it.

The moon becomes dim in the brighter light of the sun; but we feel that the moon is still there in the sky. The sweet notes of music poured forth by the skylark, convince us of its presence in the sky, though it is invisible.

The whole atmosphere resounds because of the sweet song of skylark, just as the moon though covered by a lonely cloud, issues forth its rays and thus floods the whole sky with light. The skylark is also invisible like moon hidden behind a lonely cloud, but the sweet notes of its song fill the whole atmosphere with music. Many of the images in the poem are selected from nature.

“With thy voice is loud”,

As, when the night is bare,

Similes in "To a Skylark"

As the skylark is invisible, the poet asks what it looks like, and what it resembles. All that he knows about it is that from it there issues forth a sweet shower of music, which surpasses in its effect even the shining drops of rain falling from clouds shadowed with the rainbow.

"Like a high-born maiden"

In a palace tower,

The skylark can be compared to a young unmarried girl of noble birth. She is singing songs in the tower of her palace in which she lives. Her heart is oppressed with the feelings of love and so to relieve this overcharged heart she sings. The hour that she chooses is the late night when people are asleep. So she can sing unnoticed by others. The music in which the young maiden's love finds expression is as sweet as the love itself. The sound of her songs has filled her chamber and it is heard below too. The skylark resembles this lady. It also sings from the invisible height and its songs are heard on the earth below.

"Like a glow-worm golden"

In a dell of dew,

Then skylark is compared to a glow worm which hidden behind flowers and grass in a valley covered with dew. Though the glowworm is invisible, yet on account of the colourful light it is shedding forth all around, without being asked for, its presence is known to the people. The skylark, like the glowworm, is invisible in the sky, but on account of the music it is constantly issuing forth, without being asked for, its presence is known to the people.

"Like a rose embowered"

In its own green leaves,

Finally the skylark is compared to a rose which is concealed behind the green leaves and thus is not visible to the bees. But the sweet fragrance it constantly emits fills the atmosphere so profusely that the bees by smelling it become almost faint and thus realize the presence of the rose hidden behind the leaves. It is from this sweet fragrance that the presence of the rose is known; otherwise it is hidden from the view. In the same manner the presence of the Skylark is realized only from the music that it pours forth. The music fills the whole atmosphere and thus is known to the people that the location of the bird is somewhere in the sky.

Song of Skylark

Even the best types of songs sung on the auspicious occasions like marriage and victory are not as sweet as the song of Skylark. These songs about marriage and victory seem to be empty chatter, because in them we feel that something is missing, which is not the case with the song of Skylark.

"What objects are the fountains"

of they happy strain?

So the poet asks the skylark what those objects are, which become the source of its sweet song. What kind of fields, waves or mountains they are, which provide inspiration for such sweet songs? What shape of the sky or the plain gives it a special inspiration to sing? Whether it is the love of its own species or is it the complete unconsciousness of the misery that surrounds the world? Being himself, the poet is inquisitive to know the source of the skylark's inspiration.

Skylark versus men

The skylark seems to enjoy absolute happiness, cannot be touched by any kind of sadness, as it is in the case with human beings. Their happiness is always mixed up with some type of

misery and it is never unalloyed. It seems to Shelley that the skylark does not experience irritation even in the least degree; though experiencing the sentiment of love, it does not reach the point of saturation when love itself becomes a source of misery.

"Shadow of annoyance

Never come near thee;

Here Shelley is comparing the Skylark with men in general, who are never completely happy, who are often annoyed on account of the obstacles which come in their love, and who, though in love, soon reach a point of satiety and the happiness of love is turned into misery.

"Yet if we could scorn

Hate, and pride, and fear.

Shelley comes to the conclusion that human beings personify hate, pride, fear and sorrow. If men could somehow get rid of these, as the Skylark seems to have done, they would be in a position to reach near the world of skylark in experiencing happiness. According to Shelley, the skylark enjoys happiness because it is free from hatred, pride, fear and mental depression. If men can also throw away these evils, tendencies from their temperament, they would attain real happiness.

"Teach me halt the gladness"

That thy brain must know.

In the end poet assures the skylark that if it taught him even half of the happiness that it experiences, he would be able to produce such rapturous songs that the whole world would listen to with as rapt attention as he is listening at present to the song of the skylark. Shelley believes that the poet must be transparently clean and virtuous; only then he can produce real poetry. It is the pure and clean life that the skylark lives, which is responsible for its music which surpasses in its sweetness all other types of natural phenomenon.

Shelley's poem is remarkable for its wonderful similes and metaphors. The skylark is compared to several objects – to a poet, to a high-born maiden, to a glow worm and so on and so forth. The lines are appropriate and highly poetic. They increase the beauty of the poem. He produces music superior to that of marriage or victory love or wine.

Shelley is always thirsting, always yearning, never pouring forth the strains of thankful satisfaction, but signals the cravings of an expectant rapture of the agony of a second nerve.

"To a Skylark" is a symbol of illimitable thirst drinking an inimitable sweetness – an image of that rapture which no man can ever reach because it soars so far from earth and because it is ever rising with unflagging wings, despising old delight. Shelley never brings the bird into contact with us at all. He will not recognize its earthly form or abode at all. It is left in the sky, singing; it will never leave the sky, but will continue to inspire all on earth.

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