

To a Skylark by P B Shelley

P B Shelley is a tremendous lyricist of Romantic Age, who believes in the creation of a new kind of society in which all human beings could live peacefully with the perfect harmony and accurate balance. He was a revolutionary poet in his attitude. He sings his own joy and sorrows through his poems. Once he was expelled from the University of Oxford for the publication of his most criticised work *The Necessity of Atheism*. He was criticised by the many critics for his uses of images which do not have a complete thought of clarity and earthly ideas.

To a Skylark is a wonderful romantic ode of Shelley. In this poem, the poet describes about a small songbird in which the poet believed embodied joy and happiness. **The Skylark's** song surpasses all music; it is a divine expression, an ideal beyond the reach of humans, who knows happiness only through sadness. If only the dark cloud teaches the poet and reveal half the gladness / that thy brain must know, then people might listen to the poet and be transformed. But can this ever be achieved? The poem is sparked by inspiration, fuelled by aspiration and carries a philosophical insight.

For Shelley the **Skylark** is a divine entity, something more than flesh, blood and feather. It is a symbol of spiritual upliftment and represents that all humans strive for but can never attain, freedom from stresses and pain of mortal life.

Throughout the 21 stanza the poet explores this realm of spirituality, comparing the bird with numerous things: a cloud of fire, a star of heaven. A rose and so on. The idea that the bird and its songs transcend the limits of earthly existence and that the bird has an inner knowledge potentially available to humanity is fundamental to the poem and creates a subtle tension.

The poet's approach to this singing bird is fervently romantic, that is, Shelley took inspiration from the natural world, believing it to be an expression of the divine. In fact, he was inspired to write the poem after a country walk in Italy one evening with his second wife Marry.

This fits in neatly with Shelley's own view of what a poet is and what poetry can do to transform and uplift:

“a poet is a nightingale who sits in the darkness and seeks to cheer his own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel they are moved and softened yet know not whence or why.”

According to Shelley, “*poetry redeems from decay the visitations of divinity of man*”

To a Skylark explores the tension that exists between the perfected unpremeditated art and that attempts by the poet to understand and capture. From the initial observation and perception, through the various comparisons and questions, the speaker finally concludes that humans are lacking and inadequate. If only the bird would share its knowledge. If only humans could express this spiritual idea.

The speaker acknowledges that harmonious madness might be the outcome if such things were possible- an idea taken from Plato’s Phaedrus- but at least society at large would be listening.

The ending of the poem resonates with other ending of Shelley’s odes. *In Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* the speaker asks that he may love all human kind; in *Ode To The West Wind* he asks that my words among mankind be scattered; and in *To a Skylark* he asks that from my lips harmonious madness would flow.

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