

To the Skylark : Critical Appreciation

The poem was first composed in 1825 and published in 1827 in the third edition of a volume of Wordsworth's poetry, entitled *The Poems*, classed as a 'poem of the imagination'. Wordsworth's own title was *To A Skylark*; but Palgrave in his *Golden Treasury* changed it to *To The Skylark*.

The poem opens with a description of a peculiar characteristics of the bird. It soars high up in the sky and keeps singing there; but all the while its eye and heart are with its nest on the ground. It can drop down into that nest at will, by suddenly folding its wings and ceasing its song. The alchemical power of Wordsworth's imagination consists in the fact that the skylark is isolated from the older song-birds, especially the nightingale. The skylark sings all the year round, while the other birds have the singing time, hid in the leafy covert of trees. It too has a privacy of light from which it pours its melody below. The bird remains invisible in the brilliance of the sunlight. Its song is diviner than that of the nightingale for it ever soars heavenwards while the nightingale is ever pinned to the ground. It sings high up in the sky but it builds its nest on the ground. It soars almost vertically and drops down straight.

The poem is an example of lyric poetry. Its music is the grave voice of a thinker, not the ecstatic song of a bird. The moralizing tendency of the poet in the poem does not rouse any emotion but if there is any emotion here in realizing the archetype of the bird, it is 'emotion recollected in tranquility'. The poet observes the habits and manners of the skylark. It is the objective reality of the bird that forms the very hub of the lyric. The skylark is to Wordsworth a tiny creature of flesh and blood and not a metaphysical abstraction. The bird sometimes soars so high that it becomes invisible in the material light of the sun. Before it is dark, it stops singing and drops down straight on the nest where its mate and its young ones are awaiting its return. The poem is thus a fine piece of lyric having its structural unity, singleness of thought with an epigrammatic ending.

The poem considers the way of life of the skylark in a moralizing vein. Wordsworth made no secret to instruct, to moralize. The skylark appears to him as a symbol of human wisdom. Like a truly wise man the skylark knows that though he is tied to the earth by a chain of homely love, he must make his home on image of heaven on earth. Wise men are bent on realizing the high spiritual ideals but they do not disregard the humble duties of their earthly lives. But moralizing here does not mar the poetic effects. Wordsworth instructs and edifies through pleasure which is derived from boldness of conception, imaginative vigour and a lofty philosophic tone in the poem 'To The Skylark'.

Wordsworth's style aims at absolute lucidity of expression. His language is selected with a view to reproduce particular experience as faithfully as possible. Wordsworth uses language not to embroider experience but to record it. His attempt to emulate ordinary speech results in language which very often lapses into banality. In this poem the diction acquires a dignity and an epigrammatic force in perfect unity with the loftiness of thought. Each stanza consists of a quatrain and a couplet. The rhythm is iambic.. There are five accents in each line.

The poet's use of metaphor is marked by an avoidance of the obscure and the abstruse. His imagery does not seek to startle us but to match like with us. The skylark is a 'Pilgrim' of the sky because it makes its journey to the heaven every morning. The bird is also an 'Ethereal Minstrel' - a

wandering musician in the court of heaven. The bird has 'A Privacy of glorious light' which seems an oxymoron meaning a hiding place for the bird. The free and lavish burst of the bird's song is compared to the flood inundating the earth- 'a flood a harmony'.

The poem has a single thought, the pointed brevity, the noble diction, the dignified tone, and the artistic grace of a sonnet.