

26.16th April, '20

Lecture No - 7 / Dr. Hemphill, The
Topic "To A Skylark by Percy Bysshe Shelley" (continued
from L. No - 6)

Shelley's lyric sense: -

Shelley's lyric sense was native. He was as much a master of short lyrics of despair as of elaborate - native - lyric like "The cloud" or hymns of hope like the "Ode to Liberty". Almost half of "Prometheus Unbound" is congeries of lyrics. "Witch of Atlas" and "Adonais" are lyrical throughout. "Hellas" is full of lyrical bursts. Shelley had no master to outweigh him and even after him only Swinburne can claim to equal his lyrical genius. Shelley's sheer instinct for lyric language was greater than that of Wordsworth, Byron or Keats. He was not a lyric artist in the sense Tennyson was. Shelley's lyric form is not always compact. The stanzas VIII to IX of "Skylark" can be arranged in any order without spoiling the poem. There is little condensation or sculpturing in Shelley's language. It is rather lavishly poured out. Shelley never "chiselled his phrases" to load every rift with ore. His lyrics are really the spontaneous overflow of his powerful emotions, fiercely passionate hopes and exhaustive despair. He never strove after the

mastery of the perfect phrase or line. He never tried to achieve the close packed richness and concentration of Keats. But it would be wrong to think that the melody of Shelley's lyrics was effortless. To quote Elton; "He did not, like his own 'Skeylark', chant without labour. He rewrought and rejected incessantly."

Usually Shelley's lyrics proceed from intense emotions and frequent enthusiasm. He was swiftly led away by his lyric impulse. He was impelled from within by his thoughts and they immediately swept him away into the emotions which belonged to them. Such is the intensity of his emotions and the heat of his fervour that it refuses to be held in check and overflows in his lyrics. Shelley himself merges his personality in his song and for the moment "becomes the unbodied voice of future or the cry of despair."

Among Shelley's lyrics of inward inspiration, love lyrics form a fairly big group. They are generally sad and reveal the ever changing and vague character of his passion which was too ideal to find fulfilment in life. They are not so much addressed to individuals as to an ideal or a vision. The element of sex is strangely absent from Shelley's love lyrics. An unusual quietness and calm pervades them. They convey more of an impression of Shelley's own emotional state than of the personality of individual inspiring

that emotion. "Shelley evinces little feeling for the human body" says Fogle. "His interest was rather in expression of ideal than of the living particular form." Considering the intensity of Shelley's actual attachment to women this is indeed surprising.

"To A Skylark": -

Shelley considers skylarks as spirit and an un-bodied joy whose song is full of pure joy without the shadow of sorrow. The skylark is rather "a winged desire" always rising and singing song that gives the hearer the yearning of youthful ecstasy.

The poet is charmed with the songs of the skylark and its power to soar and to sing at the same time. It seems to the poet reflecting his own yearning after the pure form of joy and beauty. The winged creature is, for Shelley, more of an ethereal spirit than a bird. The poet considers the body of the bird free from the grossness of matter. Shelley was more interested in abstract than in the concrete and was able to conjure up abstract notions from concrete things. "To A Skylark" is considered to be one of the most

representative poems of Shelley from the artistic point of view. Its sonorous music, its wealth of metaphors, its unusual ~~music~~ imageries and ebullient lyricism makes the poem a symbol of Shelley's desire in the pursuit of divine ecstasy. This pursuit has been well put by Hutton: "Shelley is always thirsting, always yearning; never pouring forth the strains of a thankful satisfaction, but either the cravings of an expectant rapture or the agony of a second nerve. Wordsworth pierces the homely crust of earth to find the rich fountain of life in the eternal mind; Shelley follows with wistful eyes the fleeting stream of beauty as it for ever escapes him into illimitable world."

Shelley, in this poem, does not complain of the shortcomings of his own destiny, but appears in the role of a prophet analysing the imperfections of human life. The lyric fervour is revealed by his prophetic ardour.

Comparison with Wordsworth's "Skylark"

Wordsworth's skylark is true perhaps to the every day life of the bird and the poet

remembers because he loves his own home and that the singer will return to the nest; but Shelley sees and hears the bird who ~~is~~ in its hour of inspired singing will not re-collect that it has home. Wordsworth humanises the whole spirit of the pilgrim of the sky. Shelley never brings the bird into contact with us at all. It is left in the sky singing; it will never leave the sky. It is the archetype of the lark we seem to listen to, and yet we cannot conceive it. We have no power. "What art thou we know not."

Metre: -

In the short lines there are three and two accents alternatively, but in the long ones there are five accents, the feet being 'trochaic'. Leigh Hunt, speaking of this Metre says: "Shelley chose the measure of this poem with great felicity. The earnest hurry of the four short lines, followed by the long effusiveness of the Alexandrine, expresses the eagerness and continuity of the lark."

(concluded)
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