

The Skylark: A Symbol of Poetic Inspiration for Generations with Special Reference to Shelley and Hughes

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ABSTRACT

The skylark is a tiny brown bird with a small crest on its head. It is slightly larger than a sparrow and is popularly known for its uninterrupted song during its upward flight. The bird is found in most parts of England and many European countries. A closer examination of English poetic tradition reveals that several English poets have anthologised this tiny bird, including famous poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Hopkins, Meredith, Rossetti, Rosenberg, and C Day-Lewis. The late poet laureate Ted Hughes also wrote about the skylark in our times. Even Shakespeare and Goethe have eulogised the skylark in their plays. Since Thomas Hardy has written a poem about 'Shelley's skylark,' it is evident that traditionally 'To a Skylark' by Shelley is the most popular of all 'Skylark' poems. However, Hughes's poem on skylark merits our attention because it is entirely different from the general trend of all other skylark poems written until his time. Therefore, this study explores how the skylark became a symbol of poetic inspiration for different generations of poets by analysing the two famous poems on skylark written by Shelley (1792–1822) and

Hughes (1930–1998). While Shelley depicts the skylark as a pure spirit of joy, Hughes considers it an embodiment of cosmic energy resulting from the bird's struggle for flight against the earth's gravitational pull. Therefore, the different perceptions of Shelley and Hughes about the skylark constitute the essence of this discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to figure out the significance of the bird 'Skylark' as a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations through a semiotic analysis of two famous poems on 'Skylark' separated by the gap of more than a century. In other words, this paper is a comparative analysis of Shelley's (1792–1822) poem 'To a Skylark' and the contemporary poem 'Skylarks' by Ted Hughes (1930–1998). A critical examination of the history of English poetry from Shakespeare to the modern age shows that more than twenty prominent poets have anthologised the skylark in various ways. Wordsworth wrote two poems on skylark, and Shakespeare wrote about the bird in many of his plays. However, Shelley's poetic rendering of 'skylark' has captured the English cultural consciousness and transformed the bird into a symbol of 'pure delight' or an 'unbodied joy.' The impact of this tiny bird on English cultural fabric was so great that several poets had anthologized the bird in several different ways based on their particular poetic vision. However, all the poets except Hughes considered the bird a symbol of divine perfection and a source of pure delight because of its uninterrupted melodious song. Thomas Hardy went to the extent of writing a poem about Shelley's skylark. He claims that the skylark achieved immortality because Shelley heard the lark's song and immortalized the bird through his powerful poetic creativity.

Similarly, in our times, the poem 'Skylarks' by Ted Hughes exerted a seminal influence on contemporary poetry because

of the originality of his perception of the skylark, which is completely different from the traditional view held by other English poets for centuries. Hughes believed that the skylarks are indestructible, and they originated much before the existence of this earth. According to Stuart Hirschberg (1981), there was a myth among the ancient people that the skylark was created before any other animals, and it came into being before the existence of the earth and even before the origin of powerful gods such as Kronos and Zeus. Moreover, the myth further explains that the skylark buried the dead body of its father in its head because there was no earth to bury him. This author published a book on Hughes's poetry and established that the poetry of Hughes was built upon the concept of indestructible cosmic energy, which was scientifically formulated as ($E=mc^2$) by Einstein (Baby, 2022). Since Einstein proved that energy is the only imperishable reality in this world, Hughes laid the foundation of his poetry on this solid basis. However, this is often misunderstood as violence in his poetry. According to Hughes, the animals that live in perfect harmony with Nature are the best examples of pure cosmic energy. In the poem 'Skylarks,' Hughes establishes that the struggle and resistance of the skylark in its upward flight eventually transform the bird into currents of pure cosmic energy. In other words, the bird's specificity is annihilated through the excruciating process of its laborious upward flight, which ultimately transfigures the bird into a 'floating sacrifice' or a semiotic expression of pure cosmic

energy. In order to explore the different perceptions of Shelley and Hughes about the skylark and establish that the skylark has been a source of inspiration for generations of poets down the ages, a chronological survey of the skylark poems has been undertaken in the literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of this study is derived from the fact that the skylark has been a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets down the ages. However, until now, there has not been any comprehensive or focused research on why so many poets have written about the bird skylark as a symbol of perfection and a source of divine joy. Among all skylark poems, Shelley's poem on skylark is a supreme poetic achievement that represents the best traditional view of the bird as an embodiment of perfection and a source of divine joy. However, Ted Hughes's recent poem, 'Skylarks,' offered a completely different perspective of the bird from the general trend of all other skylark poems written until his time. Therefore, the research question that is addressed in this study can be summarised in the following words:

What qualities marked out the skylark as a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets ideally represented by Shelley's poem, and what is unique about Ted Hughes's poem that departs from the general trend of all other skylark poems written before his time?

In order to address the above research question, a comparative analysis of Shelley's and Hughes's poems is necessary because Shelley represents the bird as an icon of perfection and a symbol of pure joy in line with the traditional concept of skylark down the ages. On the other hand, Hughes's skylark marks a significant departure from the traditional concept of the bird ingrained in English cultural consciousness. Although both these poems explore divergent and sometimes mutually contradictory aspects of the bird, they offer valid revelations for overcoming human limitations through powerful expressions of poetic creativity. In this sense, the skylark in Shelley and Hughes gradually emerges as a symbol of transcendence for the readers of both poems through different routes. In Shelley, the bird achieves transcendence by keeping away from the earthly surroundings and pouring out celestial music from ethereal regions. However, in Hughes, the bird achieves transcendence through its struggle and resistance against the earth's gravitational pull during its upward flight. This struggle ultimately causes the transcendence of the bird into currents of indestructible cosmic energy, which is a central concept in Hughes's poetry, as already explained. Shelley's skylark is a pure spirit of joy or a divine messenger. In contrast, Hughes' skylark is a floating sacrifice of pure cosmic energy or a symbol of struggle and resistance in a hostile world.

In order to establish that the skylark has been a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets down the ages, it

is necessary to examine English literary history from the time of Shakespeare. A chronological survey from Shakespeare reveals that more than 20 English writers have anthologised the skylark down the ages. For example, Shakespeare has eulogised the bird in many of his plays, such as *Troilus and Cressida*, *Love's Labour Lost*, *Venus & Adonis*, *Cymbeline*, and *Romeo & Juliet*. Shakespeare addresses the skylark variously as the "the morning lark," or "the herald of the morn" to depict the bird's heavenly origin by associating it with the radiant beauty of the dawn:

"Lo, here the gentle lark, weary
of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up
on high,
And wakes the morning, from whose
silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty;"
[Venus and Adonis]

The merry song of the skylark singing melodiously from celestial height is celebrated by Shakespeare in the following lines:

I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye,
'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow;
Nor that is not the lark, whose notes do beat
The vaulty heaven so high above our
heads: **[Romeo and Juliet: III,5]**

Next to Shakespeare, Goethe, a prominent contemporary of Shakespeare, wrote about the skylark. He mentions specifically the celestial quality of the skylark's song in his famous work *Faust*:

But 'tis our inborn impulse, deep
and strong,
Upwards and onwards still to urge
our flight,
When above us pours its thrilling song
The skylark, lost in azure light,
[Faust: Lines 1093-1096]

In continuation to Shakespeare and Goethe, several other poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Hopkins, Meredith, Rossetti, Rosenberg, and C Day-Lewis have written about the skylark in different periods. The poets invariably consider the skylark a symbol of transcendence primarily because of the bird's singular ability to sing melodiously and fly vertically at high speed simultaneously. It is the obvious reason why the skylark has become a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations starting from Shakespeare to Ted Hughes, as evident from the poetic rendering of the bird by numerous other poets. For example, Shakespeare begins his poem with the invocation: Hark, hark! The lark at heaven's gate sings, and Goethe glorifies the skylark's song by saying that it pours out its thrilling song from far above us and is lost in azure light. Similarly, Cecil Dey-Lewis says the skylark is a singing star whose wings and voice are in heaven's abode. For Isaac Rosenberg, there is a strange joy in listening to the showering music of the unseen larks from the heavens above. Wordsworth, the father of English Romantic poetry, declared emphatically that the skylark is a symbol of poetic inspiration because of its melodious song and swift vertical flight through his opening lines:

ETHEREAL minstrel! pilgrim of
the sky

Dost thou despise the earth where cares
abound? (*Skylark poems*, n.d., p. 28).

In short, a chronological survey of the skylark poems written by various poets establishes that the skylark has become a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets primarily because of the bird's singular ability to sing melodiously and fly vertically at high speed simultaneously. Moreover, most poets consider the bird a symbol of transcendence and an icon of perfection in this imperfect world. As a result, this study has indicated that the skylark is a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets by pointing out that all the poets invariably speak of the heavenly music the bird can produce. In addition, most poets unanimously agree that the bird dwells mostly in ethereal regions or is invisible most of the time. The detailed analysis of two famous poems on skylark by Shelley and Hughes further elaborates on the bird's singular quality of transcendence through its vertical upward flight. The above chronological survey has established that the skylark has become a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets primarily due to the bird's singular ability to sing melodiously and fly vertically at high speed simultaneously. Therefore, the next section will examine the descriptive-analytic method of comparison and contrast for analysing the skylark poems of Shelley and Hughes to vindicate the research question further.

METHOD

A descriptive-analytic method of comparison and contrast is employed for analysing two famous poems on skylarks by Shelley and Hughes to address the specific research question about the qualities that marked out the skylark as a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets ideally represented by Shelley's poem in contrast to the radical nature of Ted Hughes's poem that departs from the general trend of all other skylark poems written before his time.

The first part of the research question has already been answered through a chronological survey of some of the famous skylark poems in the literature review by establishing that the skylark has become a symbol of poetic inspiration for generations of poets primarily due to the bird's singular ability to sing melodiously and fly vertically at high speed simultaneously. Moreover, most poets consider the bird a symbol of transcendence and an icon of perfection in this imperfect world, as the bird is invisible when it sings. Shelley's poem can be considered the culmination of this traditional line of thought that depicts the skylark as a blithe spirit pouring out celestial melodies from the heavens. However, Hughes' skylark radically departs from this conventional view by becoming a symbol of struggle and resistance by laboriously trying to extricate itself from the earth's gravitational pull. Shakespeare's concept of the skylark's celestial melody and its proximity to heaven are the basic concepts on which Shelley builds up his poetic artefact, replete with exquisite verbal music.

For example, Shelley addresses the bird as a blithe spirit that pours out full-hearted melodies in strains of unpremeditated art.

As a result, Shelley's direct invocation of the bird as a 'blithe spirit' at the beginning of the poem completely obliterates the physical reality of the bird and its specificity. On the other hand, the skylark of Hughes is firmly rooted in the world of physical reality. Shelley's skylark is a natural metaphor for a harmonious life on this earth. The bird is untouched by any traces of sorrow or misery. However, the Skylark of Hughes is a symbol of struggle and resistance in a hostile world. Ultimately, the bird becomes a floating sacrifice and transfigures into indestructible cosmic energy. These opposed perceptions of the skylark offered by Shelley and Hughes constitute the essence of this research. While Shelley and Hughes agree that the bird is a symbol of transcendence, several other distinguishing features warrant a comparison and contrast of both the poems, such as the content, style and poetic vision. Moreover, it is important to understand the concept of transcendence which the bird achieves through different routes in both the poems. Therefore, the next two sections will take up the individual analysis of both poems separately to reveal their linguistic peculiarities and the poets' contradictory perceptions about the skylark. (See Appendix for the text of the poems)

'To A Skylark' By Shelley

Shelley's poem consists of 105 lines divided into 21 stanzas of five lines, each with a regular metrical pattern with the repeated

rhyme scheme of ABABB. Shelley employs flowery imagery and melodious diction and uses almost all poetic devices to make the poem a perfect artistic creation. The secret of the poem's appeal lies in the harmonious fusion of Shelley's poetic creativity with numerous poetic devices. Shawa (2015), who undertook a stylistic analysis of the poem, says that in addition to the usual phonological, graphological, morphological and syntactic analysis, even punctuations and capitalisations have special significance in Shelley's poem. For example, he elaborates on capitalising on the words 'Heaven' and 'Spirit'. Shelley creates slant rhyme in the poem by skilfully manipulating consonant sounds such as /s/ /p/ /r/ /t/. The poem's musical quality is heightened by the application of trochaic trimeter throughout the poem and iambic hexameter for the long line with which each stanza ends. Poetic devices such as alliteration, apostrophe, paradox, and anaphora are used with consummate skill by Shelley in the poem (*To a skylark poem summary*, n.d.).

For example, in Lines 46 and 47, we find examples of

Alliteration:

Like a **g**low-worm **g**olden
In a **d**ell of **d**ew.

Line 1 is an example of **Apostrophe**: Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

Line 103 offers an example of **Paradox**:/ harmonious madness/.

The repetition of the word 'What' in lines 71–75 gives us a beautiful example of **Anaphora**:

What objects are the fountains

Of thy happy strain?

What fields, or waves, or mountains?

What shapes of sky or plain?

What love of thine own kind? **what** ignorance of pain? (*To a Skylark* by Percy, n.d., p. 4)

The poem's structural perfection is further enhanced using certain imagery and figures of speech. The imagery of light and brightness dominates the poem. The continuous use of the imagery of brightness and reference to light in the first part of the poem makes the reader believe that the skylark is a divine messenger like Christ, who is the light of the world. The uninterrupted flow of the imagery of light such as fire, lightning, sun, brightening, star, daylight, beams, bright, light and glow (lines 8–47) elevates the bird into a symbol of divine messenger (*To a Skylark. A poem*, n.d.). The skylark is a spirit of joy that cannot be perceived through our sensory experience alone because the bird is invisible most of the time, as the divine presence of God in this world. Zaiter (2018) says that Shelley's Skylark is observed on a flight to Heaven. The bird is there, but it stands for the highest point that the poet's imagination can reach. The corporeal existence of the bird is eclipsed by describing the bird's flight along with its melodious music. The bird

sings and soars while pouring out its heart in ceaseless divine melody from the lofty heights of the heavens. The poet employs an array of vivid images to enhance the divine nature and the heavenly melody of the skylark.

In short, Shelley's 'skylark' is an exceptional poem both structurally and linguistically because of its unique stanzaic form consisting of four uniform lines and a lengthy line at the end. The continuous repetition of this five-line structure and its exceptional diction produced by the poet appear naturally like 'profuse strains of unpremeditated art' (*"To a Skylark": Critical Appreciation*, n.d.). Like a wizard of vocal music, Shelley transforms the poem into divine worship through his incomparable selection and arrangement of words. In short, the skylark's song gradually becomes a divine melody of prophetic utterance as the bird is endowed with a penetrating insight into the mystery of life and death. Consequently, no song of man can ever come near the joyous melody of the bird. As a result, the poet yearns for this divine spirit of the skylark to inspire humanity into a fearless, hopeful, and happy existence. The song of the invisible skylark finally culminates into a "harmonious madness," symbolising the height of happiness.

Finally, the skylark's ecstatic song surpasses the beauty and glory of any created object in this world. The inspiring metaphors in the poem transform the bird into an immortal spirit. The poet compares the skylark to several exquisite objects in

this world, such as a radiant glow-worm, a beautiful rose flower, or a twinkling grass in the sunshine. According to Shelley, the ideal world of the skylark should be the ultimate goal of every human being. In short, Shelley's skylark inhabits an ideal world far removed from the mundane miseries of ordinary mortals. In contrast, Hughes' skylark struggles to fly higher and higher with its heart drumming like a motor, and it ultimately becomes a floating sacrifice in its attempt to transcend the harsh realities of this world. The following section will analyse Hughes's poem in detail to understand how it is different from all the skylark poems written by generations of poets before his time, especially in comparison to Shelley's poem.

'Skylarks' by Hughes

Hughes's poem consists of 102 lines divided into eight sections with a varying number of lines in each section. The lines are highly irregular in length, and certain lines contain only a single word. The irregular stanzaic structure reminds us of the tortuous vertical flight of the skylark. However, even the poem's structure is completely different from Shelley's skylark, whose flight is a flawless, ecstatic activity realized in regular stanzaic structure. The structure, diction and the poetic images in Hughes are all oriented towards an energetic struggle for transcendence through a sort of excruciating purgatorial ritual similar to that of a shaman:

The skylark's flight can be considered a symbolic re-enactment of the shamanic rites of purgation, flight and transcendence. The bird's struggle for flight finally culminates in a ritualistic primitivism through its mimetic recreation of the dynamics of the shamanic technique of transference. (Baby, 2022, p. 82)

The skylark's flight in Hughes is materialised through several descriptive metaphors that declare the poet's superior craftsmanship. On a perceptive analysis, the skylark's flight can be regarded as a semiotic expression of Hughes's theory of poetry. The skylark's flight process can be considered an explication of the "Chora," a keyword in understanding the semiotic concept of Kristeva and Moi. According to Kristeva and Moi (2002), the "Chora" is the cosmic energy that activates a living organism's basic instincts. On critical analysis of the poem, the Skylark's struggle for flight ultimately transforms into the Chora or a sort of pure energy. According to Kristeva and Moi (2002), the Chora is "a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stasis in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" In other words, the elements of intertextuality in Hughes's poem skylark explicates its affinity to the Chora which is another form of cosmic energy as propounded by Julia Kristeva.

The first part of the poem, skylarks instantly transports a discerning reader into the realm of energy. For example, the metaphorical descriptions of the

skylark, such as barrel-chested, whippet-head and hunting arrow, are powerful images of struggle and resistance. The sign “skylark” signifies the condition of a struggle which ultimately becomes a semiotic expression of pure cosmic energy as the bird tries to extricate itself from the earth’s centre to be free of its gravitational pull. (Baby, 2022, p. 79)

In short, the cosmic energy or the Chora helps the skylark transform the earth’s centre into the essence of the skylark’s life’s centre. As a result, the bird finally becomes a symbol of struggle and resistance. In the second section, the flight of the skylark emanates from “an irresistible biological necessity, and the entire process of the lark’s flight is a virtual experience of death by the ritualistic annihilation of life and everything that binds the bird to the gravitational centre of the earth” (Baby, 2022, p. 80). In order to be released from the gravitational forces of the earth, the bird has to be “obedient as to death a dead thing. The pitch of the lark’s struggle is so intense that the fine thread of distinction between joy and struggle is lost in the experience” (p. 81).

The skylark sheds its specificity in the fourth section of the poem and assumes several metaphorical significations to become pure cosmic energy. According to Baby (2022), all the images in this section explicate the cultural milieu of the poet, as evident from the following lines:

My idleness curdles
Seeing the lark labour near its cloud.
(*Skylarks by Ted Hughes*, n.d., p. 4)

The laborious flight of the lark with ‘its heart drumming like a motor’ is a replica of the contemporary industrial environment filled with the drumming sound of machines that the poet experienced during his time.

The concluding section of the poem virtually depicts the process of transfiguration caused by the laborious flight of the bird. Baby offers an excellent semiotic analysis of the poem by establishing that the skylark’s struggle for flight finally culminates in the total annihilation of its body or its physical identity by becoming a floating sacrifice:

The whirling currents of a consumeristic society wiping out the identity of the man is captured metaphorically in the image of the lark dithering in ether and evaporating in the whirling sun. The speaking persona in the poem finally becomes indistinguishable from the lark and the process of its physical struggle for flight. The possibility of a flight from the earth that is a folded clod entails the annihilation of the self. When the larks achieve perfection by transcending their physical limitations through their struggle, they become floating sacrifices, the missionaries of mad earth. The transcendence of the lark through the process of their physical struggle makes them semiotics of energy realized in their mortal bodies. The larks virtually exemplify the human condition through a process of struggle and their ultimate triumph like a shaman (2022, p. 81).

The descriptive-analytic analysis method has presented the difference in perception of the skylark in Shelley and Hughes. As a result, the following section will critically evaluate the study's findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The semiotic analysis of the poems of Shelley and Hughes revealed that Shelley's perception of the skylark aligns with the traditional concept of the bird from the time of Shakespeare until Ted Hughes. It upholds the idea that the bird is of celestial origin, singing out heavenly melodies. Therefore, Shelley calls it an "unbodied joy" or an "ethereal spirit" dwelling blissfully in ethereal regions. In other words, Shelley's skylark is a sign that gives rise to unlimited semiosis generating metaphorical images of transcendence conditioned by the poet's cultural context. On the other hand, Hughes radically departs from the traditional view and makes the bird a symbol of struggle and resistance. In short, Shelley's skylark is a pure spirit of joy or an unbodied delight that signifies the semiotics of transcendence. However, in Hughes, the skylark symbolises struggle and resistance with its heart drumming like a motor. However, Hughes' skylark achieves transcendence by becoming a floating sacrifice recharged with pure cosmic energy.

The mutually contradictory views regarding the skylark held by Shelley and Hughes can be justified by applying Umberto Eco's theory of Semiotics. According to Umberto Eco (1997), a real object is a sign or a code that signifies a physical or living

object. However, the real image or the meaning of a word is completely detached or independent of the real object signified by the code. In this sense,

when someone does something in response to a particular sign vehicle, it merely gives us information about the cultural units in question. Therefore, the skylark is not equivalent to any particular skylark (real object), but it is a pure sign encoded within a specific cultural context. (Baby, 2022, p. 77)

As a result, the skylark of Shelley can signify a completely different set of meanings or significations from that of Hughes because the social and cultural contexts of both the poets are different. Other famous semioticians like Roland Barthes (1977) also supported this view.

In short, the sign that signifies the skylark in Shelley and Hughes generates diverse metaphorical significations reflecting the social and cultural milieu specific to each of them. In Hughes, the bird's struggle for the flight can be considered "a semiotic expression of contemporary life which is a series of struggles against the inimical forces that threaten man's integrity" (Baby, 2022, p. 81). On the contrary, in Shelley's poem, the skylark symbolises transcendence signifying pure delight. K. M. Sagar has analysed this difference brilliantly:

Shelley assumes the skylark's song to be an expression of careless rapture and feeling that no creature of earth

could know such pure delight and ignorance of pain is driven to call his skylark an 'unbodied joy', a 'blithe spirit'. Hughes, on the contrary, starts from the bird of muscle, blood and bone, feathers thrashing, lungs gasping, heart drumming like a motor, voice-box grinding like a concrete mixer and cannot believe that such climbing can be done for joy (1978, p. 89).

While Sagar illustrates the contrast of perceptions in Shelley and Hughes, Thomas West (1985) goes a step further and establishes that the skylark is essentially an embodiment of energy in Hughes because the bird is a sign 'encoded within the poet's social and cultural context.' Therefore, according to West, the skylark is an exact counter or equivalent of energy itself:

The energetic bird, Hughes would say, is ultimately the exact count of the word skylark. Stated the other way round, a skylark is the adequate figure of speech for the energetic animal, as long as that figure of speech is as it was experienced rather than understood. (1985, p. 44)

It can be said that the skylark in Hughes undergoes a total transformation from a physical bird into the semiotics of pure cosmic energy for an observing persona. According to Baby (2022), the specific details of the bird and its laborious flight gradually transform into an abstract internal struggle in the reader's mind. The excruciating process of the lark's flight

is a symbolic expression of the primitive shamanic rites of flight and purgation. Life in contemporary society can be considered a virtual enactment of the purgatorial flight of the lark. However, at the culminating phase of the lark's laborious flight, it is recharged with pure cosmic energy and begins to drift and float not like sacrifices but with changed notes of perfect conscience like the risen Christ. The excruciating process of the lark's flight and the intervention of the speaking persona at the end of the poem amplifies human life as a condition of struggle and resistance against the inimical forces present in this world.

Ultimately, the intervention of the speaking persona in the poem can also be viewed from another angle. According to Panecka (2018), the shamans invariably transfer their anguish and sufferings onto animal totems during their shamanic initiation rites. Analysing the lark's excruciating experience from any angle or perception reflects modern man's existential agony of going through the meaningless activities of his daily life. In short, the critical analysis of the skylark given above is based on the perceptions of several poets in the past and specifically Shelley and Hughes. Undoubtedly, the skylark symbolises poetic inspiration for generations of poets because of the bird's singular ability to sing melodiously and simultaneously fly vertically at high speed. While Shelley upholds the conventional view of the bird as a 'blithe spirit' singing divine melodies, Hughes departs radically from this conventional concept and depicts

his skylark as a symbol of struggle and resistance resulting from its laborious upward flight. However, Hughes's lark achieves transcendence just before the final plummeting dead drop by becoming a 'floating sacrifice' recharged with currents of pure cosmic energy. It can be concluded that Shelley and Hughes hold opposing views and mutually contradictory semiotic functions in their representations of the skylark, as Lechte (1994) claims. However, both agree that the bird is undoubtedly a symbol of transcendence for all human beings in this miserable world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that despite the contradictory perceptions of Shelley and Hughes about the flight and song of the skylark, there is a converging agreement between them about the skylark as a symbol of transcendence. However, in both, the final goal of transcendence achieved by the skylark is through mutually contradictory experiences. In Hughes, this is made possible through an excruciating struggle of upward flight, which is reflected in the line which says that the whole agony was for this plummeting dead drop. The poet further says that the recharged energy of the bird is typified in long cutting screams, which are buckling like razors that transform the struggle and flight of the skylark into pure currents of cosmic energy signifying the bird's final liberation from all its limitations.

On the other hand, Shelley's skylark enjoys a blissful existence aspired by every

human being in this miserable world. As a result, Shelley makes a fervent prayer to the skylark to give him at least half the gladness of the bird so that he could at least understand the essence of the "harmonious madness" or the unalloyed joy experienced by the bird. On the other hand, the skylark of Ted Hughes is a symbol of struggle "manacled with blood battering their last sparks" in their laborious flight. However, at the penultimate moments of the flight, the skylark becomes a floating sacrifice recharged with pure cosmic energy that enables the bird to transcend its limitations before its final plummeting drop. Therefore, the purgatorial struggle of the skylark transforms the bird into an alert spirit with a perfect conscience, similar to the risen Christ or a shaman. In Short, the skylark has inspired generations of poets and writers diversely throughout the history of English literature.

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APPENDIX

TO A SKYLARK: BY [PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY](#)

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
Thou dost float and run;
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of Heaven,
In the broad day-light
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,

Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is overflow'd.
What thou art we know not;

What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

Like a Poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aëreal hue
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:

Like a rose embower'd
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflower'd,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves:

Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awaken'd flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.

Teach us, Sprite or Bird,
What sweet thoughts are thine:
I have never heard
Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.
Chorus Hymeneal,
Or triumphal chant,
Match'd with thine would be all

But an empty vaunt,
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

What objects are the fountains
Of thy happy strain?
What fields, or waves, or mountains?
What shapes of sky or plain?
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest: but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

Waking or asleep,
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!
Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.
Lines taken from: [To a Skylark by Percy Bysshe Shelley | Poetry Foundation](#)

SKYLARKS : BY TED HUGHES

I

The lark begins to go up
Like a warning
As if the globe were uneasy –
Barrel-chested for heights
Like an Indian of the high Andes,
A whippet head, barbed like a hunting arrow,
But leaden
With muscle
For the struggle
Against
Earth's centre
And leaden
For ballast
In the rocketing storms of the breath.
Leaden
Like a bullet
To supplant
Life from its centre.

II

Crueller than owl or eagle
A towered bird, shot through the crested head
With the command,
Not die
But climb
Climb
Sing
Obedient as to death a dead thing.

III

I suppose you just gape and let your gaspings
Rip in and out through your voicebox

O lark
And sing inwards as well as outwards
Like a breaker of ocean rolling the shingle
O lark
O song, incomprehensibly both ways –Joy! Help! Joy! Help!
O lark

IV

You stop to rest, far up, you teeter
Over the drop.
But not stopping singing
Resting only for a second
Dropping just a little
Then up and up and up
Like a mouse with drowning fur
Bobbing and bobbing at the well-wall
Lamenting, mounting a little –
But the sun will not take notice
And the earth's centre smiles.

V

My idleness curdles
Seeing the lark labour near its cloud
Scrambling
In a nightmare difficulty
Up through the nothing
Its feathers thrash, its heart must be drumming like a motor,
As if it were too late, too late.
Dithering in ether
Its song whirls faster and faster
And the sun whirls
The lark is evaporating
Till my eye's gossamer snaps
and my hearing floats back widely to earth.
After which the sky lies blank open

Without wings, and the earth is a folded clod.
Only the sun goes silently and endlessly on with the lark's song.

VI

All the dreary Sunday morning
Heaven is a madhouse
With the voices and frenzies of the larks,
Squealing and gibbering and cursing
Heads flung back, as I see them,
Wings almost torn off backwards – far up
Like sacrifices set floating
The cruel earth's offerings
The mad earth's missionaries.

VII

Like those flailing flames
The lift from the fling of a bonfire
Claws dangling full of what they feed on
The larks carry their tongues to the last atom
Battering and battering their last sparks out at the limit –
So it's a relief, a cool breeze
When they've had enough, when they're burned out
And the sun's sucked them empty
And the earth gives them the O.K.
And they relax, drifting with changed notes
Dip and float, not quite sure if they may
Then they are sure and they stoop
And maybe the whole agony was for this
The plummeting dead drop
With long cutting screams buckling like razors
But just before they plunge into the earth
They flare and glide off low over grass, then up
To land on a wall-top, crest up,

Kappalumakkel Thomas Baby

Weightless,
Paid-up,
Alert,
Conscience perfect.

VIII

Manacled with blood,
Cuchulain listened bowed,
Strapped to his pillar (not to die prone)
Hearing the far crow
Guiding the near lark nearer
With its blind song
“That some sorry little wight more feeble and misguided than thyself
Take thy head
Thine ear
And thy life’s career from thee.”

Lines taken from: <https://lyrics.lol/artist/21050-ted-hughes/lyrics/3746304-skylarks>