



## Exploring Birds as Glorified in the Romantic Poetry

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**Abstract:** English Romantic poetry contributes profound love and genuine reverence of the poets to nature. Birds constitute a part of nature, and love for nature is one of the perpetual features and themes of the Romantic poetry. This article, which aims at exploring birds how English Romantic poets glorify them in their poetry, comprises five poems of four celebrated English Romantic poets, namely Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. This article concludes that the Romantic poets glorify birds as a blithe spirit, a light-winged fairy, an ethereal minstrel, a blithe new-comer, a wandering voice, a darling of the spring, Christian soul and so on.

**Keywords:** Albatross, cuckoo, nature, nightingale, Romantic poetry, skylark.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a cherished asset of creation of mankind. Poetry, a supple form of literature, is rich in emotions, imagination, musicality and implied expressions. It is a projection of life through imagination and feelings (Hudson, 2002). Romantic poetry holds the features like love for nature, melancholy escapism, imagination, Medievalism, subjectivity supernaturalism and Hellenism. Romantic poets were recognized as those poets who followed Romanticism, a movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that exposed the reaction in literature, philosophy, art, religion and politics from Neoclassicism and formal orthodoxy of the prior period (Harmon, 2009). They revolted against the poetic tradition of the eighteenth century and detested the established rules and instructions of the neo-classical poets and provided too much emphasis on passion, imagination, uniqueness and independence in their poetry written in normally used everyday language. English Romanticism can be viewed as both a revolt and a revival. The best accredited English Romantic poets are Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is a British poet from Grasmere, Lake District (Parrish, 2021). He abridged man's mystical relationship with nature (Parrish, 2021). Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) is an English poet, literary critic and philosopher. He is a focal figure in the Romantic Movement of the early Nineteenth Century (Beer, 2021). Percy Bysshe Shelley (4 August 1792 – 8 July 1822) is one of the major English poets (Reiman, 2021). John Keats (1795 – 1821) is a leading English lyric poet (Hough, 2021). This article explores how these Romantic poets treat the birds in their poetry. The article writer takes five poems as a sample for writing this brief article.

## 2. Birds in Romantic Poetry

A bird is a warm-blooded egg-laying vertebrate animal distinguished by the possession of feathers, wings, a beak, and typically by being able to fly (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003, p. 167). It is a dull and physical definition of a bird, but birds are, much more than these identities, special creatures for the poets. They are the creatures which enjoy both the earth and the sky. They are beautifiers of nature and inspirers for the poets. Nature in poets kindles

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imagination that draws on our understandings and information of the world around us and joins them with the entirely unacquainted entities to make somewhat innovative (Lavelle, 2014). Romantic poets commonly treat birds in a special way. They are such beings which are glorified maximally in poetry by presenting them to be much merrier, far freer, and more gratified than mankind.

### 2.1 Birds in Wordsworth's Poetry

"To the Skylark" created by William Wordsworth (1827) is a beautiful poem which describes the activities of the Skylark in the sky. The poet praises the bird for the sweet melody it produces. The skylark, compared to an ethereal minstrel or a bard, sings in the upper regions of the air. It is addressed as the pilgrim of the sky that it flies high in the sky from place to place like a pilgrim. He addresses the skylark as "Ethereal minstrel! Pilgrim of the sky!" (line 1). It has its nest on the earth and yet it flies into the sky. It has great fondness and care for its nest though it soars into the sky, producing sweet and euphonious music. The poet considers it to be wise, and asserts "Type of the wise who soar, but never roam; / True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!" (lines 11-12).



**Figure 1: Skylark**

"To the Cuckoo" is one of the best bird poems composed by Wordsworth (1802). The cuckoo is a migratory bird. Every year it arrives in England in April and leaves by the end of summer. He regards the cuckoo as a "blithe New-comer!" (line 1). The voice of the bird can be heard from place to place "a wandering Voice" (line 4). It brings happiness, therefore he calls it "a darling of the Spring!" (line 13). The bird can't be seen, it is mysterious but its song can be heard. He addresses it as "An invisible thing, / A voice, a mystery" (lines 15-16). The poet thinks that the bird is happy as it is blessed with happiness a "blessed Bird!" (line 29). The song of the bird charms him with its melody. He used to listen to the melody of the bird in his school days too. He assumes that the song of the bird transforms the earth into a fairy land. He highlights the charming power of the bird as "An unsubstantial,

faery place; / That is fit home for Thee!" (lines 31-32). This bird loves both the earth and the sky. It can be taken as a great symbol.



**Figure 2: Cuckoo**

### 2.2 Bird in Coleridge's Poetry

Coleridge uses the bird the Albatross in his poem "The Rime of Ancient Mariner". It is a very large, chiefly white oceanic and an ice-winged stout-bodied bird that has long narrow wings, and is mainly found in the Pacific and Southern Oceans. The Mariner considers and compares the bird with the Christian soul, and hails it in God's name. It is to be noted that the Albatross was the first living being the sailors came across in the region of mist and snow. Coleridge (1798) in "The Rime of Ancient Mariner" writes:

At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name. (lines 63-66)

The ancient Mariner had wantonly killed the innocent Albatross who had brought new hope to the sailors and whose arrival coincided with the blowing of the South Wind. It was criminal to kill the very creature which had brought a turning point for the better in their lives.

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—  
Why look'st thou so?'—With my cross-bow  
I shot the ALBATROSS. (lines 79-82)



**Figure 3: Albatross**

### 2.3 Bird in Shelly's Poetry

"To a Skylark" by Shelley (1820) describes the powerful grace and beauty of the skylark's

birdsong. It remains an archetypal example of Romantic poetry. Ruston (2008) affirms that “birds sing in this way is because they have not experienced the pain and suffering that humans experience” (p. 68). Shelley is almost forgetful of this earthly life and is eager to escape the bondage of the sad worldly existence while Wordsworth is ever true to the kindred points of heaven and home (Sarkar, 2020).

Shelley addresses a skylark as “blithe Spirit” (line 1), and assumes it like “an unbodied joy” (line 15), like “a star of Heaven” (line 18), like “a Poet hidden/ In the light of thought” (lines 31-32), like “a high-born maiden/ In a palace-tower” (lines 36-37), like “a glow-worm golden/ In a dell of dew” (lines 41-42) and like “a rose embower'd / In its own green leaves” (lines 46-47). The poet urges the bird to teach him gladness the bird knows “Teach me half the gladness / That thy brain must know” (lines 101-102). The poet accomplishes this poem with the suggestion that people should listen to its song as he is listening at the moment “The world should listen then, as I am listening now” (line 105).



**Figure 4: Skylark**

## 2. 4 Bird in Keats's Poetry

“Ode to a Nightingale” stands as one of the finest odes composed by Keats (1819). Daiches (1990) asserts that “the nightingale’s song as a symbol of the timeless, of the escapes from time and change, and the relation between art, death and life is the true theme of the poem” (p. 920).

Keats views the nightingale as “a light-winged Dryad” (line 7) who is a wood nymph, and an “immortal bird” (line 61). He is highly influenced by the sweet song of a nightingale that it provides to him an escape from the sorrows and sufferings of life. He is so enchanted by the song that he is entangled in the mood of forgetfulness for a while. When the bird flies away, he comes back to his reality or normal state and wonders whether he has woken or slept. The ode ends with “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?” (lines 79-80). He presents the bird with an immense power of mesmerization.



**Figure 5: Nightingale**

## 3. CONCLUSION

Birds as the constituents of nature kindle imaginative aptitudes in the poetic figures. Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats are enthralled in employing birds in their poetry for revealing the human feelings, emotions and states. They glorify the birds for their unique features and artistic virtuosity. Poets differently glorify the birds as an ethereal minstrel, a pilgrim of the sky, a type of the wise being, a blithe New-comer, a wandering voice, a darling of the spring, an invisible thing, a voice, a mystery, a blessed being, a Christian soul, a blithe spirit, an unbodied joy, a star of Heaven, a poet hidden, a high-born maiden, a glow-worm golden, a light-winged Dryad, an immortal being and so on. Romantic poetry places birds at its height and humans beings at its foot from where they vainly aspire to exult in the virtues of these glorified beings.

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