CHAPTER IV

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Nature as a forerunner of man turned him to itself in admiration and reverence to begin with and later impressed him with an order and harmony reflective of divine order. Before he learnt to sing the praises of God, man had begun to glorify and idolise nature. Nature has thus remained a perennial fascination for man. It is an imitation of an ideal world, an Utopia, an Eden created for man's emulation. Of all the objects of nature it is the bird with its song, motion, colour that impressed itself on the mind and heart of man; the poet's mind in particular. It is an image, a symbol, an objective correlative, and finally a metaphor for his delights and despairs and joys and sorrows.

Wordsworth's cuckoo and his skylark reveal him as a poet of nature. This 'wandering voice' makes the poet rejoice as he lies on the grass. Its song is welcome and is reminiscent of his childhood when he ran eagerly in search of it. It is a hope and a love that is longed for. It is a blessed bird. It recreates the
The skylark is an ethereal Minstrel that pours down a flood of harmony with a divine instinct. The bird is surrounded by a glorious light. Wordsworth's intense love for the bird also brings out his pantheistic attitude. In the bird which is immersed in nature the poet finds something 'blessed'. It soars up but never roams and remains true to the points of Heaven and Home.

The Nightingale of Keats expresses a state of intense aesthetic and imaginative feeling which is revealed by the song of the bird and vanishes when the song is done. It reveals that joy and melancholy, pleasure and pain, art and life are inseparable parts of human experience. Keats describes the rich experience created by hearing the song of a nightingale.

Keats deviates from the Greek story that the Nightingale's song expresses pain and sorrow. His Nightingale sings a song of ecstasy. In contrast to the poet the bird is immortal. It is not born to die.
The Nightingale contrasts the world of human beings with that of the bird. It reveals a moment of great happiness and joy which has a temporary existence. The poet seeks for an empathy with the bird but is unable to achieve it. Man is alienated from nature and is self-conscious. In contrast, the bird is wholly merged in nature. There can never be a permanent mingling of the world of man with that of the bird.

Shelley's skylark stands for an ecstatic joy and the unattainable perfection of the ideal. Shelley uses a number of metaphors to describe this 'blithe spirit'. The bird is a part of nature. It soars and sings, over the blue deep. The Skylarks music is one of unalloyed joy. Then the poet strongly emphasises the difference of the bird from human beings. Unlike man, the bird loves its own kind and knows no pain. It does not experience the same satiety of love like human beings. Its joy is unalloyed by care. It has a true knowledge of death. Human beings pine for the things which they do not have. Even their sincerest laughter is mixed with pain. Their sweetest songs tell of sad thoughts. Even if man could get rid of his mean
qualities of hate, pride and fear he would not be able to attain the joy of the bird. Shelley appeals to the skylark for a personal inspiration of divine madness. He longs for the bird to serve as an objective correlative to instill gladness in him. He would sing to win the applause of the world. "The skylark is a contrast between the joy of the spirit of the ideal poet embodied in the bird and the depression of the earthly poet of nature." Man is alienated from nature and far away from the skylark. The joy of the skylark is an unattainable condition that contrasts with the cares, and sorrows of the world.

Edgar Allan Poe depicts the Raven as a bird of ill-omen. Just as birds bring about an intense joy, here the raven brings sorrow and pain. Its mechanical repetition of the word 'never more' to every question of the listener, increases his grief and makes him dread the bird. It becomes a symbol of morbidity and a never-ending remembrance, cloying at the heart of a person.

One longs for the company of a bird which causes delight but the raven with its frightening manner is shunned by the poet. Once again man desires an alienation from nature.

Whitman's mocking bird reveals the ultimate knowledge of things that is gained through the bird. The mocking bird wails pathetically for its mate. Through its song it teaches the boy that death is inevitable. It teaches the knowledge of death and makes him the poet of life. It becomes an objective correlative. As the boy listens to the wail of the bird, he is inspired into poetry. A thousand echoes start to life within him. The song of the bird and that of the poet unite harmoniously to form a concert.

For the first time one notices a mingling of a bird's voice with that of a human being. Whitman achieves a complete empathy with suffering Nature. The death of a bird and the grief of its mate transform the boy into a poet. The mocking bird is a clear departure from conventional bird poetry. It speaks of an intense sorrow which conveys a great knowledge to the listener.
and moulds him into a poet. The song of the bird is
"an artifact of nature that teaches the human artist
whitman."²

The thrush of Robert Frost gives an invitation
into a dark pillared world. It brings into contrast
more emphatically the world of man with that of the bird.
The poet stands on the edge of the woods and the bird
within the wood. If it was dusk outside it was dark
within the wood. The bird could not even better its
perch within the wood. But the poet was 'out for stars'.
He aspired to achieve something worthy. So he had decided
not to enter the woods even if asked. The song of the
thrush was like a call into the dark world to lament.
It depicted an anti-Romantic world. But the poet rejects
the alluring call of the bird. He was determined not to
enter the woods. The song however, was not meant for
him. It was only a vague call sent out through the dark
woods meant for no one in particular. The poem shows
the world of man as opposed to that of the bird. Man
does not want to enter the world of nature and lament.

2. Leo Spitzer, "Explication de Texte Applied to Walt
Whitman's Poem:Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"
Essays on English and American Literature
He was out to achieve something. Man is conscious of his purpose and seeks an alienation from nature.

Hardy's 'thrush' on the other hand gives but a ringing call. Amidst the bleak surroundings the song arises expressing an unlimited joy. It was a heartfelt song, an ecstatic sound that expressed a blessed hope. It offered a contrast to the dull winter's landscape. The bird expressed a joy and hope, while the poet stood without enthusiasm. The entire landscape is expressive of the disillusionment of the nineteenth century. The song of the thrush brings hope and life into these desolate surroundings. "Hardy's point is that the bleakest of lives can still offer sources of happiness even if this is only the song of an elderly thrush". 3

In "The Windhover", Hopkins depicts the bird as an image of Christ. The bird has mastered the vast expanse of Heaven, similar to Christ's mastery of the world. Its condition makes the heart of man long for such a state. The brute beauty and valour of the bird is then 'buckled' to the heart of man which shines forth

more brightly. When the brute beauty and valour of the bird is crushed down as by the ploughshare it gives rise to the bright image of Christ. Christ appears as a chevalier of true beauty, act and valor.

Bridges takes up the Greek implication of the word Nightingale. There is a convulsed grief in the song of the nightingale. The Nightingales sing in sorrow and frustration. It is agony and not ecstasy that inspires their divine song. The birds' song unwinds a sad tale in the night. The birds show that "the greatest beauty does not spring from pleasure but from pain, not from happiness but from sorrow, not from satisfaction but from desire." The birds come from dry and barren lands and their minds are filled with unfulfilled desires and futile dreams. They reveal a conquest of pain and sorrow and desire.

The hawk in "Hawk Roosting" depicts the defying and assertive manner of the twentieth century. It voices its attitude. It has no gentility about it. It holds the whole of creation in its foot and allots death

mercilessly to its prey. It reveals a world of violence, which is not meant for human beings. The hawk does not extol violence or take pleasure in it. It simply describes "an amoral nature and imagines the awful power of non-human life, contrasting it with the limitations of the power of human nature." 5

The 'Crow' embodies the inner experience of modern man who lacks religious explanation in which he can believe. He faces a meaningless existence of pain and evil. It depicts a ruthless will power. It shows the spirit of endurance and courage even under the most difficult experiences. The Crow depicts a bleak black vision. There appear to be no consolations in his kingdom. "Crow takes a look at the worst man must face." 6

Birds have thus been used to express messages of love, grief or ecstasy. Whether it is a message of joy or one of sorrow, the bird has aptly depicted it. Wordsworth's Skylark is an ethereal minstrel with a divine instinct. Keats's Nightingale is a symbol of intense joy.


Shelley's blithe spirit also depicts an unalloyed 'joy'. Whitman's mocking bird is 'an artifact of nature that teaches the human artist'. The thrush of Robert Frost depicts an anti romantic world by its call 'to come into the dark and lament'. Hardy's thrush sings of 'a blessed hope to humanity' in the midst of desolate surroundings. The Nightingales of Bridges stand out as symbols of sorrow and grief. According to the Greek myth Edgar Allan Poe's raven becomes a symbol of 'morbidity'. The hawk in "Hawk Roosting" depicts a condition of violence and the crow reveals the spirit of courage and endurance at the bottom of even the worst experiences.

Birds have occupied a prominent place even in Indian Literature. "In the stories narrated in the Puranas, birds and beasts speak like men and sometimes they give sound advice and even teach spiritual wisdom".  

One of the characteristic beauties of the puranic literature is this happy fusion of nature and imagination. The birds are made interesting vehicles

of the great truths they convey. In the Mahabharata a rishi named Mandapala takes birth as a saranga bird to obtain children. He lives with a female bird named Jarita who lays four eggs. The father bird then wanders away to find a new mate. But the little birds being the children of a rishi could cheer and encourage their mother. When a fire caught the forest, they persuade their reluctant mother to go away. When the fire approaches closer to their nests they pray to the fire God like "brahmana brahmacharins reciting the Vedic Chants". After the fire the mother bird returns and fondly embraces her children who are safe. The bird Mandapala returns and finds his mate indifferent to him. He philosophises and says that a woman cares more for her children.

In the 'Ramayana', Valmiki who was walking along a river bank saw two loving krauncha birds9 sporting and singing in their joy of life and love. Suddenly the male bird fell down, hit by a hunter's arrow. The

8. Mahabharata, p.74
female bird, seeing her lover rolling on the ground, lamented in piteous fashion. Observing this Valmiki cursed the hunter but his words were full of rhythm, from sorrow (soka) arose verse (sloka). When Rama, Sita and Lakshmana stayed at Chitrakoota in the course of their wanderings in the forest they heard lovely birds singing in the early morning. This offered a wonderful background to the happy life in Chitrakoota. It is 'the good bird Jataayu' that tries to rescue Sita from the clutches of Ravana. Though old, it reveals great courage and strength by the manner in which it combats the rakshasa Ravana. Ravana makes it helpless by cutting off its wings and its talons.

Sita was able to personally witness the fight of Jataayu with Ravana in the Dandaka forest. She realised his devotion and heroism. Jataayu's battle with Ravana is more important than the battles in Lanka, which Sita could not personally witness. The bhaktas worship Jataayu as the best of bhaktas. The pious revere Jataayu along with Bharata and look upon him as an 'Aalvaar', a guide in the holy path. Bharata and Shatrughna performed the obsequies of their father when

10. Ramayana, p.159
he died in Ayodhya. Rama and Lakshmana were denied this privilege because they were away in the forest. They regarded Jataayu as their own father and in performing his obsequies derived some consolation for not being by Dasaratha's side and performing the last offices to him. This was the honour that they accorded to heroic Jataayu. 11

Thus birds have always been used as vehicles to embody a poet's reflections on life. They have been used to give messages of either happiness or sorrow and these choristers have successfully conveyed their messages through their melodious songs.

11. Ramayana, p.173