

The imagery of bird in poetry in 16th to 17th century research paper sample

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



Birds have been applied in poetic imagery since time immemorial. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries apply birds in the same taste and scale. Ordinarily, the common thread in the use of birds is the position it assumes in the poetry. Birds tend to represent two contrasting yet essential matters. That is freedom and captivity. Free birds and their lives have been applied across the centuries' poetry to represent freedom of the people, of the beauty of love and freedom. On the other hand, the same birds have been applied illustratively to show the concept of captivity. The latter applies captured birds in cases illustrative of captivity. It is this paper's contention that birds have had a place in the sixteenth and seventh centuries' poetry and illustrate the place of freedom and captivity or slavery.

The mythology of the Roman, Greek and Latin have the common character of associating their lives to the gods and goddesses. It should be noted that the mythology merely entail the body of narrations and stories that attempt to explain and tell about the origins and nature of the ancient Roman, Greek and Latin speakers. However, in relation to birds, it should be appreciated that the gods and goddesses in the myths have supernatural powers that supersede the power of mortals. However, the gods and goddesses share a lot of characteristics with the birds. This goes deep in showing the symbolic power of the birds in these mythologies. The gods and goddesses are able to fly around the sky, they easily maintain a presence over the earth. This position relates well with the actual position of the birds. Birds have indeed been appreciated and admired for their ability to tour over the skies. This should be read to mean reaching over the skies. The message is that while birds had the ability to fly around hovering over humanity, no other mortal

was able to do that. This makes them stand out from the other mortals. It also confers upon them some power of the other mortals. This informs the Greek, Roman and Latin application of the flying ability on their gods and goddesses. Indeed, curiously, no single god or goddess lacked the ability to tour over the skies. This all powerful presence is symbolized by the birds in the air. It should be appreciated that the all-powerful nature of the gods in the myths have the bird's ability to fly all over the surface of the earth. This is what distinguishes them from the actual birds. The latter have a limited stretch that they can cover while the former's stretch is unlimited.

Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' poetry covers a lot of matters cutting across the social, political and economic divide. It should be appreciated that it was at these times that the new world was springing up. Concepts were coming up from all sectors. Poetry was not left behind. Indeed, it is the sixteenth century that produced the world's most famous and appreciated poet William Shakespeare. Shakespeare and his fellow poets discussed social, political and economic issues. Of great importance and related to the birds imagery was freedom and romance. The poets would apply birds in different poems with the intention of communicating salient messages safely encrypted in the symbolism of birds. It ought to be accepted that poetic license and prosody allowed for the application of symbolism in an interpretation depend on the poet's line of thought. Due to different mental processes, poets across the divine applied birds in poetic imagery in different ways. The remainder of the paper would explore the application of birds in the poems giving examples of lines and phrases where applicable.

Birds have adversely been used by poets in these centuries to illustrate

freedom. Often, these poems served to champion for freedom. Freedom sufficed in three different limbs all of which could be symbolized by the birds. Freedom could mean political freedom. This dictated for liberty, political plurality and democratic systems of governance. In that vein, a number of poets used birds in their poems showing how much they either adored the birds for the freedom or loathed the birds for their lack of freedom. In the latter case, the loathed lack of freedom also came with the bird's desire to be freed.

Richard Lovelace in his poem, "To Althea from Prison", writes in admiration of the birds' freedom. He compared his thoughts of his love with the bird's freedom. It should be noted that he writes from prison and wishes to meet his love whom he compares only to the birds' freedom. He says when he thinks of the freedom of the birds, he thinks of his love. Lovelace's characterisation of the love he has for his lover to the birds' and their freedom illustrates a desire to have both political and social freedom. It places a call for the authorities not only to stop the political persecution, but also for society to embrace love with freedom of choice. He posits that the thought of love should resonate around the thought of freedom. To him, he sees the birds as a free society. He admires their world. The fact that no regulation, persecution or obstacles faces the lives of the birds. He desires the same of himself and wonders when he will eventually meet his lover, Althea. This poem illustrates the place of love and freedom in society. It shows that love cannot be enjoyed in a vacuum and that freedom ought to proceed the enjoyment of love. The poet uses the world of the bird to show the perfect society that can harmoniously leave in peace and love with

freedom conferred upon everyone.

Lovelace's approach on the freedom of bird representative of the freedom of the world is replicated in the work compiled as the Cambridge Songs. An excerpt goes like this, "Quadruped shine and wonder. Birds Nest. On Blossoming branches they cry joy." This is applied illustratively to show both love and freedom and the beauty in having the two. The bird in their nests reproduce and enjoy their lives. They cry in joy. The poet deliberately elects the word cry rather than the usual sing of the birds. He demonstrates the joy in the birds and comes off supporting the concept of freedom using the life of the birds. The Cambridge Songs appear to envy the beautiful life the birds leave, unlimited, uncontrolled and settled in their humble station in life. One cannot help but notice the settled and contented life free birds despite their humble dwelling the nest. In addition, the poet brings out the fact that birds nest in blossoming branches where they cry in joy. This is applied illustratively to stress the place of freedom in society. It does not matter how wealthy, how comfortable one is. What matters is the presence of peace and freedom. The people would be happy in poor dwelling, low income but with freedom. That is the message in the Cambridge Songs.

While Lovelace assumes an adorable and admiral approach to the lives of the birds, his colleague also of the sixteenth century employs birds in a condescending yet sympathising manner. Robert Sempill in his poem, "Birds of the Cage" sympathises with the lack of freedom of the birds. He uses his poem to illustrate the failure of the political system to confer on the citizenry their demands. Robert decries the life of the bird in the cage which basically represent the life of the enslaved and balkanised citizenry. A glide through

the prose by Sempill reveals his frustration with the political system whose rot cuts through economic and social lives of the citizenry. Sempill applies the life of the bird in the cage on the surface. However, this internally symbolizes the life of the common citizenry frustrated by the political systems. Some of the matters Sempill reveals through the eyes of the bird in the cage include deception, lack of freedom, craftiness and ruin. The bird feels deceived into the cage. It has hopped of a better offer but his capturer is determined to have it caged and used for recreational purposes.

Meanwhile, the bird loses its ability to engage in its activities and peacefully go about its businesses. This shows the manner in which the political system works to exploit the citizenry. The citizenry are deceived into electing the politician. The voter happily votes in the politician. However, on wining the elections, the citizenry become their victims. Just as the bird capturer locks the bird in the cage and uses it for its own benefits so does the politician who deceives the citizenry then exploits him for his own selfish gains. In addition, once the bird is locked in the cage, freedom is thereby lost. The bird can no longer fly at its pleasure. It cannot chose its food no more. It cannot see the stars and the sky. It has to get used to the new system of life. Suddenly, the world which had seen unending and inexhaustible can now be exhausted and is too small for the bird. The new world is the cage. This symbolises the new life the citizenry experience upon the election of the politician. The citizenry's freedom is compromised and they have to act in consonance to the aspirations of the regime. Their world of opportunities is now reduced effectively to the choice of the political class. Like the caged bird whose options as to cooperation is limited so is the option of the citizenry to

entertain the demands of the political regime. In addition just like the bird capturer can decide the date of the end of the bird in the cage so can the political regime exploit the state machinery to occasion the death of a dissident citizen. In this poem, Sempill employs the trouble of a caged bird to show the trouble facing a citizenry in a political system that allows no freedom.

Johanna Wolfgang of the seventh century appears to borrow Sempill's line of thought. However, he deviates from the freedom representation to symbolise the loss of hope. The lines of Wanderer's Night Songs goes as follows, " In all treetops, Hearst thou the birds are asleep in the trees, wait soon like these, Thou too shalt rest" . Johana appears to illustrate the fact that everyone can give up the hope. He uses the birds to demonstrate the fact that hope could be illusive. He says of the birds that they are asleep in the trees. This strikes the audience's mind on the extent of lost hope. This is because seeing birds asleep is often a rarity in the real world. One would, therefore, want to associate a sleeping bird to complete loss of hope. Johana brings out the fact that birds are often associated with hope and determination and that they do not easily give in. Their giving up in the poem communicates the fact that the persona in the poem has lost hope in his pursuits. He encourages the others to give up for the simple reason that success has become illusive. In general the bird imagery in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' poetry represents freedom or lack of it. It is illustrative to note that the same birds are employed to show two contrasts. Closely related to freedom is the hope, determination and love which also inform the use of bird imagery in poetry. It is not entirely true that the birds represent women. However, like is seen

in Lovelace's works, birds can equally be used to symbolise romance and love between man and woman.

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