

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY'S CONCEPTION OF THE POET AND POETIC CREATIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Percy By she Shelley, as one of the pioneers of English Romanticism, depicts many of the school's principles in his poems; typical motifs and themes that keep recurring in typical Romantic texts include imagination, nature, inspiration, individualism, revolutionism, emotionality, and nostalgia. These elements, which are also common in the works of the founders of British Romanticism, laid the foundation of an unprecedented way of literary aesthetics in the last years of the eighteenth century. Therefore, a thorough study of Shelley's or any other Romantic writer's works can yield a perfect picture of Romantic tenets and values in writing. In the present article the central questions of are: What are Shelley's views regarding the poet, the process of writing, and poetic creativity? Can we consider Shelley as a Romantic critic? To answer the questions, the researcher draws upon Shelley's ideas inserted in his "A Defence of Poetry" and highlights the relevant propositions and assertions proclaimed by the poet. This research shows that Shelley held individualistic and idiosyncratic criteria for appreciating and composing literary texts. Furthermore, like Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, Shelley founded his writings on certain theories and expositions he expounded in a critical essay. In effect, Blake's myth-making, Wordsworth's emotionality and simplicity of language, Coleridge's primary and secondary imagination and fancy, and Shelley's imaginative creation and recreation are indispensable notions in Romantic aesthetics and versification as they constitute the theoretical backbone of British Romanticism. Also, it is argued that like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley can be regarded as a Romantic critic.

KEYWORDS: *Romanticism, Shelley, Imagination, Creativity, Poetry, Myth, and Symbols*

INTRODUCTION

In his "A Defense of Poetry," Shelley claimed that the literature of the age "has arisen as it were from a new birth" and that "an electric life burns" within the words of its best writers, which is "less their spirit and then the spirit of the age." He regarded this spirit in literature as the accomplishment of political and social revolution (in Sokhanvar and Honarvar, 2005, 477). The idea of revolution preoccupied the imagination of Romantic writers. In his "Preludes," Wordsworth wrote that France stands on the top of golden hours and it seems that human nature is born again (Ibid.). According to John B. Halsted, the French Revolution of 1789 had proved the possibility of a sweeping change. Romantic revolutionaries who sought to break with the past and to create a new order, were dominated quite as fully as conservatives by the past – by a new political thought and a new sense of relativism (2017, 29).

Poetry, according to neoclassical theory, was an imitation of human life, or "a mirror held up to nature," in a form aimed at instructing and pleasing man. Romanticists thought radically differently; for instance, Wordsworth considered all good poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." So for him the source of poetry was not in the outer world, but in the mind of the poet, and it was the feeling of the poet that provided the essential material of writing. Blake

and Shelley defined a poem as the poet's imaginative vision, which they contrasted with the world of ordinary experience. Coleridge, too, regarded poetry as the product of imagination which could transform the material of sense into an organic unity by making an equivalent creation of its own (Sokhanvar and Honarvar, 2005, 478). Keats held that "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all." Blake insisted that he wrote from "Inspiration and Vision" and not from "Labor or Study." Shelley believed that it is "an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labor and study." Finally, for Coleridge, versification involved the psychological contraries of "passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose" (Ibid., 479). According to Margaret Drabble, some the major themes in Romanticism are notions such as: remembered childhood, unrequited love, political activism, the exiled and reclusive hero, natural beauty, self-expression, idealism, individualism, revolt against Classical forms and conservatism, and fight for peace, justice, and morality (2016, 843). Similarly, Thomas R. Edwards insists that nostalgia, emotionality, inspiration and imagination, hope, rebellion, and humanism are among the most conspicuous characteristics of the Romantic poet (2016, 163). Marshal Brown claims that all the British Romanticists shared a spirit of revolution, but not only of French Revolution in the sense that the course of political revolutions is often guided by revolutions in ideas, attitudes, philosophy, life style, and even poetic style (in Curran, 2014, 6).

Natural scene plays an important role in the creation of Romantic poems, and poets like Wordsworth or Shelley described natural phenomena accurately and carefully, so that the way they employed in their poetry had no previous match. The plethora of beautiful landscapes and their reflection in Romantic poetry made it synonymous with nature poetry. However, neither Romantic theory nor practice shows that the purpose of this kind of poetry was a mere description of nature with no other aim beyond it. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" and "Dejection," Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and Keats's "Nightingale" are centered around a natural scene, but it serves as a means of stimulating thinking and contemplation. In fact, Romantic nature poems should be called meditative poems, in which the described scene leads to a sentimental dilemma whose development gives order and organization to the poem. Natural objects, according to this view, correspond to the world of the spirituality and cause a tendency, specially by Blake and Shelley, to write a symbolist poetry in which a rose, wind, river, or the sun represent a significance beyond themselves and find new concepts and meanings. Shelly said, "I always seek in what I see the likeness of something beyond the present and tangible object." For Blake, too, the world when simply observed by the physical eye and undeconstructed, was regarded as "the dirt upon my feet, no part of me." (in Sokhanvar and Honarvar, 2005, 481).

A major function of poetry for many Romantic writers was to arouse the sense of a wonder and freshness of sensation in the representation of familiar objects. Poetry, said Shelley in his "A Defence of Poetry," "reproduces the common universe" but "purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being," and "creates anew the universe, after it has been blunted by reiteration" (Ibid., 482). The effect of wonder was achievable for Romantic writers by violation of traditional and conventional laws and creation of a supernatural world by the privilege of poetic imagination. In "The Rime of Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan" Coleridge entered the realm of mystery and magic, in which folklore, superstition, and demonology are employed to affect the reader's mind with odd powers and universes. Shelley's "Alastor," "The Mask of Anarchy," "Ozymandias," and "The Witch of Atlas" show how imagination and Poetic vision can create an unusual and strange world. Alastair Fowler explains that "Idealized poets figure prominently in Romantic poetry, and come to have family resemblances, so that they amount to a new

symbolic type. The Romantic poet is an alienated outsider ... But despite his emphatic loneliness, he is an expressive being and cultivates his self-absorbed sensitivity openly" (2010, 230)

Individualism is another basic element of the Romantic movement; it made philosophers and poets put a higher estimate on man's personal aspirations and aims. Romantic Individualism transformed the figure of man from a social animal to an individual whose personal feelings and desires had to be respected, resulting in a higher dignity and importance for man. According to German Idealism, which originated many of the characteristic ideas of Romanticism, it is the mind of an individual that creates, or in fact recreates, the universe it perceives. In Blake's poetry, the desired atmosphere is produced only after the material world is rejected and changed. The same thing occurs in the case of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley whose minds combined the inner and outer worlds. Shelley and other Romantic writers believed that through imagination man's mind can acquire the ultimate knowledge or truth, an idea presented by German Idealists and rejected by skeptical empiricists who emphasized on sensory experience in their quest of knowledge. Blake's symbolic lyrics, Coleridge's "The Rime of Ancient Mariner," Wordsworth's "The Prelude," Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound," Keats's "Odes," and Byron's "Don Juan" all include lots of innovative and revolutionary principles and gave rise to a new way of appreciating and composing literary works, which was later to be called the school of Romanticism.

The present article aims to introduce and contextualize Shelley's Romantic views as stated in his famous essay titled "A Defence of Poetry." It endeavours to shed light on his perception of the poet and poetry as well as of the function of poetry and the nature of poetic creation. The central questions of the present article are: What are Shelley's views regarding the poet, the function of poetry, and poetic creativity? Can we consider Shelley as a Romantic critic? To answer the questions, the researcher draws upon Shelley's own ideas expressed in his famous essay and highlights the relevant propositions and assertions proclaimed by the poet himself, juxtaposing his opinions with other major Romantic poets of his time. The discussion section that follows consists of two parts: "Creative Imagination," which reviews Shelley's understanding of poetic imagination and the nature and purpose of poetry and "Personalized Myths and Symbols," which shows how the poet uses familiar and existing folk tales and myths and transforms them into novel narratives and fresh discourses.

DISCUSSIONS

In this section, Shelley's conception of the role of imagination, poetic process, poetry and the poet, and the function of poetry is discussed. Also, it shows how he used the raw materials from existing literature and mythology to render a personalized account of familiar narratives.

A. Creative Imagination

Besides Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley is the only literary figure among the English Romantic writers of the nineteenth century who discussed the theory of poetry and writing, presenting a framework for appreciating a literary work and producing it in the most effective way. The most conspicuous element in Shelly's literary criticism - which makes it quite different from those of Wordsworth and Coleridge - is his overestimation of the concept of poetry and poet. He even went so far as to imply that poets are divine, sacred, and the bests of human beings. His main ideas regarding literary criticism and the role of poetry are fully embodied in his "A Defence of Poetry" on which David Daiches has commented that

Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," written in 1821 and published in 1840, was originally conceived as the defense of the value of poetry against the arguments brought forward by Thomas Love Peacock in "The Four Ages of Poetry," that poetry had outlived its usefulness and in an age of knowledge, reason, and enlightenment appeared only to obscurantism and superstition.... The essay emerged as a large theoretical statement of the nature and value of poetry modeled in general style and Sidney's "Defence" though lacking the simple didacticism so important to Sidney's position. (2005, 110)

In "A Defence of Poetry," although Shelley follows Coleridge's stress on the function of imagination, he develops and reinterprets it in the light of his own Platonic idealism. Shelley's interest as a critic lies largely in his use of Platonic ideas to escape from the Platonic dilemma. He does so by recognizing that the poet does not simply imitate the reflections of the physical world, as Plato claimed, rather he touches the world of Platonic ideas and the ultimate truth through his power of imagination.

The two critics who have been addressed and answered by Shelley are Plato and Thomas Love Peacock, although the hostility Plato showed toward poetry is much more severe and radical than that of Peacock who was a close friend of Shelley's. Not only Plato repelled poets and artists from his Republic, but also he put any kind of art under question, either imaginative and creative or descriptive and imitative. Influenced by Socrates, Plato believed that poets are "possessed" since they do not use language in a way that normal men do, and they speak in a divinely inspired frenzy. This view, according to Georg Misch, made poets deserved to be called prophets and madmen and sometimes both. A poet, he held, is a prophet since he delivers the word of God to man and also is a madman because he is so intoxicated with his passions and emotions that he can no longer be logical and reasonable (2003, 25).

Yet this is not Plato's sole objection to poetry; in his famous proposition known as the allegory of the cave, he held that the natural world around us is not the ideal one and everything we observe and feel is only the shadow of the ideal world, just like the reflection of the shadows on the walls of a cave inhabited by men who are not able to see the light originating the shadows, or step out (Stumpf, 2010, 51). Here, the symbolic cave is the world we live in and the symbolic shadows and light are what we see, and the ideal world respectively. For Plato, the world was merely an imitation of the ideal one and whatever an artist presented was nothing but an imitation of an imitation, being two steps away from the ideal work and as a result corruptive and worthless. He adds that not only the artist is an imitator of an imitation, but also he is ignoring of the true use and nature of what he imitates. Furthermore, his artistic imitation both uses and deals with an inferior part of the human faculty. This leads to the third and more serious objection - that poetry instead of drying men's passions up, feeds and waters them. The duty of a wise man is to control passion by reason, yet poetry by exciting and strengthening the passions makes this task rather impossible. Artists and poets, as a result, are not to be praised and glorified because of they are "possessed," imitators of an imitation, introducers of an inferior part of the soul, and feeders of the passions (Daiches, 2005, 22). That is why Plato expelled them from his state.

But Plato was not the only person who stimulated Shelley to write his "A Defence of Poetry"; Thomas Love Peacock, a minor poet in Shelley's time, too, mocked poetry and imaginative creation, although his reasons for doing so were different from those of Plato's. He raised the question of whether, in a modern and scientific time when philosophers and scientists were able to investigate reality systematically, the poet had not become a "semi-barbarian in a civilized community" (Ibid., 130). In a half-serious essay entitled "The Four Ages of Poetry," Peacock argued that poetry passed through repeated four stages: first, an iron age, in which literature was crude and simple, like the period of court bards, folk

ballads, and romances; an age of gold, in which great poets developed the great epic and tragic form, like the period from Homer to Euripides and from Dante to Milton; a silver age of polished and civilized, but derivative poetry in which it was governed by fixed rules, like the Augustan age in Rome and the English Augustan age from Dryden to Pope; and finally, the age of brass, in which the narrow vein of social poetry and satire was exhausted and poets sought novelty in imitation of great works of past (in Reiman and Powers, 2010, 763). This is the age Peacock saw in the England of his own time; in his animosity toward poetry, he urged men of intelligence to avoid wasting their time writing poetry and apply them themselves to the new sciences of their age, including economics and political theory, which were useful and would improve the world. In his time, early in the nineteenth century, with the development of Victorian science, the clash between poetry and science became more serious, and Peacock who preferred systematic study to poetry and imagination underestimated poets (Perkins, 2008, 763).

With these serious charges against poetry claimed by Plato and Peacock, defending the concept of poetry and reviving its value and prestige does not seem to be an easy job. Their mocking statements against poetry are best refuted by Shelley's persuasive justifications in his "A Defence of Poetry," so that the questioned value of imaginative works is regained, something done by Aristotle after Plato, and Sidney in his "Defence" as an answer to Puritans' similar attacks. Shelley starts his discussion with the function of imagination which inevitably involved the defense of poetry in the something larger in scope, just as Coleridge who in discussing a poem was led to consider the wider imaginative activity of which a poem is a special case. For Shelley, any exercise of imagination which brought one into contact with the Platonic idea, that is the ideal world underlying the ordinary phenomena, was in the larger sense poetry:

Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be the expression of the imagination; and poetry is connate with the origin of man. In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is a poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exist in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression. (Daiches, 2005, 22)

It can be concluded that in Shelly's opinion, imagination, beauty, and truth make a person a poet. Beauty or a correspondence with the ideal order of things is achieved by "a certain order or rhythm belonging to each of these classes of mimetic representation," and recognition or appreciation of that achievement is called taste for aesthetics. Artists, lawmakers, politicians, and founders of religions deal with the ideal order of things including social, legal, and moral order, as well as a more general ideal of order which is called beauty. Therefore, "the institutors of laws, founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true" are to be called poets. (in Perkins, 2008, 1073).

Not only poets, Shelley argues, deal with "the beautiful and the true," but also they are prophets since they possess a prophetic vision toward the concept of reality. He says:

Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier of the world, legislators, or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time. (in Daiches, 2005, 114).

Although Shelley praises artists of any kind, he considered poets, who use language as their expressive medium, superior to others. He believed that the most effective servant of imagination is language because it is produced by imagination for its own needs, while the media of other arts limit the effectiveness of an imaginative vision and are not as straight-forward as language (in Perkins, 2008, 1073). He wrote:

And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a mere direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression (in Daiches, 2005, 115)

After discussing the superiority of language over other kinds of artistic media, Shelley elaborates on the distinction between metrical and unmetrical language, believing that the first is much more effective than the latter, as far as harmony and uniformity are concerned. He held that translation of poems is impossible and any attempt in this regard is futile:

The language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as to seek to transfuse from one language into another the creation of a poet. (in Perkins, 2008, 1074).

This is similar to what Coleridge thinks about poetic language; he believed that the magical power of poetry activates the whole soul of man and blend opposite or discordant qualities such as idea and object, novelty and familiarity, or emotion and logic (in Dutton, 2006, 55). For Shelley, harmony of utterance is an inseparable part of an effective expression and is achieved by the proper choice of words and the relation of sound to sense among the words. Translation from one language into another results in the loss of this unique relation, and thus is aimless. In other words, sound and sense make an organic whole, as the seed grows into a flower, and they can not be put together mechanically (in Perkins, 2008, 1074).

Just as Aristotle had preferred the world of literature to the world of history, Shelley gave the prominence to poetry instead of story. Aristotle had argued that the function of a poet is to describe, not the thing that had happened, but something probable or necessary. The poet does not simply imitate or represent certain events which he happens to know; he recreates them in such a way that their universal and characteristic elements are unveiled, although what he is telling may not be historically true. Unlike the historian who must restrict himself to what happened, and can not arrange or invent his facts in order to present what is more inherently probable, the poet creates a self-sufficient world of his own, with its own compelling kind of probability. To sum up, “a probable impossibility is better than an improbable possibility” (Daiches, 2005, 116).

Poetry, Aristotle adds, is more universal and philosophical than history, since it deals with general truths about man, not the adventures of an individual. These are the ideas Shelley reiterated in his “A Defence of Poetry”:

A story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no longer connection than time, place, circumstance cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature.... The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time... the other is universal.... A story of particular facts is as a mirror, which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted. (Ibid., 38)

Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley believed in the importance of pleasure to poetry: "Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight" (in Perkins, 2008, 1075). Yet unlike Wordsworth, he did not go into details about the origin of this pleasure or examine how and why it is bound up with poetry. Only once he directly talks about pleasure:

The pleasure that is in sorrow is sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself.... Not that this highest species of pleasure is necessarily linked with pain. The delight of love and friendship, the ecstasy of the admiration of nature, the joy of the perception and still more of the creation of poetry, is often wholly unalloyed ... A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why. (Ibid.)

Like Plato and other Classicists, Shelley believed in instruction through literature, considering it as one of the most basic elements of poetry. For him, poets were potentially the best teachers of morality who could make a better world for mankind. But his opinions about teaching were quite different from those of Plato's or even Sidney's. Sidney held that readers imitate the virtues of the characters described in poetry - who are more refined than ordinary people - and identify themselves with them, and thus get instructed in an indirect way. In other words, since the poet presents a world which is "golden" and superior than the natural "brazen" one, readers get the chance of having access to the highest ideals which would enhance human morality. Yet in Shelley's opinion, neither Plato's cold reason nor Sidney's idealistic sample can function as a means of effective teaching.

Shelley's key word in instruction is imagination. For him, the poet does not provide a "speaking picture" of morality - as Sidney did - rather he strengthens the imagination. His argument is conducted through two syllogisms. He says that sympathy is an instrument of moral good, and imagination leads to sympathy; therefore, imagination is an instrument of moral good. Then he takes this conclusion as the major premise of his second syllogism: imagination is the instrument of moral good, and the poetry strengthens the imagination, so poetry is an instrument of moral good. Consequently poetry activates its moral effect by strengthening the imagination, which is "the organ of the moral nature of man" since it develops sympathy which is the great instrument of morality (Ibid.). In Shelley's words,

The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person; not our own. A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause ... Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of moral nature of man, in the same manner exercise strengthens a limb. (in Daiches, 2005, 121).

Shelley thus settles the significance of poetry and imaginative creation which were doubted by Plato and Peacock. He portrays that poetry is neither harmful to man nor inferior to science, and although science teaches man and brightens

his mind, it does not necessarily make him loving and understanding. He adds that not only poetry is not a waste of time and “aimless” in a scientific era, with the growth of industrialization and materiality, it has become more urgent and useful than ever. He said that poetry can eventually save man and remove the Adam's curse and is superior to any branch of human study:

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all.... It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things. (in Perkins, 2008, 1076)

Yet that is not all, for Shelley finds imagination even more important. Plato's main objection to poetry was that he thought poetry is imitation of an imagination and thus two steps away from the ideal world. But Shelley claims exactly the opposite; he uses Platonic idea to solve the Platonic dilemma. The core of his argument is that this world is in fact the world of shadows, but the ideal one is easily accessible: the ideal world can be experienced through imagination and poetic vision. Poetry is not for Shelley imitation of an imitation; it is recreation of an imitation which leads to the ultimate truth or ideal world. Sidney held the same idea: “Flowers smell sweeter in the works of the poets than they do in real gardens” (in Perkins, 2008, 1084). He wanted to imply that only poets can, by their invention and imagination, produce something that goes beyond nature, and imagination does not result in insight into reality of this world, but in an alternative to reality which is superior to it in every way (in Daiches, 2005, 57). Regarding the same point, Shelley has written:

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and adds beauty to that which is most deformed.... It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms. (in Daiches, 2005, 58)

Earl R. Wasserman has argued that for Shelley the poetic imagination is a deconstructor; it first shatters the familiarized and imperfect arrangement of thought, then it rearranges them into the perfection they ought to have. This doctrine of the plastic imagination is responsible for the transformation and syncretism of the natural world, resulting in the highest beauty. In fact, the radical principle of “A Defence of Poetry” is changing diversity into an approximation of perfect unity, or the very perfect unity, which is truth, beauty, and goodness (in Perkins, 2008, 1085).

Shelley finishes his discussion with one of the most fervent admirations of poetry ever made. Like Plato, he gives poet “the golden crown,” but he does not repel them from his Utopia; he makes them its Kings:

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest minds.... The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry....Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present ... the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. (in Reiman and Powers, 2010, 525).

These grand claims, as Daiches has pointed out, are justifiable defenses which successfully give an immense significance to poetry, even for those who disagree with Shelley's ideas (2005, 59). They show the enthusiasm of the

Romantic movement for imagination, inspiration, and sentimentality, so that they can be regarded as the touchstone of aesthetics in this school. His ideas in criticism also depict why poetry is the best human mental activity and how it functions as a means of teaching morality, not only in his time but also in all ages.

Personalized Myths and Symbols

Wasserman explains that Drawing upon imagination and creative power, Shelley willingly modified myths and well-known stories and folk tales into completely new narratives. He argues that the thoughts triggered by imagination are those upon which the mind has already acted "so as to color them with its own lights" which is the reflection of the light of the perfect or the ideal world" (in Reiman and Powers, 2010, 526). Similarly, as he wrote in his *Prometheus Unbound*, "the poet does not regard objects as external "things," but first watches the "lake-reflected sun illumine" them and then organizes these transfigured thoughts into "Forms more real than living man,/ nurslings of immortality" (2007, 149). For Shelley, the elements of myth, being mental apprehensions of things, are pre-eminently thoughts and therefore pre-eminently the valid materials to which the poet is obliged to give the best and purest shape.

This kind of mythology, which is called syncretic mythology, had been revitalized in the eighteenth-century, particularly by those deists who argued for the common basis of all Faith's and attempted to demonstrate the relationships of all myths. Earl R. Wasserman has emphasized that:

This tradition of syncretism was part of Shelley's intellectual heritage, and this mentalistic ontology provided it with a special philosophic justification. If, then, all myths data ... are real and valid, the various received myths are not to be thought of as discreet narratives or distinct national faiths, but only as variant efforts of the mind to apprehend the same truth. (in Reiman and Powers, 2010, 526).

Hence, the mythopoeist collects the available myths to give thoughts their best structure according to his taste. Consequently, all inherited folk science, legends, and stories are among the materials for the poet's imagination to syncretize an interlock into the most nearly perfect form. "Adonais" for example, is not merely another variant of the Venus and Adonis myth; Shelley recasts that myth into a new and presumably true system of interrelationships and creates another story out of the original one which is basically different from it. Myth, so inclusively defined, is not an assemblage of accepted fictional terms, as it was for Dryden and Pope; nor merely a fiction that reveals truth better than facts. So, however diverse and unrelated their traditional contexts may be, they are interwoven into a beautiful whole "containing within itself the principle of its own integrity" (Ibid., 527). If the structures of giving myths are already "beautiful and true," Shelley held, they are integral thoughts having "the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts," and thus any conventional myth so organized is undoubtedly capable of presenting new truths. On the other hand, since error, ugliness, and evil are various modes of disorder, the task of the imagination is to reform the seemingly erroneous and misshapen myth based on the model of the mind's perfect unity (Ibid.). Shelley tries to develop his own ideas in his elegy and recreate the new material found in mythology.

The same thing happens in Shelley's *"Prometheus Unbound."* Prometheus appears in Greek mythology as a divine being, one of the Titans, descended from the original union of the sky and the Earth mother. In some stories, he is the creative of mankind, and he is always there champion. He is supposed to have stolen fire from heaven, which they were denied it by Zeus, and to have been punished by being fastened to a cliff where an eagle tore daily at his liver (Geurber, 2005, 22). Aeschylus (525-456 BC), a great Athenian poet, in his *"Prometheus Bound"* supposed the reconciliation of Zeus

with his victim, Prometheus, as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis. In the end, he is delivered from his captivity by Hercules, under the permission of Zeus. But Prometheus in Shelley's work finds another character. In the preface to his play, he wrote: "Had I formed my story on this model I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus ... But in truth I was averse from the catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the champion with the oppressor of mankind" (in Reiman and Powers, 2010, 132).

Shelley's Prometheus is a hero for fight against his enemy with his utmost strength, not seeking reconciliation, but seeking his fall. Although he is captivated by Zeus and is inferior to him as far as physical power is concerned, it is he who defeats Zeus but his spiritual power, love, and hope. In Shelley's work, he is the symbol of a savior and a champion, not a wrongdoer to be punished by a tyrant, and Zeus is to be overthrown and pitied, not to be regarded as the sole power to decide on the Fate of all. Thus, myths for Shelley or not some old stories working on a passive mind, rather they are to be recreated by an active one to embody the poet's different ideas. That is why it would be unfair to claim that his artistic skills are not in creation, but in imitation. Regarding the point, he said: "As to imitation; poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by combination and representation. Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of Man or the nature" (Ibid., 135).

The same principle is observable in his "The Cenci," although it is not developed out of a myth, but of a historical event. According to the story, an old man, having spent his life in debauchery and wickedness, conceived a deep hatred towards his children which showed itself in an incestuous passion for a daughter, who after long and vain attempts to escape from what she considered as a perpetual contamination of body and mind, finally plotted with her stepmother and brother to murder their common tyrant. The deed was discovered and in spite of the most earnest prayers made to the Pope, the criminals were put to death.

Yet Shelley's aim in writing the drama was not only exciting pity for the wrongs and presenting the mischievous deeds of a dictator farther toward his children, as it was in its Italian origin. Through the recreation of this historical event, Shelley tries to convey his long-held political and humanistic idea which was embodied in his "Prometheus Unbound": a perfect man should not hate anybody, not even his enemy; he should replace revenge and hatred with love and pity. In the preface to "The Cenci," he wrote.

The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the dramas, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind ... Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are all pernicious mistakes. If the daughter had thought in this manner, she would have been wiser and better. (Ibid., 240)

Wasserman has argued that according to Shelley's theory, the myths and allusions that appear in his poetry are to be understood as really having no inherited context at all. So any particular previous appearance of myths in his poetry should not be considered as a literary allusion, but merely another instance of the actual or potential archetypal form (in Reiman and Powers, 2010, 529). For him, as far as a poet is creative, he is a mythopoeist, not by inventing myths, but by reconstructing the imperfect ones.

That is why it would be unfair to claim that Virgil was an imitator of Homer. In a passage in the preface to his "Prometheus Unbound," Shelley wrote: "The ideal conceptions had been newly remodeled within his mind, they had been

born again" (Ibid., 135). Wasserman explains that for Shelley, all human minds are portions of one mind, and because of the interconnections of all poems, each is a fragment of "that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of world" (Ibid., 530). Evidence of his respect for his position is to be found not only in his resort to traditional materials but even in his reluctance in using myth with their plots unchanged. their structures, although true and beautiful, are waiting to be properly drawn out by imagination and recreation, and his mythopoeic art lies specially in eliciting the existing potentials of myths to form new combinations.

From his reading and his experience, Shelley came to associate various words with particular phases of man's moral life. Heat and coldness, light and darkness, owls and eagles, violets and roses, sun and moon, all come to symbolize certain moral and aesthetic concepts. To communicate his ideas to the reader, he drew this symbolic significance from earlier poetic tradition, and then modified them according to his individualized conceptions of literary taste.

His symbolic universe will be fully elucidated only after some of his keywords in his poetry and prose are examined. in the "Essay on Life," which can be considered as the most important document of Shelley's intellectual development, he divides natural phenomena into two major categories: first he speaks of "the system of the sun, and the stars, and planets ... the spectacles now afforded by the nightly cope of heaven," and then of "the scenery of this earth" (Ibid., 538). Thus, the distinction between celestial and terrestrial phenomena - between the "cope of heaven" and the "scenery of Earth"- plays an important role in Shelley's symbolism. According to Wasserman, Shelley adopted for poetic purpose of pre-Copernican cosmology that considered all created things beneath the moon subject to change, whereas the sun, planets, and stars beyond the moon existed in a realm of permanence. The moon, "to whom alone it has been given/ to change and be adorned forever," was mutable, but eternal and regular in its mutations. It governed the sublunar world and was the symbol of its imitations. When the celestial bodies considered of the single element of fire, terrestrial creation contained the four elements fire, air, water, and earth. Earth, often referred to as dust, represented inert matter; water, symbolized mortal generation; fire, the element of the sun, and stars symbolized spiritual energy; and the air, being between the Earth and the fire of the sun, was the realm of abstract ideas that raise man above his mortal perspective (Ibid., 539).

Besides distinguishing between the pure fire of heaven and the sublunar creation, Shelly recognized two subdivisions within terrestrial nature. The quotation below is from his "Essay on Life":

The scenery of this earth, the mountains, the seas and the rivers; the grass, and the flowers, are the variety of the forms and masses of the leaves of the woods, and the colors which attend the setting and the rising Sun, and the hues of the atmosphere, turbid or serene.(in Reiman and Powers, 2010, 539).

Shelley distinguished natural forms like mountain, sea, and river - that consist of a single terrestrial element - from slighter phenomena such as cloud, wave, leaf, dew, mist, rainbow, and flower. A terrestrial phenomenon like an ocean, a river, or a mountain exhibits the qualities of its elements in an abstract way. The sea or ocean in Shelley's poetry, for example, often symbolizes the realm of temporal existence upon which man pursues his voyage of life. the symbol has been used in his "Alastor," "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," and "Time." sometimes a small stream symbolizes the course of life or some particular individual, whereas a river may signify the history of some particular society, like in "Evening: Poute la Mare, Pisa." The smaller ephemeral creatures frequently represent a certain aspect of man. The cloud, for instance, is a recurrent symbol of the human mind or soul. Or, a mimosa, the "sensitive plant," becomes the symbol of

man, with his unfulfilled longings for the good, the true, and the beautiful, as contrasted with the other transitory creatures whose natures seem to be fulfilled within the scope of temporal existence.

Wind has a unique position in Shelley's symbolism, which in its wilder manifestations as storm or whirlwind was his symbol of necessity. Donald H. Reiman has argued that as a follower of Hume and Drummond, Shelley rejected the Aristotelian theory of causation and held that the causes for both sensory impressions and psychic ideas are unknown and unknowable. He used wind, which "blows where it wills" though nobody knows whence it comes or whither it goes," to symbolize the relations among series of physical, historical, or psychological events. Since air is the element symbolizing human concepts and ideas, the wind, a connected movement of this element, proves an effective sceptical symbol of the concept of Necessity that had played a significant role in 18th century thought (Ibid., 540). Also, it symbolizes change and modification, as it does in "Ode to the West Wind." Here, the poet regards the west wind as a natural power that is capable of changing the appearance of nature, a power he wishes to have in order to change the social condition of this time and establish his idealistic society.

Among the celestial symbols, the moon or "the mother of months" is associated with rationalization (Wilson, 2011, 186). In his "To Constantia," it is described as "the planet of Frost, so cold and bright" that it makes things "wan with her borrowed light" and is usually identifiable with reason or analytic faculty, which in "A Defense of Poetry" was distinguished from imagination or the synthetic faculty. In a letter to Olliver answering Peacocks "Four Ages of Poetry," Shelley wrote:

He would extinguish imagination which is the sun of life, and grope his way by the cold and uncertain and borrowed light of that moon which he calls reason, stumbling over the interlunar chasm of time where she deserts us, and an owl, rather than an eagle, stares with dazzled eyes on the lottery orb which is the Queen of his pale heaven. (Ibid.)Or in "Epipsychidion":

- The cold chaste moon, the queen of heaven's bright isles,
- Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles,
- That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame
- Whichever is transformed, yet still the same,
- And warm not but illumines. (Ibid., 347)
- And elsewhere, in the fragments "To the Moon":
- Art thou pale for weariness
- Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
- Wandering companionless
- Among the stars that have a different birth, -
- And ever changing, like a joyless eye
- That finds no object worth its constancy? (Ibid., 476)

The moon in Shelley's poetry is beautiful but cold, pale, and inconstant. It is of a different order from the stars, and gives only the borrowed and secondary light of the sun. But the sun is linked with the creative imagination, a burning fountain of warmth and light out of which flow the spiritual natures of created things. At the universal level, the sun signifies the Deity; in the world of human experience, it represents imagination. In a note to his "Queen Mab," Shelley observes: "Beyond our atmosphere the sun would appear a rayless orb of fire in the midst of a black concave. The equal diffusion of its light and earth is owing to the refraction of the rays by the atmosphere, and their reflection from other bodies" (Ibid., 542).

The rainbow, product of the distortion of the white light of the Sun, symbolizes the unreal appearances of earthly life a "painted veil" that hides from human vision the nature of things or the ultimate knowledge. Shelley, with his mental epistemological dilemma, speaks of the human mind as diffusing truth and "casting rainbow hues" over the external world. So the sun plays an ambiguous role in Shelley's symbolism. In itself it illuminates in the highest sense, but because of the rainbow and the clouds, its light cannot be trusted. In "Letter to Maria Gisborn" Shelley writes:

- how we spawn
- A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun
- Of his family life, which seems to be
- But is not: - or is but quaint mockery
- Of all the would believe, and sadly blame
- The jarring and inexplicable frame
- Of this wrong word (Ibid., 160)

The sun as seen by man is deceptive, and in such later poems as "The Sensitive Plant," and "To Night," Shelley praises the night and its dreams as fountains of higher knowledge. The "fixed stars" in Shelley's works symbolize the immutable realm of being that enjoys all the conditions for which man long but which are impossible in this life under the rule of "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change." They shine with an unchanging light that does not obscure them in their own bright veil, as does the sun, and offer the hope to a man that he can rise above the mutability of his existence into an unchanging fulfillment of the highest aspirations.

In "Adonais," the stars symbolize the souls of great and good men of the past, "the splendors of the firmament of time" who "may be eclipsed, but are extinguished not" (Ibid., 494). Since the real sun is obscured by the clouds, man depends upon the inner sun of his own imagination, and upon the example of those noble dead who, like stars, beacon "from the abode where the eternal are" (Ibid., 495).

Finally planets receive considerable attention throughout Shelley's poetry. He believed in two of the theological virtues: hope and love, and while faith was, for him, and moral responsibility, they wear the cornerstones of his ethical philosophy, love its motivating force and hope for the triumph of good over evil. Venus, as the morning star, was the sign of man's regeneration within his earthly life, or his awakening to spiritual love; as Hesperus or Vesper, the evening star, promised fulfillment of man's aspiration after death and thus symbolized hope.

The celestial symbols remain relatively consistent in their association throughout Shelley's poetry, as do many of the terrestrial symbols. However, each individual poem develops its particular symbolic universe, drawing meanings from specific traditions (the pastoral elegiac tradition in "Adonais"), from literary Models (the "Parsae" of Aeschylus in "Hellas," or his "Prometheus Bound" in "Prometheus Unbound"), or from relevant historical events (the Peterloo massacre in "The Mask of Anarchy," or his "The Cenci"). It should be noted that in explicating Shelley's individual poems, the reader should not impose the poet's symbolic universe in a generalized fashion; he must read each work in its own terms, keeping in mind the approximate values of these symbols in it. The variation in his symbolism is as individualistic as his poetry is different from the literary sources he used, the cause of which is his imagination and recreating power.

CONCLUSIONS

Even a glance at Shelley's main works reveals that he put the basis on his writing on a specific poetic principle and his taste in appreciating and judging a particular work was always systematic. So it seems unfair to the researcher that Shelley has never been recognised as an English Romantic critic; in fact, in England, the only Romantic poets who are given the label are Wordsworth and Coleridge, even though all of their ideas in the field of literary criticism had a counterpart in Shelley's theories and sometimes they all shared exactly the same opinion. In other words, their views on the concept of poetry and poetic creativity, poetic language, pleasure derived from poetry, the role of the poet, and the purpose of poetry, are at times remarkably convergent, if not identical. Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry," like Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* deals with similar poetic elements; nevertheless, Shelley's ideas in literary criticism are not usually well received and he is hardly hailed as a critic. Shelley believed that anyone who talks and writes about the true and the beautiful is a poet. In addition, for him, poets are divine creatures and prophets in that they can see the past, the present, and the future more vividly than common people. Through their imagination and poetic vision, poets can represent the physical world in such a way that they can approach the ideal or the perfect and unveil the ultimate truth for all humanity. As for poetic language, Shelley contended that although any kind of true and beautiful expression is poetry, the best medium of artistic expression is language. The harmony of utterance, achieved by the proper choice of words and the relation of sound to sense among words, is part of the way in which imagination can approximate and correspond to the ideal order, which in his view is made accessible only via the metrical language of poetry.

Shelley proclaimed that poetry is the outpourings of the best and happiest minds; he emphasized that poetry is always accompanied by pleasure, although it is not its ultimate purpose. For him, the ultimate purpose is teaching morality; he held that love and sympathy with the pain of others is the highest kind of morality. This humanistic mindset could be taught and propagated by poetic imagination. Put another way, poetry intensifies and waters imagination and in so doing becomes an instrument of teaching morality and humanity. Poetic imagination invokes the best and the most sublime feelings and turns individuals into a better version of themselves. That is why Shelley insists that poets are the best of mankind; they change everything into loveliness and transform everything they touch into gold. By the use of imaginative vision and creativity, they offer profound insight into the nature of human beings and human societies, combine everything even opposite qualities and open the reader's mind to eccentric and wonderful worlds and bring about a deeper conception of reality, which become ideality, namely, peace and loving all. Under the spell of poetry, human beings become more sympathetic, more understanding, more patient, and more loving and the world becomes a better place.

To conclude, the basic principles of literary criticism, including the role and definition of the poet, the concept and function of poetry, creative imagination, poetic language, and aesthetic pleasure have been elaborated by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. Although some of their critical theories and ideas are not exactly the same, they never contradict each other and sometimes it seems that they are actually saying the same thing. Shelley's high regard for poetry and the poet, his recommendations concerning the use of proper words and diction in versification, and the standards for appreciating a literary work have compatible and even identical counterparts in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's critical theories. That is why in the researcher's view, critics and anthologists have done injustice to Shelley in underestimating and ignoring him as a critic despite all his contributions to literary criticism and his influential critical theories. If Wordsworth and Coleridge are qualified and classified as Romantic critics, so should Shelley be since either he totally agrees with them or elaborates on the same concepts they were interested in and dealt with in their critical treatises.

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