

## Poetical Contribution of Shelley in the French Renaissance

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### Abstract

*Political injustice, absolute power, and an economic catastrophe contributed to the French Revolution in 1789. The French society attacked the Bastille prison in July 1789, marking the beginning of the French Revolution. The Liberte, Egalite, and Fraternize values that the society fervently upholds create a republican state inspired by J.J. Rousseau. The idea was swiftly abandoned since it made people think of warfare. That becomes the ethos of democrats and liberals who promote democracy to defeat tyranny and an oppressive government. English Romantic poets were influenced by this idea to draw inspiration for their works from events in the French Revolutionary society. In response to the failure of the French revolution in 1789, romanticism gained popularity. The Percy Bysshe Shelley poems are grounded in this Rousseau's theory. A literary work's character during the Romantic era is influenced by a love of nature, conscience, and a sympathetic attitude toward the underprivileged. The cultural antecedents of modern ethnicity and nationality are of interest to romanticism. The purpose and the main objective of the present survey is to investigate and interpret the text in the light of New Historicism in the selected poems of Shelley. The term new historicism invented by Greenblatt whose essays often have a new historicist approach "The foremost charge of new historicism is well-defined as literary texts are obligated with pretentious constructions; which are the part of history and still in the process of composition".(Muller, 2013).The textual analysis reveals strong effect of French Revolution upon Shelley's mind ideas about the French Revolution, such as freedom from oppression, humanity, camaraderie, liberty, and equity.*

**Keywords:** French Renaissance, New Historicism, Romanticism, Humanity.

## **Introduction**

This research paper deals with the impacts of the French revolution on the thinking ability and revolutionary nature of P.B. Shelley. The way he started writing about the social injustice from being a pure romanticist can be seen in this paper. It is commonly observed that historical issues affect, either directly or indirectly, literature in many ways. The French and Industrial Revolutions influenced the fundamental literary principles of Romantic poets, especially the French Revolution (1789), which fostered the thought of freedom and individuality that had an undeniable effect on the Romanticists. Hazlitt (1934) states that the French Revolution emerging in France came along with "a new impulse which had been given to man's minds"(Ayyildiz, 2017). A secular and liberal conception of a man sprang from the French Revolution. Thus, there was a shift from a social man to an individual man. Featuring in the initial phases of the Revolution, democratic idealism also had an enormous impact on the Romantic writers. Thereby, they reflected the language and experience of ordinary people and their own imaginative worlds in poetry. The French Revolution is widely recognized as one of the most significant events of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe, with far-reaching consequences in political, cultural, social, and literary arenas. Although scholars such as Jeremy Popkin point to more concrete political issues as grounds for the upheaval, supporters of the Revolution rallied around more abstract concepts of freedom and equality, such as resistance to the King's totalitarian authority as well as the economic and legal privileges given to the nobility and clergy. Enlightenment ideals of equality, citizenship and human rights were manifested in this resistance to monarchy, religion, and social difference. These beliefs had a profound influence on the Romantic poets.

## **Background of the study**

During the Paris celebration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution in the summer of 1989, Margaret Thatcher reminded her hosts that their Revolution was a nasty affair that had gotten entirely out of hand. To the further astonishment of various French cabinet ministers, she also reminded them that the British shared their ideals but were the more elegant practitioners of Revolution, having them invented the Rights of Man peacefully in 1215 and 1688. The Prime Minister's ideology is a venerable and Burkean one: the British uphold those ideals that inspire Revolution but are so often betrayed when large groups not in power attempt to act on them. In fact, the British customarily suspect ideals and idealists since both seem too weak or too unworldly to survive political conflict or to participate in history itself. We should recall that this was precisely the attitude of the Victorian bourgeoisie toward the radical origins of the romantic poets. How did the British look back on this literature in the years around the last centennial, in 1889? The case of Shelley, whose place in literary history was the most controversial, provides us with the most exciting example of how a virtual literary outlaw became an object of study within a well-defined academic discipline. Such "placement" of Shelley was made possible by the creation of a "Romantic era" as a distinct historical object of study in university lectures and texts only around the turn of this century. As David Perkins has recently remarked, "In England between 1798 and 1824, the term "romantic" did not name a contemporary movement or period." However, Perkins notes, there was a sense of historical impact which was developing among authors like Shelley and

Wordsworth, who, nevertheless, would not see themselves as part of a unified or unique literary movement: "For this sense that their own age was a period, the overwhelming reason was the French Revolution" (Kipperman, M. 1992,p. 134).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Literary texts are the products of the belief of every age in which they are composed. Which should be understood in terms of its historicity since history forms all literary writings. Literary texts are produced and actualized in social and cultural conditions, and are not created in the vacuum. Man, and his age have been the major matter and concern of every author. The present study deals with Shelley as a romantic poet notably influenced by the historical, social and cultural aspects of his respective age. The problem of the study is essentially related to Shelley's poetic work making special reference to the new historicist perspective. The present study will focus on completely new identity of the poet and ideologies related to him.

### **Significance of the study**

The present study will be substantial as it will provide new/fangled knowledge to the prevailing body of literature. It will give familiar knowledge about the relation between the text and history, and between the text and world. Additionally, the study will also be significant as it will give a new and positive identity to the poet Shelley in the realm of literature. The study will concentrate on analyzing Shelley as a romantic poet from a specific perspective, namely, New Historicism. In fact, no one can deny the greatness of Shelley as the most prominent figure in English Literature and that is why his poetic works have been long studied. Furthermore, the study will be noteworthy for the scholars and researchers in the field of literature generally and in the genre of poetry specifically.

### **Objective of the study**

Able to investigate the traces of French Renaissance in the poetic works of Shelley

## **Review of Literature**

Abrams, M. H. (1993) The Romantic writers were influential supporters of the French Revolution through their works, and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was one of them. "Grown up with violently revolutionary ideas, which contrasted with those of his father's" (Gillie, 1977, p. 783), Shelley was a radical nonconformist in every aspect of his life and came from a conservative background. Following his experiences as a student at Eton and Oxford, he "saw the petty tyranny of schoolmasters and schoolmates as representative of man's general inhumanity to man, and dedicated his life to a war against injustice and oppression" (Abrams, 1993., p. 698). He attributed the evils in the world to "humanity's own moral failures and grounded the possibility of radical social reform on a reform of the moral and imaginative faculties through the redeeming power of love" (Abrams, 1993., p. 700). Therefore, he is not hopeless "in redemption from present social ills"; for him, "by keeping open the possibility of a better future, hope releases the imaginative and creative powers" (Abrams et al., p. 700). Thus, it can be claimed that his hope for a good world for human beings also fostered his imagination and creativity in his poetry.

The romantic literature of the 1790s was alternately apocalyptic (the visionary transcendence of history) and utopian (the universal secularization of paradise). On both fronts, the

Victorians in the generations after the Reform Bill deployed forces of containment. They saw history as progressive, but only in the continuous harnessing of idealization (as of some motive force) for immediate personal or domestic utility. One scholar has called this development a "secularization of a secularization." Sometimes this took the form of lowering one's sights and an emphasis on the attainable, as in Macaulay's famous preference for Francis Bacon over Plato. More negatively, many critics emphasized the high cost to the social order, to one's friends and oneself, of idealistic pursuit or social rebellion. Here, the Shelley Myth served as a great admonition. In his recent bibliography of over one thousand essays and monographs on Shelley up to 1860, Karsten Klejs Engleberg demonstrates how the Victorian obsession with the poet's life (so far as it was known) centred on the spectacular events—the elopement, the rumours of hallucination and madness, the death, cremation, and ghoulish passing on of relics to sustain the myth of a poet either ludicrously incapable, criminally irresponsible, or gloriously and ineffably transcendent.

Luo yan (2018) describes that Shelley embraces poetical fills in as arms and horns to dissipate his progressive thoughts and request to the people to ascend against the corrupt life and predicts the perfect fate of humankind. His progressive soul and hopefulness intrigue a great deal. The symbolism of Shelley's works allows peruse to encounter the one of a kind encounter of his life. Madhusuda (2016) confirms that Shelley is most likely to be an anxious, multicultural poet with a concern for the mankind. He depicts and extends liberty and humanity. He longs for a society which is represented by equality, brotherhood and righteousness. The poet seems to have detested and scorned all fierce and wicked means. He supports the privileges of revolutionists, veggie lovers, and female's place in society. He also expresses his concerns about the others including slaves, writers, sages, legislators and even rulers and sovereigns.

Saleh (2018) affirms that Shelley appears as an extremist persona. He guards the privileged of all underestimated gatherings or unheard voices; privilege of being free, privileges of ladies and even of other poor creatures. He seems to have added to annihilate the present world and model a liberated individual from all the psychological, mental and tangible subjugation.

Smith and Davy (2017) declare that Shelley was a solid supporter of social equity for lower classes. He perceived mistreatment in taming and butchering of creatures, and he turned into a warrior for the privileges of every living being that he saw being dealt with cruelty, some critics consider that the explanation of Shelley's vegetarianism was affected by old books or compositions.

### **Research Methodology**

The inquest approach used in this study is strictly qualitative in nature. The method of inquest for this research is purely qualitative. The strategy utilized in the present investigation is both analytical and descriptive. It looks to investigate the outside context behind the development of the themes and different other devices used by Shelley with required text. Furthermore, reading and analyzing of Shelley's poems in background circumstance with the tenets of New historicist theory which is utilized as a major method in this research. In the eyes of many social and behavioural scientists, qualitative modes of inquiry are as much a point of view on

how to examine a study subject as they are a method of investigation (Bengtsson, 2017). In methodology the selected poems of Shelley analysed and interpreted with lens of New Historicism under a qualitative research design through textual analysis. "Textual analysis fills three needs in which researcher's attribute meaning to the text, under-stand the influence of factors outside the text, and scrutinize or assess the text" (Frey & Kreps, 1992).

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The researcher has found several literature and research papers in which he has found the impact of French revolution on the works of P.B. Shelley and his thoughts. Here we discuss the impacts of French revolution in the findings. Revolutionary poets advocate for the rights of the underprivileged and write against social injustice. They are fearless protestors, rebels, and parliamentarians with a heart for the underprivileged. In "The Haunted Oak," Paul Laurence Dunbar penned revolutionary poetry about the brutal deaths of African Americans by white people. Similarly, P.B. Shelley composed "The Masque of Anarchy" in response to the murder, in which he denounced the unfairness of society.

And a mighty troop around,  
With their trampling shook the ground,  
Waving each a bloody sword,  
For the service of their Lord.

The poet seeks comfort and rebirth in nature, and it is beautiful not only because of itself but also because the spirit of God is revealed in nature, which unites all created beings into a whole. Therefore, nature has a religious and spiritual significance for Romantic poets. Their skepticism of the existing society made them return to nature, the past ages, the Middle Age and the Renaissance for rebirth. Emphasizing the French Revolution's prompting rebellious nature of the Romanticists, (Chappey & Vincent, 2019) argues: "Much as the French Revolution signaled an attempt to break with the old order and to establish a new and revitalized social system, Romanticism sought to free itself from the rules and standards of eighteen-century literature and to open up new areas of vision and expression" (p. 261). Thus, it is evident that the changing approaches resulted in changes even in the language the Romanticists used in poetry. Poetry shifted from imitation to expression, as the mirror held up to human nature was turned to the human heart. The poem became "the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (AYYILDIZ, 2017), and poets were regarded as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (802). The period's literature arose "as it were from a new birth" (795) and poetry aesthetically gave the sense of rebellion by means of diction in it.

Most of the Romantic era, the interpretive struggle would be to distance the authors in some way from the Revolution that was so often felt to be their inspiration; at the same time, the well-known appeal of Shelley to radical elements in his society needed to be contained through reinterpretations and formulations of literary history that both admitted a notion of progress as a historical end and avoided validating social upheaval as a means. As Perkins concludes, "it was around the turn of this century that the decisive break in interpretive tradition took place. Before then, there was a period when the movement might be seen, with William Courthope, as inspired by the French Revolution or, with the Pre Raphaelites,

essentially a political. The triumph of the latter view coincided with the bestowing of the name Romanticism".

However, Perkins's broad study touches only briefly on the causes of this shift. He said, I would like to look more closely at the institutional and ideological forces at work on the teachers, who struggled to admit Shelley's appeal and to interpret his relevance for vast numbers of new readers, the working and middle classes of the nineteenth century.

In his other poem, "To a Skylark", Shelley ascends to the high level of aestheticism achieved by means of the harmony between the form and the content. He can even manage to reflect the feeling of the sublime in the poem, which demands a special talent. The stanzas of this long poem can be grouped into three parts. In the first part, the poet describes the bird as a "blithe spirit" (line 1) whose song is a product of "profuse strains of unpremeditated art" (line 5). It sings as it flies "like a cloud of fire" (line 8) in the sky. The poet is fascinated with the song of the bird. Although he cannot see it, he can sense that the sky is full of the bird's sweet voice. The bird's divine beauty becomes so integrated with the sky that it becomes invisible whenever it flies high up in the sky. It becomes united with Heaven. For the poet, the bird becomes a kind of "unbodied joy" (line 15) whose "shrill delight" (line 20) evokes happiness and peace in the listener. In the middle part of the poem, Shelley compares the bird to many things in different stanzas of the poem to describe the beauty of the bird's song. He asserts that even "rainbow clouds" cannot rain as brightly as the shower of melody that pours from the bird's song (lines 33-35).

The comparison of the melody in the bird's song with the rain of rainbow clouds is a part of aestheticism in the poem. The bird is resembled "a poet hidden / In the light of thought" (lines 36-37), and it can present the universe with "sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not" (line 40). It is likened to "a lonely maiden" in a palace who sings to cure her soul suffering from her love (lines 41-45). For the poet, the bird is like "a golden glow-worm", illuminating its around even when it is unseen. (lines 46-50). It is like a rose, which is not seen, but whose powerful scent is felt when the wind blows, and even the bees are fainted with "too much sweet" (lines 51-55). The bird's melody goes over "all that ever was, / Joyous and clear and fresh" (lines 59-60). The poet does not find all these comparisons sufficient because, for him, none of them can express the delight the poet feels in his soul while listening to the bird.

However, they provide a strong sense of aestheticism for the poem. Shelley also states that pain and languor "never came near" (line 79) the skylark. For instance, he notes that although it loves, it has never known "love is sad satiety" (line 80). Also, the bird must know "things more true and deep" about death (line 83) than people can imagine; or else, the poet questions, "how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?" (line 85). Furthermore, the thin line between happiness and sadness in mortals' lives finds an aesthetic expression in the poet's work. For him, people who are doomed to die "pine for what is not" (line 87); even their laughter is noted to be "fraught" with "some pain" (line 89); their "sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought" (line 90).

According to Shelley, tragedy is the source of "the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody" (2000, p. 797). That is to say, the melancholic sound in the poem makes it pleasurable. However, Shelley says, people can "scorn / Hate and pride and fear" (lines 91-92), and they are born with the ability to weep. Nevertheless, he is not sure whether all

feelings could ever approximate the joy the poet senses about the skylark. In the last part, Shelley expresses his aspiration to share the secret of the "unbridled joy" the skylark feels because he believes that this sense is not a similar one felt by people. The skylark is a special source of inspiration for the poet because he notes that he has never heard from any other people or things such as "a flood of rapture so divine" (line 65). The poet wishes it to teach him its sweet thoughts, just like he wants the west wind to make its lyre in the poem. It can be claimed that the poet underlines that freedom is not only something physical, moreover, something with "half the gladness / that thy brain must know" (lines 101-102). He notes that the seed of life, imagination and consciousness of human beings can get out of the state of inactivity and take all humankind to a peaceful life in harmony. Thus, the poet believes that with the help of the skylark, he will improve his readers' lives, and Shelley implies that this indicates the power of poetry, which takes its force from the power of nature. Shelley discusses injustice as sadness in the poem which was common during and after revolution. We should recall the context of Matthew Arnold's 1888 remarks about Shelley as the "ineffectual angel": he does not precisely say Shelley was an angel but that, after reading Dowden, he wants to remember Shelley as one. Arnold is reacting not to Shelley's poetry—he wrote little, in fact, about any Shelley poem—but to his own horror at the whole story of the Godwin circle, at free love, and at the cost of social rebellion: "What a set! what a world!" Indeed, Arnold had said explicitly that the Revolution had produced an era of emotional, idealistic "concentration," emphasizing action over thoughtfulness and corrupting a whole generation of English poets.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In conclusion, it can be claimed that Shelley is the embodiment of Romanticism. He also achieves aestheticism, the source of which is imagination and subjectivity resulting from his rebellious spirit of Revolution in his Romantic poems, speaking out his personal ideas and emotions. Despite coming from a noble family, Shelley has no desire to utilize his noble class. Instead, he consistently held extreme beliefs that he would never compromise for whatever fleeting or trivial expediency. In an effort to speak and think freely and to persuade the readers to follow his path, Shelley fights against all forms of power and oppression. The reader is reminded of James Joyce, a modernist writer, as he leaves his family and country since Joyce also sought to break free from the constraints of authority, including those of his faith, family, and nation. Wherever he went, Shelley remained opposed to all forms of tyranny. He made an effort to make his social and political ideas clear to the reader in all of his writings. He expressed his beliefs in the sonnet, ode, and ballad forms. His works' content was more significant to him than their format, which is not essential. He wrote his poems "Ozymandias" and "England in 1819" in sonnet form, for instance, and "Ode to the West Wind" in ode form. However, three of these poems have the same sentiments. He denounced the abuses of authority and tyranny that led to social unrest in each of the poems this research examined. He takes on the role of the voice of the marginalized and disadvantaged and fiercely defends the beliefs that sprang from the French Revolution. Moreover, on Shelley further research can be developed with the perspective of other formulated theories.

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