



NECESSITY OF P.B. SHELLEY AT THE PRESENT TIME

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ABSTRACT: Percy Bysshe Shelley is widely regarded as a literary icon and essential player in the Romantic Movement. His poetry is well-known for its rebellious, imaginative, and hopeful attitude, as well as for defying society standards. Percy Bysshe Shelley, a fundamental character in Romantic literature, is still surprisingly relevant in the 21st century. Shelley's best-known works include *Ozymandias* (1818), *Ode to the West Wind* (1819), *To a Skylark* (1820), *Adonais* (1821), "The Necessity of Atheism" (1811), and *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819). Shelley's reputation varied during the twentieth century, but since the 1960s, he has received growing critical appreciation for the sweeping motion of his poetic imagery, his command of genres and poetry forms, and the intricate interaction of sceptical, idealist, and materialist concepts in his works. This paper examines Shelley's revolutionary aspirations, utopian dreams, humanistic principles, environmental concerns, and cultural influence to determine his works' long-term relevance. It further shows how Shelley's ideas continue to connect with contemporary challenges and spark continuous dialogue by examining his primary topics and their modern applications.

KEY WORDS: Literary icon, Romantic literature, Humanistic principles, Contemporary challenges, Revolutionary aspirations.

**"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."
(To a Skylark, Percy Bysshe Shelley)**



The lines are quite befitting to the people of all societies in all the ages simply because these lines reflect human nature which remains same in all the ages. As human beings we peep into the past and regret for not getting the things we wished for. And we brood over the future and cultivate fear, thinking that, perhaps we shall not be able to get the things we wish to get. We know that brooding over the past and the future is useless because the moments that have passed cannot come back, not even at the cost of our lives. The future, in fact, is uncertain, unpredictable and non-existent. No benefits can come out of thinking about it. Still we think about both as it is human nature to crave for the things which are out of our reach. Moreover, in pursuit of happiness we forget that the very feeling co-exists with pain and both are inseparable. Well, our purpose is not to establish Shelley as a reflector of human nature or a philosopher, our attempt is to find out how relevant Shelley, the then called Mad Shelley, is at the present time.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (4 August 1792 - 8 July 1822) was an English writer who is regarded as one of the most significant English Romantic poets. Shelley, a radical in his poetry as well as in his political and social views, did not achieve fame during his lifetime. However, recognition of his poetic achievements grew steadily after his death, and he became an important influence on subsequent generations of poets, including Robert Browning, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Thomas Hardy, and W. B. Yeats. Harold Bloom, an American literary critic, described him as “a superb craftsman, a lyric poet without rival, and surely one of the most advanced sceptical intellects ever to write poems.” Shelley’s reputation varied during the twentieth century, but since the 1960s, he has received growing critical appreciation for the sweeping motion of his poetic imagery, his command of genres and poetry forms, and the intricate interaction of sceptical, idealist, and materialist concepts in his works. His most well-known compositions are *Ozymandias* (1818), *Ode to the West Wind* (1819), *To a Skylark* (1820), *Adonais* (1821), the philosophical pamphlet “The Necessity of Atheism” (1811), which his friend T. J. Hogg may have co-authored, and the political song *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819). His other important works are the verse plays *The Cenci* (1819), *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), and *Hellas* (1822), as well as the epic narrative poems *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude* (1815), *Julian and Maddalo* (1819), *Adonais* (1821), *The Triumph of Life* (1822) and many more.

Shelley also created prose fiction and several articles on political, social, and philosophical topics. Due to the fear of punishment for political and religious libel, most of his poetry and prose works were either never published or only in expurgated form. From the 1820s



on, his poetry and political and ethical essays gained popularity in Owenist, Chartist, and radical political groups, and he later acquired followers such as Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, and George Bernard Shaw. Shelley's life was plagued by family troubles, illness, and retaliation for his atheism, strange political ideas, and disobedience of societal norms. In 1818, he went into permanent self-exile in Italy and over the next four years composed what Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill call "some of the finest poetry of the Romantic period". His second wife, Mary Shelley, is the author of *Frankenstein*. He perished in a boating accident in 1822, at the age of 29.

Percy Bysshe Shelley is widely regarded as one of the greatest Romantic poets whose writings are suffused with a deep sense of idealism and a devotion to social justice. Despite the historical and cultural distinctions between his age and ours, Shelley's literature addresses issues that are still relevant to modern society. His revolutionary objectives, utopian aspirations, humanistic perspectives, environmental awareness, and effect on current society demonstrate his enduring relevance. Shelley's poetry is distinguished by its extreme political and social criticism, which questions existing authority and advocate for change. His poem *The Mask of Anarchy*, written in response to the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, exemplifies his revolutionary attitude. The poem is a strong indictment of political violence and injustice, asking readers to fight oppression in nonviolent ways. Shelley's focus on communal action and moral bravery is consistent with modern social movements that seek to overcome structural inequalities, such as those fighting for racial equality, gender rights, and democratic reforms. The poem's first lines—"As I lay asleep in Italy, There came a voice from over the sea" (Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*)—set a prophetic tone that refers to the present fights against authoritarian governments and socioeconomic inequities. His demand for a mental revolution, in which individuals recognize their own ability to change, reflects current attempts to confront established power systems and promote social justice.

In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley reimagines the Prometheus tale as a metaphor of resistance to tyranny. Prometheus' rejection of Zeus and eventual emancipation might be interpreted as a metaphor for modern battles against repressive regimes and the search for human liberation. His portrayal of Prometheus as a symbol of hope and transformation serves as a model for contemporary movements seeking to destroy tyranny and promote justice.



Shelley's idealism is a distinguishing aspect of his writing, marked by a belief in human potential and the prospect of a utopian society. His poetry frequently addresses themes of beauty, creativity, and the transformational power of the human spirit. In *Ode to the West Wind*, Shelley calls on the natural elements to inspire transformation and renewal: "O wild West Wind, thou breathe of autumn's being" (Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*). This poem expresses his conviction in the power of nature and creativity to promote societal change.

Shelley's final writings, such as *To a Skylark* and *The Cloud*, explain his vision of an ideal world in which people live in harmony and freedom. His representation of the skylark as a symbol of pure joy and freedom shows his utopian view of a world free of restrictions. In the light of today's global issues, such as climate change, social injustice, and political upheaval, Shelley's idealism provides an optimistic foundation for creating a better future. His emphasis on human potential and growth inspires current readers to seek revolutionary answers to today's complicated concerns.

Shelley's conception of the poet's job is centered on his humanistic beliefs. In "A Defence of Poetry", Shelley contends that poetry is a source of moral and intellectual enlightenment. He sees poets as visionaries who inspire ethical conduct and foster empathy: "Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world" (Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry"). For Shelley, the poet's mission is to question established standards and present a vision of higher values.

Shelley, as we judge through his poems, was a rebel simply because he was not satisfied with most of the things prevalent in his time. He, in fact, revolted against the social, political and religious systems of his time. His pamphlet "Necessity of Atheism" resulted in his expulsion from the University as it asserted that "the entity of God cannot be proved on empirical basis". It aroused the anger of religious institutions and the result was shocking for Shelley and his collaborator. Due to his unorthodox notions he was called mad Shelley and his poetry was termed insane. Arnold went to the extent of calling him an ineffectual angel beating in void his luminous wings in vain. Actually, Shelley was much ahead of his time but unfortunately he was misunderstood and misinterpreted by orthodox British minds. He was considered to be a murderer like Cain, like Christ he was misunderstood by his own people. His poems show that he wanted the annihilation of social, political and religious institutions and the reconstruction of



a new world guided by love. He was against codified morality, institutionalized religion, social institutions, customs and conventions of his time. Fearless and uncompromising to the last degree, Shelley was a pure soul who wanted reforms of extreme nature. If we try to have a look at his ten principles, we can come to know that he is more relevant today than his own time:

- I. Liberty of thoughts and action
- II. Toleration at the opinions of others
- III. Revolt against injustice of every kind
- IV. Love for rationalism
- V. Necessity of free love
- VI. Passion for drastic reforms in institutions
- VII. Consentaneous love
- VIII. Selfless faith
- IX. Fearless behaviour
- X. Use of poetic legislation

The first principle propounded by Shelley is liberty of thoughts and action, which we can very strongly feel is the backbone of any democratic structure. Any society where people can think freely and act freely without any fear of authorities can be a real heaven on this blighted planet of ours. History shows how the world suffered under the dictatorial and totalitarian forces of Fascism and Nazism in the 1930s. Free thinking can bring novel notions in different fields of different institutions. Human mind can cultivate fecund ideas if it is nourished by fearless air. Most of the discoveries across the globe have got real shape just because the researchers were given liberty to think freely. Under fear human mind can produce doubts only, not novel ideas. The present scenario is that universities, colleges, thinkers, social activists and most importantly the press- all seem to whisper rather than speak openly. It may be an ill omen, a world of calamities for any nation. The point is that Shelley, for his advocacy for the liberty of thoughts and actions, is very relevant today.

Shelley's second principle is to advocate liberation of the opinions of others. The present time is very critical where floccinaucinihilipilification has become a new norm. Today, most of us are trapped in an illusion of self-proclaimed scholarship. We feel that whatever we say is right and whatever others say is wrong. This is the most fatal tendency if we are also a part of such



thinking. Intolerance of thought and religion can prove to be the last nail in the coffin of any society's structure. Truth can ever be absolute, it is always relative, what we feel or say about anything may be only one interpretation, what others feel and say about that thing should also be given weight. It is a universally acknowledged fact that those who rule the words, rule the world also and set narratives and discourses. And the narratives of powerful people are often misjudged as true statements. But, let us not forget that any statement becomes a true statement only after marginalizing other statements. In binary opposition also the weaker part has its own value simply because the stronger part becomes stronger just because of the weaker one. Moreover, the beauty of literature lies in its varied interpretations of one fact. This is what may be called the nub of deconstruction- allow other to speak. We may agree with others, we may disagree with others, but proper respect must be given to what others think about anything. We cannot confine any book in one interpretation. As there can be no fixed meaning in any text, there can be no fixed interpretation of anything. Hence, Shelley, on the basis of this principle becomes more relevant today.

Revolt against injustice of everything is yet another idea given by Shelley. At this critical point of time when scholars, thinkers, intellectuals and historians have become mute spectators to all forms of injustice, Shelley is missed seriously. Be it some major revolutions in the west or minor revolts in India- all have resulted from revolt against injustice in any form. It is true that history narrates the harbingers of injustice, but it is also true that it narrates those people in golden letters who raise voice against injustice. The annals of rebels inspire and motivate generations perpetually. Injustice in the name of caste, religion, class and upbringing is seriously fatal for all-encompassing growth of any society. A nation or a society can develop only if it eradicates injustice in any form simply because injustice to someone is like shutting the doors of opportunity and progress to this someone's family, caste and class.

Love for rationalism is the other principle propounded by Shelley. In today's world, poets and artists can play an important role in creating social consciousness and sensitivity. Shelley's view of the poet as a social critic and moral adviser remains relevant in contemporary arguments about the purpose of art and literature. Writers and artists nowadays are frequently viewed as advocates for social change, tackling topics such as inequality, environmental degradation, and human rights. Shelley's idea of poetry as a transformational force is consistent with modern initiatives to use artistic expression to advocate for social justice and promote understanding.



In the same way, his other principles like passion for reforms in institutions and fearless behaviour are the necessities of the present time. In fact, both are interconnected simply because reforms in social and political institutions can be done by those who are fearless in behaviour. Unfortunately, we all preach on the name of reformation but no one is truly willing to move on this painful path. It can be assumed that there is a big difference between what should be and what is happening in reality. What should be is a fictitious state where everything is fine but what is happening is the actual one, which is corrupt and deformed. We see that all-teachers, politicians, philosophers and thinkers remain busy in preaching but they never apply the same things in their own lives. Thus, Shelly, for these principles, is relevant at the present time.

Shelley's observations about nature and the environment are remarkably applicable to the current ecological issues. In *Mont Blanc*, Shelley reflects on the magnificent force of nature and the influence of human activities on the natural world: "The naked countenance of the sky, the Sea, the mountains, and the sky" (Shelley's *Mont Blanc*). His picture of the Alps as a beautiful and pure force contrasts with humans' proclivity to exploit and damage the environment. Shelley's understanding of the interconnection of nature and people provides vital lessons for the current environmental initiatives. His appreciation of nature's beauty and cautions about the dangers of environmental neglect are consistent with current efforts to combat climate change and promote sustainability. Shelley's work can encourage today's environmentalists to explore more peaceful and respectful connections with nature.

Shelley's impact stretches well beyond his lifetime, influencing current literature, music, and popular culture. His unique use of language, imagery, and subject investigation has had a long-lasting impact on future generations of creators. For example, the themes of resistance and change in Shelley's poetry have been reflected in current music and literature that deal with social and political concerns. Musicians, poets, and novelists continue to use Shelley's work to explore themes like idealism, revolt, and human potential. Shelley's thoughts are brought to life via his poems, prose, and life. His ideas will continue to be a test of the everyday acceptance of authority, as well as a challenge to everyone to reach their full potential. His poetry inspires readers to set greater aspirations for themselves and society.

Shelley's aesthetic and philosophical breakthroughs have also influenced conversations concerning the function of art in society. His focus on the poet's duty as a prophet and social



critic is consistent with current views of creative expression as a tool for questioning conventions and pushing for change. Shelley's impact may be seen in the works of succeeding poets and authors, who continue to wrestle with and build on the ideas he presented in new and unique ways. Percy Bysshe Shelley's works remain relevant today because of his revolutionary aspirations, idealistic vision, humanistic principles, and environmental concern. His literary and philosophical contributions provide important insights into modern challenges like political activity and social justice, as well as environmental stewardship and the significance of art. By interacting with Shelley's poetry and philosophy, the current readers and artists can find inspiration and guidance in confronting today's complicated issues, demonstrating the continuing power of his visionary concepts.

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