



## TREATMENT OF LOVE AND NATURE IN THE POETIC REALM OF P.B. SHELLEY

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### **Abstract**

*This paper lays focus on the forces generated by French revolution, religious criticism, widespread melancholy spirit of speculation, intelligent aspiration, interesting scientific discoveries paving the way for literature as marked by a return to Nature longing for love and nature through romantic poets like Shelly who was an idealist inspired by a vital possibly impracticable but beautiful philosophy of life possessing a radiant faith in the possibility of perfection and shows how shelly's poetry is not an emotion recollected in tranquility. It further examines how shelly has been considered the apostle of ideal, spiritual or platonic, love which has nothing to do with the flesh, singing in praise of spiritual or ideal love and how he advocated free love and he vast and the subline in nature had a special charm for him and he frequently found in Nature Symbols and images suitable to his poetic expression.*

**Key Words:** *Love, Nature, Speculation, Revolution, Melancholy, Ideal, Simplicity, Rapture.*

The last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the opening decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century constitute the era of revolutionary social changes – economic, political, religious and literary. The rapid social change which took place between 1776 and 1832 resulted from a variety of causes. It arose from the writings of the French intellectuals, writings which circulated freely in England, from the spread of interest in scientific discoveries and their possible applications and from the philosophical speculations about man and life. The process of social change was accelerated by the French Revolution. The forces generated by the Revolution shook the very fabric of European society, including English society. New knowledge and old dogmas came into fierce conflict, ancient system of thought was shaken to its foundation: traditional landmarks were swept away: intelligent men of all sects and classes were deeply stirred by the spirit of speculation and unrest. Religious skepticism, continual heart-searching's, widespread melancholy became the features of the Age.

Literature of the period was marked by a return to Nature and the output was found to be abundant. Even the lavishness of the Elizabethans could not excel that of this age. The developments of new ideas brought fresh inspiration for poetry and the poetical sky was seen as bright with luminaries of first magnitudes. It was one of the most fertile periods of English literature. There was a great range of subjects. The new and buoyant race of writers, especially the poets, laid the knowledge and experience of all ages under a heavy toll. The classical writers were explored anew and were drawn upon by the genius of Keats and Shelly. The Age was remarkable for its revolt and reaction against the Augustan tradition of literature prevalent in the Age of Pope. Realism was replaced by romanticism, urbanity by the pastoral touch, artificiality by simplicity and naturalness. The writers began to escape from the real and the matter-of-fact to the remote past or distant future of the imaginary Utopia. The impressionable and sensitive nature of Shelly, with his generous impulses, was pained and moved to indignation at the sight of misery and distress and unfreedom. In response to the passionate yearning of his heart he naturally broke into poems of liberty. It can be said that Shelley Wrestled in spirit to win universal freedom for mankind and pined in longing for it.



Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was born on 4 August 1792 at Field Place, Warsham, Sussex. He was first sent to Sion House a private school at Brentford at the age of ten'. In 1810, Shelley went to University College, Oxford. In 1813, Shelley came in contact with the renowned political philosopher Godwin. Whose political individualism and ethical determinism had impressed him deeply during his college days. On July 8, 1822, he wants to pay a visit to Byron along with his friend Mr. Williams. When he was returning the weather and sea became rough. The boat Ariel in which he was sailing capsized and both Shelley and his friend William were drowned. A fortnight after, Shelley's body was washed ashore and was burnt according to the Guarantinc Law of Italy on pyre in the presence of Byron, Leigh Hunt and Trelawncy, and his ashes were buried in the Protestant Cemetry at Rome.

Shelley tried to live his life upto the rules of his own making. The attacks of the word never caused him to modify his conduct or point of view and he never allowed them to make him sour or bitter. He was an idealist who refused all compromises with the world as he knew it. He was inspired by a vital, possibly, impracticable, but beautiful philosophy of life. He is said to have possessed a radiant faith in the possibility of perfection, which led him unmeasured, unbalanced attacks on the institutions and prejudices surrounding him. His poetry was rather an echo or emanation on his own spirit. In his verse, there was the pulstian of the emotion of love for his fellowmen. The instinct of universal benevolence which was at the basic of his being was found winging the flight of his poesy. In no poet was the moral sense so well developed as in Shelley and none had devoted his whole life and rich gifts of language and imagination to the betterment of humanity and the glorification of human dignity, unity and brotherhood, so exclusively as this young Utopian who was consistently charitable and selfless, dedicated to the service of the Intellectual Beauty, whose bright vision of fell upon him in his early spring.

Shelley's ideas came to him not from the world around him but from his own volitions of visions. His poetry is not emotion recollected in tranquility. It fervent emotion outpoured in a gush. In the white heat of emotion and intense fervour of his passion he often lost touch of reality. In intense contemplation of the ideal, he could not maintain the link with the actual. When the actual forces started acting upon his consciousness, a cry of pain and frustration escape his lips and he was overcome with a sense of weakness of soul, wishing to "lie down like a child and weep away this life of care". (P 11). He has to his credit composition of such notable poems as 1. **Queen Mab** (1813), a poem which is an attack on dogmatic religion, government, industrial tyranny and war. It is, in fact, the poets outcry against the unspirited force that weighs down humanity. 2. **Alasto or The Spirit of Solitude** (1816), Shelley's spiritual autobiography in an allegorical form neatly depicting the predicament of a Utopian, the discomfiture of a visionary, 3. **The Revolt of Islam** (1817), an epic dealing with the growth and progress of individual mind, devoted to the love of mankind 4. **The Promethens Unbound** (1820), a lyrical drama that enshrines the poet's loftiest visions of a golden future, the universal regeneration of mankind, when liberty, love, justice and brotherhood will prevail throughout the world 4. **The Cenci** (1819), a drama that presents the conflict between good and evil, thereby presents the conflict between good and evil, thereby dealing with a gruesome family affair. 6. **The Masque of Anarchy** (1818), 7. **Epipsychidion**, 8. **The Witcch of Atlas** (1820), an ambitious poem dealing with a with known for its delicate fantasy 9. **Hellas** (1822), a short lyrical drama inspired by the Greek revolution. 10. **Adonais** (1822), a pastoral elegy written on the death of John Keats. 11. **The Triumph of Life** (1822) a poem in which the familiar thoughts of Shelley's philosophy are unrought into imaginative allegory.



The French Revolution influenced the entire great romantic especially the poets. While Byron was the great interpreter of revolutionary iconoclasm, Shelley was a revolutionary idealist, a great prophet of faith and hope in a world which for the moment had lost both faith and hope. He drank deep at the fountain of the Revolution and denounced in his poetry kings, priests, injustice and tyranny. All his poems are full of revolutionary spirit Shelley represents the influence of the idealistic aspect of the Revolutionary philosophy. Like Byron, he came in a time of reaction. His imagination was inspired more by abstract ideas than by facts or events. Unlike Byron, he remained in his inner spirit wholly unaffected by the reaction. He advocated free love, revolted against the time honoured all the glow of a lover. The vast and the sublime in nature had a special charm for him and he frequently found in Nature symbols and images suitable to his poetic expression. He often intellectualized Nature. Being a romantic poet, Shelly does uphold the romantic theory of poetry which lays stress on imagination in Comparison to reason. In his view, the poet is a divinely inspired being, a seer blest, a legislator unacknowledged. In his poetry, he constantly soars aloft on the mighty wings of his rich and fertile imagination.

Besides being a romantic poet, Shelley is a lyrical poet. “As a lyric poet, Shelley is one of the supreme geniuses of our literature” (Long 40). A lyric is the product of Swift, momentary and passionate impulse coming from without. “Lyrical poetry may perhaps be described as that which expressed emotion directly. It expresses the writer’s personal emotions and experiences, joy, sorrow, complaints, aspirations and despair” (Girling 667). Since the lyric is direct expression of the poet’s feeling it is word wide poetic form, suddenly awakening the poet from a dream into vivid life. The lyric is almost unlimited in range and variety, for it may touch nearly all aspects of experiences, from those which are most narrowly individual to those which involve the broadest interests of our common humanity. The main characteristics of a lyric, are brevity and condensation, emotional power, subjectivity and sweet melody.

Shelley’s lyricism is incomparable. His lyrics are great and charming, because they share the charm of his great personality. They are the outpouring of his soul and they are the cries of his noble heart at the spectacle of life. There is no doubt that Shelley’s lyrics represent the highest achievement of romantic poetry. Some of his most outstanding lyrics are: “Ode to the West Wind”, “To a Skylark”, “The Cloud” and “Lines written in the Eugarean Hills”. All his poetry is lyrical for his lyrical impulse penetrates even his unlyrical verse. Shelley’s lyrics are gifted with a unique glow of rush and impetuosity and have an emotional ecstasy. The songs of **Prometheus Unbound** are marked with emotional feeling of joy, probably at the liberation of man from thralldom. The ecstatic note comes out at its best in the lyric ‘The Spirit of Delight’, where the poet flows out his ecstatic joy in an address to the spirit of Delight in the following rapturous lines:

“Thou art love and life! O come.  
Make once more my heart thy home.

In his ‘Ode to the West Wind’, the personal cry becomes very piercing and the agony of the poet’s heart comes out poignantly in the lines:

O lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
I fall upon the thorns of life I bleed”.

Rapture and simplicity are the two essential qualities of a lyric. ‘A lyric is the expression of a passionate ideal and besides being rapturous, pure passion is always simple, whether it be the passion



of love, hatred, joy or despair. Shelley's lyrics have this quality of simplicity in a marked degree. Poetry is concerned with the beauty of the world, with the truth about life and with the splendor of man's imagination. Truth, beauty and imagination are inexhaustible and many-sided. No pact can attain fame without touching nature. Like Wordsworth and Byron, Shelley had a deep and passionate love for nature and love as main themes of his poetry. Shelley himself said that his chief pleasure in life was "the contemplation of nature" (Mathews 20).

Being a lover of nature, Shelley found joy in nature by loving the desolate rocks and caves, the fury of the storms, lighting and thunders, the waves dancing fast and bright, and the lightning of the noon-tide ocean flashing sound him. Like his own skylark, Shelley was always soaring high into the realm of sun-and light. Commenting on Shelley's love of the gorgeous in nature, Dowson writes:

"..... the pomp and splendor of the evening sky,  
the wind and the changeful glory of atmospheric  
effects, the terror of tempests, those  
rare and more awful manifestations of nature  
when she puts on a supernatural grandeur  
and seems indeed to be alive, a spirit of  
strength and beauty, whose rainbow blinds  
us, whose ethereal loveliness awes and  
matters us as Shelley's  
special objects of love" (Banerjee 71)

As a poet of nature, Shelley did not love merely the calm and the serene in nature. He loved more the indefinite and the changeful elements; the fiery and the dynamic aspects of nature. His restless soul was constantly drawn to her ever changing and dynamic aspects, the moving winds, on-rushing torrents, floating, clouds and leaves like ghosts from an enchanter feeling and waves dancing fast and bright. Nature, in Shelley, was ever changing, ever becoming and growing into something different. He was the poet of mountains and rivers. Being interested in the remoter and less known aspects of nature more than any other English poet, he showed an awareness of the vast spaces and to millions of words that surround the little world of man. To him, objective nature in eternal and undying. The cloud is a fitting symbol of its endless existence:

"I am the daughter of earth and water,  
And the nursing of the sky;  
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;  
I change, but I cannot die" ('The Clud' 73-76)

All the romantic poets are the great lovers of Nature and each of them renders her in his poetry in his own distractive and natural way. Whereas to the neo-classical poets of the Age of Pope "return to nature" meant a return to civilization and human nature, to artificial system of the society and contemporary social phenomena, to the romantic poets, it meant a return to the meadow and the forest, to the hills and river-banks to the flowers and birds and other natural beauties. Shelley is also a lover of all these phenomena of Nature. In one of his poems, he says that he loved "the fresh earth in new leaves dressed", "the starry night", "autumn evening", "the morn when golden mists are born" and so on. But more characteristic of Shelley is the love of wilder, vaster and the unfamiliar in nature. The poems like "The Invitation", "The Recollection", "To A Lady with a Guitar" and "Stanzas written in Dejectino neer Naples", may be taken as examples in which 'nature' is found to be one of his leading themes. In



“The Invitation”, Shelley gives us a description of the lovely natural surroundings in which he proposes to spend his time in the company of Jane Williams. In “The Recollection”, Shelley gives us a remarkable picture of the peace and serenity of a selected scene of nature. Not only are we given vivid images of the pine trees standing still and the waves of the ocean half-sleep, but we also get striking picture of the reflections of the sky, the sun and the trees seen in the pools by the side of which Shelley and Jane Jane Pausa. The poem “Epipsychidion” is also a remarkable for its abundance of nature – pictures and especially the passage which describes a paradise island. “It is an isle under Ionian skies, beautiful as a wreck of Paradise”. This description too is richly sensuous. As a believer in the healing influence of nature on the human mind, Shelley pictured and presented nature in its different moods. Sometimes, he pictured nature in close association with human affections and sometimes he represented her in an absolutely detached and unconcerned way as if he were a scientist interested only in an objective analysis of the beauties of nature. For example, in “Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples”, nature is presented in the background of the poet’s own emotional feelings. The landscape of this poem is coloured by the poet’s personal feelings. He describes the landscape:

“The sun is warm, the sky is clear,  
The waves are dancing fast and bright,  
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear  
The purple moon’s transparent might,  
Around its unexpanded buds  
Like many a voice of one delight,  
The winds, the birds, the ocean floods,  
The city’s voice itself is soft like Solitudes” (1-9)

In the “Euganean Hills”, Shelley undoubtedly draws comfort from his contemplation of the natural scene around him and also from his fanciful description of an imaginary island where he and those he loves, might lead a happy and care free life. It is one of those poems that show Shelley’s deep love of nature. There are a number of vivid picture of nature in this poem. The sun is described as “broad, red, radiant, half-declined on level quivering line of the waters Crystalline” while the ‘sapphire-tinted’ sky is contrasted with the dark ocean. There is the picture of the ‘noon of autumn’s glow’ with ‘a soft and purple mist’ rising and filling the air and the sky. The following lines are remarkable for their nature imagery:

“And the plains that silent lie  
underneath, the leaves unsodden  
where the infant Frost has trodden  
with his morning – winged feet,  
whose bright print is gleaming yet;  
And the red and golden vines  
piercing with their trellised lines  
The rough, dark-skirted wilderness;  
The dun and bladed grass no less,  
Pointing from this hoary tower  
In the windless air; the flower  
Glimmering at my feet”. (294-309).

Another exquisite picture of nature is found in the concluding stanza where the poet talks of some flowering island where he and those whom he loves may find refuge from the trouble of life:



Other flowering isles must be  
In the sea of Life and Agony;  
other spirits float and flee  
O'er the gulf: even now, perhaps,  
on some rock the wild wave wraps,  
with folded wings they waiting sit  
For my bark, to pilot it  
To some calm and blooming love  
Where for me, and those I love,  
Many a windless bower be built,  
Far from passion, pain and guilt  
In a dell mid lawny hills" (335-346)

"The Recollection" also illustrates Shelley's belief in the power of nature to sooth the human heart. In "The invitation", the concluding lines make a reference to the existence of a divine spirit in all objects of nature:

"And all things seem only one  
In the universal sun" (50-51)

Shelley loved the indefinite and the changeful in nature. This enabled him to describe better than any other English poet the scenery of the clouds and the sky whose appearance undergoes a constant change. Shelley holds the view that a spirit penetrates the objects of nature. He feels the presence of 'the awful shadow of the unseen power visiting this various world'. In "Ode to the West Wind", he describes it as:

Wild spirit, which art moving everywhere;  
Destroyer and preserver, heer, oh, heer!" (11. 13-14).

He feels that nature never betrays the heart that loves her. There is thus an underlying feeling of love in the poet's attitude towards nature. He seeks nature for his help:

"As thus with thee in prayer in any more need.  
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
If all upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" (52-54)

No doubt, Shelley's presentation of nature is like a perennial stream that goes on forever unaffected by crises that occur in the course of human life. While "The Cloud" shows Shelley's preference for the shifting and changing scenery of nature, the poem "Ode to a Skylark" is noted for its musical quality and here in this poem, Shelley dwells upon the sweet and rapturous singing of the skylark. A skylark, according to Shelley, is not a bird but a spirit which pours forth rich melodies of spontaneous music from somewhere in the key. Shelley's skylark, like his cloud, is a fine invention transfusing with beauty, a neutral or common place object.

Shelley is said to be the one using Nature for symbols for his own thoughts and emotions. The west wind becomes the symbol of Shelleyan revolution, a destroyer and preserver, the **Shiva** and **Brama**. Similarly, the skylark is the symbol of that ideal happiness, the dream of mortal men, who is free from the shadow of longer, annoyance and that satiety to which love generally leads as and the thought of



death which is a pricking thorn in the flesh of happiest men as this earth. The cloud is the symbol of his belief in immortality and his yearning for some kind of supernatural status. In **Adonais**, pansies are the symbols of his sad thoughts, and violates of his modesty and innocence. The eagle and the snake in his poetry recurringly stand for the good and evil respectively. No doubt, Shelley is the great impressionist who catches all those subtle effects of light and shade and the fleeting combinations of objects always in movement which would escape the attention of a formalist like Keats whose sensibility is more of a sculptor than a musician.

Believing in the theory that all Nature is the expression of the universal spirit, the poet Shelley does identify the spirit of Nature with the spirit of love. Under the spirit of love, Shelley sees in every object of nature a subtle beauty of the spirit, capable of thinking, feeling and expressing in quite the same way as man. Shelley loves to transform aspects of nature into dream shapes of his own; for instance, he transforms the skylark into 'a cloud of fire', 'a highborn maiden in a palace tower', 'a glow-worm golden' and so on. In short, Shelley looked for un bodied joy in nature and she also sought consolations from nature.

Shelley not only lived and showed through his poetic creations as a poet of nature but also a poet of love. Love has been one of the most predominant subjects of poetry from time immemorial. No poet could ever resist the temptation of singing about it, since it happens to be one of the universally felt emotions. In fact, it is love that sustains the human race. Herbert Read refers to four different kinds of love – passionate love, sophisticated love, physical love and calculated love – and observes thus:

“The recognition given to each kind of love has varied from age to age. Even published love, the instinct that ensures the perpetuation of the race is subject to variations, as the birthrate shows. Calculated love, the love that satisfies social vanity and leads to a sensible marriage, is characteristic of all societies with a complex class structure.... Sophisticated love is an elaborate artifice developed to relieve the boredom of an idle life,... Each kind of love has its own characteristic poetry but only passionate love evokes poverty of the highest order” (Read 43)

Shelley is the poet of passionate love. There were many women in his life who inspired most of his love poems. He considers love as a balm which can bring solace to him in troubled moments. In an early poem entitled “To Harriet”, Shelley speaks of the power of love thus:

“The look of love has power to calm  
They stormiest passion of my soul;  
They gentle words are drops of balm  
In life's too bitter bowl;  
No grief is mine, but that alone  
Those choicest blessings I have known” (Lines 1-6)



The same sentiment is echoed in the poem “To many Wollstonecraft Godwin”. The healing power of the beloved’s voice, touch and looks in portrayed in the poem thus:

“Upon my heart they accents sweet  
of peace and pity fell like dew  
on flowers half dead; they lips did meet  
Mine tremblingly; thy dark eyes threw  
Their soft persuasion on my brain  
Charming away its dream of pain” (Lines 19-24)

Many women, apart from Harriet and Mary, inspired Shelley. Most of his short love lyrics owe their origin to the poet’s relationship with these women: ‘Love’s philosophy’ is a plea for love-making:

The fountains mingle with the river  
And the rivers with the ocean,  
The winds of heaven mix for ever  
With a sweet emotion;  
Nothing in the world is single,  
All things by a law divine  
In one another’s being mingle –  
Why not I with thine? (Lines 1-8).

The poet continues to present more images from nature. The mountains kiss the high sky, the waves clasp one another, the sunlight clasps the earth and the non-beams kiss the sea. Then why should his beloved not kiss him? The argument, it seems, is sound and reasonable. Another lady who spurred Shelley to write love poems was Jane Williams. Through did not impress him at first, he sought her company when he came to know her better. She has an expert in hypnotism which attracted Shelley. She was also to singer. The first of the several, poems addressed ‘To Jane’ is ‘The Invitation’ in which the poet invites her to accompany him to place for from the madding crowd:

“Away away from men and towns,  
To the wild wood and the downs –  
To the silent wilderness  
Where the soul need not repress  
Its music lest it should not find  
An echo in another’s mind” (“The Invitation’ 21-26).

Shelley, like his master Plato, recognizes two varieties of love: the earthy and the ethereal. Plato also recognized two varieties of love, symbolized by Urania Apbrodite or Intellectual love and Venus of the earth which united man and woman in physical love and paved the way for immortality through procreation. Shelley realized the physical love in practical life with Harriet and with Mary Godwin. But none of these or any other earthly women could satisfy him, for the soon realized that physical love was transitory. So, he turned to spiritual love, the ideal love in his poetry. Hence in his poems, it is only ideal, higher and spiritual kind of love that is reflected and expressed. In love, he finds something ideal, something ever to aspire after something ever to look forward too. It is in the non-realization, it is in the expectation of fulfillment that his happiness lies.





As a love, the poet does not expect much from the beloved; an occasional smile will satisfy him:

“From you he only dares to crave,  
For his service and his sorrow,  
A smile today, a song tomorrow” (40-42).

True to the tradition of love poets, Shelley is never tired of praising the beauty and charm of his beloved. Lines such as

“Best and brighter, come away  
Fairer far than this fair Day” (‘The Invitation’ 1-2)

Point to this direction. The poem ‘To Many’ describes the beloved thus:

“O Mary dear, that thou were have  
with you brown eyes bright and clear,  
And your sweet voice, like a bird  
Singing love to its lone mate  
In the ivy bower disconsolate;  
Voice the sweetest ever heard” (Lines 1-6).

Shelley considers his beloved as a companion whose absence is felt much. The same poem makes clear their intimate and inseparable relationship:

“Mary dear, come to me soon,  
I am not well whilest thou art far;  
As sunset to the sphere moon,  
As twilight to the western star,  
Thou, beloved, art to me” (Lines 10-14)

Shelley has been considered the apostle of ‘ideal’, ‘spiritual’, or ‘platonic’, love which has nothing to do with the flesh. This view endeared him to the Victorians. “The distinction between spiritual and physical love, which is presented always of if it were Shelley’s own, has turned many modern readers against his poetry because of the hypocrisy involved in such an attitude” (Bostetter 247). There is no doubt that Shelley has sung in praise of spiritual or ideal love. In the words of Ernest Raymond, “Shelley loved and idealized his women, but not only or even one at a time; he had other impassioned interests, and all too often his women were little more than worshipful symbols of Intellectual Beauty or some other higher unearthly thing” (P 146). The worshipful and innocent attitude of the lover is proclaimed thus in the poem ‘I fear thy kisses’.

“I fear thy mien, they tones, they motion,  
Thou needest not fear mine,  
Innocent is the heart’s devotion  
With which I worship thine” (5-8)

He declares:

“True love in this differs from gold and clay,  
That to divide is not to take away.  
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,  
Gazing on many truths; ‘tis like they light’,  
Imagination!..... (160-164)



Here true love means ideal love, ‘Platonic Love’ or intellectual companionship. Its comparison with ‘understanding’ and ‘imagination’ is also noteworthy. “For Shelley, the upholding and uplifting power in men and their societies is Love (or Imagination), whose language is poetry or any kind of beauty” (Hughes 209). Shelley declare that true love will overcome all obstacles:

The walls are high, the gates are strong, thick set  
The sentinels – but time love never yet  
was thus constrained: it overleaps all fence!

(Epipsy Chiddion 396-98)

The poet visualizes his sailing with Emila to an ile uner Ionian skies whose few inhabitants enjoy the spirit of the golden age. He would live with her in a house in that island, enjoying the beauty of nature. He would lead a simple life in her company:

“We two will rise, and sit, and wall together,  
under the roof of blue Ionian weather,  
And wander in the meadows.... (541-43)  
Possessing and possessed by all that is  
Within that calm circumference of bliss  
And by each other, till to love and live  
Be one.....:” (549-52)

**Epipsychidion** is mainly responsible for the notion that Shelley idealized the women he admired. **Epipsychidion** presents “a vision of life... It has only the barest outline of a narrative, and gains its effect through a sequence of a narrative, and gains its effect through a sequence of ‘idealizing images transmuting earthly love into an infinite passion” (King Hele 283). Sexual love is an inseparable part of ideal love which is the universal thirst for a communion of our whole nature. Though the sexual gratification is essential Shelley insists that it becomes a very small part of the profound and complicated sentiment which we call ‘love’. The perfect sexual experience is one in which the sexual act itself is almost eliminated or forgotten. Considered in this light, it may be concluded that Shelley’s love poems need not be interpreted on spiritual plane alone. His use of sexual imagery can be taken as symbol or metaphor of ideal love, or it can be interpreted to refer to physical love.

Shelley’s greatness as a love-poet is found no in his transcendentalism but I his depiction of the different moods of the lover. Love has broadened in Shelley’s thought to an ethical principle: “the sole law which should govern the moral world” (Ridenour 67). “One word is too often Profane” addressed to Jane Williams expresses Shelley’s deep devotion to Jane, with whom he had a special kind of relationship. In this poem, he elevates her to a high position and offers her his worship. He pleads with Jane not to reject his offer. He feels that even sympathy from her would give him greater happiness than love from another woman. He says:

“And pity from the more dear  
Than that from another” (7-8).

Shelley invites Jane to accompany him to the wilderness where his heart and her heart can hold a communion:



“Away, away, from men and towns,  
 to the wild wood and the downs –  
 to the silent wilderness  
 where the soul need not repress

.....  
 White the touch of Nature’s art  
 Harmonizes heart to heart” (21-28)

“The Recollection” is a sequel to “The Invitation” where the poet recalls the lovely experience he had in the company of Jane in the Pine Forest. In “The Invitation”, he had asked Jane to accompany him to the wild woods and she had accepted the invitation. The poem describes the soothing effect that the company of Jane Williams had upon him in the Pine Forest. The poet and his companion paused amid the pines which stood silent and still. It seemed that the pines trees were asleep. The two visitors forgot their worldly anxieties and it seemed to him that the atmosphere around was filled with love radiated by the fair form of Jane:

“And still I felt the centre of  
 The magic circle there  
 was one fair form that fill’d with love  
 the lifeless atmosphere” (49-52)

“The Flight of Love” deals with the transience of love. When a lamp is shattered, its light dies, when a cloud is dissolved, the rainbow fades away. When a lute is broken, its musical notes are lost. When love is lost, the heart starts singing sad and melancholy songs. The sad music of the frustrated lovers and the mental agony that pricks their hearts and makes them express their frustration in a touching way are revealed in his poem “To Caroline”. The hero of the poem unfolds his heart thus:

And yet, my girl, we weep in vain,  
 In vain our fate in sighs deplore;  
 Remembrance, only can remain,  
 But that will make us weep the more” (17-20)

Of Shelley’s personal lyrics, his love lyrics are generally sad expressing his vague yearning for an ideal or a vision, too perfect to be realized in life. Crompton – Rickett points out:

“So readily does he pass from the personal  
 to the universal, so engrossed is he with  
 love as an abstract ideal, that as a love  
 poet, he is curiously unsubstantial” (Tilak 21)

To conclude, Shelley’s love poems often reveal his yearning to love and to be loved. He shudders at the thought of the gap between him and the beloved, and naturally a tinge of melancholy becomes thus:

“I can give not what men call love;  
 But with thou accept not  
 The worship the heart lifts above  
 And the Heavens reject not;



The desire of the moth for the star,  
Of the right for the morrow,  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow”

(“One word is too often profaned 9-16)

The tone of despair and the helpless and frustration resulting from it mark a significant facet of Shelley’s love lyrics. The musical quality of his love-lyrics is really praiseworthy. No doubt, the sweet melodies of Shelley do beautifully captivate the ears and hearts of the readers. In a word, love in the ordinary sense of the word does not certainly satisfy his longing and aspiration to find in love something more than a craving of the heart, which is partly sensual and partly spiritual.

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