

## *The Romantic Style of P. B. Shelley's Poetry*

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**Abstract:** Shelley's poetry is rich and varied, harmonious in tone, delicate in feeling and expansive in artistic conception, which pushed the British romantic poetry to the peak. Shelley had a very high talent, received a good education since childhood, coupled with diligent thinking, and has twists and turns of life experience, so his works all reflect the pursuit of the truth of the strong philosophical mood. This article mainly focuses on two of Shelley's poems to analyze the romantic style of his poems from the image and theme. Shelley, as a political poet and lyric poet, expressed his poetic aesthetics very clearly. He endowed poets with a lofty mission, believing that they should shoulder the dual mission of social revolution and artistic innovation. Of course, Shelley believes that this dual mission is realized in the poet's creative artistic imagination. Therefore, in Shelley's view, the real "imaginary expression" of poetry should have a spiritual inspiration and aesthetic influence. It can be said that Shelley's poetry aesthetics not only clearly reflects the characteristics of his changing era, but also illustrates his romantic aesthetic stance. Shelley's aesthetic thoughts of poetry are enlightening for people to better appreciate and understand his poems.

**Keywords:** Shelley, romanticism, style

### 1. Introduction

Shelley, a renowned romantic poet from the British literary sphere in the 19th century, was born into nobility. His life seemingly lacked turbulence as he was able to grow up healthily under his parents' care. However, young Shelley's thinking about life was very profound, with his own depth, and his cognition of the origin of the universe was also very profound. Therefore, he began to embark on a path that was incompatible with the social formation of the time. While studying at Oxford, he was expelled from the school for propagating atheism in abbreviated poems, thus offending his August father, and eventually choosing to leave home and live on his own. Following that, he and his wife travelled to Ireland and aligned themselves with the local rebellion against British rule, earning him the disdain of the British governing circles. Given his conspicuous rebellious streak, Shelley succeeded in pissing off the entire British ruling class, which resulted in his subsequent banishment. Unable to go back to his native land, he ended up settling in Italy with his wife. Shelley lived a short time, less than 30 years, and he spent half of his practice in writing, he enjoys a good reputation in the English literary world, is an active romantic poet, but also the world literature history is very outstanding lyric poet [1]. His poems are rich in content and expressive skills. They are not only the embodiment of political ideas, but also of beautiful lyrical poems. In the process of combining ideas and art, they achieve a perfect unity.

Previous studies have explored the romantic style of Shelley's poetry. According to Wu, out of great love for nature, Shelley devoted his passion to the creation of nature lyrics [2]. He is able to organically and naturally link the depiction of natural ecology with social life and people's mood, using various means to compare phenomena and connotations, present and future, to convey the true meaning of nature, the sadness of the world, the helplessness of reality, and the longing for the future [2]. According to Jiang, Shelley realized the profound philosophy of nature in his observation of nature [3]. This is deeply reflected in his poems in praise of nature, and the philosophical views in his poems are everywhere. For example, he observed the spring and autumn changes of nature and the changes of history. What his poetry symbolized at that time was a strong dissatisfaction with society at a time when revolutionary power and the desire for peace were the deepest aspirations of almost all young English people [3]. According to Rennell, in character, Shelley showed a kind of rebellious attitude, he hoped to write his own life, not in reality, rather than become the same as those who did not do things in real life [4]. Therefore, Shelley's behavior was destined to be extraordinary. Such extraordinary behavior challenged the authority of the time, and a person used his own strength to confront the whole society at that time, so he was doomed to failure. But he was still looking forward to the future and still believed that he could realize his ideal life one day in the future. This kind of contradiction is a common part in Shelley's poetry creation, in which the contradictory life is not only the material of creation, but also a part of life [4]. According to Fauconnier, Shelley lived in the most brilliant era of English poetry, and he impressed people with his beautiful poems [5]. He brings the genius, inspiration and intuition of a poet into his works to create happy and perfect memories for the reader. Through his literary pieces, readers are able to immerse themselves in the author's admiration of nature, longing and quest for an improved life, and his strong critique and fight against sinister forces [5]. According to Sternberg, Shelley's prophetic poetry is also unique, and the poet Shelley has a keen understanding of social change [6]. For the infinite cycle of nature, Shelley applied it to human society through philosophical thinking [6]. According to Ullmann, Shelley created a picture completely different from the real situation with unbounded imagination, making people realize that there are still hopes and expectations behind the fleeting reality [7]. The Romanticism in Shelley's poetry redescribes the real world from an ideal perspective, eliminates the ugliness and evil in the reality, and uses romantic techniques to promote the consistency and harmony between poetry and reality, so that human emotions can be integrated into the social reality, and then seek to transcend and become a spiritual force against the reality [7].

From the above points, it is clear that past studies were various, but have not formed a systematic understanding of Shelley's romantic style. This article will focus on chosen excerpts from two poems "*Ode to the West Wind*" and "*The Revolt of Islam*" to offer a deeper analysis on the romantic style of Shelley's poetry.

## 2. Shelley's Romantic Spirit

Several significant figures in the realm of poetry emerged in England at the start of the 19th century, Shelley being one of them. This renowned poet's unique viewpoint on nature and deep philosophical musings not only exposed the societal darkness of his era, but also severely critiqued its negative aspects through emblematic and figurative methods. His assessments of contemporary society were based on the prototype of an idyllic world. His work, brimming with sentiments of rage and pity, reshaped the literary world's perception of the romantic style of poetry [8]. Shelley's creative skills are extremely profound, which is due to his careful observation and summary of the nature. This essay will focus on Shelley's romantic style of poetry by referencing excerpts from "*Ode to the West Wind*" and "*The Revolt of Islam*".

## 2.1. *Ode to the West Wind*

Romance requires not only an imaginative spirit, but also a deep understanding of life. The emergence of romantic poetry often has some special causes. Shelley's "*Ode to the West Wind*" was written in a society in the throes of change. People's yearning for a new life and their longing for a new century were spread by Shelley with the power of the West wind. The west wind's gift after the depths of winter is the advent of spring, signifying life's resurgence.

In nature, the cycle of seasons is irresistible, but when winter comes, the wise man can see the upcoming hope of spring. Shelley's romantic generalization of nature, with the irresistible force of nature to metaphor the final victory of the revolution, his poetry has a strong political nature, and in the literary circle at that time is also the most representative. Here is a stanza excerpted from his poem "*Ode to the West Wind*":

*Thou on whose stream, mid the steep skys commotion,  
Loose clouds like earths decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,  
Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread.  
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head,  
Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge.  
Of the horizon to the zeniths height,  
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge.  
Of the dying year, to which this closing night.  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might.  
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere.  
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh hear!*

In this stanza, Shelley depicts the westerly wind as it agitates the dense clouds and fog overhead, which signals the approach of a storm and the ensuing thunder as the principal setting. Shelley makes use of literary techniques like metaphors and personification to convey his point. Phrases like "angled boughs of Heaven and Ocean" symbolize the stubborn reactionary class in England. Words such as "dirge", "night", and "dome" represent the crumbling of the old decaying power structure. With the final words in the stanza, "black", "rain", "fir", and "hail", Shelley depicts the west wind as a powerful force of destruction. The coming of the storm here also hints at the coming of the revolutionary storm that will destroy the old.

Shelley's "*Ode to the West Wind*" is an excellent work of British positive Romanticism, which fully demonstrates the subjectivity, political lyricism and idealism of positive Romanticism. By drawing a comparison to the west wind, the poet showed his belief in life and his resolution to challenge the old world. In the face of the oppression of evil forces, only by raising the banner of resistance can he win the final victory for himself. On this road of revolution, Shelley suffered persecution again and again, but he did not give up. Shelley's courage and conviction in the eventual victory of the revolution over the wickedness was spurred on by such struggles.

Shelley's other poems about natural landscapes also embody the romantic style. Shelley has shown great love for nature since he was a child, eager to explore the mysteries of nature. After entering the literary creation career, he could not be confined to reality, walk into nature, in the mountains, grasslands, lakes, open fields to carry out artistic excavation, making it an inexhaustible source of his artistic creation. In his mind, everything in the world was spiritual. He believed that a

qualified artist should grasp the pulse of nature, explore their thoughts, communicate with them and resonate with them. The poem “To the Lark” was inspired when he heard the birds singing happily and freely in the sky. This creation is entirely a response to the call of nature. Shelley does not limit the image of the lark to an ordinary creature, but beautifies it as a beautiful vision by means of symbolism. Against the background of nature, people weave a vibrant and beautiful picture with the help of flowers, dew, spring rain, clouds, moonlight and stars. The skylark created by Shelley is forever singing in joy, and its song fills the sky, making the whole world immersed in it. In this painting, from the brilliant light of the rainbow, to the starlight of the firefly, to the fragrance of the flowers in the field, the reader is bathed in the joy of freedom [9]. In his work “To the Lark”, we can see his resistance to reality, the pursuit of beautiful things, and the desire for freedom. In this poem, Shelley describes the scene of the skylark’s brave struggle to break free from its bondage. It is not difficult for us to find that the skylark flies so unrestrained. Poets compare the lark to the embodiment of freedom, and its song to the cry of freedom. There are countless writers who resist the power and sing freedom, but what is different is that Shelley can show endless beauty in his works.

## 2.2. *The Revolt of Islam*

Shelley’s romantic ideal is not his subjective imagination, but from a certain social reality. In the preface of another poem “*The Revolt of Islam*”, Shelley says, “I have seen the visible scenes of disaster caused by despotism and war; Cities and villages were reduced to scattered, charred roofless houses, and their naked inhabitants sat starving in their desolate doorways.” Through poeticizing reality, he makes people know how to seek and struggle. In the poem, the poet praises the resolute resistance of the people with his full enthusiasm, and tells people with vivid descriptions that revolutionaries must not only have lofty beliefs, but also insist on fighting for the realization of their beliefs. Here is a stanza excerpted from his poem “*The Revolt of Islam*”:

*Around, around, in ceaseless circles wheeling  
With clang of wings and scream, the Eagle sailed  
Incessantly -- sometimes on high concealing  
Its lessening orbs, sometimes as if it failed,  
Drooped thro’ the air; and still it shrieked and wailed,  
And casting back its eager head, with beak  
And talon unremittingly assailed  
The wreathed Serpent, who did ever seek  
Upon his enemy’s heart a mortal wound to wreak.*

In this stanza, as the beginning of the poem, the poet presents an allegorical and moving picture of a cosmic aerial battle between the serpent, symbolizing “freedom” and “kindness”, and the eagle, symbolizing “tyranny” and “evil”. In the fight, the kind snake was defeated by the evil eagle and fell into the sea, but did not die, and then fought again. However, according to the Bible, the eagle symbolizes “kindness” and the snake is the image of “evil”. Here, Shelley uses it in reverse, fully demonstrating his strong determination and indomitable spirit of striving and struggling.

Shelley was only 25 years old when he wrote “*The Revolt of Islam*”, at a time when French ideas of democracy and freedom were gaining unstoppable popularity in England. Shelley believes that when the revolution fails to realize people’s hopes, it should not be completely denied its importance, but should be objectively affirmed its role. Despite the pessimism of the time, Shelley had great hope for the future, just as he said: “It seems to me that mankind is waking up from its slumber. I seemed to perceive a slow, gradual, silent change. It is from this conviction that I write this poem.” Shelley used this poem to call on the people to continue the struggle to complete the unfinished cause of the

French revolution, and then promote the bourgeois democratic revolutionary movement in his own country [10]. At the same time, he also sharply criticized the prevailing pessimistic thoughts in the literature field at that time. Although the French revolution has lost its last hope, if the people rise up and cast off the illusion of disappointment, they can see the golden dawn.

Shelley's other revolutionary poems also reflect the romantic style. The period from 1818 to 1820 was the most important period in Shelley's life, during which he completed his masterpiece, *The Emancipation of Prometheus*, which was the emotional lyric work that laid the foundation for Shelley's life achievement. Northrop Fry described the work as a poem that replaced religion with a more rational and secular vision, reflecting the second revolutionary change in the chapter of human history from the shackles of feudalism. Shelley created an imaginary being, Prometheus, to represent the most perfect image of human morality, and Shelley crafted the character to express the root cause of social evil and social injustice and suffering through revolution. *The Liberation of Prometheus* is a poetic drama about the origin and elimination of evil, in which Prometheus undergoes a process of transformation and regeneration through the elimination of the curse, freeing him from the tyranny of Jupiter and finally reuniting him with his lover, Asia. The triumph of powerful love over hatred and tyranny ushered mankind into a period of peace and freedom. Thus, the *Emancipation of Prometheus* significantly impacts the inception of evil, the prospect of transformation, and the ethical accountability of humankind. For Shelley, the image of Prometheus included the four supreme qualities of man: the formation of man, great resilience, resistance to tyranny, and selfless love for mankind. Prometheus was a hero in Greek mythology who fought against the gods and won. The image of Prometheus varies from author to author. Goethe's Prometheus is a symbol of reason, Byron's Prometheus is a symbol of perseverance, and Shelley's Prometheus is a symbol of wisdom, perseverance, love, and the symbol of human liberation. In *Prometheus Unchained*, Shelley takes symbolism to the extreme, portraying an all-encompassing world in which different figures and different characters mean different things [11]. In this work, there is both despotism and hope, both change and justice, and when every corner of the whole world is involved in this great change, it is justice that wins and gets the final light and happiness. Prometheus undeniably embodies transformation in this piece, specifically the shift during the industrial revolution which fostered the growth of production capabilities and subsequently altered production relations. To put it simply, it signifies the relentless efforts made by the proletariat towards achieving communism. Although at the time the struggle between the proletariat and the dominant bourgeoisie was going to be long and difficult, Shelley remained absolutely confident in his work that change would prevail. *Prometheus Unchained* is considered by many researchers to be the culmination of Shelley's romanticism and political vision.

### 3. Conclusions

Shelley lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a time when England was at its peak. During that period, Britain spearheaded the industrial revolution and initiated its transition into a modern society. Mass production of machines made Britain a world power. Living in such an era, the creative passion of literati is as strong as the pace of national progress. Shelley was one of the representative poets with progressive thoughts at that time. His poems are magnificent, positive, optimistic and elegant, which are the reflection of the spirit of the British times.

This paper selects two of Shelley's masterpieces to analyse the romantic style of his poems from the image and theme.

In the poem "*Ode to the West Wind*", Shelley praises the west wind, a symbol of revolutionary power. The poem has a wonderful artistic conception, a harmonious and unified rhythm, and a powerful form, achieving the perfect unity of sound, form and meaning, thus expressing the poet's hot revolutionary optimism. The indomitable spirit of struggle in the poem has inspired generations

of people in difficulties. It still has great reference significance in modern society. *Ode to the West Wind*, a lyric poem, both conveys the poet's creativity and reveals his confident, spirited and defiant character. The wild west wind spirit in the poem is actually the liberalism spirit shared by the poet himself at that time. Shelley's long poem "*The Revolt of Islam*" was written in 1817. The poem was written shortly after the French Revolution suffered setbacks and the restoration of the monarchy, and was intended to inspire confidence in the revolution. The most prominent artistic feature of this poem is the use of symbolism. There are many symbols, allegories and fantasies in the poem, and with the development of the plot, its true meaning gradually unfolds and becomes more distinct. Compared with some of Shelley's previous works, the poem is livelier in image, less didactic and less abstract in contemplation. In this poem Shelley expressed faith in the French Revolution and the liberation of mankind. This is a masterpiece that mixes myth, fantasy and reality.

This article only explores two of Shelley's poems, future studies are suggested to analyse more poems of Shelley from the linguistic perspective.

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