

Shelley's Optimistic Attitudes Inspired by Nature in His Poems

Lu Zhang

Department of Humanity, Liaoning Communication University, Shenyang, 110000, China

saraxiaonie@163.com

Abstract. This thesis chooses Shelley's concept of nature as the main theme. It analyzes some representative poems written by Shelley and finds out Shelley's views on nature. For Shelley, nature is a rich source of truth. Nature teaches us a lot of things. Freedom and ideality are the main themes in Shelley's poems. For his age, the social background is full of revolution. It is certain that Shelley should become a revolutionary poet. Like in *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound*, we can find his strong desire for freedom. Even in *The Cloud*, Shelley hopes to be like the cloud because it is free and happy. Shelley also shows to us a kind of optimistic attitude towards life and future. To a *Skylark* may be a typical one. Shelley is just like the skylark; he pursues being in harmony with nature. These two main themes seem to be the basic views of Shelley's concept of nature.

Keywords: Shelley, freedom, optimistic attitude, future.

1. Introduction

We can see in Shelley's poems that he speaks highly of nature. He eulogizes the natural beauty and presents his optimistic attitudes toward life and future. Shelley infuses passion and energy into nature. Nature seems to have life. Shelley tried to embody his love to nature and passes his optimistic attitude to the public through his nature poems. In his poems, we can easily see Shelley pursue freedom and ideality.

2. Pursuit of Freedom

For the special period of the society, freedom becomes a popular topic of the romantic literary works. At that time of the late eighteenth century, the French Revolution and the American Independent Movement inspired people. The progressive idea of freedom encouraged English people a lot; people began to fight for freedom. But in early nineteenth century, the federal English government suppressed people's action for freedom. People suffer a lot and the writers are angry with the government's cruelty. That's the reason why in Shelley's poems we can find the strong desire for freedom.

In his major works, we are easily to see the pursuit of freedom. Shelley appeals people to fight for freedom in the revolution. Like in the poem *Queen Mab*, Shelley uses the form of dream to criticize the social reality and depicts his romantic idealism. In the eyes of fairy *Queen Mab*, the society is full of poverty and disasters. People should pursue a society under love and freedom, which will take place of tyranny. *Prometheus unbound* is also a typical representation of Shelley's revolutionary epic. In this poetic drama, Shelley again presents the contradiction between material and spirit, between the people who love freedom and the old common customs. For Shelley, *Prometheus* symbolizes hope. He is a victim who sacrifices himself for freedom and ideal society. In the poem *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, there is an expectation of Shelley, "if Freedom should awake" then people "might adorn this sunny land/ Twining memories of old time/ with new virtues more sublime".

Other examples like in poem *Ode to the West Wind*, the fourth canto shows that Shelley hopes to be "a dead leaf", "a swift cloud" and "a wave" which can be driven by the wind. In Shelley's eyes, the west wind is so free and powerful that nothing can stop him. He wants to be free like the west wind; he spread his beliefs and faith without being forbidden. Also in another poem *The Cloud*, Shelley describes the cloud as "the daughter of Earth and Water, and the nursling of the Sky". The cloud can

“pass through the pores of the ocean and shores” freely. She can do things with her mood. Here Shelley personifies the cloud and eulogizes the passion of freedom and the strong desire for free.

Shelley's *To a Skylark* is one of the typical examples which embody the desire of freedom. In the beginning of this poem, Shelley depicts the picture that the skylark flies high in the sky.

“Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.”
(Shelley, 1988:64)

The skylark's action is freely with the passion. “The pale purple even melts around thy flight, like a star of Heaven in the broad day-light thou art unseen, -but yet I hear thy shrill delight.” The purple shine of the setting sun mixed with the skylark. It seems that the skylark likes a bright star, being enchased in the sky. It flies higher without limitation. It seems that nothing can prevent it to fly higher. No matter how difficult and no matter what kind of trouble it meets, it still flies in the sky with beautiful singing. It flies higher in the sky to embrace the beautiful sunshine of the setting sun. It flies higher to embrace the purple sky, as if the whole sky is its own square and it can fly to any direction as it likes. How freely and how happy it is! In the next several stanzas, the author depicts the beautiful nature and the beautiful song of the skylark. The song of the skylark is so beautiful that “all the earth and air” are filled with its voice.

Then Shelley makes some comparison to describe the function of the skylark's song. The song symbolizes a kind of freedom. Everyone wants to set himself free. The song helps the poet who is “hidden in the light of thought” to sing “hymns unbidden and the hopes and fears. It helps the “high-born maiden” to soothe her love-laden soul. It helps the glow-worm to scatter their light to the flowers and grass. It helps the rose to send its sweetness. All these images remind of us the word “free”. All these images are restricted by some difficulties. Like the poet, he faces the coldness of the social reality; the maiden suffers from loneliness; the glow-worm's light is hidden by the flowers and grass and the rose was attacked by the wind. All of them envy the free skylark and hopes to be taken by the skylark. So, we can see that each of them sends a part of them to follow the skylark.

The beautiful song of the skylark is like a symbol of hope. It contains the hope of freedom and the hope of the ideality for having a beautiful future. With the beautiful nature song, how can't our hearts be being shocked by it?

3. Optimistic Attitude towards Future

The beautiful nature makes us imagine our beautiful life. We human all hope to have a happy life, so does Shelley. He expresses his strong desire to have a better life and beautiful future through his beautiful nature poems. With the vigorous and energetic nature Shelley gives us, we can feel a kind of optimistic attitude towards life and future.

Shelley's passion and optimistic attitude towards life and future is also shown in the poem of *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*. There is a “green isle in the deep wide sea of misery”. There must be a hope no matter how difficult situation we are in. Shelley also presents us a delightful picture of the beautiful scenery of the mountain with a hopeful tone.

“Ay, many flowering islands lie
In the waters of wide Agony;
To such a one this morn was led,
My bark by soft winds piloted;
Mid the mountains Euganean
I stood listening to the pacan
With which the legioned rooks did hail
The sun's uprising majestic;”

The entire picture here is bright and clear in tranquility. It's so quiet that all the troubles and sadness in human's mind is forgotten at this moment. People can totally release himself and feels the beauty of nature. He describes the beautiful autumn scenery. It seems to be soft and mysterious. All the natural images of the poem show Shelley's desire of being in harmony with nature.

In the poem *Ode to the West Wind*, Shelley gives us a hope — “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” If we combine with the background of this poem, we can easily understand that this sentence not only tells us a natural rule of the seasons changing, but also tells us that all the pain will pass by and a brighter future is waiting for us. Just like many other scholars say that it fires the hope of the people to fight for the revolution which happened of that age. At that time, European labor movement and the revolutionary movement surged. British working class began to struggle against the bourgeoisie. The well-known “Peterloo Massacre” occurred in August of 1819. The “Winter” here stands for the cruel society of that century, the “Spring” symbolizes the liberty of human being. This sentence encourages people to fight for the freedom of human being and the bright future and realizes the social ideality.

In the poem *To a Skylark*, Shelley presents us a free skylark singing beautiful songs. The skylark flies “higher still and higher”, “thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight”. This indicates that although the skylark flies higher and higher till unseen height, the author still hears the delight songs of it. In the author's heart, the joyful song can be heard no matter how far it is. The beautiful song is in people's heart, just like the hope deeply rooted in our minds. This beautiful song is like a bud of hope which planted into our heart and mind. We can feel the song must be full of joy and happiness and full of the hope for bright future.

In the middle of the poems, Shelley makes many comparisons like the poet, the high-born maiden, the glow-worm golden and the rose. In these stanzas, Shelley makes contrasts to show his optimistic attitude. “Sympathy”, “fear”, and “secret” etc. all these words show a kind of gloomy mood. It indicates the reality and difficulties. While “all that ever was joyous, and clear and fresh, thy music doth surpass.” After the flying of the skylark, the beautiful song makes these things happy and hopeful. Life is as beautiful as the skylark's song. Here we can feel Shelley's optimistic attitude.

“What objects are the fountains
Of thy happy strain?
What fields or waves or mountains?
What shapes of sky or plain?
What love of thine own kind? What ignorance of pain?
With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be-
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee;
Thou lovest- but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.”
(Shelley, 1988:67)

In the first of these two stanzas, Shelley asks several questions. But these questions are answered in the second stanza. The fountain of “happy strain” is the love and “ignorance of pain”. Here Shelley depicts that the song of the skylark is “clear”, “keen”, with joyance. The “clear keen joyance” contrasts with the “shadow of annoyance”. Love is beautiful and happy, but behind the love there is sadness. Just like the skylark, it had sadness, but it still presents the happy mood with its beautiful song. It still brings hopes to the earth, the sky, the ocean and the poet, the high-born maiden, the glow-worm and the rose. What Shelley wants to tell us is that when suffering from pains, difficulties and predicament, people should never give up and should persist. Beautiful days will be coming soon.

In this poem, Shelley's optimistic attitude is stressed through the contrast with sad. Like the following stanza:

“Yes if we could scorn
Hate and pride and fear;
If we were things born

Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.”
(Shelley, 1988:67-68)

If we human cannot cry since we were born, if we human have no emotion of hate, scorn, pride and fear, we also could not feel the happiness and joyance. Just because the sad feeling of hate, pride, scorn and fear, we had the feeling of happy, joyful and beautiful. So, when we suffer from the spiritual pain, we should think about that there must be happiness before us in the future. Happiness always comes after the sadness. When you are caught in great pain like the description in the poem, at that moment you hear the beautiful song of the skylark. The voice is so beautiful that you lose yourself into its song. Your sadness and pain are thrown out at the short moment. That's the feeling of happy Shelley wants us to feel.

The song is full of pure joy without any hint of melancholy or bitterness. It falls down like the rain. It rains all the places where the skylark flies by. Even the whole world hears the beautiful song. The bird sings out the beauty of nature, the beauty of hope and the beauty of human's heart. It seems to be a Spirit rather than a mortal bird. This skylark inspires Shelley to pursue happiness and joy.

“Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then--as I am listening now.”
(Shelley, 1988: 68)

Shelley wants to learn the gladness in the skylark's brain and learn to sing such a beautiful song. Because this beautiful song can be heard by the whole world; Shelley wants to sing his optimistic attitudes and the progressive beliefs to the whole world.

The skylark is the symbol of pursuing brightness. It flies in the sky higher and higher with persistence. It sings when it flies and it brings its beautiful song to every corner of the world. It searches in the sky with its persistent mind, hard effort and diligent hardworking. Its song encourages and shocks every heart of the people who pursue freedom and bright future. The entire earth, sky and ocean sing with it and let people know the significance of life and the beauty of the society. Shelley hopes people to be like the skylark, to pursue human freedom and beautiful life without giving up.

4. Conclusion

Above all, we have a general analysis of Shelley's poems on the aspect of freedom and optimistic attitudes towards life and future. Shelley is a poet who loves nature and loves life. In his mind, freedom is the basic right of human being. Everyone should pursue freedom and build a society which is full of love, freedom and rationality. Although the social reality is cruel in his age, people should still hold the faith in bright future and wonderful life. Life is wonderful and beautiful. God must leave a hope for every person when he is caught in difficulties.

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