



MYTHS AND HELLENISM IN THE POETRY OF PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

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Abstract

Myths are an effort to figure out the inconceivable truth. Angle of Myths and Hellenism give out a clarification why the globe is as it is and why goods take place as they do. They set up the grounds following phenomena-social, religious or natural-which may or else appear mysterious. Usually unspecified and deep-seated in primeval folk values, mythology make an effort to comprehend formation, mysticism and faith and to reveal the meaning of existence and loss. Unlike mythology, they are over and over again conveyed in terms of the mystical and do not have much of a chronological foundation and again, are different from fables in being less moralizing in principle. They are, almost regularly the product of a tribal or ancestral group rather than the production of a personality.

Keywords: Myths, Nature, Hellenism, Personification, Eternal, Symbolism

Percy Bysshe Shelley known as a romantic English poet and considered as finest lyricist and philosophical poet. Shelley regarded as an influential poet of the 19th century and best known for his standard collected works verse such as "Ode To The West Wind" and "The Masque Of Anarchy" including "Queen Mab" and "Alastor", "Ozymandias", "Music To A Skylark", "The Cloud", "When Soft Voices Die", "Adonais", "The Triumph Of Life", "The Revolt Of Islam". His imaginative poetry dramas include, "Prometheus Unbound" And "The Cenci". Due to his inflexible romanticism and the alternative life of Shelley united with his dominant censorious accent made him a criticized and respected stature in his lifetime.

Etymologically, the original sense of myth in the Greek word "muthos," which means oral narration of speech or story. With the passage of time, on the other hand, "muthos" has come with new term "mythus" in late Latin or in nineteenth century concerning with traditional significance. So

that now, it is not just a wonderful tale or a piece of entertaining fiction but a story with a immense purpose for those who tell it and those who are its recipients.

In modern mythical investigation, myth has become a period not to be overlooked and the myth critics like Robert Graves, Francis Fergusson, Richard Chase, Philip Wheelwright, Leslie Fiedler, and last but not the least, Northrop Frye, interpret the genres of all literature in terms of "archetypes" and basic myth formulae. The inexplicable mixture of denotations that the term *myth* has in contemporary criticism includes its meaning as a widely held fallacy as in "the myth of progress" and the verisimilar microcosm of a work of fiction as in "the mythical world of Moby Dick."

By tradition, the fictitious dealing of myths can be categorized into three basic types. First, there is the printed chronicling of the transmissible oral story as in the case of the early *Ramayana* in India,

or the chronicling by interested observers as in the recording of African folktales from Uganda and the West Coast. Secondly, there is a mixed treatment of the original myth by a later poet or tale-teller as in the example of the later *Ramayana* by Tulsi Das or the *Story of the Magi* by TS. Eliot. Thirdly, there is the separate imaginative handling of the story without state to its reality. The appeal of the myth is continuous for it pacifies the civilizing longing of modern existence.

Harold Bloom in his introduction to *Shelley's Mythmaking* quotes the views of Martin Buber and a duo of anthropologists of Mercia Eliade's following to verify his scheme that the spiritual approach of philosophy, which sees the exterior dealings of the self in terms of I-thou and not I-it, is characteristic of the prehistoric myth-maker as also of the poet in his role of the progressive myth-maker. This attribute of the advanced myth-maker viewing the self's external relations in terms of I-thou is unambiguously articulate in Shelley's poetry, chiefly in his Nature poems where the amalgamation of the lyricist with the theme of myth-making is approximately absolute and the desire that clinches the fusion is largely emotional. Shelley's poems conform closely to Richard Chase's concept of mythical literature:

Literature becomes mythical by suffusing the natural with preternatural force toward certain ends, by capturing the impersonal forces of the world and directing them toward the implementation of certain expressive needs.¹

In *'On the Devil and Devils,'* that is an unbreakable work of monotheistic religions, we find very comprehensively through the investigation of mythology, as Milton applied this concept in his classic works who was not a Hellenistic or mythical writer in his work, he only flourished religion in a manner that Shelley puts it. In his notes to 'Queen Mab' he refers to both "The strong evidence afforded by the history of mythology, and geological researches"² as the scientific bases for speculations on the past and future climate of the earth. Shelley left no systematic statement on his conception of mythology but his casual remarks and allusions help

us reconstruct his casual remarks and allusions help us reconstruct his attitude towards the subject In his *'Defence of Poetry'*, too, he makes relevant statements like "all original religions are allegorical, or susceptible of allegory, and, like Janus, have a double face of false and true."³ Thus the mythology of a religion is considered to be a fairly precise pronouncement of historical truth but special objectivity and sensitivity are prerequisites for the perception of this truth.

The actions in Shelley's poems, thus, may be interpreted as figurative of man's artistic energies directed towards an everlasting seek for autonomy from domination. Instantly recognizable in his poetry is the reappearance of allusions to Dionysus, not by name but by multiple association with the attributes of that essential god. In this perception of matter as energy, Shelley recognizes the source of human love and creativity of political revolution and of the celestial activities of generation and destruction. It is this Dionysian motif, the various forms of the "Destroyer and Preserver," that may be traced through all his works. Joseph Raben in his essay, "Shelley the Dionysian" underlines Shelley's use of Dionysus as a metaphor to explain all phenomena:

This Dionysianism can be traced through Shelley's letters and prose writings, as well as his verse; it is a fundamental trope that goes a long way toward unifying his artistic output and clarifying apparent ambiguities or contradictions in his major works. To recognize this Dionysian strain, to observe its diverse manifestations and their evolution, to relate these atavisms with Shelley's developing thought, is to appreciate both the art and the thought that animates them.⁴

The Dionysian element, then, without expressly being named, appears in almost all of Shelley's major works: *'Alastor,' Prometheus Unbound, The Witch of Atlas, 'Adonais,' Hellas and 'The Triumph of Life'*. In this drama 'Cenci', alone, it is not alluded to at all, and in *'The Revolt of Islam'* only suggestively Shelley's shorter poems, specially his Nature lyrics, are almost all endowed with the

ideal magnificence of the Dionysian commencement and shows the promise of calm that lies away from the powerful tempests and remind that worship and harmony may follow aggressive and serious annoyance.

According to F.S Ellis, in exploration of Shelley's Nature Poetry, Shelley's verse has five different meanings of the word 'Nature.' 'Nature' for the poet, according to him, was first, the universe or all creation; secondly, the power which guides and rules the world; thirdly, disposition or temper of mind; fourthly, human life vitality; and, lastly, nature's handiwork.⁵

Shelley observed a correspondence between his own feelings and the ways of Nature- the vagueness and changefulness of his feelings as recorded in his poetry in terms of objects of Nature like the clouds that form and dissolve incessantly are among the few images of its kind in poetic art. An extraordinary image of poetic art in nature lyrics is delivered by Shelley in fusion art. Sometimes he simply observed and recorded beauties of nature, sometimes spiritual echoes of myths and Hellenism and sometimes he personified nature in different aspects. According to him, nature speaks a significant language and stirred within them profound spontaneous creation of myths. His intense reality of consciousness of lyrics addition with Greeks passion that settle in nature that are not merely a metaphors of nature but they are active by his long-lasting perception of dissimilarity among the world and reality. . Thus, the Sun, the west wind, the cloud and the skylark were to him not the conservative personifications of the eighteenth century odes, but live forces celebrating their free will and their vigour. They are superiority of the pleasurable, airy leanings of their designer. This particular myth-making association with Nature through which Shelley entered the life and consciousness of a bird or a cloud, is best revealed in poems like '*The cloud,*' *To a skylark*' and '*Ode to the West-wind.*'

The world of appearance and the material actualities of the present evoke in him a mood of melancholy which soon dissolves and is substituted

by hope aroused by the ideal reality that lies behind the veil. The West-wind, the harbinger of winter and Death, will sweep the poet away like it sweeps the leaves of the forest, but Spring, sure enough, will follow and bring the fruition of his hopes for humanity. The clouds of the sky enact the future of mankind; they may appear to symbolize the transience of beauty but actually, they only change and never die. Again, the song of the skylark suggests the truth of absolute love and joy despite the earthly sorrows that abound in life.

Shelley, with his characteristic super ability to create in his poems myths from objects of nature, presents in '*The Cloud*' an interesting autobiography of the cloud itself. In the poem, a masterpiece of transformation and natural process, the cloud conveys to us its various states and moods. The poem illustrates in striking imagery the various forms water vapour assumes. In the first stanza we see the cloud's impish delight at its transition from the gentleness that brings "fresh showers for the thirsting flowers" to the violence that wields "the flail of the lashing hail." In the second stanza we see the cloud as a bringer of snow to the mountains. Stanza three shows the cloud at sunrise and sunset. The scene following sunset is described in the next stanza and stanza five elaborates upon the halo effect of the cloud which binds "the Sun's throne with a burning zone" and gives the moon "a girdle of pearl." Subsequently the cloud envelops the mountain tops and descends over the stormy sea. Finally, we see its triumphant march through the rainbow.

The immortal nature of the cloud, which, born of Earth and Water, can never expire. Not only does it change its profile and consistency but also its very nature from vapour to water and back again to its vaporous form. Even after a clear blue sky the allegedly dead cloud can arise and "silently laugh" at its "own cenotaph." The metaphors of death and rebirth in the poem may lead us to draw a parallel between the life of the cloud and that of man. Possible the earlier verses symbolize the adventures and travails of the human spirit which, however, is essentially immortal.

This truth of eternity is part of the Truth that Shelley seeks in poetry, the poetic truth that he pursues through his synthetic and intuitional creative imagination. It is a truth that ever eludes the comprehension of man. Shelley, however, persistently seeks, through his significantly metaphorical and creative language to grasp and invisible and unattainable truth. 'To a Skylark' is one of his indomitable attempts at exploring the nature of absolute Truth. As in 'The Cloud,' we have in this poem another myth he weaves around a natural existence, a myth through which he arrives at the quality of Beauty and Truth. The skylark, buoyant and vibrant with the very music it commemorates, is a symbol of Perfection and Truth and is suggestively unseen and remote. Similarly, meaningfully, the poet is hidden in the depths of thought, the maiden is isolated in a tower, which symbolizes absolute withdrawal from actuality; the glow-worm spreads unseen its aerial hue; the rose lies concealed within its own green sepal from where emanates its overpowering fragrance. This concrete-abstract dualism is present almost everywhere in life; the West-wind itself is an 'unseen presence.' Thus, the images through which Shelley arrives at his idea of Beauty, all represent the unseen which is visible only through its effects upon perceptible objects.

In "To a Skylark" Shelley again chooses a possible purpose from the natural world, an object that allows of myth-making in terms of the poet's special aptitude. The skylark, singing its melodious song, soars upwards often beyond the reach of sight and hence, despite its natural identity, has an ethereal trait that conforms to Shelley's concept of the bird as a Spirit that embarks upon its unfettered flight over land and sea. The ecstasy of the bird's song can be paralleled only by effulgent images of the sky itself until dusk descends and the lark is out of sight.

"Ode to the West-wind," which represents with impact and vigour the natural cycles of breakdown and revival because of the Shelley's keen interest in the Dionysian element. The sustained drive and the steady compulsion of the West-wind has to be effectively visualized by the reader to be able to see beyond the procession of clouds, leaves

and waves and to register the effect on the poet himself and through him, on the process of history. The poet seeks identification with the West-wind when he personifies and addresses this usual happening and believes himself to be "One too like thee." He establishes in the poem the reciprocity between Man and Nature:

Make me the lyre, even as the forest is:

What if my leaves are falling like its own!

The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,

Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,

My Spirit! Be thud me, impetuous one!"

One observes in the poem, no doubt, the effect of movement and fluidity, but, there is, to these "loose clouds" that are "shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean" and to the "commotion" of the storm, the firmness and stability of the "vaulted" sky and the "dome" of "congregated" vapours, from whose "solid" atmosphere "the black rain" is bursting. Thus the charges of vagueness and the lack of substantiality cannot always be held against Shelley for there is, often, in his nature lyrics a certain architectural immobility and solidity that resists the fluidity of undifferentiated flux. Richard H. Fogle, in his analysis of the imagery of Shelley has discriminatingly observed that

His swift-moving forms and essences are generally put in a fixed and concrete border. In that poem of his which most vividly conveys the mood of violent and winded speed, the "Ode to the West-wind," it is too rarely noticed that the wind moves lower than a solid dome within which the scene is enclosed.⁶

"Ode to the West-wind" creates a new myth by making the wind a commanding figure, a symbol not of a one to one association, but a symbol with multiple connotations and denotations. The West-wind represents for Shelley change, poetic inspiration, strength and energy, hope, regeneration

mankind and finally, his own personality. It is the West wind that can prevent him from falling upon "the thorns of life" and "bleeding" and it is this alone that can carry his message of hope to mankind and bring about a realization of his revolutionary idealism; and hence, the complete self-surrender of the poet, the surrender being a notable from of his detection with the fundamental and everlasting personality of the West-wind.

"West Wind" termed as "strength of mind" in the vocal of Shelley that means "Wandering Universally" and it suitable way of appearance what Shelley was looking for in the West Wind. A resonance sometimes finds with incantation, supremacy in the "Ode to the West-wind" that is sacred and supreme but most necessary in nature.

O life me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

Creative energy and poetic inspiration for human being is quite enough and necessary from the sorrows of existence and he pleads with the wind to endow him with "the trumpet of a prophesy." (l.69). Many of Shelley's poems are simple and plain, but there are poems that are rich in symbolic content and symbolic overtones as well. Though his main interest is in human- beings in individual accomplishment, natural world too plays a foremost role in defining his mode of poetic opus. Shelley's lyrics show the poet to advantage as a highly imaginative and creative myth-maker who establishes new links and pleasurable relationships between the world of nature and that of man.

Shelley was Hellenistic in temper and in spirit as well and transports himself in his imagination to the days of ancient Greeks. Use of myths and legends in Greek instinct and for its culture and literature, Shelley personifies many metaphors in his poems and attributed human shapes in many images and finds poetry is a mixture of various allusions to the art, culture and literature of Greek. Visual poet, writer of senses and feelings in the expressions of Hellenism and in mystic approach and Hellenistic thoughts in his poems are commendable. Shelley rewarded with numinous pantheism and this is the

mental picture which permitted him to distinguish underneath all appearances the living presence of a single divine mind.

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