

Portrayal of symbolism in P.B. Shelley's Poetry

Ajay Sangwan

Shiv Colony Near ITI Bhiwani, Haryana, India

Abstract

P.B. Shelley was first and foremost an idealist. His imagination was an audacious that would not only break down all restraint, but would scar higher and higher, scoring the actualities of life. Hence he would lose contact with actualities and turn even concrete objects into ideas, he worships beauty not in its concrete forms but intellectual beauty that dignifies everything it shines upon.

Keywords: Shelley, concrete, shines, worships

Introduction

The word, symbolism, denotes in a broad sense, the imagery used by a writer to express his ideas. Shelley's imagery is symbolic to an unusual degree. He saw the manifestation of something beyond any tangible object. Shelley followed the platonic concept that the visible world is only a shadow of a higher world. In order to speak about that world he had to use symbols. The use of symbols has created a kind of vagueness in his poetry. Strong says in his essay on Shelley's symbolism, "The exultation of Earth at her liberation in Prometheus the grief of spring for lost Adonais, the charioting of the winged seeds in their dark wintry bed by the West Wind, and their re-awakening when her azure sister blows her clarion call over the dreaming earth, all of these things are exquisite symbols of Shelley's faith." These are the symbols of a general- nature which are scattered throughout Shelley's poetry. There is however, a special variety of symbols, which Shelley uses to express certain definite ideas and images, personate his deepest conviction and faith.

Symbol of The Veil: The word 'Veil' is used in the following lines to express the whole fabric of our personal existence.

'Lift not the painted veil, which those who lives,
 Call life, though unreal picture be pictured there,
 And it but mimics ail we would believe,
 With colours idly spread – behind lurk fear
 And Hope, twin Destines.'

Shelley had a deep – rooted conviction that the visible world is an imperfect image of the reality of the invisible world, and that there is a thin partition that separates the two. If the partition were torn as-under, men would see reality and all suspicion and hatred and cruelty would cease and love and peace would reign in the world. Thus, the generation of the world would be brought about by the tearing as-under of the partition. To express this idea, Shelley constantly uses the symbol of the veil.

In some passages Shelley speaks of 'Eternity's Veil' meaning not the veil which is Eternity, but the veil which hides Eternity from the sight of men. In 'The Revolt of

Islam' this word is used to express that which conceals truth or beauty from man. Sythna says,

'With Strong speech I tore the veil that hid,
 Nature and truth and Liberty Love.'

Shelley had a firm faith that the visible world is an imperfect image of the invisible world and that there is a thin partition separating the two. Men should liberate himself from this veil. In 'A Dialogue, Death, while refusing the mortals appear for liberation says,

'Cease, Cease way word Mortal! dare not unveil,
 The shadows that float o'er Eternity's sake.'

But the most important meaning of 'the veil' in Shelley is that in which it is regarded as a symbol of life, life itself is conceived as a thing veiling or preventing humanity from achieving the highest form of its realization. Thus the spirit of the Mour in Prometheus Unbound speaks of the world's regeneration,

'Lift not the painted veil, which those who were called life,
 Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
 Ail men believed, or hoped, is torn aside,
 The loathsome mask has fallen.'

The serpent and the eagle: The idea of the struggle between good and evil is symbolized by the struggle between the serpent and the eagle at the beginning of 'The Revolt of Islam'. Ever and anon the serpent (good) and the eagle (evil) renew their fight, which symbolizes the strife of mankind against its oppressor of freedom, justice and truth against Custom's hydra brood. At the beginning of the poem, the eagle defeated the serpent, but afterwards,

'The victor Fiend,
 Omnipotent of yore now quils and fears,
 His triumph dearly won, which soon will lend,
 An impulse swift and sure to his approaching end.'

Symbol of Poison: Shelley used the symbol of poison in his poems to express spiritual evil and corruption. The use of

the symbol is seen in such lines –

‘And how these seeds of hope might yet be sown,
Whose fruit is evil’s mortal poison,
The dark fiend, who with his iron pen,

und itself when it becomes active, in the second place, evil through the very law of its being must in the end destroy itself after the scorpion’s fashion and disappear, Dipped in scorn’s fiery poison,

Makes his fame enduring there.’

The frequency with which Shelley employs this symbol in a spiritual context shows how intensely he felt both his own and the world’s evil and misery, and how passionately he presented what he felt.

Symbols of Jupiter and Prometheus: In Prometheus unbound characters are not individual characters, they are symbols of Shelly’s views. Jupiter is the symbol of all evil and oppression and Prometheus is the symbol of freedom and liberty and the noble forces in human nature.

Symbol of Scorpion: Another frequent image of evil with Shelley is the Scorpion. There is a twofold significance in the use of this symbol. In the first place just as the scorpion sings itself, do does evil wo

‘The truths o their pure lip, that never die,
Shall bind the scorpion falsehood with a wreath,
Of ever living flame,
Until the monster sting itself to death.’

The Boat And The Stream –This symbol is also used frequently by Shelley. He loved boats and whenever he saw sufficiently large piece of water, he rejoiced to sail or row in them. The great poet met his death moving in a boat. He was fond of using the symbol of the boat in his poetry. He first meet it in ‘Alastor’ when the forlorn poet is described as wishing to use a boat as the means by which he will find.

‘One death on the dear ocean’s waste’
In the second act of ‘Prometheus Unbound’ Asia’s we have–
‘My soul is an enchanted boat,
Which, lie a sleeping swan, death float,
Upon the silver waves of the sweet singing.’

In ‘The Revolt Of Islam’ the boat and the stream are symbols of the human soul sweeping on beyond the grave towards that unity in Love which is the consummation of the universal spirit. In ‘Adonais’ again the Boat again is the human soul, sailing on the ocean of Eternity,

‘The breath whose might I have invoked insong,
Descends on me: my spirit’s bark is driven,
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng,
Whose sails were never for the tempest given.’

Thus we see that Shelley uses symbols to represent his revolutionary and mystical ideas. Through these concrete symbols he tries to express his abstract ideas. But his symbolism is not extensive, deep and evasive like those of the modern poets or French Mallarme. He uses symbols

casually.

Shelley’s symbols do not broadly speaking, stand for anything in the systematic manner in which he Cross, for example, stands for Christianity. To find out all what winter, or intoxication, implies in a given context, one must reckon with the whole of Shelley – and not with his texts alone, but also with his science, politics, his theories of literature, his medical record. What really happens seems to be that a certain concept – generally of a class of external objects – may be ‘over determined’, that is may serve as a collecting point for several of the writer’s political, scientific or philosophical perceptions of reality. The fields of perception supplying these concepts with associations are very various, as may be briefly illustrated in the case of hollow place, often arbitrarily restricted to the words cave and cavern. This concept sometimes, involves a hole in the ground, or in cosmic space, a sanctuary, or a prison, the lair of bestiallife, or the abode of librated humanity, the hollow of the womb, or of the grave, a hotbed of subversive activity, or a fortress of convention. It may imply the physical hollow of the skull, intellectual potentiality, or the now – fashionable recesses of the introspective mind. No doubt, certain of these implications out – weigh others, inparticular poems, but lack of interest in any but the ‘dim caves of human thought’ type of is due to the ‘idolaspecus’, the private prejudices, of the interpreter, and is hard to justify statistically. If for example, the hollow places of Prometheus Unbound are investigated I would be found that of 58 examples, clearly involves the mind or spirit, and seven more could be claimed to do so, while 10 of the 58 clearly involve volcanic action, with another 8 doubtful cases. The remainder of other association in the first place or are symbolically neutral. This should at least temper the urge to attribute a ‘precision of symbols’ in Shelley’s work and I shall adopt, where possible, the term ‘over – determined concept’ rather than ‘symbol’ in order to avoid the notion of reference ton incorruptible mystical system now attached to the latter word.’ (G.M. Matthew)

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