


<p style="text-align: center;">Percy Bysshe Shelley A Major Figure Among the English Romantic Poets, His Unconventional Life and Great Literary Work</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Literature</p> <p>Keywords: P.B.Shelley, Romanticism, Poems, Lyrics, Revolutionary.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>Shelley is one of the best poets of the period of English romanticism. He belongs to the second group of romantic poets, together with John Keats and the great Lord Byron. Shelley's life itself is very interesting and unusual, he went through so many difficulties, tragedies, troubles, tension and oppression, confrontations, etc, he could not find peace anywhere, he moved from one place to the other, from one country to another, etc. Beside personal problems, emotional and health problems, he could not accept the social reality England was living. Politics was another issue that tackled him, and he openly expressed his opinion, what made him a kind of state enemy. He met and was influenced by many great people of that time, who had a very important role in his life. These people, like Godwin, developed his political and ideological belief, etc. All his belief, his opinion, his ideology, was put on paper, he expressed it through his great works that he wrote. He faced very harsh criticism from the early days in Oxford, when his work <i>Necessity of Atheism</i> established him as an atheist. He expressed his esthetics in his greatest works. All his literary work can be classified in long narrative poems and lyrical poems, which cover topics ranging from politics, revolutionary, and philosophical, where we can notice Shelley's dissatisfaction with state institutions and the state itself, and his desire for human wellbeing and freedom as well, to poems with meditative ideas, love poems, visionary ones, which express Shelley's emotions, burst feelings, love, pain and spiritual joy. His greatest narrative poems are: <i>Prometheus Unbound</i>, <i>Triumph of Life</i>, <i>Queen Mab</i>, <i>Julian and Maddalo</i>, <i>Adonais</i>, <i>Alastor</i>, <i>Mask of Anarchy</i>, etc and his best lyrics: <i>Ode to the West Wind</i>, <i>The Cloud</i>, <i>To Skylark</i>, <i>Mont Blank</i>, <i>The Indian Serenade</i>, <i>England in 1819</i>, <i>Ozymandias</i>, and many others.</p>		

Percy B. Shelley belongs to the second generation of romantic poets who didn't reach old age, but deserved a great respect. P.B.Shelley is considered to be the most original and the greatest romantic poet, and more. He was a critic, philosopher, essayist, fighter for human rights, a man who fights against destructive social elements, a person who radiates goodness and humanity for mankind. His youth, atheism, his first marriage, expulsion from Oxford, make his character to be seen as controversial as his poetry. This is for example due to his attack on marriage and support of free love; he was the only English poet who touched the hearts of workers, etc. We cannot separate his revolutionary theories, his personal life and his poetry. He was a human and a poet, so he was eager to change the world, and he knew how to do it. His task was to touch people's reason as well as their imagination. He hardly made difference between the truth of everyday actuality and truth of poetry. He was born on 4th August 1792 in Field Place, near Horsham in Sussex. His parents were Sir Timothy and Lady Elizabeth Shelley. His father was a member of the parliament, but he had a very difficult character, he was stubborn and strict, with a low intellectual capacity. In his father's character Percy saw an enemy of his own free literary beliefs. He began his education at the age of 6, where the books gave him a real pleasure and a real inspiration to write. Other greatest inspirations for him were his own birth place, life itself, nature, etc. This made him sound very philosophical, so he got isolated in his own mysticism, and his father sent him to Sion Academy, which was a very strict school. The educational system, appearance, hygiene, basic school conditions, authority of the school, and bullying from his friends disturbed his own spiritual calmness. All this resulted in him being unkind, oppose everything, hate tyranny, but express his love feelings as well. In 1804 Shelley was sent to Eaton, where he was called *The Mad Shelley*. He was offended there and this made him hate the authorities even more. He was dedicated to books, reading, experiments, and he was interested in supernatural forces –ghosts, political philosophy, etc. So at his last year in Eaton, Shelley could be considered a scholar, an eccentric, a strange philosopher, etc. There he was supported by Dr. James Lind, who introduced him to *Political Justice*, 1791, a great work of William Godwin who later became his idol. In Eaton he made his first poetical attempts, beside his two gothic novels. His first collection of poems appeared in 1810, named *Original Poetry, by Victor and Cazire*, where he condemned the tyranny and celebrated freedom, and another similar collection was *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*. However, the quality of these poems was far below the quality of his later poems. In April 1810 Shelley published *Zastrozzi* in *The British Critic* magazine. In 1810 he enrolled Oxford, a university that became his fortress full of religious and royalistic ideologies and prejudices. Beside all this he made a very good friend, Thomas.J.Hog, who later became his biographer. Hog described his friend as in cases hysterical, very explosive, but he told about calm and sincere discussions that they had over love, ideal woman, about differences between poet's physical and extraphysical passion, etc. But Shelley's father thought that Hog led Shelley on the wrong way – away from christianity and towards atheism, and called him '*corrupter of his principles.*' [1] This made Hog begin a series of lessons against atheism, which brought immorality, social inferiority, political betrayal, etc, and

on the other hand Shelley continued with his discussions, continued writing about love, atheism, philosophy, etc, and as a result, he published his first edition against religion in England, named *Necessity of Atheism*. Here he expressed his hatred against any persecution, especially religious one. This was a short time pleasure for Shelley, since this work caused him a lot of troubles - it was publicly burned, and he was expelled from university on 28th March 1811. Beside these troubles, his friendship with Hog, brought him his first love, Harriet, who was a friend of Hog's sister, a relationship that didn't last for long. Later, Shelley built a platonic relationship with Elizabeth Hitchner, a teacher, 10 years older than him. They kept a very voluminous correspondence where they discussed over virtues, feelings, reason, and many other important issues. Unfortunately, this relationship too, ended. It was shaken by the appearance of Harriet Westbrook. Shelley met her after he was excluded from Oxford. They loved each other and together with Hog, moved to London, where they begin a new stage of their life – full of divagation, debts and persecutions. He felt he was neglected in the society and lacked family love, what hurt him too much. He continued his life with Harriet, but didn't want to get married, since he respected and liked pure, free love. Harriet had a very strict family and she suffered, she was not free. The only way to save her from the strict tyranny was to marry her, so believing in personal right for freedom, Shelly married her. They got married in Edinborough on 25th August 1811. They moved to York. Harriet was young and kind, but had a superficial interest in Shelley's revolutionary beliefs. This made him continue his correspondence with Mrs. Elizabeth Hitchner, which was a kind of confession for him. After a while, he invited her at his place, and he spent a lot of time with her, and on the other hand his wife Harriet, got close to Hog, who tried to seduce her. When Shelley discovered this, he run away, leaving Hog alone and not telling him where he was going. We understand that he remained stable and quite reasonable and strong in this situation, saving his marriage and not 'punishing' his wife. He moved to Qesuick, where he met the lake poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. He got close to Southey since they both liked and discussed Godwin's *Political Justice*, a work that built and developed Shelley's beliefs and character. But when Shelly discovered that Southey served the tyrant government, he ended his friendship with him. This made him move to Ireland, where he hoped to spread his ideology of social revolution by working for the Irish independence. Here is where he wrote *Address to the Irish People*. In Ireland he got a lot of support for denouncing the English tyranny, and he began another mission, that of the Irish rebirth. However, Shelley and Harriet could not settle down, and they moved again -to Dublin, than to Wales, etc. Even though he changed places, he continued his correspondence with Elizabeth Hitchner. Even though this correspondence was interrupted by Elizabeth's father, she somehow managed to join Shelleys and helped Percy distribute his *Declaration of Rights*. This pamphlet was written in 1812, heavily influenced by Godwin's ideas. This was a dangerous move, so Shelley was now under a strict control of state authorities, so he had to move again, and this time he moved to Tremadock, where he was short of finances and he couldn't distribute his pamphlets. No matter he did not call for uprising, his political activity caused him a lot of troubles with the police. He was spied, and luckily fended off imprisonment. After a month he had to move to London, where he was very lucky to meet his spiritual leader and friend, William Godwin. Godwin lived with his second wife and their children and two children from their first marriages. After two months, Shelley suddenly had to return to Tramadock. Political incidents that occurred at that time, like slandering of the prince, made him write his famous poem *Queen Mab*. This is his first great work, which represents Shelley's political, philosophical and esthetical view at that time, and it is 'his *earliest and most proselytizing of his poems with a social purpose*' [2], a poem that was written in a form of a political vision, with a visionary subject. In Tremadock Shelley experienced some health problems, psychological ones. He suffered a nervous distraction, so he had to move again – to Dublin, than to London, and so on. But during this time something beautiful happened to him, a beautiful baby daughter was born, he named her Janthe and he wrote a sonnet for her. Meanwhile, Shelley made many friends, who taught him Italian. As far as his relationship with Harriet is considered, it was considered stable, and they didn't have misunderstandings, no matter they were different characters. However, as time passed, things changed and Harriet was not the sweet, young girl anymore, now she was serious and worried about serious and real issues like debts and family troubles and not about ideals that Shelley was living for. This situation made Shelley sympathize other woman's sorrow, and his feelings for Harriet began to change, and this is noticed in his poems as well. At the beginning of their love he called her a virtue, beautiful and clever, and a year later, we notice a great change, when in the poem To Harriet he says:

Oh, trust for once no erring guide!
 Bid the remorseless feeling flee;
 'Tis malice, 'tis revenge, 'tis pride,
 'Tis anything but thee;
 Oh, deign a nobler pride to prove,
 And pity if thou canst not love.

So Shelley's feelings for his wife were gradually exchanging for an idealized love, so they got divorced in 1814. This idealized love was supposed to be for Godwin's daughter Mary. However, Shelley suffered because of the divorce, and never forgot Harriet. Shelley and Mary ran away and travelled through Europe, what caused them a lot of

financial troubles, so he had to get back and borrow money, earn dirty money, what was against his idealistic belief. He even asked money from Harriet, but now the relationship with Godwin was shaken. Because of the debts and creditors, he had to move again until the end of 1814, when he published his philosophical dialogue *A Refutation of Deism*, where he condemns deism as a compromise between mysticism and atheism, and what is more important, he denies the christian principle of indisputability of evil with violence. When Shelley's grandfather died he left a testament, and a great amount of money was left to Shelley, but he could not use them at the moment. Anyway, he made a deal with his father and got the money, so he paid his debts. He bought a house at Bishopgate, where he wrote *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, in Autumn 1815. This poem differs from other poems of general themes, because it deals with more individual, or more personal theme, where the history of a poetic spirit is presented in a free natural environment. Shelley here allegorically presents spiritual states embodied in characters, events and natural appearances. The major character is a noble poet who retires in himself, his egoism and loses his relations with outer world, and this is how he dies morally. More or less, this is the personification of Wordsworth's rise and fall, since there are some autobiographical elements involved. In 1816, Shelley became a father of a son named Marin, and since the financial and other trouble did not end, the family decided to live in the continent. They lived in a hotel in Geneva, where he met Byron. There he lived until August, when he was called by the court to return to England. Another important poem was written during this period, it was *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, a poem composed of seven stanzas in iambic pentameter, which is an analogy of Wordsworth's *Ode to Immortality*. The similarity lies in the fact that both poems try to revise the individual values and to reorganise the personal life after losing relation with the basic life force, which resembles the divine one. Shelley continues writing, but now he writes a prose work, named *Speculation on Morals*, influenced by Aristotle and Plato. It is about departure from the natural goodness towards exoticism, as well as about moral diseases. The author uses these ideas to tell that a true virtue is every person's aim to contribute to the happiness of the whole society. Plato, Aristotle and skeptical philosophers like Democritus, Cicero, Montagne, Thomas Brown, and Hume, influenced his other important work *Essay on Christianity* as well. There he rejects the historical Christian doctrine and thinks that it is nothing but an imagination about God-man with inappropriate and sick moral views, and the church was nothing but a repressive and expulsive institution. These works somehow corresponded to Shelley's emotional state, because in autumn of 1816 his ex-wife Harriet committed suicide, and he was very sad. This was a great shock for him, and he had to take care for his two children. Nevertheless, he decided he should marry Mary, and they got married in December 1816. In fact he had a lot of troubles to keep his children since his ex father in law took the custody of children. He tried to escape these troubles by writing, so next important thing after *Queen Mab* was *The Revolt of Islam*. It is a poem consisted of 12 cantos written in Spenserian stanza. It is about an uprising against a tyrant ruler of the Golden city of Islam, but it is also a counterpart of French revolution. Shelley justifies the Jacobean terror over the enemies of the revolution, and this kind of ideology endangered him, as he was an easy target for persecution. Because of this, the publisher advised him to change some disputable parts. At the end of 1817, Shelley wrote *Ozymandias*, another important sonnet, which beside the powerful themes and virtuous diction it, 'reveals the impermanence of human achievement'[3] We saw that Shelley faced a lot of problems, difficulties, financial troubles, health problems, and all this made him leave Britain, and on 11th March 1818, he departed for Italy to never return to England. He thought that this way he would leave all his troubles behind. *Rosalind and Helen* was a poem that he began writing in England, and finished in Italy. The main issue discussed here is rejection of free love, married life without love. When he arrived in Italy, he first settled in Luca's Spas, and they stayed there for three months. Then he went to Venice where he met Byron, and this episode was presented in *Julian and Maddalo* and marks the beginning of their friendship. *Julian and Maddalo* is written in heroic couplets and presented in two parts. In the first part we can see the dialogue between Julian (Shelley) and Maddalo (Byron), whereas the second part represents a mad man's monologue, who tells about Shelley's spiritual sufferings over Harriet's suicide and the troubles with Mary. In Italy he also wrote *Lines Written among Eugenic Hills*, visually the most clear lyrical poem. But Shelley moved again, and he travelled through Ferrara, Bologna, to Rome and Naples, where he stayed for three months and wrote *Stanzas Written in Dejection*, a poem dedicated to Naples, a place where he found his spiritual tranquility, to its nature and the beautiful surrounding. In February 1819 he returned to Rome, where he finished his masterpiece *Prometheus Unbound*. With this poem he fulfills his poetical ideal and expresses his broad knowledge. It is based on the ancient myth of Aeschylus, but Shelley does some considerable revisions. His drama has a more optimistic tone and expresses a new step in the history of mankind. *Prometheus Unbound* has a complex structure, with abstract and symbolic characters. It is written in four acts, three of which are narrative, and the fourth one is lyrical, where choirs appear. The fourth act is written later and is added to the first three, and makes the poem more special. As far as the theme is considered, this poem deals with Prometheus' release, a hero that saves humankind from the tyranny of the rulers. In Rome Shelly suffered a big tragedy, when his son died. The family did not feel well so they moved again, and now they went to Leghorn, where Shelley finished *The Cenci*. According to Shelley, this poem represents the dark reality, which is done through realistic dramatization, even historical equality, but without any theatrical drama. However, here we see a tragic, gruesome story, where there

is no taboo, Shelley speaks about a father's suicide, incest, etc, but we still have moral shining of the characters, what takes this poem high above the dark atmosphere of renaissance prose drama. The major character is Beatrice, who is forced to kill her father. However, changing places did not finish, so they moved to Florence. Shelley's imagination is here tackled by the political situation in England, or specifically by the so called Peterloo massacre, which inspired him to write *Songs and Poems for the Men of England* and *The Masque of Anarchy*. The popular ballad form appears again. But, beside poetry, Shelley continued writing prose as well, for example *Philosophical View of Reform*, which was a moderate answer to their political events in England, but which misses the violent anger of the poetic criticism which appears in *Mask of Anarchy* and *England 1819*, a political sonnet where Shelley depicts the whole social and political situation in England in 1819. *Philosophical View of Reform* is consisted of approximately 20.000 words and it is divided into 3 chapters. It offers systematic history of changes that took place from pre-hellenic times to actual revolutions in America and Europe. Shelley continued writing, and the next thing was *Peter bell the Third*, which was a kind of mocking poem, or a parody of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*. Another important poem that classifies Shelley among the best of poets is *Ode to the West Wind*, the best among his short lyrics. In this poem, human soul merges in the movements of invisible forces of nature. It is consisted of original stanzas, enriched with brave and complex images of the poet, where he depicts the effect of the wind on the earth, water and air, and where the poet takes the role of the wind. Shelley was physically weak, and he suffered of a poor health, so in order to avoid the harsh winter climate, he moved to Pisa in January 1820, where he lived almost for the rest of his life. He travelled only to Leghorn to meet his friends Gisborns, and in St Giuliano. During this period Shelley was preoccupied with the political situation in Europe, for example the Spanish independence, an event that inspired him to write *Ode to Liberty*, and the revolution in Naples made him write *Ode to Naples* and express his love for freedom. On the other hand, Swellfoot the Tyrant was a political satire about royal disputes over marriage. Shelley was very skillful in translating as well, and we see that in his translation of Homer's Hymn to Mercury, and his active literary and metaphysical part of his genius was shown in *The Witch of Atlas*. This poem was written in ottava rima, and depicts the spiritual beauty personified in a woman, where Shelley '*indulged his taste for pure invention.*'[4] One of the most virtuous and most beautiful poems in English is *The Cloud*, because it rises into an allegory of poet's vitality, and it includes poet's different scientific knowledge, where we notice stanzas of different length and form, and where depiction of the human and the inorganic sometimes reaches almost mythical dimensions. Shelley continues with his lyrical poems, for example one of the most successful is *To a Skylark*, where the spirituality of Shelley's feelings is stressed. This poem is marked by its simple poetic nature, with a lot of symbolism where the skylark represents a complex symbol, thoroughly spiritual, as well as sublimation that comes from freedom and human happiness. It is formed of four line stanzas with variable rhyming patterns. Shelley felt a platonic love towards Emily Viviani in Pisa. She was girl of a noble descent, but locked in a monastery against her will. These platonic feelings inspired Shelley write *Epipsychidion*, where he expressed his revolt against this feature of the corrupted mentality of that time. The narrative element in this poem is minimal, and this is why it represents '*mixture of real experiences, suppression of reality and youthful dreams for the ideal spiritual state*'[5] Shelley expresses his opinion against restriction and humiliation of women by the strict parental and school regime and tyranny. During this period Shelley wrote his famous *Defence of Poetry*, but it was published only after his death. This was his most famous prose work, which is not a pure political work, neither a pure philosophical one, but it is a manifesto of criticism, a response to *The Four Ages of Poetry*, a pamphlet by Thomas Peacock, who considered that the poetry was losing its importance due to a rapid technological development. Shelley's defence is very strong, saying that poetry is a basement where man should build his spiritual knowledge, where poetry and poets should play a major role, and he says:

We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry in these systems of thought is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes.

According to Shelley, the basis for poetry and basis for divine inspiration of the poet were the ideas on love, beauty, social welfare, etc, and this is what he says about poetry:

Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it.is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the color of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.

And he also defines:

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred.

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.

Poetry ever communicates all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving: it is ever still the light of life;

A great poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.

And the most important definition, one that resembles a prophetic trumpet is:

Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world

There we see Shelley's poetic vigor, his defense and sublimation of poetry and poets, but his critical skills as well. The death of another romantic poet, John Keats in 1821, inspired Shelley's elegy, and it was his poem *Adonais*, which is one of his most anthologized poems. In the poem we can find typical elegiac elements, expressed in Spenserian stanzas where the poet numbers his neo-platonic symbols with a great poetic energy. That year Shelley visited Byron in Ravenna and they decided to found and edit a periodical named *The Liberal*, where they will publish their own original works. But it was a period when Grecian-Turk a conflict begin, which was an inspiration for Shelley's next work, *Hellas*, a poem dedicated to his friend Mavrococoro and it represents the echo of the Greek war against Turks. Shelley's last long poem, and unfinished, was *Triumph of Life*, written in terza rima. It is a very powerful and grim poem, because of its 'fragmentary nature and consequent obscurity, and the picture of those who have been destroyed by worldliness following in Life's triumph' [6] This poem can be compared to Dante's Divine Comedy, expressing a vision of humanity interpreted through alegorical symbolism. Until 1922 Shelley tried to help Byron with his family troubles so he went to Leghorn, Pisa where Byron planned to go. He stayed there with his friend Williams. On 8th July 1822 he sailed for Specia together with Williams, but a great storm caught them and the boat sank. There was no news on Shelley and Williams until 18th July when two bodies were taken on the coast. The bodies of Shelley and Williams were cremated on 15th August, and their ashes were buried in the English cemeteries in Rome in 7th December 1822. Based on what is said so far, we understand that Shelley was not only a poet, but an essay writer, translator, philosopher, political activist, etc, and his literary opus is consisted of sonnets and other short lyrical poems, narrative poems, philosophical and political essays, literary criticism and translations. We can clearly see that Shelley's ideals covered various fields and interests, like politics, philosophy, etc., due to his great interest in the works of writers and philosophers of the antiquity and illuminism like Plato, Epicure, Spinoza, Bacon, Lock, Russo, the French encyclopedists, and certainly Godwin, who left an indelible mark in his life and literary work. Shelley translated the great works of Greek poets like Homer and Euripides, what proves his knowledge of Greek classical language and literature. We can also notice a similarity between Shelley and Greek's poetry, and it is the power of abstracting ideas out of natural objects and embodying them in brilliant images. 'continuing to the end of his life to view Nature, Men, and the institutions of Society through the modifying light of the revolutionary philosophy which he assumed as the starting point of action.' [7] So, we can conclude that Shelley spread his feelings in three major fields – politics, nature and love. Shelley is considered to probably be the most brilliant representative of romanticism. He was a poet par excellence – his strange and a short life, his moods of ecstasy and weakness, his tiredness, his high poetic imagination and his faded idealism, made a perfect combination of a popular image of romanticism. As we know, he was haunted by Plato and Greek literature and civilization in general. His poetry became less didactic; exploring the feelings of mystery, weakness of ecstasy, no matter that he never gave up his passion to change the world. As means for his expression, Shelley used the epic, drama, and the elegy. In all of his works the lyric humor dominates over the creative one, and this perplexes the principles and foundations of poetic structure. As Francis Thompson says 'To such following of Nature, Shelley felt no call. He saw in her not a picture set for his copying, but a palette set for his brush; not a habitation prepared for his inhabiting, but a Coliseum whence he might quarry stones for his own palaces.' [8] According to all this, we can make another classification of Shelley's works, in a) long poems and b) lyrical poems. His poems are of different topics, discussing social, political, revolutionary and philosophical issues, which express Shelley's revolt against the state institutions, and his desire for human wellbeing and freedom, and we also notice meditative poems, love poems, and those visionary, which express his emotions, feelings, love, his spiritual pain and joy. Some of his great poems that we can name are - *Ode to the West Wind*, *The Cloud*, *To Skylark*, *Mont Blank*, *The Indian Serenade*, *England in 1819*, *Ozymandias*, and many more. So, as we saw, in his life of few years, everything was short – his childhood, youth, maturity, all in only 30 years. A quarter of his life was spent in poverty, without glory, on the run, in persecution, in controversy, and stained. A quarter that remained in history full of nicknames - like mad Shelley, Shelley the atheist, the rebel, reformer and feminist. But above all, he remained

Shelley the poet, Shelley the genius. He dedicated all his short life to his fight against injustice and oppression. Till the end of his life, Shelley remained an immature romantic boy and an idealist, whose work seduced people of the same age as his, and of similar emotional affinities. Shelley himself appears in his own work. Shelley is a poet, philosopher, essayist, translator and letter writer. He is a dreamer, kindhearted who loves mankind and prosperity, he is a realist who seeks for the truth and the justice through reason and knowledge, he rebelled against any kind of oppression and injustice in life, politics, art and religion, and thus he confirms his statement that the poets are the *Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world*.

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