

Power Subverted and Desired Love Achieved, An Optimistic Look at Shelly's Poem "*England 1819*"

Navid Salehi Babamiri

Department of English Language and Literature, Payame Noor University, Islamic
Republic of Iran

Tel: 98-919-921-4782

E-mail: navid.babamiri1988@gmail.com

Received: Nov. 30, 2016 Accepted: Dec. 11, 2016 Published: December 12, 2016

doi:10.5296/ijl.v8i6.10450 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v8i6.10450>

Abstract

The poem "*England 1819*" is to be considered as one of the best poems of the romantic poet Shelly, which has to deal with political statements. The poem, as a symbol both to suppress the power in the hands of some and to make people encourage in their life, shows Shelly's deep feeling toward his people especially ones who have been trapped in the bitter power of Tops, big noses who ruled the England and had the complete authority over the oppressed ones. Thus the poem not only deals with the oppression of government, religion, churches and oppressors but also gives hope to people that by resistance they can abolish it and make a utopian life in their own domain. The present paper sheds light on this despotism through symbols and other literary devices and also demonstrates through the same literary devices that if people want, it will not be impossible for them to overthrow that unjust power.

Keywords: Hate, Resistance, Subversion, Love, Hope and Desired Utopia

1. Introduction

The romantic period spans from 1785 to 1830. It was the period of turbulence since England had seen a great shift to itself. It was the period of French Revolution which promised the Rights of Man and it also aimed at releasing the political offenders from the jails. It was so significant because it showed the capability of people in handling and seizing the power from aristocrat.

This promise (also later revealed as a False false) promoted the felicity among English liberals and radicals because they sought for comfort, easiness of life and welfare. But unfortunately not only this revolution did not change the structure of England but it let the power be given to one group and deprive others from it. Furthermore, it was the time that the economic power was acquired by a few numbers of employers who could easily but violently ruled over the working class.

From another side, the English romantic poets were disenchanted by the false promise the government and churches provided. They also hated Napoleon since what he promised to his people was not more than a pack of lie. They knew that his character also had changed to a despot and an arch aggressor as Wordsworth in his Prelude mentions it; “And now, become oppressors in their turn, Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense...”(2001, p. 245).

However, later poets like Shelly and Blake among all romantic poets were the first ones who supported him not because of his false promises but due to the fact that they saw his revolutionized character who could change not only the France but also other countries. These poets’ imagination preoccupied with the idea of revolution because they contended that it could make a strike in the mind of the people especially the poor ones to discard their outworn and inherited custom and move them toward political, social and intellectual rest.

Here it is pointed out that Shelly’s aforementioned poem reveals his extremely desired aspiration, it means that he combines the power of love and beauty in a perfect way to guarantee the humanity’s bliss. He claims that the fire blame is bright enough for this happiness if the darkness of hatred ends and if a person grows his sense of revolution. In his poem “*England 1819*” he shows us that his principal theme is the subversion of power, to confiscate it from the hands of clerical institutions and governmental bureaucrats those who have looted people’s properties and their creed and defined them to their own benefits. This subversion of power is done through people’s act of love to each other, the kind of love which has to defeat tyranny and embrace the beauty. Thus the present paper tries to show a great poet like Shelly that he has been affected by the sense of romanticism to show his hatred against those who are in power and at the same time is ready to give hope to his people that if they have sense of revolution against the inequity, they can make their desired utopia.

2. Discussion

As a revolutionary, idealist and radical poet whose literary work is of a reformist, Shelly’s life was shaped by his seclusion from actual life to live in a higher world, a world that has been created by his poetry and to a great consideration is captivated by love, beauty and freedom. More, this romantic person was a nonconformist in his life and he was always bumptious and

intrepid to show his love of philosophy and scorn of orthodoxy. Although he was from a ruling class, his quick decision made him relinquish his birth right and adjust himself with the working class people. In most of his poems like *"Prometheus Unbound"*, *"Queen Mab"* and even the most notable one *"England 1819"* he asks the proletariat to revolutionize against unjust power and inequality. As Parks also believes Shelly in *Revolt of Islam* shows his extreme indignation by saying that equality is for both sexes, which he reinforces his idea simply that all humans are equal and that forms of organized government and religion are means by which the stronger minority represses and controls the weaker masses (2004, p. 3). Therefore, He was completely opposed to inequality and firmly announced that poetry can change the social abnormality to normality. In addition, what is more staved in his mind other than poetry itself is the power of hope; he always asks his people to cling to hope. He also believes that it is true that hope does not bring felicity and prosperity to people but it can show them the possible ways to the achievement of their aspirations. Thus hope is the key terms in his poems.

According to Sokhanvar (2008, p. 709) although Shelly did not give up his hopes for a millennial future, he now attributed the evil of the present society to human's own moral failures and grounded the possibility of radical social reform on a prior reform of the moral and imaginative faculties through the redeeming power of love. Though often represented as a simple minded doctrinaire, Shelly in fact possessed a complex and energetically inquisitive intelligence that never halted at a fixed mental position; his writings reflect stages in a ceaseless exploration.

What he wants to expatiate on in his poetry is his liberal ideas which accompany love and promise the upbeat future. His subjectivity is shown in each line of his poems. It's true that his poem shows the pain of the people imposed on them by bureaucrats and clerical institutions but instead he does not stop and continues by using the invective words just to prove that he is a riot as far as the law is unjust. He wants to abolish and eradicates the tyranny. The best pieces of his poetry portray it and invoke hope for the better future for great men to live in.

He strongly shows his protestation and accuses governmental bureaucracies, and clerical centers which have exercised restraint on human thoughts. He believes that by surmounting this obstacles man can become successful and bloom his own world. Finally what he wants is to hollow out the world from war, prejudice and unhappiness and blossom in the world the sense of idealism. The only thing he searches for is to change his people's mind in order not to be subjugated to the inhuman kings and inclement priests. In his opinion it's done when the sense of revolution flows in his people's body.

In the first lines of his sonnet Shelly gives a special report about the devastated condition of England. His political idealism comes to apex when he wants to use the invective terms to direct them toward the ruling class. This ruling class is not only for him the people who have money or they are rich but he directs his attention to governmental and religious centers which they all try to spoil people's life and loot their properties. Shelly knows that England is ruled by a person who is old enough and near to death that he cannot continue to be. This person whom shelly indicts is Gorge III who tries to stay in power by giving his seat to his

son and to let him rule the England. But this is here that Shelly believes that even his son is not capable enough to maintain the power because he is “*the dregs of dull race.*” (Shelly, 2004, p. 51). Moreover, Shelly believes that the son wants to be in the power because if he does not want to be, he will be like the “*starved*” and “*stabbed*” people. Therefore, Shelly believes that his society is sick and it has been corrupted because it is ruled by monarchs who neither see the problems of the people nor feel that people are starving.

In the middle lines Shelly’s anger intensifies and he does not hesitate to denigrate and excoriate government and its members. He believes that they are faithless and treacherous who cannot govern the country and even they struggle to manipulate the power at hand to their own privileges. He calls them “*leeches*” who are ready to feed on their people any moment they like. He also shows them his hatred more directly by calling them “*Christ less*” or “*Godless.*” He knows that these governmental staffs and clergy men use bible language to suppress people and make them obey to them. Thus, the imbalance of power is again demonstrated in the way that the clergymen have manipulated and controlled relationships between different groups of people who cannot mobilize to overthrow their power. Therefore, according to Foucault Power is not a commodity, a position, a prize, or a plot; it is the operation of the political technologies throughout the social body. The functioning of these political rituals of power is exactly what sets up the nonegalitarian, asymmetrical relations (Dreyfus, 1983, p. 185). However, while Shelly comes to anger with governmental staffs, he is rather disappointed with people who play the role of repressive regime to that kind of power. He wants them to be the active agents to defend their rights.

In the last lines Shelly boosts up the people’s mood, gives them hope and delights them by saying that if they try and accumulate their power, they can overcome their oppressors since they are in group. By mentioning “*army*” he concludes that these people need a good leader and a kind of poetry to boil their emotion which according to his Lyrical Ballad Wordsworth says (also edited by R.L. Brett 1963, P. xlvi) “[poetry] is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings [for the poet who versifies and makes his people act]”. Thus the leader may be the poet himself, and his poetry both help and direct the people like a “*phantom*” to “*burst*” and to bring them the happiness. And finally they get their own equality and liberty too and achieve the desired utopia which they have created for themselves.

3. Conclusion

Shelly as an unacknowledged legislator of the world has seen that world is packed with inequity and if the people around are not as careful as poets they must live in dour conditions, to accept the social injustice and foreclose their welfare. Being exhausted by the registration of the wrong legislations and also with the fabrications and mendacity of the rules and petitions of church, he calls for the people not to obey them but he wants them to be ready to revolutionize wherever they see and feel inequality and at last he invites all people to acquire the same amount of liberty to live well in their created desired utopia.

References

Dreyfus, H. L., Rabinow, P., & Foucault, M. (1983). *Michel Foucault, beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Parks, I. (2007). Shelly and Revolution. *English Association Bookmarks*, (62), 1-6. published by The English Association University of Leicester University Road Leicester LE1 7RH UK

Shelly, P. B. (2004). *Classical Poetry Series*. PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive.

Sokhanvar, J. (2008). *An Abridged Edition of The Norton Anthology of English literature* (1st ed., Vol. 1). Tehran, Iran: Eshtiaghe Noor.

Wordsworth, W. (2001). *The Prelude of 1805, in Thirteen Books* (DjVu ed.). Copyright c 2001 by Global Language Resources, Inc.

Wordsworth, W., Coleridge, S. T., & Brett, R. L. (1963). *Lyrical ballads / the text of the 1798 edition with the additional 1800 poems and the prefaces; edited with introduction, notes and appendices by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones*. London: Methuen and Ltd, 36 Essex Street, London, W.C.2.

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).