

Shelley's Imagery in His Poetry

GONG Xiao-hui

Southwest University, Chongqing, China

"Imagery" is a most frequently used poetic technique, which helps the poet to achieve desired poetic effect and to produce aesthetic pleasure. With no difference from other poets, Shelley's imagery has both typical features of British Romantic poetry and unique characteristic of his own. His imagery can be divided into four groups, namely, nature imagery, Italian imagery, mentalistic imagery, and reflective imagery according to their respective features. Percy Bysshe Shelley's nature imagery often combines description of the external world with expression of the inner world. He often displays the process of recreating or transforming the natural scene in his poems, thus allowing the reader to see the workings of their mind. His "Italian imagery" including the images of Italian land and architecture exerts much influence on Shelley's poetry, which can be seen from his letters and poems. His "Mentalistic imagery" finds expression in preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, in which Shelley announces that the imagery which he has employed can be found in many instances to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind. His "Reflexive imagery" recurrent throughout Shelley's poetry, draws much attention from literary critics. A close study of Shelley's imagery is helpful for us to appreciate his poetry and to recognize the beauty of his poetic imagination and also necessary for us to evaluate this poet both as a man and as an artist.

Keywords: Imagery, nature imagery, Italian imagery, mentalistic imagery, reflexive imagery

Introduction

As a Romantic poet, Shelley is famous for writing a large number of poems which often reflect his idea in political ideal, therefore, he is often regarded as a radical political poet. Many predecessors have studied this aspect of his poetry, so I do not intend to further analyze it. My major interest lies in his style in poetry, especially his imagery in poetry. In order to better understand Shelley's poetry, this thesis tends to give a close study of his unique use of imagery in poetry and analyze his imagery by taking examples from his poems.

Shelley's imagery may be divided into four groups, namely, nature imagery, Italian imagery, mentalistic imagery, and reflective imagery according to their respective features. He often displays the process of recreating or transforming the natural scene in his poems, thus allowing the reader to see the workings of their mind. He personifies the external world, and the scene in his poetry usually changes from material to spiritual or symbolic, ultimately losing its connection with the physical world. He tends to direct the reader's attention to some higher, intellectual meaning and to leave the material scene behind. With nature imagery, Shelley sought to express his inner world through the observers' response to or perception of the natural objects. For him, the natural object first appears in the natural world, then is gradually moved into his imagination, and finally becomes more abstract,

and attains a more complicated significance.

The second type is Italian imagery. In this section, the author attempts to describe how Italian land and architecture are embodied in his poetry and how the Italian landscape provokes his rich imagination and joy. His several visits to the English cemetery in Rome remained to be a fond memory in his mind and then resurfaced in his poems. Pastoral convention also exerted important influence on Shelley's description of the Ionian Isle. To further utilize such imagery, Shelley drew something moral from the architecture he had seen in the Greek city of Pompeii. Because Shelley never saw Greece, he visualized its cities in terms of the ruins of Pompeii.

The third type is mentalistic imagery: imagery drawn from the operation of the human mind. Firstly, this thesis would present a definition of mentalistic imagery through a comparison between traditional imagery and mentalistic imagery. Secondly, the nature and the philosophic basis of mentalistic imagery would be elucidated in this thesis. And then by using examples from *Prometheus Unbound*, the function of this peculiar device would be analyzed in this thesis, which contributes significantly to evaluating Shelley's success in realizing the expressive potential of this kind of reversed or inverted simile.

The fourth type is reflexive imagery. To begin with, this thesis attempts to explain what reflexive imagery is and then describes the feature of reflexive imagery in *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *The Witch of Atlas*.

Nature Imagery

Nature Imagery as a Contrast to Human Life

Frequently in Shelley's poetry, human life is described as an uncertain and ephemeral thing, in contrast with the nature of enduring beauty, which remains constant, as in the mountains and the sky, or continually renews itself, as in the plants.

Shelley often expresses the permanence and beauty of nature in the core images of his poems, which also carry its traditional associations with knowledge, life, and love.

Shelley's *Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples* is purely an expression of his personal feelings with neither metaphysical meditation on nature, nor the relationship between human and nature, nor any philosophical problems. It begins with a description of the beauty of Naples and its surroundings:

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,
The waves are dancing fast and bright,
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear
The purple noon's transparent might,
The breath of the moist earth is light,
Around its unexpanded buds;
Like many a voice of one delight,
The winds, the birds, the ocean floods,
The city's voice itself is soft like Solitude's.¹

Here the natural scene such as sun, sky, waves, moist earth, winds, and birds brings you the feeling of pleasure and enjoyment contrasted with the scene of the city (artificial, man-made) which often evokes the

¹ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). *Stanzas written in dejection, near Naples*. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 557).

feelings like solitude.

In Shelley's poem, the delightful scene is not taken as the background of his mind but set off by contrast of his situation. There is a tension between the scene and his feeling. The images of scene remain separated from the image of his mind.

Nature Imagery as Subjective Interpretation of Visible Scene

Shelley also describes the high peaks, waters, pines, and animals of the mountain, but his "awful scene" is presented more subjectively and imaginatively:

Far, far above, piecing the infinite sky,
Mont Blanc appears, -still, snowy, and serene-
Its subject mountain their unearthly forms
Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
And wind among the accumulated deeps,
Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
And wind among the accumulated steepes;
A desert peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
And the wolf tracks her there-how hideously
Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
Ghastly, and scared, and riven.²

Shelley's poem focuses more on his own response to and contemplation on the mountain scene and the nature scene appearing mainly as the medium through which the mind presents itself. His poem is not a visible manifestation of an inner experience but, on the contrary, a subjective and philosophical interpretation of a visible scene. As Drummond Bone pointed out, in this poem "the metaphorical explanation of the scene precedes the quasi-topographical description" (Bone, 1992, p. 125). The main impression Shelley's poem leaves in the reader's mind is the working image of the poet's mind itself.

Nature Imagery as a Stimulus for Thought

In many of Shelley's poems, when natural scenery is used as a stimulus for thought, nature is also often used as a theme. Shelley's *A Summer-Evening Churchyard* begins with a description of an evening scene in the churchyard and follows with a meditation on death. The scene itself serves as a stimulus for thought while conveying the poet's mood.

The wind has swept from the wide atmosphere
Each vapor that obscured the sunset's ray;
And pallid Evening twines its beaming hair
In duskier braids around the languid eyes of Day;
Silence and Twilight, unbeloved of men,
Creep hand in hand from yon obscurest glen.
.....
Thou too, aerial Pile! Whose pinnacles

² See Shelley, P. B. (1901). Mont Blanc, II. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 528).

Point from one shrine like pyramids of fire,
 Obeyest in silence their sweet solemn spells,
 Clothing in hues of heaven thy dim and distant spire,
 Around whose lessening and invisible height
 Gather among the stars the clouds of night.³

Shelley emphasizes stillness and silence and humanizes everything in nature to make nature animate: The evening lights are described as hairs, and the day has eyes; "silence" and "twilight" come out "hand in hand"; the grass is described as having sense perception, and the pinnacles as being able to "gather" stars. The relations among natural objects and phenomena are also in harmony.

Nature Imagery as Symbols

Imagery has a function of representing symbol meaning. Because briefness is one article principle of poetic work, the writing imagery in the poem is often transformed into a symbol denoting. Except in pure nature poem, the significance of nature imagery is not only nature writing.

West wind. In Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, the poet identifies himself with the wind instead of attributing his personality to the object. Here Shelley does not make the *West Wind* a human figure, but describes it as a power which is both physical and symbolical from the beginning. The first three parts of this poem describe the action of the *West Wind* on the land, in the sky, and on the ocean. The poet uses personification to describe the natural objects affected by the West Wind. The description of the action of the *West Wind* could even be taken as a metaphor for the action of a revolutionary force in the world.

The poet expresses his desire to become the natural objects blown by the *West Wind*, suggesting that he wants to share the strength and energy of the wind, or its symbolic power. This aspiration recalls in him his childhood, when he was closer to nature, and he also wishes that the wind could "lift" him from his painful life. Through these subjective responses, the West Wind acquires a purely personal significance, rather than being an influence on the natural world. For the speaker, the *West Wind* symbolizes strength and freedom as well as hope, and in last line of stanza IV, he identifies himself wholly with the wind, turning it into metaphor for his own "tameless" personality.

Bird. Shelley's *To the Skylark* seems to be mainly written in terms of the natural object; two thirds of the poem concentrates on portraying the image of the skylark. However, the poet does not describe the physical appearance of an actual bird—the bird is invisible. Instead, Shelley projects himself spiritually and emotionally into the bird, presenting the bird as something magnificent and unique, and as a symbol for abstract qualities such as inspiration, imagination, or expression, as critics have perceived (Angela, 1987, pp. 116-118).

Teach us, Sprite or bird,
 What sweet thoughts are thine:
 I have never heard
 Praise of love or wine
 That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.⁴

³ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). A summer evening churchyard. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 520).

⁴ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). To the Skylark. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 597).

The speaker contrasts the rapture of the bird with the sadness of the human being—"what love of thine own kind? What ignorance of pain?" he sighs that mortal life cannot match the skylark's: "Waking or asleep/Thou of death must deem/Things more true and deep/Than we mortals dream/Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?" (Shelley, 1901, p. 597) here Shelley attributes what he desires to the bird. In the last stanza, the poet identifies the skylark with a poet, and asks the bird to teach him how to write a joyful poem. Thus the bird becomes a representative of what the poet yearns for.

Shelley's Italian Imagery

Italian Land and Italian Imagery

As with many Romantic poets, nature is Shelley's source of inspiration. Natural objects always provoke his rich imagination and joy. Experience in nature inevitably brings new vitality to his poems. Traveling in Italy is no exception.

In 1818, he smelt the air of Italy for the first time and he was inspired by the natural scene there. It was easy to see that his first important poems written in Italy were mingled with Italian atmosphere.

This experience exerted great influence on the *Second Faun*'s description of "the pale faint water-flower that pave the oozy bottom of clear lakes and pools" (Shelley, 1901, p. 598); in "the sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear the sapless foliage of the ocean" (Shelley, 1901, p. 680) from *Ode to the West Wind*, and in two passages from poems whose titles explicitly connect them with Naples.

Shelley has been to Naples for only once (from November 29, 1818 to February 28, 1819), however, this experience exerted strong influence on his poems.

The Italian atmosphere is not only vaporous and dissolving, but also splendid, clear, and glorious, sometimes even like somewhat rigid precious stone, translucent and crystalline. Shelley's Italian atmosphere achieves a perfect balance between the softness and dissolving outlines of mist and the sharpness and sparkle of "elemental diamond".

Pastoral convention, not merely exemplified by the classical eclogues or pastoral elegies, but in English by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, *The Sad Shepherd*, and most of the early poems of Milton, shows important influence on Shelley's description of the Ionian Isle. Pastoral convention and the "light clear element" can prevent the fluidity of Shelley's imagery in *Epipsychidion* from degenerating into a complicated and undifferentiated flow for its simplicity and reserve.

The Architectural and Geometric Side of Shelley's Italian Imagery

In another great work of transformation and natural process *The Cloud*, an architectural structure is being assembled, destroyed, and reassembled. Both the cloud and the sky are described as the solid parts of a building. The peculiarity of the imagery is duplicated by the poem rules and forms, which combine rapidity of movement with inflexibility of rhythm.

The Cloud and *Ode to the West Wind* illustrate strikingly the architectural and geometric side of Shelley's imagery, which either forms a framework within which process can take place, or at other times, mingles with the process itself.

His travels in Italy were an important element to develop a tendency which had been little more than sprouting and conventional before. These experiences had much impact on Shelley's later poetry, such as the

architectural descriptions in *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, and *Ode to Liberty*, the fragmentary story, *the Colosseum*, and the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, which show Shelley's sensibility to this sort of imagery.

But the figurative uses of architecture such as those in *Ode to the West* and *The Cloud* are more important than the utility of architecture in its concrete form.

He wrote Peacock an equally breathless account of Pompeii, and two years recalled his impressions in the first stanza of the *Ode to Naples*. Since Shelley never saw Greece, he visualized the Greek cities in terms of the ruins of Pompeii, which can be evidenced by his description of Athens in the *Ode to Liberty*:

Athens arose; a city such as vision
Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
Of battlemented cloud, as in derision
Of kingliest masonry: the ocean floors
Pave it; the evening sky pavilions it;
Its portals are inhabited
By thunder zoned winds, each head
Within its cloudy wings with sun-fire garlanded,
A divine work! Athens, diviner yet,
Gleamed with its crest of column, on the will
Of man, as on a mount of diamond, set...⁵

The description of *Epipsychidion* witnesses Shelley's most successful effort to display something of what he saw in the ruins of Pompeii, Posidonia, and the Baths of Caracalla in his poetries.

The architecture of man and the architecture of Nature seem to form two sides of the same thing, and it is absurd to wonder whether the art of Nature mimics the art of man, or vice versa. It is somewhat like one thought in ancient China—the Heaven united with the man into one entity.

Mentalistic Imagery

A Definition of Mentalistic Imagery

One prominent characteristic of the imagery in Shelley's poems is that in many instances the images have been drawn from the operation of the human mind (thereafter named "mentalistic imagery").

We traditionally conceive a poem's imagery to present sensory analogues or concrete vehicles for the figurative expression of mental states and operations, but Shelley reverses the usual figurative function of imagery and makes a mental state or operation the vehicle in a figure whose tenor is sensory and physical.

In Shelley's notion of "Imagery...drawn from the operations of the human mind" (William, 1984, p. 255), imagery is no more limited than presenting to the picturable, or even to the sensuous. He suggests that mental actions and processes may as well be represented as imagery in poetry. Shelley elucidated this idea in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*. He recognized that in both rhetorical and non-rhetorical usage, the words image and imagery constantly went beyond the presumed boundary between the inner and the outer, the mental and the material.

⁵ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). *Ode to liberty*. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 599).

Philosophical Basis

In a purely theoretical facet, "Imagery...drawn from the operations of the human mind" might be understood as an evident stylistic metaphysical and linguistic conclusion of Shelley's essays.

The metaphysical basis is that Shelley holds that thoughts alone may be said to exist, then it certainly follows that words can signify "thought alone". In his essays, Shelley implies that all imagery must be drawn from mental operations, either from the "human mind" or from the "one mind" of which each individual human is "a portion" (Shelley, 1901, p. 478). It is obvious if we dip into Locke⁶'s ideas who had argued that even though the names of certain essential "ideas of reflection" depend upon sensory metaphors, these ideas themselves derive not from sense experience but from "reflection on the Operation of our Mind".

Mentalistic Imagery as Similes

Mentalistic imagery as reversal of usual relation. A representation of Shelley's mentalistic imagery is the reversal of the usual relation between the psychical and the physical, in consideration of the following sequence of similes spoken by the Chorus of Spirit in Act I of *Prometheus Unbound*:

As the birds within the wind,
As the fish within the wave,
As the thoughts of man's own mind
Float through all above the grave,
We make there, our liquid lair,
Voyaging cloudlike and unpent
Through the boundless element—⁷

In the first two lines, from "birds" and "fish" and to the six line "voyaging cloudlike", the Spirits compare the psychical and immaterial—in this instance themselves—to the physical and material, which is in conformity with our conventional use. But with the third simile, the Spirits compare themselves to what they in fact are—"the thoughts of man's own mind". Shelley extends and complicates the conventional process of allegorical comparison (in which thoughts might be presented as floating, or burning desire) until it turns back to itself in a figurative cycle. It seems to upset the usual distinctions between the mental and the material, even between tenor and vehicle.

Mentalistic imagery as reversed simile. Similes that reverse the expected relation between thought and matter or sensation are in enlightening relationship to conventionally organized similes or metaphors; tenors referring to the material world or to physical experience are intricately linked to psychical vehicles, that is to say, they are interpenetrating with each other. Three sequences from *Prometheus Unbound* will allow us to evaluate Shelley's success in realizing the expressive potential of this kind of reversed or inverted simile.

Questioning the Furies who come to torment him in Act 1, Prometheus himself seems to realize that these agents of Jupiter may also be projections of his own capacity for hate and revenge:

Horrible forms,
What and who are ye? Never yet there came

⁶ John Locke (1632–1704), British famous philosopher and political thinker in 17th century, whose greatest work is *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

⁷ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). *Prometheus unbound*. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 206).

Phantasms so foul through monster-teeming Hell
 From the all-miscreative brain of Jove;
 Whilst I behold such execrable shapes,
 Methinks I grow like that what I contemplate
 And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy.⁸

For their part, the Furies define themselves as a function of Prometheus's way of conceiving of them:

Third Fury
 Thou think'st we will live through thee, one by one,
 Like animal life; and though we can obscure not
 The soul which burns within, that we will dwell
 Beside it, like a vain loud multitude
 Vexing the self-content of wisest men—
 That we will be dread thought beneath thy brain
 And foul desire round thine astonished heart
 And blood within thy labyrinthine veins
 Crawling like agony.
 Prometheus
 Why, ye are thus now...⁹

Shelley's writing in the exchange between Prometheus and the Fury insists on presenting mental torment as physical and physical torment as mental—on treating the difference between mental and physical torment, one might say, as “merely nominal” (Shelley, 1901, p. 477). Such writing is extremely in need of the reader's ability and willingness to follow its complicated figurative movement. In this case, however, his compositional eccentricities are self evident and coherently rooted in his experiment in psychical allegory.

Mentalistic similes used circularly. In the following poetry, Shelley uses simile inharmonious and mysterious in its circular movement from “operations of the human mind” to “those external actions by which they are expressed”, and then back again to mental operations.

Not swifter a swift thought of woe or weal
 Darts through the tumult of a human breast
 Which thronging cares annoy—not swifter wheel
 The flashes of its torture and unrest
 Out of the dizzy eyes—than Maia's son
 All that he did devise hath featly done.¹⁰
 ...thou hast descended—
 Yes, like a spirit, like a thought...
 Like genius, or like joy which riseth up...¹¹

In a characteristic Shelleyan manipulate, the last of these similes contains within it another simile—the vehicle of one figure becomes the tenor of a subsequent figure—which in this instance completes the cyclical movement of the passage by returning to the imagery of physical nature with which it began:

...or like joy which riseth up

⁸ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). Prometheus unbound. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 220).

⁹ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). Prometheus unbound. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 221).

¹⁰ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). Prometheus unbound. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 218).

¹¹ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). Prometheus unbound. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 235).

As from the earth, clothing with golden clouds
The desert of our life.¹²

The internal similes in Asia's address have another characteristic: they compare a natural phenomenon to the intellectual or emotional effect it produces in the mind of the speaker. Shelley creates and sustains a necessary difference between the seasonal and psychical terms of his comparisons, even as those comparisons express the seasonal and the psychical as transformations of each other.

Mentalistic imagery embodied in landscape. In his poetry "Mont Blanc", Shelley presented the imagery of his own doubts and questions behind the description of Mont Blanc, which is a site of possible religious affirmation. Rather than beginning with a description of the landscape of the title, Shelley described the complex process of perception, which resembled a process occurring within the landscape of Mont Blanc. The things in the universe such as the river he views move through his mind; the imagery of perception resulting from it resembles the imagery of ravine. Nevertheless, in the following stanza, when Shelley was conscious of the metaphor of the environment, he immediately shifted his attention to meditation in examination of his own mind:

Thou art the path of that unresting sound
Ravine of Arve! and when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a vision deep and strange
To muse on my own various fantasy
My own, my human mind. (Shelley, 1901, pp. 35-39)

That Shelley embodied his mind in the landscape can be seen as a conventional Christian response to viewing Mont Blanc. The presence of Mont Blanc and the beauty and grandeur of the surrounding scenery become a proof of divinity, literally pronouncing the name of God, which is expressed by means of imagery of his mind. Mont Blanc has become a cultural symbol and a site of religious revelation. Shelley bore an idea that nature reflected the operation of the mind: Mysteries are as deep as the ravine and speculations are as high as the mountain. For Shelley, the mountain is a thing in the "eternal universe of things" and not only is the mountain ugly, but also is more revelatory of a demonic presence than a seriously divine one:

Reflexive Imagery

Reflexive imagery is recurrent throughout Shelley's poetry, from *Queen Mab* to *The Triumph of Life*. Here the term "reflexive" refers to phraseology in which an object or action is compared, implicitly or explicitly, to an aspect of itself, or is said to act under the conditions of an aspect of itself. The writer's own attention and the reader's mental action in reading the poem may be provoked by such phraseology. In the act of mind, something is perceived as both one thing and more than one thing, as both itself and something other than itself. Reflexive images often include or appear to be connected with literal physical reflection (or shadow), when they may appeal strongly to the visual imagination. The basis of the reflexive image is grammatical and syntactical, for example:

One seat was vacant in the midst, a throne,
Reared on a pyramid like sculptured flame,
Distinct with circling steps which rested on

¹² See Shelley, P. B. (1901). Prometheus unbound. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 240).

Their own deep fire...¹³

Here while "Deep fire" is separate from "circling steps" and capable of becoming the grammatical object of the phrase "rested on", at the same time inseparable from "circling steps", because what the steps rest on is an aspect of themselves.

In an inconstant world, there remains only a subject with the capacity of being its own object. The solitary mind is driven to project itself as its own narcissistic object. The poet's mind requires an infinite subject as its object, an "intelligence similar to itself". When the mind fails to limit itself to any finite being, it can do nothing but imagine its own object. The act is reflexive and has no completed object but itself.

Reflexive imagery includes "short-circuited comparisons", "self-inwoven similes", and other reflexive locutions. The poem with the most thoroughly inwoven reflexive imagery is *Alastor*. The reflexive imagery in *Alastor* is intrinsic to Shelley's ambivalent exploration of solipsism, radical idealism, and imaginative self-sufficiency. In *Alastor*, there is a complex dialectical relationship between the narrator's passionate but confusedly agitated nature-worship and the poet's passionate but solipsistic quest after a reality that lies outside nature. Reflexive imagery functions on one level within this dialectic relationship by enacting verbally the process through which the wandering poet's imagination projects the self as other.

In the first major crisis of the poem, the poet dreams erotically of a maiden whose "voice was like the voice of his own soul/Heard in the calm of thought" (Shelley, 1901, pp. 153-154):

At the sound he turned,
And saw by the warm light of their own life
Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil...¹⁴

Here the reflexive image appears not in a simile or comparison but in a labyrinthine adverbial phrase. The wandering poet's seeing the dream-maiden's limbs "by the warm light of their own life" means the same power is responsible for the life of those limbs and for the fact of their being "seen"—namely, the protagonist's imagination. The "light" with which the dream-maiden's limbs "glow" comes from the mind which creates and perceives them; the reflexive phraseology signals a self-inclosed psychological experience. Even the words "warm" and "glowing" suggest the qualities of the dreamer's imagination have been transferred to the projected self-reflection.

Another more difficult reflexive image appears earlier in this section of *Alastor*:
Wild numbers then
She raised, with voice stifled in tremulous sobs
Subdued by its own pathos.¹⁵

There is an emotional intensity which produces a kind of music ("tremulous sobs"), which may heighten the intensity. The reflexive phrase subdued by its own pain suggests the degree to which the dreamer's mind is determining the nature of what it projects. The pathos of the dream-maiden's song is a reflection of the wandering poet's own dilemma. The reflexive image here means a transference from the dreamer's mind to the reflected image of the self as sexual other whose desire intensifies itself. What the poet envisions is his own desire turning

¹³ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). The Revolt of Islam. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 106).

¹⁴ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). *Alastor*. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 16).

¹⁵ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). *Alastor*. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 19).

back on itself.

What the wandering poet sees in nature—in a wandering stream, is an image of his own mind, which in turn becomes the “type” of that natural image:

Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulphs,
Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course
Have each their type in me.¹⁶

Some of Shelley's reflexive images imitate verbally this impulse of the mind to invest nature with its own reflexive activity. When the protagonist is almost swallowed up in a vast whirlpool, he escapes from this whirlpool only to find himself upon “a placid stream” that conducts him to a “calm” at the center of the whirlpool. The stream flows into a cave where it is:

Closed by meeting banks, whose yellow flowers
For ever gaze on their own drooping eyes,
Reflected in the crystal calm. (Shelley, 1935, p. 25)

Here the reflexive locution intensifies an image of literal reflection; they give a proper verbal form to the state of complicated consciousness which the questing mind has driven itself into.

Conclusion

Most of Shelley's poetry reveals his philosophy, a combination of belief in the power of human love and reason, and faith in the perfectibility and ultimate progress of man. His belief that poetry can contribute to the moral and social improvement of mankind impacts his poems. His lyric poems are superb in their beauty, grandeur, and mastery of language. Although Matthew Arnold labeled him an “ineffectual angel”, 20th century critics have taken Shelley seriously, recognizing his wit and his gifts as a satirist, and his influence as a social and political thinker. Most of his poems combine the various elements of Shelley's genius in their most complete expression, and unite harmoniously his lyrically creative power of imagination and his “passion for reforming the world”.

Today Shelley is remembered as a poet of nature and wild raptures. Shelley tends to invoke nature as a sort of supreme metaphor for beauty, creativity, and expression. This means that most of Shelley's poems about art rely on metaphors of nature as their means of expression. Shelley sought the Divine in nature, having abandoned his own faith in a conventional deity; he studied other religions, worshipped the intellect as the Divine capability in individual men, and saw in nature and in each act of human emotion an expression of the sublimity he sought. For Shelley, nature represents a powerfully sublime entity which feels utter indifference for man.

Shelley was inspired by Italian nature scene. It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout his poems. In some works of transformation and natural process, an architectural structure is being assembled, destroyed, and reassembled. The peculiarity of the imagery is duplicated by the poem rules and forms, which combine rapidity of movement with inflexibility of rhythm. Shelley's tendency to see nature in terms of architectural and geometric shapes was strengthened or developed by

¹⁶ See Shelley, P. B. (1901). *Alastor*. In T. Hutchinson (Ed.), *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 21).

what he saw in Italy. The architecture of man and the architecture of Nature seem to form two sides of the same thing somewhat like one thought in ancient China—the Heaven united with the man into one entity.

Shelley's mentalistic image, in violating our usual distinction between the physical and psychic, the mental and the material, leads us to rethink the nature of human consciousness and knowledge. Mentalistic imagery is often used as simile. Shelley extends and complicates the conventional process of allegorical comparison (in which thoughts might be presented as floating, or burning desire) until it turns back to itself in a figurative cycle which upsets and seems to slack the usual distinctions between the mental and the material, even between tenor and vehicle. Shelley intensifies the moral and psychological contrast between vehicle and tenor.

Reflexive images often include or appear to be connected with literal physical reflection, when they appeal strongly to the visual imagination. What the poet envisions is his own desire for turning back on itself. Shelley's reflexive images imitate verbally the impulse of the mind to invest nature with its own reflexive activity. These reflexive figures take on a larger importance if we read the poem allegorically.

In a word, Shelley's imagery combines nature with human life, sometimes permeated with Italian atmosphere and architecture features. His imagery drawn from the operation of the human mind is also different from conventional poetic principle. His imagery in sonnets can express the political anger of "England in 1819" as well as the intensely personal message of "To Ianthe", or the philosophical meditateness of "Lift not the painted veil". All the imagery decorates his poetry and endows them with richer meaning, magnificent air, and limitless connotation.

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