

Shelley as a Romantic poet

Page No.:

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(continued)

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The reading Matthew Arnold charges that Shelley's poetry is vague and lacks clarity is not a plausible reason for undermining Shelley as a second rate poet. The reading of Eliot's 'The Waste Land' is considered difficult because it gives expression to complex ideas. Every poet cannot be a Pope or a Dryden. The language used by the poet solely depends upon the sensibility he wants to convey. Thus we cannot expect mathematical accuracy in the poetry of Shelley. Arnold's argument is unquestionably misdirected because he fails to make out proper equation between language and sensibility.

Actually Arnold looked back to Greek antiquity and looked for inspiration to Homer and Aristotle. Goethe's sanity, classical urbanity and love for architectonic qualities in art appealed him deeply. He was an advocate of grand style and he acknowledged Saint Beuve, the French critic, as his torch-bearer. He had in

his mind the purple patches which occurred so frequently in romantic poetry in general and Shelley's poetry in particular. He found Shelley unsatisfactory because Shelley did not fit in his Victorian ideal. Arnold preferred clarity, precision, simplicity and restraint and severity in expression, the qualities which were lacking in Shelley's poetry. He wanted poetry to moralize and it must necessarily be linked with life. He defined poetry 'as a criticising life'. He did not notice anything worth reading in the poetry of Shelley.

Arnold's remark that Shelley did not allow his muse to venture into the realm of rational thinking which is properly reflected in his poetry is misconceived as it was repugnant to Shelley's taste and temperament. A. C. Bradley in his book Oxford lectures on poetry came to the rescue of Shelley and said that 'Obscurity ^{Everywhere} cannot be expressed in clear terms' in poetry. I. A. Richards too appreciated Shelley's poetry despite its vagueness and obscurity. He found in Shelley's poetry some thing substantial, a prophetic move and symbols which were quite apt and suggestive. It is a fact that Shelley was

not uncertain or confused while expressing his ideas. His poetry seems to be vague because one fails to reach to the height at which Shelley wrote. He was the most philosophical of all the Romantic poets. He wanted to give expression to his Platonic ideas in his poetry. He derived the material for his poetry from Greek mythology. One cannot keep pace with his poetry unless one is fully equipped with Platonic ontology and Greek mythology. Platonic or transcendental philosophy is itself very difficult to understand. It is an ailment for which no medicine has been suggested. Actually Shelley's poetry presents an amalgam of variegated influences - philosophical, ontological and mythological.

C.M. Bowra made a full-length study of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound and praised it in high-flown works. Bowra insisted that Shelley created a metaphysical world of his own. The range of Shelley's poetry is wide. One can appreciate Shelley's poetry only when one is conscious of his poetic domain and is ready to appreciate his abstractions and vague analysis. What is commonly branded as Shelley's obscurity, in view of Bowra, is not obscurity but a natural outcome of his philosophy.

Therefore,