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# MIDDLE FLIGHT

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A National Level Peer-Reviewed Journal

**SPECIAL VOLUME:**  
The Wonderful Year 1816 – A Bicentenary Appraisal

*DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH*

**S. S. MAHAVIDYALAYA  
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## *Editorial*

The objective of a journal, for that matter any meaningful literary endeavour, is as much to look back as to look forward. Looking back is important because it establishes linkages. Exploring continuities should be the life-breath of any advancement of learning. The fifth volume of *Middle Flight* has focused on a particular year which witnessed the birth of so varied undying literature. Given the long life-span of English literature, a year is but a moment and literature records all but moments, rare and spare. What a milestone is to a traveller from a distant land, years are to the chroniclers of life. The justification behind the commemoration of a particular year or some events around that year or an author is that the occasion sparks some meaningful thoughts and communications. The avowed aim of this special volume on “The Wonderful year 1816: A Bicentenary Appraisal” is to inculcate among the academic community renewed interest in such authors as Coleridge, Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Lord Byron, P.B. and Mary Shelley and Keats. The year 1816 had been significant in their literary careers, and saw the ‘birth’ of some of their celebrated works. 1816, known as “the year without a summer” throughout Europe (because of a cloudy and stormy weather, crop failures and epidemics that followed the 1815 volcanic eruption of Tambora) inspired not only such dark, gothic masterpieces as ‘The Vampyre’ and *Frankenstein*, but also became a great impetus to Romantic landscape painting as well: William J. Turner and John Constable painted some of their ‘apocalyptic’ works, featuring the smoky and blood-red sky after the explosion, or a dark and gloomy atmosphere looming large over the earth. We have thought of commemorating such magnificent works of pictorial art alongside the literary masterpieces, by choosing Constable’s *Weymouth Bay with Approaching Storm* for the cover illustration of this volume.

Whether this volume will fulfil the aforesaid objective is a matter of conjecture, but what is unambiguously true is that it provides a platform for getting together some teachers and research scholars who are against ‘erasure’ of the ‘moments’ of the past and who believe that the capacity to turn eyes occasionally from the ‘New love’ (New Literatures, we mean, which has been sweeping away everything else on its way) to the ‘long loved mistress’ is a healthy sign. Metaphors aside, we were apprehensive as to whether our choice of such a narrowed focus on a specialized area would be approved by the academia. Hopefully, cordial responses from the contributors have dispelled that apprehension. We feel like acknowledging our debt to Dr. Joyjit Ghosh, Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, Vidyasagar University for giving us a chance to publish his invaluable article. The paper contributed by Prof. Satyaranjan Das is a modified version of the paper presented in “John Keats: Poet-physician, Physician-Poet” conference organized by Keats Foundation at London. Special thanks to Prof. Das for preferring our ‘call’ to the lure of an international journal where he could have easily published his paper. We confess that we couldn’t resist the temptation of re-publishing Rob Harle’s wonderful paper on the recent ‘find’ of a hitherto unpublished political poem by P. B. Shelley.

The arrangement of papers, so varied in their scope and insights, has been a matter of serious consideration. In doing so, we have sought to maintain chronology. Considering the absence of Wordsworth (from the present volume), Coleridge claims to be placed at first in terms of seniority; afterwards come Jane Austen, Byron, P.B. Shelley, Polidori, Keats and Mary Shelley. The only paper we have received on Charlotte Brontë (born in 1816), has been placed at last. We admit that some papers included in this volume are differently cited, and two of them do not directly address the year 1816, although they focus on related topics. However, since our honourable reviewers have recommended them, we are pleased to include them as well. The endeavour that goes into the making of this volume would be somewhat fruitful if the papers included here prove to be of any interest to the readers and academicians. Artless thanks to our honourable members on the Advisory and Editorial board, reviewers, colleagues, students and above all to Dr. Dipak Kumar Bhuniya, Principal, Sukumar Sengupta Mahavidyalaya, Keshpur, Paschim Medinipur. Without his generous patronage the journal would not have come out. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year in advance to all concerned with the wellbeing of *Middle Flight*.

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## The Road to Xanadu after 200 years: A Measure of the “Pleasure-dome”

Prodosh Bhattacharya

**Abstract:** Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’, 200 years after its publication, still continues to baffle the critical attempts to measure it. The road to Xanadu is labyrinthian, and travelers who undertake the journey is left to wonder at the pleasure dome, realizing that it is impossible to say any final word about this ‘miracle of rare device’. The present paper proposes to frame certain questions about the very processes of entering a hermeneutic practice which may lead today’s readers to think anew of the masterpiece, ever-mystified in its conceptualization through ‘symphony and song’, trying to locate the ‘spiritual in art’ and measure the ‘natural’ against the ‘transnatural’.

**Keywords:** ‘Kubla Khan’, spirituality, artistic agency, transnaturalism

In the long road to Xanadu, Prospero’s polemic quite wears its heart out :

“ We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.” (*The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene I)

However an anecdotal indulgence of the critical sojourn to Coleridge’s Xanadu, brings forth the image of travelers in labyrinthian ways trying to seek through their critical apparatus the essential hermeneutics of what Coleridge famously declared as ‘the willing suspension of disbelief’. While some sought to be mystified in the transnatural impetus of the notion, yet others shone in the armory of cognitive science and its affiliated categories to unravel the distinct psychic moorings of the idea and its operations. The resultant trajectory of such analytical points and counterpoints has ultimately brought out the very banal yet contextual question of the manner of approaching ‘Kubla Khan’ and its value as a literary work 200 years after its first publication in 1816.

While to pursue with the anecdote might seem a juvenile critical endeavour, to carry forth its spirit and its relevance for the Academia finds a testimony in a passage from T.S Eliot’s ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’(1919) –

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order [...] will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.”(Eliot 23-24)

To account for Coleridge’s reverie inspired poem from a vantage point of 200 years presents this specific challenge of locating what has been canonically understood as a specimen of poetry invested in the conceptions of poetic imagination and creativity and the understanding of identity in the Romantic Age or period of Romanticism in Literature. Such an effort doesn’t necessarily amount to a decontextualisation of Coleridge’s poetic oeuvre but a constant and sustained recontextualising of his literary output in terms of its relation to fields of philosophy, history, culture and politics.

A significant and crucial point to begin with, is the history of Kubla Khan’s publication in 1816 and the Preface attached to it by Coleridge, testifying the source of the poem and the manner of its inception-

“In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchas's Pilgrimage : "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall." The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things , with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awakening he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter!...Yet from the still surviving recollections in his mind, the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to him.”( Coleridge 51-54)

A significant problematic and critical debate surrounding Kubla Khan is focused on the viability of this prefatory note to the design and structure of the poem and more importantly to the concern of the poem's completeness that has been haunted by Coleridge's self-induced subtitle to Kubla Khan as 'A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment'. A considerable and important point is raised by Irene. H. Chayes in the essay "“Kubla Khan” and the Creative Process” –

In any critical consideration of "Kubla Khan," the chief stumbling block is likely to be the exact relation of stanzas one and two to stanza three. Between these two unequal parts of the poem there disjunction, like that between the "before" and "after" sections headnote, and there may still be a temptation to emphasize either at the expense of the other. But the two parts are dependent on each other and on the order in which they appear, and in their different ways both are concerned with the creative process. (Chayes 5)

The creative process that engulfs Kubla Khan's composition is best explicated in the philosophical expositions of the seminal *Biographia Literaria*, in chapter xiii, where Coleridge catalogues the notion of Primary and Secondary Imagination and its distinction from fancy. To consider Kubla Khan in a literal sense as a delineation of Coleridge's prefatory prose would be a misappropriation of the very design of the Preface in the structure of the poem. Kubla Khan is not merely its' poet's attempt to finish what was given to him in a dream. To extenuate Kubla Khan in such a paradigm would be to treat it as a project under the mnemonic trigger of fancy and as such be the very testament of Hartley's associationism which Coleridge sought to dispel. The very presence of the phrase 'caverns measureless to man' and 'sunless sea' in the opening stanza is a standing testimony to the same.

The comprehension of the structure and mechanism of Kubla Khan gains cogency when considered in lieu of what P.B Shelley says in his *Speculations on Metaphysics*-

Thoughts, or ideas, or notions....differ from each other, not in kind, but in force. It has commonly been supposed that those distinct thoughts...which are called real...are totally different in kind from those...such as hallucinations, dreams and the ideas of madness. No

essential distinction between any one of these ideas, or any class of them, is founded on a correct observation of the nature of things.(Shelley 59)

Perhaps what has been frequently referred to as the supernatural in Coleridge's poetry is more a category of the agency of the mind's workings more than a characteristic steeped in mythology. To this extent the relation between the three stanzas of the poem is also an exploration of the relation between mind and nature, and to what extent does the living power or the theosophical nature of Imagination modulate the ontology of the human mind. One goes on to find in Coleridge's poems on mystic experiences a burgeoning of a Romantic self that is not necessarily static as the canonical status of most Romantic literature reveal, in light of a larger cultural and historical fact of a prominent European imperialism that had set forth the Enlightenment principle of Cartesian subjectivity into motion in its formation of the discourses about the Orient.

In spite of this acknowledgement, Coleridge is not exempted from the larger political and historical dimension of what Edward Said was to characterize as Orientalism. It is recalled from Coleridge's own prefatory revelations that he had been reading *Purchas Pilgrimage* and the description of Kubla Khan's kingdom had transformed in his opiate dream into a vision of a palace and the garden surrounding it. Jalal Uddin Khan in his article " " Kubla Khan": A New Historicist Study" speaks of the intellectual contact between the West and Asia, of its thought, studied in detail in J.J Clarke's *Oriental Enlightenment*, and the extent to which bodies of English, French and German Literature of Eastern origin dealt with the influence of political, philosophical and religio-cultural practices of those regions especially, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Arabic. The imagery in the first few lines of the poem is contained historiographically in the fourth book of *Purchas Pilgrimage* , about the rise and fall of the Mongol Khans, and their empire as the other of Western civilization. Also the reference to the sacred river Alph and its surrounding terrain finds echoes in the seventh book of *Purchas Pilgrimage* which describes the Ethiopian empire with further references to Abyssinian associations, the great 'Queen of Sheba' and the holy Nile. Jalal Uddin Khan goes on to observe-

Coleridge was fascinated by James Bruce's popular *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790)..... Citing the catalogue of details in Bruce such as thick woods and cedar groves, which seemed a cover from which savage animals might jump out at any moment, hills with cliffs and caves, and downhill slopes, John Livingston Lowes argues, in his famous *The Road to Xanadu*, that Coleridge adopted many striking images from Bruce and that his Xanadu resembles the area around the fountain from which the Nile begins, the Nile itself being the equivalent of the Alph ("Kubla Khan Sources- Bruce" n. pag.)." (Khan 101-102)

The long and endless citations of Kubla's oriental traces remains innumerable, and what is of comprehensive critical importance is an exploration of the very logic of transnatural or liminal nature of the Romantic self that becomes central to Coleridge's theory of poetry and Imagination. The locus of the logic lies in both a historical and political dimension of the conditions that gave rise to this poem's vision and also a certain metaphysics and its relevance to ethics and freedom of the creative faculty of a poet as artist.

The movement of the poem is marked by a gradual surfacing of contrasting imageries after the initial visual and circular, symmetrical dimension of Kubla Khan's kingdom. The structured and bounded nature of "twice five miles of fertile ground" girdled by walls and towers, with forests "enfolding sunny spots of greenery" is in the tradition of Romantic landscape poems. However it immediately is overpowered by the image of the 'mighty fountain' that sprang from what Coleridge describes as a 'deep romantic chasm'. Compared to the image of Kubla's pleasure dome and the hilly forests, the chasm is dark, covered with cedar and has the contrasting association of being a savage place under the haunting

influence of moon. The figure of a woman wailing for her demon lover has brought in many supernatural associations, and in the post-Freudian era a certain anthropomorphic understanding of nature and its process. The contrasting image of the dome and the cave, of the deep chasm and the momentary fountain that flung up with pieces of rocks and earth generates the symbolic language of psycho-sexual union. However what seems contextual in terms of the poem's progressive mindscape is the sense of unity to which it strives in the post-coital cosmology. The river becomes the embodiment of the flow of the imaginative power, or 'esemplastic' power as Coleridge terms it, through the symbology of the 'shadow of the dome' floating midway between the waves that has been extracted out of the received mnemonic vision of the pleasure dome. The poem hereon doesn't describe the originary vision but rather its effect on the psyche of a mind in activity.

In "“Kubla Khan” and the Creative process” Irene .H. Chayes points out –

The fountain in "Kubla Khan" carries no convenient metaphorical tag, but by its action and effects as well as by its imagery it would fulfill both conditions of the definition. In the "finite mind" of dreamer, where a new world in miniature is soon to be created out of the materials of the vision itself, it is a ready analogue of the measurable fount" of divinity; for good reason, the place in which rises is called "holy and enchanted" and the river that falls from "sacred." And since the ultimate product of the creative process that is going on in the dream-vision is to be a visual image, hailed by exclamation, the "living power" of the fountain would plausibly be the "prime agent" in the activity of perception that is going on, least subliminally, during the dream. For although the dreamer's presence can only be inferred, the tone of wonder and the vividness of the description make the scene in the chasm a rudimentary aesthetic revelation which prepares the way for the closer relation between perception and creation that is to come in stanza.(Chayes 10)

The precise point at which this binary amalgamation of the visual symbols seeks a transgression, a historical consciousness intervenes-

And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The following lines echo the wisdom that the moral authority and power of Kubla Khan is ephemeral, much like the rise and fall of the French Revolution and the consequent promise and downfall of the Napoleonic regime. It is this precise testament of failure embedded in the historical consciousness, that urges the poet of Kubla Khan to seek into the inner recesses of his soul, the inspiration of a unified and indivisible ethos. And in his search what the poet uncovers is not his egocentric Cartesian self, but rather a liminal othered identity where the subject and the object coalesce in realization of a certain sublime truth in experience, the nature of which is theosophical, transcendental and essentially unifying.

In light of this theme Charles Mahoney in a review of Gregory Leadbetter's work *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* opines-

The transnatural necessarily names something transgressive, something beyond nature as well as beyond the law.... Most importantly, Coleridge's sense here that the transnatural is experienced "not as one given me by any other being, but as an act of my own Spirit". This sense of agency is critical to understanding what is for Coleridge, the transgression, the exhilaration and the creative energy of the transnatural" (Mahoney 246)

Kubla Khan's final stanza doesn't in anyway give a determined solution to this holistic experience of a non-thetic self. It shifts the tumultuous mechanism and process of a mind in creation to a sustained

image of poetic inspiration and also what in his own words he prescribes as 'secondary imagination' – an echo of the primary imagination, coexisting with the conscious will, identical with the primary in kind of its agency, differing in degree and mode of operation.

The drive to build the dome floating midway between the waves, represents in neuroscience and psychology vestibular events of the brain. But perhaps more important than the anatomical details of a mind at borders of conscious and unconscious, is the mechanism by which such a notion of imagination and creativity charts out the field of an artist's work. To dissolve, diffuse, dissipate in order to recreate while essentially vital, also exists as an ethical imperative of the spiritual in art. While post-Marxist, and post-structuralist conventions of our age does put to question the nature of this spiritual element in art, and the monolithic nature of a supposed bias of German Transcendental thought in Coleridge's philosophy of poetry, we are in the academia faced with the challenge of seeking a relevance of Kubla Khan in our contemporary critical milieu.

The vision of the Abyssinian maid, singing of paradise and the very auditory conditional that remains central to the self-othering transcendence of a poetic persona under the living and directive power of the eternal act of creation in the 'Infinite I Am'. To Orientalism and its studies Coleridge does lend an image of a transformed Shaman-poet, a poet in the process of becoming complete in divinity-

And all who heard should see them  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

It is hinted that such a disposition of a godlike poetic persona would only be possible if the poet could revive the symphony of the song sung by the Abyssinian maid, a song that culturally symbolizes paradise as the ultimate embodiment of perfect creation. The much talked about mystic quality of the poem lies in its idea of rebuilding a vision and its essence through the agency of sound or auditory impulses. It is this shift in sensibility that along with the prose versions in both the preface and the Crewe manuscript led to the debate regarding its fragmentary nature. However to read into Coleridge's apologia in prose a subtle trick of outlaying the very idea of fragmented consciousness as a necessary illusion only opens up Kubla Khan to Coleridge's wider perspective of fragmentariness as the very pattern and mechanism in which poetry breathes and seeks its energy, now in rest and now in motion. Moreover the primacy of sound as a temporally mediated vibration itself makes way for a critique of the phantasmic nature of visuality, leading to a notion of the spiritual and sublime nature of harmonious sound, as vibration and thus energy. Coleridge's own exposure to Oriental religion and spirituality through Schelling and other German scholars, is reflected in his own seeking for the elemental vibrations in poetry as a continuous negotiated utterance at the threshold of the material and immaterial, of feeling and understanding, of conscious and unconscious, of the visible and the invisible. As a poet then he seeks to partake of the cosmological spirit in words, and not merely to engage the dialectics of form and content.

Jalal Uddin Khan's views regarding the final self-fashioned divinity of the poet as a god and king is enlightening-

Purchas goes on describing, among other strange uses of magic, the "marvelous" yet "devilish art" and the deceiving "holiness" and "sanctity" of the necromancers, who could make it possible for the rain to fall around the palace of Kubla Khan without touching it and for him to drink from

the bottles flying through the air. Clearly, all this, conceived in oxymoronic terms, is exploited by Coleridge in, the last part of the poem, which in its equally oxymoronic details- such as the longing of the poet to build exactly the type of dome that resembles Kubla's in the air, magic circles woven around him, who has drunk "the milk of paradise" and the sense of the audience in "holy dread"- is full of echoes from Purchas. The sunny dome with the "caves of ice" that the poet aspires to build in the air is perhaps symbolic of his autonomous or willed imaginative creations of great beauty and "a circle round him thrice" perhaps symbolizes the willful or self-imposed isolation of the romantic poetic genius" ( Khan 90-91)

Perhaps some of the lingering questions that remain at best as ones that posit the frame of critical reference of Kubla Khan in its 200<sup>th</sup> year are – a) Can one come out of the obvious nature of the romantic egotism of a self-imposed isolation, to look at a transnatural, moving identity that seeks its loci in the unity of a collective? And to what extent can the notion of spiritual in art be inclusive of the ethics of artistic creation and name its agency? and b) in the significant rise of environmental issues and its relevance in multiple disciplines, can an ecocritical perspective of Coleridgean semantics of Nature be sustained or must a certain deifying hermeneutics follow the post-anthropocenic world?

The possible trajectory of the latter question has already sought the corruption in nature as depicted in Coleridge's poetry as a result of human activities enveloped in the false rationalizing domain of mythological reasoning, and hereby opens a separate discourse of literary criticism beyond the purview of the present article. The answer to the first question may not and rather should not lie directly in Kubla Khan, but rather in its *modus operandi*- "the willing suspension of disbelief" as a model of ethical praxis against the seemingly inscrutable metaphysics of violence of institutionalized systems of cognition, both in religious and secular domains.

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## ***Christabel* and Intertextual Imagination : From Coleridge to Keats**

Pritha Kundu

**Abstract:** Published in 1816 but already in circulation among the fellow-poets and critics since 1800, Coleridge's *Christabel* inspired a curious chain of intertextuality. Sir Walter Scott was influenced by its incantatory rhythm, which he reproduced in his 'Lay of the last Minstrel'. Byron, who never stopped critiquing the earlier-generation Romantics, for political, literary and personal reasons, however nurtured a comparatively moderate attitude towards Coleridge, and he took a significant role in the publication of *Christabel*. Three individuals as different as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron came under a strange spell of intertextuality, in connection to the poem, *Christabel*. Later, Keats' poem 'The Eve of St. Agnes' betrays many a signs of poetic affinities, in its literary indebtedness to both *Christabel* and Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. In this short and unassuming article, without any attempt to provide some new and enlightening critical and theoretical insights, a simple attempt has been made to bring together some interesting issues regarding the chain of intertextuality created around *Christabel*.

**Keywords:** *Christabel*, *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Eve of St. Agnes*, intertextuality

Sir Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* was published in 1805. In his 1830 Introduction to the poem, he recounts that he could not find a proper verse form for his first major narrative poem until he heard John Stoddart recite Coleridge's *Christabel* (then unpublished, but in circulation among the literary friends). "The singularly irregular structure of the stanzas, and the liberty which it allowed the author to adapt the sound to the sense," felt Scott, "seemed to be exactly suited to such an extravaganza as I meditated" (Scott, *Complete Works*, qtd. Lau 120). Coleridge and some of his friends feared that Scott would claim 'originality' on this account, which might have been a serious blemish on the uniqueness of *Christabel*, which was yet to be published. But Scott did not have such an intention: though he was late in officially acknowledging his debt to *Christabel*, in a meeting with the Wordsworths, he candidly spoke of the charm he found in the verse-form of *Christabel*, how he assimilated its peculiar rhythm into his unconscious creative sympathy. Such an admission privately made renders Scott in a role similar to *Christabel*, who, "'o'er-mastered by [a] mighty spell,' is moved by 'unconscious sympathy' 'passively [to] imitate' her enchantress" and "invests . . . Coleridge's verse with the power of folk spells", argues Margaret Russett (85-86).

Again, Scott may be freed from the charge of having any intention to damage Coleridge's claim to originality, considering that it was he who recited the poem to Byron. Since the publication of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, Byron was a proclaimed antagonist to his senior literary colleagues. In *Don Juan*, he said of Coleridge:

And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing,  
But like a hawk encumbered with his hood, —  
Explaining Metaphysics to the nation —  
I wish he would explain his Explanation. (*Don Juan*, Dedication, 2)

As is evident from the quoted passage, Byron's ground of criticism against Coleridge is the question of unintelligibility. To Byron, Coleridge's metaphysics is 'muddling', and as difficult to grasp as Wordsworth's 'physic'. In a similar fashion, he degrades Coleridge's enthusiasm for his philosophic writings :

Mr. Coleridge may console himself with the "fervour, — the almost religious fervour" of his and Wordsworth's disciples, as he calls it. If he means that as any proof of their merits, I will find him as much "fervour" in behalf of Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcote as ever

gathered over his pages or round his fireside. He is a shabby fellow, and I wash my hands of and after him. ( Moore 368)

For all his attacks on Coleridge, Byron did have a favourable opinion of him as well. They exchanged correspondence through letters; later they also met face-to-face and Byron helped Coleridge's *Remorse* to be performed at Drury Lane. And he had a great admiration for *Christabel*, from which he used to quote lines freely often, to himself and in his friendly circles. "I won't have any one sneer at 'Christabel' ; it is a fine wild poem" – says he. (*Letters and Journals*, III, 356)

The communication between Byron and Coleridge on the subject of 'Christabel' started through the kind offices of Scott, who recited it to Byron. In October 1815, Byron writes to Coleridge , expressing his admiration of *Christabel*:

Last spring I saw Wr. Scott. He repeated to me a considerable portion of an unpublished poem of yours – the wildest and finest I ever heard in that kind of composition. The title he did not mention, but I think the heroine's name was Geraldine. At all events, the 'toothless mastiff bitch' and the 'witch Lady', the description of the hall, the lamp suspended from the image, and more particularly of the girl herself as she went forth in the evening – all took a hold on my imagination which I never shall wish to shake off. I mention this, not for the sake of boring you with compliments, but as a prelude to the hope that this poem is or is to be in the volumes you are now about to publish. I do not know that even 'Love' or the 'Antient Mariner' [sic] are so impressive – and to me there are few things in our tongue beyond these two productions. (*Letters and Diaries*, 316-17)

Coleridge replied generously, thanking Byron for his kind interest in *Christabel* and agreed to send him a copy of the poem. After reading it, Byron realised that he has unconsciously borrowed from it in *Siege of Corinth* and offers to omit the lines. When the poem is published, Byron retains the lines but offers the explanatory note :

I must here acknowledge a close, though unintentional, resemblance in these twelve lines to a passage in an unpublished poem of Mr Coleridge, called "Christabel." It was not till after these lines were written that I heard that wild and singularly original and beautiful poem recited: and the MS. of that production I never saw till very recently, by the kindness of Mr Coleridge himself, who, I hope, is convinced that I have not been a wilful plagiarist. The original idea undoubtedly pertains to Mr Coleridge, whose poem has been composed above fourteen years. Let me conclude by a hope that he will not longer delay the publication of a production, of which I can only add my mite of approbation to the applause of far more competent judges.

– Byron, note to lines 465-476 of *Siege of Corinth*

Later on, Byron wrote another letter to Coleridge, dated October 27, 1815 (*Letters*, 1899, iii. 228). This letter clearly shows that Byron sincerely wished to clarify his unconscious borrowings from *Christabel*.

... the enclosed extract from an unpublished poem . . . was written before (not seeing your Christabelle [sic], for that you know I never did till this day), but before I heard Mr. S[cott] repeat it, which he did in June last, and this thing was begun in January, and more than half written before the Summer. (*Letters and Journals*, vol iii. 228)

With a readerly interest, we may compare the extract from *Christabel* with the stanzas from Byron's *Siege of Corinth* which appears to resemble the former. Here are the lines from *Christabel*, Part I :

She kneels beneath the huge Oak Tree,  
And in Silence prayeth She.  
The Lady sprang up suddenly,  
The lovely Lady, Christabel!

It moan'd as near, as near can be,  
 But what it is, she cannot tell—  
 On the other Side it seems to be  
 Of the huge broad-breasted, old Oak Tree.

.....

Hush, beating Heart of Christabel !  
 Jesu Maria, shield her well !  
 She folded her Arms beneath her Cloak,  
 And stole to the other side of the Oak.  
 What sees she there?

There She sees a Damsel bright,  
 Dressed in a silken Robe of White,  
 That shadowy in the moonlight shone:  
 The Neck, that made that white Robe wan,  
 Her stately Neck and Arms were bare;  
 Her blue-vein'd Feet unsandal'd were;  
 And wildly glitter'd here and there  
 The Gems entangled in her Hair.  
 I guess, 'twas frightful there to see  
 A Lady so richly clad, as she,  
 Beautiful exceedingly!

'Mary mother, save me now!'  
 Said Christabel, 'And who art thou?' (lines 37-68)

This is the crucial moment when the heroine meets another female – a mysterious one, a visitor from some 'other' world. In Byron's narrative, the hero Alp unexpectedly meets a dazzling lady, who appears to have something uncanny about her as well:

There he sate all heavily,  
 As he heard the night-wind sigh.  
 Was it the wind, through some hollow stone,  
 Sent that soft and tender moan?  
 He lifted his head, and he looked on the sea,  
 But it was unrippled as glass may be;  
 He looked on the long grass—it waved not a blade;  
 How was that gentle sound conveyed?  
 He looked to the banners—each flag lay still,  
 So did the leaves on Cithaeron's hill,  
 And he felt not a breath come over his cheek;  
 What did that sudden sound bespeak?  
 He turned to the left—is he sure of sight?  
 There sate a lady, youthful and bright!  
 He started up with more of fear  
 Than if an armed foe were near.  
 'God of my fathers! what is here?  
 Who art thou? [...].'  
 (lines 465-476)

Generically speaking, *Christabel* is modelled on a dark sort of medieval romance, full of supernatural and magical charm, whereas *The Siege of Corinth* is a historical narrative poem. Despite such obvious differences in their setting and thematic pattern, there are similarities in the ways both poets handle the gothic, the uncanny and the mysterious. The gothic suspense of *Christabel* appealed to Byron's own vision of 'dark romanticism'. Upon reading it with much enthusiasm, he also

arranged for its publication. Coleridge and Byron met in person on April 10, 1816, where Byron again brought up the subject of *Christabel* and encouraged Coleridge to publish it. Through Byron's persuasion, two days later – on April 12, John Murray came to visit Coleridge. The publication of *Christabel* and 'Kubla Khan' along with 'The Pains of Sleep' was settled.

*Christabel*, despite its harsh reception by most of the reviewers upon its publication, continued to have a great influence on the imagination of the younger Romantics. During their stay at Vila Diodatti, one evening Byron was reciting aloud from *Christabel*, when suddenly P. B. Shelley shrieked and ran out of the room. As John Polidori records in his diary: "He was looking at Mrs. Shelley, and suddenly thought of a woman he had heard of – a woman who had eyes instead of nipples, which, taking hold of her mind, horrified him." (qtd. Ford 99). The idea seemed to have made an impact on Mary Shelley as well, as she discusses the relation between Frankenstein and his madly ambitious in terms of a "possession". As Jennifer Ford points out, much discussion has been made on the possible sources of Shelley's hallucination which made him imagine eyes on Mary's breast, but what is of equal intrigue in terms of Coleridge's influence upon the group of the younger Romantics, is the conception of Geraldine as a witch, or someone capable of 'possessing' another soul.

Another celebrated text of the Romantic period which may claim some kind of intertextual connection with *Christabel*, is Keats' *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1819). *Lamia* and 'La belle dame sans merci' also share certain thematic associations with *Christabel*, but none is so closely reminiscent of *Christabel* as *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Keats set this long narrative poem against an atmosphere of rituals, romance and medievalism very close to the world of *Christabel*. The same is true of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. All three works share certain common features in setting and thematic elements: the medieval-gothic castles, feudalistic vanity and ideas of family feud, a pervading aura of ritualistic romance, with young heroines engaged in clandestine love, and supernatural sensations.

In all three works, the young heroines are described as pious, gentle and innocent, but their actions are often courageous and transgressive, even manipulative of their gender-roles. Christabel goes out to pray in the woods, leaving the safety of her father's house. When Geraldine seems to faint at the threshold, she lifts her up and carries her into the castle, assuming a man's role carrying his 'bride' into the bedchamber. Margaret sneaks out of the castle to visit her clandestine lover in the woods, and she is indeed a bold heroine who exchanges vows of faithfulness with her lover, who is the son of her father's mortal enemy, at her own risk. Madeline is also in love with Porphyro in spite of the family feud, and though her heart is beset 'with fear', she has the courage to elope with her lover. All three heroines are shown to be guarded by the family watchdog. We encounter "The mastiff old" in *Christabel* [1.140], "the shaggy bloodhound" in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (2.304), and "The wakeful bloodhound" in *The Eve of St. Agnes* (365). All three heroines, in their state of innocence, are compared to doves. Bard Bracey dreams of a dove grasped by a serpent that he interprets as Christabel under the spell of Geraldine; Scott's heroine, Margaret "Flew like the startled cushat-dove" through "the hazel grove" after she encounters Lord Cranstoun (2.410-11); and Madeline makes her way to the chamber "like ring-dove fray'd and fled," and later, fearing that Porphyro may betray her, she compares herself to "A dove forlorn lost with sick unpruned wing" (198, 333). Dreams feature significantly in all three narratives: Christabel "had dreams all yesternight/Of her own betrothed knight". Madeline's desire is to dream of her future husband, to have "visions of delight,/And soft adorings from their loves"(Keats). Besides thematic and symbolic affinities, there are a number of parallels in language and expression, such as "The lamp with twofold silver chain" (1.176) in *Christabel* and "A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door" in *The Eve of St. Agnes* (357). Significant parallels have also been identified between *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, particularly Scott's description of the moon shining through "the east oriel" of Melrose Abbey—

The silver light, so pale and faint,  
Showed many a prophet and many a saint,  
Whose image on the glass was dyed;

Full in the midst, his cross of red  
 Triumphant Michael brandished,  
 And trampled the apostate's pride.

The moonbeam kissed the holy pane,  
 And threw on the pavement a bloody stain (2.121-28)

Keats's description of the moon shining through the "casement high and triple-arch'd" in Madeline's bedchamber, across its "panes of quaint device, / Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes" rings like an echo of the former passage. The image of the cross shining in moonlight reappears ; but it is not the blood-red cross belonging to an ancient wizard-hero. Instead of throwing a "bloody stain" on the floor, it throws "warm gules on Madeline's fair breast", and shines upon "" her silver cross soft amethyst".

Scott's heroine, Margaret "waked at times the lute's soft tone" as she thinks of Lord Cranstoun, her lover (3.314), while Porphyro at Madeline's bedside "took her hollow lute" and "play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute" (289, 291). Silence, suspense and secrecy pervade all three narratives: Margaret walks softly, making no noise, lest her watchful mother and the entire castle wake up. Christabel asks Geraldine to pass in silence, because her father "seldom sleepeth well". The lover's secret entry to the castle where the beloved is at rest, is described by Keats in the way Scott makes his knight enter the Melrose Abbey . Porphyro "follow'd [Angela, Madeline's matronly attendant] through a lowly arched way. / Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume" (109-10). In Scott's narrative poem, Sir William of Deloraine (though he is not the hero in Scott's poem) follows the porter through "The arched cloister" of the Melrose Abbey "Till, stooping low his lofty crest, / He entered the cell of the ancient priest" (2.35, 37-38). Madeline and Porphyro escape "Down the wide stairs" and "glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall" (355, 362). This is clearly reminiscent of Scott's heroine Margaret, who "glides down the secret stair" (2.298, 303) to meet her lover secretly.

More parallels and verbal echoes can be cited; and Beth Lau, a recent critic has already attempted to list them in her 2014 article 'Authorial Disguise and Intertextuality : Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Coleridge, and Keats'. The purpose of the present article is not to prolong the list, but to hint at a curious aspect of intertextuality, where the question of authorial originality dissolves into a larger issue of collective imagination. There are indeed different types of 'Romanticisms', as A. O. Lovejoy argued; and Keats' handling of the medieval theme and setting is in many ways different from that of Coleridge or Scott. However, it is to be noted that Byron and the Shelleys got attracted to the 'wild' aspects of the poem—especially , to the horror, suspense and mystery concerning the figure of Geraldine whereas what interested Scott and Keats was the heroine, Christabel herself. Margaret and Madeline – both are versions of Christabel, though their situations and actions differ. So one may feel that all three writers were somehow under the 'spell' of a young, love-lorn heroine falling dangerously on the verge of losing her innocence; and whether she is able to recover from her 'fall' is the question which haunts all three poets. Coleridge keeps the mystery unsolved, Scott answers it indirectly, showing that love has the power to triumph over evil and feuds. However, this we get from the perception of his 'minstrel' and not from the point-of-view of the heroine herself; and Keats leads Madeline and Porphyro to a world away from disaster, family feuds and suffering. But whether their escape really turns out to be heroic and happy at the end, we cannot know. Long gone are the middle ages, but glimpses of the love-lorn maidens circumscribed by the feudal settings of repression, temptation, family-feud and ritualism never failed to excite the creative imagination of some major Romantic poets who often shared a curious affinity of thoughts in handling the medieval past with a deep insight into the mysteries of the human psyche .

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## Pride of Colonial Presence and the Prejudiced Hangover: Jane Austen Back in India

Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty & Priyanka Chatterjee

**Abstract :** Have we overcome the pride of colonial presence or is it resurfacing back through our prejudiced preference of the fair complexion and the predominance of the Western domination through the consumerised culture and the control of the subaltern? When Gurinder Chadha and Rajshree Ojha brought the Jane Austen's novel in India through their respective films, *Bride and Prejudice* and *Aisha*, one can expect a rewriting of the Austen narratives to offer a postcolonial reading through the films. The issues of marriage and matchmaking or mismatch making (as in *Emma*) which are so subtly represented through the fine irony and deep insight by Austen are so pertinent in the Indian socio-cultural context that the adaptation of the novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* holds enlightening possibility of cultural deconstruction. But the deeper understanding of the films set in Amritsar and Delhi rather unfurls the cryptic presence of the colonial obsession with cultural hegemony, exoticization, and social domination. Our paper will try to explicate the colonial hangover as it is weaved in the texts of the films which proclaim to be the Indianisation of two British novels, and thus a process of writing back.

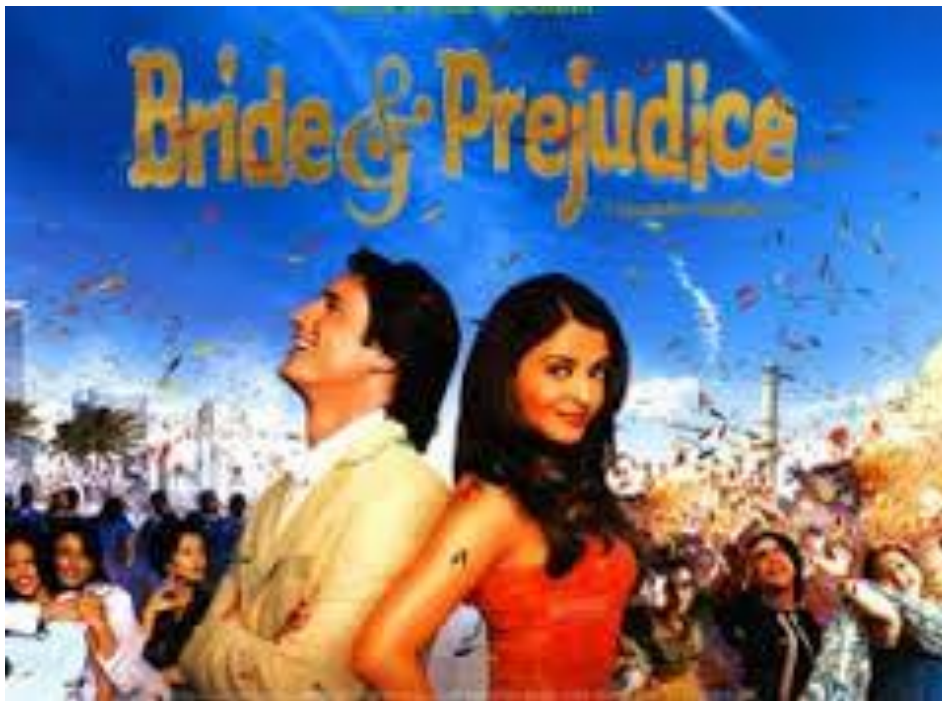
**Keywords :** Colonial hangover, prejudice, exoticisation, neo-colonialism, cultural hegemony.

### I

When we read Jane Austen in the Indian context, she emerges not only as a woman writer, intending to carve her own space in her own name, but also a woman conscious of her curbed space in the public world. Domesticity is the space within which she mostly remained confined and which in turn becomes her strength as she is the writer with penetrating eye. For the Indian mind Jane Austen provides an engaging study owing to her preoccupation with the in-depth understanding of human relations, so often a part of the Indian social system with its traditions of joint families and the caring and nurturing extended to mere acquaintances. Her focal analysis of the tradition of marriage and even the tradition of love, so well exemplified by the traditional system of arranged marriages and 'arranged love' in India makes her more pertinent in the Indian classroom. The Indian reader finds a familiarity with the Austenian characters although the locale seems to create a sort of distancing. Sometimes we even voluntarily assimilate ourselves to the English setting, a tendency that finds its origin in what Harish Trivedi calls 'the authoritative auspices of the British rule' (Trivedi, 239). By this assimilation, the colonized tries to acquire the supremacy of the colonizers and therefore, to attain a kind of equality. However, our eagerness to relive those English moments with familiar Indian instances, to contextualise our so long dwelled-upon moments of English works, has often led many directors of Indian origin to Indianise such works. Vishal Bharadwaj's consistent rewriting of Shakespearean master-tragedies into Indian context, contextualising it in the present, has been received with accolades. Thus when Gurinder Chadha and Rajshree Ojha brought Jane Austen's novels in India through their respective films, *Bride and Prejudice* and *Aisha*, a veritable expectation was a rewriting of the Austenian narratives to offer a postcolonial reading in the films. The issues of marriage and matchmaking which are so subtly represented through fine irony and deep insight by Austen are so pertinent in the Indian socio-cultural context that the adaptation of the novels –both of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* holds enlightening possibility of cultural deconstruction. But the deeper understanding of the films set in Amritsar and Delhi rather unfurls the cryptic presence of the colonial obsession with cultural hegemony, exoticization, and social domination. Gurinder Chadha and Rajshree Ojha do really intend to Indianise Jane Austen by their respective adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* through 'Bride and Prejudice' and 'Aisha', but they ultimately end up in more orientalist representation of India and thus uncover the neocolonial substratum of the text. The superficiality of 'Aisha' distances the movie more from the novel *Emma*, and thus ends up as an upper class social drama.

## II

The British novel of the nineteenth and early twentieth century has always held definitive proofs of displaying 'structures of attitude and reference' (Said, 62) that allude to the Empire. Even Austen's apparently harmless, stay-at-home novels have been shaken up by Edward Said to uncover the hidden lineaments of power and capital that the Empire stood for. The colonial undercurrents in Austen's works, more pronounced in *Mansfield Park*, are by-passed mostly as silences, without much indulgence. After Said there has been an awakening to this new perspective that creates shock to find Austen prejudiced by imperialistic determinants of authority and centre. However, Gurinder Chadha is far from evoking these challenges in her Bollywood- Austen spin that she names 'Bride and Prejudice', trying to focus on the central concern of Austen's work bride-ing (or the role of women in marriage) in the title, quite overlooking the fact that she has completely disregarded the groom, unlike Austen for whom the title was indicative of tendencies present in various characters across the narrative. Chadha's confirmed project here is the neo-colonizer's education at the hands of the native, where these counterparts are also symbolic of the ever-existent power struggle between the sexes.



The Poster of 'Bride and Prejudice', the 'desified' version of *Pride and Prejudice*

Moreover, when Chadha names her cinematic adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as 'Bride and Prejudice', she also plays on the famous first line of Austen's text, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"(1), and through the Bollywood style representation of the opening by a song-and-dance number, 'A marriage in the town' she reinforces the focus on matrimony as the central axiom of the novel as well as in the movie. Bringing Jane Austen in India, Gurinder Chadha transforms Netherfield Park to Amritsar and brings Darcy in India to attend a 'typical Indian arranged marriage' in expectation of 'simple, traditional Indian girl'. The constraints on the representation of the native woman as the 'bride' and the neo-colonizer as 'prejudice' is evident from the very beginning when the film opens in Amritsar where an Indian girl is getting married to a non-residential Indian. As the stage is prepared for shifting the action across borders (places Chadha, an NRI herself, seems more comfortable in picturing!) India is made to parochially remain involved in the arranged-marriage fan-fare, at the utter disgust of the blue-eyed imperialist, Darcy. His bewildered gaze is struck with awe when he spots the beautiful Lalita (Austen's Elizabeth equivalent) amidst the marriage-chaos. With all complexities of the first meeting between Elizabeth and Darcy chucked overboard, Chadha introduces a boisterous dance number where Darcy fails to

appreciate and qualify in the so-called Indian standards of the culture of dancing, that seems to be more limited to Bollywood than India. In a contrast the utterly non-descriptive, unimpressive Wickham of the film seems to gain advantage over Darcy by being able to master the Garba instantly besides mouthing barren ideas like "...if you have money, we would not be able to enjoy the real India..." which easily wins over the quite-hard-to-impress heart of Lalita. It is these dances, created in the image of the ball-room sessions of Austen, that turns into Darcy's classroom for the subject of 'real' India which is, as claimed by Lalita, far from being 'traditional' in the derogative sense of the term. Lalita enlightens Darcy about the economically poor India as she scorns his disgust at the poor internet and electricity connections at the 'best' hotel in Amritsar, quite glossing over the fact that she makes a sweeping general statement based in a local context. Chadha puts some critique of easy exotisation of India in Lalita's mouth when she refutes Darcy's imbecile understanding of Indian life, Indian women and the values. But the deliberate stereotypification of various facets of India to project an oriental East meeting with the progressive rational West falls in the trap of neo-colonisation. The millionaire hotelier tries to lookout for the possibilities of opening a luxury hotel in Goa, an initiative that receives sturdy reproach from Lalita who finds it disgusting that he is trying to allure crowds by a 'sprinkling of Indian culture' at his hotel. While the Goa-trip ends in further widening the gap between Lalita and Darcy for no apt reason, there enters the non-residential Indian Kohli who boasts of his achievement abroad but nurtures the clichéd thought of a traditional Indian bride which seems to be the foremost agenda that the movie voices against. But Kohli's presence induces in Lalita a dream to be an overseas bride in white, unlike the Indian coloured costumes that the brides dress in, and have an overseas wedding, 'live in the land of her Majesty', she sings. However, she would not marry the India-born, overseas-wealthy Kohli, because being the non-'traditional' witty, Indian girl Lalita has reservations in marrying a man she cannot converse with, a trait depicted as a new-Indian women characteristic. To this Peter Bradshaw, in his review of the film in *The Guardian*, remarks, following Jane Austen's statement in the book, "Ain't it the universally acknowledged truth?". To state that an Indian girl becomes different when she asks for such qualities in a man is harsh, constricted criticism of Indian standards that, as the undercurrent of the film shows, should update itself following the western model. For Lalita the man of her dreams is Wickham followed by Darcy; no Indians are allowed there.

The binary that is created at the very beginning of the film sets out to attack the ways in which the occidental reads into the oriental. But unexamined and unchecked shallowness makes Chadha assert all that she sets out to disagree. While the entire NRI gang along with the real westerners move out of Amritsar, there is not much show left there. Except for the horizon reaching greenness of the fields, Chadha seems to find nothing more of 'real' India to frame. Thus, without wasting much time, she whisks her characters from Amritsar to London, then to Los Angeles where the tour round the city helps to render a tourist-eye view first, of London and then, of Los Angeles. Lalita finds herself quite taken in love by the changed Darcy who seems to have changed himself completely about India and thus, by showcasing his new earned sympathy for the land is eligible to mesmerize Lalita. Adapted from Austen's novel that had English locales and characters, with no apparent colonial undercurrent, this Austen-Chadha spin could have been an interpretive challenge had Chadha engaged herself with a little more than just the universally accepted single-sighted notion that south-Asia steeps in arranged marriages which are deliberated with immense exuberance. She slights the project to the extent that all the complex emotional, social agendas that formed so important a part of the original finds no space in the Indian version, relegating the Indian version to be nothing more than 'a low-octane and glassy-eyed Bollywood romp'(Bradshaw, *The Guardian*). The bride is presented with her prejudice for the 'land of the majesty' where alone she is able to find her man of dreams who now attests his life-long dedication to what seems to be a myopic view of the Indian culture (or more of Bollywood!) by beating on the Indian marriage-dhol to its rhythmic perfection. This 'sprinkling of culture', so detested by Lalita at the beginning, makes her run to the arms of accultured Darcy; as such she can be the bride now. Specifically, Gurinder Chadha's clinging to stereotypical Bollywood norms compels Darcy to be engaged with Wickham in a Bollywood style action scene where he 'heroically' saves Lucky, the Indian avatar of Lydia Bennet, so that he can be a hero to Lalita in a Bollywood sense. Chadha returns to India only when the NRI Bingley is ready to marry the coy Indian Jane, and also when the foreign blue eyed Darcy will tie the knot with the Indian Elizabeth. The prospect and expectation of NRI husbands, especially in the part of India where the film is located, almost provides Chadha with the escape tool to indulge in the

foreign lands and its exuberance and hence uphold the charm it exhibits for 'poor India'. No where can we find any other moment of Indianisation except in Chadha's excess indulgence in the matrimonial ceremony and its conventional portrayal with dazzling dresses, jewelries, food and fun; even in the last scene with the newly married couples on elephants project a prejudiced understanding of Indian culture and human relationships. Germinating in all contrasting, problematic terms this film is example of the impossibility of being able to overcome the colonial hangover. Chadha's unabashed subservience to the exotisation of India through the colourful marriage rituals rather underlines her colonial hangover instead of offering a postcolonial rewriting of an Austenian text in the Indian way.

### III



The poster of *Aisha*, the Bollywood version of *Emma*

When we begin with *Aisha*, her cultural adoption of *Shefali*, which is a postcolonial representation of *Emma's* taking on *Harriet*, underpins the colonial control and cultural hegemony of an upper-class woman over a lower class woman. According to a critic's review,

Aisha Kapoor (Sonam Kapoor) is the quintessential uptown girl from super rich South Delhi. She's smart, sassy and intelligent and spends her time with usual cosmo concerns: animal rights, art exhibitions, weekend getaways, polo matches, shopaholic sprees....But more than all this, her pet obsession seems to be matchmaking.

*Aisha* presents herself as a fashionable woman decked up in the Western fashion brands to promote a Western culture as a superior model to fall back upon for self-grooming and denigrates the honest simplicity of a small town girl *Shefali* as backward and inferior to the high cultural world in Delhi. *Aisha's* self-opinionated sense of cultural supremacy and her voluntary project of match-making tend to pose her as an upper-class woman burdened with the white man's burden to civilize the uncivilized, acculturate the uncultured and to appropriate the Other. *Aisha's* undue intervention into lives of others and her hegemonic appropriation, specially of *Shefali* shore up the colonialist overbearing. Marking someone as the Other and then assimilation of the Other within the dominant fold to muffle her voice conjures the colonial hangover in the text. But it is not left without criticism as it is constantly pointed out and snubbed by *Arjun*, the Indian avatar of Mr. George Knightley, though *Aisha* remains unperturbed by the criticisms and holds on to her imposing interference. *Aisha's* realizations of her fault do not come out of her self-knowledge, rather she suffered the resistance to her hegemonic control when *Shefali* decides to write back to the acculturation project

of Aisha and chooses wisely her life-partner. 'Aisha' is not interspersed with the deliberate exorcism of India in order to bring Jane Austen's *Emma* in India. Still the neocolonialist consumerism and the hegemonic ideology are retained in this Indian representation of Austen's *Emma*.

The two focal points of Austen's *Emma*- the heroine's constant tendency towards matchmaking and her sense of social superiority- are retained in placing Aisha in the super-rich South Delhi and the corporate world of Mumbai and in her indulgence in the makeover of small-town Shefali, 'the Haryanvi behenji into an uber chic style diva like herself'. She thinks herself as the standard set to be followed by others. Austen presents *Emma* not only as a heroine celebrated in the narrative, but rather a woman who undergoes self-knowledge to attain a more human understanding. As Arnold Kettle points out in his chapter titled 'Jane Austen: *Emma*', in *An Introduction to Novel*, Volume 1:

She is not merely spoilt and selfish, she is snobbish and proud, and her snobbery leads her to inflict suffering that might ruin happiness. She has, until her experience and her feeling for Mr. Knightley brings her to a fuller, more humane understanding, an attitude to marriage typical of the ruling class. She sees human relationships in terms of class snobbery and property qualifications: Harriet, for the sake of social position, she would cheerfully hand over to the wretched Elton and does in fact reduce to a humiliating misery; (95)

Actually Edward Said and other postcolonial reading of Jane Austen criticize her unquestioning acceptance of the social hierarchy. It is also true, as the critic points out in the same essay, "The values and standards of the Hartfield world are based on the assumption that it is right and proper for a minority of the community to live at the expense of the majority." (99) But Jane Austen's de-romantisation of the actual materiality of her world motivates her to depict the snobbery, smugness, condescension, lack of consideration, unfeeling nature to the social inferior and all these are held up for disdain. Thus Jane Austen cannot be merely accused as the uncritical limited artist of her social milieu. *Emma*'s critique is strongly voiced through Mr. Knightley who plays the eye-opener in the novel. On the other hand, the character of Jane Fairfax offers Austen the scope of analyzing and critiquing the prevailing situation of women who are devoid of economic inheritance and the social security of upper class families. Her real concern for women's position in the society motivates her ironical understanding of marriage as the only suitable profession for women to survive. Thus, though matchmaking and marriage in Jane Austen's novels, especially in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, occupy the central position, Austen's understated irony exposes the frailties of womanhood and the deplorability of woman's condition through the social obsession with marriage. In 'Aisha', Arjun, the Indian version of Mr. Knightley does play the role of the conscience-keeper. But, the Jane Fairfax of 'Aisha', Arti is introduced as the New York- returned corporate, white-collared, sophisticated woman, who with her professionalism and social standards even outshines Aisha. Therefore, the movie ends up as a mere chic-flick which celebrates the urban aristocracy, utmost consumerism, the Western fashion and a neo-colonial obsession with cultural idioms of western world. The irony which is subtlest and finest weapon of Austenian narrative misses its edge both in the Indianised versions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*.

#### IV

The post-colonial treatment of these texts do not present a substantial critique of some of the disturbing underbellies of Austen's world, specifically Austen's acceptance of the class hierarchy which contributes in the continuation of domination and hegemonic control. This 'continuation of preoccupation' of the Western supremacy dilutes the postcolonial project of Chadha to offer a writing Austen back. These films are not only postcolonial re-readings of the nineteenth century British novelist Jane Austen, rather unknowingly they contributed in the construction of the national and cultural identities which seem to be shrouded under the neocolonial hegemony. Jane Austen is quite pertinent in India as her social insight into the personal relationships, women's position and their vulnerability under the culture of marriage, the shrinking space of women's agency do resonate with similar issues in India and overbearing presentation of marriage and the surrounding matrimonial celebrations in the films reinforces her insights and ironic understanding

of social judgments. But these film-texts disappoint to substantially represent a postcolonial presentation of Jane Austen, rather the prejudiced hangover and the colonial presence do cling to these cinematic adaptations of Jane Austen's best-loved novels.

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## **Heterogeneity, Experiential Specificity and Woman: A Study of Jane Austen's *Emma* and Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors***

Soumyadeep Chakraborty

**Abstract:** Orthodox western feminists have portrayed woman as 'a systematized and homogenized category, as a singular monolith', and perhaps that is the reason why their views seem more as a general formula to locate the self of a woman than 'the authentic heterogeneous voice of the self of an individual woman'. But one must acknowledge the fact that formation of one's essential self is highly associated with that being's essential experiential specificities. Therefore, based on particular, different and divergent experiential parameters, the study of locating self of a woman should always be invested with heterogeneity. Eminent critics, like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Kumari Jayawardena, Nawal El Saadawi, Anibal Quijano are of the view that 'a woman as a subject should always be studied in difference'. My paper, at this juncture, seeks to address a strong but subtle parallelism between Jane Austen's *Emma* and Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in the light of portraying a woman and articulating her self amidst her heterogeneous domestic experiences and essential experiential specificities.

**Key Words:** homogenized, heterogeneous, self, difference, experiential specificities.

Orthodox western feminists have championed such a feminist view that is supercharged with homogeneity. Without concentrating on the heterogeneity of a woman, they have projected a 'universal sisterhood'. In their attempt to analyze women, they are found to construct a generalized form of thought based on the 'commonality of gender'. Woman, in an orthodox western feminist text, is portrayed as 'a systematized and homogenized category, as a singular monolith', and perhaps that is the reason why their views seem more as a general formula to locate the self of a woman than 'the authentic heterogeneous voice of the self of an individual woman'. To articulate the identity of a woman, one has to articulate the 'struggles' of that woman that remain specific and conditional to diverse contexts, contingencies, cartographies, histories and issues such as class, caste, religion, race etc. Not only that, formation of self is highly associated with that being's experiential specificities. Based on particular, different and divergent experiential parameters, therefore, the study of locating self of a woman should always be invested with heterogeneity. Eminent critics, like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Kumari Jayawardena, Nawal El Saadawi, Anibal Quijano are of the view that 'a woman as a subject should always be studied in difference'. These critics seek to highlight an analysis of womanhood not being based on any 'systematised binary of inter-sexual differences' but on the basis of the dynamic drives of 'intra-sexual differences'; a difference which speaks greatly in favour of the ethnicity, heterogeneity, divergence and uniqueness of one's essential existence. Regarding the fallacious homogenization in feminist discourse, C.T. Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* opines:

To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being "woman" has nothing to do with race, class, nation, or with sexuality, just with gender. But no one "becomes a woman" purely because she is female. (Mohanty 55)

Creative writers with such critical feminist bent have often found to posit their female protagonists in close association with a domestic space, and in terms of positioning the heterogeneity of a woman within her domestic space, the name of Jane Austen comes forth with

much force and detail. If Jane Austen appears most prominently among the British women writers in this respect, Shashi Deshpande, among the Indo-Anglian women novelists, comes up having strong parallelism with the former. My paper, at this juncture, seeks to address a strong but subtle parallelism between Jane Austen's *Emma* and Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in the light of portraying a woman and articulating her self amidst her heterogeneous domestic experiences and essential experiential specificities.

Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816), the last novel published during her lifetime (1775—1817), not only represents Emma Woodhouse as “handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence” (Austen 19), it also unfolds a saga of education, maturation and articulation of the self of a unique eponymous female protagonist by virtue of her diverse economic, familial and social positioning. Going by the same fashion, Shashi Deshpande is found to address the self of her female protagonist Sarita in her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, published in 1980. Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is basically the story of a married woman Sarita (Saru) and her ‘quest’; the self remains central to the venture here and the purpose is to know and locate her ‘self’ not in isolation but in association with her familial grounding and diverse ethno-cultural and social experiences. This articulation of the heterogeneous ‘gendered’ identity of a woman unmistakably demarcates the meeting point of the two texts and the respective female protagonists. This is where a reader finds ‘unpremediated’ parallelism between Austen's *Emma* and Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

Raymond Williams remarks in *Country and the City*—“It is a truth universally acknowledged that Jane Austen chose to ignore the decisive historical events of her time” (Williams 113). William's remark can well be complimented with another truth universally acknowledged that Austen, in her novel, has reflected ‘a socio-cultural and domestic reality’ upon which she has concentrated to essentialize her vision and the self of her female protagonists, and *Emma* is not an exception to that. Jane Austen herself has said that in *Emma* she has chosen a female protagonist “whom nobody but myself will much like”. At that point of time she anticipated such view as she realized perhaps that her female protagonist asserts heterogeneous ideas, experiences and attains ‘voice’ of her self also in a heterogeneous way which was not the brand of feminism of that time. *Emma* seems an exceptional one among Austen's creations because here the eponymous female protagonist is endowed with significant worldly and materialistic advantages which are denied to the other Austenian heroines. From economic, familial and social stand point Emma stands unique as well. Apart from possessing a considerable amount of personal wealth she is practically the head of the family when the novel begins. Emma lives in Highbury, a small town about sixteen miles away from London, with her aging father. Mr. Woodhouse has provided Emma with all sorts of affection, but he's utterly unable to offer her proper parental guidance and which is perhaps the reason why Emma doesn't seem to have any sense of limitation. The memory of her long-deceased mother has turned almost into an oblivion; her elder sister Isabella has been married off and exported to London leaving her ‘a saga of domesticity’. Unlike other Austenian heroines, her family never stands in the way of her handling of domestic affairs, familial relationships and social conducts. Her former governess Mrs Weston is found to be indulging and noninterfering as her father Mr Woodhouse. Life proves to be sweet enough yet full of ennui to Emma, and so she decides here to add spice in life by taking on a protégé, Harriet Smith. Even though Emma's determined never to marry anybody, she immediately decides to find Harriet a husband. Determined to make Harriet into ‘a true gentlewoman’, Emma begins to better Harriet's tastes and aesthetic values, especially in selecting a male counterpart. She is found here to convince Harriet to dump Robert Martin, the young farmer with positive likeness for her, and set her eyes on the town's clergyman, Mr. Elton. Quite dramatically, Mr. Elton here starts to incline towards Emma. After such a fiasco, Emma begins to think that she has learned her lessons in ‘matchmaking’ well. Emma's immaturity leads her to make a good deal of mischief by flirting with a

dashing young fellow, Frank Churchill in front of Jane Fairfax, a young woman who recently returned to Highbury to live with her aunts. Meanwhile, Emma decides that Frank might just be the perfect new man for Harriet. Emma's freckled behaviours, taken for granted outlooks, exploits, mischievous deeds are watched with minute attention and commented upon by her good friend, Mr. Knightley. Although Emma frequently ignores to implement his advice, she has noble respect for his good opinion. When Mr. Knightley starts to point out her flaws and accuses her of belittling the poor neighbours, Emma begins to reflect upon her mistakes. Dramatic happening again emerges in the novel when Harriet confesses her love for Mr. Knightley. At this juncture, Emma realizes that now she is in deep love with Mr. Knightley too. Fallaciously anticipating Mr. Knightley's interested in Harriet, Emma deliberately hampers Mr. Knightley's attempts to propose to her. After clearing all romantic, familial and domestic intrigues, the novel ends with twinkling of marriage bells that knots Emma with Knightley and Harriet with Martin.

If we analyze Emma throughout the novel, we shall witness that with the exception of Mr Knightley, she used to rule her household and neighbourhood from the beginning of the novel. Her rule continues throughout and is reinforced at the closure of the novel through her marriage with Mr Knightley. Apart from presenting a series of diverse domestic experience through her female protagonist, Austen here brings forth Emma's peculiar approach to marriage as well. Towards the beginning of the novel, Emma is found to be quite confident that she will never marry. Here Austen presents the self and understanding of her female protagonist Emma as having fallacies, she is portrayed as having 'avarice of marriage' to have ruined the freedom and happiness of a lady. But what makes Emma more charming a character is whenever her domestic specificities, socio-cultural rootedness attempt to teach her, she restricts her obstinacy and becomes an obedient recipient of 'grey values', values which are not absolutely right nor altogether wrong, values which have crucially contributed to the formation of Emma's self. Regarding Austen's positioning Emma amidst her domestic specificities, Elizabeth Drew in her book *The Novel: A Modern Guide to Fifteen English Masterpieces* beautifully opines:

She narrowed her field to domestic life in country villages not because she knew of nothing else, but because she felt that this setting was what she needed for concentrating the essentials of her visions. (Drew 97)

Emma is believed by many critics to have undergone a process of education and purification guided by Mr Knightley who is her only critic in the text. Margaret Kirkham's view to examine the female protagonist seems very interesting at this point. She opines that Emma is such a unique character who needs to be studied in a unique way and that is in close association with Knightley. She is of the view that in order to have proper reflection on the development of Emma's self, we should have a clear reflection of the development of her relationship with Knightley. Kirkham writes:

As the novel unfolds, the education of hero and heroine, about themselves and one another as moral equals, is shown in a way which subverts the stereotype in which a heroine is educated by a Hero-Guardian. (Kirkham 138).

Emma's education here implies her development which is achieved only for the flexibility of her self. The issue that should be marked at this juncture is that her education has not only bestowed on her development to flexibility, the development of her self from rigidity to flexibility here also emerges as her education. Arnold Kettle remarks, "Her (Austen's) judgment is based... always on the actual facts and aspirations of her scene and people." (Kettle 114). After going through Emma, one has to say that Austen's judgement is strengthened by her socio-cultural consciousness, keen sense of domestic reality and acknowledgement of heterogeneity of self.

Crucial contribution of diverse socio-cultural, familial issues and domestic experiences in the formation of the self of a woman remains the core of the novels written by Shashi Deshpande as well. In her novels, she is found to address the root of a woman's identity in diverse normative social structures, ethno-cultural issues and domestic realities. Shashi Deshpande's first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, published in 1980, holds her spirit intensely; she herself says: "I found my voice in this novel". *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is out and out the story of Sarita or Saru and her 'quest' for her essential self. A professionally successful doctor Sarita marries Manohar, a handsome, dashing poet, against her mother's will and now becomes the mother of two children, 'living in a paradise of matching curtains and handloom bedspreads'. Third-World feminists are often found to posit certain circumstances where a professionally successful woman is viewed as a contrast to the concept of successful wifehood or motherhood. Sarita, being a professionally successful woman, a doctor, is found to struggle hard to attain her place as a wife or a mother. Within a specific socio-cultural mindset, Sarita has been nurtured from her childhood within the concept of 'femaleness' in relation to a superior, conquering male; she used to think herself all female and cherish the dream of being chosen for a superior, extra human male. But with the gradual growth of her self-consciousness, she realizes that there is no "I" in it. Becoming a doctor, marrying a man of her own choice are all the means to attain her identity. Quite interestingly, Sarita's identity as a doctor is never seen in isolation but always in relation to what Manohar is and here falls the shadow as Saru begins to earn more than her husband. She lives in a society that is accustomed to see a woman as an 'otherized' follower of a man, not as a forefronter. Thus, she violates the social norm and her propagation of self-identity turns to a social guilt. Saru's success as a doctor makes her more than a wife, whereas Manohar's relatively lower socio-economic status makes him less than a husband. It starts to challenge the dominant social framework and Saru is plunged into 'marital rape'. The gaps between appearance and reality are unearthed here. Earlier Saru took economic independence as necessary prerequisite for a woman's identity. But she now realizes that 'a room of one's own' is necessary prerequisite for a woman, for her identity. Sarita returns to her paternal house but all alone, neither as a wife, nor as a mother, and here begins her voyage of self-discovery. Discarding the outward gloss, elegance and professionalism, she undertakes a journey to understand the darkness within and outside.

Marrying a man of her own choice, Sarita stepped beyond the threshold, and when she returns alone to her natal home, after the death of her mother, she re-crosses the threshold. The reality of Sarita's life is intensified as her father's house as 'a place to revisit and shelter' is negated. Denial of turning back is a recurrent symbol in Deshpande's novels. Here Sarita's situation retains similarity with that of Jaya in *That Long Silence* or of Sumi in *A Matter of Time*. The house here is represented as a character with specific dynamics; it absorbs the tensions, tears and terrors of the dwellers, and reacts accordingly. It shows ample reluctance to be a room of Sarita's own. The epigraph: 'You are your refuge/ there is no other refuge' speaks blatantly of Sarita's situation. Sarita's paternal house is a miniature of her socio-cultural belonging, accessible within third-world periphery. It is replete with rooms constructed by past memories, gender consciousness and religious ideologies. This is the house where Saru experienced the bitterness of privileging a son over a daughter. The bitterness of such gender discrimination was heightened when her seven year old brother Dhruva was drowned to death and her mother held her responsible for the mishap, when she was hardly eight years old. Mother's words – "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?...you killed him" still sting her ears and echo in the rooms. Saru remembers the act of 'othering' to which she is doomed since her adolescence. She thinks of the days when she was kept away from the puja-room and kitchen for three days of menstruation, when the site of worshipping became site for shame to her. The self of a third-world woman is constructed by several third-world values, ideologies and inhibitions; and that collectively constitute 'the third-world reality' for her. In

*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the sacred space within the house, the puja-room and the kitchen are invested with a religious and cultural code by which a woman can be interpreted whether pure or impure, mistress or pariah.

This is the same house where Saru now begins to seek her identity, her root. She comes across women of the neighborhood and finds most of them as victims of domestic-violence, patriarchy and ‘matriarchy’ as well. She witnesses the plight of her women friends victimized and tortured physically and mentally by the in-laws, but who have practiced themselves to subservience and regression. Sarita is found, at this juncture, to suffer from an ‘anxiety of influence’, an impact of her surroundings and her domestic realities. Meenakshi Mukherjee’s observation is quite impressive at this point; she scrutinizes Saru as a professional doctor who is able to “analyze her physical and psychological trauma with the detachment of an analyst”. Primarily she lacks both ‘voice and a forum for self-expression’. But the novel does not end in Saru’s confinement, rather it ends in her ‘release’ that is her realization of the socio-cultural and domestic specificities in which she has to condition her self. Almost at the end of the novel she is able to articulate her ingrained darkness, inert trauma to her father; this is the point where her self attains voice. Past and present seems to coalesce absolutely as Usha Tambe points out “the darkness of the present is seen as expiation for past sins”.

Through her diverse experiences, familial hegemony, patriarchal silencing and social othering, Sarita here achieves articulation of her self. Sashi Deshpande in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* does not project womanhood as a homogeneous gender consciousness, she posits the womanhood of her female protagonist specifically in the context of social, cultural, historical, mythological and geo-political conditions of the place where she belongs.

This is the heterogeneous treatment of womanhood and positioning of the selves of the female protagonists amidst their socio-cultural specificities and domestic realities that brackets *Emma* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. One thing should be marked out at this juncture that though the paper propagates a parallelism between *Emma* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, it does never seek to call Emma and Sarita sisters for having merely the similarity of sex. But, the way of the female protagonists’ attainment of the essential voice of their selves and the sameness of the authors’ heterogeneous treatment of womanhood can form a close friendship among Emma and Sarita definitely though they belong to altogether different time and space. Emma and Sarita, in their own distinct ways, have projected the critical feminist parlance based on ‘heterogeneous experientiality’ of a woman as vindicated by C.T. Mohanty, Kumari Jayawardena, Nawal El Saadawi, Anibal Quijano et al. Emma and Sarita hardly generate any sort of general formula of survival or common suggestion for attaining ‘voice’ for self. Any sort of generalization in the corpus of feminist discourse is what Bonnie Mann says in the book *Women's Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment* as, “a disciplinary dogmatism that constrained and homogenized feminist thinking”. They have rather their own stories distinctly different from other women; in the real sense of the term they are indeed women who do never prefer any homogenous group characterized as ‘women’. Both Emma and Sarita have achieved recognition and acknowledgement of their essential selves but not through any homogenized gender consciousness or systematized gender binary but through their understanding and education of their heterogeneous experiential specificities. Emma and Sarita in their own way enhance plurality of the society, multiplicity of the self and, above all, the essential differences not only among women but among human beings as well.

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## **The Fallibility of Matchmaking: A Study of the Film Adaptations of *Emma* in *Clueless* (1995) and *Aisha* (2010)**

Mir Ahmmad Ali

**Abstract:** At an early stage of writing the novel, *Emma*, Jane Austen once remarked that 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself [Austen alone] will much like' (*Memoir* 157). While this statement seems slightly exaggerated (because not Austen alone, but readers too despite her repetitive mistakes 'like' Emma very much), it is true that there is some valid point of this emphatic proclamation. Readers of this novel are excited, alarmed and finally disgusted with Emma's constant habit of 'foretelling' (9) things and making repeated mistakes. The chief among these mistakes is her propensity for 'matchmaking' which usually turns out to be a fallible act of 'mismatch making'. 'Matchmaking' for her, as she propounds is 'the greatest amusement in the world' (10). But the irony is that her repeated attempts to match-making become abortive. This 'fallibility of matchmaking' is the key element of the novel and in several silver screen adaptations of *Emma* as well this subject matter is being emphasised and taken into consideration. Examples of such adaptations are – *Clueless* (1995), direction and screenplay by Amy Heckerling; *Emma* (1996), direction and screenplay by Douglas McGrath; and *Aisha* (2010), direction by Rajshree Ojha and screenplay by Devika Bhagat. This paper aims to focus on two such adaptations of *Emma* from two different cultural contexts– one from Hollywood (*Clueless*) and another from Bollywood (*Aisha*) where the issue of the heroine's fallible act of 'matchmaking' predominates.

**Keywords:** Foretelling, matchmaking, film adaptations, fallibility, screenplay, Hollywood, Bollywood

### I

In her review of Douglas McGrath's 1996 adaptation of *Emma*, (for The New York Times) the renowned journalist, and literary and film critic Janet Maslin described Jane Austen as 'the posthumous queen of genteel cinema'<sup>1</sup>. Maslin made this comment in view of the fact that the large body of Austen's novels are aptly suitable for silver screen of our time. As time changes from Austen to ours, so also changes the medium and the ways to appreciate, response and receive Austen's works. One obvious reason for this transformation of medium from page to the silver screen of megaplex is to circulate Austenian texts widely among the new generation of audience/readers. Two of the major novels of Austen that have been constantly adapted to this new medium of silver screen are *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Since my intended topic of discussion is *Emma*, I shall be focusing on this novel henceforth and shall talk about the two well-known adaptations of the same novel, one from Hollywood and the other one from Bollywood.

When she began writing the novel (*Emma*) around 1814, Jane Austen remarked that 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself [Austen alone] will much like' (*Memoir* 119). This statement, made by Austen seems slightly exaggerated because of the fact that not Austen alone, but readers too 'like' Emma very much despite her repeated mistakes and follies. But it is true that readers are sickened with Emma's repetitive mistakes. The chief among these mistakes is her propensity for 'matchmaking'. Emma's fallible act of matchmaking often turns into a disaster which ends in 'mismatch making'. The problematic of matchmaking is the main thread of the novel and in several adaptations of this novel the heroine's concern for matchmaking is being emphasised and taken into consideration. Notable adaptations of this kind are – *Clueless* (1995), direction and

screenplay by Amy Heckerling; *Emma* (1996), direction and screenplay by Douglas McGrath; and *Aisha* (2010), direction by Rajshree Ojha and screenplay by Devika Bhagat.

Emma Woodhouse, the “handsome, clever and rich”<sup>2</sup> (1) heroine of Austen is somewhat a superficial girl whose keen interest in life is to interfere with the lives of other people and her main hobby is to make suitable matches. Near the beginning of the novel, Emma confesses that according to her “[Matchmaking] is the greatest amusement in the world!” (10). Emma takes cues by observing two people together, misinterprets it and thinks that they ‘perfectly match’ together. She takes pride in this matchmaking capability. Her fallibility is evident in the novel when she fancies a match between two mismatches – Frank Churchill and Harriet Smith. She then supposes that Mr. Knightly is attracted to Jane Fairfax and again she thinks that Mr. Knightley is in love with Harriet. But all her conjectures prove to be false later. Mr. Knightley and her father have tried many times to put a check in this habit of matchmaking but this is of no avail. Mr. Woodhouse even warns her that:

Ah! my dear, I wish you would not make matches and foretell things, for whatever you say always comes to pass. Pray do not make any more matches (9).

But she can’t help it. As soon as she realises her previous folly, she commits another one. It is this habit of Emma that leads to the disaster both in her life and the lives of other people. The constant habit of the heroine to ‘foretell things’ and her proclivity to matchmaking is given emphasis in the adaptations of the novel as well. In *Clueless* the heroine, Cher Horowitz makes similar mistakes which affect the life of Tai (modelled on Harriet Smith). In *Aisha* also, the title character Aisha’s inclination towards matchmaking is the key theme of the movie.

## II

In her essay “Emma Becomes Clueless”, Suzanne Ferries talk about the cinematic adaptation of *Emma* in *Clueless* in these words that:

*Clueless* features the same key themes relating to the roles of women (the *fallibility of matchmaking* and flirtation; the danger, in the words of the novel, of a girl “having rather too much her own way” and thinking “too well of herself” [Austen 1]).... In Heckerling’s hands, Austen’s novel proves itself to be surprisingly *malleable* and *readily adaptable to the contemporary period* (Troost and Greenfield 122-123). [Emphases mine]

The novel’s central theme i.e., the ‘fallibility of matchmaking’ are seen to be predominant in the movie *Clueless*. The setting of the movie is Beverly Hills and it focuses on the adolescent lives of some teenage high school students. Cher Horowitz (starring Alicia Silverstone) just like Emma Woodhouse is a beautiful, rich but spoiled child of a millionaire father. This Californian school girl is somewhat ‘superficial’ whose only direction in life is ‘towards the mall’. Cher lives a luxurious life, surrounded by the modern cultural products – designer’s clothes, cell phone, branded sandals and dress etc.



**Figure 1:** The Film Poster of *Clueless*, showing Cher, Tai and Dionne surrounded by modern gadgets and contemporary fashion

At the very beginning of the movie Cher's predisposition for match/mismatch is being highlighted when she uses her computer to choose her school wardrobe and the computer screen shows the dress to be a mismatch.



**Figure 2:** Cher chooses her regular school wardrobe in the computer for its proper outfit

This is indicative of her affluent but superficial life. Cher's proclivity for matchmaking is revealed early in the movie when she decides to make a match between two aged yet unmarried teachers, Mr. Hall and Miss Geist. But the reason behind this act is very selfish as to increase her marks in the exams. The

novel's initial wedding between Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor is adapted in this way. Just like Emma, (who Credits herself in this matchmaking) Cher also takes pride in making this match between Mr. Hall and Geist. But her 'only critic' Josh (modelled on Mr. Knightley) constantly challenges Cher's view saying that it is the individual who ultimately decides to form a match with whom. Cher fails to understand that it is one own individual choice to chose his/her life partner and external manipulation is not desirable and necessary.

This initial success of matchmaking compels Cher to take her new 'project' and to 'adopt' a new comer in the school whose name is Tai Fraiser (modelled on Harriet Smith). Like Emma who tries to make a match between Harriet Smith and Mr. Philip Elton, Cher also struggles hard to make a match between Tai and Elton knowing the fact that it is a complete mismatch. Although Tai develops a natural liking for Travis Birkenston (who is modelled on Robert Martin), it is only because of Cher's constant manipulation Tai rejects Travis. But when Cher finds that it is she, not Tai whom Elton desires, she realises her folly. This rejection of Elton hurts the naive and innocent Tai very much. But Cher does not learn from this grave mistake but is keen to find some other one for Tai who can "take Elton's place right away". Suzanne Ferriss' insightful observation in this context is worth-noting:

Matchmaking is still central to the story of the film but more clearly allied with the heroine's "imaginist" tendencies. Cher's two matchmaking efforts centre on "making over" women: Miss Geist, the spinster teacher, and Tai, the transfer student. Cher and Dionne strip Miss Geist of her glasses and dowdy sweater. Tai undergoes a more rigorous regimen to change her hair color, her body (through exercise), her accent, and her vocabulary. In a fitting comment on the 1990s, image is everything. To Cher, makeovers offer "control in a world of chaos." (Troost and Greenfield 124)

The next matchmaking that Cher predicts is not of any other one, but for her solely. She is very much attracted to a handsome new comer named Christian Stovitz (modelled on Frank Churchill) and tries every possible ways to impress the boy. But despite her bold efforts Cher fails to draw Christian's attraction towards her. Later it is revealed that Christian is a gay. There were multiple clues/indications of this but 'clueless' Cher misses each and every point to identify Christian's alternative sexual preference. Even when Cher, in the absence of her father plans to finally 'do it' with Christian but Christian is seen to be unresponsive to her. She realises that her presupposition is wrong and here again the similar fallibility of matchmaking comes to the surface. Drawing a distinction between different attitudes toward matchmaking as presented in the novel and its adaptation, Suzzane Ferries remarks that:

Cher, like Emma, misreads the intentions of three men. The novel's Frank Churchill, the second source of Emma's errors, appears in the film version as Christian, the handsome boy who makes a sudden appearance at midterm. Emma's gossip and wordplay with Frank become games of a different sort on film. Cher sends herself flowers and love letters to attract Christian's attention. Despite her ability to manipulate images and appearances, she fails to read the images offered to her critically. Christian's clothes and fondness for the film *Spartacus* clearly signal his sexual preference, but Cher does not see it. Emma, blind to the signs of Frank Churchill's engagement to Jane Fairfax, mistakes the object of his attraction; Cher misreads the nature of the attraction itself (Troost and Greenfield 125).

Cher is now disgusted and devastated because of her repetitive fallible acts of matchmaking. She now begins to envy her protégée, Tai whose popularity surpasses her in the school. Tai in the mean time has begun to fancy Josh to be her desired match and asks Cher for her help. Cher gets shocked at this and realises her folly. Cher constantly tries to shut out Tai's interest for Josh by saying that Josh and Tai don't "mesh well together". And then Cher realises that She is "majorly, totally, but crazy in love with Josh".

She tries to make amend in her habit of matchmaking later on. The voice-over narration of Cher follows thus:

Everything I think and everything I do is wrong. I was wrong about Elton, I was wrong about Christian. Now Josh hated me. It all boiled down to one inevitable conclusion that I was just totally clueless.

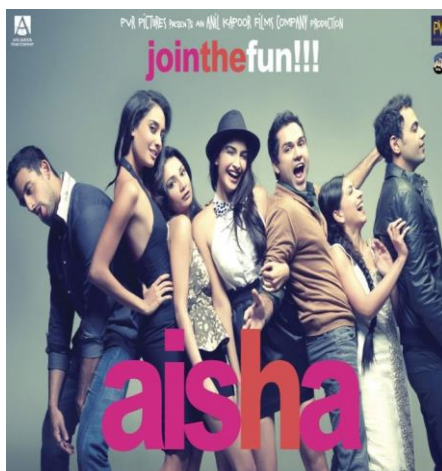
Cher ultimately admits her cluelessness in matchmaking. And it is only when she stops to take someone under her wings and ceases to be manipulative to the individual lives of others, she acquires the maturity to visualise things clear and unbiased. In a skating match Cher apologises Tai for being too judgemental and manipulative and finally reconciles with her. It is at this moment she can observe “the sparks between Tai and Travis” and comes to know that “Josh is out of the picture”. Then both Josh and Cher admit their love for each other and the movie ends in the wedding ceremony of Mr. Hall and Miss Giest, where all the characters find their suitable matches – Cher (Emma) finds Josh (Mr. Knightley), Tai (Harriet) finds Travis (Robert Martin) and Dionne finds Murray.

### III

When the Bollywood adaptation of *Emma* was released as *Aisha* in 2010, *The Times of India* made a stupendous review<sup>3</sup> of this movie in the ‘Entertainment’ column and the film review goes thus:

Aisha Kapoor (Sonam Kapoor) [modelled on Emma Woodehouse] is the quintessential uptown girl from super rich South Delhi. She's smart, sassy and intelligent and spends her time with usual cosmo concerns: animal rights, art exhibitions, weekend getaways, polo matches, shopaholic sprees....But more than all this, her *pet obsession seems to be matchmaking*. [Emphases mine]

Rather than the novel’s setting of Highbury village, the movie is set in the busy, rich city life of South Delhi, India.



**Figure 3:** The Film Poster of *Aisha* set in the city life of Delhi

According to Harish V. Nair, in Rajshree Ojha’s adaptation “Jane Austen’s *Emma* gets desified”.<sup>4</sup> Even in this ‘desification’ of *Emma*, the central theme of the heroine’s ‘pet obsession’ for ‘matchmaking’ predominates. What is this matchmaking all about?

“Making a match” according to Anne Crippen Ruderman means “figuring out what would suit two people to each other, and Jane Austen suggests that suitability – even conventional suitability – is important for lasting love” (Crippen 230). This is evident in this Bollywood adaptation as well. Just like

the novel *Aisha* also opens on a wedding ceremony of Aisha's aunt Chitra Masi (based on Miss Anne Taylor) and her new colonel Masu (based on Mr. Weston). Aisha takes the credit for this matchmaking and this initial success leads her in further ventures of matchmaking. Immediately, in the same wedding party Aisha begins to fanacy a match between a small town girl Shefali (modelled on Harriet Smith) and Randhir Gambhir (modelled on Mr. Elton). The further story goes like thus:

After having found a suitable match for her aunt, she [Aisha] now wants to pair off her newfound friend, downmarket, small town-ish Shefali Tiwari (Amrita Puri), to Randhir Gambhir (Cyrus Sahukar), the man who actually is all eyes for Aisha alone. But before she can do that, she must transform the Haryanvi behenji into an uber chic style diva like herself. Indeed, a difficult project that gets even more tough because childhood buddy, Arjun Burman (Abhay Deol), seems hell-bent on scuttling all her 'new projects' and censuring her 'social work' as meddling mess (The Times of India Aug 5, 2010).

From the very beginning of this movie Aisha's proclivity for matchmaking is being emphasised. Aisha's propensity for matchmaking is condemn by her only critic Arjun (modelled on Mr. Knightley) who advises Aisha time and again that everyone has his/her own choice and it's not right to interfere unnecessarily with someone's personal life. Pinky, Aisha's best friend also cautions her about this "intentional interfering" and "poking her nose between two mismatches [Randhir and Shefali]." But Aisha does not pay heed to them. She plays a very abominable trick to unite Randhir and Shefali in a lonely scary jungle at night but this proves to be disastrous for both Randhir and Shefali and for Aisha. Aisha constantly manipulates Shefali in believing that Saurabh Lamba (modelled on Robert Martin) is not the right person for her and instead directs Shefali in uniting her with Randhir. And because of this Shefali also rejects Saurabh's proposal a couple of times in spite of the fact that she likes and thinks Saurabh to be her suitable match. In one of the river-rafting camp, organized by Randhir, Randhir takes Aisha inside the jungle and proposes Aisha (rather than Shefali). Aisha now realises her folly and ponders over what will happen to Shefali when she will hear the news. Foreseeing the consequence, Aisha vows not to "do matchmaking again". But Aisha does not stop in her approach and commits mistakes time and again. She fancies Dhruv (based on Frank Churchill) to be the possible/suitable lover first for herself and then for Shefali. And this assumption again proves to be fallible when Aisha finds that Dhruv forms a new relationship with the 'New York returned' Aarti (modelled on Jane Fairfax), whom Aisha envies and despises very much all along the movie.

Aisha's repeated fallible acts of matchmaking hurt the naive and 'poor' Shefali very much. And it is when Shefali begins to develop a keen liking for Arjun, Aisha vehemently tries to resist Shefali in this approach. In a heated argument with Aisha, Shefali is seen to be remorseful and laments that she has been a 'project' for Aisha so far. When Aisha claims that Shefali and Arjun are mismatched, Shefali responds that:

Shefali: What do you mean by mismatched? Aisha!  
 Because I don't wear expensive cloths like you do.  
 Because I don't speak English like you.  
 My father isn't as rich as yours.  
 I'm middle-class.  
 Because I am a villager! Right?  
 I'm just a project to you!  
 Cut the poor thing's hair  
 Give the poor thing some clothes.  
 Take the poor thing to Mumbai.  
 Shefali, Randhir is nice.

No, no. Randhir is not nice.  
 Shefali, Dhruv is nice.  
 No, no. Shefali! Dhruv is not nice.  
 Enough is enough, Aisha!  
 You never considered me an equal to you. Isn't it Aisha?  
 And one thing more. Arjun loves me as well.

Aisha now realises her foolishness and this is evident when she confesses to Pinky that "I am so selfish, self-centred, wrong and little arrogant." And when Arjun learns through Shefali that how much she loves him, he accepts and proposes her. The movie ends in an epiphany moment for Aisha where she learns that:

Love cannot be planned by anyone.  
 You cannot assert love for someone.  
 You just fall in love with a person.  
 Anywhere, anytime and with anyone.

#### IV

Some critics consider the novel *Emma* to be a 'blidungsroman' where the formation or the education of the eponymous heroine takes place gradually. It is by committing repeated mistakes she learns in due course that love does not come by force and hence biased matchmaking is utterly useless to bring two people together. So, the entire novel or its adaptations can be seen as a novel/ cinema of formation where the heroine learns from her repeated mistakes and follies and ultimately she tries hard and corrects it.

Both the adaptations, *Clueless* and *Aisha* equally present conformity and fidelity to the original text to make it more suitable to the screen in specific cultural context. In the novel and its adaptations the contemporary world's engagement with commodity culture, advertising world, society's obsession with commercial products and shallowness of upper-class life and are being shown and satirised. Regarding this commodification and cultural consumption, (in both the novel and the adaptation *Clueless*) Anna Despotopoulou puts forth her views that:

In Amy Heckerling's adaptation of Austen, despite the modernized setting, populated by fashionable teenagers occupied in endless cellphone conversations and effortless digital clothes consultations, rather than in paying polite visits to country houses and heeding sisterly advice on appropriate attire, the affinity implied between the superficial concerns appropriated by womanhood in Austen's time and the vacuousness of feminine preoccupations in our time is quite uncanny. (Despotopoulou 116)

Two adaptations of *Emma* (both *Clueless* and *Aisha*) revolve around the main thread of the heroine's fallible act of matchmaking just as Emma did in the novel. There are so many cinematic techniques used for projecting this theme on/onto the silver screen like voice-over-narration, flashback, flash-forward, intercut and montage. Voice-over narration in both these adaptations plays a vital role to convey the narrator's point of view of the novel. John Wiltshire, therefore, thinks that:

Cher's *voice-over narration* is an *important ingredient in the movie's success*. The contrast between her spoken appraisals and what the screen itself shows parallels Emma's equally mistaken assessments of the world delineated in the novel. Cher's commentary provides continuity for the

action, but also supplies unspoken thoughts to supplement the visual images of her face. (Wiltshire 54) [Emphasis mine]

This cinematic technique transforms the narrative point of view of the novel's protagonist to the cinematic visual representation of the heroines in montage. This technique allows the audience to see the 'external reality' and the 'voice-over narration' presents the subjective 'internal reality' i.e., the inner happenings within the heroine's mind (for Cher or Aisha). In *Clueless* for example, when Cher suddenly realises that 'I love Josh' the intercut technique of showing different shots together of Josh and Cher in flashback seems to express the novel's narrative point of view on the screen. From the very beginning of the novel and its adaptations to the end, the sole theme of the fallibility of matchmaking predominates and pervades all through.

### Notes and references:

1. This review by Janet Maslin was published on August 2, 1996 under the titled "So Genteel, So Scheming, So Austen" in the 'Movie' column of *The New York Times*. Readers can find the entire review in this link: <<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/02/movies/so-genteel-so-scheming-so-austen.html>> .
2. All the excerpts and quotations from the text are taken from the 1971 Oxford edition of *Emma*, ed. by James Kinsley and with an Introduction by David Lodge.
3. This review was printed in *Times of India* on Aug 5, 2010 in the 'Entertainment' Column
4. This review by Harish V. Nair was published in the 'Movie Review' column of *The Behind Woods*. Readers can find the entire review in this link: <<http://www.behindwoods.com/bollywood/hindi-movie-reviews/reviews-1/aisha-movie-review.html>> .

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*Clueless*. Dir. Amy Heckerling. Perf. Alicia Silverstone, Stacey Dash, Brittany Murphy, Paul Rudd. *Paramount Pictures*, 1995. Film.

## Complications of *Being* in Lord Byron's "Darkness"

Hemant Kumar Golapalli

**Abstract:** The article tries to look at some of the ambivalences (characteristic of Lord Byron and by extension Byron's "self-projection" (Wright 598), the Byronic Hero) prevalent in his short poem "Darkness" (1816), especially those concerning death. Nothingness or nihilism (more precisely a reactive nihilism) has been and continues to be a predominant theme of Lord Byron's poetry. Lord Byron in this poem engages with all forms of nothingness or nihilism from individual death to collective extinction to a mood of angst which in his other poems and verse tales, such as "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" and "The Corsair" is replaced by extreme egoism. This paper grounds the poem in a larger philosophical tradition beginning with Epicurus' and his view on living and death. This article refers to other prominent philosophers like Spinoza who talks of 'bondage' in human life, Heidegger whose theories of 'angst' and 'being-towards-death' form the basis for this article. This article also refers to Nietzsche who deals with a wide array of topics from society to the isolation of man, art, artists and death.

**Keywords:** ambivalences; nothingness; nihilism; death; extinction; angst

Lord Byron wrote "Darkness," originally entitled "A Dream" ("I had a dream...") in July of 1816, a year known as the "year without a summer" (Wright 768). The manifest content of the poem which "imagines cosmic catastrophe, and envisages the rapid decay and eventual obliteration of civilisation" might refer partly to the "peculiar[ly] dark and cold conditions of 1816" (Wright 768), caused by the eruption of the Tambora volcano, in what is now Indonesia. In the opening lines of "Darkness," Byron maintains that he "had a dream, which was not all a dream" (1) which could mean that the dream he had was not an "irrational mental phenomena, which ignored logic" (Storr 46) but was in some sense invaded by the reality he saw around him. It could also mean that "Darkness" was a conscious, deliberate refashioning of a dream to suit the political atmosphere of Europe after the Congress of Vienna in 1815.<sup>1</sup>

A more diligent analysis of the poem reveals a deeper engagement with philosophical problems related to social living, death, nothingness and with philosophy in general wherein "opinion [becomes] an omnipotence – whose veil mantles the earth with darkness" ("Childe Harold" 4.833-34). As one proceeds through the poem one realizes that Byron's poetry did contain, what Arthur Symons calls "flaming doubts"(qtd. in Watkins 395), doubts as to the validity of a fixed philosophical position or system in poetry. To attribute, to Lord Byron, a fixed philosophical system is as much a fallacy as to claim, as Arthur Symons does, that he had none. As Byron once stated "As to poetry, in general, the more I think about it, the more I am firm in the conviction that we are all on the wrong path, each and every one. We are all following a revolutionary system that is inherently false. Our generation or the next will come to the same conclusion" (qtd. in Nietzsche 127). Byron understood the complications that involve in the contemplation of man and the dangers associated with absolutes. This was one of the reasons why he was unable to fully subscribe to any particular system of thought, which lead to doubts and contradictions that constitute many of his poems.

A prominent contradiction of his day, peculiar to the Romantic man or the Romantic Movement is the contradiction between "solitary instincts" and "the difficult precepts of social co-operation" (Russell 34) which Byron as a man of influence and Byron the artist would constantly negotiate between throughout his life. The theme of social living has been and continues to be a fundamental question in philosophy and literature. The Byronic hero exists in the natural progression of human history wherein he is inevitably extricated from his environment, indifferent to nature, looking outward or "look[ing] down"

("Childe Harold" 3.400). The Byronic hero then is an "anarchic rebel or a conquering tyrant" (Russell, 33) "who surpasses or subdues mankind" ("Childe Harold" 3.399) while being driven by an extremity of feeling, of suffering that would somehow dumb the essential, inherent "condition of numbness" (Wright 598). In a "subtle vexation of soul" (Nietzsche 369), he is constantly torn between maintaining appearances and to exist, at the same time, 'authentically.' The 'authentic life'<sup>2</sup> does not involve mere isolation or alienation for Heidegger since the Byronic hero, the merely alienated, is also part of the they-self (*Man-selbst*), "withdraw[ing] from the "great mass" the way *they* withdraw" (qtd. in Elkholy 37).

Critically, to understand Byron's "Darkness" is to understand death or finitude for "all earth was but one thought and that was death" (42). To live 'authentically' is intimately connected with Heidegger's concept of being-towards-death. Hence, it would involve not only a mere awareness of death but also include the question of how, precisely, does the *da-sein* ("being – possible") understand death. The ignorance of death is symbolized in Byron's use of the traditionally sinister image of "Forests" (19). Forests have always been considered to be sinister symbols in literature whether it is Dante's "Inferno," Milton's "Comus" or Spencer's "The Faerie Queene," all of which "begin with somebody lost in a forest" (Damon 171). Another prominent example of forests as a sinister symbol appears in Byron's contemporary William Blake. In Blake's "The Tyger," forests symbolize "the darkness of ignorance" (Tomlinson 31). The burning down of the forests by "fire" symbolizes awareness. Fire is a purifying force and a source of light which shows way through the dark forests of ignorance and/or of repression. This awareness in some men, including in the Byronic hero, eventually leads to despair as shown in the phrase "despairing light" (22). This is an instance of one of the possibilities that reside in the being-towards-death.

These possibilities that reside in the being-towards-death are ideally disclosed to it by angst. *Angst* (anxiety) is, essentially, a *stimmung* or a mood; a mood that exists not on the surface of the being but at the very ground of its being, becomes the 'basic state of the being' or *grundbefindlichkeit*. It is not a simple mood that is brought on by everyday 'inauthentic' living. It is a feeling of being shipwrecked, being on the edge or being in an extreme situation. In the case of "Darkness," "those who dwelt within the eye of the volcanos" (16-17), are the ones filled with angst, who have understood the true meaning of death. Angst is also object-less sorrow and as such must be separated from what Freud calls *Furcht* (fear) –

Angst relates to the state and disregards the object, while 'Furcht' [fear] draws attention precisely to the object. (Freud 3444)

It would be wrong to suggest that the "men [who] forgot their passions in the *dread*/ of this their desolation" (7-8; emphasis added) are in a mood of angst. The lines therefore suggest a third category that Freud calls *schreck* or fright. "'Schreck' [...] lays emphasis [...] on the effect produced by a danger which is not met by any preparedness for anxiety. We might say, therefore, that a person protects himself from fright by anxiety" (Freud 3444). Although Freud uses these terms in the context of psychoanalysis, the basic distinction that is drawn between these terms still holds true in the present context. When Freud, for instance, talks about angst or anxiety he is talking about a particular kind of anxiety, that of 'expectant anxiety' or 'anxious expectation' which is "freely floating [...] [which] always foresee[s] the most frightful of all possibilities" (Freud 3446).

In the Heideggerian sense, of course, angst is hard won, it is a mood that comes when one has exhausted all the possibilities of 'inauthentic' living, when one has left all the vanities, illusions, inanities and lies of the world that act as 'tranquilizers' and stops one from perceiving or "understanding [...] the existential meaning of death" (Elkholy35). Therefore, the use of the word 'dread' and "fearful" (as in line 18 "A fearful hope was all the world contain'd") in the poem "Darkness" signifies a breakdown; it

signifies a dysfunctional state of mind whereas angst, more specifically, is a breakthrough for “in a dark time the eye begins to see”(“in a dark time,” 1.1)

Dread *forces* men to forget their “passions,” existential angst, on the other hand, *allows* men to give up their “passions” and makes *da-sein* aware of the being-towards-death. The latter types, for Byron, are the ones who “did rest their chins upon their clenched hands, and smiled” (25-26) at impending death. These men are calm, imperturbable and represent for Byron, one of the three ways of understanding death. We will call this type the Epicurean hero deriving from the philosophy of Epicurus (341 B.C. – 270 B.C.). Epicurus advanced *ataraxia* (imperturbability) or a freedom from the perturbation that includes uncontrolled passions caused by the sound and fury of an ‘inauthentic’ world as the basis of ‘the good life.’<sup>3</sup> This type, for Epicurus, has the best chance to find what is called ‘*eudaimonia*’ (happiness). Like Epicurus, Spinoza advances a similar philosophy wherein he suggests or demonstrates rather than it is necessary to give up one’s passions or desires which he calls ‘primary causes’ “because men are generally ignorant of the causes of their desires” (4). The inability to control or moderate one’s emotions is what Spinoza calls “bondage” in *The Ethics* (4). Spinoza advocates a more extreme stance than that of Epicurus, which is that of passivity related in turn to his concept of free will (or rather the lack of it). So the good life for Spinoza basically means a life without errors which runs quite contrary to the character of the Byronic hero.

The Byronic hero in this poem represents the other side of the spectrum from the Epicurean hero. The Byronic hero tries to hasten the prospect of death, “immediate and inglorious” (43) by feeding his “funeral pile [...] with fuel”(28) when he realizes not without a certain amount of chagrin, “the fatal truth” that “the tree of knowledge is not that of life” (“Manfred” 1.1). What the Byronic hero fears is not the final coming of death but the incompleteness of life; what he fears is not having led a good life or even a full life. As such The Byronic hero is constantly seizing upon possibilities and making mistakes which reveals to him what his being is capable of. He has not realized in a sense the possibilities that his life holds. What, then, separates the Byronic hero from the Epicurean is the acceptance of death and not the mere awareness of death; it is the awareness not merely of death or finitude (if death could be interpreted as a physical event) but the awareness of death as a nothing, a fact, or as Nietzsche calls it, a “banality” (417). In *Letter to Monnoecus*, Epicurus suggests one to -

Get used to believing that death is nothing to us. [...] a correct knowledge of the fact that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life a matter for contentment, not by adding a limitless time [to life] but by removing the longing for immortality. For there is nothing fearful in life for one who has grasped that there is nothing fearful in the absence of life. Thus, he is a fool who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when present but because it is painful when it is still to come. (13)

In keeping with the view of Epicurus and in the context of impending death to be found in “Darkness,” Nietzsche criticizes the “singular druggist-souls,” the ones who suffer in anticipation of death, who “have made of death a drop of poison, unpleasant to taste, which makes the whole of life hideous” (502). This attitude towards death is again intimately connected with the attitude towards contraries that has formed the basis of so much of the romantic and modernist poetry. The fallacy of understanding death as an experience is directly proportional to looking at life and death, the ontological dichotomies as discrete entities divided by borders. The ignorance of the proper meaning of death causes fear or “dread” which leads us to the third type of men who “lay down and hid their eyes and wept” (24-25). It is through this attitude to contraries that the image of death is amplified into a ‘hideous’ and ‘painful’ experience. To understand death as nothing, as Nietzsche proposes, one must understand all contraries (including death) merely as transitions and not as contrasts (420). In essence, the Byronic hero is a contradictory figure in that he neither typifies the dualized fears of mortals nor is he in a state of

“complete simplicity” (“Little Gidding” 5.40) of the non-dual self, of the Epicurean hero. In his sorrow is the Byronic hero a figure of angst or in his haste a man betrayed by his uncontrolled passions which disallow him to stoically accept death? He neither fears death nor can he accept death. Thus, it would be impossible to neatly categorize the ambivalent attitude of the Byronic hero.

From the topic of individual death, we are led to the larger topic of what Jonathan Schell in *The Fate of the Earth* calls “a second death,” (115) a collective death. An individual death or a hundred individual deaths is nothing compared to the greater, profounder nothingness that extinction steps mankind into. Faced with eventual individual death amplified by collective death or extinction, the individual mind extends to include what Hannah Arendt calls “a common world,” which is “made up of all institutions, all cities, nations, and other communities, and all works of fabrication, art, thought, and science, and it survives the death of an individual” (qtd. in Schell 118). The common world signifies the continuation of mankind as a species. The second death is not only significant because it brings an end to the common world or the death of all people but also because it brings with it “the separate loss of the future generations,” “a cancellation of all future generations of human beings” (115) for “death cuts off life; extinction cuts off birth” (117). The comprehension of such a huge loss forces men in “Darkness” to gather around “to look once more into each other’s face” (15) before the “cities were consum’d” (13) not only by “fire” but by “war where every man is enemy to every man” (“Leviathan” 13). The sense of community resulting from the awareness of death very soon disintegrates into alienation and violence.

The dissolution of the world and life, as we know it, is characterized by the same conditions that characterize the dissolution of art of which Nietzsche talks about in the section titled ‘From the soul of artists and writers’ in *Human, all-too-human*. On its path to dissolution, according to Nietzsche, art “touches in the process all phases of its beginnings, its childhood, its imperfection its former risks and extravagances. It interprets its origin, its evolution, as it is perishing” (127). Replacing art with life, man is also led to an earlier primitive stage of mankind or the natural condition of mankind where “the life of man [was] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (“Leviathan” 13). It was a state of complete isolation where “a meal was bought with blood and each sate sullenly apart/ gorging himself in gloom: no love was left” (39-41).

This state of war consisting “of every man against every man” leads to one of the poem’s most enigmatic scenes involving two men who were enemies, possibly before the planet became “a lump of death, a chaos of hard clay,” (72) before darkness became “the universe” (82) – “but two of the enormous city did survive, and they were enemies” (56-57). The fact that “they were enemies” would seem like an unnecessary inclusion since they died “Unknowing who he was upon whose brow/ Famine had written Fiend” (68-69). It can be argued that death when it comes is an indiscriminate, equalizing force bringing about a destruction of both an individual and the individual relations as part of the collective world. What is enigmatic though is the nature of their death. The two men made a “feeble” fire (another instance of the terrible despair brought on by (feeble) light or awareness) near an altar and then “...as it grew lighter” (65),

“lifted up

Their eyes [...], and beheld

Each other's aspects saw, and shriek'd, and died” (64-66)

The men, it can be argued, saw death, in all its “hideousness” (67), in each other’s respective “aspects” (66), which represents a final coming to terms with death. This scene would represent a position that rejects Epicurus’ philosophy of death, a non-dual fearlessness which is very difficult to attain. These lines typify, as Larkin declares in “Aubade,” the state of “total emptiness for ever.” In conclusion, Byron in

“Darkness” shows us all the possibilities that precede the state of complete nothingness that is death and extinction for “it is in these possibilities that the being ‘understands’ itself” (par. Heidegger 184).

### Notes:

1. “The congress of Vienna was convened in 1815 by the four European powers which had defeated Napoleon. The first goal was to establish a new balance of power in Europe which would prevent imperialism within Europe, such as the Napoleonic Empire, and maintain the peace between the great powers. The second goal was to prevent political revolutions, such as the French Revolution, and maintain the status quo.” (www2.sunysuffolk.edu)

2. The authentic life or authenticity is a Heideggerian concept positing that an authentic being is a being-towards-death. We become authentic by acknowledging the deepest truth of our being that is being-towards-death which is revealed to us by anxiety or *angst*.

3. The good life is a major concept in Western ethics, it conceptualizes what is best for an individual or “a life which might rationally be wished for by every human” (Debbarma 347). For Plato, the well-being of an individual is related to social well-being while for Aristotle the good life involves contemplation combined with action. For Epicurus the basic of the good life is *ataraxia* or imperturbability.

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## Poets as Visionaries

Rob Harle

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the recent find of Shelley's (presumed lost) poem written 200 years ago entitled: *A Political Essay on The Existing State of Things*. A comparison is then made of the subject matter of this poem with that of my own, and my great grandmother's poetry which shows that this work of Shelley's is as relevant today as it was in the early 1800s. The suggestion is made that the best poets are visionaries and I use the above examples to illustrate this claim.

**Keywords:** Shelley, *The Existing State of Things*, visionary, activism

The recent "find" and consequent acquisition by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, of Percy Bysshe Shelley's work; *A Political Essay on The Existing State of Things* written in 1811 is exciting, vitally important, and engagingly relevant to the 'state of things in 2016'. Shelley wrote this 172 line poem (with Preface and Notes) under the pseudonym of - *A Gentleman of the University of Oxford* just over 200 years ago. He is considered a poet of the romantic genre, and perhaps the greatest lyrical poet in English literature. With masterpieces such as *Ode to the West Wind*, *To a Skylark*, and *Adonais* - rightly so. However, Shelley's work *The Necessity of Atheism*, the pamphlet which resulted in him being "sent down" (expelled) from Oxford, and *The Existing State of Things* show clearly he was also a reactionary, rebellious, activist poet.

In *The Existing State of Things* he prefaces the work with a disclaimer:

The following poem is such, as some might conceive to demand an apology; it might appear to those, who do not consider with sufficiently accurate investigation, that its ultimate view is subversive of the existing interests of Government. A moment's attention to the sentiments on which it is founded must demonstrate the erroneousness of this supposition. (p. 5)

I am personally not convinced by this disclaimer, fortunately those in power at the time of publication were. Had they not been Shelley could have been charged with sedition and faced far more dire consequences than being expelled from Oxford because of his following publication (the same year) regarding atheism.

Punishment for sedition in this era varied greatly, partly depending on whether actual physical violence was committed or only criticism with the written or spoken word. Nevertheless, fines, periods of imprisonment, or transportation to the colonies were all possibilities. (Scrivener ) Had he been charged and found guilty he may have ended up a convict in Australia, avoided accidental drowning off the coast of Italy at the age of thirty, and become Australia's first bard!

A Footnote to the Preface also shows Shelley's distrust and loathing of certain religious doctrine and members of the Church. A few pertinent lines:

These ideas of a future state of rewards and punishments, it must be confessed, do not exactly coincide with those of St. Athanasius, regarding that, by which he so liberally condemns all who differ from his own opinions to eternal torture. (p. 6 – 7)

This shows that Shelley had in his "firing line" not only Kings and Governments but also the Church. *The Necessity of Atheism* was printed (published) also in 1811, a revised and expanded version was printed in 1813, please see Appendix 1 for a full copy of this text. As mentioned, *Existing State of Things* is vitally important especially for scholars researching Shelley's very short career. The work was, "considered lost until it was rediscovered in a private collection in 2006, and has only been viewed by a handful of scholars since." "Now the 20-page printed pamphlet – the only known copy of the text in existence- has been acquired by the Bodleian Library..." (Flood, 2015) The library has digitised the text in exact facsimile and is free to download to the general public, for me this find and

*availability* is a literary “pot of gold”. Please see References at the end of this paper for the URL link. Below a few lines from the poem:

Ye cold advisers of yet colder kings,  
To whose fell breast no passion virtue brings,  
Who scheme, regardless of the poor man’s pang,  
Who coolly sharpen misery’s sharpest fang,  
Yourselves secure. Your’s is the power to breathe  
O’er all the world the infectious blast of death, (*Lines 37 – 42*).

I came across the news of this find in a wonderful article in *The Guardian* paper written by Alison Flood, this was exciting news for me personally for two reasons. Firstly, my great grandmother, Agnes Maddox (wife of Dr Richard L. Maddox) wrote similar poetry concerning social inequality, scathing of the existing government and rulers of England in the 1880s. My own ‘find’ of Agnes’ poetry (and artwork) in her notebooks and memoirs gave me the idea to create a book of poetry in which each contemporary poet represented had to have an ancestor who also wrote poetry – “ink the veins” or “poetic DNA” some have commented. This resulted in the publication in 2014 of *Voices Across Generations* which I edited. (Harle, 2014) As well as the normal text poems the book has scans of original hand written poems, and photos as far back as the late 1880s. Appendix 2 reproduces two of Agnes’ more activist style poems, followed by two of my own. I am not at all comparing the quality of the poems by Agnes or myself with that of Shelley, just the subject matter and concern about social issues. As the spokesperson for the library at Oxford said; “*The themes Shelley addresses remain as relevant today as they were 200 years ago.*” (Flood, 2015) Secondly, both Shelley and Maddox’s poems concerning activist themes are similar to many of my own and informed my statement that, these works “*are engagingly relevant to the state of things in 2015*”. Do the following words of Shelley from *A Defence of Poetry* sound familiar? “*To him that hath, more shall be given; and from him that hath not, the little that he hath shall be taken away’. The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer;*”

Shelley’s belief that poetry can change public opinion is well known, as he is often quoted from his prose work *A Defence of Poetry*, “*poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world*”. Although Shelley, was from a well educated, and well to do English social position, as was my great grandmother, he chose to champion the poor, and speak on their behalf, through poetry and prose. That is, he gave a voice to those who were rendered mute because of social standing, lack of education and suppression by those in power whose only agenda was to further, “feather their own nests”.

This “championing of the poor”, if for no other reason, connects Shelley with my recent poetry and publication efforts which has seen ten books published in the past three years. These books have been co-edited respectively, Sunil Sharma, Sangeeta Sharma and Jaydeep Sarangi from India. Our declared modus operandi was, and is, to give a voice to those who for the same reasons that were present in Shelley’s time cannot speak for themselves. Our work has helped the Dalit in India, indigenous Australians and exiled Tibetans tell their story through poetry and short fiction to the world.

Poetry is serious business. As Shelley remarks, “*Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it.*” (ADOP) Writing poetry is not an activity for dabblers nor for insincere dilettantes. As the old saying goes, “*If you don’t have anything worth dying for you’ve got nothing worth living for.*” All great poetry is worth dying for. In the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century poetry seems to have become quite prolific, it is my opinion that this increase in quantity, primarily because of the Internet and desktop publishing, has not necessarily been accompanied by commensurate quality.

Much recent poetry has narrow self-absorbed themes, oh yes, sorry I forgot, it is a Steve Jobs’ “I” “me”, “mine” world! Apart from solipsistic subject matter, poor poetic structural quality, such as forced amateurish rhyming words at the end of lines, and complete ignorance of metrical qualities, result in poems which are quite tragic to read and distract the reader from of the *sometimes*

important message of the poem. Secondly “free verse” does not mean “free for all”, good quality free verse should still retain such poetic qualities as rhythm, musicality or cadence, and use the absolute best possible word available in every case. I despair of reading poetry which is churned out, with little or no revision, and reads just like a paragraph in a newspaper article. Good poetry may come from being born with the gift of a poet but we also need to learn the craft of writing poetry to hone the works into their final perfection. One of the best resources I have come across for learning this is a fairly old book, *The Poet and The Poem* (Jerome, 1979).

The great poets of the past all were characterised by having a visionary quality, not necessarily in everything they wrote, but when Tennyson wrote of the “*flower in the crannied wall*” he was dealing with the big questions concerning humankind not just his personal psychoses! The simplicity and brevity of this poem belies its significance.

Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,  
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower—but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

“Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators, or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters.” (ADOP) Shelley in this prose work is not giving a lesson on how to write poetry but has the intention of restoring poetry to its rightful position as one of the highest, most important arts. Again quoting from his essay, “Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge.” This statement immediately reminded me of the lines of T.S. Eliot’s poem, in *The Four Quartets, Burnt Norton*:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

This work is absolutely at the heart of divinity, and expresses the “*centre and circumference of knowledge*” as an astonishing metaphysical insight. If poets are truly “*the unacknowledged legislators of the world*”, and as poets we emphatically believe this, then it carries with it huge responsibilities. If we want to be taken seriously and bring about change for the good of all people we need to develop or maintain the visionary components that result in great poetry such as the Shelley, Tennyson and Eliot examples above.

## Appendix

### *Two poems by Agnes Maddox written 1880 – 1890*

#### **The Visit of The Shah**

England stretches hands of welcome  
To her Royal Guest  
Shows him all her Palaces  
Gives him of her best  
Proudly wave the Flags on high  
Happy people passing by  
All to please the Shah!

Royal hands present their treasure  
 Gifts are lordly without measure!  
 Army, Navy. all combine  
 To show him how they can shine  
 "Happy People." "Wealthy land"  
 Whispers he behind his hand.

Shall we show the King another picture  
 Not just from the Palace of the Queen  
 Where around the island of the wealthy  
 Moan the dark tide of our crimes unseen.

Where the little children live or languish  
 In foul dens amid despair  
 Does the Shah know of this Coppice?  
 When the lank beasts spread in noisome air.

Does he know how very sad and dreary  
 Are the lives of people in "the Slums"?  
 Or of this deep wrong is England silent?  
 And for very shame of it – is dumb?

Oh the sorrow, Oh the sadness  
 Of this blot on England's fame!  
 How can she rejoice and triumph  
 With this slur upon our name?

Oh Rulers. Princes. People  
 Rise and battle with the Foe!  
 Grow sweet flowers where lank weeds flourish  
 Till the fields and plant and sow.

And when next the Shah doth visit  
 This fair land of wealth and fame  
 Let him find the thorns uprooted  
 Slums called [by] another name.

"Gardens" fair with all things lovely  
 Grow and flourish in fresh air  
 So that even Kings may enter  
 And pronounce thine "Very fair".

### **Dedicated To A Visitor In The East End Of London**

Without the helping hand, how can the poor arise?  
 Give them – bread first – after that  
 The virtues – if you're wise!  
 How can they rise. When all they know of life  
 is living death?  
 And – every breath they draw  
 is just a dying breath.  
 To them. Virtue is but a name -  
 A name – and nothing more – and Truth a Tabernacle

With a closed door!  
 A door that's never opened. Night or day!  
 How can they enter 'till they know the way?  
 Oh Ye Who Know these things.

***Two poems by Rob Harle written 2014 & 1996***

**Ennui**

*He is Ennui! - with tear-filled eye he dreams  
 Of scaffolds, as he puffs his water pipe.  
 Reader, you know this dainty monster too;  
 -Hypocrite reader, - fellowman, my twin!*

...*Charles Baudelaire*

Ennui I'll have no part of you,  
 living in a village green  
 where water pipes are plague-like  
 common as the morning mist,  
 and just as truth obscuring.

I am x21 an alien from far away,  
 millennia have come and gone  
 and only peace sustains my home of light.  
 Baudelaire, an alien and from very far away  
 lit the smallest candle  
 in the *Flowers of Evil's* pages,  
 but no one understood the warnings,  
 or didn't care ... Ennui?

Mugabe - dictators, despots of history -  
 Stalin, Kim Jong II and the like  
 inhuman beyond acceptance  
 merchants of unconscionable death,

have tortured countless millions  
 more sinister than any Satan

invented by a deceptive, lying, dying Church.  
 They still exist .... though covert,  
 hidden in the cells of spread sheets

going by the multi-national title ... CEO,  
 their insanity kills others - once removed  
 their destruction of the very earth  
 that sustains their own deranged existence.

Greed drips from their mouths  
 like puss from gaping gangrene wounds,  
 families live in constant fear  
 of hunger and foreclosures,  
 as media barons manipulate the masses  
 from fortresses of legal shelter.

Empty hearts in hollow suits  
 haunt Wall Street and the like,  
 these are no dainty monsters  
 and no tears will ever fill their steely eyes,  
 and the planet slowly dies.

### **Betrayal**

The baptismal fonts decay,  
 and information structures  
 breed like alien dictators;  
 fat rubber stamps rot slowly  
 as the assumption of integrity  
 collapses under hypocrisy's vengeance.  
 Force the young to live in gutters  
 squats and cardboard cut-outs,  
 build your National empires grand  
 which rest on stumps of misery;  
 your status rises, temporarily  
 with every option to oppress.

The young who only want a chance,  
 share the air and blood that's yours;  
 even more they trust you with their care.  
 Just like Judas you betray  
 not once, not twice,  
 but your enshrinement in the Chamber  
 perfects a continual betrayal  
 of lies and graft and horror.

Even as you drown your mind  
 and whisky spills across your soul,  
 you can't escape the burden of their hope.

Councillors of heavy hype and hail  
 empty, heartless, barren,  
 your life is a useless farce  
 if you sleep warm and weightless  
 when your children cower and freeze  
 in the sewer of your mind.

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## Shelley's letter to the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*: A Study in "the unfortunate subject"

Joyjit Ghosh

**Abstract:** Keats's *Endymion* (1818) has an infamous history of criticism. Almost immediately after its publication it was bitterly critiqued first in the *Blackwood's Magazine* and then in the *Quarterly Review*. Shelley among other friends of Keats would allege that these attacks on Keats had contributed to the poet's early death. In his Preface to "Adonais" (1821), Shelley made an allegation in this regard against the *Quarterly Review* in particular. He also wrote a letter to William Gifford, the Editor of *Quarterly Review*, most probably in 1820, but there is no record that it was sent to Mr Gifford. The letter has its "unfortunate subject" that involves the discourse on the vituperative criticism of *Endymion* and its terrible effect on Keats. The present paper attempts to make a close study of this subject with reference to some other letters of Shelley written before and after Keats's death and the letters of Keats written during 1818 among other things. In the course of discussion the paper also modestly examines Shelley's relation with the *Quarterly Review* that from time to time attacked his personal life and his works.

**Key Words:** Genius, politics, poor, review, savage, unfortunate

Keats's *Endymion* written in 1817 and published the following year has an infamous history of criticism. In the August number of *Blackwood's Magazine* (1818) J.G. Lockhart made a savage attack on the poet and his works particularly *Endymion*. It was followed by another bitter piece of criticism of *Endymion* by John Wilson Croker that appeared in the *Quarterly Review* for September, 1818. Edmund Blunden in his Introduction to *Selected Poems: John Keats* (1955) observes, "Much has been written since 1818 on these destructive pieces of criticism of Keats's *Endymion*, and it will still be debated whether or not they did more than other adversities to destroy Keats himself" (Blunden 31). This is a significant observation. Shelley among other friends of Keats would allege that these attacks on Keats had contributed to the poet's early death. In his Preface to "Adonais" (1821), one may remember, Shelley made an allegation in this regard against the *Quarterly Review* in particular.<sup>1</sup> He also wrote a letter to William Gifford, the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*, which was most probably never sent. This letter does not bear any date. But from a close reading of *Select Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1882), edited by Richard Garnett, we can guess that the letter was written in 1820 (145-48). Reading the letter almost two hundred years after it had been written is an enriching experience as the letter under scrutiny offers a sharp edge to the debate alluded to by Blunden.<sup>2</sup> The present paper basically attempts to make a close study of Shelley's letter with a view to exploring its "unfortunate subject"<sup>3</sup> but in the course of discussion it modestly touches upon Shelley's own relation with the *Quarterly Review*.

Garnett in his Introduction to *Select Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* comments, "He [Shelley] is armed against triviality by never writing without a legitimate motive" (Garnett xiv). The letter under concern has certainly "a legitimate motive". It begins with a reference to "a slanderous paper" alluding to a review of *The Revolt of Islam* that appeared in the *Quarterly Review* in which he was "compared to Pharaoh". Shelley's reaction in this regard is worth noting, "I never notice anonymous attacks. The wretch who wrote it has doubtless the additional reward of a consciousness of his motives, besides the thirty guineas a sheet or whatever it is that you pay him". We know that Shelley had a strained relation with the *Quarterly Review* which time and again attacked not only his poetical works but his personal life as well. Kim Wheatley in *Shelley and His Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics* (1999) lucidly observes:

Regardless of the initial impetus for the attacks, from the vantage point of the reviewers, Shelley turns out to be the ideal object for politically motivated personal attacks. His life exemplifies the connection between radical opinions, lax moral principles, and immoral behaviour. Since Shelley is a wicked man, it follows that his poetry is perverted. Before it even reviews his work, the *Quarterly* blasts Shelley's reputation. (Wheatley 44-45)

The observation of Wheatley compels conviction. Shelley's radical political doctrines and his staunch atheism often made him a prey to violent attacks from the reviewers, and more importantly, obscured his powers as a poet during his lifetime.

The central issue of the letter under concern, however, is what Shelley phrases as "the unfortunate subject". Shelley makes it clear to Mr William Gifford, the Editor, that he entreats the latter's attention to the "feelings and situation" of the author of *Endymion*, and rhetorically writes, "I am persuaded that in an appeal to his humanity and justice, he will acknowledge 'fas ab hoste doceri'"<sup>4</sup>. Shelley thus shrewdly brings home the point that he is not writing the letter for his own sake but for one whose work has not been properly evaluated in the *Quarterly Review*. Shelley's argument is very much nuanced as he states:

I am aware that the first duty of a reviewer is, towards the public, and I am willing to confess that the "Endymion" is a poem considerably defective. And that, perhaps, it deserved as much censure as the pages of your Review record against it; but, not to mention that that there is a certain contemptuousness of phraseology from which it is difficult for a critic to abstain, in the review of "Endymion", I don't think that the writer has given it its due praise.

The observation of Shelley is significant. First of all, he agrees that Keats's poem is "considerably defective" and hence it merits the "censure" by the reviewer. The informed reader is aware that in his letter to Keats, dated 27 July 1820, Shelley criticizes *Endymion* on the ground that "the treasures of poetry" in it are "poured forth with indistinct profusion" (143). Shelley himself sings in glory of the Skylark who "pourest thy full heart/In profuse strains of unpremeditated art". The phrase "indistinct profusion" is therefore loaded and most probably speaks about the lack of, what Bhaotosh Chatterjee calls, "a unified structure of thought" in *Endymion* (Chatterjee 247). Shelley even significantly adds that this will not be endured by "people in general" thereby largely supporting the act of the reviewer whose "first duty" is "towards the public".

But Shelley is not prepared to accept that the reviewer should resort to "a certain contemptuousness of phraseology" while criticizing *Endymion* particularly when there are passages in the poem which bear a testimony to Keats's potential as a poet. In Shelley's view, "the poem, with all its faults, is a very remarkable production for a man of Keats's age" thereby reminding us of Keats's own words in the Preface to *Endymion*

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of must necessarily taste in going over the following pages.

I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the reviewer in the *Quarterly Review* did not honour this modest approach on the part of a blooming poet and attacked his poem in bitter terms:

If anyone should be bold enough to purchase this "Poetic Romance," and so much more patient, than ourselves, as to get beyond the first book, and so much more fortunate as to find a meaning, we entreat him to make us acquainted with his success; we shall then return to the task we now abandon in despair, and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr. Keats and to our readers.

The reviewer thus caustically criticized Keats's "Poetic Romance" and commented that in spite of "the fullest stretch of our perseverance" they failed "to find a meaning" in it. Keats was even compared to Leigh Hunt in this regard:

This author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype, who, though he impudently presumed to seat himself in the chair of criticism, and to measure his own poetry by his own standard, yet generally had a meaning. But Mr. Keats had advanced no dogmas which he was bound to support by examples; his nonsense therefore is quite gratuitous; he writes it for its own sake, and, being bitten by Mr. Leigh Hunt's insane criticism, more than rivals the insanity of his poetry.<sup>6</sup>

This is savage criticism. The quoted passage is replete with abusive adjectives like “tiresome”, “absurd”, “insane” etc. and many other extremely unpleasant expressions, and thereby dismisses Keats’s poetry as “nonsense”. Shelley in the letter under concern staunchly reacts to it:

Why it should have been reviewed at all, excepting for the purposes of bringing its excellencies into notice, I cannot conceive, for it was very little read, and there was no danger that it should become a model to the age of that false taste, with which I confess it is replenished. (146-47)

Shelley’s retort to the reviewer contains a vital point, and that is, “it was very little read”. Shelley draws the attention of the Editor of the *Quarterly Review* to various lines and passages in the text and argues that “it deserved milder usage”. In Shelley’s view, the review of *Endymion* emerges as “a model to the age of ... false taste” thereby possibly hinting at the destructive criticism of non-conformist writers including himself by the critics and reviewers of his age who succumb to mercenary (“thirty guineas a sheet”) and other ugly motives.<sup>7</sup>

The letter to the Editor of *Quarterly Review* has some other interesting aspects which we would like to explore now. Shelley in the middle of the letter engages in giving an account on the effect of the review of *Endymion* on the poet. Let us read how Shelley broaches the issue:

Poor Keats was thrown into a dreadful state of mind by this review, which, I am persuaded, was not written with any intention of producing the effect, to which it has, at least, greatly contributed, of embittering his existence, and inducing a disease from which there are now but faint hopes of his recovery. The first effects are described to me to have resembled insanity, and it was by assiduous watching that he was restrained from effecting purposes of suicide. The agony of his sufferings at length produced the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs, and the usual process of consumption appears to have begun. (147)

This is a passage that demands a closer scrutiny. The language of the passage anticipates that of the Preface to “Adonais” (“The savage criticism on his *Endymion* . . . produced the most violent effect on his susceptible mind; the agitation thus originated ended in the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs; a rapid consumption ensued”)<sup>8</sup> and gives birth to a debate on the politics of representation. The question may arise: who “described” this “dreadful state of mind” of Keats to Shelley? Keats even contemplated “suicide”, Shelley wrote to Mr Gifford. It may sound ironic that Keats dedicated his *Endymion* to the memory of Thomas Chatterton who took arsenic in a fit of depression and died at the age of 18. The question, however, remains unanswered: who told Shelley about Keats’s “insanity” caused by the infamous review? In any case, Keats himself never did that. The question has no easy answer. But Keats was not certainly as much disturbed as was represented by Shelley. A close reading of Keats’s letters written during 1818 shows that the poet was more pained by his “own domestic criticism” than by the reviews in *Blackwood* and *Quarterly*. But these bitter pieces of criticism could not dampen his faith in his own poetic genius. The letter to J.A. Hessey dated 8 October 1818 reveals that Keats is making an evaluation of himself as a poet:

I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness – Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own Works.

Keats indeed emerges as “a severe critic” of *Endymion* when he honestly acknowledges that in his poem he “leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become acquainted with the Soundings, the quick sands. & the rocks”. These are all metaphorical expressions on the part of a budding poet to suggest the adventure that he undertook while composing the poem. Keats readily recognized the shortcomings of *Endymion* but he did not forget to make a fresh resolution: “I have written independently *without judgement* – I may write independently & *with judgement* hereafter”.<sup>9</sup> Keats, in fact, was fully conscious of what he was attempting at this stage of his poetic development. David Daiches sounds persuasive when he states, “it was for him a necessary stage, and he felt a compulsion not only to write it [*Endymion*] but to publish it” (Daiches 917).

As a poet Keats was indeed “self-scanned” and “self-secure”, to borrow the epithets from Matthew Arnold’s sonnet titled “Shakespeare”. He wrote to J.A Hesse on 8 October, 1818, “I was never afraid of failure, for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest”.<sup>10</sup> This tremendous self-confidence is again echoed in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats, written in the same year: “I think I shall be among the English poets after my death”.<sup>11</sup>

The “unfortunate” side of the whole story is that Shelley was not aware of Keats’s self-assessment nor of the latter’s self-esteem. He loved to portray Keats as a hypersensitive and fragile poet who could be shattered to pieces by a bitter piece of review. This is evident in his letter to the Editor of the *Quarterly Review* as well as in the Preface to “Adonais”. In this context we would like to quote a sentence from the Preface that has an unmistakable rhetorical flourish:

The genius of the lamented person to whose memory I have dedicated these unworthy verses was not less delicate and fragile than it was beautiful; and where cankerworms abound, what wonder if its young flower was blighted in the bud?<sup>12</sup>

James A.W. Heffernan in his paper titled “‘Adonais’: Shelley’s consumption of Keats” shows in a brilliant way that “this strange story of Keats’s death was deliberately fabricated by Shelley”, and comments that “it is not only a fabrication, it is also an insult” (Heffernan 301). To a fair extent, one may agree with Heffernan. One would notice that the expression “poor Keats” recurs in Shelley’s letters (it is there in the letter to the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*). The letter to Edmund Ollier, dated 25 September 1821, may also be cited here where Shelley writes, “The “Adonais”, in spite of its mysticism, is the least imperfect of my compositions, and, as the image of my regret and honour for poor Keats, I wish it to be so” (181). The repetitive use of the expression “poor Keats” in Shelley’s correspondence seems to evoke the imperfect sympathy of a poet for a fellow poet.

Kim Wheatley who views Shelley as “the chief publicist, if not the inventor” of the myth of Keats’s death forcefully argues, “The myth that Keats was killed by an article in the *Quarterly Review* enables Shelley to project onto the younger poet his own sense of persecution at the hands of the reviewers”(163-64). At this point it would not be inappropriate if we take into consideration Byron’s letter to John Murray, dated 26 April 1821, which shows the former’s reaction to Keats’s death:

Is it true – what Shelley writes me that poor John Keats died at Rome of the *Quarterly Review*? I am {very} sorry for it – though I think he took the wrong line as a poet – and was spoilt by Cockneyfying and Surburbing – and versifying Tooke’s Pantheon and Lempriere’s Dictionary ...<sup>13</sup>

So Shelley here emerges as the “publicist” of the myth of Keats’s death. A close reading of the lines quoted above reveals that like Shelley Byron also uses the same unkind/insulting epithet “poor” in connection with Keats. But unlike Shelley (who tries to make a balanced view of Keats’s poetry) Byron mercilessly criticizes Keats (“he took the wrong line as a poet”). His reference to “Cockneyfying” among other things is indeed savage. Byron refuses to recognize Keats as an original poet, and Byron’s language in the aforementioned passage is as biting as that of a “lampoon” which as a form of satire achieved excellence at the hands of Dryden and Pope.

Before concluding my paper I would like to make an analysis of Shelley’s appreciation of “Hyperion” which comes at the end of the letter to the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*. Shelley

remarks, “The great proportion of this piece is surely in the very highest style of poetry. I speak impartially, for the canons of taste to which Keats has conformed in his other compositions are the very reverse of my own” (148). This is where Shelley pays an honest tribute to Keats. And Shelley’s impartial appreciation of a fellow poet’s poetry opens up a fascinating discourse in the context of Romantic poetry. Shelley’s poetry indeed differs from that of Keats in “the canons of taste”. Shelley’s views on poetry and the role of a poet which are recorded in “A Defence of Poetry” are opposed to those of Keats that are embodied in his letters. In Shelley’s view, a poet essentially comprises and unites both the functions of the prophet and the legislator whereas in the idea of Keats, a poet must have “self-concentration”. One may very well refer to that oft-quoted letter of Keats dated 16 August 1820 where Keats gives voice to his aesthetic doctrine, “An *artist* must serve Mammon”, and taking a cue from Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* prescribes to Shelley that he “might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and ‘load every rift’ of your subject with ore”.<sup>14</sup> Keats’s concern with the beautiful rather than with the political or any other consideration is manifest here. “But it is also true”, to agree with Jon Mee, “that this aesthetics of pleasure was itself politically inflected as part of the struggle against what both Hunt and Keats perceived as the gloomy Christianity of the old order” (Mee xxiii-xxiv).

Shelley’s letter to the Editor of the *Quarterly Review* fascinates the readers of the present day. It sheds critical light on the function of a reviewer but at the same time it takes cudgels against the “false taste” of his age which mainly accounts for the vituperative criticism of the works of himself and that of his contemporary writers. The letter has a central place in the discourse on Shelley’s relation with the critics and reviewers of his time. The letter is “at once barbed and imploring”.<sup>15</sup> The last paragraph of the letter contains a sentence of crucial import: “But let me not extort anything from your pity”. While championing the cause of *Endymion* against its savage criticism Shelley does not seek “pity” from the editor or from anyone on earth. Because he believes that *Endymion* contains “the promise of ultimate excellence”.

### Notes

All references to the letters of Shelley are from *Select Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited with an Introduction by Richard Garnett, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1882 ; digitized by the Internet Archive in 2008). The page no/s are given in parentheses.

1. See the Preface to “Adonais” in *Selected Poems: Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Edmund Blunden, (London: Collins, 1954; latest reprint 1970), pp. 434-36. The subsequent references to the Preface are from this edition.

2. Edmund Blunden’s essay titled “*Endymion* and Criticism” in the Introduction to *Selected Poems: John Keats*, pp. 30-33, offers an illuminating discussion on the contemporary critical reception of *Endymion*.

3. The phrase is Shelley’s own.

4. The full phrase is “Fas est et ab hoste doceri” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book IV, 428). It means “It’s better to learn even from an enemy”.

5. The Preface to *Endymion* is available on  
<file:///F:/Endymion,%20by%20John%20Keats%20%20%20Preface.html>

6. The criticism of *Endymion* in the *Quarterly Review* is available on  
<file:///F:/John%20Wilson%20Croker%20%20%20Review%20of%20Keats's%20Endymion.html>

7. Kim Wheatley in *Shelley and His Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics* (p.43) quotes a statement from Hazlitt’s essay, “The Periodical Press,” published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1823 where Hazlitt identifies a reason for the reviews’ reliance on vituperative rhetoric: “It is equally well known and

understood too, that this savage system of bullying and assassination is no longer pursued from the impulse of angry passions or furious prejudices[implying that it was at one time], but on a cold-blooded mercenary calculation of the profits which idle curiosity, and the vulgar appetite for slander, may enable its authors to derive from it". Hazlitt's phrase "a cold-blooded mercenary calculation of the profits" stands close to Shelley's "thirty guineas a sheet".

8. See the quoted passage in Preface to "Adonais", p.435.

9. See Keats's letter to Hessey in *John Keats: Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings, revised with a new Introduction and Notes by Jon Mee. (Oxford UP, 2009), p.146.

10. This statement is also taken from p.146.

11. See this oft-quoted statement in p. 151.

12. See the quoted passage in Preface to "Adonais", p.435.

13. Byron's Correspondence with John Murray, 3: 1820-1824 [work in progress], edited by Peter Cochran., p. 88 <<https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/byron-and-murray-1820-18241.pdf>>

14. See the letter in p.361. Graham Hough writes, "this letter perhaps marks the beginning in England of the doctrine that was later to develop into "Art for Art's sake". See *The Romantic Poets* (Calcutta: BI Publications Pvt. Ltd, 1980; 1995), p.157.

15. The argument is that of James A.W. Heffernan: "Self-defeatingly argued, at once barbed and imploring, this letter was apparently never sent". See the article " 'Adonais': Shelley's Consumption of Keats",p. 302.

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## “Ineffectual angel” mired in “adolescent” thoughts ? Rereading Shelley

Chanchal De Boxi

**Abstract:** Among the English Romantic poets P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) had his destined place and showed a critical bent of mind. He offered a powerful defence of poetry against the charges made by the contemporary critic Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) who denounced poetry in his essay *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) as immoral and of no use. Alongside his fellow romantic poet, Byron, Shelley presented a very radical version of romanticism in both theory and practice. Poetry for him was both a source of pleasure and beauty and an instrument to bring about social change. He defined poet as “a nightingale who sits in the darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.” (*Defence of Poetry*) Nevertheless, Shelley’s genius as a poet and critic has often been called in question by critics like Mathew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and C. S. Lewis among others. Arnold found in Shelley a constant habit of idealizing and losing touch with the real world. It is for this reason that Arnold labeled him as “the beautiful and ineffectual angel” and T. S. Eliot discerned in the Shelleyan lyric the signs “of adolescence”. Again C.S. Lewis laments “few poets have suffered more than Shelley from the modern dislike of the romantics”. Standing almost two century ahead of the epoch of this great romantic poet and critic, we cannot just let these allegations brought against him to pass without question. The objective of this paper is to rethink as to whether we can look into these defamatory allegations a little bit differently in the light of some of his select poems and his treatise *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

**Keywords :** visionary experience, mythopoetic creation, social amelioration

English romanticism characterized by a rejection of neoclassical norms of reason, balance, order and artifice started around the mid-eighteenth century and reached its culmination during the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The socio-political context and artistic grounds were responsible for the rise of romanticism as a cultural movement in Europe such as the Enlightenment, the American and French revolutions, the industrial development and the urbanization. Kant, the eighteenth century philosopher whose name is almost synonymous with Enlightenment nevertheless spoke of ‘Copernican’ epistemological movement which places human mind at the centre of all perceptions. To a certain extent it influenced the romantic theory of the authorial subjectivity. Romanticism champions vision, imagination and love of nature and beauty. For the sake of convenience we divide the English romantic poets into two groups – the earlier group of poets like William Blake, William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge and the later group consisting of P.B Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron.

Among the English Romantics, P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) had his destined place and showed a critical bent of mind. He offered a powerful defence of poetry against the charges made by the contemporary critic, Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) who denounced poetry in his essay *Four Ages of Poetry* (1821) as ‘immoral’ and of no use. Alongside his fellow romantic poet, Byron, Shelley presented a very radical version of romanticism in both theory and practice. Poetry for him was both a source of pleasure and beauty and an instrument to bring about social change. Poetry can help moral progress keeping pace with scientific and material progress and poets, as “unacknowledged legislator of the world” can guide social and moral awareness. Yet, Shelley’s genius as a poet and critic has often been called in question by critical thinkers of different ages like Mathew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and C.S. Lewis among others. Arnold found that Shelley had a constant habit

of idealizing and losing touch with the real world. It is for this reason that Mathew Arnold calls him “the beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain”. In the early twentieth century, T. S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis criticized Shelley for being ‘adolescent’ and for having “a weak grasp upon the actual”. C.S. Lewis has lamented that “few poets have suffered more than Shelley from the modern dislike of the Romantics”. Discerning in the Shelleyan lyric sign “of adolescence”, T. S. Eliot vituperates -

The ideas of Shelley seem to me always to be ideas of adolescence- as there is every reason why they should be. And an enthusiasm for Shelley seems to me always an affair of adolescence; for most of us Shelley has marked an intense period before maturity but for how many does Shelley remain the companion of age?( Eliot qtd. in Mundra and Agarwal<sup>337</sup>)

Standing almost two century ahead of the epoch of this literary luminary(Shelley), we cannot just let these allegation brought against him to pass without question. The objective of this paper is to rethink as to whether we can look into these defamatory allegations a little bit differently in the light of some of his select poems and his treatise *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

The thematic concerns of Shelley’s poetry are largely the same themes that defined romanticism: beauty, passions, nature, political liberty, creativity and the sanctity of imagination. The centre of his aesthetic philosophy can be found in his celebrated essay *A Defence of Poetry*(1821), in which he argues that poetry brings about moral good. Shelley argues that poetry nurtures and expands imagination and the imagination is the source of sympathy and love, which rest on the ability to project oneself into the position of another person. He, therefore, proclaims in *A Defence of Poetry* :

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and so many others. The pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. (Shelley Qtd. in Enright and Chickera 233)

Again Shelley goes on to prove the benign nature of romantic imagination by explaining it through a touching simile: “poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.” (*A Defence of Poetry* ). No other English poet of the early nineteenth century believed so avidly in the power of art’s sensual pleasures to improve society. Shelley’s poetry is stuffed with this kind of inspired moral optimism which he hoped would affect his readers sensuously, spiritually and morally all at the same time. In one of his finest lyrics ‘To a Skylark’, he refers to the heavenly song of the skylark as the symbol of perfect joy and happiness. It also stands for something timeless in art and beauty. Shelley’s Skylark unlike Wordsworth’s is a ‘blithe spirit’. The bird is like a soul having no earthly existence or physical form. The moment the poet listens to the song of the bird, he is immediately transported to the world of joy. This kind of happiest, rather blessed moment seems to the critics of Shelleyan lyrics as being segregated from the touch of reality. But, we must observe the poet’s missionary zeal of regenerating the world from morally and intellectually degradable condition. The poet appeals to the bird to teach him half of its skill and the secret of its gladness or ‘harmonious madness’ so that he can hold the world enwrapped by the music of poetry. That is why, the poet appeals fervently to the bird:

Teach me half the gladness

That thy brain must know  
 Such harmonious madness  
 From my lips would flow  
 The world should listen then as I am listening now! ('To a Skylark', ll. 101-105)

Learning from the bird how to "scorn/ Hate and pride and fear"(ll. 91-92) , Shelley wants the fast-changing world to "listen to and act on the basis of his poetic ideology, which he believes , would purge the society of these evils- 'hate', 'pride' and 'fear'" (Roy v)

Like many of the romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth, Shelley demonstrates a great reverence for the beauty of nature and he feels closely connected to nature's power. In his early poetry, Shelley shares the romantic interest in pantheism- the belief that god, or a divine, unifying spirit, runs through everything in the universe. He refers to this unifying natural force in many of his poems. He describes it as the "spirit of beauty" in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. This force is the cause of all human joy, faith, goodness and pleasure and it is also the source of poetic inspiration and divine truth. Shelley asserts several times that this force can influence people to change the world for the better. In 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' Shelley mentions the 'consecrating' power of this "spirit of beauty":

Spirit of Beauty, that does consecrate  
 Withthine own hues all thou dost shine upon  
 Of human thought or form, where art thou gone?  
 Why dost thou pass away and leave our state.  
 This dim vast vale of tears vacant and desolate?"(ll. 13-17)

Shelley sets many of his poems in autumn, including 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Ode to the West Wind'. Fall is a time of beauty and death, and so it shows both the creative and destructive powers of nature, a favourite Shelleyan theme. As a time of change, autumn is a fitting backdrop for Shelley's vision of political and social revolution. Shelley by attributing west wind a revolutionary power to change the old social order consciously creates a myth. West wind to him is an omnipresent and omnipotent spirit working havoc to change the natural order. As the poet like autumnal forest has lost buoyancy and impetuosity, he earnestly evokes the west wind to inspire him, to blow through him to draw out music with the help of which he can stir the world from inertness and dull stupor. So, the poet exhorts, "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is / What if my leaves are falling like its own!"('Ode to the west wind', ll. 57-58).In his emotional intensity of passion and imagination the poet identifies himself with a 'leaf', ' cloud' and 'wave' which are subject to the force of the wind . One can not overlook the poet's robust optimism regarding the fact that old order of society with its exploitations and injustices will pass away and a new society free from the bondage of custom will emerge. The poet prays to the West Wind to help him disseminate his hitherto unknown and inoperative ideas to give a staggering blow to the present order and usher in a new age-a golden millennium:

Drive my dead thought over the universe  
 Like withered leaves quicken a new birth  
 ( Ode To The West Wind, line 64-65)

Shelley's 'Ozymandias' is a celebrated sonnet. Essentially it is devoted to a single metaphor: the shattered ruined statue in the deserted land with its arrogant, passionate face and monomaniacal inscription-"look on my works, ye mighty and despair!". The once -great king's boasting has been ironically disproved; Ozymandias's works have crumbled and disappeared , his civilization is gone , all has been turned to dust by the impersonal, indiscriminate and destructive power of time. The ruined statue of Ozymandias is now merely a monument to one man's hubris. Ozymandias is first and

foremost a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of political power and in that sense the poem is Shelley's most outstanding political sonnet. It is significant that all that remains of Ozymandias is a work of art and a group of words. As in the Shakespearean sonnets, so also in the poem Shelley demonstrates that art and language long outlast the other legacies of power.

The speaker in 'England in 1819' describes the king as "old, blind, despised, and dying". The princes are "the dregs of their dull race" and flow through public scorn like mud. The nobility ('princes') are insensible leeches draining their country dry; the people are oppressed, hungry and hopeless; their fields are untilled; the army is corrupt and dangerous to its own people; the laws are useless; religion has become morally degraded; and the parliament ('senate') is "time's worst statute unrepealed." Then surprisingly, the final couplet concludes with a note of Shelleyan optimism: from these "graves" a "glorious phantom" may "burst to illumine our tempestuous day". What this phantom might be is not specified in the poem but it seems to hint simultaneously at the spirit of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and at the possibility of liberty won through revolution.

For all his commitment to romantic ideals of love and beauty, Shelley was also concerned with the real world. He was a fierce denouncer of political power and passionate advocate for liberty. The purpose of social amelioration is hardly ever missed in his poetry as it is simultaneously discerned in the poems under discussion - 'To A Skylark', 'Ode To The West Wind', 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', 'Ozymandias' and 'England in 1819'.

Critics like Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot may call him 'ineffectual' and 'adolescent' for his cherishing too ambitious a dream of ushering in golden millennium but we cannot overlook his proclamation in *A Defence of Poetry* about what ought to be the role of a poet. In *Defence* he writes:

A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence and why.

So, a poet, according to Shelley seems to be lost in poetic thought during poetic composition and goes on singing revolutionary songs to ameliorate society from the prevalent ills and evils without bothering whether his ideal would come into effect or not. In his 'To a Skylark' Shelley suggests what should be the avowed role of a poet:

Like a poet hidden  
In the light of thought  
Singing hymns unbidden  
Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not. (ll. 36-40)

Thus, his belief that poetry can contribute to the moral and social improvement of mankind impacts his poems in several ways. And in doing so if he occasionally loses his foot form the solid ground of reality and verges on the fantastic or the extra terrestrial, he should not be blamed for that. He is not 'a scorner of the ground' for good.

Besides the majority of the Shelleyan lyrics and a good number of poems of Romantic era as well are embedded in such radical social ideology. Blake is inclined to "make use of myth to hone his tirade against the tyranny and enslavement unleashed by the social intuitions". (Roy v) Wordsworth, on the other hand, is not so radically concerned with devising a means of how to grapple with 'evil tongues', 'rash judgment', 'sneer of selfish man' that disturb our 'cheerful faith'. William Blake in his 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs Of Innocence* had a romantic vision of

numerous chimney sweeps released from the confinement of dark coffins spending their time in freedom and cheerfulness. He gave scope to his visionary wistfulness through the beautiful dream of Tom Dacre, a fellow chimney sweep in the poem:

And by came an angel who had a bright key,  
 And opened the coffins and set them all free  
 Then down a green plain , leaping, laughing , they run  
 And wash in a river and shine in the sun.  
 ('The Chimney Sweeper' form *Songs Of Innocence*, ll. 13-16 )

Hopefully it won't be entirely out of place if we cite the example of Derek Walcott , a Caribbean poet-visionary who seem to a spiritual descendant of Shelley. The similar kind of visionary experience for the purpose of social amelioration may be traced in Derek Walcott's poem entitled 'The Season of Phantasmal Peace'. In the poem Walcott cherishes a vision of golden millennium as did Shelley. He refers to in the poem an propitious hour when the birds take away all that is evil from the world and carry it away. The lines needs to be quoted here:

Then all the nations of birds lifted together  
 The huge net of shadows of this earth  
 In multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues  
 Stitching and crossing it...(‘The Season of Phantasmal Peace’ ll.1-4)

So, the justifiability of the allegations such as Shelley being “ineffectual” or his lyrics being adolescent need further revision as the same kind of romantic vision for the betterment of society verging sometimes on extraterrestrial is not alien in literary sphere. William Blake, the pioneering visionary artist and romantic poet sought to create around himself a wonderful aura of mythopoeic imagination as opposed to the mechanistic and materialistic world of 18th century rationalism.

I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man's  
 I will not reason and compare: my business is to create.  
 ('Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion' ll. 21-22)

So we have to rethink as to how far justified it is to stigmatize Shelley as ‘adolescent’ as well as ‘ineffectual’. The kind of lofty idealism that we find in Shelley and for which he is blamed is the hallmark of many a great poets down the ages. It goes in favour of my argument that eminent critics and present day scholars like Kenneth Cameron, Carlos Barker, Harold Bloom, Earl Wasserman, Donald Reiman, Stuart Curran, Timothy Webb and others have repudiated Shelley's poetic merit. It won't be surprising if the ensuing ages witness a revival of renewed interest in Shelley.

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## John Polidori's "The Vampyre": A Double Text with Byronic Impression

Arup Ratan Chakraborty

**Abstract:** John Polidori's classic tale "The Vampyre" is a product of the same ghost-story competition that produced Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* at Villa Diodati by Lake Geneva in 1816. Lord Ruthven in Polidori's story is a vampire modelled after the Byronic hero – sophisticated and highly seductive. Partly because of a misattribution to Byron, the story became hugely successful after its publication in 1819. My attempt in this paper shall be to evaluate "The Vampyre" as a double text and to assess Byronic influence in this text. "The Vampyre" doubles Byron's own unfinished story, "A Fragment". It doubles Byron's own publications, having been first printed in the *New Monthly Magazine* as Byron's story. In Ruthven and Aubrey, it offers doubles of Byron and Polidori themselves. The ambivalent nature of this relationship, structured by both antipathy and camaraderie, can be read in terms of the homosocial and possibly homosexual dynamics of enmity and bonding. Polidori's story is an ironic portrayal of Byron; however, it is also a sort of self-portrait, a presentation of both his ambivalent feelings of reverence and resentment towards his employer, and of his own uncertain subjectivity. Aubrey in "The Vampyre" is repeatedly shown as susceptible and passive, as virtuous and doomed as Ruthven's ill-fated female preys; precisely like them, he is captivated and finally wrecked by the vampire. Evil prevails and triumphs in an ending that mocks the traditional happy one usually found in vampire narratives. In some strange ways and by an ironic turn of destiny, the conclusion of "The Vampyre" seems to echo the very end of Polidori's own life.

**Key words:** John Polidori, "The Vampyre", Lord Byron, "A Fragment", Ruthven, Aubrey

He shut his eyes, hoping that it was but a vision arising from his disturbed imagination; but he again saw the same form, when he unclosed them, stretched by his side. There was no colour upon her cheek, not even upon her lip; yet there was a stillness about her face that seemed almost as attaching as the life that once dwelt there: — upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein: — to this the men pointed, crying, simultaneously struck with horror, "A Vampyre! a Vampyre!"<sup>1</sup>

("The Vampyre" 13)

The origin of John William Polidori's "The Vampyre" is fascinating. The story is viewed as the precursor of the romantic vampire genre of fantasy fiction. Polidori was an Italian English physician and writer, known for his associations with the Romantic Movement. In 1816 Polidori entered Lord Byron's service as his personal physician, and accompanied Byron on a trip through Europe. The year 1816 is known as the "Year without a Summer" because of severe climate abnormalities that caused average global temperatures to decrease significantly. Evidence suggests that the anomaly was predominantly a volcanic winter event caused by the massive eruption of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies in the previous year.<sup>2</sup> Byron who had left England in April to escape the scandal surrounding his separation from Lady Byron rented Villa Diodati, a mansion in the village of Cologny, near Lake Geneva in Switzerland and stayed there with Polidori in the summer of 1816. Percy Bysshe Shelley rented a house nearby Villa Diodati. He stayed there with the eighteen-year-old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, whom he was to marry in December 1816.

They were accompanied by Godwin's eighteen-year-old stepsister Claire Clairmont, who was hoping to resume a relationship with Byron that had begun in March, resulting in her pregnancy and ended with his departure for the Continent. These three persons were frequent visitors to Byron's villa. Because of poor weather, in June 1816 the group famously spent three days together inside the house creating stories to tell each other, two of which were developed into landmark works of the Gothic horror genre.

The online *Encyclopedia* tells us that on the night of June 16, 1816 Byron read aloud to the group from *Fantasmagoriana, or Collection of the Histories of Apparitions, Spectres, Ghosts, etc.* (1812), a collection of stories by Jean Baptiste Eyries. This "along with the consumption of opium stimulated their imaginations after Byron suggested that each should write a ghost story" ("Phantasmagoria"). Byron and Shelly were the famous published writers of the time; however, Byron wrote and quickly abandoned a fragment of a story — "A Fragment",<sup>3</sup> which Polidori used later as the basis for his own tale, "The Vampyre", the first vampire story published in English. Christopher Frayling describes the work as "the first story successfully to fuse the disparate elements of vampirism into a coherent literary genre" (108). Shelley's contribution in the ghost story narration contest was completely forgettable. It was Mary Godwin and John Polidori who came up with the best work. Mary Godwin worked on a tale that would later evolve into her famous work *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, published in 1818.

Rather than use the crude, bestial vampire of folklore as a basis for his story, Polidori based his character on Byron. Polidori named the character "Lord Ruthven", pronounced as "rivven" (Guiley 300); the name was originally used in Lady Caroline Lamb's novel *Glenarvon* (1816), in which a thinly-disguised Byron figure was also named Lord Ruthven. Polidori's Lord Ruthven was the first fictional vampire in the form we recognize today — an aristocratic fiend who preys among high society. Dismissed by Byron after five months' service, Polidori travelled in Italy and then returned to England. His story, "The Vampyre", was published by Henry Colburn on All Fools' Day in 1819 issue of *New Monthly Magazine* with the false attribution "A Tale by Lord Byron". However, Polidori soon established himself as its author. In order to distance himself from the tale and its author, Byron had his own piece printed as "A Fragment" in an appendix to his work *Mazeppa* in 1819. It was, however, already too late to prevent the beginning of a long association between Lord Byron and popular conceptions of vampirism. Whatever the truth of the matter, when considered together, Polidori's "The Vampyre" and Byron's "A Fragment" remain subject to a mutual literary haunting. Polidori's tale created a sensation in Europe. Goethe who was still under the impression that it belonged to Byron, thought it as his masterpiece. But Polidori was unable to capitalize on its success. A year later he decided to renounce both literature and medicine, and study the law, but by this time he had become ruinously fond of gambling. In August 1821, after a disastrous three-week spree at Brighton, he returned to his father's house in London, where he died at the age of 25 by consuming prussic acid. The vampire figure he created, however, continues to outwit death, for Polidori's contribution to the ghost-story contest established the model for the entire modern tradition of vampire fiction, and touched off a vampire craze that still shows no sign of diminishing.

My attempt in this paper shall be to assess John Polidori's "The Vampyre" as a double text and to evaluate the presence of Byronic image in this text. I shall try to estimate the various aspects of doubling in "The Vampyre" and make an examination of Byronism in the text. "The Vampyre" doubles Byron's own unfinished story, "A Fragment", adapting the poet's narrative of two associates wandering across Europe and the death and return from the dead of one of them. It doubles Byron's own publications, having been first printed in the *New Monthly Magazine* as Byron's story. In Ruthven and Aubrey, it offers doubles of Byron and Polidori themselves. The ambivalent nature of this relationship, structured by both antagonism and companionship, can be read in terms of the

homosocial and possibly homosexual dynamics of rivalry and bonding analysed by Rene Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* and by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men*. Polidori's "The Vampyre" is important not only as a pivotal text in the literature of vampirism but also as an examination of the nature of Byronism, a critique of the Romantic imagination comparable to *Frankenstein* and an early example of the double narrative that would develop through the nineteenth century. As a double story, "The Vampyre" presents a struggle between two opposing parts of the self, with Aubrey's social and moral values and his sense of the real coming increasingly under threat from the transgressive desires and appetites associated with Ruthven and Byronic romance. Ruthven's link with the idea of the divided self is of course emphasised by his name, pronounced as 'Riv[v]en', a pun that anticipates Stevenson's naming of Jekyll's repressed side as 'Hyde'. As the narrative of "The Vampyre" progresses, Aubrey becomes doubly Ruthven, both split in two and increasingly like the figure of his imagined hero.

Polidori maintained a precarious place in the Byron–Shelley circle throughout the summer of 1816. In late August he completed his tale of "The Vampyre", where he drew on Byron's "A Fragment", a debt he openly acknowledged, as well as on a series of recent poetic treatments of vampires, including Robert Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), Byron's own *The Giaour* (1813), and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Christabel* (1816) — all of which had briefly introduced vampiric figures or direct references to vampiric folklore. But at the same time Polidori went dramatically beyond these precedents, not only by giving the conventional figure of the upper-class degenerate new and fatal powers of seduction, but — more crucially — by transforming the foul-smelling phantom of earlier vampiric mythology into the well-to-do and travelling aristocrat whose violence and sexual attraction make him a seducer of ladies. The result is a story of guilt, paralysis, wish fulfilment, and snare in which the worshipful Aubrey's allure to Lord Ruthven is often read as Polidori's projection of his own passive submission to the overbearing presence of Lord Byron. Yet in true vampiric fashion, Polidori also resists Byron, borrowing the name "Ruthven" from Lady Caroline Lamb's recent critical portrait of him in her novel *Glenarvon* as false, predatory, and remorseless.

The story follows Aubrey, a young, innocent and wealthy orphan who meets the older Lord Ruthven, a "singular character", "entirely absorbed in himself", a man of the world "with the reputation of a winning tongue" ("Vampyre" 4) which got him "invited to every house" ("Vampyre" 3). Steeped in "high romantic feelings of honour and candour" (4), and prone "to cultivate more his imagination than his judgment", Aubrey "soon formed this object into the hero of a romance ... determined to observe the offspring of his fancy, rather than the person before him" (5). They travel to Rome and though Aubrey is advised by his guardians to leave his friend whose "irresistible powers of seduction rendered his licentious habits ... dangerous to society", he is blind to his companion's real nature and it takes some time before he succeeds in "abandoning him altogether" (7) and heading off on his own to Greece. Once in Greece, he falls in love with Ianthe, a peasant who was "innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling balls" (9). From her he learns the superstitions about vampires; but before their relationship can develop, Ianthe is killed by a vampire and Aubrey is attacked while trying to save her. Aubrey doesn't link Ianthe's death to Ruthven. He re-joins Ruthven in his journeys where they are attacked by bandits and Ruthven is mortally wounded. Before he dies he makes Aubrey promise not to mention his death for one year and one day. His body is taken out to a rock in the moonlight, from which it disappears. Aubrey agrees and returns to London. Aubrey can't believe his eyes when he sees Lord Ruthven alive under the name of the Earl of Marsden, and plans to marry Aubrey's sister. Ruthven reminds Aubrey of the oath he took. Soon Ruthven seduces Aubrey's sister and they get engaged. Helpless to stop Ruthven's advancement, Aubrey suffers an emotional breakdown. Aubrey deteriorates physically and psychologically, lapsing into delusion and insanity, but is bound to his oath, and just

before one year passes, Marsden and his sister are married. When the period of his oath is up, he informs his guardians and dies, but it is too late and they find that “Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey’s sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” (23).

Byron’s “A Fragment” is written in an epistolary form with the narrator recounting the events that had occurred in a letter. The narrator embarks on a journey or “Grand Tour” to the East with an elderly man, Augustus Darvell. During the journey, Darvell becomes physically weaker. They both arrive at a Turkish cemetery between Smyrna and Ephesus near the columns of Diana. Near death, Darvell reaches a pact with the narrator not to reveal his impending death to anyone. A stork appears in the cemetery with a snake in its mouth. After Darvell dies, the narrator is shocked to see that his face turns black and his body rapidly decomposes. Darvell is buried in the Turkish cemetery by the narrator.

Polidori’s literary genius spurred a phenomenon that has taken flight and over the centuries has compelled many a people into reading and believing in its existence. Polidori was able to transform a figure that was considered ugly, dumb and from a lower class to a sophisticated, mysterious figure that resided in the upper class of society. Polidori openly acknowledged that “A Fragment” laid the groundwork for “The Vampyre”. In both tales, two male friends travel from England to the Levant, where one of them dies, though not before securing from his friend an oath of secrecy with regard to his decease. At this point, Byron’s story breaks off, but in Polidori’s tale, the dead friend of course comes back to life as a vampire, returns to England, and gluts his thirst at the throat of his friend’s sister. Byron does not explicitly mention vampires in “A Fragment”; but as he made clear three years earlier in his immensely successful *The Giaour*, they enthralled him. He writes in *The Giaour*:

But first, on earth as Vampire sent,  
Thy corpse shall from its tomb be rent,  
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,  
And suck the blood of all thy race,  
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,  
At midnight drain the stream of life. (755-760)

Perhaps most remarkably, as Polidori used “A Fragment” as the model for “The Vampyre”, so he used Lord Byron himself as the model for Lord Ruthven, the blood-sucking seducer of women in his tale. Like Lord Byron, Lord Ruthven is a man of wealth, good-looks, mobility, callousness, and keen sexual appetites. Polidori created the modern vampire, a glamorous figure whose potency both attracts and appals us, and whose grip on the popular imagination has for two centuries now remained fascinatingly strong. Ken Gelder in *Reading the Vampire* says that although Polidori drew on Byron’s fragment, as well on *The Giaour*, the self-exiled set apart from cultural and personal community, “he used this material creatively (even ironically) rather than slavishly” (26). Ruthven is not only a master of seduction, a “dreadfully vicious” lover involved in “scandalous intrigues” who takes perverse delight in hurling virginal maidens “from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation” (“Fragment” 7),<sup>4</sup> but a cynical and corrupted aristocrat ruining people at the gambling tables. If Polidori’s story is an ironic portrayal of Byron, it is also a sort of self-portrait, a dramatisation of both his ambivalent feeling of admiration, jealousy and resentment towards his employer, and of his own uncertain subjectivity; while Ruthven is clearly modelled on Lord Byron, similarly, Aubrey, the vampire’s travelling companion, through whom the tale is told, is in many ways a projection of Polidori himself. In the tale, Aubrey has more imagination than judgment; he confuses the dreams of poets with the realities of life. Aubrey makes

Lord Ruthven as Polidori had considered Byron, “into the hero of romance”, obscuring the person by imaginative fancy (Skarda 251).

When Aubrey sets off for the Grand Tour, it is Ruthven who proposes to join him. Polidori here “not only reverses the actual order of the invitation to travel, but promotes himself as an equal, forgetting for the fiction that Byron hired him as a travelling physician, not as a companion and certainly not as a peer” (Skarda 251). Likewise, it is the vampire, who improbably nurses Aubrey to health, becoming “his constant attendant”, (“Vampyre” 13) though in reality it was Polidori the physician who nursed through fever and bad sprain his famous patient. And again, it is Lord Ruthven to assent to a separation from Aubrey after he has upset his plans in Rome. In fact it was Polidori who was forced, after less than five months of service, to leave Byron, in part for his inappropriate attentions to Mary Shelley. Polidori puts himself in Byron’s place and “provides far more serious moral grounds for dismissing Lord Ruthven than Byron had for dismissing Polidori” (Skarda 253).

Poised on the horrors of a Gothic tale and a cogent psychological dialectic, the core of “The Vampyre” is not restricted to an anatomy of envy, but it is also the illustration of Polidori’s own egotistic wounds and feelings of inferiority to Byron, “the most distinguished poet”, as he writes in *The Diary of John Polidori*, who mocked Polidori’s belief that he was Byron’s intellectual equal (28). As such, it is the dramatisation of his suffering self, of his dependent personality and of the difficulty in achieving the separation–individuation which is at the base of the stable sense of self, as the epilogue unmistakably shows.

In both the “A Fragment” and “The Vampyre”, a connotative linkage between space, desire and knowledge is put into play when the protagonist’s sexual-epistemological quest is allegorically enacted through a journey of spatial discovery. In the “A Fragment” the two men travel into strange marginal places “hitherto not much frequented” (246), and this journey is posited as a means by which the narrator hopes to learn more about his object. Darvell is a mystery, but one thing is known for sure, and that is that he has “already travelled extensively” (“Fragment” 267). Recognizing his own desire to travel in the other man’s experience, the narrator admits, “It was my secret wish that he might be prevailed upon to accompany me” (248). Along a “wild and tenantless track through the marshes and defiles,” they travel past “the roofless walls of expelled Christianity, and the still more recent, but complete desolation of abandoned mosques” (249). If the narrative can be read as a “homosexual” allegory, it can also be said to present a sexual textuality at the level of space, drawing, as it does, upon the rhetorical production of desire between men as marginal and expelled from the mores of religion and society. At times it could be said that the “A Fragment” and “The Vampyre” cultivate what David Greven has called a “winking rhetoric” through “coded and specific lexical devices” whereby queer content is potentially communicated to certain readers “in the know” (4).

Towards the end of “The Vampyre”, the third-person narrator finally reveals the nature of Lord Ruthven’s “irresistible powers of seduction” (“Vampyre” 7). Describing how the vampire Ruthven has impressed Miss Aubrey, the sister of his European travelling companion, the narrator asks:

Who could resist his power? His tongue had dangers and toils to recount — could speak of himself as of an individual having no sympathy with any being on the crowded earth, save with her to whom he addressed himself; — could tell how, since he knew her, his existence had begun to seem worthy of preservation, if it were merely that he might listen to her soothing accents; in fine, he knew so

well how to use the serpent's art, or such was the will of fate, that he gained her affections,... (22-23)

Polidori presents Ruthven's irresistibility as a product of his mastery of the rhetoric of Byronic poetics. Ruthven's "power" derives from his use of language — "his tongue" — and particularly from his ability to exploit the two most distinctive features of Byron's writing of the — exciting romance narrative and sympathy-evoking self-presentation — to create a particular kind of subject position for his listener. Ruthven appeals to Miss Aubrey by offering her a seemingly empowering role as the only individual capable of saving him from his fallen and dissolute state in exactly the way that Byron's verse constructed a reading position eagerly occupied by many of his women readers.

In "The Vampyre", Polidori not only exposes the techniques by which Byron holds sway over a large portion of his readership, but also presents as vampiric the system of production through which the poet sustains his position in the literary market place. Ruthven's vampirism, poses a particular threat to the fair sex and results in the deaths of Ianthe and Miss Aubrey and the ruin of many other women; indeed, the two deaths seem like figurative versions of the wider loss of reputation. However, despite Polidori's desire to demonise Byron, Ruthven is an ambiguous figure who can be seen as potentially liberating as well as corrupting. For example, as Aubrey travels across Italy with his companion, he receives a letter from his guardians which describes how Ruthven's seductions of women has "hurled [them] from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation" and how, "since his departure, [they had] thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze" ("Vampyre" 7). What is most striking about this passage is the way it presents the supposed ruination of these women as something more like liberation. Despite the morally condemnatory phrase "the whole deformity of their vices", the encounter with Ruthven would seem to inspire women to an indulgence of sexuality that is itself presented as natural; it is the socially defined self that is cast aside as a "mask".

In "The Vampyre", Polidori meets the authorial challenge of producing a tale based on Byron's fragment which bears the appearance of probability by leaving open for the majority of the story the issue of whether or not the events depicted are supernatural or the product of a deluded imagination. If the story is read psychologically, Ruthven can be seen as Aubrey's double, "the offspring of his fancy", and an imaginative projection of his own desires or elements of the self ("Vampyre" 2). Aubrey's relationship with Ruthven is comparable to the more familiar doubling of creator and creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in which Victor describes his creation as "my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me" (57).

Aubrey in "The Vampyre" is repeatedly shown as vulnerable and passive, as virtuous and doomed as Ruthven's hapless female victims; precisely like them, he is fascinated and eventually destroyed by the vampire. What's more, he is in no way rewarded for his honesty and goodness. Evil prevails and triumphs in an ending that mocks the traditional happy one usually found in vampire narratives. In some strange ways and by an ironic twist of fate, the end of "The Vampyre" seems to adumbrate the very end of Polidori, a true case of life imitating art. Not long after quitting Lord Byron, he returned to London, and overwhelmed by debts, failing to make a living either as a physician and writer, he committed suicide in 1821. By a system of reversals and transformations, Polidori, whose interest in the workings of the mind, in the unconscious itself, is testified both by his medical research on somnambulism and hallucinations and by his novel *Ernestus Berchtold; or, The Modern Oedipus* (1819),<sup>5</sup> succeeded in endowing his Gothic tale with subtle complexities as befits a

genre that, beneath its sensationalism, from its inception germinated in its creators' dreams and fears, helping to define inner reality.

### Notes

1. I have quoted passages of John Polidori's "The Vampyre" from *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick, Oxford UP. All page references are given in parenthesis.
2. For detailed information on "Year without a Summer" and eruption of Mount Tambora, see "Mount Tambora and the Year Without a Summer." *UCAR Center for Science Education*. The National Science Foundation., 2012. Web.
3. Byron's unfinished vampire horror story "A Fragment" is also known as "Fragment of a Novel", "The Burial: A Fragment", or "Augustus Darvell". This incomplete short story first appeared under the title "A Fragment" in the 1819 collection *Mazeppa: A Poem*, published by John Murray in London. In this paper I shall use the title "A Fragment".
4. I have quoted passages of Byron's "A Fragment" ["Augustus Darvell"] from *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, Oxford UP, 247-251. All page references are to this edition
5. *Ernestus Berchtold or, The Modern Oedipus* which like "The Vampyre" was largely inspired by his travels with Byron, is explicitly concerned with incest. It scandalously draws on the rumours of Byron's affair with Augusta Leigh for a Faustian updating of the myth of Oedipus, combined with an account of the struggle of Swiss patriots against the Napoleonic invasion.

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## John Polidori's *The Vampyre*: His Tradition and Legacy

Soumya Sundar Mukherjee

**Abstract:** John Polidori's *The Vampyre* is the first English story about vampires. The idea of it originated in a meeting in 1816 in Villa Diodati near Lake Geneva where Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, Lord Byron and John Polidori, Byron's physician, decided to write their own horror stories. Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* which created a sensation of its own. Polidori's tale, *The Vampyre*, published in 1819, inspired by an unfinished tale by Byron, is credited to be the first vampire tale in English language. But did he create the vampire figure only from his imagination? Certainly not. There is a long tradition of blood-sucking, flesh-eating monsters in the Classical myths as well as in the folklores of the world. Although Polidori's tale is probably the first of its kind in English prose (because, in verse, there were already some predecessors of Polidori's vampire, Lord Ruthven), the mind of the reading public was already populated with horrifying demonic creatures who suck the blood of the innocents. So Polidori belonged to a tradition to which he contributed a tale that became the forefather of great fictional vampire figures like Count Dracula, Carmilla, Skinner Sweet and Edward Cullen. The paper is divided into three segments which deal respectively with the tradition of vampires in popular imagination; the Romantic or Polidori's contemporary treatment of the vampire lore or the process of evolution of vampires along with Polidori's own contribution to it: how he helped to shape the figure of the vampire that is so well-known to us today; and lastly, the legacy of Polidori, i.e., the flourish of vampire fiction throughout the next two centuries in novels, graphic narratives or comic books and in films, all of which seem to be a part of the expanding universe of thousands of bloodsuckers after that bright moment of big bang which is Polidori's *The Vampyre*.

**Keywords:** Polidori, Vampire, Byron, 1816, monster, bloodsucker.

It is perhaps only a coincidence that the year 1816, which sows the seeds of two of the most influential fictional works in the Gothic mode, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), is known to us as "the Year without a Summer". But it must be admitted that this summer-less year proved to be a very much fertile period for the dark tales that the writers of the age spawned, with an honourable mention to Lord Byron's poem "Darkness" (1816) which depicts a terrifying spectacle of a sunless world. Severe climate abnormalities like the Mount Tambora volcanic eruption on the island of Sumbawa, Indonesia, and several others like it in 1815 generated a substantial amount of sulphur and volcanic dust in the atmosphere and resulted in a worldwide fall of temperature due to the less amount of sunlight coming through the abnormally dusty stratosphere. 1816 also witnessed an "incessant rain" for three days which made Byron, Polidori, P. B. Shelly, Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont (Mary Shelley's stepsister) stay indoors at Villa Diodati overlooking Lake Geneva where they planned to write their own horror stories. Their recent readings of *Fantasmagoriana*, a French anthology of German ghost stories translated anonymously by Jean-Baptiste Benoît Eyriès in 1812, was the main inspiration behind this enterprise. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Polidori's *The Vampyre* originated from this endeavour and they are both trend-setters in their respective subgenres. But in the brief scope of this paper, the main focus will be on Polidori's tale: how he helped to create a tradition that is still enormously popular even today, how much he is indebted to the sources existing in his day, and what his influence is upon his posterity.

### **The blood-suckers who were already there before Polidori's tale:**

The figure of the vampire or a blood-sucking monster abounds in the myths and folktales of several cultures throughout the globe. Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow write:

Bloodsucking spirits of various kinds populated the early legends of Assyria and Babylonia, for example. Some of these foul creatures were human in origin: They were the souls of the restless dead, condemned by a violent death or improper burial to haunt the lands where once they dwelled. Others were supernatural, such as Lilitu, whose tales were once known throughout Mesopotamia. Lilitu had been a sacred figure in Sumerian goddess mythology, but over time she devolved into a fearsome demon, famous for seducing and devouring men. Hungering insatiably for the blood of infants (especially those of noble lineage), she prowled the night in the form of a screech owl, hunting down her next victim. (Teeth, page xiv)

It is not unwise to observe here that Lilitu's transforming herself into a screech owl might be a link to the later myths of the vampire fiction that vampires are associated with bats – another creature of the night, along with the fact that there are some real 'vampire' bats who do suck blood from sleeping animals in South America.

Polidori's vampire, Lord Ruthven, does have a number of frightening predecessors in the myths of the Classical literature, too. The imagination of mankind had always been populated with demons, ghouls and flesh-eating monsters who also surfaced into thousands of paintings, sculptures and written texts all of which are not necessarily fictional. The cannibalism implied in this vampiric blood-sucking can be traced back to the Classical myths and folklores (e.g. Hansel and Gretel, Slavic folklore of Baba Yaga). The example of the Titan Cronus devouring his children was the most notorious of all the incidents. The stories of Thyestes, Tereus and Tantalus have their shares of feasting upon the human flesh to prove that the strain of cannibalism is a motif that appears again and again in the stories of the ancients from the depths of the unconscious of humankind. And in this connection, the painting "Saturno devorando a su hijo" or "Saturn Devouring His Son" (1820 – 1823) by Francisco Goya should have an honourable mention, because it was a product of the Romantic Period. The visually revolting blood dripping from Saturn's (Greek Cronus) mouth and the crimson-stained body undoubtedly bring the image of a vampire to the modern mind. Visual-Arts-Cork.com minutely describes the monstrosity of the work significantly known as one of Goya's "Black Paintings":

Although allegedly inspired by the more conventional "Saturn Devouring His Son" (1636, Prado, Madrid) by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), the cannibalistic ferocity with which Saturn is eating his child makes it horrifyingly unique.

In fact, the picture is a virtuoso rendering of a frenzied psychopath, caught in the darkness, who is unable to control his homicidal behaviour. Saturn's rough nakedness, dishevelled hair and beard, wide-eyed stare, and aggressive movements all indicate a state of hysterical madness. He has already torn off and eaten his child's head, the right arm and part of the left arm, and is about to take another bite from the left arm. He is gripping the dead child so tightly that his knuckles are white and blood oozes from the top of his hands. Furthermore, there is also evidence that in the original image - prior to being transferred to canvas - the god had a partially erect phallus, thus imbuing the work with even deeper horror. (Visual-arts-cork.com)

The association of vampirism with blood, sexuality and death has become a fearful and unstoppable image of evil to the AIDS-conscious mind of the modern man. The cannibalism and the oral form of sexuality that the vampires symbolise by their protruding fangs and sucking of blood have long become an indispensable part of the popular culture as we see today an ocean of vampire-themed novels, short stories, comic books, fan fiction and movies. Polidori's vampire is an "undead" creature that returns from its death to feast upon the blood of the innocents. Terry Eagleton writes:

Evil is a transitional state of being – a domain wedged between life and death, which is why we associate it with ghosts, mummies, and vampires. Anything which is neither quite dead nor quite alive can become an image of it. (Eagleton, 123)

The "neither quite dead nor quite alive" monster's mouth becomes the weapon of destruction in many Western and non-Western cultures. Not only the blood-sucking and the tearing of flesh, there are a number of other ways in which the oral cavity is used in the world of the monsters as a life-

taking tool. Many demons in various cultures emit smoke and fire from their mouths. David Gilmore reports of a Polynesian giant ogre known as “Flaming Teeth” who has glowing coals for teeth. The Native American Windigo uses its mouth both to kill and eat its victims as well as to issue such thunderous screams that may uproot trees and cause severe whirlwinds. Gilmore observes:

Even the shape-shifters of modern fiction fit the pattern of polymorphous oral aggressiveness. Take, for example, vampires, whose mouths are often normal size in Western lore. As depicted in films and fiction, vampires always reveal themselves by oral clues: protruding canines. In addition, they destroy their victims with their mouths: draining dry, biting, devouring, dismembering, swallowing.... Reviewing the literature on European vampires, psychoanalyst Richard Gottlieb notes that, despite the wide variety in the ways they are portrayed in Western folklore, they regularly destroyed with their mouths, whether by blood-sucking, flesh-eating, dismemberment, necrophilia, or simply “tearing apart”.... The gaping, tooth-lined, flesh-tearing mouth is a universal synecdoche for monstrous predation. All this naturally brings us to the main point of all this oral depredation: cannibalism. (Gilmore 180)

There are instances of fierce cannibalism, though coated with the moral justness of the punishment of the sinner, in Dante’s *Inferno*, too. While journeying towards the ninth circle of hell, where the worst sinners who are the traitors to their benefactors are covered in ice, Dante becomes aware of a great shape at a distance surrounded by fog. As Dante and Virgil move forward, they discover that it is the immensely gigantic figure of winged Satan each of whose three mouths holds three of the greatest sinners, all of them traitors to their benefactors. In the central mouth he gnaws Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ; and the two mouths at his sides holds Brutus and Cassius, the murderers of Julius Caesar. Dante’s description is gruesome:

At every mouth his teeth a sinner champed,  
Bruised as with ponderous engine so that three  
Were in this guise tormented. But far more  
Than from that gnawing, was the foremost panged  
By the fierce rending, whence oft-times the back  
Was stripped of all its skin. (Dante, Canto 34, 51-6)

This fascination of human mind with the eating of human flesh and drinking blood has long been an interesting subject of psychoanalysis. Albert Mordell writes:

It will be probably a shock to many people to be told that the cannibalistic instinct still is part of our unconscious. It appears in that pathological state known as lycanthropy where the patient often has a craving for human flesh. (Mordell, 172)

Tons of examples of the monstrosity of blood-sucking and cannibalism might be cited from the various cultures of the world, but it would be safe to say that there is a long tradition of fearful and blood-thirsty creatures who are the predecessors of Polidori’s Lord Ruthven.

### **The Romantic Tradition of Vampires and Polidori’s contribution to it:**

Even in the Romantic Age, vampire-like characters came into existence before Polidori’s tale was available to the public eye. Although never, never a vampire figure, Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* did something which had an echo of spine-tingling vampirism amidst the terribly macabre world of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,  
And cried, A sail! a sail! (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, 160-1)

Coleridge’s *Christabel*, published in 1816, too, gives us the vampire-like lady, Geraldine, who possesses many of the characteristic features of the popular vampire figure: she can mesmerize whom she wants with her eyes; she gets weakened in front of religious objects; animals seem to sense her disturbing presence; she cannot enter a household unless being invited or being helped by an insider.

Keats's *Lamia*, published in the same year in which Polidori's tale got published, was inspired by the Greek myths. The name 'Lamia' comes from the story of the beautiful queen of Libya who, after being cursed by Hera, kills and drinks the blood of children. Johann Ludwig Tieck's story "Wake Not the Dead" was published in England in as early as 1800, although it cannot be credited as the first English vampire story, because originally it was written in German and it was translated into English in 1823, four years after Polidori's *The Vampyre*. Tieck's story deals with the obsessive love of a man for his wife whom he resurrects after her death, only to discover that now the lady, although more beautiful than ever, has an insatiable thirst for blood.

Although the story by Polidori is credited to be the first vampire tale in English language, the word "vampire" itself was already there in the vocabulary of the English people. Polidori uses the word in his work for a number of times which gives the idea that the concept of what a vampire is is already quite familiar to his target audience. Actually the first use of the word in English language dates back to 1745 in a travelogue entitled *Travels of Three English Gentlemen*. But the terrifying figure of the blood-sucking monster took its time to occupy a firm place in the public mind. Robert Southey's *Thalaba, the Destroyer* (1801) also features a vampire who takes the form of Thalaba's wife, Oneiza. The next and possibly the most influential English experimenter with the vampire-lore is Lord Byron who also serves as the greatest catalyst behind Polidori's tale. Byron's *The Giaour* tells the story of the cursed Giaour (the word "Giaour" also appears in Beckford's novel *Vathek* in 1786 where the Giaour, an offensive term used to a man of non-Muslim faith, is a demonic figure) who is cursed to become a vampire, drinking the blood of his near and dear ones. The curse that befell the "false Infidel" is terrible:

But first, on earth as vampire sent,  
Thy corse shall from its tomb re rent:  
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,  
And suck the blood of all thy race;  
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,  
At midnight drain the stream of life.... (Byron, from *The Giaour*, p. 78)

We shall move to the next of Byron's more direct vampire tale, but before that, attention must be paid to a few words in this poem. The man is cursed to become a vampire; but from whom would he suck blood? Daughter, sister, and wife! The monster as a male destroyer of the female is hinted at even in this early stage of the evolution of the vampire narrative. And later we shall see in this discussion that the vampire was indeed used in the stage of Victorian England as an attacker of the vulnerable women (which is just another version of the 'damsel in distress' theme) for sheer entertainment value!

The next and the direct influence of Byron on Polidori is that aforesaid meeting in Villa Diodati in 1816 where the Shelleys (though it should be mentioned here that the future author of *Frankenstein* was still not 'Mrs Shelley') spent time with Byron and his physician Polidori. After that meeting, Byron began to write a vampire story which he never finished. It was known as *Fragment of a Novel*, or *The Burial: A Fragment* or simply *A Fragment* which was the title under which it appeared in the collection *Mazeppa: A Poem* in 1819. Byron's *Fragment of a Novel* deals with a wealthy, elderly vampire named Augustus Darvell who accompanies the nameless narrator and dies mysteriously. Byron planned to resurrect Darvell from his death, although he never completed the story. Polidori's *The Vampyre* is directly influenced by this fragment.

It is a known fact that Byron and his physician Polidori parted not on very good terms and perhaps that is why Polidori's vampire is modelled upon his former patient. Alan Ryan observes:

...Dr. John Polidori, a former friend who had quarrelled with Byron, wrote and published a story called "The Vampyre." Not surprisingly, the evil figure of the vampire, named Ruthven in Polidori's tale, bore more than a little resemblance to Byron himself. (Ryan, xiii)

The resemblance does not end with the portrayal of the attractive and seductive manners of the vampire figure. The name "Lord Ruthven" given by Polidori to the blood-sucker is significant too. The year 1816 saw another significant publication in which, too, Byron was represented in a thinly

veiled way as a negative character: Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon*. The book was an immediate success with the reading public. The part where *Glenarvon* becomes significant to the production of Polidori's tale is that Polidori named his vampire "Ruthven" after the name of the Byron-ish character in *Glenarvon*, making it clear to the readers that the vampire in his story is none other than Byron himself.

After having made a brief survey of the tradition of vampiric tales, we should now observe what new things Polidori did and what his contributions to the vampire lore are. Polidori's story has often been severely criticised by modern day critics for its long passages and the ineptitude in building a steady suspense. Perhaps Otto Penzler is too hard on him when he calls Polidori "clearly an untalented hack" (Penzler, vii), because it is to be remembered that he was the first man writing the fully fledged vampire tale in English language and he had no model in his own language to follow. But that does not diminish the fact that Polidori lacked the genius of Mary Shelley to spawn a tale of the macabre and make it full of human sympathy like that narrative of the "Modern Prometheus". Stephen King very aptly comments:

In point of fact, Polidori's novel isn't very good... and it bears an uncomfortable resemblance to 'The Burial', the short story written by his immeasurable more talented patient, Lord Byron. There is perhaps a breath of plagiarism there. (King, 78)

Whether there was a case of plagiarism or simply an 'inspiration', we do not know. But it is to be admitted that Polidori's story did set a trend that resulted in an unending flood of quality vampire fiction for the next two centuries. Jerrold E. Hogle in the essay "Film" calls it "a literary ancestor of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)" (Hogle, 635). Stoker's *Dracula* is undoubtedly the greatest of the vampire novels written ever, and no later bloodsucker has yet surpassed the Transylvanian Count's glamorously creepy horror that gets under the skin with such a seductively potent disturbing feeling. But Polidori remains the main influence behind Stoker's ageless creation as it was Polidori who made the vampire a member of the wealthy upper class and later vampires follow Lord Ruthven's footsteps in their aristocratic ways. In fact, we rarely meet canonical vampires who are poor and do not possess material wealth. David Roger's in his 'Introduction' to *Dracula* finely observes:

...Polidori's tale, which appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* and was later adapted for the stage under the title *The Vampire or The Bride of the Isle*, left two important legacies. It established the vampiric villain as anti-bourgeois (vampires before then had not been consistently linked with an established class), and it aligned the nineteenth-century vampire with the perceived threat of unbridled romanticism and a sexual potency that ensured neither society ladies nor innocent girls could resist his advances. (Rogers, 11)

Polidori also contributed to some of the attributes common to the vampire as we know him/her today: the pallor of the skin, the attractiveness to the opposite sex, the piercing gaze and the overall mysteriousness that makes the vampire an object of interest. Polidori describes the influence of Lord Ruthven upon others:

Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose: some attributed it to the dead grey eye, which, fixing upon the object's face, did not seem to penetrate, and at one glance to pierce through to the inward workings of the heart.... In spite of the deadly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion though its form and outline were beautiful, many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection.... [H]e was as often among those females who form the boast of their sex from their domestic virtues, as among those who sully it by their vices. (Polidori, 7-8)

It must be admitted that Polidori's language is stiff and the total absence of any dialogue in the story makes it a bit tedious to read. But it is true again that although he lacked a story-telling genius, his subtly evil portrayal of Lord Ruthven is indeed amazing. The other major male character of the story, Aubrey, realises too late that Ruthven brings only destruction to those whom he frequents, and tries to prevent his sister's marriage with the fiend, but in vain. The last couple of lines of the

story are intended to inspire horror and they did so to the readers of the first half of the nineteenth century, although the ending seems too obvious to the modern readers who are much more familiar with the monster called 'vampire':

The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE! (Polidori, 24)

This disappearance of Lord Ruthven at the end of the story is a motif that resurfaces in several monster stories, novels, movies and comic books. The Joker always escapes from Arkham Asylum in the *Batman* comic books; Skinner Sweet, the first American Vampire created by Scott Snyder, always evades death by his sheer violence; Voldemort comes back again and again in *Harry Potter* novels; the sun boat of Ra, the supreme god in Egyptian mythology, is attacked every night in the underworld by the serpent Apophis, but not even the most powerful sun god can slay that snake which symbolises chaos; Moby Dick can never be killed by Captain Ahab. J. J. Cohen argues that monsters are repeatedly capable of escaping. He writes:

We see the damage that the monster wreaks, the material remains (the footprints of the yeti across Tibetan snow, the bones of the giant stranded on a rocky cliff), but the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes.... (Cohen, 4)

And Polidori's Lord Ruthven perfectly fits the bill: he disappears, leaving only the lifeless body of Aubrey's sister behind.

### **The Post-Polidori period of vampire fiction:**

After Polidori, the vampire fiction gained popularity in the hands of James Malcolm Rymer whose *Varney the Vampyre, or, The Feast of Blood* started to appear weekly in England. It was not serious literature, to be honest, but it provided the readers with cheap thrills and it continued for two years and it stretched out to 109 parts. The popularity of the vampire grew and plays about them began to be staged in the playhouses of England, and the bloodsuckers proved to be a good source of thrilling entertainment. Alan Ryan writes:

Looked at from a commercial angle, the vampire's human form was wonderfully convenient. Since the vampire had the shape of a human being, it could be represented on a stage by an actor, and the middle years of the nineteenth century saw many productions of plays about vampires staged both in England and on the Continent. Furthermore, for sheer entertainment value, it didn't hurt that vampires seemed to have a special interest in attacking beautiful and vulnerable young women, a symbol for all that was good and holy in Victorian England. (Ryan, xiv)

Stoker's *Dracula* was the culmination of the vampire fiction as it leaves its predecessors behind by miles in its depiction of the main antagonist of the novel. The subtle horror, the eroticism and the masterly building of supernatural tension are unparalleled in any novel in its time. In a way, Stoker's *Dracula* is far more influential in the vampire-based stories of the later generations than Polidori's *Ruthven*.

Stoker's novel gave rise to innumerable vampire inspired stories, novels, graphic tales, movies and TV serials. It is impossible even only to mention all those blood sucking monsters. Some unforgettable contributions to the world of vampire literature are *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan le Fanu, *I Am Legend* (1954) by Richard Matheson, and *Salem's Lot* (1975) by Stephen King. Laurell K. Hamilton's *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* (The first book of this series, *Guilty Pleasures*, features a vampire named Aubrey, perhaps a tribute to Polidori from the author), Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* are some of the most popular vampire novel series of the modern world. *The Twilight* saga by Stephenie Meyer introduced the romantic vampire hero, Edward Cullen, who instantly became a sensation in the world of Young Adult fiction. And in comic books Scott Snyder created the immortal figure of Skinner Sweet, the American Vampire, whose violence and immorality make him a loathsome yet immensely attractive monster to the readers of

the series. Even the Dementors in the *Harry Potter* novels are vampire-like figures, although they suck out the happiness instead of blood of an individual. And in the realm of movies, actors like Max Schreck, Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee portrayed the vampire in such innovatively powerful ways that they have left an undying image of the monster in our minds.

Lord Ruthven's creator had no idea in 1816 that he was about to create a character whose influence would still be felt even after two centuries throughout the globe. Like the immortal vampire himself, who comes back even after his own death, Polidori's creation has remained a powerful influence, the first of its kind, to inspire a whole genre of storytelling in the different media of today's world – both the print and the virtual.

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## Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': Poetry by a Physician Poet\*

Satyaranjan Das

**Abstract:** After his apprenticeship to Hammond, a surgeon and apothecary, and nearly one year's training in Guy's Hospital Keats abandoned medicine in preference to poetry which offered a promise for him to soothe and heal in a broader field. Indeed, Keats's poetry may be interpreted as a dream to transcend the world of suffering and decay. In 'Ode to a Nightingale' Keats is excited at the prospect of transcending the world of transience, and suffering, hinted at by the bird-song. And the excess of joy causes an aching sensation. He yearns to fly away into a state of supreme happiness and eternity, leaving the sorrowful experience gathered throughout the brief span of life including the year at the wards of the Guy's. Yet he is tempted to linger in the sensations of the joys of earthly life. At the end of utmost satisfaction of senses the poet visualizes a state without senses, i.e. death. In all his poetic oeuvre he observes that the present joy is the cause of sorrow or joy is there in pain itself and what is life-giving may be life-threatening. This paradigm of opposites occupied an important place in the medicine of Keats's time. In 'Ode on Grecian Urn' there is joy in arresting the transition from joy to sorrow but the poet is all the time acutely conscious of the sorrows. The poet's medical experience haunts him time and again. It brings to his mind 'embalmed darkness' or sod-like state after death. The third stanza of Nightingale Ode reflects his experience at Guy's. In 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' in words like 'unravished', 'breathing', 'burning forehead' etc. we can notice a consciousness of the bodily which is supposed to be ingrained from his study of medicine. By objectifying the personal feelings and emotions Keats finds a therapeutic role for poetry which becomes a remedy for not only himself but the readers also, in reverberating with universal cries of agony and suffering.

**Keywords:** Keats, poetry, therapeutics, 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian urn'

2016 is the bicentenary year of Keats's passing the examination for being qualified as a 'Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries'. Recently researchers have engaged themselves in the exploration of Keats's study of medicine and its effect on his poetry. In this paper I have strived to find out how Keats's study of medicine influenced his mind and poetry with special reference to two of the poet's most famous odes – "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

Whether Keats opted for the study of medicine on his own or not is much debated. But the truth is that he took at last his study at Guy's Hospital seriously, though he found his pursuit not of much avail when he was going through the final stage of his course. The poet abandoned the study of medicine in preference to poetry which offered a promise for him to soothe and heal in a broader field. Medicine had nothing much to offer him after he found his experience at the wards of Guy's distressing, and his dislike for anatomy and weakness in surgery because of 'excess of feeling' became obvious. To the decision of Keats we may also ascribe the fact that the incurables of the Guy's pointed to the limitation of medicine for Keats. In Keats's times medicine made a strident progress; importance was attached to surgery and specialization in branches of medicine. Small pox was on the way of being conquered. Much was achieved in medicine; but still it had no remedy for diseases like tuberculosis. Besides, the poet did not find in medicine any solution for age or palsy. Nor did he find any satisfactory remedy for mental weariness, feverishness, fret or the morbidities of temperament like anxiety, depression and melancholy. Keats realized the limitation of the knowledge:... 'it is impossible to know how far knowledge (sic) will console [us] for the death of a friend and the ill 'that flesh is heir to'(Gittings 92). Medicine could not offer any consolation for deaths, and the decay the human body is subject to. Besides, there was Abernethy's doctrine of life as a 'principle independent of bodily organisation' (Fulford 96) which might lead Keats to explore life

which was supposed to be unfathomable to medicine, through poetry. The writer(s) of the *Guide* for the students of the Guy's, under the pseudonym Aesculapius, mentions 'the mysteries of the spirit' in the older medical knowledge still dominating the scene and 'admits its vagaries and mystique'(White 30). Under the circumstances Keats might be 'in a mist' – in a mental state best suited to poetry which championed 'the capacity to live with uncertainty' (Whale 8).

To him poetry had to be 'a friend / To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man'("Sleep and Poetry" l. 247). Poetic imagination came to reform and exalt the melancholy feelings arisen out of responses in the poet's heart to bleak reality and to induce this moment the vision of the ideal and the next moment a heightened awareness of the unavoidable reality of sorrows and thereby benefitting the poet as well as the readers. The poet is, as Keats affirms in *The Fall of Hyperion*, "a sage; /A humanist, physician to all men". Keats abandoned medicine even after his apprenticeship to Hammond and training in Guy's for one year (though Apothecary's Act 1815 made it mandatory to have only six month's experience in hospital work to be a 'licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries'); but the experience of studying medicine did not cease to influence his poetry. It rather played a definite role by reminding him of the sorry state of the suffering mankind including bitter realities of death, of the particulars learnt in the years of training. It supplied natural imagery 'not just for pictorial and sensuous effect but also for precise medicinal signification' (White 32). Above all, the experience induced in Keats a physician-like attitude to find out some alternative remedy for the ailments which ultimately led to the dreams of wish-fulfillment of overcoming them. Even after abandoning medicine he once considered opting for it as a career. To a poet like him no experience was useless. He writes in May 1818, 'Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole. I am so convinced of this, that I am glad at not having given away my medical books, which I shall again look over to keep alive the little I know thitherwards;... An extensive knowlege [sic] is needful to thinking people – it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the burden of the Mystery' (Gittings 92).

Keats's poetry may be interpreted as a dream to transcend the world of suffering and decay –as an imaginative pursuit of the ideal health, happiness and well-being. It is a dream of a poet with years' experiences of pursuing medicine and an awareness of mythic connection between medicine and poetry. But the visions are all very much a fleeting affair. Medicine and poesy have been both a tantalizing experience for Keats. Keats in his poetry continually shifts between life and death, healing and suffering, the ideal and the real. Since his very childhood Keats could realize that human life balances precariously on a fine string between life and death - between merriment/ health/well-being and sorrows/ disease/ decay. He found in his study of medicine the curative quality of poisonous substances like arsenic, mercury, opium, nux vomica etc. used in a moderate dose just as in life he found that what leads ultimately to sorrow is the cause of present happiness. Even the vision of the ideal –the cause of extreme happiness turns out to be the cause of sorrow and bitterness. In Hermione de Almeida's observation, Keats highlights 'a common medical and poetic crux on the frequent indistinguishability between sweet sustenance, physic and poison'(151). Keats writes of 'balmy pain' in his early poem "I Stood Tiptoe". In *Endymion* the vision which has been enchanting to the 'chieftain king' has been the cause of his sorrow. La belle Dame Sans Merci, 'full beautiful, a faery's child' offering wild honey, manna dew and an unearthly love becomes the cause of sorrow of the Knight at arms 'alone and pally loitering' 'on the cold hill's side'. Keeping the words from *Lamia* in mind Blades finds Keats 'resigned to the impossibility of ever unperplexing 'bliss from its neighbour pain' (130). In *Isabella* we read: 'bees ... know there is richest juice in poison flowers'. Hermione de Almeida observes: '*Lamia's* 'bewildering cup', Porphyro's 'magical and tintured feast' in *The Eve*, and la belle dame's fragrant 'honey wild, and manna dew' become paradigms of the philtre/ pharmakon as a consumptive and consuming formula – a Romantic potion for the induction of dreams that are both healing and diseased' (142). "Ode on Melancholy" dwells on the realisation that joy's 'hand is ever at his lips' or 'in the very temple of delight /Veiled melancholy has her shovran shrine'. Sorrow begins in 'being too happy' in "Ode to a Nightingale". But still the birdsong in the poem, just as the Grecian Urn, ultimately attempts to hint 'at a brief glimpse into eternity' which is 'at the heart of a mortal world of 'the fever, and the fret" (Blades 108).

“Ode to a Nightingale” may be read as a reverie of a worshipper of art and beauty having the experience of studying medicine, who is, again, an ailing patient – a patient ailing physically as well as suffering from a deep melancholy which tends almost to melancholia because of early losses in life and an acute awareness of the limitations of life and reality. The first line of the poem speaks of the poet’s heart aching in excitement at the inkling of the world of the ideal beauty and happiness beyond sorrow and suffering – at the rapturous prospect of transcending the world of suffering in his wish-fulfilment. It seems to him that a drowsy numbness induced by opium has taken over his senses. We are charmed by the suggestion of the ecstatic experience causing numbness which would transport him to an ideal state of well being. This dream of being transported from opium-induced numbness to wellbeing assumes a different meaning when we keep it in our mind that Keats the trainee apothecary found the patients in Guy’s in opium-induced numbness before undergoing a surgical operation likely to transport them to a state of healing or well being. Then the poet, in his restlessness, thinks that he will have recourse to wine. He dreams that the intoxicant will make it possible for him to lose consciousness and it will enable him to reach beyond the limitations of body. Wine is conceived by Keats as having its association with forgetfulness of sufferings in life; again, with health and enjoyment in life. Sensuous satisfaction associated with drinking the wine which has the warmth of southern province and taste of Flora, with enjoying the dance and Provencal song and sun-burnt mirth catches the imagination of the poet who aspires to the ideal state of well being. The colour of the wine also vividly appears in his vision with its shape of beaded bubbles winking at the brim and conjures up the beauty of the colour of blushing- the feminine beauty –an object of his masculine desire. Wine has been welcomed as a medium of escape from life full of sufferings; at the same time it lures the poet to brood over the life full of enjoyment. His enjoyment was, however, eventually to help him escape from the mundane world into that of the nightingale. But it is to be kept in mind that ‘Keats’s imagination is fundamentally dialectical: he cannot conceive of one state without summoning up its opposite’(O’Neill 288). While the poet is excited in thinking about the perfect pleasures which will be there on a higher plane of reality, he is led to brood over the sorry state of things in human world full of sufferings which hangs heavy upon his heart. In the lines 24 to 30 (‘Here where men sit and groan’ etc.) Goellnicht finds a reminiscence of his experience at the wards at Guy’s. But the poet ultimately finds the intoxicant (as towards the final stage of his apothecary’s training, he found the anaesthetic or the whole of medical science, too) inadequate to take him to the world of recovery and health and happiness. He finds faith in Poesy.

In the fourth stanza the poet finds a conflict between the senses of the brain and the power of poetic imagination. Here follow the ‘rare ecstatic moments when consciousness loses its sense of self, and the ego is overwhelmed by visionary being, freed from clock time’(Barnard 111).The poet reaches a world beyond physical existence. The idea of ‘Embalmed darkness’ links the world of the Nightingale – the world of the ideal to the world beyond physical existence. Darkness of the forest is linked to darkness beyond the world of senses and the aroma of the forest flowers to the scented preservatives used to anoint dead bodies about which Keats learnt in his medical years. This moment brings for the ailing life fullest happiness. Again, whereas violets are fast fading, musk rose is coming and full of dewy wine which is indicative of life and happiness. Life is also celebrated in the murmurous haunt of flies. Here is a co-existence of life and death, happiness of fulfilment and sadness over withering. Interestingly, Keats studied medicine - a subject which faces at the same time at both life and death; now it can bring joy of healing or prevent death and now it fails and cannot avoid sorrow. His consciousness of both life/joy and death/sorrow at the same time was deepened by his study of medicine. At the prospect of being absorbed with the eternal - at the prospect of transcending the ailments and frailties of the real world the poet wishes for self-annihilation. Extreme happiness in a painful life culminates in a desire for painless death. The poet can visualize the state of death to which even the bird’s melody has no meaning. This ‘sod’-like state was very much familiar to Keats in his years at Guy’s. (His experience of seeing his parents and other relations dead also might have been borne by his mind.) But death-wish gives way to the thought of immortality- immortal art- a salve to bewailing heart, though the poet cannot wander in the world of imagination for long - his senses bring him down to the solid earth. Thus the dream which might be born of a complex interaction between the knowledge gained as a medical student and the artist’s perception in the deeper recesses of the ailing poet’s mind vanishes midway after tantalizing him by music, health, merrymaking, beauty, poetry and eternity in a life of ailment and sorrow, disease and death.

While in “Ode to a Nightingale” Keats is restless before the evasiveness of the nightingale’s song with its promise of escape from the world of death, disease and mutability, in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” he is much poised at the prospect of transcending the world of sorrows, decay and transience relying on art. In the poem a contrast between the ravished and the unravished comes to the fore. From the pristine beauty of the urn untouched by time the idea of contrast is carried to immutability of love between man and woman. As a student of medicine Keats must have been aware of the sexual realities as he had to go through the ‘physiology of sex’(White 37) and the ideas of forensic medicine dealing with the crimes like rape etc.. The poet thinks that endless exhilaration lies in the prospect of rapture rather than the actual rapture, as in the lines: ‘Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair’. In the human world delight once experienced ends in satiety. The enjoyment of love is followed by disgust and satiety. But the bold lover in the art work can never kiss his beloved; so she will never fade. The poet is all the time painfully conscious of the sorry state of affairs in the real life where moments of joy ultimately become the cause of sorrow but he is elated at the prospect of arresting in art those very moments of joy before turning sour. The poet hoists high the flag of art which has been a most welcome means of attaining immortality which is beyond the grasp of medicine.

The actual enjoyment is characterized by determinacy while in the suggestion of joy/enjoyment everything is indeterminate – there is infinite possibility. The suggestion of the melodies unheard stirs the imagination of the onlooker. Beauty unravished is the supreme truth to Keats and the realization dawns on him: it is only art that can arrest the ravishment of earthly beauty. Love ‘powerful and sacred’ is conceived in ‘an idealized realm of romance, often located within a pagan, classical mythology or a chivalric medievalism’ (Whale12) by Keats who laughs at the commonality of love in his poems like “What is love? It is a doll dressed up” or in his letter where he says: “Nothing strikes me so forcibly with a sense of the ridiculous[sic] as love – A man in love I do think cuts the sorryest figure in the world-...”(White 147). John Whale, with reference to “Ode to Psyche”, points out: “Keats turns his attention to feminine beauty and its mortality, in particular its being subject to decay or its tendency to pall with familiarity...The poem locates the possibility of an ideal of feminine beauty beyond real women and their bodies”(Whale 94). For Keats sorrowful situations are transmuted into the occasion of happiness. Bold lover in the art work can never kiss - in this he is saved from the risk of satiety and for ever will he love; though the lover has not his present ‘bliss’ of fulfilment. The same sense of unfulfilment might be somewhere lurking in the image of ‘unravished bride’; but it holds out a prospect of eternal lure of fulfilment. In spite of being conscious of the fact that on the reverse of festivity there is endless silence/ loneliness, the poet sings of the art capturing the joyful moment.

One thing to note further is that an art work representing ‘a scene of group rape’ and a scene of a sacrificial procession which is taking to the green altar a heifer which is lowing at the skies has been ‘a thing of beauty’. For Keats ‘the flowery tale’ is distanced by a long gap of time and culture. And what is witnessed and appreciated in the scenes is the representation, not the reality<sup>2</sup>. Richard Cronin quotes Keats’s letter to his brothers where he says that ‘excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeable evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth’(269). He considers the urn as a work of art, ‘its men and maidens carved from marble, its timelessness dis severed from the time-bound world in which we live’(271). Art objectifying and universalizing the human experiences - placid, silent, arresting the fleeting time - will soothe and instruct man facing suffering, waste, death and decay. The instruction will come to rescue man from the woes which are unavoidable truths and which medicine cannot redress. Keats obsessed with melancholy has taken to the art of poetry to objectify his feelings and emotions by giving them poetic forms and this art is a self therapy. In Blade’s view, ‘Sometimes writing was like a drug for him’(193). Keats writes to J. H. Reynolds on 18 April, 1817: ‘I find that I cannot exist without poetry- without eternal poetry – half the day will not do- the whole of it- I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan – I had become all in a Tremble from not having written anything of late - the Sonnet overleaf did me some good. I slept the better last night for it-’(Gittings 7-8). In a letter to Fanny Brawne on 8 July 1819 he again writes: ‘I do not pass a day without sprawling some blank verse or tagging some rhymes...’ (Gittings 267). And Keats’s poetry

recapturing his personal emotions, joys and sorrows becomes a remedy for the whole mankind in reverberating with universal cries of agony and suffering.

### Notes:

\*This is a modified version of a paper presented in “John Keats: Poet-physician, Physician-Poet” conference organized by Keats Foundation at London on 1-3 May 2015.

1. See R. S. White, *John Keats: A Literary Life*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.p.18

2.Richard Cronin has discussed about the first scene on the Grecian Urn in “Formalism” (p.269) in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*. He has referred to the third scene in p.270 in another context.

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## Poetry as Exploration / Discovery: Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"

Bisweswar Chakraborty

**Abstract:** In 1816, seriously considering poetry as his true vocation, Keats expressed his youthful enthusiasm for the new world of Hellenic inspiration in the sonnet, 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer'. The sonnet is notable for its use of images and metaphors related to the notion of 'exploration' and 'discovery'. This paper is an attempt to read how the idea of 'poetry as exploration' worked in Keats' imagination, moving from a progressive searching to an internalisation of poetic feeling.

**Keywords:** Chapman's Homer, exploration/discovery, sublime, progressive searching

"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" was the first successful piece of poetry of Keats' career and reveals many of his characteristic poetic processes. This sonnet was the produce of the poet's passionate experience upon reading Homer as translated by Chapman. The word 'into' in the title of the sonnet indicates a true attempt to penetrate the spirit of the Greek bard's work. The compact structure of the sonnet designates that it issued out from a solitary idea: discovery. The octave informs about the speaker's previous experiences, his engagements in the dominion of 'gold' and the 'Western islands' which, according to Greek mythology, pertain to Apollo. The speaker asserts he had a beforehand knowledge of Homer's powerful authority but the speaker's direct approach to Homer through Chapman was a more pronounced experience than any of his preceding literary contacts with Homer's 'demesne'. The depth of this contact is communicated by the verb 'to breathe', that is, penetrating into every cell, producing crucial response. The first eight lines present a progressive searching — the speaker goes round the Western islands, he perceives sound of Homer and finally gets in touch with him. The effects of the explorer's discovery upon himself are revealed in the sestet and are conveniently preceded by a colon which signals for a transition between the two movements of the sonnet. One initiates the other. The second part describes the traveller's feelings in the moment of discovery. His sensations are those of a successful explorer, signified by an astronomer who discerns a new planet and a navigator who contemplates an unknown ocean. All the images refer to exploration and this provides unity to the poem.

One can deduce, of course, from the nature of the subject — the poet's reaction after studying a literary masterpiece — that this voyage evokes and intellectual and emotional expedition through the sphere of Western literature. The idea of artistic creativeness is added to the expressions 'realms of gold' and 'goodly states and kingdoms' by the reference to Apollo in the fourth line. The journey around the Western islands stands for a journey through Western literature attempting to reach Homer's 'demesne'. The culminant image in Keat's sonnet presents Cortez standing on an isthmus which separates the Caribbean Sea from the Pacific ocean. It is the Pacific and not the Caribbean Sea that attracts Cortez' fixed gaze because the Pacific was unheard of up to that moment. This ocean completely absorbs Cortez. The Pacific is considered to exercise an enthrallment upon men because it suggests an undecipherable mystery.

Keats could not read Greek so would have been unable to read Homer's *Odyssey* in its original form. Other translations of these works were widely available but Chapman's version was the one which really brought the epic works to life for Keats when read to him by his old school friend, Charles Cowden Clarke. Clarke commented later that at several points Keats actually shouted aloud in excitement and was evidently much stimulated by the experience. The pair had stayed up

all night reading but nonetheless, Keats went straight home to pen this sonnet and he presented it to his friend at ten the next morning.

The 'Darien' referred to in the sestet is in the Isthmus of Panama. It was not Cortés who first saw the Pacific Ocean but Balboa. Before writing this poem, Keats had read William Robertson's *History of America* and it seems that he confused Cortés' sighting of the Valley of Mexico with Balboa's discovery of the Pacific. Here is the extract from the book that inspired Keats to compare his discovery of Chapman's Homer with such a significant moment in the explorer's life:

At length the Indians assured them, that from the top of the next mountain they should discover the ocean which was the object of their wishes. When, with infinite toil, they had climbed up the greater part of the steep ascent, Balboa commanded his men to halt, and advanced alone to the summit, that he might be the first who should enjoy a spectacle that he had so long desired. As soon as he beheld the South Sea stretching in endless prospect below him, he fell on his knees, and lifting up his hands to Heaven, returned thanks to God, who had conducted him to a discovery so beneficial to his country, and so honourable to himself. His followers, observing his transports of joy, rushed forward to join in his wonder, exultation, and gratitude. (Vol. I; Book iii, ll. 202-205)

Keats simply considered the image, rather than the actual historical facts. Clarke noticed the error and pointed it out to Keats but Keats decided not to correct it, possibly because the rhythm of the poem would have been upset by the extra syllable in the name 'Balboa'. The words - 'wonder', 'exultation' and 'gratitude' – contribute to Keats's imaginative image of the explorer because that is how he felt on first reading Chapman's Homer.

Considering William Hazlitt's influence on the poems in Keats's first publication, *Poems* (1817), "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" stands out as a masterpiece. Helen Vendler calls it Keats's first "perfect" poem, and labels it "strikingly mature" (44) in the context of the 1817 volume. It also marked a defining moment in Keats's career, as Robert Gittings observes that the sonnet "has an authority never heard in Keats before" (129). It was written shortly after Keats returned from his largely unsuccessful stay at Margate, where he had expected to write poetry away from the city. After several weeks, however, he returned discontented, having written little (Bate 82). It was only shortly after his return that pondering over Chapman's Homer gave him the impetus he needed to write (Bate, 84-86). Walter Jackson Bate points out that, like the other poems in the collection, "Chapman's Homer" is full of borrowings, and "[e]very possible echo ... of Keats's reading has been exhaustively traced" (88). What is different about this sonnet is that it reproduces, as Charles Rzepka writes, not only his reading experience but also the "*feeling* of the sublime" (72, original emphasis). In a poem saturated with images of exploration and discovery, Bate argues that the most noteworthy of Keats's discoveries is not that of Homer, but that of his own poetic aptitude and the confidence he is able to draw from it (89). Keats not only discovered his ability to write great poetry, however; he also surmised the extent to which his reading could contribute to the creation of such poetry.

Although it is a poem about a reading experience, the various words Keats employs to describe his reading in the Chapman's Homer sonnet do not comprise any variation on the verb "to read." Reading is likened to "travell[ing]", and in addition to motion, Keats's aural and visual senses are invoked. He "hear[s]" Chapman speak, instead of reading him. A visual metaphor for reading is introduced in the title, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," and is maintained throughout the poem: he describes the works he has "seen" and compares himself to both a "watcher of the skies" and Cortez, who "star'd at the Pacific". The importance given to the visual metaphor by its inclusion

in the title is cemented by the concluding image of the poem, that of Cortez looking out over the Pacific. Yet it is the act of breathing, which is introduced in the seventh line that makes this particular reading experience distinctive. David Ferris highlights the significance of breathing, noting that although the speaker hears Chapman's voice first, it is breathing that is introduced first in the poem, at line 7 (72). The emphatic "[t]hen" of line 9 also suggests the importance of inhaling as a catalyst for the sublime effect of his reading:

Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken; (ll. 7-10)

Hearing Chapman's voice permit him to "breathe [the] pure serene" of Homer, but it is the breathing itself that produces the sublime experience. In an 1818 letter to John Taylor, Keats writes that poetry's "touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content" (*Letters* 1: 238). Great poetry, for Keats, was vitally connected to breathing. In the "Mansion of Many Apartments" letter of May 1818, he suggests a sort of intellectual atmosphere when he writes that "we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere" in the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought" (1: 281). The "Chamber" is a stage of human intellectual development, and one becomes "intoxicated" within it by breathing in the surrounding atmosphere. "[A]mong the effects this breathing is father of," Keats continues, "is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the [heart] and nature of Man" (1: 281). Just as in the Chapman's Homer sonnet, inhaling the sublime atmosphere awakens visual faculties.

In order to fully realize the effect of Keats's inhaling the sublime power of Homer, however, we must account for both the taking and the receiving of possession; Keats responds to being possessed by both Chapman's and Homer's "pure serene" by taking possession of his own. He does this not by, as Daniel Pollack-Pelzner suggests, "revis[ing] an earlier poet's scene to place himself within it" (42), but by assimilating the sublime feeling that he reads into his own experiences. Rzepka quotes Andrew Motion on the "exceptional and suddenly found maturity" of the Chapman's Homer sonnet, which "depends not on Keats escaping the tensions which shaped his personality, but on incorporating them" (71). It is not about revising another poet's work, but using the other poet's sublime influence to improve his own. White points out something similar in discussing the way Keats re-interprets images he has read in Shakespeare for *Endymion*: "Keats is not simply echoing but interpreting ... or ... amplifying the scope of an image from a single word to a more comprehensively visualized scene" (107). Keats transforms poetic influence into an augmentation of his own poetic vision. White draws attention to the idea of the new poetic self when he explains the "mode of thought" behind Keats's persistent treatment of "the related subjects of reading, writing and living":

"Complete submission to external impressions, complete immersion in the flux of experience, lead to a feeling awareness of the dark and light in human existence, and out of this knowledge, phoenix-like, emerges a fully responsible, compassionate and self-aware identity, (26)..."

"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" reveals Keat's idea in actual experience as the best means to knowledge. The close contact with the physical world propitiates discovery. Scrutinizing earth, sky and water exercises the human faculties and makes one able to find a new planet or an unknown ocean. There exists a relationship between man and his environment. Man assigns himself into the space he contemplates and the notion of such immensities causes effects

upon on him. The image of the watcher of the skies puts forward the dissemination of the outer world into the human range of sight. The new planet 'swims into his ken.' Cortez's figure beholding the Pacific presents his eagle-eyes silently penetrating into the water. And it seems obvious that the poet in Keats with an extraordinarily imaginative leniency responds to this welcome change after such an experience. Keats believed that experiences of all kinds are received and contemplated upon before their integration into the soul. Human life is a vale of soul-making. Each man is the result of what he has lived; only through experience the essence of human intelligence can acquire the individual traits which will make each man unique and insubstitutable. Each experience is non-transferable since it induces different special effects according to psychological difference in the reception of things. This is why the images in the sonnet are so varied and concrete; and, yet the particular details make each situation unique. The importance given by Keats to each particular experience makes one think of the particular effects his contact with Chapman's Homer could have caused on his make-up as a poet.

Keats imagines himself on the near shore of his poetic career, gazing out across the waters of experience like an explorer to set off into the unknown, as it is evident in his *Sleep and Poetry*:

An ocean dim, sprinkled with many isle,  
 Spreads awfully before me. How much toil,  
 How many days, what desperate turmoil,  
 Ere I can have explored its wideness!  
 Ah, what a task! (ll. 306-10)

Bhabatosh Chatterjee's observation adds to the present issue an interesting dimension. He notes:

Herschel's discovery of the new planet Uranus vividly described in Bonnycastle's *Introduction to Astronomy* (which was awarded to Keats as a prize at Enfield School) provides the astronomical parallelism. The image points to the shift in speaker's response. Originally, the vision is something remote and beyond the range of direct sensuous apprehension; suddenly it grows into an immediate, almost tangible reality (in the seventh and eighth lines) Again the vision is projected into distant, infinite space; the distance is once again contracted telescopically, as it were, by the use of the phrase 'swims into his ken'. (209, original emphasis)

Considering this opinion it is to be seen that in the ultimate four lines of the sestet, the explorer's astonishment and perplexity are sublimated to an amazing height of experience that is akin to spiritual appreciation. The epic stature of Cortez – the unwilling chronological blunder in confounding Balboa with Cortez becomes irrelevant – standing motionless upon a high peninsula and intently looking silently at the ocean has the effect of a 'still capture' (209). The sublimation of his response is made more effectual on the contrary, by the portrait of his followers standing little below the peak, and staring at one another in 'wild surmise'. The phrase 'eagle eyes' (possibly inspired, as Hunt suggests, by Titian's portrait of Cortez' [209]) is much better than the original 'wond'ring eyes' and advocates the explorer's intense look at the vast width of waves. The idea of infinite expanse is restated, and the resulting impression 'justifies Middleton Murray's impression that there is a certain discrepancy between the emotional content of the poem and its ostensible cause (209)' The exuberant emotion finds its location in the images of the sky and the sea; the discovery of "Chapman's Homer", now extends to a more superior and important revelation of the entire world of poetry gradually elongating mysteriously before and afar the onlooker's bewildered gaze. Chatterjee holds the visualization to be 'both inspiring and disturbing, and the last line gathers up the explorer's exultation, puzzlement, wonder, and awe (209).' Mythology, natural world, science, and history add to the experience, but the original impulse initiates from a literary work.

Besides, the central metaphor of 'reading-as-travel', the allusion to actual people – Chapman, Homer, Cortez and the anonymous astronomer – all exert a metaphorical vigour for an aspiring poet who is trying to put his small step towards pursuit of poetic ambition. And it is exciting to see that Keats's first noteworthy accomplishment is an eloquent meditation on the infinite scope of a poem.

It is a great sonnet, one of the most perfect in English poetry. It is in the Petrarchan form. The rhyme-scheme is abba abba. cd cd cd; and the two parts, the octave and the sestet, are properly divided by a distinct pause, and the whole sonnet has a deep organic unity and is suffused by an impassioned glow of the poet's burning enthusiasm. Thus it conforms to the ideal type to the Petrarchan sonnet-form. "Never have the true capacities", remarks Mr. Murray, "of the Petrarchan sonnet form been more cunningly realised." The imagery and the emotion have been fused into one. From the first line to the last it seems to grow spontaneously, inevitably. The emotion of eager exploration in the octave leads to and mingles in the emotion of rapturous discovery in the sestet, and in the final picture of Cortez on a peak in Darien "gathers up, clinches, makes tangible the emotional content of the poem, it is made perfect culmination of the sonnet. All that the sonnet means is crammed into the final image: it is the flower of the pleasing fulfilment of the purpose and the essence of the created thing." Keats shows here his superb poetic power in communicating to us in the wonderful images of the sestet his mood of youthful, enthusiastic discovery and delighted wonder. Keats, as a dreamer of dreams, and ardent explorer of in the realm of truth and beauty, finds a new dreamland, a new truth and a new vision of beauty opened out to his wondering eyes in the poetry of Homer. To him it appears to be almost like a culmination of all his findings in the realm of poetry. The sonnet has all his passion of poetry, his musical and pictorial gifts, and his fine organising power. Thematically and structurally this brilliant sonnet, as D.G. Rossetti observes, is "pre-eminent in singleness of thought, illustrated by definite and grand image. It has true opening and a true climax, and a clear link of inventive association between the things mentally signified in chief and the modes of its concrete presentment."

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## Humorous Afterlives of a Keatsian Epiphany

Abhirup Mascharak

**Abstract:** This paper examines the uses to which P.G. Wodehouse put the famous 1816 sonnet by John Keats, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'. The lines and phrases from this poem have been referred to in many of his works, mostly to a humorous effect, as most of his allusions tend to be. Underlying the humour, though, is a deep respect for Keats, most eloquently expressed in the postscript to the anthology *The Clicking of Cuthbert and Other Stories*. Moreover, the way Keats's lines have been deployed to mock the follies and foibles of the British upper class, the milieu in which most of Wodehouse's works are set, merit study. This paper undertakes such a study, attempting to throw light on how a poem written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century continued to find resonance with an author of decidedly different temperament from Keats almost a hundred years later.

**Keywords:** 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', P.G. Wodehouse, *The Clicking of Cuthbert and Other Stories*, humour

Intertextuality, as a practice, rarely respects genre divisions, or the hierarchy of so-called 'higher' and 'lower' forms of literature. Quotations from Boethius and Lucius Accius can open a detective novel by J. K. Rowling, and characters from Shakespeare, Brecht, and Orwell can populate the pages of a comic book series, whose creator, Alan Moore, has described it as a variation of the *Justice League*. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that a sonnet written in 1816 by one of the pre-eminent Romantic poets should find itself alluded to, repeatedly, in the books of a humorist who wrote almost a century later, and who uses the phrases from that sonnet for purposes vastly different from the poet's. John Keats's 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' is an expression of his delight at having read George Chapman's rendition of Homer, and the exorbitant similes he uses to describe his ecstasy include the joy of an astronomer upon discovering a new planet, or an explorer's awe-struck response to the vast expanse of the water body he has chanced upon. This very exultation may have prompted P. G. Wodehouse to affectionately skewer it by using Keats's lines to a humorous end. This is a characteristic feature of his works, in which the plethora of allusions (to literary works as well as to stage musicals and films) are often given a funny tweak rather than made directly. As Ann-Marie Einhaus puts it, 'Indeed, one of the most noticeable features of Wodehouse's fiction is its remarkable intertextuality, both in terms of reusing his own material in new guises, and in its *comic use* of literary allusion ... His reading finds expression in innumerable *comic uses* of literary (mis)quotation, embedded in the text, or as part of his characters' dialogue.'<sup>1</sup> (Emphases added) With Keats's poem, he does much the same.

The first allusion to the sonnet that we find in Wodehouse is in the 1922 collection *The Clicking of Cuthbert and Other Stories*. In the second story of the anthology, 'A Woman is Only a Woman', we find two golfers, Peter Willard and James Todd, engaged in a contest to decide who shall get the first opportunity to propose to Miss Grace Forrester, a woman they both have fallen in love with, but who has not shown any more interest in one than in the other. The supposed tension in the match between them is described at one point with a reference to the line in Keats's sonnet about Cortez looking 'with eagle eyes' at the Pacific while 'all his men/ Look'd at each other with a

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<sup>1</sup> Ann-Marie Einhaus, "Know Your Audience: Aesthetic and Literary Positioning in the Fiction of P.G. Wodehouse." <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/25720/> Accessed on: 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2016.

wild surmise - / Silent upon a peak in Darien'.<sup>2</sup> In Wodehouse, the Pacific becomes 'the second lake hole', and the peak in Darien 'a tee in Woodhaven',<sup>3</sup> as these love-struck (and thoroughly incompetent, as we have already been informed) golfers replace Cortez and his fellow-travellers, looking with the same 'eagle eyes' not at a landmark geographical discovery but at their respective positions in that particular round of the match. Since the stories in this collection are all about the antics of the members of a golfing club, as narrated by a senior member of the establishment known only as the Oldest Member, Wodehouse locates the Keatsian simile within the context of the game, and his use of the simile functions on at least two levels. At the more immediate level, it acts as an expose of the ridiculousness of Willard and Todd in treating this match as a contest with high stakes, when Miss Forrester, to win whose hand they are playing, has given no indication that she likes either of them. The only way to know, for sure, what she feels about them, Willard and Todd ought to have asked her directly, but they find themselves beset by the opposite pulls of obsession and diffidence, unable to get over Miss Forrester and unable, also, to muster the confidence needed to ask her out. They resort, instead, to speculating about her gestures, and unsurprisingly, these speculations turn out to be completely off the mark. For instance, when they see her knitting something, they assume it is a sweater for one of them, and spend days trying to guess who the 'lucky man' is,<sup>4</sup> only to learn, finally, that it is not a sweater at all, but a sock, which she is sewing for the youngest son of her cousin. Their decision to play a golf match to decide who shall get to propose first to her is foolishness of the same order. This is because, like their guesses about what Miss Forrester is knitting, the match, too, is being played without the slightest clue on the part of Willard and Todd about what Miss Forrester would feel if she hears that a game of golf is being used to settle a romantic tussle over her, given that she detests the sport. Learning about her views on golf shall finally end the two men's preoccupation with Miss Forrester, but since they do not know it in this early stage of the game, the match is, to them, as significant as the discovery of the Pacific was to Cortez and his companions. More precisely, it is the unexpected 'achievement' of both of them having 'got over' the second lake hole, each of them with his 'first shot', instead of, as had been usual so far, 'sinking a ball or two' in the lake.<sup>5</sup>

At a broader level, the simile functions as a commentary, no matter how gentle, on the tendency of the upper classes – golf is, largely, a pursuit for the wealthy – to inflate their tiny inconveniences (in this case, infatuation over a woman who does not seem betray much by way of romantic attraction to them) to make them look like major problems, which, owing to their money and social status, the rich rarely experience. Calling the tee in Woodhaven the same as the peak in Darien is to, literally, make a mountain out of a molehill. Therefore, when Wodehouse describes Willard and Todd looking from the former at the second lake hole as Cortez and company looked from the latter at the Pacific, there is an underlying observation, a subtext, to the allusion: the likes of Willard and Todd, having not experienced any actual hardship in their lives, nor having achieved anything truly significant, treat golf and passing infatuations as something more than that. Consequently, their being snubbed by Miss Forrester may be read as a lesson of sorts; it is all right, Wodehouse seems to be saying, as long as golf is indulged in as a sport and nothing else, it is fine. However, if used as the means to gain something else (least of all the love of a woman), it becomes, as a pursuit, nothing short of foolish.

The factual inaccuracy in Keats's allusion allows Wodehouse another bit of truancy in the foreword to the book, which he entitles 'Fore!'.<sup>6</sup> It was not Cortez but Vasco Núñez de Balboa who discovered the Pacific in 1513. Keats was made aware of the error by Charles Clarke, but decided to

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<sup>2</sup> P.G. Wodehouse, *The Clicking of Cuthbert* (1922; Penguin Books: Middlesex, 1962), 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

not make any changes to avoid adding an extra syllable. Wodehouse recounts being sent a letter which said, “You big stiff, it wasn’t Cortés, it was Balboa.”<sup>7</sup> He responds thus to the correspondent:

This, I believe, is historically accurate. On the other hand, if Cortés was good enough for Keats, he is good enough for me. Besides, even if it *was* Balboa, the Pacific was open for being stared at about that time, and I see no reason why Cortés should not have had a look at it as well. (Emphasis author’s)<sup>8</sup>

This response clarifies two things. Firstly, while the allusions he made to Keats’s poem may have been in a comic vein, Wodehouse’s attitude towards the poet and his work is one of admiration rather than scorn. This admiration is not necessarily as far as Wodehouse’s allusions are concerned. The references to Russian literature that one finds in his books, for instance, are rarely respectful. To get an encapsulation of what he thought of the works of the authors from that country, one only needs to take a look at Vladimir Brusiloff, the fictional Russian writer in the story which opens this collection, entitled ‘The Clicking of Cuthbert’, who ‘specialized in grey studies of hopeless misery, where nothing happened till page 380, when the mujik decided to commit suicide.’<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the statement ‘if Cortés was good enough for Keats, he is good enough for me’ evinces a high regard for the poet, despite the knowledge that the latter is incorrect about Cortez discovering the Pacific. This brings us to the second aspect of Wodehouse’s attitude that his reply to the correspondent reveals: like Keats, he values artistry over accuracy. For Keats, maintaining the proper scansion was more important than being correct about who first found the Pacific, and Wodehouse, likewise, is more concerned about making a humorous allusion that shall makes his readers laugh than getting his history right. In other words, Wodehouse’s reply is a stand in favour of poetic license, to articulate which he deliberately alludes to a poem that has a factual error, and retains that error in his own allusion. It matters little, Wodehouse seems to be saying, if it was Cortez or Balboa who discovered the Pacific; it alters neither the sense of awe that Keats seeks to convey in his poem, nor the humour in Wodehouse’s story. It comes as no surprise, that Wodehouse, in the subsequent references to the sonnet, shall continue to name Cortez rather than Balboa.

*The Inimitable Jeeves*, published in 1923, has the next reference to the poem, in the story ‘The Great Sermon Handicap’. Bertie Wooster, the narrator, is involved in a betting scheme with his troublemaking cousins Claude and Eustace over which of the local pastors can give the longest sermon in the upcoming Sunday mass. At Bertie’s suggestion, the cousins had bet on Reverend Heppenstall, but then they find out that Reverend Hayward, who has recently spoken for a good twenty-six minutes at a wedding, may be the more likely victor. Therefore, Eustace and Claude have now decided to put the money on Hayward, but Bertie asks them to stick to Heppenstall, whom he shall ask to deliver the latter’s famous sermon on Brotherly Love, which, at fifty minutes, ought to be lengthier than any address by any other preacher. Delighted at this ‘brainy scheme’, the two cousins ‘looked at each other, like those chappies in the poem, with a wild surmise.’<sup>10</sup>

Once more, we find Keats’s lines being used for a similar purpose—the very apt awe felt by the travellers upon first seeing the Pacific is used to describe the response of a pair of mischievous youngsters to a moneymaking scheme which, typically, involves little labour or even investment (given that it is Bertie’s money that is going into the bet) on their part, thus offering the readers a good idea of the lives of the idle rich, the landed gentry, of England, to whom winning a foolish bet tantamounts to a thrilling discovery. Since Wodehouse was no Marxist (his reservations about them is well noted in many of his works, among them ‘Comrade Bingo’, also found in *The Inimitable Jeeves*), and his temperament was far too jovial to indulge in the blanket denunciation of any segment of the society, his mockery of the upper class follies and foibles is seldom too stinging. Nevertheless,

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘Postscript’, 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> P.G. Wodehouse, *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923; Penguin Books: London, 1953), 134.

the fact that these foolhardy schemes of the rich routinely backfire in his stories bespeak a less-than-admiring view of them on his part. In this story, too, all the supposed cleverness of Bertie, Claude, and Eustace comes to naught, and they lose their money, while Bertie's valet Jeeves, acting on a tip from Heppenstall's butler, manages to win a fortune. It is the working class characters, on whom Wodehouse's upper class men in spats are habitually dependent, who are more alert and aware of what is going on around them, and benefit more as a result. The use of the phrase 'wild surmise' from Keats's poem, then, also serves to ridicule the assumption on the part of Claude and Eustace that Bertie has suggested a foolproof way of making money; as the denouement to the story proves, their belief in their own cleverness, over which they had been so gleefully excited, is entirely ill-founded.

*Thank You, Jeeves*, the first of the Bertie-and-Jeeves novels, was published in 1934, has an early reference to Keats's sonnet, in conjunction with Bertie's brief spurt of attraction to a Miss Pauline Stoker:

'Jeeves', I recollect saying, 'who was the fellow who on looking at something felt like somebody was looking at something? I learned the passage at school, but it has escaped me.'

'I fancy the individual you have in mind, sir, is the poet Keats, who compared his emotions on first reading Chapman's Homer to those of stout Cortez when with eagle eyes he stared at the Pacific.'

'The Pacific, eh?'

'Yes, sir. And all his men looked at each other with a wild surmise, silent upon a peak in Darien.'

'Of course. It all comes back to me. Well, that's how I felt this afternoon on being introduced to Miss Pauline Stoker. Press the trousers with special care to-night, Jeeves. I am dining with her.'<sup>11</sup>

This passage serves many purposes, the most obvious of which is contrasting the portrayal of Bertie and Jeeves's respective intellects. Much of the pleasure of the works featuring this pair hinges on the dichotomy between them. While Bertie is slothful, somewhat dimwitted, prone to loud protestations, but easily bamboozled into doing things against his will and thus getting into trouble, Jeeves is resourceful, smart, mostly silent, but a keen observer and fast thinker who pulls Bertie out of his predicaments. All of this can be seen in the cited passage. Here, Bertie is in comparatively lesser trouble, struggling to remember something he had once read but has now forgotten, and Jeeves supplies him with the necessary information about the poem, thus allowing Bertie to put in words how infatuated he is with Miss Stoker. This infatuation, though, all but evaporates once his engagement to her is cancelled, and a mere three months later, when he meets her again and learns of her attraction to his friend Chuffy, Bertie feels not a twinge of envy or regret, for 'of the ancient fire which had caused me to bung my heart at her feet that night at the Plaza there remained not a trace.'<sup>12</sup> Later, when Miss Stoker says she would have gladly married him had she not been in love with Chuffy, Bertie is actually mortified: 'No, no. Don't dream of it.'<sup>13</sup> Given how easily he has gotten over his feelings for Miss Stoker, Bertie's comparison of them to the feelings of Cortez as mentioned in Keats's poem become all the more ludicrous, throwing into sharper relief the transience of Bertie's attraction vis-à-vis the intensity, the genuineness, of Keats's response to Chapman, or Cortez's to his discovery, as described by Keats. The way Bertie and Miss Stoker's cancelled engagement keeps creating trouble for Bertie—from Chuffy, who suspects that Bertie may still be in love with Miss Stoker, and from her father, Washburn Stoker, who thinks the same and

<sup>11</sup> P.G. Wodehouse, *Thank You, Jeeves* (1934; Arrow Books: London, 2008), 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

tries to forcibly marry Bertie off to his daughter—it is not unreasonable to assume that Wodehouse is giving Bertie a comeuppance of sorts. If Bertie had not let his passing fancies guide him to propose to Miss Stoker, and had thus left no antecedents of any relationship between them, these later complications would not have arisen. The mention of Keats’s poem in this novel, therefore, serves as a reminder to not use the loftiest of words and phrases about anything unless one means them. Finally, it ought to be noted that—as mentioned before—Wodehouse does not bother to replace Cortez with Balboa in this allusion, his reluctance to tamper with Keats being obvious, and his belief that any furor over this factual inaccuracy is little more than nitpicking still the same.

If the admiration one author has for others can be gauged by how often the latter are alluded to, in some way or the other, in his/her own works, then it is easy to guess who Wodehouse’s favourite authors are: Shakespeare, Tennyson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and, as the aforementioned examples prove, Keats. This is not to say that every mention of Keats one finds in Wodehouse is made in admiration. The author’s varying states of mind did influence the manner in which he spoke of the poet. In a letter to Denis Mackail, with whom he was having an argument over Wodehouse’s use of a phrase from Keats’s ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ in *The Old Reliable*, Wodehouse remarks, ‘Keats must have been an ass if he thought the wretched wight line was as good as—I mean better than—the other.’<sup>14</sup> The reference here is to the two versions of the poem, one of which has the phrase ‘wretched wight’ in the opening line, while the other has ‘knight-at-arms’ in its stead. In the same letter, Wodehouse goes on to mention ‘spells of loathing all poetry and thinking all poets, including Shakespeare, affected fools’, and adds that he is presently going through such a phase.<sup>15</sup> This could be only a phase, a temporary state of mind, though. In writing about the literary merits of his works, Wodehouse, with his characteristic modesty tinged with humour, had remarked about them, “You are never likely to feel like Keats on first reading Chapman’s Homer.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *P.G. Wodehouse - A Life in Letters*, ed. Sophie Ratcliffe (Hutchinson: London, 2011), 442.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Hynes, ‘P.G. Wodehouse: “The Greatest Trivial Novelist”’, *New Republic*, June 16, 1982. <https://newrepublic.com/article/115181/samuel-hynes-reviews-frances-donaldsons-pg-wodehouse-biography>. Accessed on: 11 November 2016

## Ontology and the Concept of Liminality in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*<sup>1</sup>: A Posthumanist Approach from Monster Studies

Soumen Jana & Krishanu Maiti

**Abstract:** With the advent of posthumanism, a critical inquiry into the human / nonhuman bipolar divide underscores the liminality of the 'strange' beings and lays bare the structures of categorization that go into the formation of the 'monstrous'. Monster studies demonstrates how particular forms of life, such as the differently embodied or the aberrant, that do not fit the norms of 'human' are identified as monstrous and consigned to the species of 'freaks', 'non-humans' or 'inhuman'. Thus monster studies, examine the representational and formational modes in literature, the arts and media that have portrayed non-human forms for the formalization of species boundaries. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818, Frankenstein's monster is a case in study; it demonstrates how the pathos of monsterism is a dialectical product of the cultural structures and monsters, therefore, are expressions of cultural anxieties about and demonization of forms of life because they are alien and located outside the familiar category.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, monster studies, ontology, liminality, Frankenstein.

A teenage girl holidaying with her friends in the summer of 1816 in the charming environs of Geneva penned – out of compulsion, so to speak – a 'ghost story' (she believes that is what she intended) to "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dreaded to look around, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart" (Introduction, 3). So goes the tale regarding the points of genesis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, to put in a simplistic manner<sup>2</sup>. That Mary Shelley's novel continues to arrest the readers' attention to its gothic horror, apart from multiple critical interpretations it lends itself to, reinforces – and testifies to – the classic status of the text. The present study intends to look not so much into the sustenance and preservation of gothic horror though the monster figure but to the strategic and ideological mechanisms that go into the creation of the monster. Thus, for convenience, the paper is divided into two sections. The first section attempts a reading of the text along the line of the monster studies and the second section intends to take this argument further by attempting to map the problematics concerning the monster's relationship with its creators, some of its 'human' endowments that problematize or destabilize the figurability of human-monster divide.

### I

The critical posthumanists treat the human as a form of life that determines the categorizations to which other forms of life belong or can be relegated or appended. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben succinctly puts it that *homo sapiens* is not a species, rather a machine for producing the recognition of the human by creating non-human as its byproducts also. On his works on freaks, Leslie Fieldler also speaks of two pertinent questions – who counts as fully, properly human? And what is only or merely a non-human? These questions seem to frame the ideals of posthumanism. Critical posthumanist studies seek to unravel the discourses and institutions through which these species difference or speciesism is engineered and the differential treatment of the species is meted out. Monster studies<sup>3</sup> is one such interest of the critical posthumanist tradition that demonstrates how particular forms of life, such as the differently embodied or the aberrant, that do not fit the norms of 'human', are identified as monstrous and categorized under the terms of 'freaks', 'non-humans' or 'inhuman'. Thus, monster studies, like animal studies, examine the representational and formational modes in literature, the arts and media that have portrayed non-human forms for the

formalization of species boundaries. It shows how monsters can be produced as such because of certain normative value attached to particular physiognomies, skin colours, shapes and behavior, how the monster's body or face always implicates something other than itself. This explains why some deformed babies get treated as bad omen and some physiognomies as indicative of moral depravity in some people. Monster studies, doing so, also throws light on certain inherent, deep-rooted anxieties about indeterminate forms of life – which cannot be subsumed under any category – and the attempt to normalize them by relocating them in a particular category.

Monsters, therefore, are expressions of cultural anxieties about and demonization of forms of life which resist bracketing, and imply or exhibit deviance. Strange physiognomies, odd complexion, uncommon physical size and different sorts of 'abnormalities' act as parameters in such categorizations and they are deemed to be 'monstrous' because they are alien and located outside the familiar category. And this discourse on the monstrous in popular culture, as Promod K Nayar illustrates, is concerned with what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen calls figure of 'ontological liminality' (Cohen 6). The ontological liminality is what characterizes Shakespeare's 'lascivious Moor' (Othello), Stevenson's Mr. Hyde, Stoker's Dracula, humanoids in sci-fi movies and even our present concern Frankenstein's monster. These are basically beings which occupy an in-between existence; these are forms that come with dual characteristics – human with bestial behavior (Mr. Hyde), human-like creature that sucks blood (Dracula) etc. Beings too distant from 'normal' humans – such as beasts – and too uncomfortably close – such as humanoid robots or creatures that exhibit human emotion or intelligence – are equally monstrous in the cultural representation of otherness. Thus, the idea of monster allows the construction of difference. Monster studies here examine the structures of *exclusion* through which some bodies have been marginalized and demonized as beastly. The Bible portrays the Canaanites, the aboriginal inhabitants of Canaan, as giants. Medieval travelers, basing their judgment on social customs, categorized races as monstrous and this in turn helped them to develop particular notions of humanity. John Mandeville's travelogue describes people with frog's head, one eye and other such different bodies. Wittkower cites that many of these races inhabited the African continent. The blacks were considered morally monstrous and hyper-sexed, in popular beliefs. Hence Shakespeare's Othello, as has been pointed out, is often presented as 'monstrous' and a 'lascivious Moor'. Even Thomas More's representation of Richards III as a monster allowed him to depict the king's physical deformities as symptomatic of moral deviance. This moral monstrous fitted in with the Christian world view in which sin resulted deformity (Jewiss). Like More, Stevenson, in Mr. Hyde, shows moral depravity in the form of twisted physiognomies and body structure. Not just moral monstrosity, corruption of any kind – moral, psychological and physical – was deemed monstrous. Hence madness was deemed monstrous, according to the medieval medical theories – but even well into the twentieth century – because it implied the corruption of thought-process. All these instances reinforce the fact that certain forms of life that were significantly different from socially constructed, mythicized norm and whose cultural practices were different, were excluded from the realm of the human, and the ontological liminality primarily enables such displacement.

Cohen, emphasizing the role of structures of categorization and boundary marking, says that the 'refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose extremely incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form of being suspended between forms that threatens to smash any such distinction' (6). The 'incoherent bodies' – patched together from other bodies or that does not die / decompose – constitute humanoid monstrous. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* offers an interesting site in that the monster's body is literary a patched one, engineered out of different body parts of dead humans; the Promethean Frankenstein collected

them together and infused the spark of life into an inanimate body. What is striking is the reaction the physiognomic appearance of the monster elicits in his creator just after the moment of creation –

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate *the wretch* whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! *His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath*; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more *horrid contrast* with watery eyes, that seemed almost of same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion and straight black lips. (51)[emphasis mine]

Frankenstein cannot ‘endure the aspect of the being’ (51) for rest of his life. Even the monster’s own account of his physical appearance in the scene – which is symbolic of Lacanian mirror stage –where the monster beholding his reflected image becomes convinced that “I was in reality the monster I am” (106) upholds his figural alienness. This specular cogito is determined by the gaze of the others; and this physical deviance misguides others to form unfavourable opinion about its moral integrity or inner being. In other words, it demonizes the creature.

Species borders, posthumanists explain, are mostly formed when cultures and races develop myths of origins. Geographical, cultural, genetic origins are essential to racial, ethnic and species identities. Offsprings born to parents who belonged to different races were seen as monstrous in medieval Europe, as articulated in tracts like Ambroise Pare’s *Of Monsters and Prodigies* (1573). St. Augustine’s views on the origins of monstrous races are unmistakable in this respect. He comments:

It is asked whether we are to believe that certain monstrous races of men, spoken of in a secular history have sprung from Noah’s sons, or rather, I should say from the one from whom they themselves are descended...It ought not to seem absurd to us that in individual races there are monstrous births, so in the whole races there are monstrous races. Wherefore, to conclude this question cautiously and guardedly, whether these things which have been told of some races have no existence at all; or if they do exist, they are not human races; or if they are human, they are descended from Adam. (cited in Ramney 82)

Lynn Ramney critically adds that “[r]ationality is a clear component of humaneness, but Augustine does not attempt to determine whether monstrous people are capable of reason; rational thinking is a test that will become central to later discussion of other races and their humanness” (82-3). This issue of the rationality is taken up in next section but it is evident that “unnatural births’ signify the monstrous and creatures like Frankenstein’s creation, born inside a laboratory, readily classifies as monstrous due to the process of his ‘unnatural’ birth. In chapter 4 of *Frankenstein*, we find how Victor Frankenstein, with Faustian hubris marches, most ambitiously and relentlessly, towards the creation of a “new species that would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me” (43). Of the mechanisms and materials that were instrumental in this creation, Victor recounts how he “collected bones from charnel-houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human forms... The dissecting room and the slaughterhouse furnished many of my materials” (48). And when the instruments of life got collected, it was on dreary night of November that he “infused the spark of being into the lifeless thing” (51), into the creature made of assorted elements. Such a history of genesis underlines the fact that the monster is the product of an unnatural act of procreation undertaken without the participation of the feminine principle of life. The absence of a mother figure, it should be mentioned that, has led critics like Helen Tiffin to find in it the reckless removal of mothering role from women (379) or critics like Ann K Mellor to find a crime against the female principle of procreation and the patriarchal denial of the value of women and female sexuality (274).

However, monster studies also point out that cultures harbour distrust for beings from different spatial (and sometimes temporal too) locations and different races, and hence the ancestry debates, as Asa Mittman has demonstrated in the case of early Britain (Ch. 1), are often origin stories to establish the purity and therefore boundary of a culture or ethnic group. Though Victor's creation does openly vouchsafe his 'naturalness' to the society other than to his creator and, towards the end of the novel, to Robert Walton, the distrust of the society is betrayed through the displacement of this emotion in the forms of hatred and rage towards this creature.

The ability of the monster to feel 'human' emotions is usually presented as redeeming feature. Here, essentializing the human as one possessing certain kinds of emotions is a cultural construction. Reading of the creature's remorse at the death of his master Frankenstein therefore treats the monster as understanding the sanctity of life. This human-likeness draws the sympathy of Robert Walton who is surprised to see the monster behave thus, even though the creature tries to convince him that this remorse is genuine and he has felt genuine pain –

'And do you dream?' said the daemon; 'do you think that I was then dead to agony and remorse? ...Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears?' (203)

While, on the one hand, these certain 'human' emotions reinforce the ontological liminality of the monster, they problematize the simplistic equation of assuming certain 'human' emotional expressions as the touchstone, betraying the politics of such cultural productions and rendering, subsequently, such categorizations as biased and concocted.

## II

Generosity, love, rationality and remorse are seen as humanizing the monsters and the freaks. The 'human' endowments are ingredients of the metanarrative that tend to normalize the monstrous and attempts to bracket it in familiar terms. As seen, monster studies and the studies of grotesque throw light on the construction of species boundaries and the classificatory regimes that seek to distinguish and displace the 'non-human'. Harpham mentions when human society faces new forms of being, it first tries to compare it with what it is familiar with unless and until it discovers 'a proper place for the new thing, and ...recognize[s] it not only for what it is like but for what it is, in itself' (Harpham 16). It is the interval between recognizing various constituent forms of the object and the clear sense of the dominant principle that defines the object that grotesque exists. Thus we recognize human and non-human characteristics in Frankenstein's monster but we are not sure about the percentile of human features in him. We know, as the account of his genesis shows, the creature comes into existence through assemblage of various human body parts. But as of its emotional embellishments, there are two parallel counter-narratives. Frankenstein's account adamantly portrays the creature in negative terms – wretch, demon, hateful, cruel, criminal, devil are some of the epithets he uses for his creation – and he doubts about any presence of human love in this 'fiend'. Contrarily, the creature's account gives us altogether a different take in his conversation with his master –

Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous. (92-3)

That misery, injustice and rejection have made the creature a fiend is evident, and his capability of human emotion is stressed in his final confessions to Walton, overwriting the tale by Frankenstein and, thereby, giving validity to a more humane view of the creature.

It is more interesting to note here that Mary Shelley has staged a ‘deformed’ and ‘menacing’ creature who, rather than using grunts and gesture, speaks and reasons with the highest elegance, logic and persuasiveness. The non-human seems to possess the most valued of human faculties – the rational faculty – and use it more elegantly and effectively than his human counterparts. The effectiveness is validated as first Frankenstein and then Walton confessed to have been taken in by the creature’s rhetoric. However, the indeterminacy around the figurability of the ‘monster’ figure – especially the overlapping of identities – problematizes the issue further. By virtue of creating the creature, Frankenstein acts like God and his creation becomes the Adam whom his god-like master rejects for no misdeed of his own. But soon enough, when rejection and misery transforms this Adam into a Satan and the Satan unleashes misery to the near ones of his creator – he first strangles Frankenstein’s brother, then scripts the innocent Justine Mortiz’s death – the guilt-ridden creator (for he has created such a creature) ‘bore a hell within me’, like the creature (81), and parallels a metaphoric Satan. Frankenstein disowns but cannot free himself from his creature, which takes on the character of a doppelganger. The interdependence is evoked with considerable power in the last part of Frankenstein’s narrative in which Frankenstein, from being pursued, becomes the pursuer; yet, by a sort of complicity, he is also lured on willingly by the creature. Frankenstein and his creature then are involved in a dialectic of desire, in which each needs the other because the other represents for each the lack or gap within himself and both know the destruction of the other means the destruction of the self for each.

### Notes

1. We have followed the 1831 edition of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (ed. Sacaria Joseph, Kolkata: The Book World, 2011) and therefore, all the textual references are from this edition.
2. In the “Introduction” to the standard edition of 1831, Mary Shelly gives a detailed account of the circumstances regarding the genesis of the novel.
3. We are indebted to Prof. Promod K. Nayar’s book *Posthumanism*. [Malden, MA: Polity Press. 2014. Print.] for primary exposure to the monster studies. This book basically spurred us on.

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## **“Lost in darkness and distance”: Exclusion of an ‘Ugly Other’ in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein***

Anindita Bhaumik

**Abstract:** Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* unavoidably points towards the marginalisation of the ‘monster’. The paper analyses the idea of ‘ugliness’ that provokes the social rejection. It explores the concept of ‘ugliness’ which symbolises the negation of the ‘original’ idea of beauty, creating anxiety about the disruption of standard norms. The creature’s ‘gigantic’ body with ‘disproportionate’ limbs and ‘deformed’ features create ‘horror’ and ‘disgust’ as immediate responses to his ‘ugliness’. The paper also shows how the ideas of ‘deformity’ and ‘wickedness’ reinforce each other in the novel, and intensifies the ‘otherness’ of the creature. At the same time, it locates the ambiguities involved in the social exclusion of the ‘monster’, with reference to the complex relationship between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. The vulnerable borderline between ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’ is an expression of that complexity.

**Key Words:** Ugliness, Monster, Beauty, Horror, Disgust, Other, Self, Marginalisation, Distance.

Few can ignore the effect of the final scene in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as their eyes catch the last glimpse of the ‘monster’ “borne away by the waves” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 180) to a profound extinction and namelessness. The creature’s destiny is the inevitable consequence of the social rejection that started at the very moment of his ‘birth’. This rejection is symbolised in Victor Frankenstein’s terror and repulsion at the sight of his own creation:

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (39)

What is evident from this description is the creature’s essential ‘ugliness’ that repels his creator. It is more shocking to Victor as the ‘wretch’ was intended to be beautiful. The “breathless horror and disgust” (39) that fills the young scientist’s heart seems to be founded on the contrast between flowing black hair and white teeth; ‘shrivelled’ face and ‘straight black lips’.

‘Ugliness’ is problematic as it is difficult to have a proper definition of it. Its existence has always been dependent on the concept of beauty. Though recent critics regard ‘ugliness’ as an independent aesthetic category, it has been traditionally conceived on the basis of its opposition to ‘beauty’. Umberto Eco, in *On Beauty* incorporates Karl Rosenkranz’s view in *The Aesthetics of Ugliness*, where ugliness is the negation of the ‘original’ idea of beauty:

Beauty is the original divine idea and its negation, ugliness, as it is a negation, has only a secondary existence. Not in the sense that the beautiful, because it is beautiful, may be ugly at the same time, but in the sense that the very properties that constitute the necessity of Beauty are converted into its opposite. (Eco 136)

Therefore, ‘ugliness’ represents the alteration of standard ‘rules’. While beauty is traditionally considered synonymous with balance, harmony and symmetry, ugliness represented everything that

was disproportionate, unbalanced and disorderly. It is, perhaps, the deviation from the accepted standard that threatens the society. Victor is not the only person who is terrified at the sight of the creature. The cottagers whom the creature has intended to have as friends are also in a state of panic after seeing his distorted features. Agatha faints, Safie runs away from the place, and Felix strikes him violently with a stick. Even Walton, the primary narrator of the story is bewildered with horror to see the 'mummy-like' countenance beside the coffin of Frankenstein, despite knowing everything about him: "Over him hung a form which I cannot find words to describe; gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted in its proportions. . . . Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness" (176).

Oscar Delgado Chinchilla in "Towards a Better Understanding of the Ugly in Literature" rightly observes that ugliness is "constantly marked by a lack, an excess, or even a combination of both in the physicality of the object" (329). He refers to Plato's idea of 'ugliness' as an 'error' or 'mistake' in "Sophist" (327). While 'lack' indicates the "aesthetic awareness of a missing part in a whole" and a feeling of uneasiness associated with the implied absence, 'excess' usually suggests exaggeration in size, causing disproportion and unbalancing effect (329). These two elements seem disturbing, as they transgress the expectations of the norms. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* manifests 'horror' and 'disgust' as immediate responses to 'ugliness'. These two feelings are intrinsically associated with ugliness. As 'lack' and 'excess' do not conform to the common aesthetic experience of human beings, they invariably create anxiety about the disruption of 'normal' social and psychological rhythms, causing both fear and repulsion. Here the monster's 'gigantic' body with 'disproportionate' limbs and 'deformed' features provide necessary effects of terror and disgust. The description of his body as the "filthy mass that moved and talked" (*Frankenstein* 115) is an expression of this repulsion. Similarly, elongated fangs of the fantastic Vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are 'ugly' since they imply aggression, and thus create horror as an inevitable reaction.

In literature, the reaction to 'ugliness' somehow creates a kind of 'judgement' in the minds of the readers. Outward ugliness often tends to be reflected in the character of a person. With a dexterous manipulation of language the author represents disorders and deformities to create desired effects. In *Frankenstein*, the creature's 'ugliness' is made inseparable from his 'wickedness' in the views of others. For instance, in Volume III, Chapter III of the novel, Victor destroys the body of the promised female companion of the 'monster' as it is dangerous to create another one "equal in deformity and wickedness" (133), and thus to inflict a 'curse' upon the earth with a "race of devils"(131). One may note the direct connection between deformity and wickedness in Victor's suggestion. The creature's justified claims to have a name, family, parent, friends and a spouse are discarded on the pretext of the supposed evil traits in his character. A society that gives too much importance on the external beauty fails to see the inner qualities of a person. The creature's frustrations at the social alienation and ill-treatment result in a vengeance against his creator. Walton calls him a "daemon" and his actions "diabolical" (176). This demonisation of body(as well as mind)plays a crucial role in the marginalisation of the 'monster'. We may say that the monstrosity of the creature reflects the society's insensitivity and violence to his exterior which does not conform to the accepted standards of beauty. The crimes committed by him duly fulfil the social apprehensions regarding his malignancy. In a way, the creature's ugliness' is a social construct. As Victor refuses to see beauty beneath the outward form of his own creation, he unknowingly instils 'ugliness' in it. This is evident in his utterance:

When I call over the frightful catalogue of my deeds, I cannot believe that I am he whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. (178)

By providing the readers with the point of view of a so-called monster, Shelley offers a critique of the very standard that differentiates between 'beauty' and 'ugliness'.

However, the social exclusion of an 'ugly other' is not without ambiguities. The monster's alienation and torments are inextricably associated with those of his creator who is, to him, the representative of the conventional social 'self'. All through the novel, both of them are seen to follow each other at different times. One may notice in the process of inflicting injury on Victor, an attempt on the monster's part to drag his creator to his own state of loneliness and suffering. He warns Victor, "Your hours will pass in dread and misery, and soon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness forever. Are you to be happy, while I grovel in the intensity of my wretchedness?" (133). He goes on to say, "I may die, but first you, my tyrant and tormentor, shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery" (133). Victor dies just before the monster is lost for ever. In spite of all the hatred and vengeance in their relationship, there is an uncanny attraction between Victor Frankenstein and the monster, the 'self' and its 'other'. It seems that they are interdependent. This is evident in the monster's heart-rending lamentation after Victor's death.

In fact, the existence of the 'other' is intrinsic to the definition of the 'self' as its counterpart. In early nineteenth century, German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) argued in his *The Philosophy of Mind* (1807) that the consciousness of 'self' is dependent on the recognition of an 'other' (Hegel 18-21). In Hegel's observation each of the two concepts requires existence of the other, although the 'self' always attempts to exert its dominance over the 'other'. They are opposed to each other, despite their interdependence. To Hegel, the process of self-recognition is a fight in which the destruction of one is necessary in achieving freedom for the other. However, the recognition of the 'self' is negated by the death of the 'other', as the idea of 'self' is absurd without the presence of the 'other':

The fight of recognition is a life and death struggle: either self-consciousness imperils the other's life, and incurs a like peril for its own – but only peril, for either is no less bent on maintaining his life, as the existence of his freedom. Thus the death of one, though by the abstract, therefore rude, negation of immediacy, it, from one point of view, solves the contradiction, is yet, from the essential point of view (i.e., the outward and visible recognition), a new contradiction (for that recognition is at the same time undone by the other's death) and a greater than the other. (22)

This contradictory and yet mutually dependent relationship between the 'self' and the 'other' may be crucial in understanding the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and the 'monster'. The attitude of the society towards the 'others' is always complex and problematic. The anxieties regarding the status of the dominant social 'self' is manifested in the obsession with 'others' and images of 'otherness'. It may lead the society to 'create' different 'others' in order to secure a definition of 'self'. Therefore, it is within the consciousness of the 'self' that the 'other' is originated. Such a view of 'otherness' may remind one of the theory of post-Freudian psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva. In her *Stranger to Ourselves* (1991), Kristeva traces the 'foreign other' in one's own self. In fact, psychoanalysis points towards the very 'otherness' that lies within the core of the 'self'. Referring to Sigmund Freud's idea of 'uncanny strangeness', Kristeva says: "Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided" (Kristeva 181). Kristeva suggests that the subject bears the strange in itself, and therefore it is split in itself. In Shelley's novel, 'beauty' and 'ugliness' transgress each other frequently, and the borderline between the two are made vulnerable. The most disturbing instance of this transgression is found in Victor's dream about Elizabeth, his beloved, after the 'accomplishment' of his experiment:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. (*Frankenstein* 39)

Elizabeth who is described as traditionally beautiful with her soft and attractive “hazel eyes”, “light and airy” figure and graceful countenance (22) is transformed into a pale corpse in Victor’s dream. The grave-worms suggest a decomposing body with all its ‘ugly’ and repulsive associations. The inanimate form reminds us not only of Victor’s deceased mother, but also the ‘demonical corpse’ which he has left in his laboratory. Just as Victor starts from his sleep with horror, he sees the “miserable monster” through the window shutters (39). The dream also foreshadows the ‘real’ dead body of Elizabeth in Volume III, Chapter VI, with “pale and distorted features”. The distortion invariably points towards the much abhorred ‘ugliness’ of the creature. The tacit association of the adorable Elizabeth with the ‘hideous monster’ blurs the line of demarcation between ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’.

Thus, in Shelley’s novel, the social exclusion of an ‘ugly other’ is made problematic and ambiguous. Though the creature is apparently “lost in darkness and distance” (180), his image looms large with all the unanswered questions. It also defies the kind of distancing and categorisation employed by the conventional society that made him an ‘other’.

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## “I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend” : The ‘Human-Monster’ Dichotomy in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Sovan Tripathy

**Abstract:** In Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*, Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, assiduously accomplishes his animation project i.e. bestowing life to a human skeleton, the bones of which were collected from charnel houses and gives birth to a creature with gigantic stature, a ‘monster’ ( the title Victor Frankenstein himself ascribes to it). Gradually, the creature performs one after another monstrous acts like killing William, Victor’s brother; Justine Moritz, a cousin sister of Victor; Henry Clerval, the friend; Elizabeth, the newly married wife of Victor in her bridal chamber, and leaves Victor an eternal pursuer of him in the Polar Regions until his death. The paper seeks to study the alternating discourse within the narrative, which exposes the dichotomy between the monstrous nature of the ‘creator’ himself and the more humane instinctive drive of the ‘creature’, though traditionally, the latter is called a ‘monster’. Engaging multiple points-of-view in the narrative, Mary Shelley problematizes the character of the creature, underpinning the steady progression of the creature to be more humane and the creator to be more inhuman.

**Keywords:** Animation project, creature, creator, monster, humane, alternating discourse, dichotomy

Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus* was first published anonymously in London in 1818 and her name first appeared on the second edition of the novel in 1831. But the origin of the novel goes back to 1816, when Mary Godwin (later Mary Shelley), P.B.Shelley (the lover and future husband of Mary Godwin), Lord Byron and John Polidori were travelling in the regions of Geneva (Switzerland) and decided to have a competition of writing the best ghost story. After thinking for days, Mary Shelley dreamt of a young scientist who created a being of gigantic stature and was horrified to see him. Her dream was exquisitely evolved into the story of the novel.

In the novel, Ralph Walton, an Arctic explorer, bound for North Pole meets Victor Frankenstein in the polar regions and in course of his attending to Victor, learns the woeful past of Victor regarding his creation of a ‘monster’ and the subsequent monstrous acts of the creature. In the narrative of the novel, Walton most of the time remains a passive narratee and some other times slightly responds to Victor and the creature. He time by time writes letters to his sister, Saville in England. Mary Shelley, though was writing her novel in the nineteenth century, uses multiple narratives in the novel and the chief interest of the novel rests in the comparative study of the multiple points-of-view, especially the points-of-view of Victor and his creature.

Victor Frankenstein, ‘imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition’ (Frankenstein 169), meticulously learns about the animation project i.e. bestowing life to inanimate objects in the university of Inglostadt and creates a figure ‘of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionately large’ (Frankenstein 35), with his collection of bones from graves and charnel houses. His selfish and utopian ambition was that ‘A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me’ (36). But, at the birth of the creature in one November night, he feels excruciating repulsion to see his own creation:

His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only

formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips. (Frankenstein 39)

He left his chamber in utter disgust and coming back a while later to his 'workshop of filthy creation' (Frankenstein 37) found that the chamber was freed of 'its hideous guest' (Frankenstein 42). Thus, at the very beginning Frankenstein not only flouts the principle of natural creation which demands the union of two opposite sexes but also denies the responsibility of the creation. Joyce Carol Oates says in his essay 'Frankenstein's Fallen Angel'—"Frankenstein is a demonic parody (or extension) of Milton's God; he is Prometheus plasticator, the creator of mankind; but at the same time, by his own account, he is totally unable to control the behavior of his demon". (69)

Frankenstein himself thinks his creature to be a 'monster' (39) and gushes out in frustration, 'the demonical corpse to which I had so miserably given life' (39-40). Subsequently, the creature wrecks vengeance to his creator and spitefully kills several members of Victor's family like his brother, William; his cousin sister, Justine as she was wrongly imprisoned for William's murder; Henry Clerval, his friend and soul-mate; Elizabeth, his wife and leaves Frankenstein in utter guilt and desolation who feels—"William, Justine and Henry – they all died by my hands' (Frankenstein 147). Thus, the creature's monstrous acts, primarily affirm his identity as a 'monster', which can be rooted out if the narratives of the creature are considered with a critical outlook.

Says Joyce Carol Oates—"By degrees, with the progression of the fable's unlikely plot, the inhuman creation becomes increasingly human while his creator becomes increasingly inhuman, frozen in a posture of rigorous denial" (Frankenstein's Fallen Angel 69). Frankenstein's denial of his creature first comes from the deformed physical features for which the creator cannot deny his responsibility. It was a kind of prank of Frankenstein himself to create a being of a gigantic stature. His creature is nothing other than a visible manifestation of his own mind—an expression of his own profane, demonic mind. Joyce Carol Oates says succinctly:

Since Frankenstein's creature is made of parts collected from charnel houses and graves and his creator acknowledges that he 'disturbed with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame', it is inevitable that the creature be a profane thing. He cannot be blessed or loved: he springs not from a natural union but has been forged in what Frankenstein calls 'a workshop of filthy creation'. One of the brilliant surrealist touches of the narrative is that Frankenstein's shadow-self is a giant.... (Frankenstein's Fallen Angel 75)

The creature is the alternate self of the creator. "He is an abstract idea made flesh, a Platonic essence given a horrific (and certainly ludicrous) existence" (Joyce Carol Oates 75).

Since Victor Frankenstein leaves the creature, the latter secretly but rapidly learns the human articulation, behavior and customs observing the family of a poor cottagers like Felix, Safie and Agatha who themselves were alienated and lived in a forest. He finds how this family, amidst pain and poverty, is tied with one another with an unseen chord of love which the creature lacks and desires the most. He secretly clears the way from snow for the cottagers, sometimes keeps fire-wood ready to be used with the only expectation that one day, at least they will appreciate his virtue and will shower love upon him. The help from the invisible hand astonished the cottagers and once, or twice, they uttered the words 'good spirit', 'wonderful' (88). The creature who is characterized with the word 'daemon' (16) is itself ambivalent, as according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'daemon' may mean—(i) secondary divinity, (ii) guardian spirit, and (iii) demon. Here, of course, the creature justifies the first two meanings. Even, he is invested with good sense and sympathy, which

are clearly manifested when he secretly returns the food which he stole from the stuff of the poor cottagers, realizing that the family is suffering from the lack of food.

The creature is a good child of nature, who can regale his ears with various sounds of nature all around him, feasts his eyes with the silver light of the moon. He himself reflects to Victor—

I felt light, and hunger, and thirst, and darkness; innumerable sounds rung in my ears, and on all sides various scents saluted me: the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure. (78)

Mary Shelley problematizes the character of the ‘monster’ by investing such finer human sensibilities that can be contradictory pointer to justify him a ‘demon’, an evil incarnate, even though, he inflicts torture and causes destruction through his action.

The soul of the creature is illimitably torn with pain, desolation, and disgust. He perpetually suffers as he does not conform to the established norm of the human world. He is direly in need of love and company, which are denied to him. The cottagers fled away to see his demonical features and his creator has already deserted him. In his mad pursuit of getting a companion, he clutches a boy at the wood of Plainpalais and wants him to make his companion, but the boy abhors him, denies his proposal and while the boy says him that his father is Alphonse Frankenstein, he kills the boy, realizing the genealogical connection of the boy with his creator Victor Frankenstein. The boy happens to be William, the younger brother of Victor. After killing him, he secretly took a chain with a portrait of Victor’s mother (though the creature cannot recognize the portrait) from the boy’s neck and left it in the pocket of a beautiful girl who happens to be Justine Moritz, a cousin sister of Victor. The girl, later on, is unintelligibly suspected as the murderer of William and is imprisoned in a cell where she finally dies. The creature says to Victor—

Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous. ( 75)

The creature in a mood of self-introspection, finds that he is unlike the rest of the human beings. In a brook, he sees his own reflection and discovers his own deformed body, and realizes that he can subsist upon a coarser diet, can endure heat and cold more than the common human beings. There is nobody like him. He is the ‘Other’ and sees himself with the eyes of others. He asks mournfully—*“When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned?”* (Frankenstein 92)

In his solitary exile amidst the vast human world, he remains deprived of love and sympathy. He regrets—*“The gentle words of Agatha, and the animated smiles of the charming Arabian, were not for me. The mild exhortations of the old man, and the lively conversation of the loved Felix, were not for me. Miserable, unhappy wretch!”*( 93)

All through the novel, what Frankenstein lacks is his reason—the rationality behind his desperate denial of his own creature. He is driven by his ego and turns a deaf ear to the urge and pathetic recounting of the tortured creature’s self. His insensible denial is reflected in his own words— *“Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall!”* (75) To which the creature’s response is marked with poise, control and rationality. The creature says—

How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourite eye upon thy creature....Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone? You my creator abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me. ( 75-76)

His unlikely and deformed physical features, the condemnation of all the rest of the world for him, lead him into an existential crisis. He has nobody from whom he can draw love, sympathy, and fellow-feeling. His existential crisis is reflected in his own words—

The path of my departure was free; and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them. (Frankenstein 99)

He gets a book in French from where he reads Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and Goethe's *Sorrows of Werter*. He realizes with another pain that he is no Adam. At least, Adam received love and bliss of his creator, but he is eternally deprived of love. Comparing his own state with Adam, he says—

...but, his state was far different in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God, a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by especial care of his creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of superior nature: but, I was wretched, helpless, and alone. (100)

Having no mate, no peer to live with mutual exchange of all experiences, he is even more wretched than that of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In his own words:

Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and deserted. (Frankenstein 101)

Suroopa Mukherjee in this context says—

What the creature lacks is the memory of a past life and a sense of history. And this, alone, becomes the basis of his deep-seated isolation. He discovers language and learns the art of reading but his very absence from the texts that he reads makes him mad with grief. He is fascinated by *Paradise Lost* and the myth of creation but he cannot recognize himself as either Adam or Satan. He learns about his own creation from Frankenstein's private journal, a knowledge that can only add to his sense of exclusion from the entire range of creation. His consciousness—the terrifying depths of his hatred and revenge—is shaped by a void and a tortuous sense of lack. (Frankenstein's Monster and the Eighteenth Century Rationality 72)

The 'monster' causes destruction, inflicts pain and torture upon his creator but, it is neither his forte, nor his prank like that of his creator, Frankenstein. He does all this not for his own sweet will, but out of tortured inner self. Love, sympathy are misnomer to him—a kind of will-o-wisp, ever to be dreamt of but never to be attained. To add insult to injury, everywhere he is a victim of gross injustice. The poor cottagers fled away in utter terror to see him, though he had helped them invisibly. He kills William while the boy gushed out shrill cry to see his deformed being and denied to be his companion. Even, once he had saved the life of a little girl while she was going to be drowned, but the man, from whom possibly, the girl had escaped, fired at him and he was wounded.

Suroopa Mukherjee says in her essay, 'Frankenstein's Monster and the Eighteenth Century Rationality' —

...Frankenstein has transgressed the principle of life by not keeping symmetry and balance in mind. But what make this artificial creature so terrifying are not the usual Gothic conventions of the horrid but the fact that the creature possesses a tortured inner life. And it is the psychological state of mind that brings the creature so close to the human world which he is otherwise excluded. (72)

The creature demands from Frankenstein a mate with equal deformity and loathsome features, who will not deny him. He will never get human association, but, at least he will get a soul to live with him. The creature's last demand from *Frankenstein* can be quoted here—"You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse." ( 113) A little later he says in a challenging mood—"...if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy". ( 113)

However, Frankenstein understood the fine sensation as well as reason in the creature's argument and agreed to the proposal of the creature with a condition that he with his mate will flee away forever and will dwell in a place which is not frequented by the human beings. He resumed the work of creating a female being like the earlier one, according to his promise at the remote place of Orkneys. But, at the final moment of completion of his work, he destroyed his artifice. He was afraid of the female 'monster' lest she should be more dangerous than the first one and an uncompromising fellow. The pain of unattained mate made the creature once again vengeful. He retorts—"Shall each man, find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone?" ( 133) As Frankenstein remains resolute, the creature leaves him with a promised return—"It is well. I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your wedding-night" (133). Consequently, the creature commits another two heinous murders- one is the murder of Clerval, Victor's friend and soul-mate, and another is Elizabeth, the wife of Victor in her 'bridal bier' (156). According to Paul Sherwin:

The killing of Elizabeth is at once a way of establishing a relationship with the only human being to whom he can claim kinship and a desperately anti-erotic act designed to teach his creator what he suffers. (Frankenstein: Creation as Catastrophe 28)

Frankenstein becomes a pursuer of the creature to take revenge, though ironically, all the time the creature eludes him. At Frankenstein's death-bed, on the deck of the ship, the creature appears for the last time and sitting beside his creator's dead body promises that he will collect the funeral wood for him and will burn his mortal frame, and the ashes will be carried away by the waves. His final choice at the death of his creator is a kind of self-immolation, a kind of sacrifice. Paul Sherwin observes:

His aggression is a by-product of disintegration, not an innate drive that has been cathartically unbound....Freed, by the end, from his creator's self-consuming rage, he makes his destiny his choice, emblazoning himself as a giant form of Solitude, an existence made absolute by its confinement to the hell of being itself. (Frankenstein: Creation as Catastrophe 40)

While living as a human being, Frankenstein, the creator, shunned all his responsibility of taking care for his creature who receives negligence and soul-killing condemnation, but, the creature, albeit having been called a 'monster' shows benevolence, finer sensibilities. He desired love, affection, and company but remains deprived of all for no fault of his own. Thus, reasonably, he

becomes furious. Meenakshi Mukherjee raises another point regarding the characterization of the 'monster'. According to her, "The radical sympathies of Mary Shelley's parents—William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft—towards the underprivileged class and workers get inscribed on the character of this nameless Creature, who remains marginal to society" (*The Revenge of Prakriti?* 175). The creature is more sinned against than sinning. His atrocities are a natural product of the inhuman treatment of the human beings. The words of Joyce Carol Oates seem to be befitting here:

He is Shakespeare's Edmund, though unloved—a shadow figure more tragic, because more "conscious", than the hero he represents. Most suggestively, he has become by the novel's melodramatic conclusion a form of Christ: sinned against by all human kind, yet fundamentally blameless, and yet quite willing to die as sacrifice. (*Frankenstein's Fallen Angel* 75)

No evil-incarnate can be a well admirer of nature, can have mercy, and love for human beings. The creature's furious actions are a kind of rebellion against the misdeed of his creator only for whom he undergoes an exiled life meeting occasionally, hatred of others. Even, Frankenstein's denial of giving a female companion to the creature is a violation of nature which he first committed in creating his first creature. Paul Sherwin delineates the character of the creature with the following words—"he also has been or can be read as Rousseau's natural man, a Wordsworthian child of nature, the isolated romantic rebel, the misunderstood revolutionary impulse...analytical reasoning, or alienating labor." (*Frankenstein: Creation as Catastrophe* 40)

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## Murmuring Multiform Masculinities And Their Dismantlement in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*

Sanju Bera

**Abstract:** Drawing on R.W. Connell's concept of multiform masculinities and 'hegemonic masculinity', this paper is going to analyze Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, a lesser-read and less-celebrated novel, from a masculine gender perspective. This paper illustrates how *The Last Man* embodies the contemporary concept of normative masculinity and it also exemplify how Shelly disrupts this masculine stereotype through different crises and finally transgresses the gender stereotype by stressing the irrelevance of gender practice.

**Keywords:** Hegemonic Masculinity, Masculinities, Sensibility, Effeminate, Male Body, Gender Performance.

The last man fiction, generally a typical product of modern and post-modern world, usually foregrounds the sudden annihilation of human species and the subsequent surviving of a solitary male persona. These last man narratives, despite the lack of overt genre consciousness, shares some common concerns. According to Florian Mussgnug, this includes "the suggestion of an essential and embodied masculinity lurking beneath the veneer of civilization (334)".

As Robert Plank points out, solitary survivor narratives may be read as straight forward heterosexual male wish fulfilment fantasies. "The fate of mankind depends on one man's sexual performance .... For a disaster to strike blindly and to eliminate all but one person is defying probability; that two would be left, one male and one female, both of reproductive age... would seem plausible only who have a more than ordinary willingness to suspend disbelief (qtd-Mussgnug-334)." Catastrophe and collapse of civilization are enabling conditions for a mature masculinity, which dispenses with material comforts and is rewarded social autonomy, political supremacy and sexual gratification. Close scrutiny of some last man novels will emphasize the centrality of gender stereotypes. However, satirical and ironic presentation of last man narratives fail to dismantle this masculine ethos. Instead they reinforce or contribute to strengthen the gender stereotypes where woman is imaged as the "potential means of masculine wish fulfillment (Mussgnug- 336)". It seems particularly interesting that *The Last man*, one of the earliest influential examples of the genre, produced as early as in the 1820s by a woman writer, charts a altogether different route by disrupting the male-identity of its solitary survivor.

A futuristic story of the gradual extermination of the human race by plague, *The Last Man* (1826) is Mary Shelley's most important novel after *Frankenstein* (1818). For Mary Shelley, masculinity matters deeply, passionately and disturbingly because she was writing at a critical juncture when the literary discourse was dominated by male authors and the social scenario, though dominated by hegemonic masculinity, was informed by a sudden shift in the gender roles. *The Last Man* explores the contemporary conceptualization of Masculinity, transcends the traditional, patriarchal, hegemonic notions of Masculinity and finally offers alternative forms of gender practice. George L. Mosse in his *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (1996) outlines the emergence of manly ideal from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. According to Mosse, the masculine ideal which involves courage, will-power and honour has been quite stable since then. Other components of masculine stereotypes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were

moderation and self-control. In this context, it is necessary to point out that Mosse refers to manly ideal of the middle classes which constitutes the hegemonic masculinity. It is crucial to mention that, in terms of hierarchies or binaries, two groups have been important for the creation of masculine ideal : women and effeminate man has served as a contrast against man has defined himself. Woman, gayman, effeminate men served as a countertypes for the creation and maintenance of the modern ideal of masculinity.

Of particular background interest to the readers is the way in which Industrial Revolution and urbanization impacted a shift in the current gender roles. The growth of the factory system and of capitalist agriculture involved a number of changes in the employment of women, which altered the condition of family life, and therefore in the long run affected the relation of the sexes (Trevelyan-499). Women challenged the inherent micro political patriarchal order, drawing their analogy from the transformation of the state from absolute monarchy to a contract among ostensible equals, the meanings of masculinity were also thrown into question. City feminized men, removing them from the land and exposing those rough-hewn rural men to the effete life of the fop. As Michael Kimmel in his *The History of Men : Essays on The History of American and British Masculinities* (2005) has shown that several pamphlets during this period evinces the growing effeminacy of men. "Mundas Foppensis", "The Levellers" (1703), "Satan's Harvest Home" (1749), "A Hell Upon Earth" (1729) – these pamphlets suggest that the cause of abandonment of masculinity lay in the enervating effect of urban life, the emasculating qualities of peace time and the influence of French culture on the traditional Englishmanliness. Men were coming to not only abandoning their roles, they were abandoning women. The equation of effeminacy and homosexuality simmers below the surface in many pamphlets of that period. As Trumbach notes in his "London Sodomites : Homosexual behavior and Western Culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century" – "the debauchee or libertine who denied the relegation of sexuality to marriage had been able to find, especially in cities, women and boys with whom if sometimes dangerously, enact his desires." Trumbach, (1985, Page No. 118). It may be pointed out here that the word 'homosexual' or 'homosexuality' did not exist then. The Oxford English Dictionary dates the coinage of the term homosexuality back to 1892. Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, men could engage in homosexual acts, to be sure, but the larger culture did not view those as indicating a different or deviant type of individual. As Michael. S. Skimmel points out, the early 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the transformation of homosexuality from a set of behavior to a type of Individual. Homosexual men were seen as unmanly; they did not correspond to the masculine stereotype. This applied to sick men as well. In other words both homosexual and sick men, especially when their sickness was associated with weak nerves, that is hysteria, provided countertype to normative masculinity. Both groups were considered effeminate and both "lacked self-control, one of the integral components of manly ideal.

I shall illustrate that Shelley's *The Last Man* may be fruitfully approached from a masculinity studies perspective. The Last Man, though are concerned with other themes like failure of the romantic elements, isolation, science and medicine, the whole story focuses either implicitly or explicitly, on different forms of masculinities. Plague, war, political unrest and imperial expansion continually destabilize the identities of the male and female characters, yet they constantly engage in projects of redefining themselves in terms of trauma they experience. Before my discussion of Mary Shelley's text, I will make a few preliminary remarks about some concepts of masculinity that will offer a conceptual framework to analyse this paper. By using the concepts of masculinity as analytical tools, I keep in mind I use modern terms to describe ancient phenomena, but phenomena that have changed their connotations probably several times in history. Masculinity or masculine identity according to R.W. Connell, is "the pattern or configuration linked to the position of men in the gender order and socially distinguished from the practices linked to the position of Women".

Masculinity, therefore, in simultaneously a place in gender relations the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture. There are multiform masculinities; Different cultures, and different forms of history, construct masculinity differently. There are definite relationships between different patterns of masculinity. Some masculinities are more honoured than others; some are socially marginalized. R.W. Connell says that the form of masculinity which is culturally dominant in a given setting is commonly called hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity, as the Men's studies in the 1990's suggests do not have to be directly or naturally linked with male body or men. They are complicated and unstable phenomena. Following the deconstructive gender theories and post-structuralist approach, the focus is on the discursive construction of masculinity.

I would like to begin with the male characters to examine how this novel presents the dominant form of contemporary masculinities and disrupts them through crisis and finally offers alternative form of gender practice. Shelley's Lord Raymond is a prime example of masculinity. Raymond is a Byronic figure; he is a dashing soldier who goes off to fight for Greece, whose "reckless courage and comprehensive genius brought him into notice .... he became a darling of the rising people." (Shelley 49). Raymond also encompasses other virtues such as wisdom, justice and fortitude, as he is a good leader and successful general. But his passions are described violent and his focus is entirely selfish . For example, he terrifies his wife with vehement reactions to her accusations of infidelity and intimidates his friends when they try to persuade him to remain calm. Raymond encompasses sublime qualities in the ways that only a male can, namely by being aggressive and dominant. But Raymond appears not as the exact prototype of the ideal man which, according to George L. Mosse, was beginning to construct in the second half of the eighteenth century as certain traits of effeminacy combines to constitute the fabric of his being. His dominant male identity disrupts when he is enthralled by the excessive raw emotionality leading him to loose self-control, thereby rejecting Idris and deciding to marry Perdita, although fully knowing that it would not confer him the much-coveted throne. Surrendering to raw emotion, Perdita and Raymond are briefly deliriously happy. But Raymond's attachment to his own emotional responses brings about infidelity and of lying to his wife, destroying his own sense of personal honour. Honour, as mentioned earlier, is one of the components of ideal masculinity. Cultural anthropological findings suggest that all over the world masculinity is conceived as a problematic category which pressurizes the individual into confirming that it meets the high expectations of the notions of masculinity raises, and this excessive demands of identity formation (here masculine) linked with a fear of failure. Raymond's masculine identity appears to be severely unsettled by the pressure arising out his sense of failure both in the domestic and public sphere. His journey to join the army of Greece leaving behind his family and his lord protectorate post might be interpreted as his search for alternative male-identity. And his ultimate self-destruction only evinces his self-gratification on the sense of self-sacrifice as another alternative form of masculine gender practice.

The male body does not have inherent meaning, except we ascribe meaning to it. Men have to assume their maleness. Adrian does possess a male body but he seems to be an embodiment of sensibility that softens him and renders him effeminate. As mentioned earlier, the modern idea of masculinity has its origin in the second half of the eighteenth century. Men of sensibility, homosexual and hysterical men were considered effeminate and they served as countertype to construct normative or hegemonic masculinity. Nervous men were not considered 'real men', as Mosse points out, "sick and diseased men had ruined their nerves, which not only threatened to make them effeminate... but, through the state of their bodies and mind, documented their lack of manliness"(60). For Micale, there were two cultures of hysteria that dominated the decades from the 1790s to the 1870s (99 ). Romantic writers showed great interest in Psychological aspects of men

and considered imagination a source for artistic, creativity. For Romantic poets, feeling and sympathy were female qualities, which they tried to include into arts in order to create 'poetry of feeling'. The poet's exploration of male psychology involved new ideals of the feminine or androgynous man. In contrast to the literary discourse, medical writings did not discuss male psychology between the 1790s and 1870s. If male emotionality was hinted at in medical texts, then it was characterized "as a sign of personal weakness and national decline" (Micale 105). Male hysteria was stigmatized as a sign of femininity or effeminacy and hysterical men were even said to have a feminine appearance. In 1807, the Scottish Physician Thomas Trotter argued that "these persons are commonly pale and sallow, soft-fibered, and of a slender make" (qtd. In Micale 83). And during late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the growing middle class set the trends rather than aristocracy. The ideal protestant man was good husband and father and belonged to the "upholders of social order" (Micale 54); he was industrious, tough and sober. Hypochondriasis or male hysteria, an illness that attacked the aristocratic upper-class men with fine nerves who were devoted to their studies. Adrian is a poet, if not in profession, then in spirit. He values, imagination and love above other considerations, and considers them divine. Rejected in love by Evedane, Adrian goes mad- "He felt in every nerve the dire storms of the mental universe were about to attack his fragile being, which quivered at the expectation of its advent"(Shelley 92). In eighteenth century context madness would be a more severe form of nervous disorder than hysteria (Micale 24). Shelley hence, describes Adrian as a member of the upper class, a gentleman, who displays sign of nervous illness. From the very start Adrian has been displayed as an essential embodiment of manly virtues; he is 'generous, brave and affable.' Lionel describes him as "a tall, slim, fair boy, with a physiognomy expressive of the excess of sensibility and refinement stood before me"(Shelley 30). He is the active embodiment of the spirit of benevolence. Benevolence was a positive characteristic of the 18<sup>th</sup> century gentleman. He is portrayed as a countertype to Raymond's selfish, quintessentially masculine brand of sensibility. He enthusiastically embarks on a program of public service when the plague renders most men too scared or sick to lead. Ultimately, however, he is defeated by the bodily weakness. Through Adrian Shelley not only moderates, transvalues and renders ineffectual our scripts of heroic, dominant masculinity; it also offers alternative masculinity scripts that was more beneficial both personally and socially – personally because they involve acceptance rather than repression of vulnerability and other qualities inherent in all humans, and socially because they entail accord and peace rather than conflict and violence. At the core of this alternative masculinity script is the quest to actualize an open relational self of love, empathy and altruism instead of the close nomadic self of self-sufficiency, selfishness and dominance.

Judith Butler famously articulates the idea that gender is performative in her ground breaking *Gender Trouble*. While the book focuses on gender and not masculinity specifically, her theoretical concepts can be brought to bear on masculinity in productive ways. In this sense then "maleness" or "manhood" in its biological configuration (as influenced by Testosterone the male sex drive, or the Penis for instance) can be understood as elements of gender as constructed through the medium of language. The male body does not have inherent meaning, except as we ascribe meaning to it. In this sense, as per Butler's ideas in *Bodies that Matter*, man have to assume their maleness. In parallel with the post structuralist common place that signifier and signified do not naturally correspond, the term no longer has to be taken with respect to its supposedly natural receptacle, the male body. Judith "Jack" Halberstam's influential book *Female Masculinity* broke new ground by arguing that a full understanding of masculinity requires. That we, include considerations of it as separate from male body : far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. Gender is inherently relational. So female masculinity should be an integral part of the study of gender. Women may possess masculine traits, the narrative indicates that women's performance of their gender identity

is independent from their biological differences from men. For instance Idris has a masculine intellect. In Evadne a masculine artistic genius coexists with feminine jealousy. The countess of Windsor is depicted as tyrannical and unprincipled. Evadne's warrior role is acted out in male disguise. But there is also a string of vignettes about other young women heroically undaunted in the face of deprivation and death as well as a band of female religious fanatics, more eager and resolute than their male counterparts. The roles of men and women are consciously displaced throughout the novel thereby degendering or blurring the male/female binary.

Through Lionel Verney, Mary Shelley seems to envision a human being who loses his gender characteristic, becoming ambiguously gendered and almost hermaphroditic. He starts out as a wild, uncivilized beast, an outcast and a vagabond. At the age of sixteen he had shot in appearance to a man's estate; he was tall and athletic, his steps were firm with conscious power. But on this stage of attaining manhood, passions, strong as the trees of a forest, had already taken root within him. From an environmental movement perspective, this primitivist narrative of innate, instinctual manhood, at least up to this point of the novel, seems to be a technique in the hands of Mary Shelley to pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinity through its own ethos and organizational practices. This challenge was implicit in several of the movement's themes like practice and ideology of equality, emphasis on collectivity and solidarity, practice and ideology of personal growth and an ideology of organic wholeness. The Environmental movement, according to R.W. Connell, with its themes of green politics and culture, would provide some challenge to hegemonic masculinity at least at the level of ideas. Dominance is contested by commitment of Equality and participatory democracy. Moreover, the emphasis on the ideology of personal growth tends to undermine the defensive styles of hegemonic masculinity, especially its tight control over emotions.

Adrian rescues him from this way of life by offering him a place to live along with education and an aristocratic identity backed by property and money. Thus this "primitive masculine" state is linked to civilization and he starts to evolve into civilized man. This transformation from a savage to a civilized man and his subsequent entry into upper elite by marrying Idris has constructed his another masculine identity with a combination of certain feministic characteristics, sensibility begins to manifest itself more and more prominently as the plot progresses. It may be argued that Lionel remains at the centre of plot construction, being effected by the actions of more powerful character. This essential passivity is usually gendered feminine by critics in opposition to Raymond masculinized, essentially aggressive and impulsive emotionalism, and that reading is supported by Shelley's description of Verney's sensibility. Shelley has Lionel always reacting; even his madness about Idris echoes Adrian's feminized response. When Lionel crouches over the sleeping form of his dying wife. "The Solitude became intolerable – I placed my hand on beating heart of Idris, I bent my head to catch the sound of her breath, to assure myself that she still existed... for a moment I doubted whether I should not awake her; so effeminate an horror ran through my frame." (Shelley<sup>349</sup>).

Lionel's nursing posture, his physical, sensible reactions are sometimes read as the vulnerability of the mental toughness that a man is believed to possess; this is surely an indication towards the development of alternative masculine identity in him. The text itself offers ample evidences of his vulnerability where he reacts to emotional situation with crying. But traditional or hegemonic masculinity prevents a man from displaying his tears publicly.

As the plot comes to the end, Shelley disrupts his masculine identity totally and Lionel completes his transition from a man to a sexless creature; he loses his gender, becoming asexual and androgynous. Gender consists primarily of three elements; biological, comparative and social. By the

end of the novel, he is the solitary survivor. Biologically, then, he becomes asexual as there is no hope of repopulating the earth; his physical sexuality is irrelevant. His sexual physical desires are also rendered useless since there is no one, male or female, to fulfill any sexual craving. He then must fulfill the role of male and female in his own life, a trend that started while he was taking care of Clara, fulfilling both maternal and paternal roles. And as there is no other gender left for Lionel to compare himself to, he cannot define himself through contrast. Finally, gender is a social contract that carries with it expectations and conventions regarding behavior and self-image. Yet, there is no society, Eastern or Western, to establish a gender code that Lionel must follow. The only trace of social gender that still clings to Lionel at the end of the novel is his own memory of these 'gender laws'. He thus becomes asexual, possessing male reproductive organs that are useless, and androgynous since he must fulfill his own sexual desires and practice both the male and female spheres of life defined by his memory of gender laws. This can be better understood in the light of a comment made by David Gilmore in his *Manhood In The Making: Cultural Concept of Masculinity* – “so long as there are battles to be fought, wars to be own, heights to be scaled, hard work to be done, some of us will have to act like Men”. Thus the novel acts like a project who objective was to separate men from the mainstream of masculinity with they were familiar and to reconstruct personality a new, non-sexist self”.

There is a wistful autobiographical element to this turn of events, as Shelley struggled to suppress his gender in a world dominated by men who were practicing the same literary craft as she. The novel suggests an equality of the sexes, a suggestions supported by the fact that the author's voice is aligned with Lionel's and that Lionel is believed to be Shelley's fictional doppelganger. Some contemporary critics have asked “why not *The Last Woman*”? Shelley answers with her desire to create a genderless encasement of spirit to stress the irrelevance of gender to her contemporary society. The construction of the author of indeterminate gender reinforces our recognition of Shelley's attempt. I would like to assert that the instability and fluidly of gender is precisely what Shelly aims at in her preface and in the novel in general, and that these qualities relate to the novel's prophetic aspect.

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## ***Jane Eyre* : An Unusual Case in Any Age**

Priyanka Chatterjee

**Abstract :** The bicentenary of Charlotte Bronte evidently brings into scrutiny her most famous work, *Jane Eyre* (1847). One engages to ponder over what makes this still one of the preferred Victorian narratives by women, especially in India. It still has an enduring presence in every book-lover's racks, in school and university syllabi across India. Thus, what becomes a matter of immense curiosity is the Indian reception of the novel. The narrative unleashes the psychological workings of a female mind that is unbound by any controls of societal norms. The various mechanisms of social control depicted in the novel in the form of the institutional controls of education, religion and marriage are derided vehemently by *Jane Eyre*, for whom the institution and control lies not the outside but in the inside, the self. This proclamation of selfhood induces in her a form of independence that is liable to attract innumerable young female minds across India who have always known life under constrictions. This paper tries to explicate Jane's movement towards selfhood by the consistent refusal to adhere to institutional control thereby trying to project how Jane's journey could affect the young Indian female minds who read *Jane Eyre* as part of their university syllabi.

**Keywords:** Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, female agency, social control

Writing of Charlotte Bronte after two hundred years of her birth inevitably attaches all discussions around her celebrated work *Jane Eyre* (1847). The frontier breaking notions of the novel, written in an age England was battling with the transformation brought in by the Industrial Revolution, confronting the consequences of the revolutions already taken place in the political, scientific and the literary world, it remains as an indelible mark of the period. In the wild beauty and isolation of the bleak town in the Yorkshire moors, Haworth, Charlotte Bronte conjured a world that shows the influence of an intensely sensitive imagination, emotional understanding as well as logical reasoning of situations that percolate into the pages of her novel. Variedly influenced by the puritan strictness of a father who otherwise encouraged the imaginative engagements of his children, the loneliness of her dwelling, her various positions as a student in a boarding school for girls, at an institution for higher education and then a governess in her later life, Bronte has churned out the character of Jane Eyre from memory, reason, understanding and her notion of the world, thus making her eponymous heroine an unusual case in any age- thus all the more a matter of awe and amazement. The novel progresses to unfold string by string the conditions and character of the narrative presence through 'I', thus enamouring the reader with every passing event who thinks herself to be Jane. And not a thoughtless engagement at that! Jane Eyre represents revolt, growth, assertion, confrontation, conformation, individuality to such magnanimous extent that it is difficult not to be besotted by her. The movement of the novel traces her evolution which is a constant struggle against norms that bind her spirit, her independence. She breaches every form of social control to emerge as an individual who is responsible for her choices and her life, a notion that remains equally attractive to every female even today, especially in the constricted, subjugated and still-stifled positions that Indian women find themselves where they are, since time immemorial, being subjected to the constricting chains of social control. Hence on the bicentenary of Charlotte Bronte's birth, the shock and thrill of Jane's travel beyond the horizon of her restricted existence still enraptures the hearts striving for independence.

The development in the character of Jane Eyre is traced by her negotiations with the various forms of social controls that she encounters in the process. Social controls are identified, by Thompson,

as mechanism used by the power groups to condition and manipulate the masses into accepting and operating in a manner that would help in the sustaining the order in an industrial society. In industrial Europe it can generally be traced as an imposition of notions and opinions on suitability of habits and attitudes of one category upon another by the apparatuses of education, religion, institution of marriage, besides others. These institutions unconsciously generated the patterns of social control by minimising the differences between social control and socialisation. The properties of maintaining social decorum became so much a part of internal socialization that it was successfully indoctrinated from one generation to another, thus making it impossible to challenge and change (191). Charlotte Bronte, however, with a sensitivity and reasoning of her own nursed notions that were beyond the accepted social doctrines, thus making the development of Jane subject to her declaration of revolt against the tyrannies of social control that she encounters at various stages of her lives.

The novel opens at Gateshead where Jane is a dependent on Mrs. Reed who is bound by promise to her deceased husband to provide for the orphan Jane. She undertakes her responsibility with much severity upon the child whom she regards nothing less than a constant impediment to her family peace. Jane here is the dependent, an orphan who must be tutored to be in control so that the others could assert their superiority by constantly demeaning her wants, belittling her position and risking her sense of security. She is time and again made to realise that being an orphan she should be grateful for being provided for by the Reeds. Hence she is unnecessarily brutalised by John Reed while Mrs. Reed locks her up in the red room despite all her pleadings to be released. She is mortified. This severe punishment results in her revolt against the Reeds. She retorts with all her might against the demonic strike of John Reed. She feels the pain, the hotness of the blood that flows makes her feel 'other feelings' (6) feelings she is unaccustomed with, feelings that would create an otherness in her, feelings of revolt against the norms of social control. She resists against the atrocities directed towards her and recognises her resistive power to be 'a new thing for me' (7). She refuses to accept the control of her benefactress over her. A 'discord in Gateshead Hall' (10), she exposes her indignation towards Mrs. Reed in stern terms: "I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again so long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty" (29). Unforgiving in the uncontrolled play of furious feelings, she finds herself enjoying 'a conqueror's solitude' (30). In Showalter's terms, 'Jane's transition from passivity and genderlessness of childhood into a turbulent puberty' completes in her revolt against the social controls that tried to dominate her in Gateshead. 'I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman' (18), she tells Mr. Lloyd and moves towards Lowood Institution anticipating 'a complete change: it implied a long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life' (19).

This 'new life' ushers Jane to another variant of institutional social control in the form of religion and education. The juxtaposition of religion with education aimed at manufacturing well behaved members of the community who displayed quiet and orderly habits. As Thompson points out, "The aim was to produce children, and thus adults, who would make well-behaved members of the community; good behaviour meant that they should be properly equipped with morals, manners and thoughts for a submissive obedient and inferior role in society conditioned not to challenge or disturb the position and authority of their superiors" (192). Lowood Institution, under the aegis of the sadistic Brocklehurst, is a like a penitentiary where sexual diminishment and repression is the norm. From 'protracted reading of the chapters in the Bible'(37), to the brown dress that 'that gave an oddity even to the prettiest' (38) to food, all about Lowood is measured living, cut to meet standards of creating girls accustomed to being 'hardy, patient, self-denying' (53) in Brocklehurst's own terms. He denies comfort to them even if it came in the form of a healthy breakfast as a replacement to burnt porridge. As an evangelical, charitable establishment he prefers to starve them of all sensory gratification, even shorning them of their natural curls, thus

removing the last sign of femininity. This sternness in bringing up is, however, confined to the institution only as Brocklehurst's own family is quite adorned in velvets and beaver hats, flaunting false French curls, thus exposing the underlying falsity of such people. Brocklehurst tries to maintain his power over these hapless girls by turning them used to plain, undecorated, dependent lives with low self-esteem that would keep them under control in the larger society. He made Jane stand on the accusation-stool pointing her out as a possessor of a devilish mind, the clear outcome of Jane's frank display of opinions when inquired about the means to avoid hell, to which she replied, 'I must keep in good health, and not die' (26). Since Brocklehurst's mission was 'to mortify in these girls the lust of the flesh' Jane's reply with all the body-association was nothing less than blasphemy. However, the inside of the institution was quite far from the interference of any of his illogical, inhumane severity. Jane was cleared of all her blames by the benevolent, logical Miss Temple. And Jane evolved from this institution as a well-informed plain girl whose self-esteem and sense of righteousness knew no norms except that which mattered to the self.

Bronte, however, uses Lowood perceptively to further her arguments and continue the course of Jane's development through revolt, although she makes Jane more judicious and sensible through her experiences here, the most impactful of which is her association with Helen Burns. It is in Lowood where Jane acquires an intense friendship with Helen Burns, the saintly schoolgirl of Lowood whose presence in the novel seems to have been to amplify Jane's rebellion against the norms of social control while also pacifying her spirits to behold the goodness around. Helen Burns is 'a necessary symbol', as Eagleton points out. She is a 'martyr' who passively accepts her conduct to be rightfully disapproved by Miss Scatcherd on account of being a 'discord'. However, she neither tries to improve herself to escape rebuke nor does she complain on being mishandled. A martyr in its fullest sense where her realisation of the self is through its surrender. Quite opposed to Jane who 'burns' with passion. She asserts her impossibility of forgiveness to Mrs. Reed. She is unable to admire Miss Scatcherd's unjustified reprimand of Helen. Yet, she finds herself drawn to Helen because of the radiance of soul she emanates. With Helen she finds 'a sentiment of attachment, as strong, tender and, respectful as any that ever animated my(Jane's) heart' (67). Helen dies of consumption while Jane is asleep with her holding her closely. Jane is spirited by Helen but not overpowered by her notions. She is convinced that the only means to avoid Hell-fire is to remain healthy and not die. Helen Burns dies unable to bear the weight of regulations imposed upon her free spirit. She gives in to the pressure thus resolving the dilemma produced by many conduct books of Victorian England and also of some of the outdated controls still imposed on women in Indian societies. 'Meek', 'sensitive', 'docile', 'accommodating', 'surrender' are epithets that still define women in derogatory terms, stripping them off their sense of freedom and independence, making them liable to remain downtrodden by pressures of society. However, Bronte seems to have directed away out. To the horror of the conduct-makers of the Victorian era then, and with an appeal to the sensitive understanding of the young Indian women who read *Jane Eyre* as part of their university syllabus now, Jane, with Helen in her heart for ever, grows more compassionate and sets out to look for that 'region of happiness' (70) which Helen promises Jane that she would find herself in. While Helen turns into a lifeless, grey marble tablet marked 'Resurgam' (Latin: "I shall rise again"), Jane begins her journey from Lowood towards Thornfield with the purpose to fight her way through all constraints and rise to live a life she chooses for herself, 'an ardent, expectant woman' (261).

On her way out from Lowood, Jane assumes the responsibilities of a governess in Thornfield, a situation that allows her to move on and brings her economic independence. She confronts the unbarred part of herself, and passionately loves her employer Mr. Rochester. Although she attaches herself fervently to Rochester, not for once does she lose herself completely, not even in the ardent expression of her love for him. In the moment when despair, fury, passion, all merge in her heart at the prospect of separation from Rochester, she admits her love for him in unforgettable terms. Bronte puts voice in a woman who fears nothing to speak of her love for a man (going against feminine conducts then as well as

now!), yet, stand erect in her character, personality and individuality. She asserts, “Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!” (223). She is not an ‘automaton’ she states, she will not accept any of his disregard based on the mortal conventionalities but she would speak to him as his ‘equal’ in spirit. Jane’s passionate love finds assent in Rochester who spurns the same in his wife, Bertha Mason, the mad woman in the attic.

Bertha Mason is another symbol in the story who is projected as a foil to Jane, just as Helen Burns. They bring forth two extremes of lives that women are expected to live then in Victorian England, and they are made to live even now in countless situations in India. While Helen project the face of absolute surrender to the controlling norms and dies like a martyr on the altar of social expectations, the other ‘discord’ Bertha Mason is locked up in the attic due to her uncontrollable passions. She is a ‘ghost’ who can be introduced only in animal terms- ‘growled like a strange animal’, ‘the clothed hyena rose up’, ‘the maniac bellowed’. Bertha remains unjustifiably hidden; nothing much is revealed about her except that she has inherited her madness, raising questions on Rochester’s conduct. Rochester ascertains his love for Jane even if she would be mad, something he denies to the hapless Bertha who cannot help but be mad, locked up and away from all the love and affection Rochester promises Jane. This has been indeed dealt with immense critical inquiry of which the present discussion offers no suitable space. Bertha Mason seems to be a symbol of uncontrollable freedom that could be thwarted as madness. Being explicated in terms of bodily prowess and gestures, quite contrary to Helen, who was all spirit and goodness, Bertha is also another extreme of one’s personality that needs to be given vent with self-restrictions. Showalter reads into the presence of these three woman as the three faces of Jane which Bronte uses to literally and metaphorically resolve the psychic dilemma of the heroine by literally and metaphorically destroying both. For an Indian woman Bertha Mason is quite an enigma, a control on self-freedom, if it can be put in such contradictory terms. Bertha could also be regarded a warning against the expression of uncalculated freedom, which can lead to arbitrariness and doom. Hence a self-control in the path of freedom when we set out for a holistic experience of a journey is essential.

While Jane removes herself from Thornfield and meets St John Rivers, Bertha dies a self-induced tragic death leaving Rochester handicapped in body, mind and fortune. Jane refuses to prematurely die with St John Rivers on his missionary sojourn to India by accepting the offer of being his wife. She chooses to follow her spirit that she finds entwined with Rochester. Unaware of his misfortunes and bent upon following her heart, she puts aside all social norms that could restrict her expression of love for Rochester she comes back to him and announces ‘Reader, I married him’ (397). Jane expounds the development of the central consciousness that must strike a balance between the spirit and the body. Existence is an integration of both the body and the spirit. Bronte in Victorian times pioneered a notion that finds its later reflection in the works of twentieth century feminists like Virginia Woolf and others. Jane fights her way through the illogical strictures, makes her choices, her own norms, and evolves as an independent woman, not only in financial terms as she inherits the properties of her uncle, or in refusing to be an angel of the house till her death although she nurses her invalid husband to health, serving both for his ‘prop and guide’(397), but she stands as an integrated woman.

This turbulent tale of a woman’s journey of self-assertion, of breaking up norms, of questioning conventions, of standing erect in pride and confidence has found its way into almost every undergraduate syllabus of universities offering an English major. Young girls, of almost Jane’s age when she left Lowood, are made to read it as part of a prescription of texts they must read to gain a degree. It’s a wonder what impact the rebellious Victorian Jane has on a 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian girl who too finds herself confronted by conventional social controls that bar her from herself! Indian society is built on reservations that are more often burdened on women who bear the brunt of all conventional notions. Any out-of-the-norm attitude is sure to be confronted with demeaning suppression. Despite an improvement in the condition in some quarters, there still remains a core that requires an urgent exorcism

of such archaic notions. The choice left for an Indian woman is always so limited that it becomes an almost impossibility to lead a life beyond convention and social control. To such a life, when Jane Eyre unfurls a world of revolt, of questioning, of choice, does the Indian girl, used to passive acceptance of circumstances, receive a jolt? When Jane asserts herself as an equal to the mighty Rochester in mind and spirit, despite lacking in beauty, in fortune, in style, does the Indian girl, who is always hinted that these qualities alone can ensure her a secure love-life leading to marriage, which is still made the ultimate aim, try to look at herself in the mind's mirror to perceive her beauty in her mind and spirit? Intelligence in Indian women, if not used for home-keeping, is still either a disappointment or a matter of awe, whereas the same in men is regarded natural. So when Jane speaks of her mind living a life with her, does the Indian girl, see herself in a new light, with a new promise for freedom? Wishing to be a Jane Eyre or a Charlotte Bronte does she wish to write her own story of making herself a woman? These questions crowd in our minds after almost two hundred years of the publication of a book that is an essential read for all, prescribed or un-prescribed. Jane Eyre creates her niche beyond all conventional social controls, she controls her social, personal, spiritual life and makes it her own. Hence for the young Indian girl or for any woman of any age, in any age *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Bronte are both an essential mode of life and living, besides encouraging critical explorations. Aren't both the creator and the created a lesson when the declaration is made in textual unison, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will. . . ." (223)?

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