**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

Percy Bysshe Shelley (August 4, 1792 – July 8, 1822; pronounced /ˈpɝːsɪ ˈbɪʃ ˈʃɛlɪ/[1]) was one of the major English Romantic poets and is widely considered to be among the finest lyric poets of the English language. He is perhaps most famous for such anthology pieces as Ozymandias, Ode to the West Wind, To a Skylark, and The Masque of Anarchy. However, his major works were long visionary poems including Alastor, Adonais, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound and the unfinished The Triumph of Life.

Shelley's unconventional life and uncompromising idealism, combined with his strong skeptical voice, made him an authoritative and much denigrated figure during his life and afterward. He became the idol of the next two or three generations of poets, including the major Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite poets Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, as well as William Butler Yeats and poets in other languages such as Jibanananda Das and Subramanya Bharathy. He was also admired by Karl Marx, Henry Stephens Salt, and Bertrand Russell. Famous for his association with his contemporaries John Keats and Lord Byron, he was also married to novelist Mary Shelley.

**Education and early works**

Son of Sir Timothy Shelley, a Whig Member of Parliament, and his mother a Sussex landowner, Shelley grew up in Horsham, Sussex, and received his early education at home, tutored by Reverend Evan Edwards of Warnham. In 1802, he entered the Syon House Academy of Brentford. In 1804, Shelley entered Eton College, where he fared little better, subjected to an almost daily mob torment his classmates called "Shelley-baits". Surrounded, the young Shelley would have his books torn from his hands and his clothes pulled at and torn until he cried out madly in his high-pitched "cracked soprano" of a voice.[2] On April 10, 1810, he matriculated at University College, Oxford. Legend has it that Shelley attended only one lecture while at Oxford, but frequently read sixteen hours a day. By all accounts, he was unpopular with both students and dons.[citation needed] His first publication was a Gothic novel, Zastrozzi (1810), in which he gave vent to his atheistic worldview through the villain Zastrozzi. In the same year, Shelley, together with his sister Elizabeth, published Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire. While at Oxford, he issued a collection of verses (perhaps ostensibly burlesque but quite subversive), Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson, with Thomas Jefferson Hogg.

In 1811, Shelley published a pamphlet The Necessity of Atheism. This gained the attention of the university administration and he was called to appear before the college's fellows. His refusal to repudiate the authorship of the pamphlet resulted in his being expelled from Oxford on March 25, 1811, along with Hogg. The re-discovery in mid-2006 of Shelley's long-lost 'Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things', a long, strident anti-monarchical poem printed in Oxford, gives a new dimension to the expulsion, reinforcing Hogg's implication of political motives ('an affair of party').[3] Shelley was given the choice to be reinstated after his father intervened, on the condition that he would have had to recant his avowed views. His refusal to do so led to a falling out with his father. His mother died at a young age just like he did.

**Married life**

Four months after being expelled, the 19-year-old Shelley travelled to Scotland with the 16-year-old schoolgirl Harriet Westbrook to get married. After their marriage on August 28, 1811, Shelley invited his college friend Hogg to share their household, including his wife. When Harriet objected, however, Shelley brought her to Keswick in England's Lake District, intending to write. Distracted by political events, he visited Ireland shortly afterward in order to engage in radical pamphleteering. Here he wrote his Address to the Irish People and was seen at several nationalist rallies. His activities earned him the unfavourable attention of the British government.

Unhappy in his nearly three-year-old marriage, Shelley often left his wife and child (Ianthe Shelley, 1813-76) alone, first to study Italian with a certain Cornelia Turner, and eventually to visit William Godwin's home and bookshop in London. It was here that he met Godwin's daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, later known as Mary Shelley. Mary was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of A Vindication of the Rights of Women.

On July 28, 1814, Shelley abandoned his pregnant wife and child when he ran away with Mary, also inviting her step-sister Jane (later Claire) Clairmont along for company. The three sailed to Europe, crossed France, and settled in Switzerland, an account of which was subsequently published by the Shelleys. After six weeks, homesick and destitute, the three young people returned to England.

In the autumn of 1815, while living close to London with Mary and avoiding creditors, he wrote Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude. It attracted little attention at the time, but it has now come to be recognized as his first major achievement. At this point in his writing career, Shelley was deeply influenced by Wordsworth's poetry and English language.

**Introduction to Byron**

In the summer of 1816, Shelley and Mary made a second trip to Switzerland. They were prompted to do so by Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, who had commenced a liaison with Lord Byron the previous April just before his self-exile on the continent. Byron had lost interest in Claire, and she used the opportunity of meeting the Shelleys as bait to lure him to Geneva. The Shelleys and Byron rented neighbouring houses on the shores of Lake Geneva. Regular conversation with Byron had an invigorating effect on Shelley's output of poetry. While on a boating tour the two took together, Shelley was inspired to write his Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, often considered his first significant production since Alastor[citation needed]. A tour of Chamonix in the French Alps inspired Mont Blanc, a poem in which Shelley claims to have pondered questions of historical inevitability and the relationship between the human mind and external nature.

**Personal difficulties and second marriage**

After the Shelleys returned to England, Fanny Imlay, Mary Godwin's half-sister and a member of Godwin's household, killed herself in late autumn. In December 1816, Shelley's estranged wife Harriet drowned herself in the Serpentine in Hyde Park, London. On December 30, 1816, a few weeks after Harriet's body was recovered, Shelley and Mary Godwin were married. The marriage was intended, in part, to help secure Shelley's custody of his children by Harriet, but the plan fell through: the children were handed over to foster parents by the courts.

The Shelleys took up residence in the village of Marlow, Buckinghamshire where a friend of Percy's, Thomas Love Peacock, lived. Shelley took part in the literary circle that surrounded Leigh Hunt, and during this period, he met John Keats. Shelley's major production during this time was Laon and Cythna, a long, narrative poem in which he attacked religion and featured a pair of incestuous lovers. It was hastily withdrawn after only a few copies were published. It was later edited and reissued as The Revolt of Islam in 1818. Shelley also wrote two revolutionary political tracts under the nom de plume of "The Hermit of Marlowe."

**Travels in the Italian peninsula**

Early in 1818, the Shelleys and Claire left England in order to take Claire's daughter, Allegra, to her father Byron, who had taken up residence in Venice. Contact with the older and more established poet encouraged Shelley to write once again. During the latter part of the year, he wrote Julian and Maddalo, a lightly disguised rendering of his boat trips and conversations with Byron in Venice, finishing with a visit to a madhouse. This poem marked the appearance of Shelley's "urbane style". He then began the long verse drama Prometheus Unbound, a re-writing of the lost play by the ancient Greek poet Aeschylus, which features talking mountains and a petulant spirit who overthrows Jupiter. Tragedy struck in 1818 and 1819, when his son Will died of fever in Rome, and his infant daughter Clara Everina died during yet another household move.

A daughter, Elena Adelaide Shelley, was born December 27, 1818 in Naples, Italy and registered there as the daughter of Shelley and a woman named Marina Padurin. However, the identity of the mother is an unsolved mystery. Some scholars speculate that her true mother was actually Claire Clairmont or Elise Foggi, a nursemaid for the Shelley family. Other scholars postulate that she was a foundling Shelley adopted in hopes of distracting Mary after the deaths of William and Clara.[4] Shelley referred to Elena in letters as his "Neapolitan ward". However, Elena was placed with foster parents a few days after her birth and the Shelley family moved on to yet another Italian city, leaving her behind. Elena died 17 months later, on June 10, 1820.

The Shelleys moved around various Italian cities during these years. Shelley completed Prometheus Unbound in Rome, and he spent the summer of 1819 writing a tragedy, The Cenci, in Livorno. In this year, prompted among other causes by the Peterloo massacre, he wrote his best-known political poems: The Masque of Anarchy and Men of England. These were most likely his most-remembered works during the 19th century. Around this time period, he wrote the essay The Philosophical View of Reform, which was his most thorough exposition of his political views to that date.

In 1820, hearing of John Keats' illness from a friend, Shelley wrote him a letter inviting him to join him at his residence at Pisa. Keats replied with hopes of seeing him, but instead, arrangements were made for Keats to travel to Rome with the artist Joseph Severn.

In 1821, inspired by the death of Keats, Shelley wrote the elegy Adonais. The text of this famous poem can be found at [1]

In 1822, Shelley arranged for Leigh Hunt, the British poet and editor who had been one of his chief supporters in England, to come to Italy with his family. He meant for the three of them — himself, Byron and Hunt — to create a journal, which would be called The Liberal. With Hunt as editor, their controversial writings would be disseminated, and the journal would act as a counter-blast to conservative periodicals such as Blackwood's Magazine and The Quarterly Review.

Leigh Hunt's son, the editor Thornton Leigh Hunt, when later asked whether he preferred Shelley or Byron as a man, replied:-

"On one occasion I had to fetch or take to Byron some copy for the paper which my father, himself and Shelley, jointly conducted. I found him seated on a lounge feasting himself from a drum of figs. He asked me if I would like a fig. Now, in that, Leno, consists the difference, Shelley would have handed me the drum and allowed me to help myself."[5]

On July 8, 1822, less than a month before his 30th birthday, Shelley drowned in a sudden storm while sailing back from Livorno to Lerici in his schooner, Don Juan. Shelley claimed to have met his Doppelgänger, foreboding his own death. He was returning from having set up The Liberal with the newly-arrived Leigh Hunt. The name "Don Juan", a compliment to Byron, was chosen by Edward John Trelawny, a member of the Shelley-Byron Pisan circle. However, according to Mary Shelley's testimony, Shelley changed it to "Ariel". This annoyed Byron, who forced the painting of the words "Don Juan" on the mainsail. This offended the Shelleys, who felt that the boat was made to look much like a coal barge. The vessel, an open boat designed from a Royal Dockyards model, was custom-built in Genoa for Shelley. It did not capsize but sank; Mary Shelley declared in her "Note on Poems of 1822" (1839) that the design had a defect and that the boat was never seaworthy.

Many believe his death was not accidental. Some say that Shelley was depressed in those days and that he wanted to die; others that he did not know how to navigate; others believe that some pirates mistook the boat for Byron's and attacked him, and others have even more fantastical stories. There is a mass of evidence, though scattered and contradictory, that Shelley may have been murdered for political reasons. Previously, at his cottage in Tann-yr-allt in Wales, he had been surprised and apparently attacked by a man who may have been an intelligence agent.[6]

In the days before he died, he was almost shot on two separate occasions.[citation needed] A British consul defended the shooter from the first of these two incidents, keeping him from all legal consequence. Two other Englishmen were with him on the boat.[citation needed] One was a retired Navy officer, Edward Ellerker Williams and the other a boatboy, Charles Vivien, who should have known how to navigate to the nearby coast at Livorno. The boat was found ten miles offshore, and it was suggested that one side of the boat had been rammed and staved in by a much stronger vessel. However, the liferaft was unused and still attached to the boat. The bodies were found completely clothed, including boots. In his 'Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron', Trelawny noted that the shirt that Williams's body was clad in was 'partly drawn over the head, as if the wearer had been in the act of taking it off [...] and [he was missing] one boot, indicating also that he had attempted to strip.' Trelawny also relates a supposed deathbed confession by an Italian fisherman who claimed to have rammed Shelley's boat in order to rob him, a plan confounded by the rapid sinking of the vessel.

The day following Shelley's death, the Tory newspaper "The Courier" gloated "Shelley, the writer of some infidel poetry, has been drowned, now he knows whether there is a God or not."[7]

Shelley's body washed ashore and later, in keeping with quarantine regulations, was cremated on the beach near Viareggio. An 1889 painting by Louis Eduard Fournier, The Funeral of Shelley (also known as The Cremation of Shelley), contains inaccuracies. In pre-Victorian times it was English custom that women not attend funerals, for health reasons. Mary Shelley did not attend but was featured in the painting, kneeling at the left-hand side. Leigh Hunt stayed in the carriage during the ceremony but is also pictured. Also, Trelawney, in his account of the recovery of Shelley's body, records that "the face and hands, and parts of the body not protected by the dress, were fleshless," and by the time that the party returned to the beach for the cremation, the body was even further decomposed. In his graphic account of the cremation, he writes of Byron being unable to face the scene, and withdrawing to the beach.

Shelley's heart was snatched from the funeral pyre by Edward Trelawny; Mary Shelley kept it for the rest of her life, and it was interred next to her grave at St. Peter's Church in Bournemouth. Shelley's ashes were interred in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome under an ancient pyramid in the city walls with the Latin inscription, Cor Cordium ("Heart of Hearts"), and a few lines from Shakespeare's The Tempest. The grave site is the second in the cemetery. Some weeks after Shelley had been put to rest, Trelawny had come to Rome, had not liked his friend's position among a number of other graves, and had purchased what seemed to him a better plot near the old wall. The ashes had been exhumed and moved to their present location. Trelawny had purchased the adjacent plot, and over sixty years later his remains were placed there.

A reclining statue, of Shelley's body washed up onto the shore, created by sculptor Edward Onslow Ford at the behest of Shelley's daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Shelley, is the centerpiece of the Shelley Memorial at University College, Oxford.