

Abstract

This thesis argues that Shelley's idea of a sustainable revolution is based on nature. The term "nature" refers to both human nature (love, emotion) and the natural world (the environment). Nature functions as a balanced system. A society built on the unnatural (violence, immorality) is unsustainable, because its very foundation is unstable. A society based on nature is therefore key to establishing long-lasting social reform. According to Shelley, change should above all be natural for it to be sustainable long-term. Violent revolutions ultimately fail, tyrannical governments meet their end, because they are distanced from nature due to their immorality. In his essay, "A Defence of Poetry", Shelley argues for a morality based on love, empathy, and connection. These emotions are inherently natural for Shelley and therefore they are morally sound. A society incapable of love becomes a hollow shell unable to connect with the natural world, immoral, and therefore unsustainable.

This thesis will discuss Shelley's ideas of sustainable revolution in the short lyrics "Ozymandias" and "Ode to the West Wind", and the dramatic poems *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Revolt of Islam*. Using ideas presented in these texts, supported by arguments in Shelley's essays "A Defence of Poetry" and "On Love", this thesis will attempt to demonstrate that Shelley advocated for the rebirth of humanity through environmental conservation. Writing at a time when the environment was, for the first time, being threatened by mass industrial processes, Shelley's engagement with political and philosophical issues opens his work up to an ecocritical interpretation. This is especially relevant in contemporary literary discourse, when ecocritical narratives are prevalent and awareness of the need for environmental conservation is so widespread. Nature and humanity are so inextricably linked that the suffering of one means the suffering of the other. Human corruption, as an outside influence, disturbs the equilibrium of a naturally sustainable environment, polluting landscapes and damaging ecosystems. A society devoid of empathy lacks the sensibility to treat the environment as a living system, instead commodifying it as a pool of resources at its own disposal. In doing so, humanity, through its immorality, restrict their own nature. If nature cannot be free, neither can humanity, resulting in a cycle of immorality and destruction. Shelley therefore argues for a self-identification more closely tied to nature that would ultimately ensure long-lasting freedom.