

SOME THOUGHTS ON SHELLEY'S A HYMN TO INTELLECTUAL BEAUTY

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Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote *A Hymn To Intellectual Beauty* in the summer of 1816. I do consider all human beings to be my beloved people, and I have dedicated a great deal of my life to this service, explicitly. This poem strikes me immediately from the ending, "thy spells did bind to fear himself and love all human kind." This moves me greatly because suddenly I feel a sudden understanding of Shelley's great wisdom that the love of all human kind has particular correlates, that it is *intellectual beauty* that brings about this love. This pleases me greatly, because it never actually occurred to me to examine any of the correlates to the love of all human kind.

It's not the sort of thing that you can ask of someone. You cannot just tell your children to love all human kind. You can't tell anyone to do that. Some people, myself included, pass through the various hoops of our lives and come to a state where this is pleasing and comfortable to our hearts, and gives us fulfillment. Others, following other music will not find it so and will not be interested.

There is, in this poem and much else of Shelley's poetry a crisp polish and a lightness of being with simple and deep words that are profound in their combination as right and perfect, a harmonious effect that seems eternal and it is difficult to believe that they did not exist in the universe for infinite time in the past. It is hard to believe that a young man wrote them in 1816.

I will tell you what I mean by this. 'Why dost thou pass away and leave our state this dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate? Ask why the sunlight not forever weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain river, why aught should fail and fade that once in shewn, why fear and dream and death and birth cast on the daylight of this earth such gloom—why man has such a scope for love and hate, despondency and hope?'

The lightness here is in the beautiful quick sketch of an eternal scene of universality that is instantly recognised like taps on a piano musical and yet able to expose something that is deeply familiar within all our hearts.

Very basic emotions project onto eternity of sunlight and rainbows and hope and despair, and very quickly and there is richness of man in nature and still and fluid life, purity of art. There is a sense of canonical in this.

In a sense this seems too lacking in visceral drama of heaviness but it is not weaker for having brushed those things away for those are not brought out but seen from a distance lightly touched.

And this is the deep genius of Shelley as well, that the heavy visceral experiences are touched lightly in an eternal universe and do not overwhelm us but are beautiful and simple. They land like light rain and seen in a harmonious whole where the elements do not overwhelm us and seem like they had existed in their harmony

forever like dark and light clouds playing quickly under the sun in strong winds. But the harmony is not cold in its distance at all. It's marvelous craft Shelley's poetry but it is not for the inexperienced who do not have the experience of love and hope and despair and longing already in the breathing lives.

This distance is not cold, and not warm. It is eternal and harmonious. For those who have not experienced already all the sentiments in the poem with nuance, the poems will *seem* trite. But the poems are really not meant for them at all. Those who have known their own hearts and emotions, the harmony and eternity in the arrangements are quite sublime.