

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCEY SHELLEY'S POEM "ODE TO THE WEST WIND" AND BOB DYLAN'S SONG "LAY DOWN YOUR WEARY TUNE"

Autora: Raquel Alves Ishii

The Romantic Age was a stylistic movement characterized by common features among the writers from a period which ranges the second part of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century. These features were not only depicted in literature (poetry and prose), but also in the theater, painting and arts in general.

The Romantic Movement was an opposition to everything related to Classicism, another stylistic movement that had a scholar character, substantiated on reason. Romanticism settled its own features based on a literature of instinct. The imagination, the sensibility, the emotion conquered the space occupied by reason. The movement was against the rationalism of the age, against the stiffness of the poetry. In fact, the romantic spirit denied its reality in order to build another reality through imagination. For that reason the poet prefers to live in the past or in the future as his present is so cruel for living.

It was an international movement, which started in Europe, specifically in Germany, with the publication of *Werther* by Goethe (1749 - 1832) in 1774.

In England, the romanticism had its first expressions in the nineteenth century. We should underline the ultra-romantic poetry of Lord Byron (1788-1824) and the historical novel *Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott (1771-1832). However, it was William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) who inaugurated the new literary tendency with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798.

According to Afrânio Coutinho (1995) most part of the romantic spirit was built in England, in his own words: "*Nature feeling, self-praise, religiosity, melancholy, desire of the past and ruins, supernatural, these are the traces that the romantic spirit had in England*".¹ (COUTINHO, 1995, p. 144)

However, if England and Germany were the precursors of the new tendency, France had the job to release it. Rousseau, a philosopher who was considered the "father of romanticism", influenced several romantic authors with his definition of the *noble savage*, which means, in few words, that man is essentially good, the society is the responsible for his corruption.

The features of romanticism, which are: individualism, illogicality, sense of mystery, escapism, reformism, dream, faith, worship of nature, return to the past, picturesque and exaggeration are very well expressed by authors from the second generation of romantic poets. In this generation we can include **Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792-1822), a poet whose life, like Byron's, was characterized by unconformity. They were the *immaturity voice* of the Romanticism. In fact, Shelley was, a typical revolted young man who rebelled against every social rule such as: religion, marriage and laws in general. Shelly was born on August 4th 1792

¹ My observation.

in Horsham, England. By the age of nineteen he was deported from the Oxford University because he had written *The Necessity of Atheism*. He made several translations of poems and tragedies. In his most famous essay he wrote: “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world”. However, it was to poetry that Shelley was devoted. In his poem ***Ode to the West Wind***, Shelley reaches his maturity in composition and gets in a single poem a lot of meanings that in spite of being related to his own time, establish dialogues with texts from different ages.

In this paper I intend to compare the poem *Ode to the West Wind* with a **Bob Dylan’s song** named ***Lay down your Weary Tune*** detaching their differences and similarities based on a specific characteristic of Romanticism which is the relation between man and nature.

Nature in both texts, *Ode to the West Wind* and *Lay down your Weary Tune*, is personified. Although, it is not clearly expressed in Shelley and Dylan’s lives, in their poetry we can identify (among several others) a philosophy of life, that is, the **pantheism**. Pantheism is the belief that God is in all things, including nature. God can not be out of us, we are, like the flowers and the trees part of the nature and nature is God.

In the Romantic Age the notion of nature, natural benevolence, the pureness of life in nature, the superiority of natural inspiration attracted more and more men’s interest. In Shelley’s poem we can notice that the West Wind is the most powerful thing ever. The poem is dedicated to it:

*“O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being—
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing, (...)”*

In the poem West Wind is always capitalized, which indicates that it is a reference to a universal wind, a divine wind, God resides in the wind. The poem brings a mixture of political and spiritual means. *Ghosts, unseen presence, enchanter*, traces the idea of supernatural in the sense that it can be related with the great power of the Wind becoming himself the depiction of an intelligible nature. Nature here is personified. The Wind is taken not only as a natural phenomenon, but he is someone who has the power of life and death:

*“Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes!—O thou
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow”*

The West Wind is at the same time, creator and destroyer; he is so powerful that the author wants to be part of him because the Wind can bring the author’s youth and his strength back. Here we have in the poem an autobiographical characteristic noticed in these quotations:

*“(...) O uncontrollable!—if even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be
The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision,—I would ne'er have striven”*

*“Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!”*

Shelley makes reference to his boyhood, he wants to turn back to that time when he was younger. *My leaves are falling* is an allusion to his situation considered by himself as decay and it's an allusion to his age as he was afraid of loosing his youth. However, the West Wind can, at the same way, give to him early stages and his devoted poetry back. It is a melancholic and hopeful tone uttered during the whole poem in order to emphasize the contrasts in the power of nature.

Bob Dylan's true name is Robert Zimmerman, he was born in 1941. By the age of twenty, Dylan got into the **folk music** in which he could show his peculiar style. In his songs his images of the world are depicted. As Shelley, Dylan's life history is marked by unconformity. He introduces in folk music the **outcry songs** in a way that the beauty of his compositions is mixed with critical point of views. Dylan was influenced by several authors and musicians.

In music, his influences were Woody Guthrie, Chuck Berry, Hank Williams and many others. In literature, Dylan had great contact with English literature, that is, English poetry. He read Byron, Longfellow, Poe including Shelley. His great songs are still sung by many artists from the whole world. *Blowin' in the wind* (1963) portrays the wishes from the youth of the year 1960 and is the most well known song by Dylan. Nevertheless, there's no such a song in which we can find the romantic spirit of nature like **Lay down your Weary Tune**. It was recorded in New York City on October 24th in 1963. In it we see Dylan's nature devotion depicted. In his own words:

“I've never saw God; I can't say it 'till I see one... like New York. I can see God in a daisy. I can see God in a windy or rainy night. The biggest form of song is the prayer. Prayers for King David or Solomon, the coyote's howl, the landslide – everything should be marvelous to be God” (COLEÇÃO: O AUTOR POR ELE MESMO. *Bob Dylan por ele mesmo*. Martin Claret, 1994)

Dylan could express the pantheism philosophy in his song and he can be attracted for simple life in nature, specifically, for the sounds of nature.

*“Lay down your weary tune, lay down,
Lay down the song you strum,
And rest yourself 'neath the strength of strings
No voice can hope to hum.”*
*“I stood unwound beneath the skies
And clouds unbound by laws.
The cryin' rain like a trumpet sang
And asked for no applause.”*

There's no such a perfect thing as nature and its sounds, for that reason, Dylan denies human voice, the most beautiful sound in the world is the sound of nature. The sounds of nature are more important than every sound produced by any human being.

Similarly to what happens in Shelley's poem in which the morning breeze blow like a bugle, the ocean played like an organ, the crashing waves clashed like cymbals in Dylan's song nature is also personified. In the song there's no trace of supernatural, but the sounds of nature are as powerful as the West Wind, 'till the point that you conclude that it does not matter the things that man does, because nature can do them better. Man can get rest in nature also, man can find an escape in nature and nature will not ask for anything in return.

*“The last of leaves fell from the trees
And clung to a new love's breast.
The branches bare like a banjo played
To the winds that listened best.
I gazed down in the river's mirror
And watched its winding strum.
The water smooth ran like a hymn
And like a harp did hum.”*

We have a **creator characteristic** in Dylan's song: *leaves fell from trees and clung to a new love's breast*, that means a resume of love, when someone's love ends (*fell from trees*) it can find a new breast and start again. There is a melancholic and hopeful tone expressed. There's no feeling to overcome nature, because there's no way to do it. However, we must be happy because we can enjoy nature and learn with it. The whole nature is transformed in a great orchestra playing the best sounds ever.

Without political, supernatural, or autobiographical meanings, Dylan's song brings such a deep dialogue with Shelley's poem because they had the same kind of relation with nature. In both texts nature is the only escape of a man, where he can find everything, even pain. The **Sounds of nature** and the **West Wind** have the same power in which we can find God, who has the power to destroy and to create life. This is what makes the synthesis in both texts: their pantheism view.