

Study on Percy Bysshe Shelley as an Artist: Perspective of Ekphrasis

Dr. Dilip Sarkar¹, Rageswari Dhar²

¹Professor, Department of English, TIUT

²Research Scholar, TIUT

Abstract: *Ekphrasis, traditionally defined as an interdisciplinary mode of expression and the literary articulation of verbal representation of visual art form, evolved significantly during the romantic period, allowing writers to absorb visual aesthetics into literary form and use imagery, moving beyond mere description to become a vehicle for philosophical, historical and political reflection. This paper examines the use of ekphrasis in the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, situating his poetry within the visual culture of romanticism. While romantic ekphrasis has often been discussed in relation to John Keats, Shelley's engagement with visual art has received comparatively limited critical attention. After a close analysis of Ozymandias, On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci and the Triumph of Life, this research paper demonstrates how Shelly's works explore direct, indirect and imaginative forms of ekphrasis, which further discusses about themes of power, historical decay, terror and imaginative freedom. The study further makes a comparative study of Shelley's poetic vision with the works of romantic painters such as William Blake, Henry Fuseli and J. M. W. Turner, highlighting shared aesthetics concerns with the sublime and symbolic representations. This interdisciplinary approach positions Shelley as a significant figure in romantic ekphrasis discourse and underscores the importance of visual-verbal interaction in romantic literature.*

Keywords: ekphrasis, romantic poetry, visual art, Percy Shelley, sublime imagery

1. Introduction

Ekphrasis is the moment when words learn to see. Ekphrasis, conventionally understood as the verbal representation of a visual work of art, which has undergone a profound transformation during the romantic period and has occupied an important place in literary criticism from classical antiquity to the modern period. The term ekphrasis derives from the Greek word , meaning "to speak out" or "to describe fully", it is a literary technique in which language is used to evoke, interpret or respond to visual art, transforming images into sites of imaginative, emotional and intellectual inquiry. In classical rhetoric, ekphrasis referred broadly to any vivid and detailed verbal representation capable of bringing an object, scene, or image before the reader's imagination. Over time, however, literary studies have narrowed the term to denote the dynamic relationship between visual art and verbal text, particularly in poems or prose passages that engage directly or indirectly with paintings, sculptures, monuments, or other visual forms.

During the romantic period, ekphrasis underwent a significant transformation. Rather than merely functioning as a mode of static artworks, Romantic poets infused ekphrasis with imagination, emotional intensity, political consciousness, and philosophical depth. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), one of the major and foremost English Romantic poets, exemplifies this evolution. Shelley's works frequently engage with visual imagery, sculptural forms, and imagined monuments, rendering his poetry deeply ekphrastic in nature. Although Shelley does not always describe specific, historically identifiable artworks, he often constructs symbolic visual forms that operate within the poem as imagined works of art, charged with ideological meaning. This assignment examines ekphrasis in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley from a literary perspective. It explores and investigates how Shelley adapts ekphrastic

techniques to align Romantic ideals, compares his poetic representations with contemporary visual artworks and artists, and analyses the advantages of ekphrasis as a literary mode. Through close reading and comparative analysis, the study argues that Shelly's ekphrasis extends beyond description to become ideological, philosophical, and revolutionary in spirit.

The Romantic Period, spanning the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, emerged as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the rigid artistic conventions of neoclassicism. During this period, poets and artists emphasized imagination, emotion, individual vision, and creative freedom. Simultaneously, Europe witnessed major political and social upheavals, including the French Revolution and rejected the dominance of reason and formal restraint, leading to the gradual decline of absolute monarchies, which deeply influenced literary expression, privileging imagination, emotion, individual vision and creative freedom. And reshaped ideas of power, authority and artistic expression, encouraging writers to question inherited traditions and explore themes of freedom, oppression and historical change.

These transformations left a deep imprint on literary and artistic expression, encouraging writers to question inherited traditions and explore themes of freedom, oppression and historical change. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote in this revolutionary intellectually charged atmosphere, where literature and visual art were closely connected. Art during this period sought to capture subjective experience and the deeper truths of human consciousness rather than adhere to prescribed aesthetic rules. While Romantic poets often engaged with painting, sculpture, and classical ruins to reflect on history, power, and human experience, creating a fertile ground for the development of ekphrasis in Romantic literature.

Volume 15 Issue 1, January 2026

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

www.ijsr.net

2. Literature Review

“In ‘Shelley’s Uneasiness About Colour in His Poetry and Ekphrasis’ by Fabien Dessert, the critic undertakes a focused and nuanced examination of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s complex relationship with visuality, particularly colour, within his poetic practice and ekphrastic engagements. Dessert’s article, published in *Interfaces: Image Texte–Langage* (2012), contributes significantly to Romantic and ekphrasis studies by arguing that Shelley’s treatment of colour reveals a deep aesthetic and philosophical unease rather than a simple delight in visual description.” Dessert begins by situating Shelley within the broader Romantic context, a period often associated with heightened visual imagination and sensuous imagery. While Romantic poets are frequently praised for their vivid pictorial language, Dessert challenges the assumption that Shelley uncritically embraces visual richness. Instead, he suggests that Shelley’s poetry demonstrates a tension between the materiality of colour and the poet’s desire for abstraction, transcendence, and idealism (Dessert 166). This tension becomes especially visible in Shelley’s ekphrastic moments, where poetry directly or indirectly engages with visual art.

A central argument of the article is that colour, though recurrent in Shelley’s poetry, is rarely stable or purely decorative. Dessert notes that Shelley frequently uses colours such as white, gold, blue, and pale shades, yet these colours often appear in states of dissolution, glare, excess, or fading (Dessert 168). Rather than anchoring the image, colour tends to destabilize perception, pointing to Shelley’s discomfort with sensory fixity. This observation marks an important contribution to Shelley scholarship, as it shifts attention away from form or symbolism alone and toward the sensory limits of poetic representation. Dessert’s discussion of ekphrasis is particularly illuminating. Drawing implicitly on ekphrasis theory articulated by scholars such as James Heffernan, the article treats ekphrasis not merely as verbal description of art, but as a site of negotiation between visual immediacy and linguistic mediation. In Shelley’s case, Dessert argues, ekphrasis exposes the poet’s reluctance to submit entirely to the authority of the visual image (Dessert 170). Shelley does not aim to reproduce the artwork faithfully; rather, he reframes and transforms it, often dissolving its colours into emotional or metaphysical states. This argument is especially persuasive in Dessert’s reading of Shelley’s poem “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, in the Florentine Gallery.” While the poem appears at first glance to be a conventional ekphrastic response to a painting, Dessert shows that Shelley avoids detailed chromatic description. Instead of emphasizing the literal colours of Medusa’s face and serpentine hair, Shelley foregrounds pallor, coldness, and death-like stillness (Dessert 173). Colour here becomes muted, almost erased, suggesting Shelley’s resistance to the sensuous power of the image. The visual terror of Medusa is thus translated into a philosophical meditation on beauty, death, and paralysis rather than a painterly description. Dessert extends this analysis to Shelley’s broader poetic practice, arguing that Shelley repeatedly associates intense colour with danger, excess, or illusion. Brightness often borders on blindness, and vivid colour threatens to overwhelm rational or moral vision (Dessert 175). This pattern reinforces the article’s

central claim that Shelley’s uneasiness about colour reflects a deeper anxiety about the material world and the limitations of sensory perception. From this perspective, Shelley’s ekphrasis is not celebratory but critical, exposing the inadequacy of purely visual knowledge. The article also contributes to Romantic visual studies by engaging, albeit indirectly, with the long-standing debate on the relationship between painting and poetry, famously articulated by Lessing in *Laocoön*. Shelley’s poetry, as Dessert presents it, seems to resist the spatial fixity of painting in favour of temporal, fluid, and transformative language (Dessert 178). Colour, which is central to painting, becomes problematic within poetic discourse because it threatens to immobilize meaning. Shelley’s strategy, therefore, is to abstract or destabilize colour, allowing poetry to retain its dynamic and temporal nature. Critics such as W. J. T. Mitchell has argued that ekphrasis often stages a struggle for representational authority. Dessert’s analysis of Shelley provides a Romantic example of this struggle, where colour becomes the contested site between visual immediacy and poetic abstraction (Dessert 182). In conclusion, Fabien Dessert’s “Shelley’s Uneasiness About Colour in His Poetry and Ekphrasis” offers a valuable and original contribution to Shelley studies, Romantic aesthetics, and ekphrasis theory. By foregrounding colour as a problem rather than a pleasure, the article deepens our understanding of Shelley’s poetic vision and his complex engagement with visual art. Dessert convincingly demonstrates that Shelley’s ekphrasis is marked by hesitation, reframing, and abstraction, revealing a poet who is acutely aware of both the power and the limitations of the visual. This study thus enriches ongoing discussions about the relationship between poetry and painting in Romantic literature and provides a strong critical foundation for future research on Shelley’s visual imagination.

The article situates Modernist ekphrasis within the broader cultural and historical disruptions of the early twentieth century. Bhagyalekshmi R convincingly links the emergence of Modernist experimentation to the aftermath of World War I, rapid industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of mass culture. These forces produced alienation, fragmentation, and loss of individuality, all of which profoundly shaped Modernist literary aesthetics. Ekphrasis, within this context, becomes not a celebratory description of art but a critical mode that reflects Modernist inwardness and self-consciousness (Bhagyalekshmi R 264). A central theoretical framework in the article is W. J. T. Mitchell’s concept of “ekphrastic fear.” Drawing on Mitchell’s tripartite model, ekphrastic indifference, ekphrastic hope, and ekphrastic fear, the author explains how Modernist poets become anxious about the possibility of words being taken too literally or overpowering the visual image they describe. Ekphrastic fear emerges when the boundary between verbal and visual representation threatens to collapse, challenging the autonomy of each medium. Bhagyalekshmi R argues that Stein’s ekphrastic practice exemplifies Modernist opacity and semiotic instability. Although her poems appear to describe objects, they resist fixed meaning and deny readers visual certainty. This strategy aligns with Modernist resistance to conventional representation and reinforces the article’s claim that ekphrasis becomes a site of linguistic experimentation rather than visual fidelity (Bhagyalekshmi

R 267). The discussion extends to Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens, further reinforcing the diversity of Modernist ekphrasis. Moore's response to René Magritte's imposed on nature symbolizes human intervention and domination. Bhagyalekshmi R reads these poems as evidence that Modernist ekphrasis is deeply symbolic and self-aware, engaging visual art as a catalyst for abstract reflection rather than mimetic representation. One of the article's most insightful arguments concerns openness and limitation in Modernist poetry.

"In 'Reflections of Reflections of Reflections: Shelley and the Terrifying Necessity of Fragmentary Art' by Andrew Turner, the critic offers a philosophically rich and theoretically ambitious reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley's unfinished poem 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery'. Turner's article examines Shelley's ekphrastic engagement with the Uffizi painting of Medusa (formerly attributed to Leonardo da Vinci), arguing that both the poem and the painting are necessarily fragmentary artefacts shaped by the terrifying logic of ekphrasis itself." Turner draws on Lessing and Harold Bloom to suggest that mythological figures are accessible only through mediated forms, through art, narrative, and reflection—never through unfiltered representation. The article's most distinctive contribution lies in its exploration of fragmentation as an aesthetic and philosophical necessity. Turner argues that Shelley's poem is fragmentary not because it is unfinished in a conventional sense, but because completion would be conceptually impossible. Medusa, as a mythic figure whose gaze petrifies, cannot be fully represented without annihilating the representational medium itself. Drawing on Wittgenstein and W. J. T. Mitchell Turner suggests that a perfectly successful ekphrastic poem would erase itself by replacing words entirely with image in the reader's mind. In such a scenario, language collapses into vision, and poetry ceases to exist as poetry. This idea leads Turner to one of his most provocative claims: Shelley's poem survives precisely because it fails to complete its ekphrastic task. Turner acknowledges that this addition challenges strict definitions of ekphrasis, which traditionally avoid introducing elements absent from the visual source.

However, he argues that the mirror functions as a self-referential device that reflects the poem's own status as a reflection of a reflection. The article also situates Shelley's poem within a broader tradition of philosophical aesthetics. Turner explicitly rejects the idea that either the poem or the painting should be privileged over the other. Instead, he argues that they exist in a mutually dependent relationship, each fragmentary without the other. Criticism itself, Turner concludes, becomes another layer of ekphrasis—a reflection upon reflections that can never fully resolve meaning. In conclusion, Andrew Turner's 'Reflections of Reflections of Reflections' offers a profound rethinking of Shelley's ekphrasis as an inherently fragmentary and philosophically charged practice. By framing Shelley's Medusa poem as a necessary failure, Turner transforms incompleteness into aesthetic success. Shelley's engagement with ekphrasis must also be understood in relation to his radical political views. He believed that poetry could act as a moral and intellectual force capable of reshaping society. By using visual imagery and imagined artworks, Shelley communicates complex

political ideas in a powerful and accessible form. Ekphrasis, therefore, becomes an instrument of critique rather than mere aesthetic appreciation.

3. Research Objectives

The present study aims to undertake a systematic literary examination of ekphrasis in the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley within the broader interdisciplinary framework and a context of Romantic visual culture. The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1) To examine Shelley's use of ekphrasis as a distinct Romantic literary strategy, demonstrating how it moves beyond classical descriptive models to symbolic, ideological, and imaginative forms of representation.
- 2) To analyse major ekphrastic instances in Shelley's poetry, particularly *Ozymandias*, *On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci*, and *The Triumph of Life*, in order to demonstrate how visual representation functions as a vehicle for political, philosophical, and historical critique.
- 3) To situate Shelley's ekphrasis within the visual and artistic culture of the Romantic period, by drawing comparative connections with contemporary painters such as William Blake, Henry Fuseli, and J. M. W. Turner.
- 4) To explore the reciprocal relationship between Romantic painting and literature, highlighting how painters absorbed literary imagination and how poets adopted pictorial modes of thinking- perception and representation.
- 5) To contribute to interdisciplinary Romantic studies by presenting ekphrasis as a shared aesthetic language between verbal and visual art rather than a secondary or ornamental device.

4. Research Gap

Although Romantic Ekphrasis has long occupied a luminous place in critical discourse, scholarly vision has lingered most persistently upon John Keats's engagement with classical art, particularly sculpted perfection of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, often treating ekphrasis as a predominantly aesthetic or formal exercise. In such readings, Ekphrasis is often approached as a self-contained aesthetic gesture- an exercise in form, sensuousness, and visual stasis. Within this focussed gaze, as a result, Percy Bysshe Shelley's contribution to ekphrastic poetry remains comparatively under-theorised, insufficiently illuminated and fragmented within Romantic literary studies.

Most critical discussions of Shelley prioritize his revolutionary political radicalism, lyrical idealism, and philosophical abstractions, while his engagement with visual art is frequently addressed only in passing. Studies that do acknowledge Shelley's ekphrastic moments tend to acknowledge individual poems in isolation instances, without situating them within the broader visual culture of Romanticism or exploring their interdisciplinary resonance which has been left unexplored. Moreover, existing research often restricts ekphrasis to the faithful verbal descriptions of identifiable artworks, thereby obscuring Shelley's more radical vision, overlooking Shelley's innovative use of

imaginary, fragmented, and symbolic visual forms, such as ruined monuments, visionary processions, and sculptural figures that exist between materiality and dream. In Shelley's hands, ekphrasis is not a mere mirror held up to art, but a restless force-mutable, symbolic, and charged with ideological urgency. Hence, a narrow definition fails to account for Shelley's transformation of ekphrasis into a dynamic mode of ideological critique.

There is also a notable lack of comparative analysis between Shelley's poetic images and the works of visual languages of Romantic painters such as Blake, Fuseli, and Turner, whose works pulse with similar obsessions, like, ruin and revolution, sublimity and terror, imagination as both creative and destructive power, despite their shared thematic concerns and aesthetic strategies. With this dialogue absence of such interdisciplinary comparison limits our understanding of ekphrasis as a cultural phenomenon rather than a purely literary device.

This study seeks to speak about the silence and addresses these gaps by offering a comprehensive, interdisciplinary examination of Shelley's ekphrasis, situating his poetry within the artistic, political, and imaginative networks of Romantic visual culture. By tracing the intersections between poetry, painting, vision and ideology, it repositions Shelley not as a peripheral participant but as a vital architect of Romantic ekphrastic thought- one who reshapes ekphrasis into a living, interrogative and profoundly modern practice.

5. Discussion

Romanticism arose as a tuning of the spirit, as a reaction against the rigid formalism of neoclassicism and cold precision of the Enlightenment. Romantic writers valued imagination, the pulse of emotion, individual vision, and artistic freedom. In this context, ekphrasis became more than a rhetorical exercise, it became a means of exploring the relationship between art, nature, history, and human consciousness.

Unlike classical ekphrasis, which often celebrated harmony, proportion, and permanence, Romantic ekphrasis dwells among ruins, emphasizing transience, decay, and the limitations of human power. Visual art in Romantic poetry is rarely timeless or stable, it weathers storms, submits to time, and bears the marks of history. Shelley's poetry reflects this Romantic sensibility. His ekphrastic images do not merely depict loss, they embody it. They are often broken, fragmented, or ruined, symbolizing the collapse of political tyranny, failed empires, the impermanence of human ambition, and the inexorable passage of time.

Shelley's ekphrasis moves fluidly across forms, and this can be broadly classified into three forms- Direct ekphrasis, where the poem describes an identifiable artwork. Indirect or mediated ekphrasis, where an artwork is described through a narrative frame and lastly, Imaginary or symbolic ekphrasis, where Shelley invents visual forms that function like artworks. These forms appear across Shelley's poetic career and reveal his sustained interest in the dialogue between visual and verbal art.

"Ozymandias" (1818) is Shelley's most typically cited ekphrastic poem and a central text for understanding his approach and perspective to visual art. This poem stands as Shelley's most enduring meditation on art, power and time. The poem describes a ruined statue in the desert, said to represent the Egyptian ruler Ramesses II. The statue is described in vivid visual detail: "two vast and trunkless legs of stone" and a "shattered visage" lying half-buried in sand. These sculptural fragments form the core of the poem's ekphrasis. The inscription carved into stone on the pedestal, "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings"- lingers like a whisper of arrogance amid the silence of the desert and functions as a textual element embedded within the visual artifact, intensifying the irony of the scene (Shelley 197). The ruler's sneer, captured in stone, outlives the ruler himself. Art preserves expression even as the empire crumbles.

Here, ekphrasis serves as a political critique. First, it demonstrates the power of art to preserve human expression even as political authority falls. The sculptor's ability to capture the ruler's "sneer of cold command" outlasts the ruler's empire. Second, the ruined statue becomes a visual metaphor for the impermanence of tyranny. Shelley's ekphrasis is therefore deeply political, using visual art to critique despotism and historical arrogance. Shelley deliberately subverts this tradition by presenting a monument reduced to fragments. In doing so, he redefines ekphrasis as a tool of historical irony rather than celebration.

Shelley's poem "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, in the Florentine Gallery" (1819) Shelley turns toward a specific artwork that represents a more traditional form of ekphrasis. The poem responds directly to a painting attributed in Shelley's time to Leonardo da Vinci, depicting the mythological figure Medusa- whose face is terrible yet beautiful, frozen between life and death- draws the poet into meditation. He dwells on the visual details, the serpents writhe silently (serpentine hair), the eyes stare without seeing, the frozen expression, to evoke the painting's emotional power. The poem does not merely describe the artwork, it interprets it, transforming visual terror into philosophical reflection on beauty, death, and the sublime, where horror and beauty coexist, inseparably. Shelley does not only merely translate the painting into words, he transforms it into thought. Both artist and poet explore the boundary between beauty and horror. Shelley's ekphrasis thus becomes a dialogue between visual and verbal art, demonstrating how poetry can extend and reinterpret the meaning of painting.

Coming to the next, Shelley's unfinished poem *The Triumph of Life* (1822) abandons the physical artwork altogether and enters the realm of visionary procession that resembles a painted mural or sculptural frieze. The poem unfolds like a vast mural, as a series of visual tableaux in which historical and philosophical figures appear trapped in a symbolic pageant. Although the poem does not describe a specific artwork, its imagery functions ekphrastically. The visual arra This form of ekphrasis can be compared with large-scale historical paintings of Shelley's era, such as those by Jacques-Louis David, whose works often depict grand processions and symbolic figures. Shelley's poetic version,

however, undermines the idea of heroic triumph by exposing its moral emptiness.

Shelley wrote at a moment when literature and visual art were deeply intertwined. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the rise of Romantic painting, characterized by emotional intensity, dramatic landscapes, and symbolic imagery. Romantic painters such as J. M. W. Turner with his dissolving landscapes, Henry Fuseli with his haunted vision, and William Blake (who was both poet and artist) with his fusion of word and images, were contemporaries whose works share thematic affinities with Shelley's poetry. Turner's landscapes, with their emphasis on light, movement, and natural power, parallel Shelley's poetic imagery of transformation and flux. Fuseli's nightmarish and mythological scenes resonate with Shelley's fascination with terror, imagination, and the sublime, as seen in poems like "On the Medusa." Blake's integration of text and image provides a particularly relevant comparison, as both artists sought to dissolve the boundaries between artistic forms. Though Shelley never was a painter himself, his poetry often feels sculpted and illuminated, as vivid as canvas or stone.

Ekphrasis enriches literature by giving thought a visible form. It offers several advantages as a literary technique and allows abstract ideas—power, decay, freedom, mortality—to appear before the mind's eye. The romantic period fostered an unusually intense dialogue between literature and the visual art marked by shared themes of imagination, terror, sublimity and revolutionary thought. The period unfolded as a space of profound conversation between the eye and the world. Painters often approached their canvas, as if composing a poetry. While the poet wrote with a painterly awareness of form colour and visual arrangement. This mutual influence created a fertile cultural context in which good flourish as a natural mode of expression rather than a specialised rhetorical device. Romantic expression is deeply rooted in this interdisciplinary exchange poets, such as Shelly did not merely describe artworks, they absorbed visual modes of thinking into political structure itself. Similarly, painters treated literary text as a source of symbolic imagery and emotional depth

William Blake stands at the heart of this synthesis. His work represents the most complete synthesis of literature and painting in the romantic period. Blake rejected the separation of artistic forms, arguing that poetry and painting were complimentary expressions of visionary truth, his songs of innocent end of experience (1794) exemplify this fusion where illustrated place and politic text function as a unified whole. In the Tyger, Blake writes:

"Tyger Tyger, burning bright, In the forests of the night"

The accompanying illustration depicts the tiger, not as a realistic animal. But as a symbolic almost cosmic presence, the stiff poster, burning eyes and unnatural landscape rainforest. The poem central question about the nature of creation and divine power. Blake's paintings such as The Ancient of Days also revealed strong literary qualities. The figure of your Urizen, bent over with a compass, visually films enlightenment rationalism as a restrictive force. This theme resonates with Shelly, critic of Tyni and fall

Authority, especially in Prometheus Unbound, where intellectual freedom replaces imposed order. Shelly poetic images resemble Blake's visionary figures—monumental, symbolic and abstract rather than realistic. Both artists use visual and verbal imagery to challenge institutional power and celebrate imaginative liberation.

Henry Fuseli's paintings demonstrate how romantic artists transformed literary ideas into powerful visual forms. Fuseli drew heavily on Shakespeare, Milton, and classical mythology, treating literary text as imaginative blueprint for painting his most famous work, the nightmare, 1781, Depi, a woman in a state of unconscious wellness vulnerability with a demonic in Cumbus, crouched, open her chest and a ghostly horse emerging from the darkness. Though not based on a single literary text, the painting bodies, themes found in Gothic literature, fear, depression, and the invasion of the mind by irrational forces. These visual concerns closely align with Shelley's treatment of terror and beauty in On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, where Shelley describes Medusa's face as:

"Yet it is less the horror than the grace, Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone."

Here, Shelley articulates the same paradox Fuseli explores visually—the coexistence of attraction and horror. Both artist and poet use the sublime to unsettle the viewer or reader, forcing confrontation with psychological and emotional extremes. Fuseli's figures often appear exaggerated and distorted, much like Shelley's symbolic imagery, which prioritizes emotional truth over physical realism.

J. M. W. Turner's paintings are often described as visual poetry due to their emphasis on light, motion, and atmosphere. Works such as Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth (1842) dissolve solid forms into swirling colour and energy, suggesting the overwhelming power of nature. Turner was deeply influenced by poetry and frequently quoted lines in his exhibition catalogues. His artistic philosophy aligns closely with Shelley's depiction of nature as a dynamic, transformative force. In Ode to the West Wind, Shelley writes:

"Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere; Destroyer and preserver; hear, O hear!"

This dual role of nature as both destructive and regenerative finds a visual counterpart in Turner's storm paintings, where chaos and beauty coexist. Both Shelley and Turner reject static representation, favouring motion, instability, and transformation. Turner's landscapes function as ekphrastic counterparts to Shelley's poetry: both create meaning through sensory intensity rather than precise narrative, allowing emotion and imagination to guide interpretation.

John Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn is often cited as the defining example of Romantic ekphrasis. Keats addresses the urn directly, calling it a:

"Sylvan historian, who canst thus express, A flowery tale more sweet than our rhyme."

Shelley's approach to classical art, however, is more ironic and fragmentary. In *Ozymandias*, Shelley presents a ruined statue whose inscription claims eternal power:

"Look at my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

The irony lies in the surrounding emptiness. The broken sculpture becomes a visual symbol of political failure and historical decay. Unlike Keats's timeless urn, Shelley's statue is subject to time and destruction. This contrast highlights Shelley's distinctive ekphrastic style, which uses visual art not to escape history but to confront it.

Shelley's engagement with Leonardo da Vinci's *Medusa* reflects the Romantic tendency to reinterpret Renaissance art through modern sensibilities. Shelley emphasizes not technical mastery but emotional and psychological impact. He describes *Medusa* as:

"A woman's countenance, with serpent locks, Gazing in death on heaven from those wet rocks."

The painting becomes a meditation on beauty, terror, and mortality. Shelley's response demonstrates how ekphrasis allows literature to extend the meaning of visual art beyond its original historical context.

What unites these painters and writers is their shared commitment to imagination as a form of truth. Whether through Blake's illuminated poetry, Fuseli's Gothic visions, Turner's turbulent landscapes, or Shelley's symbolic verse, Romantic artists sought to reveal inner realities rather than external appearances.

Ekphrasis emerges from this shared aesthetic as a natural and powerful literary strategy. It allows poetry to think visually and painting to feel poetically. In Shelley's work, ekphrasis becomes a means of transforming visual art into philosophical and political reflection, enriching literature through interdisciplinary dialogue.

6. Conclusion

The approach from the standpoint of Ekphrasis reveals a new dimension of P.B. Shelley, going beyond the traditional understanding of the poet. The study concludes that Percy Bysshe Shelley's engagement with ekphrasis represents a significant contribution and plays a crucial role to Romantic literature. His poetry demonstrates that ekphrasis as an imaginative and politically resonant mode that transcends mere visual representation. Through direct, indirect, and imaginary ekphrasis, Shelley transforms visual art into a medium of philosophical inquiry and social critique. By comparing Shelley's works with contemporary visual art, this study highlights the interconnectedness of Romantic artistic expression. Ultimately ekphrasis in Shelley's work affirms the Romantic belief in the power of imagination to transcend artistic boundaries and to challenge established forms of authority. As a literary strategy, ekphrasis proves to be not only an aesthetic device but also an intellectual and ethical force within Shelley's poetic vision.

References

- [1] Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Oxford University Press, 1970.
- [2] Heffernan, James A. W. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- [3] Krieger, Murray. *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- [4] Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Translated by Edward Allen McCormick, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- [5] Mitchell, W. J. T. "Ekphrasis and the Other." *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 151–181.
- [6] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *The Complete Poems*. Edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- [7] *The Triumph of Life*. Edited by Donald H. Reiman, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- [8] Turner, J. M. W. *Selected Paintings*. Tate Britain, London.
- [9] Bhagyalekshmi, R. "Surpassing the Ekphrastic Experience in Modernist Poetry." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2019, pp. 263–269.
- [10] Desset, Fabien. "Shelley's Uneasiness About Colour in His Poetry and Ekphrasis." *Interfaces. Image-Texte-Langage*, vol. 33, 2012, pp. 165–192.
- [11] "Ozymandias." *The Complete Poems*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 196–197.
- [12] "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, in the Florentine Gallery." *The Complete Poems*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 301–303.
- [13] Turner, Andrew. "Reflections of Reflections of Reflections: Shelley and the Terrifying Necessity of Fragmentary Art." *Romanticism*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2011, pp. 170–183.
- [14] Leonardo da Vinci. *Medusa*. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.