
Masters Theses

Student Theses and Dissertations

1930

The social and political philosophy of Shelley as revealed in his poetry

Eulalie Imogene Powell

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsmine.mst.edu/masters_theses



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Department:

Recommended Citation

Powell, Eulalie Imogene, "The social and political philosophy of Shelley as revealed in his poetry" (1930). *Masters Theses*. 6658.

https://scholarsmine.mst.edu/masters_theses/6658

This thesis is brought to you by Scholars' Mine, a service of the Missouri S&T Library and Learning Resources. This work is protected by U. S. Copyright Law. Unauthorized use including reproduction for redistribution requires the permission of the copyright holder. For more information, please contact scholarsmine@mst.edu.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SHELLEY
AS REVEALED IN HIS POETRY

BY

EULALIE POWELL

A

THESIS

submitted to the faculty of the

SCHOOL OF MINES AND METALLURGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

in partial fulfillment of the work required for the

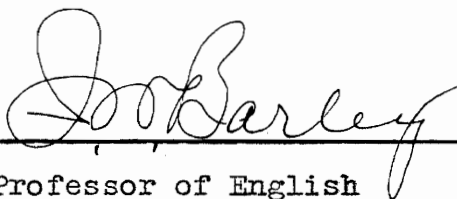
Degree Of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Rolla, Mo

1930

APPROVED BY



Professor of English

36400

Table of Contents

	Page
I. Introduction	1
II. Shelley's Debt to William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft	5
a. Godwin <u>An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice</u>	
b. Shelley's Creed as Differing From Godwin's	
c. Wollstonecraft <u>The Vindications of Women</u>	
III. Shelley, the Youthful Philosopher	15
a. Early Influences	
b. <u>Queen Mab</u>	
IV. The Maturing Shelley	33
a. Domestic Troubles	
b. Long Poems of Period: <u>Alastor, Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, The Revolt of Islam.</u>	
V. Shelley At His Best	54
a. Home in Italy	
b. Poems of Period: <u>Prometheus Unbound, The Mask of Anarchy, Peter Bell, The Witch of Atlas, Swellfoot the Tyrant, Epipsychidion, Adonais, Hellas.</u>	
c. Death of Shelley	
VI. Conclusion	103

11-18-30 Northwestern Bdy 11.25 Bdy.

I

Introduction

The interest in a study of the philosophy of Shelley does not lie in the hope of discovering anything new, since there is little in anyone's belief that is without historic parallel. Rather, the sources of such an interest are first, the medium of poetry through which Shelley expressed his belief, and secondly, the transference of these beliefs into the acts of his life. It is to a consideration of the first of these that this paper is limited. Biographical facts will be used only for the elucidation of the theories expressed in his poems.

Briefly, the purpose of this essay is to show that Shelley embodied in many of his poems his belief in : (1) the strength of the human will in overcoming the wrong, and in leading to action; (2) the use of reason in the rectifying of all evils; and (3) the power of love to create, inspire, and perfect.

From these somewhat abstract theories come the more familiar elements of Shelley's philosophy.

He believed the human will to be a power able to overcome the superstitions of man inherent in his religious beliefs, his fear, his blind obedience. The will can make man endure torture for the sake of the right rather than yield to tyranny. Woman through the power of the will can rise from her debased position to one of honor. Will is almost supreme, yielding only to necessity:

"Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing
power

Necessity! the caprice

Of man's weak will belongs no more
to thee

Than do the changeful passions of
his breast

To thy unvarying harmony."¹

Shelley would have reason used where force was wont to be, to banish scenes of bloodshed, the tyranny of monarchs, and the authority of religious institutions. He believes reason or the mind to be creative, with the power to make a world which, while not material, is more real and more enduring than the physical world. Love he makes equally creative with the mind, but less ethereal, since it can bring peace and joy

1 Percy Bysshe Shelley: Queen Mab, Part Vi, ll. 197-203

to the people and creatures of earth as they exist. By the unselfish suffering of one, love works for the happiness of the many. It is humanitarian in its breadth embracing the poorest of humanity and the weakest of living things. It protests against the shedding of blood for food or wantonⁿness. Through the combining of will, reason, and love Shelley visualizes a perfect world, a millenium wherein

"A brighter morn awaits the
human day,

When every transfer of earth's
natural gifts

Shall be a commerce of good
words and works;

When poverty and wealth, the
thirst of fame,

The fear of infamy, disease
and woe,

War with its million horrors
and fierce hell,

Shall live but in the memory
of time."²

He believes in the perfect adjustment of our whole social and political system. In the principal chapters of this paper, this belief will be traced from Queen Mab to Hellas.

To accomplish the purpose mentioned above it seems best first, to consider in part the sources of Shelley's ideas, especially in the acknowledgement of his debt to William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft; secondly, to show how he absorbed, diverged from, and altered their theories; and last, by illustrations from his poems to show the presence of his philosophy in his poetry.

II
 Shelley's Debt
 to
 William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft

Shelley's devotion to the doctrines taught in the works of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft is evident from his absorption of their theories into his own philosophy. Godwin's An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, read by Shelley when he was an Eton schoolboy, was the principal philosophic work of the time. Perhaps a brief survey of the theories in this book that were accepted or partially accepted by Shelley would serve as a fit precursor to a discussion of the beliefs of Godwin's poetical disciple. Reading from one who lived in an age when reason was enthroned, we might expect the dictum: "The reason has unlimited power over the emotions."¹ His attitude toward crime illustrates this belief. The criminal is not to blame for any crime; instead he is merely an agent in the protest against coercion. Punishment is used because there is thought to be a unity of idea between crime and suffering. No such unity exists. "The only measure of equity is utility, and whatever is not attended with any beneficial purpose is not just."² Punishment is only to do

1 William Godwin: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice
 Introduction p. XXI

2 Ibid. Book VII, Chapter I

good. If it will help the guilty, he should have it. Likewise, if it will make of the innocent a better citizen, he, too, should have it. There is no such thing as desert. He who administers punishment on a fellow-man with a view to the past and not the future administers it in vain. All of which argument seems very reasonable if it would only really work. It remained for Shelley to demand its practice.

However, the power of reason, according to Godwin, does not stop with the restraining of criminals. It can undertake and accomplish revolutions. Argument and persuasion are the only weapons that need be used. Then, too, things may not be righted at once. We should be willing to wait even for years for the realization of our hopes, in the meantime ever working for the truth. To Godwin in his maturity there was a placidity in waiting that was not present in the enthusiasm of Shelley. The pupil believed in the emotional conversion,³ the quick-springing growth, while the master said, "The seeds⁴ of virtue may appear to perish before they germinate".

This supreme power of reason, able to carry on bloodless revolutions, is just as able to destroy the forces of evil which institutions have brought upon the

³ Cf. Brailsford p. 236

⁴ Godwin Book IV, Chapter II, Section 4

earth. The equality of man must be granted. True the mental powers of one often exceed the mental powers of another, but this only should be the test of merit. We are equal and alike in many ways. Our senses, our feelings, our pleasures, and our pains are similar; hence, we need the same improvements and the same opportunities. Institutions would destroy this right. They would forget justice and increase the feeling of inequality by fostering injustice and wrong. Though the very poor and down-trodden, he admits, may not have an acute sense of injustice, such a condition does not take away the evil of unjust acts. Besides the direct harm of an act of injustice, it takes away the faith in the future, thus making a strong spirit weak. If we support that which we know to be unjust, we will soon lose our strong sensibility of the right. That this is done in our governmental institutions is a further argument for their annihilation. The minority are almost forced to support what they feel to be wrong in national assemblies. To avoid disagreeableness, they assent to the will of the majority. Argument and reason are used too little to enable either side to see what is really right. And, anyhow, one must live. Godwin at no time preaches the doctrine of active rebellion against an existing force. Since government means the ex-

ercise of force, we obey because we have no remedy. It is not ~~immoral~~ to give that which will be taken by force. But such a bending of the will is not really obedience. Obedience and intellect go together. We should not obey what we do not understand. When man "surrenders his reason, and becomes the participant of implicit faith and passive obedience, he is the most mischievous of all animals".⁵

Godwin's protest against tyranny settles around the monarch himself. Nor even here is the blame to rest on the despot alone. His education and treatment from infancy have been such as to distort his mind, giving him a sense of the divinity which he thinks is his. To be educated a man must have mixed pretty freely with men, have felt emotions and expressed them, have observed the human mind in its many intentions. But a prince has no such education. Always he is trained to consider himself better than all around him. His servants cater to him to secure his favor. Simple truth is ever kept from him. Because he is kept in the darkness of falsehood, his maturer years reveal him as a stranger to the people he is to govern. Instead of a forward-looking leader, the nation has one fed with the food of tradition and

⁵Ibid: Book III, Chapter IV

nursed in the lap of falsehood.

Man must have the power of discernment to help in the welfare of others. This power a monarch cannot have because he is perpetually deceived by his ministers regarding the condition of his people and his country. Ministers and their subordinates live upon the smile of their superiors; so the king is unavoidably a despot. The rich are insolent and usurping, aggravating the unhappiness of their inferiors who think luxury and felicity synonymous, and buying mercy and the power of legislation. Hence, laws are always against the poor. Every man should have a share in his government since there is no reason for any to govern others, remembering that "all private considerations⁶ should yield to the general good."

Such a statement, however, does not take away our right of private judgment. We should not suffer a war we object to. There are, according to Godwin, only two reasons for war: (1) the defense of our own liberty; and (2) the defense of the liberty of others. It is true that such a defense may be called anarchy. Anarchy has slain hundreds while despotism has sacrificed millions. Anarchy, moreover, is shortlived; despotism is almost immortal. Anarchy is a dreadful remedy, but a sure one. If not opposed

6 Ibid: Book III, Chapter IV

by despotism, reason would soon lead it into a calm, peaceful result, for "Reason is at all times progressive".⁷

Despotism, however, is not willing to allow the full exercise of reason. "The general idea is that the government should aid in keeping the minds of its subjects free from ideas that are pernicious".⁸ Yet all religions, by their ideals, at least, believe in vast knowledge, and in the use of this knowledge for the spreading of wisdom and justice. Differences in opinion can do no harm so long as the government does not interfere. But just here is the cause of so much error. That fear of future punishment should be taught people to keep them from so much evil is the argument of many divines and politicians. The tendency of a code of religious conformity is to guard against degeneracy and decline, but to make no advance. Stagnation is impossible with a nation. It either declines or advances. Moreover, a set religious code makes men hypocrites. The clergy pretend to follow things which they do not really believe, and the people either take up these false ideas or despise their leaders.

All this authoritative power would disappear with the simplification of government for, if man is vicious, it is because he has been made so by injustice and hypocrisy. Godwin, following the trend of thought of other rev-

⁷ Ibid: Book V, Chapter XI

⁸ Ibid: Book VI, Chapter III

olutionary leaders, had no faith in the innate tendencies of man. He is what he is because of environment and heredity. The doctrine of the perfectibility of man follows such a theory inevitably. That man is perfectible is shown by his improvements in methods of communication. If perfectible in this, there is every reason to believe that it is only a question of time until man in his social and political life may be perfect.

Godwin in this book became the promulgator of principles that were to be revived twenty-five years later in the poetry of Shelley. Many theories of Shelley are but poetical repetitions of those of Godwin. Those he followed most implicitly were: (1) the power of reason to overcome crime, to bring about bloodless revolutions, and to destroy the evils left by institutions; and (2) the doctrine of man's perfectibility. However, in many of his later poems, Shelley has, probably unconsciously, changed the philosophy of Godwin to one less materialistic and rationalistic. These changes may be summed up briefly thus: (1) the importance attached to reason by Godwin has developed in Shelley into a devotion to the world of thought; (2) Shelley has demanded the freedom of the mind advocated by Godwin, but has further emphasized this freedom by an opposition to tyranny in all its

forms; (3) the "anarchical individualism" of the older philosopher has approached the idea of a "humanitarian brotherhood and the authority of the wise"⁹ in the younger; and (4) Shelley has broken away from the theory of Godwin's slow evolution to perfection and from his plan of doing the greatest good to the greatest number to an acceptance of love as the ruling power of the world, and the creation of the happiness of earth and the bliss of eternity. If we add to this list Shelley's belief in the rightful place of woman by the side of man, we may accept it as at least the major part of his creed.

This last theory, while an outgrowth of an innate sense of justice and reverence, was doubtless formulated by the teachings of Mary Wollstonecraft, a member of the later famous Godwinian circle, and a woman whose writings were read and loved by Shelley.¹⁰ While her voice was not the first to be heard in protest against the status of women it wielded the greatest influence of that time.¹¹ It is perhaps a little difficult for women of the twentieth century to realize the position of woman at the time of the French Revolution. Even Rousseau says, contemporaneously and honestly regarding the education of women: "To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, to take care of us when grown-up, to

⁹ Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian: A History of English Literature, page 1085

¹⁰ Andre' Maurois: Ariel, page 147

¹¹ Brailsford: page 206 ff.

advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable",¹² all this, he says, is the duty of women. The prevailing theories of the day were full of high ideals, buth they were forwarded by men and not by women. Submission, the art of pleasing, agreeableness, and ignorance seemed the only requirements woman need aspire to.

A few, indeed, were beginning to realize that woman had her own place in life. Baron Holbach is one of the pioneers in the field of woman's rights. He foretells the future freedom of woman, attacks her position of inferiority and the grave dangers facing the women of the poorer classes, and mentions the possibility of women's political rights having recognition. Condorcet, years later, pleaded for the broader education of women; that the home and family, the seat of social reform, might be bettered by the removal of that domestic inequality that fosters later tyranny.

But Mary Wollstonecraft was a woman, with a woman's viewpoint and sympathy. Facing her own personal problems bravely, she with a heart full of love for humanity, yearned to help others. In her Vindication of the Rights of Women she takes a stand taken by only a very few in her day that there must be a "revision of the attitude

of men toward women, and of women toward themselves."¹³
 Though she barely hints at the possibility of women being represented in the government, she seems to know that this is not their first need. The revolutionary movement had allowed reason supreme. Mary Wollstonecraft uses this belief as proof of the tyranny to which women were subjected. She demands the broad education of her sex with the result that there will then be no blind obedience to the sensual tyrant. Women, she asserts, can never be virtuous until they are independent of men. They have been pretty to arouse emotions, never strong to influence to virtue. "Liberty is the mother of virtue,"¹⁴ and women will never be what they could be without this liberty. They should not be the mistresses of men, but their companions. Here is no radical demand. She does not preach the tailor-suited type of masculinity in women but she pleads that woman may lead her own life. She would not detract from their femininity. Though motherhood is the primary duty of woman, she still thinks that certain trades and professions should be open to them. With the brave understanding of a woman who had suffered from the social Pharisees, she attacks the double standard of morality

¹³ Brailsford: page 207

¹⁴ Brailsford: page 209

set for the sexes. This she did before the birth of the little Mary Godwin whose life was later to wind about the life of another prophet of woman's emancipation, Percy B. Shelley.

III

Shelley, the Youthful Philosopher

Arcadias and Utopias are as old as humanity. That they are evanescent and transitory has never detracted from their charm. The Garden of Eden is still a place of beauty and a human dream home in spite of the expulsion of our earthly parents. Youth especially lives in its dreamland. Shelley, an Eton school boy, set apart from his fellows because of his beliefs, lying on the bank of a stream, poring over Godwin's Political Justice was merely living in his Utopia, the right of every normal youth. It is true that the ever-pressing needs of the world will not leave us to passive enjoyment. The droning voices of his imprisoned school companions came to him as the call of his fellow-men under the hand of tyrants, and the desire to help them was born:

"So without shame I spoke:- I
will be wise,

And just, and free, and mild,
if in me lies

Such power, for I grow weary
to behold

The selfish and the strong
still tyrannize

Without reproach or check".¹

Surely not a very revolutionary rebel, this delicate boy who had every reason to hate the companions he was pitying. The artificial atmosphere of the school, with the tyrannical power of the masters, was to his freedom-loving soul the world he was to liberate from the forces of wrong. One finds much in these early years of Shelley's life to explain the attitude of defiance so much deplored later by his father and the school and college authorities. Left much to his ~~own~~^{own} devices to secure amusement for himself and little sisters, he seems rarely to have felt the restraint of authority. Bright, self-willed, and affectionate, he filled the hours of childhood with happy, wild dreams and hair-raising experiments. Confronted suddenly with the strict discipline of the

1 Shelley, Percy Bysshe: The Revolt of Islam - To Mary, Stanza IV

schools of the time, and by boyish cruelty and heartlessness, he easily became the victim of the one and the foe of the other. Oxford, however, presented the companionship and leisure his active spirit needed. But once more the dragon of authority assailed the youthful author of The Necessity of Atheism. Hogg, his friend and constant companion, says that he can never forget the look and tones of the disgraced boy when he first told of his expulsion from the college. Had there been a sympathetic home to receive him, it seems likely that many of his rebellious protests would never have been written. Shocked by the disgrace, and entirely unable to understand rebellious youth, Sir Timothy Shelley once for all threw away the opportunity to contribute to the happiness of his gifted son.

The paternal discipline created a feeling of injury in Shelley coupled with a restlessness only too dangerous for the impulsive lad. His meeting with Harriet Westbrook and her subsequent pursuit of him are well known. There is nothing strange in Shelley's abduction by Harriet. For one as sincere as Shelley to do a thing he really did not believe in, that is, take part in the marriage ceremony, shows the hand and power of a pursuing woman. Not that Shelley was un-

happy. Believing, as the deeply sincere do, that those who seemed to be sympathetic really were so, he incorporated the pretty little Harriet into his own idealism. She believed what he believed. Together they set out as reformers of the Irish condition. That Harriet got a good deal of childish fun and nothing else out of the escapade seems never to have irked Shelley.

During the first two years of their marriage, Shelley was constantly working for the cause of political and religious freedom. The methods of peaceable assembly and discussion emphasized in his prose works of the time, and reminding one rather strongly of William Godwin, is apparent in much of his later poetry. Though not published until 1813, Queen Mab had been in formation for three years. The poem is a strong protest against the prevailing religious beliefs. It is rather crude and unmistakably Godwinian, but full of the emotional sincerity found in all his poems. At the time he wrote it, he believed just what he wrote. Later he protested against a re-publication of the poem because he feared it " ' better fitted to injure than to serve the sacred cause of freedom.' " ²

"Queen Mab is nothing but Godwin in verse,

with prose notes which quote or summarize him."³

While Godwin seemed able to stand without his theories, Shelley's became a part of him. If he did not create, he breathed in the breath of life, and the perfect forms created by Godwin became vital, pulsing, and beautiful. He worshipped Godwin from his Eton days to the day of his death. It is true there came a time when he saw too clearly his idol's clay feet, but his eyes, to a great extent, remained kindly blinded. Although he cannot be regarded as only Godwinian in his beliefs, neither can he be said to escape the influence of the cold reasoning of Godwin on his own impressionable imagination.

In Queen Mab Shelley voices his desire to reform the world. "He saw, in a fervent call on his fellow-creatures to share alike the blessings of the creation, to love and serve each other, the noblest work that life and time permitted him. In this spirit he composed Queen Mab."⁴ Ianthe, following the Fairy to the gorgeous car, ascending through the illusory, tinted clouds, touched always with the imagination of a poet, and reaching at last the ethereal palace, is the soul of humanity longing for beauty and

³ Brailsford, page 175

⁴ Mrs. Shelley's note on Queen Mab, Woodberry

freedom. Resting in the Hall of Spells, Ianthe learns from Queen Mab the ruin of the past, the evils of the present, and the glories of the future. Before Queen Mab presents to the intellectual eye of the spirit of Ianthe the panoramic view of the world through the centuries, she issues a command, the theme of which is to sound again and again in the poems of Shelley:

5
"Learn to make others happy."

The sole purpose of life was to Shelley as it was to the characters of his poems, the securing of the happiness of those about him. The virtue which would be happy within itself he counted as nothing. Only that which would bear fruit was worth while to Shelley. And perhaps here is the greatest difference between Godwin and Shelley. The philosopher was willing to expound his theories; the poet must live them. Sure that they were right, he still had the desire of a scientist to try them out. He must satisfy himself that the means of happiness be within the reach of everyone. Nor has he even in this earliest poem that callousness to suffering that we sometimes ascribe to the youth that is just reaching maturity. The sympathy and love for all of earth's creatures remind us that this is a poet

speaking, sensitive to every emotion, cognizant of every creature. The tiny insect has a life

" And the minutest throb
That through their frame diffuses
The slightest faintest motion,
Is fixed and indispensable
As the majestic laws
That rule yon rolling orb."

6

This humanitarianism of Shelley that caused him to regard the inhabitants of the entire world as his fellow-creatures endeared him to many. Little children found in him a companion who could be one of them. The story of Shelley, as a college youth, feeding bread and milk to a hungry, homely little girl with his own hand, is related by the sympathetic Hogg. The many charitable acts throughout his life are concrete examples of the philosophy of a far-reaching brotherhood, bringing everlasting joy, as he has his Ianthe say:

" ' For when the power of imparting joy
Is equal to the will, the human soul
Requires no other heaven.' "

7

6 Ibid, Part II lines 238-243

7 Ibid, Part III lines 11-13

Contrasted to this are presented the horrible conditions of monarchy, an unhappy king pleading for a peace which can never be his. All the emotions of a freedom-loving spirit and the protest against tyranny and wrong are expressed in the words that make a position of selfish power a Hell. The helplessness of the tyrant in the throes of his environment recall the words of Godwin regarding the monarch. A better understanding of his position is aroused when he mutters that

" '..... the unconquered powers
Of precedent and custom interpose⁸
Between a king and virtue.' "

These words show the insight of a reformer who laments the impotence of the thousands under tyrants who submit because they always have. The condition of the monarch and subject, he contends, is contrary to nature and will be overcome

" '..... when reason's voice,
Loud as the voice of Nature, shall
shall have waked⁹
The nations; ' "

another quotation reminiscent of Godwin and the Age of Reason.

8 Ibid. Part III lines 97-99

9 Ibid. Part III lines 126-128

With a fine contempt for the "gilded flies"¹⁰ who, living lives of indolence, allow others to slave and toil, "to drag out in labor a protracted death,"¹⁰ that these parasites may "glut their grandeur," Shelley furiously attacks the systems of autocracy giving as their source, vice with all its attendant evils. Not without hope is the world, however, for he has faith in the reason of man, that, in the maturity of his powers, he will reject the unnaturalness of the hectic glare of the court for a life of truth.

The prevailing form of religion with its hypocrisy and tyranny he also discloses. The idea of a God that men have had, with a religion which has caused so much bloodshed, created such fear, and which has been fostered by tradition and falsehood, he spurns. Such a god is the god of ambition, of power, and of punishment. In its place he puts the

" ' Spirit of Nature! all-suffering
Power,

Necessity. Thou mother of the world.

Unlike the God of human error, thou¹¹
Requirest no prayers or praises. ' "

Just what were Shelley's ideas of religion at the time this poem was written is not easy to tell. He

¹⁰ Ibid, Part III, lines 115-116

¹¹ Ibid, Part VI, lines 197-198

had repudiated the conventional belief of a God who has created a weak being, permits temptation, and then punishes eternally because of the yielding to that temptation. The idea of a God who gave his son to die for the world, and then worked malice against those who rejected him, allowing all this to be followed by scenes of bloodshed in his name, - small wonder is it that the sensitive soul of Shelley would shrink from such a creed. He had branded himself an atheist and thereby brought down on his head much buffeting that he would have been spared, had he been content to remain silent as to his beliefs. But such a silence would have been for Shelley an act of cowardice. To have seemed what he was not was a form of guilt absolutely foreign to his nature. Likewise, he lacked the egoism of the perfect romanticist. While it is true he created again and again a character in whose lineaments and ideals we cannot fail to see the poet, even this pseudo-Shelley inevitably gave his whole life and being for the sake of others.¹² His own thoughts and experiences he seemed to affix to the thoughts and ex-

12 Cf. the youth in Alastor, Laon in The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus in Prometheus Unbound

periences of his fellowmen. Back of the evils of the world, the poverty, crime, drudgery, and debased living that he describes in Queen Mab there is the hopeful idealism of the youthful poet. The rich and poor together are slaves, but they have hope:

" Yet every heart contains perfection's
germ." 13

He then visualizes the perfect being,

"..... of cloudless brain,
Untainted passion, elevated will,

Which death

..... might alone subdue." 14

We know of course that we are not perfect, but the dream of perfection belongs to man's innate subconsciousness, that thought-chamber which its owner scarcely enters, keeping it closed to the curious and familiar. The longing for that "untainted passion" is there. Because we occasionally feel its presence we are sure of its attainability. Human waywardness too soon rushes back and stains the pure thoughts; but, because we have realized a brief Elysium, we cannot truthfully scoff at the idea of that "cloudless being" with its one conqueror, Death. Even this master presents no dread, but in this world where reason and passion are as sisters,- a world

13 Queen Mab Part V, line 147; 14 Ibid., lines 154-158

without law, - death is merely a gate to another country,
 Without the diseases or pains of old age, one may at last
 find that

" Mild was the slow necessity of death,
 The tranquil spirit failed beneath
 its grasp,
 Without a groan, almost without a
 fear,
 Calm as a voyager to some distant
 land
 And full of wonder, full of hope as he." 15

The world will not always be full of the evils
 that we see. The very physical nature of earth will be
 as it should be, - perfect. Man, no longer hurt by the
 extremities of heat or cold will stand

16
 " Immortal upon earth."

Nor will he stand among his fellowmen only. All crea-
 tures of earth will be his equals. No longer will there
 be scenes of cruelty and bloodshed, instituted by the
 lords of creation,

" no longer now
 He slays the lamb that looks him
 in the face,
 And horribly devours his mangled
 flesh," 17

for there is no need of this flesh as food, the law of

15 Ibid. Part IX, lines 57-61; 16 Ibid. Part VIII, lines 211

17 Ibid. Part VIII, lines 211-213

Nature being now never broken. The birds are play-fellows of little children, and man associates, undreaded, with his equals, the earth-creatures secure in his peaceful, healthful home, decorated only with the gem of truth. There is no prostitution because there is no prudish chastity, forcing wrongs to be committed. Instead the souls " with kindred sympathies " ¹⁸ associate in freedom, unabashed by the world's conventional opinion. Woman, formerly the slave and pet of man, as she is described by Mary Wollstonecraft, moves freely by man's side:

" Woman and man in confidence and love,
Equal and free and pure, together trod,
The mountain paths of virtue, which no
more

Were stained with blood from many a
pilgrim's feet." ¹⁹

In this ideal world there is no friction. There are no rulers, no churches, no prisons. Institutions for ^{not} the restraint of criminals are needed for there is no crime, no need for crime. The churches built to please a ruler have become a ruin. Little children play about the prisons, and the sunshine falls through the ruins

¹⁸ Ibid. Part IX, line 78 ; ¹⁹ Ibid. Part IX lines 89-92

on their happy faces.

True to Godwin in the latter part of the poem, Shelley does not predict that this change will be sudden. The spirit is warned to pursue

" ' The gradual paths of an aspiring change.' " ²⁰

There is still much to be done, but the duties of the human spirit is manifold:

"..... thy will

Is destined an eternal war to wage

With tyranny and falsehood,
and uproot

The germ of misery from the human heart." ²¹

The spirit of the French Revolution is still alive, guiding the pen of a rebel against the causes of the world's misery.

Immature as is Queen Mab, imitative and inconsistent as it is branded, it is remarkable for the age of its author. Very few of his other early poems show aught of his political or social ideas. A few give a reflection of a very precocious boy's hopes and dreams. He saw with keen eyes, however, many of the evils of the day, and fearlessly attacked them. The govern-

20 Ibid. Part IX, line 147

21 Ibid. lines 189-192

ment's use of its power to draft soldiers among all classes he condemns in a little poem sent to Miss Hitchener, January 7, 1812. He said the facts were real, the usual sad story of an aged, broken-hearted mother forced to give up her only son to the government:

" When the tyrant's bloodhounds forced
the child

For his cursed power unhallowed arms to
wield -

Bend to another's will -. " 22

The son returns broken in health and spirit, and Shelley's repudiation of the social inequality existing is expressed in the lines:

"And now cold charity's unwelcome dole
Was insufficient to support the pair
And they would perish rather than bear
The law's stern slavery, and the
insolent stare." 23

To the same period belong some impassioned poems on liberty. The people of all countries fighting for freedom were the brothers of Shelley. To the Mexicans he addresses an appeal to continue the start

22 Shelley's: A Tale of Society as It Is, Section II

23 Ibid, Section VII

made toward freedom, assuring them of his sympathy.
Even in this country beyond the Atlantic that he may
never see, he is sure that

24

"Love shall burst the captive's prison."

The impetuosity of the poet cools somewhat into the
patience of the philosopher when he reflects that liberty
does not spring quickly from slavery:

"Thou art a conqueror Time; all things
give way

Before thee but the 'fixed and virtuous
will.' " 25

He does not ever quite escape from the influence of
Godwin during these earlier years. Even in the rollick-
ing ballad, "The Devil's Walk," Shelley temporarily
puts aside the weapon of love which he uses so effectually
in later poems, and has the Devil's fall come from
the blow of Reason:

"But were the Devil's sight as keen
As Reason's penetrating eye,
His sulphurous Majesty I ween
Would find but little cause for joy."

24 Shelley: To the Republicans of North America, St. II

25 Shelley: To Ireland, St. II

"For the sons of Reason see
 That, ere fate consumes the Pole,
 The false Tyrant's cheek shall be
 Bloodless as his coward soul."²⁶

IV

The Maturing Shelley

The year 1814 marks a great change in the life of Shelley. The growing coldness of Harriet, shown by her entire disregard of his wishes in putting the baby in the care of a wet-nurse, her demands for a carriage and for finery that was really beyond Shelley's means of providing, and her growing lack of sympathy with the things he loved began to have an effect. She, being apparently more content with the Westbrooks than with him, spent a great deal of her time with them. Shelley, thrown on his own resources, sought sympathy and happiness with his friends, the Boinvilles, where he found a depth of emotions and intellectuality that was never really present in Harriet. It is evident, too that about this same time he became acquainted

26 Shelley: The Devil's Walk, Sts. 29 and 30

with Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, with whom he was thereafter to be connected. There is no need to attempt to lift all blame from Shelley in the events that followed. Nor is Harriet blameless. The possibility of her unfaithfulness has been suggested as a reason for the separation, but this seems unlikely. There is nothing in any of Shelley's letters to her to indicate that he believed it, and from what we know of Shelley's attitude toward crime, it seems unlikely that he would voluntarily have used such a reason as an excuse for leaving Harriet. His openly expressed opinions on the subject of marriage were, as he thought, shared by Harriet. To him there seemed no wrong in transferring his affections to Mary Godwin, then a prematurely minded girl of sixteen. She, being a follower of the teachings of both father and mother, likewise saw no wrong in the step she took. That the conventional, judging world of England did see the wrong was inevitable. That a man could be a friend to his wife and love and live with another woman seems to have been as inconceivable then as now. With the traditional idea of a home as the basis of social life, people are too prone to forget that a home is an impossible institution without love. To

Shelley, affection given and received was a necessary part of life. When this was gone, there remained only his kindness of heart and sense of justice. That this kindness did not extend to the unselfish giving up of Mary, and to the devoting of himself to his wife and child, must but add to the growing list of his inconsistencies, and indubitably human characteristics. One palliating factor lies in the memory of Shelley's first connection with Harriet. In a letter found but recently, he says:

"Our connection was not one of passion
and impulse. Friendship was its basis,
and on this basis it has enlarged and
¹
strengthened."

He appeals to Harriet to let him be her friend, her brother. He even, with the inborn tactlessness of a man, "wishes she could see Mary." The toleration that Harriet had evidently exhibited in her letter, probably with the hope of thus winning him back, he thanks her for as a child believing and trusting in a woman. In another letter he again asks her to allow him to superintend her after life. He evidently thinks it would be entirely possible for all three of them to live together. That Harriet's dependent nature must

1 Leslie Hotson: *The Atlantic Monthly*, Jan. 1930, p. 129
A Letter No. 2

have caused her to seek sympathy and advice in this crisis of her life is evident from his words: "Suffice to your own self, and despise the miserable compassion of those who cannot esteem or love."² He fails to understand how Harriet can feel injured at his taking up with Mary, when he has always been, and is still so ready to help her. He thinks that Harriet, if generous or even just, should be kind to the woman he has selected as the "noblest and most excellent of human beings."³ The inability of a perfectly sincere nature to understand deceit is nowhere more evident than in Shelley's helplessness before the scheming, ambitious Westbrooks. Harriet, influenced by her sister, Eliza, and her friends, had done enough to enrage even the good-natured Shelley. She had gone to his solicitor, Amory, and told⁴ everything concerning their separation. Having learned this, and that the ever-active Eliza had been telling of their father's intention to "..... take legal steps in consequence" of Shelley's conduct, he says: "The memory of our former kindness, the hope that you might still not be lost to virtue and generosity would influence me, even now, to concede far more than the law will force."⁴

2 Ibid: B Letter, No. 2, page 132; 3 Ibid,

4 Ibid: D Letter, No. 5

Depressed and indignant by this double-dealing from one he had learned to trust, he reproaches her not without a good deal of justice:

"I was an idiot to expect greatness or generosity from you, that when an occasion of the sublimest virtue occurred, you would fail to play a part of mean and despicable selfishness."⁵

While it is entirely possible that Harriet was scantily provided for at the beginning of their separation, the same was rather more true as regarded Shelley and Mary. He provided regularly for Harriet and the two children as soon as his financial affairs were settled.

Dejected by these events as well as by the constant presence of a dread of pulmonary troubles, Shelley shows a solemnity and calmness in the writings of 1815 in sharp contrast to the fiery exhortations of Queen Mab. In Alastor, Shelley unveils the mental movements he was at this^{time} experiencing. A youth is represented, one who has drunk deep "at the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate."⁶ His longing for intercourse with a being of an intelligence like his own results in the imaginary creation of such a being. Disappointed by

5 Ibid.

6 Shelley's Preface to Alastor

his vain search for this intelligence, he dies prematurely. In a sense the life of this youth is a direct antithesis to the ideal of Shelley. There is no sympathy with mankind, no desire to be of service, but only a deadening, vain delusion, that ends in its love. "Those who love not their fellow-beings," he says, "live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable death."⁷ This great love for humanity and for every creature is the Shelleyan creed apart from the Godwinian benevolence:

"..... no bright bird, insect, or
gentle beast

I consciously have injured,
but still loved

And cherished these, my kindred."⁸

In addition to this strong sympathy for the weak, there is, in this poem and in several later ones, the expression of that intense longing for the perfect mate, the passionate outpouring of a mind needing a kindred mind to understand and love. Perfect love and understanding do not exist except in high idealism. If they did, social problems would be solved and the world

⁷ Ibid,

⁸ Shelley's Alastor, ll. 13-15

would be a heaven. As Shelley grew older he relied less and less on weak, human characteristics, and more on the satisfying creations of the world of thought. He believed in what he calls "intellectual beauty" or the power of the mind to work magic in the world, to right all its wrongs, and to free its people from slavery. His appeal to this spirit voices his ever-present desire to help others:

"Thus let they power
 to my onward life supply
 Its calm, to one who worships thee,
 And every form containing thee
 Whom, spirit fair, thy spells did
 bind,
 To fear himself, and love all humankind."⁹

His desire to "love all humankind" met its greatest test in the trying events following the finding of Harriet's body in the Serpentine River, December 10, 1816. Although free from the consciousness of having acted from evil motives, Shelley suffered keenly at times from the pangs of self-reproach. The thought of the sweet face of Harriet, bloated and stained from the effect of the water, sometimes taxed to the utmost

9 Shelley Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Stanza VII

the enduring powers of Shelley. They had lived and suffered together. He had abandoned her at a time when her need was greatest, and, though the cause of her death cannot so justly be laid at his door as at that of her unjust family, his sensitive, honest soul suffered. On only one occasion that we know does he give expression to the remorse that was his because of Harriet's death. He had fallen into a fit of gloomy abstraction while walking with his friend, Peacock. On Peacock's attempting to rally him, he had answered with a rudeness, foreign to his usual gentleness. Referring to this unreasonableness the following day, he said, " ' I will tell you what I would not tell anybody else. I was thinking of Harriet. ' "

The marriage with Mary took place near the last of the month. Shelley's reason for the allowing of this ceremony is similar to that of Godwin's in marrying Mary Wollstonecraft, the fact that he had no right to bring more unhappiness on a woman through refusing to take the vows of marriage. The attempt to secure the care of his children was foiled by the Westbrooks. The judgment of Lord Eldon was against

10 Woodberry: Introduction , p. XXXIV; also cf. Symonds, page 92, and note, page 93

Shelley because of his atheistical views and immorality. Queen Mab had been used as chief proof of his unfitness for the care of the children. Not only were his feelings those of an outraged father, but also those of a captive slave, subject to the injustice of a tyrant master. He had hoped to train the young minds

" To gentlest love, such as the
wisest teach," 11

but instead they were to be given to the care of hirelings and reared to the belief in the falsehoods that his soul detested. With a bitter hate, unlike Shelley, he curses this tyrant:

"By the false cant which on their
innocent lips

Must hang like poison on an
opening bloom,

By the dark creeds which cover
with eclipse

Their pathway from the cradle
to the tomb." 12

This fear of the power of the law was renewed a little later when he heard of a hint to deprive him of Mary's first-born. The despair regarding the future of his children had grown, and those whom he had hoped to

11 To the Lord Chancellor, Stanza VII

12 Ibid, Stanza X

make "fearless and free,"

"To a blighting faith and a cause
of crime

They have bound them slaves in
youthful prime

And they will curse my name and
thee, (his son, William)

Because we are fearless and free."¹³

This rather personal rebellion against tyranny finds a fuller and broader expression in The Revolt of Islam. In this poem Shelley returns somewhat to the social and political ideals of Queen Mab. At the time of writing The Revolt of Islam, the Shelleys were living at Marlow in Buckinghamshire. This was a habitation of poor people. The women were lace-makers, earning little. The sufferings were increased by the results of a long war and bad harvest. Shelley, in his sympathy, helped them all he could, but the land was full of disease and death. Some of this local coloring steals into the poem. Shelley says he wrote this when he thought death was near. Fearful lest he might die before his thoughts were told, he gave to the world the sincere beliefs of his heart. Though he had lost much of "the eager spirit which believed it

13 To William Shelley, St. II

could achieve what it projected for the benefit of mankind,"¹⁴ he retained his belief in the ultimate effect of love, goodness, and virtue, together with wisdom and eloquence.

The poem under its first title of Laon and Cythna merely increased the feelings of prejudice aroused by Queen Mab. The publisher, realizing the attitude of the reading public toward the relationship of Laon with his sister-bride Cythna, induced Shelley to alter this relationship. The poem with this change appeared in 1818 as The Revolt of Islam. The purpose of the poem as he said was "to kindle a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice can ever wholly extinguish among mankind."¹⁵ Furthermore he proposed to show love as the "sole law which should govern the moral world."¹⁶ The seeming failure of the French Revolution has had its effect in demoralizing the world's thinking, but the belief in the returning sanity of people, and in the slow but sure progress of democracy is making itself

14 Cf. Mrs. Shelley's note on The Revolt of Islam

15 Shelley's Preface to The Revolt of Islam

16 Ibid.

felt. The struggle between the eagle and serpent, in the first canto, is representative of the struggle between oppression and right. Now in midair, now low on the crest of the waves they strive, grow weak, regain strength, and fall again, until at last the eagle or the power of evil is triumphant, and the serpent, the spirit of good, repulsed by the world, sinks into the sea, wounded but not dead; therefore not without a hope of some day renewing and winning the battle. Shelley's deliberate flouting of public opinion is again emphasized by his wilfully regarding the serpent, from the time of Eden a symbol of evil, as the spirit of good.

Many of the attacks on conventional belief in the poem are put into the mouth of the youth Laon, who in the Temple of the Spirit tells a story of earth. The story of his and the maiden Laone's attempt to put down injustice and wrong embodies everything that Shelley believed. When they are at first successful in dethroning the tyrant, and when the old cry of an eye for an eye is heard in the words:

" He who judged
let him be brought
17
To judgment. "

"Man and woman

Their common bondage burst;
may freely borrow

From lawless love a solace 20
for their sorrow."

The childish love of Laon and Laone has developed into that physical and spiritual joy that is Shelley's conception of the relationship of man and woman. Laone has saved Laon from the angry foe, and they seek joy in one another in an old ruin where they have taken refuge. Here their former early friendship deepens, and they unite body and spirit as one. To Shelley this unconventional union seems right.

"To the pure all things are pure,"²¹

he says with truth. In the early morning light Laon speaks of this uniting of body and soul as needing no dependence on ceremony:

"There we unheeding sat, in the communion
Of interchanged vows, which with a rite
Of faith most sweet and sacred, stamped
our union." 22

A further protest against convention and the tyranny of

20 Ibid. Canto V, St.51, Part 4

21 Ibid. Canto VI, St. 30

22 Ibid. Canto VII, St. 40

custom and religion he voices thus:

"And such is Nature's law divine,
that those

Who grow together cannot choose
but love,

If faith or custom do not interpose

Or common slavery mar what else
might move

23
All gentlest thoughts."

One need not agree with Shelley to ^{be}able to appreciate his beliefs. He urged a freedom of intercourse between man and woman, a freedom unbound by law, but unspoiled by impure thoughts and deeds. His hatred of the horrors some women were forced to endure he expresses in the story of Cythna's life among

"the thralls
24

Of the cold tyrant's cruel lust,"

and her terrible frenzy after the night spent with the tyrant in a mockery of love. Once more Shelley discloses his ideals for the condition of woman, and protests against her present position:

" Woman as the bond-slave dwells
25

Of man, a slave."

23 Ibid. Canto VII, St. 40; 24 Ibid. Canto VII, St. 4

25 Ibid. Canto VIII, St. 13

In Laone he realizes his dream woman, one who can take her place by the side of man, endure with him, love him, die with him. She is not a toy for the playful mood of males, but a woman possessed of that wisdom which, alone, can create leaders. At a feast prepared by the multitude for the celebration of the victory of liberty, Laone was chosen the priestess of the rites. A touch of Shelley's temperance is infused in the preparations for the feast. Contrary to the custom, instead of meats, there are to be fruits of many kinds, the roots of plants, and the juices of grapes before

"Accursed fire their mild juice
could transmute
Into a mortal bane." 26

The world that Laone pictures for the crowd is free from the taint of impurity of food. As she visualizes this world open for them all, she sees it a place without bloodshed where the birds and beasts need have no fear:

" ' Never again may blood of
bird or beast
Stain with its venomous stain
a human feast." 27

26 Ibid. Canto V, St. 56

27 Ibid. Stanza 51

Though the world as Laone sees it is free from the tyranny of fear, and governed by the spirit of good, the conquest is short-lived. The scene changes, and we have again the power of the tyrant triumphant. Hatred and force reign. Fear and panic have done their work. The multitude flee until Laon with eloquent reasoning and scorn urges them to defend themselves. Partly victorious they become like beasts, Laon alone restraining himself until he sees the white hair of an old friend under his feet. The ensuing scene is a horrible one of hatred and bloodshed. The old cry of Shelley against force may be heard:

" And this was thine, O War! Of hate
and pain
28
Thou loathed slave. "

Later, even the beasts are driven to kill their kind, the streams are poisoned, the very insects perish. The skies are brazen, the air is full of vile odors, and plague follows in the wake of famine.

Back of all this suffering is the motive that drives on the Priest of Islam, - the reinstatement of the belief in God, and a vengeance on those who refuse

to conform to man-made rules. Shelley thought that the power which people believe to be working for them is just a creation of their own, clothed in their own conceptions and experiences as he has Laone say:

" ' Some moon-struck sophist stood,
Watching the shade from his own soul up-
thrown
Fill Heaven and darken earth, and in such
mood
The Form he saw and worshipped
was his own." " 29

This man-made God has for his ministers those that bring

"Man's free born soul beneath the oppressor's
heel," 30

a religious tyranny unacceptable to Shelley. According to his conceptions, this great Power is dealing out deadly tortures to his followers, showing that though there is little difference between virtue and vice, might makes right. The people bowed down by sorrow, plague, and famine feel that some secret sin has caused God to turn against them. They implore his mercy and devoutly pledge their lives to him, each one to his own idea of God. He is too angry to be appeased, and the plague continues until the vile suggestion of the priest, a

29 Ibid. Canto VIII, St. 6

30 Ibid., Canto VIII, St. 7

hater of free thought, is made. He demands that Laon and Laone, the leaders in the fight for freedom, be sacrificed to expiate the sins of the people and reconcile God to them. The acceptance of this plan by the people whom these two had served is comparable to the actions of blind followers of religious doctrines. Ignorant, superstitious leaders seek to divorce reason from the minds of their flock. The unswerving conservatism of the older men of the council, unmoved by the reason and wisdom of Laon, which had won the younger men, urges on the death plan for Laon. The inexperienced youths, ready to comply with the call to liberty, are stabbed in the back by their wiser, experienced elders.

This condemnation of age appears in both these earlier poems of Shelley, and may be somewhat the reaction of the Oxford youth against his dogmatic guardians. Age has never been able satisfactorily to settle the affairs of youth, perhaps because they are too eager to inflict on the young their own ready-made ideas of religion and of conduct. To Shelley, religion was but a cloak for cruelty and injustice. He hopes for a world of happiness and equality, free from this curse:

"Religion's pomp made desolate by
the scorn

Of wisdom's faintest smile, and
thrones uptorn

And dwellings of mild people
interspersed

With undivided fields of ripening
corn

And love made free -" 31

At this last line we touch again upon that magic word that Shelley believed would lighten the gloomy world, - love. It is to the troubled hearts of men a calming influence; it embodies justice, truth, and joy, and

" those only can

From slavery and religious-labyrinth
caves

Guide us, as one clear star 32
the seaman saves."

This great love was present in the heart of Laon, a love that would make him willing to yield up all he had, his life. The expiation is demanded, reason has failed, and believing that love alone has power to free the world from madness, Laon calmly gives himself to the cause of liberty. And again an act of a character of Shelley's poems reminds us of the words of Jesus,

31 Ibid. Canto VII, St. 35

32 Ibid. Canto VIII, St. 11

"Greater love hath no man -. " Laon gave his life for humanity. United with this universal love is the more personal love of Laone, who will not permit Laon to die alone, but smilingly bids the mutes bind her on the dreadful pyre. The sacrifice is complete, and as we are wondering if it is all worth while, there comes again the note of Shelley's hope:

"..... if ought survive, I deem
It must be love and joy for they immortal
seem. " 33

In spite of the horror and bloodshed of this poem, in spite of its appeal to the sensuous, and in spite of its rather stern condemnation of an earnest if blinded people, the aspirations expressed by Laone are worthy any ideal of life:

"To give to all an equal share of good,
To track the steps of freedom
..... to suffer all in patient mood,
To weep for crime,
To feel the peace of self-contentment's
lot,
To own all sympathies
To sit and smile with joy

To kiss salt tears from the worn
cheek of woe

To live as if to love and live
were one." 34

That Shelley lived to a great degree the creed he has here seems apparent from the record of his many deeds of charity. Stories of his caring for the unfortunate and poor are told by Leigh Hunt and other friends. His purse was open to all. Besides discharging many of Godwin's debts, and giving gifts of money to Leigh Hunt and Peacock, he was often the first subscriber to various reforms. "Without a murmur, without ostentation, this heir of the richest baronet in Sussex illustrated by his own conduct those principles of democratic simplicity and of fraternal 35 charity which formed his political and social creed."

V

Shelley, at His Best

Only four short years yet remained for the poet to carry out his ideals. In the spring of 1818, the Shelleys with Miss Clairmont and her and Byron's child, Allegra, went to Italy. The compan-

34 Ibid. Canto VIII, St. 12
35 Symonds, page 102

ionship of Byron, while not satisfying to Shelley, at least gave him new food for thought. While his sensitive nature shrank from the rough egotism of Byron, there seems little doubt that his influence over the moody pilgrim was greater than he thought.¹ The companionship of the two as is given in the poem, Julian and Maddalo, though close, had in it ever that lack of complete understanding that makes perfect friendship. The scenes of Italy impressed the mind of the poet, and though his love for people did not decrease, ^{there} seems to have been in him a great dependence on the beauties around him, — the watery streets of Venice, the historic ruins of Rome, and the hills and blue skies of all Italy. Loving the free beauty of the land, he felt the weight of her thralldom and urged release. He pleads with Venice to rise from her lethargic sleep, to bid freedom awake, and unlock the dungeons in which the imprisoned cities of Italy lie:

"Thou and all thy sister band
Might adorn this sunny land
With new virtues, more sublime."²

Though the hopefulness of his youth is not dead, there is a less certain assurance that in time the tyrants

1 Cf. E. J. Trelawny: Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron, p. 36 ff.

2. Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills, ll. 155-158

will fall, in the lines:

"Men must reap the things they sow,
Force from force must ever flow
Or worse; but 'tis a bitter woe
That love or reason cannot change
The despot's rage, the slave's
revenge." ³

While ever interested in the political and social life of his fellow-men, Shelley continued to spend much time among the poets of the past. His appreciation of Greek and Italian literature was profound. Poetry he regarded in its highest sense as the product of an inner spiritual urge, "the interpenetration!" as he says, " ' of a diviner nature than our own' ". ⁴ Though he has frequently urged his dislike of didacticism in poetry, there seems little doubt that Shelley did believe in the moralizing value of poetry. To him there was poetry existing in the very philosophy that was his. His Prometheus Unbound and The Cenci, products of the same year, reflect his familiarity with the themes of the past, as well as his modernity. The Greek play, Prometheus,

³ Ibid. ll. 231-235

⁴ Shelley: Defense of Poetry

by Æschylus, had ended with a compromise between Prometheus and Jupiter, but such an ending was most distasteful to Shelley. He could not conceive of a compromise between tortured humanity and its tyrant oppressor. To do so would be to compromise good with evil, liberty with tyranny, and love with hate. The conception of a defiant, suffering Prometheus waiting through almost endless ages of torment for the overthrow of evil, is one typical of the Shelleyan doctrine. The hour of triumph comes and the unrighteous power of civic and religious institutions, deified by Jupiter, is driven out by the strength of wisdom and necessity, found in Demogorgon. The union of Prometheus with his old love, Asia, signifies the reuniting of the spirit of humanity with the spirit of beauty and divine love, aided by the spirits of faith and hope, and other attendant spirits, all of whom will help to make the world free from the evils brought into it by the long reign of the spirit of evil.

If, in reading this poem, we are blinded by the radiance of its colors, or confused by the swarming spirits, good and evil, that seem to fill the air, we must remember that Shelley lived not in the actual world we have all so painfully learned to live

in, so much as he lived in a world of unreality which to him was real. The spiritual was even more real to him than the actual. With this in mind it will be easier to understand the wealth of imagination displayed in Prometheus Unbound.

Occasionally, it is true, even here we catch an echo of the more earthy philosophy of Godwin. Prometheus logically, if stubbornly, refuses to submit to the tyrant, Jupiter, and to disclose the secret of the time of his fall, because he knows by so doing he will lengthen the time of the power of evil. He refuses to flatter the tyrant, and awaits the end, not to gloat over his enemy in vengeful punishment:

"For Justice, when triumphant, will
weep down

Pity, not punishment, on her own wrongs,
Too much avenged by those who err,"⁵

but secure in the knowledge that he is right. Mercury, wishing to save Prometheus from the additional pain he must endure, pleads with him to divulge his secret knowledge, pointing in his sympathetic eagerness to the joys that would be Prometheus' if he would only submit. But Prometheus sees no joy in re-

penting of his service to mankind, preferring rather the awful, eternal torture than the joys of "the self-despising slaves of Heaven."⁶ Calmly he assures the furies, who are waiting to torture him, of his own self-control:

"Yet am I king over myself. "⁷

As a true king he is, in his strength and courage, in his tenderness and love. His pity extends even to the fiends who torture him. The greatest of unselfishness it surely is to pity those who do us evil.

" ' I weigh not what ye do, but what
ye suffer⁸

Being evil,' "

he says to the demons, and we see in the lines the reverence Shelley had for the suffering Christ who taught the too often forgotten doctrine of doing good to "those who hate you. " Once more is the great spirit of Prometheus moved with pity as he beholds the symbol of Christ's sufferings shown by the furies. He forgets his own suffering in looking on the sacrifice that now seems to him so vain, in that those who are most like Christ are tortured and disdained. The fury, to torment further his victim,

⁶ Prometheus Unbound, Act., ll. 480-481

⁷ Ibid. l. 493

⁸ Ibid., Act I., ll. 480-481

presents to him the conditions existing on earth, the dominion of hypocrisy and convention, the weakness of the good, the strength of the evil, and the ignorance of all in that

" they know not what they do."⁹

Dispirited by the seeming vanity of his own sacrifice, and wearied in soul and body by the futility of his efforts, Prometheus for a time well-nigh despairs, forgetting the comfort of his secret knowledge. When he has seen in a vision all his hope of the power of love, liberty and truth being destroyed by the injustice of the heavens, he is comforted by his mother Earth, welcoming the spirits

"Whose homes are the dim caves of
human thought" ¹⁰

to bring comfort to him. Here we enter the thought-world of Shelley for to him these messengers were more truly comforters than the people of earth could be. The spirits of self-sacrifice, of revolution, of wisdom and of poetry bring with them the message of courage for Prometheus, the courage to do the things that make up his duty. He feels indeed, loneliness, for Asia is far away, but bravely he takes up the burden:

⁹ Ibid. Act I, line 631

¹⁰ Ibid. Act I, line 659

" I would fain
 Be what it is my destiny to be,
 The saviour and the strength of
 suffering man,
 Or sink into the original gulf of
 things.
 There is no agony, and no solace
 left,
 Earth can console, Heaven can
 torment no more." 11

The brave strength in these words commands our attention. Can this be the ideal of the shy, reticent young man, blushing and stammering in the presence of strangers, often insulted by his inferiors, and condemned by many of the good? Just as our thought-world is so often in direct contrast to the acts men judge by, so this strong, self-reliant Prometheus was indeed the inner, spiritual self of the emotional, erratic Shelley.

True, too, to the highest ideals of Shelley, Prometheus was ready to suffer to secure, once more, the freedom of man. Asia briefly reviews ^{the universe.} from the creation, through the reign of Saturn when everything on earth was joyful and alive, down to the time when they were refused the

11 Ibid. Act, 11. 815-820

"..... birthright of their being,
knowledge, power,
..... the thought
Which pierces this dim universe
like light,
Self-empire and the majesty of love."

Prometheus had given this wisdom to Jupiter with the provision, only, that man might be free. The promise had been broken, but even now the hour of the tyrant's downfall is approaching when man will once more regain his liberty, and love will have paid the debt. The power of love is sounded by the deep voice of Demogorgon when Asia asks him for the name of the power that rules all:

"What (would it avail) to bid speak
 Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change?
 To these
 All things are subject but eternal
 Love."
 13

So once again we reach the core of Shelley's philosophy, the power of love, to recreate, to live, to inspire, to make happy. Hercules, though he unbinds Prometheus,

12 Ibid. Act II, Sc. IV., ll. 38-42

13 Ibid. Act II. **Sc. V**, 11. 118-120

the act signifying the power of strength, himself says that he is ready to become a slave to Prometheus who typifies

" ' Wisdom, courage, and
long suffering love'" 14

This love is now to live in the world, making it glorious, and free from the evils of the past. The waters of Ocean are no longer stained with blood, her ships no longer carry desolation and ruin to the nations, but peace and happiness reign. Appollo, too, joins in the general rejoicing, glad that he will no longer look down upon scenes of bloodshed and sorrow. Earth, pulsing under the joyous freedom of her child, predicts the change that will come to the things in her bosom, as she feels this love, this joy of life. She sees them no longer sick and miserable but with beautiful colors, strong and happy, with homes among the sweet flowers. Those who sleep on her bosom shall have happy dreams and awake to the joyful day, while the dead shall be enfolded as a wandering child by its mother. The trees and flowers, even the gorgeous rainbow become more beautiful under this new regime of love. As the new-created earth, with all

14 Ibid. Act III. Sc. III, ll. 1-2

the evils of the past, destroyed, joins in the joyous song, the moon feels the warmth of the power and sings in harmony the joy of her rebirth, giving the cause of it all as :

" 'Tis love, all love . . . " ¹⁵

As the things of nature rejoice in their new freedom, there comes a sigh of ecstasy from the world of men. Sweet communion, music, and joy form the day's happiness for Prometheus, Asia, and her sisters as they sit in their beautiful cave. From the world without come the echoes of the great change brought about by love and freedom, the assurance that man is daily growing better through this great power that as it grows,

"veil by veil, evil and
error fall." ¹⁶

The Spirit of the Hour comes into the cave and reports what she has seen on earth. It is, indeed, a scene desired by Shelley, a scene in which all who love liberty and peace would rejoice. Thrones and all the objects that accompany them are no more. The prisons wherein man once thought to force his fellowman are gone. Gone, too, are the emblems of that religious belief that made the people shed blood, break hearts, and destroy love that they might please their God.

15 Ibid. Act IV, l. 369; 16 Ibid. Act III. Sc. III, l. 62

The mask of pretense is gone and

"the man remains,

Scepterless, free, uncircumscribed,
but man

Equal, unclassed, tribeless and
nationless

Exempt from awe, worship, degree,
the king

Over himself; just, gentle, wise." 17

This tribeless, nationless being is not a savage, 18
but a man still of the future, a man to whom the world is
a community, and the inhabitants of the world, his
neighbors. We have not yet attained this ideal of
man, though perhaps we are a little nearer than we were
in the time of Shelley. If we lack in this, there is
perhaps an even greater lack in the realization of the
rightful place of women who here are

"..... frank and beautiful and kind," 19

with that perfect freedom from the taint of custom, so
that they may indeed speak as they feel, voice the emo-
tions of their hearts, be free from aching fears and
jealousies, and be able at last to create a heaven of
earth as was intended. From social to political per-

17 Ibid. Act III. Sc. IV, 11.194-197

18 Leslie Stephens; Hours in a Library, page 380

19 Prometheus Unbound,

fection we turn again to face a happier land where

" thrones were kingless and men
walked

One with the other even as spirits
do -

None fawned, none trampled."²⁰

No hateful emotions are depicted on the faces of the people, nor is anyone afraid of another, trembling under any one else's will. There is no one confusing and doubting himself, no hypocrisy, no self-mistrust. Man is changed from a divided power to a mighty whole where everything is done because of love, and the motive beautifies even the commonest acts. His will being master over all evil thoughts and mean passions, is in turn guarded by the stronger power of love.²¹ Man is now able to create all beautiful things—buildings, fabrics, poetry. Armed with this new power, he finds the elements yielding to his will, and he is master of earth and air, while the deep yields up her secrets.

The joyous singing of the spirits is an echo of the love that fills the world, of the love that was in the heart of the poet. The rhythm and the swing ~~and the swing~~ are as joyous as the notes of a robin

20 Ibid. Act III, Sc. IV, ll. 131-133

21 Compare with Godwin's ideas on reason and the will above.

in the springtime. We find ourselves fully believing in the power of love to create a new world

"From the chaos made calm by love,
not fear," 22

and feel a great desire to answer to the call of Demogorgon or Eternity as he calls on all things of heaven, earth, sea, and oblivion to work together, as Love has laid over the world her healing wings that there may be no more terrible destruction. Though he knows what love has done he knows, too, that through the ages there will be much more to do when

"Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and
Endurance" 23

must help. Contrary to the more youthful belief of Shelley in a change like an emotional conversion²⁴ we hear the maturer man through the sonorous voice of Demogorgon giving certain spells by which men may regain power over the cleared chaos:

"To suffer woes which Hope
thinks infinite;

To forgive wrongs darker than
death or night;

To defy Power, which seems
omnipotent;

22 Prometheus Unbound, Act IV, 1 171; 23 Ibid. 1 562

24 Brailsford, page 236

To love and bear; to hope
 till Hope creates
 From its own wreck the thing
 it contemplates;
 Neither to change, nor falter,
 nor repent;
 This..... is to be
 Good, great, and joyous, beau-
 tiful and free;
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire,
 and Victory. " 25

The noble unselfishness permeating these lines is the spirit breathing throughout the poem as it is the spirit of Shelley. Entirely free from blame he may not be, for the tragedy of foolish little Harriet cannot be obliterated, nevertheless he is in soul, truly Promethean, ready to suffer for others, eager to serve, willing to deny self, opposed to force, cruelty, and hypocrisy, and so infused with that love for people that feelings of enmity cannot long exist with him.

A production of the same year as his Prometheus is his drama of The Cenci. The story of the old Italian family had been handed him in Rome in manuscript, and this tragic story added to the beauty and pathos of the pictured face of Beatrice had encouraged him in the production. It has little of the ethereal quality of Prometheus. The characters are real, though excited and

passionate. The situations are highly dramatic, and the drama ranks deservedly high. Though originating in the old, tragic story of the Cenci, there are some familiar Shelleyan ideas expressed in the drama. The evils of the practices of the existing Roman Catholic Church were no secret. But Shelley's conception of the character of Beatrice, so pure and sweet, blindly struggling against the tyranny of her licentious father seems symbolical of society vainly rebelling against the thralldom forced on it by the tyrant, Obedience. Earthly parents, law, religion stand as his ministers. The injustice of life is keenly felt by Beatrice as she faces the inexorable judge who represents the religion she believes in, the God she has been taught to obey. The cry of despair, not alone for herself, but for humanity, rings in the words:

"Oh what a world we make

The oppressor and the oppressed." 26

There is in these two short lines the wail of eternal humanity. That Shelley, at twenty-seven, was able to see into the depths of human suffering in this way assures us, not of his poetic genius, but of his perfect, sympathetic insight. The twentieth

century finds us still oppressors. In our foolish egotism, in our ignoble greed, in our blind ignorance, we are busy making it "what a world".

The sin of patricide is not a creation of Shelley. One who knew his ideals could not conceive of his creating Beatrice to kill, __ rather to suffer and forgive. It is not the Shelley plan to use force, but the old story goes on. One may feel the calm acceptance of Shelley in the casting aside of regrets for past deeds. To regret uselessly seems wrong to Shelley. Beatrice's words to her mother and brother, as they lament their weakness in confessing upon torture, are fraught with the calm reasoning of a Godwin:

"What it was weak to do

'Tis weaker to lament once
being done.' " 27

The bravery of this girl whose will forces her to endure torture without whining, to face death calmly, trammled as she is by her training and environment, shows again Shelley's belief in the power of the will to say, "I am king over myself."

Shelley, himself, thought little of The Cenci, perhaps because he had not allowed free expression to his thought. Thinking it might find

favor on the stage, he had tried to make it acceptable to the public. For Shelley wilfully to pander to public taste was for him to stultify the freedom that is his charm.

Though enamored of the beauty and poetry of Italy, Shelley did not forget England. The news of the Peterloo massacre aroused him to stern protest. In a letter to Mr. Ollier, his publisher, in which he alludes to both The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound, he says:

"The same day that your letter came, came the news of the Manchester work, and the torrent of my indignation has not yet done boiling in my veins. I wait anxiously to hear how the country will express its sense of this bloody, murderous oppression of its destroyers. "Something must be done. What yet I know not." ' " 28

The approval of the government for the killing of six people and the wounding of several at a mass meeting held in St. Peter's field at Manchester for the purpose of parliamentary reform was the occasion for the burst of indignation in The Mask of Anarchy. There was no cowardice in his attack on Eldon, Lord High

Chancellor, Sidmouth, Home Secretary, and Castlereagh, Foreign Secretary, whom he fearlessly labels Fraud, Anarchy, and Murder, respectively. Angry at the leaders of the government who permitted and encouraged the outrage at Manchester, he sternly faces them with the charges of hypocrisy, robbery, and murder. His voice, like the lash of a whip, falls rebukingly on the people of England, who have submitted to the power of Anarchy, calmly trampling the multitude into a mass beneath his feet, and proclaiming himself in the words:

"I AM GOD AND KING AND LAW"²⁹

Hope, only, is not crushed by the tyrant, but cries out to the people to shake the chains that are binding them, and secure that freedom which is theirs by natural heritage and by the laws of their country. She pleads that this freedom which is made up of justice, peace, wisdom, love, science, poetry, thought, patience, and gentleness shall reign; that a free assembly be held, an assembly free from fear and panic, refraining from the shedding of blood, but ever ready to resist the tyrant, if necessary. Here, too, we hear Shelley, for the first time, appealing to law:

" Let the laws of your own land
 Good or ill between ye stand,
 Hand to hand, and foot to foot,
 Arbiter of this dispute." 30

The laws are to help in the saving of the people
 from the power of anarchy, those laws

" whose solemn voice
 must be

Thine own echo — Liberty." 31

In another song he appeals once more to the
 people of England. An outcast himself, the object
 of bitter attacks and calumny, he pleads with his
 fellow-countrymen to

"Sow seed, — but let no tyrant
 reap;

Find wealth, — let no impostor
 heap;

Weave robes, — let not the
 idle wear;

Forge arms, — in your defense
 to bear." 32

His picture of England is his idea of the results of
 tyranny, dull, blind, stupid rulers, a starved and
 lifeless people, an army paid to kill liberty, a gov-

30 Ibid. St. LXXXII

31 Ibid. St. LXXXIII

32 Song to the Men of England

ernment allowing laws that kill, a nation with

"Religion, Christless, Godless__
a book sealed" 33

It is true it is easy to talk, to encourage, to condemn. If Shelley had never attempted to help his country, one might judge him more harshly. It is true the youthful, enthusiastic plans for reform had in them much that was impossible, much that was idealistic and futuristic. But he was doomed to be without honor in his own country. The personal note of suffering is heard in the cry for liberty of one whom

" A heavy weight of hours has
chained and bowed." 34

Shelley should never have been so bound. He puts in his plea to the west wind his longing to serve mankind:

"Scatter as from an unextinguished
hearth

35

..... my words among mankind;"

and then with the optimism of eternal youth he looks to the future:

"If winter comes, can Spring
be far behind?" 36

Several minor poems of the same year show the

33 England in 1819; 34 Ode to the West Wind, St. IV
35 Ibid. St. V; 36 Ibid.

interest and love that Shelley still maintained for his homeland. Peter Bell the Third, though a humorous poem probably satirizing the growing conservatism of Wordsworth, bears witness to the poet's continued interest in affairs at home and his nonchalant fearlessness in attacking the social and political evils of England. He presents Hell to the reader as a city³⁷ "much like London" with its inhabitants, little and big, the men who talk and scheme and lie, and the women who like cats mew

"Of their own virtue, and pursuing
Their gentler sisters to that ruin
Without which __ what was chastity?"³⁸

The comments on subjects of interest to his countrymen show less of the dreamy poet than of the sharp-sighted economist. The attack on the scheme of paper money, unjust taxation and the dishonesty of those representing the government shows a rare political insight. Poor Peter, in this city of Hell, first boldly attacks the conventions of its smug inhabitants in a book, only to find himself dodging the thrusts of the cruel reviewers, instigated by the Devil. Soured by

³⁷ Peter Bell the Third, Part III, St. I
³⁸ Ibid. St VIII

the injustice of the world, he turns from the songs of freedom and seeks relief in the harsh beliefs and dogmatism of the day. Delighted by the yielding the Devil once more accepts Peter, now dull, stupid, and lethargic, but upheld by the government he praises. Though the humor of the poem may be dubious to some, there is a certain boyish mischief about it that helps us better to understand the Shelley who enjoyed "doing the horn," i. e. making a devil's horn of his forelock and mimicking that gentleman for the half-fearful delight of the children who were always his friends.

Judging from the literary productions of the year 1819, one may believe that the first two years in Italy were busy ones. Early in the year 1820, the Shelleys settled at Pisa. Their friends were increasing in number. Lord Byron engaged the use of a nearby palace, drawn, almost against his will, by the warm genius of Shelley. Captains Medwin and Trelawny are memorable friends of the remaining two years of Shelley's life. Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Williams and the Shelleys lived together much of the time. Friendship and appreciation were having their sure effect on the sensitive spirit that had borne buffeting and suffering uncomplainingly. The poems of the year are more free from bitterness, fuller of genial warmth. They range from

the simplest verse to the highest expressions of emotion. The delicacy of their only remaining child, (the little William having died the previous year), requiring mildness of climate, the Shelleys took up their residence at the baths of San Giuliano, four miles from Fisa where the Witch of Atlas was produced, following a solitary walk to the top of Monte San Pelegrino.

This adorable witch, the daughter of the sun, wanders freely over the earth, bewitching and changing the unchangeable. She visits the grave of the beautiful, disrobes the decaying body of its inmate, and restoring it to a dreaming, beautiful sleep, destroys all the hateful equipment associated with death, making beauty everlasting. She would bewitch the priests so that they would no longer deal in hieroglyphics and fairy stories, but would make right their lies:

"How the god Apis really was a bull,
and nothing more," 39

and would give all people the right to speak what they please. Religion unmasked, monarchy next presents a challenge to her powers. With delicate humor this whimsical witch causes the king to dress up an ape

and put it on the throne. In the morning the
courtiers crawl to kiss the feet of their emperor,

"And kissed ___ alas, how many
kiss the same." 40

The freckled, sunny face of Shelley seems to grin
at us as he endows the witch with the power he would
like to possess.

Proceeding from the court to the camp, the
witch enjoys herself in the Shelleyan reform of turn-
ing the force of militarism to ways of peace. The
soldiers become somnambulists and, walking in their
sleep, they think themselves blacksmiths and beat
their swords into ploughshares. The prisons are opened
and the jailers under the power of this mystic witch,
dreamily set free the prisoners who have been imprisoned
for liberalism. Love, too, is freed from the conven-
tions of the centuries. Young lovers who have been
afraid to do what they wished to do can now do no wrong
in obeying their joyous desires, but gladly come toget-
her

" and so they took their fill

Of happiness, in marriage warm
and kind." 41

Broken friendships are healed, and friends, when they
see the evils and errors that parted them

40 Ibid

41 Ibid. St. 67

" unite again with visions clear
Of deep affection and of truth sincere."⁴²

Oedipus Tyrannus is another poem written at Pisa, reflecting certain political and social conditions in England with an exaggerated imagery that is most amusing. The landing of Queen Caroline in England, the struggle of George IV against her claims, the action of Lord Castlereagh in instituting in Parliament an inquiry into the conduct of Queen Caroline in the king's name, and all the subsequent gossip and scandal gave to the impish Shelley the material for another expression of ridicule toward monarchs in general, together with all the stupidity and wrong that their existence makes possible. The grunting of pigs at a street fair under his windows suggested to him the idea of a chorus for a satiric drama, and Swellfoot evolved. Its appearance in England was followed by threats of persecution, and it was withdrawn, but **now** lives as the expostulation of an English poet who dared attack the stupid conventions, the dishonesty and injustice of his government, disclose the causes of suffering, and create the hopeful vision of the approach of a time of freedom.

The ridiculous picture of monarchy in its gross selfishness is given in the appeal of Swellfoot to the goddess, Famine:

"by whose power divine

These graceful limbs are clothed
in proud array

Of gold and purple,"⁴³

and as he continues to survey his "swelling paunch" and perhaps to caress the fat cheeks that

"Sustain the cone of my untroubled brain

That point, the emblem of a pointless
nothing,"⁴⁴

a sly bit at monarchs in general and perhaps of George IV in particular, he seeks to pacify the gods that has made his position possible. Shelley believed that ~~mon-~~~~archy~~ existed by the growth of famine, and that the leaders of the state with the help of their leech taxes, of the rat, espionage, and the gadfly, slander, contrive to destroy any outgrowth of feelings of liberty and freedom in the state. The condition of the citizens is conceived as that of starving swine, pleading for more food, better sties, and for the right to produce their kind, __ a right about to be taken ~~away~~ by the gelding of the sows. In other words, they were asking for the needs of humanity __ better living conditions, and a

43 Oedipus Tyrannus, Act I, ll. 1-3; 44 Ibid. Act I, ll 8-9

standard of living that can support a family.

Purgonax (Lord Castlereagh) expects to be able to influence the swine, or multitude, by promises of good food, clean straw, and "bits of ribbon round their legs,"⁴⁵ so that they will condemn the innocent Queen Iona who is about to usurp the place of Swellfoot. Hammon urges the separation of the queen from her followers, or as he says:

⁴⁶
"Divide and rule. "

He then displays the Green Bag which signifies the evil that may be done by slander, espionage, and unjust taxation, an evil that will make the innocent seem guilty, and that will make those gentle of looks seem deformed and terrible. The contents of the Green Bag are, of course, to be used to cover Queen Iona, thereby effecting her ruin and enhancing the prosperity of Swellfoot and his crew. Purgonax, in his speech to the multitude, assures them of a hog wash, regrets their present poverty, as unavoidable, and hopes by testing out the innocence of Queen Iona to protect the purity and chastity of the sows. His half-revealing innuendos regarding the sin of the queen are the usual refuge of a liar. The triumph of the right, as Iona empties the contents of the Green Bag on Swellfoot and his court,

45 Ibid. Act I, 11.295-300; 46 Ibid. Act I, 1. 344

is emphasized in the disappearance of Famine at the cry of Freedom who

"In voice faint and low
47

Freedom calls Famine, her eternal foe."

In the concluding scene of the drama, Shelley shows an Englishman's understanding of that love of freedom characteristic of the Minotaur (John Bull) who, while promising to carry the queen in the hunt after Swell-foot, rather grudgingly and too loyally concedes that

"At least till you have hunted
down your game,

48
I will not throw you."

Never, however, could Shelley be interested in only one country. The breadth of his sympathies made him truly a citizen of the world. When Naples announced its constitutional government (1820), Shelley was overjoyed. To him Greece and especially Naples was the place of the nativity of freedom. He hails her with joy because she is once more asserting that she will be free forever,

"If Hope and Truth and Justice
can avail."49

He wishes much for her future and paints in glowing

47 Act II, Sc. 2, ll. 101-102.

48 Ibid. ll. 114-115.

49 Ode to Naples, l. 64.

colors her cleansing of the form of freedom,___ the taking away of falsehood and wrong, and the leaving her exposed in all her loveliness. He adds:

"And equal laws be thine,
And winged worlds let sail
Freighted with truth even from
the throne of God." 50

There had been no liberty till Athens arose; then came Rome. But Tyranny stepped in and liberty departed. Later came the many forms of the Christian religion to choke and thwart liberty: /

"When from its sea of death,
to kill and burn,
The Galilean serpent forth did
creep
And made thy world an indis-
tinguishable heap." 51

Shelley never shrank from attacking the deed of tyranny done in the name of Christ by those who are least like him. The Puritanic fear that rules the actions of so many he knew not at all. He thought of tyranny in religion as he did in government, a thing to be destroyed.

50 Ibid., ll. 26-100

51 Ode to Liberty, St. 8.

"Oh that the free would stamp
the impious name

Of King into the dust

The sound has poison in it;

't is the sperm

Of what makes life foul, cankerous,
and abhorred." 52

Liberty, to Shelley, has nothing in common with the
tenets of a formal religion. They bind her and
those who are wise will so work

"That the pale name of Priest
might shrink and dwindle

Into the hell from which it
first is hurled," 53

so that our mind might be free to converse each
with its own "awèless soul," and the words that are
clothed in hypocrisy and pretense may be stripped
and the thoughts laid bare,

"Till in the nakedness of false and true,

They stand before their Lord, each to
receive its due." 54

The poet conceives for our many ailments, our creation
of tyranny, our slavery, our blind devotion to relig-
ion and government, a certain Cure, wisdom:

52 Ibid., St. 15

53 Ibid., St. 16

54 Ibid

"Come thou, but lead out of
the inmost cave

Of man's deep spirit

55

Wisdom".

These political poems were reflective of the contemporary thought of Shelley as is evident from his personal letters of the time. These letters also show the practical mind of the poet, and his ability to understand and improve the economic condition of England. From the contemplation of such philosophy, one must possess the versatility of a Shelley to sympathize perfectly with the metaphysical ideas in the fanciful, imaginative poem, The Sensitive Plant. Though full of the bright beauty and ethereal dreaminess that characterize most of the poems of the past two years, this poem conveys the poet's firm faith in the eternal existence of love, and truth, and beauty. The gentle mistress of the garden may have died, the beautiful blossoms may have withered, the tender plants may have been choked by noxious weeds, while the sensitive plant, having needed more love and care than the others, may indeed have become a "leafless wreck,"

56

55 Ibid., St. 18

56 The Sensitive Plant, l. 111

though all this work of decay and destruction may be true, we find ourselves almost willing to believe it all a dream and

"To own that death itself must be
Like all the rest, a mockery."⁵⁷

To Shelley as to Keats, beauty was eternal. In spite of the disillusion that the years had brought, his youthful spirit still believed that

"For love, and beauty, and delight
There is no death or change."⁵⁸

In Epipsychidion, this same "Spirit of Beauty and Love, also the eternal soul of the world, is represented as veiling itself in this form of woman, one of its incarnations."⁵⁹ The inspiration of Epipsychidion, Emilia Viviani, a beautiful Italian lady suffering from Italian conventions by being held virtually a prisoner in a convent until she should give her consent to a hated marriage, was to Shelley, for a while, the personification of his ideal. Love, to Shelley, is finding in another the response to the feelings in oneself. He is looking for someone that agrees with him, not his weaknesses and his faults, but his best parts, his ideals. He wants one who

57 Ibid., ll. 128-129

58 Ibid., ll. 134-135

59 Woodberry: Note on Epipsychidion, page 629

feels as he feels at the same time, one who will
 kiss with burning lips when his are so, not with
 the chill touch of cold ice. "We are born into
 the world and there is something within us which,
 from the instant ⁶⁰ we live, more and more thirsts
 after its likeness." Friendship and love should
 be joyous, thinking little of the chaos of the world,
 living to create light in darkness, sweetness in
 bitterness, and beauty where all is sordid and ugly:

" gentle tone

Among rude voices, a beloved light,
 A solitude, a refuge, a delight,
⁶¹
 If I had but a friend."

The longing for one who understands is not confined
 to Shelley. Much of the tragedy of life, much of
 its misfitness, its awful loneliness lies in the
 unappeased longing, "if I had but a friend."

It seems equally unnecessary to protest
 that this was not the usual kind of infatuation, and
 as Shelley whimsically complains against the putting
 him in the "circle of a servantgirl and her sweet-
⁶²
 heart," or to deny that the beauty and romantic

60 Shelley's Fragment, On Love, Woodberry, page 630.

61 Lines Connected With Epipsychidion

62 Memorials, page 168

position of Emilia had an effect on the nowise invulnerable heart of the poet. Epipsychidion, or the "soul within a soul", is an attempt to materialize that idealistic love which is so much a part of Shelley. For a little while he thought the ideal was the real, and with this conception he completed the poem which he had sometime before attempted to write. Had we the power of loving that Shelley had, we might better understand this impassioned poem. However, in spite of the passionate utterances and farfetched dreams, one may feel the unsatisfied longing, almost the belief that all this is not real, and that he is merely disillusioned again. Poor Shelley! The love that he desired is not possible in our land of marred perfection. Perhaps as he says:

"Love's very pain is sweet,
But its reward is in the world ~~d~~ivine
Which, if not here, it builds beyond
the grave." 63

Love is the leveller. When we have love we are no longer unequal in rank, but as he says:

63 Epipsychidion, ll. 596-598.

"The spirit of the worm beneath
the sod

In love and worship, blends itself
with God." 64

This universality of love is peculiarly Shelleyan. While many before him urged the practice of humanitarianism, Shelley expressed the highest aim of such a practice in the words:

"And Socrates, the Jesus Christ of
Greece,

And Jesus Christ himself did never
cease

To urge all living things to love
each other

And to forgive their mutual faults,
and smother

The Devil of disunion in their souls." 65

Unlike our selfish conception of a love that should be given to one only in this world, Shelley, rather, saw its power increased by division. He considers the worship of one without permitting room for any other as inexpressibly narrow, and a "sepulcher for its (the spirit's) eternity!" 66

Nor does he, though flaunting his idea in the face of all convention, consider it any more than

64 Ibid., ll. 127-128

65 Lines Connected With Epipsychidion, ll. 33-27

66 Epipsychidion, l. 178.

the life of a slave for a person to confine his
 earthly happiness with one whom he has at one time
 selected as life's partner. He acknowledges that
 it is the modern, moral code for a man or woman

"With one chained friend, perhaps
 a jealous foe,

The dreariest and the longest
 journey go," 67

but he urges the lack of wisdom in such a compact.
 The picture of the three, himself with Emily and
 Mary, his "sun and moon" flying away to an island in
 the Aegean is visionary; of course, and impossible.
 Something shattered the dream. He later describes
 the poem as "a portion of me already dead." 68 He
 had raised to the divine a human being — she could
 only fall. He later wrote, "I think one is always
 in love with something or other. The error
 consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of
 what is, perhaps, eternal." 69

If this poem failed to find grace with
 its readers, the same cannot be said as truly of an-
 other poem of the year 1821, Adonais, written in com-
 memoration of Keats whom he truly admired, as well
 as in condemnation of the cruel Quarterly reviewer
 who was thought to have hastened the death of Keats.

67 Ibid., ll. 158-159

68 Symonds, page 141: Letter to Leigh Hunt

69 Ibid., page 146

by his infamous criticism.* The poem, a beautiful and artistic elegy, is filled with an "aerial spiritualism,"⁷⁰ that expresses, or is an attempt to express the metaphysical philosophy of Shelley. As he soars into a song of consolation, he expresses his belief of the fusing of the spirit of man with that of the eternal universe. He consigns the body to the earth:

"Dust to the dust! but the pure Spirit
shall flow

Back to the burning fountain whence it
came,

A portion of the Eternal."⁷¹

The hunger for eternity, ever-present in the heart of the idealist, rises in a song of triumph:

"Peace, peace! he is not dead, he
doth not sleep

He hath awakened from the dreams
of life,

..... we decay⁷²

Like corpses in a charnel."

Though to confine the exultant blending of the spirit of Adonais with nature to a pantheistic belief is ig-

70 Symonds page 146
71 Adonais, Stanza 38
72 Ibid., 39

* Woods: Note on Adonais,
p. 913

morning the individualistic ideals of Shelley, there is a strange combining of pantheism with individualism in the lines beginning:

" He is made one with Nature; there
is heard

His voice in all her music, from the
moan

Of thunder to the song of night's sweet
bird." 73

Though his grief for the death of Keats is human and real, no Christian could express a higher faith and belief in eternity than exists in these words:

"The One remains, the many change
and pass;

Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's
shadows fly;

Life, like a dome of many-colored
glass

Stains the white radiance of Eternity
Until Death tramples it to fragments. 74

While basking in the joy of spiritual triumphs, and the mental life that was daily growing more real to him, Shelley did not lose his interest in the political events of the world. Hellas, the last of his longer political poems, was written in the fall of 1821. The nations of Southern Europe, restless under the German yoke, were beginning to assert their

73 Ibid., 42

74 Ibid., 52

independence. The unlooked-for insurrection of Greece in the Spring of 1821 filled Shelley with delight. Hellas, written in one of his rare periods of enthusiasm, celebrates the event, and expresses the keen sympathy Shelley had always felt for the fighters for liberty. He sees no hope for Greece without this freedom. For this child of free thought, there should be no chains or slavery:

"Let Freedom leave, where'er she
flies,

A desert or a paradise;

Let the beautiful and the brave⁷⁵

Share her glory or a grave."

Shelley had firm faith in the spread of freedom. Born with the creation, it has been trampled and seemingly defeated, only to come triumphantly down through the generations, overcoming again, and at last bursting gloriously from the West in America:

"From far Atlantic its young bears⁷⁶
Chased the shadows and the dreams."

Shelley, the dreamer, saw in America, as he saw in Emilia Viviani, his ideal materialized. Perhaps it is well that he could not live to see in our country,

⁷⁵ Hellas, Act I, ll. 90-94

⁷⁶ Ibid., ll. 70-71

77

as he saw in Emilia " a cloud instead of a Juno."
 He could not brook silently the contempt of malicious
 tyrants who were sure of the ultimate victory of might.
 The righteous indignation of Christ flashed out at the
 boasting Satan in reproof and hopefulness:

" Obdurate spirit!

Thou seest but the Past in the ~~Te~~-come!

True greatness asks not space, true
 excellence

Lives in the spirit of all things
 that live,

Which lends it to the worlds 78
 thou callest thine."

As a source of the strength that must lib-
 erate mankind, Shelley voices a strong faith in Christ.
 Other sources had failed until:

" A Power from the Unknown God,

A Promethean conqueror, came

Like a triumphant path he trod 79

The thorns of death and shame."

As Shelley looks in spirit into the cloudy uncertain-
 ties of the future, he can only say and try to believe

77 Symonds page 141

78 Hellas- Prologue, ll. 161-168

79 Hellas, ll. 211-214

that

“
blazoned as on heaven's
 immortal noon

80
 The cross leads generations on.”

In his notes on this passage Shelley says, "Let it not be supposed that I mean to dogmatize upon a subject concerning which all men are equally ignorant, or that I think the Gordian knot of the origin of evil can be disentangled by that or by any similar assertion." While Shelley cannot understand the purpose of a God who makes it almost impossible for us not to do wrong, and then adds to our wrong-doing an eternal punishment, he nevertheless here puts himself on the side of the noblest and most exalted ideas. The "riddle is not solved" as he says, but he clings to what seems best.

The ability to enter, easily, the realm of thought provides for Shelley a constant refuge from the seeming "riddles". He ignores time. The present, past, and future are fused together in one great harmony. The evils and injustices of the earth become more and more of small moment to him, since the world of thought is the real world in which we live. The things of earth, the temples, the towers, the palaces,

and market-places are doomed to decay,

"But Greece and her foundations
are

Built below the tide of war,
Based on the crystalline sea
Of thought and its eternity." ⁸¹

The past and the future mean little compared to the
present, and the present will so soon be the past.

"Thought

Alone and its quick elements,
Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
..... what has thought
To do with time, or place, or
circumstance." ⁸²

Shelley puts into the mouth of the old Jew his belief
in the power of thought and the transiency of everything
but thought. Earth and ocean, the elements, the planets,

" and men, and beasts,
and flowers,

(Are) but a vision;

Thought is its (the whole's) cradle
and its grave, nor less.

The future and the past are
idle shadows

Of thought's eternal flight - they
have no being;

Nought is but that which feels
itself to be."⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., ll. 696-699; ⁸² Ibid., ll. 796-802
⁸³ Ibid., ll. 777-785

The italics are not Shelley's but serve to emphasize his certainty of the eternity of thought. Death, life, everything shrink before the great world of the intellect. All else is a mockery.

There is, however, much that is concrete in Hellas. Shelley has lost his trib^eless, nationless people and created Greeks, triumphant even in their defeat. The sound of the voices shouting the victory of Islam over the Greeks comes into the mind of the now unblinded Mahmud as a cry of slaves, because he has just realized through the wisdom of Ahaseurus and the Phantom of Mahomet, the weakness and flimsiness of such a victory. It is true that the power of wrong is still strong. The call to the tyranny:

"Anarchs, ye whose daily
food

Are curses, groans, and gold, the
fruit of death,

From Thule to the girdle of the
world,

Come feast! the board groans with
the flesh of men;

84

The cup is foaming with a nation's blood;"
has in it a fiendish joy somewhat shadowed by the added

command:

85

"eat, drink, and die."

The cry of the semi-chorus is a half-despairing wail that perhaps liberty, virtue, and love may be overcome by these evil powers now so triumphant, and even that

"Truth, who wanderest, lone and
unbefriended,

If thou canst veil thy lie-con-
suming mirror

Before the dazzled eyes of Error

86

Alas for thee."

But we are not left in the abandonment of despair, else Shelley would not have been Shelley. He, with his more or less prophetic power, proclaims anew that even though Greece must be conquered, and

"A wreck, yet shall its fragments
reassemble,

And build themselves again im-
pregnably

In a diviner cline,

To Amphionic music, on some

Cape sublime

Which frowns above the idle
foam of time." 87

85 Ibid., l. 939

86 Ibid., ll. 984-987

87 Ibid., ll. 1002-1006

Once more Shelley's idealistic enthusiasm for the future leads us to share with him this hope. He predicts a new Greece, a new Athens, with all the old beauty and grandeur, more beautiful and more grand with nothing that is of hatred and death but rather:

"Saturn and Love their long repose
 Shall burst, more bright and good
 Than all who fell, than One who rose,
 88
 Than many unsubdued."

It is true, this new Athens may never rest on the soil of Hellas, but "Where any mind strives after justice, where any soul suffers and loves and defies, there is the ideal Republic." And though there is one last dread that all the evil is not in the past, Shelley refuses to

" drain to its dregs the urn
 Of bitter prophecy.

The world is weary of the past,
 90
 Oh, might it die or rest at last.

Hellas was published in the spring of 1822.

The Shelleys were still living near Pisa and had united with the Williams family in a common home called the Villa Magni on the Gulf of Spezzia. We owe much of

88 Ibid., 1090-1093

89 Brailsford, page 248

90 Hellas, ll. 1098-1101

our knowledge of those last few weeks of the poet's life to the intimate recollections of Captain Trelawny, a former friend of the Williamses, who lived in close contact with the circle near Pisa. Reading and writing were still the chief occupations of Shelley. A boat, owned by Shelley and Williams, the "Don Juan", was the innocent instrument of the snuffing out of these young lives. Shelley would read as he steered, insisting that the two could be done together, "as the one was mental, the other mechanical."⁹¹ On the home journey from Leghorn, where Shelley had gone to help the Hunts settle in part of Byron's house, on the eighth day of July, 1822, came the twenty-minute storm that sank the "Don Juan" with its owners and an eighteen-year-old boy who had been helping them. Several days later the mutilated bodies were found, one a "tall, slight figure"⁹² in a jacket with a copy of Sophocles in one pocket and Keats' poems, doubled back in the other, all being too familiar to leave a doubt of its identity. Evidently the Keats volume had been thrust hastily away when the storm came. As the poet lived, so he died with a joy in the present:

91 Trelawny, page 105

92 Ibid., page 123

"Is not to-day enough? Why do
I peer

Into the darkness of the day to come?

Is not to-morrow even as yesterday?

And will the day that follows
change thy doom?" 93

The brief life was ended. Not so the visions
born of the brilliant mind. Nor yet was the sweetness
that is diffused through his poems. If there is one
characteristic of Shelley that stands supreme in his
life and work, it is the belief in love. Forgiving his
faults as we wish to be forgiven, we cannot fail to feel
with him that

"Love, though misdirected, is
among

The things which are immortal
and surpass

All that frail stuff which will be-
or which was." 94

VI

Conclusion

Throughout the preceding discussion Shelley has been considered in the light of a philosopher. To separate a man's beliefs from his actions is, in the case of Shelley, almost impossible. Therefore, from time to time biographical matter has been used to clarify the principles he expressed in his poetry. The spirit of revolt, present in Queen Mab, is better understood by the addition of the knowledge of his early rebellion against authority. The extracts from Shelley's letters to Harriet are an exposition of his social ideas expressed poetically in Epipsy-chidion. His poems often grew out of some incident¹ or series of incidents in his life. The death of Harriet and the subsequent harsh criticism to which Shelley was subjected made almost necessary, for peace at least, the home in Italy whence have come so many of his best poems.

The isolated passages quoted from the poems

1 See Mrs. Shelley's note on The Revolt of Islam and The Witch of Atlas- Woodberry.

can not in themselves prove Shelley's philosophy. In order that false impressions might not be created by the illustration of a few lines, many longer poems have been briefly paraphrased. In recapitulation of Shelley's theories, the poems best illustrating his philosophy may be mentioned. First, his belief in the will to endure injustice for social benefit may be found to be most emphasized in The Revolt of Islam, and Prometheus Unbound. Especially in the first is there the expression of the individualistic spirit that makes the woman a being equal with man, his companion and friend. Secondly, chiefly in The Revolt of Islam is reason used in the righting of wrongs. The hero, Laon, protests against bloodshed, appealing to the reasoning power of his hearers that theirs is a mental slavery more than a physical. Laone, too, in her speech to the mariners, proves by the use of argument and persuasion the weakness of their beliefs, and by the same power secures their cooperation and help. Reason fails, temporarily at least, but love and a courageous will provide the needed sacrifice. Reason, evolving into the supremacy of thought, is paramount in Hellas. Lastly, the belief in the strength of love that, according to Shelley, is to

perfect the world socially and politically is present in nearly all the longer poems. The note of humanitarianism in Queen Mab and Prometheus Unbound is a part of the great scheme of perfecting the world. The willing sacrifice of Prometheus in the latter poem, and of Laon in The Revolt of Islam is another illustration of the power of love. The witch in The Witch of Atlas is a personification of that happy love which like a will-o'-the-wisp, darts about over the earth doing good. In Adonais, love becomes immortal.

In nearly all Shelley's poems there is the constant protest against tyranny, convention, falsehood, and hypocrisy. In four, Queen Mab, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound and Hellas, he presents the world as a perfect social and political system would make it. Each successive picture shows the changing, maturing mind of the poet. Because of the monotony of repetition of ideas, many shorter poems and fragments have not been touched upon in the foregoing chapters. But enough has been said to show that, in spite of various interpretations of Shelley's poems, there is in each an unmistakable philosophy of life.

Bibliography

Books

- Arnold, Matthew - Essays in Criticism. Macmillan Company. New York. 1889. pp. 205-252.
- Brailsford, Henry Noel - Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle. Home University Library. Henry Holt and Company. New York. 1913.
- Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley - Edited by George E. Woodberry. Houghton, Mifflin Company. New York. 1901.
- Godwin, William - An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. Edited by Raymond A. Preston. Alfred A. Knopf. New York. 1926.
- Legouis, Emile and Cazamian, Louis - A History of English Literature. Macmillan Company. New York. 1929. pp. 1083-1091.
- Maurois, Andre - Ariel, translated by Ella D'Arcy. D. Appleton and Company. New York. 1926.
- Myers, Frederick, W. H. - Selections and Introductions from T. H. Ward The English Poets. Macmillan Company. New York, 1888. Vol. IV. pp. 348-356.
- Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley - Edited by Mrs. Shelley. Crissey and Markley. Goldsmith's Hall, Library Street, Philadelphia-1839.
- Shelley Memorials - Edited by Lady Jane Shelley. Ticknor and Fields. Boston. 1859.
- Stephen, Sir Leslie - Godwin and Shelley from Hours in a Library. G. P. Putnam's Sons. New York. 1899. Vol. III, pp. 356-406.

Symonds, John A. - Shelley from English Men of Letters. Edited by John Morley. Harper and Brothers. New York. 1879.

Trelawney, E. J. - Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron. Ticknor and Fields. Boston. 1858.

Periodicals

Hotson, Leslie - "Shelley's Last Letters to Harriet." The Atlantic Monthly. January and February. 1930.