

University of Louisville

ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

1948

Shelley's God.

Albert Stutzenberger
University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stutzenberger, Albert, "Shelley's God." (1948). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 2182.
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/2182>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact thinkir@louisville.edu.

3527

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Shelley's God

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

by

ALBERT STUTZENBERGER

Year

1948



This PDF document is a scanned copy of a paper manuscript housed in the University of Louisville (UofL) Libraries. The quality of this reproduction is greatly dependent upon the condition of the original paper copy. Indistinct print and poor quality illustrations are a direct reflection of the quality of materials that are available for scanning. The UofL Libraries greatly appreciates any better copies that can be made available for replacement scans.

NAME OF STUDENT: ALBERT STUTZENBERGER

TITLE OF THESIS: SHELLEY'S GOD

APPROVED BY READING COMMITTEE COMPOSED OF THE
FOLLOWING MEMBERS:

W. E. Lensing

W. F. Ekstrom

NAME OF DIRECTOR: Mary E. Burton

DATE: June 4, 1948

SHELLEY'S GOD

CONTENTS

	INTRODUCTION	1
I	Historical Background: GROWTH OF THE MODERN SPIRIT IN RELIGION BEFORE SHELLEY	9
II	Personal Background: EARLY INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES. DEVELOPMENT OF HATRED FOR ORTHODOX RELIGION	24 34
III	Shelley's God: THREE PHASES OF HETERODOXY THE ADVANCE TO A PERSONAL GOD	46 64
	CONCLUSION	121

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

My thesis is concerned with Shelley's fluctuating attitudes toward God. In the main, it treats of the poet's flight from and subsequent search for God. My purpose in choosing this subject is to discover and present more fully what I take to be Shelley's final and positive affirmations regarding the Deity.

To this day, a century and a quarter after his death, there prevails a confused multiplicity of opinions, and Shelley is still denominated an atheist or a pantheist, a disciple of Godwin or a Platonic visionary.¹ In his own lifetime he was hailed as one of "a miserable crew of atheists and pantheists."² In a leading magazine of his day such epithets as "hideous blasphemy," "impious profanation", and "pages of raving atheism," were cast at his poem, Queen Mab.³

Byron, whose mode of living was anything but exemplary, protested the placing of his daughter in the custody of the Shelleys, to "be taught to believe there is no Deity."⁴ Thomas Moore, the Irish songwriter, enjoined Byron not to associate with Shelley lest he be corrupted.⁵

¹ See Archibald Strong, "Shelley's Faith", in Studies in Shelley, p.9.

² Quarterly Review, xxi, p.461 (April, 1819). See White, The Unextinguished Heart, p.135.

³ Literary Gazette, ix, p.307. (May 19, 1821). See also in White, Op.cit., p.55.

⁴ Prothero, in The Works of Lord Byron, V, p.15.

⁵ Ibid., VI, p.35.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Shelley continued to appear as the symbol of revolt against religion. Dante Gabriel Rossetti says that he kept the reading of Shelley's poems in abeyance for several years because his mother had begged him, with tears in her eyes, not to destroy his soul by opening that book.¹

Even today the assertion that Shelley believed in a God would seem to many critics like a travesty of truth. In both biographical and critical studies there has been a fairly general tendency to assume that Shelley's views remained static from the period of his first published statements on the subject at Oxford. He was then still in his intellectual adolescence. He did not reach the full maturity of his powers until four or five years later. We are then to believe that Shelley stated his position on religion in his nineteenth year and did not express any new views on the subject subsequent to that time.

Most authorities proceed no further than to assume that Shelley had no distinctly formulated conception of a God, or, at least, of one that would cast any kind of influence over the minds of men. This prevalent idea is accurately expressed by S.F. Gingerich, who finds in Shelley's work only a "vague belief, at most, in some impersonal, abstract force or power ruling the universe."²

1

Rossetti, Wm Michael, Praeraphaelite Diaries and Letters. Containing some early correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1835-1864), p.66.

2

Gingerich, S.F. "Beauty in Shelley, Keats, and Poe," University of Michigan Publications, VIII, p.175.

Newman Ivy White, who has written a most intimately detailed life of the poet after a study requiring twenty-four years, still could say: "At no time did he believe in a personal deity." And again: "He did believe in an impersonal force governing the universe."¹

Arthur C. Hicks, who made a study of the influence of Christianity on Shelley's thinking, could still say as a result of his investigation: "Shelley in this essay (on Christianity) represents Christ as a benevolent Deity, invested with personality only to give force to the conception.... To the end he maintained his opposition to the idea of a personal God."²

I plan to examine the subject in the light of these statements, and to proceed beyond the conclusions, if possible, which these men have reached. From my reading of Shelley I am convinced that he arrived eventually at a point where his ideas of a Deity were running parallel to, and sometimes coinciding with, those of the average Christian believer.

I believe the majority of critics have dealt only with the early phases of Shelley's religious experiences, which display prominently his theophobic tendencies. I believe from my close reading of The Cenci and other later writings that these same critics have overlooked the gradual progress of Shelley to a position where he loved and venerated the God or

¹ White, The Best in Shelley, p.11.

² Hicks, The Place of Christianity in Shelley's Thought, p.24.

Spirit of Goodness, Love, and Universal Sympathy.

In addition to The Cenci I shall make considerable use of Prometheus Unbound and Hellas, together with the shorter poems written after 1815. There are many late fragments which furnish strong evidence of Shelley's belief in a Divinity. Of his prose writings, the Essay on Christianity contains his most mature thoughts on the subject of a Divinity. I shall make only slight use of The Revolt of Islam, Alastor, and Adonais, because the idea-content of these poems, as a whole, lies outside the domain of this investigation.

There are many aspects of Shelley's religious beliefs; his attitude toward a Divinity, his animus toward Christianity and the Church, his faith in man, the possibilities of perfectibility, and his conceptions of Heaven, Hell, and the evolution of the soul here and hereafter. Of these several aspects I intend to restrict myself in the main to Shelley's doubts and distrust of a Deity; his fluctuations of thought regarding the possible nature of this Deity; and finally, his gradually increasing conviction that there is such a Supreme Spirit pervading the universe and manifesting itself in the atmosphere through which we move and live. It is in the last seven years of his life that Shelley's devotion to and veneration for the God of Love and his Universal Sympathy are clearly discernible.

To formulate my conclusions I shall employ the analytical method of deduction, proceeding by the means both of nobis notiora and of notiora naturae, more familiarly known as

hiding and seeking, since both apply most appropriately and most logically to Shelley's flight from and subsequent search for God.

That Shelley arrived at that stage where he held essentially the same belief regarding the Deity as the orthodox Christian remains the onus probandi of this study.

My main source for biographical material was the two-volume life of Shelley by Newman Ivey White. Other biographies which I used, mainly for verification of details, were by Ingpen, Medwin, Feck, Trelawney, Hogg, and Campbell. Mrs. Campbell's book contains much good critical material also.

One excellent investigation helpful to me was Ellsworth Barnard's Shelley's Religion, in which a great many aspects of Shelley's beliefs are treated in a general way. Although the unbounded admiration of the author tends to make him defend in an uncritical manner much that is indefensible in Shelley's life and work, I owe him an immense debt of gratitude for confirming, through his pronouncements on Shelley's "supra-personal God," my conviction that I was on the right track in my investigation.

Another study that was valuable to me was the discussion of "Shelley's Faith" in Studies in Shelley, by Archibald Armstrong. It threw insight upon certain passages that needed illumination for me, although it was concerned primarily with other phases of the subject than mine.

Other critics to whom I resorted, chiefly for reference,

were Clutton-Brock, Gingerich, Brailsford, Paul Elmer More, Quiller-Couch, Symons, and Solve. The main sources which I used for my guidance on the historical background were Randall's Making of the Modern Mind, McGiffert's Protestant Thought Before Kant, and Moore's History of Christian Thought Since Kant. In some instances I had to take recourse to the histories of English literature by Buchan or by Legouis and Cazamian to find material on such authors as Drummond and Dugald Stewart, since they are mentioned nowhere else, and I deemed it useful to discuss briefly every name that appears among writers on Shelley's reading lists.¹

All of Shelley's prose needful, except the letters, was contained in the collected edition by Shawcross. With the exception of the letter to Lord Ellenborough, which is printed and discussed in White's biography, all references to letters pertain to the two-volume edition of Ingpen. These letters, as well as excerpts from the literary and philosophical essays, have been quoted many times, simply because this body of prose is the key unlocking the great themes and ideas in Shelley's poetry.

And, of course, the real fountainhead, the mine yielding richest ore, for my investigation is the poetry of Shelley. Without it there could be no investigation. With it, "veil after veil may be withdrawn and the inmost beauty of the

1

The names of Paley and Stewart are either too briefly mentioned or omitted entirely by Dubray, Thilly, Weber, and Randall and Buchler, whose histories of philosophy I consulted.

meaning never exposed."¹

Additional books which I read chiefly to amplify my knowledge of all the intricate ramifications of my subject were in the field of hermeneutics, or modern theological interpretations of a "personal God". On this particular topic I have gathered most enlightenment from Brightman's The Problem of God and Montague's Belief Unbound. And for general purposes I read segments of Jevon's Elementary Lessons in Logic, Randall and Buchler's Philosophy: An Introduction, and Fryer and Henry's Outline of General Psychology.

In outline, my study will consist of three main parts. The first part will treat of the historical background, the development of the modern spirit in religion before Shelley's time. The second part will trace the necessary personal background; the hereditary and early intellectual influences, and the development of his hatred for orthodox religion. The third section I shall divide into two periods according to his earlier and his later contrasting viewpoints, treating the several stages of his theophobia, wherein he doubted or looked upon the Deity merely as some vague, impersonal force; and finally, his advancement to a belief in the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, Goodness, and Love.

¹

Shelley, A Defence of Poetry (Shawcross), p.149.

GROWTH OF THE MODERN SPIRIT IN RELIGION
BEFORE SHELLEY

GROWTH OF THE MODERN SPIRIT IN RELIGION BEFORE SHELLEY

In order to comprehend more fully the causes and the consequent nature of Shelley's revolt against traditional religion, it is necessary for us to explore and evaluate the liberalizing movements in the field of religious thought before Shelley. Intellectually, Shelley was the legatee of the rationalizing humanists who first pierced a breach in the heavily armored breastworks of doctrinal orthodoxy, and who bared the way for the new scientific reasoning and modern methods of investigation.¹

Protestantism, during the period of its early cleavage from Catholicism, remained essentially as medieval in the external features of its faith and ordinance as the older church. Both branches of the Christian church were conservative, and stoutly defended the dogmatic pillars of their faith from thrusts by liberal-minded dissenters. But the new rationalistic spirit, when it first appeared in the seventeenth century, repudiated all traditional theology, and proved to be as deadly to Protestant denominationalism as to the more venerable Catholicism. It discarded all ecclesiastical canons which it considered medieval in nature, and insisted on the elevation of man from his lowly state of sinful depravity to one of self-respecting dignity.²

1

Randall, Making of the Modern Mind, p.283.

2

Ibid., p.284.

In some instances the departures from orthodoxy were slight, in others, of paramount significance, but the deviations were always motivated by the spirit of moderate liberalism. In Holland a group called Arminians reacted against the retention in Calvinism of belief in the total depravity of man and the consignment of souls to eternal hellfire through lack of grace. To Calvin man had no choice of thought or action, and was merely an instrument to be destroyed or saved as the scales balanced in the hands of an uncompromising God. "But the spirit of the modern age, with its new estimate of man, was out of sympathy with such a doctrine. Man is not a mere cipher whose fate is of no importance; he is a rational being who may demand consideration and fair treatment from God."¹

It was a natural development that led rationalism to domesticate itself within the Protestant fold, since the multiple partitions there offered admissible sanctions and concessions. Speaking of divergent opinions, Voltaire says, "Were there but one religion in England, its despotism would be fearful; were there but two, they would cut each other's throats; but there are thirty, and they live in peace and happiness."² The birth of new denominations and the freedom of thought within those denominations accelerated a tolerance of opinion which would have been impossible, had Christendom remained under a single sovereignty. It was the schism

¹ McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant, p.188.

² Voltaire, Lettres Philosophiques, Lettre 6, p.79.

itself within the older ecclesiastical body which had effectually secured immunity for those who harbored unconventional ideas in religion.

In England it was possible, owing to the divers opinions expressed through the rise of many sects, for rationalistic thought to find favor and support in many outspoken publications. Shortly before the death of James I, in 1624, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, in his book De Veritate, advocated certain common principles of belief which could be accepted by the wisest and most intelligent of all races and ages. Most religions, he claimed, had deteriorated through the voluminous addition of supererogatory doctrines which had eclipsed the pristine glow of primordial truths emanating from their original founders.

Thirteen years later, in 1637, Chillingworth's book, The Religion of Protestants, proclaimed the Bible a sufficient standard for the conduct of one's life, and minimized the importance of doctrinal distinctions. Tolerance was recommended for all those who accepted the Bible as their guide.¹

Roger Williams in 1644 argued for the separation of Church and State, believing the Church needed no assistance or patronage from the State but should gird itself only with "the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit."² In the same year Milton pled

¹ McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant, p.190.

² Williams, The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience, ch.XLV, p.373.

eloquently in Areopagitics for tolerance of minor differences in religious matters. Thirty years later he urged unity among all Protestants by a universal acceptance of the Bible.

Jeremy Taylor was the first Anglican divine to speak in defense of tolerance. In his Discourse of the Liberty of Propheying (1647), he stated it as his belief that any one accepting the Apostles' Creed should be recognized as a Christian. John Locke in his Letters on Toleration (1689) said that religion was a personal matter and that the government should place no restrictions on one's beliefs. Anthony Collins in his Discourse of Free Thinking (1713) rejected any belief in revelation, prophecy, or miracles, and upheld the right of the individual to his own opinions, religious or irreligious, on the grounds that reason was a sufficiently certain and safe guide for any man.

Collins was champion of Deism, which was widely espoused at the time of the Revolution of 1688. The basic principle of Deism was absolute freedom for all sects and all opinions. Its shibboleth was "natural religion", the antipode of revealed religion, and it condemned the bibliolatry of the Puritans as being pragmatically as untenable as the ecclesiastical practices and hagiolatry of the older Church.

Matthew Tindal's book Christianity as Old as Creation, designated as "the Deists' Bible", contends that Christianity is intrinsically sound because it unites in itself all the

L
McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant, p.192.

features of a natural religion. "I shall attempt to show you that men, if they sincerely endeavor to discover the will of God, will perceive that there is a Law of nature or reason; and that this Law like its Author is absolutely perfect, eternal, and unchangeable; and that the design of the Gospel was not to add to, or take from, this Law."¹

The Deists reduced natural religion to the simplest forms of an equation: God is a morally perfect Being; He requires a virtuous life of man as the token of homage to his will; therefore, the virtuous man will be awarded in the future life for his righteousness, and reason will lead him to see the merits accruing to and contingent on a life of moral rectitude.

Deism wove itself into the texture of theological thinking, and "its arguments were never successfully refuted. On the contrary, the striking thing is that their opponents, the militant divines, had come to the same rational basis with the Deists."²

Upon this type of natural religion a group of religious thinkers, led by Archbishop Tillotson of Canterbury, superimposed a supernatural element. "Natural religion is not enough," he says; "it is the foundation of all revealed religion, and revelation is designed simply to establish its duties."³

¹ Tindal, Christianity as Old as the Creation, p.7.

² Moore, Edward Caldwell, History of Christian Thought Since Kant, pp.23-24.

³ Tillotson, "Natural Religion and Christianity," in Works, II (ed.1857), p.333.

Tillotson was opposed to mystical experiences and envisioned reason as a balance wheel in religion. When he championed reason, he constructed its significance as a proper means to an end, a means that would make the religious mode of life appear wholesome and desirable of attainment. Revelation, he persisted, leads us to recognize Christ as the Son of God, to worship God in His name, and to partake of the Divine Spirit through His sacraments. The latter, he said, imbue us with a sense of revolt against sin, and the figure of Christ furnishes us confirmation for preceptive belief and inspiration.¹

John Locke agreed in the main with Tillotson that religion is a personal matter, and advocated revelation because it brings man to a closer relationship with God. He stated that "a miracle is a sensible operation, which being above the comprehension of the spectator, and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine."² In The Reasonableness of Christianity (1695) he says that "divine worship required simpl ifying and purifying; that encouragement to virtue was needed as an assurance of future rewards and punishments."³

William Law wrote The Case of Reason, or Natural Religion Fairly and Fully Stated in 1731 as a refutation to the stand taken by Tindal in Christianity as Old as the Creation that

1

McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant, pp.196-197.

2

Locke, Discourse of Miracles, p.217.

3

McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant, pp.206-207.

the Christian faith could be defended by the laws of reason. Law denied the need of subjecting religion to the test of reason. Man's judgment errs constantly in discerning the truth and in divorcing the right from the wrong, prior to divine revelation. We are powerless to plummet the utmost depths of God's nature; therefore, we can know only in part what He would consider it worthy for us to know through revelation. Dr. Samuel Johnson ascribed his devoutness in his later years to the reading of Law's works.

One of the greatest metaphysicians of the eighteenth century was George Berkeley (1685-1753), an Irishman, who spent three years in America in missionary attempts to Christianize the Indians. He combatted the coeval tendencies of philosophers to rationalize religion, and denied the existence of matter.

His idealism led him to proclaim that "things, so far as they have any meaning for us, exist in our minds only."¹ Berkeley ran counter to the prevalent ideas of his day, though he was widely read for the grace and urbanity of his style. He was first brought to Shelley's attention by Southey. In some of his later writings Shelley reveals the influence of Berkeley.

The Scotchman, David Hume (1711-1766), disclaimed any basis for rationalism in religion. He undermined the foundations of supernaturalism so thoroughly in his Essay on Miracles

¹ Dubray, Introductory Philosophy, rev.ed., pp.510-522. Other discussions of the Berkeleyan theory are found in Randall and Buchler, Philosophy: An Introduction, pp.208-217; Thilly, History of Philosophy, pp.333-344; and Fraser, A. Campbell Selections from Berkeley, pp.xii-xxxvi.

(1748) that "intelligent men have rarely questioned it since, that a miracle, in the sense of a supernatural event, as a sign of the divinity of its worker, cannot possibly be established."¹ Mind, according to Hume, was only a reservoir of impressions stored up through and by the senses. The senses are deceptive, and knowledge is relative to our experiences, and since it is experience which is the final authority for all our beliefs, "it appears that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof."² Hume proceeded to destroy the argument for the existence of a Creator by stating there was no necessity for a First Cause. If the world did have a Creator, he was an incompetent workman and must have ceased to exist after his labors, since he has never demonstrated his Being to any living mortal. Hume's work is an expression of doubt about the efficacy of any religious beliefs.

It is appropriate to mention here two other Scotchmen, not because they provided any re-orienting directives for the worldstream of thought, but because they produced stimuli for the rationalistic proclivities in Shelley's adolescent thinking. William Drummond, a century before Hume, had written Cypress Grove, a meditative essay on death and the conditioning of the soul prior to and following the payment of its "debt to nature". Drummond discounted sectarianism and dogmatism in graphing

1

Randall, Making of the Modern Mind, p.293.

2

Hume, "Essay on Miracles," in Works, II, p.313.

spiritual dimensions. Another Scotchman, Dugald Stewart, a popular professor at the University of Edinburgh in Shelley's day, defended the ethos of a liberalized theology and asserted that "the simplest 'ideas' with which Locke and Hume tried in vain to reconstruct the world are little else than an arbitrary and artificial product of the intelligence."¹

Voltaire, the great exponent of rationalism in France, repudiated Christianity and all other forms of revealed religion. He proclaimed the right of every individual to arrive at his own conclusions regarding religion independently of tradition. Voltaire strove to destroy intolerance in whatever guise it assumed. He admitted the existence of a Superior Being: "To believe in a wise Creator, eternal and supreme, is not faith, it is reason."² And again, in his Dictionnaire Philosophique, he asks, "Is it necessary to chase away God because we have chased away the Jesuits? On the contrary, it is necessary to love Him the more."³ Reduced to its simplest denominator, Voltaire's theory amounted to a rejection of every belief which did not satisfy the demands of reason.

During the Restoration period and thereafter well into the eighteenth century a group of latitudinarian divines had been infusing religious thought with the rationalism of science and philosophy. Representative among these writers, centered

¹ Legouis and Cazamian, History of English Literature, p.976.

² Voltaire, Foi (Faith), quoted in Nitze and Dargan, History of French Literature, p.264.

³ Ibid., Article on Dieu, (God), p.265.

mainly around Cambridge, were Benjamin Whichcote, Henry More, Isaac Barrow, Ralph Cudworth, Joseph Glanvill, John Smith, Robert South, and Edward Stillingfleet. "The latitudinarians tend to broaden Christian doctrine; they lay stress upon common beliefs, upon what unites sects, not what divides them. Their notion of faith and its proofs thus develops towards a pure matter of reason; they react against the enthusiastic zeal of the Puritans, against the extreme forms of the personal interpretation of Scriptures. They provide the connecting link between science and religion." ¹ This group of writers, impregnated at first with the mystical tendencies of Platonism, gradually veered to a position where belief became a matter of intellectual sobriety and reasoned judgment. The natural corollary of this secularizing attitude in religion was a greater latitude and tolerance for the polemical patterns of dissent in the numerous sects which arose during the period.

A natural outgrowth of, or in one sense, a reaction to, the latitudinarian relaxation of spiritual austerity, was the great religious awakening in the middle of the eighteenth century, irradiating in the main from the evangelistic personality of John Wesley. The immediate precursors of Wesley were William Law and the Moravian Brethren, with those teachings Wesley had much in common. Methodism, the denomination founded by Wesley, was allied to the general movement all over northern Europe against ecclesiasticism at this time. In Germany and

¹

Legouis and Cazamian, A History of English Literature, p.693.

Scandinavia it assumed the title of Pietism, in France that of Jansenism, and in America, under the guidance of Whitefield, it virtually merged with Methodism. On the whole it exalted the devotional at the expense of the rational in religious experience, emphasized regeneration, sanctification, and repentance, and declared that faith, through the intuitive faculties, was an attitude not of the mind but of the heart. It was opposed to the establishment and controls of a state church, decried the prevailing class distinctions, stressed practical values, and, in such poets as William Cowper who wrote directly under its influence, it gave rise to a new humanitarianism which was basically modern in outlook and democratic in its essence.¹

In France, owing to the extremely reactionary attitude and the abuses of the established church, the form that opposition to religion assumed was an openly-avowed and somewhat militant atheism. Baron d'Holbach, a physicist, was the ablest exponent of this "new enlightenment," which was not entirely destructive in its nature, since, while it favored a general abolishment of all kinds of religious beliefs, still upheld justice, goodness, and love as humanity as noble, moral ideals. Holbach, in his two books, The System of Nature (1770) and Common Sense (1772), excoriated the orthodox notions of God, freedom of the will, and immortality. He was a consistent materialist, attacking from every angle the existence

¹ See Legouis and Cazamian, A History of English Literature, pp. 953-962.

of a First Cause. Shelley, prior to the composition of The Necessity of Atheism and Queen Mab, was thoroughly imbued with Holbach's materialistic ideas, and in several instances incorporated whole passages from Holbach into his own writings.¹

In Germany, where Pietism penetrated more deeply and widely into the upper and the more intellectual strata of the population than in England, the philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his Critique of Pure Reason, published in 1781, was demonstrating the validity of God, freedom of the will, immortality, and the practicality of faith. Kant denied the efficacy of science and reason to prove anything in the field of faith. Religion found its sanction for being, not in reason, but in the charismatic experiences which man derives from his intuitive faculties.² He announced his postulate for the existence of a Deity as follows: "There are only three possible ways of proving the existence of God by the speculative reason

The first is the argument from design, the second, the argument from a first cause, the third, the ontological argument. There are no more, and there can be no more. I shall show that the reason can accomplish as little in the one way as in the other, and that it spreads its wings in vain in the effort to rise above the world of sense by the mere power

1

Randall, The Making of the Modern Mind, pp.301-304.

2

In Webster charisma is defined as "a special divine or spiritual gift; a special endowment conferred upon a believer as an evidence of the experience of divine grace and fitting him for the life, work, or office to which he was called; a grace, as a miraculously given power. . . .attributed to some of the early Christians."

of speculation. I assert then that all the attempts at a mere speculative use of the reason in the field of theology are entirely fruitless and in their very nature null and void." After Kant's rational justification of faith, it was nugatory to argue that religion could be analyzed scientifically, like a chemical, for its component parts. Religion henceforth was to be a matter of the heart; the world no longer was to be looked upon as a blind, bloodless mechanism, but as a living organism, spiritual and moral in content. Kant's influence in relating science to the world of empiricism waxed strongest under the apostolate of Fichte, Hegel, and others of his followers, but that discussion belongs to a later period than that we are now studying.

Two men merit notice here briefly, not so much for their contributions to late eighteenth-century thought as for their bearing on Shelleyan historiography. One of them, William Paley, whose Evidences of Christianity (1794) served Sir Timothy Shelley as a vade mecum in numerous arguments with his son, came to a belated defense of revelation by stressing the argument of design. Paley wrote chiefly in refutation of Hume's skepticism.

The theories of William Godwin, whose life is intimately bound up with Shelley's, will be discussed in more detail in subsequent pages, where it will be seen how the early radical opinions of Shelley dovetail with those of Godwin. The

¹ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p.150.

latter's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793) preached the doctrine of determinism, the elimination of emotional influences from our thinking as being illusory, and the destruction of all ties binding us to a past which is irreconcilable with the future. Godwin's thought was an abstract of many similar avowments made by the French philosophes just prior to the Revolution.¹

Thus, we have proceeded in this chapter from the rise of rationalism in the beginning of the seventeenth century to the period of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth. The contributions made by both those who advanced and those who retarded the growth of the modern spirit in religion have been cited, some mainly for whatever significance they may have in relation to this treatise.

Shelley was one whose flame-like devotion to Revolutionary doctrine was whole-hearted and inextinguishable. As we shall see in the succeeding chapter, he drank deeply at the fount of these heterodoxical philosophers. He was consumed by whatever he read, and often he returned the ore, enriched and mettlesome, in a new mold. He was an avid reader, and at an early age was already acquainted with practically all of the philosophical writers discussed in this chapter.

In our next chapter we shall take up a study of the early intellectual influences in the life of Shelley.

¹

Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle, p.78.

EARLY INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

EARLY INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

It is apparent even from a superficial study of Shelley's writings that his mature thinking processes did not stem from hereditary or early environmental influences. He grew up among people who did not understand him and from whom he could derive no intellectual stimulation. If the forms and nature of his later beliefs are to be rightly understood, one must examine their substance in the spirit of the times and in the diverse type of reading he pursued, rather than in his ancestry, his family associations, or his uncongenial surroundings at school.¹

Sussex, the county in which he was born, was a rock of conservatism in a time when thrones were toppling and century-old institutions were being assailed. On the very day of his birth the National Assembly in France dispossessed the Church of all its property. On the same day the Allied governments issued a proclamation, warning the French that Paris would be leveled with the ground if Louis XVI suffered bodily violence. The Whig party, of which Shelley's father was a partisan, erupted in acrimonious debate for and against the Revolutionary doctrines. Thomas Paine and William Godwin exhorted Englishmen to support the Revolution; Edmund Burke urged them to resist it. Government spies were busy in enemy countries. French emigres, most of them members of the aristocracy, were daily streaming into England and furnishing tales of horror and devastation left behind them.

¹White, Shelley, I, p. 18

Two books published about this time, Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman and William Godwin's Political Justice, shocked their English readers for the outright boldness of the thought. The latter book was especially provocative by its attacks on the existing laws of marriage, property, and all governmental restraints in general, and by its advocacy of the Revolutionary shibboleths: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. It likewise proclaimed a belief in the fundamental goodness of man and possibilities of his eventual advancement to a state of perfection.

Shelley had the misfortune to be the son of his own father, a country squire, who would have wished for nothing better than to have his son follow after him in the honorable pattern of a staid country gentleman. Mr. Timothy Shelley was not a narrow-minded reactionary. As a member of the Whig party he must have favored many liberal aims in government. As a "friend of religious liberty", he once subscribed for two copies of the sermons of a Mr. Sadler, a Unitarian clergyman, and expressed the view that he would like to have Mr. Sadler¹ as the minister of his own church. Christianity held significance for him, less for its spiritual values than for its stabilizing influence upon the home and the individual. To him the church was one of the chief pillars of state. He erred in "imagining himself a true type of patriarch, a shepherd to² his wife and daughters, and to his son a veritable Chesterfield."

¹ White, Shelley, I, p.12.

² Campbell, Shelley and the Unromantics, p.70.

Mr. Shelley prided himself on originating most of the arguments set forth by Paley in his Evidences of Christianity.¹ He disliked any display of doubt or questioning on the origin and truth of Christian beliefs. He ended all polemics by saying, "I believe because I do believe" when his son argued with him on the unreasonableness of revealed religion. A strict observance of Christian practices as well as a pietistic attitude was distasteful to him. Religion was therefore valuable as a soporific, a sedative to be applied when needed.

Once when Shelley was walking with his father and they met the chaplain of Horsham gaol just returned from administering the last religious rites to a condemned man before his execution, Mr. Shelley exclaimed facetiously, "Well, old soul-saver,² how did you send the rascal off?" This light-hearted indifference to the tragedy of the recent execution had an adverse effect on the serious-minded youth, who suspected his father of being a hypocrite in his beliefs.³

An obituary notice appearing shortly after Sir Timothy's death says that he "...was sincerely respected. As a landlord he enjoyed a high reputation. . . .He possessed in a high degree the best qualities of the English country gentleman."⁴

Of Shelley's mother less is known. In one of his letters, Shelley apprises Hogg that his mother was liberal-minded, since

¹ Hogg, Life of Shelley, p.35.

² Campbell, Shelley and the Unromantics, p.71.

³ Medwin, The Life of Percy Byssne Shelley, p.62.

⁴ Obituary notice in the Gentleman's Magazine, xxii, August, 1844.

she deemed that strict adherence to religious forms and creeds¹ mattered less than good character and breeding.

Of his other relatives who might have had some influence on his future views, mention might be made of Sir Bysshe, his grandfather. Shelley states that the old man was a complete atheist. Medwin describes him as a cynical materialist in his² later years.

With his two oldest sisters Shelley kept up a steady correspondence as long as he was away at school, but little can be said for any influence they may have held over their older brother. Conversely, it was Shelley who cast a net over their young minds, hoping he might convert them to his way of³ "enlightened thinking".

From his divers teachers he professed to learn little beyond the routine instruction prescribed in the textbooks. He did receive a thorough grounding in the classics, and in later life he was able to read the Greek and Latin masters with obvious ease.

Aside from his regular school work, however, he was reading omnivorously all sorts of books that best suited his tastes and fancy. What he read stimulated his imagination, and his memory was prodigious.

1

Shelley in a letter to Hogg, May 15, 1811, speaks of his mother thus: "My mother is quite rational; she says: 'I think prayer and thanksgiving are of no use. If a man is a good man, philosopher or Christian, he will do very well in whatever future state awaits us'. This I call liberality." (Letters, I, p. 79.)

2

Medwin, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, p. 55.

3

Ibid., p. 57.

Most of his early reading was in the realm of the weird and fantastic. He delighted in the Gothic romances with their sensations of horror, their mysteries, and supernatural beings. One of these books, which he read when he was fourteen, was Robert Paltock's Peter Wilkins. Peter, the Messianic hero, purified the religion of the glumms and the glowries, which had degenerated through the worldly ambitions of priests. Throughout the story, Peter's efforts at reform were thwarted by selfish priests. Several years later, before he wrote Alastor,¹ Shelley read this book again.

Two other priests, Mrs. Radcliffe's Schedoni and Lewis' Ambrosio, which greatly aroused Shelley's attention, were characters who personified the vices of lust, selfishness,² and worldly vanity.

Ambrosio, the hero of Lewis' novel The Monk, was the abbot of the Capuchin order in Madrid. Called the "Man of Holiness", Ambrosio is tempted and snared into unholiness by his own supercilious, self-righteous attitude. Baited by an evil spirit in the guise of woman, Ambrosio falls, and, in committing one sin after another, he pursues the road of infernal degradation to its bitter end.

The monk's progress is accompanied by a series of incidents abounding in every conceivable horror. The Monk is a cheap dime-novel thriller with a fantastic array of villains, ghosts, yawning pits, blood-lettings, and other pseudo-

¹ White, Shelley, I, p.30.

² Ibid., p.31.

horrific incidents.

The young Shelley also derived much pleasure from reading those books in which a dictatorial father persecuting one or more of his children was a stock character. Since the boy's mode of thought and action was taking such a "perceptible color from his reading, is it strange that the respectable Mr. Timothy Shelley soon fitted into the pattern, ¹ or that he later felt that his son had been ruined by books?" So strong a detestation did Mr. Shelley come to feel for books that for years he would not hire any bailiff who could read, ² to manage his estate.

Shelley read a great deal of poetry, and he was particularly fond of two poems of Southey: The Curse of Kehama and Thalaba. The latter is written in a "singularly jejune metre, a sort of cadenced prose with lines of very unequal length, the idea of which Shelley was to imitate for a brief spell (in Queen Mab)."³ When Shelley was sixteen he read the first volume of poetry published by Felicia Browne (later Mrs. Hemans). A correspondence developed between them but it was brought to a close when the young lady's mother became alarmed at the ideas expressed in Shelley's letters.⁴

¹

White, Shelley, I, p.31.

²

Hogg, Life of Shelley, p.55.

³

Legouis and Cazamian, History of English Literature, p.1048. For an examination of Thalaba, see Fitzgerald's edition of Southey's Poems (Macmillan, 1909).

⁴

Medwin, Life of Shelley, p.47.

Shelley was seventeen and still at Eton when he first read Godwin's Political Justice, a book that was to have a far-reaching effect on his whole after-life. When later he was to study it seriously, he wrote to the author:

It is now a period of more than two years since first I saw your inestimable book on Political Justice. It opened to my mind more and more extensive views; it materially influenced my character and I rose from its perusal a better and wiser man. I was no longer the votary of romance; till then I had existed in an ideal world--now I found that in this universe of ours was enough to excite the interest of the heart, enough to employ the discussions of reasons. I beheld, in short, that I had duties to perform." 1

What is of interest to us is what Godwin has to say on religion. Godwin had once been a non-conforming minister, but feeling the restraints imposed upon him by the clerical garb, he forsook the pulpit. How far he departed from the viewpoint of the pulpit may be seen in this passage:

Religion is in reality in all its parts an accommodation to the prejudices and weaknesses of mankind. But it is time that we should lay aside the instruction intended only for children in understanding." 2

Furthermore, Godwin asserts that while teachers of religion instead of condemning the injustice of accumulated property, merely palliate it and advise the rich to repair the injustice by individual acts of charity. It is a system of clemency instead of a system of justice. The world was governed by a vague sort of mechanical system called Necessity, according

1 Shelley in letter to Godwin, January 10, 1812. (Letters, I, 219)

2 Godwin, Political Justice, p. 43-46.

to Godwin, and had nothing in common with organized religions, which had become worldly, rich, and powerful, condoning all sorts of political injustice.¹

In the conclusion to his first letter to Godwin, Shelley calls him "the regulator and former" of his mind. This statement made by Shelley at twenty has led subsequent students to overestimate the debt that Shelley owes to Godwin. Perhaps it is as well to hold with Mrs. Campbell that "Shelley's hungry idealism seized on these doctrines as a new religion; and though they confirmed him in his rejection of the imaginative world, and urged him on to a kind of practical life for which he was quite unfitted, they said, at any rate, occupy his mind and save it from chaotic confusion.... Cold and mechanical though they seem to us, the theories of Godwin were, after all, idealistic."²

This brings us up to the period when Shelley begins to question the conventional and accepted ideas regarding many things. As this paper is concerned with Shelley's views on religion, I have paid particular regard to anything that would have further bearing on the work in hand. I have taken into account whatever influences he may have derived through heredity and environment, and in so far as possible I have indicated the romantic type of books which may have been the sources of many of his later ideas. As Shelley's whole life

¹ Godwin, Political Justice, p.48.

² Campbell, Shelley and the Unromantics, p.93.

was dominated by the power of the idea, it is necessary to take this preliminary outlook on his early formative years and the books which he read at that time, to evaluate properly his later thinking.

DEVELOPMENT OF HATRED FOR ORTHODOX RELIGION

DEVELOPMENT OF HATRED FOR ORTHODOX RELIGION

We do not know when Shelley began to question conventional religious practices and beliefs. If we had the letters he wrote to Felicia Browne or Harriet Grove, we might find the first signs of a germinating doubt. But in all his writings until his eighteenth year there is every evidence of views which we would consider as safe and circumspect orthodoxy.

In Zastrozzi, the romance which was published in June, 1810, this passage occurs: "Convinced of the folly of hope, he addressed a prayer to his Creator--to Him who hears a suppliant from the bowels of the earth."¹

Again from the same novel we extract this:

Mathilda knew not how to pray; but God, who from the height of heaven penetrates the inmost thoughts of terrestrial hearts, heard the outcast sinner, as in tears of true and agonizing repentance, she knelt before Him.²

The supposition might be advanced here that Shelley, like any other novelist, is merely imputing such sentiments to his characters without holding any firm convictions on the subject himself. Accepting as fact such a supposition would be bellying the true nature of this particular author. If there ever was anyone who could not conceal his real convictions on matters of belief and disbelief, it was Shelley. The tragic events of his life were mainly owing to the fact that he spoke

¹ Shelley, Zastrozzi, p.6. .

² Ibid., p.104.

and acted forthrightly and with resolute honesty on such subjects always, regardless of consequences.

Six months later, when St. Irvyne was published in January, 1811, there are some slight shades of skepticism creeping into his thoughts, as we may well see when Ginotti, one of the main characters in the romance, makes a compact with the devil for his soul, and at times hurls his vituperation at witchcraft, priestcraft, hagiolatry, and other forms of idolatrous superstition to "prove the non-existence of a First Cause."¹

At the same time the author is addressing an aside to the heroine to

Beware, Eloise!--a precipice, a frightful precipice yawns at thy feet! Advance yet a step further and thou perishest! No, give not up thy religion--it is that alone which can support thee under the miseries with which imprudence has so darkly marked the progress of thine existence."²

Shelley could well be speaking to himself in cautioning the young girl not to abandon the consolations of her religion. Had he already considered taking such a step himself?

Farther on in this romance occurs the confession of the character Ginotti:

"I thought of death--I shuddered when I reflected, and shrank in horror from the idea, selfish and self-interested as I was, of entering a new existence to which I was a stranger....I was about seventeen.

¹

Shelley, St. Irvyne, p.214.

²

Ibid., p.197.

With sophistical arguments had I convinced myself of the non-existence of a First Cause, and, by every combined modification of the essence of matter, had I apparently proved that no existences could possibly be, unseen by human vision...I then believed that there existed no God. Ah! at what an exorbitant price have I bought the conviction that there is one!! 1

Ginotti acknowledges his sin in harboring misconceptions of the true nature of God, and reverts in his last moments to a belief in the Deity. Shelley himself at this period of his authorship was very near the same age as Ginotti when the fictional character disavowed belief in God.

The first germ of his subsequent ideas regarding the nature of God, says Medwin, came to Shelley from reading Pliny's essay De Deo. Pliny held that it was ridiculous to conceive of God in the likeness of any human shape or image formed in the human mind.²

In the writings of another Roman philosopher, Lucretius, Shelley was struck by the observation that there was no other god than blind chance governing the affairs of men; that revealed religions were illogical and merely served to benefit a selfish priestcraft.³ Already in St. Irvyne the character of the Rosicrucian voiced his doubts of a First Cause and held the same beliefs on priestcraft as Lucretius.⁴

1 Shelley, St. Irvyne, in Prose Works, pp.269-271.

2 Medwin, Revised Life of Shelley, p.50.

3 White, Shelley, I, p.52.

4. Ibid., p.52.

It was not until January, 1811, that Shelley,

who had upheld the idea of God or an over-
ruling Providence, in his novels, but who
had been dipping into Locke, Hume, Sir
William Drummond, Dugald Stewart, and Spinoza,
felt himself slipping from orthodoxy into
belief in a First Cause which he devoutly
wished might be 'the soul of the Universe,
the spirit of universal, imperishable love.' 1

Hogg states that he and Shelley had been reading several
metaphysical works, in part or in whole, together during the
winter months of 1810-1811. Locke and Hume were the two
selected for the closest examination.²

On November 11, 1810, Shelley asked Stockdale, the pub-
lisher of his romance, to procure for him a certain Hebrew
essay demonstrating the falsities of the Christian religion.
Stockdale informed Timothy Shelley of his son's growing "pre-
dispositions against revealed religion."³ This occurred during
the Christmas holidays, two days after Percy's return from
Oxford. Mr. Shelley was biased in the belief that Hogg, his
son's roommate, might be the source from which this skepticism
was emanating.

Shelley wrote to Hogg that he was "reckoned an outcast"
in his own family. His father, and presumably his mother also,
remonstrated with him for his "detestable principles". "Yet,"⁴
he says, "I defy them and laugh at their ineffectual efforts."

1
Peck, Shelley: His Life and Work I, p.102. The term "First Cause"
as used by Shelley and repeated by Peck here, is ambiguous.
Perhaps the "Principle of Necessity" would be more accurate.

2
Hogg, Life of Shelley, p.71.

3
Shelley, Letters, I, 18n (December 13, 1810)

4
Ibid., I, 18-19 (December 10, 1810)

Mr. Shelley, to keep his son from further infection by Hogg's opinions, would have withdrawn him from college, and thereby from association with Hogg, if Percy had consented. Upon receiving an excellent report on Hogg's "patrician background," Mr. Shelley made no further objection on that score.

Another grievous wound suffered at this time was the cancellation of the love-match between him and his cousin, Harriet Grove. The girl, perturbed at the tone of Percy's letters on speculative subjects, handed them over to her parents. The tacit engagement was at an end.

The abruptness of the separation just when his friends were few--and the bitter demonstration that it was to him of the power of intolerance, and the brutality of convention, so disturbed his naturally unbalanced emotions that he ceased to be an enthusiast for liberty and became a fanatic.¹

The hurt of humiliation and the wounding of his sensitive pride left scars on his soul that were never fully healed, and his hatred assumed the form of some fury combatting the imaginary Spirit of Intolerance.²

He wrote almost daily to Hogg. "O! I burn with impatience for the moment of the dissolution of Christianity; it has injured me." And he swore "on the altar of perjured Love to revenge"³ himself on Intolerance. It seems that Shelley actually had Christianity in mind whenever he mentions intolerance. M. Koszul, in examining the original

¹ Campbell, Shelley and the Unromantics, p.86.

² Dowden, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, I, p.101.

³ Letter to Hogg, December 20, 1810 (Letters, I, pp.18-19)

letters, found Hogg had substituted the word "intolerance" for "Christianity" in many instances in his biography of the poet.

In the midst of the Christmas festivities Shelley's wretchedness was unmitigated. "My unhappiness is excessive. Thanks, truly thanks for opening your heart to me....Dare I do the same to you? I dare not to myself....I dare not even to God, whose mercy is great." ¹ At this juncture Shelley is far from being an agnostic. He still believes there is a compassionate Deity.

A week later his spleen against Christianity rose to a high fever-mark.

Eternity blast me--here I swear that never will I forgive Christianity! I am convinced that it is of great disservice to society. Oh! I wish I were the Antichrist!--that it were mine to crush the demon....You shall see--you shall hear--how she has injured me. She is no longer mine! She abhors me as a skeptic as what she was before! Oh Christianity! When I pardon this last, may God (if there is a God) blast me! ²

Here again, most books following Hogg employ Intolerance for Christianity, though the latter word is what Shelley used. His speculative opinions had brought him to grief twice within the period of the holidays, and hence, for him intolerance and Christianity were synonymous and interchangeable. His

¹ Letter to Hogg, December 26, 1810 (Letters, I, p.26)

² Ibid., January 3, 1811 (Letters, I, p.30)

cousin's retraction of her implied engagement was the very essence of intolerance, a natural derivative of Christian practices. The phrase, "Crush the demon", sounds very much like Voltaire's well known Ecrasez l'infame, which Shelley was to use as a preface to Rosalind Mab.

It is plain that Shelley was now veering definitely toward agnosticism--"if there is a God". His skepticism was reinforced by the very methods which his family had devised for weakening its hold on him:

Having to suffer for his way of thinking only made him the more determined to persist in it. All his life he was animated by a rare devotion to the things of the mind; he was ready at any time to face martyrdom for the sake of an abstract idea; he was the last person in the world to surrender his principles for fear of persecution or the destruction of any selfish hopes.¹

The conflict going in Shelley's mind was a warring between his emotions which swayed him toward belief and his rationalizing intellect which swayed him toward doubt. When he felt deeply, he believed. When he applied cold reason to his pro-and-con problem, he bowed to the dictates of negation. "His normal state at the time seems to have been just short of belief in a deity."²

Still, Shelley could write to Hogg, before the holidays were over, one of the most feeling avowals he ever made of the

¹

Bernard, Shelley's Religion, p.21.

²

White, Shelley, I, p.104.

strong desire within him for some definite convictions on which his teetering opinions could finally come to rest:

I love what is superior, what is excellent, or what I conceive to be so; and I wish, ardently wish, to be profoundly convinced of the existence of a Deity, that so superior a spirit might derive some degree of happiness from my exertions....Even if the Universe were created by mere fortuitous concourse of atoms, that fortuity must have had a cause, and that Cause must be Deity. O that this Deity were the soul of the Universe, the spirit of universal, imperishable Love! Indeed I believe it is." 1

Shelley and his father continued their debate by correspondence after Percy returned to Oxford. Mr. Shelley advanced every argument at his command to defend the merits of orthodoxy. His son replied that, for those who do not think at all, and that group constitutes the "major part of civilized society," it is best that they should accept the religion handed down to them. But those who can reason for themselves should not be denied the privilege of doing "that which is, or ought to be the essence of their being." The person who can reason is fettered by religion "with the very bonds which restrain the unthinking one from mischief." 2

One month later, on February 9, 1811, the Oxford University and City Herald carried a paid announcement that very shortly The Necessity of Atheism would be published and made available at all the bookshops of London and Oxford. No one was greatly

1

Shelley in letter to Hogg, January 12, 1811 (Letters, I, pp.41-42)

2

Shelley in letter to his father, February 5, 1811, (Letters, I, p.52.

1

stirred by this notification.

A few weeks later Shelley entered the store of the Messrs. Munday and Slattery in the absence of the proprietors, placed copies of the new booklet in conspicuous locations of the windows and counters, requesting the clerk to dispose of the copies at once.

About twenty minutes had elapsed when the Reverend John Walker, Fellow of New College, paused from his stroll to glance in the windows of the bookstore, took note of the offending title, entered, scrutinized the contents of the pamphlet, and began consulting with the proprietors. They agreed with the clergyman that the book contained harmful ideas, and should not be allowed to grace their counters. Gathering the copies together, they marched with them to the kitchen and consigned their cargo to the flames.

Shelley and Hogg, meanwhile, employed their time in mailing copies to professors, heads of colleges, and clergymen. The title page, with names of the printers, had been cut out.

The matter would have blown over if one copy had not fallen into the hands of the Reverend Edward Copleston, afterwards Professor of Poetry, to whom Shelley under the masqued name of Jeremiah Stukeley, had mailed a copy. He called it to the attention of the Master of University College.

1

This small pamphlet on atheism, which produced a major crisis in the life of the youthful poet, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The author's identity was no secret. The culprit was called into conference before the Master and two or three Fellows, Shelley refused to acknowledge or deny authorship of the syllabus, or to reply to any questions on the subject.

In spite of his non-committal attitude, he was expelled March 25, 1811, and Hogg, for protesting the verdict, was given the same sentence. Instead of going home after his dismissal from Oxford, Shelley chose to live in solitude and cheap quarters in preference to a reconciliation with his father, a matter that could have easily been effected if he had been willing to recant his opinions.

In an effort to regain the good will of his father, he did agree, however, that he would "not obtrude atheistical opinions upon any one whatever."¹

A few months later Shelley, in writing to Godwin, stated that he would never again "crudely obtrude the question of atheism on the world."²

"Had he now behaved himself pardonably in the eyes of the conventional in those days, Shelley would have gone to London," says Leigh Hunt, "with the resolution of sowing his wild oats and becoming a decent member of society--that is to say, he would have seduced a few maid-servants, and then bestowed the remnant of his constitution upon some young lady of his own rank of life, and settled into a proper Church and King man of the old leaven, perhaps a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice."³

In this portion of Shelley's life which we have had under

¹
Ingpen, Shelley in England, p.232.

²
Shelley, Letters, I, p.223 (To William Godwin, January 16, 1812)

³
Hunt, Leigh, Autobiography, p.274.

discussion, we see that a chain of circumstances had led Shelley gradually to a definite break with Christianity or any other accepted form of religion. The reading and discussion of metaphysical works with Hogg established the trend of his thoughts in that direction. The revelation in Mr. Stockdale's correspondence with Mr. Shelley of Percy's speculative tendencies, the rupture of the love-match with Harriet, the publication of his pamphlet at Oxford and his subsequent expulsion on that account, and finally the intractable position taken by his father, at such antipodes to his own, that he recant all heretical opinion--all led to the irrevocable conclusion that he was subject to a peculiarly hateful form of persecution, and the incubus of intolerance pursuing him was thinly veiled in the guise of orthodox religion or Christianity.

It remains for us now to look into Shelley's writings and to find out what were his actual beliefs at this time and from this time to the end of his life.

THREE PHASES OF HETEROLOGY

THREE PHASES OF HETERODOXY

It is difficult to follow clearly at all times the progressive steps in Shelley's thinking on religion. There constantly arise before us confusing and, indeed, conflicting elements, through which it is possible to perceive, however, a leaven of ideas at work building organic forms out of the inorganic ferment.

During the holidays of 1810-1811, the last sojourn spent in his father's home, Shelley could still write to Hogg about a God on the orthodox plan:

Stay! I have an idea. I think I can prove the existence of a Deity--a First Cause. I will ask a materialist, how came this universe at first? He will answer in the words of Spinoza: 'An infinite number of atoms had been floating from all eternity in space, till at last one of them fortuitously diverged from its track, which dragging with it another, formed the principle of gravitation, and in consequence the universe.' What cause produced this change? Was not this first cause a Deity? Now, nothing remains but to prove that this Deity has a care, or rather that its only employment consists in regulating the present and future happiness of its creation....The Deity must be judged by us from attributes analogical to our situation.¹

This passage is quite pointed in its defense of the existence of a First Cause. It may not be the argument of the thorough-going believer, but it is sufficient to satisfy the demands of that believer. There is not even an implication of doubt, but a positive defense of a First Cause.

¹

Shelley in letter to Hogg, January 12, 1811 (Letters, II, pp. 41-42)

Yet scarcely two months later Shelley, in The Necessity of Atheism, was traveling in a diametrically opposite direction by repudiating his own arguments for a First Cause. Since the publication of this pamphlet was the first measured treatment of Shelley's preoccupation with religion, we shall look at it in some detail.¹

It opens with the assertion: **THERE IS NO GOD**, followed by the reservation that this applies solely to a creative **Deity**. "The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe remains unshaken."

Belief is a matter of the will, neither moral nor immoral. Belief derives from three sources. The senses are the source of all physical experience. The decision of reason, founded on our experience, depends on our senses. Testimony, based on the experience of others, "occupies the lowest degree" in belief. The senses grant us no grounds for belief in the existence of a **Deity** because the "God of Theologians is incapable of local visibility." Man must be convinced that the universe was created, and until that fact is demonstrated, we must infer that it has stood through all eternity, having no beginning, and therefore no creator: "It is easier to suppose that the universe has existed from all eternity than to conceive a being beyond its limits capable of creating it."

Belief derived from the evidence of others is untrustworthy. They may have been deceived. "Testimony is insuffi-

1

I am following the revised version published as Note VII. 13 to Queen Mab

cient to prove the being of a God." Our reason denies us a belief in the depositions of those who not only declare they were eye-witnesses of miracles, but that the Deity was irrational."

"God is a hypothesis, and as such, stands in the need of proof." Whenever we seek to explain our ideas of God, we end our research by calling him the last cause, or beyond all causes yet known. If we say God has created some phenomenon, it signifies merely that we are ignorant of the operational forces causing the phenomenon. "Man has always respected unknown causes, surprising effects that his ignorance kept him from unraveling." It is out of the unusual effects which strike man that he has built the "imaginary colossus" of God.

Most of our beliefs have been passed down to us from generation to generation by hearsay or word of mouth, and the priests, casting aside conviction and proof, demand authority, confidence, and submission to custom. Whole peoples "prostrate themselves and pray because their fathers taught them to prostrate themselves and pray: but why did their fathers fall on their knees? It was because the law demanded it in primitive times. The people were too ignorant to understand the wisdom of the gods. Therefore it was their simple duty to kneel, adore, pray, and trust those who told them what to do.

All religions rest on authority; they forbid reasoning on their precepts. God himself rests solely on the word of a few in authoritative positions who pretend to know him. "A God made by man undoubtedly has need of man to make himself known to man."

Theology is likened to the sieve of Danaides, and "by dint of its contradictory qualities and haphazard assertions it has handicapped its God", making him incapable of acting of his own free will.

If he is infinitely good, what reason should we have to fear him? If he is infinitely wise, why should we have doubts concerning our future? If he knows all, why warn him of our needs, and fatigue him with our prayers? If he is every-where, why erect temples to him? If he is all-powerful, how offend him, how resist him? If he is reasonable, how can he be angry at the blind, to whom he has given the liberty of being unreasonable? If he is unconceivable, why occupy ourselves with him? If he has spoken, why is the universe not convinced? If the knowledge of God is the most necessary, why is it not the most evident and the clearest? 1

This is the gist of the slender pamphlet, the publication of which occasioned Shelley's expulsion from Oxford. The motive actuating the little tract, the author states, was a love of truth, and he earnestly entreated any of his readers who were in possession of proofs or could discover deficiencies in his reasoning to offer them. And he signed himself: AN ATHEIST.²

Shelley hoped by publicizing his little manifesto to engage theologians in a debate wherein they would furnish rebuttals to his arguments. He professed to be a disinterested person who had run upon this tract by chance. Although Shelley declares himself to be an atheist through deficiency of proof, he is doing himself an injustice. He is obviously a skeptic

1

Under note to Queen Mab, VII, l. 67

2

Many of these statements were taken directly out of Baron d'Holbach's Systeme de la Nature, published in London in 1781.

or agnostic, going through a period of doubt in which disbelief is uppermost in his mind. He is willing to be persuaded to the opposite view if he receives answers to his questions which offer convincing refutations to his doubts.

In The Necessity of Atheism Shelley rejected the existence of a First Cause. He was uncertain just what to believe, but emphatic on his right to believe what his reason dictated.

A few months after his expulsion from college, Shelley was writing to Elizabeth Hitchener his beliefs in a Deity of an impersonal nature, and at the same time revealing views which would be acceptable to a follower of materialistic philosophy:

To a belief in Deity I have no objection on the score of feeling: I would as gladly, perhaps, with greater pleasure, admit than doubt his existence....What then is a God? It is a name which expresses the suppositious origin of all existence....The word God then, in the sense which you take it analogizes with the universe, as the soul of man to his body, as the vegetative power to vegetables, the stony power to stone. Yet were each of these adjuncts taken away, what would be the remainder? What is man without his soul? he is not a man. What are vegetables without their vegetative power? stones without their stony?....I acknowledge a God, but merely as a synonym for the existing power of existence. It is the essence of the universe, the universe is the essence of it. It is another word for the essence of the universe. You recognize not in this an identical being to whom are attributable the properties of virtue, mercy, and loveliness--imagination delights in personification; were it not for this embodying quality of eccentric fancy, we should be to this day without a God. 1

A year later Shelley was willing to identify God with

1

Shelley, Letters, I. 91-93 (June 11, 1811)

the universe in a form of naturalistic philosophy, when he defined the impersonal nature of God in a letter to Lord Ellenborough:

Moral qualities are such as only a human being can possess. To attribute them to the Spirit of the Universe, or to suppose that it is capable of altering them, is to degrade God into man, and to annex to this incomprehensible Being qualities incompatible with any possible definition of its nature....To attribute to God the moral qualities of man is to suppose him susceptible of passions, which, arising out of corporeal organization, it is plain that a pure Spirit cannot possess.¹

This passage is a protest against the kind of God which many Christians profess. The idea that God who had created so vast a system of worlds would hold the same petty attributes of morals and indulge in the same weaknesses of passion and brutality common to man was incomprehensible to him. He could not reconcile himself to a deity of all-goodness who was likewise subject to the vices of anger and revenge.

In a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener in the early part of 1812 he expresses naturalistic opinions on the Deity, in which he assumes that the ideal universe transcends the physical, thus clarifying the term "universe", which he had used hitherto ambiguously:

I have lately had some conversation with Southey which has elicited my true opinions of God. He says I ought not to call myself an atheist, since in reality I believe that the universe is God. I tell him I believe that God is another signification for the

1

Shelley, Letters, I, p.330 (To Lord Ellenborough in June, 1812. The exact day is not given.)

Universe. I then explain:--I think reason and analogy seem to countenance the opinion that life is infinite; that, as the soul which now animates this frame was once the vivifying principle of the infinitely lowest link in the chain of existence, so is it ultimately destined to attain the highest....that everything is animation, and in consequence being infinite we can never arrive at its termination. How on this hypothesis are we to arrive at a First Cause?--Southey admits and believes this.--Can he be a Christian? Southey agrees in my idea of Deity, the mass of infinite intelligence....I, you, and he are constituent parts of this immeasurable whole." 1

A new light is thrown on one of Shelley's ideas in this letter, something which engaged his thoughts from time to time in later years, and that is the evolution of the soul through an infinite number of stages.

Another problem which occupied Shelley's attention in his correspondence with Miss Hitchener was the role of the pneuma in eternity.

You have said no more of the immortality of the soul. Do you not believe in it? I do, but I cannot tell you why in a letter --at least not clearly. You will want some feelings which are to me cogent and resistless arguments. Do not consider it a gloomy subject: do not think me prejudiced....I shall get Godwin's opinion of this if I can." 2

Only rarely, and then not to his satisfaction does Shelley debate the continuous existence of the soul. He seems to have kept the problem in abeyance for several years before he discussed it to any considerable extent again.

1
Shelley, Letters, I, p.205 (January 2, 1812, to Elizabeth Hitchener)

2
Ibid., p.232 (January 20, 1812)

The publication of Queen Mab in 1813 exhibits most fully the influence of Godwin on Shelley's thinking. It also gave rise to an opinion, not yet entirely dispelled, that most of Shelley's philosophical poetry is an exposition of Godwinian theories, and that Shelley remained consistently a disciple of Godwin.

Before we discuss the doctrine of Necessity, the next phase of Shelley's religious thought and one which he transferred largely from Political Justice, let us examine the plan of Queen Mab.

The young girl Ianthe, while asleep, is carried off by Queen Mab to a height above the earth where she can survey the past, present, and future of the world in one vast panorama. Queen Mab, in reality the voice of Shelley, explains the universe and its government to the heroine. The ruler of the universe and of every human action is Necessity, the blind, impassive spirit of Nature. God is a debased figment of the human mind. It is possible for man to be noble, pure, and happy though he has degenerated through the machinations of kings, priests, and their puppets. Christ is an egotistical demagogue.

How closely Shelley followed Godwin in the doctrine of Necessity may be seen in a comparison of their respective statements on the subject.

Godwin declares:

In the life of every human being there is a chain of events, generated in the lapse

of ages which preceded his birth, and going on in regular procession through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it is impossible for him to act in any other instance otherwise than he has acted. 1

Shelley transposed this to say:

Every human being is irresistibly impelled to act precisely as he does act: in the eternity which preceded his birth a chain of causes was generated, which, operating under the name of motives, makes it impossible that any thought of his mind, or any action of his life, should be otherwise than it is. 2

At the beginning of the poem Shelley proclaims this "all-sufficing Power", an impersonal force, as the "mother of the world". But immediately he overlays this universality of being with a crude form of pantheism, in which there is no place for prayers, praises, virtues, or moral judgments:

Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,
Necessity! thou mother of the world!
Unlike the God of human error, thou
Requirest no prayers or praises; the caprice
Of man's weak will belongs no more to thee
Than do the changeful passions of his heart
To thy unvarying harmony....

No hate, no love thou cherishest; revenge
And favoritism, and worst desire of fame
Thou knowest not; all that the wide world contains
Are but thy passive instruments, and thou
Regardest them all with an impartial eye,
Whose joy or pain thy nature cannot feel,
Because thou hast not human sense,
Because thou art not human mind." 3

How illogical this doctrine is may be assured by the fact that "the very name of Godwin's great work contradicts the

1
Godwin, Political Justice, I, p.384.

2
Shelley, Note VI on Queen Mab, II. 165-173

3
Shelley, Queen Mab, VI, ll. 197-219

theory it contains: for according to the doctrine of Necessity, justice is a word without a meaning. It is amazing that Godwin could not see the abyss of nonsense into which such a theory was bound to lead him." ¹

Shelley, while following somewhat blindly this deterministic theory, which explicitly denies the right of the human will to act on its own accord, consistently refutes the theory quite unknowingly:

Nature, impartial in munificence,
Has gifted man with all-subduing will. 2

A little farther on, in the Platonistic line, "Yet every heart contains perfection's gem," one must needs realize how paradoxical the idea is: the striving for perfection devolves upon the individual's freedom of thought and action.

Toward the end of the poem Shelley overthrows the doctrine completely:

.....bravely bearing on, thy will
Is destined an eternal war to wage
With tyranny and falsehood, and uproot
The germs of misery from the human heart. 3

A survival of influences from his adolescent reading springs into evidence:

Kings, priests, and statesmen blast the human flower
Even in its tender bud; their influence darts
Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins
Of desolate society. 4

¹ Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.139.

² Shelley, Queen Mab, V, ll. 132-133.

³ Queen Mab, IX, ll. 189-192.

⁴ Ibid., V, ll. 22-24.

Religion is associated with the worldly vices in this harsh condemnation:

Twin-sister of religion, Selfishness!
Rival in crime and falsehood, aping all
The wanton horrors of her bloody play. 1

Throughout the poem Shelley excoriates the orthodox God. In one long passage which describes the origin and gradual corruption of religion beginning with

Thou taintest all thou look'st upon! --

he concludes by portraying the type of God worshipped by unthinking humans, a very personal God and one which Shelley strongly indicted at the time:

The self-sufficing, the omnipotent,
The merciful, and the avenging God!
Who, prototype of human misrule, sits
High in Heaven's realm, upon a golden throne,
Even like an earthly king; and whose dread work,
Hell, gapes forever for the unhappy slaves
Of fate, whom He created, in his sport,
To triumph in their torments when they fell! 2

The Fairy holds up before Ianthe the God of orthodoxy as a cruel and inhuman demon, and points out

.....yon sterile spot,
Where now the wandering Arab's tent
Flaps in the desert blast!
There once old Salem's haughty fane
Reared high to heaven its thousand golden domes,
And in the blushing face of day
Exposed its shameful glory.
Oh! many a widow, many an orphan cursed
The building of that fane; and many a father
Worm out with toil and slavery, implored
The poor man's God to sweep it from the earth
And spare his children the detested task
Of piling stone on stone and poisoning

1 Shelley's Queen Mab, V, ll. 22-24.

2 Queen Mab, VI, ll. 103-110.

The choicest days of life
 To soothe a dotard's vanity.
 There an inhuman and uncultured race
 Howled hideous praises to their Demon-God;
 They rushed to war, tore from the mother's womb
 The unborn child--old age and infancy
 Promiscuous perished; their victorious arms
 Left not a soul to breathe. Oh! they were friends!
 But what was he who taught them that the God
 Of Nature and Benevolence had given
 A special sanction to the trade of blood? 1

The origin of the word God was believed by Shelley to have been "an expression denoting the unknown cause of the known events which men perceive in the universe. By the vulgar mistake of a metaphor for a real being, of a word for a thing, it became a man endowed with human qualities and governing the universe as an earthly monarch governs his kingdom." Hence, this Imaginary Deity is addressed much as subjects do their earthly ruler. They praise his kindness, fear his anger, and supplicate his favor. 2

In contrast to this personal God, which he here specifically condemns, Shelley holds up an immutable, impartial Necessity. The idea that an all-powerful God, who is the source of all-Good, is likewise the source of all-Evil, was especially distasteful to Shelley. If God were the source of food, light, and life, he would also be the source of poison, darkness, and death. If he is entitled to our gratitude for his blessings, he is entitled to our curses for the miseries he visits upon us. Hence, God made man as he is and damned

1
Queen Mab, II, ll. 134-157.

2
 Note to Queen Mab, VI, l. 198.

him for being so. If God were the creator of all good and man the creator of all evil, it would be like saying one man made a straight line and a crooked line, and another man made the incongruity.¹

The concept of Hell was particularly obnoxious to Shelley. To the end of his days his thought was opposed to the possibility of such a conception. Late in life, he dismissed summarily the idea that Christ could believe in "a Being who shall deliberately scheme to inflict on a large portion of the human race tortures indescribably intense and indefinitely protracted."²

Typical of the Christian God as a vindictive being was Milton's Almighty in Paradise Lost:

One who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repentance of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments.³

One of the chief reasons perhaps for Shelley's antipathy to orthodox Christianity was its seeming predeterminism. One of its worst features from which no man could free himself was the doctrine of original sin. It infuriated him to think that

In Adam's fall
We sinnéd all.

That one was guilty of sin from birth led him to denounce Christianity, in a letter to Hogg, as "an odious system", an

¹ Note to Queen Mab, VI, l. 198.

² Shelley, Essay on Christianity (Shawcross), p.93.

³ Shelley, A Defence of Poetry (Shawcross), p.146.

arrangement that may still be the best for the ignorant, the canaille, but one which "the inquiring should reject altogether."¹

In the early summer of 1812 Shelley sent a letter more in the nature of a pamphlet to Lord Ellenborough protesting the trial and conviction of Daniel Eaton, who had been tried for publishing a part of Paine's Age of Reason. Only one copy of this pamphlet is extant. From it we become aware of Shelley's animosity toward the kind of Christianity practiced at this time.

Christianity is now the established religion; he who attempts to disapprove it must behold murderers and traitors take precedence of him in public opinion....The same means that have supported every other popular belief have supported Christianity. War, imprisonment, murder, and falsehood; deeds of unexampled and incomparable atrocity have made it what it isHad the Christian religion commenced and continued by mere force of reasoning and persuasion, by its self-evident excellence and fitness, the preceding analogy would be inadmissible.

Do you think to convert Mr. Eaton to your religion by embittering his existence? You might force him by torture to profess your tenets, but he could not believe them.... Belief and disbelief are utterly distinct from and unconnected with volition.... Volition is essential to merit or demerit." 2

Shelley courageously manifested a preference for the opinions of Mr. Eaton to those of his accuser, as being "more true and good." A constant stream of books, tracts, and essays

1

Shelley in letter to Hogg, April 26, 1811 (Letters, I, p.62)

2

Letter to Lord Ellenborough in White's Shelley, I, pp.245-246; also in the Ingpen edition of the Letters, I, dated June, 1812, but no day is specified.

in defense of Christianity was an evidence that its tenets were open to question. In case Christianity were proved to be false, Mr. Eaton would deserve thanks for destroying error.¹

He asserted to Elizabeth Hitchener his doubts about Christianity:

I cannot conceive even the possibility of its genuineness....I once was an enthusiastic deist, but never a Christian. 2

The Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell were anathema to the logical mind. How could the inheritor of Heaven enjoy his exalted state when he was cognizant of the fact that one-half of his fellow-beings were suffering eternal damnation? Hell was an accretion to the misinterpreted teachings of Christ, converting a religion of love into one of rewards and punishments, spites and chicanery.

He bewailed the overthrow of Greek culture with its easy pantheistic beliefs and philosophical systems.

The first doubts which arose in my boyish mind concerning the genuineness of the Christian religion as a revelation from the divinity, were excited by a contemplation of the virtues and genius of Greece and Rome. Shall Socrates and Cicero perish whilst the meanest hind of England inherits Christian life?" 3

A Refutation of Deism, a tract that appeared in 1814, presents an argument between a deist and a Christian. Shelley states that the object of this debate is to prove "there is

1

Letter to Lord Ellenborough in White's Shelley, I, pp.245-246 (June, 1812)

2

Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, January 2, 1812 (Letters, I, p.205)

3

Letter to Godwin, June 11, 1812 (Letters, I, p.320)

no alternative between Christianity and Atheism, Deism is untenable, and the existence of God can be argued only if Divine Revelation is accepted.

The Deist is defeated and admits that he will accept as many of the Christian precepts as will be in accordance with his views of "goodness, unity, and majesty of God".¹

In this debate the assertion is made, though seldom met with elsewhere in Shelley, that good and evil are relative terms, having no significance unless human feelings are involved. Shelley was always deeply concerned with the co-existence of good and evil, and he was fully conscious that evil is embedded in the nature of things.

We are coming to the end of the first period of Shelley's search for a satisfactory religion, actually a sincere search for an adequate conception of God and a comprehensive understanding of His true nature. His doubts about orthodox religion began to trouble him about 1810. A few months later he was calling himself an atheist, though substantially a skeptic. He then advanced through stages whereby he was close to being at one time or another a rationalist, materialist, pantheist, determinist or Necessitarian, and Platonist, until 1815. Hitherto with him all Power had been vested in impersonal forces, such as Necessity which governed all thought and action "through a chain of consequences which led him back to the first movement of time and prescribed everything ir-

1

White, Shelley, I, pp.295-296.

revocably."¹ This doctrine allowed no freedom of the will, which Shelley was simultaneously advocating.

We have examined in this chapter those writings of Shelley which have to do with his reflections on God and religion until his twenty-third year. During this time he was particularly virulent against organized Christianity. While he generally admitted the existence of a Deity in the guise of one name or another, he denied for it any powers of "personal interest."

Shelley's objection to Christianity were based on the contention that the true teachings of Christ had become encrusted with the barnacles of superstition; wars and persecutions were justified in the name of Christ; and the Church was a worldly, mercenary institution in which spiritual values had become extinct. Kings, priests, and statesmen joined hands to keep the masses of people in a state of political bondage and intellectual stagnation.

In the next chapter we shall see that Shelley advanced far beyond this preliminary stage of belief. With the publication of Alastor and the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, we enter into a new period of Shelley's thinking, a more positive one, in which he reached the full powers of his maturity. Contrary to the assertions of critics who take his first militant expressions on religion as final and definite, his God was to become a very personal one. We shall proceed to demonstrate how these critics are in error through lack of concentration on the more obvious evidences for such a study.

1

White, Shelley, II, p. 35

THE ADVANCE TO A PERSONAL GOD

THE ADVANCE TO A PERSONAL GOD

Most critics have assumed that Shelley's basic ideas on religion were made in Queen Mab and that he had nothing more to say on the subject, although he lived eleven more years, the last seven being the period of his greatest lyrical powers. We are left to suppose that he learned nothing more in the realm of religious experience.¹

The popular view that Shelley, like a chameleon, reflected Godwin's ideas and that he must therefore be interpreted solely in that light is a fallacy that becomes more and more apparent through conversance with Shelley's writings after 1815.²

The one great development in the poet's thought is the change from Godwinian rationalism to an avowed mysticism, in which Platonic, neo-Platonic, and Christian elements are fused.... Thus Shelley passes from an optimistic humanitarianism, which looks forward to almost perfect happiness for man on earth, to a denial of the reality or value of the whole realm of physical experience in space and time, except as it gives birth to the beauty and goodness by which it is transcended, and which alone has eternal reality.³

It is in this twenty-third year that we begin to notice a more positive and teleological attitude in Shelley's utterances regarding God, a predication which was never again

¹ Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.8.

² Strong in "The Faith of Shelley" (Studies in Shelley, p.41) says: "His (Godwin's) influence on Shelley was definite and obvious, though it has lately been exaggerated."

³ Barnard, Shelley's Religion, pp.15-16.

wholly submerged by the intellectual drive within him toward rationalism. As we have seen, his passages referring to God in the schoolboy romances accord with acceptable Christian views, and in his Juvenilia here and there appear lines whose thought harmonizes with his later beliefs. In A Dialogue (1809) a piece purporting to be a colloquy between Death and a Mortal, Death proclaims the very essence of Shelley's later philosophy:

Nought waits for the good but a spirit of Love
That will hail their blessed advent to regions above;
For Love, Mortal, gleams through the gloom of my sway,
And the shades which surround me fly fast at its ray! 1

Likewise in another juvenile effusion, To Death, he vaunts the superiority of Love over every other force:

To know in dissolution's void
That mortals' baubles sunk decay;
That everything, but Love, destroyed
Must perish with its kindred clay. 2

Here we have, in a crude uninspired form, a foreshadowing of the "real Shelley," already obsessed with something much bigger than a materialistic application to the principle of the macrocosmos. By 1815 he was ready to relegate the French and all other expositions of materialism, as he later stated it, to the "limbo of false and pernicious theories".³ He continues the same sort of categorical condemnation in his essay On Life:

This materialism is a seducing system to

¹ Shelley, A Dialogue, ll. 23-26

² Shelley, To Death, ll. 16-19.

³ Shelley in letter to Horace Smith, April 11, 1822 (Letters, II, pp. 959-960.)

young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk, and dispenses them from thinking. Man is a being of high aspirations....There is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution. 1

He proceeds to say that he was discontented with such a view of things as afforded by materialism, which preaches annihilation of spirit and the transitory being of mind.

In the essay On the Punishment of Death (1815), Shelley refers to "the vast sum of action and thought which disposes and animates the universe, and is called God."² This, of course, is but a repetition of the thought which he had communicated to Hogg in a letter four years earlier:

Does it (the word of God) not imply the soul of the universe, the intelligent, necessarily beneficent, actuating principle?This it is impossible not to believe in; I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample, are, in themselves arguments more conclusive than any which can be advanced, that some vast intellect animates infinity. 3

This irradiation of the universal mind, spirit, or power lies at the core of Shelley's faith. He held to the cardinal tenet expounded by Plato that the universe had a Soul, and this postulate led him in turn to imbue such a Soul with an intelligence superior to and transcending the nature of human comprehension.

¹ Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism (Shawcross, ed.) p.54.

² Ibid., p.62.

³ Shelley in letter to Hogg, January 3, 1811 (Letters, I, p.29)

In the fall of 1815 Shelley began to work on Alastor. Mary Shelley says that her husband had become a disciple of the immaterial philosophy of Berkeley shortly before he began the writing of Alastor.

This theory gave unity and grandeur to his ideas. The creation--such as it was perceived by his mind --a unit of immensity, was slight and narrow compared with the interminable forms of thought that might exist beyond, to be perhaps perceived hereafter by his own mind; or which are perceptible to other minds that fill the universe, not of space in the material sense, but of infinity in the immaterial one. 1

A marginal note written by Charles Lloyd in his copy of Berkeley, out of which Shelley was reading, "Mind cannot create, it can only perceive," impressed Shelley profoundly and gave impetus to his reaction in favor of immaterialism.

Indicative of the new orientation are the numerous references in Alastor to

that power which strikes the luminaries of the world with sudden darkness and extinction by awakening them to too exquisite a perception of its influences, (and) dooms to a slow and poisonous decay those meaner spirits that dare abjure its dominion....loving nothing on this earth, and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse. 2

Shelley was already discovering that an impassive, impervious Necessity was a philosophy too sterile and too ex-

1

Mary Shelley in Preface to Essays, Letters from Abroad, etc. (Complete Works, V, ix)

2

Shelley in Preface to Alastor, p.33 (Cambridge edition)

iguous to give proper scope to his widening sympathies. The first stanza in Alastor, is an incantation as fervent as a prayer and filled with a "natural piety", invoking a Beneficent Power in nature that is capable of seeing, hearing, and being moved, like the Christian Deity, by the supplications of His children, for the poet earnestly begs Him to

Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
Thee ever and thee only. 1

There is slight distinction between Milton's "Spirit", whom that poet invokes for his own instruction and illumination, and the "Power" whom Shelley calls upon for inspiration:

serenely now
And moveless, as a long-forgotten lyre
Suspended in the solitary dome
Of some mysterious and deserted fane,
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
May modulate with murmurs of the air,
And motions of the forests and the sea,
And voice of living things, and woven hymns
Of night and day, and the deep heart of man. 2

This Power is variously addressed at the beginning of the poem as "our great Mother", "Mother of this unfathomable World", and "Great Parent", and in consonance with these omnific appellations, the poet's attitude throughout the poem remains one of "religious veneration and devotion."³

By 1816 the doctrine of Necessity had lost its hold and been superseded by the more expansive doctrine of Intellectual Beauty. "The history of this change is in fact the history of

¹ Alastor, ll.19-20.

² Ibid., ll. 41-49

³ Melvin T. Stone, Shelley: His Theory of Poetry, p.18.

the growing influence on Shelley's mind of idealistic philosophy and his partial realization of the inconsistency of Necessity¹ with freedom of the will and sympathy."

The credo for Shelley's new belief is most succinctly voiced in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. The abstraction which Shelley specifies in his Hymn cradles more weight than that conveyed by the term itself. In one sense, it is related to the Spirit of Nature in Queen Mab, but only in its exterior semblance of law and systematization. In its wider connotation, this Beauty embraces also the attributes of Goodness, Love and Universal Sympathy.

The Hymn was composed in 1816 when the Shelleys were summering on Lake Geneva, and a great deal of the atmosphere is symbolically embedded in the poem. The poet is cognizant of the presence of some divinity whose visitations to man, though few and fleeting, afford him glimpses of a sublimer world:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
 Floats though unseen among us, visiting
 This various world with an inconstant wing
 As summer winds that creep from flower to flower.

*** ***

Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
 With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
 Of human thought or form, where art thou gone?
 Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
 This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate? 2

Throughout the poem runs the haunting theme that the beautiful things,

1

White, Shelley, I, p.664.

2

Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, I, ll.1-4, 13-17.

like clouds, depart
And come, for some uncertain moments lent. 1

To all the questions the poet asks regarding the "doubt, chance, and mutability of all we see and hear," no answer has ever been satisfactorily given by sage or seer. Even the attempt to comprehend the functions or even to name specifically the phenomenon has been futile.

While yet a schoolboy he had stalked this secret Power and dedicated his efforts to the pursuit of its purposes. He had sought it

Through many a listening chamber, cave, and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead. 2

He calls the "phantoms of a thousand hours" as witnesses to his "studious zeal" and intense loyalty in shadowing this "awful Loveliness", praying to it thus for guidance:

Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature, on my passive youth
Descended, 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 mankind. 3

This poem is not only an augury of all of Shelley's later and most valid thinking, but also a speculum of new elements which had hitherto not presented a clear-cut configuration in his thought. He assumes a worshipful attitude, though attended by sentiments of fear and ecstasy, toward the "unseen Power"

1
Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, IV, ll.1-2

2
Ibid., V, ll.2-4

3
Ibid., VII, ll.6-12

that mysteriously haunts the minds of men. He also recognizes the evasive presence in the world of some evil force militating with malignant intent against the divine influences of goodness, beauty, and spirituality. This awareness becomes more pronounced with time.

In Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni, Shelley is preoccupied with the "everlasting universe of things", which "flows through the mind",

where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters. 1

He pictures the Ravine of Arve as an

awful scene

Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne.

... ..
Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee,
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange,
To muse on my own separate fantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around. 1

The poet is apparently debating here a question which once seemed settled affirmatively in his mind: Is the universe activated and guided by the springs, cogs, and levers of a blind mechanism called Necessity? The old conflict between rationalizing doubt and mystical faith arises momentarily. But now he sees "gleams of a remoter world:"

1

Mont Blanc, stanza II

I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? 1

After surveying the vast panorama of this "daedal earth",
he meditates:

Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,
Remote, serene, and inaccessible: --
And this, the naked countenance of earth
On which I gaze, even this primeval mountains,
Teach the adverting mind. 2

The former doctrine of Necessity has become amalgamated and its identity lost in the greater dimensions of the more recent concept of Intellectual Beauty, not specifically mentioned, but implicit in this poem. "Its hint that experience is simply the universe flowing through the individual mind reflects the philosophy of Berkeley and shows that Shelley was already well on the road to his later and more mature view of the nature of reality."³

The conclusion that Shelley draws from the scene is in the nature of a strengthened conviction that the "secret strength" molding the destination of river, mountain, glacier, cataract, and lake is a part of the same derivative source which "governs thought."

The secret strength of things,
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee! 4

Hence, thought or mind, while it may be regarded as a

¹
Mont Blanc, in stanza III, lines 4-6

²
Ibid., in stanza IV, lines 13-17

³
White, Shelley, I, pp.454-455.

⁴
Mont Blanc, stanza V, ll.139-141

distinct entity in its own domain, is nevertheless subjected inescapably to the same immanence of the Power pervading the physical world and is created out of the same fabric.

Some Power not mind, and greater than mind must fashion and give form to 'thought's stagnant chaos,' and then sustain and govern the cosmos it has shaped. This Power is Shelley's God; and it is clear that in his mature thinking Shelley did not identify God with the universe. ¹

The long narrative poem, The Revolt of Islam, originally entitled Laon and Cythna, which Shelley wrote in 1818, contains nothing useful for our study, since its main concern is with the author's revolutionary faith and the moral implications deriving therefrom. The dominant theme of the poem is the dualism existing in the spiritual world, the cosmic conflict between two categorically opposite forces, the Spirit of Goodness and the Spirit of Evil, both of them eternally active. Evil has hitherto always been victorious in its aggrandizements, but Goodness will, in the final Armageddon, triumph with an imperishable ascendancy. This Spirit of Goodness is very unlike the aloof Spirit of Nature or Necessity in Queen Mab. It is noble, unselfish, patient, and forbearing, in spite of all the lacerations suffered at the hands of Evil.

About this time Shelley had been translating portions from Plato's Republic, and the duality of powers or principles envisioned by Plato is explicit in this translated passage:

God then, since he is good, cannot be, as is vulgarly supposed, the cause of all

¹

Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.56.

things; he is the cause, indeed, of very few things. Evil prodigiously overbalances good in everything which regards men. Of all that is good, there can be no other cause than God; but some other cause ought to be discovered for evil, which should never be imputed as an effect to God. 1

The other long poem which Shelley wrote in 1818, Julian and Maddalo, purports to be an informed discussion between two men, actually Shelley himself and Byron, concerning the freedom of the will, and it contains little bearing on the subject of our study except in references to the conflict forever being waged between the two worlds in which we live, the material and the spiritual, the material world being associated with the powers of evil and the spiritual with those of good:

... .. We know
 That we have power over ourselves to do
 And suffer -- what, we know not till we try;
 But something nobler than to live and die.
 So taught those kings of old philosophy,
 Who reigned before religion made men blind;
 And those who suffer with their suffering kind,
 Yet feel this faith, religion. 2

The haunting question is asked:

What Power delights to torture us? I know
 That to myself I do not wholly owe
 What now I suffer, though in part I may. 3

The answer is not definitely stated, though Shelley implies optimistically that man's transcendent faith will eventually learn the provenance of suffering, its nature, and ways

¹ Fragment from Plato's Republic, translated by Shelley (Herne Shelley's Prose Works, II, p.579)

² Julian and Maddalo, ll.184-191. In some editions of Shelley's poems there is no comma between the words faith and religion.

³ Julian and Maddalo, ll.3;9-321.

of deliverance from it.

The next major production of Shelley, Prometheus Unbound, was begun in the autumn of 1818 and completed in the spring of 1819. In it are combined all the most harmonious elements of Shelley's lyrical genius together with that spiritual idealism which permeated his mind for reforming the world. The story is not related to the trilogy of Euripides, but is an original narrative which required all of Shelley's powers to complete. The subject is elevated far above the vicissitudes of ordinary human interests, and concerns itself with the passions and ordeals of gods and demigods. Even the scenes are such as disdain a lowly earthly level and rise into a rarified atmosphere midway between earth and heaven.

The theme is one that appealed powerfully to Shelley's imagination, having been treated by him before: the problem of discord between the forces of good and evil rampant in the universe. A new idea is developed in this poem, in that evil is accidental and incidental, a transitory fungus-growth that can be uprooted from man's road to perfection. Mrs. Shelley offers this explanation:

The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was, that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled. This also forms a portion of Christianity; God made earth and man perfect till, he, by his fall, brought death into the world and all our woe. Shelley believed that mankind had only to

will that there should be no evil, and there would be none....That man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater portion of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system. And the subject he loved best to dwell on, was the image of One warring with the evil principle, oppressed not only by it, but by all, even the good, who were deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity. 1

She further states that Shelley had intended to write eventually prose metaphysical essays designed to serve as claves for his poetry, but the observations he left were of a sketchy and fragmentary nature.

When the story opens, Prometheus has been bound for ages to a remote precipice in the icy mountains of the Indian Caucasus. Panthea and Ione, two of the Oceanides, are his sole attendants. His hostility to Jupiter, his tormentor, has diminished through the years, and he cannot even recall the prophetic curse he had uttered against Zeus until the shade of the tyrannical god, raised by Earth, the mother of Prometheus, repeats the pronouncement for him. Jupiter sends Hermes and the Furies to tantalize Prometheus into a retraction of the curse and to learn a secret which Prometheus has for averting the dethronement of Jupiter, foretold by oracles. Unable to achieve their purpose, the Furies harrow the chained man with a recital of the woes of humanity and then leave him. Panthea and Ione travel to a lovely vale in the mountains to meet their sister, the wife of Prometheus. Echoes and fauns

1

Mrs. Shelley in the Introductory Note to Prometheus Unbound (Cambridge edition), pp.161-162.

summon Asia to the abode of Demogorgon, the Greek personification of the primordial creative power penetrating to the heart of things. While conversing with Demogorgon, Asia is apprised of the imminent redemption of her husband, and she mounts into a car borne by the Hours to a snowy height where she can witness the execution of this momentous task. Hercules, the personification of Strength, unshackles Prometheus, the symbol of suffering Humanity and Spiritual Wisdom. Zeus is toppled from his throne by Demogorgon, the voice of Eternity and the child-incarnate of his own power. Prometheus and Asia retire to a grotto to begin life anew under the most favorable auspices for an infinitely happy future. Everywhere the voices of unseen spirits in Heaven, Earth, Sea, and Air proclaim in jubilant choruses the downfall of tyranny and the coronation of a new sovereign, the holy spirit of Love.

How far Shelley has moved in this poem beyond the ideas expressed in Queen Mab may best be seen from the vantage-point of comparison. Christ, who had been taunted derisively as an impostor with worldly ambitions, is now shown to be a sorrowing spectator weeping for a fettered mankind:

One came forth of gentle worth,
Smiling on the sanguine earth;
His words outlived him, like swift poison
Withering up truth, peace, and pity.
Look! where round the wide horizon
Many a million-peopled city
Vomits smoke in the bright air!
Mark that outcry of despair!
'Tis his mild and gentle ghost
Wailing for the faith he kindled.
Look again! the flames almost
To a glow-worm's lamps have dwindled. 1

1

Prometheus Unbound, Act I, ll. 546-559.

This metamorphosis of conception regarding Christ is a drastic reversal of the scoffing attitude once assumed by the pragmatist, callow youth of nineteen. There is a growing apprehension of the profound compassion for suffering mankind in Christ's words, which accordingly have engendered in Shelley a perceptibly-increasing reverence for Christ's personal attributes.

At one time Panthea relates to Ione what she has witnessed when she looked forth into the world:

I looked forth twice, but will no more. 1

Ione asks what she has seen, and she replies:

A woeful sight: a youth
With patient looks nailed to a crucifix. 2

The Furies continue the story of Christ's agony until Prometheus exclaims:

Ah woe!
Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain forever, forever! 3

It is the same anguished cry of Christ on the cross: "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" It is the same outcry through the ages wringing the hearts of honest men at the unfolding testimonials of evil.

In the conversation between Asia and Demogorgon in the latter's cave, we have a more pointed approach to the nature of a personal Deity than any he had hitherto intimated:

¹
Prometheus Unbound, l.533.

²
Ibid., I, ll.585-586.

³
Ibid., I, ll.635-636 (Used several times elsewhere in the same act)

Asia. Who made the living world?
 Demo. God.
 Asia. Who made all
 That it contains? thought, passion, reason, will,
 Imagination?
 Demo. God. Almighty God.
 Asia. Who made that sense which, when the winds of spring
 In rarest visitation, or the voice
 Of one beloved heard in youth alone,
 Fills the faint eyes with falling tears which dim
 The radiant looks of unbewailing flowers,
 And leaves this peopled earth a solitude
 When it returns no more?
 Demo. Merciful God. 1

Demogorgon is positive in his assertions of God's goodness, but adumbrative in his responses to Asia's question: "And who made terror, madness, crime, remorse....and hell, or the sharp fear of hell?"² Demogorgon parries every thrust at a direct answer, and is somewhat more oracular as the discussion proceeds:

Asia: Whom called'st thou God?
 Demo. I spoke but as ye speak,
 For Jove is the supreme of living things.
 Asia: Who is the master of the slave?
 Demo. If the abysm
 Could vomit forth its secrets, but a voice
 Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
 For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
 On the revolving world? What to bid speak
 Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change? To these
 All things are subject but eternal Love. 3

Love, then, is freed from the laws of determinism in its various ramifications of "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change," and disengaged from the impersonal sway of Necessity, which knew no universal sympathy. We have seen that Shelley

¹ Prometheus Unbound, Act II, Scene IV, ll.9-19.

² Ibid., Act II, Scene IV, ll.20-23.

³ Ibid., Act II, Scene V, ll. 112-120.

had been steadily working toward a more sympathetic, less mechanistic belief, in a new creed which he first expressed in his Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. In Prometheus Unbound the phrase "intellectual beauty" does not occur, but the word "love", meaning sympathy for all humanity has been added to Shelley's idea of intellectual beauty. Thereafter, Shelley's God is Love.

The God, whom Demogorgon speaks of, can be traced back through successive steps to the Spirit of Beauty in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. Following the Spirit in genealogical line is that Power, in Mont Blanc, which is the secret strength of things and which governs thought; the Spirit of Good in The Revolt of Islam; and finally the Spirit of Universal Love and Divine Goodness, represented in Prometheus and also in Asia, the latter being the source of "beauty and harmony both in nature and human life, the being in whom love kindles and through whom creation becomes beautiful."¹

In Prometheus Unbound Shelley endows his hero with those Christ-like attributes of gentleness, patience, wisdom, virtue, endurance, and self-abnegation. Even the hatred which Prometheus originally held for Jove is converted to an apprehending pity. The human will is victorious in its contention to deny and eschew evil, and it submits to martyrdom rather than to tyranny. Prometheus Unbound "might almost be regarded as a vast dramatic fulfillment of the faith expressed in the Hymn to

¹ Woodbury in Notes to Prometheus Unbound (Cambridge edition) p.625.

1

Intellectual Beauty."

The next major production of Shelley was the tragedy in blank verse, The Cenci, written between May 14 and August 8, 1819. The narrative follows closely the account of the murder of a Roman noble, Count Cenci, September 9, 1598, and the execution of his wife Lucretia, his daughter Beatrice, and son Giacomo, the following May, for their perpetration of the murder. The count had starved, beaten, imprisoned, and cruelly hounded members of his family, and as the crowning act of his infamous deeds, outraged his daughter Beatrice. During the trial scene Beatrice departs herself with the greatest dignity and strength of character, and our sympathies are aroused to regard her with profound admiration and tenderest pity. The repulsiveness of the incest-theme is nearly contravened by the rich, sombre beauty of the characterizations and the delicate handling of the most intimate emotions of the young heroine.

In all the treatments which I have read concerning different phases of Shelley's religion or philosophy, I have been struck by the fact that there is little or no mention made of The Cenci. There is no plausible reason for this curious lack of investigation. I believe that Shelley is partly responsible for this omission, since he stated in his Preface:

I have endeavored as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conceptions of right or wrong,

White, Shelley, II, p.251.

false or true: thus under a thin veil converting names and actions of the sixteenth century into cold impersonations of my own mind. 1

The reader of that passage might easily infer that any arguments on Shelley's religion, either pro or con, based on The Cenci, would not be valid, and, therefore, useless for the purposes of our study.

Again, the tragedy treats of human entities mortised in flesh and blood, a strong surging of human emotions, the considered thoughts and actions of humans, all in a specific time and place, amid scenes and prototypes of people not unknown to the author himself, whereas the student is promarily accustomed to an assemblage of metaphysical abstractions and symbolistic figures flitting about in an ideal world of the imagination whenever he turns the pages elsewhere in the volume of Shelley. Consequently, The Cenci is relegated to the discard, discountenanced as being not representative of the true Shelley.

Paul Elmore More, in referring to Shelley's intense individualism, says that it was the "source of an overweening self-trust, which in the final test, left him almost inhuman."²

It is particularly pertinent to say Cedit quaestio in the case of The Cenci. Here, Shelley is definitely aligned in sympathy with his nobler-minded characters, who are quite human. All the facets of his own "intense individualism" are

¹ Shelley in Preface to The Cenci (Cambridge edition) p.210.

² More, "Shelley" in the Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series, p.9.

subordinated to the purposes of the play, without a hint of some inner symbolism, political implications, or obscurant philosophical casuistries.

There are no more valid reasons for discounting the statements made regarding a belief in the Deity in The Cenci than those in any other piece of writing by Shelley. If we can say with good reason that Shelley is merely putting these religious persuasions into the mouths of his characters in The Cenci without voicing his own personal convictions, we can also say with the same semblance of reasoning that Shelley was only a disinterested recorder of Godwin's opinions in Queen Mab. It would be fatuous to say more on this subject, for such unsound reasoning leads only to culs-de-sac.

There are seventy-nine references to God in The Cenci, far more than in other composition of Shelley's. In the light of these many repetitions, it is relevant to quote White: "There are occasions on which Shelley uses the word God in the conventional way in which it is used around him by regular Christians, but these are palpable slips." ¹ Curiously enough, these "palpable slips" are all found interwoven into his later works, above all, in The Cenci.

I base the validity of my belief that Shelley's own sentiments are represented in The Cenci, not only on two expressions which Shelley himself made in the Preface, but also on what Mrs. Shelley had to say concerning its composition. In the first place, he stated that the ideas come to him more

L

White, The Best of Shelley (in the Introduction), p.40.

easily and naturally than hitherto:

It gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length. 1

And again:

I have written more carelessly, that is, without any overfastidious and learned choice of words. In this respect I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men. 2

Shelley could not have hoped that readers or auditors would be moved to exhibit "true sympathy" toward the many earnest of faith, under duress, in his play, if he himself entertained no such sympathy. Speaking of the history of the play, Mrs. Shelley says that "he began and proceeded swiftly, urged on by intense sympathy with the sufferings of the human beings whose passions, so long cold in the tomb, he revived and gifted with poetic language. This tragedy is the only one of his works that he communicated to me during its progress. We talked over the arrangement of the scenes together
³...." It is impossible to believe that the reader would be moved solely by the outward, visible sufferings of the characters and yet remain peculiarly unsusceptible to the voluble utterances of those tortured souls whose religious faith was at once their sustenance and their defense. The name of God

1

Shelley, in Preface to The Cenci (Cambridge edition), p.208.

2

Ibid., pp.210-211.

3

Mrs. Shelley in her notes to The Cenci (Cambridge edition), p.206.

appeared on the lips of Beatrice Cenci as frequently as it did on those of the Maid of Orleans. The two girls are alike in their perfervid obsecrations.

Shelley has not only sloughed all impersonal symbolism in naming the Deity, but he has also adopted Biblical phraseology; for instance, in the Preface to the play, when he says, "Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion,"¹ he was obviously paraphrasing the Gospel version of the transfiguration and vicarial mission of Christ: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Father), full of grace and truth."²

All the characters in the play employ the name of God with honest intentions except the Count, who, in any other piece of Shelley's would be personifying the Spirit of Evil, but is here simply the villain, the execrable father persecuting his wife and children. Though the Count calls frequently upon God, he is a heinous creature, and yet his behests are not insincere:

God!

I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform
By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought.
My disobedient and rebellious sons
Are dead! 3

It is not my purpose to repeat all the spoken manifestations of trust in the Deity, but rather to select, here and there in

¹ Preface to The Cenci, p.210.

² Gospel of St. John 1:14.

³ The Cenci, Act I, Scene III, ll.4-45.

the play, a few passages from the characters with whom Shelley is most in sympathy.

First, let us examine several utterances by Lucretia, the Count's second wife and the step-mother of his children:

O God Almighty, do thou look upon us,
We have no other friend but only thee! 1

Death must be the punishment
Of crime, or the reward of trampling down
The thorns which God has strewed upon the path
Which leads to immortality. 2

And when her husband is asking Heaven to rain curses down upon the head of his daughter, Lucretia boldly declares:

When high God grants, He punishes such prayers. 3

During the trial scene, she is resigned to rest her case with God, not men:

Let us all quickly die;
And after death, God is our judge, not they;
He will have mercy on us. 4

And in that last great scene in prison, before the execution, she comforts her step-daughter:

Trust in God's sweet love,
The tender promises of Christ; ere night,
Think, we shall be in Paradise. 5

This last quotation is not only a complete refutation to Paul Elmer More's animadversion that Shelley's theories "left him almost inhuman," but also strikes at the root of all those

¹
The Cenci, Act II, I, ll.4-5.

²
Ibid., III,I, ll.122-125.

³
Ibid., IV, I, l.138.

⁴
Ibid., Act V, Scene III, ll.55-57.

⁵
Ibid., V, Scene IV, ll.75-77.

criteria which would classify him as a confirmed apostate from Christian precepts.

I do not intend to incorporate any expressions of religious belief of Cardinal Camillo, the defender of the Cenci family on trial for the murder, since one would naturally expect his professions to be canonically correct. Except for the following excerpt, I shall pass over all else of this character. When he is pleading for compassion from the judges, he likens Beatrice to

That most perfect image of God's love
That ever came sorrowing upon the earth.
She is as pure as speechless fancy! ¹

It is important to take note of this passage because it presages Shelley's subsequent solicitude concerning the material and immaterial being of the Deity. The average Christian believes in the genesis of man as expressed in the first chapter of the Bible: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them." ² If God molded man accordingly in his own image, man therefore resembles God in spirit and in form. This God being the parent of mankind and the original model for the human image, takes a personal interest in bestowing the beneficences of his nature upon all those of his children who merit these mercies through the measure of their obedience.

The substance of this idea is reiterated in the soliloquy

¹ The Cenci, Act V, Scene II, ll. 67-69.

² Genesis 1:27.

of Giacomo when he is meditating upon the murder of his father,
the Count:

It is the form which moulded mine that sinks
Into the white and yellow spasms of death;
It is the soul by which mine was arrayed
In God's immortal likeness which now stands
Naked before God's judgment seat! 1

Let us turn now to the words and thoughts of Beatrice,
most of which are the personal pleas of a soul-racked young
girl holding converse with a heavenly Father, who hears and
heeds, and toward whom she is driven for alleviation of her
mental sufferings, while at the same time being instinctively
repelled by the gross, inhuman aberrations of her earthly
father. The personal note is ever present in her prayers and
entreaties, as for instance when she admonishes her father to

Seek out some dark and silent corner -- there
Bow thy white head before offended God,
And we will kneel around, and fervently
Pray that he pity both ourselves and thee. 2

God is omnipresent, ever heedful, in the mind of Beatrice:

Almighty God, how merciful thou art! 3

Hide me, O God! 4

Many might doubt there were a God above
Who sees and permits evil, and so die;
That faith no agony shall obscure in me. 5

1
The Cenci, Act III, Scene II, ll.2-24.

2
Ibid., Act I, Scene I, ll.156-159.

3
Ibid., Act II, Scene I, l.22.

4
Ibid., Act II, Scene I, l.111.

5
Ibid., Act III, Scene I, ll.100-102.

I have prayed
 To God, and I have talked with my own heart,
 And have unravelled my entangled will,
 And have at length determined what is right. 1

Believe that Heaven is merciful and just,
 And will not add our dread necessity
 To the amount of his offences. 2

You do well telling me so to trust in God;
 I hope I do trust in him. In whom else
 Can any trust? 3

There is a multiplicity of such repetitions in the same spirit of trusting adoration. Only for one brief moment does Beatrice waver, and that is shortly before her execution, but she quickly overcomes her irresolution, and asks

Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts. 4

In this play we find a complete refutation also of the theory maintained by so many critics that Shelley's God remained to the end of his life an impersonal Being. Solomon Gingerich, in a fairly recent essay, says:

To conceive of power in terms of personality was instinctively difficult for him....All Being, including the mind of man, was to him impersonal....Love, like the words Necessity and Power, is a word almost interchangeable with Wisdom, or Nature, or God, and though it has a human side, it is chiefly a cosmic force, as impersonal and impalpable as Time, or Nature, or any other of Shelley's abstractions, which live and work in a necessitarian spirit almost exclusively independent of the human consciousness. 5

1
The Cenci, Act III, Scene I, ll.218-221.

2
Ibid., Act IV, Scene II, ll.13-15.

3
Ibid., Act V, Scene IV, ll.87-89.

4
Ibid., Act V, Scene IV, l.57.

5
 Gingerich, Essays in the Romantic Poets, pp.203-206.

This late estimate follows the same fallacious tendency established as authentic by earlier critics, from whom I shall select only Bagehot's resumé as a typical example: "In Shelley the spirit of the universe has no will and no virtue; it is animated, but unholy; alive but unmoral; it is an object of intense admiration; it is not an object of worship."¹ All the previous quotations I have given from The Cenci refute such inaccurate assertions. Yet I shall use one more quotation as evidence that Shelley could portray flesh-and-blood people who believe implicitly in a God of goodness and justice. When Lucretia begs

Oh, take us not to Rome!

Beatrice assuages her anguish with this assurance:

Why not to Rome, dear Mother? There as here
Our innocence is as an armed heel
To trample accusation. God is there,
As here, and with his shadow ever clothes
The innocent, the injured, and the weak;
And such are we. ²

Nowhere else does Shelley become quite so human as in The Cenci, nowhere else does he voice feelings more intimate and fervent than these. We have no theories of Godwin, Berkeley, Hume, and others from his latest reading, half revealed and half concealed in the context. He was always the ardent partisan, and chose only subjects wherein he could voice his innermost convictions. It would not be logical to assume that he took the purely objective viewpoint of a disinterested specta-

¹ Bagehot, Estimations in Criticism, I, p.130.

² Shelley, The Cenci, Act IV, Scene IV, ll.153-163.

tor when he wrote The Cenci. It was never his intention to speak in Delphic terms. His writing was a recording of his own convictions.

From the skeletal framework of a mildewed story he resurrected the members of this high-born Roman family, dead for two centuries, chased their bones with flesh, invested their sufferings in a raiment of poetic radiance, and suffused intuitively his own heightened, all-pervading spirituality into the mystical recesses of their Lazarus-like souls. It is the sort of metempsychosis engendered in and by the prerogative art of genius. To Shelley, no less than to Beatrice, God is a merciful arbiter who presides over the destinies of man, the protector of "the innocent, the injured, and the weak," the sole trust when there is none else to trust.

We have proceeded far enough to see that by 1819 Shelley was beginning to abandon many of the negations found in his earlier pronouncements on religion. It is true he was still as unflinching as ever in his detestation of evil, selfishness, and tyranny. With a struggle he had freed himself from whatever was iconoclastic and tergiversative by the time he reached his twenty-third year, and was ready to admit that the skeptic, while destroying gross superstitions, should "spare to deface, as some of the French writers have defaced, the eternal truths characterized upon the imagination of men."¹

I have refrained thus far in this chapter from any mention bearing closely on Shelley's private life, but I shall make a brief departure from this practice to quote Leigh Hunt's

¹

Shelley, The Defence of Poetry, (Shawcross), p.143.

enlightening remarks which served as a rejoinder to the savage attack of a critic:

The reviewer (of the quarterly) asserts that 'Shelley is shamefully dissolute in his conduct.' We heard of similar assertions when we resided in the same house with Mr. Shelley for nearly three months; and how was he living all that time? As much like Plato himself as any of his theories resemble Plato. This was the round of his daily life: --He was up early; breakfasted sparingly; wrote all the morning; went out in his boat or into the woods with some Greek author or the Bible in his hands; came home to a dinner of vegetables (for he took neither meat nor wine); visited, if necessary, the sick and the fatherless, whom others gave Bibles and no help; wrote or studied again, or read to his wife and friends the whole evening; took a crust of bread or a glass of whey for supper; and went early to bed. 1

The picture is one of frugal domesticity, but the important revelation for us is the fact that he had become a contemplative student of the Bible and practiced its tenets far more than the average church-visitant.

Shelley made another "palpable slip" in using the term God in a conventional way when he wrote to Henry Reveley about the construction of the engine on the steamboat in which Shelley held a jointure:

Your volcanic description of the birth of the cylinder is very characteristic of you, and of it. One might imagine God, when He made the earth, and saw the granite mountains and flinty promontories flow into their craggy forms, and the splendour of their fusion filling millions of miles of the void space,

1

Shelley-Leigh Hunt: How Friendship Made History (edited by R. Brimley Johnson), p. 346.

like the tail of the comet, so looking, so delighting in His work. God sees his machine spinning round the sun, and delights in its success, and has taken out patents to supply all the suns in space with the same manufacture. 1

The evidence becomes unimpeachable that Shelley is speaking of God much the same as the average Christian on the street does.

Late in 1820 Shelley began Epipsychidion, verses addressed to a noble and unfortunate lady, Emilia Viviani, placed in a convent by her parents, The poem which is a paean glorifying the "poor, captive bird", "high, spirit-winged heart", and "seraph of heaven", is an idealization also of the Shelleyan spirit. For a while Emilia became the incarnation of eternal beauty and goodness embodied in a human image. The passage beginning

There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings.... 2

needs little explanation. "The supernatural Being to whom Shelley dedicated his youthful search should not puzzle any one. It is far too suggestive of Alastor and the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty to indicate any other divinity than Intellectual Beauty."³ But the following passage is more significant for us:

¹ Shelley, Letters, II, pp.751-752 (Written at Florence November 17, 1819)

² Epipsychidion, ll.;90-191. The passage referred to continues on through line 255.

³ White, Shelley, II, p.120.

I know
 That Love makes all things equal; I have heard
 By mine own heart this joyous truth averred;
 The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
 In love and worship, blends itself with God. 1

Even the lowly worm is gravid with love and adoration,
 and by the immanence of the Divine Spirit has become a cor-
 porate particle of that Spirit.

The rejected lines connected with this poem reveal the
 generic change that had come over Shelley, a reconciliation to
 the teachings of Christ:

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. 2

Another poem written in 1820, The Sensitive Plant, betrays,
 like Epipsychidion, evidences of expanding animistic beliefs
 in Shelley.

A Sensitive Plant in a garden grew,
 And the young winds fed it with silver dew. 3

The garden is inhabited also by other flowers: the Naiad-like
 lily of the valley, the pied wind-flowers, the tulip tall,
 the jessamine faint, the sweet tube-rose, and many others.

And the Spring arose on the garden fair,
 Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere.

.....
 But the Sensitive Plant, which could give small fruit
 Of the love which it felt from the leaf to the root
 Received more than all....

1
Epipsychidion, ll.125-129.

2
 Lines connected with Epipsychidion, ll.53-37.

3
The Sensitive Plant, ll.1-2.

For the Sensitive Plant has no bright flower;
 Radiance and odor are not its dower;
 It loves, even like Love, its deep heart is full,
 It desires what it has not, the beautiful!

....

There was a Power in this sweet place,
 An Eve in this Eden; a ruling grace
 Which to the flowers, did they waken or dream,
 Was as God is to the starry scheme. 1

On the surface we are apparently beholding a garden that is exquisitely harmonious and glowingly fair as long as it is attended by the guardian spirit, the Lady "whose form is upborne by a lovely mind", but which withers and becomes like a soul-less corpse as soon as she departs:

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
 And all sweet shapes and odors there,
 In truth have never passed away:
 'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed, not they.

For love, for beauty, and delight,
 There is no death nor change.... 2

The conclusion to the poem is an antiphon which resolves our bafflement: a pentrant mirror is held up for us, whereby we see the garden as a microcosm and the Lovely Lady is actually the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty. In a larger sense, the garden symbolizes a planet on which human beings are eminently well attended so long as the great spirit of Divine Love, which "has no companion of mortal race" ³ is present in the hearts of that mortal race.

Adonais, the elegy written in the spring of 1821 on the

1

The Sensitive Plant, I, ll.5-6, 70-73, 74-77; II, ll.1-4.

2

Ibid., Conclusion, ll.17-22.

3

Ibid., II, l.13.

death of Keats, is "noteworthy among other things for its passionate expression of Shelley's pantheistic faith." ¹ It would be a misapprehension to regard the poem as a retrogression of thought or retraction of ideas formulated in any of his more recent creations. Since the poem was composed as a "highly wrought piece of art," ² it is invested with the transcendental nature of metaphysical thought. The fundamental error in such a conception as Buchan gives us lies in the fact that the nature of a pantheistic God is "neither good nor evil in any human sense," and Shelley refused to subscribe to a God "in whose nature, as in that of man, both good and evil are mingled." ³ The cosmic dualism, the essence of which Shelley had striven so long to comprehend, is painted in this symbolistic picture of the struggle of the Spirit of Beauty with some "recalcitrant principle", in this instance called the unwilling cross:

He is a portion of the loveliness
 Which once he made more lovely; he doth bear
 His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
 Sweeps through the dull sense world, compelling there
 All new successions to the forms they wear,
 Torturing the unwilling cross that checks its flight
 To its own likeness, as each mass may bear,
 And bursting in its beauty and its might ⁴
 From trees and beasts and men into the "Heaven's light.

The Spirit of Love abides in and above the universe, immutable and imperishable, renascent and regenerative, individual and connate, a force not divisible by the veil separating

¹ Buchan, History of English Literature (the one-volume edition), p.312.

² Woodberry, in the Introduction to Adonais (Cambridge edition), 307.

³ Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.62.

⁴ Adonais, stanza XLIII

Life and Death:

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. 1

Adonais is in the highest degree mystical, but the testimonies in it are cumulative that the Spirit of Love, in Shelley's philosophy, has become the motivating force of the universe, opposed but not circumvented by any other power:

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe
 That Beauty in which all things work and move
 That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
 Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
 Which through the web of being blindly wove
 By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
 Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
 The fire for which all thirst. 2

There is little else in Adonais that has any direct bearing on our subject. If we were discussing the questions of soul, immortality, and the hereafter, we could profit greatly from Adonais. Although mention of God is made four or five times, the word in each case seems isolated and leads to no progression of ideas helpful to our study.

Nothing would be gained by calling attention to all the poems, short or fragmentary, which contain the name of God or a relative term. Some of them, such as The National Anthem, written on the death of the Princess Charlotte, with its reiterated refrain, "God save the Queen", would only serve to bear out White's contention that the word God, when used by

1

Adonais, stanza LII

2

Ibid., stanza LIV

Shelley in the conventional way, is a "palpable slip". I shall likewise pass over the incidental references to the Deity in the political poems, except the apostrophic solicitation in The Ode to Naples:

Great Spirit, deepest Love!
Which rulest and dost move
All things which live and are....1

The Boat on the Serchio, one of the fragmentary poems of 1821, contains the lines which led Browning to believe that "had Shelley lived, he would have ranged himself with the Christians"²:

All rose to do the task He set to each,
Who shaped us to His ends and not our own.
The million rose to learn, and One to teach
What none yet ever knew or can be known. 3

It is an impressive thought which Shelley gives us of the Life Universal awakening at dawn to the performance of its daily tasks.

The unfinished play, Charles the First, incomplete as it is, may still serve as an arrowhead indication of the type of drama Shelley might have eventually turned to writing, had he lived.

He had just begun the fifth scene of the first act at the time of his death. All we can say, therefore, is what Shelley himself said in a letter to Ollier: "It promises to be good."⁴

¹
Ode to Naples, Epode II B, ll.1-3.

²
Robert Browning, in "Paper on Shelley," Complete Works, p.1013.

³
The Boat on the Serchio, ll.30-33.

⁴
quoted by Woodberry in the Introduction to Charles the First (Cambridge edition), p.453.

The play, as much of it as we have, deals, like The Cenci, with real people. I shall quote a few lines without much comment, since they are largely self-explanatory and exhibit the conventional treatment of the Deity in a manner which had now become a practice with Shelley:

A man who thus crucifies his God
May well his brother. 1

For a king bears the office of God
To all the under world; and to his God
Alone he must deliver up his trust.
Unshorn of its permitted attributes. 2

And when our great Redeemer, when our God,
When He who gave, accepted, and retained
Himself in propitiation of our sins,
Is scorned by his immediate ministry. 3

That he has accepted, at least for dramatic purposes, the Biblical version of man's origination with the spirit and form of God as a model, is testified by the poignant utterances Shelley puts in the mouth of the Puritan Bastwick:

If, like the prelates, I
Were an invader of the royal power,
A public scorner of the word of God,
Profane, idolatrous, popish, superstitious,
Impious in heart and in tyrannic act,
Void of wit, honesty, and temperance;
If Satan were my lord, as theirs,--our God
Pattern of all I should avoid to do;
Were I an enemy of my God and King
And of good man, as ye are;--I should merit
Your fearful state and gilt prosperity. 4

In Hampden's incomplete monologue in the fourth scene, when he declares that impious rites cannot "wrest man's free

¹ Charles the First, Scene I, ll.102-103.

² Ibid., Scene II, ll.153-156.

³ Ibid., Scene II, ll.259-262.

⁴ Ibid., Scene III, ll.10-20.

worship from the God who loves,"¹ he is but paraphrasing the Scriptural axiom that "God is Love",² and reversing the admonishment made to man: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."³

The foregoing passage is a refutation also of Charles Kingsley's prognostication that Shelley would probably have wound up in Rome as an Oratorian or a Passionist, had he lived. There is little or no basis for the assumption that he was veering in that direction. Shelley was intensely individualistic; he denied the constraints of systematization in religion. Doctrine and creed, ceremony and ritual, all were external trappings incidental to faith. As we have seen earlier, he disclaimed any form of authoritarianism imposed by a state church. He had come to regard the formulae of orthodox religions as a series of perversions and abuses leading to various kinds of tolerance, which went so far at times as to instigate wars, persecutions, and iniquitous practices. The historical religions through the ages had tended to galvanize social injustices, which the more thoughtful elements in society had been powerless to remove.

He detested the homilies of clergymen, considering them as so much cant and humbug. "Can there be worse slavery than the depending for the safety of your soul on the will of

¹ Charles the First, Scene IV, ll.32-33

² 1 John 4:8

³ Mark 12:30; also found in Deuteronomy, Matthew, and Luke

another man?" he expostulated quite caustically in his Address¹ to the Irish People. This, of course, was written early, in 1812, but the belligerent mood exhibited toward the clergy in Charles the First (1822) shows that there is no diminution of his dislike for the official (and officious) prerogatives of the clergy.

In the short fragment preserved to us from his ideas On the Doctrines of Christ, he says that an established religion "returns to death-like apathy the sublimest ebullitions of most exalted genius, and the spirit-stirring truths of a mind inflamed with a desire to benefit mankind."² Another opinion he held to the very last was that the congregating of people to worship together in a church was more often than not a display of ego and worldly purposes: "Where two or three are gathered together, the devil is among them."³ Man's conscience is his best mentor and will teach him what to believe in; Shelley's never became "trained to the service of the deities either of Hebraism or Philistinism."⁴ Conscience, to Shelley, was superior to the dictates of any government or religion. "It surpasses, and where it can act, supersedes all other, as nature surpasses art, as God surpasses man."⁵

¹ Shelley, Prose Works, (Herne, edition), I, p.228.

² Ingpen, Shelley's Complete Works, VII, pp.145-146.

³ Letter to Mary Shelley, August 16, 1821 (Ingpen, Letters, II, p.905)

⁴ Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.23.

⁵ Shelley, Proposals for a Benevolent Association (in Prose Works, I, p.277.)

Shelley's last long poem, completed shortly before his death, is Hellas, concerned primarily with the struggle of the Greeks for independence from Turkey. The poem affords an opportunity for contrast of the respective religions of the two peoples, the Greeks being Christians and the Turks Mohammedans. The Cross symbolizes the Spirit of Goodness and Love, while the Crescent represents the negative attributes of evil, discord, and slavery. At last Shelley is defending Christianity, and when Christ speaks in his one long monologue, the religion which bears his name is adumbrated as the "complement and crown of the Grecian spirit, Christ being preferred even to Plato, usually the idol of Shelley's worship";¹

by Plato' sacred light
 Of which my spirit was a burning morrow --
 By Greece and all she cannot cease to be,
 Her quenchless words, sparks of immortal truth,
 Stars of all night -- her harmonies and forms,
 Echoes and shadows of what love adores
 In thee, I do compel thee, send forth Fate,
 Thy irrevocable child: let her descend,
 A seraph-wingéd Victory arrayed
 In tempest of the omnipotence of God
 Which sweeps through all things. 2

Christ augurs the eventual mastery of Freedom over Tyranny in Greece through the Spirit of Love irradiating from the smile of the Heavenly Father:

She shall arise
 Victorious as the world arose from Chaos!
 And as the Heavens and the Earth arrayed
 Their presence in the beauty and the light
 Of thy first smile, O Father, as they gather

¹ Strong, "The Faith of Shelley", in Studies in Shelley, p.17.

² Hellas, ll.94-104.

The spirit of thy love which paves for them
 Their path o'er the abyss till everywhere
 Shall be one living spirit. 1

The reverential spirit toward both Christ and the Christian God is all the more remarkable since it is residual in one who had once been strongly infected by a virus of hatred for the whole system of Christian practice, Shelley could now write:

Almighty Father!
 Low-kneeling at the feet of Destiny2

Christ is likened to Prometheus, and suffers martyrdom, but is triumphant through the passive virtues of purity, gentleness, humility, and wisdom:

A power from the unknown God,
 A Promethean conqueror, came;
 Like a triumphal path he trod
 The thorns of death and shame.
 A mortal shape to him
 Was like the vapor dim
 Which the orient planet animates with light;
 Hell, sin, and slavery came,
 Like bloodhounds mild and tame,
 Nor preyed until their Lord had taken flight;
 The moon of Mohamet
 Arose, and it shall set;
 While blazoned as on Heaven's immortal noon
 The cross leads generations on. 3

Our attention is focused here, not only on the presentation of Christ's primacy over Mohamet in a laudable tribute, but also on the supernaturalistic theism which accepts God as a mystical eudaemon from whom Christ emanates as a "power".

The spirit of Love is interchangeable with that of Pity or Compassion when the Semichorus I sings:

1
Hellas, ll.112-119.

2
Ibid., ll.73-79.

3
Ibid., ll.211-224.

In sacred Athens, near the fane
 Of wisdom, Pity's altar stood;
 Serve not the unknown God in vain,
 But pay that broken shrine again
 Love for hate, and tears for blood. 1

In the discussion between Mahmud and Ahasuerus on the attributes of the Deity, God is envisaged largely in the anthropomorphic likeness of man.

Mahmud

I apprehended not
 What thou hast taught me, but I now perceive
 That thou art no interpreter of dreams;
 Thou dost not own that art, device, or God,
 Can make the future present --let it come!
 Moreover thou disdainest us and ours!
 Thou art as God, whom thou contemplatest.

Ahasuerus

Disdain thee? --not the worm beneath thy feet!
 The Fathomless has care for meaner things
 Than thou canst dream, and has made pride for those
 Who would be what they may not, or would seem
 That which they are not. Sultan! talk no more
 Of thee to me, the future and the past;
 But look on that which cannot change --the One,
 The unborn and the undying. 2

It would be otiose to deny that Shelley is here ascribing to God "not only greater power and greater goodness", than that inherent in man, but also "perfect power and perfect goodness", and like the traditional supernaturalist, holds that God is "eternal and infinite: infinite in power, goodness, and knowledge; eternal in that for him there is no time."³

In Shelley's conception God has come to be anthropomorphic, and is characterized by the same traits of selfishness which

¹
Hellas, ll.733-737.

²
Ibid., ll.755-568.

³
 Randall and Buchler, Philosophy: An Introduction, p.157.

are individualized in human beings. In so doing, he has dissociated himself from the philosophers and allied himself with the mystics.

Philosophers have usually tried to avoid anthropomorphism, realizing that it is the product of a crude attempt to envisage a supernatural being pictorially. In a sense, however, any attempt to relate God to human affairs involves some anthropomorphic element. Thus the assumption that God responds to prayer, that he participates in and influences human relations, that he rewards and punishes, in short, the assumption on which such of organized supernatural religion is based, is inevitably anthropomorphic. 1

Shelley's mystical moorings are strikingly testified by the final chorus of Hellas, in which he says:

Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream. 2

In The Triumph of Life, the last poetical fragment which Shelley has left us, the mystic is portrayed as a spirit suspended somewhere between Earth and Heaven:

Gregory and John, and men divine,
Who rose like shadows between man and God. 3

The Triumph of Life is a true vision of the Dantesque mystic who beholds the profluent chariots of men sweep past, engulfed in the world-stream of half-illusion, half-reality.

I among the multitude
Was swept. Me sweetest flowers delayed not long;
Me not the shadow nor the solitude;

Me not that falling stream's Lethean song;
Me not the phantom of that early Form
Which moved upon its motion; but among

1
Randall and Buchler, Philosophy: An Introduction, pp. 157-158.

2
Hellas, ll. 1064-1065.

3
The Triumph of Life, ll. 288-289.

The thickest billows of that living storm
I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime
Of that cold night, whose airs too soon deform.

Before the chariot had begun to climb
The opposing steep of that mysterious dell.
Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme

Of him who from the lowest depths of hell,
Through every paradise and through the glory,
Love led serene, and who returned to tell

The words of hate and awe, --the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured except Love;
For deaf as is a sea which wrath makes hoary,

The world can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers. 1

This fragment also contains a muffled reverberation of the quondam challenge which once pre-empted Shelley's thoughts for a solution, the perpetual warring of evil with good. And this Jobean perplexity remains incomprehensible as ever, the Gordian knot of Manicheism is still spliced, unsevered, its mystery still ineluctably unsolved:

And much I grieved to think how power and will
In opposition rule our mortal clay;
And why God made irreconcilable
Good and the means of good. 2

Barnard declares that, in the foregoing citation, the word God is used, "in the same manner as that in which an avowedly Christian poet might use it, in speaking of the corruption of the original teachings of Christ through the growth of superstition."³

1
The Triumph of Life, ll.458-479.

2
Ibid., ll.228-231.

3
Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.76.

We have completed a detailed analysis of Shelley's poems, but there remain two of his prose essays embodying material pertinent to our investigation. There is uncertainty about the specific dating of these compositions, but it is known they went through several revisions, and in their final versions reinforce what Shelley had already been saying repeatedly in rhythmic measures. Both of them date from the last year of Shelley's life.

A Defence of Poetry, written in 1821, while Shelley's most significant prose writing, is apposite to our study only for the auxiliary illumination which it casts upon his expanding transcendentalism and its contingent concern with religion.

The earliest definition Shelley gives us of religion is in a note to Queen Mab. There he simply states that it is "the perception of the revelation in which we stand to the principle of the universe".¹ In A Defence of Poetry, however, he complemented this empirical terminology by a more metaphysical one in his exegesis on the supernumerary functions entailed on the high calling of poets:

Poets are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dances, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers who draw into a certain proximity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies

1

Queen Mab, Note on VI, l.198.

of the invisible world which is called religion. 1

Recognition is here given to the symbiosis of the two worlds in which we live, and religion provides the contacting agencies between them.

There are three definitions in A Defence of Poetry, employing the speech-form of transcendentalism, that have intrinsic value for this study, in as much as they present testimonials of the reincarnative principle in the divine permutations experienced by the human psyche, which, in the broader Greek connotations of the word, embraces the intellectual and spiritual faculties of mankind collectively, and operates ad infinitum and in perpetuum. First, that of a great poet, which while referring specifically to Dante, may be applied as well to Shelley or any other inspired poet: "His very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor."²

Of great poetry he says:

All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be withdrawn, and the inmost beauty of the meaning never exposed. 3

And of a great poem:

1

A Defence of Poetry (edition by Shawcross), p.123.

2

Ibid., p.147.

3

Ibid., p.147.

A great poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight, and after one person and one age has exhausted all their divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight. 1

In all three of these definitions Shelley's belief in the divine origin of poetry is as implicit as the Christian's faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible. 2 The earnest mode of speech, the reverential attitude, and the luminous imagery all betoken a high degree of spiritual insight. Poetic experience, like religious experience, is an effluence from the sacred fount of empyreal inspiration. "Poetry is indeed something divine", Shelley proceeds to say, "and it redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man." 3 It is surcharged with beauty, harmony, and ardor, all of which lift it particularly as those same qualities in religion do, to the heights of kenotic vision. Shelley's interpretation accords in toto with the modern teleological temper, with its perceptible stress on the nature of the Paraclete, as expressed by Professor Montague of Columbia University:

Religious experience at its highest and deepest is the contact which mortal men have with immortal spirit, and forms all material structures -- the electrons, atoms, and molecules, and their aggregates, the nebulae stars and planets, and the living bodies of human beings. Surely it is not too fantastic to believe that a spirit that

1 A Defence of Poetry, (Shewcross), pp.147-148.

2 See Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.7 footnote.

3 A Defence of Poetry, pp.152,154.

is everywhere can also be here, and on occasion visit mortals and make known its presence in their hearts: when they are in sorrow, as a comforter; when they are bewildered, as a light; when they are in terror, as a power; when they are in joy, as a glory. ¹

A Defence of Poetry is evidence, therefore, that Shelley fully recognizes the consanguinity of poetry and religion, and that to aver categorically that the poet can enjoy divine visitations in the rare moments of his creative impulses without a concomitant credence in a Divinity is false.

Let us proceed now to the Essay on Christianity (1822) which, as Barnard says, "contains Shelley's latest reasoned statements concerning the nature of God; statements which sweep into the discard a large number of the arguments that are flaunted so defiantly in Queen Mab and A Refutation of Deism."² Again, as in his poetic and dramatic works, Shelley interprets the hypostasis of the Godhead within the premises of a predicated character, and this time the interpretation is made through the commentaries of and on Jesus Christ. God is here neither an impersonal power nor a mere abstraction, but an indiscernible being with the personal attributes of perfection.

Jesus Christ represented God as the principle of all good, the source of all happiness, the wise and benevolent Creator and Preserver of all things. But the interpreters of his doctrines have confounded the good and the evil principle. They observed the emanations of their universal natures to be inextricably entangled in the world, and, trembling before

¹ Montague, Belief Unbound, pp.91-92.

² Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.67.

the power of the cause of all things, addressed to it such flattery as is acceptable to the ministers of human tyranny, attributing love and wisdom to those energies which they felt to be exerted indifferently for the purposes of benefit and calamity. Jesus Christ expressly asserts that distinction between the good and the evil principle which it has been the practice of all theologians to confound. 1

He continues to state explicitly the duality of the two separate principles exercising their powers for the mastery of the universe:

God is represented by Jesus Christ as the Power from which and through which the streams of all that is excellent and delightful flow; the Power which models, as they pass, all the elements of this mixed universe to the purest and most perfect shape which it belongs to their nature to assume....According to Jesus Christ, and according to the indisputable facts of the case, some evil spirit has dominion in this imperfect world. But there will come a time when the human mind shall be visited exclusively by the influences of the benignant Power. 2

That Christ ever preached or even accepted the concept of Hell is rigorously rejected, and the assertion of "everlasting fire" is imputed squarely to those partisans who willingly vitiated Christ's teachings:

How monstrous a calumny have not imposters dared to advance against the whole tenor of his doctrines and his life....The absurd and execrable doctrine of vengeance seems to have been contemplated in all its shapes by this great moralist with the profoundest disapprobation. 3

1 Essay on Christianity, (Shawcross), pp.100-101.

2 Ibid., pp.94-95.

3 Ibid., p.78.

The promulgation and the incorporation of the doctrine of eternal damnation into the Christian system is the underlying basis for Shelley's earlier rejection and detestation of conventional theology.

Mankind, transmitting from generation to generation the horrible legacy of accumulated vengeances, and pursuing with the feelings of duty the misery of their fellow beings, have not failed to attribute to the Universal Cause a character analogous to their own. 1

In contrast with this man-made automaton, Shelley presents another Supreme Being, anthropomorphic it is true, but one who is independent of human cogs:

That merciful and benignant Power who scatters equally upon the beautiful earth all the elements of security and happiness-- whose influencings are distributed to all whose natures admit of a participation in them -- who send to the weak and vicious creatures of his will all the benefits which they are capable of sharing. 2

And again:

The image of this invisible, mysterious Being is more or less excellent and perfect -- resembles more or less its original and object -- in proportion to the perfectness of the mind on which it is impressed. 3

It is easy to apprehend the nature of this Deity and difficult to misconstrue it.

Surely this does not mean that men have communion with a Nature not their own and yet like their own....A Deity, benignant, merciful, bestowing upon his creatures all

1 Essay on Christianity, (Shawcross), p.99.

2 Ibid., p.92.

3 Ibid., p.99.

the happiness which the measure of their obedience to his will enables them to receive, could not be labeled an impersonal one or a mere abstraction. 1

The theory that the Creator was viewed by Shelley as a "mere abstraction" is further weakened by this exposition of the distinction between the nature of God and man:

We can distinctly trace in the tissues of his (Christ's) doctrines the persuasion that God is some universal Being, differing from man and the mind of man....It is important to observe that the author of the Christian system had a conception widely differing from the gross imaginations of the vulgar relatively to the ruling Power of the universe. He everywhere represents this Power as something mysteriously and illimitably pervading the frame of things. 2

In some respects the thought embodied here is a cohesion of the same colloidal jelly, long before crudely conceived, inchoate and inorganic, in the protoplasmic pages of Queen Mab.

The Platonistic concept of perfectibility is visualized as being within the sweep of attainment, and Heaven becomes more than a mere sanguine aspiration, untinged by optimistic mollities:

This Heaven, when pain and evil cease, and when the Benignant Principle, untrammelled and uncontrolled, visits in the fullness of its power the universal frame of things. Human life, with all its unreal ills and transitory hopes, is as a dream, which departs before the dawn, leaving no trace of its evanescent hues. 3

1
Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.69.

2
Essay on Christianity, (Shawcross), p.88.

3
Ibid., pp.96-97.

Shelley reiterates his belief in God as a visitant to human beings:

We live and move and think. But we are not the creators of our own origin and existence; we are not the masters of our own imaginations and moods of mental being. There is a Power by which we are surrounded like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will. Our most imperial and stupendous qualities -- those on which the majesty and the power of humanity are erected -- are, relatively to the inferior portion of its mechanism, active and imperial; but they are the passive slaves of some higher and omnipresent Power. This Power is God; and those who have seen God have in the period of their purer and more perfect nature been harmonized by their own will to so exquisite a consentaneity of power as to give forth divinest melody, when the breath of universal being sweeps over their faces. 1

It is difficult to conceive how any one could misconstrue the faceted precision of this particular passage, yet Stopford Brooke ventures to project this animadversion in all good faith upon our attention: "We have no business to assume that Shelley expresses in it-- as I should like to assume -- his settled thought. He is either saying what Jesus thought about God, or he is carried away by the splendour of the speculation into emotional poetry."²

Fortunately, we have White's authority against this interpretation. In the first place, White in The Best in Shelley, asks cogently why Shelley should have written the essay at all if he were interested in Christ's teachings only from a dog-

1

Essay on Christianity (Shewcross), pp. 98-99.

2

Brooke, Naturalism in English Poetry, p. 222.

matic viewpoint. Then again, the strong sympathies and enthusiasm inherent in Shelley's nature precluded his treatment of any subject which held no personal interest or appeal for him. And more convincingly yet; during his maturative years Shelley had conceived a boundless admiration for the character of Christ; in Hellas he had sublimated Christ to a position of preeminent grandeur.¹

How closely Shelley's views concur with those of Christ regarding the duality of antithetical agencies operating in the universe may be seen from this straightforward avowal:

This much is certain, that Jesus Christ represents God as the fountain of all goodness, the eternal enemy of pain and evil, the uniform and unchanging motive of the salutary operations of the material world. The supposition that this cause is excited to action by some principle analogous to the human will, adds weight to the persuasion that it is foreign to its nature to inflict the slightest pain.²

The preceding statement is an admission of a Divine Will functioning in a fashion similar to the human will. Such a belief makes the postulate of personality reasonable. I advance the ablest exposition I have been able to find on the subject of Deus in propria persona in modern religious studies.

Personality is that part of the universe which is immediately present to us. The self is the true datum of all experience. Our view of everything else that is, rests on our actual, present, ever-changing personal consciousness... In various ways the existence of personality makes the

1

See discussion of this subject in White, The Best in Shelley, p.261.

2

Essay on Christianity (Shawcross), p.95.

existence of a personal God reasonable. In the first place personality is organic to the universe....Our will meets other will which opposes or works with it; our experience meets other and infinitely larger experience which is its source. Thus the fact of personality points to a world beyond our personalities, but essentially of the same kind, that is, of thought and action and experience, yet on a cosmic scale. To this cosmic experience, in organic relations with which our mind stands, we give the name of God. 1

This scoliolum on the nature of a personal God is quite helpful to our investigation, in as much as it defines and summarizes much of what Shelley himself was saying in his later writings. The manifestation of a cosmic personality, possessing the attributes of an epigenetic consciousness, obviates the argument for a mechanistic will creating and governing the universe. What is unconscious cannot create and govern the conscious. John Locke pursued the thought in these somewhat egregious terms: "Incogitative being cannot produce a cogitative....It is as impossible to conceive that ever bare incogitative matter should produce a thinking intelligent being, as that nothing of itself should produce matter."² Only the prescribed conditions of our insight limit the human understanding from a more expansive and a more definite knowledge of the Supreme Creator.

In pursuance of the thought that the Deity, like man,

¹ Edgar Sheffield Brightman, The Problem of God, pp.155-156.

² John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, (Vol. IV, of his Collected Writings, pp.8,10.

possesses personality, Shelley says,

Man, resembling God, fulfills most accurately the tendencies of his nature; and God comprehends within himself all that constitutes human perfection. Thus God is a model through which the excellence of man is to be estimated, while the abstract perfection of the human character is the type of the actual perfection of the divine. 1

Thus God is vitually the matrix after whose likeness all men are stamped, but more than that, he is the apex of perfection, the emulation of which gives purpose to human endeavor.

In explaining certain portions of the Beatitudes, Shelley quotes Christ as saying that

a being of pure and gentle habits will not fail, in every thought, in every object, to be aware of benignant visitings from the invisible energies by which he is surrounded. 2

Any human participating in the divine effluences emanating from the Godhead must necessarily be cognate to that Nature in its attributes.

Hence, man, in so far as he is good and pure, and is able to subdue his will to harmony with the 'benignant visitings' of the Divine, may be truly said to be created in the image of God. 3

We have arrived at the conclusion of our extended analysis of Shelley's progressive steps in quest of a Deity. In retrospect it is apparent that he began to abandon his material-

¹ Essay on Christianity (Shawcross), p.70.

² Ibid., p.91.

³ Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.70.

istic philosophy by the time he had reached his twenty-third year, and the period of his "unappeasible revolt" against traditional religion was over. Thereafter he veered slowly but gradually away from a mechanistic conception of the universe toward a more humanistic faith in some Power that radiated Beauty, Goodness, and Love.

Let us recapitulate briefly the course of this progress. In Alastor, the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, and Mont Blanc, written during 1815 and 1816, Shelley reveals his awareness of the presence of the unseen Divinity whose tenders of contact with man are fleeting and few. Hitherto, he had assumed the philosophical attitude that an impersonal Power with blind mechanical functions operated the system of the universe, and his organon of that Power was in the nature of definition, criticism, and comprehension. Henceforward, through Prometheus Unbound and The Cenci to the Essay on Christianity, Shelley treats God as an object of worship and devotion. Religion and poetry are interwoven through the common spiritual purposes of cooperative goodness, beneficence, and Love. The strictures binding the human will to limitation and inescapable slavery are loosened by the transcending power of this Divine Love abiding personally in the human spirit. Thus, his Deity emerges unmistakably as the supreme embodiment, material and immaterial, of that Love, through contact with which human beings pass, as though an alembic, to be refined and rendered in the likeness of the Godhead. We can say, therefore, that

Shelley's God is, as Barnard expresses it, "supra-personal
--that is, personal and more than personal at the same time.¹
Regardless of the ignoratic elenchi of those critics cited
in the introductory part of this study, Shelley's God is a
personal God, anthropomorphic in being, a God of Love and
Mercy and Intercession, and, as such, conforms to a concept
which should be acceptable to all those who practice
Christianity according to the precepts of Christ.

¹Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p.72.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

We have arrived at the final stages of this study, By way of recapitulation, I shall summarize as briefly as possible the various units comprising the aggregate of this thesis.

As a prefatory postulate I assumed, from a preliminary survey of the field, that all the investigations relative to Shelley's conflicting religious beliefs left a desideratum of unexplored matter concerning the specific subject of Shelley's varying conceptions of a Deity, and accordingly I restricted my efforts solely to an ampler exposition of this one particular phase through an analytical inquiry into all of Shelley's writings and into all the previous material casting light on this debatable point of Shelleyan criticism. My study was undertaken explicitly from the viewpoint of a clarification, or rather, a rectification of those discursive criteria in which the writers have generalized too freely from a priori assumptions.

First we presented a synoptic condensation of historical data on the growth of the modern spirit in religion before Shelley's time, needful for a proper comprehension of values and terms analogous to those employed by Shelley himself in his modes of thought and expression.

Then we proceeded to Shelley's personal background. We found that Shelley was influenced, in his childhood, less by his parents and teachers than he was by his diversified reading.

From the fleeting stages of childhood and adolescence we

proceeded to an examination of the period when he began to develop a questioning attitude toward orthodox religion. Here we found that his skepticism widened the breach between him and his father, and caused him to be regarded by the other members of his family as a spiritual leper. The wretchedness of such a humiliating position chafed severely the sensitive chords of his vibrant nature. He felt keenly as if he were being pursued by the demon of Christianity. It was at this time he developed a pronounced form of theophobia.

The publication of The Necessity of Atheism, his expulsion from Oxford, and the abysmal rift with his father, brought us to consider Shelley's concern in the spirit of an impartial and disinterested First Cause. We found that, although Shelley called himself an atheist at this time, he was obviously more of an agnostic, his mind fluctuating between inconstant spells of belief and disbelief.

During the next year, throughout 1812, Shelley was identifying God with the universe in a form of naturalistic philosophy. God becomes an impersonal force transcending the physical world and indifferent to its activations.

In Queen Mab, published in 1813, Shelley denies the right of the human will to act on its own accord, and attributes all unknown power to a mute and immutable Necessity, impervious to the prayers of a supplicating humanity. The Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell, he declares, are anathema to the logical mind.

Until 1815 Shelley advanced through stages of disbelief

wavering in connotation between rationalism, materialism, pantheism, and determinism. His objections to orthodox Christianity were based on the idea that the true teachings of Christ had become corrupted by the endless accretions of superstition and tradition; war, bloodshed, and persecution were condoned in the name of Christ, and the Church was a mercenary institution without a true sense of spiritual values.

In the last and final phase of our study we enter into a new period of Shelley's thinking, wherein we perceive a more positive attitude in his utterances. He rejects materialism as a opiate for adolescent minds. In Alastor, composed in the autumn of 1815 and published early in 1816, the new orientation toward an immaterialistic Deity is indicated by the numerous invocations addressed to a deific Power, pleading for instruction and inspiration.

By 1816 the doctrine of Necessity had been superseded by the more illuminative doctrine of Intellectual Beauty. In the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty the poet becomes aware of the presence, floating unseen among us, of an asomatous divinity, through whose invariable visitations we are invested with visions of a hyperphysical world beyond the range of doubt, chance, and mutability. Again, in Mont Blanc: Lines written in the Vale of Chamouni he catches gleams of this remoter world, and his conviction is further reenforced by the conclusion that the secret strength which molds the destiny of natural phenomena is coevally of the same quantum which governs thought.

In Prometheus Unbound Shelley concerned himself with the problem of discord inherent in the two opposing principles of good and evil existing side by side in the world and he sought to devise means for its eradication. He assumes for the first time a more reverent attitude toward the figure of Christ, and liberates Love from the impersonal governance of determinism. Henceforth, Love becomes the leading attribute of Shelley's God.

In The Cenci he employed the word God in the customary manner of all Christians. His characters, who were eminently Christian in their concepts and language, were most sympathetically portrayed. Henceforward, God was to be, for Shelley, the benign Father of Mercies, presiding over His human seed, and the personal protector of those who trust in His immediacy.

Epipsychidion and The Sensitive Plant, both written in 1821, evince Shelley's expanding belief in animism. Adonais, the most mystical of Shelley's poems, is indicative of the fact that the Spirit of Love has become the focal force motivating the universe. The fragmentary poem, The Boat on the Serchio, pictures the matutinal stir of all animate elements when they rise to a resumption of the daily tasks assigned individually to each by an omniscient Creator.

The sketchy remains of Charles I, dealing like The Cenci with real people, throw further light on the fact that Shelley, at least for dramatic purposes, intended to personate God as a loving Father to mankind.

In Hellas, Shelley takes the unequivocal position, which

in his earlier years would have appeared paradoxical, not only of defending Christianity but also of designating it the non-pareil of religions. Christ is regarded as a magnetized power, conterminous with the spiritual realities of a revealed Divinity. For our investigation the salient feature of Hellas is its irrefragable conditioning of God as an anthropomorphic Being.

The Triumph of Life is a mystical interpretation of man's journey through life as a composite of illusion and reality. God is mentioned by name in exactly the manner employed by the average Christian who is honest enough to say that Christ's teachings have been debased by too much needless dogma.

A Defence of Poetry, 1812, Shelley's finest piece of prose, demonstrates the kinship of poetry and religion. It would be a delusion of grandeur for the poet to believe in divine visitations during those sporadic moments when he is overwhelmed by the afflatus of composition without the accompanying belief in Divinity.

The Essay on Christianity, 1822, is the last and most germane of all those writings Shelley has given us, to serve as a final key to his most reasoned thoughts on religion. As in many other of his works, he interprets the essence of Deity by focusing his attention on the vicarious character of Christ and the latter's enlightening commentaries on the attributes of the Godhead. Christ here portrays God as the generator of all goodness, wisdom, and happiness. The concept

of Hell is denied, being an invention of those who knowingly vitiated Christ's teachings. The supreme ruler is that merciful and benignant Power which visits and influences all those whose natures admit of an immanent participation within their being.

The likeness of this Deity, it is fairly clear, is anthropomorphic, since it is not a mere abstraction but a Power pervading the frame of things and visiting us at will. Shelley definitely states that this Power is God and, furthermore, that those who have seen Him in the moments when their theomorphic natures were purest, have been moved to give forth the most harmonious utterances known to man.

In the Essay on Christianity, God is represented not only as the fountain of goodness, but as the enemy of evil, one to whose prevailing spirit it is utterly foreign to inflict the slightest pain. A will functioning in such a manner analogous to the human will would necessarily imply personality. Hence, we may conclude that Shelley, in recognizing the beneficent personality of the Power which sweeps across the chords of our theomorphic being and inspires us to divinest utterance, also recognizes and accepts, as Christ does, the sentient personality of that cosmic Power. God, containing within himself all that comprises human perfection, is the paragon through which the excellence of man is to be measured, while human nature strives in the abstract to arrive at the perfection actually attained already in divine nature. Hence, we may conclude that Shelley's God is in every physical and abstract

purpose the matrix after whose image all men are stamped.

Shelley was denied a long life. Had he lived, he would have supplemented his poems with expository essays, and there would have then been no misconceptions and no diversity of opinion on his religious beliefs. He worked persistently to clarify his ideas and to rectify his erroneous judgments. Out of the great mass of his assertions on this subject, it becomes increasingly evident that Shelley was laboring and searching all the few years of his hectic and harried existence for a truer knowledge of the nature of God.

As a result of our investigations in this study, we may safely conclude that Shelley did not remain for long a devotee of atheism, materialism, pantheism, or Godwinism. We have perceived, as Shelley soon perceived, that these theophobic phases were not in consonance with the finer essence of his warm, expansive nature. We have perceived a unity of purpose and a steady progress, onward and upward, in his search for the key tuning the infinite. We may conclusively say that, by varying degrees, he approached and finally arrived at a settled state of belief in a personal God. In this final stage of his spiritual convictions, we have found that Shelley's God is an onipresent Power with all the Attributes of perfection. And, above all, we have found that Shelley's God is a God of love and mercy and intercession, the fountainhead of all goodness, the eternal enemy of all pain and evil, and, as such, conforms to a concept which should be acceptable to all those who practice Christianity according to the teachings of Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A EDITIONS OF SHELLEY'S WRITINGS

The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, edited with a biographical sketch by George Edward Woodberry. Cambridge Edition. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston and New York, 1901.

Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism, edited by John Shawcross. H. Frowde, London and New York, 1909.

The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, edited by Roger Ingpen. 2 volumes. G. Bell and Sons, London, 1914.

The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, newly edited by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. 10 volumes. C. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1926-1930.

Shelley's Lost Letters to Harriet. Atlantic Monthly Press. Boston, 1930.

B WORKS MAINLY BIOGRAPHICAL

Dowden, Edward: The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. 2 volumes.
K. Paul, Trench and Company, London, 1886.

Hogg, Thomas Jefferson: The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley.
E.P. Dutton and Company, New York, 1935.

Ingpen, Roger: Shelley in England. K. Paul, Trench, Truber and
Company, London, 1917.

Medwin, Thomas: The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Oxford Uni-
versity Press, New York and London, 1913.

Peck, Walter E.: Shelley, His Life and Work. 2 volumes. Houghton,
Mifflin, Boston and New York, 1927.

Trelawney, Edward John: Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author.
B. N. Pickering, London, 1887.

White, Newman Ivey: Shelley. 2 volumes. Alfred Knopf, New York,
1940.

C CRITICAL WORKS AND STUDIES

Arnold, Matthew: Essays in Criticism. E. P. Dutton and Company, New York, 1916.

Bagehot, Walter: Estimations in Criticism. Volume I. A. Melrose, London, 1903.

Barnard, Ellsworth: Shelley's Religion. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1937.

Bradley, Andrew C.: "Notes on Shelley's 'Triumph of Life'," in Modern Language Review, IX (1914).

Brailsworth, Henry: Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle. Henry Holt, New York, 1913.

Brooke, Stopford: Studies in Poetry. G.P. Putnam's, New York, 1913.

Campbell, Mrs. Olwen Ward: Shelley and the Unromantics. Methuen and Company, London, 1924.

Clutton-Brock, Arthur: Shelley: The Man and the Poet. Methuen and Company, London, 1929.

Gingerich, Solomon F.: Essays in the Romantic Poets. MacMillan and Company, New York, 1929.

Grabo, Carl H.: A Newton Among Poets. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1930.

Hicks, Arthur C.: The Place of Christianity in Shelley's Thought. Stanford University Press, Stanford University, 1932.

Johnson, R. Brimley, ed.: Shelley -- Leigh Hunt: How Friendship Made History. Macmillan and Company, London and New York, 1929.

Kingsley, Charles: Literary and General Essays. Macmillan, London, 1890.

Kurtz, Benjamin P.: The Pursuit of Death. Oxford University Press, London and New York, 1933.

More, Paul Elmer: Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston, 1910.

Quiller-Couch, Arthur: Studies in Literature, Volume I. G. P. Putnam's, New York, 1909.

Solve, Melvin T.: Shelley: His Theory of Poetry. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1927.

Strong, Archibald T.: "The Faith of Shelley", in Studies in Shelley. Oxford University Press, London, 1921.

Symons, Arthur: The Romantic Movement in English Poetry. E. P. Dutton and Company, New York, 1909.

Thompson, Francis: Shelley. Burns and Oates, London, 1909.

Winstanley, Lillian: "Platonism in Shelley", Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, IV, 1913.

Woodberry, George Edward: Literary Essays. Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1920.

D MISCELLANEOUS WORKS FOR BACKGROUND

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield: The Problem of God. Abingdon Press, New York, 1930.

Buchan, John: History of English Literature. T. Nelson and Sons, New York, 1937.

Drake, Durant: Invitation to Philosophy. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston, 1933.

Dubray, C. A.: Introductory Philosophy. revised edition. Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 1923.

Fraser, A. Campbell: Selections from Berkeley. Black and Tait, Edinburgh and London, 1891.

Fryer and Henry: An Outline of General Psychology. Barnes and Noble, New York, 1937.

Godwin, William: Political Justice. S. Sonnenschein, London, 1890.

Hume, David: "Essay on Miracles", in Works, II. Black and Tait, Edinburgh, 1876.

Jevons, W. Stanley: Elementary Lessons in Logic. Macmillan, New York, 1911.

Kant, Immanuel: Critique of Pure Reason. Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 1898.

Legouis and Cazamian: A History of English Literature (one volume edition). Macmillan, New York, 1935.

Locke, John: "Discourse on Miracles", in Works. Ward, Lock, and Company, London, 1899.

McGiffert, Charles E.: Protestant Thought Before Kant. Scribner's New York, 1911.

Northague, William Pepperell: Belief Unbound. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1930.

Moore, Edward Caldwell: History of Protestant Thought Since Kant. Scribner's, New York, 1912.

Nitze and Dargan: History of French Literature. 3rd Edition. Henry Holt and Company, 1938.

Randall and Buchler: Philosophy: An Introduction. Barnes and Noble, New York, 1942.

Randall, John Herman: The Making of the Modern Mind. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston, 1935.

Rossetti, William Michael: Praeraphaelite Diaries and Letters. With some early correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1835-1854). Hurst and Blackett, London, 1900.

Taylor, Alfred Edward: Platonism and Its Influence. Marshall Jones, New York, 1932.

Thilly, Frank: History of Philosophy. Henry Holt, New York, 1914 (recopyrighted 1942).

Tillotson, John Robert: "Natural Religion and Christianity",
in Works, II, J. F. Dove for R. Priestly, London, 1820,
revised 1857.

Tindal, Matthew: Christianity as Old as the Creation. Printed
and sold by David Denniston, Newburgh, New York, 1808.

Voltaire: Lettres Philosophiques. E. Cornely et Cie., Paris,
1899.

Weber, Alfred and Perry: R. B.: History of Philosophy.
Scribner's, New York, 1925.

Williams, Roger: The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of
Conscience. O. S. Straus, New York, 1894.