

# Shelley's Philosophy of Liberty

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The dislocation of established patterns of thought and behavior, under pressure of the kaleidoscopic changes that for convenience we often ascribe to the *French and Industrial Revolutions*, led many to turn nostalgically to the safety of precedent and custom. Others, however, looked forward expectantly to the actualization of glorious potentialities that would release society from the shackles of the past. The late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries thus became an arena where many of the doctrines of authority and of liberty which form the staple of much modern political thought battled for supremacy. Among the better-known advocates of liberty were Erasmus Darwin, Tom Paine, and William Godwin. Shelley is usually regarded as a disciple of all three, whose views he expressed in rhapsodic verse. He is also known for his activities against oppression and social injustice among the weavers in Marlowe, the laborers in Wales, and the Irish rebels. His influence on Chartism and Fabianism is generally acknowledged. However, he is not usually thought of as a discursive prose writer who contributed to such issues as passive resistance, the National Debt, or fiscal reform. Above all, his philosophy of liberty is underrated.

In the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-1819) Shelley announced his intention to analyze the concepts of liberty and of authority and to trace their development in "a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society." Indeed, he came to believe that "poetry is very subordinate to moral and political science"; he conceived "a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind has been ruled."<sup>1</sup> Though he did not live to achieve this purpose, his later writings incorporate disparate ideas embryonic in his earliest works, taking them much further and organizing them into a coherent scheme. Its fullest expression is in the "Defence of Poetry" and the "Philosophical View of Reform," two late and closely related essays presenting Shelley's most fully developed thought.

The "Defence" in particular has often been dismissed as a dithyrambic outpouring of emotion. Yet on closer examination a very different picture presents itself. Once one grasps the overall plan and intention, the argument can be seen as marshalled in a step-by-step logical progression. The present paper seeks to analyze Shelley's philosophy of liberty as a breaking of the

bonds of egocentricity into empathy with other individuals, groups, and societies. Such attitudes, he claimed, were initiated by individuals such as Socrates, Jesus, Shakespeare, and Milton, whom he called "Poets in the most universal sense of the word." From these assumptions he developed a philosophy of history assuming a wavelike form of alternating progress and regress, of liberty and authority. We shall try to show that the influence of these ideas was far more extensive than is commonly assumed, and that they were echoed even in the writings of such conservative thinkers as Carlyle and Disraeli.

The basis of Shelley's thought lies in his equation of liberty with creativity, as expressed through the relationship between the self and the non-self. From his earliest writings he showed his familiarity with the skeptical school of philosophy, as his references to Locke, Hume, Berkeley and others indicate, and the doctrine of the "everlasting universe of things" which "flows through the mind" was not peculiar to him.<sup>2</sup> He held however that the Ultimate Cause is beyond all apprehension. As early as "Mont Blanc" (1816) it is symbolized by the hitherto unclimbed peak. As late as *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) Demogorgon, answering Asia's query "whom calledst thou God?" replies "I spoke but as ye speak."<sup>3</sup> The effects flowing from the ineffable Cosmic Power, to the degree that they are perceptible by the human senses, are given meaning and order by two faculties of the mind: reason and imagination. Reason is the intellectual or conceptual exploration and analysis of the modes of existence, their categorization and arrangement into generalized laws by which man is related to his environment. It is partial and quantitative, the "enumeration of quantities already known." Imagination, on the other hand, is qualitative, "the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole." It is the "creative faculty," producing the harmony of "the inner faculties of our nature" with "the external." Therefore "reason is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit."<sup>4</sup> Such a distinction was something of a commonplace among the Romantics. Several decades later, Carlyle adopted the terms "the mechanic" and "the dynamic" provinces of the mind for the two faculties, and lamented the decay in his time of the evaluative and creative faculty, namely the imagination.<sup>5</sup> Shelley however took the argument a step further. For him imagination is the motivating force of liberty, which he saw as breaking the shackles of authority and releasing our national originality from the impedimenta of past prescription and restriction. Imagination operates in three interrelated ways. First, it encourages the mind to encroach on the ineffable unknown by staking out new grounds and "marking the before unapprehended relation of things."<sup>6</sup> Secondly, it extends the capacity for communication so that closer relationships develop between new dimensions of experience and the symbolic media of expression. Thirdly, in the social sphere, it generates sensitivity so that the individual relates empathically to other people. It thereby leads to the formulation of new social and moral standards which "repeal/Large

codes of fraud and woe."<sup>7</sup> He therefore regarded the interlocking activities of the creator, the communicator, and the social revolutionary as manifestations of the dynamic of creative liberty. The stages by which he arrived at such conceptions begin with "the relation subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and the expression."<sup>8</sup> They end with something akin to what we call today information theory.

The primary assumptions underlying Shelley's thesis are familiar. He argued that sensory impressions set up corresponding vibrations in the mind, which do not merely copy external phenomena but react to them in a creative mimesis. "The external and internal impressions" form not a melody but a harmony; they are different but persist in proportional relationships.<sup>9</sup> This harmony is a source of pleasure, which we seek to perpetuate by recalling the sensory stimuli through a medium used symbolically—language, pigment, stone, etc. These in turn become further objects of pleasure. But the "external world" includes other human beings. "Man in society", therefore, "next becomes the object of the passions and pleasures of man; an additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expression."<sup>10</sup> The pleasure in the media is thus extended even more strongly to the social sensations, and constitutes a further stage in the going out of our own selves already present in an elementary form in the very nature of perception.

Perception and the pleasure derived from it imply order, for by means of it man finds meaningfulness in the welter of stimuli impinging on his mind. It becomes a function of the expression of human reactions, and in turn is felt as desirable. Different facets of what we conceive as reality have their own characteristics which condition the different orders of impression, which in turn condition the distinct order or rhythm of expression or "mimetic representation." Every branch of stimuli has its own normative form for the time and place. The poet in the universal sense is he who is most sensitive to the deeper relationships between all three levels: the sense data, the *Gestalten* and value systems we create out of them, and the orders or rhythms of expression. All creators and expressors of such orders are poets in this sense, whether they are artists, philosophers, or law-givers.<sup>11</sup> They constantly extend further the awareness of the mysterious relationships of the three dimensions of time and "perpetuate their apprehension." Whereas the ordinary man uses words or signs as equivalents of single separable concepts, the poet sees and formulates new and more complex structures, connections and relations. He creates new combinations forming new associations and new orders generalized out of the isolated particulars.

For Shelley, the process of extending and perfecting our apprehension of the dimensions of order in the universe and of their relations was of direct social importance. Man's behavior in society is conditioned by his understanding of himself and his world. The poet, in creating and perfecting the structures of thinking and feeling, creates thereby the norms and moral bases of social conduct. It is in this sense that "poets are the unac-

knowledgeed legislators of world," laws having not their strictly constitutional meaning, but applying to all spheres of life. Thus poets "are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of law and the founders of civil society."<sup>12</sup> Social behavior, therefore, cannot be justified by appeal to absolute Divine injunctions or to precedent. Rather it derives from the apprehension of the shifting relations between existence, perception, and expression in a specific time and place. In this respect social morality is relative.

There is nevertheless a higher order of the ultimate "Power" which, through incomprehensible to man, unfolds itself by degrees through the intuition of poets at successive periods. History is not random, and poets are prophets who advance humanity according to the "indestructible order of the universe"; for the poet "not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time."<sup>13</sup> Shelley however did not accept the view that progress is steady and continuous. On the contrary, as we shall see, he held that the pattern of historical development is wavelike, a series of crests and troughs.

Crests in the development of societies, as initiated by successive poets, represent the "Divine pattern" as far as human beings can intuit it. The human force that engenders the high points of historical development is the human analogy of the "Divine Creative Power". Shelley called it "Love". Like other Romantic poets he based his interpretation of Love to a large degree on the Christian doctrine of charity in its etymological sense, on Plato's "Symposium" (which he translated), and on the Roman doctrine of *Venus Creatrix*. It probably owed something also to Godwin's famous notion of "Universal benevolence". In his early "Essay on Love" it is described as "the bond and the sanction which connects everything which exists."<sup>14</sup> In the "Defence" it is defined as a "going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with . . . thought, action, or person, not our own."<sup>15</sup> Love therefore is the principle that links existence and perception. It is creative since it enters into fruitful communion, or "Oneness," with all that is outside the self, and because it prevents us from getting so used to things outside ourselves that we can no longer react fully to them. Liberty of thought, behavior, and expression allows the imagination to respond to the creative activity of the universe. The evolution of man resolves itself then into an ever-widening and opening out of human sensitivity. It embraces man's sense of identity with his fellow man as revealed in social orders and relationships. Above all, through its emphasis on consideration for others, it demands toleration based on the idea that all norms are relative and subject to modification.

The extension of knowledge into the *terra incognita* of existence, the creation of new patterns of communication, and the increase of awareness

of new aspects of society must develop unceasingly, the old becoming in time mere formulae. What stood before for a complex relationship is worn down to cliché. It is then that "new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized [otherwise] language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse."<sup>16</sup> Habituation, by constant repetition of the cliché, intervenes between the self and the non-self. This blunting of response and appeal to outworn formulations is the mark of authority. It is not other-centered, but self-centered, and the retention of power beyond its vitality span spells egotism. For Shelley this shutting oneself off from the cosmic Power has a negative ethical significance, for "a man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and many others."<sup>17</sup> In this sense Love, as the power diametrically opposed to self-centeredness and egotism, is a moral regenerator of humanity.

The eternal struggle between the cliché as the vehicle of past-oriented authority, and Love which is the vehicle of future-oriented liberty, recalls forcefully what Abraham Moles called the "banal-original dialectic" of redundancy in information theory.<sup>18</sup> The more the communication consists of items of information already familiar to the receptor through established codes and precedents, the greater its redundancy and the greater its degree of triteness. It is the unpredicted and unfamiliar that reduces the redundancy, though it may be at the cost of easy intelligibility. Most communication, therefore, must oscillate between the polar extremes of the cliché and the esoteric. The greater the reliance on authority and prescriptive rules, the less the reliance on the freedom of the communicator to express what is new and original, and vice versa.

It is worth noting the similarity of Shelley's thesis with Carlyle's well-known theory of the Hero. Already in 1831, nearly ten years before the "Defence" was posthumously published, Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* defined Love as that which "connects my *Me* with all *Thees*," and creates the "Union of the Like-Unlike." It is a moral force that unites society so that "even the pitifulest mortal person" is not "indifferent to us." Through "the conducting medium of fantasy" the "Universe is majestically unveiling, and everywhere Heaven revealing itself on Earth."<sup>19</sup> Those who formulate most sensitively this sentiment and transmit it most clearly to ordinary mortals so as to "excite them to self activity" are the Heroes. They are the "inspired [speaking and acting] Texts of that divine *Book of Revelation*, whereof a Chapter is completed from epoch to epoch, and by some named *History*."<sup>20</sup> Like Shelley's poets "who develop new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth," and replace by new symbols and metaphors the old which have lost their vitality, Carlyle's Hero "Prometheus like can shape symbols and bring new fire from Heaven."<sup>21</sup>

Both thinkers conceived man as the arena in which two opposing qualities wrestle for supremacy. The same struggle creates the dynamic of social history as in the essence of historical evolution. Like Carlyle's Devil and

God coexisting in his archetypal Diogenes Teufulsdröckh, Love and Egotism—the liberating going out of the self and the tyrannical restrictions of self-centeredness—strive for mastery in Shelley's conception of man. This Manichaeic principle is stated explicitly in the *Revolt of Islam*, the reworking of his earlier *Leon and Cythna, or the Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*: "Two powers o'er mortal things dominion hold/Ruling the world with a divided lot/Immortal, all—pervading, manifold/Twin Genii, equal Gods."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, in *Prometheus Unbound* the evil Furies, as they torment the good Prometheus, tell him: "We will be dread thought beneath thy brain/And foul desire round thine astonished heart,/And blood within thy labyrinthine veins."<sup>23</sup> Both writers maintained that whereas the poet in the universal sense, or in Carlyle's terms the "Promethean Hero", is the agent of Love, egotism has a covenant with "the icy chains of custom" and habit.<sup>24</sup> Both shared Wordsworth's lament that "Custom lie upon thee with a weight,/Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life."<sup>25</sup>

Where the two differed was in their conception of the way these opposing qualities operate in historical terms. Carlyle accepted a "Father Principle". For him, egotism is the force that transforms natural hierarchy into tyranny and exploitation. Shelley, by contrast, insisted that the hierarchical "Father Principle" itself was the source of tyranny and exploitation. In *Queen Mab*, which is virtually a versified version of the doctrines of such thinkers as Paine and Godwin, he claimed that "Kings, priests and statesmen," indeed all institutions and institutionalism, are "like subtle poison through the bloodless veins of desolate society." In spite of the remarkable development and deepening of his thought during his short career, this idea remained with little change. Though his earlier Godwinian atheism and anarchism were mellowed, and in the "Defence" poetry even assumed the form of law-making or institution-creating,<sup>26</sup> he retained to the very end his abhorrence of priests, kings and aristocrats. Even in his latest works he saw the dynamic of history as the eternal war between the Promethean spirit of liberty and the Jupiter spirit actuated by the desire to dominate and fetter.

Shelley had no doubt of the final victory of the good in each battle of the unending war.<sup>27</sup> Demogorgon, Jupiter's son and the spirit of historical inevitability who can only fulfil his mission when called upon by Love, puts an end to his father's reign just as Jupiter had done to his father Saturn. But in the final speech of the play he warns that the virtues which bar "the pit over Destruction's strength" may be called upon to act again, whenever Eternity frees "the serpent that would clasp her with his length to reassume/An empire o'er the disentangled doom."<sup>28</sup>

This dialectic of history was taken up by Disraeli, who was familiar with Shelley through his valet, and even quoted from the as yet unpublished "Defence", probably through an acquaintance with Medwin's *Shelley's Papers*.<sup>29</sup> The influence appears most clearly in the *Revolutionary Epic*, where the two Genii of History, that of the past and that of the future,

debate before Demogorgon who plays a similar role. However, Disraeli left the issue undetermined, being unsure of the direction society ought to take, or of the nature of the process of change.<sup>30</sup> Shelley, on the other hand, had clear opinions on these matters. Repeatedly he insisted that the revival of poetry in any of its forms "has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will."<sup>31</sup> Each triumph marks the release of another group of people from oppression and exploitation. However, after each crest of poetical creativity there follows the downward slope when lesser men apply the victorious principles until they are in danger of hardening into dogma, and a widening gap develops between the letter and the spirit. Then compromises are arrived at between those who have gained their liberty and the remaining forces of tyranny, at the expense of those who are still in bondage. "The liberators. . . in turn become their [the people's] tyrants."<sup>32</sup>

These compromises are described in the "Essay on Christianity" as "so many trophies erected in the enemy's land, to mark the limits of the victorious progress of truth and justice." In the "Philosophical View of Reform" the image is repeated: "maxims so solemnly recorded remain as trophies of our difficult and incomplete victory, planted in the enemy's land."<sup>33</sup>

Such compromises, which try to make permanent the *modus vivendi* with the enemy, spell the corruption of society. "Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure" and there can be no pleasure where people do not "open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight." "The end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and, therefore it is corruption. It begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core."<sup>34</sup> Whereas in the early stages in his writing career Shelley believed in the approach of the "Golden Age" when all evil would finally disappear—in brief, a secular millenium—later he saw no end to historical progress.<sup>35</sup> After the crest comes trough. It is important to emphasize that he saw the alternations of crests and troughs as by no means regular. The crests are far from equidistant in time, and the waves are not of equal height or depth. Furthermore, there is a complex of activities involved in the ascent towards the crest or descent from it. Literary, philosophical, social, political, and similar activities cannot, as Shelley repeatedly noted, be synchronized with any exactitude. Commonly, a high crest is followed by a series of decreasing crests declining to the trough, and thereafter by lesser ascending crests increasing to the highest point. But always there is "a reflex in the tide of human things which bears the shipwrecked hopes of man into a secure haven after the storms are passed." One principle obtains throughout history: even in the steepest down slopes, "The wingéd seed [of poetry] lie cold and low,/Each like a corpse within its grave", until their revival in the next upward move. Poetry is thus always "the faculty which contains within itself the seeds at once of its own and of social renovation."<sup>36</sup>

This concept of the pattern of historical process is illustrated in brief in several of Shelley's earlier prose works, such as "Essay on the Revival of

Literature," "Essay on Christianity," and the Preface to *Leon and Cythna*. It is elaborated somewhat further in the "Defence" and yet more fully in the "Philosophical View." However, in the "Defence" it is admittedly digressive from the main theme which is the theory of "Poetry" as the mainspring of liberty, and is largely confined to earlier historical periods. In the "Philosophical View" it is for the most part related to later periods, since there his concern was essentially with the present and the future. Combining both, one can see the pattern of the "systematical history" he planned to write. The factual elements in this scheme are open to serious doubt. But our concern is with the pattern rather than his selection and interpretation of facts.

Shelley saw the high points of human achievement in the history of the Western world as the age of Homer, the age of Pericles, the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, and, as he confidently anticipated, the immediate future of the Europe of his own day. The first period provided "the elements of that social system which is the column upon which all succeeding civilization has reposed."<sup>37</sup> The century preceding the death of Socrates was preeminent in the arts, philosophy, and "the forms of civil life," although "Athenian society was deformed by many imperfections," such as slavery and the degradation of women. These were gradually erased "from the habits and institutions of modern Europe by the poetry existing in chivalry and Christianity" and later by the "modern Europeans."<sup>38</sup> The time of the Renaissance and the Reformation witnessed not only a great galaxy of writers and thinkers, but also saw the challenging of the supremacy of the degenerate Catholic Church, the peasants' Revolts against the "despotism of the wealthy," and the founding of the Swiss and Dutch republics. In England the same liberating movement manifested itself in the "passing away of the strain of conquest."<sup>39</sup>

Between these high points of spiritual and social liberation Shelley noted two periods during which spiritual and social tyranny all but stifled the creative impulse of civilization. The great age of Rome, though it largely imitated Greek art and culture, nevertheless retained enough of the vital spirit of creativity to make its contribution to civilization through its powerful sense of order. "The true poetry of Rome lived in its institutions."<sup>40</sup> The decline and fall of the Roman empire marked the beginning of the period commonly known as the Dark Ages. However, the sparks of "Poetry," creativity and freedom, were not wholly extinguished during this long period. The embers were kept alive by "the mythology and institutions of the Celts," and by "the poetry in the doctrines of Jesus," though the "system of liberty and equality. . . preached by that Great Reformer were perverted to support oppression" by the Church.<sup>41</sup> Jesus had even anticipated the idea of egalitarianism, but "the system of equality which he established necessarily fell to the ground, because it is a system that must result from rather than precede the moral improvement of human kind."<sup>42</sup> The embers burst out in brief flame during the eleventh century and later in Florence, where "free-

dom had one citadel wherein it could find refuge from a world which was its enemy."<sup>43</sup>

A second great period of darkness followed the Reformation and the Renaissance, and was associated in England with the Stuart dynasty. Cromwell tried to stem the ebb, but his Protectorate was short-lived owing to "the selfish passions and compromising interests of man." Shelley did not see the Bill of Rights of 1688 as a "Glorious Revolution." It was no more than another compromise "between the spirit of truth and the spirit of imposture, between the spirit of freedom and the spirit of tyranny."<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, corruption and tyranny failed to quench the vital spark in the writing of Milton. During the eighteenth century the onward march of progress was slowly and hesitantly resumed. The political philosophy of Locke and his followers, and "a crowd of writers in France," though far from reaching the heights of their predecessors, illustrated "with more or less success the principles of human nature as applied in political society."<sup>45</sup> Contemporaneously there was a remarkable advance in the "mechanical sciences" and in commerce. But their effect was limited by the "inartificial forms" of government and society. Instead of contributing to the spiritual and material well-being of the people as a whole, they widened the gap between the strata of society. It was to the credit of the political philosophers that people became aware of their condition and understood what was happening. The outcome was the American Revolt and the French Revolution. The former succeeded in material and political terms, but failed spiritually through the acceptance of utility as the standard of value. The latter, after its initial successes, led to a yet steeper decline because of its excesses. After "the great tyrant" Napoleon, came the Bourbons, who, Shelley maintained, were repeating the pattern of the Restoration of 1660. Both came after a revolution which saw the execution of a despotic monarch by leaders of high ideals. Both failed because the people were animated by passions which debased those ideals. "But in both cases abuses were abolished which never since have dared to show their face."<sup>46</sup> The final outcome, both in England and in France, was again a compromise between the true spirit of liberty and the political institutions of the day.

From his earliest writings both in poetry and in prose Shelley had shown himself aware of the evils of the society in which he lived. His awareness did not weaken with the years. However his sense of a historical pattern led him later to see things in a different light. As we have seen, he held that the great ideas of the Renaissance had been whittled down by the political philosophers of the eighteenth century. In spite of a brief recrudescence here and there of the true spirit of poetry, the process of narrowing down persisted. After the French Revolution, political philosophy was further restricted to the doctrine of utility. In the "Defence" he opened his criticism of his own times with an attack on this approach. He distinguished between two concepts of pleasure and two concepts of utility.<sup>47</sup> The first kind of pleasure is "durable, universal, and permanent." This, as we have seen,

results from the progressive "going out of the self" inherent in the nature of perception, and develops from the child and the savage to the most sophisticated forms of society. The other kind of pleasure is the "transitory and particular," deriving from the "here-and-now" satisfaction of the self. Utility may "express the means of producing the former or the latter." In the former, "what ever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense, is useful." In the latter, utility is only "that which banishes the importunity of the wants of our animal nature." No one can deny the importance of the "promoters of utility in this limited sense" in the conduct of "common life," so long as they confine themselves "to the inferior powers of our nature." However, Shelley maintained that many of them had taken animal life as the highest value, and thereby "debased the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men."<sup>48</sup> In effect, he was anticipating J. S. Mill's criticism of Utilitarianism, that it was quantitative, whereas true happiness is qualitative. In his *Autobiography*, Mill conceded that Carlyle had levelled the same criticism before him, though he was not then aware of the fact.<sup>49</sup> Both, then, were preceded by Shelley, though neither could have known the "Defence" or the "Philosophic View."

Shelley, Carlyle, and Disraeli were indeed close in their doctrines, for they all saw the philosophy of "Utility" as a dangerous compromise which had extended the extremes of luxury and want by encouraging the egotism of the powerful at the expense of the helpless and poor. Love, or the "going out of the self," had given way to exploitation and the idolization of the self by the "unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty."<sup>50</sup> Both Carlyle and Disraeli would have endorsed Shelley's summarization of the situation: "poetry and the principle of self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world."<sup>51</sup> They too bewailed the weakening of Love, the creative faculty, and the strengthening of the spirit of self-centeredness; similarly they regarded egotism as the quality that had given rise to the new aristocracy-of-money that lacked the responsibility of the old landowners. As Disraeli put it: "Liberal opinions are very convenient . . . for the rich and powerful. They ensure enjoyment and are opposed to self-sacrifice. The holder of Liberal opinions . . . maintains that the possession of land is to be considered in a commercial light and no other. He looks only to the income which it will afford him."<sup>52</sup> This new aristocracy, Shelley maintained, consisted of the middle classes who had once proclaimed the principle of liberty and egalitarianism against the hereditary land-owning aristocracy, but had been seduced by their opponents to share in the despoiling of the nation.<sup>53</sup> Their elevation led these "advocates of equality" even to accept the pernicious doctrine of Malthus which would throw the entire burden of the state upon the lower classes, "merely because their opponents have insolently announced it."<sup>54</sup> The result, as Carlyle and Disraeli were also to insist, was the splitting of the people into two classes, the rich who were becoming richer and the poor who were becoming poorer. The ship of

state was being driven between the "Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism" and the country was heading for a crisis.<sup>55</sup> But whereas Carlyle and Disraeli believed that revolution could and should be prevented, Shelley saw revolution as inevitable and desirable. While they hoped to revive the responsible paternalism of the old system, he was convinced of the inevitability of a free classless egalitarianism. The spirit of revolution already reviving in Spain, Italy, Greece, and the Caribbean<sup>56</sup> indicated that a new wave was building up to a crest which would tower over all the changes and developments that had occurred since the last great wave of the Renaissance. It was heralded by "such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty."<sup>57</sup> In his verse and prose he repeatedly called it "a new birth," literally "a Renaissance."

Shelley died before he reached the age of thirty. From the days when he rebelled against the flogging system at Eton he tried to put in practice his ideas of liberty. His exile from England and ill health compelled him thereafter to confine his activity to his writing. Yet he always saw himself as a Prometheus "chained and bound," as a Christ who had fallen "upon the thorns of life," or as a dead leaf that helps "to quicken a new birth" by keeping warm "the wing'ed seeds" through the winter, till they can flourish again. He was, in his constant premonitions of early death, ready to offer himself, like the leaders of primitive societies, as a sacrifice to maintain the life of the people. He did not live to accomplish his purpose of producing "a systematical history" of human liberty. But the Chartists, the late-nineteenth-century radicals, socialists and Fabians were responsive to his "trumpet of a prophecy." The wind of revolution did "scatter as from an unextinguished hearth ashes and sparks" his "words among mankind."<sup>58</sup>

## NOTES

1. Percy Bysshe Shelley, letter to Thomas Love Peacock, January 26, 1819.
2. Shelley, "Mont Blanc."
3. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* (1819), act 2, sc. 4, ll. 111-12.
4. David L. Clark, ed., *Shelley's Prose, or the Trumpet of a Prophecy* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1954), p. 277.
5. Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," in H. D. Traill, ed., *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in 30 Volumes* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1907), 27:7. See also William Wordsworth, *Prelude*, 1805 version, bk. 2, ll. 217-25.
6. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 278.
7. Shelley, "Mont Blanc."
8. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, pp. 277, 279.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 282-83.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 283, 208.
18. Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*, trans. J. E. Choen, (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 124.
19. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, in *Works*, 1:52-53, 107, 153-54.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 21. See also Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, in *Works*, 5:29.
21. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 179. See also his *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, p. 45, and *Past and Present*, in *Works*, 10:90-91.
22. Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, canto 1, ll. 347-50.
23. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, act 1, ll. 487-90.
24. Shelley, "Queen Mab."
25. Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality."
26. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 279.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 316.
28. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, act 4, ll. 565-68.
29. See Richard Garnett's privately printed pamphlet, *Shelley and Lord Beaconsfield* (London: British Library, 1887).
30. Benjamin Disraeli, *The Revolutionary Epic* (London: Edward Moxon, 1834), bk. 2, l. 42.
31. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 297.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 232.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 281, 286.
35. See, for example, Shelley's attack on the "false view of the Golden Age" in his "Essay on Christianity," *ibid.*, p. 211.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 316, 287; Shelley, "Ode: to the West Wind."
37. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 282.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-33.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 291-92.
49. J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), p. 100. Cf. Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," p. 67; and *Sartor Resartus*, p. 153.
50. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 292.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
52. Disraeli, "Speech at Aylesbury" (June 26, 1847), in T. E. Kebble, *Selected Speeches of Earl of Beaconsfield* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882), 1:178.
53. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 245.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
56. Shelley, "Ode: to the West Wind."
57. Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, pp. 296-97.
58. Shelley, "Ode: to the West Wind."