

THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE PROMETHEAN THEME AND IMAGE IN SHELLEY'S PROSE

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Critical scholarship concerned with Shelley's thought has turned from hostile rejection to stout defense and finally to objective evaluation. Readers have, at last, been able to overcome emotional reactions to the unorthodox and disquieting ideas that Shelley took such pains to express. The result has been an effort to sort out the subtleties and apparent contradictions in Shelley's philosophy and elucidate a central, unifying principle that governed his thought.

Most of these studies tend to overemphasize one aspect of the poet's thought at the expense of others. The early influences of Godwin and Drummond are seen as the controlling forces behind Shelley's work by Kenneth Neill Cameron, Henry Noel Brailsford, David Lee Clark and Gerald MacNiece.¹ They feel that the poet's mind was essentially formed in his early years, 1809-14; and that later works of his are but modifications of earlier ideas.

The foundations of his thinking were laid down in the years 1809-1813, the years covered by this study; and in some of the works of this period, notably Queen Mab, this thinking is transmitted into powerful creative expression. But Shelley was not born a radical thinker, he developed into one; and it is in watching the unfolding of this development that one gets insight into his works - the later as well as the earlier works. For Shelley did not, contrary to the widely held opinion, change fundamentally in his later period. The theme of Queen Mab is the theme of Prometheus Unbound; the revolutionary spirit of A Letter to Lord Ellenborough is the spirit of Hellas.²

Opposing this interpretation are a number of other critics who feel that Shelley's more mature ideas focus on Platonic concepts.³ To varying degrees they allow for the early influences of empiricism, but they find a definite turn of mind after 1816. "These views of Godwin are present to some extent in Shelley's early writings. But even here they are greatly

modified, for the poet at twenty had in some respects a deeper insight into human nature and its needs than the philosopher at sixty; and long before the end of Shelley's brief career, the teachings of Godwin had given way almost completely to those of Plato and the New Testament."⁴

The difficulties involved in acknowledging a number of contradictory influences on Shelley's thought have resulted in this critical polarity. But C. E. Pulos, in his excellent book The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1954), advances a logical explanation. Shelley was never entirely convinced by the arguments of either empiricism or Platonism. He was too quick to notice their deficiencies. The quality that most distinguishes him is his skepticism. Blatantly apparent in his anti-Christian attitude, this skepticism becomes the basis for his rejection of materialism and his inability to espouse Platonism as the ultimate solution to worldly misery.⁵ "Read, then, in the light of the sceptical tradition, Shelley's philosophy reveals itself as remarkably consistent and coherent."⁶

Thus, the turn of mind that occurs around 1816 is not a contradiction of earlier values, but a reformulation of them. This is the theme that underlies the studies of Joseph Barrell and A. M. D. Hughes.⁷ They contend that Shelley came to view his world in a different perspective after the turbulent events of 1814-16. Floyd Stovall, in Desire and Restraint in Shelley (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1931), interprets all of Shelley's thought as a working out of the two forces in his title. The most recent critical consensus is that Shelley developed from an empiricist to a Platonist. "It is sufficient to assume, with Stovall and Barnard, that Shelley had a growing mind. We may, then, roughly divide his thinking into immature and mature. Many of the ideas which appear in the first stage continue into the second, these to be used in new combinations with other

ideas. The first stage might be called rationalistic, the second idealistic or mystic."⁸

The purpose of this study will be to examine the validity of this viewpoint by analyzing the Promethean theme and image in Shelley's prose. "He spent his life and genius in trying to make a connection between ideal and commonplace reality,"⁹ and his use of the Promethean figure reflects that attempt. Most of the studies cited above deal primarily with the poetry, and treat the prose as secondary material. Pulos is a notable exception, but his purpose is to clarify Shelley's philosophical position, not to illustrate his changing perspective. Tracing the development of the Promethean theme and image will provide a useful handle for understanding Shelley's own development from a concern with the external objects to a concern with the internal subjects of experience.

Shelley was very conscious of his purpose and aim in literature. As he tells us himself, in a letter to William Godwin dated February 24, 1812, he desired to leave "a picture of a mind" (VIII., 280) for future generations. Stovall comments on its importance:

In this letter he also expresses the desire to leave in his published writings a complete picture of his mind in all stages of its development. He wanted to be the prophet of a new order, the hero not of today but of tomorrow, the "dawnmaker" of a more glorious day and a more perfect world, the golden age of Saturn, which he believed to lie beyond the horizon on the vast orbit of time. If he should succeed in becoming the prophet of his dreams, future generations would wish to have a minute record of his thoughts and actions; for that reason, if for no other, he felt himself bound to write and publish his ideas as they poured from his teeming and feverish brain.¹⁰

It is easy to see from this letter why the impetuous writing of an idealistic youth would result in contradictions when compared with the later, carefully reasoned work of a mature poet.

The Promethean theme, one of Shelley's most frequent and well developed, is a prominent example of the poet's attempt to come to grips with reality. "His best poems," writes Professor Butter, "are not mere outpourings of emotion, but are efforts to master and understand his experience and to relate his own particular feelings to his general ideas about politics, about morals, about religion. His favorite images constitute a symbolic shorthand language for expressing ideas as well as feelings."¹¹ Shelley was a serious artist who left an account of his understanding of reality at various stages of his maturity. The Promethean theme and image are expressions of how he perceived reality at particular times.

It is significant to this study that Shelley's favorite poem is also the one which deals the most extensively with Prometheus.¹³ Prometheus Unbound expresses the final version of the Promethean figure, against which we will measure the two main phases of its evolution. Although a more complete discussion of the poem will be reserved until later, it is necessary to analyze the salient features of Prometheus now in order to be able to detect their emergence in earlier works. Shelley did not rewrite the famous play by Aeschylus. He "was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind." (II., 171), as he says in the preface. Prometheus is unremittingly defiant and eventually successful in overthrowing the tyrant Jupiter. But it is only after a long period of suffering that Prometheus is able to recognize the real situation: he is his own tyrant. Once he is able to admit this (by recalling and retracting his curse) nothing can bind him, because Jupiter depends upon the irrational fear of his "self-despising slaves of Heaven" (II., 192, L. 429) for his power. Prometheus removes

himself from the "unreal" world of Jupiter and the result is a (temporary) return to the golden age.

Attempts to resolve the struggle against the tyrant on different planes are the themes of many of Shelley's earlier works. The prose written between 1810 and 1814 was mostly political and speculative. It viewed the conflict in external terms, embodying in physical form the tyrant and the hero. During the second stage (1816-21), however, after the two years of personal and social setbacks that followed his separation from Harriet, the context of that conflict changed. He turned more and more to his own mind for the solutions to earthly problems. He saw the external phenomena of the world to be only shadows of the ultimate reality, the "one mind" which was re-united by the coupling of Asia and Prometheus. "Like his master Plato," writes Kurtz, "and like the Master whom he placed above Plato, he felt that human life as it is, in the world that men call real, where Change and Time and Death and Chance and Mutability hold undisputed sway, is but a mirror that reflects partial and distorted images of a divine world beyond."¹³

Clear as the general outlines of Shelley's development are, it must be admitted from the start that there is an obstacle that stands in the way of detailed certainty. Many essays were published soon after they were composed; others were never published during Shelley's lifetime; and still others were left in so fragmented a state as to render dating impossible. Arbitrary standards and speculation were all that guided early compilers such as A. H. Koszul, Harry Buxton Forman, John Shawcross, and Walter Ingman and Roger Peck in assigning dates to the more controversial fragments.

James A. Notopoulos proposed, in "The Dating of Shelley's Prose,"

PMLA, 58 (1943), 477-98, a more accurate method of ascertaining the dates of Shelley's prose, based primarily on internal evidence. Generally accepted as definitive, Notopoulos' article ascribes to the fragments on morals and metaphysics the date 1816, except for certain sections for which 1818-19 is suggested. Of the other fragments pertinent here, "Essay on Christianity," "On the Punishment of Death," "On Life," and "On Love," he assigns 1814-16 to the first two, and 1818-19 to the latter two.

Six years afterwards David Lee Clark published "Dates and Sources of Shelley's Metaphysical, Moral, and Religious Essays," Texas University Studies in English, 28 (1949), 160-94, which contradicted the conclusions of Notopoulos. Although disparaged as "egregious, misguided theories on dates,"¹⁴ his proposals are well supported:

The evidence for my conviction that the essays were composed in 1810-1813 and for the most part were identical with the essays now published as prose essays and fragments is based upon seven facts: first, that the Journal of Shelley and Mary, begun on July 28, 1814, is absolutely silent about the essays; second, that Shelley's letters, which invariably reflect his literary activities--every known production of his being mentioned or discussed in letters at the time of its composition or its publication--after 1814 are also silent; third, that the similarity in thought and in language between the essays and the letters of 1810-1813,--a similarity that scarcely exists between the essays and the letters of any other period of Shelley's life--is striking; fourth, that the sources of Shelley's ideas in the essays are known to have been books that he was completely absorbed in during this period--and at no other period; fifth, that he wrote essays on metaphysical, moral, and religious themes during 1810-1813 is an established fact; sixth, that Shelley seems to have drawn upon these essays in compiling his notes for Queen Mab in the winter and spring of 1813; and lastly, that he published separately in the summer of 1814 (though probably composed in 1813) a metaphysical and religious essay entitled "The Refutation of Deism."¹⁵

Clark disagrees with Notopoulos on a dozen fragments altogether. Since no absolute method may ever be discovered by which to positively date these fragments, and since the relative merits and demerits of the

two opposing points of view are not the subject of this study, it would seem advantageous to rely on the popularly accepted one advanced by Notopoulos. But Clark has not been refuted by more than vague dismissals, and his theory offers a decided advantage to this study. "I repeat that if this theory herein set forth wins acceptance from Shelley scholars, a difficult problem in Shelley scholarship will have been solved, and instead of an abrupt break in the growth of the poet's mind, we have an orderly development and an understandable maturing of his ideas. There were not, then, two Shelleys as is so commonly asserted, but only one developing character."¹⁶ The metaphysical and moral speculations, then, will be considered as products of Shelley's early years (1810-13), as Clark suggests.

The first stage began in 1810 with the appearance of Shelley's first publications, and closed in 1814 with the break-up of his first marriage and the attendant difficulties of the next two years. Floyd Stovall calls it a time of enthusiasm,¹⁷ and it is characterized by an immature optimism which is toned down in his later works. During this period Shelley adopted the principles of Godwin and Drummond¹⁸ and made ineffectual attempts to realize them within the existing political structure.

Prior to his preoccupation with political affairs and his speculations on religious and philosophical topics, Shelley published two romances: Zastrozzi and St. Irvyne; or, the Rosicrucian, in successive years. They were largely products of his voracious reading in the popular vein of Gothic novels written by Anne Radcliffe and her imitators. Shelley can hardly escape classification with the worst of the latter, for his novels possess little literary merit. But they do exhibit some original traits and provide us with an early glimpse of the ideas that were later to ab-

sorb the poet's interest.

The title character of Zastrozzi is interesting in himself as a prototype of Prometheus. Like Ginotti in St. Irvyne, he is a man of towering stature who is obsessed by a single passion, manipulates the lives of the other characters to his own advantage, and perishes for his misdeeds. Shelley (and the reader) is fascinated by this character. Zastrozzi's unbending defiance on the rack is awesome, and intended to evoke conflicting emotions. "Even whilst writhing under the agony of almost insupportable torture his nerves were stretched, Zastrozzi's firmness failed him not; but, upon his soul-illuminated countenance, played a smile of most disdainful scorn--and, with a wild, convulsive laugh of exulting revenge, he died" (V., 103).

The purpose of Zastrozzi's entire life - revenge upon Verezzi - is evil and causes his downfall. He is a misguided man, and even he recognized it briefly: "'--Ah! by what horrible fetters am I chained--fool that I was--Ugo! he shall die--die by the most hellish torments. I give myself up to fate;--I will taste revenge, for revenge is sweeter than life: and even were I to die with him, and, as the punishment of my crime, be instantly plunged into eternal torments, I should taste superior joy in recollecting the sweet moment of his destruction. Oh! would that destruction could be eternal!'" (V., 18-19). He embodies, simultaneously, the attributes of faithful defiance and misdirected action (revenge) - the forces that will imprison Prometheus in Prometheus Unbound.

Zastrozzi is guilty of evil deeds and he dies as a result of committing them, but he possesses nonetheless important features of the Prometheus figure. His stature and his defiance of physical pain are the most prominent attributes. What is of more importance, however, is the conflict to which he succumbs. Zastrozzi is pulled away from truthfulness by his

obsession with revenge; passion has overclouded his reason. The Prometheus of the drama suffers the same fate, but manages to free himself from the bonds of passion.

A situation similar to that in Zastrozzi exists in St. Irvyne. It is a more confusing story, having two plots and a larger cast of characters. The salient traits of Zastrozzi seem to be divided between Ginotti and his victim Wolfstein. Consequently, there is more of a focus on the mind of the victim and his inability to escape the grip of his persecutor. "Wolfstein reclined upon the heath; he retraced, in mental review, the past events of his life, and shuddered at the darkness of his future destiny. He strove to repent of his crimes; but, though conscious of the connexion which existed between the ideas, as often as repentance presented itself to his mind, Ginotti rushed upon his troubled imagination, and a dark veil seemed to separate him for ever from contrition, notwithstanding he was constantly subjected to the tortures inflicted by it" (V., 169).

Shelley introduces the image of the veil to describe the plight of Wolfstein. He uses this image often in his poetry, and many times in conjunction with the Promethean myth. It functions to explain the relation between man's mind and the "deep truth which is imageless." It could have been used as well to account for Zastrozzi's inability to see his own sorry state. Eloise St. Irvyne sums up the situation aptly in her song halfway through the story:

Ah! why do darkening shades conceal
 The hour, when man must cease to be?
 Why may not human minds unveil
 The dim mists of futurity? (V., 159)

This is the nucleus of the Promethean image: the strong defiant hero who is struggling to come to some understanding of his situation, but unable to rise above his own limitations. He has the strength to persevere, but

not the insight to proceed in the right direction.

This is Shelley's usual approach. He saw the universe as a battle between two opposites. One of these forces is good and the other evil. The struggle takes place in many areas (politics, religion, etc.) and is inherent in many opposites (right against wrong, reality against appearance, freedom against tyranny), all of which are manifestations of the greater struggle: truth against falsehood. The Promethean theme, to which he had long been exposed,¹⁹ served as the vehicle for expressing the conflict, that for Shelley, was the underlying principle of the universe.

To the young Shelley, the implications of, and solution to, this problem were yet hidden. He needed more experience than his nineteen years could supply. But he believed he was on the right track, and that a solution could be found. "I have long been convinced of the eventual omnipotence of mind over matter; adequacy of motive is sufficient to anything, and my golden age is when the present potency will become omnipotence. . . . Will it not be the task of human reason, human powers...?" (A letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, Oct. 18, 1811; VIII., 160). With his sight set on such a goal, he entered actively into society.

Before attempting a practical application of his ideas in politics, Shelley wrote a religious tract entitled "The Necessity of Atheism" (1811). The point of the essay was an important one to Shelley, and the method he used to expound it typical. He urged his audience to question conventional modes of thinking and perceiving by using their own reasoning powers. He directed his attack at what he felt was the worst offender against free thought - religion. The established dogmas of Christianity merely prevented men from apprehending the truth about their existence by advancing superstitious and unreasonable explanations about earthly phenomena. There-

fore, it was man's duty to be an atheist, to question and determine for himself what the truth was, to lift the veil that obscured the truth.

Shelley published and distributed this pamphlet while at Oxford. When he was discovered to be its author (he had not signed his name to it), the authorities at the college acted immediately and expelled him. His father was upset by the news, both of the dismissal and the heretical essay, and Shelley had to face his displeasure as well. But he did not retract his statements, despite the possibility of reinstatement at the college and reconciliation at home. He strove to break free from the chains of orthodoxy, and this inevitably brought him into conflict with social institutions.

Convinced he had the understanding necessary to establish truth and justice in the world, Shelley involved himself in politics. He went to Ireland to test his ideas among the oppressed people there. "An Address to the Irish People," published in 1812, was designed to teach the Irish about their English oppressors. He told them not to resort to violence: "If you can descend to use the same weapons as your enemy, you put yourself on a plane with him on this score, you must be convinced that he is on these grounds your superior. But appeal to the sacred principles of virtue and justice, then how is he awed into nothing? how does truth show him in his real colours, and place the cause of toleration and reform in the clearest light" (V., 224). And he told them how to achieve the virtue necessary to overthrow the tyrant: "Temperance, sobriety, charity, and independence will give you virtue; and reading, talking, thinking and searching, will give you wisdom; when you have those things you may defy the tyrant" (V., 229). The epigrammatic exhortation with which he closed the speech sums up the import of the whole: "Be true to yourselves, and

your enemies shall not triumph" (V., 230).

The Irish were ill inclined to follow such idealistic advice from a young man of twenty who wasn't even a countryman of theirs. Shelley received a cool reception (when he wasn't ignored) and saw his advice unheeded. Few could envision the success of the stoic-like resistance that he advocated. Shelley was asking the people to "be true to themselves" and not allow themselves to be manipulated - the way his Prometheus would allow Jupiter to gain dominion over him through his own weakness. But such an alternative is not amendable to men with an interest in worldly things and a deep fear of death.

Before leaving Ireland Shelley had intended to form a philanthropic society dedicated to the abolition of social evils and the proliferation of the ideals expressed in the "Address." He wrote a pamphlet in 1812, "Proposals for an Association," which outlined the basic principles of such a society. His ultimate concern was that the members agree to work impartially, without hope of personal gain, for the alleviation of suffering among the poor. He framed this concern in an allegory which used the figures of the Promethean myth. "When Jupiter and a countryman were one day walking out, conversing familiarly on the affairs of earth, the countryman listened to Jupiter's assertions on the subject for some time in acquiescence, at length happening to hint a doubt, Jupiter threatened him with his thunder; ah, ah, says the countryman, now Jupiter I know that you are wrong; you are always wrong when you appeal to your thunder. The essence of virtue is disinterestedness" (V., 262-63).

This little parable has an important implication. Given that Truth will win out eventually, any appeal to physical force implies that the party wielding the power is fighting against the truth. Thus Jupiter,

and any person or organization that resorts to "thunder" to institute its policies, is acting contrary to reason and truth. This was to form the basis for Shelley's political attacks in later works. It is also the chief characteristic of the tyrants he portrays in all of his works.

Shelley thought he saw just such a tyrant in Lord Ellenborough. In "A Letter to Lord Ellenborough" (1812) he attacked the eminent judge's decision to imprison the printer Daniel Isaac Eaton for publishing the third part of Paine's allegedly heretical Age of Reason. Shelley portrayed the judge as the very type of irrational tyrant:

In the name of justice, what answer is there to these questions [concerning the guilt of Eaton]? The answer which Heathen Athens made to Socrates, is the same with which Christian England must attempt to silence the advocates of this injured man--"He has questioned established opinions." --Alas! the crime of inquiry is one which religion never has forgiven. Implicit faith and fearless inquiry have in all ages been irreconcilable enemies. Unrestrained philosophy has in every age opposed itself to the reveries of credulity and fanaticism. --The truths of astronomy demonstrated by Newton have superseded astrology; since the modern discoveries in chemistry the philosopher's stone has no longer been deemed attainable. Miracles of every kind have become rare, in proportion to the hidden principles which those who study nature have developed. That which is false will ultimately be controverted by its own falsehood. That which is true needs but publicity to be acknowledged. It is ever a proof that the falsehood of a proposition is felt by those who use power and coercion, not reasoning and persuasion, to procure its admission. Falsehood skulks in holes and corners, "it lets I dare not wait upon I would, like the poor cat in the adage," except when it has power, and then, as it was a coward, it is a tyrant; but the eagle-eye of truth darts thro' the undazzling sunbeam of the immutable and just, gathering thence wherewith to vivify and illuminate a universe! (V., 284).

Like his pamphlets written at Oxford and in Ireland, his letter contributed nothing to the relief of social injustice: Eaton was imprisoned for his deed. But Shelley did not abandon faith in his ideals. He remained sure that tyranny and injustice would be overcome, and he said as much to the Lord. "I would have you to know, my Lord,

that fetters of iron cannot bind or subdue the soul of virtue. From the damp and solitude of its dungeon it ascends, free and undaunted, whither thine, from the pompous seat of judgment, dare not soar" (V., 291). He still saw the struggle between truth and tyranny as central to the problem of existence.

Up to this point in his career, Shelley had concentrated mostly on the tyrannical side of the dualistic struggle. The protagonists are defeated in his novels, and his political tracts devote more attention to the tyrannical aspects of society than to a successful opposition to them. Shelley is engaged in sketching out the problem, in trying to fathom its depths, and the tyrant is omnipresent in his mind. The hero has yet to be brought into focus.

Along with the numerous political tracts, Shelley also wrote a number of speculative fragments. In some of these he tried to deal with the duties of the Promethean figure. The means of resisting were not quite clear to him, beyond the general principles suggested in the "Address." The tyrant he understood well - he had living examples of him. But the hero was incomplete. History provided Shelley with some examples, a few of whom he cited in "Speculations on Morals" (1810-13), being careful to point out that they did not seek personal advantage (an important point in "Proposals for an Association"). "When Mutius Scaevola thrust his hand into the burning coals, and Regulus returned to Carthage, and Epicharis sustained the rack silently, in the torments of which she knew that she would speedily perish, rather than betray the conspirators to the tyrant; these illustrious persons certainly made [a]²⁰ small estimate of their private interest. If it be said that they sought posthumous fame; instances are not wanting in history which prove that men have even

defied infamy for the sake of good" (VII., 76).

Shelley was not satisfied with these examples. He needed more assurance that the suffering these heroes endured was worth something. He created his own hero in The Assassins (1814), an unfinished romance. In it, Albedir comes upon a mangled man lying impaled in the branches of a tree, and overhears him address some unseen enemy. "'The great tyrant is baffled, even in success. Joy! joy! to his tortured foe! Triumph to the worm whom he tramples under his feet! Ha! His suicidal hand might dare as well abolish the mighty frame of things! Delight and exultation sit before the closed gates of death! --I fear not to dwell beneath their black and ghastly shadow. Here thy power may not avail! Thou createst-- 'tis mine to ruin and destroy. --I was thy slave--I am thy equal, and thy foe, --Thousands tremble before thy throne, who, at my voice, shall dare to pluck the golden crown from thine unholy head!" (VI., 166).

The mangled man is a representation of Prometheus uttering his threat against the tyrant. He remains unconquered by the physical torments delivered by his oppressor, but he has not attained any ideal existence. Because The Assassins is unfinished, we cannot be certain how closely his future actions would parallel those of the later Titan. Mary Shelley saw a resemblance between this and the later work. "There is great beauty in the sketch as it stands; it breathes the spirit of domestic peace and general brotherhood founded on love, which was developed afterwards in Prometheus Unbound" (VI., 358-59). And the story also suggests a struggle larger than the one between the tyrant and his mangled opponent. "Here is the tyrant force (Rome), and here is the power which resists it (the Assassins). The one has the characteristics of Jupiter, the other has the qualities of Prometheus."²¹

As he drew more fully the portrait of his hero, Shelley realized that the hero's problem was not how to deal with the oppressor, but how to deal with himself. Intimations of this are present in Zastrozzi and the "Address," but the physical presence of an external force is more vividly felt in these works. Shelley saw Zastrozzi as a victim of his own passions, and the Irish as prisoners of their own vicious habits, but he didn't understand the problem well enough - as is indicated by the failure of his attempted solution.

The real enemy, then, was not an external force, but an internal one. The veil image is Shelley's attempt to get at this concept. It deprives the tyrant of an active role in the struggle and attributes it to the victim's own weakness. The fragment "On Life" contains a re-statement of the struggle in these terms:

Life and world, or whatever we call that which we are and feel, is an astonishing thing. The mist of familiarity obscures from us the wonder of our being. We are struck with admiration at some of its transient modifications, but it is itself the great miracle. What are changes of empires, the wreck of dynasties, with the opinions which supported them; what is the birth and the extinction of religious and of political systems, to life? What are the revolutions of the globe which we inhabit, and the operations of the elements of which it is composed, compared with life? What is the universe of stars, and suns, of which this inhabited earth is one, and their motions, and their destiny, compared with life? Life, the great miracle, we admire not, because it is so miraculous. It is well that we are thus shielded by the familiarity of what is at once so certain and so unfathomable, from an astonishment which would otherwise absorb and overawe the functions of that which is its object. (VI., 193).

A fuller explication of this idea seems to be the theme of The Assassins, although, again, we do not have enough material to be sure. Shelley spends a great deal of time outlining the "historical" background and describing the physical beauty of the valley which is inhabited by the Assassins. In their isolation and constant exposure to beauty, these

people have become blind to the wonders around them. Nevertheless, some appreciation of their situation exists, as it does in all men. "The coldest slave of custom cannot fail to recollect some few moments in which the breath of spring or the crowding clouds of sunset, with the pale moon shining through their fleecy skirts, or the song of some lonely bird perched on the only tree of an unfrequented heath, has awakened the touch of nature" (VI., 160). These "few moments" are Reality, and the habitual response to the world the accumulated results of social training.

At this point the Promethean struggle is already moving inward. Less emphasis is placed on an external force and more on an internal weakness. Man is deluded, imprisoned in the physical world which he thinks is the real world. He can and does catch glimpses of reality, but never escapes the clutches of illusion. The veil surrounds him, and, like Prometheus, he suffers for his lack of insight.

Shelley is beginning to deal directly with the relation between mind and body. He had told the Irish to subjugate their physical wants to the cultivation of their minds, though his advice concerning the latter was vague. He had arrived at a clearer picture of the problem, and he delineated it in his "Essay on Christianity" (1810-13): "Your physical wants are few, whilst those of your mind and heart cannot be numbered or described from their multitude and complication. To secure the gratification of the former, men have made themselves the bond-slaves of each other. They have cultivated these meaner wants to so great an excess as to judge nothing valuable or desirable but what relates to their gratification. Hence has arisen a system of passions which loses sight of the end which they were originally awakened to attain. Fame, power, and gold are loved for their own sakes, are worshipped with a blind and habitual

idolatry" (VI., 246).

In an attempt to free himself from the tyranny of physical wants, Shelley became a convert to the ideas of the vegetarian John Frank Newton, both as a result of reading Part I of The Return to Nature, or a Defence of the Vegetable Regimen (1811) and of becoming personally intimate with the man. He became so caught up in the practical application of Newton's theory that he included a long section defending it in his notes to Queen Mab, practically reprinted this in a pamphlet entitled "A Vindication of a Natural Diet" (1813), and wrote another essay at some later date dealing further with the same topic.²² In the second of these essays he used the myth to express the importance of a natural diet.

The story of Prometheus, is one likewise which, although universally admitted to be allegorical, has never been satisfactorily explained. Prometheus stole fire from heaven, and was chained for this crime to mount Caucasus, where a vulture continually devoured his liver, that grew to meet its hunger. --Hesiod says, that before the time of Prometheus, mankind were exempt from suffering; that they enjoyed a vigorous youth, and that death, when at length it came, approached like sleep, and gently closed their eyes. . . . How plain a language is spoken by all this. --Prometheus, (who represents the human race) effected some great change in the condition of his nature, and applied fire to culinary purposes; thus inventing an expedient for screening from his disgust the horrors of the shambles. From this moment his vitals were devoured by the vulture of disease. It consumed his being in every shape of its loathsome and infinite variety, inducing the soul-quelling sinkings of premature and violent death. All vice arose from the ruin of healthful innocence. Tyranny, superstition, commerce, and inequality, were then first known, when reason vainly attempted to guide the wanderings of exacerbated passion. (VI., 5-6).

Shelley later abandoned both the theory and practice of vegetarianism, as he had his other schemes. But he was convinced of the basic truths he had learned from his experience. His solutions may have been naive and unfeasible, but he believed he had grasped the underlying principle behind existence. "Before man can be free and equal and truly wise he must

cast aside the chains of habit and superstition, he must strip sensuality of its pomp and selfishness of its excuses, and contemplate actions and objects as they really are. He will discover the wisdom of universal love. He will feel the meanness and the injustice of sacrificing the leisure and the liberty of his fellow-men to the indulgence of his physical appetites and becoming a party to their degradation by the consummation of his own" (VI., 246).

Shelley grasped the problem, but he had not solved it. He had begun with the defiant hero - Zastrozzi - but found that defiance alone wasn't enough. He tried to investigate the properties of the tyrant - social institutions - only to find that the real threat did not come from them. The problem was man's acceptance of things as they seemed to be. Shelley's approach in the second stage of his development will be to uncover the way things really are.

Undoubtedly the two years that followed his first meeting with Mary Godwin affected Shelley's thought. Newman Ivey White feels that it was a crucial period in his life, and cites Mary herself as an authority. "Physical sufferings, ill health, and the loss of friends had, as Mrs. Shelley wrote, 'brought home to him the sad realities of life. . .inclining him rather to brood over the thoughts and emotions of his own soul than to glance abroad.'²³ He was faced first with a temporary separation from Harriet in April of 1814. He then met Mary and fell in love with her. This undoubtedly contributed to his attempt to commit suicide in July of that year, and he traveled to Europe, with Mary and Claire Clairmont, to escape the immediate pressures of his problems. The trip was uncomfortable, as they traveled in poverty, and when they returned in September Shelley had to hide from creditors who were threatening legal action. The following

year he inherited an annuity of 1000 pounds upon the death of his grandfather, but he and Mary lost their first child in infancy. He had lost a number of his friends because of his relation with Mary, as had Byron for what would have been a lesser "offense," and he decided to go to the continent again in 1816. He spent five months there, in frequent company with Lord Byron. Upon his return he was confronted with the suicides of Fanny Imlay (Mary's half sister) and Harriet. The year ended with the marriage of Mary and Percy in an attempt, which, much to Shelley's disappointment, failed to regain for him custody of the two children of his previous marriage.

Such a whirl of conflicting events cannot have failed to impress themselves on a mind as sensitive as was Shelley's. He was forced to view things in a different perspective and seek an explanation for them. The hostility he faced in the outside world provided the impetus for him to turn inward for the answer, and this is reflected in his mental development. As one critic has observed:

Shelley's intellectual history presents us with a collection of ideas which are almost all assembled at the first. They gain as time goes on in depth and substance, and are fraught with a larger passion. And certainly by 1816 and in the course of that year we can speak of a turn of mind, for by then he has made himself a mould of Platonic notions and the frequent use and sore need of it are new. Yet if we put to the sum of his earlier speculations not only what he wrote, but what he read and used afterwards, like a fund laid by, it may still be said of him that he "grew like a tree", having loved Plato from his teens.²⁴

Stovall recognizes this trend toward Platonism. "From the philosophy of Godwin, which he never completely relinquished, Shelley had moved by various channels steadily toward the idealism of Plato, always adapting the borrowed philosophy to the circumstances of his own life"²⁵ And Clark feels that Shelley's prose offers an especially good illustration of this development: ". . .when in 1815, Shelley definitely had finally turned

from speculative prose to philosophical poetry he did not turn his back on his early principles--he merely changed the medium of transmission. Shelley's prose must thus be regarded as an integral part of the poet's work, an understanding of which, therefore, is eminently necessary for a sound appreciation of his poetry and invaluable in understanding his development."²⁶

Shelley prepared the way for this Platonic orientation early. In the fragment "On Life," which we have looked at before, he begins to deal with individual minds as but apparent divisions of the one mind:

The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy, is that of unity. Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought, which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words I, you, they, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind. (VI., 196).

By incorporating all thoughts and external objects into the same category of perceived things, Shelley posited an essential unity behind the chaos in which most men lived. He didn't deny the empirical axiom that nothing exists but as it is perceived, but he modified it so that the emphasis was on the mind, not on the thing it knows. The former is real, the latter only appearance.

It is the one mind concept which comprises the solution to the problem posed in the "Essay on Christianity."²⁷ Man's inhumanity to his fellow and the resultant chaos are due to his failure to bring himself into harmony with the one mind of which he is but a shadow. He is fettered in Plato's cave, unable to see that what he perceives as reality is but an

image of it.

The political writings of the second stage, when contrasted with those of the first, reveal this internalization. The early essays, especially those written in Ireland, are urgent and propose impossibly ideal solutions. "A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote" (1817) and "A Philosophical View of Reform" (1820), however, are more patient and sensible - and they devote more space to explaining a larger process than to proposing solutions. "It is their [the oppressed people's] will--it is their own concern. If such be their decision [to remain enslaved], the champions of the rights and the mourners over the errors and calamities of man, must retire to their homes in silence, until accumulated sufferings shall have produced the effect of reason" (VI., 64). As Shelley was to show in Prometheus Unbound, the solution cannot be imposed; it must be realized by the person affected. Prometheus' own mistake caused his imprisonment - and only he can effect his release.

A more significant difference in the later political essays is the larger historical perspective in which the Promethean image is viewed. "When this resistance was overpowered (as what resistance to fraud and [tyranny]²⁸ has not been overpowered?) another was even then maturing. The progress of philosophy and civilization which ended in that imperfect emancipation of mankind from the yoke of priests and kings called the Reformation, had already commenced. Exasperated by their long sufferings, inflamed by the spark of that superstition from the flames of which they were emerging, the poor rose against their natural enemies, the rich, and repaid with bloody interest the tyranny of ages" ("A Philosophical View," VII., 6). Again, the solution cannot be imposed, it must come of itself. Eventually the mind will overcome the delusion of appearance - it is all a

matter of time and experience.

Another contrast can be made between the passion of revenge as seen before and after 1816. Sometime between 1810 and 1813 Shelley wrote "On the Punishment of Death," in which he attacked capital punishment.

The passion of revenge is originally nothing more than an habitual perception of the ideas of the sufferings of the person who inflicts an injury, as connected, as they are in a savage state, or in such portions of society as are yet undisciplined to civilization, with the security that injury will not be repeated in the future. This feeling, engrafted upon superstition and confirmed by habit, at last loses sight of the only object for which it may be supposed to have been implanted, and becomes a passion and a duty to be pursued and fulfilled, even to the destruction of those ends to which it originally tended. (VI., 189).

Revenge is dealt with as an habitual response, as it functioned in Zastrozzi, a cause of delusion. It is externalized, treated as an evil force which is to be overcome.

After 1816 the concept of revenge becomes internalized. It becomes part of a larger process, an inevitable condition of mind that can be overcome by an act of will. It no longer functions as it had in earlier works. The tyrant is no longer the executor of revenge; Jupiter is not Prometheus' real tormentor, " . . . although Jupiter appears in the drama as a god, he is not a being or an autonomous power, but only the dark shadow of Prometheus, an unnatural condition that mind wrongfully permits and can repeal by an act of will."²⁹ Prometheus is the cause of his own condition. As long as he persists in the state of mind that resulted in his bondage, he will be bound. But as soon as he recognizes this, the bonds can be broken.

The closest portrait of this situation in prose occurs in "On the Devil, And Devils" (1821):

The Devil, it is said, before his fall, as an Angel of the highest rank and the most splendored accomplishments

placed his peculiar delight in doing good. But the inflexible grandeur of his spirit, mailed and nourished by the consciousness the purest and loftiest designs, was so secure from the assault of any gross or common torments, that God was considerably puzzled to invent what he considered an adequate punishment for his rebellion; he exhausted all the varieties of smothering and burning and freezing and cruelly-lacerating his external frame, and the Devil laughed at the impotent revenge of his conqueror. At last, the benevolent and amiable disposition which distinguished his adversary, furnished God with the true method of executing an enduring and a terrible vengeance. He turned his good into evil, and, by virtue of his omnipotence, inspired him with such impulses, as, in spite of his better nature, irresistibly determined him to act what he most abhorred, and to be a minister of those designs and schemes of which he was the chief and the original victim. He is forever tortured with compassion and affection for those whom he betrays and ruins; he is racked by a vain abhorrence for the desolation of which he is the instrument; he is like a man compelled by a tyrant to set fire to his own possessions, and to appear as the witness against, and the accuser of his dearest friends and most intimate connexions; and then to be their executioner, and to inflict the most subtle and protracted torments upon them. As a man, were he deprived of all other refuge, he might hold his breath and die--but God is represented as omnipotent and the Devil as eternal. [Italics mine] (VII., 95-96).

The devil is the Promethean figure and God the tyrant. Shelley admits the limits of his analogy at the end; God is identified with omnipotence by the average reader. But if he did not have such a connotation, the analogy would be a restatement of the theme in Prometheus Unbound. God "effects" the devil's bondage, as Jupiter did Prometheus', but the devil (though not as we understand him) has the ability to escape his situation by recognizing the deluded state of his mind and correcting it by being true to himself.

The abstract ideas with which Shelley was dealing in the second stage were inadequately expressed in words. As he said himself, in a note to "On Love" (1810-13): "These words are ineffectual and metaphorical. Most words are so--No help!" (VI., 202). He found his prose especially unequal

to his task, and it is significant that, as Weaver says, "up until the writing of Prometheus Unbound the mass of Shelley's prose is greater than that of his poetry, and the main tendency of his thinking in the prose is toward the principles celebrated in the drama,"³⁰ and that he was unable to finish a single one of his prose efforts after 1814. Even "A Philosophical View" and "A Defence of Poetry," despite their length, were parts of longer projected works.

But Shelley's struggle to express himself was resolved in his dramatic poem. He was finally able to adapt his medium to the theme. In fact, the "Defence" is his attempt to explain how poetry is the adequate expression of truth. "A poem is the image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (VII., 115). ". . . it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms. . . . Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; . . . [it] redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in Man" (VII., 137). Prometheus Unbound is the image of life made clear.

Most critics are in agreement in assigning to the poem a central position in Shelley's thought. By far the largest bulk of Shelley scholarship and criticism, as Weaver and Reiman remark,³¹ has been devoted to Prometheus Unbound. The strongest evidence is Shelley's own opinion of the poem, cited above. "Were we seeking that work of Shelley's which gives fullest expression to his more distinctive ideas, one would probably come to the Prometheus Unbound."³² But even more to the point in the poem is the resolution of the central, dualistic problem that occupied the poet's mind and emerged in most of his prose. "With some accuracy it may be said that the prose work of Shelley is a preface to Prometheus Un-

bound."³³

This is most obvious in the actual preface to the poem in which Shelley informs us of his intent and tells us why he chose the myth.

The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgment, a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which, in the Hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest. The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. In the minds of those who consider that magnificent fiction with a religious feeling it engenders something worse. But Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends. (II., 171-72).

Three elements from earlier works are present here: defiance, disinterestedness and purity of motive. Prometheus now embodies all of these, whereas his "predecessors" (Zastrozzi, Satan, et. al.) were lacking in at least one.

Another characteristic of the second stage that is of importance in the poem is universality. Shelley is again concerned with the "spirit of the age," interpreting all external things as manifestations of the one mind which encompasses them. In considering the literature of his time he wrote: "The peculiar style of intense and comprehensive imagery which distinguishes the modern literature of England has not been, as a general power, the product of the imitation of any particular writer. The mass of capabilities remains at every period materially the same; the circumstances which awaken it to action perpetually change" (II., 173). The sense of this passage could be paraphrased, "the one mind is always the same, its appearance is manifold."

The characteristic which most distinguishes the second stage from the first is the internalization of idea. "The imagery which I have employed will be found, in many instances, to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed" (II., 172). Prometheus becomes more than a representation of man; he is an abstraction. Earl Wasserman's summary will perhaps be helpful here in explicating how the drama works on this level.

It will be useful at this point to summarize the structure of the play's metaphysics as it has emerged in this analysis. As the One Mind, Prometheus is identical with existence, or Life, and is limited to its scope and capabilities. Only in his possessing will can he be said to have power, and it is a power only to consent or refuse to yield control over that will to anything outside himself. He is free to resist the effort of tyranny to bend his will and free to relinquish his will to Necessity, but he has no causal power. Human minds are a mode of this absolute Existence, but since they are only portions of the One Mind and are subject to the illusions of time, space, and mutability, the reality they constitute is only appearance, a deluding "veil which those who live call life." Jupiter also is but a function of Prometheus, a feigned distortion of the One Mind projected by it upon a feigned Heaven and, in turn, disfiguring the realm of Existence by its despotism. Even though Jupiter is eventually withdrawn into Demogorgon's realm, he is to remain there as a potential condition, not an independent reality. Prometheus, Jupiter, Asia, and the human mind represent only Existence, its possible modes, and its possible factors; they can only affect events, not effect them. Within this realm, the principle governing the processes of events is Demogorgon's inviolable law of Necessity--quite independent of Prometheus' will--according to which what is called a cause must be followed by what is called a determined effect. However, these patterns of succession are the laws of the Power's manifestations within the realm of Existence, not the causative Power itself. Strictly speaking, then, there are only two self-sustaining factors in the drama: Prometheus, the One Mind, or Existence; and Demogorgon, absolutely different from the One Mind and inaccessibly remote from it, and yet the mysterious source of all the energy that appears in the domain of the One Mind as the sequences of events.³⁴

The Promethean image in Prometheus Unbound has been expanded to an

image of all reality. Instead of representing various aspects of reality in the political and religious realms, the image engulfs everything. In the chronological development of Shelley's understanding, the figure of Prometheus originally symbolized the defiance of a single man in the face of a world he couldn't understand. It then represented the state of mind within man that sought freedom from the tyranny of falsehood and patterned behavioral responses in the various spheres of activity: political, social, religious. And, finally, it symbolized the ultimate process of reality, beyond the human mode of existence: the one mind which is known in a number of guises.

It is not surprising, given the ambitious intent of Prometheus Unbound, that Shelley has a reputation for being obscure and contradictory. He attempted to assimilate the ideas of many great thinkers³⁵ into a consistent *raison d'etre*. His literary remains are testaments of his own struggle to work out the answer to fundamental questions. "Shelley was a man totally aware of the human predicament. The unfinished Triumph of Life ends with the question 'What is life?' and it was a question of which Shelley was continuously conscious. And he did provide an answer. That love, which he declared the secret of morals, he also regarded as the guiding principle of the universe. Again, he was following Plato and, more particularly, Dante."³⁶

The most explicit prose statement of Shelley's final version of the answer to "what is life" appeared in the "Defence." Although he doesn't utilize fully the Promethean dichotomy, he does use the veil image, which is frequently used to explain the struggle, and a number of other images which evoke it.

All things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient. "The mind is its own place, and

of itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common Universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. (VII., 137).

The italicized words, my own addition, show how fundamental to his conception of things the internalization of the Promethean image was becoming.

Had Shelley lived longer he might have been able to formulate a more detailed solution to the problem. We know little about the universal love to which he often alludes from his writings, but we know a great deal about the human predicament it was supposed to remedy. The Promethean struggle is well developed and a solution to it advanced, but it is at best a temporary one. Falsehood is never destroyed; it is a condition that will always return. Truth will ultimately win out, but only after a protracted struggle with its opposite.

The Promethean theme has taken us from Shelley's early world view, that of man's opposition to the forces of evil and falsehood; through his attempts to reconcile these opposites; to his last vision of what life is: a constant struggle to attain harmony within the one mind. The struggle was always at the center of his thought; but the context in which he placed it changed from an external one to an internal one. Shelley recast the struggle in more abstract terms as he found his previous views inadequate to the scope of his experience. The final statement of the struggle is in Prometheus Unbound, and the closing stanza to that poem presents his final solution:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates:
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory!

(II., 262).

NOTES

¹See Cameron, The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical (N.Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1950); Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle (N.Y.: Henry Holt and Co., 1913); Clark, ed., Shelley's Prose; or, The Trumpet of a Prophecy (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1954); and MacNiece, Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969).

²Cameron, p. xi.

³See Benjamin P. Kurtz, The Pursuit of Death: A Study of Shelley's Poetry (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933); Carl Grabo, The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley's Thought (Chapel Hill: Univ. Press, 1936); Elsworth Barnard, Shelley's Religion (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1937); James A. Notopoulos, The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1949); Neville Rogers, Shelley At Work: A Critical Inquiry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

⁴Kurtz, p. 169.

⁵For his rejection of materialism see "On Life," in The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Vol. VI., ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter Peck (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1926-30), p. 194. The clearest example of the inadequacies of Platonism is in Prometheus Unbound. The union of Asia and Prometheus is only a temporary one for Shelley, whereas Plato's philosophy allows for no such temporality. Future references to Shelley's works will appear within parentheses in the body of the text, e.g. (VI., 194).

⁶Pulos, p. 110.

⁷See Barrell, Shelley and the Thought of His Time: A Study in the History of Ideas (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1947); and Hughes, The

Nascent Mind of Shelley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947).

⁸Bennett Weaver, "Shelley," in The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research, ed. by Thomas M. Raysor (N.Y.: MLA, 1950), p. 172.

⁹Kurtz, p. xvi.

¹⁰Stovall, p. 45.

¹¹Shelley's Idols of the Cave (N.Y.: Haskell House Publishers, 1969), p. 3.

¹²His letters to the Olliers dated September 6, 1819, October 15, 1819, and March 6, 1820 in Vol. X., pp. 78-81, 95-96, and 48-49, make it quite clear that Prometheus Unbound was his favorite.

¹³pp. 164-65.

¹⁴Bennett Weaver and Donald H. Reiman, "Shelley," in The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research and Criticism, 3rd ed., ed. by Frank Jordan (N.Y.: MLA, 1972), p. 337.

¹⁵Clark, pp. 163-64.

¹⁶Clark, p. 194.

¹⁷Stovall, p. 55.

¹⁸See Pulos; and, G.S. Brett, "Shelley's Relation to Berkeley and Drummond," Studies in English by Members of University College, Toronto (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1931), for a concise treatment of Shelley's empirical ideas.

¹⁹Shelley ordered a copy of Aeschylus' play in 1812 (IX. 35-36), and he probably knew the myth before this. See Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Variorum Edition, ed. by Lawrence John Zillman (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1959), pp. 27-28.

²⁰Textual emendation supplied by Ingpen and Peck.

²¹Bennett Weaver, "Pre-Promethean Thought in the Prose of Shelley,"

Philological Quarterly, 27 (1948), p. 203.

²²Ingpen and Peck title it "On the Vegetable System of Diet" and it appears in pp. 335-44 of Vol. VI. They note that it originally bore no title nor any indication of a date, but appears to be a first draft written after the two other essays mentioned above (VI., 380).

²³Portrait of Shelley (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p. 191.

²⁴Hughes, p. 218.

²⁵Stovall, p. 143.

²⁶Clark, "Dates and Sources," pp. 165-66.

²⁷See p. 18.

²⁸Textual emendation supplied by Ingpen and Peck.

²⁹Earl R. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 258.

³⁰"Pre-Promethean Thought," p. 194.

³¹Weaver and Reiman, p. 367. Grabo, Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N.C. Press, 1935); Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948) and either of Earl Wasserman's studies, Shelley: A Critical Reading, or Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965) are the prominent representative studies.

³²Weaver, "Pre-Promethean Thought," p. 193.

³³Weaver, "Pre-Promethean Thought," p. 193.

³⁴Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 326-27.

³⁵That Shelley tried to distill the common element in his reading is suggested by an ambitious, but unfulfilled, project outlined in "Speculations on Morals:" "An essay on the progressive excellence perceptible in the expressions--of Solomon, Homer, Bion and the Seven Sages, Socrates, Plato,

Theodorus, Zeno, Carneades, Aristotle, Epicurus, Pythagoras, Cicero, Tacitus, Jesus Christ, Virgil, Lucan, Seneca, Epictetus, Antoninus. . . Sulpicius, Severus, Mahomet, Manes, The Fathers--Aristo, Tasso, Petrarch, Dante, Abeillard, Thomas Aquinas--The Schoolmen. The reformers. Spinoza, Bayle, Paschal, Locke, Berkeley, Leibnitz, Malebranche, The French Philosophers, Voltaire, Rousseau, the Germans--the Illuminati--Hume. Godwin--State of General Society. Perfectibility," (VII., 72).

³⁶ Herbert Read, "Shelley's Philosophy," in The English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal, ed. by Clarence D. Thorpe, Carlos Baker and Bennett Weaver (Carbondale: So. Ill. Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 212-13.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROMETHEAN THEME AND IMAGE
IN SHELLEY'S PROSE

by

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IN SHELLEY'S PROSE

AN ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the validity of the critical consensus that Shelley's thought, though in constant flux, developed from empiricism to Platonism without making an abrupt break from the one to the other. Shelley's use of the Promethean myth in his prose as an image for his conception of the world is the means by which this hypothesis is analyzed. The early compositions that can be dated with any certainty - the romances, political writings and speculative fragments written between 1810 and 1814 - manifest a particular world view consistent with Shelley's exposure to empiricism. In these the Promethean figure functions as a representation of man's limited knowledge and as a symbol of his struggle with appearance and reality. The later works (1816-21), composed after the turbulent years of separation from Harriet, indicate a definite trend toward Platonism. The lessons of empiricism are not forgotten, but reconstructed in the light of his "one mind" concept. The Platonic ideas are not wholly products of the later years; traces of them can be discerned in the early writings as well. But, as the difference between the political essays of the two periods illustrates, Shelley's focus changes radically, culminating in his dramatic poem Prometheus Unbound. In it the Promethean figure becomes a symbol for the mind of man, for existence per se, rather than for the individual man.