Shelley's conception of God.

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Shelley's Conception of God

by

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Introduction

In an album at an inn in Montanvert, Switzerland, the author of *Queen Mab* took up the pen, and signed his name with the addition, "democrat, great lover of mankind, and atheist."¹ Shelley's fatal propensity for shocking people has resulted in his misrepresenting himself to them. Some readers have accepted such evidence as this, or Shelley's views at the time that he wrote *Queen Mab* as sufficient proof that he was a rebel and atheist and remained thus until his death. To assume that a person's views on a particular subject would necessarily remain the same over a life span of thirty years would be doing him a gross injustice. Certainly, it would be an injustice, indeed, to a poet whose "Thoughts became a mounted infantry, passing with baffling swiftness from horse to foot or foot to horse."² His writings reveal that there was a distinct growth in his religious belief and that he did accept and love an All-beneficent Being as God.

¹. Rosetti, *Memoir of Shelley*, p. 251
². Thompson, *Shelley*, p. 57
In order to form a justifiable conclusion with regards to Shelley's Conception of God, it is necessary to trace as clearly as possible the development of his ideas in reference to God and religion until the time of his death. The course of this development will be indicated in the present study.

Due to the brevity of Shelley's life, it is difficult to say whether Shelley's Conception of God would have broadened to such an extent that the most reverent Christian would recognize him as one embracing his faith. Browning concluded, "Had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians."¹

Shelley certainly impresses his readers as being intensely individualistic, but the history of his life illustrates that there were external influences that played an important part in governing his attitude toward religion and God.

¹ Browning, *On the Poet Objective and Subjective*, p. 15
Background and Development of Shelley's Skepticism

Shelley could be called a child of the Revolution. Born in the year 1792, he grew up in the most terrible days of the French Revolution and became a part of the tumult and unrest that was characteristic of it. Mr. White describes the general conditions as follows: "On the very day the poet was born the National Assembly of France decreed the sale of all religious houses, and the King's grenadiers were protesting and revolting at the indignity of having to guard the King. It was the very day that allied monarchs threatened dire vengeance on Paris if the King were harmed or insulted - and five days later the Swiss Guards were slaughtered. In England the Whigs were split violently into the Old and the New. Burke trained the heavy artillery of his eloquence against the Revolution. Paine and Godwin encouraged their English supporters. Mary Wollstonecraft was publishing her Vindication of the Rights of Women. The government was becoming alarmed about seditious writing and was beginning a repressive attitude toward them that lasted through the poet's life and caused him some danger and inconvenience. Henceforth for a generation there were to be more government spies and less of the right of habeas corpus
than England had known for centuries."¹

It can be well understood that Shelley, keen-sighted and aspiring, would soon grasp the spirit of the Revolution and join the reformatory and rationalistic forces. The zest for reformation was prevalent all over Europe. Men rebelled not only against the traditional European social forms, not only against the religious beliefs but also against the superficial philosophy of the eighteenth century. Mr. Royce states: "Men felt, in the beginning of the Revolution, that the ground was insecure under their feet, that the future held great possibilities, that the world concealed the most weighty secrets."²

The turmoil of the period showed no immediate effect in the first ten years of the poet's life. He spent most of his time in the pleasant company of his five devoted sisters, whom he took great delight in enlightening with ghost stories and tales about an old Alchemist that was supposed to live at Field Place. His mother, Elizabeth Pilfold Shelley, was kindly and less prejudiced than her husband but indifferent to her son's later efforts to exert freedom of thought and action. Mr. Timothy Shelley, on the other hand, possessed culture and kindness but they were controlled by strict conservatism that at times bordered tyranny in dealings

1. White, Shelley, p. 15
2. Royce, Shelley and the Revolution, p. 72
with his son. He did not feel it necessary to ponder or question religious, political or moral standards. They were to be accepted but not to be taken too seriously. This fact proved a handicap when Shelley tried to sift the doubts and speculations in his mind in discussions with his father.

The picture of Shelley's school life is a progress in variety and intensity. He received impressions that continued throughout his lifetime. From Sion House to Eton, from Eton to Oxford; each school contributed to his resentment of tyranny, his love of freedom and his revolt against authority and formalism of every kind. His rebellion led him away from association with his fellow students to literary pursuits that dealt with metaphysical speculation and politics.

Subjects such as these were certain to have effect upon Shelley's skeptical thought. Although there is no definite line of demarcation as to when Shelley's skepticism toward religion began, there is evidence that he read books concerning the nature of God at Eton. Mr. White states:

"Pliny's Natural History and the De Rerum Natura of Lucretius, both left an undoubted impression upon his mind. According to Medwin, Shelley was deeply impressed with Pliny's chapter 'De Deo', which was 'the first germ of his ideas respecting the nature of God', and he, studied deeply Lucretius whom he considered the best of Latin poets. Pliny's famous chapter told him that there was no God other than blind chance, and
that revealed religions were nothing but superstitions encouraged by priests for selfish purposes. A few years later these ideas, reinforced by the doctrines of the eighteenth-century rationalism, were to find striking expression in Queen Mab."¹

Another book that Shelley was known to have read while at Eton was Godwin's Political Justice. Mr. Stovall writes: "In his Eton days through the influences of Godwin's Political Justice, he became a devotee of 'Reason'. The hold of romances had previously been so strongly upon his youthful mind that reason was not actually the guide to his actions though he may have thought it was. Now, led by his enthusiastic study of Godwin and of the rationalistic literature to which through Godwin he was introduced, he came more to subordinate (theoretically) impulse and emotion in his life and to exalt reason as the 'only' guide."²

Reflection from reading these books did not show itself in Shelley's writings until he was a student at Oxford. Even though he had written a number of poems and novels, there had been no particular evidence of his questioning the religious beliefs amid which he had been brought up. But at Oxford he began to illustrate his ability to reason and challenge others to refute his arguments.

¹. White, op. cit., p. 52
². Stovall, Desire and Restraint in Shelley, p. 16
He soon found a friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who shared Shelley's skeptical opinions and encouraged his argumentary procedures. "But whereas", Mr. Peck remarks, "Hogg indulged in skepticism as a pleasant pastime, Shelley could not be content with parlor radicalism. He must preach and publish and convert his fellows from their present state of darkness. So taking his cue from Voltaire, Shelley cried, 'Ecrasez l'infame!' or 'Down with intolerance!' 'Down with Bigotry!'"1

All was very clear to Shelley; he felt that man's greatest need was a noble nature. Institutions such as marriage, the church, and government should be completely annihilated.

It was necessary only for man to use his reason and the advantages of a noble nature would exert itself. He felt, says Mr. Campbell, "...Was there anything that seemed to block the light of pure Reason so much as orthodox Christianity? This therefore Shelley must attack. With no small relish he concocted a series of letters, provocative of discussion on religious subjects, and dispatched them, as from a would-be believer to various clerics.2 When he received a reply to his letters of this nature, he would attack his disputants as a lion his prey. He was an enthusiast of reason, completely

1. Peck, Shelley His Life and Work, p. 67
2. Campbell, Shelley and the Unromantics, p. 85
fascinated with the exercises of logic.

There was another important event that occurred in Shelley's life which had tremendous effect in increasing his skeptical viewpoint. Shelley had been desperately in love with his cousin, Harriet Grove. News had reached him that she was to be married. Her rejection of him was due to his unorthodoxy tendencies. Shelley felt that this blow had been rendered him by the forces of intolerance which he conceived to be organized Christianity, and that he must revenge himself against it. Believing himself to be the champion of truth, he resolved to destroy tyranny and superstition which served as obstructions to the progress of mankind.

Shelley, however, continued his enjoyable pastime of intellectual activity. Hogg described his and Shelley's reading thus: "We had read together attentively several of the metaphysical works that were most in vogue at that time, as Locke's Concerning Human Understanding, and Hume's Essays, particularly the latter, of which we had made a very careful analysis, as was customary with those who read the Ethics and the other treatise of Aristotle for their degree."\(^1\)

In the meantime, the clouds were still gathering fast for him. With the circulation of his argumentative letters, he had begun writing a pamphlet which was soon to be

\(^1\) Hogg, Shelley at Oxford, p. 207
published under the title of The Necessity of Atheism. The intoxication of new ideas made him over confident and resulted in his sending copies of the tract to all bishops of the Church of England and all the heads of colleges at Oxford. The officials of the University already knowing the identity requested him either to affirm or deny authorship of the tract, and when he refused, they expelled him from the University. His friend, Hogg, did not wish to escape the punishment that Shelley underwent and chose to share his fate. Shelley considered his treatment to be that of a criminal; thus, his hatred of any form of orthodoxy was intensified more than ever.

The arguments presented in The Necessity of Atheism are based upon the authority of Hume - that is that belief results (1) from the evidence of the senses, (2) the decision of reasoning dependent upon the senses and the testimony of persons. He further argued that God was an hypothesis that stands in need of proof, for if he were really omnipotent he would reveal himself in a more convincing manner. He continues, "All religious notions are founded upon authority alone, all the religions of the world forbid investigation, and will not permit reasoning; it is authority which requires us to believe in God, this God himself is only founded upon the authority of some men who pretend to know him, to announce him to the world. A God made by men has doubtless need of
men to make him known to men.......

Shelley's intention in publishing this tract was not to convert the world to atheism but rather to get answers from men whom he considered understood Divinity and would give satisfactory or unsatisfactory replies. He was still displaying his exuberant love of argumentation.

Needless to say the shock of Shelley's expulsion from Oxford enraged his parents, especially his father, and resulted in a break in the relationship between them. Mr. Forster states in regard to his attitude and that of others, "His father and most of the respectable classes regarded him with horror." 2

Therefore the occurrences of these three events, namely, the rejection of Shelley by his fiancee, Harriet Grove, the expulsion from Oxford, and the break in the relationship with his father, were sure to strengthen a sense of persecution in Shelley and make him more determined than ever to "crush the wretch" of Intolerance. 3

The conflicts in his mind, as far as religion is concerned, are illustrated in his letter to Hogg, January 3, 1811, after their expulsion from Oxford. He writes:

"Before we deny or believe the existence of anything, it is necessary that we should have a tolerably clear idea of what it is. The word

1. Note on Queen Mab, VII, p. 47
2. Forster, Great Teachers, p. 66
3. Peck, op. cit., p. 52
"God", a vague word, has been, and will continue
to be the source of numberless errors, until it
is erased from the nomenclature of philosophy.
Does it not imply 'the soul of the universe, the
intelligent and necessarily beneficent actuating
principle.' This it is impossible not to believe
in; I may not be able to adduce proofs, but, I
think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect
of which we trample, are, in themselves, arguments
more conclusive than any which can be advanced,
that some vast intellect animates infinity. If
we disbelieve this, the strongest argument in sup­
port of the existence of a future state instantly
becomes annihilated. I confess that I think Pope's

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,

something more than poetry. It has ever been my
favorite theory, for the immortal soul, 'never to
be able to die, never to escape from shrine as
chilling as the clay-formed dungeon, which now it
inhabits'; it is future punishment which I can most
easily believe in.....Yet here I swear--and as I
break my oath may Infinity, Eternity, blast me--
here I swear that never will I forgive Intolerance!"

In a continuation of his letter to Hogg on January
12, 1811, he writes:

".....I here take God (and a God exists) to witness,
that I wish torments, which beggar the futile des­
cRIPTION of a fancied hell, would fall upon me; pro­
vided I could obtain thereby that happiness for what
I love, which I fear, can never be. The question is,
what do I love? It is almost unnecessary to answer.
Do I love the person, the embodied identity, if I
may be allowed the expression? No! I love what is
superior, what is excellent, or what I conceive to
be so; and I wish, ardently wish, to be profoundly
convinced of the existence of a Deity, that so
superior a spirit might derive some degree of hap­
piness from my feeble exertions; for love is heaven,
and heaven is love. You think so, too, and you dis­
believe not the existence of an eternal, omnipresent
Spirit. Am I not mad? Alas! I am, but I pour out
my ravings into the ear of a friend who will pardon
them. Stay! I have an idea. I think I can prove

the existence of a Deity—A first Cause. I will ask a materialist, how came this universe at first? He will answer, By chance. What chance? I will answer in the words of Spinoza: 'An infinite number of atoms had been floating from all eternity in space, till at last one of them fortuitously diverged from its track, which, dragging with another, formed the principle of gravitation, and in consequence the universe'. What cause produced this change, this chance? For where do we know that causes arise without their corresponding effects; at least we must here, on so abstract a subject, reason analogically. Was not this then a cause—was it not a first cause? Was not this first cause a Deity? Now nothing remains but to prove that this Deity has care, or rather that its only employment consists in regulating the present and future happiness of its creation. Our ideas of infinite space, etc., are scarcely to be called ideas, for we cannot either comprehend or explain them; therefore the Deity must be judged by us from attributes analogetic to our situation. Oh, that this Deity were the soul of the universe, the spirit of universal, imperishable love! Indeed I believe it is....Adieu! Excuse my mad arguments; they are none at all, for I am rather confused, and fear, in consequence of a fever, they will not allow me to come on the 26th but I will. Adieu!'

This correspondence shows Shelley's state of mind during this period. Although he rejected the abstract principle of religious belief he was earnestly trying to find a plausible answer to all the questions that presented themselves to him.

His reasoning was incoherent and illogical but it shows an honest effort on his part in trying to find reasons for having religious beliefs in God, if there were any. He sought truth and recorded his thoughts and emotions as they came to

him, but they revealed that he did not make any hasty acceptance of atheism. Mr. Masson describes Shelley's attitude as follows: "If he denies Zion and Christianity, and assails Christian and Hopeful (Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress) for believing in them, it is as one walking with mad eagerness, while he does so, in the same direction with them, scanning as intently the distant sky, and blaspheme sideways in their ears that he does not see, not because his eyes have ceased one moment to look for it, but he would falter in the middle of his talk, he would start and shade his eyes to gaze, he would fall to the ground weeping!"¹

The remaining ten years of Shelley's life witness an immeasurable change in his thoughts and feelings and modification of his language against God that had made Christians shudder. His suffering and struggles against the unhappiness that is the result of human folly and selfishness strengthened him and prepared him to regard religious traditions with more reverence and sympathy than he had done when he was younger. But this did not destroy the hatred of and disgust for what he considered organized Christianity.

Before studying Shelley's development and final conception of God it is necessary to discover what his attitude was toward Christianity and why he rejected it.

¹ Masson, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and other essays, p.117
II

Shelley's Revolt against Organized Christianity

Shelley's revolt against organized Christianity was the result of its accomplishments. Hypocrisy, hate, and persecution were sanctioned by the church instead of love, self-sacrifice and forgiveness of sin. War, imprisonment and death were the penalties for rebellion against the doctrines that the church advocated. Ritualism superimposed upon the church as faith in Christ spread from the Holy Land and the Roman Empire to the North and west of Europe. It resulted in man's complete subjection of reason to dogma. Shelley states: "Even under a government which whilst it infringes the very right of thought and speech boasts of permitting the liberty of the press, a man is pilloried and imprisoned because he is a Deist, and no one raises his voice in the indignation of outraged humanity."¹

The church was just a tool for the political parties of the government. Its name stood to sanction all kinds of religious and political oppression. The entire organization was held in the power of the State. There were few clergymen

¹ Note on Queen Mab, VII, p. 97
who failed to join in with the nearsighted government and scourge every person who wished to be a man instead of a slave.

Shelley declared war upon the wealth and ease countenanced by the church and its leaders. Mr. Peck substantiates this fact with the following descriptive passage:

"If we can believe historical evidence, there was need of some such challenge in England one hundred years ago. The parson of the Spectator Club, who was hastening to the goal of all his dreams, so much preoccupied with thoughts of the hereafter that he had no desire for being of service here, had not perished with Addison. He still held a comfortable living, preached endless sermons and was everywhere equally out of step with the needs of his people and the advance of the human mind, an unreal shadow of leadership, a hollow voice of consolation. Oxford always affected by and affecting the state of the establishment in England, was peopled with his type, who being provided with adequate fellowship, were not troubled with the pressing problems of the people of England, the possibility of alleviating suffering, eliminating wage-slavery, cleansing rotten boroughs or enfranchising the mass of citizens. Secure in their settled leisure, they received the Sacrament and led unblemished lives without the colour of action or warmth of a life-giving creed."¹

¹. Peck, op. cit., p. 112
Mr. Clark says that it was "an age where the crudest atheism and religious persecution dwelt side by side and was in sore need of healing perhaps more in need of healing than any other in the world's history—for the disintegration was world wide, and social institutions and religious, where they yet hung together, were fastened with the rottenest thread."  

Shelley's opposition to organized Christianity was encouraged also because of his bitter resentment of the authoritarianism of the Christian Scriptures, especially the Old Testament. He renounced the horror and destruction attributed to Jehovah in the Old Testament as evidence by the following: "Those who obey not God, and believe not the Gospel of his Son, shall be punished with everlasting destruction." Not only were the dissenters punished after death for not obeying God but those who lived and believed were given in sacrifice of his holy name. Men, women and children were butchered, tortured and assassinated in the spirit of the Religion of Peace and the glorification of God. Atrocities such as these and others recorded in the Old Testament were responsible for Shelley's rebellion against the authority of the Christian Scripture.

Shelley rejected the peoples' acceptance of certain dogmas of the Christian religion. He felt that the Christians

1. Clarke, The God of Shelley and Blake, p. 278
2. Shelley, Note on Queen Mab, VII, p. 97
accepted them through passion rather than faith. He attributed this passion to the teachings of Christ that had originated in the Holy Land and reached Europe. In the Essay on Christianity Shelley describes the effect of Christ's teachings upon the people as follows:

"Thus like a skillful orator he secures the prejudice of his auditors, and induces them, by his profession of sympathy with their feelings to enter with a willing mind into the exposition of his own. The art of persuasion differs from that of reasoning; and it is a true cause, that the judges who are to determine its merits should be free from those national and religious predelections which render the multitude both deaf and blind." ¹

Shelley's argument, however, is erroneous here because there was no advocacy by Christ of blind acceptance of his teaching through the subjection of reason to will. He offered, instead, salvation through the alteration of man's inner self to a new spiritual wholeness that consisted of love of God and the love of his fellowmen. His ideas have been robbed of their best expression through the years but they have persisted and in doing so created saints and martyrs who have endeavored to keep the lamp of hope and love burning.

He rebuked organized Christianity, finally, because it did not induce virtue but taught a morality whose inducements were those of reward of Heaven or fear of Hell. Shelley

believed in a true disinterested virtue which comes from the
love of good because it is good and which is its own reward.
Mr. Kingsley gives a summary of Shelley's attitude as such:
"The delicately-nerved dream creature, thus trampled on by
professing Christians, tortured but not tamed, learns to re­
gard Christianity as the foster-mother of crime, an organized
oppression drenching the earth with the blood of innocency.
Obedience to God he pronounced the servility a trembling
slave pays to a tyrant.

"As all religions threaten punishment for disbelief
a purely involuntary act they, he claims, should all alike
pass under condemnation. The present system of constraint
makes hypocrites or open foes out of the majority of those
bound."¹

¹ Kingsley, Views on Vexed Questions, pp. 270-271
Shelley's rejection of organized Christianity increased his skepticism toward God and religion. He was also influenced by the French Materialistic School. Mr. Campbell states: "During the year of 1812 Shelley became an ardent follower of the French Materialistic School, of whose doctrines he afterwards said: 'They are as false as they are pernicious; but still they are better than Christianity, inasmuch as anarchy is better than despotism'. The French Philosophy was a barren soil for a born idealist like Shelley, yet: 'A positive faith and a creative sentiment underlay their rage of destruction—a faith in human intellect and the sentiment of social justice'. It was this that attracted him above all things; for all through these years of misdirected energy his saving grace was always his 'enthusiasm of humanity'.'\(^1\)

Campbell adds: "It is difficult to believe that there was ever a poet in such a plight as Shelley of these years. He was utterly out of touch with the literary revival

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1. Campbell, op. cit., p. 112
of his time; materialism limited his vision on earth, and atheism forbade any prospect beyond it.\(^1\)

Shelley's attitude toward God at this time seems to be farther away than ever from the religious beaten path of thought. In his letters he seems to be headed in the direction of a thorough-going materialist. "God", to him no longer meant "imperishable love", as he had stated to Hogg in correspondence previous to this time, but the "existing power of the universe". He identified God with the universe. This identification is closely connected with a naturalistic philosophy. Mr. Barnard thinks even though Shelley seems to be inclined toward this doctrine that idealism is usually dominant. He states that: "There can be no doubt that Shelley's final view was that the physical universe is dependent upon mind; and not vice versa. But his idealism was never absolute, for in his mature thought he did not identify God either with the universe or with mind. His earlier views, however (say, from 1811 to 1814), seem to be fairly stated in this passage from a letter to Miss Hitchner:

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

\(^1\) Campbell, op. cit., p. 112
another signification for the Universe. I then explain:......
I think reason and analogy seem to countenance the opinion
that life is infinite: that as the soul which now animates
this frame was once the vivifying principle of the infinitely
lowest link in the chain of existence, so is it ultimately
destined to attain the highest.....that everything is anima-
tion.....and in consequence being infinite we can never arrive
at its termination. How, on this hypothesis, are we to arrive
at a First Cause?  -- Southey admits and believes this -- Can
he be a Christian? Can God be Three? Southey agrees in my
idea of Deity, the mass of infinite intelligence.....I, you,
and he, are constituent parts of this immeasurable whole."¹
Shelley was in this state of mind when he wrote Queen Mab,
which illustrates very clearly his attitude toward the an-
thropomorphic God which he believed orthodox Christians
worshipped.

Shelley was a rationalist and moralist above all
other things and as a result he could not accept the Christian's
conception of God. He found it preposterous that a man could
believe that the God that he worshipped possessed the same
imperfection as he did. A God who was jealous, cruel and
selfish, was most contemptible to Shelley. He attributed the
Christian's conception of God to originate from superstition.

¹. Barnard, Shelley's Religion, p. 31
His indictment against religion resulting from superstition is addressed as such in *Queen Mab*:

"Religion! but for thee, prolific fiend,
Who populate earth with demons, Hell with men,
And Heaven with slaves!

Thou taintest all thou look'st at upon!—the stars,
Which on thy cradle beamed so brightly sweet,
Were gods to the distempered playfulness
Of thy untutored infancy; the trees,
The grass, the clouds, the mountains, and the sea,
All living things that walk, swim, creep, or fly,
Were gods: the sun had homage, and the moon
Her worshipper. Then thou becam'st, a boy,
More daring in thy frenzies: every shape,
Monstrous or vast, or beautifully wild,
Which, from sensation's relics, fancy culls;
The spirits of the air, the shuddering ghost,
The genii of the elements, the powers
That give a shape to Nature's varied works,
Had life and place in the corrupt belief
Of thy blind heart: yet still thy youthful hands
Were pure of human blood. Then manhood gave
Its strength and ardour to thy frenzied brain;
Thine eager gaze scanned the stupendous scene,
Whose wonders mocked the knowledge of thy pride:
Their everlasting and unchanging laws
Reproached thine ignorance. Awhile thou stoodst
Baffled and gloomy; then thou didst sum up
The elements of all that thou didst know;
The changing seasons, winter's leafless reign,
The budding of the Heaven-breathing trees,
The eternal orbs that beautify the night,
The sunrise, and the setting of the moon,
Earthquakes and wars, and poisons and disease,
And all their causes, to an abstract point
Converging, thou didst bend and called it God;
The self-sufficing, the omnipotent,
The merciful, and the avenging God;
Who, prototype of human misrule, sits
High in Heaven's realm, upon a golden throne,
Even like an earthly king; and whose dread work,
Hell, gapes for ever for the unhappy slaves
of fate, whom He created, in his sport,
To triumph in their torments when they fell."

Shelley further interprets the Christians' God as one who desires revenge. He believed that the Creator received a malicious pleasure from seeing his followers suffer:

"Is there a God?—ay, an almighty God,
Was heard on earth; earth shuddered at the sound;
The fiery-visaged firmament expressed
Abhorrence, and the grave of nature yawned
To swallow all the dauntless and the good
That dared to hurl defiance at his throne,
Girt as it was with power. None but slaves
Survived,—cold-blooded slaves, who did the work
Of tyrannous omnipotence; whose souls
No honest indignation ever urged
To elevated daring, to one deed
Which gross and sensual self did not pollute." ¹

He condemns God for creating Hell as another form of punishment for his victims. "God made man such as he is, and then dammed him for being so; for to say that God was the author of all good, and man the author of all evil, is to say that one man made a straight line and a crooked one, and another man made the incongruity."² Mr. Barnard points out another example in Shelley's prose works of a bitter invective toward the cruel punishment of God. "In the last of his prose works, A Defence of Poetry, he indignantly characterizes the Almighty in Milton's Paradise Lost as 'one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments.'³

1. The Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed.
2. Barnard, op. cit., p. 37
3. Ibid, pp. 37-38
In the Essay on Christianity Shelley adds: "All the arguments which have been brought forward to justify retribution fail, when retribution is destined neither to operate as an example to other agents nor to the offender himself. How feeble such reasoning is to be considered, has been already shown; but it is the character of an evil Daemon to consign the beings whom he has endowed with sensation to unprofitable anguish. The peculiar circumstances attendant on the conception of God casting sinners to burn in Hell forever, combine to render that conception the most perfect specimen of the greatest imaginable crime." It is evident that Shelley's objection to God was from a moral rather than a metaphysical standpoint. Morality was always first in Shelley's mind. He was not only interested in removing evils that he thought impeded man's progress but also in making man better. He could not see any consistency in the Christian's belief that God was omnipotent and benevolent yet deprived his worshippers of the happiness that so many suffering men lacked. He finally concluded in Queen Mab that the Christian's God was a celestial tyrant that required priestcraft, kingcraft superstition and warfare to carry out his tyranny on mankind:

"Look to thyself, priest, conqueror, or prince! Whether thy trade is falsehood, and thy lusts

Deep wallow in the earnings of the poor,
With whom thy Master was:—or thou delight'st
In numbering o'er the myriads of thy slain,
All misery weighing nothing in the scale
Against thy short-lived fame; or thou dost load
With cowardice and crime the groaning land,
A pomp-fed king. Look to thy wretched self!
The Development of Shelley's Conception of God

In Queen Mab, Shelley relates the sufferings that mankind has undergone from the tyrannies of a benevolent God. He considers necessity the force that governs the universe and which knows no limits or decay. He addresses it as such:

"'Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power, necessity! thou mother of the world! Unlike the God of human error, thou requir'st no prayers or praises; the caprice of man's weak will belongs no more to thee than do the changeful passions of his breast to thy unvarying harmony; the slave, whose horrible lusts spread misery o'er the world, and the good man, who lifts, with virtuous pride, his being, in the sight of happiness, that springs from his own works; the poison-tree, beneath whose shade all life is withered up, and the fair oak, whose leafy dome affords a temple where the vows of happy love are registered, are equal in thy sight; no love, no hate thou cherishest; revenge and favouritism, and worst desire of fame thou know'st not; all that the wide world contains are but thy passive instruments, and thou regard'st them all with an impartial eye, whose joy or pain thy nature cannot feel, because thou hast not human sense, because thou art not human mind."

Shelley, a sworn disciple of William Godwin, was under the spell of Godwin's Political Justice. Godwin advocated necessity as governing man. He states: "Man is the

creature of necessity, and the nexus of cause and effect
governs the moral world like the physical. We are the product
of our conditions. But among conditions some are within the
power of the will to change and others are not."¹ Mr. Brails-
ford states in regard to Shelley's relationship to Godwin as
follows: "Godwin in short explains Shelley, and it is equally
ture that Shelley is the indispensable commentary to Godwin."²
In regards to Queen Mab he adds: "Queen Mab, indeed, is noth-
ing but a fervent lad's attempt to state in verse the burden
of Godwin's prose."³ He is correct in interpreting that Queen
Mab was a "fervent lad's attempt" of stating, through the
philosophy of Godwin, the relationship of man to the universe
and also the acknowledgement of the Spirit of Necessity as
God, but Shelley was soon to change his views and not only
to change them but also to give them systematic expression.

It should be made clear that Shelley was not a
materialist. Even though he had accepted the doctrine of the
French Materialist for awhile he completely rejected it later.

He makes it even clearer about his position as far
as materialism is concerned in the fragment On Life. He
states:

"It is a decision against which all our persuasions
struggle, and must be long convicted before we can

¹. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and their Circle, p. 97
². Ibid., p. 214
³. Ibid., p. 218
be convinced that the solid universe of external things is 'such stuff as dreams are made of'. The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals, and their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things, had early conducted me to materialism. This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk, and dispenses them from thinking. But I was discontented with such a view of things as it afforded; man is a being of high aspirations..... there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution."

Shelley's rejection of materialism was influenced particularly by the philosophy of Berkeley and Drummond. In his essay On Life he seems to have the desire to transcend the realm of illusion. Mr. Brett states: "The material philosophy hampered him because it gave him only a world of bodies and made him look on all persons as primarily flesh and blood; on the contrary the form, the voice, the look are our own experiences, the sense-material through which the other person is revealed; and that other person in its inner self is what we are, a living experience. If, then, two persons have the same thoughts, the same feelings, are they not truly one? In the language of mechanical philosophy, with its time and space and matter, they cannot be; but that world is now transcended: it is not the only reality; it has no more ultimate value than the ink and paper which similarly embody the meaning of a poem. In this way Shelley grasps the idea that the immaterial philos-

ophy makes possible the unity of all things. This is shown very clearly in the quotation above, where we are told that the existence of distinct individual minds is a delusion. This passage also shows how Shelley limited his discovery in philosophy to the one question of personality; this was his dominant interest, and his morbid sense of isolation doubtless contributed much to his use of the 'intellectual' philosophy.  

Shelley shows his search for reality in the lines that he wrote in *Queen Mab* as follows:

"Throughout this varied and eternal world
Soul is the only element; the block
That for uncounted ages has remained
The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight
Is active, living spirit. Every grain
Is sentient both in unity and part,
And the minutest atom comprehends
A world of loves and hatred; these beget
Evil and good; hence truth and falsehood springs
Hence will and thought and action, all the germs
Of pain or pleasure, sympathy or hate,
That variegate the eternal universe."  

He later makes the same speculation in *Hellas* but he shows a deeper search for reality and illustrates, "A depth of thought and power of expression that mark the inspired utterance of a great mind and a noble character self-disciplined to the service of a Power greater than he".  

In *Hellas* he also describes this Power as such:

"... -- This Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings

1. Brett, Shelley, Berkeley and Drummond, pp. 176-177
2. Shelley, Queen Mab, IV, p. 32
3. Barnard, op. cit., p. 53
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,  
Is but a vision; - all that it inherits  
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;  
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less  
The Future and the Past are idle shadows  
Of thought's eternal flight--they have no being:  
Nought is but that which feels itself to be."

Shelley's emphasis upon thought and mind led him to a greater Power. This Power will soon be illustrated as Shelley's Conception of God.

Shelley might be considered a dualist in his conception of God because he believed in a Supreme Being but he also believed that the forces of evil especially the Christian God prevented this Supreme Being from visiting mankind. If this Spirit of Power did make visitations it was swift and fleeting.

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power  
Floats though unseen among us, -- visiting  
This various world with as inconstant wing  
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower,--  
Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,  
It visits with inconstant glance  
Each human heart and countenance;  
Like hues and harmonies of evening,--  
Like clouds in starlight widely spread,--  
Like memory of music fled,--  
Like aught that for its grace may be  
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery."2

Mr. Brailsford states: "His creed was as ardent dualism, in which a God and an anti-God contend and make history."3 He points out a passage in The Revolt of Islam as an example:

"Know, then, that from the depths of ages old  
Two Powers o'er mortal things dominion hold,"

2. Ibid., p. 569
3. Brailsford, Ibid., pp.226
Ruling the world with a divided lot,
Immortal, all-pervading, manifold,
Twin Genii, equal Gods - when life and thought
Sprang forth, they burst the womb of inessential
Nought. 1

Another illustration of the anti-God, whom men
worship blindly and who creates madness and terror on the
earth is found in Prometheus Unbound:

"Utter his name: a world pining in pain
Asks but his name: curses shall drag him down." 2

Shelley's conception of God might have been from a
dualist point of view but we are particularly interested in
the God that represented the principle of Goodness. A God
who was the Spirit of Love that Shelley believed would lift
human beings above the misery and suffering that they had
labored under by worshipping a God in opposition to it. Mr.
Southeran states: "The idea of the Supreme Power or God, as
emanating from Shelley, is one of the most sublime to be found
in the pages of metaphysical learning at the command of
ordinary morals." 3

The one predominant feature of Shelley's God is good-
ness. His was a Spirit of Love that possessed a quality of
goodness that eliminated all possibility of evil. Shelley re-
jected the Christian conception of God because he is evidently
the source of evil as well as good. Shelley would not kneel to
a God whose nature was similar to man nor would he kneel to

1. Brailsford, Ibid., p. 227
2. Ibid., p. 227
3. Southeran, Percy Bysshe Shelley As A Philosopher and
Reformer, p. 7
a God who possessed neither attribute of good or evil in the human sense as the Panteistic God.

In *Alastor*, we find Shelley appealing to this Spirit of Love who must be capable of goodness for he states:

"Favour my solemn song, for I have loved Thee ever, and thee only;"

After the poet in the poem has sought his prototype in vain Mr. Hoffman describes his death and his reference to God as follows: "The moon is sinking behind the peaks, and the sensuous frame of the poet, that was once delicately attuned to the mysterious universe, is now attuned to it once more as there rises within his passive being the sense impressions which he once loved, impressions that are in Locke the beginning of knowledge, and in Berkeley the signs by which a God, infinitely wise and good, addresses the minds of men."2

In the preface to *Revolt to Islam* he associated the Supreme Being of mankind with love and he made it clear that he was not attacking the Supreme Being itself but, the "erroneous and degrading idea", that it represented. He states:

"The erroneous and degrading idea which men have conceived of a Supreme Being, for instance, is spoken against persons whom I have brought upon the stage entertain of the Deity, as injurious to the character of his benevolence, is widely different from my own. In recommending also a situation of mankind, I

2. Hoffman, *An Odyssey of The Soul; Shelley's Alastor*, p. 132
have avoided all flattery to those violent and malignant passions of our nature which are ever on the watch to mingle with and to alloy the most beneficial innovations. There is no quarter given Revenge, or Envy, or Prejudice. Love is celebrated everywhere as the soul which should govern the moral world."\(^1\) Shelley was under the influence of Plato at the time he wrote *Laon and Cythna* later known as *Revolt of Islam*. Mr. Hoffman says: "At the university he had read Plato and it is conceivable that he had then, or a little later, dipped into the Neo-Platonists as well; but it was not until he wrote *Laon and Cythna* that he began assimilating his imagery to the Platonic idealism."\(^2\) This Platonic idealism is illustrated in his celebration of love as "the sole law" of the universe. He speaks of love as follows:

"O Love, who to the hearts of wandering men
Art as the calm to Ocean's weary waves!"\(^3\)

In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* Shelley acknowledges this Spirit and describes it as Beauty, but it shows him accepting the simplest faith of Christianity that is to hope in all things and love thy neighbor as thyself. This poem shows his idealistic point of view on religion and art. The power that he addresses creates faith in him and desire that

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love must have communion whether with man or God:

"Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm—to one who worships thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, Spirit fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love mankind."

Mr. Macdonald states in connection with the influence of Plato upon Shelley: "Since then Shelley's Great Spirit, Spirit of Nature, Light, Beauty, Love, resembles the "Ideas" of Plato very closely, and since these Ideas have been indentified by St. Augustine and other Christian platonists with the "mind of God" it is doubtful that Shelley was an atheist in the strict sense of the term. His poetry at least will tend to imbue us with a realization of God's Presence." 

The influence of Love upon Shelley and his final worship of it as God is further commented on by Mr. Kurtz: "But Shelley's romantic dream of love becomes a reasoned faith in a kind of miracle—-in love as the effluence of the divine. His dream may indeed originate as a creative expression of an enthusiast's special need for sympathy......And, first by brooding on love he comes to feel its more than mortal nature. This has always been the way of enthusiasts. He who prays much to God hears the voice of God. Dr. Masefield's confession

1. Modern Library ed. ibid, Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, p. 571
2. Macdonald, The Radicalism of Shelley, p. 100
of faith is a case in point: 'I believe that this world is only a shadow of the real world, and I think that the beauty and the bounty and the majesty of the real world, shine in upon the soul'. Then, second, because he believes in living by reason, Shelley assimilates this intuitive belief in the conceptual form of a Platonic Idea; the Idea of love is immortal Idea."

Shelley was not hesitant in associating God with love. His conception of God had been vaguely defined especially for poetic purposes. He had veiled his meaning in obscurity but as he matured his meaning became clearer and the identification of God as a Spirit of love was easier to comprehend. In the fragment essay Coliseum he states: "And this is Love. This is the religion of eternity, whose votaries have been exiled from among the multitude of mankind. 'O, Power! ' cried the old man, lifting his sightless eyes towards the undazzling sun, 'thou which interpenetratest all things, and without which this glorious world were a blind and formless chaos, Love, Author of Good, God, King, Father!'"

The Spirit of Love which Shelley worshipped is defined more clearly in Prometheus Unbound. From Prometheus's vows of vengeance to his last appeal to Love, he shows tremen-

2. The Complete Prose Works of Shelley, ed. Forman, p. 36
dous growth in power and virtue. This growth was brought about through the power of Love. Shelley expresses this thought in the following passages from the poem. When Asia asks the nature of the living world and God, it seems that Shelley was asking the questions himself and he finds the answer within himself through the character of Demogorgon:

"Asia. Who made the living world?  
Demogorgon. God.  
Asia. Who made all  
That it contains? thought, passion, reason, will, Imagination?  
Demogorgon. God: Almighty God.  
Asia. Who made that sense which, when the winds of Spring  
In rarest visitation, or the voice  
Of one beloved heard in youth alone,  
Fills the faint eyes with falling tears which dim  
The radiant looks of unbewailing flowers,  
And leaves this peopled earth a solitude  
When it returns no more?  
Demogorgon. Merciful God.  
.........................  
Asia. Who is the master or the slave?  
Demogorgon. If the abysm  
Could vomit forth its secrets...But a voice  
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;  
For what would it avail to bid thee gaze  
On the revolving world? What to bid speak  
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these  
All things are subject but eternal Love."  

Jupiter who rules man's universe is overthrown through the dawn of eternal love and passes to nothingness. Asia represents the spirit of Universal Love. She is the source of all beauty and kindness and harmony at work in the universe and in human life. A beautiful description of

her is given by Shelley in the mystical titles of "Life of Life", "Shadow of Beauty", and in a speech by Panthea describing the effects that Asia has upon living things is rendered very vividly:

".........love, like the atmosphere
Of the sun's fire filling the living world,
Burst from thee, and illumined earth and heaven
And the deep ocean and the sunless caves
And all that dwells within them; till grief cast
Eclipse upon the soul from which it came;
Such art thou now; nor is it I alone,
Thy sister, thy companion, thine own chosen one,
But the whole world which seeks thy sympathy.
Hearest thou not sounds i' the air which speak the love
Of all articulate beings? Feelest thou not
The inanimate winds enamoured of thee? List!"¹

Mr. Grabo states: "By casting out hate Prometheus has identified himself with the ruling power of the universe which is Love, and, Love commands Destiny or Fate, which is Demogorgon. Shelley's philosophy here is akin to neo-Platonism, in which the One is thought of as the mysterious all-perfect source of life and energy, the creative brain, and the executive will. In this conception Prometheus, or mankind, by developing in himself the spirit of love grows into God, becoming himself the creative brain of God and commanding Demogorgon to execute his thoughts."² After Jupiter's overthrow everything is in harmony; all physical forces served Love. Mr. Grabo comments further: "Nature ceases then to be hostile to man and moves at his command. Earthquakes and

¹. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelly, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 264
². Grabo, The Magic Plant, p. 280
volcanic eruptions cease. The moon, warmed by the liberated energy emanating from the earth, becomes fruitful and populous. All nature sings a hymn of joy now that it has been released from the control of hate and moves only at the command of Love. Put in its boldest terms Shelley means that man, once he has learned to control himself, can learn to control the universe through his knowledge of science. But an ethical transformation, a mortal revolution is necessary before man, through his directing brain, can command the forces of nature to his advantage. This I believe to be the most significant point of Shelley's matured philosophy, his belief that the will is freed only through Love.1

Shelley pursues the unifying effects of Love even further and calls this effect God in the other following poems. In the lines connected with the poem Epipsychidion dedicated to Emilia Viviani, who is a symbol of beauty and divine Love, Shelley connects the idea of God and Love as follows:

".......A Power, a Love, a Joy, a God
Which makes in mortal hearts its brief abode,
Not to be touched but to be felt alone,
It fills the world with glory—and is gone.

It floats with rainbow pinions o'er the stream
Of life, which flows, like a dream
Into the light of morning, to the grave
As to an ocean......."2

2. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 482
He describes this power further in Adonais. He writes:

"That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality."

In the Ode to Naples, Love has by its presence made the cause of liberty sacred and inspired human freedom in place of slavery:

"Great Spirit, deepest Love!
Which rulest and dost move
All things which live and are, within the Italian
shore;
Oh....raise thy sons, as o'er the prone horizon
Thy lamp feeds every twilight wave with fire--
Be man's high hope and unextinct desire
The instrument to work thy will divine!"

And finally in Hallas he writes about the Power of Love upon fallen Athens as follows:

"Saturn and Love their long repose
Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears and symbol flowers."

Although Shelley does not always call the spirit by the name God it is not very significant, because one feels that he is certain that his conception of God is the same as that of

2. Ibid., p. 658
3. Ibid., p. 534
any other intelligent broadminded person. In his early years he had associated the name with all the horrible and detestable things of human nature but during the last three years of his life he came to use the name with reverence.

The first of these instances occurs in the year 1819 when he wrote The Mask of Anarchy. He bids the English people as follows:

"Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free--"

In the Sensitive Plant he refers to the power that may be identified as his God as such:

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

He makes the same reference in a famous couplet in Epipsychidon:

"The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
In love and worship, blends itself with God."

And, in Lines connected with Epipsychidon he writes in defense of his doctrine of love with the following:

"In commendation of this kind of love:--
Why there is first the God in heaven above,
Who wrote a book called Nature......"

In the Ode to Naples he addresses the city as:

2. Ibid., p. 630
3. Ibid., p. 467
4. Ibid., p. 479
"Thou youngest giant birth
Which from the groaning earth
Leap'st, clothed in armour of impenetrable scale!
Last of the intercessors!
Who 'gainst the Crowned Transgressors
Pleadest before God's love! ........"1

He states in the poem The Boat on the Serchio that at the dawn of day:

"All rose to do the task He set to each,
Who shaped us to His ends and not our own...."2

In a Sonnet to Byron, he refers to Byron's poetical creations as being able to

"............rise as fast and fair
As perfect worlds at the Creator's will."3

In the figure of speech in Hellas he states:

"In the great morning of the world
The Spirit of God with might unfurled
The flag of Freedom over Chaos........"4

And finally in The Triumph of Life Shelley uses the name God as any avowedly Christian poet might use it:

"...Gregory and John, and men divine,
Who rose like shadows between man and God..."5

And again in the poem he writes:

"...why God made irreconcilable
Good and the means of good......."6

Mr. Swinburne states in connection with the development of Shelley's faith in a God, a Spirit of love pervading the universe as follows: "Such workings of the creed, such

1. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 656
2. Ibid., p. 693
3. Ibid., p. 696
4. Ibid., p. 509
5. Ibid., p. 553
6. Ibid., p. 551
development of the faith were before Shelley's eyes when he wrote; he had also about him the reek of as foul an incense going up from the priests of that day to their Ferdinand or their George as those of ours have sent up to Bonaparte or to Bourbon of their own mixing with the smell of battle smoke and blood, the more feted fewer of prayer and praises; and wide as the gap between his first and last manner great as is the leap from Queen Mab to Hellenas."

Before further comments, it is necessary to explain as nearly as possible the nature of Shelley's God. Shelley's conception of God like Plato's is not anthropomorphic and personal like the God of the Bible. Both Plato and Shelley approach God from the aesthetic side. Plato loved the glorious beauty of the visible world and admires most in the creator the element of beauty. This fact is illustrated in the Symposium where the supreme vision is represented as the highest good and the ultimate point of attainment. The attainment is reached in an ascent through different stages of aesthetic perception. So in the case of Shelley, his approach to the Supreme Power and conception is an aesthetic one. He calls this Power Beauty, Goodness and then Love.

One comes to the question then whether Shelley's God, since he is not anthropomorphic or personal, is omnipotent?

1. Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, p. 192
Mr. Winstanley finds similarity between Shelley and Plato again on this issue. He states: "Again it should be noted that as with Plato, Shelley's God is only doubtfully omnipotent. Plato does not appear to solve to his own satisfaction the problem of evil; faced with the dilemma that either 'He is not good or not omnipotent' Plato decides for the latter half of the dilemma and limits his Deity's omnipotence. Now in all of this Shelley follows him. The Revolt of Islam the whole poem illustrates the conflict between the power of good and those of evil symbolized by the fight between the eagle and the snake, the eagle being emblematic of evil and the snake of good. The same conception - of the power for good struggling against and almost overcome by the power of evil - appears in Prometheus Unbound. Thus in the speech of Asia:

"How glorious art thou Earth! And if thou be
The Shadow of some spirit lovelier still
Though evil stain its works and it should be
Like its creation, weak and yet beautiful."

Therefore Shelley's God, a Spirit of Love possessing Goodness is limited to Goodness.

Thus another question comes to our minds: Since Shelley's God is not omnipotent and is limited to Goodness, is there a greater force which governs his God? Mr. Barnard sets forth the following theory: "There is one aspect of his conception of God which remains (and to some extent must remain) obscure. His God, or the Spirit of Good, is not omnipotent or

1. Winstanley, Platonism in Shelley, p. 78-79
all-comprehending; and the question immediately arises: What then, is Ultimate Reality? What is the God who has made irreconcilable good and the means of good? What is the unknown God of which Christ, in Hellas, is said to be the prophet? What does it mean to say that God turned on Chaos? And what is Chaos? Is there some principle standing above and uniting in itself both the Spirit of Good and Power which opposes the workings of that Spirit?¹

Of course, no one who is not intellectually irresponsible will undertake to answer these questions dogmatically, or even, perhaps, very definitely, but Mr. Barnard has made the following suggestions: "To begin, then, with the relation between God and Chaos -- for Shelley's God does not create the element it works in -- it will be recalled that Shelley considers the primordial stuff of the universe to be of the nature of mind -- 'thought, passion, reason, will, imagination' -- rather than matter; although this distinction is perhaps more nominal than real, and significant chiefly as showing the poet's natural tendency toward idealism. But it is mind in a chaotic, unorganized, and un-self-conscious condition. From this aimless, infinite flux the creative Spirit, which seems to comprehend within itself both the patterns or Ideas according to which it manifests itself, and the energy by which it impresses these upon the stuff in which it works, brings forth the

¹ Barnard, op. cit., p. 88
universe which man knows."¹

"It must be made clear, however, with reference to Shelley's Berkeleian leanings, that his God -- the Spirit of Good -- although it has consciousness, that is, a mind (which seems to be the cosmos), is itself not mind; for it is active, and mind is always passive."²

"Shelley seems to have allowed his conception of Ultimate Reality to be assimilated to that of "the one Spirit" of the forty-third stanza (Adonais)........which clearly refer to the limited and, in a sense, personal Spirit of Good. Again in Helias, one does not know to which conception 'the Fathomless' and 'the One' are intended to refer. The 'unknown God' from which Christ is sent, however, seems to be Ultimate Reality or the Absolute, as is the God of The Triumph of Life, who is assumed to permit the existence of evil."³ Thus Mr. Barnard has indicated that the God that Shelley worshipped might be controlled by Ultimate Reality or identified with the Absolute. Not many critics have made such conjecture although Mr. Browning states: "I pass at once therefore, from Shelley's minor excellencies to his noblest and predominating characteristic. This I call his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws from his poet's station between both,

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¹ Barnard, op. cit., p. 88
² Ibid., p. 89
³ Ibid., p. 93
swifter, subtler and more numerous films for the convexion of each with each, than have been thrown by any modern artificer of whom I have knowledge."¹

No matter how confusing their interpretation may be to the reader, he will probably be convinced after reading such poems as Prometheus Unbound or Hellas that Shelley worshipped a Spirit of Love that pervades the universe creating beauty and goodness among mankind. And if this Spirit is governed by a greater force, Ultimate Reality if you wish, it doesn't prevent it from performing these acts. Mr. Santayana states: "....The chief characteristic of his philosophy is its Promethean spirit. He maintained that the basis of moral authority was internal and diffused among all individuals; that it was the natural love of the beautiful and the good, wherever it might spring, and however fate might oppose it."²

A similar summary is given by Mr. Thomson who states: "Of course, we are agreed that Shelley's real religious character consisted in his unquenchable love and reverence for all holiness, truth and beauty. This Spirit of Love is all-pervading and unchanging and works in a passive flux of the unorganized elements of the mind creating a world of harmonious and beautiful forms."³

¹ Browning, Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley, p. 26
² Santayana, Winds of Doctrine, p. 179
³ Thomson, Shelley, A Poem, p. 31
This Spirit of Love though always producing love and beauty is opposed by a Spirit of Evil, ever present in human life which brings forth all of the discord, the ugliness and suffering of mankind. Mr. Quiller-Couch remarks: "Shelley has much to teach us yet. If he can teach us the root of his matter - that human society will never be reformed but on some law of love and understanding he will come in time to an even greater Kingdom than he yet inherits."¹ This statement is quite true, for one can see that the God that he worshipped is truly religious, and if mankind would accept love and goodness as the two most necessary elements for human happiness, it is no doubt the misery and unhappiness that is ever present in the human life would be eliminated. Mr. Kirthan points out: "Love is triumphant, through the welter of life and movement and being, through all manifestation of force, through world agonies love beams on his soul. Love is the beginning and the ending. There is purpose beyond and above the apparent purposelessness."² Shelley's God and his religion is a source of inspiration and hope, "a religion for humanity, a religion which unlike the spectral Christianity about him, should permeate and regulate the whole organization of men."³

Shelley's Deity is altogether benevolent; it has

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¹ Quiller-Couch, Studies in Literature, p. 82
² Kirthan, Political and Religious Creed of Shelley, p. 234
³ Thomson, op. cit., p. 71
nothing of the sternness attributed to the Christian God. Mr. Ullman describes Shelley's God and attributes of his God as follows: "With the insane confidence of a child he rejected as superficial and unsatisfying all those innumerable, phenomenalized reflexes through which essence manifests itself in form and sought essence itself — the absolute, the prime mover, the One, in which all things have their birth, their being, their death. He sought God, if you will, but a God who was more than a word. He sought him in the spirit of man. And the spirit of man is Love."¹ Thus the God that Shelley worshipped possessed Love and Goodness that included all things. This was, "The Knowledge of the Glory of God — This was the goal of Shelley's Quest"². Shelley repudiated the Christian God being presented to us by our conscience as that of a Judge and held to the Godwinian principle that justice and benevolence were identical. Whether this belief is in harmony with the New Testament, it is certainly opposed irreconcilably to traditional Christian theology. Mr. Hughes comments on Shelley's God as follows: "Shelley made his divinity, in one of its forms or aspects, in his own image; it is a spirit pressing on to good, and its lamp maybe high or low, its plastic stress on man and nature is hindered by adversities or speeded by desire; its course is marked by culmination of glory and joy.

¹. Ullman, Mad Shelley, p. 96
². Bald, Essay and Studies, p. 127
But the Power, this sublimated Shelley, struggling in the mutable world, transcends it at the same time; a portion of its pure and absolute, in reserve; and its work in finite creatures is to reclaim them as far as maybe, from their finitude; for even the millennial happiness in *Prometheus* must carry with it the clogs of mutability and the eclipsing curse of birth. And here Shelley takes after Spinoza, 'he is more for the One than for the many, and fain to see the finite not persistent in itself or individual in its own right, but ever surrendering and fading into the infinite.'

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Parallel to Shelley's conception of God was his reverence for Jesus Christ. The following passage from *Hellas* shows the poet's admiration for the sublime character of Christ:

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

Shelley clearly represents Christ not merely as a morally perfect human being who is free from sin and passion, which he attributed to the Jehovah of Christian Scriptures, with whom Christ had been mistakenly identified, but as a purely spiritual being. He represents Christ assuming for a time a mortal form, in order to redeem mankind from "Hell, Sin, and Slavery". Mr. Middleton concludes: "No one ever

I. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 513
entertained a higher appreciation of the moral beauty of the character of Christ than he did."¹

Five or six years earlier Shelley had acknowledged the nobility of the character and teachings of Christ, in his Essay on Christianity. He pointed out in the study, however, the perversions of those teachings by the institutionalized church, united with the social tyranny, oppression and war. Of him Shelley writes: "We discover that he is the advocate of equal justice; that he is neither disposed to sanction bloodshed nor deceit, under whatsoever pretences their practice may be vindicated. We discover that he was a man of meek and majestic demeanor, calm in danger; of natural and simple thoughts and habits; beloved to adoration by his adherents; unmoved, solemn and severe."² Mr. Weaver points out some other interesting doctrines discussed by Shelley in connection with the basic principles taught by Christ. He states: "To insure the practice of righteousness on earth Jesus broke down the unnatural distinction between men. He found the meaning of the human social order at its point of greatest need. 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath chosen me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliver-

¹ Middleton, Shelley and His Writing, p. 353
² Complete Prose Works, ed. Forman, p. 356
ance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and
to set at liberty them that are bruised (Luke 1v, 18)." As
Shelley interpreted it, this meant the banishment of luxuries
and establishing of society upon the principle of equality.
Perfect love not only casteth out fear, it casteth out prop-
erty."¹ This fact is evidenced from the following lines taken
from his Essay on Christianity: "In proportion to the love
existing among men, so will be the community of property and
power. Among true and real friends, all is common. The only
perfect and genuine republic is that which comprehends every
living being. You ought to love all mankind. You ought not
to love the individuals of your circle less but to those who
exist beyond it more. Once make the feelings of confidence
and of affection universal, and the distinctions of property
and power will vanish. Fame, power, and gold, are loved for
their own sakes. The pageantry of empire, and the fame of
irresistible might are contemplated by the possessor with
unmeaning complacency. Before men 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 self-
ishness of its excuses, and contemplate actions and objects
as they really are. He will discover the wisdom of universal
love. Such appears to have been the doctrines of Jesus Christ.²

¹. Weaver, Toward the Understanding of Shelley, p. 34
The most interesting of all the points illustrated in *Essay on Christianity* is Shelley's attempt to show that Jesus' conception of God was very similar to his own. "It is important to observe that the author of the Christian system had a conception widely differing from the gross imagination of the vulgar relatively to the ruling Power of the universe. He everywhere represents this Power as something mysteriously and illimitably pervading the frame of things."¹ And again: "He (Christ) considered the venerable word (God) to express the overruling Spirit of the Collective energy of the moral and material world."² He finally decides: "This much is certain that Jesus Christ represents God as the fountain of all goodness, the uniform and unchanging motive of the salutary operations of the material world."³ Mr. Gingerish comments: "Though in *Queen Mab* Shelley considered Jesus the author of much evil in the world, he yet there pays tribute to the purity of his life. But now he attests the truth and beauty of his teaching, not only as regards God but also as regards human life, and attempts to harmonize those teachings with his own views."⁴

Therefore Shelley admired Christ because he was a morally perfect human being who was meek, majestic and of simple habits and thoughts. He admired the teachings of Christ.

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⁴ Gingerish, *Shelley's Doctrine of Necessity versus Christianity*, p. 457
his emphasis upon love of all mankind, upon the principle of equality, upon the destruction of habit and superstition, of sensuality and selfishness. To him Christ represented one most infinite in vision and most true in action. It may be said that the spirit of Love and Goodness — for the poet's own words in *Hellas* suggest it — stands in Shelley's thought as Christ does in the Christian system, as the mediator between man and the Absolute. In the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Christ is asserted as being identical with, and yet other than, God the Father; so in Shelley the mediating Spirit of Love and Goodness, which may probably be said to represent the absolute in its human aspect, is sometimes identified with the Absolute and sometimes distinguished from it. Mr. Stovall asserts: "In any case, the Spirit of Love or Beauty was the immediate object of worship, standing to him in some such relation as Christ stands for the orthodox Christian."¹ He also states: "The Daemon of the world, or the Spirit of Love, becomes in a sense the interpreter of inscrutable necessity, and stands to Shelley in the same relation that Christ stands to Christians."² This perhaps can account for Shelley sometimes confusing the Spirit of Love and Goodness with the attributes which religious persons generally ascribe to God.

¹. Stovall, op. cit., p. 217
². Stovall, op. cit., p. 145
VI

Shelley and the Problem of Evil

In connection with Shelley's Conception of God there are two other topics though incidental to the purpose of this study may shed light upon the relationship of his Conception of God with them. These two topics are The Problem of Evil and Immortality. A brief consideration of the Problem of Evil will be undertaken first. Even though Shelley may have trusted in the triumph of ultimate good, he felt not less strongly that evil prevails on the earth. He has an intense perception of the overwhelming preponderance of evil in all that pertains to human life.

From Queen Mab to The Triumph of Life Shelley makes the most painful observations of evil upon mankind. In Queen Mab he sees the complete corruption of human society, the degradation, the wrongs, the sufferings of men before he turns to his vision of great happiness and good government. In Alastor the poet is overcome and dies vainly trying to seek an ideal which cannot be afforded in life. The Revolt of Islam, like the French Revolution, ends in the defeat of good and the victory of oppression. Leon and Cythna are killed but they find happiness in the eternal temple of the Spirit of Good, where they were to await the triumph of this spirit. Julian Maddalo
shows Shelley giving all the hopeful arguments that he is able in opposition to Byron's cynicism. Shelley represents the maniac as a type of all the sensitive and magnanimous natures. He expresses the mental agony that can be inflicted upon man by his own sin or those of his fellowmen or by some malicious principle. He exclaims:

"Me -- who am as a nerve o'er which do creep
The else unlert oppressions of this earth....."1

Good is triumphant in *Prometheus Unbound* only when it has endured:

"Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, for ever!
I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear
Thy works within my woe-illumed mind,
Thou subtle tyrant! Peace is in the grave.
The grave hides all things beautiful and good;
I am a God and cannot find it there,
Nor would I seek it: for, though dread revenge,
This is defeat, fierce king, not victory.
The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
With new endurance, till the hour arrives
When they shall be no types of things which are."2

Shelley describes the state of those who are good in the lines spoken by the Fury to Prometheus.

"In each human heart terror survives
The ravin it has gorged: the loftiest fear
All that they would disdain to think were true:
Hypocrisy and custom make their minds
The fanes of many a worship, now outworn.
They dare not devise good for man's estate,
And yet they know not that they do not dare.
The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
The powerful goodness want: worse need for thmm.
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
And all best things are thus confused to ill."3

2. Ibid., p. 244
3. Ibid., p. 244
Man is subject to:

".........crime, remorse,  
Which from the links of the great chain of things,  
To every thought within the mind of man  
Sway and drag heavily, and each one reels  
Under the load towards the pit of death;  
Abandoned hope, and love that turns to hate;  
And self-contempt, bitterer to drink than blood;  
Pain, whose unheeded and familiar speech  
Is howling, and keen shrieks, day after day;"

Man is also subject to:

"Evil, the immedicable plague, which, while  
Man looks on his creation like a God  
And sees that it is glorious, drives him on,  
The wreck of his own will, the scorn of earth,  
The outcast, the abandoned, the alone..."

But his noblest destiny is:

"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."

This, concludes Shelley, is the severe task every man must face to live a spiritual life in this unregenerated life.

The Cenci is unusual in the degree of evil and depravity it represents but it is a good picture of the tyranny and cruelty practiced by the church and state. Innocence and youth are destroyed by the deviltry of Count Cenci. He is

1. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 259
2. Ibid., p. 261
3. Ibid., p. 293
respected and noble to those around him and is in conformity with the regulations of the church, but in his home he is a brutal and vile character. Only murder can destroy him and when this murder is committed, those who undertook the task destroyed themselves in usurping his power.

This play clearly represents good being destroyed by evil. It shows that the strength of innocence is not enough. If good overcomes evil, it might be too late to do any good as in the case of Beatrice who freed the world of a monster but was finally executed. The church-state who protected Count Cenci was unshaken and as a result destroyed his murderer as dangerous to itself.

In The Triumph of Life, the car of Life, the vast mass of humanity destroys all. He describes the dreadful sight as follows:

"Old men and women foully disarrayed,
Shake their gray hairs in the insulting wind,

And follow in the dance, with limbs decayed,
Seeking to reach the light which leaves them still
Farther behind and deeper in the shade.

But not the less with impotence of will
They wheel, though ghastly shadows interpose
Round them and round each other, and fulfil

Their work, and in the dust from whence they rose,
Sink, and corruption veils them as they lie....."1

Shelley saw that in order for humanity to rid itself of evil it must begin and end with the regeneration of the

I. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p.549-50
individual human soul. This regeneration is illustrated in the story of Prometheus more clearly than in any other of his poems.

Prometheus' punishment and suffering is that which every person must pass through who will attain self-mastery. Prometheus is tempted to lose his soul by conforming to the ways of the world. He is tempted through pain and despair. This despair is brought about when Prometheus has to behold a vision of Christ upon the cross and a vision of the French Revolution. He must face the apparent fact that the Spirit of Good in its efforts to overthrow the Spirit of Evil has made Jupiter's position even more secure. This is the same mystery that evil presents when it constantly triumphs, changing good to its own nature, as in the case of the professed followers of Christ, who are often successful in crucifying his own true followers. This is one of religion's deepest mysteries.

Prometheus' victory has to come from a renunciation of self, a denial of all personal emotions or desires. This is symbolized by Prometheus recalling the curse from Jupiter with the following words:

"It doth repent me: words are quick and vain; Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine. I wish no living thing to suffer pain." ¹

He transforms hate to love and in so doing freed

himself from the long suffering that Jupiter had inflicted upon him.

The paradise that Shelley describes at the end of the third act will come when all human beings have undergone the test that Prometheus underwent. They will then attain moral perfection. Law, government organized Christianity will be unnecessary. This day will come with man's conquest of evil. Shelley held to this dream until his death. Mr. More concludes:

"Always his philosophy, whether magnified into a shadowy onymology or expressed in human drama, whether it be love or hate of Prometheus or his own relation to mankind, is the voice of enthusiasm."¹

Shelley's vision of man being free from evil and enjoying a happy life of moral perfection was similar to his vision of man's acceptance of a Spirit of Love to worship that would bring the harmony and happiness which would result in both instances from the power of Love. Mr. Graham points out what posterity has clearly recognized: "The beneficient social purpose in Shelley's poetry, the genuine Christianity of his spirit; his faith in the 'slow gradual change' for the better in human affairs."² Mr. Cameron recognized Shelley's contemplation of the betterment of mankind through the destruction

¹ More, Shelburne Essays, p. 14
² Graham, Shelley's Debt to Leigh Hunt and the Examiner, p.192
of evil as a part of a reform movement that to Shelley was "a vast sweep of progressive historical forces out of the past into the future of a democratic republic and beyond that, into the Godwinian equalitarian State - the grand vision of Prometheus Unbound."¹ It cannot be denied that Shelley was interested in reform but he was more interested in the latter part of Mr. Cameron's statement, "the grand vision of Prometheus Unbound" - the vision of Love ruling the universe and evil destroyed through the realization of Love. This state may be described in the words of Prometheus after the overthrow of Jupiter who represented the forces of evil:

"Of all that man becomes, the mediators
Of that best worship love, by him and us
Given and returned; swift shapes and sounds, which grow
More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind,
And, veil by veil, evil and error fall."²

¹. Cameron, Shelley and the Reformers, p. 65
². Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 270
Shelley's Views on Immortality

Shelley's attitude toward Immortality is very profound and complex. Although a detailed account will not be given, it is important that some necessary facts be mentioned.

There has never been a more interested person in bringing about a heaven on earth than Shelley; there has likewise been none more interested in the immortality of the soul.

At the end of Queen Mab after Shelley had made long attacks and abuses upon the social conditions and after he had denounced religion he pictured a regeneration of the earth by looking beyond "birth, life and death"; Queen Mab tells Ianthe:

"Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,
That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
And happy regions of eternal hope."

But in 1815 the optimism that Shelley had shown in Queen Mab had changed in Alastor into sadness and without any hopes for the future. The life of the poet has been quenched by time and remains to those behind a mournful remembrance.

"It is a woe too deep for tears when all
Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,

1. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 848
Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves,
Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,
The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
Birth and the grave that are not as they were."1

There is an overshadow of death throughout the poem

for an example:

"O stream!
Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?
Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulfs,
Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course
Have each their type in me; and the wide sky,
And measureless ocean may declare as soon
What oozy cavern or what wandering cloud
Contains thy waters, as the universe
Tell where these living thoughts reside, when
Upon thy flowers my bloodless limbs stretched
I' the passing wind!"2

In the same year he wrote a sonnet On Death. The

poem has no definite denial of hope but is rather one of ques-
tioning. He infers there may be another existence; but

"Who telleth a tale of unspeaking death?
Who lifteth the veil of what is to come?
Who painteth the shadows that are beneath
The wide-winding caves of the peopled tomb?
Or uniteth the hopes of what shall be
With the fears and the love for that which we see?"3

In a Sonnet written in 1820 he still expresses a

pessimistic viewpoint on life after death. He states:

"Ye hasten to the grave! What seek ye there,
Ye restless thoughts and busy purposes
Of the idle brain, which the world's living wear?

1. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 18
2. Ibid., p. 13
3. Ibid., p. 563
Of thou quick heart, which pantest to possess
All that pale Expectation feigneth fair!
Thou vainly curious mind which wouldest guess
Whence thou didst come, and whither thou must go,
And all that never yet was known would know—
Oh, whither hasten ye, that thus ye press,
With such swift feet life's green and pleasant path,
Seeking, alike from happiness and woe,
A refuge in the cavern of gray death?
O heart, and mind, and thoughts! what thing do you
Hope to inherit in the grave below?"

As has been noted, Shelley's early enthusiasm about
a future state soon gave way to a more rationalistic and pess-
imistic outlook. But the doctrine of reincarnation again finds
a place in thoughts in the following lines from Prometheus
Unbound. Demogorgon says:

"Ye happy Dead, whom beams of brightest verse
Are clouds to hide, not colours to portray,
Whether your nature is that universe
Which once ye saw and suffered—""

to which "A Voice from beneath" replies

"Or as they
Whom we have left, we change and pass away."3

One could conclude that Shelley is suggesting that
the souls of those who died will obtain union with the One
"Spirit" by a long process of evolution to higher forms.

The same idea is presented in Hellas with the beauti-
ful passages from the Chorus.

"Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river
Sparkling, bursting, borne away.

1. Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., p. 663
2. Ibid., p. 232
3. Ibid., p. 232
But they are still immortal
Who, through birth's orient portal
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light
Gathered around their chariots as they go;
New shapes they still may weave,
New gods, new laws receive,
Bright or dim are they as the robes they last
On Death's bare ribs had cast."

In a note on the Chorus of Helias Shelley explains his belief more clearly. He states: "The popular notions of Christianity are represented in this chorus as true in their relation to the worship they superseded, and that which in all probability they will supersede, without considering their merits in a relation more universal. The first stanza contrasts the immortality of the living and thinking beings which inhabit the planets, and to use a common and inadequate phrase, clothe themselves in matter, with the transience of the noblest manifestations of the external world.

The concluding verses indicate a progressive state of more or less exalted existence, according to the degree of perfection which every distinct intelligence may have attained ..........That there is a true solution of the riddle, and that in our present state that solution is unattainable by us, are propositions which may be regarded as equally certain: meanwhile, as it is the province of the poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity, let him be per-

mitted to have conjectured the condition of that futurity towards which we are all impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality. Until better arguments can be produced than sophisms which disgrace the cause, this desire itself must remain the strongest and the only presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being."¹

Shelley expresses reincarnation more beautifully in *Adonais*. He seems to suggest that at the end of life there is a union of every individual with the Spirit of Love which has been spoken of as Shelley's God. This Spirit of Love both transcends the world of things and at the same time is inherent in whatever the world contains that is beautiful and good. This seems to be the thought in *Adonais* when Shelley expresses the immortality of Keats' soul:

"Nor let us weep that our delight is fled
Far from these carrion kites that scream below;
He wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead;
Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now--
Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change, unquenchably the same,
Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame.

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move

¹ Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., pp.534-5
which has withdrawn his being to its own;  
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,  
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely; he doth bear  
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress  
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there,  
All new successions to the forms they wear;  
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight  
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;  
And bursting in its beauty and its might  
From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.\(^1\)

The Spirit in which the soul continues to exist after death is not conceived by Shelley to be an impersonal force but one that is benevolent, including in its own nature all that is called good by man. This union would not bring about the extinction of being but rather the expansion of it. As Mr. Kurtz concluded: "The Key-phrase changes. No longer is it: I change but I cannot die. It becomes: I live and die, the many change and pass; but the One remains, and the individual in losing his worldly personality by becoming at one with the eternal achieves the perfection of self."\(^2\) Therefore, Shelley believes that the soul will unite with the One, The Spirit of Love which he worshipped as God, and this Spirit of Love transcends the world yet is a part of everything that represents beauty and goodness.

\(^1\) Complete Poems of Keats and Shelley, Mod. Lib. ed., pp.495-6
\(^2\) Kurtz, op. cit., p. 288
VIII

Conclusion

In tracing the development of Shelley's Conception of God, it may easily be concluded that Shelley was the "most spiritual, the most idealistic, the most religious of poets."\(^1\) He showed, in his quest for God, a clear insight into the enduring elements of the Christian creed. He was able to discern its spiritual purity and thereby develop a faith that would be in harmony with its Founder.

From *Queen Mab* to *Hellas* Shelley has shown definite progress in his Conception of God. In less than ten years, his conception had grown from the "Omnipotent Fiend" to the "One". During this time he had been influenced by several schools of Philosophy, namely, the French Materialist, Godwin and finally Plato. It was with Plato that his conception of God began to grow. Shelley's bitter resentment of organized Christianity and the Christian Conception of God seem to dissolve into his worship of "love" as "sole" law of the universe. "He believed so firmly and intensely in his own religion -- a kind of passionate positivism, a creed which seemed to have no God

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because it was all God — that he felt convinced he only needed to destroy accepted figments, for the light which blazed around him to break through and flood the world with beauty."¹

The principles of his religion that have flooded the world through his works have shown the purity and nobleness of his belief. He worshipped a Spirit of Love which, if allowed to permeate mankind, could bring peace and happiness in place of misery and discord.

Shelley's faith in this Spirit of Love enables him to see hope for humanity in its overthrow of evil. He believed that evil can be destroyed through love. Man can overcome evil through suffering and despair and resistance of temptations presented by the forces of evil. He can grow in love, as he characterized Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound* until the forces of evil are completely annihilated from the earth. He believed that this "Spirit of Love rules all things, and with perpetual Orpheus song 'harmonise and orders the whole universe.'"²

Shelley's belief in Immortality was based upon faith in his God or the Spirit of Love. He believed that after death the Soul of man would unite itself with the "One" or The Spirit of Love and continue to live in all things that are beautiful and good. Thus we see that Shelley's faith in his God was so

¹ Symonds, *Shelley*, p. 40
complete until it not only gave him peace and happiness on this earth but hope for life after death.

Therefore, if Shelley has instilled into the hearts of those who have read his works the principle of love and goodness which his God represented, we will not consider his efforts futile or consider him, "A beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating the void with his tremendous wings in vain." ¹

¹ Arnold, Essays in Criticism, p. 231
Abstract

Shelley was born in an extraordinary age amid extraordinary conditions. In 1792 the thunder clouds of the revolution were breaking all over Europe. The general crash of things were felt in the political, social and religious systems of Europe. It was a time of restless activity, where fears, hopes, impulses tinged men's notions of things. Men were eager to build in a day the structures which centuries of growth had fashioned. Their spirits uncompromising and shattering yielded only to the purpose of creating new methods in place of the old. They desired knowledge for they felt that the future held great possibilities for them. It was a period of great revolutionary thinkers such as Paine, Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Shelley though sheltered at home for the first ten years of his life soon entered into the tumult of the age. He made his entrance at Sion House. This school and later Eton and Oxford contributed to Shelley's hatred of formalism and authoritarianism. He became a foe of tyranny in any form. His rebellion led him into the realms of literature where his sensibility fed upon the stimulating ideas presented to him from metaphysics and politics.
Shelley's skepticism toward religion could have started when he was a student at Eton. He was known to have read such books as Pliny's *Natural History*, Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* and Godwin's *Political Justice*. When Shelley became a student at Oxford he boldly stated his skepticism in the form of argumentative letters and in a pamphlet known as *The Necessity of Atheism*. This pamphlet had disastrous results because he was expelled from Oxford for the opinions expressed in it. The pamphlet based upon the authority of Hume stressed reason and questioned the existence of a God.

Shelley's expulsion from Oxford, coupled with the loss of his fiancée and the denouncement of his parents made him more bitter than ever against the foes of tyranny. He considered his greatest enemy to be organized Christianity which he believed to have been responsible for all his misfortune at that time.

He began a Shelleyan crusade against the evils that he found represented in organized Christianity and his first attack was upon its accomplishments. Shelley rejected the hypocrisy and tyranny practiced by the Church in upholding its doctrines, the authoritarianism of the Christian Scripture, the control of the Church by the State, and the subjection of reason to dogma by the people of the church.

Shelley also revolted against the Christian Conception of God. He could not worship a God whom he believed possessed the same passions as human beings such as hate, envy
and revenge. The Christian's God, to Shelley, seems to receive pleasure from seeing his followers suffer; he created Hell to inflict eternal torture upon them. Shelley could not worship a God of this nature. He believed that the Christian's acceptance of God had been the result of superstition, therefore, he desired to destroy superstition, and what he considered the "Omnipotent Fiend".

In Shelley's destruction of the Christian's Conception of God, he was creating his own God. He borrowed from the French Materialist, Godwin and Plato in his creation. His Conception of God however, at the time of his death was more the embodiment of Plato's philosophy than any of the other philosophies that were mentioned.

Shelley, like Plato, approached his God from the aesthetic side and as a result his conception is an aesthetic one. His God was a Spirit of Love, that possessed goodness and was a part of all things that were beautiful and good. His God, Spirit of Love, was not omnipotent in the sense that it possessed both good and evil but was limited only to goodness. This Spirit of Love could bring harmony and peace to the universe if man would allow it to function.

Shelley believed that his God, Spirit of Love, was represented more thoroughly in the character of Jesus Christ than any other mortal that has been upon the earth. He, therefore, expressed deep reverence and admiration for Christ. He admired his teaching of love, equality and justice among mankind
and believed that Christ represented the true spirit of Christianity. And, even though, Christ's teaching has been misinterpreted and misused over the years, Shelley still concluded that Christ through his teaching, was the most noble and sincere of men.

Shelley was always conscious of the forces of evil operating in the universe. This is evident in his *Prometheus Unbound*. Evil was not destroyed until Love was predominant. Shelley believed that this fact would apply to mankind until the same transformation took place. If love could triumph over evil then happiness and peace would be its reward.

Shelley's faith in the Spirit of Love gave him hope for life after death. Although he had appeared pessimistic in some of his poems such as *Alastor* and *On Death*, he expressed complete faith in *Adonais* in the continuation of life after death. He thinks that even though the body dies the soul of man lives to unite itself with the "One", the Spirit of Love, and continues to live in all things that are in peace and harmony and that are beautiful and good. This was Shelley's faith in his God, the Spirit of Love - this was his hope for Immortality.
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