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Shelley's critical views on religion as expressed in Queen Mab

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Thesis

SHELLEY'S CRITICAL VIEWS ON RELIGION
AS EXPRESSED IN QUEEN MAB

by

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INTRODUCTION

To Percy Bysshe Shelley may be assigned the distinction of asserting, in an age of reaction, lyrical expressions of religious skepticism and unbelief. His Queen Mab and its notes, first published in 1813, when he was just twenty years old, served as an inspiration to the great multitude of freethinkers. Here was a poet, who unlike Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, would not be won over by orthodoxy. Thus Shelley was welcomed by the socialists, the rationalists, the idealists, and even the mystics as a worthy votary to their respective principles.

The events of Shelley's life up to the composition of Queen Mab might be justly regarded as explanatory, or, at least, of an influential character, to the seemingly violent declaration of reform which the young poet expressed in this philosophical poem.

In his childhood, Shelley developed an interest in occult, imaginative and scientific studies. His years at Sion House Academy and at Eton were unpleasant ones, filled with persecutions and bitter oppositions. In 1810, Harriet Grove became alarmed at Shelley's skeptical tendencies and broke the engagement that had existed between them. Shelley resolved, it seems, to attack in his early works those institutions which had caused this separation.
He had written and had published by 1811, two romances, *St. Irvyne* and *Zastrozzi*, curious tales of terror much after the Anne Radcliffe style which he greatly admired. The year and a half at Oxford were marked by the dull intellectual life of the college; the establishment of the friendship with Thomas Jefferson Hogg; and, in 1811, the publication of *The Necessity of Atheism*, which resulted in his, and Hogg's expulsion from the university.

The remainder of that year brought a break with his father, the elopement to Edinburgh and the marriage with Harriet Westbrook, and then residence in Keswick. Shelley started to correspond with William Godwin in 1812 and also published his *Letter to Lord Ellenborough* as a protest against the sentence inflicted upon Daniel Isaac Eaton, the publisher of the third part of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. With Harriet and Elizabeth Westbrook, Shelley went to Dublin where the *Address to the Irish People* and the *Proposals for an Association of Those Philanthropists* were published as Irish reform propaganda. They became established in London during April, 1813, after a short residence in Wales where they were joined by the unpleasant "Brown Demon," Elizabeth Hitchener. It was in the spring of 1813 that *Queen Mab* was completed.

The religious views which Shelley asserted in *Queen Mab* are to be observed in this study from three different angles:
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first, Shelley's denial of a Creator of the Universe and his belief in a pervading spirit, together with his opinions on the origin of good and evil; second, the disbelief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and his attack upon the Christian religion as it existed in the established system; third, Shelley's belief in the doctrine of Necessity and his prediction of a virtuous state which the acceptance of this belief would ultimately bring.
PART I

SHELLEY'S CONCEPTION OF THE DEITY

There are three particular problems to be recognized in this part of the study: first, Shelley's disbelief in a God of creation; second, his interpretation of God as the soul of the universe; and third, his views as to the authorship of good and evil.

A. The Denial of a Creative God

Shelley based his rejection of a Deity of Creation upon his belief that there did not exist sufficient evidence of such a God, that the universe was infinite, that man had perceived God as a symbol of the unknown cause, and that upon ignorance and superstition all theological conceptions of a Creator depended. Shelley's denial of the Deity was made by Queen Mab in the seventh canto of his poem when, after the story of the burning of an atheist, (a story which the Spirit of Ianthe had narrated) Mab declared,

There is no God! 1

She called upon Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, to attest the supremacy of the awful God whom theologians worshiped. This

In conclusion, we can summarize the findings of our study as follows:

1. The results of our experimental design show a significant difference in the performance of the two groups.
2. Group A performed better than Group B in all measured variables.
3. The differences were statistically significant, as indicated by the p-values.

We believe that these findings have important implications for future research in this area. Further studies are needed to explore the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the observed differences.

In the discussion section, we will delve deeper into the implications of our findings and suggest areas for future research.

References...

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was the Jehovah who filled the world with fear; this was the "omnipotent fiend," according to Ahasuerus, who was responsible for the creation of the universe, which he portrayed in the lines:

From an eternity of idleness,
I, God, awoke; in seven days' toil made earth
From nothing; rested and created man;
I planted him in Paradise, and there
Planted the tree of evil, so that he
Might eat and perish, and my soul procure
Wherewith to sate its malice and to turn,
Even like a heartless conqueror of the earth,
All misery to my fame.  

This was the God, in Shelley's mind, to whom man paid homage in his devotion and to whom he erected his

... costly altars smoked
With human blood, ...

It was against this

... vengeful, pitiless, and almighty fiend,
Whose mercy is a nickname for the rage
Of tameless tigers hungering for blood; ...

that Shelley rebelled and whose very existence he denied. Of the revengeful God of orthodoxy, Shelley wrote in a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, dated July 25, 1811:

...I should doubt even the existence of a God who if he cannot command our reverence by Love, surely can have no demand upon it from virtue, on the score of terror. ——It is this empire of terror which is established by Religion. 

2 Ibid., 97.  
3 Ibid., 106-114.  
5 Ibid., iv, 211-213.  
This Almighty God of Creation, this God whom orthodox believers worshiped and feared, Shelley said in his Notes on Queen Mab, was an hypothesis and stood in need of proof. Before the human mind could be convinced of a belief in the Deity, it was necessary, he continued, to study the nature of man's belief itself. To deduce any knowledge offered to the mind from a proposition, such as the acceptance of God's being, it was requisite that the mind perceive the agreement or disagreement of the ideas which this proposition was composed. When the mind agreed with the ideas, the perception was termed "belief." To his analysis of belief, he added:

Belief, then, is a passion, the strength of which like every other passion, is in precise proportion to the degrees of excitement.

The degrees of excitement are three.

The senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind; consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent.

The decision of the mind, founded upon our own experience, derived from these sources, claims the next degree.

The experience of others, which addresses itself to the former one, occupies the lowest degree.

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8Ibid., p. 803.

9Ibid., pp. 803-4.
To prove the being of a God, the ideas of the proposition had to be perceived by the mind and tested by these three degrees constituting the nature of belief. If the testimony in favor of the existence of a Deity could be referred to one of these divisions incorporated in belief, then the evidence of the proposition could be accepted as valid.

The first measure to which the proof of God's being had to be tested was that of the evidence of the senses. If God be revealed to mankind, Shelley maintained, His existence would therefore be firmly established. "But," he argued, "the God of Theologians is incapable of local visibility."

Reason constituted the second test. Man had been urged to believe that whatever existed must have had a beginning or had survived throughout eternity. That which was finite must have had, according to Shelley's opinion, some primal cause. To the questions as to whether the universe was the result of a primal cause, that it was created by a Master Builder, or whether it had endured from infinity, Shelley answered:

... it is easier to suppose that the universe has existed from all eternity than to conceive a being beyond its limits capable of creating it.\(^{10}\)

Shelley believed that the cause of man's being was not known, that the effects of known causes had been responsible for the belief that he was created by an inherent generative power.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 804.
"We admit," he went on to say,

that the generative power is incomprehensible; but to suppose that the same effect is produced by an eternal, omniscient, omnipotent being leaves the cause in the same obscurity, but renders it more incomprehensible.11

The third source of conviction was that of testimony incorporating reason. "Our reason," Shelley declared,

can never admit the testimony of men, who not only declare that they were eye-witnesses of miracles, but the Deity was irrational; ...12

The belief in testimony as evidence of God's existence could not be commanded, since belief in itself was not a voluntary action, and the mind was passive, or involuntarily active.

There did not exist, therefore, Shelley asserted, any sufficient evidence to prove that a Deity did exist. The elements of the senses of reason, and of testimony had failed to demonstrate the Being of a Supreme Creator. Man could not rightly assign the origin and cause of the universe, Shelley went on to say, to the hand of an incomprehensible Author, who Himself stood in need of proof.

Shelley had expressed earlier, in 1812, in his Letter to Lord Ellenborough, his opinion as to the nature of belief, a position similar to that which he expanded in the Notes on Queen Mab. In the first place, he asserted:

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Belief and disbelief are utterly distinct from and unconnected with volition. They are the apprehension of the agreement or disagreement of the ideas which compose any proposition. Belief is an involuntary operation of the mind, and, like other passions, its intensity is precisely proportionate to the degree of excitement.\(^{13}\)

On February 6, 1810, Shelley had written an answer to his father's ideas of orthodoxy, in which he attacked with bitterness all attempts that were made to prove God's existence.

It was satisfactory, he wrote, for the masses of society, who did not give any thought as to the validity of an existing Deity, to accept the faith inherited from their fathers. He continued to point out the necessity for the thinking man to employ reason to the question of a Creator before he blindly accepted the orthodox doctrine. He said:

... after a rational being, or rather a being possessing capabilities for superadded rationality, ... has passed that point, before which he could not or used not to reason, after which he both did reason, and took interest in the inferences which he drew from that reason, ... do you then deny him to use that reason in the very point which is most momentous to his present, to his future happiness, in the very point which, as a being of greater importance, demands a superior energization of that distinguishing faculty of man? You cannot deny it, not as an animal rationale, but irrionale, retaining no distinguishing characteristic of Man but animal ... --I then have passed that point, because I do reason on the subjects, I do take interest in that reasoning and from

that reasoning I have adduced my own. I think I could to your private satisfaction, prove that the testimony of the twelve Apostles is insufficient to establish the truth of their doctrine, not to mention how much weaker the evidence must become, when filtered thro' so many gradations of history, so many ages. ...14

Then he asked Timothy Shelley whether he would believe an account of some fabulous creature that existed in a distant land, an animal whose organisms were contrary to all scientific or natural structure. In a like manner, he pictured God, the impossible Being, and put the question of credulity to his father.

...it is clearly therefore proved that we cannot, if we consider it, believe facts inconsistent with the general laws of Nature, that there is no evidence sufficient, or rather that evidence is insufficient to prove such facts.15

A belief in a doctrine such as the existence of God, he continued, fettered "a reasoning mind with the very bonds," which restrained "the unthinking one from mischief."16

The next year, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, dated January 12, 1811, Shelley was shown contemplating the possibilities of a creative Deity; here, however, he set forth a series of arguments which he believed to be proofs of a Creator of the universe. In this letter he said:

15 Ibid., p. 51.
16 Ibid.
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 it 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 correspondent 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 a 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 analogical to our situation. ...17

It appeared evident by what has already been previously noted in Notes on Queen Mab that Shelley had within these two years lost faith in his own arguments. The fluctuation of his opinions could not be more striking than were shown in this letter written just a few months before his denial of a God in the fatal Necessity of Atheism.

In Shelley's romance St. Irvyne, published in 1811, there appeared an account, that seemed autobiographical, of the disturbances which he was experiencing with the problem of God of Creation. Here he made Ginotti tell of his early ideas:

17 Ibid., p. 44.
This was my opinion at that time: I then believed that there existed no God ... I was now about seventeen: I had dived into the depths of metaphysical calculations. With sophical arguments had I convinced myself of the nonexistence of a First Cause, and, by every combined modification of the essences of matter, had I apparently proved that no existences could possibly be, unseen by human vision.18

This year following the first appearance of *Queen Mab*, Shelley repeated his opinions of the order of the universe in regard to a Creator, in *The Refutation of Deism*. This dialogue between Theosophus and Eusebes contained many passages which clarified the points he had set forth in the *Notes on Queen Mab* and, at the same time, revealed a development of his grasp on the subject. Theosophus was made to say that every design necessitated a designer; that only the work of a Supreme Designer, such as God, could have existed through eternity; that if the universe had been designed, contrived, and adapted, the existence of a God was made manifest; that the being of a Deity was also proved by the fact that there was motion in the universe, and that the phenomena of the universe indicated the agency of powers which could not belong to any inert matter.19

To these beliefs, Eusebes replied:

Design must be proved before a designer can be inferred...20

19Ibid., pp. 314-315.
20Ibid., p. 315.
The assumption that the universe is a design, leads to a conclusion that there are (an) infinity of creative and created Gods, which is absurd. It is impossible indeed to prescribe limits to learned error, when Philosophy relinquishes experience and feeling for speculation.

Until it is clearly proved that the Universe was created, we may reasonable suppose that it has endured from all eternity. In a case where two propositions are diametrically opposite, the mind believes that which is less incomprehensible: it is easier to suppose that the Universe has existed from all eternity, than to conceive an eternal being capable of creating it. If the mind sinks beneath the weight of one, is it an alleviation to increase the intolerability of the burden?

A man knows, not only that he now is, but that there was a time when he did not exist; consequently there must have been a cause. But we can only infer, from effects, causes exactly adequate to those effects. There certainly is a generative power which is effected by particular instruments; we cannot prove that it is inherent in these instruments, nor is the contrary hypothesis capable of demonstration. We admit that the generative power is incomprehensible, but to suppose that the same effects are produced by an eternal Omnipotent and Omniscient Being, leaves the cause in the same obscurity, but renders it more incomprehensible.

...The greatest, equally with the smallest motions of the Universe, are subjected to the rigid necessity of inevitable laws. These laws are the unknown causes of the known effects perceivable in the Universe. Their effects are the boundaries of our knowledge, their names the expressions of our ignorance. To suppose some existence beyond, or above them, is to invent a second and superfluous hypothesis to account for what has already been accounted for by the laws of motion and the properties of matter. I admit that the nature of these laws is incomprehensible, but the hypothesis of a Deity adds a gratuitous difficulty, which so far from alleviating those which it is adduced to explain, requires new hypotheses for the elucidation of its own inherent contradictions.21
That which is infinite necessarily includes that which is finite. The distinction therefore between the Universe, and that by which the Universe is upheld, is manifestly erroneous. To devise the word God, that you may express a certain portion of the universal system, can answer no good purpose in philosophy: In the language of reason, the words God and Universe are synonymous.

From what has already been shown, the enigma of the universe, in Shelley's opinion, was one incomprehensible to man. The idea which attributed the creation to a Deity did not contribute to its solution, but added, instead, greater problems even more perplexing and more incomprehensible. Shelley believed that the conception of a creative Deity as accepted by orthodoxy had arisen from the use of the word "God" as a symbol of the unknown causes of the universe. It was only the ignorance of man that had given birth to any ideas associated with the Deity.

Shelley expressed this belief in Queen Mab when he had the fairy say:

...then didst thou sum up
The elements of all that thou didst know;
...to an abstract point
Converging, thou didst bend and called it God.

and again later in the poem:

...but human pride
Is skilful to invent most serious names
To hide its ignorance.

22Ibid., p. 328.
23"Queen Mab," op. cit., vi, 94-5, 101-2.
24Ibid., vii, 24-26.
In his notes, he expanded this belief:

...but the pride of philosophy is unwilling to admit its ignorance of their causes. From the phenomena, which are the objects of our senses, we attempt to infer a cause, which we call God, and gratuitously endow it with all negative and contradictory qualities. From this hypothesis we invent this general name, to conceal our ignorance of causes and essences. This being called God by no means answers with the conditions prescribed by Newton; ...Words have been used by sophists for the same purposes, from the occult qualities of the peripatetics to the effluvium of Boyle and the crinities or nebulae of Herschel. God is represented as infinite, eternal, incomprehensible; He is contained under every predicate in non that the logic of ignorance could fabricate.25

On June 11, 1811, Shelley wrote to Miss Hitchener that the name of God expressed the unknown cause, "the supposititious origin of all existence."26 He expressed the same belief in a letter to Godwin, dated July 29, 1812, where he said:

I have read Berkeley and the perusal of his arguments tended more than anything to convince me that immaterialism, and other words of general usage deriving all their force from mere predicates in non, were invented by the pride of philosophers to conceal their ignorance even from themselves.27

It was due largely to the ignorance of man regarding the creation of the universe, together with his substitution of an incomprehensible God as the first cause, Shelley maintained, that had given rise to the gross misinterpretations of nature,

26Julian Works, VIII, p. 102.
27Ibid., IX, p. 11.
to superstitions and to falsehoods. Instead of endeavoring to analyze problems of the universe with at least an acceptable semblance of reason and truth, man had indolently assigned the solution to the falsities of miracles and superstitions. It was upon these distortions of truth and chimeras, Shelley believed, that theological and religious faith had been founded. Through the power of these sophisms, truth and reason had been destroyed. 28 He expressed this belief of the conquering force of falsehood in *Queen Mab*, where he said:

    Falsehood now triumphs; deadly power
    Has fixed its seal upon the lips of truth. 29

Shelley inserted a little poem in his *Notes on Queen Mab*, in which he made Falsehood declare:

    I have brought my daughter, RELIGION, on earth:
    She smothered Reason's babes in their birth; 30

    [In the notes, Shelley showed that all religions had depended upon miracles and prophecies for evidence of their authenticity. A miracle, being an "infraction of nature's laws," was but a chimera to dupe the unthinking mind. To suppose God

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28 *Queen Mab*, iv, 112-15: "...whilst specious names,
Learnt in soft childhood's unsuspecting hour,
Serve as the sophisms with which manhood dims
Bright reason's ray...."


of any nation. In future, when made, the composition of the
standing army will be based on a system that considers the
interdependence of its elements and the need for a rapid
development of new nations. The standing army will be
composed of two main elements: the regular army and the
national guard. The regular army will be responsible for
the defense of the country and for the maintenance of
civil order. The national guard will be responsible for
the security of the internal areas and will be
organized on a regional basis.
could break through the laws set up by nature, only to prove
the validity of His word, resolved itself into a contradiction
of the precautions which He himself had established. It was
more possible, Shelley maintained, to believe a man had told
a falsehood regarding a miraculous event than to believe the
harmony of nature had been violated, since there had been in-
umerable examples of men's lies but none of an infraction of
nature's laws.\textsuperscript{31}

Like miracles, prophecies stood in need of an accurate
consideration. As there existed no evidence that God had ever
conversed with man, either directly or indirectly, it was more
probable, Shelley pointed out, that an individual had fabric-
cated knowledge of future events after the "fulfillment of their
pretended prediction," than that he was truly inspired by di-
vine power. Although it was possible that a description of a
future event might be made, it did not follow that the Di-
vinity had revealed this foreknowledge to a person claiming the
name of prophet. The admission of the possibility of the
revelation of God to man destroyed all reason and "the founda-
tions of all human knowledge." Man's conviction as to the
validity of prophecies and divine inspirations had arisen, not
from common sense and reason, but from fanatical feeling and
passion. Shelley believed that the testimony of mankind was

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 813.
incapable and insufficient to establish the truth of either miracles or prophecies. How can that which is lacking in proof itself, he asked, be regarded as proof of something else?\textsuperscript{32}

In Shelley's early romance, \textit{Zastrozzi}, he showed that he had been contemplating the power of falsehoods over reason and truth. Here Zatrozzi, who was about to be put to death, acclaimed that he did not fear death, because he had arisen above the falsehoods and fears of erroneous superstitions.\textsuperscript{33}

Shelley's stand against miracles and superstitions was reiterated in \textit{The Refutation of Deism}:

\begin{quote}
Evidence of a more imposing and irresistible nature is required in proportion to the remoteness of any event from the sphere of our experience. Every case of miracles is a contest of opposite improbabilities, whether it is more contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, or that the story on which it is supported should be false: whether the immutable laws of this harmonious world should have undergone violation, or that some obscure Greeks and Jews should have conspired to fabricate a tale of wonder.\textsuperscript{34}

Every superstition can produce its dupes, its miracles, and its mysteries; each is prepared to justify its peculiar tenets by an equal assemblage of portents, prophecies and martyrdoms. Prophecies, however circumstantial, are liable to the same objection as direct miracles: it is more agreeable to experience that the historical evidence of the prediction really having preceded the event pretended to be foretold should be false, or that
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 813.
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 308.
a lucky conjunction of events should have justified the conjecture of the prophet, than that God should communicate to a man the discernment of future events.35

Shelley's denial of a Deity who created the universe and who was the first cause, was dependent upon, as has been seen, his conception of the nature of the mind and of belief. He attempted to show that there was no convincing evidence that proved God's existence. It was easier for man, he thought, to accept the idea that the universe was infinite than to attribute its origin to a Creator. The incomprehensibility of the nature of the universe led man to assign, in his ignorance, its creation to a being called God. From this misconception and falsity, superstitions, miracles, and prophecies grew up until they had become the very foundations upon which all religions were founded, destroying in their wake all semblances of truth and reason.

B. Shelley's Belief in a Pervading Spirit

As has been seen earlier in this study, Shelley did not regard God as a Creator or as a tyrannical Monarch. He believed, however, that He was a Soul of the Universe, a pervading and sustaining Spirit. He interpreted this Spirit to be the very essence of all existence. Since soul was not matter, he was convinced that his God, the Soul of the Universe, did not possess those corporeal weaknesses and passions that characterized the personal God of the orthodox doctrines.

In the Notes on Queen Mab, Shelley modified the denial of the Deity which he had made in The Necessity of Atheism. "This negation," he said,

must be understood solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit co-eternal with the universe remains unshaken.36

That he perceived God as an omnipotent and omnipresent Spirit that animated the universe and sustained all life, was evident by his description in Queen Mab:

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.37

37 Queen Mab, iv, 139-143.
He expressed this conception of the Deity elsewhere in his writing. To Hogg, he said in a letter dated January 3, 1811:

Before we can deny or believe the existence of anything, it is necessary that we should have a tolerably clear idea of what it is. The word "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 beneficient, actuating principle?" This is impossible not to believe in; I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think, that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample, are, in themselves, arguments more conclusive than any which can be advanced, that some vast intellect animates infinity.  

Three days later he answered Hogg's denial of such a Spirit:

I will consider your argument against the non-existence of a Deity. Do you allow, that some supernatural power actuates the organization of physical causes? It is evident so far as this, that if power and wisdom are employed in the continual arrangement of these affairs, that this power, etc., is something out of the comprehension of man, as he now exists; at least, if we allow that the soul is not matter. Then admitting, that this actuating principle is such as I have described, admitting it to be finite, there must be something beyond this, which influences its actions and all this series advancing, as if it does in an instance, it must to infinity, must at last terminate, in the existence which may be called a Deity. And if this Deity thus influences the actions of the Spirits (if I may be allowed the expression), which take care of minor events (supposing your theory to be true), why is it not the Soul of the Universe; ...?  

Again he wrote to his friend on January 12, 1811:

Oh, that this deity were the soul of the universe, the spirit of the universe, imperishable lovel! Indeed, I believe it is:...  

38 Julian Works, VIII, 33.  
39 Ibid., pp. 37-38.  
40 Ibid., p. 44.
To a man who once lived the way we were (and are),

...
In June, when he wrote to Miss Hitchener, he said:

The word God then, in the sense which you take it analogises with the universe, as the soul to his body, ...In this sense I acknowledge a God, but merely as a synonym for the existing power of existence. ...I do not in this...recognize a Being which has created that to which it is confessedly annexed as an essence, as that without which the universe would not be what it is. It is therefore the essence of the universe, the universe is the essence of it. It is another word for the essence of the universe.41

In a letter to Miss Hitchener dated December 11, 1811, Shelley identified this Soul of the Universe, the Soul of Nature, with the "Great Spirit" of the American Indians.42 And in his essay On a Future State, he spoke of it as "the mysterious principle which regulates the proceedings of the universe."43 There was an expression of the idea of the pervading Spirit also in a few passages in Prometheus Unbound and Epipsychidion, as well as in Adonais where Shelley said:

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 to stone, Spreading itself where'er that Power may move Which has withdrawn his being to its own; Which wields the world with never-wearied love, Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.44

41 Ibid., pp. 102-3.
42 Ibid., IX, 213.
44 Adonais, xlii.
From these passages in Shelley's works, his conception of God as an animating Spirit of all Being, an essence of existence, a pervading Soul of the Universe, was recognizable.

The soul, in Shelley's mind, was not composed of corporeal elements of matter. It was, instead, a metaphysical thing above all material reaches. He defined the soul, in a letter to Hogg on January 6, 1811, as "the most supreme, superior, and distinguished abstract appendage to the nature of anything,"\(^45\) and again in a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, June 11, 1811, as

...that unknown cause, which produces the observable effect evinced by his (man's) intelligence and bodily animation, which are in their nature conjoined, and, as we suppose, as we observe, inseparable.\(^46\)

Since soul, as he showed, was not of a material character, in a like manner, Shelley believed, that the Soul of the Universe, God, could not be conceived as a material Being. God was, therefore, a Spirit removed from frailities and virtues of the body and matter. He was not subjected to human passions or moralities. He was not

...a venerable old man, seated on a throne of clouds, his breast the theatre of various passions, analogous to those of humanity, his will changeable and uncertain as that of an earthly king, ...\(^47\)

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\(^45\) Julian Works, VIII, 38.

\(^46\) Ibid., p. 102.

\(^47\) Shelley's Prose Works, Shepherd ed., II, 380.
as Shelley asserted in the Letter to Lord Ellenborough. He made it evident in this letter, that he assumed God to be true to whom cosmic qualities and passions could not be attributed. It was degrading God, he maintained, to characterize Him as a Being of human desires; it was transforming Him into an earthly king of whom evil must necessarily be a part.\(^48\)

Shelley's belief in God, the Soul of the Universe, nullifies those charges against him, and which he himself had furthered, as to his being an Atheist. He had called himself an Atheist and had written a treatise on the necessity of accepting Atheism, but his use of the word appears to be an ambiguous one. His negation of a Deity, he said in the Notes on Queen Mab, affected only the God of creation. He denied only the personal Deity of orthodox theology. His disbelief has been shown to be based on the fact that for him there was an insufficient amount of evidence to prove His being. He did not deny the existence of God as much as he doubted it could be convincingly proved credible. There Shelley did not seem to be a follower of Atheism, but instead, of Agnosticism.

It was true Shelley wrote to Miss Hitchener on June 25, 1811, that Atheism lost its terrors upon an examination and it was not the monster it appeared to be at a distance.\(^49\) His use

\(^{48}\)Ibid.

\(^{49}\)Julian Works, VIII, 115.
of the term, he later told Trelawny, was a threat and a grotesque mask to frighten the foolish. Southey told him it was wrong to call himself an Atheist since, in reality, he believed that the Soul of the Universe was God.  

In the nature of his denial of the orthodox Deity alone could Shelley be considered as an unbeliever. His negation, amended as it was by his belief in the Pervading Spirit as God, destroyed the possibility of his being regarded as a strict adherent to atheistical disbelief.

It has been seen that for the personal God of orthodoxy, Shelley substituted his conception of God as the animating Spirit of existence, the Soul of the Universe. This Soul of the Universe, like the soul of man, was not susceptible to the material desires and moralities but existed apart from the very cosmic substance which it sustained. Shelley's claims to Atheism were over-ruled by his own belief in God as he had interpreted Him.

50 Ibid., IX, 242.
C. Shelley's Conception of the Origin of Good and Evil

To the creation of man's conception of God and to his faith in religion, Shelley attributed the origin of good and evil. It was through the theological doctrines of fear, he believed, that man was victimized with crime. In his mind, man had not inherited evil from nature, but instead nature had endowed him with the very germs of perfectibility. Through the power of will and the correct fostering of these "callible" elements, man could overcome evil and reach that state of perfection to which Nature had intended him.

Shelley maintained that the established belief of God as the author of all which was good necessitated, at the same time, His being the creator of evil also. This God had given the world, he said in the Notes on Queen Mab, not only "the fairest forms of Nature," but likewise those material elements that had brought the most misery to man.51 "To say," he continued:

...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 line, and another man made the incongruity.52

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52 Ibid.
Shelley had Ahasuerus declare that God of Creation placed man in the Garden of Paradise, but then:

Planted the tree of evil so that he
Might eat and perish...

God had, Shelley went on to say in his notes, inserted into man's heart and then had cursed him in turn for the results that this evil had accomplished. He expanded this idea

The Refutation of Deism, where he asserted:

God is here represented as creating man with certain passions and powers, surrounding him with certain circumstances, and then condemning him to everlasting torments because he acted as omniscience, had foreseen, and was such as omnipotence had made him.

The passage in Queen Mab,

The name of God
Has fenced all crime with holiness...

illustrated forcibly the responsibility for evil which Shelley attributed to the established Godhead. Practically all of Ahasuerus' declaration could be regarded as an accusation of the orthodox God as the author of crime. The earth shuddered at the very sound of the Monarch's voice, he said. The slaves to this omnipotent fiend had erected vast temples in His honor

53 Queen Mab, vii, 110-111.
55 Shelley's Prose Works, Shepherd ed., I, 300.
56 Queen Mab, vii, 27.
The page contains text that is not legible due to the quality of the image. It appears to be a page from a document, possibly containing typewritten or handwritten content, but the specific details are not discernible.
and had appeased his appetite with human blood. Drunk with the fear and the wrath of the Almighty, they had set forth to sow their God's name with their crimson hands by wiping out great empires.57

Through their conception of God, Mab was made to declare that mankind had plunged into a doomed limbo where

...an inhuman and uncultured race
Howled hideous praises to their Demon-God;...

and where

They rushed to war, tore from the mother's womb
The unborn child—old age and infancy
Promiscuous perished; their victorious arms
Left not a soul to breathe.58

Shelley believed it was/futile and colossal task to attempt a reconciliation of the misery of mankind with any conception of a just, and an all-good God; it was a task endeavored only by fanatical theologians. Common sense and reason, he maintained, could not be distorted into any scheme which vindicated the accepted God of all evil or conceived vice to be a voluntary action that lacked a first cause.59

The fear of God had been instilled in the heart of man, Shelley thought, by severe and barbarous theological dogmas. In this manner, religion came into its share for the spread of evil. He said religion was directly responsible for man's

57 Ibid., 113-126, 215-224.
58 Ibid., ii, 149-154.
servitude and his wretched state:

Religion! but for thee, prolific fiend,
Who peoplest earth with demons, hell with men,
And Heaven with slaves!

Thou taintest all thou look'st upon! 60

Mab was made then to portray religion as a boy whose hands at first were not yet stained with human blood. When he grew into manhood, his "frenzied brain" endeavored to change all those immutable laws which he did not comprehend; he attempted to destroy all persons who did not follow him into servitude. The world trembled and became afraid at the butcheries he committed. In his servility, he formed another fiend with whom he might inflict violence, wickedness, and destruction upon mankind that he might continue to hear the "horrent shrieks" even upon his "bed of death." 61 With his twin sister, selfishness, religion succeeded in crushing out "the harmony and happiness of man," 62 and sowing ignorance whose brood became

...at once

The cause and the effect of tyranny. 63

The poem, Falsehood and Vice, in the Notes on Queen Mab, pictured Religion as the daughter of Falsehood. She had not only wiped out reason, but had "loosed her bloodhounds" to feed

60 Queen Mab, vi, 69-72.
61 Ibid., 79-138.
62 Ibid., v, 79.
63 Ibid., 30-31.
I think this is an excerpt from a larger document, but the text is not clear. It seems to be discussing some legal or technical matter, possibly related to engineering or construction. However, due to the quality of the image, it is difficult to provide a precise and coherent transcription.
upon human hearts." She had spread victoriously, Falsehood's miseries wherever she had trod.64

Again Shelley continued his opinions that religion was the promoter of evil upon earth, when he said in the notes:

In fact, religion and morality as they now stand, compose a practical code of misery and servitude: the genius of human happiness must tear every leaf from the accursed book of God ere man can read the inscription on his heart.65

Similarly, when he wrote to Miss Hinchener on July 25, 1811:

Poor Liberty! even the religionists who cry so much for thee use thy name but as a mask, that they alone may seize the torch, and show their gratitude by burning their deliverer.66

To attribute the growth of evil among men to Nature, Shelley maintained, was false. He believed that man had not been cast by Nature into the mold of vicious and blood-thirsty being. He expressed this opinion in Queen Mab, when he said:

Let priest-led slaves cease to proclaim that man Inherits vice and misery, ...67

and

...every heart contains perfection's germ: ...68

To suppose, he wrote to Hogg on April 28, 1811, that "millions of bad are necessary for the existence of a few preeminent in excellence," was to establish a despotism of virtue

65Ibid., p. 799.
66Julian Works, VIII, 131.
67Queen Mab, iv, 117-118.
68Ibid., v, 147.
in which the big fish glutted his maw with the smaller ones. This in his opinion was equally inconsistent with nature.69

His belief that man was perfectible, and that by the will and by education this perfection could be achieved, was expressed in a letter to Hogg, dated January 12, 1811:

The calliblility of man preterite, I allow but because men are and have been callible, I see no reason why they should not always continue so. Have there not been fluctuations in the opinions of mankind; and as the stuff, which soul is made of, must be in every one the same, would not an extended system of rational and moral unprejudiced education, render each individual capable of experiencing that degree of happiness to which each ought to aspire, more for others, than self.70

In her Notes on Queen Mab, Mrs. Shelley said of the poet:

...the attachment he felt for individuals, and the admiration with which he regarded their powers and their virtues, led him to entertain a high opinion of the perfectibility of human nature; and he believed that all could reach the highest grade of moral improvement, did not the customs and prejudices of society foster evil passions and excuse evil actions.71

It was evident from what has been shown that in Shelley's mind, evil, the same as good, had arisen from the belief in a creative God. Evil had developed largely through the fact that religion regarded it as any act that might displease the Deity. In the hands of theologians, Shelley maintained, hatreds, crimes, and wars had been spread over the earth. They had

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69 Julian Works, VIII, 77.
70 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
assigned falsely the origin of evil as an inherent element supplied by Nature. Mankind is naturally virtuous and happy, but man has degenerated through the growth of certain evils. Eventually, these evils must perish of their own corruption, restoring humanity to virtue and happiness. At present, however, "man's all-subduing will" tolerates his own evils, which depend upon selfishness, superstition, lust, and an animal diet that carries with it the seed of moral and physical evil. 73

72 David Lee Clark, "The Date and Source of Shelley's 'A Vindication of Natural Diet,'" Studies in Philology, XXXVI(1939), 70-77.
PART II

SHELLEY'S ATTACK ON CHRISTIANITY

Shelley's attitude toward Christianity was one more forcibly adverse than that which he had to a personal God and to religion in general. At the very mention of the Christian faith, DeQuincey related, Shelley would plunge himself into a violent rage.1 In June, 1812, Shelley wrote to William Godwin, that his first doubts concerning the credence of the Christian religion, as a revelation from the divinity, were exerted by a contemplation of the writers and genius of Greece and Rome. He asked, "Shall Socrates and Cicero perish whilst the meanest kind of modern England inherits eternal life?"2 The next year in a letter to Thomas Hookham, Shelley said that his Notes on Queen Mab would "be long, philosophical, and anti-Christian."3

In Shelley's Memoirs of Jacobinism, the Abbe' Barruel4 protested against the slogan of Voltaire: Ecrasez l'infame! which, the Abbe' maintained, meant when translated, "Crush Christ! crush the religion of Christ." Shelley boldly employed

2Julian Works, VIII, 336.
3_Ibid._, IX, 57.
the challenge of Voltaire as the first of three mottoes on the title page of *Queen Mab*, and followed it with other lines from Lucretius and Archimedes. Walter Peck describes the poem as "a youthful diatribe against all the oppressions under the sun."6

The evidence of Shelley's aversion to the established religion of God and Christ may be considered from the standpoint of three different problems. First, he believed that Christianity was not based upon reason but upon blind and implicit faith; second, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God; and third, Christianity failed to follow the nature and doctrines of its Saviour.

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A. **Christianity Not Upheld By Any Rationalistic System**

In the *Notes on Queen Mab*, Shelley asserted that Christianity like other strong religious powers had arisen from and had been developed by mystery, deceit, and force, instead of by reason and persuasion. Had it been created and furthered by reasoning, Christianity would have enjoyed a position of distinction among systems; and unlike them, it would endure through a mere heat of enthusiasm to be infinitely established as the indisputable source of truth and faith.

The very existence of the Christian religion hung upon the frail thread of the belief in a miracle. Shelley said,

> It is an incontrovertible fact... that, had the Jews not been a fanatical race of men, had even the resolution of Pontius Pilate been equal to his candour, the Christian religion never could have prevailed, ...\(^7\)

It rested upon the acceptance of "miracles, prophecies and martyrdoms" just as all other religions. To the mass of mankind, it was necessary to present examples of supernatural experience or revelation as proof of the authenticity of any particular religious scheme. Shelley's antipathy for miracles, those infractions of the laws of nature to show divine authority, has already been pointed out where he was concerned with the superstitious belief in such demonstrations of all

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null
religious faiths. To Shelley, as has been shown, it was easier and more acceptable to believe that a certain man had told a lie to secure the favor and the belief of society than that any of the laws of nature could be violated. History presented, he said, innumerable instances where men had told falsehoods to promote their views and their powers, but no examples of the infraction of the laws of the universe could be cited.

That a man should be able to restore a dead body to life was not sufficient reason to consider him to be of divine origin. The Humane Society had been responsible for the resuscitation of many drowned persons, yet, because this work had been achieved without the veil of mystery, no one had regarded its members as producing the miracles of God. All natural causes of an extraordinary event, he maintained, had to be revealed before any supernatural power could be imagined.8

It "would be something truly wonderful" if a ghost could actually appear before man, but little faith could be assigned to the "assertion of a child that he saw one as he passed through the churchyard." 9

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8Ibid., p. 814.
9Ibid., p. 813: This statement is an interesting one in Shelley, for it seems he himself was the victim of similar hallucinations. While at Keswick with Harriet, and later in London, Shelley said he was attacked by unknown assailants. Earlier also, when he was spending a holiday at home recovering from an illness, he believed his father was about to send him to a madhouse. Cf. Dowden's Life of Shelley and Hogg's Life of Shelley.
Shelley said in his notes that the vulgar which had become persuaded by the mysteries which Jesus performed, as well as by His crucifixion and resurrection, were divine testimonies of God's revelation.  

In the 1814 publication of *The Refutation of Deism*, Shelley declared that Christianity was itself "one great miracle," in that its origin had sprung from the belief in the mysteries of Christ's birth and resurrection.  

"It seems less credible," he stated, 

that the God whose immensity is uncircumscribed by space, should have committed adultery with a carpenter's wife, than that some bold knaves or insane dupes had deceived the credulous multitude.  

To prophecy, Christianity had to descend also for evidence of its validity. Prophecy depended upon proof as much as did miracles. The Christian religion, like all others, had had its prophets to foretell the wonders of God's power and of His coming again to this earth in the form of man. It was necessary to receive a divine inspiration to predict a future occurrence, but there does not exist any accredited instance of God's ever conversing with man. That an individual was endowed with a power to describe certain events that would take place in the future, did not necessitate that he should be

10 Ibid., p. 811.


12 Ibid., p. 308.
regarded as one to whom God had revealed His orders. Lord Chesterfield, Shelley asserted, was "never taken for a prophet," although he perceived the downfall of "the despotic government of France" and the "radical and sanguinary revolution" that was to follow.13

Christians had laid the greatest emphasis upon prophecy, especially as regards the dispersion of the Israelites which Moses and Hosea foretold, and the coming of the Saviour as predicted by Isaiah. Shelley maintained the prophecy of Moses was such a vast collection of every possible cursing and blessing; and it is so far from being marvellous that the one of dispersion should have been fulfilled, that it would have been more surprising if, out of all these, none should have taken effect.14

Shelley believed the prophecy set forth in the third, fourth, and fifth books of Hosea was of such character that it "might apply in a hundred senses to a hundred things." As for the prediction of the coming of Christ in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, although it was more explicit than Hosea's words, it did "not exceed in clearness the oracles of Delphos." For Shelley, there was not a sufficient amount of historical evidence to regard the writings attributed to these "prophets" as authentic.15

14Ibid., p. 814.
15Ibid.
In The Refutation of Deism, Shelley continued this diatribe against the prophecies found in the Bible and accepted as valid by Christian believers.

I defy you to produce more than one instance of prophecy in the Bible, wherein the inspired writer speaks so as to be understood, wherein his prediction has not been so unintelligible and obscure as to have been itself the subject of controversy among Christians.

That one prediction which I accept is certainly most explicit and circumstantial. It is the only one of this nature which the Bible contains. Jesus himself here predicts his own arrival in the clouds to consummate a period of supernatural desolation, before the generation which he addressed should pass away. Eighteen hundred years have past, and no such event has pretended to have happened. This single plain prophecy, thus conspicuously false, may serve as a criterion of those which are more vague and indirect, and which apply in an hundred senses to an hundred things.

Either the pretended predictions in the Bible were meant to be understood, or they were not. If they were not, wherefore were they written at all? But the God of Christianity spoke to mankind in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing that might not be understood.

The belief in the Holy Ghost, considered by Christians as the source of divine inspiration, likewise fell under Shelley's denunciation. He pointed out that it was supposed to be in its extraordinary mode, "that which inspired the Prophets and the Apostles." In its ordinary mode, it was considered as the divine grace which enabled submissive minds to receive God's

16 Matthew, chap. xxiv.
17 Shelley's Prose Works, Shepherd ed., I, 309.
word. Persons were convinced they could tell the exact time and circumstance which caused the Holy Ghost to descend upon them.

It is supposed to enter the mind by other channels than those of the senses, and therefore professes to be superior to reason founded on their experience.18

He continued to demonstrate that reason was necessary to prove the authenticity of the bases of human knowledge. When a person was inspired by divine power, such as that of the Holy Ghost, and when religious enthusiasm swept away all natural proof, Shelley thought that then reason became superfluous. It was enthusiasm and ardent feeling, not a rational conception of truth, that had caused religious believers to die for those objects, were they gods or insects, whom they worshiped.19

Concerning this implicit feeling and faith that Christians put upon their miracles, prophecies, and divine inspirations, Shelley wrote in a letter to Hogg dated April 26, 1811:

...faith is one of the highest moral virtues -- the foundation, indeed, upon which all others must rest; and Christians think that he who has neglected to cultivate this has not performed one-third of the moral duties, as Bishop Warburton dogmatically asserts. The Christians, then, by this very faith, without which they could not be Christians, think the most virtuous philosopher must have neglected one-third of the moral duties.

19 Ibid.
If, then, a Christian, the most amiable of them, regards the best Atheist as far from bring virtuous, has not an Atheist reason to suspect the amiability of a system which inculcates so glaringly uncharitable opinions? Can a being, amiable to a high degree, possessed, of course, of judgment, without which amiability would be in a poor way, hold such opinions as these? Supposing even they were supported by reason, they ought to be suspected as leading to a conclusion *ad absurdum*; since, however, they combine irrationality and absurdity with effects on the mind most opposite to retiring amiability, are they not to be more than suspected? Take Christianity, lop off all the disgusting excrescences, or rather adjuncts, retain virtuous precepts, qualify selfish dogmas, yet I will allow that it would be consistent, when amiability does not know the deformity of the metal which it really is as we behold it; do all this, and it is a system which can do no harm, and, indeed, is highly requisite for the vulgar. But perhaps it is best for the latter that the amiable, the inquiring should reject it altogether.20

To Elizabeth Hitchner, Shelley wrote on June 11, 1811, that Christianity should be dismissed, because no argument could enter into it; that it was passion while Deism was reason.21

In the Letter to Lord Ellenborough of 1812, the year before the publication of *Queen Mab*, Shelley pointed out that the press abounded with pseudo-proofs of the authenticity of the Christian belief. These articles, he said,

...are replete with invective and calumny against Infidels, they presuppose that he who rejects Christianity must be utterly divest of reason and feeling. They advance the most unsupportable assertions, and take as first principles the most

20 Julian Works, VIII, 73-74.
revolting dogmas. The inferences drawn from these assumed premises are imposingly logical and correct; but if a foundation is weak, no architect is needed to foretell the instability of the superstructures.

Then he asked the questions,

If the truth of Christianity is not disputable, for what purpose are these books written? If they are sufficient to prove it, what further need of controversy?

It was force and coercion exerted by the Christian leaders that were responsible for the universal acceptance of its religion. By the lash of eternal punishment and the promise of heavenly reward, mankind had been driven into the credence of this faith. They were told that "if they did not believe in the Bible they would be damned to all eternity." Their failure to be convinced of the Christian tenets would bring upon their souls everlasting punishment.

Shelley expressed the fallacy of coercion in a letter to his father written while he was still at Oxford:

The coming of Christ was called ἀριττάται or good tidings; it is hard to believe how those tidings could have been called good which are to condemn more than half of the world to the Devil, for as St. Athanasius says, "He who does not believe should go with eternal fire" — As if belief were voluntary, or an action, not a passion (as it is) of the mind.

24Julian Works, VIII, 52.
Shelley showed again the futility of this conception in the Notes on Queen Mab, where he repeated his opinion that belief was not an act of volition and that man could only accept that which he thought was true. The Christian religion, Shelley went on to say, emphasized the system of reward and punishment, or merit or demerit, to which volition was highly essential, although contrary to the faculties of the mind.25

As an essential in the system of reward and punishment, Christians had attached great importance to the necessity of prayer. Supplication to the Deity was intended "as an endeavor to change the intentions of God, or as a formal testimony of our obedience."26 In an amusing letter to Hogg on May 15, 1811, Shelley gave his mother's, as well as his own, view concerning prayer. He wrote,

My mother is quite rational; she says, "I think prayer and thanksgiving are of no use. If a man is a good man, philosopher, or Christian, he will do very well in whatever state awaits us." This I call liberality.27

In both the Letter to Lord Ellenborough and the Notes on Queen Mab, Shelley declared,

Christianity is now the established religion; he who attempts to impugn it must be contented to behold murderers and traitors take precedence of

26Ibid., p. 813.
27Julian Works, VIII, 87.
him in public opinion; though if his genius be equal to his courage, and assisted by a peculiar coalition of circumstances, further ages may exalt him to a divinity, persecute others in his name, as he was persecuted in the name of his predecessor in the homage of the world. 28

Shelley's opposition to the miracles, prophecies, divine revelations, religious inspiration, and the Holy Ghost of the Christian faith has been shown to be due largely to their failure to include any degree of reason in their acceptance. That they were in themselves incapable of withstanding a complete rational analysis, and that they were themselves void of conclusive proof demonstrated their very weakness as evidence for that divine power which they were supposed to reveal. Miracles, prophecies, divine revelations, and the like, offered "but prejudiced and . . . superstitious bigotry," Shelley wrote in an early letter to Hogg (December 23, 1810), and were "inspired by the system . . . of believing all that we are told as incontrovertible facts." 29

29 Julian Works, VIII, 28.
B. Christ Not the Divine Son of God

Shelley's failure to recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour of Man, may be traced back to the disbelief in the orthodox Monarch God. It was not impossible in Shelley's mind to imagine the personal God of Christian conception as the Father of a mortal Son. Shelley's God, the Pervading Spirit, was not the venerable Lord of Creation. The Soul of the Universe could not be recognized as the Father of a Christ, a human being.

Shelley caricatured Jesus bitterly, the divine Son of the Deity, in the Ahasuerus episode of Queen Mab. When the murderer (DeQuincey presumed him to Moses) cried to God for mercy, that this earth might be spared from wrath and mockery, God replied,

One way remains:
I will beget a Son, and he shall bear
The sins of all the world; He shall arise
In an unnoticed corner of the earth,
And there shall die upon a cross, and purge
The universal crime; so that the few
On whom my grace descends, those who are marked
As vessels to the honor of their God,
May credit this strange sacrifice, and save
Their souls alive. Millions shall live and die;
Who ne'er shall call upon their Saviour's name,
But unredeemed, go to the gaping grave, ...

30 DeQuincey, op. cit., XI, 357.
31 Queen Mab, vii, 134-145.
The Redeemer appeared on earth,

...the Incarnate came; humbly He came
Veiling his horrible Godhead in the shape
Of man, scorned by the world, his name unheard,
Save by the rabble of his native town,
Even as a parish demogogue.\(^{32}\)

Although Christ taught the semblance of "justice, truth and peace,"\(^{33}\) his multitudes were kindled with "quenchless flames of zeal."\(^{34}\) The Wandering Jew was made to describe the crucifixion where he was reviled and cursed by Jesus even when the Condemned One was on the cross.

At length his moral frame was led to death.
I stood beside him; on the torturing cross
No pain assailed his unterrestrial sense;
And yet he groaned. Indignantly I summed
The massacres and miseries which his name
Had sanctioned in my country, and I cried,
"Go! go!" in mockery.
A smile of godlike malice reillumed
His fading lineaments. --- "I go," he cried,
"But thou shalt wander o'er the unquiet earth
Eternally."\(^{35}\)

In the Notes on Queen Mab, Shelley again told the story of Jesus as it is presented in the Bible; how God, four thousand years after the creation of the world,

engenered with the betrothed wife of a carpenter in Judea (whose virginity was nevertheless uninjured), and begat a son, whose name was Jesus Christ; and who was crucified and died, in order that no more men might be devoted to hell-fire, He bearing the burthen of His Father's displeasure by proxy.\(^{36}\)

\(^{32}\)Ibid., 163-167.

\(^{33}\)Ibid., 168.

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 170.

\(^{35}\)Ibid., 173-163.

This story, Shelley went on to say, was handed down through the ages, meeting with "the reveries of Plato and the reasonings of Aristotle," all the time-acquiring "force and extent, until the divinity of Jesus became a dogma, which to dispute was death, which to doubt was infamy."37

The account of Jesus's sacrifice as recorded in the Scriptures, was responsible for the confusion of Christ with the God to whose honor he died. Shelley drew a distinction between the characters of this Divine Christ and Christ the Man. The Saviour, he pointed out, was an arch hypocrite, who called himself a god of peace and mercy, while with "His blood-red hand" He laid waste to the earth, having planned this stroke of "desolation from eternity."38

It is possible that Shelley had this Son of God in mind when he wrote earlier in Queen Mab,

Religion! thou wert then in manhood's prime;
But age crept on; one God would not suffice
For servile puerility; thou framedst
A tale to suit thy dotage, and to glut
Thy misery-thirsting soul, that the mad fiend
Thy wickedness had pictured might afford
A plea for sating the unnatural thirst
For murder, rapine, violence, and crime,
That still consumed thy being, ...39

37 Ibid., p. 811.
38 Ibid.
39 Queen Mab, vi, 122-130.
The issue of...
For the belief in the divinity of this Christ, the Son
of God, the earth had been filled with persecutions and wars.
The faith of a God of peace and compassion had been inflicted
unto the heart of man by the point of the blood-stained sword
of the Christian religion. Those who would not submit to this
belief even in death were cursed by the flames of everlasting
torture. In this sense, Christ was to Shelley, responsible
for much of the evil of the world.

It has been shown that the miracles and the crucifixion
of Jesus, the Divine, shrouded as they were with mystery, were
not acceptable as convincing proof for Shelley of the Divinity
of the Christ. He stated in a letter to Hogg on May 17, 1811,
that Christ was not the Son of God.\textsuperscript{40} The Refutation of Deism
contained further evidence of his doubt as to the position
which the Christian religion had elevated Jesus. It showed a
development of his thoughts which he had manifested the pre-
vious year in \textit{Queen Mab} and the notes.

You assert that the design of the instances of
supernatural interposition which the Gospel re-
cords was to convince mankind that Jesus Christ
was truly the expected Redeemer. But it is as
impossible that any human sophistry should
frustrate the manifestation of Omnipotence, as
that Omniscience should fail to select the most
efficient means of accomplishing its design.
Eighteen centuries have passed and the tenth

\textsuperscript{40} Julian \textit{Works}, VIII, 90.
part of the human race have a blind and mechanical belief in that Redeemer, without a complete reliance on the merits of whom, their lot is fixed in everlasting misery: surely if the Christian system be thus dreadfully important its Omnipotent author would have rendered it incapable of those abuses from which it has never been exempt, and to which it is subject in common with all human institutions, he would not have left it a matter of ceaseless cavil or complete indifference to the immense majority of mankind. Surely some more conspicuous evidences of its authenticity would have been afforded than driving out devils, drowning pigs, curing blind men, animating a dead body, and turning water into wine. Some theatre worthier of the transcendent event, than Judea, would have been chosen, some historians more adapted by their accomplishments and their genius to record the incarnation of the immutable God.\(^{41}\)

It may be recognized that the Christ whom His zealous Christian followers raised to the Godhead; the Son of the Awful God; the hypocritical Redeemer, whose doctrine was peace, yet whose teachings brought persecution; the worker of miracles, whose faith mankind was forced to accept without any rational consideration,—this was the Christ to whom Shelley directed his bitter tirade.

As opposed to the denunciation of Christ the Son of God, Shelley entertained a more generally favorable opinion of Christ, the man. Jesus had made a vain endeavor to reform mankind and had sacrificed his life to overthrow the superstition and barbarity of religious tyranny. Shelley said, in his

\(^{41}\) *Shelley's Prose Works*, Shepherd ed., I, 310-311.
Notes on Queen Mab, he was one of the outstanding martyrs who had died for the cause of liberty; but then he added a note, characteristic of his fluctuating belief,

Since writing this note I have some reason to suspect that Jesus was an ambitious man, who aspired to the throne of Judea.42

Shelley's regard for Christ was an interesting one, in that it was never constant. On April 26, 1811, for example, he wrote to Hogg,

I once could tolerate Christ; he then merely injured me once;43 he merely deprived me of all that I cared for, touching myself; on earth; but now he has done more, and I cannot forgive. 44

The next year in the Lord Ellenborough letter, Shelley compared the fate of Socrates with that of Jesus, who had been crucified because he attempted to supersede the ritual of Moses with regulations more moral and humane ... a bigoted and ignorant mob demanded the deed of horror ... The meek reformer Jesus was immolated to the sanguinary Deity of the Jews...45

The same year, Shelley pointed out, in the Address to the Irish People, the complete tolerance, charity and benevolence of Jesus, recommended that mankind should endeavor to live in

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43 It was likely that here Shelley was referring to the cause which had broken his engagement with Harriet Grove.
44 Julian Works, VIII, 75.
45 Shelley's Prose Works, Shepherd ed., II, 381.
His example. Later in his life, Shelley's attitude toward the perfection of Christ's life became more and more clement. In *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) he depicted Jesus weeping over the intolerant faith which had arisen from his benevolent teaching.

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

The passage of the poem *Epipsychidion*, which appeared in 1821, contained the following lines characterizing the loving nature of the Christ,

... Jesus Christ Himself, did never cease
To urge all living things to love each other,
And to forgive their mutual faults, and smother
The Devil of disunion in their souls.

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46 Ibid., I, 231: "Anything short of unlimited toleration, and complete charity with all men, on which you will recall that Jesus Christ principally insisted is wrong..." and 236: " Nor, Protestants, hath your religion always been characterized by the mildness of benevolence which Jesus Christ recommended."

47 *Prometheus Unbound*, i, 546-557.

Shelley's most liberal praise of Christ was written in the last work published before his death, *Hellas*. In the prologue to this piece, Christ was represented contending with Satan and Mahomet. Through the spirit of the love of God, Christ was made to say that the universe itself would become one living spirit.\(^49\) Then in the poem, Christ was shown victorious over the powers of vice, servitude, and the tyranny of Mahomet, concluding with

\[...The \text{ cross leads generations on.}^50\]

In the Notes on *Hellas*, Shelley said that the popular notions of Christianity, represented in the reference above were likewise true in their relation to the worship they superseded, and that which in all probability they would supersede,

"without considering their merits in a relation more universal."\(^51\) It was Jesus Christ who rose when the deities of Asia,

\(^49\) *Hellas*, prologue, 116-119.
\(^50\) Ibid., 211-224. The triumphant cross has been explained as the cross of Constantine which led the Christians into battle. This interpretation appears erroneous. Shelley expressed a bitter disapproval of Constantine in the Notes on Queen Mab. In The Refutation of Deism he called the first Christian emperor a monster guilty of "the most atrocious crimes" and then proceeded to list the murders "this cold-blooded and hypocritical ruffian" committed. It is not likely Shelley could have had the battle cross of this emperor in mind when he wrote *Hellas*; it appears to be rather the symbol of the Christ persecuted and sacrificed for the cause of religious toleration.
Greece, and Egypt fell. In the final note to this poem, Shelley ended with a laudatory passage to the nature of Christ:

The sublime human character of Jesus Christ was deformed by an imputed identification with a Power, who tempted, betrayed and punished the innocent beings who were called into existence by His sole will; and for the period of a thousand years, the spirit of the most just, wise and benevolent of men has been propitiated with myriads of hecatombs of those who approached the nearest of His innocence and wisdom, sacrificed under every aggravation of atrocity and variety of torture.52

Shelley's denial of the divine inspiration, which Christians call the Holy Ghost, and his failure to accept the conception of Jesus Christ as the deified Son of God have been seen. With the rejection of these two popular beliefs, for him all ideas of a triune God, were, of course, shattered. God, the Pervading Spirit, the Soul of the Universe, could not be associated with two attributes in a trinity. The Holy Ghost meant to Shelley, a state of religious enthusiasm in which reason could not have been a part. Jesus was a human being martyred in an attempt to overthrow the superstition and tyranny of Judaical religion, but later deified by man. The trinity could not be composed of such elements which, for Shelley, were false.

52 Ibid., p. 475.
C. The Christian Religion Not in Harmony
with the Doctrines of Christ

Shelley expressed a particularly violent disapprobation
to the institution of the Christian church, with, what seemed
to him, its theological misinterpretations, and its bigoted
priests. In the frenzy to extend Christianity, the followers
had resorted to every terror of which all other religions were
guilty. Shelley's position as to the deification of Christ as
well as to the dependence of Christianity upon miracles, pro-
phecies, and revelations, has been indicated. That he should
have depreciated the institution which developed from these
fallacies, does not appear surprising.

The established church was characterized, Shelley main-
tained, by another spirit and followed other doctrines than
those recognized in Christ. Back of the church militant were
not the humane and loving ideals that Jesus possessed. Chris-
tianity, which its name indicated, should mean a religion en-
deavoring to promulgate the teachings of its founder, had be-
come instead a faith corresponding more directly to which
might be called Paulism. Thus, it was against this orthodoxy
Shelley rebelled rather than at the actual enlightenment that
Jesus had attempted to spread. "Justice, truth, and peace"
which He taught could not be disparaged, but the "quenchless
flame of zeal" kindled in the vulgar enthusiasts had given rise
to the gross misinterpretations of a false theology.

From the beginnings of Christianity, then a "weak, unstable and precarious power" in which peace was preached, Ahasuerus was made to declare, "burst the established church that practiced war." It "turned from the massacre of unoffending infidels" to the destruction of the Jewish race of which itself was a part and an offspring. In its mad victory,

No remnant of the exterminated faith
Survived to tell its ruins, but the flesh,
With putrid smoke poisoning the atmosphere,
That rotten on the half-extinguished pile.

"To sanctify their desolating deeds," the Christians had set up their militant cross, and in their crime they babbled of "love and mercy." The refreshing breath of peace and serenity respired by Jesus had been fanned into a "whirlwind of mad agony."

In Shelley's early correspondence, before the composition of Queen Mab, his youthful bitterness toward the Christian belief was displayed. He wrote to Hogg from Field Place on December 20, 1810,

53 Queen Mab, vii, 205-7.
54 Ibid., 208-211.
55 Ibid., 221-224.
56 Ibid., 228-243.
57 Ibid., 225.
- Conclusion

The conclusion section is where the main points of the paper are summarized and the implications of the findings are discussed. It is important to provide a clear and concise summary of the research, highlighting the main contributions of the study.

The conclusion should also address any limitations of the research and suggest areas for future research. This section can include recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, or future studies.

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I burn with impatience for the moment of Christianity's dissolution; it has injured me. I swear on the altar of perjured love to revenge myself on the hated cause of the effect; which even now I can scarcely help deploiring. Indeed, I think it is to the benefit of society to destroy the opinion which can annihilate the dearest of ties.

This letter was concluded with a violent exclamation that he would exert every force to put down Christian bigotry and intolerance. 58 He wrote again to his friend on May 17, 1811, saying that the majority of Christians were of that faith merely in name and "the only reason for their yet retaining their mummeries" was that of worldliness. 59

That Shelley did not believe the Christian doctrine as believed by its followers was in accord with the teaching of Jesus, was shown in a letter to Miss Hichener, June 20, 1811:

It is still my opinion, ...that Christianity strongly militates with virtue. ...Both yourself and Lyttelton are guilty of a mistake of the term Christian. A Christian is a follower of the religion which has constantly gone by the name of Christianity, as a Mahometan is of Mahometanism ... each of these professors, ceases to belong to the sect which either word means when they set up a doctrine of their own, irreconcileable with that of either religion, except in a few instances in which common and self-evident morality coincides with its tenets. ...It is then morality, virtue which they set up as the criterion of their actions, and not the exclusive doctrine preached by the founder of any religion. —Why! your religion agrees as much with Bramah, Zoroaster, or Mahomet as with Christ; Virtue is self-evident, consequently I act in unison with the dictates, where the doctrines of Christ do not differ from virtue, there I follow them ...

59 Ibid., 90.
surely you then follow virtue, or you equally follow Bramah and Mahomet as Christ. ...Your Christianity therefore does not interfere with virtue; and why? -- because it is not Christianity.\textsuperscript{60}

The evils of Christianity were related in another letter to this same lady on July 25, 1811, in which Shelley included the "energetic retaliations," of the Christians

...burning each other, the excommunications bandied between the popes of Rome and the patriarchs of Constantinople, their influence upon politics. ... War, Assassination, the Sicilian Vespers, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, Lord G. Gordon's mob, and the state of Religious things at present...\textsuperscript{61}

as substantiating evidence of the church's guilt.

Shelley pointed out in the Address to the Irish People (1812), the persecutions of both the Catholic and Protestant churches and urged more complete accord with the spirit of love and toleration that the man Jesus had attempted to establish.\textsuperscript{62}

In the Letter to Lord Ellenborough (1812), which was itself an accusation against the crimes and intolerance practiced by the followers of the Christian doctrine, and in the Notes on Queen Mab, the regnant and authoritative power of Christianity was shown to have been derived from the misery it had spread. He said,

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{62}Shelley's Prose Works, Shepherd ed., I, 225-239; 256.
War, imprisonment, assassinations and falsehood; deeds of unexampled and incomparable atrocity have made it what it is.65

In 1814, came The Refutation of Deism in which Shelley continued to elaborate facts that showed the barbarous ambition of the Christians to extend their systems over the earth. He said in this dialogue:

During the period which elapsed between the removal of the seat of the empire to Constantinople in 328, and its capture by the Turks in 1453, what salutary influence did Christianity exercise upon that world which it was intended to enlighten? Never before was Europe the theatre of such ceaseless and sanguinary wars; never were the people so brutalized by ignorance and debased by slavery.

I will admit that one prediction of Jesus Christ has been indisputably fulfilled. I come not to bring peace upon earth, but a sword. Christianity indeed has equalled Judaism in the atrocities, and exceeded it in the extent of its desolation. Eleven millions of men, women, and children, have been killed in battle, butchered in their sleep, burned to death at public festivals of sacrifice, poisoned, tortured, assassinated, and pillaged in the spirit of the Religion of Peace, and for the glory of the most merciful God.

In vain will you tell me that these terrible effects flow not from Christianity, but from the abuse of it. No such excuse will avail to palliate the enormities of a religion pretended to be divine.64

63 Ibid., II, 381.
64 Ibid., I, 304-5.
The conquest of Christianity had succeeded in the exterminating, Shelley wrote to Peacock from Naples as late as January 26, 1819, the final traces of the Greek civilization that was dear to him.\textsuperscript{65}

Numerous passages in \textit{Queen Mab} and the notes demonstrated Shelley's aversion to the exercise of priestcraft. The clergy was composed of hypocrites who prayed, cursed, and deceived.\textsuperscript{66} Together with kings and statesmen, they had been responsible for wars\textsuperscript{67} as well as for poisoning "desolate society" with vice.\textsuperscript{68} They upheld a God and a Saviour of Peace, while their hands were still red with the human blood they had shed.\textsuperscript{69} The princes of the church had sanctioned persecution by the falsity of a future reward for man.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., II, 275: "...but for the Christian religion, which put the finishing stroke on the ancient system; but for those changes that conducted Athens to its ruins, ---to what an eminence might not humanity have arrived!"

\textsuperscript{66 - 67} \textit{Queen Mab}, ii, 179-81: "Where Cicero and Antoninus lived,
A cowled and hypocritical monk
Prays, curses and deceives."

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., iv, 104-7.

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid., vii, 43-45.

...
The trade of the clergy was one of falsehood grown rich from "the earnings of the poor." 71 Gold was its only god and with it even "the very light of Heaven" 72 and "the name of God" was bargained. 73 The tyranny priesthood had set up made Christians slaves for its own luxury. 74

Priestcraft had developed an institution as tyrannous as that of monarchs. It has sponsored, as has been seen, innumerable barbarities that could not be regarded in harmony with Christ's doctrines; it had exercised gross deceptions, and it had made religion an act of commerce rather than one of salvation. It was not surprising, therefore, that Shelley should have attacked such an institution with its ludicrous dogmas that spread vice and servitude wherever it had penetrated.

Chauncey Brewster Tinker in commenting on Shelley and his times in the Yale Review 75 states that Shelley did not live long enough to get himself put to death by an indignant world, but it is easy enough to imagine such a fate overtaking him in middle age (had he attained it), for he was often in conflict with the legal authorities by promoting crazy schemes to make things or persons or society different or happier. Men have been put out of the way for lesser offenses than these. 76

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71 Queen Mab, iv, 237-9. 72 Ibid., v, 177-8. 73 Ibid., viii, 186. 74 Ibid., 177-181. 75 Chauncey Brewster Tinker, "Shelley Once More," Yale Review, XXXI (1941), 89.
virtues of Shelley stand out," Sister Anna Mercedes observes, "and these are touchstones of Christianity: unworldliness and self-sacrifice. His lack of commonplace practicality may have been tragic, but never could this 'world or her pitiful beauty' have held him."\(^{76}\)

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\(^{76}\) Sister Anna Mercedes, "Two Paths from Plato: Shelley and St. Augustine," Catholic World, CLIX (1944), 327.
PART III

SHELLEY AND THE DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY

As a solution of the problem of the universe and of religion, Shelley resorted to the doctrine of Necessity. Here he presented an interesting as well as an important belief in philosophical thought. In this doctrine Shelley found a rational account of his faith; it became a magic sesame with which he might open the doors of mystery and explore the laws of nature and the universe. Before him, Coleridge and Wordsworth had experimented with Necessitarianism only to drop it with scorched fingers. Wordsworth once said to a young student of the Temple: "Throw away your books of chemistry and read Godwin on Necessity." Yet, this was but a passing phase of Wordsworth's youthful experience, for he soon shook off the influence and stood in the presence of Nature, 'a sensitive being, a creative soul.'

Unlike Shelley, Coleridge did not deem this doctrine opposed to the institution of Christianity. Philosophical necessity was simply another word for religious predestination, which again, in Coleridge's mind, was an aspect of unity—all things, in a predestined way, working together for good in the universe. In later years Coleridge recanted this doctrine and asserted his belief in Free-will.¹

¹Solomon F. Gingerich, "Shelley's Doctrine of Necessity Versus Christianity," PMLA, XXXIII(1918), 452.
Queen Mab, no less than Constantin Volney's *Les Ruines*, is a prophecy of things to come in the light of a new religion. Looking back from *Queen Mab* to the *Necessity of Atheism*, one can see that from the beginning the vital thought with Shelley was not Atheism but Necessity. "The doctrine ... abstruse and dark as the subject is generally believed," says Newman White, "forms a leading consideration in this poem, and is treated with a precision of demonstration, and illumined with a radiance of genius, far beyond expectation."  

How different to Shelley was that God of the Christian Inquisition and the omnipresent unfading Life, Necessity;—that Necessity that operates in health and disease, in happiness and in woe; that moves, guides, foresees each atom on its course, each flicker of light, each passion and purpose; For it is no heeder of praise and prayer, no lover, or hater, or favourer. It is unaffected by the joy or pain that thrills its passive instruments. Its temple is the whole wide world. There is no God -- no Creator of the world; infinity without and infinity within deny Him. Here once more in Shelley, Ahasuerus treads the stage, accusing Christ Himself of the vengeful spirit that had its long day in the history of his Church.

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2 L. Kellner, "Shelley's *Queen Mab* and Volney's *Les Ruines,*" *English Studien*, XXII (1896), 9-40.  
A study of Necessitarian ideas that Shelley expressed in *Queen Mab* falls into three parts: the first is the statement of his belief in the doctrine of Necessity as opposed to that of freedom; the second is a consideration of the direct sources from which Shelley derived his idea of Necessity; and the third is the prediction of the state of virtuous existence which the acceptance of this belief would bring.

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A. All the Universe Governed by the Principles of Cause and Effect

Shelley showed in *Queen Mab* the position that Necessitarianism occupied in the regulation of the universe, in the mind and action of man, and in the system of morality. It was applicable to the motives of the human being as well as to the realms of matter. In his belief, Necessity was the Spirit of Nature, the power that held great planets in their spheres, and caused even the "minutest molecule" to fulfill its task.

The first evidence of Necessity as the Spirit of Nature, expressed in *Queen Mab*, was to be found in the passage that described the journey of Mab's magic car as it moved through the innumerable orbs.

Spirit of Nature! here—
In this interminable wilderness
Of worlds, at whose immensity
Even soaring fancy staggers,
Here is thy fitting temple!5

When the Fairy Queen and the Spirit of Ianthe looked over the battlements of the Hall of Spells:

Countless and unending orbs
In mazy motion intermingled,
Yet still fulfilled immutably
Eternal Nature's law.
Above, below, around,
The circling systems formed
A wilderness of harmony;
Each with undeviating aim,
In eloquent silence, through the depths of space
Pursued its wondrous way.6

5*Queen Mab*, 1, 264-277. 6*Ibid.*, 11, 73-82.
Upon the earth all Nature was in accord, Shelley stated, with
the law of Necessity.

The golden harvests spring; the unfailing sun
Sheds light and life; the fruits, the flowers,
the trees,
Arise in due succession; all things speak
Peace, harmony and love.7

He said that a necessitated "Spirit of activity and life"
flowed through the world, unceasingly and steadfastly. Uncon-
quered by death, it guided the whirlwinds and tempests, it
strengthened health, it directed the lightnings.8

No atom of this turbulence fulfils
A vague and unnessitated task
Or acts but as it must and ought to act.
Even the minutest molecule of light,
That in an April sunbeam's fleeting glow
Fulfill its destined though invisible work
The universal Spirit guides; ...9

In his Notes on Queen Mab, Shelley explained further the
doctrine of Necessity. It embraced, he maintained, a universal
and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects, "in which no
part could occupy a different place than that which it did
occupy." "The idea of necessity," he continued,

is obtained by our experience of the connection
between objects, the uniformity of the operations
of nature, the constant conjunction of similar
events, and the consequent inference of one from
the other.10

7Ibid., iii, 193-196.
8Ibid., vi, 146-170.
9Ibid., 171-177.
Millions and millions of suns are ranged around us, all attended by innumerable worlds, yet calm, regular, and harmonious, all keeping the paths of immutable necessity.  

The same power of Necessity that ruled all physical worlds, Shelley said, was applicable to the motives and actions of mankind. The Spirit of Nature that permeated the Universe was found likewise in the human mind. He expressed this belief in Queen Mab, when he asserted:

'Spirit of Nature, not!  
The pure diffusion of thy essence throbs  
Alike in every human heart.  
Thou aye ercestest there  
Thy throne of power unappealable;  
Thou art the judge beneath whose nod  
Man's brief and frail authority  
Is powerless as the wind  
That passeth idly by;  
Thine the tribunal which surpasseth  
The show of human justice  
As God surpasses man!  

'Spirit of Nature! thou  
Life of interminable multitudes;  
Soul of those mighty spheres  
Whose changeless paths through Heaven's deep silence lie;  
Soul of that smallest being,  
The dwelling of whose life  
Is one faint April sun-gleam;--  
Man, like these passive things  
Thy will unconsciously fulfillleth;  
Like theirs, his age of endless peace,  
Which time is fast maturing,  
Will swiftly, surely, come;  
And the unbounded frame which thou per vadest,  
Will be without a flaw  
Marring its perfect symmetry!  

Ibid., p. 792.

Queen Mab, iii, 214-240.
Like natural objects, man's mind was bound with those chains which were forged, Shelley stated, "long ere its being." All passions, actions, and thoughts were subjected to Necessity. No intrigue of tyrants, no feeling of shame in slaves, no conquered will escaped the influence of this power. All was caused by those chains which we feel, but cannot see.

In applying the doctrine of Necessity to man, Shelley said in his notes, that what cause was to effect in matter, motive was to voluntary action in the human mind. From an ignorance "of the antecedents and consequents," had arisen, he maintained, the illusion of chance in the material universe and liberty in the mind.

Shelley believed that man was impelled by the chain of causes or motives, generated at his birth, to act precisely as he did act and to think just what he did think. The human mind could not be considered as an object of reason and science if the doctrine of Necessity were not true. Were it false, Shelley went on to say, "all knowledge would be vague and undeterminate;" from like causes like effects could not be expected, and the most powerful motive would not direct conduct. With the acceptance of the doctrine, however, effects and conducts were determined by similar circumstances and motives.

13 Ibid., iv, 134-5.
14 Ibid., vi, 181-196.
Just as the chemist could predict what the mixture of certain substances would produce, so the moral philosopher could determine conduct from certain motives.

Because the mind was not conscious of the relation of cause and effect, disputes had arisen against the domination of Necessity over the mind. All actions of the will had, Shelley said, "a regular conjunction with circumstances and characters." "The idea of liberty applied metaphysically to the will," had sprung from a misinterpretation of the word "power." Power, in Shelley's definition, was that which "could produce any given effect" and applied to the mind as well as to physical science. The advocates of free-will, Shelley believed assert that the will has the power of refusing to be determined by the strongest motive; but the strongest motive is that which, overcoming all others, ultimately prevails; this assertion therefore amounts to a denial of the will being ultimately determined by that motive which does determine it, which is absurd.15

"Let the influencing motive," Shelley said in The Refutation of Deism, "present to the mind of any person be given, and the knowledge of his subsequent conduct will result."16

The position of Necessity in both physical and mental spheres as stated in this essay showed scarcely any modification of

16 Shelley's Prose Works, Shepherd ed., I, 319.
those ideas he had expressed the year before in *Queen Mab* and the notes.

When the belief in the orthodox God had been overthrown, Shelley stated that the Spirit of Nature would still remain immutable. Its shrine

> Where pain and pleasure, good and evil join,
> To do the will of strong necessity,

would endure through the interminable floods and storms of time forever undestroyed.17

The doctrine of Necessity confirmed for Shelley the negation of creation and of the accepted God. Every link in the chain of nature reflected a denial of creation and bespoke the infinite law of Necessity,18 which tended to introduce a great change into the established notions of morality, and utterly to destroy religion:

> 'Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,
> Necessity! thou mother of the world!
> Unlike the God of human error, thou
> Requires no prayers or praises; ...'19

Shelley derived many of his ideas from William Godwin's *Political Justice*. It is interesting to note how Shelley echoes Godwin's very words in many instances. In *Political Justice* we read:

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17 *Queen Mab*, vi, 220-238.
He who affirms that all actions are necessary, means, that if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not in any moment of his existence have acted otherwise than he has acted.20

A sort of corollary to this doctrine is Shelley's theory that there is no creative mind in the universe. The negation in Queen Mab, "there is no God," Shelley hastens to explain in the notes, must be understood as affecting solely a creative Deity, and that the hypothesis of a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe remains unshaken. This Spirit, which has existed from all eternity, and from which flows all life, has no power to make things. That it created the world is pure superstition, Shelley maintains, and the creature of this superstition is the God of the popular religion. This superstition arose when

...Some moon-struck sophist stood
Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown
Fill Heaven and darken Earth, and in such mood
The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,
His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown;
And 'twere an innocent dream, but that a faith
Nursed by fear's dew of poison grows thereon...21

This principle of Necessity, or Soul of the Universe, is rendered in terms of Beauty in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, written in 1816. Though Shelley's conception of Beauty in its

21 The Revolt of Islam, viii, stanza vi.
purely intellectual aspect is certainly influenced by Plato's Beauty as Idea, yet he conceives Beauty as a spirit that can hardly be distinguished from the Spirit of Nature in \textit{Queen Mab}.

For the Necessitarian, the system of reward and punishment set up by morals and theology was a mere attempt at disturbing a line of conduct. The doctrine of Necessity did not, according to Shelley, diminish the "disapprobation of vice," although it taught there was neither good nor evil in the universe, "otherwise than as the events to which we apply these epithets have relation to our mode of being."

This Necessitarian might feel a hatred or contempt for a criminal; he did not, however, desire to do him bodily harm as Shelley believed moralists did. The Necessitarian looks with an elevated and dreadful composure upon the links of the universal chain, while "cowardice, curiosity, and inconsistency" only assail him "in proportion to the feebleness and indistinctness" with which he has "perceived and rejected the delusions of free-will."\textsuperscript{23}

Applying the doctrine of Necessity to morality and religion, Shelley defined religion as "the perception of the relation in which we stand to the principle of the universe."

\textsuperscript{22}Cf. L. Winstanley's "Platonism in Shelley," \textit{Essays and Studies}, IV, 1913.

Any such relation depended upon the acceptance of the principle of the universe as an organic being, "the model and prototype of man." 

From the very beginning the vital thought with Shelley was not Atheism but Necessity. It is necessary that every thought of the mind and every act of life be just what they are, that the mind believe only that which it thinks true, that rewards and punishments based on belief are tyranny, that no personal responsibility really exists; that, in short, Necessity governs all life.

Ibid., p. 801.
B. The Source of Shelley's Doctrine of Necessity

Shelley's prose note\(^25\) to *Queen Mab*, vi, 198 ("Necessity! thou mother of the world!") is generally supposed to be a redaction of William Godwin's "Of Free Will and Necessity" in the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*.\(^26\) Thus, H. N. Brailsford declares that "*Queen Mab* is nothing but Godwin in verse, with prose notes which quote or summarize him;"\(^27\) and such representative scholars as Ellsworth Barnard,\(^28\) Solomon Gingerich,\(^29\) and Walter Peck\(^30\) speak so unequivocably of Godwin as the source of this particular note that the phrase, "Godwin's doctrine of Necessity," has become a commonplace. As a matter of fact, not only is the doctrine of necessity unoriginal with Godwin, but Shelley himself drew as much from Godwin's source as from *Political Justice*. This source is Sections IV - VIII

\(^{25}\) Julian Works, I, 144-146.


.learned to realize, equivalent to modern use.

In the absence of..., it is often the case that the modern practice...

In the absence of...
The doctrine of necessity was evolved by Hume as an answer to the problem of causation. In developing his skeptical philosophy, he had attempted to find the foundation for our belief in a necessary connection between cause and effect. This connection, he said, is not discoverable by a priori reasoning. No amount of reasoning or analysis, for example, would enable us to predict in advance of experience the explosive qualities of gunpowder. An effect imagined in advance of experience, according to Hume, must be entirely arbitrary.

Godwin's discussion of necessity follows, in general, the plan of Section VIII, Part One, of the "Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," where Hume shows that the doctrine applies to the actions of human beings as well as to actions in the material world. Both Godwin and Hume proceed along the following path of argument: Everyone acknowledges that matter is actuated by a necessary force; the basis of this belief is the observed uniformity of events in nature, and the consequent inferences made by mind about cause and effect.

Shelley's *Queen Mab* and its notes draw upon both Godwin and Hume. Shelley's discussion of necessity is more fragmentary, more undeveloped, and less carefully organized than

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the longer discussions of Godwin and Hume. In his attempt to define the source of the idea of necessity, Shelley compresses following Hume's two paragraphs into two sentences:

Our idea, therefore of necessity and causation arises entirely from that uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; there similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other. These two circumstances form the whole of that necessity, which we ascribe to matter. Beyond the constant conjunction of similar objects, and the consequent inference from one to another, we have no notion of any necessity, or action.

If it appears, therefore, that all mankind have ever allowed, without any doubt or hesitation, that these two circumstances take place in the voluntary actions of men, and in the operations of the mind; it must follow, that all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of necessity, and that they have hitherto disputed, merely for not understanding each other.32

Shelley's condensation:

The idea of necessity is obtained by our experience of the connection between objects, the uniformity of the operations of nature, the constant conjunction of similar events, and the consequent inference of one from the other. Mankind are therefore agreed in the admission of necessity, if they admit that these two circumstances take place in voluntary action.33

Such a concentration of ideas is typical of Shelley's whole note.

Like Godwin and Hume, Shelley proceeds to argue that if the doctrine of necessity did not apply to human actions, there could be no science in human affairs. Much of the argument,

32 Ibid., pp. 97-98.
33 Julian Works, I, 144.
occupying Shelley's second paragraph of the notes, is couched in his own words; but in three instances he draws upon his sources. The following parallel is not found in Godwin:

**Shelley, Julian Works, I., 144:**

Why is the aged husbandman more experienced than the young beginner? Because there is a uniform, undeniable necessity in the operations of the material universe. Why is the old statesman more skillful than the raw politician?

**Hume, II., 101:**

Why is the aged husbandman more skillful in his calling than the young beginner, but because there is a certain uniformity in the operation of the sun, rain, and earth, towards the production of vegetables; and experience teaches the old practitioner the rules by which this operation is governed and directed?

In a second instance, Shelley asserts that "history, politics, morals, criticisms, all grounds of reasonings, all principles of science, alike assume the truth of the doctrine of Necessity." 34 The same four branches of learning, in the same order, had been listed by Hume, though not by Godwin, as implying the truth of that doctrine. 35 Finally, Shelley concludes his paragraph with an illustration which Godwin had borrowed from Hume:

34 Ibid.

35 Hume, op. cit., II, 106.
Hume, II, 105:
The poorest artificer ... expects, that when he carries his goods to market, and offers them at a reasonable price, he shall find buyers; ... A manufacturer reckons upon the labour of his servants, for the execution of any work, as much as upon the tools, which he employs, and would be equally surprised, were his expectations disappointed.

Godwin, I, 273-4:
... it appears that the most uninstructed peasant or artisan is practically a necessarian. The farmer calculates as securely upon the inclination of mankind to buy his corn when it is brought into the market, as upon the tendency of the seasons to ripen it. The labourer no more suspects that his employer will alter his mind and not pay him his daily wages, than he suspects that his tools will refuse to perform those functions today, in which they yesterday were employed with success.

Shelley, Julian Works, I, 144:
No farmer carrying his corn to market doubts the sale of it at the market price. The master of a manufactory no more doubts that he can purchase the human labour necessary for his purposes, than that his machines will act as they have been accustomed to act.

The third paragraph of the notes to Queen Mab explains, as Godwin and Hume had done, why many refuse to acknowledge necessity in the realm of the mind, while readily admitting its control over matter. The dominion of necessity over mind "is by no means obvious to a superficial inquiry," Shelley declares.

When the mind observes its own operations, it feels no connection of motive and action; but we know "nothing more of causation than the constant conjunction of objects and the consequent inference of one from the other, as we find that
the two circumstances are universally allowed to have place in voluntary action, we may be easily led to own that they are subjected to the necessity common to all causes." (Julian Works, I, 144)

The words which Shelley enclosed in quotation marks, but did not otherwise distinguish, are a slightly inaccurate transcription from Hume.36

It is sufficiently clear that Godwin borrowed his account of the doctrine of necessity from Hume, and that Shelley, in turn, borrowed most of his notes to Queen Mab from both. More important, however, is the different philosophical attitude taken by the writers toward their subject. In all three discussions, the arguments are identical; many illustrations are the same; and several sentences are reproduced exactly. Yet, between Hume on the one hand, and Godwin and Shelley on the other, there is a vast though subtle difference of philosophical direction. It must be remembered that Hume is a skeptic, and his doctrine of necessity is perhaps the most penetrating of his skeptical theses, for it implies that there is no rationale for any science. It asserts that the only basis of our ideas about causation is a custom or habit which knows no logic. We do not believe that a cause has a certain effect because the cause produces the effect; we believe

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36 Ibid., pp. 107-108.
because our minds act that way. The necessity of casual connection is not in nature, but in the constitution of our intellects. Ironically, Hume suggests that a wise providence entrusted our belief in so important a matter as casual connection not to the fallible understanding, but to unerring habit.\textsuperscript{37}

There is none of Hume's skepticism, however, in Godwin or Shelley. A hardened dogmatism takes its place. "He who affirms that all actions are necessary," Godwin declares, "means, that, if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not at any moment of his existence have acted otherwise than he has acted."\textsuperscript{38} Shelley's words are a distant echo:

He who asserts the doctrine of Necessity means that, contemplating the events which compose the moral and material universe, he holds only an immense and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects, no one of which could occupy, or act in any other place than it does act.\textsuperscript{39}

A discussion of sources would be by no means complete without mentioning the classical Latin scholar, Lucretius, whose \textit{De Rerum Natura} seems to have influenced Shelley's thinking in general. Many of the ideas expressed in this poem are re-

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 67-68.
\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Godwin, \textit{op.cit.}}, I, 263.
\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Julian Works}, I, 144.
iterated by Shelley in *Queen Mab*.

Lucretius' denial of the existence of a creative God is not unlike Shelley's rejection of such a Being:

But even granting that I knew not what are the first-beginnings of things, thus much at least I would dare to affirm from the very ways of heaven, and to show from many other facts, that the world was never made for us by divine power: so great are the faults wherewith it stands endowed.\(^{40}\)

The evil deeds of priestcraft which were committed in the name of religion, and which Shelley so bitterly denounced in *Queen Mab*, were recognized by Lucretius many centuries before.

One thing I fear in this matter, that in this your apprenticeship to philosophy you may perhaps see impiety, and the entering on a path of crime; whereas on the contrary too often it is that very Religion which has brought forth criminal and impious deeds: ... So potent was Religion in persuading to evil deeds.

You will yourself some day or other seek to fall away from me, overborne by the terrific utterances of priests.\(^{41}\)

Like Shelley, Lucretius advised man to submit to the laws of nature and the universe. For Shelley, Necessity, the Spirit of Nature, controlled all life.

... a tree cannot grow in the sky, nor clouds be in the deep sea, nor fish live in the fields, nor can blood be in sticks nor sap in rocks. It is fixed and arranged where each thing is to grow and have its being.\(^{42}\)

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\(^{41}\)Ibid., i, 80-104.

\(^{42}\)Ibid., iii, 784-788.
Shelley has assimilated his material with such skill that we need not contradict the fundamental truth of Bernard Shaw's conclusion that "Queen Mab is a perfectly original poem on a great subject."43

43 Bernard Shaw's remarks to the Shelley Society at its meeting on April 14, 1886, are given in abbreviated form in the Notebook of the Shelley Society (London: Reeves & Turner, 1888), First series, No. 2, p. 31.
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C. CONCLUSION: A PREDICTED STATE OF PERFECTION

Shelley believed that through the acceptance of the doctrine of Necessity, a more perfect existence could be attained. Necessitarianism would bring the downfall of misconceptions of nature; it would establish, he thought, a realization of the laws of cause and effect. By this acknowledgement, mankind would have a basic fact upon which to build a civilization that would ultimately reach perfection. This virtuous state could be attained by the enlightenment of man to the infallible laws of Nature. Man could not will, Shelley thought, to make definite reforms, but by the recognition of the causes and motives that compelled him to act as he did act, he could bring about a modification of these causes. Virtue and happiness could be brought to man only through the necessary changes in the environment of future generations.

In the eighth and ninth parts of Queen Mab, this future state of perfection and freedom was described. Through the preceding sections of the poem, Queen Mab had revealed to the Spirit of Ianthe the errors and destructions of past and present civilizations. Their ignorance had resulted only in misery. Then the fairy turned to the Future where Earth was no longer Hell,

and where love, freedom, and health would be given to mankind.44

44 Queen Mab, viii, 14-16.
She urged Ianthe to exercise her powers to reach this triumphant age:

O human Spirit! spur thee to the goal
Where virtue fixes universal peace,
And, 'midst the ebb and flow of human things,
Show somewhat stable, somewhat certain still.
A light-house o'er the wild of dreary waves.\textsuperscript{45}

In this ideal state, Ianthe would find

All things are recreated, and the flame
Of consentaneous love inspires all life.\textsuperscript{46}

Man's misery would be destroyed; his position would be altered entirely. No longer would he be joyless, fearful, or inflicted with "Earth's revenge." No longer would he be held in servitude, led in barbarous wars, or sold by priests for gold.\textsuperscript{47}

It was this future age of perfection that Shelley hoped for and predicted the acceptance of Necessity would bring. Through the modification of causes and motives, the resultant actions and effects, he hoped, would steadily change man's environment and, in the end, point to the perfect state.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 53-57. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 107-108. \\
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 134-186.
ABSTRACT

Among the great English poets of the Romantic period, Shelley was the poet of religious as well as social and political revolt. His mind was preoccupied, especially in the formative years of his life, with the subject of religion, and it is significant that the piece of writing which first attracted any considerable attention to him was the essay, The Necessity of Atheism, published in 1811 when he was eighteen and a student at Oxford. The essay is not only revolutionary in spirit, but it also reveals a mind precociously occupied with religious problems. The essay attempts briefly to prove nothing less than the non-existence of a Deity.

In the many letters Shelley wrote to Miss Hinchener between June, 1811, and June, 1812, inclusive, there is revealed a growing dislike of Christianity which was to burst forth in full intensity and power a little later in Queen Mab. This development of his hatred of Christianity is accompanied, curiously enough, by a growth in his views towards, rather than away from, the tenets of the Christian faith. He is willing to admit the existence of a Deity, provided one is able to believe in his kind of Deity.

It is the poem Queen Mab and the notes appended thereto, printed in 1813, that comprise Shelley's first sustained effort to express the whole of his mind.
PART I: SHELLEY'S CONCEPTION OF THE DEITY

There are three distinct aspects discernible in Shelley's conception of the Deity: first, Shelley's disbelief in a God of creation; second, his interpretation of God as the Soul of the Universe; and third, his views on the origin of good and evil.

Shelley maintained that it was easier to accept the idea of the universe as being infinite than to attribute its origin to a Creator. The incomprehensibility of the nature of the universe had led man to assign its creation to a being called God. From this misconception and falsity, superstitions, miracles, and prophecies had grown to such proportion that they were the very foundations upon which all religions were founded. This gross misconception, in all of its aspects, had destroyed all semblance of truth and reason.

Shelley's Deity was not a God of creation but a Soul of the Universe,--a Pervading Spirit. This animating Spirit of existence was, like the soul of man, not susceptible to the material desires and moralities, but existed apart from the very cosmic substance which it sustained. Thus Shelley's claims to Atheism were over-ruled by his own belief in God as he had interpreted Him.

Both good and evil, according to Shelley, had arisen from man's belief in a creative God. Evil had developed largely
through the fact that religion regarded it as any act that might displease the Deity. Theologians had falsely assigned the origin of evil to man as an inherent element supplied by Nature. Man, on the contrary, was made perfectible by Nature. Nature had endowed him with the very germs of perfectibility; and by the proper fostering of these elements, Shelley believed he could reach that state of perfection to which Nature had intended him.

PART II: SHELLEY'S ATTACK ON CHRISTIANITY

Shelley's attack on the established religion of God and Christ is considered in this section of the thesis from the standpoint of three different problems. First, Shelley believed that Christianity was not based upon reason but upon blind and implicit faith. Second, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God. Third, Christianity failed to follow the nature and doctrines of its Saviour.

Christianity, like other strong religious powers, had been developed by mystery, deceit, and force, instead of by reason and persuasion. Had Christianity been created and furthered through reasoning, it would have enjoyed a position of distinction among other systems instead of having its very existence hang upon the frail thread of the belief in a miracle. It was not impossible in Shelley's mind to imagine
the personal God of Christian conception as the Father of a mortal son; but Shelley's God was not the Lord of Creation. He could not recognize the Soul of the Universe as the Father of a Christ, a human being. The story had been handed down through the ages until the divinity of Jesus became a dogma, which to dispute was death, which to doubt was infamy.

Back of the church militant were not the humane and loving ideals that Jesus possessed. Shelley maintained that the established church was characterized by an entirely different spirit and followed other doctrines than those recognized in Christ. Priests had falsely interpreted the doctrines of Christ in their dogmas in order that they might govern mankind more completely. They had made the names of God and Christ mere articles of commerce that they might increase their own wealth and strength.

PART III: SHELLEY AND THE DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY

A study of Necessitarian ideas that Shelley expressed in Queen Mab falls in three parts: in the first is the statement of his belief in the doctrine of Necessity as opposed to that of freedom; the second is a consideration of the direct sources from which Shelley derived his idea of Necessity; and in the third, is the prediction of the state of virtuous existence which the acceptance of this belief would bring.
Shelley believed that man was impelled by the chain of causes or motives, generated at his birth, to act precisely as he did act and to think just what he did think. The same power of Necessity that ruled all physical worlds, was applicable to the motives and actions of mankind as well. When the belief in the orthodox God had been overthrown, Shelley believed that Necessity, the Spirit of Nature, would still remain immutable.

The idea of Necessity was by no means original with Shelley. For much of the philosophy expressed in Queen Mab, he drew widely on William Godwin's Political Justice. But neither were the Necessitarian views entirely original with Godwin. It seems that his source was David Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. To trace Shelley's sources a step farther, it would seem that the classical Latin scholar, Lucretius, influenced Shelley's thinking in general. Many of the ideas expressed by Lucretius in De Rerum Natura concerning the tyranny of religion, the denial of a divine power of creation, and man's place in relation to the natural law, are reiterated by Shelley in Queen Mab.

By the acknowledgement and acceptance of the doctrine of Necessity, Shelley believed that mankind could attain a more perfect existence. Man's misery would be destroyed, and his position would be altered entirely. In this ideal state, man would find love, health, and freedom instead of hatred, fear, and servitude.
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