

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY; VENGEANCE AS A VEHICLE FOR
PRESENTING HIS MORAL PRINCIPLES

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In an article published in the Boston Daily Advertiser on October 5, 1838, Andrews Norton wrote, "Of Shelley, perhaps, many readers have heard but little; for his works are not popular, and never can become so till religion and morality are empty names. He was an atheist and bitter infidel, and his conduct answered to his principles."¹ This statement by Norton is highly typical of Percy Bysshe Shelley's reputation during the nineteenth century. Indeed, Irving Babbitt in Rousseau and Romanticism writes of Shelley that "nothing is more certain than that the quality of his imagination is on the whole not ethical. . . ." ² And in Shelburne Essays Paul Elmer More argues that Shelley's character and poetry were perverted by the revolutions and by the romanticism of his age: "It is not that he was by nature base or sensual or cruel. . . . Nevertheless, there was some flaw at his heart, some weakness of overweening self-trust, which exposed him to the most insidious poison of the age, and in the final test left him almost inhuman."³ These

¹ Julia Power, Shelley in America in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), p. 64.

² Irving Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), p. 358.

³ Paul Elmer More, Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series (New York: Phaeton Press, 1910), pp. 8-9.

vicious attacks against Shelley, however, clearly overlook the fact that he was actually deeply devoted to a personal code of ethics. Although Shelley admitted that he tried to refrain from being didactic in his poetry, his moral principles appear in almost all of his writings, whether they be prose or poetry. The purpose of this thesis is to show, by references to three of his major poetical works, selected religious and philosophical essays by Shelley, and any of his letters which I deem pertinent, that Shelley intentionally used the theme of vengeance against tyrannical oppression as a vehicle for presenting his moral principles.

The organization of this thesis will be as follows:

(1) I shall use selected philosophical and religious writings by Shelley, including "Essay on Christianity," An Address to the Irish People, and A Philosophical View of Reform, to illustrate his moral conception of vengeance as this conception relates to despotic domination. (2) I shall make use of any letters by Shelley which apply to this thesis. (3) I shall explore the moral principles found in Prometheus Unbound as those principles relate to revenge and tyrannical oppression. (4) In The Cenci I shall discuss the conditions under which Beatrice Cenci felt it necessary to take revenge against her father, Count Cenci, and why Shelley, although sympathizing with her, held that she performed a physical act that was not wholly justified.

(5) I shall examine the moral principles presented in The Mask of Anarchy, especially as they relate to revenge and tyrannical oppression.

CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS

Shelley's "Essay on Christianity," generally held to have been written between 1815 and 1816, and published by Mrs. Shelley in 1859, is one of his most direct statements of his moral principles. Some Shelleyan scholars believe, however, that it first appeared as Biblical Extracts, which Shelley wrote in 1812. Shelley had written to Elizabeth Hitchener on February 27, 1812, that he had "often thought that the moral sayings of Jesus Christ might be very useful, if selected from the mystery and immorality which surrounds them; it is a little work I have in contemplation."¹ And on December 17th of that year he wrote Thomas Hookman that he would soon receive the Biblical Extracts, although the work apparently was never published.

Throughout his life Shelley contended that the "immorality" which surrounded Christ's moral sayings was Christianity itself. Thus he did not condone Christianity as beneficial to the moral edification of mankind; on the contrary, he insisted that Christianity is detrimental to man's moral growth. As C. E. Pulos points out in The Deep Truth,

¹Percy Bysshe Shelley, Complete Works, eds. Roger Inpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), VIII, 285. All subsequent quotations from Shelley's correspondence will come from this edition, which will be designated as Letters and will be followed by the volume and by the page reference.

"Shelley's hostility toward Christianity was primarily based not on metaphysical but moral grounds. . . ." ² Moreover, Shelley attributes the hatred in the world, which has plagued humanity throughout history, to organized religion. In an undated letter to Janetta Phillips in 1811, Shelley wrote, "As you mention Religion, I will say, that my rejection of revealed [sic] proceeds from my perfect conviction of its insufficiency to the happiness of man--to this source I can trace murder, war, intolerance. . ." (Letters, VIII, 89).

The "Essay on Christianity" is indeed a work of extracts taken from Christ's moral teachings. Here Shelley praises Christ, a man of "invincible gentleness and benignity," ³ for having influenced the morality of mankind more than any one man in history. Christ was born into a world infested with tyranny and slavery and dominated by materialism, selfishness, and hedonism. Though the doctrine of Christianity was perfect in its inception, Shelley says that Christ intended to restore this doctrine, which had been corrupted and distorted in the mind of man by an "evil Spirit" (p. 204). He implies that the "evil Spirit" sprang, at least in part, from the misinterpretation of Christ's doctrine by theologians, who

²C. E. Pulos, The Deep Truth (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954), p. 94.

³Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley's Prose, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954), p. 197. All subsequent quotations from Shelley's prose writings will come from this edition. Each quotation will be followed by the page reference.

have confused the "good and evil principle" (p. 207). Although Christ's critics often painted him as malicious and vindictive, or as superstitious and narrow, Shelley remarks, it is not difficult to discover that the true picture of Christ shows "he is the enemy of oppression and falsehood, that he is the advocate of equal justice, that he is neither disposed to sanction bloodshed or deceit under whatsoever pretences their practice may be vindicated" (p. 198). Furthermore, Christ taught that if a man hated his enemy, he should overcome evil with good, for in refraining from vengeance he would be heaping coals of fire upon his enemy's head. Thus Christ attacks the Jewish law "and absolutely selects the law of retaliation as an instance of the absurdity and immorality of its institutions" (p. 200).

Even though he was threatened and harassed by tyrannical oppression, according to Shelley, Christ remained steadfast in his determination to teach against revenge. Christ dwelled on the evil of revenge to the extent that "the absurd and execrable doctrine of vengeance," writes Shelley, "seems to have been contemplated in all its shapes by this great moralist with the profoundest disapprobation" (p. 203). Shelley frequently quotes Christ when emphasizing an aspect of Christ's moral teaching. An example is Shelley's use of Matthew V: 44-45, which he quotes, or rather misquotes, to reinforce Christ's disapproval of revenge: "'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you that ye may be sons of

your Heavenly Father who makes the sun to shine on the good and on the evil, and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (p. 203).⁴

In the time of Christ, observes Shelley, retaliation was regarded as the only cure for violence because it supposedly taught the injurer the folly of evil and thus served to prevent further evil. He illustrates this ignorant and often fatal conception by citing an incident which cost the lives of many people and the destruction of several cities. Once an Athenian soldier fighting with the Ionian army, which had assembled to declare the independence of the Asiatic Greeks, accidentally started a fire in Sardis; the entire city burned to the ground. The Persians then felt compelled by duty to seek revenge against Athens. They and several other nations attacked Athens, burned the city, and destroyed the surrounding vegetation. The Greeks' desire for vengeance in return dominated their love of freedom until the appearance of Alexander of Macedon. This tragic incident proves, Shelley argues, that revenge increases rather than diminishes the evil in the world. Jesus Christ, then, concludes Shelley, whose life overflowed

⁴The correct reading of these verses in the King James Version of the Bible is as follows: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

with compassion, benevolence, and forbearance, believed in and taught "that human perfection required the refraining from revenge or retribution in any of its various shapes" (p. 207). This statement, as well as Christ's other moral doctrines presented in "Essay on Christianity," parallels Shelley's own disapproval of revenge under any circumstance and his advocacy of love, forbearance, and forgiveness in the face of tyrannical oppression.

In Shelley's Address to the Irish People, written in January of 1812, the following advertisement was included on the title page:

The lowest possible price is set on this publication, because it is the intention of the author to awaken in the minds of the Irish poor, a knowledge of their real state, summarily pointing out the evils of that state, and suggesting rational means of remedy. Catholic Emancipation, and a Repeal of the Union Act, (the latter, the most successful engine that England ever wielded over the misery of fallen Ireland), being treated of in the following address, as grievances which unanimity and resolution may remove, and associations conducted with peaceable firmness, being earnestly recommended, as means for embodying that unanimity and firmness, which must finally be successful. (p. 39)

William Pitt, the British Prime Minister, was instrumental in getting the Irish Parliament, which was almost entirely Protestant, to pass the Act of Union on January 1, 1801. It provided for the unification of the Parliaments of Great Britain, with Ireland being represented in the British Parliament. The Catholics supported the measure primarily because they had been assured by Pitt that emancipation

would soon follow; but there was no emancipation, and for many years Ireland fought desperately and vainly for political and religious freedom from England. The Address to the Irish People is one of Shelley's attempts to inspire as well as to instruct the Irish Catholics in their struggle against British oppression.

On January 20, 1812, Shelley wrote to Elizabeth Hitchner, "I am now writing an "Address to the poor Irish Catholics" (Letters, VIII, 246). A week later he again wrote Miss Hitchner saying that the Address "is intended to familiarize to uneducated apprehensions ideas of liberty, benevolence, peace, and toleration" (Letters, VIII, 254). Just as the distortion of Christ's moral teachings by theologians led to mankind's oppression by an "evil Spirit," Shelley fears that some Protestants, upon seeing the title of his essay, will misunderstand its purpose and regard it "with a sort of hope that it may recommend violent measures and thereby disgrace the cause of freedom. . ." (p. 41). Moreover, he concedes to the Protestants that the Catholics were once a barbarous people and persecuted the Protestants. In one particular year during the Inquisition, for example, 30,000 Protestants were burned in Spain and Italy for heresy against Catholicism. And one bloody night in August of 1572, 80,000 Protestant French Huguenots were massacred in France by order of the Pope. Shelley defends the present-day Irish Catholics by saying that they are no longer hostile

toward Protestants, nor do they believe their religion to be more divine than Protestantism. Yet he rebukes the Protestants for thinking that, in order to redeem themselves, they must avenge their past injuries inflicted upon their forefathers by the Catholics. Can the Protestants argue against Catholic emancipation, Shelley asks, on the basis that they were once murderers, when they themselves are now playing the role of barbarian killers?

Shelley urges the Irish Catholics to remain steadfast in their religious beliefs and in their fight for religious and political freedom. A measure enacted by the British Parliament to ban Catholics from participating in that governing body, for instance, might prevent Catholics by force from taking part in government, but it does not actually take away their rights. "Besides," Shelley writes, "no act of a national representation can make anything wrong which was not wrong before; it cannot change virtue and truth. . ." (p. 44). Furthermore, no man will ever have need of resorting to violence in combating oppression if he relies on the principles of wisdom and virtue; and one cannot be wise, Shelley insists, without first being virtuous. Though we may have sympathy for those who advocate force, the employment of any method of violence is "directly wrong" (p. 51). According to Shelley, only intolerance and violence by the Catholics could keep them enslaved by the Protestant government, since "nothing was

so well fitted to produce slavery, tyranny, and vice as the violence which is attributed to the friends of liberty. . . ." (p. 52). Moreover, government itself as an institution, Shelley maintains, is evil; if all men were wise and good, government would cease to exist. Thus he advises the Catholics to remain wise and patient in the face of despotic oppression and recalls a particular doctrine emphasized by Christ: "Anything short of unlimited toleration and complete charity with all men, on which you will recollect that Jesus Christ principally insisted, is wrong. . . ." (p. 44).

Shelley admits that the Address to the Irish People is directed not only toward Catholic emancipation but toward universal emancipation as well. Thus speaking to all men who feel and think, he challenges them to abide by passive resistance when confronted with oppressors. He echoes the advice he gives to the Englishmen in The Mask of Anarchy when he admonishes them to "firmly, yet quietly, resist. When one cheek is struck, turn the other to the insulting crowd. You will be truly brave; you will resist and conquer" (pp. 54-55). Shelley concludes his Address to the Irish People with a plea for both the Protestants and Catholics to unite in a common bond of respect for each other's religious beliefs and to think of past injuries with a forgiving heart: "I earnestly desire peace and harmony: peace, that whatever wrongs you may have suffered,

benevolence, and a spirit of forgiveness should mark your conduct towards those who have persecuted you; harmony, that among yourselves may be no divisions, that Protestants and Catholics unite in a common interest, and that whatever be the belief and principles of your countrymen and fellow-sufferer, you desire to benefit his cause at the same time that you vindicate your own" (p. 56). Throughout the Address to the Irish People Shelley prophesies gradual Catholic emancipation. Although he did not live to see it enacted, the English Parliament passed the bill for Catholic Emancipation in April of 1829.

Shelley's A Philosophical View of Reform grew out of his concern over the political strife that beset England between 1815-20. On December 15, 1819, he wrote Charles Ollier, "I am preparing an octave on reform. . . . I intended it to be an instructive and readable book, appealing from the passions to the reason of men" (Letters, X, 135). And in a letter to Leigh Hunt on May 26, 1820, Shelley wrote that A Philosophical View of Reform "is intended for a kind of standard book for the philosophical reformers politically considered. . ." (Letters, X, 172). Strangely enough, the work was not published until 1920, one hundred years after Shelley composed it.

The work is divided into three chapters. Chapter One begins as a brief discussion of the upsurge of despotic states in coalition with the Catholic Church up to the fall

of the Roman Empire. The Catholic Church originated, Shelley observes in recalling his attack against theologians and organized religions he wrote about several years earlier in his "Essay on Christianity," when "names borrowed from the life and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposture, and a system of liberty and equality . . . was perverted to support oppression. . ."

(p. 230). Therefore Shelley accuses the Catholic Church of intentionally misinterpreting the doctrines of Christ to gain political and religious power for the purposes of enslaving the people. With the coming of the Reformation, the tyrannical rule of the Catholic Church over the people was at last effectively challenged, for the Reformation instilled in the people a strong and unquenchable desire for freedom. The eventual result was not only the rise of Protestantism but the establishment of the Republics of Holland and Switzerland as well. The cry for liberty begun by the Reformation reached its culmination with the American and French revolutions in the eighteenth century. Of the French Revolution in 1789, Shelley says the oppressed French retaliated against their tyrannical oppressors after a long and bloody period of slavery. Yet he refuses to sanction the method of their rebellion as he writes, "Their desire to wreak revenge to this extent, was in itself a mistake, a crime, and a calamity. . ."

(p. 235).

Much of the inspiration for these religious and polit-

ical revolutions came from such great philosophers as Lord Bacon, Spinoza, Berkeley, and Hume, who justified the reform movements on ethical and philosophical grounds. These political philosophers, Shelley asserts, attempted to restore the true meanings of Christ's moral teachings which had long been perverted. The undying efforts of these men have resulted in "the establishment of the principle of utility as the substance and liberty and equality as the forms, according to which the concerns of human life ought to be administered" (p. 234). Moreover, in A Philosophical View of Reform appears one of Shelley's most famous phrases, that philosophers and poets "are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (p. 240).

In Chapter Two Shelley argues persuasively for the necessity of reform in England. Chapter Three proposes how these changes might be accomplished. To Shelley, the ultimate aim of all reform is the "natural equality" (p. 252) of all men in relationship to their rights, not to their property. "That equality in possessions which Jesus Christ so passionately taught," writes Shelley, "is a moral rather than political truth. . ." (p. 253). Ideally, reform should begin within the Houses of Parliament. If the Houses of Parliament refuse to grant just reforms to the people, then a struggle must ensue. But the struggle can be "merely nominal" if the Englishmen unite in "an unwarlike display of the irresistible number and union of the people" (p. 259).

Shelley urges the people to resist passively even if the oppressors resort to armed force. In advocating passive resistance, he refers directly to the Manchester Massacre on August 16, 1819, which occasioned his writing of The Mask of Anarchy. Thus the true patriot will encourage the Englishmen to assemble in groups and protest peaceably. And "if circumstances had collected a more considerable number as at Manchester on the memorable 16th of August, if the tyrants command their troops to fire upon them or cut them down unless they disperse," Shelley writes, "he will exhort them peaceably to risk the danger, and to expect without resistance the onset of the cavalry, and wait with folded arms the event of the fire of the artillery and receive with unshrinking bosoms the bayonets of the charging battalions" (p. 257). The effect of passive resistance might very well be to convert the enemy because the people's determination to die rather than resist or flee would render him impotent and indecisive; in this state of bewilderment he would probably reflect back on the true nature of the oppressors and subsequently become an ally of the people.

Shelley ends A Philosophical View of Reform with a condemnation of those who incite the ignorant and uneducated to vengeance and who insist that revenge is an innate quality of man's nature: "There is one thing which certain vulgar agitators endeavor to flatter the most uneducated part of the people by assiduously proposing, which they ought

not to do nor to require; and that is, Retribution. Men having been injured desire to injure in return. This is falsely called an universal law of human nature. . . ." (p. 261).

CHAPTER III

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

Prometheus Unbound, considered by Percy Bysshe Shelley his greatest poetic achievement, was written in Italy between September 1818 and the close of 1819. Originally composing three acts, Shelley added a fourth and published the complete spiritual closet drama in the summer of 1820. While in Italy during 1817, Shelley had become quite familiar with the works of Aeschylus. His Prometheus Bound (fifth century B.C.) provided the foundation for Shelley's Prometheus Unbound. In Aeschylus' drama the protagonist Prometheus incurs the wrath of Zeus, ruler of both heaven and earth, for teaching man the arts and rudiments of culture; his punishment is to suffer eternally, chained to a rock and tormented by Zeus' eagle. Yet after three thousand years of suffering, according to a fragment of Aeschylus' lost Prometheus Unbound, Aeschylus reconciles the omnipotent Zeus and the omniscient Prometheus. This reconciliation occurs when Prometheus secures his release from Zeus by informing him of the divine prophecy whereby Demogorgon, the progeny of Zeus and the sea nymph Thetis, will soon dethrone his father and free Prometheus. Shelley, however, refused to accept Aeschylus' undignified propitiation: "But in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the

Oppressor of Mankind. The moral interest of the fable which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary."¹ To Shelley a reconciliation would be a surrender to evil, the "Oppressor of Mankind."

In Shelley's Prometheus Unbound the physical world exists as a manifestation of the conscious mind. Shelley depicts Prometheus as the father of Jupiter (Aeschylus' Zeus), the personification of all the evil civil and religious institutions in the world, which were conceived with the notion of benefiting mankind, but which, throughout the centuries, have become a tyrannical impediment to the advancement of social welfare:

And those foul shapes, abhorred by god and man,
Which, under many a name and many a form
Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable,
Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world. . . .

(III. iv. 180-183)

¹Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to The Cenci as found in Shelley: Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 205. All quotations from and associated with Shelley's poetry will come from this edition, which will be followed by the page reference or, where applicable, by the act, scene, and line reference.

Because of the omnipotence Prometheus gave to Jupiter, which he soon abused, Prometheus, who represents humanity or the mind of man, must succumb to the suffering imposed upon his very soul. Therefore, as retribution for Jupiter or, more correctly, for Prometheus himself for making Jupiter omnipotent, Shelley has Prometheus suffer three thousand years and ultimately regain his control over the forces of evil not by seeking vengeance against his foe but rather by his voluntary forgiveness of Jupiter. Thus Shelley has Demogorgon, Jupiter's son, who represents Eternity, overthrow Jupiter and free Prometheus, initiating the reign of the Kingdom of Love as Prometheus is wedded to Asia, the spirit of love and goodness in nature. According to Shelley's wife, Mary, Shelley "believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none" (p. 271). Man, not God, Shelley maintains, created evil through a willing conscience and can--and indeed must--expel evil by reversing his will. Shelley's major theological concern, then, is his belief that both the origin of evil and the possibility of redemption through love are the moral and ethical responsibility of man.

Greek classical myth has it that Jupiter became omnipotent after he, the usurping Olympian Gods, and Prometheus fought and defeated Prometheus' fellow-Titans,

then the rulers of heaven and earth. Although there are various views as to the true identity of Shelley's Jupiter, I contend that Jupiter is the manifestation of Prometheus' own weakness toward evil. Jupiter is granted existence and remains omnipotent, therefore, only through Prometheus' moral weakness. Moreover, he exists because of Prometheus' hatred of the very evil being he created; his vindictive defiance of Jupiter nourishes him with strength to endure his spiritual anguish. Ironically, however, Prometheus' hatred is actually the fetter that binds his mind and will to evil and also the eagle that claws at his soul for having submitted himself to evil. He is, then, "the wreck of his own will . . ."

(II. iv. 104). Thus Prometheus acknowledges, amid the pangs of psychological agony, his mental creation of Jupiter:

I gave all
 He [Jupiter] has; and in return he chains me here
 Years, ages, night and day . . .
 Whilst my beloved race is trampled down
 By his thought-executing ministers.
 Such is the tyrant's recompense (I. 381-383,
 386-388)

Furthermore, Prometheus

Gave wisdom, which is strength to Jupiter
 And with this law alone, 'Let man be free,'
 Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven. (II. iv.
 44-46)

Jupiter, however, disobeyed the law commanded by Prometheus and forsook the love of humanity as he sent

"swift mischiefs" (I. 274) to "blast mankind" (I. 275).

Under his reign famine, toil, disease, and death beset all living things:

Plague had fallen on man, and beast, and worm,
And Famine; and black blight on herb and tree;
And in the corn, and vines, and meadow-grass,
Teemed ineradicable poisonous weeds
Draining their growth (I. 172-176)

Thus for thirty centuries, Prometheus remained chained to an immovable rock in the mountains of the Indian Caucasus. Simultaneously, Prometheus' lover Asia, the embodiment of divine Love and the spirit of Nature, was exiled into an Indian valley; this separation symbolizes Man's divorce from Love and Nature. Consequently, during those thousands of years of torment, Prometheus cursed Jupiter and vowed revenge: "Heap on thy soul, by virtue of this Curse, / Ill deeds, then be thou damned, beholding good . . . (I. 292-293).

Jupiter is aware that Prometheus alone knows a secret "which may transfer the sceptre of wide Heaven" (I. 373) and, subsequently, free Prometheus from his enslavement to evil; therefore, he sends Mercury to obtain from Prometheus the secret of the "destined hour" (III. i. 20), the hour at which Jupiter is to be dethroned by his son Demogorgon. Shelley compares Prometheus' resistance to Jupiter to Christ's perserverance in not yielding to

temptation by Satan while he fasted forty days in the wilderness. Thus as Satan offered Christ dominion over all the world if he would obey and worship him, which he declined, so Mercury promises Prometheus a place in the heavens among Jupiter's gods in return for his secret and for his obedience to Jupiter. Moreover, as Christ refused to call legions of angels to take him down from the cross and avenge his suffering, Prometheus vows not to leave "this bleak ravine, these unrepentant pains" (I. 428) and abandon mankind to "Hell's wide gate" (I. 518). Angered by his failure to tempt Prometheus to submit his soul and will in prayer to him, Jupiter has the furies from Hell inflict upon Prometheus the most horrible mental tortures experienced by man: "pain, and fear,/ And disappointment, and mistrust, and hate,/ And clinging crime . . ." (I. 452-454). Shelley further likens Prometheus to Christ, whose faith has been shunned by mankind as his words became "like swift poison/ Withering up truth, peace, and pity" (I. 548-549), when Prometheus gazes at the emblem of crucifixion:

Behold an emblem: those who do endure
 Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap
 Thousandfold torment on themselves and him. (I. 594-596)

The furies rejoice further upon seeing "how kindred murder kin" (I. 573) until "Despair smothers/ The struggling world, which slaves and tyrants win" (I. 576-577). Furthermore, one fury observes that much of man's adversity is a result

of his victimization by ignorance and hypocrisy:

[Men] dare not devise good for man's estate,
 And yet they know not that they do not dare.
 The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
 The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.
 The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
 And all best things are thus confused to ill. (I. 623-
 628)

"They know not what they do" (I. 631), exclaims the fury, resounding the words of Christ. Prometheus agrees with the fury, but he also expresses similar emotions of pity and compassion which Christ felt for all humanity, feelings which the fury cannot understand. To the dismay of the fury, Prometheus' defiance of evil is even strengthened by the agony his soul endures. Thus the evil tyrant, Jupiter, has failed in his attempt to make Prometheus' will subservient to his own as Prometheus exclaims:

For, though dread revenge,
 This is defeat, fierce king, not victory.
 The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
 With new endurance, till the hour arrives (I.
 641-644)

Through his undaunting passive resistance to the evil principle, Prometheus abruptly forgives Jupiter at the beginning of Act I and echoes the proclamation of many ancient Grecian heroes--"I hate no more,/ As then ere misery made me wise" (I. 57-58)--amidst cries of "pain, pain ever, forever!" and "no hope! Yet I endure" (I. 23-24). Prometheus' suffering, then, causes him to repent his hatred of Jupiter and wish no living thing pain;

thus to the Phantasm of Jupiter he says, "The curse/ Once breathed on thee I would recall" (I. 58-59). Therefore Prometheus, who gave to Jupiter power "O'er all things but thyself . . ./ And my own will" (I. 273-274), has now voluntarily and unknowingly willed the eradication of evil from his soul and, consequently, from all mankind by his single act of forgiveness. Grown wise through suffering, Prometheus realizes that the only retribution necessary for Jupiter's tyrannical reign is not revenge but pity because evil is its own punishment:

For Justice, when triumphant, will weep down
Pity, not punishment, on her own wrongs,
Too much avenged by those who err. (I. 403-405)

Upon renouncing the curse Prometheus becomes, as Shelley characterizes him in his Preface, "exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge and a desire for personal aggrandisement . . ." (p. 205).

To Shelley only the dominant force in the universe could have been strong enough to bring about the moral reformation of the once "proud sufferer" (I. 245). That undefinable and infinite quality is Love. Until the hour of Jupiter's fall Prometheus, as humanity, could neither view nor understand the ultimate love except as a "shadow of beauty unbeheld" (III. iii. 7). At the moment Prometheus renounces his curse on Jupiter, Asia and Panthea, who

represents to Asia the shadow of Prometheus' soul by which she lives, are intuitively impelled to descend to the Cave of Demogorgon. Their quest signifies the journey away from the temporal world, toward the ultimate reality of Eternity. Just as Jupiter is the representation of Prometheus' own weakness toward evil, Demogorgon, Jupiter's son, actually originates in Prometheus' mind when he dispels evil by a conscious act of will. Most scholars also equate Demogorgon with Necessity, the one power greater than Jupiter that must inevitably bring about the defeat of evil and the redemption of the human soul. Although Demogorgon effects Jupiter's downfall as prophesied by Prometheus, he also serves to show his inability as Eternity, to answer Asia's questions concerning creation, good, and evil. Not only is Eternity unable to give cause for these mysteries, he cannot explain the existence of his own being because "the deep truth is imageless . . ." (II. iv. 116). The one question Demogorgon can answer is the hour when Prometheus shall conquer the force of evil pitted against humanity and Necessity. Divine Love, in the form of Asia, fulfills the prophecy upon that hour by releasing Doom whereby "Demogorgon's mighty law" (II. ii. 43) dethrones Jupiter. When Asia removes her veil and becomes transformed into the pure essence of beauty and nature, the Spirit of the Hour senses a change:

As if the sense of love . . .
 Had folded itself around the sphered world,
 My vision then grew clear, and I could see
 Into the mysteries of the universe (III. iv.
 102-105)

With the arrival of the "retributive hour" (I. 406), the axis upon which the entire spiritual drama revolves, the moral rejuvenation of man resounds throughout the universe. The ensuing marriage of Prometheus and Asia symbolizes the apocalyptic vision of a new heaven and earth; moreover, the wedding of mankind to divine love "made earth like heaven" (III. iv. 160). The reunion of Prometheus and Asia, then, represents the regenerating unanimity of a diffuse humanity as man is no longer divided against himself:

And behold, thrones were kingless, and men walked
 One with the other even as spirits do,
 None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain, or fear,
 Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows
 No more inscribed (III. iv. 131-135)

This paradise is timeless, perfect, and eternal. Nevertheless, although Act IV is a hymn of rejoicing over the conquest of evil, the idealist Shelley realistically asserts the possibility of "the immedicable plague's" (II. iv. 101) return to haunt humanity. Therefore, Demogorgon voices the possible future destruction of the timeless earthly paradise made perfect following the downfall of Jupiter. He speculates about the conceivable reappearance of evil and a time-controlled universe, thus making it necessary for Prometheus to struggle again with his conscience:

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,
 These are the seals of that most firm assurance
 Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
 And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
 Mother of many acts and hours, should free
 The Serpent that would clasp her with his length;
 These are the spells by which to reassume
 An empire o'er the disentangled doom. (IV. 562-
 569)

Shelley's four cardinal virtues, then, (line 562) are those qualities which enable Prometheus to endure long-suffering and, through love, overcome the passions of hatred and revenge, thereby breaking the infinite chain of evil; and they are those moral principles which would necessitate once more Prometheus' battle with and defeat of evil. Moreover, Shelley specifically emphasizes these moral precepts in The Cenci and The Mask of Anarchy. Thus Shelley has Prometheus consciously bring misery upon mankind and then redeem himself when his suffering and repentance generate the moral perfection of man as he begins to put his "evil nature off" (III. iv. 77). Moreover, Prometheus' love for man has made the "earth/ One brotherhood" (II. ii. 94-95). Therefore, because of Prometheus' compassion for humanity, in his Preface Shelley ascribes to him "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (p. 205).

CHAPTER IV

THE CENCI

In 1819 Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote his only human drama, a play entitled The Cenci, based on a Catholic family who lived in Italy during the sixteenth century. In this drama Count Cenci rapes his only daughter Beatrice, seeking to dishonor not only her body but also her soul. The vengeful Beatrice retaliates by initiating a plot that results in her father's death.

Some Shelleyan critics insist Beatrice killed Count Cenci as a vehicle of Divine Justice, and thus they hold as self-evident truth the statement by Beatrice that she "lived ever holy and unstained" (V. iv. 149). For instance, Ernest Sutherland Bates argues in his Study of Shelley's Drama The Cenci that "her act was a righteous act . . . but against her suddenly arise men who call this holiest act of hers a crime."¹ In Shelley: His Theory of Poetry, Melvin J. Solve states, "We may even doubt Shelley's statement that Beatrice was actuated by revenge. Rather she was vindicating God."² And Stuart Curran, in Shelley's

¹Ernest Sutherland Bates, Study of Shelley's Drama The Cenci (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), p. 73.

²Melvin J. Solve, Shelley: His Theory of Poetry (New York: Russell and Russell, 1927), p. 30.

Cenci, writes that "Beatrice is not simply an instrument of God's justice on earth. She is its embodiment."³

On the other hand, if only the humane aspects are considered, one is certainly impelled to sympathize with Beatrice for being the victim of an incestuous assault by her father. Shelley himself pities Beatrice; he admits that she possessed a compassionate and benevolent nature. On the other hand, because of her apparent ignorance of Christian dogma, Beatrice unjustifiably claims her retaliation against Count Cenci is divinely sanctioned. As critic Robert F. Whitman observes, ". . . we must not let our sympathy for her suffering or her humanity blind us to the fact that she is wrong."⁴ Shelley, too, implies that one's humanitarian nature has a natural propensity to acquit Beatrice of any wrongdoing although one's conscience cannot accept her act of parricide as justified. Thus he contends it is the emotional and psychological horror that pervades the incestuous act committed against her "with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification . . ." (p. 276).

³Stuart Curran, Shelley's Cenci (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 94.

⁴Robert J. Whitman, "Beatrice's Pernicious Mistake," PMLA, 74 (1959), p. 251.

Furthermore, if one considers the same God Beatrice says she worships, there is undeniably more truth in Shelley's criticism of her in the Preface to The Cenci. Here Shelley writes, "Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character . . ." (p. 276). Regardless of how much Shelley sympathizes with Beatrice, then, to remain faithful to his disapproval of revenge under any circumstance and for dramatic purposes as well, he is forced to present her as she appeared in real life, a tragic figure. Therefore, in paralleling The Cenci with what actually happened to the Cenci family some two hundred years before, he uses Beatrice's vengeful act against her father, which he felt was not wholly justified, to present his moral principles.

Count Cenci has grown up a violent and hateful man. During his life he has committed many crimes, including murder; but he has always bought pardon for his evil deeds from the Catholic Church. Vainly trying to excuse his ungodly motives, Pope Clement has justified his permission of Count Cenci's sins by having:

Enriched the Church, and respited from hell
 An erring soul which might repent and live
 (I. i. 8-9)

The Count's friend, Cardinal Camillo, rebukes him for sanctifying his "thousand unrepented crimes" (I. i. 54) under the false justification of the Church. Through the years Count Cenci has grown calloused to humanitarian feelings for his fellow man, even for his own family. His warped conception of his purpose in life is evident when he soliloquizes:

I do not feel as if I were a man
 But like a fiend appointed to chastise
 The offenses of some unremembered world. (IV. i.
 160-162)

This inhumane "fiend," then, feels that he has been called by God to purge the sins of a corrupt world. Beatrice herself long regarded her father's wrath as a necessary method of atonement for her family's iniquities:

I have . . . kissed the sacred hand
 Which crushed us to the earth, and thought its stroke
 Was perhaps some paternal chastisement! (I. iii. 111-
 113)

For many years Count Cenci has been content to kill and relish the dying moans of his victims, as well as the cries of their children. Not satisfied with physical torment alone, however, he has sought ways not only to inflict but to sustain psychological terror within the human soul. Thus while torturing his subject, he looks for:

The dry fixed eyeball; the pale quivering lip,
 Which tell me that the spirit weeps within
 Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of Christ.
 I rarely kill the body, which preserves,
 Like a strong poison, the soul within my power,
 Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear
 For hourly pain. (I. i. 111-117)

Now old and thinking his family wishes for his quick death, he vows to perpetrate an act "whose horror might make sharp an appetite/ Duller than mine . . ." (I. i. 101-102). Beatrice is determined to quell her father's hatred through love and perseverance, and for many years she lives the life of a noble and devout Christian; inspired by her belief that she is sanctioned by divine righteousness, she matures in spiritual strength and develops courage to bear the physical and psychological pain Count Cenci begins to inflict upon her and other members of the family. She echoes the words of Prometheus, who vows to remain chained to Jupiter's rock until he has sufficiently suffered for the "unrepentant pains" of mankind, when she says:

Nor will I leave this home of misery
 Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
 To whom I owe life, and these virtuous thoughts,
 Must suffer what I still have strength to share.
 (I. ii. 16-19)

Beatrice has been the only protector of her suffering family against the inhuman tyranny of Count Cenci. Lucretia, Beatrice's step-mother, praises her for her steadfast defiance:

You have ever stood
 Between us and your father's moody wrath
 Like a protecting presence; your firm mind
 Has been our only refuge and defence (II. I.
 46-49)

After learning that two of her brothers have died accidentally and that Count Cenci had prayed for and gloried over their deaths, Beatrice is still confident of overcoming her father's "tyranny and impious hate" (I. iii. 100) by "patience, love, and tears" (I. iii. 115) and by many "passionate prayers" (I. iii. 119) to God. Yet she begins to succumb to doubt and even despair when her relatives ignore her pleas for help and when Count Cenci threatens her with a "charm" that would make her "meek and tame" (I. iii. 167), Beatrice is frightened by these words; consequently, her faith in the power of love and forbearance begins to falter as she thinks it is perhaps better to die than to endure more suffering. Yet she is deterred from these suicidal thoughts by the resulting incestuous assault by her father. In his Shelley: A Critical Reading Earl R. Wasserman maintains that "the rape of Beatrice identifies Cenci as the human impersonation of the Jupiter of Prometheus Unbound, whose similar act of oppression is his destructive rape of Thetis" ⁵ Ironically, Count

⁵Earl R. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 86.

Cenci's rape of Beatrice serves to strengthen her faith in a God who permits evil, but will inevitably bring about the punishment of evildoers through divine justice:

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

(III. i. 100-103)

Therefore Beatrice is convinced that something must be done, "something which shall make/ The thing that I have suffered but a shadow/ In the dread lightning which avenges it" (III. i. 87-89). She assures herself and Lucretia that immediate action must be taken because she believes:

In this mortal world
There is no vindication and no law
Which can adjudge and execute the doom
Of that through which I suffer. (III. i. 134-137)

Her father's incestuous attack has, Beatrice believes, "stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul . . ." (V. ii. 123). Thinking her mind and body transformed and polluted by a "clinging, black contaminating mist" (III. i. 17), Beatrice therefore takes matters into her own hands and sets herself up as judge:

I pray thee, God,
Let me not be bewildered while I judge.
If I must live day after day, and keep
These limbs, the unworthy temple of Thy spirit,
As a foul den from which that Thou abhorrest
May mock Thee, unavenged . . . it shall not be!
(III. i. 126-131)

In her prayer Beatrice is conscious only of her physical body. She overlooks the fact that the spirit of

the Christian God is housed not in her body but in her immortal soul, which still remains spiritually pure even though her body has been violated by the physical act of incest. It is not the Christian God, though, who hears her prayer and directs her course of action; rather it is the God of her own warped conscience, now clouded by the "contaminating mist" of revenge, who determines retribution:

I have prayed
 To God, and I have talked with my own heart,
 And have unravelled my entangled will,
 And have at length determined what is right.
 (III. i. 218-221)

Moreover, Lucretia senses this change in Beatrice's soul:

Thou art unlike thyself; thine eyes shoot forth
 A wandering and strange spirit. (III. i. 81-82)

Notwithstanding incest as a crime by human standards, Beatrice has passed sentence on Count Cenci as a violator of divine law. To her, then, this inhumane act requires divine atonement; thus she arbitrarily sees herself as an instrument of divine justice and believes God has sanctioned her the right to take revenge against her father.

As the fabric of her once unscathed moral character begins to harden, Beatrice declares that she has no father and that her family should discard "as garments overworn/ Forbearance and respect . . ./ And all the fit restraints of daily life" (III. i. 208-210) which would now be but a mockery to her "holier plea" (III. i. 212). She never

swerves from her blind conviction that what she is doing is necessary and right in the sight of God. When Olympio and Marzio come to carry out Beatrice's plan to murder her father, she asks, "Ye know it is a high and holy deed?" (IV. ii. 35). And she assures Lucretia that "We do but that which 'twere a deadly crime/ To leave undone" (IV. iii. 37-38). After the murder she still does not sway in her religious conviction as she tells the assassins they were "a weapon in the hand of God/ To a just use" (IV. iii. 54-55). She has no sense of guilt nor fear of misfortune to come: "I could even sleep/ Fearless and calm: all ill is surely past" (IV. iii. 64-65).

All ill is not past, however, for Beatrice is caught and sentenced to die along with the other conspirators. Whereas Prometheus renounces his curse on Jupiter and, consequently, overcomes the domination of his soul by evil, Beatrice is intent on exacting vengeance against her father even at the risk of not only her life but the lives of others as well. Thus it is clear that she values her vain honor more highly than she does the lives of her family and fellow men, a selfish and totally anti-Christian view. Disillusioned and feeling that she has been unjustly betrayed, damned, and deserted by man and God, she cries out:

The God who knew my wrong, and made
 Our speedy act the angel of His wrath,
 Seems . . . to have abandoned us. (V. iii. 113-115)

She begins to doubt her faith in God, in divine justice, and in truth. Although even to death Beatrice clings to the belief that she "lived ever holy and unstained," the Christian God Beatrice thinks she has obeyed is actually the God of her own blind invention, a God of hate and revenge rather than one of love and forgiveness who conforms to her own misconstrued ways of comprehending truth and justice. She herself admits that her decision to commit parricide was determined by hate and not by the Christian principles of love and forgiveness. The injustice she suffered at the hands of her father, Beatrice tells Cardinal Camillo,

Was not mortal; so my hate
Became the only worship I could lift
To our great father (V. ii. 126-128)

Both Beatrice and Count Cenci, asserts Wasserman, "repeatedly claim that in carrying out their monstrous deeds they are merely agents of God's will . . . thereby fabricating a sanction for any evil they care to perform and releasing themselves from moral responsibility."⁶ In vain Beatrice attempts to pray directly to the deity she supposes is the Roman Catholic God, without invoking the interposition of the Virgin Mary or of Jesus. Beatrice's Catholic creed, moreover, states that revenge is not

⁶Wasserman, p. 90.

justified under any circumstances except by threat of imminent death, a predicament she never faces.

Aside from criticizing Beatrice in the Preface for committing a "pernicious mistake" for seeking revenge against her father, Shelley reinforces his disapproval of revenge when he has Savella, the Pope's Legate, appear at Count Cenci's house with a warrant for his immediate death the very day he is murdered, a scene totally original with Shelley. Shelley's intentional dramatic irony is effectively achieved as the doomed Beatrice, upon hearing of Savella's unexpected arrival, condemns herself in regard to her position with the Christian God:

'Tis a messenger
Come to arrest the culprit who now stands
Before the throne of unappealable God. (IV. iv. 21-
23)

Curran argues that Count Cenci must die because there is a just and wise God governing the affairs of men. "That death being wise and just," he writes, "Beatrice cannot be condemned. If she is condemned, the wise and just God does not exist beyond the borders of her mind."⁷ Curran has failed to consider, however, that Count Cenci would have received a "wise and just" death without the intervention of Beatrice, for Savella had a warrant for his execution. Beatrice's tragic flaw, then, which led to her "wise and just

⁷Curran, p. 96.

death," was her lack of "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance," the qualities Prometheus relies on to overcome hate and evil. As Newman Ivey White acknowledges in his Portrait of Shelley, Beatrice narrowly avoids being a flawless character; nevertheless, she "is motivated by revenge, the tragic flaw in her character."⁸ The Papal Legate's untimely arrival, then, at least for Beatrice, serves as the means by which Count Cenci's murder is first suspected and later proved as Savella and his officers find Marzio and Olympio hiding near the Count's house, each with a bag of money. Moreover, they discover on Marzio a letter written to Beatrice by Orsino, one of the conspirators, expressing his moral difficulty in sending Marzio and Olympio to carry out the murder plot.

Thus Beatrice falls prey to her selfish desire for revenge against the injustice done to her body and, as she thinks, to her very soul. She fails, however, to realize that neither her bodily chastity nor her spiritual chastity could "be truly dishonoured" by her father's act of incest because it has been committed without her willful consent. Therefore in The Cenci Shelley presents the moral principles which ultimately govern Prometheus and which Beatrice first believes in and abides by but eventually shuns for revenge, retaliation, and atonement, considered by Shelley as

⁸Newman Ivey White, Portrait of Shelley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p. 333.

"pernicious mistakes." The eminent Shelleyan scholar Carlos Baker points out in Shelley's Major Poetry that "Shelley still believed in the course followed by Prometheus, and specifically blamed Beatrice for not having done likewise."⁹

⁹Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 148.

CHAPTER V

THE MASK OF ANARCHY

In the fall of 1819, before he had completed The Cenci, Shelley wrote his least human and most allegorical work. Entitled The Mask of Anarchy, this political poem was inspired by the tragic Manchester Massacre. During the early 1800's England had been tormented by social unrest, which sprang from the economic depression following the Napoleonic wars and by the anti-domestic policies of the Tory government. On August 16, 1819, thousands of workers assembled in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, to protest their lack of representation in Parliament. A company of government cavalry attacked the peaceful demonstration and killed nine people while wounding many more. Shelley, in Italy at the time, became extremely upset over the news of this senseless and cruel murder of innocent people. On September 9, 1819, he wrote to his close friend, Thomas Love Peacock, "The tyrants here, as in the French Revolution, have first shed blood. May their execrable lessons not be learnt with equal docility!" (Letters, X, 82). Three days earlier he had written a letter to Charles and James Ollier in which he had quoted the very words Beatrice Cenci exclaimed after she had been raped by her father: "Something must be done. What, yet I know not" (Letters, X, 80).

Shelley's course of action came in the form of The Mask of Anarchy, a protest against the English political system and a cry for the English people to unite in seeking justice from their tyrannical oppressors. The Manchester Massacre, then, according to Mrs. Shelley, in a note on The Mask of Anarchy, "roused in him violent emotions of indignation and compassion. The great truth that the many, if accordant and resolute, could control the few . . . made him long to teach his injured countrymen how to resist. Inspired by these feelings, he wrote The Mask of Anarchy . . ." (p. 345). Shelley had requested Leigh Hunt to publish the poem in The Examiner, where it probably would have attracted the interest of many reform-minded Englishmen, but Hunt refused to risk its publication and perhaps Shelley's life as well until he felt the time appropriate; for Hunt the time was not ripe until the passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832, ten years after Shelley's death.

As I have noted above, The Mask of Anarchy is a bitter attack against the English government as well as a plea to the British public to demand as a unified force their domestic and social rights. Yet the method Shelley proposes in The Mask of Anarchy by which to obtain those rights is not, even though he quoted her angry words in the letter, Beatrice's use of vengeance against tyrannical oppression; rather he endorses non-violent passive resistance.

The poem begins with Shelley asleep in Italy; while asleep he heard a "voice" from England that led him to visualize and express in poetic language what he was to see as his spirit was transported to England. Shelley then describes allegorically the various kinds of tyrants he saw who were disguised as important political figures. The first tyrant he met was Murder wearing a mask which resembled the face of Lord Robert Castlereagh, the British Foreign Secretary. The imperialist Castlereagh was largely responsible for several of England's wars while he was in office. Shelley has smooth-looking Murder followed by seven fat bloodhounds which are fed "human hearts" (l. 12). Then came Fraud wearing an ermine gown and representing John Scott Eldon, the Lord Chancellor. Shelley includes Eldon primarily because he was responsible for taking from Shelley his two children by his first wife, Harriet Westbrook. Eldon's heart of stone is revealed when his large tears fall as "millstones" on the innocent children who are deceived into thinking the tears are gems; the children, representing the English people, in trying to grasp Eldon's glittering tears, are fatally wounded as the tears drop on their heads. Hypocrisy rode by next on a crocodile. "Clothed with the Bible" (l. 22) he portrays Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, who was strongly against domestic reform. Following the tyrants came numerous other "Destructions" (l. 26) disguised "like Bishops, lawyers, peers, and spies" (l. 29).

Last came Anarchy wearing a crown and bearing the inscription "I am God, and King, and Law" (l. 37) on his brow. Shelley uses Anarchy to depict the current English government which rides:

On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse. (ll. 31-33)

It is interesting to note that this description closely resembles the vision St. John discusses in the Book of Revelation, where the rider astride the pale horse was Death, and Hell followed in their wake. The "ghastly masquerade" (l. 27) of Murder, Fraud, Hypocrisy, and Anarchy, moreover, is synonymous with the image of the four horsemen whom St. John describes. To Shelley, the English government and its disregard of domestic and social reform meant death to the English people; indeed he saw Anarchy and his murderous troops, "Waving each a bloody sword" (l. 44), marching through the ignorant populace and:

Trampling to a mire of blood
The adoring multitude. (ll. 40-41)

Having grown wise to the destructive motives of Anarchy and the other masqueraders, who have been unmasked, the once "adoring" public became horrified as they witnessed their fellow men being slaughtered. The people were paralyzed by fear and therefore were unable to resist their oppressors.

To insure his dominion over the terror-stricken people, Anarchy employed "hired murderers" (l. 60), who had awaited impatiently the anarchist's coming; they were now hungry for "glory, and blood, and gold" (l. 65). Priests and lawyers quickly succumbed to Anarchy and worshipped him as God and Law. Thus Anarchy came to govern the church and soon controlled the Bank of England and the Tower of London. Yet Anarchy was actually only a weak "Skeleton" (l. 74) because he ruled not by the willful consent of the people; instead he subdued the English public by instilling in them the fear of death for disobeying the unjust laws of a self-appointed King and God.

Although looking "more like Despair" (l. 88), Hope appeared to proclaim that presently only she was exempt from death and misery. Nevertheless, she, too, yielded to Anarchy because he now ruled when her "'father Time is weak and gray'" (l. 90) and therefore unable to bring about the rise of a democratic government. Despondent, Hope

Lay down in the street
 Right before the horses' feet,
 Expecting, with a patient eye,
 Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy . (ll. 98-101)

But before Anarchy could destroy Hope, "A mist, a light, an image rose . . ." (l. 103) which shielded Hope from her enemies. Frail and weak at first, this "Shape" (l. 110) soon swept over the heads of the English people, who sensed its presence. At its helm rode a planet resembling

the morning star which encompassed the world with its light. It is significant to note here that in The Revolt of Islam Shelley identifies the morning star with the Spirit of Good. The newly-inspired Hope, united with the powerful Shape of Liberty, overwhelmed and defeated Anarchy:

And Anarchy, the ghastly birth,
Lay dead earth upon the earth;
The Horse of Death tameless as wind
Fled, and with his hoofs did grind
To dust the murderers thronged behind. (ll. 130-134)

As in Prometheus Unbound, there is a possibility that evil in the form of any kind of tyrannical oppression could return if mankind submits his will to the control of evil forces. Thus to be a slave of tyranny, Hope tells the English people, is:

'To be a slave in soul
And to hold no strong control
Over your own wills, but be
All that others make of ye.' (ll. 184-187)

Therefore, Shelley, as Hope, urges the "Men of England" (l. 147) to fight for freedom of will against the chains of evil which had shackled their unsuspecting souls:

'Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you--
Ye are many--they are few.' (ll. 151-155)

Hope warns the people, however, that to be enslaved is also to "feel revenge" (l. 193) when one has seen his family

killed by the tyrant's murderers. In seeking a violent retribution, Hope exclaims, one can avail nothing by exchanging "Blood for blood--and wrong for wrong . . ." (l. 195). To be free, then, is to possess Justice, Wisdom, Peace, and Love. Freedom is the quintessence of "Spirit, Patience, Gentleness" (l. 258), the very moral principles Prometheus adhered to and those which Beatrice abandoned for impatience and revenge.

Hope then calls for a meeting similar to the assembly at St. Peter's Field "of the fearless and the free . . ." (l. 263) who have suffered "For others' misery or their own . . ." (l. 274). She encourages them to remain steadfast in their non-violent resistance even if more tyrants come with "fixed bayonet" (l. 311) to dip its sharp point in the Englishmen's blood:

'Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war' (ll. 319-322)

Moreover, Hope advises the people to yield not to violence and revenge though the tyrants ride among them slashing and stabbing with their knives, for she assures them that the tyrants' rage will eventually subside. As proof of the effectiveness of forbearance and passive resistance, Hope tells the assembly that the oppressors "will return with shame" (l. 348) and subsequently inspire the Englishmen

to once again arise like lions in unconquerable numbers and burst their chains of slavery. Thus Shelley writes to Leigh Hunt in November of 1819, "The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy; to inculcate with fervour both the right of resistance, and the duty of forbearance" (Letters, X, 130-131).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Since the earliest publications of Percy Bysshe Shelley's works, critics have disagreed on questions of morality in both his poems and his prose writings. The dominant view of his works in the nineteenth century was that they were immoral and blasphemous. Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics contended that Shelley was didactic in none or in only a very few of his writings. On the contrary, Shelley's moral principles are operative in the great majority of his works, both in his poetry and in his prose writings. Thus Shelley's ultimate aim in most of his works, especially with regard to his poetry, has been to make his readers more perfect by acquainting them with "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence . . ."; to him "until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which" (p. 207) are trampled into the dust.

Further proof of Shelley's morality, at least in his works, is evident in that nearly all of the moral precepts he advocates coincide with the moral teachings of Jesus Christ, whom he frequently quotes from the Bible. The moral ideas which sprang from Shelley's concern over the widespread use of vengeance to bring about religious and polit-

ical changes dominated his religious and philosophical writings between 1812 and 1820. These moral principles are also embodied in Prometheus Unbound, The Cenci, and the Mask of Anarchy, all of which were written in approximately 1819. Shelley, then, purposefully used the motif of revenge against tyrannical oppression as an occasion for presenting his moral principles.

I have shown, then, using such religious and philosophical essays as "Essay on Christianity," An Address to the Irish People, and A Philosophical View of Reform, how fervently Shelley disapproves of vengeance under any circumstance while emphasizing the moral virtues of love, forgiveness, and forbearance. Similarly, in Prometheus Unbound Shelley illustrates, in a situation centering upon revenge, how Prometheus purges his mind of evil by adhering to these moral principles. In The Mask of Anarchy Shelley exhorts the English people to abide by passive resistance in eschewing active measures of vengeance against the allegorical representations of murder, fraud, hypocrisy, and anarchy. Finally, I have shown how Shelley sympathized with but, in accordance with his insistence on forgiveness and forbearance, could not exonerate Beatrice Cenci of blame for avenging the incestuous act committed against her by her father.

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PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY: VENGEANCE AS A VEHICLE FOR
PRESENTING HIS MORAL PRINCIPLES

by

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(ABSTRACT)

More than any other English Romantic poet, with the possible exception of Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley has been attacked by critics who argue that in both his personal life and in his poetry and prose writings, he was immoral. Regardless of what may be said against Shelley's personal life, as a writer he is profoundly moralistic in almost all of his literary works. This thesis shows, using several of his longer poetic works, selected religious and philosophical essays, and various letters, that Shelley deliberately used the theme of vengeance against tyrannical oppression as an agent for presenting his moral principles.

The first chapter introduces Shelley's didactic moral code concerning revenge against tyrannical despotism as revealed in certain philosophical and religious essays, Prometheus Unbound, The Cenci, and The Mask of Anarchy. Chapter II examines the following three philosophical and religious essays by Shelley which illustrate his moral concept of vengeance as this concept relates to tyrannical

oppression: "Essay on Christianity," An Address to the Irish People, and A Philosophical View of Reform. The third chapter discusses the moral precepts involved in Prometheus Unbound as they relate to revenge and despotic domination. Chapter IV explains how Shelley, even though sympathizing with Beatrice Cenci, criticized her for not persevering in love, forgiveness, and forbearance as she avenged the incestuous assault committed against her by her tyrannical father. Chapter V explores the moral principles found in The Mask of Anarchy as they relate to revenge and tyrannical oppression. The conclusion reemphasizes Shelley's use of vengeance against tyrannical oppression as a means of presenting his moral principles.