PLATONISM IN SHELLY'S POETRY

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OUTLINE

PLATONISM IN SHELLEY'S POETRY

I. There are many general resemblances between Plato and Shelley:

A. Each resorted to the use of --

1. Myths,
2. Allegories,
3. Symbolism,
4. Imagery,
5. Vague and abstract terms.

B. Each resembled the other in his theory of --

1. Ideas,
2. Beauty,
3. Love,
4. God,
5. Death,
6. Immortality,
7. Pre-existence.

C. Each resembled the other in his attitude towards--

1. Marriage,
2. Freedom,
3. Wealth.

D. Each inherited a certain amount of wealth; and each was favored with an early environment which gave him the advantages of an education.

II. Early in life Shelley was captivated by Platonism as a poetic medium, and throughout his poems one sees a deepening of this Platonic influence:

A. Even in Alastor, an early poem, one sees Shelley's adherence to Plato's use of --

1. Beauty,
2. Imagery.

B. A real echo of the Symposium is found in Shelley's Hymn to Intellectual Beauty in his reference to--

1."Some unseen power,"
2. The Spirit of Beauty,
3. The Platonic Idea.

C. In The Revolt of Islam, another early production, one finds, as in the Hymn, traces of Plato--

1. In the symbolical use of the eagle and the snake,
2. In the use of allegories.

D. In Prince Athanase Shelley carries forward Plato's favorite theme of --

1. Love,
2. Beauty,
3. Pre-existence.

E. The futility of hate and the desirability of love are expressed in the short poems Amor Aeternus and Lines to a Critic, written in 1817.

F. Evidence of Shelley's likeness to Plato in his conception of love and hate is shown in --

1. Lines to a Reviewer, where he says--

   (a) There is no profit in hate;
   (b) There is no hate in his heart.

2. Lines to a Critic, where he says --

   (a) That he hates only the critic's want of truth and love;

   (b) That he has no time to think of the critic, since he is busy with greater problems.

G. In Prometheus Unbound one sees the effect of Shelley's having translated the Symposium and the Banquet. This effect is shown by Shelley's--

1. Further search for the Ideal,
2. Greater use of imagery,
3. Greater use of mysticism,
4. Greater use of Love.

H. Some views in the Epipsychidion are Platonic --

1. Love,
2. Marriage,
3. Beauty,
4. Pre-natal life.

I. Shelley's Adonais is unintelligible without reference to Plato's dialogues. The poet is --

1. Searching for the One, the eternal Idea;
2. Saying that the world which we see serves as a veil to the real world, the world of Ideas;
3. Trying to solve the mystery of future existence.

J. A further influence of Plato is revealed in the poem Hellas, where Shelley

1. Makes clear his attitude towards--

(a) Christ,
(b) Christianity.

2. Makes use of his knowledge of Greek.

K. The poems composed in 1822 continue with Plato's doctrines. One sees--

1. In the Zucca --

(a) A yearning after the Ideal,
(b) A searching for the one perfect being;

2. In the Epigrams a constant reference to the Greek of Plato;

3. In the Triumph of Life --

(a) A dance of lights and shadows,
(b) The predominance of the Platonic spirit of Love,
(c) Direct traces of Platonic images and unrealities,
(d) An example of Platonic questioning in the words "What is life?"

III. In a final survey of Shelley's poems one observes the Platonism throughout:

A. Beginning with the early poem Alastor there is a steady growth of the Platonic influence.

B. This influence deepens as Shelley comes in closer contact with Plato's works through translating them.

C. The lovers of Plato are indebted to Shelley for keeping alive, to a certain extent, the Platonic doctrines.

D. The true Platonic ideal is realized when one begins to lead the life of the free soul among the things of the spirit.

PLATONISM IN SHELLEY'S POETRY

In Shelley's poetry the influence of Plato is evident. In many instances one can detect a striking similarity between the two writers. For example, both in their writing resorted to the use of myths, allegories, symbolism, imagery, and the use of vague, abstract terms. Each resembles the other in his theory of Ideas, Beauty, Love, God, death, immortality and pre-existence. Then, too, their ideas of marriage, freedom, and wealth are somewhat alike. In order, however, to understand these likenesses in their entirety, one must know something of the life and early environment of both Plato and Shelley.

Born as he was, the heir to an English baronetcy, and to more than the usual wealth and consideration attending that rank, Shelley during his entire life was at war against custom and against the tyranny of his fellows and the teachings of the masters. The same traits characterized him at Oxford. He was then an avowed revolutionist, a writer of verses, a hypothetical atheist, and a Greek scholar. While Shelley was at Oxford, his and Hogg's favorite author was Plato; but Hoggs says that they only approached the divine philosopher through the medium of translations. The substance of these translations, however, acted powerfully on the poet's sympathetic intellect. Although at this

time he had adopted the conclusions of materialism, he was at heart, all through his life, an idealist. The mixture of the poet and sage in Plato fascinated him.[1]

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[1] Symonds, J.A. - Shelley, p. 8.

At Oxford Shelley was allowed to do a great deal of private reading, in which his soul delighted. But his views were too liberal to permit him to remain until he completed his college education. Becoming tired of merely talking with his acquaintances about his views, he sent a printed statement of his opinions to the university authorities, challenging them to an argument with him as to the necessity or utility of any religious belief. As a result of this paper, he was expelled from the university. His family were shocked, and could not tell what to make of such a youth; and, at the age of seventeen, he went to London to live as his own master.[2]

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[2] Masson, Davis - Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and other Essays, p. 111.

Keeping in mind these facts concerning Shelley's early life, one can easily detect resemblances between him and Plato the man, as well as resemblances between the works of the two great thinkers. Both were from wealthy families. Plato had a profound contempt for the opinion of the masses and an aristocrat's dislike for any taint of the shop, or

the workman's bench. He was a great believer in freedom of thought, and it was through his influence that philosophy began to take on the character of remoteness from practical concern.[3] Shelley was not so great a republican at heart as

[3] Rogers, A. K. - A Student's History of Philosophy, p. 67.

Mrs. Shelley makes him out. He did not love a democracy, and was in some respects as aristocratic as Byron, and he was far from despising the advantages of birth and station. It is true that his hatred of a despotism that looked upon the people as not to be consulted was extreme; but he said that a republic was the best form of government with disinterestedness and abnegation of self.[4]

[4] Forman, Buxton - Medwin's Revised Life of Shelley, p. 444.

Platonism as a poetic medium very early captivated Shelley. It contains nothing commonplace, nothing that has been worn threadbare by others; it was a menstruum from which he hoped to work out pure art, but the sediment of mortality was left in the crucible.[5] Two of the ideas which recur most

[5] Ibid, p. 345.

frequently in Shelley's prose and poetry are essentially Platonic, though they were probably not derived from Plato, whom Shelley did not study deeply till long after his early

speculative days. These are the belief that life as man knows it is only an unreal show or a dream, and the conception of some all-prevading Spirit of reality dwelling behind this painted veil of life. But the likeness between Shelley and Plato was deeper than this; there is a profound resemblance in their whole outlook. Shelley was a Plato spoiled, or Plato réussi according as one values most philosophy or poetry. Both were inspired almost entirely by what Jowett calls the "passion of the idea." Plato's theory of Ideas is a high poetic language consistently employed to affirm the precedence of soul form, ideal, reason, and design over matter, body, and the accidents, irrelevancies, imperfections, and necessary compromises of concrete physical existence. "For Soul is form and doth the body make." From this it is but a step to the imaginative, mythological personification of ideas. They are beautiful shapes, almost persons, first, beheld by the soul in pre-natal vision and now in life's stormy voyage ever fleeting before or "down the waste waters day and night" or gleaming "like virtue firm, like knowledge fair" through the mists that encompass the vessel's prow. So conceived, these ideas provide a ready explanation or evasion of all the problems which Plato was both willing and unable to answer in the cause of an unflinching materialistic nominalism.[6]

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[6] Warner - Library of World's Best Literature, Vol.20, p.11542.

Both Shelley and Plato seemed to see life not in its transient and imperfect form so much as in its eternal relation to the future and the ideal, and to value it for the unrealized more than for the actual. Both not only taught but felt that between the shadow life on earth and the immortal world of ideas there was only a mist of ignorance, or error, which any man might dispel at any time if, according to Plato, he had sufficient wisdom, and according to Shelley, sufficient love. For both, the possible was the foundation of the actual, and the abstract perfection of the human character was a reflection from the actual perfection of the divine.[7]

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[7] Campbell, O. W. - Shelley and the Unromantics, p. 279.

From Plato, Shelley derived the idea that these sensations with which alone we are acquainted in this world are imperfect shadows of a higher world into which, perhaps, we may pass at death where exist in perfection the archetypes of all we dimly perceive here. He was brought to this idea by his persistent discontent with the actual and by his yearning for ideals that would completely satisfy the cravings of his nature. "I seek in what I see," he said, "the manifestation of something beyond the tangible object." One of the archetypes plays a very important role in Shelley's poetry--namely, the archetype of Beauty. About this conception some of those feelings cluster, which, in the case of the majority of men, connect themselves with the idea of a personal God.

Upon this conception of all-sufficing Beauty which but faintly manifests itself in the various forms of beauty known in this world, the poet dwells to some extent in Alastor, a poem composed as early as 1815. Although Shelley had not yet translated Plato's Symposium, he uses the same idea found therein. In the Symposium Plato had Diotima to explain how the love of beautiful objects leads on to the love of the beautiful in soul and thought and finally to the conception of universal Beauty, and of perfect Beauty, "eternal, unproduced, indestructible, neither subject to increase nor decay; not, like other things, partly beautiful and partly deformed; nor at one time beautiful and at another time not; not beautiful in relation to one thing, and deformed in relation to another; not here beautiful and there deformed; not beautiful in the estimation of one person and deformed in that of another. This supreme Beauty cannot be pictured to the imagination like a beautiful face, or beautiful hands, or any portion of the body, nor like any discourse, nor any science, nor does it subsist in any other that lives, and is either in earth or in Heaven or in any other place. It is eternally uniform and constant and monadic with itself. All other things are beautiful through a participation of it, with this condition, that, though they are subject to production and decay, it never becomes more or less or endures any change. He who wishes to contemplate this supreme Beauty, must ascend through these transitory objects which are beautiful towards that which is Beauty itself, proceeding as on steps, from the love

of one form to that of two, and from that of two to that of all forms which are beautiful, and from beautiful forms to beautiful habits and institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines until from the meditation of many doctrines he arrives at that which is nothing other than the doctrine of supreme Beauty itself in the knowledge and contemplation of which at length he reposes."[8] Through the perception of

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[8] Jewett, B. - Dialogues of Plato, Vol. III, pp.341-3.

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such Beauty, the soul receives, according to Shelley, its highest and best stimulus. The desire of this Beauty lifts one above the petty and ignoble. Unfortunately it is only at times that one is conscious of it.

Shelley's worship of this ideal Beauty and his own disappointment at not finding the ideal in female form is enshrined in Alastor. "The youth in this poem is led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe. He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sink profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and afford to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted. So long as it is possible for his desire to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous and satisfied. But the time comes when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened,

and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves; but he seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave."[9]

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[9] Hutchison, Thomas - Shelley's Poetical Works, p. 14.

In Alastor the philosopher presides over all; but the unsubstantialism, the mysticism, the abstractness of the poem are not from him. The prince of philosophy, Plato, deemed it bliss enough for the perfect man, forswearing all human love, all personal and individual life, to proceed "From the love of one form to that of two, and from that of two, to that of all forms which are beautiful." In a like manner, the youth in Alastor

> "Obedient to the light
> That shone within his soul,
> He went, pursuing
> The windings of the dell."

Like Plato, Shelley is continually dealing in imagery and shadows. In Alastor, he says:

> "Does the bright arch of rainbow clouds,
> And pendant mountains seen in the calm lake,
> Lead only to a black and watery death,
> While death's blue vault, with loathliest
> vapours hung,
> Where every shade which the foul grave exhales
> Hides its dead eye from the detested day,
> Conduct, O Sleep, to thy delightful realms?"

The connection of the two ideas expressed here is probably this: If the beautiful reflection in the water allures to something so unlike itself as the black depths

beneath, may not the ugly vault of death lead to something as unlike itself, namely, to Plato's and Shelley's beautiful ideal world?[10] Here, as elsewhere, Shelley yearns for death,

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[10] Alexander, W.J. - Selections from Shelley, p. 304.

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as opening the way to the world of the ideal. He asks:

> "Does the dark gate of death conduct to thy mysterious paradise, O Sleep?"

All his life, Shelley wished for some form beautiful enough to satisfy the aspirations of his soul. Alastor breathes this insatiable craving for that "Spirit of Beauty" and that "Awful Loveliness."[11]

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[11] Halleck, R. P. - New English Literature, p. 425.

A recognition of at least a spirit of intellectual Beauty as pervading all visible things, of human life as but an evanescent incarnation and short local battle of principles that have their origin beyond time and beyond the stars, seems the one characteristic of Shelley's poetry from the first, which if one does not attend to, it has no logical coherence. In his Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, composed in 1816, there is an idea which is characteristic of Shelley, and which is continually recurring in his works. It is the idea of the one supreme Beauty, an idea which Shelley must have borrowed from Plato since the Hymn is a perfect expression of the Platonic idea of beauty as explained in the Symposium, with

which he had long been familiar.[12] Shelley says:

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[12] Houston, P. H. - Main Currents of English Literature, p. 318.

"While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead - - - -.
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

"I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine--have I not kept the vow?- - -
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
Each from his voiceless grave; they have in
vision'd bowers
Of studious zeal or love's delight
Outwatched with me the envious night -
They know that never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou,-O awful Loveliness,
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express."

Both of these passages are vague. They were written before Shelley learned to express himself precisely; but he describes in them the two great and lasting passions of his life as clearly as he was then able to see them. First, there was a definite passion for reforming the world; and then, far stronger, there was the passion for a perfection that should give simultaneous delight to all the parts of man's nature--moral, intellectual, and sensuous--in which all conflicts should be reconciled, and music and moonlight and feeling should be one.

The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty was written when Shelley had become a Platonist, and one feels justified in agreeing with Professor Dowden that it was Plato who purged

Shelley's mind of those superstitions which wrought upon his nerves rather than upon his imagination. The romance of ideas took the place of the romance of fiends and ghosts and churchyards.[13]

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[13] Clutton-Brock, Arthur - Shelley the Man and the Poet, p. 12.

In the study of Shelley's Hymn one is better able to understand the meaning of the Spiritual Beauty which fills the world like a mysterious "shadow." In Diotima's speech, in Plato's Symposium, Diotima explains how the love of beautiful objects leads on to the love of the Beautiful in Soul, Mind and Thought; and finally leads on to the conception of universal Beauty, an abstract Beauty, an eternal and indestructible Beauty. It is only through meditation of the divinely Beautiful that one can realize its presence everywhere and in everything. Plato says that to know this Beauty, and to be able to appreciate it, the youth should begin early to study, first, one object; and when he sees the spiritual Beauty in one object, he will see beauty in other objects; he will see the kinship of beauty in all forms. Then he will consider the beauty of the mind, which is more honourable than beauty of the outward form, since it develops a deeper love for that purer, truer, Spiritual Love, and leads to the creation of noble thoughts. At length, this contemplation of beauty guides the mind to an appreciation of laws, institutions, habits, ideals, and finally, to the study of

beauty in the sciences. Thus in the growing love of beauty, both Plato and Shelley say in the same words "he grows and waxes strong, until at last a vision is revealed to him of a single science which is the "Science of Beauty everywhere."[14]

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Plato's Symposium, Jowett's Translation, p. 201-2.

It is this Spirit of Beauty to which Shelley is referring in the beginning of the Hymn when he says:

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

These lines at the opening of the poem tell of the awe-inspiring Spirit of that mysterious Love which permeates the earth. The poem continues by making beautiful comparisons of this Spirit of Love to the beauty of the sun, the moon, the wind, the "memory of music fled"; these, in their various natures and forms, show the Platonic Ideas, his multiplicity of forms, and the intensity of God's love.

In the second stanza of the Hymn the poet cries out questioningly, in his yearning for closer contact, and for the perpetual companionship with this magic spirit. (Plato says that this wonderful Spirit of Beauty does not

stay always with those who recognize it.) Thus Shelley questions the Spirit:

> "Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
> With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
> Of human thought or form,--where art thou gone?
> Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
> This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?"

Shelley answers these questionings which poets so often ask in poems by telling in the following lines how this Spirit of Love and Truth reveals itself to us. He says:

> "Thy light alone--like mist o'er mountains driven,
> Or music by the night wind sent,
> Through strings of some still instrument,
> Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
> Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream."

The Platonic Idea and conception of intellectual, spiritual Beauty is the entire theme of the poem. It contains even Plato's idea of the youth who gropes in the cave and among ruins and moonlight woods, searching for something, he knew not what.[15] Speaking to the Spirit of Beauty the

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[15] Plato's Phaedo, p. 66.

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poet says:

> "Sudden thy shadow fell on me;
> I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy."

The fifth stanza is still retrospecting. It is an avowal that in appreciation of "the awful shadow" the youth would dedicate his life to the Spirit shadow of Love and Beauty. Mrs. Shelley explains the writer's thoughts and feelings at the time of the writing of these last stanzas. She says:

"A presence, or its radiant, yet awful shadow, haunts, and startles and waylays us in all that is beautiful, sublime or heroic in the world about us, or in the world within; to this we dedicate our powers in all high moments of joy, or aspiration, and when the ecstasy has sunk and the joy has faded, still in a clamer calm, a purer temper, it may become the habit of our soul to follow upon the track of this Ideal Loveliness, until in a measure, we partake of its image."[16]

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[16] Shelley, Mary W. - Shelley's Poetical Works, p. 526.

Shelley's keen intellectual appreciation of the divine, spiritual Beauty indicates that he had "intelligence of the soul." He seems to have shared in, or to have experienced something of Plato's transcendental ideal theory, in that Shelley feels the presence of this Spirit of Beauty, which is Love, the mediator between God and man. This divine Love interprets; it touches all life and things of this world, and consecrates them and makes them holy. In God's creation of this world he made everything, according to Plato, in imitation of himself. He is the Ideal, and the only perfect One; and it is through his mediator, Love, that earthly objects receive their imitative beauty of the Ideal. Shelley possessed an impulsive nature, which inspired him to write of that mysterious Beauty which filled his soul. He was eager to give happiness, and his method to make men good was to impart goodness into them rather than to win them to goodness. Plato's teachings of Beauty and his

theory of perfect Ideas were entirely adopted and sincerely appreciated.[17] Like Plato, Shelley acknowledges that this

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[17] Bradley, A. C. - Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 158.

Intellectual spiritual Beauty is mysterious and that the complete realization of perfect Beauty incarnate is impossible; but the essential thought of his creed, as well as Plato's, is beautifully set forth in The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. Both the great thinkers believe that the universal is penetrated, vitalized, and made real by a Spirit which Shelley in the Hymn sometimes calls "the Spirit of Nature," but which he always conceived as more than Life, as that which gives its actuality to Life, and lastly, as "Love and Beauty."

Another of Shelley's early productions is The Revolt of Islam, composed in 1817. Here, as in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, one finds undeniable traces of the author's beloved Plato. The questions Shelley asks are very similar to those asked by Timaeus.[18]

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[18] Plato's Timaeus - p. 28, Jowett's Translation.

> "What is that power? Ye mock yourselves, and give
> A human heart to what ye cannot know.
> As if the cause of life could think and live
> 'Twere as if Man's own works should feel and show
> The hopes, and fears and thoughts for which they flow
> And he be like to them."

Like his model, Plato, Shelley believed that the world possessed a soul. He would have God erased in favor of

the Soul of the universe, "the intelligent and necessarily beneficent[19] actuating principle."

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[19] Strong, A. T. - Three Studies in Shelley, p. 28.

The Revolt of Islam resembles Plato's work in that it contains many symbolical and allegorical figures.[20] Shelley's

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[20] Ibid, p. 30.

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favorite method here is to take as images of good things those usually associated with evil. His most important struggle between good and evil is that furnished by the symbolical eagle and snake. In the first canto of the poem the snake is the eagle's victim. He is wounded and falls into the sea, but is picked up and cherished by Cyntha. Now the evil spirit assumes the eagle's shape since

> "The darkness lingering o'er the dawn of things,
> Was Evil's breath and life;
> This made him strong
> To soar aloft with overshadowing wings."

The fight between the eagle and serpent, which is symbolical of the strife of mankind against its oppression of freedom, justice, and truth, is constantly renewed. Shelley, however, does not regard the serpent as a symbol of unrecognized beauty or goodness. He sometimes mentions the beauty of the snake, but in the breast of the Iberian priest, he is an emblem of evil:

> "Did hate and guile lie watchful, intertwined
> Twin serpents in one deep and winding nest."

Further on in the poem, snakes form part of the couch of torture on which the lov rs are to perish.[21]

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[21] Hutton, R. H. - Literary Essays, p. 163.

Half allegorical and half physical are Shelley's references to fleshly food and wines as poisons. In The Revolt he forecasts the joyous time when man shall no longer eat flesh and

> "Avenging poisons shall have ceased
> To feed disease and fear and madness."

A little later he uses the symbol of poison to show his scorn for

> "Traditions dark and old, whence evil creeds
> Start forth, and whose dim shade a stream of
> poison feeds."

and further on in the poem he assails

> "A faith nursed by fear's dew of poison."

The symbol of the boat and the stream is also employed by Shelley in The Revolt of Islam. The boat is presumably the human soul, and the goal is love, love between man and woman and the love of both for their kind. The isolated simile at the beginning of the poem shows how strong a hold the symbols of the boat and stream had at this time obtained upon Shelley's mind. In His description of the storm as it sweeps down toward him, and of the interlocked shapes of the eagle and the snake which in the distance at first appear to be a single winged form, he says:

> "Even like a bark, which from a chasm of mountains

Dark, vast, and overhanging, on a river,
Which there collects the strength of all its
fountains,
Comes forth whilst with the speed its frame
doth quiver,
Sails, oars, and stream, tending to one endeavor;
So, from that chasm of light a winged form
On all the winds of heaven approaching ever
Floated, dilating as it came, the storm pursued it
With fierce blasts, and lightnings swift and warm."

Later on, the poet, after watching the struggle between the eagle and the serpent, is borne away with the woman who has rescued the serpent in

"A boat of rare device, which had no sail
But its own curved prow of thin moonstone
Wrought like a web of texture fine and frail,
To catch those gentlest winds which are not known
To breathe, but by the steady speed alone
With which it cleaves the sparkling sea."

As they speed over the sea, the woman tells the story of the morning star and of her own life, and finally they come to the marvelous temple where

"There sate on many a sapphire throne,
The great, who had departed from mankind
A mighty senate."

This is the temple in which Cyntha is to tell the tale of herself and Laon. Here the symbolism of the boat is not very definite, but one feels that it is meant to be something more than a mere piece of machinery of fancy, created to carry the poet from the place of the struggle.[22] Most significant is the

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[22] Woodberry, G. E. - The Torch, p. 44.

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fact that the boat is sped to its goal by

"Those gentlest winds which are not known
To breathe but by the steady speed alone
With which it cleaves the sparkling sea."

Here we have another vision of the human soul in search this time not of death but of the Platonic Spirit of Love, which is the main theme of the poem. Even after the lovers have undergone death, their spirits are once more swept by the "charm boat" toward the same fair haven of Love. The boat is essentially the same as that of the earlier episode of The Revolt.

> "The boat was one curved shell of hollow pearl,
> Almost translucent with the light divine,
> Of her within; the prow and stern did curl
> Horned on high, like the young moon supine,
> When o'er dim twilight mountains dark with pine
> It floats upon the sunset's sea of beams,
> Whose golden waves in many a purple line
> Fade fast, till borne on twilight's ebbing streams,
> Dilating, on earth's verge the sunken meteor's gleam."

The voyage is now one of hope and joy. The boat and stream are symbolical of the human soul as it sweeps on beyond the grave toward that in Love which reaches its consummation in the Spirit of universal Love and Beauty.[23]

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[23] Warner - Library of World's Best Literature, p. 13268.

Although not filled with as many symbolical and allegorical figures as The Revolt, Prince Athanase, composed the last of the year 1817, carries forward Plato's favorite theme of Love and Beauty. Like the youth in Alastor, Athanase seeks through the world for one whom he may love. He meets, in the ship in which he is embarked, a lady who appears to him to be his ideal of love and beauty, but much to his sorrow, she proves to be Pandemos, or the earthly and unworthy Venus, who deserts him. Crushed by his grief, Athanase pines and dies.

When he is dying, the lady who can really reply to his soul comes and kisses his lips. The poet describes her in the fragment at the close of the poem:

> "Her hair was brown, her sphered eyes were brown,
> And in their dark and liquid moisture swam
> Like the dim orb of the eclipsed moon;
> Yet when the spirit flashed beneath, there came
> The light from them, as when tears of delight
> Double the western planet's serene flame."

Further on in the poem Shelley's idea of pre-existence also resembles that of Plato. Plato says that the idea of an incident is nothing that comes originally from sense experience; therefore thought and recollection represent the traces left upon the soul by a previous existence. Before it united with the body and was immersed in the world of sense, the soul lived in the realm of true reality. It looked upon ~~with~~ unveiled eyes the changeless Ideas of which this realm consists.[24]

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[24] Rogers, A. K. A Student's History of Philosophy, p. 90.

In Prince Athanase Shelley in like manner says

> "Others believed that memories of an antenatal life
> Made this, where now he dwelt, a penal hell."

Further on in the poem the symbol of the snake is used to represent grief:

> "For like an eyeless nightmare grief did sit
> Upon his being; a snake which fold by fold
> Pressed out the life of life, a clinging fiend
> Which clenched him if he stirred
> With deadlier hold; and so his grief remained."

That the poet was at this time a confirmed disciple of Plato is evident by his acknowledgement in the poem of his indebtedness to him:

"'Then Plato's words of light in thee and me,
Lingered like moonlight in the moonless east,
For we had just then read--thy memory
Is faithful now--the story of the feast;
And Agathon and Diotima seemed
From death and dark forgetfulness released - -'"

In the lines above Shelley was probably referring to the time when he read the Symposium with a friend, perhaps Dr. Lynd. In Prince Athanase, as in all his early poems, Shelley tries to establish the fact that Love and life are dualistic, and that Love is the sole principle of freedom, joy, beauty, and harmony in nature and men. The very vagueness of the poem, like the dialogues of Plato, is an essential part of its charm. The poet gazes dimly and steadily on nothing of earthly build, and every visible object is merely another starting point in his search for the Ideal.[24]

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[24] Raleigh, Walter - Some Authors, p. 293-94.

Like his master Plato, Shelley seems never to have entertained any hate toward anyone, not even his enemies. Even to the author who severely criticised and ridiculed his work, there is no feeling of hatred or resentment evinced. In Lines to a Reviewer, composed in 1817, he says:

"Alas, good friend, what profit can you see
In hating such a hateless thing as me?
There is no sport in hate when all the rage
Is on one side; in vain would you assuage
Your frowns upon an unresisting smile,
In which not even contempt lurks to beguile
Your heart, by some faint sympathy of hate."

In Lines to a Critic, also composed in 1817, he ends with:

"I hate thy want of truth and love--
How should I then hate thee?"

How forcibly does Shelley remind one of Plato who when written to by Dionysius, who had sold him for a slave, replied that he had no time to think of Dionysius. Both Plato's and Shelley's lives were governed by the great principle of Love that both advocated in their works. Both the poet and the philosopher were too busy trying to solve the vast problems concerning the universe and life to concern themselves with the petty, ignoble strife that occupies the time of most men.

In Shelley's poems written during the year 1818 and thereafter, one can detect a far deeper Platonic note than in the early poems. This difference in tone may be attributed to many factors. During this time Shelley's health was feeble; therefore the physicians ordered him to Italy. They warned him against the excitement of composition. His creative power was allowed to slumber; but the weeks at the Baths of Lucca were not wholly unproductive. Being totally forbidden to engage in original compositions, he set to work on the morning of July 9, 1818, to render into English the Symposium, the most admirable in form of all the Platonic dialogues. The next day he wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Gisborne: "I am employed just now, having little better to do, in translating the divine eloquence of Plato's Symposium; only as an exercise or, perhaps, to give Mary some idea of the manners and feelings of the Athenians, so different, on many subjects, from that of any other community that ever existed."[25] In about ten mornings his task was

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[25] Peacock, L. L. - Memoirs of Shelley, p. 1347.

completed, and Mrs. Shelley says in her journal for July 17, "Shelley finishes the translation of the Symposium and reads Herodotus; walks out in the evening to his bath."

While Mary was transcribing his manuscript, Shelley proceeded from the Symposium to the Phaedrus, but he did not try to render it from the original. His task of a translator had excited him to an effort towards independent authorship. It had been felt by Mrs. Shelley that Plato's conception of love and friendship in many particulars shocks our present manners. "To anticipate and obviate such a shock, Shelley undertook to write A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients Relative to the Subject of Love,. A fragment of this discourse, on a subject to be handled with delicate cuation, was in fact written, and remains; but it is no more than the introduction leading up to the special study. The translation of the Banquet, not always exact in scholarship, has much of the life, the grace of movement, and the luminous beauty of Plato.[26]

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[26] Bowden, Edward - Life of Shelley, p. 396.

After his task of a translator one feels that Shelley had learned that practical reform required a machinery that he could not provide; and he now more than ever before recognized the power of ideas of eloquence to stir men's hearts, of poetry to embody images of the ideal with mastering force; above all, he recognized the fact that practical reform is a thing that from moment to moment, results from abstract principles which have an eternal being. He had, moreover,

fallen in with Greek choral poetry, on the one hand, and with Greek Platonic philosophy on the other. His mind was Hellenized; like dark cloud his soul approached the dark clouds of Aeschylus and Plato, and the contact was an electrical discharge of power; the flash of that discharge was Prometheus Unbound.[27]

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[27] Woodberry, G. E. - The Torch, p. 211.

It is, then, in Prometheus Unbound that one finds numerous proofs of the deepening influence of Plato upon Shelley's works. In this lyrical drama, composed in 1818, one sees that the thoughts of Plato were fast becoming Shelley's own. Although the framework of the drama is probably modelled after Aeschylus' Prometheus Unbound, the imagery, idealism, and ideas seem to be tinged with Platonism. Asia, in this drama, represents the Ideal which will be attained when evil is overthrown and good is predominant. For this Ideal, the noblest natures search and that which encourages them in their struggle with sin, is for Shelley, the Platonic spirit of Beauty that is referred to in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty and elsewhere.[28]

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[28] Alexander, W. J. - Selections From Shelley, p. 329.

Beauty, Love, and the Ideal are embodied in Asia. In her relation to Jupiter she is primarily the Ideal, the Spirit of Beauty; but when she acts independently, she is more the impersonation of Love. Shelley loved to idealize the real;

to give the mechanism of the material universe a soul and a voice, and to bestow such also on the most delicate and abstract emotions and thoughts of the mind. Through the entire poem there reigns a sort of calm and holy spirit of Love; it soothes the tortured, and gives hope to the expectant, till the prophecy is fulfilled, and Love, untainted by any evil becomes the law of the World.

The mysticism and Idealism of Plato are early introduced into the poem:

"In the world unknown sleeps a voice unspoken;
By the step alone
Can its rest be broken;
Child of Ocean! - - - - - -

"O, follow, follow!
Through the caverns hollow,
As the song floats thou pursue
By the woodland noontide dew;
By the forest, lakes and fountains,
Through the many-folded mountains,
To the rents, and gulfs and chasms,
Where the Earth reposed from spasms,
On the day when he and thou parted, to
commingle now;
Child of Ocean!"

The real meaning and the purpose Shelley had in introducing this idea into the poem is not clear. It is probable, however, that this idea of a world of shades was suggested to him by Plato's notion of Archetypes.[29]

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[29] Alexander, W. J. - Selections from Shelley, p. 321.

According to his notion, all things which once existed still continue to live. They maintain what may be called a shadowy existence and may be called forth by memory. It is thus

with Prometheus' body which is dead, so far as its author is concerned.

The material world was not Plato's sphere, nor was it to any greater extent Shelley's, and in the ideal realm of Prometheus his powers found larger play. Here his idealizing power is carried to the extreme. In the world of spirits which his imagination has created anything is possible. Shelley symbolizes his revolutionary ideals and his dreams for the happiness of men. His dream, like Plato's idea of a Utopia which he describes in his Republic, is impracticable; but at the very heart of it, there is a sacred truth as well as some wonderful lyric music. The truth that Shelley teaches is that forgiveness is the secret and crown of victory. He says:

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

The symbol of the veil is later used in the poem. This symbol expresses Shelley's conviction that goodness and beauty are the essential realities in man's nature, that error and evil are the less essential fabrics which conceal him from his fellows and himself. He refers to

"Swift shapes and sounds, which grow
More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind,
And veil by veil, evil and error fall."

The most important use for which Shelley employs the veil and the one which explains the rest, is that in which he uses

it as a symbol of life.[30] Thus, in Prometheus, the spirit of the Hour speaks of the regeneration of the World:

"The painted veil, by those who were called life,
Which mimicked, as with colors idly spread,
All men believed or hoped, is torn aside.
The loathsome mask has fallen."

The very fact that Shelley regards life itself, or what people ordinarily term life, as an obstacle to man's regeneration is similar to Plato's views concerning the body. In the Phaedo Plato says: "For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food, and also is liable to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after truth, and, by filling us so full of loves, and fears, and fancies, and idols and every sort of folly, prevents our ever having, as people say, so much as a thought. For whence come wars, and fighting and factions? Whence but from the body, and the heat of the body?"[31] To both Plato and Shelley it seems that the body was a hindrance to the attainment of the worthwhile things in life; but both seem to have believed that when the veil of life should be lifted, the body would no longer impede the soul in its search after truth.

"Death is the veil which those who live call life.
They sleep and it is lifted."

This passage is very significant of the Platonic quality of Shelley's thought concerning life and reality.

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[30] Strong, A. T. - Three Studies in Shelley, p. 74.

[31] Plato's Phaedo, p. 66.

In Prometheus Unbound Shelley seems to see the world lying before him transfigured. It is wearing a garment of outward beauty like a new morning. Shelley has now come to be the most Platonic man of his age in spirituality. He has come to be the poet suiting the source of all reform in the spirit itself; and he is using all his powers of thought, imagination, learning, and art to set forth the ideals of the spirits in their eternal forms. As for his personal self, one principle reigned supreme--the idea of Love. Love guided all his actions and was the impulse of his being, Love in all its forms--personal, friendly, and human. In Prometheus Unbound he made love, the love of man for man, the principle of society regenerated. It is significant that in this, his greatest poem, Shelley has the spirit of Love to sustain Prometheus in his long agony, and it is this same spirit of Love, which, unchecked by other considerations of duty and humanity, worked disaster in his private life.

Prometheus Unbound is far more than a dance of prismatic lights and a concert of sweet sounds; it is a record of spiritual experience, subtle in its analysis and profound in its clear insight. Doubt is the form in which torture comes to Prometheus, doubt lest his age-long suffering should all be vain, and worse than vain. The Furies who inflict the punishment are "hollow underneath, like death"; and those who darken the dawn with their multitude are the ministers of pain and fear, of mistrust and hate. It is they who plant self-contempt and shame in young spirits, and live in the heart and brain in the shape of base desires and craven thoughts. The ugliest of all the passions, in Shelley's opinion, is hate; and the

most terrible is fear. But Prometheus, although he is in agony, feels no fear and harbors no hate. The pity and love that endure in his heart are at last victorious, and the furies, baffled, take themselves away.

Most characteristic of Shelley's views on love and marriage is his poem Epipsychidion, composed in 1818. However, this poem is wholly unintelligible without a knowledge of Plato's Republic and Symposium. Very typical of both Plato's and Shelley's views on love are the lines in Epipsychidion:

> "True love in this differs from gold and clay
> That to divide is not to take away.
> Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
> Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
> Imagination! which from the earth and sky,
> And from the depths of human fantasy,
> As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
> The universe with glorious beams, and kills
> Error, the worm, with many a sunlike arrow
> Of its reverberated lightning.
> Narrow the heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
> The life that wears, the spirit that creates
> One object, and one form, and finds thereby
> A sepulchre for its eternity."

These lines are comparable to the mystical doctrines of Diotima in Plato's Symposium. She says that he who would love rightly should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms, and first to love one such form only, and out of that he should create fair thoughts, and at length he will perceive that beauty in every form is identical.[32] Shelley, in the lines above, merely echoes

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[32] Bakewell, C. M. - Source Book in Ancient Philosophy, p. 155.

the thought of Plato, especially when he refers to "the spirit that creates"

> One object, and one form and builds thereby
> A sepulchre for its eternity."

A little later on in the poem Shelley says:

> "One whose voice was ~~venomed~~ melody,
> Sate by a well, under blue night-shade bowers;
> The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers,
> Her touch was as electric poison,--flame
> Out of her looks into my vitals came,
> And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
> A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew
> Into the core of my green heart, and lay
> Upon its leaves until, as hair grown gray
> O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
> With ruins of unseasonable time."

In contrast to the spiritual love earlier mentioned, Shelley in these lines gives a description of the purely sensual love. Similarly, in Plato's Symposium, Plato mentions two Venuses and two kinds of love: the uranian, or heavenly, and the pandemian, or common. This common love does not elevate but rather degrades. It is this species that Shelley describes in the lines above.[33]

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[33] Woodberry, G. E. - The Makers of Literature, p. 226.

In Epipsychidion the person who Shelley thought was the embodiment of all that was beautiful, was Emilia Viviani, a young Italian girl. In her he thought he ~~was~~ saw released all the visionary beauty which from "youth's dawn" had called and whispered to him in all the romance and wonder of the world.[34]

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[34] Cambridge History of English Literature - Vol. 12, p. 81.

Plato's doctrine of free love is combined with the sublime Platonic faith that love permeates the universe and cannot therefore be completely mirrored in the face of any human form. Emilia is no mere symbol; her beauty and her womanhood are very real. In her is gathered up beauty more universal and enduring than her own. She is comparable to the light in the sun.

Both Shelley and Plato believed that legal marrying was not a proper social institution.[35] Shelley's belief in love

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[35] Woodberry, G. E. - The Torch, p. 422.

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without marriage was an extreme way of stating his disbelief in marriage without love. He asserted that in the ideal commonwealth love and marriage would be one. All his life, Shelley yearned for a spiritual companion, a soul-mate, rather than some physical companion. He says that Emilia is not merely beautiful, but that she has cultivated her mind beyond that of any of the other Italian women that he had met. According to Shelley's estimation of her, she was made for love, and had the purest and most sublime conception of the master passion. Without having read the Symposium, she wrote an Apostrophe to Love.[36]

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[36] Alexander, W. J. - Selections from Shelley, p. 285. (?)

Epipsychidion, moreover, inculcates the necessity of loving more than one woman in the interest of the higher

spiritual culture.[37] It truly echoes Plato's definition of Love.

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[37] Schyler, Eugene - Italian Influence on Shelley, p. 143.

Platonic Love meant ~~either~~ a love devoid of all sensual desire, an innocent or hopeless passion, Its one characteristic notion was that true love consisted in a union of soul with soul, mind with mind, or essence with essence.[38] The exposition of the

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[38] Harrison, John - Platonism in English Literature, p. 161.

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true inward Beauty of woman is found in the Epipsychidion. In the vision of this inward world of beauty in woman's mind, Shelley says, begins the passion of Love. In the Phaedrus Plato has analyzed it as a divine form. And in his account he emphasizes the feeling of reverence with which the lover gazes upon the Beauty of the beloved, seeing in it the idea of pure Beauty which his soul has beheld in the pre-natal existence. Plato says:

> "He whose initiation is recent and who has been the spectator of many glories in the other world is amazed when he sees anyone having a Godlike face or any bodily form which is the expression of divine beauty; and at first, a shudder runs through him and again the old awe steals over him; then, looking upon the face of his beloved as a God, he reverences him, and if he were not afraid of being thought a down-right madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a God."[39]

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[39] Plato's Phaedrus, p. 251

One is inclined to agree with Stopford Brooke, who says that Epipsychidion is the most impalpable, but for those who care for Shelley's ethereal world, the finest poem he wrote.[40]

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[40] Brooke, Stopford - English Literature, p. 240.

The poet is himself native to a haunted and scarce visible world; and when he tells of the being who communed with him in his youth, it is in this world that they meet:

> "On an imagined shore, under the grey beak of
> Some promontory she met me, robed in such exceeding glory
> That I beheld her not."

Shelley calls the Epipsychidion a mystery and intimates that it is merely imaginative. He says: "As to the real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles. Expect nothing human or earthly from me." His love for Emilia was the kind described in the Symposium by Socrates, who defines it "as a desire of generation in the Beautiful." Here, as in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Shelley is giving a commentary on the words of Socrates as derived from Diotima.[41] In

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[41] Plato's Symposium - p.213, Jewett's Translation.

Epipsychidion, as elsewhere, Shelley develops Plato's doctrine of antenatal life. He says:

> "O too late
> Beloved! O too soon adored by me!
> For in the fields of Immortality
> My spirit should at first have worshipped thine,
> A divine presence in a place divine;

Or should have moved beside it on this earth,
A shadow of that substance, from its birth."

That Shelley was a close adherent to Plato's doctrine of pre-existence is very evident. Professor Lynd says that one day at Oxford, after Shelley had been reading Plato with Hogg and after he had soaked himself in the theory of pre-existence, and while he was walking on Magdalen Bridge, he met a woman with a child in her arms. Immediately he seized the child and said to the mother in a piercing voice: "Will your baby tell us anything about pre-existence, madam?" The mother at first made no answer; but on Shelley's repeating the question, she said: "He cannot speak." "But surely," Shelley exclaimed, "he can if he will, for he is only a few weeks old! He may fancy perhaps that he cannot, but it is only a silly whim; he cannot have forgotten entirely the use of speech in so short a time."[42]

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[42] Lynd, Robert - The Art of Letters, p. 106.

When one reads the Epipsychidion, one is almost inclined to Plato's belief that all knowledge is but a remembrance of a first existence revealed to one by the concord of poetry, the original form of the soul. That fantastic spirit which would bind all existence in the visionary chain of intellectual beauty became in Shelley the centre in which his whole intellectual and sensitive powers were united for its formation and embellishment.

Possibly many are the critics who see reflected in

the Epipsychidion the influence not of Plato but of Godwin. One must admit that Shelley's doctrine of love without marriage and his ideas on political freedom are very much like those of Godwin; but on the other hand, it is evident that at this time Plato claimed an ever-growing share of Shelley's thoughts; and furthermore, one must remember that in several of his fundamental tenets Godwin was a Platonist without knowing it. However that may be, it is very evident that the Epipsychidion coincides with many of Plato's views, such as the search for the ideal marriage and pre-existence.[43]

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[43] Brailsford, H. N. - Shelley, Godwin and their Circle, p. 218.

The doctrine of free love is inwrought by Shelley in the Epipsychidion with the other doctrines adopted from Platonism, of ideal or intellectual Love, which had so often appeared in his verse already. The greater part of the darkness and mystery of the poem vanishes if one supposes that the poet means it in neither more nor less than just what he says. One must realize that it is a metaphysical expression of his absorbing, though not lasting passion, for Emilia Viviani; of passion, nevertheless, never perhaps made actual by his practical will, or so meant to be, but fully realized in imagination, and by that faculty carried to its extreme. Shelley is in love, not so much with two or more women, as with Love, which one woman after another embodies. The aspiring and flaming fancy of the poet passes back and forth, swift as a weaver's shuttle,

between Emilia and the principle for which she stands, the discarnate ideal of love and beauty. Image after image, he showers upon her as the type of such beauty; and his lavishness is not wasteful, for it is the essence of the case that no image suffices; and on these images he rises to those great heights of metaphysical impassioned speech, where "cold performs the effect of fire." He comes back at the end to Emilia, and imagines their life together--Emilia's features and all human features in the consuming devotion of the poet to Beauty for its own sake.[44]

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[44] Elton, Oliver - A Survey of English Literature, p. 206.

Turning from the Platonic bridal hymn Epipsychidion to Adonais, composed in the same year, 1821, one finds it also unintelligible without constant reference to the dialogues of Plato, particularly to the Symposium and the Timaeus.[45] Adonais is an elegy upon the death of Keats. It contains some

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[45] Collins, J. C. - Current Literature, p. 78.

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of Shelley's most splendid verse, especially those lines echoing the poet's reading of Plato:

> "The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it into fragments."

These lines are a concrete example of Shelley's tendency to

spurious Platonism. He, like Plato, is haunted by the fancy that if he could only get at the One, the eternal Idea, in complete aloofness ~~for~~ *from* the many, from life with all its change, decay, struggle, sorrow, and evil, he would have reached the true object of poetry.[45] Plato taught that the sense world,

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[46] Crawshaw, W. H. - The Making of English Literature, p. 307.

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the world we see, is a mere appearance which only served to to veil the real world, the world of Ideas. This conception, he expresses in his famous cave myth:

"After this, I said, imagine the enlightenment or ignorance of our nature in a figure: Behold! human beings living in a sort of underground den, which has a mouth open toward the light, and reaching all across the den. They have been here from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they can only see before them. At a distance above and behind them the light of a fire is blazing, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have before them over which they show the puppets. And do you see men passing along the wall carrying vessels which appear over the wall? and some of the passengers, as you would expect, are talking and some of them are silent.

"That is a strange image, he said, and these are strange prisoners. Like ourselves, I replied, and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave.

"True, he said. How could they see anything but shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

"And if they were able to talk with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them? And suppose, further, that the prison had an echo which came from the other side; would they not be sure to fancy that the voice which they heard was that of a passing shadow? And now look again, and see how they are released and cured of their follies. At first, when any one of them is liberated, and compelled suddenly to go up and turn his neck around and walk,

and look at the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows. And then imagine some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, he is approaching real beings; what will be his reply? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?"47

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Plato's Republic, p. 515, Jowett's Translation.

Plato, in order to account for our knowledge or general conception of abstract ideas, imagines that these have a real existence in another world from which our spirits come at birth. Of these general forms, or Ideas, the actual things of the world are imperfect representations, which, however, serve to awaken in the soul of man a reminisence of the perfect types which it knew before birth. This theory of Plato's attracted Shelley because of his utter dissatisfaction with all earthly things, and because of his love of the mysterious. Shelley in the stanza above imagines that at death the spirit of man enters into the world of Ideas and there contemplates the perfect object of which he saw only the image in this world.

These lines, "The one remains," etc., also show a development of Shelley's metaphysical ideas of Intellectual Beauty. Far more spiritual than Keats is his vision of Beauty; for Shelley Beauty is Intellectual, Spiritual--a spirit living and working through the universe, and ultimately undistinguishable from the "love" which "sustains" it; the sensuous world, its "veil," discloses it here and there in
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flowers, flame and heroic souls.

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[48] Ward, A. W. & Waller, A.R. - Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. 12, p. 66.

To a mind so constituted as Shelley's the ideal abstract philosophy of Plato gave a hint without giving it the deep understanding of the world of things which distinguished the great philosophy. Like his master, Shelley followed the principle of Ideal Beauty. He saw behind the concrete object the divine essence molding and perfecting its form. Accordingly he talked of Beauty and Love and Virtue and Wisdom as the true realities without a clear conception of their relation to the material world.[49]

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[49] Houston, P. H. - Main Currents in English Literature, p. 317.

As the years went on and the world did not become perceptibly better, Shelley turned his mind to dreams of ethereal, heavenly Beauty. He pictured to himself life freed from the trammels of flesh. His vision was of things beyond human life; and well might he sing in Adonais about the Platonic One that remained after the many have passed.

Shelley calls himself a phantom among men, companionless. He probably means that for them his realities are unreal.

"He - - - - - - -
Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
Actaeon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued, like ragine hounds their father and
their prey."

For Shelley "Nature's naked loveliness" is an image of something which only he has known. It is something beyond sense, but seen through sense and entrancing with a double spell upon spirit and sense alike.[50] Shelley loved to idealize reality.

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[50] Clutton-Brock, Arthur - Shelley, Man, Poet and Thinker, p. 79.

In this respect he resembled Plato, since both took more delight in the ideal than in the actual and tangible. He was at this time a true imitator of Plato, for he had translated Plato's Symposium and his Ion; and the English language boasts of no more brilliant composition than Plato's praise of Love translated by Shelley.[51]

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[51] Hutchison, Thos. - The Complete Poetical Works of Percy B. Shelley, p. 12.

In Adonais Shelley also brings up the mystery of future existence and the relation of the individual to the universe:

> "Naught we know, dies, Shall that alone which knows
> Be as a sword consumed before the sheath
> By sightless lightning?"

Here the poet is positive that the spirit of man shall not utterly perish. He thinks that the spirit of Adonais is reunited to the one eternal spirit which animates and beautifies the universe. He exclaims:

> "Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep--
> He hath awakened from the dream of life--
> 'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
> With phantoms an unprofitable strife,

And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings. We decay
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
Convulse us and consume us day by day,
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay."

Shelley's views on death and immortality are very similar to those of the master philosopher, Plato.[52] In the

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[52] Plato's Phaedo -. p.212, Jewett's Translation.

Phaedo he says that death is merely the separation of soul and body; and this is the very consummation at which philosophy aims; the body hinders thought, and the mind attains truth by retiring into herself. In no bodily sense does she perceive justice, beauty, goodness and other ideas. The true philosopher has a lifelong dispute with bodily desire, and he should gladly welcome the release of his soul. The soul and the body, Plato thinks, are related in that the body furnishes a dwelling place for the soul while it remains on earth; the body is for the sake of the soul. Their relation Plato sets forth in the well-known figure of the Charioteer and the winged Horses. One horse is of noble origin, and the other of ignoble; therefore there is some difficulty in managing them. The noble element, comparable to the soul, is trying to mount to the region of the heavens, where it may look upon images of divine Beauty and Wisdom that are proper to its nature; but the body, the ignoble element, is ever dragging it down to earth and earthly delights. When the Charioteer gets perfect control of his steeds, he can guide them to the heights of heaven, and the

body will submit itself to the ways of the soul.[53]

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[53] Plato's Theaetetus, p. 184, Jewett's Translation.

Both Plato and Shelley conceived of the world as dualistic; that is, as composed of matter and spirit. Shelley in speaking of Adonais says:

"He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely; he doth bear
His part, while the one spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear."

One finds in Adonais, therefore, a combination of Shelley's Platonic belief in the dualism of the world, pre-existence, immortality, intellectual and spiritual Beauty, and the moving spirit of existence, Love. He says:

"That light whose smile kindles the universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being kindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each one mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst."

In addition to his great practical power, Shelley was a close, logical, and subtle reasoner. Much of this ability he also owed to the constant study of Plato whose system of getting his adversary into admission and thus entangling him in hiw own web. He owed, furthermore, to Plato the simplicity and lucidity of his style, which he used to call a model for prose.[54]

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[54] Forman, Buxton,- Medwin's Revised Life of Shelley, p. 443.

In his Defence of Poetry Shelley says that the order or measure of poetry may remain at the stage which it reaches in beautiful prose like that of Plato, the melody of whose language he declares is the most intricate it is possible to conceive.[55]

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[55] Bradley, A. C. - Oxford Lectures on Plato, p. 158.

No where does Shelley soar so easily into the Ideal World of Plato as in Hellas, also composed in 1821. At this time classical histories were his continual study, and as he steeped himself in Plato, a world of ideal forms opened before him in a timeless heaven as real as history and as actual as the newspaper; therefore Hellas is the vision of a mind which touches fact through sense, but makes of sense the gate and avenue into an immortal world of thought. The past, present, and future are fused into one glowing symphony. "The Sultan is no more real than Xerxes, and the golden consummation glitters with a splendour as dazzling and as present as the Age of Pericles. For Shelley the denial of time had become a conscious doctrine. Berkley and Plato had become for him in his later years influences as intimate as Godwin's."[56] In his later poems Shelley again and

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[56] Braislford, H. N. - Shelley, Godwin and their Circle, p. 214.

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again turns from the cruelties and disappointments of the world; from failure, decay and death, not with revolt and anger, but with a serene contempt. The only reality to him now is thought; time with its appearance of mortality is the dream and the

illusion. In Hellas Ahasuerus says:

"The future and the past are idle shadows of
thought's eternal flight."

This poem was among the last of Shelley's compositions. His style, for example, is beautifully exemplified in the assertion of the intellectual empire which must be forever the inheritance of the country of Homer, Sophocles, and Plato.

In Hellas, among other things, Shelley's attitude toward Christ and Christianity is shown. The prologue, which contains Christ's own speech, clearly represents Shelley's view of Christ. The original form of Christianity is represented as the complement and crown of the Grecian spirit. Christ is preferred even to Plato, usually the idol of Shelley's worship. The poet says:

"By Plato's sacred light
Of which my spirit was a burning marrow--
By Greece and all she cannot cease to be,
Her quenchless words, sparks of immortal truth,
Stars of all night, her harmonies and forms,
Echoes and shadows of what love adores
In thee, I do compel thee, send forth Fate,
Thy irrevocable child: let her descend,
A seraph-winged victory arrayed
In tempest of the onmipotence of God
Which sweeps through all things."

Plato believed that the Idea of Good was banished from man's consciousness at birth, and only returned to it through that turning of the soul to the light which alone is real education; therefore Virtue with him, though intuitive, was realizable only with difficulty, through recollection, or the recapturing of the Idea of the Good by the human soul. One may well believe that in the passage above, Shelley was consciously

or unconsciously influenced by Plato, and one may therefore conclude that Plato's teaching regarding the dual nature of virtue was accepted by Shelley and made his own.[57] Hellas, from the

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[57] Strong, A. T. - Three Studies in Shelley, p. 32.

Platonic standpoint, contains much more than an exquisite reminder given to man of an ideal which he will never realize, but which it is good for him occasionally to behold. It contains the actual symbol of that which may yet be, which of a necessity must be, if the progress of man, despite its imperfections and frustrations, be an upward one, making for an increased love of his kind. One sees the close connection between the old order and the new in Shelley's poetry. The present already holds the future:

> "Like unfolded flowers beneath the sea,
> Like the man's thought dark in the infant's brain,
> Like aught that is which wraps what is to be."

In time happiness will be achieved and:

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

Hellas, probably better than any of the other poems, gives magnificent expression to the faith of Plato and of Christ.[58]

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[58] Ward, A. W. and Waller, A. R. - Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. 12, p. 81.

To say that Shelley opposed the religion of Christ with all its hierarchy is only true of his crude first stages; the mature

Shelley denounced ecclesiastic Christianity precisely because it was false to the religion of Christ.[59] Hellas is a series of

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[59] Lee, Sidney - The Year's Work in English Studies, p. 208.

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lyric pictures which are quickening to the soul. They are hymns of faith and hope, "songs before sunrise." The faith may be vain, and the hope deferred, but both are noticeably definite:

"Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay. - - - -
But they are still immortal
Who, through birth's orient portal
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light; - - - -
New shapes they still may weave,
New Gods, new laws receive,
Bright or dim are they as the robes they last
On Death's bare ribs had cast.

A power from the unknown God,
A Promethian Conqueror, came."

The conclusion of the last chorus is among the most beautiful of Shelley's lyrics. The imagery is majestic and distinctly Platonic; the prophecy is such as poets love to dwell upon--the regeneration of mankind; and that regeneration reflects splendor on the past from which it inherited much of its intellectual wealth, and the memory of past virtuous deeds.

Again in the Zucca, written in 1822, Shelley is yearning after a Love that alas, continued to elude his grasp:

"I loved, oh, no, I mean not one of ye,
Or any earthly one, though ye are dear
As human heart to human heart may be; -
I loved, I know not what--but this low sphere
And all that it contains,
Contains not thee,

Thou, whom, seen no where,
I feel everywhere.
From Heaven and Earth, and all that in them are,
Veiled art thou, like a star."

The one perfect being, the object of the poet's search, is not to be found in this world of shadows, but will probably be found after the veil of this life is torn away.

By the year 1822 one sees clearly that Shelley had become thoroughly immersed in the Greek of Plato. His Epigrams, written at this time, testify to this fact. The first one, To Stella, is undoubtedly based on the Greek of Plato. To Stella the poet says:

"Thou wert the morning star among the living
Ere thy fair light had fled;-
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving
New splendour to the dead."

and again in the epigram entitled Kissing Helena he says:

"Kissing Helena, together with my kiss, my soul
beside it
Came to my lips, and there I kept it,--
For the poor thing had wandered thither,
To follow where the kiss should guide it,
Oh, cruel I, to intercept it!"

It is, however, in the third epigram, Spirit of Plato, that Shelley reveals his knowledge of his master, Plato. He asks:

"Eagle! Why soarest thou above that tomb?
To what sublime and star-paven home floatest thou?"

His question is answered in the lines:

"I am the image of swift Plato's spirit,
Ascending heaven; Athens doth inherit
His corpse below."

The last of Shelley's productions, The Triumph of Life, published in 1824, is a pageant portraying life. Life, in the poem as it stands, is a mere rout, a scene of bewilderment, a

blind dance towards a goal of darkness leading from distracted youth to powerless age, unredeemed by any Prometheus, though lightened by the presence of some rare spirits who "could not tame their spirits to the Conqueror." In the darkness and bewilderment, however, the Platonic spirit of love is present.

> "Through every paradise and through all glory,
> Love led serene, and who returned to tell
> 'The words of hate and awe; the wondrous story
> How all things are transfigured except Love.'"

In addition to the spirit of Love which pervades the poem, it is fi led with rare imagery and beauty similar to that found in the Prometheus. In reading the poem, one is hurried through a shadow-world of ever-changing lights and sounds. The poet tells us that:

> "The grove grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers,
> The earth was gray with phantom, and the air
> Was peopled with dim forms - - - -
> Phantom diffused around and some did fling
> Shadows of shadows - - - -
> Behind them - - - -
> Others like elves
> Danced in a thousand unimagined shapes."

This imagery continues throughout the entire poem until numerous forms have passed before the wondering eyes of the poet. He, at length, asks the question:

> "What is life?"

The answer to his question is not given to us by Shelley; but even in this unfinished poem one sees traces of the vague, unreal mysticism of the master philosopher, Plato. How like him is Shelley in his use of the lights and shadows which hide the real world from one's sight. Like Plato, he leaves one in doubt as to the real idea he wishes to convey in the poem.

In a final analysis of Shelley's poems, one may well say that beginning with Alastor, and possibly earlier, there is a noticeable trace of Platonism, and that, from poem to poem, there is a steady growth of the Platonic traits. In the early poems written before he has come in direct contact with Plato's works, Shelley is more in favor of reforming the world by force, but during the year 1818, and thereafter, his zeal for reforming the world is replaced by seeking relief in Plato's world of Ideas, with his theory of Love and Beauty. This change is due, no doubt, to his translation in 1818 and thereafter of Plato's Symposium, Banquet, Phaedrus, and other of his works. The echo of Platonism found in his early works was an outgrowth of his reading of Plato's works as translated by someone else. Constantly recurring, however, in all these poems, early as well as late, is the same evidence of Plato. The Intellectual Beauty of his Hymn is absolutely the same thing as the one which in Adonais he contrasts with many; and in like manner the vision of Alastor and Epipsychidion is identical to the one perfect form the poet is searching after in Prince Athanase.[60] Nevertheless, in the later poems there is an increasing and ever-growing use of Platonism not so evident in the early poems. From the time of the composition of the Prometheus until the composition of the last poem, The Triumph of Life, Shelley's handbook was Plato; hence we have his myth-making power, his use of symbols, his

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[60] Bradley, A. C. - Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 152.

use of allegories, and his ideas concerning marriage, God, and death, as well as his theory of Love, Beauty, pre-existence, and immortality.

One finds, moreover, that it is partly to Shelley, as a true exponent of the Platonic doctrine, that the lovers of Plato owe a debt of gratitude, since it is partly his work that accounts for the fact that today Plato is not a thing of the past twenty centuries, but a mood, an approach to supreme Beauty. Professor Woodberry says that the Ideal forms of thought and emotion, charged with the life of the human spirit through ages, are now a part of a past and present life; and as one's life takes on these forms which cast their shadows on time, one is raised as by the hands of angels up the paths of righteousness; one is released from the temporal; one lays hold on eternity and enters into one's inheritance as heir to man's past glory. One begins in the true Platonic sense to lead that life of the free soul among things of the spirit which is emphasized in the Platonism of Shelley's Poetry.[61]

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[61] Woodberry, G. E. - The Torch, p. 217.

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