An Orderly Presentation of Three Objects of Shelley's Symbolism.

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AN ORDERLY PRESENTATION OF THREE
OBJECTS OF SHELLEY'S
SYMBOLISM

by

John V. Hopkins, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

How often throughout the gospels of our Divine Lord do we see Him speaking parables and trying to raise the hearts of men to the knowledge and love of eternal things through the sensible and material. This was our Lord's manner throughout His whole life. He could have cured the blind with but an instantaneous act of His omnipotent will, but He preferred to take a little dirt and mixing it with His own spittle, to apply it to the eyes of the blind. How right all this was is explained by St. Thomas:

I answer that, It is befitting Holy Writ to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things. For God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature. Now it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible objects, because all knowledge originates from sense.  

Our body and soul, created by an omniscient God Who knew what He was about, are not two separate kingdoms at war with each other but allies joined for mutual assistance. When properly ordered the body becomes the aide-de-camp of the soul and provides for it that material whereby the body itself is ennobled and

serves an eternal destiny proper to the soul itself. Thus, far from despising the body and the material universe, the Christian humanist recognizes it as the normal medium through which human nature is completely realized.

Should not we, then, following the lead of the all-wise God and of the nature created by Him, make use of the material and sensible world, even the common things of life that are not directly connected with divine worship, to raise our hearts to things eternal? Would you not say that this is even the reason why God made them so beautiful? Thoughts like these sincerely and deeply moved Cardinal Newman when speaking of what he called the "Sacramental system." That is "the doctrine that material phenomena are both the types and the instruments of real things unseen." 2

A person imbued with the above ideas should at least tolerate and perhaps be even grateful to those poets who express for us the beauty of the universe, whether it be the beauty of men, animals, plants, or the inorganic things of the world. We often miss the harmonious order of things in nature, and it takes the poet's selection and subordination, their similes, metaphores, and all their other devices of literary art, to bring it out for

us. Going to their productions, we ourselves can better see the beauty of God's works; and then those of us who have faith can use this beauty as a type and instrument for things unseen.

What has been stated in the preceding paragraph may be considered the scope that a certain class of poets set for themselves. They rest content if they can depict graphically and significantly the created life that daily confronts us in our round of work and play. They don't deny a higher life or the sacramental nature of created life, but they prescind from these things. However, there is another class of poets who try to do even more. These poets aim to express beautifully how through the contemplation of beautiful sensible things we can raise our hearts and minds to things that are spiritually beautiful. They are artists that portray for us man's ascent to God, however inaccurately they may conceive the Supreme Being or the discipline that will bring us to Him.

Now every artist or craftsman has the tools of his own art or trade. The carpenter has his rule and saw; the sculptor has his chisel and hammer. The author-artist has words and the whole gamut of sense-appealing language to express artistically his thought and emotion. Poets, however, of the type who speak of the sacramental aspect of created life, are not interested very much in such figures of speech as similes and metaphores, for these usually relate the material with the material. Their mode of expression is rather symbolic and is sometimes confusingly desig-
nated as mystical. This means merely that they recognize the reality of something above the material that cannot be adequately expressed by the material. Yet, because of the dual make-up of our nature, the material must be the medium of their expression of this supra-material object if the poet is to be artistic; and so they substitute for it an object that best expresses this spiritual being. This object they call a symbol, which The Oxford English Dictionary defines in its second meaning as follows:

Something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation); esp. a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality, or condition; a representative or typical figure, sign, or token; occas. a type (of some quality).

The symbol, therefore, has somewhat different a connotation from a comparison. It is a comparison, but that type of comparison in which a sensible image is used to express something spiritual. Symbolism is for this very reason a very difficult mode of expression. The symbol, as a formal sign or one that represents its object by virtue of its likeness to that object, must partake of the delicacy, simplicity, and refinement of what is spiritual. For this very reason it may seem that the symbol is even without substance or inner meaning. Ultimately it comes down to trying to make as immaterial as possible what must be quite material if it is to be an instrument of artistic expression.

Shelley is one of those poets who uses the symbol in the sense that the author has just been describing. The purpose of this thesis, then, is to explain in some detail how Shelley symbolizes three objects which to his mind were of utmost importance: Supernal Beauty, Love, and the Imagination. The author intends also to untangle the intricacies of Shelley's poetry and to present these three objects in a more orderly fashion than is found in any of Shelley's poetry; for Shelley is, as it were, always in medias res, and it is difficult for the uninitiated reader to follow his thought. Moreover, these three objects are part and parcel of Shelley's Platonic philosophy; and hence, from time to time, there will arise the need also to investigate these objects in the light of this philosophy.

If the above purpose can be accomplished, the reader will no longer feel that Shelley lived in an ivory tower, as has been falsely supposed by some, where he completely lost touch with reality. Indeed, it will be seen that he had a definite objective in mind and that he accomplished this objective with singular beauty and force. Moreover, the condemnation which we would place against him on highly ethical grounds will give way to pity and sympathy for a man who sought with such intense desire what was most beautiful and loveable in life. How can a person feel anything but poignant sorrow for a man who, speaking of this desire from the depths of his soul, lamented:

The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.4

Because the objects of Shelley's symbolism took on their most definitive form in his mature poetry, that written between the years 1818 and 1822, the author of this thesis has chosen to exemplify his remarks from the poetry only of this period. These best set forth Supernal Beauty, Love, and the Imagination. There is some justification for this, too, in the fact that during these years age and experience had begun to make the "mad" Shelley a saner person. It is much easier to sympathize with the Shelley of this period than with the Shelley of the preceding years. The following statement from the Symposium of Plato, translated by Shelley, can be applied quite appropriately to the poet himself, "The vision of the understanding then grows keen when the radiance of youth first wanes in the eyes."5

Assuredly others have made investigations similar in part to the one that the author of this thesis proposes to undertake, but his is truly an original approach to the subject.

In the first place, the author has investigated a considerable number of works on Shelley, and never has he found the


subject of symbolism given the extensive consideration that it merits as a help for understanding his poetry. In addition to what he has already said on this particular figure of speech, he intends to revert to it from time to time as need arises.

Secondly, the writer intends to present three very important objects of Shelley's symbolism, Beauty, Love, and the Imagination, in a very orderly fashion according to the meaning behind each and to show the connection between these objects. Other authors have taken either the historical approach and thus use the chronological order, or they have presented only a part of what this writer intends to do. This latter statement is true not in the sense that he will treat certain phases at greater length, but in the sense that his treatment will, he believes, give a more unified and complete picture of the main driving forces behind Shelley's poetry. Finally, he hopes that his study will give a more compact and yet comprehensive understanding of this Romantic poet.

Lest there result some confusion in the succeeding chapters, a remark should be made even here in the Introduction about the type of distinction that exists between the three objects that will be treated, Supernal Beauty, Love, and the Imagination. For all practical purposes, the Imagination, considered as a faculty according to its manner of existence, is really distinct from Beauty and Love; but according to the thought-content of its secondary operation, the Imagination is only rationally distinct from
them, for Beauty and Love reside in the Imagination as its production. Beauty and Love, however, are only rationally distinct from each other according to the manner of their existence, for Love is a thing of Beauty; but according to what they say the mind can distinguish differences between them, and hence they can be called rationally distinct. The author realizes that he has imposed scholastic terminology on Shelley's notion of these objects, but he believes that this rigorous terminology accurately sets off Shelley's notion of the differences between these objects. Moreover, it will clear the air of some confusion and prepare the way for an easier understanding of what will follow, especially where these objects will seem to overlap.

The Bond of Being, by James F. Anderson, and Beauty, by Aloysius Rother, S.J., have been of help in the author's efforts to get a better understanding of the symbol. A number of books have helped him in his investigation of the objects of Shelley's symbolism, but the principal ones are Shelley the Man and the Poet, by Clutton-Brock; The Magic Plant, by Carl Grabo, and Portrait of Shelley, by Newman I. White. All three of these works are monumental biographies joined to critical analyses of the poems. The Platonism of Shelley, by James A. Notopoulos, is a large tome giving a very thorough exposition of the Platonic influences in Shelley's poetry. Of all the related books, Shelley, His Theory of Poetry, by Melvin T. Solve, comes nearest the aim of this thesis. Besides his greater emphasis on symbolism, the
The author hopes to say more on the interconnection of the Imagination with Beauty and Love. Moreover, Solve's work does not appear to the author to have the compact unity of his attempt. Obviously, however, this and all the other works mentioned have eased the burden of investigation, nor would this study have been possible without their aid. The author wishes also to express his gratitude to Philip H. Vogel, S. J., whose expert professional advice and encouragement were of considerable assistance.
CHAPTER II

SUPERNAL BEAUTY AS AN OBJECT
OF SHELLEY'S SYMBOLISM

No one who has gazed into a clear, star-lit night or
who has watched the indomitable waves of the ocean pounding on a
sandy shore will deny that this sensible world is filled with
beauty. "That there is beauty in the sensible objects themselves
needs no proof, as it is admitted by all . . . ."¹

Nevertheless, to say that this sensible beauty is per­
manent would be equally as foolish. It passes as a blade of
grass blown by the wind. Men of the belles-lettres and poets,
who are accounted men peculiarly responsive to the beauties of
the sensible world, have almost universally borne witness to the
fading nature of this beauty. Some authors, as Poe, have gone so
far as even to say that the highest art is reached only when it
presents beauty in the process of disruption.

The poet Shelley was a man who himself recognized this
two-fold aspect of sensible beauty. He was torn by the beauty of
passing life and at the same time by the pathos of its mutability.

¹ A. Rother, S. J., Beauty, St. Louis, 1917, 72.
He saw the mixture of sweet and bitter in earthly things and acknowledged the inconstant and deceptive summer of delight and beauty which invested this visible world. At one time he would speak of the passing odor and color of the violet\(^2\); at another, of how the beauty of this world "breaks in our bosom and then we bleed."\(^3\) So much did the "venomed melody"\(^4\) of beauty and the inevitability of its decay haunt him that in the end of his life he seldom felt the delight that sensible beauty brings but only the sorrow.

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight;
    Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
    No more--oh, never more\(^5\)

Nevertheless, Shelley's optimistic spirit would not permit him to despair but drove him on, even from youth, to seek that greater permanence and universality of beauty present within the realm of human thought. He talked about the great creations of the human spirit, symbolized in the Greek nation during the classical period, as being eternal.

But Greece and her foundations are
Built below the tide of war,
Based on the crystalline sea

\(^4\) Ibid., "Epipsychidion," l. 256, 302.
\(^5\) Ibid., "A Lament," 410.
Of thought and its eternity; 6

The majestic sweep and ceaseless movement of the ocean have always induced poets to use it as a symbol of eternity. By a clever association between this visible symbol and the universal character of thought, Shelley has painted in liquid language this greater permanence of beauty in the human mind.

In Epipsychidion he reiterates the permanence of the mind's creations; and in Prometheus Unbound the Chorus of Spirits, who come to comfort Prometheus and symbolize the creative moods in him, sing of the universality of beauty in man's mind:

And we breath, and sicken not
The atmosphere of human thought:
Be it dim, and dank, and gray,
Like a storm-extinguished day,
Travelled o'er by dying gleams;
Be it bright as all between
Cloudless skies and windless streams,
Silent, liquid, and serene;
As the birds within the wind,
As the fish within the wave,
As the thoughts of man's own mind
Float through all above the grave;
We make there our liquid lair,
Voyaging cloudlike and unpent
Through the boundless element. 7

In the above quotation these winged spirits are eternal forms that inhabit the mind in its gayer as well as more somber moods. Moreover, these forms are always in a fluid state. In their eternity they yet are in constant flux. This is symbolized by the

7 Ibid., "Prometheus Unbound," Act I, ll. 675-689, 176.
movement of birds in air and fishes in water. Of course there is a reason for this. The mind itself is fluid in the sense that it can encompass all nature and become a universe in itself by going about observing all forms that exist in the world. Thus these thoughts in the mind become unlimited, "... unpent through the boundless element."

Since human thought as an object of Shelley's poetry will be treated at greater length in Chapter IV, what has been said on this subject will suffice for the time being, except where certain features of it pertain to that highest type of beauty, Supernal Beauty. This we must now bring under consideration.

After finishing the first act of Prometheus Unbound, Shelley wrote in a letter to his friend Peacock, "You know, I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present and tangible object." On the authority of S. A. Brooke, this "something" was never clearly defined in Shelley's mind. In true Neo-Platonic form, he thought that if he could have clearly conceived it, it would have been circumscribed, limited, capable of satiety, and thus still manifestative of "something beyond." Yet on the authority of all the critics and on Shelley's own avowal, this "something" was closely identified with the One, the

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9 S. A. Brooke, Naturalism in English Poetry, New York, 1920, 205.
Supreme Good, the Supreme Wisdom, the Supreme Beauty of Plato's philosophy. In connection with this Supernal Beauty, human thought would be of interest to Shelley in as much as it was a more perfect imitation of this Platonic Beauty than any sensible replica might be and in as much as the mind was the means for coming in contact with it. In terms of Platonic philosophy the analysis may be worded as follows.

In Plato the forms of things considered as absolute patterns of perfection exist in another world than ours. In our world the reflection of these forms abides in sensible and intellectual beings. In beholding a work of art, for example, we have a sensible image and a concept of the beautiful. The Platonist conceives this concept to be but a reflection and image of the absolute Form existing apart from this world of sensible reality. Moreover, this most perfect Form of the Beautiful is better realized in the mind than in the sensible world, and mind alone can lay hold of and conceive it. L. Winstanley gives a very good exposition of what I have been saying:

The consideration of Plato's heaven leads us to what is his chief characteristic as a thinker: the extraordinary tenacity with which he lays hold upon the world of mind; to him the world of sense, vividly as he apprehends it, is always less real, less emphatically existent than the supersensuous world; it always appears as if to him 'mind stuff' were the essential material of the universe. The common man feels as if the objects of sense were the realities and all mental things 'abstractions'; to Plato the things of mind are the only true realities, and matter is, in comparison, 'the dream and the shade.' No one has apprehended the splendour of the outer world more fully than he, but nevertheless, he regarded it in all its magnificent variety, as being only a dull copy of certain ideas which, in their eternal beauty.
could be seen and realized only with eyes of the soul. He
dwells by preference, amid abstractions; they are for him a
world in themselves—brighter, more vivid, more beautiful
and above all, more real than the world of so-called reality.10

As was stated above, a more detailed analysis of Shelleys world of mind will be presented later on in this study.

Let us proceed, then, to see how Shelley recognized the absolute
form of Beauty as revealing and yet veiling itself in the sensi-
ble world. Of course, that the beauty of sensible things does
thus reveal Beauty makes them partake immediately of the nature
of symbols, for a symbol in its generic sense is a sign or a medi-
um through which a person comes to the knowledge of something
else. However, a symbol is also a conventional sign. Such a
sign, in itself, depends on the arbitrary choice of the one who
uses it. Unless the user tell a reader what such a sign means,
the reader must deduce it from a somewhat wide perusal of the
users works and from an investigation of his life and philosophy.
This the writer thinks he has done with respect to Shelley and in-
tends to point out now some of the objects which Shelley chooses
for his symbolism of Supernal Beauty as well as to give a rather
minute explanation of a rather difficult passage in order that
the reader may know how to go about interpreting Shelleys poetry.

Shelley thought that Supernal Beauty revealed itself
most exquisitely in woman, especially in a woman's countenance.

10 L. Winstanley, "Platonism in Shelley," Essays and
He makes reference to this fact in a comment on a statue of the Greek goddess Niobe, "The countenance of Niobe is the consummation of feminine majesty and loveliness, beyond which the imagination scarcely doubts that it can conceive anything." Shelley's life and the characters and subject matter of his later poems also are sufficient proof of this. Take, for example, Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*, Emelia in *Epipsychidion*, and those women to whom he addressed many of his shorter poems.

Shelley need not be thought to be in any way odd or sensuous in this association that he makes between woman and Supernal Beauty. Commenting on the symbolism of the Middle Ages, de Bruyne remarks:

... for the sage of the Middle Ages, a woman is by her beauty, the symbolic revelation of God at the same time as she is the synthesis of the beauty of the World. It is Scotus who insists on this symbolic power of her beauty: "In general calling ... a woman ... the beauty of the entire sensible creation." 

I would not make reference to this fact except that I believe Shelley has been the subject of some unjust criticism in this matter and I want to show that in his symbolism he is in

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12 E. de Bruyne, L'Esthétique du Moyen Age, Editions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Louvain, 1947, 90. "... pour le sage du moyen âge, la femme est par sa beauté, la révélation symbolique de Dieu en même temps que la synthèse de la beauté du Monde. C'est Scot qui insiste sur cette valeur significative de sa beauté: 'Nulierem ... appellans ... generaliter totius sensibilis creaturarum formositatem.'"
line with the tradition of the past.

However, Shelley did not restrict Beauty's revelation merely to women but saw its glory transfused throughout the entire universe. A skylark which was not seen but whose song was heard, an autumn wind which could not be seen but whose breath one felt, the spirit-like cloud which condensed and formed rain to moisten the parched earth—all symbolized it. A stanza from the poem The Zucca gives us some idea of the many manifestations of Beauty that Shelley saw in nature and the poem also makes reference to its revelation in women. In the word "thee" of the last line he addressed Supernal Beauty.

In winds, and trees, and streams and all things common,
In music, and the sweet unconscious tone
Of animals, and voices which are human,
Meant to express some feelings of their own;
In the soft motions and rare smile of woman,
In flowers and leaves, and in the grass fresh shown,
Or dying in the autumn, I the most
Adore thee present, or lament thee lost.13

In Prometheus Unbound, too, there are some lines that describe most beautifully the visitation which Supernal Beauty makes through the world. In the following selection Asia is the one who speaks the words. She is the light of life, or the shadow of Beauty unbeheld. According to Platonic thought, she is the form that mirrors the Absolute Form and is joined with the principle of imperfection of this earth. In this passage Asia's soul

is symbolized as a boat that rides on the voice of a Spirit (the voice, though belonging to the Spirit, is itself symbolized in the form of a river). The Spirit, of course, belongs to Supernal Beauty. Asia’s soul, under the influence of the Spirit’s voice, passes through the external world, through death, and is finally brought to that realm where Supernal Beauty most pervades. It will help the reader’s understanding of these lines to know that for Shelley a river usually symbolized the course of human life, which at death passed into eternity, or symbolically, the ocean.

Asia

My soul is an enchanted boat
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;
And thine doth like an angel sit
Beside a helm conducting it.
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.
It seems to float ever, forever,
Upon that many-winding river,
Between mountains, woods, abysses,
A paradise of wildernesses!
Till, like one in slumber bound,
Borne to the ocean, I float down, around
Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound:
Meanwhile thy spirit lifts its pinions
In music’s most serene dominions;
Catching the winds that fan that happy heaven.
And we sail on, away, afar,
Without a course, without a star,
But, by the instinct of sweet music driven;
Till through Elysian garden islets
By thee, most beautiful of pilots,
Where never mortal pinnace glided,
The boat of my desire is guided:
Realms where the air we breathe is love,
Which in the winds and on the waves doth move,
Harmonizing this earth with what we feel above. At the risk of seeming to repeat what has already been said in a prefatory way on this passage, the author would like to explain the Neo-Platonism behind the above passage and to paraphrase it in his own words. Only by this detailed explanation will the reader fully appreciate it.

In Neo-Platonic parlance there are three main principles in the world: the One, the Mind, and Life, according to their descending order of excellence. Only Life is mixed with matter, but both Life and Mind emanate from the One, which acts as an efficient cause. In connection with Shelley and the afore-stated passage, the One is nothing more than Supernal Beauty, the Spirit is the Mind, and Asia is Life (she is addressed as "Life of Life" by the Spirit in some lines preceding the quoted passage). Now it is also a cardinal principle of Neo-Platonic philosophy that every participated excellence, besides being an image of its cause, has also a principle of return or desire for that cause, so that every effect desires its cause and ultimately the One. Consequently, in the above passage we see Asia, or Life, enchanted by the beauty which the Spirit, or Mind, makes by its singing. The Spirit then directs Asia, or her soul because this is the purely immaterial part of her nature, as though she were a boat that

floats through all the natural beauties of this earth. Next, in an ecstasy of melody she dies and passes into eternity. But it is here that this ethereal pilot, the Spirit, guides Asia to beauties incapable of being experienced on earth, until finally the "boat of my desire" is brought to that excellence most supreme, where all disagreements are reconciled in love.

Thus far I have been speaking about Supernal Beauty without giving any detailed account of its nature. I have said that Shelley called it a "something" without clearly defining it. But was it an entirely amorphous thing with no special properties and characteristics which he at least implicitly acknowledged? No, it was hardly that. Indeed, Supernal Beauty had at least four special features: it was inexhaustible, harmonious, spiritual, and one. To a discussion of these four attributes of Beauty and of Shelley's symbolization of them, let us now proceed before taking up the next object of Shelley's symbolism.

By saying that this Beauty is inexhaustible is meant Beauty both that never decays and that, as it were, the more one takes, the more there is left to take. That this Beauty is inexhaustible in this sense has already been implied by my treatment of it elsewhere in this chapter. There is further proof of it in Shelley's own prose and poetical works and the statements of the critics. Remarking on the beauty of a Grecian statue, Shelley gives us an insight into the infinitude of Ideal Beauty, "... it allows the spectator the choice of a greater number of points of
view, ... in which to catch a greater number of the infinite
modes of expression, of which any form approaching ideal beauty
is necessarily composed."

The symbols of Shelley's poetry also express the inex-
haustibility of Supernal Beauty. Among the many symbols that
could be used to exemplify this point, let us choose that peculiar-
ly Neo-Platonic one, Shelley's so-called soul-out-of-my-soul, this
me, not mine. These expressions, seemingly esoteric in meaning,
designate for Shelley merely the creations of the poetic faculty.
Of course such creations will symbolize Supernal Beauty better
than anything else will, since they are man's greatest effort to
create beauty. Here, if anywhere, should be seen the inexhaust-
bile aspect of Supernal Beauty. The poem Epipsychidion, which
means in Greek over or above my soul, shows that this indeed is
the case.

To the intense, the deep, the imperishable,
Not mine, but me, henceforth be thou united.
Even as a bride, delighting and delighted.

This brief poetic statement is filled with Shelley's philosophy.
Simply explained, it means that the woman whom the poet addresses
stands for the prototype of his most perfect self. The poet
desires that she be united to this most perfect self, which is in

15 P. B. Shelley, "Remarks on Some of the Statues in
the Gallery of Florence," The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, 11. 11.
393, 304.

16 Shelley, "Epipsychidion," Poetical Works, 11. 391-
a way the creative mind of man and is called "intense," "deep," and imperishable," words synonymous with inexhaustible.

The last proof to show that Shelley's Supernal Beauty is inexhaustible is the opinion of a critic. Notopoulos, in his scholarly work on Shelley's Platonism, reaffirms my position here on the nature of Supernal Beauty by saying, "Beautiful objects in the world of time and space pass and fade, but Ideal Beauty knows naught of the seasons."17

Shelley's Supernal Beauty was also harmonious; that is, it harmonized in itself all the passing beauty of the world and all the seemingly divergent notes of opposed philosophies and creeds. "... I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled," wrote Shelley to Peacock.18 In his poetry as well, Shelley spoke of the spirit of Supernal Beauty as the "harmony of truth,"19 the great symphony that would join in melodious tune all that was good and beautiful in life and consign to mute oblivion all that was base and ugly. Supernal Beauty was harmonious, too, in the sense that it was musical. Music is nothing more than beautiful sound; and thus, being beaut-

17 Notopoulos, The Platonism of Shelley, 18.
iful, it gives to us from the Shelleyan viewpoint an imperfect idea of the nature of Supernal Beauty and is symbolic of it. In the Ode to the West Wind Shelley makes reference to the "tumult of thy mighty harmonies"; and there is no one who has read even cursorily Shelley's To a Skylark and not recognized the beauty that the poet attached to song. Shelley entitled a number of his poems Song; and indeed, song seemed to him to inundate all that was beautiful in the world. The fresh earth dressed in new leaves, the starry night, the golden mists of morn, the radiant frost, the waves, the winds, the storms, the society of the quiet, the wise, and the good—all were filled with song. In his last days Shelley was entertained frequently by the singing of Jane Williams. So much, in fact, did song symbolize for Shelley Supernal Beauty that he looked upon it as the best of all the symbols. This will be seen even more clearly after the treatment of Love in the next chapter.

Supernal Beauty as inexhaustible and harmonious has been the subject of the preceding paragraphs. The next attribute of Shelley's Supernal Beauty is its spirituality. For those who have studied Shelley's writings and life more thoroughly this is not hard to admit; but for the sake of those who have not, I wish to give more space to it than to the other attributes. Moreover, it

20 Ibid., "Ode to the West Wind," V, 368.
21 Ibid., "Song," 403.
is this attribute that places Shelley in a very favorable light and makes his poetry more acceptable for us.

It is possible that in Shelley's early life the spirituality of what captivated him was not very clearly disassociated from the earthly. Perhaps he confused the two and even tried to justify the one by the other. Clutton-Brock, in his *Shelley the Man and the Poet*, says, "The confusion of ideals with appetites is a phase of growth in all men who are both passionate and imaginative; and those who continue to grow outgrow it, and understand themselves better for the experience." However, we must be very careful in this matter where we are dealing with the confused and half-conscious motives of a man. Certainly we ourselves can never pass final judgement. Moreover, the following words, made by Shelley as early as 1811, indicate that he did recognize even at that early date the superiority of the spirit over the flesh:

But Love, the Love which we worship--Virtue, Heaven, disinterestedness--in a word. Friendship, which has as much to do with the senses as with yonder mountains, that which seeks the good of all, the good of its object first, not because that object is a minister to its pleasures, not merely because it even contributes to its happiness, but because it is really worthy, because it has powers, sensibilities, is capable of abstracting self, and loving virtue for virtue's own loveliness, . . . .

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Nevertheless, under some few aspects we can say that the younger Shelley emphasized the material over the ideal. In his early life he was extremely interested in the natural sciences, especially chemistry. He was taken in by the materialist Godwin. Newman Ivey White says of Shelley in his early life, "Similarly he poured over various moral and metaphysical writers, giving somewhat closer attention to the materialists than to the idealists." Moreover, when Shelley was interested in the spiritual or supernal, it often took on the ghostly and weird aspect of the Monk Lewis type. Finally, although in Queen Mab most of Shelley's later doctrine was here set forth and here a definite upward flight is perceptible, yet his idealism was still hampered by the early youthful enthusiasm for the Spirit of Necessity.

But regardless of the stand that one takes on this point, all this was the early Shelley. Shelley, like the skylark, was continually flying up, and he was not very old before he became in his imagination what by his nature it was very easy for him to become, a full-fledged idealist. In consequence, there also took place a clarification in Shelley's notion of Beauty. Reason began to see what swept it along. As N. I. White says:

In Alastor he had already found his old doctrine of a dispassionate Necessity too cold and rigid for his expansive sym-

24 N. I. White, Portrait of Shelley, New York, 1945,
pathies. He had referred in the Preface to a "Power" whose exquisite influences it was dangerous to perceive too suddenly, and fatal to ignore. To this power in his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," he now gave a definite name and definite functions. It was "Intellectual Beauty," or beauty which can only be conceived as an idea, rather than experienced in its fullness. 25

In the more mature years of Shelley's life there is no shadow of doubt that he realized to the full the supernal aspect of the Beauty that he sought. Life as mere physical activity was of little interest to him; whereas, the undying spiritual values of life became the object of his incessant desires. These values, almost exclusively, occupied his thoughts. Speaking of his poem Epipsychidion, Shelley wrote to his friend Gisborne, "... as to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in these articles; you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me." 26 This is the burden, too, of these lines from The Zucca, written in the last year of Shelley's life:

I loved--oh no, I mean not one of ye,
Or any earthly one, tho' 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 nowhere, I feel everywhere.
From heaven and earth, and all that in them are.

25 Ibid., 205.
26 Shelley, The Letters of P. B. Shelley, II, 920.
Veiled art thou, like a star.27

Seeing that Shelley conceived Supernal Beauty as spiritual, he must have chosen symbols that were ethereal to exemplify it. This, as was mentioned earlier in this study, is demanded by the fact that a symbol is a formal sign. As a matter of fact, Shelley does use symbols of this transcendent nature. Very seldom does he choose the mundane, the earthly, the minute particles of clay; but he dwells by preference amid the sky and air, floating there as an unbodied spirit. The moon, the stars, the mist and haze of dawn and twilight, soft breezes, the fleeting clouds, the spray of rushing rivulets, their number could be multiplied again. Shelley seems never to be a part of natural phenomena but only to be passing through it as a vapor. It is the spirit of nature's forms that he envisions, not nature itself. So intangibly and smoothly run some of his lines that a quick, careless reading may miss the meaning, which is there for the enquiring mind. All difficulties are again resolved in the truth of this statement by Alfred Noyes, "... because he found his 'substance' in the soul, criticism has too often declared that his poetry lacked 'substance.'"28

The final attribute of Shelley's Supernal Beauty that

the writer wishes to treat is its oneness. There are a number of places in Shelley's poetry where he speaks of it as being one, but it is difficult to say with certitude precisely what he meant by it. Did he mean that it was spiritually simple, or that it was a single substance, or that it was a person, that incommunicable being of nature? Would the individual human being be lost in the oneness of Beauty or retain his identity? He leaves us in doubt about these matters. This much, however, can be said. Realizing the seeming contradiction of the one and the many in the world, Shelley thought that somehow it would find a solution in Supernal Beauty, the great reconciler. Furthermore, over and above the lacunae in Shelley's doctrine of the oneness of Supernal Beauty,

It is of the first importance for the understanding of Shelley to realise how strong in him is the sense and conviction of this unity in life: it is one of his Platonic traits. The Intellectual Beauty of the Hymn is absolutely the same thing as the Liberty of his Ode, the 'Great Spirit' of Love that he invokes to bring freedom to Naples, the One which in Adonais he contrasts with the Many, the Spirit of Nature of Queen Mab, and the Vision of Alastor and Epipsychidion.29

Shelley himself stated that "The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy, is that of unity."30 Consequently it is not important to know precisely what Shelley meant by unity, but it is important to know that he

set great store by it. It saves one from becoming too analytical in his reading of Shelley's highly symbolic poetry. For example, Hungerford gives a very detailed and scientific account of the precise symbolic nature of the Moon and Earth in the last act of Prometheus Unbound. Praiseworthy and accurate as this is, the ordinary reader need not try to unravel its intricacies. If he will but keep in mind the key to all of Shelley's poetry, the simple fact that all nature is but a graded participation in and at the same time revelation of Supernal Beauty, the passages will be clear enough. For instance, in the passage referred to above, the Moon is but a lesser light of the same Supernal Beauty that is reflected in the Earth. This simple recognition, together with what in the succeeding chapters will be learned of Love and the Imagination as an integral part of Supernal Beauty, would enable the reader to read these passages with considerable understanding and delight. Shelley's central thought, at least in his later works, is always the same. The confusion comes in getting too close to the poem and forgetting this central thought. In any even, Shelley's Supernal Beauty must always be considered as one, and any lesser revelation of it as a part of that same Supernal Beauty.

In this chapter the author of this thesis has tried to

give the reader an idea of how Shelley symbolized Supernal Beauty. and what he understood by that term. Some may feel that Shelley's moth-like muse attempted too much and was burnt by the too great heat of the object that he very boldly tried to portray, or perhaps that the labor involved in trying to decipher Shelley's meaning is not proportionate to the frugal profit that this labor brings. But no one will deny that this object was an exalted one and that the lines, once they are understood, have beauty and music.

Moreover, the exposition of this chapter has presented to the reader a simple formula for understanding Shelley's poetry. Shelley's object is Supernal Beauty and the figures by which he chooses to portray it are symbols. This, certainly, is not complicated. It is true, however, that Shelley's poetry becomes somewhat filmy by reason of the spirituality of his object. Furthermore, a symbol is a conventional sign, that is, one that is determined arbitrarily by the poet, and thus one will be lost if he is not acquainted with the poet's use of these symbols. However, a symbol is also a formal sign, and thus it is even more important that the reader understands the nature of Supernal Beauty somewhat in detail so that the symbol can be easily interpreted. Hence these symbols are not in themselves very difficult; and once Shelley's general method is understood, they can be recognized with a little serious thought. This is even more true if one has a wider understanding of Supernal Beauty, an understanding that
includes both Love and the Imagination; and so these two objects, very intimately connected with Supernal Beauty, will be the subject matter of the following chapters.
CHAPTER III

LOVE AS AN OBJECT OF SHELLEY'S SYMBOLISM

Someone has said quite truly that love is what makes the world go round. The great forces that have shaped and even now are shaping the world are the resultants of great loves, either good or bad, in the hearts of leaders and their followers. In the small world of private life it is love again that is responsible for man's actions. No one need be surprised, then, nor raise his eyebrows in condemnation when we say that love was the center of Shelley's life. Love is the center and force of everyone's life. Some, however, are wont to talk of Shelley's love and refer only to his affairs with women; but in so doing they misconceive his concept of love and greatly constrict it, giving only a half-truth which is really no truth at all. Obviously the Christian moralist cannot endorse Shelley's doctrine of free-love, but it is equally as obvious that he cannot wholly reject that higher love which alone Shelley contemplated very seriously. To recognize this latter fact one has but to read the poet's A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love, where he says, "... the gratification of the senses is no longer all
that is sought in sexual connexion. It soon becomes a very small part of that profound and complicated sentiment, which we call Love, . . . .

1 Love, therefore, meant for Shelley something far more than sexual intercourse. It was a very profound and complicated sentiment. We must, consequently, study more thoroughly this sentiment called Love before taking up the subject of Shelley's symbolization of it and its connection with Supernal Beauty.

There were three aspects of Love that greatly interested Shelley: its cause, its nature, and its effect. With respect to its cause, he looked upon the human spirit as a great vacuum or void that cried out for fulfillment. Naturally this fulfillment would be of the nature of human perfection, something that would fit into this void or vacuum. Man was not a void, however, in the sense that he was nothing, but man recognized in himself movements and perfections that were capable of greater and greater expansion. Conceiving what this expansion might be, man desired to commune with an object similar to it. Thus Shelley thought that the cause of Love in man was that potency in him for the most perfect prototype of all that belonged to the nature of man, both on the lower and, more especially, on the higher plane. This ideal prototype is the soul-out-of-my-soul, this me, not mine, that Shelley talked about very frequently. It is the

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1 Shelley, "A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love," The Platonism of Shelley, 408.
image of man raised to the sublimest heights. It is not true to say that this prototype is the same as the Christian God; for although we are made to the image of God, yet God is not made to our image. But still Shelley came rather close, and we cannot expect him to know a distinction which only centuries of study and the revelation of God have made known to us.

Put briefly, then, likeness and goodness stirred up in man the sentiment of Love. Explained in this way, Love might seem to be a purely concupiscible power, a desire that good accrue to one's self. Shelley did not understand it in this sense alone. In fact, love as friendship always won greater praise from him. Of course a rejected love, or one that could not find some sublime object on which to bestow its selfless devotion, would leave him despondent. But it was love of friendship, none the less. His heart would cling to the object of its desire and not claim in return "one smile for all the comfort, love, It may bring to thee."\(^2\)

Finally, Shelley thought that Love was consummated in that communion where understanding, imagination, and feeling were one. Thus the effect of Love was that union or sympathy in which the soul of man was joined to that ideal prototype of all that is most excellent in man. Shelley's own words will summarize and conclude for us this discussion on the three-fold aspect of Love:

\(^2\) Shelley, "From the Arabic," Poetical Works, 403.
Thou demandest what is love? It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. . . . This is love. . . . We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. . . . We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man.  

... Love, which is rather the universal thirst for a communion not merely of the senses, but of our whole nature, intellectual, imaginative and sensitive; and which, when individualized, becomes an imperious necessity, only to be satisfied by the complete, or partial, actual or supposed fulfilment of its claims.

Shelley realized, therefore, that man was insufficient in himself and that Love was the desire that man had to be in communion with what would make up for this insufficiency. In his own private life Shelley experienced this desire. N. I. White says of him, "For Shelley's nature complete sympathy was almost a vital necessity; his whole life and works are a record of his search for it." However, since we are interested primarily in Shelley's works, let us restrict ourselves to them to see how he speaks of Love.

In the first place, in keeping with Shelley's notion of

4 Shelley, "A Discourse on the Manners . . . ," The Platonism of Shelley, 408.
5 White, Portrait of Shelley, 149.
Love as the union of the human mind with its ideal prototype, the poet often treats Love as harmony. This, of course, will immediate recall to the reader what has been said of Supernal Beauty as harmony in the last chapter. However, this is not the reason that I bring up the topic of Love as harmony at this point in the present chapter, nor do I mention it principally because Shelley himself often spoke of Love as harmony. I have done so rather because harmony is a word that better expressed the dynamic, real approach that Shelley took towards Love. It was not something purely speculative, but something which he believed with his imagination and with his whole emotional nature. Life was instinct with the pulse of Love, and Shelley felt it everywhere. As Arthur Clutton-Brock says, "He is in love, not with a theory, but with a vision." For him Love was not a word but a world, and a "wind blew from it laden with its scent. The wind that we hear and breathe in his poetry." As with Supernal Beauty, so with Love, it is a light that burns bright through the mist that seems to hide it.

Harmony, therefore, as a word which is often applied to music and to the feelings, seems to be a more accurate word to express what is meant by the communion of Love. Indeed, in order


7 Ibid.
that the strength of feeling and imagination with which Shelley believed in this doctrine of Love may be seen more clearly, two quotations exemplifying them will be made from Shelley's poetry. In the following lines from *Epipsychidion*, he addresses Emelia as the ideal prototype whom he loves. Remember—that Emelia symbolizes "for the nonce, the other half of the two-fold soul of which Plato wrote and in which Shelley still (1821) believed." This is the reason that he addressed her as "Sister" and "Spouse."

Notice also how in the sixth line of the quotation he makes reference to the love of friendship in which the lover is content with tears if these please the beloved.

Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate Whose course has been so starless! I love thee; yes, I feel That on the fountain of my heart a seal Is set, to keep its waters pure and bright For thee, since in those tears thou has de-light. We—are we not formed, as notes of music are, For one another, though dissimilar; Such difference without discord as can make Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake As trembling leaves in a continuous air?

The real, ardent manner in which Shelley viewed Love is also reflected in his *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills*. In

8 Peck, *Shelley His Life and Work*, II, 189.
this poem there is a beautiful description of a noon in autumn
when a mist envelops the land "Like a vaporous amethyst" or an
"air-dissolved star," and the frost has trodden the plains "With
his morning-wingèd feet." The poet further describes the golden
vines, the flower glimmering at his feet, the olive-sandalled
Appenine, and the Alps "whose snows are spread High between the
clouds and sun." He then remarks how together with his spirit,
all of them lie interpenetrated in perfect harmony and are sym-
bolized in the "swift stream of song." The last few lines pro-
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And of living things each one;
And my spirit, which so long
Darkened this swift stream of song,—
Interpenetrated lie
By the glory of the sky:
Be it love, light, harmony,
Odor, or the soul of all
Which from heaven like dew doth fall
Or the mind which feeds this verse
Peopling the lone universe.10

In the discussion of Love thus far it would seem that
Love and Beauty were two entirely different aspects of Shelley's
world. Each has been treated separately for the sake of clarity,
but it would be wrong to think that Shelley so separated them.
He was too much steeped in the consciousness of the unity of all

10 Ibid., "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills,"
11. 310-319, 351.
things ever to admit that Love and Beauty were separate realities. In *Prometheus Unbound* he represented Asia as the spirit of both Supernal Beauty and Divine Love; and in this same drama, the Moon, a lesser but representative light of the Great Absolute, is addressed by Demogorgon as "beauty, love, calm, harmony," thus indicating the oneness of all these forms. In *Adonais* Shelley again showed that Supernal Beauty is synonymous with Divine Love. (I doubt that you would not find at least implicit reference to this habitual attitude of Shelley towards Beauty and Love in all his Platonic poems.)

The fact that in Shelley Love is identified with Beauty warrants even more the use of the word *harmony* to signify Shelley's notion of Love as well as to explain his frequent use of music, song, and their accompaniments to symbolize it; for the word *harmony* carries with it, besides the notion of union of complementary parts, the connotation of something beautiful. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states in its third definition of the word *harmony* that it means the "combination of parts or details . . . so as to produce an aesthetically pleasing effect." The use of the word *aesthetic* in this definition is significant for our present study, for it shows how Shelley could look upon har-

11 Ibid., "Prometheus Unbound," Act IV, 1. 527, 205.


mony, or any pleasing combination of parts, as symbolic of the Great Absolute of the world. Harmony carries with it the notion of the union of complementary parts, or Love, as well as the notion of the pleasing combination of these parts, or the Beautiful. In his excellent study of Shelley's poetry and of his apostolic spirit in life, Solve states very clearly the unity of all the Platonic forms in Shelley and further substantiates the use of the word harmony to include all of them:

Beauty as perfection, or rhythm, or harmony, or light, or as the apperception of them, is inseparable from love. Beauty and love are but two modes or attributes of harmony, the underlying principle of the universe; that which binds the world together.14

Love, then, understood as harmony and including Beauty, became for Shelley the Supreme Being of the universe. Love cannot be separated from beauty; and Beauty, in its widest sense, includes Love. C. Grabo characterizes Shelley's Love as the "primal force" and the "sole" and "ultimate power of the world,"15 Shelley himself wrote to his friend Peacock, "Social enjoyment, in some form or other is the alpha and omega of existence."16

N. I. White, speaking of Shelley's departure from the doctrine of Necessity, mentions that Shelley's doctrine of Beauty was "in

process of being merged in his conception of the supreme importance of Love, or universal sympathy." However, it would be untrue to go so far as to say that Love excludes all the other Absolute Forms, but merely that "the truest name of that perfection called Intellectual Beauty, Liberty, Spirit of Nature, is Love." 18

For the understanding of some of Shelley's poetry that will be quoted, it is important to point out here that Love, or man's own high will, was of supreme importance also because it was the means whereby man was going to free himself from tyranny and dark slavery. To appreciate Shelley, one must realize that all this life he was an apostle of social reform. Social reform, more than anything else, was his greatest desire in life. One of the means whereby this reform was going to be effected was for man to love. He thought that hate was what enslaved man to the object of his hate and that only Love and patience would deliver him. Once again, then, do we see the all-important nature of Beauty and Love in Shelley and the reason for his singing their praises.

Nowhere does Shelley himself better celebrate the noble destiny of Love than in the last act of Prometheus Unbound. The Earth here eulogizes on the interpenetrating, expansive, and enlightening nature of Love. Recall that Earth and Moon are both

17 White, Portrait of Shelley, 261.
symbolic of some phase of Supernal Beauty and Love. In the following selection, the Moon is addressed by the Earth as a void which is filled by the beauty and love of the Earth. The passage is symbolic of the nature of man seeking in Love its ideal prototype. The Earth weeps and then rejoices over the Moon's fortune:

How art thou sunk, withdrawn, covered, drunk up
By thirsty nothing, as the brakish cup
Drained by a desert-troop, a little drop for all;
And from beneath, around, within, above,
Filling thy void annihilation, love
Bursts in like light on caves cloven by the thunder-ball!19

The Moon, in turn, is thrilled by the life-giving and beautiful nature of Love. Love makes beautiful shapes burst forth on her, and Shelley cannot resist adding that harmony is in the sea and air. The Moon answers the Earth:

Gazing on thee I feel, I know
Green stalks burst forth, and bright flowers grow,
And living shapes upon my bosom move;
Music is in the sea and air,
Winged clouds soar here and there
Dark with the rain new buds are dreaming of:
'T is love, all love!20

In the final message of the drama Demogorgon stresses the point that Love is the panacea for human happiness. Observe that in the fourth-last line of the following passage Shelley re-

verts to his old dread of mutability and claims for Love an undying constancy.

Love, from its awful throne of patient power
springs
And folds over the world its healing wings.

To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory!21

The foregoing study of Shelley's Love has brought us to these conclusions: Love, which is the union of human nature with its ideal prototype, was a supreme being in the Shelleyan world; it was best symbolized in the phenomena of harmony; and it was not a reality separate from Supernal Beauty but merely a different aspect of the Platonic Absolute. The author would like now to investigate further the relationship that Love and Beauty bear towards each other.21

Although Supernal Beauty and Love were not separate realities, yet each had to play its own proper function. Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that goodness, or that excellence towards which man feels it within himself to aspire, was one of the causes of Love. Now the word beauty can quite appropriately be substituted for the word goodness; for all that is beautiful is

21 Ibid., II. 557, 561, 573-578, 206.
good, beauty merely adding to the notion of good a cognoscitive faculty that delights in the knowledge of the good. Immediately, then, Beauty is seen to stand towards Love as a cause to its effect. This dialectic, as a matter of fact, is quite in keeping with Platonic thought and was accepted by the poet Shelley. Plato's *Symposium*, which Shelley himself translated, gives a very clear idea of the purpose of beauty according to the Platonic mind and exemplifies quite well Shelley's outlook in this matter. An analysis of this work relative to our present discussion can be stated quite simply. According to Plato, Love is the desire that the Good be forever present to us in constant intellectual generation; but the Good will not appeal except under the aspect of the Beautiful. There must be grace and charm in the object of our desires, or else it cannot entice our Love. This statement, almost naive in its simplicity, is all that need be said to understand the all-important role that Beauty plays with respect to Love. Thus again we return to our primary emphasis, the supreme importance of Beauty. Love, Harmony, whatever else you want to call the Supreme Absolute, is inoperative without Beauty. In his essay *On Love* Shelley explicitly states that all ugliness must be chiseled from the object of our desires. N. I. White remarks, "Thus Shelley emphasizes his belief that the human mind can experience Love, or complete sympathy, only when in the shadow of intel-
If we could stop here in our study of the relationship of Beauty to Love, all would be simple; but there is a corollary to this relationship which, while in itself quite easily understood, yet in its symbolic complications makes Shelley's poetry confusing at times. Love, as was explained above, has for its object the beautiful; but in the embrace that takes place between Beauty and Love there is generated a new Beauty, which is again an object of new admiration and love. Consequently, there starts in motion a continuous process in which Beauty and Love, mutually acting upon each other, enhance and perfect each other. In the Symposium there is a happy phrase that very cleverly expresses this regenerative function of Beauty. "Beauty," states Diotima, "is, therefore, the Fate, and the Juno Lucina to generation." In Greek mythology Juno Lucina is the goddess of light or rather the goddess who brings to light, and hence she is aptly used to figure the power which Beauty has to bring to light or generate Love.

Commenting on some highly symbolic lines in Epipsychidion, lines 86-104, Solve explains them precisely in the manner of the regenerative power of Beauty. "The love of beauty," he says, "which is present in the soul of this wonderful being generates

22 White, Portrait of Shelley, 324.
beauty or makes it possible for beauty to reproduce itself."24 Beautiful as are the lines to which Solve refers, I prefer to choose another selection from Prometheus Unbound to illustrate the reciprocal movement of Love and Beauty. This other passage better exemplifies the fact that Shelley is not only symbolic, but it is the symbolic process itself, as it were, that brings man to the Absolute Form. Each new embrace of Beauty and Love is really symbolic of that which is to come, and so on, up to the Absolute. Quite clearly, for anyone not acquainted with this procedure, Shelley's poetry could become hopelessly entangled. In the following passage from Prometheus, the mind of man embraces those phantoms of Beauty that are present in the sensible world. These phantoms, of course, are but symbols of Beauty itself. Under the passion of its own love for these beautiful sensible objects, the mind creates by the energy of its love new forms, the immortal progeny of the arts. But these forms, too, are only shadows and mediators of Beauty whereby, through Love, man reaches that ideal archetype of human nature spoken of throughout this chapter. The last few lines reflect again Shelley's belief in the power of Love to dissolve error and sin.

And lovely apparitions,—dim at first,  
Then radiant, as the mind arising bright  
From the embrace of beauty (whence the forms  
Of which these are the phantoms) casts on

them
The gathered rays which are reality—
Shall visit us, the progeny immortal
Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy,
And arts, though unimagined, yet to be:
The wandering voices and the shadows
these
Of all that man becomes, the mediators
Of that best worship, love, by him and us
Given and returned; swift shapes and
sounds, which grow
More fair and soft as man grows wise and
kind.
And, veil by veil, evil and error fall. 25

This discipline by which the mind ascends to Supernal
Beauty is, properly, a mark of Platonic dialectics. The Platon-
ist reasons that if he is to reach that form which is "at once
the centre and the circumference" 26 of all forms, he must continu-
ously exercise himself in the contemplation of beautiful objects
until he reaches the highest object possible. The following
selection from Shelley's translation of the Symposium is often
quoted, but it cannot be quoted too frequently if one is to under-
stand the poetry of Shelley.

He who has been disciplined to this point in Love, by con-
templating beautiful objects gradually, and in their order,
now arriving at the end of all that concerns Love, on a sud-
den beholds a beauty wonderful in its nature. . . . When
any one, ascending from a correct system of Love, begins to
contemplate this supreme beauty, he already touches the con-
summation of his labour. For such as discipline themselves
upon this system, or are conducted by another beginning to
ascend through these transitory objects which are beautiful.

25 Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound," Poetical Works, Act

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 institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines; until, from the mediation of many doctrines, they arrive at that which is nothing else than the doctrine of the supreme beauty itself, in the knowledge and contemplation of which at length they repose. 27

Frequently enough this successive and exalted contemplation of beautiful forms is expressed symbolically in Shelley's poetry. However, as with Love under the aspect of its harmonious nature, so with Love understood as the successive contemplation of beautiful forms, the process is expressed in its dynamic, vital nature and not in its static, purely speculative form. Again the approach is of a philosophical belief that the poet lived with his whole being and that consequently found very passionate and imaginative release in his poetry. He never merely contemplates a shapely tree, a gorgeous sunset, the beauty of a man's thought, the beautiful coordination and unity of some political creed; but he seems to pass through all of them as a bee gathering honey, expanding, growing wings that enable him to soar above into the pure, rarified stratosphere of Supernal Beauty and Divine Love. Often this succession of contemplation is symbolized in the rolling, vaporous motion of mist, rain, or cloud, or that of the wind and storm, or perhaps even in the constant panting of the sea.

Sometimes these thoughts are personified in the form of people;

but it is seldom one person or even a few people, but usually un-
resting multitudes, since Shelley was deluged and overwhelmed by
the onrush of beautiful thought that bore him onward and afar.
Sometimes the poet chooses a particular phenomenon of nature
which, if the reader understands Shelley's general policy, is
easily recognized. Or it may be that these many different meth-
ods of symbolizing the contemplation of Love are all thrown to-
gether in a beautiful panorama of lights and sounds that almost
sicken the imagination hardly able to contain them.

In *Prometheus Unbound* there are some good passages exem-
plifying the vital approach that Shelley took towards this succes-
sive contemplation of beautiful forms. One such passage was
quoted and explained on pages 17 to 20. Some passages referring
to the nymph Panthea also beautifully illustrate this vital
approach. In none of the authors consulted (Grabo, Hungerford,
Notopoulos, and White), was there found a satisfactory answer to
the symbolic nature of the two Oceanids, of whom Panthea is one.
However the following is an explanation which seems to be well-
founded on Shelley's general procedure and the circumstances of
the poem. The ocean is often used by Shelley to symbolize the
human mind.\(^{28}\) Now Panthea is an Oceanid; and so Panthea, who is
addressed by Asia as a sister and hence is merely a lesser light
of Supernal Beauty and Divine Love, is symbolic of any poet or

\[^{28}\text{White, Portrait of Shelley, 329.}\]
imaginative mind that participates in the winged, contemplative discipline spoken of above. This interpretation gains even more plausibility by the function that Panthea plays as the messenger between Asia, symbol of Supernal Beauty, and Prometheus, symbol of human nature. If Panthea be explained in this manner, it is not "intolerably bad poetry" for her to be addressed by Asia in the following words:

The Aeolian music of her sea-green plumes
Winnowing the crimson dawn?

It is merely an imaginative, musical description of the human mind seeking out Supernal Beauty. But think, if possible, all that is behind these few lines! The general movement and sense of the lines express an upward flight; and this, together with the word Winnowing, which connotes the successive flap of wings by which the Oceanid makes her way, symbolizes the mind's quest for Supernal Beauty. The words music, sea-green, and crimson flood the senses with the beauty of the scene. But why does Shelley speak of the music of the flapping wings? Is such a noise musical, especially very musical, which is obviously intended by the use of the word Aeolian? No doubt it is an idealized concept, and the noise is called musical because music symbolizes for Shel-


ley the harmony of Supernal Beauty and Love. Admittedly this is
difficult poetry, but it has purpose and beauty to it.

This successive and exalted contemplation of beautiful
forms is well expressed in another of Shelley's poems, Prince
Athenase. There the thoughts of man are symbolized as unresting
multitudes. They are said to be ignited and to be forced to roll
afar by a secret power, which is understood to be Love and Supernal
Beauty. Further on in the poem Love is said to be that radiance
which invested the rolling ocean and soared among the towers
of men, symbolic of the light that illuminated the mind in its
contemplation of Beauty.

And through his sleep, and o'er each
waking hour,
Thoughts after thoughts, unresting mul-
titudes,

Were driven within him, by some secret
power,
Which bade them blaze, and live, and roll
afar,
Like lights and sounds, from haunted
tower to tower . . . 31

Throughout this present chapter I have been speaking of
Divine Love, a highly spiritual and supra-sensible object. In the
previous chapter the subject of discussion was, for the most part,
another such supra-sensible object, Supernal Beauty. If you re-
call, the chapter on Supernal Beauty began with a treatment of
sensible beauty, and it is with a similar topic that I will close

this chapter. Shelley's Love was all-embracing. The smallest, most insignificant reflection of Beauty was never disdained. Mis-guided as he was, this was the reason for his doctrine on matrimony. This, however, we can pass over in silence and go on to his love of sensible beauty in the garden of nature. Even though in Shelley's later days he fluctuated in his enthusiasm for the beauties of nature, yet up to the end there were moments when he could not help but be moved by them. N. I. White gives a very good account of this enthusiasm which is well worth quoting. It refers to a Pisan sunset in the land of Italy, that country which was the inspiration of Shelley's greatest poetry.

He was equally intense in his reaction to physical beauty. Many times he and Medwin watched a gorgeous Pisan sunset from their upper windows and saw the grim prison of the Torre del Fame turn to a bright gold. At such times Shelley seemed completely dead to his immediate surroundings in merging himself with the beauty of the scene. Returning to himself he would exclaim: "What a gorgeous world! There is, after all, something worth living for. This makes me retract the wish that I had never been born."32

In a letter written during April, 1818, a date earlier than the one referred to in the preceding quotation, Shelley wrote that his "chief pleasure in life is the contemplation of nature . . . ."33 Someone might well ask why he could be very much moved by the beauty of nature when his chief desire in life was the contemplation and love of Supernal Beauty. My answer is two-fold.

32 White, Portrait of Shelley, 382-383.
First, all nature was symbolic for Shelley in the sense that it actually took the place of Supernal Beauty, and hence it took on a sacramental character that deserved great respect. Moreover, as long as nature remained symbolic, it could move him with the same intense Love with which Supernal Beauty itself would. Really, what he desired in nature was not the external form but the spirit within, Supernal Beauty. Secondly, Shelley was never quite sure that the human spirit could view Supernal Beauty in its naked form. The high noon of the sun actually blinds us, and it is only in the lesser lights of dawn and sunset that we get a glimpse of the sun's gradeur. In the same way nature gave Shelley that glimpse of Supernal Beauty which face to face with it he could not have seen. Actually it was the only way in which he could come in contact with it. As was mentioned in the Introduction, all knowledge comes through the senses; and so these in some way, at least, had to be the medium of his quest for and love of Supernal Beauty. Sensible reality might seem to have a purpose of its own, but for Shelley it was always diverted into that symbolic function that the author of this thesis has been at labor to explain in these chapters. So much, in fact, was Shelley dependent on sensible nature for his realization of Supernal Beauty that it was there that he felt he either possessed or lost it.


This dependence on nature seems hardly to require proof, so filled with imagery is Shelley's poetry. Yet a quotation may be in place. In *The Sensitive Plant*, Shelley speaks of a beautiful garden where the Spirit of Love is felt everywhere. To describe this presence of Love he paints a beautiful picture of flowers and other plants. Here are a few excerpts from the poem. Previous analyses make an explanation for them unnecessary, except to say that the Sensitive Plant is Shelley himself.

And the Spring arose on the garden fair,  
Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere;  
And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast  
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.

The snowdrop, and then the violet,  
Arose from the ground with warm rain wet,  
And their breath was mixed with fresh odor, sent  
From the turf, like the voice and the instrument.

And the hyacinth purple, and white, and blue,  
Which flung from its bells a sweet peal anew  
Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,  
It was felt like an odor within the sense;

And the jessamine faint, and the sweet tube-rose,  
The sweetest flower for scent that blows;  
And all rare blossoms from every clime,  
Grew in that garden in perfect prime.36

In conclusion, therefore, Love takes on in all its vary-

ing degrees and functions an aura of grace and dignity. It aims not at what is base or selfish but at what is noblest in man, man's ideal prototype. Moreover, because beauty and love go hand in hand and act on each other reciprocally, man does not scorn the brilliance of lesser beauties, but uses them as touchstones towards the attainment of Beauty in its most elevated form.

Shelley felt all this passionately and tried to pattern his life after his beliefs. For this reason he lived his thoughts and aimed in his poetry to mirror his life. This vital approach injected into his poetry an apostolic spirit and it also was the principal reason why we chose to refer to his notion of Love as harmony.

Finally Love, as an all-embracing form including in its real-world function the notion of Beauty, became for Shelley the Supreme Being. The lack of Love in the world was what he most decried, and when singing its praises he seems to become most eloquent. (A fitting conclusion to this chapter on Love is a stanza from *Adonais* in which Shelley sings of the all-pervasive nature of Beauty and Love and of man's possession of them in death.

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and
sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.37

37 Ibid., "Adonais," LIV, 316.
CHAPTER IV

THE IMAGINATION AS AN OBJECT
OF SHELLEY'S SYMBOLISM

The argument of the last two chapters has brought us to the realization that Shelley attempted in his poetry to symbolize two highly sublime objects, Supernal Beauty and Divine Love. In addition, it has impressed on us the fact that this symbolization was not merely a fanciful escapade with which Shelley diverted and relaxed himself from the more serious business of life. They were the great realities of life, the only things that mattered. Consequently, he would never be content with a partial understanding of them nor of the means for attaining them, even though he knew that this feeling of discontent could never be entirely dispelled in this life. Seeing then that these sublime objects of Beauty and Love wrapped themselves in a misty shroud and must be symbolized to be known, the mind immediately infers that there is some faculty that acts as a medium through which it arrives at a knowledge of them. In true Romantic fashion, Shelley believed that this medium was the imagination; and so, if our knowledge of Shelley's Supernal Beauty and Love is to approach even a sketchy sort of completeness, we must investigate this faculty and Shel-
ley's symbolization of it.

In the beginning of this treatment on the imagination, an important distinction must be made to insure ourselves once again against those who would want to place Shelley off in his ivory tower. This distinction is that between the imagination and the fancy. There are various distinctions made between these two faculties, by Romantics and non-Romantics alike. The distinction used here will be, for the most part, a combination of S. T. Coleridge's and Father Charles Coppens's, a distinction that fits best Shelley's notion of the imagination. The imagination is ordinarily understood to be the poetic faculty. The fancy, on the other hand, is the make-believe faculty, that power of ingeniously originating unreal situations and people which provoke interest precisely because they are unreal. Its creations may contain a latent truth, but in general it is preoccupied with the unreal. Moreover, there seems to be no genius at work in the productions of fancy, but only the clever mind at work to put together unrelated objects that have at most only an accidental connection with one another. Thus we might say that fancy's finished product always lacks an organic unity and is not suffused with that inspiration of great art which makes its creations universally true.

The imagination, however, has for its object the truth. Granted that it does not present us with merely a wooden reproduction; yet its object is the real world, however differently this real world is explained by particular men. Indeed, the
imagination succeeds in giving us a better insight into the real world than an actual reproduction would, and this is one reason why its creations are called beautiful. The truth of this assertion has been proved too often to necessitate our delaying on it any longer. Any good book on aesthetics will present the arguments, and a more detailed explanation of the imagination will be unfolded as we progress in our study of Shelley's own understanding of it.

According to Shelley, the human cognositive power, taken in its general sense, has a two-fold faculty, the reason and the imagination. The reason stores within itself all the impressions made on the senses and can reproduce them. The imagination, on the other hand, can select and remake these stored impressions into new patterns of exceeding great excellence and beauty. The imagination may also call into its service other objects with which the observer is familiar and by comparisons with them make his inventions more effective. These new patterns, however, are not divorced from the real world. It is still a mountain, a river, a cloud, a flower, a human being, or some other such object originally known by reason that the imagination pictures. However, this original object, reached through the reason, is so particularized by the elective and synthetic power of the imagination that one sees this form with greater clarity than is ordinarily experienced. The mind, as it were, casts on the original object illuminating rays that show us reality in its noon-day brilliance.
Thus the final result is always the same, to lift the veil covering reality. This properly is what Shelley meant when he said that the artist creates something beautiful. It is not that beauty is not already there, but our sluggish and blinded faculties are too weak to perceive it. This Shelley explicitly expressed when he said that poetry "strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms."1

The foregoing explanation makes us realize once again that Shelley did not deny the world of sense. He was an idealist; but as most idealists, he thought that the mind, in the inception of any intellectual process, had at least an idea of a sensible object. The reasoning power of the soul had a multitude of such impressions, all scattered notions unrelated as yet and not harmonized into any beautiful form. This reasoning power, moreover, had this type of analytical knowledge also of higher spheres of existence, such as truth, law, virtue, and love. But again, all this knowledge was of no real value until it had been synthesized into an integral, organic, beautiful whole. To the imagination belonged this sublime right of coordination and harmony. Earlier in this thesis I spoke of the word harmony as an apt expression for the joint function of beauty and love on each other, and here also it is fitting that we dub the imagination the faculty that

harmonizes. In the words of Solve, "It is the imagination which apprehends the relationships of things and ideas, and which perceives the before unknown harmonies and beauties of the world."^2

The imagination, in such movements of harmonizing, is not always conscious of the associations and beauty that it is spinning. As though wrapped in its own dark cocoon, the imagination doesn't realize what has been taking place until the final creation breaks the bounds between the subconscious and the conscious and finds expression in the poetic thought. This, of course, is nothing more than the muse spoken of by the poets, the inspiration that at times comes and at times doesn't come. We do not seem to have any direct control over it. Because of this lack of control and because of the unconscious work that the mind performs, Shelley sometimes spoke as though this part of his human life were not really a part of himself. It is that other self, this me, not mine, and other such phrases that have been referred to. This distinction appears in Shelley's prose and poetical works as well. Classical examples can be easily detected in such popular lyrics like To a Skylark and Ode to the West Wind as well as in the more exclusively symbolic poems like Prometheus Unbound. Writing to Mr. and Mrs. Gisborne, July 19, 1921, Shelley said that the poet and the man are two different natures, humbly setting aside any claim of being a poet himself:

2 Solve, Shelley, His Theory of Poetry, 157-158.
The poet and the man are two different natures; though they exist together, they may be unconscious of each other, and incapable of deciding on each other's powers and efforts by any reflex act. The decision of the cause, whether or no I am a poet, is removed from the present time to the hour when our posterity shall assemble; but the court is a very severe one, and I fear that the verdict will be, "Guilty--death!"  

At this point the reader can understand why Shelley put such great store in the imagination. It was the faculty that made possible all that he held most sacred in life, Beauty and Love. It is the imagination, in the first place, that creates the single beautiful form. It is the springboard, therefore, from which the Platonic dialectic takes its origin. Moreover, this dialectic cannot continue unless the imagination again comes in to create from these lesser forms a greater beauty, and so on up to the most beautiful form, thus playing an "integrating role between the particular and its Platonic archetype."  

The imagination, accordingly, is the means whereby the human spirit mounts from the lower world of lesser beauties to the upper world of Divine Love and Beauty.  

In addition to this exceedingly important office that the imagination performs, it is also the means whereby love is possible. Myopic moralists, according to Shelley, took a near-sighted outlook on life. They were always analyzing the completed effect of love and virtue—the finished product. Shelley

3 Shelley, "Letters from Italy," The Works of P. B. Shelley, 149.  
4 Notopoulos, The Platonism of Shelley, 335.
thought that there were not lacking enough doctrines and religions that were good, but the good as such never appeals. Following the Platonism of the Symposium, he reasoned that Love was needed but that Love was impossible without Beauty, which is the creation of the imagination. In connection with Shelley's notion of the Supreme Being, the poet concluded that his emphasis on the imagination reached the indirect cause of virtue and love. For the imagination forms the most perfect image of the human spirit, which is the cause of Love as explained in Chapter III. Furthermore, the imagination also enters into the fruition of Love because it is in the imagination that man's most perfect self and its prototype are joined together in perfect harmony. Thus Shelley claimed that man's preeminence resided not in his moral or intellectual nature but in his imagination. In the same way the reading and writing of poetry, taken in its widest sense, was the best intellectual discipline that man could undergo, because this exercised the imagination. An authoritative statement from C. M. Bowra's rather recently published book, The Romantic Imagination, will conclude this lengthy but necessary formal presentation of Shelley's doctrine on the imagination.

Shelley saw that though the poet may hardly notice the visible world, he none the less uses it as material to create independent beings which have a superior degree of reality. Nor did he stop at this. He saw that reason must somehow be related to the imagination, and he decided, in contradistinction to Wordsworth, that its special task is simply to analyse the given and to act as an instrument for the imagination, which uses its conclusions to create a synthetic and harmonious whole. He calls poetry "the expres-
sion of the Imagination," because in it divers things are brought together in harmony instead of being separated through analysis. . . . he insists that the imagination is man's highest faculty and through it he realizes his noblest powers. 5

If Shelley had such a high opinion of the imagination and considered it as so indispensable in the realization of Beauty and Love, it would not be surprising to find that he spoke about it in his poetry. This conclusion becomes even more probable when we realize that Shelley had in his poetry a message of salvation to deliver to mankind. The imagination was an integral facet of this salvation and hence should rightly be an integral part of the poet's celebration of it in his works. This a priori suspicion becomes an authenticated fact when a careful reading is made of Shelley's poetry. Therefore each of the steps in the previous delineation of the imagination will be taken in order, to show how this indeed is the case. The imagination will be exemplified as revealing reality, creating beauty, harmonizing all forms into an integral whole, unconsciously doing all these things and being the cause of Love in man.

One of the first observations made about the imagination was that it was concerned with reality and not with mere fanciful illusions. This statement, true as it is, becomes somewhat difficult to explain when we realize that Shelley was, it seems evident, an idealist. Shelley frankly acknowledged this in his

essay On Life. "I am one of those," he said, "who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived." Yet an idealist, in writing poetry, would still try to lift the veil from reality, the reality we know as trees, animals, and so forth, whether this reality was in the mind or outside the mind. Shelley himself would be the first to admit this, insistent as he was on the unity of all things. In his Speculations on Metaphysics he said:

It imports little to inquire whether thought be distinct from the objects of thought. The use of the words external and internal, as applied to the establishment of this distinction, has been the symbol and the source of much dispute. This is merely an affair of words, and as the dispute deserves, to say, that when speaking of the objects of thought, we indeed only describe one of the forms of thought—or that, speaking of thought, we only apprehend one of the operations of the universal system of beings.

The last sentence in the above quotation is somewhat involved, but it means merely that it imports little whether you make what we would call sensible reality a part of the mind or not, so long as the objects of thought and thought itself are bound together into the woof and warp of the entire universe.

It would have been unnecessary to bring up this topic of Shelley's idealism at this point except that his poetic descriptions of the work of the imagination on the world of reality

7 Ibid., "Speculations on Metaphysics," 61.
are tinged with just enough of this idealism to be confusing or even misleading, again making Shelley appear unrealistic.

Obviously, since there was such great unity in all Shelley's thought and since Beauty, Love, and the imagination were inseparably linked together, many of the quotations already used make explicit mention of this function of the imagination. Reread especially the quotation on page 38 and that on pages 46-47. Although this purpose of the imagination is often taken for granted and only indirectly applied, there are other examples as well. Favorite symbols in all of these examples are those of a veil and of light. Note that light is the predominate figure used in the following lines from Epipsychidion:

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... 't is like thy light
Imagination! which, from earth and sky
And from the depths of human fantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors,
fills
The Universe with glorious beams, ... .
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The second function of the imagination which Shelley symbolized in his poetry was its creation of beauty, exemplified quite well in The Sensitive Plant. This poem begins with a luxurious description of a garden in which is planted the Sensitive Plant, emblematic of Shelley himself. The Sensitive Plant is said to have loved excessively the beautiful which pervades the garden. A Power, also called a Lady, is next described as tending

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the garden throughout the day. She is symbolic of Supernal Beauty itself, which nurtures all the participated beauty in the world. Immediately after introducing this Lady, Shelley tells us how she came to be molded and formed, and his description is unintelligible except in the light of the creative imagination. He tells us in the following stanza that it was a lovely mind, expanding under the swell of its creative impulse, that shaped her into the wonder of her kind.

A Lady, the wonder of her kind,
Whose form was upborne by a lovely mind
Which, dilating, had molded her mien
and motion
Like a sea-flower unfolded beneath the ocean, . . . .

It is not mere accident that Shelley compares this creation of Beauty by the mind to the unfolding of a sea-flower beneath the ocean's sway. The ocean is used over and over again to symbolize the mind, and a sea-flower unfolded by its undulations is representative of the mind's creation of Beauty.

The imagination was also said to harmonize all forms into an integral whole. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that in the drama Prometheus Unbound the Spirits symbolize the creative moods of man. Moreover, these moods, or Spirits, are the product of the human mind. Besides stating this explicitly in such words as "the Spirits of the human mind," Shelley refers indirectly to it in the many dialogues that are had among

9 Ibid., "The Sensitive Plant," Part II, 11. 5-8, 374.
these Spirits. They are always light, airy, phantom-like elves plumed with fire and invested with glows and shadows that mark them unmistakably as symbolic of human consciousness. Near the end of this play a Chorus of these Spirits and of the Hours, who symbolize the ephemeral forms of nature, join in a song of mystic melody that signifies the union and harmony established between them in the imagination of man:

Then weave the web of the mystic measure
From the depths of the sky and ends of the earth,
Come, swift Spirits of might and of pleasure,
Fill the dance and music of mirth
As the waves of a thousand streams rush by
To an ocean of splendor and harmony.¹⁰

The unconscious element involved in the imagination's creations is the fourth aspect that will be demonstrated. This unconscious element has a multiplicity of applications, and hence must not be given too restricted an interpretation. For Shelley, it pertains to all the operations of the mind which are inexplicable, whether those in dreams or sleep, whether those connected with associations made by the mind from stored impressions, or whether merely those hidden operations of conscious thought itself. In his essay *Speculations on Metaphysics*, he paints in poetic terms these obscure caverns of thought:

But thought can with difficulty visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits. It is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards;—like one in dread who speeds through the recesses of some haunted pile, and dares not look behind. The caverns of the mind are obscure, and shadowy; or pervaded with a lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals.

These enigmatic operations of the imagination were often symbolized in the vapors, mists, shadows, and other half-light figures used in Shelley's poetry. Some of these figures are suggested in the quotation given from his Speculations on Metaphysics. The gossamer-spun lyric, The Witch of Atlas, has a rather long passage, stanzas LVII to LXXVII, that also describe this unseen work that forms beautiful imagery in the mind of man. In this poem the Witch acts the part of a beautiful Lady, none other than Supernal Beauty herself, who passes through the world casting spells over everything. But her chief sport is to visit the spirits of human beings; and what is very significant, she delights to do so mostly in the shadow of the night and in the hours of sleep. It was at these times that she mingled her Spirit with those of mortals. One of these stanzas is quite reminiscent of the cavern and chamber type of figures used in the Speculations on Metaphysics. After stating that Supernal Beauty, or the Witch, delights most to sport in the hours of sleep, Shelley compares her motion to that of a gentle breeze that deepens sleep.

Then she is pictured as passing through the haunts and chambers of mankind, scattering visions which clearly are of beautiful forms. The chambers through which the magic Lady passes may seem extra-mental to the unsuspecting reader; but in view of the fusion which Shelley made between the external and internal world, the activity described here takes place in the mind. The reader must be cautioned likewise against confusing the parts that both Beauty and the imagination take in the creation of these visions. Supernal Beauty and the imagination are co-causes. The visions take place in the imagination, but the creative imagination receives inspiration from on high and also participates in the divine nature of Supernal Beauty. Hence results the frequent overlapping of these notions. With this explanation the following stanza becomes clear.

With motion like the spirit of that wind Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light feet Passed through the peopled haunts of humankind, Scattering sweet visions from her presence sweet; Through fane and palace-court and labyrinth mined With many a dark and subterranean street Under the Nile, through chambers high and deep She passed, observing mortals in their sleep.12

The final function of the imagination which the author

12 Shelley, "The Witch of Atlas," Poetical Works, LX,
wishes to show Shelley as portraying in his poetry is its participation in the production of Love. Now Love, as the author was at pains to show in Chapter III, was the panacea of earthly wrongs and the regenerative force in the world. But where does this Love take place? In man's imagination, Shelley reasoned, because Supernal Beauty is found in man's imagination; and hence this became the theme of most of his poetry. Solve corroborates this opinion in his statement, "Regeneration through the power of the mind is the theme of most of his poems..." 13 Recall that Love consists essentially in the union of man's most perfect self with his ideal prototype. The passages in which he makes reference to this most perfect self created in man's imagination are quite numerous. The poem Epipsychidion, as its title indicates, makes many remarks about a soul within the soul; and Shelley in a note to this poem said this soul, or his most perfect self, was created by him in his own thoughts. Prometheus Unbound is also filled with expressions and figures of the same connotation. The number of instances in which this recurs is too great to demand a quotation; and since the reader has already been over-burdened with quotations, a conclusion to this chapter is now in place.

In the first act of Prometheus Unbound one of the Spirits who represent the thoughts of man sings a fanciful lyric that neatly digests most of what this chapter has tried to set

13 Solve, Shelley, His Theory of Poetry. 88.
forth. Perhaps this song will be best appreciated if the lines are first quoted and afterwards explained.

On a poet's lips I slept
Dreaming like a love-adept
In the sound his breathing kept;
Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
But feeds on the aerial kisses
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernes.
He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illume
The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,
Nor heed nor see, what things they be;
But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality!
One of these awakened me,
And I sped to succor thee. 14

Notice that the Spirit first acquaints us with the fact that he has slept on a poet's lips and that shapes haunt thought's wildernes., and these figurative expressions tell us that in man's mind thoughts are often formed unconsciously. There seems to be no direct reference made to the harmonizing activity of the imagination, but it is implied in the sound imagery of the third line. Next the Spirit informs us that the poet uses sensible reality to create forms more real than living man, and this epitomizes for us what was said about the imagination's revealing reality and creating Beauty. Finally the Spirit makes an observation not yet commented on, namely, that these forms are what bring about immortality. This remark about immortality has a direct

bearing on Love and requires a somewhat more lengthy explanation.

According to the doctrine of the *Symposium*, immortality itself consists in this, that the Good should be forever present to us in constant intellectual generation. Consequently such a remark as the one about immortality is understandable only within the panoramic scope of Shelley's view on Love. For since Love is the desire of the Good and the Beautiful, the Good cannot be absolute unless it is present in the mind constantly. The *Symposium* places the argument in these words, "It necessarily, from what has been confessed, follows, that we must desire immortality together with what is good, since Love is the desire that good be for ever present to us."¹⁵ Hence beautiful forms are nurslings of immortality because they are the cause of Love, and it is the insatiable desire for these forms that keeps the imagination of man immortal. A rather odd way to arrive at a belief in immortality, you might say, but thoroughly consonant with Shelley's other beliefs.

No doubt this last quotation has been impressive by reason of its concentrated thought. This was often Shelley's way, as was noted in the Introduction to this thesis. He was always in *medias res*. Perforce Shelley's thought had to be divided into small segments in order that it might be understood. In the last

chapter the author of this thesis will try to piece together these segments, a more difficult task than that of dividing them; but a task incumbent on him if he is to be fair to the spirit of Shelley's poetry.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The chapters of this thesis have presented in orderly form three principal objects of Shelley's symbolism and have supplied examples demonstrating how he actually did symbolize these objects. Of necessity, the author had to go into some detail in explaining the nature of these objects, for it was only by this means that the symbols themselves could be understood. Strange as it may seem, it is the best way for anyone to begin a reading of Shelley, for the imagery is too extensive to make permissible a listing of the symbolic meaning of each image. Shelley's main philosophical beliefs, on the other hand, are comparatively few; and once these are understood, most of the imagery can be recognized rather easily. This is not to say that his poetry can be read rapidly, like a nursery rime, for admittedly symbolic poetry has its inherent difficulties; nor is it a claim that all of Shelley's poetry can be understood with just the doctrine elucidated in this thesis. Nevertheless, most of Shelley's poetry does become clear in the light of this doctrine. There are some passages based on intricate classical mythology, for instance, that would require a professional's understanding of this mythology to inter-
Moreover, Shelley himself admitted that in his poetry of later years he aimed purposely to write for a special elite class. He did not think that the majority of people would understand his mystic numbers. Yet he was thoroughly convinced of the inseparable unity of all things and all beliefs, and consequently a knowledge of his main tenets makes his poetry understandable even for the ordinary person. A conclusion pointing out this unity will be of greater interest than a mere recapitulation of what has already been said. The author will show this unity by taking each of the points established with regard to Supernal Beauty and setting forth how intimately they are bound together with the other two objects, Love and the Imagination. In this chapter the word Imagination will be capitalized, for it will be seen here how closely this faculty is allied to Love and Supernal Beauty.

During the course of his explanation on Supernal Beauty, the author has brought out the fact that sensible beauty was not of interest to Shelley except in so far as this aspect of reality brought him closer to Supernal Beauty. Yet this sensible beauty deserved a certain amount of respect and Love; for inasmuch as the Imagination made it take on the beauty that it possessed, in part this sensible beauty was a mirror of man's most perfect self, his imaginative ideal. As a result, Supernal Beauty, Love, and the Imagination all conjointly work together in the face of sensible beauty. The Imagination creates it; Supernal Beauty shines through it; and Love cherishes it.
Supernal Beauty was said to be manifest more especially in the mind of man, rather than in sensible reality. Now that we know what Shelley meant by beautiful sensible reality, namely, this reality molded and formed by the Imagination, this is merely stating over again what was said in the previous paragraph. How inexorably even the detailed aspects of these objects are joined together. In fact, each includes the other, and this precisely was Shelley's own outlook. The creative thought itself is sensible reality made beautiful, and this is the beautiful form of reality that manifests Supernal Beauty, even though through a veil. The following selection from Hellas shows how all nature, arrayed most beautifully, is a part of thought, and how all things are bound together in one simple whole. Note the use of the words light, dreams, shadows, and Ocean, whose symbolic meanings were commented on elsewhere.

Earth and
Ocean,
Space, and the isles of life or light that
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire,
Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably
Against the escape of boldest thoughts,
repels them
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds--this Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts,
and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to
be,
Is but a vision; all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles, and
dreams;
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
The future and the past are idle shadows
Of thought's eternal flight--they have no
being;
Nought is but that which feels itself to be.

Mistake me not! All is contained in each.¹

This working of the Imagination on Earth, Ocean, Air, and Fire,
the four elements that the ancients thought constituted sensible
reality, is something that takes place within man, and hence is
a partial manifestation of his most perfect self, leading eventual­
ly to perfect Love. Thus Love is much the same as the Imagi­
nation, for in this creative work that the Imagination does is
formed man's perfect self at the same time as there is thereby
enerated that impulse to find something that will sympathize
ith this self, and this was what Shelley understood by Love.

Supernal Beauty was analyzed as that Beauty which was
so perfect that it knew nothing of change, exhaustibility, materi­
al composition, or division. One reason why Supernal Beauty is
changeless is that the Imagination or thought which produces it
is removed from time and space. Moreover, the Love which Imag­i
nation generates with one bold stroke of its creative force
saches out to all manifestations of beauty, so that although
ensible reality seems to pass and fade, yet the Imagination al­
ays remains because it is always producing these sensible mani­

¹ Shelley, "Hellas," Poetical Works, 11. 769-785, 792.
festations. Love also remains constant, because it is always loving them. Shelley would go so far as to say that Love itself would die did not these so-called material objects undergo a constant flux.

Supernal Beauty is inexhaustible, and here again the Imagination and Love are intimately bound in. Love implies man's most perfect self, human nature exalted to its highest level. But seeing that this human nature involves the Imagination, which is capable of envisioning all beauty, this Love is really the Love of Supernal Beauty, and man's imagination is really the Imagination that contains Supernal Beauty. At this point, however, we must confess that if you were to ask Shelley whether his own imagination were the Imagination par excellence, he would say that it wasn't but that it participated in it. This brings to our attention the age-old problem of an explanation of the manner in which a finite mind participates in the Divine Mind and the question of Shelley's pantheism. A definitive Shelleyan answer cannot be given to these questions, nor would the answer be too pertinent to the purposes of this thesis.

That Supernal Beauty was immaterial is obvious when it is realized that it is composed from the mind-stuff of the Imagination. Love, too, as the sympathy between man's perfect self and his ideal prototype, must also be immaterial, owing again to the fact that the ideal prototype is the result of the spiritualizing activity of the Imagination. Shelley had talked of fe-
male forms whose gestures beamed with mind, and he always regarded the mind as engaged in envisioning the spirits of forms that brought about Love.

After this rather complicated analysis of the synthesis with which Shelley viewed all reality, it seems difficult to see how he could be called "mad," unless perhaps he is meant to hold a philosophy of life that makes his poetry maddening to one that wants to slough off this poetry with an ignorant shrug of the shoulders. Perhaps he took life too seriously, but certainly not too lightly nor fancifully. Shelley was a widely read intellectual, always seeking the truth and an answer to life's riddle, as he regarded it. He had delved voraciously into the works of many of the philosophers of modern Europe, like Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, and Spinoza; and he had more than rummaged amid the philosophers of ancient Greece. It is too bad that his devotion to Aristotle had not been more ardent, since his readings here may have shown him that the visions of Aristotle were more realistic than those of Plato. Nevertheless, looking for the answer to life and having a moral revolution to bring to mankind, he would have been helplessly didactic in his poetry had not this moral revolution been essentially an aesthetic and Platonic one as well. Aristotle's philosophy, not presuming to give man a higher intuition on earth than he actually had, would have indeed taken the poetry out of Shelley. However, Shelley's Platonism was a faith so strongly rooted that such a conversion was almost impossible.
Having experienced early in life what he thought was the visitation of Supernal Beauty, he held on to his faith in the reality of this Beauty to the bitter end. Perhaps his faith in Supernal Beauty was too prejudiced, blinding him to the possibilities of truth in other philosophies; but at least he held on to this faith with a devotion deserving admiration from anyone who himself is not prejudiced in Shelley's disfavor. How extremely intelligent becomes all of his poetry when we realize these facts, and surely the imagery and emotion that channels his philosophy to us merits for the Romantic poet recognition as one of England's great poets.

But what of Shelley's atheism? Does this ruin his poetry and make him unacceptable? Certainly Shelley was against the God of Christianity, but it was against the God of Christianity as understood by the deistic England of his day. He was against the hypocritical religion of those who made God a cloak for their own injustices. Time and time again he pays homage in his poetry to the God of mercy and love. If Shelley had been an incomplete humanist like so many of his contemporaries, not looking for the Supreme Being outside this world, his poetry would not have been so shrouded in sadness; but as he tried to take a more complete outlook on life, his poetry was always touched with that melancholy which attends anyone who is looking for God and feels in the deep recesses of his heart that he has not understood nor found Him. Shelley was looking for complete unity in
life; and of necessity from his vantage point, all he found was frustration. Did Shelley think that he could arrive at the complete possession of Supernal Beauty? It seems doubtful that he thought its possession possible here in this life, but only in the dissolution of death. The following picturesque expression of this desire fittingly ends this thesis.

Then from the caverns of my dreamy youth
I sprang, as one sandalled with plumes of fire,
And towards the lodestar of my one desire
I flitted, like a dizzy moth, whose flight
Is as a dead leaf's in the owlet light,
When it would seek in Hesper's setting sphere
A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre,
As if it were a lamp of earthly flame.  

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The thesis submitted by John V. Hopkins, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given the final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

July 30, 1957

Date

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