Percy bysshe shelley

TITLE

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on August 4, 1792 to the extremely conventional Sir Timothy, who, being a man of influence, no doubt wanted his first born son to follow in his footsteps (Richards 671). Shelley, however, had much less conformist views, and was even ragged at Eton for expressing such (Matthews 196). He did not care to learn what his tyrants taught, but was interested rather, in science (which was outlawed from Eton at the time), Godwin, and the French skeptics. The rebellious nature persisted as he grew older and he developed a delight for controversy (Matthews 195). This delight ultimately lead to his expulsion from Oxford because of his writing The Necessity of Atheism. His patience for authority continued to diminish, until he eventually developed a passion.

Shelley wanted to fight tyranny, as well as slavery. His ultimate goal was to lead men to a life of freedom, love, and apprehension of the beautiful (Richards 672). Shelley felt that repression exist because mankind instituted and tolerated it (Matthews 200). He believed that Mankind only had to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none (Ford 161). This idealistic view of the world is evident in the majority of Shelleys literary works.

In 1819, Shelley wrote Song to the Men of England (Editors 610). This poem was written for the same purpose as many of his others: to urge the working class of Great Britain to rebel. The imagery of a bee hive is evident throughout this piece. In stanza II, for instance, the tyrants are referred to as Those ungrateful drones who would / Drain the sweat - nay, drink the blood. In stanza III, a reference is made to the working class as the Base of England.

The metaphor is picked up again in stanza VII, when Shelley orders the Men of England to shrink to their... cells (Editors 611).

The most rebellion-inspiring lines are found in stanza VI:

Sow seed - but let no tyrant reap;

Find wealth, - let no impostor heap;

Weave robes, - let not the idle wear;

Forge arms, - in your defense to bear. (21-24)

This is the second time, in this poem alone, that Shelley refers to the aristocrats and rulers of England as tyrants. This is evidence of his strong desire for political reform. He sincerely felt that the only way to gain freedom was by overthrowing entrenched order (Matthews 199).

Another of Shelleys poems focused on the reform of civilization, especially government, is England in 1819. In this sonnet, Shelley uses numerous adjectives to defile Englands ruling class. He refers to the king as Old, mad, blind, despised, and dying (1) and to the Princes as the drags of their dull race (2). The people, though not villainous, are described in a rather negative manner, as well. They are said to be starved and stabbed in the untilled field (7). Shelley goes on to deliver his presentation of the effects of the government in lines eight through nine:

An army, which liberticide and prey

Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield, -

Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;

This poem is very dramatic and reveals Shelleys convictions very passionately. Mary Shelley said that her husband loved the People... but believed a clash between the two classes of society was inevitable.... In her

notes concerning Percys works of 1819, she commented on the earnestness and heartfelt compassion of his desire to express his view that oppression is detestable as being the parent of starvation, nakedness and ignorance (Editors 626).

Another poem, that falls under Mrs. Shelleys previous commentary in fact, is Prometheus Unbound (Editors 374). This piece of literature is Shelleys version of the great European humanistic myth of the Titan who gave humans fire and taught them about the arts and sciences. Shelley, however, incorporated the knowledge gained in the struggle for human emancipation since the fifth century B. C. He once again uses symbols in reference to the two social classes. The Roman god Jupiter represents the repression of Europes ruling classes (Matthews 199). In Act III, scene i, lines 3-5, Jupiter melodramatically commands the people to:

Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent.

All else had been subdued to me; alone
The soul of man...

Prometheus symbolizes humans, and his wife, Asia, symbolizes human nature (Ford 162).

Throughout the five acts, Shelleys hero Prometheus defeats evil, but fails to make mankind sinless through ignorance. He does, however, make them virtuous through wisdom (Ford 162). This turn of events reveals Shelleys prophecy that one day humanity will be free of tyranny (668).
Prometheus Unbound was written as an idealism meant to condition peoples minds for the stupendous changes that society must undergo in becoming

truly human (Matthews 199). Shelley never even expected this piece to sale, but he felt that it truly conveyed his message of the necessity of man defying his ruling power (Richards 674). In consideration of his poetry, Shelley said Prometheus Unbound was a poem of higher character than anything he had attempted and perhaps less an imitation of anything that has gone before it (Ford 161).

In conclusion, the concept of human idealism and revolt is clearly evident in Percy Bysshe Shelleys work. He was interested in the issue of humanities place in the universe as well as humanities quest for happiness (Matthews 195). He loved to use the image of man verses the Evil Principle (Ford 162). For this Shelley became known as the poet of fiery imagings (Matthews 195).

The earnestness with which he expressed a need for a revolt against authority provided Shelley with the reputation of being the most politically radical of the romantics (704). Dying before he reached the age of thirty, he was never able to see his idealistic prophecy for humanity be fulfilled. Regardless, Percy Bysshe Shelleys literary work has had a phenomenal affect on society. His concepts and ideas concerning government are still in circulation today, perhaps proving Mrs. Shelleys statement that very few knew his worth while he lived (Editors 610).