

## **Abstract:**

This thesis aims to understand Percy Bysshe Shelley's attitude towards the role of the poet in society as an usher of progressive change. To do this, it examines his metaphysics, chiefly his contact with the doctrines of idealism, which crystallised at the dawn of his life through his intimate relationship with the works of Plato, the early engagement with French materialists, English philosophers like Priestley and Hume & a later one with Lucretian materialism, and his deep entanglement with the first modern proponent of anarchism, William Godwin – who could be described as a perfectionist by some or as utilitarianist by others. By doing that the thesis seeks to shed light on how these doctrines influenced Shelley and how he conversed with and critiqued them, revealing the intricacies of his work because, in Shelley's philosophy, the nature of differentiation between the two, that is between materialism and idealism, is notoriously problematic.

The beginning of the thesis serves to engage with Shelley's early contact with materialist doctrines, their fast repudiation in their pure form and his later critique in "Cloud" and response to them. The materialist influences of Shelley are pondered, as well as some of the possibilities of interpreting Shelley in a materialist way. Next, Shelley's subsequent engagement with revolutionary<sup>1</sup> thought is going to be investigated; *Queen Mab* is used as a continuation of the determinist principle and the example of utopian impulse. The influence of Godwin's doctrine and the concept of 'Necessity' is investigated.

Lastly, Shelley's relationship to Plato will be mulled over, and some of the important terms and concepts which were expanded upon from Plato by Shelley like mimesis and the role of a poet in society will be discussed to provide an understanding of Shelley's Platonic view and the poet's scepticism. *A Defence of Poetry* will be considered the marker of a solidifying of Shelley's metaphysical roots and the poems *Alastor*, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," "Mont Blanc," "To a Sky-lark" will serve to illustrate how he relates to the Ideal via imagination and the problems that poets face when instigating social change.

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<sup>1</sup> The word revolutionary (and those related) refers throughout the thesis to Shelley's pursuit of change in people's minds (with poetic license what we call 'change of heart,' too) from which he believed the changes in material world will follow.