

DEMOGORGON IN SHELLEY'S *PROMETHEUS UNBOUND*.

In Mr. Kooistra's article in this periodical on *P(rometheus) U(nbound)*, which I have read with great pleasure and profit, the figure of D(emogorgon) is but briefly spoken of. The author mentions Prof. Alexander's interpretation of D. as being intended for Fate or Necessity, but very rightly observes, that this view does not explain, why D. and J(upiter) should "henceforth live together in darkness" nor why D. should reappear in the last act as a quite different personage. In the following lines I venture to suggest another interpretation which, I think, satisfactorily accounts for these seeming contradictions.

If we look up what commentators and critics have written about D. we find a bewildering variety of opinion.

R. Ackermann gives an all but exhaustive list of references¹⁾ to D. in older writers showing, that this character has always been represented as an awe-inspiring, vague, almost undefinable being. In his book on Shelley he gives it as his opinion that . . . "die düstere Figur D's ist aufzufassen als die ewige Gerechtigkeit." Todhunter's interpretation is near akin to this, he calls D.: "Divine Justice, the Eternal Nemesis." Schuré sees in him: "la conscience profonde éternelle." Alexander as already stated: "Fate or Necessity." A quite different view is taken by Scudder, who calls him "Revolution" and at the same time: "the Principle of Reason", Churton Collins thinks he is: "the Primal Power" and Dickinson: "the ultimate power behind and above all things" a phrase which, to us, conveys very little meaning. Hughes observes, that D. carries the influence of Asia into effect and says, that D. is the indefeasible power which governs the evolution of the world. H. S. Salt also introduces this idea of evolution in his commentary on D. We have to go back to one of the older writers on Shelley, W. Rossetti, for an interpretation which keeps close to what D. says of himself in the drama: he calls him "Eternity personified" without, however, giving any further elucidation.

More quotations might be adduced, but the above are fairly representative and will suffice to show, that not only do the best critics disagree, but that their interpretations are for the most part vague and do not fit in with what we read about D. in the drama. Yet the poet attached, as Mrs. Shelly testifies, a very definite meaning to the allegory and this applies particularly to a figure as D. whom Shelley did not find in Aeschylus, but introduced into the drama himself. Why then did he want this additional character?

Jupiter, the principle of evil in *P. U.*, is conquered, dethroned. This is brought about by Prometheus' heroic defiance and self-sacrifice together with the powerful influence of love as typified by Asia. But evidently Shelley did not think these two characters sufficient to indicate what was wanted for the coming of the millennium about which he dreams in *P. U.* He ardently believed in the perfectibility of mankind, but he felt clearly, that

¹⁾ *Englische Studien*, XVI.

the ideal could not be reached until ages upon ages should have elapsed. 1) In other words: man must pass through a long period of evolution. To this Hughes and Salt refer. Now it is possible, that a genius like Shelley may have had an inkling of the theory of evolution as demonstrated by science many years later, but at any rate this notion cannot have been clear. He did not, could not know of the laws of heredity and natural selection. What was uppermost in his mind was the fact, that the development of the divine instinct in man, the working out of evil, would take a considerable length of time. And this important factor in the liberation of mankind must be personified in the drama.

In Act III Sc. I. 51.2) D. himself answers Jupiter's question: "Awful shape what art thou?" by saying: "Eternity, demand no direr name" and it is therefore certainly not very presumptuous to suppose with Rosetti, that Shelley really intended D. to represent Eternity or Time in general, which, philosophically speaking, is eternal. And if we thus keep close to the text, the difficulties already referred to disappear.

When D. has arrived at J's throne, he says: "Descend and follow me down the abyss . . . and we must dwell together henceforth in darkness" (III. 1. 52 ff.). If now we glance back at the interpretations of D. given above, we shall find, that they do not fit in with what is so clearly stated here. How can: 'Eternal Justice' or the 'Principle of Reason' etc be assumed to go down as soon as Evil is conquered? Is not this rather a contradiction in terms? But if we think of D. first and foremost as representing the spirit of time, the allegory becomes clearer: J. tries to retain his hold over man, he marries and expects of the child he begets, that it will be even mightier than himself, in other words, that *the future* will make man still suffer under the yoke of evil. But he is mistaken. Man has become wiser and better through suffering, meekness and love, he succeeds in subduing evil at last, so that time does not bring a continuation or increase of Evil's power as J. expected, but the reverse. Time in the shape of D., far from supplying J. with a successor, becomes his conqueror and annihilates him. As an immediate consequence the times of misery and hardship for man have come to an end, they are now matters of the past and live only in dim remembrance: D. follows J. into the abyss and lives henceforth in darkness.

Time, however, is eternal: D. reappears in Act IV, but now he is no longer, as Ackermann says, the spirit of destruction, but of life and victory; in other words: the present times bring hardly anything but sorrow, man being tyrannized by J. or evil, whereas the future holds a rich promise of virtue and bliss.

Very suggestive in this connection seem to me the following lines from *Q(ueen) M(ab)*:

"War with its million horrors and fierce hell
Shall live but in the memory of Time,
Who, like a penitent libertine, shall start,
Look back and shudder at his younger years."

Q. M., 255 f. f.

1) Cf. *P. U.*, 422 (Mercury) The slow years Which thou must spend in torture, unreprieved? (Prometheus) Perchance no thought can count them, yet they pass.

2) I quote throughout from: Ackermann's *Erste kritische Textausgabe*.

The similarity between *Q. M.* and *P. U.* as regards their subject has often been indicated; broadly speaking we may say, that in both we find a representation of the past, the present and the future of the human race according to Shelley's idealistic conception, but whereas *Q. M.* deals for the most part with abstractions and generalisations, these have taken concrete shape in the maturer work, a change quite in the line of poetic development. And so we have in *Q. M.* the abstraction: „Time” for which in *P. U.* we find the figure of D., an embodiment of Eternity.

There are more striking similarities between what is said about „Time” in *Q. M.* and what we learn of D. in *P. U.* We will quote a few more lines:

Time-Unfold the brooding pinion of
thy *gloom* . . . And from the cradles
of *eternity* Tear thou that *gloomy*
shroud (*Q. M.*, VIII 3ff).

Now Time his *dusky* pennons o'er
the scene.

Closes in steadfast *darkness*
(*Q. M.*, IX. 143).

Time . . . that *hoary giant* (IX 23)
Time's eternal veil.
(*Q. M.*, VIII 12).

Even *Time*, the *conqueror*
(*Q. M.*, IX 23).

The present is now past,
And those events that desolate the earth
Have faded from the memory of *Time*
Who dares not give reality to that
Whose being I annul.
(*Q. M.*, VIII 44ff).

Through the wide rent in Time's
eternal veil
Hope was seen beaming through the
mists of fear . . . (*Q. M.*, VIII 12ff).

Cf. Panthea's description of D.

(*P. U.* II. 4. 98ff).

A mighty darkness . . .

and rays of *gloom* dart round . . .

(Even the same words recur.

Note also in *Q. M.* the connection of
the notions of time and eternity.)

Panthea: What *veiled* form sits on that
ebon throne (= D.) *P. U.*, II. 4. 1.
Asia: The *veil* has fallen.

D. is J's conqueror. Cf. *P. U.*, III. 1. 79
"and thee and me-the *conqueror*
and the conquered."

Cf. *P. U.* D. does not make J. a
successor, he cannot continue evil,
because mankind has become wise
and virtuous.

Cf. D.'s change in Act IV. The future
is bright and hopeful.

Prometheus himself also ponders on the steady progress of time, which will at last lead to J's downfall. He says:

"I wait, enduring thus, the retributive hour which since we spake is even nearer now" I. 1. 404. and: . . . "to me welcome is day and night . . . for they lead their wingless hours, one among whom shall drag thee-cruel king" etc., I. 1. 44 ff. Now as a matter of fact it is D. who drags J. down; he is one of the "hours" of which Prometheus speaks, because D., eternity or time in general, comprises them all.

It is not only in *Q. M.* that we find the notion of time treated in Shelley's poetry; on the contrary it occurs very frequently and mostly personified. It had evidently a firm hold on his imagination. We need

only remind the reader of: *Hellas, the Triumph of Life, the Witch of Atlas, the Ode to Liberty, Adonais, the Ode to Naples*, the short poem to *Time* etc.

Lastly, does it not also speak for the interpretation proposed, that the description Panthea gives of D.:

"a mighty darkness . . . and rays of gloom dart round as light from the meridean sun, ungazed upon and shapeless . . . neither limb nor form nor outline, yet we feel it is a living spirit" *P. U.*, II, 4. 98ff.

is so well suited to shadow forth our notion of the strange phenomenon we call Time, of which we can imagine neither beginning nor end, nor independent existence and which yet we feel as such an all-important 'living spirit' in the universe?

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DRIE STUKKEN VAN JOHN GALSWORTHY.

Onder den titel *The Silver Box and other Plays* zijn in een Tauchnitz-bundeltje van 1912 drie tooneelstukken van John Galsworthy verschenen: *The Silver Box, Joy* en *Strife*. In alle drie behandelt de schrijver psychologische problemen, maar slechts in *Joy* gaat het om het psychologische probleem zelf: in de beide andere stukken wordt het van te voren bepaald door de overtuiging van den schrijver — waarmee niet gezegd wil zijn, dat hij vooropgestelde conclusies trekt, maar dat de probleemstelling minder op psychologische dan op andere motieven berust. *Joy* is zooals de ondertitel zegt: "a play on the letter I", met al het zelfbedrog, waartoe zulk een spel moet voeren. *The Silver Box* en *Strife* worden beheerscht door de sociaal-democratische gezindheid van den schrijver, die in zijne romans tot heden slechts de geestelijke machteloosheid der middenklasse met gevoeligheid en begrip had bespot. In beide stukken voelen wij, hoe sterk hij aangegrepen is door den ongelijken strijd tusschen kapitaal en arbeid: duidelijk spreekt zijn eigen ik zoowel in het stuk, waar hij bourgeoisie-onmacht en klassejustitie ten tooneele brengt, als in het angstig-pijnlijke verloop van de werkstaking, die ondanks de vele offers, die zij eischt, op een vergelijk moet uitloopen, dat niemand bevredigen kan. Want in het laatste stuk doet Galsworthy ons duidelijk voelen: geven en nemen moge levenskunst zijn in het leven van den dag, tot groote dingen kan het nooit voeren.

The Silver Box geeft het verhaal van twee gevallen van diefstal: de eerste wordt gepleegd door eenen werklooze in zijne dronkenschap en mogelijk gemaakt, bijna uitgelokt zelfs, door de domme zelfgenoegzaamheid van een jong student, den zoon van het liberale kamerlid John Barthwick, die dronken thuis komt en wien de werklooze den dienst bewijst om de straatdeur te openen, waarvan hij het slot niet vinden kan. De andere diefstal wordt gepleegd door dien rijkelui's zoon, ook werkloos op zijne wijze en ook dronken. En in beide gevallen gaat het niet om den wille van het stelen zelf, in beide gevallen geschiedt het ter bevrediging van eene heftige geïrriteerdheid in den toestand, waarin opkomende gevoelens niet