SOME MARXIST INTERPRETATIONS OF ROMANTICISM

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There is no question that to many orthodox Marxists, Romanticism as an artistic method or as a complex of attitudes and tendencies is suspect. Marx himself has done much to foster this negativity. Gaylord Le Roy points out that "in the *Rheinische Zeitung* Marx campaigned against Romanticism that associated itself with feudal hierarchy, with fantastic and perverted emotions, mysticism and pietism..."[1] Lukacs makes a similar assertion: "The poetry of the future demands, in Marx's eyes, sober and inexorable criticism of the forces leading--in actuality, not only in imagination--towards socialism. . . This notion of Marx is so clearly opposed to Romanticism that further discussion may be dispensed with. It is not accidental that Marx should always have opposed Romanticism and held Shakespeare and Balsac, the 'cruelly' critical realists, to be the masters of post-classical literature."[2] Marx himself, in a letter to Engels, speaks of Chateaubriand, an important French romantic writer, with cutting vituperation which leaves little doubt about what he thinks of the kind of writing that Chateaubriand exemplifies: "he is the most classic incarnation of French vanity, and he embodies this vanity not in a light and frivolous eighteenth century sense, but in a romantic dress, flaunting newly hatched expressions, false depth, Byzantine exaggeration, toying with emotions, many-colored sheen, and word painting, theatrical, sublime, in a word, a mishmash of lies never before achieved in form and content."[3] The romantic preoccupation with so-called lies, exaggeration, sentimentalism, theatricality, the imaginary and the fantastic, etc. constitutes an unforgivable weakness in the eyes of the orthodox Marxists for whom reason, objectivity, self-control, and a firm and accurate grasp of the nature of the historical process are paramount virtues.

And yet, some recent Marxists, like Raymond Williams, see this doctrinal rigidity as counterproductive because it rejects the enriching influence of alternative traditions. The tendencies toward determinism and positivism cannot but lead to a general theoretical closure and impoverishment of the Marxist tradition. A more sensible strategy is to recognize the rich possibilities of Romanticism and assimilate some of its more desirable qualities and implications. Such recent hybrid labels as "fantastic realism" and "revolutionary romanticism" reflect attempts to arrive at some juncture, however imperfect. A careful examination of the meanings of Romanticism does reveal some possible bonds, some kindred connections between Marxism and Romanticism.

Historically, Romanticism is defined as "a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement originating in Europe in the 18th century, characterized chiefly by a reaction against neoclassicism with its stress on reason and intellect and an emphasis on the imagination and emotions and their freely individualized expression or realization in all spheres of activity, and marked especially in English literature by sensibility and the use of authobiographical material of an introspective cast, an exaltation of the primitive and the common man, an appreciation and often a worship of external nature, an interest: in the remote in time and space, a predilection for melancholy, and the use in poetry of older verse forms."[4] Henry Remak, in "West European Romanticism: Definition and Scope", examines Romanticism as a cohesive historical movement in England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy, its characteristic attitudes toward the past (specifically, interest in non-classical mythology, folklore, primitivism, medievalism, anti-neoclassicism, etc.), its general attitudes (e.g., imaginativeness, cult of strong emotions, sensualism, restlessness, individualism, subjectivism, interest in nature, religion, mysticism, liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and nationalism), and its stylistic tendencies (e.g., lyrical moods and forms, national epic, historical drama and novel, symbolism, and exoticism).[5] A major

difficulty in defining Romanticism underscored by Remak is that various countries do not reflect an identical conception of Romanticism. The manifestations, indeed, are diverse and even contradictory. This has led Remak to claim that "there may be a romantic period, perhaps there are Romanticisms, but there is no Romanticism.".[6] This problem is compounded by the fact that people often isolate a specific quality and make it represent the general idea. Thus, for Hugo Romanticism is liberalism in literature, for Hedge it is mystery and aspiration, for Lanson a lyrical expansion of individualism, for Lucas an intoxicating dream, for Immerwahr an imaginative literary process, for Geoffrey Scott the cult of the past, for Pater strangeness added to beauty, for Kasinski a reaction against the excesses of intellectualism.[7] Frank Lucas, in *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal,* is supposed to have counted 11,396 definitions of Romanticism.[8]

Romanticism is frequently opposed to Neoclassicism. "To neoclassical dictates of objectivity, imitation, invention, clarity, separation of prose and poetry, the romanticists oppose demands for the free play of imagination and originality, functional rather than decorative imagery, the use of prose rhythms on poetry, and of lyrical prose in novel, essay, and criticism."[9] The romanticists are generally against rationalism and they defend obscurity as a necessary implication of the subconscious processes of intuition, symbolization, and myth-making which are at the heart of the romantic method.

Romanticism is also contrasted with Realism, an artistic method which is concerned, as V. da Sola Pinto says, "with giving a truthful impression of actuality as it appears to the normal human consciousness."[10] Le Roy, however, rejects the simplistic identification of Romanticism with dream and Realism with truth, or the former with the subjective and the latter with the objective. He says that "we come closer to a true distinction when we observe that the subjective emphasis in romantic art has its source in a particular kind of cleavage between the artist and life, a cleavage associated with the lack of historical concreteness..."[11]. This concreteness, according to Lukacs, involves an awareness and understanding of "the development structure and goal of society as a whole."[12] A realist tends to explore the typical--in the use of normal situations and average characters speaking the common language in ordinary settings, as opposed to the more colorful and imaginative choices of a romanticist. He also rejects the use of far-fetched images and metaphors. But above all--especially from the Marxist perspective--a realist has a concrete grasp of reality. "In realism the writer examines the relationship between the individual and society--more concretely and makes the inter-relationship more clear. . . He will have a better understanding of estrangement, both of its sources and of how it is to be overcome."[13]

This failure to understand reality in its various forms--the dynamics of the historical process, the nature of the relationship between man and society, the function of a man as a determined and a determining force, etc -- is central to the Marxist rejection of Romanticism. And the charges of escapism, idealism, Utopianism, formalism, subjectivism, mysticism, etc. leveled frequently against Romanticism essentially reflect this failure to come to terms with the concrete reality. Even today, the term "romantic" has not totally disengaged itself from the complex of qualities attached to it when the word first came into use in England about the middle of the 17th century--that is, "having the wild or exciting qualities of medieval romances,"[14] with the concomitant implication of a nostalgia for a colorful and heroic distant past.

In the face of the overwhelming complexity of the nature of Romanticism, including its inner contradictions (e.g.., its preoccupation with the exotic as well as the common, the fantastic as well as the real, the past as well as the present and future), one must realize the unfairness of a sweeping condemnation of the concept. Some Marxists see in Romanticism a patently reactionary tendency which under-

mines the officially sanctified artistic method of Socialist Realism. As one Soviet critic asserts, "It is imperative to tear out this blend of idealism and romanticism at the root."15 The passionate rejection of Romanticism by some Marxists is understandable because it allegedly constitutes a threat to the primacy of Socialist Realism. As A. Ovcharenko observes, some dogmatists are working toward the wedding of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism, "trying to force on socialist art, as one of its basic methods, a romanticism revolutionary in form and counter-revolutionary in its final intentions."16 As if that were not enough, Ovcharenko also claims that "militant revisionists like Henri Lefebvre would like to make romanticism into a battering-ram with the help of which they would destroy socialist realism."17 The controversy surrounding Romanticism partly revolves around the question of conventional forms in art and the right of the artist to "potentify", i.e., "to show us what might be achieved rather than what is, to shift emphasis or to 'hyperbolize' in characterization, to ignore the principle of 'verisimilitude of detail' and to overstep the boundaries of reality."18 Others, rightly or wrongly, see in the assimilation of some romantic elements into the Marxist tradition the possibility of enrichment and hope in the spiritual emptiness, narrowness of vision, and bankruptcy of imagination that have increasingly come to characterize a rigid adherence to Socialist Realism. As Gabriel Pearson points out in Romanticism and Contemporary Poetry," "It is a mistake of many socialists that they envisage a socialist society involving an almost religious conformity to certain central regulating principles. . . Socialist-realist poetry or committed poetry of the Logue type it seems to me, tries to re-invest socialist principles or programmes or particular causes with the central, regulating authority once possessed by religion."19

The movement away from crude sociological analysis and vulgar utilitarianism in some Marxist quarters reflects a growing willingness to explore alternative strategies, alternative traditions, in the socialist search for the very essence of humanity which, after all, is the ultimate aim of socialism and socialist humanism.

Edward Thompson, in his account of the special achievement of William Morris, whose Utopian works(like ***News from Nowhere***) have always presented some problems to orthodox Marxists, embodies this progressive outlook. In "Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism: The Case of William Morris,' Thompson refuses to define the romantic tradition only in terms of its traditional, conservative, regressive, escapist, and utopian characteristics--which, to him is a facile way of avoiding the problem.20 Instead, he posits that Romanticism 'contained within it resources of a quite different nature, capable of undergoing this transformation independently of the precipitate of Marx and Engels' writing. This is to say, the moral critique of capitalist process was pressing forward to conclusion consonant with Marx's critique, and it was Morris's particular genius to think through this transformation, effect this juncture, seal it with action."21 Thompson sees the doctrinal antimony in orthodox Marixst tradition between science (good) and Utopianism (bad) as underlying, for instance, Engels's disdain for Morris and the Marxist approach to Morris which " combines an exercise of 'domestication' and 'repression', in which the Utopian components in his thoughts are reduced to an expression of Scientific Socialism."22 Determinism or evolutionism is a pseudo-resolution of the problem of alienation, according to Thompson, because it is achieved by forces outside of man. Morris's works portray an artistic mode in which the creative mind is seen in its determined and determining relationship to historical actuality and also the people themselves as a determining as well as determined force.23 "This cannot be done however, within the received forms of realism. It is therefore inevitable and right that Morris should turn to new account his old Romantic inheritance of dream. The affirmation of the responsibility of dream in a world in which consciousness has become ineradicably dislocated from the field of its existence is an assumed feature of

all of Morris's socialist writing.'24 Utopianism, therefore, is considered as a valid imaginative form. But Morris's use of Utopianism is neither facile nor polemical, Thompson insists. And Morris, moreover, does not resort to it in order to escape the exigencies of the depressing actuality. Thompson says that "part of Morris's achievement lies in the open, exploratory character of Utopianism. its leap out of the kingdom of necessity into an imagined kingdom of freedom in which desire may actually indicate choices or impóse itself as need, , , '25 Thus, Thompson claims, "Morris was a Marxist and a Utopian, but we must not allow either a hyphen or a sense of contradiction to enter between the two terms."26

This assumption that Marxism and Utopianism are not necessarily irreconcilable concepts is a radical departure from Engels' insistence in "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" that Utopianism, as embodied in the thinking of Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Owen, is nothing but empty projections--visionary, fantastic. unscientific, impossibly idealistic, reactionary, and incapable of realization. "These new social systems," Engels says, "were foredoomed as Utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure fantasies."27 Thompson's more positive reevaluation of the imaginative Utopian faculty (an important element of Romanticism) does not only demonstrate its relevance even in a socialist framework, but also underscores the basic weaknesses of the orthodox Marxist tradition: "its inability to project any images of the future or even its tendency to fall back in lieu of these upon the utilitarians' earthly paradise--the maximization of economic growth."28

G. Plekhanov's analysis of Pushkin and the French romantics in *Art and Social Life,* particularly in relation to the romantic's belief in "art for art's sake", represents another Marxist approach to the problem of Romanticism. Romantics, as a rule, are not a particularly didactic and dogmatic lot. As one critic puts it. "They do not furnish cut-and-dried formulae which we can readily apply to those problems peculiar to our individual lives or to our generation as a whole."29 Some see this tendency as a reaction to the neoclassical imperative of instruction as a cardinal artistic function. The characteristic Marxist approach is not only to reaffirm the cognitive function of art (that is, art as instruction and knowledge)., but also to relate any divergence from this goal to that complex of socio-political and economic conditions which brought it about. Plekhanov's central question then is. "What are the most important social conditions in which artists and people keenly interested in art conceive and become possessed by the belief in art for art's sake? "30 And that is what he proceeds to find out. Plekhanov traces the growing estrangement of Pushkin from his social environment--from his early sympathetic identification with the people in such poems as "Freedom" where his heart goes to his "unhappy nations" and the men who "suffer under whips and chains," to his later poems like "The Rabble" and "To the Poet" where he vehemently rejects any such personal involvement: "Begone, ye pharisees! What cares/ The peaceful poet for your fate?"31 The radical change in Pushkin's attitude towards the function of art is a result of the socio-political conditions of his time: the repressive reign of Nicholas I, the December 14 catastrophe, the subsequent demoralization of society, the insistence of his patrons "to make him a minstrel of the existing order of things," etc.32 Plekhanov concludes that "being in *such* a situation, wearing the chains of *such* tutelage, and having to listen to *such* instruction, it is quite excusable that he conceived a hatred for 'moral grandeur', came to loathe the 'benefits' which art might confer. . ."33 Thus, Marx's contention that existence determines being finds a perfect illustration in Plekhanov's critical method.

His discussion of the French romantics -like Theophile Gautier and Baudelaire-- posits the same kind of intimate connection between artist and social environment. The indifference of the romantics to a more constructive or utilitarian kind of art

is rooted, according to Plekhanov, to their being "out of harmony with their bourgeois social environment" 34, just as Pushkin is out of harmony with his. The romantics are contemptuous of the bourgeois--the "bankers, brokers, lawyers, merchants, shopkeepers, etc." 35 They are "revolted by the sordidness, the tedium and the vulgarity of bourgeois existence." 36 Plekhanov says that "when the bourgeoisie assumed the predominant position in society, and when its life was no longer warmed by the fire of the struggle for liberty, nothing was left for the new art but *to idealize negation of the bourgeois mode of life*." 37 This negation is partly reflected in the physical appearance and idiosyncracies affected by the young romantics: their pale face, their long hair, their fantastic costumes, etc. are a means of "drawing a line between themselves and the detested bourgeois." 38 This is also true in their works where they portrary "stilted and affected" romantic heroes. 39 But this negation is finally embodied in their rejection of the utilitarian view of art, that is, "the tendency to impart to its productions the significance of judgements on the phenomena of life, and the joyful eagerness which always accompanies it, to take part in social strife. " 40 Plekhanov, however, is careful to point out that it would be wrong to think that a utilitarian view of art, which is the official Marxist view, is shared principally by revolutionaries since any political authority--whether revolutionary or conservative or reactionary--always prefers this because "it is to its interest to harness all ideologies to the service of the cause which it serves itself." 41

Thus, Plekhanov sees the romantic espousal of 'art for art's sake" as a symptom of a serious social malady, a deep-rooted disharmony between the artist and society. Although the romantics revolted against bourgeois vulgarity (and thus earning the partial admiration of the Marxists), they "had a deep dislike for socialist systems, which called for social reform. The romanticists wanted to change social manners without in any way changing the social system." 42 This, to Plekhanov and many other Marxists, is a crucial failure.

Plekhanov's objection to the early realists, like Flaubert, is grounded in the belief that "their objective attitude to the environment they studied implied. . . a lack of sympathy with it." 43 He seems to suggest that a moral engagement is necessary and that mere documentation of reality is insufficient. However, he likewise condemns the Saint-Simonists who were pressing for social reform because "like most utopian Socialists, they were believers in peaceful social development, and were therefore no less determined opponents of class struggle." 44

This clearly reflects Plekhanov's rigidly socialist biases. He automatically rejects the concept of "art for art's sake" because to him art must demonstrate a purposive relevance to society; but, on the other hand, he can only accept a utilitarian view of art in the context of revolutionary- of course not reactionary-- objectives. Thus, he rejects the commitment of the Saint-Simonists to social reform because it does not espouse the right political strategy- which is no less than the total socio-political restructuring of society by the proletariat through a violent revolution, if necessary.

The serious limitation of Plekhanov's critical approach is also seen in his analysis of the physical and emotional idiosyncracies of the romantic artist and romantic hero. He sees them chiefly as a negative reaction to the bourgeois image of man. However, a more accurate analysis must take into consideration some other contributing factors such as the new cult of strong emotions, the influence of Byronism, individualism, subjectivity, etc. Thus, the new image of the romantic hero or artist may be seen as a consciously positive popularization of a new ideal, rather than a mere rejection of bourgeois values. This is suggested, for instance, in Macaulay's account of the rise of the vogue of Byronism in England among the young: "They bought pictures of him; they treasured up the smallest relic of him; they learned his poems by heart, and did

their best to write like him, and to look like him." 45 This is also the effect of Chateaubriand's work *Rene'* where the literary hero becomes a cult figure, a new model for the young aspiring artists: "A family of Rene poets and Rene prose writers has been swarming about. We can hear nothing now but pitiful and disconnected phrases; they talk of nothing but winds and storms, and mysterious words whispered to the clouds and to the night. There is not a scribbler just out of school who hasn't dreamed of being the unhappiest man on earth, not an upstart of sixteen who hasn't exhausted life and felt himself tormented by his genius, who, in the abyss of his thoughts, hasn't given himself up to his vague passion, struck his pale and disheveled brow, and astounded men with sorrow which neither he nor they could describe." 46 Thus, a consideration of such factors as changing fashion and taste, or popularization of a new ideal, may give a better account of the new image of the romantic artist and hero rather than Plekhanov's simplistic negative reaction theory.

Ernst Fischer, in *The Necessity of Art*, comes close to Plekhanov in that he also examines the tendencies of Romanticism in terms of the socio-political realities of the times, although less simplistically so. [Fischer interprets Romanticism as essentially a movement of protest--"of passionate and contradictory protest against the bourgeois capitalist world, the world of 'lost illusions,' against the harsh prose of business and profit." 47] All the specific manifestations of the movement--its peculiar conception of reality, its attitude toward reason and imagination, its championing of art for art's sake, its preoccupation with folklore and mysticism and myth-making--all these are reduced to smaller revolts against specific tendencies or realities of the capitalist world. Thus, the attitude of art for art's sake is seen as "a protest against the vulgar utilitarianism, the dreary business preoccupations of the bourgeoisie. It arose from the artists' determination not to produce commodities in a world where everything becomes a saleable commodity." 48 The romantic myth-making tendency is seen as a result of "*the desire to simplify this unbearably complex reality, to reduce it to essentials*, and the desire to present human beings linked by elementary human relationships rather than material ones. . . Romanticism, in its rebellion against 'prosaic' bourgeois society, resorted to myths as a means of depicting 'pure passion' and all that was excessive, original, and exotic." 49 The preoccupation with folklore likewise emerges as a rebellion against alienation. 'In its search for a lost unity, for a synthesis of the personality and the collective, in its protest against capitalist alienation, Romanticism discovered folk songs, folk art, and folklore, and straightaway proclaimed the gospel of 'the people' as an organically developed, homogeneous unity.' 50 The nostalgia for the idealized past, the golden age, the age of innocence, the lost paradise, is a turning away from the contemporary horrors of capitalism. Individualism and subjectivity, the cult of the Byronic hero, are also the natural reaction against a social system that alienates man, fragments all human relationships, obscures social connections, and isolates the individual. Romantic emotionalism and even irrationality become the antidote to the capitalist veneer of respectability and order. "In proportion as material production was officially regarded more and more as the quintessence of all that was praiseworthy, and as a crust of respectability formed round the dirty core of business, artists and writers attempted more amd more intensively to reveal the heart of man and hurl the dynamite of passion in the face of the apparently well-ordered bourgeois world.' 51 To Fischer, then, Romanticism is essentially a language of protest.

However, his interpretation of Romanticism presents a more balanced account: he sees both its negative and its positive side. He points out that part of Romanticism, in fact, developed into realist criticism of society and many romantic artists, far from indulging in purely visionary exercises, were also people deeply involved in the issues

of their time. Pushkin sympathized with Decembrists, Stendahl supported the national liberation movement in Italy, and Byron died of marsh fever fighting for freedom n Greece. But even Fischer cannot resist throwing one devastating jab at the romantics. He says that "the romantics. . . were unable to see through the real totality of social processes. In this respect they were true children of the capitalist bourgeois world. They did not understand that precisely by wiping out all social stability, destroying all fundamental human relationship, and atomizing society, capitalism was in fact preparing the way for the possibility of a fresh unity," which is to come with socialism. 52 Thus, the old criticism of the failure to grasp the concrete actuality and understand the historical process is once again brought against the rebellious but deluded romantics.

Fischer sees this failure reflected in the many contradictions of Romanticism which is "on the one hand, a deeply-felt protest against bourgeois values and the machinery of capitalism on the other hand, fear of the consequences of revolution and escape into mystification which inevitably leads to reaction." 53 It could not be otherwise, according to Fisher, because Romanticism is "the most complete reflection in philosophy, literature, and art of the many contradictions of the developing capitalist society." 54 He says that "the petty bourgeoisie was the very embodiment of social contradiction, hopeful of sharing in the general enrichment yet fearful of being crushed to death in the process, dreaming of new possibilities yet clinging to the old security of rank and order, its eyes turned towards the new times yet often also, nostalgically, towards the 'good old' ones." 55. Such contradictions, in a way, are responsible for some of the ambivalence in the Marxist attitude toward Romanticism.

This ambivalence can be seen clearly in the critical evaluation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's achievement. Marx, of course, has placed his famous stamp of approval on Shelley whom he considers as "essentially a revolutionist and he would always have been one of the advance guards of socialism." 56 Le Roy, however, does not feel as positively about Shelley. He says that "romanticism lacks the richness of differentiation of realist literature, as we see in Shelley's poetry. Lacking a concrete grasp of reality, the romantic artist did not understand how the realization of his ideals was to come about." 57 Fischer, as has been pointed out already, makes the same conclusion about the romantics in general as does Plekhanov. The failure to understand the concrete actuality and the subsequent indulgence in the play of fancy is attributed to Shelley not only by the Marxist critics, but even by the non-Marxist critics. For instance, Mathew Arnold describes Shelley as "a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in vain." 58 Francis Thompson considers him a "child", winsome yes, but still only a child, with a child's attendant limitations. 59 Andre Maurois sees him as an impulsive Ariel. 60 F. R. Leavis says of one of Shelley's poems that it exhibits the poet's "notable lack of self-knowledge and a capacity for ecstatic idealizing." 61 And George Santayana claims that: "The cannonade of hard, inexplicable facts that knocks into most of us what little wisdom we have, left Shelley dazed and sore, perhaps, but uninstructed. When the storm was over he began chirping again his own natural note. If the world continued to confine and oppress him, he hated the world, and grasped for freedom. Being incapable of understanding reality, he revealed in creating world after world in idea." 62 The general assumption of the above statements is that Shelley has little understanding of himself, much less of his social environment; and that his ideas, likewise, are not based on the concrete social realities, but are the product of his imagination, his fantasy.

Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx Aveling, in *Shelley's Socialism,* demonstrate just the opposite: i.e., that far from being a hopeless Utopian or idle dreamer, Shelley is, in fact, deeply in touch with his social milieu and that he has a much greater understanding of, and involvement in, the concrete actuality The claim of Shelley's vigilant socialism is made on the basis of his attacks on all kinds of tyranny and oppression, his support of liberty for all nations, and above all, his clear perception of the class struggle.

Aveling and Aveling see him as "pure-minded, earnest-souled, didactic poet, philosopher, prophet "[63] They attempt to demonstrate Shelley's sharpness of historical observation by indicating that Shelley, for instance, did not see in the French Revolution "an incident of the movement towards a reconstruction society", [64] that he perceived in the lionized Napoleon the Great a "Napoleon the Little," "a mean man, a slight man, greedy for gold,"[65] that he understood the role of genetics and environment in thedevelopment of the individual and society,[66] and that the epic of the nineteenth century was to be the contest between the possessing and the producing class."[67] Shelley's social consciousness is reflected in his belief in sexual equality, which he embodies in his personal relations and in such works as "Laon and Cythna", where the central figures are "equal and united powers, brother and sister, husband and wife, friend and friend."[68] His perception of the woman's position in society and the real cause of that position (which he attributes to economics and not to religion or sentiment) indicates a high degree oof maturity. As he says "The woman is to the man as the producing class is to the possessing."[69] Both in theory and practice, Shelley attacks tyranny." The ideas that exercise a malevolent despotism over man's minds are attacked. Superstition, or an unfounded reverence for that which is unworthy of reverence, was to him, at first, mainly embodied in the superstition of religion."[70] But later on, he denounces not only the priest, but also the king and the statesman, and the institutions they represent. He also assails simultaneously the superstitious belief in the capitalistic system and the empire of class, the economic superstition and the despotism of class. His "The Mask of Anarchy", written on the occasion of the massacre at Manchester where six people were killed by a group of militiamen trying to disperse a demonstration, is a passionate indictment of specific personalities and institutions. As he says in his famous exhortation in the final stanza.

"Rise like lions after slumber
In unvaquishable number!
Shake your chains to earth, like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you–
Ye are many, they few!"[71]

In "Ode to Liberty," among other poems on the same theme, he celebrates the Spanish liberal revolutions as he has elsewhere sung about the struggle for liberty in Mexico, Greece, Ireland, England: "Liberty/ From heart to heart, from tower to tower, o'er Spain,/ Scattering contagious fire into the sky,/ Gleamed."[72] In "Song to the Men of England," Shelley portrays the economic oppression of the working class.

"The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps
The robes ye weave, another wears
The arms ye forge, another bears."[72]

References to other works–"Peter Bell the Third," "Queen Mab," "The Cenci,"

"Lines Written During the Castlereagh Administration," etc –are made to illustrate the range and depth of Shelley's socio-political consciousness. His understanding of the dynamics of economics is no less sharp: "he knew the real economic value of private property in the means of production and distribution, whether it was in machinery, land, funds, what not. He saw that this value lay in the command, absolute, merciless, unjust, over human labour.'" 73

The critical approach of the Avelings, while certainly much more appreciative of Shelley's achievement, demonstrates a characteristic stance among many Marxist critics who try to effect a harmonious conjunction between socialist ideas and romantic tendencies, that is, a selective myopia. This, as Thompson points out, is essentially the Marxist approach in the case of Morris. In other words, they emphasize those aspects of Shelley's works that harmonize with Marxist ideas--particularly their common resistance to oppression and exploitation of the working class by the ruling classes and institutions--and minimize or ignore those that are not in consonance with those Marxist ideas. "The Mask of Anarchy,"' for instance, deals with the oppression of the people, true, but Shelley's final defensive exhortation is actually less for a Marxist proletarian revolution than a Gandhian non-violent resistance. As he says in a letter to Leigh Hunt: "The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy; to inculcate with fervor both the right of resistance and the duty of forebearance ". 74 Thus,

> "With folded arms and steady eyes,
> And little fear, and less surprise,
> Look upon them as they slay,
> Till their rage has died away" 75

Although the Avelings give the reassurance that Shelley's "practical remedial measures" and his vision of "the possible future" would be "in harmony with modern socialistic thought," 76 it is clear that there are, in fact, fundamental differences that need to be addressed and resolved. Shelley's revolution is simply not the revolution that Marx envisions. As one critic observes; Shelley "spoke often in support of 'revolution', but it was not a revolution of violence which he advocated, but a moral transformation whereby individualism and social justice would be released, and tyranny would succumb simply because it was obscurantist, outmoded and inadequate " 77

In effect, Shelley's essential strategy for social and economic reform is more in line with the Utopian Socialism of Saint-Simon and company--a strategy that Plekhanov, Fischer, Engels, and other Marxists have repeatedly considered reactionary and reflecting a seriously defective perception of the real historical process.. It is a defect that irreparably mars the viability of Shelley's bright vision and hope and underlies the Marxist rejection of similar romantic views. Lukacs in *Realism for Our Times* speaks of Lenin's belief in the necessity of dreaming, "that profound, passionate vision of a future which it is in the power of realistic revolutionary measures to construct." 78 But he, too, can accept the usefulness of dreaming "only if that act is based on a correct understanding of objective reality, taking into account the complexity, the 'slyness' of reality " 79

Thus, the question goes right back to the old socialist conception of concrete actuality, the nature of the historical process, that is so central to orthodox Marxist

thought. Romanticism--with its preoccupation with the imaginative faculty, its subjectivism, its individualism, its Utopianism, its independence from the constricting influence of monotheistic dogmatism, its love of liberty in human ideas and human relations--will always pose a problem to Marxist integration. As long as Marxist thinking itself continues to assume an ossified and inflexible stance towards certain Marxist principles, as long as it continues to assume its own theoretical and practical infallability, the co-existence and mutual enrichment of Marxism and other alternative traditions will always be difficult and precarious, if not impossible. The irony is that there is so much that is common in Marxism and Romanticism: their affirmation of the ultimate worth of man is at the heart of both movements. But this bond will always be submerged under a crust of sharp and irreconcilable divergences as long as Marxism itself refuses to allow its assumptions to be questioned and as long as it perpetuates the belief in its exclusive possession of the true view of man and society.

ENDNOTES

[1] Gaylord C. Le Roy, *Marxism and Modern Literature,* Occasional Paper. No. 5 (New York. The American Institute for Marxist Studies, 1967), p. 21.

[2] George Lukacs, *Realism in our Time. Literature and the Class Struggle* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 126.

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