

Review

Dynamic organicism and the romantic imagination: Shelley's vegetarianism as nonviolence

Ewane George Ngide

British Literature University of Yaoundé I, Cameroon.

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This paper sets out to study the concept of 'dynamic organicism' in Percy Bysshe Shelley's romantic vision of Vegetarianism. Dynamic organicism refers to an energetic and driving force instrumental in growth or change. It is a universal literary concept whereby the writer transcends the ordinary view of things, sees reality beyond the corporal frame of existence and through the imagination seeks an ideal and works towards changing the corrupt order of the universe by reinstating order and moving it backwards to its natural state of felicity. According to Barzun (1943: 2 to 3), it is "a kind of revolt, a vindication of the individual, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against scientific methods...a revival of Catholicism...a return to nature". Abrams (1973) considers dynamic organicism as a return to man's original state of felicity as in *Genesis* before the original sin of Adam and Eve. For him, therefore, it is a kind of progression that looks like a regression. This study posits that Shelley's vegetarianism is not only a health prescription, it is also a return to the nonviolent nature of man as in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve distorted and corrupted the natural order of being. It is, therefore, Shelley's goal to seek a return to vegetarianism as a meal prescription in the Bible both for health reasons and as a nonviolent necessity in the universe. The quickening point here is that those who feed on vegetables are less prone to violence than those who slaughter for food. The violence on animals is a microcosm of man's macroscopic violence on man, thus the result of all societal violence, conflicts and ills. The paper uses both the romantic theories of Morse Peckham and the Ecocriticism of Glotfelty in the interpretation of Shelley's vegetarianism.

Key words: Vegetarianism, dynamic organicism, romanticism, imagination, nonviolence, ecocriticism.

INTRODUCTION

In the Holy Bible, God said to Adam and Eve, "Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat" (Genesis 1, verse 29). This is a prescription to Adam and Eve before the original sin was committed. The word "meat" in the quotation above should be understood to mean "food". This prescription is not limited only to man but extends in verse 30 to "every beast of the earth and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life". To them, God gave

"every green herb for meat, and it was so". Such is the prescribed feeding habit in the beautiful Garden of Eden that indeed is a microcosm of the universe. Put differently, Adam and Eve are instructed by God to be vegetarians. The eating of the forbidden fruit is not only contrary to God's directives; it is equally the beginning of man's loss of the Golden Age. Because Adam and Eve have distorted the natural order of things and broken the chain, there is inevitably an organic lesion, in this case their dismissal from Eden and their hitherto suffering life. It is a question of paradise lost that needs to be regained.

The only way of regaining the lost paradise is to embark on a journey by going backwards towards the original prescription and eating habits as in Genesis, thus vegetarianism. In the words of Barzun (1943), this entails a revival of Catholicism... a return to nature. It is a kind of progression that looks like a regression. Shelley (1813: 1) notes:

...at some distant period man forsook the path of nature, and sacrificed the purity and happiness of his being to unnatural appetites. The date of this event seems to have also been that of some great change in the climates of the earth, with which it has an obvious correspondence. The allegory of Adam and Eve eating of the tree of evil, and entailing upon their posterity the wrath of God, and the loss of everlasting life, admits of no other explanation than the disease and crime that have flowed from unnatural diet.

That is the organicism, whereby the universe is metaphorically organised like a tree, in the words of Kumar (1995: 7), where there is a relation of “leaves to stem to trunk to root to earth”. What this means is that every element of nature in the garden is at one with itself and with others, finite or infinite, animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic. This unity is what Wordsworth calls “cosmic harmony”, Shelley calls it the “Everlasting Spring” and Alexander Pope names it “the Great Chain of Being” (Pope and Warburton, 2010). That the human being should kill for food is contrary to the Biblical prescription. The consequence of such a break in the chain, or in the organicism, is an organic lesion, that is, the consequence that befalls any element of Nature that breaks or distorts the chain and natural order of things.

Vegetarianism as health and nonviolence

The word “Vegetarianism” means different things to different people. The Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary (2003) defines Vegetarianism as the habit of not eating “meat for health or religious reasons or because (one) wants to avoid cruelty to animals”. Others consider it as the practice of not consuming the flesh of any animal (including sea animals) with or without also eschewing other animal derivatives such as dairy products or eggs. A Vegetarian is also defined as “someone living on a diet of grains, pulses, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits with or without the use of dairy products and eggs”. A Vegetarian “does not eat any meat, poultry, game, fish, shellfish or crustacean or slaughter by-products” (<http://www.vegsoc.org/info/definitions.html>).

Vegetarianism should be distinguished from neo-logisms such as Fruitarianism, (a diet of only fruit, nuts,

seeds, and other plant matter that can be gathered without having the plant), Pescetarianism (a diet in which the only animals consumed are fish or other sea-food), Pollotarianism (a diet in which the only animals consumed are fowl) and Flexitarianism (a diet that consists principally of vegetarian food but that allows occasional exceptions). Lacto-Ovo vegetarians consider vegetarian food as food that excludes ingredients derived strictly from the death of animals, such as meat (including fish), meat broth, cheeses that use animal rennet, gelatin (from animal skin, bones, and connective tissue), and for the strictest, even some sugars that are whitened with bone char (for example, cane sugars but not beet sugar) and alcohol clarified with gelatin or crushed shellfish and sturgeon (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/vegetarianism>).

Apart from these definitions, the word “Vegetarian” was invented with the formation of the first Vegetarian Society in 1847. Vegetarians in India (http://www.indiachild.com/vegetarians_in_india.html), claimed that (they) created the word vegetarian from the Latin ‘Vegetus’ meaning ‘lively’ (which is how these early vegetarians claimed that their diet made them feel).

Shelley’s justification for vegetarianism

For Percy Bysshe Shelley, the word “vegetarianism” finds a definition in its moral propensity and the advantages of being a vegetarian for society at large. This finds a suitable explanation in his essays on the subject entitled “A Vindication of Natural Diet” published in 1813, “On the Vegetable system of Diet” (Shelley, 1947) and in some of his poems such as “The Daemon of the World”, “Alastor”, “The sensitive Plant”, “Laon and Cythna” or “Queen Mab”, and “Oedipus Tyrannus or Swellfoot the Tyrant”.

The practice of a vegetarian diet is not only vindicated for health reasons, but also for the fact that it takes one back to his natural eating habits as prescribed by God in “Genesis”(1: 29 to 30) and as such builds in the human being the subtle spirit of a universal brotherhood that shuns murder and killing. In other words, the practice of a vegetarian diet inculcates in man the virtue of nonviolence. The killing and slaughter of animals for food according to Shelley is a microcosm of the macrocosm of societal violence. It is the violence and pain inflicted on animals (including fish) that spill over to the violence of man against man in society. Non-vegetarians are therefore more violent in society than vegetarians. Such a thesis may sound banal but Shelley (1813: 16) cites several examples in “A Vindication of Natural Diet” as well as in many other essays and poems to buttress this point.

How many thousands have become murderers and robbers, bigots and domestic tyrants, dissolute and abandoned adventurers, from the use of fermented liquors; who had they slaked

their thirst only at the mountain stream, would have lived but to diffuse the happiness of their own unperverted (sic) feelings. How many groundless opinions and absurd institutions have not received a general sanction from the sottishness (sic) and intemperance of individuals'? Who will assert that, had the populace of Paris drank at the pure source of the Seine, and satisfied their hunger at the ever-furnished table of vegetable nature that they would have lent their brutal suffrage to the proscription-list of Robespierre?... Is it to be believed that a being of gentle feelings, rising from his meal of roots, would take delight in sports of blood?

This is why Shelley (1813: 26) calls for a Vegetarian system of diet prescribed and summarized in the last lines of "A Vindication":

*NEVER TAKE ANY SUBSTANCE INTO THE STOMACH THAT ONCE HAD LIFE.
DRINK NO LIQUID BUT WATER RESTORED TO ITS ORIGINAL PURITY BY DISTILLATION.*

One critic who seems to have understood and given meaning to Shelley's ideal of vegetarianism as a non-violent necessity is Morton (1995). According to Robert (1998:7) in *Green Shelley*, Morton's (1996) work is "ground-breaking both in content and method, and its shortcomings can be directly attributed to its ambitions". Morton's book shows vegetarianism as part of a web of figures in Shelley's work.

The subtitle "The Body and the Natural World" according to Corbett (1998) alludes to Morton's intention to render Shelley's figures physically. As he puts it (in pages 4 to 5), Shelley's faciality (sic) concretely suggests:

"... animals have souls and so should not be killed; but it also suggests connections not familial or sexual that are necessary for radical politics. Shelley pushed this rhetoric farther than any sentimental writer could have by extending the reach of sensibility to inorganic matter".

This confirms the fact that far from being an abstractly intellectual poet, Shelley, according to Morton, was a phenomenologist of pathos, although the level of philosophical generality that he sought often obscures this fact to casual Shelley readers and critics. As a strong advocate for social justice, Shelley witnessed many of the same mistreatments occurring in the domestication and slaughtering of animals, and he became a fighter for the rights of all living creatures that he saw been mistreated. In his book, *On the Vegetable System of Diet* (1816: 4), he posits:

"If the use of animal food be in consequence, subversive to the peace of human society, how unwarrantable is the injustice and the barbarity which is exercised toward these miserable victims. They are called into existence by human artifice that they may drag out a short and miserable existence of slavery and disease, that their bodies may be mutilated, their social feelings outraged. It was much better that a sentient... never had existed, than that it should have existed only to endure unmitigated misery".

What Shelley insinuates above is that butchering animals is wicked. Forcing them to produce more products than is natural is wicked. Forcing them into existence is wicked. Eating animal food therefore means torturing animals. Man tortures either when he kills them or when he raises them. Unfortunately, this is very contemporary with present day factory farming.

Shelley's vindication of vegetarianism

"A Vindication" is one of the two very prominent essays on vegetarianism written by Shelley. To convince us of the necessity for a vegetarian diet as a "back to basics", Shelley uses several examples where a non vegetarian diet has led to disorder and, therefore, generated in man the depravity of moral values. The story of Prometheus who stole fire from heaven and was chained for his crime to mount Caucasus "where a vulture continually devoured his liver" is an example. Like Shelley puts it in his book, *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813: 1):

"... before the time of Prometheus, mankind were exempt from suffering;... enjoyed a vigorous youth and ... death, when at length it came, approached like sleep, and gently closed their eyes".

Shelley stresses that "Prometheus who represents the human race affected some great change in the condition of his nature and applied fire to culinary purposes". From this moment "his vitals were devoured by the vulture of disease" (10). For Shelley, "All vice arose from the ruin of healthful innocence" (11). In other words, tyranny, superstition, inequality and violence came as a result of man's quest for dietary habits that are not natural. The example of Prometheus shows that man at creation was not made to be unhealthy. On the contrary, he was fashioned to be in constant health and youth until Prometheus moved him from his natural state by creating fire. The consequence of Prometheus' deviant action and behaviour is exemplified by Newton in an extract of "Defence of Vegetable Regimen" quoted by Shelley in *A Vindication* (2):

Man at his creation was endowed with the gift of perpetual youth; that is, he was not formed to be

a sickly suffering creature as we now see him, but to enjoy health, and to sink by slow degrees into the bosom of his parent earth without disease or pain.

The acquired habit of using fire, of killing and slaughtering animal, of eating them, of forcing them into industrial production for consumption, and the habit of man to “tear a living lamb with his teeth, and plunging its head into its vitals, slake his thirst with the steaming blood” (13) has not only rendered man unhealthy and sickly, but has equally made man a blood-thirsty animal with a penchant for destruction and murder even of man himself (Adams, 1990). Shelley in “A Vindication” therefore calls on man to return to his natural state of felicity through a change of diet. The example of new born babes who are innocent, close to nature, and therefore Godly is edifying:

Young children evidently prefer pastry, oranges, apples and other fruit, to flesh of animals; until, by gradual depravation of the digestive organs, the free use of vegetables, has for a time produced serious inconveniences Almost everyone remembers the wry faces with which the first glass of port produced (3)

This is to say that man’s natural habit is tilted towards natural substances- vegetables, fruits and the “water we drink if remote from the pollutions of man and his inventions” (3). According to Shelley, therefore, man should eat the same meals, drink the same water, breathe the same air like “our fellow denizens of nature”, and also “do [things] in common with the undiseased (sic) inhabitants of the forest”. A contrary behaviour is considered as crime against nature and ourselves, which crime results to absolute violence.

Crime is madness. Madness is disease. Whenever the cause of disease shall be discovered, the root, from which all vice and misery has so long overshadowed the globe, will lie bare to the axe. All the exertions of man, from that moment, may be considered as tending to the clear profit of his species. No sane mind in a sane body resolves upon a real crime. It is a man of violent passions, blood-shot eyes, and swollen veins, which alone can grasp the knife of murder (15 to 16).

The man who is not a vegetarian is “a man of violent passions, blood-shot eyes, and swollen veins”, and according to Shelley, it is only this kind of man (and we know they are many) whom alone “can grasp the knife of murder”. Non-vegetarian diet, therefore, is “the root of all evil”. But this evil can be changed if nations, societies, families, and even individuals adopt a vegetarian diet, because like Shelley rhetorically questions:

How many thousands have become murderers and robbers, bigots and domestic tyrants, dissolute and abandoned adventurers from the use of fermented liquors?... who will assert that had the population of Paris drank at the pure source of the Seine and satisfied their hunger at the ever-furnished table of vegetable nature, that they would have lent their brutal suffrage to the proscription-list of Robespierre ... Is it to be believed that a being of gentle feelings, rising from his meal of roots, would take delight in sports of blood? (4)

These and many rhetorical questions are asked by Shelley to buttress the point that a vegetable diet is synonymous to nonviolence and a non-vegetable diet synonymous to violence, tyranny, oppression, repression and all other unimaginable ills of society. The example of Napoleon Bonaparte of France is used by Shelley. Had Napoleon, he says, “descended from a race of vegetable feeders” he would not have had either the inclination or the power to “ascend the throne of the Bourbons”. This is because the “desire of tyranny” or the “power to tyrannize” would not have been his or that of any society that feeds on a natural diet. As he says:

There is no disease, bodily or mental, which adoption of vegetable diet and pure water has not infallibly mitigated, wherever the experiment has been fairly tried. Debility is gradually converted into strength, disease into healthfulness; madness in all its hideous variety, from the ravings of the fettered maniac, to the unaccountable irrationalities of ill temper, that make a hell of domestic life, into a calm and considerate evenness of temper, that alone might offer a certain pledge of the future moral reformation of society. (18)

Shelley’s second essay on vegetarianism is “On the Vegetable System of Diet”. Like “A Vindication” the above essay also stresses the health and moral need of moving away from animal food to a vegetable diet. Shelley considers the eating of animal food as an unnatural habit that produces disease. Because the human being has not got the teeth that predators and animals have, it is normal to assume that animal food should not be eaten by humans. This is as far as the health reasons are concerned.

From a purely moral perspective, eating animal food means torturing animals. These “miserable victims” are called into existence by “human artifice” only to “drag out a short and miserable existence of slavery and disease”. In other words, eating animal food entails that the animal is killed, slaughtered, cooked and eaten by the human being without the slightest remorse as to the pain inflicted on them. For Shelley, human beings who eat animal food are barbaric and unjust. The injustice and barbarism on

animals is what is extrapolated in the society. The injustice and barbarism on animals is a consequence of the violence and oppression of man by man. It is in fact a microcosm of the general violent behavior of human beings for whom shedding blood, killing, slaughtering etc have become a habit transferred from the animal kingdom to the human society. Shelley's advice is, therefore, to have a simple culinary habit as the human being is most capable of bodily exertion after or before a simple meal. The great Romantic poet advocates vegetarianism in a manner that is convincing and contemporary.

So far we have focused on Shelley's prose, but the crux for a reading of Shelley's vegetarianism is also found in a careful reading and understanding of his poetry (Axon, 1971; Hutchinson, 1967)). As mentioned earlier, a number of Shelley's poems portray the complexity of Shelley's engagement in what can rightly be termed the politics of abstinence, that is, abstinence from animal food and corrupted drink. Morton explains that the poem "Alastor" can be analyzed from the point of view of Wordsworth (1798) who starts off as a "poet of nature" and then deviates from the supposedly natural path, paradoxically by seeming to travel "farther into nature" rejecting revolutionary politics. This is what he calls "alastorization", that is, the creation of the "vengeful ascetic in persons that lack the desire to pursue a monstrous and decoded death drive" (109). In other words, the poet whose goodness is epitomised by his making of "the wild his home/ until the doves and squirrels would partake/ from his innocuous hand his bloodless food" (Alastor, 99-101), could end up literally dissolving into nature. The poem in fact becomes a prescription or a guide book that enacts the same process of alastorization in the reader.

The reader or the practitioner of vegetarianism, therefore, lives in the wild by becoming a part of nature, by being natural in his ways and eating habits. He would become a friend of birds and animals, and eat the same food that they eat, which is not cooked. As such, he will not make a meal of these friends of his and his hands will therefore be bloodless. These animals and birds will be "lulled by the gentle meaning of his looks (102) to the extent that even the "wild antelope" that is usually frightened by the rustles of dry leaves will "suspend/ her timid steps...upon a form/ more graceful than her own" (104-105). The union, nay, the fusion of the wild and the poet forms a kind of cosmic harmony or monism where all the elements of nature, although apparently different, participate in the same mood. These elements of nature, including man, therefore, form the Great Chain of Being. The harmony that results from this peaceful coexistence will ultimately create a philosophic mind in man represented in "Alastor" by the poet. This philosophic mind derived from an interfusion with nature creates in man what Wordsworth calls "a sense sublime", a moment of great "spiritual sensation" developed out of a "wise

passiveness", all of which lead the human being to the understanding of nature by the use of the "inward eye". This inward eye of man is what Shelley commands. It is the eye that sees beyond the corrupted world of man, the eye that takes the mind back to nature and commands him to live naturally. This philosophic mind is the romantic imagination.

Shelley's vindication of vegetarianism as a health and moral prescription for society as well as its nonviolent propensity, places the poet in his original status as a legislator of the world whose social insights are not only micrological in content, but equally macrological in method and meaning.

Organic lesions

As stated earlier, eating animal food and the application of culinary methods to feeding habits is contrary to the law of nature or organicism. Such behaviour is tantamount to a breaking of the chain of being or cosmic harmony. Peckham (1951: 10) says that "entities are an organic part of that which produced them. The existence of each part is made possible only by the existence of every other part". This is a truism that can only be apprehended intuitively, imaginatively, spontaneously, "with the whole personality, from the deep sources of the fountains that are within" (13). Like Wordsworth posits in "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Wye During a Tour", this is what permits us "to see into the life of things", and "feel a sense of sublime/ of something far more deeply interfused;.../ A motion and a spirit, that impels/ all thinking things, all objects of all thought/ and rolls through all things" (95-1003). Shelley in fact drinks from the deep sources of the fountains that are within to capture the importance and essence of vegetarianism. From the point of view of dynamic organicism, he has understood that breaking the chain by feeding on animal food leads to an organic lesion. This lesion is defined as the punishment that befalls the chain breaker, in this case the non vegetarian. Such a punishment could take several forms. Alienation, isolation, disease and much more could be the consequence. Peckham describes these consequences as "the depths of the unconscious" (19). The non vegetarian thus suffers from an organic lesion which results in his alienation and isolation. Because he goes contrary to nature and distorts the order, he suffers heavily for it. Such lesions as named by Shelley in "A Vindication" (1), and they include:

*Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs;
Intestine stone and ulcer, choleric pangs,
Demonic frenzy, moping melancholy,
And moon-struck madness, pining atrophy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence,
Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums.*

And how many thousands more might not be added to this frightful catalogue!

The same fate befalls Prometheus. Shelley quotes Newton (1811: 9) by saying:

"Prometheus first taught of the use of animal food and of fire, with which to render it more digestible and pleasing to the taste. Jupiter, and the rest of the gods, foreseeing the consequences of these inventions, were amused or irritated at the short-sighted devices of the newly-formed creature, and left him to experience the sad effects of them. Thirst, the necessary concomitant of a flesh diet, "(perhaps of all diet vitiated by culinary preparation)" ensued; water was resorted to and man forfeited the inestimable gift of health which he had received from heaven; he became diseased, the partaker of a precarious existence and no longer descended slowly to his grave".

With these examples, Shelley notices, questions and advises:

...But the steps that have been taken are irrevocable. The whole of human science is summarized in one question – How can the advantages of intellect and civilisation be reconciled with the liberty and pure pleasures of natural life? How can we take the benefits and reject the evils of the system which is now interwoven with all the fibres of our being? I believe that abstinence from animal food and spirituous liquors would in a great measure capacitate us for the solution of this important question.

In order for man to live a life of health and peace, vegetarianism is encouraged because its benefits are far-reaching. Otherwise, the consequences, as seen earlier, are equally far-reaching. From the perspective of dynamic organicism therefore, man needs to shun his industrial eating habits and go back to the original eating habits as prescribed by God in *Genesis*. It is not only an imaginative movement, it is equally a possible physical attitude that Shelley encourages.

Dynamic organicism and the romantic imagination

Barzun (1943: 2 to 3) defines dynamic organicism as "a kind of revolt, a vindication of the individual, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against scientific methods...a revival of Catholicism,...a return to nature". Man's adopted feeding habits have been scientific, uncatholic and unnatural. For these reasons, man suffers

ailments and diseases and has become violent in all the ramifications of the word. A return to nature, a revival of Catholicism and a reaction against scientific methods is the solution. This is the journey back to the lost paradise or the Golden Age. According to Abrams (1973: 225), it is "the restoration of a lost unity of the human intellect with itself and with nature". He also holds that Shelley, in "Prometheus Unbound":

...fused the ... myth of a lost Golden Age with the Biblical design of a fall, redemption, and millennial return to a lost felicity, and gave special prominence to the associated Biblical figure of exile, return, and marriage of the bride (299).

This is a radical opposition in ways of seeing the world with the need to turn from one way to the other. Man generally sees with a "single vision", that is to say, relying on the bodily, the physical, vegetables, the corporeal or the outward eye. This way of perceiving reality, results in the slavery of the mind to merely material objects, a spiritual sleep of death, and a sensual death-in-life. Shelley, on the contrary, sees "through" and not "with" the eye. He visualises with the "inward eye", the "intellectual eye" or simply the imagination. Shelley thus moves from the single vision to what Thomas (2001: 84) in "*On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*" calls the "spiritual optics" and what Blake (1998) and other romantics call "vision". It is this visionary insight that makes Shelley see the need for vegetarianism as nonviolence.

According to him, a return to vegetarianism is a return to man's natural state of infinite goodness. These ties in the theory are today known as Ecocriticism. According to Garrard (2004) in "*Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*", this has to do with "the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production...inspired by, but also critical of, modern environmental movements".

Ecocriticism, like Dynamic Organicism, therefore, seeks a return to nature, a cleansing of the environment, a use of everything that is natural, a return to an Edenic society not only in terms of the environment and the foods we eat, but also in terms of socio-political behaviour (Buell, 2005). The point here is that, man has drifted away from his natural environment, created and adopted eating habits that conflict with nature and God's orders. Percy Bysshe Shelley's romantic imagination is therefore a return to naturalism or vegetarianism as a nonviolent prescription in a universe characterised by violence and other ills resulting from the eating of animal food.

Shelley therefore calls on all nations of the world to adopt a natural diet because the end result of this will be the transformation of the minds of the citizens and make them live in harmony, without any tyranny and oppression.

“... the spirit of the nation that should take the lead in this great reform, would insensibly become agricultural: commerce, with all its vice, selfishness and corruption gradually decline; more natural habits would produce gentler (sic) manners, and the excessive complication of political relations would be so far simplified, that every individual might feel and understand why he loved his country, and took a personal interest in its welfare” (21-22).

A return to natural diet will therefore be a return to the natural state of man as established in the Garden of Eden before the sin of Adam and Eve. Those who adopt this dietary habit will find it horrible and a disappointment that is beings capable of the gentlest and most admirable sympathies “should take delight in the death-pangs and last convulsions of dying animals” (7).

A return to vegetarian diet will thus produce a peaceful society, a kind of paradise on earth. As stated in “A Vindication” (20):

The change which would be produced by simpler habits on political economy is sufficiently remarkable. The monopolising eater of animal flesh would no longer destroy his constitution by devouring an acre at a meal, and many loaves of bread would cease to contribute to gout, madness, and apoplexy, in the shape of a pint of porter or a dram of gin, when appeasing the long-protracted famine of the hard-working peasant's hungry babes.

Another advantage of such a return to vegetarianism is in the domain of health. A longer life, less illnesses and gradual old age are guaranteed. Shelley (1813: 18) intimates that:

On a natural system of diet, old age would be our last and our only malady: the term of our existence would be protracted; we should enjoy life, and no longer preclude others from the enjoyment of it; all sensational delights would be infinitely more exquisite and perfect; the very sense of being would then be a continued pleasure, such as we now feel it in some few and favoured moments of our youth. By all that is sacred in our hopes for the human race, I conjure those who love happiness and truth, to give a fair trial to the vegetable system. Reasoning is surely superfluous on a subject whose merits an experience of six months would set for ever at rest. But it is only among the enlightened and benevolent that so great a sacrifice of appetite and prejudice can be expected, even though its ultimate excellence should not admit of dispute.

CONCLUSION

Although vegetarianism is widely discussed, it is practised by a few for essentially health reasons. Looking at vegetarianism as nonviolence and as a return to man's natural state of felicity or a regain of the lost paradise is yet to be deciphered and discerned. Shelley thus captures the essence of vegetarianism in the perspective of dynamic organicism and the romantic imagination. Through vegetarianism, the universe is at one with itself and man as an integral part of the cosmos. Understood and taken from this perspective of cosmic harmony, the umbilical cord relationship between man and other elements of nature, material or immaterial, organic or inorganic, finite or infinite, is re-established. The result is man's state of infinite goodness as in Genesis before the original sin. In this state of felicity and the new golden age, man eventually dissolves into nature, becomes an integral part of it and like in “Alastor” makes “the wild his home/ until the doves and squirrels would partake/ from his innocuous hand his bloodless food” (Alastor, 99-101). Shelley thus finds in vegetarianism the presage of an ideal future. In “Queen Mab”, this millennial future is exquisitely presented whereby man no longer “slays the lamb that looks him in the face / and horribly devours his mangled flesh / ...All things are void of terror: Man has/ lost/ his terrible prerogative, and stands/ an equal amidst equals” (VIII, 212-227). Such is Shelley's vindication and such is his vision seen through vegetarianism whereby the universe becomes a “paradise of peace”.

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