

III. Culture and Science

The Political Power of a Poet

by Paul Gallagher

Aug. 4—Today marks the 230th birthday of that striver to “excite the benevolent passions” in human society, the poet and political pamphleteer Percy B. Shelley. His greatest achievement likely was his least well-known. It was his discovery of the idea of a *political mass strike*, or as he described it a “crisis [of] the increase of virtue and wisdom” of a great people, of which the “herald, companion and follower” is the power of poetry among that people. Lyndon LaRouche wielded and greatly developed that idea in building his movement from the 1960s onward, always urging Shelley’s words in the process.

Shelley at 19, intervening as a pamphleteer and public speaker in a kind of mass strike of the Irish in 1812, described that kind of “crisis” this way:

A crisis is now arriving which shall decide your fate.

Man cannot make occasions, but he may seize those that offer. None are more interesting to Philanthropy than those which excite the benevolent passions that generalize and expand private into public feelings, and make the hearts of individuals vibrate not merely for themselves, their families and their friends, but for *posterity, for a people*, till their country becomes the world and their family, the sensitive creation....

I perceive that the public interest is excited; I perceive that individual interest has, in a certain

degree, quitted individual concern to generalize itself with universal feeling....

A benevolent and disinterested feeling has gone abroad, and I am willing that it should never subside. I desire that means should be taken with energy and expedition, *in this important yet fleeting crisis*, to feed the unpolluted flame at which nations and ages may light the torch of Liberty and Virtue!

The crisis to which I allude as the period of your emancipation ... is *the increase of virtue and wisdom ...*

And again:

The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry ministers to this effect, by acting upon its cause.... Poetry strengthens

that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner that exercise strengthens a limb.

Shelley’s fullest and most “political” statement of



With his poems and pamphlets, generally unknown in the period of his brief life, the great English poet Percy Shelley is a factor in the world today, his 230th birthday.

this power of poetry, the one invoked so often by Lyndon LaRouche, is found in his 1821 article, “The Defence of Poetry,” written a year before his death at 29:

The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is Poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power resides may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little apparent correspondence with that spirit of good of which they are the ministers. But even whilst they deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve the Power which is seated upon the throne of their own soul. It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations, for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Creative Non-Violence

In pursuing his discovery of the “crisis of beneficial change” as the mission of his brief adult life, Shelley also—perhaps also as an original discovery—described



Richard Carlile

Enraged at the “Peterloo Massacre” of peaceful demonstrators in Manchester by British cavalry in August 1819, Shelley conceived of non-violent civil disobedience, in poetry and a pamphlet.

creative non-violent civil disobedience. He described it twice simultaneously in August 1819. The description which had more lasting power, was that of the last 20 onrushing stanzas of his great poem, “The Masque of Anarchy,” written in that month.

The other was in a pamphlet written in the same week:

The true patriot will endeavor to enlighten and to unite the nation and animate it with enthusiasm and confidence. For this purpose, he will be indefatigable in promulgating political truth.... He will urge the necessity of exciting the people frequently to exercise their right of assembling, in such limited numbers as that all present may be actual parties to the proceedings of the day. Lastly, if circumstances collect a more considerable number as at Manchester on the memorable 16th of August, if the tyrants command their troops to fire upon them or cut them down unless they disperse, he will exhort them peaceably to risk the danger and to expect without resistance the onset of the cavalry and wait with folded arms the event of the fire of the artillery and receive with unshrinking bosoms the bayonets of the charging battalions. Men

are every day persuaded to incur greater perils for a less manifest advantage. And this, not because active resistance is not justifiable when all other means shall have failed, but because in this instance temperance and courage would produce greater advantages than the most decisive victory. The soldiers are men and Englishmen, and it is not to be believed that they would massacre an unresisting multitude of their countrymen drawn up in unarmed array before them and bearing in their looks the calm, deliberate resolution to perish rather than abandon the assertion of their rights.... This unexpected reception would probably throw [the soldier] back upon a recollection of the true nature of the measures of which he was made the instrument, and the enemy might be converted into the ally.

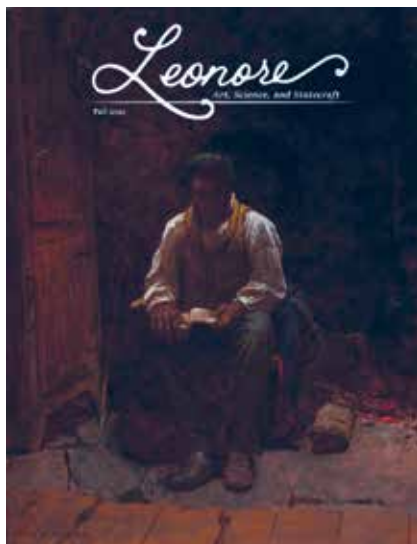
The patriot will be foremost to publish the boldest truths in the most fearless manner, yet

without the slightest tincture of personal malignity. He would encourage all others to the same efforts and assist them to the utmost of his power...

To Shelley

The youth who wrote *Prometheus Unbound* Stormed heaven for its beauties; he was bold To set aright the oldest story told, Our victory in our music's noblest sound. He scorned Zeus' power and punishment profound— Prometheus' heart broke through its torture's hold— Old Zeus was but the rock, the pain, the cold Of frozen custom, vaunting despots crowned. And listen how he sang them into dust, The powers wisdom was so wary of! His trumpet swept them from the heights above, That we might freely think. He would not rest 'Til mankind's fire lit the darkening ground, That youth who made Prometheus unbound.

The Schiller Institute has just released the second issue of its new quarterly journal dedicated to the creation of a classical culture. The 95-page issue, described below, is yours as a monthly contributing member. Memberships start at \$5/month. Give more if you can. This beautiful journal, written for audiences from 12 to 102, is a map to winning a beautiful future. Failure is not an option.



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In this special issue, we take on the question of “What is an Aesthetical Education?” This is an incredibly important and challenging question, but one that must be taken up. We want to examine different people and nations who have either attempted or successfully created this type of educational system.

We have a very wonderful composition for you to work through. Here are a few highlights:

Restore Classical Education to the Secondary Classroom

by Lyndon LaRouche

The Cult of Ugliness, Or Beauty As A Necessary Condition of Mankind

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Foundation for the Future

by Leni Rubenstein

The Current Transformation of Education in China: Shaping a More Beautiful Mind

by Richard A. Black

A Taste of the Sublime Comes from the Most Unexpected of Places

An Interview with Heartbeat Opera's Ethan Heard

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